

THE COMMUNITY OF THE HOLY CROSS HAYWARDS HEATH

A SHORT HISTORY OF ITS LIFE AND WORK

BY ALAN RUSSELL

WITH A FOREWORD BY THE REVEREND DONALD REA

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FOREWORD

A MONG the wonders of Divine grace springing from the Oxford Movement are the works of such as Fr Dolling at St Agatha's, Landport, and Fr Lowder at London Docks. The novels of Charles Dickens have drawn a grim picture of the scenes of misery, squalor and evil in the London of that time, without telling of the remedial grace which alone could change them and bring the Light of Christ to those environments of human degradation.

In two little books, Five Years in St George's Mission and Ten Years in St George's Mission, Charles Fuge Lowder recorded the Augean task to be accomplished. He did not write with Hogarthian colour, exaggerating the scenes of his daily work. But what shines through these forgotten booklets is the Divine operation that changed not only the surroundings but the lives of those among whom he ministered.

What was the secret of such as he? It was, of course, a sanctity of remedial power. Here was no Welfare State, no service of National Health to meet the cholera epidemic of 1866, but a work of God calling such agents as Elizabeth Mason Neale, or, elsewhere, Florence Nightingale.

How the Mother Foundress of the Community of the Holy Cross began and developed the band of Mission Sisters under the guidance of Fr Lowder is unfolded in the pages which follow. The Community has, under God's providence, often changed its external dwelling-places and its work. Yet there is the constant thread of a spirituality firm-based on the vision of Charles Lowder, his immediate successor Robert Meux Benson, and Elizabeth Neale. We may trace it in the earliest rules for the Community or in those for its House of Mercy, or we may find it in the first books of Chapter Minutes – the abiding thread of prayer expressed in the rule for daily Eucharistic Communion and the recitation of the Seven Canonical Hours.

Thereby was fostered that unchanging spirituality which marks Holy Cross whatever the external work to which the Divine Will has called it in the changing circumstances of a hundred years' history. Unflorid as the rugged cave of St Benedict at Subiaco where Western monachism was born, unflorid as Charles Lowder's own record of the Mission, it is this spirituality which chance visitors such as a priest of another Religious foundation, or a Mother General of many convents, speak of as an unforgettable memory, uniting them with Holy Cross in a union of prayer, faith and charity.

May the Divine Will unfold the years of a new century with his blessing upon whatever work he may call the Sisters not merely to perform but to live, as those hallowed women the sorrowing Virgin Mother and St Mary Magdalene lived in the few hours by the Cross. For in the twentieth century there is a sorrow in the world – not, may be, from the same despairing evils as at Wapping in 1857, but from spiritual maladies only to be healed by the redemptive power of Christ triumphing on his Cross and through the lives in every age of those whom he calls to uplift the Cross and follow him. Among these spiritual maladies Christian disunity is the gravest, as it is itself the cause of so many other evils. The Community has always offered prayers for the healing of these divisions and has now undertaken specific work for that cause. Clearly the Holy Spirit is showing it that this is the work to which at this time he is calling it.

DONALD REA

Warden CHC

Eye Vicarage, Suffolk Feast of St Antony of the Desert 1957

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

R everend mother tells me that the Community has often had requests for a brief history of this kind. It is a particular privilege to have been asked to write it, and I hope that despite its evident imperfections it may in some measure be found to fulfil its purpose. I am aware that the Community will think me to have praised too much in praising at all, but justice requires nothing less, and I could not in conscience have done otherwise.

The early days of the Mission, more extensively documented than the later years, naturally bulk large, but not, perhaps, inappropriately, since they provide the background against which all that follows must be viewed. A very few minor statements here and there are actually no more than carefully drawn inference, but that is true of any history, especially where there is no space to develop supporting argument. The plethora of dates is unavoidable, but I have tried not to be tedious. Footnotes have been kept to a reasonable minimum; unidentified quotations are either from the two little books by Fr Lowder (see Foreword) or from various Community documents and occasional publications. I am much indebted to Reverend Mother and to Father Warden for their suggestions and corrections, and not least for making available a series of extracts from the Chapter Minutes.

ALAN RUSSELL

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THE COMMUNITY OF THE HOLY CROSS HAYWARDS HEATH

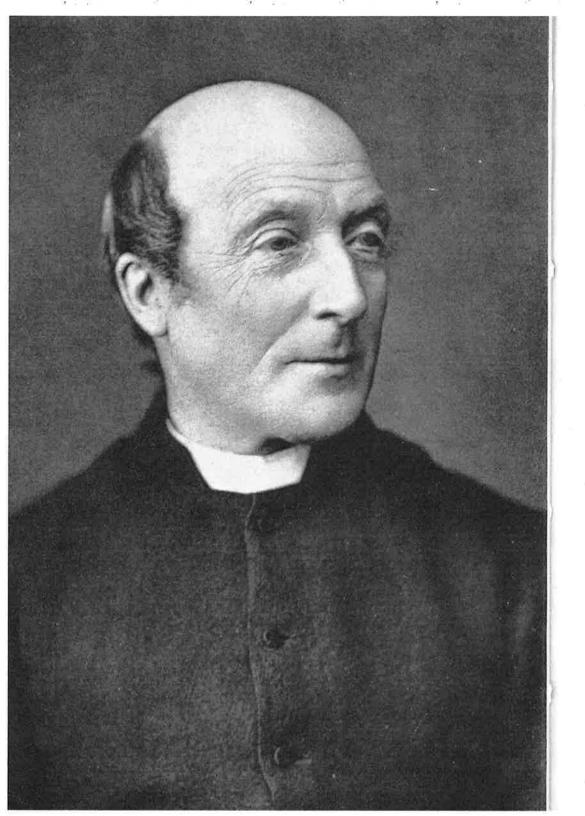
1857 - 1957

From the railway station at Haywards Heath to Holy Cross Convent at the far end of Bolnore Road is about a mile, ending well out on the edge of the town – a pleasant walk. But if the weather is bad, or if you are disinclined for exercise, all that your taxidriver needs to hear is "Holy Cross, please." Only the old can remember when Holy Cross was not there.

But even the very old cannot remember the days when – undreamt of in the Sussex countryside – the Community had its beginnings in Wapping and the Highway.

History delicately skywards, the slender filaments of cranes showed for the moment as things of fairy-tale beauty. From the Thames behind us the riding-lights of ships – a curious sight at high noon – peered fitfully through the murk, and somewhere downstream a hoarse muted bellow gave notice of a tug proceeding with caution. I looked towards the old gentleman in the blue coat and hazarded a remark. "Wapping," I said tentatively, "looks best in fog." He glanced sideways at me, made to spit, thought better of it and swivelled to face me, standing very squarely on his feet. "Sir," he said, not without passion, "I'm a man o' peace to me fingertips, and I values 'uman life more than most, but I sometimes wish old 'Itler 'ad





knocked a few more 'oles than 'e did in these parts. It's the only way ter git improvements. Not but wot"—and he shuddered visibly—"it was a lot worse in the old d'ys. Even wot I can remember."

Wapping, the home of London Docks, is effectively an island, though to realize it properly one must look at a detailed map of the district, from Tower Bridge and St Katherine Docks down to Shadwell. Small lift-bridges, to west, east and north, span the oily black water of the connecting entrances and basins of London Docks and give access to and from the "mainland". To the south is the River and the Pool of London, and, separated from it by tall grimv warehouses, is Wapping High Street - a far cry from, let us say, the High Street of Chipping Campden. From the upper stories derricks swing squat bales of merchandise to the long line of tarpaulined lorries below, and on the shore side blocks of modern flats, already stained with the inevitable grime, vie for place with more warehouses, looking down over courtyards of grev asphalt and lines of multi-coloured washing. Yet, granted the grime, the note is one of respectability and determined cleanliness. At the very heart of Wapping, in what was once Old Gravel Lane, stands St Peter's Church. And almost any route you may choose leads eventually - across water - to the Highway.

Of the Highway, since 1939–45, there is not a great deal left. Great open spaces lie fallow, waiting on enterprise and money. The occasional "caffy", fly-blown, affable and steamy, draws the custom of dark-skinned Lascars in oily berets, and there are still (despite the old gentleman's pious wish) some buildings which must

have witnessed the "old days" at their worst. But for the most part the bombed sites alternate with small ramshackle offices and lock-ups, in a few of which modern fluorescent lights contrast oddly with cardboarded windows and lath-patched plaster. There seems to be little life – if you want crowds and bustle you must go north a short walk to the clanging traffic-laden thoroughfare of Commercial Road, that runs on through Poplar and Canning Town towards the newer and larger docks downstream which have robbed Wapping of so much of its former trade. Dull, drab, respectable – such is the Highway today, with the name "Ratcliff" conveniently dropped into the already misty background of history.

