

# Against the Odds

Copyright Pat Harris 2010

Digital Edition



Copyright Lesley Jolly

# Contents

**Dedication**

**Acknowledgements**

**Preface**

**Introduction**

**Chapter 1**            Foundation and Early Years

**Chapter 2**            School for Young Ladies

**Chapter 3**            Into a New Age

**Chapter 4**            The Grammar School

**Chapter 5**            A Grammar School at War

**Chapter 6**            Growth and Change

**Chapter 7**            Interesting Times

**Chapter 8**            The Promised Land

**Chapter 9**            The Lost Grammar Schools

**Chapter 10**          In My End is My Beginning.

Appendix A          The School Song

Bibliography

Sources

## Dedication

The Hollies was founded twenty years before the national move to provide grammar school education for girls. It was the first convent secondary school in Manchester. This book is testimony to the work of a group of women who were pioneers in the field of education for girls, to the seven generations of girls who attended the school, and to the staff, friends and benefactors who contributed so generously to the spirit of The Hollies.



## **Acknowledgements**

This book has been made possible by the enthusiasm and commitment of all who were involved in its production. It is the culmination of a long process of generous sharing of expertise, memories, and collections of memorabilia.

Throughout the process, I have benefited from the support of the Trustees of the school, The Society of The Faithful Companions of Jesus, to whom I am indebted for access to their Archives; Sister Mary Campion McCarren – FCJ Archivist; Sister Denise Mulcahy – FCJ Archivist; Sister Victoire Murphy – for her memories of over twenty years as Headmistress; Sister Bernadette O’Malley – the last Headmistress of the Hollies.

I am grateful for the inexhaustible support of many ex-Hollies personnel; to The Publishing Team; Kathy Gorman (Walton) – for printing, and binding the book; Julie Kirk – for copy editing the text; Lesley Jolly (Townson) – for her brilliant art work; Celia Poole – for her work on publicity in the Manchester area; and Frances Ratchford – who managed the whole project. My thanks go also to The Hollies Past Pupils’ Association; Wyn Gleeson (Hill) – Secretary and “keeper of the lists”; Gay Colligan – Treasurer.

A special mention goes to past pupils and staff; Anne Brown (Butterly) – for her work extracting the statistics provided in the Speech Day Programmes; Bernadette Bradley (Coffey) – for use of material from her MA thesis; Anne-Marie Lowes (Carroll) – who “started the

ball rolling” in gathering the mass of memorabilia and “final photographs”; and to the innumerable “old girls” and friends who contributed their memories, documents and photographs.

I am personally indebted to Eamonn for taking over as “base manager and chief dog walker” for the last two years, to Jenny Drummond, the first ‘reader’ of the text, June Henderson Wayland for her patient scrutiny with a historian’s eye for detail; and the *Friends Reunited* website, for facilitating contact with so many ex-pupils who would have otherwise been “untraceable”; Mention must also be made of Geoff Appleton whose skills with a graphics package provided the images for the front cover and page iv.

### **Publisher’s Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material:

Manchester City Galleries, Mosley Street, Manchester for Plate 28; Manchester Archives and Local Studies, Central Library, Manchester for Plates 4, 5, 8, 31, 47; Documentary Photography Archive, Greater Manchester County Records Office, Marshall Street for Plate 7; Imperial War Museum, London for Plate 30.

**Author's Note:**

Where reference is made to materials in the FCJ Archives, specific primary sources are not named but location is specified.

Women's surnames used in the text are maiden names. When used elsewhere, the married name is given first with the maiden name in brackets.

Photograph ownership is acknowledged in brackets at the end of each caption.

The availability of e-mail allowed the copy editor to process each chapter without our ever having met in person. Needless to say, the final responsibility for any errors, omissions or misinterpretations is mine.

Pat Harris (February 2002)

## **Preface**

When Patricia Harris started out to reflect on the educational experience of three generations of women - herself, her mother and her daughter - she soon realised that her research into the history of the school she had attended would result in the presentation of more than a chronological survey.

In the last few years more emphasis has been placed on 'lived experience', and reflection has drawn significance from events whose meaning is more than their having happened. This certainly has been evident in the history of women's education.

Over time, fundamental values would endure but the content of the curriculum through which they were to be delivered and the context in which they were to be lived out would change. The world from which the pupils came and into which, as school leavers, they would go would be vastly different.

This is not an anthology of anecdotes but a considered history of The Hollies F.C.J., through more than a century. It draws on archival material as well as oral tradition and is the fruit both of research and of appreciation and love. In terms of bricks and mortar The Hollies may be no more; in terms of spirit and values it lives on in the women who cherish the traditions.

Readership should not be limited to those who have been part of the tradition - past pupils, teachers and FCJ Sisters. *Against the Odds* has much to offer to students of education in general, to those interested in the development of Catholic education in England, and to

those concerned to see due regard given to the work and influence of women religious in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Mary Campion McCarren FCJ, British Province  
Archivist.



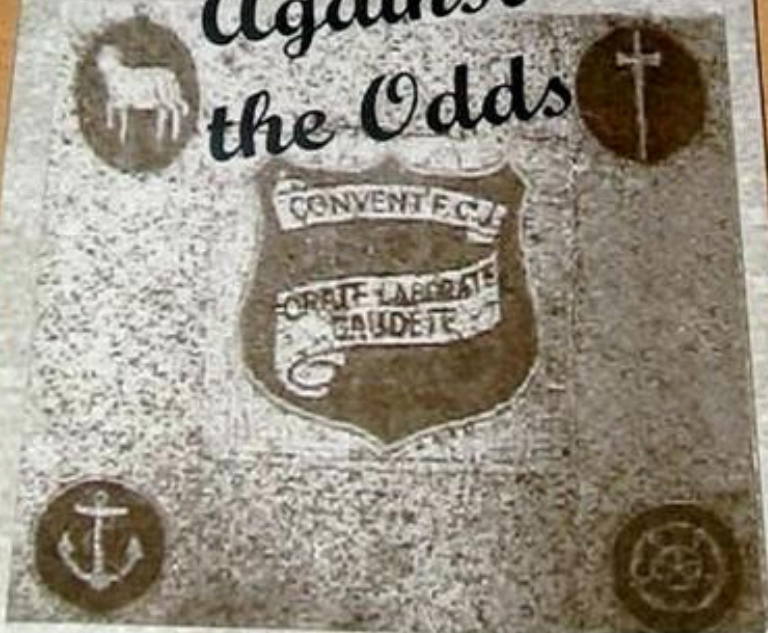
## Introduction

The research for this book grew out of an Oral History project with the Open University that focussed on the education of three generations of women, mothers, and their daughters. The literature available for that project concentrated on the development of girls' grammar schools in the 1870s. I was aware that The Hollies had a much earlier origin and was curious to find the reason. This led me, in 1999, to the Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus, to France and the French Revolution. The origins of the Society were marked by conflict both social and ecclesiastical, as was the history of the school.

A past pupil wrote to me about her experiences of entering the school buildings on the day it was due for demolition. She said "We all, no doubt, have a plethora of special memories of our youth at The Hollies. What I believe may be common to them all is the school's special ethos which made it a unique place in which to lay the foundations to grow towards adulthood." What was the source of that ethos? Finding the answer to that question was the goal I set myself when I undertook the task of researching the history of the school.

I was aware of the paucity of archival material for The Hollies. Much was lost when the school closed though some important documents were "saved" by Sister Victoire Murphy. I resolved to find what was available from past pupils and staff. This was not an easy task. Women tend to change their surnames at marriage, and move with their husbands to other areas, countries, and even continents. Those who do not marry go where their work takes them. A website seemed a useful tool for attracting potential supplies of information, but it was the discovery of the *Friends Reunited* website that resulted in a massive increase in numbers. *Friends Reunited* works on the simple premise of entering the name by which one was known at school under the year of leaving that school. For the payment of a small fee, I was able to contact hundreds of past pupils. A mass of materials was the result. Since the publication of the printed book, Facebook continues to provide new contacts., renewal of old friendships and sharing of old photographs and memories of the school.

# Against the Odds



The Story of the  
Hollies FCJ Convent  
School 1852-1985

Pat Harris

## **Chapter 1**

### **Foundation and Early Years**

‘If no pupils come, it will be a sign of God’s will.’

Girls' high schools of the nineteenth century were the creation of great teachers. To learn how the schools arose, one does not read the story of the school. It is the life of the Founder that gives the history of the institution and explains its origin, character, and development. The story of The Hollies does not, however, rest with the story of one person but with a religious community of women. Despite their stereotypic image as ‘naïve or strictly otherworldly creatures’, nuns, as a group were among the best-educated and most accomplished women of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Notwithstanding their subordination to men within the Church, nuns exercised greater control over their lives than any other group of female contemporaries.

The Society of the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJs) was founded in 1820 at Amiens, France, by Marie Madeleine Victoire de Bengy de Bonnault d’Houët. She was born in Châteauroux, France, in 1781, married Joseph, Viscount de Bonnault in 1804, and was widowed the following year. As a young widow with estates to run and a child to care for, Marie Madeleine nevertheless felt called to do God’s work as a companion of Jesus. She knew she would meet with opposition from the Jesuits for her wish to take the name “Faithful Companions of Jesus” and so she worked slowly and carefully. She took her guidance from a trusted chaplain and believed that every divine work was marked with the cross. The special cross attached to her courageous enterprise was that ‘having been greatly aided in the beginning by certain ecclesiastics, these same priests should afterwards ... become estranged from her and placed many obstacles in her path’. She wrote in her diary that Père Sellier ‘told me very often that the Jesuits would do nothing to help on my cause ... and that ... on the contrary, they would persecute me and even [he] shall then turn against [me] ... When you find the Jesuits beginning to

persecute you, let the fact raise your faith and courage, and above all, confidence.’

So began the first of the many struggles that were to mark the FCJs’ work, both in its foundation and in the establishment and maintenance of many schools across Europe and the Western World. As the foundation spread, the Bishops were favourably impressed by what they saw, but the Jesuits continued to ‘harass and even persecute Madame d’Houët and her Society’. Direct appeals to Pope Leo XII led to his freeing her from the need to seek advice from the Jesuits, and formally naming the Society “Faithful Companions of Jesus”. The Sisters would follow the rule of St. Ignatius, live lives of apostolic service and cultivate the principles of humility, poverty, obedience, and gentleness. However, the FCJs were to wait over a hundred and sixty years to receive final ratification of the Constitution that Marie Madeleine desired.

Pope Leo wrote to the Bishop of Amiens:

*This society (FCJ) has for its main objective (in France) the moral and Christian formation of young girls especially among the poor. This project ... is truly necessary, since it aims at nothing less than attacking at its root cause the cause of moral disorder, namely the neglect or perversion of the education of youth, the dangers of which are no less serious for men than for women.*

The work of the FCJs began with the education of seven poor children in the house in Amiens, but it received no recognition from the Church. As the work expanded, so too did the need for more members of the community. Marie Madeleine gave the title “Mother” to those in the community who would have charge of the children, to remind them of the love they would bear to all the children in their schools. In addition to running schools for the poor, the FCJs took charge, as was the custom of the time, of boarding schools for daughters of wealthy families and other schools for daughters of the middle-classes.

In 1830, fearful for the safety of the FCJs in revolutionary France, Marie Madeleine travelled to England with Mother Julie Guillemet. She had been warned that it would be very expensive to make a foundation in England. Marie Madeleine and Mother Julie reached Somers Town, a French émigré colony, on a foggy day, which made her fearful of bringing the Sisters to ‘such a dismal climate’. But there, in Clarendon Square, they found a well-established school for young ladies under the direction of Miss Nérinckx, sister of Father Nérinckx. Father Nérinckx told them the history of his school, its foundation, enrolment, and income, and offered it to the FCJs. They were to take his place and continue their mission in England.

Having taken the school in Somers Town, Marie Madeleine was anxious to establish a boarding school for girls of the upper-classes. She was convinced that this was the only means of ‘recruiting subjects’ for what she foresaw could be done in the country. She wrote ‘If only we had a house for young ladies as we had intended we would obtain subjects for our Society.’ The rapid expansion of work in England was augmented by that in Ireland and across Europe. Everywhere the pattern was the same, convent schools for the higher and middle-classes, “free” parish schools in large, urban populations for the poor.

The Right Reverend Abbott Gasquet, President of the English Benedictines, wrote the “Introduction” to the English translation of the *Life of the Foundress*. In 1913, he recalled, ‘*Among the shadowy figures which come forth from the mists of my early recollections, one stands out with exceptional distinctness. It is the person of the venerable servant of God who is the subject of this biography.*’ Abbott Gasquet was taken as a child to Somers Town, ‘*and there was presented to a little old lady with a grave yet smiling face, dressed all in black like the nuns of the convent who had been our earliest friends as children. ... This was a very great holy woman and we gathered that in some way or other she was connected with the great French Revolution ... I thus saw and had some words of blessing spoken to me by Madame de Bonnault d’Houët, Foundress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus.*’

Companionship was central to Marie Madeleine's philosophy of education. It was to be expressed through faithfulness, gentleness, and respect. She sought to create schools with a caring atmosphere, where all could find a place and feel at home. The uniqueness of each person was to be respected and all were to be guided to use their gifts for the service of others, for the transformation of society and the coming of the reign of God. Marie Madeleine's founding ideal was to 'lead all those connected with our schools towards authentic human, Christian living so that their lives will be marked with faithfulness, truth and justice, self-giving and service, while being all the while rooted in respect for self and others'.



Marie Madeleine d'Houët  
Foundress  
Faithful Companions of Jesus

Plate1: The Viscountess d'Houët. (FCJ Archives, Broadstairs) Plate 2: Marie Madeleine de Bengy de Bonnault d'Houët.(FCJ Archives, Broadstairs)

In England and Wales, the period from 1860 to 1914 saw important developments in girls' secondary education. In the 1860s, there were no girls' grammar schools and only a handful of academically orientated proprietary schools. By the 1890s, there were over two hundred endowed and proprietary schools for girls but as late as 1914, the vast majority of middle-class girls were educated at home or in traditional private schools. Most of the successes of the new schools were the result of headmistresses and their staff overcoming the idea that intellectual study was harmful to girls' health. Curricular reform was not the result of a feminist attack on existing male fortresses, but the outcome of a general movement for sound middle-class schooling. Equality of provision was advanced less by feminists than by sympathetic and influential male academics, clerics and public figures, and fathers. For some professional men, a daughter's intellectual education represented an indication of elite status. An increasing number of professional, clerical, and businessmen whose incomes were precarious, provided for the time when their daughters might have to earn their own livings.

Religion, too, was a moving force in the growth of female education. Many new girls' schools modelled themselves in varying degrees on the corporate ethos of boys' public schools, emphasising character training in a religious and moral environment. Some girls' proprietary schools were Quaker, Methodist, and Roman Catholic foundations. Though most girls' high schools were non-sectarian, many male supporters and female headteachers were motivated by evangelical motives to give Christian meaning to women's lives. For the Church, education was a mission; for the FCJs, it was central to their vocation.

The industrial revolution had drawn many thousands of Irish workers to England's industrial north, but penal laws had reduced the Catholic population of Britain to a powerless group. In 1847, Sir Robert Peel, son of a wealthy Mancunian industrialist, made an impassioned plea to Parliament for the extension of Government grants to Roman Catholic schools. He said, 'Irish immigrants have no natural protectors, as there are few wealthy Roman Catholics immediately connected with Manchester to care for their interests,

and there is no one probably to superintend their education. The means of the priest are too scanty for such a purpose.' Given the constraints, the establishment, spread, and entrenchment of Roman Catholic education in Manchester was a great achievement. In 1850, a Bill proposing the introduction of mass-schooling in Lancashire was introduced into Parliament. It met with much opposition; education and religion were inseparable to Catholics. The Bill proved unacceptable and was defeated. The Catholic Education Board in Manchester had been seeking financial aid, not legislative intervention. However, Roman Catholic education was not part of the mainstream national development and could expect no financial aid until it accepted intervention and the separation of religion and education.

The nineteenth century was marked by the Bishops' struggles to retain control of the education of Catholic children. Before Catholic Emancipation, in 1839, Vicars Apostolic rather than Bishops governed the Catholic Church, and there was no Diocesan or Parish organisation. However, in 1850, partly to administer to the large number of Catholic Irish flocking into England after the Irish Famine, the Catholic Church re-established its full hierarchy. Bishop Turner, the first Bishop of Salford, had his pastoral headaches arising from the responsibilities centered on the two fast-expanding twin cities of Salford and Manchester. In 1831 the population of Manchester was 70,000; by 1836, it had doubled. The Catholic population of Manchester was estimated at between 34,463 and 50,000, of whom 90% were Irish. By 1851, 17% of Manchester's population was Irish Roman Catholic.

The years of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) were a period of intensive industrialisation and urbanisation. Social change was a visible feature of Victorian society. Within the span of two generations, families might move from the country to the cities and then on to the suburbs. For the new generations of industrial middle-classes, social identity was created around sets of values that marked them out as separate and different from the aristocracy above them and the working-classes below them. Middle-class identity was built on a platform of moral respectability and domesticity. In the early



1850s, Canon Toole of Salford saw the education of girls as crucial in this, for the woman was the cornerstone of the family. He deemed the education of poor girls a vital means of self-help and change. Girls, if educated, could bring new moral and social standards to the family, and hence avoid the slide into the evils of industrialisation and urbanisation.

In the hope of bringing Madame d'Houët's Sisters to the Salford Diocese, Bishop Turner's first move was to begin negotiations with Mother Clotilde Dupont, Superior of Lingdale at Birkenhead. On 13<sup>th</sup> June, 1852, he wrote directly to Marie Madeleine, asking her to take charge of the day schools and the Sunday schools in the Salford Diocese. He knew that his request was more of a daunting challenge than an invitation. Two religious congregations had heroically attempted a foundation there but had survived only a couple of years. Some Sisters were stoned and the convent regularly had its windows broken. One Sister, collecting for the poor, was surrounded by a crowd calling her "madwoman" and "daughter of the Pope". In 1847, the convent of the Sisters of Charity in Salford had been 'marked by abuse, at least one physical attack on a Sister in the street, and by arson to the house. Fearing further attack, they withdrew from Salford and from England altogether in 1849.' The conditions in Manchester were appalling and resources were minimal. The Bishop wisely anticipated objections when, in his third appeal he wrote, 'There is an excellent house to be sold ... very near the school ... superior to the one where you reside (near Birkenhead). ... The immediate neighbourhood is quiet and respectable. I hope we shall be able to avail of your services in Salford.'

Writing later that year, Marie Madeleine reported, 'I have just come from Manchester ... where I thought I should die with the noise of the carriages.' She was disappointed at the lack of promised quiet, but what appalled her more was the quantity and variety of work offered her. She feared lest the religious spirit of her "daughters" were endangered by the very nature of some of the ministries. 'Can you see any way of giving up Manchester?' she wrote to Mother Julie Guillemet. But, despite her misgivings, Marie Madeleine believed it was God's will 'that we go to this place'. To her, a

foundation 'sealed with God's cross' gave assurances of its' being in accord with God's design. In a later letter she wrote, 'If no pupils come to us it will be a sign of God's will.' But the children did come, eventually, and in good numbers. It was the beginning of a 'vast and varied apostolate' serving both Salford and Manchester. Later in 1852, the FCJs rented a second house on the corner of Clarendon Street and Russell Street, Chorlton-upon-Medlock.

There were many difficulties and misunderstandings regarding the arrangements to be made at Manchester. Marie Madeleine worried that 'Mr. L. says that the house in Birkenhead will be lost if we do not go to Manchester but how are we to do this without subjects? [novices]. And besides, all these little foundations do not suit the spirit of our Society.' Nevertheless, the FCJs arrived in October 1852.

Unable to preside at the foundation of Salford, Marie Madeleine appointed Mother Julie to do so in her stead, in a letter stating, 'I cannot ... dispense you from seeing to the proper beginning of the house at Manchester, as well as the arrangements of its affairs before you return. I am grieved to give you this trouble.' Marie Madeleine directed Mother Julie by letters, less on material matters, more on the spirit she was desirous of imparting to the new foundations. She wrote, 'In beginning this house, place it at once on a proper footing. I recommend you often speak of edifying subjects at recreation and show great love for and entire confidence in your Superior General and in all the members of the Society.'

Some of the instructions written to the local Superior of the Manchester convents show the spirit that the Foundress wished to see in all her houses. She believed that the Society needed independent houses to provide for both the poor and fee-paying pupils. It would then draw good subjects needed for the apostolate into the High School. The work that brought the FCJs to Manchester was to minister to the poor children of St. Augustine's parish. The FCJ Community was not large at the time and, having travelled daily from the Adelphi Convent to Granby Row, was glad to secure a house in Upper Brook Street that would provide accommodation for

the FCJs and offer room for fee-paying children and adults. In 1852, two convents had been established; one at Adelphi House in Salford, the other in Chorlton-upon-Medlock, Manchester. There were boarding and day schools for the middle-class pupils. 'From these two bases, or rather power houses, the Sisters were to spread their apostolate into many of the new parishes of the two cities.'



Picture Lam69449

© Manchester Central Library

Plate 4: St Augustine's Church (Manchester Local Studies Unit)

In 1838, the Borough of Manchester was established, comprising the areas of Manchester, Beswick, Cheetham, Chorlton-upon-Medlock, and Hulme townships. By 1846, the Borough Council had taken over the powers of the Police Commissioners. In 1853, the Borough received the title of City. The work of the FCJs in this new city was immediately recognised and acknowledged.

In a letter to the Chairman of the Poor School Education Committee, Lord Edward Howard wrote:

*We must especially desire to be brought home to the conscience of Protestant England that Catholic religious teaching orders alone are competent to fulfil the finer and more delicate and more precious work of education; the moulding that is of human will; and that their schools are, intellectually no less than morally and religiously, far superior to all others. This assertion does not lose any weight because it comes from a Government Officer and is put forward ... without the slightest compromise in his ex officio Report made to [the] government.*

In the same year, during a period of civil threat in France, Marie Madeleine received disquieting news from England. Times were hard and Marie Madeleine began to fear for the continued existence of both Somers Town and Manchester. 'Increasing difficulties threatened more and more to wrest the house at Somers Town as well as the newly founded house at Manchester which was unable to support itself.' The situation alarmed her, for it seemed that efforts were being made to detach the houses of England from the Society and that Manchester's finances were in a perilous state.

Marie Madeleine wrote:

*Your letter, my dear Mother Julie, gave me much pain. It is written in so sad a strain. Courage now and confidence my dearest daughter and let us remember we are Faithful Companions of Jesus. ... One of my heaviest crosses is to know you are giving way to sadness and that you are in bad health. ... My intention is not to cause suffering to our Sisters. Their ordinary fare and clothing at Manchester must be the same as in our other houses and we will supply whatever is wanting. Write and tell them to buy at once whatever is wanting to keep them warm, so as to preserve their health.*

Manchester and Somers Town survived the storm, but from London, in the same year, came the news that fire had completely destroyed the house at Tottenham. Marie Madeleine never forgot that she was a daughter of the Church Militant and ‘took to heart [their] troubles making them her own’.

Despite the struggles of the Manchester Community, there was also good news; the FCJs' Manchester mission experienced great successes. In a letter written in 1853, Bishop Turner told Marie Madeleine:

*The Faithful Companions of Jesus are at the head of numerous schools; in Manchester there are four in the same town. The number of children who attend the schools is considerable. They have free schools but this is not an exactly accurate name; the children pay a penny per week. It is difficult to describe the misery of these little children. They often suffer afflictions and have not always enough clothing to attend church services.*

He added:

*I will not speak of the proficiency [of the FCJs] in secular knowledge, a proficiency which places their work on an equality with the best in the country. They give their lessons with patience and open the hearts of the children. Let me paint a portrait of any one of the Sisters. You see at once that she knows how to make herself loved and at the same time respected. She can say “yes” but she can also say “no”. And in training the character of her children she strives to develop the hardy traits which will stand the exposure to the world. ... The Sisters are ministering angels of the children under their charge.*

In their dealings with the children of all classes, the FCJs were recognised for their gentle charity. Parents congratulated themselves ‘on having placed their children under an influence so refined and far-reaching’.

For the Victorian middle-classes, the pure woman was closely associated with the shelter of the private sphere of the home. Her moral and sexual purity guaranteed the home as a haven and a source of social stability. By 1853, a house at 148 Upper Brook Street provided a school with this homely atmosphere. For the poorer classes, the FCJs' work was carried out in the Sunday school, free day schools and the continuation classes. The FCJs of Brook Street were noted for their charity to the poor for they 'set aside part of their meal for their young pupils in the poor school.' Bishop Turner was also able to 'say without exaggeration that there is scarcely a young girl in the large parishes where the Sisters are established who has not received a Christian education and a practical religious training'.

Marie Madeleine was much consoled by the results achieved by these missionary houses at Salford and Manchester, for she saw in them what was, humanely speaking at least, an un hoped-for realisation of one of the principal aims of her Society. The house in Upper Brook Street was set up in order to take charge of the parish schools of St. Augustine. A double day school was opened there. 'That at Salford [Adelphi] had a boarding school which our Mother had engaged to open.' The FCJs were among the first communities to open convent boarding schools. It was their custom to open alongside their boarding schools, large day schools. These were popular among English parents as their children received the benefits of school training and, at the same time, were able to participate in home life in the evening.

Upper Brook Street is situated in Chorlton-on-Medlock. In 1852, this was a "township" of Manchester, at quite a distance from the sights and sounds of the busy city centre. It had become part of the Borough of Manchester in 1838. In 1853, the house was a detached dwelling, separated from the street by iron railings and large iron gates that opened on a slope of asphalt in front of the house. To the rear, across Rumford Street, was the site that was chosen, in 1871, for the Manchester High School for Girls. There was a circular stone porch surrounding the steps leading up to the entrance of 148 Upper Brook Street; to the right was a carriage drive to the stables at the back of the house. These disappeared later, to provide

room for a Junior Study, greatly needed on account of the increase of pupils. The rest of the drive 'did duty as the little ones' playground.' There was a good entrance hall and fancy glass-folding doors, the width of the hall, divided it from the rest of the house. To the left was the entrance for the children of all the schools. The FCJs used the basement as kitchen, larder, refectory, laundry, and cellars. . In the main convent, there were two small dormitories for the nuns upstairs. Very soon the house was considered too small for the number of pupils, which was always on the increase. The dormitories were taken and used as classrooms.

By 1867, thanks to Canon Wilding, the FCJs had a 'comfortable house' in Plymouth Grove. Fourteen of the community left the convent each evening in after night prayers to spend the night at a private house at Number 30. It was almost at the end of the Grove so it was quite a walk and 'many an episode could be related of various happenings in the dark empty passages'. In 1876, the nuns prayed that the house would belong to them. Neighbours wanted to build a shop, but Reverend Mother General made arrangements to buy the house when she visited it. The Convent School's chapel was over the Senior Study of the High School, and the Sacristy opposite on the far side of a narrow passage. From this passage a staircase led up to a small attic. The Superior's room and a small bedroom adjoined the sacristy. They were directly over the Junior Study and were considered a great acquisition.

There was plenty of space behind the main house in Brook Street, and, at the back of the house, leading to the other schools, 'was a thing of beauty'. One of the nuns had a miniature frame for seedlings that she managed to grow. Plants, including geraniums, were suspended from the glass roof. The children took an interest in helping and so developed an interest in nature study. Later on, someone else provided a small greenhouse that supplied plants for the chapel. In the centre of the convent's back garden was a low wall, bordered by a few trees. There, surrounded by flowerbeds, was the statue of the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. At the opposite end of the garden was a hen-pen, well-stocked with some poultry and ducks. The cook flooded a small piece of ground completely hidden from

view between the low wall and the hen-pens. The ducks enjoyed a swim in this artificial pond but were not as well-behaved as the poultry. The nearest neighbour to the convent was an elderly gentleman who complained that the ducks disturbed his sleep in the mornings. The ducks had to be sacrificed and the convent feasted on them ‘for a good few days at Christmas’.



Plate 5 Map showing Upper Brook Street site. (Manchester Local Studies Unit)

The old stable buildings were taken down to provide good-sized schoolrooms, a cloakroom, and a music room. This school was called “St. Joseph's School for Seniors and Juniors”. A former pupil of the High School in Upper Brook Street recalls that ‘there was a separate building in the garden which must have been built by the Society. This was the “second class” school, the convent being the “first class”.’ She goes on to say that she did not think there was much difference between “first class” or “second class” pupils or the fees, but that ‘we never mixed’. A Catholic newspaper of the day, *The Catholic Educator*, could have enlightened her. In 1854, a Government Inspector wrote:



*Of schools there ought to be many sorts. ... First rate "for the rich", second rate, perhaps best known by the name of the "middle school", which must depend upon private and independent support, and to these two sorts these [Government] Inspections do not apply.*

The former High School pupil recalls that 'The only time I can remember going to the "second class" was to see a performance of *King Robert of Sicily* which I thought marvellous.'

*A second house was rented for the St. Joseph's pupils, in Rumford Street, adjoining the convent High School's back garden. The Seniors were upstairs, the Juniors downstairs. Every room was full to overflowing. The landlady was a friend of the Reverend Mother of the Lark Hill Convent and was keen to help the FCJs in any way she could. The only request the nuns made of her was for permission to make an entrance door from the convent's back garden wall, to connect the little garden and yard of the house in Rumford Street. All the pupils of all the schools on the premises would then enter and leave 'without any inconvenience to the neighbours'. The day schools had different hours for dismissal; a good number of children came from a distance, and a room in each school served as a dining room. 'In foggy weather during the winter, there were a great number to be looked after, dinners to be warmed and dinners to be provided. The "little gents" were allowed to eat with their sisters, and the dinner hour was a busy one for quite some time.'*

In 1886, the FCJs opened continuation ["night"] schools 'for girls who were careless about their religion'. Two hundred girls attended. At first they were very undisciplined, but 'little by little their rude ways were made smooth.' The senior pupils enrolled in the Legion of Mary and assisted the nuns in this work. Pupils knitted, sewed, sang hymns and songs, and listened with increasing interest to the religious instructions. The Reverend Mother of Brook Street, Mother Lucy Shaw, commented 'So many of them have wretched homes with either a drunken father or mother, and sometimes both.' In 1889, at St. Augustine's, Granby Row, a new continuation school

was opened. The elementary school was under the Headmaster, Mr. Sedgewick, and classes for young women and girls over 14 were offered, 'where they [could] learn cookery, domestic economy, cutting out, and laundry work'. Fees were 2d-3d per week, under the charge of the Brook Street nuns. By 1892, the continuation classes had enrolled factory girls into the Guild of Our Lady of Good Counsel and 150-160 girls were attending every week. Bishop Vaughan, Archbishop Elect of Westminster, said farewell to the convent at Brook Street in April 1892. He enquired about the number of girls attending the night school and hoped that the rough ones as well as the quiet ones attended. He re-visited them in 1893 as Cardinal Vaughan.

Sometimes charity inspired the wealthier members of the congregation to give a stimulus and an encouragement to the continuation classes by paying for a treat. This might take the form of a tea party or of giving prizes to the children. The joy and appreciation of the poor people on such occasions well rewarded the sacrifice, which the rich made for their sake.

An article in *The Manchester Universe* reported:

*Members of the Evening Continuation Classes, to the number of over two hundred, partook of an excellent tea provided by the nuns of the FCJ. The scholars were served by the nuns and teachers under the supervision of the Reverend Mother who, by her attention to the needs of all present, gave another instance of her deep interest for those under her control. Canon Corbishley presided over an entertainment which followed. A number of parishioners were also present, and Councillor Makin showed by his presence that he takes a great interest in the Cathedral and School. The programme included songs and character sketches by the teachers in training at the Adelphi House Convent. ... Canon Corbishley gave the address in which he exhorted the scholars to show their appreciation ... by regular attendance at classes until the end of the session.*

Brook Street was essentially a mission house, having no boarders, but five well-attended day schools on the premises. There were always a number of young people taking private lessons in the evening, after school hours. Converts came each day for two of the Mothers to instruct them; some were sent by the Fathers of the Holy Name, and others from different localities. There were many converts and those who preferred to attend Sunday school to listen to the Sisters in preference to any great preacher. Sunday work for the convent was teaching in the numerous attended classes of children, and the instructing of poor women. The nuns' work with converts left them open to attack 'in this Protestant town and they found themselves in dangerous situations amid an indifferent world'. Quite often the FCJs would be hooted at and insulted as they walked along the city streets. Parents who sent their children to the schools were sometimes worried that their girls would be abused as "Papists". Anti-Catholic feeling was high in Manchester, fuelled by the events of the late 1860s, and hardening in 1867 with the murder of Police Sergeant Brett on Hyde Road. Three Irishmen, later known as the "Manchester Martyrs", were convicted of the murder and executed in New Bailey Prison. There were many accounts of converts suffering at the hands of their own families who rejected them. However, the good effected by the nuns 'proved clearly it was God's work they were doing. Without saying anything about the innumerable children confided to their care in the schools, a great many poor and ignorant women came to be instructed by them. Their number often amounted to many hundreds. These missions were a great consolation to the Foundress in the last years of her life.'

In 1862, when Manchester's economy was badly affected by the American Civil War, the FCJs were given flour by non-Catholic mill-owners to distribute to the poor. The mill owners viewed the FCJs as agents of social order, but there were also complex responses involved in the shift from hostility to tolerance, and even affection. The FCJs reaped the reward they coveted when, in 1869, numbers in the elementary schools increased by 100, owing to the good will of two important mill-owners who agreed to transfer the Catholic children of their employees from Protestant to Catholic schools. For

Brook Street, however, there were, at different times, worries about lack of pupils at the High School. This required special action. In 1866, there was special devotion to St. Joseph through a novena for an increase of pupil numbers in the two classes. In 1880, thirteen new pupils enrolled after prayers to St. Philomena.

Increasing numbers necessitated the re-organisation of classroom provisions. The High School's Senior Study was on the second floor of the main house, directly under the chapel. It occupied the length of the building from the bay window in front of the house to the glass-covered playground at the other end. In the centre of the house was the parlour, which had a bay window looking on to the street. At the back, adjoining the parlour, was a small classroom, which served as a common room for the nuns every morning and also on Saturdays and Sundays. From this room the pupils entered their cloakroom. To the right of the original rooms, parallel to the Senior Study at the other side of the house, a new Junior Study was erected on the plot. Bishop Vaughan blessed it in 1878. In 1879, the nuns announced the death of the architect who had drawn up the plans for this new building and superintended its construction. A visit to the convent removed his prejudices against Catholics, and he gave permission for his children to follow religious instruction.

The Seniors of the High School took their recreation under the veranda outside their study. Many a cricket match took place on this limited space; the players were greatly encouraged by the Chaplain who proved to be a staunch friend, taking a great interest in all the pupils. He carried in his coat pocket a box of the 'true, famous, Stonyhurst toffee, and all who joined in the games were duly rewarded'.

In 1858, a Royal Commission chaired by the Duke of Newcastle, investigated the rising level of public expenditure on education. Newcastle's Report, published in 1861, recommended that public money for education be continued, but suggested that such support should be dependent upon a system of payment by results. Every year, Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) visited each school to test pupils in Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. In 1870, the Education

Act provided the country with about 2500 school districts; School Boards were to be elected by ratepayers in each district. The School Boards were to examine the provision of elementary education in their district, provided then by Voluntary Societies, and if there were not enough school places, they could build and maintain schools out of the rates. The School Boards could make their own by-laws which would allow them to charge fees or, if they wanted, to let children in free. In 1871, the schools at Brook Street were inspected for first time by Protestant Inspectors. The tasks set were recorded as harder, the exam syllabus more demanding but ‘all passed brilliantly’.

The Bishop of Salford reported on the new education code in 1889. He said, ‘Catholics spend more than they receive on their scholars.’ Catholics as a group in the Salford Diocese were poor but they contributed £577,900 over ten years to education. Standards in Catholic schools exceeded those in the whole country in Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. The new code meant that more space must be provided per pupil. That meant more money had to be spent on new schools for the same numbers of children as were accommodated in the existing schools, ‘For example what would have cost £1000 to build for 120 pupils, now costs £2000 with new rules for space and so on.’ The Cooper-Temple clause of the 1870 Education Act allowed for religious instruction in schools. In fact this was the only compulsory curriculum content. This not only enabled Catholic schools to receive government finance, but also defended Catholic philosophy in terms of parents’ rights and the fusing of religion and education. On 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1889, the Bishop of Salford’s advice to Catholic school managers was a ‘Catholic education for every Catholic child’. On 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1889, Mr. Chamberlain’s free schools plans were discussed. The Diocese was adamant that ‘only “religious matters” would not be willingly devolved to Local Education Authority control’.

The Ladies’ High School at Brook Street received neither public nor Diocesan funding. The FCJs maintained their independence from Diocesan control while contributing, free of charge, to Catholic education in St. Augustine’s parish. This service did not go

unnoticed; in 1885 there were improvements made to the chapel at Brook Street, which was opened on 22<sup>nd</sup> October by Bishop Vaughan. In 1886 there was the first religious Retreat for pupils in the enlarged chapel given by Father Anderson S.J. and, in 1888, a Retreat was given on 15<sup>th</sup> May to which many past pupils were invited. This was the first recorded event for past pupils of the school. The 1888 religious inspection was given by Father R. G. Richardson, the new Rector at Granby Row and in the same year, the Children of Mary gathered clothes for the poor children of St. Augustine's to enable them to attend Mass properly attired. The tradition of providing clothes for the poor had its roots in this action. In 1890 the whole school travelled to the Holy Name Church for a dedication of all Manchester's Catholic schools to the Sacred Heart. In the evening procession, the children from Brook Street carried baskets of flowers and 700 children were consecrated. In the same year, the nuns made a Novena to Francis Xavier for yet more pupils to help finance their expanding mission.

