

# A Brief History of the Church in Taunton

The Catholic Church in Taunton goes back a long way. There was a large Augustinian Priory at the northern end of the town, and much of this area was taken up by it. After the Reformation when the Priory was closed the land was gradually used for other purposes, but the area still has some links : there is an area in Taunton which today is called 'Priory' & one of the early buildings (now called the Priory Barn) is still in use by Somerset Cricket Club.

There were other links too. A Carmelite monastery was founded in 1322 in the area near to the present County Council offices, but it was abandoned before the Reformation, and only the ruins were left, until later the land was built on.

The time between the Reformation and even up to the beginning of the 19th century was a difficult time to be a Catholic, but there were a small number of Catholics in the area, and Masses were said in rooms at homes.

This gradually changed : in 1807 a group of Franciscan nuns, fleeing the effects of the French Revolution were invited to move into a house at the South Road end of the town. The order was made up largely of ladies from England, but had been abroad since 1619, living in Belgium. They established their chapel, which became the main centre for Masses in the town.

This continued until 1822, when a church was built in the Crescent, and the numbers continued to grow. In the 1860's another convent was established on the former Carmelite monastery grounds, and about this time a decision was made to establish a larger church. The land for this was given to the Bishop by the Franciscan nuns, and the Crescent church was sold.

It was dedicated to St. George, and was opened in 1860. The church continued to flourish as the town grew, but in 1929 the nuns at the former Carmelite site - the Convent of Perpetual Adoration - left the town, selling their buildings to the Town Council. One of the buildings is still called Mitre House, and they are now used as offices.

The Franciscan nuns, too, decided to move on, some leaving in 1860 but the rest left in 1953, after having been in the town for nearly 150 years. The convent was taken over by another order of nuns (there was a school there since the beginning), but they too left the convent and it was closed in the late 1970's, the site being bought by a local public school (It is now under housing development)

The number of Catholics in the northern part of the town grew to the point that it was felt that another church was needed, and in 1959 the church of St. Teresa of Lisieux was opened (Taunton is twinned with Lisieux in northern France).

As well as churches, education was felt to be important, especially after the convent closed, and the primary school of St. George and the combined C of E / RC Voluntary Aided Comprehensive school are now part of life in Taunton.

I hope you have found this brief tour of the history of Taunton of interest.