

Researching the History of a Catholic Church and Parish

We are very grateful to Father Nicholas Schofield, Archivist of the Archdiocese of Westminster, for his contribution to this guide and for his introductory comments below.

I often go back to a sermon preached in 1948 by one of the most erudite Catholic priests of his generation, Mgr Ronald Knox. The Church of St Thomas, Fulham was celebrating the centenary of its consecration and in his sermon, Knox said

Do not be deceived into thinking that history is the record of wars or crises, of social developments or changing fashions of human thought. Such things are only the backwash on the current. History is the life of John Smith, of the parish of Fulham, his birth, his marriage, his death. All that you will find set down in parish registers; and always with the priest's name appended...so, year after year, the ruling moments of human destiny stand dispassionately recorded. And meanwhile, how many secrets, these last hundred years, have been breathed through the grilles of those confessionals, and died with the priest who heard them! How many resolutions have been made, prayers granted, before that Lady statue! How many graces, unfelt, unseen, have been received at those communion rails! A church like this is a great museum of unwritten history; the history that really counts.

Knox, of course, was not a professional historian – many historians would criticise the way he disregards ‘social developments or changing fashions of human thought’ – but he makes an important point: every parish has a story that is worth telling.

Speaking for myself – and I suspect the same goes for most clergy and parishioners – we become so focussed on the here-and-now (although with an eye firmly fixed on eternity), we become so obsessed with the next page of the diary, on the current liturgical season or the latest project, that it is easy to forget that our parishes are indeed museums of ‘unwritten history.’ As Knox reminds us, much of this exists on the invisible spiritual level, not really the concern of a historian and pretty much inaccessible in terms of research, but even in the most ‘ordinary’-seeming parish, a little bit of historical investigation will reveal interesting connections and fascinating characters. So often we take these things for granted and perhaps miss all the clues that point us to our heritage – clues they may indeed be staring us in our face!

In my work as diocesan archivist, I've been involved in researching and writing a number of parish histories – including Welwyn Garden City, Willesden, Kingsland, Spanish Place, Lincoln's Inn Fields and Uxbridge (my present parish). I thought I would say a little about how we can go about this task and what we can learn from it.

Firstly, I always try to place a parish's history in the context of the area's wider ecclesiastical heritage. Rather than starting with the parish's foundation – normally within the last 200 years – it is fascinating to look for links with recusant Catholics and get some idea of the local activities of the medieval Church. That way, the parish is seen in terms of continuity with the on-going Christian history of the area.

In writing the history of Our Lady of Willesden it was necessary to do this because the Catholic shrine, restored at the end of the nineteenth century, can only be understood with reference to the medieval one, which flourished in the years leading up to the Reformation. This continuity was expressed in a new sign placed outside the church, showing two canonised saints who had made the pilgrimage to Willesden, one before the Reformation and one in more recent years: St Thomas More and St Josemaría Escrivá.

Likewise in Uxbridge, exploring the parish's 'pre-history' uncovered not only medieval guilds and chantry chapels but interesting connections with Elizabethan Jesuits (including St Edmund Campion), gunpowder plotters and even an indirect reference in Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Researching parish history can be very rewarding and involves looking, listening, reading and researching on many different levels. I've certainly found that exploring our past can help and inform present ministry:

- Firstly, it helps parishes understand their **unique identity** – with their own traditions, their own story, their own heroes and heroines. Some of these factors can be re-discovered and used by the parish in the present. For example, since St Edmund Campion spent a short time in Uxbridge in 1580, the parish celebrates a Mass on his feast day (1 December), keeping alive his memory and witness.
- Secondly, previous generations can **inspire** us in our current mission. We will often encounter dedicated laity and tireless priests who built churches and schools and raised the money for them. I always think of Fr Henry Hardy (a relative of Sir Thomas Hardy, Lord Nelson's flag captain at Trafalgar), who founded five parishes and, as soon as one mission was established, would move on to found another. At his ordination in 1878, Fr Hardy asked Cardinal Manning to send him to the obscurest part of the diocese – and so he was duly sent to Harrow-on-the Hill. From Harrow he founded a church in Rickmansworth; moving to Rickmansworth, he was able to open a chapel at Boxmoor; when he eventually moved there, he started Berkhamstead and, finally, turned his attention to Tring. As his obituary noted 'Thus, single-handedly and depending mainly upon his own resources, most carefully husbanded, and by living in unusual simplicity and abnegation, he exercised an apostolate in western Hertfordshire in which he has diffused the beauty of the Catholic faith'. I always get a real sense of standing on the shoulders of giants.
- Thirdly, parish history **informs** us – it helps us understand what really happened in the past and why things are as they are (where we have come

from). It can also question long-held assumptions and historical myths, which can sometimes hold communities back.

