

**Eighty Years On**

## Acknowledgements

Our thanks go first to those who produced the Golden Jubilee publication in 1980. John A. Curran was Editor, John Fowler designed the cover. Fr Shaw, the Misses Black, Jim Murphy, Anne-Marie Connell, Miss Frances Winrow and the people of the parish compiled it. Photographs were by parishioners and The Catholic Pictorial. Mersey Mirror produced it. We have relied on it for the early history.

We thank Matthew Byrne for his superb photographs of the church. Bob McGrath, Pat Overend, Hugh Pinnington, and Mgr Fleetwood supplied other photographs. Noelle Duffy provided the photograph of the icon and Kath Barton the portrait of Fr Shaw. The ecumenical prayers picture was in the files.

Noelle Duffy, with her quick reactions and fertile brain, was the channel through which much of the material flowed. She conveyed the material which Veronica O'Callaghan wrote on St Helen's Help and the Family Circle. Many people supplied facts, comments and corrections, so many that it is impossible to name them all. We thank them for enabling us to produce this booklet at all and we are pleased that we can say, as was said thirty years ago, that it was compiled by "the people of St Helen's Parish".

It is not an exhaustive history but we hope that it puts into perspective the parish as you know it. We apologise for omissions and mis-readings of events. We came to St Helen's as strangers, knowing nothing at all before the Summer of 1980. To Fr Shaw and to the parish which welcomed us we owe eternal gratitude.

Look around St Helen's. Remember those from whom we took over the baton. We see those who ran with us and those who with their children are taking over. The old names we know: Chrissie and Peter, Theo and wife, Mrs Mugarza, Marie McGrath, Betty, Ella Overmeer (who was in the Ops Room at Hornchurch during the Battle in 1940), Marie Coyne, Paul & Mrs Lovelady, Paul Reilly (whose father was here, too), the Old family, Margaret Costigan and Phyllis, for whom the expression 'one-off' was invented. The new names and faces we are learning. They were and are our parish family. The new generations coming on will continue the line. You are all in our thoughts and prayers.

**“Hope in Him,  
Hold firm and take heart.  
Hope in the Lord.”**

**In the long-term future** St Helen’s Centre will prove its worth in the way its planners intended, and as it is working now. Its central position in Crosby, its space, its variety of possible configurations and its car park make it a natural venue for many activities.

Mgr Fleetwood’s Luncheon Club initiative with home-cooked reasonably priced food on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays of every month has been a great social success with pastoral possibilities. Did it have something to do with Mgr Hunt’s holding his Diaconate training here?

Local ‘groups’ have been encouraged to use the Centre. The Multiple Sclerosis group has been meeting here every three months for some time. Heart and Stroke have also been here for years. The Sefton Alzheimer’s Support Group has its first meeting in the Centre on 16 September. Alzheimer’s has been referred to as “the happy disease”, not for those who know what is happening. It terrifies them. They and their carers become very isolated. The Centre supports these important initiatives in Christian charity.

The Centre is also being used for staging Hospice events. The Newman Association meetings every few months on Tuesday evenings are very promising. Speakers are invited to talk on a variety of stimulating topics. The participation of the audience adds to the interest.

The Centre is also ideal for training Catechists. It is clear that we will need more lay catechists, trained to a high standard. As for the Prayer Groups, the Centre has shown for three decades how suitable it is for their meetings and Masses. In our situation we are likely to be “much in need of prayer”.

The Slimming Club, meets twice a month. The Art Group has been using the Centre for ages and the Bridge Club, too. Here we serve the community without any specifically Catholic purpose but it helps us to be perceived as part of the community, not as something out of “Brideshead Revisited”. In the Forces we were often the first Catholics other servicemen had ever met and they had strange expectations of us.

Our future depends on the future of Crosby. If it prospers it will attract more shoppers as the rising price of fuel reduces the attraction of Tesco and Waitrose, six miles away. The position of St Helen’s fits it to serve those who park free, come to church and then cross the road to shop in the village.

### **Eighty Years On: St Helen’s Parish, Crosby.**

In the early 19th century Kirkdale was actually outside Liverpool.

By 1840, the population had grown naturally and as a result of immigration from Ireland and Wales drawn by economic expansion. The town had engulfed Kirkdale and the pleasant villages to the north, including Bootle and the picturesque, 1820s, seaside settlements of Seaforth, where the Gladstones had a house, and Waterloo. Sail gave way to steam. The new, northern docks, Langton, Huskisson and Canada, were built to take bigger ships. The complex was linked to the Leeds-Liverpool Canal. Industries and railways were located close to them.

A road transport network developed where during the eighteenth century there had not been a decent road west of the A59. In addition, by the mid 1850s the entrepreneurship of local landowners, prominent among whom were Thomas Weld-Blundell of Ince Blundell and his ‘cousin Blundell’ of Little Crosby, built the Liverpool-Southport Railway, steam-powered initially. Population moved out along it.

Turn of the 20th century housing close to Crosby station with bay windows, glazed brickwork, some of it yellow, indicate the date. The documentary evidence confirms it. Deeds for a family house in Victoria Avenue, for example, showed that it was built in 1914-15. The village end of Eshe Road is slightly older in design and materials.

Many of the incomers were Catholics. The route of migration from the traditional Catholic area around Scotland Road where refugees from the Famine settled, ravaged by typhus, cholera and scarlatina, was via Kirkdale, Bootle, Litherland and Seaforth to Waterloo, Crosby and Blundellsands. Others came from the old recusant areas of West and North Lancashire. Many came from impoverished, post-Famine Ireland, to profit from the employment opportunities here.

The Parish of SS Peter and Paul, founded in 1826, built a new church in 1894 to cater for the increasing population. To the North there was Little Crosby village church (1847) but the population continued to grow in areas a long walk from the nearest Catholic church. By the 1920s it was clear that a new parish was needed and in 1926 it was decided that the church should be built on a site between Alexandra Road and Cook’s Road.

The foundation stone of the new church was laid by Archbishop Downey on 2 February, 1930. It was completed in seven months and the Archbishop returned for the first Mass on 14 September, 1930.



