

Chapter 31 – St Albert's, Hinckley, England

A Hand to rock the Cradle

The English Province of the Friars Preachers was founded by St Dominic de Guzman himself at the General Chapter held at Bologna in 1221. As the last official act before his death, our Holy Father dispatched Gilbert de Fresney as the first Father Provincial to establish the Order in England. They settled at Oxford and from there they spread and, in the course of the following three centuries, the Order produced many illustrious men, playing an important part in the history of the country. Then came Henry VIII, who ruthlessly destroyed the Order by 1539. In 1555 it was re-established by Queen Mary, only to be disbanded again by Elizabeth I, three years later.

Although the Dominicans were then forbidden by law to dwell in England, for which their predecessors had toiled with such devotion, they nevertheless survived the blow and never entirely died out. Individual Englishmen were still found who chose to join the Order of Truth. They would enter some convent abroad and, after receiving Holy Orders, would return as disguised priests to their native land. Some of them were thus privileged to die for the Faith; many others suffered the greatest hardships, imprisonment and exile. During the Commonwealth (1640-1660), however, there were no more than six Dominicans in England and about as many again belonging to the Province abroad.

In 1658 Father Philip Thomas Howard, afterwards Cardinal, founded the convent at Bornham, Flanders, and there erected the English Noviciate. In 1688 England was once more raised into a Province – the same that exists today.

During the 18th century many Missions were undertaken by individual Fathers and, in 1730, the first Provincial Chapter for nearly 200 years was held in a private house in London and canonical elections were established. In 1734 Father John Clarkson, O.P. was sent to Aston Flamville to be the chaplain at the manor House. His activities were not confined to the Manor House but he became an active missionary in the surrounding district, including the towns of Hinckley, Leicester, Nuneaton and Coventry. Probably the Catholic Faith never became actually extinct in the town of Hinckley, though in 1675 when Charles II relaxed the severe laws against the Catholics, only four persons were admittedly Catholic in the town but there may have been others who thought it wiser not to trust to the word of Kings and kept their faith hidden. Thus the little village of Aston Flamville may be called the cradle of the renaissance of the Dominican English Province where, from this single kernel, like a grain of mustard seed, the present English Province of our Order has grown.

On 29th June 1759 Father Matthew Thomas Norton, P.O. was sent to take over the mission at Aston Flamville but he moved to Sketchley from where he ministered to Hinckley, Coventry and the surrounding district. This priest was the true founder of the Hinckley Mission. On February 18th, 1765, in the name of John Little, a hosier of Hinckley, he purchased a small house and land in Hinckley. His next step was to build a small chapel behind the house which he opened in 1767.

To give some idea of the dangers under which priests worked in those days it is noted that the factory in Causeway Lane, Leicester, where Mass was said, had a spyhole in the door through which a close scrutiny was kept on all who entered and the back of the altar was a door through which the priest might escape if necessary. The priest would come to the factory disguised as a vendor of vegetables, carrying a large basket at the bottom of which the chalice and other Mass requisites were covered by market produce. In fact, the priest was sometimes so poor that he had to sell fruit and vegetables from his garden even in half-pennyworths.

Owing to the scarcity of priests, Hinckley was again for a time served from Leicester after the death of Father Norton. Hinckley Catholics are beholden to Father Ambrose Woods beyond all others for uplifting the mission from poverty and obscurity to the position of notability. The state of about all the Religious Orders in the early part of the 19th Century had sadly declined, chiefly as a result of the effects of the

French Revolution and the dictatorship of Napoleon. The Dominicans could not claim to be an exception to the rule.¹ In fact, so black was the outlook in England that in 1810 when the little band of Fathers met together at Hinckley for a Chapter, there were some who saw no alternative but to disband the Province. But the year 1814 witnessed a fresh development in the Hinckley Mission when the newly-elected Provincial, Rev Lewis Brittain O.P. erected the house at Hinckley into a Priory and Noviciate, appointing Father Albert Underhill Plunkett as its first Prior, bringing him, with the first five postulants for the Order there. Thus Hinckley became the first Dominican Priory in England to be established after the Reformation, becoming the chief house of the Order in the realm.²

