

A guide to St Paul's, Scotforth





Although the village of Scotforth has existed since before the Norman Conquest, it did not have its own church until 1876. From 1845 Curates from St Mary's Lancaster (the Priory) held services in Scotforth School.

In 1870 an appeal was launched with a building committee chaired by Edmund Sharpe, a local architect. The foundation stone was laid in 1874 and the church was consecrated on 18 th February 1876 by Bishop Fraser of Manchester.

Sharpe wished 'to produce a structure of greater comeliness and ecclesiastical character than using exclusively the grit-stone of the neighbourhood' so moulded terracotta was used instead of carved stone, both outside and inside the building. His interest in Romanesque architecture explains why the church was built with round Romanesque arches when pointed Gothic arches were in fashion. According to Pevsner, the tower is the really impressive part with geometrical tracery and a saddleback roof. The bell-storey of the tower is yellow brick, with the

remainder of the building having terracotta detailing inside and out. St Paul's is one of three so called 'pot' churches, relating to the building materials used.

The church was extended in 1891, by the addition of two arches and transepts at the west end of the nave, to a design by the local firm of Paley and Austin.

In 1930-31 choir stalls were placed in the chancel, the sanctuary was panelled in oak and the pulpit was moved to its present position. In 1978 some pews were removed from the back of church to create a meeting space. At the same time a kitchen and toilet were added at the north-west corner.



On entering the church, walk across behind the back pews and stand in the middle facing the length of the building. Notice the Romanesque arches, the clerestory windows above them and the small circular murals depicting Christian symbols. From this point, the floor slopes gently downwards allowing a clear view of the whole church and the beautiful apse at the east end.

There are only two aisles, a central aisle being omitted to 'prevent pompous processions'!

Return to the porch door by the font.



The Victorian font is located in the traditional position near the main entrance to the church, but today we use a portable font which can be placed in front of the congregation.

Continue down the south aisle of the nave. On your right, the board listing the Vicars of the parish was installed as part of the centenary celebrations in 1976. It is interesting to see that there were only five incumbents in the first century.



The pillar nearest the pulpit stands on the foundation stone laid in 1874. It is marked with a brass plaque at the bottom of the pillar.

To the south of the pulpit is a stand holding various flags belonging to our uniformed organisations.

The standard of the North and East Lancashire Women's Section of the Royal British Legion was laid up here in 2000.

The parish had a branch of the Mothers' Union from 1932 to 2001. The branch's original banner depicted Mary with Jesus. A replacement banner was dedicated at the branch's golden jubilee in June 1982.

At the east end of the aisle, beyond the flags, is an area set aside for private prayer. It contains an oak case holding the Book of Remembrance, both of which were given by the widow of Rev Donald Smart, the fourth Vicar, and Mr W H Clark, his Churchwarden, to record the names of those whose ashes are interred in the consecrated ground on the north side of the church. In 2010 the inscribed trowel used to lay the foundation stone was returned to the parish and this is also displayed in the oak case.



A specially commissioned icon depicting St Paul, painted by Valerie Gedge, a church member, was officially unveiled at the service celebrating the 150th anniversary of the church, in February 2026.



Moving into the chancel, notice the impressive size of the wooden pulpit and the panel design which reflects the Romanesque arches. The Processional Cross stands by the opposite wall.



The new font, the base of which was made by a local craftsman, stands near the pulpit, but is placed by the altar for baptisms.





The altar now stands at the front of the chancel, having been moved from below the East window in the sanctuary, to enable the officiating clergy to stand behind the altar, facing the congregation. The altar frontal showing various emblems connected with St Paul, was designed by church members for the 150th Celebration service in February 2026.

The choir stalls which dated from 1930 were removed in 2001 when the chancel was reorganised and rededicated.

Notice the terracotta decoration on the side walls, repeating the Romanesque style of the main arches in the nave. Between these are plaques commemorating John Brockbank who helped to raise funds for the building; Edmund and Elisabeth Sharpe, the church's architect and his wife; Rev William Armitage, first Vicar; and Frederick Griffiths, second Vicar. The small green plaque by the vestry door was given to the parish in 1976 to mark the Golden Jubilee of the Diocese of Blackburn.

The communion rail kneelers, embroidered in 1982 by five parishioners, show the emblems of the Dioceses of York, Chester, Manchester and Blackburn which have been responsible for the Scotforth area since the Reformation. The central kneeler bears a Chi Rho which is the earliest monogram of Christ used in both Eastern and Western churches.



Beyond the communion rail and around the sanctuary, notice the crests on the panelling. Some of the crests show the implements of the Passion story such as the crown of thorns. Other crests show symbols used in the early church, an example of which is the entwined Alpha and Omega, meaning the beginning and the end, as used to depict God in Revelation 1 verse 8. There are two remaining crests: one of crossed swords representing St Paul, who as a Roman Citizen was martyred by beheading rather than crucifixion; and the other of crossed keys with a rose emblem depicting the Diocese of Blackburn.



