

So why are we here?

The chapel built in mid-19th Century was provided to meet the spiritual needs of those Catholics working on the farms of Boldmere. Life and our parish has changed a great deal in the years since then.

Farms are gone and our congregation is much more culturally and ethnically diverse than back then. But what continues to inspire us and define the purpose of our community is the love of God and love of neighbour. In both of these works we are united in the love of God in Christ who, by that love, frees us from death and fear, and gives us the hope of heaven.

The love of God is for all people, always and everywhere. The Church is the people whom God calls and gathers together from every part of the earth; the assembly of those who through faith and Baptism have become children of God, members of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit.



The Church finds her origin and fulfilment in the eternal plan of God. She was prepared for in the Old Covenant with the election of Israel as a sign of the future gathering of all the nations. Founded by the words and actions of Jesus Christ, fulfilled by his redeeming death and Resurrection, the Church is manifested as the mystery of salvation by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. She will be perfected in the glory of heaven as the assembly of all the redeemed of the earth. She is 'mystery' in as much as in her visible reality there is present and active a divine spiritual reality which can only be seen with the eyes of faith.

The mission of the Church is to proclaim and establish the Kingdom of God begun by Jesus Christ among all peoples. The Church constitutes on earth the seed and beginning of this salvific Kingdom.

To put it more simply, we find the meaning and purpose of our lives in the love of God in Jesus Christ. We rely on that love to help us live our lives faithfully and well. When we mess up, we turn to the Lord to help us recover and move on in hope.



The fundamentals of our faith are known through God's self-revelation, handed down to us through the generations of the Church in Apostolic Tradition. The Apostolic Tradition is the transmission of the message of Christ, brought about from the very beginnings of Christianity by means of preaching, bearing witness, worship and inspired writings.

The teaching and witness of the Apostles is handed on through the generations, preserved especially through the successors of the Apostles, the bishops, united in communion with the Pope, Successor of Peter. The faithfulness of the Church is guaranteed by Christ, and achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit.

The unity of the Church and the unity of Catholic Faith go hand in hand, and are sustained in the communion we enjoy together in Christ.



To learn more about the present day life of our parish please visit our website, read our newsletter and come visit us for conversation, prayer or worship. You will be very welcome.

For those interested in learning more about the faith of the Church please contact Fr Allen to learn more about our *Journeys in Faith Group*. This group offers those interested a chance to explore the Scriptures, the teaching of the Church, prayer and worship, and raise any questions they might have.

An introduction to St Nicholas Boldmere

Our History, Faith and Life

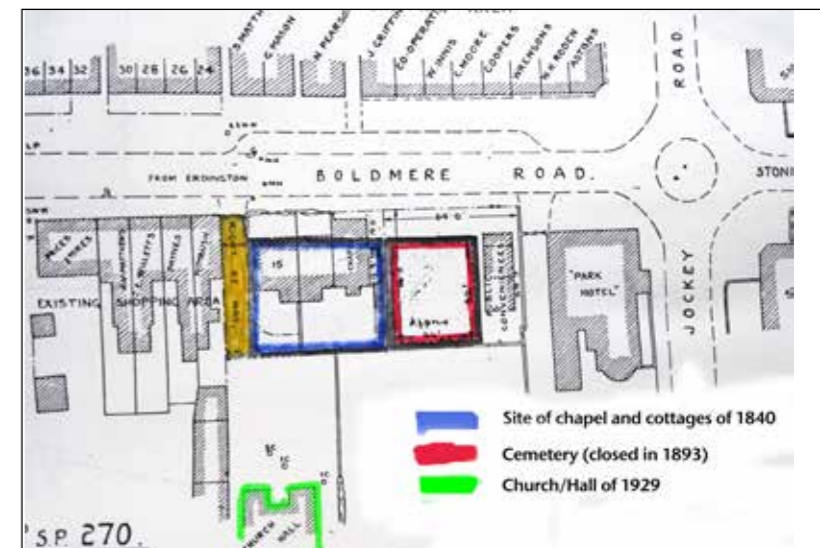
History of the church

A church without a parish

The beginning of Boldmere Parish lies in the sale of a plot of land. On the 17th June 1839, John Buggins, a farmer of Sutton Coldfield, sold to the Catholic Church 'all that piece or parcel of land containing one rood and twenty eight perches... fronting the road leading from Erdington to or towards Sutton Park'.

A year earlier the new college at Oscott had been opened, transferred from the old buildings at Old Oscott (now Maryvale). In September 1840 its new Rector arrived, Nicholas Wiseman. He had been consecrated in Rome in the previous June, as co-adjutor bishop to Bishop Thomas Walsh, the Vicar Apostolic of the Central District (there were no dioceses in England until 1850). Bishop Walsh was a great church-builder, and though it was only a few years since Emancipation was granted to Catholics, he deemed the time ripe for the extension of churches throughout his Vicariate. He was responsible for the building of the College at New Oscott, St. Chad's Cathedral (opened in 1841), Nottingham Cathedral, St. Mary's Derby and over 50 other churches and chapels.

