

70 YEARS AGO... there were two Catholic Churches in Ruislip

by Eileen M. Bowlt

The 1939 edition of the Ordnance Survey Map, below, shows two Catholic Churches in Ruislip: the one in the middle of the High Street was about to be demolished; the other in Pembroke Road was to be blessed and consecrated on 15 June that year.

The reason for this unusual state of affairs has been mentioned in these pages before. (See *RNELHS Journal* 1972, *Golden Jubilee of the Sacred Heart Church*, and *RNELHS Journal* 1982, *Sacred Heart Diamond Jubilee 1921-1981*, both by Eileen M. Bowlt.)



Part of the 1939 edition of the Ordnance Survey Map, Middlesex Sheet X 9

Briefly, Eleanor Charlotte Warrender 1862-1949, lived at Highgrove, Eastcote, from the mid 1890s. Her parents were Sir George Warrender, sixth Baronet of Lochend and Helen Hume-Campbell.

Her maternal grandfather, Sir Hugh Hume-Campbell, seventh Baronet of Marchmont, came into possession of Highgrove through his second marriage to Juliana Fuller, only daughter of Lt General Joseph Fuller who had purchased it in 1834.

The second marriage was childless and the house and estate passed to Sir Hugh's grandchildren from the daughter of his first wife.

Eleanor Warrender was received into the Catholic Church whilst serving with the French Red Cross during the First World War. In 1918, Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, was negotiating the purchase of plots 7-21 on the Ruislip High Street frontage of the Church Croft estate - hoping to establish a Catholic Mission in Ruislip. The cost was £450. A £300 loan was needed. Miss Warrender gave the £300, and subsequently undertook to supply the whole church and rectory and most of the furnishings. See Figs. 1 and 2.

The Church of the Most Sacred Heart, a dedication chosen by Miss Warrender, was opened and blessed on 25 September 1921.



Fig.1. Church of the Most Sacred Heart on Ruislip High Street 1921 - 1939

The door was at the side at Miss Warrender's request, so that curious Protestants could slip in unobserved. The rectory adjoins the church on the right and there was a hall at the rear on the left.



Fig. 2. The site in May 2009

The Church frontage on the High Street is now occupied by Thomson's, Saunders, Marks & Spencer, Pizza Hut, Cancer Research, Sydney, Coral, The Bread House and The Red Onion.

The second parish priest, Father Sutton, came to a freezing and snow-covered Ruislip from Our Lady of Victories, Kensington, at the end of January 1933. It was the year that George Ball started building the 5000 Manor Homes south of Ruislip Manor Halt -

The number of parishioners increased...

The church only seated 200 people...

The centre of the parish was moving eastwards and southwards...

The High Street site was worth a great deal of money to developers and offers were made...

A new site was found on Pembroke Road near Ruislip Manor Halt in 1938, and to Miss Warrender's lasting sorrow it was decided that the High Street church should be deconsecrated and demolished.

The 1939 OS Map just catches the historic moment when the new building, see Fig. 3, was up and the other not yet pulled down.



Fig. 3. Church of the Most Sacred Heart in Pembroke Road

The new church

So it came about that the 'new' church, see Figs. 4 and 5, celebrated its 70th anniversary in June 2009.



Fig. 4. Cardinal Hinsley laying the foundation stone of the new church on Lady Day (25 March) 1939



Fig. 5. The church was complete and having no debt, ready to be consecrated by Bishop Myers on 15 June 1939

The church, designed by George Drysdale, is simple in plan and modern in appearance. There are unbroken views of the high altar from all corners and a star-spangled tester and hanging crucifix suspended from the roof above it draw the eye to the sanctuary. The walls were originally off-white, giving a calm atmosphere, with touches of colour coming from the altar hangings and statues, some of which had been gifts of the Warrenders and their friends, and had been brought from the High Street church.

The exterior is equally plain, in golden-brown brick, with red quoins relieved only by a centrally-placed cross in relief and roundels carved with the symbols of the four evangelists above the door.

The calvary cross that had hung on the High Street front of the first church, was placed on the side wall of the new one. Father Peter Latham had it moved to the front in 1999 and fixed within the outlines of the cross in relief.

Interior changes

The church remained virtually unaltered until after the Second Vatican Council 1961. When the dust had settled and changes in the liturgy had been agreed, the layout of the sanctuary was altered to fit the new requirements. Father Peter Geraerts, parish priest 1964 - 78, removed the high altar to the Lady Chapel and installed a new high altar, like a stone table, in the centre of the sanctuary, so that mass could be said with the celebrant facing the people (see Fig. 6). The tabernacle was moved to a newly created Blessed Sacrament Chapel on the right-hand side of the church.

A more colourful church

The next parish priest, Father Adrian Arrowsmith 1978 - 87, brought colour into the church with his redecorations. He also restored the Blessed Sacrament to the sanctuary. The old monochrome statues were



Fig. 6. Father Geraerts saying mass in the newly-ordered sanctuary c.1969

painted in bright colours and new ones, mainly of English saints, were commissioned from Siegfried Pietzche, a Polish sculptor. They included one of St Thomas More, complete with the monkey that was said to have been a family pet at the More household in Chelsea. A local note was introduced with the statue of Blessed Sebastian Newdigate.

He was one of the seventeen children of John and Amphylisia Newdigate of Harefield Place and had entered the Charterhouse on the outskirts of the City of London following the death of his wife. He was one of the Carthusians who were martyred at Tyburn in the summer of 1535.

By 1980, the outside of the church looked a little untidy. The house on the corner of Pembroke Road and Green Walk that became the Presbytery had already been built when the site was acquired. The Hesdin Hall was opened on the other side of the church in 1964 and a new Bec Club, previously in a room at the back of the hall, was built adjoining the hall in 1968. Father Arrowsmith brought unity to the façade by building St Joseph's Colonnade in 1982, see Fig. 7.

Subsequent parish priests have maintained the church and improved the Hut used by Scouts, Guides, Cubs, Brownies, Beavers and Rainbows. The parish has continued to thrive especially under Father Michael Johnston, who came in 2002. He moved to Notting Hill, shortly after the seventieth anniversary celebrations. The present parish Priest, Father Duncan Adamson, is no stranger to the parish, having served on the altar and acted as MC for many years before becoming a priest. He was ordained at the Church of the Most Sacred Heart in 1989.



Fig. 7. St Joseph's Colonnade, with a foyer and coffee lounge behind, brings unity to the façade in 1982. It was blessed by Cardinal Hume in 1984.