The two prayer desks, and possibly their accompanying chairs, were made by Waring and Gillow.

The 3 stained glass windows were added in 1883 in memory of William Roper, one of the original trustees. The centre window, made by Shrigley and Hunt, shows the Risen Jesus with the stigmata on his hands and feet and holding a book with the statement 'I AM'. The other two windows are by Lambert and Moore. To the left is St Peter with his book, quill and the keys to the gates of heaven. To the right is St Paul with his book and quill and holding a sword - 'the Word is mightier than the sword.'

In the other arches are painted the Ten Commandments. These are now on boards replacing the original murals which required extensive renovation.



The apse ceiling shows the symbols of the four Gospel writers, as described in Revelation 4 verses 7-8: the human face for St Matthew, the lion for St Mark, the ox for St Luke, and the eagle for St John. These are arranged on either side of the Lamb of God, showing Jesus bearing the flag of St George. It is interesting to note that the words held by St Matthew, are in fact the words from the beginning of the Gospel of St John! Around the circumference is a quotation from Revelation 19. The ceiling was repainted to the original design in 1989.



Returning towards the nave you will pass the wooden lectern. The original brass eagle lectern was removed as it became insecure, and the present oak lectern was donated in memory of Edith Bell in April 2005.

Turning right is 'Olivia's Music Corner' with a plaque commemorating Olivia Clarke, a budding musician, to whose memory the corner is dedicated.

The space was created in 2007 for use by musicians. Originally music was provided by a harmonium. In 1885 an organ by Hewins of Stratford on Avon was purchased and remained in use until 1966 when it was replaced by an organ made by J Walker of Ruislip. This was then replaced in 1997 by an electronic organ. A Bluthner Grand piano dated 1892 was purchased



in 2002. Both the electronic organ and the piano were superseded by a digital piano/organ in 2026.

After a new heating system and new radiators were installed in 2015, one of the original radiators, no longer in use, was moved from near the font and placed in this corner as a relic.



The north wall contains four Shrigley and Hunt stained glass windows dating from 1926/7. The first two commemorate Joseph Statham and depict famous religious musicians, St Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury 960 -988, and King David the Psalmist. The second two commemorate Mary Statham and depict New Testament teachers: Gamaliel teaching the young Saul, who became St Paul; and Eunice teaching her son Timothy, who later accompanied St Paul on his travels.

A plaque nearby commemorates Richard Willis who was a Churchwarden from 1884 to 1909.

In 2022 several pews were removed from the north aisle and lino was laid, providing space for tables and chairs. A refreshment area was then created near the door leading to the kitchen and toilet.

Reaching the back of church, a black box houses all the equipment needed for the sound and vision systems, which have been gradually improved since 2020, with the installation of screens in 2025 and 5G Internet in 2026.



Above this, the wheel or rose window high on the west wall was given by Rev William Armitage in memory of his wife. The centre piece depicts Jesus the Paschal Lamb, and is surrounded by a choir of angels singing "Alleluia".



Below this are three arched stained glass windows made by Seward & Co, given in 1897 by former pupils of the Ripley Hospital in memory of its founders, Thomas and Julia Ripley. The Ripley Hospital opened as an orphanage in 1864 and now forms the present Ripley St Thomas Church of England Academy. The windows portray the purposes of the Institution as defined in St Matthew's Gospel, chapter 25 "I was a stranger and you took me in" represented by the giving of bread; "I was naked and you clothed me" represented by the giving of clothes; "I was sick and you visited me" represented by the giving of grapes from a basket of fruit.



Looking back down the church, there are two banners , one on each side, hanging between the arches. They were made by church members in 2026 to celebrate the 150th anniversary year, and portray 'Fruit of the Spirit' and 'Seven days of Creation'.



As you return to the Victorian font, on your right are two windows installed in 1981 to commemorate 50 years of Scouting and Guiding in Scotforth. The windows were paid for by former members and were made by the Lancaster firm of Abbot & Co.



The actual church building and much of the interior furniture and accessories, have over the years been designed and crafted by local firms or individuals, and willing parishioners. The church is surrounded by a beautiful garden, maintained by another small group of church members.

As you come to the end of your walk around St Paul's church, you cannot have failed to see the areas of damp and disrepair. The tower was repaired and repointed in 2021, but the church is in need of a new roof and we trust that this can be undertaken in the not too distant future, with the help of various funding groups and voluntary donations.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to our Church and that you will pray for our continued work and witness in Scotforth.



August 2026.

More information about St Paul's church, services and activities can
be found at stpauls-scotforth.org