

*T*he Johnstown Kennedy Bell was donated to the Church of the Holy Family in Rathcoole to mark the church's Silver Jubilee.

During the celebrations, the late Tom Cullen was invited to ring the bell for the first time. It was far from a first for Tom as he had been tasked with ringing the bell on a daily basis when it was in use on the Johnstown Kennedy estate, and had been the last man to do so before it was removed.



For many years the bell's home was underneath a stage in the Community Centre, before it was removed by Sean Nolan (R.I.P.) of Crookshane and kept at his home for safekeeping.

The Johnstown Kennedy Bell

By,

Niall Mansfield

I was delighted to hear that the Johnstown Kennedy Bell is being erected in the village. It was once one of the most dominant sounds in the locality. I am not sure exactly how long it ran; it was there at least as far back as the mid-seventeen hundred's, 1745 perhaps. It was placed in a bell tower in the Johnstown estate as a means of timekeeping, on what was then a very large gentry estate.

The bell rang at 8.00am and all the workers were to be in to start work before the bell rang. This not only started the day's work in Johnstown Kennedy, but it gave the time to every house and home for miles around; this was at a time when very few people anywhere would own a clock. In later years the people of Killeel would set their clocks by its ring.

The sound of the bell was different to Saggart Chapel and Rathcoole Church of Ireland. It had a more-lively double beat. One little story I heard was when Tommy Cullen, who was the steward in Johnstown Kennedy, was asked by Johnny Quinn the Sacristan in Killeel Chapel to ring the bell for him as he was running a bit late with his other duties. Tommy Cullen gave the bell the double ring as he was used to doing, much to the annoyance of Johnny Quinn, who, as Tommy Cullen told me, 'danced a hornpipe with temper,' at such a sacrilegious act.

It rang again at noon, this was the start of dinner break, and it also served the double purpose as a call to prayer. Every person within its sound would stand and say the Angelus. It was a moment when the countryside around would fall silent except for the bell.

It then rang at 1.00pm to signal that dinner break was over and it was time to return to work. It next rang at 6.00pm in the evening, the end of the working day for some and again the Angelus was said. For the people of the area, particularly the people who lived within the radius of the sound of the bell, it was a sad loss of an old and treasured part of our lives when the bell was removed. The Kennedys were good people and good neighbours; a lot of the people living in the area nowadays are descendants of people who were once employed in Johnstown Kennedy estate.

A lot of other things have gone from our pre-1968 community, without a thought for the people who cared for such things. Pumps, fountains, milestones, place names, field names, road names and stone walls.

‘So welcome back to the Johnstown Kennedy Bell.’