

## **Sr. Frances Pedrick FMA (1887– 1981): She the first**

\* Mary Treacy

The subject of this paper was not the first English Sister in the Institute; that honour belongs to Sr. Mary Pash from Battersea, London, who was professed in Nizza Monferrato in 1901, but Frances Pedrick is undoubtedly a figure of supreme significance in the development of the Salesian educational charism in the GBR province of the Salesian Sisters.<sup>1</sup> It was she who first gave an English face to FMA education in England and enabled the province to enter the voluntary aided system.

When, in the early years of the last century, the English province of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was struggling unsuccessfully to create or establish its identity and purpose in England, Frances Pedrick emerges as the first person to set a pathway for achieving an English Salesian mission for the Institute in an environment otherwise still highly influenced by an Italian style of community and apostolic life.

Having entered the FMA congregation already with the experience of several years teaching in Catholic elementary schools run by religious of another order, she was well positioned to assist in the development of a more open attitude to the educational mission in England while integrating the core elements of Don Bosco's method, the so-called 'Preventive System'.

Under obedience she qualified as the first certificated teacher in the province, the first (and only) laureate of Oxford University where she graduated successively with a B.A. Hons. degree and a Master's degree in history.

Most importantly though, she pioneered the Sisters' longed for entry into the state funded voluntary aided system for denominational schools through which the FMA could reach out to children and parents of the working classes.

After two short introductions on English Catholic education and the situation of the FMA in England at the beginning of the last century, this paper will look at Sr. Frances's early life with its importance for her educational development. It will then concentrate on her growth as a teacher, her further studies and training, her deepening understanding and practice of the Preventive System, and finally the entry into state funded Catholic Schools which she pioneered. This meant reaching out to children of the poorer classes whom she met in the Sunday oratory and greater contacts with members of other religious congregations. Lastly attention will briefly be drawn to Frances's contribution to the government of the province as a provincial councillor and provincial secretary, aspects of her ministry which have often been overlooked.

### **Sources**

The documentation in the FMA/GBR archive for the early years of the last century is not extensive and not all records of a Catholic educational nature have been deposited in county or diocesan record offices. The archival holdings in the parish schools researched are often poor in amount and arbitrary in what has been

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<sup>1</sup> The GBR province of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA = Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice) comprises the communities in England and Scotland. The houses in England and Ireland were formerly grouped as the Anglo-Irish province until 1970 when a separate Irish province was established. Earlier still the communities in England were known as the English province, the name used here. In England the Institute and its members are more usually known as Salesian Sisters from their shared founder and mission with the Salesians of Don Bosco.

preserved; some, in fact, have difficulty in locating past records. However, Sr. Frances was well organised, and she collected a body of documents relative to her educational career and civil appointments and a very interesting 'diary' she compiled towards the end of her life, reminiscences of her early years and schooling. Nevertheless, despite her collection of official documents, she left barely no personal reflections in writing of her experiences in taking over voluntary aided schools and particularly the difficulties in one which was in an educationally poor state. Her file in the FMA/GBR archive contains **many** tributes to her manner of interacting with the children and a few have been recorded in this paper where appropriate but the lack of her own reflections limits what might otherwise have been stated.

Recourse has also been made in the SDB/GBR archive in Bolton, thanks to the patience of Fr. Bernard Grogan SDB, and in various record offices in London, Surrey, Hampshire and Oxfordshire with varying success. Diocesan archives have also been consulted in Southwark (London), Birmingham and Plymouth. The archivist of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur also gave assistance. Several religious/diocesan archives, though, suffered severe damage during the WWII and had little to offer. Earlier research in the FMA General Archives in Rome has been incorporated in this paper as appropriate.

### **Catholic education in England in the early years of the last century**

The Catholic Church was officially re-established in England in 1850 with its own hierarchy. Some religious congregations had re-entered the country once the penal laws were relaxed but after 1850 religious life began once more to flourish, principally through the arrival and establishment of active religious congregations from the Continent, particularly France and Belgium, such as the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the Faithful Companions of Jesus and others. Some English or Irish orders were also founded during this time, for example, the Sisters of the Cross and Passion, the Poor Servants of the Mother of God and the Sisters of Mercy.<sup>2</sup> The bishops were intent on providing Catholic children with a Catholic Education imparted by Catholic teachers.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, religious congregations offering education were favoured. Recognising the need for a supply of qualified Catholic teachers, several women's congregations established teacher training institutions, notably, among others, the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, the Religious of the Sacred Heart, the Sisters of Charity of St. Paul, the Society of the Holy Child Jesus.

A welcome, if disputed, government boost to faith schools came in the Balfour Education Act of 1902 which placed the responsibility for education into the hands of the newly formed local education authorities (LEAs). The new legislation impacted particularly on county elementary education, transferring the government of each school to a body of six managers. Voluntary, or non-provided, schools were likewise to be overseen by a governing body of six managers, four of whom would be considered 'foundation

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<sup>2</sup> See W.J. Battersby, 'Educational work of the religious orders of women 1850-1950' in George Andrew Beck, *The English Catholics 1850-1950* (London: Burns Oates, 1950), 337-364; Susan O'Brien, 'Religious Life for Women' in V. Alan McClelland and Michael Hodgetts (eds.), *From Without the Flaminian Gate 150 years of Roman Catholicism in England and Wales 1850-2000*, (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), 198-141; Barbara Walsh, *Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales 1800-1937 A Social History*. (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2002); Carmen Mangion, *Contested Identities. Catholic women religious in nineteenth-century England and Wales* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2008).

