

***The History of the Catholic  
Church of English Martyrs, in  
Tuffley***

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## **1. *English Martyrs - History***

Although the current church building has only been in Tuffley Lane since 1980, the history of English Martyrs goes back to the early 1940's. It all started back on 14 March 1943 when the first mass was said in the Northfield Hotel (which became The Retreat\*) in Southfield Road, for the troops of Reservoir Road Camp and local Catholics. A site was then purchased in Southfield Road and a wooden hut from the Reservoir Road Camp was constructed. This hut was blessed by Father Roche on 13 July 1947 and dedicated to the English Martyrs. A house on the opposite side of the road was also purchased for use as a Presbytery. In February 1965 work started on a semi-permanent building to replace the wooden hut. This was constructed over the existing hut. The first mass was said in the new hall in January 1966, although this building was incomplete. The hall was used for fund raising and it was this money and later sale of this hall and the house in Southfield Road which funded the construction of the church hall in Tuffley Lane. The land for this had been purchased back in the 1930's. The last mass in Southfield Road was said by Canon Roche on 06 May 1979. Mass was subsequently held in the Anglican church of St George's in Tuffley, until the completion of the church hall in Tuffley Lane in 1980. The first mass was celebrated on 29 June 1980. In 1985 this church hall was consecrated and became the present church of English Martyrs. The wooden cross mounted to the left of the entrance and the reredos (picture) behind the altar both came from the Southfield Road building.

### **1.1 *Parish Priests***

Fr Joseph O'Brien : 1985 – 1996

Fr M Ryan : 1996 – 1996

Served by St Peter's : 1996 – 2000

Fr Vincent Clements : May 2000 – Sep 2004

Fr Keith Miles : Sep 2004 – May 2009

Fr Gary Brassington: May 2009 – Sep 2012

Fr Richard Barton – Sep 2012 – Sep 2015

Served by St Peter's – Sep 2015 to Jan 2016

Fr Gerry Walsh – Jan 2016 to present

\* The Retreat was demolished to make way for houses in Autumn 2003.

(History Info by MWE/MH 2003)

## **1.2 Additional History**

It can be argued that the father of English Martyrs' Parish at Tuffley was actually Canon Joseph Bernard Chard, Parish Priest of St Peter's from 1894 until 1934. It was not his lot to build much in a material sense but during his forty years in Gloucester considerable sums were spent in renovating the church, reconditioning the organ and in maintaining the schools. His energies during his last years were devoted to raising funds for a new church. In this he was most successful, and the money raised was placed in the hands of the Diocesan Trustees in readiness for a second church. Monsignor Matthew Roche, his successor from 1934 to 1983, wrote in 1939 – 'Whenever and wherever the new Church is built it will in a sense be Canon Chard's memorial'

Monsignor Roche added further details about Tuffley in the 1948 edition of his 'The Story of St Peter's Catholic Church, Gloucester':

'The question of a Church in the Tuffley Area had been considered in Canon Chard's time. For this purpose he had secured a site in King Edward's Avenue. This, however, was thought to be too near St Peter's and eventually a new site was purchased in Southfield Road (in March 1933 for £883.15.0d. This site was held upon a Trust Deed dated 25th March 1933).

The houses on the Lower Tuffley estate brought many new families to the district. For a time the problem was solved by running a special Sunday 'bus service for Catholics in the Tuffley area, but in January 1943 this had to be suspended by order of the Ministry of Transport. On February 7th an experiment was made with a Mass at the New Inn, Stroud Road. About thirty-five people attended but the only room available was too small and the place was not central enough. On March 7th, (in his 1968 booklet he wrote 14th March) by courtesy of the landlord, Mass was said in the lounge of the Northfield Hotel. After a short time the numbers attending Mass so increased that it was necessary to move to the adjoining skittle alley. For over three years this skittle alley was the Tuffley Mass Centre. There was no heating, the lighting was poor and chairs and altar had to be packed away after Mass. In spite of these handicaps the number grew, and in 1946 a hut was purchased (for £15 from the Robinswood Hill Army barracks) and in August of the same year permission was obtained for its erection on the Southfield Road site. There were still many difficulties and many delays but Messrs. Costello and Kempe (contractors) and Mr. E. Whitmarsh-Everiss (architect) eventually managed to assemble all the necessary materials and in the Spring of 1947 the first Mass was said in the yet unfinished Chapel. On Sunday, July 12th, (in his 1968 booklet he wrote 13th July) the Chapel was formally blessed and dedicated to the English Martyrs. The occasion was marked by a Sung Mass and about one hundred and sixty people were present. The finished job far exceeded anticipations and the Chapel is very devotional, well heated and lighted. The electrical work was done by Messrs. Conroy and Owen. The Altar is a feature of the Chapel, and its reredos, portraying a representative group of English Martyrs, is the work of Messrs. Hardman of Birmingham.

