

A historical perspective of the parish of

St Mary's and Ladychapel

April 22

Maynooth is placed amongst the richest heritage and historical regions in Ireland. Its role in Christian development is greater still, with a chronicle of change and progression over 1600 years dating from the arrival of St Patrick in the 5th century. This study of the Maynooth parish encapsulates some of this Christian experience through the centuries.

To quote from Fr Brendan Supple's pamphlet in 1990 on the 150th anniversary of the dedication of St. Mary's parish church of Maynooth "from the beginnings Christianity has been experienced in community, a community that finds its principal bond in the coming together for the Sunday Eucharist". The Parish of Maynooth was conceived within this process dating from the first mention of a church in the enclave of the Geraldine castle in 1248, to those that command the parish of Maynooth today.

The origins of the name of "Maynooth" derives from an early influential overlord of the region named Nuadha, to Magh Nuadha (Nuadha's plain)

The progress and Christian administration in and from Maynooth may be grouped under the following headings:

- a) Arrival of Christianity through the "golden age" of the monastic learning and culture
- b) The Norman period
- c) The FitzGerald dynasty
- d) Reformation and suppression of the Catholic Church
- e) Revival of the Catholic Church
- f) 17th century Ireland
- g) 18th century Ireland

h) The new Catholic church of St Mary's

1. Early Christians in Maynooth (5th to the 10th century)

The arrival of Christian culture, mainly through the conduit of Patrick, left its mark on Maynooth from the earliest. Monastic settlements followed, centred on four pillar churches and settlements bordering Maynooth, Donaghmore, Taghadoe, Confey and Laraghbryan.

Apart from remaining ruins and positions, the Ogham stone discovered in Donaghmore in 1902, testifies to early Christian origins in the district. According to experts, the stone is said to date from the late 5th century. Deciphering Ogham (Celtic writings based on Roman lettering) is said to state "Natfraich son of the kin of Trianling". Scholars have concluded that the stone (now housed in the National Museum) is of Christian origin. This assumption fits neatly with local folklore that Patrick passed this way on his pilgrim journey from Downpatrick to his penitential site of Croagh Patrick in County Mayo.

The development of monasteries led to clusters of residential occupation in the districts and the creation of an economy. Laraghbryan (Lathrach-Briuin meaning "the sanctuary of the O'Byrnes") would appear to have been the more important monastery in this group. The O'Byrnes was a powerful clan in the province of Leinster prior to the arrival of the Danes and Normans. Laraghbryan remained a religious centre through to the 17th century. A record in the Annals of Ulster noted Laraghbryan as a resting place for dignitaries and church men passing through the region, such as "Cormac, scribe and bishop, slept in peace at Laraghbryan in 856". There is evidence that suggest Laraghbryan continued to be utilised by the Reformed Church into the early part of the 18th century until the restoration of current Church of Ireland of St Mary's, facilitated by Robert FitzGerald, Earl of Kildare on his return to Maynooth in 1739. Laraghbryan was also encompassed in the short lived College of the Virgin Mary from 1526 to 1535.

Sir William Petty's map of 1685 describes "a civil parish of Laraghbryan" in the Maynooth area and was, apparently, used for *civil administration*. This function was eventually abolished in 1898 in sole favour of church administration.

2. The Norman period

The arrival of the Danes in the 9th century was followed by the Normans, bringing raids on establishments and territorial wars, changing the landscape of the Maynooth region. The Great Norman, Maurice FitzGerald laid claim to substantial lands in the Maynooth plains and beyond, in the 12th century supported by the legendary Strongbow. Maurice built the castle in Maynooth in 1175 as his headquarters, constructed defensively at the confluence of the rivers Lyrene and the Joan Slade. Laraghbryan Church came under the Fitzgerald control and further strengthened the family's position with the acquisition of a prebend associated with the Cathedral of St Patrick in Dublin in 1248 (a "prebend" may be described as an institution within a diocese of which the holder "prebendary" was entitled to a fixed income and was, to a degree, independent of the bishop for the area of the prebend). Prebends as such, disappeared after 1547 after the *Act of dissolution of Collegiate Churches and Chantries*. However, an honorary title of "prebendary" was retained by both Catholic and Reformed churches for centuries after.

It was about the 12th century that most of the current diocesan structures in Ireland were put in place (Synod of Kells 1152) consolidating a myriad of smaller dioceses. The Dublin archdiocese was merged with that of Glendalough and forming the boundary that exists today. It seems reasonable to assume the extension of the Dublin archdiocese to include Maynooth and most of County Kildare including Athy into the Dublin diocese, was due to some Geraldine influence, as it covers much of the FitzGerald territory.

Within the new archdiocese of Dublin and Glendalough a list of churches in North Kildare was made by William, bishop of Glendalough, as noted:

“Nomina ecclesiarum Decanatus de Saltu Salmonis”. Which translates as; “names of churches in the deanery of the Salmon Leap (Leixlip)”

- a) Confey
- b) Taghadoe
- c) Laraghbryan
- d) Maynooth (current Church of Ireland St Mary’s)
- e) Donaghmore

Interesting to note “Saltu Salmonis” also lends its name to the local baronies i.e. North and South Salt.

