

## Marie Madeleine d'Houet, Foundress of the Sisters Faithful Companions of Jesus and her links with the Diocese of Shrewsbury

In the year 2000, Canon Marmion asked me to speak on the FCJs as the first Sisters to come into the Diocese after Catholic Emancipation and before the Restoration of the Hierarchy... So I'm well aware that I've already dealt with Marie Madeleine's work as Foundress in Liverpool and her coming to Lingdale in 1849 at the suggestion of Bishop George Brown, (first Bishop of Liverpool), of the outreach in time to Birkenhead and Chester at the invitation of Bishop James Brown (first Bishop of Shrewsbury): the names of Lingdale, Holt Hill and Dee House are still alive in memory and of course there is still Upton Hall School.

Apart from this last, Marie Madeleine was a familiar figure at each foundation. She travelled regularly to see how things were going and to lend a helping hand... the development of railways must have been a tremendous help to her; she crossed the Channel more than 60 times and rejoiced when the London-Dover line was opened in 1844 and linked with a time table of regular steam boats to France; but she could never have dreamed that after her death too she would travel between France and England, and indeed travel from North to South of this Country as well. But this is to anticipate. Enough to say that Marie Madeleine's links with the Diocese of Shrewsbury did not end with her death.

### I. The Introduction of her Cause.

#### Gathering of memories

She died in Paris April 5<sup>th</sup> 1858. Within the next ten years people started jotting down their memories – mostly for the young women coming to the Society who had never known her. Then in the summer of 1873 Mère Josephine Petit, the Second General Superior, asked all the Sisters who had known the Foundress to write down what they knew of her life. The following year, Cardinal Guibert Archbishop of Paris, asked P. Apollinaire de Valence to draw the information together which he did between 1875 and 1878. With '*scrupulous attention (he) studied 20,000 documents and the written depositions of 300 witnesses.*' The French religious troubles of 1880 stopped further steps for the time being and it was not until 1886 that Cardinal Richard, who had succeeded Cardinal Guibert, sanctioned the erection of an ecclesiastical tribunal in Paris for the examination of witnesses bearing testimony to the heroic sanctity of the Servant of God.

#### Shrewsbury Diocese

Then came the official introduction of her Cause. Although it was officially introduced in Paris in 1888, distance necessitated the establishment of subsidiary tribunals in France and elsewhere under the patronage and with the permission of the Ordinaries. One such tribunal (the only one in England) was held in the Diocese of Shrewsbury .

This morning's programme might well have been sub-titled 'The Gibson Family'. Fr Peter will inevitably talk about the two Bishop Gibsons and at this point in my narrative I introduce Mother Mary Frances Gibson – their niece. Mother Mary Frances was one of the first Pupils at Lingdale and is credited with being the true founder of Holt Hill School in that it was she

who laid down its academic traditions. In 1888 she was Provincial Superior of the Society in the North of England.

Mother Mary Frances was naturally delighted that the Tribunal for the examination of English-speaking witnesses was established in the diocese of Shrewsbury. She and Mother Isabella Yates, (another past pupil of Lingdale House but then serving as Secretary General in Paris and who came to England to transact business in the name of the Postulator of the Cause,) visited Bishop Edmund Knight, Bishop of Shrewsbury to ask his co-operation. He not only co-operated but flung himself heart and soul into the process...the letters which passed between them, the recorded visits paid by both sides - even on one occasion mention is made of a telegram which the Bishop almost apologises for sending.

