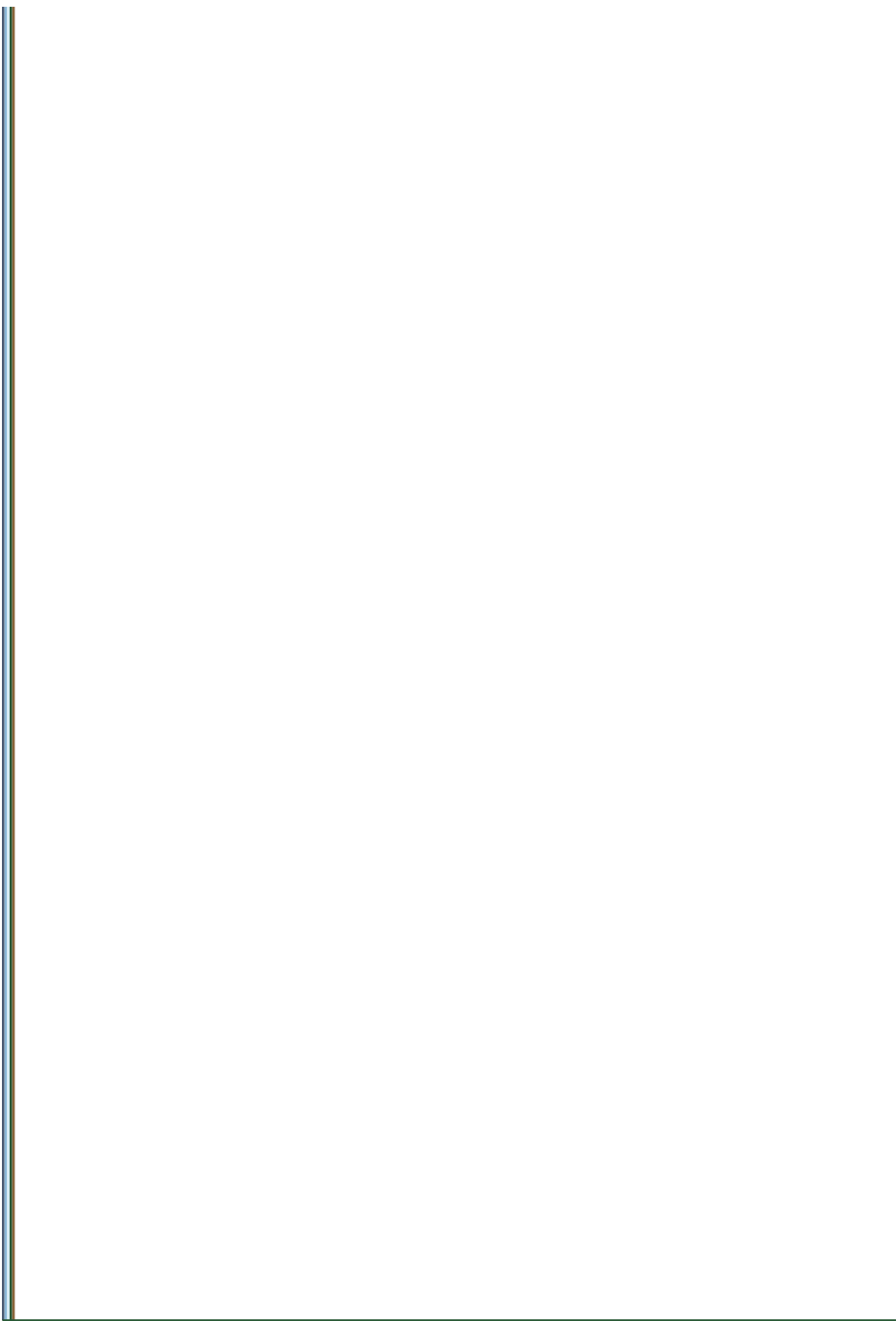




The Faithful Companions of Jesus
Thanet, Kent, England
1900-2012



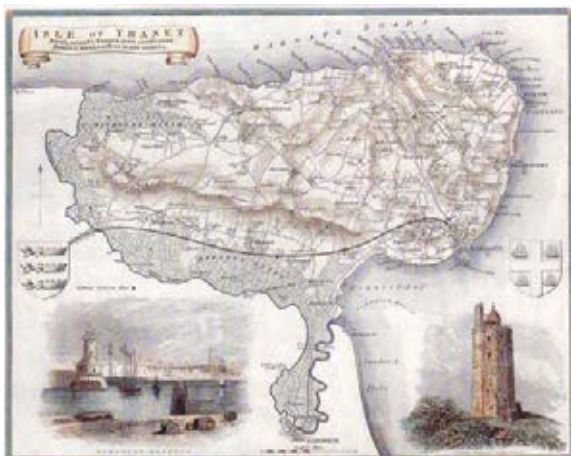
The Faithful Companions of Jesus

Thanet, Kent, England

1900 - 2012

By Teresa White FCJ

Based on research and notes
by Miriam Maher FCJ



Old map: Isle of Thanet



Modern map of Thanet



Pierremont Hall

A Foothold in Kent

At the end of the nineteenth century, the FCJ communities of the two London houses in Poplar and Somers Town, then crowded, insalubrious districts, felt the need to rent a house in a healthy location where Sisters and pupils could enjoy some time of relaxation during the school holidays, especially in the summer months. In the 1890s, they rented accommodation in Westcliff, near Southend-on-Sea in Essex, but in subsequent years they showed a preference for the Kent coast. The Annals of 1900 and 1901 describe summer holidays spent by the Poplar community with groups of their boarders in Ramsgate. During the month of August, they rented *a large and beautiful house which they had the good fortune to obtain at moderate terms*. The house was situated *in a retired spot and at a convenient distance from the Benedictine Church, the beach and a fine park in which the pupils often sat to listen to excellent music*. A few years later, the Somers Town Annals of 1906 note that ... *the end of July and the month of August found us enjoying beautiful air and sea breezes at Broadstairs, North Foreland*. In 1909, they rented Pierremont Hall (which later became Broadstairs Town Hall). By that year, **Thanet** had become the favoured holiday location for both communities.

1912: FCJ Day School in Cliftonville

As the Sisters became more familiar with the area, following requests from local people, they saw that the provision of a school could be of benefit to families living in that part of Kent. The Superior General of the time, Zoé Girod, asked them to look into this matter. Their original idea had been to start a boarding school, but the Bishop of Southwark, Peter Amigo, discouraged this on the grounds that an FCJ boarding school might adversely affect pupil numbers in some of the other Catholic schools along the coast. Since the FCJs had such a good name in the field of education, he said, parents might decide to transfer their children to the new school—a situation which could lead to undesirable consequences for all concerned. Finally, in 1912, having investigated various possibilities, the Society leased two adjacent houses in Cliftonville (near the site of the present Public Library), to be used as a holiday house in the summer months. Here the Sisters

made preparations to open a day school, which they named ***Stella Maris***, and six members of the Somers Town community were sent to staff it. The school was small, and catered for children of both primary and secondary age-groups. On the first day, in early September, the Annals record that there were eleven pupils, who were *nearly all Protestants*. As the school became better known, its reputation spread, and the number of pupils grew rapidly.



