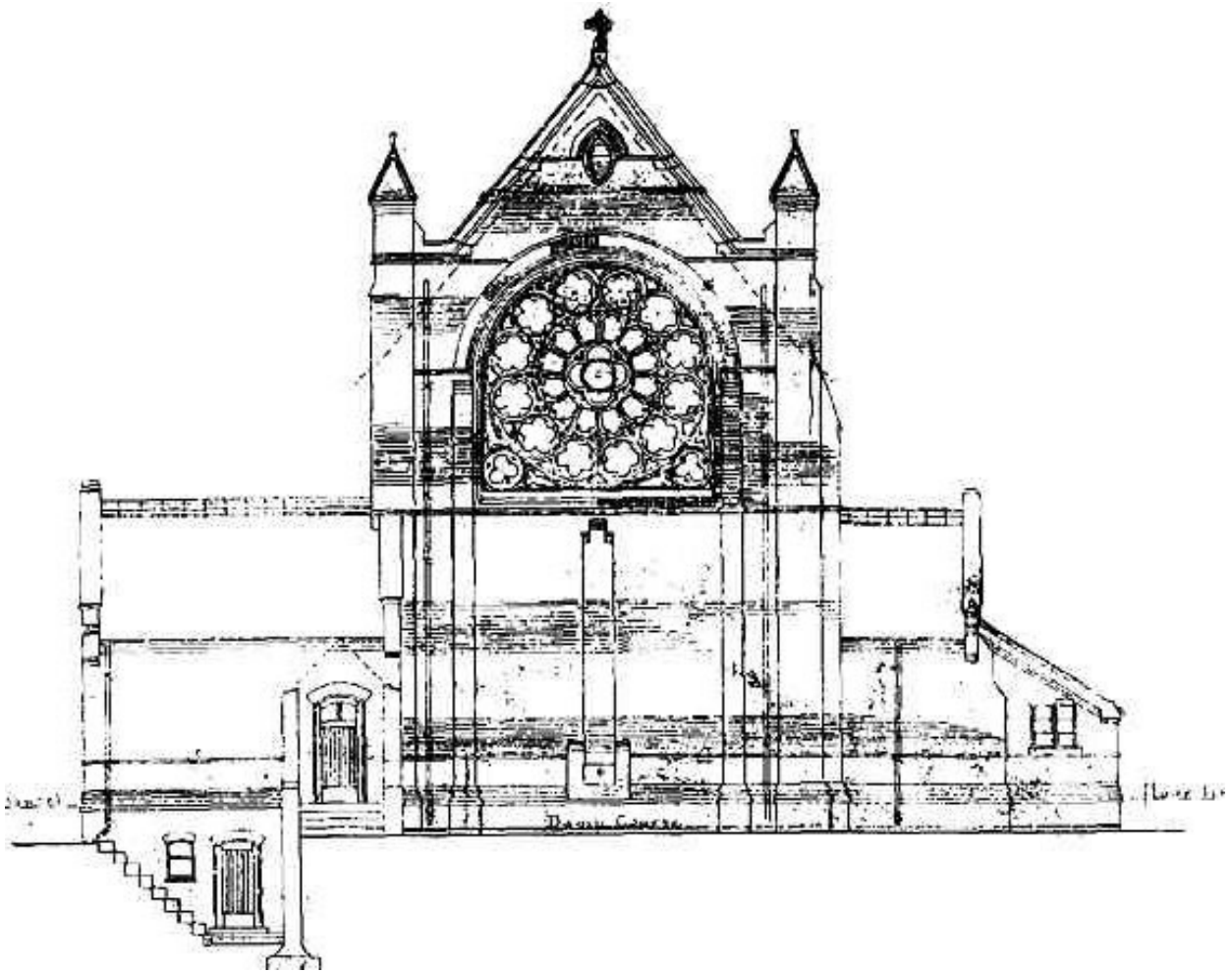


A
HISTORY OF
ST JOSEPH'S
CATHOLIC CHURCH
BIRKENHEAD



We are very much indebted to Frances Lee and Eileen Carty, two faithful parishioners, for the enormous amount of work they put into the research and presentation of the material in this History section, which was originally printed as a booklet to mark the parish's centenary in 2000.

CHAPTER 1: THE MISSION

From pre-Roman times until the end of the 17th century the Wirral Peninsula has been made up of many small villages and hamlets. Even in 1801 the town of Birkenhead consisted of only 110 people, an ancient priory, a ferry house and a number of cottages and houses. The population of Birkenhead was then dramatically boosted by the sea trade in and out of the port of Liverpool and subsequently Birkenhead became a domestic suburb of the city.

In the beginning:

The parish of St. Joseph's was located on the edge of the ancient hamlet of Tranmere on what was previously heathland divided into individual crofts. Parochial Boundaries were established in November 1918 from a point where the G. C. Railway crosses Woodchurch Road - along the railway to Storeton Station, - North East to Storeton (exclusive), - then the road by Little Storeton (inclusive) and North West End of Quarries to Storeton Road, along Storeton Road to Birkenhead Parliamentary Boundary to Borough Road, along Borough Road and Mount Road to Allcot Avenue, Roxburgh Avenue, across Victoria Park to Rosedale Road, (both sides) - Downham Road - Old Chester Road - Queen Street - Holt Hill - Elm Grove - Wilmer Road - Balls Road - Christchurch Road - Rose Mount - Ingestre Road - footpath from Talbot Road to and along Woodchurch Road to starting point.

Parish population :

1900—1,000

1951 - 3,500

1983 - 5,000

1998 - 3,500

The Diocese of Shrewsbury was created in 1851 under the auspices of Bishop James Brown. At that time there were only 30 priests in the whole of this newly formed diocese.

In 1898 it was decided to found a much needed new mission on the new housing development known as 'Devonshire Park Estate'. The task was given to Father

George Carton then chaplain to the FCJ nuns at Holt Hill Convent, living at 43 Chestnut Grove.

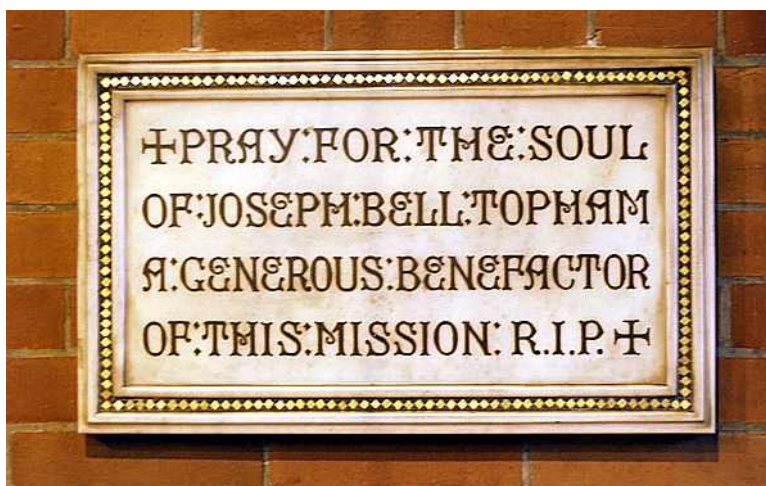
The Mission was opened on 25th September 1898 and on this first day Father Carton called a meeting of gentlemen of the congregation who were to help him get the mission established. Unfortunately no record of who attended this meeting can be found. During the early days of the mission Mass was offered in the private chapel at the home of Mr. Joseph Bell Topham who lived at 'Heathley' Woodchurch Road, Oxton (the site on which St. Joseph's Primary School now stands). By the following month, October, Evening Service with Benediction was being held on Sunday afternoons in Holt Hill Convent Chapel. By January 1899 Mass was being said during the week at 'Heathley' whilst some Baptisms were being conducted in the convent chapel at Holt Hill. During this period Father Carton was living at 56 North Road. At Easter of this same year 'all' the houses of the members of the congregation were blessed.

Before naming, the church site was known as 'the Devonshire Park Church'. The land site valued at £569.15s.0d. was purchased by Mr. Joseph Bell Topham who then donated the land to the Parish Mission for the building of a church and presbytery.

According to the available documentation much correspondence was exchanged over the planning application to build a Catholic church on the site. Several local objections had been raised, in the event the tact and diplomacy of the then Bishop, (Bishop Samuel Allen) prevailed where legal argument apparently failed and planning permission was eventually granted. The architects selected to build the church were Edmund Kirby of Liverpool, the

building work was given to local builder Mr. Peter Rothwell.

The Foundation Stone of the new church (at a cost £99. 8s 1d) was blessed and laid on 19th March 1899 on the land donated by Mr. Topham.



Birkenhead News - March 1899

NEW CATHOLIC CHURCH STONE LAYING AT TRANMERE

'On Sunday afternoon the foundation stone of the new Catholic Church of St. Joseph at the junction of Willow Bank and North Roads was laid with due ceremony by the Right Rev. Dr. Allen Bishop of Shrewsbury. There was a large gathering including representatives of the Young Men's Societies of St. Werburgh's, St. Laurence's and Our Lady's Churches, and also a contingent of the Third Order of St. Francis from Liverpool. The ceremony was taken part in by the Very Revv. Canon T. J. Marsden, V.G. E. Lynch, H. Singleton and J. Barry, Fathers G Carton, E. R. Hitchings and W.S. Jones. His Lordship alluded to the pressing necessity for the Church through the growing population of the neighbourhood. He also referred to the responsibility which rested upon the shoulders of those connected with the Church, and expressed the hope that they would not cease their energies, or stay their generosity until the burden of debt was entirely liquidated. About £100 was laid upon the stone, which was inspected at the close of service. Father Carton presented the Bishop with a beautiful silver trowel and thanked His Lordship for his attendance, and the Catholics of the locality and from Liverpool for their assistance. The foundation stone contained copies of the Birkenhead newspapers, coins of the realm and the usual documents bearing the names of the architect and Father Carton. The new edifice which will accommodate 600 persons will be of the Gothic style, of brick and terracotta facings. The roof will be panelled, the flooring of wood blocks, and the seats of pitchpine. There will be a nave and two aisles. All modern appliances for ventilation will be used and provision will be made for an installation of electric light. Attached to the church will be the Presbytery. The contractor is Mr. P. Rothwell. '

The total cost of the church building was £9,200 much of which was borrowed. Therefore there was to be much fund raising over the next few years to pay off this substantial debt.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH

by Peter Howell
Architectural Historian

The architect chosen to design the church was Edmund Kirby. Born in Liverpool in 1838, he was for five years a pupil of Edward Welby Pugin, son and successor of the great A.W.N. Pugin. Afterwards he was an assistant to the distinguished Chester architect John Douglas. The date when he set up his own practice in Liverpool seems to have been 1867. In 1888 he became Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects. In 1897 he moved his residence from Claughton Road, Birkenhead, to Overdale, Beresford Road, Oxton. Two years later in 1900 he built the Church of Holy Name in his own orchard. He took two of his sons into partnership in 1905, and died in 1920.