### A 'first', a steep learning curve for every one

❖ April 16<sup>th</sup> 1889

Bishop to MMF *The first session as written by **M. Anastasia** seems not to be from the appendix, as named by M. Isabella and may have to be changed. The whole series is such a tangle that I should not trust our version of it until the copy has been sent to Paris and approved or corrected. It would not answer to summon our witnesses and have all our work pulled to pieces afterwards...*

❖ *I instructed Fr Dallow to acknowledge the papers sent and to get and read up this book on 'procedure' named to him. It might be worth while to ask him, if he is now informed as to his part*

M. Isabella:

❖ *'As a tribunal is being instituted in England, it is necessary to present the articles in English ... it is necessary that the Bishop and priests who will see our translation should be satisfied with our English. I will send you 10-12 pages at a time when translated... I can no longer find the proper terms ... I shall be obliged if you will have my translations corrected*

❖ *Will you allow me to suggest that the writing should be like a man's as much as possible as probably English priests do not like lady's writing.'*

❖ On May 15<sup>th</sup> 1889, Mother Isabella wrote to Mother Mary Frances Gibson:

*'I am desired by Mother to send you the papers for your first session and my first request is that you will keep them out of Father Dallow's hands. The letter rogatoria which you returned to us was so black, crushed and dirty, that although we cleaned it as well as we could and even cut off the edges Père Stanislaus was much ashamed to have to present such a paper to the Bishop and Tribunal here ...'* Father Dallow, a noted scholar and antiquarian, was chaplain at Upton for thirty-three years. The Annals of 1918, the year after his death, record that *'our late revered pastor, Canon Dallow did not bestow much thought upon the appearance of his house, and in consequence, after his death, it was found necessary to re-decorate it from attic to cellar before our new chaplain could be invited to make it his residence.'*

### M. Isabella Yates

This may be an appropriate moment to pay tribute to Mother Isabella Yates. One of the first pupils at Lingdale, she was the daughter and sister of prominent Liverpool lawyers who acted for Marie Madeleine and the Society in the North West of England. At his death, her father, Mr John Yates, was described *'as one of the ornaments of the legal body in Liverpool. ..*

*upright, sterling character ...no church or school was erected, no charitable movement founded, no social reform inaugurated during his long life in Liverpool, without his name being prominently associated with it, either in the shape of money, work or advice.’ (Brown Catholic History of Liverpool 1910)*

It is commonplace now for contemporary historians of women religious to reflect on the opportunities for women in nineteenth century religious life to put into practice what they had observed in their fathers and Isabella Yates is no exception. When she died in 1893 P. Stanislaus remarked “*What a splendid head she had. I do not know how I should have managed at the sessions without her*”. The archives of the Society testify to the extent of her work, to the journeys she made for the sake of the various Tribunals and the great order of her work but it is the meticulous records kept of each session at each tribunal that indicate the enormous amount of work that was involved. ‘*The original Process at Paris ...forms three large volumes, of 1700 pages. We bound the volumes ourselves. There were also the auxiliary Processes of St Anne’s, Shrewsbury, Nice, Veyrier.*’

## England’s Missionary Status

The day book kept at Upton Hall to record all matters concerning the Cause throws interesting light on the difficulties arising from the missionary status of the church in England.

- ❖ Although Catholic Emancipation had become reality in 1829, and the Hierarchy been restored in 1850, it was not until 1908 that the Roman Catholic Church of England and Wales came out from the jurisdiction of Propaganda Fide. Bishop Knight, therefore had to explain that there were difficulties around the matter of the oath to be taken since it was felony in England to take such an oath and to explain too the steps taken by Propaganda about the dispensation.
- ❖ 18/4 P. Stanislaus said oath too serious for him to answer
- ❖ Mother Frances Gibson, on the advice of Bishop Knight consulted Fr Morris SJ Postulator for English Martyrs to ask about the form of the oath and received the following reply: ‘*We have not troubled ourselves about the civil illegalities but have conducted our Processes as if we were in a catholic country. The form of oath is prescribed for every official and for the witnesses.*’
  
- ❖ Similarly, English dioceses did not have standing appointments such as Defender of the Faith and one had to be appointed specifically for the tribunal.  
Q. 4/5 from Paris: Who is the Promoteur of the Diocese?  
A. 10/5 Claughton We have no Promotor of the Faith of the Diocese. In our missionary state they are not made standing appointments. Fr. Marianus named.
  
- ❖ Bishop Cornthwaite of Beverley was eager to make his deposition but was ill. Bishop Knight cannot leave his diocese; Posulator asked was there not a place nearer to Bishop Cornthwaite than Birkenhead but still in the Diocese?  
In the event he was judged too ill to be moved.

