

A SHORT HISTORY OF ST. MARY'S PARISH, PAISLEY



On 12 November 1871, a Mass Centre was established in the West End of Paisley to serve the ever increasing number of Catholics in the town. This Mass Centre formed part of St. Mirin's parish/mission and this led to the opening of St. Mary's church-school in Queen Street, Paisley.

On 15 December 1876, St. Mary's parish/mission came into being under the charge of Rev. William Dillon as its first parish priest. The parish had an estimated Catholic population of 2300 with a school roll of 262 in its initial year.



Sadly, Rev. William Dillon only remained in Paisley for a few months longer before emigrating to Canada and he was replaced by Rev. John McDonald who initially lived in a top floor flat in 22 Newton Street. It was Rev. John McDonald who arranged for the purchase of the site in George Street to build a church and rectory. The rectory was opened in June 1880 but it was to be another 11 years before the present building of St. Mary's church was opened.



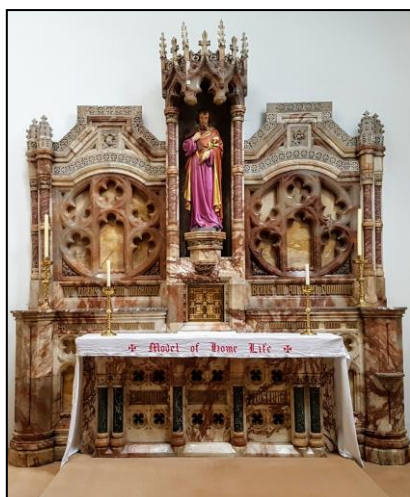
The church was built from plans by Pugin & Pugin, Westminster, and was built using red stone from Locharbriggs Quarry. Initially the church was built at a cost of £5000 and had seating for 900. The church was a large construction for the time, having a length of 120ft, breadth of 50ft and height of 60ft to the top of the cross outside on George Street.

In the years 1903/4 the length of the church was increased to 132ft when the High Altar and side altars were constructed under the supervision of Rev. William Davidson, as well as the construction of the Sacred Heart Altar, 3 confessionals, altar rails and the sacristy. The high altar was a gift from Miss Eveline Coats.

The builders were fortunate that they were able to obtain further red stone from the original quarry and there was no noticeable difference. The only visible sign of the extension is the outside view of the roof at the rear where the end of the original building is marked by a stone cross, the same as at the front of the building on George Street.

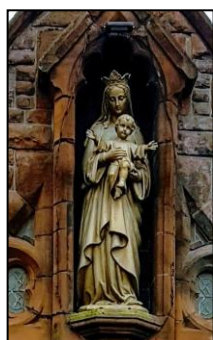
Over the next 100 years several changes took place with regard to the decoration of the church not just the colour of paint. A number of significant items were added to the church.

1. In March 1925 the Calvary statue in the rear porch of the church, donated by Miss C. Gardiner, was unveiled and dedicated.



2. On 24 February 1929, the St. Joseph Altar, paid for by the parishioners, was unveiled and dedicated as a memorial to Canon William Davidson, former parish priest who died in 1926.

3. On 14 March 1931, the large brass Paschal candlestick was presented to St. Mary's in memory of Hugh Gilloughley. The existing wooden candlestick was transformed to a lectern.



4. On 28 April 1931, the bronze statue of Our Lady holding the child Jesus, donated by Mrs. M.J. Greene of Park Avenue, New York, was installed in the niche above the main door of the church on George Street.

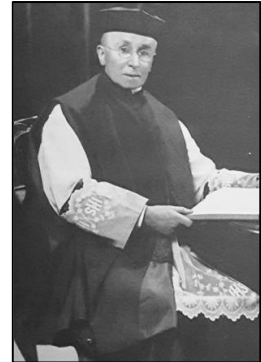
5. In March 1937, Mrs. Anne McGarrity of Brown Street, Paisley presented the large crucifix which hangs above the sanctuary area memory of her husband, Charles McGarrity. The cross was hand carved by peasants in the Tyrol.



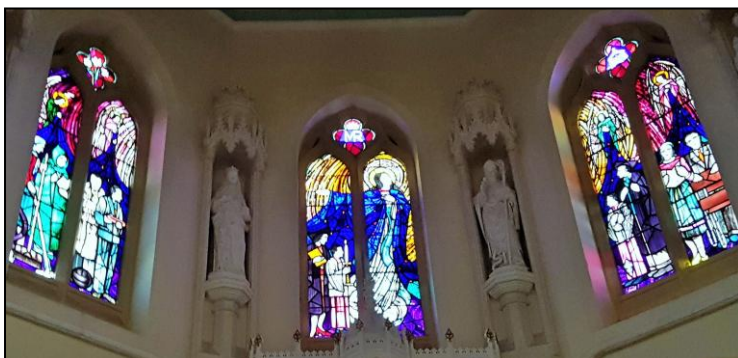
At 2am on 6 May 1941, a German parachute mine exploded in a stable yard at 36 Newton Street causing extensive damage to the church hall, the church and presbytery. Most windows in the area were destroyed, including the stained glass windows of St. Mary's church. Two fire service personnel were killed by the mine which landed in Newton Street. Sadly, worse news was to follow, as this was also the night when another parachute mine landed on the First Aid Post at Woodside, killing 97 people.



