

ST. OSWALD, KING AND MARTYR 170 YEARS OF A PARISH



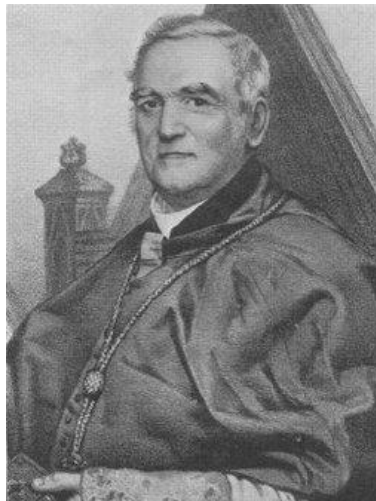
St. Oswald, King and Martyr, 604-642

CATHOLICISM IN THE OLD SWAN AREA PRE-1842

From 1688 to 1840, England and Wales were divided into four vicariates, each under a Vicar-Apostolic with the powers of a Bishop. In 1840 the growth of the Catholic population led Pope Gregory XVI to create eight vicariates, one of which was Lancashire, with Bishop Brown being appointed to this post. He subsequently became the first Bishop of Liverpool when the hierarchy was restored in 1850.

1837 there were only five catholic churches in Liverpool, two more being opened in 1838. In 1839, Fr. Maddocks moved to Old Swan; and the foundations of a new church were laid, being completed in 1842. However, even before that, Mass was being said in at least five private oratories of private houses in the area (e.g. in Oakhill Park and Sandhill Park).

When Fr. Maddocks arrived, he started saying Mass in the outhouse of his small cottage in Broadgreen Road. It is recorded that the attendance was so great that the windows were left open, so that crowds kneeling on the cobblestones outside could hear Mass.



*Bishop Brown, Vicar Apostolic of Lancashire District 1840 – 1850
1st Bishop of Liverpool 1850 – 1856*

Old Swan

Old Swan takes its name from the Inn. Indeed, there were three inns here with the sign of the Swan, which may have been given because the Walton's, of Walston Hall, who were in ancient times the Lords of the Manor, had for their arms three white swans on a blue shield. The centre inn, at the junction of Prescott Lane (now Road) and Petticoat Lane (now Broadgreen Road) was the original Old Swan.

At this time Old Swan was just a small village "near Prescott". Indeed in 1835 between Old Swan and Sheil Road not more than twenty houses are shown on a map of the district. From Sheil Road on to the top end of London Road was all fields, except for the country

road along which the stagecoach conveyed passengers. Horses were changed at Low Hill (a small hamlet) and again at Old Swan Inn.

The area of the parish in Fr. Maddock's day was about three miles by four. In this area there were three roperies (one at least opposite St. Oswald's), three quarries, the glass house, an icehouse, a borax works and a tannery. The people of Old Swan would earn their living in one of these places, or as servants in one of the large house, as around Oakhill Park.

PARISH BEGINNINGS

In his 25 years at Old Swan he had built up a flourishing parish with church, schools, convent, confraternities, and presbytery ... Indeed, he had done so well that his successors, all of them splendid men, had little to do in the way of building. It was not until the beginning of this century [now last century] that any extensive additions became necessary.
(quote from the Centenary Booklet)

Canon John Maddocks 1842 – 1864

Born in Liverpool in 1801, John Maddocks was trained at Saint Cuthbert's Seminary, Ushaw College, Durham, and the English College in Rome. He was first appointed to St. Nicholas, Copperas Hill. However, Fr. Maddocks was soon drawn to the poverty and isolation of the Catholic villagers in Old Swan, four miles from his church. He moved to a cottage in Petticoat Lane (Broadgreen Road) saying Mass for an ever-increasing number of local people while building the church. He moved to a small house next door and then to a slightly larger one by the school he had built and opened in 1845, moving back to the cottage when the Sisters of Mercy needed it. When Bishop Brown became the first Bishop of Liverpool, Fr. Maddocks was made one of the Canons of the Chapter. After serving the people for 25 years he fell ill at the beginning of 1864 and died on the 4th January aged 63. He is buried near the side porch of the church he had built. The people held the Canon in great esteem and after his death a street off St. Oswald Street was named after him.

The 1st Church 1839 – 1942



At the end of 1839, the foundation stone of the church was laid. The architect was the best Catholic architect of his day, Mr. A. W. Pugin, famous for his re-introduction of the Gothic style. The builders were the firm of Myers and took two years to build. It was opened by Bishop Brown on 4th August 1942 amid great rejoicing, and a large congregation was in attendance. The spire (approx. 165ft) became a landmark for miles around and, unfortunately, a target for German bombing raids during the blitz. The main door was painted green, as was customary in Pugin churches, and the porch led to a winding staircase up to the choir and organ loft. After 1855, the bell pull on the left rang out the times of Mass. The side door facing south was also approached through a porch.

