

## SECTION 'B' – THE PRESENCE OF THE JESUITS

The establishment of the Church of England following King Henry VIII breaking from Rome was one of the most significant happenings in British religious history. It led to the destruction of St Edmund's Abbey in Bury St Edmunds in 1539 and centuries of religious rivalry.



Within the town of Bury St Edmunds reminders of past bloodshed exist – the memorial to 17 Protestants within the Great Churchyard show that this was not always a one-sided affair and there are many vivid accounts in other documents that illuminate the scale and abhorrence of such epochs. The purpose of this chronicle is not to cover the realm of those historic events but to commence by considering the role of those from the Society of Jesus who served the town.

In 1603 there were 20 recusants within Bury St Edmunds indicating that Catholicism had not been totally suppressed. According to records within the Jesuits' archives at Farm Street, London, we know with a degree of certainty that the Jesuits' Mission existed prior to 1685 but it was in that year that they established a college for boys, house and a chapel within the ruins of St Edmund's Abbey, making use of the former Abbot's Palace. The annual letters of the English Province of the Jesuits indicate that there were 18 noble youths as boarders at the College. This Mission was especially supported by the Rookwood family (referred to in Section 'H', especially Elizabeth Rookwood (who died in 1694) who purportedly donated 50 chalices to their cause. These chalices came to be known as the 'Rookwood chalices' and are mentioned later in this Section.

The following priests resided in Bury St Edmunds in the years shown: Thomas Acton SJ (1679); Francis Bruning SJ alias Hyde, alias Grimsditch (1680); Francis Rockley SJ alias Ireland (circa 1683 – 1687); Alexander Keynes SJ (1685); Nathaniel Stafford SJ (1687); Charles Poulton SJ (for several years before 1688); William Collins SJ (from 1690 – 1693 and probably later); George Cotton SJ alias Blount (before 1697); John Sadler SJ (from 1693 until probably his death in 1699).

In 1688 at the time of the Orange Revolution there were riots which led to the ousting of the Jesuits from the Abbey Grounds although it is apparent that some remained in the area. The riots led to the deaths of three of the rioters and of Mr Prettyman, a lay person who was endeavouring to protect the College. After that, occasional visits by Benedictine Priests had to meet the spiritual needs of local Catholics, a situation that existed until 1756 when the last Benedictine Fr Howard left.

Fr John Gage SJ first came to Bury St Edmunds in 1755 where he celebrated Mass. This was conducted in secret in a house at 43 Southgate Street to avoid the risk of legal proceedings – the threat of punishment by death for the open celebration of Mass still lay in the statutes. He initiated a baptismal register on 1 January 1756 but sadly this has been lost.

Seven years of Fr Gage's ministry led to the purchase in 1760 of a house and surrounding land in Westgate Street at a cost of £593. This was to become the Presbytery with a simple Chapel to the rear out of sight of the road. The first Mass in the Chapel was celebrated on 8 December 1762; at that time Catholics numbered around 160 of the town's approximate population of 6,000. Penal times continued for over twenty-five years, until 1788. Fr James Dennett SJ, Provincial, gave the original approval but resources came from Fr Gage's brother, Thomas, and his cousin Sir William Gage. The house was large enough to accommodate the family when they chose to stay. Fr John Gage's ministry continued until his death in 1790 when, as described in Section 'H' he was buried in the family vault in Stanningfield.

His mother, Elizabeth Rookwood Gage, descended from a strong Catholic ancestry, had died in 1759. She was heiress to the Coldham Estates (situated in the parishes of Lawshall and Stanningfield) where she had spent a long widowhood before moving to Southgate Street. She bequeathed the mission-house with its adjoining meadow and a farm at Westley to her son Fr John who made all this over to the Mission. Thus, Elizabeth Rookwood Gage was the founding Patroness of the Bury Mission. It was finally licensed in 1791 after the Catholic Relief Acts had been passed.

St Edmund's Church has always benefited from the generosity of its parishioners and within this chronicle and more specifically in Sections 'F' and 'J' mention is made of some of the more prominent donations and those that no longer appear in the Church. However, without the financial support of the Jesuits and the contributions made by Mrs Elizabeth Rookwood Gage and her son Fr John Gage, Catholicism in the town would not have flourished.



The sum of £900, probably saved at the Suppression of the Society (by Pope Clement XIV in 1773), helped to support the Mission at Bury. It came on the death of the former Provincial, Fr James Dennett, in 1789. Later the bequest of Fr Edward Baptist Newton, former Professor at Liège, provided a collection of books and the interest from money to relieve poor Catholics in Bury.

Following Fr Gage was Fr Charles Thompson who arrived in 1790. At the time of the Restoration of the Society in England (1803) three priests lived in Bury St Edmunds. Fr Robert Cole was Missioner until his death in 1812. Fr Thomas Angier who had been at the Mission since 1795 went on to become Missioner until 1826 on his posting to New Hall, Chelmsford.

Fr Thomas Angier - reproduced with kind permission of Jesuits in Britain Archives

In 1826 Fr Henry Wright took charge of the Mission though he left due to sickness and died very young. He too came from a grand family – indeed his brother later became a Baronet. Fr John Laurenson took over in 1832 but, to everyone's great sadness, died after only two years. In 1794 Fr Laurenson had been one of 18 Jesuits (10 priests and 8 scholastics) who came from Liege to Stonyhurst; their number included Fr Joseph Tate. A most able man, Fr Laurenson had founded the Clitheroe Mission in 1799.

The Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Herald of 4 February 1835 reported an early loss for the Chapel: *'The Sessions for the Borough were held on Monday last – James Betts for breaking into the Catholic Chapel in Westgate Street and stealing several articles of plate etc and was sentenced to be transported for 14 years'*.

Fr Joseph Tate started at the Yarmouth Mission in 1822 and moved to Bury St Edmunds in 1835. He found Fr Gage's Chapel to be too small and undertook the task of building our present Church. Unfortunately, a dispute with the builder led to the threat of a lawsuit, the matter being eventually decided by counsel who awarded the sum of £347.18.0 to the builder, Mr Newnham. This, plus plaintiff's costs of £738.12.4 and defendant's costs of £700.15.9, placed a great burden on the parish over and above the building costs.

