



NUNS ACROSS THE ORANGE

*A History of the Pioneering Anglican Community
of St Michael and All Angels, Bloemfontein*



MICHAEL SPARROW

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BOOKS

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*His servants shall serve him,
and they shall see his face.*

Revelation 22, v.3-4

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AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION



One day in the middle of 1984 I received a letter from Miss Kay Hill OBE, Chairwoman of the English Committee of Help to the Community of St Michael and All Angels, Bloemfontein, inviting me to take on the voluntary role of Warden of the English Associates of CSM&AA. I had attended the previous year's Annual Meeting in London, where I had been persuaded to join the Committee. The Warden, Fr Austin Masters SSM, was unable to attend that meeting, and had recently let her know that he wished to stand down.

Agreeing to her request made me aware that I had not been in Bloemfontein for more than twenty years and had never seen the new St Michael's complex. I made plans to go out there after Easter the following year, to stay with the Sisters for three weeks and to see the various works in which they were engaged.

I was met at the airport and driven to the House, shown my room and told that there would be a cup of tea available in the Guest Wing Common Room at 4 p.m. Entering that room, I was greeted by an old monk who introduced himself as Father Cecil Hemsley, from the Society of the Sacred Mission's Priory at Modderpoort. He was staying with the Sisters while he had a course of medical treatment in one of Bloemfontein's hospitals. We sat at the table chatting. My back was to the door, and at one point he looked over my shoulder and said, "Oh! Here's Sister Evelyn." Addressing her, he said, "Sister, a new priest has arrived. Have you met him yet?"

"Have I met him?" The Sister echoed his question as she came into the room, and then repeated it. "Have I met him?" She paused briefly. "I've known him since he was knee high."

My acquaintance with CSM&AA is almost life-long. I was not quite three and a half years old when my family arrived in Bloemfontein. My father's sister Violet, who had served

previously as a SPG missionary, was joining the Community and, while on furlough in Britain before entering the novitiate, had persuaded my parents to drop arrangements that they were making to emigrate from London to Australia, in favour of going to South Africa. My father was appointed Music Master at St Andrew's Boys' School and Organist and Choir Master of Bloemfontein Cathedral. On our arrival, the house the Cathedral was buying to accommodate us was not ready and we stayed for five weeks in the Sisters' Guest House, St George's. We lived only two and a quarter years in Bloemfontein before moving to Natal, but our contact with the Sisters continued through my aunt, who came to stay with us in July every year for two or three weeks' holiday. I remember nothing of our first stay at St George's, being very young, but I have clear memories of our family holidays there when I was eleven and fifteen. I returned to live in England when I was eighteen years old, and had little or no expectation of visiting Bloemfontein again. My aunt kept in contact, of course, regularly writing blue aerogrammes, and she came to England to attend my ordination as priest. Becoming Warden of the English Associates renewed my contact with the other Sisters.

The origins of the present project are much more recent. In 2006 I received a letter from Sister Mary Ruth CSM&AA, telling me that she had recently completed the last of five booklets she was writing on aspects of the Community's history that she thought had not been documented adequately. "These should be on record when we are no more," she wrote. Her letter is reproduced after this Introduction.¹ It tells also of the celebration of her 101st Birthday. I intended to reply, suggesting that she write another booklet about her own call to the Community and her recollections of the older Sisters she met on her arrival in 1932. Some may have provided an insight into the earliest days of the Community. My letter was never written. Sister Joan told me later that Sister Mary Ruth took ill just two or three days after correcting the proofs of the fifth booklet, and died a few weeks later.

Those booklets had a very limited circulation. My initial intention was to bring them together with other already published material, such as extracts from the first two School histories, to edit them lightly, and to write an introduction and an epilogue. I had no opportunity to turn to this until late in 2014, when I went to Bloemfontein to look at the archives. I found that there was more that should be added. The Sisters had been pioneers

1 Sister Mary Ruth referred in the second paragraph of her letter to two articles I had written. They were:
 a) 75 Years on the Front Lawn. *Quarterly Review of the Community of the Resurrection*, No.413 (St John the Baptist, 2006), and
 b) Building on 150 years of Faithful Ministry, in *Flying Angel News*, July 2006, together with page 1 report: Traumatized crews need to talk after pirate attacks.

and the record of their life and work belongs not only to the realms of the Religious Life but also to the missionary history of the Anglican Churches in Africa.

St Michael's Community archives are not all together in one place. At about the time of the Community's move from the city centre to the suburb of Brandwag, some documents, books and other items, particularly those relating to Sister Henrietta CSM&AA and the early nursing work, were given to the University of the Free State to be preserved as the Henrietta Stockdale Memorial Collection. After the first large volume of the Community's chronicle, known as the White Book, covering the period 1874 to 1976, was completed, it was lodged in the Free State Provincial Archives. At the end of March, 1998, a substantial collection of documents was sent to the Historical Papers Research Archive at the William Cullen Library of the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg. A large number of other papers remain at St Michael's School in Bloemfontein. Some other items were given to Bloemfontein's Educational Museum and the National Museum.

Missing from all those collections are the Chapter Minute Books. Sister Joan was still alive when I started work on the archives, and I asked her about these volumes. "They must be there somewhere," she said. My searching has not turned them up and my guess is that they were destroyed. They would still have been in existence when the last Superior, Doreen Mary, died in October 2002. The Constitution was then suspended so that there would be no further Superiors and probably no more formal Chapter meetings. The remaining three Sisters moved to a flat at St Michael's School the following February and, with Sister Mary Ruth nominally in charge, a former Superior and a historian, I would expect that the Minute Books went with them. It is possible that she disposed of them: she did destroy some papers she regarded as sensitive. A year after Sister Mary Ruth's death, in 2007 Sister Joan vacated the flat to move into frail care. The Revd David Tanton, retired as Chaplain to St Michael's School but still providing regular ministry to the Sisters, helped her pack up and told me that Sister Joan had him destroy various papers because they were confidential. He did not remember Minute Books being among those. They may not have looked like Minute Books – the original Profession Register (in Witwatersrand University) is written in a card-covered school exercise book. We cannot know what happened to them. The absence of the Minute Books is a loss to historians, and leaves a number of questions unanswered.

Nevertheless, the Community's life and work is amply documented. I found it better to do my own research and writing, rather than to include the texts of Sister Mary Ruth's five booklets. It was a great achievement that she wrote them when she was one hundred years

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

old, but in places they show her age. I have re-used her titles for the relevant chapters. Her booklets are really the inspiration for this book. If she had not written them and told me about them, it is unlikely that I would have looked at the archives. I have tried to let the history speak for itself and to hear the voices of the Sisters. One could write a shorter record of the Sisterhood, but a Community is made up of many varied individuals called together by God and each with something to add to the story.

When I told one Religious that I was working on a history of St Michael's Community, he raised his eyebrows and asked, "Is there enough material to make a history? Did they do anything apart from the School?" I hope that the following pages will answer those questions.

Michael Sparrow

London, 2020

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION



June 30, 2006

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COMMUNITY OF ST. MICHAEL

AND ALL ANGELS

P.O. Box 79

BLOEMFONTEIN

9300

Dear Michael,

I have left you so long without a letter that I am ashamed. So here goes.

First of all, let me congratulate you on the article you wrote for the C.R. Magazine which we much appreciated. And secondly on your contribution and reports in the last number of the Flying Angel. Your ministry to the crews of the vessels attacked by pirates so necessary to them - quite indispensable - and, of course, we liked the photograph of you doing the 'listening.'

The winter cold in Bloemfontein is very severe this year - in fact over most of the country. There is a lot of sickness about with many of our friends in bed. I'm just recovering from a left lung infection which I acquired just after my 101st birthday!

2

I didn't do a survey of Bloemfontein from a helicopter as I did last year but the School organised a 'reception' in the Hall for everybody and "a good time was had by all!". The cake was huge but was decorated by ONE candle only to blow out instead of the 100 last year!

Fortunately I had just finished No 5 of the booklets on the Community's work during the 132 years of its existence - apart from the School. It is the last one. So here are the titles:-

1. Dust and Diamonds : 90 years in Kimberley
1844 - 1964
2. Cave, Cows, & Contemplation
30 years at Modderpoort 1923-1953
3. The Anglo-Boer War: MEDALS for ST MICHAEL'S
1899-1902
4. Ma 'Mohau: Mother of Mercy
Sister Enid : 1944 - 1954
5. Uphill All the Way. Basutoland/Lesotho
1910 - 1961

3
—

kois41

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COMMUNITY OF ST. MICHAEL
AND ALL ANGELS
P.O. Box 79
BLOEMFONTEIN

It was much on my Conscience, 9300
because these should be on record when we are
no more.

Gertrie van der Sijde has written a most
interesting account of her arrival in Bloem
to marry Willie and their life at the Cathedral
- in LIMK, the Bloemfontein Diocesan Magazine.
Wasn't that all when you were a boy and your
father the Cathedral Organist? I would
like to relate the two!

We don't forget you and have your
important work in our prayers.

Sister Joan sends her affectionate
greetings and so do I. Oenone Gradwell
has just come in and wants to add her too!

Tary Ruth Estman

P.S. Have you any recent news of Kathleen
Cornford?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



The author is grateful to many people who have contributed directly or indirectly to this work. Among them, I want to mention the following.

As described in the Introduction, the inspiration for this book came from Sister Mary Ruth CSM&AA in 2006, shortly before her death. At that time, I was serving as Mission to Seafarers Port Chaplain in Mombasa, Kenya. In that capacity I was invited to join with the Southern Africa chaplains in their occasional Conferences, which were held under the chairmanship of the regional Liaison Bishop, the Rt Revd Patrick Glover, Bishop of the Free State. Three of those Conferences took place at Modderpoort and involved travelling through Bloemfontein. It gave me opportunities to visit Sister Joan CSM&AA: in April 2007 at St Michael's School, and subsequently in the Serenitas Frail Care complex. More visits to Sister Joan followed after I started my research, when I was able to discuss various parts of the history with her.

The Revd David Tanton had retired from his Chaplaincy to St Michael's School and was about to move to Johannesburg when I wrote to him, asking about archives held at the school. He very helpfully posted to me in England a copy of the School's centenary history, *One the Faith*, and provided contact details for the Headmaster. In September 2016, David Tanton came to my rescue in Johannesburg when I arrived from England to work in the Historical Papers Research Archive, only to find Witwatersrand University completely closed for an indefinite period following violent student protests. He took me to an airline office to re-arrange flights. Thanks also to the clerk in the Mango office who went to a lot of trouble contacting SA Express, a competitor company.

Mr Braam van Wyk, Headmaster of St Michael's School, Bloemfontein, has been very warm and generous in his welcomes, and interested in the project. I felt that I was treated as one of the family, belonging, and completely at home. At the School, many thanks also

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

to Dr Johan Cromhout, who now has care of the Archives and whose own enthusiasm for the history is encouraging. The Librarian, Mrs Alistine Veldschoen, opened the archive room each day for me, enquired after my progress, gladly did some photocopying, and kept me supplied with cups of tea. Many thanks. Roseanne in the Reception Office and other members of staff provided various help and information, and were always smiling and friendly.

At Bloemfontein Cathedral the Dean, the Very Revd Lazarus Mohapi, not only welcomed me warmly but also invited me to tell the congregation about my study of the Community's history and of my connection from early childhood. On subsequent visits he involved me in the Sunday worship. The Dean took me to meet the Bishop, the Rt Revd Dintoe Letloenyane, at Bishops' House. Again I was welcomed as if I belong, and I was honoured when the Bishop invited me to concelebrate with him and the Dean at a Sung Mass in the Cathedral for Freedom Day, 27 April (2015).

Mrs Sandy Botha and Mrs Cheryl Schroeter in the Cathedral office were always welcoming and very helpful. As a two year old, Sandy was one of Sister Constance's pupils in a Sunday School at Leribe. Sandy Botha and Basil Schroeter (the Estate Manager) gave me access to the (rather dusty) Diocesan archives, which are stored at the Cathedral. Again, many thanks. I am grateful also to the Rt Revd Thomas Stanage, Bishop of Bloemfontein from 1982 to 1997, and afterwards the last Warden of CSM&AA, who welcomed me to his home when I asked to go to speak with him about the Community.

In the Africana section of the Sasol Library at the University of the Free State, the Librarians Mrs Hesma van Tonder and Mrs Carmen Nel provided willing and interested help. Locating some of the material required a search: Hesma said that I was the first person to ask for it in the years she had worked there. The kindness with which I was welcomed is well exemplified by a lady whose name I do not know. On my first arrival at the University, on a Friday, it was closed because of student demonstrations. She worked on the switchboard but came to the door of the Visitors' Centre to receive a parcel delivery. Hearing that I was from England she asked where I was staying. At eight o'clock on the following Monday morning she telephoned me at my hotel to say that the University was open again. Thank you so much.

My thanks also to the helpful staff at the Free State Provincial Archives, where I spent several days reading the Community's White Book, and also to staff at the National Museum, and the First Raadsaal and Wagon Museum.

Dean Lazarus Mohapi generously gave up a public holiday (when the archives were closed and I could not work) to drive me to Leribe in Lesotho. At the Convent of

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

the Holy Name we were welcomed with kindness and interest, and given an abundant lunch. I had good conversations with Sisters Hilda, Alphonsina and Calista, who had all joined the Society of St Mary at the Cross under CSM&AA's guidance, before transferring to CHN in 1962. We went on to Maseru and visited St James' Cathedral. It was good to meet the Sub-Dean of the Diocese, the Revd Atwell Xana, who is a fellow alumnus of St John's College, Durham, although of a more recent generation.

I hired a car from Mothebe Shuttle Services in Bloemfontein, together a driver, Makalo, to visit Kimberley on a Saturday in May 2016. Makalo was very helpful and a pleasant companion for the day. It never occurred to me that the Cathedral would be locked and barred, and our attempts to raise a response from the Deanery (to which we had been directed by a neighbour) proved fruitless. We went searching for Sister Henrietta's Chapel, but again without success: the gatekeepers of the Hospital were certain it was not there and directed us elsewhere. Our last hope was to find the Sisters of the Precious Blood at St Monica's House of Prayer. Sisters Elaine Mary and Camilla Mary invited us in and provided cups of tea while we talked. Sister Elaine Mary rescued the day's expedition by telephoning the Dean of Kimberley on his mobile number ("He's one of our Associates," she said). It was his day off, but he agreed to meet us at the Cathedral so that I could see the font, window and other items connected with CSM&AA, and visit the graves of Sister Henrietta, Mother Emma, and Mary Hirst Watkins, locked away in the garden at the foot of Sister Henrietta's statue. Afterwards he took us back to the Hospital to show us Sister Henrietta's chapel, which, unfortunately, was locked. Thank you, Dean Reginald Leeuw, for your time and trouble. What at one stage looked like a wasted journey proved to be an enjoyable and useful day.

Although I had been at Modderpoort with The Mission to Seafarers, I went there again as part of my research. The Manager, Mr Steve Shone, was an excellent and kindly host. I enjoyed being free to wander around on my own, looking at things of interest, and would like to have stayed longer.

The Historical Papers Research Archive at Witwatersrand University in Johannesburg is a pleasant and relaxed place in which to work. It is the main repository for Anglican Church records in South Africa. My thanks to Mrs Zofia Sulej and others on the staff for their friendly encouragement, helpfulness and efficiency.

In Britain, I made use of the archives of King's College, London; the British Library; Lambeth Palace Library; and the library of the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield. Before I was able to start on the main work of this project, the helpful staff at

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

the Felixstowe branch of Suffolk County Libraries ordered books for me on inter-library loans so that I could read about the Anglo-Boer War period.

My grateful thanks to Sister Superior Victoria Mary SPB and Sister Margaret Mary SPB of Burnham Abbey, who gave me access to their library and facilities to photocopy the booklet by Sister Teresia Mary SPB on Fr Patrick Maekane.

Thank you to Sister Provincial Edith Margaret CHN, for sending me a copy of the article *Under African Skies*, which had been published in the 2013 issue of the CHN Journal. I thank her also for putting a later question to two Sisters of the Community of the Holy Name who had served in Lesotho, Marjorie Jean and Jean Mary. Both remembered the SeSotho words which gave the initials SMMS. I am most grateful for their help.

Throughout the years that I have been engaged on this project I was serving as Priest in Charge of a small village parish in Essex. I thank the clergy and Readers who covered duties for me on the seven occasions when I went to South Africa for research.

Fr Crispin Harrison of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield, (who served many years in South Africa) very kindly read through my completed manuscript and gave me helpful comments that enabled me to make some changes, as well as encouraging me to find a publisher.

My hearty thanks to Liezel Meintjes and the team at SunBonani Media, Bloemfontein, for agreeing to publish my work and for bringing the project to fruition.

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN FOOTNOTES AND THE TEXT



BDA	Bloemfontein Diocesan Archive
CHN	Community of the Holy Name
CP	Community of the Presentation
CPSA	Church of the Province of Southern Africa
CR	Community of the Resurrection of our Lord, Grahamstown
CR	Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield
Crisp	<i>William Crisp: Some Account of the Diocese of Bloemfontein, 1863 to 1894</i>
CSMV	Community of St Mary the Virgin, Wantage
CT	The Church Times, London
ECH Report	Report of the English Committee of Help
FSA	Free State Provincial Archives, Bloemfontein
HPRA Wits	Historical Papers Research Archive, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg
HSC	Henrietta Stockdale Collection, in the University of the Free State

ABBREVIATIONS USED IN FOOTNOTES AND THE TEXT

KCL	Kings College Archives, London
Lewis & Edwards	Cecil Lewis & G.E. Edwards: <i>Historical Papers of the Church of the Province of South Africa</i>
OGS	Oratory of the Good Shepherd
QPBM	Quarterly Paper of the Bloemfontein Mission [from no.30, October 1875]
QPOFSM	Quarterly Paper of the Orange Free State Mission [until no.29, July 1875]
SMS	St Michael's School archive, Bloemfontein
SPB	Society of the Precious Blood
SPCK	Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge
SPG	Society for the Propagation of the Gospel
SSA	Society of St Augustine, Modderpoort
SSM	Society of the Sacred Mission
UFS	University of the Free State
White Book I	The Community's chronicle from 1874 to 1976, in the Free State Archives, where it has been divided and rebound into four volumes, shown in footnotes as vol.i, vol.ii, vol.iii, and vol.iv
White Book II	The Community's chronicle from 1977, in St Michael's School archives

PRELUDE



When the Community of St Michael and All Angels was founded in Bloemfontein in January 1874, it was the first Anglican Sisterhood in Africa, and probably the first in the Southern Hemisphere. A series of “firsts” attended its early years: the first girls’ school north of the Orange River; Bloemfontein’s Cathedral became the first in the Anglican world to institute a daily celebration of the Eucharist, beginning on the fourth day after Sister Emma’s arrival; the first school for Black African girls in the Free State; the first hospital in the Orange Free State; the first training course for nurses in South Africa; the world’s first State Registration of nurses, achieved largely through the efforts of Sister Henrietta CSM&AA.

They were not, however, the first Anglican Religious Community in Africa. That honour belongs to the Missionary Brotherhood of St Augustine, founded in 1867 by the first Bishop of the Free State, Edward Twells. He identified the need for a Sisterhood also, but it was the second Bishop, Allan Webb, who founded it. Both Bishops wanted Religious Communities as arms of mission: to play a vital role in rooting churches in places where the seeds of faith were only then being sown. From their inauguration onwards, both Communities worked across racial barriers, often in the face of some opposition from the White settlers.

The pioneering women who joined the Community came mainly from the United Kingdom. Some made regular visits back to their homeland, but others rarely or never made a return visit. They had thrown in their lot with the emerging country and saw no reason to leave it. Initially they lived in quite primitive conditions, and often in great poverty. The society in which they were placed underwent radical and sometimes violent changes during the Community’s one hundred and forty-two years. From time to time in this history we will need to look briefly at political and military events in order to

understand the life of the Community itself. The Sisters were mostly silent on political matters, seeing their role as serving God and his people without distinction.

The modern reader needs to understand that when the Community was founded, South Africa as we know it today did not exist. There were six separate political jurisdictions, apart from Basutoland (modern day Lesotho). Of these, three were British colonies: the Cape of Good Hope (which was self-governing from 1872), Griqualand West, and Natal. Zululand was an independent kingdom. In the interior were two independent Dutch-speaking republics, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. The British Empire was still expanding and its local officials were keen to extend their power across the whole region.

British forces had taken control of the Cape of Good Hope from the Dutch in 1806 and gradually pushed their borders eastwards. As they did so there was a series of border wars with African tribes, and also a great movement of European settlers. The Dutch farmers who had long dominated the Cape resented the British takeover, and were unwilling to comply with British laws and taxation. Many decided to leave their farms in the Cape and to trek inland to seek new territories where they could be free from external authority. Crossing the Orange River in the year 1836, they staked out land for themselves and built new farmsteads. Forming a loose structure of government, they declared a republic centred on Winburg. Gradually many other settlers drifted northwards across the Orange River in search of good grazing lands for their livestock. The British authorities were not far behind them and Governor Maitland of the Cape Colony made a treaty with the Griqua chief, Adam Kok, to permit European settlements within his territory. There were, however, continuing skirmishes between the settlers and the tribesmen. In an attempt to broker peace, in 1846 Major Henry Douglas Warden was appointed as British Resident for Trans-Orange¹, with civil and military authority. The central spot which he chose as base for his administration was the farm Bloemfontein. The farmer Johannes Brits was paid compensation and Major Warden had a house built and also a small fort for his troops. It was the birth of the modern city of Bloemfontein. A new Governor was appointed for the Cape Colony in 1847, with additional powers over all British claims in southern Africa. Sir Harry Smith visited Bloemfontein in 1848 and on 3 February declared the whole region between the Orange and Vaal Rivers to be British territory, as the Orange River Sovereignty.²

1 Also known as Trans-Gariep, from the Khoi name of the great river, Gariep.

2 These historical details are from two undated booklets: *Bloemfontein*, issued by the Department of the Town Clerk, Bloemfontein; and *The Enchanting Province*, published by the O.F.S. Provincial Administration. Both were collected by the author when visiting Bloemfontein in May 1985. See also Barlow, *Life & Times of President Brand*, p.18-20

At the time, the first Bishop of Cape Town, Robert Gray, was on the high seas. He had been consecrated in Westminster Abbey on St Peter's Day in 1847, under Letters Patent from Queen Victoria which appointed him to be Bishop of the Cape of Good Hope and its Dependencies.³ After a voyage lasting two months, he landed in Cape Town on Sunday 20 February, 1848. The Governor's declaration on the 3rd of that month had suddenly added a vast new area to his responsibilities.

"With a diocese measuring hundreds of miles and only animal transport available, Bishop Gray's resolve 'to visit every nook and corner' of it was a brave thing."⁴ His first Visitation, from August to December 1848, took him eastwards towards Grahamstown, returning to Cape Town by an inland route, and covered some three thousand miles. In 1849 he went to the island of St Helena, part of his diocese, and later that year made another Visitation in the southern Cape. On Easter Monday 1850 he set out on his third Visitation: "perhaps the most important ever made by a bishop of the Church of England. It is a record of the very beginning of the vast missionary work which is now being carried on by the Church in Kaffraria, Natal, the Free State, and Eastern Province."⁵ He travelled through Graaff Reinet, Richmond and Colesberg, and crossed into the Orange River Sovereignty, where his first visits were to Philippolis and Bethany.

On 3 May, a deputation of both military personnel and civilians met Bishop Gray outside Bloemfontein and escorted him into the town. Crisp states that the inhabitants were almost exclusively English, and that they had previously appealed to the Bishop for a clergyman. On his arrival they were able to tell him that they had already raised £200 towards the costs. Major Warden and the Bishop selected sites for a church, parsonage, burial ground, and school. On Sunday 5 May, 1850, Bishop Gray conducted the first Anglican Services to be held in Bloemfontein. In the morning there was a special Service for the troops and he consecrated a military cemetery for them. A marathon Service was held in the afternoon in the Government Schoolroom, constructed in 1849 under Major Warden.⁶ Three children were baptised, one couple was married, four candidates (whom he had prepared in the days since his arrival) were confirmed, and the Holy Communion was celebrated, with ten communicants: "the building being crowded inside and out

3 Lewis & Edwards, p.31, give the wording of the Letters Patent

4 Lewis & Edwards, p.37

5 Lewis & Edwards, p.52

6 Now known as the First Raadsaal, this building was used as a school, a church, and a council chamber. The first two Presidents of the Orange Free State Republic were inaugurated here. It is Bloemfontein's oldest surviving building and is a national monument and a branch of the National Museum.

throughout the whole services, which lasted three hours.”⁷ The Bishop promised to try to send them a clergyman.

Gray was in the Sovereignty for altogether two weeks. He visited the chief at Thaba Nchu and a French missionary station at Maquatling, before going to Winburg and Harrismith, from where he travelled with great difficulty over the Drakensberg Mountains and into Natal. At Maritzburg he ordained as Deacon William Steabler, one of the party of mission workers who had travelled with him from England, and instructed him to go to Bloemfontein to begin his ministry there. Steabler reached Bloemfontein in July 1850. After visiting many settlements and conducting numerous Services, Bishop Gray arrived home in Cape Town on Christmas Eve, exhausted but thankful to God after his nine month journey.⁸

The site chosen for the church in Bloemfontein was “cleared by defaulters of the 45th Regiment, who also, the following year, gave one day’s pay towards the Building Fund.”⁹ The site was level and ready when Archdeacon Merriman walked up from Grahamstown for the laying of the foundation stone. He found Church matters on the whole to be “proceeding very satisfactorily.” There were only ten communicants at a celebration on Sunday, but the English population “were zealously determined on pushing forward the building of a new church; and the following day [Monday 25 November, 1850] I had the great pleasure of assisting in laying the foundation-stone of a church, to be dedicated to St Andrew.”¹⁰ The stone was laid by Major Warden, the British Resident.

Nathaniel Merriman, a friend of Bishop Gray, had sailed out from England in August 1848, and after his arrival was appointed Archdeacon for the eastern half of the Diocese, to be based at Grahamstown. Undeterred by lack of funds, he would load a tent, some provisions and clothes, on to a pack horse, take a servant with him, and then walk to wherever he needed to go. Hospitality would be sought at farmhouses, but was not always given. Bishop Gray commented,

7 Crisp, p.3; see also Lewis & Edwards, p.54

8 The Visitation is reported in Lewis & Edwards, p.52-63; also Brooke, *Robert Gray*, p. 52-56

9 Aidan H. Cross, *A Place of Rare Power*

10 Varley & Matthews (Eds), *The Cape Journals of Archdeacon N.J. Merriman*, p.137. Lewis & Edwards, p.242, give an edited version of this entry from his journal, which reads that he laid the foundation stone. They state in their Preface that they have “sometimes condensed” quotations (p.x), but we may note also that they were working from the first (unauthorised) published edition of some of the journals, *The Kaffir, the Hottentot and the Frontier Farmer*. Crisp, p.5, states that Major Warden laid the stone. The stone has been damaged in the passing of time and the remaining part of the inscription that is still legible gives no clue as to who laid it. See Alan C. Brown, *150 Years of Service to God*, p.38

PRELUDE

If my dear friend the archdeacon while performing his pedestrian visitations is sometimes shown the door, and refused a morsel of meat, and told as a favour he may lie in the outhouse, it is, I believe, in consequence of suspicion of him, not from any desire to be inhospitable. They cannot believe that a predikant would walk, so they take him for an imposter, a discharged or disgraced soldier, or a convict. It is vain to tell them that our Lord and Master walked; they know that predikants *don't* walk.¹¹

Archdeacon Merriman visited Bloemfontein again in October 1852 and related one such experience during his journey:

I had wound up my long week's walk from Cradock by wandering through the Veldt, having lost my way for a good part of Saturday night, and scarcely gaining admittance at last to a Boer's house as the moon was setting. I must say, in vindication of his hospitality, that as soon as he was waked up from his lair, to which he had retired under the influence of a glass too much, he was very kind, staggering himself into the field with a sickle to cut my horse some green forage, and insisting on his wife making me a couch. She had been up like a notable housewife, after all the family were gone to bed, washing her house over with South African paint (i.e. cow dung) for the ensuing Sunday; and very angry the poor body was at my unseasonable arrival, and did her best to drive me from the door. But it was too serious a matter, as I had left my tent and clothes behind with a wagon that I accidentally found that afternoon at the Stormberg Spruit, to spend the remainder of a cold night in the Veldt, very thinly clad by reason of the dog having torn my walking clothes. So I laid aside my shyness and persisted in seeking admittance, till the Boer came to my relief against the wrath of his vrow.¹²

On this visit, the Archdeacon stayed ten days with Mr Steabler, and on the second Sunday had fifteen communicants. Because Steabler was still in Deacon's orders, it was the first celebration since the Archdeacon's previous visit. He found the church unfinished, roofless for want of timber: wars with tribes in the eastern Cape made the cost of carriage from Port Elizabeth too high.

11 Quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.53

12 BDA, *The Kaffir, the Hottentot, and the Frontier Farmer*, p.190-191. Also, Varley & Matthew (Eds.), *Cape Journals of Archdeacon N.J. Merriman*, p.197-8

The Government in London decided to abandon the Sovereignty, and on 23 February 1854 the Bloemfontein Convention was signed, by which the United Kingdom recognised the Orange Free State as an independent republic. The British troops and administrators left, and so did Mr Steabler. The Free State was again without an Anglican clergyman. To provide some ministry for the English population who remained, and with the help of the new Governor of the Cape, Sir George Grey, it was arranged for another Deacon, the Revd Mark Every, to take up residence. He was there from August 1855 until May 1858.¹³

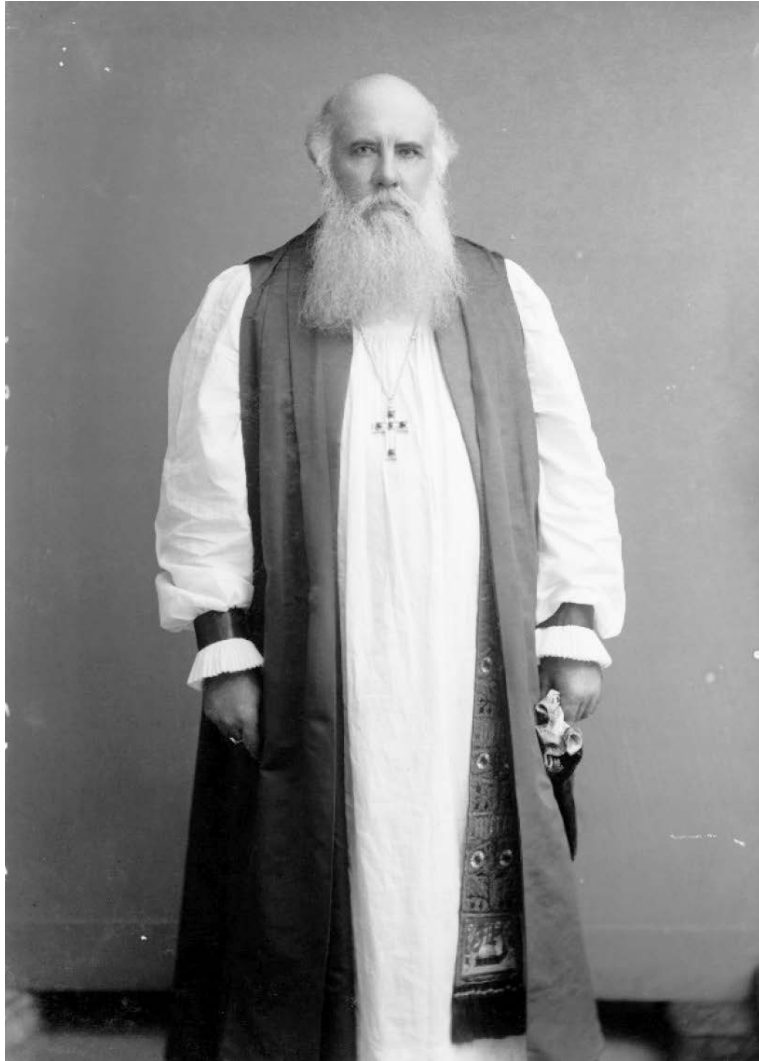
In anticipation of their withdrawal, the British Government had excluded the Sovereignty when they passed the legislation necessary to divide the Diocese of Cape Town in 1853 into the three Dioceses of Cape Town, Grahamstown and Natal. With the lowering of the Union Jack, the territory no longer fell within any Anglican jurisdiction. Although many of the English had left, there were still enough there to write to Bishop Gray in Cape Town, appealing for him to send clergy to the Free State, and promising their support. Gray concluded that the best solution, and the only one which would provide the necessary stability, was to appoint a Bishop for the Free State, who could lead a new mission into the country.

There was considerable opposition among Bishops of the Church of England to the idea of consecrating missionary Bishops who would have no defined Diocese under British law: it had never been done before and some questioned whether they had the authority to do so. The case was argued over more than two years. After the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge formed their Mission to Central Africa, opposition fell away, and Bishop Wilberforce of Oxford obtained consent from Convocation for the consecration of a Bishop to lead that project. A precedent had been set. Bishop Mackenzie took office in January 1861, but died in Central Africa little over a year later. In order to arrange for the appointment of a successor, Bishop Gray went to England in 1862 and took the opportunity to obtain agreement from the Convocation of Canterbury for a new bishopric to open up missionary work north of the Orange River. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel promised a grant for the Bishop's support.

Edward Twells, Incumbent of St John's, Hammersmith, was selected for the new See, and on the Feast of the Presentation, 2 February, 1863, was consecrated in Westminster Abbey to be Bishop of the Orange Free State Mission.¹⁴

13 Crisp, p.5-6

14 Lewis & Edwards, p.77-80; 393-394; Crisp, p.7; Brooke, *Robert Gray*, p.84-85. He was a younger brother of Henry Twells, author of "At even, ere the sun was set" and other hymns.



The Rt Revd Allan Becher Webb, Founder of the Community of St Michael and All Angels, and of St Michael's School, photographed in 1895 by Alexander Bassano © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Mother Emma, First Superior.

CHAPTER 1



WHO WILL GO FOR US?

It was on Wednesday 16 September, 1863, that Bishop Edward Twells arrived in his Diocese. Until that day, all that he knew about the territory and the tasks that lay ahead of him was what he had been told by Bishop Gray of Cape Town, and by Archdeacon Merriman, whom he had met at Grahamstown during a break in the journey from the coast. Twells was to be responsible for ministering to British settlers scattered over wide distances on isolated farms and in small towns, and for beginning missionary work among the indigenous tribes. His southern boundary was the Orange River and to the east of the mountains lay the Diocese of Natal, but there was no defined boundary in the west or to the north. Parts of the region were still unexplored by Europeans.

Accompanied by three priests, the wife of one of them, and two school masters with their wives, the Bishop had left England on 7 July, on board the Union Line's "*Cambrian*". Arriving in Cape Town on 14 August, they stayed for two weeks at Bishops court before re-embarking for the voyage to Port Elizabeth, where they arrived on 31 August. Here the party split into two: most of the group were to travel inland on bullock waggons, but the Bishop and the Revd A. Field used the quicker post-carts for their journey so that they could make some stops *en route* to Bloemfontein. First came Grahamstown, to visit the Archdeacon. After crossing the Orange River, Bishop Twells went to Smithfield

which “had from the first taken great interest in the establishment of the Diocese.”¹ On the following Sunday he conducted his first Services there. Mr Orpen, the “mainstay of the Church” at Springfield, a few days later took the Bishop into Basutoland to meet King Moshesh, who had written to Bishop Gray requesting English missionaries. On 2 October, eight months after his consecration, Bishop Twells reached the capital of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein.

After the rest of the mission team arrived in the Free State on 21 October, the Bishop assigned them to posts in the south of the country: Bloemfontein, Fauresmith, Smithfield and Philippolis. The schoolmasters, Clegg in Bloemfontein and Bell in Smithfield, assisted by their wives, worked with great success. It appears that the clergy had more difficulty settling; there were as yet no church buildings and they were working alone in small towns many miles apart. One left in 1864 and another the following year, leaving the Bishop with only one priest on his staff, the Revd C. Clulee. “My English letters bring me the news that no clergyman will come to help us,” wrote Bishop Twells in his journal.² The Bishop had to leave a visiting clergyman to take care of Bloemfontein when he set off on his first visitation in June 1864. That three-month journey took him to the more sparsely populated north, Winburg, Kroonstad, Bethlehem and Harrismith, before crossing into the Transvaal to visit English settlers at Potchefstroom, Pretoria and Rustenburg. It became his practice to make an annual visit to the small congregations in the Transvaal. Back in Bloemfontein, building work was resumed on the incomplete church, with the intention that it should form the chancel of a future cathedral. The Cathedral of St Andrew and St Michael was consecrated by Bishop Twells on St Andrew’s Day, 1866, and the following day he was formally enthroned by Archdeacon Merriman.³

Twells was “a missionary with fresh and original ideas,”⁴ and the unwillingness of English clergy to go out to help in his pioneering work led his thoughts in a direction that was to give the Diocese its distinctive place in Anglican history. After discussing his plans with Mr Clulee, early in 1866 he wrote:

We have been singularly unsuccessful in attracting men to our Mission.
We have offered in vain good stipends, endeavoured to create comfortable

1 Crisp, p.10. For details of the Bishop’s arrival see Crisp, p.9-11, and Lewis & Edwards, p.393-4

2 Quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.397. On the distribution of staff, see Lewis & Edwards p.396 and Crisp, p.11

3 Crisp, p.14; Cross, *A Place of Rare Power*, and Brown, *150 Years of Service to God*, p.8-9, probably follow Crisp. *The Church Times*, quoting the *Bloemfontein Gazette*, gives the date of the consecration as 29 November and provides a detailed description of the Service. President Brand attended. “The congregation was exceedingly numerous.” (CT, 26 January, 1867)

4 Hinchliff, *The Anglican Church in South Africa*, p.80

conditions, and to make the work easy. Well, let us now tempt men by new allurements. Let us put before them the hard life of a missionary brotherhood. This may attract those who are able to devote their whole lives to our Lord, and who will not be attracted by settled income and easy living.⁵

Taking as his model the common Religious Life of St Augustine and his clergy at Hippo, which gave rise to the Order of Augustinian Canons, he sketched the basic outlines of the community he envisaged. The Brethren would live by a common Rule of prayer, study and work, under the direction of a Superior, and would share a life of poverty in which they were provided with the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. They would have to be prepared to do manual work as necessary. They would be trained for missionary work and could then be sent out to conduct an itinerant ministry to the small scattered congregations of the Free State and Transvaal. In his own travels around the Diocese, the Bishop had become aware that “a mere imitation of the home parochial system is unsuitable.”⁶ The brotherhood would provide stability and a home to which the missionaries could return for rest, refreshment and mutual support.

It was a bold move. Although the first Sisterhoods in the Church of England had been established some twenty years previously, the few attempts to form a stable male community had foundered. The Society of St John the Evangelist at Cowley, always counted as the first successful foundation of a men’s community, was still in the process of gestation when Bishop Twells publicised his ideas.⁷ Canon Henry Beckett, an experienced priest in his fifty-first year of life and a long-standing friend of the Bishop, volunteered to join the new Brotherhood and was asked to become its first Superior. He set about raising funds in Britain and recruiting younger men to join him.

Accompanied by six men as the founding nucleus of the Brotherhood, Canon Beckett sailed from England on Ascension Day, 30 May, 1867, and landed at Port Elizabeth on 12 July. Bishop Twells, on his way to England to attend the first Lambeth Conference, was able to spend a few hours with them the following day. After six weeks on board ship, the group had the long and hard journey to the interior ahead of them. They left Port Elizabeth by ox waggon on 30 July and soon afterwards one very promising member deserted the company. When they reached Bloemfontein on 6 September,

5 Bloemfontein Occasional Paper II, quoted in Lewis & Edwards, p.401

6 Quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.401. See also Crisp, p.15-16; Hinchliff, p.140

7 Fr Richard Meux Benson and two companions made their Professions at Cowley on 27 December, 1866.

it was considered unwise for them to go at once to the farms the Bishop had bought for them at Modderpoort, because of a new border war with the Basutos. A temporary home was rented on the farm Springfield, nine miles from Bloemfontein. There “two others were obliged to be sent home soon after their arrival ... because of their unwillingness or inability to comply with simple rules.”⁸ The three remaining with Canon Beckett persevered. He wrote,

These trials have strengthened the purpose of the others who seem to bend their whole powers to the work before them. One is diligently learning the native language and is going to live at Thabanchu because of the facilities it gives for that purpose; another is a pattern to all in faith, meekness, humility, and steadiness of purpose.⁹

The following May, Canon Beckett moved the whole community to Thaba Nchu, where they set about building a church, which was consecrated in 1868. In April 1869 they were at last able to take up residence at Modderpoort as the Society of St Augustine.¹⁰

Bishop Twells arrived in England on 22 August. Although his main purpose was to attend the Conference of Bishops, he took the opportunity provided by being in Britain to encourage more support for his mission. Just one week after his arrival, the Orange Free State Mission Association was formally inaugurated. First among those admitted as Associates by the Bishop on 29 August, 1867, was his Commissary, the Revd James Cowan, of St John's Parsonage, Hammersmith, his successor as Vicar of the parish. Next on the roll is the Revd Sir Henry Baker, the well-known hymnologist¹¹, who is listed as Corresponding Secretary for the Leominster District. William Twells, of Soho Hill near Birmingham, is named as General Secretary and Treasurer. During nearly six months in Britain, Twells travelled widely, speaking about the Mission and enrolling Associates. Number 95 on the list is Henrietta Stockdale of Bole Vicarage, Gainsborough, of whom we shall hear more in subsequent chapters. The Associates committed themselves to pray daily for the work of the Mission and to give or collect money for its support. To keep them informed about the progress of its work, a Quarterly Paper would be published: the first issue appeared in February 1868. Two hundred and ninety-seven people had

8 Quarterly Paper no,2, May 1868, quoted by Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, p.19

9 Quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.403

10 See Crisp, p.16-17; Lewis & Edwards, p.401-404; Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, p.19-21. For more about the SSA, see chapter 20 below, 'Cave, Cows and Contemplation: Thirty Years at Modderpoort'.

11 Among his many hymns are 'The King of Love my shepherd is', 'Lord, thy word abideth', and 'O praise ye the Lord.'

been admitted by the time Bishop Twells sailed for South Africa on 11 February 1868.¹² Travelling with the Bishop on that voyage were five young laymen, destined for work in the Diocese.

We noted that two schoolmasters were among the five missionaries accompanying Bishop Twells when he first went to the Free State. Education was from the beginning an important part of the Mission's work. In 1867, when the bishop left for England, the diocese was running schools in Bloemfontein, Smithfield and Fauresmith. There was no adequate schooling for girls, and soon after his return from England, the Bishop wrote:

Since my return I have felt more than ever the want of a good boarding-school for girls. We have none in the country, and girls are sent from here to the school kept by Roman Catholic Nuns in Graham's Town, where a cheap and good education is given. Several laymen have urged on me the necessity of bringing out some members of a Church of England Sisterhood to undertake such a work. It could only be done effectively by such a religious society.

When I was in England several ladies expressed their willingness to come out to help the Mission; and I heartily wish such a body could be organised, not only to carry on work such as I here mention, but also to help in the education of girls in our native missions. Without trained Sisters living under rule we cannot hope to do much with the native women. I should like half-a-dozen Sisters trained for our work in one of the English houses, and coming out here under a Superior, as an offshoot or branch of that English house. It would be much better than beginning a Sisterhood for ourselves, separate from others ... unfortunately, we have no spare funds.¹³

Having already founded a Brotherhood as a means of promoting the Church's missionary work, Bishop Twells now sowed the seed which would bring a Sisterhood to share in the task.

It was not to happen during his tenure. The episcopate of Bishop Twells was brought to a sudden end in July 1869. "Twells' personal history, like that of Colenso, ends on a note of tragedy," wrote Peter Hinchliff; "the loneliness and spiritual strain of directing his

12 A register of the 297 Associates admitted during Bishop Twells' stay is in the SMS archive.

13 Quarterly Paper 4, November 1868, quoted by Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, p.18,19, and Lewis & Edwards, p.405

remote and strenuous diocese was too much for him to bear.” Lewis and Edwards wrote with understanding: “his love for the uncared-for of Christ’s flock made him unsparing of trouble to shepherd them; but his life of prayer failed.” On 12 July 1869 a warrant for his arrest was issued by the Free State Government, on charges of pederasty. He was absent on a visitation tour to the Transvaal at the time, and escaped hurriedly, crossing the border into Natal, from where he wrote a letter of resignation to the Metropolitan.¹⁴ “As well as from the character of Bishop Twells as from sundry suspicious circumstances, we imagine that the charge is the result of a very foul conspiracy against the Bishop,” a letter from the Cape informed the *Church Times*. A subsequent issue added,

The fact that the Bishop of the Free State took an active part in the Colenso matter is enough to have secured for him plenty of enemies of the most unscrupulous kind, and there seems no doubt that the very worst has been made of what may turn out to have been merely an act of indiscretion after all. ... Our latest Free State news says that ‘though the criminal charge is not borne out, it is better for the Bishop and for us that he should not return.’ What the truth is we cannot conjecture.¹⁵

The announcement of his resignation in the *Quarterly Paper* gave no details, but suggested indirectly that the Association should be wound up.

The Bishop’s Commissary believes that the Associates are now released from the obligations into which they entered; although their prayers and help are still greatly needed not only for Canon Beckett and the other Missionaries, but also for Archdeacon Merriman who has been sent ... to take temporary charge.¹⁶

It would appear that the Commissary himself resigned: Crisp noted that in 1869 Sir Henry Baker succeeded Mr Cowan as Commissary. Having been appointed Vicar-General of the Diocese, the Archdeacon arrived in Bloemfontein on 4 August and stayed more than one month, “to encourage Mr Croghan and Canon Beckett in the difficult task of

14 Hinchliff, *The Anglican Church in South Africa*, p.80; Lewis & Edwards, p.406; Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, p.22

15 CT, September 10, 1869 (p.341), and October 15, 1869 (p.397). Bishop Twells had been an assessor with Bishop Gray when Bishop Colenso of Natal was convicted of heresy and formally deposed. In June and July 1867, while on his way to London, Twells gave episcopal ministry to some congregations in Natal, despite the protests of Colenso, whose right to remain as Bishop had been upheld by the Privy Council.

16 *Quarterly Paper* 8, October 1869, quoted in Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, p.22

strengthening the things which remained, and of making such provision for the future as straitened and saddened circumstances permitted.”¹⁷

Merriman had once, “with characteristic pungency, said that he sometimes wondered how the devil dared to be so audacious.”¹⁸ At the first Provincial Synod, held in Cape Town in January 1870, Bishop Gray declared the See vacant. It was at this Synod that the title “Diocese of Bloemfontein” was used for the first time. Gray planned to make a visitation to the Free State in July, but that had to be abandoned when Mrs Gray was taken very ill and needed to go to London for medical treatment. Instead of the Bishop heading inland for Bloemfontein, in July they sailed from Cape Town bound for Southampton. While in Britain he offered the Bishopric to William West Jones, who declined it. That opened the way for the position to be offered to the thirty-one year old Allan Becher Webb, a former Fellow and Tutor of University College, Oxford, and Vice-Principal of Cuddesdon College from 1864 to 1867 under Edward King, later Bishop of Lincoln. In order that Webb could make his oath of canonical obedience to Bishop Gray as Metropolitan of South Africa, it was arranged that the consecration should take place in Scotland, where English Canon Law did not apply. On St Andrew’s Day, 1870, Bishop Gray presided in Inverness Cathedral, assisted by the Primus of Scotland and three other Bishops. The new Bishop Webb reached Bloemfontein on 28 July, 1871, and was enthroned in the Cathedral two days later. “The life and vigour which his coming among us would bring were foreseen from the time the glad news of his acceptance of the Bishopric reached us,” wrote William Crisp.¹⁹

From the time of his appointment Webb realised the value of the Mission Association founded by his predecessor. Far from allowing it to fade or be wound up, he used the months between his consecration and his departure from England to strengthen and expand it. Local branches were formed at centres across the United Kingdom and new members enrolled to replace those who had left or died: membership rose to three hundred and ninety-three. He appointed as his Commissary the Revd P.G. Medd, “an Oxford man who could put his hand on possible young clergy, and he secured a committee of forty-five leading Churchmen with a well-known London man, Henry Wagner, as Treasurer.”²⁰

In a letter written on 3 August, 1871, only one week after his arrival, we have what may be regarded as Bishop Webb’s first impressions.

17 Crisp, p.17 & 19. The Revd D Croghan had arrived in February 1867 and was Priest-Vicar of the Cathedral.

18 Quoted by Brooke, *Robert Gray*, p.128

19 Crisp, p.19-23; Lewis & Edwards, p.91 & p.408; Brooke, *Robert Gray*, p.135-136

20 Lewis & Edwards, p.409; Crisp, p.24

The need of another Priest and two or three Deacons, as well as other helpers, is most urgent; you will not forget it in your prayers. Another great want is woman's help. I did not know till I got here, how very much Sisters are wanted, and how directly and fully they would be appreciated. Two or three Sisters to teach and visit, and nurse, would be an inestimable boon.

There is work too, among the half-caste women, in a section of the town which ladies alone can purify by visiting and care. They are wholly without religion, and are exposed to great temptations without any counteracting influence. But of all the needs which Sisters can supply, the most pressing is education.²¹

Despite the apparent clarity of those words, it is not clear from the sources that Bishop Webb was thinking initially of a formal religious community of Sisters.

The first idea was that some thoroughly experienced, middle-aged ladies should come out from England, and open schools in the various towns and villages of the Diocese. ... the difficulty has always been to find properly qualified persons, able and willing to go in this fashion, two and two, or separately.²²

In an address given in 1883, he said,

When I first went to Bloemfontein, I did not start with the idea of a Sisterhood. I had no pre-conceived plan of working with 'Sisters', when I was called to the Diocese. I had had a little experience on the subject in England, and I was not at all sure that a Sisterhood would be the thing needed, in South Africa.²³

This is borne out by words spoken by the Bishop in his Charge to the First Diocesan Synod, which he convened to meet in the Cathedral on the Feast of the Epiphany, 1872. Six priests, two deacons and seven lay members attended. After speaking of the need for more clergy, and proposing to admit suitable men to the minor offices of Sub-deacons, Catechists and Readers, as a possible step towards a permanent Diaconate, he continued:

21 Quoted by Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, p.30

22 Webb, address given perhaps in 1878 "Woman's Work in South Africa", published in *Sisterhood Life and Women's Work in the Mission-Field of the Church*, p.19

23 Address "Sisterhood Life", in volume noted above. Quotation from page 30

It is not for the labours of men only, but also of women, wise, devoted, and well-trained, that there is great scope in our Church here – for such as will be ready to serve the Lord without distraction in prayer, meditation, nursing, visiting, and teaching, as Deaconesses or Sisters of Mercy. I have made application to our friends at home, and some I trust the Lord may grant to our prayers. Their presence and influence in our midst would, I am quite sure, be beneficial to our Society.²⁴

Deaconesses could fit the bill.

The idea of a Sisterhood, of the advantage of which I was only very gradually convinced, was seriously entertained in 1872; when a lady began work, as well as she could, single-handed, residing at Bishop's Lodge. And then we were led, step by step, to the founding of a Community of women, upon those great principles of the common life which, on the whole, have stood the test of 1400 years' experience, and were first written on *African* soil, by the great African Bishop, S. Augustine.

It was felt that a Community was absolutely needed, to give stability and fixity to work undertaken so far away ...

But how was such a Community to be established? The readiest way seemed to be to apply to some English Sisterhood: but even the largest English Sisterhood could not then spare a band of Sisters, to live seven thousand miles away from the mother-house; and – though the experiment has been made in other Dioceses, not unsuccessfully – I, for my part, could never venture to undertake the responsibility of having only a branch and affiliated house, governed and guided practically by an extra-diocesan and even extra-provincial authority.

It was plain that our Sisterhood must stand upon its own foundation, with a constitution based upon the ancient principles of the same great Rule, but suited to the peculiar needs of the country; getting its first existence from the Mother-Church, but living its own life, ruled by its own Diocesan, and organically one with the corporate life of the Church around.²⁵

24 BDA, *A Charge delivered to the Clergy and Lay Representatives at the opening of the First Diocesan Synod*, p.19,20 (printed by White, Barlow, and Co., Bloemfontein, 1872)

25 Webb, "Woman's Work in South Africa", p.20

We are given a hint here that Bishop Webb had tried to get Sisters sent out from an English Community before he decided that the best course was to create a new Sisterhood. “I have made application to our friends at home,” he said in his 1872 Synodical Charge and, in his 1878 address, “Even the largest English Sisterhood could not then spare a band of Sisters.” Bishop Gray of Cape Town had tried for some years to persuade an established Community to send Sisters to the Cape, but with no success. In 1868 he had taken a group of eight women from England to form St George’s Sisters in Cape Town. They had a Rule of Life but took no vows and were free to leave at any time they chose. In 1870, during his visit to Britain for his wife’s medical consultations, the same visit during which Bishop Webb was consecrated, Gray had again approached some English Communities, asking them to send Sisters to train and form the St George’s Sisters into a formal Community. Again, the answers were negative. He wrote:

Butler cannot help us, nor East Grinstead, nor Clewer, nor All Saints.²⁶

Gray’s successor, Bishop West Jones, renewed the appeal, and six All Saints’ Sisters arrived early in 1876 to take over the works started by the St George’s Sisters.²⁷

Archdeacon Croghan (he had been appointed Archdeacon by Bishop Webb in 1872) and his wife left for England early in February 1873. They were to be away for over one year. The *Quarterly Paper* gave a report of his preaching at the Anniversary Services of the Mission, held on 29 April. “He has come over mainly to procure the means to supply the most urgent need of the Church in South Africa, namely, ‘Superior Female Education in connection with the Church.’ It is desired to establish a Sisterhood for Educational and Mission purposes in union with the Cathedral at Bloemfontein ...”²⁸ There were other needs that he was attending to also, and some are mentioned in a letter he wrote for publication before leaving the country: recruiting more clergy, raising funds, and seeking an experienced priest to take over from Canon Beckett as Superior of the Brotherhood.²⁹

In July 1873 members of the Association were able to read for the first time of the “Proposed Mission Sisterhood of St Michael & All Angels, Bloemfontein.” Over six pages the article set out the needs that were to be supplied (“1st – Education; 2nd – Nursing; 3rd – Mission Work among Native Women”); the reasons why this could be done properly only by a Sisterhood (“... the love of Christ. No weaker motive will supply the requisite

26 Quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.91. See also their p.106-109 re St George’s Sisters

27 Lewis & Edwards, p.138; Mumm, *All Saints Sisters of the Poor*, p.xiv, p.15, f.n.55; Mayhew, *All Saints*, p.153

28 QPOFSM, no.21, July 1873

29 QPOFSM, no.23, January 1874

strength of purpose”); the need to raise funds of between two and three thousand Pounds (“of this sum about £400 are now in hand”); arrangements setting out the relationship to the Cathedral and Bishop, and requirements for joining; followed by some preliminary rules framed by the Bishop for the life of the Sisters. Most of the article was re-printed in the subsequent issue of the *Quarterly*.³⁰

From those “arrangements and rules” it is interesting that although *Communities* were not able to send anyone, Bishop Webb thought that individual *Sisters* may be attracted to the new venture. “The services of professed sisters, probationers, and associates will be thankfully accepted.” They should be prepared to work in obedience to the rules of the new Community for three years, after which “Sisters already professed may then make their decision whether they will permanently attach themselves to the community.” How this appeal over the heads of established Communities was received by them, we cannot know, but we may note that, apart from Sister Emma, not one of the early members of CSM&AA had been professed in another Community.

In addition to appealing for professed Sisters, probationers and associates from other Communities, and for probationers to St Michael’s, there is an invitation for other women to come forward as Associates. These would “not offer themselves for the religious life, but engage to live and work with the community, in obedience to the rules, for three years.” As we shall see, the Associates were to play an extremely important role in the early life of St Michael’s: without them many of the works successfully accomplished would have been impossible for the Community to undertake. Their passages to and from Bloemfontein were paid, but for the term of their service they received no payment and lived as the Sisters did, sharing their home and food.

One of Archdeacon Croghan’s tasks while in Britain was to interview candidates and to send those considered suitable for admission as probationers or Associates to “receive such training in a religious house as may help to fit them for community life. The Rev. the Mother Superior of Clewer has, with great kindness, opened her house to such ladies as the Archdeacon may recommend. It is needless to point out the immense advantage of such training.”³¹ Those who would never fit in would be able to withdraw before travelling to the Free State. The Community of St John the Baptist, Clewer, could not spare a band of Sisters to send overseas, but they were very willing to do everything

30 QPOFSM, no.21, July 1873, and no.22, October 1873

31 QPOFSM no.21, July 1873

they could to enable the success of the new Community. One of those the Archdeacon sent for training at Clewer was Henrietta Stockdale.

Bishop Webb had clearly been in correspondence with the heads of various communities, seeking their help. William Crisp's account tells us that "on reaching England the Archdeacon had put the needs of the Diocese before the Rev. Thomas Chamberlain, of S. Thomas', Oxford, and the Community at Osney House, of which Mr Chamberlain was Warden, had given Sister Emma."³² That may be so, but there must have been an exchange of letters between Bishop Webb and Fr Chamberlain before that time. An Oxford man, Webb most probably knew Fr Chamberlain, who had been Vicar of S. Thomas's since 1842, where he had brought the Sisterhood into being to meet the needs of women's work within his parish.³³ Without that personal acquaintance, it is difficult to see why one of the smaller Communities should have been willing to offer a Sister, when the larger Communities had failed to do so. An obituary of Sister Emma recorded that when Fr Chamberlain showed Bishop Webb's letter to the Superior at St Thomas's, her immediate reaction was, "Sister Emma would go in a moment."³⁴ Born in Plymouth, the daughter of a Naval officer, Sister Emma had been professed in St Thomas's Sisterhood in January 1863, and had served in their branch house in Liverpool as well as in their St Anne's School in Oxford.³⁵ When all the arrangements had been made, the Superior wrote to Bishop Webb, "We are giving to South Africa one of our very best."³⁶

The agreement between Fr Chamberlain and Bishop Webb was of a loan for five years.

We lent you Sister Emma originally on the understanding that she was to try to get together a Sisterhood under your Direction, of which, if all things went on favourably, she was to be eventually the Superior – but that she

32 Crisp, Chapter IV, p.31

33 The Sisterhood of St Thomas the Martyr, Oxford, originated in a group of devout ladies who by 1847 had gathered around the Revd Thomas Chamberlain at St Thomas's Church, where they devoted themselves to works of mercy and charity. Formally constituted as a Community in 1851, they were one of the first six Sisterhoods that came into existence in the Church of England between 1845 and 1851. The first Rule and Constitution was drawn up in 1859. Vocations had begun to decline by the time Canon Chamberlain died in 1892, and in 1936 the Community was affiliated to the Community of St Mary the Virgin, Wantage, although continuing its separate existence until 1958, when the three remaining Sisters transferred to Wantage. See Anson, *The Call of the Cloister*, pages 285-288; Allan T. Cameron, *The Religious Communities of the Church of England*, p.40-41; also csmvonline.org.uk/history

34 SMS archive. Unfortunately the newspaper cutting does not give the name of the newspaper.

35 Peter Anson, *The Call of the Cloister*, p.285f, describing their various works, does not mention the Liverpool House, where they ran St Margaret's Orphanage. It is mentioned in Susan Mumm (Ed): *All Saints Sisters of the Poor*, p.34

36 Quoted in Lewis & Edwards, p.418

was to be at liberty to return to us, if she desired, & that if the effort failed, she would, as a matter of duty, resume her place among us.³⁷

The January 1874 issue of the Quarterly Paper appeared late, partly so that it could include a farewell letter from the Archdeacon, who was preparing to return to South Africa. He wrote that his visit to Britain had been cheered by the great sympathy and kindness with which he had been met everywhere. He continued,

I am thankful to be able to tell you that one of the objects of my visit may be said to be successfully accomplished, and we can look forward with hope to the future establishment of a Sisterhood in Bloemfontein. Two ladies, Miss Young and Miss Peltre are already on the spot. The Sisterhood of St Thomas, Osney House, Oxford, has offered us the services of one of their community, Sister Emma, who will be the first Superior, and with two Lady Associates – Miss Stockdale and Miss Sibley, will (D.V.) sail with me in February. Two other Ladies, a trained Schoolmistress and a Serving Sister will, it is hoped, follow shortly.

We cannot express too strongly our thankfulness for so much efficient help, and especially we feel a deep obligation to the Sisterhood of St Thomas's for their timely and generous aid. All who are thus throwing in their lot with us devote themselves to a life of labour and self-denial, looking for no earthly reward.³⁸

Archdeacon and Mrs Croghan, accompanied by Sister Emma and five others³⁹, sailed from Southampton on board the s.s. *Roman* on 5 March, 1874.

37 HPRA, Wits., AB2644/80. Letter from Fr Chamberlain to Bishop Webb, January 10, 1879

38 QPOFSM, no.23, January 1874, p.2

39 Miss Stockdale, Miss Sibley, Miss Grimes, Miss Newland and M. Blackwell; QPOFSM no.24, April 1874; Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.21



*An illuminated page from the Rule of the Sisterhood
of St Thomas the Martyr, Oxford.*

CHAPTER 2



AFAR OFF UPON THE SEA¹

We left Southampton at 2 p.m. on March 5th, and after a short and favourable passage, reached Plymouth at 3 a.m. the next morning. After taking in a few more passengers and some mails, we left again about twelve. We spent most of the next day in our berths. I got up and lay on the deck for about two hours in the afternoon. On Sunday morning most of us were at breakfast; we had then quite passed through the Bay of Biscay.²

Before Sister Emma and her travelling companions embarked on the s.s. "*Roman*", Archdeacon Croghan conducted a Farewell Service in the village church of Rownhams, about four miles from Southampton, where the Vicar, the Revd F.F. Wilson, was "an old and deeply attached friend of Bishop Webb".

It was not the first time that this small country parish has had the honour of bidding God-speed to those connected with this Mission. When the bishop first left England, ... he preached his last sermon in Rownhams Church, and made his parting Communion there on St Mark's Day 1871.³

1 Title of an article written and revised by Bishop Webb, QPBM no. 31, January 1876

2 QPOFSM no.27, January 1875, p.6, Extracts from Sister Emma's Journal

3 QPBM no.31, January 1876

They were leaving their home country at the call of God, and wanted to ask his blessing for their journey and their future work.

In the early years, missionary workers nearly always travelled in groups led by one of the senior clergy or by someone who was already experienced in the mission field. This practice had the advantages that the team got to know one another during the sea voyage; anyone who may be lonely or suffering trepidation at what they were setting out to do could take courage from being with others committed to the same venture; and the days on board gave an opportunity to prepare for their new work. It was a long voyage and the time need not be wasted.

When Bishop Robert Gray first sailed for Cape Town on Monday, 20 December, 1847, on board the ship "*Persia*", the passage occupied two months. He was accompanied by his wife and four children, with two priests and several laymen who were to work in the new Diocese. They made up a substantial proportion of the fifteen men, five women and sixteen children on the passenger list. The ship made a call at Madeira, laying there over the last day of 1847 and New Year's Day 1848. Bishop Gray went ashore to try to fulfil a commission from the Bishop of London to resolve a dispute in the small Church of England congregation on the island. Many of them accompanied the bishop to the beach when it was time for him to re-embark. On Sunday 20 February the "*Persia*" anchored in Table Bay and Bishop Gray and his party landed by boat.⁴

That voyage was made ten years before the British Government awarded the first Cape mail contract to the Union Steamship Company, specifying a passage time not exceeding forty-two days from Plymouth to Cape Town. A new contract reducing the time to thirty-eight days came into force four months before Bishop Twells sailed from Plymouth on board the "*Cambrian*" on 7 July, 1863, in the company of a small mission team. During the voyage the Bishop "made a great study of Dutch," successfully enough to be able, on his arrival in the Free State, to lead a Coloured congregation at Smithfield in saying the Creed and Lord's Prayer.⁵

Lessons in Dutch were part of the daily programme that Bishop Gray set out for the eight independent ladies who accompanied him on his return from England in October 1868. They were to be the nucleus of the St George's Sisters, and the days on board provided an opportunity to introduce them to an orderly and disciplined way of life. "The routine arranged for every day of the voyage gives some idea of the solemnity with which the

4 Brooke, *Robert Gray*, p.17-26; Lewis & Edwards, p.34,35

5 Details of the contract passage times are from Peter Newall, *Union-Castle Line: a Fleet History* (London, Carmania Press, 1999); Crisp, p.9

whole thing was carried out.” Apart from the language lessons, there was a pattern of daily devotions, of Bible reading and of study. “There are some a little against any rules,” the Bishop noted wryly. The voyage was a time of getting to know one another.⁶

Bishop Webb’s first voyage to the Cape, accompanied by his wife, two children, his two sisters, and five other workers, was extended by three weeks when the “*Celt*” was sent to anchor in quarantine at Saldanha Bay because of some cases of smallpox among the passengers. Having left England on 25 April, 1871, it was towards the end of June when the party arrived in Cape Town.⁷

No such problems attended Sister Emma’s voyage, as she recorded it in her journal. Having crossed the Bay of Biscay, the “*Roman*” was sailing past the north west coast of Spain on their first Sunday at sea. “We longed to go on shore and go to church somewhere,” she wrote, “but there was no church to be seen.” Instead, they had Services on board: Mattins at 10.30 a.m. with a sermon, and Evensong with another sermon at 7 p.m. In the morning most of the crew and fore-cabin passengers were present, but no crew attended the evening Service and only some of the passengers. “Miss Blackwell played the piano in the morning, and Miss Stockdale in the evening; we sang the canticles and two hymns.” For each of the next three Sundays on board they had a celebration of the Eucharist at 7 a.m. in the Ladies’ Saloon, Mattins at 10.30 a.m. and Evensong at 7 p.m. “The singing [at Mattins] does not go well somehow,” Sister Emma commented on the 22nd March. “We all sing, but others don’t join, one reason is the unfortunate shape of the cabin, I think; so long and narrow.” The following Sunday both Mattins and Evensong were “nice bright” services, with better attendances and better singing. Every day during the week they held a short Mattins in the saloon at 10.30, and an evening service at 7 o’clock in the fore-cabin⁸, where the passengers included a number of Cornish miners, all Methodists. The miners were heading for Griqualand West, where diamonds had been discovered five years previously. One passenger gave “a very interesting account” of the Diamond Fields.

Having no mails for Madeira, the ship bypassed the island and, a day or so later, passed through the Canary Islands. Off West Africa they sighted a vessel bound for England which the Captain stopped in order to send mails home. Sister Emma described being given a tour of the ship by the Captain: “we saw the cow, sheep, pigs, and poultry.” Reading this in the Twenty-First Century reminds us that in the days before refrigeration ships carried livestock to provide meat, cows for a supply of fresh milk, and poultry for

6 Brooke, *Robert Gray*, p.9-10, 124-125; Lewis & Edwards, p.107

7 Brooke, *Robert Gray*, p.139; Crisp, p.23

8 Fore-cabin was the second class accommodation. The Mission team were Saloon passengers, or first class.

eggs. The Captain had quite a sense of humour: “he is very funny,” remarked Sister Emma. He enjoyed spinning a yarn for his lady passengers. “We crossed the Line this morning at 9.45; we saw nothing different from the rest of the ocean, however, for the Captain says that the Americans sent out a ship with an India-rubber bottom, to go all along the Line, and rub it out!!”

Sister Emma described her life on board as “very idle”, but she seems to have kept busy. She wrote,

There are some nice little children on board, and I have three of them for a Bible Class every morning. I teach them hymns and tell them stories, &c. ... Tomorrow I am going to the other deck, to give a Bible Class to the children of the fore-cabin passengers. I made the acquaintance of one of the mothers today. ... We say most of our offices on deck, back on the stern; but when, as this morning, some one will not see that we have books in our hands, and wish to be alone, we go down to the ladies’ saloon and say them there. ... Every day, at two, the Archdeacon is kind enough to give some of us a lecture or lesson on the Epistle to the Romans; it is very deep and interesting. And I read aloud for an hour every day. ... I go to the other part of the ship and teach the little children in the evenings, after vespers, and take the little ones from this side with me. We generally have a little general talk on astronomy and geography first, and then Bible Class, and then we sing hymns which I have taught them, and infant school songs. Last night I had them on the fore-castle, and a Cornish man came close and listened to the singing, and said, ‘We do sing that tune down along with we.’

Four days before arrival in Cape Town she noted that they had “got nearly to the end of the history of Joseph, besides an occasional lesson on the Creed, &c.”

They were glad to reach Cape Town on the Monday in Holy Week, and went ashore to visit the St George’s Sisters and to attend some Services at the “very ugly” Cathedral.⁹ On Easter Eve the ship sailed for the coastal passage to Algoa Bay, and almost immediately “began to rock and tumble about much more than we had ever done before.” The morning

9 Archdeacon Merriman thought little of the building when he visited on Friday 17 November, 1848, writing in his journal: “as the interior of the building – to say nothing of its Grecian exterior – is fitted up in anything but Cathedral fashion, being filled with large high pews, and no chancel-like arrangements, it is to be hoped that ere long a real Cathedral will rise in place of it.” (Varley & Matthews, *The Cape Journals of Archdeacon N.J. Merriman*, p.2.) On 22 November, 1901, the foundation stone was laid for the present Cathedral designed by Sir Herbert Baker.

of Easter Day was fine and the vessel was steady, so they were able to have their celebration of the Eucharist at 7 a.m. and “Mattins with bright Easter hymns at 10.30. And I can safely say I never spent a happier Easter day, altogether it was so bright and beautiful.” By Evensong the ship was encountering a heavy swell.

It was really quite difficult not to laugh sometimes, to see the Archdeacon in his surplice swaying to and fro, and scarcely able to keep himself from falling. We sang the Easter hymn, holding fast to the bar running around the saloon, and there was a running accompaniment of occasional smashes of crockery in the pantry, and things tumbling about in the cabins.

Before 8.30 the next morning the ship anchored in Algoa Bay, where they were to disembark for the journey inland.

There are no docks here, so vessels are obliged to anchor a long way out; when we went ashore there was a stiff breeze blowing off the land, so we had to tack, and got almost drenched and blinded with the spray. It was great fun.¹⁰

At the end of the year after Sister Emma’s voyage, Bishop Webb, who had been in the United Kingdom to recruit more personnel and to raise funds, sailed from Southampton on board the steamship “*Danube*”, accompanied by a large party of nine lady workers and four clergy. The group met at Rownhams Church on Christmas Eve for a Service at 6.30 p.m., and returned there on Christmas morning for the 8 o’clock celebration of Holy Communion. Then it was time to join the ship, which sailed later in the day. One of the lady workers described a typical day on board, where the hours were put to good use.

She tells us that they rose early, when the crew were still busy washing the decks, and would try to find a corner where they could read. Breakfast was served at 9 a.m., and “then I go off to the Steerage children (2nd Class)” with a scrapbook given her by Mrs Webb, to tell them stories and answer their questions. At 10.30 a.m. the Bishop, clergy and all the missionaries gathered for Mattins: “we sing it all and have a hymn.” After that they would read or write and work at learning Dutch until it was time for luncheon at 12.30. At 3 o’clock in the afternoon Bishop Webb held a little class for some of them, and “reads ‘Wilberforce on the Incarnation’, which we enjoy extremely.” At 4 o’clock there was tea or oranges, and Dinner at 6. At 7.30 p.m. they gathered in the Second Class part of the ship

10 QPOFSM, no.27, January 1875, Extracts from Sister Emma’s Journal, p.6-13

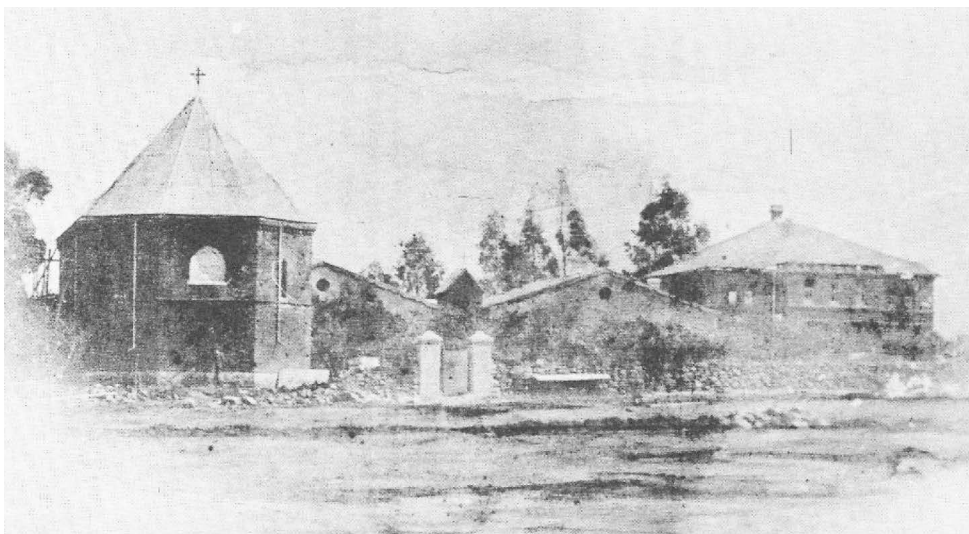
for Evensong. There was “quite a congregation; much larger than in the morning. There is a large party of Wesleyans going out with us, and several young men, who look so good and reverent that one cannot but respect them. We have a hymn again at this Service: sung straight from their hearts! One of our clergy, Mr Maude, takes great interest in them, and is trying to help them learn Dutch.” Mr Maude was also conducting a Bible Class among the Second Class passengers, while the Bishop gathered a good congregation for his readings of the Book of Daniel, and had started a Bible Class on Acts.¹¹

The “*Danube*” arrived in Cape Town on 18 January 1876, where the Bishop disembarked in order to attend the Episcopal Synod and a Provincial Synod a few days later. The remainder of the party stayed on board for the two day voyage to Port Elizabeth, where Sister Emma met them for the journey to Bloemfontein.

Mrs Webb stayed a few months longer in the United Kingdom and her departure was scheduled for 5 May, 1876, “in order that the party may include the Rev. J.W. Barrow of Philippiolis, and his bride.” The Mission’s recruitment was going well: there were two theological students and a further group of lady workers to travel with her. Her two children “and her own two servants” completed the party.¹² In the absence of information, we can only speculate whether this group had such a fully organised daily routine as those who travelled with the Bishop and Archdeacon.

11 QPBM, no.31, January 1876

12 QPBM, no.32, April 1876



St Michael's Home as the Chapel neared completion in 1877. The double-storied building on the right was completed in 1876, providing a refectory and kitchens on the ground floor, with a dormitory above. The two low buildings in the centre are the original farmhouse and the extension added in 1874.



St George's Cottage Hospital, constructed in 1878, with Sister Frances.



A coach similar to those travelled on by Mother Emma and the early pioneers.



A transport waggon crossing a drift.

CHAPTER 3



A JOURNEY UNATTENDED BY AN ACCIDENT IS AN ACCIDENT

Bloemfontein is situated 4,568 feet above sea level, and the distance from Port Elizabeth, following the route used by Archdeacon Croghan's party, is 469 miles along the modern roads. In the 1870s, the roads were rough tracks across unfenced countryside and there were no bridges to cross the rivers. A few of the larger rivers had been supplied with punts, flat-bottomed vessels which were hauled from one bank to the other with ropes, but in all other places travellers headed for the drifts or fords, often having to descend steep river banks to reach them. "The roads at that time were alone serious matters to encounter, and the drifts or fords by which the rivers were crossed were each one a new danger."¹

The most common form of transport was the ox waggon. When the Dutch settlers left the Cape and moved inland, their families travelled in high canvas-covered waggons. One of the original Voortrekker waggons is preserved in the Wagon Museum in Bloemfontein, which houses also an example of the flat-bed waggons used for the transport of heavy goods. Eighteen or twenty feet long and six feet wide, these were constructed of wood and had large metal-rimmed wheels, the rear pair of which were

1 Crisp, p.23

approximately five feet in diameter. Loads of up to 8,000 lbs could be carried, subject to the number of oxen used, most often between six and eight pairs. From the wooden shaft on the front of the waggon, known as the *disselboom*, a long chain connected the yoked pairs of oxen. Travel was slow, moving at walking pace, with the front pair being led by an African *voorloper*. The driver, seated on the waggon, controlled the whole team. After three or four hours on the rough tracks, the oxen had to be unyoked, rested and allowed to graze before continuing for a second session. Failure to observe these breaks could result in oxen collapsing and dying. At drifts, if the rivers were running high, the oxen would frequently have to swim across, and in difficult places it was sometimes necessary to unload waggons or to connect them to a second span of oxen. Given these conditions, progress of ten miles a day was considered satisfactory.

When Canon Beckett and his party arrived, “wagons were hard to procure by reason of the drought; carriers being unwilling to expose their oxen to the risks of a road scant of both grass and water.” They left Port Elizabeth on 30 July, 1867, and, after a “long and toilsome progress” but with “little inconvenience and with no mishap worth speaking of”, reached Bloemfontein on 6 September.² Among their heavy luggage was an organ which they had brought out from England for the Cathedral.³

Bishop Webb, on his first arrival, disembarked at Cape Town and he and his party travelled by mule waggon the long route through to the Free State. It was a frightful journey. They were seriously delayed by snow in the Karoo: “we should have died if it had not been for a colonist who rode out to us with two bottles of wine.”⁴ Twelve miles from Bloemfontein the waggon stuck fast in the mud, and Canon Beckett led a relief party to rescue them with fresh horses and mules.⁵

Nothing in their past experience could have prepared the 37 year old Sister Emma and the English ladies with her for the rigours of the journey that lay ahead of them after disembarking from the ss “*Roman*”. In her journal, “one sees the struggle between the ‘respectability’ of a Victorian maiden lady who was also a nun, on the one hand, and the indomitable pioneering spirit of a heroine, on the other.”⁶ They were to travel to the Free State by horse-drawn coach, making an early start.

2 CT, November 2, 1867, title page

3 Crisp, p.17

4 Lewis & Edwards, p.409

5 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i

6 Hincliff, *The Anglican Church in South Africa*, p. 227

We left Port Elizabeth on Monday the 13th, starting in the dark, in the coach or cart called after its owners, Cobb & Co. This conveyance is something like a stage coach, only longer and wider, with three seats, holding nine persons. The place to get in at, is only about four inches higher and not wider than a railway carriage window; most of our luggage was put up behind, outside, but we had many little bags and lots of rugs and umbrellas inside. The coach is slung on wide bands of bullock hide, so the motion is delightfully easy; but we were very much crushed. We started very well with six horses, but just after daylight we had a tremendous jolt, which shook us all off our seats and down again, with a bump 'enough to put one's bones out of joint,' we all exclaimed; and twice since we have had similar ones.

Sister Emma described the countryside they passed through, the wild-flowers she saw, the meals they took at stops along the way (the "usual fare" seemed to be mutton chops, eggs and bacon, tea and coffee), the accommodation at overnight stops, but also some of the unforeseeable difficulties. After a stop at Grahamstown the two front horses did not want to start, they "jumped and backed," and had to be dragged and pulled until at last they got going. Sometimes fresh horses were not available at the rest stops, making it necessary for the coach to proceed slowly and halt often to give tired horses a rest.

At Dagga-Boer's-Neck, where we stayed a night, there was a good hotel; but when we wanted to proceed in the morning we heard that the horses could not be found. They had been let loose in the veldt overnight, because forage is so scarce, and were not forthcoming. So we went out to see the sun rise.

At the end of one afternoon they came to a river where an ox waggon had stuck fast in the middle of the drift. There were several others waiting to cross, so the coach turned back to find an inn where the passengers could spend the night. The innkeeper, "in wonderfully educated English said he would do his best for us; but bad was the best, as far as the food went. The bread was musty, mildewed and sour; we opened seven eggs which were bad ..." At 5.30 in the morning, when everyone was ready to leave, the horses were lost again. By the time they were found, the white driver was missing, so they set off with an African driver "who had never been upcountry before, and did not know the way." Fortunately, at a meal stop, they met a Cobb & Co coach returning from the Diamond Fields: "we exchanged horses with them, and they gave us a driver who knew the way." After an overnight stop at Colesberg, they crossed the Orange River on a pont and arrived at Philippolis on Sunday 19 April, two days late. Because the Cobb & Co coach

was proceeding to Kimberley, Bishop Webb was to send a waggon to fetch the party from Philippolis, but the letter telling him when to expect them had been “left behind somewhere by the post-cart.” Three nights at Philippolis gave the travellers a rest, and provided an opportunity to join in Services at the church where they met the priest, Mr Barrow, “such a devoted, hard-working man.”

The journey was resumed on Wednesday but, being in the waggon sent by the Bishop, there were no arrangements for changes of horses and frequent stops had to be made to rest the animals. A day was spent at Fauresmith before going on to a German Lutheran mission station called Bethany. “They were, and always are, the Archdeacon says, so kind and friendly, and provided us with beds, tea, supper and breakfast, all for nothing, only charging for forage for the horses.” Leaving there on Saturday, they

had to get out of the waggon several times that day; once, to cross a river with very precipitous banks. Mrs. C. [Croghan] crossed with naked feet, - the rest of us on stepping stones; but poor Miss S. [she could mean Sibley or Stockdale] fell in and got very wet. Then there were also some miserable boggy cut up places, where there were ruts two feet deep, dry at the top and wet at the bottom. Sometimes our waggon would stick and sometimes the horses ... would not move. ... On account of the many difficulties and delays, it was dark ... When we went on again, we came to a bad place, and had to get out again in the moonlight, and jump across some water, wetting our feet.

There was nothing but a track to guide them, “and as our two drivers knew but little or nothing of the country, they had to get out every now and then to find the road.” They arrived at last in Bloemfontein, at about 10 p.m.; “the town looked so pretty by moonlight, and does also by daylight.” The Bishop and Mrs Webb welcomed them and accommodated them that night in Bishop’s Lodge. The journey from Algoa Bay had taken thirteen days.⁷

Two years after that introduction to the hazards of travel in the Free State, novice Sister Henrietta would have expected some difficulties when she accompanied Bishop Webb to Kimberley in April 1876. The Bishop was anxious to enquire into the need for nurses on the Diamond Fields. They left Bloemfontein on Friday 31 March – “We were almost

⁷ Extracts from Sister Emma’s travel Journal were printed in QPOFSM, no.27, January 1875, and no.28, April 1875.

afraid to go on, because of the exceeding badness of the roads.” That day they outspanned twice to take their meals and to rest the horses. At the second stop, heavy rain started and they had to beg shelter in a small shop.

It was late in the afternoon when the rain ceased, and we were able to go on our way; brightly enough at first, but very heavily afterwards, as hour after hour passed, and darkness came on, and our horses got more and more tired. At last a bank of mud about three feet high, brought us to a standstill. No whipping, or shouting, or coaxing, was of any avail; no turning back a little way, and coming at it again, deceived the horses. The Bishop got out; very carefully, for fear of breaking the pole, and at once fell down in the slimy, slippery mud; and then after another attempt at getting over the bank I got out too. Nothing can describe the stickiness, and slipperiness. At every step I was nearly down, until the Bishop, after many falls, got a waterproof sheet to serve as an island for me. Then he took off his boots and coat, and tried by pushing the wheel, to force the horses forward. The driver jumped out and tried the other wheel; but of course two men could not do much against four horses, even supposing they had been equally determined, which they were not.

Then they all went away, and left me sitting on my waterproof sheet, quite alone in my now moonlit world. In about a quarter of an hour, they appeared again, on my side of the mudbank, having driven round it.

Ten minutes further on, they found a hotel where they were greeted warmly and shown great kindness: “we were glad enough to get to our rooms.” When they left the next morning, the hotel keeper declined to accept any payment.

The roads were “rather better” at first, and they made a long day’s travel to Boshof, where they stayed overnight with friends. The next day, “we were so glad when, from the top of a steep descent, we saw the white tents of Kimberley, in the distance.” It was Passion Sunday. “With darkness came rain, and Kimberley’s streets were almost knee-deep in mud.” They drove to the Governor’s house, where no-one was expecting them to arrive through such bad conditions. In chapter 6 we tell of the discussions which took place over the next days and of the agreement made between Bishop Webb and the Governor, that St Michael’s Sisterhood would provide nurses for a new hospital to be built by the

government. Bishop Webb and Sister Henrietta left the following Friday for their return to Bloemfontein. They had a good journey of only two days.⁸

At the end of December the following year, Mother Emma and three others from St Michael's travelled to Harrismith, in the far north-east of the Free State, "three long days' journey by post cart from Bloemfontein, travelling from thirteen to fourteen hours each day."⁹ They went at the Bishop's behest to open a branch house of the Community. Opened in January 1878, the house proved to be a valuable resting place a year later for Mother Emma, Sister Louisa, Miss Langlands and Miss Potts, when they had been called to nurse in the Zulu War.

Their journey in 1879 lived up to the bad reputation of Free State travel. On the second day out from Bloemfontein, a stop was made to change horses some two hours short of Bethlehem.

At last, about 8 o'clock, we had them harnessed and ready to start, but after going a very few yards, they stopped and utterly refused to proceed. The driver went on whipping, etc., and using every effort to make them go on until 11 o'clock, when he desisted, and we all slept just as we were. We four sitting upright in the coach (a close-covered one, fortunately), the driver and his assistant on the box, the horses in their harness! The one outside passenger, however, lay on the ground on, and covered by, a kaross.¹⁰ It was a bitterly cold night but we were fairly warm and comfortable. At 6 a.m. we got out and walked, for about that time the driver tried to make the horses start, but they would not. The whole country was covered with hoar frost, all the puddles in the road were frozen over. ... We walked on and on, in the hope of finding a house where we could get some coffee, for we were faint and hungry.

Miss Langlands walked through long wet grass to a house, where the residents supplied a large can of coffee, plentiful enough also for the driver and his assistant, who came up with the coach at about 7.30 a.m. "They had been obliged to get two oxen and put them in front of the six horses to pull them up a little rise. Ought not the horses to have felt ashamed?"

8 QPBM, no.33, July 1876

9 QPBM, no.59, January 1883

10 kaross - "A mantle of animals' skins with the hair on, used by S. African natives."
(*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 5th Edition.)

They reached Bethlehem just before 9 o'clock on Low Sunday morning and spent most of the day with the Revd and Mrs Allum, the resident clergyman and his wife.

At 5 p.m. we started again in an open cart – at least, open in front and behind – with a waterproof over top and sides, intending to go all night and get to Harrismith early next morning, as is the usual fashion of that post-cart, only this time it was twenty-four hours late.

It was a bitter night again. You see we were on the very highest ground of the Free State. At 9.30 p.m. the driver became so ill and aguish¹¹ with the cold that he could go no further.

We had just arrived at a wayside store built of iron and kept by a German ... [who] gave up his bed for the driver, and we did our best in the store, among bottles of brandy and wine, tins of biscuits, and paraffin, bales of calico, blankets, mealies, pumpkins, bridles, lanterns, brooms and pictures, etc.¹²

A mattress was put on the counter for Mother Emma, while Sister Louisa settled in a rocking chair which she later exchanged for a sack of pumpkins, and the two lady workers wrapped themselves up on the mud floor. “We were very merry over our adventures, and tried to take an inventory of the goods around us before going to sleep.”

Arriving in Harrismith about noon the next day, they rested three days before setting off to cross the Drakensberg on a road that was “very bad indeed, very stony and full of holes.”¹³

It was not cold but intense rain that caused difficulties when Sister Louisa travelled that route again in January 1881, on her way with two lady workers to nurse at the military hospital in Newcastle during the Transvaal War. It rained from the time they left Bloemfontein, and the forty-seven year old Sister had to be taken pickaback across a flooding stream.

The Rhenoster Spruit was so full the horses could with difficulty get through, and could not manage to make the start up the steep bank on [the other] side, so we had to be carried on [the driver] Isaac's back. I laughed so much that I nearly fell off.

11 aguish – “of the nature of ague; ... shivering fit; quaking.” (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 5th Edition.)

12 QPBM, no.45, August 1879

13 QPBM, no.46, October 1879

A little further on, the Modder River was running so full as to be impassable. Refuge had to be sought in a Dutch farm labourer's hut.

The name of the farm is 'Perfectly Satisfied' which we are not, though I suppose we ought to be thankful for any shelter during this heavy rain. The owner ... has a wife and six children, the hut is mud and thatch, perhaps 10 feet long and 8 wide, no fire-place or chimney, and no window, the only ventilation is by the door. The other passengers, with ourselves, the family, five dogs and two cats, making twenty one inhabitants, make me fear for a sufficiency of air to breathe.

On Sunday 23rd, Sister Louisa wrote that the river was going down.

The drivers got a number of oxen this afternoon and drove them up and down the drift to trample the mud. It was strange to see the mud slipping in quantities from under their feet and getting washed away by the river. We hope to get over tomorrow as the oxen are to take us across, the mud being still too deep for the horses to work in it.

They waited four days to cross the Modder. Heavy rain continued for the remainder of their journey over the Drakensberg and into northern Natal: having left Bloemfontein on 21 January, they did not arrive in Newcastle until 9 February.¹⁴

Swollen rivers were a constant danger to travellers. Bishop Webb crossed the Orange River "with great difficulty and danger" and narrowly escaped drowning when he was *en route* to Grahamstown for the consecration of Archdeacon Merriman on St Andrew's Day 1871. Less fortunate was Mr W. Lacy, Canon Widdicombe's "pure-minded lay helper ... who had won the affectionate regard of all who knew him": he was drowned in the Caledon River while crossing it on his return from a visit to the Free State on 9 November, 1877.¹⁵

St Michael's "White Book" describes many of the difficult and hazardous journeys undertaken in the early years of the Community. Having Branch Houses at Kimberley and Harrismith necessitated regular travel between them and the Mother House. Mother Frances, accompanied by Miss Harrison, set out to visit Harrismith in November 1889.

14 QPBM, no.53, July 1881. The Dutch name of the farm was Weltevreden. It was quite common at that time for farm houses to consist of only one room.

15 Crisp, p.25 & 42

En route to Winburg the native driver threw his reins to the other man remarking he had forgotten his waybill and must return to Brandfort to get it. The passengers were left in the veldt in the broiling sun, for about two hours. Reaching Winburg they changed into a covered cart leaving for Bethlehem about 9.30 pm. The jolting was terrible, presently came a tremendous shock and sensation of falling. The wheels on one side had come off and the passengers were asked to get out. The Mother took her rug, lay down on the veldt and went to sleep. Her companion was unable to follow her example from nervousness. A fresh cart had to be fetched from Winburg, it arrived in the middle of the night and they were soon en route again.

On their return journey a month later, accompanied by Miss Price (who had been teaching at Harrismith), an axle of the post cart broke while they were on the road.

The passengers had another long and trying wait in the hot sun without any shade while the driver returned to Senekal in search of help and another cart. The only cart available was smaller than the Post Cart, so half of the luggage had to be left behind till there was opportunity for forwarding.¹⁶

In telling his readers of the “many disasters” that befell Canon Beckett during his pastoral visits by pony cart in the eastern Free State, so many that “the iron of the splashboard was said to be the only remaining piece of the original vehicle,” William Crisp recorded also that,

President Brand once described a Free State journey by the following happy aphorism, ‘A journey unattended by an accident is an accident.’¹⁷

We can understand the great excitement in Bloemfontein when the first railway engine arrived in the town on 10 October, 1890. The Sisters made an entry in the Community’s chronicle.

Building the railways from the coast took several years. An Associate who went out from England in 1883 described her journey inland; just five days as against the thirteen days of Mother Emma’s journey nine years previously:

16 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, p.96, November 23 and December 21, 1889

17 Crisp, p.23

Now, as there is a railway as far as Middleberg Road, a distance of a day and a half from Algoa Bay, the journey is comparatively easy, but it was an amusing experience to travel from there to a little place called Noport [Noupoort] by what they were pleased to term a ‘material train,’ but what we at home should call in honest English a common coal-truck. It was rather a difficult matter for the ladies to mount into it; but when in, it was not nearly as uncomfortable as it looked, for benches were put around for us to sit on: the dust certainly was most disagreeable. The road was picturesque in many places, leading through and around mountains: often it seemed as if there were barely room for the train to pass along. The rest of the way was made by coach and cart. In the former we were packed twenty-four when there should have been only fifteen, seven men being on the top where the luggage is stowed away. We were afraid that the luggage with the above-named seven men would descend upon our heads, for with the weight three of the supports of the roof on one side of the coach gave way; they were however bound up with cord and we proceeded on our way. We stayed one night at Cradock, another at Colesberg, the next at Fauresmith, and the last at a Dutch farmhouse. We arrived at Bloemfontein a little after 1 p.m. on Saturday, July 7th, having left Port Elizabeth by the 8 a.m. train on the Tuesday before.¹⁸

On 17 December, 1890, “amid great excitement” and with extra crowds in town, a passenger railway service opened linking Bloemfontein to Port Elizabeth. Mother Frances did not delay to try it out and left on 27 December, bound for Grahamstown.

Owing to heavy rains the train was delayed some days; the temporary bridge at Orange River was under water and further on some rails had been washed away. Some of the passengers returned, but the Mother and others waited till relief came. A special train with provisions was sent down from Bloemfontein and before the train started again a local man sent around cooked chickens ready cut up to all the passengers.¹⁹

18 QPBM no.62, October 1883, p. 203-204: letter from an Associate dated August 29, 1883

19 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 17 and 27 December 1890

It was not until 1908 that a railway was opened to connect Bloemfontein with Kimberley. It made regular contact between the Mother House and the Branch House much easier, because the travelling time was reduced from twenty-six hours to seven.²⁰

The construction of railways began in sea ports and progressed towards the main towns inland. So it was that a rail connection from Durban reached Harrismith in 1892, but there was no direct rail link between Bloemfontein and Harrismith until many years after the Community withdrew from its work in the latter town.

20 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, August 7, 1908



Sisters, Novices and Associates standing outside the Refectory and north Dormitory, photographed probably in the late 1870s.



St Michael's Home as it was by 1883, seen from the junction of Markgraaf and Elizabeth Streets. The original farmhouse and extension had been replaced by a double-storied building providing additional accommodation and a more fitting main entrance. A substantial debt for the building costs was still outstanding when Bishop Webb was translated to Grahamstown that year.

CHAPTER 4



FORMING THE SISTERHOOD

Last night at Evensong, I was formally made Mother Superior, with a beautiful office from the Priests' Prayer Book. The Psalms at Evensong were Psalms cxxi and cxxxiii; the 1st lesson, Song of Songs xi chapter, verse 10 to end; after which I was presented to the Bishop by the Archdeacon, the 'Veni Creator' was sung, and the service proceeded. The 2nd lesson was Rev. xxi. 5 – 17, and the hymn 330, Ancient and Modern. It was very beautiful.¹

Having arrived in Bloemfontein at about 10 o'clock at night on Saturday 25 April, 1874, Sister Emma and her companions rested at Bishop's Lodge until Monday, when they went to their new home. Bishop Webb had bought from Mr Goodale a farm house just to the west of the town, and work was already in progress to add an extension. A small outbuilding had been fitted up as a chapel – "it is a dear little place; but it has only mud walls with unbleached calico stretched tightly over them," wrote Sister Emma – and because of its small size her installation took place in the Cathedral.

On arrival she found a full and busy house. Miss Peltre, who had been in Bloemfontein since December, had started the girls' school there on 6 January with the help of the Bishop's sisters and Miss Young, who had been admitted that day as a Postulant for the

1 Sister Emma's letter is in QPOFSM no.28, April 1875, p.15

new Community.² Thirteen pupils were boarders and the house was crowded. “I am already dreading the arrival of our cases,” Mother Emma wrote on 29 April, “because I cannot think where we will put all our things.”

The worst of the present part of the house is that you can hear in any part of it all that is going on in every part. Only the outer walls are carried up into the pitch of the roof; the rest are mere partitions, ceasing with the lowest part of the roof, and the ceilings are of canvas, so that the house is like one large room. So we sit in the sitting room, where there is a music lesson going on, and can hear not only that, but the singing lesson in the refectory, and the class in the school room – with each word that each teacher speaks. However, the new part of the house is to have wooden ceilings, very expensive, but indispensable. I am writing this in the summer-house in the garden, for there it is quiet.”

A month later, on May 26, she wrote,

We are settling down pretty well; the worst of it is that there is not room to do things quite properly, and even when the new building is finished, we shall not be much better off. But I must not grumble, although we are £2,000 or £3,000 in debt; it will be sure to come right, if the work is according to God’s will.

Not being able to “do things quite properly” may well refer to the practices of the religious life. She had postulants to train.

Tomorrow, Miss Blackwell will be a postulant; Miss Peltre became one on Trinity Sunday, so now I have three, Miss Young having been made one before my arrival.

One help was that the daily celebration of the Eucharist had begun in the Cathedral on April 29 – “Ours is the first cathedral, belonging to our own Church, which has this, I suppose.” It was a quarter of an hour’s walk from the Home.

2 The White Book chronicle of the Community states that on 6 January 1874 Sister Agatha [Miss Young] was clothed as a Novice. That was written some years later and may be incorrect, because Mother Emma described her as a Postulant. (FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i; and QPOFSM no.28, April 1875, page 19) On the other hand, the White Book does not record any other date for her clothing.

Bishop Webb had intended that the extension should be complete before Sister Emma and the ladies with her arrived, but construction had to stop for a time because of heavy rains, which also “wasted back into their original mud, £30 worth of bricks.” The new building was to have five rooms, including a large refectory, which would be used also for classes, a school-room, and one room that would serve as reception room, Mother Emma’s sitting room and bedroom combined. “I shall call it combination-room,” she commented resolutely.

The Bishop wanted to build a room on to the side of the new building for me; he asked the builder for an estimate, and found it would cost £100. So there is no money for that just yet: and when it is built, my bed must be in a corner, screened off. A reception-room is much needed; Wednesday and Saturday afternoons we receive visitors, and of course there are many, to see the children, as well as ourselves. The present house will all be turned into dormitories, excepting the community-room.

The new part of the house was finished by 17 July, just giving time to move into it before the children returned from their school holidays.

The ladies “seem happy and to have taken to the life and country very much more kindly than I should have dared to hope or expect,” wrote Bishop Webb in a letter on 28 May, 1874. Their new life was very different from anything they had known before. In letters home, Mother Emma commented on the high cost of butter, and the unpredictability of their of milk supply.

We have one cow, but as she is always turned out on the veldt to go where she likes, she takes it into her head to go long distances sometimes, notwithstanding that she leaves her calf at home. Now we have seen nothing of her for seven days, and in the meantime we have no milk for breakfast.

A swarm of locusts flying over the town caught her attention. A few came down and landed in the garden, where “the cats and fowls have been very busy catching them. They seem to have four wings each, and are like large crickets.” Fortunately most flew high: “the air was thick with them ... they took about an hour in passing, so you may imagine their number.” She wrote also of her first visit to St Patrick’s Mission Chapel with its devout Black congregation, who knelt and responded heartily when the Litany was sung; and in the Cathedral she observed the disparaging attitude of whites towards blacks – “It makes one quite indignant!” In this strange world, with unfamiliar problems,

I hope people are not forgetting to pray for us; for we need their prayers much. I hope and think that I am thankful for our present troubles and inconveniences; for it proves that the work is of God, when the mark of the cross is on it so plainly. The postulants also are a proof of God's blessing.³

In June, Miss Stockdale became the second of those who had travelled out with Mother Emma to express a wish to test her vocation to the religious life. She wrote to her father in England for his approval, and was admitted as a Postulant on St Michael and All Angels' Day, 1874. Two months later, on St Andrew's Day, she and Miss Peltre were clothed as Novices at a service in the Cathedral, becoming Sister Henrietta and Sister Julia.⁴

The struggle we have here at the Home, to keep on at all, is not pleasant, although it is very delightful to think that the work has been given to us to do.

Sister Henrietta was writing home and expressed thankfulness that another group of ladies was on its way to join them, "for we certainly are very much pressed for workers." It was not the only pressure. Pupil numbers at the School were rising, and there was an urgent need to add more accommodation. A letter from Mrs Croghan revealed that Sister Agatha was sleeping at the Archdeacon's house, for want of space at the Home. Mother Emma told of being "much perplexed" about building, not least the high costs involved. Kind help was being given. Mr V. (she gave only the initial and not his name) had made a plan and gave his advice and help for nothing, and Mr Bell was trying to persuade people in Bloemfontein to commit to paying the interest of £500 so that the Community could borrow money to build. By May 1875, Mother Emma and Miss L. had been to the Diamond Fields to beg for money. Morning and evening they were out: "once we went among all the heaps of debris, asking of every white man we saw; and ... while all the diggers were leaving work ... [we] asked of every digger we met." Most of the men gave something, and more than £200 had been collected by the time Mother Emma returned to Bloemfontein. On 1 July she started a round of begging in Bloemfontein. Mrs Croghan arranged sales of the "beautiful things" sent out from Britain in Mission boxes. The sales were held at the Town Hall and all the profits went to the building fund. £500 had been raised by August 1875, but the two large rooms that were to be

3 The quotations and details are from Mother Emma's letters of 28 April, 29 April, 7 May, 26 May, 17 July and 29 July, 1874, published in the QPOFSM, no.28, April 1875, p.15-21. Bishop Webb's words are from QPOFSM no.25, July 1874, p.5

4 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1874

added would cost £1,600.⁵ The Revd A.S. Allum, who had trained as an architect before taking Holy Orders, designed a double-storied addition to the Home. Completed in 1876, it provided a refectory and kitchens on the ground floor, with a large dormitory above. There was only one other double-storied building in the Free State, and the new extension caused some anxiety among the builders and uncertainty among the first group of boarding pupils.⁶

When the proposal to found the Community was first published, it was thought that “between two and three thousand Pounds” would be required “to meet the expense of erecting the necessary buildings and placing the establishment in working order.”⁷ Very soon it was realised that this estimate was wholly inadequate; such was the demand for “Women’s Work” that both premises and staffing needed rapid expansion. Given the relatively small white population within the Diocese, and the much smaller number of Anglicans among them, it was inevitable that appeals for financial support would have to continue in the United Kingdom. The principle was expounded in 1873:

It must be recollected how poor we are as a Church – what arduous struggles we have passed through – and that our labour is far beyond our strength. There are no doubt large claims on any willing to give at home, but the basket and store will never be diminished by increased giving to God, and a most abundant reward is laid up for those who help in his work.⁸

Accompanied by his wife and 5-year old daughter, Bishop Webb left Bloemfontein in March 1875 bound for England, where he hoped to raise funds and recruit more workers. They embarked on the steamer “*African*” at Port Elizabeth. Rough weather was encountered during the passage to Cape Town and, by the time they arrived there on 5 April, the always delicate child Alice was seriously ill. The Bishop went ashore by boat for a previously arranged meeting with the Metropolitan, but his mind was very anxious about his daughter. Letters in the Community’s archive convey his anguish at not

5 QPBM no.30, October 1875 – letters from Superior, 13 May, 30 June & 1 July, 1875; letter from Sr Henrietta 29 July, and Mrs Croghan 6 August, 1875.

6 Crisp, p.41; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1876; Margaret Leith, *One the Faith*, p.11. St Michael’s, with the first girls’ school in the Free State, was responding to competition. The first double-storied building was the Greenhill Convent and School, built in 1876. (Schoeman, *Portrait of Bloemfontein*, no.78, p.38) Bishop Webb remarked in 1878, “Roman Catholics seem to be able to send any number of people, to subscribe any amount of money; to raise large, grand-looking buildings as Convents.” (*Sisterhood Life*, p.31)

7 QPOFSM no.21, July 1873

8 QPOFSM no.21, July 1873, page 24. Schoeman, *Portrait of Bloemfontein*, no.49, p.26, described the Anglican Church in the Free State as “small, poor and widely scattered” when Bishop Twells was appointed.

knowing how she was, and then his distress on returning to the vessel to find that she had died.⁹ Mrs Webb carried Alice's body ashore wrapped in a shawl, in order to conceal from the ship's other passengers and crew that she was dead. The child was buried at Claremont on 6 April.¹⁰

The long voyage to England gave an all too brief space for mourning before Bishop Webb started out on a series of speaking engagements. By the time he left Southampton on Christmas morning, 1875, for the return voyage, he was able to report considerable progress.

Some plans initiated the previous year were about to come to fruition. The Revd Bernard Puller, Chaplain to Cuddesdon College, where Dr Webb had served as Vice Principal, formed a committee in 1874 to raise funds towards providing Bloemfontein with a Theological College, and himself donated £500. The College was to be a memorial to Bishop Samuel Wilberforce, formerly Bishop of Oxford and a defender of the Catholic movement, who had died in July 1873. Gifts from other Cuddesdon friends gradually brought the fund to £1,000, but it had stalled until Bishop Webb enrolled the interest of his former Principal, Canon Edward King, by then Regius Professor of Pastoral Theology at Christ Church. An appeal by Canon King in the *Guardian* of 15 December brought in a further £500 by Christmas and took the total to £1,500, the minimum stipulated by the SPCK for them to provide a grant of £1,000. Canon King became Chairman of the fundraising committee, which undertook to provide half the endowment for a theological tutor, the balance coming from the SPCK. Bishop Webb described his aims:

At present we can arrange for a very small work, i.e. training a few European students under the Bishop's supervision, in the midst of the scene of their future labours; and educating a few Africans as readers, catechists, and preachers, if not with a view to their actually receiving Holy Orders within the next few years.

A property near the Cathedral was bought and in January 1877 St Cyprian's Theological College was formally inaugurated. It opened with five resident students, the Revd William Gaul reported, in a

large and very commodious house ... (with) seventeen rooms, besides kitchen and pantry; seven on the ground floor, and ten in the

⁹ HPRA Wits, AB2644/25, 62

¹⁰ Margaret Leith, *One the Faith*, p.10, 11; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1875

roof. ... at the end of the dormitory is our little Chapel, our 'Upper Room', about 15 x 12 feet, at present quite unfurnished, with the exception of a picture of the Crucifixion.¹¹

The Revd C.O. Miles arrived from England in 1878 to take charge, and continued until 1882. The financial depression of 1883 made it necessary to close St Cyprian's, the same year that Bishop Webb's inspiring force was removed by his translation to Grahamstown. Noting the good work it had done, William Crisp wrote:

The College proved to be a premature venture. ... With no other means of travelling than expensive passenger-carts, the exceedingly long distances prevented its being of service to other parts of the Province. He would have been a sanguine man who would have prophesied the advent of the railway in another seven years.¹²

During his time in England the Bishop had appealed also for funds for a variety of other projects: to open a "much needed" Industrial School for Native Girls (under the charge of the Sisterhood); for buildings at the Sisters' "High-Class Girls' School"; for St Andrew's College Building Fund; for enlargement of the Cathedral; for the Clergy Sustentation Fund; and for opening a mission to Basutoland.

Mother Emma travelled to Cape Town to meet the Bishop when he and his party landed: they were expected on 18 January, but the White Book states that they came on 24 January 1876. When she left Bloemfontein on the 5th of that month, the Mother was accompanied by Agatha Young: "in consequence of decided want of vocation in Novice Agatha it was settled that she must leave the Community." The Bishop would be staying in the Cape to attend the Episcopal and Provincial Synods later that month. He had brought a large number of new workers with him, and Mother Emma led fifteen ladies when she arrived back at the Home on 24 February. Among them was an Associate, Miss Olden, who was admitted as a Postulant on 1 April and in due course became Sister Louisa, and Miss Margaret Langlands, a Lady Worker.¹³

There were the inevitable losses as well as gains. All three of the first Postulants were to leave: Novice Agatha Young in December 1875; Novice Julia Peltre a year later;

11 QPBM no.31, January 1876, p.14f; no.33, July 1876, p.36; QPBM no.35, January 1877

12 Crisp, p.36-37

13 QPBM no.31, January 1876, Afar off upon the sea, which states that the plan was for Mother Emma to meet the workers at Port Elizabeth; FSA, A510 White Book I, vol.i, Dec 1875 & Jan 5, 1876

while there is no record of Miss Blackwell being clothed as a Novice. She continued living at the Home and leading St Michael's Day School until returning to England towards the end of 1876. That year saw five women admitted as Postulants and clothed as Novices: Louisa Olden, Ellinor Sendall and Georgina Harden for the Choir, and Sarah Moore and Rosa Spencer for the Second Order. In what was at the time a very small Community, this division into Choir Sisters and Second Order Sisters assumed that the class distinctions imported from life in Britain were appropriate in a new country.¹⁴ The arrival of Fanny Baillie in mid-January 1877 brought experience from another English Sisterhood: she was a Novice of the Community of St Mary the Virgin, Wantage, and had taken a few months' training at the House for Women Missionaries at Warminster. Her move to South Africa was on medical advice: "when the time for her profession approached, she was advised to seek acceptance in a community in a warmer climate, as she had a very delicate chest."¹⁵ In telling of her departure from England, the Bishop's Commissary wrote that she was going "with the purpose of doing such work with the Sisters as her health may permit." She travelled out at her own expense, and "will not draw on the funds of the Mission while she is there."¹⁶ Her health continued to be troublesome. She became seriously ill with pleurisy in May 1878 and it was not until Christmas that year that she was able to resume normal activity.¹⁷

When calling the Community into being, Bishop Webb's stated aim was that it should be founded on the great principles "first written on *African* soil by the great African Bishop, S. Augustine."¹⁸ It was an advantage to his plans to emphasise the African connection. He had already had to deal with criticisms about ritualism in his Diocese, and he was well aware that many members of the Church were deeply suspicious of the Sisterhoods that were springing up in England. Bishop Webb was following the majority of the new communities by adopting the Augustinian model: it proved flexible for combining very active external works with the development of a strong common life. St Augustine's theology had been championed by the Reformers and Protestants, and his writings on the monastic life contained little to which they could object. Notably, the *Regularis*

14 Mandy Goedhals, *Nuns, Guns and Nursing*, p.6

15 CSM&AA records show Sr Fanny as a Novice of the Sisterhood of St Denys, Warminster. That Community was not founded until 1879, and we have followed (and quote) Sister Margaret Anne SSJD, *What the World Counts Weakness*, p.18. We may note that SSJD spelt Sr Fanny's surname as Bayly.

16 The Commissary's report is in QPBM no.35, January 1877.

17 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1878, May 14 & Christmas Day

18 Webb, *Sisterhood Life and Women's Work*, p.20

Informatio, Ordo Monasterii and other documents include no requirement of vows, unlike the Rule of St Benedict,¹⁹ although in practice most communities introduced them.

The Rule of the Sisterhood of St Thomas the Martyr, Oxford, quoted St Augustine. There is an illuminated copy of this Rule in the archives of St Michael's School in Bloemfontein. Whether it was carried out by Sister Emma, or given to Bishop Webb in Oxford, we cannot know. Some pages are beautifully illuminated and illustrated; others give the impression of being half-done, as if the scribe intended to return to them later; while the last eleven pages are written in ordinary handwriting, either because time was short or because the volume did not have enough leaves for every page to be generously spaced and adorned. In the open volume, only the pages on the right are used: the richness of the colours shows through on the backs of most of those pages. The otherwise blank pages on the left have been used to record changes to the Rule made by the Chapter of St Thomas's Community. This enables us to date the making of this copy to between April 16, 1859 (the date of the Sisterhood's foundation) and January 3, 1866, the earliest amendment, when the Chapter extended the novitiate from one to two years. Of interest to us is the way that Bishop Webb worked through it, using the blank backs of pages to write rough notes (sometimes crossed out and re-worded, and in two different pencils) of the changes he was making in order to adapt the Rule for St Michael's Community. Some deletions and alterations are initialled "A.B.B." - Allan Becher Bloemfontein. In Chapter II he has written the date, Nov 30, 1874, which must relate to his re-working of the text. On the third page he wrote the opening two words of the text he chose as the motto of CSM&AA: "His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face." (Revelation 22: 3-4)

Prior to that, in the *Quarterly Paper* for July 1873, some preliminary rules drawn up by Bishop Webb were published. These dealt with the recruitment and training of Sisters and Associates, the length of their probation, the need for obedience to the Superior and her responsibilities, the right of Sisters to have free access to the Warden, and the necessity of the Warden's sanction before any rules could be made or altered. The final three paragraphs provide a basic outline for the spiritual life of the Sisters.

The canonical hours of prayers shall be observed, and the daily offices in the Cathedral attended.

Meditation shall be used daily by the Sisters, the time chosen being either in the early morning, before the world has broken in upon them, or between

19 Rule of St Benedict, Chapter 58. (Translation by Justin McCann, London, Sheed & Ward, 1970)

Sext and Nones – remembering that it was [then] our Blessed Lord in a special way bore our sins in His own Body on the tree. On Fridays, the subject of meditation shall be nothing but Jesus on the Cross.

One day in each month shall be secured for each Sister, to be spent in retreat, under the direction of the Warden, when the shortcomings of the month past will be reviewed, and resolutions made for the future.²⁰

We can note that there is no mention of attendance at the Eucharist, but these rules were written before daily celebrations began in the Cathedral on 29 April, 1874, the fourth day after Sister Emma's arrival. It could not have been easy for the Novices and Postulants to grow into this disciplined life of prayer, given the pressures of space in the Home, the many demands of their work, and the fifteen minute walk between the Home and the Cathedral.

The Community took a great step forward on the feast of St Barnabas in 1877, a Monday. All day on Sunday 10 June some of the Sisters and their helpers worked hard to prepare their new Chapel for its consecration. The foundation stone had been laid by Mrs Eliza Webb, wife of the Bishop, on St Andrew's Day, 1876, and the entire cost of the building was a gift from a benefactress in England, in memory of the Bishop's daughter Alice. The donor wished to remain anonymous at the time, and only the Bishop and the Superior knew her name.²¹ Installed on the exterior of the building was another memorial to Alice, the oratory bell which had been given to the Community in 1875.²² A Sister, probably Henrietta, related,

In the afternoon the workmen came in again to hang the seven lamps in the sanctuary, which was the last thing done; but after all we had not finished our work in time for First Vespers, which were said in our poor little old chapel, the place where for nearly four years we have received our greatest blessings, and which has been a resting-place amidst our labours.

The old and the new were joined together, for we were all in the great chapel for Evensong an hour later. It seems to us too good to be true, being the consummation of many hopes, the desire of our hearts granted to us, and the answer to many prayers.

20 QPOFSM no.,21, July 1873, p.25-27

21 White Book I, vol.ii. Miss Barton. She died on 19 July, 1916, at Clewer as Sister Louisa Dora CSJB.

22 This bell was moved in 1970 to the Chapel of the new St Michael's Chapel at Brandwag. Leith, *One the Faith*, p.11; also *A New St Michael's, Supplement to The Friend*, September 23, 1970, p.5

The building was dedicated to the glory of God, and in the names of St Michael and All Angels; and then came the prayers for a continual fountain of blessing ‘in this house,’ and for a special blessing on the Foundress, her kindred and her people.

The Bishop gave an address on the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God, “where we shall see his face.”

In the morning, the day of the Feast,

all the Communicants in the house were there, besides the clergy and two or three others who had special claims, including Mrs Webb and her little boy. Sister Henrietta and Sister Fanny were professed. The Gospel for the Profession of a Sister is, in our Office, the Parable of the Ten Virgins, and it is the key to the whole Service, to all the antiphons and responses.

The Bishop’s sermon was based on the words, “She hath done what she could”, and dwelt on the apparent waste in this world – nothing of which is really wasted in God’s harmonious creation. He spoke about his little daughter Alice, and how her death had put it into the heart of the munificent Foundress to offer this beautiful Chapel. “No life is really lost,” he said, and turned to the Professions:

You may think of a Sister that she is lost to the world, that her place is empty, that the gladness she might have brought to many a household is lost. Yet that soul which seems drawn aside from the world for contemplation, for sitting only at our Lord’s feet and striving to do his will brings before many and many a household a vision of something of the love and devotion to God of which the human heart is capable; and as she passes from one to another in lowly and self-denying labours, she is bearing a witness for God which could not otherwise have reached them. And what may not the prayers of one Sister do?²³

Unlike many of the Bishops in England, Bishop Webb considered that vows were necessary in the dedicated life of a Religious. Speaking in England in 1883, he addressed “the very delicate – and, in some ways, extremely difficult – question of ‘Vows.’” He said,

²³ The consecration of the Chapel and the Professions, with reports of the Bishop’s words, are recorded in FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1877; and QPBM no.38, October 1877, pages 5-7

“what is really meant ... is the *formal expression*, - the offering up to GOD, in some special way, of *this inner purpose of her life*; and its acceptance, in the Name of CHRIST by the Church. ... It seems to me that, in some form or other, we *must* put a question, the answer to which will satisfy the congregation of the faithful, as to the freedom, the deliberation, and the clear and unmistakable nature, of the resolve. ... For this deliberate resolve, they need both a sacramental embodiment ... and also the formal acceptance and sanction of the Church.”²⁴ The oldest Profession scroll found in the archives dates from 1879, when Sister Sarah, “having now of my own freewill devoted myself to the Life of a Sister in the Church of God do hereby ... promise fidelity to this Community of St Michael and All Angels in Bloemfontein ...”²⁵

The first two Professions having been made in the morning of St Barnabas’s Day, 1877, that afternoon Mother Emma convened the first meeting of the Chapter.

In addresses given in England in 1878 and 1883, Bishop Webb set out some of the ideals that he was trying to embody in the Community. It was a Diocesan institution, “under the immediate supervision of the Bishop or his deputy.”²⁶ He emphasised that,

the Diocesan principle is essential. The Sisterhood must be one with the Bishop, who has constitutional – not arbitrary – control; and by this means those scandals of the early Sisterhoods will be avoided ... [they] were not part of the Church in the midst of which they grew up; they did not feel the air of the Church around them, controlling and ventilating their life.²⁷

He believed that he drew this principle from the common life fostered at Hippo by “the great African Bishop, S. Augustine.”²⁸

In my own special Diocese, we are working out, pre-eminently, the problem of the corporate life of the Church, the ‘Collegiate’ idea; the expression of the manifold life of the Church, in its social aspect. This principle of associated work ... is in fact the root and foundation of Sisterhood and Community Life. ... The Sisterhood is bound up with the Bishop, through the Cathedral Chapter. It has a special ‘Charter’ of its own. And it is in this

24 Webb, *Sisterhood Life*, p.40-41. Italics and capitals in the original.

25 HPRA Wits, AB2644/80 (1)

26 QPOFSM no.21, July 1873, p.25

27 *Sisterhood Life*, an address given in England in 1883, published in *Sisterhood Life*, p.43. Emphasis in original.

28 Webb, *Woman’s Work in South Africa*, address given in 1878, *Sisterhood Life*, p.20

its *constitutional relation to the Diocese*, that our Sisterhood differs, so far as I know, from all others in the Church.²⁹

The point was emphasised:

All Sisterhood work, to be perfect, ought, if possible, to be carried on with its real central power vested in the Bishop: or in the Warden, representing him and working with him. ... the work must be under his personal control and rule; not under the irresponsible rule of any *woman*.

In insisting on this as a principle, I feel strongly that we are resting upon a revealed Law of Creation. All our Sisters and other workers are 'help-meets' to their Bishop, who represents the special office of Man, as 'the image and glory of GOD,' in the care and conduct of the Church on earth, under the supreme rule of CHRIST our LORD, as Head. [1 Cor.xi.7]³⁰

Mandy Goedhals observed that "in spite of Webb's assurance that women's communities would be under male authority, women religious found a way of governing themselves."³¹ This became apparent after Bishop Webb left the Diocese. His successors as Bishop of Bloemfontein did not exercise the same sort of personal control over the Community and its work. The Sisterhood learned that it could stand on its own feet.

One immediate effect of being under the direct control of the Bishop in the early years of the Community was that its field of work was expanded more quickly than its numbers should have allowed. Bishop Webb was in a hurry to develop the work of the Diocese and to establish the Anglican presence before either the Roman Catholic or Dissenting Churches could gain much influence among English-speaking residents. "We have to guard our people against the influence of *Romanism*," he said.³²

When he first proposed forming the Mission Sisterhood, Bishop Webb considered the education of girls to be the most pressing need. They would be the future mothers of families on remote farms and in small towns, and could exercise great influence for good. Nursing was his second intention, and mission work among African women was the third aim. The work of education began at once, with the Home School opened on the day of

29 Webb, *Sisterhood Life*, p.29. Emphasis in original.

30 Webb, *Sisterhood Life*, p.33. Emphasis and capitals in original.

31 Goedhals, *Nuns, Guns and Nursing*

32 Webb, *Sisterhood Life*, p.31. Emphasis in original.

the Community's foundation, 6 January, 1874. By 1 May that year the Sisterhood was responsible also for St Michael's Day School, meeting near the Cathedral. On 1 April 1876, they took over responsibility for a School for Half-Castes, and in August 1876 opened a boarding school for African girls. We discuss the early educational work in our next chapter. All of this was in Bloemfontein, and it absorbed most of the women who had gone out from Britain in response to the Bishop's appeals.

The Sisters and Associates began to do a little home nursing. Until this time there was no hospital in the Orange Free State. Bishop Webb was anxious to address this lack, and in 1874 he purchased a house near the Cathedral for use as a convalescent hospital. That never opened, and in 1876 he tried again by inviting citizens to contribute to a hospital fund. The response was small. In June 1877, the Bishop called a meeting at Bishop's Lodge, which was attended by some of the prominent residents and by the Revd William Gaul of the Cathedral. The meeting agreed to form a working Committee under the Bishop's chairmanship. Soon it was arranged to rent a small house in Monument Road, and Mr Leviser and Mr Gaul approached businesses in the town to ask for donations of furniture and all the necessary equipment. "In a week nothing was missing," reported Sister Henrietta, and added,

the pleasant openhearted assistance which is continually offered, and which is never asked for in vain, is one of the pleasantest among many bright encouragements in our work.

With a capacity for three in-patients, and medical attendance given voluntarily by Dr Kellner, the Cottage Hospital was opened formally by President Brand on 22 June, 1877. The Sisterhood was to supply the nursing staff and the novice Sister Rosa was appointed to be the first Matron.³³

Wherever the work of the Church was spreading in Southern Africa, there was a call for Sisters. The Revd George Sharley wrote from Pretoria in 1874 of the need for "at least four English ladies, Sisters from a regularly organized English Sisterhood", to run a ladies' college and a girls' school.³⁴ He would have known of the new Community at the centre of the Diocese in Bloemfontein. Wisely, Bishop Webb did not try to respond to that call. He had been able to send only three clergy north of the Vaal River, and the

³³ Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in SA*, p.47-50; QPBM no.40, April 1878, letter from Sr Henrietta. Dr B.O. Kellner became Bloemfontein's first qualified doctor in 1863. Schoeman, *Portrait of Bloemfontein*, no.25, p.17

³⁴ QPOFSM no.25, July 1874, p.14

Bishop was aware that a separate diocese for the Transvaal had been proposed by Bishop Gray in 1870. When Henry Blousfield was consecrated as first Bishop of Pretoria on 2nd February, 1878, the territory ceased to be Bloemfontein's responsibility.³⁵ There were more than enough demands for Bishop Webb to respond to in the Orange Free State, Griqualand West, Bechuanaland, and Basutoland.

The fast-growing population on the Diamond Fields cried out for greater attention from the Church and Bishop Webb took the novice Sister Henrietta there in April 1876 to assess its needs. In September, she and two Associates commenced the nursing work that would make her famous. Early the following year the Sisters were given responsibility for the Carnarvon Hospital, which was to evolve into Kimberley Hospital. A girls' day school was opened nearby in January 1877, headed by the novice Sister Louisa.

As a by-product of the diamond rush in Griqualand West, the Free State town of Harrismith was growing. It stands near the Natal border on the main transport route from the port of Durban to the interior. In November 1877, Bishop Webb purchased a property there, for the Sisters to establish a school. It opened in February 1878, staffed by a Postulant and three Associates.

Bishop Twells had promised King Moshesh of Basutoland that he would send Anglican missionaries into that country but the shortage of personnel meant that the promise was not fulfilled until his successor's episcopate. Bishop Webb took Mother Emma with him in January 1877 when he went to Hlotse Heights to bless new mission buildings and to dedicate the chapel. The priest in charge, the Revd John Widdicombe, appealed for Sisters to teach BaSotho women and girls. The request could not be met at that time. In the course of a six week tour, the Bishop, the Mother and Miss Trench visited Maseru also. Plans developed for the Community to open a school for BaSotho girls at Mohale's Hoek, in the south of the country, but, after several delays, the project had to be abandoned in 1880 following the outbreak of the Gun War. In that conflict, on 4 October, 1880, the Mohale's Hoek church, mission house and school were razed to the ground, and it was some years before work was resumed there.³⁶

Bishop Webb was in Britain for several months in 1878, recruiting new workers and raising funds. He was, he said in a published letter, "anxiously desirous to receive the aid of fellow workers, whether clergy or students, or lay helpers, as well as of Sisters and other ladies, who can come as Associates. ... There are no posts in my diocese where

³⁵ Lewis & Edwards, p.574, 575, 580

³⁶ Lewis & Edwards, p.465; Dove, *Anglican Pioneers in Lesotho*, p.18, 26, 34; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i., July 1880

I can offer more than hard work and a very poor living.”³⁷ While able to speak “gladly and hopefully” of the Sisterhood work, he acknowledged that “the strength of our staff has been greatly overtaxed of late, and the Mother Superior has written to me earnestly begging that additional helpers for nursing and educational work should go out with as little delay as possible.”³⁸ Travelling around the country, he gave a number of addresses on the work of the Diocese. In one he said that there were then on the Mission staff some thirty engaged in Women’s work. “Some are with us as members of our Sisterhood, either in the first or second order; others as Associate-workers, some unattached, and one formally set apart by the Bishop as Deaconess.” He gave the numbers in the Community as “three confirmed Sisters, with nine others ... still under probation, and three more seeking admission; besides several Associates living with the Sisters, under an easy rule.”³⁹

It was the presence of the Associates that made possible much of the Community’s early work. These women committed themselves to live and work with the Sisters for two or three years without any pay, after which they were free to return to the United Kingdom if they so wished, or to continue in the Bloemfontein Diocese or elsewhere in South Africa. Some arrived as Associates, while others were admitted after arrival. One of the latter was on an extended visit to her sister and brother-in-law in Basutoland when she met Mother Emma and the Bishop during their 1877 visit to Maseru. Her everyday life was “dull in the extreme,” she wrote, although she sometimes accompanied her brother-in-law on his rounds as Medical Officer. Taken very unwell in the cold Basuto winter, a return to Britain was being considered when she received an invitation to try life in Bloemfontein. She travelled the two day journey with the Governor of Basutoland, who was on his way to collect his children from the Home School for their holidays. Her first surprise and delight was seeing the pleasant exterior of the Home buildings, “and especially the chapel. There is a good-sized garden in front, or small peach orchard, where figs, grapes, and flowers also grow.” Met by the Mother Superior, she was taken through to the Community Room,

which looked very comfortable in the flickering light, for there was a little wood fire in one corner. In different parts of the room were several ladies, reading, working, or talking, all dressed alike in black with white caps, and blue ribbons and crosses. I saw they were not some of the Sisters, and

37 QPBM no.41, July 1878 – Bishop’s Letter

38 QPBM no.42, October 1878, p.8

39 Woman’s Work in South Africa, in Webb, *Sisterhood Life*, p.18, 21

was rather puzzled as to who they could be. Before very long I joined their number, and was admitted an Associate of the Sisterhood.

It began the happiest year of her life, she wrote. She taught in the School, and after her return to England encouraged more support and prayer for the Sisterhood “and all its varied branches of work.”⁴⁰

This unnamed correspondent provided us with a description of the Home as it was after the extensions added between 1874 and 1878.

[In the Community Room,] at the opposite end to the fire-place and window were well-filled bookshelves and cupboards. The floor was polished wood, and on the tables were plenty of writing materials, sewing machines, and piles of foolscap. ... This room had a glass door leading by a passage on to the slope, and on either side of this passage were doors, one belonging to the Mother’s room, and the others to the Sisters’. ... My room was upstairs (a wonderful thing in South Africa), and was one of four partitioned off a large dormitory. ... The refectory is a good-sized room, with four large windows as well as a door opening into the garden; the walls are washed pale blue, with dark brown wainscoting, and a stained floor; on one side is a slightly raised platform, where our tables were placed, and on the other hatchways, through which things can be passed to and from the kitchen. ... The Chapel is beautiful and peaceful. ... At the opposite end of the refectory is the school-room, and behind that is a very large dormitory, lavatory, and shower-bath room, also a linen room. The kitchen offices are all admirable also in their arrangements. ... There are several small single bedrooms in different parts of the house; a third dormitory, which was our infirmary, and a good-sized work-room opposite the visitors’ parlour, and a class-room behind that. Then the hall itself is roomy enough to have a piano and be used occasionally for classes. At the back of the buildings are three recreation grounds, each a good size, in the corners of which the children are allowed gardens of their own.⁴¹

40 QPBM no.43, January 1879, p.23-30, A Sketch of Life in Basuto Land and at St Michael’s Home

41 QPBM no.43, January 1879, p.25-27

We have reproduced this in some detail because of its contrast with the description written by Mother Emma soon after her arrival, and shows the considerable progress that had been made in the first five years.