Directly the priory was opened Father Ambrose Woods established a high-class School for “the sons of gentlemen” there, with some measure of success. The Provincial Chapter of 1834 also met at Hinckley, electing as Provincial, Father Samuel Augustine Procter in succession to Father Woods. But, if Hinckley was now renewing its life, the English Province as a whole was still far from flourishing. During the thirties all the missions, save Hinckley and Atherstone, (which last was abandoned later) had to be given up by the Order for the Fathers continued to diminish in number. In the course of 1850 they were reduced to six. This, however, was the last storm of winter and a “second spring” was about to begin.

William Leigh, a convert to Catholicism, had built a church at Woodchester and pressed the offer of this church so strongly upon the Fathers at Hinckley that they accepted it in October 1850. Hinckley ceased to be a formal priory when the Noviciate was moved to Woodchester where the strict conventual life of Dominican observance was once more established under the direction of Father Augustine Procter and Father James Dominic Aylward being then Provincial in England. A few months later Father General Jandell sent the famous Father Thomas Burke from Santa Sabina to teach the young community there the true traditions of the Order. A while later the holy and energetic Father General himself visited Hinckley and the new house at Woodchester³.

By the third decade of this present century (20th) the Friar Preachers were obliged to dispose of their old Priory at Hinckley, however much they cherished it as the “second cradle of their Order in England.” The Catholic parents of the Hinckley parish had been asking for a High School for their children. In 1931 the December number of St Peter’s Parish Magazine stated that the Priory had been purchased by the Sister of the Christian Schools from Reading in order to open a boarding school in the premises during the following September. Whilst welcoming the advent of the Sisters, many felt with regret the severance of the Priory from its old associations with Dominican traditions. But when the Sisters did arrive to inspect the place they decided that the building was not suitable for them so the project was given up.

Father Bede Jarrett, the English Provincial, now turned to the Prioress General of the King William’s Town nuns in South Africa. Mother General Augustine Geisel considered that the future of Schlehdorf Convent in Germany may come to jeopardy under the Nazi Regime and decided to accept Father Bede’s offer. Accordingly then, in January 1933, Mother Aidan Kilbride and Sisters Ambrose Teubes and Madeleine Stamm set out from South Africa for Hinckley. They arrived at Southampton in a blizzard on 25th February. While still at sea, on the liner “Nyssa”, they heard that the entire county of Leicestershire was under water. A cold welcome to England!

At Leicester Father Benedict White, O.P. met the travellers and took them to the Dominican Sisters at Dane Hills. Here they were cordially welcomed and met Mother Aidan’s own sister who was a Mother Councillor at Stone Priory. They stayed at Dane Hills Convent for the night and on the following day took the train to Hinckley. Father Benedict again met them at the station and took them to the old Priory where Father C Sweeney, O.P., at the main entrance, welcomed them to the empty and desolate-looking building. Together the three Sisters and two Priests explored the place from cellar to loft. There was no furniture whatever, so the five held a business meeting, seated on the trunks which contained the Sisters’

¹ Pope Pius IX was aware of this state of affairs and he finally found a man after his own heart, Father Vincent Alexander Jandell, who became master General and reorganised the Order of Preachers.

² The Church of St Peter at Hinckley was completed and opened on 12th July 1825.

³ The chronicle states that Father Jandell was accompanied by Msgr PR Griffith, O.P., then Bishop at the Cape of Good Hope. The annals also mention that “the great Dominican orator, Pere H Lacordaire, spent ten days in Hinckley during the summer of 1852...”

luggage, in what was once the Father's refectory. The house had stood empty for a long time and was now dirty and unfit for human habitation; so the Sisters spent the days cleaning it, but returned each night to Leicester to sleep at Dane Hills. On the 4th March they came to stay at the Priory, now christened St Albert's Convent.⁴ Mr Frank Brocklehurst, uncle of Father Mark, O.P. was very helpful. He lit fires in the rooms; but that in their living-room refused to burn. Years of disuse had blocked the chimney and clouds of smoke filled the room. The place was, moreover, rumoured haunted by a late housekeeper of the Friars, but no nocturnal visitor troubled the worn out Sisters. From Sister Miriam Illing, headmistress of St Albert's School for many years, this account of the ghost was obtained:

