

## The Catholic Boys Brigade

In 1896 Fr Sesseger, assistant priest at Dockhead, decided to adapt the format of the Boys Brigade as used by the Established and Dissenting churches, and make it available to boys in his own parish. In one account of the founding of the CBB, H.J. de W. wrote (Plum Duff p.16, October 1905) that although the Church Lads' and Boys' Brigade had been in existence for some time, they had never been heard of by Fr Segesser, so we can say that the "CBB" is not a copy of any other Brigade. This however was later contradicted as the Sixth Annual Report of 1906 states that Fr Segesser determined to adapt the organisation known as the Boys Brigade, which had proved of invaluable service both to Anglicans and Nonconformists, for the boys of his mission. Two years later, the Annual Report recorded that he had made a study of the existing Boys Brigades and had convinced himself and others that to adapt their invaluable work to the needs of his own catholic lads might be the solution of the difficult problem.

The problem of course was the age old one of keeping contact with the youngsters as they left the catholic elementary school and entered the world of work. Fr Segesser hoped to secure their interest and to keep them in touch with the Church. To do this the Brigade made use of military methods and discipline, with a modified drill, and uniform, and the provision of such opportunities as reading Rooms, games, gymnastics, and sports. There were annual inspections, and camps, and quarterly Church parades. The CBB however strenuously stressed it was not a military organisation, and had no direct or indirect connection with the army. and received no financial assistance from it. Whether this remained true after the Great War is doubtful. Thus then CBB gave the lads an opportunity of continuing to mix with each other, of gaining friends among catholic companions, and understanding that they belong not to this or that parish, but that they are also members of the Catholic Church, which was most anxious to provide for and help them. The work was placed under the patronage of St Sebastian. The one and only aim of the Brigade was "to safeguard the Faith and Morals of our Catholic Lads" when they left school. The Brigade kept the lads together, in touch with the Priest and the Church, and instilled principle of discipline and obedience, and encouraged their regular attendance at Mass and the Sacraments. The Drill and the military aspect of the Brigade were acknowledged to be its attractions but only represented a small portion of what the Brigade was, and offered its members. Each Company had its Club, its gymnastic exercises, its ambulance lessons, its evening classes, its cricket and football teams. Getting suitable employment for its members was seen as one of the more difficulties placed on its chaplains and officers. The Brigade described its main object, not only in spiritual but also in temporal matters, to be "to help the lads to help themselves". (2) CBB Gazette June 1912, inside of front cover.

So successful was his plan that Fr Joseph Newton copied him and founded a unit at Rotherhithe in 1899. The movement then extended to St George's, Southwark, the Borough, Croydon, Vauxhall and Camberwell. Five more companies were

founded in 1901, with the result that a Battalion Committee for London was formed. By 1902 nearly thirty missions or parishes in different parts of London and the Provinces had started units. (1) 6th Annual Report 1906 pp 5-6

In 1901 it appears an Annual Report was first published, followed later by a magazine "Plum Duff" in October 1905, initially a quarterly publication, and later by "The C.B.B. Gazette", issued monthly. Details of which parishes had units were usually contained in Diocesan Almanacs, although these can be unreliable, as the demise of a unit could take place a long time before the Almanac editor was informed of that fact. The CBB was also represented at many of the National Catholic Congresses which took place in the first quarter of this century. These provide the main source of information for these notes.

The CBB, conveniently for future archivists, registered each unit in numerical order. This gives an indication of when each unit was founded. Some lasted but a short time, others for some 45 years.

The list below gives the name of the town (or parish within the town) where units were known to exist by 1912, the numerical reference of the unit, and the date (if known) of foundation or closure. The list is far from complete, as it is clear many units were registered, but the names are not yet identified, and many units whose names are known remain without their numerical identification.