One matter that Bishop Webb needed to deal with during his visit to England in 1878 was the position of Mother Emma. She had been lent to the Bloemfontein Diocese for a period of five years, but that was nearing its end. In Oxford he called on Fr Chamberlain and the Mother Superior of St Thomas's Sisterhood, but correspondence in the archive suggest that the issue was not concluded during that visit. In a letter wishing the Bishop Godspeed for his long return journey, Fr Chamberlain wrote that he was sorry to learn from the Mother that the Bishop would not be in Oxford again:

I had hoped for a more formal settlement of the Sisterhood matters between us. When you were good enough to call on me in the summer, I said I thought the time had come when you might naturally desire a more complete organisation of the Sisterhood of St Michael on its own basis. We lent you Sister Emma originally on the understanding that she was to try to get together a Sisterhood under your Direction ... Well, God seems to have blessed your endeavours in a remarkable manner: Sister Emma writes that she is anxious to continue at her post in Bloemfontein, and we learn that it is your wish to retain her as permanent Superior.

Under these circumstances I believe I express the desire of the Mother and Sisters here in giving a hearty sanction to the plan. It is of course a matter of great regret personally to sever the tie which had bound Sister Emma to them for many years ...

Mother Jane of St Thomas's also considered that Bishop Webb should have made another visit to them. She wrote to Mother Emma,

We have been very grieved not to see more of your Bishop during his stay in England, and the matter which required and which I think should have had a personal interview has been settled by letter. ... if we had perfect love we should rejoice that you have been so directed by God as to be successful in carrying out the work ... yet we cannot but be sorry to lose you.

Both Fr Chamberlain and Mother Jane asked that there should be a daily memorial in the prayers at St Michael's, asking for the divine blessing on St Thomas's Sisterhood; and also

that any Sisters from Bloemfontein going to England should visit St Thomas's, and regard it as their resting place.

After nearly five years in Africa, with all the variety of challenges that she had faced and overcome, it can be understood readily that Sister Emma was reluctant to return to convent life in Oxford, but it is surprising that she wrote that she no longer loved her old Community. Mother Jane responded,

I do not know why you should express coolness towards us. I assure you it is not returned – but we wish to feel a warm and loving sympathy in all that concerns you. ... [St Thomas's] will be as much your home under these altered relations as it has ever been.⁴²

Bishop Webb and his family, with a large party of workers, arrived back in Bloemfontein on February 28, 1879. Eight days later the Bishop presided in St Michael's Chapel when two Novices were clothed and four women were admitted as Postulants. One of the new Novices, Frances Harcourt-Vernon, had arrived from England in June the previous year, in the company of Sister Henrietta. She was a great-granddaughter of Edward Venables Harcourt Vernon, Archbishop of York from 1807 to 1847, and was born at Grove, near Retford in Nottinghamshire. The Stockdale family was in the same area of that county and, with both their fathers being clergymen, it is possible that she first heard of the Free State Mission from Henrietta Stockdale, who actively promoted its interests from 1867 onwards. Frances Harcourt-Vernon met Bishop Webb at a drawing-room meeting where he was speaking about his work and appealing for workers. Enthused by the idea of helping in the mission, she persuaded her mother to allow her to go out "for a time" – and stayed.⁴³

During Sister Henrietta's visit to England, St George's Cottage Hospital had been built on a site adjacent to St Michael's Home. The rented house in Monument Road had quickly proved too small and it was replaced by this new building, which was designed to be one wing of a much larger hospital that the Committee intended to construct in the future. Here there was a four-bedded ward and two single private wards, as well as a convalescent day room and rooms for the staff and administration. The hospital was to be supported partly by the fees of paying patients, but mainly by public subscriptions which were

42 HPRA Wits, AB2644/80. Fr Chamberlain's letter to Bp Webb is dated 10 January 1879. Mother Jane's letter does not appear to be dated. There is also a letter from Fr Chamberlain to Sr Emma – "My dear Child" – in which he gently rebukes her for writing hastily letters that were "painful to read".

43 As recorded by S. Levisieur in St Michael's School Magazine, May 1935, p.8

sought in every town of the Free State. It was agreed that the Community of St Michael and All Angels would provide the nursing staff free of charge. President Brand conducted the formal opening ceremony on 7 June, 1878. Arriving three weeks later, Sister Henrietta was immediately appointed Matron,⁴⁴ but in March the following year she was transferred to Kimberley to take charge of the Carnarvon Hospital temporarily, when Sister Louisa and Miss Potts, an Associate on the Carnarvon's staff, were required for nursing in Natal, where British forces were at war with the Zulus. St George's remained the responsibility of the Sisterhood but, because it was next-door to the Mother House, it was easier to manage and staff than the hospital in Kimberley.

This was a period of great ferment in Southern Africa, with many wars as the expansion of British power was resisted by the African tribal nations and by the Dutch settlers, whose farms occupied much of the country. We tell of the Sisters' nursing in the Zulu War of 1879 and the Transvaal War of 1881 in other chapters.

Forty miles to the east of Bloemfontein, there were great political and social convulsions at Thaba Nchu in 1880 following the death of Chief Moroka, when two of his family disputed the succession. Surrounded by the Free State, the Baralong territory was an independent enclave. When an attempt to broker peace failed and violence erupted, the Mission Church was in danger. Deaconess Elsie and Miss Rose, an Associate, who had started work at that Mission towards the end of 1879, had to be withdrawn hastily in September 1880, and the Priest in Charge, the Revd George Mitchell, left and went to Kimberley. The Revd William Crisp, Priest in Charge of St Patrick's Mission, Bloemfontein, who had helped to build Thaba Nchu's Mission Church in 1868 and to establish its work, returned. "The difficulty seemed to be at an end" by about September, he wrote, and he must have persuaded Mother Emma to send workers back to Thaba Nchu, because she listed that Mission House among works in which Sisters and Associates were active, in an article she wrote for the *Quarterly Paper* of October 1882. Conflict erupted again in 1884, leading to the formal annexation of the territory by the Orange Free State.⁴⁵

We referred earlier to the Gun War which broke out in Basutoland in July 1880. At the time, the kingdom was being administered by the government of the Cape Colony, which decided, following the rebellion of one small tribe, that all BaSothos should be disarmed. It led to a national uprising: "Basutoland from end to end was soon in blaze." Colonial

⁴⁴ Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in South Africa*, p.52-56; QPBM no.40, April 1878; Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.29

⁴⁵ Crisp, p.48-50

troops were called up from the Cape, and some were garrisoned at Mafeteng in the south of Basutoland, but they proved unable to quell the revolt. As fighting continued into 1881, Bishop Webb was again asked to provide nurses. Because there were no Sisters available, the two nurses sent to Mafeteng were Miss Rogers and Miss Jackson. Nurse Jackson had arrived in Bloemfontein as recently as that March. Both contracted severe illness

through their self-sacrificing and devoted attentions to the sick and wounded in the military field hospitals. We had great cause for anxiety, especially with regard to Miss Jackson, about whose recovery there seemed at one time to be very little hope.

Bishop Webb made a special journey to minister to them in their sickness. After some months, both were restored to health. "I have had letters containing the warmest thanks for the services of our nurses," the Bishop reported. Peace returned to Basutoland in 1884, after the Imperial Government agreed to administer the country entirely independently of the Cape Colony.⁴⁶

Death made an early visit to the Community's Home. Georgina Harden arrived from England as an Associate in mid-1876 and was admitted to the Novitiate on St Stephen's Day that year. She was professed on the Feast of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1879, and sent almost immediately to Kimberley to take over the School from Sister Louisa, who had been called to war nursing. The ensuing months were very busy there, with a move into new premises and all the School activities, and Sister Georgina was unwell when she returned to Bloemfontein on 18 December for the Christmas holidays. The doctor was called in the next day, and diagnosed a mild attack of typhoid fever. Because her symptoms were not severe, there was little anxiety about her until two days before her death. Novice Sister Mary Elizabeth wrote a touching account of her end.

On Monday morning [29 December], we were told that Sister Georgina was dying, and the Bishop said he wished we would go into the chapel and keep up intercession. I went, and then Mother arranged that we should take it on by the half hours, and so we did all day, and when night came we took it

⁴⁶ Crisp, p.61-62; Dove, *Anglican Pioneers in Lesotho*, p.34, 46; QPBM no.54, October 1881; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1881. We should note that Loots & Vermaak (p.77) say that the two nurses were nursing and then ill at Wepener. At first sight, this appears unlikely to be correct because the conflict was between Cape Colonial forces and the BaSotho, and the independent Republic of the Orange Free State was not involved. On the other hand, Crisp says that the Free State authorities allowed a hospital to be established at Wepener (p.44). Bishop Webb wrote of driving to Mafeteng to visit the sick nurses: "The reason for my visit to Mafeteng was owing to the severe illness of two of our lady nurses, Miss Rogers and Miss Jackson." QPBM no.54, October 1881.

by hours, but almost continually many were praying. (Mother said we need not go to bed, she did not see how we could.) She was in the new infirmary in the Sisters' room, it was just finished for her, I may say. Sister Elizabeth and I were sitting on the stairs below for a long time that night, listening to the Bishop repeating beautiful texts, and saying the blessing, and comforting her. He had asked if she was happy, she said, 'Yes, indeed, quite happy.' Then later on, all but the one keeping the watch in the chapel crept up into the outside room, the children's infirmary, and there we knelt and prayed; we heard her breathing growing more and more laboured – faint. I was on the watch from 2.30 to 3.30. I just came upstairs as she was gone, 3.35 a.m. She looked *so* lovely, so noble, with that look upon her brow of 'It is finished.' When I went to bed I was awake by hearing our dear Mother tolling out her twenty-nine years herself. The funeral had to be the same day; we all walked, excepting Sister Frances and Sister Fanny, they drove, and we walked in procession, the choir going before and chanting the Songs of Degrees. When we came before the Cathedral they stopped and sang 'the King of Love'; when we reached the grave, kind friends had lined it beautifully with willow branches and Passion flowers and laid a white cross and crown beneath. We sang 'Jesus lives.'

From Kimberley, Sister Henrietta wrote of Sister Georgina that "her whole life was so absorbed in God, that one could only regard her as belonging to him." Preaching in the Cathedral on January 4th, 1880, Bishop Webb said, "The saintliness of our Sister's life was combined with great simplicity, great human loving-kindness. ... It is not that it is necessary to saintliness to forsake all and come here, or to some other distant land. ... She asked herself simply, 'Why should I not come?' without bringing up all the advantages on the other side; she obeyed in simplicity, naturally, freely." Later, he said the Community could now be regarded as indeed founded, with a living stone in the secure foundations of the Eternal Temple.⁴⁷

"Who will go in her place?" the Bishop asked members of the Association while he was on another visit to England at the end of that year. During his absence from Bloemfontein, Archdeacon Croghan was appointed Acting Warden of the Sisterhood, and Fr Douglas

⁴⁷ QPBM no.48, April 1880, pages 8, 20-21, 42f. Sister Georgina was the first CSM&AA Sister to die. By the time the next burial of a Sister took place, the cemetery where she was buried had been closed. At some time about the year 2000, the stone marking her grave was moved to the Community's Garden of Remembrance near the east end of the Cathedral, where the ashes of the last CSM&AA sisters are interred.

SSA came over from Modderpoort once a month to hear the confessions of Sisters. Fr Douglas had arrived in the Diocese in January 1880, and stayed in Bloemfontein for three months at the Bishop's request, before going to Modderpoort to take over from Canon Beckett as Superior of the Mission Brotherhood.

While the RMS "*German*" was approaching Madeira on its voyage to Cape Town, Bishop Webb wrote a letter for publication in the Quarterly Paper. He was "accompanied in the ship by a considerable staff of mission workers, as well as by my own sisters." There were two clergy and two laymen, as well as ten women workers, one of whom in the course of time joined the Community and was professed as Sister Caroline. The Bishop voiced his frustration at one of the problems in recruiting new staff:

... experience has once more proved to me that the Mission work of the Church would not be so crippled for want of labourers were it not on account of the objections and hindrances placed in the way of good workers by their relations and friends. Sometimes, it must be allowed, the objections are reasonable; but more frequently difficulties are raised and claims made to withhold true hearts and souls from the work which Christ our Lord has committed to his whole Church, which would never be alleged in the case of soldiers, or in ventures of commercial enterprise.⁴⁸

As more workers arrived, so it became possible to start new projects.

Canon William Crisp, although living back at Thaba Nchu, was still in charge of St Patrick's Mission in Bloemfontein, making use of Cathedral clergy and local African laity to cover his duties. He saw a need which required women workers.

One of the most important works in Bloemfontein is the care of the African girls. These are exposed to many temptations. It is more difficult to reach them than the young men, since they are at work all day, and cannot be permitted to come to night-schools and instruction classes as the latter. To obviate this, we have recently built a school-house in the location, and I am thankful to say that the Sisterhood has undertaken to devote one of its number, first to the care of the young girls and to general mission work

48 QPBM no.52, April 1881. The Bishop's letter is dated March 28, 1881. Bishop Webb had spoken about this problem before. In an address given in England in 1878, he said: "Are not many, perhaps, kept back from honest prayer that 'the Lord of the Harvest' will send forth more labourers into His Harvest, by the secret reservation, 'Only, LORD, not my son – not my Pastor!'" Webb, *Sisterhood Life*, p.15

among the African women and servants, and secondly to the management of the children's day school.

Sister Frances Mary, the Novice who was to have been sent to Mohale's Hoek in Basutoland, was assigned to this work, and the Chronicler recorded in 1881 that it was bearing much fruit, with well attended evening classes, many preparing for Confirmation, and instruction being given on the sanctity of marriage and laws of purity.⁴⁹ So began the close involvement of the Community with St Patrick's Church, where Sisters were to be active for more than a century.

Another new work which was taken up by the Community in 1881 was nursing in a small hospital at Jagersfontein, some sixty-five miles south-west of Bloemfontein. Diamonds had been discovered, drawing a population of miners. As the diggings got larger, the hospital would be much needed, wrote Mother Emma, because "illness, fever, and accidents always seem to come to these sort of places." Initially there were ten beds for white people and a little detached building with six beds for blacks, but a few months later the capacity for patients is given as twenty-four, and the Hospital was said to be "flourishing." Miss Williams, an Associate who had previously been in charge of the Community's nursing in Kimberley, was head of "a fine staff of nurses, they are all so bright and happy." The Revd John Stenson as Priest in charge appealed for reading materials for the patients and pictures for the walls.⁵⁰

Across at the River Diggings, Sister Henrietta expanded her work by opening a Convalescent Hospital at Barkly West. It brought the number of Branch Houses of the Community to seven, four of which were hospitals, and three schools. There could have been more, but the shortage of Sisters, nurses and teachers made it impossible to respond to requests to open schools at Jagersfontein and Bethlehem, and a request from the Bishop of Pretoria for Sisters to nurse at a new hospital at Barberton had to be declined also.⁵¹

The pressure of all these works was taking a toll on Mother Emma's health, and in December 1881 she was obliged to leave for England for medical treatment and recuperation. Sister Fanny, as Assistant Superior, was left in charge of all the works of the Community. The Diocesan Magazine reported the following August that the Mother Superior was

49 QPBM no.51, July 1881, p.29; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1881

50 QPBM no.54, October 1881, p.218; no.55, January 1882, p.41

51 QPBM – re Jagersfontein, no.58, October 1882, p.198; re Bethlehem, no.77, July 1887, Bishop's Letter; re Barberton Hospital, no.76, April 1887, p.87

still in England, and had been ordered by the doctors three months' complete rest.⁵² There is no record to tell us whether she stayed at St Thomas's or another Convent, or with members of her family. Her absence was to be lengthy. An Associate wrote in the July 1883 issue of the *Quarterly Paper* about her return:

The last party for Bloemfontein, numbering six, started on May 31st from Southampton, the Mother Superior joining them at Plymouth. The *Mexican*, in which they sailed, is a very fine new vessel, beautifully fitted up, having large cabins, with only two berths in each, and on this voyage, the Mother and one or two others were able to have the benefit of the whole cabin to themselves – a great luxury on board ship. They all looked very bright and happy at Plymouth, but from Madeira we heard that all had suffered more or less from the rolling of the vessel; the Mother, however, had not been very ill, which was a thing to be thankful for, considering her recent weakness. It will be remembered that she came to England for her health, in January 1882, since which time she has been more or less ailing, and neither allowed to return to South Africa nor to do the 'begging' in England on which she had so much set her heart. This was a real grief to her, as she had confidently expected to obtain help from friends in England (and especially those at Liverpool, where she had worked for ten years as a Sister) for the pressing needs of the 'Home.'

It was only quite at the end of May that her medical adviser would allow her to fix a day for returning to Bloemfontein, which, after being so long absent from her adopted home, she was only too anxious and eager to do.⁵³

Mother Emma would have become particularly anxious to return to Bloemfontein after she received news that a meeting of the Elective Assembly of the Diocese of Grahamstown, held on 7 March, 1883, had chosen Bishop Webb to succeed Bishop Merriman, who had died after a carriage accident. Bloemfontein was to lose its Diocesan, and the Community its founder and Warden. Many arrangements would have to be put into place to ensure the continuation of the Sisterhood and its work.

She arrived to find the Community not only worried about the future without Bishop Webb, but also passing through very trying financial circumstances. There had been a

52 BDA, Bloemfontein Diocesan Magazine, Vol.1, no.2, August 1882, p.28

53 QPBM no.61, July 1883

prolonged commercial depression in trade, partly as a consequence of the Basutoland and Transvaal wars. Although the Orange Free State was not officially involved in either – except in trying to mediate peace – the drain on resources and the racial distrust generated by the wars in bordering states had an inevitable impact on the Free State itself. Those problems were compounded by a very severe and lengthy drought that set in during 1883, almost ruining the country. Many parents could no longer afford to send their children to school, and pupil numbers in all schools dropped by about half. St Michael's Home schools in Harrismith and Kimberley were intended to be self-supporting, but at the Home School in Bloemfontein, with its large staff and many buildings, the charge made for boarders was never adequate to meet all the expenses involved, even when the School was full.⁵⁴ In all three of these schools the sudden removal of pupils caused the income to drop well below the running costs. Sister Louisa in Harrismith wrote of the problem of sometimes keeping and boarding a child for six months, only to find that the parents were bankrupt and unable to pay the fees. In Bloemfontein there were several orphaned or motherless children who were entirely dependent on the Sisters, and for whom no fees were ever paid. The price of provisions rose very high as food became scarce in Bloemfontein.

Transport waggons are unable to bring groceries, fuel, or other supplies into the town, because, owing to the drought, the veldt is barren; and as there is nothing for the oxen to live on, they cannot travel any distance, and are too weak to draw heavy loads.

In appealing for help from the Association in the United Kingdom, a Sister described the drastic measures being taken at St Michael's Home.

We have tried to do what we can in the way of reducing our expenses. One or two of those who had hitherto been engaged in teaching, have been able to give that up for the present, and are now doing house-work. One Sister has replaced the African women servants in the pantry, and two superintend and help in the laundry, so that we are able to have less paid labour there; and could we spare more of our workers, we should reduce it still further. The Mother Superior is trying to arrange for us to take in washing, so that we might thus earn something towards paying expenses.

⁵⁴ QPBM no.58, October 1882, p.194-195. Mother Emma wrote at a time when there were about ninety boarders and twenty or thirty day scholars, and said that the School was not self-supporting.

But this heavy manual work is very exhausting to the strength, in a climate where the thermometer often registers 80 degrees in the shade, even in the early summer; therefore it would require a good many hands to take in any quantity.⁵⁵

It may have been partly to help the Community that the cleaning of the Cathedral was given into their hands from 1 January 1885, with a salary of £50 a year. Sister Florence was appointed Sacristan, with Miss Price as her assistant.⁵⁶

Compounding the troubles, a great storm during the night of 5/6 September, 1885, blew the roof off the little dormitory. It landed first on the Novices' roof and finished up on the road by St George's Hospital. One beam went through the roof between the Novices' dormitory and the South Dormitory; the heavy rain caused a flood and there was a rush of activity to bring tin baths to collect as much water as possible.⁵⁷

Perhaps it is not surprising that Mother Emma was very ill again by February 1886. Recovering, she went to stay at the Harrismith house for two months of rest and recuperation, before returning to her work at the end of June.⁵⁸

55 QPBM no.63, January 1884, p.15-17 – Letter from St Michael's Home, dated November 29, 1883; and letter from Sister Louisa, p. 18. See also QPBM no.62, p.202; Crisp p.68, 76

56 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1885, January 1

57 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1885, September 6

58 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1886; QPBM no.74, October 1886, p.89, letter from Sister Fanny dated February 16, 1886: "I am sorry to say the Mother is very unwell."



Sister Helen is seated in the middle of this group of parishioners outside the second St Patrick's Church in Waaihoek, which stood from 1894 to 1923.

CHAPTER 5



ESTABLISHING SCHOOLS IN BLOEMFONTEIN

From the very beginning of the Orange Free State Mission, education was understood to be a priority. As we have seen, when the first Bishop, Edward Twells, arrived in the territory, he was accompanied by two schoolmasters as well as by priests. Mr Bell was assigned to Smithfield and Mr George Clegg to Bloemfontein, where he established the Cathedral Grammar School. That educated boys and by 1868 Bishop Twells wrote of the need for a good boarding school for girls. Bishop Webb took up the cause and it was one of his main motivations in founding the Sisterhood. He sent Archdeacon Croghan to England early in 1873,

mainly to procure the means to supply the most urgent need of the Church in South Africa, namely, ‘Superior Female Education in connection with the Church.’

The pressing need was to lay the foundations of “future healthy female influence in the family.”¹ Because there was no girls’ school in the Orange Free State, only those girls whose parents could afford to send them to the Roman Catholic convent schools in

1 QPOFSM no.21, July 1873, title page, and p.23

Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth received a formal education. While recognising that the “externally brilliant Continental education” offered in those schools was attractive to colonists, Bishop Webb wanted to counteract their influence.

We have to provide education, in order to prevent the daughters of our Church from going off to Romanist establishments ... and coming back to their homes, even if not perverted to Romanism, yet without any knowledge of their own faith, or filial attachment to their own Mother-Church.”²

In setting out proposals for the Sisterhood, the possibility of two schools was envisaged.

The Female education needed is not one of the fashionable boarding school type, but careful training in lady-like demeanour and self-disciplined habits, - such plain teaching in useful knowledge as will fit the girls for practical home life, and a sufficient acquaintance with literature and music to enable them to take their part with credit in society. It is also contemplated having a school open to those who require a less extended education.³

The Bishop’s plans for education would mean changes in the boys’ school also:

the development of the Grammar School, Bloemfontein, into a Diocesan Educational Institution has become necessary.⁴

President Brand laid the foundation stone for new buildings situated on the corner of St George’s Street and Church Street, and the name was changed to St Andrew’s School. A new headmaster was appointed, the Revd Douglas McKenzie.⁵ Resolution 2 of the Diocesan Synod held on July 8, 1874, accepted the recommendations of the Committee that had been appointed “to frame a Constitution for St Andrew’s College and to consolidate the educational work of the Diocese.” The next Resolution was “That St Andrew’s Seminary be recognized by the Synod as a Diocesan Institution.” This Resolution referred to the newly-formed Sisterhood school, and a later Resolution, number 11, recorded a vote of thanks to the Benefactors of St Andrew’s Seminary,

2 Webb, *Sisterhood Life*, p.32

3 QPOFSM no.21, July 1873, p.22

4 QPOFSM no.23, January 1874, p.2, Archdeacon Croghan in his Farewell Letter.

5 Lewis & Edwards, p.414

especially to the Superiors and Communities of St Thomas, Oxford, and St John the Baptist, Clewer.⁶

“St Andrew’s Seminary” seems a strange name to give to the girls’ school, but it may have been Bishop Webb’s intention that the two schools together should constitute St Andrew’s College. He considered their work to be integral to the mission of the Diocese, which itself began under the patronage of St Andrew, the first missionary. When the foundation stone of the Cathedral was laid, the dedication was in the single name of St Andrew, but the completed building was consecrated by Bishop Twells as the Cathedral of St Andrew and St Michael. The Sisterhood had been announced from the first as St Michael and All Angels, but their house in Markgraaf Street was initially called St Andrew’s Home. Mother Emma wrote that heading on her letter of 29 April, 1874. It is not clear exactly when the name of the Home was changed, but a letter from Sister Henrietta, dated November 12, 1875, and published in the January 1876 Quarterly Paper, is headed “St Michael’s Home.”

St Andrew’s Seminary opened its doors to girl pupils in January 1874. Miss Peltre was in charge, “a schoolmistress of spirit and energy.” She had arrived in Bloemfontein a month earlier and oversaw all the preparation of the building and its conversion from farm house to Community Home and School. Until other staff arrived with the Archdeacon in April, the Bishop’s sisters assisted her every day.⁷ The first intake of pupils was of twelve boarders (“who were ever after referred to as ‘The Twelve Living Foundation Stones’”) and about twenty day girls, although the latter number appears to have fluctuated initially. On 26 March Bishop Webb gave the numbers as thirteen boarders and twelve day pupils. He considered it “a very fair start.”⁸ The inadequacy of the building became apparent almost at once: “you can hear in any part of it all that is going on in every part.” An extension adding five rooms was completed in July 1874 and provided some relief. Pupil numbers soon increased, making further building work necessary. It was to be the pattern at the school for the next half-century.

Boarders came from all across the Free State. Bloemfontein itself was still a very small town. There are no population records prior to 1880, when it achieved municipal status and the first census was taken: there were then 2,567 inhabitants, of whom 1,688 were white and 879 black. An old pupil wrote in 1903:

6 CR Library, *Acts of the General Synod of the Diocese of Bloemfontein with the Resolutions adopted at the sessions of 1872 and 1874*, see Resolutions 2, 3 & 11.

7 Lewis & Edwards, p.417

8 Leith, *One the Faith*, p.7; QPOFSM no.25, July 1874, p.4-5

The present generation of girls can scarcely grasp what it meant ... to have a number of cultivated ladies like the Sisters and ladies of the Home settled among us, when Bloemfontein was as much in the interior of Africa and cut off from civilisation as the Victoria Falls are today.⁹

One month after her arrival, Mother Emma described some of her first impressions.

The children are in very fair order; they are wonderfully listless, not a bit like English children, although they all speak English, but with a foreign accent; they never think of breaking silence in the dormitories at night, they are too tired and too glad to get to sleep. The air here must be very strong, I think; for I must confess that we are all apt to get tired, and we all need a good deal of sleep.¹⁰

In November 1875, Sister Henrietta wrote that at the “Upper Class School” in the Home they had fifty boarders and at least twelve day-girls. She continued,

We have been compelled to begin building, largely; a dormitory for thirty girls, a bathroom and linen-room, and a big school room. ... We have three other small dormitories, a music-room and class-room, Superior’s room, Community room, two tiny bedrooms, and a dining-room so full that we scarcely know how to get into it, (from 50 to 60 of us) all together. ... Besides these rooms, we have a kitchen, pantry, and larder ... There is a little cottage in the yard which contains store-room, bake-house, and one servant’s room. The cook and her husband, with three children, sleep in this room: the rest of the servants take their blankets and lie down anywhere; some under trees in the yard; some, in the Community room, and so on. If we are not able to borrow money to build new kitchens, I do not know how we are to get on.¹¹

9 Letter from “An Old Pupil” in St Michael’s Home School Magazine, May 1903, p.12

10 QPOFSM no.28, April 1875, p.19. Letter dated May 26, 1874

11 QPBM no.31, January 1876, p.23. Letter dated November 12, 1875. As noted in our previous chapter, a double-storied extension was completed in 1876, providing a large dormitory, a new refectory and kitchens.

To provide additional space, a small house of eight rooms near the Home was acquired. Known as “The Laundry”, it served that purpose for the Home, and also accommodated a good number of the girls, “and wonderful tales they told of the ghosts that haunted it.”¹²

Meanwhile, a start had been made with the second school under the auspices of the Sisterhood. On 1 May, 1874, Bishop Webb blessed a cottage opposite the Cathedral as St Michael’s Day School. The first pupils were admitted on 4 May. It was a small beginning: Mother Emma wrote of only seven children. Miss Blackwell, a trained National School teacher who had travelled out with Mother Emma, was in charge, assisted by Miss Grimes and Mrs McKenzie. It was intended as a Middle-Class School, for children whose parents could not afford the fees at the Home School. Numbers increased rapidly and there were forty-five pupils by November 1875, and 100 by the end of 1877. After Miss Blackwell returned to England, Miss Margaret Langlands was given charge of the School. In 1878 she was asked to provide boarding accommodation for the continually increasing number of pupils, and when the adjoining house and grounds were offered for sale, the Bishop bought the property at an outlay of £1,000. By the time she left, after two years in charge, she was able to report that they had begun training pupil teachers, “so as to enable the inhabitants of the Free State to help themselves.” One of the pupil teachers came from a poor home and was being housed and educated free of charge.¹³

At some date which is not given in the records, the School changed its name to avoid confusion with the Home School, and became St Gabriel’s. It is advertised as such in the Bloemfontein Diocesan Magazine of August 1882. The advertisement reads,

This School provides a plain and thorough English Education. It includes a Senior and Junior Division. Boys from four to eight years of age are received as Boarders.

Applications for admission were to be made to the Sister in Charge, showing that it was still a work of the Community at that time. Mother Emma described it as a school “for smaller children” in an article she wrote that year for the *Quarterly Paper*. Another change was on the way. The *Chronicle* recorded that in November 1884 it was decided that St Gabriel’s School should be handed over to the staff of the Cathedral, to serve as a Parochial School for poor children. Although the management was transferred, the Community continued to provide a teacher for the next ten years, withdrawing only

¹² SMS, School Magazine, May 1903, p.12

¹³ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1874; QPBM no.31, January 1876, p. 23; no.39, Jan 1878, p.9; no.46, October 1879, letter from Miss Langlands.

in 1894. Margaret Leith noted that the School “ended its brief career in June 1899.” The building was sold in 1903.¹⁴

St Andrew’s Seminary at the Home and St Michael’s Day School were the first schools for girls north of the Orange River. They stimulated the latent demand for female education and can be seen as having spurred two other churches into founding their own schools. The Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church was concerned that too many girls from Dutch-speaking families would enrol in the Anglican Schools – even President Brand sent his daughters to the Home School – and in 1875 opened the *Dames Instituut*, later known as Eunice School. Later that same year, the Roman Catholic Church sent Sisters to Bloemfontein ready to open the Greenhill Convent School in 1876.¹⁵

In 1876, St Michael’s Community became responsible for two more schools. They were asked to take over a school for Half-Castes which had been started a little while previously by one of the clergy. This had been meeting in a room of the Theological College, but had been required to leave that accommodation, and classes were being held in a domain “consisting of bare mud walls, a mud floor, and *one* bench, holding about ten children,” although the roll numbered twenty-five. In April, Miss Donovan was put in charge of this work. She had arrived in Bloemfontein in February that year, having travelled from England in a large party of workers led by the Bishop. Almost immediately she came up against the racial prejudice that had provoked Mother Emma’s indignation two years earlier.

These poor children are so neglected! Africa seems full of these Half-Castes. Bloemfontein has numbers of them who do not come to my school; and no other will have them, because of their brown skins! I cannot bear to hear the white people talk of Blacks and Half-Castes as if they were so much dirt! ... I want to make them my particular care. No one has had much time for them, as yet. ... I know English people have not much sympathy with these Half-Caste children. They will shake their heads and say that such children ought not to exist! But here they are. They could not help it.

14 BDA, Bloemfontein Diocesan Magazine, Vol.1, no.2, August 1882; QPBM no.58, October 1882, p.194; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, November 1884 & July 1894; Leith, *One the Faith*, p.8; HPRA Wits, AB2644/51, Record of Works

15 Leith, p.6-9

She appealed to the Association in the United Kingdom for funds to build a school. The Bishop had given his permission to call it the Good Shepherd School.¹⁶

Three months later the school was operating in a rented building, but at £70 per annum it was more than could be afforded and they were making plans to leave, although they had nowhere to go. Again Miss Donovan appealed for financial support.

The Colonists will not help us. They despise and hate the Half-Castes ... they call them a blot upon the face of the earth, and forget the human *soul* that is in them, as much as in others. ... God has given them these souls, and very loving human hearts, and I think that the GOOD SHEPHERD, when he said 'FEED MY LAMBS', could not have altogether forgotten *them*. ... You, in England, cannot conceive the opposition that a Half-Caste school arouses here. They say it is an utter waste of time and money; that the Half-Castes have *no souls*; and that it is impossible ever to do them any good.¹⁷

"They were nobody's children indeed," commented Ruth Hickmore, years later, while the Community's Chronicler recorded that, in spite of the opposition, "Miss Donovan kept on pluckily, aided by the Revd W.T. Gaul."¹⁸ When Miss Donovan completed her term of service, she was replaced by a new Novice, Sister Mary Elizabeth.

The Good Shepherd School continued to struggle for want of suitable accommodation. The Revd George Glover, of North Malvern in Worcestershire, visited in 1879 and described the premises as a

horrid place, with earth floor always in holes, and the bats, which are always a nuisance with their cry, like a slate-pencil scratching a slate, are doubly so where there is only a bad calico ceiling; they are also troubled with parasites. Few things are more wanted in Bloemfontein than a decent schoolroom for the poor coloured children. Sister Mary Elizabeth, with some help from the Home, works it with great tenderness and success. Of course Mr Gaul when at home frequently visits.¹⁹

16 QPBM no.33, July 1876, p. 21-23. Letter dated April 26, 1876.

17 QPBM no.34, October 1876. Emphases and capitals in original.

18 SMS, Ruth B. Hickmore, History of the Educational Work of the CSM&AA, ch.8; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, April 1876

19 QPBM no.46, October 1879, p.43. Letter dated 26 September 1879

Bishop Webb asked Sister Mary Elizabeth to write a letter for the *Quarterly Paper* describing their need of a schoolhouse. Dated February 12, 1880, it reads,

The rooms of our present school are small – one about 14 feet by 10 feet, the other 14 feet by 9 feet; also the ventilation is exceedingly bad. When we asked that a hole at least might be made to let in more air, we were told that the house was in such ruinous condition that the wall would fall in probably; for the same reason we cannot open the window in one room more than a foot wide, the ceiling is resting on it.

I am glad to say that although the poor population is always fluctuating, both the number of children and their regularity in attendance is steadily growing, and will, I trust, continue to do so ... Last year we had sixty on the roll, this year our roll is already up to forty-six; there are both boys and girls, and we are gathering quite a respectable first-class this half. The average attendance is between thirty and forty. If more should come we should scarcely know what to do. During the summer months we have been obliged to take a class on the veldt, under shadow of the house, part of every morning, but between the dust storms and hot sun it is sometimes rather difficult to keep up the attention of either children or teacher. It is also very cold in the winter with the mud floors. I tell the children they must go on coming through everything, and then I think we shall be given a schoolhouse. £500 is the least sum that we can name as sufficient for the purpose.²⁰

The Report read at the end of term prize-giving in June 1887 showed the Good Shepherd School to have very satisfactory examination results. Another change of location was imminent.

Thanks to the unwearied efforts of Sister Maria, the large room at St Gabriel's has been prepared for the School at its re-opening, on Monday, July 25th; and with the increased accommodation we expect to see the School very flourishing.²¹

20 QPBM no.48, April 1880

21 BDA, The Bloemfontein Cathedral Magazine, Vol.II, no.15, July 1887

The second new venture in 1876 was an Industrial School for African girls. Bishop Webb had spoken of the need for this school in the course of an address he gave at Rugby during his 1875 visit to England, and his words were followed up by a letter from “a Lady Correspondent” published in the *Quarterly Paper*. The appeal was for £500 to build the school (with dormitory, school-room and class-room), furniture (which would be more cheaply sent direct from England than purchased in South Africa), and a yearly sum of £10 to support each girl. It was suggested that a healthy interest would be created “between givers and receivers, if each girl were separately provided for in this way by some English Parish or School, or other associated band of workers. Some help has been promised by the Ladies’ Association of the S.P.G.” After a parenthesis about the circumstances at Thaba Nchu, the correspondent went on to quote the Priest in Charge there, the Revd William Crisp, who had been pressing for this school to be created in Bloemfontein.

(It must be remembered that there is no married Missionary on the spot, and that the native girls have no lady workers among them at present, to teach those details of household life, which only a woman can teach.)

‘If the school can be opened next year, we can send eight girls, all communicants, some of whom have been in our day school for seven years. Especially they need to learn simple habits of cleanliness, and such ways of household management as in a respectable English cottage could be put into practice.

‘The lady who undertakes to teach them should keep them firmly in hand – insist on punctuality – but be gentle in managing them. To pet them would be to miss the mark entirely.

‘Plain needlework, knitting and darning, and the most complicated mending, should especially be taught; also how to cut out their own clothes. It would be well if they were taught how to use a sewing machine.’

The lady correspondent recalled a visit she had made to Bloemfontein three years earlier.

I have taken coffee in a native kraal, and heard the welcome words, in broken English: ‘We are Christians!’ How hard it must be to live as Christians,

amid heathen neighbours, and how arduous is the work set before native women, in changing that heathen kraal into a Christian home.²²

It was because of teaching the girls how to live as Christians in a Christian home, that it was considered necessary that they be boarders and not day-pupils.²³

Two Associates who arrived in the party brought from England by the Bishop in January 1876, Miss Copleston and Miss Piggott, were appointed to share the work. While they were waiting for the school to be built, they took lessons in the local language from Gabriel David, Catechist at St Patrick's Mission. The School had a difficult start. The first seven girls arrived from Thaba Nchu on 3 August to find that there was only a single room available, which had to be used temporarily as sleeping, school and dining-room. There were no tables or seats, and they had to use tin plates and mugs. The two teachers initially followed a timetable drawn up by Fr Crisp, which included lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic, and needlework, and gave some time to manual work in house and laundry. By mid-1877, when there were twelve pupils, Miss Copleston was doing most of the work on her own, with limited help from a lady from the Home "to teach needlework for two hours, and take the girls out three times a week." It left her very little spare time.²⁴ Her first assistant, Miss Piggott, must then have been working at the Home or elsewhere: she was admitted as a Postulant in January 1878 and clothed as a Novice on 8 March 1879.²⁵

Associates committed themselves to two or three years' service in the Diocese, and it appears that Miss Copleston returned to England in 1878, but continued to take a great interest in the School she had started. Her successor was the Novice Sister Henrietta Theresa, who wrote telling her about the progress of the pupils. The building must have been completed before then, because they seem to have had more space and better facilities. Writing on 16 August, 1878, the Sister gave the results of end of term examinations and described a display of their work.

22 QPBM no.30, October 1875

23 QPBM no.31, January 1876, p.25

24 QPBM no.33, July 1876,p.6; no.35, January 1877 (in Ladies' Association Leaflet no.44); no.37, July 1877; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1876.

25 The records do not give the name taken by Miss Piggott on admission to the Novitiate, but she may have been Sister Mary Elizabeth, who took over the School of the Good Shepherd from Miss Donovan. The dates fit. She was never professed, and left for England in December 1881, as Miss Piggott, accompanying the unwell Mother Emma.

The School-room table was laid out with their plain and fancy work, knitting, copy-books, and specimens of what they could do in Arithmetic, the Kindergarten Cards you had left – worked by them on occasional holidays and made up into blotting-cases with bright ribbon – also some small mats in cross-stitch with Berlin wool – making the table look quite pretty. Mr Crisp and the Mother expressed themselves much satisfied with their evident improvement. ... After their Exam they had to wait nearly a week for the waggon – and to keep them happily employed I set them to mend and patch their own poor garments, much to their satisfaction.

No waggon was available when the girls should have been returning for a new term, and five walked the whole way, some 35 miles, “which proves at least that they appreciate the School.”²⁶

The Quarterly published another letter from Sister Henrietta Theresa to Miss Copleston, written on 7 February 1879. Again there is a report of examination results and prize winners – those who are named had been pupils under Miss Copleston. “I enclose a letter from your goddaughter Grace,” wrote the Sister, and the enclosure expressed thanks for the cross which Miss Copleston had sent her. Sister Henrietta Theresa had been busy mending and readjusting the girls’ clothes – “we have had so few new ones from home this year that with all my endeavours we have only just enough to commence with.” The girls had not yet returned from their holidays: “it is the hoeing season, and they are very busy; they may come any day, or it may be a fortnight before I see them.”²⁷

The National Museum in Bloemfontein, in its gallery of exhibits on the History of Bloemfontein / Mangaung, states that the Industrial Boarding School for Native Girls, established in 1876, was the first school for Black African girls in the Free State, but it does not mention that it was an initiative of the Anglican Church, or that it was run by the Community of St Michael and All Angels for the first three years of its existence.²⁸

The Community’s Chronicler recorded in the White Book that in October 1879 it was decided that this School should be an independent work, and no longer under the Community. No reason is given, but there was always pressure on the small number of Sisters, Associates and Lady Workers. We can note that four had been away in Natal, nursing in the Zulu War, and in September two workers were sent to open a Mission

26 QPBM no.42, October 1878, p.28

27 QPBM no.44, April 1879, p.23-24

28 The author visited the Museum on Friday 28 September, 2018.

house at Thaba Nchu. In January 1880, Sister Henrietta Theresa was needed in Kimberley to replace Sister Georgina, who had died.

While these other schools were being developed, the Home School at St Michael's was making steady progress. The "Old Pupil" who wrote a letter for the first issue of the School Magazine in 1903 recalled that the beginnings had been "rather erratic." She joined the school when she was fourteen years old. The large schoolroom was used by the younger pupils while the older girls were in a smaller room.

I do not know how things went on in the big schoolroom, but our teaching was rather erratic – for instance, we had only two geography books among 16 girls, the consequence was that three-quarters of us could not do it, and were kept in every day from 1.30 to 2 o'clock, our dinner-hour.

Our Arithmetic was very elementary indeed, and no wonder, for our teacher would pick out a few girls and say so-and-so need not attend this lesson – she's so stupid – let her do some other lesson.

However, all this was changed when Bishop Webb brought out the second and, I believe, the largest group of workers for the Home that has ever come out at one time. Miss Robinson soon put the School into order and on a proper footing, and, for the first time, the Bloemfontein girls knew what it was to attend a well-regulated school.²⁹

Miss Robinson, who had trained as a National School teacher, contributed some of her memories for the second issue of the magazine, telling first of the group's arrival by post cart after dark, when the oil-lamps in the streets "simply intensified the darkness" to their unaccustomed eyes. It was early June, 1876. After being taken to St Michael's, "what an odd school it seemed to English eyes."

Going into the large Schoolroom the morning after our arrival, a little heap of dust and fragments was to be seen in the middle of the room. On inquiring why this was there, we were told, with a sly twinkle in the informant's eye, that 'the Monitresses had each swept her own corner clean, and it was nobody's business to take up the dust.'

29 SMS, School Magazine, May 1903, p.12

The examinations and prize-giving followed, and then the girls went home for their winter holiday, some being collected by family carts and others by various post-carts, which announced “their arrival at the Home gate by most cheerful blasts on the horn.” The last girl gone, they were able to inspect the premises. “What a sight met our eyes!” Everywhere, both inside and out, there were items discarded by the girls: torn clothing, broken toothbrushes, old sponges, and dilapidated hats. The month’s holiday was used by the staff to arrange things,

so that habits of neatness and order might be practised and learnt. That was the Bishop’s great wish, that the Home should be a centre from which all higher things, whether spiritual, mental, or physical, should be taught, and become part of the life of the girls.

The next term the new rules and regulations came into force; the girls fell in with them wonderfully well, considering their own free home-life; and the pleasant way they submitted to restraints they must have found tiresome, and which were opposed to their ideas in general, has always filled me with admiration. Happy, cheerful souls they were, not liking to work *too* hard, but liking still less to vex those with whom they lived, and after a time really appreciating the good teaching and care by which they were surrounded.³⁰

There were seventy-five “happy eager faces” filling the large schoolroom, wrote Sister Ellinor late in 1877. Forty-nine were boarders and the others day scholars, and ages varied from 4 to 18. The Chapel had been consecrated on 11 June that year.

What a comfort our Chapel is to us, you will, I am sure, understand. Our girls all assemble there every morning at 6.20, to say their prayers. At 6.30 we say Prime. Then they have an hour’s Preparation before breakfast. Real school-work begins at 8.45, and continues (with half an hour’s intermission) until 2. The afternoon is taken up with recreation, walking, and preparing for the next day’s lessons. ...

You would like to see our ‘Communicants,’ when they all go to the early service. We have eighteen this half, and I hope about eight more will be confirmed before the Christmas holidays.

30 SMS, School Magazine, May 1904, p.2-5, a paper written for that issue by Miss L.A. Robinson.

The work of the School is divided between two Sisters, Associates, and Workers. We have 'Kinder-garten' twice a week, under Sister Georgina's superintendence, and it is a great success. ...

We have two Celebrations in our own Chapel every week, Wednesday and Saturday, when our Bishop is at home (only one when he is away), and Evensong every Sunday. The children chant the Psalms very well indeed, and most heartily, with Mother to lead them; we are hoping to have an American organ, some day; at present we have a harmonium, which is always out of tune, and which, indeed, is not ours, but only lent to us. The girls are all very fond of music and singing, and never are tired, however much we want them to practise. We have some good voices amongst them; they are now learning a great many of 'Mendelssohn's Part Songs,' and really sing them very well.

The excitement is great at the monthly examination, because, according to the marks gained for each paper, they change their places in class. To tell the truth, I don't know who get the most anxious, teachers or children: the adding up of the marks is a very momentous affair.³¹

Bloemfontein's English-language newspaper, *The Friend*, carried a long report about the School's Prize Giving held on 14 January, 1878. It was reprinted in the Quarterly Paper. His Honour President Brand was there, together with Mrs Brand, Mr Justice Buchanan, Bishop Webb, Archdeacon Croghan, and leading citizens of the town. The large dormitory had been converted into a commodious hall, with a platform and stage erected at one end. The whole School commenced proceedings by singing a 'May Song' by Mendelssohn, and there followed a programme of music, recitations, and drama, including some scenes from Shakespeare's 'Midsummer Night's Dream.' While praising all the performances, the reporter noted that, "the one fault of the programme, its great length, will, we are assured, be remedied on future occasions." During the interval, Bishop Webb addressed the guests and reflected on the progress made in the first four years of the School's existence. He said that the motivation of the Church's schools and hospitals came from the commission of Christ to work for the good of all, on the ground of the common brotherhood of all humanity. On the same grounds, he appealed for financial assistance from the State. President Brand's reaction

31 QPBM no.39, January 1878, p.7-9

is not given.³² The President distributed the prizes, “and with his usual amiability spoke a few words of commendation to each successful candidate.”³³

In those early years, the girls were taught a strict and demanding religious discipline, as we learn from Miss Lucas in her description of Good Friday at the Home.

It is the rule that everyone, even the quite little ones, keep silence till 2 o'clock in the afternoon. We said Lauds in the Chapel at 6.30, then Prime, to which the children always come at 7; breakfast at 7.30. After breakfast ... we got ready to take the children to a special children's service at the Cathedral. The Archdeacon took it, and it consisted of hymns and reading the different accounts of our Lord's sufferings, and finished with the Metrical Litany of the Passion.

Then I took them for a walk to the English cemetery, where we sat in the shade (of a wall, for there are no trees there) and sang hymns; and I brought them back to the Cathedral for 11 o'clock Matins and Sermon.

After that we went home to dinner, and after dinner nearly all went down again to the Cathedral to a special service at 2 o'clock, which consisted of addresses on the Seven Words, by Mr Miles, and hymns.

After that we brought the children home, and they sat in the recreation ground till 5, and were allowed to talk, but quietly. At 5 o'clock we had tea, and at 6.30 Evensong in the Chapel. The Archdeacon gave us a little address. The children kept the silence wonderfully well, considering some of them are quite tiny.

Easter Eve must have come as a great relief to the children: “there was great excitement among them preparing and decorating the Chapel, and getting cards to give to us, and one another.” On Easter morning most were woken by a teacher and some of the older girls singing Easter hymns outside their windows. Communicants among the scholars

32 The President's reaction came later. In May 1872 the Volksraad established a fund for education. The Bishop's words at the Prize Giving were prompted by a decision of the Volksraad in 1877 to refuse assistance to the English Church schools, on the grounds that they would not adopt the educational policy of the State. “Brand and the Executive Council took the view that the request of the English Church schools was a reasonable one and they received a grant in 1878.” Barlow, *Life & Times of President Brand*, p.190.

33 QPBM no.40, April 1878, p.14-18

were taken to the Celebration at 8 o'clock, with all attending other services later in the day.³⁴

Sister Ellinor and Miss Lucas both described the religious life of the School. A young Associate described other parts of the School's routine. She arrived at the Home on the afternoon before the children were due to go away for their holidays. She had not yet found her way around when,

a bell began to ring. Five minutes after it rang a second time, and then began immediately a clattering of feet along the passage; 50 children marching in silence to the refectory for 7 o'clock supper. When they had passed, the Mother and Sisters, and we, all followed. As soon as grace was over and all seated, the 50 tongues were unloosed.

In the morning, the Bishop came to bless the children, before many "started in carts and bullock waggons for their homes, others waited for the next day's coaches." The holiday gave her time to prepare for the teaching she was to do in the new term. "We teach mostly by reading up our subject, and then lecturing the children on it, while they take notes; this is so at least with the seniors." Every day, after morning Chapel, the boarders had breakfast at 7.30. On Fridays and Vigils it was in silence, but other days talking was allowed,

though no shouting across the table, or to those at a distance. At least two of us, and the Second Order Sisters, are present at this breakfast. Then comes bed-making, when silence again prevails, until that business being over, all the children gather in the recreation ground for any amount of fun and frolic. ... During the next half hour, the day scholars arrive, and at 8.45 the school-bell rings, and after short prayers read by Sister Ellinor, and the children's marks taken for morning punctuality, work begins. First a Scripture lesson for half an hour throughout the school, each class having its teacher; then ordinary lessons according to the time-table, the seniors having of course many more subjects than the juniors. At 11.30, a lunch of coffee, bread and butter – sometimes fruit – and while the children get a little fresh air in the garden, the Sisters and those of us that like, go into Chapel for mid-day office. From 12 to 2 work again, then putting away of lesson books, and dressing for dinner at 2.30. From 3 to 4 recreation in the school-room, when one of us is always in charge of the children. ...

³⁴ QPBM no.41, July 1878, p.22

At 4 o'clock in winter one of us takes them for a walk till 5.30, and from that time till supper another has charge in the school-room during silent preparations for the next day's work. In summer the walk and preparation are *vice versa*. [There is a] third recreation, after supper till Compline. After Compline is sung the children stay 10 minutes ... for their private prayers, and then go silently to bed. At 9 p.m. their lights are put out, and at 10 p.m. all other lights in the 'Home'.

All the girls dress in uniform, black and blue, with white Leghorn hats, trimmed with blue, out of doors. Marching to the Cathedral on Sundays, they look most imposing, 50 of all sizes, from 5 to 20 years of age. We only go to the Cathedral for Matins as a rule, all our other services are in the Chapel.³⁵

Another unnamed Associate wrote about "Life at S. Michael's Home" for the Quarterly Paper of October 1880. Life was continuing much as it had before, but the number of pupils had continued to grow.

There are more than seventy boarders now, a great many new ones having arrived after Christmas, ... Eight of us are regularly taking classes in the school now, besides a few who teach occasionally, and two for music and work. ... There are many, living in the Home, who are employed in outside work ...

There are wonderful alterations and improvements now being made, and when they are finished, all will be very charming. The works grew so rapidly that more space was absolutely necessary, and though it has been rather difficult to carry on the school-work through all the noise and dust and unroofing of rooms, we are getting on wonderfully well.

We learn that Bishop Webb came to preach at Evensong in the Home Chapel every Sunday at 6.30 pm, "and a very bright service it is, with a great deal of music. The children wear blue veils, tied over their heads, and hanging down behind, and some fourteen or sixteen, who have been chosen to form the choir, wear white ones, and sing so nicely." The choir gave up forty minutes of their free time to practice on both Saturday and Sunday, and were singing an anthem each week. The writer continued:

35 QPBM no.43, January 1879, p.24-30. The author is not named.

Many more are wanted for 'woman's work' in the Diocese ... We want *ladies*, and ladies who are ready to do anything whatever that has to be done. ... *Individually*, one seems to be doing very little, but 'the Home' is doing a great work. ... Time flies faster than ever it did before, and if those who have promised to go home at the end of three years (one of which is ended) should have to go without leaving more reinforcements from England in their place, it will go hardly with the work.³⁶

The recruitment of staff in Britain to replace those who completed their contracts may have been impeded by some criticisms of the nature of the work being carried out in Bloemfontein. The Quarterly Paper carried a spirited defence of the Home School.

A good deal has already been written in the QUARTERLY PAPER about our School at the Home for the daughters of colonists; that is, as to the arrangements of time, the system on which the girls are taught, and about the life in general at the Home. So that it is by this time clearly understood, by most people, that our girls are white and not black, and that the kind of teaching they receive is, as nearly as possible, similar to that given at an English High Class School. But we are not sure whether our English Associates as clearly understand the motives which caused such a school to be established, and whether some do not still consider that a greater work might be done by the Sisters and ladies of the Home among black women and girls, and that such a work would be more really advancing the Kingdom of God in South Africa. However, one has only to go out there to discover that such an idea is a mistake. One cannot travel about among the isolated farmhouses, or spend any time at the populous Diamond Fields, without acknowledging that the Church's first concern in that country must be her own baptised sons and daughters; and it would be almost an impossibility to hope to be able, in any real way, to bring the influence of Christianity to bear on African tribes while they could point to white men and women leading thoroughly unchristian lives, or could attribute many of their acquired vices to their intercourse with professing Christians.

36 QPBM no.50, October 1880, p.15-17. Italics in original. Also, QPBM no.53, July 1881, p.162-163

The key-note of the work carried out in Bloemfontein in the schools for the sons and daughters of colonists must be the resolve to make each boy or girl who goes forth from them a missionary in word and example, and an endeavour to train them in such a way that in their future homes they may each be a living advertisement of the power of the Church of Christ, and of the influence which civilisation and refinement may gain over untrained and ignorant minds. And then we must not forget the importance of manifesting the power of the Kingdom of God in the sight of the powers of this world. ... During the last School half-year we had in the Home School 85 boarders and about 45 day-scholars, of ages ranging from 3 to 19. Those working in the School make it their object to train these girls – First, in the *duty to God*, as faithful members of His Church; secondly, in their *duty to those around them*, by showing them the advantages of neatness and order in household arrangements, and of politeness and courtesy in their intercourse with others; and thirdly, in the *cultivation of their own minds* by good hard study.

Many of them are prepared for Confirmation and first Communion by the Sisters, and thus receive just the help and counsel they need before going out into the world to fight, sometimes almost single-handedly, against the evil influences around them.³⁷

The criticisms must have been persisting, because Mother Emma found it necessary to address them in an article she wrote for the October 1882 Quarterly Paper. She was in England for medical reasons, but may have been attending some Associates' meetings where she heard questions that indicated "a very vague idea ... as to the *kind* of work which has been undertaken, and is being diligently carried on, at present, by the Sisterhood, and the ladies in connection with it."

Surely to try to educate the heathen and to leave so-called Christians to take care of themselves, would be to begin at the wrong end altogether. Who will be the future mothers and fathers of the country? The very children who are now being educated by the Sisters and other missionaries. The importance of this work of education simply cannot be over-rated ...

37 QPBM no.52, April 1881, p.94-95. Italics in original. The author is not named.

... these children ... may very probably become future missionaries to the heathen of South Africa; nay, in a sense, they *must* be, for they all have more or less intercourse with blacks in their own homes, as servants or labourers; and these servants becoming Christians ... may in their turn influence for good their own relations and friends.

There were about 300 white children in schools of the Sisterhood, in Bloemfontein, Harrismith and Kimberley; in addition there were the schools for half-castes and Blacks; and the Sisterhood had four hospitals (Kimberley, Bloemfontein, Jagersfontein, Barkly West) and a mission house at Thaba 'Nchu. She appealed for financial help – “people in England can hardly realise the amount of income required in that part of South Africa to carry on works such as I have briefly described” – and for more volunteers as teachers and nurses (“twelve nurses are most urgently needed for the Hospital at Kimberley”). She wrote also of the need for more clergy, particularly for Kimberley, where one young clergyman’s health had broken down from over-work after only six months in post.³⁸

An Associate recently returned to England for a time of rest wrote in the same issue of the Quarterly Paper that

there are hopes that we shall not always be so dependent on England for teachers as we are now. Several of the girls who have been educated at the Home are helping to teach at Bloemfontein, Kimberley, and Harrismith, and many are proving to be very good teachers. ... One has thrown herself cordially into teaching at the half-caste school, and this gives us the more pleasure because these poor children, and the blacks too, are generally very much looked down on by the colonists.³⁹

The Community always took a particular pride in one of those St Michael’s girls who served for a time as a pupil teacher in Harrismith, Annie Emmet. She married General Louis Botha, who became the first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa.

The Sisters’ policy of giving a comprehensive academic education to the pupils was put to the test in 1883, when five of the girls were entered for the matriculation examination of Cape Town University. “Most people prophesied total failure, and thought us somewhat presumptuous to send up any girls at all.” The result was “far better than we had hoped

38 QPBM no.58, October 1882, p.193-197

39 QPBM no.39, January 1878, p.199

for”: two of the five candidates passed. The foundations had been laid for a future record of academic excellence.

The financial problems were not easily resolved. Mother Emma had written that the charge made for boarders was not adequate to cover the costs of running the Bloemfontein School, but the situation was about to become a whole lot worse. In 1883,

a great depression of trade throughout the country makes it very difficult for parents to afford to pay for their children’s education. Consequently, instead of a full school, we have, this half-year, barely half our usual number, and in such hard times it is very difficult for us to make both ends meet. It may, any day, become a serious question whether we can afford to keep up our schools, and whether the whole work will not be brought to a standstill for want of funds.⁴⁰ And then, just as we have this possibility weighing upon us, we have to bear a blow, which would have been severely felt under any circumstances – the loss of our Bishop, the founder of our community, and of our school, and with him, possibly, some of the interest taken in our work by friends at home, as also of the contributions in money which have hitherto been bestowed upon us.

There were then only forty boarders and twenty day pupils in the School. Bishop Webb was about to leave for the Diocese of Grahamstown.

Much of what we are doing now, and much of what we may hope to do, depends, under God, upon the goodwill and sympathy of friends in England, and we cannot but hope and trust that now, when our need is greatest, our appeal for help and support will not be made in vain.⁴¹

40 We may perhaps connect the transfer of St Gabriel’s School from the Community to the Cathedral in 1884 with this financial crisis. Apart from providing one teacher, the Sisterhood would no longer have budgetary responsibility for the School.

41 QPBM no.62, October 1883, p.202, 203, 205



Sister Flora with a group of girls and Canon Bate, at Beaconsfield, in about 1913.



Sister Hilda Clare with the motorised bicycle Ezekiel, so named because wherever she went, the wheels went with her – a reference to Ezekiel 1:19.

CHAPTER 6



A GREAT DOOR OPENS ON THE DIAMOND FIELDS

In a dry and seemingly worthless region, traversed by the semi-nomadic Griqua people as seasonal grazing for their cattle, and home to a few widely scattered Dutch farmsteads, diamonds were found. The first “bright, shimmering ‘pebble’” was picked up late in 1866 by Erasmus Jacobs, son of a farmer, while he was playing near the banks of the Orange River and, after its identification several months later, was found to weigh twenty one and a half carats. Numbers of small diamonds were discovered over the next few years, but the event that startled South Africa and completely changed the fortune of the region occurred early in 1869 when a magnificent diamond weighing eighty three carats was picked up off the ground by an African shepherd. News of the find quickly attracted fortune hunters:

The Eastern Cape, Port Elizabeth and small townships in the area were the first on the scene and these places were in consequence partially denuded of the younger members of the population. Sailors deserted their ships in harbour, farmers left their farms, businessmen deserted their shops, and as

the news spread there was a concerted rush of immigrants who came from all over the world.¹

Archdeacon Merriman, on a visitation to Hopetown on the banks of the Orange River early in 1870, saw and heard much about the search for treasure:

Many a waif finds here an outlet for some spasmodic exertion which may enable him to get out of the mire of despondent poverty. I spoke to a young officer who had lost his commission, to a young surgeon with insufficient practice. There are also ex-civil servants who have come to grief in law courts, Boers whose farms are overstocked with owners by the working of our peculiar laws of inheritance, young fellows retrenched by the depression in trade, together with some adventurers who will light on their legs anywhere: about 500 now, but in a year perhaps 5,000. ... I wish we may be able to take the ministrations of religion to them before the time for planting the Church has passed away, and the field of spiritual digging is in other hands.²

The diamond fields lay over one hundred miles west of Bloemfontein. The first Anglican clergyman to visit them was the Revd C. Clulee, Headmaster of the Grammar School, who went across there during his holiday in July 1870. He wrote of what he saw:

After we had passed Jacobsdal we overtook many waggons loaded up to the roof, having Scotch carts fastened behind them and laden with 'cradles', sieves, wheel-barrows, and all kinds of implements for digging and washing.

It was estimated that there were 2,000 diggers in the camp in 1870, and the number rose to 12,000 the following year. The population was constantly shifting from place to place. Only a few got rich, while many more failed.³ Mr Clulee conducted well-attended Church Services at Hopetown, and his efforts were followed by other clergy. The Rev. D. Croghan of Bloemfontein Cathedral and the Revd F. Doxat from Philippolis both visited; the Revd H. Sadler arrived from England; and, in February 1871, the foundation

1 Buss, *The Lure of the Stone*, p.19, and other details from their Chapter 1.

2 Quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.479-480

3 Lewis & Edwards, p.480. Perhaps among the failures was Herbert Rhodes, who in mid-1870 left his farm in the Umkomaas Valley in Natal to try his luck on the diamond diggings. When his younger brother Cecil followed him there in November 1871, Herbert handed over his claims and went back to his farm in Natal.

stone for a temporary church was laid at Klipdrift by Sir Henry Barkly, Governor of the Cape Colony. Klipdrift had become the centre of the digger's activity by June 1870.

Bishop Webb was anxious to visit the diamond fields as soon as possible after his arrival in the Diocese and, within two months, he travelled there in September 1871 with Mr Croghan. Together they addressed public meetings, and secured promises totalling £550 to build a church at Dutoitspan. Afterwards the Bishop wasted no time in appointing clergy to take up permanent residence on the Fields: Mr Doxat was moved from Philippolis and the Revd J.W. Rickards, newly arrived from England, was sent to assist him. On the Feast of the Epiphany 1872, in his Charge to the First Diocesan Synod, Bishop Webb said:

The Diamond-fields, as you are aware, is the point to which, not only commercially and politically, but ecclesiastically also, our interests and anxieties are now principally directed. They present the most hopeful, as well as the most important field of labour, but they make us realize how sadly deficient we are in both men and means.⁴

In September that year, after his fourth visit to the Diamond Fields, Bishop Webb was able to report considerable progress:

At the New Rush evensong was very impressive and hearty, attended by about 800 people. We have now at the Dry Diggings two priests (Doxat and Rickards) and two deacons (Baker and Wright), and a deacon at Klipdrift (Stenson). An African catechist is working under Mr Stenson, and the Black congregation have nearly finished a small chapel for themselves. Mr Stenson has a Sunday school and a day school with 25 boys. A hospital is being built at Klipdrift.⁵

The first hospital was "a small wattle and daub affair" and was replaced in 1873 by a brick building, which was later destroyed by fire.⁶

The Revd William Crisp visited the Fields in 1872 "with a view of aiding the African work there" [he was fluent in the SeTswana language], and returned in June 1873 for

4 BDA, Charge delivered to the First Diocesan Synod, p.18

5 Quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.482. Bishop Webb had moved the Revd H. Sadler to Zeerust in the Transvaal, per Crisp, p.28. The Revd J.W. Rickards gave the name of St Cyprian to the church at New Rush. He had previously been Curate of St Cyprian's, Marylebone, in London. Crisp, p.24-25

6 Buss, *The Lure of the Stone*, p.21-22

a stay of almost two months. After the latter occasion, he wrote an account for the Quarterly Paper:

Remembering what one saw at the Dry Diggings last year, one could not help being struck with the very different state of things they now present. Du Toit's Pan Camp has very much decreased. The continuance of fortune attending the Colesberg Koppie at the New Rush, has drawn the majority of people thither ...

But it is in the dwellings of the diggers that one sees the change. The tents and shanties of last year have for the most part given place to neat little villas, built of wood, iron, or canvas stretchings, many of them with verandahs and enclosed with neat reed fencing. Here and there brick cottages have been erected; and within, solid furniture and every appliance of European comfort make one forget that three years ago one saw 30 or 40 waggons and tents occupying the ground where so many thousands are now living amid substantial comforts.

Du Toit's Pan Church has been enlarged ... Very handsome new choir stalls have been erected, and a powerful harmonium purchased. Subscriptions have been set on foot for replacing the canvas sides of the church with brick walls, raising the roof and putting in a wooden floor.

Last year the Africans at Du Toit's Pan were using a tent which formerly had been intended for the Zambesi Mission, but disaster after disaster befell this...⁷

The black congregation had been started by an Independent preacher and asked to be admitted to the "English Church" in Holy Week 1872. The tent they were given had been sent out from England for Bishop Mackenzie to use in Central Africa, but arrived in Cape Town after his death. Mr Doxat reported,

The work prospered, but the tent has been most unprosperous. Made in England, it was more fitted for a cricket tent than for the boisterous weather we have here! Bit by bit it fell to pieces till we were worshipping in a rag

7 QPOFSM, no.24, April 1874. A Visit to the Diamond Fields, p.6-7

shanty. Nothing daunted, our Africans began collecting for a new building. It is substantial ...⁸

The United Kingdom annexed the Diamond Fields in October 1871, snatching the area from the powerless and impoverished Orange Free State republic, and created the colony of Griqualand West. The Lieutenant Governor was given the task of finding a better name for the New Rush camp that was growing up on the farm Vooruitzicht. Neither of those names was considered suitable. In July 1873 the name Kimberley was promulgated, in honour of the Colonial Secretary in London, the Earl of Kimberley.

In January 1876, Bishop Webb returned from a visit to England bringing many new recruits for the Diocese, including two priests whom he sent to Kimberley, the Revd Charles Maude and the Revd N. Borton. Maude described his first impressions in a letter for the *Quarterly*:

It is always difficult for us to make out what a place is like, when it is quite different from anything we have ever seen. The town is put down in the middle of a vast plain, covered with a scanty green which they call grass; but it is more like a weed, than grass. This plain stretches for miles and miles, and in some directions is only bounded by the horizon. It is more like a camp than a town, as we nearly all live in tents, like an army encamping out. Mr Borton and I have a canvas house for our sitting-room, and a wooden one for our bedroom. They are both very small, but they are now very comfortable.

Our floors are made of bricks, burnt hard in the sun; but these are very soft, and the legs of our beds, and of the chest of drawers, soon make holes in them. ...

The church in Kimberley, which is called St Cyprian's, is not equal to our parish church in Leeds! In the first place it has only a mud floor, so it is very dusty. Then, too, it is a very low building; and as it has an iron roof, in the rainy season the clergyman has often to give up the service, as he cannot be heard, for the rattling of the rain.

They had a surpliced choir of boys and men and a full choral service, "only, no anthems". On Sunday evenings the church was crowded – it held about 400 – and because of

8 January 1873 *Quarterly Paper*, quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.482

the lack of other buildings the church was used also for the Sunday school and for a day school.

We bought a canvas house, the other day, for our school-master. You would have laughed, if you had seen me helping to move it from its old site to our own ground! A friend of mine lent me his black men to assist; and about fifty of these picked up the house, and carried it on their shoulders, about a quarter of a mile, to its new destination. I walked along *inside* the house ... I had never *walked off with a house* before...!

No building on 'the Fields' has a storey to it: the winds, at some seasons, are very strong, and would blow a high building over.

Mr Maude gave the population of the camp as about 6,000 white people and 10,000 coloured, and he remarked on the high cost of living.

Nearly all the things have to come from the coast, which is 450 miles off; and as they mostly come in waggons drawn by oxen, which take six weeks, or more, to get here, a shilling pot of jam is worth two shillings, by the time it comes into our hands.⁹

While Maude and Borton, together with the remainder of the party accompanying Bishop Webb were still "afar off upon the sea", some notes written and revised by the Bishop were published in the January 1876 issue of the *Quarterly*, and informed readers that the Bishop had "already been in communication with Canon Doxat, with a view to the commencement of some nursing work, under a Sister and an Associate of our Community, at the Diggings."¹⁰

Concerns about health on the Diamond Fields had been raised as early as September 1871 by Dr W.G. Atherstone.¹¹ The pursuit of quick wealth had blinded men on the camps to the need for adequate sanitation in a region where water was in short supply. Typhoid was an early visitor. Many of the diggers who had come out from Europe were ill-prepared

9 QPBM, no.34, October 1876, pages 36, 37. Italics in the original. Three years later, the very strong winds he mentioned demolished a new iron St Cyprian's which had been shipped out from England and was under construction, intended to be ready for use at Christmas 1879. "Those who saw it said that it was lifted three feet off the ground, and dropped, a pile of ruins, utterly shapeless, like a street of children's card-houses." Letter from Mrs Maude dated 11 December 1879, in QPBM no.47, January 1880.

10 QPBM, no.31, January 1876. Afar off upon the sea.

11 Dr William Guybon Atherstone from Grahamstown, a London-trained medical practitioner with an interest in geology, in March 1867 identified as a diamond the stone found by Erasmus Jacobs some months earlier.

for the harsh climate, and proved very susceptible to the fever. In addition, the number of men working in confined spaces in the four hundred and fifty separate working claims of New Rush resulted in accidents and injuries as the mines deepened. Late in 1872 a hospital was constructed beside the road running between Du Toit's Pan and New Rush. Known as the Diggers Central Hospital, care was provided free of charge to diggers and their African labourers.¹²

When Sister Henrietta visited that hospital in 1876, she found it to be "in a terrible state." She wrote,

A fire destroyed the first building, just after it was completed; so the present one (which was hastily run up to take its place) is wholly inadequate to the number of patients. Eighteen men are put into a room which would scarcely hold six, conveniently. They have very narrow beds, with only one thin mattress; there are no quilts, no lockers (unless a few boxes can be so called) no screens, no pictures, no books, except a few old volumes, which are kept in the pantry – not a table nor a chair! There is no mortuary; the dead are put out under the verandah, in the veldt, (for there is no enclosure) until they can be buried. The floor is bare earth. There are never less than six urgent cases, waiting for a vacant bed. ...

This was the *white* ward; there is no need to tell you about the tent where the *coloured* people are.¹³

Sister Henrietta had been taken to Kimberley by Bishop Webb, who wanted to make "a survey, if only a hasty one, of the work and its needs."¹⁴ The Bishop had been away from the Diocese for over a year. They left Bloemfontein on 31 March, 1876, and reached Kimberley three days later, where they stayed at the Governor's House. It would appear that there had been some previous communications between the Bishop and the Governor (probably conducted through Canon Doxat during the Bishop's absence in Britain) on the subject of providing nurses, because discussions began the morning after their arrival. Before the day was over, "the Governor had undertaken to build new wards and a house,

12 For a description of the increasing health problems and the steps taken to deal with these, see Buss, *The Lure of the Stone*, chapter 2.

13 QPBM, no.33, July 1876. Letter from Sister Henrietta

14 QPBM, no.33, July 1876. Letter from the Bishop, dated 6 April, 1876

and to furnish both, if we would provide the Nurses; and the bishop had accepted his offer, on condition of board and lodging being supplied to us.”¹⁵

It was agreed that the nurses would be under the direction of the doctors as to their hospital duties but in all other respects under the authority of the Bishop. They would not interfere with the religious views of the patients and would render their services to all patients without distinction. The nurses would work without remuneration but with their costs of travelling and board and lodging paid by the Government.¹⁶

Sister Henrietta told of the immediate steps being taken to implement the agreement.

The present arrangement is that Nurses, a House-keeper, and a Lady Visitor, shall live there, and that they shall be, from time to time, under the personal supervision of a Sister.

The order for furniture, and for the necessary appliances in the wards, has already been sent to England; and the Griqualand West Government has already sent money to pay for them. A site has been chosen, almost adjoining the old Hospital; a grant of money for building has been made, and plans are now laid before the Governor. We are hoping to be at work there in the beginning of August.¹⁷

Wasting no time, Bishop Webb wrote from Government House, Kimberley, on 6 April, 1876, for publication in the next issue of the *Quarterly Paper*. He referred first to the need for more clergy:

The supply is not yet in any way proportionate to the opportunities and requirements of the place. A new church and school are urgently needed.

Then he gave his exciting news:

I must confine myself, however, today, to *one* piece of work, for His glory, which God has put into our hands.

A great door has been opened here, in a wonderful way, for ‘Women’s Work’. When I came here, I found Major Lanyon, the Administrator of

15 As footnote 13

16 Loots and Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in South Africa*, p.35

17 QPBM, no.33, July 1876. Letter from Sr Henrietta

Government, exceedingly anxious about the Hospital. Indeed, pitiable accounts had reached us of the want of nurses, and neglect of the sick. The Government wished also to establish a ward for *paying* patients.

Having brought these ladies out, and hoping and trusting that *more* will come, I offered to take charge of this ward; and the offer has been most thankfully accepted. So about three months hence, when the ward is built, we shall begin, please God, this department of our 'Women's Work' ... It will test the loyalty, devotion, patience, and skill, of our workers ... I do not think we can spare even one 'Sister', as yet, to reside here; only to take charge at first, and supervise, from time to time, afterwards. ...

Oh! If you hear of a good lady-nurse, well-trained, or handy, and ready to act under obedience, beg her to come! There is room, and work, and need, here for six or seven. One more good trained nurse, we require *at once*. ...

It will be a wonderful *preaching of the Gospel*, in the midst of earthly-mindedness!¹⁸

Sister Henrietta's letter in the same issue of the *Quarterly Paper*, already quoted, showed her looking forward to taking over the new ward and bringing a better standard of care to Kimberley.

The Government, with a liberal hand, will give all that is *necessary*; ... But it is from *individuals* that we must beg the *little* things which go so far to make pain endurable: flower seeds, that we may have something pretty and gay, which does not require too much care or water, around the verandah; pictures and illuminations (framed) to hang on the walls; books, to beguile the weary hours of convalescence, ... small religious photographs and prints, and a good strong scrapbook or two, to paste them in; old linen for dressings ... A small set of Altar vessels, and linen; a portable Altar, so that the sick and dying may have the Holy Sacrament in decency and in order; some little Church furniture too, that we may have a small Oratory, to spare us the weary walk through the dust and heat, to the Church, which is, I think, a mile and a half distant, and that we may have a place of refreshment and soothing at hand, when our bodies and

18 QPBM, no.33, July 1876. Italics in the original.

minds are exhausted by toil, and by the disappointments that *will* come!
I would also ask for a pall, for the decent covering of the Hospital dead.

In her modesty and reserve, she did not mention that “she no sooner got there, than she was sent for, to nurse a case of fever. One poor English lady ... at the sixteenth day of the fever, and had no-one to come near her or nurse her, but her husband and brother in law.” The lady died.¹⁹

Sister Henrietta observed that the open door invited other work apart from the Hospital nursing.

I have said nothing of two other great needs at the Fields, because the Bishop sees no way at present of supplying the want; but I cannot pass them over in silence. One is a Day-School for girls of the middle class; and the other is a Penitentiary, chiefly for very young European girls. Nurses to attend the sick in their own houses, are also very much needed.

Forgive me if I have spoken too freely. I do not know if you have seen the Fields, but I am eager with the thought of their terrible need. I was only there for four days, but I saw many a sad sight, and heard a terrible tale of suffering.²⁰

19 QPBM, no.33, July 1876. An unnamed Associate's Letter

20 QPBM, no.33, July 1876. Letter from Sr Henrietta



Sister Louisa, wearing her decoration of the Royal Red Cross awarded by Queen Victoria in 1884.



Sister Henrietta (Stockdale) CSM&AA, pioneer of professional nursing in South Africa.



Sister Henrietta as Matron with two nurses in the grounds of Kimberley Hospital, early 1890s.

CHAPTER 7



KIMBERLEY HOSPITAL, SISTER HENRIETTA, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF NURSING

I have not yet got into the new Hospital. It is such a nice building; the best in the camp; cool and airy. Some delay in sending out the furniture from England is keeping us all back. However, the Governor is going to lend us some of his own furniture, so I shall live in the Hospital, with two lay-sisters, doing *general* nursing, until we can open it.¹

Sister Henrietta, accompanied by Nurse Spencer and Miss Sendall, had gone to the Diamond Fields towards the end of September 1876,² and were disappointed at the delay. The time was not lost because Dr James Prince, a Canadian-born American citizen who had been in Kimberley since 1873, asked for the assistance of Sister Henrietta in home

1 QPBM no.35, January 1877. Letter from Sr Henrietta

2 Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in South Africa*, p.37. The White Book entry is vague on the date: 1876 - "Before the year was out, the Community had begun work ..." Rosa Spencer and Ellinor Sendall arrived from England in June 1876 as Associates. FSA, White Book I, vol.i, 1876

nursing. Over the next months he instructed her in midwifery, for which there was a great need at the time. The Hospital may have been her base but the work necessitated spending most of her time away from there.

For some months she lived in the wretched homes of the poorer sort of people in the Camp; and the discomforts and hardships and actual suffering she then endured while nursing the poor women in their confinements used to make my heart ache as I listened to her tales of them. Many of the things she suffered could not be told here, but in one case the people were so poor that there was not sufficient food for her and she would have been thankful to have had even enough bread – she suffered real hunger. In all cases she had to do the whole work of the house as well as nurse the mother and care for the baby – look after the other children, cook their food, clean the place, etc., etc. After some months of this severe work, Sister Henrietta had broken down with an attack of fever, so that it had to come to an end. But she had gained a thorough knowledge of maternity work as well as an experience which she never forgot.³

We may assume that Nurse Spencer and Miss Sendall also were occupied in district nursing until their return to Bloemfontein to be admitted as Novices of the Community, on 25 November and 26 December 1876, respectively.

Sister Henrietta's letter published in the January 1877 Quarterly Paper must have been written some time during the months she was engaged on home midwifery duties, but she did not mention any of those difficult circumstances. She was more concerned about the suffering of others.

Five mothers of families died last week. One of them had been deserted by her husband, and left 7 children behind her without a shilling in the house. There is no Poor-Law here. A doctor came to fetch me, to lay her out, but I was unfortunately ill myself, with a touch of fever, so he gave 5/- to a coloured woman to do it. Then she went away, and the children went and sat outside the tent for the remainder of the night.

Apart from that case, readers learned only more general information. She found the heat trying:

3 G.A. Hodgson, in Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.145

I cannot go to Church here, except in winter. The earliest service is Mattins, at 7.30, by which time it is really unsafe, on account of the heat, to walk the mile and a half, from Hospital to Church: besides which, it prevents your doing any other work during the day. No white umbrella is sufficient protection. The men who go out in the sun, which they avoid if possible, wear a high pith helmet, coming down like a coal-heaver's at the back, and with a wide brim in front, and mostly covered with a 'puggaree'. ... No women go out until sun-down. The burning fine sand nearly ankle-deep, adds very much to the pain of walking, and 'working women' such as we are, who must keep their tempers, have to avoid a three miles' walk.

Notwithstanding the heat, I like Kimberley very much, and am sure that I shall like it more and more. I cannot tell you the kindness and consideration with which I am everywhere treated ...

I am glad to have this unsettled time, as it helps me to know the people a little: but I need your prayers.⁴

When Bishop Webb informed the Association in England in April 1876 about his agreement with the Governor of Griqualand West, he wrote that the Sisterhood would be supplying nurses for a ward which was to be built within the next few months. Sister Henrietta's letter published in January 1877 refers to "the new hospital", and an undated newspaper report quoted in Buss's *The Lure of the Stone* informed readers that the hospital had only recently opened. We highlight this because other sources indicate that the Carnarvon Hospital had already been completed before Governor Lanyon approached Bishop Webb for assistance in supplying nurses. As noted in our previous chapter, the Diggers Central Hospital had been constructed in 1872. After extensive research, Dr Searle wrote,

as increasing pressure was being put on the Administration for hospital facilities for paying patients, the Government in 1874 erected a Provincial Hospital next to the Diggers Central Hospital. It had 14 beds. The hospital was built of mud bricks protected against weathering by a galvanised iron sheath. It was later enlarged and renamed the Carnarvon Hospital.⁵

4 QPBM no.35, January 1877. Letter from Sr Henrietta.

5 Searle, *History of the Development of Nursing in South Africa*, p.139. Also N. Kretzmar, On the Diamond Fields Around Kimberley, in *S.A. Medical Journal*, 30 September 1972, p.1448, but this author may be quoting Dr Searle, whose work is listed in his Bibliography.

It was suggested during the meetings held in April 1876 that the Community should take responsibility for nursing in the already existing wards, as Sister Henrietta revealed:

... when the Governor offered us the old Hospital, we were not strong enough (i.e. there were not trained workers enough) to take it; and now (other arrangements having been made) we must wait.⁶

Bishop Webb realised that he would be stretching his infant Community to supply nurses for even one ward: a Sister would start the work and supervise, but could not be spared to live there. By agreeing to staff a small new building, he could ensure that the task was not larger than could be managed at the time.

The sources disagree also about the staffing. The Community's Chronicler wrote for 1877:

In January Sister Henrietta began the nursing work in Kimberley. With her, Sister Louisa, Misses Robinson, Thackwaite, Heale (Associates) and Miss Homan. Towards the end of January, Sister Rosa joined them, and early in March, Sister Sarah arrived.⁷

The entry is less precise than it appears because the next line tells that St Cyprian's School was opened the same month, and some of those ladies would have been assigned to School and not Hospital duties. Loots and Vermaak state that Sister Louisa, Miss Robinson and Miss Homan staffed the School, while Dr Searle has Sister Louisa as Matron of the Carnarvon Hospital, doing "yeoman work" in bringing order by her efficient management for two years until 1879, with Sister Henrietta as her assistant from January 1877.⁸ Both Sisters were still Novices at the time. Although Sister Henrietta was the senior in Community, Sister Louisa was a fully trained nurse with much greater experience. The hospital nursing began as a work of the Sisterhood, rather than that of any one individual. It is possible that after Sister Henrietta's return to Bloemfontein, Sister Louisa was given oversight of both of the Community's works in Kimberley, the Hospital and the School.

6 As footnote 1. The 'old' hospital was in fact not more than five years old.

7 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i

8 Searle, p.140. See White Book I, vol.ii, 1909, where a newspaper obituary states that Sr Louisa went to Kimberley in 1877 as first Principal of the School, "and took an active interest, with Sr Henrietta, in the establishment of Kimberley Hospital."

In March 1877, the new Carnarvon Hospital opened with a capacity for eight paying patients. It was immediately much appreciated. The Revd William Crisp went to help the clergy of Kimberley for Holy Week and Easter that year and wrote afterwards,

It is impossible to underrate the blessing of such a place of refuge on the Diamond Fields. In time past, when men fell ill, they were often deserted by their servants, and unless some kind friend or neighbour came to their aid, were left to die alone. ... Here, they have the benefit of skilled nursing; they are housed in pretty, well-ventilated rooms ... a bright, well-furnished room is set apart for their use during convalescence, while the whole is sufficiently removed from the Camp, to be free from the bustle and clatter which pervade the streets. At present the work is a new one, and, I fear, taxes the Sisters' strength; but as they go on, it will naturally become more stereotyped, and so make less demands upon them.

He visited also the Free Hospital, "a very nice iron building" close beside the Carnarvon, with its two wards, both fully occupied. "The nursing ... is necessarily inferior to that at the Carnarvon but the Matron is a kindhearted, hard-working woman, who takes great interest in her charges."

One of the great steps upward is the fact of a Celebration of Holy Communion 3 times a week, in the Sisters' Oratory at the Hospital. It is necessarily a very early one, at 6.15 a.m.; for the convicts come to sweep the Hospital at 7. It is not always easy to be there in time; and indeed, the priest at Du Toit's Pan, who celebrates on Thursdays (on which day there is also a celebration at St Cyprian's) has to walk a good two miles up hill, before he gets there. But the benefit repays all exertion; and indeed I hope the time is not far distant, when Daily Celebration will be established on the Fields.⁹

Sister Henrietta returned to Bloemfontein on 5 April, 1877, unwell. During the months when she had been engaged on district nursing, living in the same conditions as many of the town's poorer inhabitants, she had contracted "Camp Fever", the ever-present typhoid. Hearing of this from her brother (who was in Kimberley at the time), Bishop Webb summoned her to the Mother House to recover. She made her Profession there on

9 QPBM no.38, October 1877

11 June, and on 22 June left for England. It had been decided that she should go home to her family to recover her strength.¹⁰

Home was a Vicarage in Nottinghamshire, where Sister Henrietta's father, the Revd Henry Stockdale, was Vicar of Clayworth, a small village some six miles west of the town of Gainsborough. The family had been in that area for all of Henrietta's life: although they moved several times, each place was within five or six miles of the others. She was born at Gringley on the Hill on 9 July, 1847, while her father was Rector of Misterton. When she was ten years old, he was presented to the living of Bole, and in 1873 he moved to Clayworth. Henrietta was the first child in a family of two girls and three boys, all born within five years. An intelligent child, she was noted as serious-minded and a little old for her age: a characteristic that was probably encouraged by her being the eldest and having some responsibility towards her younger siblings. Brought up with religious discipline and a strong sense of duty, 1863 was a significant year in her life. At the age of fifteen, she was Confirmed by Bishop Jackson of Lincoln on 22 March. That same month, Bishop Edward Twells visited a nearby parish in the course of promotional work he was doing before sailing out to take up his appointment as the first Bishop of the Orange River Mission. Mr Stockdale was invited to go to meet the Bishop and he took Henrietta and one of her cousins with him. Seeing and hearing Bishop Twells fired Henrietta's missionary enthusiasm, and she began to pray and to raise funds for the Mission. When Bishop Twells was in England in 1867 to attend the first Lambeth Conference, he travelled widely speaking about the Mission and enrolling members for the newly-formed Orange Free State Mission Association. He visited the Stockdales and enrolled Henrietta as an Associate. A young woman by then, Henrietta was "above the average height, she was largely made, but she was so upright it prevented her looking clumsy; she had a pleasant voice and a good complexion, and fine dark brown hair." Henrietta was an enthusiastic Associate, doing all she could to spread the word about the Mission, and it is not surprising that Bishop Webb went to meet her before he left for the Free State. The following year, the Revd Henry Bevan visited, and encouraged Henrietta's youngest brother, then eighteen years old, to go out with him to the Mission farm at Modderpoort. Henrietta had already expressed an interest in herself going to the Free State, but it was another three years before she received a clear call. Then she was invited to join a group of Mission workers who were to travel out

10 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.26; Buss, *Lure of the Stone*, p.55, 59. The White Book states that she "sailed" for England on the 22nd, in which case she must have left Bloemfontein almost immediately after Profession. If "one of the Sisters" who described the opening of St Michael's Chapel was Sr Henrietta, then she left between the ceremonies on Monday 11 June and the following Sunday. QPBM no.38, Oct, 1877

with Archdeacon Croghan in the spring of 1874. To prepare for the work she would be doing, the Archdeacon directed her to the Clewer Hospital of the Community of St John the Baptist, who had offered to train young women for the Free State Mission. Henrietta stayed there for some months and then went on to the Children's Hospital in Great Ormond Street, London, for further training. At that stage she had no intention of joining the new Community of Sisters.¹¹

It was as Sister Henrietta CSM&AA that she arrived in her father's parish on an August evening in 1877, to an enthusiastic welcome. "It was an unusual thing in those days for the inhabitants of a village to see a Sister among them; a great many had never seen one before."¹² After regaining her good health, she spent some months at University College Hospital in London to acquire more training and experience. There she worked under the direction of the All Saints Sisters of the Poor, who held responsibility for all the nursing at that Hospital from 1862 to 1899. Sister Henrietta had probably made contact with the All Saints Sisters on her way to England, when she passed through Cape Town: their Branch House in that city was opened in 1876.¹³ For her return voyage, Sister Henrietta sailed from Southampton in May 1878, accompanied by an aspirant for the Community, Miss Frances Harcourt-Vernon, another daughter of a Vicarage. They arrived in Bloemfontein on 28 June.¹⁴ Sister Henrietta had been away for just over one year.

She had not been out of contact with the work during that time and, in a letter she wrote in England for the April 1878 issue of the *Quarterly Paper*, quoted correspondence she had received from Miss Williams and Miss Heale. It had been a very happy year for the Hospital in Kimberley,

beginning with large grants from the Griqualand West Government, for buildings and furniture, no harassing debts or grasping mortgages have swallowed up the money as it came in. Full wards and regular fees have each week shown more plainly what could be done, and what ought not to be attempted. ... it was almost self-supporting. Miss [Sarah] Williams, who is in charge of the House, writes very happily about it, and, indeed, she has good reason to do so, for it must have required much careful management. ... As a reward, we are to have the great luxury of a boarded

11 These details are all from Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, pp.1-20

12 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.27

13 Mayhew, *All Saints: Birth and Growth of a Community*, p.109-11, and p.153

14 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 28 June 1878

floor instead of only mud, and the garden is to be enclosed with a stone wall, which will keep out the goats.

The chief complaints that had been treated were rheumatism and inflammation of the lungs, but there had been fifteen deaths in nine months. Miss Heale (an Associate) had written during the Kimberley summer, when the temperature was 110 degrees Fahrenheit in the shade and fever was raging in the camp, leading to the deaths of many children. The Governor had asked Bishop Webb to send two more nurses, one to take charge of the African Hospital. "We are very anxious to begin this as soon as possible," wrote Sister Henrietta, explaining,

A good African ward has lately been added to the Hospital, standing a little apart, but in the same compound; and it seems as if we ought to be able to do something towards civilising and helping the Africans if we have twenty-five always with us dependent upon us, and something towards softening and Christianising them too; if we can surround them for a few weeks of sickness with some words of hope, some signs that we are members of one family, and that we share alike in the love of a Father and a Saviour.¹⁵

On her return from England, Sister Henrietta was given charge of the newly-opened St George's Cottage Hospital in Bloemfontein, situated just to the south of St Michael's Home in Markgraaf Street. It was a "pretty, airy little Hospital", as she described it in a letter written while on duty one night in November, "sitting close to the kitchen fire, to try and escape from the chilliness of very early morning." She observed that Bloemfontein had grown in the year she had been away, making "nurses more of a necessity, and we have our hands full."¹⁶

Others had to respond to that need, because in March 1879 Sister Henrietta was sent back to the Carnarvon Hospital in Kimberley. "They tell me that I am only here for three months," she wrote, "still I hope and hope on that I may stay. ... The Bishop really only sent me here because the Hospital must have been given up if he hadn't, but he hopes a nurse will be out from England in June who will undertake it permanently. I hope she won't."¹⁷ Bishop Webb may have been reluctant to send Sister Henrietta back to Kimberley because of her previous experience of contracting typhoid after just

15 QPBM no.40, April 1878, p.12,13

16 QPBM no.43, January 1879

17 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.57, and quoted by Buss, *The Lure of the Stone*, p.59

a few months' service in the town. The necessity arose in 1879 because the Bishop had been asked to send nurses to an emergency military hospital set up for troops during the Zulu War. The shortage of personnel meant that Mother Emma led the party herself, and Sister Louisa and Miss Potts had to be withdrawn from their work in Kimberley. Miss Margaret Langlands, an Associate who had been on the point of returning to England after three years' voluntary service, went with them. Miss Sarah Williams, the trained nurse and Associate who had been in charge at the Carnarvon since April 1877, had probably already left. She had arrived in Bloemfontein from England on 24 February, 1876, and had completed her agreed term of three years.¹⁸

Records do not tell us if the nurse arrived from England, but we learn that Sister Henrietta was confirmed in post as Sister in Charge. Miss G.A. Hodgson, two months after her arrival in Bloemfontein, and having been admitted as a Postulant of the Community,¹⁹ was sent at the end of April to work under Sister Henrietta, and for the next three years was "off and on" a member of the staff. She described the Carnarvon Hospital in her *Reminiscences of Hospital Work in Kimberley*. Apart from the Sister-in-Charge there were three nurses, two for day and one for night duty.

There was another, rather larger Hospital, also supported by the Government, for patients, black and white, who could not pay; we called it the 'General Hospital'. Sister Henrietta had no control over that; ... but the two Hospitals were in the same compound and had the same resident Medical Officer. ... The Carnarvon Hospital had a paid cook and one servant, an African constable; but all the rest of the work, inside and outside, was done by black convicts supplied by the Government, and invaluable they were. ... The only drawback was that at 5 p.m. the whole party of convicts was marched off back to the gaol by the native constables in charge, and until 7 a.m. next day we had no helpers in the wards nor anywhere else.

As a building it had many advantages. ... it was well ventilated and cool – for Kimberley. It was covered with beautiful creepers and had a raised, wide stoep, or verandah, all along the front; and there was a garden with flowers – Sister always loved flowers supremely – really beautiful flowers,

18 Miss Williams later took charge of the nursing staff at Jagersfontein. QPBM no.55, Jan 1882, p.41

19 She was admitted as a Postulant on 8 March, 1879. FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i.

moon-flowers, four o'clocks, marigolds, zinnias and others, and, besides, a hedge of great aloes around the drive in front.

After writing about the “squalid and insanitary” Camp, devoid of beauty because “in the early days of the ‘rush’ to the mines every tree had been cut down for firewood,” and of her respect for and friendship with Sister Henrietta, Miss Hodgson continued by outlining some of the difficulties of the work. Chief among those was that,

The Hospital was much too small for the number of patients who wanted to be admitted. There were only nine beds – four double wards and one single – but there were often eleven or twelve patients in the Hospital. Sister Henrietta could not bear to refuse an urgent case, and would never do so if by any expedient she could make room for another. And so, often – and more and more often as time went on and the hot season began when enteric fever and dysentery became rife in the Camp – beds were made up for convalescents on the floor of their sitting room so that their wards could be given to fresh cases. The night nurse shared a bedroom with one of the day nurses – *a la* Box and Cox – and I myself have slept on a couch in Sister Henrietta’s room and dressed in her office so that another patient could be admitted. ... Of course, all this enormously increased the work; only patients extremely ill could be taken in, and there were times when by night or day we ‘could hardly sit down for five minutes at a time.’²⁰

Sister Henrietta did her best to impress upon the authorities the urgency of enlarging the Hospital, and had great hopes that it would soon be accomplished. On the Feast of the Visitation (31 May), 1879, she wrote:

only last night it was arranged that the Hospital should be made three times its present size. The people here are so delightful; I happened to say rather casually one day, that we ought to have a good-sized room for the Chapel, and they are actually going to build us a proper one, standing out by itself, and joined to the main building by a passage; we are to have a nurses’ quarter and a doctor’s room, so that the Sister in charge will have her sitting-room to herself altogether, beside all sorts of luxuries in the way

20 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.141-147

of storerooms, and linen cupboards, and ward sculleries. I have got such a famous staff, and we are all so happy together.²¹

Her enthusiasm proved to be premature because a variety of difficulties cropped up between the Hospital's Board of Management and the Government. No doubt financial considerations played a large part in delaying the planned extensions, but we may note also that the territory was undergoing a change in political administration. Major William Owen Lanyon, who had taken a close personal interest in the provision of hospital services, had been succeeded as Lieutenant Governor in March 1879 by James Rose Innes. Innes's appointment was intended to be short-term, because the Parliament of the Cape of Good Hope Colony had passed an Act in July 1877 agreeing to incorporate Griqualand West into its territory. In October 1880 the separate Colony ceased to exist, and political and financial control was transferred from London and Kimberley to Cape Town.

Ever resourceful, early in 1880 Sister Henrietta rented a small iron house nearby to use as a Nurses' home, so freeing up their rooms in the Hospital to accommodate extra patients. This arrangement worked well for the day nurses, but those on night duty found their rooms too hot for sleeping in the middle of the day. The pressures told on Sister Henrietta's health, and that April she was recalled to the Mother House for an extended rest. She stayed there until October 1880, and at one time thought of not returning to the Hospital. "But after all I believe my heart is there," she wrote in July.²² While she was in Bloemfontein, the Government of the Transvaal wrote to Bishop Webb regarding a hospital they were planning to build in Pretoria: they made a special request that Sister Henrietta should go to start the work. She was willing to go, but Bishop Webb and Mother Emma did not agree.²³ It was the second time that Bishop Webb had declined to send Sisters to the Transvaal, and with good cause: Pretoria had become the seat of a separate Diocese in 1878. He may also have been thinking about a discussion he had with Sister Henrietta some months earlier.

Sister Henrietta had been developing some ideas for the future, which she had outlined to Bishop Webb while he was on a visit to Kimberley in December 1879. He put them to the Mission Association in a letter for the *Quarterly Paper*.

21 QPBM, no.46, October 1879

22 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.147; p.58

23 Hodgson, *Reminiscences of Hospital Work in Kimberley*, in Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.148

She would be glad of the help both of a thoroughly trained nurse and also of young ladies who wished to be trained, and who would come as *probationers*. She says: 'I think the great difficulty which the nurses here have to contend with is their long hours of work, in this climate it is harder than elsewhere to be in the bad air of a small ward for many consecutive hours. Our day nurses are on duty thirteen hours every day; one night nurse eleven hours. When the hospital is enlarged, I much hope that each nurse may undertake half as many again of the number of patients than at present, but in that case she must have a probationer under her. This will keep both fully employed in the morning and evening, but each will have the alternate afternoon to herself for rest or exercise. It will also enable us to go to Church oftener, which, to say the least, is much to be desired.'²⁴

Late in 1880, a "sufficiently large and very nicely planned wing" was added to the Hospital, providing a room for convalescents, a dispensary (until that time the dispensary was a cupboard in a passage way), a scullery and new wards, raising the capacity to seventeen beds. Even that was not enough for the summer of 1880-81, "a fearfully unhealthy one – enteric and dysentery raging in the Camp. The number of deaths was extraordinarily high." Sister Henrietta wrote of the labour, fatigue and anxiety suffered by the nurses.

One nurse frequently has five or six bad fever patients to attend to ... perhaps three delirious patients in different rooms, each of whom she is ordered to feed every hour and to keep in a recumbent position, notwithstanding their restlessness. Our space being so cramped, only the severest cases are admitted; and several, who are now very ill, would have had only a slight illness could they have been taken in when they first applied for a bed. Two deaths lately would have been avoided, humanly speaking, had the patients been sooner taken into the hospital.

There were accident cases also, as Miss Hodgson told:

... on Christmas Eve [1880] a poor young fellow was brought in dreadfully smashed in some accident in the mine, and only lived a few hours.

24 QPBM, no.47, January 1880, p.18-19. Letter from the Bishop dated 11 December 1879

Loving care was given to all.

Sister Henrietta always made a rule of being present when any patient was dying, and saying the last prayers by the bedside, and again and again she had to be called up at night to perform this sad duty.²⁵

Overworked and over-tired, Sister Henrietta had to take to her bed in March 1881 with a severe attack of jaundice. After about a month she was well enough to travel to Bloemfontein and then to her brother's farm in the Free State, to convalesce. She did not return directly to her duties at Kimberley but, accompanied by novice Sister Emily Mary, went to Barkly West, on the banks of the Vaal River. In the first days of the diamond rush, this village had been known as Klipdrift, and it was there that the first hospital had been erected in 1872. Rebuilt the following year, it had been abandoned when most of the diggers turned their attention to Bultfontein, Dutoitspan and New Rush. Sister Henrietta had a plan in mind.

I went there in June, and found the old hospital, which Canon Doxat used as a school,²⁶ in a very wretched condition, the Clergy had been living in a few rooms and leaving the others. Every one leaked, there was not a floor you could traverse safely at night without a candle, the walls were plains of dust, of stains, of broken plaster, the chimnies had fallen, the garden wall was down, and the whole place fast becoming a ruin. It was some time before I could get leave to do anything, as the Bishop thought it rather a doubtful experiment, but at last he gave his consent to our trying to make the place habitable.

Sister Henrietta headed for Kimberley, twenty-five miles to the south east, and started begging for money.

I collected £400 in a few days (I asked for £300), and then I began buying, and after that was done I went back to Barkly. Then began the real tug of war, for no workmen could be got, a Zulu and I really did all the house. We found a Cape boy to do the floors, and the daily beseeching him to work, sending him to his work, seeking him on the many occasions when

25 QPBM, no.51, January 1881; Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in SA*, p.88; Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.148-149

26 Canon Doxat left in 1878, unable to shake off the effects of fever. Lewis & Edwards, p.482-483

he went off into the country for a trip, and persuading him to do the house room by room, instead of having all the floors up at once, was the severest task we had. The ladies in the village were very good in helping us to sew, and by degrees we got things done. I had a very good [recipe] for distemper for the wall given me, and although I was some time learning to mix the colours, we got it pretty fair at last.

It is a most excellent house, the Government (from whom we have it on a lease) are now putting the roof and all the outside into perfect order, and it is full of convalescents, and has been ever since we could take them in. There are eleven beds only, as we thought it better to make a few thoroughly comfortable than to crowd many, a good sized entrance-hall, furnished, and a very large dining-hall, a lovely verandah, overlooking the great flood of the Vaal River, and very fair offices. There is a connecting door between the dining-hall and our wing, which has a charming little sitting-room with three lancet windows and an arched doorway, two nice little bedrooms, and a small oratory.

We have been receiving visitors, as we call them, for a month [she wrote on September 8th], and it is the most delightful thing to see pallid skeletons from Kimberley getting rosy and fat and strong in the course of a few days. We want it to be especially useful to ladies and children, we charge £5 a week, and I think it will be nearly if not quite self-supporting.²⁷

On her return to Kimberley a few days before writing that letter, Sister Henrietta was sorry to find one of the doctors amongst the patients, “with that low muttering typhoid, which seems to sap away all the strength. I shall be grieved if we lose him. The very painful character of the fever here seems to strike one afresh coming from the hopeful, joyous work at Barkly.”

The incorporation of Griqualand West into the Cape Colony led to changes that were to be of great significance for the development of nursing, not only in Kimberley but throughout the region. The Cape Government did not favour maintaining two separate hospitals in Kimberley, and appointed a single Hospital Board with the brief of amalgamating the two. The Board included some of the most influential citizens of Kimberley, among them Mr Cecil Rhodes and Dr Starr Jameson, then still practising as a surgeon. In November 1882,

27 QPBM, no.55, January 1882

the Diggers' Central and the Carnarvon Hospitals were merged to create the Kimberley Hospital. Sister Henrietta CSM&AA was appointed Matron of the combined Hospital. "The official bed capacity for the two hospitals was 51 beds (Diggers 35 and Carnarvon 16) but the daily average occupancy was steadily rising. For this small number of beds the Government contracted with the Community of St Michael and All Angels for a staff of 20 Sisters and nurses."²⁸ In fact, new wards were already under construction to increase the patient capacity and all those nurses would be needed. "The east-wing has just been completed, providing accommodation for upwards of forty patients," reported *The Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette* on 28 December 1882. The reporter noted, "One thing which struck me forcibly was the long hours the Sister-in-Charge and nurses are at work daily. From 7.30 a.m. to 9 p.m. is, I venture to say, too much, but at present it is unavoidable, owing to the nursing staff being too small."²⁹ The Hospital continued to grow. With new wings being added to the Hospital, an increase in the number of nurses was required and in July 1882 Bishop Webb had appealed for "at least eight more."³⁰

In February 1883, Sister Henrietta described the expanded Hospital.

We always have more than a hundred patients here, of whom a large proportion are suffering from accidents. We have also of course every possible nationality and creed, and terrible confusion of tongues. We seldom have less than twenty different languages going on at the same time [an interpreter was kept on the staff] ... We now have capital buildings, almost all the wards are new, they have been thoroughly well and carefully built, and there are good rooms too for the nursing staff, and fair rooms for the officers of the Board, and greatly increased accommodation in every way – wide airy passages, long cool verandahs, large dispensaries, drug-stores, kitchens, stewards' offices and stores, sculleries, and so on. It makes the work lighter and better in many ways, although there is more to keep clean.³¹

2,399 patients were admitted in 1886, and in February 1887, Sister Henrietta gave the number of beds as 172, with an average daily occupancy of 164. By 1888 there were over

28 Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p.141. The contract included money, and we presume that nurses were now to be paid.

29 Quoted in Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in SA*, p.94-95

30 QPBM, no.57, July 1882

31 QPBM, no.60, April 1883, p.89. Letter dated 12 February 1883

300 beds with daily average of 255 patients, and a staff of 42 nurses.³² It was by then the largest hospital in South Africa.

1883 was the year in which the first medical consultants were appointed and major surgical work became a feature of the Hospital.³³ It was also the year in which the first probationers were admitted for training as nurses.³⁴ Sister Henrietta had put forward the idea in December 1879, but only now did circumstances permit a start to be made. It became the first training school for nurses in South Africa.

Initially the course lasted for one year, followed by a practical year as staff nurse, but later the programme was extended. In 1889 the sixteen probationers were receiving a very sound course of training both in the wards and by the use of professional books and lectures. Lectures were given by the Senior House Surgeon and Dr John Mackenzie as well as by Sister Henrietta. These took place during the cooler months and in the first year covered various subjects such as anatomy, elementary physiology, practical nursing, surgery and sick cookery. Lectures were given according to the syllabus of the British Nurses' Association, and were followed by examinations at the end of the probationary year. Sister Henrietta reported to the Board,

When a pupil has been a full year she is expected to take a staff nurse's work, but her instruction still goes on, and she has a second examination towards the end of that time, and she is expected to write careful and accurate reports of her work. At the end of three years, if the nurse does well a certificate is given; the nurse becomes a member of the British Nurses' Association and if she wishes to do so enters her name on the register.

During the year 1889, thirty new pupil nurses joined the staff, of whom twelve had been born in South Africa while the remainder had arrived from Britain in order to be trained. Dr Searle observed,

Special attention was given to ethical instruction. Sister Henrietta personally conducted the 'talks' with the nurses, not only in regard to professional conduct and practice, but also in regard to moral values in general. Her nurses had to be 'ladies' in every sense of the word and

32 QPBM, no.76, April 1887, p.89; Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p.141; Kretzmar, On the Diamond Fields around Kimberley, *S.A. Medical Journal*, p.1450

33 Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p.141

34 Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in SA*, p.97

God-fearing women above all else. She advocated that sympathy in nursing was not enough. Empathy and absolute professional honesty were the key to good nursing. She gave regular talks on the social problems to be found in health work, and advised on how to deal with these, thus introducing the study of the social sciences into the curriculum in a very practical manner.

The Senior House Surgeon reported that he could not speak too highly of the work done by the nurses and of their behaviour in the wards. "Having worked here for over two-and-a-half years and had considerable hospital experience in England of all kinds, I can only say that never have I seen work more honestly and cheerfully done, or greater nursing knowledge and ability shown."³⁵

Kimberley-trained nurses acquired a reputation for excellence, and came to be in demand throughout South Africa. Sister Henrietta was asked to supply Matrons and staff for other Hospitals. "The matrons at Queenstown Frontier Hospital, and at the Barberton Hospital, de Kaap Goldfields, and the Pretoria Private Nursing Institute were all entirely trained in the Kimberley Hospital and they are working their own hospitals on the system in vogue here and in connection with the British Nurses' Association."³⁶ Before they left Kimberley, Sister Henrietta extracted a promise from each of these new Matrons that they would train pupil nurses, and by the end of the century a Kimberley-trained Matron or sister was associated with each of the eighteen hospitals entering nurses for the examinations of the Colonial Medical Council.³⁷

In 1889 Sir Henry Loch was appointed Governor of the Cape Colony and British High Commissioner for South Africa. His wife reflected some years later,

It is difficult to express in adequate words all I feel about Sister Henrietta of Kimberley and her magnificent life work in S. Africa. It was soon after our arrival in December, 1889, my husband heard from Mr Rhodes, Dr Sir Starr Jameson, Mrs J.B. Currey, Bishop Gaul, then Rector of Kimberley, and many others, of the strong character of Sister Henrietta, who trained matrons and nurses for all parts of S. Africa, and we heard when travelling about the country, these nurses were an unfailing influence for good, always showing that remarkable power and capability derived from their teacher.³⁸

35 Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p.141-143

36 Sr Henrietta, quoted by Searle, op cit, p.142

37 Searle, op cit, p.143

38 Lady Loch, in Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.42

Lady Loch and Sister Henrietta became personal friends, visiting one another and exchanging letters for the remainder of the Sister's life.

The British Nurses' Association, whose syllabus Sister Henrietta was following in 1889, was a new body established as recently as 1887 through the determination of Mrs Bedford Fenwick. As Miss Ethel Manson she had been Matron of St Bartholomew's Hospital in London, and had married a wealthy and well-connected medical practitioner, Dr Bedford Fenwick. Together they devoted their talents and energy to the development of nursing into a formally registered profession. The idea of state registration had been floated a few years previously as a means of introducing a common standard for training. It met with considerable opposition from the medical profession in Britain and also from the most influential nurse of the time, Miss Florence Nightingale. The fame she and her nurses had achieved through their work in the Crimean War had led many hospitals to adopt her methods of training, but Miss Nightingale considered that the professional competence of nurses could not be assessed by examinations. Undeterred by this opposition, Mrs Bedford Fenwick used her connections to persuade Her Royal Highness Princess Christian, the third daughter of Queen Victoria, to support and become President of the proposed British Nurses' Association. The inaugural meeting was held on 10 December, 1887. The Princess attended and spoke at the second meeting two months later. With Sir Joseph Lister and other leading doctors present and consenting to serve on its Executive Committee, the Association was launched very successfully. Its aim was to establish nursing as a properly trained and recognised profession. In 1891 Queen Victoria accorded the prefix "Royal" to its title.³⁹

Sister Henrietta appears to have been in touch with these developments from their beginning. They supported her own views on the training of nurses as professionals. She considered that such training should belong within the educational system of the country, on the same lines and with the same status as teacher training. In her view, the best way to achieve this was by having a system of state certification and a register of duly qualified nurses.⁴⁰

Sister Henrietta was aware that the Legislative Assembly of the self-governing Cape Colony had appointed a Select Committee to look into the reform of the existing medical laws. That Committee had been set up under the chairmanship of

39 Searle, *op cit*, p.160-161. Princess Christian was known as Princess Helena of the United Kingdom until she married Prince Christian of Schleswig-Holstein. She was very active in charitable work in Britain.

40 Charlotte Searle, *Nursing is the Concern of All Citizens*, The Henrietta Stockdale Memorial Lecture, 1984, *Curationis* 8(2).

Dr W. G. Atherstone of Grahamstown, a medical practitioner and an elected member of the Assembly. Included in their brief was the question of whether midwives should be registered along with other practitioners but, after consultations, the Committee decided that no such provision should be made in the new Act.

Meanwhile, Sister Henrietta had started her efforts to enlist the support of doctors to have both midwives and nurses included. A Resident Surgeon of the Kimberley Hospital, Dr Gerald Callender, joined with her in calling a meeting of nurses to discuss the developments taking place in Britain. The meeting was held on 17 July 1888, and was addressed by both of them. Dr Callender spoke of the rapid changes that were taking place in the medical profession. By “profession” he meant not only the doctors but also the nurses. He said, “There is no medical man of the present day but will acknowledge, if he be honest, that he owes many of his best cases of recovery to good nursing.” He continued by speaking in favour of the registration of nurses, and urged his hearers to join the British Nurses’ Association.⁴¹ Sister Henrietta’s membership card for the Association is in the Library of the University of the Free State.⁴²

Not all the medical practitioners in the Cape of Good Hope agreed that nurses and midwives should be registered: as in the United Kingdom there was opposition. Sister Henrietta was never deterred by difficulties, and she realised that the proposed new Act was an opportunity not to be missed. She tackled Dr Atherstone directly by going to see him, and took him to task for not insisting that midwives should be properly trained and registered.

Take a look at the calendar, Sir, we are on the threshold of the 20th Century and you put proposals like this. We must move forward. This country needs properly trained and qualified midwives, intelligent women who are able to lay the foundation for a healthy nation, who can help solve the many social problems which we find threatening family life at present. Sir! I expect you to do your duty by the women of this country and to press for State Registration of midwives, and whilst you are about that, please remember the interests of the nurses as well.

41 His speech is quoted by Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p. 162

42 UFS, HSC, 1/2/B42

Dr Atherstone subsequently told a friend that Sister Henrietta put “hot thumb-screws” on him. He was persuaded.⁴³

It was not the end of the Sister’s campaigning. She travelled to Cape Town to enlist the support of Sister Mary Agatha of the All Saints Community, Matron of the New Somerset Hospital. They already knew one another and had consulted over the training of nurses. Having become Matron in 1885, Sister Mary Agatha admitted her first group of student nurses the following year. As Matrons of large Hospitals in the principal towns of the Colony, the two Sisters had a wide range of influential contacts.⁴⁴ Those were followed up diligently by letters and personal visits.

Members of the Cape Town Parliament received the 1890 Report of Kimberley Hospital, in which Sister Henrietta took the opportunity to write about the desirability of a recognised legal standard for the training and certification of nurses, so that there could be “the same protection given both to employers and employed that can be claimed for other professions.”⁴⁵ When Members contacted her, Sister Henrietta spelt out her meaning more clearly. Gradually not only the majority of the medical profession, but many others also came around to her support. The final success of the campaign in the Legislative Assembly is usually attributed to Dr Atherstone, as Chairman of the Select Committee, and Dr Matthews, another practitioner Member, but it is right also to mention Mr Cecil Rhodes. He knew Sister Henrietta from Kimberley and greatly respected her work. As Prime Minister of the Cape of Good Hope from 1890, he was in office when the Medical and Pharmacy Act was passed in 1891.

Act No.34 was promulgated on 21 August, 1891, to make provision for the Licensing and Registration of Medical Practitioners, Apothecaries, Dentists, Chemists and Druggists, Midwives and Nurses. Under the provisions of the Act, the Colonial Medical Council was constituted to oversee standards and to grant certificates of competence. Nurses who had completed a training course of not less than two years or who had a recognised certificate could register. Dr Charlotte Searle included in her *History of the Development of Nursing in South Africa* a list of the twenty-two nurses who registered on the first day

43 This incident is related by Searle, op cit, p.103

44 Searle, op cit, p.150, 163; Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in SA*, p.112. See also Norman Levy: Somerset Hospital: South Africa’s Oldest Hospital, in *South African Medical Journal*, 100 (6), June 2010. Peter Mayhew, in his book, *All Saints: Birth and Growth of a Community*, mentions Sister Helen being sent to nurse for that Community at the Somerset Hospital (p.140), and in his section dealing with their work in South Africa tells briefly of Sisters visiting in the Old and New Somerset Hospital (p.157), but does not record that four All Saints Sisters served successively as Matron, and five as Ward Sisters, over a period of twenty-four years. See Searle, op cit, p.149-151

45 Searle, op cit, p.163

available, 6 September 1892. Two members of CSM&AA were among them, Sister Henrietta herself and also Sister Louisa Jane. Fifteen of the nurses had received training at the Kimberley Hospital under Sister Henrietta. These twenty-two became the first State Registered Nurses in the world.⁴⁶

Achieving the State Registration of Nurses in the Cape Colony in advance of any other country stands as Sister Henrietta's greatest accomplishment. The Royal British Nurses' Association awarded her its Gold Medal of Merit in 1892, and took encouragement for its own campaign in the United Kingdom. It was not until 1902 that the United Kingdom Parliament passed an Act for the registration of Midwives, and only in 1919 was the State Registration of Nurses enacted in Britain.⁴⁷

While all that was going on, the regular work of the Hospital was continuing as normal. Sister Henrietta's practice was to visit every ward both morning and evening, and to speak with as many of the patients as possible. Her understanding was holistic: that physical, social, moral and religious welfare were all bound up together. On one of her visits to England, someone asked if she tried to help the souls of her patients as well as their bodies. Her reply was instant, "Why, yes, or we might just as well nurse a lot of broken-down old horses."⁴⁸ The nursing was the responsibility of the Sisterhood, but the Sisters were greatly outnumbered. She wrote,

While two or three Sisters work here the rest of the staff is composed of ladies helping us, either coming from home, or joining us in this country. In the great strain on nerves and bodily strength which such a work as this involves the true *raison d'être* of our work here is sometimes difficult to keep prominently before us. But we have to thank God for permitting about twenty baptisms here in the last six months, and there are many who leave us for whom we may cherish a comfortable hope. We have all peoples, nations, and languages to deal with. ... A Lutheran Missionary Magazine, published in Berlin a few months ago, gave an account of the baptism and death of an African on the Limpopo; the African said he first heard the Gospel story in the Kimberley Hospital.⁴⁹

46 Searle, op cit, p.166, 167

47 Searle, op cit, p.161

48 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.30

49 QPBM, no.76, April 1887, p.89-90

The care of the nurses fell to the Matron's charge. The Hospital had expanded quickly and while the facilities for patients had improved greatly, the conditions for staff were lagging behind. J.R. Booth, in his history of the Hospital, wrote that in 1887, "the accommodation for the nurses was of the poorest description, and it speaks well for their loyalty that they had carried on in discomfort for so long without complaint."⁵⁰ That year, Sister Henrietta proposed to the Hospital Board that the Oratory should be converted into four bedrooms as a temporary measure while a new nurses' home was built, and that a new Chapel should be constructed also. With their agreement, she launched a public appeal for funds to commence the new buildings. The mining companies and many private individuals responded generously. The archives contain letters from the well-known Kimberley citizens C.D. Rudd, C.J. Rhodes and Alfred Beit, who all sent donations.⁵¹ "Sister Henrietta had great power of getting money," wrote Lady Loch, "as she was so trusted, and all knew she never asked but for a great need."⁵² The new Chapel, under the patronage of St Michael the Archangel, was completed in time to be dedicated on the Feast of St Michael and All Angels, 29 September, 1887. The new nurses' home was completed the following year.

We have a brief description of the hospital and nurses' quarters as they were in 1890. Nurses Rose Blennerhassett and Lucy Sleeman travelled out from England early that year in response to a call for nurses in Johannesburg, where a typhoid epidemic was raging. They found the conditions there to be very bad and "moved heaven and earth to escape from the place. ... After much correspondence, the doors of Kimberley Hospital were opened to us."

The Hospital is rather a rambling place. The part devoted to European patients, nurses' dining-room, kitchen, and offices, formed a long low bungalow set in the midst of pleasant grounds. Close at hand, but scattered irregularly over a large compound, were the African wards – surgical, medical, women, and lock⁵³ – each at some distance from the other. The nurses' home was a building apart. The nurses' rooms were built around a flowery quadrangle. Each nurse possessed a little cell, which opened on a shady verandah, or 'stoep' as it is called in Africa.

50 J.R. Booth, *Care of the Sick*, quoted in Buss, *The Lure of the Stone*, p.92

51 UFS, HSC, 1/2/B5 and 1/2/B6. From Mr Rudd's letter we learn that De Beers Company had recently built a hospital in its compound to serve its African workers, with the aim of relieving pressure on Kimberley Hospital.

52 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.45

53 Presumably a locked ward, but note *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 5th Edition: "lock, 7. (*Also L- Hospital*) hospital for venereal disease."

Setting aside the nursing work, I believe few hospitals in London could compete successfully with the commissariat of Kimberley Hospital. The seclusion and austere respectability of this institution afforded a welcome change after the shiftless scramble of the Johannesburg Home.

They stayed only six months in Kimberley,

then the work began to tell on me. I was the night superintendent, and had to go from ward to ward in all weathers. I was often wet through, and of course had to remain wet until morning. The compound was large and unlit. Here and there were large holes, which after rain were filled with water. Into these holes one invariably stumbled when in a hurry. Apart from this, continuous night duty does not suit all constitutions.

The two nurses decided to go home to England but, after missing their train from Kimberley, received a telegram inviting them to meet with Bishop Knight Bruce, who persuaded them to join his new mission to Mashonaland.⁵⁴

With the success of the nurses' training school, more qualified nurses became available, and Sister Henrietta reported to the Hospital Board in 1889 that a staff of private nurses for nursing the sick in their own homes had been established in connection with the Hospital. They were sent out not only into Kimberley but all over the Colony, travelling far and wide. Seven in number, they worked under the Matron but paid for their board and lodging so that they were no expense to the Hospital.⁵⁵

Perhaps we should connect with this the provision of nurses for Robben Island. The All Saints Sisters of the Poor in Cape Town were asked in 1891 to go to the island to help with leper work, but they declined. The Governors' wife, Lady Loch, recalled,

When the Government at the Cape took charge in 1891 of about 500 lepers on Robben Island, Sister Henrietta was invited to go over, taking two or three nurses, and leaving them there in charge of the wards for the sick. She went several times herself, as we know now, with no fear of the possibility of catching the illness – in those days it was thought there was some risk – and we all admired her example. The work was well taken

54 Blennerhassett & Sleeman, *Adventures in Mashonaland*, p.12, 21-22, 24, 30. The Blennerhassett Family Tree on-line says that they joined CSM&AA. They did not and their connection was at Kimberley.

55 Searle, op cit, p.143

up by her devoted nurses, but after about eighteen months or two years, they had to give up the work, as the poor lepers objected so much to being washed twice a day, also to the comfortable beds. When dying, they used to slip out of their beds on to the floor, this being more in accordance with their memory of Black homes and the friends they loved.

In August 1892, Sister Henrietta rushed down on the train from Kimberley: "I got such urgent letters from Robben Island that I could only come down here and see about it." It was, as she noted, a round trip of 1300 miles.⁵⁶ There were few volunteers to do this hard work. Appealing for eight more nurses immediately, Sister Henrietta cautioned that no one should take up work amongst the lepers lightly. "Alas! if any Nurse came out to them and forgot Who it was Who did not fear to touch a leper, and that he was her own Master."⁵⁷ The records we have seen do not record the exact date when Sister Henrietta's nurses withdrew. In 1910, at the request of the Government and the Archbishop, All Saints Sisters went to the island to work in a home for Black and Coloured young lepers between the ages of five and fifteen, and stayed until 1922.⁵⁸

"Sister Henrietta had a most beautiful face, and such a bright laugh and smile, and was much beloved by the patients at Kimberley, and yet they were afraid to disobey any rule she made." Lady Loch's observation chimes in with some remarks from Dr Jameson, who thought highly of Sister Henrietta but was aware of some faults. She was, he said,

arresting in appearance and masterful in temperament. Unsparing of her own energy, she demanded the same devotion from her nurses, and was perhaps too precise a disciplinarian to be entirely popular.⁵⁹

One of her rules was that all the nurses should be present at Compline in the Chapel at 9 p.m. every day. She was concerned to keep the religious tone of the work: the nursing continued to be under the auspices of the Community although, as we have noted, there were usually only two or three Sisters resident.

The religious custom of providing a fish diet on Fridays was one of the criticisms of Sister Henrietta's management of the Hospital made by a former resident medical officer, and published in the medical press in 1894. He alleged also that she was controlling other

56 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.44, 66

57 KCL - The Isle of Lepers, in *The Nursing Record*, IX (238), October 1892, page 863

58 Peter Mayhew, *All Saints*, p.159-160. The Sisters of Bethany also were asked to go to Robben Island, in 1913, but the outbreak of War caused the plans to be cancelled. www.sistersofbethany.org.uk/history

59 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.44; Jameson is quoted by Buss, *The Lure of the Stone*, p.97

departments in addition to her own; that she had sole control of expenditure on nursing; that she kept the register of cases; and took upon herself to decide when the condition of patients was such as to necessitate the summoning of friends to the bedside. Each of the charges was answered. Meat had always been available for those who did not like fish, and from then on every patient would be given a choice; the Hospital Committee had officers in charge of each department; the finance for nursing was through the Sisterhood and was independently audited annually; the register of cases was kept normally by the Secretary but Sister Henrietta had helped her during a few very busy months only; and because of the great distances from Kimberley at which many friends and relatives lived, the Hospital Board considered that the discretion of when to call them should remain with the Sister in Charge. "We discovered that [the assertions] savoured strongly of personal feeling," wrote *The Nursing Record*, "conveying to Sister Henrietta heartfelt sympathy and unabated admiration for the great example which she has always been to the members of her profession."⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the charges stung, and we may perhaps link them to developments a few months later.

On November 24, 1894, the Community's Chapter assembled in Bloemfontein to consider the question of whether to retire from the nursing work at Kimberley Hospital. Sister Henrietta travelled across for the meeting. The Chronicler made an unusually long entry in the White Book.

The Warden (Canon Holbech) explained to the Sisters that it had been and was more likely to be difficult to send a sufficient number of Sisters to the Hospital to keep it as a Sisterhood work; but that the chief reason for retirement was that the circumstances of the Kimberley Hospital had changed so much since the Sisters undertook the work that it was difficult to keep on the work on the lines then laid down, and that it was advisable to retire before that difficulty became too great a strain on the Sisterhood. He said he had asked counsel of the Bishop and of Archdeacon Gaul [Rector of Kimberley] on the subject and both thought that under present circumstances it was advisable. Sister Henrietta expressed her opinion that since the Sisterhood Nursing Staff could not under existing arrangements in the Hospital continue to work in ways essential to its efficiency as a Sisterhood Work it was best to retire, though personally she should leave the work with great regret.

60 KCL, Nursing Echoes, in *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, XIII (335), Sept.1, 1894, p.136-137

The Chapter agreed unanimously that they should leave the Hospital, but that the private nursing should be continued under the auspices of the Community. Six months' notice, effective from the end of December, would be given to the Hospital, giving adequate time for the appointment of a new Matron. That timetable worked in well with the Community's plan to take back the use of St Michael's Home in Kimberley when its lease as a school to Miss Woods expired at the end of June 1895. The building would then become St Michael's Home for Nurses, the base for district nursing.⁶¹

From the Mother House, Sister Henrietta wrote to next day to a friend, telling her of the changes.

There is much that makes me very sad, but still there is much to be thankful for that we can lay down our work when it is done, and let others go on with it and do their share. I shall never again have such a congenial life and work; but I am glad to have had eighteen years at it. ... I shall be much freer in some ways, and not have, I do hope, such very hard work, late and early as the Hospital is.⁶²

The Chairman of the Hospital Board wrote a letter to Sister Henrietta after she had completed the handover, expressing their "entire satisfaction" with the manner in which she had discharged "the onerous and exhausting duties" entrusted to her as Matron. He continued,

The Board desires to recognise the singular efficiency with which you have presided over the nursing department of the hospital, and the rare energy, self-denial, self-control and kindness, which have marked your course in a very difficult and responsible position.⁶³

One of the ten nurses who transferred with Sister Henrietta to St Michael's Home was Miss Mary Hirst Watkins, eldest sister of Dr Arnold Hirst Watkins, a Visiting Surgeon at Kimberley Hospital. She had been a teacher in England until in her forties she decided to train as a nurse. It was her brother's suggestion that took her to Kimberley, where she became a probationer under Sister Henrietta. Continuing at the Hospital after qualifying in 1887, she trained as a Midwife and in 1893 passed the examinations and was registered

61 FSA. A510, White Book I, vol.i, November 24, 1894

62 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.67, letter written on 25 November 1894. The recipient is not named.

63 The text of the letter is given by Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p.145

by the Colonial Medical Council. Sister Henrietta asked her to take on the training of midwives at the Hospital. Dr Searle described her as “an inspired teacher of midwifery”. A devout Christian, she became a close friend and confidant of Sister Henrietta, and it was a natural step for her to move from the Hospital to the new Home. Her midwifery work continued, and St Michael’s Home became established as another training school.

St Michael’s Home was not far from the railway station, “at the corner of De Beers Road, a dusty corner and a noisy situation, but the house inside is cleanliness and peace itself.”⁶⁴ From that Home, “a vigorous system of District Nursing is carried on among the poor white and coloured populations,” wrote Sister Frances Louisa, “and is the means of bringing many into touch with higher things.” In addition, there was a staff of private nurses who went out to paying patients in all parts of South Africa, “often involving very arduous and difficult travelling.”⁶⁵

The outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War broke that pattern for a few years. Hostilities began on 12 October 1899. Within two days Kimberley was under siege. The telegraph wires and railway to Cape Town were cut on the 14th, and the next day the railway lines to the north were partly torn up. Boer forces captured the pumping station and cut the water supply. Martial Law was declared in Kimberley, and no-one was permitted to be outdoors between 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. While some people were “considerably astonished” (in Dr Ashe’s words) by the turn of events, others had been preparing for the worst and had either laid in stocks of tinned and dried food or evacuated their families. Mr Cecil Rhodes, who had returned to Kimberley on the 10th October, managed to get a message through to High Commissioner Milner at the Cape on the 17th, urging the rapid relief of Kimberley. Few people expected the siege to be prolonged.

“It is so hard to wait day after day expecting relief and day after day to pass without getting it,” wrote Sister Henrietta on the twenty-second day.

The strain tells on one as the days go on. There are more cross words and offences taken in the house in a day now, than we generally had in a month. I pity the nurses in enforced idleness very much; few people can afford to have a nurse now. All the richer people have gone, and our country cases, of course, are out of reach. We are not wanted for the wounded at present, as they all go to the hospital.

64 Rolleston, *Yeoman Service*, p.132

65 HPRA Wits, 2644/81, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.22

Shelling began on 11 November and continued intermittently for seven days.

