



HOLY TRINITY CATHOLIC CHURCH  
CHIPPING NORTON  
1836 - 2008



## **To The Reader.**

To-day, as we worship at Holy Trinity, we probably give few thoughts as to how there came to be a church here in the first place nor that, little more than one hundred and seventy years ago, life was not very easy as a practising Roman Catholic.

Much of what we have today is due to three major physical influences down the years, the Earls of Shrewsbury (the Talbot family), the Jesuit Fathers and all those Religious who have served the Parish down the years. They all deserve our thanks and prayers.

This rather leaves out the parishioners, but whether we like it or not, in real terms our role is a minor one even if for some it involves a lot of "minor work". It might be better if more of us took more part in Parish affairs and spread the work load a bit but nevertheless, we should not overlook the role the Faith of parishioners has played in our small church, in the past and will continue to play into the future.

This history is intended as a reminder of both the past and present parish and is concerned with three things – the physical structure of the church buildings, the Religious who have served the parish down the years and the parishioners for whom the Church and they exist. The origins of this and a Short History published earlier would not have come about without the suggestion of Father Frank Hull in 2006 and the major sources are acknowledged later.

The history covering the first 125 odd years until 1950 has been collated from various published and written sources and it cannot be expected that very much new will come to light in future years. However, from 1950 to the present is in the recall of most of our senior and not-so-senior parishioners and to many of these we are indebted. As parishioners we are still making history and perhaps we can all take advantage in taking a look at just where we are today and where we would like to be tomorrow. At some point in the future the latter part of the parish history will need revising and editing. All comments, corrections and additions will be welcome and preserved for the next edition.

As this project proceeded, the quantity of material found dictated that a printed paper publication containing it all would be far too expensive. For those with a deeper interest in the history of the parish this history and many of the associated documents and photographs have been transferred to a CD and can be read using a computer with Adobe Acrobat Reader or a similar programme that can read .pdf files. For the future up-dating of this history all the original data has also been placed on a CD so that future editions are easier to produce.

## **Acknowledgements.**

In 1984 a history of the Chipping Norton church and parish was compiled by Miss Pat Firkin and revised in 1994 and this provided the starting point. A most important and useful source of early information is to be found in Mrs Bryan Stapleton's 1906 book "A History of Post-Reformation Catholic Missions in Oxfordshire" and this is still available on loan from Oxford Library Services. Other important sources have been the Birmingham Archdiocese Archive (BAA), the archives of the Society of Jesus, Daughters of Providence of St Briec, Daughters of Jesus, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Dominican Congregation of Oakford, Society of the Holy Child Jesus, Centre for Oxfordshire Studies, Chipping Norton Museum as well as the memories of a large number of parishioners and to all these sources go our grateful thanks.

We acknowledge our gratitude to the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies for allowing us to reproduce black and white photographs of Holy Trinity. These were taken near the beginning of the last century by the well-known Chipping Norton photographer, Mr Packer. The pictures of the Hook Norton Chapel were taken at the opening on November 11th 1932 by an unknown photographer and other photo credits (except those of the author) are in the text. Please note that all photographs used are covered by copyright and may not be used without the permission of the copyright holder.

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## How it all started – Father Heffernan and the Earls of Shrewsbury.

When Henry VIII made the decision to break with Rome in 1532 life became difficult for Catholics and failing to attend Anglican worship brought financial penalties and exclusion from public affairs. Matters did not get any better through the times of the Civil War, the execution of Charles I and the Protectorate. The restoration of the monarchy may have made things easier for some but keeping the Faith relied much upon the self-sacrifice of many priests (secular and religious), landowners outside of the towns and cities, who supported their small communities and provided a chaplain for their personal as well as staff and neighbours' benefit.

Our local post-reformation Catholic history and that of the parish started with the purchase of the Heythrop Estate in 1706 by the 12th Earl of Shrewsbury, George Talbot. He was a godson of Charles II, had been brought up as a Catholic but found, as many others did in similar circumstances, to be a member of the Church of England allowed him to remain in the Society of the day and in which he was to become a prominent statesman. Initially the Talbot residence was at the Heythrop Manor House in Old Heythrop – today's Heythrop village - and between 1706 and 1712 he built Heythrop Hall but soon after, in 1718, he died. His estate was inherited by his Catholic cousins, initially Gilbert Talbot, a Jesuit priest, but as he had renounced his inheritance and title, then his brother George Talbot succeeded as the 14th Earl.

Although not permanently resident at Heythrop, George Talbot maintained a chaplaincy for the staff and locals with Mass said in a chapel built adjacent to the Hall. The Catholic connections were strong – his son later became Bishop James Talbot and until 1745, Bishop John Stoner, Vicar Apostolic of the Midlands District lived at the Manor House in Old Heythrop. The estate eventually included property in Swerford, the Tews, South Newington, Chipping Norton, Over Norton and Broadstone Farm and was some 5 000 acres in total.

In 1780 the first Catholic Relief Act was passed by Parliament and this enabled land to be bought and inherited and seven years later Charles Talbot succeeded as 15th Earl of Shrewsbury. George Talbot was buried in Old Heythrop and there is a memorial to him in the mortuary chapel, all that remains of the medieval church of St Nicholas. It laments the penal laws which disqualified him "from treading the steps of his ancestors either in the senate or in the field".

In 1791 the second Catholic Relief Act was passed permitting worship, service in the military, practice in Law, organised religious schools and the vote but to hold Public Office or sit in Parliament was still prohibited. At this time the Rev Anthony Clough was chaplain at Heythrop and he applied for registration of the Hall chapel under the new law. The Shrewsbury interest in residing at Heythrop declined and Charles Talbot started to move his belongings to Alton Abbey in 1815 where he commissioned Pugin to build a new residence known today as Alton Towers. In 1818 the Heythrop Estate was leased to the Duke of Beaufort as a hunting lodge and the Hall chapel was no longer available for Catholic use.

The first Vicar Apostolic for the Midland District was William Bishop whose family was the centre of Catholic activity at Brailes. His relative, Francis Bishop was Chaplain to Charles the 15th Earl and before he died in 1821 and with the loss of the use of the Hall chapel, he started the construction of a church next to the manor in Old Heythrop. Charles appointed as Bishop's successor the 29 year old Fr Patrick Heffernan. He came from Ossory in Ireland and had been ordained 3 years earlier and took up residence in the Old Heythrop manor house.

Interestingly this church, St Mary's, was the third to be built in Oxfordshire since the Reformation, the first in 1792 being at Mapledurham near Reading. The second was St Ignatius in St Clements, Oxford, built in 1800.

In 1824 a small graveyard was started by Fr Heffernan in the Park grounds and it was used by the Heythrop congregation until 1860 but survived the later demolition of St Mary's and the Manor House. When the Jesuits bought the Heythrop estate in 1924 it was again put into use and can still be visited in the grounds of the Park where it is a tranquil spot between the fairways of the golf course.

The completion of the new church took place in 1826 and in the same year Charles Talbot moved his permanent residence



St Mary's Church, Old Heythrop. Completed in 1826 and demolished 1882. From a watercolour by Mrs Janet Dunkley.

to Alton Towers in Staffordshire. Unfortunately one year later he died in London but was buried in St Mary's. He left Fr Heffernan £100. The Catholic connection to Heythrop was effectively ended when Charles was succeeded by John Talbot as 16th Earl who maintained his residence at Alton Towers but continued the Talbot support to the Church and for which he was made a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Gregory. After his death the contents of Alton Towers were put up for sale and the Birmingham Archdiocese was one of the beneficiaries of his will.

In 1829 the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed removing all remaining restrictions and restoring full civil rights. This naturally caused a re-evaluation what had been in effect missionary tactics and it was to be expected that the centre of religious activity would move from the countryside and landowners' support, to the towns and cities of Britain. So far as Heythrop Estate was concerned its future was in even more question when the Hall was largely destroyed by fire in 1831 with the exception of the stables and family chapel. The latter still exists and is used as a storeroom.

Evidence of the more tolerant religious atmosphere was shown in 1835 – 1836 when Dr Nicholas Wiseman, the president of the English College in Rome, made a lecture tour of England. For the first time since the Reformation throughout the country Catholic Faith was preached publicly. Catholics and non-Catholics were startled, alarmed and fascinated.

