

ADELPHI HOUSE CONVENT F.C.J. THE SCHOOL BY THE IRWELL 1852 – 1981

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Dedicated by the F.C.J. SISTERS to their many friends with love and gratitude and asking God's continued blessings for each one.

LOOKING BACK

During the two hundred years immediately preceding the industrial changes of the nineteenth century, the Catholics of Salford, although fairly numerous for those times, were widely scattered. Throughout the eighteenth century a limited but steady flow of Irish immigrants had been swelling their numbers almost unnoticed. As there was no Catholic church in the town, the faithful met in small groups, to avoid attracting attention.

View from the banks of the Irwell



As early as 1828, however, a Sunday school had been opened in Union Street; then, immediately after the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, two more appeared, to be followed ten years later by yet two others. It was not until 1843 that Mass was to be offered publicly in Salford, the first since the Reformation. The celebration took place in a small school-chapel on the site of the present sanctuary of St. John's Cathedral. This school was demolished a few years later and transferred to new buildings in Upper Cleminson Street; the church of St. John was then built, and opened in 1848. At that time the parish of St. John

included the whole of Salford, Pendleton and Lower Broughton, so the school served a very large area. The church became a Cathedral in 1851, and Bishop Turner, the first Bishop of the newly erected diocese of Salford, was consecrated in the following year.

It may be appropriate here to recall a few facts about the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, whose Sisters arrived in Salford in 1852, to serve in St. John's School. The Society had been founded in Amiens in 1820, by a young widow, Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy de Bonnault d'Houet. Her aim was to reach out to the spiritually and materially deprived by means of education (using the word in its widest sense) and by giving them and others the opportunity of making Retreats. Her Sisters first came to England in 1830, settling in London near to what is now Euston Station. In 1852 Canon Wilding of St. John's, Salford, having heard of their work in both London and Liverpool, invited them to take over his girls' school, from which the Presentation Sisters had regretfully withdrawn a few months earlier. (They had succeeded the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, when these latter had been recalled to France.)

The Original house



EARLY DAYS

"Salford" - "The Ford with the Willows" - How the name belied the reality when the F.C.J. Sisters first set foot on its streets in October 1852! It is true that "Top Salford", typified by the gracious houses on the Crescent, retained much of its Georgian spaciousness and grandeur. All around, however, "the populous and beautiful town giving its name to the Hundred", referred to in a document of 1728, had been transformed into a maze of narrow alleys with closely-packed streets of small dingy houses, without gardens and lacking proper sanitation. The "Coronation Street" of television fame is handsome by comparison with some of the "Courts" erected to house the numerous labourers required by the mushrooming heavy industries of the early nineteenth century. As the potato famine in Ireland of 1846-1847 forced many Irish Catholics to seek refuge and work in England, so the Catholic population increased rapidly.

The nuns, immediately on their arrival, took up residence in the small house which had already been used as a convent, and which adjoined St. John's Elementary School, where they were to teach. They also opened a "Middle School" where pupils were taught for a modest fee. This latter work expanded quickly, so plans were made to procure larger premises.

Adelphi House, No. 10 Adelphi Terrace, a fine old Georgian mansion, was purchased on the last day of December 1852 from the Leeming family, loyal and generous Catholics and great benefactors of Salford Cathedral. The land on which the house stood, together with the stretch alongside the River Irwell, was leased from the Earl of Derby.

Early in 1853, the Sisters took up residence in Adelphi, bringing with them the pupils of the Middle School who formed the nucleus of the Day School which soon prospered. Some of the pupils came from the nearby houses on Adelphi Terrace, while a number of them were the daughters of doctors who practised in the nearby Salford and Pendleton Dispensary (later known as the Salford Royal Hospital). Side by side with the Day School the nuns opened a boarding school, and for many years the two functioned happily under the same roof.

In 1855 Madame d'Houet herself came to stay at Adelphi for a short time. When she attended Mass at the nearby Cathedral, she would always use the side entrance, known by many of the parishioners as 'the door of the poor'.



Basket ball at Adelphi date ?

Meantime, the scope of work in the elementary schools broadened until the Adelphi Sisters were teaching not only in Saint John's, but in Saint James', Saint Peter's, Mount Carmel, Saint Charles' (later Saint Sebastian's) Saint Boniface's, Saint Ann's, Adelphi, Saint Anne's, Stretford and (later) Saint Joseph's. They taught in the schools during the day, and also held night schools, organized Sunday schools, and involved themselves fully in ever-widening parish apostolates.