Words on the sign:
Stella Maris Convent FCJ
High School for Girls
Preparatory School for little boys

1913: Santa Maria della Strada, Broadstairs

A year later, in 1913, the decision was taken to purchase rather than rent a holiday house for the communities working in the FCJ schools in London and for the children in their care. It was envisaged that when a suitable house was found, it would double as a residence where Sisters could convalesce after illness. Their search ended in May of that year, when the Faithful Companions of



Jesus took possession of a property a few miles from the new school in Cliftonville. Set in extensive grounds beside the North Foreland Lighthouse in Broadstairs, the main house was then known as North Foreland Cottage (or according to some documents, North Foreland Lodge). The FCJs gave it the new name of ***Santa Maria della Strada***. From the beginning, the

North Foreland Lighthouse in the early years

house received many visitors, some recovering from serious illnesses, others needing rest and wishing to benefit from the bracing sea air on this part of the coast. Pupils from the schools in London were brought down in relays to spend part of their summer holidays in Broadstairs, and the property was ideal for them: *The well-laid lawns, the tennis courts and a large field for running games, gave the children ample scope for amusement whilst its proximity to the North Foreland beach offered a special attraction and facility for sea-bathing.* (Annals of Somers Town 1914).

Early Years in Thanet

From the angle of European history, the early years spent by the FCJs on the Isle of Thanet were to prove eventful. They arrived just one year before the start of the Great War and in both 1914 and 1915, the little community at ***Santa Maria della Strada*** (until 1920 the Broadstairs convent was still known by that name) experienced the effects of the heavy bombardment of the south coast of England. The annalist of 1915 describes some of the disturbing things that were happening in the vicinity of Broadstairs in that year: *On the 16th of May there was an air raid at Ramsgate; bombs were dropped and damage was done; a few lives were lost. We were awakened by heavy firing of guns which shook the house.... The Zeppelins passed over North Foreland on their way to London. ... On 31st we were once more called out of our sleep by the firing of heavy guns and every door and window in the house rattled most violently. Our grand expanse of sea is decked with various kinds of battle ships, and we see hundreds of soldiers marching to and fro between Ramsgate and Margate.* In the Somers Town Annals of the same year, 1915, it is interesting to note that a warning system operated between Santa Maria della Strada and Somers Town: *We knew that at our Convent in North Foreland printed instructions had been received as to what was to be done in case of an air raid. The warning was to be given by a Syren [sic], and we therefore arranged that should our mothers hear the alarm there they should at once telephone to us so that we, too, should be on the alert. About midnight on the 6th June the telephone bell rang out with unmistakable clearness. On being answered we were told that the Syren had been sounded and the Zeppelins had been sighted off the Foreland.*

Princess Marie-José of Belgium

Many young refugees were sent from continental Europe to England during the First World War, and some of them came to the Isle of Thanet. One of these was the eight-year-old Belgian princess, Marie-José. The little girl attended the Ursuline Convent boarding school in Brentwood, Essex, but sometimes spent her holidays at **Naldera**, the twenty-room cliff-top mansion on the North Foreland Estate belonging to Lord George Curzon (Viceroy of India, 1899 – 1905). With her governess and temporary guardian, Miss Hammesley, *the little exiled princess came to Mass in Della Strada chapel* (Annals 1915), and was welcomed by the Sisters. It seems that Marie-José returned to England several years after the war had ended, and once again spent some weeks with the Curzons on the North Foreland. One day at the end of June 1922, she arrived at the convent, accompanied by the two daughters of Lord Curzon. The three girls asked permission to go into the nuns' refectory for a few hours – they had a surprise in mind. When the community came in for tea, they found the table beautifully decorated in the colours of the Belgian flag, black, yellow



and red. Choice flowers and exotic fruit from Lord Curzon's green-houses, as well as *numberless dainties*, were laid out on the tables. The Sisters did not hesitate to show their appreciation of these gifts and enjoyed their festive tea to the full.

Princess Marie-José of Belgium

Stella Maris Convent, North Foreland

In the course of 1914, the Cliftonville community, mainly because of the difficulties they were experiencing in attending daily Mass, moved to *Santa Maria della Strada*. They travelled each day to school *driving over to Cliftonville together early every morning in a beautiful closed coach given to us by Her Reverence and returning after school hours in the evening* (Annals of Broadstairs, 1914). When the lease on the two houses in Cliftonville expired in 1920, the

school moved to the North Foreland, and about that time, the ***Santa Maria della Strada*** property was re-named ***Stella Maris***.



Santa Maria della Strada (pre-1920), then *Stella Maris*

When it became clear that more accommodation was needed for the school in its new location, an extension was planned. The foundation stone was laid on 16 June 1920, and a new wing, later known to generations of FCJs as ***Bethany***, was added to the existing building, on the site of what had been the garage. The school opened on the Broadstairs site in September of that year. It cannot have been easy for the sisters teaching in Cliftonville to move their successful school to new premises. When Abbot Bergh (from Ramsgate Abbey) had visited the school in the previous year, 1919, the annalist recalled that he had told the community that *a great*



Bethany, built between 1920 and 1936 to the left of the original house

future awaited the house, and that a *large boarding school would be sure to follow*. The account continues: *Notice had to be sent to parents about the transference of the school. Many pupils wished to follow us to Della Strada, but parents thought the distance too great.* Letters of regret and appreciation poured in. It must have been a difficult transition, but the 1920 Annals simply record in a typically under-stated way: *With feelings of regret we locked the door and said goodbye to our little school ... we lost many of our Cliftonville children.*



Aerial view of the Foreland, pre 1936 (Stella Maris at left)

From about 1929, Mother Philomena Higgins, who had been elected Superior General in 1914, began to use Stella Maris as the administrative headquarters of the Society from May to October, spending the other six months in Longchamp, Brussels. It is probable that Stella Maris School closed about this time, for not long afterwards the house began to be used as the venue for the third year of spiritual formation (tertianship) for Sisters who had spent some years in active ministry and were preparing to make final profession. 1932 was the first year that Stella Maris was used for this purpose, and from then on, groups of tertians replaced one another on a yearly basis. Over the years, to accommodate not only tertians and numerous FCJ visitors, but also, at a later date, postulants and novices, several additional houses on the North Foreland effectively became part of the Stella Maris Convent complex.

Additional Properties

Before the war, in 1937, Maryhurst (on North Foreland Road) was acquired by the Society and The Knoll in 1938. St George's, formerly a preparatory school for boys, was also purchased in 1938. During the war years, when St George's was obliged to close, the little school was used as a novitiate. It re-opened after the war, in 1948, as the preparatory school for Poles Convent School in Hertfordshire, at the same time taking in a small number of local day pupils. St Augustine's, adjacent to St George's, was used as a community residence.



St. George's



Aerial view of the Foreland (c. 1945, showing, from l-r, the original Redriff, St George's, St Augustine's, and Beacon Lodge. In the background at the corner of North Foreland Avenue and Crescent Road is the Knoll. The Grange is just out of the picture to the left.)

By the late 1940s, it was becoming clear that many owners of properties on certain parts of the Kent coast—properties which had been left vacant during the war due to compulsory evacuation—were choosing not to return. As a result, a number of houses and plots of land near Stella Maris were being sold off cheaply. Towards the end of Mother Philomena Higgins' term as Superior General and at the beginning of Mother Catherine Windle's, the Society acquired several of these houses and some of the land surrounding them. Beacon Lodge, which subsequently functioned for many



Maryhurst,
purchased in 1937



Wyncot,
purchased in 1961



Deepdene,
1946-1968, 1979-

years as a novitiate house, was purchased in 1945, and Redriff (originally located on Cliff Road) and Deepdene (on North Foreland Avenue) as well as North Foreland Grange (on Cliff Road) followed in 1946. (Deepdene was sold in 1968 but returned to the ownership of the Society in 1979.) Wyncot (on North Foreland Road) was added at a later date, in 1961. In this way, the number of FCJ properties on the North Foreland increased in the post-war years. For many decades, Stella Maris Convent, supplemented by the accommodation made available by the acquisition of these additional properties, was able to provide houses of formation for postulants, novices and tertians, while at the same time offering hospitality to the many FCJ visitors coming to the Generalate from different parts of the world. In this same time period, the original laundry was extensively damaged by fire sometime in 1950-51 and a new laundry was built in 1955-56.

