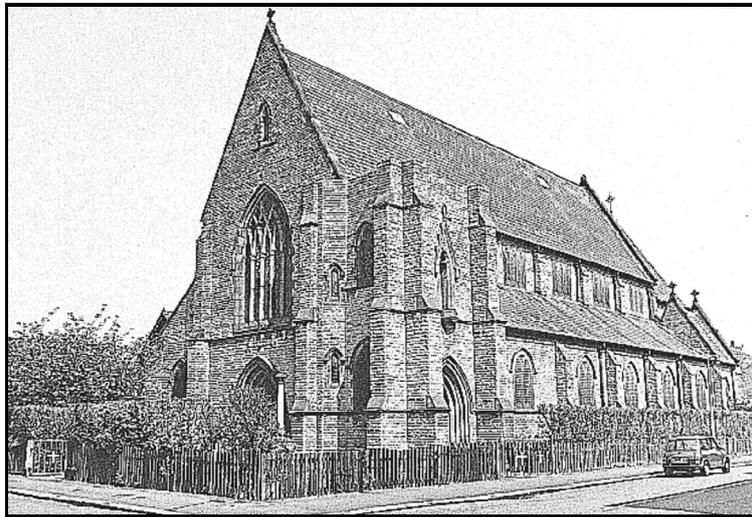


**OUR LADY  
OF THE  
ASSUMPTION**



**A PARISH HISTORY  
CHURCH CENTENARY EDITION**

**BY**

**DAVID FORREST**

## **FOREWORD**

A short account of Our Lady's Parish was printed in the Warrington Observer in 1910. Another, more detailed, history was published for the Golden Jubilee of the parish in 1919. This was updated and reprinted in the handbook for the Indian Bazaar of 1929. Much has happened since then, hence this booklet.

I would like to extend my thanks to those members of the parish who have helped in this project, especially to Father J. T. Daley for allowing me access to the parish records.

Grateful thanks are also due to Miss M. C. Miller, whose help has been invaluable.

Finally I must thank Mrs. D. Sullivan for her help with the research. Without her prompting I would not have undertaken writing this history.

David Forrest  
Latchford  
February 1991

## **SECOND EDITION**

I must give an acknowledgement to the publication ~~to~~ preserve their memory+ by Canon E. Maurice Abbott. It has enabled some detail concerning the clergy of the parish to be added.

David Forrest  
Latchford  
January 1998

## **CHURCH CENTENARY EDITION**

In this edition a few new facts have been added that have come to light over the last four years. Also added are the events that have shaped the future demise of the parish and the subsequent actions that resulted.

David Forrest  
Latchford  
July 2002

Before his death in August 2009 David Forrest agreed to an abridged version of this history being produced by his family and published on the church website, so the following is not the complete history of the church of Our Lady of the Assumption.  
Copies of the full parish history are available.

## THE HISTORY OF OUR LADY'S PARISH

When Henry VIII broke away from Rome, life for the English Catholic was far from easy. The penalties for continuing to profess the Faith were many. The Act of Uniformity of 1559 made non-attendance at Church of England services an offence carrying a fine of one shilling for each offence. In 1581 the fine was raised to £20 per month for absenteeism and fines of 100 marks with one year's imprisonment were imposed for attending a Catholic Mass. The same imprisonment plus a 200 mark fine was the penalty for celebrating the Mass. Three years later it became high treason to receive the ministrations of a Catholic priest.

In 1586 the non-payment of fines was punished by the seizure of all one's movable goods and two thirds of one's lands. Priests were hidden by the wealthy landowners who risked all for their faith. It was not until the Catholic Relief Act of 1791 that Catholics were allowed to worship at their own registered churches under registered priests. The Emancipation Act of 1829 gave Catholics the right to vote and to hold property unconditionally. This Act led to church building on a large scale.

The south of Lancashire had, from the Reformation, always had a strong Catholic presence locally at Southworth Hall, Croft and at Culcheth.

When the Catholic Hierarchy was restored in 1850, the south of the River Mersey became the Diocese of Shrewsbury and the north side the Diocese of Liverpool. Warrington was therefore split between two ecclesiastical districts, a decision that still creates problems today with important matters such as education.

The population of Warrington continued to grow throughout the 1800s partly because of the Industrial Revolution and partly due to the increased birth rate. In Catholic terms this increase was also due to the influx of Irish immigrants following the potato famine.

