

# THE PAPAL VISIT

*The pages of **Portsmouth People** are unfortunately too few to accommodate all contributions. Those below by Adam Charnaud, Meike Cook, Marius Hopley, Nancy Johnson and Bernard & Susan Kelly are representative of the response from across the diocese. Ed.*

## **Adam Charnaud (Newbury) on the occasion at Cofton Park of the Beatification Celebration Mass**

The day was damp and chilly with characteristic grey rain-filled clouds scudding menacingly across the sky at 200 feet. Our coach departed Douai Abbey at 0400 hours, with an E.T.A. at the Longbridge car park of 0600 hours. Our coach driver explained we were on time for our touchdown slot, as one of 1000 coaches, all with specific arrival times. Each pilgrim was issued with an identification wristband to comply with the tight security in force. From the Longbridge factory site, now razed to the ground and a producer of moist red clay rather than fine motors, we walked to Cofton Park, past a brand new building right opposite Longbridge, billed as a centre of enterprise. Such is our national humour! The magnificent St. Joseph's parish banner, raised high as we walked the mile through the crowds in the damp early morning, was a great rallying point as, walking at different speeds, the group split up gradually only to converge again at the entrance to the arena.

We made our way into the arena at 0730, and led by some St Francis de Sales, Wash Common parishioners, pitched camp in a raised, open, grassy spot behind a chapel. In front of us the ground sloped away towards the sanctuary, giving us a clear view over the crowds. The scene was evocatively framed on the right by an impressive old oak tree. A corner of Cofton Park that is forever West Berkshire!

The two hours before Mass passed pleasantly and rapidly with music, comment, chat and the opening of a magnificent blue sky to herald the arrival of the Popemobile, which on time to the minute carried a smiling, waving and immaculate Pope Benedict. The crowd some 60,000 strong, delighted, cheered and waved, most umbrellas lowered, as the rain lifted with the break in the clouds. The Mass, the music and singing were unimaginably moving, the detailed preparation of Archbishop Bernard Longley, his team and the Magnificat service books were also unimaginably impressive and wonderful. There was a real church bell at the consecration, and communion was distributed to all by a plethora of concelebrating priests within six minutes. Fantastic stuff, fantastic co-ordinated organisation.

Deacon Jack Sullivan, whose cure by Newman's intercession paved the way for this beatification, proclaimed the Gospel, and in his Boston voice the Parable of the Dishonest Steward resonated slowly, powerfully, and unforgettably across Cofton Park, and deep within the hearts of those present.

Then the deep, rich, utterly fluent English but unmistakable and moving German accent of the Pope was heard by all, and the apology for the cause of the Battle of Britain momentarily broke the silence of the assembled multitude with an audible sucking in of the breath; His Holiness unquestionably had the measure of England, outwardly secular, most notably in its media, actually multitudinously silent believers, their silent and deep faith not to be worn on the cuff in obvious and amused contrast to the opinions of their mistaken but enjoyable press and media.

I, the writer of this note, happened by chance upon a Benedictine Abbot I know after the ceremony when departing Cofton Park, who told me with a boyish grin of pleasure never

to be forgotten, 'You know I was a concelebrant', and then in answer to my question who of the other Abbots were concelebrants, with an even bigger grin, 'None!!!'

An occasion of enormous historical momentum, huge inspirational spirit, and exceptional privilege and enjoyment for every man, woman and child present, but also to many more who watched on Sky Television.

Heart speaks to heart, and what other way is there, for we are here on earth for three score and ten, some a little more, in which time appreciation of the creation is open to us, but reasoning not, the love of God and faith alone our mainstay.

The rain clouds present as a timely reminder in mild discomfort of our human form, the clouds breaking with brilliant blue sky and a welcome hike in air temperature, for the beatification celebration of a very great Englishman by a very great Pope, on England's fair, green and gentle soil.