He built many churches, both Catholic and Anglican, all in the Gothic style. Those in stone include St. Werburgh's, Chester (1873-5 and 1913-4); Our Lady's, Parbold (1878-84), with an elegant spire; and St. Laurence's, Birkenhead (1889-90). This was regarded by Sir Charles Reilly as the best church in the town, but was demolished in 1996. Particularly remarkable are Kirby's works in the red pressed brick, manufactured at Ruabon, (known as Raw Meat Brick in the trade) which was so much favoured by local architects (not least John Douglas) in the later 19th century. He sometimes combined it with half-timber, as at the grand St. Hildeburgh's, Hoylake (1897-9), and the delightful little St. John's, High Leigh (1893). He built some large houses also in red brick, such as Mere Hall, Oxton (1880). Non-ecclesiastical works include the Gothic Queen Victoria Monument in Hamilton Square (1905) and the classical Edward VII Memorial Clock Tower (1912).

(Ruabon Brick was in current use by the Victorian railway industry to build railway bridges as it required little maintenance, as it is not eroded by weather and pollution like the normal house brick in use today. Many of the contemporary houses built around the church at the same time used this same hard wearing material. Unfortunately because it is so hard wearing, it does not absorb rain water, so this has a tendency to collect and soak into the mortar

joins, probably causing much of the rot that the structure of the building has been burdened with in latter years.)

St. Joseph's Church is characteristic of Kirby's work in its proportions: its striking height compensating for the lack of tower or spire. The materials are red pressed brick with moulded terracotta details, both outside and in, and the roof is of Westmoreland Green slates. Its colour and grandeur contribute to its imposing presence on the side of the hill.

The building consists of nave, with lean-to aisles, and a short chancel flanked by side-chapels. The interior has real nobility. Although the windows are narrow lancets, their size and height fill the church with light. Below the paired clerestory windows runs a moulded brick cornice of small trefoil arches. The chancel arch frames the big rose window at the east end. The fact that the clerestory windows in the chancel are larger than those in the nave (the panelled chancel roof rising higher than the nave one) makes the chancel even lighter. The bold and richly patterned decorative scheme (in red, green, blue, yellow, black and white) which covers the trussed wooden roof ensures that the interior is even more colourful than the exterior.

At the west end of the nave, a gallery, bracketed out into the nave, houses the organ in its painted wooden case. Below the gallery is a narthex: at its south end is the former baptistery, (now used as the Repository), on the south side of which a new window was formed in the 1960's. A glazed tile dado runs all round the church. Near to the south-west corner are a marble plaque commemorating Joseph Topham, a generous benefactor of the church, and the carved War Memorial in polished mahogany.

The arcade columns of the nave are of polished granite, with sandstone capitals (all different) and bases. The four middle bays of the south aisle have cross gables and are closed off with wooden screens to form confessionals. There is no stained glass in the church: all the windows being glazed with textured 'cathedral' glass of pink, blue and green. The font has

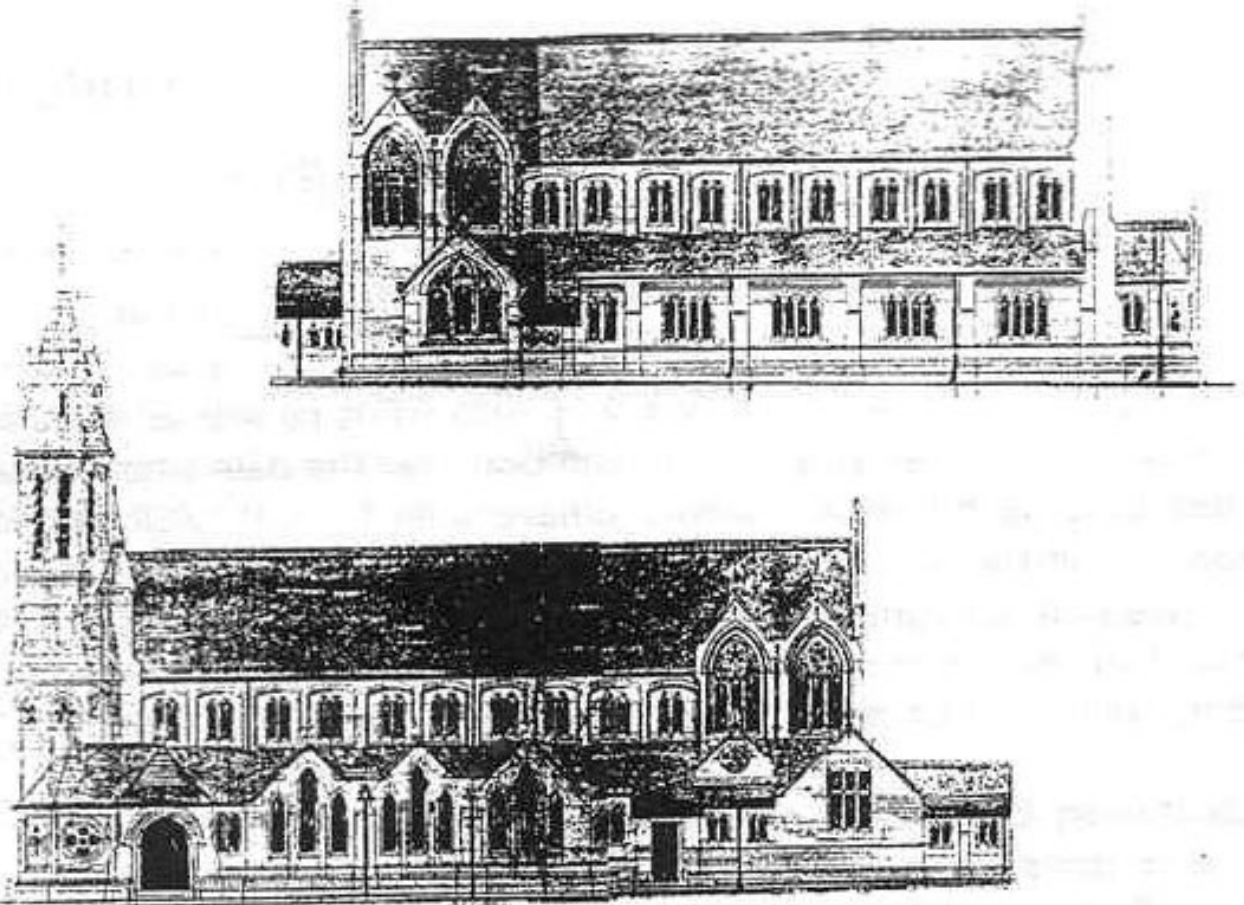
been moved to the east end of the nave. It is made of stone with black marble colonnettes (taken from the pulpit that was situated in the immediate area), but parts are now missing.

In the chancel, a tall carved wooden reredos fills the space below the rose window. Its raised border is carved with gilded vines. In the centre is the exposition throne, flanked by pairs of gilded angels. The sanctuary was re-ordered in 1968 (by the firm of Hayes and Finch). The old high altar has been removed and replaced by a screen carved to match the existing furnishings, which supports the new Tabernacle and the 'big six' candlesticks. The ambo matches this screen. The new free standing altar re-uses the old mensa (reduced in size).

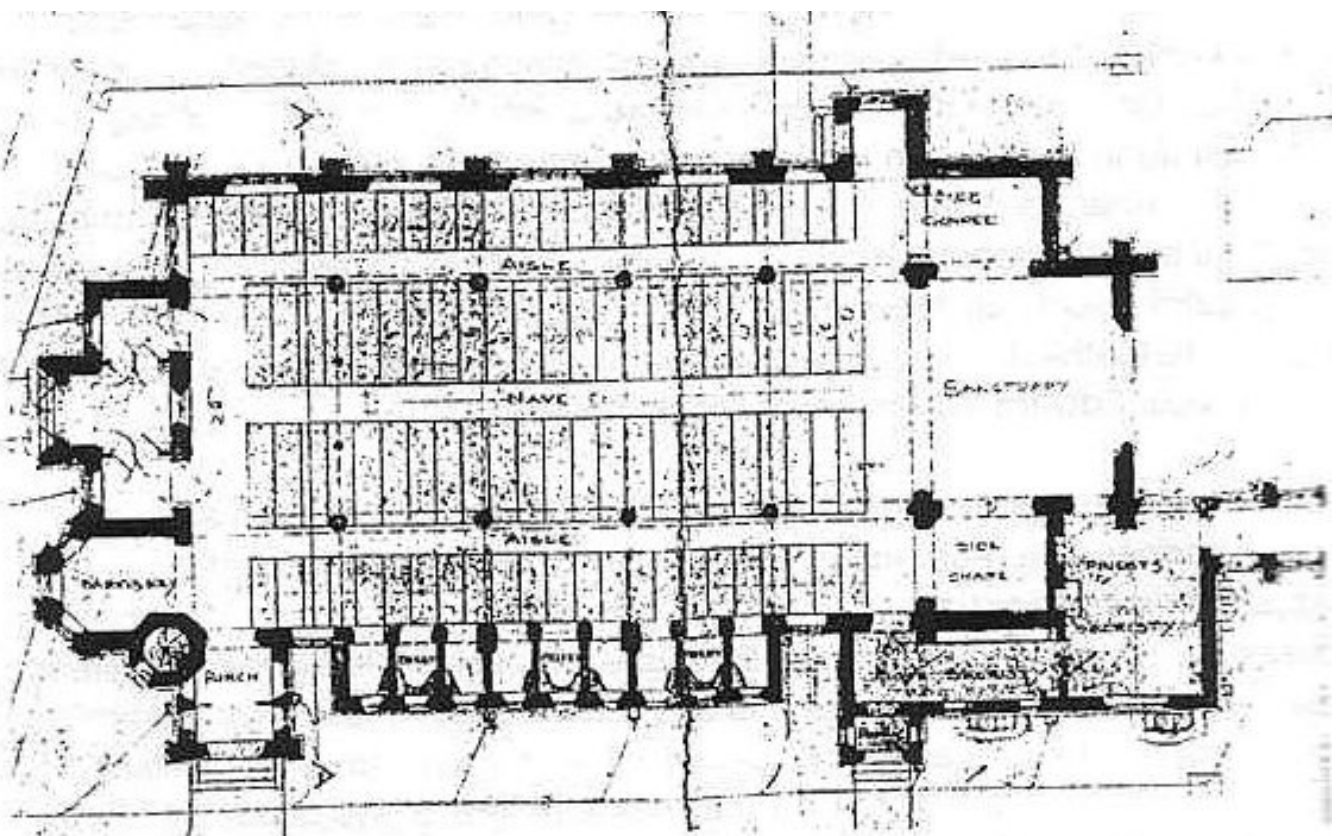
The chancel is lined with rich wooden panelling, and on the south side are triple Sedilia (stalls) with canopies. The wooden altar rails are richly carved. On brackets on either side of the chancel arch are statues of Saints Joseph and Peter.

