



Olton Friary

Centenary - 100 years since
the laying of the foundation
stone



Church of the Holy Ghost and
Mary Immaculate



Prayer for the Anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone at Olton Friary

Almighty and gracious Father,

We give You thanks and praise for Your unfailing faithfulness as we celebrate the anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of our Church of the Holy Ghost and Mary Immaculate

Lord, You are the master builder, and Your Son, Jesus Christ, is the chief cornerstone, the unshakable foundation upon which this house of prayer is built.

We thank You for the vision, faith and sacrifice of those who came before us, the priests, religious brothers, sisters and the people whose hands laid the physical stones. May their good works go with them into Your eternal rest.

As we, Your people, form the living temple of Your Church, make us more worthy as living stones, joined together in unity of spirit, love, and purpose.

Bless our ongoing efforts to build Your Kingdom here on earth. Renew in us a deep love for Your Word and a generous commitment to serve our community, so that this place may remain a beacon of hope and light for generations to come.

Most loving Father, through the intercession of St Francis of Assisi, St John Henry Newman and St Michael Garicoits, bless our Friary building. Sanctify all who enter here and guide us always in faithful service to You.

We ask this through Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Olton before the seminary

Olton was once, like many areas, open countryside, woods, cottages, farmland and the odd large estate. The majority of the people of Olton were farmers, agricultural labourers and servants. Much of the land was owned by wealthy business men and landowners and rented out to tenant farmers.

1869 saw the golden age of steam reaching out towards Olton with the opening of Olton Railway Station, its main function to act as a passenger station for commuters to Birmingham. The railway drew attention to this once quiet hamlet, and so the Victorian development of Olton began with the building of new roads and villas that were able to boast of railway connections to the city, but also still offer a more peaceful pace of life and beautiful countryside views.

In 1868, a large area of land had come onto the market following the death of William Williams Esq, a landowner and ironmaster from Handsworth, who foresaw the great potential coming to Olton had purchased land before the railway had been completed. One area of land he owned was Folly Hall Farm, managed by tenant farmer, Edward Glover. It was at this time the farm was purchased in 1869 by Bishop Ullathorne of Birmingham, for the building of England's first seminary since the reformation.

in the County of WARWICK.
MESSRS. CHESHIRE and GIBSON have received instructions from the Trustees of the Will of the late William Williams, Esq., to **SELL** by **AUCTION**, on **TUESDAY**, the 22nd DAY of JUNE NEXT, at the Hen and Chickens Hotel, in New Street, Birmingham, at **THREE O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON FOR FOUR O'CLOCK PRECISELY**, in the following or such other lots as may be determined at the time of sale, and subject to conditions then to be produced, and which may be inspected at the Offices of the undermentioned Solicitors for seven days previously—the above important **BUILDING, ACCOMMODATION, and FARM LANDS, PERPETUAL RENTS, and FISHERY**, forming one of the most advantageous opportunities for the investment of capital in the neighbourhood of Birmingham that has occurred for some years,
THE OLTON BUILDING ESTATE, and **LANDS** included in the above Sale, possess unusual advantages, the situation is elevated and commands charming views, the subsoil dry, and the locality proverbial for health; indeed it may be truly stated that the many advantages possessed by this charming Property are second to none in the neighbourhood of Birmingham, from which it is distant only four miles by the Birmingham and Warwick Turnpike Road. The Estate adjoins that road, and is close to the newly-erected Olton Station on the Great Western Railway, which gives every facility that can be required to parties engaged in business in Birmingham and its neighbourhood who desire to live in the country.
A Road has recently been constructed through the Estate from the Warwick Turnpike Road, and lots commanding a view of
“THE OLTON RESERVOIR,”
to meet the requirements of parties

St Bernard's Seminary

The first Bishop of Birmingham began life as William Ullathorne, born in 1806 in Pocklington, near Yorkshire, when the family moved to Scarborough, Ullathorne took up life as a sailor. During this time he met the Craythorne family, a strong Catholic family who contributed to reigniting his faith and led to his calling to a religious life.



