

DESTINED TO SURVIVE

St Augustine of Canterbury,

Weymouth

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1819 The Bishop makes up his mind: the Dartmouth Mission must close. Weymouth will be the next Mission. The last report sounded promising: 42 Catholics in the Barracks, about 15 in Weymouth itself - plus all the visitors. Dr. Barnes knows some rich Catholic families in Bath who visit Weymouth regularly - they can afford to give something to the Mission, With Dartmouth closed. Abbé Simon will be free to start the mission - until he goes to Plymouth. There are supposed to be a few French priests in Weymouth, all elderly and retired now, but the Lulworth French priest, he is already administering the Sacraments at Weymouth - he can keep an eye on things. Mr. Weld too - he goes to Sutton (Poyntz) every year and he is keen to see a mission there. And the £80 the Dartmouth endowment brings in, that can be transferred to Weymouth and it is more than enough for a priest's salary. It is hard being Bishop of the Western District in the 1820s. Too few Catholics spread over too large an area; too few priests and too little money; too many rich people demanding too many private chaplains; too many poor people with no hope at all.

Abbé Simon books rooms at No. 63 St. Mary Street, "There is my lodging and my chapel". Two months later, the elderly Abbé Dubuisson is persuaded to take over the Mission. He writes, "The class of labouring people which is the greatest part of the Congregation has been almost starved to death this winter" "A woman in Upwey died last week. For want of holy oils, I could not anoint her".

1823 The Abbé struggles on in the Mission for two years and then a young and zealous missionary straight out of Carlow is appointed. Soon he has to beg the bishop for some money. Indeed, nothing goes right for Fr. McDonnell, even with the visitors: "The Rev. McGerrard is here and says Mass for Mr. Jones' family which the other strangers generally attend."

1825 Fr. McDonnell is replaced by the newly consecrated Bishop Peter Augustine Baines. Bishop Baines is destined to become Bishop of the Western District and he will make the decision to build the church. He is already well

known throughout the country as a powerfully persuasive orator and writer of texts. He is at ease too in any company, Catholic or Protestant, rich or poor. He writes to his Bishop, "I am satisfied your Lordship did well in pitching on this town for a Mission. With a small decent chapel that may be built for £200 a congregation might soon be formed... I have reason to believe that some of the protestant inhabitants might contribute to the building of a chapel."

He spends two periods of 3 months here and looks at possible sites for a church. Bishop Baines cannot stay in Weymouth for ever though and he tries hard to involve a Franciscan in the Mission, "Fr Edgeworth is here. I trust he may suit this place. I only fear he may be a little low-spirited here."



Bishop Baines
(from a contemporary engraving)

1824 Fr. Edgeworth stays for 4 months. Later on this year, Mr. Weld will plan his holiday in Weymouth and please could the Bishop spare him a chaplain? The Bishop sends him Fr. Burke as chaplain cum Missionary. Fr. Burke finds it difficult to relate to wealthy English Catholics while Mr. Weld thinks that Fr. Burke will do extremely well once he has had a little experience in the world, Fr. Burke leaves Weymouth about the same time as Mr. Weld.

1829 The Catholic Emancipation Bill becomes law on the 14th April - (high time too, they have been arguing about it since 1801). This same year Bishop Baines becomes Bishop of the Western District and almost immediately sends Fr. Hartley to Weymouth. For 12 months, Fr. Hartley will research properties and building materials and will even draw plans of seating arrangements. Fr. Hartley wants to see the church built, the Bishop wants Fr. Hartley at Cannington, Sir M.S.Weld wants him at Sales House, and Sir Bernard Whey wants him at Tavistock. Fr. Hartley says if he must move, please can it be Poole, only 25 miles away?