The Lady Chapel is north of the chancel, and is separated from it by a wooden screen. Its east wall has linenfold wooden panelling, and a plain tester hangs over the plain wooden altar. The Sacred Heart Chapel on the south side has a carved wooden altar (unpainted), which served as the model for the screen which replaced the high altar. On it stands a brass tabernacle. There is bold painted decoration on the east wall. This chapel is lit by a very remarkable gabled wooden roof light, glazed on three sides.

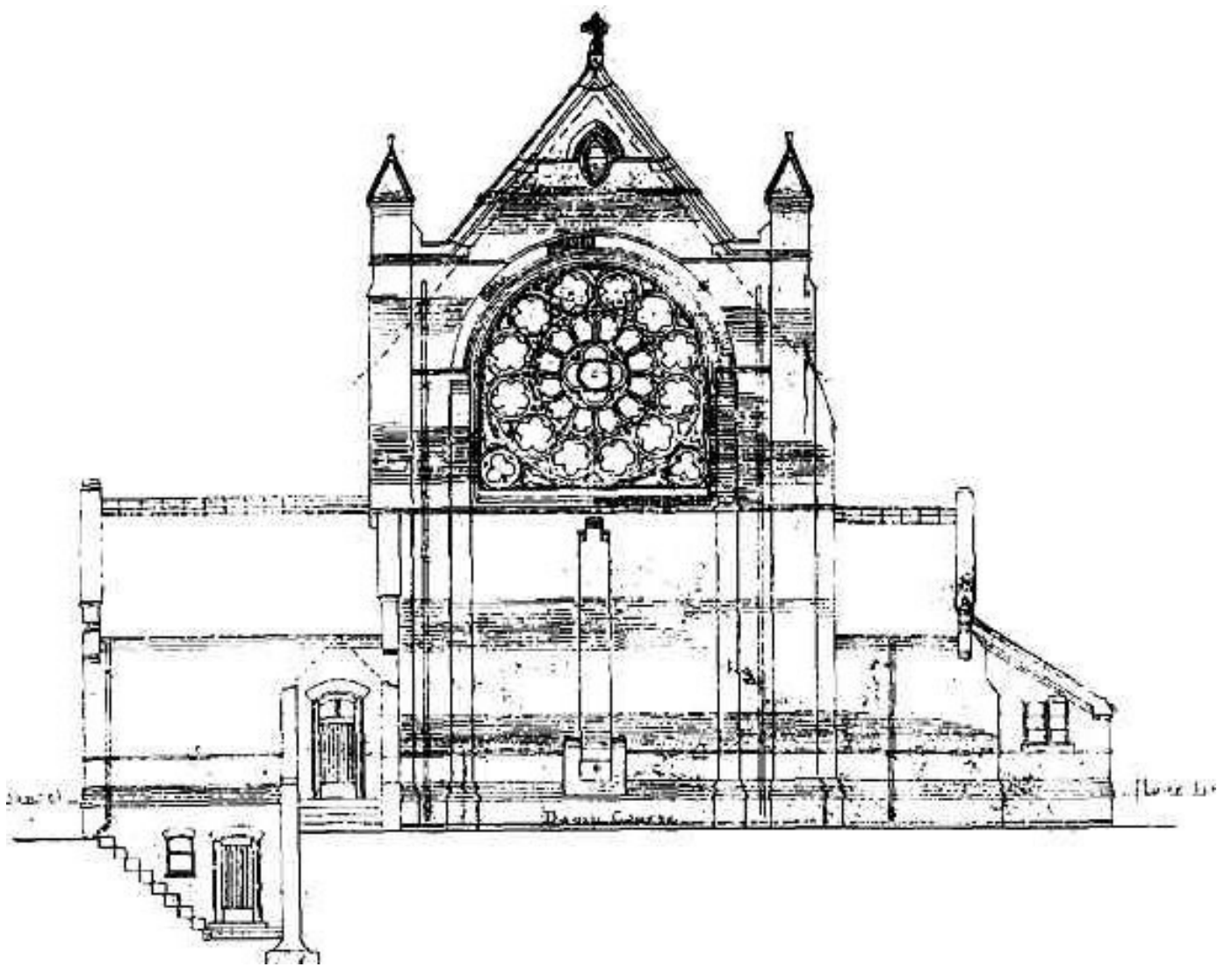
The church was built quickly to the time schedule stipulated by the builder Mr. Peter Rothwell whose family are still represented in the parish today, culminating in the official opening ceremony on the following 19th August 1900, by which time Canon Aloysius O'Toole had replaced Father Carton as Parish Priest.



Original Elevation Drawings 1896 (with/without spire).



Interior Ground Plan 1896



Birkenhead News August 1900
ST. JOSEPH'S NEW RC CHURCH
OPENING SERVICE ON SUNDAY

DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDING

The Bishop of Shrewsbury, on Sunday last opened the new Roman Catholic Church of St. Joseph, a handsome edifice in North Road. The opening services were largely attended, admission being by ticket. At the morning service Dr. Allen (Bishop of Shrewsbury) pontificated, the assistant priest at the throne was the Very Rev. Canon Marsden, VG and the assistants at the throne were the Very Rev Canon Barry and the Rev Father Eugene Rooney. The celebrant of the Mass was the Very Rev. Provost Clegg, the Deacon was the Rev. E Kirby. The Very Rev. Canon Singleton was Master of Ceremonies. The music of the Mass for male voices was Van Bree in C. conducted by Mr. J. Flannery, Mr. J. Davenport officiating at the organ. The Offertory piece was Cherabini's "Ave Maria" which was very effectively rendered by Miss F. Bardsley. The principals in the choir, whose efforts were very praiseworthy, were Mr. B. Broderick (first tenor), Mr M Perry (second tenor) and Mr. J. Kennedy (bass).

Before delivering his sermon, which was characterised by much eloquence and force, Dr. Allen said it was his first duty, as it was his greatest pleasure, to speak in his own name, as representing the diocese, and to offer his congratulations to that portion of the Catholic Church, which centred in and around that building, upon the accomplishment of a great factor - a great and stupendous factor - the completion of the building of a new church. He could only hope that the church would do what it had been built to do, and that it would be not only a centre for advancing Christianity, but an instrument from which would go forth blessings abundant upon those who had striven to make it what it was, and to those who would help them in time to come - and that those blessings would descend upon them and theirs here and hereafter.

In the evening the service was Rosary followed by a hymn and sermon by the Rev. Charles Coupe, S.J. who selected his text from the 14th Chapter of St. John's Gospel, and the 6th Verse. After this a quartette (Deum Omnes) by

Buhler was nicely rendered, and the Benediction was then pronounced. His Lordship the Bishop of Shrewsbury officiated and had as his attendants the Very Rev. Provost Clegg and Canon Barry, Father Carton being the officiating priest and the Rev. Kirby Master of Ceremonies. For the following description of the church we are indebted to the architect Mr. Edmund Kirby:-

"The church is situated on a plot of land in North-Road at the corner of Willowbank Road on a site given by a generous donor. Besides containing the church the land is big enough for a future clergy house. There are two entrances to the church from North Road leading into a large spacious porch, entering into the nave and aisles, which terminate in a chancel and two side chapels. At the chancel ends of the church, escape doors are provided in case of fire or panic. The usual priests and assistants' sacristies adjoin the Chancel. The church is spacious, lofty, well-ventilated and is heated with hot water. Electric light will be used. The general style of architecture is English Gothic and the church will accommodate about 700 people. The contractor for the whole of the work was Mr. Peter Rothwell of Birkenhead who has practically executed the work in the time stipulated for its completion. Although there are still many objects wanted for the completion of the furnishing of the church, several gifts from benefactors have been received, among which are the tabernacle, candlesticks, sanctuary lamp and vases etc."

CONTINUING CONSTRUCTION

But St. Joseph's was by no means fully completed or fitted out in time for the ceremonial opening. There was much urgent activity to raise the considerable funds necessary for the completion of the installation of all the fittings of the church, the building of the presbytery and Sacristy, and the paying off of what was then an enormous debt.

Over the following years, Jumble Sales, Bazaars, Dances, Raffles, Sales of work and numerous 'second and even third collections were organised by the parish in a very business-like fashion with some events spanning morning afternoon and evening over a period of three days. In 1906 it is recorded

that the Pope sent a 'handsome' present for the bazaar via the Bishop (Allen). Unfortunately there is no record to say what this gift was or what became of it. Bearing in mind the small congregation and the low wages at the time a tremendous effort was made by the parish to pay off all debts in a very short period of time.

According to the parish records many of the fixtures were generously donated often by anonymous benefactors. Substantial amounts of money were also received to help alleviate the large outstanding debt.

1901 - The Lady Altar and statue were erected after a special appeal (and through the generosity of a 'non-Catholic gentleman'.)

In 1952 as a memorial to Provost Hazlehurst, the chapel was refurbished by Canon Goodear and a new statue of Our Lady was erected. The halo of the statue was set with precious and semi-precious stones collected from old jewellery donated by parishioners. The casket at the feet of Our Lady contains the names of the parishioners who have promised to say the Family Rosary every day.

1901 - The Sacred Heart Altar was erected. The Sacred Heart Altar was completely renovated in 1970 when the Tabernacle from the High Altar was transferred and a new one put in its place.

In 1976 the altar was dedicated to the memory of Father Edward Doyle and a Mass Bell was donated to hang at the side of the altar which is rung by the priest as he is leaving the sacristy. This is still the practice today.

1902 - Baptismal Font - donated by Mr. Topham.

1903 - Statue of St. Joseph - donated by Mr. Topham.

1904 - Stations of the Cross at a total cost of £224, donors names were inscribed under each station ;

1st Station - Mr. & Mrs. Luke Dodd

2nd - Thomas and Julia Hodskinson

3rd - Catherine Clarke

4th - Joseph and Dorothy Topham

5th - Thomas Aloysius Knowles

6th - James and Mary McBride

7th - John and Elizabeth Linden

8th - Maurice and Cecilia Murphy

9th - William and Eileen Freeman

10th - Francis Hatch

11th - Dr. Jennette & Family

12th - The O'Toole Family

13th - Children of Mary

14th - Ellen Ormond & Family

1904 - Statue of St. Peter

1905 - Pulpit was blessed and opened.