Bishop Turner wrote: "If anyone wishes to see for himself the reality of the work done by the F.C.J.s, let him visit the parishes of Salford and he will find Christian education carried on with

energy and activity. He will see night schools frequented by hundreds of young women, day schools with thousands of children, Sunday schools for adults, sodalities of Our Lady, and classes for the waifs and strays of this great town. All these works are in a flourishing condition among Protestant surroundings, where difficulties abound."

In 1885, Bishop Vaughan asked the Sisters to undertake the education and training of Pupil teachers for Catholic Elementary school children. Then Adelphi House became the site of three establishments, a boarding school, a day school and a Pupil teachers' centre.

At the opening of the century, there were eighty-four Pupil teachers in training. Examinations of the Oxford and Cambridge Universities and the College of Preceptors, were undertaken with astonishingly good results. Music, too, reached a high level and more than a few girls gained their L.R.A.M. status while under the Sisters' tuition at school. In the convent kitchen, a large spacious place, Domestic Science lectures were given and the girls obtained certificates for Cookery from the University of Aberdeen.

Enthusiasm for learning was great in those stern days. Girls are said to have risen at 4.30 a.m. to study in preparation for the day's work in school, and they assisted at Mass in the convent chapel at 6.30 a.m. The mistress of the pupil teachers was Mother Berchmans Conway, a valiant practical woman, while Mother Mary John Greene recalled giving lessons to the Pupil teachers before setting out for her day's work in St. John's School.

As numbers increased in Adelphi House, further accommodation was required and so, by 1902, all the other houses on Adelphi Terrace had been purchased and an additional storey was added to the original No.10. Even in those early days His Majesty's Inspectors were frequent visitors, and they demanded a science laboratory, a demonstration room and more classrooms. The erection of these on Adelphi Street and of a gymnasium on the lower terrace by the river, raised the debt to the alarming figure of £6,000.

Then, in 1902, a great Golden Jubilee Bazaar was held in Salford Town Hall. Many distinguished persons offered their patronage, while appreciative parents and very many friends, Catholic and non-Catholic, contributed to its success. All realized that the work being carried on at Adelphi was for the benefit of the public at large, and so extraordinary efforts were made to pay off the debt on the school. A contemporary issue of 'The Salford Chronicle' reported extracts from the speeches made on the opening day, and preceded to quote from the 'Bazaar Handbook' a passage outlining the origins of the Society of the Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus, concluding thus; "Their spirit is one of self-sacrifice, obedience and great charity, and the aim of its members is to reproduce, as far as possible, in their own lives, the life of the Holy Women who so closely followed Our Saviour. Thus, the work of the Institute includes not only the education of girls of all classes but, wherever necessary, the care of orphanages, visiting the poor, etc."

The article continues with an extract from the opening speech on the second day - an address given by Mr.T.Stuttard J.P. who found that the work done in Adelphi House was such that seventy five per cent of the three hundred pupils presented for the different Government and University examinations had obtained first class certificates. He said that the feature which marked the work of the Roman Catholic community and one which was worthy to be copied, was their determination to uphold Religious Education. Canon Corbishley in replying, claimed that it would be difficult to find a finer body of pupil teachers than had been turned out at Adelphi House.

By 1902, between three and four hundred Pupil-teachers had been trained at Adelphi, but the system was gradually giving way to that of training Student-teachers, who were drawn mainly from the Secondary School. In 1903 Canon Richardson requested that the Sisters should open a Catholic Teachers' Training College in Adelphi, and here we quote from the recollections of Rose Killen, written in the Sedgley College Magazine of 1954.

"Who but splendid, courageous Mother Josephine Daly would have dared to embark, at the end of the summer holidays, when all intending college students had been placed, on such a venture as the opening of a new College with but three 'Corner Stones' as she styled Nellie, Katy and me? What a welcome awaited us when 'The Three Daughters of the United Kingdom' arrived! Surely no students ever had such a training as ours was."

These first three students were followed, in 1904, by forty-two others and, as the numbers in the school were growing, it became imperative for the Training College to seek a home of its own. In 1905 it was transferred to Sedgley Park, Prestwich, where it flourished until 1979. The building now serves as a Police Training School.

