

# HISTORY OF THE PARISH

## PREAMBLE

As the year 2000 approaches, it seems a good idea to commit to paper the history of the Parish so far. Since Peacehaven was initially served from Newhaven, our early history is closely linked with theirs and so the Newhaven history, as it affects Peacehaven and its beginnings, up to 1970 is recounted.

My thanks to all those who have offered help, especially to the older parishioners, but since we are dealing with events ranging from more than 100 years ago, all we can hope for is that the history is fairly accurate. My apologies for any errors and for any facts or personalities omitted.

## EARLY DAYS

The Newhaven "Mission" was founded in 1895, and taken over by the Assumptionist Fathers (A.A.) in 1902 at the request of Cardinal Bourne, Bishop of Southwark. Fr. Barnaby Gizaud was the first Parish Priest followed by Fr. Delphin Coussirat in 1905.

The Catholic population of Seaford at the turn of the century numbered one solitary soul, and we can realistically assume that the situation in Newhaven was only marginally better. The priests in those days, mostly French, were indeed missionaries, and the Catholic laity must have been fairly committed and loyal.

The first recorded baptism and the first burial occurred on the same day, September 15th, 1895. The first confirmation was on January 2nd 1902, and the first marriage not until September 25th 1909. The usual Mass offering at that time was 2s.6d (about 12p).

Within a few years there were two Sunday Masses with a total attendance of about 40, some of that number possibly coming from the scattered settlements in Peacehaven. There were evening devotions both on a Sunday and a Friday, and a Catechism service for the children was also on a Sunday, mid-afternoon. One of the Sunday Masses was sung, the choir being formed from the nuns and the schoolchildren. These nuns, some 35 in number at their maximum, had come to Newhaven in the early 1900s. By the time they moved to Billingshurst they were down to 15 in number (see insert - my thanks to J.H.M.). The last surviving nun, a Sr. Gabriel, was visited in Littlehampton in late 1998, but unfortunately died in early 1999, in the Mother House in France.

**Josephine H Moss**

## INSERT

### NEWHAVEN CONVENT

The Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary is a French Order. Around the turn of the century a small group of Sisters was sent to England to set up a House and lived for a while in Fort Road, Newhaven, in a property called Abbeville, which still bears that name today. Subsequently the Order acquired Meeching Place, a large property in Church Hill. In addition to the buildings which front on to the road, the property then also comprised several small brick cottages and outhouses, several acres of grassland for grazing the cows, tennis courts and a tree-lined walk at the end of which a grotto to Our Lady was built.

The school which the Sisters started in Church Hill took fee-paying day pupils and boarders. Part of one of the buildings was designated for "lady boarders", ie. ladies who, for whatever reason, needed accommodation and were able to pay for it.

The Newhaven Convent had two small off-shoots: a non-fee-paying school in Newhaven known as the Elementary School, and a school in Peacehaven. In both these, the nuns from the Newhaven Convent taught the pupils.

About six months after the outbreak of the Second World War it was realised that the south coast of England, especially the area around the ports, could become dangerous. As a result, and in common with many other similar establishments, the main school at Newhaven was evacuated leaving the Peacehaven school still operating. About four or five Sisters initially accompanied the pupils to a "place of safety" in Billingshurst (near Horsham) where they stayed for a few months. A week after arriving, the Convent in Newhaven received a direct hit from a German bomb and one Sister was unfortunately killed. The temporary accommodation was soon replaced by a larger house nearby thus enabling those Sisters left behind in Newhaven to rejoin the community and the school was re-established. This was actually achieved by September 1940 and the Newhaven Convent remained in the same property until 1945, apart from two Sisters who lived in a house in Roderick Avenue South, near to the Peacehaven school where they taught.

During the war years the demand for places at the Convent in Billingshurst, both for day pupils and boarders, had become very considerable indeed. A suitable house to purchase was found in the area and the Newhaven property was subsequently sold. The Order also relinquished ownership of the Peacehaven school. By September 1947, the school was operating under the control of the Local Education Authority.

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### PARISH STATUS AND THE END OF THE WAR... 1918

By way of explaining what might seem to be a confusing situation, it can be said that in religious orders like the Assumptionists, the usual period of appointment as Father Superior or Parish Priest was three years, and where possible this ruling was adhered to, but often, sheer practical reasons meant a second period was allowed and sometimes both positions could be combined in the one person. This is one reason why Fr. Delphin Coussirat was still in office until the parish was built up and, later, why he was able to return from a parish in Rickmansworth in 1938 for a second spell which, sadly for him, again included a war.

Initially, for his vision of evangelisation and, secondly, for his fortitude in adversity during the bombings, 1940-1944, the name of Fr. Delphin Coussirat should be "writ large" in the history of Newhaven.

