

Presbytery at the Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph Aberdare

Level 2 Historic Building Record



Richard Hayman

for

Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cardiff

November 2023

Crynodeb

Comisiynwyd Richard Hayman i ymgymryd â'r gwaith o gofnodi adeilad hanesyddol yn achos Tŷ'r Offeiriad yn Eglwys Gatholig Rufeinig Sant Joseff, Aberdâr, ym mis Tachwedd 2023.

Mae'r adeilad yn rhestredig gradd II. Rhoddwyd caniatâd adeilad rhestredig i wneud amnewidiadau i'r adeilad, ac amod o hynny yw y dylid cynhyrchu cofnod adeilad hanesyddol, sy'n gyfystyr â Lefel 2 Historic England (cyfeirnod cynllunio Rhondda Cynon Taf 23/0432/12). Mae Lefel 2 yn gofnod 'disgrifiadol' a noda canllawiau Historic England y bydd 'archwilio'r adeilad yn cynhyrchu dadansoddiad o'i ddatblygiad a'i ddefnydd, a bydd y cofnod yn cynnwys y casgliadau a ddaethpwyd atynt, ond ni fydd yn trafod yn fanwl y dystiolaeth y seilir y dadansoddiad arno'.

Adeiladwyd Tŷ'r Offeiriad ar yr un adeg â'r eglwys sy'n sownd iddo, sydd hefyd wedi'i rhestro'n radd II, ac a agorwyd yn 1868. Pensaer y ddau adeilad oedd Benjamin Bucknall o Abertawe. Estynnwyd Tŷ'r Offeiriad yn y 1920au, ond fel arall mae'n gymharol ddi-newid.

Mae'r adroddiad yn disgrifio hanes yr adeilad, a'r cyd-destun y cafodd ei adeiladu ynddo. Mae darluniau mesuredig ac arolwg ffotograffig wedi cofnodi cynnwys a deunydd yr eglwys yn fanwl. Daw'r adroddiad i ben gyda datganiad o arwyddocâd, sy'n tynnu sylw at bwysigrwydd hanesyddol eglwys Sant Joseff a'i Dŷ Offeiriad wrth sefydli addoldai Catholig yn Ne Cymru'r bedwaredd ganrif ar bymtheg, rhanbarth ble roedd poblogaeth sylweddol o dras Wyddelig ac Eidalaid wedi ymfudo iddi. Mae hefyd yn nodi gwerth esthetig yr adeilad fel cynllun annatod ar y cyd â'r eglwys gyfagos.

Summary

Richard Hayman was commissioned to undertake historic building recording of the Presbytery at the Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph, Aberdare, in November 2023. The building is listed grade II. Listed building consent has been granted for alterations to the building, a condition of which is that a historic building record should be produced, equivalent to Historic England's Level 2 (Rhondda Cynon Taf planning reference 23/0432/12). Level 2 is a 'descriptive' record and Historic England's guidelines specify that 'examination of the building will produce an analysis of its development and use and the record will include the conclusions reached, but it will not discuss in detail the evidence on which this analysis is based'.

The Presbytery was built at the same time as the adjoining church, also listed grade II, which opened in 1868. The architect of both buildings was Benjamin Bucknall of Swansea. The Presbytery was extended in the 1920s but is otherwise relatively unaltered.

The report describes the history of the building, and the context within which it was built. Measured drawings and a photographic survey have recorded the fabric of the church in detail. The report concludes with a statement of significance, which highlights the historical importance of St Joseph's church and its Presbytery in establishing Catholic places of worship in nineteenth-century South Wales, a region where there was a significant immigrant population of Irish and Italian origin. It also notes the building's aesthetic value as an integral design with the adjoining church.

Presbytery at the Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph Aberdare

Level 2 Historic Building Record

Richard Hayman

© Richard Hayman, 2023

Contents

1 Introduction.....	6
2 Aims and Objectives.....	7
3 Methodology and Standards	7
4 Historical Background.....	7
5 Building Description	8
5.1 Exterior.....	8
5.2 Interior.....	10
6 Statement of Significance	16
7 References	17
8 Archive	17
Appendix 1: Digital Photographs.....	18
Appendix 2: Survey Drawings.....	26
Appendix 3: Listed Building Descriptions.....	28

List of figures

Figure 1. Location plan.....	6
Figure 2. Presbytery entrance front with meeting room on the left.....	9
Figure 3. Side wall, with stair window, of the Presbytery.....	9
Figure 4. 1885 Ordnance Survey.....	10
Figure 5. 1920 Ordnance Survey.....	10
Figure 6. Ground floor plan.	11
Figure 7. Glazed panel in the sitting room.....	12
Figure 8. Flagstone kitchen floor.	12
Figure 9. Meeting room, with parquet floor.....	13
Figure 10. Meeting room fireplace, with tile surround.	13
Figure 11. Stained glass in the meeting room rear windows.	14
Figure 12. Top of the stairs, viewed from the landing.	14
Figure 13. First-floor plan.....	15
Figure 14. In-built shelves and drawers in Bedroom 1.	15
Figure 15. Direction of exterior photographs.	23
Figure 16. Direction of ground-floor photographs.....	24
Figure 17. Direction of first-floor photographs.	25
Figure 18. Ground-floor plan.....	26
Figure 19. First-floor plan.....	27

I Introduction

Listed building consent has been granted for alterations to the Presbytery of the Roman Catholic Church of St Joseph, on Monk Street, Aberdare, a grade-II listed building (Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council planning reference 23/0432/12). A condition of the listed building consent is that a historic building record is made of the building before on-site works commence, equivalent to Level 2, as defined by Historic England. This report, together with accompanying photographs and survey drawings, and the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) that preceded it, discharges that condition. It takes the form of archaeological building recording equivalent to Historic England’s Level 2 and was undertaken before commencement of building work.

The building adjoins the Church of St Joseph, which occupies a corner site at the junction of Monk Street and Pendarren Street (fig 1). The Presbytery faces Monk Street, but is set well back from the street at SO 0001 0237. It is attached to the Church of St Joseph on its east side and faces a small forecourt behind a dwarf wall and railings.



Figure 1. Location plan.

