



**ST AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY**

**AND THE**

**ENGLISH MARTYRS**

**LATCHFORD**

**1929 – 2005**

**By**

**David Forrest**

# Introduction

When I was asked to write a history of the Parish of Saint Augustine and the English Martyrs my first reaction was a realisation that I was an outsider. Not having worshipped at the church meant that I had no first hand experience of the traditions of the parish. Could I do credit to all those parishioners, past and present, who have formed the backbone of the Catholic presence in that part of Latchford and Westy?

I soon became aware that there were hardly any parish records from which I could draw information. For the Golden Jubilee two short histories were written, one about the church and the other on the school.

Bitter experience of oral history has taught me to treat it with caution, not to ignore it, but to use it as a source for further research. Clues from parishioners, past clergy and a handful of newsletters and Miss Rigby's 1981 history have been invaluable to help me piece together events of yesteryear.

I know that many of the treasured memories of parishioners will not be included here and for this I can only apologise, but I hope that those events of the past I have recorded will make up for any omissions. I have only included a small amount about the school's history as this still continues, and have instead concentrated on the parish and its church.

My grateful thanks are due to many people who have helped in so many ways— even posthumously. Particular mention must be made of 'To Preserve Their Memory,' a book published in 1995 by the late Canon E. M. Abbott giving details of the deceased priests of the Diocese.

Whether I have succeeded in my task to record the true history of the parish is for you, the reader, to judge. It is my sincere hope that I have done justice to those who, down the years, made Saint Augustine's such a vibrant community.

David Forrest.

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Before his death in August 2009 David Forrest agreed to an abridged version of this history being produced by his family and published on the church website, so the following is not the complete history of the church of St Augustine and the English Martyrs.

Copies of the full parish history are available.



The altar in September 2004- © David Forrest

I first became aware of the existence of St Augustine's parish in 1975 when Fr. Frank Gordon left Latchford to become parish priest in my own home parish. Ever since then I have taken an interest in the comings and going of priests to the parish little knowing that one day I would follow in their footsteps. Of course priests come and go more quickly than most members of parish communities and this carefully researched book is a testament to the many individuals and families that have shaped and sustained the community.

David Forrest has served us well in researching, writing and editing this record of events and people. His account captures some of the atmosphere that first saw the parish established. It was a time of growth in numbers and those who lived through that time will know just how hard and generously the Catholic community worked and developed through the subsequent years. Entire families lived, prayed, played and grew together in a way that was special to those times.

Of course there was always the dream that what had been built as a temporary church would one day be replaced by something more 'permanent.' Recent developments in the church and society have taught us to be a little more circumspect in harbouring grand ambitions and schemes. The closure of the church in 2005 was a painful experience for all those involved. Yet gathering together as we do under the title of Our Lady and Saint Augustine of Canterbury it is possible to discern the first shoots of a new future. If this future is to be strong it will be based on the faith and community that have survived through tribulation and disappointment.

The prospect of a new church and community building remains a real one and we pray that if and when we get the opportunity to do 'something beautiful for God' it will be a fitting tribute to all those who have gone before us.

Thank you to all who have shared in the story so far!

Fr. Peter Montgomery

# **The Parish is born**

During the 1920s Warrington Council became aware of the lack of good housing in the town. Plans were drawn up and in 1924 a start was made on the construction of a large housing development to the west of Kingsway. Many of those Catholics who moved into the new housing estate worshipped at Our Lady's Church and some of their children went to the school attached to that parish, whilst others attended nearby Bolton Council School or St Mary's, Buttermarket Street.

The Diocese of Shrewsbury was made aware of the problems of those who attended the church and especially the overcrowding at Our Lady's School and took the matter very seriously. An approach was made to Warrington Borough Council to purchase land. This was discussed by the Housing Sub-Committee and on July 8th 1929 they resolved:-

*That the Town Clerk, Borough Surveyor and the Borough Treasurer report on the question of the sale of a piece of land for an Elementary School and Church for the Roman Catholics of Westy Lane.*

Although the Council Minutes do not record the decision that was made it is certain that it was favourable as in 1929 Father Kearney wrote:

*We are faced with a difficult problem in Our Lady's Parish of Latchford. The Warrington Corporation has built, and are building, a considerable number of houses in this area. They lie about a mile away from Our Lady's Church and School. In consequence, a very large number of people have come from other parts of the Town to reside in our Parish.*

*Most of these families have young children, and owing to the distance from Our Lady's School, the ever-increasing traffic along Knutsford Road is a continual source of danger. Under the circumstances we feel it is a matter of paramount importance that we build a Catholic School for them as soon as possible.*

*We propose, therefore, to begin with a School to accommodate 150 children, which can be extended as the need arises. Further, it is our desire to build a small Church to meet the requirements of the growing population.*

Bishop Hugh Singleton agreed to the formation of a new parish early in September 1930 and appointed the curate from Our Lady's Parish, 48 year-old convert parson Father John Louis Cullen, as the first parish priest. He started to say Masses each Sunday at the Premier Cinema in Powell Street. The first Masses were on October 26th and were at 8-30, 10-00 and 11-0 o'clock.