## 1930-1949.



The first Parish Priest was Fr Edward N. Sherin who had been senior curate to Canon Walmsley at SS. Peter and Paul. Fr Sherin was educated at Mount Vernon School, St Edward's College and Upholland College. He was ordained on 10 June, 1911. At the time of his appointment to St Helen's he was already an experienced pastor, known for his quietness and charity, and his devotion to the parish and his people. With Fathers Connolly and Nugent Fr Sherin ran an active parish.

The Parish Guild, the Guild of St Agnes, the Children of Mary, the S.V.P., the C.W.L., the Scouts and the U.C.M. were all flourishing by the mid-forties. The Amateur Dramatic Society put on its first production in 1931.

The thirties were the era of The Great Depression; they saw the rise of Communism, Fascism and Nazism. They culminated in the outbreak of WWII in September 1939. Throughout his ministry Fr Sherin devoted himself to the sick, now he comforted the families bereaved by the loss of servicemen and merchant seamen. Many civilians also died in the 'blitz' of 1940-41. Bootle and Seaforth are known to have been very high on the list of the most heavily bombed areas in Britain. They were the European end of the Atlantic bridge. If they were knocked out Britain was finished.

One dock was destroyed. On 3 May, 1941 ('the May Blitz'), SS Malakand was in Huskisson 2, loading munitions. She was set on fire during a long, heavy raid and on 4 May, about 0730, she blew up. Substantial pieces of her were found half a mile away. The dock was filled in and where it had

## What about the future?

Some of it we can see already. There is new and plentiful crop of Special Ministers. The average age is noticeably lower.

We watch The Little Church go off to do its own thing every Sunday. It is the best development in a long time.



Altar servers even get taken to 'Camelot' and many of them, some of the best, are girls.

A particularly hopeful sign is that there seem to be plenty of young parents committed to the Church and obviously combining faith with fun for their children .



This is evident in these pictures taken at the Paris Picnic. It is labour-intensive for the parents but a joy for the children.

A youthful contribution from an older age-group comes via Martin Bennett of Sacred Heart Catholic College. Week by week he provides Scripture sheets at the back of the church. People complain if they run out. His work with Sacred Heart SVP is evident several times a year. He also is our contact for 'Silver Surfers' which introduces older people to IT. When one still uses a computer largely as a pricey typewriter it is amazing what the 'Silver Surfers' can get their clients to produce.

## How are you, St Helen's, as you celebrate your 80th Birthday?

Here are three photographs of the porch in the last days of August 2010.

Right, we have a notice-board: material on Irenaeus; a Catenian pilgrimage to Walsingham; a pilgrimage to Sutton, the shrine of Bl. Dominic Barberi; devotion to Padre Pio; a notice about the visit of the Pope, Catholic magazines, newspapers, local and national, and CTS publications. There are many more indications of activities and interests.



Ken Kendrick and his group were



appalled by the nuclear catastrophe at Chernobyl. Because of the length of the half-life of the substances released much of Belarus is effectively poisoned for centuries. The group drives lorry loads of relief supplies to Belarus and has several times brought youngsters here on holiday to give them respite from conditions at home. This is a long-term, long distance commitment: the memento is dated 1996.



Here is the second, busy notice board. We have notices from UCM, CWL, SPUC, SVP, 'The Little Way'. There are notices of an appeal from Aid to the Church in Need, thanks for £157 from 'animate', an Archdiocesan youth charity, thanks for £704 from the St Barnabas Society, an appeal made a few weeks ago, invitations to pilgrimages. There are fifteen notices in all, and a table of booklets marked, "Free, please take".

**St Helen's  
is a fit, active and extroverted eighty year old.**

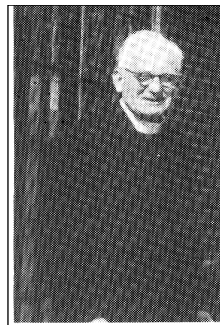
been, between Huskissons 1 and 3, there is a large parking space.

Fr Sherin's work covered all aspects of the life of the parish and he put his own talents to work. He arranged flowers and candles on the altar. He was a noted painter of water colours and had a good voice. He often launched into song, producing the sheet music from his overcoat pocket.



Interior view of the original church

His family moved to the United States during the war. Shortly after it he went there on holiday. The altar servers on his return were delighted when



he gave each a packet of chewing gum, a very welcome gift. It was peacetime but rationing was still in force and the sweets ration varied from eight to twelve ounces per month.

Food was rationed, you might get an egg a week. For the first time even bread was on ration.

Clothing was rationed. Families pooled their clothing coupons to see that a bride had a wedding dress, or somebody had to 'liberate' some parachute silk to make one.

The NHS had been founded and the 1944 Act proposed Secondary Education for all. Raising the money for the new schools was a problem which bedevilled Church and State for years.

In 1945 we marched, yes, children were taught to march in step, in the Victory Parade – St John's Ambulance Brigade Cadets. I was worried for years about finishing up at a service in a non-Catholic church. That was how it was.

Fr Sherin retired to live in the United States in 1949.

## 1949-1966

Fr Sherin's successor was Fr Christopher Maguire. Born in Kirkdale, he attended St John's School and trained for the priesthood at Ushaw College. After his ordination he went to the University of Cambridge and then returned to Ushaw to teach Maths, Physics and Chemistry.



Fr Maguire was appointed to St Helen's in 1949. He became Dean ten years later.

He is remembered as a popular, warm and caring pastor with a particular ministry to young people. It was he who established a Youth Club and encouraged a number of other organisations with a range of interests and activities. It was said of him that "he was ahead of his time".

From the mid-1950s, however, his health was poor. His determination to continue his ministry led him to conceal his illness from the parishioners. The photograph shows him as he approached his Silver Jubilee.

It accompanied a newspaper article in 1957 announcing, even perhaps revelling in, the news that the church was likely to collapse

At the beginning of the 1960s he disregarded medical advice to retire to a warmer climate if he wanted to survive. He continued to serve his people for another five years.

On 2 December, 1966, he was 62. He died three days later.

Times changed greatly during Fr Maguire's tenure. Rationing finally ended in January 1954. The age of affluence dawned. By 1966 'the swinging sixties' were well under way, drug abuse was becoming common, 'the pill' had arrived and 'Beatlemania' was a pandemic.