- Finally, researching parish history can create a feeling of **déjà vu**, of having been there before. History reminds us that there is nothing new under the sun. Many of our concerns and challenges today are remarkably similar to those of a century ago. Modern priests signing school reference forms are not the first to ponder how to define a 'practising Catholic'. The past was not a golden age of universal religious practice and all the nuances of human nature that we experience existed in previous generations. There is a sense, too, of continuity. Thankfully, many Catholic parishes in London are currently growing thanks to the creation of more houses and immigration. Thus, in Uxbridge we currently have a weekly average Mass attendance of 714, with people from 71 countries around the world. When the mission was first founded in 1891, numbers and ethnic diversity would have been much more limited but the same process was going on: Catholic provision was needed because of urbanisation and the influx of Catholics from Ireland and elsewhere. It is interesting to look at how the Church responded to these factors in the past and to compare them to the present. A look at parish history helps us deal with change and continuity in the present and planning for the future.

It is good also to help parishioners have some sort of 'ownership' over their history and to bring it to their attention not only in books but on the website, in displays and referred to in homilies and talks. Thanks to the *Building on History* project, St Mary's school in Uxbridge has been engaged in several projects to explore Catholic history locally. Year 6 have been looking at a school report from the 1950s; other classes have been exploring the church building (asking how it has changed since it was built in 1931) or imagining how a First Holy Communion celebration would have been different in the past.

Speaking as a diocesan priest, I always think we are at a disadvantage when it comes to remembering our history. Religious Orders are very good at handing down the family tradition. They will have their own saints and *beati*, whose lives express the spirit of the congregation. They will have customs and celebrations that are particular to them. They often have well-kept archives; indeed, many convents record all the comings and goings in an official *Journal*. Each house will be very aware of those who have gone before and their names are recorded in the *Necrology* read during the Divine Office. This is especially the case for enclosed Orders practising monastic stability. One Benedictine monk wrote:

We soak in the timelessness with the air we breathe. In fact the air is actually an atmosphere that is part chemical and part historical. And when we walk down great vaulted and stone-paved corridors, we see our monastic ancestors walking ahead of us along the same stones to the church for Matins...and we realise that we are part of one ageless moral person. (W. Mork, *The Benedictine Way*, 1987)

It would be wonderful if we could say the same about our parishes – that ‘we realise that we are part of one ageless moral person’ not only by discovering our past but by making sure the present is preserved for posterity. Presbyteries are not expected to be mini-versions of the National Archive but common-sense should help us in keeping newsletters, orders of services of important events, significant correspondence and e-mails, photos, and so on. Some parishes keep scrap-books or photo albums so that this can be done.

In an often-quoted speech, Pope Paul VI once said to a group of Church Archivists:

It is Christ who operates in time and who writes, He Himself, His story through our papers which are echoes and traces of this passage of the Church, of the passage of the Lord Jesus, in the world. Thus, having veneration for these papers, documents, archives, means having a veneration for Christ, having a sense of the Church; it means giving to ourselves and those who will come after us the history of the passage of this phase of *transitus Domini* in the world.

In other words, even the most mundane details of parish history – an old account book, say, or a musty newsletter - tell us something of the *transitus Domini*, ‘the passage of the Lord Jesus’ at a particular time in a particular corner of the Lord’s vineyard. An archive, seen with the eyes of faith, is a record of the work of God in time and a monument to the power of Him who preserves the Church despite her many human weaknesses and tensions. Let us keep our eyes open to the great museum of unwritten history that lies in front of us; let us discover it, use it and learn from it!

Fr Nicholas Schofield

A Guide to Exploring Church and Parish History

Exploring and researching the history of a Catholic church and parish can be rewarding, but it can seem rather daunting. Sometimes it can be difficult to know where to start your investigations and which resources to use. This guide will explain how you can begin your research and will also present a range of sources that are available to you.

You can find out much about the history of a church and parish without doing any research in a library or archive, and even without doing much reading. We suggest the following sequence of activity: ***Look-Listen-Read-Research***

Look

Look at the church building itself – which may already be very familiar – with new and inquisitive eyes. Historical evidence is often staring us right in the face. Indeed, whole books could be written about the exterior or interior of Westminster Cathedral, for example. But even in humbler buildings much can be learned from such an exploration. An old statue of St Patrick, for instance, would obviously suggest that the parish had a substantial Irish population, while saints of a particular religious Order would point towards the local involvement of that congregation.