One of our Sisters was going home one day from Church when there had been no shelling for some hours, when someone screamed out: 'Look out, forward, forward!' She flung herself forward, and the shell whizzed past just behind her. Poor thing! Her nerves were quite shattered for a day or two.⁶⁶

Dr Oliver Ashe, a surgeon at the Hospital with private patients in the town, described his anxiety:

All the time this shelling was going on it was rather nervous work seeing one's patients in the part of the town where most of the shells were falling. Most of them came from the same direction, and if you were on foot when a gun went off, you had plenty of time and knew just where to shelter; but driving about was different, as you did not hear the gun, the rattle of the cart deadening the sound.⁶⁷

Food began to be in short supply and rationing was introduced. "Our work is ruined, but I think we shall be free of debt," wrote Sister Henrietta on 12 December. They had endured no real troubles until that time, although keeping house was difficult. That was the day when news leaked through that a relief column of British troops advancing from the south had been routed with heavy losses at Magersfontein and forced to retreat. Rumours circulated that the British plan was to evacuate all women, children, and non-essential men and then to leave the town to its fate. It caused an uproar. The railway company gave notice of some arrangements although there had been no official announcement. "If I have to leave I shall most likely come straight home," wrote Sister Henrietta to her mother. The military problem was the length of railway that would need to be defended. Dr Ashe expressed his frustration:

The authorities saw there was a choice of two things – either to bring up food to Kimberley or take Kimberley to the food, ... Naturally, being officials, the wrong thing seemed right to them, and they seem to have decided to take

66 Diary during the War, Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.121, 123

67 Ashe, *Besieged by the Boers*, p.42

Kimberley to the food. ... Oh, it was a foolish notion, and the very mention of compulsion got the people's backs up.⁶⁸

All necessities were rationed – including bread, milk, meat, flour, sugar, tea and coffee. Vegetables became very scarce. As the beef supply ran out, horse meat was substituted. “I fear we get more donkey and mule now than horse,” wrote Sister Henrietta on January 29, “but I dish it up and no one asks any questions.” At St Michael's Home in January 1900 they were feeding six extra people on their allowances. A good friend helped, coming twice a week.

Mr Rhodes has been a great help; he brought £50 with him one day when he called, and he has both brought and sent beautiful fruit and vegetables. Three times he has brought us two onions, and I can't say what they were worth ... The peaches and grapes and plums and apples have been worth more than gold to us. ... It is very kind of Mr Rhodes, for he must have plenty to think of.

De Beers Mining Company had its own vegetable gardens and cattle. They kept the Hospital supplied with fresh milk, and sent good quantities to the Benevolent Society for free distribution among the sick and poor. De Beers made enormous quantities of soup every day, to be served hot in the market houses and townships.

The buyer pays for his quarter pound of meat which is in each pint of soup, and Mr Rhodes gives vegetables, thickening, flavouring, water, fuel, labour, etc.

Sister Henrietta went one day to see it being made by a team of about twenty men.

Mr Rhodes came while we were there, and we sat down under the trees and had half-an-hour's talk, a most unusual thing.⁶⁹

The enforced idleness of St Michael's Nurses did not last.

After Christmas there was a great call upon all our resources, but often in houses where food was so scarce I was terrified for them, and the hospital

68 Ashe, *Besieged by the Boers*, p.77, 78

69 Diary during the War, Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.130-133

became so full that many sent to us who would not otherwise have thought of having a private nurse. At last, too, so many hospital nurses were ill that we had to send all we could spare to help there.⁷⁰

Our brave district nurses ... went about their work all day regardless of danger. I used to feel thankful when one after another they came safe home again. One had to throw herself on her face in the road as the horrible thing flew over her and exploded in front of her. Another was washing a baby when a shell exploded in a room next to her and killed a man. Two others were at work in a house when one fell close in front and burrowed 8ft deep in the macadamised road.⁷¹

Sister Henrietta's nurses "did all the nursing in Kimberley that was done outside the Civil Hospital during the siege, and they displayed remarkable courage," wrote Lady Rolleston, "in many cases going to their patients through shot and shell when everyone else was taking shelter."⁷²

The shelling intensified and on January 24 Sister Henrietta recorded that two shells had fallen about 150 yards from the Home; one had landed on Nazareth House, the Catholic orphanage; and one close to the Hospital. Dr Ashe reflected,

It is not altogether a question of fear, but the knowledge that wherever you are, a shell may drop on you at any moment, and that you have to do your work all the same, does not much exhilarate you.⁷³

After five awful and unnerving days of shelling with hundred-pounders, on Sunday, 11 February all twenty-two residents vacated St Michael's Home and went to a laager for safety. They found their first night "really intolerable". The Civil Commissioner allowed them to sleep on the verandah of his house nearby. The shelling was causing many casualties, and the Hospital sent to Sister Henrietta "for all the nurses I can spare." On Tuesday she and the district nurses went back home: the nurses "were getting quite worn out with the extra walking, alfresco meals and bad sleep." Sister Catherine and Miss C. stayed where they were: they were "dreadfully frightened." Shells were still falling all

70 KCL, Sr Henrietta, Notes on Nursing in War Time, *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, XXV (645), Aug 11, 1900, p.118-119

71 KCL, Sr Henrietta, Notes on Nursing in War Time, *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, XXV (644), Aug 4, 1900, p.100

72 Rolleston, *Yeoman Service*, p.132

73 Ashe, *Besieged by the Boers*, p.132

around on Thursday morning, 15 February, but at about 5.30 that afternoon General French's relief column rode into the town.⁷⁴ The siege was over.

As soon as the railway south was reconnected, Sister Catherine joined the many residents who went away for a break after their four-month ordeal. Sister Henrietta, Sister Louisa and the Home's nurses had immediate duties to attend to. The military authorities had asked for assistance. Sister Henrietta wrote in her diary,

After all the deadly dullness of the siege, especially latterly, when we never thought or talked of anything but getting a little more food, I am terribly rushed with work. We have undertaken three temporary Hospitals of 300 beds amongst them, and as all sorts of things have to be referred to me, I am incessantly on the go. When this is over, nearly all the nurses are leaving; some are tired and some are cross and some want to go home, and I am sure I don't wonder. Dead donkey and old horse and brown bread are not very nourishing. It is a great mercy we are having cooler weather; the awful heat of the last four months has increased everyone's sufferings so; indeed, there is hardly a young child left in Kimberley.⁷⁵

Together with other temporary hospitals, one thousand beds were prepared for troops suffering from injuries or typhoid. Dr Searle noted that because of the number of trained staff, and their experience in dealing with typhoid, the military death rate in Kimberley was substantially lower than in other places.⁷⁶ No sooner were Sister Henrietta's three hospitals arranged, than she received a note from Lord Methuen asking her to undertake also the nursing of wounded Boer prisoners of war, taken when General Cronje surrendered after the battle of Paardeberg. Lord Roberts had refused to lend some of his doctors to tend Boers wounded in the main fighting on Sunday 18 February and, because the surrender did not take place until 27 February, their "ghastly wounds" had not been touched for a fortnight by the time they had been transported to Kimberley. Initially split between St Mary's Hall of the Catholic Convent and an old skating rink, the 155 prisoners had to lie on folded blankets on the floor because no bedsteads or mattresses were available. After about three weeks the majority were well enough to

74 Diary during the War, Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.131-137. The nurses would have had extra walking because nearly all the cabs had stopped, for want of forage for the horses. (Ashe, op cit, p.110)

75 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.68-69. Taking blacks and whites together, the death rate among children amounted to about 160 per 1,000 during the last two or three weeks of the siege. Sickness at the Seat of War, in *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, XXIV (626), p.249

76 Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p.198

be transported to Simonstown in the Cape. Two months after the end of the siege, the arrival at Easter of the Eleventh General Hospital with Army Reserve nurses brought the military nursing of St Michael's Home to an end.⁷⁷ Sister Henrietta and Miss Watkins were among fourteen civilian nurses from the Hospital and St Michael's Nursing Home who were mentioned in despatches by Lord Roberts, having "rendered special and meritorious service."⁷⁸

Maud Rolleston, wife of an officer in the South Nottinghamshire Hussars, and one of a number of English ladies who followed their husbands to South Africa,⁷⁹ arrived in Kimberley on 30 March and soon was introduced to Sister Henrietta, who was "the kindest of friends." At the suggestion of the Army's Principal Medical Officer, in late April Lady Rolleston opened a small convalescent home for the Yeomanry. She relied greatly on the help and advice of Sister Henrietta: "It was through [her] that I got my servants, and whenever I was in any trouble I used to fly to her for help and comfort, and never came away empty."⁸⁰ Lady Rolleston's Home closed at the end of June after she left for Kroonstad to nurse her husband, who had been wounded in battle.

The War was finally over in 1902 and thoughts began to turn to the future. In addition to re-establishing the district nursing service, Sister Henrietta had two projects in mind – an extension to St Michael's Home, and a residential Hostel for women and girls. The Chapter agreed in December that year to buy the land adjoining St Michael's Home in order to build additional accommodation for nurses.⁸¹ "The whole ground is being washed for diamonds," she wrote, "and the sifting makes a terrible dust." They found only two really good stones. The after effects of the War had increased costs and the building tenders were much larger than anticipated. Four rooms and the bath and linen rooms were taken out of the plans for the new wing, but even then it cost about £2300. Unfortunately nearly all the nurses were away when the Archdeacon blessed the new wing in August 1903, "but we had quite a gathering of old friends and clergy."⁸²

There had been a need for some time for a Hostel for single women and girls working in or visiting Kimberley, so that they did not have to stay in hotels or boarding houses.

77 Sr Henrietta, Notes on Nursing in War Time, in *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, XXV (645), Aug 11, 1900, p.119-120. Easter Day 1900 was 15 April. The siege ended on 15 February. On the battle of Paardeberg, see Pakenham, *Boer War*, p.331-342

78 KCL, *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, XXVII (702), p.210/211

79 Even the Commander in Chief Lord Roberts took his wife and daughters to South Africa.

80 Rolleston, *Yeoman Service*, p.134

81 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, December 1902

82 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.70-73

A committee was established in 1902 with Lady Michell, wife of the Chairman of De Beers, as its president and Sister Henrietta as secretary. To begin the work and to raise funds, a restaurant was opened for use by the young women. Sister Henrietta ran it for three months. “I *love* it,” she wrote, telling of nearly fifty girls enjoying themselves, “teachers, typewriters, nurses, milliners, forewomen out of shops and shop girls.” The Hostel was completed by June 1904 and opened formally by Sir Lewis Michell in the presence of the Mayor and Archdeacon Holbech. It was a great success and by 1905 plans were afoot to enlarge the building. “Last Thursday brought me the delightful thing, a cheque for £1000 – from Mr Beit.” The new wing was named in his honour and taken into use in January 1906. Mr Beit “partly gave and partly obtained for me £7000 in money and kind when I was collecting for the Hostel.” The total she raised was £8000. It was a “terrible heart-break” when Sister Henrietta had to give up the secretary’s post: “perhaps I thought too much of it,” she wrote.⁸³

In the years preceding the outbreak of war, Sister Henrietta had continued to promote the ideals of the Royal British Nurses’ Association and to work for greater recognition of nursing as a profession. Through contacts with doctors, she encouraged moves towards a State Register of nurses in the Colony of Natal, which was achieved in 1899. In July that year she was in London to attend a Congress of the International Council of Women and was present when Mrs Bedford Fenwick called for the formation of an International Council of Nurses. Representing the Cape Colony, Sister Henrietta was made a member of the provisional committee.⁸⁴ Perhaps it was during that visit to London that she was invited to meet with Princess Christian, President of the Royal British Nurses’ Association. When Princess Christian visited Kimberley for two days in September 1904 to open a new children’s ward in the Hospital, named in her honour, all the nurses from St Michael’s Home who were not away on duties attended. The Princess had sent for Sister Henrietta to visit her the previous evening and they had a half or three-quarters of an hour alone together. It was an informal meeting, and the Princess was sufficiently at ease to weep while speaking about her son, Prince Christian Victor, who had died of typhoid at Pretoria in 1901, while serving as *Aide de Camp* to Lord Roberts.⁸⁵

Mary Hirst Watkins, friend and co-worker with Sister Henrietta for more than twenty years, died in August 1905 from a very severe form of influenza. “I saw from the first moment it was hopeless,” the Sister wrote. She and Dr Watkins were present.

83 Loch & Stockdale, op cit, p.69-80, 86-87

84 Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p.167-169

85 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.74-75; Pakenham, *Boer War*, p.458

Miss Watkins' death was a great loss to Sister Henrietta and to the work of the Home. She had given "a service rendered equally readily to all, rich and poor, white and black alike, but most gladly rendered to those who could give nothing and do nothing in return." Her midwifery pupils did so well in their examinations that the Colonial Medical Council commented on the very high standard of training.⁸⁶

"Nurses are sent north, south, east and west at very short notice, often only returning from a difficult case to find they must start off again after a few hours or one night's rest to help another case in reply to a pressing telegram for immediate help."⁸⁷ Sister Henrietta gave a description of one of her days, ("yesterday"):

I got up at 1.45 a.m. and called a nurse, and got her the things she wanted and sent her off to a sick person who sent at that agreeable hour for a nurse. I then went to bed again, and at 6.30 had a cup of tea and got up, went to church and then to market where I had to lay in a stock of provisions for three days for my family, as tomorrow is a bank holiday, and also for the Mission Sisters at S. Matthew's, whose marketing I do for them as they are too far away from the shops to do it for themselves. ... Then we had breakfast; then I had to go to the bank and to buy some handkerchiefs ... When I came home I found a nurse was wanted in Kenilworth, and I had to get her some lunch and a cab and get her off. Then came a telegram for a nurse to go to Pieterburg, right up in the North Transvaal near Swaziland, and a good many things had to be seen to about that. During all the morning people kept coming in to see me about every conceivable thing, and I had to write numerous notes and letters and two or three telegrams and use the telephone many times. After dinner I ... saw the servants, laundry people, and so on, who are paid weekly, and went off to the Confessional at S. Matthew's. Afterwards I stayed and had a little chat and saw the Sisters and clergy. Came home and saw the Swaziland nurse had her supper, and suddenly remembered I had not got her a passport – so I went to the station with her and got one from the station-master. Then I came home to our supper, ... saw a man a long time about a servant, and a woman about a nurse, made up my money for the day, locked up ... and finally settled down to sleep about 11.15 p.m.⁸⁸

86 Loch & Stockdale, op cit, p.77; QPBM, no.150, October 1905, p.162; Searle, op cit, p.107

87 QPBM, no.150, p.162

88 Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.82-83. The account is of a day in 1906.

In their busy life, good contact was maintained among the various members of the Community in the Kimberley area. In an earlier letter she told,

We have a Sisters' meeting here every month which I much enjoy; all the Sisters in the Archdeaconry come in for the afternoon and we have tea and Vespers and a talk and chat. Some of them stay to supper and some don't, as they have night-schools and things to see to.⁸⁹

In 1907 the Home had six District Nurses always at work, with a seventh about to be engaged. In 1908, 545 patients were nursed by 20 nurses, and six pupils passed the Colonial Medical Council examination. One passed First in the Cape Colony and two were joint third. "The training of Nurses and Midwives has been a very important part of all the Hospital and Home Work," wrote Sister Henrietta for the supporters in England. "Some 150 nurses have been certified under the Sisterhood, and nearly 30 Midwives have been taught, certified, and licensed."⁹⁰

Years of hard work and many pressures took their toll on Sister Henrietta's health, and in May 1906 she consulted a doctor because of lapses of memory. Her heart was beginning to fail, and a year later he told her that if she continued to work so hard, a complete breakdown was very near. She managed to go to Bloemfontein for the Community Retreat in July 1906, travelling first class on the train and accompanied by another Sister to look after her. During a two-month stay she was very ill: one night they thought she was dying and called a priest. Back in Kimberley, she relied heavily on her niece, Miss Sunny Stockdale, who had joined the staff of the Home. De Beers provided a wheelchair so that Sister Henrietta could be taken to Church. Kind friends arranged to take her to Cape Town for holidays in 1908 and 1910, but she was increasingly immobile. In the Kimberley Home she could no longer manage the stairs, and was "too infirm to get about more than just from room to room." She wrote in December 1910 of being "weary of being kept so much to [her] chair, unable to get a book from the next room or to call anyone." Still she presided over the Home, joining the nurses for meals and keeping watch over the work. "We have had 403 cases this year already," she wrote on 25 September, 1911.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Loch & Stockdale, op cit, p.71

⁹⁰ SMS, Half-Yearly Paper, June 1907, p.3; ECH Report for 1908.

⁹¹ Loch & Stockdale, op cit, p.36, 46, 84, 92-95, 97, 100-101, 107, 110-111, 114

Sister Henrietta was dressing to go to church on the morning of 4 October when she suffered a stroke. She died two days later. The Mother Superior, Sister Caroline, her niece and her brother, were at her bedside. She was sixty-four years old. Many of the leading citizens of Kimberley attended her funeral in St Cyprian's Church, and a fund was started to place a stained glass window there in her memory.⁹²

At the end of October a Chapter Meeting was held in Bloemfontein to decide the future of St Michael's Home for Nurses. It had been very much Sister Henrietta's project. An effort would be made to keep it open by recruiting a lay head from England, but if that failed then the Mother and Council were empowered to close and sell the Home.⁹³ Sister Ella was transferred from St Matthew's Mission as temporary head of house.

In January, a highly recommended nurse, Miss Salmon, arrived to take charge, but all was not well. On the voyage out she had begun to suffer from sciatica, and two days after her arrival in Kimberley she had to take to her bed. For eleven months she struggled on, directing the work as best she could and instructing pupils, but her condition failed to respond to any of the treatments given. She left at the end of November to return home. Negotiations were entered into for King Edward's Memorial Nurses to take over the work, but that possibility failed also. The Community's Council resolved that the Home should be closed at the end of February 1913, and sold. With many other calls which appeared to be of more direct benefit for the Church, it did not seem right to spare Sisters for this work.

At the time of its inception it was the only one of its kind in this part of the country. ... As time went on, similar institutions were opened in different centres, and although to the end the demand for St Michael's nurses was as great as ever, yet the Sisterhood felt that the Church had more important work for its members to do.⁹⁴

The Community had been nursing in Kimberley for thirty-six years, during which the rough mining camp had been transformed into a modern city. With their pastoral and mission work continuing at St Cyprian's, All Saints and St Matthew's, Sisters would still be a familiar sight in the streets of the city.

Writing about Sisterhoods in England, A.M. Allchin said,

92 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, October 1911

93 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, October 1911

94 ECH Report for 1912, p.12-13; QPBM, no.180, April 1913

It is difficult to assess exactly the contribution which the Anglican communities made in the particular field of nursing. None of the Sisterhoods became great nursing orders, and by the end of the century most English nursing was in the hands of 'seculars'.

He quoted A.E. Pavey's opinion that the Sisterhoods filled the gap between the ousting of the old, uneducated class of nurses and the arrival of a new educated class of trained nurses.⁹⁵

Dr Charlotte Searle considered that "of the several Anglican Sisterhoods which contributed to the development of nursing in South Africa, the Community of St Michael and All Angels made the most significant and the most lasting contribution." She attributed this to several factors, among them

the discovery of diamonds at Kimberley; the great influx of diggers from all over the world; the range and extent of the sanitary, health and social problems on the diggings; the interest of the Anglican Bishop Webb of Bloemfontein in the care of the sick; ... the personal qualities of Sister Henrietta and her friendship with Royalty, with Mrs Bedford Fenwick, ... with government officials, politicians, medical practitioners and with wealthy financiers such as Rhodes and Beit.

Sister Henrietta did not subscribe to the idea that control of nursing should continue to be vested in Sisterhoods:

She studied the needs of the South African community and realised that in a largely Calvinist orientated community the real contribution of Anglican Sisterhoods lay in preparing educated secular women of good class and high moral values to carry nursing to all parts of the country. Therein lay her greatness. She well knew that ... it would inevitably lead to the replacement of the Anglican nursing orders ... by secular nurses.⁹⁶

The South African Nursing Association regards Sister Henrietta as the pioneer of professional nursing in the country. They commissioned a statue of Sister Henrietta from Dr Jack Penn, known not only for his sculptures but also as a distinguished plastic

95 Allchin, *The Silent Rebellion*, p.120f

96 Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p.136-137, & p.144

surgeon. The Community thought long and hard before giving their agreement but, once the decision had been taken, they co-operated fully by providing a mock-up of the habit as it was in the Nineteenth Century. The statue was erected in the grounds of St Cyprian's Cathedral, Kimberley, and was unveiled by nurses of different races in a ceremony held on 15 January, 1969.⁹⁷

The Church of the Province of Southern Africa added its recognition at the Provincial Synod held in 2002. Sister Henrietta CSM&AA, Religious and Nursing Pioneer, was included in the Calendar and Lectionary for annual commemoration on 6 October, the date of her death. Inaugurated formally at a special Synod Evening Prayer held on 25 September, a pamphlet was distributed outlining her life's work. After a paragraph on her nursing accomplishments, it continued:

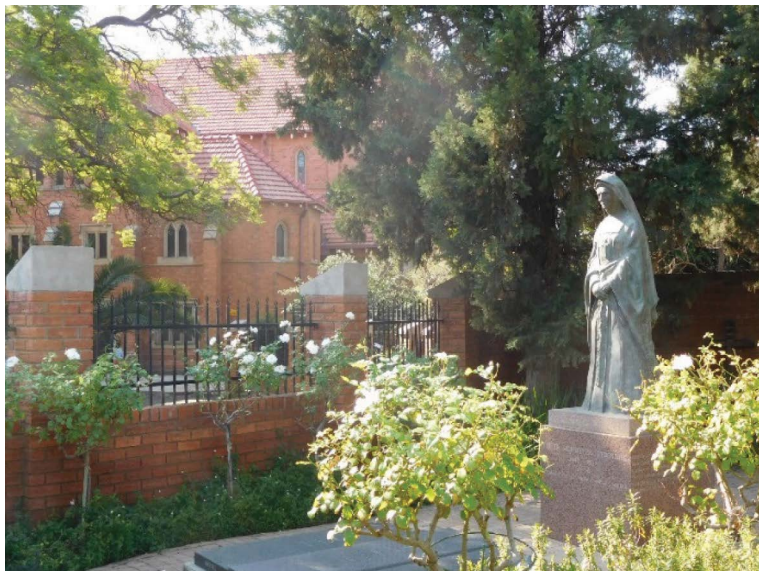
As a Religious, Henrietta's life in community shaped her disciplined devotion and spirituality. Her love for God found expression in a spirit of joyful service, in a deep concern for the sick, and in her courage and untiring work. Although she was in failing health for many years before her death in 1911, she grew in wisdom, courage and perseverance, so that her particular witness became the offering of her whole life to God.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 15 January 1969

⁹⁸ Copy in SMS archive and author's files. Mother Mary Ruth told the author of the Synod's decision in a letter dated October 24, 2002.



St Michael's Home, on the corner of De Beers Road, Kimberley. Constructed in 1879, it served as a day School until 1895, and then as a Home for Nurses until closure in 1913.



The Statue of Sister Henrietta CSM&AA in the grounds of Kimberley Cathedral. In front of it are the graves of (from left to right) Mother Emma, Sister Henrietta, and Miss Mary Hirst Watkins. (Photo: Author)



St George's Cottage Hospital at the time of the Anglo-Boer War, with a military marquee providing additional accommodation alongside the Victoria Ward.

CHAPTER 8



DUST AND DIAMONDS – NINETY YEARS IN KIMBERLEY

Sister Henrietta was not alone in perceiving that there were other great needs on the Diamond Fields apart from nursing. Even before the new Hospital ward had opened, the Community had started a school for girls. Kimberley was no longer simply a mining camp: it was growing into a town, and there was a need for educational facilities. St Cyprian's School opened on 25 January, 1877, with 39 day pupils.¹ The records do not tell us where this school was situated, but its name suggests that it was not far from St Cyprian's Church.

The Revd William Crisp was in Kimberley for Holy Week and Easter that year, and noted very great changes since his work there four years previously. There was “far more of settled regular life.”

Of course a great deal of this must be attributed to the continued exertions of the Government; but I suspect it is mostly owing to the great increase in domestic life – to the presence of more women and children. Kimberley has

1 QPBM no 36, April 1877. Letter from the Bishop dated 1 March 1877.

been lately satirically called “The city of tin”, since corrugated iron still forms the principal material of the houses. But plain enough as such dwellings necessarily are, inside hundreds of them may be found prettily-furnished rooms, and happy families – a great improvement on the hand-to-mouth bachelor life, which was the rule a few years ago.

Such a change has, of course, made the Church’s work more hopeful, as well as more interesting. The large congregations at both camps, are no longer a mass of men only. Children sing in the choir, and on Sunday the large church of S. Cyprian’s is full of little people, singing the same hymns which their contemporaries so much delight in at home.²

Sister Louisa was sent to take charge of this new work, assisted by Miss Robinson, who had come to Bloemfontein from Huddersfield College in Yorkshire, and Miss Homan, an Associate.³ Miss Robinson, it may be recalled from an earlier chapter, had transformed the Home School in Bloemfontein. In that she had not been there for more than six months, it seems surprising that she was sent to Kimberley: unfortunately the records do not tell us if she was to stay, or if her role was merely to assist in setting up the new school before returning to Bloemfontein. There were to be several changes of personnel at the Kimberley School within its first few years. In April 1879 Sister Louisa was needed in Natal, where the Community had been asked to provide nurses for a military hospital, and the newly-professed Sister Georgina was sent from Bloemfontein to take her place in charge of the School. “She is at Bloemfontein just now for her holidays,” wrote Sister Henrietta on 31 May 1879, and “a better house is to be built for her before she returns.”⁴ Sister Georgina returned to her post in Kimberley during July, and oversaw the move into the new buildings. Bishop Webb opened those formally on 11 December, 1879, as St Michael’s Home and School. The name of the School was changed to avoid confusion with St Cyprian’s College in Cape Town, and to make clearer the connection with St Michael’s in Bloemfontein. A great sale of work followed the official opening, and then there was the end of term entertainment. It was thought to be the result of those pressures that Sister Georgina complained of a persistent headache. We told in an earlier chapter of her return to the Mother House for the Christmas holidays, where she

2 QPBM no 38, October 1877, p.8. Holy Week and Easter at the Diamond Fields.

3 Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in SA*, p.41, give this staffing, but note our discussion in the preceding chapter. A newspaper obituary included in the White Book states that Sister Louisa was appointed first Principal of the Kimberley School. FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1909.

4 QPBM no 46, October 1879. Letter from Sr Henrietta

was diagnosed as suffering from typhoid, and died on 30 December.⁵ On 14 January, 1880, immediately after making her profession in the Community's Home Chapel, Sister Henrietta Theresa was sent to take charge of the Kimberley Home, where the School re-opened for a new term.⁶ Sister Henrietta [Stockdale] wrote, "Our new School is very beautiful indeed, and we are all very proud of it, although we have now a sad pride whenever we think of it."⁷

"Cricket-Ground, de Beer's Road" is the address shown for St Michael's Home, Kimberley, in an advertisement which appeared in the Bloemfontein Diocesan Magazine. Described as a "High-Class Day School", the fees per annum were £12.12s for Senior pupils and £8.8s for Juniors, with an extra charge of £8 for music lessons.⁸ The fees proved hard to collect when Kimberley had a very bad year in 1882. Severe drought led to a shortage of water and the pollution of what water was available, resulting in outbreaks of camp fever (typhoid). There were dust storms, and a shortage of fresh fruit and vegetables. All aspects of life were affected, including the School.

"It is now twelve months since we, i.e. most of the present school staff, changed places with those who had been working in Kimberley; twelve months which have taught us much of the needs of the Diamond Fields." The staff was one Sister, one Novice, two lady workers, and two pupil teachers. Sister Louisa Jane was writing on 11 July, 1884, and gave a detailed report of the school and its needs. Prize-giving on the last day of term, Friday 27 June, had gone better than they expected. At first it had seemed there would be no dignitary to chair the occasion, but then Canon Gaul returned from a journey of several days just in time. There were not enough prizes, until a gentleman sent them a £5 note to spend as they wanted. One teacher wanted to use the money for much-needed new black-boards and another would have bought chairs, but the Sister in Charge had the last word and insisted that the children "must not be disappointed of the prizes for which they have worked so well and heartily." There were 30 children in the Senior School and 28 Infants. "These are small numbers, but as good as we can look for until times are better; so many children have to be sent away because their school fees have not been paid." There were two or three large accounts in arrears, as well as many smaller ones, but there was little prospect of receiving the money when parents' businesses had failed. We learn that there was a large mortgage outstanding on the new buildings: the fund-raising had not

5 QPBM no.48, April 1880. Letter from the Mother Superior. See also Chapter 4 above.

6 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, January 14, 1880

7 QPBM no.48, April 1880, page 37. Letter from Sr Henrietta, Carnarvon Hospital

8 BDA, *Bloemfontein Diocesan Magazine*, Vol.1, no.2 (August 1882)

gone so well as they hoped and a debt of £2,000 remained, draining their resources with interest payable at 10 per cent.⁹

Three years later the situation had improved considerably.

The High School here is quite our leading school at present, with large numbers, and ever-increasing influence and prosperity. Through the kindness of many friends in England the crippling mortgage on the building is nearly paid off, and we are just now able to add more much needed rooms, a small oratory having been built last year.

They had been helped greatly by an accomplished and educated lady living in the town, who for five years had given voluntary service as a teacher of French and Algebra.¹⁰

Sister Louisa Jane's report in 1884 mentioned that appeals were being made for the Sisters to take on other works in Kimberley, but they were prevented by their small numbers and lack of finance. The provision of sufficient salary for support was the condition attached by the Community in 1885 when they agreed to a request from Canon Gaul to undertake the teaching of the Perseverance School in St Cyprian's Parish. The Revd William Gaul had known the St Michael's Sisters almost since their beginning, having arrived in Bloemfontein as a Deacon in 1874. He had been made Rector of Dutoitspan early in 1880, elected a Canon in 1881, became Rector of St Cyprian's, Kimberley, in 1884, and Archdeacon of Kimberley in August 1887. The Curate of St Cyprian's from 1881 to 1887, the Revd J.T. Darragh, formed the Perseverance Guild to encourage church membership among the Coloured or mixed-race population. From it grew the Perseverance School, which met in a rented tin house "with the thermometer up to 4004 degrees, more or less".¹¹ Sister Catherine and Miss Cuyler were appointed to take charge of the teaching. The School thrived, and attracted more communicants to the Church. Writing on 14 February 1887, Sister Henrietta described the "bright responsiveness" which had been

especially apparent at the Diamond Fields lately, where the Guild, with much kindly assistance, built a school (not half large enough) for their own children. Their fees, and the Government Grant, make it self-supporting, maintaining sufficiently (although not by any means leaving a margin for

9 QPBM no.66, October 1884, p.164-168

10 QPBM no.76, April 1887, p.89. Letter from Sr Henrietta.

11 FSA,A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1885 June; Crisp, p.32, 57; Lewis & Edwards, p.487

luxury) the teachers we have been able to supply them with, or who not being Sisters have kindly undertaken it at our request. Eighty children claimed admittance when there was only room for sixty. A hundred and twenty almost suffocated one another. A large room was added, and a hundred and seventy poured in.¹²

The teaching at the Perseverance School continued to be the responsibility of the Sisterhood after Sister Catherine was withdrawn to take charge of St Matthew's Mission School. Canon Gaul, as Rector of Kimberley, supported the request made by the priest at the Mission, the Revd George Mitchell, for Sisters to take over the School. At its meeting on 5 January, 1887, the Community's Chapter accepted the task. Sister Catherine began work the following month.¹³

She will begin with about 45, but it would be hard to prophesy how many will be there next year at this time. This school will, no doubt, have a good many of the lowest class of white children amongst its numbers, and will bring in a number of children who really live almost a wild life amongst old machinery and heaps of *debris* in that part of the town.¹⁴

The school met in St Matthew's Mission Church, which had been constructed in 1877 by the Revd Henry Bevan during a two year stay in Kimberley, while he was waiting for the opportunity to open up new work in Bechuanaland. Built of mud bricks, and measuring forty feet long by eighteen feet wide, St Matthew's took forward the Church's work among the large black population. Estimates of their numbers varied: it is suggested that some 60,000 passed through Kimberley every year in search of work, with a permanent population of about 20,000. The Revd George Mitchell, who had worked previously at Thaba Nchu, was given charge of the Mission in 1880. He opened the Mission School the following year and taught in it himself, struggling on faithfully with inadequate funding and many discouragements.

We may connect Mr Mitchell's approach to the Sisters with his wish to take his own work in a new direction by ministering in the large compounds that the mining companies had been setting up since 1885 to house their workers. Access to and from the compounds was

12 QPBM no.76, April 1887, p.88-89

13 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1887 January 5; Lewis & Edwards p.492

14 Sr Henrietta, 14 February 1887, in QPBM no.76, April 1887, p.89

restricted but Mr Mitchell had a ready entrance. A meeting was chaired by Canon Gaul on 9 February 1887 with the aim of securing funding to put this new work

... on such footing as will enable it, at least, to be called a witness for Christ to the ever-changing 10,000 who come there from nearly every part of South, it might almost be said, Central Africa: - a witness, which though it may leave the majority of them untouched by Christianity, will yet prevent them returning to their country believing that all the evil which they see and hear is the natural outcome of Christian civilisation.¹⁵

The valuable work he had started in St Matthew's Mission School flourished under Sister Catherine's care. It became the "perfect model of what a mission school should be", and within two years the number of pupils had grown to approximately 140.¹⁶ The School continued in the old building after a new and larger St Matthew's Church was built, and dedicated by the Bishop on 2 June, 1889. It was with regret that the Sisters had to withdraw from the teaching of this Mission School after Christmas 1889, "for lack of workers."¹⁷

A grant from the S.P.G. in 1891 enabled Mr Mitchell to work full time in the compounds, and the Revd J.W. Stenson was appointed to lead St Matthew's Mission. He wrote of some of the difficulties the Mission had to face, and appealed for support from the Mission Association in Britain, which had been sending help to White parishes but nothing to St Matthew's.

If you could only realise what missionary work means in such a place as Kimberley, where nearly every European, man, woman, and child, is antagonistic to work among the Africans, you would sympathise with us more. Not only is there this hostility from our fellow-countrymen, and white communicants, but there is the bad example shown by the flagrant violation of every law laid down by the Church. ... Very many Europeans never go to any place of worship. All of this is perplexing to the African mind ..."¹⁸

15 BDA, The Diamond-Fields, *The Bloemfontein Cathedral Magazine*, March 1887; Lewis & Edwards p.490

16 Lewis & Edwards, p.489-492; Crisp, p.39-40

17 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1889 December

18 QPBM, no.108, April 1895, p.58-59

The Sisters' work in Kimberley appeared to be going very well but needs elsewhere in the Community were about to change its direction. The *Chronicler* recorded that on May 25, 1891,

It was decided in Chapter that St Michael's School, Kimberley, should be given over to Miss Woods, the Head Mistress, for three years. Miss Woods to pay a rental for the House. This was done to economise the working powers and expenses of the Community, so that the liabilities might be paid off more readily.

The next entry informs us that "Archdeacon Gaul made arrangements for the Perseverance School to be taken over by a Head Master after the June holidays. This freed the Sisters from that work."¹⁹

This retrenchment left the Sisters with their major work at Kimberley Hospital as their only involvement in the town, and that also was nearing its end. It was a period of major changes. As detailed in our previous chapter, in November 1894 the Chapter of the Community decided to withdraw from the nursing work at Kimberley Hospital with effect from the end of June 1895. That coincided with the end of Miss Woods' lease of St Michael's Home and School. The Chapter decided to take the premises back into Community use, to close the School, and to operate the buildings as a Home for Nurses.²⁰ Mother Frances visited Kimberley to superintend the arrangement of this House.²¹

Privy to all these decisions was Canon William Holbech, who had succeeded Bishop Webb as Warden of the Community in January 1887: he chaired the Chapter Meetings. After Archdeacon Gaul was consecrated Bishop of Mashonaland at a liturgy in Bloemfontein Cathedral on St Mark's Day, 1895, Canon Holbech was appointed to be Archdeacon of Kimberley and Rector of St Cyprian's Parish. The Community's request that he continue as their Warden was supported by Bishop Hicks as Diocesan and Visitor. The Bishop chaired a meeting of the Chapter on 21 September, 1895, to consider a letter addressed by Archdeacon Holbech to the Mother Superior, in which he requested

that the Community will undertake the working of a Refuge for the Fallen in this Parish, preparatory to their going to the House of Mercy in

19 FSA, White Book I, vol.i, 25 May, 1891

20 FSA, White Book I, vol.i, 1893, and November 24, 1894. "As the towns in Griqualand West became more settled the government had amply supplied schools for Europeans, and it was thought that there was not the same need for the Church ... to struggle with education." Lewis & Edwards, p.520

21 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, June 30, 1895

Cape Town. A house which can be made suitable has been offered for the purpose at a low price, adjacent to the Mission House in which Miss Cuyler and her companions do their work, and within five minutes' walk of St Cyprian's Church. ...

I ask for two Workers, both Sisters if it can possibly be so, leaving the obtaining of a third worker to be settled as it may be needed: the first care of the Sisters would be to look after those desiring to be Penitents, and when not so occupied to do any Parochial Work within their powers which I, as Rector of the Parish, may direct.

To finance this work, he intended to offer £50 a year from his income as Rector, and asked if the Community could raise some money towards the maintenance of the Sisters. The Community would be at no financial risk because the balance of expenses would be met by the Church Rescue and Orphan Society.

I need hardly say how great pleasure it will give not only to myself, but to a good many Church people of Kimberley if the Sisterhood can take up work in Kimberley beyond the Nursing Work at Saint Michael's Home which is much valued.²²

The Chapter accepted his invitation to begin this work and set aside the sum of £60 annually towards the Sisters' maintenance. Subsequently, the Superior wrote to Miss J.C. Harrison in England, asking her to arouse interest in the project and to collect funds towards the Community's contribution.

Three years later the Chapter agreed to another new work. Canon Woodman, Rector of All Saints, Beaconsfield, asked for a Sister to engage in general parochial work, and Sister Louisa was assigned to the parish. She continued to live at St Michael's Home, and travelled out there every day. Beaconsfield was formerly known as Dutoitspan, and had been one of the early centres of Anglican Church work. The original canvas structure had been replaced by a wood and iron building, until the present All Saints' Church was built in 1886. A request for two Sisters or workers to live at Beaconsfield was turned down by the Chapter in September 1899 because war was imminent.²³

22 His letter was copied in full into the White Book I, vol.i, p.128-129

23 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 29 September 1898, & September 1899; QPBM no.126, October 1899, p.174; BDA, *Diocese of Kimberley & Kuruman: Golden Jubilee 1911-1961*, p.33

Four Sisters were resident in Kimberley when the Anglo-Boer War broke out on 12 October, 1899, and the town was besieged: Sisters Henrietta, Louisa, Catherine and Mary.²⁴ We have told in our preceding chapter of the effects on the nursing work of St Michael's Home. Life in the parishes went on also, but with necessary adjustments.

At first, when we were really shut in, it was difficult to realise that we might not walk where we liked, - could not take the short cut across the veldt to Beaconsfield, for instance, nor be out after 9 p.m., - and we were startled by the rise in the price of provisions ...²⁵

The clergy had no easy time, visiting the sick and injured, burying the dead, which was often attended by considerable risk, and taking services. ... The daily services in St Cyprian's were only given up during the last four days when the shelling was terrific, and resumed the day after General French rode in.²⁶

St Cyprian's Church was hit by a shell one day not long after a service was over, and fortunately no-one was injured.

There was no military chaplain in Kimberley during the siege, and consequently all the military services and funerals and hospital work have fallen on the town clergy, in addition to the regular services and duties of their parish.

The See of Bloemfontein was vacant and, in the absence of a Diocesan Bishop, the Bishop of Natal visited six weeks after the siege ended, and suggested that the military authorities should make some financial contribution towards the deficit of £190 in the ordinary income of the Church, caused by the falling off of offertories.²⁷

The privations in Kimberley were great; for several weeks only ¼ lb of horse or mule was allowed to each person daily, the price of eggs rose to 20s. per dozen, and neither butter nor cheese were to be had at all. [All food was rationed. The horse-flesh] required very good cooking to be at

24 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1900

25 QPBM no.128, April 1900, p.57

26 QPBM no.128, April 1900, p.71

27 QPBM no.129, July 1900, p.132

all palatable, and this became a great difficulty when there was no coal, and very little wood.

One of the biggest deprivations was the lack of contact with the outside world. No letters could be received or sent, and very little outside news got through. In Bloemfontein, Mother Frances wrote, "I do feel very anxious as to how our Sisters and friends in Kimberley are faring."²⁸

As soon as the four month siege ended, many civilians took the opportunity to go away for a time of rest and recuperation. Leaving St Cyprian's, Sister Catherine went to Cape Town and Sister Mary travelled to England.²⁹

The War continued for another two years, but Kimberley had seen the last of military action, and life had begun to return to normal even before the peace was signed. The Community's two parochial engagements continued, and the invitation for Sisters to live at Beaconsfield was renewed. Two Sisters took up residence there, one working among the Coloured population, and the other gave her time to the white families of miners.

Although the Refuge was the main intention of the house at St Cyprian's, the Sisters there were very active in other areas of the parish's life, as we read in a 1908 report written for friends in Britain. District visiting was being done among the poor whites and the Coloured population. A Mothers' meeting was held weekly with twelve members, and there was a working party of thirty young girls. The Sisters took Confirmation classes, and on Sundays led a Bible Class for fifteen communicants, as well as helping in the Sunday School. One of the Sisters was Secretary and Guardian to the Perseverance Guild, with fifty members. The care and the cleaning of the church was also in the Sisters' hands.³⁰

The same report gave details of the ministry being carried out at St Matthew's Mission. In April 1902 the Community accepted an invitation to resume work at that mission church, now led by the Revd G.M. Lawson. A house was provided, and Sisters Catherine and Julia went to live there among the Black and Coloured people they were to serve. Their role was to assist the priest in the general parochial work. An associated worker was Head Mistress of the day school.³¹ In 1908, the Sisters were engaged in home visiting,

28 QPBM no.128, April 1900, p.71 & p.75

29 QPBM no.128, April 1900, p.60. After leave, Sister Mary returned to her work in Kimberley. She died there on 8 September 1921, and is commemorated by the font in St Cyprian's Cathedral.

30 SMS, ECH Report for 1908

31 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, April 1902; QPBM, no.150, October 1905, p.163

teaching Scripture and needlework in the Day School, and holding sewing classes for women and girls out of school hours. The Sisters ran a Bible Class for thirty women and had care of the Sunday School with its 160 children. There was a night school for boys and young men, and one Sister was conducting Confirmation classes in Dutch.

Three years later the report described the area served by St Matthew's and some of the difficulties of the work. The people lived in two large locations on the outskirts of Kimberley and, in a further small area known as the "Homestead", a branch Mission called Holy Cross had been built. The housing varied from well-built structures to "wretched little shanties. Some are regular native huts, covered with sail cloth or sacking." There were people from "every tribe in South Africa, but the greater number were Bechuana (this being their native territory). Many half-castes lived around the Mission House." This mixed population meant that classes and instruction given by the Sisters had to be adapted, and between them they were teaching in English, Dutch, SeTswana, "and what little Xhosa the Sister can manage to put together." The Christian converts faced many temptations,

living as they do in an atmosphere of semi-heathenism and vice of every description. ... They often begin their Christian lives ... with very good intentions, but grow careless and fall away. ... Yet the hearts of those working among them are often gladdened by the way they do respond to the grace given and the lessons taught them. It is often wonderful to see the change in expression and in the whole bearing of those coming out of heathenism into the Light.

The Mission House was a busy place: "classes of one sort or another go on every day," and many visitors came with questions to be answered or with various demands on the help and sympathy of the Sisters. The associate worker had left but had been replaced by Agnes, a half-caste sent from Basutoland, who had helped for a while at St Faith's Orphanage in Bloemfontein.³²

Across the town, Beaconsfield "was the centre of the mining industry and was inhabited by European miners and coloured people." They worshipped together in All Saints' Church but because of language difficulties the Sunday School classes and guilds were separate. The guilds

³² SMS, ECH Report for 1911

were a strength to the parish in that they brought people in who otherwise found it difficult to meet. ... In 1904 a work party was started for the European children, dubbed 'The Junior Church Working Party'. Twenty-five to thirty girls met at the Rectory on Wednesday afternoons to sew. The same was done for Coloured children who met on Tuesdays. ... In 1909 the 'Guild of the Holy Guardian Angels' (European children) worked hard and collected money for a stained glass window in the church in memory of child victims of warfare.³³

The Sisters and their associate workers encouraged the Guilds to be outward-looking, as we read in the English Committee of Help Report for 1912:

The Guild of Coloured Women and Children undertook this year to provide for a native girl in Basutoland to be trained and cared for by the Sisters at Hlotse.

A Sanctuary Needlework Guild was formed last year, with the object of supplying Altar Linen and Vestments as required for All Saints' Church. The surplus will be given to the Bishop for the Mission Churches of the Diocese, and the Mission Priests are most grateful for this help. The workers meet weekly to sew, and the materials are provided by subscriptions of 1s. a month, given by the male members of the Guild.³⁴

It was very difficult to write about the work at Beaconsfield, readers in Britain were told, because it had so much to do with individuals and their families. A sketch was given of one family "who have been brought out of darkness into light through their little son, who found his way into the Mission Night School, which led to his baptism and confirmation. He is fifteen years of age."³⁵ The parish organisations and guilds clearly played a large role, as noted by Sister Mary Ruth:

[The] girls clamoured for the establishment of a Junior Branch of the Good Shepherd Guild, a kind of mothers' get-together fostered [later] by Sister Flora. Sunday afternoons were very busy: the older European and Coloured

33 Sister Mary Ruth, *Dust and Diamonds*, p.10-11

34 SMS, ECH Report for 1912

35 SMS, ECH Report for 1913

girls met together; at 4.30 p.m. there was a Bible Class for lads over seventeen. They would stay on afterwards and read magazines and papers.

Bible classes were organised and prospered. One group was for European shop girls; another for Coloured domestic workers, and a third for Black people. Sister Helen used to go over to Kimberley with a magic lantern slide show of the Life of Christ. ... Her slide shows were very popular in the town. On one occasion a small hall was hired for a cosmopolitan audience, but the press was so great that they had to move to a bigger venue. The pictures were well chosen and did a lot of good.³⁶

As already related, the death of Sister Henrietta on 6 October, 1911, led to the closure a year later of St Michael's Home for Nurses, and to its sale in March 1913. St Cyprian's Cottage, the Refuge Home at 102 Dutoitspan Road, became the Sisters' headquarters in Kimberley. It was

a very tumble-down iron building quite near the Cathedral. It stands on a good piece of ground, and the situation is excellent, but otherwise it is about as unsuitable for its purpose as it could possibly be. There is but one sitting-room, into which the front door, a glass one, opens, so that the Sisters' life has to be lived in far too much publicity; tradesmen, parish people, clergy, visitors, all come to that door; there is no escaping from interruptions. Nor is that all, the walls of the house are calico, over stuck with paper, and when in one room (if the mice are not making *too* much noise), you can hear everything which goes on all round you; and this in a Mission house, where spiritual and confidential interviews are constantly being sought, is a most serious matter and a terrible hindrance to the work.

Another difficulty is that the house is too small. There are only three bedrooms. One is occupied by a Sister who works in the parish of Beaconsfield [Sister Flora], the Sister-in-charge sleeps in another, while Miss P. [Pearce], the Parish Worker, is in the third. If anyone else is taken in, a piece of one of these rooms has to be curtained off, or a piece of the Mission Room (which also serves as a Refectory).

The original purpose of the house was to be a Refuge, where rescue cases could be brought in, but owing to the inadequate accommodation and the

³⁶ Sister Mary Ruth, *Dust and Diamonds*, p.11

lack of Sisters, this side of the work has somewhat languished, and the very name by which it was first known, "The Church Refuge," has fallen into abeyance. It is to be hoped, however, that something more may be done in this way in the immediate future. An experienced rescue worker has offered her services for three months, and with her help fresh efforts will be made to draw in one or two of the sad cases, in spite of all the difficulties of housing them. ...

The cottage needs to be brick-lined and to have a small wing built on to it, so that more Sisters might be sent to live in it. It might then become the centre of the Community's work in Kimberley, and great possibilities would open out, not only among the white and coloured, but amongst the black people, for whom as yet not much is done in the town itself.³⁷

The Rescue and Orphan Society gave the Cottage to the Community in 1914, on condition that if the Sisters withdrew from all mission and parochial work in and around Kimberley, the property should be handed on to the Diocesan authorities. Chapter voted to use £250 from the proceeds of the sale of St Michael's Home to build on some extra rooms.³⁸ The architect who was consulted said of the Cottage, "If you don't pull it down, it will come down before long." There was inadequate money to rebuild, and so a detached wing was constructed in the front garden, providing two extra bedrooms and a small Oratory. With four Sisters then resident, one was available to work under a Black priest at Greenpoint. "As he has eight outlying stations to serve, he is very glad to have help from the Sisters."³⁹ In the Diocesan magazine for January 1918, the Bishop wrote of the poor condition of the Cottage and launched an appeal to fund improvements and for the addition of more rooms.⁴⁰

As early as 1890 it was proposed that the Diocese of Bloemfontein should be divided to create a new bishopric with its seat at Kimberley, but this did not come about until 1911. Extending over an area of 305,000 square miles, including Griqualand West, Bechuanaland, and parts of the Northern Cape, the Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman was staffed initially by twenty-two clergy. The Dean of Pretoria, the Revd Wilfrid Gore-Browne, was selected to be the first Bishop, and he was consecrated in Bloemfontein Cathedral on St Peter's Day, 1912. The "*Church Times*" in London reported,

37 SMS, ECH Report for 1913, Mother Superior's Letter

38 FSA, White Book I, vol.ii, 1914

39 SMS, ECH Report for 1914

40 FSA, White Book I, vol.ii, 1918 January; Sr Mary Ruth, *Dust and Diamonds*, p.5

The inherent dignity of the service was heightened by everything that splendour of pageant and beauty of ritual could give to it. The brilliant coloured copes and mitres of the five consecrating Bishops, together with the dalmatic worn by each Bishop's chaplain, made a blaze of colour – with which the banners, the processional crosses, the crosiers, the music of trumpet and organ gave a glorious feeling of preparation for warfare. It was the Church militant here in South Africa ...⁴¹

The enthronement took place the following day, 30 June, in St Cyprian's Church, which became the Cathedral. The old iron church was no more: the construction of a "more worthy parish church" had begun in 1907, and was finally completed for the Diocesan Jubilee in 1961.⁴²

Bishop Gore Brown visited every part of his vast Diocese, and developed a special love for St Matthew's Mission. He wrote,

St Matthew's is always interesting, partly because everyone is poor, partly because all do so much for their church, which is generally quite full, till there are fears lest the people packed and crushed against the cheap dagga walls will make holes in it. The seats have no backs, but the sanctuary is beautifully kept, and it is a place of real devotion.

On the same dusty site he visited the schools, and the Sisters' house,

with not an inch of spare room in it. In 1913 De Beers gave £20 towards the venture of a parish nurse who lives on £1 a month and boards with the Sisters.⁴³

Sister Rosalie (described by Sr Mary Ruth as "a tiny little woman with an easy pen"⁴⁴) was sent to work at St Matthew's in 1910 under Sister Ella, and served there until the Mission House was closed at the end of 1935. She wrote of Bishop Gore Brown's love of St Matthew's.

41 CT, July 26, 1912, p.103. Re. formation of the Diocese, Lewis & Edwards, p.514-518

42 BDA, *Diocese of Kimberley & Kuruman, Golden Jubilee 1911-1961*, p.13

43 Quoted in Lewis & Edwards, p.521-522

44 Sr Mary Ruth, *Dust and Diamonds*, p.8

When he was in town he always sang the Friday School Mass at 8.30, and three Christmasses running he sang the Midnight Mass. Miss Gore Brown wrote an account of one to the “Church Times”. She described the drive through the rather squalid Barkly Rd, then the crowded Church – the different atmosphere outside and ended up – ‘But it was Bethlehem at St Matthew’s.’⁴⁵

From Sr Rosalie’s notes we have information about the parish nurse mentioned by the Bishop. Nurse Freil,

came out as one of Sister Henrietta’s nurses, but Sister died about that time, and soon after the Nursing Home was closed down. Father Clements who was much troubled about the infant mortality in the place asked her to come as Mission Nurse. Miss Gore Brown formed a small Committee of Ladies and subscriptions were collected. Miss Freil came for a mere pittance and had a room in our yard, and another as dispensary. Later on, a two-roomed cottage was built for her. For eighteen years she worked devotedly. After the influenza outbreak (she had the sickness herself) the Municipality woke up to their responsibility, and appointed her Municipal Nurse at an adequate salary.⁴⁶ She caught her death from Typhus Fever through shaking out a dirty rug which had been used by a bad case of typhus from the country. Of course she was buried from St Matthew’s Church after the Requiem Mass, but two or three weeks later, the Dissenters had a Memorial Service in the Bantu Hall to which we went. The last speaker ended with the words, ‘She may have been a white person, but she had a black heart.’”

The influenza epidemic in 1918⁴⁷ was “a terrible time”.

45 The article was published in CT, 23 January, 1914, p.124: Christmas Eve at Kimberley, not attributed to Miss Gore Browne, but anonymously as “by a South African”.

46 After working from 1913 at £12 per annum, Nurse Freil was engaged officially by the Municipality in 1923. *History of the Parish of St Matthew, Kimberley*, p.22

47 Spanish influenza spread worldwide in 1918/1919. It arrived in Cape Town with 1,300 South African troops on board the ss “Jaroslav” on 13 September 1918, returning from the War in Europe. Quarantine measures proved inadequate and the disease spread with passengers travelling on the railway, reaching Kimberley late in September. 4,696 deaths resulted in Kimberley, almost 9% of its population of 52,988. *Black October: The impact of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 on South Africa* – Ph.D. thesis by Howard Phillips, University of Cape Town, 1984.

Sister Ella had gone back to Bloemfontein then, and Sister Emma Frances was with me. Mother Frances sent Sister Martha to give extra help. The mines had had to close down, but De Beers contract for meat and milk still held good, and they sent supplies to different depots. About fifty pounds of meat used to come to us every morning, and Sister Martha and I used to cut it up for soup. She was in charge of that department. We borrowed large cooking-pots from the neighbours, and with a couple of choir boys to look after the fires, she set to work in the yard. Mid-day Angelus was the signal for distribution, and then they came with jugs and basins. 'How many in your house?' 'Six.' 'And yours?' 'Four', and so on. At last it was done, but at about three o'clock came the milk-carts and another crowd. Miss Gore Browne came down to help us sometimes. One little boy used to come: 'Milk for the babies.' Two little orphans, cousins. I went to see them once and there were two little aunts each with a baby on her lap, one bottle between them. First one baby had a good drink, then the bottle was passed over and the other one had a drink. Sister Emma Frances looked after the house and had beef-tea always 'on tap'! The Bishop had dispensed us from fasting; Mother Frances said we were to eat whatever was given us. As I knew the Location so well my business was to look up the sick, and to go with the priest when he took the Viaticum to the dying. I was at five death-beds in one afternoon. At five o'clock came the funerals. Different times were assigned for the different Religious bodies. The epidemic was raging in Kimberley and there was not wood for the coffins. Sister Martha and I sewed up the sub-deacon, whilst in another part of the Church a father was sewing up his baby in a little quilt. One day Father Blackman came in: 'Have you something to sew a baby in? A man has placed his baby on a bench with only a bit of muslin curtain to cover it.' We found an old serge table-cloth. The daily Mass was not omitted but only three of four were allowed to go up at a time, kneeling a good bit apart and we received by intincture.

Sister Rosalie recalled many happier memories also.

I think of the great Services. The 4.30 Mass on great days averaging about once a month, was instituted. The first was on the Feast of the Epiphany, and I pulled my mattress on to the floor, for fear of over-sleeping. I need not have done it, for there were thunderstorms all night, and at Mass there

were only three people, the waters were out, the spruit (usually a dry ditch) was a roaring torrent, and people could not cross it. The Purification was also a 4.30 day. In one of the early years it was a very still morning and the Procession was out of doors. It was beautiful walking round the Church in the quiet with our lighted candles and the stars shining overhead.

She worked together with Sister Ella to produce “Bethlehem Tableaux” at Christmas time. Their first effort was “primitive”, using tablecloths and blankets to drape the figures, but the Bible scenes made a great impression on the people. “Several told us they couldn’t sleep that night for thinking of them.” For a number of years at sunset on Good Friday, the Stations of the Cross were preached through the Locations, showing the pictures in the worst courts and streets.

Sister Mary Ruth wrote that, “in their mission work, the Sisters were under no illusions.” It was extraordinarily difficult to work in a polyglot mining ‘city’, where every kind of evil was rampant, “especially in the district where our Mission Church lies.” They admitted that “through ignorance of their ways of thought and expression, much of the teaching that we are trying to give is lost.”⁴⁸

The love and care shown by the Sisters no doubt made up for many deficiencies, but the modern reader cannot help being struck by the cultural disconnect that is apparent in Sister Rosalie’s account of a picnic they arranged for the children in one of the 1914 – 1918 war years.

We arranged to go to Kenilworth, the children to pay their own train (tram) fare, but we would beg for food or money. It depended on how much we got whether it would be a half-day or a whole day affair. We went to our baker or rather bakeress, and asked modestly for cake. ‘Cake?’ she said, ‘What’s cake? Wouldn’t you like mutton pies, we make them on Saturdays?’ Of course we were delighted but there were a hundred to provide for. She turned to one of the shopmen: ‘Write and order a hundred mutton pies for S. Matthew’s Mission.’ It was certainly an all day’s picnic now. As we waited for our special tram at the Market Square, a big parcel of bananas was brought us, the gift of the priest: he was at home that weekend, and had blessed us before we started. At the appointed time the mutton pies were distributed. I think they caused more curiosity than appreciation, it was too

48 Sister Mary Ruth, *Dust and Diamonds*, p.8-9

unknown a food, but when the bananas came there was a ripple all down the rows, ‘Ba-na-na! Ba-na-na!’ It was a very happy party that returned singing with fervour, ‘Tipperary, my heart’s right there!’ and every little black hand went up to where its heart was supposed to be.

During the years of Sister Rosalie’s service at St Matthew’s a whole generation grew up in the faith. She told of three who became priests: Fr Sefotho, Fr Gabriel Mani, and Fr Vincent Molete.

Bishop Gore Browne died unexpectedly on 15 March, 1928.

According to his wish ... his body was brought to S. Matthew’s, where the watch was kept all night, and then the Requiem, with the hymns we always sang at one. His body was taken to the Cathedral about 9 o’clock for the Service there, but our teachers Mr John Matthews and Mr Oesi stood at the [West End] cemetery gates with the torches, awaiting the arrival of the funeral procession, and our children lined the path. It was the wish of the African people that the new Training College should be called after him. He did so love them and they him.⁴⁹

The worldwide economic depression of the early 1930s had a major impact on Kimberley, as we read in Reports of the English Committee of Help.

Kimberley is feeling the present distress acutely, but Sister Rosalie refuses to be cast down, saying, ‘We must remember that we live in the land of Good Hope.’ The diamond mines are still closed, but she tells us that all the surface work is shortly to be got ready, so that when the mines are open again work can begin without delay. The closing of the mines affects most people directly or indirectly; shopkeepers suffer, as their customers only buy necessities, and as most of the white people can no longer afford to employ servants, many black women are out of work. Most of the blacks who were employed in the mines are either unemployed or working in the town for low wages The three classes in need of relief are the ‘poor whites’, coloured people, and blacks; there are municipal and other funds

⁴⁹ All the quotations from Sister Rosalie are from her typescript, *Memories of S. Matthew’s, Kimberley*, in the HPR A Wits, AB2644/59; copy in SMS archive. Sister Mary Ruth made liberal use of the *Memories* in writing her booklet *Dust and Diamonds*.

to help the first and second, but not the third; for example, Toc H made a collection for poor relief, but the blacks got none of it.

A year later the depression continued:

Things are very bad, and the shops find it difficult to get their money, many have already closed or are closing, and it is quite sad to walk down Du Toit's Pan Road and see the number of empty windows. Yet there *is* money in the town, the bioscopes are always full and any unusual or especially attractive entertainment is well attended. One wonders if those who go to these places have paid their debts ...⁵⁰

The records do not tell if the economic depression was among the reasons why St Matthew's was without a Priest Director for most of 1934. After arriving that October, the Revd R.A. Russell wrote,

The condition of the work generally as I found it was without discipline, order, or method. Much dissipated effort had been put into things which were and are quite non-essential, and there had been a steady falling away of our people for a long while.

He was writing to the newly-elected Mother Superior at Bloemfontein, Mary Ursula, and he wanted changes. In what may have been a swipe at Sister Rosalie, who had been in post since 1910, he continued,

We are not dealing with the unsophisticated African of thirty years ago, but the deteriorated town product of today. I know the good work and self-sacrificing labour which have gone to make all that St Matthew's has stood for in the past ... But we cannot close our eyes to the fact that new conditions require fresh methods...⁵¹

Perhaps it was because she was new to her office that Mother Mary Ursula did not act at once. She wrote to the Dean of Kimberley, the Very Revd Hugh Chigwell, for his advice, and he consulted Archdeacon J.G. Mogg before replying in late November. The Dean was Vicar General of the Diocese while the Bishop was away on an extended visit to

50 HPR A Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1933 and 1934.

51 HPR A Wits, AB2644/51, letter from Revd R.A. Russell to Mother Superior, January 5, 1935.

the United Kingdom. Because the Community lacked Sisters to send to Kimberley, he advised that instead of maintaining two weak centres of work, it would be wise to close the house at St Matthew's and to concentrate efforts at St Cyprian's. But there were other factors also. "I fancy Fr Russell does not get on too well with [the Sisters]." Although Fr Russell was shortly to be replaced at St Matthew's, the Dean thought that "the Sisters might not be very welcome" with his designated successor. On 19 December, the Dean wrote again to the Superior, suggesting that she withdraw the Sisters from St Matthew's from 1st January.⁵²

So it was that on January 2nd, 1936, Sister Rosalie and Sister Mary Grace left St Matthew's Mission House. The building was taken over for use in connection with the new training college that was being established in memory of Bishop Gore Browne. Sister Rosalie, at the age of 75, was sent to work at Leribe, while Sister Mary Grace took up residence at St Cyprian's Cottage, from where she continued to do some work at St Matthew's.⁵³ In due course there was a change of personnel. Fr Russell had asked for a new Mission worker who should be "loyal to the Church, a missionary-hearted, sensible disciplinarian." A former British Army nurse, the newly noviced Sister Hilda Clare, was assigned to the task. The Dean's letter of November commented also on other Sisters. "Sister Dulcie has been too long in Kimberley." In February 1937 she was sent to England to open a house in London. Her replacement was Sister Beatrice. "I am very sure that Sister Helen ought to be relieved of this secular work [of running a Book Room at St Cyprian's Cottage]." That part of the Dean's advice was not taken, although subsequently we read of an "excellent manageress" bearing the brunt of the work. Sister Helen had started the Church Book Room with no capital many years earlier to help the clergy who found it difficult to get books or parish requisites; she kept a good stock of books and sold also charcoal and wicks for sanctuary lamps. It was greatly valued but at times the income fell short of necessary expenditure. Sister Helen visited in the Hospital and, together with Sister Beatrice, taught Sunday School and Confirmation classes at the "very poor" Holy Cross Mission.⁵⁴ She was well known in Kimberley from her slide shows of the Life of Christ. "She loved evangelistic work, preparation for Parochial Missions, classes at the gaol, and was ready to talk to people in shops or buses (or in fact everywhere) about their souls or their private affairs – very often with fruitful results."⁵⁵

52 HPRA Wits, AB2644/51, Letters from the Dean dated Nov. 26, 1935, and Dec.19, 1935.

53 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1935.

54 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1939, 1941, 1942 and 1947.

55 SMS, Old Girls' Letter from the Mother Superior, 31 July 1955.

St Cyprian's Cottage was a long way from St Matthew's, and Sister Hilda Clare sometimes had to walk the whole way because of the unreliability of the bus service. In her 1940 letter to supporters, Mother Mary Ursula reported that the Community's capacity for mission work had been increased after the Bishop of Bloemfontein and the Warden gave their approval for the Sisters to ride bicycles.

Bicycles had become necessary because in both Bloemfontein and Kimberley the Black townships were expanding further away from the town. "Sister Hilda Clare has been able to increase her work at St Matthew's Mission since she took to cycling." Despite heavy use, she managed to keep her bicycle "Ezekiel" in good condition. She described her work. "Care of the Church's well-worn linen; classes for Confirmation candidates, the lapsed and the penitent, women and girls; visiting in the three widespread and congested locations, well fill the three days a week I spend at the Mission. My room at the Mission, St Francis, is well used by the women and girls who like to come to tell Sister 'all that is in my heart.'"⁵⁶

The Book Room was handed over to St Augustine's Parish after the Sisters were obliged to move from the Cottage at 102 Dutoitspan Road. On 12 May, 1945, the City Council gave public notice that the whole area was to be re-planned and that the Cottage and neighbouring properties would be subject to compulsory purchase orders, ready for demolition in order to make way for the approach to a proposed new Civic Centre. The period of notice gave the Diocesan Trustees time to find an alternative property, and Mother Mary Ursula travelled to Kimberley to view the house selected, at 100, Barkly Road. This was considered to be very suitable because it was near to St Matthew's Mission. The move took place on 28 January, 1946, and two days later the Bishop celebrated the first Mass in the new house and reserved the Sacrament. By the time of the formal blessing of the house on 14 March,

... visitors were already being directed to 100 Barkly Road as 'the house that has a little light in one of its front rooms' – the light burning day and night in the Chapel as a constant witness to the presence of the Reserved Sacrament, and all that this implies. Since the Sisters left the old St Matthew's Mission House eleven years ago many people have longed for their return, not only for their work in the Mission, but for the presence of a house thus dedicated to the service of God. May this very ordinary

56 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1939 and 1941; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, 16 August 1940.

little house in an unfashionable street in Kimberley be truly one in which
‘His Majesty is served.’⁵⁷

Sister Hilda Clare served on the Diocesan Committee of the Mothers’ Union and helped members to overcome some conflict which had arisen with the longer-established Anglican Women’s Guilds. They eventually amalgamated. As a branch leader, she spent time preparing members for the renewal of their promises on Lady Day. The Union was “a great factor for good,” wrote Mother Mary Ursula, and “a great help to the clergy through their prayers, their influence and their readiness to co-operate in all sorts of ways.” Sister Hilda Clare encouraged the women in their efforts to raise funds for a new church building project. Initially it was intended to add an extension to St Matthew’s Church and a foundation stone laying was planned for October 1951. The disadvantage was that St Matthew’s stood on the very edge of the district it served, near to the town, while the new housing was stretching further and further away. By 1955 we read that plans were going forward to build a new church closer to the centre of the new areas, instead of continuing with the enlargement of St Matthew’s. The women of the parish worked hard to help the fund, constantly knitting – “and so are the Sisters” – and selling new and good second-hand garments, and scones and cakes that they made, to raise money. The fund-raising took some time but was successful. Building started in February 1961; the steel framework was up by August; and in due course St James, Galeshewe, came into being.⁵⁸

The regular work of parochial and hospital visiting, Sacristan duties, and teaching classes continued, and the Sisters remarked on a “growing tendency among the boys and girls to borrow books to read”. To supply this need, the Sisters built up a library in their house, collecting cartons full of good second-hand books on their visits to the Mother House in Bloemfontein. The desire to learn was seen in other ways also. In earlier years at St Cyprian’s Cottage the garden work was done by a trainee teacher, who would go there after his afternoon classes and on Saturdays to earn money to help with his training. After teaching for a few years he went to St Peter’s College, Rosettenville, to train for the priesthood. “To their great joy, [the Sisters] have seen Joseph Thekiso, once their gardener, ordained to the priesthood, and received the Blessed Sacrament from his hands.”⁵⁹

57 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii: May 12, June 1, & 26 July 1945; Mother Superior’s letter 29 July 1946

58 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, p.118, Mother Superior’s letter, 25 July 1947; SMS, Old Girls’ Letters, 26 July 1951, 31 July 1955, 29 July, 1956, 10 August 1961.

59 SMS, Old Girls’ Letters, 17 July 1952, 31 July 1955, 29 July 1956.

One of the rewarding features of the work done by the Sisters is the close contacts and friendships it is possible to make with the Black and Coloured people among whom they work. The house is not far from St Matthew's Church, and callers are many. For a number of years now they have never been without an interest in some young men and boys (sometimes their garden boy who works after school hours, or ex-garden boy) who are 'thinking about ordination', or working to pass some necessary school examination before offering themselves, or training for the ministry, or serving their diaconate, and two of the younger priests of the Diocese have been known to them for many years and encouraged in their vocations.⁶⁰

Those were the years when the National Party Government's policy of *Apartheid* was beginning to have major effects on everyday life. In 1957, the Sisters were told that they could no longer use the African bus service to and from central Kimberley. "This is not the doing of the Bus Company, which has always been friendly and helpful, but is due to a higher authority." They needed to be able to get to town so that they could visit in the Hospital and do necessary shopping. To solve the problem a motorised bicycle was bought for Sister Hilda Clare to use. "She and the bicycle did not get on very well together at first, but they both persevered and now they are fast friends and go everywhere together," wrote the Superior. Sister Hilda Clare became a familiar sight, riding along in her black habit and veil.⁶¹

One of the laws introduced under *apartheid* was the Group Areas Act, which divided South Africa geographically along racial lines, permitting citizens to live only in areas designated for their own racial group. Although some whites had to move, the impact was far greater for the non-white population, many thousands of whom were displaced from neighbourhoods where they had lived for generations.

In 1961, supporters in England read that the Sisters were "in a precarious position," because they were the wrong Group Area. At some time they would be forced to move from 100 Barkly Road.

That makes the time remaining to us all the more precious. It has been good to be allowed to live amongst the people we try to help for so long. The keeping of the Golden Jubilee of this Diocese has shown us this cause for

60 SMS, Old Girls' Letter, 25 July 1958

61 SMS, Old Girls' Letters, 22 July 1957, 25 July 1958; Sister Mary Ruth, *Dust and Diamonds*, p.12

great thankfulness: that our Community has been blessed in being allowed to help so much in a quiet way these many years. In the Mission work, the educational and nursing services we were the pioneers, by the grace of God.⁶²

The effects of the policy were already being felt by 1963.

As thousands of people have been moved from one part of Kimberley to Vergenoeg, an area extending beyond Galeshewe, another church must be built there as soon as possible. Already we are using a house for services and having Sunday School under a tree. We think it will be called St Paul's, in place of the very old Church the people are leaving at Greenpoint.⁶³

No order to vacate 100 Barkly Road had yet been issued when the new Superior, Mother Mary Ruth, announced in 1967:

On March 31st this year we shall be closing our Branch House at Kimberley, where we have worked ever since the Community was founded (1874). Naturally, our roots there are deep. In pioneer days the Kimberley area was part of the Bloemfontein Diocese which has borne many children since then. Our departure is caused by political and ecclesiastical events. Kimberley is being drastically re-zoned according to Group Areas policy, and the Sisters' Cottage, No. 100 Barkly Road, is now in the Coloured Area from which Europeans are being moved out. At the same time Bishop Crowther of Kimberley and Kuruman is exercising the pastoral care of the Diamond City through a group ministry. This eliminates the kind of parish work done by the Sisters. The decision was a joint one made by the Bishop and myself; there was nothing else to be done.⁶⁴

The implementation of the Group Areas Act transformed the environment around St Matthew's. Writing in 1988, Canon William Peters, who had been born in the neighbourhood and was baptised and confirmed in the Mission Church, told,

62 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1961

63 SMS, ECH Report for 1963

64 SMS, ECH Report for 1966 (issued in 1967)

All that remains of Barkly Road or No.2 Location where most of the congregation and some of Kimberley's most prominent Black citizens once lived, are a few shanties amidst the ruins of that which they once called Home. Streets like Legodi, Mackenna, Twaku, Cindi and Khatlane which rang with the noise and laughter of the residents have become as quiet as a churchyard.⁶⁵

Unlike the forced re-location of 1946, no attempt was made to find an alternative property for the Sisters, and this reveals another reason for closing the Branch House. In his Charge delivered at the end of his Visitation in July 1959, Bishop Burnett asked the assembled Sisters,

Now that the [Kimberley] parishes have developed to adulthood, does your work warrant keeping a house open there? I have a fear that you may be dissipating your strength.⁶⁶

When in 1973 the Community was considering moving from Bloemfontein, Bishop Crowther's successor, Philip Wheeldon, in a letter to the Archbishop of Cape Town, did not mention the Group Areas Act but said the Branch House had been closed "owing to the shortage of Sisters in Bloemfontein."⁶⁷

On 26 March, 1967, Mother Mary Ruth and five other Sisters from the Mother House went across to St Matthew's Church for a farewell function. A Service of Solemn Evensong was held at which the Bishop presided and the Dean preached, followed by tea in the Church grounds, speeches and a presentation. "Then, having taken Sisters Hilda Clare and Marion Faith aboard with their effects, they drove away under a Paschal moon."⁶⁸

The Community's Chronicle includes a letter which told the end a little differently.

We started back for Bloemfontein under an uncertain moon, and all went well until for the first time in its history the Combi threw a flat tyre. The Sister Drivers, working on theory, started up the drill of changing the wheel, but providentially a station wagon hove to, and two brawny farmers took the operation out of our hands.⁶⁹

65 HPRW Wits, William Peters, *A History of the Parish of St Matthew, Kimberley*, p.31

66 HPRW Wits, AB2644/54, Visitation Charge 16 July 1959

67 HPRW Wits, AB1363/C67, letter dated 6 September 1973

68 Sister Mary Ruth, *Dust and Diamonds*, p.12

69 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 1967



Mother Frances, second Superior, photographed at Christmas 1933.



A group of Sisters at St Michael's Home, Bloemfontein. Mother Frances is seated on the deck chair in the centre, surrounded by (clockwise from left) Sisters Rowena, Florence, Marion, Frances Louisa, Annie, Edith and Ella. The photograph is undated but because the last of these to be professed was Sister Edith in 1905, that is the earliest date possible.

CHAPTER 9



HARRISMITH

On the 24th of November, 1877, Bishop Webb signed an agreement with Samuel Spilsbury of Harrismith to purchase “a certain piece of land with the buildings thereon situate and being the half Water Erf no 126 facing Stuart Street, Town of Harrismith.”¹ The purchase price of £2,000 Sterling was to be paid in instalments, beginning with a cash deposit of £100, £400 on the 17 January 1878, and four equal instalments of £375 payable over four years on the anniversary date of the agreement. Interest was to be paid at 6% per annum on each of those four instalments.

The town of Harrismith had been founded in 1849 and took its name from the Governor of the Cape Colony, Major-General Sir Harry Smith. Smith was appointed in 1847. His additional responsibilities as High Commissioner gave him authority over British claims in southern Africa outside the Cape. There was already a British Resident in Bloemfontein, Major Henry Warden, with a small military force, but there were continuing conflicts involving both the Dutch settlers and the BaSothos. On 3 February, 1848, Smith proclaimed the whole area between the Orange River in the south and the Vaal River in the north to be British territory, as the Orange River Sovereignty. After defeating the Boer forces under Andries Pretorius in a battle on 29 August that year, Smith decided to consolidate British rule by establishing

1 HPR A Wits, AB2644/15

settlements in strategically important places. So it was that he gave orders for a town to be built close to the mountain passes through the Drakensberg, controlling access to and from Natal, and Harrismith came into being.²

Harrismith was “a promising village as yet of only two or three houses” when Bishop Robert Gray of Cape Town visited it in May 1850.³ Being joined there by the Rev J. Green of Maritzburg, Bishop Gray commissioned him to fix upon sites for a church, parsonage and school. It was a very forward-looking move, because at the time there were no Anglican clergy resident in the Sovereignty. From time to time clergy would conduct Services when passing through the village, but it seems that there was no regular ministry until after the establishment of the Mission Brotherhood at Modderpoort. It was in June 1871 that Canon Beckett, the Superior, set out to make his first visit to Harrismith.⁴ “Before there was a resident clergyman, the spiritual needs of the place had, from time to time, been supplied by periodical visits from Canon Beckett. This was done till it could be done no longer; the distance (150 miles) proving too much for the good Canon’s strength.”⁵ In mid-1873, Bishop Webb ordained as Deacon William Clark, who had come out with him from England two years earlier, and sent him to Harrismith as the first resident clergyman.⁶ The town was growing rapidly, a by-product of the diamond rush in Kimberley, many miles to the west. Because of its position on the transport route from Natal, hotels, stores and public buildings began to spring up. Harrismith became a municipality in 1874. The population were mainly English-speaking and Bishop Webb wanted his infant Sisterhood to extend their educational work to that far corner of his Diocese.

Under the terms of the agreement, possession of the property on Water Erf no.126 was to be given to Bishop Webb when the payment due on 17 January 1878 was made. A group from St Michael’s was by then already in Harrismith; the Superior, Novice Georgina, Miss Andrews and Miss E. Pople having left Bloemfontein on December 28 to prepare for the new Branch House. It was a three day journey by Post Cart or coach, travelling from thirteen to fourteen hours each day.⁷ “A house had been secured in a good position,” we read in the *Community’s Chronicle*, “At one time it had been a store, then a hotel with billiard room and detached stables. The billiard room became the school room and

2 Watt, S.A., Harrismith. *South African Military History Journal*, 8(1), June 1989.

3 Crisp, p.3

4 Crisp, p.23

5 QPBM no.35, January 1877, from Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, page 68

6 Crisp, p.28

7 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1883; QPBM, no.59, January 1883, Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, p. 70

the stables were turned into a dormitory.” Sister Georgina returned to Bloemfontein on January 21, before the new School opened on 4 February 1878.⁸ Miss Burton, who had been admitted as a Postulant on February 23, left the Mother House on 1 March with Miss McDonald to join the staff at Harrismith.⁹

We have a capital house, [wrote the novice Sister Maria (Burton) on October 31, 1879] like a farm house, and a beautiful school and dormitory, both detached from the house, with a good garden and a large yard. ... We have made a good deal of progress, one way and another; and one great cause of blessing is that the people are growing far less fearful of us. I believe most of them are for us. The church is a dear little church; and now we have celebrations in our own chapel as well, so that we are very happy. We have about thirty girls, most of them day scholars; they are remarkably nice pupils.

She wrote also of her wish to raise £300 by a series of sales of work to replace the roof. “Our roof is thatched with thatch forty years old, and in the rainy season we find that it is not impervious to rain; also, ours is almost the only thatched roof in Harrismith which has not been burnt down.”¹⁰ A new roof was not the only thing needed. The house “wants more furniture of an ordinary kind – chairs, crockery, and school apparatus, and a few pictures for the walls,” wrote Bishop Webb on 25 August 1879 while staying there.¹¹

After that visit to the work in Harrismith, Bishop Webb decided to continue to Ladysmith, where some of the Sisters were nursing during the Zulu War. The Mother Superior, Sister Louisa, Miss Langlands and Miss Potts had left Bloemfontein on the Friday in Easter Week, 18 April, and had been glad to stop over at Harrismith for two days to break the long journey.¹² “This emergency has at last demonstrated the blessing of having such a Community of lady workers in the country,” wrote Bishop Webb on 15 September, 1879. “As was clear at Harrismith, where we have a branch house of the Community, the presence and life of devout people, quite apart from the benefit of their work, is a great

8 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i

9 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i

10 QPBM, no. 47, January 1880

11 QPBM, no.46, October 1879

12 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i

aid to the building up of the Spiritual House of God. I hope the time may come when we shall be able to send two or three of our Sisters to every district of the Diocese.”¹³

A letter from Bloemfontein reminded supporters that “the chief work of St Michael’s Home is the education of the daughters of the colonists,”¹⁴ and Sister Louisa wrote from Harrismith, “Our work is a boarding and day school, after the pattern of the Bloemfontein school, but on a smaller scale. Most of the people who have settled here are Scotch; we have a few English families, and a good many Dutch.” This mixture of people and local circumstances had a bearing on the religious education of the girls attending the School.

When a girl comes first to school, in most cases we find it difficult to discover what religious body she belongs to. If the girl has been brought up on a farm (usually far from any town) she may possibly have been baptised by a Dutch minister, or any religious teacher who has chanced to pass by, and as most farms are out of reach of any place of worship, the children have very vague ideas of Sunday, and none of worship. When we ask, ‘Is your daughter to be educated in the doctrines of the English Church,’ the reply as a rule is, ‘Let her choose for herself;’ ‘She can go to the English Church while she is under your care.’ Next we extract permission to buy the young lady a Bible, Prayer Book, and Hymn Book, all three quite new to her and looked upon by her as part of her school outfit.¹⁵

The “doctrines of the English Church” include the celebration of Patronal Festivals, and we have a description of one in a letter from Miss Isabella Madden:

We had a great day on Monday, S. Michael’s Day. On Sunday evening we had a regular choral service, the same music to the Psalms and responses as at S. Bartholomew’s at home; it was very good indeed.

Then on Monday we had a celebration here at 7 a.m. with a good deal of music; then a holiday breakfast in the schoolroom for all of us. Matins at 10.30 a.m., and a beautiful address to the children from Mr Balfour. Tea at 3 p.m. for the day scholars, and games. &c., in the garden. Then tea again at 6.30 p.m. for the rest, and a little acting got up by Miss Barrett, a charade,

13 QPBM, no.46, October 1879

14 QPBM, no.63, January 1884

15 QPBM, no.59, January 1883. Letter from Sr Louisa

and dancing until 9.30. The children enjoyed it greatly. ... our Festival services quite put to shame many a choir at home.¹⁶

A “long-looked-for” visit from the Bishop, which had been delayed for a year, is described in a letter written by “An Associate” in November 1881. Accompanying the Bishop was Father Rivington of the Society of St John the Evangelist, *en route* for Bombay via Natal, and also the Rev the Hon. A.V. Lyttelton, who was to take temporary charge of the parish. They arrived on a Saturday afternoon. That morning,

we set to work to decorate the front stoep and the door with greenery and roses, which the children had procured for us. Happily, at noon, the sun came forth in all its African splendour, and we drove out in three several parties to meet the Bishop and his friends ... We met the Bishop about three hours from the town and then returned in procession. ... Next day we enjoyed a Sunday of refreshing services. The Bishop preached in the morning; Father Rivington gave an address to children in the afternoon, by which he quite won their hearts, and he preached again in the evening. He gave a special service on Monday at 8 o'clock; the church was crowded each time. He had to leave Harrismith early on Tuesday morning. On Wednesday and Thursday our children had holidays, and at 5 p.m. on Wednesday the Confirmation took place. Our ten “Home” girls walked to and from the Church looking very sweet and nice in their white dresses and soft white veils. The Bishop was specially pleased with their quiet, composed demeanour.¹⁷

While festival days brightened the year, most of the time the staff’s attention was focussed on the regular work of education. Letters home sometimes asked for necessary materials. “We teachers want some sterling reading-books for the upper classes – Roman, Grecian, and French histories; and also French and German reading-books, not too advanced; and any amount of good classical music would be most acceptable, and glees or part songs for girls’ voices only.”¹⁸ “Scripture pictures are much needed for both the Colonist Infant and Native Schools.”¹⁹ “Bibles, Prayer Books, and Hymn Books for school use;

16 QPBM, no.47, January 1880. St Michael’s Day, 1879. Miss Barrett joined the Community that December and later returned to Harrismith as Sister Louisa Jane.

17 QPBM, no.55, January 1882. Re. the Rev the Hon A.V. Lyttelton, see Crisp, p.72

18 QPBM, no.55, January 1882

19 QPBM, no.58, October 1882. The African School is described later in this chapter.

prizes.”²⁰ Having received a mission box, Sister Louisa wrote, “We are very grateful for the Archbishop’s books. The other books will, most of them, be additions to our library.”²¹ Later in the same year, Sister Emma Keith did “not know how to be grateful enough” for all the items received in a mission box from Dublin, which included books that “we were very glad to get, some for prizes and some for our library and for lending to children and others.”²² A letter published in January 1886 reported that “an increase in our numbers this half has put more spirit into both teachers and scholars, and we hope next year to send up some for the Cape Town Elementary Examination.”²³

In November 1881, one of the staff wrote from Harrismith²⁴, “The house itself *must* be repaired before next winter and its snow-storms; for the winter, though short, is quite as cold as at home, and Harrismith is famed for its piercing winds.” She described how, during the last snow-storm, they “ate, cooked, dwelt and almost slept in one room, the refectory, and sat huddled round the one stove like so many Lapps. ... School was not thought of for five days.” Many improvements were needed.

There are four rooms in the house with earth-floors, a sign of great poverty, and our canvas ceilings act as ventilators, and also, too well, as percolators! We are also most anxious to improve the outward respectability of the house. We did what we could, a short while ago, by painting the window-frames ourselves, but the white-washing wants renewing very badly. We are also doing our best to rear a few plants in paraffin tins and butter barrels (painted green). Would some kind friend send us out some seeds? They are very expensive, and can hardly be got here.

“I know it would do your hearts good to hear of the brave, beautiful work Sister Louisa and her loyal helpers are doing, such a happy healthy tone there is among the girls,” wrote Mrs Standley-Allum, wife of the Rector of Bethlehem, to Miss Trench on June 16, 1882. She mentioned also the new dormitory under construction at the school; and a letter from an Associate at Harrismith, published in the same issue of the *Quarterly Paper*, gave more details. There had been a great need for additional accommodation, and the new building formed a continuous line with the schoolroom and the old

20 QPBM, no.59, January 1883

21 QPBM, no.63, January 1884. Books by Archbishop Trench of Dublin, sent by Miss Trench.

22 QPBM, no.66, October 1884

23 QPBM, no.71, January 1886

24 QPBM, no.55, January 1882

dormitory. “We are rather proud” of it, she wrote, going on to say that the cost may “sound extravagant to English ears, but you must take into consideration that we have boarded floors and ceilings, the acme of luxury out here, as wood is a very expensive article.”²⁵ Sister Louisa, in the following issue of the *Quarterly Paper*, gave the cost as £340, of which only £200 had been paid. The room measured 36 feet by 28 feet. “We are extremely poor, and are just now struggling to pay We must trust to external help for all improvements and means of keeping our place in repair.”²⁶

“The work here cannot be a drag upon the Mother-House,” Sister Maria had written in October 1879,²⁷ but the viability of the Branch House depended heavily upon the success of its school. Pupil numbers were affected by conditions in the surrounding countryside. Sister Maria reported a roll of about thirty girls, most of them day-scholars. At the time, St Michael’s was the only English-language High School for girls in that part of the country. At the end of 1882 two new girls’ schools opened, one Wesleyan and the other private, reducing St Michael’s to nineteen pupils, although “still having the largest number in the town.” Appealing for financial help from the Association in the United Kingdom, the Rector of Harrismith, the Revd W.A. Holbech, wrote, “the fees of nineteen pupils do not nearly cover the expenses of a household such as S. Michael’s Home, though the staff of Sisters and Lady Workers is reduced to the smallest number consistent with the efficiency of the work. To close the school and withdraw from the work would be disastrous to the Church in this place.”²⁸ The following year the problem was a very severe drought, leading to very bad business in the towns, “and poverty is universal. If only we had our bad debts paid, we would manage to live; but we sometimes keep a girl for six months, give her board and lodging, and then find her family are bankrupt, and our money lost.”²⁹ The *Quarterly Paper* for January 1886 carried news of an increase in numbers in the School. The Rector wrote: “Our Sisterhood School ... still continues its good work; those who have worked there during the last three years have shown a good example of how a work small in appearance but great in importance, may be not only carried on through difficulties, but carried on well and vigorously. I do not know if the Sister in Charge thinks it worthwhile to possess a purse, but if she does, I know that she can have very little to put in it.”³⁰ Three years later, Canon Holbech, by then Warden to

25 QPBM, no.58, October 1882

26 QPBM, no.59, January 1883

27 QPBM, no.47, January 1880

28 QPBM, no.60, April 1883

29 QPBM, no.63, January 1884. Letter from Sister Louisa.

30 Rev. W.A. Holbech, QPBM, no.71, January 1886

the Sisterhood, made a return visit to Harrismith and found “the school there increased in numbers and in good order; the staff consists now of one Sister, two Associates, and a Pupil Teacher, who has been educated in the Bloemfontein School.”³¹

The school “prospered and increased under Sister Florence’s able management,” reported the *Chronicler* in 1893.³² The recovery in the fortunes of the school enabled the Sisters to start saving money towards building a new chapel. From the beginning they had a chapel in the Home but it was very small. Acknowledging receipt of a white frontal which had been made specially to fit the altar, the letter writer described it as “such a beautiful piece of needlework for a tiny chapel in an out-of-the-way corner of this large Diocese, where *only* two or three can ever gather in Christ’s name. *Small* as our chapel is, ... it is a great comfort to have it, and a great rest in the midst of a busy and somewhat monotonous life to be able sometimes to go away from the work, and be quite alone there.”³³ The new chapel was completed in 1893 at a cost of £168, almost all raised by the sale of items sent out from England in mission boxes. Subsequently “our old friend Miss Playnes and her sister” sent gifts for the chapel, including six altar candlesticks and two standards.³⁴

Although the main purpose of St Michael’s Home, Harrismith, was to educate the daughters of colonists, from very early in its history Sisters and Associates (who had, of course, gone to the country for mission work) began to look for opportunities of extending their efforts to include the black population. Miss H. Madden wrote home on 18 April, 1879: “It is so sad there is no mission here to the Africans. I want to pick up Zulu; one might then talk to the two men” who worked in the kitchen and garden.³⁵ A later issue of the *Quarterly Paper* included another of her letters.

It made me so sad one day, to hear poor Jack [the African servant] singing the air of a hymn that he heard the school children sing, and to think that he knew nothing about the words. Do try very hard to get someone to come, we are wanting an African Mission here so much. You don’t know how sad it is to have all these poor natives working for the colonists as servants, and to think we never do a thing for them; I can hardly bear the idea some times. I want you all to pray for an African Mission here.³⁶

31 QPBM, no.84, April 1889

32 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1893

33 QPBM, no.71, January 1886

34 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1893

35 QPBM, no.45, August 1879

36 QPBM, no.47, January 1880

The report of Bishop Webb's visit in November 1881 indicates that some work had by then begun. Four coloured women were confirmed and several black children were baptised at other services.³⁷ Sister Louisa wrote of the progress:

One thing I am most pleased about, and this is that, owing to Mrs. Madden's kind interest, we have been able to open a day school for black children. It is as yet only two months old, and has thirty-eight children on the books, as well as ten women, who come to a night school held four evenings in the week. It is an iron building 40 feet x 25 feet. The cost of it is £78. Mr Lyttelton opened it the day before he left. We now have thirty-one Africans in Sunday school.³⁸

Mrs Standley-Allum, writing after a week's rest in Harrismith, was full of praise. "For Miss Walker's African school, there is only one word – vigorous; teachers and children working away 'might and main', and certainly looking as 'happy as the day is long.'³⁹

As already mentioned, the Sisters employed some African staff to assist in the running of the Home, and one letter from Sister Louisa described their work and told of the Sisters' encouragement of their education.

Our staff of servants consists of two young native women and one Zulu man; the latter chops wood, carries water, scrubs the floors after an *African fashion*, and goes on messages. One woman is housemaid and assistant laundress, I am head laundress; one of our ladies is ironing woman, which she manages on Saturday when we have not school. Another lady folds all the linen for our *live mangle*. This living mangle is our Zulu, who, when the clothes are folded and wrapped up in a cover pinned neatly together and covered with a rug, stamps on them, or rather dances a war-dance, and sings a war-song to which he keeps good time. When well trampled the linen looks almost as well as if really mangled in a machine. Our other black woman is parlour-maid, and I suppose should say cook, as she takes the dinner from the kitchen after having stood to see Miss P[ople] or myself cooking. ... I send these two to our African school every morning

37 QPBM, no.55, January 1882

38 QPBM, no.56, April 1882. "Mrs Madden" probably refers to the mother of Miss H. Madden who wrote of the need for an African mission. Henrietta Madden and Isabella Madden were sisters from Co. Wicklow in Ireland, and were in Harrismith together. Henrietta taught in the School and Isabella gave music lessons.

39 QPBM, no.58, October 1882

for two hours; one was baptised some time ago, and was confirmed last month during our Bishop's stay, when besides nineteen of our townspeople, including five of our girls, there were three blacks confirmed. My little housemaid is preparing for baptism; Miss P[ople] is teaching her. ... Our African school is not yet a year old, and it numbers 52 boys and girls.⁴⁰

The African school was prospering, supporters of the Mission read in January 1886, although the attendance varied much with the weather. The African Service on Sundays was also very well attended, and there had been two or three adult baptisms and two weddings, beside a class of Catechumens, and another group preparing for Confirmation.

The work is necessarily very slow, and there are many disappointments and drawbacks; but there is much too that is very encouraging, and when grown-up men and women come really eager for instruction Sunday after Sunday, in all weathers, we cannot but hope that some seed is being sown which will spring up in due time. But that may be said of all our work; it is all in its infancy, we cannot look for grand results yet, only we must try to lay the foundation so firmly, that others may build on it in the future.⁴¹

It must have been a great disappointment to all involved when the African school had to be closed twelve years later for lack of funds. The other work among the blacks went on steadily.

Miss Walker still continues her class for Instruction. Last year fifteen candidates were confirmed, six men and nine women, and all who live in or near the town are regular communicants. ... At present we have three Catechumens preparing for Holy Baptism.

One of them had been instructed for some time previously by another black living on a neighbouring farm – “a good deal of work is carried on in this way by the Africans themselves.” The Rector had been hoping for money to employ an African Catechist to work in the district, but not enough had been forthcoming. “There is also room for the development of work in the town amongst the Zulu who come here from Natal, but for this work also an African Catechist is much needed.”⁴²

40 QPBM, no.59, January 1883

41 QPBM, no.71, January 1886

42 QPBM, no.125, July 1899, p.138. The Rector was the Revd D. Hepburn Brown

Sister Louisa had taken charge of the work in Harrismith directly after completing some months of nursing the sick and wounded at Newcastle in Natal, during the Transvaal War. “Her great wish is to see a hospital in Harrismith,” an Associate wrote in November 1881.⁴³ Two years later, the hard-working Sister was able to describe the beginnings of the work.

Just now we have begun hospital work under difficulties, and I have four serious cases on my hands in addition to my other duties at the Home.⁴⁴

In the following issue of the *Quarterly Paper* she gave more details.

Our Bishop rents for us a long store in the town, and in it we have begun the much-needed work of nursing. ... there is no leisure moment in the day. I am nursing the hospital with its five beds single-handed, without even a servant, in addition to the Home school-work. We have no funds to pay a nurse. I can hardly tell you what miseries have been suffered and deaths caused, both to Europeans and Africans, for want of anybody to take care of them when ill. ... Our work is necessarily very rough; but a bed to lie on, and some one to give them a drink, is thought luxury in this rough place, by poor strangers who fall ill. I take in all the prison sick, and the Dutch Government pay me £1. 1s. a week for them. We hope in time to go into regular hospital work. We have one black patient now, such a nice little Zulu boy. He was operated on for cancer, and is doing well. The blacks are most easily nursed; they ... have a sort of superstitious reverence for the doctor and nurse.⁴⁵

A letter from Bloemfontein published in the same issue of the *Quarterly* appealed for “a lady nurse, who could pay her own passage, and something for her board,” to relieve the pressure on Sister Louisa. “All the beds have been occupied ever since it was opened.”

By the time that information was published, Bishop Webb had already left the Diocese for his new duties as Bishop of Grahamstown. Sister Louisa also was about to leave, moved by the Community to strengthen the staff of the Carnarvon Hospital in Kimberley.

43 QPBM, no.55, January 1882

44 QPBM, no. 62, October 1883. Letter from Sr Louisa, dated August 31, 1883

45 QPBM, no.63, January 1884

The Editor of the *Free State Chronicle* wrote of their “unfeigned regret” at her departure. The work would continue:

The Public Hospital in which she took so much interest and brought so much experience and enthusiasm to bear upon, will now pass into other hands; the public have undertaken a responsibility which she had charged herself with and conscientiously and religiously devoted herself to.⁴⁶

It was probably the Hospital begun by Sister Louisa which evolved into “the little Cottage Hospital” where twenty-five British prisoners of war and eighteen Boers were treated up to January 1900, following the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War.⁴⁷

When Webb’s successor, Bishop Knight Bruce, made his first visit to Harrismith in November 1886, apart from visiting St Michael’s School and the African school, St Mary’s, the Bishop held an evening *Conversazione* “to which all the church people and their friends were invited.” It took place in the large school room at St Michael’s, which was “furnished as a drawing-room; the parishioners sending furniture, flowers, and decorations for the purpose.”⁴⁸ By that time the Sisters were well-known in the town, not only through their work of education but also because of the Sales of Work which were held from time to time after mission boxes had been received from the United Kingdom.

Our sales are, I am glad to say, very popular, as the things our kind friends send us are far superior to any that can be bought in the stores here. In the Free State towns, we have not got shops of different sorts, as at home; but each store sells things of all sorts, from bacon to cheese to bonnets and feathers; so, as you may believe, all are inferior; and I have been long enough in the country now to look on the pretty things that come from home as a treat. It is most amusing to recognise our sale goods on most of the best-dressed children in the town.⁴⁹

Apart from building good relationships with the townspeople, the sales raised important funds for the two schools.

46 Issue of 7 February 1884, quoted in Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in South Africa*, p.86

47 Watt, S.A., Harrismith, *South African Military History Journal*, 8 (1), June 1989.

48 QPBM, no.76, April 1887

49 QPBM, no.63, January 1884. Letter from Sister Louisa.

The Free State was scourged by rinderpest, a cattle plague, in 1897, bringing most business to a standstill and creating much hardship. The Sisters' school in Bloemfontein was seriously affected, but the Harrismith school somehow prospered, with an increase in numbers and excellent examination results.⁵⁰ On August 28, 1899, the Community's new Warden, the Revd Edward Bate, reported that there were forty pupils, of whom nine were boarders. Two Sisters and four teachers were in residence, and they were assisted by the Rector, the Revd D. Hepburn Brown.⁵¹

Circumstances were about to change. On October 11, 1899, the South African Republic and the Orange Free State declared war against the United Kingdom. Martial Law was declared in the Free State the following day. The first entry for 1900 in the Community's chronicle noted where the various Sisters were. Sisters Monica and Louisa Jane were the two in Harrismith, and it recorded that Sister Louisa Jane was very ill.⁵² She had been wasting away since August, wrote Canon Balfour at Epiphany 1900.⁵³ She died on 22 February and was buried in Harrismith the next afternoon. "It was practically impossible for the Mother and myself to get to Harrismith to see her before the end," wrote the Warden. "We sung her Requiem here [in Bloemfontein] the following day."⁵⁴ Although the Orange Free State was still intact, under war conditions travelling would have been even more difficult than usual.

Bloemfontein was occupied by British forces on 13 March, 1900, and Harrismith on 4 August. The War, however, continued until May 1902, and Harrismith "was to serve as the base for all military operations conducted by the 8th Division until the end of hostilities."⁵⁵ It makes understandable the decision taken in July 1901 by the Community's Chapter that the school at Harrismith should be closed.⁵⁶ Apart from the continuing military skirmishes, the region was being devastated by the British policy of moving non-combatant men, women and children off the farms in order to deny their support to the Boer commandos. "The first removals in the Harrismith district took place in October 1900 when 255 women and children were sent to Ladysmith, while 190 men went to Durban."⁵⁷ There was a heavy death toll among the women

50 FSA, White Book I, vol.i, 1897

51 QPBM, no.126, October 1899

52 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1900

53 QPBM, no.127, January 1900

54 QPBM, no.129, July 1900

55 Watt, S.A., Harrismith, *South African Military History Journal*, 8 (1), June 1989.

56 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1901

57 Watt, S.A., Harrismith, *South African Military History Journal*, 8 (1), June 1989.

and children in the concentration camps, and “universal ruin” overtook the country. “Every homestead was burned, all crops and livestock destroyed.”⁵⁸ The Community foresaw that for some years to come there would be few pupils able to attend a boarding school, and no money to pay the fees on which the school depended. It is not recorded when Sister Monica and the three or four lady teachers left the town for Bloemfontein. The buildings remained the property of the Community, “and work may be resumed there at any time, if it should seem desirable.”⁵⁹

The school never re-opened. The buildings were probably let out until it was decided to sell them. On April 21, 1921, a Chapter Meeting was held to decide what to do with the money received from the sale of the Harrismith property.⁶⁰ The *Chronicler* showed the amount as £600, but a letter and account from the Bloemfontein Board of Executors and Trust Company Ltd states it as £650.⁶¹ This was considerably less than the £2,000 paid for the property by Bishop Webb. It is possible that the Home had been re-mortgaged: as early as February 1882 Bishop Webb had taken a loan using “the half (bordering on Stuart Street) of the Water Erf No. 126 ... with the buildings thereon” as collateral.⁶²

Ten years after the school closed, a very successful meeting of St Michael’s Old Girls was held at Harrismith in November 1911.⁶³ Former pupils of the Sisterhood’s schools at Bloemfontein, Kimberley and Harrismith gathered from all over South Africa. Prominent among them was Mrs Annie Botha, wife of General Louis Botha. As Annie Emmet she had been a pupil teacher in Harrismith. Mrs Botha chaired the meeting jointly with Miss Andrews, Headmistress of the Bloemfontein school. After the business meeting in the Town Hall, lunch was taken at the Royal Hotel. Mrs Botha invited all the Old Girls to attend a meeting the following year at the Prime Ministerial residence in Pretoria.

The Sisters’ contribution to the development of Harrismith was remembered with affection, and when the Municipality celebrated its centenary in October 1974, the Community was invited to send representatives. Mother Mary Ruth and Sister Eleanor attended, participating in “a grand service in the Church of St John the Baptist” and in the other festivities that followed.⁶⁴

58 Reitz, *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Anglo-Boer War*, p.249

59 QPBM, no.143, January 1904

60 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 21 April 1921

61 HPRA Wits, AB2644/17

62 HPRA Wits, AB2644/15, Acte van Schepenkennis nr.10/36, 8 February 1882

63 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, November 1911

64 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 25 October 1974



The Sisters' holiday cottage at Scottburgh, painted in watercolours by Sister Elsie.



The Mission Box from between 1900 and 1910, in the archive room of St Michael's School. (Photo: Author)

CHAPTER 10



MISSION BOXES

We have made mention in earlier chapters of Mission Boxes that were received by the Sisterhood, and of their useful or saleable contents. In the *Quarterly Papers* there are many articles and letters about these boxes that were sent out from the United Kingdom to individual clergy and parishes, as well as to the Sisterhood. We read of their arrival, of the excitement of unpacking them, and details of the contents and how they were used or sold. Published letters include requests for particular items that were needed or which would help in the work.

We are fortunate that one Mission Box has survived and is kept in the archive room of St Michael's School. The address painted on the lid, "The Revd. Mother Superior, St. Michael's Home, Bloemfontein, O.R.C., S. Africa", reveals that it was despatched from the United Kingdom at some time between May 1900 and May 1910, because that decade was the only period in which the O.R.C. (Orange River Colony) existed. The sturdy wooden box has an interior metal lining to protect the contents during transportation.

In 1876, Mrs Webb provided some general directions for any readers of the *Quarterly* "who may at any time like to *send out their own boxes*, either of gifts to the Mission itself, or presents to members of the Mission party." This is what she wrote:

The actual expense of sending out a box, including the packing-case, and carriage as far as Port Elizabeth, varies from £2 to £6. The carriage cannot

be *pre-paid*, beyond Port Elizabeth, though extra money is kindly sent by our friends, sometimes, for this purpose. Wooden cases are recommended, lined with tin or zinc. – Any ordinary carpenter will furnish these, at from £1 to £2. High, long, and rather narrow boxes are better than square ones. The tin cover has to be soldered on, and the wooden lid *screwed*, not *nailed* down. Rope is of no use for fastening, as it is often stolen on the road. A ‘military chest of drawers’ has from time to time been sent out by our friends, instead of a packing-case. Such things are invaluable afterwards, as furniture is very scarce; and they hold a great deal. Second-hand, they can sometimes be bought for £4.

As the cases have to travel nearly 500 miles up the country, by bullock-waggon, (a very rough mode of conveyance,) they should be *very carefully packed*, and all needless weight avoided. Coarse unbleached calico is recommended for wrapping, instead of paper, as this is useful afterwards for kitchen purposes. For details as to the most useful articles to send, see Quarterly Paper for July. Miss Buckle would supply the list, on application.

The address should always be *painted* on the box. ‘Bishop of Bloemfontein,’ (or ‘The Mother Superior,’) Bloemfontein, O.F.S., PORT ELIZABETH (in large letters,) S. Africa. If needed, any private name might be added in the corner.

For all particulars of shipping, apply to the Agents of the Union Steam Ship Co., Messrs. Mercer & Co., 11, Leadenhall St., London, E.C., stating roughly the contents of the box, and the value for which it should be insured.

Because of the length of time necessary for the sea passage, the unloading at Port Elizabeth, and the waggon journey inland, she advised that “acknowledgement of safe arrival must not be expected under four or even six months.”¹

Although some mission boxes were despatched by individuals, it was most common for boxes to be sent either from branches of the Mission Association or on behalf of the whole Association. “The Annual Sisterhood box will be sent end October / November by Miss Holland, 109 Harley Street, London,” we read in 1879, and in November 1880

1 QPBM no.32, April, 1876. Italics in original.

she sent two boxes to the Sisterhood. The Birkenhead Associates sent a box in 1881, and the Dublin branch, organised by Miss Trench, sent boxes to the Sisters at Harrismith.²

Letters usually advised the addressees when boxes had been despatched from Britain but, because of the slow transport from the coast to the Free State, it was difficult to know when they could be expected to arrive. An Associate at Harrismith wrote,

After waiting for the boxes in great suspense, for what seemed to us an eternity (as we feared some accident had befallen them coming ‘up country’, such as falling overboard into a ‘spruit’ or being looted), we at last received the joyful tidings that the waggons containing them were being off-loaded in the town.³

Boxes for Harrismith were shipped via the port of Durban, to provide the shortest route inland. Even so, we read of a box taking more than two months from Natal.⁴

The transport within South Africa was not only the slowest part of the journey: it was also the most expensive. After the luggage belonging to Mother Emma and her party arrived in Bloemfontein, she wrote:

It has all come up beautifully safely, and so quickly, only 21 days from Grahamstown. What do you think the charge is for carriage? 24s. per cwt, or £24 per ton: so that the cost altogether amounted to £105! I tell you all this that you may see in sending things out how necessary it is to ascertain that they are really worth the carriage.⁵

Mrs Croghan told of expenses for two boxes “in Port Elizabeth and carriage up the country” amounting to £27. The contents were sold for £115, “so I think those boxes did very well.”⁶

You must *come* to Africa to know what it is to open an English box; no sensation that I have experienced is so delightful as seeing the last

2 QPBM no.43, January 1879; no.51, January 1881; no.54, October 1881; no.66, October 1884; no.71, January 1886.

3 QPBM no.58, October 1882.

4 QPBM no.71, January 1886. Letter to Miss Trench written on 17 October 1885.

5 QPOFSM no.28, April 1875. Sister Emma’s Journal Continued.

6 QPBM no.30, October 1875. Letter from Mrs Croghan dated 6 August 1875.

screw taken out; and hitherto the contents have always been more than the expectations.⁷

Each box contained items sent in by many individuals and Work Parties. It was a very good way of enabling a wide variety of people to make what contribution they could to support the Sisterhood and the work of the Diocese. The two boxes sent by Miss Holland in November 1880 contained parcels from four Work Parties, one branch Association, and thirteen individuals. The Sisters tried to acknowledge each contribution, writing sometimes long letters in the *Quarterly* – Sister Fanny took two pages of the October 1886 issue. Miss Langlands was briefer, but added a caution: “Should any name have been omitted in the list, the cause is that, being single-handed when unpacking the various parcels, it is almost impossible to put down each name when sorting the things, and adding them to the lists, as one is anxious to see what is in the next parcel.”⁸

Many of the items sent were needlework, such as baby garments, clothes for children and adults, embroidered handkerchiefs, table cloths and napkins, crocheted shawls, and a variety of fancy goods that were not easily available in a pioneering environment. The idea was that the Sisters and other recipients of boxes would sell the items, so raising money in the Free State while also building up contacts with the local community. If residents asked for particular things, that request would be sent back to the United Kingdom in the hope of receiving the desired items in the next box. The money raised was vital to maintain the work. “I am thankful to think that your Box will soon be on its way to us,” wrote Sister Louisa to Miss Trench, “as this year is a hard struggle for us.” Proceeds from the sale of nearly all the items in a box sent by the Pimlico Association to Mrs Webb were used “to help pay the Sisters’ expenses at the new Jagersfontein Hospital.” The Rev. J.W. Stenson of St Matthew’s Mission, Kimberley, where he had the help of Sisters, appealed: “I find that boxes are regularly sent to large European parishes, whereas S. Matthew’s – a purely native mission – has not benefitted from any help from the Association ... A few boxes of clothing and fancy articles for a bazaar to be held in October will help us.”⁹

Not all the contents were for sale. The boxes were used also to send things needed by the Sisters for their Schools, and Mother Emma requested Bibles (“They must have maps and references, and I *like* them to have the Apocrypha bound up with them also.”), and “a box containing only exercise and copy-books and note-books, foolscap paper, blotting-

7 QPBM no.30, October 1875. Extracts from a letter written by one of the Sisters.

8 QPBM, no.74, October 1886; no.54, October 1881.

9 QPBM, no.61, July 1883; no.55, January 1882; no.108, January 1895.

paper, drawing-paper, lead pencils, indiarubbers, patterns, and materials for fancy work.” On another occasion she wrote,

I will mention a few things we will be glad of for our own use. *Unbleached table-cloths*; material for making them would be best ... Between 90 and 100 dine every day in our Refectory; so you may imagine the wear and tear of table-cloths. *Carving-knives and forks* ... and some infallible machine for sharpening them. *Nice books for prizes* ... all standard works of poetry and fiction, and well-bound Bibles and other devotional books, such as the Imitation, Christian Year, and Herbert’s Poems. ... homoeopathic medicines in pillules (any quantity of the mostly used medicines, and a few others.)¹⁰

In the early years, timber was in short supply in the Free State and very expensive. It is probable that many of the mission boxes were taken apart so that the wood could be re-used for other purposes. “We have only unpacked two of the smallest boxes yet ... because we have no room to put the things”, wrote Mother Emma five days after the arrival of her party’s luggage, but several weeks later she reported, “We have unpacked everything now, being obliged to do so because the wood of the packing cases was wanted for the ceilings of the new rooms.”¹¹

The railway connecting Bloemfontein to Port Elizabeth was completed in 1890, and substantially reduced both the time and costs of transporting the boxes within South Africa.

Boxes were still being sent regularly in 1913¹², but the Great War of 1914 – 1918 interrupted the pattern. The 1915 Report of the English Committee of Help advised supporters,

It is impossible for the Committee to undertake to send boxes this year on fixed dates. The cost of carriage has increased and it is uncertain if working parties will be able to send their usual contributions.

Two years later the Report revealed that “the risk and prohibitive cost has prevented us sending any boxes this year, although gifts have been collected ready to send.” The end of the War did not immediately improve matters, and it continued to be impossible to

10 QPBM, no.44, April 1879; no.54, October 1881. Italics in original.

11 QPOFSM no.28, April 1875. Extracts from later letters: May 26 and July 17, 1874.

12 QPBM, no.180, April 1913.

send boxes in 1919, but in 1920 Sister Maud was visiting England and packed a box for which she collected money to pay the freightage.¹³ Shipping was by then returning to its pre-War schedules.

Boxes appear to have been sent out regularly during the inter-war years, but the experience of the First World War had helped to reduce dependence on this material help from the United Kingdom. By the 1930s, text books, school books and almost everything the Sisters needed for their work was available in South Africa, and the contents of the boxes were destined for the Annual Sale of Work in November. Passengers travelling on the Union-Castle Line ships had a free allowance for items not wanted on the voyage to be carried in the ships' holds. In 1937, two ladies packed a box to be taken by Sister Margaret Dorothea when she returned to South Africa after visiting Britain. Opportunities to save on shipping costs were not wasted: "as an aspirant is sailing in the middle of October she can bring out another box," wrote Mother Mary Ursula.

In this connection, I must speak of the faithful work done by Miss Goodwin, who packed the 'Bournemouth Box' for us year after year; she wrote last year that she was in failing health and could not continue the work, and we heard of her death not very long after we received the last 'Bournemouth Box'.¹⁴

A box from the Birkenhead branch shipped as freight arrived too late for the 1939 Sale, and in 1940 there were boxes from East Dulwich, Winchester, Birkenhead and Leamington. Britain was then again at War, and the Sisters realised they could expect little or no help from England.¹⁵ One box, "chiefly from Winchester", arrived to help the 1946 Sale¹⁶, but that may have been the last.

The era of the Mission Box was over.

13 SMS, ECH Reports for 1915, 1917, 1919

14 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, Mother Superior's letter, 7 August, 1937

15 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's letters 16 August 1940, 24 July 1941, 21 July 1942

16 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's letter, 25 July, 1947



Sister Rosalie at Scottburgh, paddling in the Indian Ocean on her 82nd birthday.



The first St Faith's Orphanage in Elizabeth Street, across the road from St Michael's.



St Faith's children with Sister Maud and her Assistant in 1914.

CHAPTER 11



CALLED TO NURSE AT THE ZULU WAR

“We have had the privilege of sending four ladies, including our Mother Superior, to nurse our sick and wounded soldiers on the borders of Natal, at the request of the Surgeon-General of the forces.” Bishop Webb’s letter, written at Whitsuntide, appeared in the *Quarterly Paper* for August 1879.

The same issue included a letter from Fr James Douglas, recently arrived from the United Kingdom and by the time of writing already taking over as Superior at the Modderpoort Brotherhood. He had sailed out on the Union Steamship Company’s *American*, which was carrying also six hundred men of the 99th Regiment, bound for Natal. He had not been able to do any spiritual work among the soldiers. The implication is that he was not permitted to do any. His voyage must have been completed late in 1878, because the 99th Regiment were already in Natal by 11 January 1879.¹

That was the date when three columns of British troops invaded the Kingdom of Zululand. Sir Henry Bartle Frere, Governor of the Cape and British High Commissioner for South Africa, was determined to bring about a confrontation with the Zulus. He had been appointed in 1877 by the Earl of Carnarvon, Secretary of State for the

1 QPBM no.45, August 1879; Clammer, *The Zulu War*, p.28, 31, 35

Colonies, with the brief of establishing a confederation of the colonies and states of Southern Africa. He arrived in April, the same month that Sir Theophilus Shepstone annexed the Transvaal Republic for the United Kingdom in the face of opposition from the Transvaal government. There had been a long-running border dispute between the Transvaal and Zululand. An independent Commission of Inquiry upheld the Zulu claims, but Frere and Shepstone chose to ignore its findings, to keep them secret from the public, and to play upon the fears long expressed in both the Transvaal and Natal of a possible invasion by the powerful Zulu army, said to number some 30,000 warriors. The Lieutenant Governor of Natal, Sir Henry Bulwer, did not consider the Zulu threat serious: he tried in vain to prevent any military action. Frere decided to provoke a crisis by issuing an ultimatum to King Cetshwayo on 11 December 1878, demanding, among other things, the disbandment of the Zulu army within thirty days. It was impossible for the King to accede to those demands and the British forces, most of which had been in their positions on the border by the end of December, duly invaded.² The major defeat and heavy losses they suffered at Isandhlwana on 22 January led to their retreat back across the border into Natal. It also prompted the military authorities to set up makeshift hospitals at Ladysmith, the nearest town to Helpmekaar and Rorke's Drift, and at Utrecht and Newcastle in the north. "Without adequate supplies and medicines, the sick list grew and deaths mounted."³

It was on the Friday in Easter Week, 18 April, that Mother Emma, Sister Louisa, Miss Langlands and Miss Potts left Bloemfontein for the journey to Natal.⁴ It was a difficult and cold journey: on the second evening, "a bitterly cold night", the horses refused to proceed and the four ladies slept sitting upright in the coach; the next night the driver was so ill with the cold that he could not continue. The party was glad to reach Harrismith, where they rested for two days at St Michael's Home before crossing the Drakensberg. They arrived at Ladysmith on 25 April, St Mark's Day, and were "most kindly received by Mr Mitchell, the clergyman, and Dr Comerford, the military surgeon."⁵ Mr Mitchell had moved out of his house to make it available as a residence for the Sisters. "A lumber room in the parsonage was turned out and fitted up in a very humble way as an Oratory in which the parish priest celebrated two or three times a week."⁶ After tidying themselves and taking some luncheon, the four went across to the hospital.

2 See Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, ch.3, & Clammer, *The Zulu War*, chapters 1 & 2

3 Best & Stossel, *Sister Janet*, p.72

4 White Book I, vol.i, April, 1879

5 QPBM, no.45, August 1879 & no.46, October 1879

6 As note 4. The Eucharists were on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturday and Saints' days. QPBM 46, October 1879

Sister Louisa, “a very capable manager, and a woman of indomitably cheerful disposition”⁷, was an experienced nurse who had trained at Dublin in her native Ireland. She was in her 42nd year when she arrived in Bloemfontein on 24 February 1876 as an Associate, intending to test her vocation to the Community. After being clothed as a novice in November that year she was sent to work in Kimberley. Miss Margaret Langlands travelled out to South Africa in the same party: she arrived as a Lady Worker and subsequently was admitted as an Associate of the Community. For two years she had charge of St Michael’s Infant and Day School in Bloemfontein and in 1878 she was instrumental in adding a boarding facility and also started training pupil teachers. Having completed three years’ voluntary service, Miss Langlands had been about to return to the United Kingdom when the Bishop was asked by the military authorities to send nurses: her boxes had been despatched to Port Elizabeth in January for shipment home, but she offered to fill in until other nurses could be sent.⁸ Miss Potts also was an Associate, and was a more recent arrival in the country. She may have been nursing in the Carnarvon Hospital at Kimberley when the call to Zululand came.⁹

Two weeks after their arrival, Mother Emma wrote a letter on 9 May describing their journey and the situation they found at Ladysmith. The Dutch Church had been turned into a hospital with thirty beds, and there were three large marquees outside, each holding twelve beds. “There were altogether sixty-eight patients, no wounded among them, but dysentery, fever and liver, also some heart complaints supposed to be caused by all the dreadful sights and sounds.”¹⁰ In a subsequent letter, published in the next issue of the *Quarterly Paper*, the number of patients was given as eighty, in the church and four marquees. “The cases were chiefly enteric fever and dysentery.” Enteric fever, also known as typhoid, was a major problem for the military forces in this and subsequent wars. When the Sisters arrived, they found the staff to be one hospital sergeant, four orderlies and one doctor. “All these were a good deal overworked.”

The bedsteads each consisted of three planks raised by two supports about six inches above the floor. The floor of the church was a kind of lime concrete, much worn away. Each patient had on the floor beside his bed

7 Goedhals, Nuns, Guns and Nursing. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34(1), p.9

8 QPBM no.46, October 1879. Letter from Miss Langlands.

9 Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in SA*, p.140, states that both Miss Langlands and Miss Potts were sent to the Carnarvon Hospital with Sr Louisa, and that they were among the first six to be subjected to a training course by Sr Henrietta, beginning in February 1877. The White Book (FSA, A510) does not include their names among those sent to Kimberley in 1877. Also, it seems unlikely that a training course could have been started as early as February 1877, because the Sisters did not take over the Carnarvon until March 1877.

10 QPBM, no.45, August 1879

his knapsack and kit, his soap, and his bottle of medicine and towel, and his rations of bread and often his ration of meat also, for in those days the rations were served out to all alike, so there was often quite a quantity of stale bread by some of the beds, whose occupants were not sufficiently well to eat it.

There was a table at the bottom of the building where the beef-tea was served out, and the patients who were able to walk took it to those who were confined to their beds. The beds and bolsters were bags of coarse linen filled with straw, but we had two air beds, which were given to the patients who most required them. ...

There are two rooms, originally used as vestries, in the Dutch Church. One, the smallest, was the dispensary and surgery, and the other was the sick room of a young officer of the 24th.

One of our first endeavours was to make the building tidy. The kits were removed from the bedsides and stowed on the pulpit stairs and in the pulpit. The bread was no longer served out to men who could not eat it, but given to us to make into puddings and bread and milk for them.¹¹

The Prince Imperial, heir to the throne of France, passed through Ladysmith with Lieutenant General Lord Chelmsford, the Officer Commanding British troops, on their way to the front.¹² Lord Chelmsford gave orders for the floor of the hospital to be repaired and then covered with cocoanut matting. "Neither the doctor nor ourselves quite approved of having matting, but it had to be. The General also ordered the walls to be whitewashed, which they greatly needed, but this was not done."

By July, the Mother Superior was able to report more improvements:

I must try and tell you how the hospital looks now. Sister Louisa very soon managed to arrange a table underneath the pulpit, on the slightly raised platform, for the medicines. So that now, instead of each taking his own out of his bottle, guessing at the time and the dose, Sister Louisa gives it to them herself in a medicine glass properly. The small vestry is now fitted

11 QPBM, no.45, August 1879.

12 The exact date is not known, but it was probably at the end of April. On 2 May Chelmsford was at Dundee, and then at Utrecht preparing for his second invasion. The Prince Imperial was killed by Zulus on 1 June. Clammer, *The Zulu War*, chapters 9 & 10.

up with shelves and racks for the men's kits and knapsacks. There is a stand made near the pulpit for all the rifles. The larger vestry is now the surgery and dispensary, and, best of all, the walls are now whitewashed. General Marshall was here about a fortnight ago, and he gave the decisive orders about it. He called to see me, and was very complimentary about the work we have done. ...

Before the middle of May some feather pillows and white pillow-cases and blankets had been unpacked, and were in use in the hospital and there were tins of flowers in all the windows and on the medicine table, so that the hospital looked delightfully bright and fresh. A little later a screen was made by one of the men, pictures were cut out of magazines and pasted on it. ...¹³

The same letter tells us that Miss Potts was doing the cooking single-handed. Working in one of the marquees, "with a small pack-fire stove, holding only one small saucepan, she has often cooked breakfast for sixteen and seventeen patients, oatmeal porridge, bread and milk, etc. With this same stove she makes all the maizena and sago for the suppers." She enlisted the help of "some of our numerous friends," borrowing the ovens of two residents of the town to bake puddings of sago, rice, tapioca and bread that she had prepared for the dinners. "The people here have been so very kind to us in this and other ways." One gentleman used to send hundreds of eggs and oranges for the patients. Others sent milk and butter, jams and lettuces, books and papers, while one paid a subscription to the lending library to provide books for patients.

Of the patients who were in the hospital when the Sisters arrived, more than half were discharged cured within a fortnight and by that time most of the others were convalescent. The two to whom the air beds were given were long and tedious cases of enteric fever contracted at Rorke's Drift. Miss Langlands added, "for some weeks one feared they could not recover." Eventually both did recover. "We had the pleasure of congratulating one of them on becoming a V.C. man." Miss Langlands was standing by when Mr Mitchell told him that he had been named for the bestowal of the Victoria Cross. "How overwhelmed he looked with delight when we congratulated him! It was almost too much for him!" Private Williams, a young Welshman from the 24th Regiment, had been a defender of the hospital at Rorke's Drift. "They came to such close quarters ...

13 QPBM no.46, October 1879

that one of the enemy snatched the bayonet off Williams' rifle and aimed it at his head, which he happily, missed."

Early in May some more sick arrived from Utrecht, among them some who were wounded at Kambula and Hlobane. One of those from the battle of Kambula had been shot in the bottom of the spine and had lost the use of his legs; another had lost a leg. In her letter of 9 May, Mother Emma wrote:

The authorities here have been instructed to prepare 150 beds; one supposes in anticipation of some hard fighting. There was a slight engagement some days since, in which six of our men were killed. I have not heard how many were wounded. ...

I have just heard that thirty sick and wounded are expected here almost immediately from Newcastle; they are from Colonel Woods' column. We are rather perplexed to know what we shall do with them all. One hundred beds and two hundreds sheets and marquees are on their way here from Maritzburg, but they were only despatched on the 6th [May]; so it will be a long time before they get here, transport waggons are so slow.¹⁴

To make space for new admissions, patients who were well enough to travel were sent to the base hospital at Pietermaritzburg.

Ladysmith was approximately fifty miles from the Zululand border, but on 13 May a report was received that a large body of Zulu warriors had crossed into Natal and were thought to be on their way to attack the town. Extra fortifications were put in place and the Sisters, hospital staff and patients were put on alert that they may have to evacuate the hospital in haste. "When our work was done at the hospital we went home and packed up everything so as to be ready when or if the summons should come," wrote Mother Emma. "Miss Langlands went to bed in her clothes, but the rest of us undressed as usual and we all slept soundly, and were not disturbed. ... The next day all cause for alarm was at an end." The report of Zulus on the move was probably never more than a rumour, symptomatic of the jumpiness which afflicted Natal after the attack on Isandhlwana. Lieutenant Henry Harford, having been serving on secondment with the Natal Native Contingent, was ordered to rejoin his own regiment, the 99th, at the Lower Tugela. He left from the NNC camp overlooking Rorke's Drift and later recorded in his journal, "On my ride down to the Coast I found everywhere – Greytown, Maritzburg and Durban – still suffering from

14 QPBM, no.45, August 1879

nerves and most of the streets with their barricades still standing. There was one laager between Helpmekaar and Greytown, (known afterwards as “Fort Funk”), where nearly a month after Isandhlwana a night scare took place, when several rounds of ammunition were expended on what proved in the morning to be nothing but a derelict ox which a fool of a sentry had mistaken for a party of Zulus.”¹⁵

British propaganda created the image of the Zulu King Cetshwayo as a warmonger disrupting the subcontinent, and responsible for the outbreak of war here, there and everywhere. The Sisters absorbed this view uncritically ... [and] gave credence to rumours of the superhuman ferocity of the Zulu.¹⁶

Professor Mandy Goedhals highlighted comments made by Mother Emma which departed from the Community’s normal reserve in public affairs:

I hope you do not believe what the papers are saying about this being an unjust war. If ever there was a just war, this is one. Until Cetewayo’s power is broken, there will be no peace in South Africa. ... We fear so much that the Government will make peace too easily, the result of which would be that directly the troops are withdrawn, the Zulus will break out again. It would be the easiest thing in the world for them to devastate and lay waste to this colony [of Natal] from end to end.

Professor Goedhals observed, “When it came to nursing individual Zulu patients, however, the Sisters escaped the political myth and the alarming stereotype.”¹⁷

There were a few days when the hospital had as many as one hundred and forty patients, but the usual number was eighty or ninety, “about half of them really very ill.” We are told details of some of the cases. Lieutenant Anderson of the Artillery was on his way up country with his battery when he was struck down by fever. Seriously ill, he was moved from a tent into the vestry, and Miss Langlands sat up every night with him for two months. “Mr Anderson had effusion on the brain as well as fever and therefore had not the proper use of his faculties for more than two months. We feared he would never again

15 Harford, *The Zulu War Journal*, p.95

16 Goedhals, Nuns, Guns and Nursing, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34(1)

17 Goedhals, Nuns, Guns and Nursing, quoting Sr Emma from QPBM no 45, Aug 1879

regain the powers of his mind, but now I am thankful to say he is really quite well in that respect, and rapidly gaining strength.”

In June some very hopeless cases were brought down from the Field Hospital at Dundee; two of fever and one with dysentery, all of whom died. Also a Scotchman, who suffered from a terrible complication of disorders – lungs, heart, liver, spleen, all being diseased. He was a very good young fellow and expressed a wish to receive the Holy Communion. Accordingly, one Sunday at 9 o'clock, the little altar from our Oratory was taken up to the hospital and was arranged neatly and orderly with a plain white cloth behind the screen and Mr Mitchell celebrated the Holy Mysteries and Sister Louisa communicated with the patient. He lived several days longer in great pain, and then was taken to his rest, as we may devoutly hope and believe.

Mother Emma added,

I ought to have mentioned, too, that every night since about the 1st of May, Mr Mitchell has said short prayers in the evening at 7 o'clock in the hospital, and in one or two of the marquees too, generally. ... There is no church in this little town, so the Sunday Services are held in the camp house. At first there used to be a service for the military at 9.30 on Sundays, but for some time past there have been so few soldiers in the camp here that this service has been discontinued, and they come to the parish service at 11.

In their nursing of the troops, the Sisters were assisted by orderlies from the Army's medical department. As the war continued, the number of orderlies was increased and a good working relationship was soon established.

One of the happiest parts of our work here has been with the Hospital Corps men – orderlies we always call them. They come to some of us, and acknowledge their faults and failings in a most simple and child-like manner. Miss Langlands and Miss Potts sometimes give them the materials for a pudding for their Sunday dinner. One day some of them were in the marquee on the Saturday afternoon helping to stone the raisins. The next morning, when the pudding was being mixed, one came and said, 'I don't think you would wish me to have any of that pudding, for I was tipsy last night.' Of course he was told that the pudding had been promised and

could not be withdrawn, but a few words of warning and exhortation were spoken which were not without their effect, for as far as I know, that was the last time he had to make that acknowledgement.