From the very beginning of their work at Brook Street, the nuns introduced special devotion to the Virgin Mary. There was 'May devotions' on a grand scale, which always involved the crowning of a statue after a procession. Each girl carried a gift for Our Lady, often a decorated candle. There was also special devotion to St. Philomena. An annual prize-giving, usually at the end of December, was established by the late 1860s. At the Prize Day of 1874, there were nine priests including five Jesuits in addition to the Superior General. In 1870, an outbreak of Scarlet Fever caused the nuns to fear they might have to cancel Prize Day, but all those affected recovered in time.

In 1889, the top class were entered for the examination of the Society of Letters and Arts, Kensington. Thirteen pupils were entered and the work was deemed to be excellent. In the following year fifteen pupils passed the Kensington exams. In the nineteenth century, parents thought the serious education of their daughters superfluous. Deportment, Music, and a little French would see them through. 'To learn Arithmetic will not help my daughter to find a husband' was a common point of view. A governess provided at home, for a short

period, was the usual fate of the girls. Their brothers might go to public schools and university, but home was considered the right place for their sisters. Some parents sent their daughters to a finishing school, but thought that good schools for girls did not exist; their teachers were untrained and ill-educated. No public examinations accepted female candidates in the early part of the century.

The memoirs of an “old girl” of the High School at Brook Street recall the curriculum of the school in the second half of the 1800s:

*Much time was given to Spelling, Grammar, Parsing, Analysis, Reading, and Letter Writing but we had no literature. ... Arithmetic was*

*difficult. I mastered notation up to millions and long division ... while still in the Prep. Geography consisted of lists of countries, capes, and bays; History was more interesting in spite of dates; 1066-1087, 1087 up to Victoria's Reign we did learn about people. French we began at an early age, but no conversation or reading. My recollection of Needlework is confined to sewing stiff calico and relieving the monotony by rolling a reel of cotton to one another across the room.*

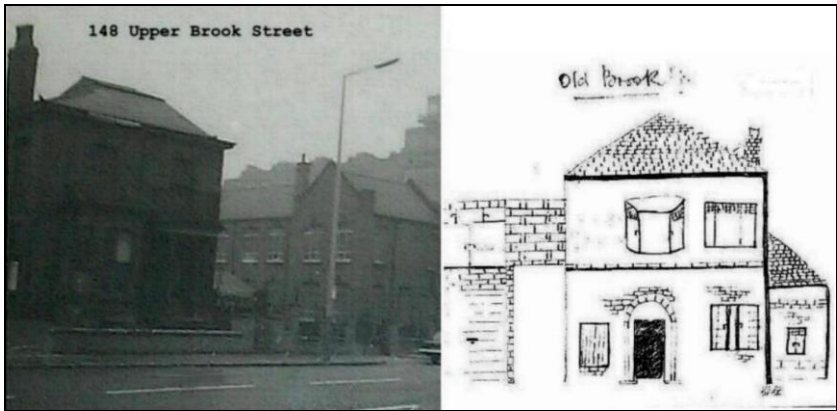


Plate 6: The School at Upper Brook Street . Two views of the school. Notice the sketch (a pupil's?) reverses the chimney. (FCJ Archives)

Organised games lessons were unheard of at this time, except for the occasional game of cricket, but Mother Hilda Gribbin took drill. Drama was enjoyed throughout the school, and some excellent plays were produced. The sister of this “old girl” was the first pupil to take a public examination of the College of Preceptors, and the younger pupils were entered for lower exams of the same college.

Other private girls’ schools continued to emphasise ladylike accomplishments and to scorn systematic academic study. However, an increasing number, including other denominational schools, attracted well-educated staff ‘motivated to the development of the intellect’. These schools achieved high standards with curricula embracing Latin and some Mathematics and structured approaches to History, Geography, and Modern Languages – though not often of Science. To varying degrees they emulated the structures and ethos of institutions preparing girls for public examinations and university entrance while maintaining the ideal of a distinct female education. Dorothea Beale explained her ideas on education in her article “On the Education of Women”, published in 1871, echoing the mission of the FCJs given by Marie Madeleine:



*The true meaning of the word education is not instruction. ... It is intellectual, moral, and physical development, the development of a sound mind in a sound body, the training of reason to form just judgements, the disciplining of the will and affections to obey the supreme law of duty, the kindling and strengthening of the love of knowledge, of beauty, of goodness, till they become governing motives of action.*

This was the basis of much of the curriculum of the Brook Street High School.

At this time, there was a growing shortage of teachers, so a plea was sent out for ‘a further supply of students for training, which should be forthcoming from the better class of Catholic families, whose daughters ‘would not be apprenticed as pupil teachers’.

In 1889, an article in *The Catholic Educator* noted that:

*A young girl who has attended one of our convent schools up to the age of 16 or 17 has had, in some respects, the best possible education to enable her to become a good useful teacher. We believe that in many instances such young ladies wish to become teachers; the parents are also anxious for it. These girls are too old to be pupil teachers.*

The FCJs had regularly recruited “subjects” for the Adelphi Convent where they were trained as teachers. The nuns were very aware of the growing need for more teachers but, in the 1890s, their minds were focussed on the more pressing problems of the Boer War. In 1899, a report of Prize Day of the FCJ Convent High School appeared in the Manchester press:

*With the laudable object of assisting the funds in aid of the poor families who are affected by the [Transvaal] war, the pupils of the Convent High School (under FCJs) provided, on Wednesday last, a most enjoyable concert. The concert was of a high character and will take rank with the best that has ever been held*

*under Catholic auspices in Manchester. Of uniform excellence throughout, the programme was sufficiently diverse to satisfy at once both classical and popular tastes. The programme opened with the chorus Christmas Greeting by the pupils, which was sung with much precision and sweetness.*

After the concert, the Bishop made the annual distribution of prizes in categories; general satisfaction, application, Religious Knowledge, hygiene, attendance, Needlework, Arithmetic, French, and Music. The Bishop then gave a powerful speech condemning the disasters at Ladysmith and complimenting the FCJs on their work at a time in which the valour of the British soldiers had been displayed.

The FCJs had:

*... shown great tact in combining their charity and patriotism together. . . . Thus they were showing their patriotism and their sympathy by endeavouring to assist the poor widows and orphans who were bereft of their breadwinners.*

The Bishop added that the nuns were ‘doing a noble work for the diocese and the pupils were no less a credit by their skill and excellence’.

For the High School at Brook Street, there was no annual Prize Day that year. From the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, the area of Upper Brook Street changed character. What had been a pleasant suburb of the middle-class became a busy urban street. There had always been a block of buildings for the few shopkeepers who supplied the people of the area, about half a dozen small shops, including the Post Office at Number 154. Some of these premises became vacant, an adjacent plot was sold and a public laundry opened. There was a good space between the school and laundry and ‘very high walls’ for the day scholars to leave and enter their respective schools, but it seemed that the quiet respectability of Chorlton was on the wane. There were even occasions when the Portress of the of the Convent opened the door to find numbers of

people carrying baskets of clothes meant for the laundry next door ‘even though there was a good-sized brass plate on the convent door “Ladies' High School”.’



Plate 7: Upper Brook Street, c1900. (Greater Manchester County Record Office)

With the decline in respectability of the neighbourhood, parents of pupils living within easy distance of the school moved away and the population around the convent declined. A search for new premises was begun in earnest. After a few weeks, the father of one of the pupils approached Reverend Mother. He was a house and estate agent and had knowledge of a ‘very good house in Oak Drive, off the Palatine Road’. Arrangements were made for inspections of the house. The nuns had earlier been given new responsibilities in parishes where the new house was situated, in the outlying district of Withington. The agent was greatly pleased when the nuns told him that the house was suitable in every respect. The Superior General of the Faithful Companions was visiting the Adelphi Convent at the

time and ‘no time was lost in seeking an interview with [her] to make known the details of the visit to The Hollies’. The house was accepted as fit for the convent and the High School and permission was granted for the purchase. At first, the owner asked a very high price but, with help from the agent, a lower purchase price was eventually accepted.

A personal memoir written by one of the nuns at the time records, ‘One Saturday morning the house bell was rung vigorously, everyone hurried to the hall, and the Superior held up a ponderous bunch of keys saying “these are the keys of The Hollies; our prayers have been answered”.’

At an entertainment given to the parents in place of Prize Day, the school Chaplain gave Benediction to the pupils and Mother Superior, presented a ‘small *Life of the Foundress*’ to each. They were ‘very pleased to receive their little souvenir’.

All the schools could not be transferred to The Hollies; only the High School was to be continued on the new site. Permission was given for the Superior to accompany groups from the FCJ Community to spend a day at The Hollies. Those nuns who taught at St. Augustine’s, Granby Row were to continue to do so and they were pleased to be afforded the opportunity to visit the new school at The Hollies. At Whit in 1900, they visited the new house and had picnics in the gardens, where ‘everyone appreciated the opportunity of seeing the new house and enjoyed a very happy day; it was a real family Feast Day’. The removal of the High School from Brook Street took place in September 1900. Thirty pupils transferred from Brook Street and ten more joined the school after the opening of the term at The Hollies in Oak Drive, Fallowfield.

## **Chapter 2**

### **School for Young Ladies**

‘We advance little by little, sometimes recede, always to gain another victory. We suffer defeat sometimes but if we can only hold on we are sure of the final victory.’

FCJ schools were without endowments hence the FCJs had continuous difficulties with finances. Their ambitious plans for the expansion of their work in Manchester met with opposition and delays. In 1900, the Education Department began discussions with the FCJs about a proposal for a teacher training college. The FCJs ‘received the proposal favourably’. It was the natural development of their work at the Adelphi and Brook Street Convents. The Diocese, however, believed ‘the establishment of such an institute would be an Herculean task’, as there were many difficulties to contend with. The scheme was ‘kept in abeyance until a favourable opportunity should present itself. Although no doubt [the college will] eventually be established there is no development of the scheme at present.’ The FCJs had to wait years for the realisation of their scheme, despite the need of the Diocese for more teachers. On 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1908, a national report on women and colleges concluded that an important step had been taken by the Board of Education in relation to the headship of women’s colleges. Experience had clearly shown that there was no lack of capable women who could most effectively undertake the responsibility of the headship of residential colleges ‘both on their administration and instructional sides’. By then, the FCJs had already acted, opening Sedgley College at Prestwich in 1904.

In 1902, the FCJs at The Hollies were struggling with debts. They still owned the property in Brook Street and were paying heavy interest on money borrowed to purchase The Hollies. Assistance was provided in the form of a ‘present from a lady’ of £100 to the convent. She felt impelled to make the gift. This was followed by a Sale of Work ‘done during free moments’, which brought further funds of over £20. The FCJs also ‘won a watch worth £20’. The talent for fund-raising was evident. The sale of the house in Brook

Street was then announced in May. ‘Number 148 has passed into the hands of the Jesuits, who purchased it for an infant school.’ It was on the feast of Our Lady when a letter was received, ‘I take the house; this is final.’ Another benefactor, knowing the high interest on the money borrowed for the purchase of The Hollies, loaned the full amount without



Plate 8 Oak Drive c1900 showing Oak Bank House (Manchester Local Studies Unit)

interest. By 1904, finances were buoyant enough to install hot water pipes throughout the house after heating plans were approved. There were even sufficient funds to transform a little room into a Congregational Chapel of Our Lady.

The FCJs had other ongoing battles to fight, against prejudice and discrimination. Nationally, though Catholic Emancipation had occurred early in the previous century, there were regular stirrings of anti-Catholic sentiments. In 1901, the Press reported the death of Queen Victoria and in *The Catholic Herald*, her obituary contained a section concerning the Queen’s attitude towards Catholics. In public she appeared benevolent and spoke out against anti-Catholic sentiment. ‘I would never have consented to say anything which breathed a spirit of intolerance ... I cannot bear to hear the violent abuse of the Catholic religion ... so painful and so cruel to many good and innocent Roman Catholics.’

Closer to home, Oak Drive housed prominent Protestant and Non-Conformist neighbours known for their antipathy towards Roman Catholics. The influence of the FCJs did much to bring about change in their opinions. June 1908 broke all records for the number of hours of sunshine; on some days, the temperatures exceeded 80°F and the tar oozed up from the pavements. During that month, the school's Protestant neighbour, Sir Edward Donner, pressed the FCJs and girls to enjoy the shade of his garden 'or rather the private part adjoining his grounds'. Sir Edward called at the school himself with a key labelled in his own handwriting. It read, 'For Reverend Mother, with Sir Edward Donner's compliments.'

Sir Edward, a leading Non-Conformist, was well known in Diocesan circles. In 1902 the Government introduced a new Education Act that abolished all 2568 School Boards and handed over their duties to local borough or county councils. These new Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were given powers to establish new secondary and technical schools as well as developing the existing system of elementary schools. Sir Edward was a Governor of the Manchester Grammar School, one of the Hulme Trustees, and Chairman of the Managers of the Manchester High School for Girls (a near neighbour of the Brook Street site of the FCJs' school.). The *Catholic Times and Opinion* had been monitoring negotiations concerning the new educational regulations. Diocesan opinion was that Catholic education had been 'threatened in its liberties and curtailed in its finances', as attempts had been made to try and remove Catholic control of their schools in return for grants. The Bishops demanded that 'We shall receive from whatever [political] party, full liberty and full finance.' The Hollies, relying on fees for its income, was totally independent of Diocese and LEA, and the FCJs trod a fine line between clerics and the school's potentially influential neighbours.

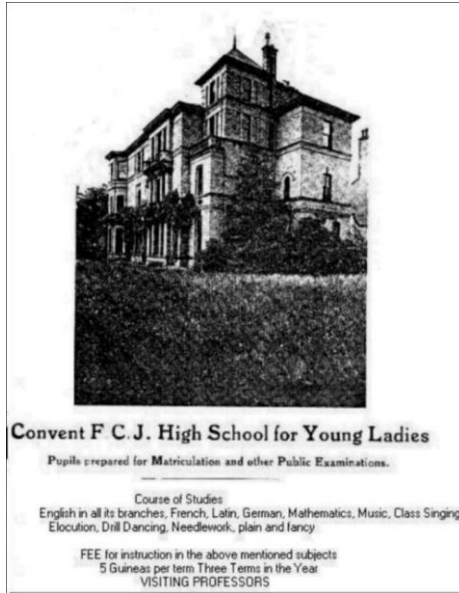


Plate 9 Sir Edward Donner (Manchester Local Studies Unit) Plate 10 The Hollies Convent School, 1913 (FCJ Archives)

In 1908, at the time of the school’s Garden Party, Sir Edward Donner wrote to Reverend Mother, putting his grounds and gardens at her disposal for the day. After tea on 17<sup>th</sup> July, the Bishop, numbers of clergy and numerous visitors, as well as all the children went, ‘accompanied by the band, to avail themselves of the kind permission’. They were surprised and delighted to find that Sir Edward and Lady Donner already awaited their arrival:

*They spoke to all and it was an event in their lives to entertain a Bishop in his robes, five or six Jesuits among many other priests, and all the Catholics of the neighbourhood in which they were the leading Non-Conformists. After an hour or so, the Bishop thanked Sir Edward and Lady Donner for their cordial reception of him and Reverend Mother’s other guests, adding he was glad of the occasion to publicly thank them, in Reverend Mother’s*



*name, for their kindness to her on that day and at many other times. Sir Edward responded to his Lordship saying it was a genuine pleasure to him and Lady Donner to contribute in any way to the day's success. It was a joy to them to see the great pleasure they had given to the children and he hoped that it was the first of many happy meetings.*

The Bishop later remarked to the FCJs that it was quite an achievement to have Sir Edward's goodwill as 'he had been a bitter opponent to Catholic interests heretofore'. Sir Edward was an active member of the Liberal Party. In 1907 he had received the congratulations of the Liberals of south Manchester on the honour the King had conferred upon him. By 1909, he was the President of the Manchester Liberal Federation, and acted as chairman for Mr. Winston Churchill at the by-election held in that year. The influence of Sir Edward's Catholic neighbours was evident in the election campaign of 1910. The Liberals had been opponents of Catholic schools but a campaign letter written to *The Catholic Herald* showed a change of opinion:

**Letter to the electors of South Manchester:**

*I shall vote for no educational measure which does not provide for the liberty of parents to select such Religious Instruction in the schools as they may desire for their children. I shall oppose any scheme [education] which is aimed at the confiscation of the property of those religious denominations which have made such a noble and successful efforts to provide their own schools.*

On a more personal level, the nuns often recorded courtesies and kindnesses shown to them by Protestant neighbours. In 1915, Reverend Mother General visited the school. A Protestant neighbour 'considered it an honour to send his best motor which he reserves for state occasions to bring Her Reverence to us'. In the severe wartime winter of 1917, there were difficulties in obtaining coke. One Protestant neighbour offered all she had in her cellar, 'sufficient to tide us over'. When thanked for her kindness, the neighbour replied

‘It is I who should thank you, you have left my cellar in such good order.’ Another time when the coal arrived, on account of a shortage of labour to carry it from the tradesman’s entrance to the cellar, the nuns set about the work themselves. Lady Donner appeared, saying ‘This is not work for you ladies, but it is very edifying to see you do it.’ She then sent her gardener over to finish the work. The Convent School did not want for anything; in spite of the scarcity of provision, ‘friends seemed so generous’.

By 1900, the ruling and middle-classes accepted secondary schooling for girls and, though no radical change in women’s status was intended and did not immediately occur, a firm basis for such a revolution was laid. Increasing numbers of well-educated girls entered voluntary public activities and higher education. This, coupled with certain demographic and economic factors, fuelled women’s demands for emancipation and further demands for female education. Most better-off parents did not envisage their daughters taking paid employment. However, a reduction in the number of males in the population (particularly in the middle-classes) created the prospect of permanent spinsterhood for many middle-class women, and the need to earn their own living. Girls’ schools generally rejected vocational training. They provided the necessary intellectual and personal basis for entry into employment, just at a time when the openings for women increased from necessity. Many lower middle-class girls took jobs from necessity, others from choice. Before 1914, most took modestly-paid clerical posts, or entered teaching and other jobs that did not compete with men. Only a few women aspired to the higher professions and the more prestigious posts in the Civil Service.

In 1900, *The Catholic Herald* reported on the new education by-laws which had come into force in Manchester. It was the beginning of compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14. Balfour’s Act of 1902 gave ‘free scholarships to selected children of poorer parents’. The Regulations of 1904 and 1907 that followed the Act then clarified the distinction between the higher elementary and

grammar school traditions. The Regulations laid down the curriculum for the grammar schools; English Language and Literature not less than four and a half hours, Languages Ancient and Modern three and a half (or six hours for two languages), Mathematics and Science seven and a half hours (of which three should be for Science), and the curriculum should also contain Drawing and Singing.

The changes in curricular requirements did not have an immediate impact at The Hollies. The subjects studied at Brook Street continued at Fallowfield, and changes were introduced slowly through the first quarter of the new century. The school maintained a Victorian approach. The Victorian ideal of femininity was encapsulated in the idea of “woman's mission”, as mother, wife, and daughter. Women were viewed as moral and spiritual guardians. In *Self-Help* (1859), Samuel Smiles had declared, ‘The nation comes from the nursery.’ In other words, the moral health of the nation and its Empire depended on the moral purity of its women. Input from feminists, who believed in educational reforms primarily as a means of advancing female emancipation, was limited. Intellectual education was not yet intended to produce emancipated females competing with men for careers. It allowed middle-class women, freed from household duties by labour-saving devices and servants, to develop intellectual and personal attributes that enabled them to fulfil their traditional roles as wives and mothers more effectively, and to act as guardians of liberal culture.

The curriculum for girls' schools, though academic, stressed the literary and the humane without neglecting the development of ladylike attributes. It reflected the views of headmistresses, parents, and male-dominated committees that girls' and boys' education should not be identical. Such an outlook was manifested in the emphasis on Botany in science teaching, the transformation of ornamental accomplishments into the serious study of Music and Art, the linkage of P.E. to hygiene and anatomy, and from the 1890s, the growing emphasis (unpopular with academics) on Domestic Science. There was no Domestic Science at The Hollies, though it had been

accepted into state secondary schools as a partial substitute for Science. A past pupil from the years 1916-1924 recalls that the pupils studying Botany had the use of Sir Edward and Lady Donner's garden.

Society's changing view of what was suitable for girls' education was clearly illustrated in 1904 when an "entertainment" was given at The Hollies on 17<sup>th</sup> November. There was Shakespeare, music (both instrumental and vocal), dancing, and elocution. The Bishop of New Westminster, Canada, was present that evening and noted that 'while the standard of education has risen to meet modern requirements, the old spirit pervades the work of the good sisters'. On 31<sup>st</sup> July, 1910, the pupils enacted scenes from *Henry IV*. Bishop Casartelli remarked that 'The girls of this school are known to excel in reproducing Shakespeare's plays.' He then commented on a recitation given by a senior pupil, congratulating her on the performance. The Bishop considered Thompson's *Hound of Heaven* to be the most difficult poem in the English language. 'Miss Michaelis has given us without a hitch, 200 lines of very high-flown language, the mere remembering of which is a feat; she has thoroughly mastered the work and drunk the full meaning of her author so rich in erudite allusions. Three Rectors of the college [sitting] by me are still aghast what "even a girl" can achieve when carefully tutored.'

It was a generally held view that men disliked "blue-stockings" and that parents considered the serious education of their daughters superfluous. In the 1860s, parity between the sexes was advanced by the admission of girls to the same examinations as boys; an achievement owing much to the pressure from headmistresses and others. In 1908, seventy-eight senior Hollies pupils were prepared for the Oxford exams, though it is not clear when the school first introduced this syllabus.



Plate 11: Participants in a Hollies 'Production', 1922 (Mary Porterfield (Bridge))

Along with the development of the academic curriculum, came the broadening of the physical and cultural education offered. There had been need for an assembly room ever since the school's arrival at The Hollies and, in 1905, the FCJs had started a "Drill Hall Fund". A corrugated iron building was the acme of their desire. However, neighbours questioned the desirability of such a building in Oak Drive. One gentleman offered to head the subscribers to 'swell the sum for bricks'. In 1906, the school raised £57 for the Fund. Initially, worries over debts had prevented the building of such a hall, as the FCJs were 'deeply in debt as all our houses are'. However, they felt the need for a loftier room for drill. The basement was too low for "club exercises", and the FCJs cited the increased height of growing children as the spur to the efforts to build a hall. In 1907, during a visit of the FCJ Superior General, Bishop Casartelli opened the new drill hall. Louis Charles Casartelli was a linguist and internationally renowned academic, who had taught all his priestly life until he was made Bishop of Salford in 1903. Under his guidance the Diocese established relationships with the newly-

created LEAs. In 1910, Albert & Co., Italian sculptors, decorated the interior of the hall and, during a visit of the Bishop in 1918 which ‘coincided with the little ones’ lesson in “physical culture”, the Bishop declared himself to be ‘very amused’.

In 1918, several epidemics were prevalent during the spring but the FCJs were able to continue their work while many neighbouring school and colleges were closed. By 1919, The Hollies had gained a reputation as a fine school and, as the only convent secondary school in the area, drew its pupils from a wide catchment.

An advertisement from the programme of *The Rivals* in 1913, announced:

*‘Convent F.C.J. High School for Young Ladies*

*Pupils prepared for Matriculation and other Public Examinations.’*

The Hollies employed its first lay-teacher in 1910 and she arranged for her friend, Professor Lodge, M.A., to give a course of lectures each term for the benefit of the Matriculation Class. In 1912, the school acquired a set of individual study desks and in the same year, gave a performance of *A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream*. In 1913, a performance of *The Rivals* was given at Prize Day, and the Bishop was so impressed, he asked them to repeat the performance early in 1914 in aid of his charity fund. A report in *The Manchester Universe* recorded:

*The pupils of the Senior Elocution Class at the convent FCJ Fallowfield are to be congratulated on their splendid performance of The Rivals given by them in the Holy Name Hall on 22<sup>nd</sup> April in aid of His Lordship’s charities. For schoolgirls, the task was an ambitious one; clearness of expression and cultured accent was most marked. They seemed to catch the author’s meaning and displayed undoubted histrionic ability. The Concert, which preceded The Rivals, was well given, and enjoyed by all. Miss Michaelis’ rendering of The Hound of*

*Heaven astounded her audience; an elocutionist of merit; her perfect rendering of this difficult poem of Francis Thompson was evident to all.*

From their foundation in 1820, a large part of the work of the FCJs was their work with converts. In 1915 the conversion of one of the lay-mistresses took place on the Feast of St. Philomena. This mistress, who taught for four years at the school, was a staunch Anglican. No one thought that she would abandon ‘that which was so dear to her’. Her son, Charlie, told her that ‘we ought to go’. She and the boy received their First Communions in The Hollies’ chapel. Other work begun at Brook Street, was charitable donations and the making of clothes for the poor; this work grew and developed at The Hollies. An early example was in 1914 when Bishop asked for repeat of *The Rivals* for his Diocesan charities. The performance raised £33.

The morale and spirit of the school reflected that of the FCJs. In 1913 a new English version of the *Life of the Foundress* was published and, at one Retreat, the presiding priest reflected that they had undertaken a great work in becoming not only companions of Jesus but faithful companions. During the War years, fears for the safety of the FCJs in Europe were uppermost in the minds of the Hollies’ Community. Throughout their Retreats and holidays, they looked for news brought to them by visiting Superiors and the FCJs’s written annals, which were eagerly awaited at the beginning of a new year. In 1917 they had news of several FCJs escaping from ‘unhappy Belgium’. At the close of the year, in spite of the threat of Zeppelins and brilliant moonlight, their Chaplain arrived punctually at midnight to celebrate three masses for them on Christmas Eve. In February 1918, they had a visit from Madame Provincial, who brought ‘news of those of ours in the Theatre of War.’ On 22<sup>nd</sup> March they enjoyed a visit from the Superior General herself. ‘Seated beneath the trees in the “pretty little garden” [they] spent a delightful day and with her followed the Faithful Companions on the continent, from Namur to Paris, Paris to Camon, Camon to Rouen, Rouen to Nantes.’ They ended the day with prayers ‘for our dear

ones and with gratitude to God for his wonderful protection'. A further escape from danger closer to home, occurred in 1922 when the FCJs heard what they thought was fireworks at Belle Vue. In the morning, they saw smoke 'issuing from the wainscot in two classrooms, accompanied by a strong smell of burning'. Workmen were called and found that an electric wire had fused and perforated the gas pipe, which had been burning all night under the boards.

The FCJs reflected on the war at their Retreat of 1918, 'The present war gives many examples of what happens in spiritual life we advance little by little, sometimes recede, always to gain another victory. We suffer defeat sometimes but if we can only hold on we are sure of the final victory.' The Hollies' Annals for the year 1918 were deemed incomplete without a mention of the joy with which they welcomed the signing of the Armistice:

The bells announced the joyful fact our children could not contain themselves. They cheered and danced in delight. As soon as the excitement had somewhat subsided, we assembled around the tabernacle and offered thanked with the *Te Deum*. The children were dismissed early, much to their delight.

The FCJs learned that their communities in Belgium were safe and rejoiced that their 'long term of suffering was now at an end'.

In 1920 the FCJs went to Upton to celebrate the centenary of the foundation of the Society. A telegram from the Superior General was received by those left behind at The Hollies, 'I am with you more than ever in spirit today.' The returning FCJs gave glowing account of the celebrations at Upton. Amid the celebrations that year, however, was a solemn event; the death of Mother Josephine Crotty. She had entered the Society of the Faithful Companions at Brook Street at the age of 14. As an assistant in St. Augustine's school, she did great and lasting work and her name was a household word to many people of the parish. Forty years of devoted work at the day school, night school and Sunday school would not soon be forgotten. In 1913, she was removed from St. Augustine's on account of failing eyesight, due to an 'accident on the cars'. She



continued her work of teaching the little girls at The Hollies. Time not spent teaching was devoted to the sewing machine. Her greatest pleasure at recreation was to talk of the old days at St. Augustine's. She 'had the distinction in some cases in having had under her charge child, mother, and grandmother, by whom she is held in the highest esteem and affection'.

This affection for the old school and for the FCJs was reiterated in a letter received by The Hollies in 1920. It was from a woman in Philadelphia whose sisters were educated at Brook Street, and who remembered Mother Mary Allen. The woman's aunt, then 81, remembered 'seeing the Foundress of your order in Manchester' before emigrating to Philadelphia in 1869. The local paper in Philadelphia had published the Pope's congratulation to Reverend Mother Philomena Higgins on the Society's centenary. The article was enclosed with the letter 'along with £5'. The pressing need for funds was never far from the thoughts of FCJs and their friends and supporters.

In 1904, the chapel in The Hollies had been refurbished. Old girls were invited to the dedication of the new chapel, which was attended by the Bishop of New Westminster, Canada, and Bishop Casartelli of Salford. The chapel was too small to admit them all and many had to follow devotions from outside. The Bishop said he felt like a schoolboy home for the holidays. It conjured up happy years of his life when he used to take part in the ceremonies of 'dear old Brook Street'. Past members of the Brook Street Community were remembered, and a statue in memory of Mother John Ennever was placed in the chapel. In 1908, the community received permission to enlarge the chapel by taking down a wall that separated it from an adjoining sitting room. The transformations took place and by 16<sup>th</sup> May, The Hollies had a chapel, 'as spacious as numbers will ever require', in time for the Preparatory school's First Communion celebrations, which were one of the high points of any year at The Hollies. At this stage the FCJs were unaware of the growing reputation of the school and their work, and had little inkling of the rapid growth in numbers that would necessitate further purchases.



*Congregational Chapel, Convent FCJ  
Oak Drive, Fallowfield.*



Bishop Casartelli c1908

Plate 12 The Hollies Congregational Chapel (Sheila Thorn (O'Keefe) and Bishop Casartelli, 1906 (Manchester Local Studies Unit)

As pupil numbers grew, so did the pressure on the available accommodation. Plans for application as a grant-earning school presented the school with demands from the Board of Education, and with it the need for an additional house. With permission from the Superior General, Mother Superior 'opened negotiation regarding the purchase of a house conveniently adjoining'. In May 1919, The Acorns was nominally the property of the FCJs. In reality they could 'not put so much as a foot into the garden', the property being occupied by the Sixth Manchesters Regiment. Meanwhile, the FCJs waited impatiently for the provision of additional classrooms and 'earnestly prayed for the removal of the Sixth Manchesters' headquarters elsewhere'. On 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1920, the FCJs took possession of The Acorns. They immediately began 'knocking down in one place and building up in another, arranging here and there but above all cleaning everywhere', to remove all traces of the military presence. Towards the end of one Retreat, a statue of the Sacred Heart was placed on a pedestal, at the head of the fine oak staircase.

The FCJs recalled that five years previously a family of exiled Jensens had occupied this house. At that time, the convent's Superior had placed a statue there for the family. They had little reason to think that one day the Faithful Companions would occupy the house themselves.

The forward planning of the FCJs was to be rewarded in 1920 when, on 5<sup>th</sup> July, two Inspectors visited The Hollies and Acorns. 'Having weighed in the balance, pupils, buildings and mistresses they found the result satisfactory.' Five days later, the school received recognition as a grant-earning secondary school. This brought further building requirements, most notably the need for a science room. A new room was built on ground formerly covered by the stables of The Acorns. When completed it was 'a very fine one, large and well lighted and fitted with all modern requirements'. Two dormitories in The Hollies became classrooms; 'Their former nightly occupants . . . emigrated to The Acorns where six more bedrooms, unworthy of recognition by the Board, [were] privileged to give them shelter.' By 21<sup>st</sup> September, when the school reopened after the summer holidays, the reorganisation was complete. The children over 11 years of age comprised the secondary school and took their lessons in The Hollies. The younger children occupied The Acorns. The school adopted the name "Hollies" for the whole school, but the separation of senior and preparatory schools had taken place.

## Chapter 3

### Into a New Age

‘Oh yes, in the houses of the FCJs it is always the same;  
the best is for the children.’

Grant-earning status ushered in a change of pace at The Hollies. What had always been thought of as a ‘homely, family way of doing things’, now altered to fit the requirements of the Education Board. In April 1921, a Lady Inspector ‘inspected not only the premises but pupils and mistresses also. She pronounced great satisfaction at the improvements that had been made since her last visit.’ On 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1923, two of Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMIs), Miss Gauntlett and Dr Wager, visited the school. They were delighted with the school premises. Dr Wagner was a specialist in science and ‘was able to appreciate the equipment of [the] laboratory.’ By 1926 there were eight full-time and three part-time mistresses at the school, and staffing was considered adequate. Three of the staff were full-time in the Preparatory school, and of the other five, four were honours graduates capable of developing the work of the school in the Sixth Form, and to School Certificate level in subjects other than their own main subject.

The growth of The Hollies’ reputation necessitated the re-evaluation of the status of the headteacher. Traditionally, the Superior of the Convent was also Head of the School. The dual role was soon too onerous for one person. An old girl, who attended The Hollies from 1921-1933, believed that the first Headmistress was Mother Mary Joseph McCorry, and ‘before that it was the Reverend Mother’. The reality was a little more complicated.

Soon after the school’s move to The Hollies, Mother Magdalen Hyor performed the dual role of Superior and Headmistress. She was born in Roscommon in 1849 and entered the Society at Gumley in 1867. The FCJ Annals record her as Superior at The Hollies from 1904 to 1906. In 1906, the role of Headmistress was separated from that of Superior. Mother Mary O’Kennedy, from County Clare, Ireland, had entered the Society in Liverpool. She first served the school on the Brook Street Site, and was appointed Headmistress in 1906. She had

charge of the school when it received grant-earning status and was, by then, also serving as Superior of the convent. In 1922, Mother Mary then moved to London and the Community was presented with its new Superior, Mother Elfrida Bretherton. Mother Elfrida was born in Warrington, and entered the society at Upton in 1894. She was formally appointed Headmistress in 1925 and was to have the oversight of the school's development until 1930. In January 1929, she initiated the practice of a formal Speech Day at The Hollies, at which the staff, pupils, parents, and visiting clergy heard a report from the Headmistress. This included details of the school's Christmas tests and the work of the previous year. 'The awe-inspiring ceremony worked wonders and created a spirit of emulation and desire to do better even among the least industrious.'

In 1924, Manchester's Education Week came at a time when the FCJs felt their resources were at their lowest. In order to equip themselves for the ever more pressing demands imposed by the educational world, they worked hard to see as much as possible of the working of other secondary schools. Miss Burstall, Headmistress of the Manchester High School for Girls, was busy with many visitors when the FCJs arrived at her school. She knew of The Hollies through her Chairman of Governors, Sir Edward Donner, and she 'left her visitors to the care of others'. She then escorted the FCJs round the school. When their Superior expressed appreciation of her kindness, Miss Burstall's reply was, 'Reverend. Mother, I have a deep respect for your habit and I consider it an honour to have a visit from any of your Sisters.' Miss Burstall was a founder member of the British Federation of University Women, which held its inaugural meeting at the Manchester High School for Girls in 1907. The FCJs were, no doubt, influenced by their meeting with her and with other well-qualified Headmistresses. On 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1925, The Association of Head Mistresses held its annual conference at The Hollies. The FCJs 'opened [their] doors to many learned ladies of varied ages and aspect'.

Education Week, 1924, was Manchester's showpiece to England's Education Authorities. Civic pride fuelled the desire to show the rest

of the nation what could be done. The work displayed in the city was considered to be 'very fine indeed both as to quantity and quality'. The exhibition at The Hollies was held in the large oak room whose walls were 'artistically draped'. Many parents and friends assembled on the open days to examine the display of needlework, kindergarten work, drawings, and paintings. Schools had been asked to focus on one particular subject on the curriculum and as far as possible to illustrate the methods of teaching it. History was the subject selected at The Hollies. One portion of the exhibition room was devoted entirely to history charts, drawings, and dolls in character costume, all the work of the pupils. Visitors were free to attend History lessons, which were given during the whole of one morning. The FCJs found 'the kindly comments on the work and methods of the school made by the Head Masters and Head Mistresses of the schools in and around Manchester most encouraging'.

This newly-found confidence resulted in plans to begin a five-year course in the senior school to prepare girls for the School Certificate and Higher Certificate. The numbers on roll allowed for just one-form organisation, with no possibility of differentiated courses. The usual secondary school subjects were offered, but only French was available for modern language study. There was no Latin, and Botany could be taken only at School Certificate standard. Needlework was the sole form of Housecraft studied. There was a very small amount of post-Matriculation work. The Inspection Report of 1926 listed the following subjects as being available: English Language and Literature, History, Geography, French, Mathematics, Science, Art, Housecraft, and Physical Education. Inspectors voiced reservations at the lack of pace and low expectations of some of the staff, but the examination results for 1926 were 'deemed to be excellent' by the school. Fresh impetus was gained from the decision to form a Higher Certificate group albeit of 'necessarily moderate proportions'. On 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1927, the school received its first official report from Her Majesty's Inspectors, and the Sisters were 'gratified to find a generous appreciation of our efforts'.

The Hadow Report of 1926 proposed secondary education for all, with a terminal examination at the leaving age of 15. The report was not fully implemented until 1947. Evidence from educational psychologists influenced this report and paved the way for the tripartite organisation of secondary schools. Hadow described two types of school; secondary modern and grammar. Those secondary schools 'which at present pursue in the main a predominately literary or scientific curriculum to be known as grammar schools. ... Schools which give ... a four years' course from the age of 11 with a realistic or practical trend in the last two years, to be known as modern schools.'