Example

In Uxbridge, an inscription on the wall revealed that two stone statues had been placed there in honour of William and Margarita Gilbey, local wine merchants and uncle and aunt of the famous Cambridge chaplain, Mgr Alfred Gilbey. This indicated that they were benefactors of the church when it was built in 1931. A flick through the Baptism Register revealed that there had been several Gilbey baptisms at Uxbridge, including that of Peter Hubert Gilbey in 1914 – who not only went on to become a monk of Ampleforth but (through his mother) the Ninth Baron Vaux, the first Catholic monk to sit in the House of Lords since 1559! For an 'ordinary' suburban parish like Uxbridge, that's not the sort of story you expect to find!

Therefore, consider the following about the church building in your research:

- When was it built? A foundation stone may well quickly give an exact date, but architectural style and other evidence will give useful clues.
- How does it compare to other churches of the same period and what is known about the architect?
- Has it been significantly extended, altered or rearranged during its history? If so, are there clues as to when and why?
- What ancillary buildings are there? (Hall or school?) What was their original purpose and how might this have changed?
- How does the church relate to its physical surroundings? Is it on a main road or a back street? Do a lot of people live nearby? Does it look like a focal point for a community, or a building that is easily ignored? Is there evidence that such factors have changed over the years?
- What does the church exterior and interior say about its first community?
- What sort of statement was it making in the local area?
- Inside the building, what can you find out about its history and community from any inscriptions, war memorials, stained glass windows, vestments, sacred vessels and other items in the sacristy and the choice of images?
- If there is a cemetery, look at the gravestones. What are the earliest dates? Who is commemorated and why?

Listen

The memories and testimony of others can form a significant component of a research project. Talk to older and more longstanding members of the parish. What can they tell you about the past history they have lived through, and perhaps about earlier periods they had themselves heard about? Their perspective on the past is part of the collective memory of the parish, and is likely to give you valuable insights into why people behave and think as they do. However, do not accept what they tell you uncritically: they may well have particular viewpoints or prejudices, or simply have been misinformed.

The collection of anecdotes can be particularly fascinating since they can tell us things seldom recorded in official documents. Even if they are not completely historically accurate, they tell us much about the views and cultures of the parish community. We have a great duty to do in recording this oral history, before it disappears for good. One such study could collect together memories and stories of older priests.

Please see our **Oral History Guide** on our website for more information and guidance.

Read

Background reading can provide an excellent 'way in' to a project. It will inform your research by helping you identify any gaps in the history of the church and parish as well as what aspects of the history you want to pursue and explore further. It can orientate you to different themes and issues and provide a wider historical context. Some churches publish monthly magazines for their parishes, which can be a goldmine of insight into the life and activities of a parish. Catholic newspapers and journals can be useful and these will be kept in specialist libraries and archives (see sections below). For example, up until the 1930s, *The Tablet* had extensive reports from parishes, especially if there was a special occasion (like an opening, consecration or public lecture). There are also the publications of the Catholic Record Society (www.catholicrecordsociety.co.uk), the Catholic Archives Society (www.catholicarchivesociety.org) and the Catholic Family History Society (www.catholic-history.org.uk/cfhs).

Published books

There is a wealth of published material. A particularly noteworthy publication is the *Victoria County History*, much of which is now available on-line: www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk. This work sets the context by giving the essential facts concerning local history. It is especially useful for the medieval church but there is usually a short section on Roman Catholicism in the area.

The following books could also provide informative background reading and a broader historical context:

Evinson, Denis; *Catholic Churches of London* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1998)

Garnett, Jane; Grimley, Matthew; Harris, Alana; Whyte, William; Williams, Sarah (ed.), *Redefining Christian Britain: post 1945 perspectives* (London: SCM Press, 2007).

Grumbridge, Brian; *The Story of St Mary the Virgin, Worton Road, Isleworth* (Holy Trinity with St Paul and St Mary, 2006)

Harris, Alana; *Faith in the Family: A Lived Religious History of English Catholicism Before and After Vatican II* (Manchester: MUP 2013).