New Chapels: 1932 and 1936

For a short time, the tertians made their final commitment in a prefabricated chapel which had been erected in 1932 in time for the ceremony of Final Vows on 22 July of that year. This was to become *Nazareth*.



The first Chapel (later the local leader's office)

A much larger chapel, a brick edifice, was built in 1936, in honour of the Golden Jubilee of religious profession of the then Superior General, Mother Philomena Higgins. For several months, while construction work was being carried out on the property, the Sisters living at Stella Maris

were told few details about the building taking shape before their eyes. They drew their own conclusions! Sharing an insight into the spirit of those serious-minded times, the annalist of that year wrote: *The community of Stella Maris did not know what the buildings could mean and true to the discretion demanded by our Holy Rules, they did not express the conjecture which naturally came to mind.* The building work was completed before the end of June, and on Sunday 24 July 1936, Mass was offered for the first time in the new chapel. It was in this chapel that, for many decades afterwards, the profession ceremonies of numerous tertians and novices took place.



Per Ipsum, Cum Ipso et In Ipso (*Through Him, With Him and In Him*)
Engraving above the door to the 1936 Chapel

Meanwhile, the prefabricated building was given the new name of *Nazareth*, and was used for conferences and community gatherings. Many years later, in the 1980s, when Sister Breda O'Farrell was Superior General, Nazareth was transformed into a small FCJ museum, known in the Society as the *Heritage Room*.

FCJ Visitors to Stella Maris

The tertianship took place annually at Stella Maris until the late 1960s, and intermittently after that until the closure of the property in 2012. In addition, especially during the summer months, the large, rambling house, together with the other properties which belonged to the Society on the North Foreland, welcomed FCJs from all over the world. The visitors would make their annual eight-day retreat, usually preached by a Jesuit, and later

for many years, this was followed by a variety of educational programmes in which the Sisters could participate. The Annals of Longchamp for 1936 give a flavour of what was on offer: *The summer brought a great number of ours to Broadstairs not only from our English houses, but also from Ireland, France and Italy. There were also representatives from our houses in the United States, Canada and Australia. Bartrum Gables [a large local house which provided sleeping accommodation for some of the visitors] was again rented and intercourse with Stella Maris was frequent.... There were Religious Education, Plain Chant and Montessori Courses. Italian and French Courses were given by our French and Italian Mothers, who exercised themselves during the day in speaking the language of the country in which they were living.*

World War II on the North Foreland

In August 1939, in anticipation of the beginning of hostilities in continental Europe, the Brussels novitiate was evacuated to Broadstairs. Sixteen novices, together with the novice mistress, Mother Euphrasia Fagan, and her assistant, Mother Margaret Donworth, left Belgium at that time. Ten of the novices sailed with Mother Margaret from Ostend to Dover and then made their way by train to Broadstairs, while Mother Euphrasia followed, after obtaining the necessary visas, with two Irish and four American novices. February 1940 saw the arrival of the first postulants to enter the Society in Broadstairs. By then, most civilians had been evacuated from the area and it would be many years before they returned.

Stella Maris, however, never left empty, was in constant use throughout the war. The ageing Superior General, Mother Philomena Higgins, together with her assistant, Mother Sabina Hayes, lived mainly at Poles, but came to Broadstairs from time to time. However, Mother Catherine Windle, Mother Mary John Conway, and the tertians, novices and postulants remained on the North Foreland until the end of the war. When, in May 1940, British troops were evacuated from Dunkirk, the Sisters saw all kinds of boats, large and small, setting out from the East coast in response to Winston Churchill's plea to help bring the men to safety. After the Fall of France in June of that year, the low drone of enemy planes was heard with ever-increasing frequency over Stella Maris and St George's.



2010 re-enactment of the flotilla of boats approaching Dunkirk

Dangerous Location in Wartime

During the war years, the whole of the North Foreland, because of its location on the south coast of England and its proximity to Dover, was considered highly dangerous. In the light of this, it seems extraordinary that the future of the Society, postulants, novices and tertians as well as two members of the General Council, should have continued to live there throughout the war. Several first-hand accounts of life at Stella Maris during those years (written retrospectively by Sisters in their nineties) make interesting reading. Sister Alice Sheridan, who entered the Society as a postulant in February 1940, has a clear memory of the bitterly cold winters of the war years and the hours spent sitting on wooden kneelers in the Nissen hut. She remembers too the presence of soldiers everywhere and their route marches past Stella Maris, running in the summer heat with heavy packs on their backs and dropping like flies on the road from exhaustion. She adds that when the Stella Maris gardeners, who until the war started had kept the large property in immaculate condition, were called up for military service, they were replaced by novices!

Sister Alice Daly, who was a second-year novice at about the same time, recalls: *Twice a day, we trooped up to Stella Maris for instructions, and twice a week for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The fields behind St George's were covered with rolls of barbed wire and were mined, so we threaded our way through a narrow path. On August 11th 1940, the novices had prepared a concert for Mother Philomena's feast day. As we made our*

way to Stella Maris, carrying our gas masks and identity cards, a dog fight was taking place in the skies above us and we had to take shelter in the bushes by the side of the road. That day a German Spitfire was shot down into the sea in front of St George's.

Sister Elizabeth Philips, a tertian in 1943, gives a graphic description of a day in the life of a tertian: *5.30 a.m. the alarm bell rings in the Catacombs. I sit up on the edge of my bunk bed, put on my shoes and stockings, don my black cloak, roll up my bedclothes, throw them over my shoulder and climb the steep steps which bring me into the light of day outside Nazareth. I go up to the dormitory in Bethany, deposit my bedclothes on a bed, get dressed and arrive in Chapel at 6 a.m. for an hour's meditation before Mass.* Elizabeth also describes the frequent visits to the Nissen hut in the lighthouse field before the Catacombs were completed. When the siren sounded, she wrote, everyone had to drop everything and walk as quickly as possible to the hut. She paints a vivid picture of what greeted them on arrival: *Mother Mary John is already there, knitting industriously while observing the tertians over the top of her glasses. Mother Catherine does not take shelter. She walks up and down the lighthouse field and watches the dog fights in the sky.*

During the war, the British government introduced double summer time. For the tertians and novices, this meant a sixteen-hour day, with two hours of gardening after supper – by any standards, a long day. One novice of those years recalls how they were ... *famished by the time they went to bed, having neither food nor drink between 6.00 p.m. supper and 7.30 a.m. breakfast and, in the meantime, having done strenuous gardening in hot summer weather.*

Although, miraculously, up to 1944, no one had been hurt, there was one casualty that summer. Many years later, Sister Helen Bresnihan shared her memory of what happened: *We got the habit on July 24th 1944 and a couple of nights afterwards a German doodle bug, flying too low as it crossed the Channel, hit the house adjacent to St George's and burnt it to the ground, also causing extensive damage to St George's as we slept soundly in our beds. We were instructed to proceed without delay to Stella Maris.... Meanwhile at Stella Maris there was suppressed panic. From the gardener's house it appeared that the Novitiate was on fire and he went to Stella Maris to tell*

Mother Catherine. A view from her room seemed to confirm this. We were a group of people in our early twenties; her state of mind can be imagined. The only casualty was Sister Breda O' Farrell who had to be taken to hospital to have shrapnel removed from her back. Happily, Sister Breda (who gave the night of 25/26 July as the date of her injury) soon recovered from her ordeal and returned to join the other novices.

