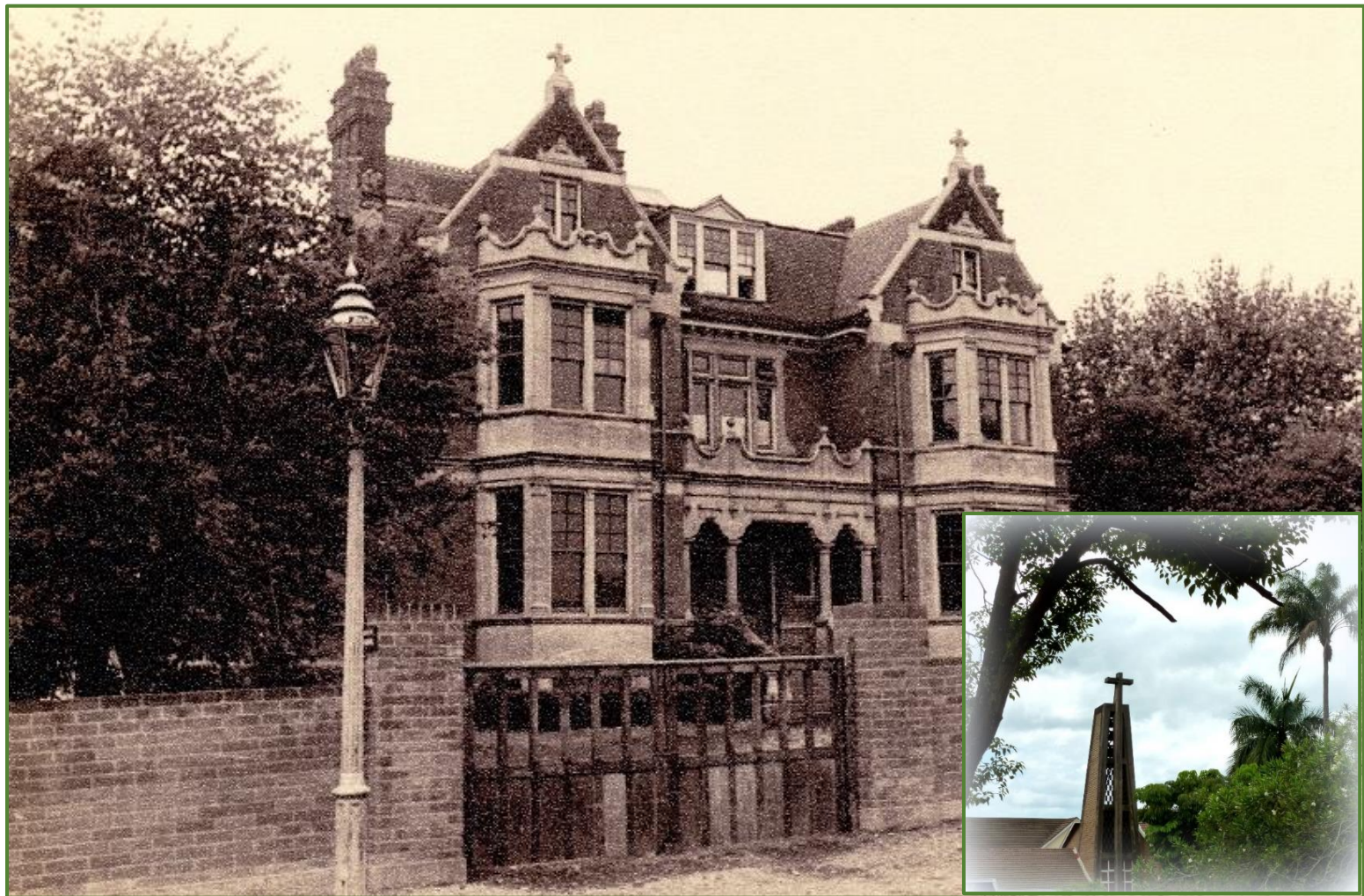


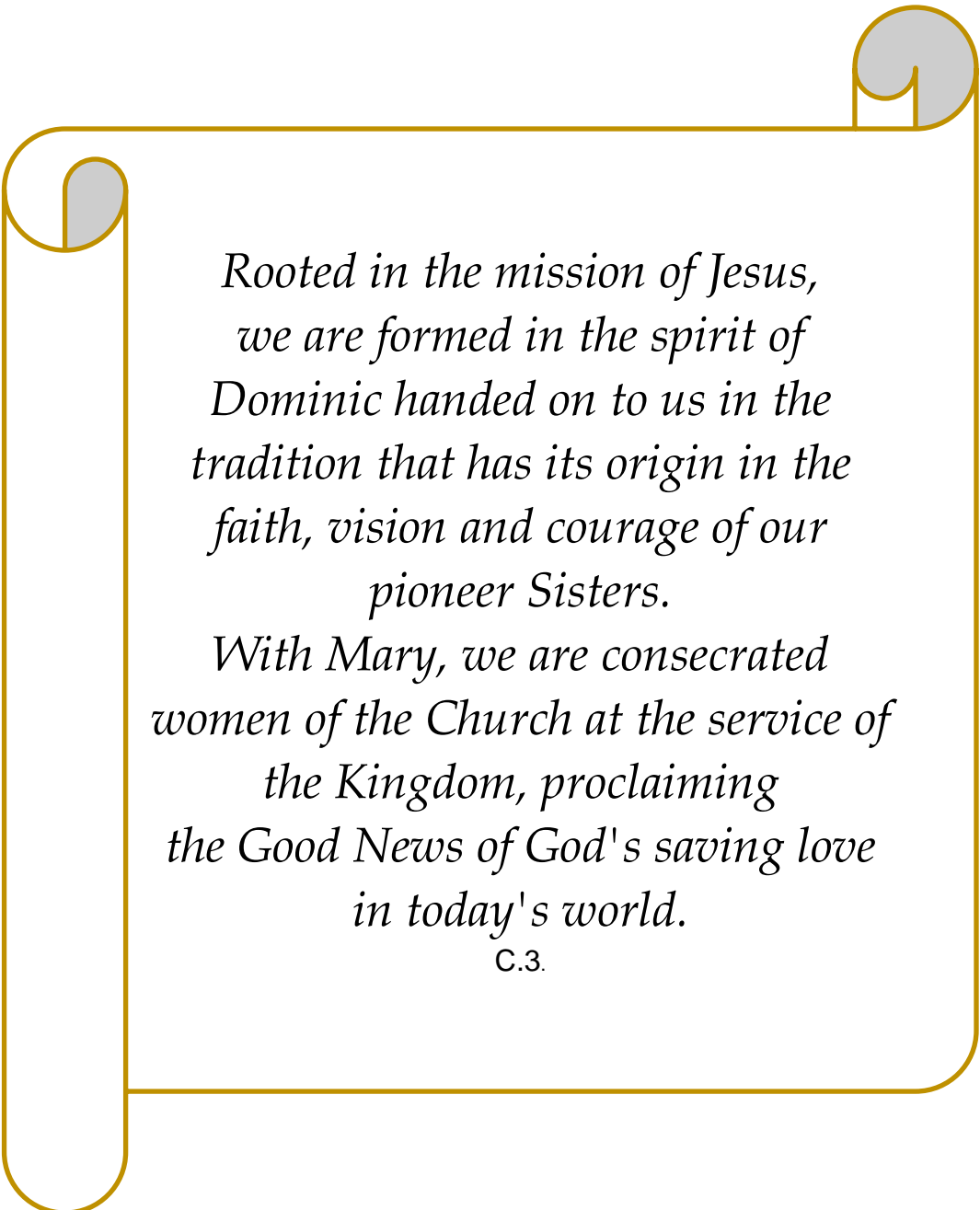
*The Dominican Congregation of St Catherine of Siena
of Oakford, Natal*

