

VOX NOSTRA



(A Private Newsletter of the London Province of the MCCJ)

Horsforth

St David's Day

Dear confreres,

As we approach the beatification of Bishop Comboni, I am happy to present a special edition of Vox Nostra containing brief notes on the history of our Province. It is in the Acta of our confreres that we can best see the spirit of Comboni alive in the Church today.

Our notes finish in 1966. Here in the UK, Public Records after that date are closed to scrutiny by the Thirty Year Rule which I am happy to apply to our provincial archives.

After 1966, people and topics are still so much alive that it is impossible to take an objective historical view.

I have set out persons, places and dates but I have not delved into motivations or underlying choices. Looking at the facts each one can do this for himself.

I would remind you that these notes are 'not complete because they do not recall "vari casi dolorosi", in obedience to the Apostle's admonition that these things should not be even mentioned among Christians, and they do not do justice to the love and kindness and generous sacrifices of so many confreres and friends and benefactors which must remain hidden and form the true history of our Province, as it is recorded in the Book of Life.

May God reward those who have gone before us and may he give us the grace to emulate them in the years to come.

Yours sincerely in Corde Jesu,

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*Let us praise illustrious men our ancestors in their successive generations.
... whose good deeds have not been forgotten their glory will not fade ,
their name lives on for all generations. The peoples will proclaim their wisdom.*

Verona Fathers
*Notes on the History of
The Sons of the Sacred Heart
in Gt. Britain & Ireland*

CHAPTER ONE

False Dawn

On 7th May 1903 a visitor of distinction called at the Mother House of the Society in Verona: he was Bishop Francis Bourne of Southwark, later to be Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.

While in Rome for his ad limina visit, he had made enquiries concerning religious orders prepared to work in his large diocese which at that time included also the territory now forming A & B. He had been advised to get in touch with Fr. Colombaroli, Superior General of a small missionary order, the Verona Fathers, who were anxious to establish themselves in England on account of their missions in British Africa.

As a result of this visit, the Verona Fathers were given charge of a Mass centre at Sidcup in Kent. Father A. Mantica was the first confrere to work in Sidcup, taking up residence in August 1903. Later Father J. Lehr, afterwards to be the Superior General of the MFSCJ, was appointed Priest-in-charge; he set about his task with great energy and enterprise and soon there were plans for a church and school.



The Church was built in 1905 and the story of its opening makes interesting reading. The dome was cast in concrete, and no temporary struts were used to support the pillars. The resulting settlement - about an inch - led the surveyor of the local council to serve a written notice that the church was unsafe and had to be pulled down within eight days. It is still serving as the Parish Church at Sidcup today!

A fierce controversy raged for the following six months, with the local politicians and the press joining in the fray. At the Council Elections of 1906 the Liberal party stood for the granting of permission for the church to be opened. They won the election, and when the

church was blessed by Bishop Amigo, on 8th September of the same year, the liberal councillors attended the ceremony in the first pew "in great uniform", as Fr. Cotta reported.

Father Lehr left England in 1909 to attend the Second General Chapter of the Congregation. At this Chapter it was decided that the moment had come to open a long desired mission in Uganda. This territory offered the greatest hopes for successful missionary work but due to lack of personnel it had not been possible to develop it earlier.

In order to do so it was decided to withdraw from England. This was the official reason for handing back what was now a flourishing parish. The fact that the new Superior General, Fr. Vianello, did not approve of clergymen having tea with ladies and, horror of horrors, even organizing dances...probably had more to do with the closure of the community than the needs of the new mission in Uganda.

There was also the question of a debt of £500 for the new church, the school and house. Fr. Colombaroli would probably have told Fr. Lehr to get on with it but the new administration was more petty minded. Fr. Lehr did not gladly accept their strictures and suddenly left Sidcup for his home in Germany. Fr. Fabro was left holding the baby and the only solution offered by Verona was to ask the diocese to accept the parish and debt. This was in 1911.

Bishop Amigo was deeply offended at the way things had been handled and, since he was to be bishop until 1949, this was to cause long lasting difficulties later on at Sunningdale. Eventually everything was sold to the Marist Fathers who made Sidcup their Provincial residence. They paid £2000 for the entire property and contents, which Fr. Cotta valued at £5,000 without including the church. The Diocese received its money but for the Congregation a very bad start had been made and this was only the first of a series of sales of property which were (unhappily) to mark the history of the Congregation in these isles...

CHAPTER TWO

A New Start

"The first members of our Congregation to come to England were Frs. Edoardo Mason and Antonio Todesco". So begins the Diary of the Province. How quickly we forgot our pioneers!

In October 1926 Frs. Mason and Todesco arrived in Southampton as guests of "Les Freres of Heluan". This was a decision of Fr. Meroni following the Chapter of 1925. It had become clear that a good command of English was necessary for our missionaries in British East Africa where the colonial power was becoming ever more intrusive and present in the everyday life of the indigenous peoples. It was no longer acceptable to speak only the local language, especially with the growing need for schools.

Our presence in St. Mary's, Bitterne Park, Southampton, was to enable the Fathers to learn English and also gain experience of the English educational system. It suited the Brothers to have a resident chaplain and later they even persuaded one of the Fathers to transfer as chaplain to their college at Pell Wall, Market Drayton in Shropshire. Among those to stay with Les Freres, during the period 1926/30, were Fr. Todesco, Fr. Leonzio Bano, Fr. Santandrea, Fr. Barbisotti, Fr. Martelli and Fr. Spreafico.

By 1930 the Government had instituted a "Colonial Teacher's Training Course" which was obligatory for those intending to teach or run schools in British Africa. On 1st July Fr. Meroni sent Fr. Cotta to England to arrange for our Fathers to attend this course in London. The diarist, in exile at Southampton, notes: "How nice and happy a thing it is to see somebody from Verona sometimes."



In London Mgr. Banfi, Vicar General of Southwark, invited Fr. Cotta to discuss with Bishop Amigo the possibility of our Fathers residing in presbyteries and receiving free board and lodging in return for some pastoral work. The Bishop was quite willing especially since the Fathers had a glowing recommendation from Archbishop Hinsley, Apostolic Visitor to British East Africa,

who among other things "recalled the virtues of Mar. Comboni and the zeal which animates the Fathers who are now walking in their Father's footsteps."

After Fr. Cotta had made the necessary arrangements for the Fathers to transfer to London, he was unfortunately persuaded by the Superior of the Brothers that it would be possible to do a similar or even better course at Southampton University. This, the Brother claimed, would be much more economical for the Congregation as the Fathers could continue as Chaplains to the Brothers. It was a mistake, since the Colonial Course was run only in London. However, Fr. Cotta accepted his arguments and the Fathers unwisely continued to reside in Southampton until 1936.

In June 1936 Sr. Francesca Kirby of the Missionary Sisters of Verona made a propaganda tour of Ireland. On her return she presented Fr. Accorsi with the applications of a few Irish boys who wished to join the Congregation in order to become missionaries. Fr. Accorsi informed Fr. General (Simoncelli) who replied on June 30th that "perhaps this is the way of Providence. Ask informations so that when new Fathers come, after a fortnight, a trip in Ireland would be quite opportune in order to find out lodging or a house for the beginning. Quad facit Deus !"

On July 20th Fr. Simoncelli writes again: "resta sospesa per il momento - fino a nuovo ordine - l'idea della casa in Inghilterra o Irlanda." 'All right," notes the diarist, " it seems to me that if this house is supposed to be opened at the beginning of the scholastic year, we will be too late. But...we shall see." It was not to be. On August 3rd, Fr. Simoncelli writes again: The idea of the house in England is dropped for now: tell the boys who made their application, to apply somewhere else."

In fact Verona had other irons in the fire. Earlier that year, Fr. Spreafico had written to Fr. Simoncelli that the Colonial Course was now "essential". In November the Fathers in Southampton heard from London that Fr. Cotta had arrived on the 14th to establish a house for some Fathers to follow the Colonial Course at London University. Fr. Cotta, recalling his experience of 1930, prudently kept his distance from the good Brothers. He called Fr. Romano from Market Drayton and both enrolled for the Colonial Course. The Fathers lived in an Italian lodging house (Roma House, 34 Coram Street, W.C.1) until they rented a furnished flat in St. James Street on 31st. Dec 1936. It consisted of six rooms situated on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd floors and cost £120 per annum (About £4,200 today). The original community consisted of Frs. Cotta, Romano and Bro. Montanelli.

During the year Frs. De Negri, Adamini, Del Zotto, Trucchi and Aleardo De Berti arrived, filling the flat to overflowing. (Fr. De Negri arrived in England on 29th October 1937 "for a three month course". He was to remain until 1948!)

Fr. Cotta wrote a report to the Chapter (September 1937) setting out his ideas for development in England. After the Chapter Fr. Cotta visited Verona to consult with Fr. Vignato, the new Superior General, who gave him £4000 and instructions to find a suitable house which would provide accommodation for Fathers attending courses in London and also for possible English aspirants. This sum was not enough for a house in London so Fr. Cotta began to look for a property on the outskirts. His search was urgent since Propaganda Fide, in the person of Mgr. Constantini, and the British Colonial Authorities were both insistent that the Verona Fathers should have a house in England and British members. This was all part of a much greater concern of the British Colonial Authorities not to have a massive presence of Italian missionaries along the Nile. In 1938 the Mill Hill Fathers had been granted the territory of Malakal and the Verona Fathers unceremoniously expelled. This was in reprisal for the expulsion by the Italian Government of English (Protestant) Missionaries from Abyssinia. The decision to expel the Italian Missionaries was taken in London, communicated to the Holy See and imposed on Mgr. Riberi, the Apostolic delegate. But this was not enough and the Colonial Authorities were demanding an even greater "English" influence upon the Verona Fathers.

A property which seemed suitable had been discovered at Chigwell and Fr. Capovilla was dispatched from Rome to view it. He approved of the building and Fr. Vignato granted permission to purchase the estate. At this point our Solicitor, Mr. Weld, discovered a right of way that made the property inconvenient. His efforts to move the path to a more suitable route failed and Chigwell was abandoned in January 1938 much to everyone's disappointment.

