



Our Lady, Star of the Sea, St. Mary's, Isles of Scilly.

The building which is now the Chapel was erected in 1860 as the island's primary school for girls and was used as such until 1906 when the school was combined with the boys' school from what is now the Parish Church Hall in Church Street and transferred to a new building at Carn Thomas.

In 1931 the Catholic community on the island approached the Duchy of Cornwall for the use of a building where they could hold services, and were offered the lease of these premises. Masses were celebrated by priests from the Order of the Canons Regular of the Lateran who would come over by boat on a Saturday and return the

following Monday. Eventually the building was purchased outright from the Duchy in 1949 and came under the control of Plymouth Roman Catholic Diocese. It has always been part of the Parish of the Immaculate Conception (now Holy Family Parish) based in Penzance.

At various times priests have resided in the Chapel flat, the most notable of these being Fr. Bernard Basset SJ who came here in 1969. He was responsible for many of the furnishings in the Chapel and the laying out of the garden including the mosaics made by Peter MacKenzie (the island vet at the time), sundial, stone table and benches and wall plaques. Fr. Basset was well known in the United States where he spent most of his winters giving lectures and retreats and was able to fund the upkeep of the Chapel from the donations he received on these visits.

Many benefactors assisted with other donations notably a schoolteacher from Liverpool, Miss Ruby Williamson, who supplied the wooden benches for the Chapel and the stone lion and other artifacts for the garden (Fr. Basset named the lion Cyril after the then Bishop of Plymouth). The statues in the Chapel, the print of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and the plaque of Mary on the rear wall were given by Mrs. Leon, the widow of Count Leon de Ferrari who lived in what is now St. Mary's Hall Hotel - the statues were in the private chapel there. The fish plate on the north wall was made by Humfrey Wakefield, an island potter, together with several flower vases. The painting above the altar is by June Lethbridge of Maypole, St. Mary's and depicts a general view of the islands. The smaller wooden altar (originally the main one) was made by local carpenters Tim Richards and the late Tom Chudleigh.

Ill health forced Fr. Basset to return to Oxford in 1976 and for the next four years the islands were served by Fr. Dunstan Adams OSB, a Benedictine monk from Ampleforth Abbey in Yorkshire. He had previously helped out in Fr. Basset's winter absences and was also well known and loved by islanders; Fr. Dunstan returned to his Abbey in 1980.

The carved wooden altar was obtained in 1992. It belonged to the Carmelite convent at Branksome in Dorset and when the convent was closed it was offered to the Church of the Immaculate Conception at Penzance. It was later transferred to our Chapel on St. Mary's. The altar is believed to be of 19th century European origin; the central carving shows a pelican plucking at its breast to feed its young with its blood and is an ancient Christian symbol representing Christ feeding his flock through the Eucharist.

More recently we have had the gift of a stained glass window over the front door which depicts the Star of the Sea and is the work of Oriel Hicks of Phoenix Stained Glass Studio at Porthmellon. It was donated by Mrs. Rita Johnson in memory of her cousin Fr. Cyril Kennedy SDB who was a regular visitor to the islands and who died in 1997.

Since 1980 there has been no permanent resident priest but we are visited by our parish priest from Penzance when he can manage it. In the summertime we are largely served by visiting priests who come to the islands for a holiday and stay in the Chapel flat.

During the winter 2011/2012 we have carried out some necessary building renovations and redecoration of the Chapel and flat, and restoration of the garden, and hope that visitors will find it a place of peace and prayerfulness.

July 2012.