Father Cullen and his housekeeper Elizabeth Percival, moved into 7, Lindley Avenue, where he ran the parish, saying weekday Masses.

## **Dedication of the parish**

Many will have wondered how the dedication of the parish came about. At that time no parish in the diocese was dedicated to St Augustine and this may have been a deciding factor. The inclusion of the English Martyrs is more certain in origin. In 1880

a start made towards the canonisation of those English and Welsh martyrs who gave their lives for the Faith between 1535 and 1680. In 1929 the first stage of this process was achieved when 136 were beatified. During the 1930s there was a campaign throughout England to bring about their canonisation. Bishop Singleton ordered three days of prayer starting on May 4th 1930 (the Feast of the English Martyrs) and that the Te Deum was to be sung on that day in every church throughout the Diocese. In 1935 Blessed Thomas More and Blessed John Fisher were canonised. The Second World War brought the campaign to a halt and forty were eventually proclaimed saints on May 4th 1970.

Since the Second Vatican Council, Catholicism has been more relaxed, but even today many people would find hearing Mass in a cinema hard to take and it would be even harder in the 1930s. Many parishioners continued to worship at Our Lady's and there was concern that Father Cullen was not receiving their weekly offerings. From December 21st a separate collection plate left at the back of the church for them to use.

On February 12th 1931 Warrington Borough Council gave approval to Father Cullen's application to build a semi-permanent church. So the hopes and dreams of so many were at last to be realised. It would seem that the formality of laying a foundation stone was dispensed with as the building was only intended to be short lived and the church was so urgently needed. The church was officially opened on Sunday June 14th 1931. The Examiner tells the story:

**NEW ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH.**  
◆  
**OPENED BY LORD BISHOP OF SHREWSBURY  
AT LATCHFORD.**

*In the centre of the extensive new suburb which has sprung up on the Corporation housing estate at Latchford, there has been built a new Roman Catholic Church. The parent Church is Our Lady's, Latchford, and it has been dedicated to St. Augustine of Canterbury and the English Martyrs. The priest in charge is the Rev. J. L. Cullen, who was for four years at Our Lady's Church, Latchford. With Solemn Mass on Sunday morning the Church was opened by the Lord Bishop of Shrewsbury.*

*The present Church is a semipermanent structure, but of a substantial nature. Its needs have arisen from the rapid expansion of the housing estate at Latchford. The area in the charge of the Rev. J. L. Cullen lies on the east side of Knutsford-road, and extends from Black Bear Bridge to Victoria-road, Grappenhall, and Grappenhall Church. The congregation of the new church is increasing rapidly. During the last few months its increase has been 250, and its present total is about 1,000.*



The exterior and interior of the church in 1932

The church was quite different to the one that most people will now remember. Illumination was by pendant lights and there were two side altars, the Sacred Heart on the left and the Lady Altar on the right. The three windows behind the altars were more ornate. Another major difference was the absence of the Stations of the Cross. The building was designed by Isaac Dixon and Company of Liverpool and cost, exclusive of furnishings, £1,000 and provided seating for approximately 400.

In August 1933 the Bishop sent Father Thomas John Aloysius Mulcahy to Latchford to help Father Cullen, his stay was, however, short-lived. He was a talented man speaking four European languages and an excellent conjurer. He also had considerable

musical skills, and it is reputed that his operetta 'In Fairyland' was produced at a London theatre in 1933. He left the parish after three months.

On November 9th 1933 one of the parishioners, Councillor Austin Matthew Crowe, was elected Mayor of Warrington and was the first Catholic to achieve this distinction in the history of the town. In the normal course of events Mayor's Sunday is held at Warrington Parish Church - St Elphinston. The new Mayor decided not to follow tradition and opted to hold the ceremony at St Mary's, Buttermarket Street. The streets were lined with people who waited to watch the imposing procession as it made its way from and to the Town Hall. The parish still had no school and it was felt that having the Mayor as a parishioner could not hurt the cause.

