

CENTENARY CELEBRATION AT ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST CHURCH, EASINGWOLD

Sunday, September 21st was a day of festival and thanksgiving to the Catholics of Easingwold and the surrounding district, when they gathered to celebrate the one hundredth year of the foundation of the church and mission.

Previous to 1830 the few Catholics that remained in the district had been ministered to, first from Newburgh Priory Brandsby and Linton-on-Ouse, and later from Oulston and Crayke.

In the early years of the 18th century the Manor House, Easingwold was in the possession of Thomas Salvin, Esq., one of an old family of Recusants, who lived there with his two sisters. The "Returns of the Non-conformists" made by clergy of the Established Church, for Archbishop Blackbourne, of York, lately edited by Canon Ollard gave twenty as the number of Papists in Easingwold in 1733, and twelve in 1735, and stated there is no "Meeting House" and no priest. It is certain however that at some time between 1741 and 1750, a Franciscan, Father Gates, did duty at Mr. Salvin's house, as is witnessed by Bishop Dicconson's list of priests, serving in his district, and there is mention of one Dom William Lawrence Hardisty, a Benedictine Monk of Lambsprings Abbey, being there from 1743 to 1754 in the same list..

From this date till 1827 there is no evidence of there being a resident Catholic priest in Easingwold, and it seems likely that their needs were provided for, first from Oulston and then from Crayke. In 1756 Thomas, fourth Viscount Fauconberg conformed to the Established Church, but his wife and daughters clung to their faith and made provision for the Catholic dependents of the estate at Oulston, and Angram Grange, near Husthwaite.

The "Return of the Non-Conformists" at Coxwold, in 1733, gave the number as 101, and in 1735 as 96, and Bishop Dicconson's list mentions Father Thomas Smith, an aged Secular priest, educated at Duca, as being Chaplain to Lady Fauconberg both at Angram and at Oulston, where he died on Nov. 2nd, 1755. Lady Mary, her daughter, who in 1776 married Thomas Eyre, of Hassop, in Derbyshire, continued to support a priest and chapel at Oulston, and left a sum of money for the benefit of Easingwold.

This suggests that at that date the Catholics depended more or less upon Oulston and its priest, and accounts for the fact that, when a church was built and a mission formally established at Easingwold, Oulston, Coxwold and Newburgh became subject to it.

The later years of Lady Mary Eyre's life were spent in Italy where she died at Pisa in 1804. It is more than probable that the pre-reformation vestments and others seemingly of Italian work at Easingwold came from her either through Oulston or Crayke.

From 1794 to 1826, Crayke was the chief centre for the Catholics of the district. About this date the Cholmleys of Brandsby adopted as their chaplain, a French Emigre priest and the chaplain who had served them from 1791, Dom Thomas Jerome Coupe, of Ampleforth took up his abode at Crayke from which he attended the tenantry of Brandsby as well as the Catholics of Coxwold, Oulston and Easingwold. His residence and chapel were in the last house but one on the left of the road going east to Brandsby. The chapel at Oulston which he also served was the second house on the southern side of the village green.

On the retirement of Father Coupe to Ampleforth in 1826, where he died the following year, Dom. John Bernard Clarkson took his place and he, in 1828 was succeeded by another monk of Ampleforth, Dom Richard Cyprian Tyrer. With the approval of superiors Father Tyrer moved to Easingwold, where having secured a suitable plot of land in Long Street, he built a Presbytery. Here Mass was said and other services conducted for a while.

In 1830 he began the erection of the church and it is the one hundredth anniversary of this event which was celebrated on Sunday last. Designed by Joseph Hansom, of York the work was executed by Mr. Wilson, a builder of that city. The formal opening is said to have taken place on Nov. 21st 1833.

Father Tyrer was succeeded in 1835 by Dom John Austin Dowding, a monk of Downside, who for the space of forty-two years devoted himself to the service of his scattered flock. Their number in Easingwold increased considerably, and in addition there were some in most of the surrounding villages.

In 1870 he had the satisfaction of seeing the present High Altar erected. It was the gift of Mrs. Stapleton, of Myton Hall, and was designed by Joseph Hansom, junr. In the following year the main portion of the school was built the infants class-room been added in 1901.

Father Dowding died in 1877, and was buried in the churchyard, where the large mission cross marks his resting place.

Later incumbents, Father Jerome Pearson, Rev. Sir John Bede Swale (Bart), Abbot Ildephonsus Cummins, and Father Maurus Blute made various additions and improvements in both Church and Presbytery which we have not space to chronicle.

An event of far reaching benefit to the parish and to the neighbourhood was the establishment in 1905, during the incumbency of Father Pearson, of a community of Sisters of Mercy of Rouen, expelled from France. Their High School for girls, both Catholic and non-Catholic, their orphanage for a dozen or more Catholic children and their devoted and artistic care of the Altar and Sacristy during the twenty-five years they have now been in Easingwold have deservedly earned the appreciation and gratitude not only of the pastors and people of St. John's but of a far wider circle. In 1908 they presented to the church a new set of Stations of the Cross, in memory of their first Superior, St. Stanislaus Vidor.

Among several other benefactors one will ever be held in special remembrance as an unfailing friend and a help in every undertaking during the past forty years, Mr. Matthew Liddell, of Stillington Hall, still happily with us.

As was fitting, the Abbot of Ampleforth, the Rev. Dom. Edmund Matthews under whose jurisdiction the Mission is placed, was the Celebrant of the Pontifical High Mass at 10.30. The assistants were the Very Rev. Dom. Hilary Willson, the present incumbent, assistant priest Dom. George Forbes, Deacon and Dom. David Ogilive Forbes subdeacon, while the duties of Master of Ceremonies were carried out by Dom. Philip Egerton. A choir of monks from Ampleforth Abbey under the direction of Dom Lawrence Bevenot, as organist, sang the proper and ordinary of Mass in plain-song with Motets in unaccompanied harmony.

The sermon was preached by the Abbot of York, Don Ildephonsus Cummins, of Knaresborough, he took for his text: "They went out in sadness sowing their seeds, they come back in gladness bearing their sheaves, for they that sow in tears shall reap in joy." Ps. 125.

The evening service began with the Office of Vespers chanted by the Monks. The Abbot of Ampleforth preached.

The service concluded with Pontifical Benediction at which the Te Deum was sung in thanksgiving, for all the mercies and blessings of the past one hundred years.