Pillars and arches dominated the interior, lit by side windows and a large traceried window behind the stone high altar, decorated with a Cross, Agnus Dei and the four Evangelists. The reredos contained six statues of Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. Cuthbert, St. George, St. Catherine, and St. Helena. Two screens cut off the area of the Sanctuary while two more led, on the right to the Lady Altar, and on the left to the Sacred Heart altar. The Sanctuary Lamp and a large Crucifix hung in front of the altar. A stone sedilla stood on the right of the main altar and a sepulchre on the left where the tomb of Bishop Brown, first Bishop of Liverpool, lay. The Stations of the Cross were Belgian. The church yard led to two "lych gates" and to Edge Lane, later known as St. Oswald Street. The total cost was, as Fr. Maddocks has it, "somewhat over £5,000." St. Oswald's became the Mother Church for many parishes - Christ the King, St. Margaret Mary's and, much later, St. Cuthbert's and St. Brendan's were formed from it.

The First Presbytery



After the church was built in 1842, Fr. Maddocks build a two storied house as a presbytery for himself. It was a small unpretentious place consisting of two rooms downstairs and two rooms upstairs. A door led from the presbytery into the school (when he build it) and into the lean-to at the side, where he stabled his donkey. It was simply furnished and no more comfortable than the surrounding cottages.

He next build a school, which was opened in 1845, and to be sure of teachers for the children, in 1850 Fr. Maddocks invited the Sisters of Mercy to come to Old Swan and teach in the school. Characteristically, this humble man handed over the presbytery to them and went to live in a very small and poor little cottage until more important tasks were

accomplished and money was available. The sisters divided the upstairs rooms in half to give them four cells. Later they built on a new convent, but the original small presbytery can still be seen as part of the Convent of Mercy.

The Second Presbytery



Work began in 1860 on the present presbytery, and it was completed in the following year. Mr. Daniel Powell, a devoted parishioner, was the architect and the building was a worthy addition to the group of sandstone edifices, church, convent, school now dominating the area between St. Oswald Street, Mill Lane and two small streets, Percival Street and Mary Adelaide Street, long since demolished. Three double windows on two floors lightened the building on the left (as facing) and bay windows were provided for the right side. A vault for the burial of the priests of the parish stood between the church and house, behind a large statue of St. Peter, seated, as in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Unfortunately, Fr. Maddock, by now Canon Maddock, was not able to enjoy the comforts of his new house for long. He died on March 4th 1863, aged 63. Fr. Clarkson extended the presbytery sometime after 1908 but since then it has not been substantially altered.

The First School

Between his house and the street, Fr. Maddocks built a school, now the Parish Hall, which opened in 1845 and catered for a wide area of population. When the school was first formed, children came from Childwall, Wavertree, West Derby, and Huyton. They were poor children and Fr. Maddocks, had local farmers give vegetables and a local woman to make soup for them.

There is no record of any teachers in the first few years, but in 1850, in order to be sure of teachers, he invited the Sisters of Mercy, who had come to Mount Vernon, Liverpool in 1842, to teach in the school. They were welcomed on August 17th 1851, visited the church and taken to their new Convent (the First Presbytery). There were four teaching Sisters, two for the boys who entered from the street side and two for the girls who entered from the garden.

A letter from a former pupil, John Taaffe, recalled his first years at the school from 1852:

About the year 1852 I began to go to school, for the first time to St. Oswald's. At that time, there was only the boys' old school, divided into two parts by a wooden partition resting on an iron rail on which the partition could be moved backwards and forwards. The boys' half of the school was on St. Oswald's Street side; the girls' half on the Convent side. There was a doorway from the Convent to the girls' school through which the Sister entered to teach; that doorway was afterwards built up when the girls' new school was opened. The yard or playground for boys was small, very little larger than it is at present. Where the present Convent portico is, there was a black boarding, and on the yard side there was a small flower bed about 3 or 4 feet in diameter. To each school there was a separate entrance for the boys and girls as the present porch will show. The wing of the Convent at the top of the present yard was not built at that time.

The Sisters of Mercy

In 1842 the Sisters of Mercy were welcomed to Liverpool and installed in a Convent in Mount Vernon through the beneficence of the Browne Family of Derwent Road and then of Mulrankin, Oakhill Park. In 1850 Canon Maddock invited them to teach in the school he had opened in 1845. They lived in the Convent which had been the Priest's house next to the school, with two rooms on the ground floor and two rooms upstairs which they converted into 4 small cells.

Here is a note from the records of Mount Vernon:

On August 17th, 1851, Father Maddocks received the Sisters with the greatest cordiality, and, after a short visit to the Church, conducted them to his own house, which he had prepared for them as well as his slender means permitted, he himself going to a very small and poor little cottage, in which he spent several years in the greatest poverty, denying himself almost the necessities of life in order to obtain for his flock the constant instructions and assistance of the nuns. The new convent was very small, consisting of only two rooms on the ground floor, and four small cells (originally two rooms) upstairs.

The Second School

Fr. Maddocks soon realised the provision was inadequate for the increasing numbers and by 1854 he had built a larger 2 storey school with the Infants on the ground floor and the Girls upstairs. There were two entrances to this school - one on the side street and one on the other side, but near the convent garden. Those who came in by the street paid no fee, but those who came in by the garden paid one penny per week This money was what the Sisters lived on. This building is now the Montini Youth Club. Pupil teachers were employed and examined. By 1864 certificated teachers are referred to in the records and

were probably from the newly opened Notre Dame Training College, Mount Pleasant. Night school was held and inspection of children and staff of all schools were regular.

