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A SHORT SKETCH
OF THE
HISTORY
OF
The Parish Church of
ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST,
KILLOWEN, COLERAINE.

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COMPILED BY D. MACLAUGHLIN.

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COLERAINE, 1900.

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INTRODUCTION.

The following sketch of the History of the Parish and Church of St. John the Evangelist, Killowen, Coleraine, has no pretensions to be considered as an exhaustive treatise on the subject. The idea has been suggested by a few parishioners of Killowen Church, and the object is to place on record some of the leading facts connected with the Church and Parish which are within their knowledge, either actual or traditional. Probably no Parish in the Diocese of Derry has developed among its inhabitants a greater love and veneration for its Priests, its Church, and its religious associations than the Parish of St. John in Killowen, Coleraine. Its members have invariably been hardworking, struggling people, not endowed with much of this world's goods, but imbued with an active and lively faith. That their Church and its surroundings has not more appearance of modern style and grandeur is their misfortune, not their fault. They have always contributed loyally and generously to the wants of the Parish, but their best has but indifferently supplied the necessities of a Church, occupying as it does one of the most commanding and

beautiful sites in the Diocese, which its Congregation would like to see more suitably equipped for the due carrying out of all the ceremonies of their Holy Religion.

Most of the parishioners living at the time of the commencement of the building of the present Church have now passed away ; and it is simply with a view to place on record the few details which can be gleaned from the oldest members of the Congregation, and which are sure to be of interest to the rising generation, that the present notes have been made and are now published.

The compiler wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Mr. Robert M'Dermott, Coleraine, who supplied a great deal of the information ; and to the Very Rev. James O'Laverty, P.P., M.R.I.A., from whose interesting and valuable book on "The Diocese of Down and Connor" extracts and information have been obtained.

COLERAINE, DECEMBER, 1900.



ST. JOHN'S, COLERAINE.

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The present Catholic Church of St. John the Evangelist, in the Parish of Killowen, and Diocese and County of Londonderry, occupies a commanding and beautiful site on the west side of the river Bann. It is situated just outside the streets of the town of Coleraine, but is within the municipal boundary.

It was built in the year 1836 by the Rev. Daniel O'Doherty, P.P., who was then the Priest in charge of the Parish. In commemoration of his work he established the Recital of a Mass each year in the Church on the Feast of St. John the Evangelist for the benefactors of the Church.

The site for the Church, Parochial House, Schools and Graveyard was obtained from Mr. Lyle, of The Oaks, near the City of Derry. The building was begun under great difficulties and without much money, and although a good deal has since been done to improve and beautify the interior of the Church, it is agreed by all that Father O'Doherty succeeded in erecting a most substantial and beautiful building, and one which easily lends itself to further developments, both external and internal.

Before the so-called Reformation the Catholic Church of the Parish of Killowen was the Church of St. John

the Baptist. It was situated within the precincts of the present Protestant Graveyard of Killowen. In excavating for graves, the foundations of the old building were recently discovered, and from these it is certain that the site of the Church was a little north of the existing Protestant Church, and that the building ran north and south. Long after the building of the present Catholic Church of St. John the Evangelist, and the acquisition of the present Catholic Graveyard, the Catholics of the Parish of Killowen exercised the right of burial in the present Protestant Graveyard, and many Catholic families still living in the Parish have ancestors buried there.

During the progress of some excavations made in the Protestant Graveyard within the last twenty years a grave was discovered in which the body had been laid in the opposite direction to those surrounding it. In this one the head was towards the east, all the others being towards the west. Tradition says that this is the grave of "Friar MacManus," who ministered in the Parish of Killowen about the year 1793.

After the loss of the old Church in Killowen, the only place the Catholics of the Parish had for the celebration of Mass was a glen called "The Mass Walk." It is situated within the present demesne lands of Somerset, the residence of Major J. A. Torrens, J.P. The Somerset estate, which belongs to the family of Major Torrens, was originally one of the estates granted at the time of the Plantation to some of the London Companies, and in the old charters and grants it is described as the "Manor of St. John the Baptist."