Aberdeen Cathedral 78 1910  
Altrincham 82 1910  
Anerley 24  
Arundel 24

Barking 10  
Birmingham St Peter's  
Bolton St Edmund's 22  
Bolton St Patrick's 16 1902  
Bolton St Peter and Paul 17 1902  
Borough 4  
Browndage 67

Camberwell 7  
Cannock  
Canton St Mary's 1910  
Cardiff St David's 81 1910  
Co Durham St Goderic  
Commercial Rd 15  
Coventry  
Croyden 5  
Custom House 69

Darwen Sacred Heart 40 pre 1905  
Deptford 42  
Dockhead 1 1896  
Dowlais  
Dulwich 14

Galashiels  
Grangetown St Patrick's 74 1909

Halifax St Mary's 47  
Hanley  
Haverstock Hill St Dominic's 50  
Hoxton 53

Jersey St Thomas

Kensal 25  
Kensington 26  
Kilburn 11

Leeds Cathedral 12  
Leyton 64  
Liverpool St Francis Xavier (2 units)  
Liverpool St Joseph's  
Liverpool St Mary's

Manchester Holy Name 36  
Manchester St Bridget 1910  
Marylebone 34  
Middleton St Peter's 73  
Motherwell

Newcastle on Tyne St Dominic's 1909  
Newport Monmouth 13  
Nottingham pre 1905

Oldham St Mary's

Plymouth Cathedral 83 1910  
Preston English Martyrs  
Preston St Wilfrid's

Roath St Peter's 80 1910  
Rochdale St Patrick's 71 1909  
Rotherhithe 2 189?

Seacombe pre 1905  
Sheffield St Charles  
Sheffield St Vincent 19  
Sheffield St William 20  
Shefford  
Southend on Sea  
Southwark St George 3 189?  
Stafford St Austin's  
Stamford Hill 32  
Streatham 8  
Swansea 30 pre 1905

Tilbury Dock 66  
Tunstall

Vauxhall 6

Walsall Mount  
Walsall St Peter's  
Walworth  
Westminster 28  
Whitehaven  
Whitworth St Anselm's  
Wigan  
Willesden 31  
Woodford 60

It is clear from the above list that the CBB enjoyed a countrywide expansion in the first decade of this century. One unit was even started in Newfoundland, and reference is made to a similar, but earlier, movement in Ireland. Several Jesuit parishes started units, and in many towns, a second or third unit seems to have been started in a neighbouring parish (or parishes) once a unit had initially been started.

The rise of Scouting seems to have been a challenge and a problem to the CBB. Baden Powell had written his book "Scouting for Boys" to offer ideas to youth groups such as the Boys Brigade. He had no intention of founding a new movement. But a new movement did spring up! In the Salford Diocese certainly steps were taken to marry it with the CBB, but by 1919 it had thrown off this union and established its own Diocesan Committee, and Scouting and the CBB lived side by side, in one case apparently within the same parish! Indeed many parishes which recorded the closure of a CBB unit recorded the existence of a Scout Troop in its place.

If we turn to look at the Salford Diocesan picture in detail, a brief word about information sources is of use. The Diocesan Almanac records under parish

entries certain parish organisations. Sometimes these refer to the CBB, or Cadets, or similar nomenclature. This is useful but fallible, as the entries depended on the whim of the Parish Priest and Almanac editor. Research into the history of Scouting in the Diocese clearly showed that some entries recorded the existence of a scout troop when official or other records indicated the troop had been (sometimes long) closed; yet other troops existed for years and were never deemed worthy of a place under the parish entry. The same is true of the CBB, as witness the discrepancies between parish entries and the Diocesan Society entry of the CBB when it named parishes with units.

For a five year period (1926-1930) the CBB gave an account of itself and listed parishes with units under the heading of Diocesan Society entries. Eight units not given in parish entries were identified here. It had affiliated with the 125th East Lancs Field Ambulance, R.A.M.C after the Great War. Four Battalions had been formed, and not less than 1000 cadets aged 12 - 18 belonged to the 15 companies mentioned in the 1931 Almanac.

The Diocesan List looks like this:

Salford: Cathedral: 1917 - 1919  
Salford: St Sebastian's: 1914 - 1919  
Salford: St Peter's Greengate: 1929 - post 1930  
Salford: St James Pendleton founded 1914; ends 1949; replaced by YCW?  
Salford: Higher Broughton: St Thomas of Canterbury: pre 1926 - 1938  
Salford: Weaste: All Souls: Pre 1926 - post 1930

Blackburn: St Ann's: 1915 - 1929  
Bolton: St Edmund's: c.1910: Scouts from c.1921 (15th Bolton)  
Bolton: St Patrick's 1902  
Bolton: St Peter and Paul: 1902: Scouts 1912 - 1930s (6th Bolton)  
Browndedge: pre 1910 - post 1913: linked with Liverpool Archdiocesan Units  
Burnley: St John the Baptist: 1919 - 1950  
Burnley: St Mary Magdalene: 1929 - post 1930  
Burnley: St Mary's: 1913 - 1922

Castleton: St Gabriel's: pre 1926 - post 1930  
Colne: Sacred Heart: 1913 - 1925

Darwen: Sacred Heart: pre 1903? - post 1905

Failsworth: Immaculate Conception: 1915 - 1960! but replaced by Scouts 1958.