Harris, Alana; *Rescripting Religion in the City: Migration and Religious Identity in the Modern Metropolis* (Forthcoming, Ashgate, 2013)

Harrison, Bernard A.; *The Windows of Pinner Parish Church* (Parochial Church Council of The Church of St. John the Baptist, 2012)

Harrison, Bernard A.; *St. Luke's Catholic Church, Pinner: The Story of a Parish* (Mark/Lucy Enterprises, 2007)

Harting, Johanna H.; *Catholic London Missions* (Sands & Co., 1903)

Kelly, Bernard; *Historical Notes on English Catholic Missions* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1907) [reprinted by Michael Gandy, 1995]

McClelland, Alan (ed) *From without the Flaminian Gate: 150 Years of the Roman Catholic Hierarchy in England and Wales* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999)

Martin, Christopher; *A Glimpse of Heaven: Catholic Churches of England and Wales* (English Heritage, 2009)

Maynard, Jean A *History of St Mary and St Michael's Parish, Commercial Road, East London* (privately printed, 2007)

Newton, Douglas; *Catholic London* (Hale, 1950)

Rottman, Alexander; *London Catholic Churches: A Historical and Artistic Record* (Sand & Co., 1926)

Schofield, Nicholas; *Our Lady of Willesden* (privately printed, 2002)

Schofield, Nicholas; *Catholicism in Uxbridge: A Brief History* (St Pauls Publishing, 2011).

Schofield, Nicholas; *Holborn - London's Via Sacra* (privately printed, 2012)

Schofield, Nicholas & Skinner, Gerard *The English Cardinals* (Family Publications, 2007)

Schofield, Nicholas & Skinner, Gerard *The English Vicars Apostolic* (Family Publications, 2009)

Wittich, John *Catholic London* (Gracewing, 1988)

For some basic information on the architecture of local parish churches, the six London volumes of Sir Nikolaus Pevsner's *Buildings of England* may be helpful.

Research

Locating such useful background reading material may require some research itself. You can begin this research by visiting the local library or the British library, or by using their online search engines if you are a member. They may also hold useful books on relevant local and ecclesiastical history. Large archive centres, such as the London Metropolitan Archives, also have libraries of local history. See the relevant section below for online access to such libraries and archives.

Undeposited material

Following your background reading, the church or presbytery is a good place to start your initial exploration. You may well find that there are invaluable sources still in their possession. Are there some records gathering dust in a dark corner of the presbytery or sacristy, or elsewhere? Is there also an old run of church magazines piled in a side room? Or has someone kept a parent's or grandparent's diary or photograph album recalling church life in the earlier twentieth century? Such material can be very useful and revealing.

Example

I was told that there was virtually no parish archive at Uxbridge when I arrived, but a bit of investigation in the presbytery attic uncovered several boxes of old papers, photos and *Notice Books*. Likewise at Welwyn Garden City, a parishioner had carefully kept a copy of every newsletter for the last few decades (very few of which had been preserved by the parish!).

Indeed, do not assume that all relevant records will be kept at the diocesan archive, everything tidily boxed and catalogued. Sadly that is not often the case since they only have the papers which have been deposited with them. There may be some items of interest kept centrally (in terms of episcopal correspondence, for example,

or the letter books of the Diocesan Financial Secretary) but most papers relating to parishes will actually be found in the church or presbytery itself.

Example

When I was researching the history of Our Lady and St Joseph, Kingsland, I focussed on the early years of the mission when it was run by Fr William Lockhart, one of Newman's disciples. He belonged to the Institute of Charity, an Italian order, and so I found myself in the Institute's archive in Stresa (Italy), on the shores of Lake Maggiore, thumbing through letters describing Catholic life in Victorian London! Such was the richness of that archive that what began as a modest parish project turned into a biography of Fr Lockhart, published in 2011. You never know where research is going to lead you!

It is also worth making an appeal directed at parishioners – this can be especially fruitful in collecting together old photographs. These parish-based resources can be supplemented by other archives, including the diocesan archive and the local studies centre, as discussed below.

Archive material

Despite the observations above, in accordance with Canon Law, dioceses and parishes should have archives of records. A simple web search or communication with the relevant parish priest should help you locate such records and materials.

If you require guidance and support regarding archiving, please see our blog (www.open.ac.uk/blogs/boh/?p=255) and the following documents from the Westminster Diocesan Archives (16 Abingdon Rd, London W8 6AF; 0207 938 3580):

Claire Childs: **Caring for Parish Archives**

Westminster Archives: **Parish Archives Leaflet** (This advice for parish archivists applies in the Westminster Diocese only)

Or email: archives@rcdow.org.uk

Church-related material

Depending on the focus of your study and the location of the church and parish, you could also try the following exemplar archives:

Archdiocese of Southwark: www.rcsouthwark.co.uk/contacts.html

The Catholic National Library (formerly Catholic Central Library, currently at Farnborough Abbey): www.catholic-library.org.uk.