<sup>3</sup> For a full discussion on Catholic education, government legislation in the early years of the twentieth century and the response of the hierarchy in England, see A.C.F. Beales, 'The struggle for the schools' in G.A. Beck (ed.), *The English Catholics 1850-1950*. (London: Burns Oates, 1950), 365-409; Mark Vickers, *By the Thames Divided. Cardinal Bourne in Southwark and Westminster*. (Leominster: Gracewing, 2013) especially chapter 10 'Education, Education, Education', 134-196; Maurice Whitehead, 'A view from the bridge: The Catholic School' in McClelland and Hodgetts, *From Without the Flaminian Gate*, 217-244. See also Roger Ottewill, 'Education, education, education': researching the 1902 Education Act' in *The Local Historian*, vol. 37, no.4, November 2007, 258-272.

managers' and would be appointed by the trustees of the school and the remaining two by the LEA. The managers were to be responsible for the building and maintenance of the school premises and, critically, for the appointment of the teachers who, however, would be paid by the LEA. In the day-to-day running of the school, the head teacher was to abide by any norms issued by the LEA but, most importantly from the point of view of both Anglicans and Catholics, religious instruction was dependent on the trustees and under the control of the managers. Under each section of provision for the schools, certain criteria had to be met if the school was to receive local government funding: the material premises had to meet conditions laid down by the LEAs and teachers had to be properly trained and qualified. These measures allowed many parishes to improve their provision for elementary schooling without some of the financial burden under which most had laboured for decades.

## Foundation of the FMA in England

That same year, 1902, saw the arrival of the FMA in England. The Bishop of Southwark diocese, Francis Bourne, had earlier intimated to the SDB that he would welcome the FMA to Chertsey, Surrey, where a sizeable group of Italian immigrants was located and which needed moral guidance and education.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the SDB Provincial, Fr. Charles Macey, had informed Mother Caterina Daghero, FMA superior general, that he was anxious for the FMA to take over the parish elementary school in Battersea, ably run by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur whose salary was paid by the Salesian parish which was struggling financially.<sup>5</sup> The initial motivation, then, for the foundation of the FMA Institute in England was clearly educational, even to the point, as Fr. Macey dreamed, of setting up a teacher training college. Circumstances delayed the implementation of the educational project and, instead, twelve Sisters were sent to provide domestic support for the Salesian community and boarding school in Battersea.<sup>6</sup>

A private school was opened in Chertsey in 1903 but struggled with all but one Sister, knowing none, or little, English. There was clearly no possibility of entering the voluntary aided system at that time. The poverty and financial insecurity of the establishment further precluded any such venture. The community was, however, destined to become the central house of the Anglo-Irish/GBR province for most of the next ninety years. It was to this house that Frances Pedrick came in 1910.

### Chertsey in 1910

By 1910, the FMA province counted three communities: Battersea, Chertsey, Farnborough, two of which were 'Salesian Houses'. A 'Salesian House' in FMA parlance was a community of Sisters dedicated to domestic support of a Salesian community and boarding school and which had little or no contact with the

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<sup>4</sup> Bishop Francis Bourne (1864-1935), later Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, had known Don Bosco personally when as a young priest he had entertained the desire of joining the Salesians. Don Bosco had discouraged the proposal but indicated that he would be of great support to his Sons in England. He welcomed the first SDB to London and gave life-long encouragement and assistance to both SDB and FMA. See M. Vickers, *By the Thames Divided: Cardinal Bourne in Southwark and Westminster* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Charles Bernard Macey SDB (1853-1928) a convert from the Church of England, under the patronage of Lady Herbert of Lea, was sent to the Oratory in Turin in 1880 where he was enrolled in the 'Sons of Mary' for late vocations. He spent most of the time before his ordination in Valdocco in 1887 in the SDB community at Nice. His first-hand knowledge of Don Bosco and his methods was therefore limited. He was among the pioneer group which arrived in Battersea in 1887 and was responsible for the early development of the SDB in England. It was he who championed the presence of the FMA in England. See W.J. Dickson SDB, *The dynamics of growth. The foundation and development of the Salesians in England*. (Roma: LAS.1991) 130-132.

<sup>6</sup> See correspondence of Mother Caterina Daghero and Fr. Macey in AGFMA 15(902) 06.

Caterina Daghero (1856-1924) succeeded the co-foundress, St. Maria Mazzarello, as superior general of the FMA Institute in 1881 on the latter's death. She remained in office until her own death.

young beyond a couple of hours in the Sunday afternoon oratory. A fourth house, also a 'Salesian House', had been opened in London in 1904 but had closed two years later when the SDB withdrew from their work in the boys' hostel in Southwark.<sup>7</sup> The one educational work in the FMA province was that of Chertsey which also functioned as a house of formation and noviciate. Opened in 1903 with twelve small boys sent by the SDB from Battersea, the school had struggled to develop. Poverty and lack of qualified teachers meant that the number of pupils had not increased dramatically by 1910. The house chronicle for the beginning of 1911 mentions thirty two pupils, an increase of one on 1909 number, most of them being boy boarders.<sup>8</sup> There was adequate educational provision in the town for all children, including the Italians, so there was no pressure for the children to attend the convent school which was, moreover, private and fee-paying.<sup>9</sup> The Sisters held catechism classes for the Catholic children attending the town school and opened the Sunday oratory to all comers, many of whom were from the Italian 'colony' in the Goosepool area of the town.<sup>10</sup>

The school was staffed by three teachers, two of whom were also studying for exams that would eventually allow them entry into Teacher Training College but none had the preparation and experience of the new postulant, Frances Pedrick.

### **Biographical profile**

Frances Marie Rose Pedrick was born into a Catholic family in Teignmouth, in the county of Devon, on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1887, just four days after the arrival of the Salesians in London. Hers was a numerous family with eleven children and by all accounts was a very united and loving family. Every member of the family, of which she was the penultimate child, played a musical instrument and they enjoyed singing together.