"... We had been tactfully made aware that the ancient convent, after all, had a claim to its ghost. The nuns at Dane Hills, too, owned to a feeling of relief when they found the first Sisters that were to inhabit the old Priory were aware of its secret. Needless to say, we kept guessing whether we would perchance see a headless skeleton, hear the rattling of bones or feel the clasp of icy fingers; but all our nocturnal observations made us wonder in the end whether we had scared the phantom away. When Father Aelred Whitacre, O.P. had preached our retreat – the last one, indeed, in his life – the community crowded round him at recreation with petitions, "Please tell us, Father, was it you who saw the ghost?" ... "Well," he replied, arranging himself more comfortably in his chair with a quick glance around his audience in search of nervous faces, 'it was in about 1930 when I arrived in this parish as a help to Father Benedict. Since I am interested in various crafts I brought with me several bags of tools and cases which I deposited carefully along the middle of the passage which led to the library – now your chapel. Next I started getting busy in my room (the first one on coming up the stairs). I arranged some books on a shelf near the open door when I heard the tap-tap of regular but gentle steps drawing near. It did not strike me then that these steps had started only at the long window of the landing which looks down on the churchyard. Naturally I looked up; when I saw an old lady passing my door and wending her way towards the library I ran to get my tools out of her path. I noticed, however, that she had arrived safely at the library door and that was all I was concerned about at the moment. Some time later, over a cup of tea, I casually enquired of Father Benedict who this person was. Father declared that there was no such person in the house. I insisted, however, and with a few quick strokes sketched her on a piece of paper; Black dress, scarf round the shoulders, black bonnet trimmed with sequins. 'Oh, but that's the old housekeeper', Father said, 'who has been dead a number of years now. Margaret Chatterton lies buried in the cemetery down there' ...

"Careful enquiry into the matter revealed that Margaret Chatterton had bequeathed a stipend of Masses in perpetuity which was to be seen from a notice hanging on the sacristy wall. The notice had been taken down and lost when the sacristy was painted and the Masses had been forgotten. Since they were resumed there was no further sign of the apparition."

To resume the Hinckley chronicle: The little community was increased by the addition of four members. Two of these, Sister Magda Weber and Consolatrix Hugger, were already booked for training as masseuses at St Gerard's Hospital, Coleshill. Meanwhile all helped in the cleaning process.

The potential attendance had been calculated at 180 students. But, since these were now settled in other schools, the sisters started a Kindergarten while keeping one or two places for older girls who wished to change over. On 25th March, ironically, the foundation stone of the St Peter's Parochial School next door was laid; but while it was being built the Sisters opened their day school on 26th April 1933 with eighteen pupils. What had been founded was an unaided private school for girls with a limited number of boys between the ages of five and sixteen. The children were encouraged to bring along some friends, "one on either hand", and they did. By September the roll had reached forty. Evening classes in embroidery were given to the Catholic members of the parish. Among these were Mrs Moby and Mrs Eileen Brocklehurst who became life-long friends and benefactors of the convent.

Meanwhile central heating had been installed in the convent and on 15th November the Blessed Sacrament was brought to the convent chapel and Father Mark Brocklehurst said the first Mass there. Hinckley Convent was also intended as a recruiting house for religious vocations.

⁴ *St Albert the Great was the son of the Count of Bollstaedt in Swabia. He became a Dominican and was reckoned one of the most learned men of his time. He also counted the illustrious Thomas Aquinas among his students.*

By 1934 there were 108 scholars and the first four boarders, Sister Madeleine's relatives from Switzerland, had arrived. Besides the ordinary round of subjects the convent also taught music, commercial subjects, elocution, dancing and swimming. To help the finance the Sisters kept hens, had 'cake and candy' sales and an exhibition and sale of the children's work became an annual event.

On 4th July 1935 the first two postulants arrived⁵ and a month later they sailed for South Africa to enter the Novitiate. In this year too, Earl Shilton Convent was begun as a filial of St Albert's but this proved unsuccessful. Death claimed the much loved Mother Aidan on 9th February 1937 and she was buried in the Fathers' cemetery at Hawkesyard.

