

A brief guide to...

## Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes

Whinney Heys Road, Blackpool, Lancashire, FY3 8NP

### *History & Background*

Dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the patron saint of the Roman Catholic diocese of Lancaster in which the shrine is located, the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes was built in thanksgiving to God for the relatively light bombing the diocese took during World War II.



*Bishop Flynn*

The leading figure in its establishment was Thomas E. Flynn, the bishop of Lancaster, who wrote in September 1945 that “as the danger [during the War] became more acute, and one diocese after another suffered terrible losses in life and property, I asked for earnest prayers to our patroness, Our Lady of Lourdes ...and we were marvellously spared. The thought was in my mind during that period of anxiety that after the war I should ask the diocese to make

an offering to God to show our gratitude.” The construction of the church began in 1955, on land donated by local builder William Eaves. The £59,000 cost was covered by subscriptions from every parish in the diocese. Blackpool was chosen for its central position in Diocese and ease of access to visitors. The shrine was designed by architect Francis Xavier Velarde, who worked on a number of churches in the Merseyside area. From its construction until 1968 the chapel was in the care of the Sisters of Adoration, whose convent was formerly next door. It passed to the hands of the Sisters of Marie before The Blessed Sacrament Fathers and Brothers took up residence at the Shrine in 1994. In 1999 the special Mission of the Shrine was relocated to St Wilfred’s, Preston, and the chapel fell out of use.



*The Holy Trinity by David John*



Tradition: Roman Catholic  
Built: 1955-7  
Congregation active until: 1999  
Listing: II\*  
Grid Reference: SD332368  
No toilet facilities on site.

### *Transport:*

The Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes stands on Whinney Heys Road, close to Stanley Park and Blackpool Victoria Hospital.

It is difficult to park close to the chapel, due to double yellow line parking restrictions. Parking is available in the direction of the hospital.

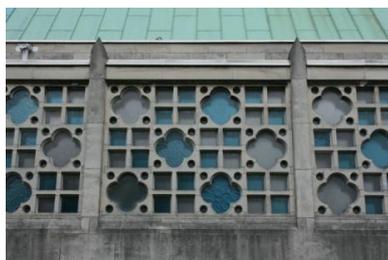
The no. 16 bus passes between the Shrine and Blackpool North station (approx 2 miles away.)

Visits by prior arrangement with the keyholder.  
Keyholder Tel: 01253 865770.

### *The Exterior*

The Shrine is faced with Portland stone. The very clean and neat style of the building is very much in keeping with the traditional post-war style of architecture. The entrance steps are made from blue York stone inlaid with marble. The sculpture on the facade measures twenty-two feet by eleven feet, and was sculpted by David John. It portrays the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Behind the Cross in low relief carving sprout branches with leaves, symbolic of everlasting life made possible by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The roots of the tree trace their way around the main door, and are supported by the four Evangelists. There are four other statues carved into the pinnacles at each corner of the building, which depict the Virgin Mary appearing to St Bernadette and Christ appearing to St Margaret Mary, St Thomas of Canterbury and St Edward the Confessor respectively. The striking pink and pale-blue glass windows are made up of geometric tracery.



*The geometric blue and pink windows*

### *The Interior*

The nave has columns with geometric capitals supporting round arches, reminiscent of early Christian basilicas, as are the yellow mosaic cross shaped insets in the sanctuary floor. The columns are sheathed in gold mosaic - a trade-mark of Velarde. The coppered ceiling creates a three dimensional effect, and is painted bright red, blue and gold.



*The shrine and vivid blue ceiling*

David John also designed the reredos and the altar. They are made from Gris Mouchete stone, brought from Burgundy. Above the reredos is a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, again carved by John. The raised sanctuary is separated from the main chapel by bronze railings in a modern-byzantine design featuring a chalice and wafer motif, reminiscent of the communion offered behind them.



*The altar and rails*

### *Subsequent History*

The shrine was transferred to the Historic Chapels Trust in 2002. A first phase of repairs was completed in April 2008. This consisted of repairs to the leaking copper roof and re-designing a defective rainwater disposal system. The works cost

£100,000. Fundraising has started to raise approximately £500,000 required to complete repairs, and introduce facilities to ensure the building can host community activities and occasional worship.

### *New Uses*

The chapel can be hired for suitable events such as concerts. The building is also available for funerals and memorial services. Contact us for details.



*An art exhibition in the shrine*

### *Further Reading*

'Thanksgiving Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes', English Heritage, List entry 1387319