

Welcome to the Parish Church of Our Lady of Mercy and St. Joseph, Lymington

A BRIEF HISTORY

by Olivia Cowan

A history, however brief of our Roman Catholic Church must include a mention of the brave people who managed to maintain their faith during hard times after the Reformation. We also must remember the French emigre priests based in Lymington and in particular the benevolence of The Weld Family.

Around the turn of the 1800's a Catholic Mission was set up in Lymington by French Jesuits and in 1801 the Weld Family (a prominent Catholic family and owners of Lulworth Castle) took over Pylewell House. Shortly after their arrival Joseph Weld had a ground floor room converted into a Chapel where Mass was held for all local Catholics to attend. Many years later the Weld Family moved closer to Lymington living at Blake's Lodge Walhampton and in 1852 built the first Catholic Church (Brickfield Lane, Walhampton) in the district since the Reformation.

In 1857 Joseph Weld Junior purchased no 132,133 and 134 High St, Lymington for 1000 guineas with the intention of building a larger church at the back of number 132.

In 1858 building works commenced. The architect was Mr Joseph A. Hanson, inventor of the 2-wheel Hanson cab. Mr Hanson also designed the Cathedral of St Phillip Howard at Arundel.

The church was built of local red bricks and Welsh slate by local builder Mr William Rickman.

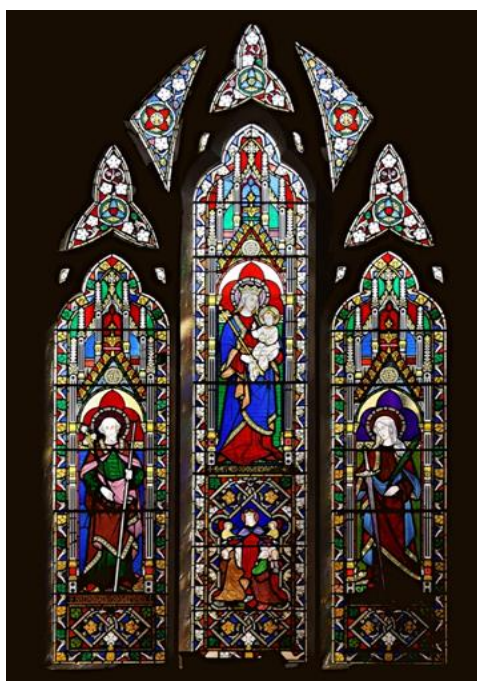


The solemn opening, blessing and consecration of the altar was performed by the then Bishop of Southwark in May 1859.

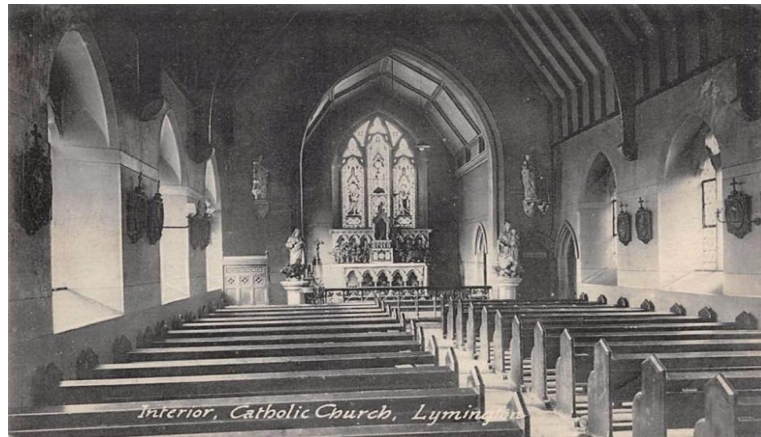


The building opposite the entrance to the church is known as Joseph's Place. This was the site of the first catholic school in this area. It is understood that prior to the building of the Victorian brick-built school in 1885, paid for by Mr Weld, there was a small school on this site from around 1859. The Weld family motto can be seen over the entrance – Nil Sine Numine (Nothing without God). This school was in continuous use until a new school was built in Pennington in 2003.

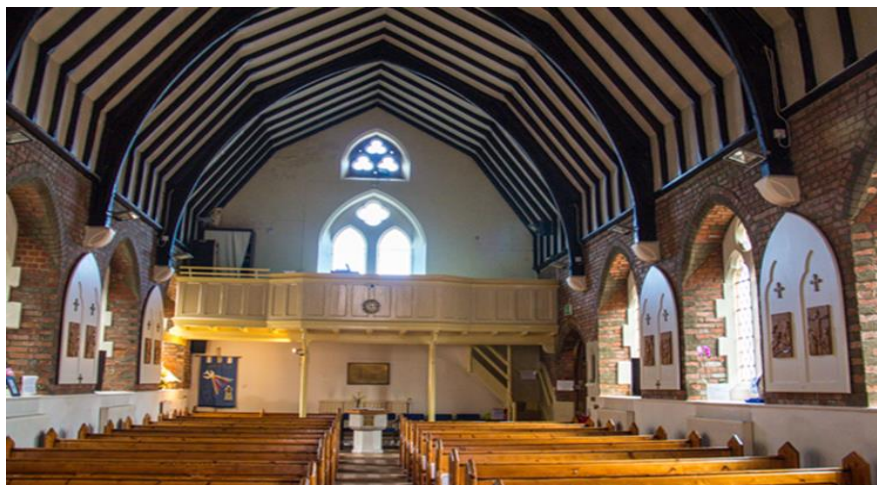
The beautiful stained glass in the Sanctuary is by Franz Mayer & Co., of Munich, Germany and is believed to be still in business today. The founders of the church, Joseph and Flora Weld and their family are depicted in the bottom central panel, behind the altar, receiving protection from Our Lady.



The pine pews were presented to the church by Mr James Brown, Mr Weld's solicitor and the Town Clerk.



The original Stations of The Cross were given to Christchurch Parish after WW2 and the stations you see today are carved from limewood by Mr F. H. Whittington of Brockenhurst using his own designs.



The Baptismal font was erected in 1890 in memory of Flora and Joseph Weld in grateful thanks for their generosity and apostolic zeal.



In 1992 our church made it into the Guinness Book of Records, or at least the organist did for being the oldest church organist – ever! The organist was Violet Loader, and she played the organ for 69 years retiring at the age of 103. Violet outlived two organs and died at the age of 108

This church is now the oldest building still being used as a Catholic Parish church in the South-West Hampshire and East Dorset area. Like all old churches it is in desperate need of repair and your donation to the building fund would be gratefully received. There is a donations box to the right of the entrance inside the building.

Before leaving us, please take a look at our Grotto to St Bernadette in the left-hand corner of the car park and our 'box gardens' dedicated to the memory of past parishioners.

The above history is taken from "One hundred- and Fifty-Years A-Growing" Revised edition 2009. With grateful thanks to all those who put their time and energy into this edition and the original text published in 1998