There was, of course, no building at the "Mass

Walk." The only place of meeting was a deep hollow beside a stream, sheltered by blackthorn bushes and shrubs. This place is situate on the left-hand side of the road from Coleraine to Macosquin, and is nearly opposite the residence known as Greenmount.

The wood through which the Glen ran was then popularly known as "The Carrot Screen." This is believed to have been a corruption of "Garret Screen," so called from the name of an old and influential family then living in the neighbourhood.

About the year 1700 the first building, to replace the ancient Church, which had been confiscated, was erected. It was known as the "Wayside Chapel," and was situated at Burnside, nearer to Coleraine than the old "Mass Walk," and quite close to the present site of "Chapelfield" House, now the residence of Mr. Hercules Hughes. The old Chapel stood on the right-hand side of the road leading from Killowen to Burnside, and a well still marks the spot near to which it was built. The south gable of the building was about 40 feet from this well. When the "Wayside Chapel" was subsequently vacated for the new Church on the present site, the old building was converted by the lord of the soil into four labourers' cottages. It had never been a very pretentious building, being a plain house, 50 feet long by 16 feet wide, and having a thatched roof.

The Parish of Killowen was then much larger than at present. It extended on the west side of the Bann from near Kilrea to Magilligan, and included also a large district of country, practically from Ballymoney to the sea, on the east side of the Bann. This included the

whole of the town of Coleraine. The entire portion on the east side of the river now belongs to the Diocese of Down and Connor. The "Wayside Chapel" was the only Church for the whole of this large district.

It was impossible in those days to get a site for a Catholic Church in or near to a town—in fact a line was drawn round the town of Coleraine within which Catholics dare not reside. This boundary may be roughly described as the Irish Houses on the north and west sides of the town, Tullyvanagh, or Laurel Hill, on the south, and Spital Hill on the east.

In the early years of the present century the site of the existing Church and Graveyard was procured on a terminable lease at the yearly rent of £10 from the Lyle family, of which Mr. James A. Lyle, J.P., of The Oaks, is the present representative.

In the pastorate of the Rev. Father Quinn, P.P., and Rev. Patrick O'Kane, P.P., a church was erected on the present site. This was a plain, substantial house about 60 feet by 25 feet, with the altar on the east side. The porch and entrance were on the west side, about the position of the present door of the Vincentian Room. One of the priests who officiated as Priest of the Parish was Father Paul Bradley. At this time the people from the Antrim side of the river attended this Church as their Parish Church, and the building was found to be too small for the congregation. Father Paul Bradley originated the idea of the building of the present Church. He began collecting money for the purpose, but did not remain long enough in the Parish to see it started.

The Rev. Daniel O'Doherty, P.P., succeeded Father

Bradley in the Parish in the year 1833, and during his term of office the present Church was built. He was assisted in the Parish by the Rev. B. Magill, C.C., the Rev. B. M'Namee, C.C. (at present P.P. of Omagh, and elevated to the rank of Monsignor), and the Rev. Philip Devlin, C.C., afterwards Parish Priest of the Waterside, Derry, and Doctor of Divinity.

As originally built, the altar and chancel were on the west side of the Church, but during Father O'Doherty's time they were changed to the north end of the building, their present position.

It must be borne in mind that at this time the Parish of Killowen included the whole of the town of Coleraine, and it was by the united efforts of the people on both sides of the river, who subscribed generously, that the Church was built. When the work was completed there was only a debt of £100 on the building, but owing to the unfortunate division of the Parish, which took place about this time, the efforts of the parishioners on the Antrim side of the river were lost to St. John's, and the portion of the congregation residing on the west or Derry side—by far the poorest portion—were left to undertake the payment of the debt and the future support of the Church.

