

St. Cuthbert's Darwen

A walk around guide



1878-2026

Welcome to St Cuthbert's,
your local parish church.
For 148 years, this building
has been a place of prayer
and Christian worship,
serving the community and
welcoming all who enter.



We hope you will take time
to explore the church with the help of this brief guide. You
are warmly invited to pause for prayer and reflection, and to
light a candle if you wish.

Overview

St Cuthbert's is a fine example of Victorian Gothic architecture. As you explore the church, two family names appear prominently: Gillibrand, the local mill-owning family, and Greenway. The church's principal benefactor was the Reverend Charles Greenway, a member of a wealthy local family whose generosity helped make the building possible.

The church was designed by the Lancaster architectural firm Paley and Austin, with the construction carried out by local builders Kay and Rutledge of Over Darwen. The total cost of the building, raised through public subscription, was £5,925.

Financial limitations meant that the church was completed in two phases. The first phase was consecrated and dedicated to St Cuthbert on the 31st January 1878 by the Bishop of Manchester. Work on the second phase began in 1907 and was completed in 1908, although unfortunately not to the original design, which had included an octagonal tower. When completed, the church could accommodate a congregation of approximately 800 people.

St Cuthbert's has a long and fascinating history and has witnessed many significant events over the years. Among the most notable were the disturbances of 1927, when the church became the centre of violent street riots following changes introduced by the vicar, the Reverend Errol Birch Lauria. His style of worship, which incorporated elaborate ceremonial practices were more closely associated with Roman Catholic tradition, which caused considerable controversy within the parish and divided opinion among the congregation.

Tensions grew to such an extent that the vicar had to be escorted by police from the vicarage on Hawkshaw Avenue to the church in order to conduct services safely. The events deeply affected the parish and led to a division within the congregation.

Today, St Cuthbert's has a thriving congregation and continues to maintain its long-standing choral tradition. Worship is conducted in the Catholic tradition of the Anglican Church. Since the amalgamation of St Stephen's Church, Tockholes, with the parish in 2002, parish life has remained busy and varied, with a wide range of activities and organisations connected to the church community.

These include the Cuthie's Choir, Our Pastoral Care Team, Junior Church, Mothers' Union, SCADS (Amateur Dramatics), Church Walking Group and a variety of other groups and activities that support the spiritual, social, and pastoral life of the parish. Some of the organisations include The Diocese of Blackburn, St. Cuthbert's Church of England Primary School, St. Stephen's CE Primary School, International Aid, Darwen Food Larder, Childline, Christian Aid, The Children's Society and Nightsafe to name a few.

We hope you enjoy your visit!



Stop 1: The Font



Begin at the North Door, through which you entered the church, and face the font, which is made from Runcorn white stone and marble. It was presented as a gift by a parishioner in 1878.



Notice the two stone pillars forming the arch before you. Each bears an important date marking the completion of the church's two phases of construction. The pillar on the left is inscribed with the date



1878, while the pillar on the right bears the date 1908. The initials carved into the stone are those of the bishops, vicars, and churchwardens serving at the time each phase of the building was completed.

Notice the window immediately in front of you in the South aisle wall. It is believed that this may originally have been intended to serve as the South Door, although this plan was never completed. In most parish churches, the South Door forms the principal entrance to the building, making St Cuthbert's unusual in that entry is gained through the North Door.



Since ancient times, it has been customary to place the font near the main entrance to the church, symbolising entry into the Christian faith through baptism.

Turn left and proceed down the North aisle towards the front of the church. As you walk, take time to admire the stained glass windows, read the memorial plaques, and explore the displays along the aisle.

At the East end of the north aisle, notice the bell beside the vestry porch door. This is the entrance bell, rung to announce the arrival of the priest at the beginning of a service. In front of you is the organ chamber.

