

10. 1944 - 1974 LIFE HERE IN THE TIMES OF CANON WARING AND FR. CROGHAN

The coming of Canon Waring

After the passing of Dean Bilsborrow there came to Weld Bank the Rev. Fr. Cuthbert Leonard Waring. He was a native of Ulverston and had had a distinguished career as a scholar, gaining degrees at Cambridge University and being ordained at Upholland in 1910. He was then for 13 years working to prepare students for the priesthood at St. Edward's College, Liverpool, and later at Upholland. Afterwards, he was for five years headmaster at St. Edmund's House, Cambridge and then for five years parish priest at Birchley. Then, until coming to Weld Bank, he was chaplain to the Catholic Teachers' Training College and the sisters of Notre Dame at Mount Pleasant, Liverpool.

Canon Waring was a keen horticulturalist, being particularly fond of roses and was successful in the grafting of new specimens. He invariably took prizes at the annual Weld Bank show which commenced in 1947 and ran with success for some 15 years.

In 1956, Archbishop Godfrey raised Fr. Waring to be an honorary Canon of the Cathedral Chapter. Four years later he celebrated his sacerdotal Golden Jubilee when there was solemn high mass at Weld Bank on both the Saturday and Sunday, presided over by Bishop Flynn of Lancaster and Archbishop Heenan of Liverpool. At a parish gathering later, spiritual bouquets were presented by children and adults and a cheque for £600 handed to the jubilarian.

The Silent March

On a cold Sunday afternoon on 13th March, 1949, Weld Bank church was the scene of an event the like of which was unique in Chorley or for many miles around. A large crucifix, carried by stalwart young men, was borne in procession from the Chorley Cattle Market, along Market Street, Pall Mall

and Weldbank Lane to the old church. Behind it, walking in complete silence, came over one thousand men, from every church in Chorley and district. The object of this silent march was to demonstrate Catholic solidarity with the Church of Silence – the persecuted Christians of Eastern Europe and to pray mentally that imprisoned prelates like Cardinal Mindszenty and Archbishop Stepinac would persevere to the end and that their persecutors would have a change of heart.

The concourse was met at the lodge gates by Frs. Waring and Mullan, with cross and torch bearers and it took 20 minutes for the assembly to enter the church. The numbers overflowed into the sanctuary, the vestries, the aisles, the porches, the gallery and even outside the church.

The service consisted of hymns, prayers, sermon and Benediction and surely never before or since has such a volume of sound issued from the old building. In the vestry, prior to the start of the service, Canon Cartmell of St. Mary's, who was visibly affected by the magnificent response, thanked the organisers of the event, whilst Fr. Waring confessed his fear and trepidation at addressing such a vast gathering. However, he went out and surely preached the sermon of his life.

Last of the Andertons

In the month of February, 1950, Sir Francis Anderton, the last member of a great Catholic family, was laid to rest in the family grave at Euxton. The Andertons had kept the old faith throughout the penal days and, despite fines and persecution, had managed to retain their old home and estates. It was at Euxton Hall that King Charles II had stayed a night when on his way from Scotland en route for the ill-fated Battle of Worcester. His host, Sir Hugh Anderton, fought for his king throughout the Civil War and, according to a manuscript still preserved in the British Museum, "boasted of being up to his elbows in blood at the massacre at Bolton," under Prince Rupert. Sir Francis

died in London where he had been prominent in many Catholic activities, though he retained his interest in Euxton and contributed to church funds.

The two chairs which have been such a feature in the sanctuary at Weld Bank for many years were originally from the Anderton Chapel at Euxton Hall, being purchased at a sale of the church furnishings.