There is a description of the Presbytery and a summary of its history in the listed-building description (see Appendix I). The church, but not the presbytery, is recorded in the

National Monuments Record (nprn 13257), but neither church nor Presbytery is recorded in the regional Historic Environment Record. The building is also described in the Roman Catholic Church heritage resource 'Taking Stock' (see references).

2 Aims and Objectives

The purpose of the historic building record is to provide a written, drawn and photographic record of the building that is to be altered. Level 2 is a 'descriptive' record and Historic England's guidelines specify that:

Both the exterior and interior of the building will be seen, described and photographed. The examination of the building will produce an analysis of its development and use and the record will include the conclusions reached, but it will not discuss in detail the evidence on which this analysis is based. A plan and sometimes other drawings may be made but the drawn record will normally not be comprehensive.

The other primary objective is to preserve by record what is to be lost, securing the long-term preservation of the information through deposition of the record and a summary written report with an appropriate depository. In this case it will be deposited with the Historic Environment Record administered by Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust, and the National Monuments Record administered by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

3 Methodology and Standards

The work has followed the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) Code of Conduct and adheres to their *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Investigation and Recording of Standing Buildings or Structures* (CIfA 2016).

Historic England's guidelines, *Understanding Historic Buildings: A guide to good recording practice* (2016), have been used as a basis for defining levels of recording. The Historic Building Record for this project is at Level 2.

A ground plan and elevations of the building was undertaken by Arden Kitt Architects. Site inspection, including written descriptions and interpretation, and photographic record were undertaken by Richard Hayman on 3 November 2023, at which time the building was unoccupied. Access was possible to all of the exterior and interior. The historical background material relating to the site was derived from online and printed sources which are listed below in the references.

4 Historical Background

Aberdare grew rapidly in the nineteenth century due to the success of its iron and coal industries, with coal the driver of the economy and population expansion from the mid century onwards. The population rose from 3,000 in 1830 to 32,000 in 1861 and peaked at

43,000 in 1900. As in other parts of industrial South Wales, the growth of Aberdare was largely by means of internal migration, but also migrants from overseas, including a strong contingent from Ireland and Italy. At first the Catholic community was served by missionary priests from Abergavenny, Brecon and Cardiff, meeting and celebrating mass in the only public buildings that were available, which meant public houses such as the Bailey Arms, Cross Keys and Cardiff Castle Inn. A mission was established in Aberdare in 1854 and in 1866 it acquired its own priest, the Reverend John Dawson who, with the help of local supporters secured sufficient funds to build a church and presbytery.

The Church of St Joseph and the Presbytery were built for a total cost of just under £1,100 and opened in 1868. The architect was Benjamin Bucknall of Swansea and the builder was Mr Richards of Aberdare. The Presbytery was extended in the 1920s. Bucknall (1833-1895) had trained under Charles Hansom in Bristol and was associated with other Catholic churches, including the Church of Our Lady and St Michael in Abergavenny (1858-60) and St David, Swansea (extensions 1864), but he was not exclusively a Catholic or a church architect. His other notable buildings included the Anglican churches of St Nicholas and St Matthew in Swansea, extensions to Swansea Grammar School and houses in the Swansea area.

5 Building Description

5.1 Exterior

The Presbytery is a two-storey building with a gabled three-window main range, with a later gabled bay brought forward on the left side (fig 2). The church is attached on the right-hand side. The main range is built of rubble sandstone, and the later wing of snecked, rock-faced stone, all under slate roofs behind coped gables. Unless otherwise stated the windows are all uPVC casements in original openings designed for sash windows. In the main range is an external stack left of centre (cut down to ridge level of the roof), with a consequence that the windows are placed asymmetrically. These have cambered heads in the lower storey and shouldered lintels in the upper storey. The doorway lower right has a replacement modern door.

The projecting bay on the left-hand side, built to house a meeting room, has a double-height canted bay window with moulded cement dressings.

The left (south-west) side of the building abuts a wall to the adjoining No 53 Monk Street. On the right-hand (north-east) side the wall is mostly integral with the church, although a section of rubble-stone wall projects beyond the end of the nave, above the lean-to brick extension to the sanctuary. This has corbels to the eaves and a single window, with shouldered lintel and original four-pane sash window, lighting the Presbytery stair (fig 3).



Figure 2. Presbytery entrance front with meeting room on the left.



Figure 3. Side wall, with stair window, of the Presbytery, above the brick lean-to attached to the church.

There is an added projection behind the kitchen, partly single storey under a lean-to roof, and partly two-storey, which is a later addition. The single-storey component is shown as early as the 1885 Ordnance Survey map, but more clearly on the 1920 map, and so may have been an original component of the building (figs 4, 5). It extends to the rear boundary of the property by which means it has split the back yard into two small yards. The rear of the meeting room has a four-light window in the lower storey. Other than that the windows are all replacements in original openings, as noted above.

