**History of the Parish of the Sacred Heart and Our Lady Tenbury**

This year, the parish celebrates 70 years of the founding of a place of Roman Catholic worship here in Tenbury. 1929 is the earliest record of a Catholic Community in Tenbury, when local Catholics would meet up in ‘Rosary Cottage’, the home of Mrs Powles and her two children. At that time, Shrewsbury Diocese were responsible for Tenbury. Father Roper, who was priest in Cleobury Mortimer, travelled each week by train to Tenbury, to celebrate Holy Mass at Rosary Cottage and to teach the Catechism. Occasionally Mass was also celebrated in the Pump Rooms. It was the practice for Requiem Mass to be celebrated from Rosary Cottage. The late Bert Mills, from this parish, could remember, as a child, swinging the incense in the cottage at a funeral.

In 1932, the care of local Catholics was passed from Father Roper to the Sacred Heart Church at Droitwich, bringing Tenbury into the Diocese of Birmingham. From that time to the present day, the Catholic Church at Tenbury has belonged to the Archdiocese of Birmingham. [Apart from a short period in 1976 when the care of Tenbury was transferred to the Diocese of Cardiff]. By 1936, Tenbury had come under the care of Kidderminster, but Kidderminster was already a busy parish, and fully occupied the priests there.

The parish owes its continued existence to this day, to the zeal of Monseigneur Dr. Francis Davis. He was the Professor of Theology at Oscott College, and later became Vice Rector. Mgr. Davis asked the Archbishop, His Grace Thomas Williams, if there was anywhere in the Diocese where he could be useful during the six week summer vacation. The Archbishop asked him to help at Tenbury, which was in need of care.

To explore the possibilities of what could be done in the parish, Mgr, Davis decided upon a six week mission, bringing with him a team of Seminarians. He came to Tenbury with friends Captain and Mrs Avery, who were as auntie and uncle to him. These two friends, like Mgr. Davis, were to play a significant part in the development of Tenbury parish. A local farmer agreed to allow the priest and his seminarians to stay in his hop pickers barns for the duration of the mission

Deacon, Father Lucas remembered that they travelled both ways between Birmingham and Tenbury on bicycles, the uphill journey back to Birmingham was particularly difficult and ‘the bicycles for some reason or another rarely behaved themselves’. Mgr. Davis and his Seminarians, living in the hop barns, looked after themselves, save for the farmer’s wife, who spoilt them with homemade apple pies! They preached from the Round Market and celebrated Mass in the Pump Rooms. They came across about fifty people who were nominally Catholic, and it seemed right that something permanent should be done for Catholics in Tenbury.

So from 1936 onwards there was an established Catholic church in Tenbury. On the return of the mission team to Oscott, Mgr. Davis continued to visit weekly, cycling the 40 miles to and from the parish, to celebrate Holy Mass in the Pump Rooms. It is said that he was often seen cycling along reading a book! The Archbishop was suitably impressed with the growth of the church, which led to the purchase of a piece of land for them, next door to a house called ‘Norville’. This house was later bought by Captain and Mrs Avery, and the name changed to ‘Maryvale’. It was a large rambling Gothic Victorian building with outbuildings to the rear. They included a stable block which was ideal for converting into a chapel. Overlooking the Teme Valley and river, the site had the most beautiful view.

The first Mass was fixed for the Feast of the Transfiguration on the 6th August 1939. Parishioners recalling the event, look back with nostalgia and remember magnificent displays of gladioli which filled the altar.

With the care of Tenbury passing once again to the Sacred Heart at Droitwich, Holy Mass was celebrated weekly in the Stable Chapel. This, together with the historic connection to ‘Maryvale’ in Birmingham, is how the church came to be called ‘The Sacred Heart and Our Lady’.

In 1943, priests and students from the Sacred Heart College, Droitwich, came to ‘Maryvale’ to establish a house of studies. The Averys returned to their Hampshire home, thinking that their task of supporting Mgr. Davies in establishing a Mass Centre had been completed. However, the ‘House of Studies’ was not successful, and after three years, was abandoned. The Averys returned, and, for the rest of their lives, served as caretakers of the community, pastoral care continuing to be administered from Droitwich.

In 1952, Tenbury again came under the care of Kidderminster parish, and in 1966 it was annexed to the parish of Stourport, which, with a short break, was responsible for the next 30 years.

Captain Avery died in December 1963 and his wife in August 1969. They bequeathed their estate, ‘Maryvale House’, the Stable Chapel and grounds to the Archdiocese of Birmingham. This, together with the field already purchased in 1936, made a substantial plot on which to build a new church.

In 1964, serious fundraising began to replace the stable chapel, which had succumbed to dry rot. The house was likewise unsound, and the buildings were demolished to make way for the new church, which stands on the exact spot of ‘Maryvale House’. Still under the care of Stourport, in 1987, Father Douglas Lamb was appointed as parish priest in Kidderminster. In 1997, Tenbury was returned to Kidderminster, once again under the care of Father Lamb, who became the longest serving priest of the parish.

Amended text from an original by a member of Tenbury RC Church.