Bishop William Bernard Ullathorne

In 1823 Ullathorne studied at St Gregory's in Downside, a Benedictine Priory. He was ordained at Ushaw and took the name Bernard, becoming William Bernard Ullathorne in 1824. He was greatly respected as a very wise and well read individual, who showed a genuine concern and caring nature for others, seen in his religious work and devotion to supporting others joining the clergy and religious sisters. Ullathorne was appointed Vicar Apostolic of the Central District and moved to Birmingham where his friendship with a John Henry Newman developed, they didn't always see eye to eye, but in 1850 Newman attended Ullathorne's consecration as the first Bishop of Birmingham and preached his famous sermon 'Christ upon the waters', later Ullathorne declared an acute awareness to Newman's holiness, stating, 'I felt annihilated in his presence: there is a Saint in that man!'

Following a Papal order for seminaries to be built across England, in 1869 Bishop Ullathorne, who had always had a great desire to further support those heading into the religious life, purchased Folly Hall Farm in Olton with a view to build a seminary. At £5,500 the purchase included just over 42 acres of pasture, meadow and arable land, a substantial and commodious farm house with extensive farm buildings, as well as a stream of water leading to Olton Reservoir.

In 1871, Edward Joseph Hansom, of Dunn and Hansom, was hired as architect for the seminary. Edward came from a well known architectural background, the son of Charles Hansom who designed Erdington Abbey and his uncle Joseph Hansom designed Birmingham Town Hall and invented the Hansom Cab of London.

Building of the first purpose built seminary in England since the reformation, began in November 1871, just 2 years later in October 1873, the seminary was opened.

In honour of Bishop Ullathorne, the seminary was named St Bernard's seminary - which in turn led to the naming of the road outside.



c1890-1900 Olton Friary Photo: Birmingham Archives

The opening of St Bernard's seminary took place on Thursday 2nd Oct 1873 with a 'very simple, but impressive' ceremony in the upstairs library, then used as a chapel. A sermon was delivered by Saint John Henry Newman - 'whose presence on the occasion was regarded by all as a happy earnest of success', a summary of events was recorded by the Tablet newspaper.



BIRMINGHAM.
INAUGURATION OF THE DIOCESAN SEMINARY.
SERMON BY DR. NEWMAN.

On Thursday, October 2nd, the Birmingham Diocesan Seminary was formally opened by the Bishop, in presence of the chapter and a numerous gathering of clergy and laity. The new institution is situated at Olton, near Solihull, within a convenient distance from the Cathedral, and in a very rural and picturesque district of Warwickshire. Forty-two acres of land have been secured and an edifice, of fair proportions and pleasing aspect, has been built on a slightly rising ground which is to be suitably laid out and planted. Although the whole design of the architects, Messrs. Dunn and Hansom, has not yet been carried out, there is accommodation for professors and students to the number of thirty, and the domestic portion of the house is nearly complete. The expense incurred, it is thought, will not fall short of £8,000, and of that sum a considerable amount has already been contributed. There is as yet no chapel, but the library, a noble and well-built apartment, serves for that purpose. Visitors on Thursday showed great satisfaction at the progress made, and the plain substantial character of what has been erected. The ceremony of inauguration was from the nature of the case very simple ; but did not fail to be impressive. Low Mass,

of success. The kindly and familiar tone of the venerable preacher added to the warmth of the feelings with which he was greeted. Taking for his text the words of St. Peter, " You are a chosen people, a kingly priesthood, he recalled to the minds of his hearers what an occasion of thankfulness it was that had brought them together, and dwelt on the pleasure which was that day the portion of their Right Rev. Father at seeing his long-cherished hopes realized. He remembered how, many years since, the Bishop had given expression to the desire for the carrying out of such a plan, and now it had been allowed him to see this great day in the history of the Church in England. Never perhaps was the need more urgent. The chief object of a seminary was the maintenance of that diocesan Hierarchy which binds the clergy to their pastor and which has ever been equal to the requirements of the Church.