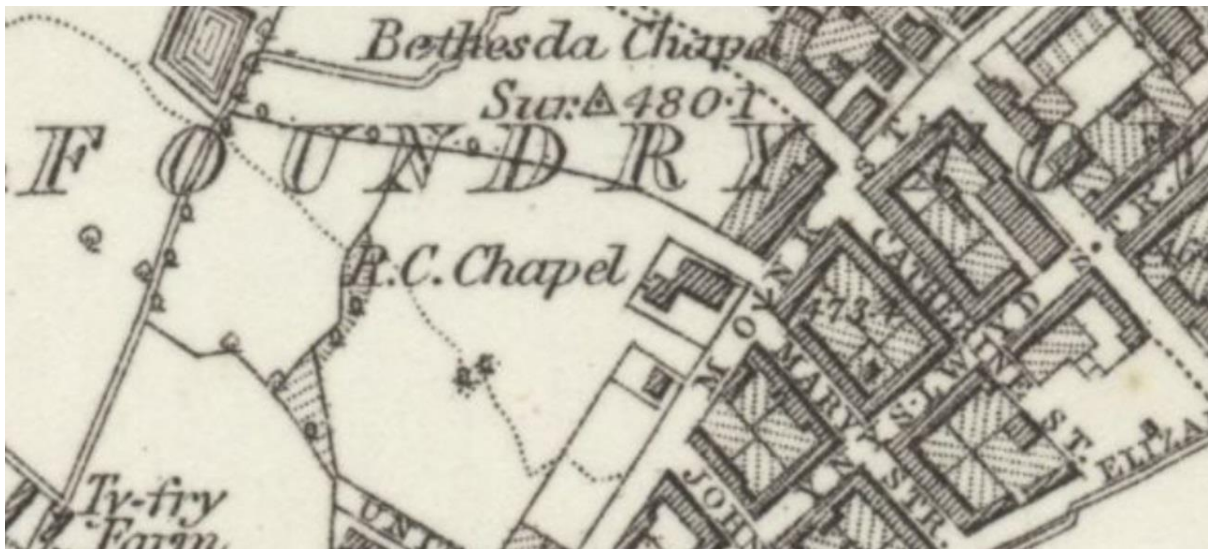


Figure 4. 1885 Ordnance Survey.

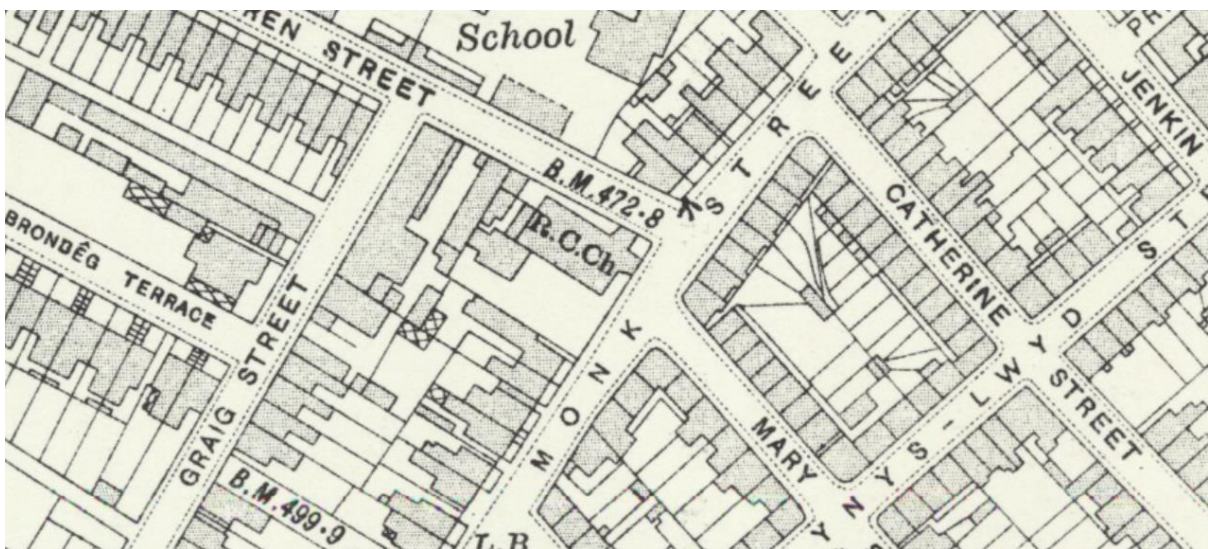


Figure 5. 1920 Ordnance Survey..

5.2 Interior

The main range opens into a stair hall (fig 6). There are two main ground-floor rooms, a sitting room and a kitchen behind. Between them is a corridor leading to the added meeting room which must have been an alteration from the original plan, made by reducing the floor area of the sitting room. The tiled floor of the corridor appeared to be integral with the

tiled floor of the stair hall (although this could not be examined in detail below the fitted carpets), whereas it would be expected to have a different floor material if was a later alteration. This anomaly will remain unresolved without fresh evidence. The sitting room has a suspended wooden floor.



Figure 6. Ground floor plan.

The sitting room partition to the corridor contains a wide glazed panel with diamond-lead panes and seems unlikely to have been an original feature, but was probably inserted to light the corridor behind it (fig 7). Within the room is a recess, probably a doorway to the meeting room that was later blocked. The kitchen at the back has a flagstone floor but no other historic features (fig 8). Cupboards and a toilet are contained below the stairs.



Figure 7. Glazed panel in the sitting room.



Figure 8. Flagstone kitchen floor.

In the meeting room are two fireplaces, both with glazed tiles of the 1950s, suggesting that it might originally have been sub-divided (figs 9, 10). It has a parquet floor, including a darker area across the centre, perhaps where there was a moveable partition. The rear window retains original stained glass in Art Nouveau style (fig 11). The utility room has no historical features of interest.



Figure 9. Meeting room, with parquet floor.



Figure 10. Meeting room fireplace, with tile surround.



Figure 11. Stained glass in the meeting room rear windows.

The stair has a moulded square newel, and plain balusters, with hand rail against the wall. There is a short dog-leg section to the landing. The landing balustrade has similar detail (fig 12). There are three bedrooms in the main range, one of them with an ensuite bathroom, and a shower room in the added projection at the rear. The first floor above the meeting room has two bedrooms (fig 13). Most of the bedrooms have panel doors with Bakelite handles. Bedroom 1 above the meeting room incorporates integral shelves and drawers, but apart from that these bedrooms have no features of historic interest (fig 14).

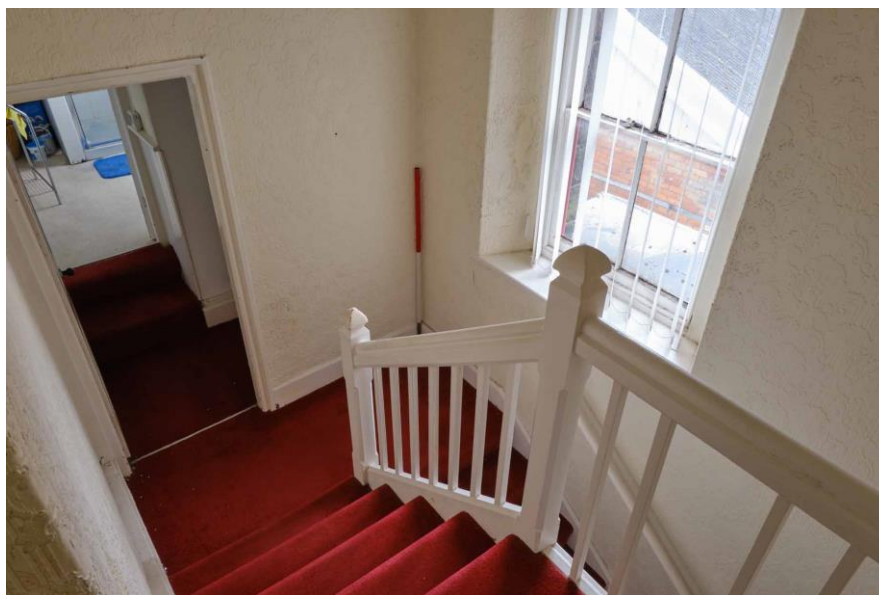


Figure 12. Top of the stairs, viewed from the landing.