Nothing was mentioned about methods of selection but, in 1929, future developments were anticipated at The Hollies, when students from Manchester University visited the school to experiment with the children on the use of intelligence tests. The children were arranged in age groups from 9 to 13 and divided among the students. The pupils 'very much enjoyed this novel re-arrangement of the timetable'. They would have been blissfully unaware of the discussions taking place in the educational world regarding the organisation of secondary education and the place of intelligence tests in the selection of pupils.

Throughout the 1920s, the Sisters worked not only on the curriculum the school offered but also on its physical and spiritual fabric. After the summer holidays of 1923, the Superior General performed a ceremony opening the 'bridge, or more properly, corridor, called St. Christopher's', which was built during the holidays and connected the two houses. From what was formerly known as St. Agnes', the Sisters' common room, the passage was across the bridge into the small rooms of The Acorns. One member of the Community wrote in the Annals, 'Those who remember the discomfort of the experience of reaching one house from the other, will understand what a boon the connection is.'

In 1923, repairs were carried out to repair damage in the drill hall. For years the lower end of the hall was badly affected by damp and much money had been spent on fruitless endeavours to remedy the

defect. The problem was caused by the close proximity of a stable on the grounds adjoining The Hollies. Applications had been made to the landlord to enter into negotiations with the Community 'but in vain'. After three months of heavy rain 'abnormal even for Manchester', water was running in streams down the wall. The Superior took matters into her own hands, 'in spite of advice to the contrary'. She wrote to the neighbour asking for an interview. He came within an hour of receiving her letter and was conducted throughout the two houses. He was 'most affable, expressed his regret that [the Community] should have suffered so much inconvenience, and offered to adopt any means suggested by the builder to remedy the defect and to defray all expenses incurred in doing so.'

The repairs to the drill hall proved timely. A concert had been given to raise funds for the building of a playground and in 1924, the school was 'the happy possessor of a large asphalted playground marked out for two games of netball and two games of tennis'.







Plate 13: Old Girls Netball Team, 1926. Plate 14: Old Girls Netball Team.

Plate 14: Old Girls Netball Team. (Christina Howley (Berry))



Plate 15: Pupils' Hike, 1924 (Christina Howley (Berry))

The playground was ‘hardly completed when our dear children with the inexperience of youth did not hesitate to match their immature strength with Manchester’s expert and well-tried teams, as a result of which, needless to say defeat was writ large in the opening of the annals of sport.’ Old girls remember the playground with mixed affection. All games were played on the same two courts which were marked for netball, rounders and tennis; netball in white, tennis in yellow, rounders in another colour. ‘Amazingly we coped quite well and somehow managed to block out visually the irrelevant markings.’ The original garden at The Hollies had been sacrificed for the playground, but the garden attached to The Acorns was so well groomed that it was of a park-like appearance with gravelled walks and rustic benches for the FCJs to take their recreation there.

The Inspection Report of 1926 provided a snapshot of the school at the time. It was described as being well-situated in a residential area near a main tram route. The premises consisted of two large houses adjoining one another and being ‘just adequate for the present numbers’ of 178 pupils. Any increase in numbers could be catered for, as there was possibility for extension. The Juniors and one form of the secondary school were housed in one building, The Acorns. The main school was housed in the other house, The Hollies. There were eight classrooms and one small Sixth Form room. Some special accommodation provided an art room, a good-sized laboratory and a dining room. ‘The best feature [was] the assembly hall’, which was also used as a gym. Cloakrooms were in the basement but the sanitary provision was described as being in need of improvement. The whole establishment was declared as ‘satisfactory throughout’. New single desks had appeared in the secondary school in 1925, to the delight of mistresses and pupils. These were a great addition to some of the classrooms, which were later painted during Easter week, 1926. The drill hall was always greatly admired and was made ‘more beautiful than ever’. There was a ‘good nucleus’ of a library in the different form rooms but a warning was given that, if the Sixth Form grew, the library arrangements would need reconsidering. The

premises were 'kept in excellent condition but some classrooms [were] overcrowded and in need of ventilation'. The surrounding grounds were pleasant with good gardens shaded by trees and two excellent hard netball courts. Equipment was 'generally satisfactory' for the school's needs at the time. As science developed, the school would need more equipment for the laboratory.

A similar snapshot was provided of the ethos of the school, beginning with its 'corporate life'. The Inspectors reported that the school assembled twice a day at the beginning of the morning and afternoon sessions. Each form chose two prefects and one of the Sixth Form acted as prefect for the whole school. There was no "prefect system" developed with responsibilities for maintaining order but, as the Inspectors noted, the manners and behaviour of the pupils throughout the school 'made a favourable impression'. From 1925, the school provided, at its own expense, medical examination for all pupils over 11. A mid-day meal was also provided at a charge of a shilling per day; about thirty children took this meal. Others brought their own lunches. Supervision at lunchtime was by FCJs who were not on the teaching staff. There were no school social societies, and the Inspectors felt this was an omission; there was an Old Girls' Association but no school magazine. The Inspectors reported only the categories laid down by the Education Board. They were unable to report the additional features that contributed to the ethos of the school; a frustrating omission experienced by School Inspectors in the closing decades of the twentieth century.

The religious life of the school was a large component of its atmosphere and underpinned the morale of both staff and pupils. The basis for the work of the FCJs was its members' strong Catholic faith and the guiding principles of their Foundress. In 1923 three priests arrived as part of the investigation promoting the cause of the Foundress. They inspected the two houses and Reverend Father Fournier remarked on 'the comfortable English' living conditions. The Sisters explained the comfort was for the children. 'Oh yes, in the houses of the FCJs it is always the same; the best is for the children' came the reply. Pere Isias, on inspecting the rooms in the

attics, exclaimed in French, 'The likeness is perfect, it is just like Paris; here are the true daughters of Madame d'Houët.' The priests listened with great interest to the tales of the old days at St. Augustine's, one of the oldest missions of the Society. The parting message was, 'We understand now why Reverend Mother General said, "above all, be sure to visit Manchester".' Central to the FCJs' vocation was the education and instruction of girls and young women. Like the evangelical women of the nineteenth century, their sphere of influence stretched beyond their immediate charges to those with whom they had contact and for whom they felt a duty of care; the poor and underprivileged. They also felt responsible for the guidance and training of the weak, the young and the oppressed. In 1929, the school celebrated the centenary of Catholic Emancipation, celebrations culminating in November by a 'lantern lecture on the life of the Foundress'.

There was a long-established tradition of religious Retreats at the school, for both the FCJs and the pupils. In 1921, the theme of the Retreat for the Sisters was, 'It is by union that the Society and each house will flourish'. Later, at a time when the Community was experiencing some difficulties and loss of morale, the Reverend Father conducting their annual Christmas Retreat, reminded them of the trials faced in the early days of the Society.

In 1924, the Retreat for pupils took place in October. Father Joseph Keating, S.J., who gave the Retreat, remarked to a secular visitor that he had 'never met so earnest and appreciative set of girls'. Another Retreat, given to the Community around Christmas time, concentrated on the morality of the nation. The theme was reflective of the tone of the nineteenth century evangelicals; 'man is the official head of the family, woman is the unofficial head. ... The welfare of the family depends upon the mother and the tone of a country is determined by its women. If they are good, the country will be in a sound moral condition.'

There were regular efforts made at the school on behalf of charitable organisations, thus cultivating a habit of care and service in the pupils. The Catholic Needlework Guild received garments made by

the pupils themselves, a tradition begun at Brook Street in the previous century. During the October Retreat of 1927, the pupils made garments for poor in their leisure time which they later sent to the Guild. In October 1928, the school sent seventy-eight winter garments, and in 1929, a hundred garments donated by the pupils were exhibited by the Catholic Needlework Guild, breaking the preceding year's record. Other charities regularly received donations and gifts. In 1927, Manchester Royal Infirmary's "cry for help" gained a steady response from the pupils, who received an appreciative letter of thanks from the Board of Managers for their donation of £10. The School's four Houses, Agnes, Joan, Philomena and Theresa, were agents of fund raising. In 1929, St. Theresa's House gave a dance for the benefit of the Holy Souls. House loyalty played an important part in school life but so too did membership of other groups.

Since its beginnings in the 1850s, the school had received an annual religious inspection, which took place early each January. In 1925, the pupils sang the Gregorian chant for the first time. The Reverend Examiner 'was delighted; he declared it to be sweet and beautifully rendered'. The school calendar was marked each year by a series of religious observances and traditions. In 1925, after a lapse of twenty years, the Sodality of the Children of Mary was re-established at The Hollies. The older pupils strove 'earnestly to merit public admission to the congregation'. Religious observance of the feasts of the Virgin Mary also contributed greatly to the character of the school. Members of Sodality, wearing their Children of Mary Medals and sashes performed the annual "crowning" of Queen of the May.

On 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1927, on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, medals were awarded to six Children of Mary. Benediction took place in the new chapel, formally opened by the Bishop early in the New Year. Mother Elfrida had worked every stitch of a beautiful altar frill herself. The pedestal and altar rail had been restored in keeping with the dark oak paneling of the walls. The 'strange Japanese paintings on the ceiling of the former oak room' had been removed. A statue of the Virgin Mary from the FCJ School, Dee

House in Chester, was placed in the semi-circular alcove on the right of the altar. The only colouring was a soft glow on the walls on which hung the Stations of the Cross which had been in use in The Hollies for many years. A new entrance had been provided for the Community and children by making a double doorway in the wall facing the sanctuary. A 'handsome oak-panelled gangway' had been 'thrown to St. Christopher's'. The beauty of the floor was a revelation to the Community once the grime of years had been removed. Experts declared it to be one of the finest pieces of parquetry in the North of England. The Clarestorey windows threw in a 'soft light from above and the electric lighting [was] perfect'.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception was celebrated each year, and the Community often received letters from past pupils saying how the manner of keeping the feast had left an indelible impression on their minds. One, at a teacher-training college, wrote that it was easy to distinguish girls from FCJ schools 'by their love for and anticipation of the Feast of Immaculate Conception'. At The Hollies, 8<sup>th</sup> December was kept with traditional devotion. The children prepared 'with fervour, Houses vied with each other as to which should provide the greater number of lilies for the altar'. Benediction was given at 4pm for all senior pupils and staff. In 1923, Benediction took place on the evening of the Feast and was accompanied by the school choir's first public performance. The pupils 'acquitted themselves very well'. In later years, the Old Girls, who had become very much part of the workings of the school community, joined staff and pupils at the evening ceremony.

The school usually held its annual Garden Party in early summer and, in 1923, the gardens of the two houses had 'been made to communicate'. It was possible to hold all the festivities, 'tea, games, singing, gymnastics, and Swedish dances' in the open. A display of useful articles was exhibited for sale in The Acorns. The Sisters 'thought it a fitting occasion for a display of needlework, drawing and handiwork done by the children'. Parents were 'gladdened by the discovery of hidden talents in their darlings'. After the event, the Community received 'many petitions on the part of the visitors to

make the fete an annual event'. The FCJs were reassured and pleased at the success of their first attempt at combining the pleasure of the traditional Garden Party with the more commercial enterprise of the Summer Fete. Some past pupils requested that in future events they might be allowed to help in the servings of tea, 'as they thought the work of seeing to the needs of 400 people were too fatiguing for so small a community'. By 1925, the past pupils had successfully contributed to the funds raised at the Summer Fetes and, on 7<sup>th</sup> December, the inauguration of the Old Girls' Association took place:



Plate 16: Crowning Our Lady (Judith Marcinick (Thomas

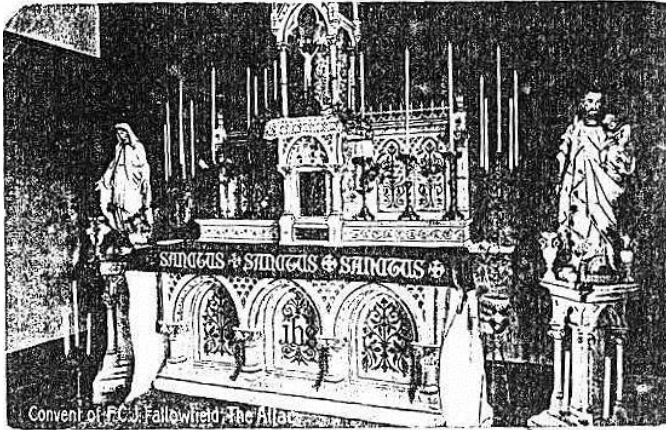


Plate 17: The Hollies' Chapel (FCJ Archives)

**THE HOLLIES  
OLD GIRLS' ASSOCIATION**

∞ RULES ∞

1. The Association shall be called *The Hollies Old Girls' Association*.
2. It shall be composed of old pupils and teachers past and present.
3. It shall be governed by the following Officers: (i) President, (ii) Vice-President, (iii) Honorary Secretary, (iv) Honorary Treasurer, and a Committee of seven ordinary members (five to form a quorum).
4. The said officers to be elected at The Annual General Meeting, and to remain in office for two years but be eligible for re-election.
5. Nominations of new officials shall be sent in writing to the Hon. Secretary fourteen days before the General Meeting.
6. The Annual Subscription shall be 3/6.
7. The Subscription for Life Members shall be £4-4-0.
8. Three weeks notice shall be given of the Annual General Meeting.
9. The aims of the Association shall be to provide and assist social intercourse among the members, to form a link between past and present pupils of the school and to help good causes and social work.
10. On the requisition of not less than six members sections may be formed among members having mutual intercourse. Sub-committees to be formed to deal with these.
11. No alteration may be made in the rules except at the General Meeting.
12. Notice of such proposed alterations shall be sent to the Hon. Sec. in writing, fourteen days before the General Meeting.
13. The Association shall hold two or three social meetings during the year.

.....

Different Sections of the H.O.G.A.

- I. **DRAMATIC SECTION**  
for particulars, apply *Hon. Sec.*
- II. **NET BALL CLUB**,  
for particulars, apply *Hon. Sec.*,  
Miss E. O'Connell, 57, Victoria Rd.,  
Victoria Park, M'c. 14.

Plate 18: Old Girls' Association Constitution (FCJ Archives)

*They were privileged to receive a beautiful letter from [the Superior General] who herself welcomed them to their Alma Mater. Such a precious recognition had been quite unexpected*



*and the girls were loud in their appreciation. After a most enjoyable evening, the members of the Association assembled in chapel to place their plans and projects for the future before the tabernacle.*

For decades to come, the members of the Old Girls' Association showed themselves devoted to the school in a variety of ways. The Constitution stated that the aims of the association 'shall be to provide and assist social intercourse among the members, to form a link between past and present pupils of the school and to help good causes and social work'. On 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1929, the annual reunion took place. About eighty members attended and 'all were delighted to find themselves in their convent school and visit the parts of The Hollies, now the school house, with which they were familiar in days when things were carried on in a more homely family way than the Board of Education permits'. The Acorns was of great interest and the chapel was a special feature in the 'changed aspect of the convent.' After tea the past pupils assisted at Benediction and 'rendered the singing very beautifully and devotionally'. The Annual General Meeting then took place in the hall.

The Old Girls also contributed to the cultural life of the school and, after the business meeting, the committee gave a 'most delightful entertainment'. Many of the past pupils were considered 'wonderfully gifted'. On this occasion, a programme that was varied and interesting kept the audience entertained for two hours. Some 'friends of the house' also performed at this event; a professional pianist, cellist and violinist provided 'delightful musical interludes'. The FCJs were pleased to hear so many of the Old Girls refer with happiness to their old mistresses. Several said 'I owe my conversion to the faith of Mother X anything good in me is due to Mother Y's training'. A spirit of loyalty and devotion to their old school was 'manifest in these old girls and the term old did apply to many who could speak of the grandchildren'.

This love for their teachers was reflected in the actions of many pupils in 1926. In that year, many pupils had difficulty attending

school as on 4<sup>th</sup> May the 'dreadful General Strike' began. It seemed to have little impact on the daily lives of those at the school other than inconvenience to transport. 'No sound of car [tram] on the King's highway but the rushing whirl and hooting of myriads of motors, the steady tramp of patient pedestrians.' Many of pupils walked long distances but some 'with all the good will in the world were not able to attend the school for a fortnight'. Affection for the school and the FCJs had been expressed in 1924 when the pupils presented Reverend Mother 'with a handsome grandfather clock for her Feastday. Its' fine oak case [matched] the oak staircase in The Acorns, whence its melodious Westminster chimes [gave] pleasant warning of the flight of time to all in that part of the extensive building.'

At the 1928 Summer Fete, as in former years, the Old Girls took an active part in the provision of articles for the children's stalls, and on the actual day 'undertook the entire duties of waitresses at the refreshments'. That year, the weather proved uncooperative and rain drove the guests into workrooms and the concert hall until the storm was over. The Fete of 1926 had been threatened with similar weather. On the evening before, Didsbury was struck by a thunderstorm. However, by the following day, the weather had cleared, the benefactors 'surpassed themselves in generosity' and the Fete was declared a great success.

The Fete of 1929 was also a success. There was a military band which 'added to the joie de vivre', several priests attended; 500 people were present, and the weather was ideal. This contrasted greatly with the weather of 1926, a year in which severe weather affected life at the school. Storms at the end of the year brought down the chimney pots 'to the consternation of those sleeping beneath it, who expected a speedy summons to eternity'. The falling pots missed the roof, but rolled some yards to the gutter 'from whence it descended upon a glass veranda smashing many panes of glass and causing expensive repairs'.

Like the Summer Fete, a further source of fostering community spirit in the school was the introduction of annual trips and visits. In July

1923, a hundred pupils went on an excursion to the FCJ house at Marple. For many, this was their first visit to Marple. In 1924, Buxton was chosen for the summer feast day celebration of the Superior General.. About eighty pupils, accompanied by their mistresses, travelled by train. The party explored the famous limestone caves ‘and examined many other curios of antiquarian fame’. After tea, they visited the flower gardens. The day was declared perfect after their arrival back home.

Following the summer holidays of 1921, the children ‘were keen to don their new uniform hats’ that replaced the earlier jockey caps that had accompanied the navy blue gymslips of earlier years. The new hats’ ‘sole decoration was our simple badge, shield-shaped with small sprays of holly, acorns, and leaves together with the motto *Orate, Laborate, Gaudete*’. The central word of that motto was to play an increasingly important role in the life of the school.



Plate 19: Velour Hat courtesy Judith Marcinick (Thomas)    Plate 20: Hollies' Badge. (Pat Harris (Mooney))



Plate 21: Win Dockney in her School Uniform, 1929. (Win Dockney (Arch))

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Grammar School**

‘Our schools are in grave danger. Parents have a right to demand religious education but their children are likely to be deprived of it through official demands which we did not foresee when we agreed to the Acts of Parliament’.

Emphasis on the academic work of The Hollies was underlined in the Inspectors’ report of 1930. In that year, Mother Mary Joseph McCorry was appointed Head of the school. She was born in Twickenham and entered the Society of the Faithful Companions at Gumley House in 1912. She had an Honours degree in Geography from London University and began her career at The Hollies in 1925. It was to Mother Mary Joseph that the Inspectors reported, ‘The tendency for an undue proportion of pupils to leave before the Certificate year, noted in the 1926 inspection, has decreased and there is now a real nucleus of Sixth Form work.’ The decrease in the number of early leavers was due, in part, to a new document of parental agreement. Despite this contract, Inspectors commented that the ‘school still serves as a Preparatory school for girls whose parents wish to send them to boarding school or to schools more distant from their homes when they are old enough for the journey’.

The Inspectors had commented on the need for better library provision for the growing Sixth Form. In 1930, they were able to report that ‘The library is a pleasant room on the ground floor, equipped with book cases and furnished for comfortable reading.’ The Sixth Form used the room for private study, while others accessed it at ‘convenient times’ to borrow books. All girls had free access to the fiction section and for specialist purposes, each mistress had charge of her particular section. Girls would apply to their subject mistress for books they wished to borrow. The Form Prefects acted as librarians, and recorded the names in a book kept for the purpose. The library collection had been started in earnest in 1928 and the Inspectors were pleased that such a ‘respectable size’ had been reached in such a short time. Girls made ‘voluntary’ library

contributions of one shilling each term but ‘the Governors apparently [made] no contribution’.

The Inspectors’ approval of progress made on behalf of the Sixth Form extended to the addition of Latin to the curriculum. However, they were concerned that Chemistry and Physics had been added to the timetable as ‘lack of equipment [made] this an unwise decision’. The newly-appointed Science Mistress was a chemistry graduate and felt able to offer these sciences in preference to Botany. Despite this note of discord, on 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1931, the FCJs received an encouraging report which concluded ‘The Inspectors were of the opinion that [further progress lay] in the hands of the staff.’ (Plate 22) The FCJs felt they were now ‘further stimulated [in] their work and prayer’.



“THE HOLLIES” CONVENT F. C. J. MANCHESTER.

c1934

*The earliest archive photograph showing the lay staff*

Plate 22: Teaching Staff and pupils, 1933 (Judith Marcinick (Thomas))

The curriculum was steadily advanced and new ways of sharing the successes of the pupils were promoted. In July 1934, the school gave an exhibition of art and needlework. A large number of visitors saw and congratulated the work done. 'One gentleman, a managing director of a large business firm, wrote a most complimentary letter on the value of the work.' The exhibition of art and needlework drew a greater number of visitors each year, and that of 1935 was declared 'particularly praiseworthy'. Each year, submissions from the pupils 'increased in quality and quantity.' By the end of the 1930s, the exhibition had grown to include needlework, art, and handicrafts. The 'New Art in all its stages was aptly illustrated along with the children's own books which were all on show proving the mounted exhibits to be *bona fide*'.

Art and crafts were among the many curricular activities which took the school community out into wider society; singing was another. In May 1930, the school received notice of a plainsong competition for children to be held at Sedgley. Though the school had short notice of the event, they entered. A 'modest little band of choristers set forth accompanied by two Mothers. To the school's surprise and delight, the following morning the FCJs received a telephone call announcing that they had obtained second place and received the beautiful silver medal award.' More success was on its way, for in March 1932, 'The junior children received the shield awarded for plain chant singing in the competition held at Sedgley.' Elocution was added to the activities put forward in competition and, in 1939, the school was able to announce 'success in the plain chant and elocution competitions'.

It was customary at The Hollies to present entertainments each December, based on work done through the year; these often took the form of recitals or excerpts from plays. In 1934, the pupils presented their entertainments usual. In the weeks prior to this, 'the fluttering of angels' wings was a common occurrence at our recreation. A day's holiday, given by the wish of His Majesty the King on the occasion of the Royal Wedding, proved most opportune for the plying of needles on white muslin and silver braid.' The reason for

the activity was the choice of play given by the Seniors, *The Lace Makers of Bruges*. The performance was repeated in January 1935, at an evening performance to the Women's Sodality group in the Holy Name Hall. 'The last touching tableau met with the heart-felt applause and the tiny boy who occupied the cradle received a deluge of affectionate praise.' At Prize Day, 1935, the Seniors performed *Little Glass Houses* a sketch of the early nineteenth century. The acting of this play 'received unstinting praise from members of [the] audience best qualified to judge it'; those past pupils from the days of the Brook Street school.

Progress in the dramatic arts followed a drama lecture given on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, 1936, by Roy Newlands. He sketched the history of drama from its 'cradle days to its full grown beauty on our modern stage'. His lecture was illustrated with scenes from various plays and the presentation of costumes, whose gorgeous colouring 'could not fail to catch the eyes of the most exacting artists'. The pupils were very impressed by this lecture and gained excellent knowledge that was later represented in their work.

1937 saw a performance of *The Duke of Christmas Daisies* by the Juniors. The Seniors, 'amongst whom were a number of gifted with very good voices', performed the operetta *Princess Zurika*. There were many comments from the audience on the performances and 'all were loud in praise of the children's entire naturalness and unusually good diction'. By the end of the 1930s, drama at The Hollies had evolved beyond Prize Day presentations. Productions were staged in their own scheduled slots on the school calendar. *The Immortal Lady* was scheduled for February 1939. The manager of the Repertoire Theatre lent the scenery and sent men to help erect it. The play was, reportedly, 'exceedingly well done'. One of the school's Inspectors was present at a performance and complimented the Senior English Mistress, saying that the performance was 'the most finished one she had ever attended in any secondary school'.

Prize Day had been an annual event from the early Brook Street days. It had been given a sense of gravity with the introduction of the Head's Report to the school. During the 1930s, it was to be



advanced even further. The early 1930s were marked by the usual format. There was emphasis on presentations of work done during the year, with recitals, plays and singing. In December 1931 the hall was filled with parents and friends who 'came to be present at the singing and recital of various items of the term's work'. Certificates were distributed for Religious Knowledge, Matriculation and School Certificates; Mother Superior awarded the prizes. The custom of prizes and certificates distributed by a notable cleric was revived when, in 1937, the Bishop spoke at length after the distribution of prizes. At the end of the performances 'he complimented them especially on their elocution'. In 1935 a major change took place in the ceremony. A large number of local clergy and parents of children were present in the 'well filled hall.' When the curtain rose on 12<sup>th</sup> December:

*A thrill of surprise ran through the audience as the whole school was revealed grouped on the stage. The children were ranged in tiers, everyone wearing the special uniform [gold] concert frock sufficiently elegant while emphasising the modesty and unwordliness that is, thank God, characteristic of all the children of our houses.*

The Bishop caused great mirth among those present on the stage, when he described the scene as 'a host of golden daffodils'.

This arrangement was to feature in all subsequent Speech Days, though the format was to change to accommodate the growth in numbers of pupils. The architect of the amazing event was the new Headmistress, Mother Theodore Gregson, familiarly known as 'Annie'. Mother Theodore was born in Newcastle, gained a B.A. in French at London, and arrived at The Hollies in 1932. She was appointed Head in 1935 and was to shepherd the school through the increasingly uneasy years until the outbreak of the Second World War.

As the numbers of pupils on the Prize Day stage grew, so did the pressure on the school's accommodation. At Prize Day 1938, the Reverend Canon Rowntree, the Chairman of Governors read the

Head's report and announced the plans for new building extensions. Criticism of the sanitary arrangements and crowded classrooms in the Inspection Report of 1930 had prompted the FCJs then to make concerted efforts to improve facilities at the school. In 1930, permission was given for more than 50% of free places to be awarded at the school. This led to an increase in numbers and larger classes. There were 206 children on roll, including thirteen boys.

During the summer holidays of 1930, workmen transformed what was 'once an unsightly den of darkness, the so-called laundry at The Acorns, into fine white-tiled airy apartments now known as "The White House."' This boasts a white terrazzo floor white wash basins and all appliances of the newest type. ... A correctly-equipped cloakroom has been supplied for the little boys.'

The old lunchroom was improved and rose to 'the dignity of dining room'. The pupils were enthusiastic in their appreciation of the improvements to the buildings and the newly provided furniture. Their appreciation took the form of extra efforts at fund raising 'to help defray the expenses entailed'. Single box-desks were provided for the babies in the Preparatory school, and proved 'an unfailing source of delight to them. Many have conducted their parents to the classroom to see these wonderful treasure stores.'

In 1932, five of the classrooms were repainted but, by 1934, the crowded state of the classrooms necessitated the making of two classrooms into three. The walls of the room used as a staff room were 'extended to accommodate one of these classes. Twelve secular mistresses were moved to a room formerly known as the Old Sacristy. In the same year, finances were stretched yet again as during the night of 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 'strange sounds as of the falling of feet disturbed the stillness of Oak Drive'. In the morning the FCJs discovered that many bricks, not feet, had fallen, creating a gap 'of some sixteen or twenty feet' (five or six metres) in the boundary wall and exposing the garden to view from the main road. The wall had been unsafe for some time and the FCJs were grateful that the fall took place at night so that nobody was hurt.

In 1934, along with restoration and renovations of the chapel and its altar, the hall was 'artistically decorated'. During the autumn term, a new drop curtain, replaced the 'red velvet veteran'. During 1936, painters and decorators were once again at work in the holidays in The Hollies making the classrooms 'really beautiful'. They were followed by 'a liberal supply of elbow grease, [which] gave lustre to floors and desks'.

Increasing pressure to fulfil the requirements of the Board of Education intensified the constant struggle against financial pressure. The Hollies' Garden Party, though it still bore the name, had evolved into a summer fete. In 1930, the Garden Party took place at a later date than usual; neighbouring schools had booked up all other available days 'for similar moneymaking devices'. Many of these rival fetes were fortunate enough to secure fine weather. The torrential rains which preceded the Hollies' Fete of 19<sup>th</sup> July ceased in time to allow visitors to arrive in sunshine. The Old Girls' Dramatic Society was at its best and delighted the large audience that flocked to the hall. Other amusements followed and the FCJs were grateful to find that the financial success of the undertaking exceeded that of preceding years. By 1931, the FCJs observed that the Garden Party had become 'quite an annual institution'. The FCJs believed themselves able to coach anyone 'entering into a similar enterprise for the first time'. The event of that year was augmented with musicians and musical instruments, games of skill and chance, silverware for the table, and articles for the lotteries; all provided by 'kind friends'. The pupils provided most of the refreshments. A 'fabulous sum was raised ... [They] made £100 net, not quite enough to keep the wolf howling for his taxes from [the] door.'

In the following years, the date of the fete moved according to the arrangements agreed with other schools; the weather was unpredictable, but the efforts of all involved were often well-rewarded. The fathers of some pupils devoted their energies to making the Garden Party of 1933 a complete success. They formed a Parents Committee (a misnomer as it was only for fathers). This committee went on to support the school in a number of ways, the

most important being fund-raising. In 1934, the Garden Party was fixed for 2<sup>nd</sup> June, a much earlier date than usual; instead of being the last in the programme of Salfordian activities, it became the first. That year, stalls were arranged in the hall and classrooms were converted into cafes for the visitors, who were waited on by the Old Girls. One corner of the garden housed a roundabout, 'Not of course of the type associated with a country fair, but an entirely refined gentle array of thoroughbreds prancing noiselessly from gilded poles. The plentiful pennies amassed by the conductor were however of the ordinary common coin and quite useful for paying such vulgar things as rates and taxes.'

Lady Donner, by now quite aged, visited the hall 'causing a momentary flutter among the stallholders'. Her Ladyship purchased 'several useful articles to be used for charitable purposes'. In 1937, the fete took place in early June. There were outdoor games of many kinds which 'whetted appetites for tea, strawberries, creams, and ices. Many friends departed with light hearts and lighter pockets.'

The Garden Party of 1938 was declared the best yet, socially, numerically, and financially. It was much earlier than usual and coincided with a visit from King George VI and Queen Elizabeth to Manchester on 25<sup>th</sup> May; a 'red letter day for Manchester'. For weeks prior to the visit, the streets were 'gay with flags and coloured bunting. The children were to celebrate the visit by a whole [day's] holiday.' It rained for the Royal visit, and did so again for The Hollies' Garden Party, which was followed, that year, by the 'great Historical Pageant' marking the centenary of Manchester's borough status, (though Manchester was not formally constituted a city until 1853). The Catholic episode of the pageant involved the pupils and mistresses. There were weeks and months of practice and long hours in the evenings, making homework impossible. Examination pupils were not allowed to take part. The pupils chosen to take part often stayed at school until 6.30pm and then 'sallied forth with their secular mistresses to Platt Fields, usually in rain or hail'. The Pageant took place after Whit Week, during which there had been the usual Whit Walks, a Manchester tradition stretching back to 1801.

Central Manchester sometimes had to be sealed off to allow ‘up to 20,000 scholars to walk behind dozens of bands’. Pride in their faith prompted Anglicans and Roman Catholics to choose different days for their processions.

The 1930 Inspection commented on the happy atmosphere in the school ‘which is undoubtedly the outcome of co-operation between staff and pupils’. Staff and pupils shared a common sense of purpose that was manifest in all they did. But success depended also on co-operation between school and parents. At Speech Day in 1931, Monseignor Gonne praised the work of the FCJs and indicated the source of the school’s character. He told parents that he owed his early education to the FCJs for whom he had an immense esteem. He urged parents to co-operate with the nuns in their efforts to promote the welfare of their girls.

In addressing the children he spoke of the necessity for hard work and application to study, adding that attaining success in any objective in life was not only for ‘the genius’ but also for ‘the dogged’. A speaker at the 1935 Prize Day said that it had been remarked to him by a non-Catholic Inspector, ‘that this school, The Hollies, was marked by its air of refinement’. He had also been told, by more than one priest, that the children were ‘distinguished by their air of piety’. He called on all the pupils to maintain ‘these two splendid characteristics and to pass them on to future generations’. These then were the traits that marked the school’s ethos. At a Retreat he gave for pupils in 1934, Monseignor Gonne again addressed the senior girls. He gave a discourse on their duties as Catholic girls, pointing out that they were ‘especially chosen from among hundreds to be pupils at The Hollies’. There they received a convent training’ and, in consequence, more would be expected of them when out in the world. They must always endeavour to ‘prove themselves Mary’s children’.

Prize Day was often the time when visiting dignitaries voiced opinions on the nature of the school community. On one occasion, the Bishop of Salford remarked that he had never seen so much good stuff packed into such small space. He reminded the pupils how

much they owed to the FCJs for their lives of sacrifice spent in working for them, and congratulated the nuns on being able to exercise their love of God by working for such a splendid set of girls. The Right Reverend Monsignor Marshall, in his opening address at the school's Garden Party had affirmed his great regard for nuns as teachers. He warned that the thing lacking in the modern world was the spirit of sacrifice. Religious communities could best combat the spirit of selfishness for the FCJs were 'living examples of self-denial'.

It was through the organisation into forms and Houses that the FCJs cultivated a spirit of self-denial and care for others in their pupils. The pupils responded to the many calls 'that train ... Catholic children to habits of sacrifice', each month throughout the school year; St. Joseph's Penny, The Holy Souls, the Catholic Needlework Guild, and the hospitals. In November 1930, at break time, the House Captains 'arrived with collection boxes and pitched themselves against the vendors of sweets'. The struggle between 'nature and grace' was a hard one for the girls but self-denial was often victorious. They were also able to contribute over a hundred garments in the same month to the Catholic Needlework Guild. The Houses vied with each other to raise the most for charity 'by little social activities during the year'. In 1930, one form organised a school dance; another gave a concert. All pupils joined a competition in which "ladders" marked the contribution by each House. By the end of a month they were able to contribute £20 and 10 shillings to St Joseph's Penny; this charity was the Children's Rescue Society in Manchester, and was a special favourite of the pupils. So too was the Apostleship of the Sea, which began in 1929. The Hollies' girls sent newspapers, magazines and letters to the crew of one of Her Majesty's ships. The captain of the ship sent four large boxes of raisins from Chile; one for each House in the school.

In 1933, with Britain in recession, Manchester's suburban streets were filled with a new kind of peddler; the door-to-door salesman, seeking a way to earn a crust as unemployment soared. One worker in three was unemployed in the north-west and the cotton industry

was beset with problems as prices had fallen to their lowest since the cotton famine of 1861. Strikes over falling wages heightened the threat from competitive Japanese production. 'In spite of the difficulties', The Hollies' contributions to St. Joseph's Penny and the Catholic Needlework Guild continued and did not suffer. Not content with the funds raised by the social efforts of the school, pupils also made 'generous personal offerings to the Holy Souls'. The girls continued their fund-raising throughout the difficult recession years. Each year, new charities and different fund-raising activities were added to their list. The pupils were 'ingenious in buying and selling' and, at various penny bazaars, 'some of the small stallholders declared their goods sold out in minutes'. The FCJs believed themselves fortunate in the generous response of the pupils to the many charitable appeals. They also had 'reason to be grateful for the excellent spirit of the children'.

A priest giving instruction at a Retreat for the FCJs commented on the importance of religious teaching to the formation and maintenance of this spirit. A Jesuit, addressing the Speech Day audience, remarked on the large number of Religious Knowledge certificates he had just distributed. He observed that 'all the schools in the charge of the FCJs were remarkable for proficiency in religious training'. This religious training took many forms at The Hollies. The Religious Inspection Report of 1930 recorded that the children had an excellent knowledge of Christian doctrine, their knowledge of the Catechism was good, and their plainsong was 'most praiseworthy; an excellent school'. In March 1931, the Reverend Father of St. Bede's College gave a Retreat for the senior girls. They made private visits to the chapel or walked in the garden and the FCJs were pleased to see how fervently the pupils followed the exercises of the Retreat.

A visit to Chester was organised for Ascension Day 1933 for many of the senior girls. Canon Knuckey took the Retreat of 1934 and, in spite of long journeys to be taken by bus or tram, large numbers were present at Mass at 9 am each morning. At the end of January 1937, the school community joined the universal grief of the nation at the

death of King George V and on the day of the funeral, there was Exposition in the chapel during the morning and afternoon. Some of the older girls were given permission to follow the funeral service ‘by wireless’.



1933 Plate 23: Trip to Chester, Ascension Day, Plate 24: Miss Gill (Mary Potterfield (Bridge))

Solid Christian virtues were the theme of a three-day Retreat in 1936; virtues that would enable the girls to take their place in the world as the Foundress would have wished them, ‘as valiant Christian women’. The girls were lectured repeatedly on the ‘world-wrecking’ spirit of today; the spirit of selfishness’. The message of the three days was ‘A selfish girl is a calamity; a selfish woman is a



monstrosity.’ Monsignor Gonne, a Governor at the school, had regularly provided the annual Retreat for the Old Girls' Association. When he died in 1938, the convents of England lost a ‘devoted and loyal friend’, especially The Hollies who had a special debt of gratitude. He was always on hand with his talents and his ‘genial friendliness, [was] always at our service’.