Frances began her schooling at the age of three in the small Catholic parish school of St. Patrick run by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, equidistant from the beach and the parish church. It was thanks to the interest and special coaching of the head teacher that Frances passed the Junior Oxford examination and a benefactress in the town then provided the school fees for her to attend the newly opened SND secondary school in Plymouth in which the pupil-teacher system was in operation.

The pupil teacher system, employed by several religious orders, enabled

'a bright girl with modest means to pursue a course of preliminary training as a monitor in their schools at the same time continuing her own education. Successful candidates were then offered places or scholarships to one of the Catholic teacher training colleges. Linscott has given [...] an outline of how the SND arranged their own pupil-teacher scheme which was felt to be some improvement on the monitorial system, "thirteen year olds were promised training by undertaking a five year apprenticeship for college by

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<sup>7</sup> See Dickson, *Dynamics of growth*, 158-160. There is discrepancy between the SDB and FMA archival data re. the opening and closing of the two communities.

<sup>8</sup> See FMA Archives Province of Great Britain (hereafter AFMA/GBR): chronicles for the Community of Chertsey, Eastworth Road (in Italian). An abridged English version of the Chertsey Eastworth Road chronicles for 1903-1915 was written by Sr. Frances Pedrick, circa 1961, see AFMA/GBR Chertsey box.

<sup>9</sup> In 1920, the parish priest of Chertsey, Fr. Philip Williams SDB approached the town council with the request to open a parish voluntary aided school but was refused permission on the grounds that there were sufficient places in the existing schools for all the Catholic children without expecting the local ratepayer to fund another one. It was not until 1946 that a Catholic voluntary aided primary school, St. Anne's, was opened in nearby Addlestone; FMA from Chertsey helped to staff it. See documentation in Chertsey Museum: local history department and David Wheeler and James Lander, *Faith in a Small Town. A History of Catholicism in Chertsey* (Chertsey: James Lander, 1998) 39-40.

<sup>10</sup> See David Wheeler and James Lander, *Faith in a Small Town*.

teaching and studying under the direction of some qualified head-teacher. They taught in school during the day and were themselves taught in the evenings and on Saturdays".<sup>11</sup>

Frances noted in her 'diary':

I suppose I must have been about 13 or 14 years old. The good Sister, a Sister of Notre Dame – the Head Mistress took a great interest in me and I owe her an eternal debt of gratitude for, if I am what I am today, it is through her great kindness and unselfish generosity [...] I think I went on studying and teaching [the 'babies'] until I was 17 years old'.

In fact, during these years, she was coached for the Senior Oxford Local Examination which she successfully passed in 1905. She had already taken the first part of the diocesan religious certificate the previous year, and subsequently passed parts 2-4, in the following years. The superior at Plymouth, Sr. Winifred, testified that 'Frances M.R. Pedrick is fully qualified to teach Religious Instruction having obtained the full Honours Certificate for the Diocesan Examinations held while she was training as a Teacher from 1904-1907'.<sup>12</sup>

Under the guidance of the SND, she was prepared for the so-called "Preliminary Certificate", a preparation for entering Teacher Training College. The Preliminary Certificate involved a teaching examination with Reading and Recitation and 'the usual subjects'. Her certificate, though, notes that she also achieved distinction in history.<sup>13</sup> She further took an examination in the theory of music. Having passed the Certificate, Frances remained with the SND in St. Boniface Catholic Elementary School, Plymouth, as an assistant teacher on a salary of £40 a year until she entered the FMA Institute at Chertsey in 1910.

One might question her choice of religious congregation. Having been educated for twenty years by the SND to whom she acknowledged such a debt of gratitude, and recognising in herself her talent for educating poor children, it would have been considered most probable that she would seek entry into that institute. In her 'diary' she makes no mention of the reasons underlying her choice of the FMA institute but in her abridgment of the early Chertsey chronicles, when writing of her fellow parishioner and probable school fellow, Beatrice Curtis, who entered Chertsey in 1903, she gave a description of Beatrice's 'vocational discernment' which possibly mirrored her own, seven years later:

'The good parish priest [...Fr. Dawson] had a great love for Don Bosco and on Sunday afternoons would read stories from the Salesian Bulletin to the children. It is not surprising, then, that, having a vocation, she was guided and attracted to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, though she had known and worked with other Sisters.'

The next period of Frances's life from 1910 until 1952 reflects and encapsulates the story of the development of the educational charism of the FMA in England.

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<sup>11</sup> Barbara Walsh, *Roman Catholic Nuns*, 42; Sister Jean Bunn SND, 'The Archives of Notre Dame de Namur in Britain' in *Journal of the Catholic Archive Society*, 13 (1993) 3-12, especially 7; see also Mary Linscott, *Quiet Revolution. The Educational Experience of Blessed Julie Billiart and the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur*, Glasgow: Burns, 1966; Alexander Wall, 'The Supply of Certified Teachers in Roman Catholic Elementary Schools of Britain 1848-1870', M.Phil. thesis, University of Lancaster, 1983.

The SDB also took advantage of the pupil-teacher system for the initial teacher training of their candidates: see Dickson, *The dynamics of growth*, 115.

<sup>12</sup> AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box: Sr. Frances Pedrick file: letter of Sr. Winifred, Sister Superior, August 1913. This may have been among the documents required for entry into a Catholic Teacher Training College. Her actual certificate reads: 'AMDG Certificate of Religious Knowledge. I hereby certify that Frances Pedrick passed the prescribed Examination for Prospective Teachers. L. O'Laughlin – Diocesan Inspector. Diocese of Plymouth, Dated 27 July 1914.' Again a requirement for College.

<sup>13</sup> AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box: Sr. Frances Pedrick file: Board of Education, Form 32 Exam, June 1907.