Mass again at Burgh Hall

In the year 1951, two events occurred which marked a milestone in the history of Weld Bank parish. After a lapse of nearly 180 years, the sacrifice of the mass was again celebrated at Burgh Hall, this time without any of the secrecy which had so often characterised the event in the previous century. The Kevill family were granted this privilege by the fact that Fr. W.P. Henry, for ten years assistant priest to Dean Bilsborrow, who was staying at the hall, had, as an RAF chaplain, the faculty of saying mass wherever he happened to be staying. It was an honour for Burgh Hall and Weld Bank, all being gratified at the return of our great central act of worship to a house that had witnessed a struggle to keep alive the Faith in times of difficulty and stress.

Following the news that mass had once again been celebrated at Burgh Hall, came the announcement that, on 22nd April, 1951, Fr. Bernard Kevill, one of the six sons of Mr and Mrs T. H. Kevill of the Hall, had been ordained to the priesthood in the Church of Saint Teresa in Rome. Thus, like the Chadwick family of nearly 200 years ago, the residents of the Hall could boast of one of its sons in the priesthood.

Fr. Bernard, like his brothers, had been educated at Ampleforth, then taken a degree at Oxford and afterwards studied for the legal profession and duly became a solicitor. But he was destined not to take up the humdrum life of a country lawyer for the war intervened and he found himself in the forces. Joining up as a private, he was later sent to Sandhurst and commissioned with the 8th Army under Montgomery. He went from Alamein to Tunis, then Sicily, Cassino, Rome and Northern Italy.

After the war, he returned to Rome, this time to the Beda College where he studied for five years. It is worthy of note that he was ordained a month after Fr. Montgomery, (a relative of the Field Marshal) and a few years after Fr. Lindsay (a brother of former Chorley M.P, Lord Balcarris) had been raised to the priesthood from the same college. Assisting at the ordination was Fr. W. P. Henry and members of the Kevill family, including his only sister, were present. Afterwards there was an audience with the Holy Father and Fr. Kevill brought back a Papal Blessing for Weld Bank parish.

Church built in nine months

With the building of new housing estates in the Sebastapol and Tootell Street areas of Chorley, it became apparent in 1954 that another parish was needed in that area and the Rev. Dr. Vincent Marsh took up residence at Weld Bank with that object in view. He displayed great energy and proved himself an able pioneer. Obtaining land from the Gillibrand Estates Company, he soon chose a site and after only being nine months in the area, he had the pleasure of laying the first brick for his new church hall. Nine months later, he celebrated the first mass in the new church dedicated to St. Anselm.

For the last few months of the building, he lived at one end of a hut he had purchased which did duty as a parish hall and which he later extended. Later still, he added a splendid presbytery and a site has now been obtained for school for the parish. Incidentally, the buildings are all within a stone's throw of Gillibrand Hall, for so long the family seat of a great Catholic family and now a convent.

Signs of decay

About 1957, structural defects were becoming apparent in various parts of the old church at Weld Bank and Canon Waring had an anxious time before

these were put right. Much of the timber and brickwork at the tops of the pillars were found to be corroded and one pillar was unsafe and had to be shored up for a time. But all was put right in the end, though it was at times dangerous work and entailed much expense. Weld Bank men did much of the work, including Mr Jack Critchley and Mr Jack Frearson who did the plasterwork. Steel girders replaced wood and bricks and it is hoped the structure is again sound.

A bit of Weld Bank at Walsingham

“Chorley is a great Catholic town – some might say the greatest Catholic town in the country and there is now a bit of Chorley at Walsingham.” These remarks were made by the parish priest of Walsingham in September, 1958 during the great National Pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham, Norfolk. He was referring to the fact that, a few days before, two statues had been installed in the empty niches on either side of the door to the Slipper Chapel, one mile from the shrine itself.

He could have added with equal truth ‘There is now a bit of Weld Bank at Walsingham’. For it was a Weld Bank man, Harold Rawcliffe, who personally designed the statues, hewed them out of stone on his own premises and he himself placed them in position in the niches. He came from a family of four generations of Chorley stone masons still in the same business whose work can be seen on most of the cemeteries in the district.