One Report of January 1884 praised the efficiency, discipline, and instruction of the Boys' school, awarding it a Merit Grant of Excellent:

The Managers have greatly improved the efficiency of the school, by the sub-division of the room which is now brighter and more cheerful than it was. The discipline and instruction have likewise made remarkable progress, and both are now so thoroughly satisfactory that I am able to recommend the award of the Merit Grant at the rate of EXCELLENT. The percentage of passes exceeds 92, the quality of the work being at the same time uniformly sound and intelligent. The Class Subjects merit equal praise, and the thoroughly good behaviour of the boys deserves the highest commendation. These results are the more creditable when the class from which the bulk of the boys is drawn is considered.

However, they complained of a deterioration in all aspects of the Girls' School which was given a lower rate of grant:

The school has, I am sorry to say, greatly deteriorated, both in discipline and instruction. The girls, orderly, are inattentive, wanting in readiness of action and presence of mind, are not steady in application, and are not as free from copying as they might be. Their instruction displays little real intelligence or soundness, and is with a general feeble imperfect and superficial tone, very deficient in Spelling in the second, third and fourth standards (particularly the third standard) and very inaccurate in Arithmetic in the first fifth and sixth Standards, the other Standards being also rather weak in this subject. Only the lower rate of Grant can be recommended for the class Subjects, to which are both not more than fair. In the fifth Standard the failure in Grammar was wholesale and discreditable. The singing from note is generally satisfactory, but the time test was not well satisfied. Great effort will be necessary to make the school efficient.

Methodist Chapel

Canon Maddocks bought a disused Methodist Chapel and used part for extra classrooms and the rest for the meetings of the Catholic Young Men's Society (C.Y.M.S.). It remained CYMS rooms for the next 100 years and in the late 1950s the building became the Parish Club.

THE PARISH GROWS ... AND CELEBRATES ITS GOLDEN JUBILEE!

Canon Thomas Bennett 1864 – 1867

He was born in Ireland in County Offaly at Thomastown and studied for the priesthood both at Ushaw and Rome. Ordained by Cardinal Wiseman on 8th December 1854, he was

sent to St. Oswald's as assistant priest and was appointed Rector on the death of Canon Maddocks in 1864; and became a Canon in 1865. He was particularly known for visiting the sick in the overcrowded dwellings of the area and it was in the course of one such visit that he caught fever and died on 10th January 1867, aged 37. He was remembered for his attempts to save the young men from the evils of drink and violence and for his work in the schools. His two brothers served at St. Oswald's and on the Cathedral Chapter.

Canon Holden 1867 – 1882

He was born at Brockside-in the Fylde in 1832 and, like his predecessors, was trained for the priesthood at Ushaw and Rome. Ordained in 1861, he served first at St. Nicholas, the Pro Cathedral, and then at Our Lady's, Eldon Street. After recovering from typhus fever, he was sent, after the death of Canon Bennett, to St. Oswald's where he served faithfully despite poor health and worsening eyesight. In 1900 his sight failed completely and for 14 years he struggled to use his gifts in blindness. After a severe fall he died on 9th March 1914 and is buried in the vault outside the presbytery.

Canon Peter Van Hee 1882 – 1894

Peter Van Hee was born in Belgium in 1837 and studied for the priesthood in Bruges where he was ordained in 1861. He came to Liverpool and began his priestly work as a curate in St. Anthony's, Scotland Rd. and then at the Pro-Cathedral. After a short period as Rector at Our Lady' Eldon St., he replaced Canon Holden in 1882. A decade later he supervised preparation of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of St. Oswald's on the 5th July 1892. He was also a Canon of the Cathedral Chapter. At the Golden Jubilee in 1892 the title of Missionary Rector was conferred on him by Bishop O'Reilly. He also served under the new Bishop of Liverpool, Bishop Whiteside, who replaced Bishop O'Reilly and was consecrated by Cardinal Vaughan in 1894. Canon Van Hee died on the 1st September 1894.

The Golden Jubilee

The Golden Jubilee came during the stewardship of Canon Van Hee. By this time, all the debt had been cleared and the church was consecrated by Bishop O'Reilly on 5th July 1892. On August 14th, the Sunday within the Octave of the Feast of St. Oswald, the Golden Jubilee was celebrated with a special sung Mass. Canon Van Hee sang the Mass. Monsignor Carr, the Vicar General preached in the morning and Fr. W Lennon in the evening. Also, on that day; the Bishop conferred the title of Missionary Rector on Canon Van Hee

Fr. Martin Gallacher 1894 – 1898

Martin Gallacher was born in Liverpool in 1845, a time of great poverty and economic depression in the city, exacerbated by the effects of the Irish Famine and the influx of many thousands of immigrants. He was educated at the Catholic Institute and studied at the English College in Lisbon. He was ordained on the 31st January 1869 and became the Principal of the Institute, Rector of St. Philip Neri's and St. Michael's, West Derby Road.