The first chapter in our parish history started when Bishop Walsh and Fr Heffernan seem to have clearly seen where the potential was and in spite of the fact that there were virtually no Catholics in Chipping Norton, bought a 5 000 sq.m. property at Rock Hill for £240, today number 26 London Road. He started the construction of the church that you know as Holy Trinity with the labour and much of the building materials coming from the Heythrop estate but the cost of construction was nevertheless £5 000. Considerable financial help was provided by Miss Mary Bowdon of Radford to the extent of £4 000, no small sum in 1836 (£315 000 in 2006) and after her death in 1854 Bishop Walsh commissioned a memorial tablet to her and Anne Bowdon in 1858, which can still be seen in the Sacristy. It is thought that the site already contained the large Queen Anne / Georgian house and outbuildings which became the presbytery and this was joined to the church by a single storey sacristy.



This picture from around 1900 is of a commemorative painted plaque depicting Fr Heffernan - the only likeness of him known to exist. The plaque must have been put up by Fr Sole and the Latin Text reads -  
*Rectors of this church  
 Fr Patrick Heffernan  
 whose image is above  
 and was rector of St  
 Mary's Heythrop. Acted  
 as rector from 8th No-  
 vember 1836 until the  
 following summer.  
 Fr John Mitchell 1837  
 - 1853  
 Fr Joseph Abbot 1853  
 - 1875  
 Fr Samuel Sole 1879 -*  
 Photo : COS D225526a.

The church was opened on 25th October 1836 by Dr Wiseman who, when the English Hierarchy was restored in 1850, became the first Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, and Chipping Norton fell within the Diocese of Birmingham. A full account of the ceremony – reproduced below - is to be found in Jacksons Journal, a contemporary local newspaper with Dr Wiseman the " Rev Gentleman" that the reporter was unable to identify.

CHIPPING-NORTON, Oct. 27.

*'The consecration of the new Roman Catholic church, at Chipping-Norton, took place on Tuesday last. It is a very neat und handsome edifice, surmounted by a lofty cupola, and ornamented over the principal entrance by a cross placed on a globe. Internally it is capable of accommodating 300 persons, and contains a spacious gallery, to which access is obtained by an ornamental corkscrew staircase. The decorations of the altar are of the neatest description; the seats in the body of the church are open stalls, resembling those in St. Mary's church, in Oxford.*

*Service commenced about eleven by the Rev. Mr. Heffernan reading sentences from the scriptures, the 95th psalm in alternate verses with the clerks, a litany, and four collects; this portion of the service was in English. A procession of priests, in their surplices, scarves, &c. then moved round the altar, and the consecration was performed by a priest (not the Bishop), whose name we were unable to learn, but whose robes distinguished him from the others. At the conclusion of this portion of the service, which was in Latin, the Rev. Dr. Tandy advanced to the front of the altar (the pulpit not being at present erected) and preached from St. John XIII.v.35, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another." It would be impossible to do justice to the sermon in the limits of a newspaper, but it may be sufficient to say, that a sermon breathing a more universal spirit of true Christian charity was never heard in church, chapel, or conventible. Its effect was considerably heightened by Dr. Tandy's energetic and graceful delivery, and, by its being preached extemporaneously*

' His air was gravity, with mildness blended—  
 His language strong, yet simple; and descended  
 As soft at first as snow upon the stream;  
 But, as he followed up his lofty theme  
 He kindled like a torch as he  
 went on.'

Mass was afterwards performed by the same priest who officiated before the sermon, assisted by the Rev. Mr. Macguire, of Hath. At its conclusion the Te Deum and the 20th psalm was said in English, and in alternate verses by Mr. Heffernan; and that Rev. Gentleman having read certain prayers, also in English, the service of the day was ended.

The congregation was as large as the church could accommodate; indeed, many were unable to obtain seats; (though we should be inclined to say that the greater portion consisted of protestants) and the collection must have been considerable.



The church exterior in about 1899. The building style can be fully appreciated.  
 Photo : Centre for Oxfordshire Studies - D 225398a.

With such a construction the building exterior was Classic in style and perhaps Father Heffernan wanted to make a clear difference to the beautiful, but once Catholic, Anglican Parish Church of St. Mary or even play down the appearance of a church.

A year later Queen Victoria came to the throne and Fr John Mitchell was appointed the first parish priest. He was ordained at Oscott in 1837 and was almost as energetic as Fr Heffernan with excellent relationships with local clergy both Catholic and non-Catholic. He took young men from abroad as pupils having room in the large presbytery to board them but he also found time to start a Catholic Mission in Fairford. He moved to Taunton to take up the appointment as Canon in the diocese of Clifton in 1853 and died there at the age of 90 in 1899.

Father Heffernan's activities were not confined to Heythrop and Chipping Norton; in 1841 he opened a new chapel in Radford and like Holy Trinity, it also received financial help from Miss Mary Bowdon. In 1853, first Fr John Fanning and then Fr John Abbot were appointed to Holy Trinity. On February 12th 1858 at the age of 63, Fr Patrick Heffernan died and was buried at Heythrop.



It would appear that the Sanctuary window was unveiled on the Feast of the Assumption 15th August 1873. It is said to be typical of this type of work in the late 1800's. *At the top is naturally a portrayal of the Holy Trinity to whom the church is dedicated. God the Father wears an almost Papal triple tiara and, lest any mistake should be made, he has a triangular halo as well. Our Lady is shown triumphant in her Assumption: flamboyant and almost baroque. (The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception had been defined in 1854, but its corollary, the doctrine of the Assumption was not defined until 1950.) At Our Lady's feet are two Saints – St Alphonsus Liguori is on the left wearing a Redemptorist habit and his book " The Glories of Mary " lies before him. The Saint on the right is not known but the crown on the floor would indicate some form of nobility.*

It would seem that the 26 years that John Abbot spent in Chipping Norton were not entirely satisfactory and the church and house were allowed to deteriorate badly while the first errors in financial administration were initiated. Still in use today is the Baptismal Register started by Fr Abbot in 1879

but unfortunately there are no records covering the period from the start of the church to this date. It is unlikely that they have been destroyed but wherever they are other treasures may well lie hidden with them. The original document in quaint official language of the day gave notice that the church building was to be used "as a Catholic Chapel or assembly for religious worship for persons professing the Roman Catholic religion". The document asks for this fact to be recorded "according to the provisions of the act. . .to relieve. . . the persons therein described from certain penalties and disabilities to which Papists or Persons professing the Popish Religion are by law subject and hereby request a certificate thereof." This request was signed by Fr Patrick Heffernan on 15th October 1836 and was granted, recorded and countersigned by John Davenport, Clerk of the Peace for the County of Oxford on the 18th October 1836.

In 1870 the Heythrop connection underwent change when, shortly before his death, the British railway contractor and civil engineer Thomas Brassey bought the Estate as a wedding present for his son Albert under whose direction the burnt out skeleton of the Hall was rebuilt.

### The achievements of Father Sole.

At the age of 32 Father Samuel Haydon Sole was appointed parish priest at Holy Trinity in 1879 and for the next 41 years, not only did Holy Trinity progress under his care but he laid much of the foundations of today's parish. He was confronted not only with the poor condition of the buildings, boundary walls to the street that had fallen down and no town water connection but more important was the problem of providing proper education for Catholic children.

During the earlier tenure of Fr Mitchell there appears to have been built some form of lean-to building that served as a school but under Fr Abbot neither it, nor its results, was satisfactory. Most of the teachers were paid £10/12 a year but kept the school pence – if there were any. The only proper



This photo of the convent and old school was taken in the 1950's and is the oldest we have of this part of the building. Photo : Oakford Sisters Archive.

school mistress was Mrs Emily Bowen who taught from 1863 to 1870 at a salary of £35 per year. During those years there were some 35 to 40 children in summer but less in winter! On average the children paid 2p a week the normal fee being 3 – 4p a week but if there were 3 to 4 children in a family or the family was poor the fee was only 1p. Mrs Bowen's salary included lodgings comprising a parlour and small bedroom in an adjoining house (later to become the school house and Convent) and when after 5 years the other occupant, Miss Stanbridge left, probably to take care of her father, she was given the use of the whole house and an allocation of two tons of coal but had her salary reduced to £30 a year. To correct matters one of Sole's first

acts in 1879 was to appoint Catherine Hippey as the Headmistress in charge of some 70 pupils.

In 1880 Fr Sole obtained Board of Education school approval and started to try and raise the necessary funds for building a proper school. In order to build the school in 1882 he acquired from parishioner Stephen Stanbridge the property next to the west boundary of the church property containing the house used as lodgings by Mrs Bowen. He raised a £350 mortgage and the new school was built onto the north or London Road side of the house. With a capacity for 150 children the new school was officially opened on October 23rd 1883 by Lord Gainsborough – Charles Noel - and the Vicar General and dedicated to both the Holy Trinity and St Agnes.