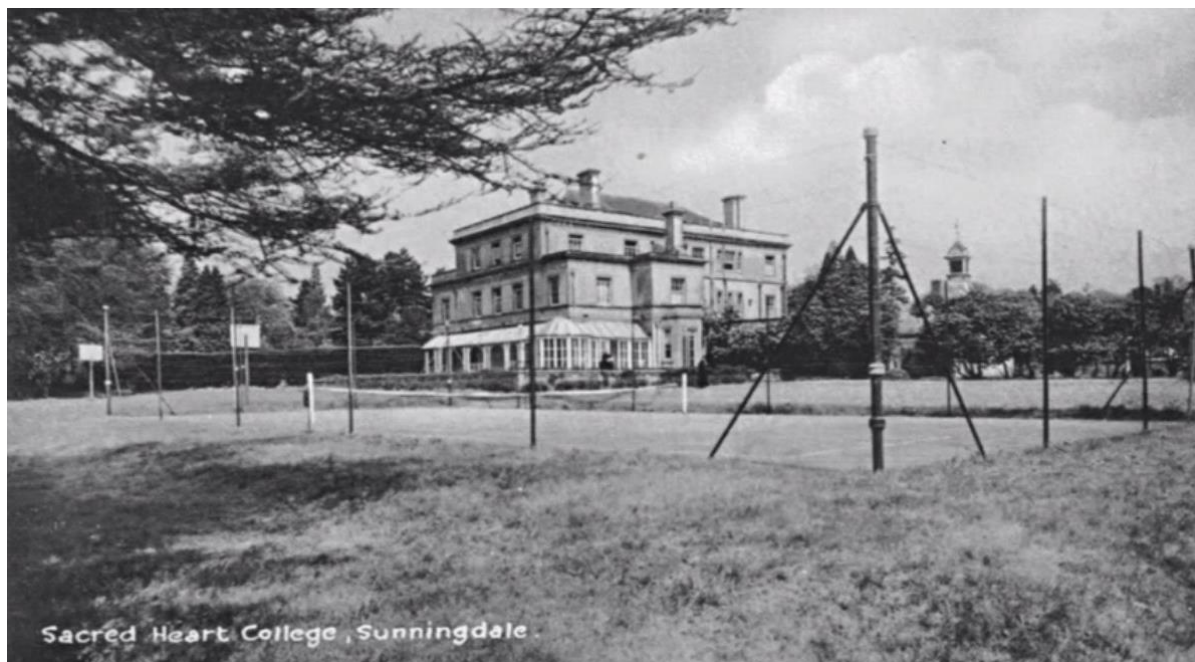
1938

Fr. Cotta now set out with a Mr. Sterret to find a house "within a fortnight". After ten days ("without lunches") visiting possible properties, they came to Shrubbs Hill Place, Sunningdale. "That's it!", declared Mr. Sterret. On the same day Fr. Cotta took Frs. Simoncelli and De Negri to view the house and then set out for Verona. The General Consulta was convened at once to consider the two offers: the whole estate of 40 acres for £9,000 or the house and wily 16 acres for £6,000 (about £210,000 today). Verona decided on 16 acres, much to Fr. Cotta's chagrin, and two days later he and Fr. Capovilla returned to England. They immediately visited Sunningdale for about an hour before going to the estate agents with Mr. Sterret and signing the contract. Fr. Cotta went to the Caledonian Market, Camden Town, in search of secondhand furniture for the new house and on March 15th, the birthday of Comboni, the first Fathers moved into Sacred Heart College for the African Missions, Sunningdale.

In the morning, Frs. Cotta and Polato arrived with Bro. Montanelli: Frs. Simoncelli and De Negri in the early afternoon and Frs. Uberti, Del Zotto and Trucchi at night, after school.

Under the direction of Mr. Sterret, a local builder prepared the Sanctuary in the former-billiards room and an image of the Sacred Heart (from a design by Fr. Cotta, and now in the community chapel) was brought from Val Gardena, together with the altar, for the princely sum of £80 (about £2,800 today).

From June 15th until June 20th Fr. General visited Sunningdale where he expressed his satisfaction with the new house.



On July 29th the Chapel was opened with Fr. Cotta celebrating a low Mass. On the 2nd August Fr. Cotta set-out for Verona, leaving behind a fully-fledged house of studies under the direction of Fr. De Negri, who was urged to maintain good relations with Fr. Tigar at Campion House and to explore possibilities in England, Ireland, Scotland and... Canada! Fr. Vignato wrote at this time: "We all know and feel the necessity of forming our own English

personnel if we wish to save our Missions."

On October 10th, with the recent Munich Agreement promising lasting peace, work was started on the adaption of the stables as a future Juniorate. The Fathers had already written to all the Parish Priests of England and Wales informing them of their plans. On October 24th the first pupil, John Mason from Barry, South Wales, entered the Juniorate. On December 3rd Francis Melling from Coatbridge, Scotland, and Peter Laversuch from Sunningdale, joined him.

1939

The new year began promisingly with a postulant joining the community, Eric Grace from Oxford, a young recent convert from Anglicanism.

In April 1939 Fr. Mason spent a week in Ireland, exploring the possibilities of a house and attempting to do some "recruiting".

In August Eric Grace went to Venegono to begin his novitiate, the first non-Italian to join the Congregation since the split of 1922.

In September 1939 the long feared war broke out with the German invasion of Poland. Fr. Vignato wrote advising Fr. De Negri and Fr. Mason to remain at their posts but granting permission for the others to return to Italy if they so desired. The uncertainties of the situation caused the re-opening of the College (Juniorate) to be postponed until November 25th when seven pupils took up residence. It seems that the Superiors in Verona thought things could continue as before, since Italy had not entered the war. They continued to send confreres to Sunningdale and these continued to attend the Colonial Course.

1940

On 14th January 1940, Christopher Hierons entered the Juniorate. He was to be the only one of the prewar group to continue in the Congregation.

Later in the month Archbishop Amigo and Fr. Preedy came to lunch at the College. This was probably a deliberate attempt by Archbishop Amigo to show support for the Fathers in view of the steadily deteriorating European situation. In fact up to that point he had not been very welcoming and had declared that he would not have granted permission for the Society to enter his diocese if it had not already bought the property. The Fathers had done so under the false impression that Sunningdale was in Portsmouth Diocese, having been misled by the postal address of Sunningdale, Berks, while the house is actually in Surrey. Because of the Sidcup debacle and the unhappy way we entered his diocese, Archbishop Amigo would never grant permission for our college chapel to be a public oratory. This influenced strongly his successor Archbishop Cowderoy - who had been baptized by our ten Fathers at Sidcup - thus hampering the insertion of our college in the local community.

Trying to keep up pretence that all was normal, the community bought a cow and some pigs. Fathers continued to frequent the Colonial course (now transferred to Nottingham), Fr. De Negri preached a mission at the Italian Church, Clerkenwell, during Holy Week and Frs. Bresciani, Colombini and Mosna enrolled at a Polytechnic.

On June 10th Italy entered the war on the side of Germany. On June 11th, at seven in the morning, the police raided the college, the boys were sent home, the Fathers and Brothers were interned as enemy aliens and the buildings were requisitioned for the duration. A sudden and unwelcome stop to a promising start.

CHAPTER THREE

The War Years

On June 11th 1940 the Community of Sunningdale was carried off in a Black Maria to begin an unexpected and very undesired tour of England. Frs. De Negri, Cerea, Bresciani, Mosna, Sina, Stellato, Colombini and Bros. De Rossi, Lunardi and Taverna were given time to pack some personal clothing and then carried off to Guildford where they found many other Italians in the same unhappy situation. Then, after a few days, off to Kempton Park, a race-course near London, to join thousands of Italians who had been rounded-up across the South of England. After three days, the confreres were among a thousand internees carted off to Bury in Lancashire. Here they met-up with Frs. Frizzero, Fortuna, Gualandi and Maccagnan, who had been arrested in Nottingham, where they were attending the Colonial Course.

On June 20th all the Verona Fathers (with the exception of Fr. Frizzero, who was to end up in Canada) were transported to the Isle of Man, where they were interned in Palace Camp, Douglas, some thirty boarding houses surrounded by barbed-wire and patrolled by armed guards.



The parish priest of Douglas, Dean Turner, visited the Fathers each week and did all he could to be of service. Within a short while the Fathers had set aside a large room as a chapel and were fully occupied with the spiritual needs of their fellow prisoners, many of whom turned to God in their time of trial.

Fortunately, the house at Sunningdale had been prudently registered in the name of Propaganda Fide and so was not seized as enemy property. However it was requisitioned by the Government, which all during the war paid a rent to the Apostolic Delegate, Mgr.

Godfrey. Efforts by Cardinal Hinsley to have the Fathers released were unavailing and all he could do was to counsel them to stay willingly in the camps for the good of their fellow prisoners.

Acting on this advice Frs. Gualandi and Fortuna went to Metropole Camp, Douglas, at the end of September, and in November Frs. Maccagnan, Cerea, Sina and Bro. Taverna were transferred to Granville Camp (Ramsey?).

In February 1941, Mgr. Godfrey visited the camps and was received by all with great solemnity as Delegate of the Holy Father. During the year Archbishop Downey of Liverpool made three visits to the camps on the Island.

In May 1942, Cardinal Hinsley wrote in Italian to Fr. De Negri congratulating the Verona Fathers on their zeal in promoting "il benessere spirituale e temporale degli internati." This was followed by a visit from Mgr. Mathew, Auxiliary of Westminster, who had special responsibility for the internees and was later to be Apostolic Delegate to British East and West Africa.

With the arrival in the United Kingdom of large numbers of Italian POWs, Cardinal Hinsley called on the Verona Fathers to volunteer as Chaplains for the prison camps and Frs. Colombini, Maccagnan and Sina were selected for this apostolate.

The surrender of Italy, in September 1943, made their continued imprisonment even harder to bear. Notwithstanding the efforts of Mgr. Mathew it was not until the end of January 1944 that the first confreres were released. They had no home to go to, as Sunningdale was in the hands of the Norwegian Ministry of Shipping which was to show no rush to leave. The Jesuits kindly offered hospitality at Manresa House, London, but, at the end of the Spiritual Exercises, renewed heavy bombing of the city made it expedient to seek lodgings elsewhere. During the year the remainder of the confreres were released and finally in December 1944 Frs. Gualandi and Fortuna were allowed to sail for Africa, the first group of our missionaries to do so since the outbreak of hostilities. It was to take them over two months to reach their destination.

CHAPTER FOUR

Another New Start

Finally in March 1945 it was decided to rent a house and reunite the confreres who were spread throughout England. A suitable house (considering the times) was found in Yorkshire and in April the confreres were reunited at Ganthorpe Hall, Terrington. The house was rented for £100 per annum (about £2,000 today) but on a three monthly lease, since the hope of returning to Sunningdale as soon as possible was always uppermost in Fr. De Negri's mind.