But a hundred years ago the name "Ratcliff Highway" was a byword on the seven seas and in every port, and even Marseilles and Antwerp paled into relative insignificance. London Docks was then one of the great termini of seaborne trade, and the cosmopolitan sailor ashore was proverbially a bird for the plucking. The dregs of every seafaring nation on earth, from gaunt Scandinavians and hard-bitten Americans to grinning negroes and wary Lascars, ranged up and down its length and in and out of its stews. Knives came easily from sheaths, and violence, robbery, murder and unrestrained lust in its most sordid and commercial aspect were a commonplace. Police, when they appeared at all, moved guardedly in twos and threes, and municipal oversight was so intimidated or so financially interested - as to be virtually absent. The brief mile of the Highway is estimated to have supported not less than 140 flourishing aleshops (a

term including every sort of cheap spirits) together with their attendant brothels, gambling and opium dens, tattoo parlours, shooting galleries, tawdry musichalls and the whole teeming, vicious humanity that went to their upkeep. Of family life there was little, and children were faced early with the prospect of earning a living by pilfering, armed robbery or prostitution. Thousands of savage Irish did not improve matters. Not least of the public horrors were the fights between prostitutes.

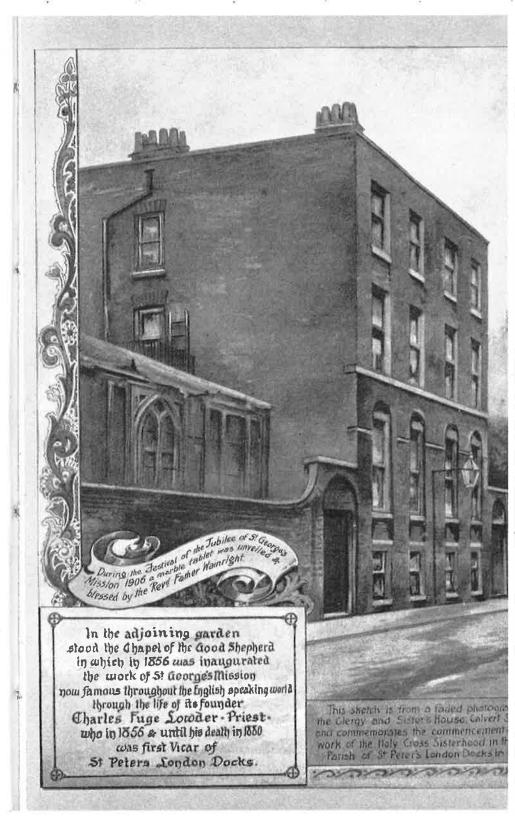
Here, then, in the great sprawling parish of St George's-in-the-East and a few hundred yards from the Highway itself, on an early spring day of 1857, Charles Fuge Lowder (lately curate in Gloucestershire and now, by the grace of God and the reading of the life of St Vincent de Paul, become Superior of St George's Mission) sat down at his desk in Calvert Street and wrote a grateful letter of acceptance – which, on its delivery in Brighton, caused a certain Miss Elizabeth Neale to delegate for a day or two the cares of her thriving orphanage and proceed to pay a visit to her brother.

The Reverend James Mason Neale – hymnographer, historian, recently founder of the Society of St Margaret at East Grinstead – was a wise priest and generous brother, and made no demur when his sister, gently placing the future of her orphanage in his cassocked lap, announced that Mr Lowder at London Docks had accepted her offer of help in his Mission. The orphanage was duly transferred to the care of the

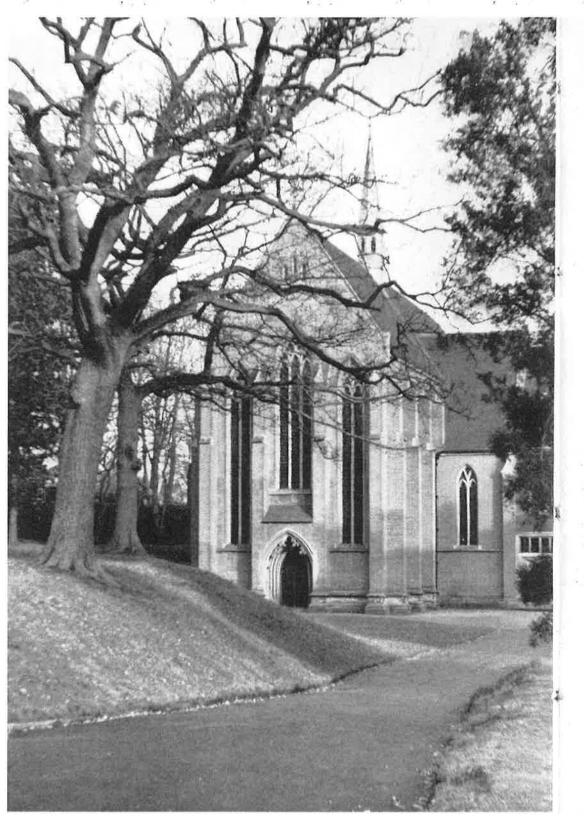
St Margaret Sisters, and Miss Neale, with her brother's blessing, departed for St George's-in-the-East and set up house in Wellclose Square, just off the Highway.

It was a change from polite Brighton. "In order [she wrote later] to give an idea of how wild the district was, I only mention that, when we were about to get our supper, several boys and girls climbed up the railings to look in, saying 'Oh! see! they eat like other people!'; and when we tried to shut the shutters, which were outside ones, a woman struck my hand with a knife, saying she would cut it off if I continued to shut them. I hardly know what excited their curiosity, for I then wore no distinctive dress . . ." But episodes like this soon became routine. And before long came the nucleus of the new Community. "In a few months three or four ladies joined me, and the then Bishop of London¹ (the late Archbishop of Canterbury), to whom I applied, gave me his blessing as Superior, and continued always to shew us much kindness. From that time we took our present dedication to the Holy Cross . . ." With the help of Fr Lowder the Rule and the Constitutions were drawn up and episcopally approved, and the Community's life began, with Fr Lowder as its first Warden. The motto Via Crucis, Via Lucis had taken seisin of Dockland.

In Lent of that year, with an eye both to extending his work and consolidating it, Fr Lowder rented a vacant Danish church in Wellclose Square, and with some repair and alteration it was formally opened soon after Easter, with a clergy house attached, in which a



¹Archibald Campbell Tait



school was begun. It became apparent, however, that maintaining two separate houses for the priests was not only an unnecessary expense but a tactical disadvantage, and in the autumn they all moved into Well-close Square and the old Mission House in Calvert Street was given to Mother Elizabeth and her Sisters, while the previous schools were transferred to the Community's first house.

So, for some years, the Mission supported two churches - the original Chapel of the Good Shepherd (the "old tin church") in Calvert Street and St Saviour's in Wellclose Square. The work was hard, but the devoted and tireless visiting of the Sisters and their fearlessness in the mounting persecution of the Mission were an incalculable support, not least when, soon after their coming, Fr Lowder lost his assistant clergy and was left with only the Community to help him. "As Mr Lowder afterwards told the Superior, at the time of heaviest pressure, when the two priests who had aided him had left him and he was lying prostrate with fever, he must have abandoned the work if it had not been that he knew we were striving with him." He was, fortunately, to have temporary help before long, and later a permanent staff.

It is instructive to note how, from the earliest years, the Community made the daily Liturgy a sine qua non. Here, spread from early morning over the toil and trouble of the day, were the islands of peace, of prayer and praise and self-oblation, giving strength and grace for all that the Sisters had to do. It is difficult, in the law-abiding Dockland of today, to imagine what they suffered, not only in a certain physical risk but in the

horror of degradation which met them on every side. The gentle and perhaps somewhat stilted upbringing of Victorian ladies, even when they were endowed with wills of steel, could hardly have been expected to rise to such an appalling situation without the charity which flowed daily from Mass, Communion, Office and Rule. And that charity strove mightily with the world which they themselves had renounced, taking its first shape in the urgent work of rescue. "What work of mercy would more naturally suggest itself to the minds of Christian women, on their first acquaintance with the sin of this part of London, than a refuge for those of their own sex whom they daily saw falling victims to its misery?" Up and down rickety stairs in damp, vermin-ridden houses, facing abuse, threats and obscenities and learning not to quail at the sights they were bound to see, month in and month out they toiled to bring at least a few unhappy and bewildered girls to a chance of freedom. Sometime in that winter the house in Calvert Street received its first six fugitives, frightened but hopeful, and not altogether unimpressed by the calm and ordered love which enfolded and disciplined them. "You can hardly have an idea [wrote Mother Elizabeth] of the homes from which some of the children come. In one street they were, when young, allowed to run about quite naked; and in one instance, when we went to fetch away a girl of seventeen whom we had promised to receive, we found the whole family without clothes." News of the refuge soon spread, and (she adds) there were not a few "girls who pretended to have gone wrong in order to find a home in the House of Mercy, and in some instances,

sadder still, girls who had so sinned in order to obtain admission."

