

A History of St Hugh's Borrowash

Although entitled 'St Hugh's Borrowash', this history relates to the formation of the parish covering Spondon, Borrowash and Ockbrook. To place that history into context it is necessary to briefly cover the development of the Church with its origin in Derby. In simple terms St Mary's, Derby, is historically the predominant parish from which St Alban's, Chaddesden, was formed, and from St Albans the parish of St Hugh's was later established.

It may appear inappropriate to issue an apology at such an early part of this writing. Because the development of St Hugh's parish was somewhat fragmented over the years, to put it into a 'readable' order it has been necessary to 'jump backwards and forwards' through historical events. It is hoped the reader will understand.

The first record of the celebration of Mass in Derby was at the Ship Inn in the Corn Market in 1766. In 1833 a small chapel was built, (in Chapel Street would you believe), which was served by its own priest. The present St Mary's church, designed by Augustine Pugin, was opened in October, 1839. As the 19th century progressed and Derby grew both in trade and population, Catholics living in the areas of Chaddesden and Spondon would walk into St Mary's for the celebration of Mass. It remained so until the late 1930's or early 1940's.

To return to Borrowash and Ockbrook (and the first historical apology – and fragmentation!), maps of the mid-19th century show Borrowash as little more than the present day Nottingham Road and Victoria Avenue. For that matter Ockbrook appears the more predominant and populated of the two.

Little more than one hundred yards from the present St Hugh's Church, is the site of the Wilmot Arms, which was destroyed by fire in April, 2023. The original inn was built in the 18th century and the adjacent house during the previous century. The first recorded Mass in Borrowash was celebrated at the Wilmot Arms in December 1896 and continued to be celebrated there until April 1909. Canon Thomas Byrne travelled each Sunday by horse and cab from St Mary's, Derby. In 1909 a small chapel was built in Alvaston which at that time was in the same parish as Borrowash. Unfortunately, there was a shortage of priests to cover both centres and as a consequence the Sunday Mass for both areas was celebrated at Alvaston.

In the late 1920's Fr Wilson, later Provost Wilson, of St Mary's, used to teach the catechism at Glover's Shop on the corner of Station Road and Nottingham Road, Spondon.

In 1946 the Sisters of St Joseph of Peace opened a convent at Borrowash House, a short distance from the present church. They became part of the Diocesan Rescue Society caring for mothers and babies and were very much part of the parish. Later Fr James McCarthy

was based at Borrowash House. He was not the first parish priest as St Hugh's, at that time, was not an established parish and was still part of St Alban's. Fr McCarthy was a retired missionary priest and was the chaplain to the sisters at Borrowash House. It is quite understandable that people regarded him as the parish priest because of the amount of work he did in the parish in addition to his work at Borrowash House. The convent had a small but very beautiful chapel in which Fr McCarthy celebrated Mass to which most, if not all, parishioners from Borrowash and Ockbrook attended on Sundays. A really wonderful man.

In the meantime, there was a rapid expansion of Spondon, Borrowash, Ockbrook and the surrounding areas. The end of World War II saw the expansion of local industries which had been at the heart of the war effort. The Spondon works of British Celanese Ltd employed enormous numbers of people as did Rolls Royce, the railway construction centres, Qualcast and numerous others.

Obviously as industry expanded, the population also expanded with people coming into the area for employment. But there was a number of other factors affecting local growth. As British Celanese expanded with the production of artificial fibres, such as nylon, the Lancashire cotton industry was in decline. Lancashire families moved into the area for employment and these included many Catholic families.

It was also a time when a number of men from overseas, who had served with the British forces during the war, decided to stay after the Armistice. Many were from Poland and in particular those who had served in the Polish air force with the RAF in Britain. Others had been held in local prisoner of war camps, in particular Italians, who had been treated so well by the local people that following repatriation, they returned with their families and settled in the Derby area. The small group of new houses next to the junction of Nottingham Road and Borrowash Road, (about a mile on the Spondon side of St Hughs), was originally Clock Farm where many prisoners of war were employed and who were well received by the local people.

The extent to which the following information was relevant to the area covered by the present parish is unknown but is included as a 'gem' of information. In a camp near Belper it was discovered that one of the German prisoners had been ordained a priest two weeks before the outbreak of war. With the permission of the authorities, the Belper parish purchased for him a motor bike to enable him to visit other camps in the area for the celebration of Sunday Mass.

With the expansion of the local population came the need for a more permanent place for the celebration of Mass. In the meantime, The Anglers Arms (now the location of a Methodist Care Home), and later the Crown Club, were used. However, for various reasons

new venues had to be found and eventually that was to be the Spondon Scout Hut on Gladstone Road, in Spondon Village. The Scouts were very helpful and it remained a venue for a number of years.