Monsignor Shine, the Bishop of Middlesborough, sent his blessing and the new life began with a five day retreat preached by Fr. De Negri. Soon the Fathers were busy with Supplies throughout England and Wales. Finally in June they received letters from Verona informing them of the miraculous escape from serious damage of our houses in Italy and inquiring about the confreres in England and the property at Sunningdale. "Is the house still there? Has it been bombed? Shall we be able to open a Junior Seminary?"

It was only in August that Fr. De Negri was able to establish contact with Verona, courtesy of the Allied Commander in the city. In the same month, Frs. Mosna, Stellato and Bro. Lunardi, set off for Africa.

During this time Fr. De Negri also attempted, without success, to publish in English a biography of Bishop Comboni. He had two texts: one prepared by a Nun of Stanbrook Abbey and the other translated from the Italian by Sr. Columbana of the Verona Sisters. Although these texts remained unpublished they proved very useful in manuscript form in the houses of formation during the following years.

In September Frs. De Negri and Bresciani made a trip to Scotland where they left behind a group of friends destined to grow with the years. Fr. Vignato decided in October to open a house in London which would serve for the Missionaries whom he intended to send there to learn English, leaving Sunningdale for the Junior Seminary whenever it should be returned to the Congregation. He instructed Fr. De Negri to look for a suitable house.

Fr. Grace, who had spent the war years studying theology at Venegono and had been recently ordained, spent two weeks with the community in November before setting out for Africa together with Fr. Colombini.

1946

Ireland was not forgotten in the midst of this activity. The need for British or Irish priests (who were all "inglesi" to those in Verona) was ever more pressing on account of the attitude of the British Colonial Authorities. They were insisting that Mgr. Negri should have at least an English secretary and that there be English members on the staff at Comboni College, Khartoum. In January, Fr. De Negri was urged by Fr. Vignato to visit Ireland, not only in search of possible vocations but also to obtain, if possible, secular priests willing to serve at least temporarily in our missions. In June Fr. De Negri visited All Hallows, Dublin, and Maynooth, the National Seminary, but to no avail. From Verona, Fr. Vignato wrote that Mgr. Constantini of Propaganda Fide was insisting that "we obtain English academic titles and overcome the barriers raised by nationality in order to become Catholic." He continued : "this directive must be followed with all determination. Devote all your energies to obtaining personnel. In this way we will save the Institute and the Missions."

In January 1946, two former pupils from Sunningdale, Christopher Hierons and John Kelleher, with two other young men, were the first pupils to enter the re-opened Seminary. Life was slowly returning to normality. It had become obvious that the Norwegians planned

to remain at Sunningdale for some time and Fr. Vignato had been insisting on a house in London. It was intended that this should serve for Fathers doing the Colonial Course and that Ganthorpe could be the seat of the Junior Seminary until such times as Sunningdale was returned. This plan was aborted when the owners unexpectedly asked the Fathers to leave Ganthorpe since the Congregation did not want to take a long lease and the owners had received a better offer from a private school. The search in London was intensified and eventually 61 Elm Park Gardens, SW 10, was rented for £75 (about £1,500 today) per quarter as a temporary measure.

In June Fr. Cerea returned to Italy and a new group of confreres arrived, two of whom, Fr. Felix Centis and Fr. Fontanari, were to play important roles for many years in the life of the Region.

Finally in July the entire community moved to London, where their first visitor was Mgr. Mathew recently appointed Apostolic Delegate for British East and West Africa, and well-known to the Fathers from their time in the prison camps. He encouraged the development of our congregation in England because he had been informed that the Colonial Office was determined that our Latin personnel should be substituted by Anglo-Saxons.

In October, the first issue of "Our African Missions", was published. Although very modest by any standards, the Superiors in Verona found it "graditissimo" and it was to do great work in the years ahead.

1947

On February 21st. Mgr. Godfrey, the Apostolic Delegate, visited the community and received the apostolic promise of three aspirants. His presence was an encouragement and gave the confreres the opportunity to thank him for his support during the war years and especially for having protected our property at Sunningdale.

Fr. Vignato continued to insist on a house in Ireland. He wrote to Fr. De Negri on Feb.24th: "The necessity of a house in Ireland is fixed in my head like a nail, and this must be as soon as possible because the need of Anglo-Saxon (sic) personnel becomes every day more urgent." At the same time Fr. Capovilla also wrote: "We strongly believe that you should look towards Ireland, in order to open a house there, where there are numerous and good vocations: this task should be your principal pre-occupation. We need, and with a certain urgency. English speaking members, and these may be obtained more easily and more quickly, as you yourself say, in Ireland."

Later in March, Fr. Capovilla returned to the question: "You must do something about Ireland. Do you think a letter of recommendation from Propaganda would help to obtain a welcome in some diocese? If so, we could ask for it. We think that it is possible to have from Ireland, more quickly and in greater number, candidates for the institute and the missions. On the other hand three houses (viz. Sunningdale, London and Ireland) would give a sound basis for future development."

At this point a General Chapter loomed-up and everything went into slow motion or even reverse gear. This is confirmed by Fr. Vignato writing to De Negri: "As regards the proposed house in London, given the proximity of the Chapter, I think it is only fitting to leave everything to our successors for a definite solution. I approve and bless your work concerning the house in Ireland." Fr. De Negri attended the Chapter in May and presented the position of the confreres in England. After the election of Fr. Todesco as Superior General, it was decided that not only a Minor Seminary but also a Novitiate should be opened at Sunningdale in order to intensify (in the words of the new General Superior) "l'Anglicizzazione dell'Istituto". This meant that a new house had to be bought for the missionaries attending courses in London in preparation for work in the missions situated in British Colonies. In July, Fr. Todesco writes that not only are they to find a house in London for the Fathers but they are also to find an alternative seat for the junior seminary if the house at Sunningdale is not to be returned before October. He writes: "Urge far vedere (e fare sul serio) che le nostre intenzioni riguardo all'Inghilterra sono serie."

In July an apparently suitable house was discovered at 16 Dawson Place (the present Comboni House) and immediately negotiations were begun for its purchase. The asking price was very high, £16,500, and the house was not as it is today. There had been bomb damage, there was no central heating in the upper stories and the new wing was of course still to be built. Our agents counselled against the purchase, but the Fathers were so anxious to have their own house in London that it was decided to go ahead with the purchase at a price of £16,000. Verona provided £12,000 from Cairo and the remainder was borrowed from the Midland Bank, using the property at Sunningdale as collateral. On October 31st the keys were handed over and the Fathers took possession. Fr. Todesco wrote a fulsome letter of congratulations to Fr. De Negri in which after thanking Divine Providence "for having helped us to find a house that we so much desired", he went on to say: "According to the description which you and Fr. Cesana furnished it seems to me that it has been prepared for us by the Lord."



However not long after the confreres moved into Comboni House, as it came to be named, its many shortcomings became all too obvious and the Superiors began to plan a move to a more suitable house closer to London University. This move was foiled only by the failure to sell Comboni House without losing a lot of money!

Fathers Bresciani, Barbisotti and Toninello all tried in turn

to get out of Dawson Place. Indeed in 1950 Fr. Bresciani had almost agreed the purchase of 263 Camden Road but the sale of Dawson Place fell through. The best offer was £12,500. A year later the best offer was £11,000. The Superiors in Verona again ordered Fr. Barbisotti to sell the house in April 1954, notwithstanding the depressed state of the market. In November 1955 Fr. Toninello was still trying to sell the property and purchase a hostel. It was only in December of that year, on advice from Withem Weld that it was "finally" decided to give up all idea of moving from Dawson Place.

But let us return to 1947. In September Fr. De Negri was appointed Regional Superior of Khartoum and Fr. Bresciani was appointed his successor in England. The Norwegians finally vacated the premises at Sunningdale on November 29th, and Fr. Bresciani retook possession. Frs. Centis, Bertinazzo, Bano M., and four aspirants, including Chris Hierons and Dom Morley, went with him. While overjoyed at returning "home", they were dismayed at "the awful mess of things". A van brought some furniture from Elm Park Gardens and, after working hard all day, the chapel was finally prepared by 11 p.m. for Mass the following morning. On the following day, the First Sunday of Advent, a new start was made with two Masses at 8 and at 10. Nine persons from the surrounding district formed the congregation. In the afternoon Fr. Cocchi joined the community.

The next fortnight was spent preparing the house for the arrival of the first group of novices from Italy. Fr. Cerea arrived with the novices on December 19th, and "while all the bells were rung" they received "a glorious welcome".

On Dec.27th Stan Woods entered as a postulant and the year ended with nine Italian novices, one Irish novice and seven "British" postulants.

On the last day of the year, Fr. Todesco arrived in London together with Fr. Ugo Toninello, who was to play a major role in the London Province for the next forty-five years. Fr. General had come to supervise in person the setting-up of the first Novitiate of the Verona Fathers to be opened outside Italy. He spent a month in Sunningdale, assuring himself that everything was according to the customs and usages of the Novitiate in Venegono, before handing over to the first Novice Master, Fr. Vittorio Albertini.

During his stay in Sunningdale Fr. Todesco inaugurated officially the Junior Seminary. On January 6th 1948, a small group of boys, including John Fraser from Glasgow, took up residence in the buildings that had formerly been the stables. The staff was: Rector, Fr. Felix Centis (27 yrs. old); Vice-Superior, Fr. Cocchi (24 yrs. old); Spiritual Father, Fr. Fontanari (28 yrs. old); Assistant, Fr. Minisini (24 yrs. old). Looking back one can only be full of amazement and wonder at this undertaking. Unsuitable buildings, very little money and a young staff with limited experience, no professional training, little English and scarce knowledge of things English... With the benefit of hindsight it would seem that a less impetuous beginning with more planning and better preparation may have produced more fruit in the long run and helped avoid unnecessary sufferings, disappointments and misunderstandings for staff and boys.

CHAPTER FIVE

Putting down roots

The New year had begun with the opening of the Novitiate and the Junior Seminary, showing that Fr. Todesco was determined to press ahead with the "anglicizzazione dell 'Istituto" because of the importance of the British presence in Africa. However the Institute numbered only some 360 priest members at this period and the Congregation had just begun an ambitious plan of development. It was expanding in the USA, it had recently moved into Mozambique, Portugal and Baja California, while the missions, especially Southern Sudan and Uganda were burgeoning, and the confreres already in the field were insistently demanding more men. The result was improvisation and asking many confreres to do too much, too soon and with inadequate resources and means. In England sources of income were virtually non-existent; there was a large debt on Dawson Place; the Region was dependent on an annual grant from Verona for its day to day expenses and the personnel assigned to the Province was very limited.