Divorce became easier. The laws on homosexuality were 'reformed'. The Abortion Act was passed, all on Jenkins's watch as Home Secretary.

The 'Cold War' was at its peak. We came to within a whisker of nuclear annihilation in October 1962 as Soviet ships approached the U.S. blockade line north-east of Cuba. One recalls lying awake with a baby of ten months, wondering whether he would see his first birthday, or whether

## Priests who served 1930 — 1980

Fr William Gaughan  
Fr Thomas Fox  
Fr William Blundell  
Fr Nicholas Lawn  
Fr Willam Park  
Fr Edward K. Taylor  
Fr John Connolly  
Fr James Anderson  
Fr Michael Nugent  
Fr William Doyle  
Fr Francis Nunan  
Fr Lawrence Tierney  
Fr Anthony Antrobus  
Fr John J. Coyne  
Fr Arthur Horner  
Fr Godfrey Carney  
Fr Eugene O'Loughlin  
Fr George Lynch  
Fr Wilfrid Kelly Fr James J. Rigby  
Fr Michael O'Callaghan  
Fr Joseph D'Arcy  
Fr Michael Garvey  
Fr Sean O'Connor

## Priests who served 1980 — 21010

Fr Byrne  
Fr John Thompson  
Fr Terence McSweeney  
Fr John Seddon  
Fr Joseph Cunningham  
Fr Vincent Cunningham  
Fr Thomas Cullinan  
Fr Brendan Rice  
Fr Chris Thomas  
The SMM Fathers  
The Mill Hill Fathers

the English and Welsh bishops for dialogue with non-believers.

From 1995 to 2003 he was responsible for dialogue with non-believers at the Pontifical Council for Culture. During that period he also taught philosophy at the Gregorian University and the Beda College.

He was deputy general secretary of CCEE (the Council of European Bishops' Conferences) in St Gallen, Switzerland, from 2003 to 2007.

From 2007 to the present he has been parish priest in Blundellsands (until November 2009 he was also responsible for St Helen's, Crosby).

It was Mgr Fleetwood who commissioned the icon of St Helen which is to be unveiled after Mass on Thursday, 9 September. The artist is local and wishes to remain anonymous.

### **2009 to the present.**

Mgr John Furnival had already been Parish Priest of SS Peter and Paul for some years when he was called upon to be Parish Priest of St Helen's as well in November 2009. He was well known to many in St Helen's as a friendly and energetic priest who had already taken over leadership responsibilities in the area.



Further afield he led us with members of the other churches to Aylesford, Rochester, Canterbury, Winchester, Iona, Ampleforth, Whitby, Lastingham, Rievaulx, where one's gallop was cut short, for the present, by a Total Knee Replacement (TKR, to the trade).

Nobody under-estimates the arduous and difficult task he has undertaken but he has the goodwill of every one of us. He has made every effort to share his time with St Helen's parish, to talk with parishioners after Mass and to keep people informed of what is going on in the two parishes.

We pray that his ministry will have every success.

there would just be an almighty flash. In the event the ships with the missiles turned about and went home. Chris has a family now but had a close call with the bomb on the bus in Tavistock Square.

John Kennedy, President of the U.S. during the crisis, was shot eleven months later. His brother, Robert, was assassinated in 1968. They had led the management of the Cuban crisis with wisdom and success.

Also assassinated in 1968 was Martin Luther King. He was only one of many who died, black and white, for advocating Civil Rights for black people in the United States. At that time President Obama would have been unthinkable

Students all over went 'crackers' in 1968. One asked me whether I thought May 1968 was February or October. She had in mind the Revolutions in Russia in 1917. The one she hoped for was Lenin's October Revolution. I told her I thought it was 1905 when nothing much happened. She became a City councillor, Militant Tendency, and was banned from holding office in the 1980s. The daughter of Catholic teachers, her heroes were Lenin and Trotsky.

Chaotic, lunatic. dangerous and murderous times were the 'swinging sixties'.

They are remembered now as just one long, jolly party, not as where we should look for the roots of many of our present ills. Perhaps those of us who had work to do and children to bring up are biased.



### 1966-1979

Fr Robert Flynn was parish priest from 1966-1979. He was born in St John's parish, Kirkdale on 9 February, 1905, won a Junior City Scholarship from St John's School in 1917 to the Catholic Institute which during his time became St Edward's College, now in Sandfield Park. The school was run by the Irish Christian Brothers. He left St Edward's for Upholland College where he studied and taught until 1927.

Archbishop Keating sent him to the Venerable English College in Rome where he attended the Gregorian University until 1934. During his time there he was ordained priest, 16 July, 1933, by Cardinal Marchetti Selvaggiani.

On his return to England he held curacies in Sacred Heart, Holy Cross and Our Lady's, Portico, all parishes in St Helen's. In addition he was assistant priest and Chaplain to Rainhill Mental Hospital.

In October 1948 Archbishop Downey made him parish priest of Our Lady of Lourdes and St Bernard, Kingsley Road, in succession to Mgr Traynor. It is now the parish of Fr Peter Morgan, who has spoken here. Fr Austin Smith CP has been in the same deprived area for some years.



With a wealth and breadth of experience in Rome St Helen's, Rainhill and East Toxteth he came in 1966 to St Helen's. Here he remained until he retired through ill health in 1979.

His tenure of the pastorate was eventful. It was a period of social change and varying economic fortune. There was extensive building in the area and a sizeable proportion of the new population was Catholic. Fr Flynn ran a large and growing, lively and active parish. He reached into the wider Catholic community by becoming Provincial Chaplain to the Knights of St Columba. He represented them at the Eucharistic Congress in Australia.

He was faced with two, big, expensive problems. The first was that of increasing educational provision. There was no school within the boundaries

### 2003-2007.



Father Shaw was not the last Parish Priest to be solely ours. That distinction is held by his successor, Fr Hubert Strowbridge. He was born at Ince Blundell, 10 October, 1930, to a family which had long-standing connections with the Weld family of Lulworth, Dorset, one of whom inherited Ince Blundell Hall and estates in 1837.