But it soon became obvious that a larger house in more suitable surroundings must be found elsewhere. Numbers were rising, secular penitentiaries would not accept more than a very few (the girls were notorious for being almost uncontrollable, and in any case where would the religion come from?) there was no sort of garden for exercise, and proper supervision meant virtual confinement to the premises – the inmates were too close to their old haunts and companions, "who congregated in the street and, calling them by name, urged them to return to their sin". The Community, practical as always, made up its mind. A house was taken at Sutton in Surrey, to which the more promising of the girls were transferred, and although the house in Calvert Street continued a modicum of rescue work until 1870² the Community entered on a new phase, which was "to be entirely the Sisters' work and not to depend on the resources of the Mission".

The change was profitable, but the essential difficulties remained. The Mother Superior of Clewer, "a dear friend of mine, who kindly came down to help me with her counsel in starting it,3 told me she quite

²The year after the Mother House was moved to Walworth. In the spring of 1863 Fr Lowder was regretfully obliged to tell the Community that the Mission could no longer support the Calvert Street refuge, and it was decided "that in the present state of the Mission districts it was necessary for the Sisters to keep the House of Mercy, which they should resume as their own immediate charge."

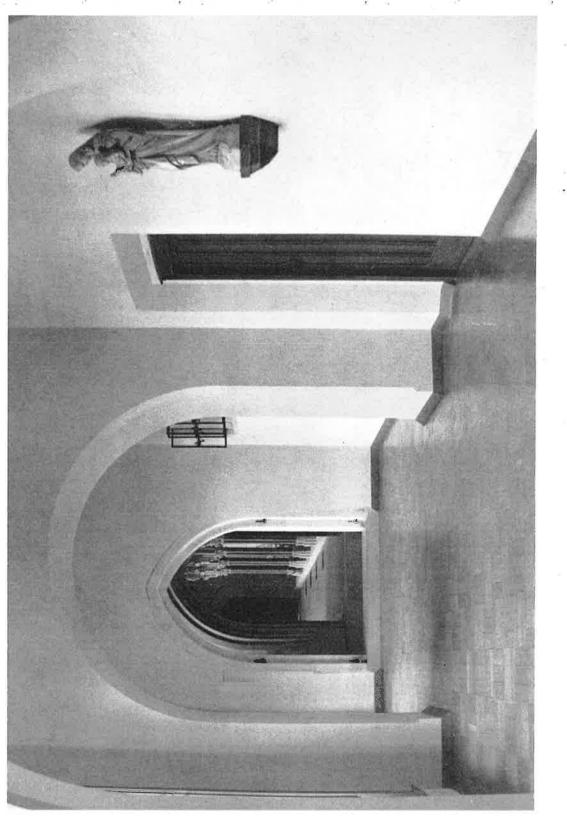
³It is not clear whether Mother Elizabeth is speaking of Sutton or Calvert Street, but from the general context I have supposed it to be Sutton.

pitied us for having to undertake it, and she did not think it could be carried on. For these poor girls were the most degraded of their class, and we had the further difficulty, that they all knew each other during their street life. Indeed, at one time we had two in the House, one of whom had, in some quarrel, bitten the other and scarred her face. I do not think, however, that we found more difficulty with them than is always met in such work; nor that the average of satisfactory cases was less. In almost all our disappointments about them the overmastering temptation has been the craving for drink, and not the wish for their former unrestrained life. There was so much that was interesting about them, combined often with scenes that would make anyone laugh to hear about now, though they were difficult to deal with then." The domestic work in which the girls were trained soon enabled the House of Mercy to become self-supporting -"Experience has taught that washing is the most profitable, and at the same time the best industrial occupation for the inmates." The Community had grown sufficiently to establish a rota of several Sisters to supervise the new establishment while at the same time continuing the full Dockland activity. Masses at Sutton could not be provided daily as in Calvert Street, but there were services and instructions regularly in the little chapel, and in due course many of the girls were brought to the sacraments.

Begun in June 1858 the Sutton house, despite some apparent disadvantages, made a big difference. Fr Lowder, after a visit, remarks the "better order, happier tone of mind, more cheerful obedience and



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improved health". The girls throve, physically, mentally and spiritually, and recreation in the country air - so new to most of them - played its own part. After careful training, and when considered ready, they were sent out to suitable positions in domestic service. There were, of course, failures; but sometimes the prodigal returned, and even those who seemed hopelessly lost were frequently known, long afterwards, either to have reformed or at least to have died penitent. "Of all the works of mercy this requires the greatest faith, patience and perseverance . . . It must not be supposed that because many have left unsatisfactorily, before their time of probation was expired, that therefore all our care has been wasted upon them." There were violent quarrels, and once at least a knife came into play; but "with all these difficulties, and keeping in mind the frequent changes incident to the establishment of this House, we are thankful to know that many are now living respectable lives. We must not [adds Fr Lowder] forget the blessing to those who have been permitted to assist in this work, in teaching them the power of sin, and deepening in them the love, tenderness and compassion with which it must be approached."

Yet, after a year, even Sutton began to show real drawbacks. Quarters seemed more and more cramped, the laundry space was inadequate, and it was noticed that the girls in Calvert Street were, despite their surroundings, healthier than those at Sutton. The trouble was eventually traced to that ancient enemy, bad drains, and the entire undertaking was transferred to Hendon, on healthy high ground and at that

time in the country. Originally almshouses, with later school and dormitory buildings added, and taken on a twenty years' lease, the new House of Mercy lent itself admirably to the alterations designed by hard experience. Begun in April 1860, the work was sufficiently advanced to allow of the official opening on the 21st of June, and at 7 that morning the chapel, duly licensed by the Bishop, had its first Mass, followed by others celebrated by visiting priests, and just before noon the dedication service and a final Mass, attended by a congregation which included delegations from other religious communities. "A very impressive and eloquent sermon" was preached by the then Dean of Westminster, later Archbishop of Dublin.

At Hendon, too, in conjunction with the House of Mercy, there was at last organized in workable and profit-making form St Stephen's Industrial School, which had in embryo been unsuccessfully attempted both in Calvert Street and at Sutton. Things were improving. Also, with the move to Hendon, and whether due to healthier conditions or to some other cause, there came a perceptible lessening in the quarrels, the obscenity, the running away.

In Dockland meanwhile, in addition to the remaining refuge in Calvert Street, the whole variegated work went on – running and staffing the Mission schools, visiting in the miserable homes, the workhouse and the hospital – pressing the claims and benefits of education, advising spiritually and physically, bringing medicines and food, finding nurses or arranging admissions to hospital – maintaining fixed consulting hours in Calvert Street for "all in any trouble or

distress"—persuading parents to come to church for services and instruction, and to bring their children with them—and, little by little, seeing the first trickle of baptisms grow to a steady flow of confirmands, penitents and communicants. It was not done in a day, but by 1862 things were going so well that the Sisters were able to accept as an additional responsibility the schools and visiting in the Wellclose Square district, which at that time ran almost up to Whitechapel.

Through it all the Community, despite some inevitable failures in perseverance, grew steadily, with, at the core of all the tireless activity, the bright and constant pattern of sacraments, liturgy and quiet pursuit of vocation. A Chapter of May 1861 records the writing of a letter to the Bishop, "thanking him for his expressions of kindness, and hoping he would become Visitor". This he felt unable to do, but continued always to be sympathetic and of the greatest assistance, and Fr Lowder's repeated appeals brought in a slowly increasing flow of aspirants. There was by now a growing body of Associates, living in the world, whose members each spent an annual period with the Sisters and were in effect oblates; an even larger group of non-Associate friends gave their prayers and were assiduous in raising funds, and the Community's enhanced reputation began to stir widening interest among the Church at large. "Already [says Fr Lowder] the Sisterhood is listening to urgent application for help in neighbouring parishes." But the first answer, in 1861, is made to a call from further afield – acceptance, for six months, of an invitation to take charge of the House of Mercy in the parish of St John Baptist,

Bedminster, Bristol. The time limit is some indication of the tentative nature of this first outside work, but it speaks well for the Community's growth that the necessary Sisters could be spared.

It was to be the first of many branches. "We have at various times," says the Foundress (writing from Kennington in 1882), "worked at Bedminster, Portsea, Sheffield, Hackney, Winchester and Scarborough; and have now Branch Houses at St Peter's, London Docks (where we still work), Dover, and St Saviour's, Pimlico. Also in York we manage a Home for Trained Nurses, whom we send to both Poor and Rich, and we also visit the Poor in the City." But for the moment – apart from Bedminster – there was only Hendon, Wellclose Square, Calvert Street and the swarming vices of the Highway.