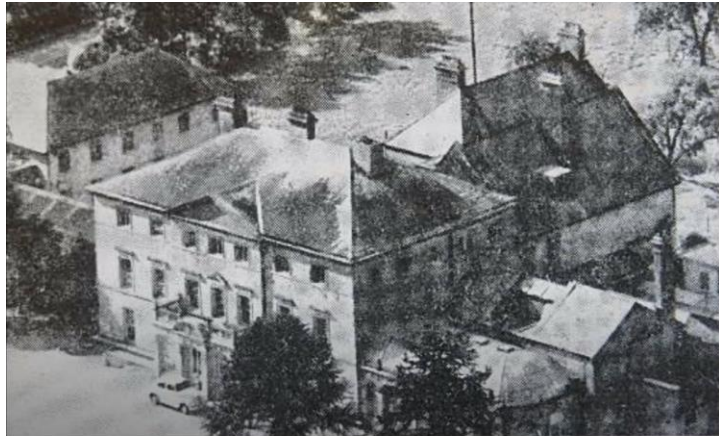
"Our African Missions" was making the Congregation better known and attracting benefactors but there were few opportunities of approaching people and it was difficult to find subscribers. Missionary appeals were forbidden and a main source of local income was the generosity of Italian friends.

This dire financial position meant that the Fathers in Comboni House, were required to do Supplies as soon as their English permitted them to travel on their own. Mass was in Latin and there was no need to preach. As a result, studies suffered, confreres were asked to undertake tasks for which they were not prepared and there was a certain amount of grumbling which was not helped by the Spartan conditions in Dawson Place and the fact that most of the students were chaffing at the bit and anxious to be off to Africa as soon as they could.

A parish was seen as a possible partial solution to some of the Region's problems and, in the spirit of the times, various novenas were made to obtain from God the grace of a parish. On October 26th a Solemn Novena began in the novitiate. The diarist notes: "We have prayed also in the past but now we shall pray more eagerly as the decision is getting near." In fact Fr. Bresciani had been negotiating with Mgr. Doubleday of Brentwood and, in January 1949, the Province accepted the pastoral care of a new parish to be erected at Elm Park, Hornchurch, Essex. Fr. Cotta was transferred from Portugal to become the first parish priest. This was his fourth appointment to England and like the others it was to be of short duration. Why the Region wanted a parish at this stage and especially a parish like Elm Park with no house, no school, no church and a very small catholic population, is difficult to understand, even with hindsight. However in the pressing conditions of 1948 it was probably seen as easing a little the serious overcrowding at Dawson Place and it was hoped that in due time it would help with the finances of the Region.

Although the Junior Seminary was functioning at Sunningdale it was obvious that other arrangements would soon have to be made. It had been decided that the scholastics, after their religious profession, would stay in England and finish their classical and philosophical education before proceeding to Italy for Theology. Where were they to stay? Fr. Bresciani, his counselors and others directly involved, mulled over at great length the many possible permutations. Finally it was decided to buy a house in the North of England as a seat for the Junior Seminary and to transform the former stables at Sunningdale into a scholasticate. This plan was put into action in May 1949, with the purchase of Stillington Hall, Yorkshire.

The reason for siting the seminary in the North of England was supposed to be the presence of large concentrations of Catholics and proximity to Scotland, which seemed to present hopes for numerous good vocations. In fact the site chosen was an old house in a very run-down condition which the Alexian Brothers were in the process of abandoning as too isolated. However, it did have attractions in that it was in the



Junior Seminary - Stillington Hall

North, it was cheap and it was in the diocese of Middlesbrough, whose Bishop, Mgr. Shine, had previously welcomed the congregation to Ganthorpe Hall. The Bishop was delighted to be able to replace the religious community which was leaving and made the Fathers feel very welcome. A loan (£3,000, some £48,000 today) was arranged with the Trustees of Ushaw College and on 1st August 1949 the Congregation took possession of Stillington Hall. It was a decrepit building situated in an isolated village with poor public transport connections, some ten miles north of York and many, many miles from any concentration of Catholics. It was hardly the ideal site.

The departure of the young boys from Sunningdale on July 22nd, had left the way free to prepare the former junior seminary as a Scholasticate dedicated to St. Joseph. Fr. Ambrogio was put in charge with the title of Vice-rector. He was 25 years old and had been ordained priest the previous year.



The chapel - Stillington Hall

On the feast of St. Peter Claver, Fr. General celebrated the early community Mass and received the religious vows of the first group of novices to have completed their full novitiate at Sunningdale. The Vicar General, Fr. Briani, presided at a Solemn Sung Mass and, in the evening, Fr. Bresciani presided at Solemn Vespers. The entry in the Diary was no less solemn: "Hodie in Nomine Domini, et auxiliante St. Petro Claver Patrono Nostro, incipit ramus anglicus Societatis Stmi. Cordis Jesu." The first group of nine novices included: Bros.

Chiste, Corti, Hierons, Morley and Woods, all of whom would play important roles in the history of the London Province.

The year 1949 ended on a quite hopeful note. Comboni House was functioning as a House of Studies, at Sunningdale the Novitiate and the Scholasticate were well founded, the Junior Seminary was settling in at Stillington and plans were well in hand for the development of the parish at Elm park. Seen from Verona the London Region seemed to be well founded, even if it was weighed down with debts.



CHAPTER SIX

First fruits 1950/1956

After the frenetic activity of the previous years, 1950 was relatively quiet. The Junior Seminary settled down at Stillington. Fr. Polato, did some successful recruiting in Ireland and in Scotland, while Fr. Bernhardt visited schools in London. The school year began with 42 boys, as many as the house could hold (In 1949 it had 27, and in 1948 it had four!). This dramatic increase in the student body made it necessary almost at once to plan an extension. In 1951 the Abbot of Ampleforth kindly guaranteed a loan of £1,000 which enabled the Brothers to begin work on a two story school building, which eased the congestion considerably.

In May 1950, Fr. Todesco decided on a general switch-over at Sunningdale: the novitiate moved to the property occupied by the scholasticate, the former stables, while the main

house was reserved for the Scholastics and Fathers.

Fr. General in July decided to recall Fr. Cotta from Elm Park. Fr. Cotta was 68 years old and quite happy to return to Italy. He was substituted by Fr. Grace whose stay in the missions had been complicated by the fact that he was the only English priest in the society. He was regarded by many as a "difficult" character and his appointment as Parish Priest at Elm Park was considered a "decent" solution to a thorny problem. Fr. Grace, who had been an Anglican religious before his conversion to Catholicism, was 37 years old at this point, had been a priest for six years and had spent six years in Africa (Uganda / Khartoum). Although he would appear to have been one of the more experienced and qualified Fathers in the Region, he was shunted off to Elm Park to spend the next five years in a kind of quarantine.

The communities of England, which had previously depended directly on Fr. General, were given a limited degree of autonomy and erected into a Circumscription on August 24th. 1950. Fr. Renato Bresciani was appointed as the first Regional Superior. He was 36 years old and had been in England since his ordination in 1939, having been the representative of Fr. General in that country since 1947.

In September, Fr. Cerea left Sunningdale for Stillington after three years "as a teacher, as a painter, as a choir conductor and as rector of our Chapel". He was to continue to exercise these same charisms, as well as that of gardening, in the junior seminary, first at Stillington and then at Mirfield, until its closure in 1984.



Since the war the Fathers had maintained an interest in the Italians whom they had come to know in the prison camps. After the war there was a growing number of Italians who came to work in the mines and textile industries under a scheme known as European Volunteer Workers (E.V.W.). Various Fathers had been giving them some pastoral assistance in Scotland, the North of England and North London/Chiswick. In April 1951 Fr. Todesco agreed with the Sacra Congregazione Concistoriale to send two Fathers, who would receive a stipend of £30 per month between them, to England to work full time with the Italian Immigrant Workers. Fr. Taddei was attached to the community at Stillington with responsibility for Yorkshire, Middlesbrough and Durham, while Fr. Bresciani was to work in the London District.

Later Fr. Michelotto was sent to work in the North West and Fr. Prina also came to undertake this work in collaboration with Fr. Bresciani. The Congregation owned two houses in Liverpool, 64 and 64A Mount Pleasant, which Miss McLean, a benefactress living in Brescia, had donated in 1939:

Fr. Bresciani thought that they could serve as a pied-a-terre for the Fathers working in

propaganda and among the Italians. Indeed, Frs. Saggion, Polato and Michelotto lived there for short periods in 1951/52. However Archbishop Downey was not in favour of our Fathers moving into his archdiocese and he was distinctly unimpressed by the excuse that they would be working with Italian Immigrant Workers. He pointed out that there were no Immigrant Italian Workers in the city of Liverpool and he recommended the Verona Fathers to find a more suitable house, closer to the immigrants and... outside his Archdiocese.

Since it proved impossible to open in Liverpool, Fr. Todesco was willing to open a parish in Dundee, where Fr. Saggion had been active among the Italian immigrants, "if the Bishop offered a parish that would give really useful possibilities (not like Elm Park!)." Apparently the Bishop's offer did not prove attractive and it was decided not to open in Scotland for the time being and also to give up efforts to open in Ireland. As is inevitable, the approaching General Chapter seemed to cast its shadow before it and necessary decisions were once again put on the back burner. At this time (summer 1952) Fr. Todesco writes: "Forget about a house in Ireland. In this period leading up to the chapter, let us go ahead as usual, then our successors will do the rest."

The work among the Italian immigrants was restricted with Fr. Michelotto residing in a convent in Rochdale, and Fr. Taddei residing at Stillington, while Frs. Bresciani and Prina gave generous assistance in the London District.

Fr. Taddei was not satisfied with this arrangement and from the beginning he wanted a house and community of his own. As soon as possible he moved out of Stillington and for some years, he lived in the presbytery of St. Urban's, Bradford. In 1953 Fr. General was determined to finish with this activity and Fr. Michelotto was transferred to Egypt. But Fr. Taddei dug in his heels and in due time (1956), with very little encouragement from the Superiors, he bought Ivy House, Russell Street, Bradford and Fr. Colombina was sent to work with him. Fr. Taddei was so persuasive or persistent that a brother was also sent to look after the house, in spite of the pressing needs of the missions.