England 1921 - 2021



First Convent Chingford, England

Oakford, South Africa



*Rooted in the mission of Jesus,
we are formed in the spirit of
Dominic handed on to us in the
tradition that has its origin in the
faith, vision and courage of our
pioneer Sisters.*

*With Mary, we are consecrated
women of the Church at the service of
the Kingdom, proclaiming
the Good News of God's saving love
in today's world.*

C.3.

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CELEBRATING ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SERVICE

In 2021 the Dominican Congregation of Saint Catherine of Siena of Oakford, Natal commemorates the centenary of its presence in England. It was on the 10 January 1921 after many delays that the first four Sisters finally moved into the house at 27 Forest View, Chingford, which was to become the Convent of the Holy Rosary. Bishop Doubleday and his vicar Monsignor O'Grady were supportive of the Sisters in their times of challenge around the initial acquisition and setting up of the house and the development of educational opportunities for pupils at the schools that were established.



Srs Declan, Xavier, Angela, Mother Joseph
Monsignor O'Grady and Bishop Doubleday,
1921

In 1924 the Apostolic Delegate in South Africa working towards one novitiate for Dominican Congregations in Southern Africa applied to Rome to have Chingford approved for the Oakford, King Williamstown, and Rhodesian¹ Dominican Congregations. Permission was received in April, and in September Sr Margaret Murphy was sent to Chingford as novice mistress. King Williamstown sent one postulant, Rhodesia sent two, but the plan lasted

only three years. In addition, in 1924, the revised Constitutions of the Oakford Dominican Congregation, known at the time as the African Congregation of St Catherine of Siena, came into operation in July. Henceforth, there was only one class of Sister; the lay Sisters were given the same habit as the choir Sisters. In 1947 Mother Reginald Buchler, Prioress General, and Mother Phelim Brady went to Rome in connection with the approval of the Constitutions of the Oakford Congregation. The Constitutions were finally approved in 1948.

There were challenges during the Second World War because of bombings over London and indeed over Chingford itself. Some Sisters and pupils had to be evacuated to Chelmsford, Stinchcombe and Wolverhampton. Pupils of the two schools served by the Sisters in Chingford occupied various buildings at different times, and the Sisters themselves moved into a new convent as they expanded

¹ Also referred to as Salisbury Dominicans in the annals. Today more commonly referred to as the Zimbabwe/Strahlfeld Dominicans.

the property. Eventually, it was not possible to continue with education in Chingford, and youth and retreat work was begun, as well as a guest house.



26 Forest View, St Joseph's Guest House

At different times, there were individual Sisters who left the Congregation or asked to transfer to other Congregations. But perhaps the most painful time in the history of the Oakford Congregation in England was the decision of a group of Sisters to leave Oakford, forming later with the permission of Rome a Diocesan Congregation at Ashurst in the South

of England. Some of those who left the Oakford Congregation were among the younger Sisters and included some novices. Before the final separation, the Oakford Sisters had moved from Chingford after 65 years of dedicated service, and were ministering in Preston, Pinner and Burghwallis.

Commitment to the Dominican life and charism was in evidence right from 1921 when the Sisters from Chingford joined the commemorations in London to mark the seventh centenary of the death of St Dominic. Sisters from Chingford often attended various talks by and gatherings of Dominicans in London and elsewhere. The Sisters in Chipping Norton participated in talks and seminars at Oxford. Community retreats were preached by Dominicans; Dominican bishops, priests and Sisters from England, South Africa and Europe visited Chingford, enjoying the hospitality of the Sisters. Clergy, friends, and former students of the Sisters from South Africa also stopped by, among them Archbishop Denis Hurley of Durban.

Today while several Sisters who served in England are now in South Africa or Germany, there are only two Oakford Sisters living in England, at St Vincent's Nursing Home, Pinner. The presence in England of the Dominican Congregation of Saint Catherine of Siena of Oakford, Natal is drawing to its close. May God reward all those who have laboured in England over the past one hundred years, welcoming into the Kingdom those who have gone ahead, and inspiring those ministering in other parts of the vineyard.

CHINGFORD 1921-1986

Chingford is a district in northeast London in the Borough of Waltham Forest. Historically it was a rural Essex parish, gaining urban district status in 1894. It was known as *Cingeford* in the Domesday Book of 1066.

In September 1918 at a meeting of the General Council at Oakford, *"It was considered an absolute necessity to procure a house in England for the probation of postulants, in order to secure the future existence of our Congregation."* However, it was found in 1918 that the house originally offered for sale in the Plymouth Diocese was unsuitable. The first General Chapter of the Congregation was held in March 1919 and at it there were discussions about the proposed foundation of a probation house in Kingsbridge, Devon, England. Later in 1919 Mother Joseph Ryan and Sr Angela Clare, were in Ireland and met Monsignor O'Grady who was looking for Sisters to open a community in Chingford in the Brentwood Diocese in England. They followed up and met him again at 27 Forest View in Chingford, at the house known then as 'Corriemulzie' (named after a place and river in Scotland). Negotiations were begun with the Council at Oakford but did not go far as the Council vetoed the proposal because of the cost involved. Then came a cable indicating their change of mind. It had been a deep disappointment to Mother Joseph to have to advise Monsignor O'Grady of the first refusal. In January 1920 she summoned up courage to write to him again. His reply was that the property was still open, but he hoped that this time *"it meant business."*



Sr Angela with postulants - 1921

In the General Council Minutes of 16 November 1920, we read *"Permission having been obtained from Rome to borrow £ 2000 for the purpose of completing the sum required for the purchase of the Chingford, London, property, the amount was borrowed from the Vicariate and immediately cabled to London."* Altogether £4500 had been borrowed for the foundation of the probation house according to the Council Minutes of January 1921. Soon after that, it was decided that Genazzano, Noodsberg and Greytown convents should each contribute towards the settling of the debt.

From June 1920 to January 1921 three Oakford Sisters, Mother Joseph, and Sisters Xavier and Angela, were accommodated at Nazareth House in Hammersmith, London. On the 10 January 1921 they set out for Corriemulzie. Sr Declan Hannigan returned from Ireland. God sent kind friends, a paying guest lent the sisters two beds, someone provided lunch. Sisters Angela and Declan slept on mattresses on the floor (*"the delights of pioneering"* said Mother Joseph.) The Sisters were soon able to attend daily Mass at St Egbert's, and Sunday Mass in the little Church, which after Easter was utilised for the school. On 18 April St Dominic's School was begun in the convent. On 22 April Bishop Doubleday of Brentwood and Monsignor O'Grady paid their first visit. And on 30 April, feast of St Catherine of Siena, the first Mass was celebrated in the convent. Four postulants arrived, three of them from Ireland. Mother Joseph returned to South Africa in August 1921 after an absence of over two years. In 1922, after the General Chapter at Oakford, Mother Joseph returned as Prioress to Chingford with Sr Aidan McNulty.