Those of us of St Joseph's in Newbury, and the other parishes of West Berkshire, returned to our coach for its 3pm take-off slot greatly heartened by the events of this exceptional day, and a little sorry for those secular sceptics who are so full in their earthly boots of what they say.

We trust that Blessed John Newman enjoyed his earthly beatification as much as his well wishers of the day, many of whom stood for the nine hours without sitting, such was the apparent ease of involvement. After all, is it not the case that the flesh has little to offer, and the spirit is life?

### **Meike Cook (Bournemouth) meets the Pope on stage at St Mary's University, Strawberry Hill**

On Friday 17<sup>th</sup> September Pope Benedict XVI came to St. Mary's University at Strawberry Hill to watch 'the BIG assembly', a celebration of Catholic education in Britain, and I was lucky enough to meet him on stage.

Taking part in 'the BIG assembly' was one of the most amazing experiences of my life. I was lucky enough to be one of 32 young sports men and woman from around the country to help launch the John Paul II Foundation for Sport in the presence of His Holiness. I was selected by my teachers to represent St. Peter's school. I left for London on Wednesday and arrived at a catholic hostel in London where all the young people involved in launching the Foundation were staying. It was great to meet other young Catholics with similar interests and I made some great new friends whom I will be in touch with for a long time.

We took part in a river boat ride down the Thames and had a look around London, which was very interesting. Thursday was spent rehearsing for the assembly with a short trip to Hampton Court Palace in the afternoon. Then came the most exciting day of all... We got up very early on Friday morning to make sure we got to Strawberry Hill on time. The security was very tight with sniffer dogs and police helicopters along with metal detectors and countless police officers. We waited anxiously for the Pope to arrive and a crowd of 4,000 young school children welcomed him with hymns and chants. The atmosphere was electric; each and every member of the crowd was on their feet worshipping. After performances from choirs and other various people our turn to go on stage with the Pope himself came. I was so excited and couldn't wait to be blessed by him. After our five minute slot on stage, the time came for him to read his homily. The atmosphere completely changed as every member of the audience fell silent to listen to his words. It was as if you could have heard a pin drop. It felt amazing to know that

the Pope was speaking directly to all young people in England and his words were truly inspiring. It was such an honour and such an amazing moment that I will never forget it and I am sure none of the other people at the Assembly will either.

### **Marius Hopley (Reading) offers a personal recollection of the Mass for the Beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman by Pope Benedict XVI**

When the alarm went off at 1am on Sunday morning, I had mixed feelings. I had only managed to fall asleep by 11pm and my body was screaming that it needed more rest but my mind was excited by what was about to happen that day. We were lucky indeed being 'Invited Persons' to the Beatification of Cardinal Newman by Pope Benedict at Cofton Park.

Within an hour we were on the road. It was cold and wet and it seemed the further north we went, the more those two situations increased. As we arrived in a traffic jam at the designated parking, it looked very miserable indeed. Soon we were parked and on one of the coaches that took us to the event, where we were ushered into the enclosure right at the front of the altar. We couldn't believe our luck – we were in the front row next to the centre aisle – ring-side seats indeed. Next to us were a couple from Ruislip, behind a young couple from University College Dublin – all of us cold, damp but very enthusiastic and pinching ourselves at our very privileged position.

We waited – and waited, now wearing the plastic rain mac that came in the Papal Visit rucksack. We saw lots of organisation, the choir, clergy, security and the event officials. Nothing was left to chance. Behind us in the public area thousands were arriving, some apparently had been there overnight having arrived mid evening. The atmosphere was quite unusual – rain, cold, a field and singing.

Our first event was to go live on Radio 4 with a more modern band-based service of worship which was still greatly respectful of the day and of Cardinal Newman. Soon however it was time for the real reason why so many had made their way to Birmingham.

