

Religious Sisters and Nuns at Hurst Green  
in the Nineteenth Century,

**Nuns at Hurst Green in 1861.**

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A request was received from the Sisters of Charity of St Paul the Apostle (Selly Park) for any information that the diocesan archives might hold on their community of sisters who had resided at Hurst Green near Stonyhurst in the 1860s. They had opened their first house in England<sup>1</sup> in 1847 at Banbury when two Sisters had arrived from the motherhouse at Chartres in France. One of the two, Sister Genevieve Dupuis, later became the first Mother General of the independent branch of this community in England, which received the approbation of the Holy See in 1864. This separation from the original motherhouse was necessitated by the rapid expansion of the congregation in England.

No information was found in diocesan archive material, and a plea for help was made to Mrs Pannikar, of Mellor, a noted local catholic historian.

In the 1861 civil census, she discovered two sets of entries, one which she believes relates to the Selly Park community, and the other to the Dominicanesses, whose stay at Hurst Green is relatively well documented.

In the census for the civil parish of Aighton, Bailey and Chaigley, the Hurst Green School is listed as 39 and 40 on the schedule and records four persons as being in residence:

<i>Mary Cassimir</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>26</i>	<i>School Mistress</i>	<i>Lancs Leigh</i>
<i>Mary A. Nolan</i>	<i>Boarder</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
<i>Mary Gannan</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do</i>
<i>Mary Heath</i>	<i>Lodger</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>Pupil Teacher</i>	<i>Lancs Clitheroe</i>

Such a group of four unmarried ladies unconnected by any obvious family links is unusual, especially given the size of the rural community whose catholic members alone would be supporting the school, which is today known as St Joseph's School and was distinct from the Anglican school. Confirmation is now awaited from Birmingham as to whether any of these names coincides with their own records.

The location of the school is verified for Timothy House is listed as 41 on the schedule, i.e. the next adjacent building.

However St Dominice Priory is listed as 35 with Sherburne House as 36 on the same schedule. At the priory are listed the following nuns:<sup>2</sup>

<i>Ann Speakman</i>	<i>Superioress</i>	<i>64</i>	<i>Prioress</i> <sup>3</sup>	<i>Lancs Wroughtington</i>
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<sup>1</sup> Anson **op. cit** p.218; Hohn **op. cit.** p.255.

<sup>2</sup> The entries are not given in full because of the demands of space.

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<i>Jane Malthouse</i>	<i>Nun</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>Nun</i> <sup>4</sup>	<i>Yorkshire</i> <sup>5</sup>
<i>Frances Russel</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>78</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do York</i>
<i>Jane Cooper</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do Leeds</i>
<i>Catherine Moore</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>47</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do Pontefract</i>
<i>Mirian White</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>41</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Wiltshire Tisbury</i>
<i>Alice Dobson</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Lancs Preston</i>
<i>Isabella Parker</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>do Bailey</i> <sup>6</sup>
<i>Catherine Egan</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Ireland</i>
<i>Elizabeth Barker</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>29</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Staffordshire Longton</i>
<i>Amelia Millerd</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Gloucestershire</i> <sup>7</sup>
<i>Margaret Dutton</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Staffordshire Aston</i>
<i>Mary A. Butt</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Dorsetshire (?)</i> <sup>8</sup>
<i>Cecilia Horne</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>39</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>London</i>
<i>Mary Laws (?)</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>do</i>	<i>Norfolk Cossey</i>

Sherburne House is shown as having two residents:

<i>Guilliam Sablon</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>RC Priest</i>	<i>Belgium</i>
<i>Sophia Cosen</i>	<i>Servant</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>Servant</i>	<i>Warwickshire</i> <sup>9</sup>

The age range of this community of nuns is of interest. Four are over sixty, while two are 22, and over half are under 40. The list is neither alphabetical nor in age order. One wonders if it is simply a random list, or whether it reflects some sort of ranking within the religious life. The places of origin of the nuns is also striking. One alone came from Ireland, whereas Yorkshire provided four, and Lancashire three.

The Second Order of St Dominic<sup>10</sup> was founded originally by St Dominic in 1206 at Prouille, near Toulouse. A convent was founded in Dartford, Kent in 1356 but was suppressed in 1539. Some nuns escaped to Flanders where the last one died in about 1573. Another convent had been founded in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1516 but was suppressed in 1559.

An English Dominican convent was refounded by Cardinal Howard at Vilvorde, South Brabant in 1661, and moved to Brussels in 1669 where it remained until the French Revolution. The nuns then fled to England, first to London, and then to Hartpury Court<sup>11</sup> near Gloucester from 1794 until 1839. As the premises became decrepit beyond economical repair, the community

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<sup>4</sup> In full "Dominice Nun"

<sup>5</sup> Hampstead Hollings

<sup>6</sup> In full "Aighton, Bailey & Chaigley" therefore very much a local lass.

<sup>7</sup> Stanston (?)

<sup>8</sup> Canford Bottom

<sup>9</sup> The location is illegible: "Chilaces Coton" (?)

<sup>10</sup> Anson **op. cit.** p.251 seq; Whelan **op. cit.** p.110 seq, 192 seq, 239 seq, Hohn **op. cit.** p.96 seq; C.R.S. Vol 25 (1925) pp.176 seq.

<sup>11</sup> In their school there they educated a Mary Beaumont, who later went to the Ursuline School in Boulogne, became an Ursuline Nun, and founded the first Ursuline Convent in the United States.

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moved to Atherstone<sup>12</sup> in Warwickshire from 1839 to 1858. The cost of the new convent however proved to be beyond their means and they ceded it to the Benedictines of Colwich who founded a daughter house there. The Dominicans then stayed at Hurst Green between 1858 and 1866, when they moved to their present location at Carisbrooke on the Isle of Wight, though the generosity of the Dowager Countess of Clare who offered to build them their present convent.

**Sources:**

1861 Civil Census                      for Aighton, Bailey and Chaigley

Anson Peter F.                      **The Religious Orders and Congregations of Great Britain and Ireland.** Stanbrook Abbey 1949.

Whelan Basil OSB                      **Historic English Convents of Today.** Burns Oates Washbourne London 1936

Hohn H.                                      **Vocations** Washbourne London 1912

Catholic Records Society   **Volume 25** (1925) pp, 176 seq.

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