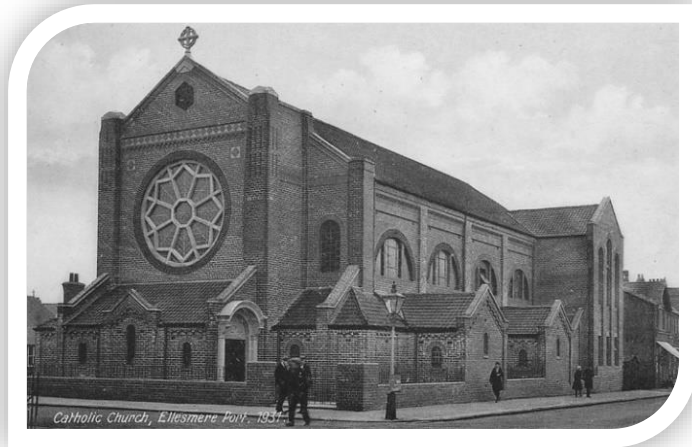


Our Lady Star of the Sea



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<https://rcchep.co.uk/ourladys.php>

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Opened in 1909 the 'tin church' was the first Roman Catholic church in Ellesmere Port. The materials for the building would have been supplied by the Wolverhampton Corrugated Iron Co. which had set up its Ellesmere Port factory five years earlier. A school for over 100 pupils was also opened on the same site in Enfield Road in 1912. These buildings were demolished in 1983 and are now the location of the new presbytery (built 1984) and car park entrance.

~ picture courtesy of Ian Bournemouth - 'Yesterday's Wirral'



The growth of Our Lady's parish has been inextricably linked with the rapid development of Ellesmere Port during the past 100 years. The arrival of the Shropshire Union Canal and the Manchester Ship Canal transformed the 18th century hamlets and villages into the 21st century petrochemical and car manufacturing town that we see today. This has recently been extended with the leisure and shopping complex at Cheshire Oaks on the outskirts of the town. The livelihood of so many of our parishioners has been bound up with the economic prosperity of the borough itself.

St Mary of the Angels at Hooton had served the needs of the area; however the need for a parish and church to serve the growing Catholic population of the Town was recognized in the first decade of the 20th century. The parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea was established in 1909 and a temporary corrugated iron church erected. The church was opened by the Bishop on 21st March 1909. The first resident priest was Fr. E.D. Kirby. The presbytery was a rented house, 10 Stanlow Villas, a derivative of, and named after, Stanlaw Abbey. A piece of the old abbey ruins was inserted in the foundation stone.

A school was built next to the church in 1912 with 115 children on the first register. In 1960's & 1970's three new schools (secondary, junior and infant) were built on a site about half a mile away. Our Lady's Secondary School soon became Ellesmere Port Catholic High School and the Infant and Junior Schools were amalgamated in 2007. All of the schools are much valued in the area, providing an excellent education within a caring Christian environment.

By the time Fr. Curran was appointed parish priest in 1927 the parish had grown so much that a new and more substantial church was greatly needed. Bishop Singleton laid the foundation stone for the new church in 1930 and the present red brick built church was opened on 12th October 1931. The church is Romanesque in style, of simple design and with a large rose window, recently restored, on the entrance side. Internally one of the prominent features is the ornate baldachino erected over the high altar in 1932. The church can comfortably seat 400 people.

Father Campbell, parish priest in the 1960's, recognized that following on from the foundation of the parish of St Saviours in 1960 there was the need for a parish to serve the east of the growing town and due to his vision in 1968 the Parish of St Bernard, Stanney, was established.

At Our Lady's in addition to weekly masses, baptisms, weddings, funerals, confirmations and ordinations, it has hosted ecumenical services, school nativity plays and even a concert given by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Choir.

Next to the church is the presbytery built when Father John Rafferty was parish priest. Attached to the church is a modern parish centre built in the early 1990's when Father Patrick Munroe was parish priest. It is well used by the parish for dances, bingo, quiz nights, luncheon clubs, brownies and guides and for receptions after baptisms, weddings and funerals. In fact it is an ideal centre for the many meetings and gatherings essential to the life of a busy parish. It is also well used by the wider local community and by various diocesan bodies.

The local Catholic community has changed considerably over the years. The fall in clergy numbers means that there is now only one priest, Father Niall Mullaley, assisted by our first Permanent Deacon, Paul Sutton (ordained at Our Lady's on 23rd July 1999) who serve both Our Lady's and St. Bernard's parishes.

The formation of the Ellesmere Port Local Pastoral Area in 2007 has brought the four local parishes of St Mary of the Angels, Hooton, St Saviours, Great Sutton, St Bernard's and our own Parish of Our Lady's closer together. We now have a joint 'Four Parishes Office', based at St. Saviour's, which helps to co-ordinate the growing number of joint programmes and initiatives, including the joint Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage programmes. Through the medium of the joint four parishes 'Compass Newsletter', there is now a greater awareness and sharing of the liturgy and parish life in general. Modern technology has led to a web site for the four parishes and much more routine communication is carried out by Email.

Parish life has changed over the years but the parish is still active with many groups supporting the poor and disadvantaged, in promoting social justice, in deepening our faith knowledge and experience and in developing the prayer and liturgical life of the parish. These include the SVP, RCIA, Justice and Peace and the CAFÉ groups. Ministries include readers, Eucharistic ministers, the welcoming group, children's liturgy and the large and well organized team of altar servers.

The 100th anniversary year promises to be a very active and busy time for the parish with special celebration liturgies, socials, a new altar and the reordering of the sanctuary, a new font at the door of the church to welcome people through baptism, garden improvements and an initiative to contact people who have stopped going to church.

The parish has faced many challenges during the past 100 years including two great wars and a massive population growth. The provision of new buildings, including the current church, schools, presbytery and parish centre has been achieved. Though there are new challenges to face in this centenary year and beyond, it is our hope that this Parish will continue to change and develop and through prayer and worship, strengthened and inspired by the Holy Spirit, and by working and sharing together as a family we look forward to our next hundred years.