1906 - Presbytery and Sacristy were finally added to the church at a cost of £1,700.

1908 - First two confessionals were erected.

1910 - Organ Gallery, Porch doors, screens and Holy Water Font (at the main entrance) were added.

It is noted that by April 1910 a greater portion of the debt still left on the church had been cleared.

1911 - At a cost of £715 the new organ was opened and blessed by Bishop Singleton.

The organ was overhauled and refurbished in 1934 and again extensively in 1971. At this time the organ was rededicated as a memorial to Miss Cecily

Hoskinson who spent most of her life as organist and choir mistress at St. Joseph's. A plaque and clock can be seen at the foot of the choir steps. On 10th June 1972 an organ recital was given by Mr Terence Duffy, organist at the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King.

1922 - The contract for the High Altar and carved oak Reredos from Salzburg, Austria was signed. Together with the altar rails these were consecrated in November 1923. The replaced original High Altar was donated to the Carmelite Monastery in Birkenhead.

1923 - Construction of the third confessional.

1924 - The formal opening of the new Sanctuary took place with Solemn High Mass in the presence of Bishop Singleton.

The re-organisation of the Sanctuary to its current style took place in 1969. This was erected as a memorial to Mr. Charles Henry Mather who had been a parishioner of St. Joseph's for 50 years and was Headmaster of St. Hugh's Catholic School for 25 years. An inscription on the new marble altar (which now faces the congregation) can be seen on the Priest's side, and reads as follows :-

''Pray for Charles Henry Mather, the donor,
and pray for his former staff and pupils
of St. Hugh's Secondary School 1969''

1924 - It is particularly noted that during this year the original church boiler 'gave out' and there was an 'urgent' second collection introduced for a replacement.

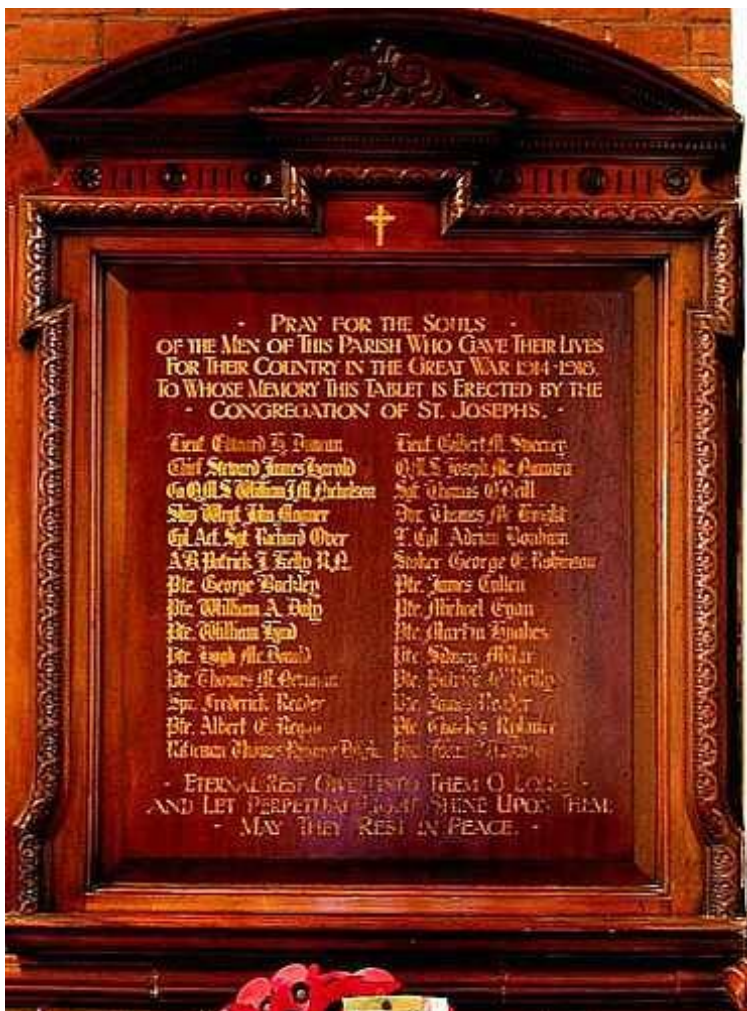
1925 - Silver Jubilee Year.

THE WAR YEARS

1st World War 1914 - 1918

There is little mention in the archives of the effects of the Great War on the parishioners of St. Joseph's but like all other communities throughout the country, every family experienced the trauma of losing loved ones in this most dreadful of wars, which is graphically described in the work of local poet Wilfred Owen. Those that survived were then victims of the virulent epidemic of flu that swept throughout the country directly following the end of the war.

After the war was over a parish meeting was called in Feb 1919 to discuss the erection of a War memorial to the memory of the members of the congregation who had died. A house to house collection was made and the War Memorial and Tablet (which can be seen on the North Road side of the church)



were unveiled on 19th June 1921 by Major General Sir Lionel Nicholson, representing Western Command ; Bishop Keating, Senior Chaplain to H.M. Forces sang the Mass in the presence of Bishop Singleton and the Mayor.

Birkenhead News 22nd June 1921

WAR MEMORIAL UNVEILED AT ST. JOSEPH'S RC CHURCH

Striking sermon by Right Rev. Mgr. George D.D.

The ceremony of unveiling the memorial dedicated to the former members of the parish who gave their lives during the war was performed with fitting solemnity and reverence after High Mass at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church on Sunday morning by Major-General Sir Lionel Nicholson in the presence of His Worship the Mayor (Councillor Luke Lees), His Lordship Bishop of Shrewsbury (Dr. Singleton) His Lordship Bishop Keating (Senior Chaplain to the Forces), the Right Rev. Provost Barry, the Very Rev. Canons A. O'Leary and H Mottram (Seacombe), Councillor and Mrs D.J. Clarke, Mr. and Mrs Oldham and many others. A large crowd of people lined the road and footway outside the Church and a Squadron of the 4th Cheshire's (Commanded by Lieutenant Chandler) was drawn up in the roadway. Belsey's Own Sea Scouts were also in attendance.

Prior to the unveiling ceremony Pontifical High Mass was sung by Bishop Keating in the presence of His Lordship the Bishop of Shrewsbury, the Deacons being the Rev. P. Burke and Rev. Dr. O'Leary, the Master of Ceremonies Father A.J. Wilson (Rock Ferry) and assistant to the throne the Rev. Father McCann (Rock Ferry), Provost Barry and the two Canons also officiated. The choir conductor was Mr. J. E. Mathews and the organist Mr. Gerald Downe. Gounods Mass of the Sacred Heart was sung, the Offertory music being 'Pie Jean' (Mozart's Requiem) and Requiem Aeternam (Mozart's Requiem).

The sermon during the Mass on the subject of the fallen soldiers and sailors was preached by the Right Rev. Mgr. George D.D.

"They had come together" he said "not in a spirit of pageantry or vain

sentiment but to perform a serious and solemn duty that of paying homage to the men of the parish who had given their lives during the war. The immortal poet Shakespeare said the 'evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones', but they should be determined that this should not be so in their case. The names were inscribed on a noble monument and we should keep their memory green, to pass a record of their deeds down to posterity. We had a lesson with a two-fold aspect to learn by their deaths. They had died that we might live, that we might live lives worthy of their deaths. Though it might seem a strenuous claim, they were the heroic dead, for those who had known them found nothing unusual in them, they were ordinary stuff and did not pose as heroes. If they were praised at any time they passed it off as a joke. And if they did not pose as heroes still less, the thought they did pose as saints. Although they had their imperfections there was all the time smouldering in their hearts that fire which only required a spark to set it into a burst of flame. Amid the mud and the poisonous gases - as if all the fires of hell had been set loose, they had found noble aspirations and lofty ideals. Hating war they had only to sustain them the grim determination that justice and right would prevail in the end. This they had lived and died for an ideal and we might now safely entrust them to God's care. "Greater love than this no man hath", and we could be confident as the end crowns the work, so noble deaths are stepping stones to greater and better things. "God grant", he continued "that we never lose sight of the duty which we owe to them. The commemoration looked to the future as well as the past. Some might ask themselves whether the world was any better for the war, or whether we had learnt any lesson by it. Then we must ask ourselves whether we individually had learnt any lessons before criticising others for having learnt it. There would be a chance that others might learn the same lessons. There was he thought a striking ignorance in modern life of lessons taught by the history of past years. Life he considered was not worth living unless there was a spirit of self-sacrifice and self-conquest. It was not a gamble in which the cunning triumphed and in which the weak and the simple went to the wall. It was only by practising the virtues which he had already quoted, that anything could be achieved and that we could then attempt to set aright the balance in the world around us. There seemed an awful phenomenon he

continued, existent in the present day, that people seemed indifferent over things that really mattered. If a man ran his business in the same way that he tried to run his politics he wouldn't achieve much. in the same way there was an indifference over religion and people were foolish by trying to run it on the (.....) of sentiment. In conclusion the preacher showed that just as the men who had fallen had had to fight before they attained their reward, so also we must stand with Christ on Calvary (before) joining Him in heaven.

At the end of the Mass the congregation proceeded en masse to where the memorial was erected. It is a tall Crucifix, the figure being of finely moulded burnished bronze and the Cross of polished teak wood, mounted on a broad pedestal of carved stonework and overhung with a sloping canopy of teak. Underneath carved into the stone is the following inscription ;

*'Erected by the congregation to perpetuate the memory
of the men of St. Joseph's Parish who gave their lives
for their country in the Great War 1914 - 1918.
May they rest in Peace'.*

With reference befitting the occasion the General drew the purple veil aside and the congregation joined together in silent prayer. The Mayor subsequently gave a typically brief and feeling address in which he enumerated the obvious reasons why we should respect and perpetuate the memory of the brave fallen. The final hymn 'Forth comes the standard of the King' (Rev. E. Caswell) was sung by the choir, and the bulk of the congregation returned to the church where the Memorial Tablet which contains 27 names was unveiled by his lordship the Bishop of Shrewsbury. The memorial, the teak of which was finished by Mr. Oldham was carved and shaped by Mr. McLaghlan assisted by Mr. McBride. The tablet was made by Mr. Dalziel, the lettering inscribed in gilt by Mr. Fred Dunne, and the masonry executed by Mr. Charles Hamilton under the general supervision of Mr. Robert Rothwell assisted by Mr. Egan'.