On December 19th 1933 Warrington's Member of Parliament, Mr. Noel B. Goldie, raised the question of a school for the parish. He asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education whether the department was in a position to sanction the building of a school. He was told that the decision would be delayed until after the opening of a new Council School (this was Richard Fairclough School, which was officially opened on March 1st 1934).

The campaigning eventually bore fruit and the parish were given approval by the Board of Education to build a new Catholic school in the Latchford district to accommodate 350 children.

Early September 1935 saw the arrival of Father George Mary Carter, a Liverpudlian by birth who had spent time in South Africa before his ordination in 1901. Saint Augustine's was his first parish in the Shrewsbury Diocese.

The foundation stone of the school was laid on February 6th 1936 by Bishop Moriarty. Many local dignitaries and clergy attended the ceremony. The stone bore the inscription 'HUNC LAPIDEM PRIMARIUM POSUIT. ILLMS. et REVMS. AMBROSIUS EPS. SALOPIEM. DIE VI FEB. MCMXXXVI' (*This foundation stone was laid by the Honorable and most Reverend Ambrose Bishop of Shrewsbury. The 6th day of February 1936*).

In one of several speeches Councillor Crowe said he knew how delighted his 2,000 fellow parishioners were that a new school was at last to become a reality.

On March 11th 1936 Warrington Borough Council discussed amended plans which had been submitted for a permanent church in May 1933. Because of the building of the school (on the original site for the church) the Diocese proposed that the church be built in St Augustine's Avenue. The dream of a permanent structure was still very much alive but never materialised.

The building work on the school proceeded rapidly and on November 11th 1936 the official opening took place. It was built at a cost of approximately £7,000 and had seven classrooms, each to hold 50 children, and a large central hall. The headmaster was Mr. A. P. B. Benson.

The school staff lost no time in presenting their pupils to the public at large and on Thursday December 17th 1936 a concert took place again at the Ashton Hall as the parish hall was too small to house the large audience of parents etc.

With the church and school built the congregation could begin to join in those activities that other parishes could enjoy. The first of these took place on May 7th 1937 when the first May procession took place, with nearly 500 children taking part.

King George the Sixth and Queen Elizabeth were crowned at Westminster Abbey on May 15 1937. This was a great occasion for the country which could, for a while, forget the threat of war. In the school, the pupils were given souvenir books by Father Cullen. After some patriotic songs and a short Coronation play by the Infants the children received souvenir medals and chocolate. After listening to a message from the Board of Education the celebrations ended with the whole school singing "God save the King".

In those days most churches and schools participated in Warrington Walking Day and St Augustine's was no exception. To fully take part it is usually thought that a parish must have a banner. The parish was no exception. The design was sent to Messrs Thomas Brown and Son of Manchester. The banner was blessed on June 20th 1937, and the parish's first Walking Day was on the following Friday 2nd July. The colour scheme for the children's clothing was maroon and gold to match the colour scheme of the banner.

At the beginning of September of the same year Father Cullen said goodbye to the parish he had established. His replacement was to be the longest serving parish priest in the history of the parish. He was Father Joseph Russell, who had been the first resident priest at Our Lady and St John, Heswall for the previous nine years. He stayed in Latchford until 1966.

During 1938 the possibility of another war with Germany became evermore likely and during May and June the teachers at the school, like many other people received training in the use of gas masks. These were issued to the public on September 29th of that year. The training that the teachers had received would soon be put to use.

## **The parish in wartime**

At the end of December 1939 Father Carter exchanged parishes with Father Herbert Campfield from Saint Laurence's, Birkenhead. The latter was to work in Latchford until 1956.

On the May 29th 1940 Father Russell celebrated his Silver Jubilee, with a concert in his honour being held in the Ashton Hall. Further celebrations took place later in the month at a luncheon in the Lion Hotel and a presentation ceremony at the Ashton Hall. There was also a parish dance and a solemn High Mass celebrated at St Augustine's.

On Wednesday, January 27th 1943, the headmaster, 47-year-old Mr. Benson died. The Requiem Mass was on the following Friday when scores of children lined up on both sides of the path to pay tribute to their late head master. The burial was in his native Kirkintilloch on the following day. He was replaced on the following May 1st by Mr Ardern.

As the war progressed the need for women to go into industry became more and more important. In July 1941 Warrington held a 'Women into Work' week and over the ensuing years this need became even more imperative. By 1943 nursery accommodation became essential as more and more mothers joined in the war effort, taking up various occupations. Accordingly a nursery was opened June 21st of that year in a prefabricated 'Horsa' building. This facility for the youngest children continued until they moved into the main school in September 1984. Initially the nursery was open for six days a week from 8.30 each morning.