He attended Holy Family School until he won a scholarship to St Mary's College, Crosby. At fifteen he entered the Seminary at Upholland and was ordained on 4 November, 1956. He served at Our Lady of Lourdes, Hillside, 1956-9, and at St William's Ince, Wigan, 1959-66. From 1966-70 he was curate at Christ the King, Childwall, He was at St Matthew's, Clubmoor, 1970-79. Then he became Parish Priest of Sacred Heart, St Helen's from 1979-2003. In 2003 he came to St Helen's, Crosby, initially as Parish Administrator and then as Parish Priest. He established himself as dedicated pastor, particularly good and assiduous at visiting the housebound. He still keeps up with parishioners he visited. I was very thankful to see him on occasions, in Ince Blundell and at home, when I was recovering after operations.

Quick in mind and humour, Lancastrian in speech, he had an incredible knowledge of the public transport system of the whole region, and a bicycle. He travelled widely in the North-West and nobody could accuse Fr Strowbridge of contributing to global warming.

He retired from St Helen's in 2007.

### 2007-2009

Mgr Peter Fleetwood went as a boy to St Francis Xavier's College, Liverpool. He was ordained priest on 31 July, 1977. From 1978-82 he was assistant priest and school chaplain in Wigan.



From 1982 to 1985 he was in Rome for advanced studies and taught philosophy at the Gregorian University.

He was teaching philosophy at Ushaw from January 1986 to August 1992.

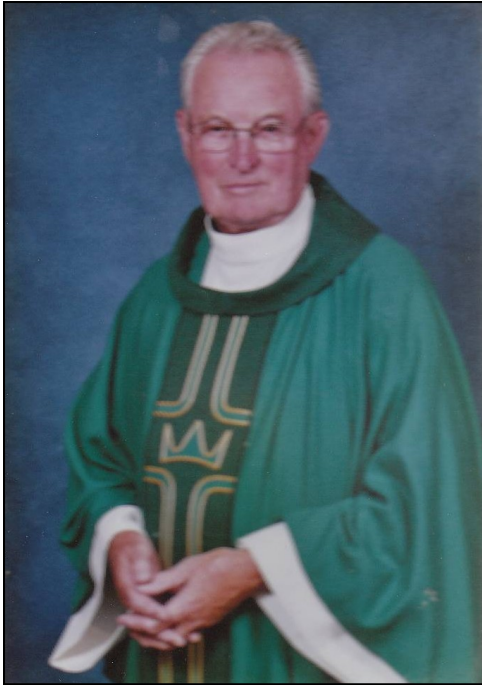
From 1993 to 1995 he was a parish priest in Widnes. During that time he served as secretary of the committee of



Then there were the readers, about forty of them. The standard was and is high. Tony Redmond ran the rota for years. Anne Fearon does it now.

In a parish as active as St Helen's there are many dozens of unsung people like these. To list their names would take a fair-sized book. If they are not here it is not because their efforts are unknown or not appreciated. They are the parish. They give it its quality.

By 2003 Fr Shaw had been Dean for best part of two decades. Having been an honorary Canon for some years he had become a full member of the Chapter.



He was in his twenty-fourth year as Parish Priest and the parish was as lively and active as ever. It was a warm, exciting and spiritually stimulating place to be. However, his health had given cause for concern several times and, like every parish priest of St Helen's before him, it was illness that forced him to retire.

So the parish lost its best friend and its father in Christ

of the parish, primary or secondary. Newcomers to the area, were advised to contact a private school. The first telephone response from the prep school for 'infants' was, "Who do you know?" We knew no Catholics in Crosby. The Welsh non-conformists next door were friendly and we knew many Anglicans and a good number of Scots and Ulster Protestants.

The Ursuline primary school took the children and they flourished but they went to Mass with their friends in Blundellsands and became loosely attached to St Joseph's for the next sixteen years. The children sang unusual hymns: "Evacuate Mary, her house is on fire"; "I will make you vicious, old men". Perhaps it was the local accent.

During Fr Flynn's tenure both primary and secondary education were reorganised. Now Great Crosby Catholic Primary School and Sacred Heart Catholic College are regarded as among the finest schools in the North-West for teaching and facilities. Their contribution to Catholic life is of the utmost importance.

The second problem was the church built in 1930. It was a pretty, vaguely Italianate building not unlike Velarde's churches on Queen's Drive at Clubmoor and Mossley Hill, though not as well built. The weight of the roof span was too great for the walls. It was scarcely credible when seen for the first time in 1958, that huge tie rods were necessary to hold the walls of the nave together so that they did not collapse outwards to drop the roof on the heads of the congregation, especially in a building twenty-eight years old.

With his two curates, Fathers D'Arcy and Garvey, Fr Flynn advocated a design for the new church which was unlike a conventional church but well suited to the needs of the people of the parish.

It was to be flexible and versatile, a centre for worship for 200 people when the area around the altar was closed off, for 600 when the folding walls were opened and the two large rooms behind them became part of the church.

At no time was any member of the congregation to be more than 50 feet from the altar. The partitioned sections were to be venues for meetings of the parish organisations, coffee after Mass, concerts, social gatherings, lectures, Christmas dinners and any other functions which could be handled by a small kitchen. Because of its convenience, size and car parking St Helen's Parish Centre became the natural focus for inter-church meetings.

From planning stage to completion took four years. On Wednesday, 29 January, 1975, Archbishop Beck consecrated the church and concelebrated

Mass with the clergy of the Deanery led by Dean Robert Flynn. Present in the church were the representatives of the Churches of Crosby and the Ecumenical Officer for Merseyside. A plaque was unveiled in the porch to commemorate the occasion.



From outside not like a church, but it serves the needs of the people of the parish.



Within it has the innate holiness of the place where the Parish celebrates Mass.

Dean Flynn insisted on maintaining a link with the old building. The original Stations of the Cross were adapted for the new building and to this day are where he had them placed.

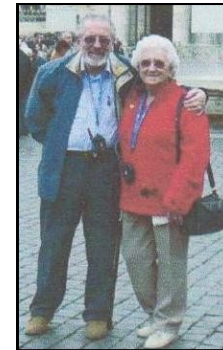
the road when Celia was out.