As the service drew to a close, the 'Te Deum' was sung in a very 'devotional and solemn way' with the Bishop granting an indulgence to all who had taken part in the ceremony.

Following the service it was announced that Bishop Ilsely, later Archbishop Ilsely, was appointed rector of the seminary. The first occupants in the seminary were four students from Douai in France and eight from Oscott College.



The Friary Library in 2026.
The Library previously served as a chapel, where
St John Henry Newman gave his opening sermon to the seminary.

1888 saw Bishop Ullathorne retire due to poor health, his successor was the Rev Edward Ilsley. The following year, at the age of 90 and after almost 40 years as Bishop of Birmingham, Bishop Ullathorne passed away. His obituary in the Tablet remembered him as being, 'ever ready to take up his pen in defence of the religious body... He maintained the rights of Catholics and fought to secure our full and perfect religious liberty throughout the Empire', this culminated in the building of St Bernard's seminary, which he himself said he hoped it would be, 'the comfort of his declining years' and to which he would 'pour whatever light was given him into the intellect of those who were to enter the seminary'.

The original seminary plans included an east wing, however the original Papal order to build more seminaries in England was retracted and so likely prevented the completion of the original plans.

Bishop Ilsley closed Oscott College to lay students in 1889 and moved the seminarians from Olton to Oscott, preferring the location and building.

The seminary went up for sale the same year and was purchased by the Capuchin Franciscans.

Arrival of the Capuchin Franciscans

In the 16th century, a group of Franciscans were called to reform what had become of the Franciscan order, they were inspired to live with a focus on prayer and poverty. Wearing distinctive brown habits with large hoods, they earned themselves the Italian nickname 'cappucio', meaning hood. The order were recognised as an official independent branch of the Franciscans in 1528 and in 1873, they moved from being governed by the General of Rome, to being erected into a Canonical Province. The Franciscans moved to Olton on the 4th October 1889 - the feast of St Francis.

The arrival of the Franciscan's was significant in both providing the order with a base within the local area, as well as enabling them to set up Olton Friary as their main house of study for philosophy and theology. In later years the friary was used solely for the study of philosophy, after three years of study, students moved on elsewhere to complete their theological studies.

THE FRANCISCAN MONASTERY.

OPENING CEREMONY.

The monastery at Olton, which is to become the centre of the Franciscan Monks in England, was formerly opened yesterday. The building itself has been used as a seminary for the preparation of candidates for the priesthood since 1873. In pursuance to a Papal order, however, the seminary is now converted into a Franciscan monastery. Olton Monastery is about a quarter of a mile from the station, is a red brick building with stone dressings, and is Gothic in style. At present the sole occupants are four monks and two lay brothers, but the Franciscans will be augmented to the number of 30 in course of time. At the inaugural ceremony yesterday, the Provincial of England (the Very Rev. Modistus Henderson), who is the head of the Order, read low mass, in which he was assisted by Fathers Bernardine and Marianus. The sermon was preached by the Rev. Canon O'Sullivan, who sketched in brief the life of St. Francis. He said the Order had now existed for six hundred years, and the great essential in which it differed from others was its great simplicity. The spirit which pervaded the whole Order was simpleness in their mode of living, coupled with kindness of heart and charity, and he trusted they would be received readily and in a kindly spirit. Among the large attendance of clergy present were Bishop Illsley, the Revs. Drs. Parkinson, McIntyre, Clayton, &c.



Postcard of Olton Friary c1905



Capuchin Franciscans at Olton Friary c1937
Photo: Capuchin Franciscan Archives

The first Superior of Olton Friary was Rev Fr Bernard supported by Fr Marianus.