Note also, Bishop William’s list refers to “churches” not parishes. It would appear that the early version of the “parish” was the prebend which relates not only to the church, but areas surrounding the church. However, the governance of a prebend differed from the concept of parishes, in that the local landlord had an input in the appointment of the prebendary with the bishop, and apparently enjoyed part of the income from the prebend. The prebend of Maynooth is a fine example, where the Earl of Kildare had certain controls dating from the 12th to the 16th century. During the Reformation and the fall of the FitzGerald, the Crown took control of the Maynooth prebend, for a short period, before reverting to the Reformed Church. Governance of Catholic churches returned to the control of the bishops with detailed structure of parishes legislated at the synod of Kilkenny in 1614. Parish priests in Maynooth claimed the title “prebendary” intermittently from research, right through to the 19th century i.e. Fr John Cainen.

3. Early rise and fall of the FitzGerald dynasty

As mentioned above, the arrival of the FitzGerald in the 12th century was marked by a consistent rise in power and influence of the FitzGerald, on the political and religious fronts up to the 15th century, as reflected in titles awarded by the English Monarchy i.e. Baron of Offaly, Earl of Kildare and Lord Deputy of Ireland. In fact by the time of the accession of the great Earl Garret Mór to the title of 9th Earl of

Kildare in the late 15th century, it was said the FitzGeralds had all but total governmental control of Ireland. While Garret Mór ruled with an “iron fist” e.g. burning the cathedral on the Rock of Cashel as he thought the bishop was inside, he did conceive a plan for a college in Maynooth. His son Garoid Óg built on his father’s wishes and founded the College dedicated to the Virgin Mary in 1526.

Thus Maynooth was not only the de facto political capital but becoming the ecclesiastical capital as well. The new college encompassed the present Church of Ireland Church into the chancery of this college (its tower formed part of the curtain walls of the college). The new college also incorporated Laraghbryan. However, Henry VIII efforts to subdue the Earls of Kildare succeeded in 1535. Garoid Óg was held at the Tower of London at this time, and based on uncorroborated adverse news, his intemperate son Silken Thomas rebelled against British authority in Ireland. In a few short years the FitzGerald Empire succumbed to Henry’s power and all possessions including the college and castle were forfeited to the Crown.

4. The Reformation

The castle, possessions and titles were returned to the FitzGerald’s some 20 years after the forfeiture in 1535, with the accession of Elizabeth I to the throne. However, the FitzGerald dynasty’s influence on Ireland was greatly weakened. The Catholic Church was outlawed and suppressed in favour of the Reformed Church with allegiance to the throne. Indicative of such suppression, the Dublin Catholic diocese was without an archbishop from 1560 to 1600. As control of the churches changed resulting from the Reformation, the Catholic Church moved towards a concept of “parish” cutting out prebends. Although, some parish priests, retained the title of prebendary e.g. Fr. Laurence Archibald was listed as “prebendary” and was also parish priest of Maynooth 1640-1669. A list of prebendaries dates from 1248 to 1535 when Richard Johnson was presented the prebend of Maynooth by the Crown.

It is worth noting that the first parish priest listed in the church today, Fr. Symon Walshe, according to research by Fr Michael McSweeney (Parish Priest of

Maynooth 1937 to 1947), was among 35 prisoners taken by Skifington during his assault on the Castle in 1535, most of who were executed.

With restoration of the FitzGerald, with properties and titles, this family protected many Catholic clergy and people at the castle, as this community suffered under the reign of Elizabeth 1 for the rest of the 16th century.

5. 17th Century Ireland

As the Stuarts succeeded to the British throne in 1603 with James I, an apparent easing of the suppression of Catholics in Ireland occurred, although regulations hindered the supply of priests mainly with the elimination of seminaries during the Reformation. Addressing this issue, the Jesuit order founded an Irish college in Salamanca, Spain, from which many Irish were educated to priesthood. The successor to Fr Symon Walshe is listed as John Boyan and was probably trained in Salamanca. Although not much is known of this man, except for a will proved in 1604. It appears that he administered in the Maynooth district during the suppression in the late 16th century and under the alias of "Bradley". He was apparently succeeded by Fr. John Coppinger sometime after his death. The parishes of Maynooth and Leixlip were united from the beginning of the 17th century, a union that continued until the late 20th century. John Coppinger was a product of Salamanca and being a distant relation of the Maynooth FitzGerald, Sir Edward FitzGerald, was well protected. Meanwhile the organisation of Catholic Church was re-constituted at the Synod of Kilkenny in 1614, with fixed pastors assigned to each district or parish, including Maynooth listing John Coppinger as Parish Priest.

