

Statement of Significance.

The Parish Church of St Theodore Port Talbot is in the Archdeaconry and Deanery of Margam, in the Diocese of Llandaff, being situated some 32 miles west of Cardiff and 9 miles east of Swansea. Standing on the A48 and within easy access of the M4 Motorway the building has excellent links by road, and is within several hundred yards of Port Talbot railway station.

The church was designed by John Loughborough Pearson of London, and was built in 1895-7 at the expense of the local landowner Emily Charlotte Talbot of Margam Park in memory of her brother Theodore (d.1876) and sister Olive (d.1894). It was originally part of the Parish of Margam and was built to accommodate the growing population of Port Talbot, the nearby chapel of ease for Margam Abbey, Holy Cross church, having become too small. Miss Talbot was a generous benefactor as well as the major land owner and the church is part of the wider development of the area associated with and generated by her.

The building's dimensions are approximately 44.5 meters by 23.5 meters, and stands on a site of approximately 1.23 acres with a frontage to the main A48 road of 63m and a depth of 81m. There is a large grassed area surrounding the building with trees and bushes on three sides. The churchyard is surrounded by cast iron railings on a stone plinth wall.

It is part of a complex comprising to the west a car park, the vicarage and 2 church halls. One of the halls predates the church while the other was constructed in the early 2000s. It is bounded to the east and north by a publicly owned memorial park and playing fields. The size of the building especially its height, set against this open backdrop makes it a dominant feature not only in the immediate landscape but also in a wider context: being clearly visible from the mountains behind and the elevated section of the M4 as it traverses Port Talbot, as well as from main line trains. (See aerial photograph of the Church in its setting attached)

A major restoration project was undertaken in 1997.

The church was originally intended to have a tower at the west end, as indicated by the thickness of the walls which are considerably thicker than the rest of the church. This was never completed and the roof of the nave continues over this section.

The church is constructed of local blue-grey specked sandstone with bath stone dressings under tile roofs.

Features of architectural merit are

- in the south east corner there is a Lady Chapel attached to the chancel which has an unusual apsidal end;
- the impressive vaulted ceilings are an unusual feature in a church of its size;

- the church contains some fine stained glass by Clayton and Bell;
- the church also contains a Charles Martin of Oxford organ;
- the west gable end was re-faced around the turn of this century during the major restoration project having had a temporary finish since its original completion;
- above the north entrance porch is a stone carved effigy depicting St. Theodore.

It was listed by CADW in February 1975, with an amended listing in 2000, as a Grade II* listed building. The reason for the listing being: 'Listed grade II* as a powerful example of the Early English style in late Victorian architecture by a nationally important architect. The largest church designed in Wales by JL Pearson'. (See CADW Listing attached)

Opposite are terraced houses, which pre-date the church, behind these runs the main railway line and then the steelworks which dominates Port Talbot.

The wider area is essentially residential of which many of the houses were built either shortly after the church or predate it. There has been little recent new residential development given the limited land availability in what, apart from the open space setting comprising the church and park, is a densely populated urban area. Close to the church there is a district shopping centre and there are also two primary schools within walking distance.

Port Talbot itself has an ageing population with identified health needs. Health issues in Neath Port Talbot are particularly acute and residents experience some of the worst health in Wales (Neath Port Talbot Local Development Plan - 2006 -2026) [LDP]. A major health concern in the areas of the church and parish is the issue of air quality and particulate matter.

According to the latest census data 19% of the population of Neath Port Talbot are 65 and over and population based projections are that this percentage figure will rise.

Employment is still dominated by the local steel works although the numbers employed there have reduced dramatically since the 1960s. As the LDP emphasises: "Economic growth in Neath Port Talbot has stagnated over the last ten years".

The memorial park abutting the church is included in a list of areas in the LDP as a 'Quiet Area': designated as such in order to protect areas of tranquility within urban areas. In the park there is also a prominent War Memorial which has the south side of the church as an immediate backdrop. The church is a dominant feature in the setting of the park and could be seen as an important aspect to the tranquility being preserved.