

A Short History of



The Congregation of The Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy

Collated by Andrew McGovern

2nd edition December 2008

Foreword

It was with much pleasure that, as current Chairman of the Association, I accepted the invitation to write a few words by way of an introduction to this History of the Congregation of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy and the College.

Being a past pupil of St Egberts during the early 1960's, I enjoyed the period immediately before eventual closure in 1970 when the site was sold for housing - a period which in many ways was the autumn of an era that spanned five decades.

Fond memories of the school still exist in my mind with The Ridgeway relatively free from traffic, poplar trees lining the drive to the school and Sports Days upon which the sun always shone.

Bro Fergus always made my geography lessons come alive particularly with his vivid descriptions of Lake Titicaca in South America, compelling me to visit this very obscure out-of-the-way place in adulthood just to see if it was really there!

However this introduction is not about my personal experiences, but the reason why I have allowed this mild indulgence is to bring into sharp focus the fact that, with the passing in the last year or so of our last two Brothers - Fergus and Edmund along with Gordon Spurgeon, our PE Instructor, an era has finally come to an end. Therefore, unless we looked around us and drew upon various sources of information currently available to us, and perhaps of more significance our members' own personal experiences, with the passing of time memories would fade and the information would be lost forever.

With this important goal in mind the Committee decided in 2007 to start a project tracing the history of the Order with the intention of placing the information in a permanent document to celebrate its existence rather than mourn its passing. As a consequence much hard work has been done by a dedicated group of people too numerous to mention here, to whom I will be eternally grateful.

In conclusion, apart from being an enjoyable read, I hope that it will now become a truly lasting history of the Order that in its time has given to both present and past pupils of the college so much.

Peter Burke

Chairman

December 2008



The Congregation's Early Years.

The Congregation, founded in 1839, is still very much in existence although it does not have any Schools or Houses in England.

The 'Superior General' of the Congregation lives at the '**Casa Generalizia Villa Scheppers**' in Rome (named after Mgr Victor Scheppers who founded the Congregation). He is elected for a period of six years at the General Chapter held in Rome in July. The current Superior General was elected in 2007.

The Congregation's school in Rome '**Pontificia Scuola Pio IX**' is situated in the main Avenue approaching St Peter's Square. It was opened in 1861 on land donated by Pope Pious IX and is a large quadrangular building on the left hand side as you approach St Peter's Square, one block back from the Square.

The Crest adopted by the Congregation for their school badge consisted of :- **A Triangle**, 'Symbol of God' - **Two Hearts**, 'Symbol of Love' - **Palm Branches**, 'Symbol of Victory' - The Motto, '**Beati Mundo Corde**' which translates 'Blessed are the Clean of Heart' is one of the eight beatitudes. The motto formed the ideals for which the Brothers strived Another ideal of the founder was 'Works, not words'.

Between 1839 and 1877 the Congregation opened many houses mainly to run reformatory schools. They also worked in a number of prisons in Belgium and Italy and in due course in England, Canada, South America and Africa where they mainly catered for the poor and orphaned children. As news of their work spread Mgr Scheppers was continually under pressure, particularly from Rome, to send his Brothers to open new houses and work in various prisons.

Following his ordination in 1832 Mgr Scheppers had been given the job of School Inspector and was responsible for 10 schools in his parish. This was his introduction to teaching, and his first 'school' was a room in his father's house. There was no shortage of children wanting to attend and with the support and generosity of his father he opened his first school in **Malines** called **Maria Mother of Mercy** on the 2nd February 1835. Adjacent to this school was a large house occupied, in the words of Mgr Scheppers, 'by some elderly ladies from good standing families' who lived as a community under his guidance and it was from this community that **The Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy** was born. Like our Brothers these Sisters devoted themselves to teaching girls from the poorest families, eventually establishing houses in England and elsewhere.

The Congregation was canonically established in Belgium by Mgr Scheppers on the 25th January 1839 and the first three Brothers took the names of Louis, Vincent and Rombaunt. By 1844 it numbered 30 Brothers and 15 Postulants, and received its Decree of Papal Approbation as a Religious Congregation on the 20th September 1857.

On the 16th March 1987 the Pope issued a decree recognising the heroism and virtues of the Venerable Victor Scheppers.