The Church was built in 1836 at an approximate cost of £9,400 (equating to £2.5 million in 2023) – of this the Province gave as a free gift £2,000 and advanced £7,400 at 3% interest. In and since the year 1842 the Province took the rent of the Westley Farm, known as Fressels, as security for the interest on the loan of £7,400.

The Bury and Norwich Post and Suffolk Herald dated 6 April 1836 referred to the external construction and funding of the Church. It also highlighted the disquiet around that time from opponents of the Faith:

*'A number of immense blocks of Ketton stone (many of them weighing 3 – 4 tons each) have been put on barges at Wansford to be used in building a large Catholic Church at Bury St Edmunds. We believe that the expense of this edifice is defrayed from the general fund for the creation of Catholic Chapels upon which every town has a claim in its turn. This fact may serve to quiet the alarms of some of those persons who see in every announcement of a new Catholic place of worship the approach to the restoration of 'Popish' supremacy in this Country. The Duke of Norfolk stated the other night, on newspaper authority, that the number of Roman Catholic Chapels in England had increased from 30 to 510 within the last 60 years. But we suspect that the smallness of the number of Chapels supposed to have existed 60 years ago may be explained by the fact of the Romish form of worship having been proscribed up to that time; and many a Chapel, perhaps like the one in this town, may have been concealed behind an old outbuilding – a standing monument of by gone Protestant intolerance. Supposing that there be 510 R C Chapels, each having a congregation of 300 persons on the average, the total will not amount to a hundredth part of the population, notwithstanding the constant immigration of Irish poor. These fears of the spread of Popery, and the perpetual hankerings after the interposition of the secular arm, are wretched complements to the Protestant Church with its endowed Ministers posted in every parish'*.

On 16 November 1837 the Church was opened and this was followed by an advertisement in the Bury and Norwich Post of 13 December 1837 which announced:

*'The Catholic Church of St Edmund, Bury St Edmunds will be dedicated to divine worship on Thursday the 14<sup>th</sup> of December at eleven o'clock am. In the morning Mozart's Mass No 1. In the afternoon at three o'clock, a selection of sacred music. Collections will be made. Mr Nunn will preside at the organ and several members of the Bury Musical Society have kindly promised their assistance in the choir. The words of the sacred music may be had at Mr Newby's, Angel Hill, price sixpence'.*

The Church was dedicated on 14 December 1837 and its splendour was described six days later in the Bury and Norwich Post:

*'The Altar is elevated on a platform approached by circular steps and is painted in ornamental panels with the name of 'Jesus' inscribed on the front, the tabernacles and crucifix with six superb candlesticks and an equal number of vases of flowers being placed upon it'.*

In the Church accounts of 15 October 1838, it was recorded that £616 was paid to Mr Fairs for painting the Church although the colours and paint type were not specified. The sanctuary pillars were Scagliola, as were those at Ickworth Park, pilasters were marbled to resemble Sienna; the ceiling was 'true blue' with white/grey mouldings; white cornice with gilt capitals.



**Fr James Brownbill - reproduced with kind permission of Jesuits in Britain Archives**

In 1837 Fr Henry Brigham came to Bury and in 1842 he was named Superior of the College of the Holy Apostles (Society Records of the English Province show this to have been in existence in 1633). Fr Brigham returned to Stonyhurst in 1845 to be Prefect of Studies.

Fr Bernard Jarrett took over the Mission for nine years and was succeeded by Fr James Brownbill who had been Rector of Stonyhurst moving then to the new St Ignatius's College in north London. The now famous Farm Street Church was built in his time and Archdeacon Manning converted, later to become Cardinal. Fr Brownbill noted in 1866 that many families were leaving Bury in search of better paid employment and the Catholic population dropped to around 200. In 1867 Fr Edward Bird ran the Mission for two years followed by Fr Thomas Knight until 1873.

In 1874 Fr Joseph Lazenby was appointed Parochus. During his 11 years he wrote an account of the Society's College in Bury in 1687 (see *Foley's Records of the English Province*). His interest in St Edmund was evident in an article in the Bury and Norwich Post of 22 November 1881:

*'The feast of St Edmund, East Anglia's King and Martyr is now looked forward to with much interest, as an annual occurrence, and two very attractive services were held on Sunday morning and afternoon last, in the above place of worship. It will be remembered that during the past six years (through the exertions of the Rev J Lazenby and the liberality of kind friends) a material change has been made in the interior of the sacred edifice, in the shape of permanent decorations in oil colours, statue of St Edmund, pictures and numerous other minor additions, all more or less symbolical of its patron Saint. This year notes the introduction of a relic of St Edmund. The pastor of the church, who is still working very hard to revive the name of, and devotion to, St Edmund, has collected a vast amount of information respecting the Martyr-King.... The Rev J Lazenby thought that a relic of the Saint was an all-important item for the Church (dedicated to him) in the town, where upwards of 1000 years ago the body lay and up to the present day bears his name. He at once made application, and eventually succeeded in getting the relic which the President Cardinal Archbishop Duprez had extracted for himself from the silver shrine of St Edmund in 1867 and which he has presented to this Church'.*

It was during his tenure that the elementary school was opened by Fr Lazenby on 4 June 1882 at a cost of £600 which was paid by Fr Purbrick Provincial. The teaching staff of the new school was augmented by a trained mistress, an assistant mistress, and a pupil teacher, the last a protestant who was subsequently reconciled to the Church. This greatly raised the character of the school, as shown by the larger attendance and increased Government grant. The number of boys was 26, 32 on the books, average attendance 23; examined 24: passed in all subjects 11, passed in some 12. Girls 38, on the books 44, average attendance 29, examined 36; passed in all subjects 16, in some 15. Infants 27, on the books 39, average attendance 20, examined 27.