Initially the priest would arrive at the Scout Hut from St Mary's, in a very large black taxi, and for years was driven by the same lady who wore a peaked cap. Some of the younger fitter priests came by bike – Father (later Bishop) McGuinness and Father Snee. The 'equipment' for Mass was held in a large trunk – kneelers for the servers, a carpet, heavy brass crucifix, and candle sticks, and the candles etc. The trunk was kept at the house of Mr and Mrs Davis who lived nearby and was collected by the altar servers using a green wooden sack trolley. There were no musical instruments to accompany the hymns but they were led by Mr Quinn. 'Lord for Tomorrow and Its Needs' was a frequent hymn – very frequent in fact. Mr Quinn was an interpreter at Rolls Royce and could speak in excess of ten languages.

Occasionally, there would be large areas of the floor marked with a circle in chalk. This indicated areas where the floor was unsafe. Once there were so many chalked areas that arrangements had to be made to celebrate Mass in the nearby Sitwell Cinema (now the Co-op Funeral Service in Spondon Village). People were so used to having the best cinema seats at the back, the priest had to ask the congregation to come to the front so he could see them. On one Sunday, there being 'no room at the inn', Mass was celebrated in the Celanese Table Tennis Club on Station Road. Despite the hardships, or maybe because of the hardships, Mass was well attended and a close community was formed.

It was obvious there was a pressing need for a permanent Church at the centre of what was becoming an established worshipping community. In consequence The Spondon Catholic Building Fund was formed with Mr Bill Cain as secretary, whose grandson, Fr David Cain, was many years later to become Parish Priest. The committee included Mr Hemming (the Station Master at Spondon and later at Nottingham Victoria Station), Mr McGee, and Mr Heaps, Apologies for any missed out.

The commitment to fundraising by the entire parish was amazing. There was a weekly prize draw which attracted enormous participation together with a grand Christmas prize draw. There was always a large summer fair in the grounds of Borrowash House and a Christmas Bizarre held in the school hall at St Marys in Derby. On one occasion, a grand summer fair was held in the grounds of the home of Mr Charles and Mrs Lillian Carlin in Morley Road, Chaddesden, opposite what is now the Derby County training ground. Mr Carlin was a renowned artist who painted the picture of the Last Supper on the front of the altar in St Hughs. More of his work can be seen in the large round paintings on the walls of St Mary's, Derby. The garden party was opened by a relative of Mrs Carlin, Lady Lewie Burkin, whose family owned much of the Nottingham lace industry. With a great deal of effort by all, things were moving at a pace.

St Albans Church was blessed and opened in 1955 by Bishop Edward Ellis. About the same time approval was given for the building of a 'chapel of ease' (ie a chapel served from another parish) to serve Spondon, Borrowash and Ockbrook. It was specified that the chapel should be located on the main road between Spondon and Borrowash. The land, on which the church now stands, was part of the estate owned by the sisters at Borrowash House and was donated to the parish.

Good fortune continued to fall upon the parish. Kazimierz Kuzminski had been a member of the Polish Air Force during the war, stationed in Britain. After the war he settled in Spondon and trained as an architect giving his services without charge for the design of St Hughs. Not long after designing the church, he and his family left Spondon when he became a partner in a firm of architects away from the parish.

Before long Holmes Builders, based in Spondon Village were selected and work was at last under way. Sadly, tragedy was to strike. During this time, what was then called the Borrowash By-pass, now Brian Clough Way, was completed and with it came a notorious black spot. Unlike today, the Victoria Avenue crossing was not by means of a flyover bridge but was an open crossover junction. It claimed numerous lives, one of the first being the builder of the church. The building at that stage was no more than the concrete floor and a few layers of bricks, as it remained for nearly a year.

Each Wednesday the ladies' group would meet at one of their homes in rotation. The group included Mrs Heaps, Mrs Loftus, Mrs McGee, Mrs Cain, Mrs Riley, Mrs Byrnes, Mrs Marshall, and Mrs Beardsmore (again apologies to those forgotten). Between them they hand made a complete set of vestments. The material came from a Catholic owned firm in Derby, Alan Turners, that made vestment material. The amount of voluntary work carried out would be too extensive to include in these pages.

Another fortunate situation arose about this time. The house immediately facing the church was purchased by Mr and Mrs Long who were members of the parish. Mrs Long was a teacher at St Mary's School in Derby. Because of Mr Long's work, it was not too long before they had to move out of the parish. The house was purchased from them at a very favourable price and made an ideal Prestytery. Because history repeats itself, the parish is once again served from St Albans, the house is no longer needed as a Presbytery but is still owned by the parish and rented out.

After many years of dedicated work by countless people, on 30th June, 1959, Bishop Ellis blessed and opened St Hugh's Church (or Chapel of ease as it was at that time, being served from St Alban's). In his address, the Bishop said it was unfortunate the architect, Mr Kuzminski, was unable to attend. The Bishop was unaware he was sitting on the front row.