In time the friary became a centre for national and international affairs. The Pious Union of the Holy Ghost, was founded by Fr John Mary, it became a world wide organisation that was devoted to the Study of the Holy Spirit, the object being to 'spread and foster the daily practice of devotion "to whom all of us" in the words of the late Pope Leo XIII "especially owe the grace of following the paths of truth and virtue"' (as commented in the Monitor and New Era paper of May 1905). At its height there were over a million members worldwide, in acknowledgement of the Pious Union, the church was dedicated to the Holy Ghost. In 1930 a pulpit was erected in the church, a gift given by parishioners in honour of Fr John Mary, it became a memorial to him as Fr John passed away the following year.



Pious Union of the Holy Ghost - originally located in the library. Photo: Capuchin Franciscan Archives

The Franciscan Annual was edited at the friary, a collective of scholarly articles with some notable contributions from a number of sources, including Francis Thompson - the poet who wrote 'Hound of Heaven'. Alongside the daily parish duties, the Franciscans also conducted missions and retreats supporting other parishes further afield, both the parish priests were supported alongside parishioners, where friars would visit every parishioner at home.

There have always been challenges in any parish, Olton being no exception and only 5 years after the arrival of the Franciscans, in 1894 it looked like they would have to leave Olton, the costs were too much to repay, despite the many sacrifices made. Thankfully, the order endured and remained at Olton Friary for over 90 years, until 1981 when, due to reducing numbers in the order, houses were merged and the Franciscans moved on.

By this time the order had established a strong Catholic community and integrated into the wider community, they established a number of parish groups including a vibrant youth group. They also reached out across the globe with the international Pious Union of the Holy Ghost, alongside their many acts of missionary work. However their most significant role during their time here was arguably, the building of the Church.

Building a Church

The Franciscans' had always desired to build a church in the monastery grounds, and a temporary chapel was placed where the parish hall now stands, however, due to ongoing repayments from the purchase of the seminary, it was not until 1924 that the Franciscans were able to commit fully to a church building fund. By this time the chapel was far too small for the growing congregation and a church was urgently needed.

In order to raise enough funds, several innovative fundraising events were held, from fancy fetes to whist drives, historical lectures and funding appeals.

CELEBRATION OF 7th CENTENARY.

Fancy Fair at Franciscan Monastery at Olton.

The Franciscan Monastery at Olton was opened half a century ago as a training college for the diocese of Birmingham, but in 1889 the Capuchin Franciscan Fathers took up residence there, and the building has been since used as a central house of studies for the education of the students, and has served as a centre from which the fathers give retreats and missions up and down the country.

A Serious Handicap.

Throughout this time they have felt the serious handicap of not having a church in which to carry out the liturgical services for the benefit both of the friars themselves and their parishioners. A corridor jutting out from the main building is used as a chapel, but the reverend fathers hope to celebrate the seventh centenary of the coming of the Franciscan Friars to England by commencing the erection of a church at the side of the college.

It is estimated the cost of building a suitable church will be at least £10,000, and with the object of augmenting the building fund a fete and fancy fair was opened in the grounds yesterday.

Many scenic effects have been arranged, and among the attractions for visitors are an African village and Chinese and Japanese gardens.

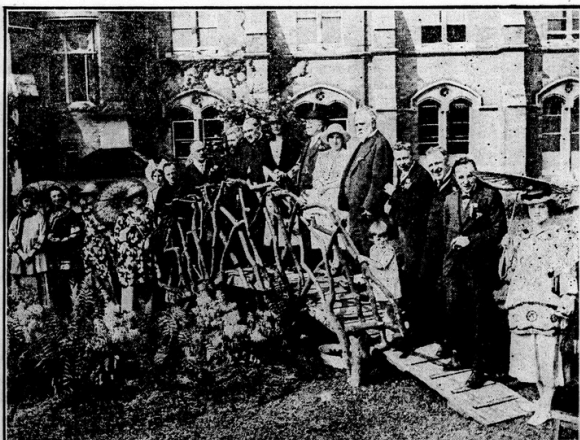
In Native Costume.

All the attendants are in native costume, and there are numerous amusements, including dancing and music.