At the outset of the 1914-1918 war came an influx of soldiers to camps in Southern England, and so Fr. Delphin saw the possibility of evangelical service to Catholics, both in the local population and amongst the soldiery, many of whom would have come from the Catholic North of England. As there was little in the way of entertainment in the town centre, he . . . . .

thought that he would build a small hut some 40ft x 20ft with Army help, which could be used for quiet pursuits, reading, letter-writing and other modest leisure entertainments. He hoped that this hut would eventually become his parish hall once the war was over, but unfortunately his forecast about the number of soldiers descending on the area was some way off target, and by 1917 the building had still not been finished even though help was given anonymously by one of the missions in Brighton. In the year that the war finally ended (1918), Newhaven was given the full status of parish, and the idea of extending the mission to Peacehaven was gradually born in the following years.

### FIRST BEGINNINGS FOR PEACEHAVEN, 1923-1927

In November 1923 it was reported that everything was set fair for a start to the Peacehaven Mission. A sacred altar stone had been obtained and a spacious room was made available, probably in a parishioner's house. Within less than two years, as had happened in Newhaven, the nuns were ready to start teaching, with two small classrooms at their disposal. Official permission was sought from the Mother General to "open up a new sphere of influence", and the Diocese was also very much in favour.

In 1923, Fr. Berchmans Lefebvre became parish priest of Newhaven. He died in 1927, and it was during his time that the Mission was founded at Peacehaven in the timber and asbestos building, now the hall, a gift of a benefactress. With the death of Fr. Berchmans went the AA.'s only link with Seaford (they had been chaplains to a Seaford convent for a number of years). Sadly he died carrying out his ministry there at the time of the Sunday Mass.

Even by 1930 the population of Peacehaven was only some 2,500, about an eighth of its present size, and this area, labelled Greater Peacehaven, extended to Bannings Vale in present-day Saltdean. So you have to visualise an area with unmade roads, and houses dotted here and there among open countryside and gorse land. The roads beyond Arundel Road were only made up in the 1962-1965 period, and the hut which served as a church was approached from Edith Avenue along a line of flagstones laid over a muddy patch which was later to become our car park.

Conditions were somewhat spartan and it could become very cold at services. The current Provincial of the Order relates that on one of his excursions up from Newhaven to say Mass, a film of ice began to form on the water and wine in the sacred vessels ..... some things never change!

From 1927 onwards until the Church was built in 1963 little has been written about the Peacehaven Mission, and so our history merges once more with that of Newhaven.

In March 1929, Fr. Cecil Bruet died. He had been a Canadian war veteran who had fought at Verdun (1914-1918), and he was so well liked that his funeral, reported at length in the local press, was attended by many of the town's dignitaries. The church at Newhaven, with its capacity of 120, must have been stretched to the limits. He was the first Catholic priest to be buried in Newhaven Cemetery.

## **THROUGH THE THIRTIES TO THE OUTBREAK OF WAR**

During this time annual visitations were made by the then current Deans, either from Lewes, Brighton or Eastbourne, whichever Deanery we happened to be in at the time. By all accounts it was a period of steady and satisfactory spiritual growth and Fr. Charles Vermech, in 1933, was able to list the fruit of his own endeavour and that of those who went before him. There were in existence:

1. Two schools
2. Society of St. Vincent de Paul
3. Boy Scouts
4. Girl Guides
5. Apostleship of the Sea
- 6 Children of Mary
7. Guild of the Blessed Sacrament
8. Society of St. Teresa of Lisieux.
9. A yearly Mission was held, and also
10. A procession of the Blessed Sacrament in the streets.

One fly in the ointment was the existence of a female lay group working from an address in Fort Road. They supported themselves by doing small tasks around the neighbourhood and around the presbytery and the church itself. As can easily happen, possibly because of a culture clash, there was a certain amount of tension. Judging from the correspondence winging its way to the Bishop at Southwark, all was not sweetness and light in their relationship with the clergy, and indeed life could not have been easy for the priests, mostly French-born with a few Dutchmen included. Their provincial set-up was administered from Paris, and directives to Newhaven, and correspondence with Southwark, were occasionally in French; but, they were true missionaries - and so they survived!

In 1938, Fr. Delphin Coussirat returned to the parish and worked in tandem with Fr. Charles Vermech. Of the two, the latter was the more outgoing, involving himself not only with parishioners but with the community as well. The parish hall was used by all the community for social events such as whist drives and the like.

Newhaven, over the years, had been a very friendly town with little or no religious tension - truly ecumenical long before that word attained its present popular usage.

## **THE WAR YEARS, 1939-1945 AND THE AFTERMATH**

Barely a year after the war had started, Newhaven felt the full effects of being targeted as a port. In late September 1940 the church was hit and rendered unusable. The Dean Fr. Flanagan, in writing to Bishop Amigo, described the damage as severe, and it was not until the late spring of 1941 that the church was made safe for use.

The convent also suffered a direct hit, but mercifully the children and some of the teaching nuns had been evacuated to Billingshurst a short time before. Nevertheless, one of the Sisters in the convent was killed in the attack and a great deal of damage done.

Parish life went on, but probably at very low-key because, added to the normal population movement in wartime, both adults and above all children had been evacuated, and this had a marked influence on the number in the congregation.