Meanwhile, in Adelphi House, the boarding and day schools were merged and the "Free-Place" system introduced. In 1904 the school received recognition from the Board of Education as "efficient and grant-earning". Before the end of the year it was recognized for an Advanced Course in Arts which merited a yearly grant of £400.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

After the transfer of the Training College, the number of pupils at Adelphi continued to increase and, as secular graduate teachers were drawn on to the staff, the combination of lay and religious teachers proved to be a happy one. The school was prospering when the outbreak of war in 1914 very soon made its impact felt. Large numbers of wounded soldiers, Belgians at first, were brought to Salford Royal Hospital, and nuns and children set about preparing small comforts for them. Later some of the wounded were actually parishioners of St. John's, for over four hundred young men of the parish had joined the Forces. Mass was said for them every Sunday either in the wards or in the Convent. There is mention in Adelphi's Annals for 1914, of a concert given on the 8th December, which was attended by the Bishop of Amiens, the Belgian Consul and a Belgian chaplain, who was carried over from the hospital. The proceeds of the entertainment helped to provide funds for the relief of the wounded.

As the war drew to a close, the number of permanently disabled men, many still young, continued to increase in Salford, and many a widowed mother struggled to rear a family alone. There was much unemployment, and in 1920 the town was facing more than a decade of struggle towards recovery. It was just at this time, that the houses on the Terrace began to show signs of decay. There was question of moving the school outside the district. Negotiations for the sale of Adelphi were underway, but the final decision, urged strongly by Canon Sharrock of the Cathedral, was that the community of Sisters must stay in Salford. Plans for the demolition of all the houses except No. 10, were made, but they materialized only slowly. The number of boarders was progressively reduced, and within a few years, the boarding school was closed altogether.

The report of His Majesty's Inspectors in 1922 mentions the number of pupils as follows: Boarders fifty seven, their annual fees being £35, Day Scholars two hundred and forty-two, their fees being £5. The headmistress was Miss M.M. Coppinger (Mother Mary Gerard) and the report refers to her as being "young, enthusiastic, fully qualified . . . whose ability is distinctly above the average". It concludes with congratulations to the Governors and Headmistress on the improvement in the general efficiency of the school "which undoubtedly exercises a very great influence for good on the lives and characters of its pupils, and in so doing is carrying on work of great social value to the neighbourhood".

During the 1920s, the scope of studies was broadened and the number of girls working towards the Higher School Certificate in the Sixth Form, slowly increased. But Adelphi remained very much a Catholic Convent School as regards its tone and its aims. Devotion to the Blessed Sacrament was encouraged and the Chapel was always open to the pupils. The Feast of the Sacred Heart and that of Our Lady's Immaculate Conception were always celebrated with special honour as in all F . C . J . houses, while regular lessons in Religious Knowledge, and annual retreats, ensured a strong Christian foundation for the girls' future. Several of the pupils received the grace of a religious vocation during their years at Adelphi and some, as Faithful Companions of Jesus, retained and still treasure deep gratitude towards their Alma Mater.

By 1929, the boarding school having been closed, the nuns moved to Monton House, Eccles, which was destined to become the preparatory school for Adelphi House.

MORE RECENT TIMES

Preparatory to the demolition of the houses on Adelphi Terrace in 1932, teaching space in the Grammar School became ever more severely limited, and all welcomed the prospect of a spacious modern building soon to be completed. The first sign that the work had begun in earnest was the sound of the hammer on the 2nd February 1932. In more ways than one 1932 was destined to be an eventful year, for during its course, the little convent at Marple Bridge, which had served as a country house for Adelphi since 1900, had to be closed to the great regret of the nuns. They and small bands of boarders had spent many happy holidays there, and a little day school had flourished. Many past pupils of Adelphi and of the nearby Salford schools where the nuns taught, will remember the annual outings, anticipated with such eagerness and excitement. On these occasions the little community at Marple would prepare a tasty picnic meal to be taken, sometimes on the lawn, occasionally in the laundry which was the only room large enough to house the chattering throng. Recollections of these happy gatherings and of the delightful walks along the banks of the Goyt or up the surrounding hills, now remain as childhood miniatures in the memory of many Adelphi-ites of the 1920s and early 1930s.

Meantime, work had proceeded apace on the banks of the Irwell. By the summer of 1933, "one of the most modern and up-to-date schools in the north of England was completed". (Quoted from 'The Salford Reporter') The new wing faced the river and dominated the view, both from The Crescent and across Peel Park. A covered playground replaced the "Caves" which generations of girls had traversed on their way to class, with heads bent to avoid the low arches. Within, a very large hall awaited the opening Assembly of the autumn term, and abundant class-room space delighted the hearts of the Staff. The girls returned in September in even greater numbers, but gone were the familiar blue blouses, characteristic of Adelphi's uniform for so long. The more serviceable fawn colour represented one more change imposed by the march of time.

