

Ceremony of Commemoration address by Rev. Fr. William Howell P.P. St
Michael's Parish Gorey.

16th August 2016

The first burial on our registers is that of Edward Fennell on the 31st March 1800 and to this day the Fennell Family are still members of our Parish. Recently the Fennell Family replaced a very old broken tombstone while leaving the old stone to contrast with a beautifully scroll shaped headstone in our oldest section of the Graveyard – St Joseph's Section.

Over the years many Sculptors, Monumental workers, Undertakers, Grave Diggers, Committees and hardworking Cemetery Caretakers have made our Cemetery one of which we can all be proud.

The job of the Undertaker has changed over the years. To quote from Michael Fitzpatrick's "Historic Gorey 6 Book – "Gorey Undertakers over a long period of time seem to have been very family oriented while attending to the wishes of the deceased person's family, or those involved in their funeral arrangements."

During the 19th century two of these families involved in the Undertaking business in Gorey were "Bates & Sons", and Margaret Webb & Sons. These Undertakers did no discriminate between rich or poor.

In the early 1950's Laurence Murphy commenced his Undertaking business, and now, over half a century later, his son Aidan still carries on that business.

In the mid 1990's Pat & John Flood set up their Undertaking Business in Mc Dermott St - they came from a family chain working at Undertaking in Arklow.

Without the craft of Sculptors & Monumental Works, the records we display would not exist. All the names displayed on our two boards have been recorded over a 5 year period by Larry Quigley. Gorey People are deeply indebted to him for his monumental work.

The Sculptors of the town started in the early 19th Century with the Grannon Family, who were residents of the town for many years. Towards the end of

that century, once again according to Michael Fitzpatrick's research , Myles Travers of Church Street established a memorial stone works. This was a change in trade for Myles as he was a Shoe Maker, but his in laws were the Grannon's, who knew the trade well. Myles became one of the foremost sculptors in the County and his work is still to be seen in many Cemeteries, Churches and Convents in North Wexford. Myles & Tom Travers grave is to be seen here in St Bridget's Section.

With the passing of time a young John Murphy commenced Monumental Works on the Railway Road. He had the good fortune to acquire the services of John (Hawk) Travers – son of Myles Travers above.

Many of the present day sculptors served their apprenticeships in Johnny Murphy's highly respected Monumental Works – William Redmond (Gorey Stone Art) and Johnny Kavanagh (Kavanagh Monumental) and to this day, both the Redmond and Kavanagh families are still in the Monumental business along with Floods.

No Cemetery can operate without Grave Diggers and Caretakers. Today St Michael's Cemetery is loving cared for by Mr Owen Kenny, along with the trojan assistance of Denis Deegan & John Roche. The task of caring for this cemetery like the Undertakers and the Sculptors, has been handed down from generation to generation within families.

Both the Gravediggers and our Caretakers fulfil their role with respect for both the living and those interred here. Every effort is made to maintain the respect and tranquility that is expected in a cemetery , while at the same time keeping up with the times by the provision of walk ways, handrails at the steps at the Courtown Road entrance, cutting of grass and caring for graves that have no longer family able to care for them.

The Cemetery Committees have consistently helped in no small way in making this Graveyard a fine example of co-operation and hardwork within a Community. In recent years Tadhg Kelly and Pat Coady have overseen many changes in the Cemetery – always done in a dignified fashion.

Gorey families have a great tradition of taking great care of their graves and every credit is due to them. Great respect is shown by relatives whose

mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters and friends are buried here. On the last Sunday of August the annual Patron takes place. Various styles of headstones are displayed in the Graveyard. From humble headstones, celtic crosses to large marble tombs. Every effort is made to try to keep the monuments to a certain level but in recent times, despite the rules & regulations the criteria is breached. But we will keep trying to keep things simple.

On our display boards are listed approx. 4800 names. Due to the large number of names, it was impossible to list all the deceased on one sign, so the Graveyard was divided in two. The Front comprising of Saints Aidan'; Brendan'; Bridget'; John'; Joseph' and Patrick. On the display at the Courtown Road entrance all the relevant names interred in these sections are noted- Blue Sections. Two maps – one map detailing the layout of the entire Graveyard, the other an aerial view detailing the burials in St Joseph's Section.

At the Main Vehicular entrance on the Clonattin Road the overall map of the Graveyard is installed, which also gives details of where the visitor maps are situated.

The Top Section (Green) comprises of Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke, Peter & Paul Sections and similar to the other Display board all the relevant names for these sections is recalled thereon.

On the wall adjoining with the IDA Park, you will note a marble plaque in memory of all the “angels” buried at the start of St Paul's section. Unfortunately no written details of those “angels” were located, but these children always remain in our thoughts and prayers, along with all those buried here.

Approximately 300 names have been located of funerals that took place in Gorey, but the actual location of burial has not been documented in books or on the headstones here. It is known that a register belonging to Webb Undertakers was lost and perhaps if it had survived the names of these people could be on our display too.

As mentioned, Larry Quigley documented by hand all these headstones. The next step of computerising these registers was done by Carmel Roice and then with great patience CK Signs provided what we see today.

Details of what is on display is also available on the Parish website, and our thanks go to Sean Fennell for all his work on the website. A History of the Cemetery and other interesting articles have been kindly provided by Michael Fitzpatrick (local historian) . Every 6 months the Burials on the website will be updated.

It is proposed to update the boards every 4 to 5 years – but the website will keep things up to date and if any visitor or relative requires any burial details in the meantime, they can of course contact the Parish Office and every assistance will be provided.

This provision of burial details will be of keen interest to those interested in Family History and the History of Gorey. Photographs of all the headstones as of August 2015 have been recorded.

It is hoped that the People of Gorey and beyond, will say a prayer, smile and maybe shed a tear when they examine these displays in memory of all those buried here.

A stroll through St. Michael's Cemetery can be a lovely trip down memory lane – seeing the name of a neighbour you may have forgotten or maybe recalling a story about that person whose friendship you shared in a distant past.

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