

URSULINE CONVENT
FOREST GATE

25
YEARS

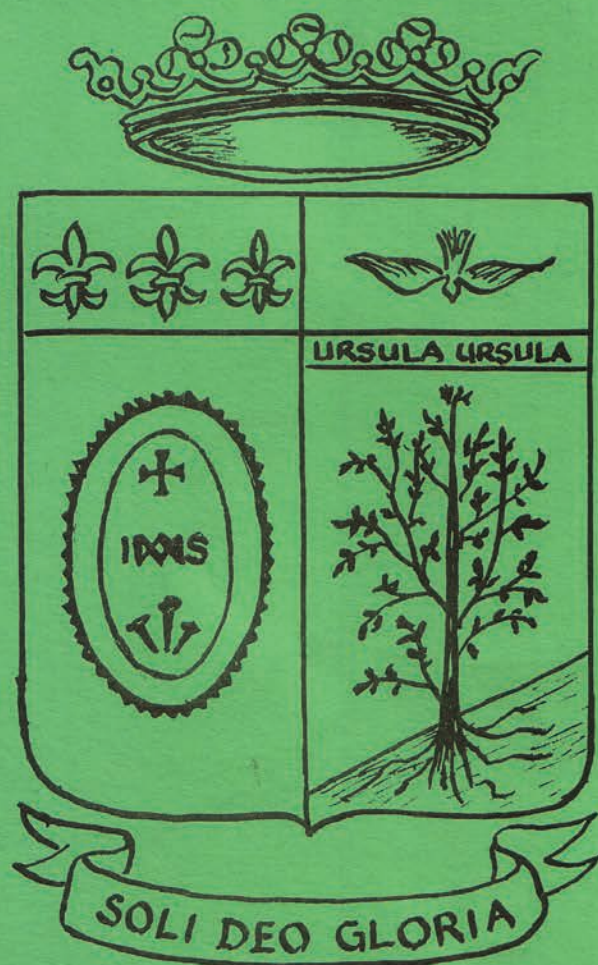
1962

1987

into

the

SECOND CENTURY



Ursuline Convent Forest Gate

*25 years into the second century -
a continuation of the centenary booklet*



Sr. Benedict Davies, headmistress in 1962, and Sr. Miriam (Maureen) Moloney, then in the Upper 6 and now deputy head.

The smaller tulip tree was planted beside the original tree to commemorate the centenary.

Twenty-five years have passed since the centenary of the Ursuline foundation at Upton, more usually known today as Forest Gate. Those twenty-five years have brought many changes - changes in the world at large, in the Church and in the province. Forest Gate has reflected these changes - as well as those more local in character.

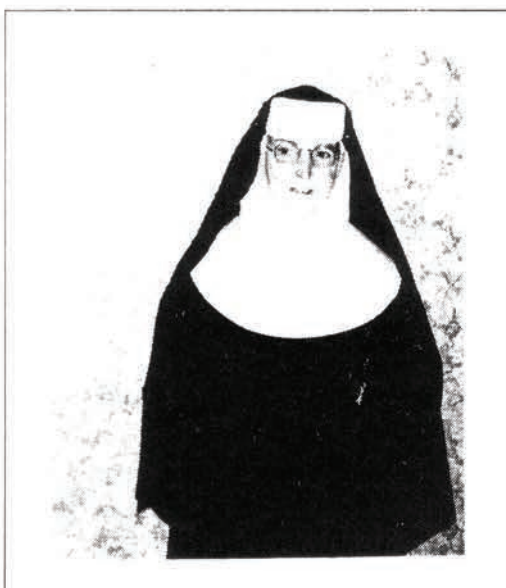
In 1962 Pope John XXIII opened a full council of the Church, the first since 1870, with the declared intention of letting fresh air into the Church. The council met for three years and produced many decrees and documents. The keynote was optimism, a positive view of the world and of humanity, a more open approach. Some of the most wide-ranging decrees were those dealing specifically with religious life - gone was what could sometimes seem a rather defensive attitude to the world, gone was marked separation and enclosure, particularly for apostolic religious. Greater emphasis was placed on the role of religious fully in the world, working side by side with the laity and clergy for the spread of the kingdom. For Ursulines, this was no new concept. St. Angela Merici had not envisaged separation and cloister; the vicissitudes of history had brought them about. That form of religious life served God's people well, but it was not Angela's original vision. For Ursulines, the call to return to their roots and the call to live a more open, flexible consecrated life were closely connected.