On succeeding Canon Van Hee in 1894 he drew up plans for a new modern school. In 1896 Mr. Hugh Cullen gave the land on Montague Road but the plans had to be shelved when he died of typhoid fever on 11th November 1898.

THE PARISH DIVIDES St. Cuthbert's Parish History



When the original Pugin Church of St. Oswald was built, Old Swan was a small country village several miles outside Liverpool. It was ample for the congregation of the time. However, by 1924 the village church had become too small for the densely populated area Old Swan had become. Despite having five Masses every Sunday it became evident that a portion of the parish had to be cut off and made into a new parish.

St. Oswald's Parish Priest, Canon Clarkson, found a suitable site in Aviemore Road, Stanley. The first Parish Priest, Fr. James Lonergan, was appointed in 1925 to oversee the fundraising and building of the new church. He became ill and was replaced by Fr. John Noblet. St. Cuthbert's site was originally purchased for a new school and temporary church. The total cost for the new building was £17,000 and with a congregation of 1,000 people this was considered to be a huge financial burden.

The church, placed on the first floor:

Is designed to be used eventually as a school, the arrangement is so, if extra school accommodation is required, for extra classrooms could be provided at once with a minimum of structural change... The church portion has a niche for a figure of St. Cuthbert with a stone canopy over. This decorative feature is placed so that it is visible from Prescott Road, and it is hoped will give some religious and artistic feeling to a dreary neighbourhood. (Alfred Gilbertson, Architect).

After over 70 years, the temporary church (which had been destined to become a fuller part of the school fabric) was incorporated into the school. In 2002 after much consultation, the parish of St. Cuthbert and St. Brendan were re-united with the mother church, that of St. Oswald and became one parish community again. St. Brendan's was to stay open as a shrine and a chapel in St. Oswald's was dedicated to St. Cuthbert on All Saints day 2003.

Canon Joseph Clarkson 1898 – 1936

In contrast to Fr. Gallagher, Canon Clarkson enjoyed a long reign and is still remembered as the Canon by old parishioners. He was born in Old Swan on 26th February 1854 and went to St. Oswald's boys' school, the Seminary of St. Edward's in San Domino Road and, in 1871, to Ushaw. In 1891 he was ordained and said his first Mass in another St. Oswald's, Ashton-in-Makerfield. As the numbers in the parish grew, it was necessary to build new parishes and the Canon assisted the planning and erection of St. Cuthbert's church and school (1927-8), Christ the King, (1925-6), St. Margaret Mary's (1931-2).

The Third School



Time moved on and eventually even the 1854 school became too small for the parish. Land in Montague Road had been given by Mr. Cullen to Fr. Gallagher and the foundation stone of the new school was laid by Bishop Whiteside on 1st June 1902, after a procession being led off by brass bands and flag bearing parishioners. The school cost £8,781. In 1908 the Girls and Infants' Schools were extended and improved at a further cost of £1,806 and the schools catered for 1,128 children. This building was demolished in 1980 after a new school Infant and Junior Schools had been built.

MORE GROWTH AND THE CENTENARY MEMORIES

In the 1930's and 1940's, the congregation at St. Oswald's greatly increased. Three thousand parishioners would crowd into the Church for a number of Sunday Masses - the Church had not then been enlarged. There were five priests. People queued for Mass down St. Oswald Street. Passengers on tramcars going up that street could not believe their eyes and wondered what the attraction was. There was a special Mass for children who filled the two centre aisles, and adults at that Mass had to occupy the side benches. Some of the front benches still had brass plates on them with the names of people who, in the past, paid a yearly sum for those seats but that system had fallen into disuse. Outdoor collectors visited each Catholic house every Sunday and collected money for Church expenses. In addition to this the Priest visited each household every four weeks. With five priests a goodly number of houses in the area could be visited each month.

Dean Nicholas Coghlan 1936 – 1968

Dean Coghlan was born in Kirkdale in 1896. He was educated at St. Edward's, Upholland, and St. Marie's Seminary, Oscott College; and was ordained 10th July 1921 at St. Philip Neri by the newly appointed Archbishop Keating. After being a curate at Sacred Heart, Leigh, he was appointed to assist at St. Oswald's and stayed there for 63 years. One of his main interests was the C.Y.M.S. of which he was the Chaplain General from 1933.

Occupying what had been the Methodist Chapel at the corner of Mill Lane, the St. Oswald's branch became very active and successful.

In 1936 he succeeded Canon Clarkson and continued to build up a strong parish and Catholic societies flourished - Young Men's Society, Children of Mary, St. Agnes Guild, Youth Groups, Scouts and Guides.

St. Oswald's was rebuilt was blessed and Mass celebrated on the 15th December 1956 This outstanding success seemed to foretell years of growth and development but in 1961 the building of St. Brendan's depleted Dean Coughlan's parish by a third and it is thought that his worries over the large debt increased his natural depression and caused his final illness.

