

Ursulines in Cheltenham

By Richard Barton (copyright)

During the year 1907 a community of Ursuline Sisters from Angers was driven out of France as a result of the anti-clerical legislation which had closed many Catholic schools run by religious. Mere Marie Chrystome Audouin and a number of Sisters crossed to Diss in Norfolk. From there they moved to 'Inholmes' in Pittville Circus Road, Cheltenham. The nucleus of a small private school emerged but when their Provincial visited the house in 1912 she insisted that the accommodation was inadequate. The Community purchased Fullwood Park for £4,500 and this became the Ursuline Ladies' College. A day school, St Angela's High School for Girls, was opened by the Ursulines to revive the work of St Gregory's High School for Girls in St St James's Square, which had been run by the Sisters of St Paul of Charity until it was closed in 1908.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1	Blanche Audouin	Head	52	single					Superior
2	Bonnie Garry		53	single					Nun
3	Alice Tarpant		40	single					Nun
4	Augustine Godwin		33	single					Nun
5	Jeanne Cudine		32	single					Nun
6	Madeleine Taidel		31	single					Nun
7	Madeleine Baudry		30	single					Nun
8	Marthe Bayon		23	single					Visitor
9	Veronique Gaudichon		60	single					Nun
10	Louise Leonard		52	single					Nun
11	Françoise Penven		49	single					Nun
12	Marie Dava		43	single					Nun
13	Ray McGrath		23	single					Assistant Teacher
14	Marie Josèphe Louvenc		14						School
15	Henriette Robin		14						School
16									

The Community in 1911

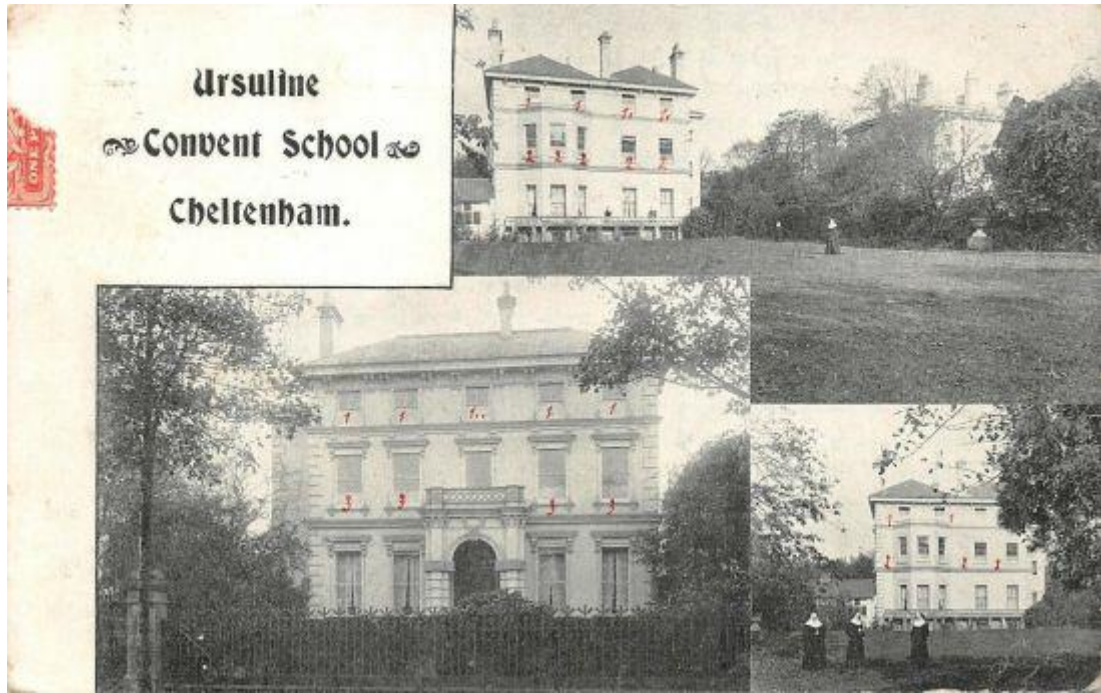
The new property stood in ten acres of parkland, in a delightful part of the town, with lawns, woods and even an ornamental lake. The Park was laid out before 1833 by its owner, Thomas Billings, as an oval tree-lined drive with a central park which, for a short period in the mid nineteenth century, became a zoological garden. The villa was built in 1847 with later additions and alterations. These included the 1890s verandah which was built for Mrs MacKnight Crawford of Lauriston Castle, which overlooks the Firth of Forth. 'Inholmes' was sold by the Sisters and, some years later, it became the Anglican St Anne's Diocesan House.

The Ursuline College offered 'a good French education' in conjunction with a thoroughly sound tuition in all English subjects. Religious Knowledge was included as an optional subject. The Community managed to retain its French identity and refused to join the English Ursuline Province. The chaplain was Father George J. Bompas, a priest of the Diocese of Angers, who