1835 Bishop Baines and Fr. Hartley buy a large site on the Turnpike Road. The land is then subdivided and the plots are sold leaving only a narrow strip of land on which to build Church and Presbytery, both in one long building, On 22nd October 1835 the Church is dedicated to St. Augustine of Canterbury The Right Rev. Dr. Baines of Bath is assisted by Rev. Fr. Moutardier. The officiating clergyman, Rev. Fr. O'Farrell is assisted by Rev. Fr Hartley. The Grand Mass by Novello in D is executed - in a very superior and effective style - by Mr. Foy at the organ and by the orchestra consisting of Mrs. Angel, Messrs Collins and Tullidge.

The Dorset Chronicle entitles this an "Increase of Popery"

1836 The Catholic Directory reports that: "Through the liberality and charity of many benevolent and good Christians, the chapel and dwelling house are completed without any debt or encumbrance being left on the place."

1839 Fr. Tilbury has repeatedly to caution his altar boys not to ring the bells too loudly lest they be heard outside. After 5 years with 5 different priests, St. Augustine's will have Fr. Tilbury here for 15 years and of the 393 entries in the first Parish Register, he will record 219. In the Register, the names Ann Odber or Catherine Dwyer will appear 48 times either as Godmother or as marriage witness. When Ann Odber dies, she will be buried at "The bottom of the chapel", a 5 year old girl will also be buried there. May they intercede for us as we tread on their graves. During Fr. Tilbury's time here, the Australian

Government refuses to take any more convicts and so, a prison colony is established on Portland. The prisoners and staff there will form the basis for St. Augustine's Mission on Portland which, in 1866, will become a separate mission. As for Dorchester, even the early missionaries had considered it a part of the Parish, and now in 1863, St. Augustine priests are saying Mass there. It too will become a separate mission in 1871.

1863 With so much going on in Portland and Dorchester, it is hard to realise that we have had so many priests in the 8 years since Canon Tilbury took ill and died. Fr. Charles is here now though and he will remain here for nearly 12 years. He has had the sacristy enlarged and refurnished and gas lighting installed. He has also opened a school in the Presbytery but has since decided to build one in the Presbytery Garden. (Mr. McMahon will make sure that Fr. Charles is remembered in Weymouth by getting a street named after him).

1871 is the year in which James Fred Player is born at Osmington. Weymouth will produce a number of priests but Fr. Player must be extra special for St. Augustine's because his mother was a Champ and that name appeared so often in the first Parish Register. 1852 was a sad year for the family, when "George Champ aged 26, drowned off Whitenose by the upsetting of a boat" and, 10 days Later "James Champ aged 81 of Osmington Mills died" - In 1983, a relative of Fr. Player, Mrs. Pryal Wright of San Francisco will visit St. Augustine's.

1893 A successor of Fr. Charles, Canon O'Brien will also be interested in schools and will invite the Pipcus Sisters to start a school in Weymouth. Perhaps his illness and sudden death in 1899 have been caused by worry over the church buildings - all the properties along Dorchester Road have been shaken and weakened by tractor engines driving heavy loads to Dorchester. He had found two houses in St. Mary Street but the sale was never completed.

1899 Fr. Barry has a different approach; he buys back 38 Dorchester Road for use as the Presbytery. Once the foundations have been strengthened, the church itself can be lengthened by knocking down a wall and placing the sanctuary where the former Presbytery used to be. A new front can also be added - with a niche for the statue of St. Augustine. While all this is being done, Fr Barry has started a long fight with the Council and Education Authority for permission to have a new school in Walpole Street. Bishop Graham talks of "the energy of the present incumbent".

1914 The First World War brings great numbers of Belgian wounded to Weymouth and the Sacred Heart Sisters turn their grounds into a Red Cross hospital while their chaplain sets up a Soldiers' mission.

He is later killed and buried on Mt Olivet and another of their chaplains is killed on the French front. The war also brings the Belgian Fr. Ketele's mother and sister, as refugees, to Plymouth.

1923 Fr Ketele's mother and sister accompany him to Weymouth where he will minister for 28 years, making his the longest ministry of all.