Haslingden: Immaculate Conception: 1919 - 1925  
Heywood: St Joseph's: pre 1926 - post 1930

Lees: St Edward's: 1911 - 1918: replaced by Scouts 1919 - 1924

Manchester: St Edmund's: 1913 - 1925: replaced by Scouts  
Manchester: St Patrick's: 1912 - 1925: replaced by Scouts  
Manchester: Corpus Christi: 1911 - 1931  
Manchester: Holy Name: pre 1910 - post 1912: Scouts from 1920  
Manchester: St Bridget: c. 1905?, 1910  
Manchester: St Joseph's, Longsight: 1912 - 1917: replaced by Scouts  
Middleton: St Peter's: 1908? - 1932  
Mossley: St Joseph's: 1930 - 1936.

Nelson: Holy Saviour: 1929 – 1954

Oldham: St Mary's: referred to 1904, possibly 1910, pre 1926 - post 1930:

Radcliffe: St Mary's: 1919 – 1925

Rochdale: St Patrick's: formed May 8th 1909 - 1953: replaced by Scouts

Swinton: St Mary's: pre 1926 - post 1930

Winton: St Gilbert's: pre 1926 - 1929

Whitworth: St Anselm's: early 1911 - ??

The number of years collective service to boys offered by all the units in the above parishes comes to over 370 years, if the dates given are correct: and some 36 parishes are involved: over 15% of all the parishes in the Diocese. Yet the CBB has seemingly passed out of living memory. One wonders if the picture is the same in other Dioceses with large urban centres.

On the above data, there seems to have been a growth in the number of units between 1910 and the Great War: and a further expansion in the 1920s when the men returned from the forces. The withdrawal of Government recognition as from October 31st 1930 seems to have brought many units to a close, although the last one known to have been founded actually started in 1931, with two others beginning in the previous year. Five Units continued bravely on, or are recorded as having done so, throughout the thirties, the Second World War, and into the 1950s!

### **The CBB within the Salford Diocese.**

Using CBB publications and the Diocesan Almanacs, it is possible to begin to put together a list of the CBB units which existed in the Salford Diocese. In so doing however we need to be aware of two pitfalls. Firstly in the CBB publications, units are sometimes referred to by name, at other times by number. It has not yet been possible to link all the names and numbers together. Consequently an early unit may have existed which has not yet been identified. Secondly the Diocesan

Almanac entries are suspect in that parish information may be repeated year after year without correction, and may omit items. It is interesting to compare parish entries with the parishes numbered in the CBB entry under Diocesan Societies when such numbers are given and see which parishes claim to have a CBB unit which the CBB do not list, and to see where the CBB claim to have units which the parish entries ignore. A similar phenomena was found to exist in other research into the history of Scouting in Catholic Parishes.

In the list below we give the period of known existence and the name of the parish. Clearly a unit may have started and ended some time before the records note its existence and some tolerance must therefore be allowed. It is also possible that a unit may have been dormant or inactive for part of its indicated existence.