The parish connection with St Mary's in Old Heythrop changed somewhat when Albert Brassey demolished both church and manor house, the site of these buildings being now the front lawn of the Parsonage that Brassey built for a new Anglican church. The material of the demolished church was either used in the new Anglican church or sold as was the case with the altar. These events did not seem to bother Fr Abbot nor the fact that the interior of St Mary's was distributed between Banbury and Radford including the clock, for which provision at Holy Trinity had already been made by Fr Heffernan. When Fr Sole arrived in the parish and heard that the reredos or backing of the altar was

to be used as a fireplace surround he quickly found £35 to buy it and the altar. It was then removed to Holy Trinity and later placed at the back of the church as a Lady Altar when Fr Sole re-decorated and altered the building.

The situation of the graves for the Earl (which had already lost its stone and brass plate over the tomb) and Fr Heffernan did not impress Fr Sole either and in 1882 he organised their exhumation and removal from Heythrop and re-burial in a crypt he had constructed under the Holy Trinity altar. As was recorded in the local newspapers, the original licence for the process to take place, given by Sir William Harcourt, Secretary of State, sounds as if the Heath and Safety Act was already in force . . . *"on condition that the removal be effected with due care and attention to decency, early in the morning, and that McDougall's Disinfecting Powder or Chloride of Lime be freely sprinkled over the coffin, the soil, or any matter that may be offensive"*.

After the death of Fr Abbot, Fr Sole paid £8 for his body to be brought to Chipping Norton and he was also interred in the crypt. Today there are 3 others buried there, Fr Dolman who died in 1917 and who was probably an assistant priest, Fr Sole himself after his death in 1920 and after his death in 1987, Fr Savin. It can still be seen that the Earl's coffin was very grand with much brass studding as well as a coronet.



The original Heythrop Altar positioned under the revised choir gallery. The picture dates from about 1900. Photo - Centre for Oxfordshire Studies - D 254870a.

With the school problem resolved Fr Sole considered his options for celebrating the church's Jubilee as well as restoring the buildings. These were given finalisation when, after evening service on January 23rd 1887 a fire broke out in the choir gallery. It was fortunately quickly put out but Sole decided he could put better use to the £80 insurance money than plain repairs.

At that time the organ was also in the choir but the floor was flat and gave limited visibility of the Mass. The front of the gallery was to be lowered and the floor tiered, and to give more room for the children who normally used the gallery, in addition the organ was to be moved. Details of the original structure and wall decoration were found in the changes made to the church in 1999.

By 1888 at a cost of £1150 raised by subscription, Fr Sole re-floored and decorated the church, installed heating for the first time, repaired the pews and made the changes to the gallery, added a side chapel with a barrel vaulted ceiling, dedicated to the Sacred Heart, extended the sacristy for use by the altar servers and added a floor above the sacristy to serve as an organ loft. From here an opening was made overlooking the sanctuary and it was here that the pipe organ was repositioned. The ceiling below the choir gallery was re-made and barrel vaulted to match the remainder of the church and in such a way that the altar from St Mary's could be positioned there to create a Lady Altar. This altar made from Heythrop stone was, and still is, a very tangible link with the beginnings of our parish as also the bell in the garden although the date on it 1816 rather pre-dates the construction of St Mary's.



The Altar details following Fr Sole's changes in 1888. The decoration is typical of the period. The candelabra are still in the sanctuary today. Photo - Centre for Oxfordshire Studies - D 225521a.

When Fr Sole arrived at Holy Trinity there were no vestments, candles, candlesticks and much more but funds were found to purchase these including the two candelabra still seen today in the sanctuary. Some parishioners thought the church decoration plain and not having received any attention for 50 years it was badly in need of attention. The new decorations, including the painting of the Stations of the Cross, were carried out between 1897 and 1898 under the direction of Mr W J Wainwright



Probably the oldest picture of the interior and was taken in about 1899. The priest sitting inside the sanctuary is most likely the Fr Sole who was responsible for the redecorations carried out in 1888 as well as the positioning of the organ loft above the sanctuary and the construction of the Sacred Heart side chapel. Photo: Parish Archive.

and no doubt influenced by the neo-Gothic style that appears in most Catholic churches built in the nineteenth century revival with decorated stonework, frescoed walls, drapery, flowers and statues as well as tall candlesticks on either side of the altar. As can be seen from old photographs these latter have not disappeared and perhaps with a new coat of paint or two, still stand by the altar although for a time in the 1970's they did service elsewhere until reclaimed. The Stations of the Cross in the nave were large and heavily framed as can also be seen in one of the photographs.

However, by 1892 Fr Sole was in considerable difficulties over the parish finances. It would seem that he was on the one hand a victim of poor administration of funds due to him, including the legacy of Fr Abbot, the endowment made by Miss Bowdon for the school and poor bookkeeping on his part. Whilst the congregation was growing there were also no rich parishioners so that the offertory was too small to support him. It took some two years to resolve the problems and in the end he was cleared of the charges made against him and the funds due paid over. In the Birmingham archives there is a 14 page letter written to the Archbishop by Mr John Busby from Rock Hill in which he defends Sole's actions in particular over children's education. In Abbot's time the school instruction was extremely poor until the appointment of Emily Bowen and there were hardly any boy altar servers until Sole's arrival but by 1894 there were regularly 13 to 16 boys in the sanctuary. This caused a problem until the sanctuary was extended to provide a "boys Sanctuary" instead of using the kitchen.

This was not to be the last time Fr Sole had problems with Birmingham and they all appear to concern his poor record keeping. He borrowed £200 from the Archbishop for alterations to the school in 1896 and although he also received a gift of £50 from Albert Brassey he had great problems in repaying it. Since he only received £152 a year from Birmingham and the parish had to find the rest it should not have been a surprise.

Fr Sole started a mission in Chadlington, allegedly buying from a blacksmith a hut at Green End for £10. Some 60 years later a parishioner proposed a chapel-of-ease there for some 12 parishioners, a proposal that was not approved.

Catherine Hippey held her post as Head Mistress at the Parish School for nearly 30 years and her suc-

cessor, Miss Quilter, was Head for 8 years but there then followed various Heads working for anything from one to three years until Miss Emily Carr took over the school in 1930 and remained there until 1940. Through all these years the school log books reflect the generally poor health of the children and its repeated closure due to outbreaks of scarlet fever and measles apart from the odd verminous child mentioned in the school log. The teachers, of which there were normally 3, were also victims of poor health and three of the Heads, the Misses Carr, Gillespie and Montgomerie all resigned as a result.

In 1903 Fr Sole was instrumental in installing the first religious sisters to provide schooling in Chipping Norton – three French nuns from the Daughters of Providence of St. Briec. In 1881 the law in France had been changed to ensure that education was free, mandatory and secular and this meant that many religious communities needed new tasks and France's loss became Britain's gain in many parishes. Initially, renting accommodation in the school house and although there was already a parish school operating they first set up in an old school in the High Street rented from a Mr Bird and started teaching Primary and Secondary pupils. In 1904 they bought and moved to Hillside House on the corner of Albion Street and Horsefair taking both boarders and day pupils. The first principal teacher was Sr St Vincent de Paul and children under 12 paid 1 guinea a term and those over 12, 1½ guineas while boarding cost £24 a year. Parishioner Mary Brailsford recalled in 2007 that her mother, then a Miss Conway, spent about a year there, having been sent by her parents to learn French. From 1909, first Mother Osmane and then from 1912 Mother Potter taught in the parish school but these pioneering sisters left Chipping Norton in 1916 after their Headmistress, Mother Cecilia Potter died following an operation in Oxford. Their school was closed and the remaining sisters transferred to a convent in Oxford. It was to be another 34 years before nuns re-appeared in Chipping Norton.

From 1899 to 1902 the Boer War in South Africa was an event in parishioners' lives and also during this time Queen Victoria died and Edward VII came to the throne. In 1910 Edward VII was succeeded by George V. Four years later came the Great War to create much more concern. Also in 1918 Albert Brassey died and the Heythrop estate was put up for sale by Capt Robert Brassey with the outlying farms being auctioned separately.