For many years, Harold Rawcliffe had been a devoted pilgrim to many shrines of Our Lady, principally at Lourdes where he was well-known as a brancardier and took a leading part in organising the annual Liverpool Pilgrimage and in organising the Chorley Lourdes Sick Fund for which he had been honoured by the Lourdes authorities in France. He had also conceived a deep love for the shrine at Walsingham.

In Catholic days the shrine had attracted many pilgrims, including many of our own and foreign royalty. The Slipper Chapel, a mile from the shrine itself, is a small chapel barely holding a dozen people and it got its name from the fact that most pilgrims of those days left their footwear in its precincts and walked the 'Holy Mile' to the shrine barefooted as an act of penitence. It came back into Catholic hands early this century and since then it has been the focal point for pilgrimages and devotees of the shrine have increased enormously.

Among the many who walked the Holy Mile in pre-Reformation days was King Robert Bruce who was granted safe conduct through England (though this country was still smarting from his victory at Bannockburn) to do penance and pray for deliverance from the skin complaint that later caused his death. King Henry VIII, in his youth, also made the pilgrimage but later, this king in his rapacity, despoiled the shrine, left the Slipper Chapel more or less intact but removed the statues. What King Henry VIII knocked down, Harold Rawcliffe of Weld Bank put back so that it can be said truthfully and with pride that 'there is a little bit of Weld Bank at Walsingham'.

Passing of Canon Waring

After 51 years as a priest, 17 of them as parish priest at Weld Bank, Very Rev. Canon Waring passed away in May, 1961. For three weeks he had lain in Chorley Hospital and latterly he had been accompanied night and day by men of the parish. It was as a scholar and teacher that most people outside Weld Bank knew Canon Waring but it was as a zealous lover of souls, a devoted parish priest and a kindly friend that he was always known in the parish.

Perhaps of all his priestly duties he will be best remembered as an indefatigable visitor of the sick, a priest whose kindly interest and understanding brought solace and contentment to many a suffering parishioner. In an address at the Requiem, Archbishop Heenan said the

Canon's interests had been largely scholarly but people of the parish knew him as a great pastor of souls. He left behind him the recollection of a priestly man and we thanked God for over 50 years of priestly service. He was interred in the priests' vault at Weld Bank.

A few days later Fr. Thomas Croghan came to Weld Bank as parish priest and happily he is still with us. He came with varied experience, including three years as parish priest of St. Dominic's, Huyton, after periods at Birkdale, Rainhill and Formby in addition to five years as an army chaplain and some time with the Allied Control Commission in Germany.

Memorial window

In December, 1963, a stained glass window was erected in Weld Bank Church to the memory of two former rectors, Dean Bilsborrow and Canon Waring. It is the Fifth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary and is at the end of the church on the Epistle side, the first four windows on that side being of the first four Joyful Mysteries. Now the five are complete.

There are two side panels to the window, one depicting St Richard for Dean Bilsborrow, the other St. Cuthbert for Canon Waring. it is interesting to note that St. Cuthbert is depicted holding in his hand a manuscript book of the gospel of St. John. The actual book is in fact one of the treasures of Stonyhurst College and is the oldest prayer book in the country. It was found many centuries ago in the tomb of St. Cuthbert in Durham Cathedral but was stolen during the dissolution of the monasteries and kept by various families until it came into the possession of the English College, Liège, from where it came to Stonyhurst by way of the Weld family.

The following year, in October 1965, a Lourdes Grotto was erected at the entrance to the cemetery. The idea was originally from the ladies of the

parish but the men took up the work with enthusiasm and took part in the building.

A great boon

The long incline up Weldbank Lane and the steep drive to the church has long taxed the staying power of the older parishioner and, as they all admit, this seems to get steeper with advancing years so it was with a great relief for many when Fr. Croghan, soon after his arrival, obtained a minibus for their convenience. This goes round the parish to various collecting points picking up the old and infirm and has proved a great boon. Mr William Martin was for a long time the driver of the vehicle and has been assisted by various men of the parish and it is hoped that this will continue for many years to come.