The war years have seen Mass Centres established at Brockworth, Churchdown and Tuffley. We hope that the foundations of new Parishes are being laid. Building sites are secured at Brockworth and Tuffley. When building conditions are better, Churches – temporary or permanent – will have to be provided'

A small account book for Gloucester has come to light for the period 1935-1949 and in it we find various entries which may refer to the new church in Southfield Road:

1946:

Costello £300

Architect (W.E.) £86.10-0d

Costello £500

Conroy & Co £30.5.6d

Costello £300

Bon Marche (100 chairs) £87. 11.0d

Vestments £57.15.0d

1947:

Costello and Kempe £300

Conroy & Co £243

Conroy (T +) £178 + £196

Wh. E. £32-8-8d

Costello £200

Bon Marche (Chairs) £31

Harmonium £75

Costello £250

Wh Everiss £40

Costello £200 + £560

Hand Wove Tester £148

Costello £100

Costello £95

Hardman Studio £280

Hut £350

1949

Tuffley S. Lamp £48.16.0d

On 24th January 1949, a property opposite to the Church, No 8, Southfield Road, was acquired for £2,750 with the object of using it as a presbytery. In the event this was occupied by the caretaker.

As the years went by the congregation increased in number and the wooden structure became unstable. In 1965 a new building was constructed. The first Mass was celebrated on 30th January 1966 in the new English Martyrs' Church, whilst it was still unfinished. The last Mass was celebrated by Monsignor Roche on 6th May 1970 when the church site, allotments and house opposite were sold to help eventually fund the erection of a new English Martyrs' Church in Tuffley Lane.

[Additional Info supplied by RB/2012]

## DIAMOND JUBILEE

13th July 1947-2007

I have had experience of many parishes in my life, both Anglican and Catholic. I have had many different roles in those parishes from Youth Leader to Head Server to deacon (twice!) and as a priest (also twice!). This experience has shown me many different aspects of church life, some wonderful and some – well to be honest – quite scary. I have sat and cried with people and I have shared in the greatest moments of joy in the people lives. All parishes are different but I have never known a community like the one here at English Martyrs'. It is a community that cares for each other in a practical and prayerful way and that welcomes new members (and new priests) so well that you very quickly feel like you been here always.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the productions of this history of a living community, not of a building, 'Living Stones' are the real church.

All those who have submitted information, pictures and notes. But especially to Mike Hynes and Vivian Newland who kindly 'offered to be editors' for this undertaking. It has taken almost 2 years to gather all the details.

A history is only relevant if it is the foundation stone for the future church and this is certainly the case here at English Martyrs' Church. We look fondly back on the past and build on it as we reach out to a community which increasingly turns to the

immediate rewards of the world. We, the modern day disciples, offer to all the everlasting rewards promised to all who follow the true path of Christ.

Enjoy this history and remember those who have gone before us and built up our community, pray for them and be a living-stone to ensure that we continue to be Christ to our community.

May God bless you at this very special time.

Father Keith Miles, former Parish Priest of English Martyrs' Tuffley.

### **1.3 Additional Material**

The Parish of the English Martyrs has come a long way since the very first Mass was celebrated in the lounge of the Northfield Hotel in Southfield Road on the 14th March 1943. At the time Father Mathew Roche of St Peter's recognised a need for a Mass centre for the troops at the army barracks on Robinswood Hill and for the local Catholic community. Attendance at Mass very quickly out grew the hotel lounge and was transferred to the skittle alley.

In 1946 a piece of land used as allotments was purchased in Southfield Road, Tuffley, just a short distance from the hotel. 1947 saw the acquisition of a temporary wooden hut purchased for the princely sum of £15 from the Robinswood army barracks. This was erected and used as a Mass centre. The first Mass was celebrated on the 13th July 1947 by Father Roche. The building was blessed and dedicated to the English Martyrs. At about this time a house situated opposite was purchased in the hope that it might eventually become the presbytery for a new parish.

As the years went by the congregation increased and the wooden structure became unsound. In 1965 a semi-permanent building was designed by Ernest Whitmarsh-Everest and built by Brennan Brothers. This building was constructed over the existing wooden hut, so as not to interfere with Sunday Mass and subsequently the old hut was demolished and carried out in sections through the front door.