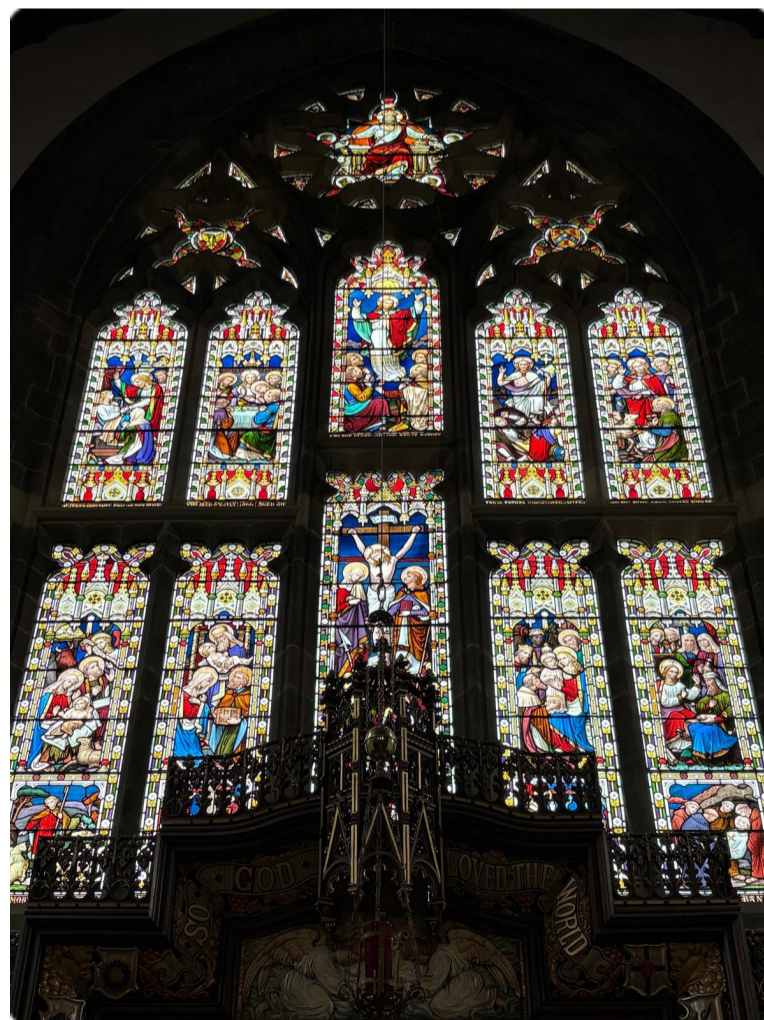




Now turn right to face the pulpit. The pulpit was given as a thank offering by a friend of the parish and is beautifully carved in alabaster.

Stop 2: The Sanctuary

Pause for a moment to take in the splendour of the restored East Window, often known as the Gospel Window.



The restoration work was completed in February 2015 at a cost of £100,000. As you walk towards the High Altar, you will enter the Chancel, which was originally decorated with extensive stencilled designs.

Pass through the screen and notice the choir stalls on either side. St Cuthbert's is one of the few parish churches to have maintained its choral tradition and continues to support a fine robed choir, which sings at our principal services.

The organ case and visible pipes date from 1702 and were made by the celebrated organ builder Bernard Smith, affectionately known as "Father Smith". He held a royal warrant, represented by the crowns and mitres carved into the case. The organ case was brought to St Cuthbert's from Kendal Parish Church in 1877.



At the end of the choir stalls, on Sunday's stands the processional cross, presented to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II in 1977 and later restored for her Golden Jubilee in 2002. It is a large replica of the cross discovered in the coffin of Saint Cuthbert. The original may be seen at Durham Cathedral.

Stop 3: The High Altar



The reredos behind the altar was installed in 1887 at a cost of £150. It was presented as a Jubilee gift by the Reverend Charles Greenway and was created by Mr Hibbins of London. Originally, the reredos consisted only of the 11 panels framed in veined alabaster. The bottom centre panel depicts a cross formed from gold mosaic.

Above the cross in the main panel is a depiction of the Last Supper. It is a fine example of a type of mosaic known as Opus Sectile, made by James Powell and Sons of Whitefriars, although the artist remains unknown.

Notice Judas Iscariot, distinguished by his black halo and the bag of silver.

In the centre panel above the Last Supper is the Agnus Dei – the Lamb of God. On either side are the symbols of the four Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The angels bowing in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, Chalice and Host, are carved and painted in wood. The woodwork of the reredos is a later addition, designed in the 15th-century style. Around the edge can be seen the vine, another symbol of Christ, together with shields displaying emblems of the Passion – representing Our Lord's betrayal, suffering and death. The inscription at the bottom of the reredos reminds us that we worship together with all the company of heaven.

Notice the sanctuary floor tiles, especially those with designs impressed into them. These rare tiles were made by the Hereford firm of Godwin, founded in 1852, and are thought to be the only example of their kind in Lancashire. The high altar is used for the celebration of the Eucharist, or Holy Communion, every Sunday and on certain midweek festivals. The stone aperture in the wall is the credence shelf, where the bread and wine were placed before consecration during services. Today, this function is carried out by a table. The large chair against the north wall is the bishop's chair. The kneelers at the altar rail were completed in 1990 by the parish needlework group.



