

The present Saint Mary's Presbytery was built as a result of generous contributions to a fund in memory of Father Michael Bailey.

May he rest in peace.

Father Michael Bailey



1835 - 1904

The Catholic Faith was re-established in the 19th Century Newport mainly through the work of the Rosminian priests and brothers, the sisters of Providence, the sisters of Saint Joseph of Annecy and a loyal, devoted Catholic community.

Father Michael Bailey who died on November 18th 1904 was outstanding in his contribution to the Church in Newport.

He was born on Michaelmas Day 1835 at Wigan, Lancashire where his father was a member of the Town Council, being the first Catholic member of that body. He was elected in the year following the Catholic Emancipation Act, 1829

Father Bailey was ordained about the year 1862 and came to Saint Mary's, Newport with his brother Father John Bailey twelve months later. Father John later moved to Cardiff where he was in contact with the Bute family and gave religious instruction to the sons.

J. H. Canning states that John was of a quiet, studious nature and his expert skill as an architect was of great advantage to his brother in the building of Saint Michael's Church.

Michael was essentially a man of action to whom obstacles were merely an incentive to increased energy. It is no exaggeration to say that he spared no effort, physical or mental in the cause of Catholic Education and his work upon the School Board and the Board of Guardians was of immense and lasting value to the Catholics of Newport.

In August 1863 Father Cavalli, Rector of Saint Mary's was telegraphed from Cardiff to say that Father Bruno had suffered a fearful attack of cholera, 'A little more would certainly cause his death'. Father Bailey was sent there to help them.

The first Catholic school in Newport was opened in the 1830's, in the Old Tithe Barn, opposite Saint Woolos Cathedral. Mass was said here, while the present Saint Mary's was being built. New Boy's and Girl's schools were built at the rear of the church in the 1840's.

In the 1870 three cottages were purchased in the High St., Pillgwenlly and Father Bailey fitted one as a school chapel and the other two were

opened as a school with eighteen pupils on September 29th 1870. They contributed two pence a week towards the cost of their education.

In 1874 Mr. Herbert of Llanarth gave a site for a school in Cross St. The Monmouthshire Merlin (2nd January) carried headlines 'New School in Lower Cross St.' and also that accommodation is now provided for over one thousand Catholic children. The five schools are already out of debt. At the opening ceremony the children sang a new piece ' God Bless Our Pope'.

Education became compulsory in this country in 1870. The Rosminian Sisters of Providence decided to leave Newport after thirty years devoted service.

Father Bailey visited Devizes in Wiltshire and suggested that the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Annecy move to Newport and in the Parish schools. They agreed. The Community moved here in August 1873 and for four months, fourteen sisters lived in the buildings next to the church, known as the Institute. The attic became the dormitory and one small room the chapel.

Father Bailey said Mass in the school chapel in Pill and the zeal of the congregation soon enabled him to plan the building of a permanent church and schools.

A piece of land adjoining the existing small school was purchased from the Tredegar Estate for £400

Mr. Gardener of Victoria Place was appointed architect and the builder was Mr. W. Blackburn, also of Newport.

Weekly collections throughout the district brought in large sums. The congregation gave all they could and several took the pledge so that they might have more to contribute.

Work soon began preparing the site and Father Michael set an example for the workmen, coal trimmers and iron shippers and others who freely gave their time and labour; with coat off and sleeves rolled up he would be found digging, mixing concrete and performing any other manual task that presented itself.

There was a job for all who ventured near, young men, old men, women and boys, Catholic, Protestant and Jew were all pressed into service. Thus the foundations were dug, almost without expense.

The foundation stone was laid by the Bishop of Newport Dr. Hedley O.S.B. on Saint Michael's Day in 1886 and the following year this imposing church was opened for worship, also on September 29th, with the full ceremonial of the Church.

Dr. Hedley was supported by a large number of clergy. Among the laity were, Mr. J.A. Herbert of Llanarth Court and Sir Arthur Herbert K.C.B. Quarter Master-General, the Mayor of Newport, Alderman G. Hoskins and the packed congregation included the volunteers who were digging the foundations just over a year previously.

The Monmouthshire Merlin reports at this time of a meeting of managers and teachers of the Cardiff district schools held in the Town Hall. Mr. Whitmell H.M. Inspector of Schools remarked that in his district no manager devoted more time and attention to his schools than Father Bailey (Applause). Father was elected a member of Newport School Board, a Director of the Newport and Monmouthshire Hospital, a member of the Board of Guardians and a Governor of Newport Intermediate Schools.