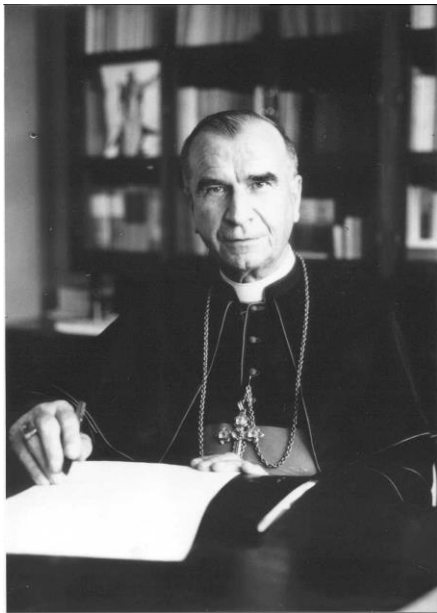
In June 1951, Fr. Baroni came from Khartoum to Sunningdale, already Novice Master "in pectore". In July his appointment was made public but Fr. Albertini remained until the Professions in September, after which he left for Uganda. Fr. Baroni paid his predecessor this compliment: "He succeeded quite well in giving the Novitiate the very structure and features of our Italian Novitiates with their spirit and traditions." Verb. sap.

On the property front the most important problem was that of Dawson Place. Although there were eighteen confreres residing in the house in 1950/51 and it was seriously overcrowded (giving rise to "malcontenti, mormorazioni e crisi"), it was foreseen that in future there would be fewer confreres attending courses in England (the Congregation had just opened missions in Mozambique and Latin America). Fr. Toninello was appointed Superior "ad interim" in an attempt to lighten the work-load of Fr. Bresciani and also give a more stable direction to the community. Fr. Bresciani was instructed to seek a smaller, more suitable house, closer to the University Colleges. As stated earlier he had almost bought a house at 263 Camden Road, N7, and Fr. Todesco had already obtained permission from Propaganda Fide for the sale of Dawson Place when the deal fell through, because the price offered for Dawson Place was not considered sufficient.

The idea of opening a house in Ireland had not been completely abandoned. Fr. Todesco still toyed with the idea of sending Scholastics or Fathers to study at Maynooth, the Irish National Seminary, but he was pre-occupied with the debts of the Region. Some £7,000 was owed to banks or individuals, and he thought that it was only prudent to clear this debt before moving to Ireland. While worrying about the debt, he was also worried about the health of Fr. Bresciani who was finding it very difficult to sleep on account of his own pre-occupation in reducing the Region's debts.

In April 1952 the Hierarchy agreed that since, by convention, only the A.P.F. and Mill Hill Fathers were allowed to have mite boxes and to appeal directly in churches, the Verona Fathers as a purely missionary order should have a share in the annual collection for the Foreign Missions. It was decided that the collection should be divided as follows between the four purely missionary orders with houses of formation in the country: the Holy Ghost Fathers 50%, the White Fathers 40%, the S.V.D. and the Verona Fathers £1,000 each. Fr. Todesco was pleased "at this moral success, the official recognition of our work as one of the Missionary institutes of England." It was obviously no more than a moral success since £1,000, as Cardinal Griffin remarked, was only a drop in the bucket.

In September 1952, Chris Hierons took his perpetual vows in Venegono and the Region began to look forward to his ordination. This was to take place on June 4th 1953, in the midst of the Coronation Year. The Junior Seminarians came down from Stillington and the whole Region was present when Fr. Hierons was ordained in the Parish Church at Englefield Green. This was a fitting climax to the first term as Regional Superior of Fr. Bresciani who after the Chapter of 1953 was transferred to the Sudan. Fr. Cocchi was appointed rector of Stillington and Fr. Centis moved to London to take over the magazine and missionary animation. There were also changes at Sunningdale. After only two years as Novice Master, Fr. Baroni was appointed Vicar General of Khartoum and Fr. De Negri returned once again as Superior of Sunningdale and Master of Novices.



The new Regional Superior was Fr. Angelo Barbisotti. He was 49 years old and had worked in the Southern Sudan before being transferred to the USA. While in California, he worked in the Mission of Pala and had made various friends in Hollywood. He was not particularly enamoured of his new posting and we must feel for him as he writes to Fr. Bresciani : "among all the places possible, I have been assigned to the least desired and the least dreamt of." Fr. Todesco tried to encourage him in his not very alluring post as Superior of the English Region, writing: May the Sacred Heart console you from the beginning, may He assist and recompense you...

The new Regional Superior was a dynamic man and taking his new Region to heart, he was determined to make a success of it. He saw the various problems and

put his finger on the most serious: scarcity of personnel, unsuitable properties, lack of money and a waning interest in the Region on the part of the Congregation, in view of many new non-English speaking commitments in Europe, the Americas and Africa.

One of his first acts was to protest vigorously and successfully against the proposed transfer of Fr. Polato to the USA. He wrote to Fr. General: "Fr. Polato is one of the few Fathers who remain willingly in England. You know that most of those who are here have not one, but both feet raised, ready to go...

After his first tour of the Region Fr. Barbisotti decided that it was necessary to sell as soon as possible the property at Stillington. Indeed, for one coming from California it must have been quite a shock to visit the old rambling quasi-ruin of Stillington Hall. He remarked sadly that it cost some £800 a year on coal to keep Stillington cold! He also agreed with Fr. Todesco that it was necessary to sell Dawson Place but he was determined to replace it and Stillington with new custom built buildings, not buy more old buildings.



In view of the continuing critical financial situation in the Region he was content to see this as a six-year plan. The Region now had a debt of £13,000 (this was equivalent to the value of Comboni House) and even for its day to day expenses it continued to rely on Verona. This lack of funds was a problem shared by other purely missionary orders working in England. They were unfairly hampered in their fundraising efforts by the notorious "convention" forbidding them from appealing in churches. The Provincials of the Holy Ghost, the White Fathers, the Divine Word Fathers and the Verona Fathers met and agreed among themselves that as soon as possible the "convention" should be changed. However this depended from the Hierarchy and others (Mill Hill and A.P.F.) who had vested interests in the status quo.

1954

In March Fr. Barbisotti visited Cardinal Griffin to discuss the matter but without receiving

much encouragement. In order to economize, or practice poverty, he sold the Provincial's car (a Ford Consul) for £600 and paid £250 for an 1939 Wolsey. In May continuing his campaign to change the unfair distribution of funds he went with Fr. Centis to visit Mgr. Shaw, National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies. He had a very sympathetic hearing and that was that. About this time, Verona agreed to raise its annual subsidy to £2,000 and suggested that Fr. Barbisotti should go to the USA for a visit ad petenda pluvia.

While waiting for the Hierarchy to change the whole funding system, Fr. Barbisotti approached the Bishops of Leeds, Middlesborough and Brentwood and, in Spring 1954, he obtained permission for our Fathers to preach in their dioceses and seek subscriptions for our magazine, as long as they took no collection inside the churches. This was a tremendous help and the Region immediately took advantage of this faculty, especially the Fathers at Stillington. Sunday after Sunday the Fathers visited parishes near and far and, within a short period, circulation increased to 8,000 and there were some 4,000 subscribers. In April 1954, a further visit to Cardinal Griffin elicited the promise that his Eminence would raise the matter of the prohibition with the other Bishops. This was a big step towards resolving the problem...

In August the Missionary Provincials met yet again to discuss their problems. The Provincial of the Holy Ghost Fathers put forward a proposal for a regulated freedom for the different Congregations to preach and collect funds. The other Provincials feared this would lead to a dis-edifying concurrence and suggested the annual national collection should remain with the preachers keeping their own returns and the remaining collections to be divided on a pro rata basis according to the number of students of each congregation. Since they could not agree among themselves, they decided to go away for further reflection.

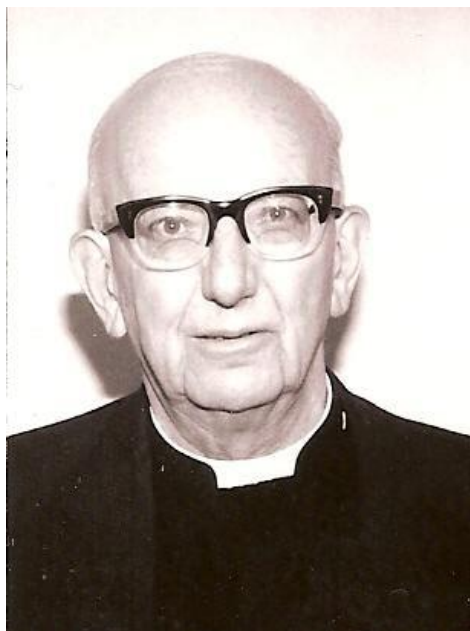
Around this time it was decided to print our magazine at the Scuola Tipografia Nigrizia in Verona and to change the name from "Our African Missions" to "MISSIONS" with a sub-title "of the Sons of the Sacred Heart- Verona Fathers". Ten thousand copies were printed of the first issue, seven thousand for subscribers /benefactors and three thousand for propaganda. The first issue of the improved magazine came out at the end of 1954, by which time Fr. Barbisotti had already been appointed as Superior of the new mission which the Congregation had just accepted in Esmeraldas, Equador.

Shortly before leaving the Region, Fr. Barbisotti had the pleasure of seeing successful outcomes to two problems which had given him great trouble. Firstly, he finally managed to cut through the red tape and sell 64A Mount Pleasant. He obtained £2,250 which was a good price and substantially reduced the Region's debt. Secondly, on February 8th 1955, he attended yet another meeting with the Missionary Provincials ("an ennesimo incontro") in the company of Fr. Toninello. This meeting came up with the embryo of the present Appeals Zoning System and hopefully submitted it to the Hierarchy.

His final gift to the Region was to practically nominate Fr. Ugo Toninello as his successor, writing to Fr. General: " He is the most catholic in his ideas and he is the most capable of understanding everyone and of being of help to them."

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ad Interim



Fr. Ugo Toninello was 41 years old in January 1955 and had been in the Region since 1947, previously having spent eight years in Ethiopia and Khartoum. He had been a very popular Superior of Comboni House and Fr. Barbisotti's right hand man.

Notwithstanding, his popularity, his experience and the recommendation of Fr. Barbisotti, he was appointed Regional Superior "ad interim" and was to hold office only for two years. He pushed forward with the plans of Fr. Barbisotti, maintained contact with our Italian friends, encouraged a wider distribution of the magazine and saw a successful end to the campaign to modify the system of financing the missionary congregations in England. In fact late in 1955 the hierarchy accepted the scheme which had been suggested by the Provincial of the Holy Ghost Fathers. They divided the dioceses into

four groups and assigned a group to each of the four "purely" missionary Congregations with permission to approach the parish priests and request leave to have a sermon and collection. It was the beginning of our present Missionary Appeal system and, almost at a stroke, put an end to the financial problems of the Region when it became effective in 1956.