Figure 13. First-floor plan.



Figure 14. In-built shelves and drawers in Bedroom 1.

6 Statement of Significance

The significance of heritage assets is measured against agreed heritage values, as set out in Conservation Principles published by Cadw (2011):

- **Evidential value:** This derives from those elements of an historic asset that can provide evidence about past human activity, including its physical remains or historic fabric.
- **Historical value:** An historic asset might illustrate a particular aspect of past life or it might be associated with a notable family, person, event or movement.
- **Aesthetic value:** This derives from the way in which people draw sensory and intellectual stimulation from an historic asset. This might include the form of an historic asset, its external appearance and how it lies within its setting.
- **Communal value:** This derives from the meanings that an historic asset has for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. It is closely linked to historical and aesthetic values but tends to have additional or specific aspects.

The Presbytery of St Joseph's Church has strong evidential value, especially of the main fabric facing Monk Street, which is typical of South Wales buildings of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

The historical value of the Presbytery is its importance in establishing Catholic places of worship in industrial South Wales in the second half of the nineteenth century. As such it is associated with the rising immigrant population in Aberdare in the nineteenth century and the importance of the Catholic faith in industrial communities of the South Wales coalfield. The Church of St Joseph was one of the earliest Catholic churches to be built in industrial South Wales and its Presbytery is likewise one of the earliest of its type: St David in Swansea was built in 1847 but the Presbytery was added c1864 when the church was enlarged; St Peter in Roath, Cardiff, was built in 1861 but its Presbytery was not added until 1872.

The Presbytery's aesthetic value is as an integral group with the church itself, which is a prominent building on Monk Street. The Presbytery and the church have an important communal value to Catholic worshippers.

7 References

Printed sources

Archaeological Archives Forum, 2011, *Archaeological Archives. A guide to best practice in creation, compilation, transfer and curation.*

http://www.archaeologyuk.org/archives/aaf_archaeological_archives_2011.pdf

Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, 2014, *Standard and Guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures.*

<http://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>

Chartered Institute for Archaeologist, 2014, *Standard and Guidance for the creation, compilation, transfer and deposition of archaeological archives.*

<http://www.archaeologists.net/codes/cifa>

GGAT, 2016, *Requirements and Guidance for the Deposition of Data with the GGAT HER.*

Historic England, 2016, *Understanding Historic Buildings. A guide to good recording practice.*

Welsh Archaeological Trusts, 2018, *Guidance for Submission of Data to the Welsh Historic Environment Records.*

Welsh Government, 2021, *Planning Policy Wales, Edition 11.*

Cartographic sources

Ordnance Survey, county series maps, 1885, 1920.

Online sources

Taking Stock: Catholic Churches of England and Wales: <https://taking-stock.org.uk/building/aberdare-st-joseph/>

Cof Cymru – National Historic Assets of Wales: <https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/cof-cymru/search-cadw-records>

8 Archive

Written Scheme of Investigation (pdf)

Report (pdf)

45 Digital photographs (tif format)

Catalogue of Photographs (Excel format)

1 Survey drawing (pdf format)

Appendix I: Digital Photographs



StJosephPresbytery_001.tif



StJosephPresbytery_002.tif



StJosephPresbytery_003.tif



StJosephPresbytery_004.tif



StJosephPresbytery_005.tif



StJosephPresbytery_006.tif



StJosephPresbytery_007.tif



StJosephPresbytery_008.tif



StJosephPresbytery_009.tif



StJosephPresbytery_010.tif



StJosephPresbytery_011.tif



StJosephPresbytery_012.tif



StJosephPresbytery_013.tif



StJosephPresbytery_014.tif



StJosephPresbytery_015.tif



StJosephPresbytery_016.tif



StJosephPresbytery_017.tif



StJosephPresbytery_018.tif



StJosephPresbytery_019.tif



StJosephPresbytery_020.tif



StJosephPresbytery_021.tif



StJosephPresbytery_022.tif



StJosephPresbytery_023.tif



StJosephPresbytery_024.tif



StJosephPresbytery_025.tif



StJosephPresbytery_026.tif



StJosephPresbytery_027.tif



StJosephPresbytery_028.tif



StJosephPresbytery_029.tif



StJosephPresbytery_030.tif



StJosephPresbytery_031.tif



StJosephPresbytery_032.tif



StJosephPresbytery_033.tif



StJosephPresbytery_034.tif



StJosephPresbytery_035.tif



StJosephPresbytery_036.tif



StJosephPresbytery_037.tif



StJosephPresbytery_038.tif



StJosephPresbytery_039.tif



StJosephPresbytery_040.tif



StJosephPresbytery_041.tif



StJosephPresbytery_042.tif



StJosephPresbytery_043.tif



StJosephPresbytery_044.tif



StJosephPresbytery_045.tif

File no	Description	date
StJosephPresbytery_001	Front of building looking NW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_002	Front of building looking NW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_003	Main range, looking N	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_004	Meeting room, looking W	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_005	Meeting room, looking NW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_006	Front of building looking N	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_007	Front of building looking N	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_008	Front of building viewed from street, looking NW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_009	St Joseph church and Presbytery looking NW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_010	rear of Presbytery looking SW on Pendarren Street	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_011	rear of meeting room from back yard, looking S	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_012	rear of building from back yard looking N	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_013	rear of building looking SW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_014	NE side wall looking S	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_015	sitting room looking SW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_016	sitting room looking W to glazed panel	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_017	door to sitting room, looking S	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_018	corridor to meeting room looking SW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_019	corridor to meeting room looking NE	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_020	meeting room looking S	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_021	meeting room fireplace looking SW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_022	meeting room looking NW	03.11.2023