## The Officers

**Bishop Knight** was **Judex or Judge**. He presided over every session questioning the witnesses at length. He professed himself happy to devote his time and energy saying he hoped ‘to draw down the protection of Marie Madeleine on his diocese’... and again ‘that she might bless his diocese of Shrewsbury’.

**Provost Buquet** was appointed **Deputy Judge** though he never presided as the Bishop was always there. He appears frequently in the Annals of both Birkenhead and Chester since his

priestly life was spent between the two parishes of St Werburgh –he actually built the Church in Chester.

**Father Marianus** O.S.F.C was the **Defender of the Faith** (popularly called the Devil's Advocate),

**Fr. Wilfrid Dallow**, the **Vice- Postulator** (who was chaplain at Upton Hall),

**Canon Keegan**,( at this time at St Werburgh's Birkenhead – having been previously at Our Lady's and later became Rector of St Laurence) **the Nuncius or Cursor** whose (diplomatic) job was to deliver the papers to the required court

**Fr. Chichele Giles** (Secretary to Bishops Knight, Carroll and Allen) the **Notary** on whom fell the lion's share of the clerical work. (28/4 P. Stanislaus: What is Fr Giles baptismal name.....is he a Canon or does he have another title... )

**Canon E Lynch** of St Werburgh Chester **notary adjoint**

**Monsignor Slaughter** author of the two volumed history of the Diocese, as a skilled rubrician was responsible for the carrying out of ceremonials and as **Chancellor** is described as being *the referee in any complication.*

## First Day

The first session was held on June 13th, in the Upton chapel.

*28/4 P. Stanislaus:Upton Chapel because the Domestic Chapel of Bishop Knight too small – sessions at Holt Hill because more central*

At 11 a.m. the Bishop and clergy went in procession to the chapel, where the community and pupils of Upton, representatives from the convents of Liverpool, Birkenhead, Chester, Manchester, Preston, and two especially selected lay witnesses, Elias de Bulnes, Esq. Spanish Consul of Guatemala whose three daughters, Louise, Isabelle and Adèle, all attended Upton, and Charles Singleton Esq. a leading magistrate and Catholic citizen of Birkenhead, were assembled. Among other priests present and a central figure was the venerable Canon Frith of the Shrewsbury Chapter who knew the holy Foundress personally and held her in the highest esteem and veneration. He too had been a source of disquiet for the Bishop. Canon Frith had written his memories at first time of asking in 1870 but was anxious to testify officially. M. M. Frances was afraid his memory, he was 83 at this time, might not be up to it and consulted Bishop Knight as to the propriety of going to visit him and talk with him about the process. *'I should think it might be well to see Canon Frith as you propose, if you are not coaching a witness thereby, as to what he shall say. When once in the meshes of law every step has its pitfall, so find out before you move, if it is all right. There can be no harm in telling him of the process on foot'*

- ❖ The function began by the Bishop's intoning the Veni Creator,
- ❖ then he gave an explanation of the ceremonies which were to follow.
- ❖ the Notary next read in Latin somewhat lengthy documents in which the Archbishop of Paris, requested the Lord Bishop of Shrewsbury to erect in his diocese a tribunal for the examination of witnesses, declaring to the heroic sanctity of the Servant of God, Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy, Viscountess de Bonnault d'Houet, Foundress of the Society of the Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus;
- ❖ the official posts of the members of the Tribunals were announced, and
- ❖ Bishop Knight with his hand on his heart promised secrecy and fidelity to all that was expected of him as Presiding Judge of the Tribunal. Provost Buquet then advanced and kneeling before the Bishop with his hand on the Gospel of the day, took the oath in nearly the same words, the other members pronouncing similar oaths. As each ecclesiastic took the oath, he signed the official register and the two lay witnesses added their signature each time. The legal document was duly sealed and the first or introductory session - the only one allowed to be public - was at an end.

