

Saint Joseph's Millfield, Saint Anne's With the Holy Family Pennywell and Saint Patrick's Ryhope

100 Years of History

The First Centenary St. Joseph's Parish, Millfield, Sunderland. 1873 - 1973

St. Joseph's Parish, Millfield, founded in October 1873 is celebrating its centenary and the parishioners are looking back on the story of the past 100 years but although they rejoice they realise that to look back on 100 years is not to look far into the long history of Saint Josephs' Church in Sunderland. This began about 647 when St. Hilda, at the request of St. Aidan, founded a small convent at Monkwearmouth, where, some 27 years later St. Benet Biscop built St. Peter's monastery. And Monkwearmouth (or Wearmouth as it was then known) became a great centre of the Faith and a seat of learning.

So far as St. Joseph's is concerned, however, records of the early days show that the first entry into the parish's first Baptismal Register (Liber Baptizatorum) read as follows:- 'Born 17th October 1873. Baptised 26th October 1873 **JOSEPHINA WILSON**, daughter of John Thomas and Margaret MURRAY, of No.1, Lime Street. Fr. Michael Ryan, Godfather Thomas Holland: Godmother Margaret Holland of 1, Cirencester Street Millfield Sunderland. The ceremony took place in the School-chapel which had been opened only a year before, and which had served as a Mass Centre, supplied by priests from St. Mary's. But from now onwards, it was, so far as the Catholics of the West End of Sunderland were concerned, their 'parish church'. Canon John Bamber, parish priest of St. Mary's, had in 1871 bought land in King's Place, (then part of King's Farm), and on this was built the school chapel in 1872.

There were some parishioners still living, who could recall the days when a sliding partition separated the Altar from the school. An original stone cross, to be seen today on the northern gable of the present Junior School marks the position of the Altar and is a visible reminder of the foundation of the parish 100 years ago. But Sadly this is not there anymore The Building that it was on was Demolished in 2012 by the Order of the School Headmistress at that time, Sunderland City Council and the Diocese of Hexham And Newcastle, [Click Here](#) To See a Picture Of The Cross.

The school was obviously built with an eye to an extending parish, and Patterson's 'Guide to Sunderland' published in 1891 gives the cost as £2,000, with an accommodation for 1,000 pupils, and the date for opening as a school 1872. In those days, and for a newly-established parish, this was a huge debt for the people to carry and twenty years later the people were being reminded by their parish priest, Fr. Thomas Joseph Smith, that 'the interest on the debt and ground rent, about £200 per annum, is twice as much as we receive through the Outdoor Collection', and so it was with such a debt on his shoulders that the first Priest-in-Charge of St. Joseph's, Fr. Michael Ryan, began his labours. His appointment was to mark the beginning of a parish which was to grow to such an extent that in 1948 it numbered 7,279 souls, which made it numerically, the largest parish in the diocese of Hexham and Newcastle.

Its numbers were lessened by the formation within what had originally been its parish boundaries of the new parishes of The Immaculate Heart of Mary (1949); Holy Rosary (1949); St. Anne's (1957); and the Holy Family (1960). Mass was continued to be said in the Little Sister's chapel which had been a Mass Centre for St. Joseph's since 1939, by kind permission of the Rev. Mother. At South Hylton, where at one time Mass was celebrated in the British Legion hut, a hut was conveyed to Hylton and erected there by men of the parish, particularly those living in Hylton, and this became the Mass Centre of St. Anne's.

When St. Joseph's parish was founded, considerable industrial development had been taking place in the West End of the town particularly in proximity to the river. But the southern side, Chester Road and Durham road areas remained almost purely residential. Just two years after the foundation of St.

Joseph's the parish welcomed within its borders the Little Sisters of the Poor who had acquired Ettrick Hall as a Home for the Aged Poor into which they moved from the house they then occupied in Monkwearmouth.