After telling of some other incidents, Mother Emma continued,

time and paper would fail me if I tried to write all the little attentions and kindnesses of these goodhearted orderlies. Best of all, six or seven of them may now be seen every Sunday night at Church.¹⁸

Almost three months after the Sisters and Associates from St Michael's had begun their nursing at Ladysmith, on Sunday 20 July a small medical team sent to Natal by the Stafford House Committee arrived at the hospital. That Committee of well-connected people had been brought into existence by the Duke of Sutherland in 1876 to send voluntary aid to sick and wounded in the Serbo-Turkish War, and took its name from its meeting place in the Duke's London residence, Stafford House. After news had been received of the loss of life and many injuries at Isandhlwana and Rorke's Drift, the Committee reconvened to raise funds in order to send doctors, nurses and medical equipment. Dr Stoker and two nurses were assigned to Ladysmith, with others going to Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Utrecht.¹⁹ At Ladysmith, Nursing Sister Emma Durham was given responsibility for the Officers' hospital, which had been set up in the Dutch parsonage, while Nursing Sister Edith King took over responsibility for about half the surgical cases in the main hospital, Sister Louisa continuing to look after the other half as well as the medical cases. They arrived at a most propitious time.

One week later, on Sunday 27 July, about sixty wounded and sick men and twelve officers arrived from field hospitals at the front, casualties of the battle of Ulundi which had taken place on 4 July. Miss Langlands, relieved of her responsibilities for officers, went to assist Sister Louisa and Miss King in the main hospital. "They kindly taught me how to dress the wounds; all were gunshot, some severe and some slight." She continued,

With the soldiers came down two Zulu prisoners, also wounded, and they fell to Miss King's charge. 'Pashongo' [who had a very bad shot in his knee] had his leg amputated, but died afterwards [from blood poisoning], though not before he had taught our soldiers many lessons in patience.

18 QPBM no.46, October 1879

19 Best & Stossel, *Sister Janet*, p 75-78, 87-88

One never heard a cross word pass his lips, and he was so grateful to his nurse for her kindness. The other, 'Dick' (I could never pronounce his Zulu name) was very sulky at first but kindness won his heart. One night that 'Pashongo' was very wakeful, and asking for water, he crawled out of bed to hand the drink, so as to save the orderly, who awoke, and so discovered his thoughtful conduct.²⁰

The Battle of Ulundi was the last major engagement of the Anglo-Zulu War. Lieutenant-General Wolseley, who had taken over supreme military command from Lord Chelmsford, sent small columns of troops to subdue continuing unrest in northern Zululand and also to search for King Cetshwayo. The King was captured on 28 August, and the war was declared over on 1 September.

"The wounded from the Battle of Ulundi had all been sent to Ladysmith," wrote Bishop Webb after making a visit to the military hospital. He had been at Harrismith on 25 August and decided to go on to Ladysmith. Writing from Bloemfontein on 15 September, he said,

the war, as we trust, is now happily at an end, and the ladies sent by the Stafford House Committee had arrived with hospital appliances and means at their disposal. Accordingly, I was able to bring back with me the Superior of our Community, leaving a Sister and Miss Potts to work on until the hospital is closed.²¹

The Bishop's arrival at Ladysmith was mentioned by a "special correspondent" travelling with Sir Garnet Wolseley in a report written for *The Daily Telegraph* on August 29. After visiting the hospital on three occasions, the correspondent considered the arrangements admirable and a credit to the officer in charge, Surgeon-Major Babbington, his second in command, Surgeon-Major Parkinson, and all those involved

20 Miss Langlands' letter was published in QPBM no.46, October 1879. Regarding Pashongo, Brian Best and Katie Stossel use a quotation from the *Daily Telegraph* of 3 October 1879 to attribute his nursing to Nursing Sister Janet Wells at Utrecht (on page 119 of their book). The newspaper report, written from Ladysmith, mentions simply "the Stafford House nurse" and they have inserted in parenthesis "(Sister Janet)" and then credit her with a comment that the Zulu was "a better man than many a so-called Christian." That quotation is drawn from the *Daily Telegraph* report, which describes the hospital at Ladysmith only, and not that of Utrecht. They may have been confused by the surname King, although it does not appear in the report. The Stafford House nurse tending to Pashongo was Edith King. Janet Wells became Janet King when she married in May 1882. It is of course possible that Pashongo had been at the field hospital at Utrecht before being sent on to Ladysmith, but the newspaper report they quote is not about Utrecht.

21 QPBM no.46, October 1879

in the work. The labours of the nurses had been “as useful as they have been incessant and arduous.” He mixed his praise with some criticism of the authorities:

The bedding in the hospital buildings was exceedingly clean, the air was sweet, and the ventilation good, but the marquees are very heavy and bad to deal with on a windy day in hard soil, and there seems no reason why huts of a permanent kind should not have been constructed long ago.²²

His description reveals one great improvement from the early days: “There is a good cooking range.” Whether it was supplied by the military authorities, or brought by the Stafford House team with the appliances referred to by Bishop Webb, is not known.

Bishop Webb’s letter in the *Quarterly Paper* wrote of the Stafford House nurses but not of the Army’s own nurses from the Royal Victoria Hospital, Netley, who had left England for Natal shortly after the departure of the voluntary Stafford House team. Six Netley nurses were reported on 26 July to have arrived in Durban “some days since”. Brian Best and Katie Stossel, quoting Emma Durham, state that the Netley nurses, led by their Superintendent Mrs Deeble, stayed only one stormy night at Ladysmith and then all returned to Durban.²³ This may be why the Bishop did not mention them: they were not at Ladysmith while he was there. We have to assume that the military authorities ordered some of them back to Ladysmith, because Miss Langlands of the St Michael’s team referred to them: “On the arrival of nurses from Netley, we seemed less wanted.” Mother Emma had already left with the Bishop, and Miss Langlands took the postcard on 5 September, bound for Pietermaritzburg and home. Sister Louisa and Miss Potts returned to Bloemfontein at the end of September.²⁴

Bishop Webb reported,

Since the time that the Sisters have been in the hospital, i.e. since 24 April, it appears they have had 770 pass through, and out of the 770 only ten deaths have taken place; so indeed they have every reason to be thankful.²⁵

22 *The Daily Telegraph*, issue number 7593, 3 October, 1879, p.5

23 Best & Stossel, *Sister Janet*, p.175, and p.92-93

24 Miss Langlands’ letter, QPBM no.46, October 1879, and White Book I, vol.i.

25 QPBM,no.46, October 1879



St Faith's Orphanage in its Jubilee year, 1957. (Photo: The Friend)

CHAPTER 12



NURSING IN THE TRANSVAAL WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Sixteen months after returning from Ladysmith Sister Louisa found herself on the road back to Natal, in the company of two Associates, Miss Cuyler and Mrs Pouncey.¹ The Community had been asked to send nurses in anticipation of troops being wounded in conflict between British forces and the Boers of the Transvaal. Initially, Mother Emma said that Sister Henrietta should go, but there was anxiety in Kimberley that her absence, and the lack of anyone to take her place, would ruin the good work that had been started at the Hospital.²

Shepstone's 1877 annexation of the Transvaal had never been welcomed by the Dutch-speaking inhabitants. Expressing their strong opposition, the Republican government had protested but lacked power to resist. Within months they despatched a two man delegation to London to petition for the restoration of their independence.

1 Mrs Pouncey, but some think her name was Pomeroy. The handwriting in the White Book (FSA, A510) appears to read Pouncey, both for her arrival from England in December 1878 and on departure for this War in January 1881. Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in South Africa*, p.77, and Goedhals, *Nuns, Guns and Nursing*, use Pomeroy.

2 Hodgson, *Reminiscences of Hospital Work in Kimberley*, in Loch & Stockdale, *Sister Henrietta*, p.150

Paul Kruger and Edward Jorissen returned empty-handed. British policy was intent on creating a confederation of states in Southern Africa and their control of the Transvaal was one key to that end.³ Unrest grew among the Burghers, and in December 1879, in a gathering at Potchefstroom, the Transvaalers renewed their call for independence. Kruger led a second delegation to London, again without success. A change of government in Britain in April 1880 gave fresh hopes that the annexation would be reversed but, when nothing was forthcoming from the new administration, and Sir Bartle Frere attempted to have the Cape Parliament vote in favour of confederation, Boer patience ran out. The spark that lit the blaze was the British confiscation of farmer Bezuidenhout's waggon for non-payment of taxes: a party of one hundred Boers forcibly took it back. Estimates vary between five and ten thousand for the number of Burghers who attended a gathering at Paardekraal that December, where it was decided to take unilateral action. On the Day of the Covenant⁴, 16 December, 1880, the Transvaal flag (the Vierkleur) was raised at Heidelberg and a Proclamation of Independence was read. Within days the seven British military garrisons within the Transvaal were besieged and a column of British troops was attacked and destroyed at Bronkhorst Spruit, between Lydenburg and Pretoria. Commandant General Piet Joubert led Boer commandos to take control of the border with Natal to prevent Major General Sir George Colley, the Lieutenant Governor of Natal, from bringing troop reinforcements.⁵

The short war that was to follow was unlike most of the military engagements that had preceded it in South Africa. This did not involve any of the native tribes, but was a dispute between Dutch and British settlers. As a precaution, the British authorities had hastily installed an undersea telegraph cable from Durban to Aden: whereas in the Anglo-Zulu War communications between Britain and South Africa took weeks⁶ (allowing British administrators on the ground considerable freedom of action), in the Transvaal War London could be contacted within one day. It was different also in that the military authorities did not wait for the first casualties before mobilising nursing and medical services.

Sister Louisa and her two companions left Bloemfontein by coach on 21 January, 1881, bound for Fort Amiel in Newcastle, and ordinarily would have expected to arrive at their destination before the end of that month. It rained from the time they left Bloemfontein.

3 Gold was not a factor in the 1877 annexation, because it had not yet been discovered on the Rand.

4 This Public Holiday is now known as the Day of Reconciliation.

5 Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, ch.6; and First Anglo Boer War, South African History Online

6 The telegram informing of the defeat at Isandhlwana on 22 January was received by the Government in London on 12 February, 1879. Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, ch.4, p.70

The Modder River was in full spate and impassable: they waited four days for the level of water to drop enough for a team of oxen to haul the coach across. “The rest has done Miss Cuyler good,” wrote Sister Louisa, after telling her readers that she had said Prime on the banks of the river that morning, “and the birds sang the hymn for me.”⁷ A break in the journey at Ladysmith gave an opportunity for Sister Louisa to visit the Dutch Church which had been her hospital during the Anglo-Zulu War.

... it was arranged for service, and looked clean and bright. At the further end, a little way from the pulpit, was a long table, placed across the church, covered with white and the vessels for nacht-maal stood in the middle, with white linen over them; seats were at either side of the table, and in the middle, facing down the Church, stood a black chair with a flower painted on the back, evidently the seat for the minister. It all looked so clean and peaceful I stopped to say a prayer. I am afraid I sympathised a little with its Puritan simplicity. An old Dutchman came in, the first of the congregation, we shook hands and then I departed.⁸

From Ladysmith they travelled in an ambulance pulled by six mules, but the wet weather continued to cause problems: the waggon kept getting stuck and needed to be dug out, while the passengers had to walk many miles up the mountain-side. Eventually they arrived at Fort Amiel on 9 February, “just as the wounded from the battle of the preceding days were brought in.”⁹

General Colley tried to break through the Boer blockade of the mountain passes on 28 January, but suffered a sharp reverse in the battle of Laing’s Nek, incurring some one hundred and ninety casualties, and had to retreat to his base camp at Mount Prospect, approximately five miles to the south. On 7 February, Boers attacked a slow-moving convoy of ambulance and mail waggons on the track between that camp and Newcastle. In response, the next morning, 8 February, General Colley led a powerful force to escort the convoy on the most dangerous part of its journey. Passing through the plateau Schuinshoogte, they were ambushed by a Boer force which inflicted heavy casualties on the British during a battle lasting most of the day.¹⁰

7 Sunday 23 January 1881, QPBM no.53, July 1881. QP incorrectly shows as 25 January.

8 Sunday 6 February 1881, QPBM no.53, July 1881.

9 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1881.

10 Duxbury, *The Battle of Laingsnek*, 28 January 1881, and *The Battle of Schuinshoogte*, 8 February 1881. *South African Military History Society Journal*, 5 (2), December 1980.

“We arrived ... just as the wounded were brought in,” wrote Sister Louisa, “a hundred and thirty poor men all badly wounded, some with three and some with even four wounds. The Ulundi wounds were scratches compared to these. The Rifle Brigade are the principal victims. ... There are sixty wounded at the front, not yet able to get down, as they have not ambulances up there to send them down in. We have very few spare beds yet for them; we are putting up tents.” Dressing the “frightful” wounds took the nurses many hours every day. “I know we have your prayers. Do remember those poor sick men, and especially those who must die; many are mortally wounded, but still living. A young officer, Lieutenant Haworth, died on Sunday. I had been with him, and had dressed his wounds with the doctors, and we thought he was getting on, but faintness came on, and he died quite unexpectedly. He was only twenty, poor boy!”¹¹ There were no coffins available: the dead were rolled up in blankets before burial.

This hospital is better provided for than Ladysmith was; it has a good kitchen and our food is comfortably served and nicely cooked. We are fortified all round, and have the Red Cross waving from every hospital tent, these are thirteen in number, and the earthworks come up to our doors; we are not allowed to go across the river to the town, we seem a long way off up here, and only see it at a distance; there is no church there, but Mr Robinson (the clergyman) often comes here, and kindly does all our commissions for us; we are expecting more tents and I tell him I mean to ask for a special tent for services.

The hospital tents are described as huts in her second letter, each about forty feet long and twenty wide. “One of these huts we have for a dwelling-house; we have three boards for bedsteads, and ticking stuffed with forage for beds, pillows to match.” Living and working with them was a Mrs Hawthorne, wife of Colonel Hawthorne, who was already at the Fort some days before the Sisters arrived. Miss Langlands’ name also appears in one of Sister Louisa’s later letters: having returned from England, she joined them in their work.

Dr Stokes, the surgeon in charge at Fort Amiel, showed Sister Louisa a telegram he had received from Dr Holloway, the Principal Medical Officer at Pietermaritzburg, asking if he needed more nurses, because the Roman Catholic Sisters in that town had offered help. “He showed me the answer he had written: ‘I am perfectly satisfied with my present staff, and unless a fresh rush of wounded come, need no more.’ He showed

11 QPBM, no.52, April 1881. Letter dated 15 February 1881.

me, too, a letter he had written supplementing the telegram and speaking of 'entire satisfaction with the Bloemfontein Sisters', and saying that he 'preferred nurses of a Religious Community to any other, as they understand discipline.'¹² Two army nursing sisters from Netley were sent later to strengthen the team at Fort Amiel.¹³

There was to be a fresh rush of wounded needing care. From early January the government in London had been in contact with President Brand of the Orange Free State through the Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Hercules Robinson, in order to try to open negotiations with the Transvaal leaders. Following the British defeats at Laing's Nek and Schuinshoogte, Robinson was anxious lest the large Boer population of the Cape should take up arms against his administration. Lord Kimberley, the Colonial Secretary, sent a telegram from London to General Colley on 16 February, instructing him to offer the Boers a suspension of hostilities in return for negotiations towards a lasting peace. The message was passed to the Boers for transmission to Paul Kruger, but Colley set a timetable for a reply of a mere forty-eight hours. It was impossible for the mounted messenger even to reach Kruger within that time. Determined to bring about a military solution to the problem, General Colley marched his forces by night up Majuba Hill: by Sunday morning 27 February they were overlooking the Boer camp at Laing's Nek. He was ill-prepared for the Boers to climb unseen up the northern face of the hill. In the ensuing battle, Colley was shot dead and his army suffered heavy casualties.¹⁴

A week later, Sister Louisa wrote,

[On] Tuesday we received the wounded from the miserable defeat on the hill – 47 men and two officers of the 58th, one officer had been wounded badly in his arm, the other in his leg and back; he had been thrown headlong down the hill, and got crushed between stones, where he could not have got out but that a Boer helped him up and tied up his wound and helped him on the road. The men's account of the whole time is quite too horrible. The wounds are healing well that are under our care, but there are still 130 sick at the front.

The Doctors would not allow us to go forward; they have not even beds there, only the long grass is cut and put together in heaps for the wounded

12 QPBM no.53, July 1881. Letter of 10 February 1881; QPBM no 52, April 1881. Letter of 15 February.

13 Goedhals, Nuns, Guns and Nursing, quoting Anne Summers, Angels and Citizens. *Studiae Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 34(1).

14 Duxbury, The Battle of Majuba, in *South African Military History Society Journal*, 5 (2), December 1980. Also Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, chapter 6.

to lie on. An average of five men a day have died on the field of wounds since the battle, none are dying now in the hospital, and during the week there has been only one death in my wards. We are sending 50 convalescents to Maritzburg on Wednesday, in preparation for having 100 more forwarded in from the front. It is really melancholy to see this place in the afternoon, when those who are well enough come outside in the Hospital grounds – a regiment of maimed young men, most of them under 25 years of age.

She wrote also of the spiritual care being given to the men, and of the hard conditions in which the nurses were living and working.

We had a Celebration yesterday morning and a service in the afternoon, the men are so pleased with the hymns. We have had a military Chaplain sent out to us. The remnant of the 58th arrived yesterday. It is amusing to see how all the men seem to think I ought to remember them by name. We have also a number of wounded Highlanders. It is real ‘roughing’ it here, I am writing at my bedside, as my bedroom boasts neither chair nor table; the rain comes through the roof on to my bed, and flows through the doorway in a river. It is not so nice as working at Ladysmith, partly because, being in a camp, we never see the face of womankind; partly because of the tents pitched all round us, the laager in front, and sentinels and outposts round on the watch at every corner.

One of the wounded officers has promised to lend me his big boots to use on the next wet night, for we sometimes do our evening work with our feet soaking wet; but in spite of all we are very lively and happy, and, thank God, we all keep well, and Miss Cuyler and I are able and ready for our work every morning as it comes.¹⁵

The Battle of Majuba effectively ended the Transvaal War of Independence, also known as the First Anglo-Boer War. Although some voices in London were calling for a decisive military victory, the government of Prime Minister Gladstone stood by the offer made to the Transvaalers on 16 February and, after Paul Kruger’s reply was received on 4 March, days of negotiations were held at O’Neill’s Cottage, in the shadow of Majuba Hill. On 23 March British and Boer delegates signed provisional peace terms which led to the

15 QPBM no 53, July 1881

formal re-instatement of the South African Republic. News of the armistice took some days to reach distant parts of the Transvaal and the sieges of British forts were not all lifted until the end of the month.¹⁶

Soldiers' wounds took time to heal, and some did not. The nurses remained at their stations, caring for the needs of their patients. Writing on Easter Monday [18 April], Sister Louisa said,

Just as I write a funeral is passing out of the Hospital, the body covered with the pall we made at Ladysmith; I wonder if it will last through another war.

I told you of the nice new Church Marquee we had, we had two Sunday services in it. On Tuesday last, when I had finished the dressings, I came back to our hut, and our boy Noble said: 'Sister look at your Church.' I looked, and, alas! Our marquee was gone and our poor little altar stood in the open ground; it appeared the General had come and this marquee was required for his use. I set off in search of another, but the one they gave me was in such a ragged condition, that two men were sent to mend it before it was put up, and it took them nearly three days. On Maundy Thursday we were obliged to have our Celebration in one of the small bell tents, out of which we turned the patients' beds for the occasion, and it was quite filled with worshippers. By noon on Good Friday the ragged marquee was mended, and I sent a note to Mr Robinson to signify the fact, and that many of the people were hoping for a service; he came at 3.30, and we had a full Church. I could not attend, I am sorry to say, as I was all the afternoon in the surgery waiting on the doctors. We still have an operation almost daily. On Saturday I got a piece of white stuff and made a frontal, a stool and box made our credence table, two vases of flowers were our only decorations, and on Easter Day we had a Celebration at which many Communicated, a Netley nurse, Officers, Orderlies, etc. Our good boy had brought in forms, and made all nice and tidy. Miss Langlands and I folded our coloured counterpanes up so as to make a kneeler.¹⁷

Their work appears to have continued until the end of May. On 7 June, Sister Louisa was staying at the Community's House in Harrismith, on her way back to Bloemfontein.

16 Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, p.106; Duxbury, The Battle of Majuba 27 February 1881, in *SA Military History Journal*, 5 (2), December 1980; South African History Online, First Anglo Boer War.

17 QPBM, no.53, July 1881

The Army's Principal Medical Officer for South Africa, Dr James Holloway DSC, wrote to Bishop Webb from Pietermaritzburg on 1 June:

As Sister Louisa and Miss Langlands are leaving Newcastle for the Free State, I feel – although I trust their eminent services, with those of the other Bloemfontein nurses, may receive due comment and approbation from higher authority than mine – that I should not allow them to leave us without expressing my deep sense of the obligation we are under for the humane and valuable assistance given by them to our wounded. All who have been under their care testify to their kindness; as do the records, by the large percentage of recoveries after desperate wounds, to their skill and devotion.¹⁸

Dr Holloway's reference to "the other Bloemfontein nurses" may refer to Miss Cuyler and Mrs Pouncey, who were part of the team from January, but could indicate that other nurses had joined them. Major-General Sir Evelyn Wood, the Commanding Officer of Her Majesty's troops in South Africa, in writing to Bishop Webb on 26 June, stated that three had already returned, "and the others will shortly have completed here their self-imposed duties." His letter began,

My Lord, It is my pleasing duty to express to you on the part of the British troops in this command, the strong sense of the obligation we are under to the Ladies of the Community of SS. Michael and All Angels, for their unwearied devotion and skilful aid to our wounded in the Hospital at Newcastle. From the Medical Officers I learn that their charitable exertions 'assisted materially the successful issue of many cases,' and for my own part I may add my belief that their presence has lightened the sufferings of many, and cheered the hearts of all, invalids.¹⁹

The approbation from higher authority, that Dr Holloway hoped would follow, came in due course. The archives include a letter addressed to Bishop Webb by Mr Childers of the War Office on 21 April 1882:

My Lord, Having received from Lord Chelmsford & others strong testimony to the devoted services rendered by the Bloemfontein Sisters to

18 His letter was reproduced in the QPBM no 53, July 1881

19 Letter reproduced in QPBM, no 54, October 1881

the sick & wounded during the recent wars in South Africa, I felt great pleasure in bringing them to Her Majesty's notice.

I have now received from Her Majesty an expression of Her warm appreciation of those services.

May I ask you to be so good as to communicate this to these ladies?²⁰

A letter from Queen Victoria's Private Secretary, Sir Henry Ponsonby, to Mr Childers on 12 September, 1882, can be seen as a follow up:

The Queen thinks it would be very desirable to establish a decoration for nurses who are employed on active service, and for those who assist them at home ...

It should be awarded to nurses sent out by the War Office and also to others who have made themselves useful in this field, such as the Bloemfontein Sisters, in whose praise you wrote to the Queen last March.

Her Majesty would wish to confer this decoration on the nurses who served in the South African Wars as well as those now in Egypt.²¹

The decoration of the Royal Red Cross was instituted by Royal warrant on 23 April 1883. Both Sister Louisa and Miss Langlands were decorated for their services in the Zulu and Transvaal Wars. Sister Louisa was serving at the Carnarvon Hospital in Kimberley when Lord Hartington wrote to her from the War Office on 2 April, 1884.

I have the pleasure to forward to you, by the Queen's commands, the decoration of the Royal Red Cross which Her Majesty has been pleased to confer upon you for the special devotion and competency which you have displayed in your nursing duties with Her Majesty's troops.²²

Miss Margaret Langlands received a similar citation with her decoration. In December 1881 she sailed back to England accompanying an unwell Mother Emma and Miss Pigott,

20 UFS, HSC, 1/3/B20

21 Letter reproduced in Best & Stossel, *Sister Janet*, Appendix A, p.157

22 Lord Hartington's letter and a copy of the Royal Warrant are in UFS, HSC 1/4/B1, 1/4/B2 and 1/4/B4. The wording of the letter appears to have been standard; compare that received by Janet Wells: Best & Stossel, *Sister Janet*, p.146

former novice.²³ Miss Langlands was “one of the most loyal and faithful members and voluntary workers in the Church of South Africa. ... Her work was of that quiet, unobtrusive nature which is never published, and sometimes quite unrecognized in any public notice or memorial.” She served not only at Bloemfontein and Kimberley, but also subsequently at Bulawayo and Johannesburg, where she died on 11 November 1914.²⁴

23 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, December 1881

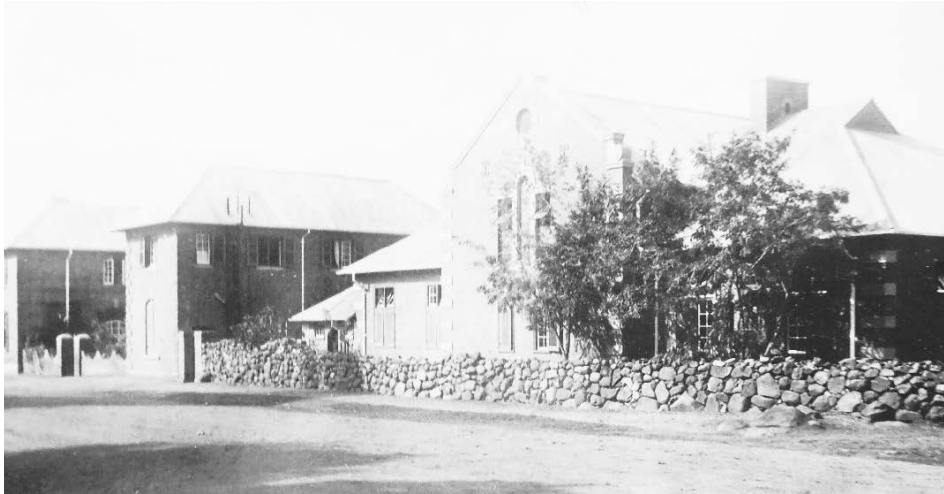
24 Obituary notice in CT, December 18, 1914, p.639



Sister Marjorie with St Faith's children in October 1958.



St Michael's School cricket team in 1905, photographed at the Ramblers' Club where they played their home matches.



The Elizabeth Street frontage of St Michael's School, as it was by the 1920s. The main entrance was through the gate to the double-fronted block on the left, constructed in 1910. The Library, in the centre with the tall windows, was completed in 1914, and the adjoining classrooms were added later.



The School's tennis courts in King's Park, opened in 1927. They were situated opposite the back of St Michael's site, on part of the land where the Waterfront shopping mall now stands.

CHAPTER 13



BEREFT OF THE FOUNDERS

Bishop Webb was absent from the Diocese when the news broke. He had been elected to the see of Grahamstown, and the Metropolitan's advice was that he should accept the appointment.

Grahamstown had become vacant through the death of its third Bishop, Nathaniel Merriman, in a cart accident on 7 August, 1882. Although then over seventy years of age, his long and active ministry was brought to a premature end. It was more than thirty years earlier, as Archdeacon, that he had walked to Bloemfontein to lay the foundation stone of the Cathedral in November 1850.

Bishop Webb travelled to Cape Town in January 1883 to attend the Provincial Synod. He had arranged that after the Synod ended he would sail to England, where his eldest son was receiving medical treatment, having been taken there some months previously by Mrs Webb. It was between sessions of the Synod that Bishop Webb was approached by representatives of the Diocese of Grahamstown, asking if he would allow his name to be considered by the Elective Assembly. That Diocese had suffered deep divisions in a dispute between Bishop Merriman and Dean Williams of the Cathedral, which had been through the courts and ended up with the Privy Council in London. Judgement had been given in favour of the Bishop, but much healing work was necessary, and it was thought that Bishop Webb possessed the necessary gifts. When consulted for his advice,

the Metropolitan, Bishop West Jones of Cape Town, was in favour of the move. Bishop Webb replied to the representatives that he would respond only to a unanimous call from the Diocese.¹

After his arrival in England, he received formal notification of his election in a “practically unanimous” vote of the Elective Assembly. Still he was not decided what to do, and he wrote a letter for the April 1883 issue of the *Quarterly Paper* in which he advised of the possibility that he would go to Grahamstown. In England he consulted the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Truro, an old friend, as well as cabling from there to the Metropolitan in Cape Town. “Go”, was the one word reply. It appeared to be a clear call, but the decision to answer it had not been easy, as he explained in a letter written in London for next issue of the *Quarterly Paper*. He signed this letter, “Allan B. Grahamstown.”

It is a special grief to me that I am called to leave the Diocese at a time of very special and serious trouble and anxiety. I am not so much concerned at having to leave the Cathedral unfinished, waiting for its roof, though it would have been a great joy to have left it so far complete.² I am sure the new Bishop will be well aided in his efforts to secure the £2,000 still required for the fabric: no liability has been incurred on the building. But there has been a very serious financial and commercial crisis throughout South Africa generally, and more especially at the Diamond Fields. This will cripple our educational work very severely. Political troubles in Basutoland, and the disturbed state of the country ... have once more placed very formidable hindrances in the way of our African mission work. ...

The maintenance of St Andrew’s College and the Sisterhood Schools will need the most strenuous and patient efforts.³

Archdeacon Croghan, who as Priest-Vicar of the Cathedral had helped steer the Diocese through its previous episcopal interregnum, and who had taken temporary charge during Bishop Webb’s visits overseas, was appointed Vicar-General. His responsibilities in that role did not extend directly to the Sisterhood, of which Bishop Webb remained Warden.

1 Crisp. p.65; CT August 25, 1882, p.567

2 The foundation stone for the nave had been laid by President Brand on 5 February, 1882. Crisp, p.78. Brown, *150 Years of Service to God*, p.10, gives the date as 15 February. 5 February was Septuagesima Sunday.

3 QPBM no.61, July 1883, Bishop’s Letter. The next items published in this issue of the *Quarterly Paper* are the letters from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the representatives of the Elective Assembly, and the Metropolitan of Cape Town, all urging his acceptance of the See of Grahamstown.

Mother Emma, who had been away from Bloemfontein for almost eighteen months whilst receiving medical treatments in England, returned as soon as her doctors allowed.

Bishop Webb arrived in his new Diocese early in September 1883, and received a warm welcome during a crowded *conversazione* held in the Town Hall, Grahamstown. After making some urgent arrangements as a first step towards resolving the problems relating to Grahamstown Cathedral, he travelled inland to make an official farewell visit to the Diocese of Bloemfontein. The fifth session of the Diocesan Synod had been summoned to meet on 28 September. A Correspondent reported for the “*Church Times*”,

The Sunday during that Synod will long be remembered when the Bishop – and how we wished to think he was *our* Bishop still – preached on the worship of Heaven. Truly the Diocese needed his thrilling words, words lifting us far above the things of this transitory world to the eternal glories of the throne of God.⁴

The Elective Assembly met the following day. The Assembly considered that the most important qualification for the new Bishop should be his contact with helpers in England, on whose financial support the Diocese depended heavily, and resolved to delegate the choice of Bishop to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Truro, and the Bishop of Edinburgh, acting jointly. This decision was supported by the Bishops of the Province, and accepted by the three prelates concerned.

Meanwhile, Bishop Webb continued his farewell visit, spending some days in the Diamond Fields, and consulting over the Community and its works. He received the Profession of Sister Frances Mary on 19 October, 1883, and that month dispensed from her vows Sister Elizabeth, who had been professed in 1881 but wished to leave the Community. To provide a continuing pastoral care for the Sisters, Fr James Douglas SSA, Superior of the Mission Brotherhood at Modderpoort, was appointed Chaplain. He was to visit them once each month.⁵

It was a time of great anxiety and uncertainty in the Community, as a letter written from St Michael’s Home on 29 November 1883 reveals.

The trying circumstances through which our work is passing, make it necessary to bring our needs before our friends and fellow-helpers with

⁴ CT July 31, 1885, p.595

⁵ QPBM no.62, October 1883; Crisp, p.68-69; Lewis & Edwards, p.432-433; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1883-84

renewed earnestness. The removal of our late Bishop, even had it stood alone, would have been a very severe trial, not only to the workers but to the various works which he set on foot; all of which, nevertheless, we are still able, at present, to carry on. But added to this loss, we have now to face very great and unlooked-for difficulties, which, though they will be felt more or less by all branches of the work, press with especial force on those in Bloemfontein itself.

The country for many miles around is suffering from a most severe drought. Coming as it does upon the great commercial depression, which has so long tried us, it places us in a most serious position. The present scarcity of food in the town, unless it becomes actual famine, is one of the least evils arising from it.

After outlining the problems, and steps the Sisters were taking to try to ease matters, the unnamed writer continued,

Our friends will feel that this is a crisis when we do especially need their support and their prayers, that God may be pleased to look in mercy on this land, and avert the evils with which we are threatened; for in addition to the rest, there is an outbreak of small-pox among the coloured people of Kimberley.

The substantial help and great kindness which we have hitherto experienced from our Associates and friends in England, embolden us to put forth this appeal. That there may be a liberal response, is our earnest prayer.⁶

We do not know what the response to the appeal was, but we note that towards the end of 1884 Archdeacon Croghan, in his capacity as Vicar General, sent a special appeal letter to the Associates in Britain asking help for the Community, which was having a hard struggle to maintain its position. "Help to them will secure vast advantages to the Diocese in the future; and their efficiency as a working agency of the Church is increasing every year."⁷ As noted elsewhere⁸, it appears that the Cathedral parish took over some responsibility for St Gabriel's School in November 1884, and from 1st January 1885 paid a small salary to the Sisterhood for cleaning the Cathedral. When the Community agreed

6 QPBM no.63, January 1884, p.15-17

7 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, December 1884.

8 In chapters 4 and 5 above.

in June 1885 to take on the teaching of the Perseverance School at Kimberley, it was on the condition that a sufficient salary for support was guaranteed.

As the episcopal interregnum dragged on and entered a third year, there seems to have been some falling off in support from the United Kingdom. Father Douglas wrote on 21 February 1885:

I little thought that I should have again to touch upon our *orphan* condition, in having no Bishop; but such, you know, is the case, and it is difficult to the natural heart and mind to understand why it should be necessary for *this Diocese* to undergo such a discipline. But we *do know*, thank God, that *He* orders *all* things well; and this is a *very great* comfort to us. If we had not trust in God's special care for His Church, indeed we must long ago have sunk into despair. But instead of that, I think we may truly say that throughout the Diocese there has *not* been the *slightest* flagging of interest or energy in the various centres, and the long continued discipline has, I hope, *deepened* the work.

Given the most severe drought that had been known for many years, there was very little money in the Free State, and increasing aid and sympathy was needed.

Oh, my friends, if any of you have grown a little lukewarm in your prayers or works for us, remember how God *has* blessed your help in time past; and I feel sure you will not let the next Bishop undertake the charge of this Diocese feeling that he has not the same amount of interest and support to depend upon in England, as our late dear Bishop could always depend on.⁹

The Diocese was about to sustain its second loss of a founder. The morning after despatching that letter for the Quarterly Paper, Father Douglas received a telegram calling him back urgently from Bloemfontein to Modderpoort. He left almost at once and travelled through the night to arrive home at 2 o'clock in the morning, only to learn that his predecessor as Superior had died the previous afternoon, Sunday 22 February, 1885. Henry Beckett had arrived in the Diocese in 1867 to lead the Missionary Brotherhood and, two days after his arrival, he was installed as the first Canon of Bloemfontein Cathedral. Although Canon Beckett was for several years Chancellor of the Diocese, after the Brotherhood took up residence at Modderpoort in 1869, most of his ministry was in the eastern region,

9 QPBM no.68, April 1885, p.68-70. Italics in the original.

training the Brothers and missionary candidates, and himself itinerating long distances around farms and villages. In each he would gather congregations, “cheering the hearts of the scattered Church people who revered and loved him, and laying the foundations of the more settled ministry which has since been established in the districts in which he was the pioneer.”¹⁰ Ficksburg, Ladybrand, Bethlehem, Harrismith, and Maseru were all within the range of his pony cart. The rigours of travelling for days on end over rough tracks were demanding on his constitution, and he was thankful when Fr Douglas arrived in 1880 to take over as Superior. Others assumed the itinerating work, and he spent his last years at Modderpoort, caring for the Africans and half-castes living on the estate. He was, said an obituary notice in *The Friend of the Free State*, “the example of one who never let any undertaking he once began, fail through lack of perseverance and energy, and was never discouraged by difficulty.”

His requiem was celebrated in the Brotherhood’s Chapel of St Augustine on Tuesday, 24 February, St Matthias’ Day, and he was buried in the graveyard “under the shadow of the church he built, close to the Mission he erected, amid the trees he planted.” About four hundred people attended the service, both whites and blacks. *The Friend* reported,

The service concluded with the hymn, ‘Oh! What the joy and the glory must be.’ The strain is martial, and one felt truly as if we were laying a hero to rest. And so we were! For was he not as true a hero as any of the Church’s martyrs? ... very, very few would leave home and home ties to brave and struggle in an unsettled country, and work patiently and manly for years, in a land with as few attractions as this, tending to a scattered flock.

Canon Beckett died in his sixty-ninth year, “and what a blank it seems,” wrote Fr Douglas, “but, thank God, a true friend in Paradise is surely better than one on earth.”¹¹

With no Bishop in the Diocese, Bishop Webb made at least two visits to provide episcopal ministry. In March 1884 he ordained two Deacons, one of whom was Gabriel David, the long-serving Catechist of St Patrick’s Mission. He was the first Bechuana to be ordained. In 1885, Bishop Webb spent a week in Kimberley, where he preached at St Cyprian’s, conducted Confirmations at All Saints’, Dutoitspan, and St Matthew’s Mission, and held meetings with clergy and lay leaders. He travelled on to Bloemfontein, where he was met on the Saturday afternoon some distance from the town by a large party of all races

¹⁰ Crisp, p.23

¹¹ QPBM no.68, April 1885, p.71. The reports from *The Friend of the Free State* were reprinted in the same issue of the QPBM, p.62-67. See also Crisp, p.75, and Lewis & Edwards, p.427

who had ridden out to meet him. The next morning, Sunday 7 June, 1885, he dedicated the newly-completed nave of the Cathedral in the presence of a very large congregation, including the Chief Justice of the Free State, members of the Government, and the entire Town Council, wearing their sashes of office. In the afternoon he confirmed thirty candidates at a Service in the Cathedral, before moving on to St Patrick's Mission where he held another Confirmation. It was the following Thursday, 11 June, when he went to St Michael's Home to celebrate the Eucharist and receive the Profession of Sister Catherine. The School provided entertainment at the reception which followed.¹²

The three Bishops in Britain who had accepted the task of finding a new Bishop for Bloemfontein failed to produce a candidate, and in due course the choice reverted to the Bishops of the South African Province. The rumour in Bloemfontein was that potential candidates were being put off by reports of the Diocese being heavily in debt. The Assistant Commissary in England, the Revd W. Allen Whitworth, perhaps added fuel to the fire by writing on 24 January, 1885,

For many years the support which the Mission has received has not been commensurate with Bishop Webb's zeal for the extension of the work; and our present embarrassments are consequently great.¹³

William Crisp observed, "To friends at a distance our debts seemed unwarrantable. Statements which were published showing what a considerable plant had been secured for the future ... seemed to be of no avail. The magnitude of the debt was the only point which seemed impressive."¹⁴

It was decided that the best way to counter those stories was to send a senior representative of the Diocese to Britain, and in May Father Douglas SSA left,

provided with full information on all points, and able to explain the actual condition and prospects of the Diocese, in a way which could not be done by correspondence.

In announcing this through the pages of the *Quarterly Paper*, the Vicar General, Archdeacon Croghan, expressed his anxiety that two points should be understood,

¹² Crisp, p.73, 77-81; CT, July 31, 1885, p.595-596, Dedication of the Nave of Bloemfontein Cathedral; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1885, June 7 & 11.

¹³ QPBM no.67, January 1885.

¹⁴ Crisp, p.76

“on which serious misconceptions seem to have arisen.” The first was that the Episcopal income was perfectly secure, and the second was that the liabilities of the Institutions were no burden to the Diocese. They were “liable for their own debts. If things should come to the worst with them, the Diocese would not be in the least injured financially.”¹⁵

The South African Bishops had asked the Bishop of Bedford to work on their behalf, and Fr Douglas wrote from England of that Bishop’s “unfailing and persevering energy in doing his very best to secure a Bishop for us.” There had been “several” refusals, but not one of those had given the finances of the Diocese as their reason for declining the appointment. The Bishop of Bedford had not “let a *single hour* intervene between the refusal unfortunately coming by one post, and the sending out another call by the next.” The choice of the Bishop of Bedford appears rather obscure until we learn that he was brother-in-law to Fr Douglas. His title is misleading because Bishop Walsham How was a Suffragan to the Bishop of London, with special responsibility for the East End. Best known for his hymn, *For all the saints who from their labours rest*, he later became the first Bishop of Wakefield.¹⁶ In December 1885 it was announced that the Revd George W.H. Knight-Bruce, of the parish of St Andrew, Bethnal Green, had accepted the see.

Despite Fr Douglas’s statement that the financial situation had not been a factor in the many refusals, the Bishop-Designate wrote at length about it in his first letter for the Quarterly Paper. There was, he said,

the necessity of an extraordinary effort being made to free [the Diocese and the attendant Institutions] from some of their debts. It is almost useless to hope that any progress can be made, or indeed that the hold gained can be retained, as long as these debts exist in their present proportions. ... It may be very painful to refuse both offers of work from England, and requests for help from Bloemfontein, because there are no funds with which to pay workers; but we must have patience, rather ... than to incur fresh debts...¹⁷

Bishop Webb, although “utterly weary of explanations”, was provoked to write a spirited defence of his stewardship, which was published in the subsequent issue – the same issue which gave a report of his successor’s consecration. It was surely an unprecedented intervention at the beginning of a new episcopate.

15 QPBM no.69, July 1885

16 QPBM no.70, October 1885; Crisp, p.83

17 QPBM no.71, January 1886

It is, perhaps, not unnatural that the one feature which has apparently been impressed upon my successor, is the '*financial difficulty*.' But I am sure it must have occurred to him and to others who have thoughtfully considered the letters and reports which have appeared since my resignation, in the 'Quarterly Paper', that, if there were any such appalling prospect as has been suggested, a very different state of affairs would have prevailed during the vacancy, and be now confronting your Association. Would there not have been collapse instead of progress?

He referred to the previous issue, with its reports of a new Mission house at Hlotse, encouraging letters from Harrismith, a new church under construction at Beaconsfield for which most of the funds were already in hand, and the new Sisterhood School in Kimberley.

Even at Bloemfontein, where the depression is most severe, a Sale of Work, obtaining £400, has almost cleared the charges upon the Cathedral and its fittings. The schools have suffered there more than anywhere, through the drought, vacancy of the See, and the railway between Cape Town and Kimberley having left Bloemfontein out in the Veldt.¹⁸ Canon Borton's departure was very unfortunate for St Andrew's College, but a good man can do much to renew its vigour. Even with reference to the Home and Sisterhood, Father Douglas was able to write in 1885:- 'I leave tomorrow, after having been a week here and looked into all the accounts. A deficit of £200, about, in annual expenses, including *everything* in connection with the Home, does not appear to Mr Beck and myself as anything serious, and altogether I feel we may take courage. The Report of the Treasurer, Mr A. Beck, for this year, has not proved to be at all worse. Meanwhile, the Sisterhood has done even more than I could possibly expect towards the reduction of its capital debt.'

He outlined all that the new Bishop would find already prepared and established, listing briefly the Diocesan structures and Institutions, the parishes with their buildings, the Brotherhood, the African Missions and the Sisterhood. Four-fifths of the whole cost of the extensive plant was already paid for: "At most he will have but *one-fifth* still to raise."

18 The railway from Cape Town reached Kimberley in 1885, a distance of 625 miles, and then was extended northwards.

To sum up then, the new Bishop will find a home, a Cathedral, an income for himself secured, a Clergy Fund well begun, a devoted staff of Clergy at the centre, as well as in every division of the Diocese, and some labouring without cost for a Brotherhood. What Sisters can do, he will only learn from observation of their manifold ministries.¹⁹

Perhaps this is the place to record some statistics given by William Crisp. On arrival in the Diocese, Bishop Webb found a staff totalling eight clergy, and resident ministry at only five centres in the south of the country. Leaving twelve years later, the staff of clergy had reached forty; the Sisterhood had been founded and the Brotherhood strengthened; mission work had extended into Basutoland and Bechuanaland; seventeen new churches, fourteen parsonages and six parochial school buildings had been constructed.²⁰

From Bishop Webb's long letter, we learn that the total costs of establishing the Sisterhood with its buildings was at least £35,000, of which £10,000 was a capital debt.

Bishop Knight-Bruce, accompanied by his wife, young son, and Chaplain, sailed from England on July 23, 1886. After landing at Cape Town they took the two day rail journey to Kimberley, where they arrived on a Saturday night to receive a very warm and cordial greeting from the clergy, Church Wardens and a large gathering of laity. At Evensong on the Sunday, "St Cyprian's was packed from porch to altar, as we have only seen it on great festivals." At the chancel steps the Bishop was presented with a hearty address of welcome, "on the occasion of your happy though unexpected presence among us, *en route* to the solemn function of your enthronement in our cathedral church at Bloemfontein." After a few days' stay in Kimberley, the Bishop travelled on to Bloemfontein, where the Cathedral bell rang out to welcome him and crowds lined St George's Street. He was enthroned on Sunday 29 August, in the presence of President and Mrs Brand, the Chief Justice and other dignitaries.²¹

Soon after this, Bishop Webb visited Bloemfontein to confer with his successor about St Michael's Sisterhood. At this stage, Dr Webb was still the Community's Warden. Four Sisters were professed on the patronal feast day, 29 September: Sisters Mary Ellen, Florence, Agnes Mary and Caroline.

19 QPBM no.72, April 1886, p.66-72

20 Crisp, p.66

21 Crisp, p.85; Lewis & Edwards, p.435; quotations from CT, September 17, 1886, p.608, column 4.

A meeting of the Community's Chapter was arranged for 5 January, 1887, and Bishop Webb wrote a letter commissioning and authorising Archdeacon Croghan to preside in his place. Mother Emma, who had probably been waiting patiently through the episcopal interregnum for this opportunity, submitted her resignation as Superior. Her health had been failing for years. The election of a new Superior was scheduled for 6 January. Meanwhile, on 5 January, the Chapter assented to the proposal that Canon Holbech should be invited to become their Warden, and resolved that the Community should withdraw from the Jagersfontein Hospital "because they could not spare a Professed Nursing Sister to take charge of this work." It was not until early March that a cable was received from Canon Holbech, who was in England for a rest, agreeing to become the Warden. He had served previously in Harrismith and knew the Sisters well from their work in that town.

"The task of electing a Successor was an anxious matter," wrote the Chronicler, "as so much depends on the Superior." Sister Mary Ruth, who had the advantage (denied to us) of consulting the Chapter Minute Book, noted that Sister Fanny was absent through illness, and that the election Chapter was "painful." Her notes indicate that the election was not concluded that day. Archdeacon Croghan must have advised Bishop Webb that the Chapter had reached an impasse. On 13 January, 1887, in his capacity as Warden, the Bishop wrote from Grahamstown setting aside the election rule that he himself had framed in 1874, and "elected and appointed" Sister Frances Jessie to be the Superior and Mother of the Community.²²

In the absence of the Minute Books, we cannot know what happened on 6 January and how divided the Community was, but subsequent events suggest to this author that Sister Fanny expected to be elected Superior, and that she had considerable support within the Community. She had been Assistant Superior for several years, and had led the Sisters competently through Mother Emma's long absences caused by illness. As Novice Mistress she had trained new Sisters.

Sister Fanny left St Michael's that January, and took two Novices with her, Anna and Margaret. They went first to Cape Town, where they lived and worked for five months with the All Saints' Sisters. They made contact with Bishop Macrorie of Maritzburg and Natal, whom Novice Margaret had known in England. It resulted in Sister Fanny going to stay with the Bishop and his wife from 31 May. While she was there, Sister Fanny discussed with the Bishop the possibility of founding a new Community in Natal.

²² FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1887; Crisp, p.87; Sister Mary Ruth's notes are in HPRA Wits, AB2644/54. See Chapter 14 below re the Chapter of July 1890, where Mother Frances resigned and was re-elected.

Two weeks later the two Novices joined her in Pietermaritzburg, and the foundations were laid for the Society of St John the Divine. Sister Fanny wrote to Bloemfontein asking for formal release from CSM&AA. Her request was considered by a Chapter held on 23 June, 1887. Archdeacon Croghan had moved to the Deanery of Grahamstown, and Bishop Webb authorised Fr James Douglas SSA to preside. Sister Fanny's request was refused. She had been absent without leave for five months.²³

After handing over her responsibilities as Superior, Sister Emma was given charge of St Michael's Home, Kimberley. Being just fifty years old, it was hoped that, released from the burdens of office, she would live for many years. At first her health seemed to improve. She would even walk to the gaol and visit the women prisoners. A few months later it became evident that she was breaking down again and, after catching a severe cold, she had to be admitted to Kimberley Hospital in a state of great weakness. With Sister Henrietta as Matron, and the Hospital as one of the Community's works, Sister Emma received such loving care that she was able to get up and dress most days and attended services in the Chapel several times. Her strength did not recover and Mother Frances travelled to Kimberley, intending to take Sister Emma back to the Mother House. It was not to be. On Whit Tuesday, 31 May, 1887, she suffered a series of three heart attacks. The first left her very weak and barely able to speak. Canon Gaul from St Cyprian's Church took her Holy Communion at midday and, after saying the prayers for the dying, asked if she wished to say anything. She replied, "I want to say one thing, and that is, 'God is and has been always *so good* to me,' and I wouldn't have anything different from what it is." The third heart attack in the evening proved fatal, and she died at about 9 o'clock.

The obituaries²⁴ published by newspapers in Kimberley and Bloemfontein looked back to the beginnings of the Community and the remarkable progress that had been made. One wrote of her bravery: "Never very strong, her health had suffered much from her many rough day-and-night post-cart journeys in the early days." Another considered a hidden side of her life.

Her work grew year by year. None can ever know the trying strain and anxieties connected with the early days of such an institution. The world goes on its way past hospital or school or study, little dreaming of the weight of anxious care being quietly borne by the workers within. Hard work and

23 Sister Margaret Anne SSJD, *What the World Counts Weakness*, p.19-22; Sr Mary Ruth's notes, HPRA Wits, AB2644/54. CSM&AA's Chronicle, the White Book, is notably completely silent about Sister Fanny's departure.

24 There are copies in the SMS archive, but the titles of the publications have not been noted on the cuttings. There is also an "In Memoriam" article in the Bloemfontein Cathedral Magazine, June 1887, in BDA.

often harder fare, financial strain and the daily anxieties of government, have to be borne gladly and in the spirit of self-forgetfulness, and with none of the world's compensations.

Sister Emma's body was taken to lie before the altar in the Sisters' Chapel throughout the next day and a continuous watch of prayer was kept until the Requiem at 6.30 am on the Thursday. Her funeral was at 3 o'clock that afternoon. Among the floral tributes placed on her coffin was a small heart-shaped wreath sent by the prisoners she had been visiting, with the inscription, "In memory of Sister Emma, who was greatly beloved by her friends in the Gaol." She was buried in the Beaconsfield Cemetery.

All the Clergy and Sisters, Associates and Nurses were present, with a large gathering of Church officers and friends, amongst them the children of S. Michael's High School for Girls. The service was taken by the Chaplain to the Sisterhood, the Rev Canon Gaul. Along the route many of various denominations closed their stores, and flags were half-mast high. At the cemetery the cortege was met by the united Choirs of S. Cyprian's and All Saints. ... The Mother Superior and Sisters bore the body to the grave ... [which] was lined with fresh green branches, and the coffin, very plain, in white, with a red cross inworked, was covered with a beautiful silk pall. The anthem 'I Heard a Voice' was perfectly rendered by the Choir, and as the service proceeded, with its mingled cadences of joy and sorrow, many a tear of sympathy for the Sisterhood was shed. The service closed with the hymn, 'Safe Home in Port'.²⁵

Safe home, safe home in port!
 Rent cordage, shattered deck,
 Torn sails, provisions short,
 And only not a wreck;
 But oh! the joy upon the shore
 To tell our voyage – perils o'er!²⁶

Another leading figure was about to take his leave. The President of the Republic, Johannes Brand, appeared to have recovered from severe illness but died suddenly late

25 Initials "W.T.G." at the end of this notice may indicate that it was written by Canon Gaul himself.

26 The hymn was written by John Mason Neale, founder of the Society of St Margaret.

at night on Saturday 14 July, 1888. He had led the Orange Free State for twenty-four years and by his wise but firm government had given it a stability that was previously lacking. A devout member of the Dutch Reformed Church, he was always a good friend to Anglicans. When the news of his death broke on Sunday morning, changes were made to the services in Bloemfontein Cathedral. Mendelsohn's Funeral March was played on the organ as an opening voluntary, and appropriate hymns were sung. Archdeacon Crisp addressed the congregation on "the sorrow which is weighing so heavily upon every heart among us today." He said,

This House of Prayer is redolent of his memory; his name is engraved upon its foundation-stone, and we are thinking today of the many special occasions on which he has worshipped with us here, and of the kind congratulations with which he encouraged us at each step of our work.

Before the final blessing, the whole congregation stood while the Dead March in *Saul* was played. The title page of the August issue of the Cathedral Magazine was given over to an "In Memoriam" notice, in which it was recalled that

almost the first public act of our late beloved President, was the laying of the stone of S. Paul's Church, Philippolis, on his entering the State in 1864, and during the many years which have passed since then he has been to us both a warm-hearted patron and an affectionate friend.²⁷

The Church at Philippolis was the first Anglican Church to be completed in the Free State. All the resident Anglican clergy attended the President's funeral on Tuesday 17 July.

In the Community's journal, the *Chronicler* wrote that President Brand "had been a kind and generous friend to the Sisters, and his two daughters were educated at St Michael's Home."²⁸

*

Mother Emma's body was moved from its first resting place in 1984, together with those of Sister Henrietta and Miss Mary Hirst Watkins. The South African Nursing Association

27 BDA, The Bloemfontein Cathedral Magazine, Vol. II, No.28, August 1888. See also Crisp, p.93-94

28 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, July 14, 1888

had requested permission to re-inter the three pioneers at the foot of Sister Henrietta's statue in the grounds of Kimberley Cathedral. On Friday 25 May, Mother Mary Ruth led representatives of St Michael's Community and School – Sisters Evelyn and Constance, the Revd Tom Cripps (Chaplain) with his wife, Mr David Jones (Head Master) and Mrs Fay Jones, together with ten senior pupils – to attend a special service in St Cyprian's Cathedral. The Bishop, the Rt Revd George Swartz, and the Dean presided, with the singing being led by the full choir. Sister Henrietta's family was represented by Mr and Mrs Stockdale, and representatives of the S.A. Nursing Association had gathered from all over the country. Dr Charlotte Searle gave an address on the legacy of the three nursing pioneers. At the conclusion of the service, there was a procession to the graves, which the Bishop hallowed before saying the committal prayers. The South African Nursing Association has promised to maintain the graves in perpetuity.²⁹

29 SMS, White Book II, 25 May 1984



The official opening of the swimming bath on October 19, 1935, by Mrs Hugh Wiley. The tall slender figure in white is Miss Christine Ogle, Headmistress, and next to her are Sister Margaret Dorothea and Mother Mary Ursula. The Warden, the Revd William Frith, stands to the left, ready to bless the pool.



St Mary's School, Leribe, in 1911. Seated are Sisters Marion and Julia, with Sister Martha standing.

CHAPTER 14



BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS AND EXTENDING THE WORK IN AND AROUND BLOEMFONTEIN

It will probably be known by now in England that a change has taken place in S. Michael's Home, that the late Mother Superior has resigned, and that Sister Frances has taken her place. She will know how much she finds ready to her hand, and the foundations on which she will continue to build. It would be hard to give too much praise to the spirit that reigns among the Sisters, to their devotion to their work, to their influence for good, to their spirit of self-denial.

Bishop Knight Bruce wrote his letter for the *Quarterly Paper* from Bishop's Lodge on May 14, 1887, only to have some of his words overtaken by events. Sister Emma died before the letter was published. Nevertheless, the Bishop's praise of the spirit prevailing among the Sisters was to provide a wonderful epitaph to the founding Superior.

Although appointed in January, Mother Frances could not be installed until Thursday 3 March, because the Bishop was away on a Visitation tour of the Diocese. The Service began at 7 a.m., presided over by the Bishop as Visitor of the Community, and with Archdeacon Croghan, Canon Gaul, Canon Crisp, and the Revd W.E. Jackson all present in St Michael's Chapel.

The prelude to the service was Bishop Webb's favourite hymn, 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow,' and immediately afterwards the Archdeacon, acting for the Warden, Bishop Webb, who could not possibly be present, presented the Superior elect to the Bishop sitting before the altar, the Sisters present all gathering round her. Certain questions were then put by the Bishop to the Mother elect, and certain promises made by her with regard to the due performance of her office as Superior, after which the *Veni Creator* was sung and several beautiful prayers offered up. The rule and the keys of the house were formally presented to her, and she was then placed by the Bishop in the Mother's seat. The celebration of the Holy Communion then followed, the introit being hymn 455, 'Jesu, the Virgin's Crown,' the special Collect, Epistle, and Gospel being those for S. Michael's Day. The service was choral, and though our choir now is very humble in comparison with what it was in the palmy days before the number of our children were reduced by the general depression over the country, there was no lack of heartiness, and goodwill goes a long way.

Of course, being a festival day, the children claimed special observance of it in the enjoyment of a half-holiday.¹

Another great cause for thankfulness in the Community was that Canon Holbech had accepted the invitation to become their Warden in place of Bishop Webb. "It is impossible to continue always with an absent Warden," wrote the Sister who described Mother Frances' installation. Canon Holbech did not arrive to take up residence until 6 December. Before leaving England, he addressed a letter to members of the Mission Association with the object of making it clear that whilst the Community was linked closely with the Diocesan structures, "yet it is independent of the Diocese in financial affairs, and is responsible for the maintenance of the works committed to it." Since 1878 the *Quarterly Paper* had always shown the Sisterhood's financial statements separately from those of the

1 QPBM no.77, July 1887. The Bishop's Letter begins on the title page. Description of the installation on p.147-148

Diocese. Subscriptions to the Sisterhood funds had decreased during the previous few years, and he appealed to supporters to commit themselves to steady annual payments, in addition to any support they were giving through mission boxes and gifts for special purposes. There had been a positive response to an appeal for more workers and he told of five already recruited. There were others who were willing to go if the Sisterhood could pay their passage. He was collecting money for that purpose. An English Sisterhood was contributing the cost of one passage, and the Mission Association two.

We must indeed be thankful for the self-devotion of those who go forth to the work, and for the generosity of those who support it; but we must still hope for more. England is surely not yet drained dry either of workers or money to send forth on the service of her Lord.²

At the Bishop's request, Sister Henrietta wrote a letter about the Community for the Quarterly Paper and again stressed the need for more women workers. "They have come in large numbers hitherto, but we want ever more and more, as more work opens out to us ... There are some sixty of us, ladies and Sisters at work now, but how much is left undone?"

We still have our old centres of work at Bloemfontein, Kimberley, and Harrismith, and although circumstances change, and one work increases and another decreases for the time being, and Sisters and workers are moved from one place to another as they are required there, and no longer needed here, we gain, I think, year by year, a deepening sense of settled home life, and more restful consciousness that here is our daily work ...

Bloemfontein, of course, under the shadow of our noble Cathedral, with our Community Home and Community Chapel, ... with its trees and gardens, and comparative coolness, close to the kindly hospitality of Bishop's Lodge is, as ever, the meeting place of the Sisterhood, the place where there is a time to get in spiritual refreshment and physical rest, in contrast to the places where there is a continual giving out.

She described briefly some of the work; noted that the "recent commercial difficulties" and the advent of the railway linking Kimberley to Cape Town had reduced the numbers

2 QPBM no.78, October 1887, p.191-193

of boarding pupils at the Bloemfontein Home; and gave figures to illustrate how the hospital work in Kimberley was increasing steadily.³

We note that hers appears to have been the last letter from an individual Sister to be published in the *Quarterly Paper*. Whereas in the first thirteen years of the Community's life, the *Quarterly* carried letters from many different Sisters, from 1887 onwards any information about the Sisterhood and its work was provided by occasional letters from the Wardens.⁴

Canon Holbech conducted the Sisters' Retreat prior to the Business Chapter in July, 1888. He was, said William Crisp, "a priest of great precision of thought and habits, of marked steadfastness and perseverance."⁵ Both he and the Community were in a new place, and we gain an impression of a careful assessment being made of the resources available and the commitments already entered into. The *Chronicler* provides the only (known) list of Associates and Workers resident with the Community at the Home: in 1888 there were twelve Associates and seven Workers.⁶ With the number of pupil boarders low, excess accommodation at the Home was put to good use by receiving for training in "industrial" work some girls who had lost one or both parents, or who came from bad homes. There was an inclusive annual charge for each child of £12, but not every family could pay that. Those who were old enough earned their keep by helping in the housework and laundry. On August 1, a programme of district visiting was started in association with the Cathedral parish, and Sister Florence, Sister Mary, and Miss How were each assigned a district.

A sudden storm on October 16, 1888, broke a very long and severe drought.

We had been wishing for a storm, of course, ... and were wishing for it all the more as the machinery of the well was out of order, the various tanks ... were all empty, and we were reduced to making pilgrimages to the Town Fountain with buckets, jugs, or watering cans, for every drop of water we used. But before the day was out how tired we were of the very sight of it! Just before 3 o'clock the storm suddenly burst on us ... a perfect cannonading of hail

3 QPBM no.76, April 1887, p.87-90. Letter dated February 14, 1887

4 Adding the caveat that we have not seen every issue, because of some gaps in the archives.

5 Crisp, p.87

6 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1888. Associates: Misses Lane, Cuyler, Woods, Smitte, Paget, Price, How, Watkins, Rainier, McCallum, M. Clare, K. Clare. Workers: Misses Briggs, Marshall, Brinton, Foxerell, Franklin, E. How, J. Hartley.

bullets, or rather, big pieces of ice. We went into Chapel for our Offices, but the rattle of ice on the roof was perfectly thrilling.

All the roofs were of corrugated iron, and in the Home the noise was so deafening that that people could not hear one another, even with shouting. Many leaks developed and several bedrooms were flooded. Residents were rushing around gathering up their possessions and bedding, trying to find a dry place to put them. With the hailstones laying between one and two feet deep in places, there was “a rush to the roof, where girls, Sisters, and Industrials were endeavouring to shovel off the hailstones, ... mostly bare legged, with petticoats tucked up, ... with any implement that came to hand, brooms, basins, shovels, dishes and spades.”

170 panes of glass were broken; not a leaf was left on the vines; the peach and apricot trees were stripped of fruit and leaves; and the flowers “perfectly demolished.” But they were better off than some of their neighbours, because everyone found some dry place to sleep that night, “anywhere but our usual quarters.”

We had to draw all the beds in the children’s dormitory close together on one side, and the children slept like herrings in a barrel, an arrangement that resulted in a good many private pillow fights.⁷

Over the following two years, a concerted effort was made to raise money towards reducing the debts owing on the Community’s buildings. An appeal was sent out to all the clergy in the Diocese, and the Warden went to Kimberley in October 1889 where, with the help of Archdeacon Gaul, he collected £500 and a promise of further help. In the Orange Free State there was less money about, and the response was small. In a letter written for the Quarterly Paper on 2 March, 1889, the Warden again appealed to supporters in the United Kingdom.

The Sisters need all the help you can give them, in order that they may gradually pay off the money advanced to them for the erection of their buildings.

In April the following year he renewed his appeal: “... until these loans are paid off the Sisterhood cannot be considered to be in working order.” They had borrowed to build at a time when all the signs were that the School would grow large, but a depression in trade

7 The anonymous 4 page account is in HPRA Wits, AB2644/ 59; also FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i

had thrown out their calculations. One lady in England who had loaned £500 generously changed it into a gift.⁸

Unpredictable weather patterns and financial anxieties were not the only sources of danger to the Community. As we have related, an unhappy and unresolved election, followed by Bishop Webb's appointment of Sister Frances to be the second Superior, caused a small schism. It could have been worse. It was evident that the new circumstances of the Community necessitated some changes in the Constitution and Rule, and the Chapter began to consider these at its session on 9 July, 1889, under the chairmanship of Canon Holbech as Warden. That first session agreed that the Superior's term of office should be three years, with the option of re-election. Although the new constitution was not yet completed, in July 1890 Mother Frances resigned. She was re-elected on 9 July, and installed the next day. This put the disagreements of 1887 firmly behind them: if anyone had questioned the legitimacy of her position because she had been appointed to it,⁹ they could do so no longer now that she was there by the vote of the Sisters.

The new Constitution was embodied in a Deed of Association drawn up by Mr Abraham Fischer, a Notary Public, and Member of the Orange Free State Raad. It was, said the covering Declaration, intended to

lay down and demonstrate the basis whereon the Community operates in regard to matters directly or indirectly touching things temporal and the business relations of the members of the Community both mutually amongst themselves and as against third parties.

The Deed of Association defined the relationship of the various office-holders. The Bishop of Bloemfontein was to be Visitor and the ultimate authority in all matters, subject to the Constitution and Rule. He was to appoint the Warden, subject to the assent of the Mother and a majority of the professed Sisters. The Mother Superior was to be elected by a majority of the professed Sisters of the First Order and to hold office for three years, after which she would be eligible for re-election. She was to be installed formally by the Visitor (or in his absence, the Warden) within seven days of her election. [Perhaps this clause looked back to the two month delay in Mother Frances's first installation.] The Community was to consist of First and Second Order Sisters, the latter not having any seat in the Chapter. Applicants for joining the Community

8 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1889-1890; QPBM no.84, April 1889 & no.90, October 1890.

9 Bishop Webb's amendments to the Rule of St Thomas's Sisterhood stated that the Superior should be appointed by the Bishop and Warden if there were less than four professed Sisters: in 1887 there were more.

were to have a time of probation of at least two years and six months, during the greater part of which they would be called Novices (not Sister as had been done previously). To proceed to election, they needed the consent of the Warden as well as of the Mother. Other clauses dealt with the common purse, the procedures for summoning Chapter, the responsibilities of individual Sisters, and authority in the Branch Houses. The Warden had considerable duties: to him was entrusted

the entire direction of the Spiritual Concerns of the Community and [he] is the Sole Trustee in whom the property of the Community is vested and acts for and represents the same in all matters temporal.

These responsibilities of the Warden as Sole Trustee reflect the beginnings of the Community, when Bishop Webb had purchased properties for them in his own name and capacity as Bishop of Bloemfontein. Documents relating to the Harrismith house show that Bishop Webb also re-mortgaged properties when money was needed urgently.¹⁰ The new Constitution included a check on the Warden's power as Sole Trustee: no house or land could be mortgaged afresh or sold without the prior assent of Chapter. The Constitution could be changed only with the agreement of the majority of Sisters in Chapter, and the Warden, and with the Visitor's assent.

The Chronicler noted that in July 1893, "the whole Community assembled" at the Mother House for the Annual Chapter and Retreat. They had not all been together for a long time, "as the necessities of work, and absences in England, had always kept one or more Sisters away." The Bishop conducted the Retreat and the Warden was present throughout. The finalisation of the new Constitution was what required that every Sister be present. On 4 July, 1893, all fourteen First Order and two Second Order Sisters signed the Declaration by which they promised "jointly and each one severally to abide by and uphold the [Deed of Association] and to be bound by the provisions thereof." They signed in the presence of two independent witnesses (a Bank Manager and the Secretary of the Board of Executors & Trust Company), before the Notary Public Abraham Fischer.¹¹

This Constitution was to be superseded and specifically revoked by a new document just thirteen years later. Nevertheless, it represented an important transitional moment in the history of the Community, as it emerged from under Bishop Webb's dominance and his

¹⁰ HPRA Wits, AB2644/15

¹¹ The original documents are in HPRA Wits, AB2644/32. The Sisters are: (First Order) Mother Frances, Sisters Henrietta, H. Theresa, Louisa, Emma Keith, Louisa Jane, Frances Mary, Catherine, Mary Ellen, Florence, Mary, Monica, Isabel, Flora Elizabeth, (Second Order) Sarah, Caroline Anne.

vision of it as an integral part of the Diocesan structure. The Sisterhood was learning to stand on its own feet as an institution in its own right.

During that period, while constitutional matters were being sorted out by the Chapter and lawyers, a small but significant realignment of the Community's work was taking place. It was noticeable first in Kimberley. After Christmas 1889, the Community withdrew from teaching in St Matthew's Mission School, citing the lack of workers. In 1891 a Head Master was appointed to take over the Perseverance School, enabling the Sisters there to withdraw. That same year it was decided that St Michael's School, until then the Community's main house in Kimberley (apart from the Hospital), should be handed over to the Headmistress, Miss Woods, to economise on both workers and expenses. After the Community withdrew in 1895 from the responsibility of providing all the nursing staff at Kimberley Hospital, new and more directly pastoral works opened up in that town. St Cyprian's Parish asked them in 1895 to open and run a Refuge for Fallen Women, and in 1898 they accepted an invitation from the Rector of Beaconsfield to undertake parochial work.

Changes were to come in Bloemfontein also. The teacher assigned to the Cathedral's Parochial School (the former St Gabriel's) was withdrawn in 1894, and the following year the management of the Good Shepherd School was handed over to the clergy of St Philip's Mission, although Sisters continued to teach there. Work among the Coloureds and at St Patrick's Mission was expanded, and some new ministries begun.

Canon Holbech's calm advice was invaluable to the Sisters at this time, and all the more so because the Visitor left and there was another episcopal interregnum. During the Provincial Synod held at Cape Town in January 1891, the Bishops resolved to establish the Diocese of Mashonaland, and Dr Knight Bruce was invited to become its first Bishop. He had shown great interest in the region and in April 1888 had set out to visit the territory, returning to Bloemfontein five days before Christmas. His last Sunday in Bloemfontein was March 5, 1891, although he did not formally resign the see until August that year. The Elective Assembly nominated as his successor Dr John Wale Hicks, Fellow and Dean of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, who had been a member of the Bloemfontein Mission Association for twenty years. Bishop Hicks was consecrated in Cape Town on St Matthew's Day, 1892, and enthroned in Bloemfontein on St Michael's Day, 29 September.¹²

¹² Crisp, p.90-92 & 105-114

The arrival of the railway from Port Elizabeth in 1890, and its extension northwards over the following year to reach the Vaal River at Viljoen's Drift, had brought with it the need to develop an infrastructure to provide support in engineering and line maintenance. A Railway Camp was established in Bloemfontein to house the workers and their families.¹³ The first Dean of Bloemfontein, the Very Revd John Ranulph Vincent, who had travelled out from England with Dr Hicks, immediately saw the pastoral needs among the frequently changing railway population. In December he asked the Community to undertake work in the camp. A chapel was constructed early in 1893, and dedicated in the name of St Margaret. During the week it was used for a day school, and on Sundays there was a Sunday School and an evening Service. Sister Catherine and the Novice Frances Louisa were appointed as District Visitors for the Railway Camp, and Novice Frances Louisa was assisted by Miss Fanny Bramley in running the Sunday School. The Novice was an experienced teacher. She had been in the Diocese since at least 1885 when she was admitted as an Associate of CSM&AA, and as Miss Price had taught in the Community's schools in Harrismith and Kimberley.¹⁴

The School of the Good Shepherd had been a work of the Community since 1876, and in July 1887 it moved from unsatisfactory rented premises into a large vacant room at St Gabriel's. The day school flourished under Sister Maria's leadership, and that year extended its reach to embrace also the adult Half-Caste (or Coloured) population by starting regular church services and a Sunday School. The Community's Warden provided priestly ministry until that role was transferred to the parochial clergy in 1889. Sister Maria wished to dedicate her energies more fully to the fast-developing ministry among the Coloureds, and the Chapter assented to her request to be released from her vows in July 1889. She had been in the Community for ten years. Continuing at first to live at the Home, she supported herself by giving music lessons, and started collecting money for the construction of a church. The *Chronicler* recorded that in July 1893 the Bishop dedicated the Mission Church of St Philip, an iron church on a site at Waaihoek allocated by the town council. The Revd H. Oldaker, who had arrived in Bloemfontein with Bishop Hicks as his Chaplain, took charge of the new Mission, and the Community sent Sisters to visit in the district and to assist with the Sunday School. With most of its pupils coming from Waaihoek, in 1895 it was decided to relocate the School of the Good

13 The railway was constructed and operated by the Cape Government Railways, by agreement with the O.F.S. Government. The agreement included clauses by which the Free State Government could take over the railway within its borders. This option was taken up in September 1896.

14 Crisp, p.126, 127; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1893; SMS, notes by Sr Mary Ruth on Sr Frances Louisa.

Shepherd from St Gabriel's to St Philip's. Writing six years later, Sister Frances Louisa described the "active thriving work" at St Philip's:

It began some years ago in an old School-room, with scanty Services and a cracked Harmonium. Of late years a Church has been built, which on week-days has the Sanctuary screened off by a wooden partition, and is then used for the Mission School of the Good Shepherd, numbering an average from 80 to 100 poor Coloured children. The teacher for this School lives at the Home, going down daily to her arduous duties.

On Sundays one Sister teaches Class after Class of Confirmation Candidates in Dutch: holds a Mothers' Meeting and various other Classes during the week, and has a large district where house to house visiting is vigorously carried on.

Another Sister does similar work among the English-speaking portion of the community, has charge of the Church, and helps in the Sunday School.

A third collects for, and distributes a Sick and Needy Fund; while a fourth is Organist, and helps with the musical drill of the Day school. In connection with this work is a very active Guild, which does much to keep the congregation together.

The Sister who taught in Dutch was Sister Ella, who was clothed as a Novice on the Feast of the Annunciation in 1892 and professed on St Cecilia's Day in 1894. The daughter of a priest, she was the first member of the Community to have been born in South Africa. Although the management of the School of the Good Shepherd was handed over to the Priest in Charge of St Philip's in 1895, when the School moved to Waaihoek, about half the expenses of maintaining the School were still being borne by the Community in 1899. "Without this help it is difficult to see how the work could be carried on at all," wrote the Revd Edward Bate, who had taken over charge of the Mission the previous year. He noted, "S. Philip's Church and the School of the Good Shepherd are the only Church and school in Bloemfontein exclusively for the Coloured people (as distinct from the Africans), of whom there are many."¹⁵

Bloemfontein's growing Black population was served very ably by St Patrick's Mission, where the Sisterhood continued its involvement by providing one Sister and an Associate

15 Crisp, p.122-123; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, July 1893; QPBM no.108, April 1895, p.56f, and QPBM no.124, April 1899, p.76,77; Sr Frances Louisa, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.15,16

to visit in the district, to teach Sunday School classes, and conduct Mothers' Meetings. Much of this work required that they know the SeTswana language.

A thorough study of it is necessary, and for this purpose Classes are held daily by a Sister for those working under her; she, in her turn, studying the language with one of the Clergy, who has been working at it for many years, and has translated several books into it from English.

Although not named, her tutor was probably Archdeacon Crisp. Sister Helen was leading the work in 1899, and her assistant was Miss Rooke, who later was to be professed as Sister Marion. Apart from their other work, they took care of the Church and Sacristy.¹⁶

Originally situated close to the Cathedral, St Patrick's had been rebuilt on a larger scale further east near Waaihoek. Seating five hundred, it had been in the care of the first Black priest of the Diocese, the Revd Gabriel David. When he died in March 1898 he left behind a large and well-organised work, including a team of voluntary workers, "not educated people, but men of Christian experience, who can read their Prayer Books and Testaments, and who devote themselves to the work of teaching the carefully drawn-up Catechism which is used in this Diocese." Early on Sunday mornings there was a fully sung Eucharist with an average of one hundred communicants, and 4 a.m. sung celebrations on great festivals attracted hundreds, who afterwards set out to their employments in the town. There were over one thousand on the Mission's roll of Communicants. The largest congregations attended an afternoon service, which was preceded by Sunday Schools and classes for Catechumens. A few months after taking over at St Patrick's, the Revd Edgar Rose reported that there were one hundred and sixty "hearers or inquirers ... and they remain twelve months under instruction before they are admitted as Catechumens. The Catechumens, who are under probation for a further period of a year, number at present one hundred and ninety. There are two priests working at S. Patrick's, and a staff of nine readers who conduct services on the farms on which they live." Small Mission chapels were erected in new districts as they developed: we read of St Peter's in Kaffirfontein, one mile from St Patrick's (and a two mile walk for the Sisters from St Michael's), and St Lawrence, serving migratory Xhosa workers. The Sister appealed to readers of the *Quarterly Paper* for funds to provide new altar frontals for St Patrick's, and other items for the Sanctuary, so that they would be able to supply the Mission chapels, "for which nothing is at present provided."¹⁷

16 Sr Frances Louisa, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.17f.; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1899

17 QPBM no.123, January 1899. St Patrick's Bloemfontein, by William Crisp; and QPBM no.125, p.139-140

Under the pastoral responsibility of St Patrick's was a small Leper Location a short distance outside the town, and the Sisters worked there also. Sister Frances Louisa described the place.

The locality in which they live presents a somewhat desolate appearance as one approaches it. There is a little grass but not a single tree or shrub, and being in the open 'Veldt' the wind often sweeps across, blowing quantities of sand into eyes and mouth. To the right on entering the Lazaretto stand the women's quarters, small boarded rooms, each occupied by two or three people; opposite the entrance are the men's rooms. The Superintendent and his wife live in a small house just outside the enclosure.

It housed about forty lepers under the care of the Government, wrote a visitor who accompanied Fr Rose, Director of St Patrick's Mission, on a visit in 1899. They were supplied with food, clothing, and shelter.

Domestic matters, and the cultivation of the ground allotted to them, provide their daily occupation. The lepers, with one exception – an Indian – speak the SeTswana language.

For some time many of these people have been taught the Catechism under the superintendence of the Sister, assisted by a leper woman, who is an old Christian and speaks three languages, including English. The Catechism is followed by a short service – necessarily short owing to their infirmity – and the afternoon's work is concluded by visits to those who are unable to leave their rooms.

Most Free State lepers were sent to the colony on Robben Island, but Fr Rose reported that the Government was in the process of erecting a new asylum about five miles from Bloemfontein. When it was completed, it was intended to return those who were on Robben Island. He foresaw the need to construct a church building in which daily services could be held and the sacraments administered.¹⁸ The new complex had been scheduled for completion in October 1899, but the work was delayed by the approach of war, and not completed.

18 QPBM no.125, July 1899, p.141-142

Sister Frances Louisa wrote of the effects of the Sisters' work, which had begun in about 1893.

The greater number in the Lazaretto are heathen ... Mission work is taking root among them; many have been made Catechumens. The Service of Admission (held in the open air) is a very simple but impressive one. Those to be made Catechumens stand in front, the Christian lepers behind them. They are asked if they wish to be taught the Faith of the Church, if they renounce the devil, and desire the Cross of Christ in their hearts. They answer simply and earnestly, and are signed with the Cross. Then follow prayers, a short Address, and some hymns, and at the close all are given pictures as a remembrance of this their first definite step in following Christ.¹⁹

As these mission works grew, there were soon more Sisters engaged in activities outside the Home than were occupied on the premises. In a letter written on August 28, 1899, for the *Quarterly Paper*, the Revd Edward Bate described the High School as the "chief work" of St Michael's Home. There were about one hundred pupils, of whom forty were boarders, and the staff consisted of one Sister and ten permanent teachers. The Industrial School at the Home, with ten to twelve girls, employed one Sister and another worker. Two teachers from the Home were assigned to the Good Shepherd School; and general pastoral work was being carried on by two Sisters and two other workers in the Cathedral Parish (which included St Margaret's), one Sister and one worker at St Patrick's Mission, and two Sisters and a Novice at St Philip's. In addition, a staff of three, including one or two Sisters, undertook the nursing at St George's Cottage Hospital, as well as some private home nursing. He continued,

On Sunday afternoons 13 persons issue from the Home to teach in Sunday-school, or take various classes for instruction, and on Saturdays an army of cleaners takes possession of all the Churches.²⁰

St George's continued to be the only Hospital in Bloemfontein for the first fifteen years of its existence. From the time of its origin in the rented house in Monument Road, and after the permanent building was constructed on its site adjacent to St Michael's Home in 1878, the Committee of prominent citizens was chaired by the Bishop *ex officio*.

19 HPRA Wits, AB2644/81, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.19-20

20 QPBM no.126, October 1899, p.172-175

They worked hard to raise the funds necessary to build, equip and run the institution. Various businesses donated most of the furniture, shops had collecting boxes on their counters, and patients were asked to make weekly payments for their care. Even so, it was difficult to meet all the costs. In 1881 the Committee petitioned the Volksraad for financial aid from the State. A grant of £200 was made for the year 1882 but, with the country in financial difficulties and suffering a commercial depression because of the severe drought, the subsidy was reduced to £150 in 1883, and by a further £50 the following year before being withdrawn altogether in 1886. The Hospital stayed open only because of the dedication of the Community, which provided the nursing, cooking and other staff at no cost to the Hospital itself.

After the economic situation began to improve, the Orange Free State Government resolved to build a Hospital of its own, and the Volkshospitaal opened for patients on 31 October, 1893. In a Diocesan Journal it was noted that the first Matron (Miss Sutton) and her successor (Miss Getting) had both served on the Sisterhood Nursing staff of Kimberley Hospital. Despite this new facility, there was still demand for the smaller St George's Hospital. Of the sixty-six patients who received treatment there in the year from 1 March 1896 to 28 February 1897, thirty-one were typhoid cases, all of whom recovered, and twenty-two were suffering from tuberculosis, of whom fourteen died. An appeal was made to the British residents of the Free State to raise the sum of £500 for the purpose of erecting an additional ward in commemoration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee. Construction began in her Diamond Jubilee year, 1897. Bishop Hicks wrote from Kimberley on 21 March, 1898:

I am to hurry back to Bloemfontein early next week to open the Victoria wing of S. George's Cottage Hospital, which has been built as a Jubilee Memorial with money subscribed by the people of Bloemfontein, aided by a grant of £200 from the Marriott Fund. This hospital is one of the valuable institutions which Bloemfontein owes to Bishop Webb.²¹

Alongside all these external activities was the "internal life and work of the Sisters, which is really far more important." Of that, wrote Fr Bate, "one must needs be silent."²²

21 Loots & Vermaak, *Pioneers of Professional Nursing in SA*, p.52-59; de Villiers, A History of Medical Services in the Orange Free State, in *South African Medical Journal*, XVIII (18), September 23, 1944, p.306-308; Colonial History of Bloemfontein, in *South African History Online*; SMS, Notes from an old Diocesan Journal, copied out by Sr Mary Ruth; QPBM no.120, April 1898. The Bishop's Letter.

22 Fr Edward Bate, in QPBM no.126, October 1899, p.173

At a Chapter Meeting on 10 July, 1894, Canon Holbech read to the Sisters a letter he had received from the Mother Superior of the Sisterhood of St John the Divine at Pietermaritzburg,

expressing her desire for a closer friendship between that Sisterhood and this, and asking forgiveness if she and another Sister of that Community had by their action caused a hindrance to such friendship.

Sister Fanny had died of consumption on 19 September, 1890, and had been succeeded as Superior by Sister Anna. She and Sister Margaret were the two Novices who left CSM&AA with Sister Fanny in January 1887. In response to their letter, the Bloemfontein Sisters asked the Warden to “express their hearty forgiveness, and to give assurance of their continued affection.”

With regard to this matter, the Warden charged the Sisters that in future they should not speak to any person not a member of the Community of the difficulties which led to two novices leaving this Community.

Mother Frances followed up on that contact by going in September, accompanied by Sister Florence, to stay with the Pietermaritzburg Sisters at their home of St Cross, “to renew friendship and to show forgiveness for the past.”²³

That would have been the last Chapter at which Canon Holbech presided as resident Warden. In April 1895 he was appointed Archdeacon and Rector of Kimberley, in succession to Archdeacon Gaul, who had been consecrated second Bishop of Mashonaland. At the request of both Bishop Hicks and the Sisters, Canon Holbech continued as non-resident Warden while a successor was found. The Dean acted as Chaplain to the Sisters until the Rev Edward Bate arrived from England at about the beginning of 1898 to serve as Bishop’s Chaplain and Priest in Charge of St Philip’s Mission. Alongside those duties, he became Chaplain to the Sisterhood, and from May 1899 he was their resident Warden, while continuing in charge of St Philip’s.²⁴

The cattle plague of Rinderpest ravaged the country in 1897, once again raising all prices because of the lack of cattle for ploughing and waggon transport.

23 HPRA Wits, AB2644/54, Extracts from Chapter Minute Books re SSJD, by Sr Mary Ruth; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1894; Sr Margaret Anne SSJD, *What the World Counts Weakness*, p.19 & p.25-34

24 FSA, A510, 1895 & 27 April 1897; QPBM no.108, April 1895. Bishop’s Letter; QPBM no.124, April 1899, p.76; QPBM no.126, October 1899, p.172. From the Archdeaconry of Kimberley, William Holbech was consecrated Bishop of St Helena in 1905.

The Sisters were reduced to scraggy mutton with boiled rice as vegetable, and condensed milk at fabulous prices. Business was almost at a standstill and School Fees could not be paid with the desired promptitude, if at all.

Bishop Hicks, a distinguished scientist as well as a theologian, would not have known of that entry in the Community's White Book when he wrote for the Quarterly,

The distress in the Free State owing to cattle plague and drought is, so far, not as great as I had feared. But in Basutoland, and in Bechuanaland, and among our people in the Transvaal, there is great scarcity and poverty.²⁵

A generous gift of money from a friend of the Community enabled the Chapter to decide to add a new wing to St Michael's Home, to provide accommodation for the Sisters. This would extend over a strip of land between the Home and St George's, which the Community had bought from the Bloemfontein Corporation in 1893, to prevent its continuing use as a public thoroughfare. £900 was available, and the wing was designed to include eight small bedrooms and an Infirmary. Construction began in 1899, "but when only the bare outside walls were up, the workmen deserted their posts, some fleeing over the border ... and others joining the Dutch Commandoes." The Orange Free State had declared War. Timber that had been delivered for use as ceilings and floors was requisitioned for military purposes, and even after the British occupation of the town, work could not be resumed for another year because of military restrictions on civilian transport.²⁶

25 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1897; QPBM no.121, July 1898. The Bishop's Letter

26 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1893, 29 September 1897, & 1899; HPRA Wits, AB2644/81, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.6-8



A Sister with a village Sunday School in the Leribe district, undated.



Sister Jane SMMS and novice Georgina with a horse they bought for visiting in remote villages, 1952.



Some of the Society of St Mary at the Cross, Leribe: (from left) Sister Janet, Novice Georgina, Sister Adelaide, Novice Sarah (undated but probably from 1955 or 1956).



The Convent of the Holy Name in 2015. A fine chapel has been added to the original house built by Canon Widdicombe in 1885, and which was St Mary's Home of the CSM&AA Sisters from 1910 to 1962. (Photo: Author)

CHAPTER 15



THE ANGLO-BOER WAR – MEDALS FOR ST MICHAEL'S

We had no railways, and the noise of the outside world reached us but faintly, so that in our quiet way we were a contented community, isolated hundreds of miles from the seaboard.

Deneys Reitz was five years old when his father was elected President of the Orange Free State in 1887 to succeed President Brand. To their home in the Presidency came the leading men in the region: President Kruger and Commandant-General Joubert from the Transvaal; Sir Henry Loch, Governor of the Cape; and Cecil Rhodes, mining magnate and Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. President Reitz resigned in 1895 because of a breakdown in his health, and took his family to the Cape. When Deneys and his brothers returned to school in Bloemfontein after an absence of two years,

the ill-fated Jameson Raid had taken place, and we found on our return that feeling was running high between the English and the Dutch, and even in the Free State, where differences of this kind had hitherto been unknown,

there was so much ill will that people talked openly of driving the English into the sea.¹

Although the United Kingdom restored a limited independence to the South African Republic after the short war of 1881, the British aim of creating a confederation of states in southern Africa under the British flag was still guiding its colonial policy. The discovery of gold on the Rand in 1886 not only brought great wealth to the Republic but also attracted so many prospectors, miners and fortune-seekers that within a short period of time their number was greater than the resident Dutch-speaking population. Those new immigrants had no political rights and, as the years went by and their numbers continued to increase, pressure began to be exerted on President Kruger's government to grant them the vote. The British officials in the region realised, as did the President, that this move could hand political control to Britain. With the Transvaal Government continuing to resist the calls, the mining millionaires Alfred Beit, Julius Wernher and Cecil Rhodes financed a raiding party of five hundred Rhodesian Chartered Company police led by Dr Jameson, which entered the Transvaal on 29 December, 1895. Plans had been laid for a simultaneous uprising by British residents in Johannesburg. The Colonial Secretary in London, Joseph Chamberlain, had given his agreement in August, "provided he officially does not know of [the] plan."² The venture was a disaster. Dr Jameson was captured and sentenced to prison, and Cecil Rhodes had to resign as Prime Minister of the Cape.

The British officials persisted with putting pressure on President Kruger. As the political crisis intensified, President Steyn of the Orange Free State invited him and the British High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner, to a conference in Bloemfontein. President Steyn was hoping that war could be averted. His own country would be drawn into any conflict because of a defensive pact made with the Transvaal in 1897. The two delegations convened on Wednesday 31 May, 1899, in the conference room of the recently-completed Central Bureau of the Orange Free State Railways, across the road from the railway station.³

But despite Steyn's goodwill, Kruger's good humour and Milner's good manners, there was to be no meeting of minds at Bloemfontein.⁴

1 Reitz, *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Anglo-Boer War*, p.11,13

2 Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, p.490, 503

3 Schoeman, *Portrait of Bloemfontein*, nos.228-231, p.98-99, has photographs of the room and of Kruger and Milner.

4 Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p.65

Each time the Transvaal delegation offered concessions and in return sought assurances from the British, Milner pushed for more. On Monday 5 June, Milner broke off the conference.⁵ Later he admitted to Lord Roberts,

I precipitated the crisis, which was inevitable ... It is not a very agreeable, and in many eyes, not very creditable piece of business to have been largely instrumental in bringing about a big war.⁶

Years later, Deneys Reitz reflected,

Looking back, I think that war was inevitable. I have no doubt that the British Government had made up its mind to force the issue, and was the chief culprit, but the Transvaalers were also spoiling for a fight, and, from what I saw in Pretoria during the weeks that preceded the ultimatum, I feel sure that the Boers would in any case have insisted on a rupture.⁷

The success of their military campaign in 1881 perhaps led President Kruger and his Council to be over-confident.

Writing from Maseru on 14 September, 1899, Bishop Hicks of Bloemfontein told readers of the *Quarterly Paper*,

We are still in suspense as regards the question of war; and it seems now as if a lasting peace founded on truth and justice may be unattainable except through war; but it is all in God's hands, and we may trust that it will all be ordered for good, so that the work of building up and extending the Church and the Kingdom of our Lord may be carried on.

Reprinted with the Bishop's Letter was "A Prayer for use in the present time of Anxiety", which he had sent to all the clergy of the Diocese, and which had been included in the July issue of the *Quarterly Paper*. He wished it to be used with the occasional prayers before the final prayers of Mattins and Evensong.

5 Pakenham, *The Boer War*, ch.6, p.61-70

6 Quoted by Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa*, p.557

7 Reitz, *Commando*, p.14

I desire also that you impress upon your people the need of earnest and continued supplication, in family and private prayer, for the peace and welfare of the country.⁸

The white Anglicans in the Free State were in a difficult position. The majority had arrived as immigrants from Britain and had received a warm welcome in the young Republic. Unlike newcomers to the Transvaal, they had been granted full rights of citizenship. As events were propelled towards war, they found their loyalties divided.

The Sisters at St Michael's Home discussed what they should do. A kind invitation from Mrs West Jones, wife of the Archbishop of Cape Town, for any of the Sisters who could leave to take refuge with them, was politely refused. They sent a telegram saying, "Grateful thanks, but the crew decline to leave the ship."⁹ It was decided that if war broke out, most of the forty boarders should be sent home to their families. On 22 September, Mother Frances sent a letter to President Steyn:

I should have asked for an interview with you but I am sure you are far too pressed. In case of need we should wish to place at your disposal one or two trained nurses (more if the Cottage Hospital is closed) and others ready to help in nursing, only asking if possible you would let us work together.

Also we should have 2 large school-rooms and smaller rooms at the Home vacant to be at your service for the sick and poor. We cannot offer the whole of the building for we have some 20 orphans and children entirely dependent on us who cannot leave, besides some others whose parents wish them to remain under our care.

We are here solely to live and work for Christ – that is all the same whether we are teaching the young or tending the sick and needy.

Replying on behalf of the President, the Under Government Secretary James Collins thanked the Sisters for their offer of nurses and hospital rooms, "should these unfortunately be required," and informed them that Dr Ramsbottom had been requested to raise up an ambulance corps. He was to be informed of the Community's offer, and they should communicate with him.¹⁰

8 QPBM, no.125, July 1899, and no.126, October 1899.

9 QPBM, no.127, January 1900

10 Correspondence in UFS, HSC, 1/3/B 24-25, and 1/3/B 26-27. Two Sisters staffed the Cottage Hospital.

The Orange Free State mobilised its forces on 2 October. Five days later, Fr James Carmichael wrote from the Brotherhood home at Modderpoort:

Last Monday 'commandeering' began. The local Veldt Cornet called all men between 16 and 60 (except those exempt) into camps, and all householders furnish some food and substance. Our first levy was 5 bags flour, 5 bags of mealie meal and meat, 5 bags potatoes, 3 spades. *Moderate!* ... Stores and shops are left with the head only in charge and the lame and disabled. Smiths, carpenters, bank-clerks are called up. They take their own provisions for 8 days, after that the Government feeds them and levies goods from all, cattle, wagons, horses, &c. It means ruin to this country, and some seem to see it; I had no idea what it meant till this began. Wives and children lose their husbands' earnings, for they get no pay for their services.¹¹

He went on to say that many young Englishmen had left the State and their professions, unwilling to be involved in a fight against the Imperial Government.

"The Britishers fled," wrote Miss Elizabeth Savage, a former teacher at St Michael's who had been serving as mission worker for the Cathedral parish in Bloemfontein. Trade had already come to a standstill; people kept their money for emergencies and for several months there was a falling off in the collections. Her work came to an end and she left for Grahamstown. The Dean, Ranulph Vincent, was remaining at his post but receiving no stipend at the time of her departure.¹²

Bishop Hicks had been away from Bloemfontein since early July (apart from a three day stopover at the beginning of August), first for Provincial episcopal meetings in Cape Town, and then travelling "almost incessantly" in the Diocese, ranging from Kimberley and its country districts, via Thaba Nchu and the eastern Free State, to Basutoland, confirming many candidates and encouraging the ministry of the Church. He administered Confirmation to one hundred and forty candidates in a large service at Masite on 17 September, and the next day complained of pain in the varicose veins of one leg. Accompanied by the priest from Masite, Fr Spencer Weigall, he drove in his cart the twenty miles to Maseru, but there had to go to bed. The doctor diagnosed a thrombosis, with the risk that a detached blood clot could cause sudden death. Over the next two weeks, the Bishop's condition deteriorated. Advised by the doctor that there was little

11 QPBM no.127, January 1900, p.7-9. Italics in original. Letter dated October 7th, 1899.

12 QPBM no.127, January 1900, p.45-47

prospect of recovery, on 4 October Archdeacon Crisp was called from Bloemfontein and Fr Sanderson, the Superior, from Modderpoort, who administered the last Sacraments. Neither could stay more than one day because of the imminence of war. On the morning of Wednesday 11 October, a telegram was sent to Bloemfontein asking for a trained nurse to take night duty. St Michael's sent Sister Caroline, hiring a cart to carry her in all haste to Maseru. She arrived in time to take over that evening, but her duties were to be short. The doctor called to see the Bishop at about 10.45 pm, and saw that he was *in extremis*. Fr Weigall was called, and later told how

Wethree, the doctor, nurse, and self, knelt down and I said the commendatory prayer. As I finished the last words his soul passed away.

The Bishop's body was taken to lay in Church the next day, until his funeral on Friday 13 October. Sister Caroline did not wait for the funeral, but left on Thursday, being one of the last to cross into the Free State before the border was closed. The war had begun.¹³

Martial Law was declared on Thursday 12 October. All British subjects resident in the Orange Free State were required to swear neutrality and were issued with permits that they had to carry at all times. The Sisters and Associates at St Michael's Home were exempted from these requirements, perhaps an indication of the respect and affection in which they were held. They did have to abide by the curfew: no whites were permitted out of their homes between 9 pm and 5 am, and blacks had to be off the streets by 7 pm.

Four of the Community were in Kimberley: Sisters Henrietta, Louisa, Catherine and Mary, together with a staff of nurses at St Michael's Home. Their experiences in the four month siege have been described in our chapters on the work in Kimberley. No communications were possible between Kimberley and Bloemfontein, and Mother Frances was greatly concerned for their welfare. Apart from those four, and Sister Henrietta Theresa (who was in poor health and was sent to stay with her brother in Grahamstown), all the Community were in the Free State. Sisters Monica and Louisa Jane with four lady workers were at the Home in Harrismith. The remainder were in Bloemfontein, and the Warden, Canon Bate, was with them.

The first offensive actions began almost immediately, with Boer forces crossing the borders into the Northern Cape and Natal. Mafeking and Kimberley were both besieged by 14 October, and Ladysmith at the end of that month. Deneys Reitz later came to

¹³ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, October 1899; QPBM no.127, January 1900, p.9-11; Lewis & Edwards, p.443

regard the sieges as one of the mistakes made by the Boer commanders: they sacrificed the Boer's advantage of superior mobility.¹⁴

Anticipating casualties, in November emergency hospitals were prepared in Bloemfontein. The Volkshospitaal would take the most seriously wounded, and others would go to Grey College, where Sister Caroline was to superintend the nursing, or to the Dames Instituut. St Michael's Home was not included in those plans, but it was used for Ambulance lessons given by Dr Savage. Thirty or forty ladies from the town attended, as well as Sisters and some of their Associate workers.

One of the first calls for nursing help came from the Presidency. The President's wife, Mrs Tibbie Steyn, Free State born daughter of a Scottish Presbyterian minister, was very ill. Sister Flora was sent to nurse her, and stayed there for four weeks until she had recovered. During that period, both Sister Flora and Mother Frances were given Night Permits, allowing them to be out during the curfew hours. After Sister Flora had returned to St Michael's, the President's family sent a letter of thanks to the Superior.¹⁵

Knowing that the Sisters' relatives and friends in Britain would be worried about their welfare, Mother Frances was able to send a message to the All Saints' Sisters in Cape Town, by handing a slip of paper with a list of relatives' addresses to a couple from the Cathedral congregation who left Bloemfontein on 20 November. No letters or sealed communications were permitted. Although they had a travel permit and a medical certificate because of the husband's ill-health, the couple were stopped on their journey south, and had to return to Bloemfontein before starting again. This time they travelled north to the Transvaal, took the railway to Delagoa Bay, and boarded a ship for Cape Town. It was the only route that was open for the first five months of the war. "We are all well, and not starving yet," said the message, which Sister Maude of All Saints wrote on post cards.¹⁶

A report that the Sisters had been living chiefly on mealie-meal from before the beginning of the war, because of the high cost of provisions, was rebutted by the Warden as "somewhat exaggerated."

The fare had to be reduced somewhat owing to excessive prices and shortness of income, but has always been sufficient, and never during the war time, and still less before the war began, could it be truly described as

14 Reitz, *Commando*, p.36

15 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, p.148. The two Night Permits are pasted onto p.147

16 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, Nov.20, 1899 ; QPBM no.127, January 1900, p.20

in the January Quarterly. Still the Sisters are and will be much straitened in income.¹⁷

It was “a very difficult time”, wrote Sister Frances Louisa:

When shut up in Bloemfontein we had to scheme and contrive and go without many things, eat poor food and drink Bush tea (without sugar)! We made our own candles out of candle ends and scrapings, and even then were only allowed half a candle a week, often going to bed by moonlight to save that. We were not allowed to strike one match without extreme need, and went round lighting our candles from one another’s. Soap was made out of waste pieces; we frequently sat in the dark to avoid lighting a lamp, and at one time were glad to darn socks at a penny a pair to bring a little grist to the mill.¹⁸

In an attempt to relieve the siege of Kimberley, British forces marched north following the line of the railway from the Cape. Commanded by Lord Methuen, they fought three battles in the days from 23 to 28 November. The third of those, at the Modder River, cost 460 British casualties and 80 Boers. On 1 December, St Michael’s received an urgent request to send nurses to the Boers’ base hospital in the border town of Jacobsdal, one hundred miles west of Bloemfontein and forty miles south of Kimberley. Sisters Caroline and Frances Louisa went with Miss Kennedy (a nurse recently arrived at the Home from England), a nurse from the Volkshospitaal, and Canon Orford of the Cathedral. They found the town largely deserted because many inhabitants had fled in fear of battles to come. The Government School had been commandeered for use as the hospital, and some houses in the same street were taken over also. The reason for the urgency of the call was that British forces had captured a unit of the Orange Free State’s medical services, comprising of six doctors, twenty-two assistants and an ambulance waggon, and had sent them as prisoners to Cape Town. They were later allowed to return to their work. On arrival at the emergency hospital, Sister Caroline and Sister Frances Louisa were surprised to be asked to discard their habits, on the grounds that they were unhygienic. Their reply was straightforward: “That we cannot do. We are ready to help you in any way possible but if you insist on a change of clothing we must return home, to our great regret.” The matter was not pursued, and the Sisters were in place to nurse men brought in

17 QPBM no.127, Jan 1900, p.21, and no.129, July 1900, p.121

18 HPR A Wits, 2644/81. Sr Frances Louisa CSM&AA, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.27

wounded after the battle of Magersfontein on 11 December. Casualties were heavy, with 902 dead and wounded on the British side and 236 Boers. Most of the British wounded were sent by train to Cape Town, but those who had been taken prisoner by the Boers were sent with wounded Boer soldiers to Jacobsdal. The majority of the British were from the Black Watch, and wounded men were brought in all day and all through the following night. Three weeks after the battle, an ambulance unit arrived with doctors and nurses sent from Germany via Delagoa Bay to assist the Boers, and the Bloemfontein team were able to return home. As they prepared to leave, the Landdrost “delayed them with an unexpected speech of thanks for the work done and led the cheering that pursued them on their way.” Conan Doyle recorded that when British forces captured Jacobsdal on 15 February, “in the excellent German hospital were thirty or forty of our wounded.”¹⁹

Two Sisters, Flora and Ella, went at the request of the Free State authorities to assist with nursing convalescent soldiers who had been transferred from the Volkshospitaal to the Dames Instituut. They were there for about one month, from 15 December to 17 January, when they were told that their services were no longer required. “Spies were very active in Bloemfontein,” the Chronicler recorded, and perhaps the loyalty of the Sisters was questioned. The war had created mistrust and “bitterness of feeling prevented any more than a very limited use of their offer,” as the Warden commented. Mother Frances let slip a little frustration in a letter she wrote on 22 January, 1900:

We are here solely to work for God and His Church, and are *ready* to help all in trouble and suffering; if there are those who will not accept it we must not wonder, for the servant is not above his Master.²⁰

Sister Flora developed typhoid, which was attributed to bad water and poor sanitation at the Dames Instituut.

Two months later, the Sisters found themselves coping with a demand for their services greater than anything they could have anticipated. Alarmed at unexpected military setbacks, the Government in London appointed Field Marshall Lord Roberts to take over as Commander in Chief of all British forces in Southern Africa. He landed in Cape Town on 10 January and by Sunday 11 February had assembled a force of some 40,000 troops

19 Landdrost = Magistrate. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p.198, 206; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, December 1899, quoted by Goedhals in Nuns, Guns and Nursing; QPBM no.129, p.121; Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, p.325

20 The Dames Instituut was a Dutch Girls' High School. QPBM no.129, January 1900, p.122; QPBM no.128, April 1900, p.74; CT, May 25, 1900, p.600

on the south west border of the Orange Free State. Lieutenant General French led 5,000 cavalry to the relief of Kimberley: they entered the town on 15 February. That task accomplished, Lord Roberts was free to begin his advance on Bloemfontein. His army's progress across the flat landscape was checked first by a major battle at Paardeberg and then by skirmishes at Poplars Grove and Driefontein. The Free State Government decided to abandon their capital, and on 11 March Boer forces began a retreat through Bloemfontein. It was watched with great interest from the Recreation ground at St Michael's. President Steyn was reported to leave by train on the night of 12 March. That day, British forces led by General French occupied the low hills to the south of Bloemfontein. A message was sent in from Lord Roberts asking if the town intended to surrender, and threatening bombardment if it did not. The threat was underlined the next morning, Tuesday 13 March, 1900, when the household at St Michael's heard cannonading from 6.15 am to 8 am. The Mayor (Dr Kellner), the Landdrost (Mr Papenfus), Mr Gordon Fraser and other leading citizens took the keys of the state offices as symbols of surrender, and went out to meet the British forces. Lord Roberts led his troops into Bloemfontein shortly after noon. Marching in from the south, they were met with much enthusiasm by a small number of residents, including some of the lady workers and pupils from St Michael's Home. The Field Marshall and his officers rode down Monument Hill, past Queen's Fort (built by the British in 1850), through the Market Square, and to the Presidency, where the Union Jack was raised.²¹

W.E. Sellers, who arrived with Lord Roberts and the troops, wrote afterwards,

It is a matter for thankfulness that the town was spared the horrors of a bombardment. It was far too beautiful to destroy. Of late years, as money had poured into the Treasury, much had been expended on public buildings. The Parliament Hall, for instance ... and several other imposing buildings proved that the capital of the Orange Free State, though small, was 'no mean city.'²²

Two days later, Colonel Stephenson visited the Mother Superior to discuss preparations for bringing five hundred wounded soldiers into the town. Several emergency hospitals were to be established: St Andrew's School had both its old and new buildings requisitioned;

21 Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p.312-320, 371-373; Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, p.311-356. Sister Mary Ruth, *Medals for St Michael's*, p.3, emphasised that it was "not the Sisters!" who greeted Lord Roberts.

22 Quoted by Chris Schoeman in *Churchill's South Africa: travels during the Anglo-Boer War*, p.147. The population was still only about 4,000.

Grey College, Eunice School, the Greenhill Convent, and the Fourth Raadsaal, completed as recently as 1893 as seat of the Orange Free State's Parliament, were all taken into use. One hundred and sixteen patients were to be accommodated at St Michael's Home and St George's Cottage Hospital: officers would be in the Hospital and other ranks in the Home. Marquees were erected around St George's to provide additional bed space, and on the School recreation ground a shed was erected for washing. The Chronicler wrote of a "turning upside down of the Home": the Schoolrooms were to become hospital wards; the School Refectory would be used for classes; the Sisters' Refectory was to be turned into a sitting room for the Medical Officers; and the lower part of the Novitiate would become the Sisters' Refectory. Soldiers came on the 19th to move furniture, and then the patients arrived. "The schoolrooms make beautiful wards, two large ones and two small ones," one Sister wrote to the Revd V.S.S. Coles in England. The Community's own nurses were supplemented by three doctors and three Army nurses. They lived at St Michael's and took their meals in the Sisters' Refectory. Remarkably, "School goes on all the time, and there were between forty and fifty pupils at Easter."²³ Most of them were day scholars. On March 27 the majority of the wounded were well enough to be sent to Cape Town, but their beds were needed immediately for typhoid cases.

In their initial enthusiasm at having taken the capital of the Orange Free State without a shot being fired, the British troops nicknamed the town "Bobsfontein", in honour of their commanding officer. Within a few months they had another name for it: "Bloeming-typhoidtein". Enteric, or typhoid fever, had long been a problem in the country, as the Community knew from almost a quarter century of work in Kimberley. Arthur Conan Doyle, who had travelled to Bloemfontein as a volunteer doctor, called the outbreak of enteric among the troops "the greatest misfortune of the campaign."

This is not an evanescent and easily treated complaint, but of the most persistent and debilitating of continued fevers, the one too which requires the most assiduous attention and careful nursing. How great was the strain only those who had to meet it can tell.

It is a waterborne disease: the machinery for preventing it "was elementary or absent."

23 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, p.156; QPBM no.129, July 1900, p.133

It is heartrending for the medical man who has emerged from a hospital full of water-born pestilence to see a regimental watercart being filled, without protest, at some polluted wayside pool.²⁴

Rudyard Kipling was in the Cape administering a charitable fund raised to provide comforts for the soldiers, and travelled by hospital train to the site of the battle of Modder River in late February 1900. From his observations, he came to the view that much of the death rate from typhoid and dysentery were caused by “our own utter carelessness, officialdom and ignorance.”

I have seen men drinking raw Modder-river a few yards below where the mules were staling.

After the capture of Bloemfontein, Lord Roberts called Kipling to the town to assist in editing a newspaper for the troops. The long-established *Friend of the Free State* was commandeered for the purpose.²⁵

When the epidemic flared up, there were inadequate hospital facilities in Bloemfontein, noted Charlotte Searle, and “there was a great shortage of essential equipment such as bedsteads, mattresses ... and general nursing utensils. Above all there was a grave shortage of surgeons, nurses and orderlies.” All the emergency hospitals were grossly overcrowded. The single-track railway line that linked Bloemfontein to the Cape ports had been torn up by the Boers and had to be repaired before new supplies could be brought in. As soon as additional hospital facilities arrived, they were filled to overflowing.

At No.9 General Hospital at Bloemfontein there were 555 patients on 1 May, 1900. By 8 May, 1900, the hospital had 1,644 patients. ... At the No.8 General Hospital which was designed for 520 beds there were never less than 1,200 patients, and on one day there were 1,419.²⁶

Conan Doyle gave the total number of typhoid cases as not less than six or seven thousand; Kipling put it at eight thousand. The plague was at its height in the months of April, May and June.

24 Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, p.374-375

25 Kipling, *Something of Myself*, p.89-90, p.253, n.19, & p.254, n.25

26 Searle, *The History of the Development of Nursing in South Africa, 1652 – 1960*, p.196-197

There were many deaths. Conan Doyle said that as many as fifty men died on one day. Kipling resorted to verse:

Who recalls the noontide and the funerals through the market
(Blanket-hidden bodies, flagless, followed by the flies?)
And the footsore firing party, and the dust and stench and staleness,
And the faces of the Sisters and the glory in their eyes?²⁷

A note in the *Quarterly Paper* told that,

On Easter Day a little party went up from St Michael's Home to the Cemetery to put bunches of Chrysanthemums on all the fresh graves – there were nearly 200 of them. Soldiers were busy digging fresh ones. The graves all looked a little cared for with the bunches of flowers, and they thought how glad the people at home would have been if they had known.²⁸

Inevitably, some of the nurses contracted the fever. Four of Sister Henrietta's nurses from St Michael's Home, Kimberley, who had been through the stresses and deprivations of the siege, responded to the call to go to the aid of the sick in Bloemfontein. Two caught typhoid at once. While one recovered, the other, Mrs Kate Clayton, died at the Mother House of St Michael's. Sister Henrietta received news of seventeen nurses in Bloemfontein sick with enteric fever, and there had been several deaths. The see being vacant, Bishop's Lodge was requisitioned as a hospital for sick nurses.²⁹ Food was not very abundant and the rations were monotonous – it reminded one nurse of Kimberley during the siege – and not one of the hospitals had a sufficient supply of milk – some none at all – although it was available at any time in the three hotels and in the Bloemfontein Club.³⁰

At St Michael's Home, the presence of over one hundred typhoid sufferers caused a scare among parents, and several took their children away from the School. It was, wrote the Warden,

27 Kipling, Dirge of Dead Sisters, in *The Five Nations*, p.131

28 QPBM no.129, July 1900, p.133. Easter Day in 1900 was 15 April.

29 KCL, Notes on Nursing in War Time, by Sister Henrietta CSM&AA, in *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, XXV (645), p.118; QPBM no.134, October 1901, letter from the Dean.

30 KCL, *The Nursing Record & Hospital World*, XXIV (635), p.438; and XXV (644), p.95

perhaps not without reason, as 9 or 10 of the household, Sisters, workers, and children, have been attacked with some kind of fever, though all, we trust, will pull through.³¹

Members of a Commission appointed by the British administration visited and reported very favourably on St Michael's. It was, they said, "the best organised and cleanest of all the military hospitals."³²

One of the Sisters who had been in Kimberley sailed from Cape Town to England in August 1900 on board a troop-ship carrying 1,100 men. Many were recovering from enteric fever and others had been wounded in battles. Her sentence beginning, "we had over sixty in hospital", suggests that she may have secured her passage by working as a nurse on board.³³ "Only a few were confined to their beds altogether," she wrote, and fine weather allowed almost all to go on deck. In a letter for the *Quarterly Paper* she noted that she could speak of Bloemfontein only from hearsay, and continued,

The Sisters at the Home have had a hard time of nursing, especially at the first before they had proper supplies. It is difficult here in England to imagine towns far inland with but one railway, and that with a single line of rails, to bring up troops, the food to feed them, and the appliances for many hospitals to nurse them in. ...

The Mother, in a letter I had from her in July, says, 'If you see any of our work party at home, do beg them to send us house linen (cotton) this year before fancy things to sell. We gave up everything to the Tommies, and sheets and blankets are ruined, stained khaki colour from disinfectants. Enamelled ware, knives and forks, &c., all 'expended' – to use a military phrase. We shall want everything new. When they came up they had nothing with them. We lent all willingly.' In another letter she mentions that 'for three months the Sisters had not had mattresses to sleep on.' The poor Sisters were evidently like the famous Margery Daws of nursery rhyme reputation, only they gave their beds instead of selling them. It will be some time before St Michael's Home, Bloemfontein, can return to its normal condition, as at present the only places the Sisters seem to have to themselves are the

31 QPBM no.129, July 1900, p.122

32 Sr Mary Ruth, *Medals for St Michael's*, p.3; Sr Frances Louisa, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.26

33 It was probably Sister Louisa. The White Book noted that she went to England after the St Michael's Nurses handed over in Kimberley. FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, p.154

Community Room and the Chapel. When school begins again the needs will be many and the work hard – not that we mind the latter if only we are hands enough to do it.³⁴

Lord Roberts and his staff resided at the Presidency for six weeks while his army rested and gathered resources to continue. The Cathedral and its well-conducted services were “an unexpected discovery”, an officer on the troop-ship told the Sister. On the army’s first Sunday in Bloemfontein,

it was a grand sight to see the Cathedral full to the very doors with soldiers, and to see the stream of officers and men going up to the altar headed by their Commander-in-Chief.

Whenever circumstances allowed, Lord Roberts attended Mattins daily. A tablet on the wall of the north aisle reads,

To the glory of God, and a thanks offering for blessings received here, the electric light was installed by FM Lord Roberts and his army, AD 1900.³⁵

Several days of very heavy rain delayed their departure. Despite leaving behind 8,000 men who had been discharged to the hospitals,

It was with glad faces and brisk feet that the centre column left Bloemfontein on May 1st, and streamed, with bands playing, along the northern road. ... Any change that would carry them away from the pest-ridden, evil-smelling capital which had avenged itself so terribly upon the invader must be a change for the better.³⁶

The British Army made rapid progress in its march north through the Orange Free State and crossed the River Vaal on 27 May. The following day, 28 May, 1900, a formal proclamation was read in Bloemfontein, annexing the country to the British Empire as the Orange River Colony. Major-General Pretymann, who had been left in Bloemfontein

34 QPBM no.130, October 1900, p.182-183. The Sisters in Bloemfontein gave their mattresses for use by soldiers, and did not get new ones until after the Home’s hospital closed in October.

35 Cross, *A Place of Rare Power*, p.9; Brown, *150 Years of Service to God*, p.12 & 17. Schoeman, *Portrait of Bloemfontein*, no.291, p.118, notes that it was during the war that the electricity supply started functioning.

36 Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, p.428. Note that Pakenham gives 3 May for departure from Bloemfontein, *The Boer War*, p.581. Schoeman, *Portrait of Bloemfontein*, no.253, p.107, also has 3 May.

by Roberts as Military Governor, became administrator for the new colony.³⁷ The country was still at war, and little changed in the short term. The hospitals were still full with typhoid sufferers.

Since the death of Bishop Hicks on 11 October, 1899, the Diocese of Bloemfontein had been without a Bishop, and the war made it impossible for the elective assembly to meet. The Vicar General, the Dean Ranulph Vincent, wrote on St John Baptist's day, 1900,

I am hoping that before this is in print arrangements will have been made to accept the kind offer of Bishop Webb to come out to us for a few months. It is needless to say how heartily he will be welcomed, and how valuable his counsel will be at this time.³⁸

Bishop Webb had resigned from Grahamstown in 1898, and after his return to the United Kingdom became Provost of Inverness Cathedral. Arriving back in the Cape late in August 1900, he attended an Episcopal Synod held in his former see city of Grahamstown, before travelling up-country to Bloemfontein in September. The Community's Chronicle records that he was with the Sisters for choral Evensong on the eve of St Michael's Day. He visited Kimberley on 7 October.

On October 14 Lord Roberts gave orders to close the emergency hospitals at St Michael's Home, the Dames Instituut, Greenhill Convent, and Grey College – all were schools and needed to return to their proper function.³⁹ St George's remained under requisition, as a hospital for officers. Tented military hospitals continued in camps around the town, and those patients well enough to travel were sent by train to Cape Town, ready for repatriation to their home countries. The British Empire had brought forces not only from the United Kingdom but also from Canada, India, Australia and New Zealand. Kipling imagined British regular troops saying farewell at the railway station:

Our blood 'as truly mixed with yours – all down the Red Cross train,
We've bit the same thermometer in Bloeming-typhoidtein.
We've 'ad the same old temp'rature – the same relapses too,
The same old saw-backed fever-chart. Good-bye – good luck to you!⁴⁰

³⁷ Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p.419; Conan Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, p.439, 407

³⁸ QPBM no.130, October 1900

³⁹ Sr Mary Ruth, *Medals for St Michael's*, p.4; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, p.159

⁴⁰ Rudyard Kipling, The Parting of the Columns, in *The Five Nations*, p.176

War medals were awarded to six of the Sisters on the recommendation of Major-General Pretzman, in recognition of their service in nursing sick and wounded troops: Mother Frances, Sisters Flora, Ella, Annie, Frances Louisa, and Caroline. Lord Roberts also acknowledged the excellent work done, by mentioning in his despatches “the nursing staff of St Michael’s Home, Bloemfontein.”⁴¹

The last patients left St Michael’s on 25 October, and then the work of recovery could begin. The shed on the recreation ground was taken down, and the medical authorities helped in the work of disinfection and renovation in the Home buildings. “Over and above that,” wrote Sister Frances Louisa,

there is still much required to put the Home in thorough order. A good deal of painting and plastering is needed, and furniture has to be replaced. Our Infirmary requisites, School supplies of crockery, knives and forks, etc., all were freely given up for the use of the sick and wounded. Now is the right time to have things put in thorough order, and so be prepared, when the opportunity comes, for replacing our works on their former footing, and meeting future possibilities.

There were “glorious opportunities” presenting themselves in the new circumstances brought about by the War, the Sister wrote, “if only our hands be enabled, by the help and sympathy of those at home, to grasp them.” Her booklet was published after she arrived for a visit to the United Kingdom, and ended with three pages listing “Things Needed.”⁴²

The presence of their Founder, Bishop Webb, must have been a great encouragement to the Community. He wrote a letter for publication in the *Quarterly Paper*, appealing for more women to offer themselves as Sisters and Workers, as well as for urgently-needed financial help.

One of my greatest pleasures in being here at this time is the opportunity it has given me of being again associated with the life and work of St Michael’s Home and its Community, which was founded in the very early days of my episcopate here. Throughout this period of strife and unrest the Sisters have been appealed to by Dutch and English alike for ministries of mercy, both when the government was a Republic and since the British flag has been flying. God’s leading has thus been followed in the spirit of ready

41 Sr Mary Ruth, *Medals for St Michael’s*, p.9; CT, April 19, 1901, p.462

42 HPRA Wits, AB2644/81, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.26, 28, and 29-31

preparedness to do the utmost that strength and preparation of resources allowed for human need without any distinction of Creed or Nationality, with quiet cheerfulness and true simplicity.

The Garrison Chaplain had told him that there would be a special need for Sisters to visit the wives and families of 7,000 soldiers who would take up residence at barracks shortly to be constructed at Tempe, three miles from the Home. Sisters were still “sorely needed” in Basutoland, and there were expanding needs in the African townships of Bloemfontein. “A single little vehicle” in which the Sisters could drive there would be “an added instrument of good work.”⁴³

Major-General Pretzman added his voice to the appeals for financial aid from Britain by addressing a letter to the Editor of *The Church Times* in London. It was published on 1 March, 1901.

I venture to ask for space in your columns to make known to a generous public the present unfortunate conditions of the Sisterhood of St Michael and All Angels at Bloemfontein; they have branches at various places in the Orange River Colony, as well as at Kimberley. The chief work done by the Sisters is educational, and nursing the poor. Before the war the institution paid its way; it is now in great straits. On the occupation of Bloemfontein by our troops in March last, St Michael’s Home at once threw open all its hospital resources to our sick and wounded, and many an officer and soldier can testify to the excellent care taken of them by the Sisters. A small monthly grant was made to the home by the military authorities, so long as it was used as a military hospital; this has now ceased. But, owing to the war, and to the fact that many enteric patients were nursed last year in the building, parents cannot or will not send their children as before, consequently a great falling off in school fees has resulted. In fact, the income derived from this source amounted to £1,730 in 1899, but to only £630 in 1900. Moreover, this serious diminution in revenue is further accentuated by the very high prices of the bare necessities of life now ruling here; indeed, it has come to my knowledge that the poor Sisters are pinching themselves terribly in order to make both ends meet.

43 Copy of Bishop Webb’s letter in FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1901.

He wrote without the knowledge of the Mother Superior. The archives contain many letters enclosing donations from military men who had been nursed at St Michaels's.⁴⁴

The war in the country dragged on; it entered a new phase but did not end.

The conditions of the military administration of the Orange River Colony render it absolutely impossible to summon the Synod for the election of a Bishop, or even to name approximately a date when this will be possible.

Because many places were still in the hands of the troops, Bishop Webb was not able to visit them. He extended his visit by three months, but could stay no longer and sailed from Cape Town aboard the "*Carisbrooke Castle*" on 24 April, 1901.⁴⁵ Shortly after his arrival back in England, he took up a new appointment as Dean of Salisbury. The elective assembly in Bloemfontein was held eventually on 10 July. The Reverend Arthur Chandler was elected to the Bishopric and his consecration was to take place on the Feast of the Purification, 2 February, 1902.

It was July 1901 when the Community's Chapter decided that it would be necessary to close the School at Harrismith. It had been for many years

a flourishing Church School, holding the whole of the Religious education in the North of the Diocese within its grasp. We much regret that, owing to the strain and expenses consequent on the war, we have had to suspend this work for a time until funds and workers are forthcoming.⁴⁶

The records do not tell us if the School had been able to continue operating during the war. One of the two resident Sisters, Louisa Jane, had died in February 1900, leaving Sister Monica and four Associate workers in post. Writing a letter of encouragement to the Community before the War began – "May we not trust that St Michael, the strong Angel, ... will protect the Community in any perils that may come" – Archdeacon Holbech predicted that "the heaviest fighting will probably be in that neighbourhood, but not at the place itself."⁴⁷ Harrismith was taken by British forces on 4 August, 1900. Being the head of the railway through Natal to the port of Durban, it became an important military centre for the continuation of the war.

44 HPR A Wits, AB2644/11 & 28; CT, March 1, 1901, p.245

45 QPBM, no.132, April 1901; CT, May 3, 1901, p.541

46 HPR A Wits, AB2644/81, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.23

47 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, p.140-142. His letter is pasted into the volume.

The war ground on but the weight of the British military machine was gradually wearing down the Boer resistance. The policy of denuding the countryside by removing women, children and old men from the farms, before destroying everything that was there, was leaving the Boer commandos with fewer and fewer resources. Deneys Reitz accompanied General Smuts when he travelled from the Western Cape to attend the Peace Conference at Vereeniging in May, 1902. Delegates from every commando attended. The appearance of those from the Eastern Transvaal came as a shock:

nothing could have proved more clearly how nearly the Boer cause was spent than these starving, ragged men, clad in skins or sacking, their bodies covered with sores, from lack of salt and food ... Their spirit was undaunted, but they had reached the limit of physical endurance. ...

I know little of the actual Peace Conference as I was not a delegate, but the outcome was a foregone conclusion. Every representative had the same disastrous tale to tell of starvation, lack of ammunition, horses, and clothing, and of how the great block-house system was strangling their efforts to carry on the war. Added to this was the heavy death-roll among women and children, of whom twenty-five thousand had already died in the concentration camps, and the universal ruin that had overtaken the country. Every homestead was burned, all crops and live-stock destroyed, and there was nothing left but to bow to the inevitable.⁴⁸

Bishop Chandler wrote from Bloemfontein,

On Sunday, June 1, General Knox sent me a copy of the telegram which had arrived from the Chief of Staff in Pretoria: peace. I was able to announce it at the Morning Service in Church.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Reitz, *Commando*, p.248-249. At least 30,000 dwellings were destroyed, according to Acting President Burger and State Secretary F.W. Reitz of the South African Republic, in a letter to the UK Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, November 21, 1901. See Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell*, p.107-109

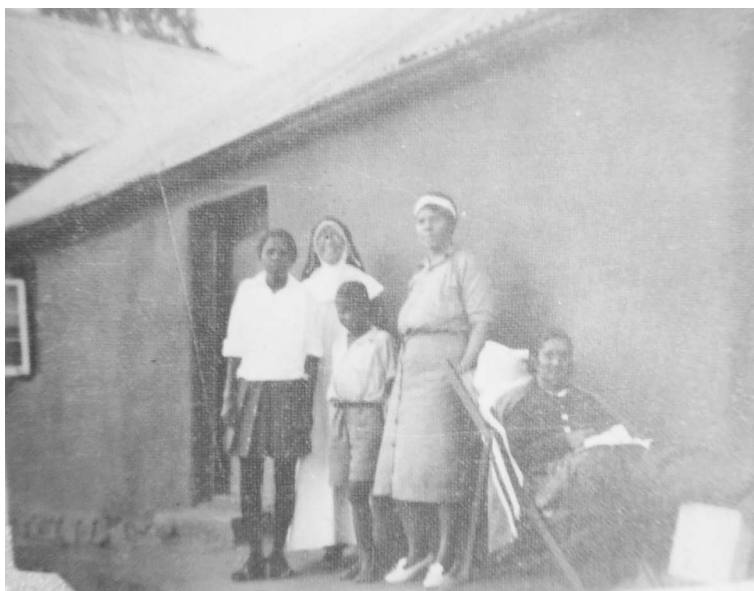
⁴⁹ QPBM no.137, July 1902, The Bishop's Letter dated 9 June.



Sister Marion CSM&AA, founder of the Society of St Mary at the Cross, Leribe.



The cave at Modderpoort, made into a chapel and living space by Canon Beckett in 1869. "To many, it is holy ground," wrote Sister Mary Ruth. (Photo: Author)



Sister Grace with her Assistant Mary and some patients at St Raphael's Cottage Hospital, Modderpoort.

CHAPTER 16



CONSOLIDATION AND GROWTH

The Anglo-Boer War was undoubtedly a watershed in the history of Southern Africa. It brought to a head the resentments among the white population that had been festering since the British takeover of the Cape from the Dutch in 1806, and it cleared the way for South Africa to emerge in 1910 as a single country under a shared flag. Reconciliation was helped considerably by the way that former opponents worked together in the post-War administration. Leading figures from Republican days, Mr Abraham Fischer, General Herzog and General Christiaan de Wet all served under the British Governor of the Orange River Colony, Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams. President Steyn took part in the Convention for the Closer Union of South Africa and then lived quietly in retirement until his death on December 3, 1916. The effects on Bloemfontein were most noticeable in the rapid growth of the town after the War. The census taken in 1890 showed a population totalling 3,379, of whom 2,077 were white and 1,302 black. The authorities of the Orange River Colony took another census in 1904. The total was then 33,883, 15,501 being white and 18,382 black.

The distinguished South African historian Karel Schoeman considered that the Anglican Church in the Free State “probably reached its apogee during the period of

Colonial government directly after the Anglo-Boer War.”¹ It was certainly a time of “glorious opportunities,” as Sister Frances Louisa had written when she sought help, not for

the personal needs of the Sisters, but for the extension and development of the different works entrusted to our care in the Providence of God, that the Banner of Christ may be unfurled, and that the Faith of the Catholic Church may be taught throughout this Diocese.

After the devastation of war, help was needed if they were to fulfil that trust, help that could be given by prayer, by financial contributions, and by others “casting in their lot” with the Sisterhood.²

The Community was passing through difficult times, she continued, and they were suffering hardships for the sake of the love of Christ. With the country struggling to rebuild, money was in short supply. The number of boarders at the Home School was down, and it would be a few years before they would increase. The Community had to curtail some of its works in order to live within its means. The decision not to re-open St Michael’s School in Harrismith saved on some expenses, and renting out the buildings brought much needed income. In Bloemfontein, the former St Gabriel’s School was sold for £8,000 in December 1902. It had been closed since before the war. In 1905, to economise on costs, the number of employed staff was reduced, and Sisters took over their work. It meant that only one Sister could be given to St Margaret’s parish. Despite these restraints, the overall mood was optimistic and forward-looking.