At 4 p.m. the second session opened. It was held in the Sodality Chapel (latterly the Principal's Office and now the Finance Office) . Canon Frith declared himself *proud and happy to bear witness to the heroic sanctity* of Marie Madeleine whom he had known well. In

fact he had accompanied her to Liverpool in 1844 when she was looking for a site for her first Northern house .

All other sessions were held, at Holt Hill, Birkenhead which was judged more central as well as roomier! The sessions were held in the afternoon and did not break up until 9 p.m., with a short interruption for 5 o'clock tea. .

Selection of witnesses was an important feature of the tribunal since there had to be as wide a representation as possible laity, clerics and religious. One FCJ called was Mother Scholastica Connolly who was named *on account of the "Bilocation" and testified on 23 July.*

### ***Delivery of the transactions***

When the process was completed the papers (313 Mss pages ) had to be delivered. Mother Isabella writes to Mother Frances Gibson: *'Don't fold the papers...never send them by post, it being customary to delegate someone to carry them to Rome, in your case someone will bring them to the Tribunal at Paris.'* **Fr. Henry Gregson** was elected (assistant) 'cursor' and had his own problems. *'I saw the French consul in Liverpool and asked if he could facilitate my journey through the customs house at Calais and Paris. He appeared very willing to help me but said it was entirely out of his power and he thought the packet would have to be opened. I am going to apply to the Ambassador in London, and if he can do nothing in the matter I shall ask you to see if in Paris itself, the necessary permit could be obtained from the minister to whom such things belong. If everything fails I suppose we must run the risk and try to find a civil functionary to pass the mysterious (sic) packet.'* 19/8

## II. The transfer of Marie Madeleine's Body to Upton

The fact that the only Tribunal opened in England to take evidence in Marie Madeleine's Cause opened in the Shrewsbury Diocese might have been sufficient to link her and the Diocese but more was to come...

Marie Madeleine died in 1858 and was buried in Paris. France then lived through increasingly troubled times – indeed Fr Anatole de Bengy SJ. Marie Madeleine's nephew was murdered at the barricades in 1870. Then in 1904, the radical-socialist government of Emile Combes, hostile to the Catholic church, forbade all teaching religious even those who had been previously legally recognised. Like all the others, the FCJs had to leave France – they sought refuge in Belgium, Switzerland and the Channel Islands. As a security measure the Society was urged by the church to move the body of the Foundress.

If Mother Frances Gibson had been delighted to hold the Tribunal at Upton / Holt Hill, she was thrilled beyond all measure when Upton was chosen over Gumley House, Isleworth to receive the body. You could call it a holy triumph! North v South!

In the early morning of 13<sup>th</sup> June 1904 the Bishop, priests of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal, the Community Chaplain, members of the Paris community and of the de Bengy and de Bonnault families gathered at the grave in Gentilly. At 8 a.m. two who had been present at the burial in 1858 swore to the truth of what they stated of this being the grave in which she had been buried and by 12 noon the coffin had been removed from the grave.

The old leaden coffin was placed in a new outer one of oak; the Government delegate fastened black seals on the two screws; the Bishop, acting for the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris placed his seal in red on each knot of the hempen bands which crossed the coffin from one side to the other and on the length of white ribbon which bound it from top to bottom and cross wise. The whole was then carefully packed in a large wooden case.

All present signed the official record.

3 p.m. the new coffin set out in a hearse for Gare St Lazare, accompanied by a family friend and the chaplain –Père Ladislas

(It is worth noting that they were probably not too soon in doing what they did – in September, the liquidator, a lawyer, an auctioneer and a valuator arrived at Gentilly, made an inventory and gave the few remaining Sisters a few days in which to leave.)

Our attention now turns to Birkenhead. On the evening of Tuesday, June 14<sup>th</sup> two FCJs met the train from London at Woodside Station and the large wooden case was handed over to Mr Abercromby, solicitor and Mr Maguire, Undertaker.