The proceedings in connection with the division of the Parish have now become historic, and as they are fully detailed in F. O'Lavery's book on the History of the Diocese of Down and Connor, they need not be further referred to here. For the benefit of those who have not read the account it is only right to mention that a claim was made by the Bishop of Down and Connor to

the part of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Killowen lying on the east side of the River Bann. This was resisted by the Bishop of Derry, and an appeal to Rome was the result. Commissioners were appointed to hold a local inquiry, which was held in Coleraine. Witnesses were examined on both sides. The hearing, which took place in Davock's Hotel (now the Clothworkers' Arms), before the Primate and the Bishops of Kilmore and Ardagh, lasted during the 9th, 13th, 14th, and 17th October, 1834. The evidence taken was submitted to the authorities in Rome, with the result that the claim of the Bishop of Down and Connor was confirmed.

In 1842 the Rev. Charles Flanagan, P.P., succeeded to the Parish of Killowen, and with his advent a new era of progress set in for St. John's. While too much praise cannot be given to Father O'Doherty for his building of the present Church, it is to the zeal and energy of Father Flanagan that we owe most of the present internal developments and improvements. He found little than four walls roofed in containing an altar, and he left it a Church of which any country congregation might be proud.

Prior to his time there was only an earthen floor in the Church. His first work was to have this replaced by a wooden one. The window frames had been of iron. These were found unsuitable, and were replaced by the present Gothic windows of wood. The present seats were put in, and the porch as now existing was built. The gallery was also erected by him. The chancel till then only extended across the High Altar. Father Flanagan had it much improved and extended the whole way across the Church. The present side altars were

also erected, and the five stained glass windows over the sanctuary put in by him. Confessionals were erected, and the two large statues procured for the High Altar. The Parochial House and Schools were built by him, and also the small Gate Lodge at the entrance. Father Flanagan remained in the Parish till the year 1863, when he removed to Dungiven, where he remained till his death.

During the pastorate of Father Flanagan subscriptions were raised from the people of the Parish by means of a tax annexed on the different families according to their means. It was cheerfully paid, and continued to be collected for about 5 years. Money was also raised by a course of lectures delivered by the then Bishop of Derry, Most Rev. Dr. Maginn and the Rev. Dr. Cahill. Father Mathew, the great Temperance Apostle, also preached a charity sermon in aid of the Parish funds. He subsequently visited St. John's in the course of his Mission of Temperance and was well received, large numbers receiving the Temperance pledge at his hands.

An important incident in the life of the Congregation of St. John's was the establishment in the Parish of a Conference of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the year 1860. It was of course affiliated to the Head Conference in Dublin, and from the time of its establishment in the Parish to the present it has steadily and uninterruptedly pursued its way. Of course with limited means and numbers no very remarkable works were within the scope of the Society, but it has always been noted in the spirit of its founder for practical and unostentatious dispensing of charity, coupled with zeal and

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attention to their religious duties by its members. Father Flanagan was the first spiritual Director of the Conference.

The following extracts from the minutes of the Society are interesting, as showing the condition of the Parish at the time, and also noting the fact of the establishment of the Circulating Library which has since been carried on in connection with the Church:—

“APRIL 12th, 1863.

“The Council of Ireland have given much anxious attention to the consideration of the question whether the assistance they have asked from the Continent might not be in part applied to help the small farmers now suffering so severely to obtain seed to crop their lands. Before they decide upon applying any part of the funds coming to their hands to this purpose they are anxious to obtain the opinion and advice of the Conferences in the neighbourhood of the most distressed rural districts as to the practicability of bringing any effectual relief, even to a few of that sorely tired class.

“The Council propose to set apart such a sum as would enable them to give about £20 to each Conference which has to contend with this particular distress, that sum to be augmented by subscriptions from local sources, the fund thus realized to be applied in grants to small farmers to be selected by the Conferences, and in order not to offend the susceptibilities of those intended to be benefited the advance might be made by way of loan, to be paid after harvest, but the repayment not to be enforced by legal proceedings. The names of the recipients might

be entered in the Conference relief books by letters (not being initials of their names) in order that no permanent record might remain of those who resorted to the Conference in the season of severe poverty.