StJosephPresbytery_023	meeting room looking NW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_024	meeting room fireplace looking SW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_025	meeting room, detail of coloured glass	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_026	meeting room, detail of coloured glass	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_027	meeting room, detail of coloured glass, and window furniture	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_028	meeting room, detail of coloured glass	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_029	kitchen flagstone floor looking W	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_030	kitchen looking W	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_031	kitchen lobby looking N	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_032	utility room looking NE	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_033	base of stairs, looking NE	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_034	stairs looking NW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_035	top of stairs looking N	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_036	Shower room looking N	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_037	bedroom 4 looking E	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_038	bedroom 5 looking N	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_039	bathroom to bedroom 5, looking N	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_040	bedroom 3 looking S	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_041	doors to bedrooms 3 & 5, looking NW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_042	bedroom 1 looking SE	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_043	bedroom 1 looking NW	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_044	bedroom 2 looking W	03.11.2023
StJosephPresbytery_045	first-floor corridor looking NE	03.11.2023



Figure 15. Direction of exterior photographs.

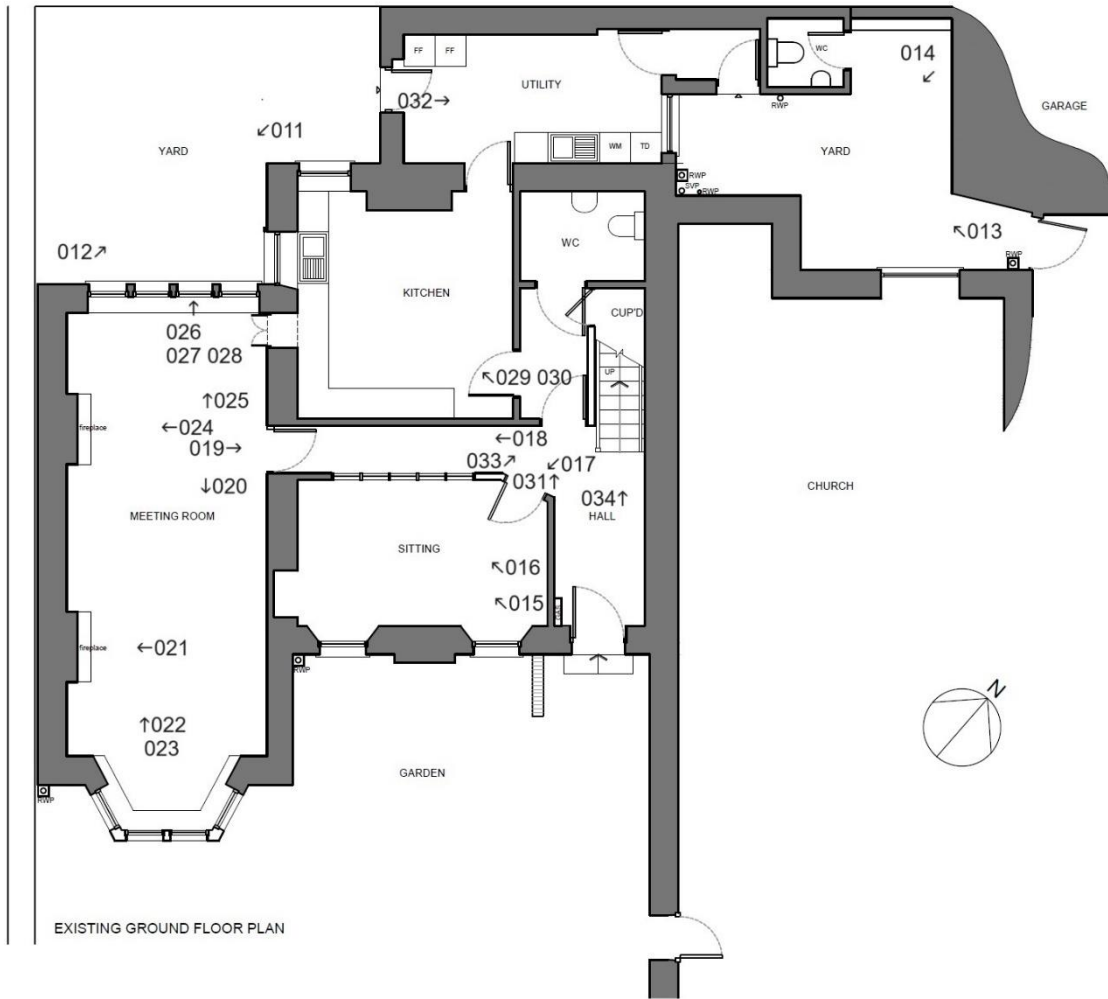


Figure 16. Direction of ground-floor photographs.