Roll of Honour 1914 - 1918

Lieut. Edward H. Duncan
Chief Steward James Harold
Co.Q.M.S. William J.M. Nicolson
Ship Wrgt. John Magner
Cpl. Act. Sgt. Richard Over
A.B. Patrick Kelly R.A.
Pte. George Buckley
Pte. William A. Daly
Pte. William Hind
Pte. Hugh McDonald
Pte. Thomas M. Newman
Pte. Frederick Reader
Pte. Albert C. Reagan
Rifleman Thomas Rylance D.C.M.
James Young
Lieut. Gilbert M. Sweeney
Q.M.S. Joseph McNamara
Sgt. Thomas O'Neill
Dvr. Thomas McKnight
L.Cpl. Adrian Bonham
Stoker George C. Robinson
Pte. James Cullen
Pte. Michael Egan
Pte. Martin Hughes

Pte. Sidney Millar
Pte. Patrick O'Reilly
Pte. James Reader
Pte Charles Rylance
Pte. John Weston

THE WAR YEARS

2nd World War 1939 - 1945

In preparation for the threatened war with Germany in 1939, it is recorded that an appeal was made on behalf of the Chief Constable for men of the congregation over the age of 30 to volunteer for instruction as Air Raid Precaution Wardens. Also the Ladies Confraternity were addressed on 'National Service' and parents were asked to bring their children to school for a rehearsal in respect of the evacuation of the children.

On 3rd September 1939 Provost Hazlehurst before 11.00am Mass announced that Britain had declared War on Germany. By this time nearly all the local school children had already been evacuated and all Birkenhead Schools had been closed. (St. Joseph's School re-opened on 1st April 1940).

A nearby school in the parish known as Devonshire Park School (now a row of houses at the corner of Clarence Road and Willowbank Road) was taken over as an Army Barracks.

In 1941 there was an appeal to the parishioners for volunteer 'Fire Watchers' for St. Joseph's School during the Air Raids of the Blitz. On the night 12/13th March 1941 the church narrowly missed a direct hit from a landmine which had landed on the Army Barracks based in Devonshire Park School, killing 39 soldiers. Many people were killed that night including some of the parishioners of St. Joseph's.

By March 1945 conditions started to get back to normal and on 13th May 1945 Solemn High Mass was celebrated in thanksgiving for the ending of the war in Europe.

Roll of Honour 1939 - 1942

Michael Clifford, *5th Medium Regiment Royal Artillery*
Michael Francis Gilligan, *Died through enemy action*
Gerard Duffey, *RAF Pilot Warrant Officer*
Captain Noel James Reeves, *Pioneer Corps*
Sergeant Thomas O'Donoghue, *Royal Engineers Bomb Disposal*
James Dowling *Seaforth Highlanders*
Private Joseph Richard Wardle, *South Lancs. Regiment*
Private Samuel Preston *K.S.L.I.*
Mrs Charlotte Yates, *killed by enemy action*
Chief Petty Officer Ernest Crowther, *Royal Navy*
John Fenwick Brewis, *Royal Marines*
Sergeant Robert Baker, *RAF Air Gunner Warrant Officer*
Joseph Leo Cullinan, *170th Cavalry Field Ambulance RAMC*
Simon Doyle, *Civilian Air Raid Victim*
Bernard Sherlock, *Civilian Air Raid Victim*
Denis Floughty, *Civilian Air Raid Victim*
Edward Comer, *lost at sea*
Williams James Barnes, *RAOC*
Major Patrick John Mulqueen, *Lancs. Fusiliers*
William Archer, *Royal Navy*
Francis William Lewis, *Commando attached to Royal Corps of signals*
Adrian Walton, *RAF Pilot*
Albert Briscoe, *killed by enemy action*
Corporal Mary Williams, *ATS*
Private William Edward Sinclair, *RAMC*
William Cooper, *RAF*
Charles Griffiths, *RASC*
John Smith, *The Bantams Regiment*
Rosalie Snape, *Civilian Air Raid Victim*
Kathleen Murphy, *Civilian Air Raid Victim*
Joanna Mandale, *Civilian Air Raid Victim*
James Shannon, *RAF*

Every Remembrance Sunday in November a wreath is laid at the memorial in memory of all our parishioners who were killed in both wars.

POST-WAR YEARS

1946 - On 6th November the inauguration of the Novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour took place and has faithfully been continued on Wednesday evenings until the present day.

1951 - GOLDEN JUBILEE

In 1951 having come safely through the war the parish celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the Church on 28th October with Solemn High Mass celebrated by Bishop J. A. Murphy, the preacher being Canon Bernard Bell, a former curate of St. Joseph's. The celebrations had been postponed from the previous year because of the illness of the parish priest Provost H.E. Hazlehurst. It was noted in the Birkenhead News at the time that the unique distinction of St. Joseph's was that the parish had only been served by 'two' parish priests during its 51 years history. 20 parishioners were present who had been in the parish since the church was built and representatives from the Convent and Holt Hill School and nurses from St. Catherine's Hospital were also among the congregation. In the afternoon a procession took place from Holt Hill Convent to the church. In the evening the church was dramatically floodlit.

1951 - Also saw the first Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes.

1959 - The first Carol and Candle Service took place at Christmas and is still held annually to the present day.

1962 - The Guild of St Stephen (for Altar Servers) was started.

1962 - The biggest event of this church year was the beginning of The Second Vatican Council which commenced on 11th October. A Novena of prayers was held in the parish which ended on the eve of the opening of the Council. The Council closed on 8th December 1965. During the period of the Council Pope John XXIII died on 3rd June 1963, and on 23rd June Cardinal Montini was elected Pope and took the title of Pope Pius VI.

1964 - As a result of Vatican II, important changes were made in the Liturgy, most noticeably in the change of language of the Mass from Latin to English, and the celebration of the Mass with the priest facing the congregation.

Several other changes were carried out gradually over the next five years and were completed by 30th November 1969.

1964 - The Shrewsbury Diocesan Weekly Covenant Scheme was introduced into the parish and continues to the present day.

1964 - The Piety stall which can be found still in the church porch was opened on 20th September "for a trial period".

1970 - In accordance with Vatican II, the first lay readers were appointed.

1975 - A practice was introduced whereby a statue of Our Lady is taken round the Parish during the month of October, stopping at a different house each night where family and friends gather together and say the Rosary. This practice continues every October.

1976 - In February the daily recitation of the Rosary was started. This took place at 12 noon every day.

1982 - On 30th May Pope John Paul II visited Liverpool as part of his visit to Great Britain. St. Joseph's parishioners were well represented at this historic event both at Speke Airport and the Cathedral of Christ the King. Some youth of the parish also took the long journey to Cardiff to meet him at their own Youth Rally.

1983 - The Bishop granted permission on 1st January, for the parish to celebrate Sunday Mass on Saturday Evenings, which would fulfil the Sunday obligation.

1984 - In February 'Decorators by Appointment to the Queen' moved in and over the following year re-decorated the whole church in its current unique gilt and colours.

1989 - A Scripture and Study Group was formed and continues to meet weekly on a Wednesday evening.

1992 - On 7th June a speaker addressed all Masses on the Traidcraft Movement - a fair trade agency established to help the poor in the Third World. A Traidcraft stall was established in the parish to be held once a month. £200 was raised on the opening day. The stall still operates from the back of the church.

1996 - Father Ned Wall left the parish to join The St. James the Apostle Society (a society of secular priests working in the countries of Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador) and begin five years of missionary service in Peru. The parish continues to help and support him in his work.

Registered Births - Marriages - Deaths

Births

The very first entry in the earliest register of Baptisms is dated the 2nd October 1898. The baby's name was Leonard Joseph Roberts of 38, Frodsham Street, Tranmere, who was born on 11th September 1898. As the church was not yet completed the child was Baptised in Holt Hill Convent Chapel by the first Parish Priest - Rev. George Carton.

At the age of 26, Joseph was married in St. Joseph's Church on 11th September 1924.

The very first baby to be Baptised actually in St. Joseph's Church, on the same day as the official opening, was Frederick Edward Dunne of Warrington Street on 19th August 1900. He grew up and remained in the parish as a Painter and Decorator.

Marriages

The very first banns read at St. Joseph's (third reading) on the same day as the official opening were for Mr. Alfred James Lee of 76, Whitford Road and Miss Louisa McIntosh of North Wales.

Funerals

The very first recorded funeral in the parish mission was on 23rd September 1898 for Rose Isabella Moscroft of 60 Woodville Road.

PARISH PRIESTS

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Father George Carton | 1898 - 1901 |
| Cannon Aloysius O'Toole | 1901—1925 |
| Provost Henry Hazlehurst | 1925 - 1953 |
| Canon John Goodear | 1953 - 1959 |
| Father Edward Doyle | 1959 - 1975 |
| Canon James Fraser | 1975 - 1986 |
| Father William Doyle | 1986 - 1989 |
| Father Terence Boylan | 1989 - 2005 |
| Father Nicholas Kern | 2005 - |

CURATES

| | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Eugene Rooney | E. Hugh Birdwhistle |
| Joseph O'Leary | John McDonald |
| Joseph Seddon | Frederick Walsh |
| Peter Burke | John Blanc |
| Aloysius Wilson | James Farrell |
| Bernard Coleman | James O'Reilly |
| Bernard Bell | Michael Cupit |
| John Campbell | Michael Gannon |
| Cornelius Campion | Ivan Burke |
| Frederick V Walsh | Michael Wagstaffe |
| Bernard Gill | William Fitzgerald |
| Clement Turner | Paul Standish |
| Albert Knight | David McNamara |
| James Fitzgerald | Edward (Ned) Wall |
| William Bergin | Michael Raiswell |
| P. Patrick Down | Philip McGovern |
| Robert Fallon | Philip Heiberg |
| Timothy Harrington | |

OTHER ASSISTANT PRIESTS

Through the years St. Joseph's has been fortunate in having the support of several priests living and serving in the parish, these have included :

Canon Busquet

Fr. Harold Ainsworth

Fr. James Malloy

Fr. Jack Hoskinson

Fr. Peter Montgomery

Canon James Hurley

Fr. James Murphy

Fr. Tony Leonard

Fr. Michael Dyson



Father George Carton

Born Cumber Co. Derry 16th Nov. 1856. Educated at Mountrath Monastery Co. Laois, All Hallows & Oscott 1879-80. Ordained at St. Laurence's Birkenhead 25th July 1880. Curate at : Crew, Hyde, St. Werburgh's Birkenhead, SS Philip and James, Stockport, Congleton. Chaplain at Talacre Hall and subsequently Holt Hill Convent, Birkenhead 1894-1898 based at 43 Chesnut Grove. He founded the mission of St. Joseph's North Road in 1898 where he lived at 56 North Road. In 1901 he moved to St. Alban's Macclesfield and from there went on to Wilmslow, Bollington and Hooton. He died 25th Dec. 1926 and is buried at Hooton. He had his own carriage and pair.



