

150th anniversary of St. Werburgh's Roman Catholic Church working group
Thursday, 23rd January 2025 7.15pm

Attendees

Fr Paul Shaw, Parish Priest
Tina Bainbridge-Chair
Lyn Williams
Ana Gasparini
Steve Tierney
John Egan
Gerry Tighe
Pat Floate
Stuart Murray
Helen Pile
Tom Rozario
Marie Cunniff
Jane Hallas
Paula Wszolek (just for the first bullet point)
Bernice Meredith (as above)
Apologies-Jeremy Black

Fr Paul began the meeting by reading a passage about the building of the church from the book "Catholicism in Chester- A double centenary 1875-1975".

"The foundation stone of the new church was laid on October 15th, 1873, and through the hard work of the contractor, Mr. Hughes of Aldford, it was ready for use by the end of 1875. It was on Christmas Day, 1875, that the first Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Manning. No details of the occasion seem to have survived, and the Parish Notice Book for this year is missing. There is, however, a full account, both in the Chester Chronicle and in the Cheshire Observer of the solemn opening, which took place on Thursday, July 13th, 1876, from which it is possible to reconstruct this event.

No pains were spared to make the opening as solemn and as splendid as possible. Pontifical High Mass - the first in Chester for three hundred years - was sung by Bishop O'Reilly of Liverpool, in the presence of Bishop Brown of Shrewsbury and a large gathering of canons and priests of the diocese. These were the days of elaborate church music, and we are told that "Haydn's Mass No. 1 was beautifully rendered by a selected band of fifteen performers and about twenty vocalists", and that "The cost of the band and extra chorus was defrayed by Thomas Wallington, Esq., of Latchford, ²⁵ Miss Wallington singing very sweetly and with much expression, the soprano solos in the service".

Following a welcome and a prayer, Fr Paul then handed the meeting over to Tina as Chair.

-Welcome to all

The attendees introduced themselves and included a wide representation of the parish, incorporating Rowton, the Catholic High School, parents of servers, readers and new parishioners.

Tina began by introducing the purpose of the meeting. It was agreed that any potential events for the 150th anniversary needed to be manageable and attainable, whilst building on the excellent renewal programme and the all-encompassing life of the parish. Numerous events had been put forward over recent months- including music, banners, a recipe book, a

celebration mass, the refurbishment of previous Parish Priests' graves, and the aim of this evening's meeting was to further explore these and to engage in open discussion.

-Bernice/Paula would like to explore having commemorative bookmarks made to be then sold on the repository. They would like them to be professionally made, and to include a prayer written for the 150th anniversary.

Action point- Bernice/Paula to gathering initial costings for the making of the bookmarks (Lyn suggested a contact at Chester University), the liturgy group to discuss the 150th anniversary prayer

-Steve is exploring different avenues for a 150th anniversary talk. The "talk team" suggested a talk by a historian covering relevant topics such as "Why build such a beautiful church?" The possibility of having two speakers was mentioned, as well as concerns about attendance and wider interest in such a talk, coupled with the speakers expectations of size of audience.

Action point- Steve to continue exploring talks.

-Lyn discussed the plan to fund raise during the anniversary year for the Hospice of the Good Shepherd. This is in response to a talk given by the hospice at Welcome Wednesday, where it transpired that numerous beds were empty at the hospice due to a lack of funds, in addition to the need to support hospices in the wake of the potential approval of the Assisted Dying Bill.

-Stuart put forward the suggestion of putting together written accounts of members of the parish for historical evidence. Helen suggested that this could be done in conjunction with the primary school- interviews with parishioners to share their stories. Lyn passed on Kate Lunt's name as a contact.

Action point- Stuart to potentially form a link with the primary school following further discussion.

-John talked about the desire to further develop the theme of "Welcome" in the parish and to build on existing initiatives since the Parish Renewal.

-Marie introduced the idea of an Easter wreath making workshop. Ana suggested speaking to the head at the high school with the aim of using the school facilities for the event.

Action point-Ana/Marie to liaise regarding the viability of booking the high school hall and a date given the proximity of Easter.

-Gerry talked about the need for the restoration of two previous Parish Priests graves-Canon Welch and Canon Chambers- both of whom made marked impact on the development of the parish of St. Werburgh. Blackwells were suggested as potential grave restorers. John has a contact at Blackwells and agreed to work with Gerry to pursue a quote and explore the idea further.

Gerry also mentioned parish pilgrimages to Shrewsbury, with perhaps one being during a half term.

Action point-Gerry/John to contact Blackwells to fact find further information.

-Jane introduced a discussion on the larger events that might be held to celebrate the 150th anniversary- mentioning a potential Gala Concert and a parish social. The potential of holding

the parish social at the high school was discussed- the need for it to be inclusive was seen as important to all of the working group. The format and timing of this event needs to be further explored carefully. Lyn suggested an additional group should work on the event, whilst being mindful of not overloading and creating too many additional meetings.

Action point-Social event to be further explored at the next meeting.

-Tom presented the plans for a number of music events to commemorate the anniversary.

- Repetition of the Lenten Reflection “The Passion through the eyes of the women who were there” that took place on one of the Lenten Friday evenings in 2024. The suggestion was that this would be held on a Saturday afternoon during Lent, making it more accessible to those who would prefer not to venture to church in the dark.
- A choir led pilgrimage in North Wales, including St Winifred’s Well in Holywell.
- A fundraising concert to raise funds for charity- it was suggested that this could become part of our mission this year to raise money for The Hospice of the Good Shepherd.
- Song of Praise- the recording of three different styles of hymns to take place and an application to appear on Songs of Praise.

Action point- Tom-Saturday afternoon date to be put in diary for the Lenten Reflection.

-Ana brought forward an idea from the high school to present the church with a banner with 150 quotes from alumni which was welcomed.

-Pat conveyed that she would email the working group the plans from the Parish history group which are well underway.

Action point-Ann Marie Curtis should be invited to attend the next group meeting.

Tina handed the meeting over to Fr Paul, who made some important practical points

- Every Parish event that takes place to celebrate the anniversary needs to breakeven.
- Decisions should be made at meetings, and email trails avoided.
- Any planning needs to take into account the Parish Diary and avoid any clashes.

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 27th February at 7.30pm. The meeting finished at 8.40pm.