

THE LAST FIFTY YEARS

In the time since Tom Gillett's book was published, there have been many changes in our community and church and in trying to make a record of them, I have come to realise how difficult it is to know just what has happened and when. For that reason, I would ask that if you notice any inaccuracies in what follows or know any further details about dates or events or have any photos that you would be willing to share, please do get in touch. (Email address on Home Page.)

Chapter 1 - LIFE HERE AT THE TIME OF FR. CROGHAN

Fr. Thomas Croghan was the rector of Weld Bank from 1961 to 1974 and was here when the people of Weld Bank celebrated the two-hundredth anniversary of the founding of their church. Fr. Croghan was an Irish man who had studied for the priesthood and had been ordained at Upholland Seminary in 1933. Before the war he served at the parish of St. Elizabeth, Litherland and then went to Our Lady of Mount Carmel parish in Toxteth but, with the advent of war, Fr. Croghan joined the army and served in Royal Army Chaplains' Department until 1947. He worked for some of this time in the Diocese of Klagenfurt in Austria. After this he worked briefly in the parishes of Our Lady's, Formby, St. Joseph's, Wrightington and St. Bartholomew's, Rainhill. However, in 1948 he was appointed to the Allied Control Commission which was the body controlling the defeated Axis countries and making arrangements for their future governance. After two years in this work he was posted to St. Teresa's at Penwortham and later to St. Dominic's, Huyton and then, in 1961 on the death of Canon Waring, he came to Weld Bank as parish priest.

Fr. Croghan was a reserved man but very dedicated to the sick of the parish and was seen out on his bicycle almost every day of the week except Sunday, taking communion to those who could no longer get to mass. He kept a very large dog, possibly an Irish wolfhound, and was ably looked after by the Weld Bank housekeeper and sacristan from the time of Canon Waring, Miss

Elizabeth Frearson. His care for the sick was further evidenced by his idea of introducing a minibus to bring the older people to Sunday mass which Tom Gillett has referred to in his book. However, Fr. Croghan was also conscious of the need for the church to appeal to the younger generation and hoped to encourage more daily mass attendances when the morning mass time changed from 7.40 to the later time of 8.15am and then 8.30. He also had the visitors' room in the Presbytery redecorated with 'Beatles-pattern' (the band not the insect) wallpaper probably to show the young couples intending to get married whom he would meet in that room, that the church was 'keeping up with the times' but this 'bold move' was much to the dismay of some of the more staid parishioners.

The last of the curates

In the time of Fr. Croghan there was only one curate at Weld Bank, initially Fr. Lynch and later Fr. Commins whereas there had been three curates in the early fifties. Fr. Commins, later Canon Commins, was not at Weld Bank for very long but Fr. Lynch was here for seven years and it was he who accompanied a Weld Bank pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1963 (*see photo*) and, when the time came for him to move on, the parish celebrated with him and presented him with a cheque. This celebration made it into the pages of the Chorley Guardian which quotes Fr. Lynch' reference to the austerity measures of the Wilson government. He also gives a special mention of thanks to Miss Frearson, the Weld Bank housekeeper of the time. (*see photo*)

Auntie Lizzie

In 1974 just as Weldbankers were celebrating the bicentenary and consecration of their church, Miss Mary Elizabeth Frearson once again came to prominence when, quite unexpectedly on her part at least, she was awarded the 'Bene Merenti' medal for her services to the church. There will still be many folk who remember this quiet, unassuming lady who attended mass daily, almost always wearing a woolly hat planted firmly on her head. As housekeeper, she managed all the domestic side of running the

presbytery (although there had once been several maidservants there, one of them being my grandmother, Mary Catherine McGinty, later Culshaw) and she also did the job of sacristan which entailed washing the altar cloths and the cassocks and cottas of the servers as well as polishing the brass (in later times it was lacquered to eliminate this work) and trimming and replacing the candles, arranging the flowers and setting out the most splendid arrangement of flowers and candles on the occasions of Quarant' Ore. She had begun her work as sacristan in the early 1930s and then took up the additional post of housekeeper in 1954 and eventually retired from this latter job in 1974 on the arrival of Fr. Firth. This lady was the youngest of the seventeen children born to Joseph Frearson who ran the farm at the end of Burgh Lane and, after his death, she lived with her mother at 79, Weldbank Lane. She never married but had many nephews and nieces, a fact which Fr. Lynch made mention of in referring to her as 'the universal aunt of Weld Bank, Auntie Lizzie'. In her response to being presented with the Bene Merenti award, she stated: *"I am very happy to receive so great an honour. I have enjoyed all my years working at St. Gregory's and would not want to live anywhere else but in Weld Bank."* Weld Bank was her world and this humble lady well-deserved the recognition that she was given. She lived to the age of 90 dying in 1995 and, having earned only a meagre wage during her working years, she left a bequest in her will to Weld Bank.