Community, Chingford (undated)

In 1938 at the blessing and opening of the new convent and chapel, Bishop Doubleday recalled the vicissitudes of the Dominican Sisters who had attempted to settle in Chingford 18 years previously. *“I am grateful for the work they have done and am glad to have them in my diocese. I pray they will climb from crag*



Sisters at prayer in the Chingford Chapel

to crag, always higher and that their example and good work may continue to benefit the town of Chingford. I pray that it may go on and prosper.” The altar for the chapel was of South African marble, donated by South Africa House, Trafalgar Square. Sisters Ceslaus Kischka and Marcolina

Blenk travelled in 1939 from Chingford to Neustadt (Germany) on holiday and could not return because of the outbreak of War. In 1945 came news of the death of Mother Joseph Ryan who had founded Chingford. In 1946, Sr Ceslaus returned from Germany.

In 1986 the community left Chingford after 65 years. The last day in Chingford was 30 April 1986.



THE PIONEER SISTERS

Mother Joseph Ryan



was born of Irish parents in Cape Town in 1866. She entered in King Williamstown, received the habit in 1883 and was professed in 1884. She was one of the eight pioneer Sisters who left King Williamstown for Oakford in 1889. She was initially assigned to the African School, and then to St Mary's at Oakford. New recruits were needed for Oakford, and Mother Joseph and Mother Gabriel Foley, the first Prioress General, sailed for Ireland in 1892 in search of postulants. In 1900 on the death of Mother Gabriel, Mother Joseph was appointed Prioress General and held the office until 1922. She founded the convent of Chingford, and after her term of office, she served as Prioress of Chingford for six years. At the General Chapter of 1937,

she was appointed second councillor and secretary general in which offices she served until her death in 1945 in Johannesburg. She was buried in the vault in the cemetery at Oakford in which Mother Gabriel had been laid to rest in 1900.

Sr Declan Hannigan (Bridie)

born in County Waterford in 1893, was one of nine children, three of whom entered the Congregation. She had become a postulant at Oakford in 1913, after having been recruited by Mother Joseph Ryan in Ireland, and being professed in 1914. She was sent to Chingford in 1919 with Mother Xavier Cullen, but had to live for some months in the Ursuline Convent in Waterford, waiting for the house in Chingford to be ready. She used the time to study music, singing, painting and Kindergarten work. She became one of the teachers in Chingford (from 1919-1923). She returned to various houses in South Africa, as teacher, nurse, bursar, superior and general councillor (the last from 1949 until her resignation in 1953). She returned to Chingford in 1961 to work with the elderly ladies at St Joseph's, and died in 1979.

Sr Xavier Cullen (Eileen)

born in Wexford, Ireland, was recruited by Mother Gabriel Foley and Mother Joseph Ryan in 1892, was received at Oakford in 1893 and made final profession in 1894 (at only 18 years old, as possible at the time). Her father said, "*Why go so far away, to such a wild country?*" After twenty-eight years at St Mary's Oakford, she was in Chingford from 1920 to 1923, as part of the negotiating team for Chingford property, and then teaching

initially in the parish church at Chingford. (There was no resident parish priest at the time). She returned as principal to St Mary's, Oakford, and was then sent as a pioneer to Bremersdorp (later Manzini, in what is now eSwatini, formerly Swaziland). She was prioress in Chingford (from 1934) during the Second World War and was evacuated to Stinchcombe with part of the community and some of the pupils. She taught in Stinchcombe, and then again in Chingford. She was recalled to South Africa in 1950 and died in 1963.

Sr Angela Clare (Agnes) was born in Dublin, the eldest of a family of nine children. One of her brothers was the father of Sr Carina Clare. She first went to South Africa in 1897 to join the Newcastle Sisters but returned home as a postulant. In 1899, she met Mother Gabriel Foley in Ireland in search of postulants. (Her aunt Sr Monica Brady was a postulant at Oakford at the time, after also having left the Newcastle Dominicans.) She received the habit in 1900 and made profession in 1901. She was appointed bursar and secretary to Mother Joseph because of previous work in the Post Office. She went with Mother Joseph in 1919 to England in search of a suitable property for a novitiate, and after two years of disappointed hopes the convent in Chingford was bought and occupied in 1921. She spent three years in Chingford, was sent to Neustadt in 1924 and given charge of the postulants. She returned to Chingford in 1928, and in 1929 was recalled to South Africa to various communities. She was involved in the purchase of Melrose House, and the founding of Mazenod (later Koinonia) and Rosary Lodge, the hostels. She died in Johannesburg in 1956 and was buried at Oakford.

Sr Aidan McNulty (Teresa) was born in 1886 in County Armagh, Ireland. In 1917 she began training as a nurse, but did not complete her training. She was recruited for Oakford by Mother Joseph Ryan and left for South Africa in August 1920, completing her novitiate at Montebello, and making first profession on 30 April 1922. She joined Mother Joseph Ryan, just out of office as Prioress General, and left for Chingford where Mother Joseph became the first prioress of Chingford. In 1925, she returned to various communities in South Africa and died in 1971.



CONVENTS IN ENGLAND

- **1921 CHINGFORD: Convent of the Holy Rosary**



27 Forest View, Chingford: first convent and school

A house in Forest View was purchased, the fourth foundation of Mother Joseph Ryan who was later appointed prioress. The first four Sisters arrived in 1921. The first postulants were received the same year. The joint Dominican novitiate, started in 1924, for

Oakford, King and Salisbury (Harare) Dominicans, lasted three years. St Dominic's was a day school for boys and girls from 1921 to 1959, when the buildings were taken over temporarily by St Paul's Secondary School. Various neighbouring properties were acquired over several years.

In 1947, Mother Reginald and Sr Xavier attended the requiem at Bushey of Mother Rose Niland, foundress of the Newcastle Dominican Sisters and a former Oakford Sister.

The formation house and school were later used as a youth centre and a home for the elderly. In 1981, the community was divided. An apostolic visitation followed, and a small group of Sisters moved to Ashurst to run a retreat house owned by the Montfort Fathers. In 1986, when Chingford was sold, the Oakford Sisters moved to Burghwallis.

- **1949 CHIPPING NORTON, Oxford, Convent of St Joseph**

Chipping is from the old English name for market, and so the name “Chipping Norton” means “market town north”.



Chipping Norton: Convent and School

In August 1949, a small diocesan school near Oxford was taken over from the Notre Dame Sisters under Mother Paula Hebel, Prioress General. The first Sisters, from Chingford, were Sisters de Ricci Devereux, Henry Adrian Cain, Rita Browne, Baptist Kögel and Amelia Boyle. The first pontifical high Mass for over a century was celebrated at midnight, Christmas 1951. In April 1952, clocks were advanced by an hour, but as the Sisters had no radio and did not read the papers, they slept in and failed to open the church for Sunday Mass. The parishioners had to waken the Sisters! Good work was done in the school, but there was only one trained Sister teaching. Oakford Sisters were withdrawn in July 1960, and the school was taken over by the Sisters of St Paul.

