

## Case Name: Church of St Raphael the Archangel

**Case Number: 467745**

### Background

An application to consider the Church of St Raphael the Archangel, Millbrook, has been received, precipitated by it having been recently declared redundant.

NB. The case has since become HOT. The local authority has advised (7 Dec 2011) that they believe the building to be under a fairly imminent and credible threat of demolition. Enquiries have been received over notifying the Council of the intention to demolish.

### Asset(s) under Assessment

Facts about the asset(s) can be found in the Annex(es) to this report.

Annex	List Entry Number	Name	Heritage Category	EH Recommendation
1	1406451	Church of St Raphael the Archangel	Listing	Add to List

### Visits

Date	Visit Type
26 September 2011	Full inspection

### Context

The applicant has requested that the Roman Catholic Church of St Raphael the Archangel in Millbrook be assessed for listing because the church has recently become redundant, due in part to the rising costs of repair. The applicant fears that it is in danger of vandalism and also notes it is suffering from structural deterioration. The applicant notes that the building is remarkably unaltered, has an interesting pre-Vatican II plan form, a dalle de verre screen by Pierre Fourmaintraux of Whitefriar's Studio, and ceramic stations of the cross and holy water stoups by Alan Boyson.

The building stands just outside Millbrook Conservation Area.

### Assessment

#### CONSULTATION

The applicant, owner, and local authority were consulted. In addition, the C20 Society wrote a letter regarding the application and was included in the consultation process. The applicant had no further comments. The owners had no particular comments on the consultation report, but did indicate that they will be making a separate submission in due course on whether they consider the building satisfies the designation criteria. The local authority and C20 Society had no further comments.

#### DISCUSSION

The statutory criteria for designating a building or structure are its special architectural or historic interest (Principles of Selection for Listing Buildings, March 2010). Particularly careful selection is required for buildings from the period after 1945, although, as with all cases, it is based upon the intrinsic interest of the building being assessed. English Heritage's 'Places of Worship Selection Guide' (April 2011) notes specific considerations when considering places of worship for designation. These include character, historic interest, intactness, fixtures, fittings and decoration.

St Raphael the Archangel is a Roman Catholic church built in Millbrook, Stalybridge, in 1961-3. Churches built in the Anglo-Catholic tradition provide the overwhelming majority of places of worship in this country and highly-regarded national architects or high-quality architectural embellishments are likely to be important considerations. The architects Massey and Massey of Warrington are a provincial rather than national practice and do not have any previously listed buildings, but they do appear to have had an ecclesiastical

specialism, designing several Roman Catholic churches during this period. The Millbrook church is a bold modern design with a wide, shallow dome, and it does have particular interest on a number of counts.

The association of a particular building with a development in worship will add to its interest. The Church of St Raphael the Archangel has clear historic interest because its internal layout reflects an innovation in liturgical practice. This was the move towards a unified worship space demonstrated by the exploration of plan forms that place the Eucharist spatially as well as spiritually at the centre of worship, as encouraged by the Liturgical Movement. The Liturgical Movement had its roots in progressive Catholic theological circles in pre-First World War northern Europe. St Raphael's is an early espousal of the approach in England and, while it does not have a fully developed centralised arrangement, it clearly demonstrates a transitional period in the planning of Catholic churches, being a precursor in date to Vatican II (1962-5) which saw the Roman Catholic church officially embrace the Liturgical Movement. The planning is essentially traditional, but is treated in an innovative manner to emphasize the involvement of the congregation with the placing of an island altar beneath a wide crossing with a dome, together with the use of shallow storeyed transepts overlooking the crossing and a central eastern chapel to create an impression of enclosure. The focus upon the altar is also enhanced by the corona of light from the dome clerestorey, and the large-scale contemporary pendent light.