In November 1944, the church was bombed again. Two houses connected with the church, one belonging to the Order and the other to the Diocese, were both damaged as well. Great sympathy was extended by the Dean and the Bishops to the poor parish priest, Fr. Delphin Coussirat, on suffering this second onslaught. It must have been soul-destroying.

By 1945 the war may have been over but the effects still lingered. The parish priest eventually became ill in 1947; he was judged to be too unwell to run the parish, and so departed reluctantly without seeing all the repairs completed. Fr. Coussirat had served Newhaven magnificently in very testing times.

As late as 1950-1953, we are told that the repairs were going well, but that a surveyor's report was still awaited on the condition of the roof.

(As Peacehaven was now rapidly attaining "cuckoo in the nest" status, it seems easier to refer to it as a parish although this did not officially come about until 1970).

In 1956, the Peacehaven parish was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. In the annual visitation reports both parishes were commended for their material and spiritual progress, and by the end of the decade, in 1959, there were the first hints that Peacehaven was now offering more scope for development than Newhaven.

### THE SIXTIES – A NEW CHURCH – THE DIOCESE TAKES OVER AND THE ASSUMPTIONISTS LEAVE AFTER NEARLY 70 YEARS

In the early 1960s the idea of building a new church at Peacehaven was growing in strength. Fr. Ambrose Moss set the process in motion and carried it through to its completion. He raised funds in many ways, but chiefly by setting up a "football pools" scheme. He consulted with the architect/builders - Lanners of Wakefield.

A somewhat revolutionary design based on supporting crossed arches of laminated wood was chosen. It had the merit of allowing for future extension in any desired direction. It was built to seat about 250, and it cost about £15,000 - a sum which in those days would have bought the equivalent of four three-bedroomed houses. There was a certain element of risk in testing this particular design against the strong winds of the South Coast. Criticism could have been levelled at the complexity of the under-floor piping, but in general terms it was a splendid church, and the old hut Mass Centre now served the purpose of a Church Hall. As the new church registers were begun in October 1963 it can be assumed that the building was spread over the previous 6-8 months. The presbytery was built at the same time as a result of a legacy from a Miss Harvey. Postcard pictures of the church were still on sale at Easter, 1964.

In May of the following year, Fr. Ambrose, who had laboured long and hard for Peacehaven, went to Anchor House, Camden Town, to minister in the Apostleship of the Sea Mission. His immediate successor was a Fr. Christopher Burgess, and in that same year, 1965, the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton was created from the old Southwark Diocese. In late 1967, Fr . . . . .

Richard Leppard picked up on the germ of an idea first mooted in 1964. The legal paper-work had already been catered for, and so the 101 Club was launched. The original organiser of the 101 Club found it virtually unworkable because of lack of numbers, so very quickly it was launched with a halved subscription and the numbers doubled. For banking purposes it was known as the Roma Club.

The end of each financial year saw the Grand Draw, for £250, taking place during a social evening's entertainment. Within a year or two this was brought forward to celebrate St. Patrick's Night, a spot it has retained ever since. The music may be different, but the show goes on! Eventually the evening was organised on a grander scale, largely due to the efforts of Pat White who has run the Club for about 22 years. Another long-distance runner was the Friday night Bingo, operated for the local community. Like Pat White, Terry Russell ran this social gathering practically unaided for some 27 years, taking over from Don Warren, the original operator.

From 1965 to 1970 there existed a period of great change, not only in personnel but also in the liturgy. The re-siting of the altar caused a stir amongst the traditionalists, especially as a splendid marble altar had been donated by the Schliengers who also helped with other church furnishings.

In Whit-week, 1968, there were the first intimations of a handover of both parishes from the Order to the Diocese. A few months later, in August, Fr. Ambrose and Fr. Richard were appointed as parish priest and curate respectively. They were both accomplished carpenters and they made many of the trestle tables in the hall which saw service for years after. Early in this five-year period, Fr. Charles Verhaart as well had served Peacehaven almost exclusively and was the first priest to live permanently in the presbytery. So it was no surprise that the parishioners were somewhat confused and saddened by all the changes in personnel among these fine priests. To cap it all, Fr. Augustine Danby of Newhaven was elected Provincial of the Order, a post which necessitated residence in Rome for the best part of each year. It then became obvious that, with the other comings and goings, the Order was having difficulty supplying the man-power. The Bishop wrote to the local Provincial in late 1969 suggesting that the Order might consider surrendering both parishes to the Diocese, and the Order, appreciating the reality of the situation, readily agreed with the suggestion. The delicate negotiations involving ownership of property, two houses in Newhaven and a mention of landed-property in Denton, supposedly promised to the church, as well as all the furniture and furnishings, were entered into and resolved amicably.

Some of the Augustinians who served the church in the years up till July 1970 when it was released to the Diocese were Fr. Ambrose Moss, Fr. Christopher Burgess, Fr. Augustine Danby, Fr. Charles Verhaart and Fr. Richard Leppard. The last three mentioned have since died. R.I.P.

Sadly, because of all the rotation of personnel in the final few years, the parish had no one person to target for the traditional send-offs, and so it came about that the priests of the Order withdrew very quietly, after nearly 70 years of service to Newhaven and Peacehaven, without any great tribute being paid.

