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Chapter One

The birth of the church

Our story began in 1793 when Richard Gillow, a well known architect in North West Lancaster, came to Margate bringing with him his own chaplain. He bought a property in Prospect Place (now known as Victoria Road) and the first mass was said in 1793 by Father Michael Grundy.

In 1801 the few scattered Catholics of the district were cared for by Father Michael Bellesent who was the first priest known to minister in Thanet since the Reformation.

A Roman Catholic chapel was then built by public subscription in 1803. This seems to have been the central mission from which our Priests would minister to the Catholic population in south east Kent.

At this time the chapel consisted of an oblong hall with a flat roof and was capable of seating 100 people. To provide extra accommodation for visitors there was a gallery at the rear. The Priest's house was within this structure but sectioned off by a wall. The Priest's house was where the present Sanctuary is now situated within the wall going across at the step.

In 1804 Father Bellesent was succeeded by Father John Jones. Father Joseph Anson took charge of the Parish from 1808 to 1821 and, in 1822, Father Thomas Costigan was sent to the "*Margate Mission*". Father Costigan remained Parish Priest of the Folkestone and Dover area until 1859.

During the next few years various alterations and improvements were made to the church. The school (adjoining the church) was built and opened in 1863. Three years later a Lady Chapel and tower, that had been added to the church, were solemnly opened.

In 1887 the property was formally made over by the Diocese to the Benedictines and Father Sigebert Saunders proceeded to enlarge the church. A few years previously the ceiling had been removed and the present open roof with its substantial beams exposed. He now extended the church to the roadway, removed the existing tower and erected a higher one at the side of the church where it terminated an entirely new aisle. A side altar was erected and the Lady Altar was placed in a more suitable position. On 28 September 1890 Bishop Butt presided at the opening of the new Sanctuary, the former Presbytery.

By transferring priest's quarters to an adjacent cottage, and knocking down the dividing wall, the church gained a considerable amount of extra space. Two years later the new Presbytery was completed and in 1894 Bishop Butt opened the new side aisle in front of the Sacred Heart Altar. In 1895 Mr Thomas

Manby Colgrave donated the gift of a new organ and also the Chapel of St Joseph where Mass was first celebrated on 1 September 1897.

From 1897 until 1934 the Parish was in the capable hands of Father Elphage Power. Fr Power's ministry at Margate was notable for many developments, the principal of which were the School and of St Anne's Church, Cliftonville.

Fr Power was succeeded in St Austin's by Dom Aelred Waterhouse in October 1934. The following year he set about restoring the Sanctuary and cleaning the church. The wooden screen was removed and replaced by the present stone screen. New parquet flooring was laid on the Sanctuary, the altars were cleaned, central heating installed and the church completely redecorated. The organ was moved from the gallery at the rear of the church to the clerestory on the left, opening up the window at the east end giving more light. The window to the left of the sanctuary was replaced with white and green antique glass with ribbons of blue and ruby. Above the high altar the window was replaced by one depicting the passion of Our Lord which was designed and executed in stained glass by Mr John Trinnick RA.

Passion Sunday 1936 was fittingly chosen for the blessing of this window and pontifical Mass was celebrated by the Rt Rev Abbot Taylor of Ramsgate, assisted by Fr Dunstan, Fr Wilfred Emery and Fr Paulinus.

In 1938 Major H S Hatfield presented to the Abbey, Salmestone Grange, Margate and a large piece of land on which it stood. Plans were made to build a school on the adjoining land, and her Fr Aelred, a former Ramsgate Town councillor serving on the Education Committee, was able to use his experience and the primary school be built at Salmestone is a lasting monument to his zeal and capability.

Thus we come to the war years. Unfortunately the war led to a great reduction in the number of parishioners. The new school was evacuated and Fr Oswald Hull accompanied the pupils to Cannock in Staffordshire. The parish hall opened nightly from 6.00pm as a club and canteen for the benefit of soldiers and parishioners. Fr Aelred and Fr Dunstan remained at Margate during the war and took up residence at Salmestone Grange from where they served the parishioners of Westgate, Birchington and Cliftonville as well as Margate parish. St Gregory's school was seriously damaged by a bomb in 1940 and the parish hall was also hit. Although bombs fell extremely close to the church it escaped any real damage.

