

Fr Alban Crossley OSB (1934 - 2021)

Benedictine Monk of Ampleforth Abbey

Assistant Priest, St Mary's, Brownedge 1990 - 1992

Parish Priest, St Mary's, Brownedge 1992 - 1996

Edward Crossley was born in Farnworth, near Bolton in Lancashire on 30 December 1934. He was the only child. Later his parents moved to Leyland and lived in Bent Lane. He went to St Mary's Primary school and later went to the Catholic College in Preston.

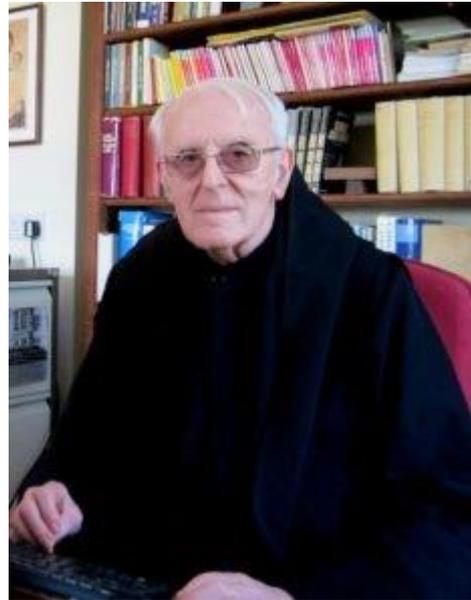
Edward Crossley as he was known before he became a monk was very involved in the liturgical life of the Leyland Parish, being one of the chief altar servers.

He used to spend a lot of time in the Sacristy and was to all intents and purposes the sacristan. He used to plan liturgical ceremonies and organised others to play their part. Not only the ceremonies needed organising but the altar and Church had

to be kept clean and tidy. The candles needed cleaning as wax would be all over them and the teenage girls would be dragooned by him to clean them from the Guild of St Agnes or the Children of Mary. One of the present parishioners in 2021 and a friend of his, remembers that she never realised that so much wax could fall on the candle sticks and had to be meticulously cleaned off.

Once Fr Alban told Fr Jonathan Cotton OSB, the present parish priest of St Mary's writing this on the cusp of his funeral, that the altar servers would often make a big show at funerals that took place in St Andrew's cemetery, the ancient medieval Church (incidentally run by Benedictines from Evesham in those days) that is Anglican. This was the burial place for all denominations in Leyland as there was no alternative. Fr Anselm Parker OSB, Parish Priest at St Mary's, Leyland (1930 - 1947), who lived in Leyland until he died in 1962 and is the only monk buried in St Mary's Cemetery, longed for a St Mary's Cemetery. With the parishioners he was determined to get one, for which he had to acquire land next to the old Church. All was achieved in the 1930's next to the old Priory house and adjacent to the old St Mary's Church. It was fully operational in 1935.

Many parishioners already had graves in the Anglican cemetery. For burials in family graves in St Andrew's cemetery in the early 1950's when Fr Alban was still in the parish, many a relative for family reasons had to go to the Anglican cemetery after



Fr Alban in April 2020 (from his personal collection)

the funeral in our old Catholic Church. Servers in their red tunics and white cottas with a crucifix with the figure of Jesus on the cross, candles on either side, and smoke pouring out of the thurible, would lead the priest in all his vestments across the road. It was deliberately provocative. This was to show the Anglicans and any others who were not Catholics how “the one true Catholic Church” did things. There was a lot of rivalry in his time between some of the people and clergy of all the Churches. Thank God that all that has gone now. We both had a good laugh at the absurdity of such gestures in modern times and rejoiced that such things would no longer happen in Leyland.

Edward also spent some time at the Harris Institute, a technical college in Preston where he went to do studies after 6th form in Preston and before joining the monastery at Ampleforth at the age of 20. That two-year gap gave him a chance to learn more. He gained some kind of qualification as a result between 18 and 20 years of age. Then in September 1955 he entered the monastery as a novice.

He confided within the last ten years to one of his group of Leyland friends at a reunion when he was back in Leyland that he had a great affection for the strikingly beautiful Jesuit Church in Winckley Square, Preston. This was because as a student at the Catholic College and going into that Church he had a clear sense that he had a vocation to be a priest; and for him that meant joining the community of the monastery of Ampleforth whose members served the parish of Leyland, with men like Fr Anselm Parker, Fr Edward Croft, Fr Dominic Allen, Fr Edmund FitzSimons, Fr Vincent Wace, Fr Theodore Young and many others.