Meanwhile, Weld Bank has gone on in its way with new buildings gradually absorbing the one-time hamlet into the Chorley orbit and, with the prospect of further development, in years to come Weld Bank will be just a name to future generations. In one of his poems, Mr John Wilson made mention of various Chorley churches and perhaps we could not do better than conclude¹ with the last verse which must surely be echoed by all lovers of Weld Bank:

Of churches, in and round about
The town, are plenty, great and small,
Some full of beauty, some without;
But oh! the grandest of them all
Is Weld Bank – outwardly most fair,
Within possessed of charms most rare.

Its tower is seen for miles around,
Familiar landmark! When I hear
Its Mass-bell's sweet and solemn sound,

¹ It seems that Mr Gillett intended this to be the end of his work but he continues with a few more stories of this community and of the church.

Heaven, after all, seems very near;
E'en to be nigh the hallowed place
doth fill the mind with thoughts of grace.

Priests from the parish

There have, of course, been many priests born in Weld Bank parish, besides the Chadwicks and Gillibrands whom we have before mentioned but it is doubtful if we know of them all. However, we must mention those of whom we do know. One of these was Fr. Catterall, a member of our parish last century. After ordination, he was sent as curate to Kirkdale, Liverpool and, at his first mass there, he was greatly impressed by the reverence and piety of his young altar server, by name Billy Godfrey. He asked the boy if he had ever thought of becoming a priest and he replied that he had thought of nothing else but his father had been killed a few months before he was born and his mother had two young sons to bring up.

Fr. Catterall, who later became a Canon, had private means and he took the boy under his wing and had him educated for the priesthood. Later, the boy was ordained and for three years was Archbishop of Liverpool and later became a Prince of the church, Cardinal William Godfrey, Archbishop of Westminster.

Another Weld Bank boy was Canon Tom Calderbank, still with relatives in the parish, who for many years was parish priest at Yealand Conyers, a little parish in the Lancaster Diocese and still well remembered in his home parish.

Others are Fr. William E. Howarth, parish priest of St. William's, Ince, born at Duxbury Mill Farm when in the occupation of his grandfather, the late Mr Nicholas Gillett. The Howarth family played a leading part in the parish for many years. Fr. Howarth was ordained in 1933, the same year as his cousin,

Fr. Joseph Moore, parish priest of St. John Fisher, Widnes. Another priest from here was Fr. Bernard Kevill whom we have already mentioned.

Then we have Fr. Joseph Marsh, another old boy of Weld Bank school, son of Mr and Mrs Walter Marsh of Pilling Lane, ordained in May, 1956. Also, Fr. Norbert Turner, son of Mr and Mrs Austin Turner, also an old Weldbanker. There have been others of whom we have no record. In the past Weld Bank has given its quota to the Church; let us pray that many others may yet follow their example – the harvest is greater, the labourers are fewer.

We have made little or no mention of the assistant priests who have served at Weld Bank over the years. We could not mention them all and it would have been invidious to single out a few. These young priests have come to Weld Bank, have entered fully into the life of the parish, some for years, some only for months, then have been transferred to new pastures but have left pleasant memories of service to God and His Church.

Past Mayors of Chorley

Weld Bank has contributed its share of men who have taken their part in the civic and public life of the town, including a number of aldermen and councillors and at least two have been Mayors of Chorley.

Mr John Green, brought up in the Birkacre area and attending Weld Bank school, removed to St. Mary's parish after his marriage and became councillor, alderman and finally, Mayor of Chorley. He also found time to be active at St. Mary's in the S.V.P. Society and was President of St. Mary's Y.M.S. Appointed a diocesan delegate for the society, he eventually became vice-president of the National Society and led members on a pilgrimage to Rome. Active also in the Knights of St. Columba, he attained the position of Provincial Deputy and became well-known at Catholic men's gatherings

throughout the country. He never forgot his Weld Bank origin and often told tales of difficulties getting to school and church in his youth.