M. Mary Frances had gathered 100 Sisters from the various Communities and at 5.30 when the cortege arrived at Upton Hall, they were waiting at the cemetery gates. There on behalf of the Diocese was Canon Dallow in the role of president, assisted by Canon O'Toole then Rector of St Joseph's Birkenhead, later PP of Our Lady's, and Fr. Charles Fisher then curate at Birkenhead Our Lady's –later PP English Martyrs Wallasey. There were too acolytes, cross bearer, lighted candles, holy water and incense.

Canon Dallow wrote an account of the proceedings for the local Paper.

*Packing case removed by carpenters, clergy followed all the rubrics laid down.*

*'carefully verified as sound and unbroken the various bands and red Episcopal seals, as also sundry black seals placed therein by the civil authorities of the City of Paris.*

*According to the prescribed rule, the ecclesiastical notary, Canon O'Toole now read an official sentence of excommunication against any person who should carry away as relics any fragments of coffin. This is a strict law of the church styled the 'non-cultus', since if any unauthorized honour is shown to the deceased before Rome has spoken, it would impair, if not destroy, all chances of Beatification.'*

6 p.m.. The body was then placed in the special brick grave built to receive it, with all due prayers prescribed by the ritual.

8 p.m. *ecclesiastical court opened in the Convent. Canon Dallow as 'Judex'; Canon O'Toole as 'Notary' drew up the 'procès-verbal'.*

*The French Lady on oath gave evidence of the exhumation, the bringing of the body from Paris to Birkenhead giving all the stages of transit, showing all receipts given by civil authorities, the letter of the English Consul in Paris etc.*

(Paris in a sealed compartment; Dieppe (S.S. Thomise) Newhaven; London; Victoria; London Euston; Woodside, Birkenhead [12.10 Euston arrived Woodside 4.38])

So carefully had the document to be drawn up for conveyance to Paris, that the whole session did not end until one o'clock in the morning.

Shortly afterwards a Latin Cross in white marble was raised over the grave, with the Inscription:

The Very Revd. Mother Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy de Bonnault d'Houet

Foundress of the Sisters, Faithful Companions of Jesus,  
Died April 5th 1858. Aged 76 years.  
Translated from Gentilly (Paris) June 13th 14th 1904.

### III. The Exhumation

Twenty one years later, May 28<sup>th</sup> 1925, Upton was the scene of yet another stage in the Cause of Marie Madeline.

Mass was celebrated in the Chapel at 6 a.m. and another at 6.30 a.m. (no concelebration!)

Home Office directions stipulate that removal of a coffin may take place only in the early hours of the day so at 7 a.m. the then General Superior M. Philomena Higgins and a group of FCJs were waiting by the cemetery for the Notary and the Delegate of the Ministry Of Health for the Rural District of Wirral. The medical signatures are those of Dr Murphy, Foster and Johnson.

Mr Maguire is still undertaker . There are also mentioned three Knights of the Blessed Sacrament, 'three workmen and our own two gardeners'. All were required to take the Oath.

Preparatory steps had been taken to prepare for the lifting of the coffin. As soon as the outer coffin was exposed, one bright red seal was still visible. Unfortunately the coffin had disintegrated and it took great skill to raise it and to put it on a wheeled bier to bring it to the House.

A sealed glass tube encased in a metal case was found between the outer coffin and the leaden shell. It contained a declaration signed by Mgr de Courmont at the time of the translation of the remains from Gentilly to Upton in June 1904.

A procession was formed: KBS with Cross ; Fr O'Connor and the 8 men specially chosen to assist in the removal. The coffin, covered by a rich purple velvet pall, was followed by the General Superior, her Assistants and the local Community and the Novices - round the garden paths and past the front of the Study Hall. Those only who were to take part in the ceremony were allowed into the rose-garden; all others had to halt at the entrance gate, whilst the procession moved on down the steps and into the St Agnes' playroom.

The two playrooms had been thrown into one. At the conservatory end were three tables: two for the priests and one for the medical men. Two other tables had been covered with linen cloths to receive the body; there were trestles for the coffin.

Undertaker measured and examined the outside of the coffin. Fr O'Connor identified the seven seals, six of which were intact. All were then asked to withdraw and he remained to seal the windows and doors. Nearly 9 a.m.