Many priests who served St. Joseph's in those early days recalled leaving the Presbytery early in the mornings to celebrate 7.00AM. mass in the home. In 1895 it was recorded that "As there will be a daily Mass at the Little Sisters there will be only one Mass daily at St. Joseph's". These priests would also recall sick visiting at the Workhouse Hospital, the General Hospital and the Isolation Hospitals All of which were within the parish boundaries. It is, alas, not possible to tell within a few pages, all that has happened in the parish over the past one hundred years, although when this brochure was first envisaged, it was hoped that it would contain the full story, for research has been made into the past, But to have given as little as half a page to each year would have meant at least 50 pages. What is not told in this brief account must, therefore, be recalled by family reminiscences and records.

Fr. Michael Ryan remained until the November of the following year when he was succeeded by Fr. Edward Dunphy, who remained only a matter of months for he left in January 1875, and was succeeded by.

Fr. Thomas Culshaw did not arrive in the parish until the July. He remained until March 1882 during which time he did a great deal of work and was responsible for the building of the Presbytery (which has undergone many alterations since!). Fr. Culshaw was followed by.

Fr. John Dunne who remained until August 1884 and who died only three months after leaving St. Joseph's. It was Fr. Dunne who recorded that the Outdoor Collection amounted only to 17/6 (87.5p) weekly but rose to £2.

Succeeding Fr. Dunne was Fr. Michael Callanan who remained until October 1890. His successor was Fr. Augustine Magill (later named Canon) Who had been a minor professor at Ushaw and headmaster at St. Mary's Grammar School, Newcastle for five years (1885-90) before being appointed to St. Joseph's, in 1890. He remained until 1892 when he became p.p. at Brooms. It was in his time that on the 1st April 1891 the first meeting of St. Joseph's Conference of the SVP took place, and this was followed a month later by the formation of a Young Men's Guild.

Fr. Magill was followed by Fr. Thomas Joseph Smith, who came to the parish in 1892 and remained until 1897. He subsequently returned to the town to become parish priest of St. Mary's, was named Canon, and became a prominent figure in the town.

During his years at St. Joseph's he built the Infant School, enlarged the presbytery, asked for 'A day's wage' to reduce the debt of £4,000 on the parish, (his suggestion of a day's wage was that every worker should give 5/-! (25p)) he approached the Catholics of Hylton and arranged or tried to arrange, occasional Masses to be celebrated there. In his time the Cemetery Chapel was opened, in 1894.

Fr. John Rogers who succeeded Fr. Smith will forever be remembered as being responsible for the building of the present handsome church so beloved by the people of St. Joseph's. The first sod for the laying of foundations was cut at Easter 1906 and the church was opened on October 14th, 1907. The cost of the church was stated as being about £3,000. It's construction marked a completely new departure for instead of bricks, concrete blocks were used and this was believed to be the first recorded instance in which they were actually made on the site.'

A few years earlier men of the parish had helped clear the land at the Little Sisters Home for a new chapel which was opened in 1908. In October 1907 Fr. Rogers opened the Men's Institute. Soon after the opening of the new church Fr. Rogers (who later became Canon Rogers) left for Tynemouth. This was in March 1908 when he was succeeded by the curate, Fr. Joseph Kinleside who had served at St. Joseph's since 1900.

A year later Fr. Kinleside called the first meeting of The Children of Mary. He inaugurated the Million Penny Fund, and the Brick Scheme which many of the older parishioners of St. Joseph's could recall. In Fr. Kinleside's time the Annual School Concerts took place in the Victoria Hall, preceded by tea, provided by the women of the parish (groups or individuals 'gave' a table) in the schoolroom. And instead of the school children 'marching to a field at Ford Hall' for their annual school treat, they embarked on a train at Pallion Station for Cox green.

The First World War was a year old when, in August 1915, Fr. Kinleside (who was later to be made an honorary Canon) left for North Shields. In his place came Fr. James Thompson who had to make the difficult war-time journey from Spain, where he was Vice-Rector of the English College at Valladolid (he had previously been at Stanley).

At St. Joseph's, he became the first Parish Priest (as distinct from Priest-in-Charge) and his great concern throughout his years at St. Joseph's was to free the House of God from debt. He had been here only a year when he announced that £125 had been paid off the debt, and this kind of report was repeated down through the years. In 1922 he added a new Junior School Classroom; in 1925 the Flemish Altar was erected; in 1928 the Sacred Heart Statue was given in memory of a parishioner. Fr. Thompson died in 1929.