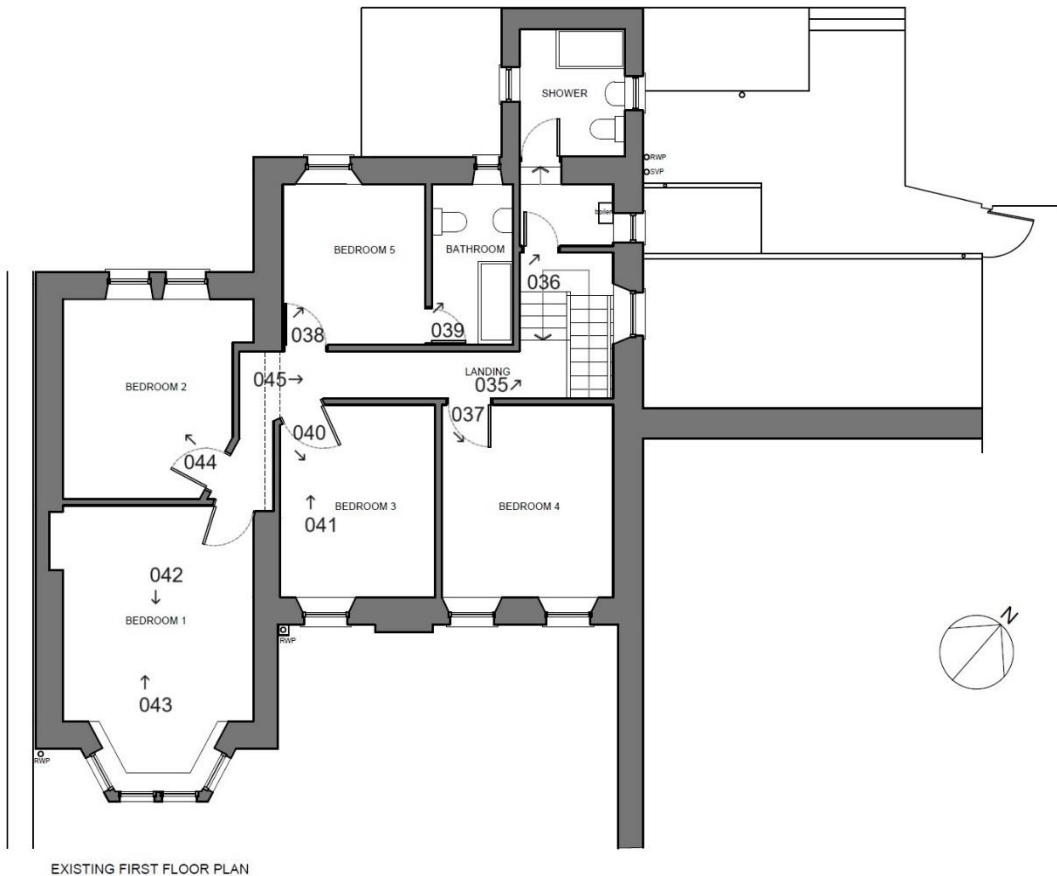


Figure 17. Direction of first-floor photographs.

Appendix 2: Survey Drawings

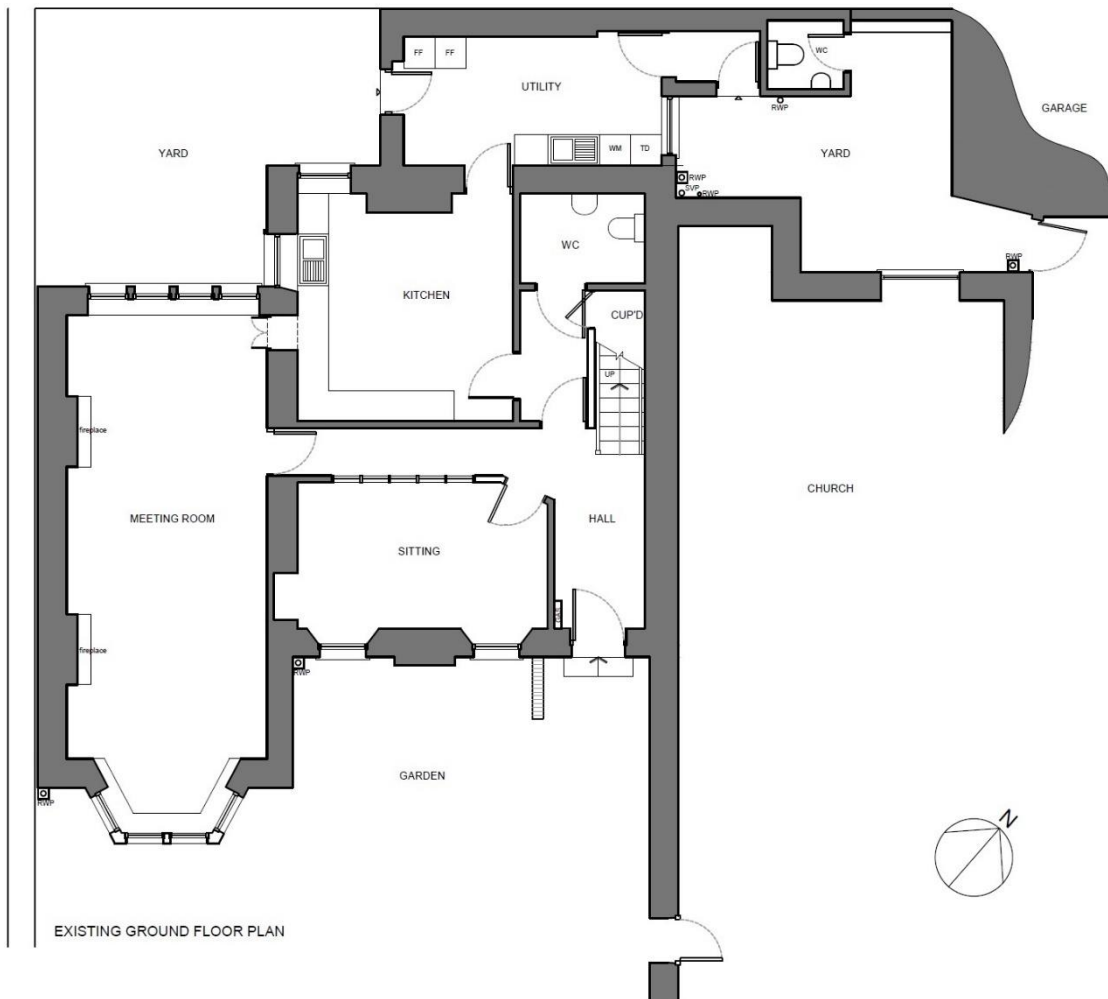


Figure 18. Ground-floor plan.