### **The 1920's and 30's and the arrival of the Jesuits at Heythrop.**

1920 saw the long tenure of Fr Sole come to an end and he died a year later at the age of 74 with Fr Patrick Reynolds being appointed to Holy Trinity as his successor. The new parish priest who came from Hethe employed both a Mrs Berry and a Mrs O'Neil as housekeepers but was not a particularly healthy person and apart from that little is known about him. In the early 1920's the Catholic population of the parish appears to have averaged about 200 and three Masses were said on a Sunday, 2 Low and one High. It was a time when ladies always covered their hair with either a hat or mantilla and Benediction was a regular event. Two years later came the election of Pope Pius XI and in 1924 a landmark for Catholicism in Oxfordshire with the purchase of Heythrop Hall and the 450 acre estate by Fr Bodkin, Provincial of the Society of Jesus. In 1926 the College opened with Fr Bodkin as its first Rector and for the next 47 years of Jesuit ownership all the neighbouring villages benefited considerably from the pastoral care emanating from Heythrop just as they had during the Shrewsbury period.

In both pre- and post-war years Heythrop was also used by those living in the area for Mass as well as for many acts of public worship, such as Corpus Christi processions as well as fund raising events such as summer fetes. In the 1930's the local paper quotes the Corpus Christi address in its entirety which is not something expected today. Heythrop also became the source of Christmas trees for the Holy Trinity school party.



The photograph above was taken after 1950 when the interior was redecorated. Both the altar and wall were painted white but the decoration of North and South walls were unchanged from 1888. The organ loft opening has been removed and the space behind the wall is a small office today. The arch into the side chapel has also been filled in but in 1998 it was again opened to provide the entry to the Lady Chapel and at the same time the entry to the small sacristy was sealed off. Photo : Centre for Oxfordshire Studies - D-225048a.



This photo of the church and presbytery was probably taken in the 1950's and is a view no longer seen following the building of the modern school. Photo - Centre for Oxfordshire Studies - D 225145a.

By 1926 Sunday Mass was being celebrated in the Sun Inn in Hook Norton served by a priest from Banbury and by 1931 it had been moved to The Bell. A mission was started in 1931 by Fr A G Wall of Banbury and with over 30 local Catholics it was followed by the opening of a chapel, to be served by Jesuits from Heythrop. It was dedicated to St Joseph and was opened and blessed on September 11th 1932 by Archbishop Williams. The wooden chapel in Rope Way was designed by Fr Askew of Birmingham and the interior decoration and altar planned by Fr Webb SJ. According to undated accounts a tabernacle was made at Besford Court and

presented by Mgr. Newsome.

George VI came to the throne in 1936 and following the death of Fr Reynolds at Heythrop that same year, Fr Isaac Savin was appointed to Holy Trinity. Also in that same year repairs were made with the replacement of the church roof tiles and the installation of that modern wonder, central heating; while in the house there was expenditure on an Ideal cooker and bath! Fr Savin was from a well known Banbury family and was about 40 when he came to the parish from Leamington and is remembered as being strict and uncompromising on the teachings of the Church, as well as short of money. To serve Mass at Shipton he rode a motorcycle until the small congregation there organised to collect him by car after Holy Trinity Mass.

### **The War and immediate Post-War Years.**

Pope Pius XII was elected in March 1939, before the outbreak of the Second World War and parish life became secondary to the war effort. In 1941 Fr Marius Rudman became parish priest, succeeding Fr Savin. Having earlier been a tutor at Cotton he was followed in September 1944 by one of his earlier pupils of the 1920's, Fr Edward Kilgallon. He came to Chipping Norton from Woodstock having spent the war serving as a priest in the RAF. He was a very popular priest, kind and generous and what one might call easy-going for the day. His sisters acted as his housekeeper and one also gave lessons in playing the organ. He was a keen rugby player and enjoyed playing golf and also kept a keen eye on the progress of Fred Sole's racehorse – run under the colours of the Hardings, another old parish family.

There are no Holy Trinity parishioners on a Debt of Honour Roll but that is not to say that they were not out defending their country. Archie Sole was one of 3 brothers, the others being Fred and Frank. A really great worker for both Parish and Chipping Norton town he served in the Navy during the war, sailing on HMS Exeter and experienced the Battle of the River Plate in 1939. After returning to the UK for re-fitting the Exeter went to the Pacific being sunk in the Battle of the Java Sea. He became a Japanese POW on 1st. March 1942 and when he was repatriated, after recuperation in Australia, weighed 35kg. As a local builder and funeral director he had much to do with the parish, much of it at his own expense – he died 2007.

There is no record of their having been parishioners before their death but the church graveyard has the grave of Pilot Officer Oliver Plunket who died in an aircraft accident as well as a memorial to his brother Lieut. George Plunket who died in North Africa and is buried in Tunisia. They were the sons of Mr Justice Oliver and Mrs Cordelia Plunket who may have lived in the parish in the 1950's. On the grave of Mrs Nina Jarrett is to be found a mention of her husband who at the age of 19 won the VC during the Indian Mutiny in 1858. He died aged 52 in India in 1891 and is buried there.

The church became a Grade II Listed Building in 1952. That the Rock Hill site of over 1,5ha (3,75 acres) contained a large tract of undeveloped land is something that has been significant for the development of the school as well as providing parking space. In 1943 it was let to Fred Sole for 10 years producing an annual rent of £9. This should be seen against the weekly offertory of £5 and annual endowments totalling £62. There were about 260 parishioners at this time and it had been static at this level for some time, thought by Fr Kilgallon due to the problem of Mixed Marriages. Today, considering the number of converts resulting from mixed marriages one might think this was not a fair comment.

Although the Mass-centre at Shipton-under-Wychwood no longer exists the following was written in 1974 by Fr Fitzgibbon :

*The chapel ( at Shipton ) was started in 1948 when Mrs Arathoon, the then owner of Shipton Court, was asked by Fr Kilgallon, if she would house one of the priests who was conducting a mission in the parish.*

*When Shipton and Milton discovered that Mass was being said at the Court the parishioners arrived knocking at the door. Mrs Arathoon and her daughters then decided to offer the hunting summer-house to the parish priest for Sunday Mass. Thus was born one of the prettiest chapels of ease in England. It is built in Cotswold stone at one end of an ornamental lake which is full of water lilies and surrounded by trees and flowering shrubs. The chapel remains a joy to regular members and visitors alike.*

In 1948 Fr Kilgallon arranged for a Grand Mission to be centred on Chipping Norton to be given by Fr John Heenan (later Cardinal) and Fr George Dwyer (later Archbishop). Reports of the time give the impression that it was a great success with major meetings in the Market Square using loud-speaker vans and platforms. The mission also visited some of the surrounding villages. Post war life was still difficult when Queen Elizabeth II came to the throne in 1952.

The entry of water into the church appears to be a recurring theme in the history of Holy Trinity and in 1957 and at a cost of £900 both the West and South sides of the roof received attention as did the roof over the side chapel. In December, Fr Edward Kilgallon our parish priest for 14 years died following a serious operation. An event clearly remembered by pupils of the time as it was the day of the school Christmas party, and they lost it! Fr Kilgallon would have celebrated his Silver Jubilee the next year and had been arranging a parish trip to Lourdes to mark the event. In a quiet and unassuming way he had been very active in supporting the parish to raise funds for the church restoration as well as the new school building which he did not see completed. As a consequence, in 1958, the elderly Fr Patrick Moore became parish priest but his stay in the parish was not that long and in October 1961 he died of a heart attack. The year 1958 was also important in our Church life; it was the year when Pope Pius XII died and John XXIII was elected to succeed him.

### **Father Peulevé and problems with the building structure.**

December 1961 saw the arrival of Fr Gerard Peulevé for 11 years of hard work and the start of what might be described as our church's second major chapter. Like his predecessor he was regarded as being somewhat stern (maybe typical to the impressions of a small boy of the day). Fr Peulevé is also remembered for his encouragement of congregational singing in Latin at a time when more participation was required. To assist in this Fred Sole used to drive to Heythrop and return with students to practice their Latin singing at 10.30 High Mass. Fr Peulevé who came from the North of England is also remembered for objecting to interruptions during the Mass, those from small children or coughing resulting in a pause until silence was restored. Unfortunately he was also to die of cancer in due course. The church was at this point still in dire need of repair and re-decoration both internally and externally largely due to water leaks from the roof and rising damp. The alternatives were to either repair the damage or close the church but the parish were naturally not in favour of the latter choice.