The huge screens to the side of the stage had shown the Pope getting into a helicopter. He was on his way, stated the text on the screen, to which a huge cheer arose. It was quite amusing because there were 2 helicopters floating about – both of them Police and not long after the announcement, people started wildly cheering one of these, assuming it was the Pope!

Then through the clouds came a blue helicopter. This was our man, the leader of our church and we were going to get to share our morning with him. The cheers were now rather deafening. He landed and rather than going straight backstage to enrobe, he came through the crowds in the Popemobile, stopping to take in babies and bless them. We all cheered, we were in a kind of state of ecstasy – nothing could distract us or dampen our spirits. Then something quite unusual happened. The rain stopped – and it never started again.

As Mass started to the refrain of Newman's 'Praise to the Holiest', Pope Benedict came to the front of the altar where a huge cheer greeted him. A smile broke out onto the old man's face and those kindly eyes burned with what I can only describe as pure love. He stopped and then blessed the crowd.

Mass was sombre in comparison to any of the previous outdoor events but it was deeply powerful and extremely special. As the process of beatification started, relics of Cardinal Newman were brought forth – a small lock of hair and some soil from his grave. A request was made by the Bishop of Birmingham that he be considered blessed, to which Pope Benedict read out a statement which said that from this time forward, the veritable

servant Cardinal John Henry Newman would be known as Blessed. A massive cheer went up!

The Mass was full of rich liturgy and beautiful music. The Pope addressed his sermon in a way that was quietly authoritative yet deeply personal. He stated his delight at being in the UK on the anniversary of the Battle of Britain and how he, as one who lived through the 'evil regime' of the Nazis, was so grateful for the sacrifices our fellow countrymen made to fight for freedom.

The Mass flew by and almost unexpectedly we were at the final blessing. No long speech goodbye just an acknowledgement to all parts of the crowd as he blessed us and thanked us for coming. Then it was over. We were emotional, tired, still a bit damp and totally elated. I felt like I had for a very short period glimpsed the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth in this soggy park. This was our faith, our time and our Pope.

Needless to say, we had to leave and so said goodbye to those around us who we had spend hours with waiting for the sun to rise, the rain to stop falling and the Pope to arrive. Soon we headed off, past the Protest the Pope group, who were TINY in number and cut a rather sad looking group, disorganised and far from eloquent. This had most certainly been our day and it had definitely not been theirs. Although they spoke with anger and bitterness, they were well behaved and did not insult anyone directly.

We arrived home about three hours later, tired and hungry but with so many wonderful memories. We watched the news and saw ourselves on it, watched the reports and synopses and felt highly blessed to have been there. It was an historic day, a special moment where an Englishman was beatified on English soil. I attended Cardinal Newman School in Hove, so I had a more than passing interest in seeing this rather special man being recognised by the Church.

So the day came to an end. Heart had spoken unto heart and the words of one old theologian were mixed with those of another old theologian, albeit a contemporary. Pope Benedict won us over without a doubt. All of us, the whole family felt enormous love for him and felt that he had enormous love for us. We watched the live broadcast of the Prime Minister's farewell to him and his final address to the people of our country. He boarded his plane and it left minutes later. He was gone and like many good things that pass into history, it was painful and we mourned his leaving.

I am so glad that he came here and that we were able to be part of this visit. I am unsure what the legacy of this visit will be but there will be one; personal and for the church in this country. He may be gone but he won't be forgotten.

### **Nancy Johnson (Reading) on the occasion at Cofton Park of the Beatification Celebration Mass**

I was privileged to be at Cofton Park last Sunday when His Holiness the Pope conducted a Mass celebrating the beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman - and I truly did feel privileged and blessed to be there. I wasn't sure that I had made the right decision to go to the Mass when I received an e-mail telling me that pilgrims were to meet at 2-45 am last Sunday morning...! When we arrived at the meeting place it was remarkable how happy and excited everyone was - the rain and the cold didn't matter and there was a real sense of anticipation. Arriving in Birmingham, the long walk - clutching our folding chairs and back packs, through the dark and by now pouring rain - only served to increase the sense of pilgrimage and homage.