A sudden flood on Sunday 17 January, 1904, caused havoc. There had been heavy rain the previous day, filling the town dam and the Bloemspruit. The rain continued on Sunday morning. Sister Emma Keith and the laundry girls lived in the laundry cottage in Fountain Street, alongside the Spruit. Between 2 and 3 o’clock on the Sunday afternoon, “a tremendous noise, like an explosion, was heard, and almost instantly the garden and yard at the back of our house were filled with water.” The town dam had burst and the water was overflowing the banks of the Spruit in a rushing torrent five or six feet deep. From an upstairs window Sister Emma Keith and the girls watched the rising water, until suddenly an outer wall gave way and one of the girls fell through the gap. After being pulled to safety by a neighbour, she struggled back to the collapsing house and called

1 Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, Preface

2 HPRA Wits, AB2644/81, Sr Frances Louisa, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, p.28-29

to the others to get out quickly. “We slid down the iron roof into our neighbour’s yard, and so into their house, but we could not stay there for walls were falling all around us.” They were advised to get into a large tree. “We were so wet by this time that it was of no importance getting any wetter, so we scrambled up a ladder, into a tree, five girls and myself. How long we sat there, I cannot tell.” Some men came to their rescue. Shoulder-deep in moving water, one managed to secure a rope, and the Sister and girls were passed from one man to another until they reached dry ground. “There we were picked up again and taken right into a house, and there supplied with dry towels and blankets.” At the Home, the first they knew of the disaster was when the Chaplain arrived soaked to the skin, telling the Sisters that he had tried and failed to reach the women. “For some time the Sisters could not get near us, but as soon as possible after they heard where we were, two Sisters came to us. They were much amused at our costumes, six of us sitting round the fire wrapped in blankets. ... That not one of us should have been even injured seems almost miraculous.” Others were not so fortunate. The Sister told of a child in the house next door being washed out of his mother’s arms and drowned.³ Sixty people died in the flood, and one hundred and seventy-six houses were destroyed.⁴ In town the Royal Hotel collapsed, “piles of bricks and rafters everywhere.”⁵ Bishop Chandler had been away at Provincial Synod, and returned to find Bloemfontein “very largely a wreck and ruin. The course of the flood was clearly marked along the banks of the spruit by fallen houses and tangled heaps of corrugated iron.”⁶ The newest of the buildings on the Laundry site survived, although ankle-deep in mud, and the Sisters tried to clean that up for use while the Municipal Council decided its response. The whole area was re-planned; the course of the Spruit deepened; and no buildings were to be too close to the banks. In compensation for the loss of the Fountain Street property, the Council gave the Community the plot of higher ground immediately behind the back garden of St Michael’s Home. There they built a new Laundry and a Lodge for the Warden.⁷ Compensation covered about half the sum necessary.

To the south of the Home lay St George’s Hospital, still under the nursing care of the Sisterhood. At times during the war there had been up to fifty officers in the hospital and surrounding tents. The military requisition ended in January 1901, and the building returned to its civilian purpose. The Committee drafted a new constitution for the

3 Sister Emma Keith’s typed account is in the White Book I, vol.i, p.181-185

4 National Museum, History of Bloemfontein gallery, September 2018

5 Leith, *One the Faith*, p.22. And see Schoeman, *Portrait of Bloemfontein*, nos.297-302, p.122-123

6 QPBM no.144, April 1904, p.56

7 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1904. The town dam was filled in and a new dam created out of town.

management of the Hospital in 1904, under which the Matron would be directly responsible to them, and giving the Committee powers to frame bye-laws for the general organisation of the Hospital. Bishop Chandler wrote to the Superior on 19 August, 1904, advising her that it may be an appropriate time to withdraw from this work. "The Sisters have done a splendid work in starting this Hospital and carrying it on off their own bat for so long," he wrote. The Superior agreed with his advice, and a salaried Matron and nurses were appointed.⁸

Fr Bull SSJE conducted the Sisters' Retreat early in January 1905. It was followed by the Annual Chapter. Her most recent three year term completed, Mother Frances submitted her resignation, telling the Sisters that, if she were re-elected, she intended to go to England to consult with the Cowley Fathers and the Mother Superior at Wantage, with a view to revising the Rule of the Community. She was re-elected by the Chapter, which also decided to commit £3,500 to erecting new buildings.

Mother Frances left for Cape Town on 4 May, 1905, accompanied by Miss Cotton, and sailed for England, where they arrived at the end of that month.

After spending a fortnight with relatives, Mother Frances began visiting other Communities to gather information and make notes. Among the Communities were those of St John the Baptist at Clewer, St Peter at Kilburn, and the Holy Family in London. At the end of August she went to Wantage, where the Reverend Mother and Novice Mistress helped her to re-draft the Rule and Constitution. Towards the end of September she moved on to Oxford and stayed at St John's House, where Father Page, Superior General of the Society of St John the Evangelist, went to see her, worked through the rough drafts and gave his advice. Her next stop was at Salisbury, where the Community's founder, Bishop Webb, was now Dean of the Cathedral. After seeing the drafts and discussing them with Mother Frances, Bishop Webb referred her to a lawyer. She left for the voyage back to South Africa early in November. During a stop-over in Cape Town she showed the drafts to Father Bull SSJE, who went through them and offered some suggestions. As with many other women's Communities, the Cowley Fathers exercised a great deal of influence.⁹

8 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1904; Loots & Vermaak, p.59. de Villiers, A History of Medical Services in the Orange Free State, in *SA Medical Journal*, XVIII (18), p.307, says the Sisters withdrew in October 1904.

9 In his 1973 Report on the Community, Fr Trevor Verryn described the CSM&AA Rule as "basically similar to many other Anglican Rules from the early years of the Tractarian movement – a sort of 'off the peg' Augustinian Rule not specifically designed for a particular purpose." HPR A Wits, AB1363/C67, p.24-25. Was Mother Frances sold an 'off the peg' garment, when she had gone looking for a bespoke fitting?

After the opening of their Cape Town house in 1884, they provided brethren to conduct the annual Retreat of the Bloemfontein Sisters every year from 1892 onwards.¹⁰

Soon after the Mother's arrival back home, the proposed new Rule and Constitution were typed out and copies were sent to the Branch Houses, together with a notice summoning the Sisters to Chapter. Fr Bignold SSJE conducted a Retreat for the Sisters prior to the Chapter Meeting, which began on 5 January 1906 and was continued on the 7th. The Chronicler recorded, "The Sisters expressed their thankfulness for the increased spiritual gain they felt the revised Rule of Life would be to the Community." After six weeks' notice, the Chapter convened again on February 24th. "The Rule was gone through chapter by chapter and on the 25th it was passed. It was decided that it should come into operation on Ash Wednesday, February 28th."¹¹

This Rule of 1906 was to remain in force for the next eighty-three years and, together with the Constitution of the same year, shaped the Community for the major part of its life. In the thirty-two years since its foundation the Community had lived by the Rule lightly adapted and supplemented by Bishop Webb from the Sisterhood of St Thomas the Martyr in Oxford. That may have been adequate for the pioneering phase of the Community's life, when Sisters, Novices and Postulants were often sent out in ones or twos to open new works with the help of Associates and other workers. During that period their life had been very much dominated by the demands of external work. After the turn of the Century, an increase in the number of Sisters at the Mother House enabled a more settled Community life to develop. For this the new Rule was a necessary guide.

The spirit of adoration, unity, ready obedience and glad service, should especially inspire those who are dedicated as Religious under the name of the holy Angels.

Dealing first with the threefold vow of poverty, chastity and obedience, and the implications of those counsels for relationships and responsibilities within the Community, the Rule continued,

The Life of a Sisterhood is corporate rather than individual, and should reflect the order and unity of the Heavenly Choirs. It is therefore before all things necessary that unity, peace and love prevail among the Sisters ...

¹⁰ With the exception of 1893, when the Retreat was conducted by Bishop Hicks.

¹¹ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, February 1906. Details of Mother Frances's consultations in drafting the Rule are all from the White Book. A copy of the Rule is in the SMS archive.

This requires humility and the readiness for each to acknowledge her own faults. “Silence is the great stay of the Religious Life,” and close union with God can be attained only with the practice of fasting and mortification. Fervent prayer is needed to perfect a vocation, and the Rule required daily attendance at the Eucharist, one hour daily in private devotion (of which half an hour should be for mental prayer and fifteen minutes in intercession), half an hour daily for spiritual reading; and the obligation of the Day Hours was specified. “A Sister hindered from attending any Office shall recite it privately before the saying of the next Office in Choir.” The Annual Retreat at the Mother House could be supplemented by a monthly retreat of one day or half a day. The Rule then turned to matters of work, sickness, the demeanour of Sisters, behaviour when absent from the Community, Recreation in Community, the spiritual rule of the Mother, and observance of the Rule, which was to be read aloud once a week so that “the Sisters will use their Rule as a mirror.”¹²

The introduction of the new Constitution followed later in the year. Under the terms of the Community’s 1893 Deed of Association, six months’ notice was required for constitutional changes. The Chapter convened again on 5 July and accepted the new Constitution, “except one chapter on Trustees which was held over until October to gain further information.” This clause was significantly different from its predecessor. Whereas in the 1893 document the Warden was sole Trustee of all the Community’s property, the proposed Constitution named the Chapter as Trustees of “all of its property of every description.” There were other important changes. The Warden was no longer appointed by the Visitor, but to be nominated by the Superior and Council, for approval by the Visitor. The Warden was still to chair Chapter Meetings, but he had no vote. In the case of a tied vote, it was the Mother Superior who was to have the casting vote in addition to her elective vote. This Constitution enhanced the Mother’s role, and extended the length of her terms of service. On the election of a new Superior, she was to hold office for three years, and if re-elected, the second and any subsequent terms were to be of five years. The Chapter was named as the supreme governing authority of the Community: its agreement was needed to disburse capital or to buy or sell property, and no new work was to be undertaken by any member of the Community without the Chapter’s consent. The 1893 Constitution described the Community as “resident in the Diocese of Bloemfontein” and named the Bishop of Bloemfontein as Visitor. Now, in 1906, the Community was “at present resident” in the Diocese, and the Visitor was to be the Bishop of the Diocese in which the Mother House was situated. No longer was the Community

12 A directive and quotation from the *Regularis Informatio*, 8.2. Augustine of Hippo, *The Monastic Rules*.

constitutionally tied to one place. When the Chapter convened again in October, the complete document was finally approved. The Community had come a long way from Bishop Webb's first conception of it as a Diocesan institution under the direct control of the Bishop. Nevertheless, "Mother read a letter from Bishop Webb expressing his hearty approval of the Constitution."¹³ Times had changed.

Although the Founder had given his agreement, it was not enough to persuade every one of the Sisters. Sister Monica, who had been professed in 1890, refused to accept the revised Rule and Constitution, and asked to be released for transfer to the Sisterhood of St Thomas the Martyr in Oxford, whose Rule had guided CSM&AA until this time. Her request was considered by the Chapter at a special meeting held on November 17th. The *Chronicler* reported, "After much discussion it was decided that although she was not justified in asking to be transferred, it was of no use to keep a discontented Sister. It was better that she should be transferred if Osney would accept her."¹⁴ She left for St Thomas's in 1907 and it is recorded that she subsequently left that Community.¹⁵

While these important matters regulating the life of the Community were under consideration, the day to day work was continuing. The more settled life of the Mother House enabled some traditional Sisterhood crafts to be developed. Altar breads were baked, and a needlework room produced vestments, cassocks, surplices and altar linens for churches in the Free State and beyond.¹⁶ When the Community's former Warden, William Holbech, was enthroned as Bishop of St Helena on Sunday 6 August, 1905, he wore a cope and mitre made for him at St Michael's.¹⁷ Improvements were made to the buildings. At the front of the House the Mother's room was next to the front door and was noisy, with bells ringing constantly and people talking outside the window. A small block was added in 1907 to secure her greater quiet. Now she had a room with its own stoep. On the ground floor the block provided also an office for the Bursar, while upstairs were three bedrooms for Sisters. Generous fundraising by friends in the town made it possible to install electric lighting that year in the Chapel and in some school rooms. A 1908 inspection of the School by three delegates from the Bloemfontein School Board led to the comment that the buildings were too cramped. Built in the early days when Bloemfontein was little larger than an English village, and when all building materials had

13 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1906. The Deed of Association, and a Supplementary Deed, dealing with the disposal of the Community's property in the event of dissolution, are in HPRA Wits AB2644/93

14 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 17 November 1906.

15 HPRA Wits, AB2644/72, Roll of Professed Sisters of CSM&AA

16 SMS, ECH Report for 1908

17 SMS, School Magazine for 1905, p.8

to be brought up hundreds of miles by ox-waggons, many of the classrooms were no longer suitable. Fortunately, a grant of £500 was received from the SPCK a few months later and three extra classrooms were built. They were taken into use immediately. There were further additions the next year, with a double storied building providing the School with an imposing Georgian-style entrance on Elizabeth Street, as well as more accommodation within. In 1911 a north aisle was added to the Chapel as a memorial and thanksgiving for Bishop Webb, who had died on 13 June, 1907, in Salisbury. It was dedicated by Bishop Chandler on St Andrew's Day. At the east end of the new aisle was a small chapel of the Resurrection. Mrs Webb donated a mosaic for the wall behind the altar, depicting our Lord meeting the holy women outside his tomb.¹⁸

The Chronicler could not refrain from mentioning the very long hair of Fr Nicodemus, a Syrian monk from Jerusalem, who came to celebrate the Orthodox liturgy on Sunday 10 May, 1908. He had been sent to South Africa to search out and care for the many Greek and other Orthodox in the country. From his base in Johannesburg, he travelled to other cities and was to become a regular visitor to Bloemfontein and St Michael's. The Community was glad to offer him use of the Chapel. Various special arrangements had to be made. On this first visit, he conducted Baptisms (for which the Infirmary bath placed on a table served as the font) and celebrated the Liturgy of the Eucharist, with a wedding in the afternoon. Orthodox gathered from all across the Free State.

There will always be visitors in a Religious House, but not all are welcome. On Good Friday, 9 April, 1909,

just as we were going to Evensong, a baboon, who had escaped from the zoo in the park, rushed through our grounds, badly bit one of the orphans, then careered all through the house. Sister Frances Louisa and Sister Caroline stayed out of Evensong to watch the baboon and to doctor the injured child. The Police were 'phoned for but had not appeared. When Evensong was over, the baboon was still rushing through the house through open doors and windows, very infuriated. Our neighbour Mr Roberts, the Warden, and Mr Lefebre with four Africans succeeded in penning him up in St Cecilia, and finally captured him with the tennis net and an eiderdown, locking him with his coverings into a large tin trunk. At this point the long delayed Policeman arrived and the trunk and contents were sent back to the menagerie in the park.¹⁹

18 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i & ii, dates as given; QPBM no.150, October 1905, p.160

19 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i. The Zoo in King's Park opened in 1906.

Needs change and evolve. St George's Hospital, so recently transferred from the Community to secular nurses, had to dismiss its matron at short notice in March 1908, following a serious complaint received by the Committee. She was replaced by a nurse from Kimberley Hospital but patient numbers were falling as the National Hospital was able to supply all nursing needs. St George's closed temporarily in September 1909. St Michael's Community immediately rented the building to provide additional accommodation for the School. A new departure was made. With St Andrew's Boys' School still closed (from the beginning of the War), there was demand from Anglican parents for a Church Preparatory School for boys aged from 7 to 14. Using the Victoria Ward of the former hospital, St George's Boys' School was opened at the beginning of 1910 with six pupils being taught by Miss Marjorie Bissett. Numbers grew, and later in the year reached nineteen, and in 1913 there were twenty-three. Miss Bissett was a local girl, having been born at Fouriesburg in the Orange Free State. She was clothed as a Novice on 25 January, 1912, and continued to teach at St George's until the end of that year, but working with Sister Edith (whose main work was in charge of boarders at St Michael's). After her profession as Sister Marjorie, she served as a form mistress at St Michael's School. Later, in 1935, she took charge of St Faith's Orphanage. Her successor at St George's, Miss Margaret West, took over that work in 1913, and records show that she was sent to work at Maseru in October 1914. She also joined the Community, and was professed as Sister Margaret in December 1923. Miss Williams was the teacher in 1915, with twenty-six pupils. It was the last year in which this little school operated. St Andrew's was re-opening with a preparatory school from January 1916, and Miss Williams was sent for a term at St Michael's expense to help "put them on their feet". There was no longer any need for St George's Boys' School. It had served its purpose.²⁰

St Michael's School also started using rooms in the former hospital in 1910. A technical class for older girls was introduced. The Bishop called to see the Mother Superior in May 1916 to advise her that the Trustees had decided that St George's Hospital would not re-open, and were considering handing over the property to the Municipal authorities. Before doing so, St Michael's was being given the opportunity to purchase it. At a special Chapter summoned for 25 May, the Sisters were unanimous in agreeing to offer £2,000 for the property. That was accepted by the Trustees. School use would continue. The white-tiled operating theatre, which had been added to the front of the building in 1906, was adapted to become the wafer bakery, a great improvement on the room in the Home that had been used previously.²¹

20 Loots & Vermaak, p.59-60; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii; SMS, ECH Reports for 1910, 1913 & 1915.

21 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1916

Other works came and went. In 1910 the Community agreed to open a house at Leribe in Basutoland: the three Sisters who went there soon found themselves very fruitfully employed. In 1912 the decision was taken to close St Michael's Home for Nurses in Kimberley at the end of the year. Its purpose had been fulfilled and it was time to move on to other things.

The long-standing involvements in the churches of Bloemfontein continued. St Margaret's district needed two or three Sisters, but only one could be provided. Visiting was done in the Cathedral parish and the care and cleaning of the Cathedral remained a responsibility of the Community. A Sister and four helpers would go there at 5 o'clock on Saturday mornings to sweep and dust. The altar linen belonging to all four of Bloemfontein's Churches was maintained by the Sisters free of charge. In St Philip's Mission district, two Sisters visited and held classes; another Sister managed a club for girls one evening every week; another was Sacristan; a Worker was organist; and seven out of eight teachers in the Sunday School were supplied from St Michael's Home. An average of forty-five men and women attended a Sunday afternoon class for Catechumens and Confirmation Candidates, given in Dutch by one of the Sisters. At St Patrick's Mission, two Sisters and a Worker were engaged in regular work both in the Church and in the township, visiting in some of the one thousand numbered homes, as well as in the African Hospital. One of the Sisters went to the prison every week to teach a class there. Five Sisters taught between two-hundred-and-fifty and three hundred women and girls in classes for Communicants, Confirmation Candidates, Catechumens, Enquirers, and Penitents. It was a loss to these groups when Sister Marion left for Basutoland, because none of the other teachers had a similar fluency in African languages.²²

The Sisters were accustomed to walking from St Michael's Home in Markgraaf Street to the churches and Locations. Bishop Webb had appealed in 1901 for a "single little vehicle" to transport them, saving time and energy. By 1908 they had been given a pony carriage and a horse to draw it. It was necessary to employ a man to look after these. It took some getting used to. A story in the Community told of one Sister being sent in the carriage to the railway station on business. Having completed what had to be done, she forgot all about the carriage, left it standing, and walked home as had been her custom for many years.²³

22 SMS, ECH Reports for 1905, 1908, 1910

23 Bishop Webb's appeal, FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1901; SMS, typescript: CSM&AA and the Cathedral – 120 Years of Service.

From 1893, one or more of the Sisters visited and ran religious instruction classes in the small leper settlement just outside Bloemfontein. It was a transit camp. Lepers were gathered there until numbers reached forty or fifty, when they would be transferred to Robben Island. For a few months in 1906 there were none, but by December 1907 numbers had reached twenty-three. Robben Island was said to be over-crowded and it was suggested that this group would stay permanently at Bloemfontein. The Superintendent, Mr van de Merwe, and his wife had been there for nine years. A caring man, he had taken no holidays during that time, preferring not to leave his charges, although he did have to accompany groups to Robben Island. In 1907 there were two communicants among the females, a woman and a girl, and two of the men were being prepared for Confirmation. It was hoped that one of those could be trained as a Reader, to lead daily services in the camp. Whereas before the war Services were held in the open air, by this time a tent was in use and there were hopes of one day building a permanent church. Numbers had risen to thirty-seven a year later. The potential Reader had been discharged on the discovery that he did not have leprosy after all, but another of the men had taken over leading Morning and Evening Prayer every day. This man, Gabriel, was teaching others to read. The religious instruction was bearing fruit. Seven were baptised before Christmas 1908, and fourteen Confirmed, raising the number of communicants to twenty-seven. Sister Helen made a visit to Robben Island that year, and received a warm welcome from thirty or forty of those she had known in Bloemfontein.

Early in 1909, the lepers were moved to a former South African Constabulary base at Sydenham, seven miles outside Bloemfontein, and Free State lepers who had been on Robben Island were brought back, taking the total number to over one hundred and thirty. A Sister wrote: "The influx from Robben Island has not brought unmitigated good. There are difficulties such as we have not met before, but they will be a further testing of our Christians." Being at a much greater distance, it was more difficult for the Sisters to visit regularly. The Government gave a free railway pass for two Sisters once a fortnight. They would start at 7.30 am, go by train to a siding, and walk from there a distance of about one and a half miles. The only train back left in the afternoon. There were fifteen white lepers now, living comfortably in the former Police hospital. Further on were the African quarters, enclosed by a high barbed wire fence. The inmates were allowed to go out during daytime, but the gate was locked at night. They were accommodated in dormitories of three, six, or eight beds, and there were good dining rooms with trestle tables and benches. Men and women were housed separately but, by a kind favour to the Sisters, they were allowed to assemble together in the men's dining room for classes. Gabriel was assisting another convert in leading the school and in holding daily services.

After Christmas Day, the Sisters visited to take gifts: eighty-four for men and boys, and forty-seven for women and girls. One Sister related,

We made what we could, begged what we could, and bought what we could, and by the kindness of people we were enabled to find enough for everyone. Thanks to good-natured storekeepers here, they each had sweets and, crowning joy, a cracker! We also gave two prizes – a writing case for the best writer, and a book for the best reader.

Planning for the long term, a welfare committee was formed in 1910, chaired by Mrs Ramsbottom, wife of the Provincial Administrator. Fr Rose, Director of St Patrick's Mission, who provided sacramental ministry for the lepers, drew up plans for a Church building, and an appeal was launched for funds. The English Committee of Help promoted this among friends in Britain, and there was a good response. The Sisters received altogether £600, and a start was made on the foundations. Fortunately that work had gone no further when the Government announced another change of plan. The lepers were all to be moved to Pretoria, where there was a large leper hospital. The Bishop of Pretoria was told about the church fund. As a Sister wrote,

You will understand how anxious we feel that our dear Christians should not lose their Church privileges, and such help and guidance as they have had hitherto. We trust that they may influence for good those with whom they are in future to be associated. We are sad at parting with them, and after over eighteen years' work among them, is it to be wondered at that we shall miss them?

On 8 October, 1912, the Sisters went to see the men off, eighty-two packed into special Third Class carriages at the end of the scheduled afternoon train. The Sisters had prepared a "good-sized" parcel for each man, containing cake, fruit, and sweets, and a barrel of ginger beer was put on the train for them, to supplement the usual rations of bread, meat and coffee. Gabriel had been given some books to take with him. In a letter to the Sisters, he said that he had instructed the two women who could read best to take the daily Mattins and Evensong for the sixty-four women, who were to follow one week later. The nineteen white lepers also were moved to Pretoria.

And so ends, as far as we can see, our work in Bloemfontein among lepers. Pray that there may be hands in Pretoria to take it up.

They realised that the clergy there were already over-burdened, but the Bishop of Pretoria had written to the Wantage Sisters, and had applied for permission to build a church at the leper hospital. "Meanwhile the building money is accumulating in the hands of the Diocesan Board of Finance."

The Government initially refused permission to build an Anglican Church at the Hospital outside Pretoria, but the Bishops assembled in Synod agreed to appeal to the Prime Minister.

Our Bloemfontein lepers are so sad; their letters are so pathetic. They have no-one to visit them, for the Wantage Community has decided that it cannot at present take up the work, and a visiting chaplain has not yet been appointed.²⁴

The Bishops' appeal must have been successful, for the Bishop of Pretoria told of journeying out on 6 August, 1914, for the dedication of the "dignified, simple, solid, and homely church." He wrote,

The bulk of the money was collected by the Sisters of St Michael's, Bloemfontein, when the lepers were there. When the lepers were moved here they generously gave me the money.²⁵

By then, two clergy and a Deaconess were providing sacramental and pastoral care.

Bloemfontein, in the centre of South Africa, was chosen as the venue for the first Conference of Women Missionaries, which was held at St Michael's at the end of June, 1913, just after the pupils had gone away for their holidays. It was organised by Deaconess Alice of Johannesburg, and forty attended, to discuss topics of mutual concern. All were boarded at the Home, and the School buildings were placed at their disposal. The Conference ended with a Retreat for the members and other women, conducted by the Bishop. One decision of this first Conference was that they should convene approximately every three years at different venues. St Michael's hosted the Conference again in 1926. "It was very heavy work," wrote Mother Frances after that gathering, "but it

²⁴ SMS, Half-Yearly Papers for December 1907, December 1908, December 1909, November 1912; ECH Reports for 1905, 1908, 1909, 1910, 1911, 1912

²⁵ Quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.622

was a great interest meeting these good people from all parts and engaged in different kinds of work – Hospital, School, Industrial, Evangelistic ...”²⁶

Mother Frances proposed to the Chapter of 10 July, 1912, that, when money became available, a Chapel should be built for the Reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. This was accomplished in 1915, and on 27 June that year Bishop Chandler dedicated the building and placed the Sacrament in the Tabernacle after Mass. This small, detached building stood parallel to the main Chapel, on its south side, and provided a quiet place for prayer.²⁷ There was an increase in the number of women hearing God’s call to the Religious Life, and the Yearly Paper of December 1913 reported that there were eleven in the Novitiate.²⁸

Prayer was much needed after War was declared in Europe on 4 August, 1914. It was far away from Bloemfontein and South Africa but, as a Dominion of the British Empire, the country and city were soon directly involved. Margaret Leith, in her history of St Michael’s School, suggested that the close ties that the Sisters and teaching staff had with their immediate families in Britain made it natural that the pupils should be influenced to play their part in the war effort.²⁹ The boarders and Sisters spent their Saturday evenings sewing for War needs. Parcels of clothing and other items they made were sent to England and Belgium for the wounded, and for the relief of British prisoners of War. Through a body called the Patriotic Union, the School was able to “adopt” a prisoner of war, to whom they sent letters and gifts. On Wednesday evenings there was a special Service of Intercession in the Chapel, and on Friday mornings at 11 o’clock there was a five minute intercession for the War, for any who were free to attend. Every Wednesday the Holy Eucharist was offered with the special intention for those serving at the Front, and any member of the Home was invited to send in names to be included in the prayers. The War came closer to the School when it became known that four old girls were serving at the Front, one of whom had been in the winter retreat from Serbia.

Sister Frances Louisa mobilised a Scattered Working Party for War Needs among the members of St Margaret’s Church Mothers’ Union. They gave so liberally and worked

26 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1913; QPBM no.180, April 1913, Bishop’s Letter; SMS, ECH Report for 1913, p.17; ECH Report for 1919; ECH Report for 1926, p.19

27 No photographs of this chapel have been found. The author saw its interior just once, when Sr Constance was showing her family around in January 1959. “You must not go in,” she said, while holding the door open so that each could take a quick look. It left a lasting impression, with the sanctuary lamp and two or three Sisters at prayer, one of whom turned her head to see what was going on.

28 SMS, Yearly Paper 1913; also ECH Report for 1913, p.17

29 Leith, *One the Faith*, p.35

so well that they were able to send many parcels through the Victoria League to Queen Mary's Needlework Guild in London. Queen Mary sent two letters of thanks to the Sister. South African troops were serving in Europe, and in 1916 a large contingent was sent to East Africa under the command of General Smuts. Forces from German East Africa had invaded the British Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, and the conflict did not turn in Britain's favour until after South African forces arrived. In 1917, Bloemfontein Town Council supplied materials and asked St Michael's to make a flag for the Cape Coloured Corps. The Regiment's motto had to be worked into the design. The flag was presented to the Corps in East Africa, and later was laid up in the Cathedral of Zomba, in southern Nyasaland (now Malawi).

The Community's Chronicler wrote in the White Book,

The War still takes its toll on the life and happiness of the world. In South Africa we are so comparatively safe that there is an inclination to forget all the pain and misery in Europe as time goes on.

Those travelling out to join the staff were not so safe. On 4 February, 1917, Miss Hilda Creese and Miss Sinclair arrived after a "very anxious voyage." That March, Miss Close returned from Britain. The voyage took five weeks because the ship had to make long diversions from its normal route in order to avoid German submarines. There had been moments of great danger and she was "truly thankful" to arrive safely.

When news came that the Armistice had been signed on 11 November, 1918, every bell in the Home was rung joyfully, before everyone went into the Chapel for a Service of Thanksgiving.³⁰

Unfortunately, celebrations for the end of the Great War were muted by a worldwide Influenza epidemic. About one third of the world's population were said to be infected before the crisis was over. Nicknamed "the Spanish Flu", the origins of the outbreak are unclear, but the distressed conditions of life in Europe after four years of War, the crowded military camps, trenches and emergency hospitals full of injured men, provided a fertile breeding ground for the virus. The virulent disease appears to have reached South Africa through the sea ports of Durban and Cape Town. A ship-load of over one thousand troops returning from the War in Europe in September 1918 were quarantined for a few days in Cape Town before being allowed to go to their homes. It was not enough.

30 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1914 - 1918

The disease appeared in Kimberley a few days later, and subsequently in Bloemfontein. The town was at first complacent.

In 1918 Bloemfontein was a town of nearly 31,000 civilians, with a large military contingent encamped at nearby Tempe. Of the resident population, 14,767 were White, 16,000 Black and 'Coloured'. Although the town's population had grown very rapidly since the Anglo-Boer War, it was widely believed that its invigorating climate, general cleanliness and apparent lack of extensive slums were proof against any serious outbreak of disease. ... Well might the Bloemfontein-based *The People's Weekly* write in 1918 of 'our unchallenged reputation as the cleanest and healthiest city in the Union.'

The onset of the disease was violent and very sudden. By 8 October hundreds were laid up in the Locations, and on 10 October the National Hospital announced that it was full and in urgent need of volunteers to help 'in any capacity.'³¹

The Council called an emergency meeting at the Town Hall. Mother Frances and Sister Frances Louisa attended, and heard about the plans being made to deal with the epidemic. The town was to be divided into districts for daily visits by volunteers, who would report to the Town Hall every afternoon of any fresh cases and where help was needed. The Superior offered Sisters for the visiting, and Sister Florence, Sister Ella, Sister Frances Louisa, Sister Mary Grace, and Novice Elsie were each assigned a district. Sister Grace, a fully trained nurse, was sent as Matron to the Eunice Girls' School, where an emergency hospital for women was set up, and Sister Edith Agnes went to the Oranje Hospital to wash bottles and give general help. In Waaihoek, Sister Marjorie and Novice Florence Mary joined the team making daily house to house visitations from 13 to 27 October, while the epidemic was at its height. St Patrick's new church, as yet unfinished and lacking a roof, was turned into an emergency hospital, nursed by Roman Catholic Sisters. Sister Martha was sent to Kimberley, to help Sister Rosalie and Sister Emma Frances at St Matthew's Mission. As the disease spread out across the Free State, Sister Beatrice and Sister Mary Grace went to Clocolan, and, after completing three weeks at Eunice, Sister Grace was needed at Senekal and Bultfontein.³²

31 Phillips, 'Black October': The Impact of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 on South Africa. Ph.D. thesis. 1984. Cape Town: University of Cape Town, p.10, 24, 25, 83, 113-115.

32 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1918

It was estimated that there were 18,500 cases among all races in Bloemfontein, just over 60% of the population. 1,291 people died.³³

St Michael's School was fortunately closed for the Michaelmas holidays when the outbreak started. Two of the African staff died: Thomas, who worked in the house, and Martin, who looked after the horse. When the School re-opened on 13 November, only about one third of the pupils arrived. The epidemic was over by then, but took longer to clear up elsewhere in the world. When a new teacher for St Michael's, Miss Margaret Baker, arrived in Cape Town in March 1919, the ship spent some days anchored in Table Bay, quarantined because of influenza on board.³⁴

The Archbishop of Cape Town wrote to Mother Frances early in 1919 inviting the Community to undertake a new work in his Diocese. Zonnebloem College had been founded in 1858 by Bishop Gray and had become a centre for training Black and Coloured young men as teachers and Catechists. It was intended to open the teacher training courses to Coloured women. They would not be boarding on the campus and, to provide for those whose homes were at some distance from Cape Town, plans were being made to open a residential hostel. A Chapter Meeting on 13 April agreed in principle to staff the hostel, if the Superior could be satisfied about all the arrangements. When Mother Frances travelled to Cape Town to discuss the project and its funding with the Archbishop and College authorities, a suitable house had not yet been found. It was in July 1920 that the Community were told that a property had been bought on the lower slopes of Table Mountain, with a view over Table Bay, "in sight of mail steamers coming in and out." Sister Julia and Sister Grace went there in November to prepare the house for receiving its first residents at the start of the next academic year. They stayed initially with the All Saints Sisters at Lilliebloem while purchasing furniture and household equipment.

To see the new work started, Mother Frances left for Cape Town on 20 January, accompanied by Sister Dulcie. The formal opening of St Clare's Hostel took place on 17 February, 1921. There were ten students in the first year, and three CSM&AA Sisters were to be resident. The buildings comprised of two bungalows connected by a verandah. One was used for dormitories, with the exception of one room which was for the Sister with direct responsibility for the young women. The other bungalow housed the refectory and kitchens, a sitting room, two Sisters' bedrooms, and a large Oratory. The girls were encouraged to attend Morning and Evening Prayer and clergy from the

33 Phillips, *Black October*, p.133

34 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1918-1919

College came “frequently” to celebrate the Eucharist. On other days, the Sisters attended St Philip’s Church, ten minutes’ walk away. On Sundays they took the students to the Sung Eucharist at St Mary’s Church in Woodstock. The Sisters were especially pleased that during the first winter holiday of June and July, three students from Rhodesia who stayed there instead of travelling home, were baptised, “so making our household entirely Christian.”³⁵ The work was not plain sailing. After a visit in 1924, Mother Frances described it as “peculiarly difficult”, requiring patience and optimism.³⁶ Sister Florence, who took over from Sister Julia as Sister in Charge in May 1922, probably had those gifts. She had taught for many years at St Michael’s School, and was known for her love not only of literature and learning, but also for her pupils.³⁷

Sister Florence lost the sight of both eyes very suddenly one day in 1926, and then on 19 September suffered a stroke. Mother Frances was advised at once by telegram, and caught the fast train from Bloemfontein, but arrived to learn that Sister Florence had died later the same day. She was buried at the Woltemade Cemetery, where some of the All Saints Sisters had their graves.

Sister Jane was sent to fill the immediate need, but it became apparent that the Community was going to have difficulty maintaining a staff of three Sisters in this house, alongside its other commitments. “It was so far away from us,” Mother Frances wrote, “the Sisters were needed in their own Diocese, so when Sister Florence died we thought it wiser to give that work up, directly someone suitable could be found to carry it on. Two lay-workers came forward about Eastertide.” St Michael’s Sisters handed over on 17 April, 1927, and boarded the train to Bloemfontein.³⁸

Back in Bloemfontein, St Michaels’ Community and School celebrated their Golden Jubilee in 1924. Planning towards this occasion had begun as early as 1918, when friends and Old Girls launched an appeal to raise £10,000 to build a school hall and to make other improvements to the buildings. Among the Patrons of the Appeal were Mrs Eliza Webb, widow of the founder, and two prominent former pupils, Mrs B. McGregor, a daughter of President Brand, and Mrs Annie Botha, widow of General Botha, the Union’s former Prime Minister. The main events were held during one weekend, from Friday 25 to Monday 28 April, when guests gathered from all over South Africa. The programme for the weekend included sports competitions and a dancing display

35 SMS, ECH Report for 1921, p.12-13, gave a description of the house and work.

36 SMS, ECH Report for 1924, p.8

37 SMS, ECH Report for 1926, p.14

38 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1919-1927, and SMS, ECH Report for 1927, p.11

given by pupils in the Town Hall. One highlight was the ceremony on Saturday afternoon, 26 April, when the School, Sisters, Clergy and some four hundred visitors gathered in radiant sunshine on the Recreation Ground for the laying of the foundation stone for the Jubilee Hall. Mother Frances laid the stone in the course of a short service led by the Warden, the Revd W. Dodd. Several speeches were made afterwards, the first being by the Administrator of the Orange Free State, the Hon. E.R. Grobler, and others by the Director of Education, Mr. C.F. Schmidt, and the Mayor, Councillor John Reid. Dean Weekes, as Vicar General of the Diocese, described the history and the vision of Bishop Webb, the Founder. Sister Edith thought that the 7.30 am celebration of the Eucharist on Sunday morning was the happiest occasion of the weekend, when many past pupils joined the Sisters and the School in “the largest gathering the Chapel had ever held at that hour.” Evensong at 5 pm that day was similarly crowded, when “every available inch in Chapel was filled by past and present.” The Director of the Society of the Sacred Mission, Fr Joseph White, preached “a most inspiring and helpful sermon.” Bishop Webb’s favourite hymn was sung, “Through the night of doubt and sorrow, onward goes the pilgrim band.”³⁹

After passing notable landmarks, the pilgrims must continue their journey. The future will look different from the past, and in the Religious Life that can mean unexpected developments. Perhaps the most significant event of 1924 was not the Golden Jubilee weekend, but the clothing of the first BaSotho novices at Leribe in September. We have written of these in chapter 19.

Six years later, there was to be another important development in the life of the Community. At the Annual Chapter meeting held on 3 July, 1930, “there was an animated discussion on the question of Second Order Sisters gradually learning to keep the full Rule and coming into the Community Room.”⁴⁰ The Chronicler does not tell us the background to this discussion, but we may note that other Sisterhoods were discussing the issue at about this time and were in the process of discontinuing their Second Orders. Some were prompted to do so by the Cowley Fathers, and their influence may have been at work in Bloemfontein also.⁴¹ The issue was not resolved during the first discussion, and

39 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, p.96-103; SMS, ECH Report for 1924, p.6; Leith, *One the Faith*, p.41

40 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 3 July 1930

41 The Cowley Fathers pressed the All Saints Sisters from 1924 to remove the distinction between First and Second Order Sisters. It was done in 1932. Mayhew, *All Saints: Birth and Growth of a Community*, p.203-204. The Community of the Holy Name considered the proposal in 1928, but did not merge the two orders until 1944. Dunstan (ed), *What's in a Name?* p.103. CSMV Wantage admitted no new Second Order Sisters after 1894, but there appear to have been special circumstances leading to the early decision to become a single order Community. Mumm (ed), *All Saints Sisters of the Poor*, f.n.32 on page xxiii.

Chapter was adjourned until after the Sisters' Retreat, re-convening on 9 July. Unusually, the Chronicler gives us the voting figures when the motion was finally agreed, with 18 in favour, 4 against, and 2 neutral. On July 27, for the first time, Second Order Sisters were admitted to the Community Room and started to attend the Office of None daily. The same entry informs us that one room, St Agnes, was "turned into a Silence Room, where Sisters could write or read during non-Silence times". The way in which these two are linked as if they belong together suggests that the creation of a Silence Room may have been a palliative for those First Order Sisters who did not want to accept the Second Order as equals. It gave them somewhere to escape.

There may have been some unease that rumbled on, although we are told little in the White Book. It is recorded that on 3 March, 1931, the Bishop as Visitor went to St Michael's Home to discuss the question of the Second Order with the Superior. A change in the Constitution was necessary before Second Order Sisters could become members of Chapter, and such changes required a majority vote at one Annual Chapter, to be confirmed by a two-thirds vote at the next Annual Chapter, plus the written sanction of the Visitor. It was not until 1934, at the Annual Chapter held on 7 July, that the Second Order Sisters were finally accepted as members of Chapter.⁴²

Agreement was obtained more quickly, at a special Chapter Meeting held on 7 February, 1931, to a proposal that the Community should buy a cottage at Scottburgh on the Natal coast, as a rest house for the Sisters. Some had been to stay with a lady at Scottburgh over the New Year holiday period, and the suggestion seems to have arisen from that time. Perhaps they had seen a cottage for sale, because as soon as May 11, 1931, we read that Sister Emma Frances and Sister Mary Grace went down to prepare the cottage. When they returned home to Bloemfontein on 4 June, the cottage was loaned to the Pietermaritzburg Sisters for a month. Through the remainder of that year, and in the next, the Chronicler noted groups of Sisters, usually three at a time, going down to stay at Scottburgh for holidays. It was a long journey, with an overnight train to Durban, and then a slow train south.

In January 1932, Miss Mary Brewster arrived to teach history. Born in Southend-on-Sea, she studied at the teacher training college in Reading, and then taught for four years at the International School in Tel Aviv in British-mandated Palestine. During that time she was attracted by the life of the Roman Catholic nuns she met, and thought that she would have to convert so that she could join a Community, not knowing of the

42 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 7 July 1934

existence of Anglican nuns. She stayed for a short leave at St George's in Jerusalem, and while she was there a Sister from the Oxford Mission to Calcutta arrived to make a brief stopover on her way to England. It was Mary Brewster's introduction to Anglican Religious Life. When her contract ended, she returned to Britain and taught Arabic for a short while at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, while looking for a permanent post. One of the clergy told her of the vacancy in Bloemfontein. "Where's Bloemfontein?" she asked. The rest, she told the author, was history.⁴³ She was clothed as a Novice in December 1933, and professed on 29 February, 1936.

Mother Frances and Sister Elsie went to the Community's seaside cottage on 18 November, 1932, and they were still there when Sister Mary Ursula left Bloemfontein for Scottburgh on 16 December. After her departure, a letter that the Superior had written from Scottburgh was read to the Community. In it she advised a change of Assistant Superior. Sister Rowena had held the appointment since 1911, but her ill-health forbade her to continue. Needing a younger and stronger Assistant, Mother Frances had appointed Sister Mary Ursula.⁴⁴

Mother Frances herself was ageing and coping with periods of illness. She had been seriously ill many years before, when prolonged sickness in 1911 necessitated her missing the Annual Retreat and Chapter. Not fully recovered, the following January she went with Sister Caroline to Kalk Bay in the Cape to recuperate. Her illness intensified and she required an urgent operation followed by eight weeks in a nursing home, before moving to stay with the All Saints Sisters while she grew strong enough to travel back to Bloemfontein. It was 10 June, 1912 before she returned to the Mother House. Twenty years later, her visit to Scottburgh in 1932 was to recuperate after three months' illness. She returned to Bloemfontein in the middle of January, 1933, and was said to be "as strong and active as ever."⁴⁵

On 14 December, 1934, Mother Frances resigned as Superior, and left to stay at St Monica's in Modderpoort while the Community elected her successor. She was eighty years old and had been in office for forty-seven years. "One could hardly think of anyone else bearing the title of Mother Superior," commented one Sister.⁴⁶

43 Sr Mary Ruth told the author this background to her vocation when he had supper with her and Sister Joan in the flat at St Michael's School one day in October 2003.

44 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1931-1932

45 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1933, p.9; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1911-1912

46 Sr Margaret Dorothea, in SMS Magazine, May 1935, p.6



Sister Cuthberga playing the recorder to entertain a group of children at Modderpoort.



Novices Ruth and Irene, just after their clothing ceremony on 4 October, 1938.

CHAPTER 17



ST FAITH'S ORPHANAGE

The Orange Free State was a farming country and its economy depended almost entirely upon the success of its agriculture. Droughts are not uncommon, and when those are prolonged the effects are severe. The Community's chronicle records that the drought of 1883 "almost ruined the country", coming as it did on the heels of a commercial depression. Most of the boarding pupils at St Michael's School came from farms and small towns scattered widely across the country. As incomes fell, parents could no longer afford to send their daughters away to school. Having spent a lot of borrowed money to extend its facilities, St Michael's found itself with surplus accommodation.

Numbers had still not recovered when, in 1888, Mother Frances decided to receive a few girls as Industrials. These were children who had lost one or both parents, or who had been rescued from bad homes, and they were to be trained in domestic tasks so that they would be able to earn their own living when they became adults. Many of the Communities in England had similar schemes. At St Michael's the plan was that the older girls would do some of the housework in return for their keep and a basic education. Their schooling was kept separate from the paying pupils, and they were accommodated in the North Dormitory. By 1898 we read that the Industrials were being trained for service and laundry work.¹ There were ten or twelve of them, under the care of one Sister

1 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1888 & 1899; QPBM no.120, April 1898, p. 60; QPBM no.126,

and another worker, and the laundry served not only St Michael's Home but also earned a small income from outside customers.

Sister Frances Louisa, appealing for funds while visiting England towards the end of the Anglo-Boer War, wrote that the Industrial Orphans varied in age from four to seventeen years and, although there was an annual charge, all those in the Home at the time were being kept entirely at the expense of the Sisters.

The elder girls are trained in house work, laundry, and kitchen-work in the mornings, and have needlework classes and lessons in the afternoons. The younger ones attend the Cathedral Day School. When old enough they are allowed to enter situations approved by the Sisters, but may always return to the "Home" in case of need. One is, at present, cook in the Refugee Camp at Bloemfontein, and is doing good and useful work.

The war has increased the need of this work, but, alas! also its difficulties. We have had to diminish our numbers and send away many against our will, because it has been utterly impossible, under the present stress, to feed and clothe them. Added to this, the only available accommodation for these children is dilapidated and quite inadequate. The children are at present cooped up in one dormitory, which is divided by cupboards for Seniors and Juniors, and has to serve the threefold purpose of sleeping, working, and playroom. It is in such bad repair, that in the rainy season the beds have to be moved about during the night to avoid a wetting through the crevices in the old iron roof and in the calico ceiling, which is quite worn out and hangs in holes; while the Sister-in-Charge, who has a small corner of the dormitory partitioned off for her, has often, on rainy nights, to leave her bedroom, and find a sleeping place, hard but dry, on the dormitory floor amongst the children. The time has come when a separate building for this work is a positive necessity.

The Sister appealed for £4,000 to buy a nearby house, and a further £1,000 to furnish and equip it.²

It was early in 1907 that a house called "Hillside" in Elizabeth Street, adjacent to St Michael's Home, was rented and St Faith's Orphanage came into being. All the

October 1899, p.173

2 HPR A Wits, AB2644/81, *Gleanings in Sunny Africa, 1873 – 1901*, p.11-15 & 30

Industrial children under the age of twelve were moved there. The older girls continued to live on the main site where a new laundry had been constructed following the destruction of the original building in the 1904 flood. There were nine at the laundry, according to the English Committee of Help Report for 1908.

The Orphanage was intended to serve the whole of the Orange Free State and, in order to raise funds, a series of begging tours was planned by the Community. On January 23, 1908, Sister Flora and Sister Helen set out for Harrismith; by the time they returned home on 12 February they had collected just £46. Later in the year, Sister Frances Louisa and Sister Lilian went to Maseru to collect money there; in August Sister Frances Louisa was accompanied by Sister Rosalie when collecting in Ladybrand, and by Sister Ella in Edenburg. The pressures of work at the Orphanage itself brought an end to the begging tours but, with direct appeals by letters and Sales of Work, a total of £500 was raised. It was a satisfactory result for a country that was only six years out of a devastating war.

Meanwhile, the opportunity arose to buy the rented house. The owners wanted to avoid the expense of much needed repairs, and a Chapter Meeting on 14 May, 1908, agreed to the purchase. The Sisters were well aware of the urgent need for renovations. "When the house was first rented it was infested with vermin (which all our efforts to exterminate failed) and was in a very dilapidated state." Bishop Chandler loaned the Community his cottage at Modderpoort, and the twelve young children from St Faith's went to stay there for three months, under the care of Sister Lilian. Sister Frances Louisa stayed behind to supervise work on the house. The iron roof was lifted so that the upper side of the wooden ceilings could be cleaned thoroughly, and all interior woodwork was removed for similar treatment, after which the whole building was fumigated. Repairs were carried out and the house was extended by adding a bathroom and a workroom. On St Faith's Day, 6 October, 1908, the Orphanage was formally blessed by the Warden, the Revd Thomas Bingham. The *Chronicler* recorded a further blessing, that generous donations made it possible for the Community to repay within eighteen months most of the money they had borrowed to purchase and renovate the property.

St Faith's continued to attract generous support, enabling another extension in 1910. Many gifts in kind were made every month, enabling the Sisters to feed the children well with a very small monetary outlay. By 1911, sixteen girls were resident, and the older ones were attending cookery classes free of charge at the Normal College. On St Faith's Day that year, friends and supporters were invited to a special afternoon tea in the garden, with the opportunity to be shown around the completed Orphanage. Early the following year,

Miss Margaret West, “a fully qualified teacher of keen missionary spirit”, joined the staff at St Faith’s, while Sister Maud was given responsibility as head of house. She continued in post for more than two decades, but Miss West’s stay was shorter: in 1914 she went to Basutoland as one of two Associates assigned to work in St James’ parish, Maseru. Perhaps it was decided that a teacher was no longer needed for St Faith’s after the children started attending government schools in 1913. Their books were provided free of charge.³

In South Africa the school year is coterminous with the calendar year and there is a long holiday in December and January. Generous friends enabled St Faith’s children to be taken away as a group most years. Supporters in the United Kingdom were told in the 1912 Report:

Three weeks of the Christmas holidays were spent most happily ‘camping out’ in an empty farm house lent very kindly by Captain Quin, at Bishop’s Glen. It made the hot weather at this time of year seem very bearable, as the children were able to sleep on the stoep, and so were out of doors both day and night. A small amount of rain had made it possible to bathe in the river, an enjoyment relished more by South Africans than it would be by children at home, for the mud was deeper than the water.⁴

At the farm Waterland, near Westminster in the eastern Free State, Mr and Mrs Cowper Johnson welcomed Sister Maud, the Matron Mrs Pentland and large parties of girls on at least three annual holidays. On 27 December, 1937, twenty-eight girls, staff, and the Sister in Charge left by coach for a month’s stay at Isipingo Beach in Natal, returning to Bloemfontein by the fast train.⁵

St Faith’s moved house in May 1926, going to the nearby no.56 Elizabeth Street, which the Community had bought for £3,000 at auction three months earlier. The move was probably made for the benefit of St Michael’s School, whose expanding Junior Hostel took over the earlier building, but the Orphanage also was able to increase numbers in its new home. Improvements were made over the years. A legacy which specified that the money was to be spent for the children’s good provided an outside playroom on a widened verandah, as well as new uniforms for Sundays. When the plot of land

3 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1908; vol.ii, 1909-1913

4 SMS, ECH Report for 1912

5 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, Dec 29, 1932, and Dec 27, 1937.

between the old and new St Faith's was purchased in 1936, several extra common rooms were added.⁶

Sister Maud retired in 1934, and died suddenly on the eve of All Saints' Day two years later. She had been professed for thirty years, and taught Scripture and Geography in St Michael's School before being given charge of the Orphanage. In her later years she again gave Scripture classes in the School. She was a woman of "cheerful, plucky and devoted spirit," conscientious in daily happenings, wrote the Superior. "It was strictly in line with the pattern of her life that she should have spent her last day here correcting exercises, putting stitches into a surplice and in laying plans for others' benefit." A Lady Worker, Miss Fannin, managed St Faith's for almost a year until Sister Marjorie was appointed to take charge in January 1935.⁷

Sister Marjorie was not complimentary about the conditions she found at St Faith's.

There were about twenty girls, ranging between the ages of 14 and 3, and most were very bitter and unhappy ... abominably badly fed and clothed ... in truly institutionally 'charity' style. ... [The girls did] All the house work, folding and ironing and all the washing, including that of two outsize matrons, preparing and washing up for most meals, mending and sewing classes, etc. Set prayers accompanied every meal, and there were many religious classes. Punishment for rules broken was corporal ... and deprivation of 'treats' such as the weekly penny for sweets from the School tuck shop.

We cannot know how much of that description is accurate because we have found no other reports that may corroborate it. We should note that Sister Marjorie wrote this in 1959 as part of a defence of her own management of the Orphanage, under circumstances that we will come to shortly. She tells us that she dismissed the Assistant Matron, "a rough Afrikaans woman", for constantly hitting the girls, and introduced a more constructive rule, with marks for conduct and work, and means of earning pocket money.⁸

On 1 November, 1920, St Faith's Orphanage was certified as an institution by the Social Welfare Department of the Union of South Africa. The advantage of this was that

6 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, Feb 25 & May 27, 1926, & Mother's Letter August 7, 1937; HPRA 2644/86, ECH Report 1935

7 HPRA Wits, AB2644/ 86, ECH Reports for 1935 and 1936

8 SMS, Typescript in St Faith's Log Book, dated 12 July 1959. She refers to Sister Martha, but means Maud.

Government grants could then be obtained to assist with the costs of maintenance for each girl in care. Initially those grants covered about half the costs, but by 1947 they had been reduced to one quarter. There was also a block grant, and the sum of £120 annually from the Municipality. Among the disadvantages were that returns had to be made to the Social Welfare Department in Pretoria, and no girl could be kept beyond the age of 14 years unless it could be shown that she was studying a course at the Technical or Normal College, or serving an apprenticeship, for example, with a dressmaker.⁹ Another disadvantage was that St Faith's had to accept any girl committed to them by the Social Welfare Department.

Following the declaration of war between the United Kingdom and Germany on 3 September 1939, the South African Parliament, although deeply divided, also declared war. South African troops were soon needed by the Allies, and there was an inevitable impact on the economy. Perhaps it was because of this that the Social Welfare grant for equipment was not made in 1941. We have noted that the individual maintenance grants were to be reduced sharply. Fundraising became more difficult, although the Orphanage still enjoyed much generous support in kind if not in cash. Street Collections were made annually. The first to be mentioned in the records we have seen was on 30 March, 1940. It raised £55.14s.2d. Annual street collections continued into the 1950s. By 1943 we read that there was difficulty clothing the children because fewer donations were being received and clothes and all materials were scarce and costly. The cost of all essential foods and clothing contributed to making 1945 "the most difficult year."

Under the insistence of the Minister for Social Welfare, a Management Committee had to be formed in 1942. The Minister claimed the right to appoint two members. The Bishop chaired the first meeting on 2 February that year, which was attended by four ladies, with the Warden of the Community, the Mother Superior, the Assistant Superior, and the Sister in Charge. Meetings were then held quarterly. The Committee was present when Lady Duncan, wife of the Governor General, and other dignitaries came to morning tea at St Faith's on 5 October.¹⁰

Writing in July 1944, Mother Mary Ursula told of many former St Faith's girls who had achieved good positions in offices, in banks, or in the Army. One of them, Jean Peters, had served with the forces in North Africa and was among those evacuated from

9 SMS, Hickmore, *The History of the Educational Work of the CSM&AA*, Bloemfontein. M.Ed. Thesis. University of South Africa. December 1947.

10 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's annual letters: 24 July 1941; 21 July 1942; 24 July 1943; 21 July 1944; 26 July 1945.

Tobruk to Cairo. A year later the Superior wrote about some of the girls who had left recently: "two have passed commercial examinations well, and have excellent posts. Mavis Mitchell has completed her Teacher's Course at the Normal College, and is doing very well at Heilbron, both in her Day School and Sunday school teaching." After the War, Sister Marjorie wrote reports for the annual letter to Old Girls of St Michael's School. She was able to tell of more successes. One girl had obtained a good post in the offices of the newspaper *The Friend*; another was training as a nurse at Addington Hospital in Durban; another had been Head Girl of Brebner High School and obtained a first-class pass with distinction in two subjects in the school leaving examinations, before starting work in the office of one of Bloemfontein's leading lawyers.¹¹

Observing from across the road at St Michael's School, Ruth Hickmore described the atmosphere at St Faith's as "such a happy one, and not one iota like that of an institution. ... The reason for their happiness and '*joie de vivre*' is to be found in the spiritual care taken of them. ... It is good to think that the sorrows of their early years may be, if not forgotten completely, yet nevertheless but a hazy memory for most of them."¹²

Friends are very kind and generous in their appreciation and help, [wrote Sister Marjorie] and the girls are asked out frequently. The Bishop [Cecil Alderson] is a frequent visitor, and our *very* old piano had to be tuned for the lusty 'sing-songs' which take place on many of his visits. He recently took a car-load of the youngest children for a drive in the direction of Tempe where they discovered the old military cemetery. The children were much interested in the fact that all the crosses on the graves were alike, and he explained that it was a special cemetery for soldiers. This led one of them to remark to the Bishop, 'I suppose you will be buried in a special cemetery for Bishops.' Whereupon there was a general chorus of 'Oh, I should like to come to your funeral!' 'However far away I am, I shall try to come!' etc. etc. In conclusion one child remarked, 'As the Bishop is so kind in taking us for drives the least we can do is to come to his funeral!'¹³

11 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's letters 21 July 1944 and 26 July 1945; HPRA Wits, AB2644/85, Old Girls' Letters 26 July 1951; 17 July 1952; 10 July 1953.

12 Hickmore: The History of the Educational Work of the CSM&AA.

13 SMS, Old Girls' Letter 17 July 1952

On 3 December, 1955, there was a visit by the Minister for Social Welfare, the Hon. J.J. Serfontein, accompanied by a retinue of officials. He was running behind schedule and arrived late, but insisted on being taken through the house, and to the library, playrooms, and other facilities, and “expressed pleasure in the homely, happy atmosphere and good care of the children.” He spoke with a few of the children who were playing in the garden, and greeted the members of the Committee who had been waiting to welcome him.¹⁴ A few years later, Sister Marjorie looked back on this visit with second thoughts, as portending a loss of favour with the Government department.

There were only fourteen children at St Faith’s (seven committed by Social Welfare and seven non-committed) when the Golden Jubilee was celebrated in 1957. The weekend of 2nd February was chosen for a great gathering of old girls, friends and supporters and it was “an outstanding success.”

That Saturday morning was a very busy time and a number of old girls helped Sister Joan and friends in the kitchen (talking of course, as hard as they worked). They made sandwiches and savouries, buttered scones, etc. The younger girls helped me in the garden, fetching and arranging tables, chairs, benches and cloths.

At 4 pm they began serving tea and cool drinks. At 5 pm the Bishop read a message of congratulations received from Mr Serfontein, and then invited everyone to cross the road to St Michael’s Chapel for a short thanksgiving service. A buffet Supper was enjoyed in St Faith’s garden, and there was a large iced cake with fifty candles.

The children gathered around its special table to see the candles lighted and the Bishop did wonders in blowing them out! He gave away candles as souvenirs and the cake was cut and proved so delicious that it was hard to save even a small piece for late comers.

Sister Marjorie paid tribute to the help given by the African staff.

Our maids were splendid in washing up all the afternoon and some others who came to help at supper remained working long afterwards until everything was done. Martha Kgaile (affectionately nicknamed ‘Martha Trumbles’ by generations of girls) has served St Faith’s for 43 years of the

¹⁴ SMS, Old Girls’ Letter 29 July 1956

50. She was in great form and was so much in demand to be photographed with and by old girls that our present servants were quite jealous. Martha still comes to work at St Faith's on Tuesdays and Saturdays.¹⁵

From the early 1940s onwards there had begun to be problems associated with girls who had been sent to St Faith's by the Social Welfare Department. Some ran away more than once, and had to be transferred to other Homes. "The new committed girls sent by the Social Welfare Department are not of the type we really desire here, being seemingly unable to respond to or profit by the particular opportunities," wrote Mother Mary Ursula in 1945, before adding, "yet we cannot refuse to take them unless there is some definite reason."¹⁶

Sister Marjorie wrote in similar vein in 1951: "We have a full house and many applications have had to be turned down. Unfortunately the new girls this year are not very suitable in type for this particular place, and some are extremely difficult." Four years later, "the latter half of 1955 was perhaps unique in the number of unsuitable girls we had to transfer to other institutions or release on licence to relatives. It is sad when some of these have failed to make good after years with us, but there are always incorrigibles ... and as the Social Welfare Department has sent only one new girl this year ... our numbers are just half what they should be."¹⁷ It was in December 1955 that the Minister and officials from the Social Welfare Department made that brief and ostensibly friendly visit to St Faith's.

In September 1958 it was arranged for the children to go for a holiday to the Morgan Bay Hotel, on the coast of the Eastern Cape,

where the Proprietor and friends gave them a royal time. Unfortunately the notice and kindness seems to have turned the heads of some of the teenagers, who set out to rouse sympathy and attention by exaggeration of true incidents and by fabrications. Instead of the young lady in charge of the children coming to Reverend Mother or me direct to ask about these tales [wrote Sister Marjorie] she went round to the men who drove the cars and to the proprietor and apparently put the girls up to 'report' to her and / or them anything they did not approve?? Some of the men went to the Bishop and even talked of going to the Police about the matter!!!

15 SMS, Old Girls' Letter 22 July 1957

16 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, letter dated 26 July 1945

17 SMS, Old Girls' Letters 26 July 1951, and 29 July 1956

The allegations they made were of cruelty at St Faith's, and that Sister Marjorie ill-treated the children by giving them hidings for minor offences and denying them privileges such as days out. For her part Sister Marjorie said that there had always been some corporal punishment "in the case of major offences persisted in ... but it has been less and in a smaller way during the last six years at least." She blamed two of the committed girls who were troublesome and dishonest for being the "prime mischief makers." The girls returned to the Orphanage after their holiday, but in the following months Sister Marjorie said that she had "never had such defiance, ingratitude and insolence, because backed by outsiders."

On 19 March, 1959, Mother Mary Ursula went across to St Faith's and told Sister Marjorie that she had said to the Bishop that the Orphanage would close down that June instead of trying to hold on to the end of the school year in December, "as we just *would* not go on thus!" Sister Marjorie was sent away for a holiday to the Community's cottage at Scottburgh on the Natal coast, and Sister Joan was put in charge of the work for the last three months. Arrangements were made for the girls to be placed in suitable alternative care, while businesses and churches which had been giving support, and government and city departments, were notified of the closure.

It was not the end of the matter. Sister Marjorie claimed that when she returned after her holiday, Sister Joan told her that she [Joan] had "three typescript pages" of accusations against Sister Marjorie that she intended to show to the Bishop.

As neither Reverend Mother nor the Assistant Superior knew what it was all about, I have not been able to understand, and it cannot have been right for her to go behind their backs thus ... She has been in charge here for weeks at a time, on at least six occasions when I have been ill or away, and here for an hour on most weekdays for years, WHY have none of these criticisms been aired before now?????

Sister Marjorie claimed to have been told of only one accusation, to which "I cannot in honesty plead guilty ... nor have I knowingly 'ill-treated' any child."¹⁸

Bishop Burnett decided to make an official Visitation of the Community. He interviewed every Sister privately, and on 16 July 1959 delivered his Charge. One section of this dealt with the closure of St Faith's. He said,

¹⁸ These quotations from Sr Marjorie are all from her typescript dated 12 July 1959, found in the St Faith's Log Book in SMS archive. The multiple use of punctuation marks is copied from the original.

I believe that the Community has failed rather badly to tackle this difficult situation. When certain charges have been made about a Community work it is not enough to draw a veil over such things. The healthy thing to do is to examine the charges frankly and either exonerate those involved or fully confess the fault. It seems to me that the Community has been unable to handle the situation with vigour and I fear that from the point of view of the spiritual life of the Community you will be the weaker as a result, unless even now you are able to face what has happened frankly. St Faith's was a Community work, and the Community as a whole obviously had an interest in it, and the Community should have known what had happened and why it was closed *when it was*.

Within the Community there is a fairly strong feeling that Sisters have been kept in the dark. There is an uneasy feeling that one Sister is being shielded at the expense of another. ... It will be most unhealthy if a segment of the Community remains convinced that Justice has not been done in this matter – It has certainly not been seen to have been done.”

The Bishop recommended that there should be an enquiry into the conduct of the affairs of St Faith's over the previous few years and an examination of the events which led to its closure.

Evidence should be heard so that certain charges which are at present being made may either be dismissed as false or substantiated. What you ought not to do is to allow this sore to continue to fester.¹⁹

The Bishop appointed the Dean, the Very Revd Aidan Cross, to conduct the Enquiry on his behalf. There is an entry in the White Book for August 17, 1959, stating, “Enquiry held at St Faith's with regard to its affairs. This was presided by the Dean (Aidan Cross).” It was one month after the Visitation. But there is another entry telling of the Enquiry in May 1960, as if it took place then. The Chronicler sometimes appears to have written up events some while after they took place and that seems to be the case here. The 1960 entries continue until recording that on June 30, St Faith's was closed. The Chronicler has muddled the years, because the closure was on 30 June 1959. There is no mention in the White Book of the troubles and allegations and instead a different slant is implied:

19 HPR A Wits, AB2644/54. The Bishop's Charge at Visitation, 16 July 1959

We had much difficulty as the Government was not able to send us many English-speaking girls, and those sent to us were near-delinquents and we did not consider that St Faith's was an establishment meant to deal with such cases; we meant it to be an Orphanage in the best sense of the word.²⁰

The Dean wrote a Report for the Bishop, and a copy would have been received by the Mother Superior. That is not among the papers lodged in the Historical Papers Research Archive, so far as we have seen. There was a copy in the Bloemfontein Diocesan Archives until Mother Mary Ruth sorted through them at the request of Bishop Stanage in 1991. In an exercise book headed "Notes on Diocesan Archives", which is in the archive room at St Michael's School, on page 11, Mother Mary Ruth wrote: "N.B. Set of papers on St Faith's Orphanage: Investigation and Closure 1959, transferred to Community Archives." The author worked through all the papers and books in the School's archive room, but that set of papers was not found. In the White Book Mother Mary Ruth made an entry for August 1, 1991, that she had started work on the Diocesan Archives. "Sorted out the CSM&AA file and destroyed some unnecessary and hurtful material, with the Bishop's permission."²¹ As noted elsewhere, the Chapter Minute Books have not been found. It looks as if the Community's records have been cleaned up. Sister Marjorie's four page typescript escaped attention because she had pasted it into some back pages of a book containing mainly photographs from St Faith's. Without that, we would be left with an entirely different understanding of St Faith's closure, and some puzzlement at the Bishop's Visitation Charge.

The author had discovered the typescript early in his research, and took the opportunity of a visit to Sister Joan in her frail care room to ask her some questions, without mentioning Sister Marjorie's notes. The conversation went like this:

M.S.: I wonder if you can tell me something about the closure of St Faith's.

S.J.: I don't know. I never worked at St Faith's.

M.S.: I thought you did.

S.J.: No, I don't remember working there.

20 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv – 1959, 1960

21 SMS, White Book II, August 1, 1991

M.S.: (thinking to himself – but you did remember when you did an interview at the time of your Diamond Jubilee in 2010!)²²

M.S.: I came across the suggestion that Sister Marjorie used to hit the children.

S.J.: Oh! I shouldn't think so. She was very kind. (*and then, after a pause*) Maybe if a child was very naughty, she gave them a slap, but nothing more than that.

Although 96 years old at the time, Sister Joan was mentally alert. Clearly she did not intend to discuss the matter, and I did not press her but moved on to some other subjects.

We will never know the truth of what happened. As Bishop Burnett observed, the Community had drawn a veil over it.

It was a sad ending to what had been a very good work.

²² With the Revd David Tanton, who wrote and published an article about Sister Joan. It formed the basis of Barry Wood's feature, 93 Years Old and still ministering to others, in the *Southern Anglican*, 2011.



A Sister at prayer in the Walled Garden, created in 1944. The crucifix was given in memory of the late Warden, Fr Frith, and now stands outside the Chapel of the new St Michael's School.

CHAPTER 18



I STAND BEFORE GOD - ST MICHAEL'S SCHOOL COMES INTO ITS OWN

St Michael's Home School continued to function throughout the years of the Anglo-Boer War, although on a much reduced scale. Even when half the buildings were in use as an emergency military hospital, the few remaining boarders were joined by some day scholars, and the Sisters and resident staff did their best to continue with lessons as usual. After communications with the south had been restored, pupils were again prepared for the Cape Elementary, High, and Matriculation examinations. All the candidates passed.¹ With numbers low there was little income from school fees and money was in short supply.

The School emerged from the War into a new phase in its history. Almost from the time it had been founded, the Sisters had been responsible for several other schools also. Most of those had either closed or been handed over to others before the War, and the 1901 decision to close St Michael's School in Harrismith left the Bloemfontein Home School as the Sisters' only educational institution. Standing alone, it gained a new prominence in the Community's work. Two developments in the next few years highlight this.

1 SMS, Hickmore: History of the Educational Work of the CSM&AA, p.37

Just one year after the Peace was signed, St Michael's published its first School magazine in May 1903. The Editorial explained its aims:

We hope this magazine may be a means of reuniting links broken and scattered by the late war, and of drawing closer together old ties. We want you to do all you can to make it a success, but also a help to both past and present pupils ... to keep up the old traditions and the spirit which our Founder, Bishop Webb, tried to instil into us – traditions perhaps expressed in the motto which hung so long on the walls of the schoolroom:-

‘Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell,
That mind and soul according well
May make one music as before
But vaster.’

Bishop Webb had chosen those words from Tennyson as the motivation for the work of the School.

How pleased he was when people commented to him, as they often did, on the ‘good tone’ noticeable about ‘Home’ girls.²

This was the first time that the Community had issued its own publication, and it focussed on the School, not on the other work of the Sisters. News of Old Girls appeared in its pages and they were included in the magazine’s distribution.

In 1905 the School was given its own motto, separate from that of the Sisterhood. Chosen by Mother Frances, it was publicised through that year’s issue of the magazine.

We feel we want as a motto something very short, easily remembered, and readily acted upon, and in some way linking itself with the School dedication to St Michael and All Angels. We think we have found this in three words, very terse, but full of meaning, and very inspiring; they are S. Gabriel’s words to Zacharias in the Latin version:

² SMS, School Magazine, May 27, 1903. The quotation is from the prologue of Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s poem *In Memoriam A.H.H.*

“ASTO ANTE DEUM”,

which may be paraphrased, 1 – “I stand waiting, in the presence of a Being infinitely above me, and that Being is Lord and King of Angels.” What a dignity comes into our lives when we think of that. I need not trouble so much what other people think of me, my school friends or teachers, or relations or the outside world, because I stand in the presence of Almighty God. 2 – “I” stand, I, with my own individual personality, not lost in a crowd, but with my own special place and special service and God would miss me if I were not there.

3 – I “stand” ready, waiting on God to carry out His behests, attending as a courtier on a King. How such thoughts would raise us up above all petty meannesses or slovenly actions, or malicious words, or discontented conceited thoughts! What a grand ennobling thing our school life might be, if we could all remember from the lowest Kindergarten child to the Head of the School, that for each of us it is absolutely true, ASTO ANTE DEUM.³

These two innovations reflect a determination to overcome the considerable challenges of the time. A report in the *Quarterly Paper of the Bloemfontein Mission* wrote that the Sisters’ High School

suffered severely during the late war, and it has been difficult to recover its former position. The Government, of course, took the Dutch Government School under its sheltering wing, and it is now a good English High School, and having Government financial support, is much less crippled by the ever present financial difficulties, and therefore can more easily meet the manifold requirements of modern education.

The writer described the necessity of improving some of the old classrooms, and of the great need for a kindergarten room and other improvements, “if the School with its valuable Church teaching and religious training is to hold its own.” An unplanned expense was “having to arrange for a new drainage system the town has adopted, and [which] will have cost the Community £1,000 when finished.”⁴

The early magazines chart the gradual progress of renovation and renewal, with amusing light touches added in descriptions and comments written by pupils. The division of the

3 SMS, School Magazine 1905, p.1

4 QPBM no.150, October 1905

large dormitory into single cubicles by means of green and white curtains, completed in the Christmas holidays of 1902/1903, drew the comment that one advantage was that a girl need not get up at once after the rising bell, but the disadvantages were that they could no longer hold whispered conversations in forbidden hours, and anyone who was naughty would no longer have a whole dormitory of admirers. During that same holiday, a new ceiling was installed in the refectory, which was painted throughout, and electric wires and globes were installed in the Chapel, although the Home was not yet connected to the electricity supply. The flood of January 1904, which demolished St Michael's laundry house, made it necessary to delay the start of term by one week while alternative laundry arrangements were made. Pupils were advised by postcard, and one wrote a poem expressing their delight at the extended holiday: "Now of course it was selfish and really distressing / but we thought the flood a merciful blessing." In the first half of that year, hot water was laid on in the bathrooms: "the water that comes out first is generally cold, but after about four buckets have been taken out it begins to get hot." As a water conservation measure, new guttering was put up and fed rainwater into many tanks around the house. Young trees were planted on the recreation ground, but conditions were so hot and dry that not all were expected to survive. One big tree in the grounds had to be felled to provide space for new building work in 1905, and also some parts of the old buildings were demolished to make way for new construction. The kitchen and scullery were being re-modelled and when the roof was taken off it was found to be home to a huge snake. "The greatest improvement of all was the taking down of the old (shall we call them 'rooms'?)" wrote one of the girls, after commenting, "I am sure there will be some who will give one sigh of regret for the tumble-down, rickety old rooms and stairs." Although the start of term was postponed for a week, the workmen were still on site when the schoolgirls arrived: "we had heard that the schoolroom had been turned into a kitchen during the holidays, and our expectations of a joyful muddle were raised to the highest pitch." A new corridor attracted many longing glances, she tells us, "and how many thoughts of pranks to be played there, - until, alas! another rule came into existence, 'Silence in the corridor.'"⁵

William Shakespeare had a hand in bringing a further improvement to the School. Guests and parents were invited to attend a Shakespeare evening in the Hall on 8 November, 1906, when form groups acted scenes from *Henry IV* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Everything was going very well until a young girl stood too close to one of the oil lamps and her costume caught fire. Quick thinking and action from her older

5 SMS, School magazines, May 1903, p.20; May 1904, p.9 & 15; 1905, p.4-5

sister saved her from serious injury, but the dangers were obvious. Lady Maasdorp, wife of the Chief Justice of the Orange River Colony, was in the audience and decided to start a fund to provide for the installation of electric lighting. She launched a public appeal through the press and there was a generous response. The press reported on the "At Home" given by the Mother Superior, Principal and staff of St Michael's School on 23 May, 1907, when more than a hundred guests were thanked for their part in raising the money which had made it possible to install electric lighting throughout the ground floor. A small balance was in hand towards installation in the new block then under construction, and the proceeds of a play put on in the town brought a further donation to the Building Fund. The school magazine published a long list of donors.⁶

It was not only the finances and the condition of the buildings that were shaky in the years immediately following the War. There was little stability in the staff. In May 1903 we read that Miss Cecil Lewis was Headmistress, but a year later Miss Wright had returned to that position, only to leave again at Easter 1905. It was a day of farewells, because she left St Michael's on the same day that Mother Frances and Miss Cotton set out for England. Mother Frances was going to seek counsel on the Community's Rule and to take a much-needed holiday. Before she left, Sister Edith was appointed to be both Headmistress and Sister in Charge of the School, and we are told very honestly that she had an "unsettled beginning" as Head.

When Mother Frances visited Bishop Webb in Salisbury, he introduced her to Miss Gertrude Edwards, the Second Mistress of Godolphin School, Salisbury. He had told Miss Edwards about St Michael's, and she had volunteered to go to Bloemfontein as Headmistress and to do it *pro Deo*, not requiring a salary. She was a Scholar of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, where she had taken the Final Honours School in English Language and Literature in 1889. At Godolphin School she taught English Literature, Geography and Latin, and also held some Art classes. Her offer was accepted gladly.

Accompanied by her sister, Miss Adeline Edwards, a skilled artist, Miss Gertrude Edwards arrived at St Michael's just before Christmas, 1905. The inscription underneath a photograph in the School's archive room describes her as the first professional Headmistress, and previous Heads are not listed in Margaret Leith's history, *One the Faith*.⁷ Miss Edwards' contribution to the School was immense, raising it to a higher plane.

6 SMS, School magazines, December 1906, p.7-8, 21; June 1907, p.19-22

7 SMS, School magazine, December 1905; Leith, *One the Faith*, p.27 and 78

The School was still quite small. A list of pupils by their forms published in the June 1906 magazine shows a total of ninety-one, including both boarders and day girls. The staffing consisted of one Sister, three Novices and six teachers.⁸ Only eighty pupils are shown in December 1907, but by June 1909 the total had risen to one hundred and twenty. At the beginning of her first year, Miss Edwards introduced a new system of marking in all subjects, and by the end of the year we read of successes in the music examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music, London. Gifts of classical art prints were received and were hung in the School. On Friday 26 July, 1907, pupils joined many members of the public who went to the Town Hall to see the first original oil painting to be exhibited in Bloemfontein. Holman Hunt's *Light of the World* had been sent on a tour of the colonies by the Hon. Charles Booth before being given to St Paul's Cathedral in London. Miss Edwards was able to attract other well-qualified staff, and we are told of one of her former pupils and of another teacher from Godolphin School joining the team at St Michael's in 1906 and 1907 respectively, and of the arrival in 1908 of Miss Lumby as Maths Mistress. She had completed the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos.

The sporting life of the School was developed. St Michael's played cricket and matches against other teams were arranged. A pupil wrote a report of a 1904 match against the Government High School. Anxious about their opponents, the team had spent the morning killing time.

Directly after lunch we had our photographs taken and then started off in the boiling sun for the Austin ground. We lost the toss and that seemed to depress our spirits, together with the fact that the majority of the spectators were for the Government School. We walked to our places with very long faces for we felt certain we were going to lose. The match ended in a win for the Home by 83 runs. ... Our Warden, Rev. W.A. Holbech, who was kind enough to coach us before the match, presented us with a bat as a memorial of our victory.⁹

When the team arrived back at St Michael's, they found the Mother and several Sisters waiting to greet them and wanting to know how they had fared. Cricket was one of the sports played regularly by St Michael's girls for almost the next forty years.

8 The Community members were Sister Bertha, Novice Cecil, Novice Maud and Novice Jessie

9 SMS, School magazine June 1904, quoted also in Leith *One the Faith*, p.24-25

Hockey was commenced in 1906 using the Ramblers' ground. Although it was said to have been a "great success", the first match was lost five-nil to the Government High School. There was a limited number of teams in the town, but matches were played also against the Bloemfontein Ladies (belonging to the Ramblers' Club) and the Normal School for teacher training.

It was a great help when, two years later, the Town Council allocated to St Michael's a large piece of ground in King's Park, where hockey and cricket pitches and a tennis court were laid out. "The girls play hockey and cricket with a zeal that would amaze those unused to our temperature, or to the exhilaration of 4517 feet above sea level," commented Miss Edwards.¹⁰ Gymnasium equipment was purchased and installed in the big schoolroom, which had been redesignated as the school hall. A daily quarter hour of drill entered the timetable, and gymnastics classes were held in the afternoons.

It is in the School magazines and not elsewhere in the Community's records that we read about the important developments that took place in the political structure of South Africa in the first decade of the Twentieth Century. The Liberal Party Government of the United Kingdom passed legislation in 1906 to introduce elected self-government to the Orange River and Transvaal Colonies. The elections were held on 20 November, 1907, and two pupils wrote accounts from differing points of view. There were two parties contesting the election in the Orange River Colony: the Unie, with colours of green and orange, and the Constitutional, using red, white, blue and orange. Feelings ran high at meetings held in the run up to voting day.

... at the last meeting but one of both the Unie and Constitutional, fighting went on, which at the Unie meeting was becoming so hot that the police had to stop it. At the last meeting, on Tuesday night, it appeared to be raining eggs and tomatoes; one would hear first a whizz, then a crash, as some eggs had just by some marvellous chance missed oneself.

On election day, the two writers, probably accompanied by other senior boarders, pinned on their colours and hurried out after supper to the Market Square, where they joined the large and noisy crowds who had been in front of the Town Hall all day. Polls closed at 8 p.m. and it was not long afterwards that the result of the City Division was announced.

¹⁰ SMS, Half-Yearly Paper, December 1908

Suddenly there was dead silence, the votes had been counted, a man had the result in his hand; would he never read it?

One writer expressed joy that Advocate Botha of the Constitutionalists had won the seat, while the other found it a great disappointment that Dr Ramsbottom, the Unie candidate, had lost. "Then we hurried to the Imperial Hotel, impatient for the next four results." In the whole Colony, sixteen Unie were elected and formed the Government, with four Constitutionalists forming the opposition.¹¹

The pupils' interest in the vital developments taking place were stimulated by a debate held on 23 May 1908, on the subject, "Unification versus Federation for South Africa". It was the first debate held in the School.

Most of those present had not been at a debate before, so that only those who had been chosen to speak did so, and there were no exciting questions from 'the House'. Unification won by one vote.¹²

Constitutional Conventions held in Durban and Cape Town had politicians debating the same issues and, after the draft unified Constitution had been considered in each colony, the final gathering was held in Bloemfontein. The School magazine of June 1909 included this paragraph:

The Convention for the Closer Union of South Africa had meetings in Bloemfontein to discuss amendments to the first draft of the Constitution. Lord Selborne was here and Dr Jameson, General Botha, Sir Henry de Villiers, Mr J.X. Merriman, and many famous others. There were festivities every night, ending up with a great state banquet at the Imperial Hotel on May 10th. The result of the Convention was published on May 11th, and will have to be passed by all the Parliaments here, as well as by the English Parliament. Perhaps Bloemfontein will be known in future history as the place where it was settled that South Africa should be one united country, no longer only 'the land we live in', but '*our* land'.

Once more St Michael's Community and School witnessed a change of political administration. On Wednesday 30 March, 1910, the entire School marched four abreast

11 SMS, School Magazine, December 1907, p.21-24. The writers were Muriel Hancock and Frieda Snyman.

12 SMS, School Magazine, June 1908, p.7

to the Market Square, where they met with the other schools of the town, and followed a band to Victoria Park. It was the official farewell to the Governor of the Orange River Colony, Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams, who was presented with a formal address marking the end of his service. The colonial period was ending.

The same issue of the magazine told of the death of King Edward VII on 6 May, 1910, and gave a series of quotes from leading political figures. General Botha had been one of a delegation of former Boer leaders who had been received in audience by the King. His tribute said,

The welcome we received from his late Majesty was such as only a great man with a noble heart could have accorded his recent enemies.

On 9 May the School again marched to the Market Square to join the other schools, a large crowd of civilians and a parade of soldiers from the Tempe base. When all were assembled, the Governor, Brigadier General Townshend, standing with other dignitaries on the balcony of the Bloemfontein Club, read the formal proclamation of King George V as King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and of the British Dominions beyond the Seas, and Emperor of India. After the Mayor, Mr Parfitt, had said "God save the King" three times, the massed military band played the National Anthem, a Royal Salute was fired from Naval Hill, and flags were raised.

For the third time in two months, the School marched four abreast to the Market Square on 31 May for a celebration to mark the inauguration of the Union of South Africa. Again all the schools were present, and a large crowd. There were speeches and the National Anthem was sung. As the schools left, each child was given a medal and a box of sweets. It was a national holiday. The other schools went to Brandkop for a great picnic provided by Mr Fichardt¹³, but St Michael's went home. Pupils could spend the day as they chose, and some used the hours to prepare their costumes as ladies or "gentlemen" for a dance to be held that night, while others decorated the Hall. We read that one girl made herself useful by knocking down the nails in the floor to make it a little less uneven for dancing, while others applied candle grease. (On an earlier occasion, Miss Edwards remarked that the floor was "SO knotty that in spite of its springiness dancing on it in anything but boots has its disadvantages.") At School Prayers the following morning, a passage from the thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah was read: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom

¹³ Mr Fichardt was a prominent Bloemfontein businessman, owning a department store.

abundantly and rejoice even with joy and singing.” This was applied to the hope for the unified South Africa as a whole, but it is interesting that this passage was selected. The words “the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose” appeared on badges made for members of the Bloemfontein Mission Association in England in 1881.¹⁴ Following the singing of Rudyard Kipling’s *Children’s Hymn*, Miss Edwards addressed the School on the significance of the Union of the four South African colonies. She outlined the history and the new constitutional arrangements, before describing how South Africa now took its place among other nations with responsibilities in the Empire and the world.

But there is a greater thing to add to the wisdom of the world. Who among you will give up your lives to work for others? ... it is in working for others that you will learn the glory of Christ’s service, giving your lives to work in his name for the good of your fellow men.¹⁵

The absence of descriptions of these events in the Community’s records may be attributed to their reticence: the Sisters did not normally attend large public gatherings.

Miss Edwards would have led the School on its three public parades in 1910, but she had been away in England for much of the previous year, needing a rest cure because of persistent and tiresome headaches. Sister Edith, normally in charge of the boarders, again took the lead as Acting Headmistress. “When we think upon our School, with hearts full of loyalty and devotion, we are conscious of the power of the personality of Sister Edith”, wrote a former pupil years later. Another expressed similar respect and affection:

She asked for no place in the public eye. Her days were full – full beyond the realisation of most of us, who took her as part of our casual young lives – but of duties as undistinguished as they were arduous, and only now and again, when she was with us as teacher, could we fully appreciate the breadth and depth of a mind of very generous understanding. We feared her disapproval with a healthy dread: but through it and beyond it we knew her to be just, broad-visioned, and of a wonderful sympathy.¹⁶

14 Isaiah 35:1. QPBM no.52, April 1881. Mother Mary Ruth quoted the words from the badge when she spoke at the 120th Anniversary Banquet at the Sand du Plessis Theatre on 12 February 1994. That section of her talk was printed in the Bloemfontein Cathedral Magazine for April 1994.

15 SMS, School magazine, June 1910, p.20-27

16 SMS, School magazine, November 1928, p.12-15

The strong loyalties inspired by the Sisters encouraged former pupils to keep in close contact with them and the School. Old Girls used to attend the Michaelmas celebrations, and a Home Re-Union Club was formed in 1909 to maintain the contacts and traditions, and to raise funds for charitable purposes in connection with the Home. There were branches in both Bloemfontein and Johannesburg and the first united meeting was held in Johannesburg in November that year, with the Mother Superior attending. She was formally named as permanent Honorary President and Mother of the Re-Union. Miss Edwards had suggested that old pupils should help the School by donations, in an article she wrote for the December 1906 magazine. She quoted the example of Old Harrovians, who raised subscriptions to aid their school. "It is the privilege of a Harrow boy who leaves from the VI to give a chair to the great speech room: his name is marked on the back." Some of the desks and chairs in St Michael's School were "absolutely worn out ... are there not some Old Home Girls who would give us a chair or a desk?" Miss Cotton, who had been on the staff since before the turn of the Century, added her support to the formation of the Home Re-Union Club, and the idea was taken up eagerly by Mrs Levisour and other former pupils. Mrs Levisour, as Sophie Baumann, had been one of the first pupils in 1874. When the second gathering of the Home Re-Union was held in the School at Michaelmas 1910, they were joined by Mrs Annie Botha, an old girl who was given special honour because her husband had recently been elected as the first Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa. The Administrator of the Orange Free State, Dr Ramsbottom, and the Chief Justice, Sir Andries Maasdrorp, attended with their wives: both families had their daughters educated at St Michael's.¹⁷ The 1911 gathering was held over two days in Harrismith. Every generation of pupils since 1874 was represented among the one hundred and thirty old girls who attended the 1912 Re-Union, which was held in Pretoria at the invitation of Mrs Botha.

Preaching at Evensong in St Michael's Chapel on St Andrew's Day, 1911, Bishop Chandler said, "Prayer has got to be the most important thing. In the chapel has to be learnt the motive for the whole work." Early that morning, before a Choral Eucharist, he had dedicated the side aisle which had been added to the chapel in memory of Bishop Webb. Of all the Founder's many works, the Bishop said, none had "a warmer place in his heart than this Community which he founded." Paid for by a friend of Bishop Webb, the extension provided much-needed additional space, making the chapel more suitable for

17 SMS, School magazines: December 1906, p.20-21; December 1909, p.10-14; January 1911, p.14-19

its use by the Sisters and the School. The School day began with prayers in the Chapel, and every year candidates were prepared for Confirmation.

The special thing that strikes the visitor is the amount of work that goes on, the incessant activity of the Sisters and Lay Workers in parishes, in missions, among the lepers, at the orphanage, in the school, on the hockey and cricket field. It is a very beehive humming with life of every sort.¹⁸

Lack of space at the Home for the increasing number of boarders prompted the Mother Superior to rent a house at the end of President Brand Street, a few minutes' walk away. It opened for use in January 1909 as St Michael's Hostel and provided accommodation for fourteen girls and two Sisters. Life there was less formal than in the Home itself and it was observed that new girls settled in more quickly. With fifty-five boarders at the Home, new arrivals felt overwhelmed. This encouraged Miss Edwards and Sister Edith to pursue one of their long-held wishes, to follow the example of boarding schools in England by forming "Houses", each divided into companies comprising of a smaller number of girls under the leadership of a senior pupil. There was already a natural division, and in 1913 three Houses were named: School House, consisting of all Boarders at the Home; Town House, made up of the day girls; and Hostel, for its residents. School House was divided into six companies, and Town House in companies of about ten girls each. One effect was to draw the day girls together and to make them feel more fully part of the School. Inter-House competitions were organised, and trophies awarded. Extra-mural activities began to be developed, with "Children of the Veld" raising support for isolated families linked by the Railway Mission, a Debating Society, and in 1913 a company of Girl Guides was started at the Home.

Miss Edwards was away again for the first half of 1913, and in 1914 she resigned. The entry in the Community's White Book reads:

At the end of June [1914] Miss Edwards felt obliged to resign her position as Headmistress of the School after nine years of devoted work. Her great powers of intellect and influence will be greatly missed. She came to us at a time of great difficulty ... when the school was feeling severely the after effects of the War. It had seriously shrunk in numbers, and was faced with very severe competition from State-aided Schools. She has left the school in a very high state of efficiency, overflowing with pupils, and with a reputation

18 QPBM no.175, January 1912; SMS, School magazine February 1912, p.24-26

second to none in the Orange Free State. She has also given to her fellow mistresses and her pupils ideals for which we cannot be too thankful. The Community owes her an immense debt of gratitude. She has accepted a post as Lady Warden of the Rhodes Hostel for Women in connection with the University College of Grahamstown.¹⁹

In December 1913, the Sixth Form mistress Sister Cecil CSM&AA left the Community. She had been on the staff as Miss Lewis prior to joining the Community. No details about her departure appear in the surviving records: the Profession Register states simply that she left, and was dismissed in 1914. We mention her because she and Miss Edwards had become friends and in the ensuing years they were to collaborate on some literary projects. The most significant of those is probably the monumental volume *Historical Records of the Church of the Province of South Africa*, which they started compiling in 1927 and which was published by the SPCK in 1934. CSM&AA's Profession Register says that Miss Lewis "expressed sorrow" in 1930. Good relationships were re-established. Miss Edwards continued to be a generous friend to St Michael's, giving many books for the Library, as well as sums of money. One donation made possible the installation of radiators in the chapel, and part of a legacy from Miss Lewis paid for a new weaving room at Leribe. Both their deaths are recorded in the Community's Chronicle, and Mother Mary Ursula told the Old Girls of visiting Miss Edwards and Miss Lewis in London, when they were living in Vincent Square.²⁰

The Old Girls Re-Union raised funds to have a library built at the School.

Books we have always had, but they have been so hidden away in the dark cupboards of the 'Dungeon' that many of us hardly knew what treasures we possessed.

Mother Frances laid the foundation stone on St Michael's Day, 1913, in a ceremony which was attended by Dr Ramsbottom, the Provincial Administrator, and by Mr Haarburger, Mayor of Bloemfontein, both of whom delivered speeches.²¹ The completed building was opened on 27 April, 1914, by Mrs Levisseur, President of the Bloemfontein branch of the Re-Union. In a short address, she said she hoped that pupils would derive as much

19 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1914

20 HPRA Wits, AB2644/72; FSA, A510, White Book I, 18 Aug 1936, 13 June 1938, 5 Sept 1948, 16 July 1949, 30 January 1955; SMS Old Girls' Letter, 31 July 1955

21 This foundation stone is now to be seen on an interior wall of the library at the new St Michael's.

pleasure from the new Library as the Old Girls had in working for it. A large free-standing room, its walls held bookcases and also four large pictures, given by the Mother Superior, Miss Tugwell, Miss Edwards, and Mrs Ehrlich.²²

A fire at night in the boarding hostel of Eunice Girls' School – all lives were saved but clothing and other possessions were lost – drew attention to the need to be prepared for emergencies. Boarders were given drills by the Master of the Fire Brigade, ladders and ropes were fixed in the dormitories, and fire buckets placed at strategic points. A pupil wrote in the magazine, “We go to bed with our drill tunics and tackies within easy reach (when we remember).”

It is not possible to prepare for every disaster. “The most exciting event of the Term so far” occurred on Ash Wednesday in 1915 when an outside wall of the Refectory collapsed, part of the oldest wing of the Home. It began while the Mistresses were at supper. Falling bits of plaster gave warning of what might happen and at the very end of the meal a portion of the lower wall sank gently against the back of one of their chairs. Other bricks followed until gradually the whole corner had gone. A builder came quickly and was able to prop up the beam across the ceiling, which had lost its support, and so prevented further collapse. There had been heavy rain, and leakage from a faulty gutter had turned the old sun-dried bricks back into mud. Fortunately no-one was injured.²³

The disaster of war had befallen Europe. Miss Cotton sailed from Cape Town for Britain on board the “*Edinburgh Castle*” on 15 August, 1914. With war recently declared, the ship was painted grey and sailed without lights at night. In a letter she sent for the School magazine, she described the voyage and their unexpected call at Gibraltar to embark one thousand troops of the Wiltshire Regiment. That delayed arrival at Southampton by three days. A subsequent letter described London and its preparations for war. South Africa was to contribute troops to strengthen the British cause, but the animosities of the Anglo-Boer War were still fresh in some minds. An uprising by rebels at Harrismith was described in a letter Sister Florence received from an old pupil. Published in the magazine, it told of the suppression of the rebellion – but it illustrated also how much time is needed for healing deep divisions in society. As we have described in chapter 16, the Sisters and staff encouraged the schoolgirls to play their part in the war effort.²⁴

A prefect from Form Two described what they were doing.

22 SMS, School magazine, January 1914, and September 1914, p.34-35

23 SMS, School magazines, September 1914, p.14-15, March 1915, p.8-9; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii

24 SMS, School magazine, March 1915, p.17-23, 30-31

Last term our teacher made up a plan that we should have a war note book, and every day some of the girls brought war news. The picture on our book was a British Sea-plane watching a German submarine. This term we have another war note book, with the picture of a man sitting on a box, with the telephone to his ear, and it is called 'What *we* have heard'.

Another plan is the war 'Scrap-Book'. It is a book made from large white sheets of paper, on each page there are different pictures of the war. We have a great many pictures in now, and we hope it will be finished at the end of this term. We have made a collection of clothes and toys for the Belgians, and we sent 10s. to Miss Wilden to buy something for the Belgian children in her hospital for Christmas Day. At the beginning of this term we sent some tobacco, cigarettes, and eggs to Captain Boyd at Tempe, for the soldiers in the hospital out there. The last three weeks we have been making large green handkerchiefs and comfort bags for the soldiers. Our prisoner is still going on well, and we have already paid in all but one threepence of the prisoner collection money due from this Form.²⁵

"Through it all our little school-world went on," reads an article written after the Armistice, "reflecting in its own way the great movements outside." At Michaelmas 1916 the school presented its first concert for two years and used it as an opportunity to raise funds for disabled soldiers. One hundred and forty-two children were studying music – piano, violin, singing, harmony and theory. Hockey and cricket matches continued to be played, and to the sporting curriculum had been added netball, drill and swimming at the town baths.

The worldwide influenza epidemic that arrived in South Africa in September 1918 delayed the start of term, initially "for a few days", and those few days developed into more than a month. There were sixteen children boarding in the Home throughout the epidemic, meeting daily for morning prayers, and lessons until 12 noon. Pupils reassembled for the start of term on 13 November, but they numbered only thirty when a Service of Thanksgiving for the end of the War was held in the Cathedral,

to which our rank of thirty (the largest school then in the town) marched, carrying thirty flags. In the evening the Boarders went to the top of Signal

25 SMS, School magazine December 1917, p.17-18, written by E. Nicholls

Hill to see the Fireworks and the Bonfire, and the next day we tried seriously to return to our schoolwork. It was hard however with such small numbers, and we appreciated the comparative freedom allowed by the Department in the matter of shorter hours, and except for the four remaining Examination candidates, the whole School gave a large proportion of its time and interests to the long-postponed Sale, which was held on a most auspicious date for Christmas shopping, the Feast of St Nicholas.

A later report shows that the Sale was held over Friday and Saturday. The classes worked hard producing handicrafts for their stalls; Miss Blake ran her own stall selling leatherwork, embroidery and knitted garments that she had made; and the Old Girls provided refreshments. The total raised was almost £84 and it was added to the Building Fund.²⁶

Miss Leta Blake sailed out from Britain to South Africa on a war-darkened ship in 1917, and worked for a short spell at the Cape before arriving in Bloemfontein, where she was appointed Music Mistress, a post she filled with enthusiasm for the next fifty years. Another young teacher who arrived early in 1917 was Miss Hilda Creese. She also gave her life to St Michael's and joined the Community, where she was professed as Sister Hildegarde. Already in the Community by then was Edith Glover, daughter of the Revd James Glover, Rector of Bethulie. She had been a boarding pupil at St Michael's and returned to teach in the Kindergarten before being clothed as Novice Edith Agnes in April 1907. These three, Miss Blake, Sister Hildegarde and Sister Edith Agnes, were to be almost part of the bricks and mortar of St Michael's School for the next half-century.

From 1915 onwards, St Michael's School was aided by a Government grant. The *Chronicler* noted the terms on which the Chapter had accepted this financial help.

Should the authorities make any demand which interferes with the Religious Instruction, or any other unacceptable conditions, the grant will be given up.

One implication was that there would be periodical inspections by the Provincial Education Department. Dr Viljoen, the Director of Education, made a farewell visit in 1918 before leaving for a new appointment in the Cape. "As he made his tour of inspection through the School he quite realised our urgent need of new buildings,"

²⁶ SMS. School magazine, April 1919, p.5-6 and 22-23

was the entry made in the White Book. The School was full, with a long waiting list. There were 211 names on the Roll at the end of 1917, and in 1919 the Superior informed the English Committee of Help that forty potential boarders had to be refused for want of accommodation.²⁷

Writing on 25 October, 1918, Bishop Carey said that a total of £7,450 was required to put in hand as soon as possible urgently needed building works. It was necessary to construct a new kitchen and dining wing, with dormitories above, to replace the old building that had been made from sun-dried bricks; other needs included additional class rooms and a school hall, the enlargement of the boarding hostel, a school sanatorium, and a new wing for Sisters. Towards the last of those, a donation of £600 had been received in England. A Kindergarten Hall had been completed in 1913 at a cost of £1,950, much of which was collected by the English Associates and friends.²⁸

There was some good news in 1921. Construction of a new wing started early in the year, and the school went down in June with the satisfaction of knowing that the new classrooms would be in use the next term. Adjoining the Library, the five rooms formed the third side of the second quadrangle and were linked by a stone corridor. This wing provided a storage room, two new classrooms, a stationery room and, at the end, a music room. The completion of these rooms released the Victoria Ward of St George's to become the School's isolation hospital for nursing any pupils with infectious diseases.²⁹ There was still more to do, and in 1923 further rooms were completed. The school magazine carried reports written by the scholars, perhaps with a little help from their teachers.

Once upon a time there were some old music rooms, they were all broken and dark inside. At the beginning of the July holiday the builders came and pushed them and they fell down, and now they have built two new classrooms where they were standing. ... When we knew we were going to move from our old room we were so excited.

Form 1B occupied the smaller of the two rooms, named "Ottaway". Form 3A was equally pleased to take over the larger room, named "Webb".

We were all very glad to go. Our old classroom is known as 'P', it is one of the old parts of the school next to the Hall. In its time it has been used as

27 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii; SMS, ECH Reports for 1915, 1918 & 1919.

28 SMS, ECH Report for 1918, p.10

29 SMS, ECH Report for 1920, p.8-9. The original part of St George's became the Guest House.

Classroom, Dormitory and a Soldiers' Hospital. The windows are broken, the doors do not fit and the porch is dangerous, as the door is gradually falling. It was much too big for us and very hard to keep tidy.

The new rooms were light and airy. These two classrooms, together with an arched corridor connecting them to the Kindergarten and School block, were paid for with a legacy the Community received from Miss Ottaway, whose interest in St Michael's had been aroused by Bishop Webb. Miss Ottaway's legacy was sufficient also for a new wing to be added to the Sister's part of the Home, incorporating ground floor rooms for the old and invalid Sisters.

Every new building was blessed in a formal ceremony, as described by Form 3A.

A week after we had moved in, the Warden came to bless the classrooms. We stayed at our desks; the Proctors, Mistresses, the Mother, and some of the Sisters came in procession with the banner, Cross, and the incense. The other girls assembled outside. We sang a hymn for the procession, then the Warden came in and blessed the classroom. Then we sang our School Hymn, 'Through the night of doubt and sorrow,' and the service was over.³⁰

The dilapidated classroom "P" and the Hall were to be pulled down in the December holidays, and foundations laid for a new Hall.

The Home Re-Union Club of Old Girls had been raising funds for a new Hall, intending that it should be a gift to the School to mark the Golden Jubilee of St Michael's foundation. When the appeal was launched, it was suggested that fifty silver coins of one value or another should be given by each former pupil. Some Old Girls responded generously and others did not respond at all. Sister Edith encouraged them all to give at least fifty pennies! The names of all those who donated were being entered into a "Jubilee Hall Book", which would be kept in the Library and passed down to future generations: she hoped that it would include the name of every girl who had ever been at St Michael's. The fund was still £3,000 short of its target when the time came to begin building. The foundation stone was laid by Mother Frances at a special service held on Saturday 26 April, 1924. More than one hundred Old Girls gathered from all over South Africa to attend the weekend of celebrations. Bloemfontein's English-language newspaper, *The Friend*, published a leading article a few days later:

30 SMS, School Magazine, November 1923, p.4, 12-14; ECH Report for 1923, p.8

The Jubilee of any institution is itself a period of note, but in the case of S. Michael's School, Bloemfontein, the marking of the end of the half-century is something more. The history of the Free State covers not much more than three-quarters of a century, so that any Free State institution that can claim an age of 50 years can almost regard itself as contemporaneous with the history of the country itself. S. Michael's School for girls, although first and foremost a Church School, and a very good Church School at that, is more. It is something that goes deep down into the educational history of the Free State. When the School was founded in 1874 Bloemfontein was in a very primitive condition, and education was indeed a difficult thing to get. The good people of the Church of England, who began in such a small way with St Michael's, were educational pioneers in this country. The work they founded grew with the country and, in some respects, led the general development. There may be differences of view as between State Schools and Church Schools, but we would say that both are necessary to the full life of any modern community. The Church School provides a want that is not satisfied by the State School, and therefore it plays an important part in the general educational structure. S. Michael's has long ago more than justified itself in this town of Bloemfontein; it is, in truth, a piece that has worked itself into the mosaic of the town's life. In the celebration of its Jubilee and in the building of its Jubilee Hall, this fine old educational institution will carry with it the warmest regards of the whole community and their best wishes for its continued development and always increasing usefulness.³¹

The Jubilee Hall was connected by corridors with every part of the school so that for the first time it was possible to move from one end to the other under cover:

this has been a great need, for when it does rain in the Free State, it does it in a comprehensive and thorough manner unknown in the British Isles.³²

From the Georgian-style front entrance of the School on Elizabeth Street, teak doors opened into a vestibule, with stairs on one side and an office for the Sister in Charge on the other. Directly ahead, another teak door led into the Hall itself. Described as

31 SMS, Quoted in the Jubilee issue of the School Magazine, May 1924, p.5. Sr Edith's letter is on p.3 & 4.

32 SMS, ECH Report for 1923, p.10

beautiful, dignified and spacious, the hall was panelled with grained wood, stained to match the doors, with the upper part of the walls painted cream. The stairs from the vestibule gave access to a dormitory built above the hall. High partitions divided the dormitory into individual cubicles, and two bathrooms with showers became the envy of the three older dormitories. Completed in time for the beginning of the academic year, the new hall was used for School prayers for the first time on Monday 9 February, 1925, and was blessed by Bishop Carey a fortnight later. The whole School was assembled in the Hall, together with many Old Girls; and Mother Frances, Sister Edith and Sister Rowena were with the Bishop and Warden on the platform for the prayers of blessing and censuring. While the scholars sang the school hymn, the procession went upstairs to bless and cense each cubicle.³³

The debt on the Jubilee Hall and dormitory was reduced considerably by a bequest of £1,000 in the will of Mr Champion, a well-known Bloemfontein citizen and friend of St Michael's. Further efforts, including the November Sales, brought it down further, and it was cleared finally by a cheque from Miss Clare at the end of 1928.

The School buildings had been substantially renewed and with the completion of the hall met the highest standards of the day. Pupil numbers were increasing, with 153 on the Roll in 1926 and 167 in January 1928, in addition to the Kindergarten classes. It was hoped that no further building work would be needed for some years, but then in 1929 the Education Department's Matriculation Handbook emphasised that Physical Science should be taught in all secondary schools. Advice was taken from the Department's Inspectors, and a Laboratory was built and equipped that year. At the suggestion of Sister Margaret Dorothea, who had been appointed Headmistress in 1927, the Chapter agreed that the School Emergency Fund would be used, and replenished gradually. Sister Margaret Dorothea was in her second term of service as Headmistress. As Miss Baker she had occupied that office from 1920 until 1922, when she entered the Novitiate.

The Old Girls' Home Re-Union Club approached the Town Council for some additional land in King's Park to make two tennis courts. The Club would fund their construction and also that of a small shelter. King's Park had been laid out by the Municipality in 1906 on the west side of First Avenue, just across the road from the back of St Michael's grounds. As we have mentioned, St Michael's School had been provided with some playing fields there in 1908. When the new tennis courts were completed, there was a special ceremony on 21 April, 1927, when the Mayor of Bloemfontein officially handed them over to the

33 SMS, ECH Report for 1924, p.7; Leith, *One the Faith*, p.42-43

School, mentioning in his speech that his wife was an Old Girl and three of his daughters were currently pupils. Two years later the Council again showed their generosity towards the School by resurfacing the hockey pitch at its own expense.³⁴

Supporters in England were told that in 1928 St Michael's girls held all four senior inter-school challenge cups for games. The teams did less well in 1929, but still won the Championship Singles and Doubles in the Orange Free State Junior Tennis Tournament. They did well in swimming also, and nine were awarded the bronze medallion of the Royal Life Saving Society. The School did not yet have its own swimming pool, and pupils went to the public baths to practice. The lack of their own facilities restricted the School's standards in swimming, but the idea of having their own pool seemed like an impossible dream because of the costs involved. Mr Thomas Webb must have heard about this, because he wrote a bequest of £1,000 into his Will for the specific purpose of building a swimming pool at St Michael's School. After his death, in May 1935 Sister Margaret Dorothea was able to inform readers of the magazine that a site within the grounds had been decided on and construction would soon begin. An additional £400 was needed to provide an adequate pool. The November issue of the magazine carried a full page photograph showing the Warden's procession, headed by Sisters as crucifer and thurifer, for the official blessing and opening ceremony on October 19, and another photo of the pool in use. In 1937 St Michael's School made its first appearance at the Inter-Schools Swimming Gala held in the Public Baths.³⁵

The office beside the vestibule of the Jubilee Hall was used by Sister Edith as Sister in Charge of the Boarders. There she was never too busy to see pupils, day girls as well as boarders, and to listen to what they had to say. Many took their troubles and their difficulties to her, and found themselves soothed by her presence and calmed by her words.

Sister Edith was always young in spirit. One had only to see her tripping down the corridor to discover this; for though it is sometimes hard to identify a Sister without seeing her face, this was never the case with Sister Edith, whose very walk bespoke a certain gaiety of heart. This endeared her to those about her; she entered instinctively into their pleasures, whether for the moment it were some recent School success – a victory in a cricket match, or the passing of an examination; or whether it were some new book,

³⁴ SMS, School Magazine May 1927, p.16-18; ECH Report for 1929, p.8

³⁵ SMS, School Magazine, May 1935, p.7; November 1935, p.7-9; 1937, p.17-18. The photo of the pool in use shows that it was behind St George's, close to the St Andrew's Street boundary. On the right of the photo one gable of the former YWCA building can be seen. Now used by a private company, that building still stands.

picture, or flower from the veld. By her ready sympathy, a visitor to her office was always made welcome. ... She had a sincere regard for individuals, never expecting all to reach the same standard, never wishing all to be alike. This regard for personality drew her into their confidence and enabled her to exercise a wide influence.

Such was the affection in which she was held that Old Girls used to call to see her. Some passing through Bloemfontein by train, and having an hour or so to spare before their connection, would hurry from the station and make their way to her office, where they would receive a very warm greeting, “so full of interest in their concerns that she might have been one of their own mothers.”

Two weeks before the end of the second Quarter of 1928, the Sisters were told that Sister Edith would have to undergo a serious operation immediately term ended. The School was not told and she worked as normal until all the pupils had gone home for their holidays. She made a good recovery after the operation but suffered a relapse on the first day of August, and died six days later. The senior girls attended her funeral in the Chapel and the juniors lined the path from the Chapel to the gate. As one of the Old Girls wrote,

In her were embodied those ideals which S. Michael's has always tried to develop in its pupils – the cultured mind, a gracious manner, the spirit of service, a living religion.³⁶

The new occupant of the office by the Jubilee Hall was Sister Hildegard, who was to remain in charge of the senior boarders for forty years, until retiring in December 1967. The Junior Hostel was already under the lovingly watchful eye of Sister Edith Agnes, who had been appointed to that post soon after her profession in 1910, and who gave it almost the whole of her professed life.

The permanence of the Sisters from one generation of pupils to another was part of what gave the School its special character. Only a minority of the Community worked directly in the School, but others had occasional contact with pupils, like Sister Caroline, who nursed them back to health when they were sick. At her requiem in 1925, the Bishop spoke of the example of her life of self-sacrifice, and the joy of such a life. Sister Rowena, who was Assistant Superior from 1911 to 1932, Novice Mistress from 1922 to 1932, and Bursar for decades until her death in February 1936, prepared “many, many” girls for

³⁶ SMS, School magazine, November 1928, p.11-17, “In memory of Sister Edith”; ECH Report for 1928, p.14

Confirmation, and some kept in contact with her, regarding her as “a friend to whom they could always turn.” Mother Frances, alongside her responsibilities, found time just after the Anglo-Boer War to read one evening a week to junior boarders while they sewed, and throughout the following years used to encourage the School societies, enquire after the results of sporting fixtures, and attend School entertainments. “To her energy we owe the beautiful school buildings we possess,” read an obituary notice in the School magazine.³⁷

Sister Margaret Dorothea reached retirement age for teachers in 1934, and stood down as Headmistress at the end of that year. She did not leave the School, being appointed in January as Sister in Charge by the new Mother Mary Ursula. Miss Christine Ogle, on the staff since January 1933, was appointed Headmistress. How well this dual control and semi-reversal of roles worked, we cannot know. Sister Margaret Dorothea had “a pronounced talent for organisation, and in particular that regard for detail which the smooth-running of school routine demands.” Miss Ogle also was a very capable organiser, and encouraged progressive ways. Urging the importance of self-discipline, she taught the girls that “spare time is given to us to use and not just to loaf away.” Fostering extra-mural activities, she stimulated interest in drama, literature, music and art. Her term of office was short because she resigned in December 1937 to return to England.

Miss Ogle had come to mean a great deal to the School in her five years as teacher and Head, and the magazine carried news of her when war broke out and she was driving an ambulance in the London docks. Later she joined the Women’s Royal Naval Service and was appointed Second Officer for the WRNS in the Port of London. Another promotion followed rapidly. She was on her way to take command of the WRNS in Gibraltar in August 1941 when the ship in which she was sailing was torpedoed and sank within a minute and a half. Only those on the bridge were saved, and everyone else on board was listed as missing, presumed dead.³⁸

St Michael’s School entered 1939 in good heart. There were one hundred and ninety-five children on the books. Thirty-six were in the Kindergarten, and some of those were boys. Boys were admitted to St Michael’s Kindergarten at the time the Sisters were running St George’s Preparatory School for boys, and when the latter closed the Kindergarten continued to accept boys, who would later move on to other schools for their primary education. Plans were afoot for a large gathering of the Old Girls’ Re-Union to be held at the end of September: it was to be in the school holidays and accommodation for

37 SMS, School magazine, October 1925, p.21; May 1936, p.5-6; November 1938, p.6-7

38 SMS, School magazine, May 1935, p.6-7; November 1937, p.6; November 1941, p.6-7; November 1955, p.7

up to forty was offered. "We want as big a gathering as possible," wrote Sister Margaret Dorothea, "so that future building schemes can be discussed." In March a Parent-Teacher Association was formed, "purely social in character."³⁹ Many plans for the future had to be laid aside or changed when war was declared between the United Kingdom and Germany, and South Africa had to mobilise forces to support the Allied war effort. In 1939 the Union Defence Force numbered only 5,500 men and a rapid expansion was needed. Recruitment from among the white population "was a great success, and 190,000 from an eligible adult male population of 570,000 joined up." They served together with more than 120,000 men recruited from other racial groups.⁴⁰ Families all over the country then had menfolk in the Forces. Everyone was affected.

"What we do in the War" was the heading of an article in the November 1940 issue of the School magazine. Since its inception, two issues of the magazine had been published every year, but the frequency now dropped to an annual edition in November, with the May issue being replaced by a mid-year leaflet of "Old Girls' News".

Our deepest need since September, 1939, shared with everybody, has been to release in some visible form our desire to serve the pangs of crisis within the limits allowed to us. ...

As soon as the war started we turned spontaneously to Miss Blake. It seemed just natural that she should organise the work we wanted to do. On December 2nd the first War Concert planned by her raised the sum of £8.5s.9d. Out of this, material was bought for the making of Hospital Comforts destined for the Red Cross through the Countess of Falmouth, from whom correct patterns had first been obtained. In the first quarter of 1940, a working party was held each Sunday morning after the Cathedral Eucharist, under the direction of Mrs Foss [wife of the Warden] and Miss Blake. Miss Klam managed the bandage department. As a result boxes were packed containing nightshirts, operation stockings, hospital bags, hot water bottle covers, bandages, bedjackets. These arrived in England eventually and were presently warmly acknowledged.

39 SMS, School magazine, May 1939, p.5

40 Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, p.242

In the second quarter it was decided to concentrate on knitting. Contributions of money were sought, and Miss Blake organised a second War Concert and a Sixth Form Show, to raise the money needed to buy wool.

So we did knit; by Michaelmas there were 95 pairs of socks, 92 helmets, 60 pairs of mittens, 17 pairs of gloves, 4 scarves, 2 pairs of cuffs, 1 'pull on'. (If Mr Herbert Morrison wants to see the slogan 'Go To It' in action we invite him to visit Miss Clare at S. George's; she has knitted between 20 and 30 helmets in her own faultless way!)

They heard at Michaelmas of a "crying need at the Seamen's Institute at Cape Town, where men from the ships arrive kitless after cruel voyages."⁴¹

The household was "well into its stride" with its war work by November 1941. "Under Miss Blake's tireless and capable guidance," the practical work resolved itself into knitting, raising money, book-mending – the volumes were sent by the Victoria League to the troops, collecting garments for the bombed areas of Britain, and the labours of Form 2, who knitted a blanket for a hospital ship and made Christmas cards for the sailors.

Into the stitches perhaps go some of our intercessions for those to whom war has meant more than we can yet imagine. The intercession list used daily at our altar and in school has grown, of course; on it now appears a number of women serving with units of the W.A.A.F.⁴² and other bodies in different parts of Africa – our Old Girls. In remembering them, we do not forget those others steadily training in hospitals and colleges for the labours of the future.

At the end of each quarter, Miss Blake arranged an exhibition in the Kindergarten Hall of all the work handed in for that period. "Each is a mute testimony to the quiet labour of knitters."⁴³

In June 1939 all the boarders and day girls were invited to a meeting in the Jubilee Hall when Sister Mary Ruth explained proposals to form a Current Events Group, with one of the pupils as elected secretary. The aim was to have one open meeting each quarter with an outside speaker who would address some aspect of current affairs. In between those there

41 SMS, School magazine, November 1940, p.11-12. Men who had been rescued from torpedoed ships.

42 Women's Auxiliary Air Force

43 SMS, School magazine, November 1941, p.16-17; November 1942, p.9

would be closed meetings when the membership would discuss topical issues. The first open meeting was held in August 1939 and the visiting speaker's subject was the "Refugee Question." In 1940, Mr Rene de Villiers, editor of *The Friend*, spoke on "The evils of nationalism", and a staff member from Eunice School considered "The meaning of War in Africa". At closed meetings that year, Sister Mary Ruth discussed "The War in the Near and Middle East", "Fifth Column Methods", and "The Four Phases of the Second World War." One of the Matric Class of 1942 described those closed meetings:

Once a month on a Saturday evening, Sister Mary Ruth would hold a 'Current Events' session. With remarkable skill, and thorough and painstaking preparation of maps of the theatres of War she was going to discuss, she would have read newspapers exhaustively and now gave us a simpler, distilled version of the most important events during the period covered. She held us spellbound as she spoke – a sheaf of papers in her hand to which she seldom referred. A real *tour de force* by a perceptive woman with a brilliant mind.⁴⁴

Meetings were held regularly throughout the war years, and Sister Mary Ruth told of some of the subjects covered, in notes for the November 1945 magazine:

'Russian headache' – effectually induced, we believe, by the perplexities of the Yalta Conference and the future of that tragic country Poland, ... and ... four problems of headline importance: The fifteen missing Poles; the fate of Trieste; independence for the Syrian and Lebanese Republics; the coming General Election in Britain.

St Michael's schoolgirls were encouraged to be aware of the world and of the challenges facing it.⁴⁵

1942 was "a hard year for everyone, especially South Africa," wrote Sister Margaret Dorothea in her Foreword to that year's magazine. The Community's Chronicle noted the fall of Tobruk on 21 June, when almost eleven thousand South African troops were captured. Also recorded is the re-taking of Tobruk by the Allies on 13 November, but there was little relief for anxious families whose men were prisoners of war.

⁴⁴ Rhoda van der Byl (James), published in a cyclostyled booklet of memories of former pupils, *St Michael's School Turns 120*, edited by Oenone Gradwell (1994), in SMS archive, also in FSA, A510.

⁴⁵ SMS, School magazine, November 1939, p.16; November 1940, p.19; November 1945, p.20,21

Fathers, husbands, fiancés, and brothers were all involved and most of those for whom we were so anxious are prisoners in Italy.⁴⁶

Life had to go on, and the School calendars, printed in each year's magazine, show the familiar pattern of Speech Days, school plays, sporting events, examinations, and dances for the leaving Sixth form. The Old Girls' Association, formed in 1940, merged the following year with the Home Re-Union Club. It was decided that the second Saturday of the first term each year should be kept as Founders' Day – a pattern that continued for many years. Candidates continued to be prepared for the annual Confirmation held in the Chapel, and the Bishop led a Quiet Day each November for those pupils choosing to attend. Usually they were joined by some girls from Eunice School. The Children of the Veld group, supporting the Railway Mission, was expanded into the School Missionary Society, at the suggestion of Mrs Foss, who took on its leadership. The Annual Sale took place every November and the proceeds increased year by year, with the School stalls as before benefitting the Building Fund and the Sisters' Stall helping their mission work. Despite all the distractions, examination results were good. St Michael's notched up successes at Inter-School competitions in tennis, hockey, swimming and gymnastics. Cricket seemed to be on its way out. St Michael's won the 1st and 2nd Inter-School League cups in 1941, but the following year found that the other girls' schools had discontinued the game. Nothing daunted, enjoyable matches were played against two boys' schools, St Andrew's and Grey College. In 1944, recognising the importance of fluency in the country's second official language, the School tried to speak in Afrikaans for two days each week.

The anxieties of the War continued. Sister Margaret Dorothea, writing the Foreword to an issue of Old Girls' News, told of the sad death at home of a sixteen year old pupil, daughter of an Old Girl. Her father was a prisoner of war, and nothing had been heard of him since the South African prisoners had been moved from Italy to Germany. The families of two other Old Girls were in distress: Billie Carter's aircraft was shot down in Italy and there was no news of him; and Woolf Harris had been killed while returning from a raid over Germany. "Woolf was just twenty-one and Billie twenty last November." In the relatively small and close-knit Anglican family around St Michael's, the impact of losses was felt by all. "They are remembered in our prayers," the Sister wrote, "and we ask

⁴⁶ SMS, School magazine, November 1942. 3,000 SA soldiers were captured by the Germans in November 1941 at Sidi Rezegh, and 10,700 at the fall of Tobruk. Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War*, p.243

that God Himself may be their greatest Comforter. It is so wonderful to know that one may pray for the dead. It does keep them very close to us.”⁴⁷

Great was the rejoicing when the War ended and families could look forward to the return of relatives who had been long absent. St Michael’s schoolgirls hung flags around the entrance in Elizabeth Street, and took part eagerly in the Day of Praise at the Cathedral on 9 May. Their own special contribution to that day was the singing of the morning Sung Eucharist. After attending Solemn Evensong, they went to look at decorations that had been put up in town, before returning to the School for their own Victory Ball. On the second of two public holidays after the victory over Japan was celebrated in August, the whole School made the long, hot climb up Naval Hill to enjoy a picnic.

The School’s War Efforts had continued to the end.

Turning to look back over the war years, we find we have made about 2,200 garments: socks, helmets, scarves, pullovers, gloves and mittens, beside hospital requirements and glory-bags.⁴⁸ Money was raised and spent on wool and materials. ... It is only right that special credit for this should go to Miss Blake. Her enthusiasm has kept this work together these six years, and the hours she has spent in distributing wool, and in ironing and packing our handiwork, must be past computation.⁴⁹

The War Effort was a very practical way for the School to encourage social responsibility among its pupils. With Sisters of the Community working at missions in Kimberley, Modderpoort and Basutoland, as well as in the poor Black districts of Bloemfontein, the needs of the less fortunate were always kept before the schoolgirls. Alongside the energetic fund-raising and knitting during the War, other charitable causes were being helped also. Clothes, toys and money were collected for the African crèche in the township; a Pound Day was held annually for St Faith’s Orphanage, when produce was brought in by the children; collections were taken for St Raphael’s Hospital at Modderpoort, for the training of African Catechists, for the Red Cross, and to help crippled children.⁵⁰ The Pound Days for St Faith’s elicited a good response – we read of five hundred and sixty-one pounds’ weight of groceries being brought in 1954 – and continued until that

47 SMS, Old Girls’ News, June 1944

48 Glory bags given to soldiers contained gifts and comforts such as socks, books, chewing gum and biltong.

49 SMS, School magazine, November 1945, Letter from Miss Andrews (Headmistress) to the Girls of St Michael’s, p.6-7; Our War Effort, p.12

50 SMS, School magazine, November 1943, p.13; November 1945, p.12

institution closed. In later years the idea was revived to support the work of Ma 'Mohau, Sister Enid.

The celebration of Bloemfontein's Centenary over the last weekend of March in 1946 was the first of two joyful occasions in the years immediately following the War. Springbok Park, a large sports stadium, was the main venue for the Centenary celebrations, which began with a pageant of the town's history. The School attended and in the evening participated in a Drill Display. The next day, Friday 29 March, had been set apart for children's events, including a parade of floats illustrating various activities. St Michael's chose the theme "Learning about Bloemfontein", but unfortunately some of their work suffered in a shower of rain before the float reached the Park. After arrival, each School read out its greetings from a scroll, before handing the message to the Mayor. St Michael's Chapel Choir participated that evening in a Festival of Song, and on the Sunday joined the Cathedral Choir to sing at a special Service. Apart from small gifts for each child, there was a lasting gift from the Municipality, one hundred trees to be planted in the School grounds.⁵¹

The great highlight of 1947 was the visit of the Royal Family. His Majesty King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, accompanied by Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret Rose, arrived in Cape Town on board the battleship H.M.S. *Vanguard* on 17 February for a two month stay. During that time they visited all parts of the Union of South Africa, and also the High Commission territories of Basutoland, Swaziland and Bechuanaland.⁵² They travelled to Bloemfontein on the White Train, arriving on Friday 7 March, and were welcomed at the station by Provincial and Civic dignitaries. Pupils from St Michael's School were among the crowds lining Maitland Street and waving flags as the royal cars drove by. That afternoon, fifty-five of St Michael's girls joined in the combined school choirs to sing for their Majesties. Miss Andrews wrote of cherishing the moment on Sunday when she stood during a special Service in the Cathedral to sing "God save the King", with His Majesty there in person. The School magazine published a "Royal Tour Symposium" with articles by St Michael's girls who succeeded in being present during the royal visits to Cape Town, Summerville (for a visit to a Game Reserve), Basutoland, and Port Elizabeth. Some of St Michael's Guides participated in a national Guide and Scout Rally held in Cape Town on the last full day of the royal visit, 23 April, when Princess Elizabeth arrived in Ranger uniform and spoke to the gathering.⁵³

51 SMS, School magazine, November 1946, p.5-6

52 The three former High Commission territories are now the countries of Lesotho, Eswatini, and Botswana.

53 SMS, School magazine, November 1947, p.4-6, 22-28. The White Train – because it was painted white –

Sister Margaret Dorothea retired as Sister in Charge of St Michael's School at the end of the academic year in December 1948. Writing a tribute in the following year's magazine, Mother Mary Ursula said that

as far as standard of work, tone of the School, conditions of life for boarders, and general progress achieved are concerned, she handed over a very different St Michael's at the end of 1948 from the one she found in 1919.

Going beyond "obvious facts", the Superior wrote of the Sister's personal character which enabled her to carry out her duties whether those were pleasant and easy, or the reverse. Being a Religious, she did not do her work as an end in itself but as an outcome of her vocation,

and by this means combined a great enthusiasm with a readiness to co-operate with others; her work was never 'her own' in the sense that so many workers use those words, with a possessiveness which hinders rather than helps what they are trying to do.

All the same, as Margaret Leith observed, Sister Margaret Dorothea "found it well-nigh impossible to relinquish authority when she was required by the Education Department to resign as Headmistress because of her age." She then became Sister in Charge of the School, and the dual control meant that the Headmistresses never really had a free hand: "to be Headmistress in such circumstances could not have been altogether easy."⁵⁴

Sister Margaret Dorothea kept up her contacts with the Old Girls, editing the annual newsletter:

It has been most curious, but whilst editing it you have all been round me with the bright faces of your schooldays, eager, alert faces belonging to girls ready for life's adventures. It is astonishing how you keep those faces though you are now older.

was the train reserved for use by the Governor General, the Monarch's representative, during the years that South Africa was a British Dominion, 1910 – 1961.

⁵⁴ Leith, *One the Faith*, p.57

She died in August 1955, and had a beautiful funeral, just as she would have liked it, on a spring day of unclouded sunshine. Forms V and VI attended, as well as Old Girls and other friends.⁵⁵

Sister Alice, who died in November 1952, never held any office in connection with the School, but nevertheless had a quiet influence. In her earlier years she was an untiring Mission Sister, first at St Matthew's, Kimberley, and then at Modderpoort. After her return to Bloemfontein, she did home visiting in St Patrick's district. When age confined her to St Michael's, she used to go to the Junior Hostel and sit and darn the girls' socks while telling them stories about her childhood. One girl

once lifted large serious brown eyes to the face of the Sister who was discussing Scripture revision with her class, and exclaimed: 'Oh, Sister, I could not tell you the names of all the Twelve Apostles, but I *do* know the names of Sister Alice's eleven brothers and sisters.'⁵⁶

One of the classrooms constructed in 1921 had been given the name "Cleaver" in honour of a distinguished Old Girl, and in 1953 a bequest was received from her sister's estate for the purpose of erecting a memorial and commemorative tablet. Anne Cleaver had been among the first group of pupils entered by St Michael's in 1883 for the Matriculation examination of the University of Cape Town. She and another passed. Anne Cleaver went to Britain and studied medicine, gaining qualifications in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cambridge and London. She returned as the first woman doctor in South Africa and was appointed Medical Inspector of Schools in the Transvaal. In reporting this to the Old Girls, Mother Mary Ursula told also of two more recent pupils who had qualified as doctors, and of others who had gone into nursing.⁵⁷

The Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June, 1953, was marked by special School prayers before pupils went off for a long weekend holiday. Public buildings in the city centre were illuminated, but there appear to have been no great public ceremonies, such as there had been at the accession of King George V in 1910. Then the Orange Free State was still a Crown colony. With the advent of the Union of South Africa, the Free State was one province of four, and, although the Queen was technically head of state, nationalism was beginning to assert itself. St Michael's School had good cause to celebrate when it

55 SMS, School magazine, November 1949, p.4-5; Old Girls' News, June 1951, Foreword; School magazine November 1955, p.6-7

56 SMS, Mother Superior's letter to Old Girls, 10 July, 1953

57 HPRA Wits, AB2644/85, Old Girls' Letter 10 July 1953

was announced on 28 August that the Headmistress, Miss Kathleen Andrews, had been awarded the Coronation Silver Medal. It was displayed for all pupils to see.⁵⁸

Public buildings in Bloemfontein were illuminated again in February 1954 to celebrate the centenary of the Orange Free State, which was marked also by public processions and a youth rally. One week before that commemoration, the Old Girls' Association had celebrated the eightieth birthday of St Michael's Community and School with a grand dinner held at the Cecil Hotel on Founders' Day, 13 February. The speaker was Mrs Sophie Levisseur. She was the oldest surviving Old Girl, and when her one hundredth birthday came around in 1957, and the Mayor and City Council gave a party in her own garden, it was appropriate that the Sisters laid aside their rule of not attending public functions. The Mother Superior, Sister Hildegarde and Sister Mary Ruth, all attended, accompanied by Miss Andrews and Miss Blake.⁵⁹

Bloemfontein was the centre chosen for national celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of the Union of South Africa in May 1960. These centred on the Stadium in First Avenue, "two stones' throw" away from St Michael's, affording them "an unmatched view of procession and pageantry." Schools were closed from May 23 to June 2, so that the pupils could take part in the week-long ceremonies. St Michael's was asked to provide accommodation in the Kindergarten Hall and at St Faith's for parties of schoolgirls from Stellenbosch, East London, and Kirkwood, C.P. They slept on army mattresses on the floor and were fed each day at the Stadium. Blue, white and orange lights were strung across the streets, shop windows were decorated, and there were large numbers of visitors in town from all across the country. There were exhibitions and cultural events to be attended, and the climax of the celebrations came on Tuesday 31 May, with a twenty-one gun salute fired from Naval Hill, a fly past of more than one hundred aircraft, and speeches by politicians in the Stadium.⁶⁰

It was the last Union Day. 1961 was a year when Afrikaner nationalism achieved some triumphs. In February the currency ceased to be the Sterling Pound and the decimal Rand was introduced. In March the country left the Commonwealth of Nations, and on 31 May a Republic was declared. That was to be a public holiday, and on the previous day the entire St Michael's School, "hatless and veil-less, wound its way into Chapel" for a "short and impressive Service of Intercession" for the country, led by the Warden, Archdeacon Donald Bailey.

