

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN RAINHAM 1921-2000

IN THE BEGINNING

The first mention of Rainham in the Diocesan archives comes in a report, dated May 8th 1923, following a visitation of Gillingham by Bishop Amigo where Canon Thomas McMahon was parish priest. Bishop Amigo writes:-

"I am very pleased that we have been able to help by giving the site for Rainham. You have a monthly Mass at Mr Lynch's and I shall be glad if you can arrange for one every Sunday for a time, letting me know after a few months whether it is worthwhile continuing."

The site given for Rainham, quoted by Bishop Amigo, is the same plot on which our beautiful church, dedicated to St Thomas of Canterbury, now stands. The Conveyance of the plot to the Diocesan Trustees is dated 31st October 1921; and shows that the plot, measuring 200' by 108' was bordered on the Rainham side by land owned by the Rainham Tennis Club and on the Gillingham side, by land owned by a Miss Blinman. The purchase price was £270. There is no record to show whether Bishop Amigo's request for a weekly Mass to be held in Rainham was met but on May 9th 1927, Fr Gerald Quinn, the assistant priest at Gillingham, sent the following letter to Bishop Amigo:-

"My Lord Bishop,

Last September I submitted to your Lordship a plan for Mass at Rainham. You told me to wait for some decision concerning Naval Chaplaincy. On the

presumption that that question is now shelved I beg to submit another plan for Rainham.

After a long time I have been able to secure (provisionally) a hall for Sunday mornings at a rental of 3/- (15p) per Sunday. The Hall is the property of the Rainham Brotherhood an undenominational collection of laymen. They use the Hall on Sunday afternoons for a lecture or some sort of a vague semi-religious service.

The Hall will seat about 70 people. It is very quiet and in the most convenient part of the village.

In my opinion, (and that of the Canon) it is perfectly suitable for Mass. The Canon has given the scheme his benediction and I shall arrange as not to throw any extra work on him. At a conservative estimate, we shall get a congregation of at least 50.

Parts of Rainham are 4 miles from here, and the Bus service is inconvenient and expensive.

The Catholics in Rainham will be deeply grateful if your Lordship will grant permission to say Mass in this Hall every Sunday.

With apologies for my handwriting.

I am, my Lord Bishop,

Yours obediently,

Gerald R. Quinn."

The Rainham Brotherhood's Hall was demolished a long time ago to make way for new housing; but it was situated in Church Lane, which runs alongside St. Margaret's Church.

From the time Mass was celebrated weekly in Rainham, the Mass count figures were shown under a separate heading on Gillingham's returns. Fr. Quinn's expectation of an attendance of at least 50 people was a little on the generous side but each and every following return showed a small but significant increase.

In November 1931, Mr and Mrs A Callahan and their little daughter, Theresa came to live in No. 2 Salisbury (then Hamilton) Avenue. The site for St. Thomas' Church had been left quite untouched and was nothing more than a field where Theresa remembers playing and making daisy chains; and even, at times, sharing the field with a pony. We now know this little girl as Theresa Smith, and her continuous and integral association with the parish has made for a valuable source of information in the preparation of this booklet. Theresa remembers going to Mass in the Rainham Brotherhood's Hall: where, because it was not a place specifically dedicated to Catholic worship, Mass was preceded every week with The Asperges.

THE CHURCH HALL

For some years before his retirement, Canon McMahon had been in failing health (as implied by Fr. Quinn in his letter to Bishop Amigo); but by 1932 the Canon had retired and Fr. 'Tommy' Scott arrived to commence his 31 years as parish priest of Gillingham.

The Notice Book for Rainham was opened on June 18th 1933. On that day, the Sunday within the Octave of Corpus Christi, there was to be a Procession of the Blessed Sacrament in the Convent grounds at Chatham at 3.00 p.m. The second collection was for St. Bart's Hospital, and the Building Fund collections the previous week had amounted to 4/6d (22p).

At that time, the weekly collections seldom exceeded £1 and were often quite a lot less. Whist Drives, of which there were many, would raise £3 on most occasions and raffles were held on a regular basis. A 'sale of work', held in October 1934 made a profit of £68; but this would have been a joint Gillingham/Rainham venture and would have been held in Gillingham. All money raising events would appear to have been held in aid of the Building Fund.

During the summer months there were many coach outings to places like Tankerton, Hartley, Faversham and Canterbury. The cost for an adult was usually in the region of 3/- (15p), and for a child 2/- (10p). Again, these outings would have involved both Gillingham and Rainham.

A very influential figure in those early days was undoubtedly a Mr John Clarke. Although Mr Clarke taught at St Michael's School in Chatham for 42 years in all, and was Headmaster from 1920-1946, he lived in Rainham at "St. Theresa's", 90 Twydall Lane, and was at the heart of all decision making here. It was Mrs Clarke who prepared the children to make their First Holy Communion. At that time, Rainham children made their First Holy Communion at Mass on Easter Day morning, so the breakfast of boiled eggs they shared together afterwards was highly appropriate. This became a tradition in Rainham, stopped only in the 1960's by Fr. Gleeson.

It was not long before Fr. Scott turned his attention to development at Rainham: and the notices for August 13th 1933, found Fr. Scott explaining that,

"At your meeting on Wednesday, August 2nd, when I occupied the chair, as you know, it was decided to arrange, if possible, a loan to proceed with the building of a Parochial Hall which could be used as a temporary church. There was no meeting of the

Diocesan Finance Committee last week; but I shall make the necessary application for permission to raise the loan before the Committee tomorrow morning."

Once the decision to build the hall was made, events moved very rapidly. A committee was formed which met in Mr Clarke's house. By September 17th, the architect had visited the site: and by the end of November, the plans had been drawn up and were being discussed.

On completion the Hall was blessed by Fr. Scott on the evening of Friday November 9th 1934, and officially opened by Bishop Amigo at a Solemn High Mass celebrated the following day, Saturday November 10th; the Feast of St. Justus. "A very wet day" wrote Fr. Scott in the Notice Book.

An account of the opening, prepared for the local press, said that a large crowd was present that morning for the Solemn High Mass which was sung by Fr. Scott. Bishop Amigo was attended by Fr. Ryan of Chatham and by Fr. Murphy, the assistant priest of Gillingham. The choir and organist of Our Lady of Gillingham was in attendance. Bishop Amigo preached on the theme "*The Master is here*", a moving sermon on the Real Presence. In the sermon mention was also made of the energetic Fr. Quinn, "*who had sadly gone to his rest.*" (Fr. Quinn had died on September 12th, 1932.) At the conclusion of Mass the Bishop "*in his own gracious manner, spoke to each one as they left the building.*"

An Inventory of the hall furniture and fittings survives, drawn up by Lewis J. Fox, the Honorary Caretaker from the date of opening. It is meticulous in detail, listing everything down to 2 Kettles (worn out). From this list, and under a separate heading, we know that the Legion of Mary, with its mission of evangelisation and pastoral care, was already active in this infant community.

At the end of 1934 there is a summary of all expenses incurred in the building of the hall, which amounted to £1,482.1s.7d. But strangely, a statement in the report of the Bishop's 1937 visitation of Gillingham, says that: "*The Rainham Hall cost £1,700 and the debt is now £1,329.*"

THE WAR YEARS

There was no Midnight Mass at Christmas celebrated at Gillingham during the war years, but with this exception, and the absence of coach outings to seaside resorts; other activities, such as whist drives, dances and socials continued to be organised quite normally, with, of course, reduced admission prices for members of the Armed Forces. A little surprisingly, considering the very real possibility of air raids: coaches were arranged in both 1941 and 1942 for the Annual Outdoor Procession in Honour of the Blessed Sacrament held at St George's Cathedral in London (in which ladies were allowed to walk!). Alternatively, one could travel by train. The 9.30 p.m. train from Charing Cross arrived at Gillingham at 10.55 p.m. In time for the 11.00 p.m. train out to Rainham. The return fare was 4s.10d (24p).

During the war there was an Army transit camp situated on the A2 at Hoath Lane, the site of the present Tesco, so there was always a steady stream of soldiers attending Sunday Mass: and in the case of a French Canadian regiment, this became a flood, and the hall would be filled. '*The Rule for Fasting*' before receiving Communion was not waived during the war years: and in the Notice Book a little pencil written note was inserted which invited any soldier going to Communion to stay behind after Mass for a cup of tea and a sandwich.

Despite rationing, parish parties for the children were still held with the mothers pooling resources to provide party spreads. The children's pleasure was heightened at at least one of these

parties when Mrs. Madigan, whose husband was in the Navy, was able to give sweets to all the children present.

Mention of the war years would hardly be complete without reference to Dr. Kary Pole, who must be the most illustrious of our parishioners to date. Dr. Pole, whose birth name was Karl Friedrich Pollaczek, was born in Vienna into a wealthy and highly influential Jewish family. He trained as a doctor in Vienna and was received into the Church there on September 29th, 1936. The occupation of Austria by Germany made it necessary for him to flee his country, and in the October of 1938 he arrived in England, and of 950 general practitioners who came to this country from mainland Europe he was one of only 40 admitted for re-qualification and practice. Having re-qualified in the February of 1940, Dr. Pole obtained a partnership in the Rainham practice of Dr. Norman Porterfield who was already in the Army, stationed at Rochester, and running his practice on a part-time basis. The fall of France to Germany in the May of 1940 left Britain open to the possibility of invasion, and Dr. Pole was interned as an enemy alien; but Dr. Porterfield, soon to be posted abroad, and other friends, successfully pressed for the necessity of his speedy release and re-appointment to Rainham, where, for the remainder of the war he ran the practice single handed. He also served in the Home Guard and was commissioned with the rank of Major, which greatly facilitated his application for naturalisation once the war ended.

After the war, Dr. Pole built up his own successful practice in Rainham, (but found time to be a founder member of the Medway Circle of the Catenian Association, and its first President from 1950-1951). He was honoured by the Pope for his writings on medico-moral matters, and was a Knight Commander of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre: while his interest in Police Surgeon's work led to lectures and publications in that field too. Besides running his own very busy general practice he also worked for 35 years as Divisional Police Surgeon until ill health

forced him to retire. He died at the age of 85 in the February of 1988 and the bearers at his funeral were Officers of the Kent Police.

YEARS OF GROWTH IN RAINHAM

The Notice Book from mid-1942 to Low Sunday, April 16th 1950 is unfortunately, missing. From the Diocesan archives, though, we know that there was a fire at the hall in 1947 caused by the ignition of (waste) creosote: but that the Fire Brigade being quickly on the scene there was only slight external damage. We also know, from the records of the Knights of St. Columba, that Lewis J. Fox, the Honorary Caretaker of the hall from the time of its opening in 1934, died on May 20th 1948.

However, from an account written in the early 1970's, and from other sources, there is other information available covering this period.

We know, that in the hall, the altar was centrally placed on a slightly raised stage on the south wall. The altar itself, when not in use, was covered with "a funny gold cloth" and curtains were drawn across the stage. To the right, when facing the altar, was a kitchen, a dingy narrow slit of a room with a gas cooker, sink, drainer and cupboards under: and to the left, a space where a screen was placed when Confessions were being heard. The hall was heated by gas fires and the floor protected with canvas. Later, the canvas was removed and the ladies of the parish kept the floor polished. Much later, industrial type polishers were used for this job! The first of these was supplied by Mrs. Ruth Kemsley, whose husband, with other members of his family, ran a chain of butchers shops in the Medway Towns.

On the death of Mr. Fox it was Mr Arthur Callahan who became the Honorary Caretaker of the hall: undertaking many of the

duties of Sacristan as well. The hall was in regular use for Catechism classes; meetings of the senior and junior groups of the Legion of Mary; whist drives and occasionally, a wedding reception or a private party. Mr Callahan continued as caretaker until illness in the last few months of his life brought about his retirement. He died in the October of 1958.

There was still only the 9.30 a.m. Sunday Mass at Rainham, but by 1950, when the Notice Book resumed, there was also a weekday Mass being celebrated on either a Monday or a Tuesday: and intermittently, Rosary and Benediction in the afternoon or evening on Sundays.

Theresa Callahan (now Smith) ran the repository, which at first occupied no more space than a card table set up at the back of the hall. This was very thinly supplied by the parish church in Gillingham, and eventually, Theresa, asked for and obtained from Fr. Scott, a letter of introduction to Laverty's, where Theresa spent £5 of her own money on cards and other stock. This was sufficient to generate a good turnover and the repository went from strength to strength.

Another of Theresa's tasks, from the time she was very young, was to collect money in a little box for the provision of altar flowers the following week. This went on for a long time, even beyond the time when St. Thomas' was built. Parishioners would also give flowers, and Mrs. Pole (Dr. Pole's wife) was famed for the roses from her garden during the summer months.