In the same year, a lecture was given to the senior girls of the school who were present at a meeting of the Old Girls' Association. The lecture followed the tenets that Monseignor Gonne had regularly emphasised; social virtues within religion. The girls were reminded that the mark of a lady was in politeness. They were warned that though they might find this relatively easy within the protective confines of the school, within six months of leaving, they would ‘be sneered at because you practice your religion. Resolve now to stick to your principles.’ Speaking to the Old Girls, the Retreat-giver urged the past pupils to carry the atmosphere of Christian service ‘into their homes, the office, the schoolroom, wherever duty called them’. The FCJs praised this spirit of service in their old girls, who ‘year in year out’, helped at the Garden Party and many other events; they were quite often to be found behind the scenes, an action which called for real self-sacrifice.

At the May Devotions of 1937, each form was represented by a candle in the chapel. The candles were decorated by a shield bearing the names of all children of the form, and were lit by the Prefect every day. Before the end of the month R.I.P. was written after the names of two girls; one in Form V, the other in Form VI. The first death was from “flu” with complications. The FCJs had no idea the illness was so serious and the announcement on Whit Sunday was a great shock. The elder girl was a most promising pupil and had just been accepted as a student at Sedgley Training College. As House Captain, she had ‘won the esteem and affection of mistresses and children’. Her attendance was always regular so she was ‘grieved early in [the] year to hear that she had anaemia and later that her heart was very weak. This dear child Jeanne gradually faded and

died on 19<sup>th</sup> May.’ The younger pupil was buried the same morning. The pupils at The Hollies were deeply affected by the deaths.

The religious life of the school was not always so sombre. In 1937, the school attended a Mass at Salford Cathedral to celebrate the Coronation of George VI and Queen Elizabeth. The whole school was bussed, the girls in full uniform, to Manchester’s neighbouring city, where the Cathedral was full to overflowing. A very appropriate sermon was preached on the Coronation dedication of the King to the ‘service of his people’. The sermon emphasised that the monarch’s life was ‘essentially one of service as all our lives must be’. Back at The Hollies, the girls were allowed to decorate their form rooms. Prizes were given for the most artistic results. On the day of the Coronation, the school community was able to follow the procession ‘on the wireless, along the entire route, hearing every sound even to the neighing of the Windsor Greys as they reached Buckingham Palace’.

Each year, the school’s Christmas festivities were also a source of great gaiety. In 1933, parties were staged in the brightly decorated hall. A large Christmas tree was placed in the centre of the stage, and after tea ‘A real live Santa Claus presented each child with a suitable gift.’ The parents of some of the pupils provided the tree, and much merriment was caused in 1935 by a debate concerning its storage. The place chosen had to be free from damp and heat and from the ‘depredations of Kerry our dog or still worse, our cats, and above all secure from the eyes of the “gentlemen” who call at our back door for refreshments and from those of the children themselves.’ A place was found and, on 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> December, the tree was to be seen ‘presiding over the revels of the happy children’. It then moved on to the Bishop’s Rescue House at Didsbury.

Christmas parties drew attention to the need for more space at The Hollies. As early as 1934, they had to take place on two consecutive days, as there was not enough room to cater for all who attended on one day. The FCJs had noticed the boom in building that was taking place all around the school. In 1931, ‘The shortest excursion abroad on business or pleasure reveals the rapid erection of houses and still

more houses on land that was until quite recently “fallow fields”.’ New churches were being built, so too were new central and secondary schools. In September of that year, the school welcomed many new children, ‘so many indeed that the housing problem became and is still a very difficult one. Time seems to be a factor likely to increase the difficulty.’ By 1935, there were 246 on roll, including twenty-eight free places.

Building plans, to which the Bishop referred at Prize Day 1938, comprised further reorganisation of accommodation at the school and convent. On 6<sup>th</sup> November, Reverend Mother received the key of a new house, formerly known as “The Club”. It bore the title “Oak Bank” on its gates and was to be known thereafter as Oak Bank House. A high wall separated the grounds from those of The Acorns; the side of the house ran parallel to the main road. The FCJs visited the new property later in the year. The garden was neglected, with strawberry runners competing with weeds. There was a summer house on the lawn and two garages at the back of the house. The house itself was in a ‘moderate state of repair’ and contained many large rooms; on the second floor three of the rooms had been converted into a billiard room. The property presented the FCJs with ‘all kinds of possibilities’.

The FCJs had always been responsive to the changing needs of the modern school. Four headmistresses served the school between 1922 and 1939. Mother Elfrida Bretherton was ‘Superior and Mistress of the School from 1922-1928’, a period of transition, when the school was housed partly in The Hollies and partly in The Acorns. She had obtained the permission for the connecting corridor (St. Christopher’s) to be built, the lawns converted to an asphalt playground and other structural improvements. Before restoration, the formerly dilapidated and unpromising Acorns ‘could not be imagined by later residents of The Hollies’. Mother Elfrida died on the Feast of Transfiguration, 1938.

In 1925, Mother Mary Joseph McCorry arrived at The Hollies. It appears she took over the duties of Headmistress from Mother Elfrida before her formal appointment to the post in 1930. She

served as Head until 1935, when Mother Theodore Gregson was appointed. The Governors' minutes for that year also recorded that 'Miss Dundon's appointment [as a mistress at the school] was confirmed.' Mother Monica Dundon was born in Limerick; an honours graduate, she became Headmistress of The Hollies in 1939.

From 1930 to 1940, the FCJs encountered yet more financial battles. There was a 10% cut in the LEA's capitation grant in 1933; three years passed before this was restored. In 1935, Cheshire Education Committee wrote that it was not willing to accede to the school's request for capitation grants. Since 1920, when the school received grant-earning status, the FCJs had to apply to the LEA for increases in fees. In 1926, the Board of Education awarded a grant of £16 per pupil 'post matriculation'. The Sixth Form became increasingly important to the economic viability of the school. Efforts were made to encourage parents to keep their daughters at the school up to and beyond the matriculation years. In 1937, the school introduced a commercial course to the fourth years. In 1939, the school received permission to admit pupils in groups of not more than twenty on the tutorial system. 'This was a great consolation and surely the forerunner of better things to come.'

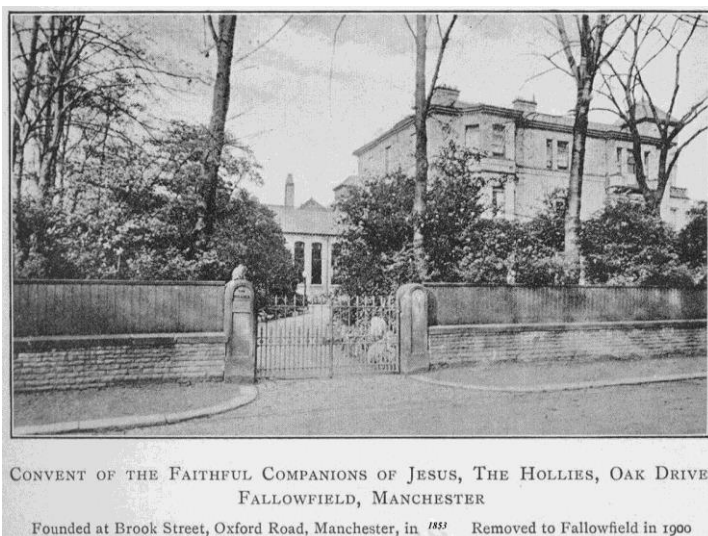


Plate 25: The Hollies, Oak Drive (FCJ Archives, Broadstairs)

The tutorial system was advocated by the Spens Report of 1938 and underlined The Hollies' status as a grammar school. On 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1939, two Education Inspectors visited The Hollies and The Acorns and, 'having weighed in the balance buildings, pupils and mistresses, they found the result satisfactory'. Five days later, the school received recognition as a grant-earning secondary (grammar) school. A new science room was built on the site of a former stable; two dormitories in The Hollies became part of the secondary school buildings and their previous occupants were moved into The Acorns.

The school had advertised "Visiting Professors" from the early years at The Hollies and these now became a permanent feature of the curriculum. In October 1938, a new College of Social Studies opened in Manchester. Lectures were given in the Holy Name School. When the Professor scheduled to give the History course that month was incapacitated, one of the Hollies' secular mistresses was asked to step in and give the course.

In 1938, Cadbury's Cocoa sent two representatives to present a film on the work of the firm. The pupils found the 'most wonderful part was that depicting a days' work in the factory, beginning with the

5000 letters' that had to be dealt with each morning, and showing the marvellous output of machine-wrapped chocolate'. In addition to these in-house lectures, excursions from the school were arranged to enrich the curriculum. As early as 1930, a chartered bus took thirty-three pupils with their secular mistresses to the Historical Pageant at Salford. After the ordeal of public exams in 1935, the older girls went by special bus to the old towns of Prestbury and Knutsford. They visited the ruins of two pre-Reformation churches, gaining knowledge of early English architecture. They took a long walk to a 'picturesque lake from which they returned with a wonderful supply of botanical specimens.' The curriculum was broadened further and, in 1939, for the first time, many pupils sat for the Drawing examination of the National Society of Art Masters. The results were very satisfying, as seventy-two girls achieved "Honours" or "First Class" in the subject taken. In the same year, one pupil obtained first place in an open competition for a scholarship to Greggs' Commercial School.

Despite these efforts to expand the numbers in the Sixth Form, the FCJs struggled against the financial discrimination faced by the many Catholic schools in the country. New ideas about the size of schools, and Sixth Forms in particular, had reached the LEAs who were pressing for 'economically efficient' large schools. *The Catholic News Pictorial* of 1939 reported Archbishop Amigo's view of the problems:

*Our schools are in grave danger. Parents have a right to demand religious education but their children are likely to be deprived of it through official demands which we did not foresee when we agreed to the Acts of Parliament. LEAs are generally friendly but the costs of the newest reorganisation are exceedingly heavy. The numbers demanded [by LEAs] for each school are so great that they would have to be drawn from extensive areas. Catholic children would have to travel long distances.*

The Hollies was already drawing pupils from a wide catchment. In 1939, Stockport agreed to pay a proportion of the fees for Stockport scholarship candidates.

The grave danger to which the Archbishop of Southwark alluded in the Catholic press was placed in perspective with the increasing threat from

abroad and the inevitable outbreak of the Second World War. Struggles against financial problems, recalcitrant pupils, and even the prejudices of a 'Protestant city' became secondary considerations. The word "evacuation" 'took its place in common speech as the first batch of papers announcing it arrived'. The grammar school was "at war".

Plate 26: Aerial View, The Hollies site, Oak Drive (FCJ Archives)

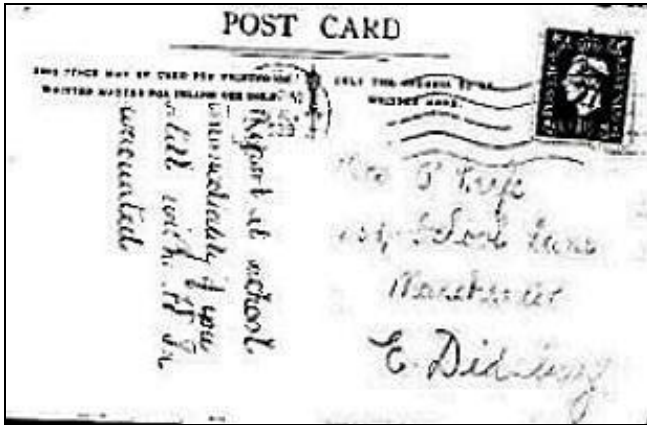




## Chapter 5

### A Grammar School at War

‘When the odds seem so great and we feel so powerless, Her Reverences’ words of encouragement come to our aid.’



**Plate 27: Postcard announcing the Evacuation, 1939 (Sheila Thorn (O’Keefe)**

During the summer holidays of 1939, the FCJs received a call to return to The Hollies. A wire came from the Director of Education saying ‘return at once and recall the staff’. One member of staff was ‘extricated from the lovely Arran Isles, where war seemed to find no entrance’. School was reopened three days early, according to government instruction. ‘Every day brought fresh piles of circulars’ to the school. On Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> August came the message ‘evacuate on Saturday according to the April circular’. Parents who did not wish to evacuate their children were asked to keep them at home. The remainder, less than 50%, arrived for further instructions.

The Community’s Annals contain a vivid description of the evacuation process, which seemed to have made a deep impression on the FCJs and lay-mistresses.

*One cannot depict the varying scenes up to the moment of departure, the children were quiet, resigned and most anxious to make things easy for all concerned. They assembled at 7.30 am*

*on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> September, and at 7.50 am three buses arrived; two sufficed for our numbers. ... Not until we reached the little station of Clitheroe, the train's first stop, did the children know of their destination. We will not linger over the scenes between the arrival of the train and the final billeting of the children; the march from the station to the school house when we were a spectacle certainly for the men, the choosing of the children by the people, the acceptance of some and the rejection of others. It could not fail to awaken in our minds the stories we had heard of the slave market. At the end of about three hours, every child had a home."*

Echoes of the disquiet felt by the Community were revealed decades later, as historians interviewed those who had taken part in the mass-evacuation from Britain's cities. Selection had been made according to rudimentary principles; billeting officers simply lined the children up against a wall or on a stage in the village hall, and invited potential hosts to take their pick. The phrase 'I'll take that one' became etched on the memory of many evacuees, though a past pupil evacuated to Clitheroe recalls no such experience.

The Royal Grammar School (RGS) had been allocated to The Hollies, and the FCJs made arrangements with the Headmistress. Her kindness throughout this trying time was a source of great comfort to the staff and pupils. The Hollies' pupils had the school to themselves for the first ten days. When the RGS reopened to its own pupils, the Hollies Community 'longed for the peace of its happy Hollies home'. The grammar school girls still continued to attend, as Hollies' numbers did not necessitate their absence; only a corridor separated the boy's grammar school. The RGS was a Catholic foundation under Philip and Mary, but for many hundreds of years Catholic children had ceased to 'pace its corridors' until the arrival of the Hollies' pupils. The Headmistress of the school was convent-educated and 'thanked God when she heard that a convent school was coming to share hers'. She said the thought of any other school was a nightmare to her.

The Hollies' girls found the sports facilities at Clitheroe far superior to those they had left behind in Manchester. There they had made best use of the playgrounds but had to use the facilities of Platt Fields for tennis and the local baths for swimming. During the morning at Clitheroe, they had the use of the school's playing fields, spacious land at the foot of beautiful Pendle Hill. Here they played their first game of hockey. The RGS lent everything and The Hollies received no bills.

*The Daily Mail* reported the progress of the national evacuation plans:

**Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 1939**

### **Evacuation plans going smoothly**

*Great progress has been made with the first part of the Government's evacuation arrangements in England, says a statement issued by the Minister of Health. The statement goes on: "The railways, road transport organisations, local authorities and teachers, and the voluntary workers in the reception areas are all playing their part splendidly. Evacuation will continue. The time that it will take to complete will vary in different areas. Evacuation of school children will continue in areas where it is not already completed".*

For a while the numbers of Hollies' pupils at RGS increased but soon there was a steady return home. There were no raids and this phony war gave the staff hope of an early peace. The final move towards home came when the Manchester Hollies opened its doors for tutorial classes for the non-evacuees. On 25<sup>th</sup> November, at a meeting of the school's Board of Governors, the Chairman, Canon Rowntree, had raised the topic of evacuation. The school Governors were keen to make arrangements for the non-evacuees. The Board of Education Circular No. 1438 gave details of the arrangements that were to be made and the necessary conditions that would have to be fulfilled.

The new house of Oak Bank, purchased early in 1939, was, by November, quite empty; its furniture removed. Nine nuns had been left behind during the evacuation to look after the houses. Blackout curtains had to be made or adapted for every window. Trunks were packed in case the house needed to be closed up, and cupboards were emptied. The ‘hoarded relics of years [were] brought to light and usually to destruction’. The chapel was emptied and removed to the parlour in The Acorns. In purchasing Oak Bank, the Community saw the ‘providence of God; its spacious cellars gave promise of magnificent air-raid shelters’. FCJs scrubbed the floors and whitewashed the walls, electricians and masons came. Eventually, the shelters were certified to hold 300 children. The school was thankful to have the building on its own premises. On Holy Saturday, 1940, the school’s Chaplain made use of ‘the splendid air-raid shelter afforded by the cellars of Oak Bank’. By then, instead of one hole in the wall it had two; the pupils leaving their ‘classrooms arrived in the shelter in the space of two minutes’. This appears to have been a practice drill, for the FCJs’ Annals make no mention of a raid. However, news of the terrible raids on London and Liverpool reached them and they ‘sympathised deeply with ... [their] dear Mothers and Sisters of Somers Town and Gumley’.

The Annals provide a graphic account of the first Manchester Blitz in December 1940. School closed on 19<sup>th</sup> December, and the FCJs were to:

*... experience the wonderful protection of God in Manchester’s hour of peril. The dreaded sound of enemy planes and heavy booming of anti-aircraft guns began at 6.30 pm on 22<sup>nd</sup> December, and lasted until 6.30 am on the following morning. [They] gathered in the shelter in The Acorns and prayed unceasingly. Several times severe shocks and the rattling of glass made [them] aware of [their] danger, especially when a land mine fell in the grounds of the grammar school quite near [them].*

Inspection the following day revealed ‘The windows in the parlours, refectory, children’s lunchrooms, the hall and many classrooms were out; [but] not the smallest injury had happened to the chapel.’ There was dust everywhere; the altar had to be stripped and the building thoroughly cleaned before it was ready for Mass. That morning the Community had two Masses to ‘thank God for [their] wonderful preservation’. The celebrant at the second Mass brought the news that St. Augustine’s had been hit by a landmine and the church, presbytery, and schools demolished. One of the curates had been killed, and only one of the four priests had escaped without injury. This had happened at 5 am when the raid was thought to be ending. The clergy had spent the night visiting the shelters and homes of the people of their parish. Earlier in the year, The Hollies had received a visit from the curate of St. Augustine’s. He and thirteen muddy-booted boys arrived in chapel during Holy Week. The nuns made ‘hasty preparations’ and provided ‘a steaming can of tea accompanied by bread and jam’ for the party. The FCJs had no thought then that this would be the last of such journeys, for the curate had met with instant death during the Blitz of 22<sup>nd</sup> December. The following evening there was another attack, a little less severe than the first and shorter. L. S. Lowry, official War Artist in Manchester, recorded the bombed site at Granby Row in his work *St. Augustine’s Church, Manchester*. (Plate 28)



Plate 29: Christmas Blitz, Oak Drive (Manchester Local Studies Unit)

Plate 28: L.S. Lowry St Augustine's Church, Manchester, 1945, (Manchester City Galleries)

The Blitz of Christmas 1940 necessitated another try at evacuation. It was announced more publicly this time that all schools would re-open on 28<sup>th</sup> December to enrol evacuees. The school complied with the order and twenty-two pupils registered, many of necessity because their homes had been destroyed, a few because of convenience to parents, but 'none because of fear'. This time the reception area was Bollington, south of Manchester. Here The Hollies joined the Notre Dame nuns who had five evacuee pupils. Notre Dame's country house was the school so the pupils were billeted in the village. By 6<sup>th</sup> January, lessons were in full swing.

Pupils were placed in the charge of two secular mistresses, one from each school. Again, one by one, the pupils returned to their school in Manchester. By Easter this evacuation attempt followed in the wake of the first and died a natural death.

The Hollies went on as usual at home in Manchester. The numbers attending were very good and, though some of the pupils suffered material damage, not one of them or their families suffered personal loss or serious injury. The school heard, with regret, that a pupil who had left in July to train at Sedgley College lost both her parents. In keeping with the tenets of the Foundress, special exertions were made on behalf of others who were suffering in the war. In answer to an appeal made by the *Sword and Spirit*, for the distress of Londoners, pupils sent knitted blankets. Some of these made their way to the East End and were acknowledged by a letter from one of the FCJ Mothers. The Catholic Needlework Guild received 248 garments, together with a donation of two guineas. A priest recalled that the Hollies' contributions received special mention, on account of the quality and finish of the garments. In 1942, calls for further aid were received from Manchester's 'great Catholic cause; the rescue society, commonly known as "St. Joseph's Penny".' Pupils organised plays, sales, and 'lucky dips' were the order of the day. The target sum was £50, double that of former years. The required sum was soon reached.

This fund-raising was scarcely over when the school's labour was directed into another channel and attention focussed on another charity. This time pupils were called to help the Catholic Chaplain to the Navy, to help fund the building of a home for the sailors and merchant seamen who arrived at Manchester and Salford docks. It was estimated that 75% of the men had no shelter 'but the streets' and were victims of the surroundings in which they found themselves. The Bishop of Salford, had appointed a Chaplain who was also to take on the work of fund raising. His first visit to the Hollies' classrooms 'elicited full sympathy from the children and they were ready to give their last penny to help their brave sailors'. The priest was much impressed when he visited the Juniors. He spoke to them about sailors and pennies and homes and, as he did, he

noticed all hands slip into their pockets. A little boy took the Chaplain's sea captain's cap and went round the class. A spontaneous collection followed; of biscuit pennies, milk pennies, and bus pennies. At the end of the year The Hollies sent £120 to the Chaplain, who purchased a house at 57 Howard Street, Salford, in 1943, which he hoped to have ready for the men 'in a short space of time'

Early in the first term of 1944, the Chaplain invited the pupils to visit his newly purchased sailors' home to which, by then, they had contributed over £350. The girls visited in groups, each accompanied by its mistresses. The Chaplain confided in the girls that he wanted an antependium for the chapel and he absolutely refused to receive it from any other school; it was to be their special gift. 'Flattered and unsuspecting the girls fell into the trap, with but faint idea of what an antependium might be.' They returned to school and set about raising the sum of £100. 'After many years at Howard Street, [the home] moved to purpose-built premises in Oldfield Road, Salford, and only closed when the Port of Manchester ceased to be based at the docks in Salford.'

Other efforts were made for the seamen serving in the dangerous wartime oceans. The ship to which the girls had sent parcels for many years had failed to return. In 1945, the secretary of the Apostleship of the Sea handed over to the school's 'care and the protection of prayers, the battleship *HMS Zealous*.' The ship was built by Cammell Laird at Birkenhead, launched February 28th 1944, and commissioned on October 9th 1944. The *Zealous* was an Emergency Class Z destroyer, with accommodation for 245 ratings. She served in Norwegian Waters and her Commander, R.F. Jessel, DSO & Bar, was "Mentioned in Despatches" for services carried out while minelaying during "Operation Spellbinder".

The girls communicated with the senior Catholic officer, who very soon wrote a letter saying:

*My dear girls, I am a Manchester man and proud of it but prouder still that a Manchester school is looking after our best*



*interests. I have just come away from the men's "off-duty" room, where I left Catholic and Protestant alike reading your Catholic Firesides. They each have a copy and are engrossed in their contents, forgetting all their cares and worries.*



Plate 30: HMS Zealous returning to Gourock after rescuing some Norwegian Islanders. Four destroyers of the Home Fleet went sixty miles behind enemy lines to rescue 525 Norwegians, 1 March 1945. (Imperial War Museum ref. A27538)

After receiving this letter, the girls' efforts redoubled and, the following day, over 250 *Catholic Firesides* were handed in at The Hollies. Later in the year, whilst home on leave, the Catholic officer paid a visit to the school. The girls assembled in the hall to hear him speak of the War at sea. He told them that he had been torpedoed and shipwrecked three times and spent days each time in an open boat. His fears at the time were as nothing compared to how nervous he felt facing the sea of faces before him. However, he showed little signs of fear as he spoke about the *Zealous'* battles at sea and

unfurled a German flag, captured from a German battleship during a battle with the Narvick flotilla. At the request of the *Zealous*' crew, the flag was presented to the girls, 'whose Masses and prayers had, without doubt, brought the gallant crew through many and terrible dangers'.

Whilst the school was extending its benevolence 'over the ocean to the good ship *Zealous*', the girls did not forget that real charity begins at home. In 1945, they raised a total of £100 for "St. Joseph's Penny". The Bishop congratulated them on this wonderful amount and wrote an appreciative letter, which spurred them on to 'greater zeal'. Earlier, in 1943, the Catholic Needlework Guild's Diocesan Report announced that The Hollies sent the highest number of garments, 'all most beautifully made, many of them delightful babies' garments'. The number increased to 300 garments by the end of the year. For the pupils, this meant the surrender not only of effort and money, but 'more precious still, of coupons'. Though the pupils were often from relatively well-off families, rationing meant budgeting of resources, even among the middle-classes.

Despite the war shortages and rationing, the Parents Committee asked for the Garden Party of 1940 to go ahead as usual. It was a day of glorious sunshine. The visitors assembled in Oak Bank's garden, where seats were arranged on three sides of the lawn. There was a gym display, folk dancing, and singing. The Bishop's Vicar General performed the opening ceremony, after which he laughingly remarked that next year the tables should be turned and the members of the Parents' Committee should perform the gymnastics. The event was exactly what was wanted to give the school community 'an uplift and change of thought'. It was, perhaps, the call to war duties that prevented the Old Girls Association (OGA) meeting at the school.

In 1944, Reverend Mother decided that the OGA should 'be revived'; they had not met since 1939. In May, The Hollies welcomed 162 members to their old school. Many travelled long distances and every age was represented, even back to the Brook Street days. They met in the pupils' dining room where 'they

partook of a generous war-time tea'. Netball and Drama Clubs were inaugurated; these were to meet regularly on Saturdays and, though there may have been 'more tea than drama', the Old Girls were united and linked to their school.

The full life of the school was curtailed during the War. After the Christmas Blitz, 1940, the FCJs continually left their dormitories for the shelter of The Acorns' cellars. The comfort they devised for themselves there was short-lived and from September 1941, the FCJs struggled each day to cross the city from Sedgley where they lodged. Their evacuation had been ordered by their Superior General, who 'deemed it best that [they] should vacate the house for the present. The greater number ... were destined for Sedgley, from whence [they] could still carry on [their] work.' That work was carried out under difficult circumstances. The school had recourse to the air-raid shelter many times in 1941, as day raids were not unusual. The pupils had seen and heard appalling things during the Christmas Blitz but they 'showed no signs of fear. They continued lessons in the shelter and calmly marched back to class when the all-clear sounded. They wasted no more time than it took to get there and back; about four minutes.'

The school community made valiant efforts to continue as many annual practices as possible. On the afternoon of 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1942, the pupils gave a dancing and choral demonstration to their parents 'who came in good numbers despite the fact that many of the men were busy war workers'. Winter term ended with the usual plays and parties. On the last day of term the whole school gave a choral recital. The school orchestra made its second appearance on the stage. It was 'still in its babyhood but its initial endeavours seemed to forecast a long and hardy life'. The summer term, 1943, ended with a choral and dancing display for the parents. In 1945, in celebration of Victory in Europe, a production of *The Comedian*, by Henri Gheon, was staged on the Feast of the English Martyrs. The Bishop was present at a performance given to parents and praised the acting, deportment, and diction. The spirit of the school had survived.

Character training remained central to the religious observances and ceremonies of the Hollies. On 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1940, a special Mass was given for 'our dear [Superior General], and our hearts went out in sympathy to her and to our dear Mothers and Sisters who were suffering so dreadfully on the Continent'. The Community remained true to the Foundress' mission, remembering 'When the odds seem so great and we feel so powerless, Her Reverence's words of encouragement come to our aid.' Early in the summer term of 1941, thirty pupils from the study circle group attended a special Mass. The wet May of 1943 did not prevent the annual devotions to the Virgin Mary, which took place in the chapel at the 'altar of Our Lady'. The following year, during May, practically every girl was enrolled as a "Handmaid of the Blessed Sacrament".

Retreats, very much a part of The Hollies calendar, provided consolation and focus for the whole community. The Retreat of 1942 provided three days for the girls of the senior school. 'It was voluntary but not one was missing.' The benefits and atmosphere of such Retreats were carried into the girls' homes 'where they had a beneficial effect on their families'. For many pupils, the Retreat was an immediate preparation for their new life in the world and the last link in the 'chain binding them to school'.

Trips and lectures continued to be a part of the curriculum, although there were far less than in pre-War years. On Ascension Thursday, 1941, pupils who were especially keen on architecture were chosen from different forms. They were taken by bus to study the Chester Cathedral, and saw what previously had been 'only on a chart or in a book'. In 1943, there was a lecture at the school about the Holy Land. This was followed soon after by a lecture on nursing as a profession. Later in the same term, the Dutch Consul spoke about Holland. The pupils discovered that children in the Netherlands had to learn a minimum of six languages. The Consul told the girls that he had been anxious to visit The Hollies because his secretary was an old pupil and very proud of her school.

Even in the middle of a school day, the War was never far away. In March 1944, pupils were given a lecture from a Belgian who had

lately escaped his country. He gave them 'surprising details of his life under the invader'. In 1940, the Free Trade Hall, home of the Halle Orchestra, had been completely bombed out during the Blitz of 22<sup>nd</sup> December and, in September 1944, The Hollies was invited to a Halle Concert which had been specially arranged for schools. Buses were provided and the pupils conducted to and from the concert hall by the organisers.

The constant exertions of the staff to maintain a 'normal school atmosphere' were well rewarded. The pupils began to work harder. Girls taking the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate, 'never wavered in all the vicissitudes of the year, to keep the one object of their examination before them'. The results of the 1940 School and Higher Certificates were very good and one pupil won an Open Scholarship to Manchester University. That year, four girls gained admission to Catholic training colleges.

In 1941, more pupils sat for the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate Religious Examinations. The results were 'very satisfactory; there were four distinctions in the Higher Certificate'. In the same year, air raid warnings sounded during some of the public examinations. No sooner had the girls settled down to begin Latin and Geometry than the warning sounded. The girls did 'not relish the idea of leaving their papers and going to the shelter but distant guns allowed no further risk and off they had to go'. According to regulations, they could return and make up lost time providing that they had no communication with anyone during the interval. In the shelter they were guarded and remained for three-quarters of an hour 'in solemn silence, thinking'. When the results were published, they had done especially well. Their mistresses attributed their success to the extra time they had for thought before writing.

One pupil gained a State Scholarship and a Stockport Major Exhibition; the latter was very difficult to obtain and was not usually given to Catholic schools. Another pupil, Marie Furphy, gained a University Scholarship and the Anne Hinde Exhibition; only one was awarded each year in Manchester to the state school pupil who

obtained the highest marks in the Higher Leaving Certificate. It was hoped that both pupils would continue as 'staunch Catholic girls' despite the fact that they would attend Manchester, 'a decidedly anti-Catholic university'. Not only did Marie Furphy stay true to her faith, she returned to The Hollies after taking her degree to become a much-loved and admired teacher of English. The successes of 1941 spurred the school to more ambitious ventures. In 1943, one of the senior girls was entered for the Oxford Scholarship and Entrance Examination. She was 'a good student anxious to go to Oxford'. For five days, five hours a day, she 'stared at then attacked papers of a very high standard'. A month later she received a telegram announcing 'scholarship awarded'. At the end of her first term at Oxford, she was nominated Secretary to the Newman Society.

The Hollies had survived the years of recession in the 1930s, the bombings and privations of the war years, and the constant upheavals these entailed. In 1941, a newly-appointed Inspector had visited and expressed her appreciation of the children's good spirit, and of their refinement. She had also expressed satisfaction with the extension of the school premises, and considered Oak Bank House a true educational asset. The second evacuation of the school had forced its closure but, in 1942, Oak Bank House re-opened and the Juniors were the first to take up residence there. Later, that year, a large room on the second floor was equipped as a dining room capable of seating over 200 pupils for dinner. The re-opening of Oak Bank gave the school more room at The Hollies. It gave the staff peace of mind because they could meet Inspectors with no fear of complaints of overcrowding. In January 1945, The Hollies was one of only a few schools in the city to open at the beginning of term. There were burst pipes and empty furnaces in many other schools due to the shortages of both fuel and plumbers. One pupil remarked that The Hollies 'had hundreds of pipes, not one of them would burst'.

Mother Monica Dundon had guided the school safely through these war years and was now to steer The Hollies through the early years of the changes brought about by the Education Act of 1944. The Governors of The Hollies were keen to build on the educational progress made and, before war ended in 1945, made formal

application to the Ministry of Education for “direct-grant grammar school status” as embodied in the Act. In December of the same year, the school received notification from the Ministry that The Hollies would be ‘allowed to continue as a direct-grant grammar school’



Plate 31: The Hollies, Oak Drive (Ann Harrison (Spellman))



## **Chapter 6**

### **Growth and Change**

‘The school was in danger of losing its direct-grant status if plans were not put into operation to provide the extra accommodation needed.’

Growth and change marked the post-war years at The Hollies. The Blitz had taken a huge toll on large areas of the city of Manchester. City landmarks had vanished, new “satellite towns” were planned, along with highways like Princess Parkway, green belts, an airport at Ringway; even the trams were scrapped and replaced by buses. Increasing numbers of women found the independence that wartime employment gave them difficult to relinquish. The Hollies’ Inspection Report of 1950 listed the destinations of pupils for the years 1946-1949; twenty-five went on to teacher training; four to university; most of the others went into office work, banks, and some to train as nurses. The post-war baby boom hit its peak in 1947 and with it, the need for more housing, nursery provision, and schools. Education had already expanded to take all children at least up to the age of 15, and the 11-plus examination had provided increasing numbers of “scholarship” pupils.

At The Hollies, there was a 10% increase in numbers in 1946, and a 12% increase in 1949. With these increases came a rise in the numbers of lay-teachers. In 1930, with 206 pupils on the school roll, there were eight full-time and four part-time mistresses. By 1939, with the school roll at 261, there were eleven secular mistresses present in the whole school photograph of that year. Ten years later, there were 407 on roll and with the increase, a rise in the numbers of secular staff. However, the school ethos appeared no different from that of the school of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when all mistresses were FCJs.

In 1947, at the first Prize Day since before the War, the Bishop spoke of education as a preparation for life in this world and the ‘life hereafter’. He praised the staff, as Canon Toole of Salford had done one hundred years earlier, for preparing girls ‘not merely to be successful young women, but preparing them to be good daughters,

good sisters and, later, good mothers'. The Bishop continued his praise of the FCJs but extended it to include the secular mistresses. He spoke at length, stating that the Catholic schools in the country 'would not be in the position they are in today were it not for the nuns who work in our midst. As for the lay-teachers, I can honestly say there has not been a finer body of ladies in the country than our Catholic women teachers.'



Plate 32: Teaching Staff, 1954 (Sheila Harkin (O'Grady))

The impressive results of 1941 had been highly praised by the FCJs themselves, though they noted the 'wavering doubts' of the secular mistresses as preparations for the examinations had progressed. The FCJs regarded such doubts as 'usual with such intellectuals'. By 1950, 57% of pupils held free scholarship places. Residuary places were awarded by the school as the result of an entrance exam conducted jointly by the three direct grant convent schools in Manchester, after the requests from the Local Authorities had been filled. Competition for places was severe and some girls from the Preparatory school were rejected. With rising numbers of able scholarship girls entering the school, the efforts of the secular staff focussed on the academic curriculum. They continued to support the

moral training of the FCJs, but the visible work of the convent became increasingly linked to the calendar of religious observances.

The FCJs continued to exert their influence directly through the House system, religious observances, charity work, and organised events such as Prize Day, Old Girls' Reunions, and Retreats. Each girl in the Third Form chose a virtue to practice for the good of her House and the good of her character. The FCJs felt that something was gained if the virtue was practiced 'only once consciously but perhaps many times unconsciously'. At the Prize Day of 1951, the Bishop again exhorted the girls to 'leave school with a Catholic mind which regarded all events with the eye of Faith'. He told them not to think of what they could get out of the world into which they were soon going but, 'above all, to think of what they, as Catholic girls could contribute to it'.

In 1947, the FCJs returned from the convent at Sedgley, where, they had been for seven years since their evacuation during the war. The secular mistresses and pupils expressed their delight at their return, and presented the Superior with a bouquet of flowers for the chapel. In 1949, the FCJs reorganised the "House system", to help pupils 'make greater progress in every way and to increase their love for the school'. Each House was given a Housemistress, and a picture of its patron saint, adorned with the colours of the House, was hung outside the chapel. A solemn Ceremony of Admission to each of the four Houses took place shortly after the beginning of the autumn term. Each week the good marks gained by the members of the Houses were counted and the results read out at Assembly on Monday mornings.

There was growing unease among many sectors of British society, especially Catholics, at the 'Communist threat'. At a Retreat given by Father Pigeon on the work of the Catholic Social Guild, he stressed the great need for Catholics to take part in public life. He emphasised that if Catholics were not willing to come forward in the service of their country, they gave Communists an opportunity to 'forward their dogma'. At the Past Pupils' Reunion in July, a Jesuit priest recalled a graduation ceremony he had attended earlier, at the

University. He said he would have liked to ask the graduands in ten years' time what they had done with their lives since graduation. He wanted to know if the world was better for what they had put into it. He told the pupils that the benefits they received from being in a Catholic grammar school brought with them a corresponding obligation towards those not so fortunate. The girls needed few reminders such as this. Through their work for charity and the model provided by both religious and secular staff at the school, they were well aware of their responsibilities for the care of others.

Although the convent had receded from public view, the work of one member of the FCJs remained highly visible; that of the Headmistress. The Articles of Government agreed in 1920 provided the Central Governing Body with the right to appoint the Headmistress of the school. The Central Governing Body consisted of the Provincial of the FCJs and her Council. There was also a Local Governing Body consisting of nine members, three of whom were nominated by the Manchester Education Authority. The Local Governors met once a term and the Headmistress was present throughout the proceedings. Through the Headmistress, the guiding principles of the FCJs remained the impetus for much of the work of the school.