From 1949 through till the mid 60's a summer fete was routine using the old school playground – now the presbytery lawn – and until at least 1970 there was a Christmas Bazaar combined with some form of dramatic presentation in the Town Hall or a Nativity play in the church. These were organised by the parish ladies of the Catholic Women's League – long before it folded due to a lack of members - and with the now urgent object to raise funds to finance the church restoration their efforts were increased with even more intensive fund raising with Fetes, the introduction of a pledge and much more. There was, at that time, a community hall in the form of a wooden building located next to the footpath in the present school playground. It was run by the Holy Trinity branch of the Catholic Young



Mens Society and it was used for social events on a Sunday evening as well as dances. The CYMS also organised dances in 1948 and 1949 at the ballroom of Cornwell Manor, by courtesy of the Crichton-Stuarts. Their fund raising enabled them to make a contribution of £4 for the children's Christmas Party organised by the nuns. From 1947 through to 1950 when they seem to have dissolved, prominent amongst their members were Frank Smart, George Kyte, Desmond and Cyril Walman, Jack and Dick Harding, William Stanbridge, John O'Shea, W Keeley and Fred and Archie Sole. The all-girl choir also played their part and at Christmas time, supported by parents, sang carols at all the numerous Chipping Norton pubs and in those days there were many more than today! The restoration work started with an overhaul of the central heating system in 1962.



At this time there was no Vigil Mass on a Saturday evening but confessions were held. The Saturday Vigil Mass was to come later as the Vatican Council progressed. The Second Vatican Council had started in 1962 and one of the early decisions affected the form of worship in the vernacular and the arrangement of the altar. It was therefore an appropriate time to make good the internal state of the building and at the same time modify the altar and make some alterations. The most significant parish benefactor over the years has been Fr Denis O'Shea, brought up in Chipping Norton and who after ordination said his first Mass at Holy Trinity in 1952. He had always maintained an interest in the parish and had been one of the organists before leaving for the seminary.

The photos above formed part of the architects report in 1963 and the top one shows clearly the poor state of the interior. The lower one is interesting as it shows that at that time the South windows were not full length as today. Photos: Birmingham Archdiocese Archive.

To enable the altar to be brought forward, in December 1964, it was Fr Denis O'Shea who offered to pay for a new stone altar and the terrazzo paving of the sanctuary but it took a further year before the final plans were approved, the work being carried out a year later by parishioner Archie Sole. Fr Denis O'Shea also provided the lecterns and the new altar cloth, made by Mrs Foulds, can still be seen today in the Lady Chapel.



The church looked like this in 1966 after the removal of the bell tower. The removal of the graveyard fence probably took place during WWII. Photo : Centre for Oxfordshire Studies - D-266685a.

Altar Servers have always been part of the church ritual and today this continues with their belonging to St Stephens' Guild, introduced into the parish by Fr Moore in 1958. In 2008 they were able to celebrate 50 years of service to the

parish and it is appropriate that two members, Emily Rumble and Natasha Sinson also received their silver medals in the same year. The practice of annual outings does not, having been overtaken by modern family holiday travel to more exotic places than Mill Hill or Alton Towers as there were in the 1950's and 60's although one outing in the 1970's to watch a First Division Football match is well remembered by one of their elders. Fortunately this change does not discourage new recruits.

In the mid-1960's there were about 8 families attending the Hook Norton Chapel, the majority were young and active in their small chapel, in particular the families Tasker, Liddell, Rayment, Pickering and Cornelius, although Fr Peulevé is reported as feeling that at the time they did not participate in the Holy Trinity Parish affairs, a sentiment that was not appreciated.

In 1963 a survey of the church structure made it clear that water entry from the parapet would have to be solved and in addition the bell tower was unsafe and the nave ceiling collapsing and dangerous. The presbytery was also in very bad repair and an initial estimate was given of £9 200 of which £900 covered the replacement of the bell tower. Four months later a further survey stated that the tower and ceiling should be attended to immediately but it was also stated that repairs could not be carried out to the vaulted ceiling made from lathes and plaster. The report also drew attention to the fact that the wood block flooring was disintegrating and there was woodworm in the pews.

With this report came a new estimate of £12000. In those days there was no Health and Safety Executive which maybe explains why nothing was done for another 2 years. By 1964 the parish fund raising had reached no less than £10000 but it was to be less than half of that needed for by then the cost estimate had risen to £28 219. Up to this point the Archdiocese had regarded Holy Trinity as financially self supporting but nevertheless initially agreed to a £10000 loan but by 1965 the loan had fortunately been increased to £20000. The work was started in 1965 with Mass being said in the Infants' school. Considering the costs now involved the bell tower was judged to be beyond the state of economic repair the decision was taken to remove it, even though this considerably changed the original external character of the building and was and still is, a great disappointment to many parishioners. The work involved the replacement of the tiled hip roof with a flat one with its fall to the South, increasing the height of the South wall and the enlargement of the windows on the South side to match those on the North and the replacement of the nave barrel vault ceiling with a flat one divided into small panels.

The problem of wood-worm in the pews was solved when John Crichton-Stuart of Cornwell Manor and future 6th Marquess of Bute donated their replacements. The family were great supporters of the parish and both their boys were altar servers until the family moved to Scotland after the death of the 5th Marquess.

By 1968, it had become clear to the Society of Jesus that the concept of an Athenaeum where both male and female students, of whatever Orders, could study for degrees or post-degrees in various Theology subjects was not going to be realised. Due both to the location of Heythrop and the fact that the courses offered had to be recognised not just in Rome but in the UK, the incorporation within a university was essential despite the fact that several commitments had been made by other orders to provide student accommodation. Therefore, in 1969 The Society of Jesus sold the Heythrop Estate moving the College in 1970 to London to become incorporated into the University of London.

### **The service by the Society of Jesus to the Parish.**

We no longer have the convenience of the Jesuits at Heythrop but since 1969 the Society of Jesus has provided all our parish priests to our very great benefit. This relocation of Heythrop College was also, in time, to affect the chapel at Hook Norton which, although an integral part of the Holy Trinity parish, had been established by the Jesuits and was managed and supplied by priests from Heythrop. After the closure of Heythrop St Joseph's became the responsibility of the parish priest in Chipping Norton. The last Jesuit priest supporting Hook Norton from Heythrop was Fr Jim Berry SJ. These so-called "4th year Fathers", using a small motorcycle or bicycle for transport, had made possible Mass at the various small chapels in the parishes of the district, of which just one was Holy Trinity. They were also very active in providing catechism lessons in the villages and their absence was going to be felt.

It was also an important milestone for the parish because in August it marked the end of Fr Peulevé's tenure, his retirement to Kingswinford, and the start of that of Fr Noel Wilson SJ and for a year the parish also had an assistant priest in the person of Fr Niall Corbett SJ. However, before Fr Wilson could be released, Fr Gerry Marsden SJ became the first Jesuit to run the parish. Fr Wilson was then in middle age and had been trained as an electrical engineer, had served in the Royal Navy during the war, converted to Catholicism and entered the Jesuits in 1946. He came to Holy Trinity from Stonyhurst where he had been Assistant Bursar and parish priest. Fr Noel was a very large man and in order to save money, he gave up driving by car from Holy Trinity to Hook Norton and rode a scooter on which he looked somewhat out of place. In reaction to this the parishioners of Hook Norton made a joint action to drive him in their cars to and from Mass and this was no doubt far better for him, particularly in winter. For a while, in 1971, Br Richard Pope joined the parish but in 1972, after 3

years at Holy Trinity, Fr Wilson left the parish for Stamford Hill. In 1984 he suffered a stroke, became very deaf and died 2 years later at the age of 74.

He was followed by Fr John Smalley SJ who was transferred from St Aloysius in Oxford where he had spent 11 years during which time he very successfully introduced the new form of the Mass. He was only a year at Holy Trinity but in poor health and should be best remembered for the present made of the beautiful carved Annunciation which he brought from St. Aloysius. It was first displayed in a niche in the Nave and is now in the Lady Chapel.

In the 1960's Fr John Edwards SJ., another ex-Navy serviceman, was living at Heythrop and for a while, had particular charge at Hook Norton. He compiled a book of jottings and photographs to be useful to his successors and it forms an interesting miniature of the time although no trace of it now exists. While Holy Trinity was closed for the roof replacement in 1965 he carried out several marriages in neighbouring churches, for instance at Radford where he married Jill Leader, née Sole.

In Hook Norton in the early 1970's the chapel was re-decorated by Don Cornelius, the altar rails removed and the altar brought forward in conformity with the Vatican II changes. A beautiful altar, priest's chair, lectern and stool were made by the late John Downes. On the front of the lectern the carving of the four evangelists was executed by a friend.