Then Mother Ambrose Teubes was appointed Prioress. The new community now numbered eleven Sisters, some having come from Schlehdorf. As the school had now grown considerably the evening classes were discontinued and after Mother General Augustine's visitation in June 1927, conventual discipline and regularity were established. Pupils continued to increase so that, in 1936, new accommodation was added to the school and the needed sports fields were provided.

In September 1939 World War II began. The Sisters knitted 6759 pairs of socks for the army; a Red Cross Link was inaugurated at the school; the children adopted a village in France and sent regular parcels of shoes and clothing; many large boxes were also sent to Holland. However, all this war work did not save the Sisters. The Community now consisted of seventeen, ten of whom were of German nationality. To the great sorrow of Mother Ambrose the ten were interned together with twenty nuns from other Congregations at Bradda Glen, Port Erin on the Isle of Man.

(This island in the Irish Sea has an area of 227 square miles and a population of about 100,000. Most of its surface is covered with wooded glens and rounded hills. The mild climate makes it possible to grow some subtropical plants there and more than half of the island's area is devoted to agriculture. The shore is lined with tall cliffs and indented by bays and the island is a tourist resort. Native to it is the Manx cat, characterised by absence of a tail. During the early Celtic Christian era, the island was closely associated with Ireland. From the 9th to the 13th century it was ruled by Scandinavia, thereafter by Scotland and finally ceded to England in 1346. Among the important historical remains are ancient prehistoric stone dwellings, Druidic monuments, ancient forts, castles and stone crosses. The isle is governed by the court of Tynwald, at the head of which is a crown-appointed lieutenant governor. A language of the Goidelic group of Gaelic tongues persists among a small segment of the population, but English is the chief language used today.

The internees, Jews, Protestants and Catholics, were accommodated at an hotel formerly used for tourists. There were, however, no servants now and the residents performed all the domestic chores, but were kindly treated. In the mornings the nuns were the first to rise and went quietly downstairs to the recreation hall to recite the Divine Office in common and perform their other devotions. Soon permission was granted them to leave the hotel premises in order to attend daily Mass at the parish church. The Sisters began doing mission work among their fellow internees, instructing the children for First Holy Communion and encouraging some adults to join the church choir. With sympathy they listened to the people's troubles and consoled them, thus they were instrumental in bringing back several lapsed Catholics to the fold.

The church was some distance from the hotel and the daily walk to Mass wore out their shoes. Our Sisters had very little money although Sister Tarcisia Schmid gave private English lessons to some of the German refugees and so earned a couple of pounds. Sister Bernarda Wagner, a music teacher in the group, tried her hand at the cobbler's trade and managed to keep the Sisters shod somehow, during their sojourn on the Isle of Man.

Through the efforts of Very Rev Father B Delaney, the Dominican Provincial, our Sisters were privileged to leave the island after only three months' internment and arrived by boat at Liverpool. It was at this time that German paratroopers were landing in England disguised as nuns. One can, therefore, imagine the perplexity of the Notre Dame Superior when ten strange German nuns arrived, seeking hospitality at her

⁵ Sisters Patricia Durkan and Bernardine Wagner.

Convent. Nevertheless, Divine Providence was watching over the homeless little group, because fortuitously at that moment Father Lawrence, C.Ss.R. passed the door of the convent parlour and was recognised by Sisters Tarcisia and Pedrina Winklmaid, who had known him in South Africa. The Priest was, by chance, preaching a retreat to the Notre Dame Sisters at this very convent. Father Lawrence introduced our Sisters to the Liverpool community while giving a glowing account of the great work the “King” Congregation was doing for the Church in South Africa. Our travellers were then welcomed to stay the night. Next morning they went by train to Leicester and from there three police cars took them right to St Albert’s Convent, Hinckley, where they arrived on 25th July 1940.

