

*The history of  
St Mary's Catholic Primary School,  
Claughton-on-Brock*

When King Henry VIII separated from the Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century the practice of the Catholic faith was forbidden. The practice of Mass was seen as an act of treason and so was held in secret. Many priests who were caught during this time were often brutally killed by being hung, drawn and quartered.

In addition to this Catholics could not educate their children in the Catholic faith and had to pay double the land taxes of their neighbours. They were also not allowed to hold public office or practise law or medicine.

After The English Catholic Relief Act of 1778 and The Second Catholic Relief Act in 1791 things began to improve allowing Catholics to practise their faith. It also meant that Catholics were allowed to build their own churches but under strict conditions. No bells or steeples could be included and the doors could not be barred during Mass. Furthermore Catholic priests were not allowed to appear in public in vestements.

The priest in charge at Claughton at the time, Rev John Barrow wasted no time in building a church at Claughton to the cost of £700 (with the support of the Brockholes family). The new church to St Thomas the Apostle opened in the summer of 1794 and Rev John Barrow wrote,

"Next Sunday the chapel is to be opened. Benches to be let all the week and particularly today after prayers and in the afternoon. Money to be paid in advance. Benches not to be taken nailed up. Convenient and good places to kneel and sit for those who are old and poor."

Many years later the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1829 allowed Catholics to build schools and the priest at Claughton Rev Fr Robert Odo Gradwell oversaw the building of St Mary's Catholic Primary School in 1837 with the support of the Fitzherbert-Brockholes family. Thomas Fitzherbert-Brockholes stated that the school buildings had, "to be handsome, commodious and substantial."

Ever since then St Mary's has been serving the community in the Claughton, Catterall and Garstang area for over 180 years and more than twenty children have been ordained into the priesthood.

Today it continues to serve the children and families of many different faiths in the area and still retains its very strong links with the Catholic Church of St Thomas the Apostle.