He joined the monastic community at Ampleforth Abbey at the age of 20 taking the name of Alban. Abbot Herbert Byrne was the abbot at the time. It was a breakthrough, for the Ampleforth community did not usually accept vocations from the parishes they served at that period of Ampleforth’s history. Vocations mainly came from the College at Ampleforth in which many of the monks taught. In those days those men not from the school who joined the monastery would be from other walks of life that would feel comfortable in a community at that time made up in large part from former pupils of the then quite prestigious public school, Ampleforth College. The young Edward Crossley had no knowledge of that kind of world nor would most parishioners of the Ampleforth parishes unless by chance they had been sent to such a public school.

From 1958 - 1961 he was at St Benet’s Hall at the University of Oxford where he took a degree in Physics, and from 1961 - 1965 he studied Theology at Fribourg University in Switzerland. Fr Alban was ordained priest on 18 July 1965.

From 1968 - 1979 he worked in the Junior House of Ampleforth College, where for many years he was Assistant Housemaster. When he retired from that role in 1979 Fr Alban enjoyed a sabbatical year studying liturgy in the United States of America,

Rome, and a number of European countries. On his return to the Abbey at Ampleforth he was appointed Master of Ceremonies and Liturgy. In 1990 things changed again; he became assistant priest and then, in 1992, parish priest in St Mary's, Brownedge, Bamber Bridge four miles from Leyland in Lancashire. He was loved and appreciated by the parishioners there.

During his time at St Mary's, Brownedge, Fr Alban was responsible for the significant re-ordering of the Sanctuary. The original altar table, very long and narrow, was cut in half and reformed into a square with the mouldings restored, and it was placed on the original pillars in an extended Sanctuary. The Tabernacle was moved to a new location to the side of the Sanctuary adjacent to the Sacred Heart Chapel but was subsequently restored to its original central location on the High Altar reredos by Fr Bede Leach OSB during his tenure as Parish Priest between 1998 and 2001. On the evening of Tuesday 29 October 1996, as his time at St Mary's, Brownedge, was almost at an end, the Altar was re-dedicated during a packed Solemn Mass at which Abbot Patrick Barry OSB was the principal celebrant.



St Mary's, Brownedge, Solemn Mass - Re-dedication of the Altar, 29 October 1996 - Photograph by the late Roy Hargreaves (courtesy of Raymund Livesey)

Also during his final year as Parish Priest, in 1996, the first Blessed Sacrament Procession in many years on the great Feast of Corpus Christi was held, the procession and benediction taking place in the church grounds.

In 1996 he was appointed parish priest of Our Lady and St Chad, Kirbymoorside, and its chapel of ease at St Mary's, Helmsley.

For many years Fr Alban was involved in the Scout Movement both locally and nationally. He began as a Scout Leader in Ampleforth College Junior House in 1965, and other roles included work as County Chaplain in North Yorkshire (1969 - 1985), Assistant and then Leader Trainer in North Yorkshire (1972 - 1986), District Commissioner for the Ampleforth District (1981 - 1990), and Chief Commissioner for Roman Catholic Scouts from 1985 - 1990.

In 1999 Fr Alban was appointed to the Monastery of Christ the Word, Zimbabwe, a foundation established by the monks of Ampleforth Abbey in 1996. He was certainly touched and changed by the reality of a completely different culture, way of monastic life and living in a new and very small community there. He remained in Zimbabwe until 2010. On his return to England he worked in St Austin's parish, Grassendale, (Liverpool Archdiocese) before his appointment as Monastery Guestmaster at Ampleforth Abbey in 2012.

In recent years he was very involved in the new monastic deaneries begun in the time of Abbot Cuthbert Madden OSB. He was the dean of the St Benet Biscop deanery and he was assiduous in giving its members due notice of meetings, preparing the contents of the meetings and generally supporting this new initiative that has helped our community through difficult times in recent years.

One of Fr Alban's final visits to St Mary's, Browndge (if not his last) was on 27 November 2016 when, together with a number of former Parish and Assistant Priests, he was present for the Mass of induction of the first non-Benedictine Parish priest in the parish's 236 year history following the decision by the Ampleforth community to withdraw from the parish and pass its pastoral care to the Diocese of Salford.