London was always the main target for the German Luftwaffe. The damage inflicted by the bombing caused a mass evacuation from London of over 41,000 mothers and children. On Saturday July 8th 800 children and their escorts arrived at Bank Quay Station and on the following Tuesday a further 314 children and 154 adults came to the town and were billeted throughout the Borough. Several of these evacuees were given homes in the parish and places at the school.

The war in Europe finally ended on May 8th 1945 and no doubt many parishioners celebrated at the firework display and band concert at Victoria Park. The school children had a two-day holiday and a Mass was said on the 15th followed by a tea party for the school in the afternoon. Complete peace did not come until Japan surrendered on August 10th of the same year.

## **The Fifties Onwards**

Many parishioners would be saddened to learn of the death of Father Cullen, the priest who had done so much to establish the parish. Suffering from cancer, he had gone to Lourdes seeking a cure. He arrived at the shrine on September 5th 1951 only to die the following day and was buried at Lourdes. He was to be remembered in the parish for many years to come.

On August 30 1955 St John's Secondary School opened its doors to pupils. This was a great benefit to St Augustine's School as for the first time since the school opened children eleven years of age and over would be taught elsewhere thus giving more space to younger children.

In the following year on March 26th the parish was again in sorrow at the death of Father Campfield. He had been suffering ill health for a long time and had been on sick leave during 1954 and 1955. He was buried at Warrington Cemetery. During this trying period Father Russell had had the assistance of newly ordained Father John Patrick McDonald.

At the beginning of September 1959 the parish bade Father McDonald a sad farewell when he left for St Joseph's, Birkenhead not knowing that he would return as their parish priest. His replacement was Father Joseph Prendiville.

Father Russell, now 77 years of age, had been finding his duties getting more difficult and decided to retire. The knowledge that changes were to come may have influenced

his decision. He said his goodbyes in 1966 and settled in Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex moving in 1971 to the Alexian Brothers in Moston, Manchester.

Father Herbert Francis Gordon was to be the next parish priest and the task before him would seem daunting. The parish was in need of modernisation both spiritually and physically. Father Gordon set about changes within the presbytery and the church and it was he who introduced the English Liturgy. Father Prendiville left the parish in March 1967 and was replaced by Father Christopher O'Brien who stayed for only two years. His successor was Father Joseph Brendan Morgan who came in the middle of 1969.

Father Gordon's Silver Jubilee was on Thursday June 20th 1968. This was celebrated with a Mass of thanksgiving at which four other Silver Jubilarians from the Diocese were present. The children from the school provided the singing and the homily was given by Monsignor Percival E. Rees. On the following day the four priests- Fathers Christopher O'Brien, John McDonald, Joseph Prendiville and John T. Daley concelebrated Mass with Father Gordon, again at St Augustine's. He was presented with a cheque to mark his 25 years service in the priesthood.

In 1970 Father Gordon negotiated a lease on premises in Westy Lane, and these became St Augustine's Club in October of that year. This venture became a reliable source of income for the parish until its closure in 1988.

Father Morgan's ministry in Latchford lasted until August 1973 when he left England to work on a mission station in Kenya. The parish did not, however, lose touch with him and gave financial support to his endeavours. His replacement was Father William Kilkenny.

On March 15th 1975 the parishioners of St Ann's, Cheadle Hulme learned of the death of their parish priest Canon Joseph Howe after 23 years ministry. Bishop Grasar asked Father Gordon to take over Cheadle Hulme and it fell to Father Kilkenny to run the parish until Father Birdwhistle arrived from St Bernard's, Ellesmere Port on August 20th of that year. He was soon embroiled in parish business and in the October of his first year he set about re-roofing and decorating the church.

In July 1979 Mr. Dorries retired after 33 years service to the school, the last 16 of which were as Head Teacher. On the 17th his leaving was celebrated by a concelebrated Mass with no less than seven priests taking part. After the Mass there was a social gathering in the School Hall when parishioners could have the chance to personally voice their appreciation of his dedication to the children.

On January 31st 1981 Father Kilkenny left St Augustine's to go to St Mary's, Crewe and Father John Hovington replaced him four days later taking his place helping to run the Young Christian Workers. He also became the first Chaplain to St John's School. Sunday June 14th 1981 was Jubilee Day. At 3.00 pm Bishop Gray presided at a concelebrated Mass in the school playground which was followed by a Parish Social on the Wednesday. On the Thursday afternoon the school had a party and this was followed by a day's holiday.