Architecturally, the church has a geometric blockiness with stepped massing building up to the large crossing dome. The dome gives the building a Byzantine air. Byzantine derivatives enjoyed considerable popularity among all Christian denominations during the course of the last quarter of the C19 and first quarter of C20. When the Catholic architect J F Bentley designed Westminster Cathedral (1895-1903) he consciously chose an 'Italo-Byzantine' style to differentiate it from the nearby Westminster Abbey, and under this in turn influenced many subsequent Catholic churches. One such is the Church of St John the Baptist in Rochdale, built in 1924. It is likely that the Millbrook church references and up-dates these and other Byzantine motifs, such as the use of mosaic in the prominent dalle de verre screen, but the obvious use of concrete in the design serves to give the building a bold, modern look, which contrasts strongly with the traditionally built stone buildings of the village.

The intactness of a building and its fixtures can be an important consideration. The loss of the Pilkington tile mural on the exterior of the north transept is unfortunate. However, the building is otherwise largely intact and architecturally unaltered, and still encompasses its original vision. In addition the retention of high-quality contemporary fixtures and fittings mean that the building is not unduly compromised by the loss of a small element of the decorative scheme.

The fixtures, fittings, and decoration can be of great importance in defining the character of a place of worship, and are sometimes regarded as the most important elements of all. The post-war cathedrals of Coventry and Liverpool Metropolitan became showcases for contemporary art and craft, and so, to a lesser extent did the Church of St Raphael the Archangel. The liturgical north wall of the building is embellished by an extensive dalle de verre stained glass screen. This may be read both externally, where the elevation forms the front façade of the building seen from the road, and internally, where the intense colours flood into the ground floor. The screen is a good example of 1960s ecclesiastical glass design whose brilliant colours and organic forms dramatically enrich the interior space. It was designed by Pierre Fourmaintraux, who was a leading proponent of the dalle de verre technique in England and a chief designer for Powell's highly regarded Whitefriars' Studio. It is a relatively early example, preceding the glass at Liverpool Cathedral, and is of interest in being figurative, rather than the more usual abstract schemes employing dalle de verre glass. In addition to the glass, the church retains its original ceramic stations of the cross and holy water stoops by Alan Boyson. The glazed relief panels were designed specifically for the church. Boyson is a significant post-war artist, who was also involved in designing many artworks for public buildings, and whose quality of design has become more widely acknowledged in recent years. Both Fourmaintraux and Boyson have listed work elsewhere and their work here undoubtedly adds to the artistic interest of the building.

Of additional interest is the large contemporary pendant light designed by McGloughlin of Dublin to the ideas of the architect, which remains unaltered and whose scale serves to visually unite the dome with the crossing space below. The period look of the church is also supported by retention of the original marble altars, altar rails and font, light fittings, and simple bench seating.

It is considered that The Church of St Raphael the Archangel clearly demonstrates historic interest in its layout, architectural interest in the intactness of the architect's original design and retention of the contemporary fixtures and fittings, and artistic interest particularly in the high quality of the dalle de verre glass screen and the ceramic stations of the cross and holy water stoops.

## CONCLUSION

After examining all the records and other relevant information and having carefully considered the architectural and historic interest of this case, the criteria for listing are fulfilled and therefore it is recommended that The Church of St Raphael the Archangel is listed at Grade II.

#### REASONS FOR DESIGNATION DECISION

The Roman Catholic Church of St Raphael the Archangel, Millbrook, of 1961-3 is recommended for designation at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- \* **Historic Interest:** the internal planning of St Raphael the Archangel focuses upon an island altar, and whilst not having the fully developed centralised arrangement advocated by the Liturgical Movement, it clearly demonstrates a transitional period in the planning of Catholic churches, being a precursor of Vatican II (1962-5), after which such schemes were officially embraced.
- \* **Architectural Interest:** the church references Byzantine motifs, particularly the large crossing dome and the mosaic-like appearance of the prominent dalle de verre screen, in a bold modern design of geometric blockiness and stepped massing culminating in the dominant circular dome
- \* **Intactness:** the church retains its original character to a high degree, being largely intact and architecturally unaltered, and retaining the majority of its high-quality contemporary fixtures and fittings
- \* **Artistic Interest:** the church is a showcase for contemporary arts and crafts, being embellished with Pierre Fourmaintraux's extensive figurative dalle de verre screen of Tobias and the Archangel whose brilliant colours and organic forms epitomise good 1960s ecclesiastical glass design and dramatically enrich the interior space, which is also imbued with a full set of bespoke ceramic stations of the cross and holy water stoops by Alan Boyson
- \* **Fixtures and Fittings:** the internal character of the church is enhanced by well designed fixtures and fittings including a large contemporary pendant light designed by McGloughlin of Dublin to the ideas of the architect, whose scale serves to visually unite the dome with the crossing containing the island altar below, and is complimented by original marble altars, altar rails and font, and other light fittings