From this date on the re-united community shared the sorrows of the war. On 15th November 1940 Coventry was blitzed because there were munition factories and it was also the parliamentary seat of Mr W Churchill. That night and many others were spent in the cellar.⁶ There the Sisters wrapped their little pupils in blankets and welcomed others who had no underground in which to seek refuge. Two French refugee Sisters of Mère Reparatrice were given shelter. Their convent had received a direct hit while they were in their cellar praying with outstretched arms before the Blessed Sacrament. One woman was sheltered as a blind person; but she proved to be an imposter. She stayed as a protected guest for a fortnight and left in high dudgeon when a detective came to interview her. Her sight was restored immediately...

On the night of the blitz of Nuneaton the community was, as usual, in the cellar. One of the pupils had gone home for greater safety. Alas, their house was hit and the entire family wiped out. A tragedy also occurred to the Sisters. Bombs fell near St Albert’s and, owing to the strain of many sleepless nights, worry, and trying to protect others, Mother Ambrose mind gave way. She was very ill and for some time had completely lost her memory. The Sisters kept nightly vigil, not only over the boarders and refugees in the cellar but also on their stricken Superior. When they could they rested on sacks filled with straw.

As soon as air-raids ceased in the Midlands, the aim of this foundation was pursued once more and, in October 1942, the first post-war recruits arrived. In January 1944 three postulants received the Dominican Habit and Mother Pedrina Winklmaid was their Novice Mistress. More young people followed and Hinckley also trained vocations from Holland and Switzerland. At times there were seven nationalities represented in St Albert’s community. There was always a happy blending of knowledge and experience in the service of the apostolate.

The number of pupils grew so large that the Sisters bought additional accommodation in Leicester Road. They called the new property “De Montfort House” and there some of the senior classes were taught until they could be transferred to the new school at Stoke Golding.

By 1945 the Sisters were quite crowded out with refugee children from the South of England so they bought another property which became known as “Prague House”. In the meantime Mother Ambrose had recovered her memory but was never quite over the shock of that terrible night. But, anxious to help her Sisters in every possible way, she went to do some shopping and fell, probably with a stroke. She was brought home and lingered for a little while, dying on 6th March, 1948. Mother Madeleine Stamm, who succeeded her as Prioress, was later appointed as Mother General’s personal Vicar for the “English District” of the Congregation. Vocations’ Exhibitions were organised, in which our Sisters joined. In the summer of 1953 Mother M Demetria Hemmer and Sister Cecilia Mueller, visitors to Hinckley, and Mother Madeleine were at Olympic Hall, London for the duration of the display.

In 1962 the Parents’ Advisory Committee was started at Hinckley. Soon the overflow of the classes suggested the possibility of a two-stream school. When this, too, outgrew its bounds a new extension was added which provided the school also with a fine entrance hall, “after 40 years of the school’s existence”,

⁶ *At the Mother House in South Africa Mother General Augustine could be seen kneeling on the altar step each evening after night prayer, praying for the safety of her sisters in war-ravaged Europe. She repeatedly reminded Father Bede Jarrett, by that time in eternity, of his assurance that she would never regret having taken over Hinckley Priory. With her characteristic humour she would say: “I told Father Bede, if Hinckley is bombed I shall be sorry!” But he kept his word, for Hinckley Convent remained unharmed in spite of very near destruction.*

remarked Sister Miriam, the headmistress. She was thrilled to get the beautiful new furniture made of French and English beech.

After this the school became a member of an Association of Grammar Schools and joined in athletic contests of the district. So far many a handsome trophy has been won and, in 1973, one of the Convent's former pupils was elected mayor of Hinckley.

Hinckley Convent, with the lower forms of education, remained what it was originally intended to be, a recruiting house for vocations, although new recruits in England are very scarce at present. Our Sisters in England are also engaged in an all-out effort in the service of their pupils. What makes them see more of an apostolate in their work than ever is the realisation that the percentage of children coming from broken homes and of lapsed Catholics has taken on quite formidable dimensions in recent years. By prayer and a carefully planned foundation the nuns are doing their utmost to prevent their pupils from becoming moral wrecks in later life.