Shortly after the opening of St Hugh's, **Fr Patrick Reidy**, was appointed the first Parish Priest. Fr Reidy was no stranger to Borrowash as he had previously served as Director of the Nottingham Diocese Rescue Society which included Borrowash House.

It was not too long after the opening of the Church that there was a need for a church hall. The initial requirement was the possible need for additional classroom space for St Alban's School which was attended by children from Spondon and Borrowash. However, as so often happens, shortly after the building started, pupil numbers began to fall and the additional classroom space was not required but the parish acquired a splendid church hall.

As there is today, for various reasons, there was a steady turnover of Parish Priests.

Fr Patrick Reidy was replaced by **Fr Patrick McKay**, a native of Belfast. Fr McKay continued the physical building of the parish and also set up the first Parish Council. Sadly, he suffered from poor health and in 1973 he was tragically killed in a road accident.

Fr William Walsh followed Fr McKay. In his short term as Parish Priest Fr Walsh continued with the progress of the parish but in 1974 he moved to Leicester and died shortly afterwards.

Fr Walsh was followed by **Fr Ted Carrick**, who had served thirty years as a missionary priest in Sierra Leone. A 'larger than life' character, he developed wonderful relationship between the parish and the Missionary Church. He always had time for the children recognising they were the future of the Church. He retired in 1982.

The next parish priest was **Fr John Mack**. His appointment in 1982 was regarded as the run up to his retirement. However, he was still the parish priest at the time of his death twenty seven years later. A native of Newcastle he was a late vocation and had previously trained in accountancy and financial management which he used to great effect in the organisation of the parish, being only too aware of the likelihood that once again St Albans and St Hughs would be served by one priest. He regarded the parish as his family and was an excellent spiritual leader.

In 2009 **Fr Ka Fai Lee** was appointed parish priest. Fr Ka Fai was born in Hong Kong and moved to Derby with his family in 1974. He gained a degree in Electronic Engineering at Trent Polytechnic before undertaking his study for the priesthood at St Mary's College, Oscott. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1987, his first appointment being St Albans, Chaddesden, as assistant priest. Having served as Parish Priest at Hucknall and Loughborough, he served for many years in the Diocesan Curia Office and as Diocesan

Financial Secretary. In 2009 he was appointed parish priest of St Albans and St Hughs. During his time at St Hughs a new roof was constructed on both the church and hall.

The next parish priest was **Fr Paul Newman**. During this time it was decided to carry out alterations to the hall, which included restructuring of the porch area and toilet facilities. It was also a time of difficulties in the financial environment and delays were experienced. In the meantime there was a change of parish priest and Fr Newman returned to his native Eastwood in Nottinghamshire.

In 2017, **Fr David Cain** was appointed parish priest, a name familiar to the parish. Having picked up the reins from Fr Newman, not long after his appointment, the Church and indeed the nation, entered a historical time, the Covid Pandemic and with it 'Lockdown'. Gatherings of people were prohibited including church congregations. St Albans and St Hughs, whilst perhaps not the first parish, were certainly amongst the first to install cameras for the celebration of Mass over the internet. Despite covid casting a cloud, indeed a very dark cloud, there was at least something of a silver lining. Although there could be no 'gatherings', people could return to work. As the church was empty it was opportunity to carry out required refurbishments. With the sponsorship of members of the parish, the windows were replaced and benches refurbished. New ceiling tiles were installed. The field adjacent to the church on the Spondon side, which is owned by the parish, was cultivated to provide an openair facility for Mass and other events. It was also opportune to carry out the modifications to the Church Hall initiated by Fr Paul. The car park was also extended. As an ardent supporter of Derby County, Fr David not only celebrated the Sunday Mass but also gave a match report from the Saturday afternoon. In 2022 it was time for Fr David to move on to take on three large parishes in the centre of Leicester.

Following Fr David, our next priest was **FrRoji Alex MSFS** who was born in Kerala, South West India. The MSFS stands for Missionary Society of St Francis de Sales, founded in 1838 in Annecy, France. Their mission is *'To pass on love of God and gentleness to the world and to bring about the renewal of Christian life by preaching parish missions, evangelizing people, and educating the youth.'* A mission which Fr Roji delivers extremely well in our parish.

At a time of falling congregations generally, it is so pleasing to see the numbers attending Mass and other services at St Hugh's remains constant as is the dedication of those who give their time and energy in support of the liturgy and other activities of the parish.

Deo Gratias.

Brian Cain

2026 with acknowledgement of the previous history written by Terry McMenamin

Photographs of Mass at the Crown Club, Spondon circa 1940, courtesy of Joy and John Heaps.



