

# *History of St Paul's Church*

*Terry Sutton*

Members of the Roman Catholic community in Dover are this year celebrating the 150th anniversary of the building of St Paul's Church in Maison Dieu Road. It was a year later before the first services were held there.

For several years before 1867 the Catholic community, including Irish soldiers stationed at Dover, worshipped at a number of venues. One place where services were held was above a carpenter's workshop in St James' Street.

When these premises were vacated the Catholics bought a former Methodist chapel in Queen Elizabeth Square near what is now the western docks.

Salvation came in the 19th century thanks to bad weather in the Dover Strait. A regular cross channel passenger was the Countess de Front, the wife of the Sardinian ambassador to Britain. She, like many others, took shelter in Dover until the sea was calmer for the channel ferries. While in Dover she realised that the Catholic community was not well served with a

centre where they could pray. So when she died in 1830 she left £1,000 in her will to build a church for them.

A site was located in Ashen Tree Lane, off Maison Dieu Road, but when the surveyor looked at the land he realised half the £1,000 would be required to level it on which to build a church. The site is now the location of St Mary's Church of England primary school.

The Ashen Tree Lane land was sold and another site, not far away, was acquired and on this land, a former nursery, St Paul's was built.

*\* In October 1987 disaster struck. An arsonist got into the church and set the property on fire. Damage was extensive. But the blaze did have one good result. The Church of England welcomed the Catholic community to the church of St Mary-the-Virgin in Dover for their services, an offer gladly accepted, until extensive repairs were completed. In 2017 the parish merged with St Finbarr's at Aylesham to create the new parish of The Good Shepherd.*



*Interior St Pauls Church Dover*