Although Rainham was growing, parish life at this time still centred on the parish church of Our Lady of Gillingham. Children would be prepared by Mrs. Clarke to make their First Holy Communion at Rainham; but Confirmation always took place at Gillingham. To attend the Easter ceremonies, or Midnight Mass at Christmas, the people of Rainham would have to go to the parish church. For Midnight Mass special buses were arranged,

with tickets ordered and paid for in advance: but mostly, children and adults would cut across the fields at Twydall and follow the path by the railway line along to the church. (The advent of the car has made it difficult for us now to appreciate how far people were prepared to walk to attend Mass. Before the hall was built in Rainham in 1934 a Miss Mason of Bredhurst would walk "across the fields" to St Michael's Church in Chatham.)

As with all the major ceremonies of the Church, so it was with most entertainments, with the people of Rainham going to Gillingham for parish dances, ceilidhs, concerts and film shows: and although Mrs. Madigan ran highly successful jumble sales at Rainham, the principal fund-raisers, the annual garden fête and the autumn sale of work, were likewise held at Gillingham with Mrs. Christina Shorten spearheading Rainham's efforts towards their success. By 1951 Rainham's contribution had become significant. At the autumn sale of work, held on October 20th, the Rainham stalls made a profit of £122, and those of Gillingham £148.

However, the most important development in Rainham in 1951 followed the Bishop's Visitation of Gillingham in June the report of which noted: "*Congregation increasing in Rainham. May need more Masses in time.*" The 'time' arrived very shortly afterwards. On December 2nd 1951, and appropriately on the first Sunday of Advent, two Masses were celebrated in the hall. There was a congregation of 237 in all. 101 for the Mass at 8.30 a.m.; and 136 for the Mass at 10.00 a.m.

During 1952 and 1953 two new fund-raising schemes were introduced to help to finance the building of a church at Rainham. One, a Catholic Football Pool, run from Gillingham, but with many agents in Rainham, received its first mention in the July of 1951; but did not commence until the August of 1952. A second, simpler scheme was a "mile-of-pennies" which began on Palm

Sunday in March 1953. By May 24th the 310 yard point had been reached: and by October 11th there was only a ¼ of a mile to go and £158.8s.0d. (£150.40) had been raised. Unfortunately, no further mention of this scheme was made.

1954: THE YEAR OF DECISION

Throughout most of 1954 there was little recorded in the Notice Book that was out of the ordinary. It was given out at the Notices at Easter that the curtains that had been hung when the hall was built in 1934 were looking shabby and in need of replacement; and on Sunday, October 15th Bishop Cowderoy celebrated the 8.30 a.m. Mass at Rainham, and then spent most of the morning here.

It was not until the evening of Sunday, November 14th, when the whole parish (Gillingham as well as Rainham), was invited to a well-publicised event in the hall, which was a strange mixture of business and entertainment that the decision was taken to go ahead with the building of a church and a school at Rainham.

The other significant step of 1954 was that for the first time, Rainham had its own Christmas Midnight Mass.

THE BUILDING YEARS

An offshoot of the meeting held on November 14th was that a committee was formed to organise a Social Club for Rainham. This committee sprang into action, and within a fortnight had organised its first Social and Dance. By the New Year a Grand Carnival Dance had been organised and membership of the club stood at 77. Out of a total congregation of 300, this figure was disappointing to the committee!

Whist drives were held fortnightly from the middle of January 1955, and a Youth Club for both boys and girls was being formed. Membership of the Social Club was 6d (2½p) a year; and admission to both dances and whist drives was 1/6d (7½p). Out of this sum the cost of refreshments and prizes was met, so the profits must have been very small. However, the weekly dances in the hall were a huge success and attracted young people from all over the Medway Towns. The music was “live”, provided by a three-piece band.

Bricks for the new church were sold at 1/- (5p) each after Sunday Masses from the card table repository: and under the foundation stone is a book in which parishioners who bought bricks have their names inscribed. The sense of drive, enthusiasm and excitement almost lifts off the pages as one reads.

The enthusiasm spread beyond fund-raising and social events. Rainham members of the Medway Catholic Women’s Guild (at that time a very strong group), made vestments for the new church. It was a project taken very seriously, with those involved attending special classes at the Rochester College of Art, where they were tutored by Enid Edwards, a highly talented artist whose commissions include the Stations of the Cross at St. Francis’ Church in Maidstone; and tapestries in the Lady Chapel of Rochester Cathedral. Some of the patterns and designs created by Enid Edwards for these vestments are still held by Mrs Ruth Kemsley, who with Mrs Kiff Finlay were two of the principal embroiderers. However, many members of the group must have been highly skilled needlewomen; for looking at the beautiful “flame” chasuble at Twydall and a purple cope at Rainham, it is almost impossible to believe that these vestments were made by amateurs, however gifted. Other vestments were made too – Theresa Smith remembers her mother cutting out one chasuble on the kitchen floor – but we do not know what has happened to them.

The architect of St Thomas' Church, Eduardo Dodds, was part English, and part Argentine, and had his offices in London at 45 Queen Anne Street. We do not have Mr Dodd's plans for St. Thomas' Church; but two scale drawings show the church virtually as it came to be built. The principal differences are that the first drawing, dated February 10th 1955, indicates that murals were planned for the walls on either side of the sanctuary; and the second, dated July 6th 1955, shows a clock face on both the north and east sides of the tower.

It was on April 21st 1956 that a letter from Eduardo Dodds to Fr. Scott gave the results of the competitive tenders for the building of St. Thomas' Church; and of the seven tenders received those of J. H. Durrant of Strood, and Cox Bros., were the lowest. These were then sent to the Quantity Surveyors, Messrs. Rider Hunt and Partners, who in checking the figures found errors in both; raising the tender of J. H. Durrant to £39,559 and lowering that of Cox Bros., to £40,337. It was J.H. Durrant's tender that was accepted.

In the autumn of 1956 with the foundations of St. Thomas' dug and brickwork so far above the ground that winter frosts would have caused damage, a crisis arose in that it became very difficult to obtain bank loans (a possible effect of the disastrous Anglo-French-Israeli attempt to reassert international control of the Suez Canal). However, Fr. Barbyer, who had been appointed to Gillingham when newly ordained priest in 1955, put the case to a bank inspector whom he knew well; and Fr. Scott prayed to St. Jude. When the bank loans necessary to continue the building work were obtained Fr. Barbyer gave thanks to the bank inspector and Fr. Scott to St. Jude! (Does this explain why a statue of St. Jude stands just within the inner doors of the church?). Because of the financial restraints prevailing, St.

Thomas' was the only church to be built in the diocese at that time.

The Laying of the Foundation Stone was a very grand occasion with Bishop Cowderoy performing the ceremony which took place, appropriately enough, on the Feast of St. Thomas of Canterbury, December 29th 1956, which was also Fr. Tommy Scott's birthday.

Building the church would appear to have been a happy experience for all concerned. For Durrants it was the first church that they had built, and they were very proud of their work: and as Mr. Dodds could "*lay and cut bricks with the best of them*", he had their admiration. During the course of the construction of the church Mr. Dodds invited parishioners to a talk in which he explained that the church had been designed so that maintenance could be kept to a minimum. While this has remained very true of the interior, the exterior has presented problems. The flat roofs have required repair and to renew them would prove very costly: and on the south wall of the church (the weather side), the nave windows now leak profusely when heavy rain is being driven in by a high wind. All the stone carving and statuary in the church is the work of Michael Clark, F.R.B.S., who was for some years President of the Royal Academy and who in 1960 was awarded the Otto Beit Medal for his statue of the '*Glorious Virgin of the Assumption*' at Aylesford.

How much or how little of Michael Clark's work was completed before the opening of the Church on April 28th 1958 it is not possible to say. The order for the '*14 Stations of the Cross*' was accepted on September 11th 1957, but their Canonical Erection, a ceremony performed by Fr. Walter O.F.M., did not take place until November 19th 1958. There is also an account dated February 3rd 1959 for the carvings of *St. George* and *St. Patrick* and the decorative carving on the canopy of the *Lady Chapel* (now the

'Blessed Sacrament Chapel'): but it is not until April 24th 1963 that Michael Clark lists and gives the prices for all his work for the church, which including the exterior statue of St. Thomas of Canterbury, totalled £2,235.

The statue of St Thomas of Canterbury in the church was the gift of Fr. Scott who brought it home from a holiday abroad. This traditional heavily gilded statue was totally out of keeping in such a modern setting but Mr. Dodds had a gentle way and persuaded Fr. Scott that the best place for the statue would be in front of the organ/choir gallery where it would be seen by all the congregation when leaving the church.

The ceramics in St. Thomas' Church were designed by Adam Kossowski. The main work is that of *St. Joseph, seated, with the Child Jesus* at his side, and in what is now the *Lady Chapel* there are angels shown against a background of blue tiles. Designs by the same artist, very similar if not identical to these, may be seen at Aylesford Priory: but the design above the main entrance, depicting the murder of St Thomas of Canterbury is unique. The ceramic work must have been completed at about the time of the church's opening as Fr. Scott writes in the Notice Book for May 28th 1958, "*I hope the ceramics, the work of Mr. Kossowski, please you all. He may do more work inside the church if I can find the funds.*" We have no correspondence from Mr. Kossowski, or accounts.

Of the opening of the Church on April 28th 1958, Fr. Scott wrote in the Notice Book:

"It was very encouraging to see the great numbers who were present at the Solemn Blessing and opening of this church on Monday last. I have had letters from non-Catholics who say how impressed they were with the beauty of the church and the function, especially the Pontifical High Mass."

Fr. Scott concludes the entry in praise of the choir: he writes; "*It was glorious.*" This '*glorious*' sound probably had much to do with the influence of Fr. Norman Swinton, who though appointed to Gillingham as a curate in the March of 1957, was made responsible for the Rainham section of the parish by Fr. Scott. Fr. Swinton, a convert to Catholicism, had formerly been a member of the '*BBC Singers*', and he quickly established a choir of some standing at St. Thomas' Church. The choir, robed in cassocks and surplices would process into the church with the priests and servers, and then, ranged at the back of the altar would face the congregation to sing. Our Sung Mass was celebrated on Sunday evenings as our resident organist, Nicholas Danby, a grandson of Charles Dickens, also played for the High Mass at the Carmelite Church in Kensington on Sunday mornings. (Mr. Danby subsequently became choirmaster at the Jesuit Church in Farm Street.)

The organ at St Thomas' was built by J.W. Walker & Sons Ltd at the cost of £3,206 and was blessed by Fr. Scott on Wednesday January 20th 1960. On the same evening Fr. Peter Farmer, a fine organist, and the choir gave a recital, the first item on the programme being Benjamin Britten's cantata "*Rejoice in the Lamb*". From then on there was an organ recital every month given by a variety of distinguished recitalists including Barry Rose, organist at Guildford Cathedral; and Michael Bigg, organist at Canterbury Cathedral. With guest preachers the calibre of Fr. J.D. Chrichton and Fr. Bernard Bassett SJ, the church must have been something of a cultural haven.

Fr. Swinton's oversight of Rainham was not official: but once St. Thomas' Church was officially opened it became clear to Fr. Scott that a resident priest would be an asset; and Fr. Swinton took up his now famous (or infamous) residence in the Church Hall with "*Bosun*" his Boxer dog as companion and protector. Not informed

of this move the Bishop was understandably displeased when news of it came to his notice: but as it was a *'fait accompli'* he allowed it to continue, providing suitable accommodation was found. It was Mrs Callahan who very kindly opened her home to Fr. Swinton. The Notice Book for June 26th 1960 records the *"temporarily the priest's address will be 2 Salisbury Avenue."* Fr. Swinton stayed there for nine months.

A site for a chapel-at-ease to be built at Twydall was acquired by Fr. Scott from Gillingham Borough Council on May 9th 1957, but it was not until August 1961, when we stood in danger of the site being compulsorily repurchased by the Council, that building work finally began. The footings were dug and the foundations were laid by the *'Internationale Bouworde'*, an Order of laypeople and religious from the Netherlands, which was founded after the 1939-45 war to repair or rebuild war damaged churches. The Order has since been dissolved. Parishioners also helped on the site, and several families offered hospitality; but as a group, they were accommodated in the hall, sleeping on camp beds. The plans for the church were available by the November of 1961, and the architect, as for St. Thomas' Church, was Eduardo Dodds, but we have no correspondence concerning its building, its fittings or its costs. Eduardo Dodds died of cancer (still a relatively young man), during the building of this church and his partner, Kenneth White took charge. Fr. Barbyer was placed as an unofficial *'clerk of works'*, but he found it impossible to prevent the theft of bricks and other materials, and believed that many garages built in the Twydall area at that time were constructed of materials taken from the church site. The builders were a small firm, Nye & Son, and often days would pass without any work at all being done; but whether this was the sole reason for the church not opening until the Lent of 1964, or whether other factors were involved we do not know.

