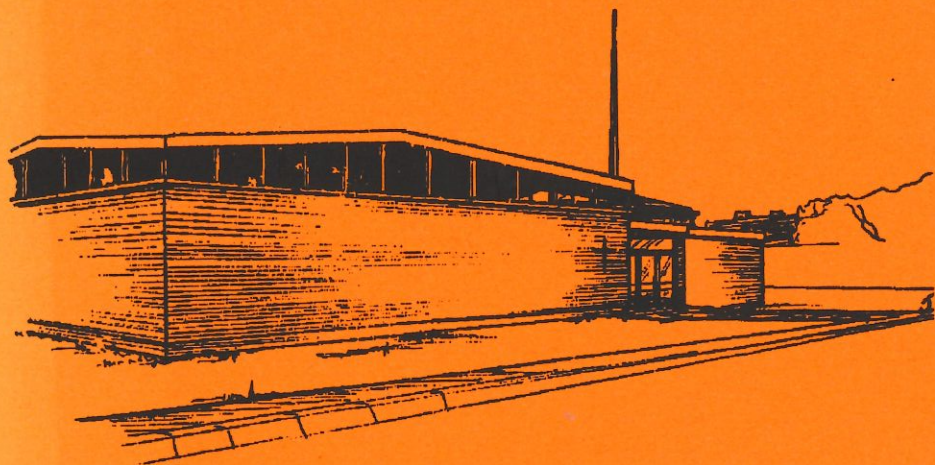


Catholics in Crediton



**A brief history
1914 - 2000**

1914 - 1928

In the beginning

The Catholic Mission started in Crediton at the beginning of the first world war when *Canon Shepherd*, the parish priest in Exeter, came by train every Sunday to say Mass in a room in the town hall. He was met at the station by a horse drawn cab. There were two military hospitals in the town and the Catholic soldiers attended Mass together with any Catholic residents who at that time numbered about fourteen. *Canon Shepherd* was succeeded by *Canon Gandy* who did not preserve the Mass centre.

At the end of the First World War *Fr. Barney* became the parish priest in Exeter. He had a great devotion to St. Boniface and a concern for Crediton and did all he could to encourage the progress of the Church here. In 1919, shortly after his arrival, *Fr. Barney* rented a building at the top of Bowden Hill where he said Mass when he could. This building had, until 1892, been a Methodist Chapel. It was then sold to a local builder, William Berry, and came to be used as a Volunteer Drill Hall.

During the 1914-18 war the hall became a community centre for the troops. Sometimes there was a visiting priest in the area. A *Father Egan*, whose family lived in Market Street, was here on sick leave for several months and his house became a Mass Centre.

1928

Purchase of the Bowden Hill hall

In June 1928 *Fr. Barney* bought the community centre for £328. It was refurbished and a regular Sunday Mass was then celebrated by one of the priests from the Sacred Heart parish in Exeter.

The family of General Redvers Buller presented to *Fr. Barney* a pre-Reformation crucifix for use in the newly acquired church. This crucifix had been discovered at Downes House, the home of the family, and given by *Mrs. Tremayne Buller*. It now hangs in the Meeting Room.

Devotion to St Boniface began with *Fr. Barney* who started to celebrate the Feast of St. Boniface each June 5th with great solemnity. Sung Mass in the morning and in the evening an outdoor procession to St. Boniface's Well

"It was certainly the first time since Cromwell's cavalry helped to sabre the faith out of our forefathers, that Crediton had seen such a public demonstration of its original faith".

The Plymouth Diocesan Record

where a sermon was preached. At Benediction a relic of St. Boniface (sent to Crediton by the Bishop of Fulda in Germany) was venerated.

1936 - 1949

The St. Boniface Statue

In 1936 a collection for a statue of St. Boniface was started. The chief problem seemed to be that nobody had any idea what he looked like! It was suggested that maybe a statue of St. Patrick, minus his trefoil and with a book and dagger substituted, might solve the problem but this was most certainly not acceptable to the parishioners.

Eventually an Italian sculptor agreed to make a statue at a very reasonable cost providing he could be given a likeness from which to work. The best that could be done was to say it must resemble a Saxon and have the correct symbols. The priest wrote to Germany and received a postcard depicting what was believed to be the Saxon saint. This picture was sent to the Italian sculptor who agreed to copy the picture precisely at a cost of £20.