The Parish diaries indicated the situation at that time:

*'1885 Catechism is now taught in the school room three times a week, and on Sunday afternoons a catechism is also given in the Church followed by benediction when all the children in the congregation attend'.*

*'Sixty are out of the Church, many from the time of the opening of the new Church in 1837, having quarrelled with the resident priest on the subject of bench rents. Others again took offence at the removal of that priest, who was deservedly popular in the pulpit, and whole families have remained unbaptized in consequence of these differences. Two or three years back, we discovered that one who always counted himself a catholic, had never been baptized, and he received that Sacrament along with his first-born son, his two brothers-in-law, soldiers, standing sponsors respectively. His marriage then had privately to be revalidated, his wife being a born catholic and then making her first confession. Yet, notwithstanding the full conviction of these people of the truth of our holy Religion, there seems to be no means of persuading them to come to mass. The brother of this good man, himself a baptized catholic, is organist at the Socinian chapel, and his children, with two exceptions, are unbaptized. The exceptions are the eldest daughter by adoption, who was received into the Church on her marriage some five or six years ago; and a son, baptized in danger of death, by Fr Thomas Knight SJ. Another brother of the father, though baptized, goes nowhere and allows all his*

*children to be brought up in the Anglican heresy. These are a few specimens of the things which render this mission so sad'.*

*'In 1885 the Congregation undergoes many fluctuations; the departure of the Rushbrooke family after the death of the late Commander Rushbrooke R N has been a great loss to the mission. Another family of eight, connected with the Post Office, has removed on promotion to Barnet near London. One year there were 100 catholic soldiers in the Barracks. Since the change in the recruiting grounds, there have not been more than 20 or 30. Many of them, especially the Sergeants, give great edification by their pious demeanour, giving attention to the sermons and assisting at the Sacraments'.*

*'A mission was lately given here by our Father Humphrey SJ, and although there were good attendances of the pious catholics and a fair number of non-catholics, not a single reclaimed was counted amongst the confessions. We gave up our confessional to the preacher, and erected one in the Tribune behind the organ, where we heard just five, for so great is the echo of this Roman Church that the least whisper was echoed back from the Apse behind the altar. Our Easters were fewer than usual, partly owing to the migration of practical catholics elsewhere. And yet it must be said the Mission was a success in a town like this which is little better than a Social Abomination, vying with what is related to the Pagans of old. And no wonder, since a great number of the inhabitants are unbaptized, registration in their case having taken the place of the Sacrament'.*

*'Two converts were the fruit of the mission, an Innkeeper who had been under instruction for some time (baptized by Fr de Betham) and a widow who had also frequently attended the services. After instruction Fr Lazenby received her into the Church. Our converts, therefore, if few, are worth having. It is easy to purchase any number of shady characters and lousers by a lavish distribution of poor-money; but such persons, for the most part, do small honour to the Church. Thus: "Few and Good," is the motto in the present state of the Church in England; for the day, however near at hand, has not yet come for the general reconversion of the nation, foretold by St Teresa of Jesus. Nor here must we omit the return to the Church of one received 18 years before in Ipswich, who had been led astray by his father and Freemasonry, and who renouncing the impious sect returned to the Church and made his first communion after fruitful instruction'.*



**Fr Joseph Lazenby - reproduced with kind permission of Jesuits in Britain Archives**

The departure of Fr Lazenby was deeply felt by the parishioners and townspeople as reported in the Bury and Norwich Post 19 January 1886:

*'The Rev J Lazenby, who for many years successfully laboured in Bury St Edmunds in connection with the Roman Catholic mission in this town, owing to ill-health relinquished his duties here, and a movement was at once set on foot to present the reverend gentleman some mark of the appreciation of his services from those*

*amongst whom he had laboured so long and so long and so well. The movement met with a hearty response from all and consequence was that the interesting ceremony took place on Tuesday evening last, the gift taking the form of a Breviarium, handsomely bound in four volumes. On Tuesday evening service was held in the Chapel, when the Rev J Lazenby who is now stationed at Yarmouth assisted. There was a good attendance, and after service the congregation proceeded to the library beneath the Chapel where the presentation took place. The proceedings were opened by the Rev J Strappini who briefly adverted to the object of their meeting. He then called upon Mr A J Floyd to make the presentation.*

*Mr Floyd, in doing so, read the following address: "Reverend and dear Father Lazenby, it is with mingled feelings of pleasure and regret that we, the undersigned, address you, regret that your failing health compels you to sever your connection with us, a connection that cannot fail to leave in the minds of all of us many pleasant recollections of your sojourn amongst us and on the other hand, pleasure that it affords us an opportunity of presenting you with a small token of our appreciation and esteem, for all you have done for us, not only spiritually, but temporally in beautifying our Church, and the manifold benefits we have received. We therefore humbly beg your acceptance of the accompanying Breviarium, trusting that it may be useful to you, and also that it will be a constant reminder of those you leave behind. Praying for you and soliciting your holy prayers, we beg to remain, your children in Jesus Christ: J Wilson, W J Clark, A J Floyd, C W Land, J S Gerald. On behalf of 120 subscribers and friends worshipping in St Edmund's Church.*

*He then said it was his duty that evening, a duty which he thought was an honour that should have fallen to the lot of an order and more tried Catholic than himself, who offered to the Rev Father Lazenby their most sincere congratulations on his restoration to health and strength. During his long residence in Bury he had endeared himself to all by the many obligations he had conferred on them. It was under God due to him some of those present had been brought into the Church, whilst by his life and self-denying labour in his priestly capacity as their spiritual father and superior, as well as by word-of-mouth he had urged them on to lead pure Catholic lives. In his private capacity he had been their honoured friend and they had all experienced his kindly congratulations offered in prosperity, his advice in times of trouble and his words of comfort in sorrow and bereavement. On all sides they saw proofs of the reverend Father's zeal in forwarding the Holy Catholic faith. They had to thank him for the ornate decoration of their Church as well as for their commodious and well-appointed school. His late illness found him, as usual hard at work for his people, and now that his removal to another mission had taken place, their sorrow at losing him was mitigated by the knowledge that he was still within easy reach of Bury. In offering for his acceptance, in the name of the Catholics of Bury St Edmunds, a token of their gratitude, they asked that he would favour them by accepting the gift and with it the earnest prayer that God my reward him for all he had done for the worshippers in the Church and shower upon him every blessing. In conclusion they asked for a continuance of his prayers on their behalf and his blessing. Mr Floyd said that they had received more money than was required for the present, and the surplus would be expended in erecting a shrine to St Edmund, in honour of Father Lazenby.*

*The Rev J Lazenby in responding said he appreciated their beautiful present and he heartily thanked them for it. When he first came to that mission there was a very different state of*