The evil was sufficient unto the day. One of the most endearing compensations was the attitude of the children, "who often delight to run a long way to meet the Sister who is coming to teach them, and think it a great privilege to be allowed to accompany her to or from school". Fr Lowder mentions the case of the small girl who appointed herself a by no means ineffective bodyguard to the Mission staff during the worst days of the riots. Militant charity on the march was also creating a new standard of family life in many homes. "The care and attention which the children receive in school are a ready passport to the hearts of the parents, and many an opening has thus been made for us where otherwise we might have found great difficulty in gaining admission." Special children's services were a vital feature of the Mission, and there were parties,

magic lantern shows and outings to Epping Forest, Richmond and Hampstead Heath.

In early 1865 Fr Lowder found his chief dream coming true. Three years earlier a generous gift had made possible the creation of a building fund, and as this grew a move was made to purchase St Saviour's in Wellclose Square (until now rented) and form an official parish around it. The trustees were willing to sell, but the Danish Government offered objections, and the scheme was finally killed by the allocation of much of the district to another parish. The original donors of the money gladly agreed to Fr Lowder's long-cherished idea of a church in Old Gravel Lane,4 and with the help of various diocesan and other funds what is now St Peter's, London Docks, began to take shape as a reality. Work was begun in April, and in July the foundation stone was laid, with all due ceremony and in the presence of many notables cleric and lay. With the rejoicing went some very natural regrets, on the part of clergy, Sisters and people alike, for the passing of the "old tin church" in Calvert Street⁵- "it was here that so many of our children had been baptized, so many prepared for their Confirmation and first Communion, so many had made their

⁴Later Old Gravel Way and now (since about 1948) Wapping Lane.

⁵The chapel has, of course, long since been demolished. About 1890 Calvert Street became the present Watts Street, running west off Wapping Lane a little below St Peter's. A map of 1896 shows a Lowder Street, also running west off Wapping Lane between Watts Street and Green Bank, but this has since been built over. The name is, however, carried on in Lowder House, a large modern block of flats just north of St Peter's.

first Confession"—but the consecration of St Peter's in June of the next year disposed of any lingering nostalgia. The Bishop preached, consecrated and was celebrant of the Mass, and at the luncheon which followed (given to 300 distinguished guests in the former chapel) did not fail to pay the Community warm tribute for the part they had played in the Mission.⁶

SWEET Thames, run softly – So Spenser, and in the 16th century it may well have been sweet. But in 1866 it was foul. Flood-tide might conceal the worst, but the ebb left naked and unashamed the full measure of the River's unofficial traffic in decaying refuse of every sort. Nice noses at Westminster complained bitterly of the smell, but no one seems to have thought any action advisable. Heaped on the mud, and combining with a drainage system scarcely above river level, the sorry fruits of 19th century neglect bred cholera.

The first case was isolated and rallied quickly, and Fr Lowder – unperturbed, and the consecration of St Peter's just over – snatched at the rare chance of a few days' retreat at Cuddesdon, "little anticipating for what scenes he was really preparing in those quiet meditations in the Bishop's Chapel". He was soon to know. People died like flies, and the summer heat did not improve matters. "We were at once in the thick

of this dreadful disease." At first the clergy managed to be of some assistance to the hospital chaplains, but after a few days had to spend all their energies in the Mission itself. The Sisters rose magnificently to the occasion, but they were not equipped for the professional side of the necessary work, and the Sisters of St John, expert nurses,7 were called in to reinforce the hospital staffs, while the Community devoted itself to its own familiar ground, the stricken homes. "No one who has not seen it [writes Mother Foundress] can imagine what such a visitation is like, it seems like a sheet of death let down on a district. Our work was among the people in their own homes, but"- she is characteristically able to add - "I used daily to go into the three Cholera Hospitals to see any patients whom we had sent there, and into the Workhouse . . . We used daily to cook for and distribute food to numbers varying between 100 and 300, and one room in our house was given up as a refuge, to which the infants of those sick or dead of the cholera could immediately be brought."

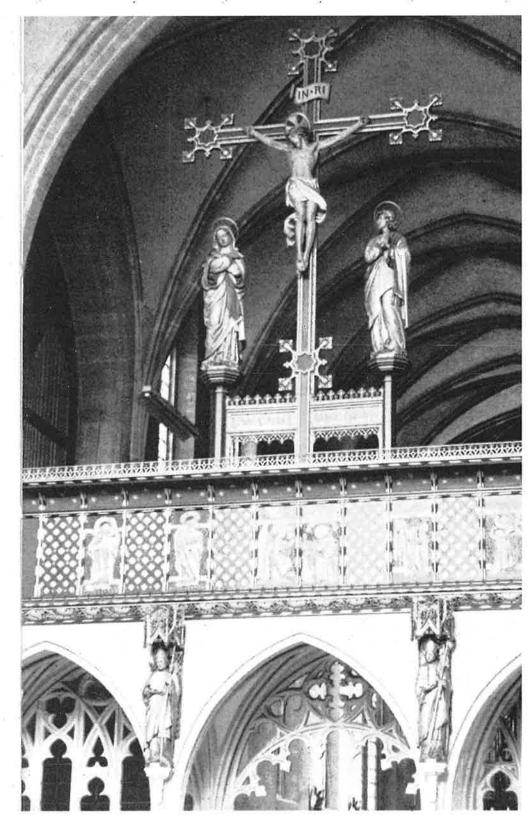
There were Orders-in-Council, "not indeed all that could be desired, and yet the best provision that could be extemporized". But locally a heavy burden fell on the Mission, and Fr Lowder, though at the time he spared his breath for the work in hand, is candid about the apathy of the Hospital of St Katherine, an ancient and royal foundation with large funds and specifically charged with responsibility for "the poor of the East

⁶The Bishop did not altogether subscribe to the doctrine taught, but he was a just man, "making the most liberal allowance for points of difference," and knew heroic sanctity when he saw it.

⁷The Community of Nursing Sisters of St John the Divine, Hastings.

of London, especially of our own neighbourhood ... And yet it is actually permitted that such a body ... should rest at ease in Regent's Park with scarce an attempt to benefit anyone but themselves, while the East of London is calling out . . ." But little by little the epidemic gave ground, and the end of summer heat brought its own welcome relief. By signal grace not one of the clergy or Community was touched, and each morning at the altar of St Peter's they gave thanks for the sacramental life which was "joining us closely to Him Whom we could thus recognize as walking with us in the midst of this fiery furnace, so that not even the smell of fire passed on us."

It must have seemed an eternity of effort. Spiritual ministrations - more often than not in the most appalling surroundings - were, to say the least, difficult, and with a very mixed and largely infidel population proper discrimination had to be observed, however heartbreaking it might seem. The swift collapse of the patient's consciousness was a powerful enemy, but scores of previous pagans were brought to penitence and the sacraments, and though some of them were later to recant when restored to health a good few souls were won. Episcopal support and encouragement were not lacking-"You will not fail," wrote the Bishop, "to command my services if I can be of use." The Mission responded gratefully, and in mid-August he came to visit the cholera wards, offering his prayers and giving his blessing in each, and showing the greatest sympathy with the patients. From there he went to Calvert Street, paid his humble and admiring respects to the Community, and thence to Old Gravel





Lane, to preach in St Peter's before a phenomenal congregation of "about 900 persons."

The cholera brought in its wake one great blessing, quite apart from the general improvement in measures for public health. The visits of the Bishop, the sermons in St Peter's by men like Neale, Carter, Mackonochie and Liddon, and above all the memory of the selfless labours of clergy and Sisters, gave a new character to opinion in and around Dockland. There was no great tide of conversion, but there was at least muchneeded peace, and the old persecution and antiliturgical riots became a thing of the past. (This was true of the whole East End, where no less than seven Sisterhoods had worked through the epidemic.) The Sisters were justly credited with, among other things, the prevention of panic, and the clergy were increasingly met with the unsolicited and hard-earned title of "Father". Mother Elizabeth writes of a shopping expedition to the West End, in the course of which "some men and boys began speaking rudely, but our cabman turned on them at once. 'I don't belong to these ladies, nor go to their Church, but I won't see women insulted who never flinched from us in them dreadful times, though they wasn't paid for it.' "

Another result was the Convalescent Home at Seaford, in Sussex. Fr Lowder's appeal in *The Times* had brought in £1000 in one week, and when the fund rose to £2000 part of it was given to this desirable consolidation of the victory − "a most valuable resource, as soon as the disease abated, for those recovering". The new Home (facing the Channel,

backed by the Downs and surrounded by the sweetest of air) was ready for occupation in three days, and some initial local opposition on the grounds of contagion was quickly disposed of by the official ruling that quarantine was unnecessary.