After the war, Fr Oswald Hull came from Stafford to assist Fr Aelred. St Gregory's school reopened and the various activities of the parish re-assembled. These included a Scout Troop (the 28th Margate) the Guild of the Blessed Sacrament, Children of Mary and many others. In December 1946 Fr Aelred was compelled by ill health to resign as parish priest.

Fr Oswald Hull then took charge of the parish. In 1949 alterations to the main door of the church in Victoria Road were made. The door had originally opened on to the narrow pavement causing considerable congestion in the porch. The

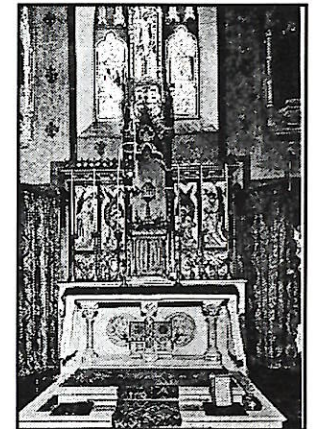
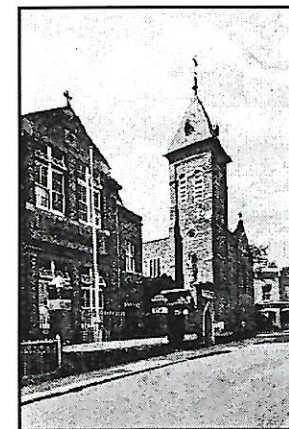
new door was made to open on to the small courtyard in front of the parish hall. Apart from the practical advantages of this alteration the general effect was more pleasing. Above the porch the statue of St Gregory, mutilated beyond repair during the war, was replaced by a crucifix.

Fr Oswald remained at Margate until 1964 when his brother Fr Edward Hull took over. At this time it was decided that the presbytery (built in 1892) was no longer fit for habitation and the present house was built adjoining the original presbytery.

In 1966 the parish was returned to Diocesan care and Fr Timothy Corcoran arrived to take charge. He was faced with a heavy debt and a slowly diminishing congregation. The redevelopment of much of old Margate meant that many parishioners were moved outside the parish. Where their homes once stood are now large office blocks, wide roads and car parks but no people.

During the late 1960s it was decided to reduce the size of the Church due to falling numbers. A glass screen partition was put along the length of the Sacred Heart Chapel. The end was divided off to form the Sacristy and the main area serves as our parish hall. (The old school had been demolished and the land sold for £10,000 in 1963 to provide the money for the repair of the church roof. The land is still vacant and we would like to buy it back but the price with planning permission at £55,000 is prohibitive.)

Fr Tim Corcoran remained with us until March 1989 when Fr Peter Soper was appointed Parish Priest. Under his guidance and leadership we have become a thriving community. The church buildings have been carefully repaired including new roofs along the length of the Lady Chapel, stonework restoration inside and out and the large windows in the church and hall have been covered externally with perspex sheeting for protection against the elements. The old presbytery buildings in Charlotte Place have also been repaired and renovated to include the parish office, and upstairs, a meeting room and small kitchen. The monies for all this work have been generously given by our parishioners and by fund-raising events organised by our social committee.



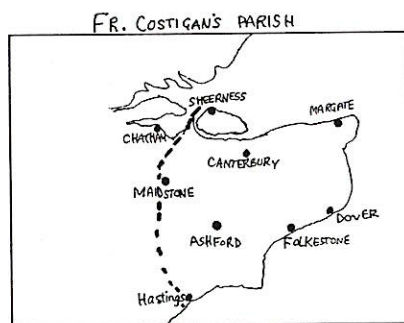
Chapter Two

Celebrating Father Thomas Costigan

Father Thomas Costigan was born on 24 January 1788 at Kilkenny, Ireland and was educated at St. Edmund's Ware (note the connection with Dover). He was ordained priest at the age of 29 and was posted to the Margate Mission in 1821, taking residence at a house called St. Austin's in Prospect Place. Margate, it seems was the central mission from which our Priest would minister to the Catholic population in South East Kent.

He was to enjoy a roving commission serving the coast between Sheerness and St. Leonard's and through exercising his ministry he became known as the *Wandering Apostle* of the South Coast. It was at this time that the great Catholic revival started, due to a variety of reasons, and behind the revival in Dover was the priest in charge of the Margate Mission, Father Thomas Costigan.