Changes since Vatican II

The new spirit abroad since Vatican II soon made itself felt in various external changes which were apparent to all. On 28th August 1966, the nuns wore for the first time a new and simplified habit, replacing the style worn since 1927 when the community joined the Roman Union. This gave rise to a great deal of excitement among the children when they returned to school and to a certain sense of strangeness, perhaps even regret for some, among the nuns. Small modifications were made later to the habit, incorporating the present freedom in some minor matters.

Another change, made in February of the same year, was the adoption of the title 'Sister' for everyone, and the freedom to revert to their baptismal name for those who wished. These two changes meant that not only the appearance of the nuns, but in some cases their names also were changed, and this caused some confusion among those who were not in regular contact with the community.

1962



1966



1987

Soon after such obvious changes came a relaxation in the rules of enclosure. Visitors are now allowed access to more parts of the convent and, in particular, invited on occasion to meals with the community in the refectory.

All these alterations have helped to bring the community closer to the people among whom it lives and works and furthered its apostolic work in a new age. As with the life of the community, the apostolate has developed considerably in the last twenty-five years, and is continuing to change to meet new needs which always arise.

ST. ANGELA'S SCHOOL

Increased numbers in the school have necessitated various alterations and extensions. In 1966 the new library was opened by the Chief Education Officer for Newham. The old dining hall is now a beautifully furnished and decorated room, with accommodation for the sixth form above the main library.



Mrs. Moody and a 5th year typing class

The next building, opened in 1971 to provide additional facilities after the raising of the school leaving age, was the Home Economics block. It was constructed on top of the science laboratories and consists of three large rooms and a gracious living area. In 1976, the Merici building was extended by an Art and Music block on the corner of Grosvenor Road and Upton Lane. A bequest from a past pupil, Mrs de Ridder (Evelyn Bancroft), helped to make this extension possible. Another generous bequest, received in 1985 from Miss Barrington, a former P.E. teacher, has been invested in the hope of a future sports hall.

A major re-organisation was undertaken when part of the convent building which had been a dormitory when some pupils were boarders was transferred to the school to meet the requirements of a growing secretarial sixth form. An adjacent area which included former bathrooms is now a computer room and a classroom.

The staffroom, situated between two classrooms on the first floor became quite inadequate. The whole area - staffroom, two classrooms and the corridor giving access to them - was transformed into one large staffroom providing the staff with a kitchen as well as leisure and working areas.

The latest changes have involved the conversion of three cloakrooms into a spacious leisure area. The doors with their wire netting have been removed, the whole area has been carpeted and an exit has been provided on to the field. Finally the old convent laundry has been completely redesigned as a drama centre. This should have been in operation in January 1987, but a week of fierce winter weather caused burst pipes and major flooding just when the work was completed.

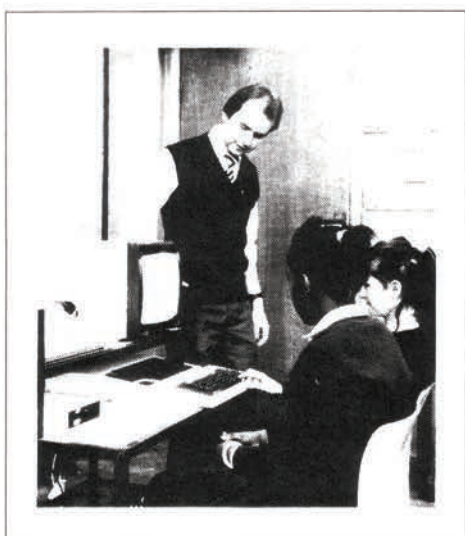


5th year games in the leisure area



A view of the staffroom

Changes in buildings, while they have been significant, are slight in comparison with other changes in education. In 1976, St. Angela's became officially a comprehensive school. In some ways, this was largely a theoretical change, as the school had been multi-lateral since 1945. More recently, the new technology, speed of communication and the growth of human sciences have all profoundly affected education. So too has the development of a more global understanding and view of the world. This last aspect is particularly evident in the expansion of multi-cultural education. Newham has become an increasingly multi-ethnic area and today approximately half the pupils at St. Angela's are Afro-Caribbean. There is need for constant revision and growth to educate for today's world and to express Christianity in a way which is comprehensible at the end of the twentieth century.



