

Marist Brother who founded Celtic Football Club is honoured with a statue in his memory

Seat in 'Paradise' for Brother Walfrid

A STATUE of Celtic founder Brother Walfrid has been erected at the entrance to the football club's home in Parkhead. It shows the Marist Brother seated with a book in his hand as if teaching a class of children - as he did for almost 30 years in the east end of Glasgow during the late 19th century.

At the unveiling on 5 November, Archbishop Mario Conti blessed the nine-foot high bronze statue, which was funded by Celtic supporters from around the world.

The Archbishop, who holds no particular football allegiance - apart from a soft-spot for his native Elgin City - said: "While I was always aware of the part Celtic played in the history and culture of the Catholic community in Glasgow over the past 100 years and more I have, since coming to the city as Archbishop, learned more about that history and have grown to appreciate how much we should value it."

That sentiment was echoed by Celtic chairman Brian Quinn who described how Brother Walfrid's vision had seen the benefits of a football club as a means of helping the poor.

"We are a movement, founded on principles established by a quiet, determined man who set out to bring out the best in people and promote a generosity of spirit that endures today," he said.

"He also saw this as a means of bringing together the Scottish as well as the Irish strands of Glasgow's disadvantaged population. From the very outset Celtic Football Club commanded the passionate support of communities it was intended to represent. This was something with which, in their deprived conditions, they could identify and from which they

could draw inspiration, a sense of self-worth and some kind of positive response to those that did not make them welcome. These are powerful sentiments and they drove the Club and its supporters forward."

An estimated 3000 supporters turned out for the unveiling of the statue which was created by Glasgow sculptor Kate Robinson. Among the official guests were Celtic manager Gordon Strachan, youth coach Tommy Burns and club captain Neil Lennon. They were joined by relatives of Brother Walfrid and members of the Marist community. The club's Old Firm rivals Rangers were represented by John Greig, whose features are captured in a statue outside Ibrox Stadium in memory of the victims of the 1971 Ibrox disaster.

Composer James MacMillan created a special piece of music, Walfrid at the gates of Paradise, which was played on the day by musicians from the Coatbridge St Patrick's branch of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.

Eddie Toner, chair of the Brother Walfrid Memorial Committee, said the statue was "a lasting memorial to a great humanitarian". He added: "Walfrid gave us a vision - one that was Christian, charitable, inclusive and about never forgetting our roots. He gave us a symbol for the community, a sense of identity and something to be proud of."

Billy McNeill, who as Celtic captain lifted the European Cup in 1967, said that the commemoration was long overdue.

"For a Marist Brother to start a football club in the east end of Glasgow which now has a reputation across the world is amazing," he said. "Celtic set out to be non-sectarian right from the outset. Even the name was carefully chosen because it reflected the Scottish and Irish roots."



His goal was to serve the poor of the east end

BORN IN 1840 in the village of Ballymote, in County Sligo, Andrew Kerins took the religious name Brother Walfrid when he joined the Marist order in 1864.

It was six years earlier, in 1858, that the Society of Mary had arrived in Glasgow and founded St Mungo's Academy, making a formidable contribution to the education of poor Catholic children in the east end of the city.

Their religious dynamism allowed the Marist Brothers to dedicate much of their lives to the community they helped to

build and subsequently serve.

Brother Walfrid taught in St Mary's, Abercromby Street, before becoming headmaster of the Sacred Heart school in Bridgeton. For many of the children hunger was a constant factor. So in association with the St Vincent De Paul Society, he set up the 'Penny Dinner' tables whereby the poor were provided with one warm, substantial meal per day.

Aware of the growing enthusiasm for football and noting the success of the Edinburgh Irish Catholic club, Hibernian, in winning the Scottish Cup in 1887, Brother Walfrid decided it was time Glasgow had its own club with a similar identity and charitable goal.

On 6 November 1887 in St Mary's parish hall Brother Walfrid met with local businessmen to propose the formation of the Celtic Football and Athletic Club.

They stated: "The main object of the club is to supply the East End conferences of the St Vincent de Paul Society with the funds for the maintenance of the 'dinner tables' of our needy children in the missions of St Mary's, Sacred Heart and St Michael's. Many cases of sheer poverty are left unaided through lack of means. It is therefore with this object that we have set afoot the 'Celtic'."

The subscription list was headed by Archbishop Charles Eym. Although the Archbishop

of Glasgow knew nothing about football, he was prepared to support any scheme that the welfare of the poor at heart.

Celtic played their first ever game on a fine spring evening on 28 May 1888 winning 5-2 against Glasgow Rangers. The gate receipts yielded some £400 which helped feed the hungry poor of the east end.

In 1893 Brother Walfrid transferred to London and later helped establish the Marist college at Grove Ferry near Canterbury.

In failing health he moved back to Scotland, to Mount St Michael's - the Marist retirement house next to St Joseph's College in Dunfermline. He died there on the 17 April 1915, and was buried in the nearby cemetery.



Chairman Brian Quinn with Celtic Cross

CELTIC CROSSES SUPPORT RESTORATION OF CALTON CHURCH

STONEWORK from the building where Celtic was founded is being used to create a unique set of hand-carved Celtic crosses.

And it is hoped that the historic collectors' items will generate funds towards the restoration and refurbishment of St Mary's church, Abercromby Street.

It was at a meeting in St Mary's parish hall on 6 November 1887 that Brother Walfrid and local parishioners proposed the founding of Celtic.

For over 100 years the Forbes Street hall was the hub of the Calton parish's social life, but was demolished on safety grounds in the 1990s. The site is now owned by Joe Logan, a former Celtic player, who donated the stone for use in making a limited edition of 100 crosses.

Archbishop Conti presented the first foot-high cross in Celtic chairman Brian Quinn. In return, the Celtic Charity Fund presented a cheque for £5000 to Mgr Peter Smith, parish priest of St Mary's, to help the church restoration fund, as a token of gratitude to the parish community out of which the club grew.

Mgr Smith said: "As a parish we are proud of our historic link with the founding of Celtic, and were delighted to be able to make this special gift to the club."

"We are also grateful to the Celtic Charity Fund for supporting our restoration appeal and hope that others will help us achieve our goal by purchasing the Celtic crosses."

St Mary's is the second oldest Catholic church in the city of Glasgow. The ongoing restoration programme is expected to cost over £1million and is being supported by Historic Scotland, the Heritage Lottery Fund, Glasgow City Council, and the sterling efforts of parishioners.

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To commission a Brother Walfrid Stone Cross contact:



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