58 SMS, School magazine, November 1953, p.8

59 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Easter Monday 1957; SMS, School magazine November 1957, p.11

60 SMS, School magazine, November 1960, p.15-16, & p.28-30

Such changes must of necessity affect us all [wrote Miss Andrews], bringing as they do another way of life, but let us hold fast to the knowledge that '... behind the dim unknown Standeth God within the shadow Keeping watch above his own.'⁶¹

A development with great significance for the future began with an initiative from the Board of Governors of St Andrew's School in 1958, when they called in a professional fund-raising organisation, and invited St Michael's to join in. It was to the advantage of both Schools to work together, and a series of fund-raising dinners was held in cities and towns all over South Africa, wherever a nucleus of old pupils could help with the arrangements. The St Andrew's and St Michael's Schools' Trust Fund was formed in March 1959, with the aim of building up a large capital sum which could ease the financial burden of necessary renovations or new buildings. The needs of the two schools differed. St Andrew's had already spent a large amount of money on building a new chapel, new boarding hostels and a junior block. To do this they had mortgaged their property, and had a substantial debt to clear. St Michael's had not started on a renewal programme but required major improvements, the most urgent of which was a new and enlarged Junior Hostel. The Superior appointed a planning sub-committee, composed of leading citizens of Bloemfontein, to make recommendations to the Chapter.

The initial response to the appeal brought promises of nearly half the target amount. Only about one third of those had been received into the account when it was decided to dispense with the costly professional organisation, and to set up local voluntary committees instead, which would be tasked with personal canvassing of donors. Details of the Trust were published in the magazines of both schools. There was a Board of Trustees under the chairmanship of Mr L.H. Marquard, a well-known Bloemfontein businessman. A small central committee of four directed operations, assisted by a larger Planning Committee.⁶²

In anticipation that the Trust would be able to release enough money for a new Junior Hostel, alterations were made to the vacant house that had been St Faith's, and the Junior Hostel moved there at the beginning of February in 1961, so that the work of demolition

61 SMS, School magazine, November 1961, Foreword & p.13

62 SMS, School magazine, November 1959, p.8-9; November 1960, p.10-13

and rebuilding could commence.⁶³ It appears that work did not start at once. Donations to the Trust were coming in slowly and the proportion that would be available to St Michael's was insufficient to cover the costs. It had been agreed that because the fundraising efforts depended heavily on business contacts built up by St Andrew's Old Boys, 70% of the Trust would be available to that School and only 30% to St Michael's. Explaining that it was important for the two Schools to work together, Mr Walter Webber, Chairman of the Canvass Committee, said that "each gains indirectly from the strength of the other. Each would be weakened if the other falls." Some of St Michael's supporters began to talk of withdrawing from the Trust to do their own fundraising, but Mr Webber advised against this: they would have less prospect of success.⁶⁴ One result was the formation of "The Friends of St Michael's" in May 1964. Its aims were to give financial help to the School, to keep parents informed of developments, to discuss the common problems of parents, and to assist the staff. The Friends continued until 1968, and was succeeded the following year by the Ladies' Association.

The new Junior Hostel, built on the site of the old in Elizabeth Street, was ready for occupation early in 1965. During the delay, building costs had risen and a Bank loan was necessary to supplement monies drawn from the Trust, some from the School Building Fund, and sums made available by the Community. Fortunately, a substantial bequest was received from Miss E.M. Donald of East London, a retired teacher, and the debt was cleared.

While this had been in progress, St Michael's was visited by a representative of the Industrial Trust Fund, which had been established by some prominent companies, including Caltex and the Anglo-American Corporation, to assist private schools with facilities and equipment to enable them to teach the sciences adequately. They were willing to finance the building of a new laboratory. Their offer prompted the Planning Committee to look at a substantial re-ordering and re-building of the School. Some of their working documents survive. One headed "Some Thoughts on a Master Plan", dated 10.4.64, proposed building a new Junior School on the north side of Elizabeth Street, alongside the Junior Hostel then under construction, and rebuilding the Senior School on the south side of that street. Another (undated) paper lists "Needs of St Michael's School (in Order of Urgency)". The architect John Anderton was commissioned to make proposals and produced a comprehensive "Long Term Building Programme". This envisaged demolishing the Laundry and building a completely new Senior School

63 SMS, Old Girls' letter, 10 August 1961

64 SMS, School magazine, November 1961, p.9-10; November 1962, p.17-18; November 1963, p.10-11

facing on to First Avenue, as the first stage of a major programme of re-development. "It all indicates heavy expenditure," reads a report in the magazine. It indicated also many years of disruption. In order to be able to attract financial assistance, the Planning Committee considered that the School would need to have its own constitution and a separate governing body. Until this time, the governing body was the Chapter of the Community.⁶⁵

The author of the magazine article headed "Progress and Purpose", published in December 1964, is not named, but some of the wording is interesting because it foreshadows the separation of the School and the Community, even though it explicitly claims that the proposals "in no way" separate the two. Observe the opening paragraph, which states that St Michael's School was "founded by Bishop Webb in 1874, and entrusted to the care of the Community of St Michael and All Angels." In fact the two were founded simultaneously, integral to one another as part of the Bishop's mission strategy. Under "Re-adjustments" it is stated that

To make the way easier for future planning, the Chapter of the Community has formally given over to the School the Junior Hostel with the extra two erven involved, and also the western half of the existing grounds ... excluding the Olive Garden used by the Sisters. All this was owned by the Community.⁶⁶

There was as yet no Governing Body or School constitution: those proposals were still under discussion.

St Michael's School Council was established early in 1965 as the new governing body. There were sixteen members, under the chairmanship of the Warden, Archdeacon Bailey, and with Mr L. Henri Marquard as the Vice-Chairman. The Mother Superior and three Sisters represented the Community.⁶⁷ Very soon after the formation of the School Council, Mr Marquard put forward his suggestion of moving the School and Community to an entirely new site. On March 26, he addressed a special meeting of the Community and outlined his proposals. To rebuild on the existing site would require considerable fund-raising, which may not prove successful. Because of the spread of the city centre, the Community's rectangular block of land, bounded by Markgraaf Street, Elizabeth Street,

65 SMS, School magazine, December 1964, p.8-11. The Planning Committee papers referred to, including the architect's report and Minutes of the meeting on 2 September 1964, are in HPRA Wits, AB2644/47.

66 SMS, School magazine, December 1964, p.8 & 10

67 SMS, School magazine, December 1965, p.9 gives the membership of the School Council

First Avenue, and St Andrew's Street, had become very valuable. Its sale could bring a capital sum that would cover the cost of new land and modern buildings. One month later, the Community's Chapter assented to this proposal.

The Community, in spite of deep attachment to its old home, was unanimous in its approval of the plan. Regrets there must be, but our duty is clear. Our beautiful Whitefriars stained glass, our memorials, and all our worthwhile traditions will go with us.⁶⁸

Negotiations began with the City Council and other interested parties.

The scholars were probably not greatly aware of all that was going on, because the daily life of the School continued as usual. In 1964 the Recorder Club led by Sister Cuthberga had a successful year, and played some Elizabethan music on Speech Night; a new Debating Society was formed under the leadership of Sister Teresa Ruth; there was a successful Matric Dance; and the hockey team made a week-long visit to Durban to play against schools there. Good results were achieved in all examinations. The changes pupils noticed were to come with some staff changes. Miss Andrews, Headmistress since 1944, announced that she would retire at the end of 1965.

This place owes more to her robust and warm personality than it can probably estimate [read a tribute in the magazine], and her Speech Day Reports will long be remembered. She has fired many generations of pupils with the love of English literature.⁶⁹

Mother Mary Ursula resigned as Superior that December, and the following Easter, after having seen the junior boarders happily settled into their new Hostel, Sister Edith Agnes handed over charge to Sister Joan, and retired. Just a few months later, in December 1966, she died suddenly after a successful cataract operation.

The new Headmistress, Mrs Gallow, together with the new Superior, Mother Mary Ruth, were two of a five member Improvements Sub-Committee of the School Council, who decided on a "shake-round" of rooms in order to make conditions easier during the remaining years of life on the old site. Among the changes they made were that the

68 HPRA Wits, AB2644/85, Old Girls' Letter written by Sister Elsie, 18 July, 1966

69 SMS, School magazine, December 1965, p.10

Kindergarten classes and Standards I and II would use classrooms in the old St Faith's building, and the Kindergarten Hall would become the School Library.⁷⁰

The Senior Hostel also was to have a change of Sister in Charge. Sister Hildegarde retired in December 1967, after forty years of responsibility. Known to generations of boarders by the affectionate nickname "Quizzy",

in school her mode of discipline was entirely her own. A slight clap of hands from St Gabriel's office reduced pandemonium to peace, and there was always a welcome there.

Former pupils remembered chats in her office when they were downhearted, "home truths delivered with twinkling eyes to the wayward [and] her particular 'My dear!' that had a dozen interpretations." When she died in 1972, the magazine noted,

Her personal interest in generations of girls never flagged, and it followed them out into the world, their marriages, their children, their travels. By means of tireless correspondence she kept them in touch with St Michael's and with each other through the years. She loved their letters, their visits, and their babies.

Miss Leta Blake, head of the Music department for fifty years, retired in June 1968, but continued to live at the Lodge on St Michael's site until shortly before the School moved, when she relocated to Natal. Apart from her successful teaching, she had run the Music Club and inspired a lively interest in listening to and making music. The School lost another music enthusiast in 1969 when Sister Cuthberga died. She taught the junior children and introduced the recorder into St Michael's.⁷¹

Sister Cuthberga was still active when the magazine published a photograph captioned "Some of the Sisters Serving the School" in its December 1968 issue. There were seven: Sister Doreen Mary (Senior Hostel), Sister Cuthberga (Junior Instrumental Music), Sister Teresa Ruth (Vice-Principal, Careers, Senior Subjects), Mother Mary Ruth, Sister Ruth (Kindergarten), Sister Joan (Junior Hostel), and Sister Betty (Catering). Sister Doreen Mary's arrival enabled a new start to be made with St Michael's Guides,

70 SMS, School magazine, December 1966, p.15 Shake-round

71 SMS, School magazine, December 1967, p.13, Retirements of Sr Hildegarde and Miss Blake; December 1969, p.12 Sister Cuthberga; December 1972, p.9-11 Sr Hildegarde; December 1974, p.7-8 Miss Leta Blake.

the 4th Bloemfontein Company. Their outdoor activities included tracking and stalking on Naval Hill [in the Franklin Game Reserve]:

On one occasion the stalking must have been a little below standard as the 'sentry buck' took exception and chased us off. At least we showed him that our sprinting was well above standard!

The Guiding was helped further the following year when Miss Margaret Bailey, the Warden's sister, returned to head the Art department, and also took responsibility as Guider: "many of our more 'way out' ideas have originated with her." Miss Bailey was to design and construct the coloured glass windows at the porch end of the new Chapel. Among the news of Old Girls there is a mention of Sister Mary Joy CR (Joy Zeeman), who had been appointed as a lecturer in Grahamstown Teacher Training College.⁷²

School life continued as normal in the old St Michael's until the last day of term on Friday 11 December, 1970. The big move to the new buildings took place during the school holidays, and the next term opened there on 20 January, 1971.

Some of the pupils who moved with the School wrote their observations for the 1971 magazine.

Everybody left the old buildings with mixed feelings. In spite of the draughty rooms, falling plaster, the old school had an atmosphere of its own." (G.S.)

This morning my first lesson is on the ground floor. ... My next lesson is upstairs. ... The lesson after is downstairs again, whither we go. In the class a slight argument ensues on whether it is good for our frail bodies to rush in and out of the cold. The teacher unfortunately is not sympathetic. ... The fourth and last lesson before break is on this blithe morning upstairs again. ... The comparison between this morning and one in the old school is remarkable. In the old school we were pampered, and the teacher took the exercise ..." (S.E.)

Boarders had their own tales to tell.

One night during the week ... a boarder ... went along to the Laundry room to do her washing. She turned on the hot tap when all of a sudden the top

72 SMS, School magazine, December 1968, p.12, p.25, and p.51; December 1969, p.16 & 25

came off, flooding the room. Standards eights and upwards came to the rescue ... Water everywhere, down the corridor, down the flight of stairs, now beginning to fill the Crush Hall. (J.T.)

We spent the next hour or so pushing it out of the doors with brooms and towels. To the watchman gazing through the window we must have been a funny sight. Eventually most of the water was out. Exhausted, we went to our Nursing Sister for coffee, and then trudged up to bed.

This occurrence was one of many that made us feel more at home in our new school. It rather reminded us of the jugs we used to have at the old school, spilling water from them all the time. (R.D.)⁷³

The plumbing in the new buildings had many problems. When the workmen came to rectify them, they were invariably accompanied by the diminutive Sister Thirza, who was quickly nicknamed by the girls as “the plumber’s mate.” Mr David Jones, Principal from 1974 to 1985, recalled another contribution Sister Thirza made to the new School.

At some time shortly before the great move from town to the present site of the school, Sister Thirza went on holiday to Knysna and brought back with her a collection of acorns which she personally cherished in jam tins before planting them out as an avenue beyond the netball fields. We watched these tiny trees grow in her care into quite respectable ones by the time we left the school.⁷⁴

As we shall tell in Chapter 24 of this book, after successfully relocating the School, the Community came to the conclusion that they should withdraw and hand over all the teaching and hostel duties to secular staff. That was implemented during 1974. Two years later, it was realised that the Community’s lack of financial resources could result in the School’s closure, and ownership was transferred to the Provincial Administration. Both decisions were taken with the future well-being of the School as the first consideration.

We began this chapter with the resolve of Mother Frances (Harcourt Vernon) that St Michael’s School should recover after the losses incurred in the Anglo-Boer War. She gave it a distinctive identity of its own, standing before God. Her brother, the

73 SMS, School magazine, p.44-45

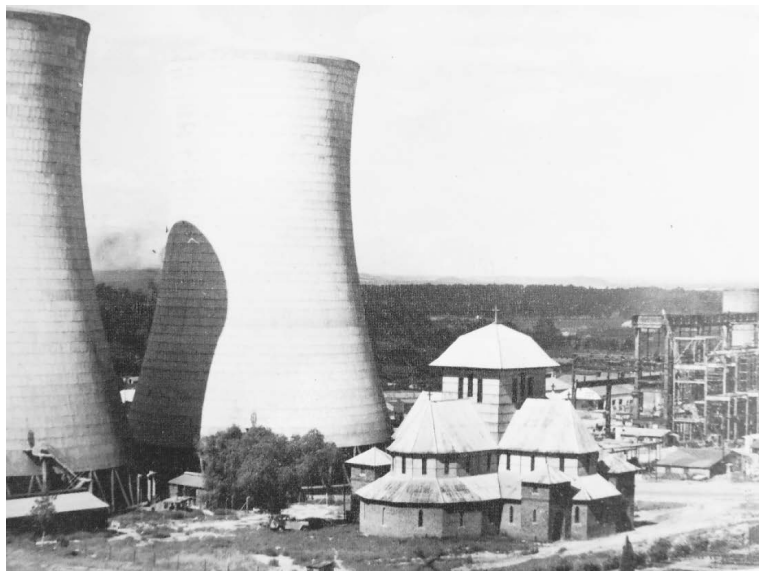
74 SMS, letter dated 10 March 2003 addressed to Mr Swart, on the return of the Sisters to the campus.

Revd Algernon H. Harcourt Vernon, had come from England to Bloemfontein in 1891 to join the Cathedral staff. Later he moved to the eastern Free State, serving as Rector at Clocolan and Ficksburg. After he died on December 15, 1936, his family remained in the eastern Free State. His daughter-in-law, Mrs Muriel Harcourt-Vernon, died in 1973 and left a substantial sum of money invested in a Trust Fund, specifying that the income should be used “to assist, finance and support St Michael’s School for Girls in Bloemfontein and St Andrew’s School for Boys in Bloemfontein”, as well as establishing several bursaries.⁷⁵ The Muriel Harcourt Vernon Trust today continues to help St Michael’s School. *Asto Ante Deum*.

75 SMS, School magazine, December 1973, p.17 reports the bequest. There is a copy of her Will in SMS.



St Michael's Chapel, Markgraaf Street, showing the stained glass windows installed in 1958.



The third St Patrick's Church, in Harvey Road, overshadowed by two cooling towers erected in 1951. This attractive building was demolished after St Patrick's moved to the centre of Mangaung in 1954.



Mother Mary Ursula, third Superior.

CHAPTER 19



UPHILL ALL THE WAY – FIFTY-TWO YEARS IN BASUTOLAND

When Bishop Gray made his Visitation tour in 1850, he passed close to, if not through, land claimed by the BaSotho nation. King Moshesh heard of his progress, and sent a message inviting the Bishop to visit him at his home. The King said that he would welcome missionaries from the “Church of the Queen of England” and would provide them with land and assistance. Gray was unable to take up the King’s invitation, but promised that the needs of the kingdom would not be forgotten. He made arrangements for two of the King’s sons to study at the newly-founded Zonnebloem College in Cape Town and one of them, Jeremiah, went on to St Augustine’s College in Canterbury. It had been hoped that he would return as a missionary to his own people, but unfortunately he died in England. Bishop Gray was good to his promise and asked Bishop Twells to visit the King as soon as possible after his arrival in 1863.

The King’s motivation was partly political. He had formed the BaSotho nation by bringing under his leadership and protection many small SeSotho-speaking tribes that had been displaced by the rising power of the Zulu nation under King Shaka. Moshesh ruled over a mountainous country. In the east, its borders with Natal and Zulu territory rise to 11,000 feet. The west, facing the Free State, lies at an elevation of between five and

six thousand feet above sea level. It is there that most of the population live. The Zulus were not the only threat. In the west the advance of Dutch settlers led to a series of wars in which the BaSotho lost much territory. In 1862 King Moshesh wrote to the British Governor at the Cape, Sir Philip Wodehouse, suggesting an alliance for mutual protection. With the Boers continuing to take land, a formal proclamation was issued on 12 March, 1868, declaring Basutoland a British Protectorate.¹ The western border with the Orange Free State was settled in 1869, to run along the Caledon River. Bishop Twells' visit to the King, in September 1863, thus fell in that period between the BaSotho appeal for British protection and its granting. The Bishop noted in his journal the King's words:

I consider myself a child of the Queen and wish to be under her. If I have English missionaries it will be easier to prove my sincerity and the state of affairs will be more secure. ... Go through my country, then tell me where you would like to live.²

There were already Christian missionaries in Basutoland. The Paris Evangelical Missionary Society had arrived as early as 1833, and the Roman Catholic Church began to establish itself in the centre of the country the year before Twells' arrival. Nevertheless, the King's invitation, usually quoted in the words, "Here is my country, it lies before you," opened the way for Anglicans. Bishop Twells conducted the country's first English Church service the next day, 27 September, 1863, in the presence of the King and his councillors. A French interpreter translated his sermon into SeSotho for the large and attentive congregation.³

Not until after the Missionary Brotherhood of St Augustine had taken up residence at Modderpoort would the next service be held. On 24 April, 1869, Canon Beckett travelled to Maseru to conduct a Service the following day for the Police.⁴ The occasional Services that he and other members of the Brotherhood held over the next few years were primarily for British administrators and traders, and there was still no ministry to the majority BaSotho population.

1 President Brand and the Volksraad of the OFS regarded the British annexation of Basutoland as a hostile act, illegal under international law and a breach of the Bloemfontein Convention, which they claimed gave them exclusive rights over Basutoland. Barlow: *Life & Times of President Brand*, p.78-93.

2 Quoted by Lewis & Edwards, p.395. See also p.394-95, 458. Also, Dove, *Anglican Pioneers in Lesotho*, p.6 & 9; and www.sahistory.org.za/place/lesotho

3 Dove, *Anglican Pioneers in Lesotho*, p.9; Lewis & Edwards, p.395

4 HPRA Wits, AB2259/Ga.1, Henry F. Beckett, Journal

Thanks to a grant from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, in 1876 it became possible for Bishop Webb to send two priests to Basutoland to establish missions. The Revd Edmund Stenson, who had been conducting an itinerant ministry in the country since 1875, was asked to make his base at Mohale's Hoek in the south, and the Revd John Widdicombe went north to Hlotse, in the Leribe district. There were some protests from the Paris Evangelical Mission that Basutoland was their field of work. Bishop Webb found it necessary to lay down some terms for his missionaries. They were to keep aloof from politics and were not to become involved in tribal issues; they were not to identify in any way with the British administration so that no one should think they were a department of the state; and they were to respect the labours of those missionaries already in the country, and to abstain from controversy.⁵ Good relationships developed later on, and Sister Mary Ruth noted that St Michael's School in Bloemfontein had the pleasure of educating daughters of the French-speaking missionaries.⁶

"It is grand, wild country up there;" wrote an Associate of CSM&AA, after she visited Leribe in 1877, "one seems quite close to the beautiful Maluti Mountains, and if only there were more water and trees the eye must needs be satisfied. The climate also is cool and healthy, and the land is fertile."⁷

Fr Widdicombe and his lay assistant, William Lacy, arrived at Hlotse Heights on 24 August, 1876, and slept in the open air between their luggage boxes until a rondavel was completed for them in November. By the beginning of 1877 a small iron-roofed chapel was almost complete, and Bishop Webb arrived to dedicate it on the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, 25 January. Accompanying the Bishop were Mother Emma and Miss Trench. Fr Widdicombe wrote of "a vivid recollection of the Mother kneeling alone between the services on the hardly dry mud floor in earnest prayer for the new mission." Canon Dove was told of her spending the whole of the previous night in the church in prayer.⁸

Just over a year later, Fr Widdicombe sent a letter for publication in the *Quarterly Paper*. He appealed for money to pay off the debt on the temporary buildings, and then continued by writing of future wants. The first two of those were,

1. A nursing sisterhood to take charge of the new cottage hospital which the government intends shortly to establish here.

5 Dove, op cit. p.14-17; Lewis & Edwards, p.458-459 and 464

6 Sr Mary Ruth, *Uphill all the Way*, p.4

7 QPBM no.43, January 1879

8 Lewis & Edwards, p.464-465; Dove, op cit. p.18

2. Sisters to establish and conduct a Boarding School for girls both European and Native. Only *women can effectually* reach the heathen women and girls of this country.

We want *institutions – training institutions* – conducted by earnest, self-denying women, who will be content with simple fare, but few home comforts, and a life almost entirely without romance in it. Such women, especially if banded together, could do a mighty work for our Blessed Lord here.⁹

It was an appeal for Sisters from Bloemfontein, but numbers in the Community did not allow the work to be taken up at that time. The Bishop, Mother Emma and Miss Trench had continued their tour through Basutoland, visiting Maseru and Mohale's Hoek. Fr Stenson felt forgotten in that out of the way place, and was much encouraged by the Bishop's visit.¹⁰

The number of converts at Mohale's Hoek far exceeded those at Leribe, and it was the former which was intended as the site of the Sisterhood's first missionary work in Basutoland. In writing "gladly and hopefully of our Sisterhood work" for the October 1878 Quarterly Paper, Bishop Webb told of two women already at sea on their way from Britain, two who were to sail shortly, and others he hoped to accompany in January.

We hope to begin new work at Thabanchu and Mohales Hoek. At the latter Mission we shall begin at once an industrial boarding school for native girls, in which Miss Williams will probably assist.

Miss Williams had worked in India, but her physician would not allow her to return to that climate. The plans to open the school were "again and again put off," and had to be abandoned altogether in July 1880 following the outbreak of the Gun War. The Community's Chronicle shows that Sister Frances Mary was to have taken charge. The Profession Register reveals that she was one and the same as Miss Williams, having been clothed as a Novice on 17 April, 1880.¹¹

The Gun War severely disrupted the missionaries' work. Fr Stenson and his wife took refuge at Wepener in the Orange Free State. The buildings he had erected at Mohale's

9 QPBM no.41, July 1878, p.8. His letter is dated February 20, 1878. Italics in original.

10 Dove, op cit. p. 20

11 QPBM no.42, October 1878, p.8-9; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i; HPRA Wits, AB2644/72

Hoek were all destroyed. Fr Widdicombe sent his helpers to the safety of the Free State but stayed at his post to minister to the troops, both white and black, and to the large numbers of BaSotho refugees who sought protection at Leribe. Sunday Services were maintained throughout the war.¹² Although there was a truce in 1881, it was not until 1884 that lasting peace returned to Basutoland, when colonial administration from the Cape was replaced by direct Imperial rule. Only after that could the Missions begin the task of rebuilding. New centres were opened up.

Thirty years were to elapse before new plans were made for the Sisterhood to work in Basutoland. The mission stations were hardly back on their feet when the whole region was disrupted by the cataclysmic events of the Anglo-Boer War. As a separate British Protectorate, Basutoland was not part of that conflict, but letters published in the *Quarterly Paper* reveal the financial impact and tell of many refugees from the Orange Free State, and also of wounded and sick troops being received into temporary hospitals at Mafeteng.¹³

On May 10, 1910, a Chapter Meeting was held at the Mother House in Bloemfontein to consider a request received from Archdeacon Balfour that the Community should go to work in northern Basutoland, making their base at Hlotse Heights, “where a furnished house was ready for their use.”¹⁴

The house had been built in 1885 as the Rectory for St Saviour’s Church, and Fr Widdicombe had rejoiced at having enough space after nine years of living in cramped huts. He gave up the house in 1894 so that it could become a small college to train young African Christian men as schoolmasters. A beginning was made in September with six students, and early in 1895 the Bloemfontein Diocesan Synod approved the Statutes of the College of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Hlotse Heights.

Candidates for admission to the College must be unmarried, at least 16 years of age, and Communicants of the Church of the Province ... of good report ... [who] who have given good evidence of their intention to devote themselves to teaching, and to such other church work as may be hereafter assigned to them ...¹⁵

12 Dove, *op cit.* p.33-40

13 QPBM no.128, April 1900, p.59-60, letter from Canon Widdicombe; no.129, July 1900, p.122-124, letter from the Rev Spencer Weigall.

14 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii

15 BDA, Resolutions of Diocesan Synod 1895.

The College was part of Fr Widdicombe's dream of spreading a Christian influence far and wide through the country, calling many to faith. There were several changes of Principal, with no-one staying for more than three or four years, and this led to the closure of the College in 1906, the same year that Fr Widdicombe resigned for reasons of age, after thirty years at Hlotse. The failure of one project opened the way for another to take its place. In 1910 the house became St Mary's Home, a branch house of St Michael's Sisterhood.¹⁶

The invitation to the Sisters had come from Archdeacon Francis Balfour, who lived in two rondavels at Hlotse. He was priest of nearby Sekubu and was appointed additionally as Archdeacon of Basutoland in 1906. In 1911 he was consecrated as the first Assistant Bishop of Bloemfontein, with special care of Basutoland.¹⁷ He continued to live in his rondavels.

There may be somewhere in the records of the Church in South Africa something to indicate whether the timing of these moves by the Church was a response to political changes. The Orange River Colony was granted internal self-government by Britain in November 1907, and on 31 May, 1910, was merged with the three other British colonies (the Cape of Good Hope, Natal, and Transvaal) to form the independent Union of South Africa. There were moves to incorporate Basutoland into the Union, but those were resisted successfully by the BaSothos. A 1909 proposal to create a separate Diocese had failed to attract sufficient support but, by appointing an Assistant Bishop with special care for Basutoland, the Church was recognising that the Kingdom was likely to develop differently from the surrounding country.¹⁸ The British administration had never allowed permanent white settlement in Basutoland. The Sisters would help to build a strong indigenous Church, as they had already been doing in Kimberley and at St Patrick's in Bloemfontein.

On 1 December, 1910, Sisters Julia and Marion with Novice Martha left Bloemfontein to take up residence at Hlotse. It was planned that they should work not only at the Home and surrounding mission buildings, but also visit in fourteen villages of the Leribe district, some of which could be reached only on horseback. Their first task had to be learning the SeSotho language. In time they became very proficient in the tongue, as recalled by the BaSotho Sisters many years later.¹⁹ They gradually picked up the work that was to be done, and were helped greatly by the Catechist Andrew, who had been doing

16 Lewis & Edwards, p.468-471; Dove, op cit. p.130. Canon Dove gives the year of closure as 1907.

17 Lewis & Edwards, p.473; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, records his selection as Bishop in 1910.

18 See Dove, op cit. p.191-195

19 Under African Skies – 50 Years in Lesotho, p.30, *CHN Newsletter* 2013.

his best to work among the women. After seeing the new venture established, Sister Julia returned to Bloemfontein, leaving Sister Marion as Sister in Charge. Canon Widdicombe thought that the Sisters' arrival was the answer to his prayers of many years, he told a visiting Associate, who wrote of her impressions for the Quarterly.

The best of foundations were being laid by friendly visits to heathen and Christian alike in the location near the Mission House, and in the villages for many miles round: the picturesque villages of round huts with their low walls of red sun-baked clay, and thatch of reeds, nestling on the sides of the rugged brown hills. The people are friendly and pleased to be visited: they seem glad to have someone to care sympathetically for them, to ask about the children, and take an interest in their concerns: they soon understood that the Sisters had come to try to help them.²⁰

Visiting all the villages involved crossing two rivers, only one of which had a bridge across it. The Sisters told of receiving a warm welcome.

The longing of many of the children to be taught is as touching as it is astonishing. The little girls of one village, whose costume for the most part was grass fringes sewn on to beaded belts, begged a disused hut from the chief's wife, 'smeared' it inside and out, and then greeted the Sister with, 'Here is our school, please a teacher.' The little bairns love pictures. As the Sister was showing them 'Christ blessing little children,' a disappointed little voice said, 'They are all white children'; and the explanation that they were Jews did not satisfy that longing little heart.²¹

The Sisters took the opportunity to give religious teaching in the villages they visited.

The Religious Instruction Class formerly held at Ntjama's Village has been given up in favour of a class at another place, where a very elementary School has been started. One little girl from this School was baptised at Christmas, and two others have come forward for instruction. The Sister was returning last week from this Class, accompanied as usual by a dozen or so of girls, when she saw a solemn party ahead; eight or more small herd boys standing by the path. They don't *generally* stand so quietly, and a moment after there

20 QPBM no.174, October 1911, p.154

21 SMS, ECH Report for 1911, p.14

was a yell from a girl who had nearly trodden on a snake curled up on the path with its head raised. Of course it was *dead*. The boys, so seemingly innocent, were waiting to see what the girls would do; and it is hard to say what they did *not* do. They shrieked, and chased each other with the snake, and jumped and capered about as African boys and girls *can* do.²²

One room in St Mary's Home became a dormitory for four BaSotho girls, one of whom helped around the house, another was homeless, and the other two were children of Christian parents who lived far away from the Church and school. The parents paid for their daughters' care in kind, providing mealies, joints of lamb, and bags of meal. The "very charming" elder of the two, a twelve year old, was being prepared for Baptism; the other was already baptised. A larger room was used for innumerable classes of girls and women: teaching catechumens, preparing candidates for Confirmation and First Holy Communion. At Michaelmas 1911 there was a large meeting.

Fresh work among the women was initiated by a meeting to explain the Mothers' Union (of which there are already four native Branches in Basutoland). In spite of the busy harvest-time, about 60 women gathered to hear an address from an English speaker, translated into SeSotho by Andrew the Catechist. Bishop Balfour, Father Deacon, and Mrs MacGregor, wife of the Resident Magistrate, also spoke, and afterwards, at the Bishop's invitation, two of the women spoke, very easily and fluently, to the effect that they felt they had been to blame in not bringing up their children better, and would welcome the Mothers' Union that had come to help them. ...

This beginning has been well followed up. The women come to a weekly meeting, when they listen to an address and have intercessions and the Mothers' Union prayer, which has been translated into SeSotho. They are still on probation, but it is hoped to admit some of them as members shortly. Meanwhile, they show their interest in Church work by helping to sweep the Church for Sunday, washing and mending surplices and cassocks, etc.

22 SMS, ECH Report for 1912, p.15

Thirty-two members were enrolled in 1911. The Sisters found the weekly meetings very helpful in their work, “for they lead to confidential talks, in which ‘come out’ the troubles and grievous temptations of those who live in heathen surroundings.”²³

Canon Weigall, Director of the Mission at Masite, where he had a training school for young men, visited the Sisters in November, 2012, and asked them to take older girls as boarders and to train them in industrial work. “The Clergy think we can do more good by influencing a few who live with us, than by having many large classes, as then we only see them on their best behaviour.” The aim was to teach them cooking, laundry, house work, and sewing, including how to make their own clothes. In the evenings they would have lessons in school subjects, up to the level of Standard IV. By 1915 there were twelve girls from distant villages living in the house, and sponsorship was being sought to cover the costs of keeping them. Sister Frances Louisa had encouraged schoolgirls in Dublin to adopt one girl in 1912, and the need was kept in the minds of supporters in Britain.

The Revd H.V. Hughes and the Revd P.E. Trevamley have each undertaken to support a girl at St Mary’s Home by weekly collections at the Bible Classes of their respective companies of the London Diocesan Church Lads Brigade.

After this 1915 entry in the Community’s chronicle, another hand has added, “Later Dom Anselm Hughes.” Fr Hughes would have been interested in the Mission by his sister, who had been clothed as Novice Margery Angela on 22 November, 1913, and probably spent part of her novitiate at Leribe. Arrangements for the girls had changed by 1917, when we read that they attended the Government day school in the mornings, and had the other teaching in the afternoons. Weaving had been added to the subjects at the Home. “They are taught to be steadfast, good Christians with the hope of their being missionaries to their own heathen villages when they return.”²⁴

A priest from the Universities Mission to Central Africa, Fr Robert Keable, took over at Hlotse in January 1915. Two years later he wrote about the Sisters:

Officially the Hlotse Sisters have a boarding school for about fifteen African girls, who are taught daily at the ordinary African school, and in addition have the advantage of the home life of St Mary’s, with certain tuition in

23 QPBM no.174, October 1911, p.154-155, written by an Associate after a visit; SMS, ECH Report for 1911, p.14

24 SMS, ECH Report for 1912; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1912, 1915, 1917.

sewing and weaving – the latter a new energy of the Sisters. Practically, however, they do about two thirds of the work of Hlotse parish besides, and work of such a kind that, as one with a right to speak, I cannot exaggerate it. The sick in the hospital, the poor white folk, bed-ridden African women, cases whom they regard as hopeless, and the outlying villages – all these are regularly visited. One Sister teaches in the white school in the week. Another Sister is Sister sacrist in the church; and the Guild of the Children of Mary, of which she is warden, under her direction, does work for the house of God that makes ministry a real joy. Their personal work among women and girls is generally felt throughout the whole parish and the Home itself is all that such a home should be, but there is still a side of their activity not mentioned. Whenever special prayer is wanted – by the bedside of the dying, or in chapel, for this or that particular need – as at all times they are true Sisters at St Mary’s. I have no doubt at all that it is to their prayers that the parish owes its life today.²⁵

Shortly before the Sisters’ arrival at Hlotse in 1910, a daily Mass had been instituted in St Saviour’s Church by Fr Norton SSM and Fr Haynes SSM, who had taken charge of the Mission in 1908.²⁶ They left soon afterwards, and the Mission had several changes of priest. Bishop Balfour was at hand to cover vacancies. The daily Mass was in SeSotho. As the work of St Mary’s Home grew, the Community sent other Sisters and Novices, Associates and workers, to help as necessary. Their names are not all recorded in the Community’s papers. Some of the temporary workers found it “rather trying” to worship in a language they did not understand, and it was a great help to them when a weekly English language celebration was started in the Sisters’ Oratory in 1912.²⁷ Leribe always had some Services in English to provide for the resident colonial administrators and traders, and their children attended a Sunday School run by the Sisters and helpers of St Mary’s Home.

“Heavenly strings surely drew Sister Marion to Hlotse Heights,” wrote Sister Mary Ruth. Marion Rooke was born in 1873 as the youngest daughter in a family of nineteen children. Her father was Vicar of the country parish of Rampisham in Dorset. From a

25 Quoted by Dove, *op cit.* p.149

26 The presence of SSM at Leribe was one factor in CSM&AA’s acceptance of the invitation to work there, as Sr Marion told Fr Dove. Dove, *op cit.* p.148

27 Dove, *op cit.* p.147, 150; SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, Leribe, 1924-1962, p.2; SMS, ECH Report for 1912, p.15

tender age she expressed a desire to become a missionary in India, but was dissuaded from that idea. As a young woman, she was cycling through the countryside and stopped to enter a church. The Rector was there and he invited her in to tea. They discussed books and missionaries, and when she was leaving he lent her a copy of Fr Widdicombe's book, "Fourteen Years in Basutoland", which described his early work at the Mission. From the time of reading that book, she felt an irresistible call to work in Hlotse. Bishop Hicks was in England at the time, and Marion Rooke managed to get an interview with him. She was too young, he told her, and Hlotse was no place for a single woman. He invited her to go instead to Bloemfontein and to work with the Sisterhood. Subordinating her personal wishes, she did so. She sailed from England in 1899, and that year we read of her working with Sister Helen at St Patrick's Mission in Bloemfontein. She became a Novice in 1901, and made her profession on the eve of St Peter's Day, 1903. When the Community was called to work at Hlotse, she was one of the first chosen to go there. It was to be her home for the next fifty-one years. A capable horse-woman in her younger years, she was able to ride out to remote villages to teach Sunday schools and visit homes. In Lent she would walk to villages to show lantern slides of the life of our Lord, often walking back along the rough tracks at night.²⁸

With the work in the Leribe district going so well, it is not surprising that in 1914 the Community received a request to send Sisters for parish work at Maseru. The Chapter met on 14 April. No Sisters were available and so two of St Michael's Associates were sent, Miss West and Miss Lindsay. The following year they were joined by a Lady Worker supported by the SPG, Miss Elwes, perhaps a daughter of the honorary Treasurer for the English Committee of Help, the Revd Edward Elwes. In a letter written to her parents in October 1915, she described Maseru, the capital town of Basutoland, which

consists of five shops, a bank, a post office, Parliament buildings, hospital and English Church. Just outside the town is the prison. The native church of St James is built of stone, with a corrugated iron roof, and it is situated on the top of a high hill, commanding splendid views in every direction. Just below, approached by a steep stony path, is our little mission house – very ugly outside but most cheery and cosy inside. It is built of unbaked brick, painted dark red and has a corrugated iron roof. There are eight white, stone steps leading up to the front door. The house consists of three bedrooms, a sitting room, and a nice back passage. The kitchen is a

28 Dove, op cit. p.149-150; Sr Mary Ruth, *Uphill all the Way*, p.5; HPRA Wits, AB2644/51. Sermon preached by Canon Dove, 10 June, 1962, on the last Sunday of CSM&AA at Leribe; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i.

separate building just outside the back door. There is a nice garden, sloping down the hill ... several peach, plum, apple and pear trees.

Their garden adjoined the premises of St Katherine's Girls' Industrial School, which was under SPG supervision. The St Michael's Associates worked in St James' parish.

However, we work together to a certain extent and have all our meals together at St Katherine's, which saves us a lot of trouble and expense.

It was probably because of that working together that Canon Dove appears to have been slightly confused as to who was who.²⁹

St James' Church had been established largely through the efforts of Deaconess Maria Burton, the former Sister Maria CSM&AA. She left the Community to work full-time at St Philip's Mission, supporting herself by giving music lessons. A holiday in 1890 in Maseru at the invitation of Lady Lagden led her to think of working among the BaSotho in the town, for whom there was as yet no provision. With the encouragement of Bishop Hicks, she moved there in 1893, taking charge of the European Day School. That provided her with a base and small income and enabled her to start work among the local population. By "sheer persistence and devotion" the "saintly and heroic" Deaconess was able to establish a school and church. She travelled to England to raise funds to build St James' Church as a memorial to Bishop Hicks.³⁰ It was to become the seat of the Bishopric when the Diocese of Lesotho was founded in 1950.

The CSM&AA Associates took over work that Deaconess Maria had been doing. In 1914, one of them wrote a brief description of their very busy Sundays. Rising at 6, they attended a celebration of the Eucharist at 6.45 am, had a break for breakfast, and then at 9.30 were back in Church ready to teach the Sunday School, a Catechism Class and a Men's Bible Reading Class, which used a SeSotho translation of the New Testament. Perhaps the writer had not been long in Africa, because she observed,

One of our difficulties is to get the adults and children to come in time for their classes: they do not trouble much about time.

At 11 o'clock there was Mattins, followed by a Confirmation Class at 12 noon taken by Miss West. She had learned to read the Catechism in SeSotho before her arrival, and

²⁹ Dove, op cit. p.180-181, where he quotes Miss Elwes' letter.

³⁰ Dove, op cit. p.124-128

within a year was competent in the language. At 1.30 pm there was a Women's Guild meeting, and Evensong followed at 2.30 pm. This was held early because a large number of the congregation had many miles to travel (probably on foot) to get to their homes before dark. After the Evensong congregation had left, the Associates visited in the prison, where a class was conducted for a group of about twelve women.³¹ During the week they had another full programme, as outlined by Miss West in a letter for the supporters in Britain. There were daily Bible lessons with children in the African Day School, and they taught needlework to the girls; for a time Miss West served as Head Teacher. Most afternoons there were classes in Church for various groups of adults and children: penitents on Tuesdays; hearers (pagans interested in knowing about faith) on Wednesdays; women Communicants on Thursdays; Catechumens on Fridays. Monday afternoons were used for hospital visiting, when they spoke with everyone whether Church members or not. In addition, the Associates visited in villages round about Maseru, giving special attention to the sick and elderly, and to mothers of new babies: at the time the custom was that the mother did not leave her hut for three months after giving birth.³²

After Easter 1920, Sister Alice and Sister Ella took over from Miss West and Miss Lindsay. Sister Alice spoke SeSotho and taught most of the classes. Sister Ella, who knew Dutch, could teach only with the help of an interpreter. That made some difficulties in School: "Fancy teaching needlework through an interpreter!" she commented. They ran Guilds: Holy Cross for Communicant women and St Agnes Guild for Communicant girls. These helped in the practical work of the Church, keeping the building and robes clean. Sister Alice did the visiting in villages, "some of which are only a few houses perched up among the rocks. To some she goes on horseback, sometimes she has to walk up mountains, leading her horse."³³

Unfortunately, the Mission House was starting to fall down. Many bad cracks had developed; the end gable was falling out, pulling the rest with it; and it was propped up at the side and front. "It is a question whether we shall be able to live in it much longer." SPG had been asked for a grant to build a new house, but it seems that was not forthcoming in time and the Mission had no money. At the end of the year the Sisters had to be withdrawn: the house was too unsafe to live in.³⁴

31 SMS, ECH Report for 1914

32 SMS, ECH Report for 1920, Letter from Miss West, p.13-17

33 SMS, ECH Report for 1920, The Mission House, Maseru, p.12

34 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1920

Back in Bloemfontein, Miss West was clothed as a Novice in October 1921, and some years later returned to Basutoland as Sister Margaret CSM&AA. At Leribe she was appointed as Principal for a new Intermediate School which opened in January 1928. This was to provide for girls who had passed Standard Three and had to leave the Mission School: it started with about thirty pupils. She was taken ill very suddenly and died in Leribe Hospital ten days later, on the eve of the Ascension, 1928. The government took over the School the following year, and Sisters and Workers taught handwork, dancing, First Aid and games.³⁵

Sister Marion's work at Hlotse was almost brought to an end in 1923 by serious illness. She had to be taken to Bloemfontein for major surgery, and for some while it was doubtful whether she would be able to return.³⁶ The "heavenly strings" were still attached, and there was a special work she had to do. It came out of the blue. Mother Mary Ursula wrote a vivid account.

In the year 1923 on a Saturday afternoon, the Revd Adam Lawton and his wife were just walking out of the Rectory gate at Mοhales Hoek, South Basutoland, to go and play tennis with some friends, when they saw a party of Africans approaching them. These people had come from one of the mountain outstations and they announced that they were bringing a girl to 'work for the Church.' The 'girl' was easily distinguished from the other women of the party, for they were wearing the many voluminous petticoats of the married woman (not so common today) which gave a crinoline effect, while the girl wore the straightly hanging plain cotton dress of the unmarried. She was in her latter twenties and at that time it was rare for any woman of that age to be single. There were not the nurses and teachers of today who often marry later; most girls married in their teens. Fr Lawton suggested that they might have friends in Mοhales Hoek and could stay for a few days while the matter was discussed, but this did not fit in with their plans at all. 'Oh, no,' they replied, 'she wants to work for the Church and we have brought her. We are going home.' They went, leaving the girl, Susanna, behind. The Lawtons talked the matter over and finally wrote to Sr Marion at Leribe in North Basutoland. They were very favourably impressed by Susanna's behaviour, her wish to work for the Church seemed to be genuine,

35 SMS, ECH Reports for 1928, p.15, and 1929, p.9

36 Dove, op cit. p.149, FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, May 6, 1923

she was able to sew, and seemed as if she would have a good influence over younger girls; could Sister make use of her at S. Mary's Home, Leribe? So it was arranged and Susanna went to Sr Marion and made herself very useful indeed.

One thing might have presented difficulties – lack of some companionship with anyone of her own age, also unmarried, but Flora Zyantlo, still living with her parents, and about the same age as Susanna was introduced to her and the two became friends; Susanna spent her free afternoons with Flora and they met on Sundays after Church. Things went on like this for some time and then one day Susanna returned from her afternoon with Flora and said to Sister Marion, 'Flora Zyantlo wants to cry when I come back here.' Sister Marion was quite annoyed and enquired why ever Flora should be so silly considering she saw so much of Susanna. Susanna replied, 'I do not think it is about me that she wants to cry, but she wishes she were here.'

The Religious Life was so utterly foreign to the ideas and customs of the country that it did not dawn on Sister Marion that African girls might be desiring it. Meanwhile Flora confided in her father, a good Christian man who had tried (as was the custom of the country) to arrange a marriage for Flora, but had not persisted when she was utterly averse to the idea. One day he called on Sister Marion and after some preliminary talk about the weather or the crops, asked her if it was possible for African girls to become Sisters. 'I expect they could, if they wanted to,' replied Sister, 'but I don't suppose any of them do.' 'Oh, yes,' he replied, 'my daughter Flora does.'³⁷

Sister Mary Ruth adds the information that Flora had been one of the first girls to live with the St Michael's Sisters at St Mary's Home, and had cherished the thought of the Religious Life in her heart for five years before she spoke with her father. We have also from her a different spelling of Flora's second name – Ziyandlhu.³⁸

The desire for the Religious Life by these two young women appeared to be genuine and persistent, and the St Michael's Sisters had to find a way of responding to it. They were aware that there was already a small community of Black women at Tsolo, in the Eastern Cape. That had come into being after Alberta Ngudle had arrived at St Cuthbert's

37 SMS, Typescript, The Beginning of the Society of S. Mary at the Cross, by Mother Mary Ursula, 1957

38 Sr Mary Ruth, *Uphill all the Way*, p.13

Mission in 1914, expressing her wish to live the Religious Life. There she was trained by brethren of the Society of St John the Evangelist and Sisters of the Community of St Mary the Virgin, who had been working at St Cuthbert's since 1904 and 1905 respectively. With her profession in 1919, the Community of St John the Baptist came into being.³⁹ In June 1924, Sister Marion travelled to St Cuthbert's to see that Community and to consult with the Cowley Fathers and Wantage Sisters. Their advice was that it would be best to form a separate BaSotho community, adapted to the culture and customs of the country, but affiliated with the Community of St Michael and All Angels. With the consent of Bishop Walter Carey of Bloemfontein as Visitor, a preliminary Rule and Constitution were drawn up. Given the circumstances in Basutoland at the time, these were simpler and briefer documents than those of CSM&AA itself.⁴⁰

The archives include some undated notes from Fr Godfrey Callaway SSJE (who had been part of an unsuccessful attempt to form a men's community at St Cuthbert's) in which he commented on the preliminary documents.

I like the tentative Rule for the native noviciate and I think it is simple and well adapted for a beginning. It naturally pre-supposes a good deal of teaching to go along with the Rule and some sort of provisional Constitution.

Part of the interest of Fr Callaway's notes is that he conducted the Community's Retreat in Bloemfontein from 5 to 10 July, 1924, and may well have been in attendance at the Annual Chapter which followed, to share his experience. The Sisters in Chapter were asked if the Community was ready to undertake the training of African women expressing a desire for the Religious Life. The Chronicler wrote that the responsibility was accepted without dissent. On the title page of a handwritten Provisional Constitution, Mother Frances noted that the Community undertook "testing, training, and care."⁴¹ This development came in the Golden Jubilee year of St Michael's Sisterhood.

Agreement having been given, on September 14, Holy Cross Day, Flora Ziyandlhu and Susanna Motsamai were formally admitted as Postulants. Each was given a cross to wear and they took up residence in a newly constructed rondavel, close to one occupied by Sister Marion. Mother Frances chose the dedication of the new Community – the

³⁹ See www.mthatha.anglican.org/CSJBCentenary.html and www.csmvonline.org.uk/history

⁴⁰ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, June 1924; Sr Mary Ruth, *Uphill all the Way*, p.13

⁴¹ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 5-10 July, 1924; SMS, Provisional Constitution for the Society of St Mary at the Cross. This appears to be incomplete, as if another page is missing.

Society of St Mary at the Cross. Perhaps because the two young women had been waiting some while, they were kept as Postulants for just four months before being clothed as Novices on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2 February, 1925. The Service took place in St Saviour's Church. On the preceding Sunday, the parish priest had explained to the congregation what was to take place and its significance. On the day there was a large congregation. Bishop Haynes, Assistant Bishop of Bloemfontein, was there, and so was Mother Frances. At the end of the ceremony, the congregation streamed out to greet and congratulate the two Novices. Flora's father brought a whole sheep to be roasted at St Mary's to celebrate the occasion.⁴²

Under the Provisional Constitution, the Object of the Society was to give African women who felt called to lead a dedicated life an opportunity of answering to that call under their own conditions of life. The lives of the Sisters were to be spent in prayer and works of mercy among their own people. Their Superior would be appointed by the Reverend Mother of the Community of St Michael and All Angels, which was responsible for training the Sisters in the Religious life, and for their care after Profession. The Diocesan Bishop would be Visitor, unless he declined, and the Visitor would appoint a Director for the Society, preferably a Religious, with the consent of the Superior. Aspirants had to bring a letter from their home church, some proof of their age, their Baptism and Confirmation certificates, and the written consent of their parents or guardians. Postulancy was to last for nine months, and the Novitiate for four years, after which there would be three years in annual vows. Life vows could not be taken until a Novice had attained the age of thirty years. The reason for this last condition, and for the necessity of parental consent, was that in BaSotho society at that time it was the custom that fathers arranged marriages for their daughters.

From the beginning, the aim was that the new Society should live the Religious Life within BaSotho culture, and not separate the Sisters from it. Habits and veils would be worn, but these were to be simpler than those of the St Michael's Sisters.

The habit worn by the Sisters of the Society of St Mary at the Cross was a dark blue garment, a brown mohair girdle, a copper pectoral cross bearing the letter M, and a black veil. The Novices wore white veils and buff-coloured habits, postulants in blue.⁴³

42 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 2 February, 1925; Sr Mary Ruth, *Uphill all the Way*, p.13

43 Sr Mary Ruth, *Uphill all the Way*, p.16

The brown girdles were made from goats' wool, washed, spun and made by the Novices themselves.

As already mentioned, the first two Novices lived in a rondavel, where they slept on grass mats, as they would have done in their parents' homes. Others were soon attracted, and by January 1926 it had become necessary to build a dormitory, which was divided into cubicles. By the time the first two Novices were ready to take their first vows, there were two other Novices and two Postulants.

The only day that Bishop Carey of Bloemfontein could manage for receiving the professions was St Valentine's Day, 14 February, 1929. Mother Frances was unable to attend, and sent Sister Margery Angela to represent her. The Profession Mass began at 9 am.

Leribe was full of interest for the Bishop was there. Father Woodward SSM, Director of the BaSotho religious order, was to celebrate, and Sister Flora's old father was present, and made his Communion with his daughter whom he had so willingly given to GOD. It was before a large congregation in the beautiful parish Church of S. Saviour that the Profession took place, and a few Europeans as well as many Africans witnessed the dedication of the lives of these two women to GOD. The service was in SeSotho although explanations were given in English to enable the Europeans present to understand. It was most impressive as such a service always is to those who have the faintest conception of its meaning, but in this case it was perhaps more impressive than usual, for these are the first two of their people who belong to the Anglican branch of the Church in Basutoland to take such a step. ...

When the Profession was over the new Sisters with their fellow novices and postulants had a simple feast provided by the relations and friends. Sister Flora's father gave mutton, another relative milk, and the Assistant Commissioner's wife a cake.⁴⁴

When Sister Margery Angela returned to Bloemfontein on 4 March, she took Sister Flora with her to greet Mother Frances and the Sisters at Bloemfontein. It was Sister Flora's first train journey and her first visit to a large town, and to the Community's Mother House.

⁴⁴ SMS, leaflet, *Society of S. Mary at the Cross*, published in 1929 to mark the Professions.

She stayed with a friend in the Batho district, but arrived at St Michael's in time for the morning Mass and spent a whole day with the Sisters. "We are so glad to think that she is our fellow Religious," reads the commemorative leaflet, before printing a poem written for the occasion by Sister Mary Ursula.

She came and knelt before the Altar rail,
 Our new brown Sister in her new black veil,
 And I, beside her at the Holy Board,
 Saw two brown hands stretched out to take her LORD.

Just two brown hands – yet, LORD, I seemed to see
 A million poor brown hands stretched out for Thee.
 A million empty hands held up to plead
 A longing, an unutterable need.

"How long," their silence seemed to cry, "how long
 Shall we, Thy poor brown children, suffer wrong?
 O Unknown GOD, come down and set us free
 From shame, injustice, heathen misery.

"We feel that Thou hast made us, hear our cry.
 We faint for Thee, O feed us, lest we die.
 Have we no portion in the Children's Bread?
 For with Thyself alone can we be fed."

Then through the silence, calm and sweet and clear,
 The answer came, "My children, I am here,
 And she who now stretched out for Me, her hand
 Shall bear Me with her to her native land."

Just two brown hands – alas, what can they do?
 But Thou canst save by many or by few,
 And who can say what yet may be the part
 Of one who bears her LORD within her heart? ⁴⁵

Sisters Flora and Susanna made their Final Profession in life vows in 1932. Again the Mass was in S. Saviour's Church and their vows were received by Bishop Walter Carey, the Diocesan and Visitor. The letters SMMS used after the names of Sisters of the Society of

45 SMS, leaflet, *Society of S. Mary at the Cross*, 1929; printed also in ECH Report for 1929.

St Mary at the Cross came from the SeSotho translation of that name: Selopha sa Maria Mohalaleli Sefapanong.

Weaving had been introduced at St Mary's Home in 1917, and in May 1924 that led to the formal creation of a Weaving School. A stone house was given by Chief Jonathan, and Lady Garraway gave financial help to purchase looms. By Michaelmas there were three looms and ten spinning wheels.⁴⁶ After completing a training course in Natal, Sister Susanna was put in charge of this school. A teacher recruited from England conducted experiments in making dyes from local plants and lichens, which produced deep browns, greens and yellows. By 1933, twelve or fourteen girls worked there regularly making blankets for sale: most had left school and it was hoped that the skills they were learning would enable them to start home industries to support themselves. The blankets were made on rough wooden frames which the girls would be able to make easily in their own homes. That year there were twenty-eight boarders at St Mary's Home, and nineteen day girls who attended the Intermediate School in the mornings and went to the Home in the afternoons to join the dress-making and cookery classes. A Lady Worker, with the help of the African Novices, ran four detachments of Wayfarers and two of Sunbeams: these appear to have been similar to Girl Guides.

One girl has recently been with the Sisters to be educated for matrimony, and another in order to escape matrimony! In the first case the girl's future father-in-law paid her fees in order that she might be given religious teaching and learn the domestic arts before she married his son, a Catechist. In the second case, an old girl came running up one day, saying: 'Take me back! I've no money! A man with five wives wants to marry me, and I'm a Wayfarer!' Sister Marion took her back, reminding her that she was also a Christian, which was a decided bar to becoming a sixth wife, but the fact that she was a Wayfarer seemed to weigh more heavily with her.

Mission work goes on as usual; there are now six Sunday Schools running in different out-stations, and every Thursday Sisters go to a large village to teach the heathen children of that neighbourhood who are too small to come to school. One child rings a bell and the others come running up from all directions. There are fifty on the roll.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Sr Mary Ruth, *Uphill all the Way*, p.10

⁴⁷ HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1933

Under Sister Marion's leadership and guidance – she had been appointed as Sister Superior for the new Society – numbers grew but many came and went.

Some found the comparative security attractive or wanted education. Others misunderstood the demands of this vocation. Most of this was understandable and without blame; one or two ran away, not knowing how else to terminate the situation. Others got married. One story relates how a young woman, having got her parents' consent, started out on her journey to Leribe to join SMMS. On her way across the mountains she encountered a young man's 'fancy' and changed her course. Quite right. It says much for the stability of the older Sisters that they weathered some rather sad defections.⁴⁸

There was, though, a steady growth, and more accommodation was needed if that was to be able to continue. An appeal was made to Communities in Britain and twenty-eight of them contributed funds towards the costs of building a large Oratory and a block of six cells. These were completed and blessed in April 1933.⁴⁹ Contacts with other Communities were important for encouraging the new Sisterhood. The Revd Augustine Moeka from the Sekhukhuniland Mission conducted the Sisters' Retreat in January 1933, and the following year invited them to attend the Profession of the first four Sisters of the Daughters of Mary, a new Community under formation in Sekhukhuniland. Sister Marion took Sisters Mary Blandina and Evelyn, both in first vows. They travelled north via Bloemfontein, staying overnight at St Michael's Home on 19 June, 1934.⁵⁰ It is interesting that they stayed at St Michael's. When Sister Flora was the first BaSotho Sister to visit the Mother House, she was there in daytime only and slept in Batho. The Community were very favourably impressed by her, and no doubt her visit broke down any reservations that may have existed on either side. After the overnight visit of the two Sisters in 1934, it became the normal practice for any St Mary at the Cross Sisters travelling through Bloemfontein to stay at St Michael's.

By 1935 the Society of St Mary at the Cross had nine members: two life professed Sisters, two in annual vows, three Novices, and two Postulants. This increase in numbers

48 Sr Mary Ruth, *Uphill all the Way*, p.16-17

49 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1932, has a list of the Communities who contributed – 2 men's and 26 women's, including two who were to go to Basutoland in later years, the Community of the Holy Name and the Society of the Precious Blood.

50 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 19 June, 1934; SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.4

enabled the opening of a branch house, and in February 1936 two of the Sisters went to Teyateyaneng, where there was a very large congregation under the care of Fr William Wrenford SSM. In retrospect, the new Sisterhood was not yet strong enough to open branch houses, and this one had a short lifespan. Fr Wrenford wrote:

[The Sisters] began work here on Thursday the 13th of February 1936 – Sister Flora and Sister Anastasia. The next morning being a first Friday a Votive Mass of the Sacred Heart was said and afterwards their little Convent was blessed and dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. On Thursday March 10th, 1938, Sister Flora was recalled to Hlotse to take charge and Sister Ana took her place later. Sister Ana's health gave in (TB) in 1940 which meant that they could spare no other Sisters to take her place – so they withdrew after 4 years and 6 months here. They have been very useful here in keeping the Church and Altars – some classes and other things. It is very sad that they have to go. They hope sometime to return.⁵¹

The House at Leribe had been reduced by the death on 2 April, 1936, of Sister Susanna. One of the foundation Sisters, her health had never been very strong, but self-forgetfulness and service marked all that she did. She died from heart trouble in the Leribe Hospital, and it was reported that her last word was 'Alleluia!'⁵²

It seems that there were only three of the BaSotho Sisters at Hlotse for much of 1939. Sister Mary Blandina was away at College studying for a Kindergarten Teacher's Certificate, and previously Sisters Monica and Evelyn had been sent to St Catherine's, Maseru, for a course in Domestic Science, so that they could obtain certificates enabling them to teach in the Housecraft School that was planned for St Mary's Home.⁵³ To help maintain the life, it was arranged that a fourth Sister or a Novice from Bloemfontein would always be at the Leribe house.

The St Mary's Housecraft School was an idea of Sister Marion. Almost from the beginning of CSM&AA's time in Hlotse they had provided boarding accommodation for girls from outlying areas who attended S. Saviour's School in the mornings and had needlework and handicraft lessons from the Sisters in the afternoons. In 1937 the Government opened an Intermediate School a little distance from St Mary's, taking the three top years away

51 Quoted by Michael Houghton in *SSM at TY (1904-1975)*, p.51

52 SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.5

53 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1939; SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.6

from S. Saviour's, which was left with the Primary pupils only. This created some practical difficulties for running St Mary's Home, and Sister Marion applied to the education authorities for permission to open a school which would take pupils through to the Standard VI examinations – the same level as provided for by the Intermediate School. Permission arrived on 30 May, 1937, and a beginning was made that August. Sister Marion Faith, who made her first Profession in CSM&AA on 9 March, 1940, was sent that year to teach at the School. She had qualified as a teacher at Whitelands College in London. In 1941 she became Principal of the Housecraft School. We read of thirty-eight girls at the School in 1942, twelve of whom passed the Standard VI examinations in Housecraft and four passing in academic subjects. Of those leaving the School, two went on to train as teachers, and two as nurses. Owing to food shortages, the Housecraft School closed with the end of term in December 1945, and remained closed for the whole of 1946.⁵⁴

It was a custom among the BaSotho to give nicknames to people according to their character or things they did. In another chapter we shall tell of Sister Margery Angela, who became a stalwart of the work at St Patrick's Mission in Bloemfontein, and who was known as Ma Thapelo – Mother of Prayer. Sister Enid became Ma Mohau – Mother of Mercy. Sister Henrietta Theresa, serving as relief for a Lady Worker at Thaba Nchu in 1910, was given the task of examining a large number of candidates for Baptism and Confirmation, and decided that many were not ready – with the result that she was given the name Ma Kottholo, Mother of Judgement.⁵⁵ Perhaps it was because Sister Marion Faith was the Sister in Charge of the School that the girls nicknamed her "Sister Moshesh". She returned to the Mother House in Bloemfontein to make her Life Profession in 1943. Such is the way of things that the date chosen was the feast of St Gregory the Great, 12 March. In Basutoland that was Moshesh's Day. A former pupil wrote to her, "We called you Sister Moshesh, and now you really are."⁵⁶

The Superior recorded that,

after three years of praying and striving, Sister Marion had the great joy of being present at the blessing of the new church at Majara on May 16 by Bishop Stainton. After many difficulties the congregation of this distant outstation have rebuilt and refurnished their church. Sister Marion with Sisters Flora and Anastasia left Leribe at 7 am on Saturday and got back at

54 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, p.185, Mother Superior's Letter dated 7 August, 1937; vol.iii, p.97, Superior's Letter dated 29 July, 1946; SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.6,10

55 QPBM no.168, April 1910, p.58-59

56 SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.8

7.30 pm on Sunday. We felt we could really see the three Sisters climbing a precipitous path up a hill, led by a man on a pony, and Sister Flora, though almost entirely breathless from the climb, trying hard to convert their guide who was a heathen, while Sister Anastasia with more breath but less power of exhortation, was trying to help by shouting aloud to the man what Sister Flora gasped out.⁵⁷

The work of the village outstations continued to be an important feature in the life of the two Communities at Hlotse. Working with the clergy, an interesting scheme was started in 1943. Mountain village women were recruited to be Sunday School teachers, and very simple lessons were prepared and sent out to them. They were invited to attend a four-day Teachers' Conference in July 1944, which included a Quiet Day and demonstration lessons. Accommodation and food was provided at St Mary's Home.

This [Conference] was not intended for day school teachers but for those voluntary teachers (mostly young married women) who have undertaken to give religious instruction to the little children in the villages in Leribe and Tsikoane districts. Three priests gave the addresses and lectures, Father Charles Martin SSM, the Rev F. Findley and the Rev M. Mohaleroe, and Novice Benigna (of the African Sisterhood) and Misses Pule and Lepele gave the demonstration lessons. Thirty people attended the conference (and also three babies who came with their mothers) and Sister Marion writes that the lectures were excellent and led to much useful discussion.

It was hoped that the conference would become annual. It is not recorded if it did, but a refresher course was held at the Home in December 1947.⁵⁸

On 23 August, 1944, a month after that conference, there was "a grand strategy meeting" at the Home to discuss young aspirants gathered by Fr Patrick Maekane MBK. Patrick Maekane had come into contact with the Religious Life through the ministry of Fr William Wrenford SSM at Teyateyaneng, and had gone to the SSM's Provincial House at Modderpoort in 1926 with the intention of testing his vocation. It was decided there that a separate African community for men should be established, and the Company

57 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's Letter, 24 July, 1943; SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.8

58 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, p.54, Mother Superior's Letter dated 21 July, 1944; HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1947.

of the Servants of Christ was formed in 1928, with Patrick as one of its two postulants. He was clothed as a Novice in 1929 and, after training by SSM, took simple vows in 1932. He was ordained priest in Bloemfontein Cathedral in December the same year. After four years at St Luke's Church in Ficksburg, in 1940 Fr Patrick and the brothers he was gathering around him were sent to live and work at Masite. That was a well-established Mission, with schools and a teachers' training college. In charge of the hostel for women students was Mary Magdalen Monyane, an Associate of the Society of St Mary at the Cross. She had asked to join the Society several years earlier, but had been refused because she was lame. Her sense of vocation persisted, and in 1942 she returned to Hlotse and was admitted to the novitiate. Also clothed as a Novice that year was Fr Patrick's sister, Margaret Maekane. In the Company of the Servants of Christ, Fr Patrick and Brother Benedict made their life Professions in 1942, but their Community did not succeed and was formally dispersed by the Bishop in 1952. However, from 1943 onwards, young women had begun to go to Masite seeking to live the Religious Life. Fr Patrick gave them a simple Rule and the group became known as the Handmaids of Mary Mother of Mercy. He sought their affiliation to the Society of St Mary at the Cross, but many of them were very young and did not have their parents' consent.⁵⁹

This is the background to the "grand strategy meeting". Mother Mary Ursula from Bloemfontein was there, together with Fr Amor SSM, Fr Patrick Maekane MBK, Brother Benedict MBK, Sister Marion CSM&AA, and the professed Sisters of St Mary at the Cross, Flora, Anastasia, Monica and Anna. In her annual letter written on 26 July, 1945, Mother Mary Ursula addressed the question of admitting girls as young as sixteen or seventeen as Postulants. Until that time there had been very few aspirants under the age of twenty-one, and none of those had stayed. While the coming of young girls was a cause of hope and thankfulness, there were practical considerations. Many years would have to elapse before they could be professed, during which time they would be an expense to the Sisterhood, which would have to teach and train them. She continued,

While they clearly feel that God has called them to this life they have little or no knowledge or experience of what such a call involves, and possibly may not persevere in the face of inevitable difficulties; also parents may consent to allow their daughters to remain for some years where they are fed and clothed and taught various useful things, and may then arrange marriages for them.

⁵⁹ Mason, *History of the Society of the Sacred Mission*, p.209-210; Sister Theresia Mary SPB, *Father Patrick Maekane MBK*, p.6-11; SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.7-9

The result of the strategy meeting was that two SMMS Sisters, Anastasia and Monica, went to live for a time at Masite to get to know the Handmaids. Working with Fr Patrick, they selected some of the young women to test their vocations at Hlotse. Sisters Marion and Margery Angela CSM&AA visited them at Masite in late July 1946. Those of the Handmaids of Mary Mother of Mercy who were not permitted to test their vocations at Hlotse remained at Masite, and they prepared the way for the Society of the Precious Blood to send Sisters from Burnham Abbey to open their own Community House at Masite in 1957.⁶⁰

Mary Magdalen Monyane made her first Profession in 1946 and became Sister Magdalen SMMS. She use to call herself “the broken sheep,” having been lame since the age of twelve, when she contracted serious blood poisoning in her left foot and lost the use of her left arm at the same time. Her only method of getting about was by a series of hops, or by helping herself along by holding on to furniture. After an Orthopaedic Surgeon was appointed to Bloemfontein’s National Hospital, in June 1947 Sister Magdalen was invited to go to stay at St Michael’s Home, and taken to see him. He was able to provide her with special boots, a calliper for her lame leg, and a stick, and she stayed at the Mother House while she gained confidence in learning to walk. Encouraged by this, the Superior sent for Sister Monica from Hlotse, who had been club-footed from birth. The Surgeon, Dr Nico Louw, operated on her to reconstruct her feet. She stayed in hospital for four months, because each foot had to remain in plaster for two months after its operation. The costs were met with help from the Surgical Aid Society. The operations were successful, and Sister Monica stayed at St Michael’s to recuperate until returning to Hlotse at the end of March 1948, wearing surgical boots but able to walk normally. In January that year, Dr Louw operated on Sister Magdalen’s lame shoulder and arm, and was able to restore them to perfectly normal use. “We do not know how to thank Dr Louw sufficiently for his amazing skill and great kindness,” wrote Mother Mary Ursula. The two Sisters wrote short articles describing their impediments, operations and recoveries for a publication called “Cripple Care.” These were published in SeSotho. Both Sisters urged parents not to neglect taking their children to doctors, as theirs had done.⁶¹

Mother Mary Ursula told of the interesting way in which Sister Magdalen gained confidence to walk without using a stick. While she was at St Michael’s, in August and

60 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, 1945; SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.9-10; Sr Theresia Mary SPB, *Father Patrick Maekane MBK*, p11 and 21-32

61 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Superior’s Letters dated 25 July, 1947 & 16 July, 1949; SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.11-12; *Uphill all the Way*, p.18. English translations of the Sisters’ stories are in HPR A Wits, AB2644/55

September a number of the school girls were ill with measles and confined in the Infirmary under Sister Enid's care. Seeing that Sister Enid could use some help, Sister Magdalen turned to, squeezing oranges, disinfecting and washing all the Infirmary crockery, carrying jugs and pails up and down the passage, with no time to think about herself, her leg or her stick, "always bright and happy and useful. Long before the measles abated, she could walk confidently, and the stick was a thing of the past."⁶²

Both Sisters had to make periodical visits to the National Hospital for check-ups and would stay at St Michael's for a few days. On one winter visit, Sister Magdalen went with Pauline, the Infirmary Maid and an old girl of St Mary's Home, to spend a whole Sunday at St Patrick's Church. They were taken out there in Sister Enid's donkey cart, but by the time they were to return it was dark and the donkey cart could not be used, having no lights. They caught a bus back into central Bloemfontein and had to walk from the bus station to St Michael's. Mother Mary Ursula related,

This was all right for Pauline, but Sister Magdalen walks very slowly. I happened to be walking along the path outside our north wall at about 6.20 pm when a rather ramshackle car stopped and a fair-haired young man assisted Sister Magdalen and Pauline out of it. I naturally went up to thank him, but he made nothing of it at first, apologising for the poor condition of his car. It appears he is a chef, recently come to work in Bloemfontein. 'I saw them struggling along,' he said, 'and I thought it would be doing a bit of God's work if I offered them a lift.'⁶³

Sister Marion CSM&AA, as Sister Superior, wrote of increasing numbers in the African Sisterhood – they reached sixteen in 1947, four of whom were in life vows, two in temporary vows, and the remainder as Novices and Postulants. "With such an influx, though we are glad to have them, there are two difficulties." The first was that most of the new recruits arrived with "a very scanty wardrobe and supply of bedding," and the second was that the sleeping accommodation at Hlotse was very inadequate. It was decided to convert the chapel into an open dormitory for the younger Postulants, and to build a new detached Chapel. Measuring 24 feet by 18 feet, with a 9 foot Sanctuary apse, when this building was nearly complete the African Sisters scoured the neighbourhood for the right coloured clays to smear the walls pale grey and pale pink. The Bishop arrived

62 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, undated insert, probably 1948, refers to the operations as "last year".

63 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's letter 29 July, 1956; and quoted by Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.16; *Uphill all the Way*, p.18-19

to bless the Chapel on 31 October. With more Sisters to support, additional means of earning money were being explored, and two of the Sisters took a dressmaking course, while another went to teach in the Mission School. Weaving continued to provide their main source of income. In 1953 they started making wafers, to supply churches, and the following year began making cassocks and vestments. As numbers continued to grow, branch houses were opened. By 1949 and 1950 we read of three Sisters at Sekubu, north east of Leribe, and of two at Makhoa. A new rondavel was built for those at Makhoa in 1950, and Fr Mohaleroe, Director of S. Saviour's Mission, arranged a lorry to take most of the Sisters to attend a special service of blessing for their new House. In the villages, the Sisters were engaged in teaching and visiting. The house at Sekubu was given up in 1952, "chiefly on account of transport difficulties," but a new one opened at Maseru. Fr Mohaleroe had been transferred to St James, Maseru, and invited the Sisters to work there. Unconsciously, the Society of St Mary at the Cross was taking over work done previously by CSM&AA. In 1956 the house at Makhoa was given up and two Sisters transferred to Teyateyaneng, where they took over the Girls' Hostel for the school being run by the SSM Fathers. Among those who went to Hlotse to join the Society in the 1950s were two women who had been working as domestic staff at St Michael's Home in Bloemfontein, and three women from Zululand. In 1957 there were three Novices, all of whom were Zulus. They started basket-making, which was a help to the finances because it was becoming more difficult to sell woven goods.⁶⁴

St Mary's School (which had been forced to close in December 1945 because of food shortages) re-opened in 1947 on a new basis. There had been discussions with the Bishop and the Education Department, which provided a grant. SeSotho was no longer used and all teaching was to be done in English. The range of subjects was changed: out went the Housecraft subjects of Cookery and Laundry, and in came spinning and weaving, practical housewifery, hygiene, elementary physiology, simple First Aid and mothercraft. By 1949, cookery had been re-introduced and was the School's "chief attraction." Lessons in Arithmetic were limited to gaining speed and accuracy in the four rules, simple bills and measurements. The emphasis of the two-year course was very practical – "its object is chiefly to help prepare them to be good wives and mothers." On re-opening in 1947, the intention was to limit the number of students to twenty, both because it was the largest workable number for the spinning room, and to try to keep a homely atmosphere. All the students were boarders. Unfortunately, in that first year of the new arrangements,

64 HPR A Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1949 (p.10), 1950 (p.10), 1953 (p.10), 1954 (p.10), 1957 (p.11); AB2644/85, Old Girls' letters 17/7/1952, 10/7/1953, 30/7/1955; SMS, Old Girls' Letter 29/7/1956

when twenty-one girls had been accepted, some apparently changed their minds without notifying the Sisters, and only six pupils turned up. Others arrived during the year and they finished with fourteen. Numbers went up and down in subsequent years: there were twenty-four in 1949 and only thirteen in 1953. The Education Department did not like the limit on numbers, but does not appear to have objected to the requirement that pupils must belong to the Anglican Church. Sister Marion Faith continued as Principal, assisted by BaSotho Sisters, and also by a series of lay women helpers. Two of those went on to join CSM&AA: Violet Sparrow, who had been a SPG missionary at Holy Cross in Pondoland, was assisting at Leribe in 1949; and Doreen Ball, formerly teaching at St Catherine's, Maseru, was there in 1956. Sister Marion Faith made a one day visit to the Superior in Bloemfontein in 1957 "to talk over information given by Fr Ambrose SSM." We are not told what that information was. They decided that the School should close at the end of 1957, and the first year pupils would be encouraged to transfer to St Catherine's at Maseru. Sister Marion Faith revealed,

We have known for some years that the Education Department considered it a waste of money to aid our small school when so few girls really wanted the course. We fought for it because we realised the importance of training even a few girls to be the wives and real home-makers of priests, teachers, and other educated men. When we decided to close, both the Education Department and the English Church Mission were much relieved and quickly made plans for the disposal of our grant. It would pay for two primary teachers with large classes.

It was planned to re-open as a hostel for girls attending either S. Saviour's School, just outside the gate, or the Government Intermediate and Secondary Schools a mile away. With the closure of the School, St Michael's Community would no longer need to keep a qualified teacher among its number at Hlotse.⁶⁵

1950 saw the creation of the Diocese of Lesotho. At the end of that year John Maund, its first Bishop, entered the territory by way of Ficksburg. He was met by horsemen near Tsikoane and rode up to Hlotse Heights on a white horse. This may have indicated changes to come.⁶⁶

65 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1947(p.12-13), 1949 (p.11), 1953(p.11), 1954(p.11), 1957(p.12-13); BDA, Old Girls' Letter, 26 July, 1951; SMS, Old Girls' Letter, 29 July, 1956; HPRA Wits, AB2644/64, typed notes dated 1/8/57 headed S. Mary's School, Leribe

66 SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.12

John Maund had served as a Chaplain to the South African Armed Forces during the Second World War, and was awarded the Military Cross for his services at Tobruk. Subsequently he returned to Pretoria, where he had been working before the War. He was consecrated in Cape Town Cathedral on 19 November, 1950, and enthroned at Maseru on 11 January, 1951. Sisters Marion and Zita Mary CSM&AA, and most of the St Mary at the Cross Sisters attended.⁶⁷ Now that the Protectorate was detached from the Diocese of Bloemfontein, the new Bishop became Visitor to the Society of St Mary at the Cross. In her history of the Society, Sister Mary Ruth states that it was in 1952 that the Bishop's interest in the Society was "clearly aroused." Together with Fr Amor, Provincial of SSM and Director of SMMS, Bishop Maund visited St Mary's Home on 25 April that year. Mother Mary Ursula went across from Bloemfontein for the occasion.⁶⁸

The next direct contact mentioned by Sister Mary Ruth was on 17 August, 1954, when the Bishop blessed the new Oratory in the Sisters' House at Maseru. Thereafter there was much more interaction. On 2 February 1955 he received the Final Profession of Sister Janet in the Chapel at Hlotse; and on 6 December 1956, that of Sister Callista in S. Saviour's Church, before a large congregation. He conducted an informal Visitation of the Society on 12 February, 1957, and was back on 3 June to receive the Life Profession of Sister Alfonsina in the Society's Chapel, and on 9 September for that of Sister Frances. It was by the Bishop's decision that the Branch House at Maseru was closed on 21 February 1958: one of the Sisters withdrawn from there left the Society, pregnant. On 8 December that year the Bishop presided at the Life Profession of three Sisters, Frangeni, Hilda and Adelaide. We highlight these contacts because Sister Mary Ruth wrote that "meanwhile and for some time the future of the Society had been under discussion," but there is nothing in the records to indicate that the Mother Superior and Chapter of CSM&AA were part of that discussion or "close scrutiny."⁶⁹ In the absence of the Chapter Minute Books we cannot be certain, but what was to transpire in 1959 seemed to come as a surprise to them.

Sister Marion CSM&AA celebrated her Golden Jubilee of Profession on 28 June, 1953. She had been working in Leribe since 1910 and, as Sister Superior, had overseen the formation of the BaSotho Sisterhood. The Provisional Constitution for the Society of St Mary at the Cross made no mention of an Annual Chapter, and none appears to have been included when that document was revised lightly in 1951.⁷⁰ It was not until

67 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, 1950 and 1951

68 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, 1952, April 23 to 9 May, Mother Superior at Leribe

69 SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.13-18

70 HPRA Wits, AB2644/55

3 September, 1956, that the first Annual Chapter was constituted. Fr Duncan Watts SSM was in the chair and Mother Mary Ursula CSM&AA was present. Sister Marion as Sister Superior was there, and all six SMMS Sisters who were in Life Profession: Flora, Anastasia, Monica, Anna, Magdalen, and Janet.⁷¹ It was an important step towards the Society taking more responsibility for its own affairs. By the time the Chapter of 10 October, 1958, met, Sister Flora had died, and Sister Janet had left the Community, but Sisters Callista, Alfonsina and Frances had made Life Professions. Fr Watts was again in the chair. This Chapter revealed some unrest. Sister Anastasia asked that a Sister of CSM&AA be appointed to assist Sister Marion because of her increasing age [she was by then 85] and because of her failing eyesight. Three others spoke in support of this and emphasised that they had great affection for her and were not intending any criticism of her leadership. But there was criticism to come. Sister Frances asked why they had to do the CSM&AA Sisters' washing. Sister Magdalen asked why a junior Sister was in charge of the Branch House at Teyateyaneng, and proposed that she should be recalled and replaced. Sister Alfonsina asked why the Society received no payment for the work of the Sister in Charge at Teyateyaneng. "Sister Alfonsina said that the daily diet of beans and samp was monotonous, and asked that once a week there should be a change. Her request received the general support of the Chapter." And it was Sister Alfonsina who asked why there were no beds for the Sisters to sleep on: they had built up platforms of bricks in order to raise their mattresses from the floor, but this was unsatisfactory. "Sister Marion said that in the early days of the Community, the Sisters slept on the floor without complaining, but one of the Sisters pointed out that since those times, sleeping in beds had become a more common practice among the BaSotho."⁷²

Sister Marion was a loving and dedicated person, and totally committed in her calling to build up the BaSotho Sisterhood. But times were changing: education and greater prosperity were transforming the country. A new Africa was emerging. Perhaps that is also why the number of applicants for St Mary's School had dropped off before it was closed: the course it offered was ceasing to be appropriate for the times. After St Mary's became a boarding Hostel for the other Schools, the number of applications grew, and many came from within the Union of South Africa, "partly because the education of Basutoland is far superior to that of the Union Bantu Education Act."⁷³

71 SMS, Typescript, Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.15

72 HPRA Wits, AB2644/55, SMMS Chapter Minutes, 10 October, 1958

73 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1960, p.11

The question about the food did not go away. Sister Zita Mary CSM&AA, who had been at Leribe since the beginning of 1954, in September 1960 wrote to Sister Enid in Bloemfontein to express her concern, after she became aware of unhappiness and tensions in the relationship between Sister Marion and the SMMS Sisters. Two of the latter had spoken with her together, saying that they were hungry and not getting proper food to eat, and that Sister Marion became upset when they mentioned it. “I do think their food needs looking into,” wrote Sister Zita Mary; “the SMMS are working hard and need good food.”⁷⁴

Bishop Maund was aware that the times were changing. In 1955 the Basutoland National Council asked the United Kingdom Government for self-rule. It led to a new Constitution being drawn up in 1959, and the election of a legislature the following year. It coincided with the time when South Africa decided to become a Republic and to leave the Commonwealth. Basutoland was to have an elected Black Government, while in surrounding South Africa the White Government was to impose an ever stricter segregation of the races.

In 1959, Bishop Maund went to England, and on 7 August visited the Community of the Holy Name in their Convent at Malvern Link in Worcestershire. Addressing them after Vespers in their Chapel, he appealed to that Community to go to his Diocese and to take over responsibility for the Sisters at Hlotse. He told them that he was approaching them before any other Community because he had been ordained in Worcester. For CHN it was a good time to be asked. They had been thinking about withdrawing a group of their Sisters from Liberia, where they were working with the American Order of the Holy Cross. They were inspired by the Bishop’s description of Leribe and “then and there determined to help.”⁷⁵

Bishop Maund may not have known that there had been some contact in the past between the CHN in Liberia, CSM&AA and SMMS at Hlotse. Sister Monica Mary CHN, Superior of their Liberian Mission House, stayed at St Michael’s in Bloemfontein in June 1942, and Father Parsell OHC visited Leribe when on furlough in South Africa. He described the Society as “like Bethlehem” in its poverty and simplicity.⁷⁶

74 HPRA Wits, AB2644/64, Letter dated 4 September, 1960. It is interesting that these papers have been preserved in the archive, which had been sorted and pruned substantially before being lodged.

75 Sr Marjorie Jean CHN, The Community of the Holy Name comes to Leribe, attached to Sr Mary Ruth’s Society of St Mary at the Cross, in SMS archive.

76 Dunstan (ed), *What’s in a Name: A History of the Community of the Holy Name*, p.147, gives the year of Fr Parsell’s visit as 1940. FSA, A510 White Book I, vol.iii, records Sr Monica Mary’s arrival on 3 June, 1942. Mo. Mary Ursula wrote on 21 July 1944 that Fr Parsell visited “two years ago,” which would be 1942. The world being at war, it seems likely that Fr Parsell and Sister Monica Mary travelled from Liberia to South Africa together.

On his return he interested his people in the Sisters, thinking it good for them to form a link with another mission, and [a donation of money] arrived as a result of their Christmas and Eastertide offerings for the Sisters. [Mother Mary Ursula had] received a letter from the Sister Superior in which she mentioned that Sister Flora's letter of thanks was hanging up in the Church porch.⁷⁷

After his return to Basutoland, Bishop Maund wrote to Mother Mary Ursula, asking if he might call on her in Bloemfontein to discuss SMMS affairs. He did so on 30 September, 1959.⁷⁸

He stated that he felt sure that in view of the trend of things in this country they must have behind them a Community whose Mother House was in England.

He continued by telling her of the contact he had made with the Community of the Holy Name, and of their willingness to have four African Sisters, who would be selected by himself and Fr Watts SSM, at their Mother House, "with a view to actually joining CHN."

In two years' time the CHN Sisters would come over to Leribe and take charge, those able to keep the CHN Rule would join that Community – those not able to (probably the 4 eldest) would be looked after by CHN as long as they lived. The Bishop wanted to go with Fr Watts to Leribe on Oct. 8th to discuss the matter with Sr Marion and SMMS, would I write and prepare her – which I did, mentioning the names of the 4 whom the Bishop said were likely to be those chosen to go to England.

It is clear that this was all news to Mother Mary Ursula. The Bishop presented her with a *fait accompli*. Clearly he and Father Watts had been discussing things for some while before the Bishop travelled to England, and had decided to leave CSM&AA completely out of their confidence. Perhaps he thought they would oppose his plan. Even at this stage the Bishop by-passed Sister Marion, who was constitutionally Sister Superior of the Society of St Mary at the Cross.

⁷⁷ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, p.55, Mother Superior's letter dated 21 July, 1944.

⁷⁸ Mother Mary Ursula typed notes of that meeting and subsequent developments. The quotations which follow come from her notes. HPRA Wits, AB2644/55.

On Sunday, Oct 11th. I received a letter from Sr Marion, posted on the Friday morning. The letter was written partly on the 8th & finished early on the 9th. She concluded by saying that she must post the letter now to catch the day's mail, but had as yet no information from the Bishop or Father Watts, though they had 3 sessions with SMMS on the 8th.

The Superior called Sister Marion to Bloemfontein to discuss the matter, and to get advice from the Warden and the Bishop of Bloemfontein. Sister Marion arrived on Monday 19 October, and she and Mother Mary Ursula met with the Warden, Archdeacon Donald Bailey, on Tuesday, and with Bishop Bendyshe Burnett on Wednesday. The plans would have come as a surprise for both of them also. As recently as 16 July, 1959, when he delivered his Visitation Charge to CSM&AA, Bishop Burnett said:

I should have thought that you ought to make the Mother House as strong as possible and then make your main work Leribe.⁷⁹

There was little that could be done other than accept what Bishop Maund had arranged with CHN. As Sister Marion said to the Sisters of SMMS: "We had no say at all about it ... the matter is out of our hands." There were some details that needed attention. The Bishop and Fr Watts had been advising Sister Marion to maintain the Branch House at Teyateyaneng, where three SMMS Sisters ran a girls' hostel for SSM's St Agnes School, and to reduce the work at Leribe. Mother Mary Ursula did not agree.

[The Bishop] and Fr Watts are looking at things from a different point of view from that of Sr Marion and myself. [They] are chiefly concerned with the carrying on of what they consider the most important part of the work SMMS have been doing in Basutoland. We are concerned with their Religious Life and the preparation for the great change they must face in the future. Those who go to England will have to adapt themselves to utterly new conditions; those who remain must uphold the life and work of their Mother House and live and work together if they are to make their contribution to what the future holds for them.

Mother Mary Ursula wrote to the Bishop of Basutoland on 22 October, 1959, and told him that the three Sisters working at Teyateyaneng would be withdrawn at the end of the school term in December.

⁷⁹ The Bishop's Charge is in HPRA Wits, AB2644/54.

It seems to me very necessary from a Community point of view that, as they are losing 4 picked members for the next 2 years, during this period the remaining SMMS members should be all together.⁸⁰

The Superior of the Community of the Holy Name, Mother Audrey Mary, wrote to Mother Mary Ursula on 6 November:

We feel it a great privilege – as well as a tremendous responsibility to be asked to try to continue the wonderful piece of work your Community initiated in Basutoland.⁸¹

In 1960, the four Sisters, Alfonsina, Hilda, Adelaide and Gertrude, travelled to England, where they were admitted as Novices in the Community of the Holy Name. It had been agreed that, as a preparation for becoming full and equal Sisters of that Community, the SMMS Sisters would serve a two year novitiate to learn the traditions and customs of CHN.⁸²

At Hlotse, the life and work of the Sisters continued. Because Sister Marion's health was failing, it was considered unwise for her to remain in Basutoland, with its very cold winters. In 1961 she returned permanently to Bloemfontein. Canon Dove, Rector of Leribe, wrote of her:

Her influence over the lives of many hundreds of BaSotho cannot be measured but it was great and it was largely through her care and sympathy that the Religious Life among African women was begun in the Anglican Church at Hlotse. Sister Marion was approached about accepting an OBE from the British Government but she declined it as being inconsistent with the humble life of a Sister.⁸³

Sister Marion Faith took over as Sister in Charge of the Mission. Life went on. In the BaSotho Sisterhood new Novices were clothed, a First Profession was made, and other Sisters renewed their annual vows. The work of the House continued, and the boarding Hostel was very full. But it was an interim period, marking time. Outwardly, life was not changed, but everyone was aware that major changes were imminent.

80 There is a copy of Mother Mary Ursula's letter to the Bishop of Basutoland in HPRA Wits, AB2644/55.

81 Copy of her letter is in HPRA Wits, AB2644/64.

82 Dunstan (ed), *What's in a Name?* p.195

83 Dove, *Anglican Pioneers in Lesotho*, p.150

On the last Saturday before the CSM&AA Sisters were to leave, a surprise party was held in the schoolroom. The headmaster of S. Saviour's School was in the chair, and Canon and Mrs Dove were there, as well as several old girls of the school. "Many wonderful speeches were made, notably one by Mrs Salomina Lebitsa, our first girl of 50 years ago." The Sisters were presented with gifts, including a blanket and a table cloth, both of which had been woven in the Weaving School. The next day, Canon Dove preached in S. Saviour's Church as the congregation marked the end of an era.

God's hand has so clearly been over this place and work for all these years and I believe it is over it still in this change that is taking place. The Sisters performed their duty admirably as God disclosed His Will to them in the passing of the years and now they hand over their work to others. That seems to me to be a basic principle of life. None of us can do everything for all time: God calls us to do His Will in our own times and in our own way and to rejoice to see others take over where we left off.⁸⁴

The following Saturday, 16 June, 1962, Sisters Betty and Eleanor drove the Community's Volkswagen Combi to Hlotse to collect Sisters Marion Faith and Zita Mary and take them back to the Mother House in Bloemfontein.

Reflecting on the events thirty years later, Sister Mary Ruth noted that a dominant consideration was that "political developments in the Republic of South Africa made it difficult for a [white] South African Community like CSM&AA to nurture a black Society in another territory."⁸⁵ In some handwritten notes she left another comment: "It makes sad reading: the *modus operandi* was unfeeling and seems to have largely ignored Sister Marion and her responsibilities." Sister Marion herself, though, had advised her BaSotho Sisters: "The work is not, never has been – our work, but God's. So please let us all take this quietly and pray for SMMS."⁸⁶

In September 1962, after the Profession of the BaSotho Sisters at Malvern Link,⁸⁷ they packed for the voyage back to southern Africa. There were altogether ten Sisters on the

84 The text of his sermon is in HPR A Wits, AB2644/51; printed also in ECH Report for 1962, AB2644/86

85 As apartheid was enforced more strictly, it became illegal in South Africa for people of different races to live together. At the Rosettenville Priory of the Community of the Resurrection, Fr Leo Rakale CR lived for twenty years "under the constant threat of arrest, prosecution, and banishment." *CR Quarterly Review*, Michaelmas 1980, p.8

86 Sr Mary Ruth, Society of St Mary at the Cross, p.18; copy of Sr Marion's letter to the SMMS is attached to Mother Mary Ursula's letter to Bishop Maund, HPR A Wits, AB2644/55.

87 Under African Skies – 50 Years in Lesotho – *CHN Newsletter*, 2013, on p.21 refers to the four as having been admitted to full Life Profession, but in *What's in a Name?*, p.197, we read that Sr Adelaide decided not to

ship's passenger list: those four, five others from CHN who were to be the nucleus of the new venture, and Mother Audrey Mary CHN, who was accompanying them for the first three months. On 6 October, 1962, Canon Dove met the Sisters at Ficksburg station with a lorry to take the luggage and a fleet of cars to convey the Sisters to Hlotse. After their arrival, all the remaining SMMS Sisters were clothed as Novices of CHN and began a new novitiate. Although accommodated at first in St Mary's Home, which had been the abode of CSM&AA, after a few days the English CHN Sisters integrated fully with the BaSotho. It was to be a multi-racial Community, living, working and praying together – a valuable witness when just across the border the lives of whites and blacks were being rigorously segregated.⁸⁸

Five years earlier, at the London meeting of the English Committee of Help on 1 October, 1957, Fr Arthur Amor SSM had spoken

of his association with the Society of St Mary at the Cross since its inception. Some people ask why there is a separate Community for the African Sisters, but in those days it seemed an absolute necessity. The poverty of the Religious Life was as untold wealth to the Basuto. Those offering themselves as postulants could be sure of a home, food and clothing, when there was, and is, great poverty among many of the Basuto.⁸⁹

We will leave the last words to Sister Mary Ruth CSM&AA.

There is little else to say. The beauty of the mountains, the fortitude of the Basuto women, the merriment of the children, the holy hours of devotion, the frustrations, the happy teaching and the near tragedies, the failures and achievements, the friendships, the misunderstandings and mistakes, are all warm under the blanket of the Everlasting Mercy and there they will remain.⁹⁰

continue in the Religious Life.

88 Under African Skies – 50 Years in Lesotho – *CHN Newsletter*, 2013, p.20-25

89 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1958, p.7 – Chairman's Report

90 Sr Mary Ruth, *Uphill all the Way*, p.20



Sister Enid making a home visit in Batho.

CHAPTER 20



CAVE, COWS AND CONTEMPLATION – THIRTY YEARS AT MODDERPOORT

One day in Easter week, 1925, three Sisters left Bloemfontein by train bound for Modderpoort, where they were to begin a new work of the Community. The Director of the Society of the Sacred Mission, Fr Joseph White, had asked for Sisters to work alongside the SSM Brethren, caring for African women and girls on the estate. The Chapter of CSM&AA considered and agreed to his request at a meeting on 9 March. Sister Julia was appointed to lead the new venture. On arrival at the Mission, they moved into a house the Sisters knew well. Renamed St Monica's, it had been Bishop Chandler's house and, after the railway was constructed in 1905, he used to lend it to the Community for two or three months each year so that Sisters needing rest and a change of scene could go there for holidays.¹ Modderpoort is situated in the quiet and very beautiful eastern Free State. The Mission buildings were scattered on the gentle slope of a hill, looking across the

1 FSA, A510, White Book I vol.i, April 30, 1907; 1908; vol.ii, 9 March & April 1925.

Caledon River valley towards the Maluti Mountains of Basutoland in the distance. Over the next three decades, Sisters from Bloemfontein continued to go to there for holidays.

Their journey was considerably easier than that of the first Religious to occupy Modderpoort. The two farms had been purchased by Bishop Twells to provide a home for the missionary Brotherhood he was calling into being. As related in our Chapter 1 above, when the Brothers arrived in the Orange Free State in September 1867, a new border war was in progress², and they went to a farm near Bloemfontein for a year before moving to Thaba Nchu. In late February 1869 a peace convention was agreed and, after a preliminary visit with the Bishop and their stonemason Mr W Terry, Canon Beckett decided that it was time to move his Community to their permanent home. Brothers John and Wilfrid left Thaba Nchu on Wednesday 7 April with an ox waggon carrying most of their equipment.

The waggon was overtaken by a heavy thunderstorm, and got stuck in a hole on Wed. evening & was thereby much delayed. Again it stuck in the Leeuw River, & a third time in the little Leeuw River. ... They reached Modderpoort just before dusk on Friday evening.

Canon Beckett travelled in a horse-drawn cart and accomplished the journey more quickly. On the Saturday the three Brethren began the work of clearing and enlarging a cave in which they were to create a Chapel and living space. With the help of two men who turned up - an injured stonemason and a German brickmaker - mud bricks were made and built into a wall across the exposed side of the cave as a protection from cold winds and rain. They had intended asking local Africans to build them some huts as temporary accommodation, but that help was not forthcoming and the Brothers lived and worshipped in the cave until after Mr Terry had completed buildings at Thaba Nchu and was able to join them on the farm.³ A small Mission House was built and, alongside it, the Church of St Augustine of Hippo, which was consecrated by Bishop Webb on the feast of the Conversion of St Paul, 25 January, 1872.

Bishop Twells' intention was that the Brotherhood home should be a centre for mission, receiving and training new missionaries, and sending out brethren to conduct an itinerant ministry in the scattered villages and farms of the eastern Free State and Basutoland. Just

2 The farms lay in the "conquered territories", land taken from the BaSotho by the Orange Free State in the war of 1865. The OFS Government portioned out the farms and received the income from the sales. See Barlow, *Life & Times of President Brand*, p.74 & 104

3 HPRA Wits, AB2259/Ga.1, Henry F. Beckett, Journal; Schoeman, *The Free State Mission*, p.20, 21, quoting QPOFSM no.7, July 1869.

two weeks after arriving at Modderpoort, Canon Beckett went off to Maseru to conduct a Sunday service. With the arrival of more priests, the Brotherhood was able to begin a regular pattern of services in Ladybrand, Wepener, Ficksburg, Senekal, Bethlehem, and Harrismith, as well as at centres in Basutoland. The demanding work and strenuous journeys by pony cart began to tell on the Canon's health. With so many absences of both the Superior and junior brethren, it was difficult to develop the common life of the Community, and several promising young Novices left to find their vocations in missionary work elsewhere in the Diocese.⁴ Father James Douglas, a former member of a dissolved Brotherhood at Stoke in England, was recruited to succeed Canon Beckett as Superior. After arrival in the Diocese on 12 January 1879, he stayed for three months in Bloemfontein at Bishop Webb's request. He conducted a Retreat for the Sisters from 19 to 23 January, and began a close association with the Sisterhood which was maintained after he had taken up his duties at Modderpoort. While Bishop Webb made a visit to England in 1880, Fr Douglas visited once a month to hear the confessions of Sisters. He was given similar duties three years later when the episcopal interregnum began, and in December 1884 was appointed Sub Warden, deputising for the absent Bishop Webb. Fr Douglas "gave on remote loan a considerable sum of money to the Community [CSM&AA] when it was in dire straits."⁵ Under Fr Douglas's leadership, the Society of St Augustine attained greater stability: he regarded the task of building up the Religious Life as his first priority. He died on 17 August, 1894, in the fifty-second year of his life, and the Brotherhood never really recovered from his loss. Father Sanderson was elected Superior, but he was clearly reluctant to hold that office and initiated discussions about the future of the Society. The death of Brother Arthur Byrd in 1902 reduced the Brotherhood to three members, and just a few months later the Bishop and Visitor, Arthur Chandler, welcomed Father Herbert Kelly and four Brothers of the Society of the Sacred Mission to take over at Modderpoort. After Fr Kelly's return to England, he sent his brother, Fr Alfred Kelly, to be Provincial in Southern Africa.⁶

The arrival of the Society of the Sacred Mission (SSM) enabled a rapid expansion of the work both at Modderpoort and throughout the Diocese. In 1906 there were ten brethren in the Province, and by 1935, twenty. Fr Joseph White SSM, who had been elected Director of the Society in 1920, in 1923 appointed himself also Provincial for Southern

4 HPRA Wits, AB2259/Ga.1, Henry Beckett, Journal; Lewis & Edwards, p.403 (quoting Fr Carmichael SSA); Kelly, *The Story of Modderpoort*, p.3. Among those who went to the OFS to join the Brotherhood but left for other long-term ministries in the Diocese were William Crisp, F.X. Doxat, W.H.R. Bevan and J.W. Barrow.

5 Sr Mary Ruth, *Cave, Cows & Contemplation*, p.2; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.i, 1879 and 1894.

6 Lewis & Edwards, p.426-429; QPBM no.138, October 1902, p.157-158; Mason, *History of the Society of the Sacred Mission*, p.200-201

Africa, based at Modderpoort. “His memorial was the Modderpoort Schools”, wrote Alistair Mason, and it was probably because of his intention of opening boarding Schools for girls as well as boys that he needed the help of CSM&AA. Over the next decades SSM opened not only primary and secondary schools with boarding accommodation, but also a teacher training institute, a theological college, and a farm school.⁷

The first five girl boarders were accommodated at St Monica’s and, when they were able to move over to a newly-built hostel the following year, they were helped by Sisters Bertha and Jane. “In July [1929], a lady superintendent arrived”: it was probably Miss Minnie Wright, who, Mason said, “ran the girl’s hostel throughout the history of the Modderpoort schools.” Her arrival seems to have taken St Michael’s Sisters by surprise. Ending her sentence with an exclamation mark, the Chronicler noted that on July 12, 1929, Sister Jane (who at the time was in Bloemfontein) “went to Modderpoort to sort and pack up Community things at the Girls’ Hostel; as it had been suddenly announced that a worker had been found!” It freed the Sisters to “help the Fathers and the Mission in any way they can.”⁸

With an increasing number of female boarders on the site, as well as day pupils and the local population of girls and women, there was plenty of scope. One Sister acted as Sacristan, caring for All Saints’ Parish Church and St Augustine’s Church in addition to the Sisters’ own rondavel chapel in the grounds of St Monica’s. There was needlework to do, and sewing and mending, and the Sisters ran classes to teach those skills to the African women. Help was given to a branch of the Mothers’ Union, and young communicant girls were enrolled into St Agnes’ Guild. Sister Alice ran that for several years, teaching its members to be faithful Communicants and to attend an annual retreat held there at the Mission. After Sister Zita Mary arrived in 1939 to take over those tasks from Sister Alice, there were further developments of the missionary work. Sister Zita Mary started a social club for the older girls where she could meet them informally. The gift of a gramophone was especially useful with that group. Once a month she spent a long day in the Ladybrand Location where she visited women and girls in their homes, both Christians and heathen. By 1943 she would stay for two or three days, because she had been given permission to visit in the prison also. Sister Zita Mary had made her first profession as a contemplative at the House of Prayer, Burnham, in England, but she had a health problem and was advised to move to a warmer climate. She made life profession

7 Mason, *History of the SSM*, p.200-210

8 Sr Mary Ruth, *Cave, Cows & Contemplation*, p.4, 8; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, July 12, 1929.

at St Michael's on 13 June, 1931. "Though artless in manner she adapted to more active life, and did useful work at the Mission", observed Sister Mary Ruth. At All Saints',

She is responsible for various guilds and classes among which the little girl communicants are a special joy as they race from school to church, each trying to be first (so as to have the privilege of ringing the bell). Having piled up their school-books they come in more or less quietly ...

There is a growing spirit of devotion noticeable among some of the elder girls – communicants, and a large number from both classes attend their Annual Retreat. We also had a little party for them at St Monica's on St Agnes' Day when, next to the buns and the lemonade, the gramophone was the chief attraction.⁹

The Sisters ran a small dispensary at St Monica's, serving anyone who asked for help: "their resources consisted of a cupboard full of remedies and about 10/- in cash."¹⁰ In 1933,

Sister Catherine Faith has had quite a number of out-patients to look after, usually with sore eyes, sore throats or cut or burnt limbs; the outdoor fires are responsible for a good many accidents, but an old woman came last week who had slashed her arm badly with a sickle. Besides those who come to the house, some have needed visits at their homes. One of the African Novices, a Deacon, was seriously ill and required a good deal of attention before he went into the hospital.¹¹

Two years later one of the Community's trained nurses, Sister Grace, was sent to Modderpoort and took over that part of the work. She was kept busy with "a great deal of visiting nursing, besides seeing numerous outpatients."

She "has nursed enteric and pneumonia, and many minor complaints, and diagnosed dysentery and got the patient taken to hospital in time. She gets

9 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1933 (p.16-17), 1935 (p.14-15), 1939 (p.17-18), 1941 (p.20); FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother's letters dated July 24, 1943 and 21 July, 1944; Sr Mary Ruth, *Cave, Cows & Contemplation*, p.8

10 Sr Mary Ruth, *Cave, Cows & Contemplation*, p.5 & 9

11 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1933, p.16-17

at least one call a day, and often a great many more, and was kept *very* busy during the influenza epidemic in the winter.¹²

The obvious and growing demand for medical services prompted the SSM Provincial, Fr Arthur Amor, in mid-October 1936 to offer the use of an empty house almost opposite the gate of St Monica's, with the request that the Sisters would start "some sort of nursing home" to care for African patients. Sister Grace moved her dispensary over before the end of the month and then began the work of cleaning, repairing and altering the premises, to turn it into a Cottage Hospital. With assistance from one or two friends and Brother Hubert Ebdon SSM ("without whose untiring help the Hospital could never have been prepared so quickly and at such a comparatively small cost"), a surgery, store-room and two wards were prepared, and the Hospital opened for patients on 1 November, 1936. In February and July 1937 the Hospital closed for a fortnight when Sister Grace went to Bloemfontein to raise funds. While she was away on her first visit, Brother Hubert "built a wood and iron lean-to kitchen to greet Sister Grace on her return."

On Sunday, April 11th, S. Raphael's Cottage Hospital was blessed by Father Norman Taylor SSM before the Sesuto Mass at the Priory Church, the congregation coming in procession through the churchyard and standing round the hospital while the blessing took place.¹³

Writing her First Annual Report, Sister Grace expressed surprise at having admitted twenty in-patients, when she had expected to have "perhaps three or four cases in the year."

For all these cases, constant attention and careful nursing have been most essential. Of these twenty patients, one was transferred to Ladybrand Hospital; one is still here; one (a boy very badly burnt all over on a farm twelve miles or so distant, and sent to us on the third day, having had no treatment of any kind, on an ox-cart, in extremis), died within twelve hours after admission; one left without showing much improvement; five were greatly relieved and improved; and eleven cured. It has been a great joy to take them in, in much suffering, or bring them from dark, distant huts, where there was no possibility of attending adequately to them, and to see

12 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1935, p.14

13 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, p.184, Mother Superior's Letter dated August 7, 1937.

them in almost all the cases, respond quickly to the healthful environment and loving care of our little hospital.

1521 outpatients, including 376 visits to huts, have been attended, many walking long distances from outlying farms, to seek aid. The daily attendance varies tremendously. I have had fifteen patients in a day, and occasionally I do not have one.

The hospital is under the medical care and supervision of a doctor who has watched its development with the very greatest interest and sympathy, and is always ready to come over at once in response to a telephone call. I have one young coloured woman as general assistant.¹⁴

She pleaded for donations of money or gifts in kind so that the hospital could continue.

A letter from Mother Mary Ursula gave more details of the boy who died.

A native hut on the Thom's farm was struck by lightning and the thing burst into flames. Three children, two boys and a girl, were trapped and could not get out without being burned. The elder of the two boys was brought on foot to Sister Grace who put him to bed in a lamentable state. It appeared that the younger boy was even worse and was too ill to come. Mr Thom sent him in on an ox waggon the next day; Sister Grace saw he was dying. The doctor confirmed this – said that Ladybrand Hospital would not take him in that condition, but took off the other boy instead in order to relieve Sister. Father Carmichael baptised the boy as 'Zabulon' – he was a catechumen – at once. Sister and the mother sat up with him, and he died at about 12.30 the same night. New Father Cyprian buried him on Wednesday afternoon.¹⁵

The foundation of the hospital was “very largely a venture of faith, and of the nature of an experiment,” wrote Sister Grace in her Third Annual Report. The results had more than justified its existence and “with the important exception of lack of assured income” it appeared to be thoroughly established. The hospital depended entirely on charity to meet all its costs. That had obvious disadvantages and imposed limits on the care that could be offered. Of the forty-six inpatients treated in 1939, five were enterics.

14 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, p.179-181, First Annual Report dated 1 November, 1937.

15 SMS, in a printed letter dated from Bloemfontein, September 25, 1937. Fr Cyprian Thorpe.

As we still have no proper sanitary arrangements, and not having the wherewithal to install them, we feel we ought not to take any more enteric cases, having no satisfactory means of disposing of infectious excreta, but it is a difficult question, as the disease is often prevalent here during the summer and autumn months, and it would seem rather hopeless to leave such cases in their own huts, both on their own accounts and on that of their friends.

Apart from that need, and the need for money for maintenance and running costs to keep pace with the increased number of admissions,

The old portion of the building, at right angles to the main block, is in a precarious condition, and quite too far gone to admit of any repair.¹⁶

It was a cause of intense thankfulness that generous friends responded to these calls to help in “this work of charity which is of such value to so many sick,” we read in the Report for 1941.

A very great need, which has been felt for a considerable time, was successfully met in the beginning of the year when totally unexpectedly generous gifts made possible the installation of the complete system of water sanitation which had been planned and longed for.

Other gifts of money paid for a complete electrical rewiring, and for building a ceiling into the women’s ward, to help keep it warmer in winter. The Government began to take an interest also.

In July we had a visit from Miss De Klerck, the Public Health Department’s Inspectress of Mission Hospitals. She expressed pleasure and satisfaction at the development of the hospital since her former visit three years previously and urged us to make another application to the Native Affairs Department for financial aid, which was refused in 1938.

Two grants were received, one specifically for medical purposes such as drugs and dressings, and £75 for the repair of existing buildings. The Building Fund was boosted

16 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1939, p.15-16

by a gift of £1,000 from Mrs Granville Harcourt Vernon, niece by marriage of Mother Frances.¹⁷

With the development of the Hospital, the increasing number of patients¹⁸, and the reception of Government grants, it was decided that a Board of Management should be formed. The Bishop agreed to be Patron, and the Chairman was the Father Provincial of the SSM. The Prior of Modderpoort, the Mother Superior of CSM&AA, Mrs Harcourt Vernon and Mr Emil Radloff were the other members. The Prior reported to his Chapter on 27 January 1942 that the first meeting had been held. It had focussed on the necessity of rebuilding the south wing. Fr Cyprian was delegated to meet with Sister Grace to discuss needs before drawing up plans. Although it was hoped to erect a completely new hospital building when circumstances allowed, to meet the immediate needs the SSM arranged to construct a block of three rooms (an orderly's room, a linen room, and a mortuary), using materials from the demolished wing. This was taken into use early in 1943, and formally blessed on 8 May. These additional rooms

proved the greatest convenience. The mortuary, being seldom required for its proper purpose, has been used for giving V.D. injections to out-patients, it being undesirable to have them in the wards.¹⁹

The Hospital was making good progress, but there were losses as well as gains. The world was at war, and two of the Doctors who had taken great interest in the work and who had given their help, went away with South African troops going abroad on active service.

The Sister in Charge at St Monica's since the Community took up work there, died.

Sister Julia 'became Modderpoort.' She was a quiet, truly holy person with visionary gifts which she shyly hid. As an old lady she would take her stick in the morning and having made her way through the outer cemetery garden, would sit in the side chapel of St Augustine's and pray before the Blessed Sacrament. ... Possessing a keen sense of humour, she was able to make contact with almost everyone. Children, grown-ups, Africans, white folk and animals all loved her. She died at St Monica's during a cold winter night, June 14th, 1945, and was buried in the outer cemetery.²⁰

17 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1941, p.16-20

18 In 1941 there were 56 admissions and 2968 outpatients. In 1943, 76 inpatients and 2205 outpatients.

19 HPRA Wits, AB2409/B2.2, Modderpoort Prioory Chapter Minutes, 27/1/1942 & 29/5/1942; AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1941, p.19, & 1943, p.20; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, May 8, 1943.

20 Sister Mary Ruth, *Cave, Cows & Contemplation*, p.4, where the year of death is shown incorrectly as 1942.

The notes Sister Julia wrote for the English Committee of Help Reports often mentioned the wildlife at Modderpoort. “The creatures we really dislike are the snakes, a large one is somewhere about in the garden, and two small ones have been killed near the fowl-run, where Sister Catherine Faith has a hen with twelve chicks at the inquisitive stage of life.” Snakes gave a good deal of trouble, inside and outside the house, “one even made a home in the vestment cupboard, which has since been lined with sheet iron as a precaution; Peter, the cat, has been bitten. The snakes departed in the winter, but have since returned with renewed energy.” She was spared what was perhaps the most dramatic encounter, described by Sister Grace, when a big puff adder

slid down the mountain bank just outside the Chapel, as we were walking out from Chapel to Refectory in single file, and took his place between Sister Zita Mary and me. She saw it, and uttered an exclamation which made Sister Mary Grace turn, and then hurriedly run for a spade which enabled Sister Zita Mary and me to dispatch him, but not before he had turned on us in a very angry and alarming manner; but the Angels kept him at bay, until we had safely finished him.²¹

Sister Grace slept in a room adjoining the Hospital and went to St Monica’s only for the Offices, meals and recreation. With no deputy, the Hospital had to be closed from time to time when she went away, and she proposed to the Board that a reliable, trained African nurse should be appointed to assist her. Only occasionally could the Community send someone.

One Christmas time, Sister Grace went to rest and recuperate in Bloemfontein. Her locum tenens was Sister Enid, Ma Mohau (Mother of Mercy), also a fully trained nurse. Sister Margaret Dorothea, sister-in-charge of St Michael’s School, was staying at St Monica’s for the school holidays together with Sister Mary Ruth on the teaching staff. One evening an urgent call came from a hut across the railway line where a young woman lay seriously ill. It was a murky night, ‘the lightning flashed, the thunder rolled’, no rain but a storm wind. Lighting a hurricane lantern, Sister Enid set out, accompanied by Sister Mary Ruth, and a wheel chair. Having got to the road, they were illuminated by the lightning, but nearly got run

We have changed the year in this quotation, because the original Profession Register and White Book both give the year as 1945.

21 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports, (Sr Julia) 1935 (p.14), 1943(p.18), (Sr Grace) 1950 (p.12-13)

over by a lone car with strong head lights, as they battled with dust and wind. They found the patient lying on the floor, loaded her up and started back for the hospital. She was suffering from enteric. When she was safely warded, the Sisters went on gratefully to St Monica's gate. Looking up the garden slope, they saw a very anxious Sister Margaret Dorothea standing by the lighted doorway of the guest rondavel where she was lodged; offering to restore them with Cherry Brandy.²²

Well, it *was* Christmas.

Sister Julia had been readily accessible to the many people who went to discuss with her their joys and sorrows and to seek her prayers: she always had time for them. When Sister Grace was appointed to succeed her as Sister in Charge, while retaining responsibility for the Hospital, it was not possible for her to be so available. The Branch House was now three Sisters instead of four.²³

The Hospital was providing a valuable service, and not least through the outpatient work. In more than one Annual Report, Sister Grace described its effectiveness in preventing minor ills from developing into major ones. The early diagnosis of conditions requiring treatment, and the local knowledge of circumstances on farms in the district, enabled appropriate care to be given. She noted a surprising decrease in the number of children attending.

This very evidently seems to be due to a distinct improvement in the general health of the children owing to the free meals and abundance of oranges given them at school.²⁴

Sister Grace had to consult a doctor about her own health in mid-1946, and the *Chronicle* made an entry in the White Book on June 4th that the Sister had been told she would have to give up her work at St Raphael's. She had started that work "at an age when a nurse would normally have retired or be undertaking only light work," Mother Mary Ursula explained to the Community's friends, before outlining the future:

As has been understood for some years, the other Sisters who are nurses cannot be spared from their present work to replace her, so the hospital will

²² Sister Mary Ruth, *Cave, Cows & Contemplation*, p.6-7

²³ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, p.71, Mother Superior's Letter dated July 26, 1945.

²⁴ HPRA Wits, AB2844/86, ECH Reports for 1941, p.17, & 1943, p.21-22

either pass out of our hands, when a successor is found or, if this does not happen soon, will have to close down for a time.

We cannot know when this was discussed with the Father Provincial of the SSM, as Chairman of the Hospital Board, but the Modderpoort Priory Chapter was advised with little more than one month's notice. Minutes are necessarily brief, but this entry for August 26, 1946, sounds rather abrupt:

Fr Provincial said that he had been told by the Mother Superior that owing [to] the difficulty of replacing Sister Grace, the CSM&AA could no longer be responsible for the Mission Hospital; from Sept.30th 1946 therefore, SSM would have to take full responsibility for staffing the Hospital.

Instead of going to Bloemfontein in July for the Annual Retreat and Chapter, Sister Grace remained at her post and kept the hospital open until the end of September, when it was closed temporarily. Sister Grace needed an operation. On her return to St Monica's she was not strong enough to take much share in the affairs of the house for several weeks while she recuperated.²⁵

SSM's Provincial Chapter was told on 18/19 December that the services of two nurses had been secured, one European and one African, and it was hoped to re-open St Raphael's on February 1st, 1947. The Native Affairs Department had withdrawn grants for health centres, but the Red Cross was promising help, and there was the possibility of the hospital becoming an official Government Health Centre. Sister Grace was once more at hand.

St Raphael's Hospital was re-opened on February 2nd with the services of an excellent African nurse, so I once more went down there for the greater part of each day, to get her into the way of things and to help her generally. We had a very busy time, as after being closed for four months, patients took full advantage of it being available again.

Perhaps there was some uncertainty in SSM about her intentions, because Fr Hemsley visited the hospital at Fr Amor's suggestion to speak with Sister Grace. He reported the outcome to the Priory Chapter on 4 July. During the five months since re-opening, she

25 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, p.96, Mother's Letter dated July 29, 1946; HPRA Wits, AB2409/B2.2, Priory Chapter Minutes dated August 26, 1946; HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1947, p.16

had regarded herself as supervisor for Nurse Carina, whom she was keen to leave on her own in the hospital. “Sister Grace said she felt it would be a great relief to be rid of its supervision.” She was going to Bloemfontein on 5 July for the Community’s Retreat and on her return would not be going down to the hospital again. “Her nursing days are over,” as Mother Mary Ursula expressed it in her Annual Letter. Fr Hemsley conveyed to Nurse Carina instructions received from Fr Amor: she was temporarily in charge, but while she was alone she may do only the School clinic, outpatient care, and home visits, and was to accept no patients requiring night nursing.²⁶ Good to her word, after the Retreat at the Mother House, Sister Grace occupied her days at St Monica’s.

It almost always happens that life at St Monica’s flows on in a very even, uneventful way, one year closely resembling another ... Obviously St Monica’s is a suitable place only for people who really enjoy quiet rest and the beauties of nature. In the past, two or three addicted to town life and its gaieties, have been inexpressibly bored throughout their stay.

Sister Grace told of numerous visitors, the majority of whom made private Retreats while they were there. “Steady, routine work” was the description given by Mother Mary Ursula. Sister Zita Mary continued with her visiting in Ladybrand and the prison, with the Guilds at Modderpoort, and in her duties as Sacristan for both the churches. Age was catching up with the Sisters and also with some of the Brethren of SSM. Fr Millard, who was Chaplain to the Sisters, walked from the Priory to St Monica’s one afternoon to take them the newspaper, which had been delayed in the post, and while there collapsed with a stroke. As the Sisters had a spare room opening on to their stoep, it was the obvious place to take him. The nurse was called from the hospital and the doctor was summoned. Fr Millard died that evening. “It seemed a very happy thing that his call should come so suddenly and at St Monica’s, which he had loved so much,” wrote Mother Mary Ursula.²⁷

The way in which SSM was unable to give proper care to its aged Brethren disturbed the Provincial, Fr Richard Roseveare. Speaking with his Provincial Chapter on 29 September, 1953, he said that he was not consulting them but reporting what he had felt compelled to do. The illness of Fr William Wrenford led him to consider St Monica’s.

26 HPRA Wits, AB2409/B.1.6, Provincial Chapter Minutes 18/19 Dec., 1946; AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1947, p.16; AB2409/B2.2, Modderpoort Priory Chapter Minutes, 4 July, 1947; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, p.118

27 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1950, p.12-13, & Old Girls’ Letter dated 17 July 1952; SMS, Old Girls’ Letter dated 26 July, 1951.

He had consulted with the Mother Superior, and asked, a. If a bungalow were built at St Monica's, could the Sisters undertake the care of aged brethren? b. Otherwise, could some of the African Sisters be brought here for the purpose? The answer to the first question was that the present Sisters could not undertake the work on account of their age, and there was no possibility of replacing them. 2. The Rev. Mother could not undertake to send African Sisters for this work.

The Provincial said that the Rev. Mother was most understanding, helpful and co-operative.

The third course of action, to withdraw the Sisters, was then gone into, and the Rev. Mother had been perfectly willing for this to be done. Regrets were felt, but no objections raised. The Sisters would therefore withdraw from Modderpoort before Dec.6th of this year.

It had been agreed that a letter jointly from himself and the Reverend Mother would appear in *The Friend* explaining the withdrawal of the Sisters, so that there should be no misunderstanding. He told the Chapter that the Bishop, as Visitor to both Communities, had given his agreement.

So far as the work was concerned that had been centred at St Monica's, the Sisters' prayer life was irreplaceable, but he was arranging for a trained SPG missionary, Miss Dorothy Wilson, at present in Cape Town, to take charge of the house and to care for the aged brethren. ... The nurse would be able to supply any professional care that was needed.

He was keen also to extend the provision of hospitality at St Monica's for lady visitors and retreatants, which should generate some income.²⁸

The letter was duly published in *The Friend* early in October, and reproduced in the English Committee of Help Report for 1953. In some covering words for the latter Report, Mother Mary Ursula informed readers that the Community had left the altar and other furnishings in their Chapel as a memorial to Sister Julia. On 2 December, the Father Provincial went to St Monica's Chapel to say a Mass of Thanksgiving for the Sisters' life and work at Modderpoort, and later that day drove them to Bloemfontein.

28 HPRA Wits, AB2409/B.1.7, Provincial Chapter Minutes 29/9/1953

Sisters Grace and Mary Grace lived the remainder of their days at the Mother House, and Sister Zita Mary was sent to strengthen the team at Leribe.²⁹

In later years, Sister Mary Ruth deleted the White Book entry which stated that St Monica's was to be used for the aged and infirm brethren of SSM, and in her booklet, *Cave, Cows & Contemplation*, she said bluntly that the Sisters received "notice to quit" because SSM wanted the house, which later became the home of Miss Minnie Wright. She added, "There is no bite in this: it was inevitable and reasonable."³⁰

Changes had taken place at St Raphael's before the Sisters' departure. In 1951, it had ceased to be a Cottage Hospital but was recognised as an Out-patient Clinic, and the lower ward was registered as a Maternity Home with three beds. The nurse who took up her appointment in May 1951, Miss Evelyn Mahlatsi, received three-quarters of her salary from the Health Department, which eased the financial situation considerably at a time when donations were declining. Nurse Evelyn was provided with a bicycle to visit nearby farms.³¹

Sister Grace had observed those developments before leaving St Monica's. She died on 21 August, 1957, in the Mother House. She left some money to the Community and it was decided that £100 should be used to purchase new equipment for St Raphael's, in memory of Sister Grace. A friend of the Community, Dr Carter, was asked for advice. He planned the expenditure so carefully that the money went a very long way, minimising costs by kindly travelling to Johannesburg to purchase the items, which included an examination couch, an auroscope and sphygmomanometer for taking blood pressure. Mother Mary Ursula made a visit to Modderpoort in May 1962 to see the equipment. She learned then that Nurse Evelyn, who was "loved and trusted by all", would be leaving St Raphael's at the end of August in order to care for her ailing father in the Northern Transvaal. The Community wanted to see St Raphael's before she left and to say goodbye to her. On 18 August eight Sisters made a full day excursion in the minibus, accompanied by Mrs Carter and her family in their car.³²

29 HPRW Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1953, p.16-17; SMS, Old Girls' Letter dated 27 July, 1954

30 Sr Mary Ruth, *Cave, Cows & Contemplation*, p.11

31 HPRW Wits, AB2409/B.1.7, St Raphael's Nursing & Social Services Committee Report, 26-27 September 1951

32 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, Mother Superior's letters, 10 August, 1961, & 6 August, 1962



The second horse-drawn ambulance, in use from 1956, photographed outside St Michael's Chapel in Markgraaf Street.



Sister Enid and Andrew Lehasa admire the new ambulance given by the Round Tables of Bloemfontein in 1972. (Photo: Ian Trill)

CHAPTER 21



THE ENGLISH COMMITTEE OF HELP AND A LONDON HOUSE

In accordance with the strong wishes and endeavours of Bishop Webb, with the full consent of the Mother Superior, the friends of the Community in England determined to form a Committee to further its interests, to organise the efforts of the Sisters' supporters, and make their work better known in England. Bishop Webb, founder of their Community, consented to be Chairman.¹

When Bishop Webb first proposed forming the Community as an integral part of the Diocesan structure, funds were raised through the Bloemfontein Mission Association. Within the General Mission Fund there were several sub-headings for different projects, and donors could specify the purpose for which their money was to be used. The Mission Brotherhood appears among those sub-headings, and in the Accounts pages of the April 1876 Quarterly Paper we find also the entry, "Sisterhood Fund (for Educational and Mission Work)". Many of the early donations are shown as received "per the Mother

1 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1907

Superior, Osney House, Oxford.” Bishop Webb’s initial estimates of the amount of money required to establish the Community proved to be wholly inadequate and that may have been among the reasons why the Sisterhood Funds were quickly separated and their own Treasurer appointed. Bishop Webb’s letter in the July 1878 *Quarterly* informed readers that,

Canon E.H. Harcourt-Vernon, who has given his own daughter to the work of the Diocese, has kindly undertaken to administer the Sisterhood Funds and Accounts as Treasurer and Secretary.

Donations were to be sent to him at Grove Hall, Retford. From that issue of the *Quarterly Paper* onwards the Sisterhood Fund was shown separately from the General Mission Fund. Canon Harcourt-Vernon was Treasurer for ten years, and after his resignation the duties were taken on by the Revd Edward L. Elwes of Over Combe, Liss, in Hampshire.² Reports of the Sisters’ work appeared regularly in the *Quarterly Paper*, often written by the Sisters themselves or by one of their Associates. We have noted in Chapter 14 above how this pattern changed after Canon Holbech became Warden in 1887. He and his successors wrote reports for the *Quarterly*, but sometimes two or three years would pass with no news of the Sisterhood, although their accounts continued to appear regularly in those pages.

There was a growing body of supporters in the United Kingdom among the families and friends of Sisters and their co-workers in the Free State. From 1887 onwards, some of those were admitted as Outer Associates of the Community, with a formal commitment to pray regularly for the Sisters and to raise money for their work. The Community’s chronicle recorded the first three Outer Associates being admitted in Bloemfontein in December 1877 – Mrs Webb, Mrs Croghan and Mrs Mackenzie, the wives of the Bishop, the Archdeacon and the Principal of St Andrew’s School – but it seems that the Outer Associates were not extended to the United Kingdom until ten years later. They were responsible directly to the Mother Superior and, as their numbers grew, one member served as Secretary and collected their annual subscriptions.

When the Anglo-Boer War neared its end and the Sisters found themselves in great poverty and in need of help to restore their buildings for the School, there were new efforts to attract support. We have written in Chapter 15 of the letter sent by Major-General

² QPBM no.32, April 1876, p.49f; QPBM no.41, July 1878; QPBM no.90, October 1890. Canon Harcourt-Vernon’s death in January 1890 is recorded in the Community’s White Book.

Pretyman to the *Church Times* in 1901. That year also, Sister Frances Louisa travelled to Britain to bring the needs of the Community before the home Church. As a result of her efforts in addressing many meetings and publishing a booklet under the title *Gleanings in Sunny Africa*, the Sunny Africa Union was formed in 1902. Its members collected funds, gifts and needlework which were sent out to the Sisterhood.