*Mr. Rutherford and a 1st year
computer class*



*Mrs. Baker and an 'A' Level
Sociology group*



Sr. Una McCreesh, headmistress since 1976, with Mr. Cox, head of Music

6th Form Consortium

For several years now St. Angela's and St. Bonaventure's have operated a joint sixth form. Pupils still belong to their own school and travel to wherever courses take place. There had been a long-standing arrangement whereby Latin and Science teaching was shared and, initially, only 'A' level subjects were involved. However, the trial period in 1982 was so successful that the scheme was extended to all subjects, including secretarial courses. The teaching of most courses rotates between the schools concerned.

Three years ago, both St. Angela's and St. Bonaventure's were invited to become pilot schools for the new CPVE (Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education). Joint planning and monitoring of the course has resulted in a very close partnership between the two schools with many meetings of the staff teaching the course.



*Sr. Colette Traveller demonstrating a video camera
and with other C.P.V.E. students in the gracious living area*

St. Angela's School Life In 1987



Sr. Miriam Moloney taking senior dinner



Mrs. Ovington with a 1st year Art class



Miss Turvey and a 6th form tutor group in the library



Sr. Alice Montgomery teaching liturgical music



Mrs. Miller with a 4th year G.C.S.E English class



Miss Burns and a 3rd year Cookery group

In 1986 St. John's also joined the group so that there is now a Catholic consortium in the area catering for about two hundred sixth form students engaged on one year and 'A' level courses.

Parental Involvement

There has also been an increase in the involvement of parents in the school, partly through the introduction of parent governors, but mainly through the formation of the very successful and active Parents' and Teachers' Association in 1978.

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme

The expansion of the curriculum has been paralleled by increased opportunities for social service and other extra-curricular activities. One major area of development since 1965 has been the school's participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

Sr. Bonaventure Kelly began the programme which has been run since 1973 by Mrs. Betts. There are three levels, (bronze, silver and gold), and four sections at each level, (skills, physical recreation, service and expedition). The skills and physical recreation sections have been based mainly in school. The service section has included diverse activities such as police courses, work in a wildlife centre and helping in a children's home. In recent years, older girls have taken part in an adult literacy scheme. A more unusual service has been a commitment over a period of time to enabling a disabled pupil to move around the school. This led to a survey of public buildings in the area to report on their accessibility to disabled people as the service section for a gold award. However, the section which is perhaps most enjoyed by participants is the expedition which involves camping and either walking, canoeing, horse-riding or cycling.



5th year girls training for their expedition with Mrs. Betts

In an Easter edition of 'The Radio Times' in 1987, a former pupil, Elizabeth Cuffy, was featured in an interview introducing a programme on the scheme. Over the years, St. Angela's has had the highest number of awards in the borough with thirty-four gold and many more silver and bronze. Gold awards are rare and are presented at St. James's Palace. The other awards take place at a local ceremony, the Mayor's Presentation, at which in 1986, Mrs. Betts was the first person in Greater London to receive a special award "in recognition of outstanding service to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme for young people". Undoubtedly, this area of school life has contributed much to the overall development of all those who have taken part in it.

The Ursuline Community involvement in School

During the past twenty-five years St. Angela's has had five headmistresses and a large number of teaching staff who were members of the community. However, since 1962, there has been a decline in the number of nuns actively engaged in the school. This reflects primarily the reducing numbers of sisters in the province and, to a lesser extent, the greater diversity of apostolic work in which the sisters are now engaged. There are at present four sisters employed full-time in St. Angela's, although many nuns help in various part-time and voluntary capacities.

Finally, a welcome expansion of the community's work in schools took place in September 1986 when Sr. Kathleen Colmer who had been a member of the teaching staff at St. Angela's took up her appointment as headmistress of St. Antony's Junior School.