Celebrating the Centenary 1942

The Centenary came during the stewardship of Fr. Nicholas Coghlan. By this time, the population had grown to over 6,000 and the Sunday Mass attendance to an average of 3,200 people. As the event occurred during the war it was, as the Archbishop of Liverpool (the most Rev. Richard Downey) put it "necessarily shorn of some of its glory". However, for the Centenary celebrations the blackouts were removed from the windows and the church could again be seen in all its beauty. For the Centenary, a booklet was produced giving much of the history of the parish to that time.

Church Building – St. Oswald's



Dean Coghlan promoted improvements to the interior and exterior of St. Oswald's as the congregation continued to expand. Numbers at Sunday Masses overflowed down the paths and it was decided to extend the building. Because St. Oswald's was a listed Pugin building, the spire, porch, and doorway could not be demolished and a new main body joined to them gradually rose as the old one was taken down inside.

The 1842 church celebrated its golden Jubilee in 1892 and its centenary in 1942. For a long time, it had become obvious that it was too small for the needs of the mid 1950's. The expanding congregation flooded out often to the gates at the Sunday Masses and, despite the building of Christ the King 1925/6, St. Cuthbert's 1927/8 and St. Margaret Mary's 1931/2, the building itself would have to be extended if not rebuilt. Sir Giles Gilbert Scott was consulted and his decision was to widen and extend the church eastwards while retaining the existing porch, doorway, and steeple. These could not be demolished as the church was a listed Pugin building. But the war intervened and work was suspended until

peace time. New plans were drawn up by Mr. Adrian Scott and in 1954 work began on the extension as the old church was taken down inside the old and all services continued as normal. It was in the half old, half new church that Bishop Malone was ordained priest in 1955.

It was blessed and Mass celebrated on 10th December 1956 by Dean Coughlan and, as Archbishop Godfrey was appointed the next Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, the official opening was delayed until Archbishop Heenan had been installed as Archbishop of Liverpool and took place on the 2nd October 1957.

The altar, sanctuary, baldachino, and half the walls were completed first. The old parts, tower, spire, porch, and door were incorporated into the finished church which could hold 800 people, while some stained glass and the baptismal font were retained. It was 170ft. long and 67ft. wide; the marble was Italian and the whole cost was some £130,000. It was greeted with joy and pride by the people of Old Swan but within three years, the building of St. Brendan's had destroyed the hopes of a fully used edifice and Dean Coughlan was deeply affected by what appeared to be the destruction of his plans and hopes.

THE PARISH DIVIDES ... AGAIN!

St. Brendan's Parish History

Rev. John Carmel Heenan became Archbishop of Liverpool and his vision was that new parishes would be created in Liverpool. The priest chosen for the parish project in the Old Swan area was Fr. Eamonn O'Brien, born in Castledrum, Co. Kerry, Ireland, then about fifty years old and already a priest in the Liverpool Archdiocese. A new parish was to be formed from parts of four other parishes - St. Oswald's, St. Margaret Mary's, St. Paul's, and Christ the King - although the major part was from St. Oswald's.

Land near Queen's Drive had been bought in 1947 for a Chapel of Ease. After the site was cleared of the old smithy and a sandstone cottage, work was able to start almost immediately. On July 5th, 1961 Archbishop Heenan laid the foundation stone for a new church to be dedicated to St. Brendan, the Navigator. One third of the parish of St. Oswald's was made into a new Parish.

Fr. O'Brien had no money and no home. A Mrs Frayne in 28 Derby Lane gave him a room and from there he trudged around the area, looking up the names on his list of his new parishioners and getting to know them. He arranged a meeting in the Hall of St. Oswald's parish and was agreeably surprised at the number of people who turned up and the many who offered help. St. Edward's School lent their hall for a weekly Bingo, one man offered to run the Pools from his own home; some said they could run Sales of Work etc., and many offered to collect around parishioners houses.

He then approached six banks for a loan but was refused and, in despair of ever getting started, he made a novena to one of his favourite saints. At this time, he was acting as

Chaplain to the Hospice in Broadgreen Road where the Sisters of Charity cared for very sick and dying people. Someone told Fr. O'Brien's story to the Chairman of the Hospice Committee, Alderman F Wilson, who then offered Fr. O'Brien £60,000 for his new Church. Alderman Wilson, owner of Starways Airline and The Cathedral Touring Agency, as well as several other enterprises, was well known for giving large sums of money to Charity.

Fr. O'Brien was delighted and as the land near Queen's Drive had been bought in 1947, after the site was cleared of the old smithy and a sandstone cottage, work was able to start almost immediately. On July 5th, 1961 Archbishop Heenan laid the foundation stone. The Church was dedicated to St. Brendan, the Navigator and a magnificent stained-glass window of St. Brendan was inserted over the main Altar. The cost of building the Church was £70,000.

Amid great rejoicing, the official opening by Archbishop Heenan took place on December 8th, 1961. Two weeks later, on December 23rd, at 52 years of age, Fr. O'Brien was found dead in bed following a heart attack. All his hard work had been accomplished and God had called him home.