Fr. Michael Reynolds took over Newhaven in May, 1970, and Fr. Leonard Turner came to Peacehaven a few months later.

### A FOUNDATION TO BUILD ON – RUN UP TO THE TRANSFER

In the mid-sixties there was all influx of newly settled families, in roughly the same age bracket. Fr. Christopher Burgess took the opportunity so presented to form a Men's Association involving both parishes. After early teething troubles an effective working unit was forged to cover the social and practical maintenance needs of both parishes.

Gordon Adams and Peter Eden organised the painting of both parish halls as well as the Lady Chapel here in Peacehaven. A social programme of at least one function per month was set up - dances, fancy dress parties and car treasure hunts were the order of the day. Amongst the outings was one to Michelham Priory where one of the youngsters took an unscheduled dip in the stream. Rescue was effected by one of the ladies at hand.

Members of this Association (among the leading lights were Michael Bartley and Michael Klust) also started a church choir and a barbershop quartet. Later on the successful Bingo Evening for the locals was also inherited. Whatever entertainment was on offer, the ladies of the UCM were always willing helpers in providing refreshments and decorating the hall. Over the last thirty-odd years a band of volunteers, too numerous to mention, have underpinned nearly every parish activity with their "unsung" contributions, ranging from raffles, coffee mornings and so on, to church cleaning.

The parish was blessed with some fine solo singers, and the liturgical services were enhanced by Mrs. Vivienne Bott, Mr. Michael Klust and latterly by Mrs Jo Cottingham.

The men carried out a census of Catholics in Newhaven and some interesting encounters took place.

In 1966, Fr. Christopher launched the "Planned Giving" scheme with a parish meal and a talk at the Lureland Hall, Peacehaven. Mrs Joan Ring, who had earlier done some of the typing, etc, for the priests, became associated with this new initiative and has run the Planned Giving/Weekly Offering scheme ever since. She has also taken on the Covenant Scheme as well.

Fr. Charles and Fr. Richard strongly supported the Sodality of Our Lady/The Cell Movement, and in the latter stages ecumenical services were held with local churches.

### 1970 ONWARDS – A NEW BEGINNING

#### Secular Priests

Fr. Leonard Turner	1970 – 1985		
Fr. John Stone	1985 – 1987	Induction 27.10.1985	Died 22.1.1994
Fr. Patrick Kenny	1987 – 1991 .....	Came initially as Priest-in-Charge	
Fr. Paul Jennings	1991 - 1998		
Fr. Patrick Emmanuel	1998 -		

Two other priests served for brief periods: Fr. Winter and Fr Maskell, probably as cover during an extended break, and to fill in while awaiting the appointment of a new Parish Priest.

As can be seen from the above list, our first secular priest spent more than half of the 28½-year period, from handover to the present day as our parish priest. Naturally enough, then, most of what follows will be concerned with his years in the parish, building on what was already there.

### A DIFFERENT SITUATION.

Any parishioners who had hitherto been somewhat confused by trying to relate to the five or six priests who had served them over the previous five years, were now confronted by an entirely different situation. Instead of many different faces and characters, they now referred to only one.

Life in a "one-priest" parish can be testing. It can be hard for the priest trying to be "all things to all men" (and women). If the parishioners felt that they could not adjust to the change, then they found a similar situation in the adjacent parishes, for all four parishes on the coastal strip, from Rottingdean to Seaford, were now in the same category - a not uncommon position in this day and age.

Fr. Leonard Turner came to a thriving parish in September 1970. The document erecting Peacehaven as a separate parish followed a few months later in early December.

Most aspects of parish life were already in full swing and much of the groundwork necessary for a separate existence had already been done.

The population of the town had grown to about 8,000 and Mass attendance steadied at some 250, with expected peaks at Easter, Christmas and the height of the summer. Figures of 320 - 350 were reached on those last-mentioned occasions.

Fr. Len had a housekeeper for a year or two; he enjoyed socialising in the parish and he had a soft spot for the elderly living alone, and the housebound. Where he could help in practical matters, he always did.

His "parish-building" project began with helpful adjustments to the outside entrances to the church. Brendan Caffrey undertook the first cycle of improvements working on the store room area. He also erected a weather canopy (for shelter) above the main steps and a cabin shelter for the Sacristy entrance. He knocked down an internal wall in the Presbytery to form a Parish Room; "a very welcoming place to be in" was a parishioner's comment. When the position of the altar was moved, he painted the internal back wall of the church.

After that, John Murphy did most of the structural alterations so beneficial to the smooth running of the parish. Heavy work it was too! The rear store room was extended, a front wall was built to dignify and protect the Garden of Remembrance (introduced by Fr. Len), a ramp was built to help the disabled, and the car park was re-surfaced. For the last two jobs, stout help was also forthcoming from John O'Grady. John Murphy also created a vesting area in the sacristy by removing the separation wall for the confessional, now located at the . . . . .

back of the church. John, as a loyal S. V.P. Member, also worked on that Society's project in the porch. The S.V.P. group was now detached from Newhaven and existed mainly for the needs of the Peacehaven parish.