All this time the Community was growing, in more ways than one, and began to hope for its own chaplain and chapel.8 In August of 1865 Fr Lowder agreed to remain Warden until the consecration of St Peter's, and against that day a "Council of Advisors (The Reverends T. T. Carter, R. M. Benson ssje and G. C. White)" were appointed to act "unless and until a Visitor be appointed". 1867 saw approval of a "form for the benediction of Veils and Rings". It is significant, in the same year, that the Community, "having considered the increased expense and great inconvenience of remaining in their present Houses, resolve that every effort be made to build a convent, and gladly accept the assistance of a Committee of Gentlemen in raising funds and making the necessary business arrangements".9 An invitation to form a branch house came from St Alban's, Birmingham, but this fell through; as an alternative the Community accepted the transfer (presumably to Hendon) of a limited number of women from Government institutions. The same Chapter confirms that Sisters are bound, except for

1869 is a decisive year. Partly, no doubt, due to the unsought but inevitable advertisement of its work. partly to the general increase in vocations, the Community found itself too big to keep its Mother House in Dockland. "As there seems no likelihood of buying ground in St Peter's district, and as there is now not work enough¹¹ in that district for a large body of Sisters, it is expedient to build or buy a large house in some other locality before May." Local education had reached a point where Mother Elizabeth was able to convince Fr Lowder that the schools could – still under the watchful control of St Peter's 12 - be safely handed over to a Government headmistress. It was time to move, and, leaving a number of Sisters behind as a branch house, the Community transferred its main body to Walworth, by invitation of the vicar of St Paul's, Lorrimore Square.

The Chapter Minutes of that May record with intense regret the resignation of Fr Lowder as Warden, and embody a moving tribute, assuring him of prayers for himself and his work, and hoping "to justify his great care of the Community". He had been asked to

⁸The Calvert Street house had only its small oratory (with no altar) where the daily Office was recited. It would appear that neither chaplain nor chapel ever became a fact in Wapping; probably the building of St Peter's and the increase in parochial clergy caused the plan to be shelved indefinitely.

⁹But it seems clear that in the event there was neither building nor buying until the final move to Haywards Heath.

¹⁰Work at Portsea lasted for one year only, but at Sheffield until 1874.

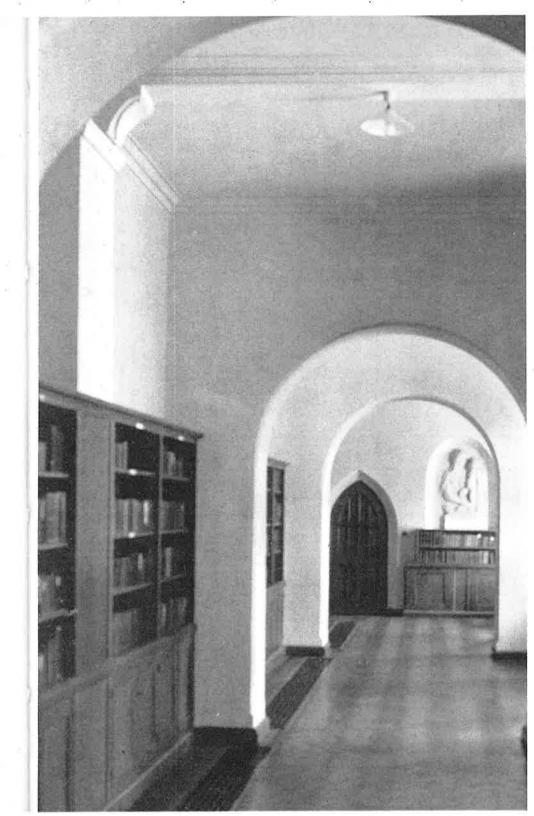
¹¹A notable phrase – Wapping and the Highway had been conquered, if not altogether subdued, in twelve years, thanks almost entirely to the Mission. The Salvation Army was not formed until 1865, and the first Roman Catholic sisterhood in the district was much later.

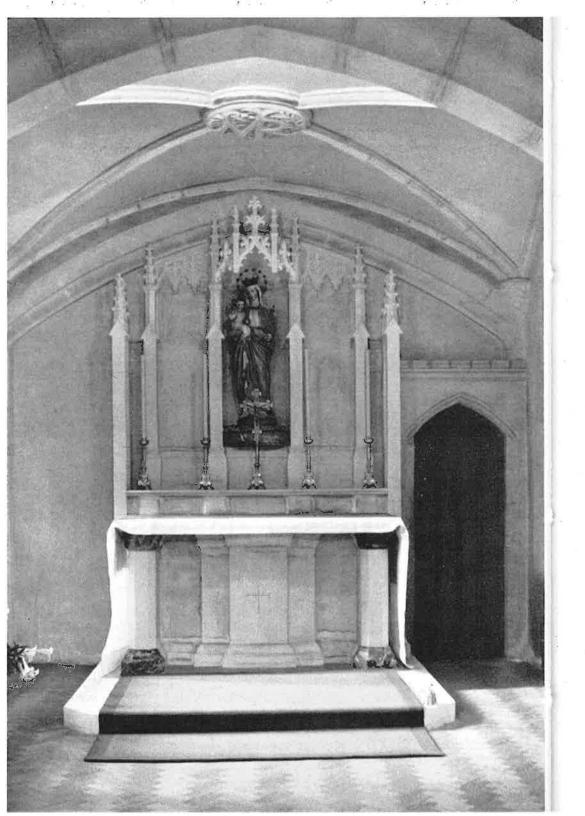
¹²In 1957, happily, they are still St Peter's own schools.

become Visitor but declined, preferring "to have spiritual charge as confessor to the remaining Sisters at St Peter's". Accordingly Fr Benson of Cowley was appointed temporary Visitor, and there began the long association with the Society of St John the Evangelist.

"At St Paul's, Walworth, we visited in the parish, helped in Guilds, etc., had a Crêche for the benefit of the working mothers and their babies, and began Schools for Girls and Infants in the embryo district of St Agnes, Kennington, which we afterwards handed over to the Vicar on the formation of that parish. The Middle Class Day School and Kindergarten were also of great service, and a Boarding School for the daughters of professional gentlemen."13 All this was according to plan, prudently developed as time and opportunity allowed. The Community remained one integrated family, its novices trained under the Rule, its members duly professed, striving always to the classic goal of perfection. And through it all, like a core of stainless steel, ran the daily Liturgy. But the ethos was still a pioneering one. "Our idea," wrote Mother Foundress in 1882, "has always been that, as a Mission Sisterhood, our special work is to break new ground, and having, so far as we may, brought it in order, either to turn it over to other houses or leave a sufficient number of our own Sisters to continue the work." Hence the repeated branching out, for periods long or short, with the occasional refusal of offers and

¹⁸Report of the Jubilee Commemoration 1907. The Community was naturally governed in such matters by the class distinctions of the time.





the final handing over of established concerns. November 1871 saw the decision to give up the House of Mercy at Hendon, but also the beginning of the boarding school project in Kennington. It is noted about the same time that "if cholera recurs" due help could be sent to Fr Lowder, since a proportion of the Sisters are henceforth to be fully trained as nurses. Offers of work at Folkestone, Durham and Newport Pagnell were necessarily declined, and in 1874 the Community withdrew from St Jude's, Sheffield, but in 1877 set up a branch house in the parish of Ss Peter & Paul, Charlton, Dover, and began to staff, though not to control, St John's Home for Convalescent Children at Brighton, which was soon to enjoy the reputation of being "the best Home of its sort on the South Coast".14 In 1883 the Community "undertook temporary work at St Augustine's, Hackney, and at Berkhampsted, lasting only for about one year".

In September 1880, after only a few days' illness, Fr Lowder died while travelling in Switzerland. His body was brought back to St Peter's for the Requiem Mass, and thence to Chislehurst for burial. Three thousand people went to Chislehurst for the funeral, among them several hundred of the very poor who made the journey on foot. One of his last wishes on his deathbed was that his blessing be sent "to the Sisters and clergy of my Parish". So died a great priest, his soul sped by the suffrages of the community he had helped to found.

¹⁴It came under the Community's full control in 1920, and was transferred to Waifs & Strays (now Church of England Children's Society) as late as 1937.