The 1950 Inspection underlined the important influence of a headteacher in any school. The Report judged the Hollies to be 'a vigorous community developing its vitality against a background of religion'. Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) recognised the place of the Corporate Act of Worship, led by the Headmistress at the start of each day, and the Inspectors commented on the girls' pleasing manner and pride in their appearance. They noted that the girls moved about the building in an orderly manner and had a friendly attitude to both visitors and staff. The Inspectors identified other instances of FCJ training through the auspices of the Headmistress. A large room in Oak Bank had been converted into a dining room. The meal was cooked and sent from one of Manchester Education Authority's central kitchens. The girls took an active part in the service of the meal; a tradition that was to continue until the introduction of the cafeteria-style dining of the late 1970s. The

Headmistress was personally responsible for all the arrangements in the school and the HMIs believed that, through ‘her interest and zeal’, improvements were effected; she was responsible for balancing the religious and secular in the life of the school.

Success in examinations and competitions continued to be matched by increasingly rewarding efforts for charity. In 1951, twenty-one out of the twenty-four girls who took the 11-plus examination were successful, ‘much



Plate 33: Increasing numbers of Scholarship Girls, Form 1 1947 (Gay Colligan)

to the joy of their parents’. Moreover, there were three days’ holiday for half term instead of the usual two, to celebrate three university scholarships won by members of the Sixth Form. These examination results were matched by a record number of 300 garments provided for the Catholic Needlework Guild. During Lent, Form 2A had the bright idea of having an animal show in the gym to raise funds for “St. Joseph’s Penny”. Each member of the form had to bring a dog if she had one. One said naively ‘we didn’t think we would bring the cats as well’. The FCJs didn’t think so either; they were amused by ‘visions of the pandemonium that would ensue’.

During the early 1950s, the FCJ Annals began to reflect the strain that began to show as the school continued to grow in both numbers and secular successes. The Annals of 1951 recorded that the Upper

School was enrolled in the Apostleship of prayer. The FCJs were urged not to worry that they did not spend their lives in poverty and prayer; their apostleship was through the blackboard and chalk. Despite this advice, when the school broke up in Holy Week, the FCJs were relieved it had 'left us in peace to take part in the devotions of that solemn week'. The role of the Headmistress, long separated from that of Superior of the convent, required a woman of great skill, diplomacy and vision. It called for someone who, like the Foundress of the FCJs, possessed a generous spirit, zest for life, and a firm will to balance the increasingly conflicting demands of modern life.

In 1948, Mother Mechtilde Hanning was appointed as successor to Mother Monica Dundon, who had served as Head from the outbreak of War in 1939. Mother Mechtilde was born in Surrey and entered the FCJ Community at Upton in 1925. She was a graduate with the experience of many years' teaching in other FCJ schools. A past pupil recalled that while Mother Monica was a tall, bespectacled, gentle lady, her replacement, Mother Mechtilde was 'very stern, very strict and appeared to have no sense of humour whatsoever'. Events proved her contribution to the development of the school to be outstanding. Her arrival coincided with many staff changes at The Hollies. She found herself in charge of sixteen full-time and two part-time mistresses; thirteen were graduates, and all except four had received teacher training. It was mainly a young staff, lacking experience; several mistresses, in their first teaching posts, were responsible for their subjects throughout the school. Lacking the guidance of Heads of Departments, they required guidance in the organisation of their subjects, as well as constant opportunities for personal development as teachers. In the first year of her headship, Mother Mechtilde strove to organise the new direct grant school and to balance the demands of a more academic curriculum with the needs of a relatively inexperienced staff.

Part of the new strategy was the provision of more trips and visiting lecturers than in previous years. Through 1948 and 1949, there were many planned trips; one to Salford docks, another to the huge grain elevators and the 'canal crossing the canal' by the famous swing

bridge. 'This triumph of engineering was much appreciated and the whole of the trip cost exactly the bus fare to Salford.' There was a visit to a clothing factory as part of a geography lesson. On such visits the school was received 'with great courtesy by those in charge of the works' and every effort was made 'to make them interesting and instructive'. There was a visit to the Agricultural College at Reaseheath near Chester, where the party saw 'all the most up to date equipment for carrying out every branch of agriculture'. A lecturer from the Ministry of Information gave a talk on the Western Union to the Fifth and Sixth Forms who gained a 'clear understanding of the formation and aims of the Union'. This was followed by a visit to the University to hear a lecture in French on the subject of Chopin. A visit to Chester Cathedral, in June 1949, 'greatly increased the girls' historical and geographical knowledge'. A technicolour film of the British Railways preceded autumn term tests; the Railways Board provided everything, including the projector and operators, free of charge. In 1948, a Catholic professor from Manchester University gave a lecture on the United Nations (UN). He stressed the fact that, in spite of very adverse circumstances in the political sphere, the UN had done some very valuable constructive work in areas such as medicine, social service and education. He also encouraged the girls to enter public service and the professions so they would be able to use their influence in the Christian cause.

If increasing links with the outside world broadened the experience of the pupils, there were developments within the school that extended the academic curriculum. Latin was a recent addition and, initially, it proved 'a burden' to some of the first years. The Inspectors of 1950 suggested that Latin be offered to 'suitable pupils after the first year'. The same Inspectors noted that there were few subjects presented for "advanced level", and little opportunity for girls who wanted to follow careers based on the study of science. The school provided three or four advanced level subjects from a choice of history, English, French, Latin, Geography, and Art. In 1949, three girls started Pure Mathematics, but there was no advanced Science course provided. Mother Mechtilde attempted to rectify this, but until suitable appointments could be made to the

staff, she expected little success. There were greater numbers of girls passing the Higher School Certificate and the Inspectors recognised that the organisation of the curriculum depended on how successfully the school could adapt to changes. The school was encouraged to accept the 'challenge to self-reliance and independent thought which examination reforms presupposed'. Mother Mechtilde was advised to consult with the staff responsible for subjects taught to the Sixth Form, to work out details of how best to use private study time. In the meantime, expansion of extra-curricular activities, both cultural and social continued.

During the summer holidays of 1949, trips were organised to Switzerland with the Elocution Mistress. Six mistresses accompanied members of the Fifth and Sixth Form to Stratford-on-Avon, where they enjoyed the 'excellent representations' of Shakespeare's plays given in the theatre and their stay in the Catholic Hostel. The Stratford trip was such a success that another trip was planned immediately for 1950. That year provided Form 3A and Form 6 with a trip to Ribchester on a combined history and geography exercise. They saw the Roman camp, the Cathedral at Chester, and boated on the Dee. In the same year, the lower school went to see *Little Women* at the local cinema. They were very surprised and pleased before the film started to hear an announcement, 'We are very pleased to welcome the girls of The Hollies' Convent Grammar School and we hope they will enjoy the picture.' They did; it was 'first-class entertainment for the modest sum of 6d'. The guiding hand of Mother Mechtilde was evident in these extra-curricular events. Cost was always an important factor, but so too was a balanced presentation. A speaker from a committee of the UN gave a lecture on 'the colour bar in South Africa'. Her appeal for justice for the 'coloured people' in the Dominion of South Africa made a great impression on the girls. The FCJs however, felt that historical factors 'had been somewhat overlooked so [they] took the opportunity offered to train [the] girls to look at two sides of the question'.

There were great changes to the curriculum from that of the inter-war years. There was a common core of English, French, Latin,



Mathematics, General Science, Geography, History, Art, Needlework, and P.E. for the first two years of the school. The third year was a year of transition, with girls in the higher stream continuing with Latin; the lower stream dropped it. In years four and five, options were introduced according to the ability of the class. Chemistry was introduced for 5A, and Biology was offered as an alternative to art; 5B chose Art or Needlework in place of Latin. Each class had a 'weekly lesson in speech training, which was skillfully related to the rest of the English course'.

The speech training reaped benefits in 1951 when many girls obtained gold medals and certificates in the Elocution Examination. The FCJs considered elocution very important in the school, 'for Manchester speech leaves something to be desired'. The most visible aspects of the cultural life of the school were the House activities, which included opportunities for drama, art and craft, music, and netball. Plays were produced regularly and a play was presented annually, on Speech Day. In 1950, after exams, the FCJs reported that 'our children, who take to acting like ducks to water, presented *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Each night saw a full hall and we have reason to believe that everyone was pleased.' On 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 1952, three girls went to Manchester Library's Theatre for an impromptu acting event. They gained the highest marks and much praise for the standard of their performance. In 1954, the presentation in October was *Quality Street*,



Plate 34: Tennis Team 1958 (FCJ Archives)



Plate 35: Netball Team 1958 (FCJ Archives)



Plate 36: *The Upper Room*, 1954 (Frances Bradburn (Wright))

and there was much admiration for the high standard of acting. During Lent the Fifth Form staged an outdoor Passion Play, *The Upper Room*. The enthusiasm for drama productions was replaced later in the decade by an equal passion for musical productions.

Other occasions of a general cultural nature included school lectures and educational visits. These were interspersed with events of a purely social or national nature. The girls were allowed to watch the Queen Consort open a new university hostel in 1951. Two past pupils were at the University and were 'delighted that the Queen singled them out to speak to them'. Later that year, the Queen was again in Manchester to re-open the Free Trade Hall, which had been destroyed in the War. Those who listened to the ceremony over the radio 'were struck by the charming simplicity of the Queen and the loyalty and affection with which she was addressed by the master builders, plumbers etc. in charge of the work'. A more solemn Royal event took place in 1952. King George VI died on 6<sup>th</sup> February, and that morning the whole school was called to a special Assembly. Pupils sat on the floor in groups as Mother Mechtild solemnly informed the school that the King had died. Several members of the Fifth and Sixth Form were given permission to go into Manchester by bus, to Albert Square, to hear the Lord Mayor give the proclamation 'the King is dead, long live the Queen' from the steps of the Town Hall.

Meanwhile, the after-effects of the War continued to impinge on the daily lives of the people of Britain. There was still some rationing and shortages. The weekly allowance per person included 13 ounces (364 grams) of meat, 1.5 ounces of cheese, 6 ounces of butter or margarine, 2 pints of milk, and one egg. Clothing continued to be available only through coupons. Even bread was rationed for two years, from July 1946. In 1950 there was a power cut at The Hollies, on the second day of the end-of-term tests. The Annals for that year record:

*Owing to the war, [the country] is six years behind the building and renewing of electricity plant; in the meantime demand has grown significantly; consequently when the weather is cold and the need for more fuel exceeds supply, a cut of about an hour or more has to be put on to restore normal balance. It became so dark that the children could not see their next-door neighbour, let alone the paper. Then suddenly after an hour as silently as it*

*had departed the electricity came back and the whole house was flooded with light.*

Later that year, a lecturer from Ministry of Information talked to the school about the ‘all important subject of coal’. Though the hardships of the war continued to be felt in Manchester, it was a lecture in 1951 that reminded the girls of the debt felt around the world for the stand that Britain had taken. The “Mother of Parliaments” lecture described the rituals and grandeur of the Houses of Parliament. The lecturer described the gifts from every Dominion of the British Commonwealth in the new House of Commons as ‘their gratitude for Britain’s fortitude during the war’.

The post-war years continued to be difficult for the whole country and, amid a growing feeling of dissatisfaction, the Labour government attempted to build an atmosphere of optimism. The Royal Wedding in November 1947 helped to dispel the mood of austerity. However, the colour and spectacle of the wedding were criticised by some, as the country was still in debt. For others, the festivities heralded a new age of confidence and a growth of cultural and leisure activities. The Halle Orchestra continued its concerts despite the lack of a proper venue, and Mancunians pursued the type of entertainment that had contributed so much to their spirits during the war. The Palace Theatre enjoyed record audiences, and attendances at the cinema were approaching a peak. Dance Halls became increasingly popular with the young. The scrimping and saving of the war years was replaced by a rise in the participation in these leisure activities and a corresponding boom in consumer spending. The factories of Manchester produced an array of labour-saving devices demanded by the new style of modern living; electric washing machines, fridges, automatic cookers, kettles, toasters, and food mixers to name but a few.

In 1951, Manchester’s successes in manufacturing, science and culture were exhibited proudly at the Festival of Britain. Conceived as an official celebration of Britain’s recovery from the war, the Festival ran for five months. Eight million people visited the main attractions in London, the South Bank Exhibition, and the Festival

Pleasure Gardens. Regional and travelling exhibitions spread the Festival spirit around the country, and every town and village was invited to arrange its own festivities. In 1851, the Victorians had welcomed their Great Exhibition to celebrate the achievements of the greatest nation in the world. A hundred years later, a nation impoverished by two World Wars could no longer lay claim to that title, but it was sorely in need of the boost to national pride that such an event could provide. By night, the vertical feature of the Festival of Britain, the Skylon, seemed to be suspended by magic above the ground; a 292-foot cigar pointing into the sky. The joke of the day was that, like Britain, it had no visible means of support. Nevertheless, the public received the Festival enthusiastically. On the first day, a crowd just short of the capacity of 60,000 was achieved, and advance bookings of school parties alone totalled between 300,000 and 400,000. On the second day of the Festival, The Hollies sent a hundred girls to view Manchester's contribution. In August, a



Plate 37: Trip to the Festival of Britain, 1951 (Ann Harrison  
(Spellman))

further fifty-six girls and four mistresses went by coach to London. When the travelling land exhibition opened in Manchester, twenty-one searchlights illuminated the skies; there was a full-sized theatre and 40,000 feet of exhibition space divided into six sections. A “corridor of time” held sixteen giant pendulums, each containing a

lighted display of Britain's progress through the ages. There were fashion shows in the theatre, a dome with a fluorescent mosaic ceiling, and a model railway and puppet display for the children. Manchester told the story of the jet engine and hosted the Exhibition's own radio transmitting and receiving station.

The Festival was intended as a signal to the world; a highly visible celebration of the achievements of the Labour government, and the announcement of the birth of a "brave new world" from a war-weary country. The 1950s were a watershed decade in the history of the country. Britain entered the decade as a respected, traditional, if somewhat battered and impoverished country, and left, as the 1960s dawned, part of a different and permissive world. For many, the 1950s continued to be a time of austerity, although the festival shone out as a moment of hope for the people of Britain. 'People who were very drably-dressed suddenly arrived at the South Bank site and they started smiling and laughing and it was all jolly and they couldn't believe in a worn, grey, bomb-damaged Britain, that something like this could happen.' The Festival helped to popularise a new style of living through the Television Pavilion, or the Homes and Gardens Exhibition, the piazzas and brightly decorated restaurants. The accent was on youth and fashion and foretold the consumer boom of the later 1950s. 'Let's be frank about it', Harold Macmillan was to say in July 1957, 'most of our people have never had it so good.'

The Coronation year of 1953 heralded Britain's new, golden "Elizabethan Age". It was a year of great celebration in Manchester, as it was also the centenary of the granting of the City's charter. At The Hollies too there was a centenary to celebrate; the official centenary of the foundation of the school. The FCJs had arrived in Manchester in 1852 and established their first convent and schools during that year. Adelphi Convent celebrated its centenary in 1952 with an article in *The Harvest*; Upper Brook Street was described in the article as a 'supplementary house' to Salford. The convent began serving the elementary schools of St. Augustine's parish in 1853, and so The Hollies dated its centenary from that year.

In January 1953, the Parents Committee asked for Sheridan's *The Rivals* to be the opening event of the celebrations. It was acclaimed as the best ever performance at The Hollies. On 9<sup>th</sup> January, the Upper Sixth sent a telegram to Queen Elizabeth II, promising the prayers asked for in her Christmas Broadcast and assuring her of their loyalty to the throne. That same evening, they received a reply, which they framed and hung in the hall. Form 5A wrote an article on the "Centenary of The Hollies" and sent it to *The Manchester Chronicle*. It was accepted for a centre-page spread, and the class was invited to visit the printing works and to attend a lecture on the making of a newspaper. In March, the school staged an Open Day for parents and friends, to see a grammar school of the 1950s at work.

Some of the visitors, while having no memory of the early days of the school of the 1850s, certainly remembered the slower pace of schooldays at Upper Brook Street. At Prize Day on 24<sup>th</sup> March, parents were reminded of the first coming of the FCJs to Manchester. The girls were told it was thanks to the work of those early pioneers that they were privileged to be in a Catholic grammar school.

The Coronation Holiday took place in half term and some pupils watched the ceremony at home, where many had televisions. The pupils had decorated the school before they broke up but some returned to watch the ceremony on television in the school. 'All were impressed by the grandeur of the spectacle.' In October, The Hollies provided a wonderful spectacle of its own; a Centenary Mass at the Holy Name Church. The whole school was present, the mistresses in their gowns and hoods, the pupils in full school uniform. The Rector of the Holy Name commented on the celebration, saying that so much depended on the choir, whose singing was an outstanding success. The *Te Deum* which ended the Mass 'was exceptional; sung as girls knowing it, girls who liked it – it sounded just what it is, a hymn of praise'. Of the school seated in the church, the Rector said, 'I cannot recall the slightest movement

even among the younger children. Surely this is control, and control over a long period.’ A bus driver stopped the bus he was driving past as the girls were assembling outside the church. At the sight of so many well-behaved young ladies, he announced ‘The Hollies is the best school in Manchester.’ This compliment, while gratifying to hear, was an overstatement, but one that was supported by the fact that, in March, 120 candidates for entry had sat the entrance exam for the grammar school, competing for seventy places.



Plate 38: Telegram from Queen Elizabeth II, 1953 (FCJ Archives)





Plate 39: The Rivals, 1953 (Judith Marcinick (Thomas)



Plate 40: Annual Boys' Football Match 1953 (Judith Marcinick (Thomas)

Amid the celebrations, the normal work of the school continued. Charitable work was not forgotten and in January, The Hollies

responded to the news of floods that had devastated Holland and the east coast of Britain. The girls sent clothing and blankets for homeless survivors and held many Masses and prayers for the victims.

The cultural life of the school included celebratory trips for every form. The lower forms went to Southport, the middle forms to Chester, and the upper school to Fountains Abbey. The usual visits and lectures also reflected the new mood of the country. A geography trip was organised to see the film *The Conquest of Everest*. The pupils reported that the written accounts of the expedition gave little idea of the dangers and hardships endured by 'the brave men who spoke so modestly about their achievement'. Another film, *The Queen is Crowned*, was shown in the school to all the lower forms.

Other activities were more closely related to the curriculum of the time. *Great Expectations*, a set book for the School Leaving Certificate, was shown to Forms 4 and 5, and the Sixth Form visited the University to watch a performance of one of Moliere's plays which was a set book on the Higher Leaving Certificate syllabus. In November, fifty Hollies' pupils took the English Speaking Board's examination. All passed, and there were fourteen distinctions and eleven credits. A letter from the Chief Supervisor informed Mother Mechtilde:

*You would have been very happy if you had seen the excellent way your girls behaved at the English Speaking Board's examination last week. They were orderly, responsive, and generous in their attitude to one another's success. The work was thorough in detail, artistic in delivery, and all could be heard clearly in all parts of the hall. We congratulate both the mistress and the girls in an outstanding performance.*

This was not the first time that the work of the Elocution Mistress had received praise. It was in 1946 that HMIs met, at first hand, The Hollies' novel method of combining speech and drama with English lessons and extra-curricular activities. In May of that year, two

HMIs spent a day at The Hollies. They each had a copy of the timetable and ‘wandered where the spirit led them’. In the afternoon, one of them met a pupil on the stairs who asked if she could help him to find the room to which he was going. The First Year told the HMI that they had a secret in that room, and when he asked to share it, was told they had written a new chapter to *Wind in the Willows* and dramatised it; it was called “Toad Joins the Navy”.

The visiting HMI held the opinion that there was no finer classic in the English curriculum than *The Wind in the Willows*. He was entranced by the First Years who insisted that he should see their play and took him to the Hall where they placed him in a ‘lonely chair’ in the middle of the room. The Annals recorded the scene he then witnessed:

For want of costumes, (not yet ready) they wore labels proclaiming that they were toads, rats, or mice. Poor Toad was then subjected to a gruesome medical examination; his heart, painted on cardboard, was minutely examined and though it moved from side to side, he was pronounced physically fit though mentally doubtful. His eyes were slightly defective and he never looked where he was going. Finally, he joined his ship where the episode was unfolded until the exasperated and sorely-tried Toad could stand it no longer. He jumped overboard, swam ashore, stole an aeroplane and flew to Germany. He was shot there as a spy and his mortal remains were returned in a chalk box. Less than half way through the performance, the Inspector sent for his colleague and they had a most enjoyable afternoon together. They told the children it was splendid, asked them to write another chapter and to be sure to let them know when it was dramatised.

This inspection had followed closely on a visit to the school’s adopted ship, the *Zealous*, when she had docked at Salford in February. Many parties of girls, together with their mistresses had visited the *Zealous* each evening. They had spent a happy time

examining the ‘wonderful battleship, hearing of its exploits so that it would seem that it was second to none in His Majesty’s Navy’. When the ship left dock one Saturday morning, a crowd of girls had witnessed its departure and, as it loosed from its moorings, they sang the national anthem with the crew. This visit, no doubt, had given rise to the topic of the playlet.

The play-writing efforts of the girls were known as ‘rainy day plays’. They took place during lunchtime when the weather prevented outdoor activity. Ever-increasing numbers for dinner taxed the Hall to its utmost and underlined a growing need for further expansion of accommodation. In 1950, lists of needs and recommendations replaced the earlier praise of ‘splendid facilities’ of the 1920s and 1930s. The HMIs recorded eleven classrooms at The Hollies, together with a laboratory, art room, small library, assembly hall partly equipped for physical training, and a small room used for music. Some of the classrooms were ‘cramped and overcrowded’, a screened-off part of the corridor was deemed inappropriate as the pupils’ rest room, and the Assistant Mistresses’ room was ‘uncomfortable and poorly furnished’.

The library was a small room on the ground floor, furnished with a few chairs and folding tables. The books were housed in glass-fronted bookcases or open shelves. The room was used occasionally for Sixth Form lessons but, apart from designated borrowing times and Sixth Form lessons, its size restricted it to private study use by small sets of Fifth or Sixth Form girls. Many girls were members of the public library, but the school was not able to ‘provide constant and systematic training in the use of the library, which would enable them to derive the fullest benefit from their membership’. The school’s library had been created between 1926 and 1930 to facilitate better Sixth Form study, but was now judged too small, and a suggestion of redistribution of books back into classrooms was offered. This was a retrograde step and emphasised the desperate need for more accommodation.

By 1950, the number on roll at the grammar school was 318, with a further eighty-nine in the Preparatory school. The HMIs of 1950 also

requested that further attention be given to the buildings by upgrading the lighting and sanitary provisions. Under the revised building regulations the numbers of lavatories would have to be increased from nine to twenty-three, and the wash bowls from twelve to twenty-three. The Inspectors also considered the lack of playing fields to be a serious deficiency, and recommended a serious search for grounds to be purchased or rented. Schemes for further expansion were suggested to provide more classrooms.

As in earlier years, the FCJs experienced difficulties arising from the many demands on their limited financial resources. A balance had to be found between new projects, repairs and maintenance of existing buildings, and the refurbishment of non-teaching areas. In 1948, on 10<sup>th</sup> October at 2pm ‘a loud crack was heard in the house’; the boiler had burst and the radiators were flooding to the outlet. The boiler needed repairs just before the onset of a cold spell. In November, Our Lady’s Congregational Chapel was restored in time for the Feast of 8<sup>th</sup> December. Further boiler repairs were required after an incident that almost led to the demise of the newly arrived assistant teacher, Mother Victoire Murphy. Carbon monoxide leaked into a dormitory and was discovered only after Mother Victoire woke the other occupants when she collapsed on the floor.

The new term of 1949 saw a freshly-painted and furnished dining room, with new tables, crockery, and cutlery (which arrived later in installments). In 1951, more funds were needed for the restoration of the netball courts during the year, so that they no longer ‘presented the appearance of a lake after heavy rains’. With similar needs to other schools, fees at The Hollies were ‘generally considered below those of non-Catholic grammars’. Despite this discrepancy, the Governors had little hope of gaining approval for an adequate rise, so, in 1949, they applied for a rise to £36 per pupil per annum. The continuous demands made on the finances of the FCJs resulted in a long delay implementing the building expansions recommended in the General Inspection Report of 1951. This proposed that the Governors consider the provision of a new hall and four classrooms, including a geography room, increased science facilities with more storage and preparation room, and a domestic science room.

It was September 1952 before Staneswood, another property in Oak Drive was purchased. The new house was acquired to relieve the pressure in The Hollies which was 'definitely overcrowded'. Without Staneswood, the problem of housing the school would have been insoluble 'owing to further increases in numbers' and an expanding curriculum. In 1951, two new subjects, Spanish and Physics, had been introduced, and Physics had been extended to advanced level. Despite the new property, HMIs visiting the school in 1953 again recommended strongly that the building programme advocated in 1950 should be carried out. HMI, Miss Dencer, 'at every visit she made to the school since the General Inspection of February 1950, enquired what progress [had] been made into putting into effect the recommendations made'.

The Hollies was in need of three new full-sized classrooms, another fully equipped science laboratory, a housecraft block for cookery and needlework, more cloakrooms, and a larger library. Miss Dencer made it clear that the school was in danger of losing its direct-grant status if plans were not put into operation to provide the extra accommodation. There was a suggestion from HMI that the school's grant was not being used efficiently, and it was made clear to the school's Governors that The Hollies could not function properly with such inadequate accommodation. The Governors' immediate response was to request an increase in the fees allowed for the school. The fees were the basis on which the Local Education Authority's grant was calculated. The Governors pointed out that the fee of £33 per annum for 1954 was based on expenditure in 1950, since when, 'nearly all prices [showed] an increase of 75%'.

Throughout these years of constant financial worries, the school continued to flourish and the numbers grew, particularly the Sixth Form, as each year brought good results and new accolades and awards. In 1946, there had been ten pupils in the Sixth Form; by 1952, this number had trebled.

In September 1954, the school introduced a Parents Meeting; a new venture as there had been little contact with parents, some of whom lived long distances from the school and were busy with work in the

home or career. The FCJs felt it was an opportunity to discuss matters with the parents, and ask for their co-operation. At the meeting the following year, the successes of 1955 were announced. One pupil had gained a place at Oxford University, another had won a State Scholarship and a Manchester University Scholarship, two others had gained places at Manchester University (one winning a Bursary for an Honours Science degree, the other a place for History Honours), another place was secured at Sheffield University, and three girls were accepted by Sedgely Training College.

By 1956, the Parents Meeting was considered an annual event at which parents were encouraged to leave their girls in school for the full course. Their co-operation was sought so that pupils could take full advantage of the benefits of an education in a Catholic grammar school. The Sixth Form had become increasingly important to the economic viability of the school. Not every girl could take full advantage of the benefits afforded by a convent school education. Some, through family circumstances or the prevailing economic climate, were unable to stay into the Sixth Form, but despite this, the numbers staying on into the Sixth Form grew quite rapidly, from twenty-six in 1949 to forty-eight in 1955. The numbers rose again, to fifty-nine the following year, giving a total of over 400 girls in the grammar school.

Successes continued in all areas of school life; in February 1956 a Sixth Form pupil won first prize in the Catenian Public Speaking competition, held at the Midland Hotel. In 1957, further pupils secured a Major County Scholarship to Manchester University and other University Bursaries, one to Liverpool for a degree in Classics. In the same year, the school again obtained first prize in the Public Speaking Competition of the Catenian Association. That year, for the first time, the Association awarded a shield, and the Catenian Association's representative took great delight in presenting it to the school that had educated his own daughter. The cultural life of the school continued to flourish, marked by a performance of *Quality Street* in 1954, and followed by *The Snow Queen* in 1955. Reports of this production judged the speech, acting, and staging to be very good. The scenery for *The Snow Queen* had been made and designed

by the Sixth Form under the supervision of the Art Mistress, and the lighting and sound effects were controlled by the Elocution Mistress.

Drama was augmented by music, when the Hollies' Choir of 200 girls took part in a Festival of Music at the Free Trade Hall. This concert of 1958 laid the foundation for further performances with professional musicians at the home of the Halle Orchestra. A venture into the world of opera was staged at the school in 1959, with performances of the Gilbert and Sullivan work *The Mikado*.

Greater numbers were now entering the Sixth Form and going on to higher education. While the work of the teachers concentrated on the all-round education of the girls, the Headmistress and her Council juggled the demands of internal and external pressures. The continued success of the school demanded that further accommodation be provided. The purchase of Staneswood, in 1952, merely delayed for a while the necessity of building on the school site. In 1954, architects Messrs. Reynold and Scott drew up plans for new extensions and applied for planning permission early in 1955. This action was to mark the beginning of one of the most challenging episodes in the history of The Hollies and to test the fortitude and patience of the FCJs in ways that were new to them.





Plate 41: Numbers at the Prep. continued to Rise (Maureen Bragg)

## **Chapter 7**

### **Interesting Times**

‘The school had been treated ... with scant consideration and ... having manoeuvred the school into such a disastrous position ...’

In 1951, the FCJs had enjoyed the Queen Consort's visit to Manchester to open a new University Hostel quite near to the school. They little realised the threat that this would pose to The Hollies in later years.

In 1954, after continued pressure from Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) to implement the recommendations for extending the accommodation, the school Governors submitted a request for a grant from the Ministry of Education. On 8<sup>th</sup> July, a reply was received from the Curzon Street office granting the proposal in principle, subject to the submission of the plans and estimated costs. Early in 1955, the school's architects submitted the plans for extensive building extensions to Manchester's Planning Department. This initiated one of the most difficult and protracted periods of the school's history. Manchester City Council refused to reach a decision and requested a series of meetings with representatives from the school to clarify a matter of which the FCJs were unaware. The school's future was in jeopardy; the enemy was unknown.

In April, a letter was received from the Town Clerk, asking a representation to go to the Town Hall to hear what the Town Buildings and Planning Committee had to say on the matter. The representatives were informed that Manchester University intended to ask for compulsory purchase of part of the Hollies' 3.5 acre site, for the erection of more student hostels. The Town Clerk advised the school to plan for a less expensive extension to minimise the financial loss to the Governors when the compulsory purchase occurred. In reply, the Governors said they'd given the matter careful consideration but intended to continue with their original plans.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> May, the Parents Committee held a meeting at which they decided to send a deputation, with approval from the school's Governors, to the Town Hall to make mass protest at Council's decision. On 25<sup>th</sup> May, a party of 200 parents, headed by a banner bearing the words "Save the Hollies", gathered at the Town Hall just before the start of the City Council Meeting. The parents made their views known about the Council's recommendation

Plate 42: Hollies' Parents take their Campaign to Manchester Town Hall (FCJ Archives)



The parents made their views known about the Council's recommendations

that the planned £40,000 extension should be allowed for only fifteen years. They also protested that there was to be no compensation paid for the new extension when the University finally acquired the site. Councillor Mrs E.A. Yarwood assured the parents that she would recommend that the City Council give further consideration to the proposals. Alderman Lever proved himself a staunch ally of the school when he declared that the matter was not a political one. He believed it to be ‘a sacred one, affecting the rights of parents to bring up their children in the way they want’, and promised further support for the school in the future.

There were already rumblings in the education world that were to threaten the future of all grammar schools in Manchester. The local Labour Party had put forward proposals for building the first two comprehensive schools, citing the “elitist” nature of grammar schools as the reason for the desirability of such schools. The debate about the tripartite system was of little concern to The Hollies in 1955, but was to re-emerge twenty years later when Manchester published its re-organisation proposals.

For the time being the support of parents and friends was needed on more than one occasion. At first the FCJs were anxious to keep negotiations with the University on an informal basis, but it soon became clear to the school’s advisors that legal representation was required when matters became far more complicated than anyone had foreseen. The desire to keep the proceedings informal was perceived as ‘the result of lack of experience in this type of matter’. Accordingly, John Gorna & Co., Solicitors, were appointed to act on behalf of the school. The initial suggestion of a time limit for any building extensions was met with dismay. The expenditure could be contemplated only if it was to satisfy the demands from the Ministry for Education to facilitate more efficient provision of a grammar school education. A debate between the University and the school ensued concerning the best use of the site for educational purposes. Towards the end of the school year, 1955, the suggestion of appealing against the decision regarding the time limit was put to the Governors. It was believed that such an appeal would be successful

and would force the City Council to make a decision that would not create hostile publicity or arouse adverse public opinion.

Some time in the autumn of 1955, a meeting with representatives from the University and the City Council resulted in a new proposal for the future of The Hollies. The University would purchase the existing site at a price agreed with the District Valuer; the FCJs would look for a new site for purchase; the school would remain on its present site until new buildings were erected on the new site. All three parties agreed to this proposal, and the FCJs began their search for new land. By November, a new site had been found and the legal searches and negotiations for its purchase put into action. The University, meanwhile, had sent the District Valuer's Report to the University Grants' Committee in London. That report valued The Hollies' site at between £60,000 and £80,000. These figures included a formula for reinstatement of the use of the existing buildings. However, the University Grants' Committee refused to give Manchester University permission to purchase at even the lower figure, arguing that the buildings were of no use to the University and would have to be demolished. The FCJs had committed time and money in the search for and acquisition of a new site and were dismayed by what they perceived as the "about turn" of Manchester University. A further meeting with University representatives and City Council officials was proposed for January 1956.

At the school's Governors' Meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1956, further communication with the University was discussed. The Governors felt that the 'school had been treated by the University with scant consideration and that the consequent position was extremely difficult'. They decided to propose that the University, 'having manoeuvred the school into such a disastrous position', might lease or sell some of their land on which to expand. The Governors agreed to ask what figure the University would offer for the school's property should they still wish to acquire the site. The next meeting at the University was attended by Sir John Stopford, Professor Rainford, and Professor Manfield Cooper, representing the University, and Reverend Dr. Duggan, Dr. Kathleen Ollerenshaw,

Councillor Hopkins, and Miss Nolan, representing the Governors of the school. Sir John stated that he was shocked ‘and deeply disappointed’ by the decision of the University Grants’ Committee to refuse permission to purchase The Hollies at the figure given by the District Valuer. This was a Treasury decision, but Sir John was anxious to pursue the question of valuation and had invited a representative from the University Grants’ Committee to attend the meeting. They had declined to do so but he had not given up hope that a satisfactory solution might be reached.

One of the arguments used against accepting the District Valuer’s valuation was that the Ministry of Education had stated that the school would ‘have to move anyway, as it did not comply with statutory requirements’. The school’s solicitor had referred to the Ministry’s “shilly shallying” in respect of the approval of plans or even answering letters concerning the school’s appeals. The Minister for Education had refused to grant permission for the acquisition of the new site until the University had made a final decision. The school was in a “Catch 22” situation. The FCJs were advised to purchase the new site themselves, as it might be sold to others, leaving them without new land. The school’s solicitor was extremely concerned about the purchase, without the Minister’s approval for the erection of a school on the land. He was of the opinion that the Ministry of Education had been kept fully informed of what was happening and was now working in conjunction with the Treasury. Had it not been for the opposition of Manchester University to the planned extension, the question of acreage and statutory requirements would never have been an issue. ‘They had not been referred to in the past, and the technicalities were now being brought into operation as a basis of reducing the price.’ These methods were deprecated by the solicitor in a full report sent to Reverend Mother General, Mother Catherine Windle, at Stella Maris Convent, Broadstairs. The FCJs were witnessing the workings of a secular body that had little regard for the courtesies of community life in either school or convent.

Sir John Stopford was anxious to conclude negotiations with The Hollies before his retirement in October 1956. He agreed to approach the University Grants' Committee to 'use every influence in his power to get them to agree to a reasonable purchase price.' He felt very strongly about the matter, as it was the first time that the Grants' Committee had turned down one of his recommendations. He proposed a sum of £50,000 as reasonable and promised he would do his best to obtain that amount if the school found it acceptable. The school's solicitor, John Gorna, sought instructions from Reverend Mother General, and personally vouched for the integrity of Sir John Stopford. John Gorna had been a fellow student of Sir John's proposed successor, Professor Manning Cooper, who assured Mr. Gorna that Sir John's reputation was 'of the highest order'.

Mr. Gorna outlined the options available to the FCJs. He calculated that there was no great difference between the amount that had been proposed to be spent on the original plans of extensions to the Oak Drive premises and the amount that would be needed for a move to a new site, with its playing field facilities and new, purpose-built school. HMIs had emphasised the need for playing fields, and the purchase of land at Mersey Bank, West Didsbury, fulfilled that requirement admirably. The house on the site would provide accommodation for the convent, and both the grammar and preparatory schools would benefit from purpose-built facilities. The proposed purchase price of £50,000 for The Hollies at Fallowfield was considered acceptable, providing that the University allowed tenancy of the site until the new buildings were completed. Further negotiations continued until agreement was reached on the payment of interest on the amount, 'in lieu of rent', until the University acquired vacant possession. There was a delay of a few weeks until assurance was received from the Minister for Education that permission had been granted to erect a school on the Mersey Bank site. By the end of February 1956, Mr. Gorna had concluded the business for which he charged the FCJs no fees 'as a small contribution to the well-being of Catholic education in Manchester'. He continued to act on behalf of the school in the conveyance of the



properties and of dealing with tenders and appointment of architects and builders.



Plate 43: The need for more science laboratories; just one of the pressures on The Hollies (Frances Bradburn (Wright))



Plate 44: A Crowded Classroom, Oak Drive (FCJ Archives)

Conveyancing was completed on 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1957, some two years after the initial proposals had been submitted to Manchester City Council. Those two years had been extremely difficult and uncertain for the FCJs and for the staff, pupils, parents, and friends of the school. More difficulties lay ahead and the enormous task of fund-raising and preparation began in earnest. In the summer term, 1956, the Past Pupils Association planned a Christmas Fair to raise funds for the new buildings. The Association thanked the visitors to the Fair in the Catholic Press through a notice that stated, 'The Organisers ... wish to thank most sincerely all former pupils, parents and friends of the school who helped them. The final result was £230.'