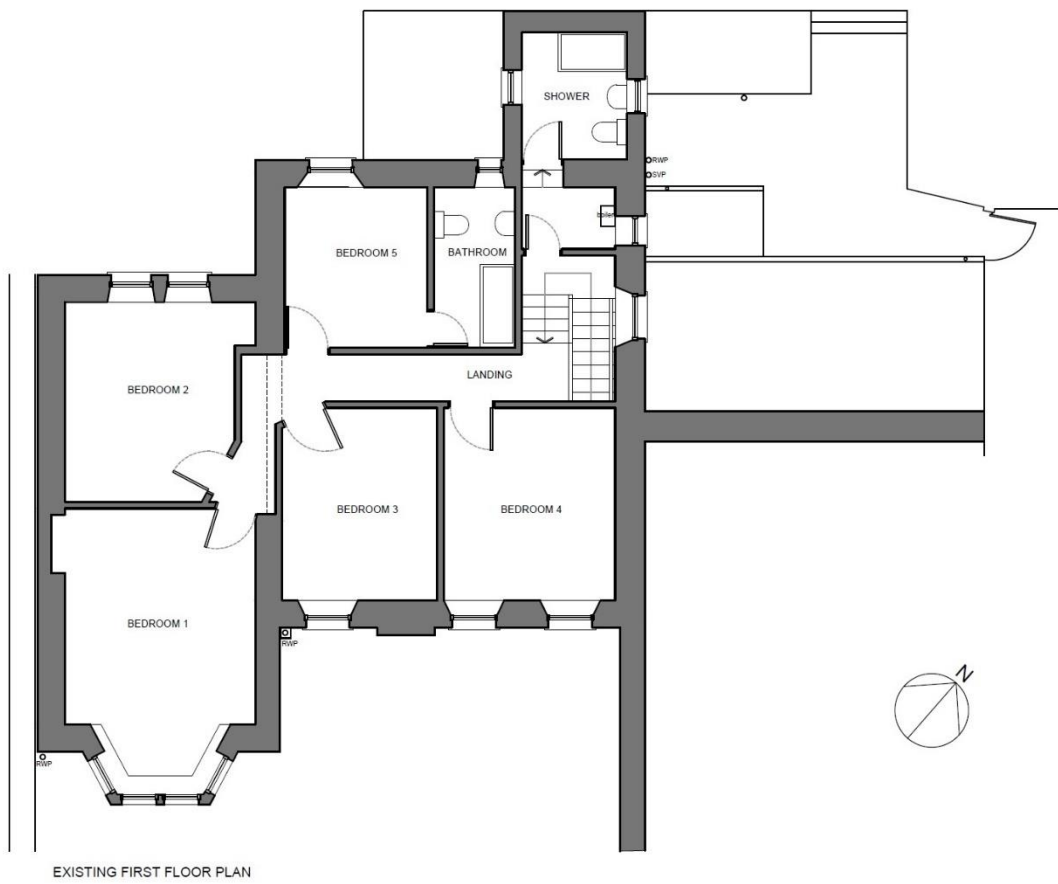


Figure 19. First-floor plan.

Appendix 3: Listed Building Descriptions

Full Report for Listed Buildings



Summary Description of a Listed Buildings

Reference Number	Building Number	Grade	Status	Date of Designation	Date of Amendment
87895		II	Designated	02/06/2023	

Name of Property	Address
Presbytery to the Catholic Church of St Joseph	

Location

Unitary Authority	Community	Town	Locality	Easting	Northing
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Aberdare West	Aberdare		300019	202373

Street Side	Location
	On the W side of Monk Street, at its S end on the junction with Pendarren Street. Attached to the W of the church set back behind a garden court.

Description

Broad Class	Period
Religious, Ritual and Funerary	

History

Built 1866-8 as part of the construction of the Church of St Joseph and likely to also have been designed by Benjamin Bucknall of Swansea. Extended in the 1920s.

Aberdare, like many towns in the valleys of S Wales, grew rapidly with industrialisation in the C19. The town and its surrounding area was found to have plentiful resources of coal and iron ore and its population expanded from a relative low level of 3,000 in 1830 to 32,000 in 1861 and then to 43,000 in 1900. Much of the population growth was from immigrant workers and their families from Ireland, as well as from Italy.

To cater for the needs of this growing Catholic population in the early-mid C19 travelling priests visited the town from Abergavenny, Brecon and Cardiff with mass said at locations across the town, including the Bailey Arms, The Cross Keys and the Cardiff Castle Inn. The Rev. Augustine Neary established a mission in the town in 1854, which went onto serve Treforest, Mountain Ash, Hirwaun and Ferndale. The Rev. John Dawson was appointed as the mission priest and he was able, with local support, to raise the funding for the construction of a church and presbytery. Construction began in 1866 and the church was opened on 3 October 1868 by the Right Rev. Bishop Brown of Newport and Menevia. The Presbytery, attached to the W, was also built at this point, set back from the street by a garden court on the side of the church.

Exterior

Presbytery, randomly coursed stone, part sandstone dressings. Slate roof. Replacement windows, all large pane sash style. 2-storey, 'T'-plan. 2-part elevation to the Monk Street garden court: advanced gabled bay to L with full height canted bay window, 3-window gabled range to R with off-centre truncated engaged stack in between the two left-hand windows; , doorway with 4-panelled door toright. . Ground floor windows with cambered heads; shouldered lintels to upper windows.

Interior

Not inspected.

Reason for designation

Included for its special architectural and historic interest as part of a group with the church it adjoins and serves.

Full Report for Listed Buildings



Summary Description of a Listed Buildings

Reference Number	Building Number	Grade	Status	Date of Designation	Date of Amendment
87886		II	Designated	02/06/2023	

Name of Property	Address
Catholic Church of St Joseph	

Location

Unitary Authority	Community	Town	Locality	Easting	Northing
Rhondda Cynon Taff	Aberdare West	Aberdare		300032	202376

Street Side	Location
W	On the W side of Monk Street, at its S end on the junction with Pendarren Street.

Description

Broad Class	Period
Religious, Ritual and Funerary	

History

Neo-Romanesque church built 1866-8 to designs of Benjamin Bucknall of Swansea at a cost of £1,100. The builder was Mr Richards of Aberdare. Bucknall trained under Charles Hansom in Bristol, and went on to set up his own practice in Swansea. He designed the Catholic Church Our Lady and St Michael in Abergavenny (1858-60) and carried out alterations to St David, Swansea (1864) and St Mary, Monmouth (1870-1). He was also responsible for St Nicholas Seaman's Church (1868) and St Matthew's Church (1886) in Swansea, as well as some domestic building in the area (Glyn-y-Coed on Newtown Road, Mumbles). His practice (Bucknall & Jennings) later designed a range of notable buildings including the theatre at Craig-y-nos (1890, GI), the Palace Theatre in Swansea (1888).