Fr. Swinton left us at the beginning of September 1961, just after work had commenced on the site at Twydall, and was replaced by Fr. James Petry who was officially appointed as *'priest-in-charge'* at Rainham. Although officially appointed there was no Presbytery in Rainham and Fr. Petry took lodgings with Mrs. Lye at 59 London Road. Before coming to Rainham Fr. Petry had had a chequered career. Like Fr. Swinton and Fr. Curtin who came to us in 1973, he was trained and ordained at Wonersh in 1948 and worked in several parishes in the diocese before becoming a chaplain in the British Army in 1950. For services in Korea he received the M.B.E., awarded he said modestly, for bringing beer to the troops under fire. Fr. Petry was also a chaplain on ships going out to Australia carrying passengers on £10 assisted passages arriving at Fremantle in March 1957. Except for the eighteen months he spent in Rainham between 1961 and 1963, he has served continuously in parishes in Australia ever since. Fr. Petry was keen to maintain the musical standards set by Fr. Swinton at St. Thomas' and spent a lot of time working with the choir. He would also take the young boys home after practice - all crammed into the back of his Morris mini-van.

Fr. Petry, though, is mostly remembered for introducing the Offertory Promise Campaign into Gillingham and Rainham. Mass attendance figures at Rainham had risen to almost 600, but the collection was averaging only £40 a week: and the debt on the church stood at £31,000. It was the level of this debt, Fr. Scott explained to Bishop's House, that precluded Rainham being cut off as a separate parish. There was also the debt on Twydall. Revenue from the Football Pool started in 1952 was beginning to fall off, and according to Fr. Barbyer, repayment on bank loans amounting to £128 a week was having a very serious effect on living standards at Gillingham Presbytery.

The Offertory Promise Campaign was run with professional help during the summer months of 1962. The brochure, glossy for the time, featured photographs of the clergy at home and parish activities. It also set out very clearly and simply the financial position. The income of £12,000 over three years needed to be raised to £43,000 over the same period of time to be able to deal adequately with the debt on the Rainham and Twydall churches, which together, stood at £39,000. The Campaign was a huge and popular success. Demand for tickets for a celebration dinner held at the Drill Hall was so great that two such events had to be organised to cater for numbers. On the first Sunday the Offertory envelopes were used, the collection more than doubled to £85.14s. (85.70p) and rose to an average of £90 - £95 in the following weeks.

On Low Sunday, April 21st, 1963, the familiar cry of “*No Parking on the A2*” is mentioned for the first time: and on May 12th, 1963, an ‘*Australian Style Social*’ was held to say farewell to Fr. Petry and to meet our first parish priest; Fr. John Gleeson.

At this point a rather sad note creeps in. Fr. Scott did not want to lose Rainham. As early as 1948, eager to build Rainham up to parish level, and believing that his presence in Rainham would facilitate this; Fr. Scott had asked Archbishop Amigo for permission to buy 211 London Road and to reside there. Unfortunately, Archbishop Amigo interpreted this as a request from Fr. Scott to be appointed to Rainham as parish priest. At this time many senior priests were leaving the Armed Forces where they had served as Chaplains during the war years, and Archbishop Amigo mistakenly saw this as an opportunity to appoint one such priest as parish priest at Gillingham. Fr. Scott was incensed on being informed by the Vicar General of this misunderstanding and replied in a letter, withering in its tone, except for one sentence. He wrote:

“When the time is ripe, when Rainham can afford to be cut off from Gillingham and have parish status, I would not mind being its first parish priest, and build its church.”

Now, having spent more than thirty years building up a congregation and where he had so recently overseen the building of the church (to which he had given the handsome monstrance presented to him by the clergy of the Deanery on the occasion of his 50th anniversary to the priesthood), Fr. Gleeson was to be the first parish priest.

Bishop Cowderoy probably had some knowledge of this earlier episode, as in a report following a visitation in March 1963, he wrote congratulating Fr. Scott on the beauty of the church at Rainham, but added, “*I am sure that you will be sorry to give it up – but after all, you did not build it for yourself.*” When this report was written it was known, to the clergy at least, that Fr. Petry was to be succeeded at Rainham by Fr. Gleeson who was to be independent of Gillingham. Remarkably, even then, Fr. Scott did not appreciate that Fr. Gleeson’s appointment was actually as parish priest; and his reluctance to relinquish Rainham is made evident in correspondence between him and Bishop Cowderoy, who wrote in a letter dated April 6th 1963, “*Fr. Gleeson must come as parish priest – not even curate-in-charge.*” (sic)

Fr. Scott retired to Glenstal Abbey in Limerick in the October of 1963 and died there eleven years later at the age of 96.

FR. JOHN GLEESON

Fr. Gleeson was a very active priest possessed of sound business judgement and much was achieved in Rainham during his ten years as parish priest. His time here also encompassed the momentous events of the 1960’s, which will go down in history as watershed years in the life of the Catholic Church. A

Council, commonly referred to as '*Vatican II*' was held in Rome between 1962-1965 and was to profoundly change thinking and understanding in the Church.

Another process of change that took place was that the Latin of the '*Tridentine Mass*' gave way for a '*New Order of Mass*' celebrated in the vernacular. Initially, the pace of change was very slow, and it was not until the First Sunday in Advent in 1964 that a small amount of English entered into the *Liturgy*. The four new '*Eucharistic Prayers*', which gave an element of choice in place of the unvarying Roman Canon in the '*Old Rite*', were introduced from June 18th 1969: and the *New Order of Mass*, in its entirety, came into use on March 1st 1970. The metamorphosis was complete. Catholics became active participants in the celebration of the Mass in a manner denied them since the early days of the Church.

Fr. Gleeson prepared the parish well to meet and accept all these changes and strongly encouraged the purchase of the New Mass booklets as each one became available. The purchase of Holy Week publications was also encouraged, for although the ceremonies had been restored to their original times from the Easter of 1956, the '*Rites*' underwent several changes until they, too, were finalised in 1970.

Along with changes in the '*Liturgy of the Mass*' came some small re-ordering of the churches. In St. Thomas' the Tabernacle was moved from its central position on the main altar to the chapel in the north aisle decorated with Adam Kossowski's ceramics of angels. The statue of the '*Sacred Heart*' was moved from there to a position close by in the north aisle. The '*New Rite of Mass*' required the priest to be facing the people, so until it was possible to move the marble altar forward, Mass was said from a temporary wooden altar placed just within the sanctuary.

In 1963 there was still no accommodation for a priest in Rainham and Fr. Gleeson, like Fr Petry before him, took lodgings with Mrs. Lye at 59 London Road but later moved to lodge in Hawthorne Avenue with two widowed sisters, Mrs Mabs Mills and Mrs. Doris Gould. Rainham was now a very large and flourishing parish with its boundaries set from the Darland Estate to Hartlip on the south side of the A2, and from Woodlands Road and the large Twydall Estate through to Upchurch and Halstow on the north; so the need for a Presbytery must have been very pressing. This was acquired in the January of 1964 when Fr. Gleeson purchased 69 London Road for, it was said, £5,000. A very fair price for such a property at that time.

Although the church at Twydall came within the boundaries of Rainham parish, it only ceased to be served jointly by Gillingham and Rainham in the September of 1965 when the Archbishop sent the newly ordained Fr. Matthew Neylon to Rainham as assistant priest. Until then, from the time the church had opened during Lent 1964, Fr. Patrick (Paddy) Porter, (who had been appointed parish priest at Gillingham on the retirement of Fr. Tommy Scott in the October of 1963), had celebrated Mass on alternate Sundays and had also taken the children's Catechism classes. Fr. Neylon, whose appointment is the only time mention is made in the Notice Book of any assistant priest during Fr. Gleeson's time here as parish priest, stayed until sometime in 1967: but once he left there was a veritable procession of assistant priests who simply came and went, until Fr. David O'Regan, appointed in 1969, broke this sequence.

Looking through the Notice Books of Fr. Gleeson's years at Rainham, scarcely a week passed without some call for money, be it a fête, jumble sale or a raffle: and as soon as one event had passed there were appeals and pressure for the success of the next. However, these calls for money were almost inevitable. Our proportion of the combined debt on the building of St.

Thomas of Canterbury Church and the Church at Twydall was set at £16,000, and our weekly collection, which averaged £95, was no more than that achieved at the time of the *Offertory Promise Campaign*.

The flagging Football Pool was re-organised (in Rainham only) in 1964, but it was never as successful as in the early days, and it was finally abandoned from the end of November 1971. A '300 Club', suggested by the parish council to raise £1,000 required for the repair and redecoration of the hall, took its place. This 'Club' was modestly successful; but parishioners were slow to join and it was never fully subscribed.

Of great help to Fr. Gleeson was the '*Rainham Catholic Ladies Club*', which was formed during the summer months of 1964.

This club had a very strong social dimension, but its members also organised the many fund-raising events so necessary to service our debts and to meet the very heavy demands being placed on so young a parish: the most pressing of these being the need for a primary school, the building of which had been decided upon at the meeting held in Rainham on November 14th 1954.

ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY SCHOOL

In 1955 a large plot of farming land, covering the area between Romany Road, the A2 and the '*Rainham Mark Social Club*', became available; but Fr. Scott considered the plot too large for a primary school and the vendor would not sell the land piecemeal. The decision not to buy the plot was to create problems for some time to come: and meanwhile, our children were travelling to neighbouring schools in Chatham, Gillingham and Sittingbourne. Miss Dorothy Howard, the Chief Education Officer for Gillingham at that time, became so concerned about the overcrowding at St.

Mary's School in Gillingham, that she intervened personally to find a solution. Part of the site on which the new Howard School was to be built was offered to the Catholic authorities, but this was not accepted, and it was not until November 21st 1965 that Fr. Gleeson was able to announce that the building of Phase I of the St. Thomas of Canterbury Primary School was soon to commence on a site in Romany Road, and to request the names, ages and baptismal certificates of prospective pupils.

In spite of all the years of waiting there were only 35 pupils enrolled when the school opened on January 5th 1967; but after an open day held one Sunday during the first term, there was a significant increase in numbers when the school re-opened after the Easter holiday, and numbers rose to 108 in the September of 1967. With only four classrooms built in Phase I, accommodation in the school was already becoming a problem. Applications for places were being received daily, and again, Miss Howard came to the rescue. As a temporary measure two classrooms were made available at St. Margaret's Church of England Primary School, but as the rate of development in the entire area was intensifying, with houses being built in Lower Rainham, Parkwood, Farthing Corner and Hempstead, the school extension which finally opened in September 1970 was desperately needed.

There were now ten classrooms and a hall in the complex and this remained unchanged until the autumn term of 1999 when a new kitchen was built adjacent to the hall and the original kitchen block converted into a reception class and head teacher's office.

The first Foundation Governors of the school were Fr. John Gleeson (Chairman), Mrs. Marjorie Harping, Major Fielder and Major John Van Walwyk, who, with two Local Education Authority (L.E.A) Governors, appointed Mr. Thomas (Tom) Carter as head teacher. This was the only permanent appointment made initially:

the other teachers were offered only temporary contracts. The first permanent teachers were appointed for September 1968.

In Mr Carter's opinion it was a blessing that so few children were enrolled when the school opened as these proved to be an excellent foundation on which to build. Because they were so few all were involved in extra school activities. They were happy, very well behaved, and eager to learn; a pleasure to teach and the parents were exceptional in their support and trust.

From the beginning transport of children to and from the school was a problem that was solved only when a small committee headed by Mr. Carter and members of the P.T.A. pressured the Local Education Authority (L.E.A.) into including St. Thomas' children on an already existing service that ran from Farthing Corner to Parkwood, which as these two areas were still divided by a wood, had to run via Meirscourt Road and Maidstone Road. Over time the nature of the problem changed and the service of mini-buses was obtained: and later still, as the number of pupils continued to increase, double decker buses. The administration of this service was a major operation for the transport committee who arranged the collection of fares and schedules of pick-up points. It was not until 1991, by which time most families ran one, if not two cars, that the bus service, and with it the transport committee ceased to function.

With excellent teachers and supportive parents the standard of education in the school has always been high; and since the introduction of Standard Attainment Tasks (S.A.T.S.), which test children at 'Key' stages on the core subjects of English, Maths, Science and I.T., these high standards are now quantifiable. Religious Education is an integral part of the school curriculum, with parents and parish catechists being involved in the preparation of pupils making their First Holy Communion and First Reconciliation.

The pursuit of excellence in academic subjects does not preclude the children's enjoyment in taking part in school productions of plays and musicals. These productions are always well rehearsed, and the enjoyment of parents and guests is heightened by the professionalism of the sets and props effected by members of staff.