*things to that existing when he left it. That was in a great measure due to their assistance and, of course, to the assistance he received from his superiors and other friends. The object of his exertions had been to raise the Catholic religion in Bury so that it might approach nearer to that grand standard of catholicity which existed in olden times and hence it was that he had taken such pains in embellishing their Church with everything which Catholics venerated, such as statues, pictures and stations, as well as with the new organ and various other additions and alterations. He had done this in order to promote a Catholic spirit amongst, and although they did not perceive a very great increase in the numbers, yet the increase had been far greater than it appeared. There had been 100 converts received into that Church during the past 11 years, and although many of them had left the town still there was a good number amongst them still who had been received into the church during the period. He was glad to think that they had got to such zealous pastors as Fathers Strappini and Drake (applause) who were carrying forward the work much more efficiently than he could have done; he trusted that the result of their efforts would be visible in a very short time. He thanked all for their kind feelings towards him and for their prayers. He was quite convinced that he owed his restoration to health as well as his increased energy and strength to their prayers which he asked them to continue in his behalf. He could assure them that on his part a day never passed in which he did not pray for them all. He prayed for them just as much now as he did when he was their pastor, joining them in his prayers with his present congregation, schoolteachers etc. In conclusion he again thanked them for their gift, assuring them that every time he took up those Breviaries which would be frequently every day of his life, he would always be reminded of the kind feelings they had expressed towards him. He should never forget to pray for their success in all things, both spiritual and temporal (applause)'.*

During the time of Fr Lazenby there was the opening of the side door of the Presbytery into the garden to facilitate access to the library and garden which had previously been approached either through the house or the Church as far as the library was concerned. This door formerly existed as a way into the old Chapel built by Fr Gage, tending to suggest that the Chapel was used as the library.

Around 1886 a proper confessional box in the sacristy to the left of the sanctuary was established and six new benches installed to accommodate the increasing numbers of Protestants frequenting the Church on Sunday mornings.

The dedication and reliability of the Jesuits recording in the Commemoranda the history of Catholicism in Bury St Edmunds was of great benefit to those who years later decided to write this account. However, the task was not straightforward because much of their work required transcription from their customised style of Latin, resulting in the italicised extracts shown throughout this Section which have been reproduced virtually verbatim.

Although some of the following extract duplicates what you will already have read, it serves as a chronicle of their times:

*'After the destruction of religion under the monarchs Henry VIII, Edward VI and Elizabeth there was no trace of the Church in Bury, the town of St Edmund. Thanks to the solicitude of Baron Petre and the Jesuit Grand Provincial, the College of the Holy Apostles was founded by Fr Richard Blount for the fellow travellers of Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridge. Among the places visited by missionaries was Bury St Edmunds. Further, it is certain that, under the reign*



*of James II, a very pious and generous king, the sacred mysteries were enacted in a Church and college established in the palace of the former Abbot of St Edmund's monastery. However, perturbed by the political situation, all the fathers left the town having been expelled and found refuge in Coldham Hall with the truly Catholic Rookwood family along with the Gage family of Ingham.*

*In 1735, Elizabeth, the long-time widow of John, the adolescent son of Sir William Gage Bart, of Coldham Hall in Stanningfield, bought from Roger Houghton the meadow known as Fresel's in Westley, for her son, John Gage, a Jesuit priest. John, in his last will and testament bequeathed this to Joseph of the same Society at Bury St Edmund's, the aforesaid will dated 7<sup>th</sup> August 1788 with probate granted in the Archdiaconal Court of Sudbury on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1790. The manor was held by the Abbey of St Edmund, with one part land held by Freemen, the tenants of the Abbey.*

*The first Church was erected by Fr Gage behind the presbytery, now however part of the presbytery. In 1835, our Society erected in the Presbytery garden a Church large enough for a good number of Catholics at major festivals. The idea was to keep everyone together. On this venture the Jesuits spent £9,400 in sovereigns. Unadorned until 1857, in which year truly through the care of Fr Joseph Lazenby, a Jesuit missionary, as far as possible the Classical Roman style was favoured. A new organ lent solemnities to the Offices of the Church. A statue of St Edmund, the gift of Lord Milner, and a painting of the saint, the gift of his son, inspired the piety of the faithful.*

*Thereto, a school building was desirable for boys and girls, for they were crammed into the Crypt of the Church. With the elapse of a vexatious year, our Society spent £600 on the inspired project to build a spacious school in the grounds of the presbytery where at least 100 pupils came together of which at least half were Catholics. All that was desired was achieved happily by 1881. Our brotherhood was founded, that which is called "first school", and in 1882 a library was opened for the people with great benefit not only to Catholics but also Protestants'.*

In 1876 the sum of £265 was paid to Mr Park of Preston by Fr Provincial for decoration/stencilling of the interior. The Sanctuary pillars were painted/marbled to blend in with the new scheme. Oil-based paints and oil gilding was used.

In 1883 members of the Children of Mary numbered 33; the men's sodality comprised 20.

Fr Walter Strappini succeeded Fr Lazenby in 1886 and set about tackling local problems.

*'During the second half of winter 1886 and the first half of the spring months, owing to the severity of the weather, the poverty of the people and depression in trade, Fr Strappini originated a plan for supplying dinners to 14 or 16 of the poorest children on all school days. It is useless to add that this was an immense boon to them. The expense which was very moderate was borne partly by the mission, and partly by voluntary contributions'.*

*'In the month of May 1886 our school was visited by Her Majesty's Inspectors. If the results of the children's examination did not come up to anticipations after the immense pains taken by all three schoolteachers, still they were satisfactory judging from the increase of the Government allowance. The 52 children forming the Infants' Division did remarkably well'.*

*'One of the two deaths mentioned in the 1886 ministeria was of an old woman named Austin who had lived for more than 30 years in the village of Hessett 6 miles from Bury. Her husband was a Protestant; she seldom was able to come to Church, yet died as she had lived full of faith and piety. She was buried in the old parish graveyard, this being the first burial performed there with catholic ceremonial since the so-called reformation. The whole village were present and behaved with great respect; thanks to the Protestant Rector, the Rev. Mr Morphy. Furthermore, the latter, besides making arrangements to secure order at the burial, carried his civilities so far as to offer the use of his carriage to the officiating priest: and after the burial invited him to dinner'.*



**(Above right) Fr Walter Strappini (Left) Fr Thomas Parkinson - reproduced with kind permission of Jesuits in Britain Archives**



The eight years that Fr Thomas Parkinson was to spend at the Mission commenced in 1887. This former Anglican minister was a fine scholar and persuasive preacher. The number of converts rose steadily: 10 in 1889, 14 in 1890, 22 in 1891.