1915-1949 St James's, Pendleton, Salford  
pre 1926-1938 St Thomas of Canterbury, H. Broughton.  
pre 1926-post 1930 All Souls, Weaste, Salford  
pre 1926-post 1930 St Mary's, Swinton  
pre 1926-1929 St Gilbert's, Winton  
1916-1960 St Mary's, Failsworth  
1914-1925 St Edmund's, Miles Platting, Manchester  
1913-1925 St Patrick's, Livesey Street, Manchester  
1912-1931 Corpus Christi, Manchester  
pre 1909-1932 St Peter's, Middleton.  
1909-1953 St Patrick's, Rochdale  
1904; pre 1926-1928 St Mary's, Oldham  
pre 1926-post 1930 St Gabriel's, Castleton  
pre 1926-post 1930 St Joseph's, Heywood  
1916-1929 St Ann's, Blackburn  
1920-1950 St John the Baptist, Burnley  
1913-1917 St Joseph, Longsight, Manchester  
1912-1918 St Edward's, Lees  
1914-1922 St Mary's, Burnley  
1914-1925 Sacred Heart, Colne  
1918-1919 St John's Cathedral, Salford  
1918-1923 St Mary's, Haslingden  
1920-1925 St Mary's, Radcliffe  
1930-1953 Holy Saviour, Nelson  
pre 1910-post 1912 St Mary's, Brownedge  
1910? St Edmund's, Bolton  
1902 St Patrick's, Bolton  
1902 St Peter and Paul, Bolton  
1903-1905;1910? Sacred Heart, Darwen  
pre1910-post1912 Holy Name, Manchester  
1905?;1910 St Bridget's, Bradford, Manchester  
1911? St Anselm's, Whitworth

1915-1919 St Sebastian, Salford  
1930-? St Peter's, Greengate, Salford  
1930-? St Mary Magdalene, Burnley  
1931-1935 St Joseph's, Mossley.

Several points seem to emerge from this table. The figures indicate some 370 years of cumulative service to boys by the CBB in the Salford Diocese. From 1914 - 1930 there was a steady presence of about 13 units. Interestingly the withdraw of Government grant did not immediately deal a death blow to the CBB: at least four units started afterwards, and some lasted up to the Second World War, and five even afterwards. Of course as new information comes to light about dates, these figures would increase.

The CBB found Scouting a challenge. It's more flexible training scheme appealed to many boys, and several CBB units seem to have transformed themselves either into Scout Troops, or have been replaced by them, although at St Patrick's they co-existed side by side for several years. Higher Broughton (288th Manchester); St Edmund's (2/168th Manchester); St Patrick's (2/72nd, 2/75th, 2/76th, 2/80th and 2/124th Manchester); St Joseph's, Longsight; St Edward's, Lees; St Edmund's, Bolton (15th Bolton); St Peter and Paul, Bolton (6th Bolton); Holy Name, Manchester (2/38th Manchester); Whitworth and probably the Sacred Heart, Darwen all saw Scout Troops apparently succeed the CBB units. St Mary's Failsworth and St Patrick's, Rochdale saw a similar situation after the Second World War, although in Failsworth the CBB unit had apparently become a band, and existed for some time alongside the new Scout Troop.

Another feature is how a successful unit in one parish helped generate others in neighbouring parishes. This clearly occurred in Bolton in the early years of this century and just before the First World War in the inner city parishes of Corpus Christi, St Patrick and St Edmund, Manchester. The Great War saw several units start during or just after its duration, and the CBB seems to have overcome both a lack of leaders throughout conscription, and any anti-war revulsion in the 1920s.

### **The Catholic Boys Brigade at St Mary's. Oldham.**

The Catholic Boys Brigade was founded in Deptford in 1896 by Fr Felix Segesser. The object of the C.B.B. was to keep Catholic lads attached to their religion, and to promote habits of Obedience, Reverence, Discipline, Self-respect, and all that tends towards a true Christian Manliness. The Brigade's uniform, military discipline, drills, gymnastics, signalling classes, and annual seven days of camping strongly attracted the lads. It was not in any way a military cadet corps, though incidentally its training was of great physical benefit. By 1910 there were over 80 companies in the United Kingdom. St Mary's was the 45th to be registered and formed the 'F' company of the 5th Battalion (Salford Diocese). Several times it hosted visits from St Patrick's Rochdale C.B.B., who

processed in the Oldham Charity Parade.

Under Fr Seed's fostering care, the St. Mary's lads were kept faithful to their church and regular in their spiritual duties. Mr Joseph Brown (known as Captain Brown) was in charge of them. In 1911 King George V and Queen Mary came to Alexandra Park for their "Coronation Celebrations" visit. All the school children were assembled on the playing field, and the Church Boys Brigade from Oldham Parish Church were to blow the Royal Salute. They missed their cue however, and Captain Brown called on the Catholic Boys Brigade who played and saved the day. In 1914 the lads won a prize in Ashton on Easter Monday, and also the Black Knights May Cycle Parade. C.B.B. was their shoulder flash - "Catholic Boys' Brigade Can't Be Beaten"