

St Alban's Church

Chaddesden, the fastest growing area of Derby after the First World War, did not have its own Roman Catholic church and the nearest places for the celebration of mass were St Mary's in Derby and Spondon from 1931. For a short time mass was celebrated by the St Mary's clergy in a clinic at Sussex Circus. As this became unsuitable, new ideas were sought.

Monsignor James Hargreaves first set about raising funds for a new church. Mgr Hargreaves, a Lancastrian, had worked in Derby for 32 years. He was a curate at St Joseph's and later its parish priest. He then became parish priest of St Mary's and vicar general of the Diocese of Nottingham. It was his devotion and decisions that led to the growing parish and the founding of St Alban's Church. He formed a committee, set about raising funds and finding a suitable site for the new church. The committee raised the money to buy land at Roe Farm Lane for £1000 in 1946. It was a large piece of land and originally it was assumed that the school would be built on the same site.

The site had an interesting history over the preceding 50 years. From 1894 until the First World War, it was crossed by the tramway of the Derby Kilburn Colliery Company. When the Chaddesden Estate was sold in 1918, it was bought by farmer Everard Johnson as part of Roe Farm. Within a few years, Johnson had divided Roe Farm and this field became part of the new Hillcrest Farm. The 1938 revision of the OS 1:2500 map shows that six bungalows had already been built on part of the field and a proposed new street named Johnson Avenue was shown leading off Roe Farm Lane exactly where the church now stands. The war started before Johnson Avenue could be built and so the land was available as a site for the church.

By July 1948 permission was granted for a temporary hut to be used as a church hall. Two War Department Nissen huts, which had been used for army training on Markeaton Park were purchased. The larger hut was used for the church, with the smaller one attached and used as the sacristy, or vestry.

Moor Grange at Chaddesden had been granted the privilege of a private chapel at the request of Mgr Payne, of St Mary's Church, Bridgegate, Derby. Mass had been celebrated and the blessed sacrament was reserved in that house. So, the hut was not the first place of worship in the parish, though the Grange chapel was a private one.

Mass was celebrated twice each Sunday and Benediction and confessions took place in the hut. From the beginning Mgr Hargreaves had taken the project to his heart and the church of St Alban's was so called because of his membership of the St Alban's College, at Valladolid, in Spain, where he trained for the priesthood.

By 1953 ideas and plans for a new church were clarified. Mgr Hargreaves instructed diocesan architects Reynolds and Scott of Manchester to prepare plans for the new church.

At 3 pm on 3 October 1953 a large crowd gathered to see Bishop Edward Ellis lay the foundation stone for the church and speak of a large and beautiful edifice rising from the foundations. In April 1955 Mgr Hargreaves' failing health led to his duties being passed to Mgr Harry Drury.



The solemn blessing of the new church took place on 26 June 1955. The first procession into the church set off from the sacristy under the direction of Father Snee and Mr Ray Donovan who served as MC. His long association with St Alban's began from the days of the hut until his death in 1971. The first appointed parish priest was Father John McLean (later Monsignor), who arrived in February 1956. A sad moment in his first year was the death of Mgr Hargreaves.

↙ The church probably photographed in the 1960s. The priest's house was to the left of the picture behind a row of ornamental almond trees. The house was demolished when the land to the left of the church was sold for the construction of the Revive Healthy Living Centre in 2005 – 2007. The church hall, just visible beyond the church, was also demolished and a new hall and priest's bungalow were built on that side of the church.



A small ceremony took place on 14 February 1960 - a memorial was blessed beside the church and a modern Lourdes Group sculpture by David John provided a fitting tribute to Mgr Hargreaves. The church was extended in the 1960s. The effect of the new transepts on the atmosphere of the building was enormous, creating a feeling of space, light and improving the acoustics. On 13 September 1960 the extensions were blessed by Bishop Ellis.

The whole building was consecrated by Bishop McGuinness on 9 June 1976. A memorial to all those who had helped in the building of St Alban's was set on the east wall in the form of a 10 foot high risen Christ sculpted in welded phosphor bronze and erected in 1977.



Monsignor Martin Cummins became parish priest on 21 September 1985, only nine days before the death of Mgr McLean, who had stepped down through ill-health. The 11am Sunday Mass on 8 February 1987 was broadcast live on ITV during morning worship. The parish now serves the ecumenical church at Oakwood, officially opened on 29 May 1993 although Mass had been celebrated there that Easter. A part of the church where adoration of the blessed sacrament takes place during the week was opened in May 1994.

↙ St Alban's Church photographed on 10 November 2010. The new priest's house can be seen in the background.

Original text by Tony Bowler with later additions. Photographs from the Chaddesden Historical Group collection.