"The following year, the then Vicar of St Paul's, Walworth, the Reverend W. Cay Adams, was taken from us, and a new Vicar appointed, of different religious views. From this cause our work in that parish came to an end and was thenceforth limited to that in St Agnes', Kennington." Meanwhile two enterprises, one soon transferred but the other eminently successful, were entered upon. In 1876 a call from Montreal resulted in the sending of one Sister, and later two more, with some hope of establishing a priory, but for various reasons - mainly the distance - the work was, after three years, handed over to the American branch of the Society of St Margaret¹⁵ and the Holy Cross Sisters recalled. (The original Sister was later, on her own petition, allowed to transfer to the reconstituted Montreal house.) Two years earlier, in 1874, "at the request of the late Dean of York (Dr Duncombe) the Sisters undertook charge of York Institute for Trained Nurses" and "here we worked for 30 years until, in 1905, we gave it up. During that time the number of Nurses had increased from 25 to over 70"- all in time becoming communicants - "and the supervision of the Free Nursing of the Sick and Poor in the City had grown enormously.

rendering the demands of the work too great to be compatible with the obligations of our Religious Rule."¹⁶ Recurrent as the 20th century advances, but already in 1880 faintly insistent, it becomes the cry in the Community's deep heart – this external work is not the ultimate vocation. Meanwhile the activity goes on. In 1885 we find a branch house in the parish of Holy Trinity, Winchester, and in 1886, for one year only, at Devizes.¹⁷

A Chapter of 1881 records the decision to move from Kennington, preferring healthier surroundings as against extended work, and not finding the desired site in the metropolitan area. (But it is carefully noted that the care of convalescents is to be continued.) An important factor was the impending expiry of the Kennington lease; the building fund begun in 1867 had grown, and it was clearly time to use it. Enquiries were deliberately exhaustive - this was to be the permanent Mother House - and five years later land was bought just outside Haywards Heath, in Sussex. Here, on the 6th of July 1887, Fr Benson blessed the first wing of the new convent, and (with Kennington handed over to the Sisters of Bethany¹⁸) the Community moved in. External work went on, but the wanderings were over. Here was the Mother House here, for all its daughters, was home.

¹⁵Originally a daughter house of East Grinstead. They are still in Montreal today, in the pleasant house in Sherbrooke Street.

¹⁶Report of the Jubilee Commemoration 1907

¹⁷The Devizes house was a temporary arrangement to accommodate several Sisters and the first children of the newly-formed St Stephen's Orphanage, pending completion of the initial building at Hayward's Heath (see next paragraph).

¹⁸Lloyd Square, London wc 1

Two years later a second wing was added, 10 and used for some time as a convalescent home. At the Mother House also was established St Stephen's Orphanage, 20 the small nucleus of which had been formed in the later Kennington period. The first Chapter held at Haywards Heath (July 1887) records the decision not to take any new work "for the moment". But in 1892, on the withdrawal from Winchester, mission work was begun in the parish of St Saviour's, Pimlico – where the Sisters' activities soon required added numbers and an additional house – and in 1897 the Community accepted the mission district of St Alban's in the parish of St John's, Upper Norwood.

Mother Elizabeth resigned the office of Superior in 1896, and died, a warrior of God to the last, in 1901, having gratefully seen the fruition of many of her highest hopes and most earnest prayers. She had built well – the ultimate vocation was still some years away, but in sight.

By the turn of the century the convent chapel²¹ was being painfully overcrowded, and it was at last found possible (thanks to the generosity of the Community's many friends) to build the present conventual

In 1905 the Community withdrew from York Institute, but meanwhile the convalescent work safeguarded in 1881 was continued. "In 1897 we were enabled to enlarge our borders by the purchase of a house which adjoined our grounds, for a Convalescent Home; this gave us much needed extra space, both inside our Home and outside, and afforded opportunity for expansion in future."²⁴ At the same time the Sisters continued to staff the work for convalescent children at St John's Home in Brighton.

But the turn of the century had seen the beginning of the Retreat Movement in the Church at large, and for the next three decades the Community's main activity was centred on this work. Conducted retreats were held at Norwood and later in two small houses at Limpsfield, in Surrey, until in 1913 at the latter place there was built a more suitable and specifically designed establishment under the title of Holy Cross Retreat House. This contained a large chapel in which the complete liturgical cycle of Mass and Office was

¹⁹Thanks to a generous legacy from Miss Cornelia Neale, Mother Elizabeth's sister.

²⁰A financial appeal of 1910 mentions a total of 43 orphans. They worshipped in the conventual church; this, and the fact that the church was originally open to the public, explains the unusually large nave.

²¹Later known as St Stephen's Chapel (see p. 43)

²²The present enrichments were added gradually, many as gifts.

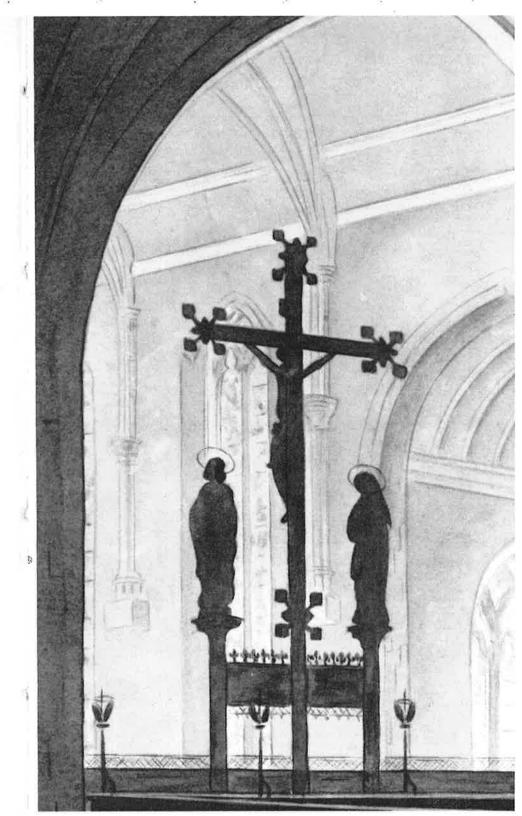
²³The church was at this time incomplete. It was dedicated the following year, on the 14th of July.

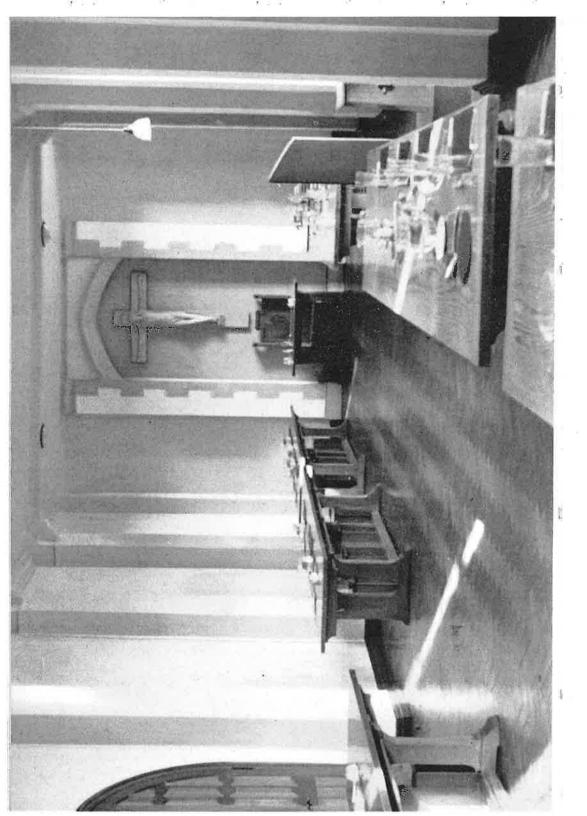
²⁴The present Guest House, later somewhat enlarged and the chapel added (see p. 45)

celebrated in its fulness, as at the Mother House, and guests came not only for rest and retreat but also to assist at ceremonies which were then much more uncommon than they are today. A few years later the convalescent home maintained in the grounds of the Mother House at Haywards Heath (see previous paragraph) was discontinued, and the building became known as St Helena's Retreat House. Here retreats were conducted on the same lines as at Limpsfield.

The year 1913 had also seen the termination of the long association with the Cowley Fathers, but under the wise guidance of Dr Darwell Stone, who had become Visitor in 1907, the Community continued to develop its ethos, and soon afterwards a secular, Fr Astley Cooper, was appointed Warden, an office which he held for the next twelve years.

In 1908 temporary work had been accepted in the parish of Christ Church, Clapham, but activity was drawing in, and 1920 brought the end of another branch house - withdrawal from St Saviour's, Pimlico. This had become imperative, due to "the impossibility of providing sufficient Sisters to staff the House efficiently, owing to the growth of retreat works, and St John's Home having come under our own management; also, the impossibility of carrying on real evangelistic work owing to the want of a priest to take charge of the Mission Chapel." In 1925, on the resignation of Fr Astley Cooper through ill-health, the Wardenship was accepted by the Reverend Victor Roberts, and there began the long and fruitful term of office which was to contribute so much – among many other benefits - to the quasi-Benedictine spirituality





and liturgical development inherent in the Community's beginnings at Wapping.