Interesting to note the conditions of the churches in the North Kildare, about this time, as noted by the protestant Archbishop Bulkeley in 1630

- a) Leixlip: "The church and chancel are ruinous all parishioners are Catholics except one or two families"
- b) Confey: "The church and chancel are in good repair ...all parishioners are Catholics"

c) Laraghbryan; “The church and chancel are in good repair, but the roof of the chancel is uncovered. The tithes are worth £100 per belonging to John Parker, prebendary of Maynooth....all parishioners are Catholics

A list of townlands in the Maynooth parish in 1640 shows the owners and their religious denominations. The vast bulk of land, 3,000 acres was owned by George FitzGerald, Earl of Kildare and a Protestant. Names of these town-lands are those known today (although spellings differ) and were almost entirely owned by members of the Reformed Church. Only one is listed as being owned by a Papist, James Eustace, 21 acres at “Ballingorme” presumably Ballygoran.

Michael McSweeney, the Catholic archbishop of Dublin in 1632 noted “at the present time we enjoy a slight toleration, while exercising our religion in private houses”.

Fr Laurence Walsh succeeded Coppinger as parish priest of Maynooth, soon after Coppinger’s death in 1641 as the country went into rebellion. Led mainly by a confederation of old aristocratic Catholic families i.e. O’Neills of Ulster (Phelim and Own Rua), and old English Catholic families, loyal to Charles 1, took the opportunity to try to recover seized lands i.e. during the plantation of Ulster, as civil war raged in England between parliament and the Crown.

Laurence Walshe was active in the area around this time siding with the Confederates. According to Gerald Fitzgerald, 5th Duke of Leinster, in a talk delivered in 1890, Walshe participated in an attack on Maynooth castle, which was occupied at the time by the 14th Earl of Kildare. Many valuables were seized and animals stolen, leaving a group in possession of the castle. The castle was eventually destroyed by Own Roe O’Neill in 1647 as part of this rebellion. Note the Castle Church was restored to an extent during this time, only to relapse into disrepair on the death of the 16th Earl in 1656.

Laurence Walshe was succeeded in 1650 by Fr Laurence Archibald. In addition to being Parish Priest he also held the honorary title of “Prebendary of Maynooth” from 1640 to 1669.

Cromwell's campaign of terror in 1649 led to more destruction in Ireland and great loss of life. Some 3,500 known lives were lost in Drogheda including 2,700 royalist troops loyal to Charles I. While the 1641 rebellion was motivated by a powerful loyalist Catholic class, Cromwell's campaign not only crushed the rebel loyalists but further subdued the whole Catholic community.

The restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1658 under Charles II offered a level of relaxation of the Penal code in Ireland after years of violent turmoil. Many prominent Catholic aristocracy recovered estates and other property. The Talbot family acquired Carton under Richard, styled "Earl of Tyrconnell". His brother, Peter, became Archbishop of Dublin and governed the diocese at a time when Oliver Plunkett was Archbishop of Armagh. Richard Talbot remained close to the monarchy and retaining his pre-rebellion position on the restoration of Charles II. Talbot was closer to the King's brother, James (a Catholic), who succeeded to the throne in 1687 as James II. Talbot sided with James at the Boyne and as a consequent to this defeat, had his properties forfeited (including Carton) to the crown under William III (son-in-law of James).

The penal code remained on the statutes for the rest of the 17th century although not consistently applied. One of the effects of the penal code was the enforced concealment and destruction of contemporary documents, as such would provide incriminating evidence of continued loyalty to Rome. This resulted, in most cases, in the loss of parochial registers and records for most of the 17th century. Surviving documents were imperfectly kept with almost complete absence of all Episcopal or diocesan papers, rendering it exceedingly difficult to present anything more than mere scraps of information. One of these precious surviving scraps of records was a list of thirty-eight parish priests and thirty curates, registered in the diocese of Dublin in 1697 including Fr John Duff of Maynooth.

6. 18th Century Maynooth

The continued application of the penal code continued right through the 18th century although inconsistently so and circumvented to suit the needs of benevolent landlords. It was not uncommon for landlords to provide secluded churches for its tenants as the 18th century progressed in Ireland. This is apparent in Maynooth, where Roque's map dated 1755 shows an old church in or around where Leinster Cottages are today, probably under the protection of the Talbots of Carton. In re-modelling of the town in the latter part of the 18th century, the Duke of Leinster cleared all random buildings including this church as he reconstructed the central town as we know it today.

Under Leinster's development of Maynooth, a new chapel was constructed in Pound Street. This building remains today, housing the Maynooth Brass and Reed band. Again this church was secluded, largely to comply with the existing penal code and for aesthetic value for an overview of the Main Street. Residents enjoyed the protection of the FitzGerald family during this century. Robert FitzGerald's (19th Earl of Kildare) returned to Maynooth in 1739 and together with his son James, provided tenants and employees of the Kildare estates with housing superior (including gardening plots) to most such classes in Ireland in the period "Leinster's stone houses".