The only Catholic church in Warrington was Saint Alban's, Bewsey Street, which was opened on the 13th of November 1823. There was no other church between Warrington and Altrincham or Warrington and Northwich.

It was against this background of increasing population and lack of places in which they could worship, particularly in Cheshire, that the Bishop of Shrewsbury, Dr. James Brown, on the 5th of June 1869, asked Father Henry Alcock of the Parish of Saint Vincent, Altrincham, to set up a mission at Latchford.

Father Alcock wasted no time in setting about his task, monumental though it must have seemed. He sent out a circular in June 1869 and this resulted in a

prompt and generous response, for, on the 24th October that same year the new Mission was opened.

Every week Father Alcock would travel to Warrington to say the Sunday Mass probably travelling by train to Arpley Station. This situation continued until almost the end of 1870, when, to the deep regret of those who had grown fond of him, Father Alcock handed over the mission to Father Thomas Mulvanny who had been appointed as the first rector by the Bishop. He took up his duties on the 7th January 1870.

Father Mulvanny - a tall, broad shouldered man - took lodgings with Mr. Leatherbarrow in Wellington Place, thus becoming the first resident Catholic priest in Latchford since the Reformation. With help from friends it was soon possible for him to furnish a house at 9, St James Street where he lived with his housekeeper Judith Foley until he moved to 11, St Mary's Street.

On the 1st September 1869, Father Alcock acquired a plot of 10,395 square metres (12,433 square yards) from James Gandy. On this marshy land in Slackey Lane he started to build a school/chapel. Father Mulvanny took on this task, sometimes to his own detriment, denying himself many of the necessities of life. The efforts of both priest and people bore fruit, and, at the 11 o'clock Mass on Sunday the 3rd September 1871, the opening ceremony was performed by Father Allen, the Bishop's secretary. It had been intended that the Bishop would preside over the opening, but he was unable to attend due to ill health.

It may come as a surprise to many that the name chosen for the new parish was St. Nicholas of Tolentino. It is thought that this had been the choice of Father Alcock.

Other writers of articles about the history of the church, state that, in September 1873, when Bishop James Brown made an official visit to the parish, he dedicated the church to Our Lady of the Assumption. This may be true, but this belief is not born out by any reference that can be found in the local papers as they all refer to the church as St Mary's. Occasionally the title of Our Lady's was used from June 1908, but St Mary's was preferred by the press even as late as September 1911. It was because of the name of the school/chapel that Slackey Lane became St Mary's Street. In those early days of the parish there was much anti-Catholic feeling, with local papers often containing angry letters referring to 'Popish practices'. The Catholic Church has always had a devotion to Our Lady, something not shared, or understood, by the Established Church. The dedication to Saint Mary, would, in those days be quite acceptable, but not to Our Lady. It is also probable that the name was changed to avoid confusion with Saint Mary's in Buttermarket Street, which opened in August 1877.

Many people in Warrington would have been dismayed to have read of the death of Father Mulvanny in the Warrington Guardian dated Wednesday June 22nd

1881. The newspaper reported that he had died suddenly at home following twelve months of failing health, and remarks that he was known for his genial affability. To commemorate the pastoral work that the popular Irish priest had done, the parishioners erected a small tablet in the chapel as a tribute to his memory.

The loss of Father Mulvanny was followed by the short stay of two new rectors. The first was Father David Williams, who unfortunately did not have very robust health. The work of the parish proved to be too much for him and he soon left to be replaced by Father Wilfrid V. S. Dallow. He, it would seem, had a very genial disposition and became affectionately known by the parishioners as Father 'Daller', a name by which he was still known, many years later. After a short stay in the parish he was replaced by Father John Thompson, who remained in the parish for eight years, in which time he saw a large growth in the population. In 1889 he was asked by the Bishop to take charge of Saint Paul's in Hyde. He was sadly missed by many Warringtonians, both Catholic and non-Catholic.

Father Edward Hanlon took charge of the parish in July 1889. His stay in Latchford was cut short by his untimely death, at forty years of age, on the 4th October of the following year.

The next rector was Father James Hennelly who stayed for about eight years. Perhaps the greatest tribute that could be paid to him was that when he left the parish in November 1896, all debts had been paid.