#### Countersigning comments:

Agreed: The Church of St. Raphael the Archangel is an innovative church making free use of Byzantine motifs in a Modernist idiom and responding to liturgical developments in the Roman Catholic Church. The high quality of its stained glass and other fittings adds to its interest. It merits designation in the national context.

# Annex 1

## List Entry

### List Entry Summary

This building is listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.

**Name:** Church of St Raphael the Archangel

**List Entry Number:** 1406451

#### Location

The Church of St Raphael the Archangel, Huddersfield Road, Millbrook, Stalybridge, SK 15 3JL

The building may lie within the boundary of more than one authority.

County	District	District Type	Parish
	Tameside	Metropolitan Authority	Non Civil Parish

**National Park:** Not applicable to this List entry.

**Grade:** II

**Date first listed:** 13 December 2011

**Date of most recent amendment:** Not applicable to this List entry.

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### Legacy System Information

The contents of this record have been generated from a legacy data system.

**Legacy System:**

**Legacy Number:**

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### Asset Groupings

This List entry does not comprise part of an Asset Grouping. Asset Groupings are not part of the official record but are added later for information.

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### List Entry Description

#### Summary of Building

Roman Catholic church. 1961-3 by Edward J Massey of architects' practice Massey and Massey of Warrington. Dalle de verre stained glass by Pierre Fourmaintraux of Powells (Whitefriars Studios). Stations of the Cross and water stoops by Alan Boyson. Central pendant light fitting by McGloughlin of Dublin.

#### Reasons for Designation

The Roman Catholic Church of St Raphael the Archangel, Millbrook, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons:

- \* **Historic Interest:** the internal planning of St Raphael the Archangel focuses upon an island altar, and whilst not having the fully developed centralised arrangement advocated by the Liturgical Movement, it clearly demonstrates a transitional period in the planning of Catholic churches, being a precursor of Vatican II (1962-5), after which such schemes were officially embraced.
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## History

The Millbrook parish was formed in 1958 from the neighbouring parish of Stalybridge; the first Mass in Millbrook had been held in 1946 in the canteen of Staley Mill. The Bishop of Shrewsbury, the Right Reverend John A Murphy (later Archbishop of Cardiff) commissioned the architect Edward J Massey of Massey and Massey, Warrington, to design the Church of St Raphael in 1960; the foundation stone was laid in 1961 and the Church was officially opened on 25th April 1963. During the commissioning process, the Bishop stipulated that the High Altar should be such that, if the Liturgy required it, Mass could be celebrated facing the congregation. An article was published in the Catholic Building Review, northern edition, in 1960 (p98) in which the architects' practice stated that 'The Church is in the new manner whereby Mass may be said from both sides of the Altar and the Congregation is grouped about the Sanctuary on three sides'. The bringing forward of the altar and move away from longitudinal planning was encouraged by the Liturgical Movement, which favoured the closer involvement of the faithful in the Mass, and is one of the first espousals of this approach in the Roman Catholic church in England; it may also be seen in the centralized arrangement at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral, designed by Frederick Gibberd for a competition held in 1959, and built in 1962-7. Such planning predates the Vatican II Constitution on Sacred Liturgy which was approved in 1963, the same year that St Raphael's opened.

The Church incorporated a screen of dalle de verre glass by Pierre Fourmaintraux in its north wall. Dalle de verre glass is richly translucent, comprising slabs of thick coloured glass with chipped or faceted edges set in a concrete frame, and was developed in France from the late 1920s. Pierre Fourmaintraux was at the forefront of the technique's use in Britain having moved from northern France in 1956 to become the chief designer of slab glass and abstract windows for Powell's at their highly-regarded Whitefriars Studios. His design here is unusual for his work, as rather than being non-figurative it forms a narrative sequence depicting scenes from the story of Tobias and St Raphael the Archangel. Christ Church, Coventry, built in 1954-8 and containing stained glass by Fourmaintraux depicting the life of Christ, is listed at Grade II. He also designed three lights in the north-east chapel of St Peter's Roman Catholic Church in Edinburgh, listed Category A.