Canon Aloysius Thomas O'Toole

Born in Birkenhead 29th Dec. 1863, educated St. Francis Xavier College, Liverpool, Oscott 1879-80 and the English College in Rome 1882-88. Ordained in Rome 26th May 1888. Curate at St. Alban's Macclesfield, St. Peter's Stalybridge, Oswestry. Parish Priest at St. Joseph's North Road 1901-1925. Died 3rd February 1927 and is buried at Flaybrick Hill. Noted as a good musician.



Provost Henry Edward Hazlehurst

Born Latchford 19th Sept. 1879. Educated at Douai and the English College Rome. D.D., 1904. Curate at Newport (also Parish Priest) Parish Priest : St. Joseph's North Road 1925-1952. Became Canon 1926, Provost 1932. Also Diocesan Treasurer and Treasurer to the Shrewsbury Secular Clergy Fund. Died 16th Jan. 1952, Buried at Landican. Built the Guild Hall. Noted as excellent Catechetical Instructor.



Canon John Goodear

Born Sale 28th July 1900. Educated St. Bede's College Manchester 1916-19 and the English College Rome. Ordained 27th Feb. 1926. Curate at St. Laurence's Birkenhead 1927-35 Parish Priest : Holy Name Birkenhead, St. Joseph's Stockport, St. Joseph's North Road 1952-59, Northendean 1959-60. Canon 1954. Died 30th Dec. 1960 buried at Landican. Remembered for his sense of humour.



Father Edward Doyle

Son of James and Mary Doyle, born Birkenhead 7th July 1910. Educated at St. Hugh's Birkenhead, Ushaw 1924-30 and the English College Rome 1930-37. Ordained 19th Dec. 1936 Bishop's Secretary 1937-40, Curate at Liscard 1940-41. Taught Philosophy at Ushaw 1941 - 1946. Curate at Northwich 1946-50. Parish Priest Romiley 1950-59, Parish Priest St. Joseph's North Road 1959-75. Worked with Catholic Housing Aid Society and acted as Judge for the Catholic Marriage tribunal. Died 26th June 1975, Buried at Landican. Was responsible for the building of the Parish and Youth Centres.



Canon James Fraser

Born Waterford 24 Nov. 1919. Educated St. Joseph's Dumfries and the English College Rome 1937-44. Repatriated during the 2nd World War, Ordained Stonyhurst 13th February 1944. Curate at Our Lady's Birkenhead 1944-45, St. Werburgh's Chester 1945-53, Our Lady's Latchford 1953-58. Founder of St. Raphael's Stalybridge 1959-1974. Parish Priest St. Joseph's North Road 1975-86, Our Lady and St John Heswall 1986-93. Despite worsening ill-health he continued pastoral work right up to his death just missing his Golden Jubilee. Remembered for his generosity and preaching. Instigated the gilt decoration of St. Joseph's Church.



Father William Doyle

Born in Ireland 1930. Trained at St Kieran's College and was Ordained at Kilkenny Cathedral. Curate at St. Joseph's Seacombe, St Werburgh's Chester. Parish Priest: Holy Spirit Runcorn 1966. St. Wilfred's, Northwich 1979, St. Joseph's Birkenhead 1986, St. Winefride's, Lymn. Died June 18th 1997,

buried in Ireland Co. Kilkenny. Member of Shrewsbury Diocesan Golf Team.



Father Terence Boylan

Born Garvagh, Co. Derry, 30th November 1939. Educated at St. Columb's College, Derry 1952 -1957, St Kieran's College, Kilkenny 1957-1963. Ordained in the Cathedral, Kilkenny 2nd June 1963. Curate at St. Laurence's Birkenhead 1963-1965. St. Alban's Liscard 1965-1972. St. Aidan's Wythenshawe, 1972-1977. Parish Priest : St. Mary's, Dukinfield, 1977-1985. St. Clare's, Chester 1985-1989, St. Joseph's 1989 - 2005. Member of Shrewsbury Diocesan Golf Team.

VOCATIONS

Parishioners who became Priests

Gerard Tickle (Bishop)

Anthony Hunt

Frank Jones

William Mackie

John Smith

John Lyons

Francis Furlong

Louis Smith

John Jones

Kevin Byrne (Canon)

John Daley

Michael Connoll

William Harrison

Kevin Daley

John Quinn

John Marsh

John Williams

Parishioners who entered Religious Life

Teresa Edwards

May Hunt

Nora Lyons

Isabel Roxburgh

Winifrede Moore

Maureen Quinn

Medals of Honour

Josie Bolger

Donald McDermott

Muriel Eyre

Mary McDermott

Eileen Carty

Laurence Stauss

Eileen Keegan

Eileen Walsh

Jack Cuffe

Silvia Roxburgh

John Reynolds (Snr)

SOCIAL LIFE IN THE PARISH COMMUNITY

Throughout the early and middle years there was a very active community life amongst the parishioners of St. Joseph's. There were many fund raising activities such as Church Fairs and Christmas Markets, weekly whist drives, garden parties etc. A host of varied societies have formed and folded over the years, whilst some are still active in the parish today, including :

Children of Mary

St. Vincent de Paul

Boys Guild
Mothers Guild
Rangers
Brownies
Girl Guides Scouts
Catholic Young Men's
Society Tennis Club*
Parish Bowling Green*
Ladies Group
Legion of Mary
Guild of St. Agnes
Parochial Men's Club
Dramatic Society
Guild of St. Stephen
Young Wives
Music and Literary Society
Over 50's Club
Parish Library
The Grail
Justice & Peace Group
St. Joseph's Development Society

1918 - In January 1918 the "Children of Mary" was re-organised under the Sisters of Charity, Cloughton Road, and meetings were held in church instead of the Convent.

1927 - It was announced on 23rd January that a Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society had been established in the parish and to this day is still fulfilling its very important role of support in the work of the parish.

A Boys Guild was formed for boys who had made their First Holy Communion. The guild was put under the patronage of the Brothers of the SVP.

1928 - The establishment of the Mothers Guild took place with the help of the Sisters from St. Elizabeth's Convent in Cloughton road. A branch of the Catholic Young Men's Society took place in the following November.

1935 - A Ranger Company, Brownie Pack and Girl guide Company were formed.

1940 - The Parish Tennis Club* was formed in 1940 in the grounds of Devonshire Park School (now a row of houses at the corner of Clarence Road and Willow Bank Road). When the army took over the school as a barracks, the tennis club transferred to tennis courts that were situated on the site on which St. Werburgh's School now stands. In the event the club had to close on the account of the air raids, the tennis courts having been hit. Due to the difficulty of access to courts the club was finally abandoned after the war.

1941 - On 23rd November a Boy Scout Group was established and on 22nd February 1942 the flag of the new St. Joseph's Scout Troop was dedicated.

1942 - A catholic youth centre for boys was opened at St. Hugh's School and one for the girls at St. Elizabeth's Convent.

1942 - The Legion of Mary was established and still continues to do good work in the parish today.

1945 - Saw the re-institution of the Guild of St. Agnes.

1947 - On 18th September a parochial Men's Club was opened on the old site of St. Joseph's School in Dingle Road.

1948 - The Kingsland Hall in Borough Road was first used for parochial dances and continued to be used until 1956. This year also the inauguration of the parish Dramatic Society.

1965 - Father James Malloy established a Music and Literary Society (which latter split). The Music Society went on for several years after the death of the founder in February 197, to hold guest lectures and themed musical evenings.

1967 - A group of young mothers (now known as Young Wives) was started on 28th March and meetings were held in the Scout Hut at the bottom of North Road. The group still continues, the meetings now being held in the parish Centre.

JOSEPH BELL TOPHAM



It seems only right to devote some words to the main benefactor of St. Joseph's Parish in its earliest years. The only information that can be found is provided from an obituary notice published in the Birkenhead News at the time of his death on 21st August 1910.

"The death took place at home Heathley, Abbey Road Llandudno on Sunday afternoon of Mr. Joseph Bell Topham who formerly resided respectively at 'Heathley' Woodchurch Road, Birkenhead for many years and subsequently at Beckenheam and the Glen, Blundellsands. He was descended from one of the oldest and best known catholic families in Cheshire and sufficient is known of his princely religious benefactions in the Birkenhead district, to defeat the donors desire to keep such actions from public notice.

It was he who gave the ground for St. Joseph's Church and for the church of Holy Name, while the house 'Overdale' which adjoins the latter edifice was also a gift to the diocese by the same gentleman. Mr. Topham has for many years taken an intimate interest in the Catholic Church in Birkenhead. His clandestine gifts have helped in no small measure to keep alive the several beneficent institutions which have been established in this and other parts of the diocese.

Mr. Topham was fond of sportsmanship, his interest in Aintree Racecourse is familiar to all who are in-touch with the turf. He was a man of military build and commanding personality. Latterly Mr. Topham had enjoyed but declining health and for some time prior to his death he lay in a critical condition which baffled the hopefulness of his physician. He was in about his 65th year.

A widow and six children, Mr. Edward, Mr. Ronald, Mr. Willie and the Misses Hilda, Edith and Freda are left to mourn his loss. Two of the young ladies are nuns."

THE PARISH CENTRE

By 1954 it was decided to start the necessary groundwork in raising funds for St. Joseph's own Parish Centre. At a garden party in the grounds of Holt Hill Convent organised by the Men's Club, they realised the first £400 which was invested in a special account for the purpose of building a parish hall. (These garden parties continued until 1958.) In 1958 the Bishop gave permission for the purchase of the land specifically for the building of the Parish Centre. But between the idea and the physical reality there was much hard work and it took many years for the dream to reach fruition, finally in 1970.

In 1964 land and a house in Greenbank Road next to the parish bowling green* (formed in 1940, now the car park at the North Road end) was purchased, and an application for planning permission was made. The clearance of the site commenced in 1965 with the demolition of the said house. In 1966 a further two houses (9 and 11) adjoining were acquired and demolished. The following year an appeal went out for parishioners to help clear the site, but despite all this effort, building could still not take place because of a shortfall in funds.

When the Guild Hall was demolished in 1968 to make way for a new school hall, the parish social activities for the next few years were moved to 32 North Road, opposite the church.

By June 1969 six plans of the proposed new Parish Centre were presented to the congregation for their approval and an extra appeal was made for the large sum of money necessary.

Parish Centre - £36,716

Youth Centre - £28,000

By October the contract for the building of the Parish Centre and adjoining Youth Centre was signed by the Bishop. A local brewery firm having agreed to construct free of charge, the bar with all its fittings and fixtures at a cost of £3000.

The opening of the new centre took place on 6th June 1970 with the blessing of the centre in the afternoon by the Vicar General Mgr. Percival Rees followed in the evening with a gala concert given by the 1970 Eurovision Song Concert Winner 'Dana'.