Mass was first celebrated on 30th January 1966 in the new and, at that time, still unfinished building. The layout was unusual with the altar situated on one side of the hall. The altar rails were donated by the Catholic Woman's League. Candlesticks were designed and turned by E W Everest in the workshops of Robinswood army camp. The reredos above the altar, depicting the English Martyrs, was commissioned from Hardmans' Studios of Birmingham. This building was used regularly for Mass on Sundays and Holy days of obligation, and these were celebrated by clergy from St Peter's in the London Road.

The new Mass centre was also used for fund raising and social activities which became the catalyst for the development of our vibrant community spirit at English Martyrs.

During the 1970's the Tuffley area expanded rapidly and Mass was also celebrated at Harewood School and at the Pike and Musket public house. It became increasingly

evident that there was now a need for a larger church in the area. Canon Roche was a shrewd businessman and he had the foresight to purchase a piece of land in Tuffley Lane in September 1965. This was to become the site for the new English Martyrs' Church.

Mass was celebrated for the last time in the Southfield Road Mass centre on the 6th May 1979. This was offered by Canon Roche and the Schola Gregoriana of Bristol University provided the music. The site and the attached allotments, together with the house opposite, were sold to fund the erection of the new complex in Tuffley Lane. For the duration of the construction the Mass was celebrated in the Anglican church of St George in Grange Road.

The only items saved from the old building were the wooden cross and the reredos from behind the altar depicting six of the English Martyrs. The figure from this original crucifix has been retained to form the new processional cross which today stands beside the altar in the re-ordered church. The actual wooden cross was made by Martin Barnard in 2007.

The Reredos depicts:

Sir Thomas More – Charged with high treason for not recognising Henry VIII as head of the Church of English. He was beheaded in 1534.

Cardinal John Fisher – Charged with high treason for refusing the oath of succession. He was beheaded on Tower Hill in 1535.

John Houghton – Carthusian Prior of the London Charterhouse. He refused to acknowledge Henry VIII as head of the Church of England. He was hung drawn and quartered at Tyburn in 1535 aged 48 years.

Cuthbert Mayne – A convent from the Church of England in 1573. After becoming a priest he worked undercover in Cornwall. He was captured and charged with treason. He was found guilty and was hung drawn and quartered. His head was exhibited in Wadebridge and his quarters were displayed at Barnstaple, Bodmin, Tregony and Launston.

Margaret Clitheroe – A married woman who for twelve years supported and hid priests at her home in York. This offence was outlawed under Queen Elizabeth I. In 1586 Margaret was crushed to death by stones at the age of 33 years.

Edmund Campion – Formerly an Anglican Deacon he was received and later joined the Jesuits in Bohemia. Having been ordained priest he came back to England and was captured and charged with conspiracy. He was sent to the Tower and racked three times and then hanged. He died aged 41 years.

The first Mass was said by Canon Roche in the new church hall on the Feast of St Peter and Paul in June 1980. The building was actually unfinished at the time and the chairs for the congregation were placed out amid the builders' rubble. These were carefully stacked away again afterwards.

Between 1980 and 1985 the hall was used for Mass at the weekends and for holy days of obligation. It was also used for social events and fund raising and during the week it was let out to a play group.

In 1985, Bishop Mervyn decided that the new Church of the English Martyrs at Tuffley should become a parish in its own right and he appointed Father Joseph O'Brien as the first parish priest.

At that time there was no accommodation for the priest so a house was purchased at 5 St David's Close and Father O'Brien moved in on the 19th October. Father O'Brien celebrated his first Mass as parish priest on the 19th October. The following week Father McGuire, the Catholic Dean of the Gloucester, concelebrated Mass and welcomed Father O'Brien to English Martyrs' Parish. His induction as the first parish priest actually took place on 9th December 1985.

Daily Mass was offered in a chapel which Father O'Brien set up in the presbytery. He converted the church hall into a proper church which resulted in the termination of use by the play group and also by the parish who had used it for various social and fund raising activities. Various alterations were made to the new church including raising and extending the sanctuary.

In March 1986 it was decided to build a presbytery adjacent to the church. This addition was to include a parish room as well as accommodation for the parish priest. On completion Father O'Brien moved into his flat and No 5. St David's Close was sold.