Today the **Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy** is very much a teaching/nursing Order and although in 1986, following the death of five Brothers in the civil war, the Brothers were driven out of Burundi by the government of the day, it still has 7 houses in Belgium, Antwerp (2) - Alseberg - Anderlecht - Hernentals - Mechelen - and Wetteren, and 5 in Italy, Rome (2) - Busnago (Milan) - Fabriano - Jesi (both in Ancona). The two houses in Ancona are more recent developments, where, responding to the needs of poor people in today's world, the Brothers look after the elderly and those in dire need, keeping the dream and goal of their founder alive.

It also has schools in Holland, Canada, Africa, and South America.

The Congregation arrives in England

Cardinal Wiseman was one of the many admirers of the work that the Congregation was doing at its reformatory schools in Belgium and Rome for poor and orphaned children and in 1855 he invited Mgr Scheppers to take over the running of a Catholic orphanage in **Hammersmith** (Hammersmith House). In July of that year four Brothers with their Director Bro Louis arrived in London from Belgium. This was followed in 1857 by the Congregation being asked to take over the running of an existing Catholic orphanage in **North Hyde** (St Mary's Orphanage).

Further reformatory and/or industrial residential schools run by the Congregation were:-

Brook Green (Immaculate Conception of Mary House, home and school for problem children). When the Congregation left it became a Catholic teachers training college which in the mid 1930's moved to Strawberry Hill in Twickenham and was called St Mary Catholic Teachers Training College and is now part of the University of London.

Manor Park (St Nicholas' Industrial School)

Islington (St Nicholas Home, run as a home in conjunction with the industrial school in Manor Park)

Walthamstow (St John's Home also run in conjunction with the industrial school in Manor Park)

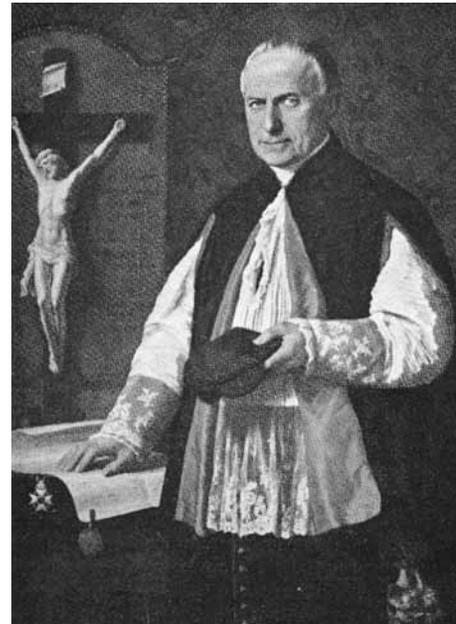
Southend (Blythe House, transferred to Boleyn Castle in 1870)

West Ham (Boleyn Castle)

Brentwood (St Charles School, previously located in

Fulham with 40 boys).

St Charles School in Weald Road, Brentwood with its grounds of 18 acres, was purpose built and the brainchild of Cardinal Manning who bought the land in 1883. The



Monseigneur Victor Scheppers

25th April 1802 - Mechelen - 7th March 1877, Founder of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy

school was fully opened in 1886 with 200 boys aged from 9 to 16. Boys under 9 were under the care of the Sisters of Charity at Mill Hill and Leyton.

Bro Arthur, the Director of the time, took a great interest in the school and was personally involved in the superb landscaping of the grounds with its avenue of trees. After the Brothers left in 1901 it was refurbished and run by the Sisters of Charity until 1936, then by the Christian Brothers until 1954. From 1971 until it closed in the 1990's it was administered by the DHSS as a residential Youth treatment centre for difficult and problem children.

Some of the Brothers and Directors of St Charles School are buried in the grounds of St Helen's Catholic Church in Brentwood, which is now The Diocesan Cathedral. The records are a little unclear, but I believe they are Bro Aidan and Bro Hugh. It also seems possible that Bro Arthur (the founder) and Bro James were brought there for burial.

The Brothers were also able to arrange accommodation at two Catholic hostels in London, **St Patrick's** (Fitzroy Square) and **St George's** (Blackfriars Road), where pupils could live on leaving school. To give the children a better chance for their future, emigration to Canada was also encouraged.

The changes to the administration of the Poor Laws resulted in a drop in the number of children sent to these schools, so by the early 1900's most had closed down or were taken over by the Sisters of Charity, and most of the Brothers then moved to **St Aloysius College**, Highgate.

St Thomas's School, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham, was run by the Brothers from 1931 until 1939 but I am not sure what type of school it was.