The Silver Jubilee of the Parish Centre was marked in 1995 with two social evenings when Cathy Murphy, Ethel Pierce, Jimmy Boyle, John Massey, Jack Hughes and Tony Giles-Burness were made honorary members in recognition of all their work.

Over the years societies have formed and folded, but today St. Joseph's Parish still maintains a fully varied representation of the needs and enthusiasms of its parishioners.

PARISH YOUTH CENTRE

The Youth Centre proved, throughout its 30-year existence, to be a vibrant and active enterprise. Unfortunately, due to a major structural defect which developed in the roof in 2002, the building was closed and later demolished as the cost of rebuilding proved to be prohibitive. What follows here is an account of the history of the Youth Centre as printed in 2000, during the Parish Centenary celebrations.

In 1972 permission was given for the building of a Parish Youth Centre. The centre was to be known as the 'Birkenhead Youth Centre' and would cater for all the catholic youth of Birkenhead. The Centre was blessed by Bishop Graser and officially opened by the Mayor of Birkenhead, our own parishioner Miss Eileen Keegan on 15th June 1974.

WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

by Fr. Tony Leonard, Director

The church has always been the vanguard of work with young people. In the last century Fr. John Bosco became famous for his work with boys and girls of Northern Italy and the establishment of the order of Salesians. After all Jesus said "Let the little children come to me for to such as these belong the

Kingdom of God.'

St. Joseph's Parish in Birkenhead has for many years seen this work as important. Even with the enlightenment of the Second Vatican Council, young people still struggled to find a voice in the Church. Catholic Youth Work, although a strong compromise, never has provided that integral place in the life of the Church. As with Don Bosco, the service provided for young people has been almost 'ex-curricula'. This does not devalue the work, but surely allows us to set a challenge for the Church moving into the next millennium.

St. Joseph's Catholic Youth Centre was opened in the early 70's for the young people of Birkenhead. There was already a strong tradition in Birkenhead through such places as the Birkenhead Boy's Club and the Shaftesbury Boy's Club. The St. Vincent de Paul Society had long been running the annual SVP camps to Abergele and then to the current site near Caenarvon, North Wales. However the perceived need for 'Catholic' young people and their friends was met by the building of the Centre with the help of the Wirral Borough Council. Over the years the Centre has welcomed countless young people through its doors. It has served as a haven from the 'adult' world beyond. It has helped young people to develop physically, mentally socially and, of course spiritually. Often is the case that Centres of this nature become distinct from the parish. This does not reduce the 'Spiritual effectiveness' of the venture, as the example given by many good adults, both professionals and volunteers, enables good values to be shared and lived.

The nature of Youth Work , especially in the eyes of statutory authorities, has changed a number of times. In 1984 a major report called the Thompson Report was published. This clearly sought to re-establish the place of the 'spiritual' within youth work. It has been fashionable to ignore this aspect of journeying with young people of all ages. In recent times Youth Centres have been closed, restricted in use and single-sex clubs have been discouraged. Many of the national organisations have restructured or joined forces. Some have changed their approach and political correctness has made its mark! Many of the traditional traits have disappeared. In some cases this may be good thing. All this has left a sense of confusion or frustration with those who have

spent years in the service of young people.

The way youth work has developed at St. Joseph's in recent times saw the establishment of two separate ventures - on the one hand the Youth Centre supported by the Wirral Youth Service; and on the other hand the parish club run for juniors by volunteers. In many local authorities budgets have been cut and in many cases the youth budget has been the one to suffer most. Re-organisations have taken place which have reduced the services available to young people and once again, there is a great opportunity for Church youth work and other voluntary organisations to 'fill the gap'.

In June 1997 it was agreed that the Diocesan Youth service would take over the St. Joseph's Youth Centre. The centre would be used for a number of purposes. First as the headquarters of the Youth Service, housing the Director and his staff. Second it would serve as a retreat centre for school and parish groups. (It had been used many years ago for such purposes). Finally it would continue to house the St. Joseph's Parish Youth Groups on a Friday evening. The centre has been refurbished, redecorated, rewired and modernised, making it a 'home from home' place for young people. There is no doubt since it opened its doors in the autumn of '97 it has continued to grow in stature and presence. Once again, it is beginning to gain a reputation as being the premier experience for young people in the life of the Church.

On National Youth Sunday (23rd November 1997) many parishioners came to see what had been achieved in the Centre and many of those who had not passed through in years, expressed their affection for what the centre had done for them and their friends all those years ago. There is much potential and growth in the Centre yet - and as we look forward to the millennium and the parish's celebrations - we give thanks for the conviction and encouragement of many priests who have been resident in the parish during those years for work with young people. May the Centre over the next generation, be for young people, a place of 'rest' on life's journey, where they may reflect on the love and compassion of a community who cares, and have cared over many, many years.

ST JOSEPH'S PRIMARY SCHOOL

Two years after the official opening of St. Joseph's Church in 1900, Bishop Allen gave his approval in March 1902, for the purchase of land in Dingle Road for the erection of a school for 250 children. (He also donated £50). The Board of Education approved the plans in May and a subscription list was set up. The contract for the new schools was signed and building commenced in January 1903.

The laying of the Foundation Stone of the school took place on 22nd March 1903 and was blessed and opened by Bishop Allen on 25th October 1903.

Birkenhead News October 1903

THE CATHOLICS

Opening of the New St. Joseph's Schools

'On Sunday last the new schools which have been erected in connection with St. Joseph's North Road, were formally opened by the Bishop of Shrewsbury, the Right Rev. Dr. Allen. The estimated cost of the new schools which have been in the course of erection since the beginning of the year is about £3,000, and provision has been made for the accommodation of 250 children. The schools which occupy a site in Dingle Road, present a handsome appearance, and the structural arrangements are excellent in every respect. The principal feature is the large schoolroom, which will accommodate 150 scholars, and can be divided by moveable partitions into three sections. There are also two class-rooms that will each accommodate fifty scholars. The lighting, ventilation and sanitary arrangements are on the most approved system, while there is ample playground accommodation. The provision of these new schools will supply a very necessary want, as up to the present the children in this parish have been compelled to attend either St. Anne's Rock Ferry or St. Werburgh's Schools, a great disadvantage owing to the distance. The schools have been designed by Mr. Edmund Kirby, F.R.I.B.A., and the contract has been carried out by Mr. P. McLachlan of Birkenhead. It may also be mentioned that the work has been carried out in considerably less than contract time.

There was a large attendance on Sunday afternoon, when the new schools were opened by the Bishop of Shrewsbury, amongst those present being the Rev. Canon O'Toole (Rector), the Rev. Father Jagger S.J., the Rev J. Thompson, the Rev. Dr. O'Leary, Messrs. Edmund Kirby, P. MacMahon, F. Berry, T. Hodkinson, Mr. and Mrs Broadbent, W. Dodd, Dr. Murphy, etc. The Bishop was met at the playground entrance and conducted to the schools, the procession being led by the Children of Mary and the school children. After having performed the ceremony of blessing and declaring the schools open, his Lordship in the course of a brief address congratulated St. Joseph's congregation on the possession of new schools, which would enable the work of the parish to be carried on in a manner which had hitherto been impossible. He pointed out the necessity for Catholics to support their schools, and also referred to the effect that the new Act would have upon education. He referred in terms of disapproval to the attitude of those who sought to oppose the act by passive resistance, and pointed out , that although there was much in the act of 1870 that did not commend itself to Catholics, they had always carried out in a loyal manner what was demanded of them by this measure. At the conclusion of the proceedings the Hallelujah Chorus was sung.'

In January 1904 it was taken over by the Local education Authority. After one or two setbacks including the Local Education Authority's initial objection to nun teachers having been appointed, the school was opened for pupils in April 1904.

By September 1904 some parents wished to pay school fees for their children attending St. Joseph's School, but as the school was free parents were asked to send donations towards the completion of the furnishings and to help meet the interest on the building debts.

Over the years the school became popular with catholic families and in 1966 parents who lived at the St. Werburgh's end of St. Joseph's were asked to arrange education for their children at St. Werburgh's School, as there would be less room available in the future, due to the demolition of the adjacent Guild Hall which housed two infant classes to build a new dining hall for the school.

A change to the schools future development came with the re-organisation of education in Birkenhead which culminated in 1970 in Comprehensive Education. The result of this was it was decided that St. Joseph's School would be primary School only and not primary and middle as was first envisaged.

The biggest upheaval in the life of the school was in 1983 when the school was transferred from Dingle Road to the site once occupied by Marian High School (formerly Heathley High School, formerly St. Winifred's and Holt Hill), the original site of Mr. Topham's home, where Mass was celebrated before the building of St. Joseph's Church. On the Feast of St. Joseph 19th March 1985 Bishop Gray officially opened the school on its new site with Holy Mass in the school in the morning in the presence of the mayor, the local Member of Parliament and the Director of Education and in the evening in the church in honour of St. Joseph.

Links between the school and the church are very strong, each year the children prepare for receipt of their first Sacraments of Confession, Communion and Confirmation in the church of St. Joseph's and Mass is regularly said on the school premises by visiting priests from the parish.

FCJ' S - HOLT HILL CONVENT

In January 1852 the Faithful Companions of Jesus opened a convent in a small house in Hampton Street, Birkenhead as a day school for young ladies. This later developed into a boarding school. Due to an increase in the number of the scholars in 1854 the school was moved to Hamilton Square and two years later another move was made to a large house called 'Tranmere Hall', acquired at Holt Hill, the schools final resting place.

For several years the school continued to be run as a boarding school for young ladies. In 1856 a small day - school was opened in addition to the boarding school, but the schools were kept separate until a large new building was erected. The 1910 Directory for Liverpool and Shrewsbury gives the following statistics : 50 nuns, 50 boarders, 100 day pupils.

In order to provide more accommodation for the day school the intake of

boarders was discontinued and the boarding school was closed in 1932.

The Sisters also taught in St. Werburgh's parish schools from 1852-1867. In 1892 they took over St. Laurence's schools, taught in the night-school and the Sunday School.

During the early years of St. Joseph's Mission before the building of the church, the Chaplain to the Convent undertook services for the mission in the convent chapel. The first recorded Baptism of the parish was recorded as taking place in Holt Hill Convent Chapel in 1898.

As a consequence of the New Education Act 1944 Holt Hill was recognised as a direct grant grammar school, and many parishioners of St. Joseph's will have fond memories of their school years, both in the mixed Prep school and later as 'young ladies' in the senior school. The school regime was strict but fair and as a consequence the final 'product' had excellent employment opportunities with local employers.