As a typical good Verona Father, Fr. Toninello was very concerned with buildings. He was convinced that the Junior' Seminary had to move from Stillington and spent much time inspecting possible substitute buildings throughout the country. He decided to extend the Novitiate and set about planning a new wing to be built by the brothers. He also interested himself in finding a house for Fr. Taddei in Bradford, and in the plans of Fr. Grace for a Presbytery and Church at Elm Park.

In June, Fr. Charles Duffin was ordained, the first Verona Father from Scotland. When Fr. Todesco visited the Region in the Autumn of 1955 he must have been pleased to see that things finally seemed to be settling down.' There were four priests from the Region (Frs. Grace, Hierons, Woods and Duffin), there were four scholastics in Venegono, six at Sunningdale, seven novices in the novitiate and thirty boys at Stillington. The question of mission appeals and fund raising had been settled satisfactorily and the financial viability of the Region was assured. Indeed in 1956 Fr. Toninello will lament that, now the Region has money, Verona does not want to send him Brothers to build the new wing of the Novitiate. On April 16th 1956 the Region bought for £1,600, Ivy House, Russell Street, Bradford, as a centre for the work of the Congregation among the E.V.W., thus realizing a long-standing ambition of Fr. Taddei and in spite of serious doubts in Verona as to the validity of this work for our Congregation.

A week later the plans for the new wing at Sunningdale were approved and it was reckoned that it would cost £7,000 (about £90,000 today) if the work was done by our own Brothers. Work eventually got under way in the late autumn. This work was supervised by Br. Biasin and built by our own Brothers at about 50% of the cost estimated by a local firm. It was inaugurated in March 1957 by Mgr. King, Bishop of Portsmouth, during celebrations to mark the 75th Anniversary of the death of of Mgr. Comboni.

The Bishop of Leeds, Mgr. Heenan, had in the meantime offered a church and house at Scarthingwell, near Tadcaster, as a possible site for the Junior Seminary. He had also suggested Hazlewood Castle as an alternative good buy. After much toing and froing both were turned down and an offer was made in June 1956 for Roe Head, Mirfield, a fine residence with thirty acres of land: The owner accepted an initial offer of £7,000 but then had second thoughts. Finally, on 20th. November 1956, he agreed to sell for £8,500 (about £110,000 today) with vacant possession on March 31st 1957.

All during his period as Regional Superior Fr. Toninello had also been negotiating with Liverpool Corporation for the sale of the remaining house at Mt. Pleasant. An offer of £7,000 was eventually made but then new difficulties cropped-up and there was no sale.

In the summer of 1956 there was a general posting in the Region. Fr. Toninello was informed that Fr. Urbani, Rector of the Major Seminary at Gulu, was to be the Regional Superior but that he would only arrive in the Region in January 1957. Fr. Toninello took it all in his stride, informing the Novices: "First you are appointed, and then, you are disappointed !"

Fr. Grace, to the great surprise of everyone, was appointed Master of Novices and, equally surprisingly, Fr. De Negri was transferred to Stillington where Fr. Cocchi relinquished the post of Rector but stayed-on as Spiritual Father. Fr. Polato was transferred to Elm Park as parish priest but this was soon changed. Fr. Toninello himself was to become parish priest in January 1957 when Fr. Polato became his curate, forming a very popular team that was to stay together for over twenty years and become an institution in the Diocese.

Fr. De Negri had not only been Master of Novices but also Rector of the Church and Superior of the Scholasticate. Fr. Grace was also appointed Rector of the Church but Fr. Piantoni was appointed Superior of the Scholasticate. It was a recipe for... at least, misunderstandings. Fr. Grace was reserved, rigid and very English, while Fr. Piantoni was expansive, demonstrative and very Italian.

Fr. Toninello's interim government ended with a serious disagreement with Mgr. Cowderoy, Bishop of Southwark, and his Vicar General. Fr. Grace wrote to the Curia asking permission to substitute an evening Mass on Saturday for one of the Sunday morning Masses. The Vicar General replied asking with what right did they have three Masses on a Sunday. It turned out that these Masses had been introduced by Fr. De Negri without asking permission from the Curia. The result was that the Bishop forbade the public to attend our chapel without written permission from Mgr. Preedy, the Parish Priest of Englefield Green. There was considerable upset among the faithful, especially since many came from outside the

Diocese. Finally, after some months, the matter was resolved when Mgr. Preedy suggested that people be allowed to attend Mass but that there should be only one collection, which should go to the Parish of Englefield Green. With the simplicity of doves the community placed a box at the back of the chapel for free offerings and thus right and honour was respected on all sides, with no one losing... too much face.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Steady as she goes

Fr. Longino Urbani arrived in London as Regional Superior in January 1957. He found the confreres very optimistic. Things seemed to be going well. There was a steady, if small, stream of vocations and, with the financial subsidy from Verona and the Missionary Appeals bringing in a steady income, the Region had already reduced its debt to £7,000 while still having 64 Mt. Pleasant and Stillington to sell.

The main problem during his first year was what to do about the "final" disposition of the houses. The Superiors in Verona were in favour of leaving Elm Park, and only agreed that Frs. Toninello and Polato could remain, on the clear understanding that their remaining in the parish imposed no financial burden on the Congregation.



At this time, Fr. Colombini, the regional Superior of the Scuole Apostoliche, was in favour of sending young Italians to the Junior Seminary in England after finishing the Ginnasio in Italy. It was intended that they would do three years at Mirfield and then one year philosophy after the novitiate. He thought this would be more convenient than the system then in vogue of sending them to England during the novitiate. This would entail a juniorate with room for more than seventy-two boys, which was the original plan for Mirfield.

In April 1957, Fr. Saggion and the first group of Brothers entered Mirfield and still the discussion raged. How big a house was necessary? For sixty, seventy-two, a hundred and twenty students? Who was going where and how many houses were required? At one point it had been decided that the novitiate should move to Mirfield and the older boys should move to Sunningdale but then Fr. Todesco, as was his wont, changed his mind and everything was back in the boiling pot. Should they accept Scarthingwell and move the novitiate there, with the scholasticate at Mirfield, the younger boys at Stillington and the older boys at Sunningdale? Or should the scholastics go to Mirfield, the Novices to Stillington and all the boys to Sunningdale? Or should they build a new seminary at Mirfield for at least

a hundred boys, move the scholastics to Stillington and leave the novices at Sunningdale? Finally it was decided that the novices and the scholastics should remain at Sunningdale, Mirfield should have a new seminary and Stillington should be sold.

An important factor in arriving at this decision was the waning interest of the Congregation in England which is evidenced by the following letter from Fr. Bano to Fr. Urbani: With the decline of the influence of England in the world, and the facility of sending personnel for studies or learning the language in England, whenever it is necessary, would the necessity for us to establish ourselves more extensively in England not now have diminished? Is it worth the trouble to open new houses and run up expenses which are not indifferent? Or is it not the case to close some houses (e.g. Elm Park) or to diminish the personnel dedicated to our works, at least in the schools, seeking external professors or even sending at least our scholastics to an outside school (a seminary or a religious house). Is it not possible to arrive at a solution that would leave us with some personnel free?"

Another indication of how little "at home" the Italian confreres felt in England is a letter to Verona from Fr. Urbani requesting permission for the confreres to travel to Italy for holidays. He paints a very sad and lugubrious picture as he claims the confreres need holidays in Italy on account of: "The climate which massacres, the work which for most of them continues from January 1st until December 31st, the atmosphere of religious indifference which penetrates the very bones, the lack of pastoral ministry with its helps for the soul and the consolations which sustain our human weakness."

Having been informed from Verona that there had been grumblings from the Missions that too much money was being spent in England, Fr. Urbani wrote to Fr. Todesco: " I know that you yourself wish well to the Region of England and have done much for us, but to the others I would say: - If you wish to keep this Region, put it on a stable footing; give us the means and personnel to expand, then you will see that it will render fruit; if you want and don't want, if you are doubtful, rather than continue as at present, skimping money and limiting the personnel, it would be better to close it once and for all. You would save money and above all you would spare unpleasantness and an impossible life for those who are here."

Another very important factor which influenced all decisions made at Verona during this period was the Giuffrè case in Italy. Many of our houses lost heavily in this financial collapse, especially the Junior Seminaries, where the Regional Superior, Fr. Colombini, had insisted that it was safe to invest with Giuffrè" and had encouraged the houses to do so.

Verona, believing it had found a crock of gold, had just bought land in Lebanon and Spain, and had begun an ambitious building program at Pordenone and other projects throughout Italy. For England it promised £20,000,000 towards the cost of building at Mirfield (which had been estimated at £40,000 Sterling) but by July 1958 the bubble had burst and a very embarrassed Fr. Arcozzi wrote that he regretted having already sent Lit 5,000,000 and there was no way he could send any more.

Another long drawn-out saga was successfully completed on 6th December 1957 with the successful incorporation of the Verona Fathers Limited. Legally this company acts as trustees for all the property of the Congregation in the U.K. and this facilitates immensely all transactions concerning property or monies. Fr. Urbani was the first President and the first Directors were: Frs. Toninello, Grace, Centis, Cocchi, Saggion, De Negri, Piantoni, Polato, and Cerea.



Finally, in 1958 work began on the Junior Seminary at Mirfield and the plans which had been approved in Verona were entrusted to Brother Adani, responsible for their realisation. In this he was assisted by a group of Brothers with Brother Tomasi at their head. In July, the following Brothers were working on the new building: Adani, Tomasi, Magistrelli, Morandini, Baggioli, Marcolin, Menini, Rossignoli, Gusmeroli, Faedo, Ongaro, Todesco. It was

a very enthusiastic team which worked with a zeal that astonished the locals and won their sympathy and support. Every possible Father was preaching Appeals at the week-end and the building was paid as it went along, being held-up when funds were scarce.