At one time in the 1930's the Congregation had a community of more than 40 Brothers teaching at its colleges in its English Province. Each College had a '**Brother Director**' who was Headmaster of the College and also responsible for the Religious Community whilst each country had a '**Brother Provincial**'. When it was necessary to move Brothers between Colleges the Superior General would issue a command known as an '**Obedience**' telling them when and where they had to go; such moves were always 'with immediate effect'. As with all Religious Orders of Brothers, Monks and Nuns there was no choice, as under the vow of obedience, it was a case of 'here today gone tomorrow' and Novices who failed to reach final Profession were treated similarly.

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J. M. J. V.

Congregation of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mercy.

OBEEDIENCE.

We the undersigned order that Brother.....

immediately on the reception of this obedience shall proceed, under the protection of his Holy Angel Guardian, to that community at
111, HORNSEY LANE, HIGHGATE, N.6.

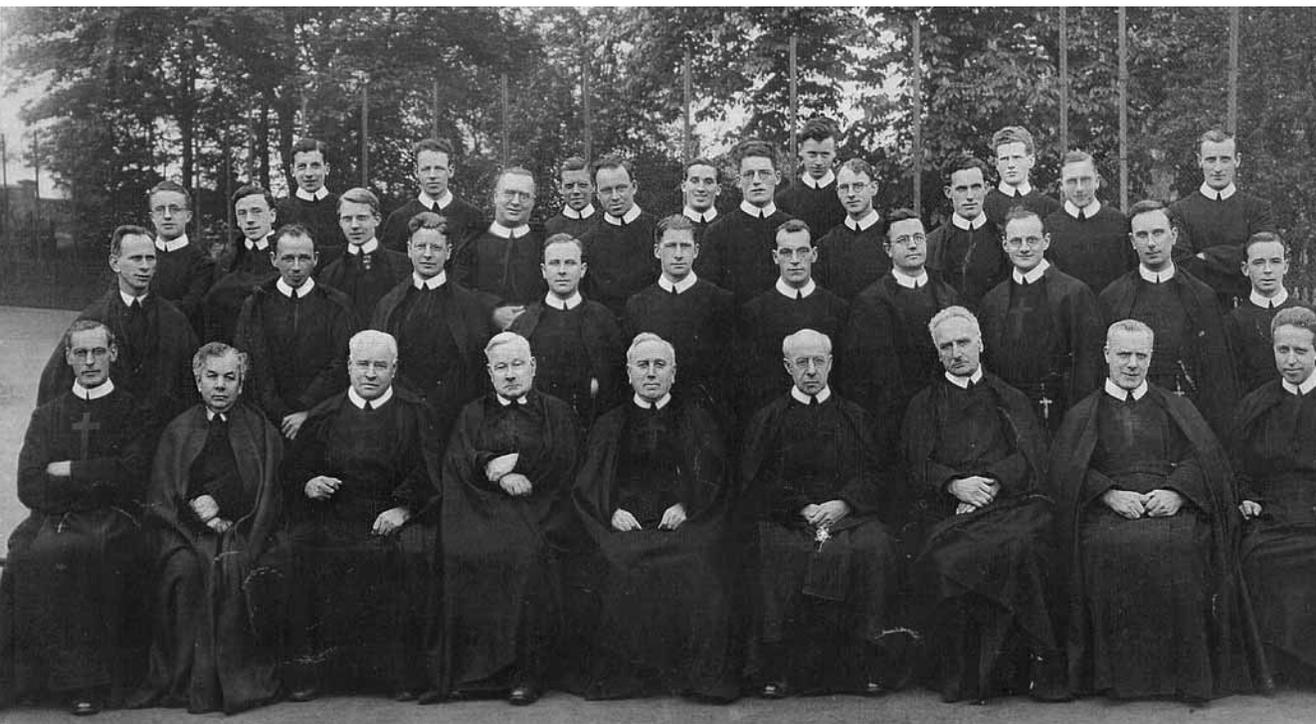
to remain there for the time being.....

Leave Sunday October the 4th. 1970 at

Date 30th. September 1970 1970

For the Sup. Gen.

