

*From Monsignor Anthony Wilcox, parish priest of Sacred Heart Parish, Henley-on-Thames*

Dear Sir,

The beginning of the year saw the departure of the Marian Fathers from Fawley Court, after nearly sixty years of residence there. Very recently at Sacred Heart Church we invited Frs Wojtek Jasinski and Andrew Gowkieski (the last superior and his deputy) to come and celebrate a Mass of Thanksgiving for all the work the Marian Fathers did during those years.

Many of the words that have been said in letters and articles in your Newspaper and elsewhere have concentrated on the Grade I Listed Building, Fawley Court. I think it important to emphasise the reason why the Marian Fathers came in the early 1950s and the contribution they have made.

The dark days of World War II were hardly over. Hundreds of thousands of Poles could not return to the land of their birth because of the harsh Communist Regime that had been imposed. This country especially was a refuge for them. Our own marriage register records nearly 100 marriages in six years from 1947.

The Poles of the time were concerned very much in preserving their culture, traditions and heritage. They dreamed and hoped for better times when they could return to their native land. It was not to be for many of them. To help preserve these ideas, the Marian Fathers sought to set up a school where the very traditions of the Polish people could be maintained and nurtured in a Polish environment and language. The main reason Fawley Court was chosen was because of its closeness to London and of the ancillary buildings which had been used during the war. It was these that were the suitable places to serve as classrooms and dormitories for the young men who came to the school. It just happened that the other building was the beautiful Fawley Court.

The school flourished for 35 years, and many men now in their middle age will record with pleasure the work and dedication of generations of Marian Fathers who came to educate them. The Fathers worked for their keep, no salaries. They were imbued with a love for their faith and country. Many died, and these are buried in Fair Mile Cemetery.

When the school closed, its work done, the Marian Fathers searched for a purpose for the buildings. The temporary ones were becoming

dilapidated; the main building needed much spending on it. They painfully realised that in the words of St Paul had come true: "the time has come for to be gone. I have fought the good fight, I have run the race to the finish; I have kept the faith." These words to me sum up the work of the Marian Fathers in our midst. They came to do that work; they did it well, now they move on.

The harsh words that have been said about their leaving and the much unjust personal invective that Fr Wojtek has suffered need to be countered. The Polish Community at large in this country, the Catholic Community in this part of England, and the community in general has benefited much from the presence of the Marian Fathers for over sixty years.

Sacred Heart Parish has been blessed by the Fathers during these times. The Mass of Thanksgiving we had a little time ago was an expression of our gratitude for the work they and their forbears did. We asked for God's blessings on their work in the future.

On behalf of our parish and all people of good will, we thank Frs Wojtek and Andrew and wish them God speed and a fruitful ministry in pastures new.

Anthony Wilcox



Ros Whitaker, chair of Sacred Heart Parish Council, makes a presentation to Frs Andrew Gowkieski and Frs Wojtek Jasinski after a Mass of Thanksgiving at Sacred Heart Church to commemorate Sixty Years of the work of the Marian Fathers at Fawley Court. Seen also on the right of the picture is Monsignor Anthony Wilcox, parish priest. *Confer letters page*