In the following year St Stephen's Orphanage was closed; the growth of what is now the Welfare State had assumed much of the country's responsibility for its children, and such Church societies as Waifs & Strays ensured a religious upbringing for many. Ten years later, in 1936, Holy Cross Retreat House at Limpsfield was given up; the heavy expense and strain which it involved did not seem justified, particularly as an increasing number of other communities were undertaking retreat work, many of them in places more convenient to London.²⁵ In both decisions the claims of the Mother House were paramount.

Towards the end of 1929 Dr Darwell Stone resigned the Visitorship. Earlier that year, on the 11th of June, Dr G. K. A. Bell had been consecrated Bishop of Chichester to succeed Dr Winfrid Burrows, and at the Community's request came to the Convent as soon as he conveniently could, together with Fr Lucius Cary ssje and Fr Tribe ssm, and spent some days in a long and conscientious visitation. Subsequently the Community asked that it might elect him Visitor, an office which he held until 1938, when he approved the appointment of the Reverend Donald Rea as his successor.

²⁵Later, in 1937, the Community was to lease Bolnore House, on its borders, for retreat work; but with the growing threat of war it became earmarked for Government requisitioning, and "so precarious a tenure" soon had to be relinquished. St Helena's Retreat House, within the Convent grounds, was continued for a year or two after this, but during the War (1939–45) was reorganized as the present Guest House (see p. 45)

On the death of Fr Victor Roberts in 1954 the Community again asked the Bishop to make a visitation, for which he appointed Fr W. B. O'Brien ssje and Dom Benedict Ley osb as assessors to represent him. In a revision of its Constitutions made at that time the Community adopted the normal conventual practice of having an episcopal Visitor, and – as a token of its gratitude for the wise and careful help which Dr Bell has always so readily accorded it – asked if it might once more proceed to elect him to that office. It was with deep satisfaction that Holy Cross received his acceptance in 1956.

Meanwhile, through its sixty-five years, the branch house at St Peter's continued faithfully to give the parish its energetic charity and definitive knowledge of the district. The Sisters' housing situation had improved -"Until the Easter of 1885 we continued to live in the same house in Calvert Street which we occupied at first; but the property was in litigation, the house fell entirely out of repair, and at the same time the present Vicar, the Reverend L. S. Wainwright,26 finding that the recently built Clergy House was inconveniently large, had it divided, and requested us to rent a portion of it, so that our Sisters are now established in Old Gravel Lane under the shadow of St Peter's." And here, though a trifle crowded, they remained, continuing daily to shoulder the rich burden of the Liturgy and to pursue the essential goal of the Community's existence - the sanctification of its members. The same Chapter of March 1926 that

decided to give up St Stephen's Orphanage decreed "that in choir at the Mother House the Divine Office is to be recited in Latin," and it is instructive to note that the Sisters in the three remaining branch houses (at St Peter's, St John's Convalescent Home in Brighton and Holy Cross Retreat House at Limpsfield) immediately sought and received permission to follow suit.

But little by little the increasing number of aged and crippled Sisters had become a prime care on the Community, and by 1933 the claims of the Mother House were even more emphatic than before. The world-wide economic depression, by now in its depths, may have played some part in the situation, but the dominant factor was the general decrease in vocations so common at that time to all Christendom; and although Holy Cross was, like many other Religious houses, to recover from this privation, "it would seem that God was asking a different type of work" from the Community. The Sisters decided, with very natural regrets but with no doubts, to withdraw from the oldest of all their work. After seventy-six years Holy Cross was leaving Dockland.

St Peter's clergy had been informed of the probability, and were dismayed, to say the least. In a joint letter²⁷ of the 3rd of March 1933 they plead their case, and speak of "the irreparable loss that we feel would result to St Peter's by such withdrawal. We fully realize the increasing difficulties under which, owing to the growing claims of other departments of its spiritual

²⁷Signed by Fr F. C. Pond (successor to Fr Wainwright) and Fr H. A. Pollock, a valued friend of Holy Cross since 1889.

work, the Community has continued to labour here. From our side we feel that we could help to solve one of the difficulties, i.e. financial, but that, we know, is probably the least of the difficulties to be faced." The letter goes on to recall the past, invokes the names of Fr Lowder and Mother Foundress, repeats the hope that the Community "may still be enabled to continue its labours in our midst" and ends by asking its prayers for the parish. The distress is eloquent, but the firm and courteous answer is inevitable. "I read the letter from Fr Pollock and yourself to the Sisters in Chapter and the matter was given the most careful consideration . . . The Community has acted not from motives of selfish predilection but believing that it is following the same light which has in fact kept the Sisters at St Peter's in the past." The actual date of leaving was made subject to the essential needs of the parish, but Fr Pond was able to enroll the help of the Sisters of Charity,28 and a few months later, in the greatest mutual affection and respect, St Peter's and Holy Cross said goodbye to each other.

The Community was not to be forgotten, and in Wapping today there are not a few people who still speak gratefully of "Fr Lowder's Sisters". Two of the Sisters represented Holy Cross at the High Mass of the parish centenary on St Peter's Day 1956. They emerged from the Underground in Wapping High Street near a crowd of workmen, from the middle of which rose the sudden cry "Gawd bless us, there's them old Sisters agyne!"; and after the Mass several members

of the congregation who remembered them personally gave them news of many of the children they had once instructed.

Nor was the Community to forget. Many years ago one of the Sisters who originally worked at St Peter's with the Foundress left the parish to go to the Mother House at Haywards Heath. The congregation loved her dearly, and on her departure subscribed to a substantial token of their regard – two alabaster carvings, one the Crucifixion with St Stephen and St Katharine (the Community's patron saints) standing at the foot of the Cross, the other Our Lady and the Holy Child enthroned. These are both incorporated in the reredos of St Stephen's Chapel. Mass is still occasionally offered at this altar, and the chapel serves as the chapter house, so the Sisters have before them a lasting reminder of the people of St Peter's.

²⁸Of Knowle, Bristol

HOLY CROSS today may seem a far cry, and not in years only, from Wapping and the Highway of 1857. Here is a community of Sisters, both lay and choir, which, while it makes no claim to belong to the Order of St Benedict, binds itself to the Rule of the father of Western monasticism and to the opus Dei, the Liturgy. Gone is the widespread activity in parishes, gone are the branch houses, the multiple works of school and orphanage and rescue work, the later retreat houses.29 It is true that for the duration of the Second World War the Sisters maintained in the Convent, and themselves partly staffed, an emergency hospital for air-raid casualties. But the technically "active" life is a thing of the past. It would not be accurate to speak of enclosure in the modern sense, for there are no grilles, and the conventual pattern includes works of mercy both temporal and spiritual. But there is no longer external activity, and the Community's members leave the grounds only for special reasons. Yet, inside the gates, there is activity enough, though only the providence of God (and to some extent, humanly speaking, the Community itself) can know the ramifications and the results. It would be presumptuous in a secular, and most of all in a layman, to embark on a disquisition about the life of Holy Religion - which, with the sanctification of its own members as its central preoccupation,30 seems to the outside world so paradoxically selfish - and I shall content myself with what, greatly privileged, I have immediate knowledge of.

²⁹But, regarding retreat work, see opposite page

The reader should now consult our frontispiece, which shows only a portion of the fifty-acre estate.

Some two hundred yards from the gates (just beyond the top edge of the photograph, at the end of the avenue of conifers) stands the Guest House – a separate entity – which, in addition to providing a home for several ladies (who are cared for until death) affords hospitality to priests who come for rest or retreat, and to many temporary visitors, some of whom make private retreats. Here too are the quarters of the Community's chaplain. In this building, the former St Helena's Retreat House, the Community hopes before long to begin again, on a modest scale, its previous work of organizing conducted retreats.