- ❖ The career pattern of Robert FitzGerald's son James is remarkable and positively impacted the economy of Maynooth. James was politically astute, with a close relationship with the monarchy and had strategically married Emily Lennox, daughter of the Duke of Richmond, (a distant blood relative of the King). James formed a political party, euphemistically called the "Patriot Party", and presented Ireland's economic issues with some success. His progress was marked by gaining two more progressive titles, Marquis of Kildare and Duke of Leinster. As would be expected this boosted the Leinster's income and spending power, spilling over to the people in the towns and living and working on the estates.

7. Fr Clement Kelly

The first parish priest to take control of the new church in Pound Street was Clement Kelly who succeeded Fr John Duff in 1755, as Parish Priest. Kelly was a native of Maynooth, born November 20th 1708, joined the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) in 1725 in Milan and appointed to his position as Parish Priest of Maynooth in 1755, by permission of the Pope of the day (Benedict XIV). He was the 5th son of Richard Kelly and reputed to be a man of “learning and edification”. His appointment by permission of the Pope is curious as such were usually at the discretion of the bishop of the diocese. However, it is noted that the Papacy and the Jesuits were at odds during this period. The Jesuits were preaching against the absolutism of the reigning monarchs in Europe. This policy much annoyed the kings of Portugal, France and Spain, who in turn put pressure on the Pope, who incidentally had his own kingdom. The Jesuits were eventually suppressed by Pope Clement XIII in 1758 and only returned to favour in the early 19th century. Father Kelly had the honour of being the first parish priest of the new church in Pound Lane, which included an attached house, still in occupancy today. Clement Kelly died in 1777 and was interred in Laraghbryan.

A level of prosperity developed in Maynooth towards the end of 18th century, with the success of FitzGerald family. In addition the establishment of the Royal College of St. Patrick’s in 1795, the arrival of the Royal Canal and various small industries (distilleries and breweries) within the bounds of the ruined castle increased employment levels and consequently the population of Maynooth significantly. It was not long before the “new” Church in Pound Street, became increasingly inadequate in terms of congregational capacity.

Clement Kelly was succeeded as Parish Priest on his death, by Fr Andrew Ennis in 1777. Ennis had a similar role in Finglas for 3 years and during his tenure in Maynooth, he introduced the first formal register of Baptisms and Marriages, which regularly came into effect in 1806. Some records refer to periods prior to this. Ennis’s successor was Fr Patrick Brennan, formerly of Celbridge (described as “Prebendary of Maynooth”). Brennan certified the introduction of formal registers in a written statement in 1820 “ I certify that the above Registry of Marriages,

commencing the 12th Jan 1806, has been copied verbatim by me from the directories of each succeeding year, in which the marriages had been inserted by Andrew Ennis, 7th May 1826.

8. Presentation Convent

The Presentation Sisters came to Maynooth to set up a new school for the community in 1822. The first sisters to arrive were Mother Augustine Drumgoole, Sister Andrew McKeever, Sister Peter Fitzharris and Sister M. Aloysius. They took possession of the old Charter School (a former Reform Church school) and later added Crom Abú house, former residence of John Dillon. Note also that John Dillon bequeathed £500 in his will to this Convent, described as a “Nunnery” in this will. Property was donated by the Duke of Leinster, whose family fully supported the setting up of the Convent and school. The foundation stone for the new school was laid on July 15th 1826, by Charles William FitzGerald the Marquis of Kildare and future Duke. The school grew in size and strength over the years and was greatly respected and cherished by the community of Maynooth.

9. New Church of St Mary’s, Maynooth

Fr Patrick Savage was appointed Parish Priest of the united parishes of Maynooth and Leixlip in 1831. He came from a position in the Pro-cathedral and was for a time chaplain to Loreto Convent in Rathfarnham. Patrick initiated the concept of new bigger churches for the united parishes. He succeeded in opening the doors to the new Leixlip Church in 1834; however Patrick Savage died the following year at the age of 40 before making progress on his planned larger church in Maynooth and was interred in the vaults of the Pro Cathedral in Marlborough St., Dublin.

It should be noted that the early 19th century, was time of fundamental change in the political and religious landscape in Ireland. The abolition of most of the penal code in 1829 prompted by the efforts of Daniel O’Connell (Catholic emancipation) and the abolition of the Tithes payments in 1838 empowered the Catholic Church

to develop and expand its presence. O'Connell's peaceful fight for British concessions was effective to a modest level, still leaving the vast majority of a swelling population utterly impoverished and vulnerable to the ultimate national disaster of the famine.

However, construction of new churches nationwide continued to progress from the early 19th century (some projects were stalled during the famine and used as shelters and hostels during this time, including the magnificent Pugin's cathedral in Killarney). The initial spark of funding was the abolition of the Tithes Act and the empowerment to attract private funding. With the disestablishment of the churches in 1871, resulting in termination of Government funding, reliance on public funding was crucial. However the rise in the prosperity of the Irish diasporas throughout the developing world became a significant source of funds for both churches and colleges.