Our priest was a tall powerful man, standing some 6'5" and he would travel along the coast walking from coastguard station to coastguard station. It is recorded that in 1814 there were some 3,317 Catholics in Kent to which the few Priests available had to administer the Sacraments.



When one considers the difficulty of travelling in those days we cannot but be impressed with the missionary zeal our Priest gave to his duties.

On one occasion he was taking Holy Viaticum to a dying man who lived between Deal and Dover. After walking a considerable distance a coach overtook him, Father Costigan made frantic signs for the coach

to stop, the gentlemen inside the coach bad the driver to carry on, but Father Costigan, on announcing himself and his mission and begging for a lift, the coach stopped and a lift was offered.

The coach then stopped at Walmer Castle and the gentleman who got out was none other than the Bishop of Exeter! Father Costigan was then taken and was returned to the Castle where he was entertained by the Bishop and the Duke of Wellington. He stayed the night and returned home the following day.

Father Costigan, being Irish, loved horses and often went by horseback to visit parishioners. When it became known that the tall gentleman on horseback was a Catholic Priest, the ignorance and bigotry manifested itself. He used to say that children formed crosses of straw and placed them in the road to force his horse to trample them as he rode by and he often had bad eggs and rotten tomatoes thrown at him on his journeys..

It is said that he rescued the Princess Victoria (later Queen) by stopping the pony on which she was riding when it bolted. After that he would write to Her majesty on the anniversary of the incident each year and would receive a reply.

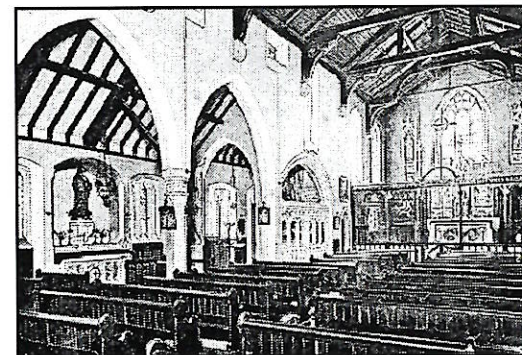
Towards the end of what seems a very arduous life, our priest seems to have become a little childish in his manner, upsetting his friends. Canon Doyle of Southwark could not believe the report and came to see him in Margate. After having a lengthy interview with our now aged Priest, the Canon was leaving just as another friend came to see Father Costigan. As the friend entered the room, Father Costigan shouted out "*Did you see an old woman going out? She has been bothering me for the past two hours!*"

Our *Wandering Apostle*, to whom the Catholic revival in the South East owes so very much, died in Ramsgate on 9th October, 1860. He had long desired to be buried in the graveyard adjoining his church in Margate but this was impossible due to an Act of Parliament forbidding intramural burials.

A small notice in the Kentish Gazette said that after a protracted illness Thomas Costigan, for many years Catholic Pastor had died aged 73. He was buried at St. Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate, and is laid near the great cross which serves as his monument and it bears the following subscription:

"Near this cross reposes Rev. Thomas Costigan, for 38 years the missionary along the South East coast. The friend of his flock and the friend of the poor. Born Kilkenny, January 24th, 1788. Died Margate October 9th 1860. May he rest in peace."

How fortunate we Catholics are to have such dedicated Priests like Father Costigan, who gave so much for the revival of the faith in England.



Chapter Three

In church

THE principles of the Reformation have evidently taken deep root in Thanet. The ozone agrees apparently with Protestantism, and while in every street or road a spire of the Establishment shoots up, or the stuccoed front of a Dissenting chapel attracts the eye, the Roman Catholics have their spiritual wants satisfied by ministrations in Mr. Pugin's flint building on the West Cliff, Ramsgate, and by the services at the quaint little chapel which hides itself away somewhere at the back of the parish church in Margate.

Two bijou temples are found more than sufficient to accommodate the followers of the old faith. The effect of St. Augustine's visit even now has its testimony in the names of churches all over the island, wherein the ceremony and the doctrines are very different from anything known to or contemplated by that highly-respectable missionary.