Veronica Saxby, linguist and wartime censor, did much secretarial work. George Saxby duplicated the newsletter with minimal fuss for many years.

Frances Lynch kept the linen immaculate. Lin Rimmer does it now. It is work that nobody notices but it would be noticed if it weren't done.

Frank Carthy, from Cook's Road was a collector. He had been an advocate of the Church's social ministry in the thirties. In his butcher's shop he dispensed meat, all-but-forgotten songs and good advice, a dear, wise man.

His bugbear was the TV chef who advised the nation to "get your butcher to bone and roll a breast of lamb", ten minutes work to sell less than 30p's worth of meat.



**Pat Overend, here with Brenda**, is among the collectors now, and Will from whose mother I learned about suffering and the weariness that comes with constant pain. I was with her on the Sunday when they were naming the Hillsborough casualties on radio, a long morning.

Jim and Eileen Higgins were involved in everything. He had been a Regular soldier, 'Sar'nt-Major', in the Royal Horse Artillery. In Summer he wore Eighth Army, Khaki Drill shorts. His sister Charlotte is still at Sunday Mass.

John Fowler, architect husband of Peggy, used his lovely script to write the notices of the dead, month by month, for the church wall in November. When he died they were printed but the custom seems to have lapsed.

What is now called "meeting and greeting" went on for fifteen years. Pat Kinsella, Matthew Byrne, and some others handed hymn books and mis-salettes to folk as they came into the church on Sunday. Some had not spoken to a soul since one of the team had chatted with them the previous week. There was a ministry in that in spite of complaints about chatter.

On the afternoon of Christmas Eve 700 service booklets and carol sheets were put together to be handed out at 8.30.

Jim McCarthy, a Chartered Accountant kept the books in order. He was also a Special Minister and a valued contributor to any discussion. Kathleen Barton took over after he died. Then Fred and Rita Wilson took over to look after gift aid and collections. Brian Jones has managed the Account for years. This is work without kudos and we thank those who do it.

ingly when mourners need a little something before starting for home after a funeral. And they always stay to clear up afterwards.

Some of the same hands are up very early to go to the market to decorate the altar with flowers every weekend, and surpass even their own standards for Quarant' Ore. Some took courses to improve their arranging. They are the only group which works on a two-year rota requiring one to 'google' the liturgical year two or three years ahead.

There were numerous other initiatives. The Family Circle came into existence to bring together small groups, ideally nine or ten couples in mutual support, especially in the education of children. Meetings were monthly. Shared meals and discussions took place in the informality of the homes of the members and Fr Thomas offered the hospitality of Ince Benet for Mass. Support dwindled over the years but a small group was still meeting three or four years ago.

Out of the Family Circle grew St Helen's Help. Volunteers manned the phone in the presbytery five nights a week to offer help as people required: transport to church; hospital appointments; legal matters; benefits; home visits to lonely people. There were plenty of volunteers but after a couple of years there was a dearth of clients and it came to an end.

Nearly all the activities running at the time of the Golden Jubilee continued. Some expanded. The Prayer Group, for example, had a junior wing at St Mary's College for a number of years. It took in young people from other schools including MTGS. Br Frank Hall was the inspiration.

Out of the parish Prayer Group came in 1993 the Padre Pio Prayer Group. In 1993. The leader was Noelle Duffy. Her daughter, Rachel, had a dangerous illness as a three-year old. She recovered and is now giving something back as a Consultant at Alder Hey. The Flahertys, Marjorie Moylan and Betty Cunningham were in from early days. It is a prayer group which prays before the Blessed Sacrament weekly for everybody in need of prayer, the sick, the lapsed, the clergy. Seventeen years of prayer at here, at St Edmund's, for a time and at St William of York have produced an impressive number of testimonies. The devotion ends with refreshments.

Many people served the parish in roles not noticed. Celia Myers for years acted as housekeeper for Fr Shaw. She answered the telephone and the door, kept the house tidy and made sure that he got his meals. She was also in the Prayer Group. Husband, Bill, looked after their house across

The central position of the church has had its disadvantages. Too often it has been used as free parking with incidental damage to the walls by those who climbed over them, too idle to walk out by an entrance. Once, a couple left their car for over a week while they took a coach tour.

On the other hand, the church for decades until the Mass times were changed gave outstanding Christian witness right in the centre of Crosby. With a hundred people leaving at 9.30 after morning Mass on weekdays and best part of two hundred leaving at 12.30 every Saturday, most going into the village. It was regular, living testimony that the Faith was alive and active at the heart of the community.

Dean Flynn soldiered on until August 1979 when he finally gave in to ill-health and retired. He was in his seventy-fifth year, twenty-three of them in a large and busy parish with major problems.

## 1979-1980

We have a wonderfully detailed snapshot of the Parish within a year after Dean Flynn left it.

Already there was a devoted group of Special Ministers of the Eucharist, all of them very active in many aspects of parish life: Arthur O'Connor, Gerry Healey, Jim and Michael Pinnington, Michael Hewlett, Kevin Toal, Peter Ashcroft, 'Big' Jim Murphy, effectively the RSM of the parish. Many more have served in the same ministry; Jim Pinnington's youngest son and grandson, Hugh and Luke, are now serving. The originals were giants, worthy successors to the Founding Fathers of the Parish.

The activities we recall here are Catholic but all have a social outreach. All sought to do something which would enrich an aspect of the life of the community. Take the contributions of The Union of Catholic Mothers. It had about fifty members. It met twice a month and prayed at each meeting. It held days of recollection and retreat. It was also active in supporting a variety of charitable collections as well as taking up a special charity every year. In 1975 it started the Centre Pram Club, in tandem with the Centre Playgroup. The objective was to support mothers who might otherwise become isolated and to assist the development and socialisation of the children.

'Pram club' was something of a misnomer. It was stressed in 1980 that you



did not need a pram, nor a baby, nor a toddler. Nor even was it mandatory to be a lady since gentlemen were welcome, not with open arms one would hope.

The Secretary of the UCM was Agnes Lawrenson, for many years of her long life a familiar and much respected figure in the Parish with a fine voice. The President was Mrs Ann Cookson who was also one of the helpers in the Centre Playgroup.