Fr John Cainen followed Patrick Savage as Parish Priest of Maynooth in 1835 being transferred from Clondalkin. During his long tenure of 34 years, Cainen created most of St Mary's as we know it today. Without delay, John Cainen took up the task of managing the building of St. Mary's, being functional in 1840 and dedicated in the same year. The site was donated by Bartle Ellis which included some acres to the north and west of today's site. Ellis owned and leased lands around Maynooth including the Maws, near Kilcock and GrangeWilliam on which the cemetery of Donaghmore is situated and Donaghstown. Ellis's son and daughter-in-law are interred in a (formerly railed) plot to the right hand side of the entrance to St Mary's. Ellis was a fine example of a typical tenant of the Leinster's estates and also availed of the benefits for funding from the 1905 Windham Act to purchase freehold lands, including GrangeWilliam.

Contributors to the cost of the building St Mary's (estimated at €3,000) and subsequent major additions in the 19th century included the following:

- a) The Swords family of Crew Hill. The timing of this support may have been later and probably in respect of work on the church later, as the memorial is unclear. The greater Swords family had properties near Lady Chapel, Maynooth and Dunboyne. Back in 18th century this family had distilleries and

breweries on lands to the north of the Castle, where Kavanagh's mills were. With John Beresford (revenue commissioner) introducing legislation in 1779 on minimum distillery production, many smaller distilleries were closed, including Maynooth's 4 distilleries by 1803. Some were converted to breweries including one situated on Swords property leased to James Casey. Thomas Swords was an influential property owner at the turn of the century and was instrumental in the construction of Mill Street (originally named "William Street" after the second Duke) including the bridge over the Lyreen. Prior to its construction, traffic heading west burrowed its way through the Castle. Thomas retained ownership of the west side of this new street. Memorials at the Church over the holy water fonts at the entrance to the transepts, commemorates the passing of Annie Marie Swords of Crew Hill in 1844. Latin translations suggests that the memorials were erected by a child of Annie Marie Swords:

b)

"For the glory of the one God, (S.D.G.)
Pray for the soul of Annie Marie Swords,
who gave birth to me,
1844,
Requiescat in pace"

Annie is mentioned in an 1835 bequest, where leases on properties in Maynooth were redeemed in her favour.

- c) Augustus Frederick FitzGerald, 3rd Duke of Leinster, uncle of the patriot Lord Edward FitzGerald is noted to have made donations to the construction of the church.
- d) John Dillon, steward to the Duke of Leinster, who in his bequests, contributed both to St Mary's and Lady Chapel. John died on January 25th 1839 before both Churches were completed. As mentioned above, his house formed part of the new convent. The row of houses outside this property on the road to Dunboyne carries his name "Dillon's Row". He may have contributed to the cost of the original houses too. John's generosity is commemorated on mural tablets in both Maynooth and Lady Chapel. His

memorial is placed over the exit door of the south transept of St. Marys, Maynooth:

“... by act of Christian munificence in bequeathing the large sum of £4,350 for the erection of churches in Taghadoe (Lady Chapel) and the completion of that in Maynooth and other religious and charitable functions in the parishes...” presuming the inclusion of the “nunnery” – The Presentation Convent as mentioned in his will.

Also mentioned is John’s wife Mary who died on 3rd August 1868 aged 63 years and his nephew Robert Grady and his wife Maryanne.

The early 19th century saw the population of Ireland reaching new highs, prior to the disaster of the Famine, which exploded in the country from 1845. Population indicators for Maynooth (excluding the College) are as follows;

Year	<u>1817</u>	<u>1839</u>	<u>1851</u>	<u>1901</u>	<u>1939</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1981</u>	<u>2016</u>
Total	<u>1,468</u>	<u>2,056</u>	<u>1,696</u>	<u>948</u>	<u>846</u>	<u>581</u>	<u>3,388</u>	<u>14,585</u>

Another measure of population decline shows the number of marriages falling from 21 in 1839 (pre famine) to 9 in 1939 (pre war) in Maynooth. Also in the same period births went from 57 down to 22 (extracts from the parish register).

10. Structure of St Mary’s

The new Church in Maynooth was described in the “Freeman’s Journal” and “The Catholic Luminary” as “purely Gothic in style and in the shape of a cross, 90 feet in length, forty feet in breadth, with two transepts, each of 30 feet”. At this point in time, the Church had no belfry; the bell was mounted on the front apex. It was dedicated “Roman Catholic Church of the Blessed Virgin” and consecrated by Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin on 14th of June 1840. There was much splendour and rejoicing with up to 2,000 reported present according to the “Freeman’s Journal”, despite a capacity of 600. The great temperance apostle, Fr Theobald Mathew preached the sermon on the day. His popularity was further demonstrated by his following in the streets before and after the ceremony where

it was estimated that up to 30,000 people hailed his presence, as he administered the pledge on the Market Place beside the Courthouse. The Duke of Leinster entertained Matthew to refreshments in Carton House later in the day.