Many months later a telephone call from Exeter railway station asked if someone would please collect the coffin-like package awaiting delivery. Packed in sawdust was St. Boniface - absolutely true to the picture. He now stands in the Meeting Room.

In 1948 a resident priest, *Fr. Walter Costello*, was appointed for a short time and it was during this period that the benches were acquired.

1949 - 1966

Growth Of The Parish

From 1949 - 1965 the little Church on Bowden Hill and its increasing number of parishioners were cared for by the priests from Exeter.

In 1966

"While preparing for the St. Boniface Centennial celebrations with *Bishop Grimshaw*, I had the opportunity of drawing his Lordship's attention to the desirability of a permanent memorial to the event, preferably in the form of a new church in Crediton, to take the place of the poor, tumble-down chapel."

"Bishop Grimshaw fully agreed in principle but as he was shortly leaving the Plymouth diocese for the Birmingham diocese he could not see his way to undertaking such a task. The idea however was launched and we are now able to announce that a very suitable site has recently been acquired for a new church in Crediton".

Dom John Stephan (of Buckfast Abbey)
Buckfast Chronicle

By appealing to the generosity of the German Bishops, *Dom John Stephan* raised £4,000 towards the cost of the new church.

1966

The Exeter Chaplaincy Connection

In 1966 the Exeter University Chaplaincy was created with *Fr. George Hay* as University Chaplain and also Priest-in-Charge at Crediton. With this new appointment *Fr. Hay* was to become the prime mover in the building of the new church.

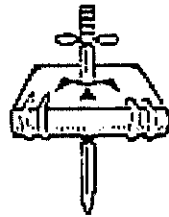


1968

The New Church

In October 1968 work was started on the new church. The Architects were Charles Ware and Son of Exeter and the Contractors were Berry and Vincent of Crediton. The cost of the church was £22,975. Berry and Vincent had never before been asked to build a church. The church design united three sections. An area for worship; the Shrine of St. Boniface and the Meeting Room all interconnected by folding and sliding doors.

The foundation stone donated by the Bishop of Fulda, was laid and blessed by Bishop Cyril Restieaux of Plymouth on March 29th 1969. In his letter the Bishop of Fulda wrote, "It was for me a very special joy to be able to provide the foundation stone for the new church of St. Boniface at Crediton, his birthplace. This stone, which has been carefully carved and engraved, came from the Ratgar Basilica, the magnificent burial place of St. Boniface which was built at the beginning of the ninth century. The choice of this stone seemed to me particularly appropriate to mark the connection between Fulda and Crediton".



(continued) The New Church

A stone from the pre-reformation parish church of the Holy Cross in Crediton was given by the *Rev, Anthony Bray*, Vicar of Crediton. The stone was built into the cornerstone in the arch of the baptistry window thus linking the new church with the past in Crediton and showing that St. Boniface is part of our common Christian heritage.

The St. Boniface shrine relief is in fibre glass and was done by *Kenneth Carter*, head of the Department of sculpture at Exeter College of Art. It depicts the felling of the oak tree at Geismar and conveys the moment with all its movement, the force of the blow, the swirling of garments and the shock of the onlookers.

The Stations of the Cross in mosaic were designed by *Arthur Goodwin*, Vice Principal of Exeter College of Art. In 1994 we added a fifteenth depicting the Meal at Emmaus. This was kindly donated in memory of the late Lord and Lady Iddesleigh who were parishioners

(continued)
The New Church

The Virgin and Child statue is in fibreglass and is also the work of *Kenneth Carter*.

The Baptistry Window was the work of *Dom Charles* of Buckfast Abbey and donated to the church by the Abbey. The design depicts water and grace.

The Font, taken from the old church, was made by *John Ponting*, a parishioner.

The Lectern and the two presidential chairs were made by a parishioner, *Mr. George Ollerenshaw*, who was a retired carpenter.

The Spire is 33ft. tall and is made of fibreglass. It was placed in position by helicopter and crane on September 22nd 1969.

The wooden Processional Cross was presented by *Lt. Commander F.W.Hay*, Fr Hay's brother.

