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Wolverhampton church receives award for its bold re-ordering

THE CATHOLIC parish Church of St Peter and St Paul in Wolverhampton has received the President's Award of the Ecclesiastical Architects and Survevors Association for 2009 as an acknowledgement of the successful completion of its re-ordering.

It is the first Catholic church to have received this award.

Fr Patrick Daly, parish priest, said: "The parish community together with the architect Stephen Oliver are enormously proud of this recognition of their daring and ambitious reordering plan."

The award ceremony took place on November 5 in Westminster Cathedral Hall.

Fr Daly and the architect himself received the award, the principal part of which was the use of a solid silver paten and chalice for a year.

The Church of St Peter and St Paul is one of Wolverhampton's most historic buildings and one with a fascinating history.

Its discreet presence, originally concealed behind the stately but anonymous Georgian town house built by the Giffard family at 51 North Street and now in the shadow of the civic centre, belies its importance in the life of the city.

The spot on which the Greek Revival church is built was the meeting place of the local Catholic community throughout the penal times in the 18th century and then in 1827, coinciding with Catholic emancipation, the present church was opened as the first place of public Catholic worship in England. To this day many pass the junction of North Street and Paternoster Row ignorant of the fact that the noble sandstone classical building is a Catholic church.

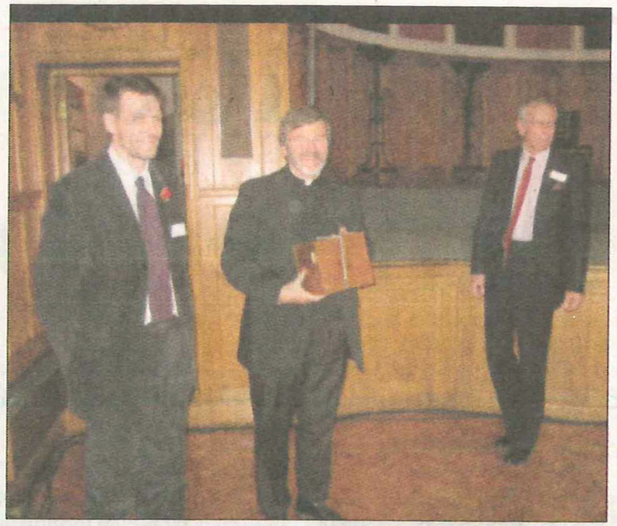
The judges were impressed with the bold re-ordering and the quality of the art and craftsmanship was exemplary

On June 29 this year the parish community celebrated the completion of an ambitious re-ordering of the church interior.

Bishop Philip Pargeter, auxiliary bishop in Birmingham, presided at a special Mass of re-dedication of the church and consecration of its new altar.

The Mass was attended by the mayor of Wolverhampton, by all those professionals who worked in the re-ordering project, by clergy from the other city centre churches and by a large gathering of parishioners.

The re-ordering, which had been on the drawing board for a number of years and which commenced in earnest on December 1 2008, involved complete re-decoration of the church interior, the fashioning of 20 new benches, the laying of a complete new floor with ceramic tiles in the nave and marble tiles in the sanctuary. A new altar, ambo, credence table and tabernacle were fashioned out of Sicilian Livinia marble and a new crucifix was set in the recess behind the altar.



Left to right: Stephen Oliver, architect, Fr Patrick Daly and Michael Hoare of the National Churches Trust

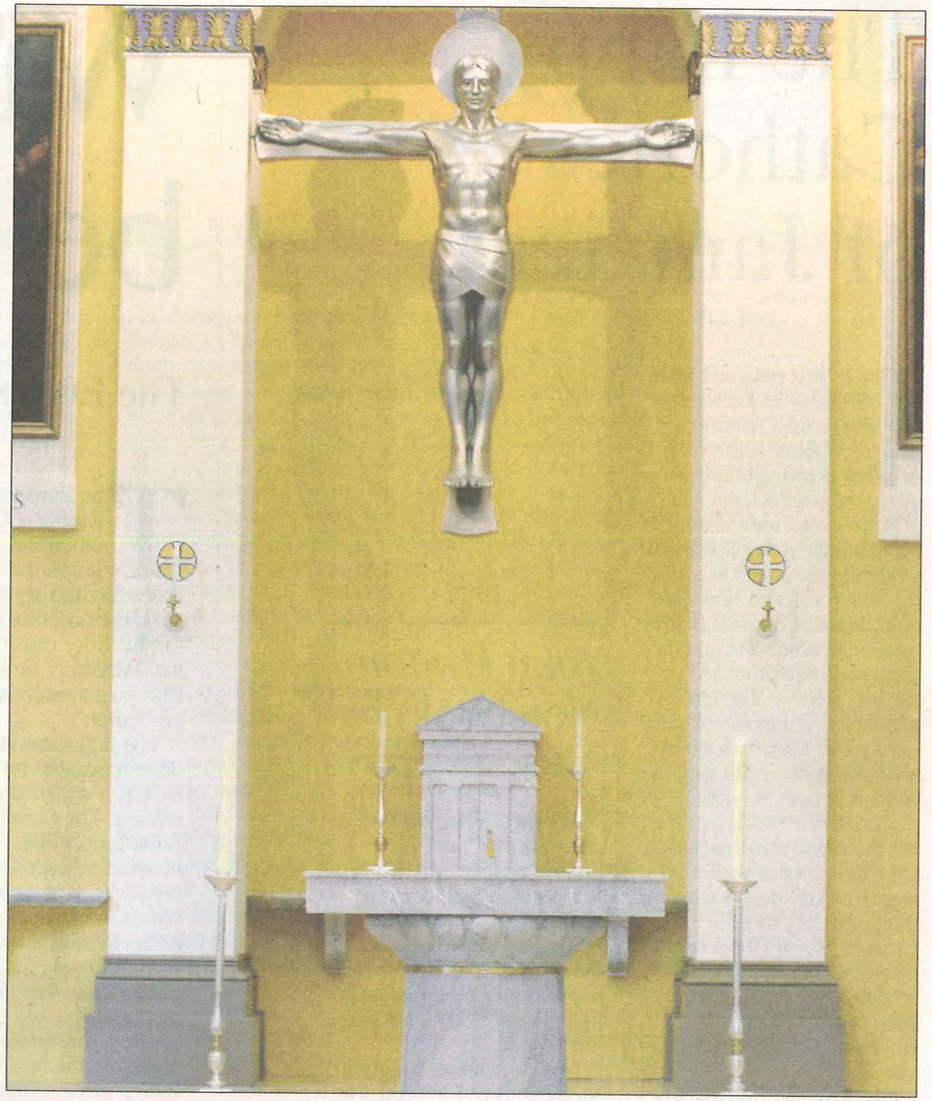
The building and decoration work was executed by a local Wolverhampton firm of building contractors, Parton builders. Parton was the firm which, in the 1990s, had carried out the decoration of neighbouring Catholic church, St Mary and St John.

The company has an intimate knowledge of Giffard House and St Peter and St Paul. The marble fittings were carved by London-based stonecarver Katie Worthington.

The distinguished artist Rory Young, whose studio is in Cirencester, created the crucifix.

The architect, Stephen Oliver of the Leamington Spa firm Rodney Melville, drew up all the plans and saw the scheme through to its final successful conclusion.

The citation in the award said: "The judges were impressed with your very bold re-ordering which is entirely in keeping with the church. The quality of the art and craftsmanship is exemplary."



The award-winning re-ordered sanctuary area of Ss Peter and Paul, Wolverhampton, showing altar and tabernacle by Katie Worthington and crucifix by Rory Young