**The O'Shea family – Holy Trinity's most important 20th century Catholic family.**



In 1907 Dr James Joseph O'Shea became the first medical doctor to live in Chipping Norton and for the next 25 years the Manor House was both his residence and surgery. He was the son of an Irish Commander in the Navy and after qualification in Ireland came first to Charlbury in 1901 and moved to Chipping Norton the following year. In 1907 he was married in Holy Trinity to Teresa Josephine Busby. The Busby family of Rock Hill had also been significant in the history of Holy Trinity as it was her father who, in 1894, wrote a long and successful 14 page letter to Birmingham in defence of the Rev Sole.

The O'Shea's had 3 children, John Patrick, James Bernard and Denis with John following his fathers' profession as a doctor and Denis, the younger, becoming a priest. Just before John qualified in January 1932 at London's Guy's Hospital his father died at the age of 60 after a long illness. In 1933 the next Dr O'Shea started practicing in Chipping Norton and by 1939 he was also the Oxford County Council councillor for Chipping Norton but after 20 years in the town, 1953 he moved to Cornwall mixing his medical practice with farming.

At their fathers' funeral son James played the organ and son Denis assisted the priest – a sign of times to come. Denis was ordained at Oscott and said his first Mass at Holy Trinity. His brother James, a solicitor, served in the RASC in the war and died in 1958 at the early age of 46 but his mother lived to the grand old age of 83, dying in 1956 after a fall in her garden.

Apart from Holy Trinity being his family's parish church where he had been an altar server and organ player, after his ordination, he maintained a great interest in the parish. In 1933 he was witness in one day to the conditional baptism of no less than 9 children, one of whom was later to be a well known parishioner, Jim Scarsbrook. In 1965 Fr Denis paid for a new altar and sacristy floor and after he died in July 1984 a considerable sum was left in his will for the beautification of the church. Without his generosity this the church would no doubt have a somewhat different appearance today.

Fr Gerald Fitzgibbon SJ was ordained in 1964 and in his early 40's came to the parish in 1972 and for a short while was joined by Fr John Girkin SJ as assistant priest. Fr Fitz is remembered as an outgoing and popular priest, intellectual, keen on jogging and a very competent horse rider and Heythrop Hunt supporter but his superiors were somewhat alarmed when he appeared at one Deanery Meeting in Banbury in riding kit. There was still unfinished business from Vatican II so that Fr Fitz brought into being the first Parochial Parish Council the members including Bob Gainey (Finance), Maureen Eddershaw, Desmond Walman, John King (Chairman), Jill Leader and Doris Stanbridge with Don Cornelius representing the congregation at Hook Norton. He also introduced the parish to the change in the Mass calling for the exchange of a "sign of peace", an innovation which Fred Sole and his wife did not quite grasp on the first occasion. He also purchased new cassocks for the altar servers but their crimson colour did not impress all and after he left the parish the colour quickly reverted to cream. Fund raising was still a major theme in the parish – the loan for the restoration had to be re-paid - and one activity was, just as in the war time, the collection of parishioners' old newspapers to sell as waste paper. Leading this operation were Jean Gainey and Maureen Eddershaw who, using the garage next to the presbytery, stored, bagged and weighed the paper until bought by the scrap merchant. They had a huge bonus when they were given all the scrap paper from Heythrop when it closed.

In those days the parish priest still had a Housekeeper, at this point, the capable Mrs Lovegrove. Fr Fitzgibbon's stay was, relative to many other of our parish priests, of a short duration and he went on to take up various duties for the Jesuits and through the years maintained the ties to his old parish saying Mass for us every now and again when he was in Oxfordshire. At the time of his death in January 2008 he was based in Liverpool.

The period from 1948 to 1975 was, in economic terms, extremely difficult for the parish and in mentioning the names of specific members of the parish who assisted will no doubt upset the relatives of those who have been left out. However, the family with the longest connection to the parish are the

Stanbridges and Pages and their descendants. In 1899 a Miss Stanbridge lived in the London Road and her father had earlier worked at Heythrop for the Talbots. They became prosperous farmers in several local villages and many were buried in Heythrop. The family probably has its origins in a Thomas Stanbridge who was a Banbury schoolmaster in the 16th century and another descendant was Desmond Walman , a very active parishioner in the 1960's. Mrs Doris Stanbridge was on the first parish council was awarded a Papal medal for all her many services to the parish. Another great worker for parish and town who died in 2007 was Sid Scarsbrook. The Sole brothers Archie and Fred have already been mentioned, Fred being another recipient of a Papal Medal at a later date as was also Pat Firkin, Dick Nolan and Mr Allan.

In 1975 Fr Thomas Middlehurst SJ, a holy, kindly and quiet person succeeded as parish priest and was to remain such for the next 20 years. He had been ordained at Heythrop in 1956 and had been in Manchester prior to arrival at Chipping Norton. Fr Tom also brought with him as Assistant Priest, Fr Laurence Lochrie SJ but he left the parish after about a year.

One of his first tasks in 1977 was to see to the redecoration of the church starting with the side chapel so that it could be used for Daily Mass in winter. In the nave the old Stations of the Cross were removed and replaced by the more modern carvings that can be seen in the church today and which were also a gift to the Parish from Fr Smalley and came from St Aloysius in Oxford. The old oil-painted Stations had been restored at the end of the 60's and not all parishioners were happy to see them go. A sign of the taste of the times can be seen in photographs showing the walls painted in what today would be considered an unfortunate shade of green. In 1978 the Catholic Church reached a further milestone when Pope John Paul II was elected as successor to Pope Paul VI.

The small crucifix with Our Lady and Saint John displayed in the Lady Chapel was originally presented to Fr Reynolds before he came to Holy Trinity by his former parishioners at Hanley Castle in 1888. After his death it was put up for auction and was acquired by Mr Heritage of the Chipping Norton's Chequers Inn. Later, his son felt that it really belonged to a Catholic church and gave it to Fr Tom Middlehurst. He might have also thought Fr Tom had more personal need of it after the local magistrates deprived Fr Tom of his driving licence for a while. Fr Tom was also a keen golfer and rugby supporter and – maybe with Higher help – he had no less than 4 holes-in-one at the Chipping Norton Golf Club! One of his playing partners, Dick Nolan, made 2 holes-in-one, maybe with the same help from above!



The interior in 1994 as seen from the altar. The screen was made by John Hulme in 1980. The old single-pipe organ can be seen at the left of the choir gallery. The full length windows on the South wall were only installed in 1968. Photo : Parish records.

Further changes to the interior were made in 1980 at the rear of the church with the installation of a glass screen made by parishioner John Hulme while in 1985 the central heating was converted from electricity to gas. In October 1986 Fr Tom was able to celebrate a mass marking the 150th anniversary of the church's existence. It is worth recording that in these times no less than 5 Masses were said during the week-end – 19.00 on Saturday evening at Holy Trinity, 8.00 at Shipton-under-Wychwood, 9.30 at Holy Trinity, 11.00 at Hook Norton and 17.30 at Holy Trinity. Travelling between these venues in winter was not a pleasant experience and anyway would not have been possible without help from temporary supply priests such as Fr Rodger Charles from Campion Hall in Oxford.

### **The O'Shea Legacy.**

The third major chapter of our parish history was when it again benefited from the generosity of Fr Denis O'Shea, for when he died in July 1984, he left to Holy Trinity church a considerable sum of money - £100 000, specifically for the further beautification of the building. This was not used immediately and Fr Middlehurst let the legacy accumulate interest so that when the time came to use it the sum had grown to over £300 000. Maybe not the most practical of priests, Fr Tom seems to have realised that spending the inheritance was going to require greater challenges than he felt able to face. Fr Tom also had to face up to the now extremely poor condition of the presbytery, help coming in the form of Frs Rodger Charles and Joe Bettigieg from Campion Hall in Oxford and whose DIY skills were used to their maximum.

In 1995, now in his late 70's Fr Tom Middlehurst retired to the Ambleside parish. He took with him as a gift from the parishioners - a deep fat chip fryer as they thought after numerous chip pan fires in the Chipping Norton kitchen it would be safer for him. Two years later he died of cancer and today a Mass is said for him each August 29th.