*Sr. M. Alban Kelly and Sr. Kathleen Colmer
with a 4th year group in 1985*

DEVELOPING APOSTOLIC WORKS

In 1963, St. Angela's became a diocesan catechetical centre, initially providing hospitality for the clergy engaged in catechetical work. Soon, however, the community became more actively involved by giving religious instruction to Catholics in non-Catholic schools. Many of the nuns had heard from girls in St. Angela's of their friends who were in non-Catholic schools and the discrepancy between the number of baptised children and the number entering Catholic schools was clear from statistics produced by Monsignor Shanahan, the Chancellor of the diocese. The demand for teachers able to help with this work increased rapidly and every Friday evening members of the community met with lay catechists to plan and prepare the work for the following week.

The now well-known Saturday school extended a similar apostolate to children of the younger age groups. More than two hundred children from the surrounding area enrolled at the convent to be instructed and prepared for the sacraments. The numbers have fallen over the years, owing partly to the lower birth rate and the consequent vacancies in Catholic primary schools. Each year, the Saturday school has its own celebration of First Holy Communion in St. Antony's Church. The work of religious instruction was also carried on for some years at the summer catechism camp to which children came and stayed for a week or more.



*Saturday School
organised at present by Sr. Bernardine Cloonan*

Throughout the years, the community has been involved in many other ventures, particularly in offering hospitality for marriage training days, days of recollection, weekend courses and lectures. For some time, an open prayer group took place weekly.

Some of the sisters give individual help either to girls in the school with special needs, such as those for whom English is a second language, or as part of adult literacy courses. For many years, classes were also held to teach English to Asian ladies coming into the area, who knew little or nothing of the language.



Sr. Brigid Sheehy giving Holy Communion to patients in Plaistow Hospital



Sr. Peter Buck engaged in R.C.I.A. work



Sr. M. Vincent Cummings teaching a 3rd year girl

It had long been suggested that something should be provided for the elderly people in the area, and so came about the tradition of the Christmas party. First held in 1971, it has been a popular event ever since. Some members of the community visit lonely old people, either in their homes or in a local hospital where they take them Holy Communion. Help is given at the diocesan centre for the deaf and hard of hearing in Ilford and at the Catholic Children's Society. The oldest member of the community dispenses tea and sandwiches daily to a number of destitute men.

The community recently sponsored the Grosvenor project as part of the government Youth Training Scheme. The project was organised by one of the community and took place in different areas of the convent and school site. Instruction and training were given in catering, machining, horticulture, printing and business studies with the aim of increasing the young trainees' chances of obtaining full-time employment. Unfortunately, financial cutbacks by the government resulted in the closure of the project which provided a much-needed service.



*Sr. Louis-Marie Ryan
with a horticulture trainee*

SERVIAM

A significant development in the closer co-operation between religious and laity has been the establishment in the province of 'Serviam', an Ursuline lay association for men and women, married or single, who wish to share in the spiritual and apostolic life of Ursulines. Discussions about the association took place over a period of time and it was officially inaugurated on the feast of Christ the King 1984.

After a year of formation, members undertake certain commitments to prayer, spiritual reading, work and a monthly meeting of the group. Each member has an individual contact within the community. All are welcome visitors to the convent and are able to make use of the community library as also to join the community for different occasions, including retreats and monthly days of recollection.

From the outset Forest Gate has had a large and active branch of Serviam. The monthly meetings usually consist of a talk of some kind, refreshment and conversation, followed by discussion. It has proved impracticable at Forest Gate to make the Eucharist a regular part of the evening, but there are special Serviam Masses. In 1986 the Forest Gate group undertook to raise money for Ethiopia partly by a coffee morning, and partly by a sponsored fast which took place on a community retreat day so that members of the community also participated.

Less formal contacts, social events and general meetings take place in the province too. A Serviam pilgrimage to Brescia and Desenzano, places connected with St. Angela, is planned for 1988. Topics for discussion by all groups in the province are drawn up each year by a central co-ordinating committee.

The foundation of Serviam has been of immense benefit to both the lay members and the community. It seems evident that the way ahead for the church lies in smaller groups, co-operating closely, and that part of the future of religious life is greater involvement with the laity in all strata of life. Serviam is a group which has begun to live out both these aspects and is a great hope for the future.