The Catholic Women's League began in what is now the Deanery in 1946. Its brief was to bring women into a fuller contribution to the work of the Church and to work widely in local, national and international affairs, always affirming its Catholic identity. By 1980 it had seventy active members working with, among other organisations, The Council for Voluntary Service, Jospice, the Sue Ryder Foundation and SPUC.

Another organisation for ladies came when Archbishop Heenan encouraged the formation of a branch of the Catholic Association of Widows. Crosby meetings were first held at Nazareth House. Then the venue became SS Peter and Paul's. It moved later to St Helen's Centre where in 1980 it was still meeting every second Tuesday

A Scout troop was in being from the earliest days of the Parish and the Guides were offering canoeing, sailing, ice-skating and pony trekking by 1980.

St Helen's Men's Guild was formed to spread through the men of the Parish something of the spirit of a number who had been on retreat together. They organised an annual weekend of retreat and periodic days of recollection. In addition they reached out by helping with transport to and from Mass, running charitable functions and organizing talks and visits. Meetings were held in the Centre after evening Mass on the first Wednesday of the month.

The Prayer Group began in the Autumn of 1979. It met weekly and from an initial membership of about twenty grew very quickly. Among the principal movers were George and Frances Glynn, Jim and Mike Pinnington, Sr Doreen of Park House, Kate Daley, Donald and Veronica O'Callaghan. It met weekly in St Helen's Centre but frequently joined with other Prayer Groups in this area and occasionally much further afield. Upholland College and Christ's College were used for retreats. Special Prayer Group Masses and services of healing took place at St Helen's, in Formby and in Ainsdale.

Members did not confine their activities to the Prayer Group. They were

were early workers. John Wills, Peter Lee and his wife, Helen and Walter Duckworth are among the mainstays now.

Another initiative taken by Fr Shaw in the 1990s was very much in tune with the ideas of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council on lay participation. He approached Harry Overmeer with the idea of setting up a Parish Pastoral Council. A secretary was co-opted to contribute to the project.

Ultimate responsibility for the parish had to rest with the person who had the cure of souls — the Parish Priest. He would be president and have the final say in decisions. The Council was essentially restricted to a consultative role. It was never, could not be, democratic: "You cannot run a parish on a show of hands". It was composed of leaders of the main parish organisations, had an elected element, kept proper minutes and circulated an agenda in advance of meetings. In later years the difference between this properly constituted structure and an 'ad hoc' parish meeting was not understood.

The Council for two or three years discussed issues, helped planning, introduced initiatives and served as a guide to the thoughts and feelings of the parish for Fr Shaw. John Flaherty, Bernard Coyne, George Hennessey, Peter Mercer, Madge Daley and Kath Barton were active and constructive members while Michael Hewlett acted as Chairman.

Fr Shaw became ill and one or two others were ill themselves or had illness in their families. The council was suspended temporarily. It was never formally ended but it did not meet again. It was a valuable experience for lay people to be formally involved in helping and advising the parish priest.

Two members of the Council, Peter Mercer and George Hennessey, were largely responsible for a venture which was very welcome to older and isolated parishioners. They organised and ran the parish Christmas Dinner. Without the facilities of the Centre it would probably have been impossible. Even so it was a complex logistical exercise beforehand and on the day itself demanded immense effort and a great deal of time. It need scarcely be said that those who made it possible gave up their own Christmas dinners. Everybody who attended had transport laid on if necessary. They went home wined, dined and carrying a present.

The Christmas Dinner was an outstanding example of the parish's ministry of hospitality. In a more modest way it is displayed every Sunday and after every meeting. There seems to be an infinite supply of tea and biscuits and, since the early days when Mary Ashcroft headed the team, an infinite supply of dedicated hands to pass them around. They turn out just as will-

those engaged in the process were asked to speak to people wanting to make their own Covenants. A dark, rainy night spent driving to Blackburn, speaking and then driving back stays in the memory.

The Covenant was the start of a co-operation which has brought us closer to St Luke's, All Saints', Moor Lane and Liverpool Road (now closed) Methodists and SS Peter & Paul's. 'Crossroads is an obvious sign of the relationship.

The Lenten Groups were another result. They ran for a number of years. A dozen or more mixed groups of ten or a dozen people met to discuss appropriate themes over the five weeks of Lent. Sometimes materials were brought in, sometimes the leaders discussed and prepared themes themselves. Peter J. Deary and Bob Slatter made great contributions. The groups met in the houses of leaders. Jim Pinnington always took a large group because he was hospitable by nature. That applied to other St Helen's leaders.

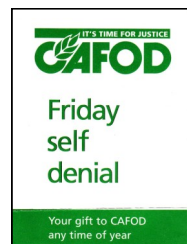
Peter, Bob and Jim had the unenviable task of putting the groups together so that there was a good mix and every one of the hundred or more got the night which suited them best. Every group leader was given the telephone number of each of his/her members and the duty of making contact before the first meeting.

Meetings ended with tea and biscuits. Hospitality sealed the friendships that formed. Our garden benefitted. Muriel, a Methodist lady, gave me two clumps of snowdrops which were planted either side of the front door. Ebony, the cat, who never went far in hard weather, scratched in the soil at the front door and soon produced two very nice drifts of snowdrops where nothing would grow before. Maybe he fertilized them, too. Muriel asked about them on the coach to Iona three or four years ago.

However, arranging the groups and often writing material were really work for younger people. More recently there have been joint meetings led by Fr Thomas Cullinan and Fr Peter Morgan, among others. A memorable series of talks was given by Bishop Harris, a tour de force for a man long retired.

And he produced very good recordings with a throat mike and a voice-activated recorder.

The formation of a group to promote CAFOD was an idea from the Archdiocese. We were to act as a catalyst parish. Both Sunday Masses are covered every week and there is a Friday self denial day every month. Our CAFOD contributes a perhaps £1,000 a month on average for the developing countries. Austin Hughes, Jim McCarthy and Kath Barton



usually in the forefront whenever help was needed. Leadership was not confined to a few people. The Prayer Group fostered the development of leaders who became prominent in other Parish activities.