The teachers in Chertsey were assisted by other Sisters whose task was the material care for the pupils and boarders. Often these roles were covered by postulants and novices. Frances was not immediately engaged in teaching but was, instead, asked to study for Froebel examinations which she took at the Sisters of the Holy Child institute in London. She passed in all but one subject (handicraft) and was on the Chertsey staff register the following year, in the meantime having become a novice, as a music teacher. Putting her to study, perhaps, indicates the growing understanding on the part of the superiors of the need of educational qualifications if the school was to prosper but also the possible scarcity of adequate candidates to undertake the necessary studies and the ever parlous financial situation of the community. Nevertheless, at least three English Sisters who had not been assigned to study, when sent as missionaries to the United States, became excellent teachers and one the 'president' of the High School in New Jersey.

## Teacher Training

After her religious profession in Chertsey on 19 August 1913, Sr. Frances taught there for a year before being admitted to St. Charles's Teacher Training College run by the Religious of the Sacred Heart in North Kensington (London). Living with twenty other student sisters, she came to know the spirit and methods of other religious congregations and deepen her understanding of her own in relation to the principles of education she was studying. The fact that a young Sister was allowed at that time to be resident in College, albeit in almost convent-like conditions, shows the confidence the superiors were already placing in her both as a teacher and a religious. She successfully followed the two year course, becoming the ***first certified teacher in the province*** on 1 August 1916.<sup>14</sup> Government legislation prescribed a one year probationary period teaching in a state funded elementary school in order for the certificate to be endorsed. Once again Sr. Frances found herself under the guidance of the SND, this time in the Sacred Heart school in Battersea (1916-1917). At the end of her probationary year, the head-teacher penned the following report to London County Council:

'Miss Pedrick [...] has ability for planning and preparing interesting lessons and controls the children in a patient, cheerful manner. She plays the piano well and is capable of teaching singing to any class. She is an earnest and reliable teacher whose high principles and firm adherence to them give her an excellent influence over her pupils. She took a keen interest in all the work of the school and was always willing to assist other members of the staff'.<sup>15</sup>

## Head teacher

At the age of twenty-nine and qualified for one year, Frances, though still in temporary vows, was appointed head teacher of the small school at Chertsey in 1917. This was a departure from what had been the norm until then in the province where, following the usual situation in smaller FMA educational establishments in Italy, the superior of the community also functioned as the head teacher, even if not actively engaged in the day to day running of the school, nor qualified to do so. Frances now had the possibility of implementing what she had learnt in her previous training both in terms of what was expected in English education and the spirit and practice of the 'Preventive System' of St. John Bosco which had to imbue this education. Her knowledge and appreciation of the saint's methods had been instilled into her not only by the parish priest at Teignmouth, but above all by her novice mistress, Sr. Maria Avio, and

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<sup>14</sup> Subjects studied: principles and practice of teaching; hygiene and physical training; theory of music and singing; drawing; reading and recitation; needlework; English; history; elementary science. She passed with credit the advanced course in theory of music and singing.

<sup>15</sup> See Reference of the Head Mistress, A. Morrissey in AFMA/GBR Sr. Frances Pedrick's file.

the other Sisters, most of whom had been formed in the mother house of Nizza Monferrato.<sup>16</sup> She spent a month in Italy in 1920, getting to know the Superiors and the mother house.

On a practical level, during her three years of headship at Chertsey, Sr. Frances saw to the closure of the boy boarders' section in 1920.<sup>17</sup> The number of girl boarders was at last increasing and accommodation was no longer adequate; so with the permission of the bishop, Peter Amigo, the school would now take only girls in the boarding section.<sup>18</sup> This decision brought it more in line with the founding charism of the Institute which was to concentrate its energies on helping and educating girls and young women, especially of the poorer classes. Permission was, however, given by the superiors for the elementary school to be mixed; this, too, was in consideration of the usual practice in Catholic elementary schools in England. The school, though, remained private and fee-paying. The desire to work with poorer children had yet to be realised.

It was further due to Frances's foresight that a military hut was bought and adapted to serve as a refectory for the children, freeing space in the main school building. It served later as a classroom, a games hall and club room until its demolition when the whole property was sold in the 1990s.

### Student at Oxford University 1921-1924

Education in the inter-war years demanded better qualifications for its leadership. By 1921, three more Sisters had become certificated and the school at Chertsey could be safely entrusted into the hands of Sr. Matilda Watts who, like Sr. Frances, had had several years' teaching experience (in France) before she entered the convent and formally qualified as a teacher.

Sr. Frances was, therefore, enrolled as a home student at Oxford University and stayed during term time with the religious of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus in the city, once more extending her first-hand knowledge of other religious teaching orders.<sup>19</sup> She appears to have enjoyed her time at Oxford and received her B.A.Hons in history on 26 October 1924 – **the first English FMA laureate** and the only one to have studied at Oxford.

But study was not her only occupation in Oxford. The SDB had recently taken over the parish of Cowley and Littlemore to the south of Oxford, and among other activities had started a Sunday oratory for boys in the reduced form common among the English houses both SDB and FMA. Whether by request or by personal apostolic initiative, every Sunday afternoon, Sr. Frances would take the bus from Oxford to Cowley for **'Sunday School', the oratory**, with the girls of the parish. One described, not the activities, but the impact the Sister made on them:

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<sup>16</sup> Sr. Maria Avio (1881-1959) arrived in Chertsey in 1908 as the novice mistress. She subsequently became the Superior there and in 1921 was appointed the Provincial. In 1927 she went to India where she fulfilled the same roles as in England, arousing similar love and loyalty among the Sisters. See Carmela Calosso, *Facciamo memoria. Cenni biografici delle FMA defunte nel 1959*. (Roma: Istituto delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice, 2000) 16-18; Mary Bout, *A pearl of great price: the story of Mother Maria Avio*. (Shillong: Auxilium Convent, 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Some internal memos in AFMA/GBR name Frances as head teacher at Chertsey from 1917 until 1927, whereas many others, both internal and external, place her in Oxford and Cowley between 1921 and 1927.