He was succeeded by Fr. George Wheatley who during his three years as parish priest carried out a great deal of restoration, re-furbishing and additions in both church and presbytery. Electric light was installed, the handsome hand-carved Communion Rail (designed by a parishioner-architect William Dent) was installed. The C.Y.M.S. was formed (and became one of the largest branches in the Diocese) in 1928, as was also the Guild of St. Agnes for girls, and the Guild of St. Aloysius for boys, and later the CWL.

Dr. Wheatley left St. Joseph's for Crawcrook in 1932 and was succeeded by Fr. J. O'Dwyer, on the 7th January 1932. Fr. O'Dwyer was not enjoying the best of health at this time, but despite this handicap his years both here, and at Ryhope from which he came, was marked with achievements. Not a priest who begged a great deal, Fr. O'Dwyer showed a keen administrative and financial turn of mind, for despite the poverty and unemployment from which so many parishioners suffered (he arrived in the midst of the great depression of the thirties) Fr. O'Dwyer raised £3,000 for the projected new school in 2½ years.

He negotiated with the Local Education Authority over the site and erection of the Senior School. He had much experience in this kind of work for he was for many years a member of the Ryhope Urban District Council, of which he was Vice-Chairman, and he served for 13 years on the Board of Guardians and Public Assistance Committee. The Legion of Mary became a new parish sodality in his time. He died in 1934.

He was succeeded in the June of that year by Fr. Roger Morrissey, who was then serving as Priest-in-Charge at Penshaw. A former Army Chaplain Fr. Morrissey kept up his love for horse-riding and made his first preliminary visit to St. Joseph's on horse-back! The grim times caused by the depression persisted and many of the men folk and boys of St. Joseph's were unemployed.

Under such circumstances the Men's Club, run by the C.Y.M.S, offering a warm fire, billiards, cards and darts every evening for a weekly subscription of two pence was an oasis - and a happy memory down the years. Much of what was done by

Fr. Morrissey is still remembered - the church was cleared of debt and was consecrated in 1938; This was an historic distinction for it was the first time a Catholic parish church had been consecrated in Sunderland since the Reformation. The Senior School, opened in 1936 was described by the Director of Education, Mr. W. Thompson, as making history in the town as being the first non-provided school,

conforming fully to the Hadow Scheme recommendations to be built in Sunderland. It had cost £13,000 and £3,000 had already been raised.

The whole debt was paid off in 4 years. A new organ was acquired and installed and a new pulpit fitted in 1937 the parish's own brass band led a May procession through the streets! Sites for new churches were acquired at Springwell, Farrington, Pennywell and Grindon. Fr. Morrissey was the first priest to celebrate a silver jubilee in the parish. He died on 25th April 1958, No successor was immediately appointed and Fr. John White, senior curate, was appointed temporary Vicarus until the appointment in the November of Fr. W. Malone who was then parish priest at St. Wilfred's, Bishop Auckland in which area he had quite a reputation as a church builder.

During his time at St. Joseph's a new stairway replaced the newel stairway to the choir, the Sanctuary carpet was renewed, new statues were erected outside above the church porch and alterations were carried out to schools and presbytery and the vestry ceased to be an additional (temporary) classroom. Collections at benediction and at post-communion mass were discontinued. Fr. Malone died while on Retreat at Ushaw on 5th August 1965.

Fr. A. K. Daley, succeeded Fr. Malone and the parish flourished under his care. Family Groups have been formed House Masses have been celebrated and weekday Evening Mass and the custom of receiving the corpse into the church on the evening preceding the Requiem Mass was re-introduced. On the material side the church was repainted, the Rose Window was re-coloured, and a £2,260 renovation was carried out on the organ, and the exterior of the church was re-pointed and repaired. In February 1970 the Planned Giving Scheme was introduced. Considerable alteration and modernization was carried out on the Presbytery. Fr. Daley had the pleasure of celebrating his Silver Jubilee in the priesthood while at St. Joseph's an opportunity which the parishioners were eager to seize upon for showing their high regard, esteem and appreciation of a parish priest who had endeared himself to his parishioners. Fr. A. K. Daley Left the Parish in 1990.