Father Gerard Mitchell was appointed Parish Priest in January 1962 and had the difficult task of uniting all the people of his new parish and dealing with workmen etc., to see they all finished the work on the new Church to his satisfaction. He did very well and in December 1962 his Silver Jubilee was celebrated in St. Brendan's Church, with a special Mass where parishioners crowded the Church. A Presentation function and concert was held in Christ the King hall as St. Brendan's did not have a hall. Fr. Mitchell was in the parish for two years, being followed by the temporary appointment of Fr. Coyne. During this time, several curates worked in the parish. These included Frs. Boardman, Finnegan, Moore and Neary.

In 1966 Canon Thomas Kennedy was appointed Parish Priest and in March 1967 he was appointed Dean of Old Swan district. He was also Chairman of St. Vincent's Hospice from 1960 to 1977. During his time as PP, a portion of the disused Co-operative shop on the corner of Queen's Drive was acquired and this became St. Brendan's Club - small but well used for meetings and social activities, and a forward-looking committee was set up. The Canon celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his priesthood with a Concelebrated High Mass on June 10th 1978 and a presentation evening with entertainment was held in St. Agnes School Hall.

Fr. Cunningham came to St. Brendan's in 1981 and soon settled in. He was to take over as Parish Priest and has now run the Parish since Canon Kennedy's retirement in 1983. The Church is very conveniently placed for shoppers and passers-by to drop in and say a prayer and due to Fr. Cunningham's willingness to keep the Church open in the daytime, many people do.

For many years we had been hearing that there would be a great shortage of priests and also that some churches would have to close. This situation came to pass in the 1990's and parishes were amalgamated and some closed for good. Other parishes were sharing priests. As we turned the corner into the new century, it became clear that something would have to be done in the Old Swan area. After many meetings, it was decided that St. Cuthbert's would close and its parish, along with St. Brendan's, would join St. Oswald's - (as they all had been in the past). Fr. Garrett was to retire and Fr. Cunningham, also in retirement, would continue to live in the parochial house of St. Brendan's - the church henceforth being called St. Brendan's Shrine - Fr. Brendan Rice to be the Priest-in-charge of all this and based at the mother church of St. Oswald's.

Although there was some apprehension about all this, since September 2002, when the changeover took place, it seems to have worked well. St. Oswald's and St. Brendan's Shrine share the services during the week and St. Cuthbert's parishioners attend one or other. St. Cuthbert's parish is remembered by having a side chapel in St. Oswald's, dedicated to their Saint. An outstanding feature has been the way the people of all three parishes have worked together, and tribute must be paid to Fr. Brendan Rice who has inspired all parishioners.

In 2007 Fr. Brendan joined the Irenaeus Project and Fr. Mark Madden of St. Cecilia's took over St. Oswald's and St. Brendan's as well. Then, in 2010, due to the departure of Fr. Mark to Southport, the Pastoral Area was re-organised and St. Cecilia's joined to St. Mathew's, and St. Oswald's and St. Brendan's were joined with St. Sebastian's. Fr. Mark Beattie from St. Sebastian's took over responsibility for both parishes.

In 2013 it was decided that such an arrangement was unsustainable and St. Brendan's was taken out of sacred use. The final Mass was celebrated by Bishop Tom Williams on 17th January.

REBUILDING AT ST. OSWALD'S **Fr. Patrick McCartney 1968 – 1980**

born on 4th April 1917 in the parish of St. Francis de Sales, Walton, Liverpool. He attended the parish school, St. Edward's College and Upholland Seminary where he was ordained 30th May 1942. He spent fourteen years at St. Malachy's, ten at St. Oswald's and two at St. Stephen's Warrington before being recalled to St. Oswald's on the death of Dean Coughlan. From 1968 to 1980 he was mostly seen riding his bicycle round the parish visiting the sick in their homes and in the hospitals. Despite ill health, constant pain, and shyness he took an active interest in the schools, in the post-Vatican II reforms and in Youth. He supervised the building of the new Primary Schools.

Fr. McCartney had died suddenly on 11th June 1980, giving Communion to the sick in Rathbone Hospital and he did not live to see the completion of the Junior School he had worked so hard to provide.

The New Infants School



By the 1970s the schools needed modernisation and work was first begun on the Infants' School in St. Oswald Street. which was to open September 1974. This was delayed because the premises were temporarily used by the Girls of St. Agnes wing of Broughton Hall, Oakhill Park. The children moved into the school on November 5th 1974, and the school was officially opened the following September and blessed by Archbishop Beck on 27th November 1975.

The Junior School

Work on demolition and rebuilding of the Junior School continued but was delayed for 18 months by the discovery of a large number of coffins (see below). Not until 8th September 1981 was the new school opened and blessed by Archbishop Worlock,

The Strange Secrets of Old Swan

The graveyard has always been a notable feature of the church environs since its foundation, covering the area from the door to the lych gates. A large sepulchre was erected by the side door for the burial of priests behind the statue of St. Peter. During the pre-war plans for the extension of the church, Fr. Coughlan discovered that the ground to the east where clearance was underway contained 172 coffins and some tombstones. He applied to the Home Secretary for a licence to remove and reinter them to the south east end of the cemetery.