As an encouragement and morale-builder, all the pupils were taken to the new site to spend a half-day at Mersey Bank. The pupils played games on the spacious lawns and gathered bluebells in the woods. Many past pupils remember vividly the fund-raising efforts that seemed to continue well into the 1970s 'for the new school buildings'. But, amidst the flurry of activities, the school did not neglect its care for others in the midst of its own problems. The struggles of the last few years were placed firmly in perspective by the civil unrest in Hungary. An appeal for Hungarian refugees raised £84 from pupils and staff, while the junior school had a Mass said for those who had fallen.

Life in the school continued its usual pattern with increasing numbers. The great increase in scholarship pupils made it imperative to provide enough accommodation in the short term. In 1957, Bishop Beck gave The Hollies a prefabricated classroom that was to act as a temporary extension for the school. At the Garden Party in the same year, he donated £1000 to match the target of £1000 set by the FCJs. The school was congratulated on the successful results achieved by the Garden Party fund-raising. But there were disappointments too; of 600 copies of a proposed covenant form, only four had been returned. The FCJs noted that 'covenants were being rather over-done at the moment and the people did not like to commit themselves'. The Hollies delayed its opening until

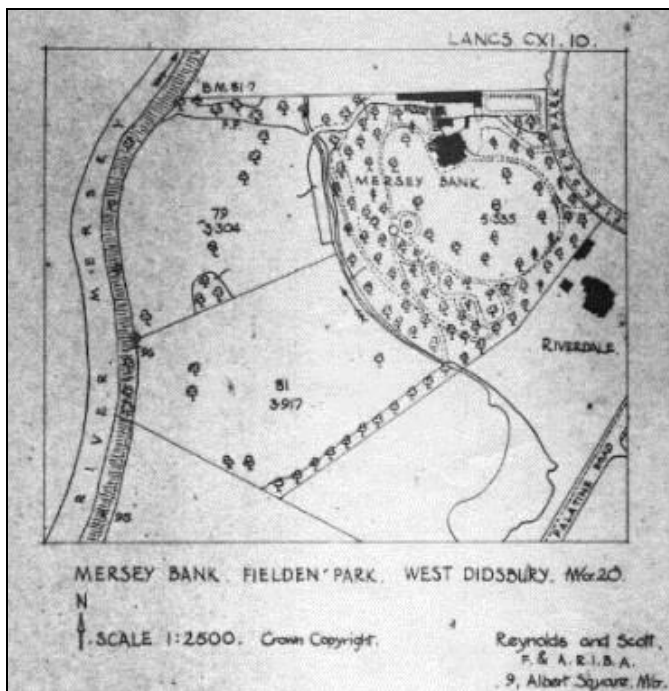
11<sup>th</sup> September in the hope that the annexe donated by the Bishop would be ready. It was not fully operational until October, but was declared to be the best lit, best heated, and most spacious of all the classrooms. It was surely ‘a promise of things to come’ at the new site.

The continuing work of the FCJs reaped the benefits of ever-increasing numbers of those anxious to secure a place at the school. Fund-raising efforts were no doubt aided by good news, both academic and cultural. Examination results for 1957 included a major County Scholarship to Manchester University and two other Bursaries for University, including one to Liverpool for a degree in Classics. The first prize and shield of the Catenian Association’s Public Speaking Competition again went to a pupil at The Hollies. A chance visit by a Japanese professor of education led to a long discussion with Mother Mechtilde about methods of instruction and discipline at the school. Though outwardly these were similar to those of the pre-War Hollies, the outside world was exerting its pressures in subtle ways. The “Cold War” resulted in feelings of insecurity, which had been heightened during the Suez Crisis of 1956. Television ownership brought world news with its stories of war, famine, and natural disasters into the daily lives of both staff and pupils.

In 1959, the Vocations Exhibition at Belle Vue provided the FCJs with the opportunity of reminding the pupils of the service expected from women in a modern society. The Exhibition recalled the pioneering work of women of the nineteenth century and displayed the variety of work done by the religious orders of the twentieth century. The older pupils were encouraged to make project books about the life and history of the Foundress and the Society, and also of The Hollies. The Sixth Form produced a volume containing notes, illustrations, and maps showing various FCJ sites throughout the world. While recognising that not many vocations would be inspired by the Exhibition, the FCJs used the occasion as an opportunity for exploring numerous ways in which modern women could be of service in the caring professions of nursing, teaching, and medicine.

In 1958, Hollies' pupils had won five university places, including two Scholarships, one Exhibition, and one Bursary. Many more went on to teacher-training college, six to the FCJs' College at Sedgely. In 1959, the results included a Scholarship, an Exhibition and four Bursaries. Six pupils went on to university including the Head Girl, whose mother had died the previous year.

Plate 45: Map of the New School Site, Mersey Road (FCJ Archives)



The plans for the new school buildings had been displayed in the school's gym and the site described as the 'finest for the school in the north of England'. But there had been deferment to the start of building work as changes were made to facilitate the provision for a four-form entry grammar school instead of the originally planned three-form. In 1958, the Governors complained about the slow

progress made, and new plans to include more room for the growing Sixth Form again added to the delay as planning permission had to be re-sought. On St. Patrick's Day, 1959, a report was received from pupils living near Mersey Bank that a hut had appeared on the site. This was surely the prelude to building. The Governors were notified that building apparatus had appeared at Mersey Bank, and the Clerk of Works, Mr. A.M. Proos was appointed on a weekly salary of £15. A report in a Wythenshawe newspaper estimated that the work would take two years to complete, and that the cost was to be raised entirely by the FCJs.

A total of ninety girls had been awarded places at the grammar school with no places available for residuary pupils. A move to the new site was seen as imperative but the slow progress continued. One FCJ reported, many years later, that the pupils would say 'never was so little done in so long a time by so many men'. The school community must have felt like the Tribes of Israel; they had wandered in the desert for so long and had, at last, a tantalising glimpse of the Promised Land.

Like the Tribes of Israel, The Hollies was to enter the Promised Land under a new leader. Mother Victoire Murphy was to become the longest-serving Headmistress in the school's history when she replaced Mother Mechtilde in 1958, after ten years' service at the school. A graduate of University College Dublin, Mother Victoire entered the Society at Brussels in 1937. Having survived a flying bomb attack at Broadstairs during the War and carbon monoxide poisoning on her arrival at The Hollies in 1949, she was well prepared for the challenges that the twenty-one years of her Headship were to provide.



Plate 46: Last Performance at Oak Drive, HMS Pinafore, 1961;  
Father Kevin O'Connor conducting. (FCJ Archives)

## **Chapter 8**

### **The Promised Land**

‘We live in an uncertain age and suffer from a lack of conviction in moral values.’



Plate 47: The Hollies, Mersey Road. (Manchester Local Studies Unit)

Mother Victoire’s Headship had begun during the two ‘very anxious years when the future of the school was at stake’. When planning permission was finally granted to build the new school at Mersey Bank, she had oversight of the plans for the new buildings and the move to the new site. Reynolds and Scott drew up some ‘interesting plans’ and on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1959, the builders, Dickensons of Bolton, began digging the foundations. The new school had eight acres of land surrounding the buildings. It was described as ‘a superb modern school built to the highest specification.’ A separate preparatory

school (“the Prep”) was built on the plot, being separated from the grammar building by the convent, which, once again, was a large Victorian house. The school buildings were wonderful, compared to the old Hollies at Oak Drive. There were light airy classrooms, state-of-the-art specialist rooms for Art, Geography, and Needlework; science laboratories and, at last, two fully equipped domestic science rooms.



Plate 48: Domestic Science Room, Mersey Road (FCJ Archives)

The FCJs, as Trustees of the school, paid the main cost of the buildings; the remainder was financed by fund-raising efforts, and some funds from the fees paid by the various Education Committees.

*The best materials and equipment were put into the school and the pupils taught how to take care of them. The Bishop had asked the Department of Education and Science to increase the two-form entry of The Hollies to a three-form entry, and this was granted with the approval of the Governors. The Hollies in Oak Drive was overcrowded, but everyone [looked] forward to the new school.*

The site was about twelve minutes by bus from the old Hollies. As one entered the main gates, the grammar school was on the left, the



Prep on the right, and the convent between the two. There was a wide expanse of playground surrounding the two schools, and at the back were eight acres of well-drained playing fields surrounded by a variety of trees. The main door of the school 'gave entrance to a large hall with terrazzo flooring' in the centre of which the school badge and the four House badges were worked in mosaic. To the right was the secretary's room and to the left, the dining room with pink Formica tables. The school dining room was large with trestle tables and chairs and a service counter. As the numbers of pupils increased, even this room was not big enough to accommodate everyone at one time and so there were multiple sittings. The staff had its own separate dining room; 'not really big enough either, but a welcome oasis away from the pupils'. Both of these rooms had hatchways that opened onto a wonderful white-tiled kitchen with every kind of apparatus to delight the heart of any cook.

Next to the hall, off the main entrance, was the library, a large room with a bay window. This room had light oak shelving around the walls and two island bookcases on either side of a large oak, boat-shaped table in the centre of the room. 'Having been taught by experience that two or three girls sitting at a table was not the ideal condition for study in a library', there were about thirty single tables and chairs for study purposes, and fitted green leather seating under the windows. A trained librarian was on duty all day, to issue the books and give advice to the pupils. Shelving ran along the long left-hand wall, the wall at the end of the room, and alongside the librarian's desk. As the stock grew, two big free-standing double-sided stacks and a large magazine rack were bought, as well as specially-made cases for large art books and atlases. All the furniture was of the best quality. The room was considered to be extremely attractive. Behind the librarian's desk was a store-room-cum office.

The office of the Headmistress was next to the library. In this ground-floor area were the cloakrooms, two large art rooms, a needlework room, and two domestic science rooms. The school office was well equipped and eventually there were two full-time and

one part-time secretaries. As the school expanded, a Bursar was also employed to deal with money matters and keep the school accounts.

On the first floor were the large gym, a few bright classrooms, the staff room, four science rooms, and a geography room. The staff common room was large enough to hold most of the staff although some specialist teachers (such as Art, Science, and Domestic Science) had their own workrooms in their departments and did not use the main staff room much. All the specialist rooms were equipped with wonderful tables, cupboards, and display boards. The top floor had twelve classrooms; each classroom had cupboards, two feet high at the back of the room. There was a ledge provided for an altar and a generous supply of display boards. The rooms were decorated in pastel shades and all were large and bright with large



Plate 49: The Gym, Mersey Road. (FCJ Archives)

windows from which could be seen the ‘lovely trees and extensive playing fields’. The corridors were wide and ran the full length of the building.

Back on the ground floor, at the end of the dining room, was a folding door that opened onto a spacious hall, with a large stage, under which was a roomy store. Leading from the hall, at the back,

was a changing room with twenty-five showers, a room for the Games Mistress, a games store, and wire lockers for P.E. uniform. From the showers was a staircase leading up to the gymnasium; this was equipped with every possible type of apparatus. The acquisition of playing fields meant that games such as hockey could be introduced, as well as track and field events. There were tennis courts and separate netball courts – no double line markings this time – and, down on the playing fields, a pavilion.

There were 520 girls in the grammar school and 210 pupils in the Prep, which was a small edition of the grammar school, but situated on the right of the entrance gates. The Prep had six classrooms, two on the ground floor and four upstairs. All rooms were ‘on the sunny side’ with windows on two sides, which made the rooms bright and airy. The hall was large and spacious with eight high windows. There were views across the River Mersey to the golf course at Northenden.

The Community realised what a difference the mahogany woodwork, woodblock floors, and efficient electric lights made to the general look of the building, which seemed to have the best of everything. A Geography Mistress recalled that she had never worked in such a wonderful geography room before or since. The FCJs admired particularly the terrazzo, which was four feet high along all the corridors and staircases. Many visitors from other schools asked to see the school and ‘all were impressed with what they saw’.

The May Crowning of 1961 took place for the last time at Oak Drive, and the June Garden Party was opened by the Lord Mayor of Manchester. He surprised everyone by telling them that his wife was a past pupil. There was a feeling of sadness as the girls went round the old school for the last time on the last day of term. It was not to be their last visit to the old school however; all girls were asked to report to school during the summer holidays to collect their books for the new term, take them home and back them in brown paper. Over 500 volunteers thus aided the transferal of books and equipment to the new site. Vans were packed with the contents of Oak Drive with

help from staff and pupils. Members of staff moved the library books; each mistress taking responsibility for one subject.

The new site was almost ready for the new term, but delays in the laying of the playgrounds and driveways resulted in an extension to the summer holiday. Despite announcements in the press and on the radio, at least one new grammar school pupil arrived early, and at the Oak Drive site too. There she was met by one the FCJs, who swept her into the building to help with the packing of laboratory equipment with the words, ‘as you are here now, you might as well make yourself useful and not have a wasted journey’. The new pupil joined groups of other pupils, teachers, and parents who gave freely of their time to help with the movement of furniture and equipment.

The Bishop of Salford expressed his delight that the site was on the “right” side of the River Mersey. Had it been on the opposite bank, it would have been outside the Diocese of Salford and over a hundred years of co-operative work would have ended in 1961. A Governors’ meeting followed the blessing of the school, and the Governors were given a guided tour of the school. They remarked especially on the quality of the woodwork, the block floors and the terrazzo on the stairs and corridors. The Community felt that the presence of the FCJs who had toiled at the old Hollies was with them when they moved to the new site, and they prayed that the same spirit would continue to inspire those who worked in the new surroundings. The prayers included requests for more novices to enter the Society to ‘carry on the traditions of the past’. The *Manchester Evening Chronicle* neglected to mention Brook Street’s part in that tradition, when it ran an article called ‘Success Story of a Century’:

*From a few desks in a convent house to a new £250,000 school of sixteen classes set in its own nine acres, all in a little over a hundred years. That is the success story of the Hollies FCJ Grammar School, whose new building at Didsbury, Manchester, will be opened this week by the Bishop of Salford, the Right Reverend George Andrew Beck. It was the Roman Catholic order of nuns, the Faithful Companions of Jesus, who began it*

*all at their house in Fallowfield a century ago; then there were thirty girls. This week 750 pupils, parents, education officials, and a hundred priests from parishes throughout the North West will watch as the Bishop blesses the results of fifteen years' work. The school has four science laboratories.*

The FCJs' prayers would certainly have recalled the early life of the school at Brook Street and they were aware of the rapidly changing society in which they now lived. Their aim, however 'was the same as it had been for over a hundred years; that [was] the formation of the whole person, spiritually, intellectually and physically, and to use their gifts in the service of others'. The emphasis remained with the school motto *Orate, Laborate, Gaudete*. The whole school community worked together 'in the light of Gospel values, and each [member] would help in changing society through mutual respect for each person's uniqueness'.

The 1960s opened as a decade that was full of international tension. The Berlin Wall had just been erected and the Cold War was escalating. It was also a decade of promise in Britain, particularly for women. The Women's Liberation Movement burgeoned, the teenager had already emerged as a new, growing consumer group, the "Swinging Sixties" arrived to the blast of "pop music", and the Catholic Church began to feel the effects of the work of Vatican II.

The decade opened with a shift of gear too at The Hollies, but one that was rooted in tradition. Change was seen, initially, in the arrangements for Prize Day. As the new Headmistress, Mother Victoire was keen to present the school's achievements to all parents, old girls, and friends of the school. The school hall at Oak Drive had long ceased to be a useful venue, as only a limited number could be seated in the audience. In 1959, it was decided that Speech Day would be held 'in the Free Trade Hall because it was the only occasion in the whole year when the staff, girls, and parents could be at a function together'.

The school saw this as an 'occasion for training the girls to walk on the platform with dignity and confidence and to sit still for nearly

two hours'. The event was a carefully choreographed display of achievement, musical presentation, and evidence of The Hollies' training of generations of girls in disciplined self-control over a prolonged period of time. One past pupil remembers that her father, an Army man, complimented Mother Victoire on the way the girls marched onto the stage in complete silence 'without a Drill Sergeant in sight'. This reinforced her belief that parents derived pleasure from 'seeing their children on the stage [at a] formal occasion such as Speech Day [which was] invaluable to self-discipline'. Each year, the Free Trade Hall filled with the whole school, their parents, and friends. Each section of the school filed onto the imposing stage and performed a series of songs, including the newly introduced school song, *Make of Our Youth*. Those left in the auditorium watched, without fidgeting. Prizes were awarded for academic achievement, sporting performances, and also for 'school spirit and courage'. Certificates were handed out, the Headmistress read her annual report, and the Bishop gave his address. Of course, what every pupil waited for was the final announcement that the previous year had been so successful that the Bishop had asked the FCJs for an extra day's holiday, which was granted.

School opened on the new site on 21<sup>st</sup> September, the birthday of the Foundress of the FCJ Community. The Pope had sent a message of congratulations on the new venture. The site workers were amazed that the pupils had begun classes immediately, despite the building work that continued on the playground. In November, parents were invited to see the new school. Over 900 visited and the response to a request for 'no stilettos' was wonderful; some mothers wore their daughters' "indoor shoes". Many past pupils wished they were back at school, especially on seeing the domestic science rooms, which were 'a great attraction with their pink and green Formica-topped working tables, gas and electric stoves, washing machines, and stainless steel sinks'. Expansion of the curriculum had been frustrated by the long delays in the move to the new site. The rapid growth of numbers in the lower school and Sixth Form resulted in large classes. The lack of facilities for Domestic Science had been one of the reasons for the move to new premises. The introduction of

Domestic Science into the timetable 'raised the morale of the second and third stream pupils', who had the opportunity of doing something which the A-stream could not fit into their already crowded week '.

The school was officially opened in a splendid ceremony on 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1962. There was Mass in the school hall in the presence of Bishop Beck. Monsignor Duggan, Chairman of the Governors, was the celebrant, and a choir from St. Bede's sang the Proper of the Mass of the Holy Spirit. There were 560 pupils and 80 guests present. A special lunch, provided by canteen staff, was served in the dining room by sixteen girls from the Upper Sixth. In the afternoon, the visitors, parents, and friends congregated in the playground, as there was insufficient room for all inside. The Veni Creator was sung and the Bishop blessed the school, walking through the whole building. There were FCJ Sisters from the schools at Upton, Bellerive, Skipton, Preston, Sedgley, Adelphi, West Hartlepool, and Middlesborough. They realised that 'it is not only the buildings that make a school', but also the spirit of the school members. Nevertheless, the new school buildings provided the facilities for the much longed-for modernisation of the curriculum, the organisation of which was scrutinised in an Educational Inspection early in the autumn term of 1962.

HMIs had been the catalysts for the plans leading to the move to the new site. Their insistence on playing fields, domestic science rooms, and science laboratories had resulted in school buildings that were the envy of many. The Inspection Report of 1962 praised the 'beautiful premises, so

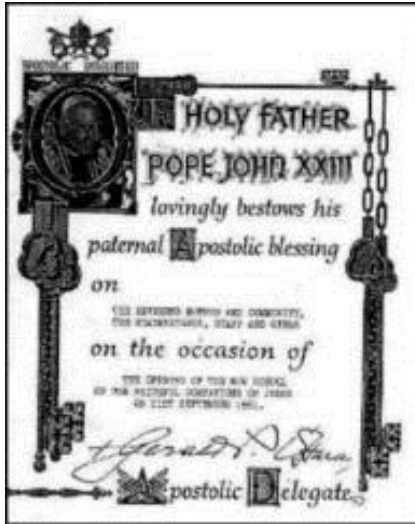


Plate 50: Papal Blessing for the New Hollies (FCJ Archives)



Plate 51: The Bishop of Salford Dedicates the New Hollies (FCJ Archives)

tastefully and well kept'. The school had been 'working under difficulties in old and inconvenient premises in Fallowfield ... and since the move in September 1961, the whole life of the school [had]



been transformed'. The Inspectors reflected that the school owed much to Mother Victoire's 'vision and untiring devotion' during the turbulent first years of her Headship. Her 'kindliness and consideration for others, combined with a sense of humour and a good measure of shrewdness' endeared her to teaching and domestic staff alike. Mother Victoire knew 'well the personal qualities of those with whom she came into contact'. Many past pupils remember her with fondness together with a great deal of respect (and in some cases, trepidation). The Inspectors commended her for encouraging Heads of Department to take part in the detailed planning of the specialist rooms. The delight of the staff and pupils in working with up-to-date equipment was evident in the 'very high standard of presentation of interesting material on display panels. ... Well-chosen pictures, growing plants and flowers [enhanced] the attractive appearance of the premises.'

The Inspectors were quick to comment on the impetus given to the work of the school since the recent move, and attributed it to the enterprise and enthusiasm of the Headmistress and her staff. Any criticism of the organisation of the curriculum was made in the context of the difficulties of the uncertainties of the late 1950s and the upheaval caused by the enforced move. The organisation of the curriculum had often been a matter of expediency in dealing with special situations, instead of a stage in a planned policy. The many problems of moving the school 'made heavy demands on the time of the Headmistress who, while realising the need for modification of the curriculum, concentrated her attention ... on providing the essential equipment and encouraging her staff and pupils to take full advantage of it'.

A few departments had suffered from frequent changes of staff and, at times, shortages had caused 'unsatisfactory features' in the organisation of the curriculum. The large numbers of visiting mistresses complicated the timetabling arrangements, but many of these part-time staff were judged to be able teachers who made a valuable contribution to the overall strength of the staff. Relationships between members of staff, and between staff and

pupils, were judged as very happy. Many of the staff gave generously of their free time to out-of-school activities, which included a Girl Guide troupe, Young Christian Students Group, Debating Society, Hiking Club, Music Group, and Cookery Club. In general, 'the girls worked well, were responsive orally, and took pride in well-presented written work'. The stimulus of the new building and the good supply of equipment showed itself in 'a growing eagerness to undertake additional tasks'. The prospects of rising standards in examinations were evident in the 1962 Inspection Report, which concluded that steady progress had been made since the last full Report. The generosity of the Order was recognised in their provision and equipping of the new school buildings, which had already been repaid in terms of the welfare of the staff and pupils. The Inspectors predicted that increased academic attainment would follow when the problems of the organisation and curriculum had been solved.

The continuing influence of the FCJs was evident in the corporate life of the school. The Inspectors witnessed a special assembly for Advent in which the pupils took part. The girls were judged to be friendly, well-mannered, and to move about the school quietly 'without being in any way repressed'. The Inspectors saw that the pupils were encouraged to be self-reliant and independent in their thinking and to take increasing responsibilities for the organisation of many activities, including those of their Houses. The Prefects in particular were deemed to be very capable. Each Prefect was attached to a form and, with the Form Mistress, was concerned with its welfare. The Inspectors viewed the senior girls as well-poised; they met and entertained visitors with ease, and were often given complete responsibility for planning and catering for special occasions. Though the Sixth Form 'enjoyed certain privileges', only one year after the school was opened, the Inspectors felt the girls needed a larger common room. The growth of Sixth Form numbers had accelerated after the move to the new buildings as the opportunities afforded by the improved facilities and enervating environment motivated both pupils and staff.

With the change of sites came a change of emphasis. The role of the Head Girl and Prefects become more formalised. The Head Girl gave the welcoming address at Speech Day. Prefects had responsibilities for lower forms and the pastoral care of the younger girls. Social events at the school were organised by the Head Girl and her team; charitable events were planned and executed by the growing numbers of girls staying on into the Sixth Form. Over 1000 parents attend Prize Day in 1961. The Bishop exhorted them to encourage their daughters to stay on for the two years of the Sixth Form. He said that these were the years when the girls were given responsibilities, and the years in which their characters were formed. The Sixth Form girls were considered a great asset to the school. The Head Girl and Vice Head Girls arranged the Prefects' duties. The Prefects had a special tie with the school badge embroidered on it, and wore beige jumpers trimmed at the wrist and waist in the school colours. There was a Prefects' scarf in the school colours, and a silver badge with the school crest. The Head Girl, Deputies, and Senior Prefects wore gowns. By the end of the 1960s, the Prefects received their badges at a special Mass held at St. Augustine's at the beginning of the school year.



Plate 52: Speech Day at Oak Drive (Judith Marcinick (Thomas))



Plate 53: Head Girl and her Deputies, 1967 (Judith Gwilliam (Leach))

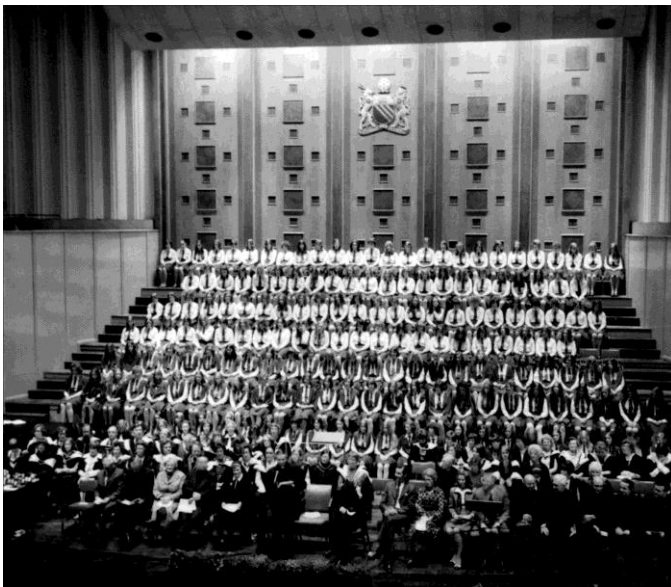


Plate 54: Speech Day at the Free Trade Hall Manchester (Anne-Marie Lowes (Carroll))



Plate 55: Sixth Form Badges Courtesy Anne-Marie Lowes (Carroll)  
Plate 56: House Captains, 1967 (Pat Harris (Mooney))

In 1970, the House system, a long-established tradition since the Brook Street days, was replaced with one based on year groups. It was evident to the staff that the sense of loyalty and interest was greatest amongst girls in the same class and year group. The prefectorial system was altered to one based on a School Council, in which the Senior Prefects took responsibility for school discipline, year groups, and social activities. The Prefects' badges were returned at a second Mass, held before A-level examinations. The Prefects were very conscientious in fulfilling their duties. They helped to supervise at break and lunchtime, took great interest in the form for which they were responsible, and organised Halloween parties for the first and second year pupils. They organised "dinner dances" for the Upper Sixth and their parents and staff. They formed forty-four groups of girls, under the leadership of Sixth Formers, to visit and help the old and needy in their own neighbourhoods at the

weekend. The school was convinced of the premise that ‘happiness comes in serving others’. The female virtue of caring continued to play a large part in the ethos of the school.

One Education Inspector, in 1962, was concerned by the presence of the small boys in the Prep school, as she was anxious about their development in an all-female community. Her fears were laid to rest by Mother Victoire, who invited her to observe a P.E. lesson. The Inspection Report commented that the Headmistress found ‘time even to see that the little boys ... [developed] manly qualities’. During the dinner hour in the winter term, Mother Victoire was to be found at the head ‘of a file of small figures dressed in brightly coloured football kit, moving rapidly down the steep slope and onto the playing field’. She was aptly described as ‘like a comet with a fiery tail’.

In addition to coaching the football team, Mother Victoire had introduced the practice of staging a Gilbert and Sullivan opera in the autumn term. Drama productions and informal reviews and presentations had been a feature in the school since its early Brook Street days. During the 1960s, plays were ousted by the operas, which offered opportunity for more pupils to participate in the productions. The first Gilbert and Sullivan opera presented was *The Mikado*. It was staged in July 1959, the Oak Drive’s ‘worn’ stage, and ‘in the girl who took the part of the Lord High Executioner, [the school] found a talented comedienne’.

The stage in the new school hall was complete with stage lighting, sound system and “swish curtains”. At first the casts of the musical productions were all-female, but later (with *Yeoman of the Guard* in 1967) ‘men, young and not so young’, were recruited to take the male parts. Some were pupils or old boys from St. Bede’s, and some of the older men were fathers of girls at the school. Subsequent marriages between former Hollies’ girls and young men of St. Bede’s were not uncommon.



Plate 57: *Yeoman of the Guard*, 1965 (FCJ Archives)

1963 saw an important addition to the annual Gilbert and Sullivan production. More than ten years' earlier, the conductor Stanford Robinson promised his friend Albert Grant that when the copyright to Gilbert and Sullivan expired, he would bring the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra to Manchester for a concert with a local grammar school choir. This would make musical history, for no school choir had ever sung with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. Mr. Grant was "Entertainment Officer" of The Hollies' Parents Committee and it was no coincidence, therefore, that The Hollies was chosen as the school to perform at the Free Trade Hall on 26<sup>th</sup> February, under the baton of Stanford Robinson. The first concert featured the male section of Manchester St. Cecilia Choir, eighty girls from The Hollies, and soloists from Manchester Royal College of Music,

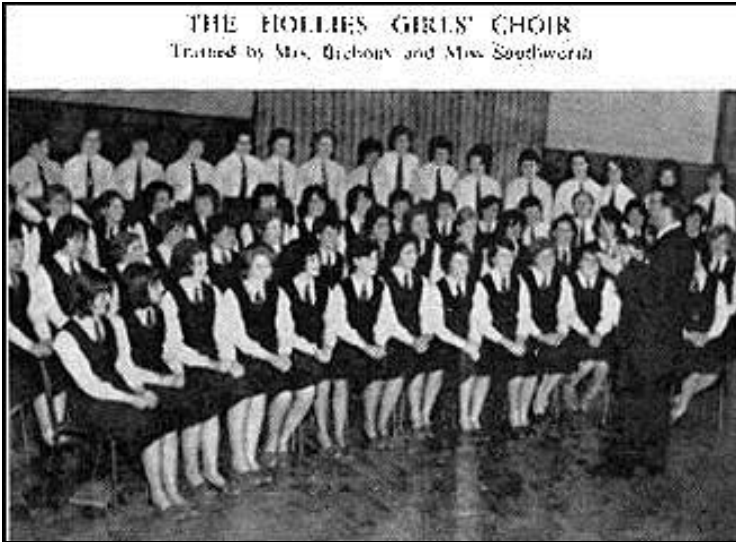


Plate 58: Sir Stanford Robinson rehearses The Hollies' Choir (Eileen Graham (Hall)

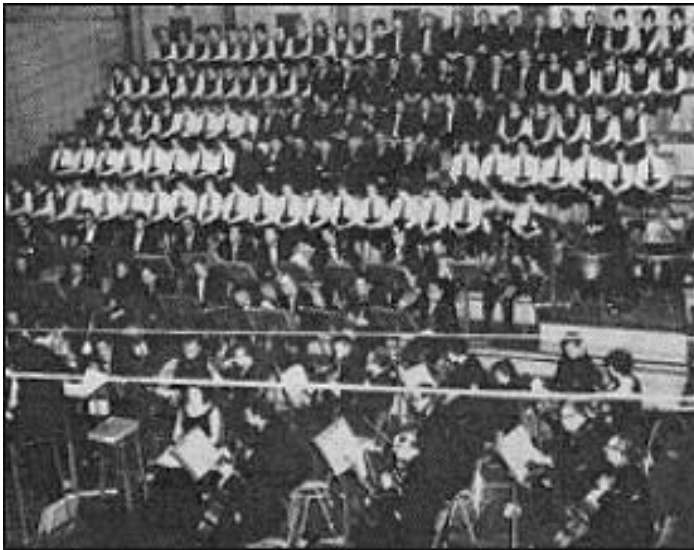


Plate 59: Gilbert and Sullivan Concert at The Free Trade Hall, Manchester (Eileen Graham (Hall)



including Owen Branigan. The staff and Sixth Form of The Hollies paid for fifty tickets for this concert, which they presented to Henshaw's School for the Blind. Subsequent concerts featured Ian Wallace, Caroline Cranshaw, and The Marjorie Brown Singers (1965). This was the start of a tradition of Hollies Choir Concerts at the Free Trade Hall. On St. Valentine's Day in 1968, the choir performed with the Manchester Mozart Orchestra.

It was not only in music that the school enjoyed success. With the new sporting facilities, the school could offer on-site classes in netball, hockey, gymnastics, athletics, and ballroom dancing. The school's netball teams had enjoyed successes since their early beginnings on the tarmac playgrounds at Oak Drive. They could now play and practice for their regular Saturday matches against other schools without the confusing multi-markings of the pitches. Tennis lessons took place on the six hard courts situated beside the two grass hockey pitches. The River Mersey surpassed the rain-laden pools of the old Oak Drive pitches, when it regularly spilled onto the flood plane on which the new hockey pitches lay. The school added to the tennis facilities by hiring a court from the Northern Tennis Club in Didsbury. 'The girls were able to have excellent tennis coaching ... [and] were invited to act as ball girls during the Northern Tennis Tournament at Didsbury during the month of June, prior to Wimbledon.' A past pupil, Anne Hobbs, won the Ladies' Tournament in 1978 and went on to play at Wimbledon.

Many other societies and groups developed in the school. A Drama Group and Astronomy Club were added to the list noted in the Inspection of 1962. Many of these extra-curricular activities were organised and run by members of the Sixth Form, who also continued the habits of earlier times in charitable activities. Each Christmas, the staff and pupils 'provided a Christmas dinner of turkey, ham, and mince pies for seventy men at the Morning Star Hostel. Large plum puddings and Christmas cakes were made in the domestic science rooms. The Hostel's dining room was decorated by the girls from the Sixth Form on Christmas Eve.'

Each year's Harvest Festival resulted in boxes of food and flowers for the local old people's homes. The old and disabled were treated to after-hours Christmas shopping at Lewis' Department Store:

The Sixth Form asked Pauldens if they would stay open for an extra hour one evening before Christmas so that forty people from old peoples' homes and thirty handicapped children could do some Christmas shopping in peace. This event gave great joy to all and the staff of Pauldens did not want any overtime payment.

Groups from the Sixth Form travelled to retirement and nursing homes, as well as the chapel at Strangeways Prison, to take part in Christmas services. A school for disabled children also benefited from contact with the privileged pupils from The Hollies.

Academic successes continued to rise and numbers grew and more pupils remained in the Sixth Form. The new buildings were 'greatly appreciated by everyone and great care was taken of all the new equipment'. The numbers of pupils who opted for The Hollies increased each year [and] most of the increase was due to the fact 'that the girls realised that they could follow a career and also have a happy family life'.

The school was built for 540 pupils and, by 1968, there were 660 on roll. This was due to an increase of 120 in the Sixth Form since 1961. New subjects had been added to the curriculum; German, Spanish, Greek, Domestic Science, British Government, Music, General Studies, and Scripture. All these new subjects could be taken at A-level, in addition to English, History, Geography, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, French, Art, Latin, and Mathematics. The school had to employ extra staff for the Sixth Form, and all staff were 'very generous in giving extra time after school to the weaker girls'. In 1960, twenty-one pupils passed their A-level exams and left to enter higher or further education or employment. By 1967, all sixty-two members of the Upper Sixth gained A-level passes. Over 84% then went on to higher education, including University, teacher

training and colleges of art. The remainder entered professions including nursing, physiotherapy, acting, and the Civil Service.

At the “old” Hollies, generations of girls had been educated in the safe world of the convent school of the first half of the twentieth century. It was a school of the *Girls Own* era, still rooted in nineteenth century tradition and the ethos of a Catholic school pre-Vatican II. A convent schoolgirl of the 1950s had similar tales to tell as one joining in 1900. ‘The isolation of convent life, combined with the authoritarianism of the Catholic Church had resulted in a moribund system that failed to keep pace with the times. What had started as a radical movement of women began to be experienced as increasingly oppressive by a new generation of girls,’

Throughout the school life of a Hollies girl, the strongest influence was the importance of the Catholic faith, and all they did reflected this. The school year was a colourful pageant, beginning with Our Lady, the mother of Jesus Christ. Every lesson began with a prayer; many old girls can still rattle off the French version of the *Hail Mary* that started every French lesson. The school had Mass and Benediction and regular Retreats. There was a great devotion to Our Lady and most classrooms had a small statue of her on a plinth on the wall or mantelpiece. Much of any conflict with the nuns and Church was the result of the school’s attempt to instil old-fashioned Victorian views of life. The move to the new site coincided with challenges to the convent’s view of the world.

At the 1961 Speech Day, the Bishop spoke about new educational dogma that emphasised activity methods in the infant classroom. He said they had produced a new spirit and a new zest for life. He said that the encouragement of self-expression was welcome in education, particularly among those who remembered the dull repressive discipline of an earlier age. However, the Bishop emphasised that ‘self expression in the growing child and adolescent is not necessarily a good thing. We live an uncertain age and suffer from a lack of certainty and conviction in moral values...no certain code of conduct is set before young people. The groping for conviction often

heads for moral relativism and the hard shell of the angry generation which is so often a cloak for despair.’

“Kitchen sink” drama emphasised this change in British society. Television brought that world into many more homes. It delivered hour upon hour of unbroken excitement and glamour, punctuated at intervals by news and documentaries; a constant mingling of fantasy and reality. *Jackie* superseded the *Girls Own Paper*, replacing homely advice on hobbies and stories of school adventures with advice columns, tips on make-up, and articles on pop music, celebrities, and the opposite sex. Nuns were genuinely alarmed by glimpses of life outside the convent. They perceived it as their most pressing duty to ‘fight a rear-guard action on behalf of God and Our Lady’.

The spiritual development of the girls was always very important to the FCJs. They tried to create a happy Catholic atmosphere in the school, where persons had respect for themselves and others. Each year at Speech Day they had the same message for parents; with their help and co-operation the school could keep Christian values before the girls. It was not easy to keep those ideals and standards in the world of the late twentieth century, ‘when some leaders almost apologised for having Christian values. The girls were the future of society.’