- **1968 KESWICK**

There are two theories around the name of Keswick: it could mean “a farm where cheese is made” or it could mean “Kell’s place at the bend of the river”. It is situated in north west England in the heart of the Lake District, and is associated with the poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Robert Southey, and William Wordsworth, among others.



The Chapel

In 1966 the National Youth Council seeing the success of Walsingham House asked the Chingford Community to take over the Diocesan Youth House in Keswick; the Lakeside property was however not suitable. The diocese owned Lakeside House and then Castlerigg Manor, operating a youth residential centre. In 1969,

the Sisters moved to the Gate House of Castlerigg Manor from Lakeside House. Sisters worked in Keswick from February 1968 to 1980. The last two Sisters were withdrawn in May 1980.

- **1971 PRESTON**

In Preston from 1971, at the invitation of the bishop of Lancaster Diocese, the Sisters were engaged in youth work and education, parish work in poor areas and the family apostolate. They first lived with the Little Sisters of the Poor and at a rented house in St Joseph's Parish before moving into the Fletcher Road Convent in 1972, providing social outreach, pastoral work, retreats. In 2006 there were three Sisters living in Preston, involved in parish work, nursing at the home of the retired Jesuits, and in work with alcohol addicts. Some Sisters lived at Hawkstone Hall, in Doncaster and at Burghwallis among the residents of the rest home. The Sisters were withdrawn from Preston in 2010.



Preston Chapel

The Anglo-Saxons originally named Preston, and its name is derived from old English, meaning *priest's settlement*. In the Domesday Book, of 1086, it is recorded as "Prestune". It has a strong Catholic history.

- **1981 ASHURST: Convent of St Joseph**

In 1980 seven sisters were given permission to live in the lodge at Chingford, on leave of absence, and in 1981 to establish an “experimental community”. Five Sisters moved to Ashurst from Chingford in 1981 at the invitation of the apostolic visitator and, for a period approved by Rome, to live a deeper commitment to Dominican Life. They ran the St Joseph’s Retreat Centre of the Montfort Fathers. The Sisters re-joined the Oakford Congregation at the end of the experimental period. The convent in Ashurst was purchased by the Oakford Congregation in November 1987 and Veritas Novitiate was opened in 1988. The Sisters again requested separation. In February 1996, the house was transferred to the new Congregation, Dominican Sisters of St Joseph.

- **1983 PINNER: Convent Siena**



St Luke's Parish Church, Pinner

To accommodate the needs of a Sister working as catechetical co-ordinator for Pinner Parish and a Sister teaching at Bushey Dominican School, it was decided to open a house in Pinner in the borough of Harrow. The first community of four, Sisters Carina Clare, Colette Sheckley, Maura Kelly, and Sarah O'Rourke, lived at 32 Love Lane, and in 1989 moved to a bigger house at 34 Love Lane. They were involved in catechetical work, teaching in school, and parish work.

In 2006 three Sisters lived in the house, retired but still involved in the life of the parish. Sr Pamela Embleton, living in Ruislip continued teaching children with severe learning difficulties until her retirement. The last Sisters were withdrawn from 34 Love Lane in 2013 and the remaining two of them are living nearby at St Vincent's Nursing Home.

- **1986 BURGHWALLIS**

St Anne's Rest Home, Burghwallis, was purchased in 1985 from the Sisters of Charity when the Chingford property was sold. The first community was Sisters Gervase Boys, Colette Sheckley, Finbar O'Rourke, Euphrasia Murtagh, Agnes Mary O'Neill, Amelia Boyle, Emma Bechold, Patricia Hannigan, Teresa Thomas, and Bernadette Hurley. In 1988, the house was opened for day groups: priests, sisters, laity confirmation classes, recollection days.



St Anne's Burghwallis

During the eleven years of its existence, the community at Burghwallis was joined by various Sisters for short periods: Sisters Jane Frances Krog, Justina Priess, Claretta Mthalande, Miriam Wilson, Martha Meinert went there from South Africa. In 1993, a board of trustees was established, and the Hallam Caring Services took over the

running of St Anne's. The home was sold to the diocese of Hallam in 1997.

The Sisters were withdrawn in 1998, with some Sisters remaining as residents in the home. Sisters Teresa Thomas, Patricia Hannigan, Agnes Mary O'Neill, Maureen Keane, Finbar O'Rourke and Carina Clare are buried at St Anne's. A plaque to the memory of the Oakford Sisters was erected in 1999.

Burghwallis has a long history; it is mentioned in the *Domesday Book* of 1086. It is in rural south Yorkshire; its name means *the town of the Wallis Family*. In the 1700s the manor house was built, eventually becoming St Anne's Rest Home. The open countryside was once the hunting ground of Robin Hood!

SO HERE WE OAKFORDS ARE, 100 YEARS ON

Mar sin anseo táimid Oakfords 100 bliain ar aghaidh

(Gaelic – simply as Srs Maura and Sarah are both Irish)

Sr. Paula–Mary van der Walt, Congregational Prioress



Our Sisters Brenda Nestor, Maura Kelly, and Sarah O'Rourke each had a challenging journey after they left our Convent 'Siena', at 34 Love Lane, Pinner and finally found themselves in St Vincent's Nursing Home. This Home had previously been run by the Daughters of Charity and our Sisters had made it clear that *this* was where they wanted to retire. Sr Anthony Mawe had been 'at home' here, being given special care for her needs until she was called home to God. Finally, the Daughters of Charity could not continue being responsible for the home and a Board of Trustees took over the institution, working hard at keeping up the good name and wonderful care for the elderly.

Sr Brenda was extremely happy at St Vincent's, as having the Chapel there, and being able to participate in daily Eucharist with Oakford Sisters and all the other religious and residents in the Home was a special privilege for her. The Sisters, while able, participated in the outings and activities, which were provided according to their preferences on the Activities Programme. Our Oakford Sisters have a special way of reaching out to the other residents. Their ministry of presence to the other aged and lonely folks is very attentive and sensitive. Sr Sarah still specializes in making certain that residents and their guests have a cup of tea.

Sr Pamela Embleton visited our Sisters twice a week, and later when she became too ill to continue living on her own and needed care herself, Matron Shiria Halsey suggested we might bring Sr Pamela to St Vincent's. Deeply touching was how Srs Brenda and Sarah were amongst those who kept vigil at Sr Pamela's bedside. Later when Sr Brenda died, it was Sr Sarah who was in attendance.

The Manager, Matron, Staff, and the few remaining Daughters of Charity still living in Pinner, continue to be incredibly caring of our Sisters in St Vincent's. They visit and call in on Feast Days, even taking a small gift at Christmas or Easter. The Parish Priest of St Luke's, Father Robert Plourde, keeps a connection with Srs Sarah and Maura. Then of course, we have Mrs Eileen McLoughlin who



Srs Sarah O'Rourke & Maura Kelly, 2019

calls in to see the Sisters on a regular basis; she ensures they get the items we would normally provide. However, her special treat for our Sisters is when she, Eileen, brings her grandchildren with her to visit the Sisters. This brightens their day greatly!