Father William F. Stanley now became the priest in charge, and during his stay he left a very permanent mark on the parish. It was he, who, in 1898, had the presbytery designed by Mr. Kirby, a Liverpool architect. The total cost of construction was £1,400. Until this building was completed, the clergy of the parish had been forced to live in various houses near to the church. He left in October 1898, to go to Saint Vincent's, Altrincham,

It was Father James W. McGrath who was next appointed to the parish and who would be one of the most important rectors that the parish has had. The population was, by now, growing very rapidly and the original school/chapel was no longer adequate for its duties. He was beset with the problem of providing larger school accommodation than could be envisaged by a further extension of the school. The Board of Education was pressing for an early solution to the overcrowding. The only answer was to build a new church and to utilise the whole of the school/chapel as a school.

Accordingly, Father McGrath called on the design services of Mr. Robert Curran, a chartered Warrington architect, and also engaged Messrs. P. McLachlan, a Birkenhead firm of builders, to erect a new church.

The plans for the new church were submitted to the Bishop for approval, and, in due course returned to Latchford, so that building work could commence. The Bishop also agreed to lay the foundation stone on the 11th August 1901.

The night before the stone laying ceremony, a wooden cross was positioned where the altar was to be built. On the following day, Sunday, in the afternoon, a large crowd gathered to witness the official stone laying ceremony. Bishop Allen was accompanied by nine priests from the Diocese of Shrewsbury and three from the Liverpool Diocese. The Bishop blessed salt and water and sprinkled this on the spot where the cross had stood. He then sprinkled the foundation stone with holy water, and, with a knife, he engraved the Sign of the Cross on each face of the stone. The stone was then laid and the foundations of the church sprinkled with holy water. The opening ceremonies were held on Sunday the 19th October 1902. An entrance charge of two shillings was made for admission to the nave and one shilling for the side aisles.

In late June or early July 1902, Bishop Allen dispatched the first curate to the parish - Father Arthur H. D'Arcy. Apart from helping Father McGrath, one of his duties was to look after the Catholics of Lymm and district and he used to say Masses there on alternate Sundays in a converted saddle-room belonging to Mr. C. de Parmiter.

In the early days of the twentieth century the course of the River Mersey was changed in the Warrington area. The New River Diversion, as it was named, moved the course of the river from the west side of Wilderspool Causeway to its present position along Chester Road. The boundaries of the Dioceses of Liverpool and Shrewsbury have not been affected by this change, and they still contain the areas outlined in 1851.

On the 26th March 1903, Father McGrath officially registered the church for the solemnisation of marriages with the Registrar General. As with the school/chapel, the name given, on the application, was Saint Mary's. The Registrar General has never been informed that the church is now known as Our Lady's, consequently all marriage certificates carried the place of marriage as 'Saint Mary's' and not 'Our Lady of the Assumption,' until October 1997.

Father McGrath's health began to deteriorate, and after several absences due to ill health, he resigned his office in 1906. He died in the following August, at West Kirby. His place at Our Lady's was taken by Father John H. Roche whose stay in Latchford lasted for two years. He moved to Saint Joseph's, Stockport, in November 1908.

Father Thomas M. Marrs was the next rector. He inherited a huge debt of £8,000 and immediately set himself the task of paying off as much as he could. Before he left to work in the parish of Saint Paul in Hyde in February 1911, he had managed to reduce the debt by £200.

Father John Joseph Tallon became the next rector. A native of Ditton, near Widnes, he had, after his education at Ushaw College, Durham and in France, been ordained at Our Lady's on the 30th August 1903. This fact, no doubt, gave him a special place in the affections of the congregation.

In October of 1915, a new curate was appointed to Our Lady's - Father Peter Lancelot Pears, but by the beginning of February 1917 the health of Father Pears was a cause of concern and was even mentioned in the Warrington Guardian. He must have made a full recovery because on the 16th July of that year the same paper printed this short column:-

### **LATCHFORD.**

**New Army Chaplain-** The Rev. Father Pears, of Our Lady's Church, Latchford, has been appointed to the Army. He left on Tuesday for Salonika. His predecessor at the church, the Rev. Father McVeagh, who has been a chaplain with the forces in the East for two years, has been wounded.

Father Pears returned from the Army having gained the Military Cross at Gallipoli and eventually left the parish in September 1920, to become the chaplain at Mawley Hall, Shropshire.