A report in the Bury Free Press of 17 November 1887 recorded the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Church. The feast-day of St Edmund was celebrated in style with emphasis on the musical accompaniment. It cost sixpence to gain admittance to the Church, a practice later forbidden by Canon Law.

On 29 December 1890 tenders were invited for hot water heating apparatus, presumably as a replacement for the Church stove which had been installed in 1870. It is uncertain when the heating contract was fulfilled although records in 1917 show that hot water apparatus was donated by the congregation, much assisted by Mr Eyre.

The decoration of the altar costing £6 was paid by the congregation and the Stations of the Cross cost £19; a processional cross was purchased for £2 17s 6d. In July 1877 Irish drovers gave a sanctuary lamp costing £30.

On 22 July 1891 Fr Parkinson went to Northampton to see the Bishop about Mr Eyre's Oratory at Moreton Hall. On 7 September the Oratory opened with Fr Parkinson celebrating its first Mass with Fr Murphy from Liverpool in attendance. Mr Eyre was a great benefactor to the Church. Annually he also provided a day of treats for children of the parish at the Hall.

The local outbreak of influenza was such that on 9 January 1892 a soup kitchen was started, a situation which escalated during the following month. On 7 March 1894 a fire in the sacristy occurred when a thurible used during Benediction was upset. Although it was soon extinguished, the floor was burnt and considerable damage done to furniture and vestments of the Benedictine era.

On 27 March 1895 extensive damage occurred to the stone wall between the Presbytery garden and the back yard when strong winds blew down this and paddock fencing. Minor damage was also caused to the Church roof.

Between 1892 and 1916 Mr A J Floyd was Church organist. Virtually unpaid, he was active in many ways for the benefit of the parish including being president of the Men's Sodality.

In 1894 the Board of Education ordered the school to be enlarged. Fr Thomas left to be Spiritual Father in St Beuno's in North Wales.

The next Superior was also a former Anglican minister, Fr Frederick Jones, another notable preacher but with much less success in converting his hearers.

On the feast of St Edmund, 20 November 1895, Frs Jones and Perrin made a peace pilgrimage to the then reputed place of the martyrdom of St Edmund at Hoxne. They noticed an oak tree not more than 100 yards from the Cross erected to mark the spot where the oak stood to which St Edmund was fastened. It is now to be as old as its fallen neighbour.

Fr Jones recognised the importance and potential benefit in establishing an Order of nuns in the town. His first effort was on 16 February 1899 when he tried to persuade the Ursuline Nuns to come to Bury St Edmunds. His visit to Swansea was in vain as ultimately the nuns declined the offer. His persistence was maintained when on 8 October 1901 he went to Mayfield and on 30 October on his visit to Gumber House with the same object but with the same result. Fr Jones continued his quest and on 30 June 1902 he rode to Bocking to ascertain if any from that Community would consider taking charge of the Schools. This also proved fruitless.

Frs Jones and Perrin accompanied by Mr Long and Mrs Faiers repeated their pilgrimage to Hoxne on 20 November 1899.

Such was the state of the influenza contagion in the town that no midnight Mass was celebrated at Christmas in 1899.

On 15 July 1901 the relics of St Edmund arrived from Toulouse at Arundel Castle. The following Sunday it is reported that after Missa Cantate there was exposition of the relic of St Edmund in the Church. This does not confirm that the relic on this occasion was that which had come into the possession of the Church in 1881 or whether it was part of those sent from Toulouse to Arundel Castle. However, a subsequent letter was sent by Fr Jones to Cardinal Vaughan and the Duke of Norfolk asking if they would give permission for him to pursue the relics of St Edmund if the Commission enquiring as to their authenticity gave credence to the relics, this indicating that the relic referred to was that received in 1901. The outcome was that the Cardinal stated his inability to present them to Bury St Edmunds as they had been given for installation at Westminster Cathedral.

The memoranda records that 'on 7 January 1902 "a casual" coming to the town brought smallpox to the town. About 14 contracted it and about 6 died. Fr Jones had much difficulty in procuring permission to visit Catholics who had contracted the disease. Permission was granted by the Sanitary Committee for him to do so but he was in danger of death'.

It is reported that Fr Jones privately carried a relic of St Edmund through the main street of the town on 9 March 1902 from which he was inclined to believe that no further reported cases of smallpox occurred in Bury St Edmunds (Section 'F' refers). The provenance and existence of the relic is unknown.

The poor health of Fr Jones led him to the bracing air of Great Yarmouth and Fr James Foley came straight from the seminary to supply for him. He arrived on Saturday evening, 23 June 1900, and served his Sunday duties. He was seen to falter and he retired to his room where he was found dead the next morning.



Fr Joseph Kenny, a former Rector of Malta College, had recently returned from India as troop chaplain and was hurriedly sent to replace Fr Jones. Two other priests were also in residence; Frs Roger Perrin and John Gretton who was an invalid.

In 1906 Fr Kenny arranged to clean the Church thoroughly for the first time in 30 years with soap and water which allowed the old decorative work to be fresher and brighter and as thought recently painted. Its beauty was captured in the following photograph taken around that time.

**Fr Joseph Kenny - reproduced with  
kind permission of Jesuits in Britain  
Archives**



The esteemed parishioner Captain Rushbrooke subsequently moved to Guildford, Surrey, but his love of St Edmund's Parish remained and he informed Fr Jones that he intended to leave in his will the sum of £1,000 to the Mission of Bury to assist the choir and towards the salary of the organist. Following discussion, he most generously offered to hand it over at once to the Mission for it to be invested in securities of which Fr Jones and Fr Perrin were Trustees, the interest to be devoted to achieve his wishes. It was known as the Rushbrooke Choir Fund although originally Captain Rushbrooke had desired his name should not be disclosed until after his death. The association of the Rushbrooke family with the parish is preserved on a plaque in the Church porch.



Fr William Shapter - reproduced with kind permission of Jesuits in Britain Archives

In April 1907 Fr Kenny was sent to replace Fr Kernan at Worcester. Fr William Shapter, his replacement as new Superior, was infirm but his short and attractive sermons were greatly appreciated and Services well attended. His diaries reveal him as a careful administrator looking after the physical needs of the Church and house; rebuilding the roof over the porch, providing a bath, repairs to the kitchen range and bringing in a supply of town gas. He also had a careful eye for legal matters; negotiating a more sensible lease for letting out to a Mis Everard a house next door belonging to the Mission. He dealt with income tax liabilities using a solicitor John Greene (who was to become the first registrar of St Edmundsbury Cathedral) and invested the Rushbrooke Choir Fund. On being told that the terms of the gift were invalid he sorted the matter out with the Provincial and clarified the custody of the Fund. St Edmund's Altar had suffered rain seepage from the window above it so he put this right.