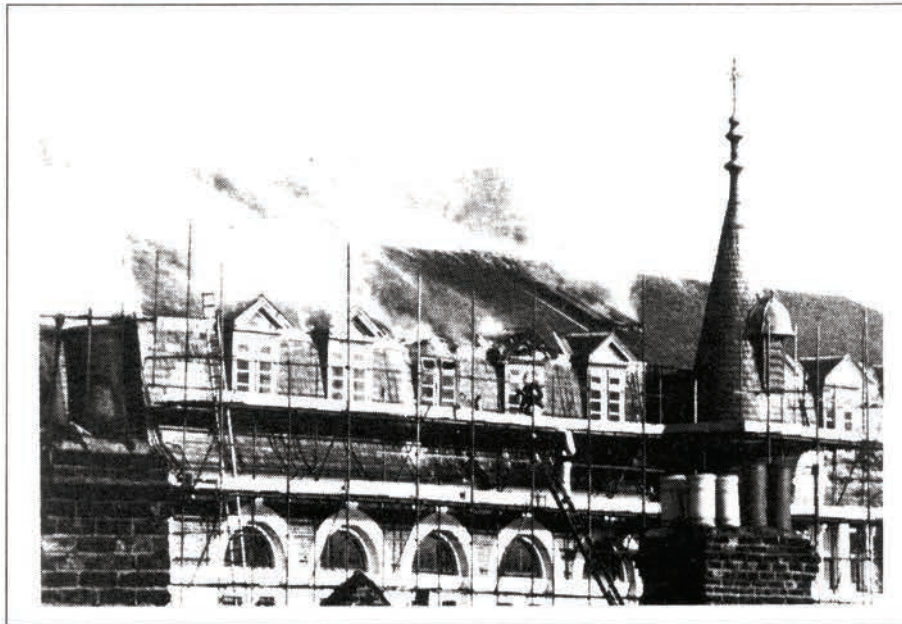


The community room (formed when the large community refectory was divided in two), where Serviam meetings usually take place

MAJOR EVENTS

The Fire

A potentially tragic event occurred at 4.00 p.m. on 16th March 1982, when providentially school had closed for the day and the community was downstairs at tea. In preparation for the external re-decoration of the building, old paintwork was being stripped. A spark from a painter's blowlamp caused the roof to catch fire and high winds caused the rapid spread of the flames, firstly to the loft where old cases and trunks were stored and then to the top corridor of the convent where many of the community had their bedrooms.



Firemen fighting the blaze

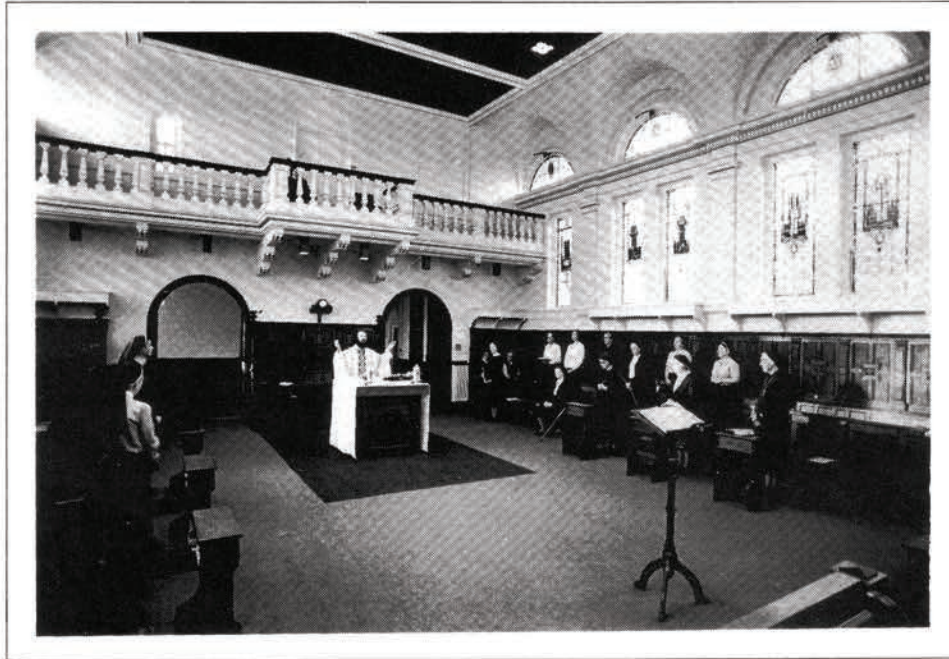
The local fire brigade, with additional help from Romford, Bethnal Green and even the City, fought the blaze for hours and eventually succeeded in extinguishing it. Although the fire had been prevented from spreading to the lower floors of the building, the whole house, including the chapel, was badly damaged by smoke and particularly water as the flames had caused the water tank in the loft to burst too.