Lawrence accompanied the other divine, and Peter the Abbot joined in the solemn litany chanted as they approached the pagan king. It is a fine old legend, that of the early missionary excursion to Thanet. Three boys stood in the market-place at Rome. Their fair complexion, white flesh, lovely expression, and light, flaxen hair, attracted the attention of Gregory the Great. He ascertained that they were Angles from the province of Deira, and thereupon proceeded to perpetrate those two very reprehensible puns of his - that about *Angeli* and that about *deira Dei*. Dr. Johnson was rather out in his calculations when he talked about depraved habits of those who play upon words:

*"The man that makes a pun" says he,
"Would e'en commit a felony:
And hanged equally should be"
Says that old fool, Dr. Johnson.*

Your pun is a respectable and historical fact. The conversion of England from paganism is associated with the commission of two very indifferent efforts of the kind, for Gregory the Great, having made his joke, determined to send out missionaries to the land of the handsome youths.

And so it was that St. Augustine of gigantic stature and forty of his monks quitted the seclusion of the Priory of St. Andrew on the Cælian Mount and landed at Ebbe's Fleet in the Isle of Thanet, carrying silver crosses, huge pictures of Christ, chanting solemn litanies, and adopting other devices wherewithal to advertise to the Saxons the beauties of a purer faith than theirs.

I wonder if St. Augustine, full of missionary zeal - I wonder if any of the forty who made the rank and file of his arm of proselytisers - ever contemplated that after certain centuries, in the very island where he planted monasteries and

built churches and enforced the doctrines of Holy Church, there would be found only here and there a little building in which God was worshipped as they were wont to worship him on the Cælian Hill? The very churches that bear his name and the names of his associates have in many of them orators who launch out with much energy about the Pope and the machinations of the Papacy.

Some such line of thought occupies me as at eventide I take my place among the worshippers in the little Margettian Catholic church. It is the most diminutive I have ever been in, save those attached to private houses. "*Where two or three are gathered together*" must be a very comfortable scriptural assurance for the sheep in this pen of the Church's fold.

The grizzled old man at the door has the surliest aspect, and I believe scents heresy in me as he motions me to a chair. By-and-by an acolyte appears before the altar, and there is lighting of candles and the depositing of the sacred properties on the altar. The usual obeisance is made at each passage from the altar to the vestry.

On the left is a little chapel. I cannot see whether it is to Our Lady. Tapers burn before the effigy therein, but I can see only the tapers and their flickering light. Some oil-paintings of a meritorious sort are on the walls and a row of ordinary prints, framed in plain wood, is arranged around each side. Beside me kneels a negro. He has a fine mellow voice, and in the mind of one who is inclined to associate the rites of natives with shouts of "*Glory Hallelujah!*" "*Bress de Lord,*" and "*Roll, Jordan, roll,*" there was something of wonder created by this dark brother's accurate pronunciation of the Latin words and evident interest in the service.

Enters upon the other side, also intent upon this Vesper service, a little girl lamentably crippled. Her poor little shoulders are dragged this way and that, and her head is fixed on one side. Her clothes are wretched in the extreme, but there is a smile of contentment upon her prematurely aged face. She makes a necessarily awkward obeisance to the altar. With her is a sturdy boy much her junior. See how she takes his hat off, arranges his hair, lifts him in her poor deformed arms, places him sitting upon the hard form, kisses him upon the forehead, and then kneels to her devotions and utters, as heartily as if the lines had all fallen for her in pleasant places, "*Deo gratias.*"

It is difficult to follow the intoned mumbled utterance of the priest, and one only feels sage in joining with the congregation when we come to the "*Magnificat,*" or the occasional "*Gloria Partri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.*" There is a hymn chanted, and the priest goes fatally wrong in the music, breaking down eventually as to voice.

Who is she in the organ-loft, which is above me, and into which, consequently, I cannot see - who is she, I say, who at this point rushes to the rescue of the Father, throws her voice into the breach, and carries him triumphantly through? I noticed an olive-complexioned, dark-haired lady go up the little steps behind me. There was a mixture of Spanish and Irish about her - a type often

seen on the west coast of the Emerald Isle. Was it she who, when organist and priest got very wrong with the chant, thus carried the congregation through with flying colours?

A romantic-looking beauty, and innocent of aspect withal - seems but little need that she should sing with fervour:-

*Ne mens gravata crimine,
Vitæ sit exul munere,
Dum nil perenne cogitat
Seseque culpæ illegat.*

Possibly some other vocalist, altogether uninteresting, led the devotions.