The other past Mayor from our parish is Mr Wilfred Rawcliffe, at the time the youngest to have held that exalted position. He has been very active in trade union affairs, yet found time to help his old parish and is a former President of the men's club. His father, the late Mr Arthur Rawcliffe, was a Justice of the Peace and trade union official and one of the founders of the men's club. It is probably unique in the county for father and son to be Justices of the Peace at the same time but Arthur and Wilfred Rawcliffe held this distinction.

Mr Jim Culshaw

Like all communities Weld Bank has had its share of worthies, men and women who for some reason have stood out above their contemporaries. It would be impossible for us to mention all of them but perhaps we might be forgiven if we single out one who, by his age and devotion to the church and parish, was among the best known and most revered. Jim Culshaw was born at Charnock Richard in 1857 but came to Weld Bank at an early age. He attended St. Mary's school because in his day Weld Bank school was closed as it was too costly to keep two Catholic schools in the town.

However, at nine years of age he finished his schooling and went into the mine, working as a collier until his early twenties when he obtained work at Birkacre Print Works, only retiring from there when he was 73 years of age. For most of his adult life he was active in the parish and for many years a collector at church services. Unfailing in his attendance at Mass, he was a familiar sight trudging up the hill to church in all weathers even when he was over 90 years of age until, at 94, he joined his many friends in the old churchyard.

Carr House

Before the 1920s, the only house standing between the end of Carr Lane and the little row of cottages at the bottom of what was then called Carr Brow was the large house known as Carr House, built by the Turner family and recently demolished. Two of the sons became Benedictine monks at Ampleforth Abbey, Yorkshire. One of them, Fr. Anselm Turner, died at Brownedge; the other, Abbot Bede Turner, became the titular Abbot of Westminster, the highest honour the Benedictines can bestow.

The daughter of the family became Mrs James Barton and they resided at Carr House for some years. Mr Barton was the founder of the firm, Barton and Gabbott, estate agents. Visitors to the well-known Way of the Cross at Pantasaph Monastery, North Wales, may have noticed a plaque on one of the stations, stating it was donated by 'Mr and Mrs James Barton, of Weld Bank, Chorley'. The family were prominent in the life of Weld Bank parish.

The second dwelling to be built on Carr Brow was a bungalow for Mr Jim Cornwell who married Miss Eccles, headmistress of the infants' school. Mr Cornwell was bailiff for the Duxbury Estates.

Music and drama

At one time, Weld Bank was noted for parishioners with musical accomplishments and its church choir was the equal of any in the district. We have little knowledge of the last century but we remember many able singers over the past 60 years and of well-known organists like the late Mr Tom France, Mr Andrew Walmsley and others.

And in the field of entertainment, the parish was not lacking. Many excellent shows of opera and drama have been performed on the little stage in the parish hall. Mr Ben Howarth is still well remembered for his ability as a producer, often assisted by Mr John George Briggs, a young man who later

went to St. Joseph's where he formed an operatic society which functioned successfully for many years. Nor who can forget the many smoking concerts in the old clubroom where Arthur Harrison and Danny Ince were always in demand with Mr Walmsley with his 'bones and glasses'.

The old parish hall was the scene of many enjoyable dances where so often the orchestra was provided by Mr Thomas William Moore and his two sons along with others in the parish of no mean musical ability.

As we go to press, we hear of the lamented death of Mr Tom Booth, a teacher at the Holy Cross school, whose untimely end we deeply regret. An able musician, he was responsible for organising the church music in recent years whilst, with members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, he was ever ready with help, solace and comfort to afflicted parishioners. May he rest in peace.

May we also pay tribute to those in the parish whose money raising with the Development Society does so much to ease the financial burdens of the parish.