Friends, neighbours, parents, children and members of staff were extremely kind, helping to clean up, wash and iron soiled clothing and providing clean clothes and food for the nuns. The older sisters were "evacuated" to other Ursuline convents in London, six to Wimbledon, four to Greenwich and three to Ilford, taking nothing with them as they had, of course, been unable to return to their rooms. Those sisters who remained were accommodated for the most part in the Grosvenor Road houses, owned and normally used by the school for the sectional lessons and practical work.

Soon after the fire a delivery of demountable Portakabins arrived on a huge lorry which also carried a crane to lift them over the wall into the garden. Traffic had to be diverted as the operation, a source of great interest to the locality, occupied the width of St. George's Road. The arrival of the Portakabins meant that some who had gone to other convents could return, but it was months before the entire community was reunited.

Major tragedy had been averted, nobody was injured, but it was still a period of great difficulty and suffering for all concerned. Nonetheless, the community's overriding and lasting memory is one of gratitude for the devoted and unstinting help received from so many.

As a result of the fire, extensive work was carried out to repair and refurbish the convent. During this time Mass and other community prayer took place in the Lady chapel and when the sisters returned again to the large chapel, several changes had taken place. Benches had been removed, the whole floor carpeted in two shades of green and, most noticeably, the altar had been moved from the sanctuary to the centre of the chapel. The position of the tabernacle was unchanged, so Mass is now said at the altar facing the tabernacle.



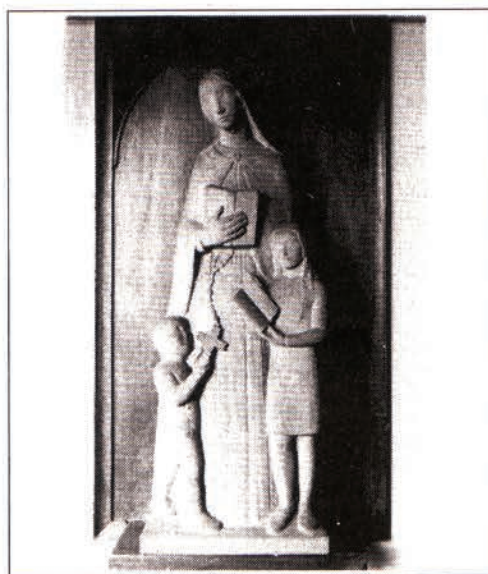
The redesigned chapel

The 450th anniversary of the foundation of the Ursuline order

A very different and far more joyous event took place on 5th November 1985, when Ursulines all over the world celebrated the 450th anniversary of their foundation. The English province's main celebration was on Saturday, 23rd November, with a Mass at St. George's cathedral, Southwark. The Mass was concelebrated by Archbishop Michael Bowen of Southwark, three other bishops and forty-six priests. The congregation numbered about twelve hundred, including almost the whole province, members of their families, friends, Serviam groups, former pupils and their parents. After Mass a reception was held at the Royal Festival Hall.

On the actual day of the anniversary, 25th November, the community and school had Mass at St. Antony's church. The girls had ice-cream at break-time; there were then three different entertainments for the various age-groups and, finally, a half-holiday. Part of the community's preparation for the anniversary was a novena of prayer during which there was exposition of the Blessed Sacrament daily, at a time when community, staff and girls could all take part.