The original Friary chapel c1905, where the Parish Hall now stands.
Photo: Solihull Library.

BAZAAR AND FETE AT THE MONASTERY GROUNDS, OLTON.



In connection with the bazaar and fete being held at the Monastery Grounds, Olton, in commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the coming of the Franciscan Friars, the picture shows the group taken in the Chinese pavilion at the opening ceremony. Reading from left to right, the figures shown on the bridge are:—Friar George (hon. secretary), Mr. Martin J. Melvin, Friar Aidan (Guardian), Monsignor Glancey, Mrs. Fullard, Mr. W. H. Fullard (who performed the opening ceremony), and Mr. J. Melvin.

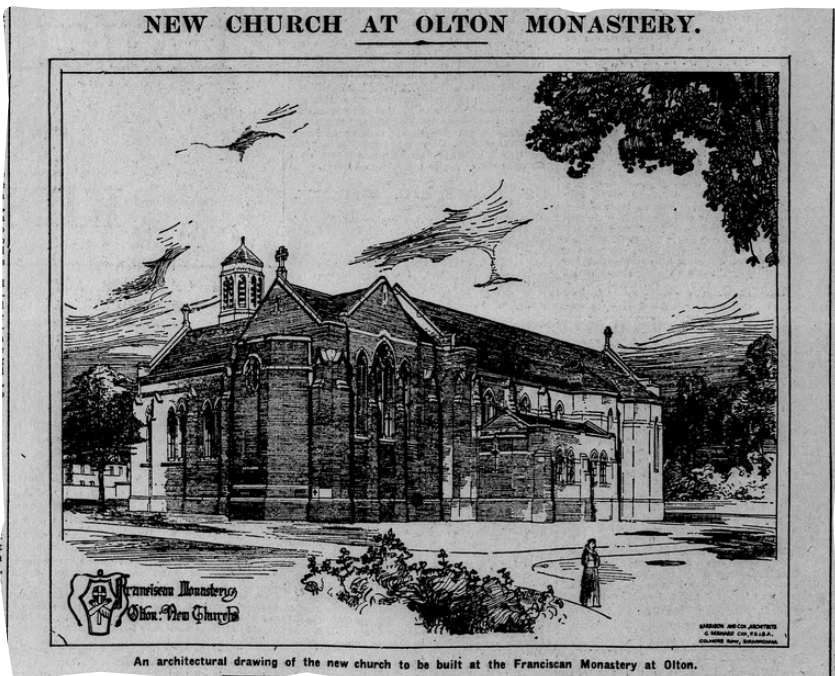
Building a Church

From 1891 the friars had been travelling as missionaries to America fundraising for Olton for their students, During this time monasteries were also being established out in America. It is likely a doner was found for the church whilst they raised funds for Olton. The story goes that two of the friars had to return to America to collect the donation, and in order to pay their fare, one of the friars shovelled coal on the ship - a unique and at the time, handy skill to have!

This generous donation from an American lady, enabled the Franciscans to employ the services of renowned architect George Bernard Cox to design the Church. The design was in keeping with the French-Gothic style of the monastery and it planned to hold 400 parishioners, with 40 friars in the choir area, uniquely a pulpit was positioned so that it would enable the speaker to see and be seen by the entire congregation.

By 1926, enough funds had been raised to begin building the Church and in March of that year, a local businessman, resident of St Bernard's Grange and benefactor to the church, Mr John Melvin, commenced the ground-breaking with students from the friary working hard to clear the area.

The church was to be known as The Church of the Holy Ghost and Mary Immaculate in acknowledgement to the Pious Union of the Holy Ghost, established at Olton Friary.



The Foundation Stone

FIRST FRANCISCAN CHURCH IN BIRMINGHAM.



The foundation stone is located on the far left of the church, past the lady chapel.



The Archbishop of Birmingham, yesterday, laid and blessed with solemn ritual the first stone of a new church in the grounds of the Franciscan Monastery, at Olton. This will be the first Franciscan Church in the Birmingham Archdiocese. The procession is seen arriving for the ceremony.