The attendance at the dedication of the Church included;

- a) Dr Daniel Murray, Archbishop of Dublin, chief celebrant, former president of the “Royal” College of Saint Patrick’s Maynooth.
- b) Fr John Cainen, Parish Priest
- c) Dr Renehan, St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth (renowned librarian and then vice president of St. Patrick’s College)
- d) Dr Callan. Celebrated scientist, St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth
- e) Lady Cloncurry, Earls of Cloncurry, Lyons estate (family of Emily Lawless, poet- *“Clare Coast– See Cold Island we stand here tonight on your shore...”*)
- f) Hon. Edward Lawless
- g) Hon. French, R.M., Co. Kildare
- h) Sir James Murray
- i) Lady Caroline Stanhope, sister of Charlotte, 3rd Duchess of Leinster
- j) Rev Dr. Gunn, Dean in St. Patrick’s (later created Canon i.e. Canon Gunn)

The liturgy of the High Mass covered the dedication, with the prime celebrant Archbishop Murray. The choir was under the direction of Hayden Corri with a selection of pieces from Haydn’s Masses nos. 2 and 3, Mozart’s Mass No.12, Rossini, Ricci and Corri. As the “Freeman’s Journal” wrote; “all was calculated to excite the most lively and striking emotions in all present”

Credits for arrangements for the ceremony were attributed to John Cainen, Drs O’Kelly senior and junior (note O’Kelly family plot to the South of Church), William Ellis and Patrick Malone.

With the move of religious services to the new Church, the old Church was made available to the boys’ national school. The girls were accommodated with a school in the convent, which was established some years earlier. The former priests’ house further facilitated the head school teacher. It remained a school until 1943 when a new boys’ school was built in its present location, including 2 class rooms. It is

worth noting that the new school currently in construction includes 24 class rooms and many other facilities.

11. St Marys, post dedication 1840

While the Church was functional in 1840 many additions and embellishments were made in subsequent years. John Cainen's achievements in completing the church in 1840 didn't stop there. His 34 years as parish priest was further crowned by the addition of a bell tower housing the bell mentioned above and bearing the inscription "Rev. D. J. Cainen, P.P., Rev. D.J. Whittle. C.C. From the Parishioners to the Church of the BVM Maynooth, J. Murphy founder". The current stone facade was also added at this point in time. Cainen secured the services of John Joseph McCarthy in these designs at the front of the Church. McCarthy was a renowned church architect of the day and also professor of Ecclesiastical Architecture of the Catholic University of Dublin. McCarthy was completing work on the Senior Infirmary in St Patrick's College, when Cainen secured his services. His architectural design remained Gothic Revival and handsomely upgraded the entrance appearance of St. Mary's. At this time, McCarthy had not yet secured the contract for the new chapel in the college. By way of note, McCarthy eventually won the contract for the College, despite stern competition from Pugin's son who demanded that his father's drafts and sketches should not be used should he not be employed. On legal advice McCarthy avoided such sketches and used a more ornate fourteen-century Gothic style as exemplified for most churches, fashioned from the Cathedral at Reims

John Cainen died in 1869 and is interred in the main aisle of St. Mary's, beneath tessellated pavement and marked by a slab, inscribed;

In Pace
Reverandus Joannes Cainen, Parochus
Vixit Annos 81
Oblit 1869

12. Fr John O'Rourke 1869-1887

Venerable Archdeacon John O'Rourke succeeded John Cainen as parish priest in 1869. He was noted for his literary work. He was responsible for the installation of the Austrian oak altar, which features strongly in the church today. It is said it was shipped from Munich and perhaps manufactured there from oak sourced in Austria. Its construction initially partly screened a portion of the stained glass window ("Our Lady's Assumption") above the altar. Surprisingly, this window together with the west window, are dated 1870, shortly before the installation of the new altar. However, the lowering of the altar by a couple of feet during the major refurbishment of 2001/2 greatly improved the vision of the window in question. The initial Austrian wood structure only related to the main central altar, with the side altars built later.

O'Rourke also added a new piped organ, again partially obstructing the western facing window, but with great sound effects. These additions were formally introduced in January 1881, with a report in the "Freeman's Journal" stating "High Mass was performed with Schubert's music, sung by an efficient choir accompanied by organ which developed sweet and brilliant tones"

A significant donor to the cost of the piped organ was Lieut. Edward Peter Godfrey Eustace Nettlefold, Royal Artillery of Crew Hill, and Maynooth.

In the 1950s the piped organ was replaced by the current electric powered organ. Apart from the upgrade to the organ, the removal of the pipes of the old instrument, freed up the "rose" window on the west side of the Church, allowing the setting sun on summer evenings to fill the Church with rose infused light. Many churches of the 19th century were influenced to some extent by the Cathedral of Our Lady of Reims, which while reconstructed many times finally offered a defining model of Gothic art. So it was with the west window of St Mary's Maynooth and McCarthy's work mentioned above.