Physical Education, athletics and sports have always played an important role in the school; and in competition events with other Medway schools, St. Thomas' teams are well respected.

To date there have been only two head teachers at St. Thomas' School. Mr. Carter, who retired in July 1989, has been succeeded by Mr. Neil McKenzie; while deputy head teachers have included Mr. Noel Sturla and Mr. Peter Keegan, both of whom left to take up appointments as head teachers: Mrs. May O'Donnell, Mrs. Lynn Dennis and Mrs. Katie Kane, who was herself a former pupil of the school.

THE REBUILDING OF THE CHURCH AT TWYDALL

The building of the church at Twydall had been dogged by disaster from the start. The architect had died; the '*Internationale Bouworde*' had damaged the main sewerage system when digging the foundation; and the builders, Nye and Son, had taken an inordinate length of time over the construction. It was not really surprising, therefore, that the '*Evening Post*' of Friday, August 22nd 1969 carried the banner headline "*New church must go*". The article reported that a huge crack had appeared on one side of the church splitting it from top to bottom; and that the glass walls and the roof of pressed straw and felt had both always leaked. Fr. Gleeson, the article went on to say, was adamant that the church was unsafe and that a new church was necessary. Parishioners who were interviewed thought differently. Some complained that to build a new church would be a tremendous

waste of money; while others were resentful about the prospect of having to pay out for a new church while the school their children attended (St. Thomas of Canterbury Primary School), was hopelessly overcrowded.

A further newspaper article that appeared at the time of the church's demolition reported that even further defects were found when the roof was taken off: that the workmanship was very bad and the structure was unsatisfactory throughout. The article concluded, somewhat poignantly, "*The church has never been consecrated, and has no name.*"

The last Mass celebrated at this nameless and unconsecrated church was held on January 25th 1970; and until the new church was built the Twydall congregation worshipped at the St. Thomas of Canterbury Primary School. The contract for building the new church was given to the Rainham firm of Flaherty Bros., and as with J.H. Durrant of Strood who built St Thomas' Church, it was their first venture into church building too. Rather disappointingly we have no plans or correspondence concerning this church; but Mr. Joseph Flaherty named the architects as the London firm of Broadbent, Hastings, Reid and Todd; and casting his mind back over 30 years, thought the cost of building the church had been in the region of £30,000. The congregation was offered a choice of two dedications for their new church: St. Alphege; or St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles. Not surprisingly the latter was favoured and the church was opened by Archbishop Cyril Cowderoy on Saturday, December 5th 1970. The church was not designed '*in the round*', but with seating facing the altar on three sides of the church's rectangular shape, the congregation, to a greater extent than ever before, faced each other, and this was found to be easier for worship and conducive to the building of community. More controversial was the '*crying room*'.

The '*Stations of the Cross*' and the large crucifix above the altar are the only features saved from the old church.

THE CONSECRATION OF ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY CHURCH

The crowning moment of Fr. Gleeson's time as parish priest at Rainham must have been the consecration of St. Thomas of Canterbury Church on June 11th 1970. At a time when it was still necessary for a church building to be free of all debt before consecration could take place, we in Rainham had achieved in twelve years what many parishes had taken 50 years to achieve. It also reflects greatly to the credit of Fr. Gleeson that an inherited debt of £16,000 was cleared in seven years.

The consecration took place on a most beautiful summer evening with the sun streaming in through the west window. Archbishop Cowderoy officiated at the ceremony which commenced at 5.30 p.m. This precluded the attendance of many parishioners, particularly those who worked in London; but such an early start was probably necessary as the consecration ceremony, which preceded the Mass, was very lengthy indeed.

Waitresses smartly dressed in uniforms of black and white, served sandwiches and cake in the hall after the ceremony. Tea and coffee were also served; but in keeping with Fr. Gleeson's strictly held '*Pioneer*' status, there was no wine.

TOWARDS PARKWOOD

As early as 1971 Fr. Gleeson was already looking towards development at Parkwood. A plan from Gillingham Borough Council dated June 7th 1971 (revised October 10th 1971) shows a five acre site for the proposed R.C. Primary School; and adjacent to it, a 1.04 acre site for the proposed R.C. Church on Deanwood Drive. This plan accompanied a letter from the Kent Education Committee dated February 15th 1972, which was sent to Fr.

Gleeson requesting his views on the proposed site as soon as possible.

There is no further correspondence at this point, but on March 20th 1973, Fr. Gleeson announced that it was hoped to start the new Mass Centre at Parkwood towards the end of April or the beginning of May. This was not to be, as within weeks Fr. Gleeson was appointed to a parish in Bexleyheath, and development of the site at Parkwood would be left to Fr. Michael Curtin.

FR. MICHAEL CURTIN

Fr. Curtin celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood on May 22nd 1973: and although he had been appointed to Rainham on Fr. Gleeson's departure, he chose to remain in his parish of Larkhall Lane until the events to mark this occasion had taken place. Over these few weeks Fr. David O'Regan was priest-in-charge at Rainham.

Although not that tall a man, Fr. Curtin was big in girth, in gesture and enthusiasm. For weeks after his arrival in Rainham the Presbytery door was left ajar and an exuberant welcome given to anyone who knocked and walked in. He regarded Rainham as the best parish in the diocese, but had he been appointed to the least attractive parish in the diocese he would not have rested content until he had made it the best. It was simply in his nature to do this.

Almost immediately Fr. Curtin turned his attention to the further re-ordering of both churches in line with post '*Vatican II*' directives flooding the Church. In St. Thomas' the pulpit, the Communion rails and sanctuary gates were removed; and a wooden font, octagonal in shape, was placed within the sanctuary. The position of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel and the Lady Chapel

were reversed and remain unchanged to the present time. Keith Morris incorporated a few panels from the pulpit, and wood from the altar on which the Tabernacle had stood when housed in the north aisle, in an altar and lectern he made for the Blessed Sacrament Chapel which is used on most weekdays for Mass. In 1979 the wrought iron baptistery gates and the font were offered to the Church of the English Martyrs at Strood: but happily the font was too heavy to be moved away and was left to withstand all weathers outside the south door of the church: and in 1984 Fr. Curtin commissioned Sister Concordia O.S.B. to colour Michael Clark's statue of Our Lady and the Stations of the Cross.

In St. Peter's, too, the altar rails were removed; but Fr. Curtin was also anxious to create a central aisle for bridal and funeral processions as the original siting of the pews had not taken this requirement into consideration. The function of the '*crying room*' was changed to that of coffee room: and at a later date the entire floor area was carpeted in grey.

The parish flourished, both as Fr. Curtin's efforts deserved, and as could be expected from the continuing development in the area: but all other development in the area was dwarfed by that at Parkwood.

PARKWOOD

At the time of Fr. Curtin's arrival in Rainham the Parkwood Estate was still growing and proving immensely popular, particularly with young families moving out from London. Mortgage repayments and the cost of commuting meant that many of these families could not afford to run cars. For Catholics so affected the distance between Parkwood and St. Thomas' Church was too far to walk and the Sunday bus service infrequent and expensive. Consequently, many were unable to attend Mass.

Fr. Curtin was almost immediately made aware of this situation, and was requested to start a Mass Centre at Parkwood. Assured of a congregation of at least a hundred people he responded positively and on July 26th 1973 Mass was celebrated at the Community Centre on Parkwood Green. On that first Sunday numbers were disappointingly low, but within a month there was a regular attendance of 90 people and within three months two Sunday Masses were being said.

Realising the potential for far greater growth in the area, Fr. Curtin was keen to begin development of the sites already reserved for a school and a church on Deanwood Drive and a study conducted in the autumn of 1973 by Messrs. Stanley Hicks, a firm of Chartered Surveyors acting for the Diocese, confirmed Fr. Curtin's thinking.

A meeting in November 1973, attended by Fr. Curtin, members of the Diocesan Finance Committee and of Messrs. Stanley Hicks, proposed to purchase the church and school sites reserved in Deanwood Drive, but initially to proceed only with the building of the school. This decision was overturned by the Diocesan Finance Committee in February 1974, who explained that due to lack of funds the building of the school would have to be deferred: but in September 1974 they proposed to Fr. Curtin that Rainham parish should finance the non- grant earning (15%) portion of the cost of the school, estimated to be between £20,000- £25,000, plus a share of the cost of the site. This proposal was duly considered by Fr. Curtin who replied in November 1974 that there seemed to be no option but to *“concentrate all efforts on providing a school with the addition, if possible, of a Chapel area and a small office for use as a sacristy and confessional. The parish will find it most difficult to undertake this rather open ended debt, but I see no alternative.....”* Regular correspondence between Fr. Curtin and the Diocesan Finance Office continued, but it was

not until November 1975 that arrangements were put in hand to clear the school site ready for building.

In the same month Fr. Curtin introduced a second collection throughout the parish to help meet the cost of the new school and also to repay the outstanding debt on the rebuilding of the church at Twydall.

Meanwhile the Parkwood Mass Centre congregation had grown to a regular 250 and was now based at the Parkwood Infant School on Deanwood Drive. In February 1976 the first Parkwood Forum, attended by 70 people, met to be informed by Fr. Curtin of the position regarding their new school, which was to be called St. Augustine of Canterbury. It was hoped that construction would commence in September 1976 in time for the school to be opened for the autumn term in 1977; and the total cost to the parish, including £12,000 for the Chapel, would be in the region of £40,000.

The figure of £40,000 proved to be a little on the low side. A letter from the Diocesan Finance Office of June 30th 1976 gave the figure of £30,750 for the school building and site, plus a provisional figure of £13,200 given by the architect for the parish accommodation. With £12,300 still outstanding on the rebuilding of the church at Twydall it was necessary for the parish to undertake a loan of £56,250 to be repaid over a 15-year period. An annual outgoing of about £8,000. This was not as fearsome a sum as at first it might appear; as during the period of repayment Rainham's Diocesan Development Fund (DDF) assessment of £5,000 a year was reduced to a nominal £100.

In November 1976 Messrs. Jarvis Ltd of Tunbridge Wells were awarded the contract for the building of St. Augustine's School, but the exceptionally wet winter of 1976/77 slowed the early building work very considerably and made it necessary to defer the school's opening until the spring term of 1978. The first head

teacher appointed to St. Augustine's School was Mr. Denis Cronin, who like his wife Sylvia, came from Jersey.

With the school built St. Augustine's Mass Centre continued in its growth with an elected and active committee taking responsibility for so much of the running of the Centre it was virtually independent. Fr. Curtin remained as committed to the project as ever, so when in April 1983 Bishop Jukes asked him for his views on the appointment of a priest-in-charge at Parkwood, he was, at first, understandably opposed to the idea.

Events moved swiftly. In early May a meeting to which all parishioners were invited to attend, was called at St. Augustine's with Bishop Jukes presiding. It was not well attended and there was no great enthusiasm expressed for either option; but the Archbishop, having received letters four to one in favour, and having sounded the opinions of the deanery clergy, the Area Bishops and others closely involved, felt, that on balance, division was the right course to take.

A house on Deanwood Drive, next door to the school was purchased as a Presbytery and Fr. Peter Ryman, the first parish priest of St. Augustine's, Parkwood, took up residence there from the first week of August 1983. Fr. Curtin, in his newsletter of July 24th 1983 wrote Rainham's 'Goodbye' to the parishioners of Parkwood, saying, *"They will now have to be content with being the best parish in Kent bar one!"*

With St Augustine's, Parkwood having been erected as a parish, Fr. Curtin was anxious to know Rainham's position regarding the repayment of the loan raised in 1976 for the building of St. Augustine's School and Mass Centre. In reply to Fr. Curtin's query the Diocesan Finance Office informed him that it was usual for a *'mother parish'* to continue in its support of a *'daughter parish'*, and that, for the time being at least, Rainham would continue to meet the repayments.

In a few short years, Rainham had moved on from being Gillingham's *'daughter'* to become a *'mother'* herself!

THE CONVENT

It was Fr. Curtin's firm belief that no parish was complete without a convent and the many benefits, practical and spiritual, that the presence of nuns could provide.

Consequently, when within a year or so of his arrival in Rainham the Sisters of Providence had to close their School of the Sacred Heart in Maidstone, Fr. Curtin invited the Order to open a convent in Rainham. The Order accepted the invitation, and having sold some of their land in Maidstone to the diocesan authorities, bought as their convent in Rainham, 60 Childscroft Road; a five-bedroomed semi-detached house for £16,000.

