

CHAPTER SEVEN

Rathcoole Village and Church Tallaght Church

This chapter deals briefly with the village of Rathcoole; St. John's sister church in Rathcoole and her clerics over the years; and St. Maelruain's church, Tallaght, formerly in a Union with Clondalkin and Rathcoole.

Rathcoole Church of Ireland church was united with Clondalkin in 1963, following a re-grouping programme by the Church of Ireland Diocesan Council. This fact warrants the inclusion of Rathcoole in our parish history. The ancient name "Radcul" appears in various records relating to the 'burgesses' of Radcul and pastures belonging to Lucas, the Archbishop of Dublin.

In 1837, according to Lewis, Rathcoole was a post town and parish, in the Barony of Uppercross, County of Dublin, and Province of Leinster, 8 miles S.W. from Dublin on the road to Naas, with 1409 inhabitants. It contained "112 houses irregularly built, and had a patent for holding Fairs on April 23rd, June 18th and October 9th".

Lewis mentions 'Johnstown' as the principal Gentleman's seat in the area — "the handsome residence of J. Kennedy, Esq., in a tastefully disposed and well cultivated demesne of 200 acres". Many will know "Johnstown Kennedy" by its television name "Shreelane House" with its Resident Magistrate, Major Sinclair Yeates, for the well-loved television series "The Irish R.M." (based on the book written by Somerville and Ross) was filmed there. "Johnstown Kennedy" now stands derelict, its future uncertain.

Lewis also says that Rathcoole formerly gave the title of Viscount to the family of Tracey, to which James Tracey, Esq., of Geashill in King's County was prosecuting his claim before the House of Lords in 1837.

The church is situated in an elevated position at one end of Rathcoole's Main Street which was, until recently, part of the main road from Dublin to Naas. Very little is known about the history of the church as all parish records were destroyed by the fire in the Public Record Office in 1922. As far as we can ascertain, the church was built in 1714, replacing an older one with monastic connections. Lewis described the church as being a "neat, plain

building which had recently received £111 from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners". The church paid £310 in tithes to the Deanery of St. Patrick's, £60 of which was paid to the Dean and the rest to the Dean's Vicar. The tithes were financed by ground rents in Rathcoole village. Rathcoole church was united in 1837 with Calliaghstown, described as being a "chapelry of Rathcoole".

On the 18th August, 1859, plans were drawn up to modernise the church and remove the box pews, the idea being that the congregation would pay more attention during the service if they were facing the preacher!

On October 6th, 1895, the Reverend William Francis Leathley Shea was instituted. At that time, the Glebe house was the old Mercers School building in Rathcoole village, the school having removed to Castleknock in the 1820s. The Rev. W. F. L. Shea retired in 1952 and is believed to be the longest serving Rector of one parish in the Church of Ireland.

In the 1950s, the congregation dropped to around five and local rumours started that the church was to close but parish determination saved it. Today, the congregation averages about twenty-five.

Inside, the church is small but pleasing and well-tended, with a beautiful stained glass window at the eastern end depicting the Angel at the Tomb with Mary Magdalen, the other Mary and Salome. From the gallery at the western end of the church, one can see the whole of Rathcoole Main Street. Many of the furnishings in the church result from the benevolence and long association of the Kennedy and Verschoyle Campbell families. One surprising fact is that, until the 1950s when electricity was installed, all services were held during daylight hours as there was no way of lighting the church.

An interesting graveyard surrounds the church. A boundary cross similar to that in St. John's graveyard can be seen at the rear and there are numerous 18th and early 19th century headstones and various uninscribed stones marking graves.

Today, there is close co-operation and unity between Rathcoole and Clondalkin parishioners



RATHCOOLE CHURCH

Interior of Rathcoole Church. United to St. John's Clondalkin since 1963.

Photo: Roy H. Byrne

with the sharing of the school and hall facilities in Clondalkin, and many social events.

Rathcoole Clerical Succession List.

- 1639 Rev. Christopher Cardiffe
- 1645 Rev. Henry Birch
- 1662 Rev. Edward Lovelace
- 1674 Rev. William Williamson (Prebendary of Kilmactalway)
- 1703 Rev. Thomas Theaker (Prebendary of Tassaggart)
- 1714 Rev. Edward Drury (Prebendary of Tassaggart)
- 1737 Rev. Roger Ford (Prebendary of Tassaggart)
- 1737 Rev. Coote Mitchell (curate)
- 1752 Rev. William Ford (curate)
- 1756 Rev. George Philips (Prebendary of Tassaggart)
- 1770 Rev. William Blachford (Prebendary of Tassaggart)
- 1771 Rev. Joseph Elwood
- 1804 Rev. & Hon. Richard Ponsonby (later Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral)
- 1806 Rev. Theophilus Blakeley
- 1806 Rev. Thomas Hayden
- 1856 Rev. William Johnson Thornhill (Prebendary of Tassaggart)
- 1895 Rev. William Francis Leathley Shea
- 1952 Rev. Herbert John Victor Packham
- 1963 Rev. Francis Robert Alexander
- 1980 Rev. Cecil Albert Faull.