OLTON MONASTERY CHURCH.

FOUNDATION-STONE LAYING BY ARCHBISHOP OF BIRMINGHAM.

In the presence of a large gathering, the first stone of the new church at the Franciscan Monastery at Olton, was blessed and laid yesterday afternoon by the Archbishop of Birmingham (Dr. McIntyre). The new building will provide accommodation for a congregation of 400, and will cost £25,000, towards which £8,000 has already been subscribed.

The service, which was invested with all the symbolic ritualism of the Roman Catholic Church, was of an impressive character, and to the ceremony was attached a special significance inasmuch as the building will be the first Franciscan church to be erected in the arch-diocese of Birmingham. Among those present, besides the Archbishop of Birmingham, were the Archbishop of Simla (who was at one time resident at the Olton Monastery as Professor of Philosophy), the Father Superior, the Rev. V. R. Edmund, superiors of the various Monasteries in England. Priors of the Olton Monastery, and a large number of the clergy of the diocese. The first stone was a solid block of Portland stone weighing three-quarters of a ton, beneath which was a cavity in which were deposited records of the foundation of the building, coins of the realm, pious medals, and copies of newspapers.

The Archbishop was presented with a silver trowel, with which he made the sign of the Cross upon each side of the stone, and then gave the blessing in the following words: "In fide Jesu Christi collocamus lapidem istum primum in hoc fundamentum. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti." The service concluded with an address by the Rev. Father Paul, who described the sacred uses to which the new building would be put.

When the Roman Catholic hierarchy was re-established in this country in 1850, said Father Paul, there were rather more than 400 public churches or chapels in the whole of England and Wales, and these were served by fewer than 500 priests. To-day, there were 2,063 churches and 4,096 priests, 1,452 of whom belonged to various religious orders. Thus the churches had increased fivefold and the priests eightfold. That day they were the witnesses of the beginning of yet another Roman Catholic church. For many years the Roman Catholics of Olton had been worshipping in a temporary place, and now the time had ripened for the building of a more spacious church. The new building would be dedicated to the Blessed Mother of God under the title of Her Immaculate Conception. It would contain six altars. The High Altar, at which the Blessed Sacrament would always be reserved, would be the shrine of the Holy Ghost and the central shrine of the wide-world Pious Union of the Holy Ghost established in that monastery. The Lady Chapel would stand apart from the body of the church, and to the right of the High Altar would be the friars' choir, where all the divine office would be recited daily. On either side of the nave would be two chapels and the four altars in these would be dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Our Lord, the Holy Souls in Purgatory, St. Francis and the Franciscan Saints, and St. Teresa of the Infant Jesus. The building of the church would entail a great expense, and he appealed to the generosity of the Roman Catholic community for assistance towards clearing the debt.

A place to rest



Postcard of Olton Monastery Cemetery c1905

The Cemetery

The cemetery pre-dates the church, land was allocated for this purpose as soon as the Franciscans moved to Olton and was consecrated on the 7th July 1890 by the then Bishop Illsley. The first burial took place that same year, with the burial of a baby, Dorothy Gibbons, aged just 4 months. The first burial from the Franciscan order was of William Brennan - Br Austin - taking place in 1893 - aged 28 years.

It's estimated there are 4000 burials and cremations here, however, records from the 1890s aren't always clear, in the early years some grave plots were dug 5 deep and over time grave plots were allocated without following any formal plan, which makes knowing exact numbers difficult.

The Brothers, Priests and Reverend Fathers - from the Franciscan order and from the wider area of Birmingham, were buried along the hedge closest to the church. A number of nuns from the area are at the far back of the graveyard. Along the right side hedges near the roadside are the common graves and there are also 20 Commonwealth War Graves within the cemetery.

A number of well-known persons from the Catholic community are buried at Olton Friary as for many years, there were a limited number of Catholic burial sites in the area.