The first four sisters to take up residence in September 1975 were Sister Agnes and Sister Mary Paul who taught at St. John Fisher School and St. Thomas of Canterbury School respectively: with Sister Elizabeth and Sister Patricia, who had both retired from teaching, running the house. Later the Order made changes in personnel. Sister Patricia was moved in June 1978 and replaced by Sister Angela: and at the end of 1985 Sister Agnes, Sister Angela and Sister Mary Paul were moved and replaced by Sister Marita, Sister Eileen and Sister Gillian. Sister Gillian who had made her first vows in October 1985 was the very antithesis of the type of young woman who might be expected to enter a Religious Order. Always exuberant with a boisterous sense of humour which at times shocked her more sober sisters, Sister Gillian taught at St. Thomas of Canterbury School where she was as immensely popular with staff and children as she was throughout the parish.

The convent very quickly became an integral part of parish life. Mass, said within the framework of Morning or Evening Prayer of the Church, was celebrated three times a week (reducing to twice). At first these Masses were celebrated in the house; but after two years the sisters converted part of their large garage into a chapel where it was possible for the Blessed Sacrament to be reserved. As the chapel was seldom closed it became a haven for private prayer as well as a centre for Mass and other devotions of the Church.

The convent was not a closed house to us, but an open and friendly place with the sisters hosting courses, particularly for the catechists of the parish, and diverse discussion groups including the ecumenical groups formed annually to follow the Lenten talks on Radio Medway.

However, the sisters' activities were not confined to the convent; they played a full and active part in all parish social events and in the Liturgies of the Church.

While they were in Rainham the sisters shared with us the milestone anniversaries of their lives in Religion; renewing their vows during celebratory Masses in St. Thomas of Canterbury Church. Sister Elizabeth celebrated the 50th anniversary of her Profession in 1978 and the 60th in 1988; while Sister Angela celebrated her 50th in 1985 and Sister Agnes 25 years in 1984.

The Order had to close the convent in Rainham in May 1991 by which time Fr. John Bliss was our parish priest; but on October 5th 1991, the Sisters of Providence; other invited guests and parishioners alike thronged to St. Thomas of Canterbury Church for Sister Gillian's Final Profession. An inspiring and beautiful ceremony.

Although the Sisters of Providence were in Rainham for only 16 years their presence here surely fulfilled all of Fr. Curtin's expectations.

THE PRESBYTERIES

Minutes of a Parish Council meeting held on November 9th 1975 inform us that Bishop Charles Henderson, when making an Episcopal visitation to Rainham, let us know that our request for another assistant priest could not be considered unless, or until, we were able to provide our priests with more suitable accommodation. It was Bishop Henderson's opinion that a priest should have a minimum of two private rooms.

At this time Fr. Curtin, Fr. Larkman, Fr. Soper and Bro. Aelred O.F.M. were resident at 69 London Road; a large detached four bedroomed house, but certainly not large enough to fulfil Bishop Henderson's criterion.

As if to meet our needs, 9 London Road came onto the market towards the end of 1975. Built as two very substantial semi-detached houses converted into one, it was the house from which Dr. Norman Porterfield had run his general practice and had also lived. The purchase price was about £26,000: but on top of that the cost of necessary repairs, renovations and decorating had to be met. As well as providing two private rooms for each priest on the upper floor, the ground floor provided accommodation for a parish office, an interview/meeting room, kitchen, dining room and priests' communal lounge, all of very generous proportions. There was also a print room, which had probably been the dispensary.

To satisfy the curiosity the new presbytery aroused among parishioners several '*open evenings*' were held, each attended by about a hundred people and followed by a beautifully prepared

and presented buffet supper. These 'open evenings' were fundraisers, but also marvellous social occasions.

9 London Road served as the presbytery for eight years; but one drawback was its distance from St. Thomas' Church which meant, that apart from Mass and other service times the church, for security reasons, had to be kept locked. Also, maintenance and running costs on such a large building were high; and in 1984, with St. Augustine's hived off and our complement of priests reduced to two, it became sensible to move to a smaller house closer to the church; and the move into 63 London Road took place on November 25th 1984.

During these eight years the cost of housing had rocketed and 9 London Road was sold for about £90,000 with 63 London Road being purchased for about £45,000. Fr. Curtin realised that 63 London Road was far too small a property 'for two not so young priests plus the usual offices required for the various parish activities,' and in an open letter to us, his parishioners, he informed us of plans being drawn up by the architect Mr. Frank Stebbing that would more than double the size of the accommodation; but that it would take at least five months and cost in the region of £70,000 to carry them out. As a temporary measure Fr. William (Billy) Cannon was able to move into a council flat on the Twydall Estate where he was close to St. Peter's Church.

The expensive plans to enlarge 63 London Road were never put in hand due, in part at least, to a suggestion put forward by Bishop John Jukes that had it been implemented would have solved the car parking problem at St. Thomas' Church. The plan would have entailed the sale of 63 London Road to help finance additions to the hall, or the rebuilding of it if necessary, to house all the usual parish offices and priests' accommodation under one roof: and to create an access to car parking space in the church

grounds, to purchase 2 or 4 Century Road for demolition. Strangely enough 2 Century Road came on to the market shortly afterwards and we bought it for £66,000. Bishop Jukes' plan was never 'writ in stone' but was rather an idea for possible fulfilment some time in the future; but Fr. Curtin gave it passing acknowledgment when in the newsletter of October 26th 1986 he wrote, 'The parish is now the owner of 2 Century Road. Its position has the special value of giving, in due time, a new access to the hall and grounds.'

The property had been neglected and needed some repair and interior renovation before it was ready for our assistant priest, Fr. Gregory Griffiths, to occupy.

CATHOLIC ASSOCIATIONS AND HOUSE GROUPS IN THE PARISH

Fr. Curtin wanted a spirit of community and friendship to permeate the parish and encouraged participation in house groups; Catholic Associations and Societies as a way of achieving this.

When Fr. Curtin arrived there was only one Catholic Association in Rainham that retained an unbroken link with the parish's earliest days. This was the Knights of St. Columba of Medway Council 151. This Council had been established in the Parish of Our Lady of Gillingham on July 25th 1926; and was the Mother Foundation of Chatham Deanery. Although Rainham has had its own parish priest since 1963 and was erected as a parish in 1970, the Knights in Rainham have remained with the Mother Council.

The only other Catholic Association active in Rainham at the time St Thomas' Hall was opened in 1934 was the Legion of Mary, which continued strongly with both senior and junior branches

meeting regularly until the early 1960's. An attempt to revive the Legion under Fr. Gleeson was unsuccessful.

It was not until 1964 that the Rainham Catholic Ladies Club was formed; though during the 1950's many of our ladies were members of the Medway Catholic Ladies Guild, and two, Irene Jeffrey and Magda Pole, both served terms of office as President. This Guild was able to attract speakers of the standing of, for example, Fr. Agnellus Andrew and Fr. Malachy Lynch to address their meetings, but in the early 1960's with the demolition of the Sun Hotel (Chatham's premier hotel) and loss of other attractive venues in Chatham, it could not continue. When Fr. Curtin came, the Rainham Catholic Ladies Club was renamed the Ladies Circle; and finally, the Union of Catholic Mothers (U.C.M.) was established in Rainham in the autumn of 1978. The U.C.M.'s principal aim is to defend Christian values in family life and to offer practical help to any family in difficulty. Our own Foundation raises funds for national and local charities in alternate years and has a varied programme of social events. A Rainham member, Mary Hamblin is currently the U.C.M. Diocesan Welfare Officer and attends meetings at Diocesan and National Level.

Fr. Curtin wanted young mothers to feel included in parish life and was particularly keen to establish the St. Gerard Majella Society; a house group movement designed to meet the spiritual and social needs of mothers of young Catholic children. Fr. Curtin had been closely associated with this group in the Home Counties during its first eight years and had seen its rapid growth there: but after a year in Rainham the results exceeded his expectations. There were almost 50 members in four house groups, and two of these groups, named for St. Catherine and St. Anne, continue to meet.

Other house groups sprang up, notably St. Peter's, St. Mark's and St. Thomas More's. These groups, and most others had an

invited priest as a member who regularly attended the meetings, so not only were friendships formed, but there was a deepening of faith and prayer life as well. These groups have now ceased to meet, although one, St Peter's, only recently.

The Newman Circle which is part of the national Newman Association was started in Rainham by Gerald Mancini. Fr. Curtin attended all the early meetings starting each one with a house Mass, until, to suit the needs of commuting members, the monthly meetings were changed from Monday to Sunday evenings. Membership of the Circle is now ecumenical, and in addition to the monthly meeting the Circle endeavours to make a retreat day annually.

When Dr. Kary Pole founded the Medway Towns Catenian Association Circle in 1950, Rainham was still a fairly small village on the fringe of the Medway Towns and the catchment area for membership extended from Rainham to as far west as Gravesend. By the mid-1970's Rainham was virtually a town in itself and with development in Sittingbourne and the villages in between, a more locally based Catenian Circle became desirable. Fr. Curtin encouraged this, and with some dual membership with the Medway Towns Circle, the Swale Catenian Circle was founded in 1978.

"Marriage Encounter", a movement designed for the enrichment of married life sprang to prominence in the parish in the 1970's and was vigorously encouraged by Fr. Curtin. The core group in the parish was very enthusiastic and many couples were invited to spend *"Marriage Encounter"* weekends away from their families and friends to take stock of their relationships. Most couples, while not wanting to become active in the movement, appreciated their weekends, and for some, the experience made a lasting difference in their marriages. The movement is no longer active in the parish.

The Clergy Fraternal and the Lay Fraternal were formed in Rainham soon after Fr. Curtin came. Both groups worked independently, but the Lay Fraternal always had the approval of the clergy for the many church services, days of prayer and social events they organised in the Fraternals' early years. A relatively long period of inactivity was ended when the two groups merged to organise events jointly; and with the ending of the British Council of Churches (B.C.C.) and the birth of Churches Together in England (C.T.E.), became known as Churches Together in Rainham. The Twydall Churches had earlier broken away from the Rainham Fraternals to organise their own ecumenical programme; and with the birth of C.T.E. became known as Churches Together in Twydall.

Radio Medway (now Radio Kent), led the country in producing '*Lenten Talks*' which were designed to foster discussion and '*phone-ins*' from ecumenical groups. Groups in all parts of the parish follow these talks.

The most practical ecumenical venture must be the Rainham Luncheon Club, which in October 2000 celebrated its 20th birthday. Every Wednesday of the year, four teams, each with members drawn from the three churches/parishes, and working on a rota basis, prepare lunch at Signal Court for 30 housebound people. For some of these people, brought in by an '*Age Concern*' Ambulance, or private car, it is their only outing of the week.

The Youth Discussion Group was started by Fr. Peter Soper who came to the parish immediately after his ordination in 1974. Membership was limited to those who had been Confirmed and fell within the 15-21 year age bracket. This group was immensely popular and very strong and brought Rainham to the forefront in Diocesan Youth matters. Fr. Soper was appointed to another parish in 1980; but under Mrs Kathy Eaglesham and senior

members the group continued successfully until Mrs. Kathy Eaglesham left the area in May 1989. When the senior members moved on as well the group finally ceased to be able to renew itself and the Youth Discussion Group folded.

The Youth Club was started in the parish in January/February 1955: but over the years there have been many changes in membership requirements and some quite long periods when club activities were suspended. Matthew Micallef took over the leadership of the Youth Club in 1991 since when it has run continuously. Currently membership is limited to boys and girls in School Years 6-8.

As well as supporting membership of house groups and Catholic associations where there was always some serious input, Fr. Curtin did not ignore the importance of activities that were purely social in content. Foremost among these were the day trips to France, which were arranged initially by John and Denise Ellery, but later, as now, by Ben Gamman. The duty free allowance when these trips began were fairly modest, but the attraction lay as much in having lunch together as in the shopping. These day trips to France remain as popular as ever, but are not now organised as frequently as they were.

Fr. Curtin always went on the French trips. He enjoyed socialising whether being entertained in a parishioner's home or as one in a crowd. He also enjoyed good food and wine, and even when he took small groups of parishioners on pilgrimage to Fatima, a shrine for which he had a deep devotion, he knew where to take the party to savour the local specialities and the good but reasonably priced wines.

LITURGICAL MINISTERS

It is the Mass that is the wellspring of all Catholic life and community and Fr. Curtin gave great attention to Liturgy and the involvement of the people.

Fr. Curtin loved to be among the first to act on any development in the Church, and embraced change with enthusiasm. Laymen had been Readers in St Thomas's Church from the time Fr. Petry had been priest-in-charge: but as soon as Fr. Curtin came, women were invited to become Readers as well.

With regard to music in church, Fr. Curtin's preference was for folk groups rather than organ and choir. Folk music was the *'in'* thing in the church and he was also sure that everyone in general and young people in particular preferred it.

Fr. Curtin insisted on calling the choir at St. Thomas' Church a schola and on the majority of occasions he would not allow the schola, or the folk groups, to sing from the organ loft; but insisted that both should play their part in the liturgy from the sanctuary. Fr. Curtin was the master of the 45 minute Sunday Mass and expected the schola (though not so much the folk groups) to play along to meet this target, cutting down on the singing if Mass was over-running at any given point. This in spite of the fact that the schola had no point of contact with the organist!