13. The Cullen family of Greensfield

In reading parish related history of the 19th century, the Cullen family surfaces frequently. A branch of the family lived in Greenfield house near Ballygoran. A well known member of the family Thomas, played GAA football for Maynooth and had the misfortune of suffering a head injury during a game in 1889 against Monesterevin, from which he subsequently died. He is interred in Larghbryan with a suitable memorial, stating his home as “Greensfield”. Maynooth GAA wore the colour black on the team jerseys ever since in memory of Thomas.

The Cullen’s of Maynooth were related to Paul Cardinal Cullen, a powerful prelate as archbishop of Armagh and later, Dublin. He presided over the church buildings including cathedrals, seminaries as well as expanding religious orders into schools and hospitals. His name appears on the marriage register in Maynooth for the marriage of Judith Cullen in 1871, obviously a relative. Paul is also mentioned as a relative of Bartle Ellis (donor of the lands for St. Mary’s). On his death, Cardinal Cullen was interred below the altar in Clonliffe. However, his resting place was disturbed in 2021, due to the sale of the property and re-interred in the Pro Cathedral.

14. Canon John Hunt 1887-1911

Canon Hunt completed work on the main altar by adding the side altars and new altar rails. He employed the Moonan brothers from County Louth, in adding the side altars and pitch pine seats. The Moonan brothers were engaged on the woodcarvings in the College Chapel being completed in time for the College’s centenary in 1895.

15. Parish priests who followed Canon Hunt

Fr Daniel Deasy 1911 – 1925

Fr Peter Early 1925- 1930

Fr Joseph Killeen 1930-1937

Fr Michael McSweeney followed Killeen, and during his tenure, made a significant contribution to the churches as an avid historian and researcher of records of the stories of the Maynooth district and parish in the “Irish Ecclesiastical Record”. McSweeney also commissioned the installation of the great stained glass windows in the transepts “The Kingship of Christ” and “St. Theresa of Lisieux” also known as “the little Flower” The insertion in the South window, commemorating the centenary of the Church in 1940 states in Latin and translated as follows:

“To our Lord Jesus Eucharistic King, the clergy and people of Maynooth with grateful hearts presented (this window) on the occasion of the 100th year since the blessing of this Parish Church, 18th of July 1940”

A well known parishioner of Maynooth and now an illustrious senior Mr Noel Clarke has many memories of Maynooth going back to the 1930s. He remembers the great celebrations throughout the country with the 1932 Eucharistic Congress and more locally the celebrations on the centenary of St. Mary’s in 1940. Apart from the solemn high Mass on the occasion, there was joy for the young and energetic with a carnival in the Convent grounds according to Mr Clarke. Mr Clarke was also a prominent member of the auxiliary defence forces in the Maynooth area during the 2nd World War.

Michael McSweeney’s historical records forms the basis of much of this history work and is acknowledged for providing a detailed foundation of the history of Maynooth Parish

16. Recent years

Since Michael McSweeney's departure from Maynooth Parish in 1947, he was followed by several memorable parish priests who led the community with full dedication through years of many changes.

Maintenance projects to address heating issues, and redecorating were regularly applied from the late 1950s. It was learned from senior parishioners that St Mary's fell into a state of disrepair in the early 1950s. Issues with heating systems appear to have contributed to these conditions, allowing cold and damp conditions to prevail. The system relied on an out-of-date solid fuel boiler beneath the sacristy. The installation of a new storage heating systems and repainting restored and maintained the Church through the remainder of the remaining decades. The Church was well presented in 1990 for the 150th anniversary during the tenure of Brendan Supple as parish priest.

Alterations to comply with changes made at the second Vatican Council 1962-1965, included;

- a) Removal of the altar rails to bind the congregations closer to Mass celebrations
- b) Removal of the pulpit, allowing more space for the congregation, aided by better sound amplification systems.
- c) The detachment of the Altar to allow the celebrant to face the congregation.

As the 21st century commenced, it became apparent that many years of use, had taken its toll on basic structures of the Church and rendered major repair essential, not only for St. Mary's but for Lady Chapel as well. The opportunity to address these repair issues in both churches arose with the sale of the old curate's residence near the Royal Canal harbour, which raised significant funds. It also allowed for further enhancements.

With Monsignor Alex Stenson as Parish Priest, the immense project was undertaken in 2001 and included;

- a) New lighting, heating and sound systems.
- b) The old pine seats were superbly restored.
- c) The bigger tasks included the lowering of the main altar (now a Reredos i.e. a large altar piece placed behind an altar usually of wood or stone) and levelling of all the transept floors
- d) The stained glass windows had to be removed, repaired and made weather proof.
- e) A beautiful large pelican mosaic was located in the baptismal area reflecting religious concepts, also seen in stained glass in the College Chapel.
- f) The Reredos was expertly refurbished and gilded.
- g) A new feature was the painting of the ceiling of the symbols of the four evangelists inspired in the book of the Apocalypse.
- h) The organ gallery was also reconstructed.
- i) Finally the whole church was fully repainted.