<sup>18</sup> Bp. Peter Amigo (1864-1949) Ordained in 1888, he taught at St. Edmund's College, Ware, before pastoral appointments in several parishes in Southwark diocese. In 1904 he succeeded Bp. Bourne as bishop of Southwark, being later given the personal title of Archbishop. The communities of Battersea and Chertsey were in Southwark diocese and Bp. Amigo was a reasonably frequent visitor calling the Sisters, 'his best of friends.'

<sup>19</sup> The Society of the Holy Child Jesus was founded in England by Cornelia Connelly for the education of girls. Sr. Frances had already had contact with it in the London centre at Cavendish Square when studying for the Froebel qualification in 1911.

‘Cowley girls coming to our school in Oxford began to tell us about the “lovely Sister” they had, and kept telling us to go and join them at Cowley and see how nice she was! Several of us did [...] and after playing games or merely standing and enjoying her easy manner and happy stories, went into Church for instruction and Benediction. After that was either the Children of Mary sodality or the St. Agnes Guild which she conducted. [...] Then when all was over, she walked with us all the way to Oxford [...] I shall never forget those happy two or three years.’<sup>20</sup>

### **St. Patrick’s School, Farnborough**

By 1927, Sr. Frances, then aged thirty-nine, had both the qualifications and experience in educational leadership to make her the obvious choice when the SDB, in the person of Fr. Aloysius Sutherland parish priest of Farnborough in Hampshire, offered the headship of the voluntary aided parish infant and elementary school to the FMA, proposing that it be given to Sr. Frances. The school would be a mixed, all age school from five year olds to fourteen year olds. At last the dream of engaging with children of the ordinary working classes was about to be realised.

The often terse minutes of the provincial council for 18 March 1927 are particularly interesting for the motivations expressed in favour of accepting the post on the retirement of the long-standing lay head teacher, Miss Alice Crowley.<sup>21</sup> The first concerns ‘the good that can be done in a well populated area; the school has three teachers with just over a hundred children and we have the sure hope of opening the Festive Oratory.’ The reason is clearly related to the charismatic identity of the Institute: the work would take place in an urban setting where children of the working classes would be the centre of the Sisters’ mission. This was not to despise the work in the private schools (Chertsey & Cowley) but it had been a long-standing desire on the part of the FMA to engage with more socially or economically disadvantaged children. The Festive oratory where the education received in school could be reinforced in a leisure time environment was also seen as a further important incentive to accept the town council’s proposal as presented by SDB, two of whom were town councillors!

A second motivation noted by the Sisters was one which still resonates today: ‘Up till now, the educational work of our Institute has been little known in this country. This [new venture] could thus prove a favourable means to greater development.’<sup>22</sup>

The FMA councillors further agreed that accepting the school would mean that the young, newly qualified Sister teachers could fulfil the probationary requirement there, in what for them would be a congenial atmosphere in which they could exercise the ‘preventive system’ under the guidance of an expert practitioner, Sr. Frances Pedrick. Having the direction of the school, moreover, would extend the practice of Salesian methods to the lay teachers who would continue to be employed in the school.

A final, practical consideration regarded finance: the councillors recognised in the project ‘a sound financial help of which this poor province stands in such need’.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See account by Mary Rogers FMA in AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters’ box, Sr. Frances Pedrick file. Both the writer of the above passage and another ‘oratory girl’ of that time, Evelyn Cadman FMA, entered Institute, inspired in their vocational choice by the example of the Salesian, joyful gentleness of Sr. Frances. At the time, there was no FMA community in Cowley.

<sup>21</sup> See Verballi Adunanza 18 marzo 1927 in AFMA/GBR Verballi Consiglio Ispettorale II 1926-1934.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



It was a challenge for the new Head as throughout her teaching career she had primarily been engaged with elementary pupils or with infants. That she found dealing with young teenagers challenging may be deduced from a letter she wrote to the Provincial eleven years later in relation to the appointment of the Sister who was to take over from her at Farnborough when she moved to Battersea:

‘Dear Mother, are you still thinking of putting Sr. Marie as Head Teacher? [...] Sister’s health is not good. Her discipline is not her strong point. And she could never manage big children – who are very difficult indeed – Apart from this she knows nothing of all the business necessary to run an elementary school.’<sup>24</sup>

In fact, when placed in a position in which she had to deal with children of all ages, she admitted that the older children could be difficult. The sources do not identify the nature of the ‘very serious difficulties’ of 1934 in Farnborough which led to the provincial council agreeing, initially, to her resignation with no one to put in her place. Sr. Matilda Watts too, had found St. Patrick’s too challenging after only a few months. The provincial council proposed reducing Sr. Frances’s workload by substituting her on the council with another Sister when a curious but revealing letter was received from the Secretary General, writing on behalf of the Superior General, in which she told the Provincial, Mother Tullia De Berardinis, to delay removing Frances from the council. It was felt that too rapid a move, given Frances’s temperament (‘predisposizioni morali’) would leave her very downcast (rattristata); it would be better to wait, talk matters over with her and gain her confidence and acceptance. It does not appear from the available evidence that she was removed from the Council but returned to Farnborough for another four years. It does suggest, though, a certain sensitivity on her part.

Nevertheless, when news of her impending move to Cowley after only three years in Farnborough, the ‘Corresponding Manager’, Fr. Thomas Giltenan, wrote:

It is indeed with very deep regret that I have to write this appreciation of the services of Miss Frances Pedrick [...] For the past three years she has been Head-mistress of our Elementary Schools and has been called to take up a more important post.

When Miss Pedrick took over her very difficult duties in Farnborough the tone and discipline of the school had given cause of great anxiety to all the managers.