On special, or one off occasions, Fr. Curtin would want the Mass to be a mix of folk and traditional music, with all the musicians from St. Thomas' and St. Peter's taking part. The strong folk group built up at St. Peter's during Fr. Curtin's time continues to accompany Masses there, alternating with the organ. At St. Thomas' the folk groups fell away after a time, and the choir returned to the organ loft when Fr. Curtin left.

The first Lay Ministers of Communion in the parish were our four Sisters of Providence. Four ministers were a sufficient number

for Communion under both kinds to be introduced at weekday Masses, but Fr. Curtin wanted to extend Communion under both kinds to all six Sunday Masses; as well as to introduce a rota for the regular taking a Communion to the Sick. To make this possible thirty of our men were commissioned as Lay Ministers of Communion by Bishop Charles Henderson at a concelebrated Mass at St. Thomas of Canterbury Church on December 1st 1979. This was a very large number of Lay Ministers of Communion for any parish to have at that time, and it was not until May 29th 1984 that seven women and one more man were commissioned at St George's Cathedral in Southwark.

The Guild of St. Stephen was established in the parish in February 1987. Tony Roberts, who has been Master of Ceremonies throughout, trains the servers who are well practised in their duties and immaculately turned out. Girls were not admitted to the Guild at St. Thomas' until July 1994 when the Church finally sanctioned what was already happening in many parishes. They have proved themselves to be a great asset.

PRIESTS AND DEACONS

The parish was blessed in that almost from the time Fr. Curtin came to us until 1984 there were always two assistant priests at Rainham. Additionally there were deacons sent here to gain experience of parish life before being ordained to the priesthood. These included the Franciscan, John Forest Holden, Desmond Docherty and Hugh Bridge, whose priestly ordination at Petts Wood was attended by many of us. Before taking up an appointment as a parish priest himself, Fr Martin Kensington came to Rainham to find out about the running of a parish as until then he had spent his entire priestly ministry in education. His rather stern appearance belied a delightful sense of humour and he was popular with the schola with whom he would accept an invitation to sing whenever this was possible. A visiting priest,

popular in parish and in school, was Fr. Villafranca who came over from Spain in several successive summers.

The fact that we had three resident priests, and so many priests and deacons passing through, added a great deal to the quality of pastoral care and parish life. Not only did house group meetings benefit from the input of a priest or deacon, but house Masses on weekday evenings were virtually the norm.

In spite of so much help and goodwill the demands of such a busy parish placed a great strain on Fr. Curtin and on February 18th 1978 he suffered a very severe stroke. A man of less determination, and perhaps less robust health, might not have made such a good recovery, but he was able to return to full duties less than five months later.

ORDINATIONS

Part of Fr. Curtin's convalescence was spent in Spain at the English College in Valladolid where a parishioner, Douglas Morris, was studying for the priesthood. He returned to Valladolid for March 30th 1980 when Archbishop Michael Bowen ordained Douglas, and two other Southwark candidates, to the diaconate. After '*Vatican II*' it became the norm for ordination to the priesthood to take place in the candidate's own parish, rather than at the seminary or cathedral of the diocese as before: and so with Bishop John Jukes officiating Douglas Morris was ordained to the priesthood at St. Thomas of Canterbury Church on July 4th 1981. The church was crowded and it was one of the few occasions when the schola and the combined folk groups were permitted by Fr. Curtin to sing from the organ loft! Fr. Morris celebrated his first Mass at St. Thomas' the following morning.

While Douglas Morris was in his last year or so of studying for the priesthood, his father, Keith Morris was accepted as a candidate

for the Permanent Diaconate, an order restored in the Church by '*Vatican II*' after a lapse of six or seven centuries. Keith was one of the earliest permanent deacons in the diocese, and his ordination by Archbishop Michael Bowen took place at St. Thomas of Canterbury Church on July 10th 1982.

THE SILVER JUBILEE OF ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY CHURCH

The 25th anniversary of the opening of St. Thomas of Canterbury Church on April 28th 1983 was celebrated with a Mass at which Bishop John Jukes was the principal celebrant. Assisting were the parish clergy, Fr. Michael Curtin; and assistant priests Fr. William (Bill) Cannon and Fr. Laurence Howard; and Deacon Keith Morris. Many of the deanery clergy were also present and priests who had served in the parish previously, including Fr. David O'Regan; Fr. Patrick (Paddy) Fox and Fr. Peter Soper. Two Sisters of Providence led the Offertory Procession with Head Teachers Mr. Thomas (Tom) Carter of St. Thomas of Canterbury School; and Mr. Dennis Cronin of St. Augustine's School. At the reception held afterwards in the hall the Sisters of Providence presented Fr. Curtin with a white chasuble embroidered with three choughs on a silver shield, the heraldic device of St. Thomas of Canterbury.

A CIVIC MASS

In 1985 Mrs. Joan Ward McNally was elected Mayor of Gillingham and Fr. Curtin felt honoured to be invited to be her chaplain and to preside at a Civic Mass at St. Thomas' on May 19th 1985. This was a very formal ceremonial occasion which Fr. Curtin, who loved ceremony, organised so well.

FR. CURTIN'S 40th ANNIVERSARY OF ORDINATION

Fr. Curtin declared the 40th anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood a day never to be forgotten. The anniversary was celebrated on the actual day, Sunday May 22nd 1988, and amid all the cards, congratulations and gifts he received, the greatest surprise of all for him was to find, only ten minutes before the start of the 10.30 a.m. Mass, that his brother, Fr. Dennis, was sitting in his! (Fr. Curtin's) chair!

Fr. Curtin was appointed to the parish of St. Ethelbert in Ramsgate at the end of April 1989. In the sixteen years he spent at Rainham Fr. Curtin had seen a great flowering of the parish: but we could not buck national trends, and even before he left there had been a small decline in the Mass count.

Fr. Curtin, having suffered a very severe stroke, died in Ramsgate on March 21st 1991 – less than two years after leaving Rainham. The funeral Mass on March 27th – the Wednesday of Holy Week – was attended by four bishops; 70 priests; his own parishioners and many of us.

FR. JOHN BLISS

Fr. John Bliss was inducted as our parish priest on May 3rd 1989. Fr. John was a very private and undemonstrative man whose concern for social justice was deeply held.

During the eight years Fr. John was with us as our parish priest he always insisted that the parish was not his: it was ours and that we should make the decisions and take responsibility for them. He was simply the *'animateur'*; and made it known straight away that he wanted to form some sort of Parish Council. Within a month of his arrival he called an open meeting to discover, particularly from those actively involved, the strengths and weaknesses of the parish. He found mostly strengths.

The name chosen for the council was the *"Parish in Council"* this name being indicative of the fact that it was not just a few parishioners who would be the decision makers: for although each of the parish organisations elected a member to represent them on the council, the quarterly meetings were open and everyone present had the right to speak and to vote. The first meeting of the *'Parish in Council'* was held in December 1989. In addition to the *'Parish in Council'* very successful Core Groups were formed to deal with matters such as Finance and Liturgy. These groups met more frequently and would report to the quarterly meetings as required.

Fr. John's early years with us were deeply clouded by the financial situation he inherited. The Offertory collection in the week of Fr. John's induction was £551.12 and the parish debt stood at £70,503.

The situation worsened during the summer months. In September 1989 Fr. John warned that we were facing bankruptcy in five months; and in February 1990 we exceeded the limit our overdraft of £80,000 as our Finance Group had met the Diocesan demand for our 1998 Diocesan Development Fund contribution of £5,000. 1989's contribution had to be paid in the June of 1990; and another £5,000 in December 1990. Appeals were made for our weekly Offertory to reach £900, but it took a long time for this target to be reached, and then only patchily. In the meantime nothing stood still. Maintenance and repair of the two houses and the two churches; and in particular repairs to the organ and the flat roofs of St. Thomas' Church were heavy: but the real enemy was the ever increasing interest rate at that time which peaked at 15% and meant that little or nothing was being paid off the capital sum. Coupled with high interest rate was recession and many parishioners, having to make economies themselves, were unsympathetic about the parish debt and the opinion was

expressed in the parish and at *'Parish in Council'* meetings that our second property, the bungalow, should be sold.

This however was not possible as a solution as with the two principal rooms in 63 London Road being given over entirely to office and parish use, the remaining three rooms (one no more than a boxroom), were totally inadequate accommodation for two priests and would allow for no privacy whatsoever.

Even so, it was not until January 10th 1993 that the Finance Group launched and led a Planned Giving Campaign; the first since the summer of 1962. The response from the parish was tremendous and the weekly Offertory rose almost immediately to an average of between £1,100-£1,200. This coupled with the by then falling interest rate helped to steadily reduce the debt.

ST. PETER'S CHURCH

Fr. John's years in Rainham were a time of positive achievement, but for the people of St. Peter's, at least, the greatest achievement was the Dedication of their church which Fr. Curtin had always opposed, but with which Fr. John had no argument. The decision taken Bishop Jukes was invited to perform the ceremony, and with the date set for June 29th 1990 the St. Peter's Committee decided to follow custom and to have a new altar consecrated in place of the one then in use which had come from St. Thomas'.

The people of St. Peter's set about the challenge to raise the necessary funds for the new altar with great enthusiasm. There were regular collections; and there was great dismay when a gallon bottle placed in the porch for small change was stolen when almost full. Individual parishioners organised fund-raisers and past clergy and parishioners made donations, so that as the

day of Dedication drew near £1,600 had been raised towards the total.

In the first instance a London firm quoted the figure of £2,730 for a simple altar in Portland stone, but parishioner Joe Kulka designed a more interesting altar and an Altar of Reservation which were executed in marble by a Newcastle-under-Lyme firm at a total cost of £2,725.50. To match these two altars the diocese advised a matching lectern and font at a further cost of £1,200. Besides designing the two altars, Joe Kulka installed the four Dedication Crosses and resited the Stations of the Cross.

The Dedication of St. Peter's Church was a much simpler ceremony than the equivalent at St. Thomas' only eighteen years earlier, but was none the less quite spectacular. Relics of St. Justus and St. Philip Howard were sealed within the altar by one of the Flaherty brothers who had built the church; and the anointing of the altar itself was undertaken with obvious satisfaction by Bishop Jukes as he spread copious amounts of Chrism across the altar's entire surface with the palms of his hands. Flames from the fire into which incense was placed prior to the censing of the altar and the people reached almost to the ceiling.

The marble lectern and font, advised by the Diocese, were installed as planned and were dedicated on June 28th 1992. The cost was £1,251 of which £1,000 was anonymously donated by two people.

The generosity of St. Peter's people was again evident in a report from the St. Peter's Committee the summer of 1996 which stated that the cost of new front doors for St. Peter's Church was to be met by an anonymous donation of £600 given in appreciation for the kindness shown by the people of St. Peter's to a lady who had died. The report went on to state that a commission for a statue of St. Peter had been placed with Sister Concordia, and

that the cost of this statue would be met by two anonymous donors. This statue, depicting St. Peter standing and very simply dressed as a fisherman with his fisherman's net at his left side and holding a golden key aloft in his right hand, was completed, and installed in time for the planned blessing on the Feast of SS Peter, and Paul in 1997.

ST. THOMAS' CHURCH

From the time he arrived Fr. John had wanted to renovate and reinstate our lovely stone font left standing outside the south door of the church for so long. It was unaffordable at the time, but in the summer of 1992 with the parish debt still standing at £86,290 Fr. John made a separate appeal for £705 which would enable the work to be carried out. Again, it was an anonymous donor who came forward, and in October, with the work having been carried out by Lee Harris, the font was reinstated and sited before Our Lady's altar. To allow sufficient space around the font for baptismal parties the statue of the Sacred Heart was moved to the back of the church to the position where it now stands

Once the font had been taken back into the church, the space where it had stood remained empty until Josie Boxall and Caroline Williams, who for a long time had wanted to create a Children's Memorial Garden, saw it as the ideal spot. The children remembered are those of the parish and the school who have died and their names with dates of birth and death are inscribed on individual plaques, which are displayed on the sheltering semi-circular wall. In the summer months, with the fountain playing amid the surrounding colourful flowers, and the rose bushes, surmounting the wall, in bloom, it is a delightful and tranquil place. The garden was blessed appropriately enough, after the Saturday evening Mass on the Feast of the Holy Innocents, December 28th 1996.

It was Fr. John who found the '*Fifteenth Station of the Cross*' – '*The Resurrection*' amid discarded or little used paraphernalia in the annexe to the organ loft where it must have lain unrecognised from the time the church was built. There is no record as to whether Michael Clark was commissioned to sculpt fifteen, or the more usual Fourteen Stations of the Cross: but certainly, Fr. Scott was only invoiced for fourteen. Sister Concordia coloured the Fifteenth Station in keeping with the fourteen she had already coloured and this was then erected, without ceremony, in its appropriate place in the church.