Latterly Fr Alban's health declined; he had an unfortunate fall about 3 years ago and the damage done to his legs and hip never allowed him to recover fully. He became less mobile, his voice became weaker and weaker and he was diagnosed with cancer in his oesophagus. Fr Alban died peacefully in York Hospital on the morning of Tuesday 2 February 2021, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and a day of prayer in the Catholic Church devoted to all men and women in the consecrated life, having been taken ill during the night in the monastery infirmary and then being taken to hospital.

Fr Alban had been actively involved in community life almost until the last day of his life, present for recent zoom meetings with our new Abbot, Fr Robert Igo OSB, for instance and still interested in everything despite his weak state of health.

He had a calmness and sincerity about him that was very positive. He was open to new things and he lived through the developing times for the Church after the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's. That period led to the Church being very unsettled. Latterly came the turbulent times for the Church and for Ampleforth Abbey in particular. He remained a calm and positive presence in our community. He knew that the Church has to adapt in its course throughout history and so does the Ampleforth community as culture changes, situations develop and things move forward. He was loyal and conscientious and a person who was very reliable, ready to do what God was asking of him through his superiors, rooted in the great tradition of the Church. Now he has reached his eternal reward.

We will miss his visits to his old parish, his wisdom, his good humour as he used to spend a few days at St Mary's Leyland during his holidays, precisely to visit the grave of his parents, and to visit his old friends, some of whom had been friends since he was a teenager. May he rest in peace and we can be sure that he will continue to be interested in all the affairs of our monastic community, for the Church in general and our world, and will pray for us here in this parish.

Fr Alban's body was received into the Abbey Church on the evening of Sunday 14 February followed by The Dirge (Vigil for the Dead). On the morning of Monday 15 February, Lauds for the Dead at 7.30am was followed by Little Hour at 9.00am and, due to the current COVID-19 restrictions, a private Solemn Requiem Mass in the Choir of the Abbey Church. Burial was in the tranquil surroundings of Monks' Wood, on the hillside overlooking the Abbey and the beautiful Ampleforth valley.

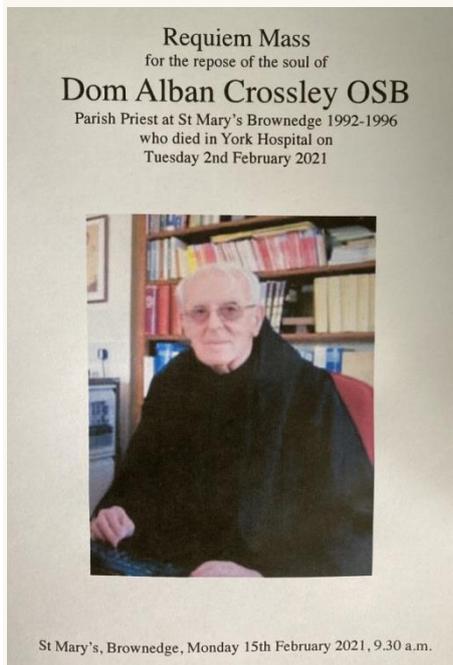


Fr Robert Igo OSB, Abbot of Ampleforth, celebrates Fr Alban's Funeral Mass in the choir of the Abbey Church (Screenshot from the Abbey live streaming service)

The celebrant was Fr Robert Igo OSB, newly elected Abbot, who had only very recently returned to Ampleforth to take up his new role from the Monastery of Christ the Word, Zimbabwe where he had served as Prior and where, as he said in his homily, he had come to know Fr Alban very well.

Had circumstances been different, many people would have travelled from far and wide to pay their last respects to a great and wise Priest and friend. Fr Alban's Requiem Mass can be viewed at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a_9Rx86nF64

At St Mary's, Brownedge, Assistant Priest and fellow member of the Ampleforth community, Fr Colin Battell OSB, who had also spent time with Fr Alban in Zimbabwe, celebrated a well-attended Requiem Mass for Fr Alban at 9.30am on the morning of his funeral.



St Mary's, Brownedge, Requiem Mass service sheet cover, courtesy of Raymund Livesey

Text by Fr Jonathan Cotton OSB, St Mary's, Leyland

Additional text, with thanks to Fr Colin Battell OSB and Mr Raymund Livesey, by David Gorman, St Mary's, Brownedge, Bamber Bridge

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