Miss Pedrick took up her very difficult task with great courage and remarkable ability.

The results of her labours have exceeded all expectations and the school today, in spite of many drawbacks, can hold its own with any school in this area.

All inspectors who have visited the school have told the writer how deeply they have been impressed with the whole atmosphere and particularly with the cheerful tone they found among the children.

We envy those who have secured the services of this very zealous and able teacher...’<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box, Sr. Marie Ranner’s file. Sr. Marie Ranner was a successful head teacher at Farnborough for thirty-one years, including the war years and planned and oversaw the transfer of the school premises from the town centre to a larger, more suitable site about a mile away.

<sup>25</sup> AFMA/GBR Reference for Sr. Frances Pedrick to Oxfordshire LEA 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1931, in Deceased Sisters box Sr. Frances Pedrick’s file.

## **Cowley and Battersea**

Soon after the new management of the school at Farnborough was underway, the opportunity of opening a voluntary aided parish school in the Salesian parish at Cowley, Oxford, was offered. The Sisters had been in residence in the parish since 1924 with a noviciate and a small private elementary school. In inviting them to Cowley, the Archbishop of Birmingham had warmly 'urged them to come as soon as possible to open a school there of any sort – Day, Boarding, Secondary or elementary or all combined. So they had only to say the word.'<sup>26</sup> Our Lady's school was, in fact, opened the following year, 1925 as a private elementary school

Now with the building and organisation of the new parish school in Cowley, Sr. Frances's experience and ability in dealing with civil authorities was called upon once more and in 1931 she was asked to move to Cowley, leaving the direction of St. Patrick's school to Sr. Matilda Watts, as she had done previously in Chertsey. Negotiations were progressing with the Salesian parish and Oxford LEA when Sr. Matilda's health began to give cause for concern and Sr. Frances was re-called there.

It appears, however, that she continued to be involved with the work of the new school until it opened in 1932 under the headship of Sr. Charlotte Morellini.<sup>27</sup>

## **Battersea**

The third of the voluntary aided schools with which Sr. Frances was involved very directly was that in the Salesian parish of the Sacred Heart at Battersea. The infant and elementary schools had been under the direction of the SND Sisters. By 1937 both the remaining Sisters were due to retire and the SDB proposed to the Provincial, Mother Tullia De Berardinis, that the FMA should apply to take their place. The Provincial requested permission from the Superiors in Turin for two Sisters to apply for the positions, one of whom would be Sr. Frances Pedrick. She explained to the Superiors that, under English legislation, it would be the task of the governing body to appoint the head teacher and others. However, she added, 'Three of the governors are: the Salesian Provincial, the Rector and the Parish Priest of the Salesian house; the other members will accept what these three decide.' Practical woman that she was, she continued, 'The teachers in the London schools are better paid than elsewhere. The head teachers received thirty or forty pounds a month which increases according to the years they have been teaching.'<sup>28</sup> As with Don Bosco, charism and financial concerns often coincided!

The following year on 17<sup>th</sup> August 1938, the community chronicle relates, 'After much prayer we have finally been able to take over these schools. Deo Gratias!'<sup>29</sup> Two months later the same chronicle declared, 'Sr. Frances Pedrick has been definitely appointed headmistress of the schools in Battersea', taking over from the SND. Although he was no longer alive to witness it, Fr. Macey's hope of having the FMA in the parish school at Battersea was at last realised, with little financial outlay on the part of the parish.

The SDB and the FMA community may have been rejoicing but Sr. Frances's move to London caused great consternation in the parish and school at Farnborough. There had been a previous scare of this nature when in 1934 it was proposed to move Sr. Frances as there were too many serious problems for her of an

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<sup>26</sup> AFMA/GBR Letter of W.G.Austen SDB to Sister Superior 5 July 1934 in Cowley box.

<sup>27</sup> Charlotte Morellini FMA (1903-1984) was the first pupil, a boarder, of the FMA school at Chertsey to enter the FMA Institute. Professed in 1921, she trained as a teacher and was the first head teacher of Our Lady's voluntary aided school in Cowley from 1932 until her retirement in 1966.

<sup>28</sup> AFMA/GBR Letter of Sr. Tullia De Berardinis to the FMA Councillors in Turin, November 1937.

<sup>29</sup> AFMA/GBR 2F Battersea chronicle.

undisclosed nature, as far as the minutes of the meeting of the provincial council record. When this had become known, Fr. John Cressey S.C. of the management committee had written to Sr. Frances declaring that he was stunned by her letter of resignation and had not forwarded it to the Hampshire Education Authority, pleading with her:

I can hardly think you mean it and I hope with all my heart that you will do all you can to make the Mother Provincial let you stay on and continue your good work which everyone appreciates so much.'

Frances was above all a religious and no matter what misgivings she may have had, she was not likely to reject the move obedience placed upon her. Sensing this, the same Salesian wrote a three page letter to the FMA Provincial:

We were all thunder struck when we heard that you intend to take Sister Frances from the school and sincerely hope it is not too late for you to reconsider your decision which will do so much damage to the school.

I have not sent in her resignation which she has sent for I feel sure that when you know what a terrible blow it will be if she goes you will let her continue her good work among the children who love her so much [...]

Moreover, if it were known that Sr. Frances were not continuing her work among the children there would be a general protest throughout the parish as her influence is known and appreciated by everyone [...]

I am writing to Fr. Provincial to ask him to use his influence with you to grant our request [...]'<sup>30</sup>

The pleas were listened to and, despite a serious illness, Sr. Frances remained for another three years. The reaction of St. Patrick's authorities gives an indication of the love and esteem in which she was held not only by the children but also by their parents. In 1938, however, the decision was irrevocable.