The school saw its mission to make the pupils ‘joyful torch bearers of Christ-like standards in a world that [was] becoming joyless because it no longer [focussed] on Christ and His Good News’. Devotion to Our Lady is one of the strong traditions of the FCJ Sisters and it was always a very special Feast Day for them on 8<sup>th</sup> December at The Hollies. Generations of past pupils have fond memories of the ‘decorated statue on the stage ... the St. Augustine’s church Mass ... [followed by] Christmas dinner in the school canteen’. The FCJs had run Christmas Fairs, for charity, since the time of the foundation of the school. The proceeds went to the missions; the Third World. Summer Fairs and collections were devoted to the same missions.

The protection of this traditional convent school life resulted in increasing vigilance against the influence of the world outside. A

television drama series aimed at the “younger generation” was criticised by the Headmistress of another (mixed) Catholic school, who had urged pupils to ‘watch television to help their drama study’. A newspaper article, of 16<sup>th</sup> September, 1966, reported her saying, ‘This series has steadily deteriorated. Last Friday’s effort was the worst of all. It was a nasty, evil play.’ Another teacher was quoted, ‘They have been throwing muck for ten or twelve weeks now, but I see a good deal of the younger generation so perhaps these plays are not so far-fetched.’ Such gritty realism had no place at The Hollies.

Throughout the 1960s, musical productions took precedence over drama. Occasional reviews, concerts, and play extracts were staged by the senior girls. The first full drama production of the 1960s was the result of special circumstances and the intervention of Nora Garbutt (Elocution Mistress) and Marie Furphy, (Literature Mistress). It was due to their tenacity, and the fact that the play was a text on the A-level syllabus, that the production took place. Many past pupils and staff remember Paula Wilcox ‘out-acting everyone else on the stage as Mrs Malaprop in [the 1967 production of] *The Rivals*’. It was also due to another sympathetic member of staff that Paula spotted a poster on a school notice board, advertising auditions for the National Youth Theatre. Paula’s ambition to be an actress met with incomprehension. Such a talented girl was expected to go into a “suitable” profession such as teaching; the advice to her was that she could be a drama teacher if she really wanted to develop her talents.

There were a number of other talented pupils in the performing arts in the 1960s. In 1962, Elizabeth Micinski and Susie Davis gained honours in the Advanced Grade I Acting Examination of The New Era Academy of Drama and Music. Paula Wilcox’ classmates, Kathleen Morrell, Frances Ratchford and Veronica Williams were awarded Gold medals in the 1965 examinations of the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. The success of *The Rivals* was followed by others under the direction of Nora and her Drama Group, including *Androcles and the Lion* (1972), *Merchant of Venice* (1976), and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1982).



Plate 60: Paula Wilcox (centre) in *The Rivals*, 1967

Plate 61:

*Androcles and the Lion*, 1972. (Tony Garbutt)



She Stoops to Conquer (Tony Garbutt)

The influence of drama and the media could not be cut out of the life of the pupils. Theatre trips introduced girls to another world outside school and to issues that were presented differently by the convent. The television at home gave access to ideas that were controversial and which the FCJs found alarming. The FCJ Annals reported that the girls would ‘pick up smatterings of new theology and immediately “jump the gun” and declare that there was no Hell and no such thing as Purgatory’. The FCJs did their best to transmit the Foundress’ devotion to the Immaculate Conception, but this was another grey area to the teenager of the 1960s and 1970s.

Social behaviour provided another sphere of potential conflict. With the advent of sexual liberation and the contraceptive pill, the taboo subject of sex afforded many opportunities for discord and rebellion. Many homilies delivered to older girls emphasised the sinful nature of sex outside marriage, and exhorted the girls to modify their dress and behaviour to ‘avoid the occasions of sin’. Vigilance was palpable about the length of skirts (measured in the kneeling position, an inch from the floor the maximum allowed), discouragement of makeup (only suitable for “street girls”), and

hairstyles (Beatle-length fringes frowned upon). Pupils received contradictory messages; those from school were those of the Catholic Church; those from outside were from the extended world of a multi-cultural, and increasingly godless, society.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the tradition of the annual football match, started at Fallowfield, had continued. The school now had its own playing fields and the event took place on-site. The school had connections with Manchester United Football Club through its manager Matt Busby. Each year the club would send its manager and some players to referee and act as linesmen. The event was one of celebration at the school with the “little boys” taking centre stage, accompanied by a piper and all the ritual afforded a Cup Final. At end of the 1960s, Manchester United players had achieved celebrity status.



Plate 63: Sir Matt Busby and George Best watch the Match  
(Christine Foster (Wilkins))

One in particular, George Best, was known as ‘the fifth Beatle’. On those occasions when George Best refereed the match, the FCJs were stretched to the limit of their control, particularly of the teenage



members of the school community. ‘Keeping high standards was always difficult and it was necessary not to lower the aims of the school.’

For many Catholic families, The Hollies continued to provide educational opportunities for girls from working-class homes. The newly expanded council estates provided even larger numbers of scholarship pupils, some of them from extremely disadvantaged homes.

It was not always easy to keep aiming at high standards of behaviour, work, and uniform but [Sister Victoire] never gave up. [She] would feel [she] was letting them down if [she] did. [She] gave an amount of time to pupils who had difficulties at home and respected their need to keep their privacy. [She] admired and encouraged them and often wondered at their strong characters and smiling faces no matter what their home situations were.

At The Hollies, such girls were gently introduced to the social graces. One routine, from Oak Drive days, was the procedure at lunchtime. There were set places at each table and a girl selected to serve at the end of the table. ‘The little silver dishes and things were passed round politely ... and of course when you were of Irish stock you could have eaten the whole lot for yourself and you had to learn that that was to be shared between eight of you.’ Prior to sitting down, girls stood behind their chairs. The Deputy Head went up to the top stand on the podium, and the whole dining room recited the “grace before meals” before being allowed to sit down. Moving around the school, girls were encouraged to open doors for members of staff and visitors, to stand when an adult entered a classroom, and to obey instructions from those in authority, including Prefects and the Sixth Form. Outside the school, girls were expected to behave in a way befitting a Hollies girl. Formal occasions, judged ‘perhaps a little unfashionable’ in the 1960s and 70s, served to reinforce this training. By now, Speech Day, was ‘a part of The Hollies tradition. [The] simplicity and dignity of the occasion [served] as a useful

training in the acquisition of some of the manners and courtesies that [seemed] to be a lost part of [society's] heritage.'

Outside the school gates, British society was less concerned with tradition and increasingly focussed on the notion of equality. The Labour Governments of the early 1960s emphasised the rights of the individual. Privilege and authority were questioned and challenged. No such questioning occurred at The Hollies. Good manners, ladylike behaviour, and respect for authority were 'drummed into' the pupils. Most pupils felt that the school was a very privileged place to be; the buildings and surroundings being very special. Many girls acknowledge with gratitude the education and moral grounding they received there. 'There was no time for those who wouldn't conform ... but it didn't make people unhappy. A lot of it was in the words that Sister Victoire used to use – things like courtesy, respect, all these things – everybody remembers those things don't they?' In many ways, the school remained a haven from the dangerous world outside. In place of the laissez-faire society of the "Swinging Sixties", 'there was such control in the school and you knew what your boundaries were and I think it made you happy. That was the thing about the atmosphere at The Hollies, I don't remember any bullying or awful [times]. It was a nice tranquil place, you could almost go there as a sanctuary ... from ... the mayhem of home.' Those outside the school, however, decided that all cultures were equally to be valued, and that a system that undervalued working-class culture must be dismantled.

After the Education Act of 1944, The Hollies was chosen as one of the schools in Manchester to educate Catholic children who were judged suitable for a grammar school education. The proposal for a comprehensive system of schooling that would abolish such "elitist" schools, was implemented in a pilot scheme in Manchester early in the 1950s. The end of the 1960s saw the Government move towards a national system. Local Education Authorities were asked to present their proposals for a scheme to reorganise their schools. Catholic schools would be asked to make a decision about whether to remain in the state system and become comprehensives under local

authority control or remain grammar schools and, once again, admit only fee-paying pupils. The FCJs had hoped that a suitable plan for the reorganisation of Catholic schools in Manchester would be available before the end of 1970, but by the end of 1971, they were still meeting and discussing but drawing no conclusion.



Plate 64: Hollies Staff 1968 (Gay Colligan)



Plate 62: Members of the Community, The Hollies, 1968. (FCJ Archives)



## **Chapter 9**

### **The Lost Grammar Schools**

‘Like all changes, there are ups and downs, and sometimes there are only downs.’

In the early 1970s, the storm clouds of reorganisation gathered and rumbled, initially in the background. After the fiftieth meeting of the working party, the FCJs organised a Golden Jubilee dinner at The Hollies which was attended by Bishop Burke, the two Diocesan commissioners, and all members of the working party. It was voted the most enjoyable meeting they had had so far and the FCJs believed that at the rate progress was being made, a Centenary dinner was likely to take place! Meanwhile, life at the school continued as normal, with the need for additional accommodation high on the list of priorities.

In 1970, the Trustees bought Wood Lawn. ‘At first it was decided to use the large house for the Sixth Form but, after much discussion with staff and girls,’ Mr. Gibbs from the Department of Education and Science (DES) was invited see the school and decide how best to use the new building. He was ‘delighted with the property’ and decided it should be used for first and second year pupils. The Sixth Form had proposed its use for younger pupils, arguing that the Sixth Form should not be separated from the rest of the school but remain a visible unit in the main school building. Mr. Gibbs agreed that it would be advisable to have the younger girls in a smaller unit by themselves. Work began on the house in July and by the second week in September, rooms were painted, floor coverings laid, and new toilet facilities installed. The Sixth Form gained a large common room and two quiet study rooms in Wood Lawn.



Plate 66: Sixth Formers outside Wood Lawn (Sue Catchpole)



Plate 65: Second Years outside Woodlawn (Nicola Milburn-Jones)

By 1971, the school was in need of yet more facilities, particularly for Music and Art. The original school building plans had included a music room, but revisions had resulted in one small practice-room-cum office. Music lessons took place in the school hall and aspiring instrumentalists had nowhere to practice. On 9<sup>th</sup> June, 1971 the



school appointed a new firm of architects, Popland and Connell, to draw up plans for various extensions. The plans were submitted to the DES in 1972, but met with some resistance. A dining room for the Sixth Form was not approved as the DES felt it unnecessary. A DES Inspector visited the school and considered a separate dining room for the Sixth Form **was** necessary but would recommend the plans only if the main dining room changed to “cafeteria service”. Permission was granted for two new art rooms, extensions to the library, showers, and a Sixth Form locker room after the Headmistress personally visited the Chief DES Inspector at Curzon Street.

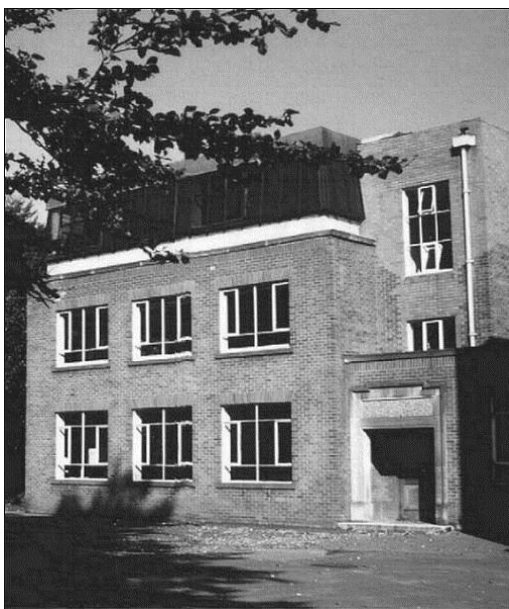


Plate 67: School building showing the Art Room extension on the top floor (Anne-Marie Lowes (Carroll))

Between 1972 and 1974, negotiations with builders and revised estimates of costs delayed the improvement to the school’s facilities. Costs increased by 15% between the school asking permission for building work and that permission being granted. Inflation was rising rapidly, and school fees were increased to £207 to meet the increase in salaries and the cost of living. By 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1974, the

extensions were completed although there was some difficulty with heating in the art room. The plans for the Sixth Form dining room were back with the DES, and the school adopted the cafeteria system in the main dining hall. The changes to the dining hall were not ready for the autumn term and the girls had a “sandwich diet” for a few weeks. A sponsored walk had helped to finance the change to “cafeteria” dining, raising £800 for the funds.

In the same year, the reorganisation of Catholic schools in Manchester had entered its final phase. The Diocese published its proposals for consideration by the school. These initial plans suggested a choice between 11-18 age group schools on split sites and 11-16 age group schools on single sites, plus three Sixth Form Colleges. This choice was complicated by alternative proposals within the initial choice. Scheme 1 suggested that The Hollies would amalgamate with St. Marks, Didsbury, and take pupils from three parishes only. Under Scheme 2, pupils would enter from four parishes (St. Cuthbert, St. Bernard, St. Catherine, and St. Ambrose). Pupils would attend St. Marks for two years, The Hollies for the next three years, then move on to a Sixth Form College (St. Ignatius or Pius X)

Both proposals disturbed the school community. ‘At a meeting of parents on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 1975, there were complaints about split-site schools and the lack of single-sex provision.’ The Trustees announced their initial responses to the proposals and their criticism of the schemes to the Diocesan Commission. Parental choice was high on The Hollies agenda and this would be denied under the proposal of amalgamation with St. Mark’s. There was recognition of the need for single-sex schools, particularly for girls.

A Governor of the school, Dame Kathleen Ollerenshaw, had published two books on the education of girls for the Conservative Education Policy group. A mathematician of notable standing, and later Lord Mayor of Manchester, Dame Kathleen had emphasised the continuing need for separate education for girls, particularly in the sciences. Much of what she advocated in her books was common practice at The Hollies. Excellent teaching from good role models

was important to the continued high expectations of pupils. Although Dame Kathleen ‘was not really so very close to The Hollies [she was] ... an admirer when [Manchester was] making such a mess of reorganising [its] schools.’ The Trustees noted that the loss of Sixth Forms in the 11-16 schools would result in wastage of staff in the grammar schools. The narrow age groups 11-13 or 13-16 would not attract the best teaching staff, and there was a need for the existing grammar school intake to finish their seven-year course at same school. Any move between sites was educationally unsound.

The FCJs’ next move was to write to D.A. Fiske, the Chief Education Officer, outlining their objections to the proposals. The move to larger schools was part of the comprehensive movement and involved “economy of scale” considerations. The FCJs reasoned that as the prediction for future pupil numbers was for falling rolls, there would be a place for smaller schools. The Trustees indicated their support to Manchester Education Committee for any plan involving smaller 11-18 comprehensive schools on one site. The FCJs also needed reassurance that there would be the financial resources to implement any comprehensive scheme.

The grave fears about the transfer of pupils, (at 11, 14, and post-16) necessitating three schools for each pupil, fuelled the resolve to fight to retain Sixth Form education at The Hollies. So much money had been invested in the top end of the school; a new extension to the library had recently been completed, and examination results ‘proved the wisdom of this enterprise’.

Members of staff were also considered; the older ‘and most loyal members of staff’ had given long devoted service in the Sixth Form. The voting system of the Diocesan Working Party was called into question as not being representative of the mass of Catholic teachers when it called for Scheme 2 to be implemented. The FCJs resolved to ‘buy time’. No one quite knew how far the fate of the school was beyond their control. Some wondered if the tide might be turned by the financial crisis in the country. The hope was that until the crisis was over, the move to a national system of comprehensive schools might be shelved and, eventually, forgotten. It was not forgotten in

Manchester however, and, in 1975, the Bishop asked religious orders to accept the assigned role for their schools under the proposed scheme. 'Having been assured that the Bishop wished the FCJ Society to continue to play a part in Catholic education in the Diocese, the Trustees offered to keep the ownership of The Hollies and all that this entailed.'

At a meeting with Bishop Thomas Holland and the Diocesan Commission on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1975, Mother Patricia Gallagher stated that the FCJs could not allow The Hollies to enter the Diocesan scheme as it stood. She repeated the reasoning behind this resolve. There were educational reasons for rejecting proposed pupil moves at the ages of 11+, 13+, and 16+. Staffing problems would result, and the FCJs' solution was a smaller, single-site comprehensive school.

The main reason for the rejection of the scheme was apostolic. The FCJs did not feel justified to assume 'responsibility for the ethos of the school as they would wish, for example, providing as far as their resources [would] permit, a Head and staff members, unless they could support it as a sound apostolic enterprise; a school with its own identity.' The life of the religious Community was inextricably bound to that of the school. It was desirable 'that the school and the Sisters share sympathy of interests'. The Hollies was one of the FCJs 'best properties in the north west of England, and they wished to retain ownership and use of it for educational purposes'. They suggested becoming a school owned by the FCJs for which they took complete responsibility. The complex problems of trusteeship and finance of two amalgamated properties was the final reasoning behind the rejection of the Diocesan scheme. When one school belonged to the Diocese and the other to the FCJs, these administrative issues could not easily be resolved. 'The FCJs submitted that the only way they could see The Hollies fulfilling an educational and pastoral role would be as a single-site, single-sex school.'

The FCJs requested that they might become either an 11-16 five-form entry girls' school, or a Sixth Form College, girls or mixed. At

this point, the FCJs stated that it was not their intention to move The Hollies into the independent sector. Nor did they intend to remove the school from the influence of the Diocese. Their apostolic mission was to work with girls from different financial and social backgrounds, not to desert those who had most need of the educational opportunities offered by the school. Nine out of the ten Hollies' Governors present at a Governors' meeting in March 1976 gave unqualified support for the FCJ proposal. One member favoured mixed schools but would give sympathetic support to the FCJs. The Governors wrote to the Chief Educational Officer informing of him of their support for the FCJ proposal and noting that it was the wishes of parents for single-sex provision.

In 1976, the Diocese published its modification to Scheme 2. The City was to be divided into three zones with a choice of single-sex and mixed schools. The modified scheme took account of the drop in pupil numbers, allowed a wider catchment area for each school, and reduced the number of split sites. The Hollies was to be one of the single-sex schools in the south. Not all the parents of Manchester and Salford were happy with these revisions. The FCJs' School at Adelphi amalgamated with its neighbouring boys' school and became the co-educational Cathedral school. In Longsight, other amalgamations took place, depriving many Catholic families of the choice of single-sex education. There was some bitterness and anger from the public, who did not understand the distinction between an FCJ school and a Diocesan school. Whereas all the Diocesan-controlled schools fell directly under the authority of the Bishop, FCJ schools did not. FCJ schools were voluntary-aided and were controlled by their Trustees. The FCJs had always co-operated with the Diocese and tried to do what it advised. Public perception, however, was that The Hollies had been given 'special, preferential treatment'.

The Governors had decided that the modifications to the Diocesan Plan were an improvement and signed a declaration of intent. This stated that:

- The Hollies would not go independent.

- The Hollies would enter the maintained system as a comprehensive school.
- There was to be a period of negotiation with the LEA and DES via the Diocese; therefore the school was not committed to the final result.
- The school would ensure the education for a direct-grant entry for 1976.
- The school would reconsider its position in the academic year of 1976-7, and the final result would be deferred until agreement with all parties.

A copy of this statement of intent was sent to the DES and the Chief Education Officer. The Governors praised the work done by the FCJs for Catholic education in Manchester during the previous 123 years, and regretted the likely loss of Sixth Form pupils who were being taught by a highly-qualified and conscientious staff. The Governors hoped that many of the present staff would stay and ensure that the school became a really good comprehensive.

Although the Governors were very pleased that, in the revised document, their wishes for single-sex, single-site provision at The Hollies had been satisfied, there remained the problem of “reserved headship”. Governing bodies had delegated the function of appointments to the Joint Agency. This would consist of a promoter from each of the fourteen newly-formed schools, seven LEA representatives, some observers, and advisers. The Governors were concerned that the Diocesan documents seemed to refer to the first appointment of the newly-constituted school. They expressed a wish that ‘as long as the FCJ congregation remains the providing body of The Hollies, it should be stated in the articles of government that the Headmistress [would] normally be a member of the FCJs. If a suitable candidate is not available, the post will be advertised in the usual way.’ This reflected parental wishes and support for the continuing services of the FCJs. Other staff appointments would be made by the Joint Agency, and the Governors wanted the Joint Agency to be only advisory in the appointment procedure.

Educationalists would have preferred the introduction of comprehensives to have taken place in 1978 to allow schools time to prepare, but the politicians wanted 1977, the Queen's Jubilee Year. Accordingly, late in the autumn term of 1976, the members of the Governing Body resigned, and a new Governing Body was formed for the new school, which was to be called "The Hollies High School". Sister Victoire Murphy was appointed as Headmistress, and vowed that if The Hollies had to be a comprehensive school, it would be the best comprehensive school in Manchester.

The FCJ Annals for 1977 entered the spirit of celebration in the country and took on a light-hearted tone as it reported the difficulties that had beset the community in the previous three years. The Annals reported the activities in the form of a log-book from a military operation. Each member of the Community was afforded a few lines' entry in the log, each one very much "tongue-in-cheek". An entry of particular note recorded 'Special commendation to Sister Victoire Murphy for "bravery under fire" while maintaining equilibrium and standards.'

Underlying this rare glimpse of convent humour lay real hardship and anxiety. The log-book contained an appendix that chronicled the practicalities leading to the protection of the school's future. The year 1977 marked a great change in the education system at The Hollies. 'The Order's one concern [was] to serve both the girls already in the school and the girls who would be sent to The Hollies in future. [FCJs] believe in [their] vocation as FCJs and, therefore, put interest of the children before any self-interest.' In order to accommodate all the pupils, it was necessary to use the former Prep school building as well as the main building. The Prep school was closed and Sister Winfred and her staff were praised for the generosity and spirit they had shown in handing over their wonderful school. The Prep school's occupants moved, temporarily, to The Rookeries, which was no longer considered suitable for the High School's needs.

The staffs of the twenty-eight Catholic schools in Manchester had to re-apply for posts in the fourteen new schools. They were appointed

by the Joint Agency, at which members of various unions were present as observers. The full panel of twenty-one members interviewed candidates for Headships and Senior Teachers. For the appointment of Heads of Department and Assistant Teachers, the Joint Agency was divided into smaller panels of about six people, including members of the Inspectorate of the various subjects. It was a long and tiring process, from January to July 1977, and involved Government bodies, at least once a fortnight, and often once a week. The FCJs had many late nights sorting out application forms and many summaries for the Governors at very short notice. They were 'fortunate in keeping nearly two-thirds of [their] former staff'.

The Articles of Government for the new Catholic comprehensive schools took two years to produce. In 1979, the Trustees and Governors of The Hollies High School found the draft articles generally acceptable but decided that some modifications were needed. Articles 6(iv) and 7(I) referred to the appointments of the Head and Assistant teachers. The FCJs wanted The Hollies brought into line with other schools for which the Order was responsible, in which the Trustees and Governors made the appointments. The FCJs realised that Manchester Education Authority would find it more convenient to have one constitution for Governors of all the Catholic comprehensives in Manchester. But, the FCJs believed that voluntary-aided, non-Diocesan schools had a 'need and a right' to secure their own futures. The amendments to the Governing Body's Constitution, retaining the right to appoint the Headteacher and assistant staff, were drawn up and published.

In the meantime, The Hollies re-opened in September 1977 as a six-form entry school with twenty-one new members of staff. The new First Years were in the former Prep school buildings and settled down very quickly. They were divided into six classes in alphabetical order, but the timetable had been arranged in such a way that they were in sets according to ability for most subjects. They were in mixed ability groups for R.E., P.E., Music, and practical subjects. There was quite a wide range of ability but the school coped with the new challenge 'with the help of a very devoted staff'. The



new staff settled in very quickly thanks to the goodwill and efforts made by the old staff to make them welcome.

Many girls of the first comprehensive intake had low reading ages and presented a new challenge to the staff. Each department had revised its curriculum to take account of the wider range of abilities; new courses had been introduced and the pastoral system was formalised in the re-allocation of duties to senior staff. The First Deputy Head was now responsible for pastoral care, academic progress and discipline, in collaboration with Form Tutors. She was also given responsibility for staff development and careers guidance. The Second Deputy was responsible for timetabling, examinations and curriculum development. Miss Pugh became First Deputy. She had begun her teaching at The Hollies in 1949, as Classics Mistress, became Deputy Head on the retirement of Miss Rue in 1974, and now continued as a Deputy Head dedicated to the maintenance of the high academic and personal standards expected at the school.



Plate 68: Hollies Staff 1977

In over 100 years, the FCJs had educated thousands of Catholic girls and they were confident that they could face the future in the same apostolic spirit. To them a child is a child and not just someone who has high or low ability. They promised to endeavour to develop the full personality and individual capabilities of each child. They hoped to retain the character of The Hollies ... not the ability range of the children, but that spirit of happiness and interest in individuals which was the essence of a caring community. It was strange having children from five or six parishes and one Diocese when they had children from three Dioceses and ninety-nine parishes. The FCJs promised ‘to do justice to the children in the school and give them the same opportunities as their predecessors who had been selected for a grammar school education.’ The FCJs were determined that standards would not be allowed to slip in the school. They continued to expect and receive high standards of behaviour and care for the school environment.

For nearly thirty-three years, the school had been a direct-grant grammar school and enjoyed the freedom and responsibility that went with that system. The school was on excellent terms with the Department of Education and Science, and Sister Victoire often went to Curzon Street and Elizabeth House to seek permission and the necessary funds for various projects. She usually came out with the permission, the funds, and the strong realisation that as long as her requests were reasonable and for the good of the pupils, there was no need to be nervous going to the direct-grant section.

The school had lost its “direct-grant status” on becoming a comprehensive and was now financed by the Local Education Authority. A new stage had been reached in the history of The Hollies. The Trustees realised that children come before any system and so they faced the new challenge with courage and enthusiasm. There was merely a local layer of administration between the school and the DES. ‘The Inspectorate and ... personnel in Manchester Education Committee were very kind and considerate’, no doubt

grateful for the few calls made for funds for repairs or refurbishment. The fabric and furnishings of the school were maintained and cared for so well that the LEA was not often called upon to inject large funds into the school. When it was, requests for the replacement of twenty-year-old furniture were often rejected on the grounds that it could still be used and did not, therefore, need replacing.

The school aimed at keeping the high ideals and standards of Christian behaviour, hard work, spirit of kindness to each other and to providing for the needs of the new intake. The new six-form entry of girls were as welcome as any girls who had ever gone to The Hollies. 'They received the best of care and attention. All the Heads of Department were directly involved with the First Years and, in this way [they] were able to plan out the best way to cater for the needs of each individual child.' At the time that the staff were starting to cope with the wider ability range, they did not forget the promise to maintain the high standard of work with the Sixth Form and with the remaining four years of selective pupils still in the school. Their courses did not change and they continued to have the same opportunities as their predecessors.

However, part of the spiritual life of the school was compromised as the loss of financial flexibility meant that Education Department monies would no longer fund outings such as the annual Retreat. From 1977 onwards, the Parents' Association funded these. At the end of the first year with a comprehensive intake, the school 'showed no noticeable drop in academic or behavioural standards'. This success was attributed to the hard work and co-operation of the staff. The school's Inspectors viewed the curriculum plan and commented that it was 'ambitious but attainable'. Business Studies was to be offered when the first comprehensive intake chose its options for examinations.

The success of the first year resulted in even greater numbers applying for places for 1978. Nominally a five-form entry, the school had been organised to accommodate six forms to allow for appeals. Forty appeals were made in 1978 and the Governors granted five. The total intake for that year was 184 pupils. A major

problem for parents choosing The Hollies was that many of them wanted their daughters to attend with older siblings. Both Manchester and the Diocese applied the 'contributory parish' ruling as criteria for entry. As a grammar school, The Hollies had a much wider catchment area, and, in those early days as a comprehensive, many parents from outside the contributory parishes were disappointed.

In these early years of life as a comprehensive school, The Hollies still had the benefits of its Sixth Form. Those girls who entered the fourth year in September 1977 had the choice of staying at The Hollies for their Sixth Form or transferring to one of the Sixth Form Colleges. The Sixth Form was at the centre of the social activities in the school calendar. They ran some of the clubs and societies and had enjoyed successes in many community competitions.

In 1972, The Hollies entered team members in the television series *Top of the Form*. Two boys from St. Augustine's joined two Hollies' girls, Josephine Finan and Anne Heaton, to represent Manchester. The Manchester team and their supporters travelled to Banbury for the semi-final, which they won. In the final, the Manchester team lost to Llanelli. The FCJs were very impressed by the way the BBC team cared for the pupils. Chaperones were provided as the pupils travelled by air or car and stayed in first class hotels. The BBC paid all expenses. Manchester,



**Plate 69:** Top of the Form, 1972 (Peter Fay, St Augustine's Boys' School Website)    **Plate 70:** Fifth Formers with Sports Trophy, 1973 (Sue Catchpole)

Llanelli, and Banbury then competed against the three best Canadian teams in the *Transworld Top of the Form*. The Canadians came from

Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Halifax. The British teams joined the Canadian teams in London.

All six teams were guests of the BBC and spent two weeks visiting London, Edinburgh, Manchester, Banbury, Llanelli, and Stratford-upon-Avon. The pupils were taken to see two Shakespearean plays at Stratford, after which the new series began. When each British team had played each Canadian team, the positions were Llanelli (1<sup>st</sup>), Manchester (2<sup>nd</sup>), Banbury (3<sup>rd</sup>), and the Canadians in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> positions. A final match between the “Best of Canadian” and “Best of British” resulted in a win for the British team. After obtaining her individual prize as a member of the winning “Best of British” team, Josephine Finan went on to obtain an Open Scholarship at Cambridge where she read Modern Languages.

Further successes followed for the school. The tradition of public speaking was maintained. In 1972, a Sixth Form girl won the shield for Catenian public speaking. In 1980, three Hollies’ pupils reached the finals of the Schools’ Public Speaking Competition; the Rotary Club of Didsbury hosted it at the Belfry Hotel, Handforth. There were eight finalists competing including the three Hollies’ girls; Lydia Estridge, Brigid McShane in the Senior Section, and Catherine Ring, who won the Junior Section. In 1973, the school joined the Justice and Peace Movement and two pupils were asked to speak on the topic for Radio Manchester.

Success was not limited to the academic sphere. In 1973, the Senior netball team won the Lancashire and Manchester Netball Shield. The team included five girls from the Upper Sixth who had played together for school teams since they were in the second year. There were many other sports’ shields to which The Hollies’ name was added during the following decade.

Each year the Hollies was asked to provide “ball girls” for the tournament at the Northern Tennis Club, which was not far from the school. This event took place just before Wimbledon, and the girls were rewarded for their hard work by being able to meet some of the most famous tennis players from all over the world. The Hollies

pupils were fortunate in having a former Wimbledon player to coach the senior girls during the year.

The Sixth Form closed in 1979. It had grown out of all recognition since the move from the old Oak Drive site. In 1960, twenty-one pupils had passed their A-level exams and left to enter higher or further education or employment. In 1978, ninety pupils passed A-levels and over 50% went on to university, polytechnic, or college courses. The Rookeries, the sanctum of the Sixth Form for some years, was unsuitable for lower school needs. The FCJs 'took a suitable offer of purchase' and acquired new neighbours very near the main building, 'a protection in these days of flagrant vandalism'. New classrooms were needed to meet the requirements of the new five-form entry, so Manchester Education Committee applied to the Department of Education and Science for four "prefabs". The Committee was told that funds were not available, nor would they be for the foreseeable future. The Trustees provided two classrooms, and the Governors were informed of this benefaction to the school and particularly to the pupils. This caused some unease in Diocesan circles. Sister Helen Costigan, FCJ, recorded that the Sisters 'acted in good faith' and were 'punctilious in their efforts to co-operate with the Diocese'.

Phase 1 of going comprehensive was complete. A 'new apostolate' opened with the comprehensive system, as children of academic ability came within the reach of The Hollies. The girls were 'very pleased with the new accommodation but sometimes wished they were in the main school building, especially during bad weather.' With the exodus of 210 pupils to Wood Lawn, the school was able to give some extra rooms to the Sixth Form to use as common rooms and study rooms. The girls appreciated these study rooms and would not allow anyone to make noise there. In May, the Sixth Form social committee organised a dinner dance for the Sixth Form leavers, their parents, and staff. The function was held at the Lancashire Cricket Club, where 180 guests sat down to a dinner. 'When it was time to go home, all sang the school song *Prayer for Youth*, and many tears were shed as they realised they would soon be leaving school.' The

Hollies said goodbye to its last Sixth Form and prepared for a new beginning as an 11-16 school.

The FCJ Annals record that, from 1977-78, ‘winds of change blew up the River Mersey from Manchester Council, whom [the Trustees] found most helpful, courteous and understanding. It is fair to add that The Hollies High School levelled up the new system rather than down as prophets of doom had predicted. All the usual cultural, academic, social and spiritual events of former times were retained; the good standards maintained. In the school log, perhaps the only difference noticeable was the new name of the school.’ The demanding but attainable programme of standards and behaviour had ‘borne verifiable fruit’, and the assistance of social workers and other LEA services were an established part of the lower school’s pattern of life, ‘to everyone’s advantage’.

The Headmistress’s Report for 1979 chronicled the events and successes of the previous year. According to the FCJ Annals, the school’s numbers were ‘steady despite falling rolls around us. The comprehensive system, now three years with us, has become our normal atmosphere. The changeover has been a gradual one. Changes in curriculum and timetable to suit the new academic requirements are being introduced. Like all changes there are ups and downs, and sometimes there are only downs.’

The “downs” included difficulties with the set-up of Business Studies, the loss of the Sixth Form, and the many inconveniences and uncertainties brought about by the social unrest in the country. The school had not opened at the beginning of the year, on 8<sup>th</sup> January, as the tanker drivers’ strike had resulted in no fuel. On 15<sup>th</sup> January, ‘the examination classes came in and worked in partially-heated classrooms. The following week, the rest of the school assembled. Almost immediately, there was a bus strike and a caretakers’ strike, and school was disrupted for another two weeks.’

The “ups” of 1979 were a mixture of academic and cultural events. Among the final Sixth Form leavers were three entrants to Oxford to read Maths, Law, and English. The Catenian Concert at the Free Trade Hall included ‘150 talented young musicians and choristers,



The Hollies pupils amongst them.’ To mark the “Year of the Child”, Manchester Council organised a Variety Concert of song, dance, orchestra, and music by each ethnic group of the country. ‘The Hollies were chosen to represent the Irish in this country and the Ceilidhe dancers and band, in bright green, white and gold national costumes, were among the brightest of the artists.’ Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Pirates of Penzance* was staged over five evenings at the school. A Christmas Dinner was held in the school for the Lord and Lady Mayoress of Manchester. The Annals commented that ‘being in Britain’s “London of the north” has many cultural advantages. One of the best events was the FCJ Christmas event at Adelphi.’ The event was a precursor of those that were to follow in 1980, the bicentennial of the birth of the Foundress.

## **Chapter 10**

### **In My End is My Beginning**

‘When asked to accept reorganisation as a comprehensive school, the FCJs had spelled out their mission. As always, it was based on the founding spirit of Marie Madeleine.’

The year 1980 was very special for the FCJ Society, but it was also one that brought events that were to have devastating implications for the future of the school. The Hollies was in its final year of mixed grammar-comprehensive population. The last of the grammar school’s Sixth Form had left in July 1979, and the “Seniors’ roles” were handed over to the Fifth Form. In Sister Victoire’s opinion, these girls handled their new responsibilities with poise and maturity. Nevertheless, the school was now functioning without its traditional core of expertise which could be called upon to organise, motivate, and act as role model for the lower forms.

In April, fifty former pupils revived the Past Pupils’ Association (PPA). The FCJs found their enthusiasm, appreciation, and desire to re-associate themselves with the Community, heartening. Within the year, the PPA had more than doubled its numbers. The FCJs observed how the spiritual values and practices of school days had made their mark on each individual’s life. At the school’s Garden Party, there was a joint Hollies-Sedgely reunion at which an elderly Sister, reflecting on the hardships of earlier life, summed up what many thought, ‘It was all worthwhile.’ The date of 8<sup>th</sup> December was chosen to mark the Foundress’ bicentenary, as the Feast Day was held in great affection by all FCJs, and present and past staff and pupils. The venue was St. Augustine’s Church, where in 1853, the Foundress had opened the first schools for factory girls, evening classes for working mothers, and a fee-paying school for the more affluent. The celebration was held in the modern church, built on the foundations of the old one destroyed in the Blitz of 1940.

The Hollies was developing along new lines as a fully comprehensive school, but the FCJs would allow for no compromise of its traditions or ethos. The driving force was, as always, the Headmistress, who had been “at the helm” for twenty years. It was,

therefore, a shock to both school and convent when Sister Victoire announced that she had responded to a call from the FCJs to take charge of their school at Bruff, County Limerick. Sister Victoire wrote personally to each member of the Governing Body, explaining the reasons behind her decision to leave The Hollies. In her letter, she was candid in her confession that her natural desire was to remain at The Hollies, but that her priority of action was as a nun. Sister Victoire bowed to the wishes of her Superior General but declared that it had not been an easy decision. She described it as ‘one of the hardest sacrifices’ she would ever have to make; she had loved her time at The Hollies. In a letter to a past pupil, she wrote, ‘We had an excellent staff and a great school of wonderful girls.’ Sister Victoire was Headmistress of an increasingly successful and oversubscribed school of 850 girls and fifty-four members of staff. There were over 170 applicants for admission in September 1979 and, in June many appeals were denied; only pupils from contributory parishes could be admitted. The reply to hopeful applicants ‘no room at The Hollies’ was a vivid reality. The FCJ’s Annals commented, ‘We were impressed by [Sister Victoire’s] faith and obedience as with brave heart and joyful spirit in the Lord, she set sail for her *alma mater*.’