It was not until the 25th Anniversary of the Consecration of St. Thomas' Church was almost upon us that the decision was taken to mark the occasion by the installation of a new lectern more in keeping with its surroundings than the simple wooden lectern used since the removal of the pulpit. Some designs considered, though excellent in themselves, either did not complement the architecture or furnishings of the church; or the cost was prohibitive. The design finally chosen for the lectern was a simple white stone column so like those supporting the altar that both might have been installed at the same time. The cost of this lectern was £1,255 and it was blessed on December 29th 1996, the 40th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone.

ORDINATIONS

Besides the very inspiring ceremony of Sister Gillian's Final Profession on October 5th 1991, there were three ordinations at St. Thomas of Canterbury Church while Fr. John was our parish priest:

On June 14th 1990, the Feast of Corpus Christi, Bishop John Jukes officiated at the ordination of Alan Boxall to the permanent diaconate.

The other two ordinations were to the priesthood. Paul Ryan, a parishioner of our daughter parish of St. Augustine's, was ordained on November 28th 1992 at St. Thomas' as the beautiful new church built at Parkwood was not large enough to accommodate the numbers that could reasonably be expected to attend an ordination.

Peter Jenner, one of our own parishioners was ordained on June 8th 1996. Peter, who trained at St. John's Seminary at Wonersh, was ordained a deacon at Norbury on July 8th 1995 where, as for his ordination to the priesthood, it was Bishop Charles Henderson who officiated.

Fr. Jenner celebrated his first Mass at Aylesford Priory on the following day, Sunday June 9th 1996.

2 CENTURY ROAD

The value of a second parish property was demonstrated, in September 1989, when David Peck, a student in his final year at St. John's Seminary at Wonersh was able to take up residence at 2 Century Road, sharing the bungalow with Fr. Gregory Griffiths. David needed time to consider his position with regard to the priesthood and while living in Rainham he taught at St. John Fisher School in Chatham and also took part in many of our parish activities.

At the end of the year David felt able to go forward to the priesthood and many of us travelled to Bromley for his ordination to the diaconate on September 20th 1990: and again to Bromley for his ordination to the priesthood on May 24th 1991.

63 London Road, housing both the parish office and meeting room was an impersonal place, attracting many callers and lacking in privacy. It was also noisy with heavy traffic using the A2; so in May 1995, as Fr. Gerard Bradley, left Rainham to take

up a new appointment and before Fr. Robert Sugg, his replacement arrived, Fr. John took the opportunity to move into the quieter and more private accommodation provided by 2 Century Road.

ECUMENISM

Fr. John Bliss established warmer working relationships with the Anglican and Methodist clergy in Rainham than had existed before and new ground was broken.

The most controversial aspect of this breaking of new ground followed a proposal put forward by the Methodist Minister of the time, the Revd. Lawrie Lambrick, that three times a year the principal Sunday morning service in the three Rainham churches should be occasions of shared worship, with the other two churches remaining closed. Fr. John was happy to co-operate insofar as Canon Law would allow; but not being permitted to close St. Thomas' Church at the time of a scheduled Sunday Mass and the Church's ruling on Eucharistic Hospitality, meant that in this venture our participation could not be complete.

From 1992 observance of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Rainham was transferred from January, when the dark nights and often inclement weather discouraged good attendances at the services, to the week before Pentecost. The week's services would culminate on the afternoon of Pentecost Sunday with members of the three churches meeting in Cozenton Park for a United Service. Preachers at these services included Bishop Charles Henderson, Fr. Wilfrid McGreal and the Revd. Alan Dawkins, the first Ecumenical Officer for Kent; and the Revd. Sheila Foreman. Summer time or not, the weather for these services was usually atrocious!

There were many successful examples of working together including Flower Festivals and "Songs of Praise" type evening services: and throughout this time the annual worship and social gathering, on or about the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul, of all the local churches dedicated to St. Peter, continued to take place.

Starting in 1993, it is most probable that Fr. John and the Revd. Michael O'Connor, the Vicar of St. Margaret's Church, were the first ecumenical Police Chaplaincy team in Kent; pre-dating the Churches Together in Kent initiative in this field. The role of Fr. John and the Revd. Michael O'Connor was agreed with the Police HQ in Maidstone, and on Friday evenings they would take it in turns either to go out with the police in the squad cars from 10.00 p.m. Midnight, or go down to the cells, chat with the Sergeant and see Officers bringing suspects in. As the number of chaplaincies grew, ecumenical and otherwise, meetings were held between them and the Police Superintendents at Maidstone.

Unusually, all three incumbents of the Rainham churches left almost simultaneously in the early autumn of 1997 leaving a hiatus quickly filled by the incoming clergy, but with little reference to that which had gone before.

Unchanged throughout have been the arrangements for the Woman's World Day of Prayer, celebrated in Rainham since 1951.

So many of Fr. John's initiatives began in his first year with us, like the programme for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (R.C.I.A.), called '*Sharing Our Faith*', which was started by Fr. John in September 1989 and flourished throughout the time he was with us. For the first two years, Fr. John personally headed the team running the sessions, but when the newly ordained Fr. Gerard Bradley came to Rainham in 1991, the responsibility for running the group was passed over to him. In his turn, Fr. Gerard

encouraged and trained the parish team to lead the sessions on a rota basis and to ultimately take full responsibility.

Great use was made of Fr Gerard's many talents during the four years he was in Rainham. A fine musician and organist he was able to help both organist and choir in many ways and the Mass and Psalm settings he wrote for them are still in regular use. Fr. Gerard's Bible Study Group which met on Friday mornings after the 10.00 a.m. Mass was necessarily small not many people are able to attend mid-morning meetings – but here his knowledge, understanding and ability to explain the passages that were read was greatly admired and held the attention of all in the group.

September 1989 also saw the launch of a monthly parish magazine. This was a field into which Dorothy Morris had wanted to venture for some time, and it is possible that Fr. John agreed to its introduction only because he in return wanted Dorothy to produce a Parish Directory every year. Or, perhaps he thought that the magazine might founder after a few months: but the magazine is now in its twelfth year and from an initial run of 100 copies (another 100 were hurriedly rushed off) 550 of each issue are now produced so that there is a sufficient number to distribute through the two churches and from St. Thomas of Canterbury School

Incidentally, this was not the first attempt to produce a parish magazine in Rainham. Records of St. Thomas' Church between 1958-1962 make occasional mention of a parish magazine on sale for 1d.

The Parish Directory was issued from 1990-1999, but has not now appeared for two years.

In most of the years that Fr. John was with us there was a Parish Day held on a Saturday in the autumn which was usually held at St. Thomas of Canterbury School. There was a crèche for very

young children and activity groups for children up to the age of fourteen which left the adults free to listen to talks and take part in discussions relating to the theme of the day. Everyone would come together for a shared lunch and for Mass at the end of the day. Leaders included Dympna Magee, who at the time was the Co-ordinator for Adult Education and Catechesis in the Diocese; Fr. Peter Hooper O.F.M. from the Franciscan Study Centre at Canterbury; and Fr. Fabian a Carmelite from Aylesford.

Every year there was a '*Seder Meal*' held on the Tuesday of Holy Week, which as it commemorated the exodus of the Jews from Egypt, must have had much in common with the '*Passover Meal*' attended by Our Lord on the last night of his life on earth at which he instituted the Blessed Sacrament. Likewise, it also demonstrated Christianity's roots in Judaism. These meals were always beautifully prepared and presented by Francis and Pauline Green with meticulous attention to the ceremonial detail.

Fr. John's deep concern for social justice was reflected in the setting up of the sale of '*Traidcraft*' goods soon after his arrival in the parish: and closer to home, he accepted Sue Fawcett's suggestion for a monthly collection of cleaning materials and dry goods for the local Cyrenian establishment

A '*Justice and Peace*' Group and a St. Vincent de Paul Group were set up as well, but unfortunately, these groups no longer meet.

'*Faith and Light*', a group for people with extra needs, founded by Jean Vanier in France in the 1970's, first met in Rainham in 1989. The group met in the hall on alternate Sunday afternoons under the leadership of June Dante, and whenever possible Fr. John and Fr. Gregory Griffiths would attend. It became a tradition that at the Sunday evening Masses on Palm Sunday and at Harvest Thanksgiving, that members of this group would act out the Gospel. June, with the help of others, would take the group away

on holidays and also to Aylesford for the special Diocesan Masses for the Handicapped.

It was Magda Pole who requested Fr. John to offer the senior citizens of the parish an opportunity to meet once a month; and suggested that this might be over a cup of tea or coffee after a weekday morning Mass. The first of these meetings was held in December 1989: and so that the senior citizens should be made comfortable, 2 Century Road, then the residence of Fr. Gregory Griffiths was opened up for them. Not many in the congregation wanted to be known as '*senior citizens*', so it was not long before the invitation for tea and coffee '*in No.2*' was extended to the weekday congregation in general and became a regular monthly feature that continues.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, a sacrament once feared and ominously known as '*The Last Rites*', has, since '*Vatican II*' come to be properly seen as a sacrament of healing and for restoration of health. It is a sacrament much more frequently used now and is a source of great comfort to many in illness. The first Mass with the Anointing of the Sick held in the parish was on Sunday December 2nd 1990 when 36 sick people, both young and old, were brought to St. Thomas' Church to be anointed. Two such Masses were held every year, alternating between St. Thomas' and St. Peter's Churches. There was always an opportunity for socialising after the Mass.

In spiritual and mundane matters Fr. John always tried to listen, and to hear what parishioners were saying: and he became aware that a common and very real complaint voiced in many parishes; '*that there is never a suitable opportunity to speak to a priest*', was a growing problem in Rainham. In January 1992 Fr. John provided an answer by introducing priests' '*At Homes*'. Fr. John would be '*At Home*' between 2.00 p.m.-5.00 p.m. one day a week; and the assistant priest between 6.00. p.m. – 9.00 p.m. on

another. This system provided a much-needed service that continues and is greatly appreciated.

In January 1994 Fr. John suffered a heavy fall in which he badly damaged his upper left arm and shoulder. Healing was not complete and for the remainder of his time here he was always in considerable discomfort. In spite of this and the continuing decline in Mass attendance his approach to every circumstance was positive and forward-looking.

THE HALL

The hall had remained virtually unchanged from the time it was built in 1934, except that, after a fire in the autumn of 1980, the stage area where the altar had stood was converted into a tea bar, and the former kitchen into cupboard space; but in 1996, prompted by the need to update and improve the toilets, and to provide toilet facilities for the disabled, further alterations to the hall were also proposed. These included extending the hall southwards to provide far greater storage space than before for the groups using the hall on a regular basis: a small tea bar and a large kitchen equipped with a cooker and a fridge. The *'Parish in Council'* voted in favour of the proposal as it was reasoned that by making the hall a more attractive venue, higher booking fees and increased bookings would offset the cost of the improvements in the matter of a few years.

Once the work was carried out in the summer of 1997, at the cost of about £35,000; the hall was renamed *'The Parish Centre'*

By the time the alterations to the hall were carried out it was known that Fr. John was leaving us. Fr John had been wanting a quieter parish, and he was appointed to the parish of St. Mary, Help of Christians in Old Coulsdon, Surrey, where there is only

one church and no school, and a Mass attendance of about 300. He was inducted there on September 7th 1997.

FR. DOUGLAS BULL

Before coming to Rainham Fr. Douglas Bull had spent most of his years in the priesthood working with young people: first as Diocesan Youth Officer and then as Chaplain to Christ the King Sixth Form College. Fr. Doug was inducted on September 28th 1997; and at the age of 41 was our youngest parish priest to date.

The cost of renovations and repairs carried out on the hall just before Fr. Doug's arrival had once again raised the parish debt to an amount in excess of £70,000. Unlike the position when Fr. John came to the parish, the parish finances were now on a sound footing, and once Fr. Doug had taken steps to minimise interest charges, he began to plan the how and when to put desirable and even necessary works in hand.

ST. THOMAS' CHURCH

Fr. Doug turned his attention first to the refurbishment of St. Thomas' Church, where apart from essential repairs to the flat roofs no maintenance had been carried out from the time it was built. Decoration of the exterior was imaginatively and beautifully carried out in colours picked out from those of the St. Thomas of Canterbury mural above the main door. The interior walls being of brick, there was little to be done by way of redecoration; but the fresh white paint on the low ceilings on either side brightened the building considerably. On the advice of Sister Concordia the dark red velvet curtain behind the altar was taken down; and once again her services were employed to re-tint the *'Christ in Glory'* group above the altar. The dark red carpeting in the sanctuary and the aisles was replaced with carpeting of a warm but muted pink, again adding in the brightness of the church and making it

appear more spacious. The statue of St. Thomas of Canterbury was removed from its position in front of the organ gallery, where it had passed almost unnoticed and resited, fittingly, in the corner of the Blessed Sacrament Chapel from where it can be seen, in all its gilded glory, from almost every part of the church. These changes took place over some time, but were complete by the year 2000.