The Easter of 1908 saw a heavy fall of snow that damaged the glass roof of the passage to the kitchen. An iron roof replaced it while other extensive work was needed in the kitchen. Fr Shapter also rearranged rooms to make the house more suitable. Physical improvements to the School followed in 1910. Fr Shapter achieved much in the three years of his tenure.

At the end of 1910 Fr Vincent O'Gorman took charge of the Mission for a lengthy period of 15 years. He too was very active priest but controversial and ruling with an excess of firmness. He concentrated on the financial state of the Mission and was especially good at raising the money needed for many improvements.

In the School, when the National Union of Teachers found favour with the Head Mistress and her assistant, Fr O'Gorman reported that he had often to *'teach them many lessons, some by private interviews'*. He regarded the Head as wanting in tact and startled her by saying that he did not care for the School unless it could show itself more Catholic! It had too much Protestantism about it. *'She is getting careful'*, he wrote. Other examples of his firmness appear in the diaries but he also protested, successfully, at excessive use of the cane in the School.

The assistant priest, Fr Timothy Courtney, restored the Guild of the Children of Mary and set up the boys' Sodality Guild. He also took charge of catechism classes on Sundays, achieving much better standards of the children's learning.

In February 1914 Fr Perrin, an important priest of the Mission who had been at Bury St Edmunds since 1889, struck his leg against the step of a bus as he was taking Communion to the sick. His foot swelled and he was confined to bed for two weeks which resulted in constipation. He was subject to surgical

operation by Mr Floyd but in spite of careful nursing he died two months after the accident. It was a shattering loss to the Mission.

There were also some happenings at that time which might now be regarded as comedic:

*'Just after Easter 1914 Miss Alma Floyd resigned the Sacristy and left the town. Fr O'Gorman put on a newly arrived couple Mr and Mrs Pritt. They soon showed that they intended "Everybody" to obey them! He received complaints in a month from all sides. They began to talk aloud in Church, showed no respect – bullied people and the servants especially. Fr O'Gorman began to caution them. Mrs Pritt had forced her way into Fr Perrin's sick room and was ejected by the Brother Infirmerian who luckily was in there at the time. She had got in after a physical struggle with the housekeeper. Soon afterwards he refused to let her send an alb to the wash. It was quite clean and only a little crumpled. Then a Storm! Both threw up the Sacristy. Mr Pritt resigned as Church Passkeeper and the School Manager's position. He also ceased to serve any Mass and collecting for Propagation of Faith. Mrs Pritt vowed vengeance on the housekeeper, and later on (with Fr O'Gorman away) she strove to seize and thrash her in the Church porch after Mass. But Madam Gaencan, cool and active, gave her a splendid box on her ear and got away. Then lawyer's letter for apology or else a summons. Madam Gaencan stated facts to the lawyer and threatened a cross-summons! The lawyer refused to take the case after that. Pritt wrote to the Bishop and Father Provincial demanding of them that Fr O'Gorman should compel the housekeeper to apologize! He explained and they were very curt with the Pritts who then packed up and went to the Isle of Wight'.*

*'Much work in the way of Church and house repairs were done this year (1914). Huge water-pipes and a large drain under the Church were found to have done no work for years!! These pipes had been entirely walled in with masonry! In all (with Fr Provincial's leave) some £60 has been this year well spent on Meadow Land, on the Church and on the Presbytery. For how many years these roofs and drains and pipes have been entirely neglected! The Church door and front and railings were all repainted by Mr Pettit. The water from Church and Presbytery roof was then made to flow away from the Church foundations into the large visible pipes to run away'.*

Fr O'Gorman was sometimes more driven by finance than forgiveness: *'I took a girl into Court whom the police saw tearing down a piece of Meadowland palings and selling it for firewood. The fines were happy and I covered costs. But for years this game has been going on. So I spent £18 17 6d on some yards of wrought iron railings to fill gaps caused by these enterprising imps'.* However, his railings proved a long-term investment either side of the 21<sup>st</sup> century car park entrance.

The opening of St Edmund's Hall:

*'In early March 1919 Fr O'G got the idea of using up as much of cellar space under the Church as possible to form a parish Hall. By Fr Provincial's permission Fr O'G and W Thomson had conjointly overhauled during many weeks the more worthless old books that Fr Shapter had stored under the Church and only by joint agreement were any books cast out as worthless. And as a result some 2,000 books were kept and taken up in the Presbytery.*

*January 15<sup>th</sup> 1919, the rest were sold off at 8/- per cwt. The old School under the Church, when thus cleared of books, was used for a whist drive yielding £8.4.6 at the close of Feb 7 1919, this room having been cleaned up and distempered and windows hung with curtains. After this drive the lath and plaster wall at its end was removed and rebuilt so as to form a room in the central portion of the cellar under the baptistery. By building a solid wall across the part formerly used as a cemetery another room was gained and after much cleaning and distempering and filling up a deep well and levelling the rough cellar floor (finishing with an asphalt top) we found ourselves possessed of a Hall which could seat 160 people for a whist drive'.*

From reading the diaries we might judge that Fr O'Gorman was something of a martinet with individuals in his parish. The following entry is typical:

*'This "High and Mighty" Committee needed a fall, and so Fr O'G allowed them to plan and print a "Tremendous Programme" of Events in the Hall from Oct 1<sup>st</sup> to Xmas. It was most amusing to watch them putting off and scratching off Event after Event – being too lazy to do "the Work" needed for success in whist drives, plays, socials and debates etc. Hence the Season only cleared some £12, and it especially showed up the hopelessness of the Men's Association, so that it came to an end (practically in Feb 1921), by Mr Armison resigning the post of Secretary at a meeting. Their Chief Aim had been to avoid "Priestly Interference" and hence they had invited every "Layman of Note" to lead them! But all "the Nobs" were content to be nominated and to do "Nothing".'*

Information regarding the arrival of nuns in Bury St Edmunds derives from the Comemoranda and is taken from a handwritten diary entry dated March 1980 which was sought out and then kindly shared with the Parish by Sister Helen Mary Haigh, Congregation of Jesus and Mary.