The choice of neo-Romanesque style at Aberdare is unusual, particularly for this date – the style had been more popular in the 1840s. Bucknall was a keen proponent of the style and used it widely, such as at the Seaman's Church in Swansea, at the same time as designing St Joseph. Later it influenced his design of St Matthew, also in Swansea, and the Church of the Holy Trinity at Llanegwad in Carmarthenshire (1878, GII*).

During the C19, Aberdare, like many towns in the valleys of S Wales, grew rapidly with industrialisation based on coal and iron ore in the surrounding area, and its population expanded from a relative low level of 3,000 in 1830 to 32,000 in 1861 and then to 43,000 in 1900. Much of the population growth was from immigrant workers and their families from Ireland, as well as from Italy.

To cater for the needs of this growing Catholic population in the early-mid C19 travelling priests visited the town from Abergavenny, Brecon and Cardiff with mass said at locations across the town, including the Bailey Arms, The Cross Keys and the Cardiff Castle Inn. The Rev. Augustine Neary established a mission in the town in 1854, which went onto serve Treforest, Mountain Ash, Hirwaun and Ferndale. The Rev. John Dawson was appointed as the mission priest and he was able, with local support, to raise the funding for the construction of a church and presbytery. Construction began in 1866 and the church was opened on 3 October 1868 by the Right Rev. Bishop Brown of Newport and Menevia. A Presbytery, attached to the W, was also built and set back from the street by a garden court on the side of the church.

From 1882 to 1911 under the stewardship of Rev James O'Reilly the baptistery, sacristy and Sacred Heart chapel were added, possibly to the designs of Bernard Smith of London (who was working for O'Reilly in designing a new church in Mountain Ash), or by F.R. Bates. Stained glass by Hardman & Co of Birmingham was added to the Sacred Heart chapel in 1910 in honour of Sr Gonzaga who had ministered in the town from 1885 to 1910. After WWII the parish priest Rev. John Cahalane carried out a range of alterations including a new organ, reordering of the sanctuary, and replacement of the tiled floor with Rhodesian teak boards. The baptistery has since been converted to an entrance and the original plaster ceiling of the nave has been removed. Painted copper panels of unknown date and artist, but originally part of the high altar, have been relocated to the liturgical E wall of the sanctuary. The church is clustered with those at Mountain Ash and Hirwaun and is served from the former, maintaining the historic connection of these communities.

Exterior

Church, simple neo-Romanesque style. Orientated NW-SE, liturgical E end to NW. Stone, randomly coursed, yellow sandstone dressings, slate roof. Dentil eaves. NW end of nave slate hung. Round headed windows with projecting cills. Aisleless nave with polygonal side chapel, W baptistery, square ended sanctuary with additions.

Gable entrance to SE, central round arched double ordered doorway, Gibbs head and panelled pilasters. Tympanum carved with an alisée patée cross (a Greek cross with rounded circular edges). Above is a stepped round headed and joined tripartite lancet window. Attached to the right is a single storey polygonal baptistery. Doorway, adjacent to church door, with a pointed trefoil-headed entrance with carved reliefs of the heads of Our Lord and Our Lady to the capitals. Window in N side. Attached to NE corner is polygonal chapel with windows to E and W. N wall of Nave with two paired small windows to left with a round window above, two further single large windows to right set higher. Sanctuary at W end with gabled roof, central circular window divided into 4 lights. Smaller building attached to N in angle with nave, single window in N elevation. Brick extension to sanctuary to W. Presbytery and sacristy attached to S. S elevation of nave divided in 2 unequal parts, to left single tall windows set high with door in red brick surround under the right. To the right two pairs of windows with circular windows centrally above. Presbytery attached to SW.

Interior

Nave of 3-bays. Timber floor, plastered and painted walls, timber boarded barrel vaulted roof. Plain sanctuary arch at W end, to the side are plaster statues, Our Lady of Fatima to the left, and St Joseph with the infant Christ to the right. Over the apex of the arch is a banner of St Joseph. Sanctuary raised by 2 steps, forward altar of marble with applied relief of the last supper. Single circular window to W, below is a crucifix with 3 copper panels of saints to either side. From I: St Vincent de Paul, St Catherine of Siena, St Juliana Falconieri, St Thomas Aquinas, St Aloysius Gonzaga, and St Hildegard of Bingen.

Stained glass. Nave, S wall from L: first 3 depict the Eucharist (dated 1906), St David, and St Patrick; Our Lady of Good Counsel (after the Augustinian church at Genazzano, nr Rome); Our Lady of Lourdes with inscription for installation in 1894 to commemorate the golden jubilee of the foundation of the mission. N wall from L: Betrothal of Our Lady and St Joseph; St Michael and the souls in purgatory; St Paul; St Peter; St James. Sacred Heart Chapel: St Aloysius and Bl. Margaret Mary, by Hardman & Co., 1910.

Narthex at E end with stair to the SW to full width gallery. Confessional underneath with coloured stained glass Art Deco style doors. Former baptistery now used as entrance porch, stained glass window of St John the Evangelist, floor of reconstituted marble with central quatrefoil detail. Sacred Heart chapel to N, raised on single step with decorative steel and brass railings and gate, gate with painted central Sacred Heart panel. Encaustic tile floor, marble altar with timber statue of the Sacred Heart. Stained glass and brass plate in honour of Sr Gonzaga. Carved wooden relief of St Joseph. Sacristy with baroque brass and marble holy water stoup, hinged doors with repoussé reliefs of the Annunciation, a baptism, knights receiving Holy Communion, and ordinations.

Reason for designation

Included for its special architectural interest as a church in a distinctive and unusual style that has survived relatively unaltered, albeit with some sensitive later additions. It is a prominent building on Monk Street and retains a range of furnishings and stained glass of quality. It is also of special historic interest in the development of the industrial areas of S Wales through the C19 reflecting the influx of migrant workers and the growth of the Catholic religion in the working class communities of Wales.