ST. PETER'S

The refurbishment of St. Peter's took place during the year 2000. Here the ceiling tiles were painted white and the predominating blue of the wall behind the altar and the doors vanished under magnolia and white. The sanctuary was reduced in depth and the marble altar, lectern and font aligned; showing them to greater advantage than before. The sanctuary floor was carpeted in a softly toned mottled brown, while a self-coloured deeper brown carpeting was laid throughout the church, coffee room and entrance. The pews were once again resited, allowing for easy movement about the church. Spare pews were placed in the coffee room so that mothers with crying or difficult children might find a place of refuge.

'*A Book of Remembrance*' giving the names of all parishioners who have died since 1958, together with dates of death, has been placed in each church.

Excitement about the approaching Millennium was gathering pace when Fr. Doug arrived in Rainham in the autumn of 1997: but amid all the preparations in the parish for the Millennium and the celebration of the Millennium year itself, the groups and activities in the parish continued much as usual, although there were some changes.

'*The Mass with the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick*' has been replaced with a specially devised liturgy called "*A Service of Healing*". While those who are sick receive the Sacrament, others present are invited to be anointed with the *Oil of Gladness*, so that everyone present is given the opportunity to take part in the ceremony and to feel included.

The R.C.I.A. Group "*Sharing Our Faith*" which had been started by Fr. John when he was new to the parish suddenly foundered after running successfully for twelve years or so: but in the autumn of 2000 another R.C.I.A. Group entitled "*On The Way*" was started and is led by Fr. Doug.

Also in the autumn of 2000, Rainham had the honour to be chosen to pilot a scheme the aim of which is to include people with extra needs in active roles in the life and Mission of the Church. The reason for this honour probably lay in the fact that the activities of the Rainham '*Faith and Light*' Group came to the notice of others in the Diocese; or, perhaps, it was that so many people with extra needs may be seen taking part in the liturgy and social life of our parish. Christina Gangemi the Project Worker, and a cousin of Fr. Gerard Bradley, spoke about the scheme at all Masses on October 15th; and on December 3rd the whole parish was invited to take part in the Advent Activity Day, "*Follow the Star*" which was held in the Parish Centre.

AHOTOKUROM

Almost as soon as Fr. Doug came to Rainham he began to share with us his specific interest in Ahotokurom, which for him began while he was Chaplain at Christ the King Sixth Form College. Ahotokurom, a name which means "*Place of Serenity*", is a small village in the Cape Coast region of Ghana where the Padre Pio Rehabilitation Centre, run by the Daughters of Mary and Joseph,

supports people with leprosy; children with special educational needs, and orphaned and abandoned children.

Fr. Doug was so successful in passing on this interest that the U.C.M. made Ahotokurom their charity appeal for 1998 and raised a magnificent £3,000 for the village.

Fr. Doug has made three visits to Ahotokurom since coming to Rainham, returning from one in January 2000 with malaria: but undeterred, he went out again in June 2000, this time accompanied by Denise Ellery and Mary Hamblin.

A more fundamental change came about as Fr. Doug considered that the usually poorly attended '*Parish in Council*' meetings were an unsatisfactory way of gauging opinion in the parish and introduced instead a questionnaire system; which on the question of whether there should be a separate Diocese of Kent produced 415 responses. On other occasions the Parish Chairman addresses the congregation either during or after Sunday Masses. The Parish A.G.M. continues to be held where everyone may express opinions and vote on matters concerning the parish: and the Finance Group and the Liturgy Committee continue to function.

It was at a Liturgy Committee meeting that the subject of the frequency and timing of Sunday Masses was first raised. The fall in Mass attendance had continued and the Mass count for 1999 stood at 635, hardly a sufficient number to warrant six Masses. Also, if a priest happened to be on his own over a weekend it was very difficult (and very tiring) to say four Masses on a Sunday morning. After several months given for notice and consultation a decision was taken at the A.G.M. in March 2000 that Sunday morning Masses would be 9.30 a.m. for St. Thomas' and 11.00 a.m. for St. Peter's. These times were introduced on April 2nd 2000.

When the reduction in the number of Masses was under discussion it had not been foreseen that their introduction would become a virtual necessity. Fr. Robert Sugg left Rainham when appointed to the Catholic Missionary Society (C.M.S.) in the summer of 1999 and was replaced by a newly ordained priest, Fr. Duncan Lourensz who served in the parish only until February 2000 when he left to take up an appointment some weeks later at St. Luke's in Sevenoaks. This has left us temporarily with one priest: a temporary state that seems set to continue for some time.

Until another assistant priest is appointed, 63 London Road is being used as an office and meeting place: its use for which having been greatly improved by the removal of the partition wall between the two downstairs rooms. This much enlarged room comes into its own not only for large meetings, but for entertaining, as when the deanery clergy lunch together, and for the monthly coffee mornings.

THE MILLENNIUM

In '*Parish in Council*' meetings during the first few months Fr. Doug was with us, we were asked to put forward our suggestions for events during the Millennium year in which we would like to participate; or for things we would like to see happen; and from the many suggestions made a final selection was drawn up. These were a Mission to be given by the Catholic Missionary Society (C.M.S.); a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady in Europe in Gibraltar; a parish dinner; discos for the young people; a parish exhibition and a history of the parish.

Preliminary work for the Mission began after Fr. John McLaughlin, a missionary from the C.M.S. spoke at the A.G.M. in March 1999. Groups were set up to organise the liturgies; publicity; leafleting and visiting and other preparations necessary for a mission to be

successful. Faith Sharing Groups, in which many parishioners enjoyed taking part, were also set up as a preparation for the Mission.

It was also realised that the Mission and many other events proposed for the Millennium would require financing, and fund-raisers for this purpose included a Concert given by the Rainham Ladies Choir and mugs, specially designed for the parish, that went on sale in December 1999.

Ahotokurom was the choice made by parishioners for the Parish Millennium Appeal Fund, and during the year, culminating with a Concert given by the Rainham Ladies Choir on December 2nd which made a profit of £500, the total raised for Ahotokurom was over £4,200.

Also in the summer of the Millennium year the Knights of St Columba (K.S.C.) financed two young ladies to go out to Ahotokurom for two months; sending with them a generous donation for the Centre.

CELEBRATION OF THE MILLENNIUM YEAR IN THE PARISH

It was always the intention that the celebration of the Millennium would go on in the parish throughout the year 2000, and it was seen in as customary in the parish, with a party in the Parish Centre. The first Masses of the Millennium were the regular 10.00 a.m. Saturday morning Mass at St. Peter's where refreshments were served afterwards: and a Mass at noon at St. Thomas' where the congregation was as large as that for a Sunday morning Mass.

It was also our intention that the Millennium would have special and good memories for the children, and at all Masses on January 2nd each child present received a gift.

On the following Sunday, January 9th, it was the staff and pupils of our parish school of St. Thomas of Canterbury who presented the 10.30 a.m. Mass. St. Thomas' Church was filled to overflowing with people standing at the back and the sides. After the Mass each pupil and member of staff was presented with a glass paperweight, decorated with the school logo, as a memento of the occasion.

The emphasis continued to focus on young people with discos given for them in the Parish Centre on Tuesday January 25th for 7-10 year olds; and on Friday February 4th for 12-16 year olds.

Mr. Pat Carroll was the organiser and M.C. for our Parish Millennium Celebration Dinner which was held at the Golf Club at Upchurch on April 28th, the 42nd anniversary of the opening of St. Thomas of Canterbury Church. Well over 100 parishioners and guests attended this wonderful social occasion at which the toast of "*The Catholic Parish of Rainham*" was proposed by Fr. Wilfrid McGreal and the response made by Fr. Doug. Dorothy Morris responded for the guests. While we enjoyed ourselves inside, the rain, so much a feature of the year 2000 lashed down unremittingly outside.

Twenty or so Rainham parishioners went with Fr. Doug on the Gibraltar Pilgrimage which took place between May 29th-June 2nd. The pilgrimage was an experience shared with Fr. Chris Keen and parishioners from Walderslade. Apart from the pilgrimage aspect and Mass said at the '*Shrine of Our Lady of Europe*', the party visited an Augustinian Convent in Medina Sidonia and the famous Cathedral Cave of St. Michael deep within the Rock of Gibraltar itself. Mass was also celebrated by Fr. Doug at the Church of '*Our Lady of Sorrows*' in Catalan Bay.

A great deal of work had gone into preparations for our parish Mission, "*A Festival of Faith*"; but just before it began there was a renewed flurry of activity. The missionaries, Fr. John Breen and Fr

Richard Carter celebrated early morning Masses throughout the week; after which there would be breakfast served in the newly enlarged meeting room in 63 London Road before commuters left for work. Apart from the mid-morning Masses, there were services held every evening, each with a special theme; and on the Friday evening questions were invited. The missionaries also went to St. Thomas' School every day where they met with both pupils and parents. The week culminated with a Barn Dance organised by the U.C.M. on Saturday evening and on Sunday September 24th, the last day of the Mission, there was a barbecue held at lunchtime at St. Thomas Church. It rained yet again; but the fact that everyone had to crowd into the Parish Centre added to the sense of fun and companionship. The KSC braved the elements, and continued cooking for all.

The '*Parish Exhibition*' was held in the Parish Hall over two very wet weekends the 21st/22nd and 28th/29th October, and told the story of the parish, mostly in photographs. Some of these photographs and some of the exhibits shown had come to light while researching for this booklet, "*The Catholic Parish of Rainham 1921-2000*". The U.C.M. and K.S.C., both mounted stands and there were photographs shown of the Mission, the Pilgrimage to Gibraltar and Ahotokurom: but undoubtedly the greatest draw were the records and the many photographs shown of the pupils and staff of St. Thomas' School from the time of its opening in 1967.

On Sunday, December 31st the Parish Chairman, Mr Peter O'Brien, addressed every congregation after Mass suggesting a New Year's Resolution that would be easy for everyone of us to make and simple to keep. This was to make a Banker's Order, for an amount each month so small that we would not notice it, in favour of a scholarship scheme to help the young people of Ahotokurom to continue their studies. The magnificent sum of £6,000 a year was pledged.

In the preparation of this booklet I would like to acknowledge and thank Fr. Michael Clifton, the Diocesan Archivist; Mr. Tom Carter the first Head Teacher of St. Thomas of Canterbury School; Fr. Norman Swinton, Fr. Pierre Barbyer and Fr. Jim Petry, priests who served in Gillingham and Rainham at the time of the building of the Church of St. Thomas of Canterbury; and the many parishioners and particularly, Mrs Theresa Smith, for all the help and information I have received from them.

Also, to Mrs. Anna Houlahan for the typesetting of this booklet.

Dorothy Morris
31 December 2000

PARISH OF RAINHAM

Parish Priests

Fr. John Gleeson	1963-1973
Fr. Michael Curtin	1973-1989
Fr. John Bliss	1989-1997
Fr. Douglas Bull	1997-

Permanent Deacons

Rev. Keith Morris	1982-
Rev. Alan Boxall	1990-

PRIESTS OF THE PARISH OF GILLINGHAM WHO HAVE SERVED RAINHAM

Parish Priests

Fr. (later Canon) Thomas McMahon	1888-1931
Fr. Thomas Scott	1932-1963
Fr. Patrick (Paddy) Porter	1963-1988

Assistant Priests

John Inwood	Nov. 1921
Gerry Quinn	Mar. 1923
Oswald Bussy	Oct. 1930
Gregory Murphy	Nov. 1932
Edward McHale	Jul. 1937
John Hurley	May 1949
Leonard Whatmore	May 1953
Patrick Guckian	Sep. 1955

Pierre Barbyer	Oct. 1955
Norman Swinton	Mar. 1957
Bernard Gallagher	Nov. 1962

Assistant Priests

Fr. Mathew Neylon	1965-1967
Fr. Kevin Pelham	1967-1968
Fr. Harold Woodman	1968-1969
Fr. David O'Regan	1970-1974
Fr. Peter Soper	1974-1980
Fr. Paddy Fox	1975-1982
Fr. Martin Kensington	1977-1978
Fr. Billy Cannon	1978-1985
Fr. Lawrence Howard	1982-1983
Fr. Gregory Griffiths	1985-1991
Fr. Gerard Bradley	1991-1995
Fr. Robert Sugg	1995-1999
Fr. Duncan Lourensz	1999-2000