We are blessed in that our *Partnerships* in England support both Civil and Canonical Law aspects of our *Governance* in England. Even though there are only two Sisters remaining in England we meet all the requirements. The Daughters of Charity offer guidance from the Religious Life aspect in England; and the Business and Finance Administrator of the Daughters of Charity ensures that our Charity is compliant with the laws of the country.

For a hundred years, the Oakford Dominicans have served the people in England, and now as we come to the close of a century of service we thank God and ask for blessings on the services we receive from God's people in England. We also give thanks for God's fidelity to us, and our Sisters' faithful commitment and generous service in the Mission of Jesus.



SOME MEMORIES OF ENGLAND

- **Memories of Keswick, Sr Celia Smit**



The Lodge where the Sisters lived

I spent three and a half happy years in ministry at Castlerigg Manor, Keswick, England between 1976 and 1980. Castlerigg is still the Residential Youth Centre for the Diocese of Lancaster. The Diocesan Residential Youth Service for Lancaster was situated in another place in Keswick, Lakeside House. As that Centre flourished, it became too small

and the Diocese acquired Castlerigg Manor, named after one of the ancient Stone Circles situated nearby. Sr Marie de Lourdes Olivier worked in Lakeside House for some years.

Two other Oakford Dominicans lived at Castlerigg while I was there. Srs Collette Sheckley and Carina Clare. I was a member of the Diocesan Youth Service Team along with a Newcastle Dominican and a Holy Cross Sister, two priests and two young laymen.

Keswick is set in the heart of the English Lake District. The surroundings were so beautiful that, as I gazed at the hills and at Derwentwater - the lake beside which Keswick is situated, I often had to remind myself that I was working! We worked with groups of young people from the Catholic schools in the Diocese and beyond. To prepare the young people for what they would experience at Castlerigg, we visited the schools and Parish Youth Clubs of the Diocese. The school groups usually came Monday to Friday, and the youth club groups at weekends. Weekends would also see groups of adults coming and making Castlerigg their base for walking and climbing on the Fells, as the hills are called locally. During the school holidays we sometimes had groups of mentally and physically challenged people from disadvantaged backgrounds who were brought on holiday by volunteers to give their parents a break.

Our work with school groups took place in the mornings. The afternoons were given to taking the young people walking in the surrounding hills, no matter what the weather. They would be issued with a waterproof and boots, and no excuses – everyone had to go! On return in the late afternoon we would



celebrate the Eucharist in the Chapel. This was a chance for the young people to be exposed to church in a less formal way and express themselves in an age-appropriate manner. In the evenings we had somewhat more light-hearted group work with the young people which also helped them to

reflect on themselves amidst the growing differences and prejudices which were emerging in society. For example, there were not many Asian or African people in the North of England at that time, yet racism was already simmering. On the last night of the course it was traditional to have a Disco and I remember being the Disc Jockey on a few occasions. I became adept at ping-pong and darts as well.

People in their 50s and 60s still talk about the impact that their week at Castlerigg had on them, and about the lessons they learned which have become part of their adult lives. One group of youth had us organise a weekend for their parents because they wanted them to share the experience they had when they were there. I am still in touch with one of these couples.

Castlerigg had a license to sell alcohol and had converted one of the smaller ground floor rooms into a cosy lounge bar in which weekend adult groups could relax and socialise with a pint! Team members, including me, became the bar staff on those occasions. I became skilled at pulling pints and even changing the beer barrels in the cellar! In my first year there I was still in full habit.

My visits to the schools and parishes often took me to Preston where I was able to visit our Sisters and establish a good connection with them. The three of us who formed the Dominican Community at Castlerigg used to visit Chingford together once or twice every year. Sr Collette did some bookkeeping for Castlerigg, and Sr Carina visited people in the local parish area, especially those

who were housebound. Because Sr Collette loved to travel, I took her on a few wonderful holidays. We went once to Torquay, and once to Scotland where we stayed with Sr Domitilla Woods' sister in West Kilbride. On another occasion we went with Sr Carol-Anne Vornhusen to Germany for three weeks, staying with her sister and brothers and a friend of mine. Sr Carol-Anne and I even managed to go to Taizé during that trip, leaving Sr Collette with her brother and sister-in-law.

We have two Sisters buried in Keswick. Sr Alphonsa Rumpel was a cook before I was there. She endeared herself to young people and staff alike and was much loved by all who knew her. Sr Amelia Boyle is the other Oakford Sister buried there. When Chingford was closing, she moved to Preston. She died in Preston and because the Congregation had another grave in Keswick, she is buried there.

When I answered the call to go to England, I felt a bit reluctant, but went in obedience. However, I am eternally grateful for the experience of working in another country, another culture and with a wider group of people. I grew in my understanding of Religious Life in general and of my own call to be a Dominican. I learnt to work in a team and how to relate to people from all walks of life. I made friends and these friendships have grown and deepened over the ensuing years. I learnt skills that were foundational for the facilitation work I did later.

I was also challenged in my own understanding of obedience and authority because at the time there were different views on the way we lived our lives as Oakford Dominicans in England. It was during this time that there were some Sisters moving towards splitting from Oakford. I learnt to trust my own inner voice of authority and made some decisions that were life-changing for me, like deciding not to wear the habit for the ministry of youth work in which I was engaged.

I remember getting very depressed before my 30th birthday. I did not want to leave my 20s. It is with gratitude that I remember my time at Castlerigg and the experience of community which I enjoyed. This was a unique and formative time in my life which I will never forget.

- **Some Memories of my English Experience, Sr Carol Mouat**



Gathering at Burghwallis (undated)

Initially my arrival in England was a shock! I picked up the pain and struggle of all the Sisters because of the Ashurst 'split' in the past. During some difficult and painful encounters with individual Sisters and at Area meetings my initial reaction was 'to return to South Africa immediately'.

I now look back on my eighteen years in England as grace filled. I was privileged to be in leadership for several years and this enabled me to visit all our Convents and Sisters in single living. I soon learnt how to laugh and cry with all my Sisters. Because we were widely scattered, I travelled long distances to the Lake District as Sr Carina Clare and Trudy (a German missionary) had a ministry of prayer in Keswick and worked amongst the poor and destitute. While in Preston, we usually travelled together in community to spend a day with Sr Emma Bechold in Doncaster and visit Sr Euphrasia Murtagh in Burghwallis. In the early days, I accompanied Sr Sarah O'Rourke as we drove to Burghwallis to visit all the elderly Sisters. I still treasure my experience of living with women who 'lived the Oakford spirit.'

Sr Anthony Mawe was an example to me of a woman of faith, she oozed Dominican truth and she lived her Dominican Charism to the full. She has become my own personal saint in heaven. Sr Anthony was a gentle humble woman who only saw the good in people. She ministered to the poor and needy

and nothing was ever too much for her. I wept bitterly when I experienced how much she was called to physical pain and mental suffering. I never ever heard her complain, hence I admired her very much and she will always remain an example to me.

