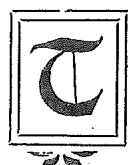


ST. ANNE'S CHURCH,

— EDGE HILL, LIVERPOOL. —

1846—1921.



THE first half of the Nineteenth Century was a momentous epoch in the history of Catholic Liverpool. Side by side with the great secular growth of the City on the Mersey, there went a rapid increase in the Catholic body and a corresponding expansion of its Catholic life. Many causes contributed to this Catholic renaissance ; but there are two which deserve special mention. The first, a negative one, was that removal of disabilities and restrictions which was effected by the Act of Catholic Emancipation (1829). The second was the great influx of Catholics from Ireland, an influx which reached its highest point towards the middle of the Century.

Liverpool, even before those days of rapid growth, was not without its Catholic "Chapels ;" but there then ensued a period of expansion and building activity which enriched the City with some of the best known of its Catholic sanctuaries. It seems to have been a time of great hope and courage, The Catholic community was far from rich ; yet great financial burdens were cheerfully accepted, and, at the same time, there was a revival of architectural taste, to which fortunate circumstance we owe the general attractiveness of the Churches that were built in that period.

In the year 1837, Dom Anselm Brewer, a Monk of Ampleforth (1792—1849) became, according to the system then in vogue, Provincial of the Benedictine Missions in the North of England. His provincialate was distinguished by enterprise and energy. New Churches were built as far afield as Cumberland and Northumberland. In Liverpool itself, where the Benedictines served the two old Missions of St Mary's (1758), then in Edmund Street, and St. Peter's, Seel Street (1788), great developments were preparing. The old Chapel of St. Mary's was pulled down

and its place taken by Pugin's beautiful church which was opened in 1845, and new Schools were built at the same time. But Provincial Brewer, nothing daunted by the many enterprises over which he presided at the same time, and although he himself was the busy incumbent of the large Mission of Browndedge, where he had built a noble Church, determined that the Benedictines ought to do something for the Catholic population of the rapidly growing district of Edge Hill. In the year 1840, he bought the necessary land and set to work to raise funds for the proposed church. It was no easy matter, as there were many appeals then to the generosity of the Catholic community. Nor was Dom Brewer's project without its full share, and more than its full share of opposition. But he persevered and overcame all obstacles. His confidence was called folly, his courage foolhardiness; but he was not the man to be deterred by criticism. In 1841, he began to build the Priest's house, and in 1843, Dom Maurus Margison was able to leave St. Peter's and reside at Edge Hill, saying Mass in the house until the Church should be built. Then work was begun on the Church and a noble structure, which in its generous lines reflects the courage of its founder, rose gradually from the ground. The architect was the well-known Charles Hansom. The Church of St. Anne was opened on the 4th of August, 1846, with great solemnity, and Dom Anselm Brewer presided at the ceremony. It must have been a proud day for him, but his joy was not unmixed with apprehension.

The building of St. Anne's, Church and Presbytery, cost in those days something like £12,000, the equivalent of a much larger sum in present values, and of course, the major portion of this was borrowed money. It followed, therefore, that the new Church was encumbered with a considerable debt. Dom Anselm Brewer had faced this cheerfully, confident that the Mission could sustain the burden; and his confidence was justified in the event. But for the moment he was subjected to severe criticism. In a spirit of generosity and self-sacrifice he offered to surrender the incumbency of Browndedge, and himself undertake the formidable

burden of the new Church. His offer was accepted by the new Provincial (Dom Anselm's Provincialate ended in July, 1846), and he was appointed Incumbent of St. Anne's on October 11th, 1846.

But he had overestimated his strength. For two years he struggled to bear alone the whole financial burden that he had undertaken. Nor was this his only anxiety. His health gave way under the strain to which it was subjected. He was compelled to resign the task and retire from active work, and Dom Wilfred Cooper was appointed to succeed him on the 28th of October, 1848. But he did not live long in retirement. He had not given up the struggle until he was compelled. He died at Liverpool on the 15th of May of the following year, 1849, being then in his 57th year. Whatever judgment may have been passed on him by adverse critics, even though we admit that he was bold to the point of rashness, and careless of consequences, yet the people of St. Anne's can have no other feelings but those of respect and gratitude towards the courageous founder of their noble Church.

This year we are celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Opening of the Church, when it will be of interest to add some further details of those early days. The original Articles of Agreement for the purchase of the land were between James Chadwick of Ellerbeck, Thomas Woodcock of Wigan, and Rev. Richard Cardwell of Liverpool, Clerk, of the one part, and Rev. Henry Brewer, George Caldwell and Francis Cooper, of Liverpool, of the other part. The Agreement states that the above Lot is situated to the front of Lord Street—now Overbury Street—and to commence at the termination of thirty-three yards measuring from the gable end of the late Mr. Lather's house: the purchase price was £1980. It was further agreed that the purchasers "shall and will make level and pave one half of the Street called Lord Street in front of the said piece of land, and make and lay down along the distent of the same front a parapet of curb stones and flagging in a workmanlike manner and so as to correspond to adjoining houses and parapet. And further the said Henry Brewer, George Caldwell

and Francis Cooper, shall not at any time erect on the said piece of land any Warehouse, Wind-Mill, Steam Engine, Soper, Oil or Blubberyhouse, Forge or Smithy or any trade or business whatever, which may operate as a newsence or produce any noise or disagreeable smell." The clause "make level and pave one half of the Street" referred to a time when this was a country district surrounded by fields.