Heythrop College Library: www.heythrop.ac.uk/about-us/library-and-learning-resources/access-to-the-library.html

Diocese of Brentwood:

<http://dioceseofbrentwood.net/servicesandsupport/archives/Default.aspx>

The Westminster Diocesan Archives:

www.rcdow.org.uk/diocese/default.asp?library_ref=4&content_ref=517

Note that some material may be in the record offices of the old counties, for example, Hertfordshire or Surrey.

Online resources

As indicated above, many archives and libraries can be explored effectively on-line. As well as the archives listed above, also try the online catalogues listed below:

The Catholic Archive Society: www.catholicarchivesociety.org

The Catholic Family History Society: www.catholic-history.org.uk/cfhs

Catholic Heritage (An online network of Catholic archives and libraries):
www.catholic-heritage.net

The Catholic National Library:

www.catholic-library.org.uk/catalogue/index.php

The Catholic Record Society: www.catholicrecordsociety.co.uk

The English Catholic History Association: <http://echa.org.uk>.

For exploring the local context (for example, population growth, industry and employment and other parishes), another useful resource is the 'Middlesex and London' webpage of the *Victoria County Histories* website:

www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/counties/middlesex-london

Images of England provides a photographic library of England's listed buildings:
www.imagesofengland.org.uk

Online Catholic newspapers may provide links to archives and include useful articles, reports and case-studies. There are a range of Catholic newspapers and online media sites, include the following UK-wide examples:

Catholic Voices: www.catholicvoices.org.uk

The Catholic Herald: www.catholicherald.co.uk (See also: The Catholic Herald Archive: <http://archive.catholicherald.co.uk>)

There is also the British Newspaper Archive:
www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

Many dioceses have their own websites with links to relevant articles and other useful materials, such as newsletters, publications, pastoral letters and obituaries. See, for example, for the Diocese of Westminster (<http://beta.rcdow.org.uk>) and the Diocese of Brentwood (<http://dioceseofbrentwood.net>).

Other online resources

Particularly for more information on the local community, you can also search the following:

Access to archives:
www.a2a.org.uk

AIM25 (specifically for London and the M25 area):
www.aim25.ac.uk

The British Library online catalogue (which has links to various other online catalogues for archives, manuscripts and specialisms):
http://catalogue.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=BLVU1

The London's Past Online database: www.history.ac.uk/projects/digital/londons-past-online

The National Register of Archives database:
www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/nra/default.asp

Old newspapers

Not always available online, old local newspapers will contain reports about the opening of churches and significant events and anniversaries, as well as valuable information about local community life. Such valuable material on parish community life could be found in the relevant local archive centre.

London Borough Local Studies Centres

Local archive centres archive historic records and other materials for public use. A comprehensive list of London Borough Local Studies Centres is provided by *ancestor-search.info* at: www.ancestor-search.info/lib-london.htm, but a sample list is provided below. Many of these centres also have online search facilities, although you may need to visit the archive to register in the first instance.

Barnet Local Studies and Archives

www.barnet.gov.uk/info/200111/local_studies_and_archives/702/local_studies_and_archives

Barking and Dagenham Archives and Local Studies Centre

www.lbdd.gov.uk/MuseumsAndHeritage/BoroughArchivesandLocalStudies/Pages/home.aspx

Camden Local Studies and Archives Centre

www.camden.gov.uk/ccm/navigation/leisure/local-history

Croydon Local Studies *Library and Archives*

www.croydononline.org/history/places/lslibrary.asp

Hammersmith and Fulham Archives and Local History Centre

www.lbhf.gov.uk/Directory/Leisure_and_Culture/Libraries/Archives/17430_Archives_and_Local_History.asp

Lambeth Archives

www.lambeth.gov.uk/Services/LeisureCulture/LocalHistory/Archives.htm

Newham Archives and Local Studies Library

www.newham.gov.uk/entertainmentandleisure/libraries/librarydetails/newhamarchivesandlocalstudieslibrary.htm

Southwark Council Local History Library

www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200161/local_history_library

Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgs/1001-1050/1034_local_history__archives.aspx

Main Archive Centres

There are also many larger archives and libraries across London, which may also have useful material on parish communities:

The British Library

www.bl.uk

City of Westminster Archives

www.westminster.gov.uk/archives

The Guildhall Library

www.history.ac.uk/gh

London Metropolitan Archives

www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/lma

Finding out about aspects of a church and congregation's history

The most useful histories of Catholic churches and parishes do not simply relate to bricks and mortar – rather they will give insights into the people and life of the parish, perhaps themes in the history of the church, and also its interaction with the local community. The following are aspects of church life that you might wish to explore.

