

Hartlepool, Northeast England, 1885-1985

The boarders from Redcar came with the community, so the nucleus of a boarding school was already formed and a day school was started immediately. The Convent school, day scholars and boarders increased slowly but steadily and a new building, day school, dormitory and chapel were added in 1892. Our nuns were asked to take charge of the girls and infants in the mixed Parish School. The numbers here grew so rapidly, 30 to 150 in a very short period that the Inspectors recommended extensions. These were opened in 1890 and the Annals of that year mention that they would then be able to take 100 children from Board Schools, 200 from private schools and 93 girls who were still in the boys' department. The other customary works of the Society were started- the Children of Mary, retreats for children and teachers, the instruction of converts and, in connection with the Parish missions, evening classes for instructions and preparation for the Sacraments for up to 200 people.

The Convent school seems to have excelled in art, music and science, and evening classes were started. In 1898, these classes were opened to girls from other schools and the Sisters



were surprised at the numbers who flocked in, mostly young teachers from the surrounding Board Schools and denominational schools. The anti Catholic feeling in the town was slowly beginning to change.

These classes became so large that they had to be held in a public hall in the Atheneum. This work continued until it was taken over by the Education Authorities. Application to

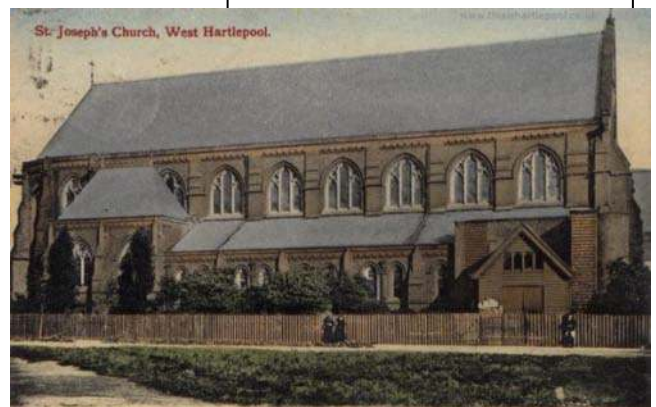
start a Pupil-Teacher Training Centre was made but it seems to have been unsuccessful. With the growth of the day school, the boarding school was phased out after the First World War. After the 1944 Education Act, the school was placed on the list of Direct Grant Schools and the numbers increased rapidly under the headship of Sister Cecilia Gillow, Sister Philomena Conlon and Sister Mary Agnes Wilson. Then in the early seventies, the Diocese decided that the school policy should be for co-educational comprehensive schools and we knew that the Convent School would have to close

The influence of the school had been far-reaching for, until the opening of St Anne's Secondary School for Girls in 1963, nearly all the Catholic professional women in the town (and many non-Catholic) had received their early training at the Convent and they still remember their mistresses and their school with deep affection.

During this time the parish schools had also continued to grow. A small school on the outskirts of the town, Hart Lane, was opened in 1901 and in 1914 St Cuthbert's School was built.

During the Second World War St. Joseph's School was bombed. By this time the Hart Lane school had been replaced by a new school, the Sacred Heart, originally mixed, but when the senior girls from St. Joseph's had to be moved, our nuns were asked to take charge of the

St Josephs Church 1905



Senior Girls' Department. Sister Angela Sumner came as a headmistress, followed by Sister Elizabeth O'Brien and then Sister Patricia Coyle. Their work in this school was greatly appreciated. Meanwhile the Juniors from St. Joseph's had been gathered into a condemned Council School, where, in spite of adverse conditions, the school flourished under the headship of Sister Margaret O'Brien, and then Sister Agnes Morgan, who opened the new primary school in 1957. In 1963, two new schools, separate secondary schools for girls and boys, were opened on the outskirts of the town, St. Bede's and St. Anne's and the senior girls from St Cuthbert's joined those from the Sacred Heart School to form the new St. Anne's. Sister Patricia Coyle was appointed Headmistress and Sister Gertrude Walsh accompanied her from the Sacred Heart School.

Then in 1973, the plans for comprehensive education were put into operation. All the senior boys and girls from the Catholic schools were gathered together into the English Martyrs' Comprehensive School in the buildings of St. Bede's and St. Anne's. Two houses, 55-57 Hutton Avenue, had been prepared as a convent and the community moved on May 30th, before the Convent School actually closed.

Sister Patricia joined the staff of the new school as associate head and Sister Gertrude as fourth form tutor and member of the craft department. Sister Beatrice Molyneux worked devotedly with the juniors at St. Joseph's Primary School until 1981 when she was missioned to St. Philomena's Portsmouth, and to everyone's grief, was not replaced. Sister Raphael Conran, was a governor of the school and Sister Bernadette Cassidy, was a member of the County Learning Support Service at this time. She had responsibility for the slow learning children in the six Catholic Primary Schools.

The community still works for the parish, helping in the sacristy, instructing converts, visiting and, as Special Ministers of Communion, taking Holy Communion to the sick and helping at parish and school Masses. God grant us health and strength to work for many more years in Hartlepool.

Written in 1990 by Sr Bernadette Cassidy RIP