Father Birdwistle was appointed to take over the parish of Our Lady and the Apostles, Stockport in August 1986 and Father McDonald took his place in the parish. The choice of the Bishop could not have been better as many of the congregation had held him in their affections since he left the parish in September 1959.

On April 9th 1987 Mrs Wilde retired from her post as Head Teacher, and further farewells were made in September the same year when Father Hovington was replaced by Father John Feeney.

April 1988 brought the closure of St Augustine's Club in Westy Lane as satisfactory terms for a new lease could not be negotiated. Over the 18 years it had been running it had proved a boon to the parish being both a parish centre and a good source of income. The club became 'Westy' and was still used occasionally by the parish.

After only three years serving the Catholics of Latchford Father Feeney was appointed as parish priest at St Gabriel's, Alsager. Father Peter Dutton replaced him in September 1988.

The parishioners were deeply shocked to learn of the death of Father McDonald on January 8th 1990. St Augustine's had been his first parish after his ordination in July 1953 and during his two terms of ministry at Latchford he had been taken to the hearts of the congregation. Bishop Gray was the principal celebrant at his Requiem Mass after which his body was taken to Wallasey for burial in his parents' grave.

Bishop Gray asked Father Peter Robertson to take over the running of the parish and he arrived in the middle of February. Like Father McDonald he hailed from Wallasey, but there the similarity ended, for their backgrounds were entirely different. Father Robertson had worked in the commercial world whereas Father McDonald had worked in the Civil Service and served in the R.A.F. before his ordination.

To mark the service that Father McDonald gave to the parish a stained glass window was installed in the porch. The Bishop blessed both the window and the porch on May 12th 1991. A further memorial was a kneeler that was blessed on January 9th 1994. His nieces and nephews donated it to the parish as a tribute to their uncle John.

The Bishop returned on June 9th 1991 for a visitation. This coincided with the Diamond Anniversary of the opening of the church. During the 11am Mass Peter Hooper received his candidacy for Holy Orders, and on the following October 12th Bishop Gray ordained him to the Diaconate and to the priesthood on July 4th 1992. After further work in the parish he left at the start of September to take up his first appointment at St Anthony's, Wythenshawe.

On August 25th of that year Father Dutton left the parish, going to Telford and was replaced by Father Stephen Woolley, but on the last day of January 1992 the former was back again in the parish to receive a testimonial. The congregation had raised £800 to mark their appreciation of all that he done for them.

In June 1995 the Sanctuary was redesigned with the floor being modified and the area decorated. In mid-February 1996 a start was made on the decoration of the church, adding carpeting to the Sanctuary and curtaining the wall behind the altar. The windows at the rear of the altar were replaced because the coloured film on the old

glass had become loose and was peeling off. The work was finished by mid-March and was made possible by a bequest of a parishioner who left £5,000 to the church.

The end of August 1995 saw the departure of Father Woolley when he went to fresh pastures at St John's, New Ferry and on September 3rd Father Phillip Atkinson joined Father Robertson in the presbytery.

The Silver Jubilee of Father Robertson's ordination was on March 27th 1996 and Bishop Noble celebrated Mass at St Anthony's, Wythenshawe for six Jubilarians of the Diocese on June 27th. Father Peter went to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea to visit some fellow priests there. This was made possible by the generosity of the congregation.

Father Robertson was invited to attend the 1400th anniversary celebrations of St Augustine at Canterbury Cathedral on May 26th and members of the parish went on a pilgrimage to Canterbury later in the year. They left Latchford by coach at 7am on Tuesday August 26th returning on the following Thursday. Accommodation was provided at Aylsford Priory. The pilgrimage was successful and on the following September 19th a social evening to further mark the anniversary was held at Westies. (ex St Augustine's Club.)

In August 1997 Iain Griffiths came to the parish as part of his studies towards the priesthood and worked in Latchford for several weeks. A coach took several members of the parish to Ushaw College, Durham, to witness his ordination to the Diaconate on June 19th 1998. After further studies he returned to Latchford in the following April for three months prior to his Ordination. Before the ceremony the outside of the church was painted and internally the floors and pews re-varnished, completing the refurbishment that had been started in 1994. Many parishioners joined Iain's parents, family and friends, Bishop Noble and clergy who came from far and wide for the impressive ceremony when he was ordained to the priesthood on July 11th 1999.