In 1892 Father Dominic Cavalli died after forty years devoted service to the Catholic Church in Newport and Father Michael Bailey became Rector of Saint Mary's.

The Education Department condemned the parish school buildings in the late 1890's. These were at the rear of the church, the infant's school was in the Institute.

Father Bailey and his associates purchased a piece of land in Queens Hill and erected a fine new school at a cost of £6000. They also founded the new Saint Joseph's Schools in Maindee.

In 1902 The Catholic Truth Society of England and Wales had its annual general meeting in Newport. A large number of clergy and laity attended. These meetings were held in the Tredegar Hall from Sunday to

Thursday. A comprehensive working committee made the arrangements for this prestigious event, with Father Bailey as its Chairman.

On the first day High Mass was celebrated by Bishop Hedley at Saint Mary's in the presence of the Bishop of Clifton. On the same day Father Ottoway celebrated High Mass at Saint Michael's in the presence of the Bishop of Shrewsbury.

The inaugural lecture was on Secondary Education by Dr. Hinsley (The Cardinal in World War Two). On the final day three hundred clergy and laity with Bishop Hedley travelled by train to Tintern. The weather was beautifully fine. The ruins were thoroughly explored and then the whole party assembled in the main transept and sang 'Faith of Our Fathers'.

In November 1903 Father Bailey became ill with heart trouble. After eminent medical advice he was taken to Menton in the South of France in the hope that the change would have a beneficial effect. His sister, Ida accompanied him and she wrote 'The doctor thought his condition so low that he could die at any moment. He sinks into a coma, then he is able to rally, but although his mind is clear he cannot express himself - and this annoys him. He is thinking about the schools and tries to talk to the doctor and nurse about them'.

Later he recovered sufficiently to return home. Now confined to a Bath Chair he was pushed up to Saint Mary's School by men of the parish and later down to visit his beloved Saint Michael's in Pill.

He died in the Old Saint Mary's Presbytery, Stow Hill at twelve noon on Friday 18th November 1904. The church bell tolled and the flag of the Town Hall was placed at half mast.

The South Wales Argus described Father Bailey as one of the most notable figures in Newport; a public man - a devoted priest, the Father of his people.

His body lay in state at Saint Mary's from the Sunday night until the Tuesday night so that all would have the opportunity of passing the coffin and taking a last look at the countenance of their priest. On Tuesday night a dirge was sung by a choir of Newport and Cardiff clergy. There was an

immense congregation. The deceased was then taken down to Saint Michaels and laid before the High Altar.

On Wednesday the Requiem Mass was celebrated by Bishop Hedley before a great congregation, including many of other faiths and representatives of the Town Council, the Board of Guardians and the Old School Board.

The bishop was assisted by Father Hill of Cardiff who was deacon and Father Hoare of Cardiff, sub-deacon. Thirty priests were present.

Bishop Hedley said that Father Bailey had spent forty years on missionary work in Newport. A man, who in a very busy life put his religion first. He constantly preached, to men and women who were too indulgent to vice and wickedness, reminding them of their immortal souls. No monument to him would be more striking than Saint Michael's Church and the schools he spent his life organising.

The funeral procession passed through Commercial Road, Commercial Street and Stow Hill. At the head marched sixty stewards followed by large body of men three or four deep. Then came a thurifer swinging the censer, the crucifer carrying the Crucifix and acolytes carrying lighted candles, then servers of the Sanctuary in black cassocks and white surplices. The clergy then followed in carriages, then a body of the Royal Field Artillery from the Barracks. Next the Victoria Car drawn by four horses, carrying the coffin and the chief mourners, followed by members of the Town Council and other dignitaries. The Pall Bearers were J.R. Bates, A. Williams, J.P.H. LeBrasseur, T. Mahoney, J. Grande, T.O'Connell and W. Pinchin. Bearers were J. Donoghue, D. Buckley, J. Burke, P. Maher, J. Walsh and M. Crowley.

Following the mourners were the girls of the Catholic Schools in white and black - the boys of the schools wearing medals of Saint Joseph, then the women members of the congregation.

At the Town Hall and public buildings flags were at half mast. At the cemetery the Nuns of Saint Joseph were in the foreground. Father Dan Hickey was responsible for the funeral arrangements.