In a short space of time Father O'Brien laid solid foundations for the new parish. He established groups for Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, Altar Servers, Readers, Children's liturgy, Choir, First Holy Communion instruction, Finance and the St Vincent de Paul conference. Over the next few years our parish priest became a well known sight as he cycled around the area visiting his parishioners. He organised two well supported pilgrimages to Knock. The parish gradually evolved and, as the attendance at Sunday Masses increased, the new parish established its place in the Deanery.

In October 1993, parishioner Colm Robinson was ordained to the diaconate and served in English Martyrs' Church and later at St Peter's parish.

After twelve years in the parish, in 1997, the Bishop transferred Father O'Brien to Frome in Somerset. The parish bade him fond farewell at a social evening held at the Irish Club in Gloucester.

Left without a parish priest, once more English Martyrs became the responsibility of St Peter's Parish with Canon Michael Fitzpatrick its parish priest. Though the numbers attending Mass dropped most activities continued. The groups set up by Father O'Brien continued to function and in many ways held the parish together.

In November 1999 Father Vincent Ryan was appointed as our parish priest by Bishop Mervyn but he was not long at Tuffley because he was transferred to Bristol in January 2000. During the short time he was in the parish Father Ryan did a lot of

parish visiting. On his departure English Martyrs' Church once more returned to the care of Canon Fitzpatrick at St Peter's.

14th May 2000 saw the arrival of our newly appointed parish priest, Father Vincent Clements. Using the groups that were already established he strengthened the parish and the numbers attending Mass increased. He made several changes to the layout of the church and to the living accommodation.

He was delighted to accept the gift of set of Stations of the Cross which came from the former Chapel at R.A.F. Innsworth when it closed.

During his years as parish priest the parish continued to flourish both spiritually and socially. Two pilgrimages were organised to Rome and one to Lourdes. At this time Gloucester City Council announced that a large building programme was planned for the Quedgeley area. On investigation it was noted that the building programme was for the construction of over 5000 houses which would be erected within the boundaries of English Martyrs' parish. In anticipation of a large increase in Mass attendance Father Vincent had various plans drawn up for a new church on the site which would have involved retaining the church as a hall for parish uses and for letting out to community groups. However, this was not feasible at the time as the necessary funding could not be secured.

In September 2004 Father Vincent Clements was transferred to Salisbury and Father Keith Miles was appointed. He celebrated his first Mass with us as parish priest on the 18th September 2004. The parish was also pleased to welcome Father Keith's golden Labrador Ziggy and, a few months later, Father Keith's mother who came to live in the Presbytery and was actually received into full communion with the Catholic Church at Easter 2006 by her son.

During Father Keith's time here there have been pilgrimages to Walsingham and Poland. The church has been extensively reordered positioning the sanctuary in the middle of the south wall with the congregation gathered around (a feature of the previous church). He formed a youth group which organised the monthly youth Masses. The group was aimed at those of confirmation age or above. A new Pastoral Council was formed and a major pastoral programme was set underway with a 5 year plan for pastoral development. Strong ecumenical ties have also been formed with other local churches and we greatly value this development. Monthly clergy lunches enable communication between the different Christian communities and provide an opportunity for discussion and planning of joint activities and services.

No history of the parish can leave out the important role of the catholic schools in Gloucester particularly the High School, under the fine leadership of its head Larry Montagu. This college is situated within the parish. The school is a crucial part of our parish life and now Mass is offered every Friday and Father Keith is able to meet with pupils from the parish during school time.

This parish history has been made possible because of all the priests and parishioners who worked together over the years to forge our community. Sixty years on, 2007, sees English Martyrs' Parish preparing to extend its existing building. As our parish welcomes the many new parishioners from the expanding estates around Quedgeley, we must remain focussed and not let this opportunity for growth pass us

by. The new extension will also provide much needed space for church groups, social and fund raising activities but most important of all enable us to better serve the community we are called to serve in Christ's name.

#### **1.4 Parishioner memories of English Martyrs' Parish at Tuffley**

My mother Mary Gray and my brother Anthony and I attended Mass in 1947 in the Northfield Hotel skittle alley. My brother was the first altar server. My dear mother made sure his surplice was washed and ironed regularly and she was proud that he was associated with the early days of Tuffley church. We continued to attend Mass at the church in Southfield Road until it was demolished for housing and then we went to various Mass centres around Tuffley. – Maureen Moloney (Formally Gray)

At Southfield Road church we had no regular priest and were served mainly from St Peter's by Canon Roche, Father Green and Father Stirrup. This gave the children a favourite – Father Green because he could deliver his sermon within ten minutes and while the others took twenty at least.