10 a.m. session for examination of the remains began. Provost Aloysius O'Toole representing for the time being, Bishop Hugh Singleton, Bishop of Shrewsbury as Judge in the Cause, examined the seals on the doors and windows and found them intact. The Court the entered: Canon Eugene Rooney, **assessor**, Fr. Charles Fisher, Promoter of the Faith, the Fr. James McNally, Bishop's Secretary (to be director of the ceremonial) and Fr O'Connor of Upton, Notary.

Provost O'Toole administered the oath to the then superior of Upton '*I know... often pointed out to me...no one else buried there*' M. Dorothy Hartigan fcJ and to MM Joseph Rampini (Senior Sister who had witnessed the translation in 1904 and hadn't left Upton since then) *I was present at the interment... never removed... for I have lived here in this Convent at Upton during the whole of that period* . He questioned each of them separately and the notary recorded their answers.

The record of the last deed of burial was then read and oaths administered to the doctors and to all chosen to take part in the handling of the remains at the examination. A sentence of excommunication (IN LATIN - reserved) was pronounced against anyone who should take away remains out of the coffin. The seals on the coffin were then examined and compared with those described in the deed.

Workmen opened the outer coffin –laid the leaden shell bare – stripped that off –inner oak *in pretty good condition* – took off the lid and let down the sides. (*at this solemn moment all those present instinctively rose to their feet*). The coffin was filled with sawdust which had to be taken out in handfuls. '*We were in an agony of suspense, each wondering what the next moment would reveal, when to our joy we saw the shroud and then the outline of the head and of the entire body*'.

## Medical examination and re-clothing

### Deposition:

On opening the glass bottle found in the grave, the parchment was intact, but owing to the dampness the writing was almost completely obliterated, the word 'O'Toole' alone remaining visible. We found that the external oak coffin contained a leaden casket lined with wood. The body was wrapped in linen embedded in sawdust and when this was removed, the body was found clothed in the habit of the order of the Faithful Companions of Jesus. This habit was in perfect condition. *The body of a small female ; on measurement found to be 4 ft 7 inches in length... all the bones in their normal position* . The body was in a semi-mummified state and was intact except in a few places where the skin was broken (at the front of the neck and the left side). There was evidence of a wound, an old ulcer, (to which a bandage was attached) on the inner side of the right leg below the knee. Hair was still visible on the head, also ear-rings on both ears and scapulars round the neck. The hands were joined on the breast clasping a crucifix and part of a rosary. The missing portions of the rosary were found among the clothing. There was also a deep wound in the left side. The limbs were quite flexible. The nails on hands and feet were intact and both feet were white, more especially the right one. (There was no effluvia of any kind or description from the body)

When the examination was complete the sisters helped move the body to the table prepared – they undressed, washed and re-clothed the body – nearly two hours.

Marie Madeleine had said not to undress her after her death – flannels, chemise, fichu, habit, apron, shawl, serre-tete, cap, veil, stockings (marked VB) scapulars and a bandage round the wound in her leg . All in good condition. Everything new was ready. Obviously they had not expected the scapular –so M.P.H. *placed her own scapular round the neck*. The body was replaced in a new coffin

The clothing taken from body was rolled, wrapped in linen and buried along with three boxes containing

1. the parts of the old coffin sawn in pieces together with some linen, wadding and a pillow found with the body
2. the leaden shell sawn in pieces
3. a quantity of sawdust found with the body

They are buried in the cemetery exactly facing the vault which contains the body and at a distance of ten feet from it.

Provost O'Toole sealed the door – *'all the windows were sealed and the door opening on the garden and finally the door leading into the corridor ,which was locked and the key left in the hand of the Notary'*

1.15 lunch

3 p.m. session re-opened. Seals inspected and verified . Provost read the account of the day's proceedings and all witnesses signed it.

Permission had been granted by Rome for Community and novices to file past the body but there was to be no outward mark of veneration...

Coffins closed and sealed.

