

## **ST ALBAN'S SCHOOLS, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE RECENTLY DEMOLISHED BONNEY'S BUILDING**

Having looked carefully through Mary Conlon's book, *St Alban's Blackburn 1773-1973*, it is clear the documents found during the demolition of the Bonney's are totally in accord with information already available, but the added details, particularly of the procession and the words of Canon Irving, quoted at such length, certainly flesh out the story.

Until 1850, St Alban's was the only Catholic parish in Blackburn, a rapidly growing industrial town. It was a thriving and growing community, led by charismatic and dynamic clergy and supported by an active and, in some cases, very wealthy laity, who were committed to the success of their parish and fully aware of the need to provide education for the children. St Anne's parish started in 1850, but it is clear that the clergy and laity of St Alban's still took a keen practical and financial interest in the development of the new parish. St Alban's seems to have remained for some time the Catholic centre of the town.

As well as the wealthy, there were also a growing number of poor and very poor families. The arrival of Notre Dame nuns in 1850, invited and encouraged by both laity and clergy, seems to have increased the numbers especially of younger children presenting themselves for schooling. The existing school facilities were quickly overwhelmed and presumably there was an urgent need to provide new buildings.

All the money needed to come from parishioners and church collections for a new school began in 1858. However, shortly after this, life in the town for both poor and wealthy was seriously affected by the cotton famine, which must have made it impossible to raise the necessary funds for the new school.

Nevertheless, in 1862 they went ahead with the laying of the foundation stone with massive celebration and publicity. The comments in Fr Irving's address seem to indicate that this was prompted by the First Education Code 1862. The vastly overcrowded schools were being inspected and were known to be inadequate. The new government funding would have been withheld if serious intent to improve the facilities were not evident.

Maybe the event was so spectacular to make sure the authorities believed the seriousness of their intent. Maybe it was simply because, despite the desperate economic times through which they were living, the Catholic community of Blackburn was still riding high on the wave of optimism brought about by their growing emancipation.

Below are details from the book and the newspaper article of 1862, which flesh out this summary. All the page references are to Mary Conlon's book, *St Alban's Blackburn 1773-1973*. I hope you find the details as interesting as I did. Apologies for any errors in the dates or page references. The information below is summarised; further details and insights can be found in the book and in the 1862 newspaper article.

## **THE NEW SCHOOL – THE RECENTLY DEMOLISHED BONNEY’S BUILDING**

c 1852 £1,802 0s 2d raised by St Alban’s congregation for the building of St Anne’s New School (the new parish which was founded in 1850) (Pg 102)

Church collections for St Alban’s new schools started 1858 (Pg 77)

The First Education Code 1862 established per capita grants and inspections (payment by results) (P 62.) These ‘grants’ were referred to as a reason for commencing work during Canon Irving’s address which was quoted at length in the report of the event printed in the Preston Guardian, found during the demolition of the building 2018.

Building started 1862, but was delayed by the cotton famine (Pg 88)

Extended description of the effects on the parish of the cotton famine 1862 – 63 (Pg 103)

Foundation stone laid Whit Sunday June 9<sup>th</sup> 1862, accompanied by a major procession through the town (Documents found during demolition & Pg 103)

Canon Irving seems to have been keen on processions (Pg103)

Building actually commenced March 1865 (Documents found during demolition)

Building complete 1866 (Pg 77)

Girls and infants moved in 4<sup>th</sup> Feb 1867 (Pg 77 & 88)

Canon Irving died March 10<sup>th</sup> 1867 and was buried in Blackburn Cemetery (Pg 104)

Aug 1889 The girls moved to the next new buildings where they stayed till March ’73 (Pg 80)

1890 The infants also moved into the new building (Pg78)

The boys could finally move into the 1866 building with Mr Bonney (who had been headteacher of the Boys’ since Sept 1867 – (See Birley Street below).

I’m sorry I couldn’t find a date for Mr Bonney’s retirement / death

Mr Bonney was followed by Mr Atkinson and Mr Mercer, both equally respected headteachers of the Junior Boys’ School (Pg 91)

1973 the Junior Boys moved to the new (present) school and The Bonney’s became the Parish Social Centre

## **BEFORE 1862 THERE WERE THREE OTHER SCHOOL BUILDINGS IN THE PARISH:**

**THE ORIGINAL ST ALBAN'S SCHOOL ON BIRLEY STREET** (marked on the map on the back of the book)

Boys downstairs – girls and infants upstairs – 1849 90 boys in boys department (Pg 74)

Money spent by the parish improving this school – 1850s parish notices (Pg75)