Midnight Masses were usually followed by the priest and some parishioners retiring to a local house for a hot drink and a tasty snack. The same house was used by the priests for a cup of tea after Mass. There was no regular choir, but there was one outstanding voice to be heard at every Mass. Unfortunately the congregation could not keep in time which resulted in a slight discord. Some children were highly amused and did their own impersonation to add to the cacophony. – Gloria Ireland

My first knowledge of a church in the Tuffley area was as a teenager in the early 1960's then attending Mass at St Peter's. I recall Canon Roche appealing from the pulpit for someone to take cutting of hay off the Tuffley Lane site as the City Council were not happy with its over grown state. A few years later I attended a Christmas midnight Mass in the original wooden but chapel in Southfield Road with my fiancé. In 1975 we moved to Southfield Road to live and attended Mass there until the chapel was demolished.

I do recall Ann Apperley working wonders with the very old organ until it finally clapped out. When the chapel was being demolished an old piano was lift standing amongst the rubble. We offered five pounds for it and wheeled it back home. After much TLC our boys did learn to play on it. – Vivian Newland

A few months after the church in Tuffley Lane was built, work began on landscaping the church grounds. The first stage was to plant green hedging around the back of the church up to the pavement on Tuffley Lane. Planting the hedging was done on a Saturday, taking five volunteers all day with the help of two mechanical diggers. The next step was to level the ground in readiness for planting the grass seed. Twelve months later the grass was ready for its first cut, again by parish volunteers. They were Tony Powell and Joe O'Donnel ( now both deceased), PJ Pentony and Tommy Meheran. The hedging was cut twice a year in the spring and autumn by Tommy for a number of years. Hard work – so he says!! Due to the commitment of many parish volunteers the church grounds have always been well maintained and were even worth a mention in the Citizen back in 2004. – Myra & Tommy Meheran

I had the good fortune to be a parish priest in Tuffley for a short period. I took up residence in early November 1998. I had been off work due to ill health for some six years. My stay proved to be very short. It was for me a very enriching and enjoyable stay. I appreciated the warm and sincere welcome of parishioners and the active support of a great team of volunteers. Though my time was short many names and faces are still alive in my mind. In January 1999 I was asked by our Bishop to take up an appointment at St Bernard's parish Bristol. My ministry at Tuffley ended but happy memories endure. Father Vincent J Ryan

In 1970 St Peter's choir visited English Martyrs' to sing a votive Mass to celebrate the canonisation of St Margaret Clitheroe. The celebrant was Canon Roche who had officiated at our wedding a few months previously and he remarked to me that St Margaret should be my patron as she was;-

1. Called Margaret
2. Was a convert
3. Married to a butcher

The Mass setting was by Abbe Lebrun and as the music was printed on paper only measuring 6'x4' was nicknamed 'the postcard Mass'. – Margaret Knight

Due to overcrowding at St Peter's all age school in London Road, the last two years 1951-1953 of my primary school education were spent at the English Martyrs' chapel in Southfield Road. Everyday two classes were taken there by bus from St Peters. Class seven was taught by Mr Bird and class eight, the scholarship class, by Sister Theresa. The two classes were divided only by a curtain. There was one toilet to be used by all the girls but I don't remember that this was a problem. No time was wasted. During the bus journey we recited the times tables up to twelve and various poems. The poems that sticks in my mind begins, 'Oh to be in England now that Aprils here', by Robert Browning which I can recite verbatim to this day. At lunch time we walked in twos along Finlay Road for lunch at Finlay Road school and then walked back again to English Martyrs'. We also walked along the lane from Southfield Road, across the railway bridge and into Stroud Road. Here we had games lessons on Sutgrove playing fields, where Ribston Hall School now stands.

I vividly remember the school day of 6th February 1952. The news was brought by Mrs Mold who lived opposite and who helped to supervise the long treks to from lunchtime at Finlay Road School. The two classes were assembled and it was announced that the King had died. We then prayed earnestly for the repose of his Soul!

My school report written by Sister Theresa states that class eight contained 39 pupils. Under the firm discipline and guidance of Sister Theresa I can remember at least 10 pupils who passed their eleven plus exam and gained entry into the City's grammar schools.

As pupils we were mindful that our school building was a chapel and its seemed to exude a 'special atmosphere'. The education received at St Peter's School, including

those two formative years at English Martyrs', was for me warm, positive and foundation building.

Kathleen Cierieszko (Formally Cooke)

## **1.5 Credits**

Editors:- Vivian Newland and Michael Hynes

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