Bishop Walsh gave approval for the building at Boldmere of a chapel and adjoining cottages (to plans of the celebrated architect Augustus Welby Pugin) and the chapel was dedicated to the patron saint of Bishop Wiseman, St. Nicholas.



The unpretentious building opened in 1841, and was to serve the needs of a tiny and scattered congregation for the next 30 years, with help of clergy from Oscott College. Mass was celebrated in the chapel by men whose names are written indelibly in the history of the Church in England - Bishop Wiseman, who became first Archbishop of Westminster, Blessed John Henry Newman, the great Oxford convert, Cardinal and founder of the Oratory in Birmingham, and Blessed Dominic Barberi, the Italian Passionist, who received Newman into the Church.

The chapel was closed in 1870, perhaps because of a dispute between the priest then at Sutton Coldfield and the College authorities. It remained closed for 13 years to the great inconvenience of the aged and infirm who had to trudge to Holy Trinity, Sutton Coldfield or St. Thomas', Erdington for Mass. During those years the chapel was used as a school, sometime as a storeroom and even as kennels.

Eventually the chapel was re-opened as a place of worship, and on Ascension Thursday (May 3rd) 1883 High Mass was sung by one of the Benedictine Fathers of Erdington Abbey. This marked the renewal of Catholic life in the district and of a long and worthy association with the monks (Benedictines exiled from Germany, because of perse-



The Pugin Chapel

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Our Parish is part of the Archdiocese of Birmingham: Registered Charity No. 234216

cution of the Church under Bismarck) that lasted till April 1922.

A parish at last

The Benedictine community returned to Germany in March 1922, and Boldmere to the care of Oscott. In October 1922, Father Joseph Hogan, recently appointed to the staff at Oscott, was made priest-in-charge of Boldmere.

He called a meeting of the parishioners at the Boldmere Brotherhood Hall (now the Methodist church) to 'talk over the prospects of the parish' and discuss plans for renewing Catholic life in the district.

From 1922 Boldmere was constituted a parish, and the first entry in the baptismal register (a sure sign of an independent parish) is dated 7th November 1922. Priests in charge of the parish continued to be appointed from staff at Oscott College

The population of Boldmere was increasing and the 'old' chapel only provided seating for 50. In 1929 a scheme was approved for building a combined hall and church to meet the needs of a congregation of 250 people.

The Parish Priest wrote to the congregation: 'Owing to various causes many of the parishioners have long been in the habit of attending neighbouring churches. May I appeal to all such at least to see that their children are brought up to attend their Parish Church at Boldmere and to receive the Sacraments there ...' His words could still be heeded by not a few parishioners.

Off with the old...

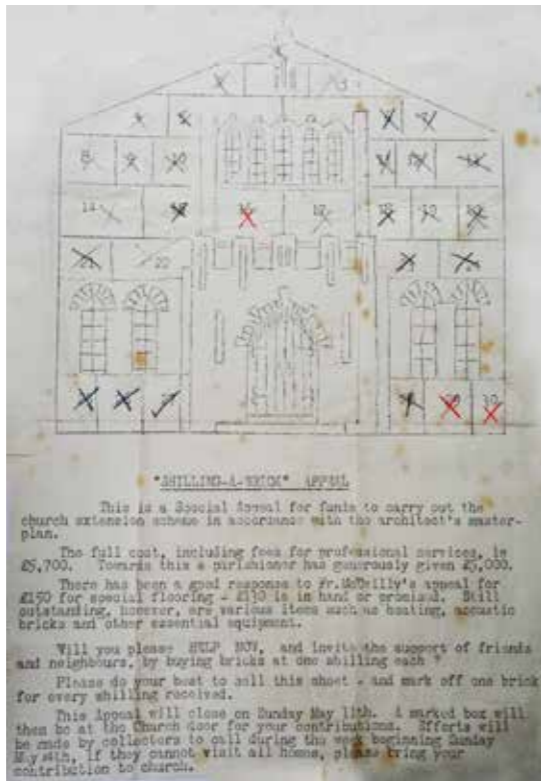
In the Autumn of 1929 the new temporary Church-Hall was built at a cost of £1,600. Money to pay for the building was loaned by members of the congregation, some with, others without interest on the amounts advanced.

The first Mass was celebrated in the new building on Sunday, 1st December 1929 One feature of the new building was a sliding screen ena-



Above: The new church in 1953

Below: Fundraising for the 1958 extension



"SHILLING-A-SHIRT" APPEAL

This is a Special Appeal for funds to carry out the church extension scheme in accordance with the architect's master-plan.

The full cost, including fees for professional services, is £5,700. Towards this a parishioner has generously given £5,000.

There has been a good response to Fr. McElilly's appeal for £150 for special flooring - £150 is in hand or promised. Still outstanding, however, are various items such as heating, acoustic bricks and other essential equipment.

Will you please HELP NOW, and invite the support of friends and neighbours, by buying bricks at one shilling each?

Please do your best to sell this sheet - and mark off one brick for every shilling received.

This appeal will close on Sunday May 11th. A marked box will then be at the Church door for your contributions. Efforts will be made by collectors to call during the week beginning Sunday May 11th. If they cannot visit all homes, please bring your contribution to church.

bling the sanctuary to be separated from the church when the building was used for social purposes.