As parishioners became less dependent on bus services, the parish priest decided to change the Mass times. A referendum was held but this proved completely inconclusive.

The times of the three Sunday Masses were still adjusted. Later on, the Sunday evening Mass was moved to a Saturday evening, thus falling in line with Fr. John Mackay of Newhaven who catered for nurses at the Downs Hospital, and for those using the Channel Ferry.

In the early days, Fr. Len had tried to start with a clean sheet by clearing the parish debt. He attempted to have the terms of a covenant altered. When this was not completely successful, he began a yearly fair. His sister Joan, a well-known variety artist, opened the first one which was held in the parish hall. In following years, with convenience and social aspects in mind, he arranged to join the Brighton Deanery and so put our parish in line for the Chaplaincy Bazaar and very soon for Catholaity itself, that fund-raising mix of Brighton's Catholic parishes. Our parish always did well out of these events.

Eventually, the debt was cleared with a bequest on the death of Mr. Schlienger. He and his wife were well-known benefactors of the parish.

### THE HUMAN TOUCH

Fairly early on in his tenure, Fr. Len began to set up rotas for church cleaning, flower arranging, Sunday coffee mornings, and the like, so that no willing parishioner would become overburdened. Those who cleaned the church usually found refreshments available before the end of their stint, and invariably at the Catholaity Bazaar he would encourage his stall-holders in a similar way.

He actively encouraged our participation in the Ecumenical Lenten Discussion Groups formed from among local churchgoers.

The Annual Diocesan Lourdes Pilgrimage received his support. He went to Lourdes himself a few times and persuaded one of his youthful parishioners, Caroline Davis, to talk at Mass about the great experience.

### CANTERBURY TALES.....AND ALL THAT

On the social side, parish outings were organised to many places, including Canterbury and Aylesford Priory

### MISSION ACTIVITY

A priest from the Mill Hill Fathers/Association for the Propagation of the Faith visited the parish, and as a result we have collected for the Missions ever since (red boxes - Tessa O'Shea).

This missionary spirit was strengthened by a second venture instigated by Peter Coghlan's

association with Fr. Cullen's project in Katete, Africa (White Fathers, white cans). Fr. Cullen has visited our parish several times, and given us a first-hand account of his work.

In 1977, Fr. Turner arranged for two Redemptorists to give a Mission, and one of the benefits accruing was a devotional service to Our Lady of Perpetual Succour. Fr. Capitanio, the Retreat Leader, came back to the parish on quite a few occasions afterwards to give impetus to this devotion which is still conducted by a lay leader at the present time.

Twice over the years the church areas were subject to attacks by vandals. Once the porch area suffered. Hymn books and notices were destroyed. On the second occasion, fire extinguishers were emptied and their contents sprayed around the main body of the church. Fortunately, the news spread quickly and there were plenty of volunteers to clean up the mess. After that it was deemed wise to keep the church locked except during service times.

Fr. Len was also asked to participate in Brighton Radio's scheme of broadcasting weekly a Mass or a Service from churches in the area. With the practices needed and other technical requirements, this involved a lot of extra work, and it all took its toll.

So much had he put into setting up the parish for its administration in this "single priest" situation that he needed a rest: he took an extended break and the parish was served by a Fr. Winter for about two months.

So, we can see that not everything went smoothly. Parishioners came and went and the Sunday Mass attendances showed a slight drop in numbers.

The Union of Catholic Mothers gave way to the Catholic Women's League in order to appeal to more ladies, but an impasse arose one year over the selection of the President. Fr. Len was not too pleased with the group's choice and the group, in turn, was reluctant to back down. After a few more meetings, and with the issue not yet resolved, the League disbanded.

Not long afterwards the Men's Association folded as well. Members began to leave the District, and others, now with growing families, found it difficult to give the time and effort necessary to sustain a worthwhile programme. Several key members had resided in Newhaven, and they turned their talents in that direction.

At one time the parish was well served by the Cronin family, but they eventually moved to Kent. Ben Ruocco (R.I.P.) also gave great service to the parish in many ways including leading the devotions to our Lady of Perpetual Succour for a number of years. Mary Pynn came to the forefront as our first trained catechist and was a member of the choir. She was also a tireless worker on joining the Catholaity set-up.

The Guild of St. Stephen was inaugurated in November 1978 and Barry Smith (R.I.P) was a fine M.C. At the first enrolment, the altar boys were some twelve in number.

A Youth Club, efficiently run by the David Kings, Senior and Junior, lasted for some 12 years between April 1983 and July 1995, and was of great benefit in keeping youngsters loyal to the parish.

Although there is no Catenian Circle as such in Peacehaven, quite a few parishioners are members, including the current President, Martin Klust, whose brother Michael had been such a stalwart figure. Martin, an accountant, also looked after parish financial matters for some years.