Following on 'job searching' in London after my arrival in England the Lord opened a new ministry for me in *The International Pastoral Centre of Hawkstone Hall*. I am grateful for the permission and encouragement of my Superiors that my Dominican charism was recognised, encouraged, and developed for the benefit of all, both staff and participants. I also received encouragement and support from my Sisters in the United Kingdom. As pastoral team members, we experienced a bond while living and working together. Our daily Mass, Divine Office and meditation together helped to form us as a community. Hawkstone became a welcoming home for all my Oakford Sisters. The many Area meetings and jubilee celebrations of our Sisters were much appreciated. Also, our visiting Sisters were always warmly welcomed by the Redemptorists.

- **My time in England, Sr Martha Meinert**

Chingford

On 19 August 1963, I left Germany for Chingford, England. Chingford was a bigish community with several teachers. They taught locally in a primary school and in Woodford in a high school. This was their mission. Being in England I had to learn the language. Sr Teresa Thomas and a good "Pitman Course" helped me to manage. On 1 August 1964, I began my training as a general nurse at Whipps Cross Hospital in London. In 1967, I completed my training.

Keswick

From the beginning of January 1968 until the end of May 1968, I spent some time in Keswick. The house was used as a youth centre. Father O'Dea had started it. The Sisters working with the priest were Sr Marie de Lourdes Olivier, Sr Alphonsa Rumpel, Sr Loretta Boller and myself. I remember well one weekend when we had a small group of teenage boys in the house. Sr Alphonsa prepared the supper for them. She baked potato pancakes. The boys finished all, much to the delight of Sr Alphonsa! There could have been more potato pancakes because they were so good!

Burghwallis

At the end of May 1968, Sr Loretta and I left for South Africa. When I left South Africa on 19 May 1995, I was asked to go back to England to help Sr Miriam Wilson in Burghwallis. Burghwallis was a home for the elderly. In the community I met Sr Miriam Wilson, Sr Euphrasia Murtagh and Sr Emma Bechold. The Sisters in Burghwallis had a special apostolate, caring for the elderly. For us it was important to meet the elderly on a regular basis, to spend time with them.

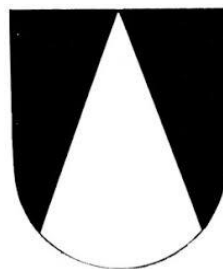


St Helen's Church, Burghwallis,
with acknowledgement

Whenever I had visited one of these elderly ladies, I felt enriched. In Doncaster, not far away from Burghwallis, Sr Emma ran a Catholic Bookshop. Sometimes I visited her; she showed me all the good books she had.

On 15 August 1998, I left England and was transferred to Diessen,

Germany. I am grateful to have spent some time in England and to have got to know the Sisters in the various communities. I'd like to thank each one for their hearty welcome and for the great hospitality. Thank you all and God bless you!



- **My Chingford Story, Sr Prudence Cooper**

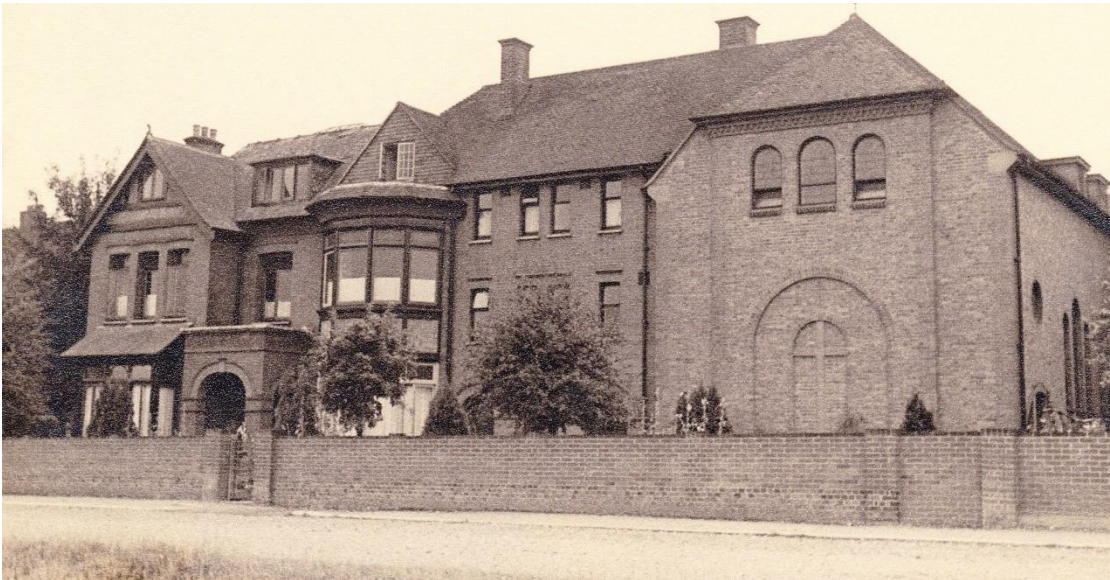


Novices, Chingford

It is sad that we are celebrating 100 Years of Oakford Dominican Life in the United Kingdom, even as we see the end close in sight. However, life is organic and open, and nothing stays the same for long – in the history of the world. So, my story looks at one phase of history of our Congregation with many beautiful memories, and dreams that were ignited in Chingford.

I went on a vocation weekend in 1965, run by Sr Marie de Lourdes and other Sisters. We were about 8-10, mainly young girls of school age. It was a dream come true for me after many years longing to become a Sister. It was a decisive weekend, and I entered at Chingford on 8 September the same year. It was pouring with rain, as it can do in England, and my whole family took me to Chingford for my reception as a postulant. The community was quite large, approximately 20 sisters, and Mother Teresa Thomas was the Prioress. She was a darling and spoilt me in various ways.

Several Sisters were teaching at St Paul's Catholic High School, and some others were teaching at St Mary's Catholic Primary school close by. The Sisters had recently turned Walsingham House into a Youth Centre for the Diocese of Brentwood. Sr Emma and Sr Alphonsa cooked, cleaned, and prepared the Centre for all the groups that came week after week. As a new and solitary postulant, I was assigned to help them. We also had a house for retired ladies, St Joseph's. So, the three properties were next door to each other and interconnected – the Convent Number 23, St Joseph's Number 25 and Walsingham House Number 27 in Forest View, facing the golf course and the nearby forest and hills. Walks there were regular and necessary.



Convent and Chapel, 23 Forest View, Chingford

Walsingham House was the first house purchased by Mother Joseph Ryan for the Congregation in 1921. This was a recruiting house for many young Irish women who came to us over many years. It was never possible to create an Irish foundation. I think there were too many Congregations already in Ireland.

Somewhere in the timetable, I had instructions with Sr Marie de Lourdes. We went to many parishes to do vocation promotion work, and eventually a young Chinese nurse, Lucy, entered to join me. Soon Gisela Wittershagen came as a postulant from Germany on her way to South Africa. They were both with me in the novitiate for 6-8 weeks, until one day Lucy had gone! And very soon Gisela got her visa and flight to South Africa. I was received as a novice on Pentecost Monday in the parish church. Two weeks later, I flew to South Africa and joined the novitiate in Oakford under Sr Dolores Renkel. Other young women entered at different times, but all left at various stages except Sr Bernadette Hurley and me.