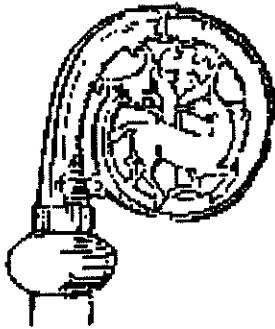
The Crucifix over the altar was made by *Mr Hulbert* of Combe Down, Bath whose widow asked her neighbour if he knew of anyone who would want it. The neighbour, *Mr. Lawrence Gainey*, whose parents, three sisters and their families were all parishioners and very involved in raising funds for the new church, asked Fr. Hay who was delighted to accept it.

(continued)

The New Church

The Meeting Room with its attractive folding doors plays an important role in the social life of the parish and can be used as an extension to the main church when necessary.

The Church was opened and blessed by the Bishop of Plymouth, Cyril Restieaux, on October 3rd 1969.



The Consecration of the church took place on October 3rd 1980 and was a great day. The debt to the diocese had been cleared and the parish had grown steadily from fourteen people to almost 250.

1980 - 2000

The Parish of St. Boniface, Crediton

The years from 1980 to 2000 have seen the parish grow and develop. We are no longer 'the new church' but an integral, important and respected part of the Christian scene in Crediton. We have become a place of pilgrimage for German and Dutch pilgrims who arrive by the coachload each year and for British pilgrims with an interest in St. Boniface. That this has been achieved is due to the work and prayers of many past parishioners and priests and to them we owe a tremendous debt of gratitude. With the help of God we will continue their work into the future.



Priests

1914 - 2000

Many priests have been instrumental in making our parish what it is today. From just over a dozen Catholics in the early days we now number approximately 250. Each priest has brought his own particular strength to the parish and we are grateful to them all.

- 1914-18** Canon Shepherd
- 1919-29** Fr. Barney
- 1947-48** Fr. McNamee (Served from Exeter)
- 1948-50** Fr. Walter Costello (Served from Exeter)
- 1950-51** Fr. Walsh (Served from Exeter)
- 1950-51** Fr. Magee (Served from Exeter)
- 1951-55** Mgr. Dewey (Served from Exeter)
- 1951-55** Fr. Wiseman (Served from Exeter)
- 1955-62** Canon Tobin (Served from Exeter)
- 1962-64** Fr. Walker (Served from Exeter)
- 1965-66** Fr. M. Murphy (Served from Exeter)
- 1966-78** Fr. George Hay (Also Chaplain at University)
- 1978-85** Fr. Reg. Riley S.M. (Also Chaplain at University)
- 1985-86** Fr. James Courtney O.S.B.
(Covering while Rev Riley recovered from a road accident.)
- 1986-89** Fr. Gerard Wilberforce (Also Chaplain at University)
- 1989-91** Fr. Gerard Gillespie (Curate at Exeter)
- 1991-92** Fr. Harry Doyle (Served from Exeter)
- 1992-94** Mgr. George Hay
(Also Parish Priest at Okehampton)
- 1994-96** Fr. Gerry Gillespie
- 1996-98** Fr. Daniel FitzGerald (Also Chaplain at University)
- 1998** Fr. Paul Cummins (Also Chaplain at University)
- to date**
-

Hymn For St. Boniface

The Father of all peoples saw an English child at play.
His gentle neighbours loved the lad and taught him how to pray.
Then God in mercy bade him come and follow in his way,
and they praise the Lord in Crediton, Alleluia, Alleluia.

The Son came down among us to die on Calvary,
And since they nailed Him on the Cross we need no other tree.
So Boniface cut down the oak and set the pagans free,
and they praise the Lord in Germany, Alleluia, Alleluia.

The Spirit comes to strengthen, He guides and understands.
At Pentecost He gave us fire to carry to all lands.
To Frisia came Boniface with consecrated hands,
and they praise the Lord in Holland, Alleluia, Alleluia.

O Trinity Eternal, he made Your power known.
His love and faith can go with us and make us more Your Own;
That sharing in his final gift, the glorious martyr's crown,
We may praise the Lord in Heaven, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Written for the opening of the new church in 1969

Words: Henry Northcote, Earl of Iddesleigh

Tune: "Wynfrith" - Fr Bede Davis and Dom Sebastian Wolff O.S.B.

Compiled by Hilary Davies 1999

St. Boniface Roman Catholic Church, Crediton, Devon