The Catacombs

At first, whenever the air raid siren sounded, by day or by night, the Sisters took cover in a Nissen hut on the edge of what was known in the Society as *the lighthouse field*, overlooked as it was by the North Foreland Lighthouse. In September 1940, however, the extraordinary project of building an underground shelter was undertaken, and once this became fully operational, the Nissen hut was rarely needed. The shelter, devised by Mother Catherine Windle, who supervised every aspect of its construction, was immediately dubbed *the Catacombs* by the Sisters. A square was carefully marked out in front of Nazareth, and then the task of excavation started. For this heavy work, which was strictly regulated by Mother Catherine, the first-year novices joined forces with the Brussels novices living at St George's. Only three sisters were allowed to use the pick-axes at a time: they hacked at the chalk for half an hour and were then replaced. These very raw recruits, for most of whom manual labour was a new experience, worked on a daily rota, hollowing out a deep shaft. In the early stages, there were no steps, and those doing the digging had to descend using footholds in the chalk walls of the deepening hole. After the initial work had been done, they dug a second shaft, with a connection to the first, on the other side of Nazareth. A windlass was set up to remove the excavated chalk, which was shovelled into buckets. The buckets were passed by human chain down to the cliff-top, where tertians waited in readiness to dump the chalk over the edge. As a result, a huge mound of chalk, soon universally referred to as *Mont Blanc*, gradually accumulated and became so big that it was visible from the air. This led to a Home Office investigation in 1941, and the mound was removed by the army.

At that point, a detachment of soldiers took over the construction of the FCJ underground shelter, but the back-breaking foundational work had

Catacombs at Stella Maris



Stairs to the Catacombs and bed in the Catacombs

been done by the Sisters. Two rooms were fashioned in the chalk sub-soil, and in each of these, six two-tier bunk beds, made of canvas attached to an iron frame, were placed. Before long, twelve people went down to sleep in the Catacombs each night. It was too damp to leave anything below ground, so each one carried her own bedding up and down the steps.

When the shelter was completed in the summer of 1942, Mother Catherine invited the Commanding Officer of the nearby troops to come and see the result of all the hard work. His comment was: *If my men had done that early work, it would have taken them two years, and a couple of them would have been killed in the process.*

Generalate of the Society

When the war ended, Stella Maris continued to serve as the residence of the Superior General for six months of each year, resuming both its customary administrative tasks and its role as a place of spiritual formation for the Sisters.

Although the large, rambling house beside the North Foreland Lighthouse officially became the sole Generalate of the Society only in 1961 – a function it had shared with Brussels since 1929 – by 1948, it was already beginning to assume many of the features of the *Mother House* as envisaged by Marie Madeleine, who, in 1848, had named Paris for this role.

Stella Maris however was never formally designated as the Mother House; nevertheless, from the post-war years onwards, it increasingly took responsibility for nurturing the spirit of the Society, cherishing the traditions, housing many archival documents and offering a place where FCJs from different parts of the world could make a retreat or enjoy some time of recuperation, rest, and renewal.

Above all, Stella Maris became the principal centre of formation for the Society and over many years, carefully structured periods of spiritual training for tertians, novices and postulants took place there. The Superior General and members of her Council supervised the tertians, while an appointed novice mistress and her assistant were responsible for the novices and postulants.

The longest-serving of all the formation directors on the Broadstairs site was Mère Marie Hélène Laverrie, who was novice mistress from 1946 to 1968. More than two hundred postulants entered the Society in the course of those years, and one hundred and ninety-one of them became novices.

1953: the North Sea Flood

During the 1950s, the whole country was recovering its strength and re-adapting to living in peace time after the upheaval of the war years, and the communities of the North Foreland recorded little of note during that decade. In 1953, however, the annalist described a violent rainstorm which battered the area on the night of 31 January/1 February. The Sisters later heard that the storm had caused surging tides to break through sea defences all along the east coast of Britain, resulting in widespread

flooding and loss of life not only in England and Scotland, but also in Holland and Belgium. Fortunately, the FCJ properties suffered only minor damage, but the North Foreland as a whole was badly affected. Local people found that Joss Bay had been completely devastated by the extraordinarily high winds and heavy rain of the previous night and all that remained of what had been a pleasant seaside beach area was a blank wall. Meanwhile, on Cliff Road, near St George's and The Grange, the Thirty-Nine Steps (immortalised in John Buchan's novel of the same name) were rendered impassable.

The Thirty-Nine Steps, the stone stairway through the cliff giving direct access to the beach and used exclusively by residents of North Foreland Estate were popular with many of the visitors to the FCJ houses on the North Foreland, but in the 1950s and 1960s, they held a particular fascination

Cliff entrance to the
Thirty-nine Steps



Beach Access to
the Thirty-nine Steps



for the pupils of Somers Town. A coach-load of senior girls from the school would travel to Broadstairs each year on the feast of Corpus Christi to take part in the afternoon procession of the Blessed Sacrament. They had little free time, but during their lunch break, their request was always the same: to go down the Thirty-Nine Steps. For many of them, the highlight of their day was not the procession itself through the beautiful grounds of St George's, or the colourful flower-petal motifs on the grass, but the descent down through the cliff to the tiny secluded beach below where the waves crashed endlessly on the rocks. By the summer of 1953, the repairs following the great storm had not been completed, so the gate at the top of the steps was firmly locked—to the deep disappointment of the Somers Town girls who went to Broadstairs that year.

St George's School

When St George's reopened in 1948 as the preparatory school for Poles, the novices and postulants moved to Beacon Lodge. The little school, which took in young boarders and local day pupils, soon reached its maximum roll and began to prosper. Often the teaching staff of St George's would be expanded temporarily, as one or more of the tertians, during their year of formation at Stella Maris, would take responsibility for some of the classes.



St George's School with Beacon Lodge in the background
(The square in the foreground is the site of the original Redriff)

Mother Catherine, who was essentially very shy, loved to visit St George's and had no difficulty in relating to the young pupils, girls and boys. She attended all the school functions and often invited the children to Stella Maris.

The community Annals of 1948, not long after the death of Mother Philomena Higgins, relate that, during the General Chapter of that year, ... *no fewer than twenty-eight Reverend Mothers visited the children in their classrooms!* From all accounts, St George's was a small but popular school and the interest of the Stella Maris community, together with the Sisters' participation in school celebrations both secular and religious, appears to have contributed greatly to the happy atmosphere.

North Foreland Grange

In October 1957, North Foreland Grange (always referred to by FCJs as *The Grange*), one of the properties belonging to the Society on Cliff Road, adjacent to St George's, opened as a small finishing school. The Grange specialised in teaching English, commercial subjects and housecraft to students from a variety of European and South American countries. Catering for about a dozen young women in their late teens, it was staffed by members of the Stella Maris community. Mrs. Patricia Riley (always known simply as *Mrs. Riley* to students and Sisters alike) was the housekeeper at The Grange, and she also played the crucial role of *chaperone* to the students, accompanying and supervising them on their numerous educational outings and recreational activities. The Grange School closed in 1967 and the property was later sold.

Changes in Religious Life after Vatican II

1963 saw the opening of the Second Vatican Council in Rome, which radically transformed the way of life of all religious sisters. At the 1966 General Chapter, an important administrative change concerned the term of office of the Superior General. Mother Catherine Windle resigned in 1966 and from then on Superiors General were no longer elected for life, but for a limited term of office. Her successor, Mother Raphael Conran, was elected for six years by the General Chapter of 1966, and

in accordance with the directives of that Chapter, lifestyle changes were introduced and soon began to take effect. Many of the restraints of previous decades were removed: home visits were allowed, the strict rule of silence was relaxed, and a broader spectrum of apostolic work opened up. The traditional religious habit (which for FCJs had been the French widow's dress of the 19th century) was simplified and later dispensed with. As a result, in common with FCJ communities all over the world, life at Stella Maris changed in many ways, becoming much more open to the local people. At the same time, the house beside the North Foreland light-house was a warm and welcoming *home* to FCJs from all over the world.