## **The Final Years**

In 1997 Bishop Brian Noble decided to act on the future problems that faced the diocese caused by the shortage of priests and falling congregations. The Shrewsbury Diocese was the first to address this problem and the Bishop instituted a survey of all the resources of each parish, population, buildings, parish organisations, etc. All parishes were notified of the results of the surveys in June of that year. The first parish meeting was held on September 15th in the school hall in order to look at the parish's response. This was submitted to the Diocese and on November 14th the result of all the submissions throughout the Diocese was published. As Dean of the area, Father Robertson was responsible for the final report and the following is part of an article that appeared in the 'Voice' for November 1999:

***Our Lady's, Latchford and St Augustine's, Latchford:** Our Lady's is poorly placed, geographically, on the edge of the boundary with the Archdiocese of Liverpool. It has no parish hall, no off-the-road parking, is ¾ mile from the school and requires immediate extensive remedial work, both external and internal. The most urgent part of this is structural. On the other hand, St Augustine's is central to the area, more than*

*adequate off-the-road parking, is adjacent to the primary school which doubles as a centre for social activities and has no immediate requirement for extended maintenance. The nominal population of a pastoral area of the combined parishes would be circa 2500 and the geographical area would be less than one third of either Appleton or Lymm. Currently there are three priests saying seven masses within less than a mile of each other.*

### **PROPOSALS**

***St Augustine's, Latchford,** is central to the area. It is in good condition overall, though the church is a temporary building. Running costs are low and there is no immediate need to consider a replacement building.*

***Our Lady's, Latchford,** on the other hand is in poor condition, with forecast expenditure of over £190,000 over the next 12 years.*

*We recommend that, in the future, the centre for this area should be St Augustine's, recognising that in time this will probably involve the provision of a new church building. Initially, St Augustine's and Our Lady's should become one pastoral area, with the church at Our Lady's being offered for sale in the near future, and the future of the presbytery being reviewed in due course. There will, however, still be a requirement for the provision of Mass in this part of the town and we suggest that it is now time to explore the possibility of using a suitable church from another denomination. We did note that there is a deacon-in-training from this parish and we wondered about the possibility of using the school as a Mass Centre. We do not believe it advisable to take on another building at **St Ambrose's**, which is at present in the Liverpool Archdiocese. Indeed, we think this would further complicate the situation, giving us an extra building and another community who may not wish to adapt to change.*

*We also believe that St Winifride's, Lymm could at some point in the future be included in the same pastoral area as St Augustine's...*

After consultative meetings for the congregation, a further meeting, this time with Our Lady's parishioners, was held at the Latchford Methodist Chapel on Wednesday March 26th 2000 to discuss the 'Green Paper'. The meeting was, at times, quite heated, with many putting their views quite forcefully. The outcome of this was the setting up of a working party to look at the future needs of all four parishes in south Warrington. The working party consisted of members of St Augustine's, Our Lady's and St Monica's parishes. St Winifride's, Lymm were not represented. After five meetings they sent their report to the Curial Offices in June 2001. Their recommendation was that Our Lady's and St Augustine's parishes "should be combined into one parish with one priest assisted by two deacons" and a new church should be built, after which both the original churches should be demolished.

At the end of June 2000 more clergy changes were announced. Father Robertson was to go to St Joseph's, Birkenhead and Father Atkinson to St Alban's, Macclesfield. They were to be replaced by Father Roger Clarke who had previously served in Peru and Bolivia. The first two left on August 29th and Father Clarke assisted by Deacon John Clowes took over the parish on September 3rd. A presentation to the two former priests was made on the following October 8th.

In January 2001 a Parish Project was launched with the express purpose of making people aware of the potential within the church community. Many ideas were considered and questionnaires were distributed to the parishioners so they could record

their joys and sorrows. A series of Lenten lectures were given by the Diocesan Adult Education Service. A Rogues Gallery of pictures from the past was assembled and put on display in April. This display also appeared in the Catholic Pictorial newspaper. On June 24th the 70th anniversary of the church was belatedly celebrated with a Mass followed by further celebration in the school hall. Various needs were highlighted and resulted in the formation of a Liturgy group in July and a Parish Retreat to St Joseph's, Malpas later in the month. A further meeting of the Parish Project committee revived the need for a parish council but once again this did not materialise.

One of the sorrows was the need for a parish room, as the school hall was not very convenient. Father Clarke put forward a scheme whereby the rear part of the church would be partitioned off thus providing a space for parish activities. The idea was put to a vote of parishioners who decided by 115 to 53 to go ahead with the plans. These were agreed to by the Diocese but eventually a way of using the school hall made any building alterations unnecessary.