Dr. John Cregg, of Oscott College, had been looking after the parish temporarily, and was appointed the first resident priest in the summer of 1930. However the accommodation offered was spartan - and at first there was no bed, so he lodged at the College while the parishioners rallied round and provided the bare essentials. Even then an upstairs bed-sitting room was his only private apartment: he had his meals in the sacristy-cum-confessional-cum-meeting room downstairs.

In 1931 it was recognised that the living accommodation should be condemned as unfit for habitation. Property in Jockey Road, adjacent to the new Church Hall was for sale, consisting of two acres of land and a detached house; the whole to be sold freehold for £2,000.

Archbishop Williams gave his approval of the purchase and the parish bought the land and house providing their parish priest with a decent dwelling.

The old chapel continued to be used on weekdays for Mass and mid-week Benediction, with the Church Hall used as a private school in the week.

On with the new (It's getting to be a habit!)

Though adequate in 1929, the Church Hall was being taxed to its capacity on Sundays and Holydays, and the lack of sacristy and other facilities, added to the spartan conditions of comfort cried aloud for a new church. War-time conditions and the aftermath of prohibitions delayed this hope, but a relaxing of building restrictions enabled a licence to be obtained early in 1951. The decision to proceed was helped by a legacy of £1000 from Mr Robert Plant, a farmer in Boldmere. The legacy was made on condition that the foundation stone of a new church would be laid within seven years of his death. The condition was met just in time, the foundation stone being laid on

July 5th 1951, with one day to spare! Archbishop Masterson performed the ceremony, assisted by many clergy and a large gathering of parishioners in the sunshine of a summer's evening.

The new church was solemnly opened on March 10th 1953, by Archbishop Masterson, the High Mass being sung by the Rector of Oscott, Monsignor Leonard Emery, to stress the link between the old chapel of 1840 with its Oscott associations and its successor of the present day.

However, the church was not complete, it had a temporary entrance, for building licence restrictions prevented the architect's plans being followed in full. But in May 1957, Alderman Lawley (formerly Mayor of Sutton Coldfield), offered £5,000 to complete the building. As a member of the congregation for 50 years, he was anxious to see the work completed.

This was set in hand and entailed extending the front of the church to form a complete new entrance, building an additional bay to the nave and a narthex and baptistery. These extensions were blessed on November 27th 1958 by Archbishop Grimshaw.

The most recent major changes to the parish plant were when the house bought for the presbytery in 1931 was demolished and a new one built as part of the development of the site when St Nicholas school was opened on September 10th 1968.

The present church

The Church is designed in the Romanesque style and constructed with golden brown rustic hand-made facing bricks and bricks of a darker colour to window heads and sills, the roof is of timber construction with multi-coloured matt green Roman pantiles. The glass in the Sanctuary windows is amber-gold in colour, chosen to give a sense of brightness and warmth.

The Stations of the Cross, and the crucifix in the Sanctuary were carved of beech wood in the studios of Bridgeman & Co., Lichfield.

The carving in the Martyrs' Chapel was installed in 1956, in memory of the men of the parish who were killed in World War II. It incorporates images of Ss John Fisher, Thomas More, Robert Southwell and Margaret Clitheroe.

The church retains certain furnishings from the old chapel and form a link with the early days.

- First of all, the statue of St. Nicholas. This is of 15th century Flemish workmanship, and is reputed to have been obtained by the architect, Pugin, from the Continent.
- The statue of St. Benedict, in the Benedict Room, preserves the association with the Benedictine monks of Erdington.
- The image in the same room, of Our Lady holding the Infant is of no great age, but it too was transferred from the original chapel.
- The last relic of the old chapel is the bell which hung in a small turret on the old chapel's west-end wall, and now hangs over the entry to nave from the porch.

Our Patron: St. Nicholas

Few Catholic churches in England bear this dedication but in pre-Reformation days more than 350 bore his name. The compliment paid to Bishop Nicholas Wiseman when the old chapel was built brought into new currency a dedication of ancient lineage. St. Nicholas is said to have been born at Patara, a town in the province of Lycia in Asia Minor at the end of the 3rd century. Though little is known of his early life, it seems he was orphaned in youth and devoted his large inheritance to works of charity. It was at this period that the incident occurred which later gave rise to the legend of Santa Claus as the secret bringer of gifts by night.

A fellow citizen who had lost all his money, could not find the dowries to enable his three daughters to be married, and decided to give them over to prostitution. Nicholas, hearing of this, took a bag of gold and under cover of darkness threw it in at the open window of the man's house. This he did twice more and so all three girls were duly married.

Nicholas died at Myra about the year 342 and was buried in the Cathedral Church: later in 1087, during the invasion of the Saracens, his relics were translated to Bari in Italy. Here his shrine remains, a place of pilgrimage from all Christendom.

Few saints hold more 'patronages' than St. Nicholas: in addition to being the saint of children, he is patron of sailors, travellers, merchants and captives. His feast, 6th December, is kept in many countries as a children's feast when they receive their Christmas presents.