Full description of coffin – shape, wood, measurements, handles and screws 'cross-cut quatre-foil' – oak – hazel – leaden case – inside coffin upholstered with linen and flannel. Sealed with 4 seals bearing the arms of Bishop Singleton – one at the head, two at the sides and one at the foot. Lead placed in oak and bound with three iron bands; leaden coffin hermetically sealed. Judex sealed the outer with the same seal in 6 places – head, foot and each panel.–

## Reburial

The body was carried back to cemetery – *' the silence was broken at intervals by the solemn chanting of the priests'* Accompanied by the officials, the workmen and the Community including novices and postulants.

The concluding portion of the funeral service from the *Rituale Romanum* was read and the coffin placed in the grave which was concreted at the bottom and laid upon three wooden sleepers. The wood was about 2 feet 4 <sup>1/2</sup> inches deep.

The following objects were placed in the coffin:

1. a bottle sealed with the seal of the Bishop of Shrewsbury stating – exhumed, examined and reburied on this day'
2. a second bottle sealed with the seal of the Bishop containing the original documents written by Mgr de Courmont and Canon O'Toole in 1904.

This document was replaced in the glass tube and sealed with the seal of Bishop Hugh Singleton – glass tube replaced in the metal tube and also sealed with the seal of Bishop of Shrewsbury (Cross of St. Chad of Lichfield and Coventry)

## IV.Next Journey!

Marie Madeline had still one more journey to make! As you listen to an account of it there will be a sense of *deja vue*...

As the Cause progressed and after the heroicity of her Virtue had been proclaimed by Pope Paul VI we were asked by the postulator to bring her body from an outside grave to an indoor one. So the decision was taken to transfer her body to the Generalate in Broadstairs.

On Tuesday June 10<sup>th</sup> 1980 the General Superior and her council left Stella Maris for Upton; the following day Fr. Eugene Kennan CP Vice- Postulator arrived.

Remote preparations were made at the grave – cross and surround removed, topsoil too and a plastic canopy erected; black tar paper spread on the ground and on the vault slab. The undertaker this time was Mr Noble of Broadstairs . (Mr Noble Senior had done a lot of work after WWII transferring bodies of war dead and he put his knowledge at the disposal of his son.)

6 p.m. Diocesan Commission appointed by Bishop Graser arrived:

Canon McGonagle Delegate

Mgr Kelly Promoter of Justice

Canon Lightbound Notary

They met with Fr Eugene

I. to present and read documents and licenses authorizing the proceedings.

1. 5/1/1980 appointing Eugene Keenan Vice Postulator –signed by Fr Federico Menegazzo CP Postulator
2. 9/2/1980 – (1) sanctioned by the Sacred Congregation for Causes of the saints
3. 29/2/1980 Home Office License
4. 25/4/1980 Sacred Congregation ordering the appointment of a commission
5. 5.6.1980 Bishop Graser named the three clerics

II. to present and study the Acts of the previous exhumation (28/5/1925) to help with the identification of the coffin

III. to discuss procedure

7 p.m. the four priests, Sister Breda O’Farrell, Superior General, and her council together with Sister Emmanuel Grant, Local Superior at Upton, went to identify the grave.

Canon McGonagle asked Sisters Breda and Emmanuel in turn: To the best of your knowledge is this the actual grave of your Mother Foundress? YES

Fr Lightbound asked: Were you present when the Foundress was buried?

EG: Yes; I was a novice in 1925

BO’F: No, but I have been to the grave before; and had been told our Foundress was buried next to next to M. Zoe Girod (fourth General Superior)

Canon asked both were they willing to take an oath. They were – but as it was raining proceedings were adjourned from the cemetery to Chapel!

Night watchman on guard from 8 p.m. (Mr Kenneth Hannan)

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> June

(If intact – straight forward; if the coffin had deteriorated , the body or remains visible – then a very different process, quite complicated)

5.30 light breakfast for all.

5.50 cemetery – Come Holy Spirit

6 a.m. Notary and Vice-Postulator made their first measurement and found the coffin 8” below the surface.