The College generously made available the use of the College Chapel for the duration of the project, which took over a year to complete. A most memorable event held in the College chapel was the memorial Mass held for those who died in the 9/11 attack.

The task of repairing, restoring of both St. Mary's and Lady Chapel was a tremendous success, gratefully appreciated by parishioners and visitors alike.

Alex Stenson, successor, Fr Liam Rigney had St. Mary's repainted in 2015 and thus retained the illustrious status of the church.

17. Leixlip Parish – devolved

With the dramatic population expansion in West Dublin and North Kildare regions, it became necessary to devolve the parish of Leixlip from Maynooth after several centuries of unification. This occurred in 1971 during the tenure of Fr Fergus O'Higgins as parish priest in the decade up to 1979. The first parish priest of the devolved Leixlip was Fr Christopher Hyland. The stand-alone status of Leixlip Parish

was further devolved with Confey qualifying as a parish in 1980. In a sense returning to the early Christian site of this name.

18. Ladychapel

The position of Ladychapel suggests a strong connection with the original monastic church at Taghadoe. The community appear to have lacked a formal church after the destructions of the Cromwellian campaign of 1649 which wiped out the last remnants of churches in many parts of the country. Mass-houses did exist according to tradition in the current cemetery area and in a building opposite the Church of Ladychapel as of today.

Legislation introduced in 1704 required every priest in the country to be registered. One such was Francis Welsh, who lived in Rathcoffey and described as parish priest of “Tatoo” a derivation of Taghadoe or the Gaelic “Teach Tua” (The house of Tua of the ancient monastic site)

An initial building of a church in the area was one on the site of Taghadoe cemetery in 1831 by the Duke of Leinster for the Church of Ireland community. However, with the Disestablishment Act of 1871, this church was dismantled in or about the same year.

As mentioned earlier John Dillon bequeathed funds on his death in 1839 for a church in Ladychapel. However construction didn't commence until the late 1850's and the church was officially dedicated in June 1863.

In the last twenty years number of renovations were carried out including the introduction of a centre aisle, a porch (with the confession box removed), and the installation of new heating system and replacement of paths. This was done in time for the 150th anniversary which was celebrated in June 2013.

Subsequently in 2021 while the church was closed because of Covid, the interior of the church was completely repainted.

19. Pastoral Centre

In the 1960's a community hall was built to serve the social needs of the parish. However, as the 21st century arrived, this came into disrepair. At the same time the Parochial House had also fallen into disrepair. It had been built around the same time as St Mary's in the 1840's and like all old buildings, needed constant attention. A project was undertaken to renovate the building.

There were increasing demands on the Boy's School as the population increased. It was decided, somewhat controversially, to demolish the Parish hall and lease the site to meet the requirements of the Boy's School.

The parish then set about building a new purpose built centre, one that served in particular the pastoral needs of the community, given that large social events could now be well catered for in other venues in the town.

It was decided to build the pastoral centre in close proximity to the church, and this required that it respected the historical nature of the nearby buildings. The parish was also mindful of cost, and set about a plan to clear the existing debt and to also have the centre built without leaving a legacy debt on the parish.

This was all achieved under the leadership of Fr Liam Rigney. The new Parish Pastoral Centre was officially opened by the archbishop of Dublin Dermot Martin on Saturday 19th May 2018.

20. Covid Times

Canon Frank McEvoy took over as parish priest in 2017. During his term Covid-19 arrived and the churches had to be closed for prolonged periods. However Fr Frank provided huge spiritual leadership to parishioners throughout this very difficult time. Thankfully we had the use of webcam (installed in St Mary's in 2013) to reach out to people, as the kitchen table became the new church. Funerals were particularly difficult for the bereaved as the normal 'coming together' of a parish in

support could no longer happen. Fr Frank ably assisted by our curate Fr Paul Kelly provided wonderful personal support to people throughout.

21. Renewal

The last decades of the 20th century brought to light horrific abuse of children by those in positions of authority. This was even more reprehensible when priests were the perpetrators. Out of this stain on the church (and the many good priests) have come strict child safeguards and a more enlightened approach.

With the decline of priests, and more forward thinking, the church began to sow the seeds of a church renewal where lay people become more involved, even central, to church leadership and parish support. 2022 sees Maynooth Parish participate in the Synod, a worldwide initiative launched by Pope Francis which is essentially a listening initiative as a precursor to a period of great change in the church.

22. Conclusion

To finalise, it seems appropriate to note Brendan Supple's words in his short history booklet produced in cooperation with Monsignor Patrick Corish of Maynooth College on the 150th commemoration of the dedication of St Mary's:

“A hundred and fifty years has added a certain venerable quality, but in the Church of a living community, age and renewal are two sides of the same coin. Courage to face the future must be rooted in a past stretching back to Laraghbryan, Taghadoe, Confey and Donaghmore “

Author: Peter Nevin
Editor: Willie Holmes
April 2022