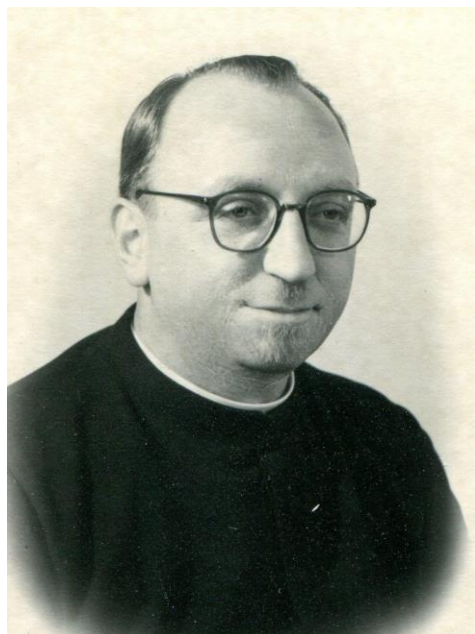
In June, Fr. Dominic Morley from Mayo, was ordained to the Priesthood, the first Irish priest in the Congregation. He was appointed to Stillington, where there were now fifty-nine boys, as Spiritual Father of the small boys. After only a month he suffered a nervous collapse and it was necessary for him to retire to Sunningdale for a period of convalescence. Fr. Chris Hierons, who had just returned from the Sudan, went to Stillington to replace him. At Sunningdale Fr. Piantoni was called to Rome to work with Fr. Lombardi in the Movement for a Better World. Fr. C. Franceschin came to the scholasticate as Superior. A man of great piety but somewhat rigid in his personal interpretation of the rules (he had been Spiritual Father at Venegono) he was fortunately balanced by Fr. Bertinazzo who came as professor of Philosophy and was a pillar of common sense.

In October of 1958 there was a good offer of a large house in Scotland but, as is customary, the forthcoming Chapter paralyzed everyone. Fr. Todesco wrote: "I would be delighted to have the house but unfortunately I think that we should await other times, given that the Chapter is at hand and that our finances are low."

On December 3rd 1958, Mgr. Dwyer, who had succeeded as Bishop of Leeds, laid the First Stone at Mirfield and the whole Region rejoiced at the evident signs of progress.

1959

The new year began with great hope. The Missionary Appeals were in Westminster, Southwark, Brentwood and Northampton. Each Sunday up to a dozen appeals were preached and the results were very re-assuring. By the end of February the Region had no debt with the Banks and was meeting the bills for building Mirfield. This was providential because, as Fr. Todesco wrote at the time, Verona was "sotto zero" and there could be no help from there. Fr. Urbani did not ask for financial help from Verona but he did ask for Brothers to speed the work and for permission to obtain a loan from the bank in order to complete the building as designed. He was confident that the Region would be able to pay off this debt in a short period but Verona was not willing to have any new debts with the Chapter in the offing and the shadow of Giuffre still hanging over the Congregation. As a compromise, it was decided to postpone the building of the college chapel for the time being and to complete the rest of the seminary.



Fr. Francesco Colombini

In July, Fr. Briani was elected Superior General and Fr. Urbani was elected Assistant General.

Fr. Francesco Colombini was appointed Regional Superior of England and one of his first acts was to obtain permission to build the chapel at Mirfield, thus completing the design.

In August it was also decided that the Scholasticate in England would close for the time being with the scholastics being transferred to Verona. In future it was planned that students should complete A Levels before beginning their novitiate. Then they would do two years philosophy, a first year during their novitiate and a second year in the scholasticate before beginning theology.

CHAPTER NINE

Last of the Summer Wine

In September 1959, Fr. Francesco Colombini returned to England as Regional Superior. He was 44 years old and had been Assistant General for the previous six years. He was no stranger to the UK, even though his experience of it was rather peculiar and particular, most of it having been as an internee on the Isle of Man. He found a very different Region from the one he had left in 1945 and was soon reporting to Fr. Briani, the new Superior General,

that "the Region seems to be founded on a solid and secure basis. Everything proceeds well, with charity, fraternal union and a good religious spirit."

Shortly after his arrival he received an unexpected Christmas Box when 64 Mount Pleasant, which had been on and off the market for years, was finally sold for £4,500.

Perhaps it would help to give some picture of the Region to recall the distribution of the personnel at the time and the tasks they were engaged in.

London: Comboni House

Fr. Colombini	Regional Superior
Fr. Felix Centis	Magazine
Fr. Valdameri	Regional Bursar
Fr. Prina	Italian chaplain
Fr. Spolaore	Ministry, in cura

Sunningdale:

Fr. De Negri	Superior
Fr. Zanolì	Novice Master
Fr. Ciappa	Teacher
Fr. L. Bano	Teacher
Fr. Toninelli	Teacher
Fr. Pio Loco	Cook
Fr. Policante	ad omnia
Novices II year...12 (4 English)	
Novices I year....7 (all English)	

Stillington:

Fr. Hieron	Rector
Fr. Valmaggia	Teacher
Fr. Andrew Cerea	Teacher
Fr. Saggion	Spiritual Father
Fr. Ferracin	Teacher
Fr. Antonio Colombo	Teacher
61 Boys	

Mirfield:

Fr. Grace	Recruiter
Fr. Grandi	Teacher

19 Brothers engaged in building:- Bros. Adani, Cogliati, Drago, Brotto, Menini, Morandini, Penden, Rossignoli, Santi, Tommasi, Zabbeo, Zamboni, Coletto, Magistrelli, Marcolin, Staton, Giuliani, Pedercini, Gusmeroli

Bradford: (Italian Mission)

Fr. Taddei	Superior
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Fr.Villani Ministry
Bro.Luisi ad omnia

Elm Park: (Parish)

Fr. Toninello Superior, Parish Priest
Fr. Polato Curate

Fr. Colombini's period as Regional Superior was marked by the II Vatican Council but really, he was the last pre-Vatican II Superior and his term of office was, in many ways, the calm before the storm. While he was Superior, eleven radical members of the Region were ordained to the priesthood (Frs. Fraser, Maguire, McGinley, Russel, McCaul, Troy, Dempsey, Pinkman, Hicks, Wade, Fulton), numerous scholastics and brothers were professed, the Junior Seminary was overflowing with students. It seemed that indeed everything was going well but Fr. Colombini set off on an overly ambitious program of building that was to cause him many sleepless nights and destroy his health.

Shortly after his arrival he had managed to persuade the Superiors in Verona (Fr. Urbani would not have been hard to persuade) that it was essential to build the Chapel at Mirfield. Fr. Briani agreed to the building of the Chapel but he also pointed out that there were nineteen Brothers at Mirfield, as many as in a Vicariate, and that Mirfield was not a Vicariate. He added that by March of 1960 the number of Brothers at Mirfield would



be halved. To obtain/retain Brothers to finish the work at Mirfield, became the source of constant friction between Fr. Colombini and Verona. In order to burn his boats Fr. Colombini began negotiations to sell Stillington by September 1960. This meant that Mirfield had to be open and functioning by that date and the work had to be accelerated.

1960

In May, Fr. General assigned Fr. Valdameri to Uganda and sent Fr. Ghirotto to London, only to later assign him to the N.A.P., thus leaving the Region without a Regional Bursar. Fr. Taddei also requested to leave the Region, where he had been working ten years and, to his considerable surprise, received permission almost by turn of post.

At Elm Park the Church was inaugurated in June, thus realizing a heart-felt ambition of Frs. Toninello and Polato. (There was a debt on the church of £25,000 but this belonged to the

parish and so did not unduly worry the region).

In September Stillington was sold for £6,500 (about £72,000 today). This was used to pay-off the original loan of £3,000, which was still outstanding in tow, and left something for Mirfield. Although there was no recreation hall, no garages and no tarmac around the new buildings, the college was fit (just) for habitation. In October Mirfield opened its doors for the first time. There were seventy pupils, three of whom are still with us; Frs. Downey, Clark and Ward.

With the Junior Seminary functioning at Mirfield, Fr. Briani was able to transfer more Brothers to the missions but he also insisted that Fr. Colombini prepare a list of Fathers who had been a long time in the Region so that he could assign them also. Fr. Colombini protested that Frs. Centis, Saggion and Valdameri, whom he seems to have considered most "in danger", were indispensable, while other "veterans", such as Frs. Toninello, Polato, etc. etc, were neither mentioned nor touched. A strange form of myopia. Fr. Briani was not impressed by Colombini's protests and replied: "Remember, dear father, our Confreres have joined the Congregation in order to go to the missions. We must not exploit those who do well. Many think that if they had behaved less well they would have been granted their desire (to go to the missions) and so they feel betrayed. Should we be responsible for creating the idea that only the maladjusted are sent to the Missions?" He insisted that Fr. Saggion, who had been ten years in England should be put on the mission list. At the end of the year, Fr. De Negri was manifesting the first serious signs of the disease which was to eventually render him a speechless invalid for the last twenty years of his life. He was only 53 years old when he began to have difficulty in speaking. However at the time, no one could imagine the course his illness was to take so rapidly and for the time being he continued at Sunningdale.

Fr. Germano Pilati was also in residence there since the autumn. He was on holiday from Uganda and had asked permission to spend some time in England studying art. However, it seems that Fr. Battelli, the Vicar-General, already had the idea of a house in Holland, at the time a rich source of missionary vocations, since he encouraged Fr. Pilati to study Dutch and to make some first contacts in Holland.

1961

In April 1961, Fr. Colombini suffered a hard personal blow when tubercular scars were discovered on his lungs. They were old scars, the result of a pleurisy he had suffered at Wau in 1946, but the doctors insisted that he submit to a nine months course of medicine and rest. This caused him considerable stress with the resultant swings of mood so typical of tubercular patients.

In late summer, Fr. Stenico came from Italy to join the staff at Mirfield where he was to remain until the seminary closed in 1984. Fr. Toniolo also arrived in the Region at this time. He was assigned to Comboni House, where in due time he would become Mission Procurator and something of a fixture, only leaving in 1978.

Since early 1961, Fr. Colombini was already busy with plans for a large extension at Sunningdale and a new Chapel. He was also considering purchasing a house in Scotland for a future Junior Seminary. Mirfield was already proving too small for both Junior and Senior boys and it was thought a good idea to split them in two groups. The reason for having the house in Scotland was to ensure the Congregation's right to appeal for funds and vocations in that nation, prompted by the fact that the majority of the new intake of 1961 was Scottish.

Fr. De Negri's health continued to deteriorate and in August Fr. Centis was appointed Superior of Sunningdale. In September, it was decided that Fr. De Negri should move to London where it was thought he would be more happy and useful working in the administration of the magazine.

By October of 1961, Fr. Pilati was finally in place in Holland, working as a chaplain to the Italians but with the aim to make propaganda and recruit for the Congregation.

In November, Fr. Colombini was asking Verona for a loan of Bro. Adani for two weeks so that he could examine the site at Sunningdale and then draw up suitable plans for the Chapel and new wing, in his "free time" in Italy. Fr. Urbani was not convinced that this was a good idea and suggested a new scholasticate far from Sunningdale and close to another religious congregation or faculty where our scholastics could attend lectures. However Fr. Colombini's view prevailed and, in February 1962, Bro. Adani drew up a first set of plans which would then be much modified before arriving at the design which was executed in 1964/65.