Two heavy tapes were introduced - one under head and one under feet – Fr. Eugene anxious – *Oh mind the middle!* – third tape (six men)

6.05 – coffin up – on the pathway – felt visible but deteriorated- felt off – wooden coffin exposed – deteriorated but wood still in place held by three steel bands... moulding still there

Fr. Lightbound and Eugene again took measurements – length 80” width at shoulders 23½” 1925 – 6 seals; top right showed Bishop’s coat of arms

Three of six handles remained and the brass screws (quatre-foil) intact

Outer coffin stripped off – lead one – measurements corresponded (length 64 shoulder 20 width at feet 11)

Five seals visible and intact – two with Lichfield cross very clear; the tapes round the coffin there but deteriorated and broken.

Coffin in reasonable condition and the bottom relatively solid...

6.30 a.m. leaden put into new outer oak coffin. The undertakers had placed three rubberized strips into the bottom to prevent the leaden casket slipping and they packed the whole with polystyrene pieces which would not only help keep it secure but also help absorb any moisture

New oak coffin: 77¾” length; head depth 20; width 17; depth at foot 18 ; width 17

Brass crucifix and a brass plate giving name dates and Foundress

Mr Noble inserted and tightened eight screws – Canon McGonagle and Fr Kelly inspected.

Large Convent Chapel – Upton and Birkenhead communities waiting

At the back : white cloth tape passed through the coffin handles at shoulders, middle and feet – the three sealed by the Bishops’ Delegate twice on each tape in such a way that the wax covered the joinings of the tape or sealed the tape to the wood.

coffin placed in front of the altar and sprinkled with holy water

Part of the preparation for Mass : a meeting of the four priests and the Central Community to draw up a document whereby the delegate of the Bishop of Shrewsbury officially entrusted the coffin to the care of the Vice-Postulator .

Duly drawn up and signed by the three members of the Diocesan Commission

Sealed with diocesan seal and addressed to Bishop Jukes, delegate for the Archbishop of Southwark

8 a.m. Mass of the Holy Name. Canon McGonagle chief celebrant –Frs. Keenan and Lightbound concelebrants.

Second breakfast

10.00 all assembled in Chapel – coffin wheeled to the Children’s door where the van was waiting – cars already packed

10.15 left

Car I Fr. Eugene, Breda O’Farrell and two of her Councillors

Car 2 Red avis van with Mr Noble and Assistant (van 'red' to help the Postulator identify it in traffic – he had to swear to having accompanied it from Upton to Broadstairs)

Car 3 Four more FCJs

Four stops agreed on in case of separation – three between Liverpool and London and one between London and Broadstairs. No problem to Camden Town but then Car 3 got lost. (If ever the van got delayed the first car always waited.)

The convoy drove through 'Marie Madeleine's part of London' - just 150 years after her arrival

6.38 p.m. they reached Stella Maris. Community, Tertians, Novices greeted them with sung 'Alleluia' followed by the Magnificat

Night Vigil – 9 p.m. Community Service... symbolic offerings placed in a wooden casket (signatures of the society; photo of John Paul II with words he repeated from 1837 in 1979; French Constitutions; Rosary Ring; FCJ Badge; Prayer for Healing)

There were there two more who had been novices in 1925. (M. Marie Helene had been used as model for the habit being made for the body)

The following morning the commission appointed by the Archbishop of Southwark, Michael Bowen authorised

Bishop Jukes Archbishop's delegate

Canon O'Freil as Notary

Fr. Eugene Keenan Promoter of Justice

Sealed envelope from Shrewsbury handed over

10.00 Mass. Diocesan commission inspected the coffin; blessed and incensed it ; before it was buried in a vault to the left of the tabernacle as the 'Te Deum' was sung.

## Envoi

Alleluias, Magnificats and Te Deums in the Archdiocese of Southwark... mourning in the Diocese of Shrewsbury... but no-one can deny but that Shrewsbury had had a good innings! And my prayer would be the same as that of Bishop Knight all those years ago to draw down the protection of Marie Madeleine on this diocese... and again ' that she might bless this diocese of Shrewsbury.'