Preparations began immediately for the official opening of the new wing by Bishop Thomas Henshaw on the 8th October. The guests included many clergy, the Mayor, Members of the Education Committee and numerous friends of the school, all of whom had gathered to witness the solemn ceremony.

A few months later, the nuns returned from Monton House to their old home in No 10. Adelphi Preparatory School was merged with the small school which had prospered at Monton since 1928, and which was now recognized as being part of Adelphi for official purposes. Meanwhile, the Parents' Association and the Past Pupils made determined efforts to help to reduce the debt of £30,000 on the new buildings.

The next few years were happy if anxious ones witnessing, as they did, cherished traditions continuing side by side with innovations consequent upon considerable expansion. Years later, Mrs. Turner (known to Adelphi-ites of the 1930s as Florence Sinnot) wrote in 'The Salford Reporter':

"I could go on for ever recalling people, especially the nuns, under whose influence we were taught courtesy, politeness and selflessness, and who helped many of us to see life in its true perspective. Dear old Adelphi House! Like hundreds of girls who were privileged to pass through your doors and benefit from your fine traditions, I will always remember you with love and nostalgia for a way of life that is now rapidly fading into oblivion. Within your walls we obtained a matchless education and a capacity for leading a fuller and rewarding life, in which materialism played no part."

Her memories are matched by those of many who passed through the school which stood "like a gracious swan on the banks of the Irwell", and which (according to another past pupil, Agnes Hopkins) "did more than teach scholarship subjects. It taught girls to be courteous and to care for others and to look back with affection on those nuns who may have seemed severe then, but who had our well-being at heart".

"I will never be able to pass that beautiful house standing on the Crescent" comments Florence, "without conjuring up a mental picture of those small navy blue clad girls, satchels on backs, taking their first tremendous steps into a school career that was to influence, and in many instances decide and shape, the whole of their future lives".

Before many years had passed, education was rudely interrupted for all by the outbreak of war in 1939. Pupils and teachers were evacuated to Accrington, where the nuns received unforgettable hospitality from the Sisters of Mercy. Very soon, however, the children began to return home and by January 1940 nearly all were back in the school which was functioning again in Adelphi. But the Christmas holidays had only just begun when at eight o'clock on the night of the 23rd December, the blast of a land mine which fell on the opposite side of The Crescent, damaged both the convent and school severely, rendering them uninhabitable. The community took refuge in Sedgley Park College where they remained for twenty-seven years, travelling in daily to Adelphi and the nearby schools. The convent, partially restored, was used for three years as a Nurses' Home, by those serving in Salford Royal Hospital.

When the ravages and noise of war ceased, Adelphi raised its head once more. The whole fabric was reconditioned and the work of the school received fresh impetus. Soon after the passing of the 1944 Education Act, Adelphi House was confirmed in its status as a Direct Grant Grammar School, the Governors having decided that the undoubted advantages of receiving Aided Status were out-weighed by the loss of certain freedoms which such acceptance would entail.

A landmark of another kind in the history of the school was the death of Mother Magdalen about this time. She had been portress at Adelphi for forty years, and many will remember with gratitude her re-assuring welcome to the "new girls" as she admitted them with a smile through the narrow door on Adelphi Street. Others will recall her quiet, humble presence in the tiny, dark parlour nearby, or her gentle counsel as she looked up from her mending to calm some troubled youngster. She spent the whole of her long life doing good in an unostentatious way, not only to the pupils but to countless souls in many walks of life. How she would have loved to see the restoration of the blitzed Chapel - a task not undertaken until four years after her death! May her prayerful soul rest in peace.

Regretfully, as the years passed, the Sisters were withdrawn from most of the Salford schools, but they continued to serve in their "first love" St. John's and in St. James'. The former was later amalgamated with St. Peter's, and in 1970 it had the joyful experience of witnessing the First Profession ceremony of one of its former pupils. It was a truly memorable occasion, being the first such celebration ever to be held in Salford Cathedral. Carol's family and friends were afterwards welcomed at Adelphi where many F.C.Js had gathered to share her joy.

Meanwhile, work at Adelphi proceeded steadily throughout the 1950s, the routine being punctuated by the traditional welcome interludes - the Shrove-tide dances, the Exhibition of Art and Needlework and organized visits at home and abroad. Although the arranging of out-of-school events had always presented problems, in view of the fact that so many of the girls lived at a distance, activities within the school had flourished from the earliest days. Musical and dramatic productions were undertaken each year and gradually numerous clubs were formed. The French Circle, The Scientific Film Group, the Geographical Society, a pre-Young Christian Workers Group and a Debating Society were all active at various times. By these means, and through the Association of Past Pupils a strong corporate life flourished. The girls were said to be "well-mannered, friendly and enjoying a discipline which was orderly but not repressive". A spirit of close co-operation between Mother Anna (the headmistress), the staff and the pupils, ensured a happy atmosphere and the school obviously met a real need. Judging from the varied and successful after school careers taken up by the girls, one must conclude that Adelphi offered a really sound education. Universities and Training Colleges claimed an increasing number of past pupils. Many others took up careers in the hospital, as nurses, radiologists or physiotherapists, while librarianship claimed several able girls who felt little attraction for teaching or nursing.