There is a time during the service at a Roman Catholic church when I think even the most vigorous and virulent opponent must acknowledge the strong and earnest faith of those who are prostrate about him. Here, indeed, is an evident and awful belief to which your Protestant never reaches. I mean when the *Sanctus*- bell rings; when a dead silence falls on the congregation; when the bodies of the worshippers bend forward, inclined by a great fear; when forms are seen to shudder, and suppressed sighs, as if from those undergoing a great agony or a great rapture, well up toward heaven; when, in a word, the *Sacred Presence* actually descends. Into this belief, or superstition, or folly, or madness - term it how you will, regarding the matter each from his own standpoint - I do not care to enter here. That it is a *Faith* not in name only that which, I think, no sane person will care to deny.

There is no preaching at the church. The priest and his two assistants file out. An attendant extinguishes the altar lights. The organ strikes up a march. We render fresh obeisance, and depart silently. There is wanting here all the gorgeous ceremony, the splendid music, the beautiful architecture, popularly supposed to make popular this religion. And yet we go away impressed. And as I drive home my horses' hoofs beat time to that which I am humming to myself - beat time to *Ora pro nobis*.

(From: *The Thanet Figaro*, 22 September 1877)



Chapter Four

200 years on

The work here continues.

Instead of a parish council we have various hard working groups

- ◆ Social committee
- ◆ Welfare & bereavement committee
- ◆ Parish liturgy committee
- ◆ Secretarial, finance & maintenance committee
- ◆ Prayer group
- ◆ Rosary group
- ◆ Choir
- ◆ Church cleaning group
- ◆ Senior & junior youth groups
- ◆ Children's liturgy group
- ◆ Union of Catholic mothers

We keep strong links with our school. We have a Family Mass once a month and activity days before major Feasts when the children prepare the decorations for the church. We also offer First Holy Communion classes and Catechism classes for children attending non-Catholic schools once a week during term-time.

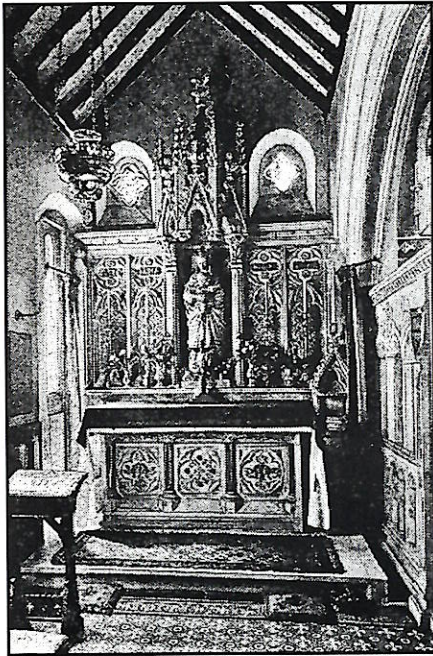
We have a long history of prayer and good works here at St Austin's thanks to good Priests and faithful people, may we continue to follow in their footsteps for many years to come.



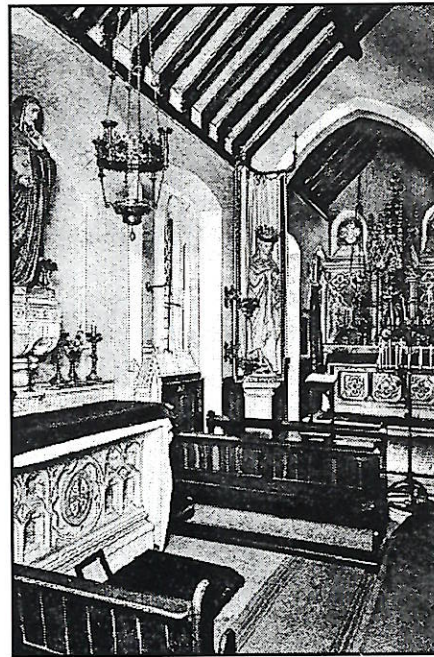
Snippets

About our church

- ◆ The church tower was only allowed to be built half the height of St John's tower as St John's was the Parish Church.
- ◆ We have a false chimney on the south side because after the Reformation "Church like" buildings were not allowed - they had to look like houses!
- ◆ The stained glass window behind the high altar was donated by John McCormack - a famous singer who was performing at the Winter Gardens and was told that we needed a new window behind the high altar.



LADY ALTAR



ST. BENEDICT'S

Acknowledgement

A Monastic Century by Rt Rev Abbot David Parry OSB

The Thanet Figaro