A novitiate was re-opened in Chingford. After several years, this ended sadly. Most of those young Sisters left us, and a major division in the Congregation in England took place. Some Sisters went to Ashurst in Hampshire in the South of England, and eventually became an independent Congregation – Dominicans of St Joseph – where they are today. The disruption was major for the town of Chingford and eventually we discerned it was better to move elsewhere, to Burghwallis.

- **From Chingford to Burghwallis and Preston, Sr Bernadette Hurley**

After much soul-searching and with help from facilitators, we began the process of discernment with guidance from Sr Marie de Lourdes. We, Sisters Marie de Lourdes, Euphrasia, Prudence, Eileen, Bernadette, Maureen, Patricia, Agnes Mary, Finbar, Collette, Sarah, Anthony, and Maura were all united in our decision to leave Chingford and move to Burghwallis.



Convent, Fletcher Road, Preston

Burghwallis

1 May was the official date on which we took over Burghwallis. A week prior to that Sr Eileen and I drove a car packed to capacity to Burghwallis to be present at the off-loading of lorries in which everything was packed, including the



A priest's "Hidey Hole",
now a place of devotion

kitchen sink! (There were some plans to extend the existing building). Burghwallis is situated in a semi-rural area eight miles north of Doncaster. The building contains a priest's "hidey hole" from the days of the Reformation. Adjacent to the property is an Anglican Church over a thousand years old and steeped in history. St Helen is said to have passed through there.

Getting adjusted to the surroundings and routine was a huge challenge. Dorothy X, a very prim and proper lady, was one of the first to be served breakfast in her room. One of the carers called her Dotti X. On hearing this Dorothy said, "*I don't care what she calls me, she takes care of me!*" One of the residents locked herself in the spare bedroom of the convent. When asked why she did not open the door she said she was told not to open the door to strangers! We inherited the peacock, Gerry, with whom I fell in love. (Gerry was also the name of the parish priest

and the dean!). Not everyone liked Gerry, the peacock, because of the racket he made at 4h00, but at the magnificent sight of the glory of his full plumage, the noise he made was perhaps forgotten! We later got two peahens to keep Gerry company. They escaped and Sr Gervase was seen running after them with a sheet! Someone else took a neighbour's ladder in the hope of catching them.

A priority was the care of our elderly sisters which was fulfilled at Burghwallis in abundance. The spiritual and physical needs of the sisters were met and having them living in the same building with us was an asset.

Preston

From the money obtained from the sale of Chingford the house in Preston was purchased. Purpose built, it was just one mile from the town, and five minutes' walk from St Joseph's Parish Church, so it was very central. I lived there from 1983 to 1985, and again from 2000-2008. Preston had been known as Priesttown and its symbol, the lamb, was seen on old buildings, pillars, and buses. The Jesuits had erected the first lamp in the town. There were many churches and many religious congregations. In the early 1980s Preston was alive and full of buzz. The people were and are very friendly, full of warmth.



Sr Maureen was parish Sister at St Gregory's, and Sisters Sarah, Cabrini and Prudence taught in the local schools. Our conference room was used once as a crèche by Sr Emma, and for prayer meetings and meetings of the handicapped. Sr Joachim did great work visiting the housebound, as did Sr Maura at a later stage. I ministered during my first time in Preston in the hospital in town, and during the second time I worked in two nursing homes, doing both day and night duty. Later I worked full-time for the Jesuits.

When I returned to Preston after being away from it, the number of churchgoers had dropped drastically, churches had to be amalgamated, and many convents had closed. What also struck me was that the dialect which I loved hearing was fading fast, and even the local people admitted that to me. Sr Maura ministered to parishioners and the housebound, Sr Prudence was teaching and counselling part time. Sr Carol, while based in Preston, ministered at Hawkstone Hall. Sr Carina lived in Keswick and was planning to start a house of prayer.

- **Memories of Burghwallis, Sr Justina Priess**



Sr Anne's Burghwallis, with acknowledgement

Burghwallis

There is a knock at the door. I respond with a cheerful, "Come in," but instead of someone stepping into the office, a stranger almost as tall as the door frame remains on the other side of the threshold and greets me. "Good morning. Where have I arrived? What is this remarkable place?" "A remarkable place indeed," I respond, while I walk towards him and motion him in. "Can we have a look around the outside first? I am simply fascinated by the architecture, the beautiful ancient trees, and, of course, the little church just off the wrought iron gate on the left." As we walk towards the far end of the spacious park, he introduces himself as a salesman for soaps and detergents, and I explain to him that this is St Anne's Rest Home for elderly ladies who find independent living just a bit too difficult to manage by themselves. On arrival, most of them are not yet ready for a care home with 24/7 care givers and all services provided. I tell him some of the life stories of our residents.

He is particularly intrigued by Mrs Brown's reasons for coming to St. Anne's. She was by herself as she drove in one day and stopped her green VW Beetle at the main door. "I see, you take ladies only," she starts the conversation after a short greeting. "Must one be single or widowed or just not married anymore?" I notice that she is nervous, and I help her along into the next stage of the conversation. "Sister, we have been married for 57 years, and my husband is

still alive. Must I get my marriage annulled if I want to live here?" "Why would you want to do a thing like that? The church has specific criteria for the process called an annulment. I'm sure your situation would not fit these." With some degree of embarrassment, she explains that she and her husband Freddy have been a peaceful, loving couple all their lives. However, "with an unusually quick onset of frailty, forgetfulness and other challenges of old age, our home has become a daily battle-field. We no longer seem able to speak civilly to each other, we blame each other, and at times, the neighbours can even hear us scream at each other. We simply need to get out of each other's way, and FAST." "That seems your real predicament, dear Mrs Brown; and with this I'm almost sure we can help you." We continued our conversation for another ten minutes or so; and a lasting solution is found: Mr Brown agreed to move into St. Michael's Care Home down the road, and Mrs Brown came to St Anne's. Whenever the weather allowed it, Freddy's afternoon walk brought him to St. Anne's, where he and his wife would sit on a garden bench, holding hands and telling stories of the good old days. With their daily troubles being taken care of by others, both these dear old people could continue to live their lives in love and peace and were an example to others of *'love till death doth us part.'*

"You are doing people a great service here," my visitor replies. "Not only the elderly themselves, but also the younger generation with their own families at home must experience this as a great relief. With people living into their eighties and nineties these days, the need for care homes like yours is increasing constantly. How many residents can you take?" We chat for a little longer while moving past the old Anne-Family Cemetery and towards the newer section of the burial grounds, where the Daughters of Charity Sisters and later the Congregation of the Oakford Dominican Sisters have buried their dead. "This is hallowed ground," he muses reflectively. "Let me tell you what my first impression was as I arrived at your driveway: I came off the York highway and followed the country road marked Skellow. I felt I was leaving the present behind and was entering some sacred grove of at least 400 years ago. The scent-filled silence, the ancient walls and trees of by-gone centuries, the harmony between the few buildings, and their surroundings, all of it tells of hallowed ground and a history of dignity, respect and tranquillity." "Yes, I respond as we walk inside for a cup of tea, "it's not for nothing that this is a registered heritage site."