The St. Vincent de Paul Society, first mentioned in 1933, is probably the oldest grouping, but it now has fewer members. Death has claimed about 4 members in the last dozen years, and there has been some wastage because members have left the Society or the district. Recruitment is unable to keep pace with such loss.

Most parish priests would agree that frequent re-generation is necessary to keep guilds and sodalities alive, and it is often the arrival of a new priest that acts as the trigger for growth. It is just as likely, however, that this re-generation comes from the parishioners themselves.

Eventually, in the summer of 1985, the time came for Fr. Leonard Turner to move on to pastures new. Given a good send-off by the assembled parishioners, he left to face a new challenge in Addlestone, Surrey.

To save undue repetition, it can be said that all the priests following on from Fr. Turner made every effort to maintain and build on his start. Times of Services, and their frequency, remained constant over the intervening years. The Devotion to our Lady of Perpetual Succour, led by a lay person, is held on the Priest's day off.

**FR. JOHN STONE – 1985 - 1986**, was here for little more than a year. His Service of Induction was carried out by Fr. Matthew McInerney, the Dean at the time. Being safety conscious, one of Father Stone's first acts was to strengthen the house by changing the front door and adding to the security devices. Fr. John had a housekeeper who cared for him and warded off the rigours of the parish round, but his health was far from robust and he eventually left to restore life to the then dormant parish at The Witterings, West Sussex. Many of the parishioners were sad to see him go. He died in St. Raphael's Nursing Home, 22nd January, 1994. R.I.P.

**FR. PATRICK KENNY – 1987 – 1991**, was a late vocation who had been a teacher. He was always keen on study and training courses, both for himself and parishioners. His presbytery groups, gathered for prayers or Scripture studies, were always brought to a conclusion with stimulating refreshments. He continued the "healing" Masses and services begun in Fr. Turner's time, and was more than happy to continue the S.V.P. tradition whereby those normally housebound were brought to church on Sunday afternoon for Mass, and then treated to a splendid tea in the hall afterwards. This practice, along with the S.V.P. annual summer outing for the sick and elderly to places such as Bodiam Castle, Arundel or Upper Beeding, rounded off with a cream tea, has now sadly ceased, largely because of increased physical difficulties - not least among the helpers themselves!

Doris **(Blake)**, his housekeeper was most helpful in all matters connected with the parish. It was during this time that the "Renew" movement was started and Fr. Paddy encouraged the mass-migration by coach and car to The Goldstone, old home of Brighton & Hove Albion Football Club, for the great inauguration service attended by Bishop Cormac and thousands of Catholics from all over the diocese.

**LOURDES.** He had a great devotion to Our Lady, and this led him to give free rein to the Kearons, Heather and Mike. Following a private visit in the late eighties, they have for some ten years made sure that any deserving cases in the diocese, and in particular in this parish, were taken to Lourdes if desired. Heather Kearon looks after all the logistical arrangements and Mike, her husband, has organised a sponsored "Lourdes Walk" on an annual basis as a fund-raiser for the pilgrimage itself.

One of Father's last efforts in the maintenance line was to have the windows on one side of the church replaced with double glazing.

Father Kenny had hoped to see out his days in Peacehaven, but unfortunately he was informed of his imminent transfer to Staplefield while he was on holiday. This hardly made for a dignified exit given the circumstances - more like a pressurised retreat. Sadly, too, his brother James, also a priest, died two years afterwards, in 1993.

Our new parish priest was **FR. PAUL JENNINGS, 1991-1998.** Fr. Paul spent some time each week at Bishop's House since he dealt with aspects of Church Law, more especially as it related to matrimonial tribunals.

In his introductory sermon he said that he would be happy to back any genuinely supported need of parishioners. This ensured that any such initiative had to come from, and be underwritten by, sufficient numbers of parishioners to make it viable and on-going. Fr. Paul was very good with children, both in the parish and in the two connected schools. The Children's Liturgy, begun so long before, was given fresh impetus. He completed Fr. Kenny's double glazing project, and attended to the large window over the entrance.

During his time, two self-supporting groups sprang up. One was for the younger generation - Mums and Toddlers - while the other was a Thursday afternoon grouping for anyone who wanted to chat, play cards, board games, and the like. From this group have come ideas for trips to places of interest, sometimes for a week or more - Dundee, Penrith Agricultural College, York (Museum), Durham, and even Italy, along with assorted local daytrips. Mary Yeates is the prime mover in these outings.

Father brought a new dimension to the art of preparing for the November Catholity Fair, involving all parishioners to one degree or another. Also operating at the same stage was the monthly coffee-morning and raffle at the Meridian Centre. Eileen Foy and her helpers were able to supplement church funds with an average £150 per month, and so, by astute borrowing early on, coupled with five or six very successful "Catholity" days, the recent parish debt was cleared.

Also, during his time, the average Sunday Mass attendance, partly because of Peacehaven's increasing population, grew to about 275. Daily Mass attendance was about 20 - 30.

Fr. Paul's tenure in the parish seemed to pass very quickly, and he was given a rousing send-off on his way to his new parish in Horley.