Following the First World War many churches erected a memorial to the dead of their parish. At Our Lady's it took the form of a single stone column, surmounted by a bronze crucifix. This is positioned in the garden to the right hand side of the front entrance. The 3.8 metre (12 feet-6 inches) high memorial has a two tier stone base with six sides. On the upper of the two base pieces there is the inscription "**Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 1914-19**".

The memorial was solemnly blessed before the 11 o'clock Mass on Sunday the 25th August 1920. After the blessing, the Mass was offered for the repose of the souls of those men whose names were listed on a tablet which is situated on the right hand side of the main entrance doors. Unfortunately, this is now badly eroded and the only words that can be discerned are at the top of the stone- "**Here are recorded those of this parish who died on service in the Great War.**"

On January 17th 1922, the parish once again suffered the sad loss of yet another priest - Father Ball. Father Ball had been ordained on the 30th March 1918 and was curate at Our Lady's when he died at the age of twenty-nine, his loss being keenly felt by the congregation. No less than 26 Masses were offered for his soul

by the parish, and for many years, on the anniversary of his death, further Masses were said.

Father Tallon left the parish in September 1926, to go to Saint Joseph's Stockport. He was succeeded by Father Patrick Kearney from Saint Patrick's, Wellington. Father Kearney had, like all his predecessors, a large financial burden to carry. The population of Latchford was still growing, albeit slowly, until the construction of the large estate of Westy started to increase numbers rapidly once again. Father Kearney left Warrington to be replaced by Father Edward D. Kirby who remained as parish priest until 1931.

In September 1930, Bishop Singleton appointed Father John L. Cullen, a curate from Our Lady's, as the first resident priest at the new parish of St Augustine and the English Martyrs. He took up residence at 7, Lindley Avenue, Latchford.

In 1931 Father John Porter became the parish priest, leaving Latchford to take charge of Saint Werburgh's, Birkenhead in 1934. His place was taken by Father John J. Ryan who remained with the parish until the 20th February 1938 when he was replaced by Father Hugh A. Welch.

This new parish priest was not blessed with good health, as he had been the victim of a German gas attack during World War 1. He had also been taken prisoner by the Germans. He left the parish in August 1944, going to Saint Werburgh's at Chester, and Father Christopher R. Hickey was put in charge of the parish. Father Hickey chose to live a frugal life and left the parish in 1957 to be replaced by Father James McGinley at the end of May in that year.

Father McGinley was replaced by Father John T. Daley, in October 1962, and the latter has the distinction of being the longest serving priest in the history of the parish, celebrating his Silver Jubilee in February 1968.

But perhaps he will best be remembered for the part he played in the founding of the new Primary School in Wash Lane. The old school was showing its age and had outlived its usefulness. The new school cost the parish £10,000 and this sum was raised by the congregation in a number of ways. The construction commenced in May 1969 and the school opened to pupils exactly twelve months later.

He also looked after the parishioners in Stockton Heath until Father Charles McKinney became the first parish priest of Saint Monica's when the parish was formally established in 1965.

From May 1970, the old school/chapel was rarely used. Initially it was used for bingo nights and occasional other functions, but eventually the parish ceased to use the building. It was leased to the builders who constructed the surrounding houses, but when they left it became derelict. On the 22nd April 1989, the

building and .43 acres (2081 square yards or 1750 square metres) of land were offered for sale. The property was purchased for £50,000, but unfortunately the parish did not profit by this, as the proceeds went to the Diocese.

For a number of years Father Daley visited the United States of America. Since 1973, his absence from the parish was usually covered by Father Anthony Farrugia, an elderly Salesian priest from Malta. During the years of visiting the parish, Father Farrugia found a place in the affection of many of the congregation, and celebrated his eightieth birthday while in Warrington in February of 1988. This was also the year of the Golden Jubilee of his priesthood.

On the 27th April 1991, 73 year old Father Daley surprised the congregation with the announcement that he had reluctantly agreed to Bishop Gray's request for him to retire and, very early on the 25th June of that year, he said a private Mass before setting off to his retirement in New York.

Father Alban Greenwood, the next parish priest, met some of the congregation later that day at the midday Mass. He had come to Our Lady's from Tarporley- as had Father Daley. He met many more parishioners and other Warringtonians on the following Friday during the annual Walking Day procession, an event he commented upon in his first weekly newsletter on the 30th June. He did not move into the presbytery until the 8th July as he still had some responsibilities at his former parish.