With the re-organisation of the local schools Holt Hill joined with St. Winifred's School and became jointly known as Heathley High School, a comprehensive school for girls. For some time the school had to operate on two sites until in 1981 the school moved to Noctorum High School on the Woodchurch Estate. It was at this time that the FCJ Sisters finally ceased any connection with the school.

The last mass in Holt Hill prior to the Convent being demolished to make way for a housing estate, was celebrated on 27th June 1982. In July the FCJ Nuns donated to St. Joseph's parish the beautiful large Crucifix which had hung in the marbled chapel of Holt Hill. This can now be seen suspended above the High Altar, and will always be a reminder of the close links between the parish and the convent. (The stained glass windows also from the Convent Chapel adorn St. Pauls on the Ford Estate.) In 1982 the buildings were finally demolished.

In 1977 the FCJ Community moved to Heathbank Road and six sisters continue to work in the parish today. Ministries include Teaching, Chaplaincy, Parish

Work, Retreats and Spiritual Direction.

IRISH SISTERS OF CHARITY

Mention must also be made of the Irish Sisters of Charity who have worked and assisted in the parish for many years, with particular involvement with the Guild of St. Agnes and The Children of Mary.

BIRKENHEAD UNION WORKHOUSE (St. Catherine's Hospital)

Prior to the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 individual parishes (not catholic) were responsible for providing for their own 'poor and dispossessed'. This Act replaced the single parish as the instrument responsible for poor law administration. In future the poor law unions were to be supervised by a central government agency successively known as the Poor Law Commissioners, Poor Law Board, Local Government Board and The Ministry of Health. These agencies mainly administered poor relief through the establishment and maintenance of workhouses. In addition they were responsible for other local government activities such as the registration of births, marriages and deaths, valuation of property for rates and sanitation services in rural areas.

Under a Poor Law Order the 'Birkenhead Union' was formed in March 1861 separating the townships of Bidston-cum-Ford, Birkenhead, Claughton-cum-grange, Liscard, Noctorum, Oxton, Poulton-cum-Seacombe, and Wallasey from the Wirral Union.

The Union Workhouse in Derby Road, Tranmere, was opened in 1863 and was subsequently known as Birkenhead Union Infirmary until 1934, then as the Birkenhead Municipal Hospital until 1948, and thereafter as St. Catherine's Hospital. It was designed to hold 1,000 inmates. Separate Infirmary and school buildings were added by 1870.

The Workhouse continued as a Public Assistance Institution until the abolition of the poor laws in 1948 at which time the workhouse infirmary became a municipal hospital and control passed to the Birkenhead HMC of the National Health Service and the site became a single hospital renamed ' St. Catherine's'.

The hospital has been administered by the Wirral Area Health Authority since 1974 ceasing to be a general hospital in 1982. The hospital now specialises in the treatment of geriatric and psychiatric patients.

Throughout its chequered history the 'Union Workhouse' and 'St. Catherine's Hospital' has been served by chaplains from St. Joseph's presbytery right up to the present day. (In the Gore's Directory 1905 its lists 'Very Rev. Canon O'Toole, Catholic Religious Instructor'.) Under the Poor Law Amendment Act 1868 a separate 'Creed' register was to be kept in every workhouse, to which all local ministers of all denominations were given a right of inspection. These registers recorded details as to dates of admission and discharge, where to, last known address, next of kin, sex, age, etc. The Parish Archive also holds its own register of catholic baptisms that took place at the 'Workhouse' during the early years.

FATHER MICHAEL RAISWELL



Fr. Michael Raiswell 1957-1998

Foreword by Fr T. Boylan
*printed in the booklet "St Joseph's Church",
published to mark the centenary of the Church in 2000.*

It was suggested to me when I was asked to write this foreword that I should try and predict the future of the parish over the next hundred years. I was toying with the idea, and reflecting on preparations being made in the Diocese to cope with the shrinking church attendance and other related matters. To try and forecast how the parish will fare over the coming decade seemed beyond me. I was in the midst of these reflections when we learned that Fr. Michael Raiswell, assistant priest in St. Joseph's, had taken his own life.

I have never known any event in the life of a parish or of the Diocese which caused such shock and distress. Michael was a quiet, dedicated and conscientious priest. To read his article in this history of the parish on the Centenary of the church will give you a flavour of his academic ability and his approach to his faith. His life was totally centred around his priesthood. There is a sense in which it is true to say that his devotion to priesthood cost him his life.

It was good to see how the priests and the people of the Diocese rallied together and celebrated his Requiem here in St. Joseph's and in his home parish of Crewe with tremendous faith and dignity. The homily preached by Bishop Brian in Crewe is printed here to reflect the mood of that time. We saw a parish and a Diocese drawing strength from a shared faith in a loving and compassionate God.

Homily given by Bishop Brian Noble
at the Funeral Mass of
Father Michael Raiswell
St. Mary's, Crewe
Friday 21 August 1998

The death of one with whom we've shared our lives never leaves us untouched, unmoved and all the more so when that death is sudden, unexpected and tragic. This last week has been painfully difficult for all of us - in the first place for you Tom and for you Helen, Patsy, Philip, Christine and Tony. But painful also for the larger families of which Michael was an important part - his parish of St. Joseph's, this his home parish, the Diocese and especially we his brother priests. Over these days we've found ourselves bewildered, deeply sad, perhaps even angry and probably guilty. At times like this, the cool voice of reason is powerless to rein in feelings that we could have done more and that things might have been different if only....

But sadly things are not different. And an important part of our coming together today is to help us cope with the reality of what is. And that being so, we can do no better than turn to Scripture and, with humility, allow its words to address us: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God still and trust in me... There are many rooms in my Father's house... I am going now to prepare a place for you...so that where I am, you may be too..." (Jn 14:1-6).

So often, the events of life and death become the questioning, the unsettling of faith. But here, Jesus urges us not to let our hearts be troubled; not to allow our faith to be dislodged, but rather to strive to see our sorrows and

perplexities as the opportunity for a new and deeper trust. Remember, He says, there is more to life than death.... "I am going to prepare a place for you...so that where I am, you may be too." Death is no falling asleep but an awakening from life to Eternal Life.

And as, like you, I've thought so much about Michael these past days, it has been the idea of his awakening that has assumed increasing significance for me. I suspect that Michael regarded himself as one of the most ordinary men. I doubt whether those of you who knew him best would agree. At school, here in Crewe and in Stoke-on-Trent, he was anything but ordinary. He was a good sportsman - excelling at soccer, rugby and athletics; he was good academically, going on to study economics in Birmingham and theology in Rome. His knowledge and love of the Church's Liturgy was evident, not only in his teaching at Oscott College, but more importantly in its prayerful celebration in all the places where he worked. His attachment to his family was deep and solid - days off were normally days to go home - and you especially Tom have our sympathy because Tuesdays will never again be quite the same.

Yes, he was perhaps unusually quiet and reserved by temperament but this didn't prevent him from forming some long and lasting friendships. And certainly it in no way, hindered a deeply effective pastoral ministry. Letters and conversations over the last week have made very clear how much quiet good he did, how much faithfulness to his ministry there was and in what affection he was held. Michael was by no means just an ordinary man.

Yet sadly, I think it has to be said that he was unaware of it and unaware of the gifts he had. Most of us know from our own experience that there is often a gap between how we see ourselves and how others see us; how we feel about ourselves and others feel about us. I guess that in Michael's case that gap was very wide - which brings me back to his "awakening".

Having passed from life to Eternal Life. I've no doubt that at last Michael will have awakened to the full realisation of the gifts so generously given him and the total love for him of the One who gave them. Now I'm sure he will know

the truth of Job's words in our first reading: "This I know; that...after my awakening, he will set me close to him He whom I shall see will take my part; these eyes will gaze on him and find him not aloof" (Job 19:26) So thank you Michael for what you gave us and may you now rest in peace.

ST. JOSEPH'S - A TEMPLE OF LIVING STONES

by Fr. Michael Raiswell

The Centenary of a church building is a time for thanksgiving and reflection. For a hundred years, God has been worshipped in this place, and the people of God have grown in holiness through celebrating the sacred liturgy together, drawn into Christ's perfect self-offering to the Father.

This occasion invites us to look back in gratitude for the past generations of parishioners of St. Joseph's whose faith and Christian witness has been nourished and strengthened by hearing God's word and by welcoming God's loving presence in the sacramental signs given to us. The faith is a gift we receive from God through others, and which we in turn pass on. The house of God stands as sign of the generosity of the countless benefactors who have contributed over the years to the building and maintaining of this place of worship. Those who have gone on before us, marked with sign of faith are remembered in our prayers at the altar.

A centenary also invites us to reflect on where we have reached in our pilgrimage of faith, as we journey towards the heavenly city. How is the Holy Spirit leading us as individuals and as God's family to build up the kingdom of God in this place? The church needs to look at how effectively she is carrying on the mission entrusted by Jesus Christ to the apostles to 'proclaim the Good News to the whole world'.

St. Joseph's church is a house of prayer in which God blesses his family with his presence. Here we are nourished at the two tables of God's Word and of the Eucharist. As the word of God is proclaimed and preached to us, Christ himself speaks to us of God's marvellous deeds. And as we gather as the body

of Christ around the altar, we celebrate the memorial of the saving death and resurrection of Christ for us and receive the holy gifts of His Body and Blood to be our spiritual food and drink.

The local Christian community forms a spiritual house, made from 'living stones' in which the Holy Spirit dwells. And so the church building is a sign that here God is building his people into a holy temple in which he is pleased to live.

For a century, within our church, God has revealed himself to his people through sacramental signs. From the waters of the baptismal font God's children have received their rebirth to everlasting life and been welcomed into the family of the church.

The gift of the Holy Spirit has been bestowed upon many through the anointing with Chrism and the laying on of hands by the Bishop in Confirmation. The healing power of the Spirit has brought forgiveness and reconciliation in the Sacrament of Penance. And from the church, the blessed oil has been taken to homes and hospitals to relieve the sufferings of the sick in the healing Sacrament of Anointing. In the Sacrament of Marriage, men and women have given themselves to one another to be signs to one another and others of Christ's love for his people and to build up God's family. And in this church, men have received the Sacrament of Holy Orders and offered their lives to serve God and his people in the ministerial priesthood. As the Christian's pilgrimage of faith on earth reaches its journey's end, the faithful soul is commended to the loving mercy of God in the church's funeral rites.

Just as the heavenly city is the place of face-to-face encounter with the lord, in our church we daily meet the One who reveals himself to us in word and sacrament. Above all, as we gather around the Lord's table, which is the altar, by sharing in the Eucharist we become temples of God's presence and the home of his glory. As one of the prayers of the church's liturgy says, May we, who have known the joy and power of God's blessing in our lives, renew the gift of ourselves to his service and the service of his people.