Novitiate Houses

During the 1960s, the FCJ novitiate at Stella Maris successively had two homes: first, *Beacon Lodge*, which continued to function as the main residence for novices, with *The Grange* (after the closure of the school there in 1967) providing needed extra accommodation for a short time; and secondly, *Redriff*.



Beacon Lodge, for many years a novitiate

Redriff had been so badly bombed during the war that it had to be demolished. (See picture of empty site on bottom of page 33). In the late 1940s, the site was landscaped by the gardener, Thomas Hickmott (always proud to be known and addressed by the Sisters as Mr. Hickmott), and became the *Sacred Heart Garden* or *Rose Garden*.



Front gate to Stella Maris



At the top of the drive



A warm welcome!



Beautiful views, green grass and many flowers ...

Views of two story addition with conference room windows lower right



The Cottage

The West Wall





Stella Maris from the front lawn



One of the urns
that survived the
bombing of the
Italian water garden
in the first Redriff

Statue of Mary in
a corner of the
front lawn



Lighthouse and the sea from the second story of the 1963 building



The path to Redriff and St George's



The greenhouses in Stella Maris Gardens



The tabernacle in the renovated chapel in Redriff

For a number of years the rose garden was the spot where postulants were photographed in white bridal dresses before the ceremony known as *reception of the habit*, which marked the beginning of their novitiate training.

After a long period of negotiation with the authorities, permission was granted for the new Redriff to be rebuilt further back on the site and adjacent to what had been the Italian water garden of the original house. In accordance with war damage regulations, the exterior of the house was required to be identical to that of the bombed property, but the interior was reconstructed as a purpose-built novitiate.



The new Redriff, photo taken from the rose garden

In 1968, the European novices moved in, and a year later, the American Vicariate sent their only novice to join the group, followed, in 1970, by two Australians. In 1971, two novices made temporary profession in Canada, but from then until 1976, Redriff was the only novitiate house in the Society.

Outreach from Stella Maris

From the late 1960s, the FCJs on the North Foreland, having lived an enclosed life for such a long time, began to take their place in the local church in the spirit of Vatican II. The Stella Maris Annals of 1969 record that in the autumn, the novices, postulants and some of the children from St George's School, sang the first Folk Mass in the parish church,

Our Lady, Star of the Sea, Broadstairs. From this time on, liturgical and pastoral involvement by FCJ Sisters in local parishes was welcomed, in both Broadstairs and Ramsgate.



Our Lady, Star of the Sea

During their twelve months of apostolic experience, novices took Catechetics in two local parishes, visited elderly people at St Christopher's Home, organised activities for under-privileged children at St Mary's, taught at St George's and followed Theology and Catechetics courses at Westgate. In addition, members of the Stella Maris and Central communities were involved in a wide variety of ministries, both local and as far afield as Canterbury and Dover. Their outreach included: parish visiting and other pastoral work, nursing and chaplaincy work in the local hospital, counselling, playing the organ in various local churches, Catholic and Anglican, teaching in local schools, university chaplaincy, and teaching English to refugees and asylum seekers.

In Advent 1999, the first Evening of Taizé Prayer took place in Stella Maris chapel. About sixty people attended, coming from different local churches and denominations. These evenings of ecumenical prayer and song were enhanced when Father Gus Kinnane, parish priest of St Ethelbert's Church, Ramsgate, led a group of parishioners on pilgrimage to Taizé and brought back a Taizé cross as the focus for worship. The Taizé Evenings continued on the first Thursday of each month until the closure of Stella Maris in 2012.

In 2003, a programme of events at Stella Maris devised by Margarita Byron FCJ was published, warmly received and evoked a good response among the Christian communities of the area. It was a full programme, with most months offering several retreats and a variety of workshops. When Margarita moved from Broadstairs in 2005, it was not possible to sustain such a full programme. Instead, a smaller number of events were offered and all were well attended.

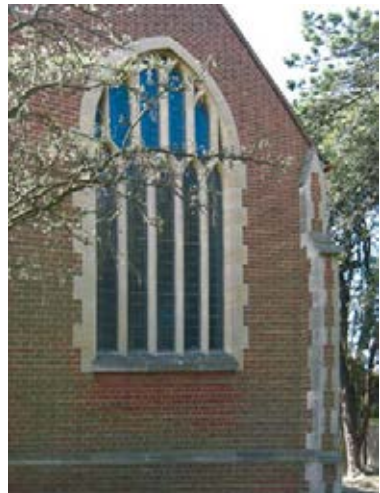
New Buildings and re-ordering Stella Maris Chapel

Between 1963 and 1965, a new two-storey building, consisting of a conference room on the ground floor, sleeping accommodation on the upper floor and an extension to the 1936 chapel, was added to the Stella Maris building. A prefabricated building, providing offices for the Generalate, was also put up in the late 1960s.

Then in 1979, under the direction of Father Nugent SJ there was a significant reordering of the chapel. In effect it was *turned round*. What had been the 1936 *sanctuary* became the sanctuary once again and what had been built as an extension in the 1960s became the body of the chapel.



The new two-storey wing, 1963



Window in the enlarged sanctuary

The result not only met the liturgical directives of Vatican II but created a fitting place for the foundress's tomb. Marie Madeleine's body having been duly exhumed and reverently transferred from the Upton cemetery, was interred in a brick-lined grave on 13 June 1980.



Newly renovated
sanctuary, 1979



Marie Madeleine's
tomb

On 24 March 1981, the chapel was formally opened and consecrated by Archbishop Michael Bowen of Southwark, and on 21 September, celebrations for the bi-centenary of Marie Madeleine's birth in 1781 took place at her tomb. Meanwhile, the old chapel was transformed into a reading room and also used as a second common room by the local community and FCJ visitors.

The 1970s saw other changes in the development of the main Stella Maris property. In 1976, the local community moved from Bethany to

the accommodation in the 1963 building, while the novices moved out of Redriff and were housed in Bethany. Almost immediately after this move, building work was begun to prepare Redriff for the arrival of a community of sick and elderly sisters. The official opening of the Care Home took place on 27 August, 1978.



Redriff was renovated as a Care Home and opened in 1978.

(This photo was taken from the rose garden, site of the original Redriff)

During much of the 1970s and early 1980s, the Central Community (i.e. the Superior General and her Council) were absent from Stella Maris. Periodically, they stayed in Brussels, examining the voluminous FCJ archives which were stored there, and meeting with the commission which had been set up for the revision of the Constitutions. They also spent some time in Rome, where they took part in various meetings and conferences organised for religious in the wake of Vatican II.

While in Rome, at the request of two General Chapters, they gave serious consideration to the possibility of transferring the FCJ Generalate to that city. Although, after carefully weighing up advantages and disadvantages, they decided against setting up a house in Rome, they encouraged members of the Society to avail of certain courses in theology, scripture and spirituality which had been set up there for the benefit of religious.

During those years, the Central Community also arranged for four General Chapters to take place in Rome.

In addition, new thinking and changes on the social and educational scene at this time meant that many FCJ schools in different parts of the world were facing serious questions about their future. Plans for the reorganisation of educational establishments were often complex and so members of the Central Community travelled to different places in order to be better informed about these matters, and to give support to the Sisters and all those working in their schools at the time. Since the government of the Society was centralised, all major decisions concerning the schools were taken by the Superior General and her Council. Those years were challenging for those in leadership and for the communities involved in the radical changes in education which, in many cases, led to the loss of time-honoured apostolates.

In January 1979, a strong gale removed the roof of the prefabricated office building, and many trees were lost. The roof was quickly repaired and new trees were planted, but the big wind was another reminder of the sheer force of the North Foreland airstreams. In that same year, the community welcomed fifty guests who assembled in Redriff to celebrate the one hundredth birthday of Sister Veronica Neylan FCJ.