At the age of 76, after undergoing a hip operation Fr Myles Lovell SJ then became our parish priest. In his earlier life Fr Myles, (born into a military family of wealth, familiar with the social life of London in the 30's) was commissioned in 1938 into the Royal Artillery. After the Second World War he converted to Catholicism at the age of 31 leaving the army with the rank of Major four years later. He became a novice and was ordained at Heythrop in 1963 going on to various duties in Africa and the UK. He is remembered for his faith and very good sermons as well as his leading of weekly discussions on methods of prayer and for making at least one visit a year to each parish family. A dynamic person and under pressure from the Archdiocese and Charity Commission it was he who had to put



Fr Myles Lovell SJ. Photo: Soc. of Jesus Archive.

in hand the work of re-decoration, setting up a committee for this purpose chaired by Jim Keeling. He and John Hulme were to take the brunt of supervising the work. However, as might have been expected, a new driving force in the parish and proposals to make contentious and divisive changes to the interior decoration created mixed feelings and Fr Myles was not the most tactful of people being somewhat short and to the point, no doubt a legacy from his Army days in command. One difference of opinion related to the removal of the tabernacle to the sacristy which he lost against the objections of Archie Sole and Dick Nolan but on the others he won. Matters were made much harder to explain as the legacy was specifically left for the beautification of the church, not its maintenance or replacement of the bell tower.

There had now been a chapel at Hook Norton for 65 years and with a capacity for about 65 was often full in spite of only having some 25 Catholics in Hook Norton, although this did change a little when a change was made to switch the Chipping Norton / Hook Norton Sunday morning Mass times. However, due to the shortage of priests - something that Fr Middlehurst had warned of several years before - the then Archbishop of Birmingham, Maurice Couve de Murville, decided in 1997 that, in future, within the Chipping Norton parish over a week-end, only 2 Masses should be said. The last Mass was said there by Fr Myles on December 21st 1997. Two years later the site was sold for a housing development, raising the sum of £47 000. This unfortunately left some 25 people with further to go for Mass. However, whereas 65 years earlier a bicycle or motor cycle was the best most parishioners



On December 21st 1997 Fr Myles held the last Mass at St Joseph's, Hook Norton. Photo : Tony Higgins.

could manage, a motor car was the norm by 1997. The priest's chair and lectern made by John Downes are now to be seen in our Lady Chapel so that at least some small part of St Joseph's is still with us as is of course the problem of the shortage of Priests.

The roof repairs of 1966 had unfortunately not been a solution, in spite of the considerable expense and maybe corners had been cut for it remained problematic. The solution proposed was to cover the existing roof material with what might be described as an industrial roof and since this cannot be seen behind the parapet, all one needs to know is that so far it has been a successful one. This work was carried out in the first 3 months of 1998.

From April to November 1999 Holy Trinity was closed for the building work on the internal changes and re-decoration associated with the O'Shea legacy, with week-end Mass said in the School hall and daily mass in the presbytery.

Today's arrangements of the church interior are the result of these decisions and can be summarised as the removal of the floor in the nave, installation of a damp course and under floor heating, new stone floor with a larger, curved and raised sanctuary, new wooden panelling painted white behind the altar, a new altar, a new screen at the back of the church extending in front of the choir gallery.

The Lady Chapel also received attention including changing the entry into it from the nave and a re-

arrangement of the confessional. In doing this the altar position was changed from the East to the West wall and relocating on it the old altar from St Mary's. The font was relocated to the back of the church.

The glass in the south and north windows was replaced and gilding added to the sanctuary window surround and the ceiling panels, and the walls re-painted. The concept of the interior colour scheme was to provide an interior to match the Classic exterior and this has been clearly achieved. New light fittings were installed as well as changing the speaker system including an induction coil fitted for those with hearing aids. The purchase, for £20000, of a new electronic organ to replace the old pipe one predates these changes but it is still located in the choir gallery.



The 17th century altar, removed from St Mary's Heythrop, is now in the Lady Chapel where daily Mass is said. The Lady Chapel also has the priest's chair and lectern retained from the St Joseph's chapel in Hook Norton.

At this time another useful change was made when the presbytery kitchen was moved to its present location and the old one incorporated into a small cottage next to the old coach house. Fr Fitzgibbon had initiated part of this change with the view of using it as a retreat but now this is leased out and provides the parish with a useful income.

Fr Myles celebrated his 80th birthday at Holy Trinity but his time working in our parish was marred by ill health and required periods in hospital. During these periods the parish did not benefit from supply priests and started to learn to do many things previously in the domain of the parish priest. He was diagnosed with cancer in 1999 and sadly he died in November at the age of 81 so he did not live to see the completion of the re-decoration work he had initiated. His Requiem was held at Farm Street in London and it was attended by a coach load of parishioners from Holy Trinity and he is buried in the Holy Trinity graveyard.

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The year 2000 saw us enter into the new millennium and with it also came our present parish priest Fr Frank Hull SJ and one of his first tasks was to resolve the contractor's workmanship problems and finalise the accounts for the re-decoration. Commissioned in the Royal Marines during WWII he took up his vocation after de-mobilisation and was no newcomer to Holy Trinity having been ordained at Heythrop in 1957. He completed his studies looking after the chapel at Ramsden, and had also acted as supply priest at Holy Trinity on several occasions. Since then and after a period with the Jesuit Provincial Treasurers Dept., his calling has taken him to various educational establishments in England and Zimbabwe as well as working (please note) for HM Prison Service on the Isle of Wight. Fr Frank's tenure at Holy Trinity might be described as his second retirement project and he celebrated his Jubilee in July 2007.

Since started in 1972 by Fr Fitzgibbon the Parish Parochial Council has had its ups and downs of activity, today under the watchful eye of Fr Frank and Chairmanship of John Hulme. The Council members as well as those of the Finance Committee and Child Protection representative are, in no particular order, Denise Dane, Tessa Rumble, Katrina Clayton, Nick Faulkner, Seamus Clifford, Anne Robinson, Jim Keeling, Wyn Brack, Jim Brennan and Tessa Quelsh, all serving the parish.

Reduced after changes to county boundaries in the 1970's, the parish now covers some 200 sq km including Chipping Norton and some 16 villages of various sizes. In 2008 the parish is estimated to contain some 650 baptized Catholics with about 150 attending Mass on a regular basis, but most do in fact come from the surrounding villages rather than the town. Our origins are also no longer the neighbouring towns and villages but from other parts of Britain and the rest of the world. By far the largest group have their roots in Ireland but there are also those from Africa, India and Asia.



Fr Frank Hull SJ.

With less parishioners in the 1970's and more funds to raise there was maybe a friendlier atmosphere than is found today and there were numerous parish trips or pilgrimages made, the furthest organised by Fr Tom using a small mini-bus was in 1982 to Lourdes and more recently in 2000 to Chartres. However, they were perhaps easier to organise in those days and with less bureaucracy. With the exception of the wooden hut in the field in the 1950 / 60's there has never been a Parish Hall and although there is space on the church site allocated for this, times have moved on and the realisation of such a project is unlikely to be suitably used considering modern life styles. With regular house or care home visits by the Parish priest or nuns no longer a routine matter their place has been taken by a very committed group of some 14 Extra-Ordinary Communion Ministers.

### The End of an Era.

Over recent years the general reduction in vocations has also affected the Society of Jesus and to some it has been clear that Father Frank would be the last Jesuit appointment to Holy Trinity. In early 2008 it was made known that Fr Frank would be able to make a new start into his retirement, already delayed by some 17 years and that in fact the succession by Jesuits as parish priest since 1969 was to be broken.



Before Fr Frank left the parish the British Jesuit Provincial Fr Michael Holman SJ blessed and dedicated this plaque commemorating those Jesuit priests who had served the parish.

The new era will be initiated by the Rt Rev Dom John Mark Jabalé OSB who is retiring from his present duties in Swansea as Bishop of Menevia. Father Mark is a Benedictine and educator by training, retiring as Headmaster of Belmont Abbey in 1983. He was then sent to Peru to build a monastery returning to Britain in 1986 as Prior and then Abbot of Belmont. In 2000 he was nominated as Coadjutor Bishop of Menevia succeeding as Bishop later that year.

### The Religious Sisters and the school.

The history of the school is long and the origins have already been described but for the reader it is perhaps better to have extracted its latter development, in particular the contribution made by the various Religious Sisters, from the body of our history. The school is no longer as integrated a part of the parish as it used to be and although only about 40% of the pupils are baptised Catholics it nevertheless continues to provide a primary education in Catholic tradition.

For the first 100 years the school had, except for a limited time always employed secular teachers but from 1940 various orders of nuns were to take control until during Fr Tom's time at Holy Trinity the last ones left.

During the Second World War many schools in London and the south were evacuated or closed including several served by the SHCJ. With staff problems and the retirement of Miss Carr at Holy Trinity Fr Savin asked them to come to Chipping Norton which they did in September 1940, one year after the outbreak of the war. Under the care of Rev Mother Mary Koe who worked in the parish there were 2 school teachers and 2 other nuns working in the convent and parish. When the war ended they were able to return to their former duties and left in 1945.

