

## ST PAUL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH DOVER

**WELCOME TO OUR CHURCH. PLEASE TAKE TIME  
TO WALK AROUND, AND HOPEFULLY THE  
FOLLOWING WILL HELP YOU APPRECIATE OUR  
STORY & HISTORY**

*A very rare and early photograph of St Paul's church. Probably taken within a couple of years of being built in 1868. There is no bell in the tower. The bell the church has today was cast in 1878. It may well have been a gift to the church. Note also the present priest's house at 103 Maison Dieu Road has yet to be built.*



In 1864 the Bishop of Southwark, Dr. Grant, finally received the legacy which had been left by the Countess de Front, who it was thought was the wife of a Sardinian Ambassador to England. This good lady, who had regularly travelled through Dover to Windsor where she stayed at the British Court, had died in 1830 leaving the interest of her fortune to her brother, Sir Thomas Fleetwood.

He died about 1860 but the money did not immediately go to her beneficiaries, the parishes of Windsor and Dover, for she had caused legal complications by mentioning Dover as being in the Diocese of London. However, after a legal action in which the Will had been unsuccessfully contested, the legacy which was to provide the initial capital for the new Dover church was handed over to the bishop.

When the surveyor came to inspect the site in Ashen Tree Lane he pointed out that half the money available would have to be spent on levelling the ground and advised that it be sold and a new site bought. Father Laws was quite willing to do this, and on 1st June, 1867, building work started in the Maison Dieu Road on a piece of land bought from Johnson's Nursery for £450.

**Fr James Laws**



The architect who designed the church was the famous Augustus Welby Pugin's son, Edward W. Pugin. True to his father's ideals, he designed his church in the Early English style. It had a commanding position at the end of Pencester Road in a developing area.

On 15th May, 1868, with the apsidal east end still incomplete, St. Paul's Church was opened.

The opening ceremony is described in the Dover Express of the same day:

*"The new Roman Catholic Church in Dover was opened this morning with much pomp and circumstance... The opening was to have taken place on Wednesday, but owing to an invitation Dr. Manning had received to be at the laying of the foundation stone of St. Thomas' Hospital by the Queen, the ceremony was postponed until to-day. The postponement was the cause of an odd mistake which has caused quite a flutter of excitement in the breasts of Constitutional Protestants. The handbill announcing the postponement was drawn up in so slipshod a fashion as to make it appear that her Majesty had invited Dr. Manning to be present. The blunder was too gross to mislead ordinary people..."*

The music chosen for the opening ceremony was Mozart's Twelfth Mass sung, according to the newspaper report, by "an efficient choir"; the choir, in fact, came from Gravesend. The church had so far cost £2,300, and £800 was still on the debt. The apse which added 30 foot to the church length was completed in 1873. A second opening took place later in that year.

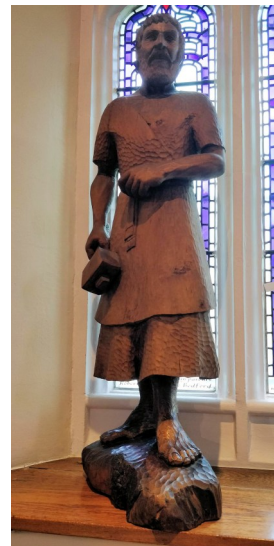
In 1870 the Elizabeth Street Chapel had been sold and the adjoining school-room with it. Two large rooms were rented in Castle Street for another school and the number of children increased to 65. In the same year the Diocese bought 102 Maison Dieu Road for a new presbytery, and Father Laws moved into the new house next door to the church. The necessity for a school nearby led at last to the building of the boys school next to the east end of the church which was opened in 1872. Ten years later a girls' school was built behind the boys school, and in 1889 an infants' school was built: the number of children now totalled 170.

Father Laws was in charge of the mission during all this building programme. He was a man of enormous energy, well-suited to guiding the parish through big endeavours. Unfortunately, he was somewhat possessive, and described in a letter to Bishop Grant by his successor, as a peculiar little man. Following his severe illness which had forced him to retire in 1891, he continued to influence events in the parish. The sacristy, which he had planned first to be built on the south side of the church and then on the north, was not built until 1892. Father Linnett who succeeded Fr James Laws, was most upset by his predecessor's "huffiness", since the money for the sacristy was a legacy to Laws and the builder, Mr. Wray, was getting anxious about his account. An amicable settlement, however, was effected and when the time came for Father Laws to celebrate the golden jubilee of his priesthood in April, 1904, the whole town of Dover, Catholic and Protestant, joined in, as the mayor said, apart "from creed and prejudice", to accord him congratulations. The High Mass was sung by Dr. Grant, Bishop of Southwark, and Dr. Manning preached the sermon on the text, 'One Church, One Faith, One Baptism'

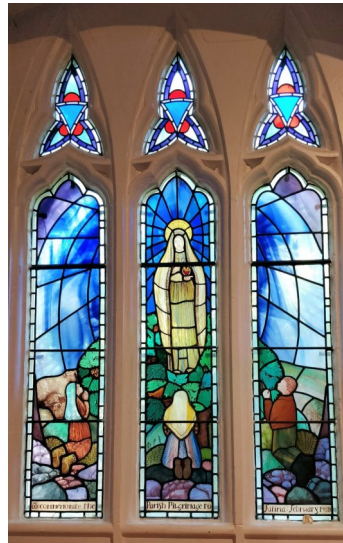
### **OUR STAINED GLASS WINDOWS**

On entering St Paul's you will notice that the nave of our church is surrounded by colourful stained glass windows. To view them each with an explanation in this booklet, we recommend you turn immediately right, passing the statue of St Peter on your right, and follow the stained glass windows around the church.