Once at Cofton Park the vast crowd was truly remarkable for the friendship and co-operation between strangers who had come together as one enormous family - my only

experience of being in such a crowd is my visits to rugby matches at Twickenham - a very different atmosphere, believe me!

The arrival of His Holiness provoked an outpouring of emotion and joy that truly celebrated the presence of our Holy Father - it was a spontaneous and overwhelming demonstration of love and faith and fellowship - how different from what we had been led to believe by the media before the visit. It seemed only fitting that as the Pope's helicopter landed the rain stopped, the sun broke through the clouds and a rainbow arched over the park! God's promise indeed.

I am sure many of you watched the Mass and beatification on television - the beauty of the liturgy and music, the wisdom and humility of the Holy Father's homily were all deeply moving. It was a wonderful reminder of the universality of the Church to reflect that all over the world the same words and actions were taking place - and here we were listening to those words from the Pope! We all felt truly blessed.

The part of the Mass that most of us will never have witnessed before was of course the Beatification of Cardinal Newman - the first time this has happened in our country. As a convert myself I have been interested and influenced by the life and writings of John Henry Newman - his struggles and doubts, his capitulation to the inevitable acknowledgement of the eternal truth, his firm belief that our faith is fundamentally a matter of the heart, and that our care and love for each other is the demonstration of that faith, resonating with each and every one of us today and serving as a shining example of devotion and humility. How moving it was to hear the Gospel read by Deacon John Sullivan, the man healed through the intercession of Cardinal Newman.

Leaving the Mass there was none of the feeling of anti-climax or sadness that one often feels after a special event - the power of the Holy Spirit has remained with me and I feel stronger and more certain of my faith than ever before. There is no doubt in my mind that the Holy Spirit was working amongst us all last Sunday and that the presence of His Holiness, of the spirit of Cardinal Newman, the love and communion of 80,000 followers of Jesus Christ brought healing and joy to all of us. On a very personal level I have been made very aware of that healing - my husband died in July and since then I have struggled to find the joy in my life - every morning when I have woken there has been a pain in my chest - since that Mass that pain has gone. I hope and pray that the impact of the visit will continue to influence this country - I read in the newspaper that the Catholic Enquiry Office has received literally hundreds of requests for help and information about the church. Again on a purely personal level I received a phone call from an avowed agnostic friend on Monday telling me that he had been so moved and shaken by watching the Mass that he had made an appointment to meet with the priest at his nearest Catholic church - Praise the Lord!

**Bernard and Susan Kelly of Equipes Notre-Dame offer married pilgrims' reflections from Hyde Park**



To be a pilgrim on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> September representing Equipes Notre-Dame in only our third year in Teams was a privileged opportunity and one we will carry with us for the rest of our lives. On our approach to the security check at 1pm in Hyde Park we were struck by the sheer multi cultural composition of the Catholic Church. So many different nationalities coming together in such a joyous and peaceful way is strength of our Church and our Nation.

Having completed our passage through the security checks we waited in the holding area to wait being called for the procession. During this Gathering time a variety of groups who were all part of the Catholic community in England and Wales entertained us on the stage and big screens with a variety of dance, mime and movement. To Susan the most moving performance was the Larondina Dance Group. This London based dance group works with people with special needs and their performance was artistic and technically superb. What an amazing achievement.

At around 2.40pm we were called to form the Procession of Banners. We were amazed by the number of Catholic groups. We were one of around a thousand groups representing Diocesan groups, Youth Services, HCPT children and carers, Parishes and Catholic Organisations and Societies. It was heart-warming to see such a breadth of support and enthusiasm working together in our church bringing the message of 'Heart unto Heart' to life. A big thank you goes to Benedicte Giraud for lending us the wonderful banner which she had created by hand for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Teams GB. It drew the

attention and admiration from other banner holders. We were also spotted by fellow Teams member Tony O'Byrne from North Thames.