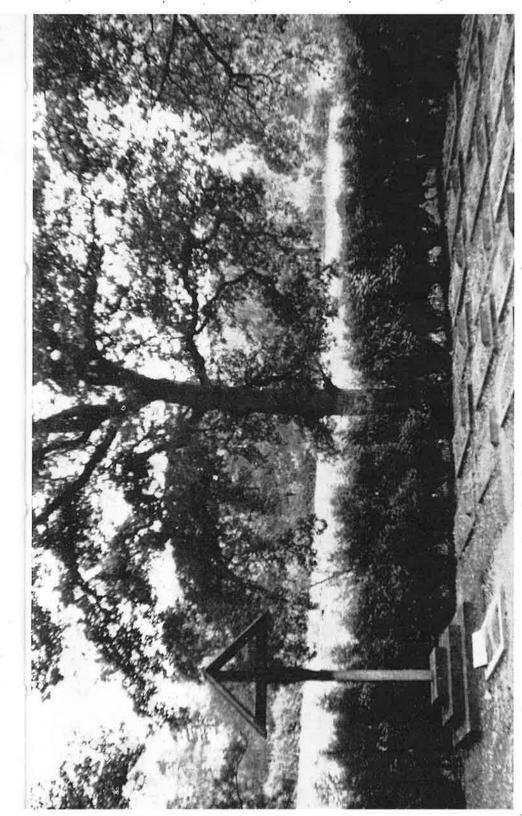
To the left of the picture, just outside the camera's view, are the neat houses which contain, with their families, the men who staff the Community farm and

^{30&}quot; (Preoccupation" is a classic word in the context, used by many commentators. "His [St Benedict's] whole soul was fixed on eternity. This preoccupation has determined the organic conception of the religious life which he founded in the Church; for with the most natural framework in the family, its pursuit is the highest that can be, union with God, and its goal, the utterly supernatural, eternity. This life is only an apprenticeship, a trial or novitiate for eternity." (Delatte: Commentary on the Rule of St Benedict p. 24.) However strange it may seem to the world, the central preoccupation is not "the celebration of the Liturgy ... nor penance ... nor apostolic work ... still less art or study . . . this or that special work . . . not edification" but "to seek God in order to possess him, to be satisfied with him, to enjoy him perfectly in heaven and in an inchoative manner on earth - this is the alpha and omega of the monastic life . . . this is the only secret." (van Houtryve: Benedictine Peace pp. 6-7.) Because, not in spite, of this, civilization owes an incalculable debt to Holy Religion, not only for its more evident historic apostolates but for maintaining, by virtue of its essential nature, "power houses of prayer" for the sanctification of the plebs sancta Dei, "the holy common people of God".

maintain the grounds. Of particular note is the Nichols family, which has served the Community faithfully for four generations. George Nichols Senior took service with Mother Foundress at Kennington in 1869, and acted as clerk of the works during the building of the present Convent and the conventual church; his son followed him, and grandson and great-grandson continue the tradition today.

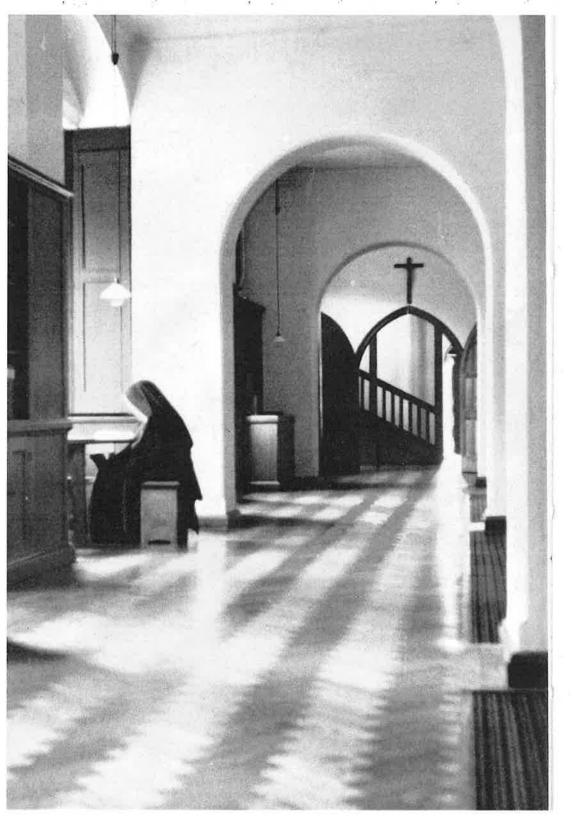
Beyond the photograph's bottom left, at the end of a stretch of pleasant woodland, is the Community burial ground.³¹ Immediately below the Calvary is the grave of Fr Roberts, who died in office as Warden. Mother Foundress was buried in St Wilfrid's church-yard in the town, at that time the nearest suitable place; but on the 5th of March 1957 her bones were brought home with the customary rites and reburied on the left of the Calvary.

The conventual church,³² attached to the original wing of the Convent, is in one of the finest traditions of cruciform Gothic – the clean, lovely interpretation native to Germany of the 13th and 14th centuries. Fluorescent lighting, hung in its oblong fixtures from the lofty roof, strikes no jarring note. The high altar,³³ surrounded by tall, narrow windows and surmounted



³¹Dedicated by the late Bishop of Chichester, Dr Burrows, in 1923. The Community hopes to erect here, during the Centenary year, a plaque bearing the names of all Sisters who died before this date and lie elsewhere, many of them in parish churchyards among the scenes of their former labours. For instance, *The Parish Record of Hendon St Mary* (issue of February 1956) mentions the graves of four Sisters, one professed and three novices, from St Stephen's Industrial School. The dates range from 1864 to 1870.

³²The work of C. E. Kempe and Walter E. Tower



by a carved triptychal reredos in wood, looks down over a choir of seventy stalls to the superb and richly decorated rood-screen. To the choir's right and left, and above (beyond the rood-loft), are the chapels dedicated respectively to Our Lady, St Benedict and St Katharine of Alexandria. (Access to the rood-loft and St Katharine's is given from the infirmary quarters on the first floor of the Convent, and here, with a minimum of movement, invalid Sisters receive Communion and assist at Mass and Office so far as their condition permits.) Beyond the rood-screen, to the left of the door from the cloister, is the nave, containing the recently acquired Stations of the Cross in stone alto-relievo,³⁴ which have replaced the former set.

"Nothing," says the Holy Rule, "is to be preferred to the Work of God." The Liturgy is at the heart of things, and is carried on daily in strict accordance with Western usage and Benedictine custom, in the ancient Latin of the Monastic Missal and Breviary. It is characteristic of Holy Cross that there is no pseudo-Gallican "High Church" fussiness; the Community brings to its liturgical worship the same devoted but intensely practical humanity that it gives to the more mundane details of its daily life. Sacristy, sanctuary and choir smell faintly as much of wax polish as of incense, and the efficiency of infirmary, laundry,

³⁸The Community hopes at some time in the future to replace this by a proper liturgical altar, which will fulfil a hope of the late Warden, Fr Roberts.

³⁴Carved 1902-1906 by Georg Busch of Munich, and probably one of the finest sets of Stations extant in this country. They have been erected in memory of Fr Victor Roberts, who had always wished for stone.

kitchen, typewriter and scriptorium35 has its own part in the oblations of the altar. The Night Office is normally recited recto tono and by anticipation, but Terce, Conventual Mass, Vespers and Compline are always sung to the unaccompanied chant in its authentic Gregorian fulness. The Community makes no particular claim for its music, but the standard is high astonishingly so for this side of the Channel - and (although the devout visitor, usually far from expert and often fresh from the common fare of parish churches, is apt to overpraise) you will go a long way to find its equal for the twin Gregorian virtues of severity and serenity. As in all but the more famous of European scholae the effective "singing choir" is limited by individual ability and musical capacity - and no religious Rule encourages "vocations to sing plainchant"- but perseverance with what a wistful monk once called "the little black marks that go up and down" can be a rich school of humility.

From the church, and beautifully integrated with the fabric of the older buildings, runs the long L-shaped cloister, giving on chapter house, refectory and common room, and at its far end becoming the library. Beyond lie laundry, a second smaller guest house and

modern airy kitchens, practical and convenient. True economy of architectural line is everywhere apparent, there is no clutter of pious pictures, and the exquisite restraint combines with solid, simple furniture to give a pervading effect of spaciousness and light.³⁶ "I have never," said a friend of mine, "seen a place look so intensely and joyously clean."

All this may seem a far cry from Wapping, but any ethos must develop, and the quasi-Benedictine spirituality of Holy Cross on its hundredth birthday is the direct if gradual result of the careful foundations laid by Mother Foundress and Fr Lowder long ago in Dockland. It is, indeed, of the essence of their vision, their practice and their doctrine. Communities, like people, grow up, and often (please God) they find, as Holy Cross has done, their ultimate vocation, which is no more than the flower of their beginnings. The courtesy, the humble will to sanctification, the tireless and unobtrusive efficiency and the consecrated commonsense which battled the squalor of the Highway and worshipped God in Calvert Street and Old Gravel Lane live on maturely and pour out their unfailing charity in Holy Cross today.

Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi, quia per Crucem tuam redemisti mundum

³⁵The scriptorium (source of the well-known Holy Cross greeting cards) is enlarging its scope and appears to have a promising future.

³⁸This stems largely from the sensitive artistry of the late Warden, Fr Roberts, who supervised much of the reconstruction, particularly in cloister and library, and personally designed the Lady Chapel and its altar, the crucifixial Christus Regnans in the refectory and all the furniture of the latter, as well as the confessional and the furnishings of the sacristy.