It is fitting that the past should be celebrated and recorded. Part of the joy in the celebration of the 450th anniversary was the anticipation of a future built on so valuable a past. It is surely the case that however much change the last twenty-five years have brought, the next twenty-five will bring much more. The Ursuline community at Forest Gate looks forward to the future, not with apprehension but with confidence and trust, recalling the words of Sr. Angela, that if we have faith and hope in God, we shall certainly see wonders. Trust, faith and hope have sustained Ursulines for 450 years; who can doubt that, however Ursuline life at Forest Gate may develop, these same gifts will carry us forward into the future?



*The statue of St. Angela
outside the headmistress's room*

THE COMMUNITY IN 1987



Sisters:

<i>Louis-Marie Ryan</i>	<i>Brigid Sheehy</i>	<i>Bernardine Cloonan</i>	<i>Una McCreesh</i>	<i>Aidan Lemmon</i>	<i>Alice Montgomery</i>	<i>Teresita Clemo</i>	<i>Dorothea Dawson</i>
	<i>Peter Buck</i>	<i>M. Magdalen Jackson</i>	<i>Rita Faria</i>	<i>Philomena Carroll</i>	<i>M. Antony Lawrence</i>	<i>Benedict Davies</i>	
<i>Josephine Baird</i>	<i>Miriam Moloney</i>	<i>M. Vincent Cummings</i>	<i>Kathleen Colmer</i>	<i>Anne Benyon</i>	<i>Colette Traveller</i>		

FORMER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY

Friends often ask the whereabouts of former members of the community. Those who were at Forest Gate for longer than three years are:



*Sr. Cecily Banwell
giving a piano lesson*

Sr. Mary Alban Kelly, tertianship,
Rome
Sr. Angela Mary Reidy, Wimbledon
Sr. Armida Veglio, deputy head,
Wimbledon
Sr. Beatrice Garnett, Greenwich
Sr. Bernard Bonington, Ilford
Sr. Bonaventure Kelly, prioress at
Greenwich
Sr. Brendan Perrott, headmistress of
the Preparatory School,
Wimbledon
Sr. Campion O'Hagan, Greenwich
Sr. Catherine Pennyfather,
Wimbledon
Sr. Cecily Banwell, Lourdes Infirmary
Community at Westgate
Sr. Elizabeth (Joseph Mary) Campbell,
headmistress at Greenwich

Sr. Felicity Young, Westgate
Sr. Francis Oakley, prioress at Westgate
Sr. Gemma Bashford, principal of the
school in Lebowa, South Africa
Sr. Jayne Horswill, Shotton,
North Wales
Sr. Joseph Powell, Westgate
Sr. Mary Luke Keitch, Rome
Sr. Margaret Lyth, Westgate
Sr. Marie-Therese McGeough, Lourdes
Infirmary Community at
Westgate
Sr. M. Magdalen Cleary, Johannesburg
South Africa
Sr. Mark Mylod, Kaohsiung, Taiwan
Sr. Mary (of the Incarnation) Murphy,
headmistress at Westgate
Sr. M. Martin Walsh, Wimbledon
Sr. Monica Henniker, Greenwich
Sr. Veronica Lyden, Wimbledon



*Sr. Lucy Alcock and
Sr. M. Therese McGeough*

After much reflection, a few are following a different way of life:

Sr. Bernadette Dwyer, now living in Wales

Sr. Loreto (Mary) Daly, now a headmistress in North London

Inevitably, in the course of twenty-five years, several former members of the community have died:

Sr. Teresa Flynn	1963	Sr. M. of the Sacred Heart Buffechoux	1979
Sr. Loyola Keogh	1965	Sr. Andrea Bayliss	1980
Sr. Campion Gibson	1965	Sr. Margaret (Stanislaus) Churchman	1980
Sr. Lawrence McCann	1966	Sr. M. Winefride Sturman	1981
Sr. Clement Cunningham	1968	Sr. M. Ursula Duffield	1983
Sr. Francis Stoner	1968	Sr. Margaret Mary Lumley	1983
Sr. Patricia Coyne	1970	Sr. Magdalen Nicole	1983
Sr. Aloysius (Nelly) Browne	1973	Sr. Clare (Iris) Tanter	1985
Sr. Aquinas Hunt	1973	Sr. Lucy Alcock	1986
Sr. Mary Angela Boord	1976		
Sr. M. Elizabeth Watkins	1979		

May they rest in peace!



*Sr. Mary Angela Boord
aged 94*