In 1973 plans were in operation for the building of a new Infant and Junior schools. The first was opened in 1974 but work had to be suspended on the second because excavations revealed thousands of rotting coffins piled 16 deep along an underground tunnel and across an area of forty square feet, said finally to number 3561. These anonymous bodies were exhumed and cremated while the area was sealed off and Public Health Officials continued their daily rounds for nearly two years. In the middle of 1975, the last corpse was removed and all the ashes were reburied in Anfield Cemetery.

The Council supplied 85% of the building costs of the school so they bought the land and had to produce the money for this exhumation, approximately £50,000. The people were buried before 1840 after which date records had to be kept, but whether the cause was plague or cholera is not known.

REFURBISHING

Fr. Joseph Flynn 1980 – 1990

An Irishman educated in Ireland was the next parish priest. Fr. Flynn was born on 17th April 1922 in Gainstown, near Mullingar, the seventh of nine children of Thomas and Mary Flynn. He went to the village school and then to the Christian Brothers School in the local town. He followed his brother John to St. Finian's College there and on to St. Kieran's Seminary, Kilkenny, where he was ordained On the 5th June 1949 for the Archdiocese of Liverpool.

After curacies at Our Lady, Star of the Sea, Seaforth, St. Patrick's, Wigan, St. Joseph's Leigh, he became parish priest of St. Finbar's, Dingle. Archbishop Worlock asked him to replace Fr. McCartney and, due to his natural reserve and humility, he hesitated in accepting charge of such a big parish. But he took it as his duty and became a popular and much-loved pastor, taking particular interest in the schools. He oversaw improvements to the interior of the church and the restoration of the spire.

He loved golf and returning to Ireland for his holidays and he was about to return from his last one on 10th August 1990 when he died in his sleep. He was buried in Mullingar, and a memorial plaque was erected and blessed on 2nd November 1991 by the crucifix outside the church.

Fr. Gerry Wharton 1990-1998

Fr. Tony Garrett, a late vocation, widower, and grandfather, held the fort until Fr. Wharton arrived. He was born in Seaforth and attended St. Edmund's school, Waterloo, before going to Upholland in 1943. He was ordained on the 6th July 1957 and served at St. Matthew's, Sacred Heart, St Helens, St. Patrick's, All Saints, St. Oswald (Ashton-in-Makerfield), and St. Sylvester's before coming to St. Oswald's, Old Swan.

He won the affection of his parishioners, was popular with the school children and devoted to the sick. He arranged an annual Mass for the sick whom parishioners collected from their own homes or from the Homes in the parish. He emphasised their importance and increased the number of Eucharistic Ministers so that many more could receive the Sacrament. He was assiduous in attending the Archdiocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes and was known for his work with younger priests. He was made a Canon and Dean of the Deanery but refused to be known as anything but Fr. Gerry.

By 1998 he felt the large parish was too much for his diminishing energy and Archbishop Kelly allowed him to move to the smaller, nearby parish of Our Lady of Good Help, Wavertree.

Spire Replaced

Regarding the spire, Pugin wrote:

The Tower, which is calculated for a ring of six bells, stands at the western end of the nave and is surmounted by a stone spire, terminating in a gilt cross. This beautiful spire was erected at the proper cost of Michael Gibson. Esq. of Eaton House, West Derby.

This was the first spire on a Catholic Church in the north of England after the Reformation. The peal never materialised but the single bell was installed to mark the first decade in 1855 at a cost of £63. It became the best timekeeper for the neighbourhood, especially during the time Joseph Bradburn was sexton. The cross was taken down in 1926, the top of the spire being rebuilt and an exactly similar cross erected in which Mgr. Clarkson placed a small relic of the True Cross.

In 1989 gales battered the tower and shifted the top thirty feet of the spire six inches, leaving it leaning dangerously over the church. Traffic was diverted while a crane removed 3.5 tons of masonry, every piece of which was accurately replaced in local Woolton sandstone at a cost of £60,000. Fr. Flynn and Fr. Garrett scaled the 175 ft steeple and were sponsored by parishioners to raise money. An electronic system of bells for four occasions was installed to mark the second millennium.

Church Refurbished



Canon Wharton and Fr. Paul Maher carried out a refurbishment plan in 1997 to bring forward the altar, extend the Sanctuary, replace the altar, lectern and priest's chair in sandstone, reduce the number of benches, carpet the church and leave more space at the rear where a Calvary was installed. During these renovations Mass was said in the church hall. The beautiful, light, and tasteful church was blessed by Archbishop Kelly in January 1998 with the top class of the Junior School standing near him while the relics of the martyrs were placed within the altar and cemented in position. This is the church we now see.

The Font



Previous to the major refurbishment, the original font of red sandstone which had been retained in the second church, was brought back into use. It was moved to its present position from near the sacristy doorway on the Feast of the Baptism of Our Lord January 1992.

1992 Sesqui Centennial

Fr. Gerry Wharton secured the help of a team of researchers to produce an exhibition celebrating 150 years of the history of St. Oswald's. This filled the church for a week and was visited by the very ill Archbishop Derek Warlock who insisted on being brought from the Lourdes Hospital to pay his respects.