Chorley and District's own Catholic newspaper

From the late 1930s, Chorley and its surrounding districts had had a monthly Catholic newspaper, the 'Chorley and District Catholic Bulletin' which was edited for much of that time by Tom Gillett, the author of 'The story of Weld Bank' and other works on local history. It was a means whereby the various communities could learn of the events in other parishes and those, such as the Lourdes pilgrimages, which were often open to people from different parishes. Many older members will have the odd copy kept for one reason or another – often because it was the edition which recorded a birth, marriage or death that was of significance to them. I have found the last edition to be published which is dated September, 1973. (See photo)

Dangerous work on the church

As might be expected with any building of this age, repairs to the fabric of the church were often needed and, during the times of Canon Waring, Fr. Croghan and Fr. Firth, this work was often undertaken by my father, Jack Critchley together with others, many from our parish, including John Roscoe, Tommy Green, John Clitheroe and David Critchley, to name just a few. In the latter days of Canon Waring, there was an occasion when repairs had to be made to the pillars involving the inserting of metal girders. There was a significant element of risk involved in this work from falling masonry or even the collapse of the roof and when dad noticed Canon Waring enter the church, he asked him to leave as he didn't want any harm to come to him. However, Canon Waring insisted on staying and explained that he had come to pray for the safety of the men at work so he stayed and indeed all went well.

On another occasion some repairs required that a scaffolding be erected below the clock which, in those days, was manually wound and had a very heavy weight which moved downwards as the clock unwound but moved up when it was wound up which it was at the time the scaffolding was put up. However, a night or two following the placing of the scaffolding, my father awoke at about three in the morning and found himself thinking about the work near the clock. He envisaged the weight having sunk lower as the clock was winding down and having met the obstacle of the planks on the scaffolding it would swing into the wall of the tower and would be likely to cause major damage. Therefore, he donned some clothes, ran across the field where St. Hilda's Close is now and woke Auntie Lizzie who let him into the church. The situation was as he had imagined with the weight having reached the plank and already partially resting on it, tilting, but not yet swinging into the wall. On this occasion, he was able to sort the matter out but, sometime later, the weight actually fell and damaged the organ blower. After this a new, electrically wound clock was installed.

On yet another occasion, dad was working alone in the belfry at the top of tower when I believe that the job in question was the re-hanging of the bell. Darkness was falling but he had a workman's electric light with a cable stretching down the tower. He was working on planks and about to finish when the bulb failed and he was in complete darkness. He then had to inch his way along the plank to the stairs which go to the top of the tower but which have no handrail. He heard the people arriving for the evening mass (there was a daily, evening mass in those days) but the process of getting down slowly and safely took at least a couple of hours, possibly more, and I recall how worried we were at home when he hadn't arrived for dinner. His tale of what had happened was one I found rather scary then and even now.

The man who made statues

We had amongst us at Weld Bank, at least until 1973, a rather unusual business. It was located in a small building just next to, or possibly a part of, Pope's mill in Saville Street. It was Mr Dick Lynskey's statue-making business which some of us can recall visiting from time to time when statues were to be bought as First Communion or Confirmation gifts. What stays in my mind is that some of the statues were very large, especially those designed for Christmas cribs and the rather dark workroom was packed with them, some still white, unpainted, others partially complete and still others finished. There were also large packing cases and tea chests lying around awaiting their cargo. I have reproduced below Dick's obituary written by Tom Gillett, which appeared in a Catholic Bulletin in 1973, as it is a lovely portrayal of a good man who once lived in our midst.

