

"I Remember..."



The following article was written by Ron Hopkins, a lifelong parishioner, after celebrating the Sixtieth Anniversary of his Wedding to Edith. Sadly, Ronnie died in January 2009. This article will remain here in tribute and in thanks.

As time goes by, you must remember this, and so the song goes on...

...and so I remember Saturday October 20th 1945, the time three o'clock, the place St Mary and St Philip Neri's Roman Catholic Church, Radcliffe - that was the day I married my girlfriend of three years, Edith. I remember it rained all day; the Parish Priest at the time was the Rev Dr Coupe and the curate Fr Richard Wilkinson who took the service.

The church was rather a dark place because on the walls were huge oil paintings of the Stations of the Cross, and I think because of them the windows were pushed nearly to the ceiling to get the pictures in. That's only my opinion, of course I could be wrong, but anyway the paintings were very dark. There were only thirteen stations, and they came, I believe, from Salford Cathedral. There were two aisles in the church but no centre one, so it was very difficult to walk side by side, so you can imagine one person was in front of the other, but the wedding was very good.

Edith and I got quite involved in some events going on in the church and I remember being involved in the Children's Concert Party organised by Mr Leo Carter and Mrs Carter and of course Marion who played the piano. I must say we were very successful; we travelled quite a far distance from Radcliffe performing at schools, halls and hospitals as far away as Longridge, Bacup and others in the Manchester area. This we did for some time, and we would take the children along with Father Wilkinson of course for a treat to the seaside, (Cleveleys I think), always very enjoyable.



Time went by and in 1948 Dr Coupe became very ill and died. A new parish priest, Father Tom Davies from Wigan, came along and of course things began to change. There were changes in the church, the old benches were taken out and new ones were put in, this time with a centre aisle, which was much better. Also I remember the old stations were taken down, leaving just bare brick, walls. However, it was eventually plastered and new Station of the Cross were put up (the ones we still have today). A French priest came about that time and blessed the Stations of the Cross putting a small cross at the top of each station. I can't remember his name but he stayed with us for a few weeks. I think the curate round about that time was Father Barrett.

Next to the church at that time (that would be during the fifties) there were two rather large houses which Father Davies had converted into a hall, so it was used by various organisations for meeting, concerts, and many social events.



Many curates came to St Mary's during Father Davies' time, but I can't remember all of them, but I do remember two others very well. It must have been around about the late fifties, early sixties when they came. Their names were Father O'Keefe and Father O'Hara. They organised quite a number of events, the football pool was one which became very successful!

Father O'Hara was very interested in singing so he was involved with the choir, and at that time I too became involved. He also organised the piety stall and the hall next door (as we called it) was used for that purpose. Edith and I helped to run it then, back in 1964, something we still do today.

There were three priests here at that time, but not for very long, maybe only two years or so before Father O'Keefe was moved to another parish in the Manchester area. During Father O'Hara's time here changes were happening in the church, one being that the mass would be said in English rather than Latin. This was welcomed by many converts (Edith was very pleased) but there were some who were sorry to see the Latin to go. However soon after that, Father O'Hara was moved to another parish, and in 1965 Father Davies became very ill and died. Everything was set to change in St Mary and St Phillip Neri's church. New parish priest, new curate and of course new housekeeper.

The new parish priest was Father John Curran, the new curate Father McIver from Whalley Range and the new housekeeper and cook was Vera. Father Curran was very interested in St Mary's club in Pine Street and also in sport. Father McIver also became involved in the club. So time went by and Father McIver left St Mary's and we gained a new curate; in fact, there were many curates came and went but I can't remember the names of them all. I do, however, remember the names of three of them, Father Sefton, Father Murphy and Father Griffin.

In 1976 the church was set to be refurbished; the altar was moved so that the priest was facing the people, the church was decorated and at the back of the church the floor was raised (I'm not sure why). Also the two small side altars were taken down and put on the sanctuary, the statues were Our Lady on the right hand side and Saint Joseph on the left. Father Sefton was the curate at the time of the alterations but of course he moved on and I think Father Murphy came for a short time after that.

Then along came Father Griffin who was to stay with us for quite a while. I remember he was the priest who organised the readers, that was in the late seventies, early eighties. At that time the

congregation was asked to take part in the readings, so some of us volunteered, and I remember that I was the first lay reader at St Mary's.