The Command issued by the Superior General when Brothers moved Community



**Brothers attending the Annual Retreat at St Aloysius College, Summer 1932;
names left to right**

Front row - Kevin, Justus, Amadeus, Alban, Egbert, Edwin, William, Oswin, Nacissus

2nd row - Gabriel, Luke, Cornelius, Damien, Francis, Leo, Brendan, Isidore, Arthur, Felix

3rd row - Aloysius, Fidelis, Clement, Patrick, Thomas, Ambrose, Jarlath, Celsus, Mark, Raphael

Back row - Stephen, John, Celestine, Finbar, Laurence, Hugh

The later English Schools and Houses

St Aloysius College, Highgate, which was founded in 1879, was requisitioned by the army during the Second World War and sadly its beautiful chapel was destroyed during the Blitz. The college was fully operational again by 1946 and in 1961 was handed over to the De La Salle Brothers to run. However, some of the Brothers such as Bro Oswald, Bro Aloysius and Bro Edmund continued to teach there. Meantime the Congregation continued to run **St Aloysius Junior School** opened in 1951 until it closed when the site was sold in 1985. Bro Fergus was Headmaster at the time of its closure. The Congregation continued to own the St Aloysius playing fields in Hurst Avenue, Highgate, until 1995 when they were purchased by the Diocese of Westminster on behalf of the college. Strenuous fundraising by the college and loans from former **Old Aloysians** have enabled the college to repay the Diocese and build a modern clubhouse.



St Joseph's Novitiate, Isle of Wight, September 1934

Front row - Bro Felix, Bro Damien, Bro/Fr Isidore, Bro Kevin
 Back row - unknown novice, Bro, Oswald, 2 unknown novices, Bro Herbert



Visit of the Superior General in the 1960's

Left to right - Bro Cornelius, Fr Isidore, Bros Oswald, Benedict, The Superior General,
 Raphael, Celsus, Edmund Campion, Aloysius



General Chapter of the Congregation July 2001 in Rome
 Superior General Bro Robert Piccolo in the centre front



The Congregation at a Novices Clothing Ceremony at "Cleves Novitiate",
 East Molesley, April 1959. **Front row** - Fr Brendan, Bro Fidelis, Fr Clement, 2 novices, Bros Kevin, Columban,
 Oswald. **Back row** - Bros Maurice, Paschal, layman, Bros Peter, Felix, layman, Joe Mason (the cook),
 Fr Isidore, Bros Raphael, Cornelius, a postulant, Bros Celsus, Aloysius



St Aloysius College, Highgate, London N6

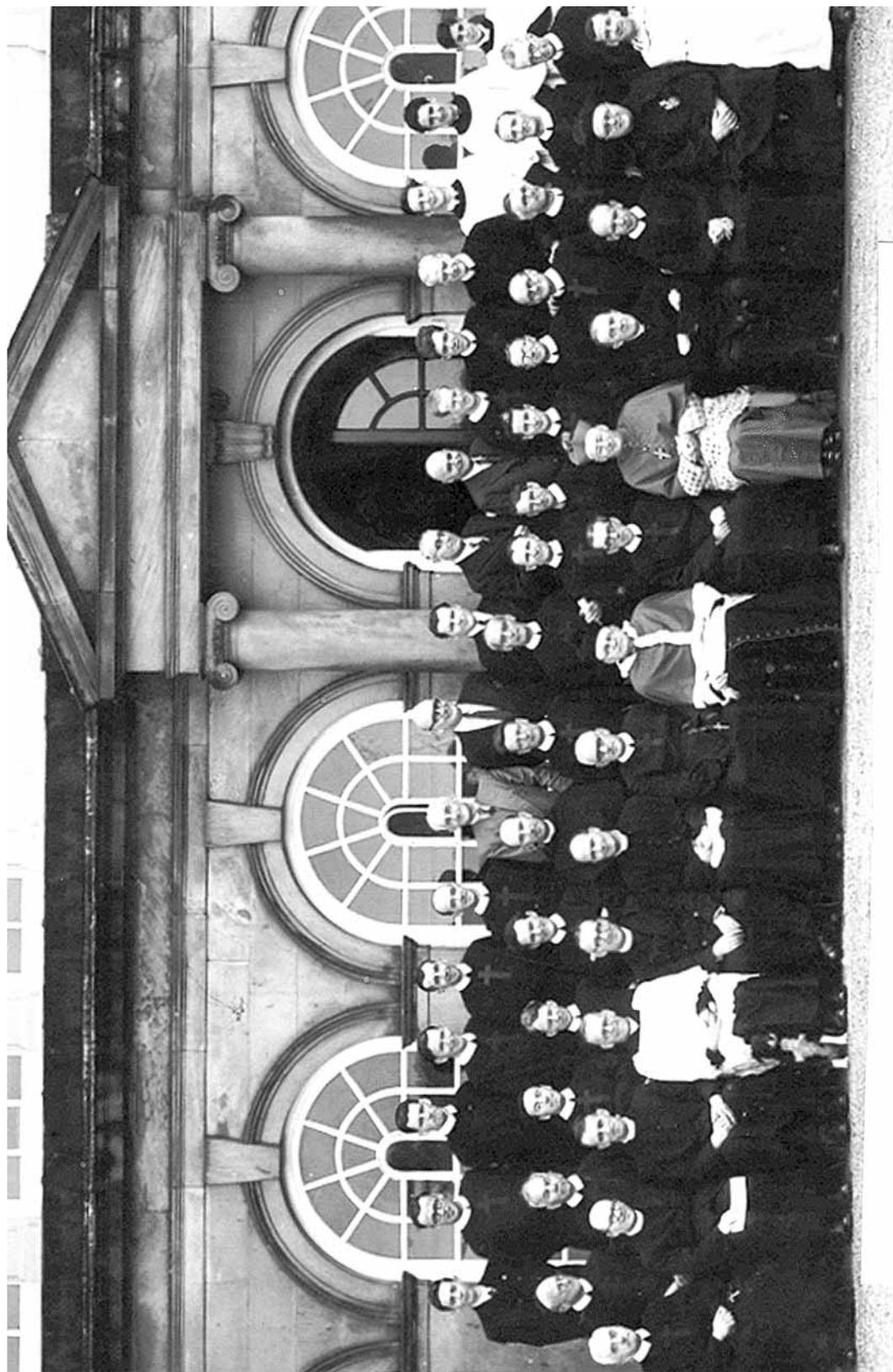
Today **St Aloysius College** is run as a 'comprehensive' by the local authority, but still has the same badge and motto as when it was run by the Congregation. Extensive rebuilding means that the college is unrecognisable from the days when it was owned by the Congregation, although the lovely carved stone War Memorial, on Hornsey Lane, recording the names of Old Aloysians who gave their lives in the two World Wars is still the venue for an annual wreath laying service on Remembrance Sunday, following the Annual Mass in the modern college chapel.