In 1947, the Diocese of Paisley was established, Rev. Frederick P. Pirrie, parish priest of St. Mary's from 1924-1957, was appointed as the first Vicar General, first priest to become a monsignor and first Provost of the Cathedral Chapter.



It was under the supervision of Mgr. Pirrie that extensive re-decoration of the church took place and the original parish hall was demolished.



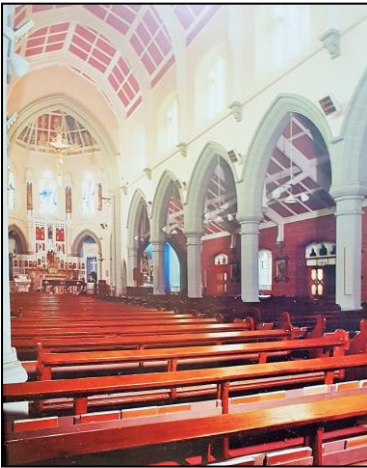
In the early 1960s, with Mgr. Francis Magauran now as parish priest, the stained glass windows were installed above the Sanctuary area depicting the various lay activists who participate in

the running of the parish and its activities, all gathered under the protective influence of the Mother of God. The windows were purchased from the Dublin Glass & Paint Company, Dublin.

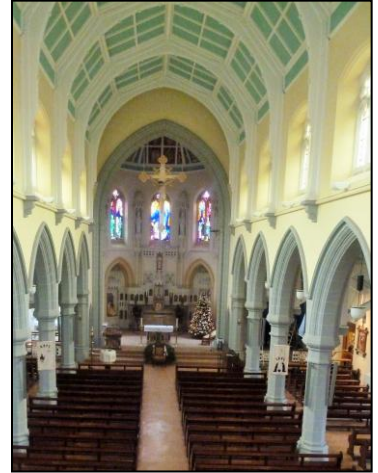
A large stained glass window obtained from Pluscarden Abbey was also installed in the choir loft around this time. There were also changes required to the High Altar at this time as, following Vatican II, the altar table was brought forward so that the priest could face the people.



Under the supervision of Rev. Thomas Mannion, parish priest 1977-1993, the altar rails of the High Altar were removed as per instructions of Vatican II and the gates restored and re-sited in the church. A new marble lectern was also commissioned.



The next major re-decoration took place under the supervision of Rev. Charles Cavanagh, parish priest 1997 – 2004, when the church was closed to all for almost 6 months during 2003 while major repairs and upgrading were carried out, including the roof and heating system and the colour of decor changing dramatically from red to muted colours throughout.



It was during this major work that the Watt pipe organ in the choir loft was restored. This organ in St. Mary's is of great importance as only a small number of these organs remain in use in Britain.



PARISH PRIESTS OF ST. MARY'S, PAISLEY

1. Rev. William Dillon 1876
2. Rev. John McDonald 1877 - 1903
3. Rev. William Davidson 1903 - 1923
4. Rev. Frederick R. Pirrie 1923 - 1957
5. Rev. Francis Magauran 1958 - 1975
6. Rev. Eugene Divney 1975 -1976
7. Rev. Thomas Mannion 1977 - 1993
8. Rev. Thomas Jamieson 1993 - 1997
9. Rev. Charles Cavanagh 1997 - 2004
10. Rev. Maurice Callaghan 2004 - 2015
11. Rev. Gerard McNellis 2015 - 2017
12. Rev. Jude Okorie 2017 -

PARISH PRIESTS OF ST. MARY'S, PAISLEY

1. Rev. William Dillon 1876
2. Rev. John McDonald 1877 -1940 b. Aberdeen 12 Aug 1852
d. Dollymount, Co. Dublin 24 Nov 1940
3. Rev. William Davidson 1903 – 1923 b. Tomintoul, Banffshire 22 Nov 1854
d. 7 Dec 1926
4. Rev. Frederick R. Pirrie 1923 – 1957 b. Coatbridge area 15 April 1877
d. 1 Sept 1957
5. Rev. Francis Magauran 1958 – 1975 b. Newcastle-on-Tyne 5 April 1901
d. 12 Jan 1975
6. Rev. Eugene Divney 1975 -1976 b. Castlebar, Co. Mayo 29 March 1917
d. 20 Nov 1976
7. Rev. Thomas Mannion 1977 – 1993 b. Partick, Glasgow 1920
d. Wexford, Ireland 9 Aug 1993
8. Rev. Thomas Jamieson 1993 – 1997 b.
d. Feb 2003 (aged 73)
9. Rev. Charles Cavanagh 1997 – 2004 b.
10. Rev. Maurice Callaghan 2004 – 2015 b.
11. Rev. Gerard McNellis 2015 – 2017 b. Port Glasgow 16 July 1963
12. Rev. Jude Okorie 2017 - b. Aba, Nigeria 1 Aug 1977