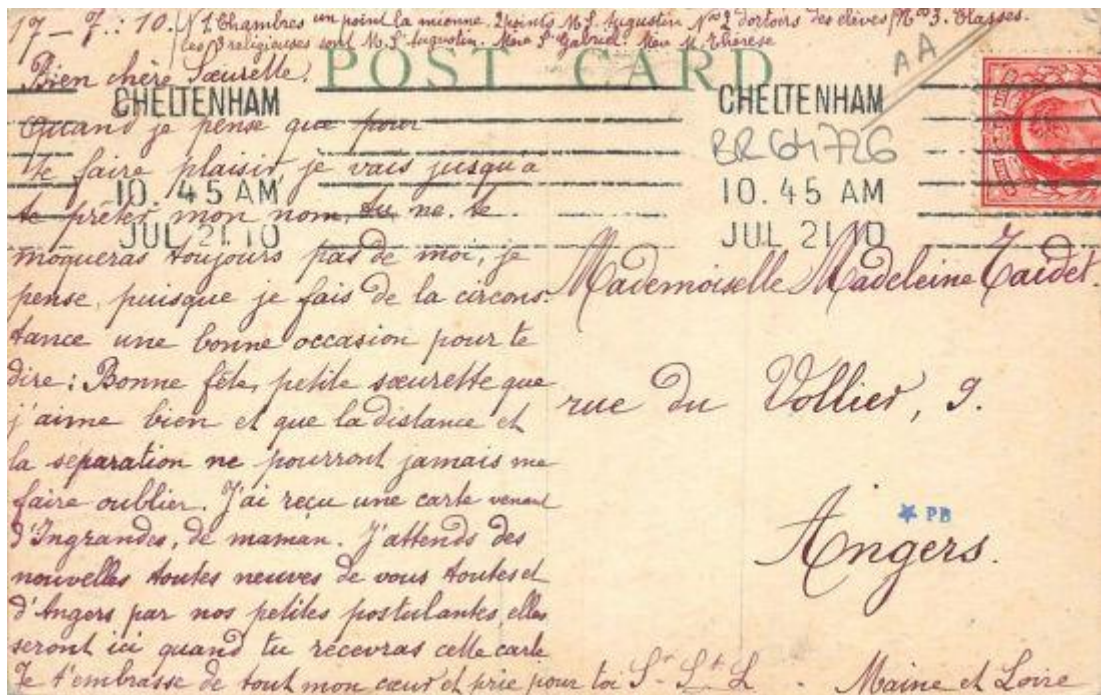
seems to have lived, at least for some of the time, at Farm Lodge, a cottage in the grounds. Every year the Ursuline Sisters hosted the annual Corpus Christi Procession which received considerable support from the local Catholic community.

In 1929 the majority of the Sisters decided to return to France but a few of them decided to join the English Ursuline Province and it is probably as a result of this decision that the school was closed. In 1931 Fullwood Park was sold to St Mary's Church of England Teachers' Training College. The site was gradually developed during the twentieth century and today, it is the 'Park Campus' of the University of Gloucestershire. The educational work of the Ursulines was, in time, continued by the Sisters of La Sainte Union des Sacres Coeurs who established their convent school at Charlton Park in 1937.

Some of the Ursuline Sisters are buried in Cheltenham Cemetery.



'Inholmes', Pittville Circus Road (1910)





'Inholmes' after the departure of the Sisters





URSULINE COLLEGE, FULLWOOD PARK, CHELTENHAM.

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Thanks for your letter, my dear Vera. I hope you will be all right next week. Don't be too imprudent, because the "flu" is very dangerous this year. I am all right, and my patients are better.

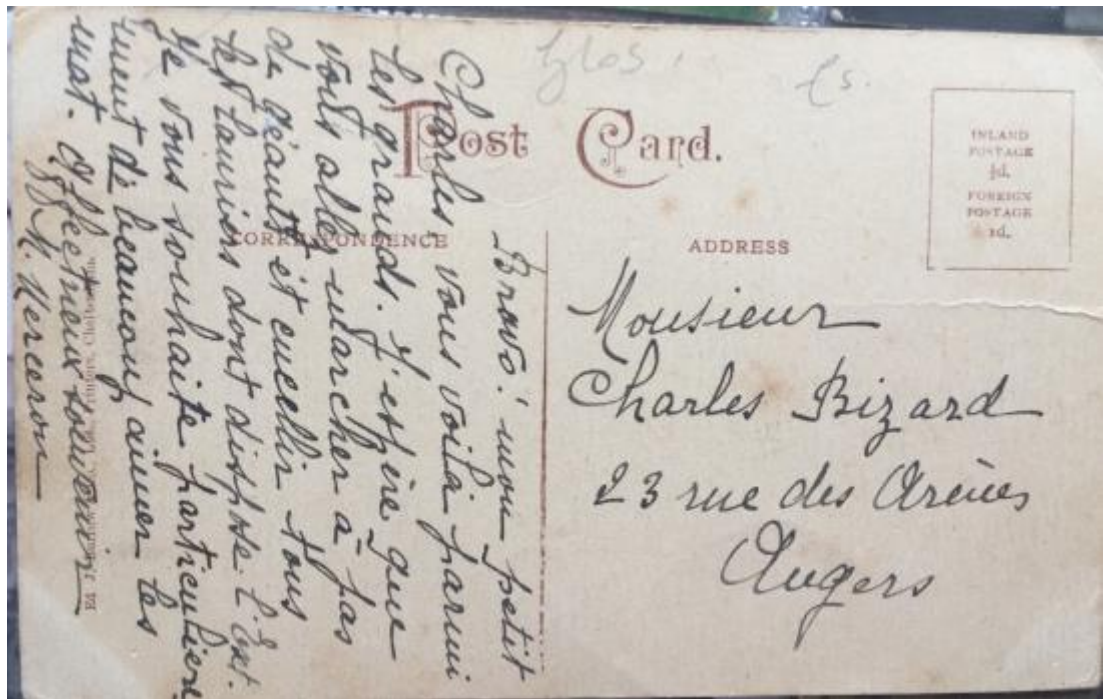
Yours sincerely
M. St. Cecilia

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1922





Corpus Christi Procession at Fullwood Park