“At the same time particular care should be taken in keeping accurate and detailed accounts of the receipt and distribution of the fund; while in order to prevent the possibility of any suspicion attaching to the mode of distribution no relative or connexion of any member should be eligible for assistance.

“We will feel much obliged, sir and dear brother, by your letting us know the views of your Conference on the above proposition and suggestions. As the time for putting in the seed is rapidly passing over we have to request the favor of your reply with as little delay as possible.

“We remain, sir and dear brother,

“Yours faithfully in J.C.,

“JOHN BRADSTREET, President.

“HENRY DEVITT, Hon. Sec.

“The President of St. John's, Coleraine.”

The following reply was forwarded to the letter of the Council of Ireland which has been transcribed in the two preceeding pages:—

“CONFERENCE OF ST. JOHN, COLERAINE,

“13TH APRIL, 1863.

“SIR AND DEAR BROTHER,—

“The Conference of St. John's, Coleraine, having had before them the circular of the Council of Ireland,

dated 10th April, inst., have desired us to say in reply—

“That from an intimate acquaintance with the present condition of the small farmers in this district, and presuming that the condition of that class is as bad (perhaps in some places worse) in other parts of Ireland, the Conference is of opinion that the money could not be more advantageously applied, nor a better mode of distribution selected, than the manner proposed in the circular.

“A succession of three bad harvests has exhausted all the resources of several small holders, and without assistance from some quarter their land must remain uncropped. This state of things, while ruinous to the poor man so circumstanced, is also a loss to the community by depriving the market of so much food as would otherwise have been produced. But this is not all. For years past it has been the policy, generally speaking, of landlords in this part of the country to increase the size of the holdings on their property, and almost in every instance a Protestant is preferred to a Catholic as tenant, so that if any of our people be evicted for non-payment of rent their places will be supplied by Protestant, and thus a considerable help will be given to the system which is slowly but steadily being pursued.

“The Conference are not unmindful of the non-sectarian character of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, but they would not think it a breach of rule, when allocating money to needy farmers, to keep in view the serious difficulties which Catholics, as compared with others, have to contend in order to retain possession of their holdings.

15
“ Should the Conference determine to allocate any sum to this Conference they hope to be able to supplement it by some subscriptions or loans, and hope to be able to render assistance to some deserving objects.

“ We are, sir and dear brother,

“ Faithfully yours, **1813497**

“ P. M'LAUGHLIN, President.

“ ED. QUINN, Secretary.

“ The President of the Council of Ireland.”

Under the date of the 6th September, 1863, the following minute is recorded :—

“ The President having announced a valuable gift of books presented to this Conference by the Rev. Charles Flanagan, P.P., on the occasion of his removal to another Parish, the following resolutions were adopted—

“ Proposed by Robert M'Dermott, seconded by William M'Laughlin, and carried unanimously,

“ That by the removal of Mr. Flanagan we feel that this Conference has lost a valuable adviser, and a generous contributor to its funds.

“ That the best thanks of this Conference are due and are hereby given to the Rev. Charles Flanagan for his valuable donation to the Conference, consisting of a library of over 200 volumes.

“ That the Secretary do forward a copy of these resolutions to the Rev. Charles Flanagan, and at the same time assure him of the lively interest we will always feel for his welfare in whatever place his duties may call him.”

16 At the same meeting of the Conference rules were drawn up for the conduct of the Library, providing for its being kept open for half-an-hour each Sunday after Mass, and that the monthly subscription for each member be twopence.

The Parish of Killowen possesses two other churches besides that of St. John the Evangelist—one at Milltown, Dunboe, and the other at Aghadowey. The Church at Dunboe was built by Father Flanagan in the year 1855. Before that time the use of a portion of a building in the demesne of Downhill Castle, known as "The Temple," was given by the Earl of Bristol, the then owner of the estate, to the Catholics of the district for the celebration of Mass on Sundays and Holydays. In consideration of their giving up any claim to the "Temple" the site of the present Church in Dunboe was granted free by Sir H. H. Bruce, Bart., in the year 1855.