Though President Brewer acquired the land and authorised the building, very great credit is due to Rev. Maurus Margison, at that time assistant priest at St. Peter's, Seel Street. For three years he said Mass in a house on the site of the present Priory, his faithful server and attendant being James Barry, a familiar figure to many of the present generation, he having survived until the early years of the present century. Father Margison laboured hard to collect funds, travelling over a large part of the North of England, and the result of his begging tours made it possible to begin the building.

The Church was finished in 1846. The Liverpool Mercury of June 19th gives a description of it. The dimensions as originally designed were 90 feet by 54 feet. The roof is supported by a range of massive arches, which have an imposing effect. The principal entrance is from the West side by a handsome porch, over which has been erected a tower 80 feet in height. It is intended that the tower shall be surmounted by a stone spire, which will make the total height 160 feet (*see illustration*). From the Mercury of August 7th, we learn that the Church was opened with great solemnity on Tuesday, August 4th, 1846. Archbishop Polding, O.S.B., accompanied by five Bishops and over forty priests, was present. Archbishop Polding preached "an impressive sermon." The collection amounted to £125. In the evening after Vespers, Bishop Morris, O.S.B., of Mauritius preached.

The Mercury of the following week informs us that on the Sunday within the Octave, Pontifical High Mass was sung by Right Rev. Dr. Murphy, Bishop of Adelaide, and the sermon was

preached by Rev. Dr. O'Connell, of Waterford. The mention of this latter reminds one of the fact that the corbel of the fourth pillar on the Gospel side bears the well known face of Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator, then at the height of his power.

Of the Sunday Celebration the correspondent of the Mercury unkindly adds: "A dinner, as is customary on such occasions should have been provided for the Clergy and Choir at the Rev. T. Margison's, the worthy priest's house, but owing we believe to some mistake on the part of the servants, it was entirely neglected and as no refreshment whatever had been prepared, they had at late hour to go away fasting." Poor Father Margison, what must his feelings have been on reading the foregoing paragraph.

In the Cemetery attached to the Church lie buried Dom Wilfred Fisher, died April, 1847, aged 80; Augustine Gilbert, died May, 1847, aged 27; Vincent Dale, died June, 1847, aged 47. These two latter were priests at St. Mary's, and were victims of the terrible plague which caused such desolation in Liverpool. There exists an interesting sketch in silhouette of the other eight Priests—ten in all—who died Martyrs of Charity in that terrible visitation.

Father Wilfred Cooper, the third Rector of St. Anne's, was succeeded in 1850 by Father Athanasius Clarkson, who built the first School. The estimate was £600 and the land cost £300; the whole field was offered for £1000, but no doubt the already heavy debt on this Mission made the Authorities cautious. The field extended to the back of Chatsworth Street. The original Schools were enlarged about 1870, and again in 1886, until they could accomodate 1400 children, but they are now inadequate to modern conditions.

Father Bernard O'Sullivan, the next rector, added to the already handsome Church the fine bell popularly known in the district as "Big Mick," which, we are told, has been heard as far off as Blundellsands. Father O'Sullivan died and was buried at St. Anne's, as was also Father Basil Duck, one of his assistants who had died in 1863.

Father Austin Davey was Superior from 1865 to 1869, when he was succeeded by Father Ephrem Guy. This brings us to another coincidence in the present Celebrations. It is just fifty years ago, in 1871, that the Chancel Choir of men and boys was introduced, and we offer our hearty congratulations to the venerable survivor of those early days, who this year attains his Jubilee as a member of St. Anne's Choir. During all these years our Choir has held a foremost place amongst the Churches of Liverpool, and especial mention should be made of the excellent work done by Father Egbert Turner, who was Choir-Master for several years, and to whose memory the handsome Oak Stalls of the Choir were added to the Church.

Father Bede Prest was Superior from 1875—1880, and Father Wilfrid Brown from then till 1883, when he was succeeded by Father Placid Whittle, who has been justly called "The Second Founder of St. Anne's." He added the spacious Transepts, the Chancel and Side-Chapels, the Baptistry and most commodious Priest's House, all designed by Mr. P. P. Pugin. Regarding the accomodation of the old Church, there exists a note in Father Whittle's handwriting :

<i>Present Accomodation.</i>	Nave ...	356	<i>Proposed</i>	Nave ...	124
	Aisles ...	288	<i>Additional</i>	Aisles ...	96
	Free Room	100	<i>Accomodation.</i>	Transepts	216
		<hr/>			<hr/>
	Total	744		Total	436
		436			
		<hr/>			
	Total	1180			
		<hr/> <hr/>			

At this period was added the very handsome Baldacchino, the gift of Mr. James Reynolds: and the Altar of St. Benedict, the offering of a grateful Congregation to Father Whittle on the occasion of his Silver Jubilee in 1892.