Stainsby Hall, Derby was bought from the Sitwell family (Dame Edith Sitwell) in 1939. It opened as a boarding school for pupils evacuated from both **St Egberts** and **St Aloysius** and later became a day school. Bro Gabriel was the Headmaster and Director during the war years.

In June 1948 Stainsby Hall, with Brother Hugh as Director, became the Novitiate for the English Congregation when Rome gave permission for two Brothers from each house to study for the Priesthood. The six Brothers who studied there were Brothers Aidan, Fintan, Isidore, Jarlath, Brendan and Clement, and they were all ordained in 1953 at St. Mary's Church, Cadogan Street, Chelsea.

Fr Aidan left the Congregation in the 1960's and became a secular priest in the Westminster diocese reverting to his family name and was known as Fr John Pakenham. He was at St Mary Moorfields in Eldon Street (near Liverpool St. station), then Notting Hill and eventually St Patrick's in Soho Square where he died in 1987. Fr. Jarlath spent most of his priesthood as Chaplain to St Egberts College whilst helping the Parish Priest at the Catholic Church in Chingford.

The Congregation's first Novitiate and Juniorate in England, opened in 1923, was **St Joseph's** on the Isle of Wight, just east of Cowes. It closed in 1937. Then in 1948 the Anglo-Irish Noviate for the Congregation was officially opened on the 21st June (the feast of St Aloysius) at **Stainsby Hall**, which had in the past been used as a temporary Novitiate. However with the drop in vocations Stainsby Hall was found to be too large so the Congregation sold it in 1958, and a smaller Novitiate was then bought and opened by the Congregation. It was '**Cleves**' 103



Brothers attending the opening of the Anglo-Irish Novitate at Stainsby Hall, Monday 2 1st June 1948 - Feast of St. Aloysius

Back: layman, Fergus, Gerrard, Paschal, Stephen, Felix, 5 laymen, Hugh, Alfred, Oswin, 3 servers

