

## **The History of the Altar at St Vincent's Church**

As told by the late Eric Tomlinson, Greengate Farm, Ashworth Valley

*"The altar at St Vincent's was first in use in pre-reformation times in a small Catholic Church hidden away in the Forest of Dean. In 1535 with the dissolution of the monasteries the church was razed to the ground and the altar lay buried for 300 years. In 1829 with the emancipation of Catholics, when Catholics were allowed to pursue their faith, a new Catholic church was built in the town of Monmouth. It was called St Mary's and situated in a small narrow street in the middle of the town. The altar from the old church was resurrected and carted to Monmouth and installed in the new church. I first visited the church on the 18<sup>th</sup> August 1963 having been married the previous day at St John's Church, Rochdale, and travelled down to Tintern Abbey and the Wye Valley on honeymoon with my wife Theresa. Next morning, looking for somewhere to hear Mass, St Mary's was the nearest church.*

*In its original form it was bare stone with crosses engraved on all four sides and over the top. Ten years later my wife Theresa and I made a return trip to Monmouth and discovered that the old altar had been replaced with a small new wooden altar. The incumbent priest informed us that the previous resident cleric had re-ordered the Church and swept away all the old artifacts including the altar. The altar was lying in a garden at the back of the Monmouth Church.*

*About this time Canon Stanley was planning the building of the new Church at St Vincent's. I told him about the altar at Monmouth and Canon Stanley agreed to incorporate it in the new church. The priest at St Mary's Monmouth agreed, so **it came to pass** that one October day in 1973, Canon Stanley his brother Michael and I set off with a Land Rover and trailer and headed off for Monmouth – 175 miles away. We were armed with planks, steel rollers and hay ropes.*

*Maneuvering the altar was difficult given narrow streets and ginnels, but Canon Stanley and his brother drew it along whilst I blocked the street with the land rover. Getting the altar up on to the tailboard was the trickiest bit, but Canon Stanley (always a good man to get helpers for church) went out on the highways and byways and found people, young and old, courting couples and all, to assist.*

*All hands were to the ropes and when the job was finished the presbytery housekeeper provided refreshments for all. Canon Stanley read from the breviary of St John Kemble whose relics were located in St Mary's Monmouth and who was martyred in Hereford in 1679. There is an annual pilgrimage from Monmouth each year.*

*Back at St Vincent's the old altar was encased in marble to match the modern church furnishings. Meanwhile the old wooden altar and two pews from the old St Vincent's on Rooley Moor Road are now the kitchen table and seating at the Charnwood Forest Farm home of my son, Blaise. (near Nanpantan, Loughborough) The altar stone from the same old St Vincent's has also made a journey and now stands guard over the grave of my wife Theresa at Greengate Hill Farm in the peaceful Ashworth Valley."*

Since Eric penned this tale he has also sadly died and has joined Theresa in his beloved Ashworth Valley.