

# The Solly Street story

By Dominic Baster

The site on Solly Street, including the old school building which will become the new mission hub, has great historical significance for the people of St Vincent's parish – many of whom were baptised or married in the church and attended the school before they closed in the 1990s.

In fact, the parish's association with the site dates back to 1851 when a plot of land was purchased there for £700 to provide a Catholic school-chapel for the area. The building was completed in July 1853 and put under the charge of the Vincentians.

The Sheffield Blitz in 1940 resulted in the destruction of the original 1853 chapel, although the newer part of the church from 1911 escaped serious damage. However, after the war the whole area was badly damaged and the church lost much of its congregation. In 1996 it closed as a place of worship, and the Vincentian Fathers then left Sheffield altogether in April 1997.

A new parish church for St Vincent's was opened in Crookes in 2001, but the parish continued to own the land on Solly Street and operated a commercial car park there. However, by 2015, both the church and the old school building were in a very derelict state and the costs of maintaining the site were soaring. The situation came to a head when the Council insisted that considerable sums of money needed to be spent on re-roofing the old school building. The parish could simply have sold the whole site, but decided instead to retain the old school building and sell the rest of the site, using the money raised to renovate the old school building for use by the parish.

This was agreed, but the parish still had a problem – how could we feasibly run a community centre with very limited resources? We put together a proposal for how it might work, but it was going to be a massive challenge... until in stepped Fr Lee Marshall with his plans for a mission hub for young people and families! Providence really was playing a hand.

Fr Lee presented his vision to the St Vincent's parish finance committee and we were all excited to see what he had in mind. Finally, after many meetings and prayers, the rest of the site was sold for student accommodation and the parish agreed to use a portion of the funds raised to help fund the transformation of the old school building into a state-of-the-art mission hub, to be run by the chaplaincy but still owned by the parish.

And so from next year, 23 years after the closure of the original St Vincent's Church, Mass will once again be celebrated regularly on Solly Street – not in the old church but in the beautifully refurbished old school building. As a parish we are delighted to have played our part in this new and exciting development, which we feel sure is an answer to our prayers. The future of the Catholic presence on Solly Street is bright.