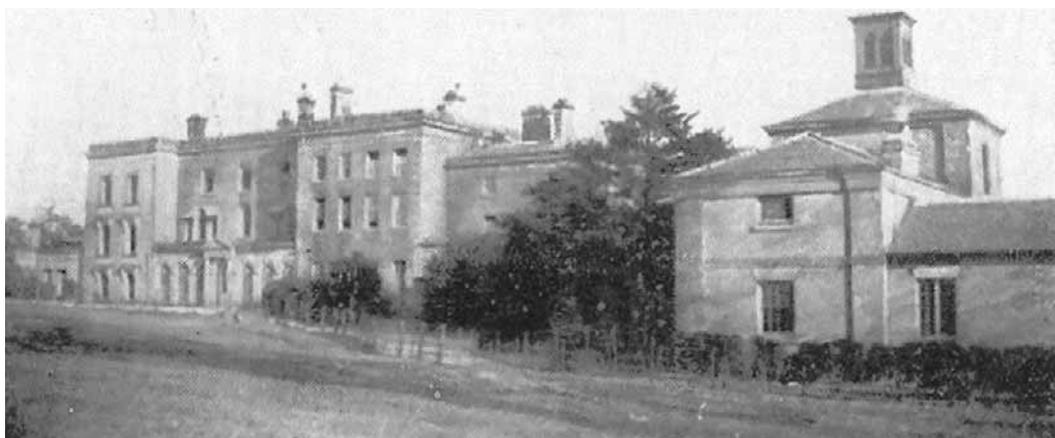
Centre: Euclaire, Justice, Fidelis, Clement, Celsus, priest, Cornelius, Kevin, Peter, Jarlath, Oswald, Mark, Isidore, Brendan, Raphael, Fintan

Front: Wulstan, 5 priests, Columban, Mgr Hargreaves, Aidan (Provincial), Bishop Ellis, priest, Libera

Palace Road, East Molesey. Its first Novice Master was Bro Fidelis and 'Joe' Mason, who for many years was the cook at St Egbert's and Stainsby Hall, was the cook.

The Congregation's Novices underwent an initial six months as a Postulant followed by one year as a Novice, and then three or six years temporary profession before finally being fully Professed as a Brother.

Following the 1944 Education Act, the Brothers obtained their teacher qualifications at St Mary's Teacher Training College, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham.



Stainsby Hall, Smalley, Derbyshire

St Egberts College, Chingford was founded in 1920 and closed in 1970 and the site sold for housing development. The only references to the College are that the main entrance to the development leading from the Ridgeway (i.e. the original entrance to the college) is called **St Egberts Way** and a road within the development is named College Road. The Congregation used the monies raised from the sale of the site towards building a mission school in Africa.

After the First World War when the Church of England put '**The Chantry**' and its grounds up for sale the Congregation saw it as an ideal site for a sister college to St Aloysius. Brother Fidelis once told me laughingly that the rumour circulating at the time was that the local church did not want the 'Catholics' to buy it to turn it into a school, however dressed in 'mufti' two of the Brothers and their solicitor met up with the vendors and were successful buyers. One can never be sure of such a rumour but, if correct, I feel the Brothers played a 'fair' hand.



St Egbert's College, Chingford, London E4

When **St Egberts College** opened on the 20th September 1920 it started with two classes and 24 boys. It eventually grew to 220 boys by September 1936, taking both boarders and day boys. The boarders slept in six smallish dormitories situated in the top floor of the Chantry.

Brother Patrick was its first Director followed by Brothers Justice and Wulstan. In its formative years it consisted of the Chantry and the 'Stable', then later came the Hall/bicycle shed (behind the Chantry), 'The Lab' and the 'Huts' (which site later became the playground for the 'New Building'). It seems all these 'buildings' were used at one time or another as 'classrooms'. The toilets were known as 'The Places'.

There was also a small productive farm and orchard in the grounds with goats and geese wandering around freely.

The 'New Building' (the main College until 1970) was talked about for some years, work eventually commenced in 1934, and its official opening by Bishop Doubleday of Brentwood Diocese in October 1934 was widely covered in the local press. In his homily the Bishop thanked the Brothers for all their hard work in establishing and building the school at no expense to either the Diocese or the Government.

During the 2nd World War the College and Chantry were requisitioned by the ARP. The junior pupils, together with those not evacuated as boarders to Stainsby Hall in Derby, were taught in a large house, **No. 5 Crescent Road**, Chingford where amongst others, Brothers Fidelis, Isidore, Damien, Thomas and Paul taught. The



