

THE BAR CONVENT

Living Heritage Centre

Our First Three Hundred Years

1686	Sir Thomas Gascoigne, a Yorkshire Catholic landowner, declares: "We must have a school for our daughters." He gives £450 to Frances Bedingfield, an early companion of Mary Ward, and she buys the original 17 th century house to set up a boarding school. She signs the papers under the pseudonym of 'Frances Long'... Catholics were persecuted at this time. It was far safer to live in secrecy, so they wore slate-coloured gowns to hide their identity.
1694	Mother Frances and her niece are incarcerated in Ousebridge Gaol.
1695	A mob attacks and severely damages the house. Local legend says that the sisters, terrified, prayed to the archangel St Michael to protect them. When a vision of St Michael on a white horse appeared over the house, the mob fled in terror. An engraving of St Michael now hangs over the front door of the Bar Convent to commemorate this story.
1699	The sisters add a free day school to the boarding school. By now they are known as the 'Ladies at the Bar'.
1727	A wealthy lady named Elizabeth Stansfield joins the community. She kindly pays off the community's debts.
1766	Mother Ann Aspinall appoints Thomas Atkinson to build new accommodation for the school and the community. It takes over twenty years to complete! Top of the priority list for Thomas Atkinson is to build the sisters a chapel. He starts building them the Hidden Chapel – so called because it is built within the house and its dome is hidden from the street outside by a dull slate roof.
1769	The first Mass is celebrated in Mother Aspinall's new Chapel. Mass is celebrated in total secrecy this way for over twenty years.
1787	Mother Aspinall gets permission 'to erect the new front wall to her house'... in fact she builds an entire extra level to the house, and a Georgian frontage that adds even more rooms.

1791	After nearly twenty years, the Second Catholic Relief Act of 1791 means that the chapel is legally recognised as a place of worship.
1834	The sisters' wing of the house is built.
1844	GT Andrews (the architect for the old York Railway Station) is appointed to add kitchens (now our Gascoigne and Aspinal conference rooms) and rebuild the day school (today, the Exhibition). He also adds the glass roof over our Entrance Hall, which was previously an open court, the beautiful Maw tiled floor, the Coalbrookdale iron furniture and lots of plants. This space was then known as the 'Winter Garden'.
1852	Some of our sisters start teaching at St George's School, newly opened for Irish immigrant children in Walmgate.
1877	The Institute set up by Mary Ward is <i>finally</i> approved by the Church – 268 years after its founding.
Early 20 th Century	During building work, something very special is discovered in the Chapel.... an original priest hole. This was a secret hiding place that a Catholic priest could use if the Convent was raided by the authorities. Being a Catholic was illegal in earlier times, and the punishment could be very harsh.
1914 - 1918	Belgian nuns and refugee children are given a home in the Bar Convent, and the school concert hall is converted into a hospital ward for wounded soldiers.
1921	The day school and the boarding school merge into one. They are now known as the Bar Convent Grammar School.
1939 - 1945	During the Second World War, the Bar Convent is bombed by the Luftwaffe. Five sisters are killed. You can still see the repairs to the building on the Nunnery Lane side – can you spot the different coloured bricks?
1985	After 299 years of being run by the sisters, the school is transferred to the Diocese of Middlesbrough and becomes All Saints Catholic School.
2015	Our brand new Exhibition opens to the public.