

*St. Bartholomew's, Norbury.

1908 - 1946

In response to the suggestion of our Guild Warden, I have endeavoured to compile something in the nature of a survey of the history of St. Bartholomew's Parish. It is not claimed that this review is exhaustive: my object throughout has been to record as far as possible only the salient events since the foundation. You will not fail to observe the remarkable way in which the high-lights of our parochial annals coincide, in chronological order, with certain epoch-making events in the great Catholic world far beyond our boundaries. Although St. Bartholomew's cannot vie with some of its neighbouring parishes in point of antiquity, it is, nevertheless, rich in memories and in its service to the Catholic community of Norbury. Herein lies the nucleus of a solid tradition.

Prior to the foundation of St. Bartholomew's Church and parish in 1908, the handful of Catholics of Norbury attended Sunday Mass and other services at the English Martyrs, Streatham—the Mother Church of our parish. Some, I have been told, went further afield attending Mass at The Faithful Virgin, Upper Norwood, or at the parish churches of Thornton Heath and West Croydon. To the late Miss Frances Ellis (R.I.P.), the generous benefactress to a number of churches in the Southwark Diocese, Norbury is deeply indebted for her gift of the site, the presbytery, and a small church. The first Mass was said in Norbury on September 13th, 1908. Bishop Amigo, on the following Sunday, formally opened the new church and preached. In the course of his sermon he envisaged the certain influx of Catholics to the district and the consequent need of a larger church. The priest-in-charge at that time was Father Peter Bovenizer. In those days there was only one Sunday Mass and no week-day Mass.

That notable year, 1908, which marked the inauguration of our parish, also witnessed the holding of the International Eucharistic Congress in London and the Centenary of the foundation of Ushaw College. Both events were of exceptional interest to the Catholics of Southwark Diocese in general, and to the Faithful of South London in particular, for the reason that the central figure at those historic functions was an eminent son of South London who worked as a priest in this Diocese, eventually becoming the fifth occupant of the See of Southwark, and later, Archbishop of Westminster—namely, the late Cardinal Bourne.

Those of an older generation will recall the Cardinal's masterly letters to the then Prime Minister (Mr. Asquith) in relation to the banning of the outdoor procession of the

Blessed Sacrament during the Congress—correspondence which effectually exposed the prevailing bigotry of a noisy Protestant section not less than the moral cowardice of not a few of the leading politicians of that day.

The architect of St. Bartholomew's Church was Father Benedict Williamson, a priest of the Southwark Diocese, who also designed the Jesuit Church and College at Stamford Hill and a number of other churches throughout the country. Before his reception into the Church he was a law student and also a student of architecture. Later, he became a priest, served as Chaplain in the first World War, and was mentioned in despatches. Father Williamson was nothing if not versatile. A prolific writer, his works range from supernatural Mysticism to a volume entitled, "How to build a Church"! It will be agreed that in our devotional church we have ample evidence of his genius.

In August, 1918, Father William Taunton was appointed to Norbury as its first Rector. During his term of office, which extended to November, 1926, he worked with characteristic zeal and with an eye on future developments and many of the church's interior embellishments are a memorial to his devotion. Under Father Taunton the Sunday Masses were increased to three and in addition there was one week-day Mass. The social side of the parish was also developed.

Father Alexander Trew succeeded Father Taunton in November, 1926, and was soon faced with the problem of extending the church, which by this time had become quite inadequate to meet the needs of the Catholics who came to people the new housing estate nearby. Older members of the congregation will remember how the side entrance to the church before its enlargement led almost into the sanctuary. The seating then accommodated about one hundred and thirty.

Many memories were stirred by the advent of 1929, in which year occurred the centenary of Catholic Emancipation, the great measure of religious liberty won for the Catholics of these islands by Daniel O'Connell, the Irish Liberator. That historic event was celebrated by innumerable gatherings throughout the kingdom, the principal observance being held at Westminster conjointly with the ninth meeting of the National Catholic Congress and attended by the Hierarchy of England and Wales and a vast assembly of clergy and laity. As an observer on that occasion I remember that Norbury and Streatham were well represented at the centenary festivities, members of both parishes taking part in the huge procession of men from St. George's Cathedral to Westminster Cathedral, the Royal Albert Hall "rally" and other incidental gatherings.

In 1929 also our beloved Archbishop (then Bishop) celebrated his episcopal silver jubilee and was signally

honoured by Pope Pius XI by being raised to the dignity of Assistant at the Pontifical Throne.

On a Sunday in December of the same momentous year Father Trew and his congregation experienced the happiness of assisting at the solemn reopening of St. Bartholomew's Church following its enlargement. Bishop Brown, V.G., officiated at the Mass and preached. In the course of his sermon the Bishop felicitated Father Trew and his people on the realisation of their long-deferred hopes. Their extended church, he said, stood as a witness to the spirit of devotion and self-sacrifice animating the pastor and congregation of Norbury. The cost of the undertaking was £4,000.

When, in July, 1935, Father Trew celebrated his sacerdotal silver jubilee a telegram from Pope Pius XI, conveying the Sovereign Pontiff's Apostolic Blessing was among the first messages to reach him. He was also the recipient of congratulations from Bishop Amigo, and his fellow priests of the Diocese, among others. Father Trew's congregation joined in a General Communion for his intentions, a tribute of prayer which deeply touched the jubilarian. On the same day Father Trew was the celebrant of the Mass of Thanksgiving, the special preacher being Father Clement Tigar, S.J. The *Te Deum* was sung at the evening service. At a large gathering of parishioners in Streatham on the following Wednesday night Father Trew was presented with a cheque and an illuminated address.

Father Trew died with tragic suddenness on February 17th, 1938, while preparing a sermon in his study. Up to the time of his lamented demise he had been planning the establishment of a Mass Centre at Pollards Hill, for which the site had already been secured. Bishop Brown and nearly one hundred priests were present at the Solemn Requiem Mass in our church. A touching demonstration of esteem was evidenced by the large crowd of mourners, including non-Catholics, at Streatham Park Cemetery. Nearly a thousand people followed the hearse from the church to the graveside.

It is estimated that during his twelve years' pastorate at Norbury Father Trew officiated at about 7,000 burials in the Catholic portion of Streatham Park Cemetery. In recognition of his services the cemetery authorities offered the choice of a grave to Father Trew's executors, together with the guarantee to maintain his grave in perpetuity. That generous offer was gratefully accepted. There, among the faithful departed over whose remains he had so often performed the last rites of Holy Church, and close to the spot where, year by year, on All Souls' Day, he was wont to celebrate Requiem Mass and to conduct the consoling ceremony of the Blessing of the Graves, the saintly Father Trew is laid to rest.

J. P. FLANAGAN.

(To be continued.)