



St Dyfrig's Parish
Registers & Archives
Document 21



Pontypridd's Catholic Orphanage:

St Michael's Home and the Treforest Nazareth House

(A review article by Rev Gareth Leyshon, 31 January 2012)

Original Content:

This review article was compiled 31 January 2012 by Rev Gareth Leyshon in the light of information received from the General Archives of the Sisters of Nazareth and the historical reviews already held in the parish. The author has made some educated guesses to present the most accurate account, with alternative dates and details being presented in endnotes. This document was originated electronically and does not exist as an original hard copy.

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For Further Information

St Dyfrig's Parish Homepage: <http://www.pontypriddrcdeanery.org.uk/churches/treforest.html>

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By email: Use the contact page at <http://www.pontypriddrcdeanery.org.uk/churches/treforest/contact.html> and please ensure you enter your email address correctly, or we will be unable to reply to you.

(i) St Michael's as a Diocesan Orphanage

St Michael's Home, Treforest was originally a diocesan orphanage run as a Poor Law School. The property - a double-bayed window house on Wood Road - was acquired by the then diocese of Newport in 1887ⁱ on a 99 year lease with money mainly provided by the diocese,¹ but with a substantial contribution of £750 from Lord Bute.² The total cost may have been £4,000.ⁱⁱ

The orphanage was fitted for the reception of boys and girls under 'An Act to provide for the education and maintenance of pauper children in certain School and Institutions'. It was certificated on 25th September 1888ⁱⁱⁱ for this purpose.³

While under diocesan ownership and management, St Michael's Home was run by a Catholic lady, Miss Morgan (also referred to as Sister Illtyd Morgan), with the help of a few companions who were third order Dominicans.⁴

"Sister Morgan and Sister Catherine cared and tended the orphans who came as far afield as Pontypool."⁵

Around the year 1966, parish priest E. L. Butler was able to say: "People still recall her [Sister Morgan] and Sister Catherine as they took care of the boys and girls in what is now the Central School."⁶

Children from St Michaels' Home were sent to the mission school then to St Michael's School, to be educated with the other Catholic children from the Pontypridd area.⁷

An inspector's report dated 18th February 1905 described the extreme poverty of the Home:⁸

The boys' clothing was patched and worn with one pair of boots each, and no new clothing for eighteen months. The bedclothes were patched and torn with just sufficient blankets. No knives and forks were available and the cracked oddments of crockery were supplemented by jam jars and treacle tins. Oil cloth strips were used to cover the tables. The children went to bed in the dark since there were no lights in the passage or bedrooms. To reach the toilets and basins and four bedrooms they had to go out in the open. There was no proper bathroom for the girls, and no playroom. However, Mr Smith of the Boys' Department, reported the boys as having three suits each, a reserve of boots, and good beds.

As they advanced in years these ladies found it increasingly difficult to cope, and on 1st September 1905^{iv} the home was taken over, at the request of the Bishop of Newport, John Cuthbert Hedley OSB, by the Sisters of Nazareth.⁹ It seems that the Sister Morgan and her colleagues had experienced great difficulty in providing funds to pay tradesmen for their services. By 1907, she was dwelling in Barry and facing bankruptcy.¹⁰

¹ Letter of 27 January 2012 by Christine Hughes from the Sisters of Nazareth General Archive – document [SDRA-20](#).

² Y. Bacchetta, "St Michael's Home, Treforest", 1984 – document [SDRA-05](#).

³ Y. Bacchetta, "St Michael's Home, Treforest", 1984.

⁴ Y. Bacchetta, "St Michael's Home, Treforest", 1984

⁵ C. Jenkins, "The Treforest Roman Catholic Church and Parish of St Dyfrig" – document [SDRA-06](#)

⁶ E. L. Butler, "Treforest Parish" – document [SDRA-04](#)

⁷ Y. Bacchetta, "The Catholic Church and School at Treforest", 1984.

⁸ Y. Bacchetta, "St Michael's Home, Treforest", 1984

⁹ Y. Bacchetta, "St Michael's Home, Treforest", 1984.

¹⁰ Y. Bacchetta, "St Michael's Home, Treforest", 1984

(ii) Treforest Nazareth House

Following the formal transfer of responsibility in September 1905, all the resident girls were transferred to Cardiff's Nazareth House in November. On 4th December 1905, the certificate permitting boys and girls to be cared for together was withdrawn, and reissued for the reception of *boys only* on the same day.¹¹

Initially, the Superior of Cardiff Nazareth House, Mother Lucy Burden, took charge of the new foundation at Treforest. It is unclear how long this arrangement persisted, but the following appointments of superior were subsequently made:¹²