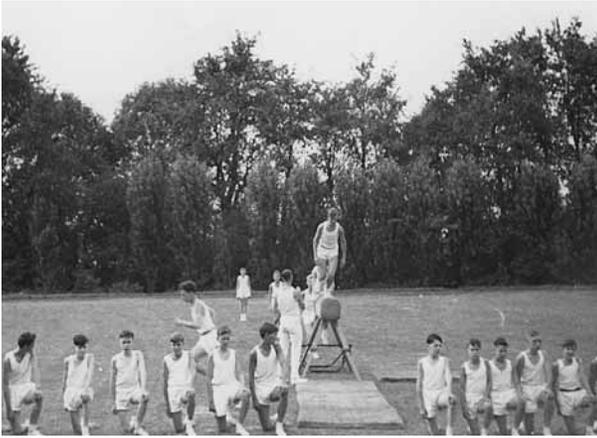
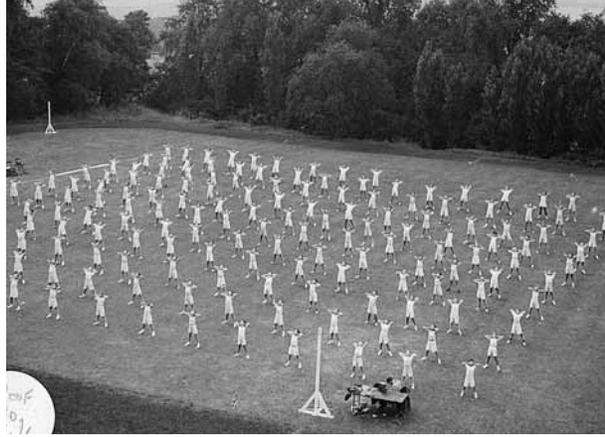
Stainsby Hall, Derby - Joint St Egberts and St Aloysius V XI 1942/43
with a young Brother Fergus as Goalkeeper

Hall at the back of the Chantry was damaged during the 'Blitz' and in my time at the College (1950-55) was still in its damaged state and known as the 'bicycle shed'.

Sporting activities always featured strongly at the College and many a Brother, kitted out in football gear, would accompany pupils down Kings Head Hill to play football on Soper's Field. The Annual Sports Day in July was one of the big occasions of the College year, in particular the PE display with its impressive tableaux, and the 'Old Boys Half Mile'. Members of **The Old Egbertian Association**, founded in 1927 and still active today, helped in the running of the various field and track events on Sports Day and usually organised a dance in the evening to which all former pupils and partners were invited.

Another annual event held in the grounds, courtesy of the Brothers, was the parish outdoor Corpus Christi Procession, organised by the local Catholic Church and attended by many of the pupils and Catholic families of the parish.

The Old Egbertian Association also ran **The Old Egbertians Football Club**, where in the early days it was not unusual to find one or two of the Brothers playing. The Football Club still survives and has a number of the children of Old Egbertians playing for them but are now known as the **The Egbertians**, with four or five teams fielded on most Saturdays during the season.



Annual Sports Day - Athletic activities at St Egbert's College including the Opening Ceremony, Gymnastics and the Tableaux

Annual Chingford Parish 'Corpus Christi' Outdoor Procession, following the Procession around the running track. Benediction was given from the Altar constructed on the grass bank, right foreground



The Congregation's final years in England

In 1985, with no new vocations, a small ageing Congregation, Bro Fergus and Bro Paschal both leaving the Congregation to retire to Ireland, **St Aloysius Junior School** and the Novitiate 'Cleves' in East Moseley were both sold and a bungalow purchased in **Ainsdale** near **Southport**. It was to this bungalow that Bro Fidelis and Bro Oswald retired in 1985. This location was chosen because Bro Oswald had a brother living in Southport and Bro Fidelis, a native of Burnley, had family living nearby. At about this time Bro Maurice moved to Rome where he taught at the Congregation's school but found it difficult to settle down and his health was not very good. He therefore returned to England in the early 1990's and, due to his health problems, Bro Fidelis found him a place in a residential home in Liverpool run by Nuns.

When Bro Oswald died in 1995 the bungalow in **Ainsdale** was sold and Bro Fidelis moved into a residential home in **Padiham** run by the Sisters of Mercy. I first visited him in 2001 and found him very sprightly and with an amazing memory and power of recall for names, faces and events. On a subsequent visit in 2003 he was still very alert but badly affected by arthritis. He sadly died in July 2005 at the age of 96 having spent 78 years serving God in the Congregation. The Superior General of the Congregation at the time, Bro Roberto Picolo had visited him three weeks earlier. Mike Fitzgerald represented the **Old Egbertian Association** at his Requiem Mass, and the Congregation was represented by Bro Kristiaan and another Brother, who both came over from Belgium.