The usual property survey that takes place after a change of parish priest was made by the Diocesan surveyor in August 1991. The report presented a depressing picture to the congregation, as many repairs were needed. These included internal and external decoration; repairs to fractured arches near the choir loft and the Sanctuary; the woodblock floors; external paving; replacement of the heating and lighting systems and repairing of the roof.

The church house required the provision of a modern bathroom and kitchen; repairs to the outbuildings; updating of the heating system and the plumbing; re-pointing externally; replacement of floor finishes; complete rewiring and internal and external decoration.

The total cost for all this work was estimated at £103,000 excluding professional fees and Value Added Tax. Eventually the church roof would have to be re-slatted and the estimate for this work was £50,000 to £60,000 plus fees and tax. Clearly this would be beyond the reach of the congregation.

In February 1993, a parish meeting was held in the church to discuss the condition of the church and presbytery, but no solution was found, although many ideas were put forward. The meeting also discussed many other items affecting the parish such as Mass times, family Masses etc.

By May 1993 the ownership of the old school/chapel had changed hands and it was now planned to build a day-care centre on the site to replace the existing one in Dallam Lane. This month saw the final demolition of the building, the slates having been removed from the roof in May and June 1991.

The newsletter dated the 20th August 1995 contained sad news for the congregation. Father Farrugia had died of cancer in Malta at the age of 87. The 9-30 a.m. Mass on the following Sunday was offered for the repose of his soul. His last visit to Warrington had been in July 1992.

The congregation was shocked when, on the weekend of the 28/29th June 1997, Father Greenwood announced that Bishop Noble had asked him to go to Saint Peter's, Wythenshawe. He was to be replaced by Father Stephen Dwyer from Saint Bernadette's of Brinnington, Stockport. The parish was not used to change having had only two priests in 35 years. Father Greenwood left on the 1st September.

Father Dwyer had visited Latchford and had seen the state of the house and church for himself. He asked the Bishop for the house to be renovated before he took up residence. This was agreed to, and the house was re-wired, re-plumbed, a new kitchen was fitted, flooring repaired and the house partially re-decorated.

At the end of September the church buildings were again surveyed and the advice was given that the choir should be closed immediately as it was unsafe. At first only the organist ventured into the gallery, but the choir eventually resumed its usual place after scaffolding was erected to support the nearby arches.

On the 30th October Father Dwyer received a reply from the Registrar General to an earlier letter, who agreed to the title *Our Lady of the Assumption* being used on marriage certificates, a change that had been needed for many decades.

During 1997 Bishop Noble instituted a survey of the Diocese's property. A meeting was held in July at the parish house. There was a long discussion about the parish buildings and their usage. The Draft Report was issued in the following December. It contained little that was not already known. *There are a number of items of major maintenance that need to be dealt with immediately. The roof needs re-slating, the stone arches to the nave - some require re-building and others remedial work, the likely cost being in excess of £100,000. In addition, until repair work has been undertaken to secure the gap in the front of the choir gallery balcony this is unsafe and should not be available for use.* It also outlined the work required in the church house, but pointed out that some of this work had been carried out since the survey had taken place.

The report also showed that the Catholic population of the Parish was 800. Mass attendance was given as 387. Many of these would not be from within the boundaries of Our Lady's parish. The 5-30 p.m. Saturday Mass, being the earliest in the area has always attracted worshippers from other parishes.

On January the 7th 1998 supporting scaffolding was positioned under the two arches at the west end of the nave - a very noticeable sign of the poor state of the building. The Diocese agreed to pay for the erection and the rental of the scaffolding.

Shrewsbury Diocese was the first to react to the growing problem of the shortage of priests and falling congregations and so a report was commissioned and the findings were made known to the parishioners in early November 1999. The main proposal that affected the parish was the decision to demolish the church. This caused great distress to many of the older members of the parish and the local, regional and national press all carried articles about their plight.

Protests were made to the diocese about many aspects of the report which were felt to be unfair and unjustified. As a result a Working Party was set up comprising of members of Saint Monica's, Saint Augustine's and Our Lady's parishes, who were charged with the onerous task of discerning the way forward. Their report was sent to the Curial Offices in June 2001. It recommended that Saint Augustine's and Our Lady's parishes should eventually be combined under one priest and a new church building erected to replace the existing two churches. These were both to be retained until the new church had been completed.