In 1917, during the First World War, a small community of Nuns from the Congregation of Jesus and Mary arrived at Meadowland, 19 Westgate Street, next door to the Church. The Nuns were Reverend Mother Anthony Cooper, Mother Magdalen Conlon, Mother Thomas of Canterbury Norman and Sister Helen (from Austria).

Fr Provincial had consented that the Nuns should tenant Meadowland and that it should be put into working order for them. Considerable renovation took place costing the nuns £78 and the Society £130. By July that year there was no money from the Suffolk Fund available but Fr Provincial authorised a loan from the Area Fund. A legacy of £300 to Fr O'Gorman from his father had gone to the area and this was drawn on.

The community had no Chapel in the house so all their devotions were held in the Church. During the six years that the Community spent in Bury St Edmunds they took care of all flower decorations each week and helped in the Sacristy on all big feasts.

Reverend Mother Anthony was very much loved by the parishioners and they called her "the little Saint". The Community experienced true poverty during this period and at one time when Mother Anthony was asked to attend a meeting in Willesden, London she had no money with which to pay the fare.



The pupils in the little independent school which was founded by them never exceeded 30 in number. Sr Edmund, who was the first pupil, remembers that they were told when there were 50 pupils they would have a holiday but the target number and holiday failed to materialise. It was, however, a flourishing little school and under the guidance of Mother Magdalen several of the girls passed the Oxford examination.

Eileen Ross was the one boarder in the school.

The parishioners were always very generous and Mr Boutell, (Sister Edmund's father) was so helpful that the community named him their 'Cardinal Protector'. Further research revealed that Sr Edmund (Alvera Bouttell) joined the convent at 19 and later became Mother Provincial, having been at both Willesden, Bletchley and latterly Felixstowe where she died in 1994. She travelled extensively during the course of her provincial business. Mr Bouttell was described by surviving family members as a 'thoroughly nice gentleman'.

During the period Reverend Mother Anthony was replaced by Reverend Mother Margaret Mary Gough. Several other Nuns also spent some time in Bury St Edmunds – Mother Peter Jeffries, Mother Dorothy Timlin, Mother Imelda Warrington and Mother Bede. At holiday times the little congregation joined the Ipswich community.

The tenure of Fr O'Gorman continued. Between September 1921 and the following May, Fr O'Gorman gave a course of lectures in the Hall to educated Protestants. All went well but it would have been wiser not to have chosen Sundays. The Archdeacon invited Fr O'Gorman to dine and they discussed the possibility of holding similar lectures in his own house. He was fearful that his Bishop, described as low-church, might object. Three months later, in a 'nice long letter' he wrote saying that indeed prejudice made it impossible. However:

*'In the last three months of 1923 Fr O'Gorman gave nine lectures on the faith and its origin in the house of a wealthy lady. She invited 40 of the most educated eg Col. Freeman and his wife, Major and Mrs Archer, the Archdeacon Rev'd. Wood and wife, the Mayor and wife, Mr Cocksedge the famous atheist, Mr and Mrs Snow, Mrs Hicks, Mrs Stiff (Doctor's wife), a banker's wife and many other notables. Some 30 came but only 15 went through the course. Held 3 – 4 pm Fridays from October 12<sup>th</sup> to December 7<sup>th</sup>, it had "excellent results".'*

Within the Commemoranda the dominant and pedantic style of Fr O'Gorman is frequently apparent.

*'In 1922 Fr O'Gorman was presented with a fine crucifix by Mrs Gurney of Hardwick House and he gave it to the Convent to hang in the first room but clearly stated that he did not give it to the nuns. It is property of the Society and must be left in the house number 19 Westgate Street if the nuns remove. In the same year and at the same time a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin was brought by motor van to the Presbytery and set up in a guest room, a gift from Mrs Milner Gibson Cullum of Hardwick house. Fr O'Gorman received a notice from his solicitors Partridge and Wilson of this gift on December 7, 1921, it was made clear that the gift was not to the Society of Jesus but to the church as Mission. By a printed circular Fr O'Gorman got the votes of the parishioners preferring that this statue of BVM should stand in public guest room. This was also made emphatic by one of the executors who heard that we wished to sell the statue'.*

For some time it had been clear that Mother St Clare was thinking of taking her nuns elsewhere. She had hoped that the Society would have found postulants to join their numbers. She made her feelings known to Fr O'Gorman but they stayed in place until she gave notice of leaving in her letter of September 1923, to depart on Christmas Eve. Fr O'Gorman wrote to 11 different heads of Orders before meeting with success and on 17 January 1924 the Sisters of St Louis came to Bury St Edmunds as outlined in Section 'E'.

In 1925 Fr O'Gorman left for Loyola Hall. Some of the congregation asked that a testimonial to him be made. This brought in £40. Of this he returned £20 to buy a ciborium for St Edmunds (SJ property). He also bought library books, for which he paid £8, from the parish collection.

The new arrival at Bury St Edmunds in 1925 was Fr Edward Field from Worcester where he had proved popular with his parishioners who had presented him with a handsome monstrance studded with stones (SJ property). He joined the existing staff, Frs Edgar Blount and John McGowan. The Presbytery needed attention and improvements were made at a cost of £110.6.3:

*'Complete redecoration, a new bathroom and lavatory, a small library on the Priests' floor, two of the Fathers' rooms were fitted with gas fires'.*

Within the Church, having obtained the necessary faculties from the Bishop, a set of new Stations of the Cross was installed on 9 August 1925 with plaques denoting the names of donors. One erected in memory of deceased members of the congregation was subscribed for by some of the poorer people of the parish.

It was a fine year of spiritual activity too: Fr Field gave a Lent Mission lasting a week. The Corpus Christi procession into the street and on to an Altar of Repose in St Edmund's grounds attracted around 450 including parishioners from Thetford, Sudbury and Stowmarket. Eighteen children and six converts received the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Since May, Fr Field had only Fr Blount (he an invalid) to share the workload. There was much to be done; he took charge of the sodalities – first the Children of Mary and soon afterwards he split the juniors into two guilds, one devoted to St Agnes and the other to St Aloysius. Both prayed their office together on Sunday afternoons. The local Girl Guides were under the leadership of a Catholic teacher at the Guildhall Feoffment School.