Before leaving the chancel, look up to the ceiling and notice the shields at each end of the beams. These include the arms of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York, the Bishop Palatine of Lancaster, the Bishop of Chester, the Bishop of Lichfield, and the Bishop of Manchester. Also displayed are the coat of arms of the Reverend Proctor, the first Vicar of St Cuthbert's, together with those of his wife, and the Darwen Borough coat of arms incorporating symbols associated with St Cuthbert.



Some of the shields at the end of the beams.

Stop 4: The Memorial Chapel

As you leave the chancel, notice the organ consoles to your right and left, in front of the clergy stalls. St Cuthbert's is fortunate to be one of the very few churches in England to possess two different organs.

Turn left, passing the eagle lectern, and enter the Memorial Chapel. As you do so, look up and notice the great height of the chapel ceiling. This is because this part of the church was originally intended to house the organ.



The Book of Remembrance records the names of those whose ashes are interred in the Garden of Remembrance outside the church.



The chapel is dedicated to the memory of those who died in the First World War of 1914-1918 and is dominated by the Memorial window in the south wall. This was made by the William Morris Company, founded by William Morris of the Arts and Crafts movement.

Please take time to read the inscriptions and memorial plaques. The altar, installed in 1921, was made by Hatch and Sons of Lancaster, who were responsible for much of the carved woodwork throughout the church. The large chest houses the altar frontals and cloths.

The Memorial Chapel is used for Said Services during the week, and you are welcome to spend time in prayer here.

The white light above the Aumbry – a safe set into the wall and covered by a coloured veil – signifies the presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The Sacrament is reserved here for taking Holy Communion to the sick and housebound and serves as a focus for prayer and devotion.



Stop 5: The Clock Tower

Leave the Memorial Chapel and walk up the South aisle towards the back of the church. As you go, take time to notice the windows, read the descriptions and memorial plaques, and look at the displays along the aisle.

Continue to the west end of the aisle, passing the South Porch. Notice the window nearby before turning right. The large canopied stalls are the official seats of the churchwardens. Also note the ornate silver wardens' staffs of office.





Move towards the centre of the west end of the building and face the West Door. You are now standing beneath the tower, which was designed by a different architect and added as part of the 1907 extension to the church. A clock and bells were installed in 1916 through a legacy left by Jane Jepson, who throughout her lifetime had been passionate

about having a clock erected here. The clock remains in working order, although its faces have suffered damage over time. There are four bells in the bell chamber, the heaviest weighing over ten tonnes. Together they strike the familiar Westminster chimes every quarter hour.

Stop 6: The Nave

Turn to face the high altar and you are rewarded with a breathtaking view down the nave, revealing the immense scale and beauty of the St. Cuthbert's.



The nave ceiling was completely renewed in 2002 after sections of the original plaster fell into the nave. Had the



ceiling been decorated according to the original design by Austin and Paley, this view would have been even more magnificent. The series of clear windows above the nave arches is known as the clerestory. These windows allow light to flood into the nave above the aisle roofs, illuminating what would otherwise be a much darker space.

The large wooden chancel screen is not part of the cathedral's original design. It was added in 1908 as a memorial to John Gillibrand, a local cotton mill owner, and bears a carved inscription in his memory. Designed by the local architect R. W. Smith-Saville, the screen was carved from Austrian oak in a 15th-century style. Crowning the screen are figures of the four archangels – Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, and Raphael. Each figure features gilded wing tips, halos, and mottos, all finished in the finest English gold leaf.



Above the screen hangs a large cross, or hanging rood, which is reputed to have come from Italy. Although it is now painted white, old photographs reveal that it was once richly decorated with paint and gilding. The word rood derives from the Anglo-Saxon rod or rode, meaning "cross." Strictly speaking, a rood is a representation of Christ's crucifixion rather than simply an empty cross. In many churches, the rood is traditionally flanked by figures of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and St John.

Stop 7: The Plain Window



Move towards the north aisle and note the window in the west wall. Returning to the north door, you will see that the final window in the North wall is plain glass. It is likely that all the windows were originally similar in appearance until benefactors began installing stained-glass windows as memorials.

Stop 8: Outside

The church is built of brick and faced with local stone from Longridge. Bands of red stone add decoration to the exterior, while on the gable end of the north porch stands a statue of St Cuthbert. In the Northwest corner of the grounds, on the grassed area just beyond the North porch, is the Garden of Remembrance.

Standing prominently beside the roadside at the Northern entrance to the town, the church forms an impressive landmark and gateway to the community.

Thank you for taking our tour of the church. We hope you have enjoyed discovering its history, architecture, and treasures.

Please feel free to continue exploring the building at your leisure and to speak with some of our parishioners, who will be pleased to welcome you and answer any questions you may have.