Since the number of pupils also outgrew the accommodation offered by De Montfort House in Leicester Road, other plans had to be made to extend the school still further. In 1947 Mother General Demetria Hemmer, accompanied by Mother M Alacoque Brien, came to Hinckley from South Africa on a tour of visitation to our houses in Europe. During their stay in England they paid a visit to *Stoke Lodge*, Captain W Robertson's Estate which was being offered for sale. Mrs Robertson was a convert to Catholicism and a great friend of Hinckley Convent. Since the house seemed adaptable for a Senior School and its lovely grounds ideal for a Boarding school later on, negotiations for its purchase were soon in progress.

The property, now in the Sisters' possession, extends over 80 acres of ground. Much of it, however, is leased to a neighbouring farmer as pasture land, while the rest is used as play- and sports-fields by the pupils. *Stoke Lodge*, or *Blessed Martin's Convent* as it was renamed, is situated three miles distant from Hinckley, amidst the most salubrious and park-like surroundings. Thus it forms an ideal recuperative holiday spot for the Sisters as well. The house contained 18 rooms and, attached to it, a cottage and also, at the entrance to the drive, a gate-lodge. A lovely drive, about a quarter of a mile in length and bordered by majestic trees, led to the main building while its borders on either side displayed in spring a wealth of primroses, bluebells, daffodils and narcissi. The vegetable garden and orchard provides the community almost the whole year round with vegetables and soft fruit. Of course, the gathering and preserving of the latter keep the Sisters very busy outside school hours, but still they are an asset to the cook who would have to provide meals for over 200 pupils who stay there every day for lunch. Five buses bring them to school at 9 a.m. and convey them to their respective homes at 4.30 p.m. The pupils agreed to help with laying of tables, serving, etc. At the west end of the building and extending into the back-yard were the outhouses of the Lodge. These were transformed into cloak rooms, etc. which did credit to the architect and the builder.

September the 22nd, 1948 was the first school day at Bl. Martin's, when 165 pupils were present and were taught by Sisters Miriam Illing, Suso Meier and two ladies, while Sister Wilhelma Enzensberger and a Swiss girl did the cooking as best they could on the little family stove. On the 4th May 1949 Holy Mass was celebrated in the little temporary chapel upstairs and from that day the Blessed Sacrament was permanently reserved at *Stoke Golding*.

Since September 1952 *Stoke Golding Convent* has its own chaplain. Previous to Father Desmond Murray's appointment the Sisters had to travel by car to Hinckley nearly every day for Holy Mass and other services. This was hard work especially for the Sister Chauffeur in foggy weather and when the roads were slippery in winter. Soon the new Convent became a place of interest and visitors came frequently. Some also became generous benefactors. To Mr W Orrill the community owes grateful thanks for the lovely monstrance and Benediction outfit. His daughter, Anne, died suddenly at the age of fourteen and so her father devoted her deposits in the Bank as memorials of his daughter. Six candlesticks were presented by Mrs Higham and these were first used on the altar when her own flame of life was fading out. She was the mother of two pupils, David and Bob; the former was ordained Priest after having joined the Benedictines. A beautifully woven cope and velum were donated by Mrs R Walker in memory of her brother and his family who lost their lives in an air-raid over Nuneaton in May, 1941. A Ciborium

was a gift of Mr G Walker. Friends from Germany also sent useful articles for the new house. Last, but not least, mention must be made of the splendid vestments that came from the Mother House in King William's Town with the arrival of Mother Demetria and Sisters Fides Woelfle and Consuela Gammel on 16th May 1953. (In the early years Sisters Tarcisia Schmid, Eulogia Neuer and Evarista Scharf also joined the staff.)

When the community had increased to thirteen Sisters the chapel proved too small. The finest room in the house, once the Robertson's drawing-room, was then converted into a devotional chapel; But even this was too small when the people from the village attended Mass at "Stoke" on Sundays. For a time the drawing-room was used as a chapel of ease which meant a great deal of extra work.

In spite of all these adaptations there was not yet enough room for all the pupils and four new classrooms were built. These were blessed and officially opened by His Lordship E Ellis of Nottingham who, on that occasion, highly praised the work of the Sisters. At the same time he blessed the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes in the charming grotto at the head of the drive.