It was in 1979 also that Mr. Hickmott, estate manager at Stella Maris since 1947, took his retirement. He was succeeded by his son, Roger, who remained as gardener and caretaker of all the properties on the Stella Maris estate until the FCJs moved from the North Foreland in 2012.

Mission to Sierra Leone, Argentina, Indonesia, Bolivia, the Philippines, Romania and Myanmar

In 1979, the missioning of four sisters to undertake apostolic work in Sierra Leone marked the beginning of a series of foundations in different countries throughout the next three decades: Argentina in 1984, Indonesia in 1987, Bolivia and the Philippines in 1988, Romania in 1994 and Myanmar in 2009. Many of the sisters involved were blessed and sent on their journeys from Stella Maris.

On 20 June 1995, Sisters Maria Dunne, Marie-Annick Guillouche and Judith Routier, who by then had replaced the original group in Sierra

Leone, arrived in Stella Maris after fleeing for their lives from that war-torn country. The following year, on 16 March, a ritual was held in the chapel, closing the FCJ mission in Sierra Leone and missioning the three sisters to new communities and ministries.

New Archives and Secretarial Space

In January 1982 construction began on a new building comprising a purpose-built archive facility, extra secretarial space and a photocopy room. This new building, completed in March 1983, connected with the library and with the office block. The extra space allowed room to employ lay secretarial help for the first time. Over the following years experienced archivists contributed to the cataloguing of the Society's archives.



Exterior of the archives block, showing windows of the new secretariat



Shelving and archival storage boxes

Renewal Courses for FCJs at Stella Maris

Following Vatican II, over a period of more than thirty years, FCJs at various stages of formation and professional involvement were invited to take part in a number of courses and workshops organised by succeeding Superiors General and their Councils at Stella Maris for various groups, some large, others smaller.

One of the first large-scale conferences, a renewal course for Sisters aged between forty and sixty years, took place in July 1980. Seventy sisters attended the course, a number which swelled to one hundred and nine when the participants were joined by the group then working on the revision of the Constitutions.

In 1983, to help cope with the constant demand for additional accommodation, the former laundry, under a new name, *Westpoint*, was remodelled, providing six bedrooms and all the necessary facilities.



Former laundry, then Westpoint

In summer 1984, it was the turn of the sixty-to-eighty age-group. The participants were known as the WAGs, filled as they were with Wisdom, Age and Grace!

Those who attended these gatherings needed all the available accommodation on the Stella Maris site, and the neighbouring Green School was rented for the overflow.

Jesuit Constitutions

Over a number of years, Sisters involved in the revision of the Constitutions and associated commissions met in Stella Maris with the Superior General and her council, assisted by various Jesuits, whom they called upon for advice and guidance. On October 29th 1985 word came from Rome that the Jesuit Constitutions, with certain minor adaptations, had been approved for FCJ use. There were celebrations to mark the occasion at Stella Maris and in each house of the Society.

Bishop Butler RIP

Bishop Basil Christopher Butler OSB died on September 20th 1986, and his death was marked at Stella Maris by a special Memorial Mass. By his wisdom and sympathetic understanding of what was needed, Bishop Butler had played a significant part in helping to steer the FCJs along the path of adaptation and renewal during the difficult years following the Second Vatican Council, and the Society wished to acknowledge its debt to him.



Bishop Basil Christopher Butler OSB

80th Anniversary of Stella Maris

In June 1993, a celebration to mark the eightieth anniversary of the founding of Stella Maris took place on the North Foreland, with many FCJs and friends joining the community for the occasion.

The d'Houët Room

In 1994, it was decided that the large Conference Room (in the 1963 building) would double as the main library of the house. Twelve years later, in 2006, both the library and its annex (*St Mary Magdalen's*, a large passage-room in the Bethany wing) received a major overhaul, and obsolete books were culled. The shelving was replaced, and a bright, well-stocked library housed in attractive surroundings was the result.

In February 1994, the former reading room (part of the 1936 chapel) was reorganised. Under the new name of the *d'Houët Room*, it was used for meetings and displays, and for many years functioned as an ecumenical venue for days of reflection and parish meetings. Many FCJ social occasions were also held there, often marking a happy conclusion to workshops and other gatherings.

Companionship, Commitment and Creativity

In July 1994, twenty-one FCJ Sisters, professed since 1987, came to Stella Maris from different parts of the world to take part in a workshop on the triple theme of companionship, commitment and creativity. Warmly welcomed by the local community, they rejoiced in the opportunity to pray and reflect together, and to immerse themselves in the spirituality and traditions of the Society.

Joint Tertianship: FCJs and Loreto Sisters

In October 1994, six FCJs joined a similar number of Loreto Sisters for the period of tertianship. This signalled a departure from the tradition in the sense that the living arrangements were similar for both groups and certain input sessions were held in common.

The whole experience was deemed happy and enriching for all concerned. It marked the beginning of a fruitful association between FCJs and Loreto Sisters, and for several years the tertian directors of both congregations worked collaboratively on this aspect of formation.

The Mandala

In July 1996, Helen Roberts FCJ (who later left the Society) painted the Society Mandala which adorned the Stella Maris Chapel for fifteen years. The Mandala now hangs in the entrance hall of the Generalate at Gumley House.



Society Mandala

Stella Maris and the Jesuits

Throughout its history, Stella Maris had a strong link with the Jesuits. In the early years, it was mainly Jesuits who were invited to *preach* the annual retreats for the large FCJ communities in Broadstairs. After Vatican II, individually guided retreats were introduced, and numerous conferences and workshops took place on the North Foreland, many of them led by Jesuits. Between 1996 and 2010, the British Jesuits frequently requested the use of one of the properties in Stella Maris for their own meetings and were always warmly welcomed by the community (as indeed were a succession of bishops, priests, sisters and others, who liked to come and spend some time of retreat and relaxation).

In Holy Week 1997, the then Jesuit Provincial presided over the beautiful ceremonies of the Sacred Triduum at Stella Maris, and from that year until 2012, the communities of both Stella Maris and Redriff were happy to be able to count on a Jesuit presence for the Holy Week Services.

Arrival of St Augustine of Canterbury

1400th Anniversary

On 27 May 1997, the fourteen hundredth anniversary of the arrival of St Augustine of Canterbury in Ebbsfleet was commemorated in Thanet. A solemn High Mass, with Cardinal Hume presiding, was celebrated in a marquee in the grounds of St Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate. In the afternoon, the FCJ community joined many local people on Hugin Green to welcome fifty pilgrims from Rome. There followed a procession through wheat fields to St Augustine's Cross, where prayers of thanksgiving were offered.

Sale of the Chicken Field

In 1998, what many FCJs would remember as *the chicken field* was sold, and members of the community watched with interest as two fine houses were quickly constructed on the site. By this time, St Stephen's School, a neighbouring property, sometimes rented to provide extra accommodation during summer courses at Stella Maris, had been empty since its closure seven years earlier. This large building was also sold in that year, and within a very short time, a complex of houses and flats appeared on the site.

Stella Maris Garden Party

In the summer of 1998, for the first time, Stella Maris hosted a Garden Party for neighbours and friends. This popular event was attended by a large number of local people, and was repeated in 2000 and again in 2006.

Automation of the North Foreland Lighthouse

In December 1998, all the members of the Stella Maris community, and some from Redriff, made their way to the lighthouse, where the Duke of Edinburgh was welcomed by the Mayor of Broadstairs. Prince Philip led a short ceremony which marked the end of an era: after more than two hundred years, there would be no more lighthouse-keepers in Broadstairs. Instead, an automated system would ensure that the beams of the historic North Foreland Lighthouse would never be extinguished. The two white houses at the base of the lighthouse, where the keepers had lived, were from then on rented out to holiday guests.