Towards the end of the 1960s, a party of ten F.C.J. Sisters returned from Sedgley to take up residence once more in Adelphi House. They immediately began the erection of Maryhall, a pre-fabricated building on the front lawn, to ease what had become a very crowded situation. In 1970, the covered play-ground was enlarged to provide yet more space, for the influx of sixth-formers from other schools had put considerable pressure on Adelphi's limited accommodation. Problems were to be further solved in 1969, by the addition of a fourth storey to the main school building. In that same year celebrations were held in many countries, including England, to mark an important stage in the beatification process of the Society's Foundress. Her cause for Canonization as a Saint had been opened in 1916 when she had been pronounced 'Venerable'. Bishop Burke, Auxiliary Bishop in Salford, led a small party of nuns and girls from Adelphi who, together with friends of the school, travelled by an early train to Euston, and thence to St. Aloysius' Convent F.C.J. nearby, to join similar parties from Scotland and various parts of England, all of whom celebrated Holy Mass in the parish church in Thanksgiving for the gifts bestowed on and through the Venerable Marie Madeleine Victoire.

Increasingly, in recent years, the Sisters have become aware that the needs of the Church call for a sharing of their spiritual riches. Their convent has been available during many years for various apostolic activities, including, F.C.J. gatherings, days of recollection for prayer groups, meetings of Catholic teachers, the Guild of Our Lady of Ransom, The Catholic Women's League and various other groups. There have been lectures on Scripture and Catechetics, and ecumenical ventures, when the school was at the disposal of groups from local Churches. The Adelphi Community feels that it has had much to offer towards the building up of inter-church friendship. It has links with the Chapel Street Group of Churches, and hosts an inter-denominational Scripture group. On numerous occasions, the Sisters of the community have shared their liturgy with all comers, notably at Christmas, Candlemas, Lent, Easter and Pentecost.

Older F.C.J.s meanwhile have carried on a hidden apostolate amongst the old, the sick and the lonely, visiting them in Salford Royal Hospital and in the local flats, or inviting them to the convent for an afternoon chat and a cup of tea. **The 'Gentlemen of the Road' are served daily by Sister Margaret Mary, who bestows on them that same smiling, gentle concern which many Adelphi-ites will remember from fifty years ago.**

These many services to the Church and others, which call not only for the availability of the convent premises but also for time required for contact and counselling, are continuing among the Sisters to the present day, despite the major educational changes of the 1977 re-organization. It has always been the policy of the F.C.J. Society to co-operate with the local Church in whatever educational plans might be put into effect. Accordingly, when Comprehensive Education for all Catholic children in Salford was introduced in 1977, Adelphi House School ceased to exist, as it merged with the Sacred Heart School to form the new Cathedral High School. On the 4th July, 1977, a Mass of Thanksgiving was celebrated, acknowledging the innumerable blessings bestowed on Adelphi's apostolate during one-hundred and twenty-five eventful years.

The F.C.J. community has continued to live at Adelphi, and the school building has been used as a part of the Cathedral High School. Extensions on the second site and the falling roll of the school, however have now rendered the use of the Adelphi building unnecessary. Let us hope that as in the past Adelphi has stood as a symbol of Catholic education, so its inspiration will live on in the hearts of the people of Salford.

At 7.30 In the evening, on the 26th June 1981, Bishop Holland will offer Holy Mass to thank God for all the gifts to the Community F.C.J. and to the school, from 1852 to the present day. The celebration will take place in the presence of Adelphi staff, the pupils of many generations, the community with their Sisters F.C.J. from other convents, and some of those many friends who have been linked to Adelphi by ties of mutual help, gratitude and affection. Although the buildings will serve other purposes, it is hoped that the traditions and the apostolates which have issued from "The Darling Spot" (to use Mother Gerard's favourite mode of reference) may long continue. May Adelphi's spirit of concern for others, of hard work, of loyalty and joyful Christian witness, endure, and bear fruit 'AD MULTOS ANNOS'•.

Written in 1981