

The Establishment & Growth of St. Patrick's Ringsend

Ringsend, as a separate parochial unit, is of comparatively recent origin. But its ecclesiastical history has its roots deep in the past.

Up to the year 1876, says Bishop Donnelly in his erudite History of Dublin Parishes, the four parishes of Irishtown, Donnybrook, Ringsend and Sandymount, formed but one. Donnybrook, anciently Domhnach Broc, i.e., Church of Broc, was formerly the designation of a village of very ancient origin clustered around a church founded by a holy woman named Broc, and dedicated (according to tradition) to the Blessed Mother of God. Broc is mentioned in the works attributed to Aengus the Culdee. This would indicate that she flourished at the end of the eighth or the beginning of the 9th century. She established a convent of nuns, and, in the martyrology of Donegal, Mobi, a nun of Donnybrook, is noticed.

The old Celtic church of St. Broc, which occupied the site of the still existing Churchyard, was standing at the time of the Norman invasion, and to this period may be attributed the beginning of the parochial history. Donnybrook had been accounted a member of the Church of Tancy or Dundrum, a great monastic centre in Celtic days, and with the advent of the Normans, Donnybrook continued affiliated to Dundrum. Such was the position during the administration of St. Laurence O'Toole and his immediate successors, John Comyn and Henry de Lemdes.

It was not until 1787, however, that Ringsend attained parochial status. The new parish of Donnybrook, Irishtown and Ringsend was created, and the then Archbishop selected as the first Parish Priest quite a young man, only just ordained, The Rev. Peter Richard Clinch, who attacked his task with enthusiastic zeal. The first fruit of his energy was the erection of a chapel at Donnybrook. As soon as it was in a fit condition, Father Clinch began to say his second Mass at Donnybrook each Sunday and holiday, having said his first at Irishtown.

When only five years in charge of the parish, he got an accidental blow of boat oar which broke his jaw. From the effects of this he soon afterwards died. This tragic end to a promising career

evoked universal sympathy and amid the deep regret of Catholics and Protestants alike, he was interred in St. Matthew's Churchyard, Ringsend, where his tombstone may still be seen. The following epitaph is inscribed on the stone: -

“To the memory of the Rev. Peter Richard Clinch, Roman Catholic Pastor of this Parish, who died on the 29th Dec., 1791, in the 29th year of his age, and the fifth of his mission”.

In 1792, Dr. Finn was appointed to succeed Fr. Clinch, and survived until 1849, achieving the remarkable record of being fifty-seven years Parish Priest of one parish.

At this period, the days of religious persecution were waning, and the spirit that inspired the Penal Laws was slowly but steadily receding into an inglorious past. Catholic Emancipation was at hand. Dr. Finn was destined to have a close and intimate contact with the Liberator.

Towards the middle of the last century the steady increase in the Catholic population of the area made the erection of a new church necessary, and in 1851, the first stone of the “Star of the Sea” Church was laid. The work progressed rapidly, but disaster supervened. In Christmas week of 1852 a terrific storm raged for two or three days around Dublin. Trees, roofs, and entire houses were demolished by it. The new church was ready for roofing when the storm burst and front and rear gables, with their elaborate Gothic windows, went down before it. However, on the Feast of the Assumption, 1853, the Church was solemnly dedicated by His Grace, Archbishop Cullen.

But the new church in Sandymount did not prove quite satisfactory to the villagers of Ringsend. It was farther removed than the old chapel at Irishtown, and even though much larger and infinitely more commodious, such was the rapid increase in the population of both districts that it was already beginning to prove insufficient for the claims made upon it.

In these circumstances Dr O'Connell, the then Parish Priest, secured the assignment of a lease from James Patrick Curran, who had obtained it only the year previous. This gave the plot of

ground on which St. Patrick's now stands, for 80 years and six months, at a yearly rental of 128. On the plot stood two buildings, one allocated to an Evening School, subsidised by the Local Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the other used as a Presbytery, in which the Sisters of Charity from Sandymount conducted a Sunday school for girls.