SPUC was already a notable force in the Parish by 1980. It was founded in St Helen's about 1970. Fr Garvey, Marie Ward and Terese Heverin were among the founder members. John and Mary Kilbane gave themselves generously to the cause. Anne Fearon, Paul Kilbane, Joe and Marie Ward are prominent among those who carry the work on to this day. SPUC is perhaps the most visible and vigorous of the Parish organisations

The Justice and Peace group was founded in February 1979 with the encouragement of Fr Sean O'Connor. There had been a number of supporters of Christian Aid in the Parish and these formed the nucleus of J & P. They were enthusiastically supported by the Parish in their activities on behalf of 'the Third World'.

Close to home the work of the St Helens SVP Conference began in the 1930s. It quietly helped the needy of the parish by home visiting, with alms, with ordinary social contact and with advice. One year they quickly found a home for an 11lb Christmas turkey which Mr Tesco had delivered by mistake and wouldn't take back although it was still frozen solid.

Arthur O'Connor used his encyclopaedic command of his profession to give the most detailed and useful advice on every possible problem of housing and benefits.

As time has passed the Conference has turned outwards and by 'twinning' helped a parish in Kerala (southern India) financially and in other ways, one of which was by providing goats. A priest chaplain at Aintree Hospital last year estimated that he had the care of three hundred nurses and assistants from Kerala working locally. The relationship is clearly not one-sided.

Members of the Parish were involved in Catholic activities beyond the boundaries. Madge Daley recalls walking back from Blundellsands station to Alexandra Road in the 'blackout' after a tutorial for the YCW, the Young Christian Workers, in south Liverpool. The YCW strongly emphasised the implementation of the Church's social teaching. Madge was a pioneer member.

Music had always been strong. There was a four part, mixed choir under William Sutton. Mr Sutton directed the choir from 1930 till 1969 and from 1942 to 1969 Mrs Massey-Lynch was organist. Margaret Carden was ac-

tive in forming a Children's Choir in 1969. Young people began about the same time to introduce new hymns.

St Helen's always had an organist. Miss Alcock, Mrs Massey-Lynch, Mr Brophy and Mrs Peggy Fowler were in unbroken succession for fifty years. Throughout that time St Helen's was admired for the contribution of music to its liturgy and the enthusiasm of its congregation in participating. In 1947 and 1948 the choir broadcast on BBC Radio.

What else did the people of St Helen's do?

They studied the legacy of the Second Vatican Council and held group meetings to prepare for and take further the National Pastoral Congress in Liverpool in 1980. We still sing the Congress Mass settings, thought difficult at the time but very soon mastered and part of St Helen's liturgy.

They supported The Centre Club led by Brian Jones, John Tilley and their group. Over a long period it raised important sums for parish funds, and formed a nucleus of activists who helped out whenever and however their help was needed.

They went on pilgrimage, to Lourdes, to Walsingham, to Sutton, St Helens, the shrine of Bl. Dominic Barberi, who received John Henry Newman into the Church, to Holywell, to Lady(e)well, near Preston, to Pantasaph. Some have been to Santiago de Compostela, Win Caveen went almost everywhere, including Nevers and Lisieux. One brought back pictures and a book from the shrine of the Japanese Martyrs in Nagasaki, Paul Miki and his Companions. At twenty-three he suffered the indignity of having his blonde hair touched by the country people who could not believe it was real.

They socialized, men and women, in the Knights of St Columba, the Catechian Association and at the events of parishes all over the region.

They had a long and successful Amateur Dramatic Society, 'doing' over a hundred major and minor plays, secular and religious, by 1980 in spite of the rise of television.

And they gave. Never was an appeal made in St Helen's without evoking amazement at the generosity of the parishioners.

grasped the meaning of "the street called "Hope".

Another factor was an inspirational address by Mgr Peter Cookson at a conference at Christ's College. In a relatively small meeting Mgr Cookson raised the enthusiasm of others. Peter J. Deary and Jim McCarthy were present. Like most men then they had been in the forces and they also worked in contexts which were not wholly Catholic. All became prominent leaders as ecumenism developed with Fr Shaw's full support.

The first meetings among the Churches in Crosby led early to the deci-



sion that we should begin by praying together.

That led to the Thursday morning Prayers now so familiar. If you recognise more than 50% of the people in this early photograph it may be time to lie about your age.

Ecumenical lunches among the local clergy had fostered good relations already. Soon laymen were asked to draft a covenant document. St Helen's members were prominent in the process and much of the work took place in the Centre or the houses of parishioners. The finished draft was presented to the local clergy. Some modifications were made to the wording but there was no radical alteration of the lay contribution.

In 1984 Bishop David Shepherd, Archbishop Worlock and the leaders of the other Churches witnessed the agreement of the local Church leaders when the Covenant was signed in St Helen's church. Churches Together in Crosby came into being. Ours was an early Covenant and some of



their debt. We owe thanks also to Mary Deary and Cath Douglas who have supported their husbands unstintingly to the benefit of us all.

The parish reached out beyond its boundaries. A direct connection with the Cathedral which has been maintained over the years is the work of several parishioners who guide visitors and give a strong educational input. May Gillet, Joan Loveridge and Bob McGrath were all busy guides until recently. Rose Langan has a different function at the Cathedral. She is one of the 'Friends of the Cathedral' and brings the firm hand of a school and parish secretary to the organisation of attractive social events.

Other Parishioners, including P.J. and Anne Deary, attended the Basic Courses of the Pastoral Formation Team led by Mgr Vincent Nichols and later by Fr Chris Fallon. The team was part of the plan to educate for lay participation. The next stage was the institution of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. A (literally) Green Paper came to the parishes enquiring about what lay people thought of the nature of the Church and its future, attitudes to particular issues and how the role of the laity might be developed.

The parishes discussed it and reported to the Pastoral Formation Team secretariat. In St Helen's the discussion took place. Then a very detailed questionnaire based on the Green Paper was circulated. A hundred and thirty-one replies were received and summarised. No parish had consulted as widely or in as much detail as St Helen's. When the Council was formed under the personal chairmanship of the Archbishop St Helen's members were assiduous in attending and brought back word of its deliberations and decisions to Parish meetings. One became a member of the secretariat. A number of initiatives were encouraged by the Council.



A principle initiative, Ecumenism, was already on the St Helen's agenda.