1962

In May 1962, Fr. Hierons resigned as Rector at Mirfield in protest at what he considered the lack of suitable staff and the lack of interest on the part of the major superiors in supplying suitable staff. This decision was a sad blow and the Superiors attempted a damage limiting exercise by looking for a "suitable inglese" as substitute but could not find anyone that would fill the bill among the ten radical members already ordained in the Region. Fr. Briani wryly remarked to Colombini that this should be a lesson to him and that in admitting members he should be careful to pay more attention to quality than to quantity! Finally, they recalled Fr. Ambrogio from Uganda, where he had been since leaving England in 1954 and Fr. Hierons was assigned to the N.A.P.

In the summer Fr. Corbetta was sent to join Fr. Pilati in Holland. The idea was that the two Fathers should buy a house and form a Comboni community. Fr. Corbetta would work among the Italians and Fr. Pilati would be more free to work in missionary animation and propaganda. These plans were to founder in the shock waves set-up in Holland by Vatican II.

In June, Fr. Fontanari returned to England after a period of ten years in Uganda which had seriously affected his health. He was appointed to Sunningdale, where he slowly regained his strength and was to give sterling service to the Region for over thirty years.

In September, Fr. Colombini visited Mgr. McGhee, the Bishop of Galloway, to discuss the opening of a seminary in Scotland. He was convinced that this was necessary because there were now 91 boys at Mirfield and everyone concerned recommended dividing the boys in two groups. Mgr. McGhee was in favour of the proposed opening but before giving his Blessing he had to consult with the other Scottish bishops as they had agreed among themselves that no one would admit a new religious congregation without the beneplacito of the others. This he promised to do when he meet the bishops at the Council.

In November Fr. De Negri was unable to continue in Comboni House and he retired to Sunningdale. Fr. Crotti, who had been some months in Bradford, working with the Italian Immigrants, moved to London and began an ambitious plan to develop the magazine, immediately transforming it into a monthly and greatly increasing the print-run.

1963

In January 1963. the final edition of the plans for Sunningdale were approved by Mgr. Cowderoy, the Bishop of Southwark, on the clear understanding that there would "not be, now or ever" a parish at Sunningdale. He did however soften a little, permitting two collections each Sunday, one for the parish of Englefield Green and the second for the Church at Sunningdale.

Fr. Crotti, who had been in charge of the magazine since Fr. De negri had gone to Sunningdale, finally decided that he could not stay any longer in England. He was full of initiatives and plans which Fr. Colombini did not consider very realistic. From the beginning their convivenza had not been easy and poor health finally counselled his return to Italy. In June he was recalled to Italy and substituted by Fr. Russel, who was shortly himself substituted by Fr. Troy.

In Scotland a suitable property had been purchased for £8,000 (about £85.000 today) at Allanton. Dumfries, and it was decided that Fr. Centis should go there as Superior with the intention that he should be responsible for the Junior Seminary which it was intended to build as soon as possible. In September, Fr. Centis and a small group of brothers took possession of our first Scottish House and Fr. Colombini, still planning, ahead and still optimistic, was writing to Fr. General: In two years time, we will be able to attempt an opening in Ireland, if we only have two extra Fathers".

At this point, building was planned or in hand at Sunningdale (new wing and church), Allanton (restructuring the house and a new wing), and Comboni House (new refectory, new kitchen, restructuring the top floor). Fr. Colombini wrote to Fr. Briani:" We are at a point in which we have everything in our favour and we are able to establish ourselves in a permanent way like the other Institutes that today prosper in vocations and means. It would be against Divine Providence not to take advantage."

Not everyone was so optimistic and some confreres were beginning to question the necessity of so much building and how it was to be financed. Looking, back, it can only be seen as ominous that, at this period, Fr. Colombini was not only Regional Superior but also, because of lack of personnel, local Bursar and Regional Bursar.

1964

The work at Allanton was entrusted to the Brothers while it was decided to put out to tender the works at Comboni House and Sunningdale. In March 1964, Fr. Colombini was telling Fr. General that he had found a friend who would pay for everything, once the building had begun... On the strength of this promise, building began at Sunningdale on May 1st 1964 and at Comboni House in June.

The everyday life of the Region went on smoothly, amidst all this flurry of building, thanks to the dedication and hard work of the confreres who were distributed as follows on 13th April 1964:

London:

Fr. Colombini	Regional Superior
Fr. Toniolo	Mission Procurator
Fr. Prina	Ministry (Italian)
Fr. Troy	Magazine & recruiter
Fr. Dempsey	Propaganda
Bro. Rossignoli	Adm. Magazine
Bro. Ricci	House, Magazine, Studies

Sunningdale:

Fr. Zanolì	Superior/Novice Master
Fr. Mencarini	Spir. Father/teacher
Fr. Fontanari	Ministry
Fr. Chiste	Bursar/teacher
Fr. Pozza	Teacher
Bro. Pioloco	Cook etc. etc.
Bro. Moore	Farm

Mirfield:

Fr. Ambrogio	Superior
Fr. Cerea	Teacher
Fr. Grace	Teacher
Fr. Stenico	Teacher
Fr. Valmaggia	Teacher
Fr. Tavano	Recruiter/teacher
Fr. Colombo	Spiritual Father
Fr. Ceresoli	Vice/rector
Fr. Pinkman	Vice/rector
Bro. Baggioli	Farm
Bro. Soster	House

Elm Park:

Fr. Toninello	Superior/P.P.
Fr. Polato	Curate

Allanton:

Fr. Centis	Superior
Bro. Lunardi	Construction
Bro. Luisi	
Bro. Dal Santo	
Bro. Bulgaro	
Bro. Prevedello	
Bro. Murphy	
Bro. Terry	
Bro. Lepore	Cook

Bradford:

Fr. Villani	Italian Mission
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Holland:

Fr. G. Pilati	Italian Mission (propaganda)
Fr. Corbetta	Italian Mission

In July 1964, Fr. Colombini was reappointed Regional Superior for a second term while Fr. Luciano Fulvi returned from Uganda to the Region where he was to give dedicated service until 1991.

On September 9th, the first stone of the new church at Sunningdale, was blessed by the Apostolic Delegate, Mgr. Cardinale, in the presence of all the confreres in the Region, the local clergy and friends and benefactors. It was a happy day for everyone and the future looked bright for the Sons of the Sacred Heart as they set about building what they were pleased to call "God's Sandhurst", inspired by the proximity of the well-known military academy.

Later in the same month, Fr. Chris Hierons was assigned once again to the Region, where he took up residence in Comboni House with responsibility for administration of the magazine and propaganda. In the same month Fr. Prina was officially appointed by the Sacra Consistoriale as Italian Chaplain, a well-deserved recognition of the work he had been doing for years among the elderly and housebound Italians in London. Later he was honoured by the Italian Government for the same work with the title of Cavaliere della Repubblica

1965

While 1964 ended on a confident optimistic note, things soon began to fall to pieces in 1965. The Region was in a healthy financial situation but it was obvious to all that it could not pay for such an ambitious building programme from its own resources. Indeed Fr.

Colombini was relying on an anonymous and mysterious benefactor, who turned- out to be a certain Argentinean, Juan Luis Pacchin, who, "by chance", had met Fr. Colombini at Notting Hill, and wormed his way into his confidence. As the months went by, Pacchin continued to make extravagant promises, but instead of donating any money to the missions or the Congregation, he managed to convince Fr. Colombini to "invest" monies with him, on the pretext that he had a short-term cash flow problem and that he was to receive very large sums of money in the immediate future. It was a classical sting but Fr. Colombini continued to trust him.

While beset by money troubles, an even worse blow was to befall the region. On the Feast of the Sacred Heart, Bros. Fregonese and Magrin drove Fr. Frigerio from Sunningdale to Heathrow Airport. On their return the car went out of control and veered into the path of on-coming traffic. Bro. Magrin was killed and Bro. Fregonese seriously injured. Bro. Magrin was only 24 years old, a cheerful young man, full of enthusiasm and promise. The Region was very down-hearted at his death and no one more so than Fr. Colombini who had called him down from Scotland to help with the Vocations Exhibition at Earl's Court. Between the death of the Brother, the inquest, the prolonged hospitalization of Bro. Fregonese and then the subsequent court case, it was a very sad and trying time for everyone but especially for the Regional Superior.

In July, Fr. Anthony Wolstenholme returned from Uganda. He was in a very poor state of health and in urgent need of pro-longed treatment.

Things were getting too much for Fr. Colombini. He was being asked for money for Scotland, Sunningdale and Comboni House but he did not have it. At this point Fr. Briani decided to make a visit to the Region. He was very frank with Fr. Colombini, telling him that he had been deceived by his so-called "benefactor" and that it was time for a change. Fr. Colombini pleaded for time, assuring Fr. General that the money would come as soon as Pacchin had settled his affairs (which, of course, were always very complicated). Fr. General relented and Mgr. Rivers, the Diocesan Treasurer of Westminster and a good friend of the Congregation, came to his aid by extending a short term loan which he had made previously. In October, there was a ray of hope when Pacchin presented him with two cheques for a value of £83,000 but post-dated to March 18th 1966. It was just another string-along.

In the meantime there was something to show. The new-wing at Comboni House was completed and, twenty years after moving in, the house was finally up to a reasonable standard. Building at Sunningdale was ending and it was possible to plan the official inauguration. Fr. Colombini continued to hope against hope, but it was obvious to all who saw him that he was wilting under the strain. No one knew the exact state of the Region's finances, Fr. General was reminding him of the penalties imposed by Canon Law on those responsible for financial misdemeanours ("see canon 234", he wrote ominously), the confreres were tired of constant Appeals and sacrifices, the fruits of which seemed to go into a black-hole.

1966

At this stage no one, except Fr. Colombini, had any faith in the promises of Pacchin. The Blessing of the New Church at Sunningdale was fixed for March 12th 1966. Pacchin promised to be present with his wife and daughter, and to donate an extra \$300,000, "enough to pay also for Valencia" in the plans of Fr. Colombini.



In March, the Church and New Wing were blessed by the Apostolic Delegate, Mgr. Cardinale, and Mgr. Cashman, the Bishop of Arundel & Brighton. This diocese, in which Sunningdale is situated, was created in 1965. With the creation of the new diocese, the long shadow of Sidcup/Amigo/Cowderoy had finally been lifted from Sunningdale and a new era had begun. However, the inauguration came and went, but no money appeared, nor did Pacchin. Reluctantly Fr. General decided that enough was enough. In April, he replaced Fr. Colombini with Fr. Bresciani who set about with his typical enthusiasm, and the cooperation of the long-suffering confreres, to clear up the situation. However, as the storytellers say, that is another story for another day.