- **1st window** - hidden behind the choir stairs  
- depicts 2 angels playing instruments (appropriate for the choir) and dedicated to Mary Alice and Ernest William Huntley.  
(See photo on the right)
- **As you move on to the second window,** notice the small display cabinet holding four Bene Merenti medals awards given by the Pope to lay members of the parish for their outstanding contribution to parish life.
- **2nd window** - of coloured glass - is dedicated to May Gertrude Holder and Elsie Eliza Versey, paternal and maternal grandmothers to a parish family.
- **3rd window** - has been reconstructed from fragments of windows damaged in the war. Dedicated to William McVey.
- **4th window** - coloured glass. Dedicated to brothers Denis and Keith O'Meara.
- **In the Alcove** stands the statue of the Sacred Heart, and picture of The Devine Mercy.
- **5th window** - coloured glass. Dedicated to Robert and Blanche Bedford, daughter Queenie Grant and son Robert Bedford.
- **At this window stands a statue of St Joseph the Worker** (see further on in the booklet for the history of this statue).



- [Pass the children's corner](#) - note the articles by the children of St Richard's school, our local Catholic primary school.
- [6th window](#) - Saints of Ireland - St Laurence O'Toole, St Patrick, St Columkille.
- [7th window](#) - In memory of soldiers once stationed in Dover - 6th Battalion Royal Fusiliers; The Kent Artillery; 5th Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Donegals; 4th Battalion Royal Fusiliers; Clare Artillery; 4th Battalion Leinster Regiment.
- [Look at the floor in front of the Altar](#) dedicated to Mary, Our Lady, as you pass over the columbarium. The window at the side commemorates the parish pilgrimage to Fatima in 1988. *(See photo on the right)*

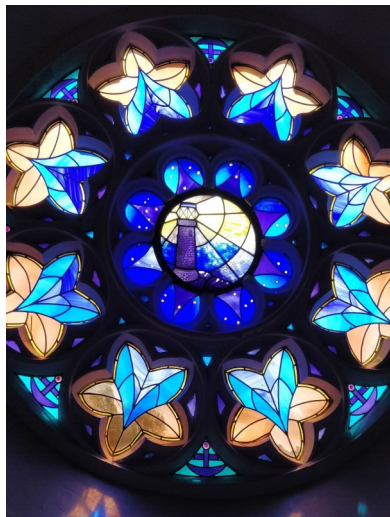


- [Continue left where you will come to the Sanctuary](#), the focal point of the church. It is where the tabernacle stands which houses the Blessed Sacrament.

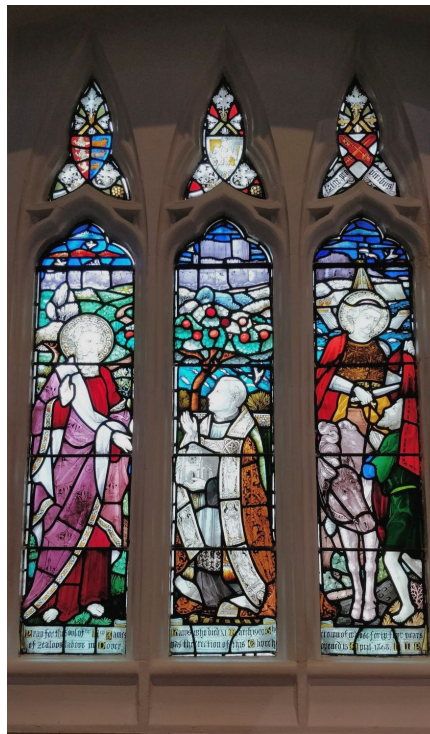
The area itself is dominated by the beautiful stained glass window above the altar of St Paul, our patron saint. This is a new window, installed following the fire which devastated our church in 1987 (more about this later). Below the window is a mural of The Last Supper and gifted by a parishioner to Fr David Maher, a former Parish priest, celebrating the Silver Jubilee of his ordination.

On either side of the Sanctuary are paintings - the one on the right depicting the Road to Emmaus and the one on the left showing Abraham preparing to sacrifice his son Isaac.

- **Before moving on,** turn around and look towards the choir loft where there are 4 painted panels identifying with the life of St Paul. The left panel shows his conversion on the road to Damascus. The two large centre panels shows him preaching to the Romans prior to his execution, and the right hand panel shows his shipwreck on Malta, during which time, whilst gathering wood for a fire, he was bitten by a viper. But when no harm came to him the 'barbarians' took this as a sign that he was a man of God.
- **Overlooking the whole church** is what was once the rose window but, since the fire, now depicts a lighthouse in the centre, confirming St Paul's Church in close association with the port of Dover and proclaiming Jesus - Light of the World.