### **A Successful Salesian Head Teacher**

In her early years she had discovered within herself a talent for educating and she built on this as her vocation which she fulfilled throughout her life in the Institute for which she had a great love. A special aspect of this was her *love for Don Bosco and cultivation of his method of education*. One of the most telling testimonies in this regard comes from a pupil at the time when the Battersea school was evacuated during WWII to Earley, Reading. Sr. Frances, assisted initially by three other Sisters, and then only by lay teachers, was responsible for billeting some hundred and fifty children in families in the area and for continuing their schooling in makeshift scholastic accommodation in the local Anglican church hall. The pupil wrote:

'We spent many happy times together. The children loved her immensely and she would always have a trail of youngsters behind her every time she appeared. I remember her starting a little group which she called the 'MERRY COMPANY' consisting of boys and girls of which my brother and I were members. Now looking back, I suppose it would have been some kind of sodality. It was certainly good anyway and she managed to keep us together and tried to instil into us a great love for our faith. [...] This all took place during our

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<sup>30</sup> AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters' box: Sr. Frances Pedrick's file. Letters of Fr. J Cressey S.C. to Sr. Frances Pedrick and FMA Provincial, 10<sup>th</sup> August 1934. Verballi dell'Adunanza del Consiglio Ispettorale, 7 agosto/2 settembre 1934.

evacuation years in Reading and in spite of such tragic times of war, we were not so conscious of this, we had some really good days with Sister.’<sup>31</sup>

Despite the difficult circumstances, Sr. Frances was able to keep up the morale of her young charges, separated from their families and entrusted to strangers. Her use of the title, ‘the Merry Company’ is a reflection of her knowledge and love of Don Bosco who called a teenage group he established, ‘la Società dell’Allegria’. Don Bosco’s life and above all, his method of education, was her continual inspiration.<sup>32</sup>

A further aspect of her love for her religious congregation was highlighted at her death by Sisters who remembered the encouragement they had received from her as they started out in their religious life. One relates:

When I entered as an Aspirant [in Chertsey] I was given a class of infants to teach [...] Sr. Frances was in charge of me and took me under her wing at once. I was very homesick and found it very hard to settle but it was the warmth and kindly interest which Sr. Frances showed to me that really won me over. It was the contact with her and her very special way with the little ones which caught me. Don Bosco’s family spirit and preventive system were evident and I wanted to be part of it.’<sup>33</sup>

Frances’s love for her religious family was generative.

A second factor in her success was undoubtedly her *professionalism*. After graduating from teacher training college, while head teacher in Chertsey, she worked towards university matriculation with an Honours certificate in Italian, Modern History, Mathematics and Education. In fact, by the time she took up her appointment at Farnborough, she was well qualified for the post but a year later she was working towards an M.A. in history at Oxford University. In her application for the headship at Battersea, she states that she had continued her professional up-dating by attending courses organised by Hampshire County Council in Farnborough and she had also earned a further teaching qualification by successfully obtaining a Cambridge University Certificate of efficiency in teaching.<sup>34</sup> At meetings of head teachers she regularly encountered other religious involved in education and was open to learn from the good practice of others, integrating it with her Salesian values. When she was preparing to take up her post in Battersea, a member of the Executive of the Hampshire Teachers’ Association wrote of her:

During that period [of her headship at Farnborough] Miss Pedrick has endeared herself to the pupils and parents, and all concerned in the welfare of the School. Her relations with the Education Authority and His Majesty’s Inspectors of Schools, have always been most cordial [...]

Miss Pedrick is a person of high academic attainment – holding the M.A. Degree of Oxford University – with other important professional qualifications. To these she adds a practical knowledge of modern educational methods, and School Management. During her Headship at Farnborough she has taken the keenest interest

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<sup>31</sup> AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box, Sr. Frances Pedrick file: testimony of Mary Louise Ballard.

<sup>32</sup> Sister Frances and the evacuees all attended Mass in nearby Woodley where, after many years, Mass had begun once more to be celebrated the previous year. Was it more than pure coincidence that when the church was officially opened in 1946 it was dedicated to St. John Bosco and the later primary school to Dominic Savio, staffed originally by the Sisters of Mercy?

<sup>33</sup> A. Darwin in AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box, Sr. Frances Pedrick file.

<sup>34</sup> The certificate covered the theory, history and practice of teaching. See AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box, Sr. Frances Pedrick file: London County Council Form no. E 40B/H.T. Application for Appointment as HEAD TEACHER in London Non-Provided Elementary Schools.

in all that pertains to the educational progress of the district, and is familiar with the many varied school activities.’<sup>35</sup>

A further outstanding feature of Sr. Frances’s achievement, noted by school governors, inspectors, parents and past pupils was her *exceptional love for the children in her care*, especially for those she termed ‘the babies’ and the ascendancy this gave her with them. The documented testimonies are myriad. The following may give a flavour of the many. One of the Farnborough school governors wrote: ‘She is absolutely devoted to her work and really loves the children under her care. Towards whom nobody could show greater kindness than does she.’<sup>36</sup> A former pupil, on learning of Sr. Frances’s death, stated, ‘Sr. Frances had a most wonderful love for the children and was very dedicated in her work for them. She was kindness and gentleness personified when dealing with them and never seemed to lose her patience.’<sup>37</sup> Once more the dictum of Don Bosco comes to mind: It is not enough to love the children, they must know that they are loved.

Nevertheless, this love was not just emotional, even if by temperament she inclined to a happy, gentle disposition. She was an educator whose advice was sometimes bearing fruit long after the pupil had left her care. A young man from Farnborough days wrote to her after the War in which he had served, ‘Do you remember the last note that you wrote? I have never forgotten it “Never do anything that would make you blush in front of others.” So you see, Sister, there must be hundreds of us who started our working life armed with your guidance and prayer.’<sup>38</sup>

She nurtured this love and gentleness through her special *devotion to the Blessed Sacrament* which she had learnt as a child. A fellow novice recalled, ‘Any time she and I prayed together, our little visit would end with a spiritual communion and then a prayer to Mary H. of C.’ Another wrote, ‘All were impressed, Sisters and pupils by her beautiful piety, her great devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to Our Lady, to St. John Bosco, to St. Mary Mazzarello and indeed to all the Saints.’