**FR. PATRICK EMMANUEL** has been with us for only six months. Already he has set in motion two training sessions, one to cater for Eucharistic Ministers and the other for church readers. This last session was held on a cold Saturday morning in a cold church, so . . . . .

somewhat ironically, it was no surprise when several potential Ministers of the Word found themselves bereft of speech for a week or two. A "think tank" has also been set up and regular meetings are held. Fr. Pat was soon involved in the Brighton Soup Run, and after a well-attended meeting, he found himself with enough volunteers to form at least two teams to help in this worthwhile project.

Father has also been the inspiration for preparing this history, at which juncture it seems timely, once again, to thank all those without whose help these notes would not have been written, and to apologise sincerely to anyone whose contribution to parish life has been omitted or down-graded. Any perceived errors will be rectified before the next millennium.

### STATISTICS SECTION.

#### Peacehaven Population

1921	88
31	2007
41	Wartime – No Census
51	3020
61	4786
71	8742
81	10073
91	12444

Before 1916 Peacehaven was not registered even as a village.

#### Baptisms and Marriages

Parish records for the above 2 Sacraments show figures from 1963 to the present day.

Baptisms: 406 in 35 years. Average 11+ per year  
Marriages: 80 in 35 years. Average just over 2 per year  
First Communion: No records kept.  
Confirmation: In Parish, 3/4-year cycle: 25  
At Arundel Cathedral: 24

These figures relate to a limited period between 1975 and 1988 only.

Death & Funerals, 1985-1998 inclusive : 160

**CHRISTMAS PERIOD 2007**

**THE GAP YEARS : DEC 1999 UNTIL JULY 2004**

**NOTE:-**

Copies of the Parish History from its earliest beginnings to the approach to the Millennium (2000) were given to Fr. Pat and later to the members of the then - existing Committee - which was still nameless. No comments were received and so the project lay fallow until it was revived by Fr. Tom Ryan who became Parish Priest in July 2004. This happened during one of the Masses said in the old Parish Hall, ie. the Church, as it was from about 1924 until the present church was built in 1963/64. The title of Parish Historian was also bestowed.

Later in the year 2007, Fr. Tom, anxious to see the project renewed and kept up to date, suggested that the writing of another chapter might be what was needed - ie. continuing Fr. Pat's tenure 1998 until Fr. Tom's own appointment in July 2004, a period of about six years.

And so we take up the story again with due (precautionary) apologies to anyone whose contribution has been overlooked or to anyone whose memory or interpretation of events differ from that recorded. Many thanks to all those parishioners who have helped in any way.

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Fr. Patrick Emmanuel had started his ministry in the summer of 1998 following the relatively peaceful era of Fr. Paul Jennings, a priest who had continued to build steadily on the good foundations already existing. Fr. Pat was a Sri Lankan and in some of his talks and sermons hinted that politically things might have been difficult for him in his homeland - movement both across the country and in and out of the country.

He settled in well, was fit, owned an exercise bicycle and was very keen on the use of the computer. At his funeral Mass the Anglican vicar spoke of their emailing each other late at night or into the early hours (possibly in the spirit of ecumenism – who knows!). A current parishioner also speaks of his perseverance in attempting to bring back into the Church a lady who had lapsed for many years. Undeterred by several rebuffs, he persevered and eventually succeeded.

Approaching 50, Fr. Pat was still fit enough to take part in the 60 yard dash at the then annual Parish Day. He was unfortunately, unable to match the speed of the younger 'Linford Christies' and so he missed out on the gold medal.

The "think tank" (aforementioned), set up by Fr. Pat, did not last long. It's members found difficulty in working together and so it was reluctantly disbanded. It was replaced by another selection of parishioners who were somewhat mysteriously . . . . .

summoned to a meeting - purpose unspecified. They were unnamed then, had no real idea of their function in parish life (activities) but they met regularly, with Fr. Pat always in attendance. A Chairman and Vice Chairman were elected and so they continued meetings for a year or so without any definite aim and certainly without any standing, but ironically, it was this same committee that held firm as a figurehead in the parish through the difficult bleak times that followed Fr. Pat's death. And augmented by two stalwarts of the parish, Martin Klust and Ian Hodgson most of its members were re-elected to become the Parish Council in the days before a Parish Priest was finally appointed.

Like most parish priests Fr. Pat had his high moments and his low ones. New parishioners were attracted but unfortunately quite a few left as well. One unfortunate incident was a clash with the S.V.P which, had the full facts been aired, need never have happened. The treasurer, saddened by the argument, left for another parish, only returning a year and a half later. The S.V.P disbanded before Christmas 1999 and, whilst still functioning modestly, is technically in abeyance.

### 12th April 2001

Just before Easter 2001, came tragedy. We received a 'phone call at about 3.30 in the morning to say that the presbytery was on fire. At a distance we could do nothing and mindful of the fact that Fr. Pat might be over in Arundel (the original intention) with a local priest preparing for the Maundy Services at the Cathedral later that morning, we went back to sleep.