The Melvin family - John Melvin, local business man originally from Cloonawoola in County Mayo lived at St Bernard's Grange, he was a great donor to the Church and friend of the Franciscans, he cut the first sod when the church was being built and presented the Archbishop with a silver trowel. His wife and children are also buried at Olton, notably his son Sir Martin Melvin Baronet - owner of the The Universe newspaper. Upon the opening of the Church 10,000 copies of the Universes were specially printed and distributed.



Melvin family memorial in 2026

Sir Martin Melvin was made Baronet, of Olton in the County of Warwick in the 1930s for his political and public services in Birmingham, a title which is no longer in use as the baronetcy ended when Sir Martin passed away in 1952. Another recognition of his works came from Pope Benedict XV in 1920 receiving Papal honours for his dedication to servicemen, in particular Catholic soldiers and sailors during WW1, he was awarded the Knight Commander of the Grand Cross of the Order St Gregory and in 1938 he was invited to act as gentleman-in-waiting to the then Pope Pius XI when Neville Chamberlain visited Rome.

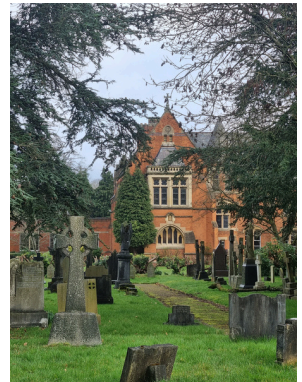
A more recent local buried at Olton was Kate Kelly, the well known flower lady from the bullring markets - Kate travelled regularly to the Friary for mass, her family had been working in Birmingham for several generations, it is believed her family had been selling flowers in the bullring for over 150 years. It was once stated that the Kelly family were related to the 'Peaky Blinders' and one maybe buried here at Olton - this has yet to be confirmed!

Another notable figure is one of the UK's top female motorcyclists, Louie M^oLean. At just 15 years old, Louie worked at her father's motorcycle shop in Birmingham as both a mechanic and bike rider, she entered into a number of trial competitions riding Scott motorcycles, James Cycle Bikes and BSAs. Louie had a promising career in a male-dominated sport, however she sadly passed away aged just 33 following the birth of her second daughter.

Of course there are a large number of friars, brothers and priests from other parishes as well as nuns within the cemetery, and many souls of the faithfully departed who each had their own connections to the parish.



Cemetery c1905 - Photo: Solihull Library



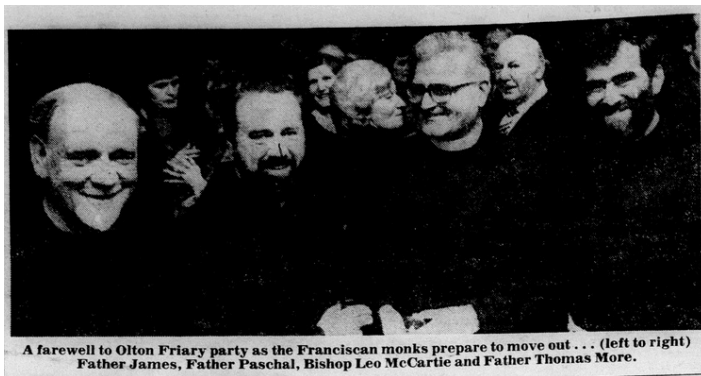
Cemetery 2026

A change of habit

In January 1981 the Capuchin Franciscans left Olton and the Sacred Heart of Bethraam took over occupancy of the friary and parish. Many parishioners were very saddened to see the Franciscans leave, the long established bond between the order and Catholic community meant it was hard to envisage Olton Friary without the Friars, the Franciscan's felt the same as Fr Michael wrote in his last newsletter:

There is 'a true, deep, spiritual family relationship in Christ which we friars have shared with you, generation after generation, here at Olton....where He is present love cannot be absent. But happy the Parish where this love is never taken for granted but is consciously and gratefully accepted, willingly and generously responded to. My hope and prayer is that the Olton Friary congregation will never lose this special quality which marks it, but that it will continue to grow and increase. We will never fail to remember you in our prayers and to thank God for you.'