### **Successful but wasted?**

Sr. Frances had made a vow of obedience and so, whatever she may have thought of some decisions made by her Superiors, she would abide by them. Her training, her educational experience and her own inclinations were for work among the youngest children, the babies as she called them. When she ‘retired’ from Battersea in 1952, she returned to Chertsey, devoting what energies she still had to these little ones. They and their parents knew she loved them and they reciprocated that affection.

In the 1930s when the three voluntary aided elementary schools were developing, Frances was the only FMA to undertake university studies which would equip her for work in the secondary sector but she never taught in a secondary school as such, even in Chertsey which was, by then, taking shape with its senior classes. Her academic achievements were not wasted in that they gave her credibility before educational and SDB authorities and in some internal legal transactions for the Institute.

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<sup>35</sup> AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box, Sr. Frances Pedrick file: W.Miller A.C.P. Queen’s Road County Council School, South Farnborough, Hants. May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1938.

<sup>36</sup> F.X. Thoburn S.C. May 4<sup>th</sup> 1938 in AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box, Sr. Frances Pedrick file.

<sup>37</sup> M.L. Ballard, 1981 in AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box, Sr. Frances Pedrick file.

<sup>38</sup> AFMA/GBR Deceased Sisters box, Sr. Frances Pedrick file.

## Her service of authority in the Province

From her early years in the Institute, Sr. Frances enjoyed the esteem and trust of her immediate superiors. Restrictions which many years later were to be imposed on student Sisters regarding choice of subjects for study, interaction with Sister students of other congregations or residence outside FMA communities, did not apply at the time of her post-profession educational journey. She came to love and appreciate the superiors and this regard was reciprocated.

The early years, and even beyond, of the Province were marked by Italian culture, language, religious life-style, piety and even food! The early English or Irish recruits who stayed do not appear to have had any inculturational influence in the adaptation of religious life to English mores.<sup>39</sup> Frances seems to have accepted the situation and learned the Italian language as a result but with this she also imbibed much of the cultural atmosphere in which the Institute was born, without losing her own English identity. As she progressed in her educational achievements, being the first in many spheres, she acquired a certain informal authority which was recognized in her early appointment to the provincial council which consisted otherwise entirely of Italian Sisters. It was important to have an English voice and signature in certain transactions and negotiations, especially in educational matters. She was called, for example, to accompany the provincial to Benton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1938 where the parish priest, Fr. Madden was hoping to build an elementary school and wanted the FMA to staff it. Nothing came of the venture as the major Superiors in Italy felt the lack of trained teachers in the province would be an impediment.<sup>40</sup> Sr. Frances also accompanied the Provincial to Limerick when negotiations were underway regarding the educational work the Sisters were to undertake and on more than one occasion she was asked to accompany the Provincial on visits to bishops and other authorities.

From her first appointment as a provincial councillor and provincial secretary in 1922 until 1954 Frances was the only English member of the provincial council. For some of these thirty- two years, 1922-1936, she was also the provincial secretary while fulfilling other roles in the province, such as the superior for a short period in Cowley, or councillor in one or other of the local communities. She appears again in the first years of her so-called retirement as the provincial secretary in Chertsey, 1951-1954.<sup>41</sup> Even in retirement, from 1957-1961 she was called to support the local superior in Chertsey as a local councillor.

## Conclusion

In her retirement years in Chertsey, the image of the diminutive, elderly Sister whom parents and others saw slowly making her way from the community house across the playground to the chapel, surrounded by a spontaneous flock of small children, drawn to her as to a magnet, belied the importance of her contribution to the life of the community. For some of the children she was just, 'the Sister who lives in the chapel'.

Yet, she was the first, who accepting the role placed upon her by her superiors, with intelligence, sound preparation and energy had set a pattern for future developments in the then Anglo-Irish province in the

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<sup>39</sup> Recruitment was very slow in the first decade of the foundation in England and the drop-out rate was high until a regular novice mistress was appointed in 1908. The need for English speaking FMA in New York at the time meant that 57% of the local English professed Sisters were sent as missionaries to USA, while Italian missionaries were sent from the mother house in Nizza Monferrato to supply the lack of personnel. See *The problems of inculturating a religious charism: the experience of the Salesian Sisters in England 1902-1946*, M.C. Treacy, unpublished Ph.D thesis, Maryvale/ Liverpool Hope University, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> See correspondence of Fr. Madden with FMA Provincial and General Council in AFMA/GBR file 2C.

<sup>41</sup> See the general directories (elenchi generali) of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for the years 1922-1955. There are gaps for some of the WWII years when communications were understandably disrupted.

sphere of apostolic work in primary schools, reaching out to children of families with limited economic resources who desired a Catholic mainstream education.

Through her own industry, she had shown the need and advantage in education of continuing up-dating, never being content to rest on her considerable laurels. She aimed to bring the best of fresh methods and research to her work but always in the spirit of Don Bosco. In this she was an outstanding model of Salesian loving kindness.

Finally, in an era in which the majority of the FMA communities in the province were reliant on the SDB for their livelihood and activity in the Salesian houses, Sr. Frances showed that relationships within the Salesian Family could be both professional and mature with mutual respect for each other. In fact, the entry of the FMA into the voluntary sector and its early expressions owes much to the interest of the SDB in the parishes mentioned above. Not everything was plain sailing but it was a tangible realisation of co-operation within the Salesian Family for the good of the young in the spirit of Don Bosco, an expression of a shared charismatic origin.

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