Although Stoke Lodge was fairly spacious, some of the rooms had to serve a dual and even a triple purpose; so the day came when the charming old Manor House had to make way for a new convent and more classrooms. From its beginning the School of Blessed Martin was run as a fee-paying Private Independent School, preparing candidates for the G.C.E. at O and A level. The Education Act of 1944, which stipulated that Primary and Secondary Education be provided in separate schools, made imperative the need for a Secondary Modern School for the pupils attending the All-age schools at Hinckley and Earl Shilton. This site of Stoke Golding, with its beautiful rural setting was considered an ideal spot for the project. The Right Rev Dr Ellis, Bishop of Nottingham, and Chairman of the Nottingham Commission for Schools, entered into negotiations with the Ministry of Education for the establishment of a Voluntary Aided Mixed Secondary School. At the request of the Diocesan Authorities and of the Parish Priest of St Peters, Hinckley, the Dominican Sisters agreed to co-operate in the scheme. Meanwhile two important changes took place: The Leicestershire Plan came into operation; the Catholic School would not be a Secondary Modern, but a High School catering for pupils of mixed ability from ages of 11 to 14 years and also providing facilities for 14 to 15-year olds, whose parents did not wish them to remain in school until they were sixteen.

Blessed Martin de Porres, the Patron of the school was canonised in May 1962 and would henceforth be known as Saint Martin. Therefore the official title of the institution is now Saint Martin's Catholic School. The extensions comprised a beautiful chapel, an Assembly Hall and Stage, Dining Hall, Kitchen, Staff Accommodation, Changing Rooms, Science Laboratories, Housecraft, Art and handicraft Rooms and four new Classrooms. The playing fields provide two Hockey pitches, two Football pitches, one Rugby pitch and one Cricket Square. The Architects were Messrs Bartlett & Gray of Nottingham and the Main Contractors were Messrs Greaves Brothers of Hinckley. The blessing and official opening was again performed by Bishop Ellis on 12th May 1965.

It was during the previous decade, too, that several eminent visitors, among them Most Reverend Father Emmanuel Suarez, Master General of our Order, His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Wendel of Munich and the Auxiliary Bishop John Neuhausler called and stayed at our Convent. Student Sisters from the Continent came to improve their English and to learn of English ways and customs at first hand.

In 1962, Sister Louis-Bertrand Curran replaced Sister Miriam Illing at Headmistress of St Martin's School, while the latter transferred to Hinckley.

A special word of thanks is due to the friends of the Sisters who had helped them financially in the erection of St Martin's School by arranging Sales, May Fairs and Christmas Draws. May God reward them for the part they played in providing Christian education for our youth!

Cradle

In October 1962 a couple of Dominican sisters moved from St Martin's Convent, Stoke Golding to Flore House in Higham Lane, the former home of Mr J L Lloyd at Nuneaton. The building was purchased by

our Congregation and named “The Convent of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart”. For the first time since the old Abbey of St Mary was made a ruin in 1539, nuns were again domiciled in Nuneaton.

Benedictine Nuns from Brittany, France, founded the Abbey of St Mary at Eaton in 1157 as the place was then known. When the Abbey was in its most flourishing state the nuns numbered nearly one hundred. By 1283 a Charter of King Edward I referred to the town as Nonne-Eaton; and the name was later changed to Nuneaton.

In September 1539 Dr John London, a King’s Commissioner and one of Thomas Cromwell’s men, thundered at the Abbey Gates, demanding to see the Prioress. He came with authority to accept, in the King’s name, the surrender of the Abbey with all its estates and valuables. The Prioress protested but, realising that “needs must when the devil drives” summoned her 26 nuns who entered “trembling and weeping”, and then signed the deed of surrender. Orders were then at once given to unroof the church and claustral buildings “so that they might become ruinous as quickly as possible and thus prevent any chance of return to the old order”.

So now, after 400 years, our Sisters settled at Nuneaton in order to help teaching in the Parochial School of St Joseph. The little green car XBF 995 soon became known in the vicinity as it bore the Dominican Sisters daily from their little convent of St Joseph’s School in Nuneaton.