On the dot of 4 o'clock the Entrance Procession started its long journey winding its way through the pilgrims and onto the stage to be greeted by a number of Bishops from around the country. During the early stages of the procession pilgrims were able to shake hands with all the Bishops but by the time we got to the stage just before 5pm the organisers had decided that the pilgrims should not shake hands with the Bishops due to timing. However as we passed three bishops spoke to us and said what a wonderful organisation Teams is.

After we came off the stage we realised that the seating area designated for banner bearers was directly in front of the stage. We were positioned to the left of the stage amongst Youth Groups from across the country from Plymouth, Hexham, Leeds, Salford, Liverpool and Nottingham, completed with their Robin Hood hats. Several times during the proceedings their sheer ebullience broke into a series of Mexican waves. It was good to see so many young people in the church and celebrating their witness to faith. During this time every group was given a candle which was to be used later during the Prayer Vigil.

The next section of the evening was a presentation on the Heart of the Church. This was divided into 4 sections the A Heart that Sees, A Heart that Serves, A Heart that Seeks Justice and A Heart that Understands. This formed a series of moving testimonies. We heard of a young mother's plight as she and her children were awaiting expulsion from this country only to be reprieved at the last moment and her subsequent conversion to Catholicism. Next a seventeen-year-old boy shared how he has been called to help the poor in Burma. For the past six summers he had spent time there helping these underprivileged people. What an example to us all. The plight of a thirty-six-year-old man who had had fought his addiction to drugs and alcohol but had been clean for the past two and a half years gave thanks to the support of the Cardinal Hume Centre in Westminster. The parents of a murdered sixteen-year-old boy, who died in his brother's arms, shared how their faith supported them and their family during this very tragic period of their life. The message from this mother was that we all must tell our children how much we love them and are proud of them. And finally we heard of the work carried out in our prisons where the strength of faith helps to reconcile and inspire those that have committed crime.

At 6 o'clock the big screens in the park started to show live coverage of Pope Benedict's approach to Hyde Park, accompanied by live music from The Priests. The first sight of the Pope on screen was rapturously greeted by the congregation of eighty thousand pilgrims in the park. The noise was deafening. Once in the park the Pope entered the arena to be greeted by the pilgrims as he made his way towards the stage to commence the Prayer Vigil. The Archbishop of Southwark, the most Reverend Peter Smith, then welcomed the Holy Father to the Vigil.



During a very prayerful service the Pope gave a short homily during which He reflected on the life of Cardinal John Henry Newman, his gift of understanding and his faith. We were reminded of the numerous martyrs who were executed at nearby Tyburn for their witness to faith and how today we all share that witness. His most poignant message was that everyone has a unique part to play in their lives and that that uniqueness has not been given to anybody else. He spoke directly to the youth present at the Vigil and invited them to join him at next year's youth gathering in Madrid.

As we reached the culmination of the Vigil all the groups were asked to bring their candles to the front of the stage where the light, which was passed from the Holy Father, lit the candles in preparation for the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament on the altar. In silence the pilgrims prayed and in the dusk of the evening, the glow of light from the candles at the front of the stage, created a moment of unity and peace. During this time and at other times during the day we prayed for all members of Teams throughout the world.



The Pope returned to the stage after the Prayer Vigil to wave goodbye to all the pilgrims with a warm and joyous expression on his face. We left the park around 8.20pm reflecting on how we would act on the message received in our own lives and in our wider role within the Teams movement.

Teams is a Christian movement for married couples which aims to help couples grow in the love of Christ and each other. The teams movement recognises that Christian marriage is a precious gift that needs to be nurtured. If you would like to find out more about Teams then please visit the new GB Teams website at [www.TeamsGB.org.uk](http://www.TeamsGB.org.uk)