More than half of Fr. Ketele's time in Weymouth has been marked by the extreme poverty and distress which is so widespread in the 20s and 30s; yet there is faith too - and fun. The Parish seems to be for ever collecting for the Poor and Needy, for the Unemployed, for the Orphanages; special dances, whist drives and social evenings all help to raise money. The Parish Hall has its own caretaker and is in constant use. The CMS buys a full-sized billiard table for it at a cost of £23 and Catholic boys on shore leave from Navy ships are allowed to use the Hall.

Schoolchildren have an annual Christmas treat, for which 6d per head is budgeted - tea and buns and a lantern show. Mrs. O'Connor wins first prize at the St. Patrick's Fancy Dress Ball. St. Augustine's Cricket team reaches the finals and there are boxing lessons in the Hall.

1934 Weymouth gets a new Church, St. Joseph's - which is bad news for St. Augustine's which must now become a mere chapel of ease. At our Centenary Celebrations, the Bishop will say - "St. Augustine's is destined to survive" - but it will not look like it for some years yet.

1939 The Sisters of Mercy come to Weymouth to teach and do social work here in 1939. They start St. Philomena's School and three years later take charge of St. Augustine's School; later on. Holy Child Secondary will come into being. The Sisters will have their ups and downs with the schools but in 1964 the new St. Augustine's School, Hardye Avenue will be opened. Right now, though in wartime Weymouth, the Boarding School in Carlton Road is closed. In Wyke Road, the "Mercy Sisters" house Channel Island refugees in their new Convent and anti-aircraft guns are sited in their field. Sr. M Patrick has to climb out on to the roof at midnight to remove a fire bomb while here at St. Augustine's, high explosive bombs in the area have damaged the Parish Hall and 10/- is spent on black-out curtains.

With the war over, the Hall has been derequisitioned and gradually things are returning to normal. The CWL sends sewing materials to Vienna for the poor and parcels of clothing to Germany for the DPs (displaced persons); the Pope gets a spiritual bouquet as a Holy Year gift. St. Augustine's is now a Parish again, intent on furthering its spiritual mission. The Holy Family church, Upwey is opened. The Church of Our Lady, Preston is opened. By now, there are two parishes and 5 churches in Weymouth. (In 1935 Bishop Barrett had said that - Plymouth apart - Weymouth was the biggest parish in his Diocese). Abroad too, past (and future) priests of St. Augustine's join the Mission in Kenya and yet another goes out on loan to the States.

1962 – 1985 Pope John XXIII brings the winds of change and the Sanctuary is enlarged and altered so that the priest can face his people. Non Catholics become people* - (On Easter Sunday Sr. Eileen gives a talk at the Anglican Church!) Mrs Kathleen Sallis receives the *Bene Merenti* award. The parish is thriving again. And the Parish continues to thrive; the church nowadays seems too small, even in the winter. There are so many young people there too and even the tiny ones have their own Liturgy Group. Weymouth's Fr. Robert Draper has been ordained here and we have received the first ministrations of our two Fathers John. So the future also looks good and it feels right that it is our Bishop who will be celebrating the Jubilee with us. Fr. Peter too, has long seemed "at home" here. (In and out of the pulpit, Fr. Peter's casual "think about it" implies a firm belief that anyone can do anything and recently there has been much activity as the Parish prepares for the Jubilee special Masses, Mission, Services, social activities) The Bishop will confirm 25 girls and boys on Sunday,

Praise be. We have survived.

* Note added 2012

"Non Catholics become people"

Having been baptised a Catholic in the 1940's and lived through pre- and post- Vatican 2, I find this sentence unacceptable. Non-Catholics were always regarded as our separated brethren.

The boot is in fact on the other foot. Catholics have never really accepted in England since the Reformation - we have been tolerated with some suspicion since 1829, yes - always regarded as different - the 'left footers' - out of step with Society. While Catholics have made great efforts to reach out to other denominations and with some success, our stand today against Abortion, Contraception and Homosexuality to name but 3 issues means that we will always be out of step with Society.

John Fannon