In the years that followed a search for a suitable site was made and the land on Knutsford Road near to Black Bear bridge was chosen as the site for the new church, and curiously, this site was looked at when land was sought on which to build the new parish school in 1962. The land was thought to be unsuitable due to its proximity to the canal and Wash Lane eventually became the accepted site.

Several of the parishioners had kept in occasional touch with Father Daley and yet it came as a shock when news of his death at Nazareth House, Prenton on the 12th April 2002 reached the parish. Members of the parish attended his Requiem Mass and many Masses were offered for the repose of his soul during the following months. It had been hoped by some of the older parishioners that he might be able to attend celebrations planned to mark the centenary of the present church but their hopes were in vain.

Throughout the history of the parish there have been thousands of parishioners who have given their time and energy for the good of others who have followed

them. It is not possible to name them all. It is possible, however, to name a few of the organisations to which some of them belonged. They are as follows:-

The Boys Guild of St. Aloysius.  
The Girls Guild of St. Agnes.  
The Legion of Mary.  
The Children of Mary.  
The Men's Confraternity.  
The Women's Confraternity.  
The Girl Guides.  
The Boy Scouts.  
The Brownies.  
The Parochial Committee.  
The Arch Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament.  
The Catholic Young Men's Society.  
The Solidarity of the Blessed Virgin Mary.  
The Social Committee.  
The Women's Guild.  
The Guild of St. John Bosco.  
The Young Christian Workers.  
St. Joseph's Guild of Catholic Workers.  
The Society of St. Vincent de Paul.  
The Union of Catholic Mothers.

There are, of course, many others who help the church in many different ways and it would be wrong not to mention the choir and organist. The parish has always had a reputation for an excellent choir. There have been many occasions in the past when the choir has suffered for the lack of members, but these occasions have usually been short-lived.

It can easily be seen that the Parish of Our Lady of the Assumption has been very important. It has been the starting point for three new parishes - Saint Winefrides, Saint Augustine's and Saint Monica's and these created extra financial burdens for the congregation when the parish had large debts of its own.

When the first edition of the history of the parish was written in 1991 the following paragraph concluded the booklet. It was not realised at the time how prophetic the words would become.

No one knows what the future has in store for the parish. The numbers attending the Masses are slowly decreasing. The Diocese, like many others, is experiencing a decline in the number of candidates for the Priesthood. It may be that, in the future, the parish will amalgamate with another. Who knows, except the One whose hand has guided the affairs of the parish since 1869?+

What the name of the new parish will be is not known. As it will be formed from the present parishes of Our Lady~~s~~ and Saint Augustine~~s~~ it cannot take either of the titles without causing resentment to members of one of the parishes. Maybe it will combine the two names. Like so many other future decisions it is in His hands.

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The history of this parish continues to be written by David Forrest~~s~~ family and the final years of the parish will be added in the future.

## **BISHOPS OF THE DIOCESE**

1851 - 1881 James Brown

1882 - 1895 Edmund Knight

1895 - 1897 John Carroll

1897 - 1908 Samuel Webster Allen

1908 - 1934 Hugh Singleton

1934 - 1949 Ambrose James Moriarty

1949 - 1961 John Aloysius Murphy

1962 - 1982 William Eric Grasar

1982 - 1995 Joseph Gray

1995 - Brian Noble

## **RECTORS OF OUR LADY'S, LATCHFORD**

Father Thomas Mulvanny	1870 - 1881
Father David Williams	1881 (Temporary)
Father Wilfrid Vincent Stanislaus Dallow	1881 - 1882
Father John Thompson	1882 - 1889
Father Edward Hanlon	1889 - 1890
Father James Hennelly	1891 - 1896
Father William Francis Stanley	1896 - 1898
Father James William McGrath	1898 - 1906
Father John Henry Roche	1906 - 1908
Father Thomas Matthew Marrs	1908 - 1911
Father John Joseph Tallon	1911 - 1926

## **PARISH PRIESTS OF OUR LADY'S, LATCHFORD**

Father Patrick Kearney	1926 - 1929
Father Edward Dodsworth Kirby	1929 - 1931
Father John Porter	1931 - 1934
Father John James Ryan	1934 - 1938
Father Hugh Aloysius Welch	1938 - 1944
Father Christopher Rosser Hickey	1944 - 1957

Father James McGinley	1957 - 1962
Father John Terence Daley	1962 - 1991
Father Alban Greenwood	1991 - 1997
Father Stephen Dwyer	1997 - 2003
Father Peter Montgomery	2003 -

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