1907 Mother Mary Aidan Maher

1913 Mother Mary Laurentius Reid

1919 Mother St. Mildred O'Keefe

1922 Mother Mary Rita Coakley

A report from October 1908 stated that, of the 60 boys in the Home, 52 were pauper children aged 5 to 14 years old. Some 17 of them were aged 7 years and under. The majority of them were of poor physique and constitution and improperly nourished, with milk fats substituted for meat. The boys were very badly flea bitten and beds extremely dirty.¹³

(iii) Subsequent Relocation to Swansea

In 1924 the sisters and boys moved from Treforest to Sketty, Swansea. The property, called "Glanyrafon", was purchased 24th March 1924 and the move took place 22nd September 1924, at which time the Treforest property was given back to the diocese.¹⁴

The "Treforest Nazareth House" building vacated near Calvary Chapel was sold for £1,400 and underwent alterations, becoming the "Treforest Central School" in secular hands.¹⁵

The relocated sisters and boys did not stay long in Sketty. On 24th June 1930, Murton Grange, Bishopston, Swansea was purchased, and during the following three years a new Nazareth House was built on this site. The Sisters and boys moved to Bishopston from Sketty during June 1933, and the Sketty property was eventually sold on 25th February 1935.¹⁶

Of the Bishopston house, E. L. Butler wrote "they moved there shortly after it^v has been opened by the late Archbishop Mostyn."¹⁷

¹¹ Y. Bacchetta, "St Michael's Home, Treforest", 1984.

¹² Letter of 27 January 2012 by Christine Hughes from the Sisters of Nazareth General Archive

¹³ Y. Bacchetta, "St Michael's Home, Treforest", 1984

¹⁴ Letter of 27 January 2012 by Christine Hughes from the Sisters of Nazareth General Archive

¹⁵ E. L. Butler, "Treforest Parish"

¹⁶ Letter of 27 January 2012 by Christine Hughes from the Sisters of Nazareth General Archive

¹⁷ E. L. Butler, "Treforest Parish"

(iv) Documents Available

St Dyfrig's Parish

Any baptisms of orphans or other St Michael's Home residents which took place locally should be recorded in the Parish Registers of St Dyfrig's, which hold baptism details back to 1868 – see document [SDRA-12](#).

The location of other St Michael's Home records dating from the period before September 1905 is not known to St Dyfrig's Parish in 2012.

The Sisters of Nazareth General Archive contains:

- a list of boys who were at St. Michael's when the Sisters took over in 1905
- the Children's registers, and some other record books, from September 1905 until the closure of the Children's Home in July 1981

Enquiries by post are strongly preferred. You can contact the General Archive at

General Archive, Nazareth House, Hammersmith Road, London, W6 8DB

Telephone: 020 8600 6846

Penny Pugh, a member of a local Anglican Church, provided the following information:

There are NO RECORDS OF INDIVIDUALS at the above institutions in Pontypridd Library.

Glamorgan Record Office in Cardiff – now entitled Glamorgan Archive – holds records for Treforest Roman Catholic School in the 19th and 20th Century.

At Pontypridd Library, there are maps and books which can give a researcher background information for these institutions, latter part of the 19th Century and early 20th.

Map Glamorgan Sheet XXVIII Part 14 25", Second Edition 1900 shows St Michael's Orphanage south of Tower Street and Wood Road, also RC School nearby in Wood Road, by the synagogue.

Newspaper: Pontypridd Observer (not all indexed) – account of 1908 of outing from Nazareth House boys.

Kelly's Directory includes mentions of the orphanage and school in 1884 (p. 450), 1891 (p. 417) and up to 1926.

Books:

Pontypridd South Past & Present by D. J. Rees p. 109-110 mentions the "Central School, previously Nazareth House Orphanage and St Michael's House Girls".

Victorian Pontypridd by Don Powell – a brief mention on page 104.

(v) Endnotes – selected use and adjustment of sources to attempt historical accuracy

ⁱ C. Jenkins (“The Treforest Roman Catholic Church and Parish of St Dyfrig”) gives 1882 as the purchase date, but the Sisters of Nazareth Archivist seems familiar with the details of the lease, and 2 and 7 are easily confused in handwriting or typescript. 1887 is more consistent with the details which follow.

ⁱⁱ C. Jenkins, “The Treforest Roman Catholic Church and Parish of St Dyfrig” and E. L. Butler, “Treforest Parish” both give this figure.

ⁱⁱⁱ Y. Bacchetta (“St Michael’s Home, Treforest”, 1984) gives the date as 1878 but this sits poorly with other details. The same date in 1887 was a Sunday, making 25 September 1888 seem most likely.

^{iv} Y. Bacchetta (“St Michael’s Home, Treforest”, 1984) identified the date as 1st September 1908, but a 5 and an 8 can easily be confused in handwriting or typescript, and 1905 is clearly the more plausible date given other sources, including those used by Bacchetta..

^v Almost certainly “it” is the new house, but the context would also allow the reading that “it” was the Sketty house blessed by the Archbishop shortly before arrangements to move were begun.