**Jim Pinnington, seen here with Joan,** was probably ahead of developments as a result of his experiences with the Eighth Army during the war and what he had seen of the chaplains of various denominations with the wounded and dead.

The Papal visit in 1982 was a huge influence. Some of us wanted to go to the Cathedral but lined Belvedere Road wearing yellow berets, as the Pope came through from Speke. We did see him from a few yards away and we had already

## 1980-2003

It fell to the new parish priest to organise the celebration of the Golden Jubilee. Fr Albert Shaw was born in Bamber Bridge, Preston. He was at Thornleigh Grammar School, Bolton, before entering Upholland College at the age of eighteen to study for the priesthood. He was ordained on 12 June, 1954, and was appointed to the parish of St Robert Bellarmine, Bootle, where he was a curate for four years. He was then appointed to Upholland College as 'Prefect of Discipline' until 1969 when he became Spiritual Director to the students. Upholland and Ushaw were amalgamated in 1975 and Fr Shaw then became Archdiocesan Director of Vocations based in St James's Bootle.

He was made parish priest of St Helen's in 1979 and first visited the Parish on the feast of St Helen that year. By Summer 1980 he had become a presence in the area. Sr Celestine of the Ursuline recommended "the new man at St Helen's" when asked whom it was best to approach if one wanted to become a Catholic. A meeting was arranged and attendance at the "family Mass" on Sunday at 10.30 was suggested. That made her mind up and on 11 December, 1980, Fr Shaw received Rosemary Dillon "into full communion". He confirmed her. Kay Byth and Brenda Bradshaw were received later; both of them became Special Ministers who have given generously of themselves in numerous parish activities.

St Helen's was a revelation: crowded, lively, bustling with activity, with something interesting and different every night of the week. It was six months since the National Pastoral Congress to which both Archbishop Hume and Archbishop Worlock had given their full support. The implementation of the work of the Second Vatican Council was the concern of everybody. The "windows" had been "thrown open". It was the time of "The Easter People", "The Priesthood of all believers", "a holy nation", "a people set apart", the participation of the laity.

There was an active liturgy group which met regularly in what is now the Sacristy. It worked in two ways. It enabled Fr Shaw to introduce new ideas and it used the originality and energy of a dedicated cadre of lay people. At the forefront were such as Jim Murphy, Jim and Julie McCarthy, Jim Pin-

nington, Michael Hewlett, Win and Gerry Healey, Joan Loveridge and, of course, Peggy Fowler who was central to liturgical development since music played such a part. The liturgy group had no monopoly. Others groups were called on when it was felt that their input would be valuable. Billy Maher did the guitar music for 1030 Mass for years and Joe Coyne plays guitar on Sundays these days.

An active auxiliary to the liturgy group was the weekly 'Singalong' in which new hymns and settings of the Mass were introduced with quite intensive practice and huge fun. Up to twenty people were regulars and they formed a strong element in leading the congregation as a whole into musical change. It was strange to hear it said years later that people of St Helen's did not sing. For twenty years or more 'Father Canary's' parish was a singing parish par excellence. Nor was it all modern hymns. The Lanigan sisters, daughters of Stephen Lanigan, an associate of THE Michael Collins in the twenties, were keen on the Latin Mass. Several sessions of plain chant at 'Singalongs' were necessary for a monthly Mass with sung 'Kyrie', 'Gloria', 'Credo' and 'Sanctus'. It helped that Latin had not yet died out among those present from an earlier period. When Cantors were needed for the Psalm Andy Hoare and Liz Kendrick emerged from the 'Singalong'. Many members of the liturgy group went to the 'Singalong' but Joe Ward's superb Good Friday



singing of the 'Improperia' came from an older liturgical tradition.

The fabric and furnishings of the church were beautified to enhance the setting of the liturgy. **A stone altar, font and lectern**, replaced the original wood. Marble facing on the brick behind the altar might

have been the next item on the agenda.

Stained glass windows of the sacraments were commissioned and installed.

**The Lady Chapel** was built. The statue of Our Lady as a slim, young girl rather than a more matronly figure quickly became popular. A small devotion grew spontaneously as numbers of people touched her left hand before leaving the chapel and the church. Eileen Doyle, a very devout lady, probably began it.

There were adornments less permanent. New vestments, banners and hangings were made. Ladies from the parish, Kay Byth and May Gillet spring to mind, were workers in Sr Anthony Wilson's sewing and embroidery workshop in the Metropolitan Cathedral. Members of her family lived in the parish. She designed, the team implemented. More recent work has included vestments for the Anglican Cathedral.



St Helen's implemented many liturgical changes during Fr Shaw's tenure but always in step with the Archdiocese as a whole. Giving Holy Communion under both kinds necessitated the commissioning of a number of Special Ministers. Mgr Rigby organised the training and the new Ministers were soon active not only in the church but also in home visits. Joan Loveridge, Win Healey, Kay Byth, Anne Deary, Julie Reilly, Alan Gardner, who died so young and had not been a Catholic long, and John Flaherty were among the newcomers. The senior ministers were patient themselves in carrying on their training and it was said of Ron Wharton that nobody ever served with him without learning something. He also took a very dim view of illicit parking.

In the 1990s the first girls became altar servers. They were welcomed in St Helen's and there was never any attempt to pin on them the derogatory title of 'Serviettes' used in parishes which ought to know better.

The reputation of St Helen's for a rich and varied liturgy grew. Mgr Jack Kennedy was here on occasions before he went to Rome, to 'the Ven'. Betty Lloyd and other liturgy activists also held St Helen's in high regard. Mgr Austin Hunt of the Archdiocesan Liturgy Commission celebrated Mass here to see how we did things.

He later had a much more significant role in developments at St Helen's. After it had been decided that married men should be ordained as Deacons, Mgr Hunt was put in charge of the training programme. Two parishioners embarked on a lengthy course which was academically, pastorally and spiritually arduous. Rev. Peter L. Deary was the first to be ordained. He was followed by Rev. Edward Douglas. It is no exaggeration to say that the parish could scarcely have survived without them. They have taken on a huge workload, supporting the priests working in the parish, ministering to its people, providing fixed points of reference in changing times. We are much in