Every effort was made to get people to the Sacraments yet numbers were lean. There were few infant Baptisms and not many converts to enhance the meagre congregation. Fr O'Gorman had launched a fund to go towards a new hall but this idea was abandoned and the money (£450) was transferred to the School Fund.

The men's section of the Guild of the Blessed Sacrament was inaugurated on 25 October 1925 with Mr Annison as Warden and Messrs Pettit and Harnett as Counsellors. They held a monthly Communion. New members were consecrated on Sunday 30 May 1926 followed by Children of Mary and the Agnesians.

Fr Field's health deteriorated and he finally left in January 1927 to be replaced by Fr Ashton. By March Fr Blount too was recovering from a heart attack and he left soon afterwards. Bury missed him greatly as his lectures and his friendship with local Anglicans had broken down much of the prejudice against

Catholics. One of his lectures in 1924 on the Benedictine monks of the monastery of Bury St Edmunds attracted Fr Blount a significant audience comprising chief citizens, catholic and protestant, all of whom were full of enthusiastic appreciation of it.



**Fr John Ashton**



**Fr Edgar Blount**

**photographs reproduced with kind permission of Jesuits in Britain Archives**

The success of the schools was apparent and it became necessary for the Convent school with 80 pupils to be moved in 1929 from Meadowlands to the Castle in St Andrew's Street. Similarly, the numbers attending St Edmund's school grew under the guidance of Sr Fanchea who remained its headmistress for 31 years. The majority of children at both schools were non-Catholic – at the elementary school the total of 115 pupils comprised only 37 Catholics.

That summer Fr General arranged with the Bishop of Northampton for secular clergy to take over the Mission. Fr Provincial ordered the Society's departure date to be September 1929. Around 5,000 books (some of which had come from Norwich or had been gifts of the Fathers of the College of the Holy Apostles) were distributed to St Beunos (North Wales), Heythrop, Farm Street, Stonyhurst, Manresa, Stamford Hill. Other items from the Church were similarly dispersed to different places run by the Society, including a late medieval chasuble which had come from the Abbey and is now believed to be held at Stonyhurst.



**Photographs reproduced with kind permission of Trustees for Roman Catholic Purposes Registered**

Archives at Heythrop contain the above pictures of one of the 'Rookwood chalices' that was dispersed upon the Jesuits leaving Bury St Edmunds, this now is in use somewhere in the British Province in an undisclosed Jesuit Parish Church.

The detail of this silver chalice is described and the engraving under the foot bears the inscription: Col Ap S J / Ex dono D nae Elizabethae Rookwood / 1684. In full this translates as Collegium Apostolicum Societatis Jesu / Ex dono Dominae Elizabethae Rookwood / 1684 confirming it as one of the 50 chalices that she donated (as referred to at the beginning of this Section). The chalice bears the coat of arms of Ambrose Rookwood (argent, six chess-rooks sable) impaling those of his wife Elizabeth Caldwell of Dunton, Essex (argent, a cross formee fitchee between eight mullets azure).

Another of the Rookwood chalices found its way to the Loyola University Museum of Art (Luma) in Chicago and is held there within the Fr Martin D'Arcy collection. A further Rookwood chalice is held within the Diocesan archives at Norwich Cathedral.

According to the Commemoranda, the dispersal also included a white cope which had been given to Fr Blount on the occasion of his Jubilee, this being sent to St Beunos. Two monstrances were parted with, the smaller of these being sent to Stamford Hill. The sending of the larger monstrance to St Beunos is of greater intrigue because it might have been the one that was used to expose the claimed relic of St Edmund which came from Toulouse in 1881 and was closely connected with a relic of the Saint held at Douai. That monstrance was described as being 25 inches high, set in Emerald, with the triangular base bearing medallions 'M' 'XP' and 'SJ'. The relic has since disappeared from the parish.

The best furniture from the Presbytery was moved to Heythrop.

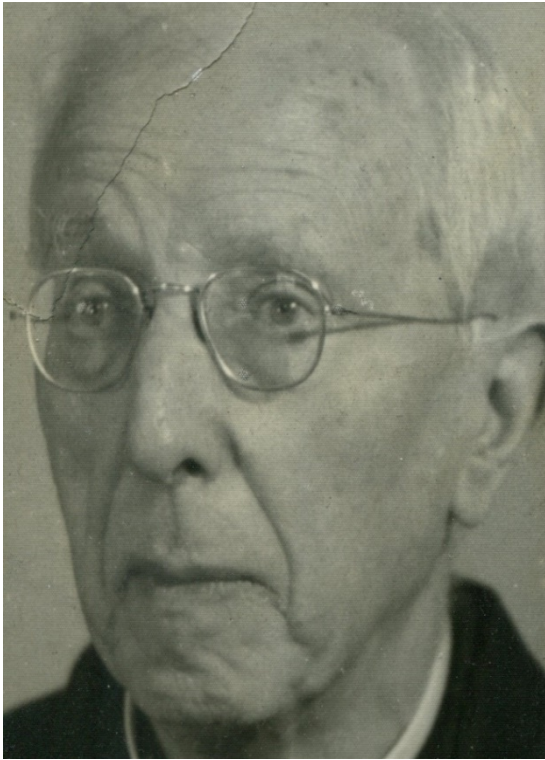
At this time the Catholic Church in Bury depended largely on its converts, having received 26 in its past two years. Not one Catholic remained from its congregation of 40 years earlier. It had been a time of great change in Bury St Edmunds and in the Country at large.

The Society of Jesus was to leave Bury St Edmunds after 174 years of service with the fabric of a sound parish that was undergoing change. Its roots were established in one of the few towns in East Anglia to have a promising Catholic presence. The Diocese of Northampton had been founded for less time than our own parish Church. It covered a huge area of disparate communities, many of them industrial rather than rural. But a succession of energetic and holy priests was charged with building up both numbers and influence on this side of England.

The Jesuits had embarked on a successful mission to create a solid foundation in the district. Their departure at the beginning of September 1929 drew an end to a most important chapter in Catholic life of Bury St Edmunds.

**Other Jesuit Priests who served the Bury St Edmunds Mission – photographs reproduced with kind permission of Jesuits in British Archives (Left: Fr John Benson, Right: Fr Frederick de Betham)**





**Fr Peter Bontemps**



**Fr Richard Sumner**



**Fr William Thompson**



**Fr David Thompson**