And so time went by. Father Griffin left us and along came Father John Daily, but he only stayed with us for twelve months or maybe less, before leaving to join the RAF as Chaplin.

So it was change again and in 1985 along came Father Draine who was very interested in music. He played the guitar, and music played a large part in the mass, which was good. He wanted the platform at the back pulled down (as I said earlier I don't know why it was put there in the first place) and so asked a few of us if we would help him. We set to work, pulled it down and retiled the floor as it had been.

Father Draine also decided he would like to take a pilgrimage to Lourdes and asked me if I would help him with it, so that's what I did. About twenty-seven people signed up to go to but Father Draine was moved from Radcliffe before the pilgrimage took place, so I was left to carry on with it. I might add it was a very successful trip!



And so in 1986 we welcomed Father John Coe, another priest who was also interested in music, which was good. Not a lot was happening at this time, but the church was carpeted during Fr Coe's stay. We also had a third priest in the parish, Father Edmund Adamus, who stayed on with us after Father Coe moved to St Boniface's in Lower Broughton, Manchester.

The Football pool was still carrying on during this time and once a year Father Curran would have a party and dance at the drill hall in Radcliffe for all the helpers and friends. They were well attended and very successful and involved helpers from other organisations as well. The football pool was very profitable over the years and made a great deal of money for the church.

Father Adamus stayed at St Mary's for at least five years I think, and again we were lucky to have a priest who was quite interested in music. So the choir continued which was good. I remember we had mass up at school with both Father Curran and Father Adamus saying the mass; this was also very good for the parish, the children being able to take part.

I remember we visited Our Lady's shrine at Ladywell, Preston on quite a few occasions during Father Adamus' stay with us, and on two occasions he organised pilgrimages to Knock in Ireland. However, time goes by, and so Father Adamus left St Mary's to take up an appointment as secretary to the Bishop and later Chaplain to the Manchester College of Music.

By now the year was 1995 and of course it was time for Father Curran to retire. He had been parish priest at St Mary's for thirty years, which was quite a long time. We had a celebration at the Civic Hall in Radcliffe, attended by many parishioners and quite a few priests of the Diocese. One of these was Monsignor Peter Wilkinson, the new parish priest of St Mary's. The new curate was Father Mark Harold.

During Mgr Wilkinson's stay at St Mary's a number of alterations were made; the altar railings were moved, a shrine was built to Our Lady at the back of the church and florescent lights put in during

the 1976 refurbishment were removed. So during his short stay with us, which was about 12 months, quite a few alterations to the church took place.

Father Mark left St Mary's shortly after Mgr Wilkinson, so once again it was all change at St Mary's and St Philip Neri. The parish eagerly awaited the arrival of a new parish priest, hoping that he would stay with us for a long time.

On October 25th, I think, along came Father James Manock a young priest, and two weeks later another young priest arrived, Father Karl Rozzo. I remember the headlines in the local paper 'Heavens above, don't they look so young.' This was something to look forward to, two young priests with new ideas!

Also during this period two people from the parish organised a walking group called the Saints and Sinners, which proved to be very successful and a good number of people took part. We walked for miles over the countryside and I remember once walking about ten miles and finishing in the Bronte Country. It didn't matter what the weather was like, hail, rain or snow we still walked and walked and had soggy butties for lunch, but it was a great Sunday out once a month.

Father Rozzo didn't stay at St Mary's for very long, but moved on to a parish in Wales. We did go to visit him at Bala two or three times which was very enjoyable.



Father Manock was now on his own looking after a rather large parish, and some changes did take place - new ideas etc which were very welcome. Here was a man very interested in music, also a priest who could sing, play the organ and other instruments, was very knowledgeable and therefore good to listen to, and provided us with talks and different services.

Father was a very good organiser, he took us on trips to York, Chester and other places of interest, and even on a pilgrimage to Rome. All in all we had a good parish priest who made everything more interesting, so that was good, but even more interesting was the announcement of a new church for Radcliffe, and that was brilliant news.

And so As Time Goes By we are looking forward to a new St Mary's and St Philip Neri Catholic Church with Father James Manock continuing as parish priest. Please God.

Ron Hopkins.