Welcoming the New Millennium

At Stella Maris, the most notable event to mark the start of the new millennium was the arrival of a group of women in early January 2000 to spend two days on the North Foreland. Representing young people from Ethiopia, Iran, Rwanda, Congo, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, they joined the community in prayer and celebration. On the second day, a special inter-faith service included a memorable procession honouring the scriptures of the different faiths of all those taking part.

Later that year, a gathering entitled Exploring the Vision took place at Stella Maris. Some of the recently professed Sisters participating in this event were from Asia, and it was their first visit to the FCJ Generalate. During the summer of the year 2000, a large number of FCJs, together with their colleagues, arrived at Stella Maris for a wide-ranging conference on Globalisation. All the participants held significant positions of responsibility in FCJ apostolic institutions, and together they looked at some of the potential opportunities for proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ in an increasingly globalised world.

Companions in Mission, Thanet Group

Groups of FCJ Companions in Mission began to be formed after the 1998 General Chapter, when the Superior General and her Council were mandated to look into ways of sharing the FCJ charism more widely with lay people. On 9 April 2001 a group of Companions in Mission was launched in the Thanet area. From then until the closure of Stella Maris in 2012, the group met regularly, made yearly retreats, and where appropriate, supported the ministries of the house. After the closure, some of the Thanet members joined a London group of Companions in Mission, and continued to meet there.

Farewell to Peter Hughes

In June 2001, the general council said farewell to Dr. Peter Hughes, the archivist who had started to reorganise and classify the voluminous FCJ archives held at Stella Maris. Expressing sincere gratitude to Peter for his unstinting hard work over several decades, the Sisters wished him many years of happy retirement.

Preparation for Final Profession 2001

In September of the same year, a group of FCJs preparing for Final Vows formed a community in Bethany and during their stay of three months gave witness to their commitment by their caring presence and creative contribution to the liturgies and prayer times of the community. A similar gathering took place in 2004, which proved to be the last time that the pre-profession retreat and formation sessions took place at Stella Maris.

FCJ Meetings in 2005

Over many, many years Stella Maris and the satellite houses hosted numerous meetings for FCJs, but 2005 must hold the record. From January to August they came, individuals and groups from all parts of the world. Perhaps the highlight was the Leadership Course which took place over several days during the summer. Twenty young women came from Ireland, England, Malta, Poland and Romania to share their experience, learn new skills, and to be challenged as leaders of their local Church. Two of the young women from Romania later became FCJs.

150th Anniversary of Marie Madeleine's Death

In 2008, celebrations were organised throughout the Society to commemorate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Marie Madeleine's death. On this special occasion, many FCJs from Europe gathered with the Stella Maris and Redriff communities at the Foundress's grave in Stella Maris chapel. The auxiliary bishop of Southwark, John Hines, led the Mass of Thanksgiving, and a number of local priests joined him in the celebration. All the Companions in Mission from the Broadstairs area were present for this significant event in the life of the Society.

Institutions Run by Religious in Thanet Changes and Closures

Some years before the final decision of the FCJs to close Stella Maris, several other religious congregations in Thanet had already begun to make changes or to move out of the area. Due to diminishing personnel,

some communities were finding themselves unable to continue their educational and other ministries in this part of the Diocese of Southwark.

On 17 February 1995, an official press release announced that the Benedictine Abbey School in Westgate would close at the end of the summer term.

The Ursuline Convent School closed at the same time, and was replaced by a new comprehensive school, Ursuline College, the trusteeship of which eventually passed into the hands of the Diocese of Southwark. This new school opened in September 1995.

The Sisters of Christian Education, who had ministered in the Broadstairs area since 1903, withdrew from Kent in August 1995. In September of that same year, St Joseph's, formerly a Preparatory School owned and administered by these Sisters, was also taken over by the diocese and became the Catholic Parish Primary School.

In succeeding years, further changes and closures took place. In 1998, at the end of the summer term, Holy Cross School in Broadstairs, a Secondary Modern School (originally opened and administered for many years by the Daughters of the Cross as a residential open-air school and convalescent home), closed, due to falling pupil numbers. Over the years, a number of FCJs had taught in this school, and the Sisters were sad to see the closure of this the only Catholic secondary school in Broadstairs.

A year later, in 1999, the Bon Secours Sisters, who for many decades had run a nursing-home in Ramsgate (where several FCJs had received care at different times), also left the area.

Finally, in the autumn of 2011, the Benedictines of St Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate, moved to a former Franciscan monastery in Chilworth, Surrey. Members of the Ramsgate community had served the FCJ houses on the North Foreland—Stella Maris, St George's, and, for the last thirty years, Redriff also—over all the years since the Society had first put down roots in the county of Kent. Warm gratitude for their friendship and faithful service accompanied the monks as they left Ramsgate and settled in their new home.

Decision to close Stella Maris

As they looked back on almost a century of FCJ presence on the North Foreland, the Sisters were filled with gratitude for all that had been accomplished in this part of God's vineyard: the general administration of the Society, the formation of its members and, after Vatican II, the apostolic outreach of so many FCJs in the local area. Nevertheless, in the early years of the new millennium, it became increasingly apparent that, with diminishing numbers, it would not be possible for the Society to maintain its many properties and considerable acreage of land on the North Foreland for very much longer. The overall estate was larger than was needed for much of the year, and ongoing maintenance had become a financial burden. In addition, many faithful staff had just reached the age of retirement, and it was clear that steps would soon need to be taken to replace them.

These considerations were all taken into account in a spirit of prayerful reflection and discernment. Finally, in 2011, with great regret, the decision was taken that Stella Maris would close and the FCJs would withdraw from Broadstairs. The local bishop and parish priest were informed, and, at a later date, the many friends of the house were also told. Preparations for the big move were then set in motion and the farewells and packing began.

A crucial concern, once the decision to close Stella Maris had been made, was to find a fitting resting place for the body of our Foundress. After prayer and reflection, the Society approached the Archbishop of Paris, Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, to see if it would be possible for a small shrine enclosing the bones of Marie Madeleine to be set up in the church of Saint Dominique, near the FCJ house in Rue de la Santé in Paris. After due negotiations with the parish priest, this was happily arranged.

On 17 April 2012, the exhumation of the body took place, in accordance with ecclesiastical and civil regulations, and attended by Claire Sykes FCJ as vice-postulator and some of the Sisters. It was agreed that the hearse carrying the remains would make the journey to Paris at a later date, once further requirements of the beatification process had been carried out.

2012: The Closure

For the General Council, and for the Stella Maris and Redriff communities, 2012 was a year of unique significance, marking as it did the removal of our Foundress' body from the chapel and its interment in the church of Saint Dominique in Paris, followed by the definitive closure of Stella Maris and the relocation of the Society Generalate to Gumley House in Isleworth, Middlesex. In March, Redriff, which had been home to so many sick and elderly sisters over more than thirty years, was vacated, and grateful tributes were paid to its dedicated staff. With loving sensitivity, the remaining residents were taken to join the care community at Kersal Hill in Salford, where they received a warm welcome.

A continual awareness of the forthcoming departure from the beautiful and much-loved FCJ property on the edge of England created the background music to all that took place at Stella Maris between January and the end of October 2012. The chords of that music, in keys that were by turn minor and major, echoed both sadness at leaving and a sense of hopefulness for the new Generalate soon to be set up at Gumley House. Customary activities went on for as long as possible: monthly Taizé Evenings, regular meetings of the Companions in Mission, ecumenical retreats and quiet days. The tertianship programme, which had begun the previous October, continued until the beginning of April, and was brought to a happy conclusion by the celebration of Easter.