On September 6th 2001, a special Mass was said on the 50th anniversary of the death of Father Cullen. Other deceased parish priests were not forgotten, and prayers were said for Father Russell who died in Manchester on December 1st 1971, and for Father Gordon whose death in a car accident was on September 12th 1986.

In October 2001 a new cross was placed behind the altar replacing the one that had been there for a number of years. The figure of Christ that hung upon it was brought back from Bolivia by Father Clarke and came from a wood-carving school in San Miguel de Velasco, about nine miles from Santa Cruz. Originally he intended this to be put outside the church but the congregation persuaded him not to do this because of fears of vandalism as a previous one had been stolen. The original crucifix from the altar was placed in the school

November 10th saw a Deanery Meeting held in St Augustine's School at which Bishop Noble was present. After far-reaching discussions the Bishop spoke about the proposed future of the parish, its amalgamation with Our Lady's and the purchase of a site for a new church. He assured the meeting that there was no hidden agenda, something suspected by both sets of parishioners. He said that the only certain thing was that at some time in the future there would be only one priest to serve both parishes and he thought it would be sooner than later.

During his September trip to Bolivia Father Clarke had explored the possibility of setting up a Breakfast Club for fifty children in Villa Fatima, part of the parish of Our Lady of Fatima in Santa Cruz, who would otherwise go to school without food. Back home he discussed the idea with other local priests and they agreed to take part in a project to help these poor children. The scheme meant that three parishes – St Winefrides, St Monica's and St Augustine's would need to raise money, each parish taking its turn. Our Lady's parish was not involved as it was supporting a mission in Kenya. The first Bolivian Breakfast Club luncheon was held on January 20th 2002 and the fund-raising continued after the parish merged with Our Lady's Parish.

On October 1st 2002 another meeting made an attempt to form a Parish Council. The imminent merger with Our Lady's was high on the agenda and from the discussions a Parish Steering Group composed of Father Roger, Deacon John and several

parishioners was formed. This was a successful group who worked together serving the Parish until the merger of the two Parishes. Many of the ideas that came from this group on matters pastoral, spiritual and social were put into action.

The changes that the Bishop said would be sooner came when Father Peter Montgomery officially replaced Father Clarke in September 2003 with the huge task of running two parishes of St Augustine's and Our Lady's. The changes that the combining would make were felt quite soon. Father Montgomery wrote to both groups of parishioners before he officially took up his duties. In his letter he wrote:-

*"The journey we are about to set out on together already promises to be full of new beginnings: new friendships, shared stories, proud memories and united witness to the gospel." . . . . .* He went on to explain that there would have to be changes in the pattern of Sunday Masses. The Saturday evening Mass would be at Our Lady's School with a Sunday morning Mass at each of the two churches. He explained, *"The advantage of holding our Saturday evening Mass at the school is that it is half way between the two churches and it has a good car park. It also provides an opportunity for members of both communities to meet together as "pioneers" of our new parish."* The changes came into effect on August 30th and continued at the school until July 23rd 2005.

A search for a site for a new church had started in 2001 and two suitable sites had been identified. Finally one site became the preferred option of on the east of Knutsford Road opposite the end of Wash Lane. The site, thought to be the best that was possible, was almost half way between the two churches something that had been desired from the outset.



The interior of the church in September 2004- © David Forrest

In early March 2005 an application was made to Warrington Borough Council seeking permission to demolish St Augustine's Church. The presbytery was by now boarded-up to counter the increasing vandalism, something that was increasing at the church as well, where several windows had been protected with boards.

In November 2004 the combined congregations were asked to suggest names for the new church. The list of 44 names was put to the ballot in the following January for reply by February 14th. The preferred name 'Our Lady of the Assumption and Saint Augustine of Canterbury' ensured that both names would live on and solve any possible problems for both parish schools. Bishop Noble gave his approval to the title in March 2005.

The date for the closure was fixed as the middle of July 2005. On the 6th, Mass was said for the repose of the souls of all deceased parishioners. Two days later a Votive Mass of St Augustine was concelebrated by Father Robertson assisted by Fathers Atkinson and Woolley. This was followed by refreshments in the school hall which gave all those present chance to chat about times past. On Sunday July 17th, the final Mass was concelebrated by Father Montgomery and Father Dutton. Many of those present had heavy hearts. Saying goodbye to a building with so many memories was not easy. Whole families had ties with the church, having had baptisms, marriages and funerals there. For many the building was like an old and reliable friend, always there in time of need. Now it was to be no more. No wonder there was sadness! The Mass was followed by a buffet, again in the school hall, where a Book of Memories was available for parishioners to write something - anything that was precious in the memory.