About the same year the Church in Aghadowey was greatly improved by the laying down of a wooden floor, the erection of seats, and the enclosing of the grounds. A new Church has just now been finished in Aghadowey. The erection of this handsome edifice is due to the exertions of the Rev. B. Mulholland, P.P., the present Priest of the Parish, who went to America and succeeded in raising the necessary funds.

Father Flanagan was succeeded in the Parish by the Rev. Edward O'Doherty, Adm., and after him came the Rev. Henry Henry, P.P., who had been formerly a Curate of the Parish in the Aghadowey district. The next Parish Priest to be appointed to the Parish was the

Very Rev. Edward O'Brien, D.D., formerly a Professor in Maynooth College. With the advent of Father O'Brien to the Parish a new stimulus was given to the religious life of the Parish. Ceremonies were carried out with an attention to detail of ritual not before attempted. He also effected considerable improvements in the interior of the Church. The present Altar of St. Joseph was erected by him. The approaches to the Gallery and Pulpit were altered and improved, and the Vestry made much more accommodating. He also presented the Stations of the Cross now in the Church.

On the departure of Father O'Brien for Limavady in the year 1890 the present pastor, the Rev. Bernard Mulholland, P.P., was appointed to the Parish.

As has been already pointed out, he has done a noble work in building a beautiful Church in Aghadowey. None of his predecessors have ever shown a livelier interest in the history or tradition of the Parish or in the spiritual and temporal welfare of its people. Looked at from the point of view of this world's goods, his lines are not cast in pleasant places, but while he has the good wishes and affectionate regard of his people, and their appreciation of his earnest efforts in their behalf, it is to be hoped he will feel in a small way rewarded by being the worthy successor of a noble line of zealous Priests, and the champion of the Faith in a Parish which has always been as a citadel in the midst of the fortifications of the enemy.

Any description of the present condition of St. John's Church would be incomplete without a reference to the beautiful stained glass window in the centre of the east

18 side. This window was erected in the year 1892 by Robert Ferris, Esq., J.P., Coleraine, at a cost of £130, as a memorial to his wife. The colouring is most artistic and effective, and the entire design, which was carried out by the eminent firm in Munich, Messrs. Mayer & Co., adds beauty to the Church, and reflects credit on the donor.



APPENDIX.

The following particulars as to the Priests of Killowen Parish are taken from Father O'Lavery's Book on the Diocese of Down and Connor, Vol. IV.:—Father Terence Rogers was Parish Priest at the period of the Revolution; he is Turlough M'Rory, who in 1704 was fifty-four years of age, residing in Dunlogan, and then Parish Priest of Ballynascreen. Father Cornelius M'Laughlin was P.P. in 1704, John Bradley or O'Brolloghan was Dean of Derry and P.P. in 1743. Matthew Rogers (or M'Rory) died in 1767. Father Henry Walls, John Walls, John M'Laughlin, James Ward, Mathias M'Cusker, Patrick M'Kenna, Bernard M'Namee, Charles M'Caffrey from 1802 till 1806. James Quinn; Patrick O'Kane died in 1828.

"Our Parish Roman Catholic Priest died during our absence, and was attended to the grave by the most numerous assembly that ever was seen to follow a funeral in Coleraine, and these principally Protestants; all our clergymen of the Establishment, and Presbyterians, Seceders, and Methodists—all attended—scarfs and hatbands. I wish our newspaper friends would insert the account of this funeral to the credit side of Coleraine."—Letter in the *Chronicle*, April 22nd, 1828. Father Paul Bradley, Daniel Dogherty, Charles Flanagan (born about 1798, ordained in 1829, was C.C. of Lavay, C.C. Culdaff, C.C. Buncrana, appointed P.P. Killowen in 1843, built the Church of Dunboe, appointed Parish Priest of Dungiven on the 20th of August, 1863). Father Edward Dogherty, the succeeding P.P., died March 25th, 1873. Father Henry Henry was appointed June 19th, 1873, and on his appointment to the Parish of Ballynascreen, October, 1884, the present Parish Priest, Father O'Brien, was appointed.

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