By 1858 (possibly 1856) Notre Dame nuns were running the girls' & infant department. It is very likely that for a time St Patrick's (see below) and this girls' & infant department on Birley Street operated as one school under one nun but in the two buildings (Pg 76-7)

March 1863 the boys moved out into Sparrow's School (see below) to make room for the extra children (girls and infants) moving up the road from St Patrick's School. (In 1863 250-300 infants were crowded in space only fit for 170 in this 'united' school) (Pg 77 & 88)

The following Spring (1864) Girls and Infants were made into separate departments, each with their own teacher, presumably one upstairs, one downstairs. (Pg77)

February 4<sup>th</sup> 1867 The girls and infants moved to the new school (see above) (Pg 77 & 88)

and the boys moved back to this building, vacating Sparrow's School, Quarry Street. (Pg 88)

Sept 1867 Mr Bonney was appointed headteacher of the boys' school (Pg 90)

1889 / 90 The boys moved out of this Birley Street building into the 1866 building (the now-demolished Bonney's)

## **SPARROW'S SCHOOL ON QUARRY STREET**

1844 Factory Act – Children from age 8 could work if they received part time education till age 13 (Pg 66)

1850 John and Thomas Sparrow, Catholic mill owners, built a Factory School costing £600 for the children, Catholic and non Catholic, working in their mill. (Pg 66-7)

The children were poorer than in the parish school – no fees were charged (Pg 75)

Sparrow's School was operating in 1863, but no longer in 1864 (Pg 66-67)

March 1863 The boys' department of St Alban's School started to use these premises (to make room for the numerous younger children in the parish school). They also had to take the non catholic boys from Sparrow's Mill. Mr Sparrow continued to oversee the school, presumably to fulfil his legal obligation to provide schooling for children at his mill. (Pg 88)

4<sup>th</sup> Feb 1867 The Boys moved to the old parish school on Birley Street, which was being vacated by the girls and infants moving to the new school. (Pg 88)

1871 the building was rented by Canon Parker for the Sisters of Notre Dame to use as a Ragged School for Girls and Infants, named St Patrick's Quarry Street (Pg67)

Often still referred to as Sparrow's School, this school continued to provide education for the poorest girls and infants who could not afford even the small school fees charged at the parish schools. Following the 1902 Education act, all fees were discontinued and the school became less relevant and ceased about 1908. (Pgs 84-87)

The building continued to be used by the parish even until the 1960s, when it was used by the Higher Grade boys for handicraft (Pg 87)

## **ST PATRICK'S DAY AND SUNDAY SCHOOL ON PENNY STREET**

Run by Notre Dame Sisters and opened 1851. The Notre Dame sisters had arrived in 1850, invited and encouraged by Fr Kaye, the parish priest before Canon Irving, and John Sparrow (Pg 101 & 47) The school was open every day, including Sunday and was also a night school.

Its aim was to educate the very poor. By 1852 331 boys and girls attended (Pg 76)

By 1858 (possibly 1856) Notre Dame nuns were running this school and the girls & infant department of the parish school on Birley Street (See above), most likely as one school under one nun but in the two buildings (Pg 76-7)

This makes sense of the references to *St Alban's and St Patrick's Boys and Girls' Schools* in the documents found during demolition. It also clarifies the reference to *these excellent ladies* and *these good sisters*. (All Pg 4 of the news report from 1862.)

March 1863 the children from this school moved up the road to join the other girls and infants in the parish school on Birley Street (See above) (Pg 77 & 88)

## **OTHER AND LATER SCHOOLS**

### **ST ALBAN'S INFANTS, GIRLS AND HIGHER GRADE BUILDING (Demolished in the 70's)**

August 1889 The girls moved out of 'The Bonney's' into the new buildings where they stayed till March '73 (Pg 80)

1890 The infants also moved into the new building (Pg 78)

May 1889 Higher Grade Boys moved in (Pg 93)

### **NOTRE DAME BOARDING AND DAY SCHOOL**

Opened 1862 for the daughters of the wealthy (The boys had to go elsewhere) (Pg 75)

More able girls continued their education through the pupil teacher process, some of them going on to study at Notre Dame Mount Pleasant Liverpool to become certificated teachers. In time scholarships were available for the most able to attend the convent school with the fee-paying girls

### **HIGHER GRADE SCHOOL**

There was nowhere equivalent to the convent for the more able older boys, with or without fees. In 1884 a Higher Grade School was opened in a house in St Alban's Place (one of only two in the diocese) (Pg 92)

May 1889 The Higher Grade Boys moved to the new buildings described above (Pg 93)

Some boys would continue to board at Stonyhurst, Ampleforth etc. Other families chose to send their sons to Preston Catholic College.

The Marist Fathers arrived in the town in the 1920s and founded St Mary's College.