The church was stripped of all those items that were removable and valuable- statues, Stations of the Cross, organ etc. Three statues- St Augustine, the Sacred Heart, and the carving of Our Lady of Walsingham were placed in the newly named church of Our Lady of the Assumption and St Augustine of Canterbury, and all was made ready for demolition, which took place in October 2005.

Early on November 6th the presbytery was set alight in a suspected arson attack, which resulted in the roof being completely destroyed. Arson was never proved, but another cause would seem unlikely as the gas and electricity supplies had been cut off.

There is little mention in previous pages of the parishioners except in the reprinted press cuttings that are included. They deserve some recognition. The overriding impression to an outsider (like the author) is of an openhearted and open-handed group of Christians. This is very evident when one takes a look at the support given to various charities. The Association for the Propagation of the Faith, CAFOD, St Vincent de Paul and many other good causes can all testify to the great generosity they have received from the parish over the last 75 years. Sometimes this would be given by those who had very little of this world's bounty for themselves, especially during the 1930s. They built a church, a hall, a school and a presbytery when times were hard and still found enough for those in need.

The most remarkable of all fund raising was by the CAFOD (Catholic Fund for Overseas Development) Group who have been active in the parish since late 1990 or early 1991. CAFOD West Midlands Region records show that since 1990 until March

2006 the group has given £73,650.00 to help those in need abroad. This amazing amount of aid has been generated by various means ó envelope collections; bring and buy sales; raffles; car rallies; sponsored events and other more inventive schemes for raising money and awareness of the plight of the poor in other countries. For a number of years Afternoon Teas have been held on Sundays at High Legh Village Hall. These have always been popular and have reached outside the parish boundaries.

There have also been other parish groups who are concerned with matters other than finance. In 1989, during Father McDonald's ministry, the Legion of Mary was formed and later a junior section was also created. This small group has done a sterling work at local hospitals and have reached out to other towns and cities, both in this country and abroad. They continue to operate now that the parish has combined with Our Lady's.

Other members of the parish formed associations for other specific purposes. In the early years of the parish there were the Women's Confraternity, the Men's Confraternity, Parents Association and the Catholic Young Men's Society. Later on there were the Children of Mary, Lourdes Youth Group, Girl Guides, Friends of St Augustine's School, the Christian Life Community (started in October 2001), those who organised pilgrimages to Lourdes and Walsingham, etc. Mention must be made of the choir whose fortunes rose and fell, sometimes ceasing to exist, but there was always someone in the parish who was willing to restart it. The church was always looked after by a team of church cleaners and the fabric of the building maintained by loyal volunteers. The scale of activity within the parish is not easy to put down in print, as it was so varied and sometimes so hidden from view that it avoided notice.

There can be no doubt that since 1930 St Augustine's was a force for good in the lives of many thousands of people both inside and outside the parish. It is hoped that this short history will be a tribute, although inadequate, to all the good that was achieved in 75 years.



## **PARISH PRIESTS**

Father John Louis Cullen	1930-1937
Father Joseph Russell	1937-1966
Father Herbert Francis Gordon	1966-1975
Father E. Hugh Birdwhistle	1975-1986
Father John Patrick McDonald	1986-1990
Father Peter Robertson	1990-2000
Father Roger T. Clarke	2000-2003
Father Peter C. Montgomery	2003-2005

## **ASSISTANT PRIESTS**

Father Thomas John Mulcahy	1933
Father George Mary Carter	1935-1940
Father Herbert Campfield	1940-1956
Father John Patrick McDonald	1953-1959
Father Joseph Prendiville	1959-1967
Father Christopher O'Brien	1967-1969
Father Joseph Brendan Morgan	1969-1973
Father William Kilkenny	1973-1981
Father John Hovington	1981-1985
Father John Feeney	1985-1988
Father Peter Dutton	1988-1991
Father Stephen Woolley	1991-1995
Father Phillip Atkinson	1995-2000

## **PERMANENT DEACON**

Deacon John A. Clowes	2000-2005
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## **HEAD TEACHERS**

Albert Beycart Benson	1936-1943
Thomas Ardern	1943-1963
Desmond Dorries	1963-1979
Florence Margaret Wilde	1979-1987
Anthony Smith	1987-1998
David Littlewood (Acting Head)	1998
Phillip Hallman (Acting Head)	1998
Michael Boland	1999-
Lisa Wigglesworth	2000

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