The ministry of hospitality, always an important aspect of the Stella Maris community apostolate, took on a special significance in 2012. An unprecedented number of visitors visited the North Foreland: FCJs attending conferences, making retreats or taking holidays; various priests, bishops, groups, friends and relatives using the different houses; and Society contacts arriving for business and other engagements. It was an extraordinarily busy year, and the FCJ houses on the North Foreland were rarely empty for long. A highlight was the summer renewal course, 'Confidence to Dare', organised by the General Council for the newer members of the Society. For ten days, twenty-five FCJs from Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar, Canada, Romania, Argentina and England lived, prayed and reflected together in the beautiful setting of Stella Maris.

FCJ Farewell Celebration

Monday 6 August 2012, feast of the Transfiguration, saw Sisters from England, Ireland and other parts of the FCJ world converging on Stella Maris to join the community and the newer members (who had not yet departed) for a special FCJ farewell celebration. After Mass in the chapel, a festive buffet meal was laid out in the conference room. The day was truly memorable for all who were able to be present. An almost tangible spirit of joy and thanksgiving pervaded the whole house as FCJs prayed, reminisced and chatted together, knowing it would be the last time that such a gathering would take place in Broadstairs.

Thanks to Lay Colleagues

Not long afterwards, a celebration meal was lovingly prepared to thank those who had worked for so long together with the Sisters to make Stella Maris a well-organised administrative centre for the whole Society and a place of welcome for all who passed through its doors. Heartfelt gratitude was expressed to Yve Newing and Sandra Patmore for their help in the kitchen and with household duties; to Margaret Harcourt-Williams for her archival expertise; and to Roger Hickmott and Michael Webb for their care of the garden. Tributes of deep appreciation were also offered to Nikki Aerts and Toni Duggan, who worked in the Generalate offices at Stella Maris, and who had agreed to continue working at Gumley House.

Farewell to the Local People

Saturday, 15 September was the day fixed for the formal FCJ farewell to the many people in the local area who had, for many years, regarded Stella Maris as a spiritual home. For at least a week beforehand, everyone prayed hard for a fine day, knowing that the expected number of friends and guests would be unable to fit into any one room in the house. Happily, the day, though not warm, was bright and sunny. A short prayer service of thanksgiving was held on the lawn outside the double doors near the library, and then tea and scones were served both in the garden and inside the house. Fond memories were exchanged, sincere gratitude expressed and much sadness shared at the imminent departure of the sisters.

Marie Madeleine Returns to Paris

On 20 September, the members of the tribunal for the beatification of the Foundress assembled at Stella Maris. In the presence of a number of Sisters, necessary formalities connected with the beatification process were carried out in the chapel by the postulator of the cause, accompanied by Claire Sykes FCJ, the vice-postulator. Two days later, Marie Madeleine's mortal remains were reverently taken to France and solemnly interred in the church of Saint Dominique in Paris. After the Mass, members of the de Bengy family along with numerous parishioners and friends joined an equally large number of FCJs at Rue de la Santé for a festive meal, celebrating the *return to France* of the Venerable Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.



Marie Madeleine's Shrine in the Church of St Dominique in Paris

Last Mass in Stella Maris Chapel

Exactly one month later, on 20 October 2012, Mass was celebrated in Stella Maris chapel for the last time. One consoling note was the realisation that the lovely altar, lectern and sanctuary lamp would soon grace a side-chapel in the same church of Saint Dominique, alongside the remains of our Foundress, Marie Madeleine. The Mass was followed by a

simple meal with some friends who had regularly attended Mass with the community over the years, and were able to join the Sisters for this sad yet memorable occasion.

One Door Closes...

From then on, large removal vans began to come and go, and by 3 November 2012 Stella Maris had been vacated. The door had closed on a rich seam of FCJ history, leaving many memories of good times and difficult times, of growth and of decline. The closure of Stella Maris represents the Sisters' readiness to face a new and uncertain future in the Church and world of the early twenty-first century. They do so with courage and confidence. One door closes, but, at this very moment, others are opening.

Postscript

The FCJs still have a foothold in Broadstairs, for they have retained two houses on North Foreland Road, Maryhurst and Wyncot. Happy to provide hospitality for small groups and individuals wishing to take a restful break on this part of the Kent coast, where a hundred giant wind turbines may be seen, turning incessantly in the bracing sea air, the houses are a humble reminder that *Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future/ And time future contained in time past.* (T. S. Eliot)

Meanwhile, night after night,
intermittently illuminating
the former FCJ Convent,
the North Foreland Lighthouse
throws its bright beams
far out to sea ...



Paschal candle, Stella Maris Chapel



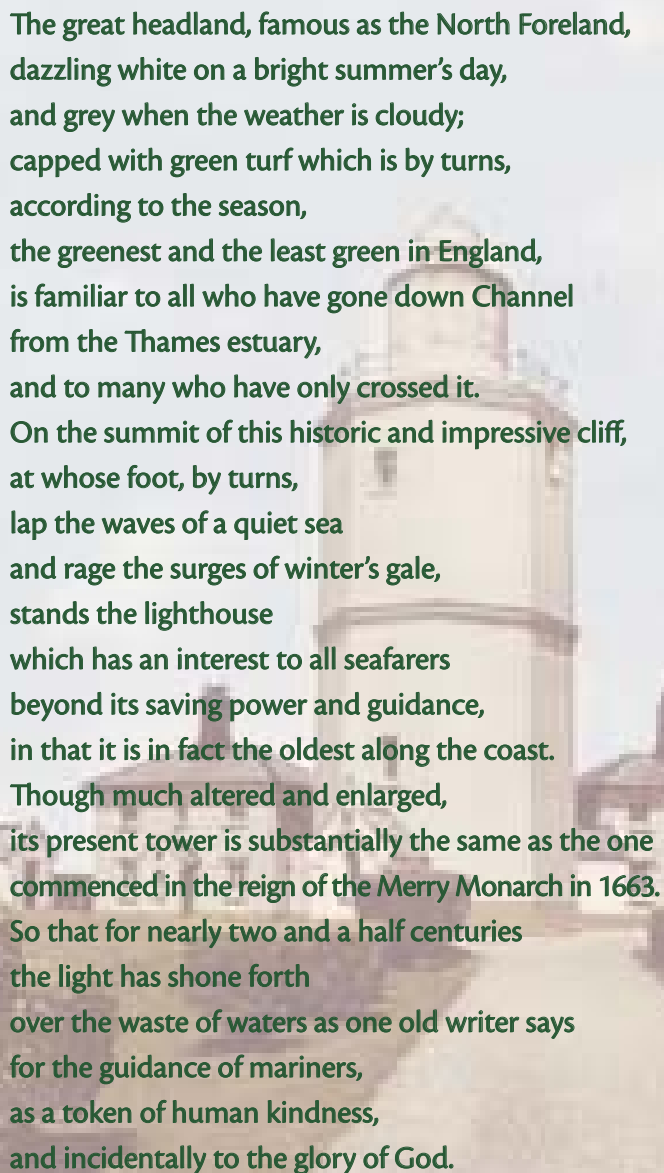
North Foreland Lighthouse, 1834



Inside the lighthouse



From inside the
lighthouse



The great headland, famous as the North Foreland,
dazzling white on a bright summer's day,
and grey when the weather is cloudy;
capped with green turf which is by turns,
according to the season,
the greenest and the least green in England,
is familiar to all who have gone down Channel
from the Thames estuary,
and to many who have only crossed it.
On the summit of this historic and impressive cliff,
at whose foot, by turns,
lap the waves of a quiet sea
and rage the surges of winter's gale,
stands the lighthouse
which has an interest to all seafarers
beyond its saving power and guidance,
in that it is in fact the oldest along the coast.
Though much altered and enlarged,
its present tower is substantially the same as the one
commenced in the reign of the Merry Monarch in 1663.
So that for nearly two and a half centuries
the light has shone forth
over the waste of waters as one old writer says
for the guidance of mariners,
as a token of human kindness,
and incidentally to the glory of God.

From the North Foreland to Penzance, Clive Holland, 1908