From 1945 until 1949 their duties were taken over by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur although it was not until September 1946 that it was made a separate foundation with Sr Agnes of the Rosary as first Superior and 4 Sisters, three of whom taught in the school. At this time there were about 60 pupils more than half of whom came from the outlying villages as far as Woodstock. The school hall contained 3 classes for infants, juniors (7 to 11) and seniors (12 to 15), each in a glass partitioned room.

It is not clear as to why these Sisters left Holy Trinity but this they did in the June of 1949 being replaced in August by the Dominican Sisters of Oakford. The Mother Prioress Sr Mathilde was accompanied by Srs Magdalene, de Ricci and Rita and after a good cleaning and re-decorating they had a formal opening at the end of the month with Fr Daniel Callus OP from Oxford saying a High Mass in their chapel. The convent was now called St Joseph's and the first resident Sisters were Sr Rita, the Superior, Amelia, Mary Baptiste and Adrian but as one or the other left they were replaced by Sisters Osanna, Domitilla, Columcille and Hermengilde. This particular Dominican order which is still active in England, has its Mother House in Natal, South Africa and several of those who attended the school in those days well remember Domitilla from Scotland (who looked after the infants) and Hermengilde from the Black Forest in Germany (who took the juniors). Other sisters came from Ireland

and England. However, in those days the top class was taught by a lay teacher and remembered is Mrs King who was succeeded by her sister Miss Angela Fitzgerald-Pierce in 1955.

In 1958 the first new school building was completed starting the process of becoming a Primary School and the infants were the first to move into it. Structural changes were then made to the old building by relocating the outside toilets into what had been one of the school rooms, a lay-out that still exists. Apart from 2 sisters teaching there were also 2 to 3 others living in the convent providing housekeeping as well as community services.

In the 1950's the school had a football team, coached by brothers from Heythrop and playing in inter-school games. The football field was in the field next to the church (now the school grounds) but before practice or a game, Fred Sole's racehorses had to be moved to their stable at the back of the field. For children attending school there was a prepared lunch by the "dinner ladies" Mrs Stanbridge and Mrs Gray. The Oakford Sisters' time in Chipping Norton ended in July 1960 and the sisters first left for Chingford but Domitilla and de Ricci who, in spite of her name was English, were sent to South Africa in the following year.



In the 1950's there was a crucifix facing onto the London Rd. Standing in front are the Dominican nuns Srs. Amelia, Hermengilde, de Ricci and Domitilla. Photo : Dominican Congregation of Oakford.

After the Dominican Sisters of Oakford left the Daughters of Jesus, at the invitation of Fr Moore, took over the Convent and School until July 1971. They re-named the convent calling it "St Charles", this being the name of their former Mother General in France. There were normally 3 sisters in residence, 2 teaching infants and juniors and the other the housekeeper. The lay teacher taking the seniors was still Angela Fitzgerald-Pierce. Several of the Sisters were resident for a number of years, in particular Srs Mary McCarthy, Agnes Dempsey and Blanche Boudreau. During the 10 years the Daughters of Jesus were in Chipping Norton the number of pupils was more or less constant at 60 until the opening of the next building in May 1962 and when they left there were 82 students. It would seem that the Daughters of Jesus left because they felt Chipping Norton too isolated from their other communities, limiting the formation of their younger Sisters.



The first class to move into the new school buildings together with Sr Domitilla. Photo : Christine Whetren.

Although now not working in the parish, in 1966 the SHCJ purchased a property in New Street earlier known as Ivy Croft renaming it Marycroft. It was to be a temporary Study Centre while a student residence was built in the Heythrop Estate so that SHJC theology students could participate in the planned Aethnaeum. There were normally 4 staff plus students but their duties did not prevent them becoming involved with parish activities. When the Jesuits found that there would be difficulties with any degrees or doctorates they awarded, a change of concept was called for and the closure of Heythrop went ahead in 1969. In 1970 the SHJC sold Marycroft and the property was re-named Hawksyard House by its new owners and parishioners Dominic King and his family. Today it is still in Catholic hands.

When Heythrop closed in 1969 the neighbouring villages no longer had family visits from the students and more importantly catechism instruction for those children not attending Catholic schools. The nuns filled this vacuum and increased their community duties in Chipping Norton to provide the visiting and catechising tasks in the villages of the parish.

When the SHCJ returned to Holy Trinity in August 1971 at the invitation of Fr Smalley they found the school conforming to the standards of a primary. Sr Mary Martina Dobson was the Headmistress. A keen gardener, she looked after the convent garden, created a Herb Wheel, provided church flowers, while as if this was not enough added to her duties supervising a junior church choir and visiting the

Catholic children at the RAF quarters at the Little Rissington airbase. Sr Mary Cuthbert Hampson was also a parish visitor for old and infirm parishioners. Sr Myra Cumming was the cook-housekeeper of the community, school secretary and also instructed groups of small children in Hook Norton and Shipton-under-Wychwood who attended non-catholic schools. She left for Birmingham in 1974 and Sr Margaret Mary Donnelly joined the convent and took over her infant teaching duties.

The first extension to the new school building was started in 1974 and when Sr Martina retired in 1977 her position as Headmistress was taken over by Mrs Myers. By 1978 all teaching took place in the new buildings but the nuns were still living in the convent at the rear of the school and for a while Sr Claudia Dalglish ran a playgroup in the old building until she left in 1980 and the old school hall was now leased and the play group run privately. Today Catholic Secondary education is provided by the Blessed George Napier School in Banbury.

Also resident in what were these last years were Sr Carmen McCarthy, who also made parish visits taking communion to the sick, Sr Miriam Martyn who took on the catechetics and Sr Maureen Grigg who from 1984 to 1985 was a district nurse serving Chipping Norton, Charlbury and Milton under Wychwood and Sr Cecilia Snipe who worked as Head of Religious Education at the Blessed George Napier School in Banbury and is remembered as being the first nun not to wear the traditional habit and drove a motor car!

In 1981 Sr Margaret Mary retired to a convent in Ireland and her tasks of infant teacher were taken over by Sr Anne Moseley who became the last remaining teaching nun and after she left in 1985 all teaching was taken over by the laity. The terms of the agreement between the SHCJ and Fr Smalley were that they could have the use of the Convent so long as there was at least one nun teaching but with no one free to replace Sr Anne their time at Holy Trinity was at an end. The last non-teaching nuns to live in the Convent house were Sisters Margaret Barnard, Carmen MacCarthy and Maureen Grigg who also all left in September 1985. Thereafter the Convent was leased as a residence until 1990 when it, as well as the school hall, was leased by The Town Nursery.

Looking back one wonders how the various Orders survived as they made no financial demands on the parish. In 1903 the parish school could barely support its lay teachers so the opening of Hillside House to day and boarding scholars provided the finances and when they decided to leave no other Order felt the need to take up the same challenge. By 1940 when the SHCJ were invited to Chipping Norton matters had changed and as teachers their salaries were paid by the Local Education Authority and this continued until the last nuns (and the District Nurse with an NHS salary) left. Further contributions to running the convent came from giving private lessons in subjects such as languages and sewing. In spite of this small financial contribution the school was nevertheless expected to reach the same standards as Government ones and only in the late 1980's did this situation change.

There were further school extensions in 1988 and 1992 but also in 1992 the school was the target of an arson attack and for a year mobile classrooms had to be used during the repairs and these were completed in 1993 and the school re-dedicated. Since the mid 1950's the school has grown steadily to the present 150 pupils but during this same period the percentage of catholic children attending has dropped from 80% to 40% and while the percentage of catholic teachers has not yet reached these levels there has been a steady dislocation between school and parish church in spite of the fact that the Governors are church appointees.

In spite of the demands made by central government on aided schools the Holy Trinity Primary School continues to provide education for Catholic children and has gone from strength to strength with building additions in 1988, 1992 and 2007 completing phase 2 of a 5-phase expansion project. In 2008 it was awarded the Outstanding Grade in the Ofsted RE inspection. There are now some 150 pupils in 7 classes with a new intake of about 30 children a year. The staff numbers have increased considerably with today 11 teachers and as many again support staff. Funding, as ever, is a concern and the PTA and members of the parish continue to raise money for expenditure not covered by the State while the annual building grant of only £30 000 makes it difficult to plan the necessary extensions in our growing town.

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