Manchester Education Department was equally impressed with Sister Victoire’s strength of character. Dudley Fiske, Chief Education Officer for many years, commented on her reputation for vigorous leadership, which had gained The Hollies a reputation for ‘scholarship in a caring Catholic community’. Though the school had been under Manchester’s control for only three years since its reorganisation, Sister Victoire was highly respected in the Education Office, for her ‘forthrightness, common sense and obvious concern’ for the school. She had set high standards for the new comprehensive school and maintained them ‘with determination, good humour and a deep understanding of human nature’. Mr. Fiske was impressed with Sister Victoire’s ability to adapt, with what appeared to him to be remarkable ease, from her role as an autonomous head of a direct-grant grammar school to that of a maintained comprehensive school head. Mr Fiske was equally

generous in his praise of Sister's work outside the school, helping less fortunate members of society and encouraging the pupils to do the same. Neither the school Governors nor the FCJs were surprised by these abilities. There had been many occasions in the school's history when FCJs had adapted to the needs of the modern world, without compromising their basic tenets. The FCJs' Annals record Sister Victoire's decision as one taken in great faith, obedience, and humility, and one that reminded them of



Plate 71: Christmas Party in Sister Victoire's Office, 1980 (Nicola Milburn (Jones))

the fact that they often took their vow of obedience for granted until it was tested.

Other staff changes were recorded in 1980. Sister Bernadette O'Malley was appointed as the new Headmistress of The Hollies. Sister Bernadette had been Headmistress of The Newlands School FCJ, Middlesbrough before taking a Theology degree at Manchester University. She was to take up office in January 1981, as Sister Victoire was required to serve a term's notice with Manchester. Miss Kiernan was appointed Deputy Head in place of Mrs Johnson, and Marie Furphy retired after spending her own school days and whole teaching career at The Hollies. The FCJs hosted Miss Furphy's retirement event in recognition of her devoted loyalty and

outstanding success at The Hollies. Another retirement took place that year; Sister Elizabeth Philips had been the first, and only, Headmistress to serve at the FCJ school in Chorlton. In 1968, the FCJs had stepped in to fill an emergency need in the Catholic school system by taking over a small independent secondary school. Sister Elizabeth's retirement put on record the enormous esteem the staff and Governors held for the FCJs.

Falling rolls in Manchester's primary schools did not affect The Hollies at this time, but the school was very aware of the trend. Sister Bernadette took over as Headmistress of the school knowing that she had, at most, three years of peace in which to build on the foundations laid by her predecessor. In March 1980, 156 pupils applied for places at the school. The curriculum had been remodelled to take account of its fully comprehensive intake. In the Upper School, there were seventy-six pupils in O-level classes, and the remainder were studying for the new 16+ and CSE modes of examination. Sister Victoire had estimated that between one and three extra members of staff were needed for this change.

Sister Victoire had hoped to remain as Headmistress until the results of the first fully comprehensive intake were announced. Fate decreed that it was to be Sister Bernadette who announced them to the Governors and parents in her Headmistress' Report of 1981. There were 164 Fifth Form pupils on roll, of whom 60% gained O-level in at least one subject, 33% gained five O-levels, 20% gained eight to ten O-levels. The average number of O-levels for the year was 3.2 per pupil, in comparison with the average for Manchester of 1.4.

Sister Bernadette's Report showed a thriving school with the continuation of the annual Retreat, work for the charities of CAFOD, the Catholic Children's Rescue Society, and St. Peter's Society for the Education of Native Clergy. There were many curricular outings; for History to Didsbury, the Battlefields of World War I, and French trips to Normandy. In Music, 150 girls were studying a musical instrument; there was a Catenian Concert at the Free Trade Hall, and carols at the "Hidden Gem" church in December. Nor were the

school's successes all academic; The Hollies won the Manchester Catholic Schools Booth Trophy for netball, and the Under-14s won the All Manchester Rally. The annual school "review" continued to be a great success, allowing the girls to display not only their organisational abilities, but to show their skills for mimicry and drama. Caroline Aherne (class of 1980) had honed her talent for comedy in her sketches portraying a 'certain Irish nun'. The school play had been revived in 1967, and, in 1982, *The Importance of Being Ernest* was performed with 'the usual high standard of acting, staging and enthusiasm'. The following year, *She Stoops to Conquer* was to be the final production from the school's long-serving elocution mistress, Norah Garbutt, who retired in July.

A few teething problems were reported to the Governors. There were only six computers available for school use and, in 1979, a suitable room for Typing was still lacking. With increasing numbers of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and a greater spread of academic ability, there was a perceived need for a change to the pastoral care system. 1982 saw a change from the "year system" and a return to a "House system". The new Houses were named after the English Martyrs. The school continued to thrive despite the changes brought about by its new comprehensive intake. Examination results were consistently the best of all Manchester comprehensive schools; the Science Department in particular was leading the way with the introduction of new courses designed to meet the needs of different pupil groups. The FCJs continued to influence the ethos of the school; the graffiti and vandalism found in other comprehensives was absent. Charitable work remained fixed on the school calendar; the Summer Fair raised £13,000, and a sponsored walk £300. The Past Pupils' Association organised a draw for a buffet meal at a PTA special event and joined in the congratulations of Mr. John Waddington, their Educational Inspector, on his receipt of an O.B.E. Later in the year, Mr. Waddington retired and was replaced by Mr. Freer. At the final Governors' Meeting the following year, the Governors congratulated one of their own members, Dame Kathleen Ollerenshawe, on the receipt of the Freedom of the City of Manchester.

It was at their first meeting of 1983, that the Governors were jolted by the news that another reorganisation of Catholic secondary schools was ‘suddenly and unexpectedly imminent.’ Manchester Education Committee had decided that the number of Catholic secondary schools had to be cut to take account of the predictions for further drops in pupil numbers. A speedy, firm decision about the school’s actions for the future had to be made. Time-consuming meetings for information gathering on education reorganisation plans, and consequences and options, were held at every level; parents, friends, older pupils, staff, and FCJs. At first, the school welcomed the Diocesan plan, which proposed the school would continue as a five-form entry with an extended catchment area to include the Levenshulme parishes. Discussions and counter discussions, and more plans and proposals speedily followed this plan. As the term wore on, the dilemma of the future of The Hollies was to reach significant proportions, with serious consequences to the FCJ’s ministry to the youth of south Manchester.

If earlier battles had been largely financial and legal, the last one was fought on principles rooted in the tenets of the Foundress herself. In 1976, when asked to accept reorganisation as a comprehensive school, the FCJs had spelled out their mission. As always, it was grounded in the founding spirit of Marie Madeleine. They had opposed the plan to merge with neighbouring schools and create a split-site school. The FCJs objected to this plan on apostolic, educational, and administrative grounds. The FCJs did not feel justified in assuming responsibility for the ethos of the school, providing it with resources, a Head and staff members, unless they could support it as a sound apostolic enterprise; a school with its own identity. It was desirable that the school and the Sisters ‘shared sympathy of interests’. The Hollies was one of the FCJs’ best properties, and they wished to retain ownership and use of it for educational purposes.

There was a complex problem of trusteeship and finance when two or more properties amalgamated, if one belonged to the Diocese and the other to the FCJs. Under Canon Law, the FCJs were directly under

the authority of the Pope and not the Bishop. The Diocese, therefore, was obliged to consult them on any matters that would affect the running of the school. The FCJs had always co-operated as fully as possible the Diocese in which they worked. In accordance with Canon Law, when setting up a new school, they would ask the permission of the Bishop to work in his Diocese. As early as 1976, the FCJs had recognised the difficulties that would be presented by the amalgamation of two schools, and had vigorously opposed such a move. The Governors had been very pleased that the revised plans of 1976 had acceded to their wishes for single-sex, single-site provision at The Hollies. The lingering concern over the “reserved headship” question had been laid to rest by the Articles of Government adopted in 1980. In that year, the FCJs had recognised that the numbers of Sisters were declining and there would come a time when a lay-head would take over in some of their schools.

Now, in 1983, there was once again great uncertainty about the school’s future and the role that the FCJs were to have in it. In April, the Diocesan Education Commission published a consultative document in which The Hollies was to remain a girls’ comprehensive school. In July, a second document was published; here The Hollies was to amalgamate with St. Mark’s. The definitive plan was published in October and, under the plans for the amalgamation, the FCJ Society was offered, and accepted, Trusteeship of the new school.

Dame Kathleen Ollerenshawe spoke for the Governors of The Hollies, who urged that the FCJs continue as Trustees for any future school on the Mersey Road site. She expressed the Governors’ strong desire that the FCJ Trustees should, in accordance with existing practice, be allowed to continue to present the Governors with a nomination for Headship. The FCJs were resolute in their desire to continue working with the Diocese that had invited them to Manchester 130 years earlier. They expressed their willingness to present the school site to the Diocese while retaining its Trusteeship. Subsequently, however, it became clear that there was pressure on the Diocesan Education Commission. Six Parish Priests had made



representation to the newly appointed Bishop, Patrick Kelly, and the Commission had decided that it must control the school's Governing Body and appoint the Head, as was the case with all other Manchester Catholic secondary schools. The Hollies had always been regarded as an 'administrative inconvenience', as it did not fall neatly under the control of the Diocese. In accordance with their previously stated position, the FCJs withdrew their offer to accept trusteeship. This action initiated the last battle for control of the school; one which was led not by the FCJs but by the parents and staff of the school. In December, public notices were issued which stated that maintenance of The Hollies and St. Marks would cease on 31<sup>st</sup> August, 1984, and a new school would be established on the St. Mark's site. Both sites would be in use until the building work on the St. Mark's site was completed. There was some discussion of the naming of the new school, with the FCJs favouring 'a calendar saint' over a 'local worthy'. They felt it appropriate that the school be named after a woman as there was only one (Our Lady's) in Manchester. It was, perhaps, significant that the name chosen was both male and local; although Ambrose Barlow, the son of a local aristocrat, was one of the English Martyrs.

A body of parents and friends strongly opposed the Diocesan plan, as it meant Catholic parents would not have the option of single-sex education for their children. The Hollies was the only girls' Catholic school in Manchester; to lose it, they would lose this choice. The parents objected to a remark published in one of the drafts of the reorganisation plan that stated Catholic parents who wished their children to be educated in a single-sex school were free to apply for places in the county sector. This deprived pupils of a Catholic education, a right that had been maintained since Catholic education began in Manchester, and which the Church itself had defended with vigour since Catholic Emancipation. In accordance with their democratic rights, the parents raised their objections with Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, with whom the final decision rested. The campaign to save The Hollies was co-ordinated by the parents, who prepared their documents to demonstrate the excellence of the school. Photographs were included, showing the

well-maintained, cared-for buildings, and the girls, both at work in classrooms, and at recreation. The Hollies' staff were also active in the campaign. They asked for, and were granted, a meeting with the Director of Education in Manchester. He was amazed to receive not a delegation of a few members as he had expected, but the entire staff of The Hollies. The distress and anger of both staff and parents was evident throughout the campaign.

Accusations and counter-accusations raged in the local press. Those in favour of the amalgamation plans cited earlier "favouritism" of The Hollies as elitist and 'protecting those fortunate enough to live in the leafy suburbs of Didsbury'. Those who opposed the plans, recognised that The Hollies catchment area was one that included pupils from very deprived homes, and was not limited to Didsbury. Catholic parents argued that 'The Hollies [was] a school of outstanding reputation and [was] full every year. Parents demonstrated its quality by choosing it, and to change its character would be a dangerous folly.'

The main thrust of the parents' campaign was the retention of a single-sex school. They found support for this among educationalists from other parts of the city and further afield. They argued that 'recent evidence [had] revealed that girls in single-sex schools [did] better in Maths and Science, hence the high proportion of girls opting for Science in The Hollies.' The 'moving spirit of the 1980 Education Act was freedom of choice'. In proposing a merger with St. Mark's, 'not only [was] the Diocesan Commission denying parents choice, but [it was] going against Government policy'. The opposing side in this argument believed 'it more advantageous for boys and girls to come together educationally and socially'. At a time when 'children [were] encouraged to have and express their own ideas', why not 'ask them what they would prefer?' In fact, the girls at The Hollies already knew which they preferred. The girls organised a petition, which was signed by 650 of the 765 girls. A group travelled to London with their home-made banners and presented the petition to their M.P., Fred Silvester.

**SAVE THE HOLLIES CAMPAIGN**

**Fact sheet 2.**

1. Sir Keith Joseph is to meet a delegation from the school to hear our objections.
2. We still endorse the original proposal that keeps the Hollies and St. Mark's as it is (Diocesan Commission proposal February 1983)
3. Latest figures show that the Hollies academic record is three times better than the average of the secondary schools, in the public sector.
4. The Hollies/St. Mark's present intake 300 – proposed intake September 1984 is 180. Children, who would normally have the opportunity of attending the Hollies, will be excluded.
5. The only choice that you will have for single sex education will be in the non-Catholic sector.
6. The Governors of FCJ School are still in favour of a girls school.

---

The parents of the Hollies wish to thank everyone connected with the 'Save the Hollies' Campaign for their overwhelming support at functions and their generosity in helping the appeal.

Reported  
Feb 10  
1984

**ALLOW PARENTS  
FREEDOM OF CHOICE**

This advertisement has been paid for by (REVENUE) 107/0003 20 PARENTS  
MR. D.P. McLaughlin Chairman of The Hollies Campaign

Plate 72: Parents' Press Release. (FCJ Archives)  
Archives)



Plate 73: Girls Lobby their MP. (FCJ

Before travelling, they asked for permission to travel and be photographed in their school uniform, indicating the pride they had in their school. Margaret Tully endorsed the choice of single-sex education when she told reporters, ‘Girls work better on their own rather than mixed [with boys].’ Judith Armstrong spoke for the school when she said, ‘The school is doing so well, we do not see why it should be spoiled.’

The FCJs found the experience of uncertainty in the future, ‘shared by so many others in the world’, to be ‘at once disturbing and potentially life giving’. In the soulless “Brave New World” of 1984, the position of The Hollies was in the balance until June, when Sir Keith Joseph accepted the plans put forward by Salford Diocese and Manchester Education Committee to amalgamate six schools, including The Hollies. Parents, teachers and friends of the school were bitterly disappointed that their efforts to keep an “independent” Hollies with an FCJ Headmistress had failed. There was no option other than to put their energy into making a success of the new school, and this they began to do. The new school was to be an 11-16 co-educational comprehensive for 900 pupils, from the parishes of Ambrose Barlow, Catherine, Bernard, Bernadette, Kentigern, and Cuthbert.

Public notices announcing the new school had made it clear that it would eventually be sited at St. Mark’s. The Diocese had approached the FCJ’s Trustees to explore the possibility of the use of The Hollies for the long-term site of the new school. Parish clergy were in favour of retaining The Hollies’ buildings and site, providing that they were declared suitable in a professional survey. The Diocesan Authorities, however, stated that the Diocese would be unable to purchase The Hollies site without grant aid from the Department of Education and Science. Such a grant would be unlikely while the Diocese ‘had the services of the excellent site and purpose-built accommodation at St. Mark’s’. A meeting of Bishop Kelly and members of the Diocesan Schools’ Commission, with representatives of the FCJ’s Trustees, revealed the gulf between the parties, and confirmed the belief that the new school would eventually be on the St. Mark’s site.

In practice, this meant that The Hollies' buildings would be in use until such time as the pupils could be accommodated on the St. Mark's site; this was estimated to be about four years. At the time of earlier discussions about reorganisation, none of the FCJs felt able to provide independent education for girls. It would not be in keeping with the FCJs' founding mission to the poor and deprived and, with the earlier loss of the Sixth Form, this idea was no longer viable. They were, however, keen to co-operate fully with the Diocese and smooth the way for the new school. The offer of The Hollies site was a generous one; it continued the practice of FCJs' provision of facilities free of charge that dated from the foundation of two schools in 1852. The first of those, Adelphi, had been 'lost' to Catholic parents in the 1970s when 'the closure of schools like Adelphi ... deprive[d] many ... children of an excellent education. Richer parents [could] indeed do, send their children to private single-sex schools.'

The whole process of re-organisation was, once again, painful for all who were involved. Press reports suggested that the FCJs were being 'forced out'; reports that the Diocese was keen to quash. A statement circulated by St. Catherine's parish clergy stated that, 'though the Sisters were being asked to change from their role as Trustees and are now not to be the sole provider of the Headteacher', they were not being forced out. This was cold comfort to the school community; the FCJs **were** the school. Without an FCJ Head, the new school would no longer be The Hollies; the FCJs would no longer have a role to play. Feelings were running high. The parents were not only dismayed that the school was, in their eyes, closing down, they were angered by the 'Machiavellian way it [had] come about'. The view, shared by many parents, staff, pupils, and the wider Catholic community, was that the clergy had overstepped their powers and interfered in the arrangements for the education of pupils. Letters to the *Manchester Evening News* spared no-one in their demands to 'Curb this group of clergy.' While it was 'correct in a democracy for schools to be run by teachers, parents and elected representatives of the people, ... what [had happened] in south Manchester [was] a travesty of this arrangement. A group of local

Catholic clergy, determined directly to control local schools, [had] upset the plans of the Diocesan Commission. They [had] managed to have The Hollies High School effectively closed down to eliminate the influence of the FCJ teaching order and thus maximise their own influence.’

For the FCJs at The Hollies, this was the last and most difficult cross to bear. There was pain at the misrepresentation of what had happened and the public perception of the FCJs having ‘pulled out’ of The Hollies. The anxiety and stress of the process of handing over the pupils to “new management” had been exacerbated by the fact that they felt they had no choice but to do what they had done. There was, however, a glimmer of consolation at the end of the process. ‘What emerged ... was overwhelming loyalty and tremendous appreciation of The Hollies, the Headteachers and other FCJ members of staff who had served at The Hollies, and for the contribution of the FCJ Society over the years to education in Manchester.’

At the Governors’ meeting of June 1980, Father Kevin O’Connor had summarised the contribution of the school’s longest serving Headmistress, Sister Victoire Murphy. He had thanked the FCJs for leaving her in post for so long; the school had had ‘the right person at the right time to give impetus to the school’. She had raised the academic standards of The Hollies to one of the highest among the direct-grant schools; her wise administration of funds had provided the school with a library ‘second only to Eton’. In the tradition of the FCJs, Sisters Victoire and Bernadette had succeeded in raising and maintaining Christian standards in a culturally declining era. The FCJs could be proud that The Hollies had implanted its spirit and ideals on generations of Mancunians. Sister Bernadette decided not to apply for the Headship at the new school, and began the task of ensuring that there would be no ‘phasing down’ of academic standards and providing maximum support to members of staff facing the uncertainties of the year ahead.

The last Prize Day, in 1984, was held, as usual, in the Free Trade Hall. On 15<sup>th</sup> October, as part of her Headmistress’s report, Sister

Bernadette O'Malley summarised the history of the FCJ Society in Manchester. She hoped in some small way to alleviate the suffering of her school community by celebrating with them all that had been achieved at the school since its inception.

Bishop Turner, the first Bishop of Salford, was so impressed by what he heard of the work of the FCJs in Liverpool, that he asked them to come to Salford in 1852. This is how it came about that Adelphi House School was founded, on the steps almost, of Salford Cathedral. The FCJs played a major part in the establishment of the Catholic education system in the Diocese. At the invitation of the Bishop, they took on the responsibility for the education of thousands of pupils in the poor and elementary schools such as St. James Pendleton and St. Anne's Silk Street. But it was when the nuns took charge of the poor school in the parish of St. Augustine's that is significant to The Hollies. Though they did not know it at the time in 1853, they began what turned out to be a century of service to the parish. Sister Gertrude O'Dea, who died in 1983 at The Hollies, was the last of a long line of headmistresses who served in St. Augustine's for over 100 years. There is a very real sense in which it can be said that the FCJs arrival at St. Augustine's was the beginning of The Hollies school.

Sister Bernadette reflected on the challenges the FCJs had faced through the century:

Often, as we know, it is worthwhile things that begin quietly. While some of the FCJs were coping with very large numbers of children in the classes in the poor school, others began a small school for senior pupils in a house in Brook Street. The school had only three or four classrooms, a chapel, and some rooms for homework. In addition to R.E., the girls learned English, Arithmetic (which the records say they found very hard),

History, and Geography. They also had Science classes and, probably because of the French origins of the Society, they started French at an early age.

The growing numbers of pupils necessitated a move to Fallowfield:

The school at Fallowfield was very successful and it was not envisaged that it would ever move. It was decided in the 1950s that the University wanted to build more student accommodation; a Compulsory Purchase Order was placed on The Hollies. It came about that The Hollies moved to Mersey Road in 1961. It was the same school in a new building. It continued as a direct-grant grammar school until 1977. In that year, The Hollies became a comprehensive school for girls under the leadership of Sister Victoire. Sister had planned the building and supervised the move sixteen years earlier. Many staff who had worked in the grammar school remained to work in the comprehensive. There were also many new members of staff. So well did the new staff blend together that I can say with pride that The Hollies continued to have a most united and dedicated staff who worked together co-operatively for the good of the girls and naturally supported each other in the ups and downs of school life. The school was a successful comprehensive school, and it is not surprising that pupils and parents, staff, and Sisters are saddened by the knowledge that after this year, it will have no independent existence.

The school motto which every girl carries on her school badge reads *Orate Laborate Gaudete*. This motto expresses well the spirit and ethics of education at The Hollies; hard work, joyfully undertaken, in the prayerful recognition that deeply at the centre is God, in whom we live and move and have our being. It is this spirit, this faith, which must support and inspire us in the months ahead.



The report went on to recount many other successes of the school. No one could doubt that it was ‘an excellent school’.

In spite of the expectation of loss hanging over the school, outwardly it proceeded as normal. In 1985 there were staffing difficulties due to a reduction imposed by Manchester. The Governors were concerned that no subject should be dropped from the curriculum as a result. From the beginning of the year it was known that eight senior members of staff were to take premature retirement compensation, an event not usually experienced in a “normal” year. Sister Bernadette and the staff decided that, as a priority, the school would maintain its standards of excellence until the last day of the last term. The task was a delicate one; to keep up morale among staff and pupils, parents and Governors, and at the same time prepare for a smooth amalgamation. Teachers from both schools had to apply for their own jobs in the new school. Work had to continue in spite of the mitigating factors militating against it. Interviews for posts in the new school continued throughout the year, resulting in absences from the classroom totalling approximately seventy days. The staff experienced anxiety, uncertainty, and, sometimes, disappointment, as they continued their tasks with the pupils and at the same time prepared for their work in the new school. In December 1984, Sister Mary Margaret Costello FCJ was appointed Deputy Head of the Barlow School, with special responsibility for The Hollies’ site. Teachers throughout Britain were engaged in industrial action for better pay and The Hollies did not escape this disruption.

Sister Bernadette reflected that there was a need for courage, dedication, and a sense of humour during the final year and that these qualities ‘were abundantly evident among the staff’. The chief effect of the teachers’ action was on dinner duty. It was customary at The Hollies for no pupil to leave the site at dinnertime. Because of “staggered” dinnertime and the appointment of extra supervisors, the school was able, with the help of Deputies, to continue with this arrangement. A visiting Inspector asked to have a tour of the school during this period. Sister Bernadette explained that the Inspector would have to accompany her on her tour of the hall, in which pupils

were waiting for their place in the dining room. The Inspector looked at the ranks of girls, sitting quietly around the sides of the hall, with some Fifth Form Prefects supervising. There were no members of staff in sight. The Inspector remarked 'Where else would you find that?' She questioned the loss of a school that produced such well-behaved, purposeful children. The school staff were mainly members of the Association of Assistant Masters and Mistresses, so the effect of action was less than in other schools with more militant union members.

School events and Parents Evenings ran as usual, although Staff Meetings after school were cancelled and alternative arrangements made. In any action, the staff showed great professionalism and respect for each other's differing opinions; unnecessary friction was thus avoided. Throughout the difficulties, the school continued to the end with full vigour, neglecting nothing, from the school play, to the checking of school uniform. The play was a 'most original production of *Tigers Bones*' by Ted Hughes. Performed in the round, it incorporated a chorus of contemporary dancers. The play was highly commended in particular by the LEA Inspector, a drama specialist.

Despite the inevitable sadness felt, the FCJ Annals of 1985 believed it was right that they concluded on note of thanksgiving for the privilege of having worked with 'these girls, these parents, this staff, and for the good things which together we have been able to achieve'. The Annals for The Hollies ended with a report of the Mass of Thanksgiving held on 14<sup>th</sup> June at the Jesuit Church of the Holy Name, where it all began in 1853. The Mass was attended by 1800 people to mark the culmination of the work done at The Hollies by FCJ Sisters and the staff who worked with them over the years. It was an occasion which gave worthy expression to the spirit which had emanated from all who worked at The Hollies since its foundation. Bishop Holland was present at the Mass at which Father O'Connor, was chief celebrant. Present in the congregation were specially invited guests, past and present staff and pupils. Father O'Connor spoke of the beginnings and development of the

Apostolate of the FCJs in Manchester. He reminded the congregation that the first FCJ venture was in the neighbouring parish of St. Augustine's, his own parish, where the Sisters had opened a poor school in 1852. At that time three other Sisters travelled daily from the convent at Adelphi. In 1852, the FCJs opened a girls' school in Granby Row. This was the forerunner of The Hollies. Against the odds, the school flourished and grew; a convent was rented in nearby Brook Street very near the Holy Name church, and a Convent High School for Young Ladies started in 1853.

After the Mass, there were many other happy and sad occasions when groups of staff, Governors, pupils, and parents gathered to celebrate, give thanks and say goodbye to The Hollies. The Governors passed a final vote of thanks to the last Headmistress of the Hollies, Sister Bernadette O'Malley, for her stewardship, and to the FCJ Sisters for their service to generations of young women. The final Governors' Meeting was an occasion to record thanks to the governors for their devoted and loyal service to The Hollies and to the FCJs. The Governors' minutes were to be archived with the FCJs.

1985 saw the fulfilment of the aspiration of the Foundress of the FCJs, with the approval of the Constitution she had so greatly desired; 165 years after the first FCJ house had been established. For The Hollies, 1985 was marked as the 'ending of an era'; the closing of The Hollies High School and the ending of the FCJs mission in Manchester. From their very beginnings, FCJs provided educational opportunities and training to generations of girls who would not otherwise been afforded such possibilities. Over the years, the FCJs had been gratified to be able to contribute so much to Catholic education in Manchester's parish schools. They had been happy to found and finance the grammar schools and the College of Education. When The Hollies became a comprehensive, that challenge too had been successfully undertaken. In the ending of the school, could be seen echoes of the beginnings of the Society; conflict with clergy, opposition in the face of evident success, the

thwarting of the aspirations of Marie Madeline herself. The FCJs reflected that there was something very sad about the end of a school in which there was so much evidence of vigour and growth.



Plate 75: School Buildings await Demolition, 1989 (Anne-Marie Lowes (Carroll))

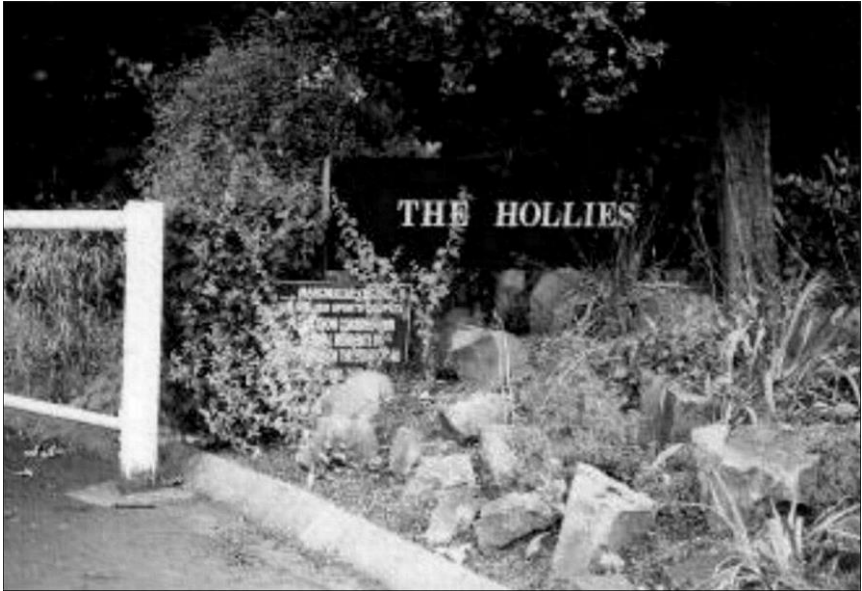


Plate 76: Entrance to The Hollies Sports Facilities, 1999 (Pat Harris (Mooney))



Plate 77: New Houses on The Hollies' site, 1999 (Pat Harris  
(Mooney)

### **Postscript**

It is now fifteen years since The Hollies FCJ Convent School ceased to exist. The buildings have been demolished and a new estate of houses replaces it on the site once described as the 'finest for the school in the north of England'. The playing fields, left in trust for the youth of Manchester, survive but are in a neglected condition and their future is no longer secure. A former pupil recently reflected, 'It is now 2001, the school and all it stood for has long since gone, but like that of the passing of an old friend, [we] remember that it is the SPIRIT of The Hollies which lives on.' Against the odds, that spirit is alive and well. The Past Pupils' Association, revived in 1980 with fifty members, now has over 200 members. Reunions take place twice a year at St. Catherine's Church, Didsbury. A different form of reunion happens in cyberspace on the Virtual Reunion Website. Through the wonders of new technology, old girls from all over the world are regaining contact with lost friends, sharing memories and old photographs, and getting to know one another again. Informal gatherings of various groups of past pupils take place as the next anniversary of each cohort is reached. The web site, at "[www.Hollies-fcj.org](http://www.Hollies-fcj.org)", provides links with the FCJ Sisters, and with past and present pupils from The Hollies and other FCJ schools around the world.

In an ever-changing world, the FCJ's mission too has adapted, but the three elements of their work, Education, Retreat, and Mission, remain at its centre. The FCJs in Manchester have concentrated on Retreat and Mission, setting up a centre for spiritual studies in one of the former halls of residence of Sedgley College. There is a full programme of day and weekend courses and the facilities for group or individual Retreats. The balance between the three elements may have shifted but the FCJs' role in education is by no means ended. Their Foundress had exhorted them to work where there was a need and, at the end of the twentieth century, there was surely no need for FCJ education when the lay-community was providing it? The

words of a young pupil who e-mailed the Sisters Website confirms the need for their continued presence, even in England:

Hi! My name is Sarah Ashworth. I attend Upton Hall Convent FCJ school in the north west of England and can I just say how proud I am to be a part of this wonderful organisation. The work that the FCJ Sisters do is outstanding! I have been brought up Christian and going to Upton Hall has made me realise that there is so much I can do to help others. The FCJ Sisters are such a good influence on me, I want to thank you.

Canon O'Toole had chosen wisely when he advised the Archbishop of Salford to invite Marie Madeleine to educate the youth of Manchester. Against the odds, The Hollies continues to work on in the lives of the women who were privileged to have been educated there and who carry the memory of the school with them in their work, their homes, and their lives.

## **Appendix A**

### **A PRAYER FOR YOUTH**

Make of our youth, O God, a Holy thing;  
Let it not languish, die and naught avail;  
Tend it, we pray Thee, in its blossoming:  
Give it the beauty that can never fail.

Let us not pass in dreams of fantasy,  
The rich young morning, heeding not Thy call;  
Then, at cold dusk, to waken suddenly  
And, terror-stricken, watch the swift night fall.

Thou who didst give our manhood dignity,  
Set our young hearts with ardour all aflame,  
Make us true soldiers of Thy chivalry,  
Loving Thy hallowed standard and Thy name.

Let us not waste Thy splendid gift, O King,  
Or barter it for all the world's poor price,  
Make of our youth, O God, a holy thing,  
Make of our hearts, O Lord, Thy sacrifice.

## **Bibliography**



“Born to Serve: women and evangelical religion”, in Wolffe, J., (1994) Evangelicals, Women and Community in Nineteenth Century Britain, Open University, Milton Keynes.

British Society since 1945, 3rd edition, Marwick, A., Penguin, London, 1996.

The Changing Experience of Women, Whiteleg, E., (ed.) The Open University/Blackwell, Oxford, 1982.

Education for Girls, Ollerenshaw, Kathleen, D.B.E., Conservative Political Centre, London, 1958.

Education for Girls, Ollerenshaw, Kathleen, D.B.E., Faber & Faber, London, 1961.

Education in Britain 1750-1914, Stephens, W.B., Macmillan Press, London, 1998.

Educational Documents England and Wales, MacLure, J.Stuart., Chapman & Hall, London, 1965.

Faithful Companion of Jesus Marie Madeleine d’Houët, McCarren, Mary Campion FCJ, Catholic Truth Society, London, 1981.

Girls and Girls-only Schools, Bone, A., Manchester Equal Opportunities Commission, HMSO, London, 1983.

The Girls' Schools: the Future of the Public and Other Independent Schools for Girls in the Context of State Education, Ollerenshaw, Kathleen, D.B.E., Faber, London, 1967.

God’s Faithful Instrument, Grogan, Patricia FCJ, Martell Press, Ramsgate, 1986.

Half Our Future; a Report of the Central Advisory Council for Education (England) Newsom, J., (chairman), HMSO, London, 1963.

History of Education in Great Britain, Curtis, S.J., University Tutorial Press, London, 1968.

The Life of the Viscountess de Bonnault d’Houët, Foundress of the Society of FCJ, (trans. from the French) – drawn up by certain members of her society, M.H.Gill & Son, London, 1884.

Lessons for Life. The Schooling of Girls & Women 1850-1950, Hunt, Felicity, (ed.) Blackwell, Oxford, 1987.

The Making of Manchester, Manchester Evening News, Manchester, 1999.

Practical Visionaries Women, Education and Social Progress 1790-1930, Hilton, Mary & Hirsch, Pam, (eds.), Pearson Education, Essex, 2000.

“Religion and Society in Industrial England” in Wolffe, J., (1994) in Evangelicals, Women and Community in Nineteenth Century Britain, Open University, Milton Keynes.

Women and Education, Byrne, Eileen M., Tavistock Publications, London, 1975.

Schooling for Women’s Work, Deem, R. (ed.), Routledge & Keegan Paul, London, 1980.

A Social History of England, 1851-1990, Bedarida, F., trans. Forster A.S. and Hodgkinson, J., Routledge & Keegan Paul, London, 1998.

There’s Something About a Convent Girl, Bennett, Jackie, & Forgan, Rosemary, (eds.), Virago, London, 1991.

Willingly to School, Cathcart-Borer, M., Chaucer Press, Suffolk, 1975.

“Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth Century England” in Wolffe, J (1994) Evangelicals, Women and Community in Nineteenth Century Britain, Open University, Milton Keynes.

Women and Families, an Oral History, 1940-1970, Roberts, E., Blackwell, Oxford, 1995.

Women and Leadership in Nineteenth Century England, Shiman, L.L., MacMillan, London, 1992.

“Women’s Mission” in Wolffe, J (1994) Evangelicals, Women and Community in Nineteenth Century Britain, Open University, Milton Keynes.

## **Journals**

Oral History, the Journal of the Oral History Society, “An Oral History of Schooling in Lancashire, 1900-1950: Gender, Class and Education”, Summerfield, Penny, Autumn, 1987.

Past & Present A journal of Historical Studies: “Terra Incognita – The Nun in Nineteenth Century England”, O'Brien, Susan, Number 121 November 1988.

Past & Present A journal of Historical Studies: “French Nuns in Nineteenth Century England”, O'Brien, Susan, Number 154 February 1997.

## **Manuscripts**

Development of Roman Catholic Education in the City of Manchester, Chapter 1 from, “Reorganisation and Curriculum Change: The Experience of the Sixth Form College”, Blackburn, Bernadette, University of Manchester, 1985.

From Dinah to Dorothea: A Study of Evangelicalism's effects on Women during the years 1790-1870, Open University Project, Fourth Level Honours, A425, “Evangelicals, Women and Community in Nineteenth Century Britain”, Harris, Patricia, 1998.

Mothers and Daughters; A Study of Girls' Experiences of Education in Hitchin, 1968-1991, with reference to the education of their mothers in the post war years 1947-1963, Open University Project, Fourth Level Honours, A422 “Oral History – Childhood”, Harris, Patricia, 1997.

## **Primary Sources**

“Companionship in Education,” Faithful Companions of Jesus, October, 1996.

FCJ Annals 1861-1914, FCJ Archives, Broadstairs.

FCJ Annals 1914-1985, The Hollies, FCJ Archives, British Province.

The Hollies, FCJ Archives, British Province.

## **Other Primary Sources**

**Interviews and Questionnaires** – conducted by Patricia Harris between October 2000 and January 2002. Many “Old Girls” and members of staff gave both formal and informal interviews and/or filled out questionnaires, 1999-2002.

**Memorabilia, Photos and Documents** – from many past pupils and staff.

### **Newspapers**

The Catholic School, 1853-1855, National Newspaper Archives, British Library.

The Catholic Educator, 1889, National Newspaper Archives, British Library.

Illustrated London News, 1909, National Newspaper Archives, British Library. Manchester Catholic Herald, 1898-1934, National Newspaper Archives, British Library.

Manchester Chronicle and Evening News, 1868-1963, and 1963-1971, National Newspaper Archives, British Library.

Northern Press, 1860-1863, National Newspaper Archives, British Library.

Universal News, 1860-1869, National Newspaper Archives, British Library.

The Universe, 1860-1909, National Newspaper Archives, British Library.

The Universe, Northern Edition, 1935-1968, National Newspaper Archives, British Library.

### **Other Sources**

Greater Manchester County Records Office.

Imperial War Museum Website.

Manchester Archives and Local Studies, Central Library, Manchester.

St. Augustine’s Boys’ Website.

Salford Diocese Website, Archives Pages.

