

The Church of Saint Wilfrid at Cotton

The Church of Saint Wilfrid at Cotton has a proud history in the life of the Archdiocese of Birmingham.

It will always be associated with Father Faber and the band of Oratorians who came here in the mid-nineteenth century. John Henry Newman was here for some weeks before the Oratory Fathers finally moved away to found the Oratories in Birmingham and London.

In many ways the most significant phase in the history of this parish and Church was the transfer, once again in the nineteenth century, of the School at Sedgley Park in Wolverhampton to become Cotton College.

Cotton can indeed be proud of the many fine priests and eminent lay men who prayed in this chapel day by day. In the 1980's the College closed. Sadly its ruins are all around us.

The history of this parish is not, of course, limited to the boys who passed through the College. The Parishioners and families of Cotton have contributed enormously with their support and generosity over many generations. You could say that the family histories of the families of this parish are built into the stones of this chapel.

Sadly the parish began to struggle from the time that the College was closed. At the last visitation four years ago Cotton was listed as one of the parishes that would need to be reviewed at this time.

Last July matters deteriorated considerably. Dry rot was discovered in the roof, and as a matter of urgency an extensive survey must be undertaken. We await the results of that survey.

In the short term, so as to limit damage to the fabric, the building must be opened up to as much fresh air as possible. This means that some window space, and the main West Doors, must be open throughout the winter. The security of the building will be safeguarded by steel grills that will protect the building from access.

This means that it will be totally impractical to keep the building open for worship throughout the winter. The cold will be one obvious factor. Others relate to health and safety. We cannot be sure how these conditions will affect the building over the winter, and therefore it would not be prudent to go on. Final decisions about the future of the building, and what is to be done, must await results of the survey.

It is therefore with great sadness that I have to announce to you, after discussion with the Archbishop and his advisers, that after the 24th October, Mass will no longer be celebrated here. Father Sandy had offered to investigate the possibilities of temporary Mass centres in the School or elsewhere, but the Archbishop's Council advised that the best course of action would be for people to seek Mass in neighbouring Parishes. Alton and Cheadle are clearly the nearest.

Let me assure you that the Pastoral care of the people in this parish will go on under Father Sandy's care. You must continue to regard him as your Parish Priest. He will continue to care for the Faber School and for the sick of this parish.