"The news of the death last month of Mr. Richard Lynskey came as a shock to a host of his friends in Chorley and District and indeed far beyond. A great worker for many Catholic causes, he came to be known far and wide as "That man who makes statues". His hobby in early years of casting plaster statues from ready-made moulds gradually became his full-time work and for many years he turned out a great number of statues of various sizes and of various saints in correct colours.

From his little shack at Weld Bank, he executed orders from churches in many parts of this country and overseas. He could have extended his works had he wished but he preferred, with the help of his family, to remain in a small way of business and personally make and supervise the finishing off of his orders.

There must be hundreds of his statues scattered throughout the world for he never turned down an order from Missionaries in remote stations in Africa, South America and other places, often at the cost of materials only. There are many at Weld Bank who can relate of the numerous occasions when priests, sisters and missionaries home on leave would stop them ask the whereabouts of ‘that man who makes statues’.

When the fashion became general for Christmas Crib sets to be set up in various town centres, he was inundated with orders and did his best to cope with them all. The many new churches and schools built in recent years created a demand for crucifixes for the classrooms and he turned part of his work to satisfying this demand.

But he did not confine his activities to this kind of Catholic action. For many years he was a valued member of the Chorley Council of the Knights of St. Columba and for something like 25 years had been a regular seller of this ‘Chorley Bulletin’ at the church door at Weld Bank, in all weathers and often returning for another Mass. The great work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society was another outlet for his energies and he was a respected member of the Mens’ Guild and frequenter of the Club where his quips and jokes and his happy outlook made him many friends. It is hard to imagine that this jovial, kind-hearted and peace-loving little man took part in the First World War in that ill-fated campaign in Gallipoli.

In his later years, he bore more than his share of this world’s human problems but, no doubt, found consolation in his daily treks up the hill to Weld Bank church which he had grown to love. Now his earthly remains have been laid to rest in the shadow of the old church but, as one lady remarked as we turned away from the graveside: “If

Dick Lynskey's soul does not get to heaven then there are poor hopes for the likes of us". We say amen to that. May his soul rest in peace."

1974 The Bicentenary and Consecration of Weld Bank church

Just as this year we are marking an important milestone in our history, so it was in 1974 but the celebrations were somewhat different. In that year, a 'Bicentenary Committee' had been formed. As ever, the Women's Guild focussed their attention on raising money to fund the proposed events and, before Christmas 1973, they held a 'Monster Bingo Drive' with a further one in February 74. Then, as now, a permanent reminder of the occasion was wanted and this took the form of the lovely shrine to St. Gregory the Great which is combined with our War Memorial and sited at the top of the church drive.

There were to be a number of different social events commencing in February with a St. Valentine's Ball, parties and a coach trip for Senior Citizens (which meant anyone over 60!), a Beef Barbecue with Bingo, a Young Wives' dance, a Games Night "at which the Ladies in particular are welcome", with a trip to Blackpool illuminations for the younger children and disco nights for the older ones and teenagers. However, the big event of the year was to be the Bicentenary Ball held in Chorley Town Hall in October. I'm not sure whether all of these proposed events took place but undoubtedly some did as the photos show.

In addition to the social celebration of the anniversary, the church was finally to be consecrated. The Mass of Consecration was led by Bishop Joseph Gray, Auxiliary Bishop of Liverpool, on Sunday, 27th October, 1974 at 7 pm, with a number of other priests concelebrating. Holy relics were placed and sealed in the altar and the ancient Christian hymn of celebration, the *Te Deum*, was sung in its English form: '*Holy God, we praise thy name*'. The altar was then anointed as were four crosses on the church pillars. Candles were lit and lights switched on in praise of Christ, the Light of the World. The

service continued with the incensing of both the altar and the congregation and then the mass continued. A further mass, deemed a 'Consecrated High Mass' took place at Weld Bank on 1st November, 1974, the precise anniversary of the day when Fr. Chadwick said mass here for the first time.

This important milestone was significant to our community for one further reason. It was to be the point of retirement for Father Croghan and was more or less the end of his time with us at Weld Bank. He had chosen to retire to the Isle of Man but, once there, he continued his priestly ministry albeit without the responsibility of running a parish. However, he retained a deep love for this place and chose Weld Bank cemetery as his last resting place.