The artist Alan Boyson designed the ceramic Stations of the Cross and holy water stoops for the church. Boyson worked on many artworks for public buildings in the post-war period, often using ceramics; his Tree of Knowledge of 1962 at the former Cromwell Secondary School, Salford, is listed at Grade II.

In 2011, the high estimated cost of repairs led to the decision to close the Church and the final Mass was held on 14th July 2011.

## Details

**MATERIALS:** Brick and concrete.

**PLAN:** rectangular with an entrance hall at either end of the north wall (liturgical rather than cardinal points used throughout), a west end narthex and separate baptistery, nave, crossing with a dome 13.7 metres (45 ft) in diameter with clerestorey lighting, storeyed transepts reached by spiral staircases and an east Blessed Sacrament chapel. The altar stands beneath the dome in front of the chapel. Sacristies, confessionals, and WCs are arranged along the south side of the building.

EXTERIOR: the church is flat-roofed with brick walls and concrete coping. A large, low inset concrete dome is set on a clerestory drum with concrete mullions and tie rings. This stands on a raised brick square with moulded concrete coping and projecting concrete rain-water spouts. On the north side is a long entrance colonnade with eight segmental concrete arches; the circular columns are of textured concrete sections with mosaic tiles to the inset heads and bases and stand on a narrow cobbled strip. The first and eighth bays each contain a timber double doorway with glazed overlight and side lights. In the second to sixth bays are concrete panels of dalle de verre glass each divided into three by narrow concrete mullion fins, with timber panelled glazing (now painted over) in the seventh bay. There are upper, flat-roofed transepts to both north and south sides; that to the north has a concrete panel of abstract forms (this replaces the original mural of St Raphael the Archangel with Tobias by Pilkington's Tiles Ltd, which was damaged by inclement weather). The west end narthex and adjacent baptistery are lit by a full-height glazed screen with narrow concrete mullion fins and a central glazed double doorway opening into the narthex. At the right-hand end is a doorway into the church located beneath a covered walkway attached to the adjacent presbytery.

INTERIOR: side colonnades of circular piers with an inset frill of fluting at the top and bottom and shallow segmental arches; the upper transepts have flat lintels each supported by two similar piers. The transepts are reached by spiral staircases and have plain metal balustrades. The east Blessed Sacrament chapel is screened off by high metal railings and gates, painted white. The island altar is of black and white marble with matching marble altar rails to the front and stands on a plinth of three shallow steps; the chapel altar is of grey and white marble. The baptistery contains a tall circular white stone font. The north wall of the nave is dominated by a full-height screen of intensely-coloured dalle de verre stained glass by Pierre Fourmaintraux with scenes from Tobias and the Archangel Raphael. Inner plain-glazed screens to the narthex and baptistery allow light into the nave, and the island altar is lit by a corona of light from the dome clerestory. Above the colonnade piers and over the baptistery and narthex screens are fourteen ceramic Stations of the Cross designed by Alan Boyson for the building. The two ceramic water stoops in the east entrance hall and similar water stoop on the south wall of the nave are also by Boyson. Suspended from the centre of the crossing dome is a large rectangular pendant light of twenty-two lights mounted in polished diamond plates fixed to a tubular frame designed by McGloughlin of Dublin to the architect's ideas. There are contemporary chandeliers over the nave with white glass shades. The simple bench seating with carved roundels is also contemporary.

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### **Selected Sources**

Anon, The Church of St Raphael the Archangel in Millbrook, Stalybridge, Cheshire , c1963

Hartwell Clare, Hyde Matthew; Hubbard Edward and Pevsner Nikolaus, Cheshire (Buildings of England), 2011, 482

Architectural History Practice, Taking Stock (Diocese of Shrewsbury), Forthcoming, 2011, Architectural History Practice, EC1M 6EJ

**Map****National Grid Reference:** SD981440044

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