

Roman Catholic Worship in Wheatley

In August 1922 the Catholics of Wheatley and the surrounding villages met to celebrate Mass in The Old House, Westfield Road, where Miss Dale made a room available for them in her annexe. Since then Wheatley has had a centre for Mass, but it was not until 1964 that a permanent Church was created in Crown Road.

Mass was celebrated in the Old House until the second World War when the army hospital at Holton was opened. A Catholic Chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes, in the hospital grounds became a Mass centre until September 1961. Then the hospital closed and the Chapel with it. For a while Mass was said in a small hall at Farm Close, then when it too, was closed, Mass was said in the Merry Bells.

On 29 August 1962 a large stone barn, with adjoining cottage and stable, was bought by the parish for approximately £6,000. The barn was originally the Tithe Barn of the old Rectory Farm (once owned by Magdalen College), believed to be over 250 years old and listed for its architectural interest. As one of the parties to the sale wrote: 'Nobody would ever expect such an ideal church for so little'. Car parking space was also included!

However, buying the building was only a first step. Although the barn was basically in good order and had been completely re-roofed between the wars, a plan was needed to make the best use of its architectural features. The two great doors on either side, used for winnowing and as entries for loaded wagons were converted to the entrance door porch with its splendid hammered iron cross on one side and the Lady Chapel on the other. Lancet windows were designed to blend with the architecture of Rectory House; otherwise simplicity was the keynote of the whole design. Plans were drawn up by the Headington architect, Patrick Little.

According to <http://corpuschristiheadington.co.uk/history-of-the-chapel/>, the architect's name was Peter Little. The conversion took place when Fr Davenport was the Parish Priest, to mark the Silver Jubilee of Corpus Christi Church. Before that Mass had been celebrated in Wheatley in a chapel in the grounds of the Military Hospital and subsequently in the Anglican Parish Church Hall and then in a room at the Merry Bells Village Hall.

Parishioners were actively concerned in the restoration and building from the beginning; they cleaned and stripped the great beams which formed the roof, and took part at every stage in the work of restoration and building. The 'team' responsible for final interior decoration included John Garry, Des Coveley, Charlie Good, Roger Hall, John McCarthy and Les Winter, all from Wheatley.

Two other members of the team came from Sandhills in Headington. Charlie Voke who planned the Lady Chapel and worked on the plan, and Fred Brown who constructed the altar and baptismal font. (*See press photograph in the porch*)

Despite the severe winter of 1962-63, building and restoration was completed in 1964. Oak benches were ordered in August of that year at a cost of £667 plus £15 for delivery from Preston. The altar stone was put in place on 3 December but the official opening was delayed by the illness of Archbishop Grimshaw. Father Joe D***** was eventually authorised to celebrate the Mass of Dedication on the Feast of the Annunciation 1965. It was noted in the Wheatley b... that 'permission was given for Mass to be offered facing the ?? on that occasion and afterwards once a month'.

The stable, which was originally thought of as a possible soc... was sold in 1986 and has been reconstructed as an office by C the accountant who first sold the site to the parish.

Ecumenical relationships were fostered by the Good Friday procession of witness started in the early 1960's and supported by Anglican and United Reformed (then Congregational) churches. This was *follo wed* by ecumenical house Groups in Lent and, in the early 1980's by Stations of the Cross (two weeks in each of the three churches in Lent and, in the early 1980's by Stations of the Cross (two weeks in each of the three churches during Lent). The Wheatley Churches Group now includes all denominations in the area.

Denis Egan
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