By 8 or 9am the dreadful news had spread. Fr. Pat was dead. He had indeed been at home in the presbytery. Mercifully, he had died from smoke inhalation and had not been burned to death. Fr. Seamus Hester returning from his year's sabbatical, arrived later that morning and carried out the Holy Week services in full. He also found time on Holy Saturday morning to gather some of the key parishioners together in order to get local information and plot the way ahead.

Some days later, Fr. Pat's Requiem Mass, well attended by fellow priests and a full congregation including local dignitaries, was held. His body was taken to Sri Lanka, so that he could be buried in his homeland.

### THE MOSAIC CROSS

The 6ft Celtic, Mosaic Cross on the front of the Church was erected as a memorial to Father Patrick Emmanuel, Parish Priest from 1998 to 2001.

Fr. Pat tragically died in a fire at the presbytery on Maundy Thursday 2001. It was decided to commission a local artist. Aimee Saic, to design and make a mosaic cross, which was funded by a parish collection. The design was done with great care. The intention was to depict Fr. Pat's colourful character with his country of birth, and images of Peacehaven. The white flowers at the top of the cross are the national flowers of Sri Lanka, his native country. One flower is shown falling down and breaking up, finally the petals come together to form a bird, flying out, past the Meridian Monument over the white cliffs of Peacehaven. The cross has been much admired and has been said to give

inspiration to both worshippers and non-worshippers, who just admire it when passing by.

The sudden death of Fr. Pat was a great tragedy and a sad time in the life of the Immaculate Conception Parish.

AF

### CANON FR. HESTER

As soon as the Easter period was over, Fr. Hester began his work in settling the parish back to normal after the great shock of Fr. Patrick's untimely death. It was obviously a bleak time, especially for those who had held Fr. Pat in high esteem.

Fr. Hester's sabbatical year had been curtailed by this tragic event. His appointment to Our Lady of Ransom in Eastbourne was scheduled for early September and so both he, and we, knew that he would spend little more than 4 months with us. His first task was to attempt to restore as much detail as possible to the parish Records of Baptism particularly - which had all been destroyed in the fire. Young Samuel Spowage, now 7, was the last child baptised by Fr. Pat, and so his name would have been the last entry in the book.

Fr. Seamus worked hard, endeared himself to everyone in the parish with his cheerfulness and good humour. He attended our last Parish Sports day and was given an excellent send off after such a short time.

With the leaving of Fr. Hester to take up his appointment at a parish in Eastbourne, our parish entered into a period of great uncertainty which lasted until early 2004 and the arrival of Fr. Stephen Hardaker.

Not only was the parish shrouded in this uncertainty, but to a certain extent the diocese was too. It had had no Bishop for some 15 months, a period started by the elevation of Bishop Murphy O'Connor to Westminster in March 2000 and lasting until the ordination of Bishop Kieran Conry in June 2001. During this time, Diocesan matters were in the hands of Monsignor Canon Hull of St Thomas More, Patcham and he attended one or two of our meetings held in the Church for the benefit of parishioners to discuss our likely future, independence, amalgamation, or even the possibility of a new Parish Priest. The next two and a half years were possibly the most difficult in the life of the parish.

### PRIESTS WHO HELPED OUT OVER THE INTERVENING YEARS

Fr. Christopher Bedford and Fr. Douglas Perkins who said the weekly Masses on a Tuesday and a Friday and who still help out, the former particularly so, even though he had been seriously ill, to a point where his life was in danger, currently says the Wednesday Mass. Fr. Weston, from Hove, came over to say Mass for several Sundays as did Fr. D. Barry (now Canon) and Fr. Doyle. Other priests like Fr. Cullen (missions or societies) came on their usual annual visit and so did Fr. Esdaile from the University - so many priests - shades of the pre-1970s! Fr. Tony Churchill in his role as overall guardian of the interests of the three adjoining parishes also came on quite a few occasions and his name was headlined on the weekly bulletin.

Early in the year 2004, Fr. Stephen Hardaker came to act as our parish priest. From the outset he made it clear that his involvement would, at most, be for eight months or so. He

**lived with Fr. Churchill in the Seaford presbytery as because of the fire, there was no accommodation in Peacehaven. These facts did not help the parishioners to . . . . .**

**feel that any sense of permanence was being established. An unfortunate effect of operating from Seaford occurred one Saturday evening when there was a traffic accident just the "wrong" side of the Newhaven bridge. Father had to ring up on his mobile to say that he was unable to get through to say Mass and that the congregation should be dispersed and encouraged to return on the Sunday.**

**During his time in the Parish, a time of uncertainty because of the shortage of priests, talk of amalgamating parishes and so on, filled the air. Fr. Stephen organised a joint meeting with Fr. Cravos of the Newhaven Parish to prepare for any such eventuality. (As has been said, Fr. Tony Churchill of the Seaford Parish, was appointed as Senior Priest with overall care of the three adjoining parishes).**

**In the mid-summer Fr. Stephen left to serve the parish of Egham Hythe, he had been well liked but his stay had been too short to leave a permanent mark. His going heralded a new chapter which began with the arrival of Fr. Tom Ryan in July 2004.**