- [Move left to the Baptistry](#) commemorating the tragic sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise and showing Our Lord being baptised by John.
- [Continue left](#), there is an Apostolic Blessing from Pope John Paul II on the wall to the left of the sacristy door offering a blessing and a pledge of divine protection on the re-opening of the church on the 28th October 1988.
- [8th window](#) - this window is dedicated to and portrays Fr. James Laws, founder of St. Paul's Church. Note Dover Castle along the top of the windows. *(See photo on the right)*
- [9th window](#) - dedicated to St Vincent de Paul. The left panel shows him pleading the cause of children, the centre panel shows him receiving deserted children, and the right panel shows him inviting Sisters to the hospital. Continue passed the notice board for the Children's Liturgy "The Mustard Seeds".
- [10th Window](#) - dedicated to Georgina Capes who died whilst on a pilgrimage to Rome in 1900 and in the left panel a portrayal of St Elizabeth of Hungary, the centre panel St Dominic and the right panel St Mary Magdalene.



- [11th window](#) - This focuses on the Crucifixion of Our Lord, supported by his Mother Mary and St. John, the favourite disciple.
- [12th window](#) - The whole window is devoted to Our Lord, The Good Shepherd. 'Suffer the little Children to come unto me.'
- [13th window](#) - The left panel portrays St. Francis of Assisi, the centre panel depicts a crowned Lord - 'King of Glory', and the right panel depicts Blessed Anthony Broder, a Franciscan Martyr.
- [Turn left](#) passing the confessional and St Paul's Statue on your right, and you have finished your circular tour.



### THE WAY OF THE CROSS



Among the many items of interest in St Paul's Church as you walked around looking at the windows, are the beautiful '*Stations of the Cross*'. They are a portrayal of the final hours of Our Lord from his condemnation by Pilate, to His death by crucifixion and

final interment in His tomb. They are used by many as a focal point for prayer and reflection and are particularly used during Lent.

To the left of the altar, is the First Station just to the left of the sacristy door, depicting the trial of Jesus in the court of Pontius Pilate, and then continues around the church in an anti-clockwise direction. There are 14 station plaques in all, depicting various scenes of the Passion of Christ.

St Paul's owes a huge debt of gratitude to Paul and Carol Smye-Rumsby who took on the challenge of restoring the plaques following the fire of the church. They spent many painstaking hours cleaning the plaques of years of fire damaged old paint and varnish, and experimenting with different painting mediums before the plaques were finally revealed in their current format.

### THE STATUE OF ST JOSEPH THE WORKER

The St Paul's statue of St Joseph the Worker was carved by Mr. Robert Forsyth in lime wood sometime in 1957. He was a policeman at that time in Dover and was approached by Bernard and Josephine Smye-Rumsby who asked if he would carve a statue of St Joseph for this church. The large lime wood, wind blown tree was available in Kearsney Abbey and a 12 foot section from the trunk was cut and lifted by crane over the Abbey wall. The work was to have been over life-size, but the then parish priest, Fr Tanner, decided that half size would be sufficient. When finished the statue was placed in the church, but Fr Tanner thought it was looking over the heads of the congregation; and seemed somewhat aloof. So Mr Forsyth cut off the head and made it look down on the people and then everyone was happy! We are indeed very pleased to have the statue of St Joseph still standing, tools in hand, and watching over the congregation.

### 1987 ARSON ATTACK

On 23rd October 1987, our beautiful church was the target of an arsonist. Whilst the church was unoccupied, a young man entered. He



found the disused confessional (the current position of the Herald Memorial) was an ideal place to set the building alight. Not only was the confessional wooden, but it was being used by the cleaners as a storage place for brooms, rags and polishes. Having set light to this material, it was only a moment or two for the flames to rapidly grow into an inferno, and soon reached into the main body of the church, the roof, and all along towards the organ gallery at the west end, destroying the recently refurbished pipe organ.

**For further information on the history of St Paul's Church visit our website:**

<https://www.parishofthegoodshepherd.uk/history-of-st-pauls-church/>

## ST PAUL'S CHURCH TODAY



**Fr. Gabriel**



**Deacon Barry & Fr. Jamie**

Father Gabriel Onoyima CSSp, was appointed Parish Priest on 10th January 2026, following the transfer of former Parish Priest Father Leo Illah CSSp, appointed as Spiritan Provincial Secretary, to Manchester. The Spiritans moved in to serve the community in January 2023 along with Father Jamie Houghton, a retired priest of the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham, and Deacon Barry Barton. This was a big change for the parish and a milestone as we became a Spiritan Parish.



### **Contact Details**

**Tel: 01304 206766**

**Email: [dover@rcaos.org.uk](mailto:dover@rcaos.org.uk)**

**Donations: [www.Parishofthegoodshepherd.uk/giving/](http://www.Parishofthegoodshepherd.uk/giving/)**

**First Published July 2024**