With this acknowledgement of thanks and appreciation of the time spent in Olton, a fond farewell was wished on both sides.



Birmingham Mail - 10th January 1981

The first SCJ Parish Priest at Olton - Fr Ted Simpson, who had been called to leave Droitwich after 12 years as Parish Priest, expressed similar feelings in his first Parish Newsletter:

'Looking at the tears of those I am leaving behind in Droitwich, I can fully understand your feelings as you bid adieu to those you have come to love and respect over the years. Everything I see about the parish shows the vast amount of love and work that the Franciscans have put into their stay here, but the needs of the times change. Vocations are in short supply and so the authorities have found it necessary to decree.

It was as much as a shock to us as to you when the Archbishop told us about the Friars leaving and asked us to move our student house here and to take charge of the parish, but as it is God's will, I know we will all work together in His work here in Olton.'

Sacred Heart Fathers and Brothers



Eight fathers of the Sacred Heart of Betharram moved into Olton friary at the beginning of 1981, with Father Terry Sheridan as Olton's new superior and Father Ted Simpson, Parish Priest.

The move from Droitwich did not mean the closure of the church, but just enabled the the Sacred Heart to make Olton Friary their new house of study.

The original church at Droitwich was built in 1909, but the Church as it is known today - the Sacred Heart and St. Catherine of Alexandria was built after the first world war, donated by a Mr Walter Loveridge Hodgkinson, who long desired to build a church as a thanksgiving offering to Almighty God. The first mass was celebrated in November 1921. Since the closure of the College, the Sacred Heart Fathers extended their missionary work in Thailand and India and continue to serve parishes in Droitwich, Olton, Birmingham, Nottingham as well as Whitnash near Leamington Spa, Leigh in Lancashire and Guernsey.



Since 1981 there have been 3 parish priests - Fr Ted, Fr Wilfred and Fr Bijou

With over 40 years of devotion to Olton Friary, the SCJ have made their own mark on the church and parish life in Olton and with it brought joy and comfort to parishioners and the wider community alike.

The Frairy building and Church pay homage to the past works of those who came before, whether in the physical carvings and devotionals to St Francis and the saints, the many parish groups and worldwide devotionals created, developed and shared with others to the stories held within the walls of the past seminary in teaching and guiding those in faith, a community has always been present in some capacity here in Olton for over 130 years.

The centenary of the foundation stone marks the beginning of centenary celebrations towards the church's official opening in 2029.

Your donations matter

The Friary and the Church, both have their own unique needs and require regular maintenance and repairs in order to preserve both the building and its fittings.

We are currently raising funds for the refurbishment of our parish hall - the parishes main source of income. If you would like to make a donation, you can pay by card via our card machine in the narthex, cash into one of our collection boxes, or contact the parish office to set up a bank transfer or direct debit - **don't forget to state where you would like your donation to go** - Hall Refurbishment to go towards our current fundraising target or please specify if donating elsewhere.

Can you gift aid? Please contact the Parish Office to arrange gift aiding your donation.

A message from Fr Biju,

As we celebrate the centenary of the laying of the foundation stone of Olton Friary, the Church of the Holy Ghost and Mary Immaculate, our hearts are filled with gratitude and joy. This special moment is not only a remembrance of the past, but a living witness to the faith and dedication of all who have been part of this community.

I extend my sincere thanks to all our parishioners, volunteers, friends and Sacred Heart Community whose support and prayers have made this celebration truly meaningful. Your faith continues to keep the spirit of the Friary alive.

A special word of appreciation goes to Sarah Welsh for her devoted work in preparing the history of the Friary and Church. May it inspire all who read it to hope, to dream, and to trust in God's grace.

As we rejoice in this Easter season, may the Risen Lord bless you all and guide us forward in faith and unity.

Fr Biju Antony SCJ, Parish Priest and Superior