

A HISTORY OF THE METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL OF CHRIST THE KING, LIVERPOOL

The first attempt to build a Catholic Cathedral in Liverpool followed the 1850 restoration of the Catholic Hierarchy in England when in 1853 Edward Welby Pugin was instructed to draw plans for a gothic Cathedral to be sited in the grounds of St Edward's College in Everton. In 1857 Bishop Alexander Goss opened the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral which served as a parish church in St Domingo Road until the 1980s. The Cathedral project lapsed because of the financial commitment of the diocese towards the cost of new parishes and the provision of schools.

The idea of a Cathedral was reborn in 1922 when Archbishop Frederick William Keating held consultation to find a suitable memorial to his predecessor Archbishop Thomas Whiteside. A fund was started and six years later it stood at £122,000. Archbishop Richard Downey succeeded Archbishop Keating in 1928 and in 1930 the Archdiocese purchased the nine acre site of the former Workhouse on Brownlow Hill for the new Cathedral. Sir Edwin Lutyens was chosen as the architect and on Whit Monday, 5 June 1933, the foundation stone was laid. At the suggestion of Pope Pius XI the Cathedral was to be dedicated to Christ the King.

The Lutyens design would have dominated the Liverpool skyline; the height from the lowest step of the western front to the top of the lantern was to have been 520 feet and a total of 53 altars would have lined the nave and transept, apses and sacristies. Building of the Crypt continued until 1941 when the war saw the cessation of the work. After the war the Crypt was completed and remains part of the present Cathedral, but the cost of the Lutyens Cathedral had risen to an impossible £27,000,000.

In 1953 William Godfrey became Archbishop of Liverpool and commissioned the architect Adrian Gilbert Scott, brother of the architect of the Anglican Cathedral, to produce a scaled down version of the Lutyens design with a budget of some £4,000,000, but within four years Archbishop Godfrey had been translated to Westminster and the project went no further.

Archbishop John Carmel Heenan became Archbishop of Liverpool in 1957 and in 1960 he announced an architectural competition to produce a completely new building to seat 2,000, which would relate to the existing Crypt and be capable of construction within five years. Of 300 entries from all over the world Sir Frederick Gibberd's design was chosen and building began in October 1962.

Less than five years later, on 13 May 1967 the new Cathedral building was consecrated by Bishop Augustine Harris, then Auxiliary Bishop of Liverpool. The following day, the Feast of Pentecost, 14 May 1967, the completed Cathedral was opened with Mass being celebrated by Bishop Harris, and the altar consecrated. The Papal Legate at the consecration was, most appropriately, Cardinal John Carmel Heenan who had become Archbishop of Westminster in 1964 and had been succeeded in Liverpool by Archbishop George Andrew Beck.

In October 2003 the grand entrance and steps were opened together with a new Visitor Centre and the Piazza Restaurant. This means that the Cathedral is now more in keeping with Gibberd's original design which envisaged a grand processional entrance looking on to Hope Street

The Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King has been host to many significant events, among them are:

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| 13/14 May 1967 | Consecration and opening of the Cathedral on the Feast of Pentecost |
| 19 March 1976 | Installation of Archbishop Derek Worlock as seventh Archbishop of Liverpool |
| 5 June 1977 | Visit of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II |
| 2 - 6 May 1980 | National Pastoral Congress |
| 30 - 31 May 1982 | Visit of Pope John Paul II |
| 26 May 1985 | Ecumenical Covenant Service |
| 31 May 1985 | Mass on the occasion of the Heysel Stadium tragedy |
| 16 April 1989 | Mass on the occasion of the Hillsborough tragedy |
| 8 September 1990 | Inauguration of the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland |
| 3 July 1996 | Installation of Archbishop Patrick Kelly as eighth Archbishop of Liverpool |
| 27 October 2003 | Opening of new Visitor Centre and new Cathedral steps |
| 2007 | Exhibition to celebrate the 800 th anniversary of the granting of the Charter to the City of Liverpool in 1207. |
| 13 May 2007 | Celebrations for the 40 th anniversary of the consecration of the Cathedral |
| October 2008 | Formation of the Cathedral Girls Choir |
| November 2008 | Joint European and African Bishops Conference for Liverpool's year as Capital of Culture. |
| September 2009 | Over 17,000 people visit the relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux at the Cathedral. |
| 1 May 2014 | Installation of Archbishop Malcolm McMahon as ninth Archbishop of Liverpool. |

The Metropolitan Cathedral is a regular venue for television and radio broadcasts.