

Benedict XVI's interest in work of Cardinal Newman makes first Papal visit to city "very likely"

Pope set to visit Oxford

By **REG LITTLE**

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POPE Benedict XVI is set to come to Oxford next year, with the historic visit timed to mark the beatification of the great Oxford churchman Cardinal John Henry Newman.

Pope Benedict would become the first Pontiff in history to visit Oxford, with the provisional itinerary of the UK visit understood to also include London, Birmingham and Edinburgh.

Prime Minister Gordon Brown extended an invitation during an audience with the Pope in February.

And senior Catholics believe the Pope's admiration for Newman means he will seek to visit places associated with the revered Catholic thinker, who had earlier been vicar of the Oxford University Church of St Mary the Virgin in the High Street.

Beatification is effectively the final rung on the ladder to sainthood. And while the beatification is expected to take place in Birmingham, where Newman founded his Oratory, the Pope may visit a number of places in Oxford where the charismatic churchman, lived and worked.

The visit would bring tens of thousands of visitors to the city, with the visit likely to overshadow even the visit of Pope John Paul II to the UK in 1982.

Government sources leaked documents about the proposed tour last week, with Oxford featured in the draft itinerary.

Peter Jennings, press secretary to the Archdiocese of Birmingham, which covers much of Oxfordshire, said: "Pope Benedict XVI has a life-long interest in John Henry Newman. Given Cardinal Newman's strong links to Oxford, I would say a Papal visit to the city is very likely."

Cardinal Newman fam-



■ **COMING TO CITY?** Pope Benedict XVI is set to visit Oxford next year, according to a leaked itinerary. Below: Cardinal Newman



ously converted from the Church of England to Catholicism.

Born in 1801, he was accepted at Trinity College, Oxford, aged 15. Having failed to get a first-class degree, he took holy orders in the Church of England and was, for a time, a curate at St Clement's before being awarded a fellowship at Oriel College.

'Given Newman's strong links to Oxford, I would say a Papal visit to the city is very likely'

There he found others who shared his belief that the Church of England had lost its way in leading the nation. What became known as the Oxford Movement arose out of Newman's deliberations in the late 1820s and early 1830s.

In 1842, with a small group of followers, he moved from St Mary's to its small sister church in Littlemore, where he converted some abandoned stables into a 'college'.

Three years later, he took the decision to become a Roman Catholic, a shatter-

ing blow that reverberated across England, described by Gladstone as an event of "calamitous importance".

He died in Birmingham in 1890, aged 89.

Deacon John Sullivan, 70, who will visit Oxford in November, claims he was cured of crippling back pain after praying to Newman.

Mr Sullivan later claimed he had decided to pray for the intercession of Newman after watching Father Ian Ker, a Burford priest and expert on Newman, being interviewed about the cardinal on television the previous year.

Mr Sullivan claims he was able to walk and had become completely free of pain after the prayer. Pope Benedict XVI cleared the way for the beatification of Cardinal Newman in July after he recognised the cure as a miracle.

Confusion over city green belt threat

From front page

"This outcome means the Government can formally consider the alternatives for the urban extension to the city and then the city council is confident that the best option will remain south of Grenoble Road.

"We anticipate that the Government needs to do a piece of work that identifies a number of options, assesses them and comes to a conclusion as to where any addi-

tional housing should be planned. This further work, including further consultation and the final publication of the plan, will take just under six months."

But Michael Tyce, of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, which issued one of the successful legal challenges, said: "This is not only good news for the green belt, but for Oxford too."

"Following the decision to accept the validity of CPRE's challenge,

the strategy for Oxford will now have to be reconsidered. We are confident that common sense will now prevail, and all thought of Oxford being allowed to sprawl over the green belt will be abandoned."

But some green belt campaigners privately admitted concerns that a full-scale review would open a Pandora's box, leading to developers 'coming out of the woodwork' with new housing schemes.



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