One of the other changes in this period was that the Community began to issue its own publications. The first edition of St Michael's School Magazine appeared in May, 1903, and some copies were sent to the United Kingdom. That inevitably focussed on the School. Mother Frances was in England for five months in 1905, and she was probably made aware of the need for more information to be circulated about the other works of the Sisterhood. In December 1906 the first Half-Yearly Paper was published, providing a more comprehensive review.

The decision by some friends of the Community to form a Committee in England to further its interests and to co-ordinate the efforts of supporters suffered a great discouragement with the death of Bishop Webb at the Deanery in Salisbury on 12 June, 1907. He was to have been the first Chairman. It was decided to hold a provisional meeting in the Winchester home of Canon Valpy on 23 September, 1907.

An entry in the White Book gives the first membership of the Committee: The Revd Canon Valpy (Chairman), the Revd V.S.S. Coles of Pusey House, Oxford (Bishop's Commissary), the Revd Canon Inman, the Revd F.M. Downton, Colonel M. Grant Wilkinson, H.W. Mozley, Esq. (Treasurer), Mrs E. Webb, Miss Barrow Simons, Mrs Bourdillon (Secretary for the Outer Associates), Miss M. Bevan, Miss Wyvill, and Miss R.G. Inman (Secretary). Canon Valpy had first-hand experience of South Africa, having visited there as a missionary. Others had personal links. Canon Inman was father to Sister Maud CSM&AA, who had been professed on 16 July, 1906. Colonel Wilkinson had come into contact with St Michael's in the Anglo-Boer War, when he witnessed the Sisters' devoted nursing of typhoid patients.

The first meeting was indeed provisional. Its agenda survives on a loose sheet of paper found inside the front cover of a Minute Book, and consists mainly of thirteen questions, beginning with: "Is this Committee to be formed? Chairman? How often shall it meet? When and where? Shall we add to our numbers?"³

Among the other questions considered by the provisional meeting were: "Magazine? How to be utilized?" The answers became known when the first Report was issued in 1908.

3 In SMS archive. The Minute Book begins from the meeting on April 16, 1912.

Sent to all the friends and supporters in the United Kingdom, it told of the formation of the Committee and quoted a letter from the Bishop, Arthur Chandler, which had been read to that inaugural meeting. He thought the formation of the Committee was “a capital idea, and I am most grateful to you for entertaining it.” The bulk of the Report was taken up with details of the Sisters’ work in and around Bloemfontein and Kimberley. With the decision that the new English Committee would produce a Report in the middle of each year, the Half-Yearly Paper became an annual supplement, and appears to have stopped altogether after the 1913 issue.

One section of the 1908 Report was headed “The Outer Associates.” We learn that there were then one hundred on the roll, of whom nine were in South Africa. Their rule outlined a minimum level of commitment, with the opportunity for more.

The Outer Associates are those who, not living in the Community, do their best to promote its interests and further its works. They undertake to observe the following Rules:

To say on Sunday the Prayer for the Sisterhood.

To communicate on the Feast of St Michael and All Angels, or as near as possible, as an act of fellowship with the Sisterhood.

To pay 2s 6d a year to the General Fund of the Sisterhood, which is due at Michaelmas.

To assist the Sisters in their work in one of the following ways:

- By giving money beyond their subscription
- By collecting money
- By needlework
- By personal service for a time in one of the works of the Community.

... Besides helping by their prayers, they are the medium between the Sisterhood and the general public, and their duty is to gather news of the Home and to spread it, so that flagging interests may be revived, and a sense of unity and fellowship be cultivated amongst all friends of the Community.⁴

4 SMS, ECH Report for 1908

It was intended that the new Committee of Help would organise two meetings a year to which Outer Associates and other friends of the Community could be invited. Both the White Book and the 1908 Report describe the first of those, a Drawing Room Meeting held at the home of Lord and Lady Halifax, 88 Eaton Square, in London. The second Viscount Halifax was President of the English Church Union and a great champion of the Catholic movement in Anglicanism. He had been to Bloemfontein, and made a short visit to St Michael's Home on 24 September, 1905.⁵ On 26 June, 1908, "about two hundred and fifty friends assembled, to whom Lady Halifax kindly gave tea." The Bishop of Bloemfontein chaired the meeting, and Lord Halifax welcomed everyone and said how glad he was to encourage support for the Community. There were several speakers, among them Father Cyril Bickersteth CR, the Revd F.M. Downton, and Colonel M. Grant Wilkinson. Special mention was made of the need to improve and extend the School buildings. A collection was taken and raised £113.18s.2d.

Some changes happened in 1909. The Sunny Africa Union ceased its separate existence and was merged into the English Committee, with most of its members becoming Outer Associates. The Committee's chairman, Canon Valpy, died and was succeeded by an old friend of Bishop Webb, Archdeacon Bourke. Following his death on 15 April 1910, the Committee welcomed as Chairman Sir Godfrey Lagden KCMG, a former High Commissioner of Basutoland. The 1910 Report observed,

It is most providential that just as the Sisterhood were starting on their new venture in Basutoland, we should be able to secure as our new chief and guide Sir Godfrey Lagden, who knows better than anyone the country over which he once presided.

Another valuable new member of the Committee was Sir Harry Wilson, formerly Colonial Secretary and Lieutenant Governor of the Orange River Colony. After four years as Deputy Chairman, he accepted the chairmanship in 1914 when Sir Godfrey Lagden retired.⁶

The Annual Report was issued by the English Committee each spring (April or May) and included a leaflet of thanksgivings and intercessions for the work of the Community. The contents began to take on a settled pattern, with a letter from the Chairman, a report of meetings held in Britain since the last Report, a letter from the Mother Superior giving

5 SMS, School Magazine for 1905, p.12

6 SMS, ECH Reports for 1909, 1910, 1914; FSA, A510 White Book I, vol.ii.

details of the life and work in Bloemfontein and at the Community's other centres, various notices of meetings or of mission boxes being sent out, information for the Outer Associates, the Treasurer's Report and Accounts, and notice of the next general meeting.

Drawing financial aid and most of its recruits from Britain was a problem for St Michael's Sisterhood. They were far away and easily forgotten by all except those with special links.⁷ Each time a Sister or someone who worked with them visited Britain and addressed meetings at different venues around the country, interest and support revived. So we read of the encouragement given to the English Committee when Sister Marion visited England in 1909; of many meetings addressed by Miss Edwards on her visits in 1909, 1911 and 1913; of Miss Lumby from the School staff speaking in 1911 about the Sisters' work at meetings in Witton, St Helen's, Cheltenham College, Bournemouth and London; of an increase in the number of Outer Associates as a result of a visit from Sister Frances Louisa in 1913, and of the sponsorship she gained for a BaSotho pupil at Hlotse from children she addressed at a school run by a Sisterhood in Clyde Road, Dublin.⁸

In the Report for 1911 supporters were told of the need to rebuild part of the Home, and the following year it was said that £10,000 was required urgently for the purpose. Friends were asked to make a special effort to raise funds. The Community was fortunate to have good and well-connected friends. A meeting in aid of the building fund for St Michael's School, Bloemfontein, was announced for 3 pm on Thursday 1 May, 1913, to be held in the Great Hall of the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. HRH Princess Christian was to attend, and there were to be three speakers: Father Maxwell, Superior General of the Society of St John the Evangelist, Sir Neville Lyttelton, and Miss G. Edwards, Head Mistress of the School. The meeting was followed at 4.30 pm by a Service of Intercession for the work of the Church in the Diocese of Bloemfontein, held in the Chapel of the Royal Hospital under the leadership of Father Maxwell SSJE. There was a very good response, and the Report for 1913 listed many donations received. £900 was raised and a further £100 lent to the Sisters from a private source. The SPCK made a grant of £150. When all of this was forwarded to Bloemfontein, it enabled the most pressing need to be met, the rebuilding of the Kindergarten section. With the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914,

7 Some confusion may have arisen among potential supporters following the creation of another and entirely separate Community of St Michael and All Angels in 1895. The English CSM&AA was based at Hammersmith and ran schools and orphanages there and at Brixton and Bury St Edmunds, as well as working in some parishes. It continued until 1946, when it was affiliated into the Order of the Holy Paraclete. See: Cameron, *The Religious Communities of the Church of England*, p.118-120 & 127; Anson, *Call of the Cloister*, p.472-473

8 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1909, 1911, 1913

the Committee decided to stop any special appeals for the Building Fund and to give up meetings until hostilities ceased.⁹

Nevertheless, another Drawing Room meeting took place at Lord and Lady Halifax's home, 88 Easton Square, on 10 June, 1915.

Viscount Halifax spoke warmly of the pleasure it was to help the excellent work of the Sisters at Bloemfontein who were upholding righteousness and truth in these days when the powers of evil were so much in the foreground. The Dean of Rochester urged on his audience the duty of the Church in England supporting the Missionary Work abroad. Sir Harry Wilson, who had lived seven years in Bloemfontein, said he had ample opportunity to realise the thoroughness of the Sisters' educational work.¹⁰

The Great War inevitably caused a falling off of support. The War changed Britain and weakened the Church of England. The country was still at war when Sir Harry Wilson hosted a meeting at his London house on 10 June, 1918. Given the state of the nation, the collection of £31 was good. Sir Otto Beit helped considerably by sending a cheque for £50. As Chairman of the English Committee, Sir Harry wrote to all their supporters on 25 October reminding them of the need for new buildings at St Michael's School. When he stood down as Chairman in 1920, he was succeeded by Brigadier General Grant Wilkinson, who had been on the Committee since its inception.

The Report for 1918 advised its five hundred readers that, apart from raising money for urgently required building work, the Committee had resolved to send £300 annually towards the maintenance of the Community.¹¹ That year it was decided to make a new beginning with the Outer Associates. As already described, they were responsible directly to the Mother Superior. It had always been difficult to maintain adequate contact and that problem was magnified during the four years of war. By appointing the Revd F.M. Downton from the Committee as Warden of the English Associates, each now had a direct contact in Britain. A small Manual was drawn up and sent to all, giving a short account of the Community and of the obligations of the Outer Associates.¹²

9 SMS, ECH Reports for 1911, 1912, 1913, 1914; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1913

10 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, June 10, 1915

11 SMS, ECH Report for 1918, p.5

12 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1918, 1920

The Community decided to send Sister Frances Louisa to England again as part of their preparations towards celebrating the Golden Jubilee. There had been some correspondence in 1921 with the Revd W.E. Jackson, Treasurer of the Committee. The Sister left Bloemfontein on 18 July, 1922. Her purpose was to visit friends of the Sisterhood, to gain new supporters, and to increase the number of Outer Associates. Focussing her efforts on the newly created Jubilee Fund, after arrival in England she sent out three thousand appeal letters and travelled around the country to visit many towns where existing supporters could set up meetings. A Reunion for St Michael's Old Girls living in Britain had been started in 1913 when twenty-four former pupils signed up. Owing to the War, it had to cancel some of the planned Michaelmas gatherings. When a meeting with Sister Frances Louisa was arranged for October 1922, the response was immediate and generous. At Bournemouth, the Pupils' Missionary Guild adopted a child at Hlotse. On May 11, 1923, Lord and Lady Phillimore welcomed to their London home in Campden Hill the Annual General Meeting of the English Committee of Help, with Sister Frances Louisa speaking about the Sisters' work. Her year in England was a great success. A special meeting for the Jubilee was held in the parish rooms of St John's Church, Wilton Road, Victoria, in London.¹³

Sister Margaret Dorothea, Principal of the School, was in England in 1926 and her visit "has put new life into us in several ways," wrote the Warden, Francis Downton. Among other things, she made contact with two priest brothers of Sister Margery Angela, and one, Dom Anselm Hughes of Nashdom Abbey, consented to be Assistant Warden of the Outer Associates. Their number had reached one hundred and twenty in England, and they met together in regional branches: the Secretary, Miss Maud Wyvill, listed twelve in the 1925 Report.¹⁴

In 1930 the Community again sent a Sister to England on an extended visit for the purpose of drumming up interest and support. This time it was Sister Marion, whose usual responsibility was at Leribe. She sailed from South Africa on 27 April and did not return to Bloemfontein until 26 September. Her months in England are described as "strenuous." She travelled around addressing meetings and interviewing potential workers. The Committee of Help organised its annual meeting for 5 June at Aubrey House in Campden Hill, Kensington, when about one hundred people attended. Sister Marion was present, but the principal addresses were given by the Bishops of Bloemfontein and

13 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1922, 1923; also SMS, ECH Report for 1923

14 SMS, ECH Report for 1925, p.8-9; ECH Report for 1926, p.16

Kimberley. Bishop Carey spoke of the good influence of the Community in each place they worked, and described the African Sisterhood at Hlotse.¹⁵

Dom Anselm Hughes OSB had taken over from Fr Downton as Warden before that 1930 meeting. He wrote in the Report of the need for vocations to the Community: “one cannot advertise for vocations as one can for cook-housemaids.” Instead, he had formed a small band of thirty or so Outer Associates who were making a special effort of prayer in 1931, “asking God to put it into the hearts of some of our girls to test their vocation to this life.” Three years later he wrote of gratitude that the number of Outer Associates was growing,

when there is so much competition for our interests. Pious associations of all kinds abound, and it really seems to me that none of them offers so little inducement to new members as does our own Society. We have an interesting meeting once a year at Michaelmas, and an uninteresting letter from the Warden once a year in the spring, and that is all. It really is a matter for thanksgiving to know that so many people are banded together with so little outward machinery of organisation, held together by the one bond of a desire to serve the Sisters in England as they are serving in South Africa.¹⁶

Perhaps it was the positive results from the support-rallying visits of Sisters to England that induced some in the Community to think towards the advantages of having their own small mission house in London. They would be able to keep in closer contact with friends and Outer Associates, and would have a place where they could interview potential workers or postulants. They knew that the Community of the Resurrection of the Lord, founded by Bishop Webb in Grahamstown, had sent a group of Sisters to London in 1929. Initially sharing a property with Sisters of the Church, by 1933 the CR Sisters had taken over the House, and were developing a very effective ministry and network of support.¹⁷

According to the White Book, it was on the afternoon of the day that Sister Mary Ursula was elected to be CSM&AA’s third Superior, 17 December, 1934, that an informal discussion of the proposal took place during recreation in the front garden of St Michael’s.¹⁸ The idea may have been discussed with the English Committee of Help in 1935 while the new

15 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1930

16 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1930, p.6, and Report for 1933, p.20

17 See www.stpetersbourne.com/about-us/history

18 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, Dec.17, 1934

Assistant Superior, Sister Margery Angela, was in England to attend the Commemoration of the Ninetieth Anniversary of the revival of the Religious Life, which was held at Ascot Priory. Wherever she went she spread the great need of women to offer themselves as postulants, “for there are opportunities of developing our Community life and work in many ways, but we are hampered in all directions by our small numbers.” Sister Helen was the next to be in England: after sailing from South Africa on 20 March, 1936, she did not return to Bloemfontein until November that year. She had been asked to begin the search for a suitable house. The Annual Report listed thirty towns she visited, ranging from Falmouth in the South West to Norwich in East Anglia, and from Rotherham in the North to Hayward’s Heath in the South. She addressed twelve meetings on the life and work of the Sisterhood. Reporting back to the Sisters at the Mother House, she spoke of the difficulties of finding a suitable place for a Branch House: some parishes would welcome the Sisters but would not be able to make any contribution towards the house or Sisters’ maintenance.¹⁹ There would be limited support through the “English House Fund” started by Mr Edington, Treasurer of the Committee of Help.

The following February, Sister Dulcie was sent to England “to reap where [Sister Helen] had sown.” Events moved quickly, as Mother Mary Ursula related in her letter for the 1937 Report.

On Sunday, April 25th, an airmail letter arrived telling us that a house was for sale opposite S. John’s Church, East Dulwich – this was the parish in which we hoped to establish our house.

There was a Bloemfontein connection with this parish. Earlier in his ministry the Bishop, Arthur Howe-Brown, had been its Vicar, and the current incumbent, the Revd J.F. Boodle, had been curate to Dr Howe-Brown at Kennington. Sister Dulcie’s letter reveals that there was initially no idea of buying, and also that Mr Edington had been negotiating to rent a house at Stroud Green in north London. On enquiring into costs, Sister Dulcie thought that the rents were “just wicked.” The house at East Dulwich was larger and available at a very good price. “I am writing to Mr Edington today. He won’t be over pleased.” She provided the Mother with a detailed description. It was a semi-detached house, with a good cellar and accommodation over three floors, with the top floor “in the roof.” “The house might have been built for us.” Its front and

¹⁹ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1935, Jan 16, letter dated 9 August; 1936, March 20, Nov 30; HPR A Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1935, p.19/20; ECH Report for 1936, p.19

side windows looked out over Goose Green with its trees and grass, an open space, “and what that means only South Africans in London can appreciate.”

The Superior convened a Business Chapter on 30 April and it was agreed to buy the house with money received in a legacy from Bishop and Mrs Gaul. After purchase, the property stood in the name of Sister Dulcie CSM&AA. It was an unforeseen complication that the Land Registry was unable to accept registration in the name of the Chapter as Trustees for the Community, because they had no legal status in England, and the English Committee of Help was not a registered charity. Mother Mary Ursula tried to resolve this later in the year by following a proposal that Barclays Bank should register the property as Trustees for the Community. Subsequent events suggest that this may not have been accomplished.

Sister Dulcie wrote enthusiastically to the Superior outlining her ideas for using the different rooms in the house. The plan was that three Sisters would be resident, and there would be a guest room also. They were to have gas fires, “which comes out cheaper than coal, and with that wonderful vacuum cleaner Mr Day has given, we can practically eliminate the servant question.”²⁰ At the end of June, Sister Margaret Dorothea arrived for a short business visit. Sister Florence Mary sailed from South Africa on July 16 to join Sister Dulcie in residence, but had not arrived by the day of the formal opening of the House.

The Bishop of Southwark gave his permission for Bishop Howe-Brown to bless the house at 69 Ady’s Road, Peckham, London S.E.15. The Superior wrote,

It is not possible to record all the help we have received ... but we must mention here the thanks we owe to the Wantage Sisters at Wyndham Road, and the Grahamstown Sisters at Lupton Street, for hospitality and advice, and the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross, Peckham, for their friendly welcome and a most generous gift of crockery and kitchen utensils passed on to us. ... We were glad to hear that all those three Communities were represented at the Blessing of the House, which took place on Sunday afternoon, July 25th [1937]. ... The Bishop and attendants proceeded from the High Altar of S. John’s Church, across the road to the House, where a number of our friends were already assembled ... oratory, bedrooms, kitchen and refectory were blessed in turn, and finally the office and common room,

²⁰ Typed copies of Sister Dulcie’s letters, and Mo. Mary Ursula’s handwritten notes, in the SMS archive. Also, FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1937

which had been thrown into one by opening the folding doors that separate them. Forty-seven guests had tea after the blessing.²¹

Two months later the Sisters again welcomed many visitors for the patronal festival of Michaelmas. Sister Florence Mary described the gathering in a letter to the Superior. There were two Masses in S. John's Church, one at 6.45 am and the other at 11 am, after which many of the congregation crossed the road to see the House. The English Committee of Help meeting was held in the front room after lunch.

Dom Anselm was there and General Grant Wilkinson arrived rather late. The General was in the chair. Miss Ensor, the speaker, was a little late ... spoke about her very short visit to Bloemfontein and Leribe. It must have been getting on for 6 pm when we said goodbye to the last one ... and we hadn't said any Offices since Terce! So we went over to the Church for Evensong at six, instead of our own Vespers. It really was a very nice day and the weather was splendid, quite warm and even a bit sunny (for England).²²

Brigadier General Grant Wilkinson stood down as Chairman at that meeting, and agreed to accept an honorary role as President of the English Committee of Help. He continued his loyal support of the Community until his death in 1943. His successor as Chairman was Mr L.E.D. Bevan, a nephew of Sister Rowena, who had died in 1936.

Sister Elizabeth arrived in February 1938 as the third member of the House, and the Superior followed in August. "Oh! The joy of being able to walk into and out of our own house so easily, taking away only the luggage needed at the time!" Mother Mary Ursula was pleased that the "dream" of an English Branch House had become a reality: it proved itself invaluable as her base for a five month visit to England. Without it, she wrote afterwards, she could not have accomplished half the amount of Community business that she was able to do. Sister Dulcie took on the task of arranging meetings and appointments for the Mother, who received over thirty visits at St Michael's House, paid twenty-nine visits while staying there, saw relatives or friends of almost all the Sisters and Novices, visited eight Religious Communities, and spoke at seventeen meetings. The Committee of Help organised two London meetings, "the usual afternoon meeting on Michaelmas Day (at Vicarage Gate) and an evening meeting (in the National Society's Hall, Great Peter Street, Westminster) – this last was an experiment which amply justified itself." Because

21 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, p.186, Mother's letter dated 7 August, 1937

22 A copy of Sr Florence Mary's letter is in SMS archive.

of the threat of war, "it was considered unsuitable, and indeed impossible, to have the usual Festival Mass at Michaelmas," but the afternoon meeting was "exceedingly good."²³

The Threat of war which hung over us in Sept, 1938, and lifted on the morning of Michaelmas Day, thus enabling us to hold the Annual Meeting as usual, in 1939 became a sad certainty which effectively put a stop to both our projected gatherings.

So began Sister Dulcie's contribution to the Annual Report for 1939. The declaration of war on 3 September was noted in the Community's White Book in Bloemfontein, and then the *Chronicle* continued that month by writing about a gymnasts' display, a concert by the kindergarten, and a reunion of Old Girls.

It was a different story for the three Sisters in London, where "the beginning of the war proved rather exciting." One Sister was assigned to First Aid duties and had to report for classes at the local hospital. Another was on Evacuation duties, meeting "mothers, fathers, children, babies, friends, relatives and staff all jumbled up" at the local school, before accompanying child evacuees on their train journey into the countryside. She was able to return to the House that night.

From bed, they, in common with other Londoners, were ejected about 3 am on Monday morning by another Air Raid warning. This was the second within twenty-four hours of the declaration of war. All S. Michael's spent a penitential hour in the cellar, as per orders, until the 'All Clear' sounded about 4 am. ...

That was Sunday and Monday. On Tuesday morning about 6.40 am came the third warning. Two of us were just crossing over to Mass, when one caught the sound of the Syren. ... As Mass had not yet begun we all adjourned to shelter, and for two hours all was quiet. We breakfasted in the cellar which had been made comfortable, and one of the most curious sights after the 'All Clear' was the sudden crowd of people, on foot, on cycles, in cars, all rushing madly down to offices. One minute the streets were utterly empty, save for the Wardens, the next, filled with hurrying crowds. Neighbours came out and gossiped for a few minutes and life returned to

23 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, Superior's Letter dated March 9, 1939.

normal. This was five months ago, and as far as we know, London's last Air Raid Warning.²⁴

Sister Dulcie's words proved to be over optimistic. The exact date does not appear to be recorded, but it was probably early in 1941, when there was intensive German bombing of London and other British cities, that St Michael's House in Ady's Road was damaged by an incendiary bomb. The upper storey suffered also from the effects of water used in extinguishing the fire. Mother Mary Ursula wrote on 24 July, 1941,

for financial reasons, the Sisters have had to seek work elsewhere. They are now established 'for the duration' at St Paul's Mission House, Kinnerton Street, Knightsbridge, SW1, and have let the ground floor of the house in Ady's Road. It is possible that their temporary work at St Paul's may become permanent after the War.²⁵

Sister Florence Mary missed the experience. During the lull of the "phoney war" of early 1940, she left England to return to the Mother House. "We are not sending another Sister to England under present conditions," wrote the Superior, "but hope to be able to do so later on."²⁶

"We are very grateful for the shelter given to us in these difficult times," wrote Sister Dulcie, "It is not nice to be houseless in London." She and Sister Elizabeth were at St Paul's, Knightsbridge, for about two years, assisting in the work of that parish and also part time at the Church of the Annunciation, Bryanston Street, at Marble Arch. Practically all St Paul's Parish was on Service, doing war work, or evacuated, but there were still Women's Meetings taking place, very successfully. At Christmas 1941, there was no Midnight Mass at St Paul's ("there could not be" – but we are not told why) and the two Sisters made their way to Westminster Abbey.

It was a wonderful experience. The streets were not too noisy and when we arrived, at 11.45pm, the queue which had reached to Great Smith Street was now shortened almost to the Abbey gates. We got seats close to the People's Altar at the junction of the Transepts and Nave whose four candles gave the only light. The whole Nave was packed, but the silence and devotional

24 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1939, p.12-14

25 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's Letter 24 July, 1941.

26 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's Letter 16 August, 1940.

atmosphere were most impressive. Uniforms of all kinds everywhere and the glint of candles on badges and brass buttons. The Dean celebrated. It was a said Mass but we sang – the organist playing up in the dark – the old hymns we all knew by heart. There was such a family feeling about it. People really *cared* and we were one with those in danger far away and not *quite* out of danger ourselves – not that the latter worried us. We had all been through it. We heard after that there were some two thousand present. The actual Administration began before Big Ben struck 12.30 and was not finished when he struck 1 am and there were four, if not six Priests administering. Yet there was not the slightest fuss. Quiet orderly movement and the occasional flash of a torch as someone made sure of the right place. The old Abbey took on a strange new beauty by the dim light; the arches were very high, the roof remote.²⁷

The prospects of ever returning to Ady's Road disappeared when the house suffered further damage as a result of bomb blast, leaving it uninhabitable.

Big blast cracks have appeared everywhere – the whole place is sinking sideways and is propped up, back, side and front. The Surveyors say it will most probably have to be totally demolished. A claim has been registered and all Community belongings removed. Government has paid the claim for furniture, etc., destroyed.”²⁸

Reporting this in her annual letter dated 24 July, 1943, Mother Mary Ursula noted that the Sisters had moved again: they were then at S. Frideswide's Mission House, Lodore Road, in Poplar, E14, by the kindness of the Nursing Sisters of St John the Divine.²⁹ She continued, “We need your prayers for guidance in making plans for a new English House when this is possible.” A year later, the Mother reported that after having had three temporary addresses since they were obliged to leave Ady's Road, the Sisters were hoping to move into a newly bought house at the beginning of August, 1944. Two thousand Pounds was sent from Bloemfontein to enable the purchase of no.6, Sutton Court Road,

27 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1941, p.21, and 1942, p.23,24

28 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1942, p.8

29 St Frideswide's Mission House and the Nursing Sisters of St John the Divine who ran it provided the inspiration for the popular BBC television series “*Call the Midwife*”, which was broadcast in several series over the years 2012 to 2020.

in Sutton, Surrey. The account sent to the Superior by Mr Edington, Honorary Treasurer of the Committee of Help, shows that he had the property surveyed for any war damage.³⁰

“As to the registration of 6 Sutton Court Road,” Mr Edington wrote, “the same difficulty arose as occurred over Ady’s Road. My solicitor suggested that the most satisfactory way would be to register it in the names of Sister Dulcie and myself and that we should sign a Declaration of Trust stating that we held it on behalf of the Community. This would ensure continuity as on the death of either of us all that would be necessary would be to nominate a new Trustee. This has been done and I enclose a copy of the Deed.” His solicitor suggested that the Community’s Chapter should pass a formal resolution appointing the two of them as Trustees.³¹

It was a great relief to the Sisters to move into their own House, and hopes were high that a fresh new beginning could be made when the War ended.

They had been resident in Sutton for less than three months when Sister Elizabeth was taken seriously ill.

She had an operation for cancer on November 2nd at St Anthony’s Hospital, Cheam (an easy bus ride from Sutton), but this operation could only afford temporary relief. The Hospital is run by Roman Sisters and as Sister’s one fear was that she might have to be moved to some other hospital after a month or so, they very kindly undertook to keep her as long as she lived. She had an amazingly lovely Christmas in a religious atmosphere – not merely the ordinary ‘Hospital Christmas,’ and Sister Dulcie writes that it is impossible to thank the Sisters enough for all their kindness and consideration. Sister was able to have her Communion brought to her regularly. Interested and enthusiastic as regards her share in the beginnings of the English House – in which her practical gifts were of great service – she little thought that she would not see South Africa again and that the trials and dangers of war would not be over before she was called to her rest by this way of suffering. It is to be kept in mind that in living the Religious Life it is the life that matters most; if one has passed through the inevitable difficulties and trials of the early stages and given oneself to God, nothing else really matters;

30 It seems there was some, because we read of a licence having been received for repairing war damage – Mother Superior’s Letter, 29 July, 1946, in FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii.

31 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior’s Letters dated 24 July, 1943 and 21 July, 1944. The third temporary address for Sisters Dulcie and Elizabeth was St Monica’s, Clapham Common. Mr Edington’s letter (dated 7 October, 1944) and account is in HPRA Wits, AB2644/65.

one's work, one's health, trials and disappointments, which might crush one in ordinary life assume quite a different proportion for the Religious. There is no such thing as wasted effort; all we are allowed to do for God is used or stored up somewhere – in this life or the next.

Sister Elizabeth died on 14 April, 1945, and was buried in Sutton. She was in middle age: the Community records of the time did not show the ages of Sisters, but we learn from Mother Mary Ursula's letter that Sister Elizabeth was twenty-five years younger than Sister Julia, who had died ten months earlier. The Mother asked prayers for Sister Dulcie who was continuing on her own.

At the present time on account of the difficulty of obtaining passages and a number of other reasons due directly or indirectly to the war, it is impossible to make definite plans for the future of the English House or the sending of other Sisters to England.³²

The Superior wrote that in July 1945 for public consumption, but a letter from the long-suffering Honorary Treasurer of the English Committee of Help, Mr Edington, written to the Superior a month before Sister Elizabeth's death, reveals the thinking within the Community.

I understand from Sister Dulcie that there is a suggestion of her returning to S. Africa and letting the house at Sutton. This, of course, is entirely a matter for you to decide and I rather hesitate to express an opinion but I cannot help feeling that it would be a great pity to close the English House for many reasons. After 'sticking it' through the war it would be more than a pity to close down when happier times seem not far off and the house could be of great benefit to the Community. Should the house be let it will be very difficult to get the tenants out if you want to open up again within a year or two, houses are going to be very difficult to get for some years to come.³³

Mr Edington had handled all the legal and financial transactions for the various properties on behalf of the Community and had given considerable help to Sister Dulcie.

32 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, p.71-72, Mother Superior's Letter dated July 26, 1945.

33 HPRA Wits, AB2644/65, letter dated 12 March, 1945.

It was what happened. Sister Dulcie saw to the sale of the damaged Ady's Road house for a satisfactory sum, and to the letting of the house in Sutton Court Road to a good tenant, and handed over the secretarial tasks of the English Committee of Help to Mrs Day and Miss Nodes, before sailing from England on 10 January, 1947. She landed in Cape Town on 25 January and returned to Bloemfontein. In a letter for the Annual Report, she wrote,

It is surely a somewhat unusual experience for a Religious to be absent from the Mother House of his or her Community for ten years at a stretch, though maybe an experience shared by a fair number in the last decade. Anyhow, it was mine. I left in 1937, and returned in 1947 to find many changes.

We are a small Community, and, as a beginning, there was practically a third of our number to make acquaintance with. After two years of almost solitude, there seemed too many people; specially seeing that on the voyage we had been packed like sardines in a box. One needed a little quiet. Superior had suggested Modderpoort, and after a week I went there. When you are tired, it is a lovely place.³⁴

Following Sister Dulcie's return to South Africa, the English Committee of Help resumed its pre-war pattern of annual public meetings at Michaelmas. Most were now held at Westminster, and some of the venues were to become very familiar over the next decades. The Church of St Matthew, Westminster, hosted a Sung Mass on Friday October 3, 1947, celebrated by Fr Alban Perkins SSM, with a choir provided by Dom Anselm OSB, who also gave a short address. After a sandwich lunch everyone moved to the National Society in Great Peter Street for the afternoon General Meeting. Fr Perkins was recently returned from Bloemfontein and spoke about the varied works of the Sisterhood. The Committee held its own business meeting at Faith House in February, when it dealt with financial matters, such as making an annual remittance of funds to Bloemfontein, and the care of the Sutton house, as well as planning for the Michaelmas festival. Dom Anselm Hughes was re-appointed to the Committee in February 1948, but the following year handed over as Warden of the English Associates to Fr Gabriel Hebert SSM.³⁵ He in turn was succeeded by Fr Martin Knight SSM in 1956.

³⁴ HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1947, p.19; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, 1947.

³⁵ HPRA Wits, AB2644/86: ECH Reports for 1947, p.6-7, and 1949, p.6

The changes wrought by the Second World War on Britain and the Church were not yet fully evident, although the records reveal some first signs. In Bloemfontein, Mother Mary Ursula noted a reduction in the number of aspirants to the Community (and to other Communities), at a time when they badly needed new postulants.³⁶ In London, Mr Edington found the drop in the number of subscribers disquieting. In the Report for 1947 he recorded that three had died, twenty-five had not renewed, and there were six new subscribers, leaving a net fall of twenty-two. He urged each member to try to get one new subscriber during 1948. The number continued to decline gradually due to deaths and non-renewals, and in 1949 the Chairman reported the lowest number for five years, at 133.³⁷ Some of the subscriptions and donations received were for specified purposes, such as work in Basutoland, the African Sisterhood, or St Raphael's Hospital at Modderpoort.

Mr Edington continued to handle the Committee's finances and the responsibilities of the house, receiving rents and paying out for repairs, rates, taxes and insurances, until his serious illness and death early in 1955. The Chairman, Mr Bevan, recruited one of his senior colleagues at Barclays Bank, Mr Knott, Manager of their Trustee Department, to take over the Committee's finances. With both the Chairman and Treasurer based in Pall Mall, that became the venue for Committee meetings, with the Michaelmas Festivals continuing at Westminster.³⁸

Sister Coelia was the principal speaker at the meeting held on October 2, 1956. So far as we have found, she was the first Sister of CSM&AA to visit England after the War. Hers was a private visit to family, paid for by her sister in Australia. Before describing the missionary works of the Community in Bloemfontein, Kimberley and Leribe, she spoke about the life of the Sisters centred around the Divine Office. Each day, after Sext, there was corporate intercession for world affairs, for the sick, and for other special needs for which the Sisters had been asked to pray. Two other Sisters travelled to England separately in April 1958, Sisters Cuthberga and Elsie. Sister Elsie travelled both ways by air – the first Sister to do so – and was back in Bloemfontein on August 8. Sister Cuthberga was on the high seas at Michaelmas and reached Bloemfontein on 7 October. There is no record of either of them addressing any meetings for the Committee of Help.³⁹

36 As reported by Mother Mary Ursula in her letter of 29 July, 1946. FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii

37 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1947, p.8, and Report for 1949, p.6

38 SMS, Old Girls' Letter from the Superior, 30 July, 1955.

39 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, 1956, October 2; and 1958, April 8, 24, August 8, October 7.

It was evident by this time that there was no prospect of the Community being able to re-open its London House. Mr Knott's Report for 1957 carried a reminder that the tenancy was due to expire in July 1958. The tenant had made a trial offer of purchase, and the following year it was reported that the house at 6 Sutton Court Road had been sold on 18 September, 1958. After the payment of costs, the capital sum received had been invested to assure an annual income which would be remitted direct to Bloemfontein and not through the Committee of Help funds.⁴⁰

The London House was gone, but the English Committee of Help still had its work to do in keeping together the supporters of CSM&AA. Business meetings were held, donations were collected, and the Annual Report was issued in the English spring. A Festival Mass was arranged for each Michaelmas, followed by a public meeting at which a talk would be given either by a visiting Sister or by one of the English friends who had been in South Africa recently. So we read of addresses by Mrs Mack (sister of Sister Margery Angela and of Dom Anselm, who was present) and Fr Paul Hume SSM (1957), Bishop Boys of Kimberley (1961), Fr Giles Ambrose SSM, who said "Sisters are on the go all the time" (1963), Sister Mary Ruth (1964), Miss Kathleen Andrews (1966), Sister Teresa Ruth (1967), Miss Dorothy Gibbs with colour slides (1968), Sister Joan (1974), and Sister Constance (1976).

The death of the Chairman, Mr Bevan, a few weeks after the Michaelmas meeting in 1971, was felt keenly. He had served in that position for thirty-four years. By this time there had been some other changes. Miss Dorothy Gibbs (a former Novice and Sister in First Profession) had become Secretary, and Mr Knott had retired in 1967, handing over to another Barclays' banker, Mr Strong. He in turn retired in 1970. Mr Vic Ward, Treasurer to the Bloemfontein, Kimberley and Kuruman, and Damaraland Association, agreed to be Treasurer for the Committee of Help also. Miss Kay Hill OBE, a friend of Sister Teresa Ruth, took over the Chairmanship in 1978. That was a Lambeth Conference year and it was decided that instead of holding its own Festival at Michaelmas, the English Associates and friends of CSM&AA would join with the South African Diocesan Associations in a great Festival Mass to be celebrated on 20 July by the Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Revd Philip Russell, in the Church of Christ the King, Gordon Square, with most of the Province's Bishops present. It set a pattern for the future. Numbers attending the Michaelmas Festivals had been dropping, and by joining annually with the South African Diocesan Associations it was possible to have a well-attended Eucharist together, a joint meeting with a prominent speaker (one year it was Bishop Trevor Huddleston CR),

40 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1957, p.9, and 1958, p.8

followed by separate short business meetings. In Lambeth year 1988, the Festival Mass was in Southwark Cathedral, presided over by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. All the Diocesan Associations were in decline, and the annual festivals ceased after the 1997 gathering.

The Community in Bloemfontein was fading gradually as old Sisters died, and it was inevitable that their families, friends and supporters in the United Kingdom were in a similar situation. When the present author became Warden of the English Associates in 1984, there were still about eighty names on the mailing list for the Annual Reports. Only a small minority were formally Associates. Each year, about two months after the Reports had been sent out, he and the Secretary, Mrs Kathleen Cornford (sister of Sister Doreen Mary), would swap notes about any returned marked “deceased” or “moved”. Mrs Neo Notley MBE (a daughter of Archdeacon Bailey) became Chairman in 1985 when Kay Hill retired because of ill health. The offices of Secretary and Treasurer were combined after Vic Ward died. The three remaining office holders discussed the future with Mother Doreen Mary at a meeting held in Mrs Cornford’s home in July 2001. Mother Doreen Mary wanted the Committee of Help to continue “as long as we do.” She died in October 2002. On St Stephen’s Day that year Sister Mary Ruth wrote to say that she thought the time had come to dissolve the English Committee of Help. The bank account was closed in February 2003, and the balance transferred to the Community. Subsequently, Sister Mary Ruth sent a letter which was copied and posted to all those still on the mailing list:

The Community of St Michael and All Angels owes more than we can say to the prayerful and material help given by the Associates and the English Committee of Help during the years. ... Now that it has been necessary to close this body, we ask you to accept our deep gratitude for all the encouragement you have given us.⁴¹

41 Letter from Sr Mary Ruth dated 4 June, 2003, and other details, from author’s files. Copy in SMS archive.



Sister Enid and Mother Mary Ruth with Ma Mohau's Boys' Brass Band.



Sister Constance was one of the speakers at the first Catechists' Conference for the Diocese of Bloemfontein, held at Kroonstad in September 1970. Here she is flanked by two of the other speakers, Fr Ramolehe and Fr Rasmini, with some of the men who attended the Conference standing around.

CHAPTER 22



A GENUINE RELIGIOUS – THE THIRD SUPERIOR IN CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

Edith Mary Cockayne arrived from England in 1926 with the purpose of testing her vocation in the Community. The daughter of a Church of England priest, she had served in the Land Army during the First World War and subsequently taught in a private girls' school in the south of England. She had been thinking of joining a Community in England until Miss Beatrice Kingsford, Secretary of the Church Teachers' Fellowship, suggested St Michael's. After teaching Geography and Scripture for about a year, she was clothed as a Novice in July 1927 and professed on 4 October 1929. Following the death of Miss Kingsford, who had helped for many years to recruit staff needed in Bloemfontein and elsewhere, the then Mother Mary Ursula revealed,

I myself owe the fact that I came out to this country to test my vocation ... to a letter from her which she afterwards called her 'bold

venture’ – a venture few women would have had the courage to make on our very slight acquaintance.¹

Sister Mary Ursula had been professed for just over three years when Mother Frances appointed her Assistant Superior and Novice Mistress. Mother Frances was unwell and her promotion of the young Sister may have been her way of indicating to the Community her own choice of a successor. It is interesting to reflect that Sister Rowena, the outgoing Assistant Superior and Novice Mistress, had been appointed by Mother Frances in somewhat similar circumstances in 1911, a year in which the latter suffered prolonged illness without the certainty of being able to return to her duties. Chosen successor or not, the White Book entry recording the Chapter election held on 17 December, 1934, suggests that the process was not straightforward: Sister Mary Ursula “eventually” received the required clear majority of votes. She was installed three days later by Bishop Gibson of Kimberley and Kuruman, the See of Bloemfontein being vacant.²

In our preceding chapter we have told of her first action as Superior, of proposing a Branch House in England. There followed the customary new Superior’s appointments to offices in the Community: in January 1935 Sister Margery Angela was made Assistant Superior; Sister Margaret Dorothea given definite charge of the School; Sister Marjorie appointed to St Faith’s Orphanage; Sister Elsie in charge of the kitchen; and Sister Zita Mary as Sacristan. All the Mother House Sisters were to take part in a new venture in maintaining a continuous watch of prayer in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel every Thursday from 12 noon until 6 pm. It began on 25 April, 1935, and continued unbroken until the Community moved house in 1970. There were some changes of work (which have been described in other chapters) – the withdrawal of Sisters from St Matthew’s Mission in Kimberley; the opening of St Raphael’s Mission Hospital at Modderpoort; the establishment of a SMMS branch house at Teyateyaneng; and the start of the Housecraft School at Leribe, to which a fourth Sister was to be permanently assigned. Within four years the old order had passed with the death of Sister Rowena in February 1936 – she first sailed to South Africa in October 1894, worked at the Good Shepherd School, and served her novitiate during the Anglo-Boer War – and the death of Mother Frances on 5 September 1938. Her health had improved after her retirement

1 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior’s Letter, July 24, 1943. Sr Mary Ursula’s biographical details from “In Memoriam” notice in SMS Magazine, 1979, p.18. Miss Kingsford worked in her early years at St Peter’s in Grahamstown and at St Michael’s, and after her return to Britain formed the Church Teachers’ Fellowship in about 1908 with the aim of recruiting teachers for overseas dominions and colonies. HPR A Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1942, p.24

2 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, Dec. 1934, & 1936; SMS Magazine, May 1936, p.5/6 Obituary of Sr Rowena.

as Superior, and she worked for many hours in the Church needlework room, making vestments for clergy all across the Diocese.³

“We could do much [in Basutoland] and elsewhere if more would join us,” Mother Mary Ursula wrote to supporters in England. “We are hampered in all directions by our small numbers.” Nevertheless, these were years in which the Community welcomed several new vocations, and her Michaelmas Letter written on 7 August, 1937, told of an increase in the novitiate. In June 1938 the *Chronicle* noted that there were nine women in the novitiate, the highest number for twenty years.⁴ Two who were clothed as Novices in 1937 and professed two years later had experience of work in other countries. The trained nurse Hilda Belsham had served in Burma, and Evelyn Smith had worked for five years as a SPG missionary among the Maoris in New Zealand. They went through the novitiate together and at the time of their Profession, Sister Evelyn penned some limericks, mainly poking fun at her companion.⁵

Hilda Clare was a wonderful nurse,
Her patients could never grow worse;
She said, “Though they’ve tried
Not one of them’s died;
I speak to them all pretty terse.”

A Novice there was – Hilda Clare –
Who always forgot to be there;
When she reached Heaven’s gate
Peter said: “You’re too late”,
And now she is – goodness knows where.

Hilda often forgets to keep ‘mum’,
And thinks other people look glum;
Her intentions are good
But she never could
Remember retreatants are dumb.

3 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, 1935 to 1938; HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1936, p.17, & 1935, p.10

4 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, Superior’s letter, 9 August 1935; also 7 August, 1937; and June 14, 1938.

5 SMS. There are ten limericks.

Those two Sisters were the last to proceed directly from the Novitiate to Life Vows. As we have seen in an earlier chapter, the founder of the Community, Bishop Webb, acknowledged the need for vows to be made by the Sisters and recognised by the Church.⁶ The Rule of the Sisterhood of St Thomas the Martyr, Oxford, which formed the basis of St Michael's first Rule, gave no details for the form of admission for a newly-elected Sister, specifying only that the Sister should make a promise of Obedience to the Superior. The earliest Profession Scroll seen in the archives dates from 1879 and has the Sister, "having of my own freewill devoted myself to the life of a Sister ... promise fidelity to this Community ...". The wording on Profession scrolls remained essentially unchanged, but the life intention of St Michael's Sisters was made explicit in the Rule of 1906, where the first chapter states, "The Threefold Vow involves a life-long dedication to the Will of God by Poverty, Chastity and Obedience." That commitment was made at the end of two and a half years' Novitiate.⁷

It was the Cowley Fathers from their Cape Town house who suggested that those completing their novitiates should proceed to three years of First Vows before making Life Profession. Fr Savage SSJE conducted the Sisters' Retreat in July 1938 and, at the conclusion of the Chapter which followed, addressed the Community on the subject. Advice was taken from the Bishop as Visitor and from Fr Bull SSJE, and the Chapter of 1939 resolved to accept Fr Bull's proposed amendments to the Constitution, by which the Novitiate would lead to three years of temporary vows, renewed annually, before Final Profession. As required by the Constitution, this decision had to be confirmed by the following year's Annual Chapter before taking effect.⁸ We may note that St Michael's was ahead of some other Communities in making this change: All Saints Sisters of the Poor introduced First Vows in 1949 and the Community of the Holy Name in 1954.⁹

St Michael's Sisters became known quite widely in South Africa as the "blue nuns" but it was not until Michaelmas 1938 that they started to wear blue habits in the heat of summer, retaining black veils and scapulars, and changing back to black habits for the cold Free State winters.¹⁰

6 Chapter 4 above.

7 SMS, Rule of the Sisterhood of St Thomas the Martyr, chapter V, Rule of the Sisters; HPRA Wits, AB2644/80, Profession Scroll of Sister Sarah, Feast of the Annunciation 1879; SMS, Rule of 1906, chapter 1.

8 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, July 11, 1938, & July 4, 1939; vol.iii, July 4, 1940; HPRA Wits AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1939, p.9

9 Mayhew, *All Saints*, p.207; Dunstan (ed), *What's in a Name?* p.102

10 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, September 28, 1938, when the Chronicler recorded also the digging of trenches in London parks and the Four Power summit at Munich.

The declaration of war between the United Kingdom and Germany on 3 September, 1939, was recorded by the *Chronicler*, together with the information that the Union of South Africa's Parliament voted by a majority to join the war against Germany. The decision caused a split in the governing party, leading to General Jan C. Smuts becoming Prime Minister. With three Sisters at the newly-opened London House, and most of the Community having their immediate families in Britain, it was a time of great anxiety, although Bloemfontein was very far from the scenes of military action. Pupils in the School, encouraged by the Sisters, started raising funds and making "hospital comforts" for the troops. Inevitably, the War was to have an impact on the help the Community received from Britain. In her Annual Letter for 1942, the Superior noted the effect on the Novitiate:

we ask your prayers for ourselves and for all Religious Communities in view of promising vocations delayed or possibly lost on account of present conditions.¹¹

Financially also, there was less support and the Annual Sales of Work were without the needlework formerly sent in mission boxes.

Perhaps we may link the privations of War to the 1940 decision by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to halve their annual grant for mission work at St Patrick's. The *Chronicler* passed her comment by the use of punctuation:

that Sisters should undertake what had been done by two ladies and receive grant for *one!*

The Community had a long involvement in the work of St Patrick's and that underwent some readjustment at the beginning of 1935, when the Society of the Sacred Mission was appointed to take charge of that Mission. One secular priest had been struggling to cope with a vastly expanded district, but the SSM was able to send in three priests. Two full time lady workers were appointed to work with them, and four CSM&AA Sisters were to continue taking weekly classes and with their visiting in areas encompassing about twelve hundred houses.

Giving systematic attention to the people in their own homes is a very important part of our work. Without it, the knowledge of the people who

11 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's letter, July 21, 1942.

come to our classes tends to be superficial, especially as the numbers in some of the classes are so enormous.

The increase in St Michael's Novitiate enabled the Sisters to take on the teaching of boy catechumens in 1936, and also to expand the area of their visiting.

It was when the two lady workers were to leave that the Bishop was in contact with the SPG about St Patrick's Mission work. The Community was to take over all the women's work of the Mission from the beginning of 1941. Their capacity to do this had been increased in 1940 when the Bishop and the Warden gave their approval for Sisters to ride bicycles. The black areas of Bloemfontein were stretching further and further to the east, away from St Michael's, and much time was taken up with walking to and from the districts. Mother Mary Ursula wrote in July 1941:

the bicycles (Rhoda, Perpetua and Felicity) did good work last year and a fourth (Vincent) was purchased last January. ... Without bicycles we could not have undertaken the extra work as it involves (besides sacristan work and general mission work) fortnightly demonstration lessons in Scripture to thirty-three classes at St Patrick's School, and in needlework to eighteen classes; the schools are a considerable distance from St Michael's. This school work is shared by three novices and Sister Margery Angela; Alice, Dorothy and Irene are doing general mission work.

In the Michaelmas octave that year the Sisters invited the teachers from St Patrick's Schools to a tea party at St Michael's, and afterwards showed them the classrooms: "they went away with ideas for their own classrooms."¹²

The Society of Women Missionaries returned to St Michael's for their Retreat and Conference which was held from 31 December 1941 to 8 January 1942. Fifty-two attended. Held every two and a half years, so as to alternate between summer and winter, this gathering had last been in Bloemfontein in 1927. It may be recalled that their very first Retreat and Conference were held at St Michael's in 1914. The Community had never been represented at the conferences held in other centres, but now was invited to send a Sister to the subsequent gathering, which took place in Pietermaritzburg in July 1944. Sister Marion Faith, Principal of the Housecraft School at Leribe, attended

¹² HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1935, p.18-19, and 1936, p.16; Mason, *History of the SSM*, p.210; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, 4 June 1940, Superior's Letter 16 August 1940, Superior's Letter 24 July 1941, Superior's Letter 21 July 1942.

and made known to the assembled missionaries that St Michael's Sisterhood had a scheme of regular intercessions in which they included the needs of other Missions besides those in which they worked.¹³

St Michael's was well-practised at hosting retreats. Every July, in the week before the Community's own Retreat, a Women's Retreat was conducted by an invited priest. This had evolved from the Workers' Retreats that were held annually in Bishop Webb's time, and which had been opened for any women to attend. Usually between twenty and thirty did so. Through the remainder of the year many individuals came for Quiet Days or to make private retreats. A small house was built in the Chapel Garden for the use of priests wanting their own retreat, and it was well-used. It gave easy access to the main Chapel and Blessed Sacrament Chapel, and to quiet places in the grounds.

On the slightly higher ground behind St George's and the Sisters' wing, an enclosure was created by building a wall in a wide circle around an old olive tree, using reddish-brown stones and boulders found on the site. It was planned to erect a Calvary there in memory of Fr William Frith, the late Warden of the Community. No cement or mortar was used, and Mother Mary Ursula described that

there is nothing aggressively new in its appearance ... in fact the wall and the olive tree might have lived and grown old together for hundreds of years, the effect by moonlight taking one's thoughts to Gethsemane.

Until the Calvary could be ordered, a temporary wooden cross was set up within the enclosure, which was kept as a place of silence.

A real atmosphere of prayer is growing up around it, for the place is much used for reading and meditation and during Retreats and Quiet Days, in fact it rather fulfils the function of an out-door chapel.¹⁴

Victory in Europe was celebrated in Bloemfontein Cathedral with a "Day of Praise." It began with Mattins at 6.30 am and continued with five Masses and other services to make a continuous offering of thanksgiving, praise and self-dedication from dawn to dusk, concluding with Solemn Evensong at 5 pm. It was estimated that over five thousand people attended in the course of the day. The care of the Sacristy and the cleaning of the Cathedral being among the responsibilities of the Sisters, some of them were present for

13 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, 1942, and p.55, Superior's Letter of 21 July 1944.

14 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's Letters 21 July 1944 and 26 July 1945.

most of the time. Two months later, the Community kept a Day of Prayer for World Needs at the conclusion of its Retreat, before the Branch House Sisters returned to their posts. The School was on holiday but the children of St Faith's were at home.

There were usually two or three Sisters in Chapel for each half-hour, and the S. Faith's children came over a few at a time as they chose. As it happened, the youngest child came on her own to fetch away two others who, she thought, were praying too long, and might be late for a tea party! She herself said later that she had 'prayed a lot' that day; the children enjoyed going when they liked, with whom they liked, and quite a number were ready to hurry back again after supper.¹⁵

One indirect effect of the War was that it became difficult to fill vacancies on the staff. The Housekeeper at St George's died and there was a vacancy for a Housekeeper at St Michael's Home, and another vacancy for a second Matron at St Faith's. Mentioning these in her Letter of July 1945, Mother Mary Ursula told also of the death of Miss Clare at the age of 93. Miss Clare had gone to Bloemfontein in 1887 to teach music at the Home School. At that time, the staff, lay workers and Associates all lived at St Michael's with the Sisters, and Miss Clare was one who continued to do so, ending her days quietly at St George's. Another long term resident was Miss Harley, once a Postulant, who stayed on, taking charge of the linen room until she left at the end of January 1961, aged 74, to go to retirement at Kearsney.

It was not only paid staff who were in short supply. The War reduced the number of aspirants to St Michael's Community, "as to others," wrote the Superior, "and we need new Postulants badly."¹⁶ In the same letter she wrote of Sister Helen's Golden Jubilee of Profession, and of the death of Sister Hilda Mary, the fourth South African to join the Community. Another South African had been clothed as Novice Joan in November 1945, and in 1949 two more were clothed, Thirza Dorey and Emily Moss. Joan Marsh was the second of three women encouraged to test their vocations by Fr Gonville French-Beytagh. Sister Betty and Sister Joan were both nurtured in faith during his time as Rector of St Boniface's Church in Germiston, and Sister Eleanor, who joined the Community in 1956, was from his congregation at the Cathedral of Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia (now Harare, Zimbabwe). Sister Thirza was born in Zululand and worked as a missionary and midwife in Nigeria before taking up employment at St Michael's School

15 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's Letter, 26 July 1945.

16 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, Mother Superior's Letter, 29 July 1946.

in 1940. Sister Emily was a local girl, having grown up as a member of Bloemfontein's Cathedral congregation. A few other South Africans arrived and stayed for short periods as Aspirants or Postulants, but the main source of vocations was always the United Kingdom. A Novena of Prayer for the Community's life and work was kept in March 1948, and the need for vocations would have been in everyone's minds.

A general election held among the white population in June 1948 brought about a change of Government in South Africa, and this was to have major long-term impacts not only on the country as a whole but also on the work of the Church. The white electorate voted into power the Nationalist Party, which had as its flagship policy the concept of *apartheid*, an Afrikaans word meaning "separateness." In later years it was spelt out as "separate development" for the races, but as the policy was introduced after the election, Sister Margery Angela was in no doubt what it meant:

This dreadful policy of 'Apartheid', white and black to be separated by the Government as much as possible, the black man treated not only as inferior, but as not fit to stand at the same counter as the white man, or to be on the same part of the railway station – all this is the very opposite of what we are striving after, indeed of all Christian endeavour: the promotion of unity.¹⁷

Bishop Arthur Howe-Brown was not deterred from inviting the African clergy and lay delegates of the triennial Diocesan Synods to lunch with him at Bishop's Lodge. He had done so in 1944, and again in 1947, as Sister Margery Angela described:

We had the pleasure of preparing and serving a rather exciting lunch. We lunched with them, and, in spite of the fact that second helpings and such like assistance were required, we managed not to be jumping up all the time, but got in a good deal of cheerful conversation.

The Bishop invited the African delegates and clergy to lunch during the May 1950 Synod also, and again it was arranged and served by the Sisters. The reason for not inviting the white delegates was that they could easily get lunch in the city centre restaurants, where Africans were not admitted.

Opportunities were created to develop good contacts between the races. In 1950,

17 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1949, p.9

The Choir of St Patrick's came to St Michael's School and rendered some lovely unaccompanied part songs. Our St Michael's children appreciate the unusual sight of black people on the stage of the School Hall. On St Patrick's Day the Cathedral was packed with Africans. The Bishop preached on, 'The Love of Christ constraineth us.' He referred to the pioneer missionaries, and those who taught others the faith from this motive.¹⁸

St Patrick's Mission entered the story of the Community of St Michael and All Angels when Mother Emma attended a Service there in 1874, and from 1881 onwards the Sisters were actively engaged in its ministry to the growing black population. The first St Patrick's was an iron building situated close to the Cathedral in St George's Street, and opened in December 1867. The Priest-Vicar of the Cathedral, the Revd Dennis Croghan, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, chose the great Irish missionary Patrick as its patron saint. The first priest in charge was the Revd George Mitchell and he was succeeded by the Revd William Crisp, in whose time Gabriel David joined the staff. Ordained Priest in 1890 by Bishop Knight Bruce¹⁹, the Revd Gabriel David became the first African priest in the diocese. Thanks to his hard work the congregation grew, and St Patrick's was rebuilt in brick on a plot more central to the Waaihoek (Windy Corner) township in 1894. Still the numbers grew, and in 1903 the congregation decided that a new and larger church was needed. The Director of St Patrick's Mission, Fr Edgar Rose, designed it with an intended capacity of 1,500 people. The foundation stone was laid on a new site in Harvey Road, part of Waaihoek, by the Prime Minister of the Orange River Colony, Mr Abraham Fischer, in 1908. Because there was not enough money to pay for professional contractors, Fr Rose supervised the building work himself, which was all done by Black workers. Delayed by the shortage of materials during the 1914 – 1918 War, the structure was not completed until 1923. On Ascension Day that year, Mass was celebrated in the old church at 4 am, and a High Mass for the consecration of the distinctive new church was sung by the Diocesan Bishop, Walter Carey, at 10 am.²⁰

Waaihoek lay a short distance south-east of the centre of Bloemfontein, and a curve in the railway track that was laid in 1890 created an eastern boundary to the district. Confined within a limited area, it was densely populated and most of the housing was

18 HPR A Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Reports for 1947, p.9, and 1950, p.9

19 Crisp, p. 104

20 Crisp, p.15, 73-74; Lewis & Edwards, p.431-432; HPR A Wits, AB2259/E3.1, *St Patrick's Mission 1867 – 1967*, by Ephraim Khotso Mosothoane, p.26, & anonymous 4-page typescript, St Patrick's, Bloemfontein.

poor.²¹ Fr Rose's new church brought an image of glory into the neighbourhood but, during the fifteen years of its construction, the Municipality had begun planning and then building the Batho township on the eastern side of the railway line. This new development was given extra impetus as a result of the influenza epidemic of 1918. The better quality housing, more widely spaced, would help to ensure a more healthy population, although it would not solve the problems of malnutrition caused by low wages. The intention was to relocate all the population of Waaihoek. That would take several years to accomplish, which the Municipality recognised by opening a health clinic in Waaihoek in 1920. By 1925, most of the population had moved, and the clinic was transferred to Batho.²² As the population continued to grow, the housing spread ever further eastwards, and the railway had become the dividing line between the White population on the west and the Black to the east. Karel Schoeman called the latter "the unknown Bloemfontein" – unknown to the white inhabitants.²³

It was not unknown to the Sisters of St Michael's, who used their bicycles to get around visiting in the homes of the people. St Patrick's Church, in old Waaihoek west of the railway, lay a couple of miles from many of the houses but was mid-way into the city where the majority of the population worked. As Sister Margery Angela reported:

Although the homes of the people are now far away, yet at 10 o'clock on Sundays the Church is nearly always full, and on special Sundays it is packed, the Churchwardens having to make a way for the procession as in medieval times. Two or three times a month there is a 4.30 Mass which is well attended by people who have to be at their work by 6.30.²⁴

It may have been entirely a coincidence that it was in 1948, just four months after the Nationalist government had been elected, that the Priest Director of St Patrick's Mission received a letter from the Town Clerk, saying that the city required the land on which the Church stood.

ERF No.1893 : HARVEY ROAD

I am directed by the City Council to inform you that the abovementioned erf, the property of the Church of the Province of South Africa, is

21 Schoeman, *Portrait of Bloemfontein*, no.305, p.125 – "Aan die rand van die stad die armoedige huisies van Waaihoek."

22 Howard Phillips, *Black October*, University of Cape Town Thesis, 1984, p.147-150

23 Schoeman, *Portrait of Bloemfontein*, p.174

24 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1950, p.8

required for Power Station extensions, and has to be acquired by the Council for that purpose. ... The matter is urgent ...”

Was it the only direction in which the power station could extend? Or did it conveniently remove a prominent Black church?

Negotiations between the Diocese and the City Council took some time and it was not until midway through 1950 that the Council asked the Diocese to agree to a set of terms which included the amount of money the Council would pay, the provision of a new site in Mangaung (on a 99-year lease and not freehold), and the right of St Patrick’s Mission to remain in possession and use of the building “until its new church is completed or until the whole of Erf No. 1893 is required ... whichever is earlier.” Part of the land had to be released to the Council at once.²⁵

Mother Mary Ursula informed Old Girls of the School about the impending move in her annual letter for 1951, and added another paragraph the following year:

I wrote last year about the necessity of removing St Patrick’s Church, which stands on the extreme edge of the location nearest to the town. In course of years those who attend it have moved farther and farther away, as the location grew. Two 200 ft. cooling towers (in connection with an extension of the electric power station) have been built right up against its north side and the site on which it stands has been acquired for the building of two more. On the afternoon of Sunday, June 15th [1952], the Bishop laid the foundation stone of the new St Patrick’s which is to be built in the centre of [Mangaung] near St Patrick’s ‘Number One School’ (Higher Primary). A very large number of Africans, with a good sprinkling of Europeans, attended the ceremony, a beautiful and reverent one, with a good deal of hearty hymn-singing, led by St Patrick’s choir. At present eleven Sisters do part-time work in St Patrick’s Mission, including Sacristan work. It remains to be seen what we shall be able to undertake when the church is so much farther away.²⁶

A little bit of St Michael’s went into the new St Patrick’s. On 22 September, 1953, the Director of the Mission, Fr Alban Perkins SSM, with the architect and a contractor

25 HPRA Wits, AB2259/E3.1, letters from the Council: original of 13 October 1948, and copies of those dated 16 May and 16 July, 1950.

26 SMS, Old Girls’ Letters dated 26 July, 1951 and 17 July, 1952.

inspected the reredos in the Chapel with a view to its use in the new building. It was removed and handed over at the end of the following month. Plans were afoot to install stained glass windows in the sanctuary of St Michael's Chapel. The main window would depict St Michael, St Raphael and St Uriel, and was being given as a memorial to Mrs Violet Coaker. Because of various delays, the Whitefriars glass, made by James Powell and Son in London, was not installed until 1958.²⁷

The *Chronicler* wrote an entry about the last Sunday at St Patrick's, Harvey Road, 24 January, 1954. There were 420 Communicants in the morning, and the Bishop preached at a 4 pm Evensong, at the conclusion of which he formally deconsecrated the building. Another entry tells of the Dedication of the new St Patrick's, the fourth and largest, on January 30. Clergy came from all parts of the Diocese and a mixed race congregation of over one thousand heard a sermon preached by Canon Moore, who had been Assistant Priest at St Patrick's for four years in the time of Fr Rose. Mother Mary Ursula was one of sixteen Sisters who attended. She made some notes from the sermon, parts of which she reproduced for an Old Girls' Letter. The preacher thought that Fr Rose would have been satisfied with the changes, knowing that his work endured with God.

Lest those who had known and loved the old S. Patrick's should be feeling sad as they thought of the old church, which had been hallowed by prayer and sacraments, being swept away by the advance of building and industry, he reminded them that S. Patrick's had not been swept away, but had moved farther into the location and closer to the hearts of the people.

The Bishop celebrated the First Mass in the new Church the following morning at 4 am, and other Masses followed at 6.30 and 10 am, with a total of 1,324 Communicants. Evensong, with a visiting preacher from Johannesburg, marked the start of a week-long Mission. Mother Mary Ursula wrote,

[The church] is much more accessible to the people, and the inspiration of the Dedication and the Mission which followed it have led to the return of many who had lapsed, and it has also become much more of a centre for the children than the old church could ever be.

Although the distance the Sisters had to travel necessitated a rearrangement of their work, two were still engaged on Sunday morning, another every Sunday afternoon, with

²⁷ Leith, *One the Faith*, p.62,63

three more once a month. Two took classes in the 'Number Two' School every Friday afternoon, another continued as Sacristan, and one worked in the SSM Priory office several mornings each week.²⁸ The Priory was now two miles from the Church.

Twelve of the congregation who attended the Dedication Service were transported in the donkey cart acquired by Sister Enid in 1953. Crippled, blind, aged and infirm, they could not have been present without that assistance. The main function of the cart was to help sick and infirm people attend out-patient appointments at hospital, as we tell in our next chapter, but the cart was useful for other work also. Crippled children were taken to St Michael's for an annual Epiphany party. The parties were started for children who were crippled through poliomyelitis or for some other reason and who were cared for in their own homes, but later expanded to include those from the Orthopaedic Home. Some made their own way and tended to arrive very early. Sister Enid provided a colourful description of one year's party:

The children – crippled, dumb or epileptic – arrived in the wagon-ambulance and much enjoyed cool drinks, cakes, sweets and water melon under the shade of the trees in the Hostel garden. When they had eaten all they could – little dumb Veronica carrying away in a small box what she could not! – we took them on to the lawn in St Michael's front garden. Here they enjoyed with much fun and laughter 'blow bubbles' and toy plastic balloons. Just then two tiny European girls came running along ... their parents were in the parlour arranging to send the elder girl to our Kindergarten ... they stayed with us and greatly enjoyed [the] party. A little later we collected the children in a group on the lawn and each child was called by name and brought to Reverend Mother who gave him or her a present and a paper hat and either a small trumpet or some other exciting and noise-making toy. The presents were really beautiful this year as a shop in town had given us some slightly damaged toys, which had been skilfully mended by Sister Edith Agnes. The girls had really lovely dolls, and their faces of almost unbelieving bliss were a joy to see. The boys had cars of various kinds – one even had a space vehicle!

Finally we went into Chapel and the children grouped themselves in front of the Crib; here they sang two Epiphany hymns and repeated very happily

28 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, 1953 and 1954; SMS, Old Girls' Letter, 27 June, 1954. The National Museum in Bloemfontein was displaying a fine model of Fr Rose's St Patrick's, when the author visited on 28 September, 2018.

short prayers said by Sister Margery Angela. They went one by one to the Crib before leaving to greet the Holy Child lying there in the straw with His Mother and St Joseph.

After this they were packed safely into the wagon and the last we heard and saw of them were trumpet calls and little brown hands stretched out of the windows waving goodbye.

It was all made possible by generous donors whose gifts were “translated into untold riches of joy.” These parties were held at St Michael’s every Epiphany until the move to Brandwag, after which the Sisters continued to host them but then at St Patrick’s Church.²⁹

In 1957, Bloemfontein received its first Free State-born Bishop. The Rt Revd Bendyshe Burnett came from Koffiefontein, a small town in the south west of the province. At his enthronement in the Cathedral on November 27, he preached partly in Afrikaans, on the text, “that they may be one.” The packed congregation was multi-racial, and among them were the Mayor of Bloemfontein and the Administrator of the Orange Free State, Mr J.J. Fouche, who in later years became State President. Perhaps it was with Bishop Burnett’s encouragement that all races were invited to a Mass in the Cathedral the following month. Sister Margery Angela wrote of it while stating a few things bearing on the subject of *apartheid*.

There was an inter-racial Mass at the Cathedral in December, the celebrant being the African Canon Makhetha, the gospeller Father Jourdan who is Afrikaans-speaking, and the epistoler Father Masters SSM, English-speaking. A good congregation of white and black made their Communion together. During the Michaelmas Octave, Africans came to St Michael’s Chapel for the CBS Ward Service, and black and white worshipped happily together. We have not been arrested.

There was a very good multi-racial congregation in the Cathedral when St Patrick’s sang Evensong on Sunday 19 March, 1959. The Dean, the Very Revd Aidan Cross, preached. His father had served as one of the priests at St Patrick’s some fifty or sixty years earlier.³⁰

29 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, January 1957; vol.iv, January 1963 (when some guests arrived seven hours early), January 1966; HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1957; St Enid’s description is in ECH Report for 1961, p.12-13

30 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, November and December 1957; vol.iv, 1959; HPRA Wits AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1957.

The Sisters continued their work at St Patrick's and in the expanding districts of Mangaung. Leading the team, Sister Margery Angela told supporters that Sister Olive had a motor fitted to her bicycle, "so that she swishes forth at a great rate."

Other Sisters still pedal away on an ordinary bike – a native bicycle as it has been styled – as most Europeans riding bicycles nowadays use the motor variety: so we are still rejoicing, in the case of pedal cycles, in the poor man's mode of transport.

St Patrick's was flourishing under the SSM Fathers, she wrote, and the Community's Chronicle records the numbers of candidates Confirmed: 150 in 1959, 230 in October 1960, 260 the following year, but on St Patrick's Day in 1963 there was a "small" Confirmation, with only 58 candidates.

As we are four miles away and the bottle neck under the railway is more full of traffic than ever, we are doing our best about transport; when it is a case of going by pedal cycle, we can go another way over some long, steep mountainous slopes over which urchins love to carry the bike, they even vie with each other as to who should have the fun of doing so; sometimes, not always, there are a few sweets handy for remuneration.

Victoria is the motor bike and she has proved herself already useful beyond words. Sister Joan, besides being Sacristan, has a sewing guild in the large airy vestry and already ever so many cassocks and other things have been made to replace the dreadful rags which at one time adorned the pegs (and the servers).

Apart from Sister Margery Angela and Sister Joan, during 1960 the others in the St Patrick's team were Sister Enid, working mainly among the sick and destitute, Sister Winifred assisting generally, and Sister Phyllis Mary who visited the African wards of the Hospital.³¹

Cycling amid the traffic had its perils. In 1961 Sister Margery Angela was knocked off her bicycle not far from the SSM Priory. She was bruised and unconscious, but recovered completely. Less fortunate was Sister Phyllis Mary, knocked off her bike in a collision in the city centre in June 1967. She died in hospital later in the day. By then, some of

31 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1957; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, Report on work at St Patrick's in 1960, with the Superior's letter of 10 August 1961.

the Sisters had already started using the bus. Under the rules of *apartheid*, they required written permission to use the African bus service.

The possibilities of attempting “something more among the African women” of Mangaung was one of the ideas put forward by Bishop Burnett in the Charge he delivered at the end of a Visitation of the Community in July 1959. The main purpose of the Visitation was to allow the Visitor to see how well the Rule and Constitution were being observed, and it is clear from the Charge that he had left few stones unturned. After saying that it had been for him “a moving and a strengthening experience to meet among you so much faithfulness ... so much loyalty to God and to one another, so clear a sense of God’s vocation and so distinct a desire to serve God whatever may be His Will,” he went on to remark that some of the Sisters “have had to endure from me questions which you have found difficult to answer – and which you may even have preferred to have left unanswered.” In his judgement, there was not enough sharing of responsibility in the Community. The Superior needed to make more use of the Consultative Council instead of making decisions alone, and the Chapter would benefit from dealing with a wider range of subjects: there was “inadequate opportunity to raise matters of common concern.” Introducing more consultation and discussion would not undermine Holy Obedience – “in point of fact lack of consultation may indeed undermine obedience much more.” Major offices should not be combined in one person – he was addressing a Community that was almost forty strong – doing so had the effect of not training other Sisters in responsibility. He referred to a “sort of Seniority Fetish” which was clogging growth and initiative. Senior Sisters needed to hand over their functions so that the more vigorous could begin to take a lead.

The fact that you feel there are no persons who can share in positions of leadership suggests a loss of nerve. We all grow under responsibility.

There were tensions in the Community about the way in which the Divine Office was recited, and the failure to establish one method for all to follow was injurious to the common life. Some Sisters missed too many Offices, claiming that their work did not allow them to attend every time.

You are all first Religious and then only active. Your work therefore must be adjusted to make it possible for you to live the life and keep the Rule. It would be better to do less work over all and keep your rule better in this connection – your spiritual life and offering of worship is of more significance than your work.

Looking to the future, the Bishop had no doubt at all “that God has His plans for your future life and growth,” but he urged the Community to make a frank reassessment of its place in the Diocese in the greatly changed circumstances of the mid-Twentieth Century, when many traditional avenues of missionary service were no longer possible. He was afraid that they were hanging on to as much as they could of some past work for fear of the demoralising effect of giving up any more. He said, “Do not allow timidity or lack of trust to prevent you from going forward.”³²

Still in the future was the departure from Leribe, but the work at Modderpoort had come to an end in December 1953. We may observe that after the sad failure of the attempt to establish a House in London, no new works were taken on under Mother Mary Ursula’s leadership.

The Community gained a new Warden in May 1958, following the resignation of Canon Francis Smith, who had served in that office for five years. Archdeacon Donald Bailey had arrived from England the previous September, accompanied by his family, and lived beside the Cathedral. There had been some other changes also. Fr Savage SSJE, who had been the Community’s external Confessor from 1936, had to give up that work after the 1953 Retreat because of poor health, and handed over to Fr Dakers SSJE. The Community’s records tell of Fr Savage’s death on 2 December 1956, collapsing while on his way to say a Mass in Cape Town. When the Cowley Fathers began to wind down their work in South Africa (the last annual Retreat they conducted for CSM&AA was given by Fr Shrive SSJE in July 1963), the Community of the Resurrection agreed to provide spiritual direction to the Bloemfontein Sisters. Fr Claude Lunnis CR conducted their Retreat in July 1966 and, on his transfer to the West Indies later that year, Fr Keith Davie CR was appointed as external Confessor, a role he filled until his return to Mirfield.³³

On Saturday 2 February, 1963, it was one hundred years since the consecration of Bishop Edward Twells as the first Bishop for the Orange Free State. The Diocese’s Centenary celebrations began that afternoon with an ox-roasting and concert in the grounds of St Patrick’s Church, and in the evening the Mayor hosted a Civic Reception in the City Hall. Many dignitaries attended the Centenary Mass celebrated the next morning in the open air in the grounds of St Andrew’s School. With nine visiting Bishops, including Bishop Eric Trapp of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel,

32 HPRA Wits, AB2644/54, Bishop’s Charge at Visitation, 16 July, 1959.

33 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii; SMS, ECH Report for 1966, p.11. Fr Davie’s death at Mirfield on 29 April, 1987, is recorded in CSM&AA’s White Book II.

the long procession of clergy took fifteen minutes. Bishop Trapp read a message of congratulations from the Archbishop of Canterbury, whom he was representing, and preached the Sermon. The combined choirs of St Andrew's and St Michael's Schools led the singing. All the hymns were printed on the service sheets in three languages: English, Afrikaans and SeSotho, and could be sung in any of them simultaneously. The multi-racial congregation numbered about two thousand five hundred, and included all the pupils of St Michael's School.³⁴

The School was eleven years younger than the Diocese, but some of its buildings were beginning to show their age and were inadequate for modern educational use. The former St Faith's building was vacant, and in 1961 the Junior Hostel moved into it temporarily, while a new Hostel was built. A new Science Laboratory was needed, and a Planning Committee was formed. As we have described in Chapter 18 above, this came up with ideas for a substantial rebuilding project on the Markgraaf and Elizabeth Street sites. On 26 March, 1965, Mr L. H. Marquard addressed a meeting of the Community and suggested an even more radical solution: selling the historic properties and rebuilding on a completely new site. The *Chronicler* wrote that "members of the Community were favourably impressed" by his presentation, and on 30 April the Chapter met in order to pass a resolution in favour of the proposal.

Bishop Burnett decided to conduct another Visitation of the Community that year, immediately after the Annual Retreat and Chapter. Remarkably, given the issues that would arise as a consequence of the decision to move, there was no Agenda for the Chapter, and all that happened was that the Minutes of the previous meeting were read and the accounts were open for inspection. The Visitation took place from 14 to 16 July, 1965. The Bishop would have known all about the proposals, and also he may have had the benefit of some information from the Warden, who had called in the Assistant Superior, Sister Margery Angela, for a discussion about Community matters at the end of November 1963. That meeting is mentioned in the White Book but with no details of what was discussed. Given the importance of some of the points the Bishop raised in 1959, he may have been looking to see if anything had changed. The archives do not appear to contain the Bishop's Charge, which was not delivered on the last day of the Visitation. Instead, after some days had elapsed, he wrote a letter to Mother Mary Ursula, which she received on 28 July, and answered in writing the same day. A few hours later, she called the Consultative Council together and told them that she would resign as Superior in December. She told the Community on 3 August, and the following day

34 FSA. A510, White Book I, vol.iv; Leith, *One the Faith*, p.65

Bishop Burnett returned to St Michael's Chapel to deliver his Charge.³⁵ Mother Mary Ursula had been re-elected in 1962 for a five year term and had two years still to run, but it looks as if the Bishop decided that it was time to give her the push.

Bishop Burnett wrote a short but generous tribute for publication in the Diocesan paper *The Sword*:

Many of you will have learned with regret of the recent resignation of Sister Mary Ursula as the Mother Superior of the Community of St Michael and All Angels. She has served the Community in this capacity with wisdom and love for thirty-one years. ... The words that spring to mind when one considers her years of faithful service are those that end the long psalm set for the fifteenth evening of the month: 'So he fed them with a faithful and true heart, and ruled them prudently with all his power.'

In her history of St Michael's School, Margaret Leith described Mother Mary Ursula as "a genuine Religious. She was blessed with real serenity and her spiritual influence was tremendous."³⁶

The following month the doctor had to be called to attend to Mother Mary Ursula while she was away on holiday and staying with a friend in Plettenberg Bay. She had suffered a slight loss of memory and her worried hostess telephoned the Mother House. Three Sisters drove down in the Volkswagen Kombi to collect her and take her back home.³⁷

After the news had gone around that St Michael's Community and School were planning to relocate, leaving their old buildings for demolition, there was a flurry of interest in St George's. Major renovations had been carried out in 1960, some of which "finally obliterated the marks and other small features which showed that [the dining room] had once been a ward." Nevertheless, it remained substantially as originally built. Mother Mary Ruth told supporters in England:

In recent years our St George's Guest House in Bloemfontein, No.3 Markgraaf Street, has received the marked attentions of South African doctors as the first hospital in this area north of the Orange River. Dr S.V.

35 These details are all from the White Book I, vol.iv, FSA, A510

36 The Bishop's words are quoted in ECH Report for 1965, HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, p.9
Leith, *One the Faith*, p.46

37 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 21 January 1966.

Potgieter, an anaesthetist, has been studying the archives, and would like the house declared a National Monument, and used as a medical museum. This, however, the Community cannot at the moment allow, as the question is bound up with the disposal of our present site, and the move to West Bloemfontein. But the interest led to a really gay occasion on October 6th, 1966. Doctors from all over South Africa met in Bloemfontein that weekend for an Anaesthetists' Conference. On that Saturday night, hot and fine, they gathered at 'St George's Hospital' to see the building and the old operating theatre. Coloured lights were strung along the drive. When the inspection was over, Dr Potgieter addressed the gathering from the terrace, commending the nursing work done by the early Sisters, and the happy co-operation between President Brand of the old Orange Free State and Bishop Webb in establishing this famous little hospital. The story going the rounds was that St Michael's Sisters gave a cocktail party; there was indeed a cocktail party, but it was laid on at Medfontein (the Medical Centre) afterwards.³⁸

On one of the gate posts, with the black lettering of "3, St George's", the word "Hospital" was still visible, showing through the white paint.

38 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, July 1960; SMS, ECH Report for 1966, p.9



An aerial view taken in 1968 shows St Michael's Home and School on the block bounded by Markgraaf Street, Elizabeth Street, First Avenue, and St Andrew's Street. Originally on the outskirts of the town, it had been absorbed into the expanding city centre. The Free State's first hospital, St George's, is the building with a verandah, left of centre in the photo. The site is now filled by the Sand du Plessis theatre complex.

CHAPTER 23



MA 'MOHAU – MOTHER OF MERCY

Johannesburg's newspaper *The Star* hosted a grand luncheon in the ballroom of the Sunnyside Park Hotel on Tuesday 4 December, 1979, in order to announce the winners of two special awards. Nominations had been invited from all across South Africa. Ms Lucy Mvubelo of Soweto was proclaimed 'Woman of the Year', in recognition of her outstanding work as General Secretary to the National Union of Clothing Workers. Sister Enid CSM&AA was declared 'Unsung Heroine of the Year'. After the Lady Mayoress of Johannesburg had presented the awards, both winners were immediately interviewed for national television.¹

Enid Barber was an unlikely heroine, having been a "very timid" child. "She was reserved and quiet in manner and sometimes insecure. Behind this was an iron determination, however, to overcome the difficulties that beset her."² We have two accounts of her early years, not entirely corresponding with one another. Sister Mary Ruth wrote of Sister Enid:

1 SMS, White Book II, Dec 4, 1979; and Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma 'Mohau: Mother of Mercy*, p.13

2 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma 'Mohau: Mother of Mercy*, p.2,3

Her scratchy notes allude to an elder sister Ruby whom she did not know; a brother Norman who was seriously wounded in World War I, and to a mysterious Oenone, and Muriel. Enid was the youngest. Her father delighted her as a small child; when she was older she tried to conceal his shady reputation which was summed up caustically by a friend: ‘Gentleman, gambler, drunkard’. He disappeared early in her life dying after a tragic accident. ... In 1913, her mother lay dying of a painful cancer and the thirteen year old Enid nursed her until she died. Left orphaned and without resources she was committed to a grim institution ... She was befriended by the Baskett family and with Nellie Baskett ... attended the Fulham Gilliatt School (Grammar) in London. She was found to have superior intelligence and did well. On leaving school, she chose the ministry of nursing. At the age of nineteen she became a probationer at the Lincoln Hospital where she qualified.³

Nellie Baskett intimated a different relationship to parents and to the “grim institution”:

Sister Enid was a life-long friend. Our parents were friends. We attended the same schools, and when she went to Lincoln to train as a nurse, I was at Lincoln Training College for teachers. After she lost both her parents, she had a nervous breakdown, and was nursed back to health by my mother. She was a gifted nurse, and became the youngest Matron in England. She did research work on Tuberculosis, and owing to an accident in the laboratory, she succumbed to the disease, and had to have a lung removed. After her recovery she was told she would have to live in a high altitude such as Switzerland or S. Africa. She chose the latter, and started her work in Bloemfontein.⁴

Although long established in the Free State, the Community of St Michael and All Angels remained heavily dependent on attracting vocations from Britain. From time to time a Sister would travel to the United Kingdom to promote their cause. So in 1930, Sister Marion was away for five “strenuous months speaking about our Community works and interviewing possible workers,”⁵ and in 1935 Sister Margery Angela was in England

3 Op cit., p.1,2

4 In a letter to the author, 9 August 1984, following Sr Enid’s death.

5 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, April 14 and September 26, 1930.

to “spread abroad wherever she went our great need of women to offer themselves as postulants, for there are opportunities of developing our Community life and work in many ways, but we are hampered in all directions by our small numbers.”⁶ Enid Barber heard the call. Sister Mary Ruth took up the story:

[Enid] announced her intention of joining the Community in Africa. When persistent friends urged her not to do this, but to look for a stronger Community or Society, she replied, ‘All the more reason why I should go – they need help.’

So in 1936 together with another aspirant, she sailed from Southampton aboard the first Union-Castle to do the fast run to the Cape in thirteen days.⁷ ... Reaching Bloemfontein on the long, long, railway journey up the Hex River Valley and through the Karoo, she entered the novitiate and never looked back. She had made up her mind to give herself entirely to Africa and never to return to England. ... Having been received by the Sisters and given the Novice’s habit⁸, she was sent into old Basutoland to tend the sick and help with mission. At that time the Community had a mission station at St Mary’s Home, Leribe.⁹

After making her Profession in May 1939, Sister Enid was appointed nursing Sister for the Community and School, and also joined the team of Sisters attached to St Patrick’s Church in Harvey Road, serving the district of Batho. Besides running organisations and providing religious instruction at the Church, the Sisters visited members of the congregation in their homes and the sick in the Government Hospital.

Walking around ‘the Location’ on her early visits she was shocked by what she saw. She wrote, ‘I found unbelievable poverty, drab surroundings, unrelieved suffering, despair, ignorance, sin and, already in those days, frustration among the young. I remember speaking to a group of tsotsis in the road, trying to inspire them to live better lives, to which they replied, “Give us something to do, and we will change our ways.” Alas, I had no

6 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.ii, Mother Superior’s letter, 9 August 1935.

7 R.M.M.V. ‘Stirling Castle’, arrived in Cape Town on 4 September 1936 after the record breaking voyage. The Royal Mail contract required a 17 day passage. (Peter Newall, *Union-Castle Line: A Fleet History*, London: Carmania Press, 1999, pages 22/23 and 72)

8 On 6 March 1937. She was one month short of her 36th birthday.

9 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma 'Mohau – Mother of Mercy*, p.2,3

answer.’ This experience gave her a panoramic view of the crying needs of the area.¹⁰

It was to be several years before she could begin to help directly in relieving suffering. Mother Mary Ursula described some of the work at St Patrick’s for the Community’s supporters:

Sister Enid, who is a trained nurse, holds regular classes in preparation for marriage for African girls on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, a different set of girls coming on each of these days. The classroom is decorated with attractive posters and pictures and the girls learn all sorts of things about personal hygiene and mothercraft. ... They also learn knitting and smocking. During the summer holiday a week’s ‘School in Preparation for Marriage’ was held at Leribe, and one on similar lines was held here last week.¹¹

These Schools filled a need and attracted good attendances. We read of Sister Enid conducting similar courses over the next two years at Uppington in the Northern Cape and in Kimberley. In 1949, the Lovedale Press published Part 1 of a small book written by Sister Enid under the title, *God, Health, and Marriage*. Appearing first in English, a SeSotho edition followed, *Molimo, Bophalo le Lenyalo*.

Inadvertently she managed to step on the toes of entrenched customs among the people, and had the rare distinction of having her books publicly burnt by a hostile group. This was compensated in part by the unexpected; Part 2 which was about Mothercraft was snapped up by the husbands and sold out.¹²

The records do not mention the Schools being run after that year. Perhaps it was too risky. Sister Enid may have been one of the two Sisters helping Fr Gonville French-Beytagh who conducted a weekend Conference at St Patrick’s in June 1951 on “The Christian Home and Family Life.”¹³ At another Conference held under the same title at St Patrick’s on the last weekend of May, 1959, she is listed as one of the speakers, along with the

10 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, Op cit, p.4

11 Mother Superior’s Letter, 25 July, 1947, in White Book I, vol.iii

12 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma Mohau*, p.8, and Mother Superior’s Letter, 16 July, 1949, in White Book I, vol.iii

13 Mother Superior’s Letter, 26 July 1951.

Bishop and Dean Aidan Cross. Husbands and wives together made up the attendance of about forty.¹⁴

Regular visiting in the Government Hospital brought Sister Enid into contact with the nursing staff, and she established a branch of the Guild of St Barnabas for the Anglicans among them. We read of them meeting at St Michael's on August 30, 1952. After prayers in the Chapel, conducted by the Warden in SeSotho, they met for refreshments in the Hall. They became regular visitors to the old St Michael's, a pattern that continued after the Community's move to Klerck Avenue.¹⁵

Sister Enid was troubled to observe that although there were emergency hospital ambulances, there was a lack of transport for sick people to get to hospital for regular Out Patient treatments. Most were too poor to hire a taxi. A gift of £2 was used to buy a donkey, and later a second was bought. A four-wheeled cart was being made for the donkeys to pull, Mother Mary Ursula wrote in her Old Girls' Letter of 10 July, 1953. The following year she described some of the patients who had benefitted from regular treatments and whose conditions were improving. In 1953 the donkey cart carried patients to hospital ninety-nine times, and was used once as a hearse. The following year it was used for two hundred and thirty-three hospital journeys. By then there were four donkeys, but they kept straying, finally disappearing altogether. The Sisters bought a roan gelding named Star, who did the work more quickly, making two journeys in the time it took the donkeys to do one.¹⁶ When the Old Girls' Letter dated 31 July, 1959, was written, there were two horses in use, named Tsediso and Tsepiso (meaning Comfort and Hope). The driver, Abel Motlhodi, was a Catechist at St Patrick's and had received training from the Red Cross.

“It has been another year of quiet and steady work, bringing help in all kinds and conditions of suffering,” wrote Sister Enid of 1960. “Sometimes emergency cases are dealt with, ... a woman picked up in the road in very acute pain and taken to hospital – there have been serious accident cases, e.g. a man lying in the road with a broken hip and a badly burnt woman. ... No one in real need is ever refused help.” She acknowledged many gifts received and told of the most urgent needs, “including fodder for the horses; food for people starving and cold through accident, illness or old age; and clothing and blankets.”

14 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 30/31 May 1959.

15 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iii, August 30, 1952; SMS, White Book II, February 26, 1978.

16 HPRA Wits, AB2644/55, OG Letter 10 July 1953; SMS, OG Letter 27/7/1954 & 31/7/1955, ECH Report for 1956.

Referring to Sister Enid's work for the sick and destitute, Sister Margery Angela, the senior of the five serving in Batho and Mangaung, noted, "Europeans in this town are most generous in contributions to relieve destitution."¹⁷

It was in 1960 that the Community bought its first motor vehicle, a Volkswagen Combi, primarily for use in runs to the market and railway station, but they soon "found it useful in all sorts of ways."¹⁸ Replaced following an accident, the vehicle was used also to ferry goods to the Township.

It has been a very cold winter, and many demands have been made on our power to help those who have little 'to keep it out.' In the Bloemfontein Location, Sister Enid has distributed over 100 blankets, and quantities of warm clothing. The Community VW Clipper goes over to the Location regularly with this help, and some is given out at our pseudo-Gothic front door. The day we came out of Retreat (July 9th), eleven shivering and hungry Africans had gathered in the front garden. There are so many old, crippled, and sick that the Clipper travels with containers of mealie meal, sugar, tea, coffee, beans, and tins of fish and meat if we have them. Two European boys, aged 13 and 11 have gone round with Sister Enid to help dole out the food, and have enjoyed it. One old woman who was told to bring a bowl for her mealie meal produced a wash basin, asking, 'Is it big enough?' The work is made possible by the quiet generosity of many European donors.

One of the saddest features of the Location is the growing number of unwanted children. Samson, aged 13, a cripple, and his younger brother Meshach have been put to live with Mrs Senoko, a widow to whom we pay R16 a month from a rather shaky fund. They had no mother and their drunkard father had cast them off. Sellwane, a baby girl, was also given into the care of Mrs Senoko. Both her parents were serving terms in gaol. St Michael's School Junior Hostel have adopted her. I wish it were possible to reproduce a coloured photograph we have of this baby in the arms of a fair-headed eleven year old, being fussed over by the rest of the household. A tiny, destitute boy of three weeks, fed with a small, water-filled medicine bottle, was put on baby food, and is now getting on prosperously with his

17 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, reports with Mother Superior's Letter dated 10 August 1961.

18 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, Mother Superior's Letter, 10 August 1961.

life. But these are only snippets from a large casebook. Much more could be done if we only had the means and the helpers.¹⁹

By this time Sister Enid had been working in the district for more than twenty years and she was well known and loved by the residents. They gave her the affectionate and respectful nickname Ma 'Mohau, meaning, Mother of Mercy. As Mangaung expanded with new housing further away from the city centre, the horse-drawn ambulance could no longer cope with the work.

The Bloemfontein Red Cross stepped in, and presented Ma 'Mohau with a second-hand ambulance, upgrading the whole outfit. It bore an impressive decal identifying the vehicle and giving the basics. A white coated driver sat at the wheel and helped with passengers and stores.

Miss Margaret Bailey, Art Teacher at St Michael's School, painted the lettering and symbols on the vehicle, which was blessed by the Warden in a small ceremony held in the front garden.²⁰ That ambulance was already fourteen years old when given to Sister Enid and its lifespan was inevitably limited. On 1 May, 1972, the two Round Tables of Bloemfontein presented her with a brand-new vehicle that could hold two stretcher cases and five seated passengers.²¹ "It meant that the ambulance work and relief could travel farther afield in the Free State."

A document found in the St Michael's School archive gives details of the journeys made in its first month of use. 134 patients were transported over a total of 3,448 kilometres between hospitals and homes in Bloemfontein and Thaba Nchu (176 Km), Edenburg (196 Km), Verkeerdevlei (146 Km), Soutpan (60Km), Dewetsdorp (312 Km), Bainsvlei (35Km), Rodenbeck (20 Km) and various farms up to 80 Km away. Longer journeys increased the risks involved.

On Friday 3 November, 1972, on the return run after safely delivering its passengers, the ambulance was involved in a serious collision on the Thaba Nchu road. The driver, Andrew Lehasa, was very badly injured and admitted to Intensive Care at Pelonomi Hospital, "being kept alive by machinery. The European doctors were beyond praise as they battled for his life during three weeks." He survived and in due course was discharged

19 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, Mother Superior's Letter, August 1968.

20 Mary Ruth CSMAA, *Ma 'Mohau*, p.5; White Book I, vol.iv, 27 November 1970.

21 *The Friend*, Thursday 28 February, 1974.

from hospital, but had to face a long convalescence.²² To enable Sister Enid's work to continue until a replacement could be supplied, the Phoenix Garage, which had supplied the vehicle, lent her a Volkswagen Combi and the services of a driver, Edwin Mashoeu. The replacement ambulance was blessed and taken into use on 1 March, 1973. Officially for reasons of cost, but perhaps to minimise risks, it was decided to limit the range of the vehicle to a radius of forty Kilometres from Bloemfontein.

Liesbet was a young woman suffering from advanced cancer. Her husband was brought to visit regularly in the ambulance. Then one day he arrived at Pelonomi Hospital to find that she had died. His grief was deepened by the fact that he was unable to pay for a funeral. He earned only R12 and from this he had to support his very sick wife and two school-going children. It was arranged – not for the first time – that the ambulance should do duty as a hearse, and give dignity to the sad occasion.²³

As Sister Enid's work attracted increasing interest and support, it became desirable to form a Committee to help in the administration of funds and to exercise some oversight. The first mention we have found is of a Committee meeting on 12 June, 1974, and Mother Mary Ruth spoke about the Ambulance and Relief Work Committee at St Michael's School Speech Day on 28 August that year. Mr Alex Krohn was the Chairman. It is probably not without significance that this was the year in which the Community was withdrawing from the School and contemplating a move away from Bloemfontein. The work had grown gradually over the years, and when the new buildings were designed, a Mission Room was included at the back of the Sisters' House to provide storage and a base for the Ambulance and Relief service. Having a Committee could ensure that the work would be able to continue should the Sisters leave. The Committee also brought new ideas and energy.

Sister Enid's African Relief and Ambulance Service grows all the time. Her enthusiastic Committee instigated a publicity campaign throughout the Republic and as a result donations have been pouring in from all parts of South Africa, many anonymous. This bears witness to social conscience here which is glad to have a channel of expression. Of her work this year, Sister Enid says: 'Hundreds of malnutrition babies pass through Pelonomi

22 SMS, ECH Report for 1972, Mother Superior's Letter.

23 SMS, ECH Report for 1974, Mother Superior's Letter.

Hospital (the well-equipped Government Hospital in Bloemfontein). It is pathetic to see these wasted and apathetic mites. Their condition is improved by Hospital treatment, then they go home to the same conditions with consequent relapse and re-admittance. So now we attempt some “follow-up” care. Bloemfontein friends gave us two big bags of skim milk powder, ProNutro and baby cereal. Baby clothes came from Port Elizabeth. We go round to these babies in the Bloemfontein Location, and the Order of St Vincent de Paul (a Roman Catholic charitable organisation) deals with babies on the surrounding plots. We work together. I supply names and addresses of babies and we pool resources. It is indeed rewarding to see the improvement in babies week by week. The Professor Child Specialist at Pelonomi told me he had noticed improvement in the incidence of malnutrition since we did this “follow-up”. The causes of this are numerous. Milk is too expensive for mothers to buy; babies are fed on black tea and mealie meal porridge. The mothers are encouraged by the help given and possibly warned by regular visits; some are careless and indifferent.’

Cancer is rife among the African people and it must in justice be said that the best possible treatment is available to them through Pelonomi Hospital. ... Sister Enid deals with the social and incidental suffering in such cases, besides providing ambulance transport to and from the Hospital for treatment. She reports: ‘Rona Mophite is a young woman with advanced cancer; her husband has deserted her and left her with three children of school age. Although she is too ill to work, she is very brave and tries to help herself and the children. A friend from Johannesburg provided a cooking pan for her and money to buy flour, cooking oil and sugar. With these she makes cookies and sells them so keeping herself and the children and buying their school books.’²⁴

1976 was a year of political uncertainty and unrest in South Africa, and although the Free State was relatively quiet, the unease lost Sister Enid her white women helpers: their husbands would not allow them to go into the Black neighbourhoods. “At this precise moment of need we received a letter from Mr Stephen Pulford. He had read about her work in the press.” He was a former Rhodesian farmer in his fifties and in November that year he went to live at St Michael’s, receiving board and lodging from the Sisters in

24 SMS, ECH Report for 1975, Mother Superior’s Letter.

return for full-time assistance in the township, where he soon became “well-known as a sympathetic visitor.”²⁵

While Sister Enid’s work in the townships continued to develop, it was financially hard-pressed. Writing for the 1978 Report of the English Committee of Help, Mother Mary Ruth revealed that,

at one time during the year it looked as if the work would have to close for want of support. Fortunately, some unexpected donations saved it at the eleventh hour. She really needs a reliable income to cover at least the cost of petrol and the wages of the African driver of the ambulance. This really should come from local sources. At the moment the Community is subsidising this work quite substantially. Sister Enid has just got a new driver, William, who for years worked under the groundsman at St Michael’s School. He has always wanted to drive the ambulance for her and now he has got his wish. She is a lay minister and takes Communion to patients in the Pelonomi and Oranje Hospitals, and in their own homes. This overlaps with her relief work. She certainly sees the whole spectrum of human misery on her rounds. She has said recently, however, that sheer destitution is much less evident these last few years; wages are better, and conditions are improving. But there is plenty of poverty still. Stephen Pulford continues to work in the Location and has quite a ministry of his own.

In her booklet about Ma ’Mohau, Sister Mary Ruth wrote:

From the very beginning this was a faith venture. There was no assured income except for Community donations and a small regular grant from the National Cancer Association. So appeals and donors had to be relied on. The work was interracial and creeds never mattered. The Service Organisations, the Red Cross, Round Table, YWCA, the Jewish bodies and others were a tremendous support. Business houses were generous with their help. What the schools did was cheerful and enthusiastic – St Michael’s and St Andrew’s Schools, Eunice, Oranje among them. SMS would have what was once called ‘Pound Days’ in the school Chapel. Never mind if a bag of mealie meal burst over the floor. The small girls loved it and the senior ‘Carers’ would pack up and convey the stores to the ‘Mission Room’.

25 SMS, ECH Report for 1976, Mother Superior’s Letter.

This was a back section (once the move to Brandwag had been achieved) of the large Community House with direct access to a garage. It was a depot from which food and clothing were issued every day. It was also a target for burglars and petty thieves, alas.

Money also came in from abroad, the U.K., U.S.A. and Australia in particular. Anglican Aid Abroad in Brisbane gives a large cheque each year (over a long period) to fund the relief. One Australian laddie in Brisbane collected discarded tin cans and sold them so that he could give too. Countless private donors, conscience-stricken and stirred by the knowledge of such misery, also took action and sent money and goods.

Oenone Gradwell (old SMS girl) and her friend Beryl Hobbs ran a Coffee Bar in the Arcade. On the counter was a bottle for donations for Ma 'Mohau's work. Patrons would put their change into it – and generous money as well.

A report in the newspaper *Die Volksblad* (19 May, 1976) described the 'Magic Bottle' as certainly the most interesting method by which money was collected. The bottle stood on the counter for several years. A notice on the wall showed the amount collected – at the time of the report it stood at R3,200.

Just once the Magic Bottle was stolen. *Die Volksblad* raised such an outcry about this dastardly deed that it quietly re-appeared on the counter of the 'Penny Whistle'.

The Raadsaal Rotary made it possible for Christmas hampers to be packed for indigent families so that they 'could keep the feast'.²⁶

When in 1979 the Johannesburg *Star* announced its search for two outstanding women whom it could proclaim as 'Woman of the Year' and 'Unsung Heroine of the Year', Mrs Pat Marshall nominated Sister Enid for the latter award.

Sister Mary Ruth quoted Sister Enid's notes of her reaction, and told of what happened next:

'One afternoon my telephone rang and I was told from Johannesburg that I was required to fly there to be present at a Sunnyside Hotel Luncheon

26 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma 'Mohau – Mother of Mercy*, p.11-12

as I was one of the nominees.’ Plans were made for her to fly up in Alex Krohn’s little aircraft in the morning, to be met at the Rand Airport by the press. ... ‘When I found myself at Tempe Airport, I gazed in amazement at what looked to me like a flock of small birds resting on a field of grass. I had never flown before and when I realised I was to go up in the sky in one of these tiny planes, well I continued to gaze. However, Mother and I climbed in and off we went ...’ [Mother Mary Ruth accompanied her.]

After a rest [at the Hotel], she went down into the lovely Sunnyside gardens for drinks and was introduced to the many interesting people who had been named. At the luncheon she was called to the platform to be acclaimed as the ‘Unsung Heroine’ by the Lady Mayoress and *The Star* editors. She was presented with a huge basket of flowers and a cheque for R2,500.00, a lot of money in those days. No sooner had she got back to her place when the TV crew dragged her off.

It was a pleasure and a privilege to talk to and congratulate Lucy Mvubelo, General Secretary of the National Union of Clothing Workers, and overwhelming favourite for the Woman of the Year title. ‘I’m so happy,’ she said.

Alex Krohn had told us we might have the little plane and pilot to take us back to Bloemfontein but warned us of the afternoon turbulence – we had better return on the evening Boeing flight. We boarded her at the last minute, carrying aloft down the gangway the stupendous flower basket.²⁷

The nationwide acclaim that followed this award – some of the media referred to her as ‘the Mother Teresa of South Africa’ – led to even wider interest and more offers of support. Two months later, the local representative of Help the Aged International visited to inspect the ambulance. They were interested to present a new vehicle – a Datsun fifteen seater, specially converted for its role. The presentation took place on 19 March, 1980, at Free State Motors, in the presence of the Mayor and Mayoress of Bloemfontein (Councillor and Mrs Groeneveld). Bishop Makhetha, Rector of St Patrick’s, blessed the vehicle, the Warden offered prayers and St Michael’s School Chapel choir sang.²⁸

27 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, op cit, p 12,13

28 SMS, White Book II, 7 February & 19 March, 1980, and later note inserted at end of 1978.

1980 was marked by widespread political unrest in South Africa, and the White Book tells of many days of rioting in the Bloemfontein townships in May and June that year. The work of Sister Enid's Ambulance and Relief Service was inevitably disrupted. The troubles of 1976 had led to the loss of Sister Enid's white women helpers, but by this time they had been replaced by women of St Patrick's congregation. Their leaders, who were both Associates of CSM&AA, were Mrs Madge Moikangoa, retired Headmistress of Rocklands School, and Mrs Lucy Schau, mother of a Diocesan priest.

It was during 1980 that World Vision started providing finance to support the children's Feeding Centres started by Sister Enid, and on 6 January 1981 the Field Director, Mr Allwood, and Miss Susan Thayer of the Hungry Children's Fund, flew down from Johannesburg to visit the project and to meet some of the children. Before going out there, the Community's Chronicle records, "an important meeting in the Chapter Room took place of the Mangaung Councillors and other interested persons to hear what Mr Allwood had to say about the work of World Vision and to discuss the reclamation of the rioting and lawless young people of the Townships. Could a Youth Centre be set up with the quiet help of World Vision?" Mother Mary Ruth and Sister Enid attended the meeting.²⁹

With the money given by World Vision, three additional Feeding Centres for pre-school malnourished children were established, bringing the number to ten in Mangaung and Heidedal, all operated by Black and Coloured helpers. "The children are given high protein soup, soya bean mince, and fortified biscuits." A journalist reporting for World Vision, Miss Barbara Hamilton, came to visit and was taken around the Centres by Sister Enid. "In conversation with Mother Mary Ruth, Barbara said that Sister Enid's name was being put forward for the Pierce Award for 'outstanding missionary service to the whole man.'" An extension of the feeding scheme to Onverwacht, an area near Thaba Nchu in which the apartheid government had "resettled" Sotho people moved from Bloemfontein, failed to materialise. "The local distribution is unsatisfactory and dishonest, and the plan has had to be shelved for the present." World Vision had some requirements that Sr Enid's helpers found difficult to fulfil. An entry in the White Book reads: "Meeting in our Chapter Room of Black people from the Townships concerned over feeding schemes. It was agreed that a local World Vision scheme as far as we are concerned was not practicable. Our people were not used to the management of money

29 SMS, White Book II, 6 January 1981.

and could not undertake the clerical work required by the organisation.” That source of funding ceased.³⁰

The Pierce Award is not mentioned again in the Community records and we presume it was given to another nominee. Other awards were about to be made to Sister Enid. The Rosicrucian Order notified their intention in May, and representatives went to St Michael’s on 7 November, 1981, to present her with their Humanitarian Award: “a happy function with tea in the Community Room.” Meanwhile, St Michael’s School Carers’ Club had put forward her name for the Trailblazer competition being sponsored by the *Sunday Tribune* in Natal.

In due course she was summoned to Umhlanga Rocks for a night at the Oyster Box Hotel as one of the seven finalists. They were to be grilled by a panel of judges and attend a banquet at which the winner would be announced. The result was Ma ’Mohau and the award a handsome cheque. Carol Keep for the SMS Carers was her escort this time. The judges were so impressed by the quality and devotion of the remaining six finalists that they presented each one with a cheque for R1,000, including Sister Enid. One of them was the [famous charitable] clown Francesco. He seems to have raised his hand to ask whether he could spend this money as he liked. When reassured he said, ‘Well, I give my cheque to Sister Enid.’³¹ The ceremony was held on 10 August, 1982.

Mrs Carol Keep, the teacher in charge of the Carers’ Club, remembered,

Interestingly, when I returned with Sr Enid, all the school girls wanted to know was whether she wore pyjamas & whether she slept with her veil on!!! I remember her reading Mills & Boone while I marked Shakespeare tests! Because of her severe diabetes all she ate was dry toast and drank black tea.³²

The idea of a Youth Centre, first put forward by World Vision, was taken up enthusiastically. “Sister Enid and Joseph Mokoko are negotiating with the Black Community Council on the subject of a YMCA for Rocklands,” reported the White Book in the entry for May 14, 1981. “It is very necessary to try and reclaim the potential and actual young

30 SMS, ECH Report for 1980; White Book II, 16,17 March & 14 May, 1981; 6 September 1982.

31 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma ’Mohau – Mother of Mercy*, p.13

32 In an e-mail to the author, 3 May, 2015.

delinquents.” Six months later we read of a Concert being given in aid of Sister Enid’s Youth Recreational Centre. “A crowd of 300 to 400 Black young people came. There was a superb performance on Oboe and piano by Andrew Moorosi.” We are not told of the venue. Other music concerts followed, all to raise funds towards building a Youth Recreation and Music Centre. The Bach Ensemble and the Senior Band from the Department of Education gave a Benefit Concert in the Cathedral Hall in March 1982, and in November that year there was a Concert at the Odeion Theatre in the University of the Free State. Afrikaans and English speaking schools took part under the direction of the Music Department of the Provincial Department of Education.³³ Although a site had been allotted for the Youth Centre, because it was taking some time to raise adequate funds, it was decided to erect a temporary pre-fabricated building in the grounds of St Patrick’s Church until a permanent Centre could be built.³⁴

The concerts reflected the enthusiastic support of Mr Osman, Music Inspector for Schools. It was proposed to form “Ma ’Mohau’s Band” from young people in Mangaung. Contests were held on 22 July, 1982, to encourage participation, with Mr Osman and his sons acting as judges. Two prizes were given in a competition for the best home-made drum: one for the drum over which the most trouble had been taken, and the other for the drum with the best quality of sound. There was a prize also for the best ‘shaking rattle’ instrument, and another for the best design for a band uniform. There was a display of band instruments for the young people. A few days later Sister Enid and Mr Osman went to the Township to test the musical abilities of band aspirants. Twenty boys and girls were chosen. “One boy showed pronounced talent and Mr Osman wants to get him a French horn.”³⁵

“The warmth that surrounded her at this period kept her going,” wrote Mother Mary Ruth,³⁶ but Sister Enid’s health was beginning to fail. She was taken very ill during the night of 11 February 1983 and had to be rushed to hospital. Bouts of illness and medical investigations dominated the remainder of that month, but by 5 March she was on the road again, travelling out to Maryvale Shannon on the eastern outskirts of the city to find out about malnourished children there. “She came home unwell and in pain and retired to bed.” It was to be the pattern for the next fifteen months: whenever she felt well enough she resumed her work in the Townships. By January 1984 it was apparent that

33 SMS, White Book II, 14 November 1981, 5 March 1982, 6 November 1982.

34 SMS, ECH Report for 1983.

35 SMS, White Book II, 22 and 28 July, 1982.

36 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma ’Mohau – Mother of Mercy*, p.14

“Sister Enid’s lungs are a matter of concern” and the White Book records many visits to specialists at the Universitas Hospital.³⁷ “Her prayer was – ‘to go on – go on – go on.’”³⁸

Still her work attracted great interest and support. The South African Broadcasting Corporation arranged to send a television team led by Barbara Hamilton to make a short feature about Ma ’Mohau and her work. They arrived early on June 20, 1984, and left immediately with her in the ambulance for the Townships. They visited Pelonomi Hospital, the Heidedal and St Patrick’s Feeding Schemes, went to Phahameng Library to see old people receive blankets, bread and oranges, and met young people interested in the Youth Recreation Centre. Back at St Michael’s after 4 p.m. they conducted a formal interview with Sister Enid. It was a long day. Mother Mary Ruth wrote in the White Book, “Everybody exhausted. Sister Enid, a sick woman, was carried through by the interest and compassion shown by the group.”³⁹

“The end was near. One cold June morning [30 June 1984] she got up feeling ill, but refused to jettison her usual tour in the Townships.”⁴⁰ The White Book recorded, “Late in the afternoon Sister Enid was taken ill with chest pains and breathless. She died in her room about 10.40 p.m. in great pain and supported by Sofie Ranotsi and Mother Mary Ruth.”

The Diocesan Bishop, Tom Stanage, celebrated her Requiem on 5 July, with Bishop Fortescue Makhetka as preacher. “It was a full chapel but not overcrowded. There were all sorts of people, black and white: Pelonomi nurses in strength, Greenhill Sisters (Coloured), Dr Anderson, Alex and Joy Krohn, the Crippses and many of note. Most moving was the appearance of Sister Enid’s boys’ brass band from the Location. They played outside chapel and [the traffic police allowed them] to precede the hearse to the corner of the Dan Pienaar Drive crossing.”⁴¹

In Bloemfontein this frail woman had rare courage. She was quite fearless in the Townships, entering places no one else did. She was a deeply committed Anglican religious, entirely indifferent to varieties of creed (or no creed). She was there to serve whoever needed her.

37 December 30, 1983, January 6 & 10, March 16, May 1, 1984.

38 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma ’Mohau – Mother of Mercy*, p.10

39 SMS, White Book II, 20 June 1984.

40 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma ’Mohau – Mother of Mercy*, p.14

41 SMS, White Book II, 5 July 1984.

Sister Enid's lifelong friend Nellie Baskett wrote to the Superior:

Right from a child she was very timid but the Community gave her the courage to do all the wonderful things she was able to do.⁴²

The television feature was broadcast on a *Crossroads* programme after her death. At one point the interviewer asked her about the circumstances of her coming to South Africa and Bloemfontein. Her answer was simple and direct: "God sent me here."

42 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma 'Mohau – Mother of Mercy*, p.10 and p.3



This photograph titled "Some of the Sisters Serving the School" was published in St Michael's School Magazine for 1968. They are (left to right) Sisters Doreen Mary, Cuthberga, Teresa Ruth, Mother Mary Ruth, Sisters Ruth, Joan, and Betty.

CHAPTER 24



GETTING THEIR BOOTS ON WITH THE FOURTH SUPERIOR

The Sisters of the Community of St Michael and All Angels in Bloemfontein were probably not particularly aware that when they elected Sister Mary Ruth to the office of Superior on 15 December, 1965, exactly one week had passed since Pope Paul VI had closed the Second Vatican Council in Rome on 8 December. That Council's Decree on the Appropriate Renewal of the Religious Life was to have far-reaching effects on Orders within the Roman Catholic Church, and it did not take long before Anglican Communities also began to experience the ripples of change.

CSM&AA was ninety-one years old and had known only three Superiors, the last two of whom governed the Community for a total of seventy-eight years. In the eyes of some of the clergy, stability had become stagnation.¹

The new Mother Mary Ruth had graduated with a London University honours degree in 1927, at a time when there were relatively few women graduates. Her mind had been kept sharp through decades of teaching lively and intelligent teenage girls, and she had

1 As noted by Trevor Verryn in his Report as Archbishop's Commissioner, p.5: HPR A Wits, AB1363/C67.

always followed current events with keen interest. She would have been aware of the Second Vatican Council's Decree, and we observe that some of the changes she tried to bring about reflect points in that document: a return to the inspiration and spirit of the founders; an adjustment of the Community to the changed needs of the time; the re-examination of the Constitution, Rule and Regulations in the light of current conditions; the adjustment of the habit to be more suitable to circumstances of time and place; and an attempt to work towards the federation or union of independent communities belonging in some sense to the same religious family.² As we shall see, not everything could be accomplished.

The habit was probably the easiest thing to change, and on February 3, 1966, about seven weeks after her election, Mother Mary Ruth appointed Sister Elsie to chair a committee charged with the task of modifying the Community's habit. There had been some small changes over the years, but now a major redesign was made. It was seen around the premises for the first time on 23 February, when a few Sisters tried it out. "Super!" was the reaction of the schoolgirls. The Community liked the new design, and most of the Sisters adopted the blue dress and scapular, made with a lightweight modern fabric, from 2 October. Gone were the large starched collars and wimples, while the black veil was shortened. A further modification two years later saw the black veils replaced with white. The retired Sisters, and a few others who did not wish to change, were allowed to continue wearing their old habits.³

"Our new, bright blue habit is well-established," wrote Mother Mary Ruth in 1967, and not only in and around Bloemfontein. The Community had started an Overseas Travel Fund and, having done so, "we could not dally in the use of it. ... It should be said that after years of *stabilitas loci*, the Sisters take to high speed, jet flying with aplomb. Some of our travellers have not seen their kith and kin for thirty years, and it has been invaluable to re-establish our contacts overseas." Between March 1966 and July 1968 nine Sisters travelled to the United Kingdom: Sisters Constance, Cuthberga, Ruth, Evelyn, Hilda Clare, Teresa Ruth, Catherine Faith, Olive, and Mary Pauline. After that the visits were to cease for a time – "there is no-one else in the Community with marked family claims." Sister Eleanor, a native of Southern Rhodesia and a science graduate, travelled to Bulawayo in May 1967 to attend the First Rhodesian Science Congress, and to visit her

2 See Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, pp 466-482: paragraphs 2, 3, 17, 22

3 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, Feb 3 & 23, Oct 2, 1966, Sept 29, 1968; SMS, ECH Report for 1966.

family. During her stay in England, Sister Teresa Ruth represented the Community at the Oxford Conference on the Religious Life, held from 3 to 6 July, 1967.⁴

The Superiors of fifteen Communities living in Southern Africa, “men and women, African and European, integrated,” met for a Conference in Johannesburg in February, 1966, under the chairmanship of the Archbishop of Cape Town, the Most Revd Robert Selby Taylor. Mother Mary Ruth was appointed Secretary to the Conference. She described it as

an exhilarating experience, full of challenge. The Religious Life is developing, is carrying new and exciting interpretation, but calls insistently for the sacrifice and service of those who may be drawn.⁵

Perhaps it was as a result of that Conference that a Week of Prayer and Preaching for the Religious Life was kept in the Church of the Province of Southern Africa from 14 to 21 September that year. The Superiors’ Conference was repeated in subsequent years.

We feel in our Community that in all works we may serve Christ and that love must direct all our acts which we try to continually offer up, remembering the Holy Angels.

Sister Margery Angela made that entry in the White Book after recording the Community’s agreement to the release of Sister Irmgard CSM&AA in October 1967. Sister Irmgard had been at Masite with the Society of the Precious Blood for three years, during which she had worn their novices’ habit while she tested her vocation to the contemplative life. Duly released from Bloemfontein, she made her Profession at Masite on December 15 and became Sister Martha Mary SPB. Among those witnessing her Profession were four Sisters of CSM&AA, who travelled across for the day with the Warden, Archdeacon Bailey.⁶

Two other losses to the Community were unexpected. On 21 June 1967, Sister Phyllis Mary died in hospital from injuries sustained when a motor vehicle knocked her off her bicycle at the corner of Aliwal and Elizabeth Streets, a few blocks from St Michael’s. Sister Emily died of cancer on 4 July, 1968. At 45 years of age, she was one of the younger

4 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 1966 to 1968; SMS, ECH Report for 1967.

5 SMS, ECH Report for 1966; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, Feb 14, 1966.

6 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 26 Oct & 15 Dec, 1967.

members of the Community and one of the few vocations from the Free State, having been a member of the Cathedral congregation.

But there was also a gain at about this time. Miss Doreen Ball, who had worked with the Sisters at Leribe in the mid-1950s, returned to South Africa late in 1967 to work at the School as Lady Warden of the Senior Hostel. Even before starting that work, she indicated to the Superior her wish to join the Community. When she was clothed as Novice Doreen Mary on 15 June, 1968, the boarders asked to attend, and filled the Chapel. She made her first Profession on 8 July, 1970, when the Chronicler noted that it was the first to take place since 1961. Many years later, Miss Edna Mallett, who had worked with the Society of the Sacred Mission at Modderpoort from 1951 to 1955, recalled going over to Maseru to see Doreen Ball at St Catherine's:

I remember her telling me that she had no intention of joining the CSM&AA! I'm not surprised, as at that time it was in some need of an up-date.⁷

"Updating" was a work in progress. The Community revised its Regulations in 1968 and, with the agreement of Chapter, Mother Mary Ruth turned her attention to the Constitution and Rule, writing to the London-based Advisory Council for Religious Communities for their advice.⁸

Meanwhile, detailed planning was in progress to give effect to the decision taken on 30 April, 1965, under Mother Mary Ursula, to sell the Markgraaf Street property and rebuild on a new site. From the start, it was realised that the project would take about five years to implement.

Messrs. Stocks and Stocks of Pretoria, who were constructing new buildings for the Provincial Administration opposite St Michael's, intended to purchase the Community's main site for re-development as a commercial hub of offices and shops. In return they would build a new School, Community House and Chapel at cost price, and pay the balance of the purchase money as a lump sum. The site chosen for the new St Michael's was at Brandwag, on the western outskirts of the city, opposite St Andrew's Boys' School on Dan Pienaar Avenue. The City Council had agreed to sell the land, but it was over-ruled by the Townships Board of the Provincial Administration, who insisted that

⁷ In a letter to the author, 16 January 1999. See also, FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, dates as in text.

⁸ SMS, White Book II, September 7, 1985: "A thorough review of the 1968 Regulations was undertaken." HPRA Wits, AB1363/C67, Report of the Archbishop's Commissioner, p.6, deplored the failure of the Advisory Council to respond: "No one seems to care."

the School should not be located beside a busy main road. The Board required that the School buildings should be moved further to the west, and that the strip of land bordering the Avenue should be used for two rows of houses, with an inner access road. It made necessary the re-opening of negotiations with the City Council, to ensure that the School would have an adequate plot. There was a change of plan also for the old St Michael's. Catching wind of the planned development, the Provincial Administration put through a compulsory purchase order, so that they could construct an Opera House complex on that block. Although Stocks and Stocks had thereby lost the commercial advantages of the deal, they generously honoured their commitment to build the new St Michael's.⁹

St Michael's School Council formed a planning sub-committee which drew up lists of the requirements for both School and Community. The new School was designed with classroom accommodation for three hundred pupils, and with boarding hostels for fifty juniors and one hundred seniors. There was to be a kindergarten for fifty, a hall capable of seating three hundred and fifty, a separate gymnasium, wings for music, domestic science, and administration, a library, an art studio, and science laboratories. All Classrooms were to be installed with the latest teaching equipment, such as overhead projectors, closed circuit television, and an intercom system.

The planning of the residential area needed special care, and got it. Accommodation on our present site (except for the Junior Hostel) is obsolete and uncomfortable. In the new Hostels, all pupils from Standard VII upwards will have their own cubicles with built-in cupboards; there are flats for the Headmistress, Lady Wardens, and School Nurse. The Sisters' House stands out to the north-west of the grounds and is entirely self-contained.

The Community House was to have thirty-two small and simple bedrooms for Sisters, with a further five bedrooms in an infirmary wing, Community Room, Refectory and Library, and a guest wing to accommodate five, with a small self-contained flatlet adjoining. There was a proposal that the Chapel should be fan-shaped, allowing an apse and free standing altar as the focus of attention for worshippers, wherever they were seated. The Bishop did not approve of that idea, and a more conventional rectangular Chapel was designed. The stained glass from the old chapel was to be incorporated into the new, and the old foundation stones also were to be relocated to the new buildings.

⁹ HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1965, p.10; ECH Report for 1968, p.9; ECH Report for 1969, p.9; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, May 7, 1969.

The planning sub-committee and Superior met regularly with the architect. When there was difficulty agreeing specific points of design, they were given over to the Superior for her decision. For supporters in England, she wrote,

The intention of the Community is that we should give to the Church of the Province of South Africa, and to our neighbourhood, something worthwhile, a base for the spiritual and educational activity, and the social service demanded of us by our founder, Bishop Webb.

Five years later, the Chronicler, Sister Margery Angela, wrote that they had been told by professionals that the Sisters' Infirmary Wing "leaves nothing to be desired." It was, she continued,

one, only, of the well-planned places the Reverend Mother Mary Ruth organised. As we have said: this whole place, 'the new St Michael's' is her doing – of course we had an architect, nevertheless it was she who 'made' the place, school and all!¹⁰

Of course, other Sisters were closely involved, and Mother Mary Ruth paid special tribute to Sister Betty, who died suddenly of a cerebral tumour on 25 July, 1970: "She had played an outstanding part in the planning and equipment of the new St Michael's."¹¹

A grand ceremony was planned for laying the foundation stone of the new Chapel on 29 June, 1970, and a thousand invitations were sent out. On the day, arrangements did not work to plan. Owing to three days of rain, the whole site was a sea of mud. The special guests had to be redirected to the Jubilee Hall, where they were served with tea. During a pause in the rain, about thirty friends and a dozen Sisters went to the site for a brief ceremony, when Bishop Amoore of Bloemfontein blessed the stone which Mother Mary Ruth laid.¹²

Over the ensuing months, Sisters would from time to time go to see the progress of the new buildings. Construction was completed in October and the new complex was officially handed over to the Community. There was much to be done in preparation for the move. On Friday 11 December, St Michael's School ended its last term in the old

10 HPRA Wits, AB2644/47, Rough Draft Outline of Requirements for the New St Michael's, 19.12.66; AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1969, p.9-10; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 1968, Mother Superior's Letter; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, April 25, 1975.

11 HPRA Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1970, p.10

12 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 29 June, 1970; Leith, *One the Faith*, p.73

buildings, with a minimum of ceremony. That afternoon an auction of antique furniture was held on the quadrangle. It raised R4,000.

The Bishop celebrated the last Mass for the Sisters in the old St Michael's Chapel on Monday 14 December, 1970, and at the conclusion read the deed of secularisation, which he then gave to the Mother Superior. It was the final morning in the Community's Markgraaf Street home. Margaret Leith described the day:

Later that morning parents, friends and Old Girls arrived with their cars to transport the Sisters – each with her own personal effects – to the new house. All day long removal vans went backwards and forwards. It was a mammoth undertaking.¹³

Awaking the next morning after their first night at Brandwag, the Chronicler remarked, "We felt it was so lovely to be in open surroundings, trees, fields, not yet a built area, and no skyscrapers." The Bishop arrived and celebrated the first Mass in the new Chapel. Vested in cope and mitre and holding his pastoral staff, he read a document setting the building aside for divine worship, before presenting it ceremoniously to the Superior. The blessing of the new Community House followed on 5th January, after Solemn Vespers for the Epiphany, the Community's birthday. With the Sisters following in procession, the Bishop moved from room to room. The Chronicler recalled: "The Infirmary was the first to be blessed; when we got to the kitchen the servants, greatly impressed and thrilled, were gathered there. We felt that we had had a marvellous day. [It] followed strenuous work over several months; and, in the case of the Mother Superior and the gentlemen who so unselfishly help us, over six years."

The strenuous work continued as the Sisters had much to do clearing the old buildings and ensuring that the new School would be ready for the start of term. On January 7 the Sisters and removal vans were still going back and forth between the two premises. "After 98 years the accumulation of hundreds of things and articles of furniture is hardly to be wondered at. Over these nine decades many buildings and 'blocks' have been added to the Nineteenth Century original St Michael's."¹⁴ The task was completed on 15 January and the old buildings were handed over to their buyer, the Provincial Administration. All the gates were wired up, and watchmen were posted. The demolition was not to take place at once, and the Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State was given permission to use the old Chapel, the Jubilee Hall, and the former Kindergarten

¹³ Leith, *op cit.* page 74; HPR A Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1970, p.9

¹⁴ FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 7 January 1971.

as workshops. Over the next few years, several public performances took place in the ‘Old Chapel Theatre’.

St Michael’s School re-opened on 20 January, and “the girls are thrilled on seeing the beautiful new school.”¹⁵ “For the pupils every day was the occasion of discovery: the art studio, the domestic science kitchen, the science labs and ... the tuck shop.”¹⁶ The official opening ceremony and blessing of the new school took place in the open air next to the Library on Saturday 13 February. Approximately six hundred people attended, including Old Girls and friends from all over South Africa. Bishop Amoore presided and Dr E.G. Malherbe, former Principal of the University of Natal, delivered a speech. Official guests included Mr J. Faure, Deputy Director of Education, Mr J. du Plessis, retired Administrator of the Orange Free State, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bloemfontein, and the Chief Inspector of Schools. The Bishop’s procession made a circuit of the Hall and a stone was blessed:

In thankful commemoration
of the opening and blessing of
the School in this place
on February 13th 1971
by the Rt Rev F.A. Amoore
Bishop of Bloemfontein.

The next day, Sunday 14 February, “a magnificent High Mass and Dedication of the Chapel was celebrated by the Bishop.”¹⁷ Margaret Leith provided a description:

On Sunday, just before 8 am, the dedication procession left the school administration for the porch end of the chapel. It was led by Sister Evelyn, thurifer, attended by a small boat boy, a junior hostel pupil, and the crucifer. Behind were the candle-bearers, the Headmistress, Mr W. Webber, Registrar of the Diocese, the head girl and seconds attendant on the Bishop, the Bishop, Father Hume SSM (deacon) and Mr S. Bithrey (sub-deacon). The Community in rank brought up the rear. The beautiful golden vestments had been borrowed from St Patrick’s Church. At the threefold knocking at the door, the Bishop was admitted by Mother Mary

15 From the White Book, which gives the date of opening as 19 January.

16 Leith, *One the Faith*, page 75

17 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 14 February, 1971.

Ruth and Sister Margery Angela as ‘church wardens’. One flower piece only was used in the chapel: it stood out to the left of the altar with an erect gilded leaf symbolic of the sword of St Michael. At the general communion, the Rev. Mother assisted with the administration of the chalice. This glad and fulfilled occasion was followed by the happiest party in the new school dining-hall.¹⁸

The singing at both the official opening and the Dedication Mass was led by a choir formed of boys from St Andrew’s School and girls from St Michael’s, trained for the occasion by Mr Ashley Botha, Director of Music at St Andrew’s.

The move of both Community and School from its historic site in the city centre to the outskirts of Bloemfontein generated much interest. *The Friend* on 23 September 1970 issued a special supplement titled “A New St Michael’s”, and the Anglican newspaper for South Africa, *Seek*, carried photographs of the new Community House and an accompanying article in its May 1971 edition.

In the religious life, as elsewhere, stagnation sets in where there is no forward looking. That the Community has acted upon an awareness of this, is evident to all who see it in its new environment.¹⁹

The article described some of the work being done by the Sisters in and around Bloemfontein and then included this paragraph:

The Community looks forward in faith to the years ahead, but wanting more Sisters to help meet an unmistakable challenge. Two more teachers, a nurse, two trained missionaries with vocations would establish it on its present commitments, and make expansion possible. There is a place however for anyone whom God may call to this life of witness, whatever their qualifications may be.²⁰

The new House included rooms designated for novices. Although there had been very few postulants during the previous decade, Sister Doreen Mary was in First Vows and the Community was in good heart. There were twenty-three Sisters at the time of their

18 Leith, op cit. p. 76, 77; HPR A Wits, AB2644/86, ECH Report for 1970, p.12-13

19 *Seek*, May 1971, page 6

20 *Seek*, May 1971, page 6

move and the Community was still very actively engaged in work in Bloemfontein's parishes as well as at the School. They hoped for renewal but were soon reminded of their gradual decline. Just one week after the move, Sister Beatrice died in her sleep while the Community was at Mass. She was 94. One month later, Sister Amelia died at the age of 66 years. Mother Mary Ursula celebrated her eightieth birthday in February 1972, and Sister Hildegarde was 83 when she died in July that year. Earlier that month Sister Margery Angela at the age of 84 handed over her duties as Bursar after thirty-six years keeping the accounts, but continued in office as Assistant Superior.