Sister Euphrasia



A Sister I remember well from my time in Burghwallis was Sr Euphrasia Murtagh. Born in 1927, she was not quite 65 years of age on my arrival at St Anne's. This made her not old enough to be a resident, and just a bit over the age to be an assistant carer. So, she was both. From soon after breakfast till just before the prayer bell called us to the chapel for Vespers, you could expect to meet Sr Euphrasia coming along the corridor from somewhere, on her way to someone. She was known for her ever-willing readiness to give a helping hand. For residents whose handwriting had gone a bit too shaky, she would address the envelopes and get their letters ready for the mail. Those who could not handle the curlers in their hair or the mascara for their make-up, she would assist in getting a little youthful beauty back into their wrinkled faces. She was an angel of patience when Marjory, a resident from the nearby village, became more and more frail after having been at St Anne's for several years. Marjory just didn't want to ever leave St Anne's, even though all of us knew that this would happen, should the district nurse assess her as "too frail for ordinary care." Sr Euphrasia would do anything to make sure that this diagnosis was never applied to Marjory. Not a hair was out of place, everything in the patient's room was in its proper place, and, provided the nursing sister had just monitored the automatic morphine implant on time, Marjory was ready for that half-sleepy smile typical of people whose pain will be controlled by nothing else but morphine. Thanks to Sr Euphrasia's care, Marjory could remain at St Anne's until one morning she did not wake up anymore.

Sr Euphrasia loved taking someone round the oval for a walk or visiting one of the graveyards in the grounds while saying that extra rosary. She would sit at the back of the sun-veranda and watch the gorgeous shows put on by Gerry the peacock or admire the blossoming forsythia against the old stonewall. Although "typically Irish" in many ways, I cannot ever remember Sr Euphrasia telling those familiar Irish stories. She was a rather quiet lady, tall, slender and always dressed in her impeccably clean habit, long rosary and shiny shoes with those elegant half-high heels, and, of course, a neat black handbag, if there was reason to go out some place.

SISTERS 2020



Sr Bernadette Hurley assists with nursing at Villa Assumpta/Siena, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

Sr Carol Mouat works at St Dominic's Retreat Centre, Bluff, Durban, South Africa, doing retreat work and giving spiritual direction.



Sr Cecilia Smit is local prioress for the Sisters at Villa Assumpta/Siena, and Director of the home for the elderly, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.



Sr Claretta Mthlane lives in retirement at Villa Assumpta/Siena, home for the elderly, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

Sr Emma Bechold lives in retirement at the Caritas-Seniorenzentrum St Martin, Lohr, Germany.



Sr Justina Priess lives in active retirement in at Riverside Park, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

Sr Kieran Delahunty lives in retirement at Villa Assumpta/Siena, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.





Sr Martha Meinert (formerly Sr Henrietta) is resident at Missionshaus St Joseph, Neustadt am Main, Germany.



Sr Maura Kelly (formerly Sr Albert) lives in retirement at St Vincent's Nursing Home, Pinner, England.



Sr Prudence Cooper does retreat work, spiritual direction and counselling at St Dominic's House of Prayer, Durban South Africa.



Sr Sarah O'Rourke lives in retirement at St Vincent's Nursing Home, Pinner, England.

SISTERS WHO WERE IN ENGLAND BETWEEN 1921-2020

DECEASED SISTERS:

- | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Agnes Mary O'Neill | 30. Edeltrudis Kast | 56. Maura Mullany |
| 2. Aidan McNulty | 31. Emmanuel Bosch | 57. Maureen Keane
(Sr Fidelma) |
| 3. Alberta Cahill | 32. Euphrasia Murtagh | 58. Michael Kennedy |
| 4. Albertina Eibel | 33. Felix Weth | 59. Miriam Wilson |
| 5. Alphonsa Rumpel | 34. Finbar O'Rourke | 60. Nepomucene
Reisacher |
| 6. Amelia Boyle | 35. Gerard Twomey | 61. Olive Farrell |
| 7. Angela Clare | 36. Gervase Boys | 62. Osanna Donnelly |
| 8. Anthony Mawe | 37. Gonzaga O'Brien | 63. Pamela Embleton
(Sr Monica) |
| 9. Aquinas Caples | 38. Henry Adrian Cain | 64. Patricia Hannigan |
| 10. Austin Mintern | 39. Hermengild
Burkhardt | 65. Phelim Brady |
| 11. Baptist Kögel | 40. Honoria Straub | 66. Philomena Caples |
| 12. Benignus McGovern | 41. Ita Mullins | 67. Praxedis Will |
| 13. Bernadine Mintern | 42. Jane Frances Krog | 68. Reginald Buchler |
| 14. Brenda Nestor | 43. Joachima Seeberger | 69. Regis O'Carroll |
| 15. Brigid Barry | 44. John Ogilvie Cardiff | 70. Remigia
Kirchgaesser |
| 16. Carina Clare | 45. Joseph Ryan | 71. Ruth Niessen |
| 17. Carmel Williams | 46. Loretta Boller | 72. Salesia Nickel |
| 18. Ceslaus Kischka | 47. Louis Marie James | 73. Scholastica Cullen |
| 19. Christopher Ortner | 48. Magdalen Brennan | 74. Tarcissius Hawkes |
| 20. Clare Trevail | 49. Magdalena Daus | 75. Teresa Thomas |
| 21. Colette Sheckley | 50. Malachy McCauley | 76. Thomas Killeen |
| 22. Colmcille Duignan | 51. Marcolina Blenk | 77. Ursula Hannigan |
| 23. Columba Monahan | 52. Margaret Mary
Sexton | 78. Xavier Cullen |
| 24. De Ricci Devereux | 53. Margaret Murphy | |
| 25. Declan Hannigan | 54. Marie de Lourdes
Olivier | |
| 26. Diana Stenger | 55. Maris Stella Chadwick | |

SISTERS WHO TRANSFERRED TO OTHER CONGREGATIONS:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 79. Ariberta Hennemann | 85. Margarita Schwind |
| 80. Berthilla Heil | 86. Maria Natella |
| 81. Cabrini Dobey | 87. Martin-Marie
Richardson |
| 82. Clare Marie Flynn | 88. Michelle Bernadette
Hawkes |
| 83. Dominic Hermolle | |
| 84. Julie Marsh-Collins | |

PROFESSED SISTERS WHO LEFT THE CONGREGATION /WERE DISPENSED FROM VOWS:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| 89. Anna-Maria Hugo | 93. Enda Delahunty |
| 90. Catherine Laboure
Abbot | 94. Johanna Rodl |
| 91. Columba Herlihy | 95. Judith Pippet |
| 92. Elaine-Marie Timmins | 96. Peter Friars |
| | 97. Theresina Kogel |



800th Anniversary of the Death of St Dominic



Dominican Congregation of Saint Catherine of Siena of Oakford, Natal
P.O. Box 448
Bedfordview 2008
South Africa

