

## The New Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, Hungerford

From the late 1800's, the Catholic population of the Hungerford area was part of the Catholic community of Kennet Valley, West Berkshire. With the reorganisation of the Diocesan Pastoral Areas, Hungerford (with Lambourn) falls within the North Downs Pastoral Area supported by Canon Peter Turbitt from Wantage. For many years Father (later Canon) Francis Green from Newbury supported the Hungerford Catholic population. It was Canon Green who acquired a pre-fabricated building from Croydon and had it dismantled and reconstructed as a church on a site adjacent to Priory Road, Hungerford in July-November 1939 at the outbreak of World War 2. This steel framed, asbestos cement panel clad "pre-fab" was dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes by the Rt. Rev William Cotter, 3rd Bishop of Portsmouth on Sunday 26th November 1939. It was intended as a "temporary" church, but served the Catholic population of Hungerford for 73 years!



*The old church in 2010*

By 2006 the church was deteriorating rapidly. A survey of parishioners indicated that 98% were in favour of building a new church in Hungerford for the W.Berkshire-N.Hampshire-E. Wiltshire area. A Parish Building Committee was formed, assisted by the Diocesan Surveyor and a Chairman appointed by the Diocese. Jeremy Bell of JBKS Architects, Thame, was appointed and the committee then steered the project through feasibility, planning, detailed design, tendering, fund raising and construction. The plan was to sell most of the land with planning consent for 14 dwellings to raise funds to build the church. In addition parishioners raised over £400,000 for the project and the Diocese provided a loan to cover a £240k shortfall. The old church was finally demolished in October 2012 and for 18 months the parish was welcomed and housed by the United Reformed Church in Hungerford, where Mass was said every Sunday.



*The Interior – Nave and Sanctuary*

Beard of Swindon Ltd built the new church in a 56 week period between March 2013 - April 2014 and the first Mass was said on Palm Sunday four days after handover. The church sits on the old site but is accessed via the new Lourdes Crescent. It has a footprint of around 360m<sup>2</sup>, and is shorter, but wider, higher and 22% larger than the old church. A steel frame supports the main Glulam wood roof beams and rafters of the steep, pitched, red tiled roof. The walls are clad with 25,000 red Olde Cranleigh bricks and capped with Ashlar coping stones on the gables and parapets.

The building comprises the church (Nave and Sanctuary) separated by a large glass "wall" from the Foyer/Hall area located under the transept. The parish and church function rooms are located to the rear of the building, under the "Upper Room" mezzanine meeting area, and comprise electrical and gas heating plant rooms (for the underfloor central heating system), a kitchen, two sacristies, a cleaning/store/flower room and three toilets. The old, uncomfortable, oak "chapel chairs" were sold to an antiques dealer and replaced by new bench seating constructed in Californian ash by ICS Ireland to match the internal exposed timber in the new church. The old tabernacle, which was in very good condition, was refurbished and polished and now sits centrally in the Sanctuary on a plinth made from the same stone and to the same design as the altar.

The carved Stations of the Cross, donated to the parish in 1940, have been re-sited on the walls of the new church and the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes from the old church has been retained and refurbished. It sits next to a rock collected from the Gave River at the Grotto in Lourdes. A large crucifix was located at Loyola Hall, Rainhill, St. Helens and donated by the Jesuit community. It now hangs in the Sanctuary and with side illumination two shadow images are created producing an unexpected three crosses "Calvary" feature.



*The Hanging Crucifix and "Calvary" shadows*

The church comfortably seats 140 people, but welcomed over 240 people on Easter Sunday and an "Open Day" in May saw over 200-300 local people call in. Sunday Mass attendance has now increased by an average of 10-15% and many previous parishioners returned and new parishioners arrived with the new church. All agree that it is beautiful in its simplicity, light, airy and with wonderful acoustics.

On Saturday 5th July Bishop Philip Egan, assisted by Canon Peter Turbitt, 2 deacons and 11 priests, including 3 former parish priests, formally Consecrated and Dedicated the new church to Our Lady of Lourdes. After receiving the plans and keys at the entrance, Bishop Egan entered the church to bless and consecrate the building and the new altar. The altar was designed by the Parish Committee and constructed by Barry Humphries the local stone mason from Portuguese Branco Cabouca limestone. During the ceremony a relic of Saint Oliver Plunkett (1625-1681) was sealed into the altar behind a front plaque inscribed with a chi-rho XP motif.



*The new church in August 2014*

The new church of Our Lady of Lourdes, the newest church in Portsmouth Diocese, is now complete after nine years of planning, fund raising and prayers. It has become a focus for increasing parish activities and you would be most welcome to call in and join us for Mass at 09.00am any Sunday or at 10am on alternate Thursdays.

**Chris Carlton Chair - Our Lady of Lourdes Parish Guild, Hungerford**