In the absence of Archbishop Warlock, the High Mass was said by Bishop Vincent Malone, Canon Gerry Wharton and others connected with the parish. Banners decorated the church and the city was represented by the Catholic Lord Mayor, Rosemary Cooper.

In addition to the exhibition a special booklet was produced tracing the history of the parish. Much of the material for this part of the web site has been culled from that booklet, and many thanks go to Miss Gertrude McLoughlin who did much of the research both then and now.

Parish Mergers

In 2002 a major reorganisation of local parishes took place with the closing of St. Cuthbert's and the designation of St. Brendan's as a shrine. The creation of a united, Catholic Community from the three parishes, witnessing to the Old Swan area of Liverpool was successfully achieved.

With the departure of Fr. Rice in 2007, Fr. Mark was invited to take on the pastoral care of St. Oswald's, Old Swan, whilst remaining Parish Priest of St. Cecilia's. Fr. Mark saw this as a huge honour with St. Oswald's being the parish where his family originate from.

With the prospect of falling numbers and fewer priests the Diocese embarked on a programme of re-organisation under the title "Leaving Safe Harbours". Pastoral Areas replaced the old Deaneries. In 2012 there were five Parish priests and one assistant priest in this Pastoral Area but this was projected to fall to just four parish priests. In the summer of 2012, the assistant priest was moved to become a Parish Priest in another Pastoral Area. In November 2012 notice was given that Fr. Madden would be moving to Southport. Plans had already been made for the reduction to 4 priests and the parishes were re-aligned with St. Cecilia's joining with St. Matthews in Clubmoor and St. Oswald's with St. Sebastian's in Fairfield. Fr. Mark Beattie became the Parish priest for both churches at the beginning of Advent 2012.

Fr. Brendan Rice 1998 – 2007

Fr. Brendan Rice, was born in Liverpool in 1942 and educated at St. Joseph's and St. Anselm's in Birkenhead. After a late vocation and training for the priesthood at Ushaw College, Durham, he was ordained in 1981 and served in St. Alban and Sacred Heart, Warrington and St. Sylvester's, Liverpool. In 1989 he became parish priest at Sts. Peter and Paul, Kirkby. On the transfer of Fr. Wharton from St. Oswald's in 1998, Archbishop Kelly appointed Fr. Rice to replace him. He has had to face structural problems, especially to the presbytery, which, being a listed building cannot be knocked down and replaced. He has succeeded in extending the active participation of parishioners in areas of liturgy, music, finance, and administration. In September 2007 Fr. Rice joined Fr. Chris Thomas on the Irenaeus Project

Fr. Mark Madden 2007 – 2012

Born in Huyton in 1971 and educated at St. Dominic's schools until he entered the Junior Seminary of St. Joseph's College, Upholland in 1983. After training for the Priesthood at Ushaw College, Durham, he was ordained in St. Dominic's, Huyton in July 1996. In November 2002 Fr Mark was appointed as Parish Priest to St. Cecilia's, Tuebrook and arrived in the parish in January 2003. It was at this time his involvement with the Christians in the Holy Land began, twinning St. Cecilia's with the parish of St. Justin's, Nablus. His dedication was rewarded with his Investiture as a Knight of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in 2010. In 2007, with the departure of Fr. Brendan, he took over responsibility for St. Oswalds as well as St. Cecilia. Then, in December 2012, Fr. Mark took up a new appointment in Southport.

Fr. Mark Beattie 2012 – 2020

In 2012 the Pastoral Area was re-organised and the parishes of St. Oswald and St. Sebastian were joined together under Fr. Mark Beattie. In 2020 he was moved to St. Chad's in Chorley.

Fr. Liam Collister 2020 –

Born in the parish of All Saint's, Anfield, in 1983, Fr. Liam was educated at All Saints infants and juniors, before attending De La Salle Secondary school and Saint Francis Xavier's VI Form College. He attended Saint Cuthbert's seminary, Ushaw, and completed his studies for the priesthood at Saint Marie's Seminary, Oscott, before being ordained at St. Matthew's Church, Clubmoor in 2012. Fr. Liam has a varied ministry, including Assistant Priest at the Metropolitan Cathedral of Christ the King, On-call Chaplain to The Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen Hospitals, Assistant Priest at St. Julie and St. Theresa (St Helens), and Parish Priest at Our Lady of Walsingham (Netherton), before joining the St. Oswald and St. Sebastian's Parish Communities in March 2020.

SAINT BRENDAN'S WINDOW'S



In January 2013, to the sadness of regular Mass goers, St. Brendan's Shrine was taken out of sacred use. Bishop Tom Williams said the final Mass on 17th January and the Saturday evening Mass was transferred to St. Oswald's.

However, to the delight of all, the beautiful windows that adorned the Lady Chapel at St. Brendan's Shrine have been transferred to St. Oswald's. They have been framed in wood and hung in the bay to the left of the Lady Altar there. Backlighting shows them in their full glory. The statue of the Blessed Virgin that graced the altar in St. Brendan's has also been re-used there, as the picture shows. Appropriately the new settings for the windows were revealed after the Pastoral Area retreat day at St. Oswald's on 5th October which was entitled 'A Day With Mary'.