Mother Mary Ruth was thinking hard about the future and discussed various ideas with Fr Keith Davie CR, the Community's external confessor. With his agreement, she arranged an appointment to meet with the Visitor, Bishop Amooore, on 20 July, 1972. The next morning, the Superior called all the Sisters together in Chapter to inform them of the discussions she had initiated. "We were rather glad when it was over," wrote the Chronicler.²¹ It would appear that the Superior had more than one talk with the Bishop before he wrote to the Archbishop of Cape Town on 21 September, 1972.

Bishop Amooore's letter outlined the current situation of the Community. In Mary Ruth's six-and-a-half years as Mother, twelve Sisters had died: four in middle age of cancers, one in an accident, and seven of old age. Only one new member had joined. Her great concern was that the few younger Sisters under the age of 60, two of whom were 45 and one 53, should be able to continue in the Religious Life. One idea discussed was the possibility of giving up the School, but there could be difficulties remaining on campus as 'spectators'. There was a radical proposal which Mother Mary Ruth asked to be put to the Archbishop: to investigate 'from top level' the possibilities of joining the three South African Communities into one larger body. There were historical links. Bishop Webb had founded St Michael's Sisterhood in 1874, and established the Community of the Resurrection of the Lord in Grahamstown in 1883. The Society of St John the Divine in Natal had come into being in 1887 following a schism in CSM&AA. Mother Mary Ruth realised that it would not be easy to bring the three Communities together, because their traditions and customs had developed in different ways. None of the three had any novices. Bishop Amooore continued,

I think what Mother would like would be a joint Novitiate somewhere, and I think she has the hope that as CR Grahamstown have given over their educational work, they might be willing to help at St Michael's School.

21 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, July 20 & 21, 1972.

In replying to the Bishop, Archbishop Selby Taylor said that he would be very happy to appoint a small committee to look at the proposals, but that would be able to consider a possible union only with the full approval of the other Communities. As a first step, he wrote that day also to the Bishops of Natal and Grahamstown, convening a meeting with the three Visitors during the Episcopal Synod arranged for November.

Following his discussions with the Visitors, the Archbishop wrote to Mother Mary Ruth on 14 November, 1972. The Grahamstown Sisters had already made plans for their future and their Reverend Mother did not think they could be of much assistance to the other Communities. As for the SSJD, they had preliminary plans but were willing to share in a commission of enquiry, although the Mother did not think that there could be very much scope for amalgamation. Given their reactions, the Archbishop proposed a one man commission to look at the affairs of CSM&AA only and to advise on its future.

“I am naturally disappointed about the Commission, but not altogether surprised,” replied Mother Mary Ruth. She accepted the Archbishop’s proposal of appointing a Commissioner, and took the opportunity of inviting the Archbishop to the Centenary Mass planned for 3 March, 1974. In a letter written the following January, she informed the Archbishop that she had heard from Mother Mary Eleanor CR, asking for some of the background to the proposal of merger, and had replied that “although some form of association and co-responsibility would have encouraged us, the future of this Community was not the primary consideration.”²²

“We are all suffering from a shortage of dedicated people”, is the comment attached to an entry in the Community’s White Book on November 12, 1972, where it is reported that “We are very sorry that the SSM is to leave Bloemfontein at the end of the year.” St Patrick’s Priory closed on 18 January 1973. Supporters in England read that “there is real grief at their departure both in the African Township and in coloured Ashbury. ... They loved Fr Bradford’s push-biking through the dusty thoroughfares of the Location.” Sister Margery Angela, assisted at times by Sister Evelyn, was left as the sole white church worker in black Bloemfontein. “She takes two women’s classes a week, and does a fortnightly house visiting.”²³

It was unfortunate that the Community had a change of Warden at this time when its future was under discussion and when major decisions were to be taken. Archdeacon Donald Bailey, much loved and trusted by the Sisters after fourteen years’ service,

22 This correspondence is all in HPRA Wits, AB1363/C67/file 1

23 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv., 12 Nov 1972; SMS, ECH Report for 1972, Superior’s Letter. Sr Enid’s relief work was extra-parochial.

collapsed and died very suddenly when out in the city on 28 September 1972. His body rested in the Chapel overnight before his requiem Mass at St Michael's on 2nd October. Although the new Warden, Archdeacon John King, was installed in January 1973, and soon gained the trust and affection of the Sisters, there was a break in continuity.

The Revd Canon Trevor Verryn arrived at St Michael's as Archbishop's Commissioner on 9 April, 1973. He was Director of the Ecumenical Research Unit in Pretoria, established jointly by the Catholic and Anglican Churches and by the South African Council of Churches. His brief was to advise the Community about its own future. His experience in this field came from previously having carried out similar studies for six Roman Catholic Sisterhoods. After being taken around the Community House and School, he set about reading the Rule, Constitution, and Regulations, and through the Chapter Minute Books, before embarking on a series of individual interviews with each and every one of the active Sisters. In his subsequent Report, he set out some of the factors which he thought had contributed to the lack of vocations to CSM&AA, among them the very long tenure of the second and third Superiors, whose unadventurous approach from the 1920s onwards had created an air of caution among all the Sisters. The geographical isolation of the Community meant that many of its members were out of touch with current thinking in the Church and with changing attitudes in South African society: there was an almost "period-piece" tone to some opinions expressed in interviews. Another problem was that the Church in South Africa had not been encouraging vocations to the Religious Life in its own Communities, and about a dozen vocations had been lost to overseas Communities during the preceding decade. But there were some very strong positive points. He found the community life at St Michael's better than that in most of the communities he knew. The move from Markgraaf Street to the new buildings had been an enormous upheaval, psychologically as well as physically, but it had a liberating effect on the Community, which was now open to the possibilities of further change. If they were intent on seeking new vocations, then that needed to be their priority and to determine what work they undertook. The character of St Michael's School did not need to change if the few Sisters involved withdrew: the whole Community could do so with a sense that it was a job well done. The Founder's intention was "that the Community should serve the Church on the front-line, where there was an element of risk," and Fr Verryn suggested that the younger members should engage in a pioneering project among the Coloured population, where some of the most serious social problems existed, while the older active Sisters could develop a house of prayer and minister to individuals in their spiritual quests. Because the Community's traditional source of recruits from the United Kingdom was now closed, its

future would depend ultimately on whether the South African Anglican Church valued the Religious Life and was willing to encourage vocations.

Is it perhaps the will of God that the CSM&AA, having fulfilled the purpose for which He called it, should now come to an end? The drying up of the life-line of new blood might indicate this. It might, instead, merely indicate that the old styles, old apostolates, old presuppositions, old visions, need to be discarded or adapted so as to open the channels to the new.

His Report highlighted also the difficulties of trying to combine both active and contemplative vocations in one community, and he commended the idea of a joint novitiate, which was working very well for some Roman Catholic communities.

If the Religious Life is of great significance [to the Church of the Province], then prompt and far-reaching action is required to bring these facts vividly before the whole Church. It is unlikely that the SSJD or CR (Grahamstown) can afford to stand aloof from this action, since what are the difficulties of Bloemfontein today can well be those of Durban or Grahamstown tomorrow.²⁴

Archbishop Selby Taylor considered the contents of Fr Verryn's Report to have such wide implications for the whole Church that he asked if an abbreviated edition could be made, omitting the names and details of individual Sisters in Bloemfontein. The shortened Report was circulated to every Bishop in the Southern Africa Province.

Bishop Amooore conducted a Visitation of the Community in May, and gave a lengthy interview to every Sister. Later, they were "each given a copy of his very beautiful Charge." Fr Verryn's Report arrived on 6 July. "We found it somewhat pessimistic," noted the Chronicler, "but it makes us think seriously about our future, and the Reverend Mother spoke to the members of Chapter about it." The Community was about to go into its annual Retreat, which was conducted that year by Fr Kingston Erson CR. He was well-known for his ministry of encouraging the development of the Religious Life and would have shown great empathy for the Community as it faced momentous decisions. After the Retreat, the Annual Chapter convened on 23 July and again "the future of the Community was discussed, especially the matter of withdrawing from the School,

24 The 41-page Report is to be found in files of the Archbishop of Cape Town, at HPRA Wits, AB1363/C67

we have so few Sisters qualified to teach, and the government may have more say in such schools.”²⁵

It was more than just a discussion. On August 6 the Headmistress, Mrs Gallow, was told that the Community had resolved to withdraw from the School, and “for the sake of courtesy” the Director of Education was informed on the 16th. Writing in 1991, Mother Mary Ruth said that the Sisters “were beginning to see themselves as ‘God’s grey warriors’; that the pace of education was quickening, and that St Michael’s School needed younger and fully competent, professional direction,” but she wrote also that “religious communities in the Anglican Church ... were being prompted to surrender their institutional work ... and enter the world of personal ministry.”²⁶

Archbishop Selby Taylor flew up to Bloemfontein on Tuesday 21 August to meet “for several hours” with Bishop Amooore, the Warden John King and Mother Mary Ruth, to discuss Verryn’s Report and the Community’s decision to withdraw from the School. The Agenda shows that the meeting began by considering four recommendations concerning the Religious Life in general: the proposal to create a South African Council for the Religious Life; the fostering of vocations; a joint novitiate; and consultations with SSJD and CR Grahamstown. Turning to CSM&AA they discussed the timing for the Sisters’ withdrawal from the School; their future work and related issues such as where it was to be located, how it would be financed, and care of the elderly; before proceeding to the revision of the Rule. The final item on the agenda was the future relationship of the Sisters to the School.

One week later, on August 28, the decisions became public knowledge. Mother Mary Ruth made an announcement that morning at School Prayers, and *The Friend* carried a report. Bishop Amooore wrote for the October issue of the Diocesan Newsletter:

The Sisters feel that they must leave Bloemfontein; they will be missed at the Cathedral, at Pelonomi and the National Hospitals, in the location and at St Patrick’s. My hope is that they may decide on a new home somewhere in this diocese. Meanwhile, they are ready, like Abraham, to go out at God’s call, to serve where it seems that he wants them.

Following his return to Cape Town, the Archbishop wrote to some of the Diocesan Bishops asking if they had any suitable houses or work for the Community. Bishop Philip

25 FSA, A510, White Book I vol.iv, 23 May, 6, 8 & 23 July 1973.

26 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, page 20

Wheeldon replied that the Diocese of Kimberley and Kuruman “would most gladly welcome the Community” back if suitable arrangements could be made, while Bishop Vernon Inman wrote that he “certainly had no offer to make” for them to move to Natal, and Bishop Freddie Amoore made it clear that Bloemfontein Diocese had “no desire to lose” the Community.²⁷

Through all this period when life-changing decisions were being made, the Sisters were continuing with their regular pattern of prayer and work. A covered way was constructed between the Sisters’ House and the Chapel to give shelter in the rainy season, but it was still a walk out of doors and the Bishop instructed them to say Compline in the Community Room during the cold winter months, instead of going to the Chapel. In line with other Communities, the number of Offices was reduced to four: Lauds, Middy, Vespers, and Compline.²⁸ The Final Profession of Sister Doreen Mary on 2 August, 1973, in the presence of the Bishop, the Warden, Dean Aidan Cross, Fr Paul Hume SSM and other guests, must have helped to restore a sense of normality.²⁹ Very welcome was an old friend, Fr Cecil Hemsley SSM, who arrived on August 25, 1973, to stay in the flat adjoining the guest wing “for some months” while he was to be on the staff of the Cathedral.

In Cape Town, Archbishop Selby Taylor wrote to his Roman Catholic counterpart, Cardinal McCann, enquiring if there were any sisterhoods disposing of their convents. The Cardinal’s reply cautioned that all those wanting to dispose of convents had schools or institutions attached, but he mentioned specifically the already vacant premises of the Good Shepherd Sisters at Brackenfel, just north of Bellville. When the Archbishop wrote to Mother Mary Ruth on 4 October, he had himself been to view the property and described it in some detail. In his opinion, it was well worth looking at. Because it lay in the Anglican parish of Bellville, he suggested contacting the Rector, the Revd Timothy Bravington, who would be able to drive any Sisters who would like to inspect the place. In a subsequent letter, the Archbishop told the Superior that his Chapter was “delighted at the possibility, and unanimously confirmed his invitation” for the Community to move to his Diocese. When told all this, the Sisters were very interested, and two groups went down to look over the building. The potential costs of acquiring and adapting the convent, and the problem of what to do with the large empty institution attached, meant

27 HPRA Wits, AB1363/C67, file 1, for the agenda of 21 August and the subsequent correspondence.

28 FSA, A510, White Book I vol.iv, June 24, 1971; June 26, 1971; December 3, 1972. Lauds and Vespers were replaced by Morning and Evening Prayer from “Liturgy 1975” in 1975. White Book I vol.iv, 28 April 1975.

29 *Seek* published a photograph of the Profession, October 1973 edition.

that nothing came of this proposal, except that it had brought the Community into contact with the Rector of Bellville.³⁰

A meeting had been convened on November 20, 1972, to begin preparations for the Centenary of both the Community and the School. Committees were set up for Finance, Publicity, Entertainment, Hospitality and Transport, and the S.M.S. Old Girls Association.³¹ Most of the work was done in these committees, with a Co-ordinating Committee meeting in April and October 1973. They planned four days of celebrations, beginning in the evening of Thursday 28 February, 1974. With the history of the Community and the School being so closely bound up together, it was inevitable that many of the events had the School and its past and current pupils in mind. The Centenary book, "One the Faith ...", is sub-titled "A history of St Michael's School", and its author, Margaret Leith, was a past pupil who had also served on the staff teaching Biology, and who had enrolled her own children as pupils at St Michael's.³²

The Centenary Celebrations were riotously and spontaneously happy. The rain pelted down most of the time, but nothing could dampen the spirits of the School or of the crowds of visiting old girls and friends from all over Southern Africa and Rhodesia, and from overseas.³³

A large blue and white marquee had been erected in the grassed eastern quadrangle of the School (costs being met anonymously by a local businessman), and it was there that the celebrations began with a buffet supper on the Thursday evening. In the Hall, two specially prepared films were shown: one of the old St Michael's and the other of the opening of the new School. Friday March 1st was an Open Day at the School, giving an opportunity for many to see the splendid facilities of the new School as well as visiting a display of archive material from the previous hundred years. The Garden Party planned for Saturday 2nd March was rained off, although the rain did stop for about half an hour, during which a flag raising ceremony took place. The South African flag and a specially designed St Michael's flag were raised on two flagstuffs outside the Library, while pupils sang a song written for the School by Elizabeth Gunner, an old girl.

30 HPRA Wits, AB1363/C67, file 1, for all the correspondence.

31 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, page 13

32 *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, page 8

33 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, Centenary News, July 1974.

Piercing clear St Michael's eyes
 Gaze across the angel ranks
 On to mortals who give thanks
 For this warrior strong and wise.
 We who proudly bear his name
 Lift our hearts in happy praise,
 Joyously our voices raise
 And our Saint's protection claim.

A former headmistress, Miss Kathleen Andrews, who had travelled out from England for the celebrations, remarked afterwards, "I had read the words and thought them full of great strength but wondered how even the Inspector of Singing [Mr Dirkie de Villiers] could set them to music; he has created a lovely, lovely air by treating the words as a psalm."³⁴ Taking refuge from the rain, the guests moved to the Hall, where the party was held, with entertainments provided by pupils, and plenty of time for the meeting of old friends. That evening the official Centenary Banquet was held in the President Hotel, with distinguished guests and speeches.

The culmination of all the celebrations was the magnificent Centenary Eucharist on Sunday morning at 9.30 am. All through Saturday the rain worried us: truckloads of sawdust were scattered over the damp grass of the tent, and we prayed for a fine morning. We got it. Eight hundred people including a number of our black friends, and a large company of visiting religious from other Communities at work in Southern Africa filled the marquee and the lawn outside.³⁵

One side of the marquee was open so that those seated outside were able to join in the Service. The Bishop of Bloemfontein (Frederick Amooore) presided and the Bishops of Lesotho (John Maund) and Kimberley (Philip Wheeldon), the Assistant Bishop of Lesotho (Fortescue Makhetha), and the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bloemfontein (Joseph Fitzgerald) were in the procession, together with Archbishop Robert Selby Taylor of Cape Town, who preached. The Archbishop's sermon "made much of the part played by the Sisters in founding and sustaining the School, and took the opportunity of

34 *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, page 14

35 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, Centenary News, July 1974.

setting out the meaning of their life.”³⁶ Mother Mary Ruth noted that at the Communion some of the congregation had their first experience of receiving the Sacrament from a black priest. The *Chronicler* summed up the thoughts of the Sisters:

We all feel that these Centenary Celebrations were a very great success, and we give heartfelt thanks. The abovementioned Thanksgiving Service was beautiful beyond words, and made a fitting climax, not only to the celebrations of the last few days, but to the efforts of the past 100 years.³⁷

Kathleen Ramsbottom wrote of “remembering the old and storing up the new” as she sat in the old chapel in Markgraaf Street that night, listening to a lovely hour-long concert of music performed by some players of the Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State. The ‘Old Chapel Theatre’ survived for a few years until it was demolished for redevelopment of the site.³⁸

Most of the guests left either on the Sunday afternoon or on Monday 4 March, and the School and the Sisters picked up where they had left off before the celebrations. Mrs Gallow, the Headmistress, prepared to hand over at Easter to the new Head, Mr David Jones, and the Sisters returned to thinking about their future. Bishop Amore signalled a significant change in the Community’s thinking when he wrote for the March 1974 “Diocesan Link” – they were no longer planning that the entire Community would move:

The future of the Community is uncertain. Having given a century to St Michael’s School, the Community now feel that the School should stand on its own. The older Sisters will remain in Bloemfontein. The younger ones feel they should go away, and while still holding fast to the spirit of their rule, should work out a new expression of it in terms of contemporary life.

As Mother Mary Ruth explained in a letter to the Archbishop, she had been put under great pressure by local opinion and friends that the oldest Sisters should not be disturbed, but should be allowed to remain in Bloemfontein. She was now proposing a ‘pilot house’ of the younger Sisters, to which other able Sisters could be added later as the deaths of the elderly gradually wound down the Bloemfontein House. Writing again in late March,

36 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Centenary News*, July 1974.

37 FSA, A510, *White Book I* vol.iv, March 3, 1974.

38 *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, page 18. Some of the Sisters attended a concert there on 1 February 1975. *White Book I* vol.iv

she had been to see the Rectory at Simonstown suggested by the Archbishop, but had also done some 'scouting around' in Bellville and had seen a house that may be suitable. She wrote,

It will have to compete with a further suggestion that we go to Kimberley. Personally, I feel drawn to the northern suburbs of Cape Town.³⁹

It was a difficult decision to make because it was crucial to the Community's future. The Superior's Consultative Council discussed the matter again on April 27, and on May 4 the *Chronicler* reported:

We have been thinking very much about opening a branch house, and have not decided whether to do so at Kimberley or Cape Town. Mother (Mary Ruth) and two other Sisters even went to Kimberley to see if that would be a suitable proposition; the following day Mother told us about the Kimberley visit.

Other ideas were considered also. On June 7 the Warden (Archdeacon King) took Mother and two other Sisters to Welkom, returning at 6 pm. That idea did not fly. Although it was Bishop Amoores who first suggested Welkom, he told the Sisters at a Chapter Meeting on 10 June, presided over by the Warden, that he could not at present see them going there.

Archbishop Robert Selby Taylor retired and on 30 April the news broke that Bishop Bill Burnett had been elected to replace him as Metropolitan.⁴⁰ The Sisters and Bishop Burnett knew one another very well from his nine years as Bishop of Bloemfontein and Visitor to the Community. It had been his practice to celebrate the Eucharist in St Michael's Chapel every Tuesday when he was at home. We cannot know if his election had any influence on the Community's choice for their new venture.

By the time Mother Mary Ruth wrote the "Centenary News", in July 1974, the decisions had been made. She informed her readers,

The Sisters are opening an Experimental House at the end of November at 31, First Avenue, Boston, Bellville, in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. This means that a small group of Sisters will live there, adapting to the neighbourhood, trying out a new expression of the religious life. It is

³⁹ HPRA Wits, AB1363/C67, file 1, letters of 21 January and 24 March, 1974.

⁴⁰ Bishop Burnett had been '+ Bendyshe Bloemfontein' but became '+ Bill Cape Town'.

imperative that the Community should break new ground if its numerical strength is to recover; vocations from the O.F.S. in the past hundred years have been few and far between. The northern suburbs of Cape Town present a challenge with their bustling development, extending townships, hospitals (Tygerberg and Karl Bremer), and the interest of the University of the Western Cape. We shall be working with the Rector of Bellville, while at the same time the Sisters concerned will be earning their living like their neighbours.

The Free State, however, is our first love. The larger part of the Community will be remaining, and is looking for ways of service as a House of Prayer, and in other projects. Sister Enid's Ambulance and Relief work in the Locations is firmly established with a local committee, and should go ahead. If it should be the will of God that the Community should die out in course of time, it intends doing it with its boots on. It is our moment of truth, but also of faith.

At the School Speech Day on 28 August, the Superior said, "We are walking according to the light vouchsafed to us, little by little." It was at the invitation of the Cape Town Diocese that the house was to be opened in Bellville. "Be assured that although we shall no longer be on the active list in School – St Michael's School and its old pupils remain in our hearts; it will always be 'our School', the subject of our interest, our concern, and our prayers, and here there can be no break at all. How could it be otherwise?"⁴¹

Adjustments could now be made to the Sisters' life in preparation for the changes that had been agreed upon. The Employments Room in the Sisters' House was converted into an Oratory: it is "beautiful and convenient", wrote the Chronicler. The Offices would now be said in the Oratory but the Sisters continued to go along to the Chapel for the daily Eucharist. "The Sisters who had work tables in the Employments Room (before we turned it into the Oratory) now use one of the rooms we had intended for Novitiate use. Alas! We have no novices."⁴²

Sister Joan, one of those who was being withdrawn from the School, was sent to England to represent the Community at the Conference of Anglican Religious, which opened in York on 29 July. Also in the United Kingdom at that time was the Warden, Archdeacon King. Fr Hemsley SSM, still residing in the Guest Wing, took over as Acting Warden for

41 FSA, A510, White Book I vol.iv, 28 August 1974.

42 FSA, A510, White Book I vol.iv, August 1974, precise date not clear.

the three months of the Archdeacon's absence. Sister Joan returned on 6 October and seven Sisters went to the airport to meet her. During her stay in England she had given an illustrated talk to the Michaelmas meeting of the English Committee of Help.

The Sisters phased out [of the School] during the course of 1974 were: Sister Teresa Ruth as Vice Principal, Sister Ruth from the Kindergarten; Sister Doreen Mary as Lady Warden of the Senior Hostel; Sister Joan that of the Junior Hostel; Sister Eleanor who helped with the Library and transport. ... But links with the School remained: Rev. Mother was an ex officio member of the Parent-Teachers' Association executive. As Sisters and School shared the Chapel, Sister Evelyn remained as Sacristan. ... from time to time the School collected money and groceries for Sister Enid's relief work.⁴³

In mid-November the staff and pupils of St Michael's School gave a Farewell Concert for the Sisters. All except the very frail Sisters attended. The entertainment included as many of the girls as possible and was "spirited and heart warming." The staff gave their own party for the Sisters a few days later.⁴⁴

The parting cannot have been easy for the Sisters, many of whom had invested a lifetime of work in the School. Perhaps it was out of mindfulness for their sense of loss that we read in the White Book of some pastoral visits being made to the Mother Superior. The Director (Father Dunstan McKee) and Provincial (Father David Knowles) of the Society of the Sacred Mission called on her on 26 November and Bishop Amore visited on November 28. "He is very kind and fatherly to us, and therefore a great strength," wrote the Chronicler. The School year ended on 11 December and the Superior took Final Prayers for the last time.

Sisters Joan, Eleanor and Doreen Mary were already in Bellville, having arrived there on 6 December to get the house ready.⁴⁵

43 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, page 22

44 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, page 21, 22

45 FSA, A510, White Book I vol.iv, 6 December 1974.



The Procession from the School's Administration block to the new St Michael's Chapel for the service of Dedication on Sunday, 14 February, 1971, led by Sister Evelyn as thurifer. The Sisters of the Community follow behind Bishop Frederick Amooore.



The Sisters' Library in their new House fronting De Klerk Avenue.

CHAPTER 25



AN EXPERIMENTAL HOUSE

Number 31, First Avenue, Bellville, was “an old-fashioned house, double-storied, on a double plot with a good garden and a borehole, and a mini-orchard.” It had big rooms, “suited to the uses we have in mind.” The estate agent knew how to sell. The house needed repairs and redecorating, and the roof had to be re-tiled. When Sisters Joan, Eleanor and Doreen Mary arrived there on December 6, 1974, they “found the place chaotic, and worked extremely hard, scrubbing and cleaning.”¹ Many years later, Sister Joan was to tell Fr David Tanton that the house had been bought cheaply, and turned out to have been the house of prostitutes. It took the Sisters a long time to clear the garden of broken bottles, syringe needles and other evidence of its past.²

In mid-January, Mother Mary Ruth flew down to the Cape for the official opening of the House, and stayed until mid-February. She described the celebrations in a letter for supporters.

On Sunday, January 19th, the Archbishop of Cape Town came to preach at the Church of the Transfiguration, Bellville, and this was the occasion of the parish welcome to the Sisters. Imagine our delight when we saw a whole

1 SMS, ECH Report for 1974 - Mother Superior's letter.

2 Fr Tanton's notes of his conversation with Sr Joan, found in the SMS archive.

clump of St Michael's School old girls standing outside the Church – they had come from all over the Cape Peninsula to greet us. After the service there was a parish breakfast at which welcoming speeches were made and replied to and all was very convivial. The C.R. Fathers from Stellenbosch were represented, and also the Brothers of Christ from Woodstock. The Sisters' larder had been well stocked by the parish and by S.M.S. old girls, and we were properly overwhelmed.

On February 8th we had a house-warming party for the clergy of the deanery and their wives, members of religious communities, lay workers, etc. Seventy-nine people turned up, Coloured and White, and the house nearly burst at the seams. It was a 'cheese and wine' effort. The guests sat on the stairs, overflowed on to the front stoep, and occupied every nook and cranny. It was a tremendous success.³

The Community's intention was that this new branch house should be self-supporting, with the Sisters "earning their living like their neighbours."⁴ Sister Doreen Mary was well-qualified as a teacher, and Sister Joan was hoping to find a market to sell her handicrafts. The plan was probably less clear for the other Sisters: the former Vice-Principal Teresa Ruth was already of retirement age for teachers, and Eleanor may have found it difficult had she wanted to return to the scientific research she had left when joining the Community eighteen years previously: science had moved on. The life of this house was intended to be different from previous branch houses of the Community, such as that operating in Kimberley until 1967. They were aiming at something less formal, and more of a family atmosphere in which to live the religious life.

There was also another pressing intention. "The overriding need of the Community is for recruits, and we trust the new venture will open our need to a more responsive environment. Unless new recruits appear within the next year or so, the Community will be seriously diminished by natural loss, and its future precarious. There is so much we could do if we had more Sisters. Please pray that our need will be met."⁵ Although South Africa was still under apartheid, which did not allow different races to live together, it was hoped that vocations may be found from Coloured (Mixed Race) parishes.

3 HPRW Wits, AB2644/61, letter dated August, 1975.

4 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, Centenary News, July 1974.

5 SMS, ECH Report for 1974, Mother Superior's letter.

Sister Doreen Mary was appointed to teach at Zonnebloem, the Anglican Church's Provincial College for teacher training. She drove every weekday to the campus at Woodstock. It made long days, leaving the house at 7 a.m. and not returning until about 4 p.m. Apart from providing support for the house, this appointment gave her close contact with the young Coloured student teachers and members of staff. Hers was the only white face on the staff, but she was fully accepted and improved her knowledge of Afrikaans so well that she was able to apply for a Bi-lingual Teacher's certificate.

Sister Joan's plan of developing a trade in handicrafts came to nothing because other interests soon took over most of her time. She and Sister Teresa Ruth were licensed as Lay Ministers to serve the two churches of the parish, the Church of the Transfiguration, Bellville, and St George's, Kuils River. The Rector, the Revd Tim Bravington, was pleased to have their involvement. Sister Teresa Ruth took on the leadership of Bible Study groups at the Church of the Transfiguration, and ran training courses for Sunday School teachers at St George's. She began to study part time on a University of South Africa Bachelor of Theology course, suggested by the Community's Warden as a way of easing her adjustment on leaving the academic life of the School. For several years she had been maintaining contact with the School's Old Girls, and the Principal asked her to continue that work from the Cape. For those living in the region, she arranged get-togethers: the first took place as an introduction to the Bellville House on 8 March, 1975. The Superior reported that as the Sisters' work developed, the House soon became "a parochial centre; people come and go and the telephone is kept busy." One room had been made into "a beautiful little Oratory, open to all," where Mass was celebrated four days each week. The care of the House and kitchen was in the hands of Sister Eleanor, who also looked after the money and supervised the garden. "We couldn't do without her at Bellville," wrote the Superior. "The House is now thoroughly habitable. Fruit has been bottled from the mini-orchard, and a vegetable patch started." After the Sisters had settled in to some routine, Sister Eleanor arranged a day out together once a month, when they were able to explore and enjoy the Cape's beauty spots.⁶

Sister Joan was developing an effective ministry to the sick. Fr Bravington asked her to take Holy Communion to parishioners in hospital, and also to some who were ill at home. Among the latter was a lady called Maria, who was waiting for an operation on her back. After administering the Sacrament, Sister Joan prayed for Maria and later recalled,

6 HPRA Wits, AB2644/61. Letter from Mother Mary Ruth, August 1975; SMS, ECH Report for 1975; *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, p.78/79

I had never prayed aloud over anyone, being very much an Anglican, and worse still I found myself laying hands on her! [Three days later, Maria telephoned Sister Joan at the House] to say her back was healed, and the specialist had said there was no need for an op. ... I had such a shock I rushed to phone the Archbishop (Bill Burnett) to confess what I had done without his permission. He laughed and told me to carry on as the Lord led me.⁷

Sister Joan started attending and then assisting in Healing Services. At about this time there was a change of Rector in the parish. The new incumbent, the Revd Barry Wood, asked her to assist him in a regular ministry of healing prayer and one-to-one counselling. “It just grew from there,” she told the author. Invitations started arriving from other churches across the Cape Peninsula, and in response Sister Joan developed courses on Prayer and Spiritual Enrichment.

South Africa experienced much political turmoil in the mid-1970s, and the White Book records that there were riots in Cape Town and Bloemfontein on 6 September 1976. While the Orange Free State was relatively quiet, the Sisters in the Cape were more seriously affected.

Trouble broke out among the large, self-conscious and able Coloured population ... across the Cape area. Separate from them are Guguletu and Langa which are specifically Black and African, where serious trouble also erupted. Sister Doreen Mary ... had close experience of the disorders, and saw the tragedy of rampaging, frustrated people held at bay by exhausted and not always experienced riot police, both sides driven to excesses. The College itself – Coloured women teacher students – were not involved in demonstrations, but were once visited by the riot squad, tear gas, fire engines, dogs and other apparatus. It was all frightening and upsetting.⁸

Zonnebloem Teachers’ Training College had to close, and did not re-open until January 24 the following year.

Sister Doreen Mary taught at Zonnebloem for four years and gained experience “very valuable to her and the Community.” Unfortunately, needs at the Mother House led the Annual Chapter of June 1978 to conclude that it was necessary to withdraw her

7 From some notes written by Sr Joan, now in the SMS archive.

8 SMS, ECH Report for 1976, Mother Superior’s letter.

from that work and recall her to Bloemfontein. Among other duties, it was intended that she would help Sister Enid with the administration of the Relief Work. Sister Doreen Mary's resignation from the College became effective at the end of the academic year, enabling her to complete her teaching programme before returning to Bloemfontein.

During the year it became clear to us that there must be changes at Bellville. The Rector of the Bellville parish wanted the Sisters to serve St George's Church, Kuils River, which is a Coloured (and lively) congregation. Kuils River is a suburb which lies east of Bellville; above the railway line is the white area, below it is the coloured lay-out. This would mean moving into Kuils River to be near the people. So in November we sold No 31, First Avenue, a house which was not very convenient, and on Tuesday, January 30th [1979] the Sisters move to 20, Joubert Street, Kuils River, 7580.⁹

The archives reveal that there was much more involved in this decision than at first meets the eye. Sister Doreen Mary's salary of R400 a month for teaching at Zonnebloem College had provided the income necessary for the Sisters' living expenses at Bellville. That money would no longer be received, and the Chapter asked the Bishop of Bloemfontein, Frederick Amoore, to write to the Archbishop of Cape Town reminding him of a recent decision of the South African Council on the Religious Life, that parishes should provide remuneration for work done on their behalf by members of Communities. He did so, and in September the Superior also wrote to the Archbishop. In his reply to her, he made it clear that the Diocese could not accept responsibility for paying the Sisters: the responsibility lay with the parish where they minister. In his final paragraph he wrote,

As you know, I desire with all my heart that the Community should continue to serve here in Cape Town, and hopefully also to grow, but I do not think we have a diocesan job at present which I could offer which would provide some funds to help sustain your Cape Town house. If, therefore, the parish in which they live and minister cannot find the means, we are faced with a sad dilemma.¹⁰

9 SMS, ECH Report for 1978, Mother Superior's letter.

10 HPRA Wits, AB1363/C67, letter of Bishop of Bloemfontein to Archbishop, 5 July 1978, and of Archbishop to Mother Mary Ruth, 27 September 1978.

The request for financial assistance was referred to the Rector of Bellville, the Revd Barry Wood. He held discussions with the Archbishop, with the Suffragan Bishop George Swartz, the Chapelry Council of the Church of the Transfiguration, and with the Sisters, and decided to make “an honest and critical assessment of the work of the Sisters in Bellville.” He realised that he had little authority to do so, he explained to the Archbishop, but thought that if he did not, no-one else would, and the future work of the Community in Bellville would be unsatisfactory. On 1 November 1978 he wrote a confidential letter to the Reverend Mother in Bloemfontein, with a copy to the Archbishop. It ran to four pages and considered the years of their presence and prospects for the future. In his opinion, the four years the Sisters had been in Bellville “have not been as fruitful as they should have been.” He attributed this to the Community having not really settled down,

nor have they been able to live happily amongst themselves. I sense that this has been noticeable to those ‘outside’ who have therefore not been attracted towards the Community. I believe that, because the inner conflicts have not been resolved, God has not been able to use the Community as He could have done.

In his view, the Sisters lacked a common purpose. They had each very much gone their own way, with little sharing or fellowship as a Community, and only latterly had they really accepted one another’s roles. The lack of a local person in authority – the Mother Superior being six hundred miles away – meant that there was inadequate support to Sister Teresa Ruth (as Sister in Charge) when problems arose. The Sisters were willing to do whatever they were asked to, but they had not really integrated into the parish of the Transfiguration, nor did the parishioners know what to do with a Religious Community in their midst.

The Annual Chapter that decided to recall Sister Doreen Mary resolved also that the house at 31 First Avenue should be sold and a more convenient property bought.¹¹ The Rector’s letter reveals that the Sisters had been considering a house in Bellville very close to that of Sister Eleanor’s sister. “She is a very troubled person,” he wrote, “and her lengthy stay with the Sisters was a great strain upon them ... she so ties them up that they are not free and open to receive people for ministry.” Was this why the Community life had been so poor? Other factors played their part. Sister Doreen Mary’s work occupied her fully from Monday to Friday every week. Sister Joan, with whom Fr Wood

¹¹ SMS, White Book II, June 30, 1978.

worked very well, was always a demanding individual¹² and had been influenced by the charismatic movement to a degree that the other Sisters had not. Perhaps we should observe also that Fr Wood inherited the Sisters: they had moved into the parish during his predecessor's time. It may have been his first experience of a Religious Community. His impressions were strikingly different from the positive image portrayed by the Superior in her letters for supporters.

Barry Wood proposed that the Sisters should move into Kuils River, where the people were more responsive and more fruit could be expected from their ministry. The far greater need for teaching would provide scope for Sister Teresa Ruth's gifts to be used much better, while Sister Joan's gifts would be equally useful. "There has not been a flicker of interest in vocations to the religious life in Bellville. I believe Kuils River may elicit a better response." There was a caveat. "I am sorry to have to state this point but I do feel that Sister Eleanor should not be included in any move." In his view, her presence was disruptive in the life of the house: whereas the other three Sisters reacted positively to the challenges they would face in the new environment, she had no desire for ministry and had stated "that for reasons of social status and race she would not like to live in Kuils River." If his proposal was accepted, he suggested that a critical assessment should be made after a trial period of two years, to avoid the Sisters' work falling into a fruitless rut. "It is not my intention to force a decision on you in any way," he concluded, but the Chapelry Council's offer of providing a monthly income of R200 towards the Sisters' upkeep would probably be reviewed if they chose to continue in Bellville.¹³

The internal life of a Community House is not under the jurisdiction of the parochial clergy, and Mother Mary Ruth decided that Sister Eleanor should remain at the branch house. Her main function was the care of the house and garden, so freeing the other Sisters to engage in ministry for the parish. The Superior and the Sister in charge, Teresa Ruth, may not have agreed with the Rector's analysis of relationships within the Community. Having decided to recall Sister Doreen Mary, the Superior had few options for replacing Sister Eleanor because the active Sisters in Bloemfontein were all older. At a special meeting of the Chapter on 20 November, 1978, the Superior was authorised to negotiate for the purchase of the house Fr Wood had found at 20 Joubert Street,

12 SMS, Sermon preached by the Revd David Tanton at Sister Joan's Requiem: "Many will know how demanding she could be at times. But, those of us who ministered to her loved her all the same."

13 HPRA Wits, AB1363/C67. This is in the files of the Archbishop of Cape Town, not in the Community's papers.

Kuils River. She travelled to the Cape on 2 December, and no doubt had discussions with both the Rector and the Archbishop during her two week stay.¹⁴

This house was “in every way more attractive and convenient,” we read in the White Book, with a “well-established garden with a rose plot.” It was not far from the railway line.¹⁵ A smaller house, it had only three bedrooms but a bed was available in the front office for a visitor. Twice a year Mother Mary Ruth went “to share the very different life at the Cape and to report on events.” One of the two outside garages was converted into a Chapel where the offices were said and the Eucharist celebrated by the neighbouring clergy. “This, however, was largely inaccessible in wet winter weather.”¹⁶

Whatever tensions there may have been appear to have been resolved and a happy relationship developed between the Community and the Rector. Sister Teresa Ruth completed her studies and duly graduated as Bachelor of Theology in a ceremony held at Parow in May 1981. It was her third degree. By this time she was a registered tutor for the national Theological Education by Extension programme, as well as continuing to teach parish groups at St George’s. Sister Eleanor took on the responsibility of pledge recorder at St George’s Church. Sister Joan’s ministry continued to develop, leading Schools of Prayer not only in Kuils River and other Anglican parishes, but also for other denominations, among them the Presbyterians in Bellville and the Methodist Church in Bergvliet. “I was giving courses in the mornings and evenings all over the Peninsula and one to one counselling in our Community Chapel in the afternoons.” Together with Rector Barry Wood she headed the Healing Team for the Renewal Conference held in the Good Hope Centre in Cape Town city. “Many people to this day testify how their lives were changed through the ministry,” wrote Barry Wood in 2011.¹⁷

The small House had a very active ministry and the presence of the Sisters was valued by the local parishes. What had begun as an experiment seeking a new expression of the religious life had changed into a more conventional parish ministry with the move into Kuils River, but the six years there appear to have been the more productive.

There was no suggestion at the beginning of 1984 that the Community would need to withdraw from Kuils River that year. In February the Sisters in Bloemfontein welcomed

14 SMS, White Book II, November 20, 1978.

15 SMS, White Book II, 30 January 1979.

16 *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, chapter 15; and White Book II, 1985.

17 SMS, White Book II, May 1981, and December 1984; Superior’s letter in ECH Report for 1980; Notes written by Sr Joan, in SMS archive; 93 Years Old and still ministering to others, by Barry Wood, in *Southern Anglican*, 2011, pages 56 & 57

a “delightful little person” who was enquiring about being a nun. Her vocation did not mature for St Michael’s and we read that she left in June for employment in East London. In mid-March Sister Teresa Ruth flew to London on a four month visit, in the course of which she addressed a meeting of the English Committee of Help. Just nine days after her departure, Sister Catherine Faith died in the Infirmary. On the morning of her Requiem, Sister Doreen Mary was taken very ill with “diabetes gone mad” and had to be hospitalised for three weeks. The ailing Sister Enid died on 30 June. The Annual Chapter met on 21 July and decided that, because of shrinking numbers in Bloemfontein, the branch house would have to be closed. 20 Joubert Street was put up for sale, and the Sisters returned to the Mother House in December.¹⁸

Ten years in the Cape had drawn no new recruits to the Community.

18 SMS, White Book II, 1984, 13 February; 16 & 28 March; 30 June; 19 & 21 July; ECH Report for 1984.



Raising the flag on 2 March, 1974, to celebrate the Centenary. From left to right, Sister Joan, Sharon van der Puil, Miss Margaret Bailey (at the back), Sister Doreen Mary, Head Girl E. Rogers.



A meeting of the Cape branch of the Old Girls' Association was held at Somerset West on 23 April, 1982. The Sisters present were (from left): Sister Eleanor, Mother Mary Ruth, Sister Teresa Ruth.

CHAPTER 26



A HOUSE OF PRAYER AND OTHER PROJECTS

We have a magnificent centre in our new buildings [wrote Mother Mary Ruth in 1972] and endless opportunities of service to the Church. ... Parents value the care of the Sisters for their children, the parishes and locations look to us for help, but unless women feel the challenge of this front line in South Africa, our work will have to be sharply curtailed and possibly re-orientated. The active members of the Community spread their services over ministry in the School, in the Bloemfontein African Townships, in the European parishes, and as visitors in the European and African Provincial Hospitals. The going is hard. On average we are retiring one Sister a year.¹

When, just two years later, Mother Mary Ruth announced a re-orientation of the Community's life and work, beginning with their withdrawal from the School, she said that they were "looking for ways of service as a House of Prayer, and in other projects."² One of the first changes noted by the Chronicler in January 1975 was that "The Blessed Sacrament Watch is now resumed." At the old St Michael's, the Watch had been kept

1 Superior's Letter in ECH Report for 1972.

2 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, Centenary News, July 1974.

every Thursday from 12 noon until 6pm. The Blessed Sacrament Chapel alongside the main building was not used by the School and was always a place of silence. In the new buildings the Sacrament was reserved in the small chapel leading off the main Chapel. There was more chance of being disturbed by the School but on every Thursday afternoon from 16 January onwards Sisters were there, continuously at prayer.³

The Community made it known that they were opening up their House to welcome meetings of parochial and diocesan organisations. There was a ready response. We read of the Anglican Women's Fellowship meeting in the Guest Wing in October 1974, and the following year of the Community Room being used every Tuesday morning by the Knit and Natter group of ladies from the Cathedral parish.⁴ Knit and Natter had been formed by Sister Constance to meet a perceived need for fellowship, and they met initially in the Cathedral Hall until permission was given to move to the Community Room. Well-known at the Cathedral, where she had served as Sacristan for several years, Sister Constance had been the "obvious choice" when Dean Aidan Cross asked in 1974 for a Sister to join the Cathedral staff as full-time Parish Worker.⁵ The garments and other items made by the group were sold and the proceeds given to African relief work.⁶ Also gathering regularly at the Community House was the Guild of St Barnabas, revived by Sister Enid for nurses she met in the course of her ministry at the hospitals. Its mainly Black members met for Services in the Chapel and afterwards went to the Chapter Room to socialise and discuss any business.⁷ The Chapter Room was being used also for meetings of clergy, for African Bible classes, and for meetings of the Ambulance Committee. Mother Mary Ruth wrote to the English Association,

There has been much activity since we made [the Community House] available for quiet days, conferences and meetings. The Chapter Room is capacious and quiet, and very convenient for such gatherings. ... We are still able to maintain a Guest Wing and this draws a succession of interesting people to our House.⁸

3 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 16 January 1975. The author asked Sister Joan about this in October 2015. She did not remember clearly, but thought that the Thursday Watch had ceased when moving from the old buildings. She was in the Cape when the Watch was resumed and was not aware of it continuing when she returned to the Mother House in 1984. By then there were probably insufficient Sisters to maintain it.

4 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv: 3 October, 1974; 1 April, 1975; 4 May 1976.

5 Mother Mary Ruth, in an obituary notice, SMS archive.

6 Superior's Letter, ECH Report 1975.

7 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv: 14 March & 9 May 1976; 8 May 1977; 26 February 1978.

8 Superior's Letter, ECH Report 1975.

Religious from other communities were frequent visitors when travelling through Bloemfontein, and some members of the Diocesan Synod were glad to use the facility to rest before travelling home. “We had the pleasure of the company of three educated blacks, delegates from Welkom,” wrote the Chronicler after reporting that Synod ended in the afternoon. “On a somewhat similar occasion some black gentlemen said that they liked coming to us as they were ‘treated like people’; surely an indictment of many white people, considering the way that some treat the black people.”⁹

Once a month we have a Diocesan Quiet Day here at the request of the Bishop, and both black and white people are welcomed. They have access to the Chapel, to the spacious Community Room, and to the garden, and these are happy hours. On Thursday mornings there is a Bible Study group for black students. If transport were easier, more would attend this weekly feature which is friendly and informal, and followed by tea. There is also a theological seminar here once a month, and numerous committee meetings.¹⁰

The Thursday Bible Study under the leadership of Mother Mary Ruth ran successfully for several years. In 1983 we read of it being augmented on one occasion by four BaSotho Sisters from the Community of the Holy Name at Leribe, who were leading a mission in Mangaung, and in March 1984 the attendance was “very large”, when CHN Sisters were again doing “a sort of mission” at St Patrick’s.¹¹

Visits were not all one way, and in 1976 we read of a group of the Sisters visiting the Roman Catholic Franciscan Sisters who were running a refuge in Exton Road; of others attending a music concert at the University; and of Mother Mary Ruth and Sister Margery Angela representing the Community at a Mass in the Sacred Heart Cathedral for the centenary of Greenhill Convent.¹² When Sister Margery Angela celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of her Profession on 6 October that year, friends were invited to join the Sisters for a festive tea party in the Community Room.

Although no longer directly involved in running the School, the whole property still belonged to the Community, “and this is creating problems and headaches.”¹³ The School

9 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 25 May 1975.

10 SMS, ECH Report 1976, Superior’s Letter.

11 SMS, White Book II, 24 February 1983 and 15 March 1984.

12 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 2 May, 23 May, 18 September 1976.

13 SMS, ECH Report 1975, Superior’s Letter.

had an overdraft at the Bank, and the financial responsibility rested with the Sisters. The news in 1975 that St Andrew's Diocesan Boys' School was to be taken over by the Government, with an agreement that it should continue as an Anglican school with Chapel and Chaplain, prompted discussion among the Sisters about the future of their School. St Andrew's debt was "enormous", very much greater than that of St Michael's. A few months later, at a meeting held in the Community Room, the Sisters discussed the possibility of giving the School to the Diocese of Bloemfontein or to the Church of the Province.¹⁴ "It was quite clear that as a private school largely (but not only) dependent on its own resources, it was no longer financially viable. A modern school needs costly and indispensable equipment, a well-paid staff, and comely residences."¹⁵ Bishop Amooore, as Visitor of the Community was consulted, and the Diocesan Registrar, Mr Walter Webber, was asked to set out all the issues involved in a paper for consideration by the Community. The Superior read his dissertation to the Sisters on 3 October. Ten days later the School Council met. It was a long meeting, with "discussion of some difficult matters."¹⁶

The Bishop, Mr Webber, the Diocesan Secretary Fred Jones and Colin Hickling as Chairman of the School Council entered into negotiations with the Free State Provincial authorities with a view to the Province buying St Michael's School. Recognising "that the School is an integral part of education in this Province," the authority agreed to buy it, with a clause that "it is the intention of the parties to this agreement that the school shall retain its character and traditions and shall be the continuation of the School thus founded and established."¹⁷ The agreement having been drawn up, the Community met in Business Chapter on 5 July 1976 and "agreed unanimously (though rather sadly) that St Michael's School should be sold to the Provincial Administration."¹⁸

On December 10th, 1976, the School closed for the year. Thus ended 103 years of its existence as a private school. On December 14th the School Council met for the last time to be replaced by the new Board of Governors.¹⁹

St Michael's campus and its buildings were designed as an architectural unity, and the Deed of Sale to the Province included the Chapel and the Sisters' House. A sub-clause in

14 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 24 March and 7 July, 1975.

15 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *One the Earnest looking Forward*, p.23

16 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 3 October and 13 October, 1975.

17 *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, p.24

18 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 5 July 1976.

19 *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, p.25

the agreement entitled the Sisters to remain in their House rent free for so long as they needed it.²⁰ A St Michael's School Trust Fund was established to administer the proceeds of the sale, with the interests and needs of the Sisters having first claim on the funds in priority over the School.²¹

While these major decisions were being taken, the regular work of the Community continued. Sister Enid's Ambulance and Relief Service operated from the Mission Room at the back of the Sisters' House; Sister Margery Angela was still active in St Patrick's parish; and Sister Constance's ministry at the Cathedral took her also to carry the Blessed Sacrament to parishioners in the National Hospital and private homes. Altogether six Sisters were licensed as lay ministers. But the strains were beginning to tell. "Our shortage of women power becomes more apparent every year," wrote the Superior. "Very regretfully we have had to close down our Wafer Bakery as we no longer have the resources to maintain what is quite a demanding service. Sister Evelyn is running the Church needlework room single-handed. We now have five Sisters who need full-time geriatric care."²² Sister Enid was in charge of the Infirmary, with black staff to assist her.

Two of the five in the Infirmary, Mother Mary Ursula and Sister Marjorie, were suffering from dementia. They are "quite happy, and of course beautifully looked after and cared for," wrote the Chronicler, Sister Margery Angela. A few years later, after completing sixty years of work with the black congregation of St Patrick's Church, Sister Margery Angela herself had to be admitted to the Infirmary.²³

Having been recalled by the Chapter of 30 June, 1978, in order to strengthen the Mother House, Sister Doreen Mary arrived back from the Cape on 20 December that year.²⁴ Her skills and experience were not to be wasted. Early in 1979, Sister Doreen Mary was appointed Assistant Director of the Diocesan Department of Education, under Archdeacon Hartwig.²⁵ Her new work took her out and about in the Free State. In 1979 she participated in a mission led by Archdeacon John Ruston in Westminster, Tweespruit and Thaba Nchu; went to Bethlehem to investigate the possibility of a community project for Qua Qua, Witsieshoek; and conducted quiet days and courses in connection with a Diocesan stewardship campaign.²⁶ The following year we read

20 *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, p.24; FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 10 December 1976.

21 *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, p.24; SMS, White Book II, January 1977.

22 SMS, ECH Report 1975.

23 In October 1978. SMS, ECH Report for 1978.

24 SMS, White Book II, 30 June, 20 December, 1978.

25 SMS, ECH Report for 1978.

26 SMS, ECH Report for 1979.

of her at Witsieshoek in April for a Sunday School Teachers' course, and at Thaba Nchu with Archdeacon Hartwig in May to lead a course for between forty and fifty Lay Ministers, "from doctors and teachers to simple folk." In July she was at St Alban's, Winburg, to conduct a pre-school and primary Sunday School teaching course, and in August at Springfontein and Bethulie with Fr Ruston to prepare for a spirituality mission. In November it was announced that she would take over as Director of Education from January 1981.²⁷ The department was restyled in 1983 and became the Department of Training for Ministries. Over the next years she led more training courses for Lay Ministers and Sunday School teachers, participated in Ordination Candidates' Selection Conferences, and prepared a Confirmation Course which went into use throughout the Diocese.

That work added to the breadth of new contacts the Community had developed since withdrawing from the School and opening up the Mother House for meetings, courses and quiet days. The Sisters had already seen the opportunity to revive the Associates of CSM&AA. Associates had existed in one form or another since the Community's foundation, but new times required a revised Rule as well as new members. The Associates' Rule was discussed at a business meeting in July 1975, and in January 1977 we read of fifteen new Associates being admitted during a Sunday afternoon Service in St Michael's Chapel. The congregation was multi-racial and numbered sixty-five. More admissions took place on 28 August that year, and on 2 April 1978. There was a programme for each year, beginning with a tea party at Epiphany (marking the Community's foundation day), meetings at St Michael's, annual quiet days in July, and a Retreat for the Associates, which took place at Modderpoort each November.²⁸

Being still resident on the campus and sharing St Michael's Chapel, the Sisters continued to take great interest in the School. Fr John Ruston OGS, who arrived as Warden to the Sisters and Chaplain to the School in October 1976, shortly before ownership passed to the Provincial authorities, wrote of being "constantly aware of the presence of the Mother Superior and the Sisters, unobtrusively in the background, faithfully praying for the school and in particular for the chapel and the chaplain, worshipping daily in chapel at the Eucharist with two of the girls as servers." On Sundays there was a larger team of schoolgirl servers for the Sung Eucharist, and the Community sat in the front two rows of the nave, with all the Anglican boarders and resident staff behind them.

27 SMS, White Book II, April 18-20; May 3-4; 26 July, 1980; 3 November, 1980.

28 FSA, A510, White Book I, vol.iv, 7 July 1975; SMS, White Book II, 30 January, 28 August, 4-6 November 1977; 2 April, 15 July, 3-5 November 1978; 7 January, 2-4 November 1979.

Fr Ruston continued, “many former pupils (who at the time were often bored by chapel services) have grateful memories of the school chapel being there, and of the Sisters just being there, praying for and loving the school.” He told of how some of the girls would enquire about individual Sisters they knew by sight.²⁹ At a time when the School was not permitted by law to admit black pupils, except for the children of diplomats, pupils were probably aware of the mix of races visiting the Sisters’ House and using the chapel. Like his two immediate predecessors, Donald Bailey and John King, Fr Ruston served also as Archdeacon of Bloemfontein, but unlike them he lived on the campus, the first Warden to do so for almost twenty years, and also the last. His presence gave strength to both the School and the Community.³⁰

As Warden, Fr Ruston’s advice must have been sought when the Community decided that their dead would in future be cremated and not buried. Dean Aidan Cross and the Cathedral Council made available a plot outside the east end of the Cathedral for use by the Sisters. Sister Olive was the first to be cremated and her ashes were interred there on 14 July, 1979.³¹ The well-meaning gift of a headstone for the Community’s Garden of Remembrance went a little awry: the Sisters did not like it, and the donor, the well-known Bloemfontein-born sculptress Laura Rautenbach, had to arrange for it to be placed in the Sisters’ plot of the Cemetery instead.³² A few months later, Bishop Amooore and Mother Mary Ruth made their own selection of a headstone: “a pinky Hammanskraal stone.”³³

The Sisters’ Requiem Masses were celebrated in St Michael’s Chapel, often early in the morning. Special arrangements were made following the death of the third Superior, Mother Mary Ursula, in October 1979, a due recognition of her thirty-one years of leadership. The Requiem at 6.45 am was followed by a Memorial Service at 8.30 am, attended by all the School and held in the Hall. The School choir sang at a separate funeral Service conducted by the Bishop at 3 pm in the Chapel.³⁴ The pupils probably did not know Mother Mary Ursula. She would not have been at any School functions for more than a decade because of her dementia.

In 1979, Mother Mary Ruth attended a Conference for the heads of Religious Communities in Southern Africa, which was held at St Benedict’s Retreat House

29 John Ruston: On Being a Chaplain, in Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, p.40

30 *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, p.33

31 SMS, White Book II, 5,6 & 14 July, 1979.

32 SMS, White Book II, 19 March and 7 July 1980.

33 SMS, White Book II, 5 September 1980.

34 SMS, White Book II, 6, 9, & 19 October 1979.

in Rosettenville from 6 to 10 August. The principal speaker was Fr Alan Harrison, Secretary to the Advisory Council for Religious Communities, based in London. It will be remembered that this was the body to which Mother Mary Ruth had written in 1968 when she was first considering revisions of the Rule and Constitution: she received no reply. Fr Harrison's theme was "The Vows and what they mean today." After the Conference ended, he travelled to Bloemfontein with Mother Mary Ruth, and on 12 August discussed the subject with the Community.

Perhaps it was those meetings that encouraged her to turn her attention again to the Community's still unchanged core documents. Seven months after the Conference she recorded in the White Book that she had completed work on a revised Constitution "as far as she could go." She wrote to Fr David Wells, the Provincial of SSM, and to the Diocesan Registrar Walter Webber for advice on clauses dealing with secularisation and closure. The revised Constitution was approved by the Community's Chapter on 27 June, 1981.³⁵

This document is notably longer than the Deed of Association of 1906, which it replaced, and incorporates some matters that were previously included in the Rule. Among the changes, the Visitor ("Bishop of the Diocese in which the greatest number of Sisters live") is shown as "the maintainer and guardian of the Constitution and Rule" but with no executive authority. The Warden's term of office is limited to five years, but he could be re-elected. He may be invited to meetings of the Chapter, but would not chair them. The Mother's terms of office, both her first and any subsequent, were to be of three years, and she was to enter upon her office as soon as she was elected or re-elected, her installation taking place as soon as possible thereafter. The Mother was to appoint an Assistant Superior, Novice Guardian, Bursar, Infirmarian, Sacristan, Housekeeper and Guest Mistress. Provision was made for widows and divorcees without family obligations to be admitted to the Community, but no divorcee was to be allowed to take Final Vows while their former spouse was still living. At each stage of admission – from Postulant to Novice, from Novice to First Vows, and from First Vows to Final Profession – a two-thirds majority favourable vote of Chapter was required. Professions were to be made before the Visitor "or such representative as he shall appoint." Any Sister asking for release from the Community would require approval from the Chapter, and would not be free to go until the Visitor had given his agreement. It was stressed that "release does not abrogate the Vows of the Religious." Dispensation could be given only by the Archbishop of Cape Town, following application through the Visitor. The twenty-second and final

35 SMS, White Book II, August 6, 1979; 3 March, 1980; 27 June, 1981.

chapter dealt with procedures for the dissolution of the Community: “the Diocesan Trustees of the Diocese of Bloemfontein shall be authorised and empowered to assume possession of all the property of the Community, to make provision for the surviving members and to take such action as may be necessary to effect formal closure.” Any assets were to be used to further the work of the Church of the Province of Southern Africa.³⁶

Mother Mary Ruth took over the task of Chronicler when Sister Margery Angela had to give up in 1977, and her entries in the new White Book often told of political events which contrasted sharply with the daily life and concerns of the Community. Political unrest in South Africa had its impact on many aspects of life. There was an outbreak of rioting in the Bloemfontein townships in May 1980 and pupils of three schools are mentioned as affected. Alice Chabane, one of the Community’s Infirmary staff, was hurt by a flying stone on her way home after her shift, suffering damage to her kidneys. Two staff members from St Michael’s School kitchen were stoned on their way to work about three weeks later.³⁷ Disturbances at Johannesburg, Fort Hare and in the Cape are all reported. At the School’s parade for Republic Day in 1981, Fr Ruston offered prayers for the South Africa “that shall be, and for which our young people must work.”³⁸

Fr Ruston’s stay was to be relatively short: in 1983 he was appointed Suffragan Bishop of Pretoria. Two other new Bishops were to be consecrated with him on 24 April: Charles Albertyn, as Suffragan for Cape Town, and Sigquibo Dwane, leader of the Order of Ethiopia. The day before the Consecrations, the Sisters at St Michael’s hosted a Quiet Day led by Canon Hopa for thirty-four members of the Order of Ethiopia. The Consecration Service was held in St Patrick’s Church, with Archbishop Philip Russell presiding and Bishop Desmond Tutu as preacher.³⁹ St Michael’s School choir participated by singing in the Service. Fr Ruston’s departure was to leave the Sisters without a Warden for the next two and a half years.

The Chronicle charts the growing frailty of the Sisters. In September 1982 Sister Ruth, the Bursar, “had a nervous collapse in her office related to age condition and worry about Community finances. The work was taken off her shoulders at once,” and arrangements were made for professional accountants to do the bookkeeping. No longer would the Community have a Bursar: instead a Sister Treasurer would handle petty cash.⁴⁰

36 HPRA Wits, AB2644/76; copy in SMS archive.

37 SMS, White Book II, 23 May and 16 June, 1980. Troubles are recorded from 4 April to 24 June.

38 SMS, White Book II, 27 May 1981.

39 SMS, White Book II, 24 April 1983; ECH Report for 1983.

40 SMS, White Book II, 5 September 1982.

The following February, three of the active Sisters were out of action through illness: Evelyn, Ruth and Enid; and at the beginning of March Sister Catherine Faith was in such poor condition in the Infirmary that the Superior cancelled a planned visit to Port Elizabeth. She lived another year. Five Sisters had to attend hospital clinics in August, and “there was much coming and going.” Bishop John Ruston travelled down from Pretoria to preach at the Requiem for Sister Mary Pauline in November 1983: she had worked as his Secretary during his Wardenship. In March 1984, “three anxious weeks” followed a collapse by Sister Doreen Mary, who had to be hospitalised with “diabetes gone mad”.⁴¹ Her diabetes was so acute that she used to carry her own food with her when travelling on her duties as Diocesan Director of Education, rather than take the risk of accidentally being given something unsuitable.⁴² The death of Sister Enid in June 1984 “brought home to the Community the fact that it could no longer sustain a distant Branch House.”⁴³ Ten Sisters had died in the ten years since opening the House at Bellville.⁴⁴ Three weeks after Sister Enid’s death, the Annual Chapter decided to close the Kuils River House at the end of the year. The Visitor, Bishop Tom Stanage of Bloemfontein, offered Sister Joan a post as Diocesan Counsellor. The three Sisters from the Cape arrived back at the Mother House in mid-December.⁴⁵

There was still work for the Community to do. Bishop Stanage asked the Sisters to pray specifically for the diocesan clergy, and a scheme was drawn up whereby each Sister “adopted” about four priests, corresponded with them, and prayed for them, their needs and their parishes.⁴⁶ It was operating well when the author visited the Free State in 1985, but it is not known for how long it continued. Sister Enid’s Ambulance and Relief Service continued under the Community’s auspices, as told later in this chapter and also in Chapter 27. Sister Constance had a full ministry in the Cathedral parish. Sister Doreen Mary was ranging far and wide as Director of Training for Ministries, and now Sister Joan also was to be working in a Diocesan role.

The Bishop asked Sister Joan to describe her new role for readers of the Diocesan newsletter:

41 SMS, White Book II, 3 February and month, 2 March, 5 August, & 18 November 1983; 28 March 1984

42 As she told the author.

43 Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *One the Earnest Looking Forward*, p.79

44 Barbara, Marjorie, Olive, Mary Ursula, Zita Mary, Margery Angela, Hilda Clare, Mary Pauline, Catherine Faith, Enid.

45 SMS, White Book II, 21 July, 1984; 12 & 13 December, 1984.

46 SMS, White Book II, 3 October 1983.

My intention is to spend every second weekend in one or other of the parishes giving courses, taking services, counselling, etc., and to be available for counselling by appointment during the week. I shall be in my office in the Diocesan Centre daily from Monday to Thursday from 2.00 pm. SPIRITUAL COUNSELLING – means dealing with every area in a person's life in which they need help. This involves INNER HEALING AND HEALING OF MEMORIES, so the counselling room is rather like a confessional, where people are able to share anything on their mind in complete confidence that nothing they have said will ever be divulged. The advantage of this type of counselling is that one relies entirely on the grace and presence of God, for wisdom in dealing with each individual, so that HIS solution to their problems may be found, and His healing power experienced.⁴⁷

From a report she prepared for the Diocesan Synod in 1987 we learn that her appointment as Diocesan Counsellor began officially on 31 July, 1985. Lack of transport limited her work at first to the city of Bloemfontein until “a very generous grant for a car and its upkeep” from the link Diocese of Blackburn enabled her to go further afield. Her first parish visit for a weekend of ministry was to the two churches of Jagersfontein, and thereafter she told of a weekend training Bible Study leaders at St Matthias, Welkom; fifteen days early in 1986 in the same parish leading courses and a School for Prayer and Spiritual Enrichment, in addition to personal counselling; a School for Prayer held over two and a half months at St Margaret's, Bloemfontein, and participating in two weekend camps for their Confirmation candidates; Holy Week in Westminster and Tweespruit; a retreat for the clergy; and various other quiet days, courses, and talks, including a four week course on Counselling conducted in the Cathedral hall.⁴⁸ Inevitably, not every parish was enthusiastic: a planned week-long course in Sasolburg at the invitation of the Rector drew such a poor response that she returned home on the Wednesday.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Sister Joan had a good reputation for her ministry, and it extended beyond the Free State and the Anglican Church. In January 1986 she conducted ten days of ministry at Gonubie in the Eastern Cape Province; in April that year she led a School for Prayer at

47 The Diocesan Link, April 1985, p.3

48 Report to Synod 1987, in SMS archive.

49 SMS, White Book II, 1 March 1986.

Bloemfontein's Roman Catholic Cathedral; and in October a Retreat for the Methodist Church at Pinelands in the Cape.⁵⁰

Despite their declining numbers and increasing average age, these years were a time of flourishing in the life of the Community, with its presence known and its influence appreciated across the Diocese. Like many other late season flowerings, the splendour was to be short lived. Bishop Tom Stange arrived to stay in the Guest Wing for a few days' private retreat in January 1987. After welcoming him on a very hot summer's day, Sister Eleanor went to the kitchen to fetch some ice. She collapsed at the refrigerator, unconscious with a brain haemorrhage. Two days later she died in hospital. One of the younger Sisters at 63 years of age, her sudden death left a major gap in the Community. Her requiem was celebrated by the Bishop, who preached a "solemn and beautiful sermon".⁵¹ Since returning from the Cape, Sister Eleanor had been Community Treasurer, the liaison with the Ambulance and Relief Service, and had oversight of the Infirmary. Needing to fill these roles, the Superior consulted with the Bishop, who reluctantly agreed that Sister Doreen Mary should be withdrawn from her responsibilities in the Department of Training for Ministries. It seems to have happened more or less at once. When the Diocesan Synod met that May, a vote of thanks to Sister Doreen Mary for her eight years' work was moved from the floor.⁵²

Other changes were to follow. At the Annual Chapter in September, Mother Mary Ruth told the Community of her wish to resign as Superior. A Chapter was planned for 30 November to elect her successor. Both the Bishop as Visitor and Fr Snyman as Warden were present that day. The outgoing Superior was given the title Mother Emeritus, and Sister Doreen Mary was elected to the office, and formally installed by the Bishop on 21 December 1987. She appointed Sister Joan as Assistant Superior. That seems to have effectively ended Sister Joan's ministry in the Diocese. We read that she assisted the Bishop with the Ordination Candidates' Retreats in 1987 and 1988, and in that latter year she was appointed to be Assistant Director of a still to be formed new Department of Training for Ministries and Spirituality. The records give it no further mention. In conversation with the author, Sister Joan said she had to give up Diocesan work because she was needed in the Community. The Chronicle reveals the need. In January 1988, Mother Mary Ruth was admitted to the National Hospital for knee replacement surgery, and the following month the new Superior, Doreen Mary, had to

50 SMS, White Book II, and Report to Synod 1987.

51 SMS, White Book II, 14 January 1987.

52 SMS, ECH Report for 1987; White Book II, 28 May 1987.

spend a week in hospital because of her diabetes. In June Sister Teresa Ruth collapsed and required five days in intensive care, and Infirmary care when back at home.

Sister Doreen Mary's installation as Superior took place in the Oratory, by then re-designated as the Sisters' Chapel. Since 7 September the weekday Masses had been celebrated there, but the Sisters continued to go to the large Chapel to share in the School's Sunday Mass. Care of that Chapel and its sacristy was handed over completely to the School in January 1988. In her last week as Superior, Mother Mary Ruth had written to the Warden, Fr Roy Snyman, saying that she considered it "highly necessary" that this be done: "I have felt for some time that the School Chaplain and the School generally are being fettered by the 'dead hand of the past.'" Liturgical practices were changing, but the Sacristan and her deputy, Sisters Evelyn and Constance, "admittedly perfectionists", were critical, and the Chaplain was afraid of offending them – "this must not be." She hoped that the transfer of responsibility would stimulate the School's involvement with the Chapel.⁵³

While the House Chapel was more convenient for the Sisters, it had its disadvantages: we read of the Paschal Candle having to be lowered at Easter 1988 because it was burning the low ceiling. Changes were made to the timetable "to suit the present condition of the Sisters", with daily Mass at 7am followed by Morning Prayer.⁵⁴ It was not until St Andrew's Day 1989 that the Blessed Sacrament was reserved in the House Chapel, using the little tabernacle that had come from the Kuils River house.⁵⁵

So far as possible, the work of the Community continued and the hospitality of the House was still offered generously. The Associates came to the House for their Epiphany and Michaelmas meetings and a quiet day every Lent, using the Community Room. At one meeting, Mrs Lucy Sehau "gave a rousing speech in the vernacular about being an Associate". The White Book noted with disapproval that the Chaplain to the Associates failed to turn up for their Michaelmas meeting in 1989. The Associates kept an annual Retreat at Modderpoort and Mother Mary Ruth had attended that of 1987, conducted by the Revd Lawrence Sehau.⁵⁶

Also continuing to meet in the House was the committee for St Michael's Ambulance and Relief Service, with the Superior attending. That work had continued after Sister Enid's death. Just one week after her ashes had been interred, the Committee met on

53 HPRA Wits, AB2644/49 contains a copy of her letter.

54 SMS, White Book II, 1988.

55 SMS, White Book II, 30 November 1989.

56 SMS, White Book II, 20 September and 6-8 November, 1987; 1 October 1989.

8 August, 1984, and formally appointed three Fieldworkers, Stephen Pulford, Madge Moikangoa and Lucy Seha.⁵⁷ This team had already been carrying the bulk of the day to day work during the period of Sister Enid's decline, and with their experience everything seems to have run smoothly for the next few years. Work had to be suspended for some days in June 1986 when a State of Emergency was declared in the country, following more than one month of high political tension, but that caused only a short interruption to the normal service. There were some inevitable changes of personnel: Stephen Pulford stopped driving and Madge Moikangoa left in January 1989 to live with her daughter in Johannesburg, but two more Associates of CSM&AA joined the team, Selinah Mogoera and Rebecca Molahloe.

The Youth Recreation Centre was an unfortunate casualty of the rising tide of political unrest. It was realised that the planned temporary pre-fabricated structure would be vulnerable during the periodic eruptions of violence. "It would be burnt down", was the sad conclusion of the Committee and its advisors. Nothing was ever built and the project was abandoned. Sister Enid's boys' brass band, so closely linked with that project, gradually disintegrated.⁵⁸

The work had expanded considerably but needs were changing as the township councils developed better services for their residents. On March 8, 1989, the Committee discussed whether the ambulance was still necessary in the new conditions. No decision was taken immediately but in June that year a significant shift was signalled when it was decided to dissolve the Ambulance and Relief Committee and to replace it with a new organisation, St Michael's Relief Work, still under the auspices of the Sisterhood. The inaugural meeting of the re-constituted Committee took place on 9 August at St Michael's House. Alex Krohn was elected Chairman, with Canon Robert Butterworth as his deputy. Meanwhile, Mother Mary Ruth spent three separate days in the townships, going about with the driver and Fieldworkers as they visited people in their homes. She was, of course, no Sister Enid, and it was recognised that the knowledge and viewpoints of the three Fieldworkers had to be paramount. Just four months later, however, these new arrangements came under severe strain when a "long and rather contentious" meeting of the Committee took place without its Chairman, who had resigned. Costs determined that the ambulance be sold and the driver paid off. In its place a Nissan one ton pick-up was purchased, to operate on a more limited and less costly schedule. Although fitted with a stretcher for emergencies, its main role was to ferry relief supplies from the Mission

57 SMS, White Book II, 8 August, 1984.

58 SMS, White Book II, 5 July 1984; Mary Ruth CSM&AA, *Ma 'Mohau – Mother of Mercy*, p.8

Room at St Michael's to the townships. A bequest of £5,000 from Sister Enid's childhood friend, Nellie Baskett, received one month later, cleared the debt on this vehicle.⁵⁹

Fundraising continued throughout: a street collection in April 1988 raised R610.00, and donations came in from Bloemfontein Cathedral, the Rotary Club, and other sources, as well as an annual cheque from Anglican Aid Abroad, based at Brisbane, in Queensland, Australia. The organiser of that fund, Fr Neville Nixon, visited in June 1995, in company with Fr Kingston Erson CR, so that he could provide a first-hand account in their supporters' Newsletter. "St Michael's Relief Work was one of the very first projects we began to help overseas," he wrote in a letter found in the archives, dated 2 May, 2009. St Peter's Church at Wolvercote in Oxfordshire was among other donors from outside South Africa. Other donations came in kind: St Michael's School made gifts of tinned and dried foods, and Save the Children Fund donated blankets and clothing.

Alongside those developments, contacts with other Religious Communities were maintained. Mother Mary Ruth attended the Centenary celebrations of the Society of St John the Divine in Durban during May 1987, and went back to stay one week with them in July. Groups of Sisters from the Society of the Precious Blood at Masite visited in February 1988 and again in June the following year. It was from a SPB Sister that the Community heard in January 1989 of the death of Sister Veronica Mary, Sister Provincial of the Community of the Holy Name in Zululand, and well known to CSM&AA as one of their former St Mary at the Cross Sisters at Leribe. Another former member of SMMS, Sister Hilda CHN, stayed at St Michael's House for a holiday in June 1989, "a delightful and happy guest".⁶⁰ Mother Mary Ruth represented CSM&AA at celebrations held in Leribe to mark the thirtieth anniversary of SMMS's incorporation into CHN.⁶¹ In 1988 the decision of the Society of the Sacred Mission to close its South African Province was noted with regret – CSM&AA had worked closely with the SSM brethren ever since their arrival in 1903 – but there was pleasure that Fr David Wells SSM would be staying in Lesotho and would continue as Extraordinary Confessor to the Sisters.

Mother Mary Ruth took the opportunity to make contact with two other Communities after she went to Australia in August 1988 for a six month stay. Her main purpose was to have a holiday with her brother and his family, but she visited also the Sisters of the Society of the Sacred Advent in Brisbane, and the Community of the Holy Name

59 SMS, White Book II, 1989: March 8, June 14, July 12, 18 & 25, August 9, September 29, December 6 & 7; 1990, January 16, February 6.

60 SMS, White Book II, 17 June 1989.

61 White Book II shows this as May 1991, but the 30th anniversary would have been in 1992.

in Melbourne. The latter Community is entirely separate from CHN in England, Lesotho and Zululand.

The Rules of the two Australian Communities were among the documents consulted by Mother Mary Ruth when she worked on the long-awaited revision of CSM&AA's Rule. It will be recalled that she first proposed a renewal of the Rule in 1968, but the pressures of the following decade did not allow her to turn to the task. The Constitution had been reworked from 1979 to 1981, when the Community was still hoping for new vocations. Hopes had faded or vanished by 1989, but the Constitution and Rule are closely interlinked, and she saw the need to complete the task which she had left half-done. We should note that among her sources was a *Critique of the Rule & Constitution of CSM&AA* received from the Advisory Council for Religious Communities in London, no doubt a product of Fr Harrison's visit to Bloemfontein in 1979. Her stated objectives in making the revision were: "to go deeper into the meaning of the Vows; to recognise modern conditions affecting Religious Communities; to make it relate where possible to the original Rule; to transfer to the Regulations certain details which belong there."

This Rule is much shorter than that of 1906, with ten chapters instead of nineteen. Half of the introduction, "On the Spirit and Purpose of the Community", is drawn directly from the 1906 Rule, which in turn quoted the Rule of the Sisters of St Thomas the Martyr. Other quotations from the earlier Rules can be found throughout, but each section has been rewritten, and the chapters dealing with the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience are less prescriptive and place more responsibility on the individual Sister, as does the whole Rule. The 1906 directive, "They must shun all levity of manner", is gone. Among the chapters which were transferred to Regulations are: "Of Demeanour; of External Relations; of Conference; of Recreation; of the Spiritual Rule of the Mother." The tenth chapter, "Of Observance of Rule", is lightly adapted from the closing paragraphs of St Augustine's *Regularis Informatio* (8.1 and 8.2), the principal variation being that Augustine's "it should be read to you once a week, lest you neglect anything through forgetfulness," has become simply, "it is to be read aloud at frequent intervals."⁶²

Copies of the proposed revised Rule were sent to the Visitor and to Fr David Wells SSM on 6 May, two months before copies were handed out to the Sisters for their consideration. On 18 September, 1989, the Warden, Dean Roy Snyman, came across from Kimberley to

62 The Rule is in HPR A Wits, AB2644/77; copy in SMS archive.

chair the Annual Chapter. The revised Rule was accepted by the Community and, with the Bishop's permission, took effect immediately.⁶³

Shortly before that revision was complete, Mother Mary Ruth attended the Religious Communities Conference at Rosettenville in April 1989. Archbishop Desmond Tutu was there, and she was delighted that he kissed her twice! Archbishop Tutu was always very encouraging to the Communities. At the time of his appointment as Metropolitan he asked each Community in the Church of the Province to pray for him, and also requested a list of their members so that he could pray for them. Baskets of fruit or bunches of flowers would be sent by him to Sisters celebrating special events, such as Doreen Mary's installation and Sister Evelyn's Golden Jubilee of Profession.

Although the Community's life was more separate from the School than at any time since their foundation, very close ties of affection were maintained. When the School held celebrations to mark its 115th Birthday, the Sisters were presented with flowers and chocolates, and attended the formal ceremony in the Hall, where Mother Doreen Mary delivered a speech on St Michael's history. Four Sisters attended the School's Confirmation and First Communion in June 1989, and the following month pupils served in the large Chapel at a special Thanksgiving Eucharist for Sister Evelyn's Golden Jubilee. Having been Sacristan for many years, she was well known to the senior pupils. Standard One pupils went to the Sisters' House in September bearing gifts of spring flowers, and gave the Sisters a musical concert celebrating the arrival of spring. St Michael's School was flourishing, much to the delight of the Community. Space had become a premium in the School, and the Sisters agreed readily to a request that one of their large rooms should be used for the Matriculation Examinations in November 1989. The Chapter Room was cleared of all its furniture to make space for the examination tables and chairs. It was six weeks before everything was back in place. It is not recorded if similar arrangements were made in the following years. The Headmaster Mr Alexander approached Mother Doreen Mary in October 1991 to ask if a room could be provided for a new pre-primary class, designated Grade O. The Wafer Bakery had not been in use for some time, except for storage, and in December work started to install infant toilets so that the class could begin with the new School year. The construction created "much noise" in the Community House.⁶⁴

In the Infirmary wing, Sister Ruth died quietly in October 1990. In 1992, the deaths of Sister Evelyn in January and Sister Teresa Ruth in June hastened other changes.

63 SMS, White Book II, 1989, May 6, July 14, September 18.

64 SMS, White Book II, 12 December 1991.

In July Mother Doreen Mary met with the Community's domestic staff to tell them that it was necessary for financial reasons to reduce their number from eleven to eight. Fr David Wells SSM, now Warden, recommended that the Sisters should use a shortened form of the daily offices. He attended the Annual Chapter in October 1992. "The main business was a decision to vacate the Community House, and make it available for School expansion in return for other suitable accommodation. ... It was a good meeting; all the suggestions made as to adaptation of our life at this stage were listened to and discussed."⁶⁵ It was agreed that Mother Doreen Mary should open discussions with the School authorities before the offer was put in writing, but by 18 October responses had been sufficiently favourable for the formal letter to be sent to the Bishop in his capacity as Chairman of St Michael's School Governors.

Events moved swiftly during the next weeks. A valuer came to assess all the furniture that would have to be sold, and Headmaster John Alexander came with an architect from the Provincial Administration. Although Mr Alexander had been to the House on many occasions, this was the first time that he saw all of it. "They were thrilled with what they saw and once more we were made to realise how well-planned it had been."⁶⁶ The following April we are told of how the School planned to use the House: "The Infirmary Wing becomes the Music section; Chapter Room and Workroom, a large art studio with pottery and storeroom; Guest Wing, a flat for the Lady Warden and her family; Superior's Office, a television room; Refectory inner wall to come down to make a larger dining area; Novitiate rooms, for student helpers; Grade O quarters to be extended through the Mission Room."⁶⁷

Meanwhile, Mothers Doreen Mary and Mary Ruth began the search for a new home.

65 SMS, White Book II, 12 October 1992.

66 SMS, White Book II, 17 November 1992.

67 SMS, White Book II, 28 April 1993.



The Sisters announced their decision to move off the campus in 1993. They are (from left): Mother Emeritus Mary Ruth, Mother Doreen Mary, Sister Marion Faith, Sister Joan, Sister Constance, and, seated on the tree stump, Sister Thirza. (Photo: Volksblad)



*Two Sisters in the garden of no. 52 de Bruyn Street. The front of the house is to the left.
The round-topped window is the Mother's Office and next to it is the Library.*

CHAPTER 27



TO A SMALLER HOUSE

“We knew the School would never ask us to leave,” said Mother Doreen Mary in an interview for the press,¹ and to the Associates she explained,

we are now only six Sisters and this House is much too big for us. So we talked together about the matter and decided it is right for us to move to a smaller House. We have therefore made this House available to the School. It will be used to benefit the ever increasing number of pupils.²

The 1976 Deed by which the Community sold the School to the Free State Provincial Administration included a clause that the Sisters could remain in their House on the campus for as long as they needed it. It is possible that the Administration had not anticipated the Sisters staying there another sixteen years: it was a unique situation, the only time that the Province bought a property from Sisters in life vows. In 1989 the Provincial Administration had to be reminded of their responsibility for maintenance of the House under the terms of the Agreement of sale.³ Now that the House was to

1 *Die Volksblad*, 18 March 1993.

2 Associates' Letter, February 1993.

3 SMS, White Book II, 17 May 1989.

be incorporated into the School, the Administration was ready to move quickly with necessary modifications.

The costs of rehousing the Sisters were to be met by St Michael's School Trust Fund, in whose name the new property would be registered. Several houses were seen before the Community's Housekeeper, Mrs Suzette Potgieter, told them of a house for sale by private treaty at 52 de Bruyn Street in the Universitas suburb. The two Mothers made a first visit there early in December 1992 and shortly before Christmas returned with the Warden, Fr David Wells, and the Chairman of the Board of Executors, Mr Colin Hickling. It was on Christmas Eve that the other Sisters were taken to see the property.⁴ On March 31, 1993, the keys were handed over to the Sisters. Before they could move in, various alterations and additions were necessary. Architects' drawings were prepared, but a delay in the legal registration meant that the builders were not able to start work until mid-May.⁵

Meanwhile preparations began towards moving. "Clearing, sorting and packing throughout the House was in full swing," we read in the White Book. All Community items from the School Chapel were collected up. Sheets, pillowcases, covers, and other household linens that would be surplus to requirements were sold to the Black domestic staff at R1.00 per item. A larger problem faced the Committee of St Michael's Relief Work. Their meetings would be held in the new House but no space would be available there to store all their welfare goods, and the existing Mission room would no longer be available. Various options were discussed and school parents were circulated about the urgent need. One possibility was to erect a special Relief Store on the School site but the Committee could not spare funds for that: rising costs meant that the entire income was being expended every month.⁶ Eventually space was found at St Margaret's Church, which became the new base for the Relief Work.

"Naturally we are going to miss the School and the campus very much. This is our home. We are heartbroken, but we know that we are doing the right thing."⁷ The move took place over three days and was completed on 5 August, 1993. Mass was said in the new Chapel for the first time on 9 August, and the Bishop blessed the new St Michael's House on 3 September, in the presence of many friends and well-wishers. A cheese and

4 Details from White Book II, December 1992.

5 Canon Robert Butterworth, the Diocesan Secretary, aware of the Sisters' needs, oversaw the planning with the architect.

6 SMS, White Book II, 1993: Feb 10, Apr 5 & 6, May 12, June 9 & 29.

7 *Die Volksblad*, 18 March 1993.

wine celebration followed. The Community's annual Chapter and Retreat, held from 27 September until 1 October, gave the Sisters time and space to reflect after a momentous twelve months. The Sisters had done more than simply move house. The Community and St Michael's School had been together ever since their joint foundation in 1874: now they were to be living apart. The hope of attracting new vocations, so alive when moving from the original site to Brandwag in 1970, was long gone: the decision to move away from the campus made explicit the Community's acceptance that it was to die out.

So far as possible, the intention was that, after moving, the Sisters would pick up on their customary round of activities. None of the regular meetings of the Associates was missed: on 4 July they gathered at Brandwag, and on 10 October they came together for their Michaelmas meeting at Universitas. With fourteen attending there were far too many to fit into the tiny new chapel, and Evensong was said in the Community Room. The Knit and Natter group also moved with the Sisters, gathering every Tuesday morning in the Community lounge, and the Relief Work committee came for their meetings. The new House was on the western outskirts of the city, more than three miles from St Michael's School and, while contacts with the pupils and staff were maintained, they inevitably became less frequent. Initially, Mother Mary Ruth spent many days back in the Sisters' House sorting out papers and archive material that had not been moved. She found "a portfolio of documents relating to our departure from Leribe 1961 and the sadness behind it", and also "in a black box" uncovered items from Sister Henrietta and Sister Louisa, including some medallions. Professor Idalia Venter was contacted, who took the items to add to the collection already lodged in the University of the Free State.⁸

Being further out of the city made the Sisters even more dependent on motorcar transport than they had been previously, but with fewer drivers around. Suzette Potgieter, their Housekeeper, was very helpful during her hours of duty, but otherwise all driving fell to Mother Doreen Mary. Her health was frail – a fall put her in hospital shortly after the house move, and she was hospitalised again in January 1994 because of her very unstable diabetes. Sister Joan could no longer drive because of arthritis, and Sister Constance had been told not to drive any more after breaking her ankle and writing off the Cathedral's Mini in a collision with a motor cyclist in May 1990.⁹ Sister Constance had continued as Cathedral Parish Worker, calling on members of the congregation to provide her with transport for hospital and home visits, but in January 1994 she was persuaded to

8 SMS, White Book II, 22 October, 12, 15, 25 and 30 November 1993.

9 SMS White Book II, 25 May 1990. The motor cyclist broke both ankles, and then found himself in the same ward as Sister Constance in the Universitas Hospital. It was not Sister Constance's first accident. On June 19, 1980, the car overturned on her way to the Cathedral. The 94 year old passenger was unhurt. (White Book II)

resign from that role, while remaining a Lay Minister and responsible for “Knit and Natter”. Paying tribute to her twenty years’ work, the Acting Dean wrote, “This ends an association of the Community of St Michael and All Angels with the Cathedral Church that began in 1876!”¹⁰

The new House had been adapted very thoughtfully for the Sisters, but life there called for many adjustments. At Klerck Avenue the House had many rooms and each Sister was able to have plenty of space around her, with her own workroom in addition to her bedroom. The School was on site: there were other people about, and opportunities to go out. By contrast, the Community was now largely on its own, far out of town, and living behind a security wall in a much smaller property. This House had six bedrooms for the six Sisters, a Refectory with one table and six seats, a large Community Room with a Library leading off it, a small Chapel, and a single Guest bed-sitting room in an annexe. Work tables were provided in half of the double garage, where a cupboard contained the Sacristy items. Members of religious communities do not always find one another easy to live with and there were some tensions after the move to de Bruyn Street. Things that had been scarcely noticed before, now loomed large. Some found Sister Thirza’s six cats, which she allowed into her room and the passage ways, very annoying; others objected to the only Community room being used for meetings.

Records suggest that another unintended result of the move was that some focus may have been lost in the Sisters’ religious discipline, leading to lapses in observance. When the Warden, Fr David Wells SSM, met with the Sisters on 16 August 1994 to assess their first year at de Bruyn Street, “It was agreed that we should tighten up on observance of Vows and the Rule.” He was back for another meeting at the beginning of October, and spoke of the need for more cohesion and reference to the Mother and one another. “It was agreed there should be a daily meeting after breakfast to publicise and discuss the doings of the day.”¹¹

Rumours had begun to be heard at the Cathedral and in St Margaret’s Church that the Sisters were not happy in their new home, and Mother Mary Ruth prepared short statements for the magazines of both, and for St Michael’s School newsletter, to try to scotch the rumours. The Community was still hosting the Cathedral’s “Knit and Natter” ladies one morning every week but the House was not really large enough for meetings to be held there so frequently, apart from the inconvenience of being on the

10 Canon David Bannerman, in the Cathedral magazine, April 1994.

11 SMS, White Book II, 16 August & 5 October 1994.

outskirts of the city, and they transferred to the foyer of the centrally-situated Cathedral Hall in May 1995.¹² The Associates also moved their meetings. The new House was difficult for them to reach, most coming from Mangaung on the opposite side of the city. Their meetings continued to be held occasionally, but now at the Cathedral or at St Patrick's Church. From time to time individual Associates visited the Sisters.¹³ Resolving the problems of transport, space, visitors, and community living were all part of the adjustment process initiated by the move. As a Religious of another Community commented, "[The new house] must be ever so much smaller than their previous buildings, and that must be irksome to start with ... but the work will be so much lighter, that in time they'll forget the old and revel in the new."¹⁴ That seems to have happened and by the middle of 1995 life appears to have regained its calm. Parishioners at the Cathedral and St Margaret's gave much supportive help, collecting Sisters whenever possible to attend Services and special functions.

Given the age and frailty of the Sisters, combined with their distance from the city centre and lack of transport, it was difficult for them to maintain adequate oversight of St Michael's Relief Work. Problems came to a head in July 1995, when a crisis meeting of the executive members of the Committee heard that the driver was exploiting use of the Nissan for his own profit and that there were questions about the efficiency of the "ageing three workers". It was decided that the pick-up should be sold and that all practical welfare should be handed over to the Diocesan Child Welfare Society. St Michael's Relief Work would continue as a fund-raising organisation only. A brochure was issued explaining the new partnership and giving details of the first joint project, the Paliso Day Care Centre. That was established successfully, and at the Welfare Society's offices in the city a "Sister Enid Room" was opened, where women could go for confidential counselling. In 1998, the surviving Sisters established St Michael's Relief Work Trust with a capital donation from the Community of R120,000. This was intended to provide material help to destitute and malnourished children, the aged, sick and disabled unemployed in the districts of Mangaung. Only in November 2005 did St Michael's Relief Work come to a formal end, with the transfer of its funds to the Diocesan Trust Board.¹⁵

12 SMS, White Book II, 11 & 12 November 1994, 26 May 1995.

13 It is not recorded when they stopped meeting at St Michael's House. There were still 23 Associates in September 2002. Never formally disbanded, they probably ceased after Mother Mary Ruth's death.

14 Sister May CP, in a letter to the author, 13 April 1994.

15 SMS archives: White Book II, 12 & 25 July, 1995; undated brochure; Copy of Trust Deed dated 21 April, 1998; letter from the Revd David Tanton to Chairman Mark Ellis, 10 December, 2005; St Michael's Relief Work Committee Minute Book.

St Michael's School invited the Sisters to join them in a weekend of celebrations to mark its 120th Anniversary in 1994. Old girls and friends gathered from across the country and from abroad. Headmaster John Alexander described the occasion:

Highlights of the weekend were the anniversary assembly held in the school chapel on Saturday morning [11 February], the gala banquet in the marble foyer of the Sand du Plessis Theatre on Saturday night and the anniversary Eucharist Service in the Chapel on Sunday morning. The banquet was a moving and memorable affair. Held on the very site of the old school, it evoked many poignant memories among most of the older old girls. The guest speaker was the inimitable Mother Mary Ruth, who spoke for 30 minutes (most people thought she had only spoken for ten) without referring to a note, except in the last moments of her speech. She vividly called to life the old school and what it had meant to hundreds of girls who had passed through it. Her memory is prodigious and she held the audience of over 200 in the palm of her hand.¹⁶

Mother Doreen Mary, Sister Joan and Sister Constance were among those who enjoyed the banquet. Special guests were the Bishop, the Rt Revd Thomas Stanage, and the Free State's Executive Director of Education, Mr Gert Heyns. The Bishop presided at the "equally moving and nostalgic" Anniversary Eucharist, with Mother Doreen Mary as preacher. Mr Alexander summed it up as, "All in all a memorable weekend. And now, for the 125th ... !!"

The School was glad to provide hospitality for another special occasion two years later when, on Thursday 29 February 1996, Mother Mary Ruth's Diamond Jubilee of Profession was celebrated with a Sung Eucharist in St Michael's Chapel. It was term time, and pupils attended and served at the Mass, with the Bishop as celebrant. Sister Joan's Golden Jubilee in December 2000 fell in the School holidays, but again the facilities of the Chapel and Administration block were made available for a Sung Eucharist and celebratory lunch.

There were just four Sisters remaining when the 125th Anniversary came around in 1999¹⁷, and the Community decided to have its own celebration on the actual foundation day, 6 January. "It's good for us to keep this anniversary," said Mother Doreen

¹⁶ Bloemfontein Cathedral Magazine, April 1994.

¹⁷ Sister Marion Faith and Sister Constance both died in 1997.

Mary, “because I don’t suppose any of us will be around for the 150th.”¹⁸ The mood could have been gloomy but it was the opposite: the Sisters were full of thanksgiving to God for all that the Community had been able to accomplish. Bishop Tom Stanage, no longer Diocesan Bishop but now Warden of the Community, presided at the Eucharist in St Michael’s Chapel, with a congregation including visiting Religious, diocesan clergy and many friends from Bloemfontein and the Free State. The three Sisters who came from the Community of the Holy Name in Lesotho had all begun their Religious Life in the Society of St Mary at the Cross, under the care of CSM&AA. The School is on holiday in January and kept its celebrations for the weekend of 12 to 14 February. Then pupils shared in a great party, followed by competitions, sports challenges, and displays by gymnasts and majorettes. Parents, old girls, Sisters, and staff (both past and present) began the Saturday with a champagne breakfast and ended it with a gala dinner. The Sung Eucharist on Sunday, presided over by the Diocesan Bishop, the Rt Revd Paddy Glover, brought the events to a fitting climax.¹⁹

These highlights brightened the life of the Sisters, who were coping with the difficulties of age and illness. Owing to her acute diabetes, Mother Doreen Mary’s eyesight became very poor: she could read with an illuminated magnifying glass but could no longer drive. Sister Joan was sometimes having to use crutches because of arthritis and spinal disintegration. Mother Mary Ruth needed hospital outpatient treatment twice a week because of lung problems. “Sister Thirza will be 99 next January but is the heartiest of us all,” wrote Mother Mary Ruth in November 2000. “At the moment we are in a bit of a fix,” she wrote three months later. “Suzette Potgieter, our Housekeeper, has six weeks off after surgery, and Isaac the gardener and handyman has been away for three weeks.”²⁰ A good friend of the Sisters and old girl of the School, Miss Oenone Gradwell, had returned to Bloemfontein and now came to the House five days every week to give her assistance. Canon Robert Butterworth, the Diocesan Administrator, took on all the financial affairs. So far as possible, the round of daily Offices was continued, but in 2002 the obligation under the Rule was modified so that any Sister who could not get to chapel was permitted to say the Office privately. It became rare for all four to be in chapel at once. Mass was still said by visiting clergy every day except Saturday, the celebrant on Tuesdays being the Warden, Bishop Tom Stanage, who himself was coping with health problems.

18 In conversation with the author, 6 January 1999, in Bloemfontein.
The author attended to represent the English Committee of Help.

19 Plans were outlined in a letter from Mother Doreen Mary to the author, 26 October 1998.

20 In letters to the author, 26 November 2000 and 14 February 2001.

From the time he became Diocesan Bishop in 1982 and Visitor of the Community, Bishop Stanage had maintained the tradition of his predecessors by always giving good support and encouragement to St Michael's Sisters. A Wantage Sister wrote of meeting him: "At retreat in October 2002, I had quite a leisurely conversation with Bp Tom Stanage who shared with me how bravely the Sisters were facing the final years of their, and the Community's, life and how he was trying to help them pastorally. In fact, he left the retreat to return and conduct Mother Doreen Mary's Requiem."²¹

Mother Doreen Mary went into hospital in September 2002 for an abdominal operation. "She had successful corrective surgery and had come home but had problems and went back to hospital and the surgeon. The main contributory factor was the diabetes."²² She died on 24 October 2002.

Her death reduced the Community to three, the youngest being Sister Joan at 84. Decisions for the future were taken rapidly. Mother Mary Ruth wrote two months later:

As this house is too large and expensive for us the Trustees will be selling it (it does not belong to the Sisters). Thanks to the immense kindness of the School we hope to return to the SMS campus by the end of February to a flat being enlarged and prepared for us attached to the Senior Hostel with a bit of garden. We are retrenching all our domestic staff.²³

In the same letter, she told of the care they were receiving.

Bishop Tom Stanage (retired Bp of Bloemfontein) now our Warden, considered that Sister Joan and I needed a break after all the stress and on Nov: 30 took us down to a friend in Mossel Bay who has a beautiful home overlooking the harbour. We were there for nine days before the Christmas rush to the coast. ... We had a lovely time ... and went out on the pleasure launch to circumnavigate Seal Island!

21 Sister Margaret Magdalen CSMV, in a letter to the author, 4 July 2003.

22 Mother Mary Ruth in a letter to the author, 24 October, 2002.

23 In a letter to the author, 26 December 2002.



St Michael's School Chapel, just before the commencement of the 125th Anniversary Mass on 6 January, 1999. (Photo: Author)



The Sisters' Garden of Remembrance, near the east end of Bloemfontein Cathedral, where the remains of the last nineteen Sisters are buried. (Photo: Author) The light-coloured stone (left foreground) is that of Sister Georgina, moved from her grave in the President Brand Cemetery. The graves of forty Sisters are in the old Memoriam Cemetery in Bloemfontein. Others are buried at Kimberley (4), Harrismith (1), Modderpoort (1), Leribe (1), CapeTown (1) and England (2).

CHAPTER 28



GOING HOME

We have been in the throes of packing up and leaving 52 de Bruyn Street, Universitas, and moving into our very pleasant quarters on the St Michael's School campus. (Still unpacking!) The de Bruyn Street house sold easily for a good price and is being used as student accommodation (University of the Free State). The money goes to our Trustees.

So wrote Sister Mary Ruth.¹ The move took place on 25 February, 2003.

In a subsequent letter addressed to the English Committee of Help, its supporters and friends, she gave the reason for the move as “facing the future”, and outlined some other changes.

At the same time, the Constitution of the Community had to be suspended. There is no point in having another Mother Superior; the three of us live together and share whatever remains to be done. On January 6, the Epiphany, this year we celebrated the 129th anniversary of the foundation of the Community by Bishop Allan Becher Webb, the second Bishop of

¹ In a letter to the author, 8 March, 2003. From this time she reverted to the title “Sister”.

Bloemfontein, in 1874 to open up a pioneer area in nursing, education, and mission. We recognise that the task is now accomplished.²

The return of the Sisters to their Alma Mater was featured on the national television news. David and Fay Jones, a former Principal and his wife, chanced to see it and wrote to congratulate the Principal, Mr Swart, on bringing the Sisters home.³ The Sisters settled in naturally.

“Sister Thirza is very happy here in the school environment and we are so glad about this,” Sister Mary Ruth wrote in her covering letter to the author. Sister Thirza often sat in the little garden, wearing a sunhat over her veil, and pupils would open the gate to go to talk with her. Conversation must have been hard work because of her deafness. Sister Thirza’s stay was to be short. By the time the author took the English Committee of Help archive to Bloemfontein that October, it had become necessary for her to go into residential care at the nearby home Mooihawe. She lived there for another two years. All three Sisters seemed to get a new lease of life by returning home to the School. When they showed the author around in the flat, with its pleasant Oratory, one quipped, “There’s a dormitory of girls above us, so we daren’t misbehave.” Scholars would pop in for a chat, or to ask for prayers in matters concerning them. During term time, the Sisters were supplied with meals from the School kitchens. An arrangement was made with Mooihawe to provide a cooked meal every day during School holidays: Sister Joan would go out into the grounds and the food was passed over the fence.⁴ Oenone Gradwell continued her help to the Sisters, going there daily from Monday to Friday, doing any necessary shopping and collecting the post from the long-familiar P.O. Box 79.

The School celebrated the Sisters’ birthdays in style. Pupils went to Mooihawe to sing for Sister Thirza’s 102nd and 103rd birthdays. Sister Mary Ruth’s centenary was marked by a whole day of celebrations. “They began with the ringing of the Chapel bell at 6 am and ended at 6 pm with a ride from Tempe Airport in a vintage 1929 car.” White doves were released before a Chapel Service at 10.30am – it was “unlike any other”, she wrote. There was a giant cake with one hundred candles: she made a valiant attempt to blow them all out but had to ask for pupils to help her. In the afternoon, a group of senior girls

2 Letter dated 4 June, 2003.

3 Their letter dated 10 March 2003 is in the SMS archive.

4 As they told the author during his visit.

accompanied Sister Mary Ruth to Tempe where she embarked in a two-seater helicopter for a half hour flight over the city. The day “was positively explosive!”⁵

“The small, bent woman with a sharp brain and good sense of humour,” as a newspaper reporter described her⁶, was not yet ready to stop work, and it was during these years that Sister Mary Ruth wrote her five booklets on aspects of the Community’s history. Oenone Gradwell assisted her with practical help and in arranging for each to be published soon after it was completed. They were written from September 2004 to April 2006. “It was much on my conscience,” wrote Sister Mary Ruth.⁷ With conscience quietened, she died on 10 August 2006.

Sister Joan was then the only surviving Sister of CSM & AA. She continued in the flat for another year, but late in 2007 moved into frail care at the Serenitas retirement complex in General Hertzog Avenue, about one mile north of the School. In answer to the author’s surprise at this news, she described her circumstances:

It became necessary to move for several reasons. School were worried about me being entirely alone in the flat during school holidays as there is no one else on the campus, and one then becomes a target for ‘break ins’ etc. Also I need a certain amount of help with dressing, undressing and in the shower etc although I am still mobile and walk without sticks inside but not outside. (I will be 90 in November!!)

I have a room, bathroom, toilet, shower, small kitchenette and a little patio with my plants in pots including roses. It took a little while to settle in, but I am quite happy and keep in touch with school and some very loving friends. God has been and is very good to me, and often through St Michael’s. Bishop Tom says Mass for me once a week and Fr David Tanton comes on a weekday so I get Mass twice per week.⁸

Oenone Gradwell was instrumental in arranging for Sister Joan to be given priority for housing at Serenitas. Oenone lived in one of the bungalows in the complex. This last and perfect service to the Community completed, she died about six weeks after Sister Joan took up residence.

5 Described by Sr Mary Ruth in a letter to the author, 14 July, 2005. She wrote first of Sr Thirza’s death.

6 *Die Volksblad*, 13 May, 2005 – “die klein, krom vroujie met die skerp brein en goeie humorsin.”

7 Letter to the author, 30 June 2006, reproduced after the Introduction.

8 Letter to the author, undated but received on 9 June 2008.

Fr David Tanton kept Sister Joan supplied with books – they had a similar taste in reading – and she still received many requests for prayers, giving her an extensive ministry of intercession. A series of falls necessitated giving up her small apartment in 2013 and moving to a room in the intensive frail care, where she exceeded the staff’s expectations by living until 14 May 2016, frail of body but sound and active in mind. Visiting Sister Joan in October 2015, the author asked her about the experience of being ‘the last of her Order’.⁹ The possibility could never have crossed her mind when she joined the Community, forty strong, in 1945.¹⁰

I don’t think of myself as the sole survivor [she said]; the link with the others is still there. We’re still a Community – in heaven and on earth. One day soon I will re-join the others.

St Michael’s School Chapel was in use for an art project involving several schools from across the Free State, and not available for Sister Joan’s Requiem. It was providential. It was right and fitting that the Requiem for the last Sister of the Community of St Michael and All Angels should be celebrated in the Cathedral by the Bishop of the Free State, the Rt Revd Dintoe Letloenyane. Fr David Tanton preached the sermon and the Dean, the Very Revd Lazarus Mohapi, who had shared in ministry to Sister Joan during her last years, assisted. The entire senior school of St Michael’s, both pupils and staff, attended, and heard the Headmaster, Mr Braam van Wyk, speak of the end of an era:

The challenge for us as a school will be to sustain the value system that was guarded by the Sisters for so many years. One thing that we will definitely miss, is Sister Joan’s daily prayers for the school. Prayer like that forms a very special bond.¹¹

The bond is unbroken, for now the Sisters offer prayer and praise on another shore.

“His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face.”

9 Title of a poem by John Betjeman: Felixstowe, or The Last of Her Order, in *John Betjeman’s Collected Poems* (London: John Murray, 3rd Edition 1970).

10 There were forty-four in the Community when Sr Winifred joined in 1947, she told the author.

11 Reported in *Bloemfontein Courant*, Thursday 19 May 2016, p.4

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The best servants are unobtrusive, drawing no attention to themselves whilst going about their duties quietly and efficiently. One sees and appreciates the effects of their work, and one certainly notices when they are not there. The same can be said of the many Religious Communities that were part of the everyday life of the Church: we were richer for their presence and are poorer for their demise. The Sisters of the Community of St Michael and All Angels in Bloemfontein, living out their motto with its ideal of service, had a great influence on generations of people in the places they served. Much of their work was not immediately visible, being concerned with building up individuals in the faith, but its effects became evident as the Church grew in fidelity and courage.

Within eleven years of the creation of the Free State Diocese, it had given birth to two Religious Communities. The first, the missionary Society of St Augustine at Modderpoort, would probably be counted as unsuccessful – if that is ever the correct word to use. Officially dissolved in 1902, its brethren continued to wear their habits and to live the Religious Life faithfully until their deaths. The plaque on the choir stalls of the Church at Modderpoort duly gives thanks for eighty years of the Society, 1867 to 1947. They laid strong foundations on which the Society of the Sacred Mission was able to build. The Community of St Michael and All Angels had a longer history. One hundred and forty-two years were to pass from its foundation in 1874 to the death of the last Sister in 2016. Since then there has been no Religious Community in the Diocese.

During the lifetime of CSM&AA, external circumstances changed completely. The Community came into being as part of the great missionary drive which became possible because of the spread of the British and European Empires around the world. Bloemfontein was an isolated small town of fewer than three thousand inhabitants. Today it is a well-connected city of almost half a million. We have charted in this history some of the political changes that affected the Community and the people they served,

from republicanism, through colonialism, the pains of apartheid, until the advent of fully representative democracy.

Did the Community respond adequately to all these changes? The Sisters' aim was always to serve all people equally without distinction. One noticeable feature of CSM&AA is the very long terms of office not only of its Superiors but also of other senior office holders. Probably the Community would have benefitted from more rotation of its personnel and a greater sharing of responsibility. Although for many years the policy was that each Novice would spend part of their novitiate at a Branch House, after Profession there was less movement and fewer fresh ideas from the mission fields reached the Mother House. Would the outcome have been any different? That we cannot say, for it is always in the hands of God.

The Cathedrals at Kimberley and Bloemfontein hold some physical reminders of CSM&AA in windows, memorial tablets, and inscriptions. Their visible heritage continues through the Community of the Holy Name in Lesotho and Zululand, and also in St Michael's School, Bloemfontein.

There was some criticism of CSM&AA for running an exclusive fee-paying School for white pupils, but that has to be held in balance with the harsh political realities of the apartheid years which did not allow the races to mix or live together. The School was dependent on Government grants. One of Bishop Webb's ideals was that girls who were educated by the Sisters at St Michael's would return to their homes with open, enquiring and cultivated minds, and carry a distinctive Christian witness wherever they went. Many families sent their daughters to St Michael's over several generations, so that many parents were Old Girls. Perhaps we can see the fulfilment of the Founder's aims when changes to national legislation gave schools freedom to make their own admissions policy, and 95% of St Michael's parents voted in favour of opening the School to all races.¹ The Christian values of equal respect for all, which the Sisters had taught from the beginning, were put into action.

Since that time St Michael's School has grown exponentially. It has not been the function of this history to follow the whole story of the School – other writers have done that very ably.² Our purpose has been to look at the Community of Sisters and their life and work. But we will mention a few statistics. The old St Michael's in Elizabeth Street was

1 SMS, School Magazine for 1991, p.10-11 Headmaster's Report. The vote was taken on 27 June 1991. 93% of parents voted, of whom 95% were in favour of implementing open admission.

2 Margaret Leith, *One the Faith*; Mary Brewster (Mary Ruth CSM&AA), *One the Earnest Looking Forward*; David Tanton, *One the Hope* (awaiting publication).

a School of about two hundred pupils. The new St Michael's was built to accommodate three hundred, of whom half could be boarders. The Sisters wanted to keep the atmosphere of the Home School – and to that end class sizes were kept small. After the Sisters moved out of the Community House, the Principal, Mr John Alexander, and the Board of Governors planned to increase numbers to four hundred and fifty. Government changes restored the independence of St Michael's School and, in order to survive as a grant-aided private School, a further expansion has been necessary. In September 2018 the roll stood at seven hundred and forty-three pupils, of whom only about eighty were boarders. The aim has been to maintain the traditions and Christian culture so long upheld by the Sisters. St Michael's continues as an Anglican School with its own Chapel and Chaplain. Academic excellence remains one of its hallmarks, with a 100% pass rate in the matriculation examinations for the last forty consecutive years.

Inevitably it is not exactly the same as when the Sisters were there. Fr John Ruston, Warden and Chaplain from 1976 to 1983, made a return visit in August 1994, and some of his observations were published in the School Magazine.

At once I noticed – no Sisters of the Community on the campus – a big loss – with their prayers, their love, their visits almost every Sunday – helped the School keep its special identity, with the School Chapel ... as the spiritual centre of the School.

Nevertheless he was aware of the continuity:

Yes, healthy growth, doubtless with the same stumbles and tears along the way, but still the same identity – St Michael's, still a faithful servant of the Lord in His loving plans for the development and preparing of young people in a healthy environment, for their share in the future of our beloved South Africa – and of lands beyond our borders.³

That was the year the School turned 120, and an Old Girl reflected on her experience of fifty years earlier:

All through our School years, [the Sisters] were there together with the tradition. Each one special, Sister Jane, Sister Betty, Quizzzy, the Mother, and many more. The tradition that never changed and hopefully never will

3 SMS, School Magazine for 1994, p.138. Fr Ruston was by then Bishop of St Helena.

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change intrinsically. Perhaps ... the Sisters are not visible in the corridors anymore, yet they are there in spirit. Pause for a minute, listen, and in that still moment in time, you will hear the rustle of their habit and even recognise a voice or two.⁴

Although the Community of St Michael and All Angels has passed into history, the story of the Sisters' lives continues to echo for all who are willing to pause and listen. Responding to God's call, they served him courageously, with steadfastness, love, a lightness of touch and infectious joy. May it inspire new generations to devote themselves in the service of God, to his greater glory.

⁴ Maud Berry (Smit), 1934 – 1944, in Oenone Gradwell (ed), *St Michael's School Turns 120*, in SMS archive.

APPENDIX 1



Professed Sisters of the CSM&AA, Bloemfontein

The original Roll of Professed Sisters is in the HPR at Witwatersrand University, AB2644/72. In the early years, dates of Admission and Profession are recorded by the Saint's Day or Holy Day on which they took place: we have shown those as calendar dates. First Vows were introduced in 1940, but only Life Professed Sisters were entered into the Roll. We have considered it right to include in this list Sister Irene, who died before she could make her final Profession. A few dates of death have been amended when other records conflict. Where the date of death is known for Sisters who left CSM&AA, it is shown in square brackets.

Sister	Surname	Admission	Life Profession	Death & Place / Other
Emma	Proctor	25 Mar 1862	21 Jan 1863 at Sisterhood of St Thomas, Oxford 27 Apr 1874 installed as 1 st Superior	31 May 1887 Kimberley
Henrietta	Stockdale	30 Nov 1874	11 Jun 1877	6 Oct 1911 Kimberley
Fanny	Baillie	14 Jan 1877	11 Jun 1877	[19 Sep 1890 SSJD Natal]
Ellinor	Sendall	26 Dec 1876	25 Mar 1879	Dismissed 188-. [1928]
Georgina	Harden	26 Dec 1876	25 Mar 1879	30 Dec 1879 Bloemfontein

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Sister	Surname	Admission	Life Profession	Death & Place / Other
Sarah	Moore	25 Nov 1876	25 Mar 1879, 2 nd Order.	17 Oct 1910 Bloemfontein
Henrietta Theresa	Saunders	23 Feb 1878	14 Jan 1880	11 Jan 1918, Bloemfontein
Louisa	Olden	25 Nov 1876	20 Jul 1880	15 Sep 1908 Bloemfontein
Frances	Harcourt Vernon	8 Mar 1879	20 Jul 1881	5 Sep 1938 Bloemfontein
Maria	Burton	25 Jul 1879	20 Jul 1881	Released 6 Jul 1889
Elizabeth	Marsh	27 Sep 1879	26 Dec 1881	Left October 1883
Emma Keith	Young	27 Sep 1879	15 Jul 1882	15 Jul 1937 Bloemfontein
Louisa Jane	Barrett	27 Dec 1879	15 Jul 1882	22 Feb 1900 Harrismith
Frances Mary	Williams	17 Apr 1880	19 Oct 1883	Released 1902 [1930]
Catherine	Carter	6 Jan 1883	11 Jun 1885	23 Jul 1934 Bloemfontein
Mary Ellen	Nelson	27 Sep 1879	29 Sep 1886	Left Nov 1898 [1919]
Florence	Watkins	21 Jan 1882	29 Sep 1886	19 Sep 1926 Cape Town
Agnes Mary	Bottomley	22 Jul 1881	29 Sep 1886	Released 1891 [1896]
Caroline	Cooley	21 Jan 1882	29 Sep 1886, 2 nd Order	15 Jun 1925 Bloemfontein
Mary	Daniell	8 Mar 1884	29 Dec 1887	8 Sep 1921 Kimberley
Monica	Townsend	22 Jul 1881	20 Dec 1890	Released 1907 [1927]

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Sister	Surname	Admission	Life Profession	Death & Place / Other
Isabel	Smith	12 Jul 1888	20 Dec 1890	31 Aug 1928 Bloemfontein
Flora Elizabeth	Rainier	6 Oct 1888	21 Dec 1892	17 Dec 1931 Bloemfontein
Ella	Bramley	25 Mar 1892	22 Nov 1894	5 Sep 1932 Bloemfontein
Helen	Harris	15 Apr 1893	2 Jul 1896	2 Oct 1954 Bloemfontein
Annie	Bassington	5 May 1894	2 Jul 1896	6 Oct 1920 Bloemfontein
Frances Louisa	Price	31 Oct 1892	20 Jul 1898	24 Dec 1938 London UK
Rowena	Bevan	27 Apr 1899	7 Mar 1902	20 Feb 1936 Bloemfontein
Julia	Day	2 Feb 1900	7 Mar 1902	14 Jun 1945 Modderpoort
Marion	Rooke	13 Apr 1901	28 Jun 1903	25 Aug 1965 Bloemfontein
Bertha	Hudson	25 Nov 1901	24 May 1904	9 May 1933 Bloemfontein
Edith	Brierley	21 Jan 1903	7 Mar 1905	7 Aug 1928 Bloemfontein
Maud	Inman	6 Oct 1903	16 Jul 1906	31 Oct 1936 Bloemfontein
Cecil Hannah	Lewis	7 Apr 1904	17 Apr 1907	Left 1913 [5 Sep 1948]
Rosalie	Evans	18 Jan 1906	1 Feb 1908	11 Dec 1955 Bloemfontein
Lilian	Garrett	18 Jan 1906	9 Feb 1909	28 Feb 1921 Bloemfontein
Edith Agnes	Glover	8 Apr 1907	19 Mar 1910	4 Dec 1966 Bloemfontein

APPENDIX 1

Sister	Surname	Admission	Life Profession	Death & Place / Other
Martha	Ivett	9 Nov 1907	23 Dec 1911, 2 nd Order	24 Nov 1929 Kimberley
Grace	Davenport	25 Jan 1912	31 Jan 1914	21 Aug 1957 Bloemfontein
Marjorie	Bissett	25 Jan 1912	25 Jan 1915	3 Oct 1978 Bloemfontein
Mary Anna	Berry	28 Jun 1913	27 Nov 1915	Left
Emma Frances	Wicksteed	30 Aug 1913	27 Nov 1915	24 Oct 1940 Bloemfontein
Margery Angela	Hughes	22 Oct 1913	6 Oct 1916	10 Nov 1981 Bloemfontein
Jane	Darbyshire	7 Oct 1912	6 Oct 1916, 2 nd Order	23 Aug 1964 Bloemfontein
Beatrice	Corbould	18 Apr 1914	2 Jul 1917	20 Dec 1970 Bloemfontein
Mary Grace	Sinclair	28 Jun 1913	11 Oct 1917, 2 nd Order	23 Nov 1969 Bloemfontein
Catherine Faith	Taylor	30 Aug 1913	11 Oct 1917, 2 nd Order	25 Mar 1984 Bloemfontein
Elizabeth	Lord	30 Aug 1913	10 Aug 1918, 2 nd Order	14 Apr 1945 Sutton, UK
Dulcie	Williams	20 Jul 1916	3 Oct 1919	13 Nov 1967 Bloemfontein
Florence Mary	Cole	14 Sep 1916	20 Dec 1919	6 Nov 1969 Bloemfontein
Alice	Young	14 Apr 1917	20 Dec 1919	22 Nov 1952 Bloemfontein
Elsie	Matthews	15 Jul 1918	27 Nov 1920	15 Mar 1969 Bloemfontein
Margaret	West	3 Oct 1921	8 Dec 1923	16 May 1928 Leribe

APPENDIX 1

Sister	Surname	Admission	Life Profession	Death & Place / Other
Hilda Mary	Gardner	7 Aug 1922	26 Sep 1924	5 Sep 1945 Bloemfontein
Margaret Dorothea	Baker	25 Jan 1923	31 May 1925	7 Aug 1955 Bloemfontein
Hildegarde	Creese	7 Aug 1922	2 Jul 1925	3 Jul 1972 Bloemfontein
Mary Ursula	Cockayne	14 Jul 1927	4 Oct 1929	6 Oct 1979 Bloemfontein
Amelia	Roffe	26 Jan 1927	22 Nov 1930	21 Jan 1971 Bloemfontein
Zita Mary	Parker	6 Jun 1930	13 Jun 1931	13 Jul 1980 Bloemfontein
Mary Pauline	Barker	31 May 1930	5 May 1933	16 Nov 1983 Bloemfontein
Mary Ruth	Brewster	16 Dec 1933	29 Feb 1936	10 Aug 2006 Bloemfontein
Olive	Edwards	9 Jul 1936	31 Dec 1938	5 Jul 1979 Bloemfontein
Enid	Barber	6 Mar 1937	20 May 1939	30 Jun 1984 Bloemfontein
Evelyn	Smith	29 May 1937	19 Jul 1939	10 Jan 1992 Bloemfontein
Hilda Clare	Belsham	29 May 1937	19 Jul 1939	7 Oct 1982 Bloemfontein
Marion Faith	Bucklow	26 Feb 1938	12 Mar 1943	21 Jun 1997 Bloemfontein
Phyllis Mary	Roseveare	21 Apr 1938	1 Jun 1943	21 Jun 1967 Bloemfontein
Ruth	Parsons	4 Oct 1938	21 Dec 1943	16 Oct 1990 Bloemfontein
Irene	Thomas	4 Oct 1938	(In First Profession)	31 Mar 1943 Bloemfontein

APPENDIX 1

Sister	Surname	Admission	Life Profession	Death & Place / Other
Coelia	Parker	6 Aug 1940	24 Aug 1945	Released 1961 [10/2/1972]
Cuthberga	Budden	3 Feb 1940	16 Feb 1946	25 Sep 1969 Bloemfontein
Barbara	Smith	1 Mar 1941	23 Mar 1946	24 Mar 1976 Bloemfontein
Betty	Pemberton	15 Feb 1943	5 Apr 1948	24 Jul 1970 Bloemfontein
Joan	Marsh	24 Nov 1945	16 Dec 1950	14 May 2016 Bloemfontein
Winifred Brigid	Kendrick	8 Nov 1947	22 Dec 1952	27 Nov 1987 Bloemfontein
Thirza	Dorey	28 May 1949	14 Jun 1954	21 Jun 2005 Bloemfontein
Teresa Ruth	Hickmore	27 Sep 1949	9 Oct 1954	21 Jun 1992 Bloemfontein
Emily	Moss	16 Dec 1949	31 May 1955	4 Jul 1968 Bloemfontein
Constance	Sparrow	11 Dec 1950	21 Jan 1956	1 Apr 1997 Bloemfontein
Irmgard	Sykes	1 Jun 1953	22 Oct 1958	To SPB 1967 [31/8/1994]
Eleanor	Giffard	22 Sep 1956	7 Nov 1961	9 Jan 1987 Bloemfontein
Doreen Mary	Ball	15 Jun 1968	2 Aug 1973	25 Oct 2002 Bloemfontein

APPENDIX 2



Superiors, Wardens, and Visitors of the CSM&AA, Bloemfontein

Date of Foundation: Epiphany 1874

Superior	Warden	Visitor
Emma <i>27 Apr 1874 to 5 Jan 1887</i>	+ Allan B. Webb <i>1874 to 1887</i>	+ Allan B. Webb <i>1874 to 1884</i>
Frances <i>3 Mar 1887 to 14 Dec 1934</i>	William A. Holbech <i>5 Jan 1887 to 30 Apr 1899</i>	+ G.W.H. Knight Bruce <i>1886 to 1891</i>
-	-	+ John Wale Hicks <i>1892 to 1899</i>
-	Edward Bate <i>1 May 1899 - Feb 1904</i>	-
-	-	+ Arthur Chandler <i>1902 - 1920</i>
-	Thomas Bingham <i>24 Feb 1904 - Nov 1906</i>	-
-	Arthur R. Pinel <i>Aug 1908 - Apr 1914</i>	-
-	William H. Dodd <i>Jul 1915 - Nov 1928</i>	-
-	-	+ Walter J. Carey <i>1921 - 1934</i>

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Superior	Warden	Visitor
-	Geoffrey C. Whitaker <i>Jul 1929 - 11 Nov 1932</i>	-
-	William E.C. Frith <i>14 Jul 1933 - 5 Jul 1939</i>	-
Mary Ursula <i>20 Dec 1934 - 15 Dec 1965</i>	-	-
-	-	+ A.H. Howe-Brown <i>1935 - 1950</i>
-	Reginald M. Foss <i>22 Apr 1940 - not recorded</i>	-
-	-	+ Cecil W. Alderson <i>1951 - 1957</i>
-	Francis W. Smith <i>Apr 1953 - May 1958</i>	-
-	-	+ B. Bendyshe Burnett <i>1957 - 1966</i>
-	Donald A. Bailey <i>June 1958 - 28 Sept 1972</i>	-
Mary Ruth <i>17 Dec 1965 - 30 Nov 1987</i>	-	-
-	-	+ Frederick A. Amooore <i>1967 - 1982</i>
-	John A. King <i>18 Jan 1973 - 18 Jan 1976</i>	-
-	John H.G. Ruston OGS <i>5 Oct 1976 - 18 May 1983</i>	-
-	-	+ Thomas S. Stanage <i>1982 - 1997</i>

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Superior	Warden	Visitor
-	Roy R. Snyman T.SSF <i>15 Jan 1986 - 23 Sept 1991</i>	-
Doreen Mary <i>21 Dec 1987 - 25 Oct 2002</i>	-	-
-	J. R. David Wells SSM <i>23 Oct 1991 - 1996</i>	-
-	-	+ Patrick Glover <i>1997 - 2012</i>
-	+ Thomas S. Stanage <i>20 May 1997 - 14 May 2016</i>	-
Constitution suspended <i>October 2002</i> No further Superiors	-	-
-	-	+ Dintoe Letloenyane <i>2012 - May 2016</i>
Death of the last Sister – <i>14 May 2016</i>	-	-



*Sister Constance in 1966, at the Markgraaf Street front gate of St Michael's Home.
(Photo: Irene Sparrow)*

APPENDIX 3



It seems appropriate to give the last word in this history to Sister Constance CSM&AA. She wanted to be a missionary from her schooldays in Tottenham onwards, inspired by a talk given to her school by a former pupil who described her work as Matron of a hospital in Northern China. More than two decades were to elapse before Violet Sparrow was free to offer herself to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. A year of training at the College of the Ascension at Selly Oak near Birmingham was followed by three and a half years' service at Holy Cross Mission in Pondoland. She was thinking it was time to move when a visiting CSM&AA Sister offered her a post at Leribe.¹

The Early Adventures of A Young Wild Bird²

It was a very windy day in January in the late '60s. Birds in nests or under the eaves of buildings were having a rough time. Late that day a Sister came to me holding a wee thing in her hand. "You like birds," she said, "I found this on the ground." (Naturally I like birds – my surname happens to be Sparrow!)

I took the tiny Swift; it had all its feathers but was too young to fly. What was I to do with it?

I consulted another Sister. "You know," she said, "these birds never come to the ground. They live on flying insects, but we'll see what we can do." She produced a doll's feeding bottle, and a drop of brandy with water from the medicine cupboard. Obviously this was what it needed for it brightened up. I held it close to me. In those far off days we Sisters

1 Details from *The Cathedral Visitor: Magazine of the Cathedral of St Andrew & St Michael, Bloemfontein*, January 1995, p.10, article 'Cathedral Characters: Sister Constance'.

2 This article appeared in the Bloemfontein Cathedral Magazine, June 1990.

wore large stiff collars over our habits and scapulars. Almost immediately it crawled towards my collar, and under it, and hooked itself on to the top of my scapular.

Did it want to leave me? NO! Could I do my work and walk around with it perched there? YES!

Feeding was going to be a problem; to collect flying insects was not in our line! The next best thing was to cut up raw meat about the size of a pin head. This my pet devoured. Needless to say there were times when he couldn't be attached to me, so we found a cage, and every night he was put there in my room and covered over.

Often he would come to silent meals with me and no-one would know he was there unless his tail could be spotted just a little below my collar; but one day the silence was broken with a loud "Chirp, chirp" and I noticed many raised eyebrows! "But doesn't he mess all down your clothes?" I was asked. No, strange to say, only about once did I have any trouble. I discovered if I put him down on the ground he would go backwards, do his business, make no attempt to get away and when I picked him up he would immediately make for his 'perch' under my collar.

Being Sacristan at this time, I had to carry six large candlesticks through the Chapel for cleaning in the Vestry, so I decided it were better for him to remain in his cage while I did the polishing. All went well for a time when suddenly there was a loud, loud chirping, and I looked up to see his head through the bars trying to get to me. Quickly I pulled the bars apart and then got on with my work with him at home in his usual place. (I suppose this is a case of 'Birds of a feather flock together'!!)

Well, I had had him now for about three weeks. He was strong and fit, and in the early light mornings got restless in his cage. It was obvious I couldn't keep him.

It was suggested I let the Curator of the Zoo see him. This I did. He tried his wings and told me he was fit to go. That night was his last in the cage; when morning came I saw that all the windows were open in my upstairs room and then opened the cage; in a few moments he was out and flying up. I too was out of bed in a flash and, looking up in the direction in which he flew, I saw a large number of his pals circling overhead. Quite obviously this was the cause of his restlessness – he had heard them calling.

I shall never forget the joy I had from that small Wild Creature.

Sister Constance CSM&AA

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When Sister Emma and the five women who accompanied her from England crossed the Orange River early in 1874, they exchanged the comfortable mainstream of Anglican Church life for the rigours of pioneering new works in an undeveloped country. Living conditions were primitive, travel was hard, and money was always in short supply. The newly-formed Community of St Michael and All Angels opened the first girls' schools north of the Orange and the first hospital in the Free State. At Kimberley, Sister Henrietta achieved a world first through her successful campaign for the State Registration of nurses. Four Sisters were besieged in Kimberley during the Anglo-Boer War, and in Bloemfontein their Mother House became a military hospital. By faith and determination the Community recovered. St Michael's School was raised to new standards of excellence, while the Sisters expanded their mission to include Lesotho and the eastern Free State. Decades of work with Bloemfontein's sick and deprived led to Sister Enid becoming known as Ma 'Mohau (Mother of Mercy), and to national acclaim in the 1970s as South Africa's Mother Teresa.

This book studies the development of the Community's religious life, and charts the progress of their work among all races from their foundation until the death of the last Sister in 2016. Across the Orange, their relative isolation from the strong centres of Anglicanism eventually contributed to their demise, but not before they had established an enduring legacy. The work they began in Lesotho is continued by the Community of the Holy Name, while St Michael's School in Bloemfontein is recognised as one of the finest girls' schools in South Africa.

The author has known the Sisters since his childhood, and was Chaplain to their support group in the United Kingdom from 1984 until 2003. He served as a parish priest in England and as chaplain to international seafarers in the Netherlands and Kenya, and is an Oblate of the Community of the Resurrection, Mirfield.

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