According to Ball, the present church was built during the incumbency of the Rev. Edward Drury.

Tallaght Church.

The parish history of St. John's church, Clondalkin, would not be complete without a mention of St. Maelruain's church, Tallaght. The foundation of Tallaght's Monastery dates from the 7th century. We are told that St. Maelruan (or Maelruain) died in 792 and he had rebuilt and enlarged the Monastery. As Bishop, he was called the "Bright Sun of Ireland" and, under his presidency, peace, piety and plenty prevailed throughout the ecclesiastical houses of this island.



MEDIAEVAL CROSS
Rathcoole graveyard



REV. WILLIAM FRANCIS LEATHLEY SHEA

Incumbent: Rathcoole (1895-1952)

Photo: Parochial Archives

He, with Aengus the Culdee, compiled "The Martyrology of Tallaght", which is now preserved in the National Library at Brussels. It is so named because it was compiled in the Monastery in Tallaght. Aengus retired to his cell in Co. Limerick, but returned after many years to Tallaght, concealing his rank and disguising himself as a servant so that his vanity might be quenched. He was accidentally discovered by his old companion, St. Maelruan, and received with hearty welcomes. For more than a thousand years, St. Maelruan's memory was kept alive by an annual festival. It was only in 1874 that this festival was abolished owing to certain practices unworthy of the Saint which had crept in.

The record of the Bishops and Abbots is continuous and uninterrupted for several hundred years.

In 1324, the Archbishop of Dublin rebuilt Tallaght Castle and up to 1821 it continued to be the country residence of all his successors. In 1700, the famous Archbishop King writes from Tallaght thanking the Bishop of Down for a sum of £15 to repair the church, and "which with £15 more", enabled him to go on with the work.

Archbishop Hoadly rebuilt the Castle in 1729 on the site of the old Monastery, and with the materials he had pulled down. It was described by one who visited it "as the poorest thing of its kind he had ever seen", and "I am at a loss what to call it". Archbishop Hoadly died when Primate in Armagh and he and his wife are buried in Tallaght churchyard.

The Archbishop in 1791 was Robert Fowler and there is a manuscript account book of his in the National Library in which mention is made of his petty cash expenses, e. g. 'the caring of his melon garden in Tallaght'!

In 1821, Archbishop Beresford suggested that by an Act of Parliament, future Archbishops of Dublin should be divested of this country residence, as its buildings and offices were in a ruinous state and unfit for human habitation; a country residence was unnecessary, and the income of the See was insufficient to bear the expense of two establishments. It was, therefore, sold by Archbishop Magee to Major Palmer, and later passed into the hands of Sir John Lentaigne, who leased it to the Dominican Order. They built the present fine structure as their Monastery on the site and foundation of the old Castle.

We read that, long ago, things did not always run smoothly in the parish. The Rector was written to by the parishioners, saying that he would be unanimously reported to the Archbishop unless he attended more faithfully to his duties. The smallness of the congregation and some broken panes of glass were not sufficient excuses in their eyes for his neglect "for the past five weeks", and, if this had not the desired effect, some stronger measures would be taken!

In 1783, the Vestry suggested the erection of a throne or a suitable pew for His Grace, the Archbishop. He declined, saying that one seat should not be decorated more than another in a parish church.

In the late 1600s, it was decided to close Clondalkin parish church and unite the parish with Tallaght. This arrangement lasted for about 40 years until Clondalkin church was re-opened in 1729 and separated from Tallaght.

In 1829, Tallaght church was totally rebuilt on a site a few yards from the old church, leaving the Tower only to mark the original site. In 1924, Tallaght and Clondalkin parishes were again united under the Rev. Harold Giles Forde. In 1929, when Tallaght celebrated its centenary services, the Rector was the Rev. John Carson, B.D., and the Church Wardens were George P. Farran and Christopher R. Jolley. When the Rev. R. C. Madden was instituted as Rector in 1936, it was decided to dissolve the Union of Clondalkin and Tallaght, and to Group the two parishes instead. In October 1963, Rathcoole parish was united with Clondalkin and grouped with Tallaght under the Reverend (later Canon) F. R. Alexander.

Due to a rapid congregation increase in the Tallaght area in the 1970s, it was decided to dissolve the grouping of the parish with Clondalkin at the time of Canon F. R. Alexander's retirement in 1980 and the Rev. Sydney Laing was instituted as Rector. As the united parish of Clondalkin and Rathcoole has also expanded considerably in the past ten years, it is unlikely that Tallaght will be united again with Clondalkin in the foreseeable future, but many parish and family links will remain for years to come.