Of the Brothers that taught at the colleges from the 1930's to their various closing dates I have been able to establish the following information so far. Those with an * after their name are buried at St Pancras and Islington Cemetery alongside the A406 North Circular Road. The plot is Plot 3 in RC4 and registered in the name of St Aloysius College, Hornsey Lane. Detailed information on the burials is available to callers at the Cemetery office.

Bro Vincent*	Died at Chingford of peritonitis 18th May 1939	aged 22
Bro Augustine*	Died Chingford 23rd December 1947	aged 52
Bro Oswin*	Died Highgate Sept 1950	aged 77
Bro Mark	Died Derby or Highgate late 1950's	aged ?
Bro/Fr Fintan*	Died East Moseley 25th November 1958	aged 60
Bro Justus*	Died Epping Hospital 1960	aged 90
Bro/Fr Clement*	Died 1st June 1960	aged 51
Bro/Fr Brendan*	Died Highgate (Chaplain) 6th June 1963	aged 67
Bro/Fr Jarlath*	Died Chingford (Chaplain) 27th February 1968	aged 69
Bro Columban*	Died 7th April 1970	aged 72
Bro Kevin*	Died 18th June 1970	aged 85

Bro/Fr Isidore*	Died Highgate 12th December 1973	aged 72
Bro Aloysius	Died of heart attack 4th February 1977	aged 62
Bro Felix	Died 18th February 1978	aged 64
Bro Peter	Died 12th August 1980	aged 80
Bro Benedict	Died 1980	aged 80
Bro Celsus	Died 22nd September 1981	aged 81
Bro Raphael	Died 21st June 1985	aged 83
Bro Cornelius	Died 4th September 1987	aged 88
Bro/Fr Aidan	Died St Patricks Soho 1987	aged 87
Bro Pascal	Left the Congregation July 1986 retired to Ireland died 1994.	
Bro Maurice	Died Liverpool 26th December 1994	aged 68
Bro Oswald	Died Southport of a heart attack 30th May 1995	aged 77
Bro Hugh	Died Anderlecht Belgium 8th March 1997 <i>NB. Bro Hugh and Bro Oswald were natural brothers</i>	aged 82
Bro Fidelis	Died Burnley 15th July 2005	aged 96
Bro Fergus	Left the Congregation July 1986 retired to Ireland died 2007	aged 88
Bro Paul	Left the Congregation just after the Second World War and became a teacher at St Ignatius College, Stamford Hill, reverting to his family name of Paddy Sextant. (He originally joined the order at the same time as Bro Peter)	
Bro Gerome	Left the Congregation in the late 1940's	
Bro Basil	Left the Congregation in the late 1940's	
Bro Alfred	Left the Congregation in 1958	
Bro Edmund Campion	(the last Headmaster of St Egberts) left the Congregation in 1975 and joined the De La Salle Brothers in 1976 where he took the name Bro John Southworth. Was Director of the De La Salle Brothers House in Southsea, where he died on 12th October 2007 at the age of 71.	

Other Brothers who taught at **St Egberts**, mainly in its earlier years, included Brothers Patrick, Wulstan, Gabriel (who was Director at Derby for most of the war), Celestine, John, Kieran**, Arthur, Stephen, Leo, Finbar, Benignus, Paul, Damien and Francis.

Brothers of the Congregation, who as far as I can ascertain did not teach at **St Egberts**, include Brothers Alphege, Amadeus, Alban, Egbert (died at Derby 1941/42), Herbert (died at Derby 1940 at the age of 90 plus), Gabriel (left the order late 40's), Michael, Libera, Euchaire Camilas**, Ignatius**, Laurence, Ambrose, Gerard, Luke, Edwin, William, Narcissus and Bro Abdan (who was tragically electrocuted at Derby during the winter of 1939/40 when rolling up blown down overhead power cables which were still live).

The 3 Brothers Kieran, Camilas and Ignatius marked ** above, left the Congregation in the late 1930's before their final profession. Brother Fidelis recalled it was a strange but normal departure, as they were there for dinner one evening and at breakfast the next morning their places were empty, no goodbyes, no explanation. Brother Benedict also left the Congregation about this time to join the forces but he returned to the Congregation when the War finished.

As a matter of interest three of our current Bishops were taught at St Aloysius by the our Brothers or the De La Salle Brothers. They are **Middlesbrough** - Bishop John Crowley, **Nottingham** - Bishop Malcolm McMahon and **Westminster** (Aux. Bishop) - George Stack.



Old Egbertians 1st eleven 1933-34

Back row second left: Bro Stephen

Back row, centre: Bro Leo

Front row, right: Bro Hugh