Beginnings of a church

There will always be specific reasons for the inauguration of a particular church and parish. It may be linked to a particular benefactor or religious order. Some churches had their origins in a private house before the construction of the new building. Often in London the first building was an iron church, a 'tin tabernacle'. Sometimes a church building was previously used by a different Christian tradition (such as the Church of the Transfiguration, Kensal Rise, opened in 1977 in a former Methodist chapel) or even for a completely different purpose (the first church used by the Oratorians were in a former whisky store on what is now William IV Street, near Charing Cross!). Local and denominational newspapers will often provide another angle for investigation here. For late-nineteenth century churches, you might find draft applications for building and planning permission in the church or in local archives.

Bishops and Parish Priests

The bishop and parish priest will, of course, have played a central role in the life of the parish. There are various ways of finding out about individual bishops and parish priests. Locating their obituaries will be invaluable, providing you with an insight into the personality as well as the major acts of these figures. There may be information in local and denominational papers and at the Diocesan Archive.

Church attendance

One way of examining church attendances is to consult the religious censuses of London religion of 1851, 1886 and 1903-4. A compilation of the 1851 statistics for London (mostly north of the river) contained in the original printed report of the Religious Census is available here as a pdf (with permission from ProQuest's *Parliamentary Papers* online): www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/resource-guide/source-guides/1851censusreport.pdf

The original returns have now been digitised and can be downloaded for free from the National Archives website (www.nationalarchives.gov.uk). Alternatively, you

can visit the National Archives at Kew or check whether the relevant local borough archive or local history library holds copies.

The results of the census conducted by the *British Weekly* in 1886 were published as *The Religious Census of London* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888), available online at: www.openlibrary.org/b/OL14037667M

The census conducted in 1902-3 by the Daily News was particularly thorough and informative and was published as Richard Mudie-Smith, *The Religious Life of London* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), with extensive commentaries and analysis. It is available online at www.archive.org/details/religiouslifeof100mudi

Statistics were also collected by dioceses in annual parish returns and regular visitation reports. In more recent years, average parish Mass attendance was listed in the diocesan directory. These can be found in the Diocesan Archive.

Lay people

It can be difficult to find out about individual lay people through archive research. Sources of information include parish magazines; baptismal and marriage registers; records of confraternities and associations (e.g. Legion of Mary. Knights of St Columba, Union of Catholic Mothers); and private papers.

Outreach

Many parishes provided direct and indirect welfare through community programmes, clubs for children and adults or temperance societies. You will find insights into outreach activity of parishes in their individual church records, magazines and websites. You may also find local and denominational newspaper articles (see list above) that give a picture on the engagement of an individual church with their local community.

Religious Congregations

Many parishes will have had a convent or other religious house within its boundaries. Sometimes the chapel acted as a 'Mass centre' and individual religious may have been closely involved in pastoral work (e.g. as parish sister). Often they directed schools, orphanages, hospitals and other charitable institutions. The records would normally be kept by the respective congregation.

Research in context

Parish history should never be purely 'parochial' in terms of seeing the parish as a self-contained bubble removed from the rest of reality. Reference should be always made to political and socio-economic developments in the area, as well as the

experiences of other denominations. For example, often the foundation of a new Catholic parish was due to urbanisation and the building of railways.

Therefore, you should also seek to examine the history of the local surrounding area and its communities. Explore local town planning records and local archives on the history of the local area, including searches of articles in local newspapers and websites. An oral history study could also capture the views of prominent community leaders and representatives of different faith groups.

Other faith communities

As discussed above, exploring your history can bring your community closer to others. Indeed, you can work with other communities to explore your shared history. Moreover, other faith communities may have useful advice and resources on local historical exploration from their own research. Examples of such would be the 'history audit' methodology produced by the *Building on History: Church in London* project (see: www.open.ac.uk/Arts/building-on-history-project/resource-guide/history-audit.htm), and the Grove Booklet by Neil Evans and John Maiden, *What Can Churches Learn from their Past?* (Cambridge: Grove, 2012). While it should be noted that these resources were written with the Church of England primarily in mind, there is much here that is useful and readily transferable to research undertaken by other faith communities.

Good luck and let us know about your results!

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