The next Superior was Father Basil Feeny, 1893—1898. In the Autumn of 1895 he organised a most successful Bazaar at St. George's Hall. The takings amounted to over £2,000, a very

large sum for those days and one which helped considerably to lessen the debt upon the Church. Father Ildefonsus Cummins succeeded as Superior in 1898. Amongst other improvements he added greatly to the pleasing appearance of the Church by the addition of windows in the roof of the Nave and Chancel.

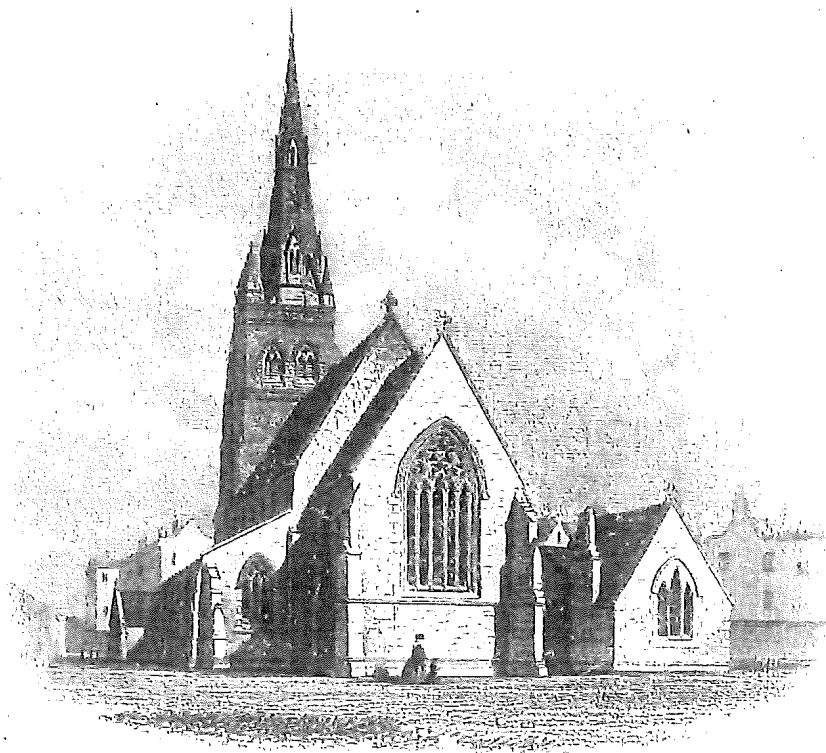
Father Wilfrid Darby during the twelve years of his Rectorship (1901—1913), devoted himself unremittingly to the thankless task of paying off the heavy debt on the Mission. In 1904 he painted and decorated the interior of the Church and later carried out other necessary and costly repairs.

It was owing to his self-sacrificing efforts that his successor, Father Joseph McDonald was enabled to celebrate the Consecration of the Church, which took place with great solemnity on May 24th 1916. Father McDonald's improvements included the introduction of Electric Light. The system adopted was that of concealed lights which bring out the beautiful architectural lines of the Church in a most effective manner. He also re-arranged the benching of the Church thus opening to view the fluted Gothic pillars of the Nave. He also introduced the Oak Screen in the Porch with its circular door, and laid down in the passages of the nave and aisles Patent Rubber covering, which adds greatly to the cleanliness and quiet of the Church.

Previous to his election as Abbot of Fort Augustus in 1919, Father McDonald had set to work to replace the old Organ by one more adequate to the requirements of St. Anne's. He was only prevented from carrying this work to completion by the difficult trade conditions resulting from the War. The present Rector, Father Philip Willson, entrusted the building of the New Organ to Messrs. Willis Sons & Lewis: the specification being by Mr. H. Goss-Custard, Organist of the Liverpool Cathedral. Towards the cost, now greatly increased by post-war conditions, a most successful Bazaar was held in December, 1920, and over £1,100 was realised, which sum was added to the amount already collected by Father McDonald.

In conjunction with the New Organ, a War Memorial to the Memory of those who fell in the Great War is being erected. It consists of a handsome Oak Screen, bearing four brass Tablets on which are inscribed the names of the fallen. Above the tablets are placed Medallions of the Patron Saints of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, whilst in the centre stands the Statue of the Sacred Heart.

The solemn Blessing of the New Organ and Unveiling of the War Memorial take place on Sunday, November 20th. This coincides with the Celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Opening of the Church in 1846. The priests and people of St. Anne's are most glad of this opportunity to welcome for the first time their new Archbishop amongst them. They join with His Grace wholeheartedly in the Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving for the graces of the past seventy-five years, and pray God that He will continue in the future to Bless the Parish.



The illustration above shows Mr. Charles Hanson's design for St. Anne's Church when completed: It is a reproduction of a steel engraving dated 1846.