

Gorey Bridge Chapel 1840

By Michael Fitzpatrick

When the Penal Laws were being enforced it was indeed a difficult time for Catholics of Gorey. The Plantation of North Wexford was much greater than other parts of the country. Under the Penal system a Catholic could not buy land, inherit it or receive it as a gift. Only registered Priests could say Mass and Catholics were forbidden to teach in a school or enter a University. The repeal of these Laws began in 1774, but it was a long process and by no means over when Emancipation came in 1829. Over the 31 years previous the people had revolted in the rebellion of 1798, and Gorey was very much part of it. We have no evidence as to the date and erection of that first little Chapel at Gorey Bridge, which formed part of St Michael's Cemetery. Just a few short years ago, I heard an old Gorey lady refer to the cemetery as "The Chapel Yard". The total area of land at that time circa 1850 was just 2 roods with a valuation of £1.0.0 per year. It is well to note that this was Courtown land, the family had a total of 23000 acres of land as late as 1914, the 5th Earl – passed it to his sons as he had received it from his father in 1858.

The Thatched Chapel was burned by the Orange faction in 1798, Gorey was no exception as a total of forty Chapels suffered the same faith – throughout the county between May and August of that year.

The records tell us that the bigotry was so great in Gorey through the 17th century and later, that no place of worship was allowed to Catholics, and for this reason Gorey became a united Parish with Kilanerin and remained so until 1845.

The Parish Priest of Kilanerin and Gorey lived at Kilanerin, and it was there the old marriage and baptismal registers were kept. An interesting incident which occurred in one of these old registers. Many years ago I discovered the name "Rogers" – a local shoemaker, whose name was written on its pages, together with the price of leather, and the price of corn. The registers may have been the original property of the shoemaker, and he presented the book for use as a register to the Priest. Times were certainly difficult for the poor and the Priest at Kilanerin travelled on a small white pony to celebrate Mass at Gorey Bridge Chapel. He kept his vestments at Penders, an old Gorey Family of shoemakers who lived in the house now occupied by another old Gorey Family Redmonds of Gorey Bridge. On many a cold morning he arrived at Penders at a very early hour, tapping on the window pane and sometimes requesting Mr Pender to stitch or repair his old shoes. (All boots were handmade at that time and it was Mrs Pender who stitched the boot uppers)

When the turmoil of the Rebellion was over, a more spacious Chapel was erected on the same site. It was used by the Catholics of Gorey until St Michael's was completed in 1842. K (Noctor) Hobbs recalls the ruin of the Chapel being used by the local children as a playground in the early years of the century. The two remaining relics of the Chapel – a stone holywater font, and an old stone cross, are located at the site of the Church in the cemetery.

The Gorey Chapel was cruciform in design and had a double entrance, one of these was from the Courtown Road, through a laneway adjoining Briertons House, now P Dwyers furniture store. Briertons was the original "Bridge Bar" and it was converted to a "Temperance Coffee House" at the time of Fr. T. Matthew. The second entrance was from the Clonattin Road side, through Keatings yard, the present day "Bridge Bar". It was formerly the "Bridge Inn".

The old National School House was situated at the rear of Keatings (the teacher was Js.Kennedy), in close proximity to the Chapel, and in those days it was known as "The School Beside the Chapel". The little School was unsatisfactory and on one occasion part of the roof caved in, it served the poor children from about 1830 to 1854, when the Christian Brothers began teaching at Gorey. Girls also attended the old School House at Gorey Bridge until the Loreto Nuns began teaching in 1843.

As stated the Chapel was a spacious structure, it measured 60 ft. long by 16 ft. wide, the extending arms also measured 50 ft. to 60 ft. by 16 ft.

The last Chapel –woman was a Gorey lady, and when she died an ornate piece of stone from the Chapel gable was placed on her grave.

In 1813 the windows of the Chapel were broken, and the Ram family who were then members of the Church of Ireland, offered a substantial reward seeking information of those who were responsible.

By the year 1834 the Gorey population was 3167 persons and the cemetery chapel may have been inadequate to cater for the large pre-Famine Catholic population of Gorey , and an inconvenience for the Parish Priest.

The townspeople often walked to Kilarnerin for Sunday evening prayers, walking long distances did not seem to pose a problem in those days.

To those who may not be familiar with our history it is right to record that many Church of Ireland people were Nationalists or neutral in their thinking and had little care for the deeds of the Orange faction. There were many deprived families of other denominations living in the town and county, who went about their daily labours, God –fearing and charitable to all sections of the Community.

GOREY BRIDGE CHAPEL 1840



Gorey Bridge Chapel 1798 – 1842



Relics, The stone cross and holy water font in the Chapel – Yard
Now St. Michael's Cemetery

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THE PENAL LAWS



Supplement to the "Shamrock", 8th Jan. 1887.
From Painting by J. Conway, 1886.

"Mass in the Penal Days".

THE PENAL LAWS

When the Williamite army had finally reconquered Ireland, England was determined to attach her troublesome neighbour more firmly to herself. The link was to be forged by her own colonists.

In order to make their position secure, a penal code of unparalleled severity was imposed on the rest of the population. No Irish Catholic was to take part in the life of the State. He was excluded both from voting and from taking a seat in Parliament. He might not aspire to either the Bar or the Bench, act as sheriff, or hold any office under the Crown.

No Catholic might buy land, inherit it, or receive it as a gift from a Protestant. No lease might be held for more than thirty-one years, or on such terms that the profits exceeded one-third of the rent. On a man's death his estate was divided among his sons, but if the eldest became a Protestant the whole was settled on him.

All priests and bishops who refused to take the Oath of Allegiance were ordered to leave the country. Only registered priests might

celebrate Mass; all others were subject to the penalties of high treason. Catholics were forbidden to teach in a school or to enter the university.

They might not even send their children to be educated abroad. The main object of these laws, apart from their religious and political aspect was to keep the Irish poor and ignorant. They must never be allowed to regain the lands which had passed into the hands of the Protestant gentry.

They must never be able to challenge the foundations of the power of the Ascendancy. It was hoped that as time went on the National ideals would fade, the Catholic Faith be silently abandoned, the people lose their racial antipathies, submit themselves to their masters and become reconciled to English rule.

Great numbers of Irishmen who went to France to enlist as soldiers in the eighteenth century and particularly in the first half of that century were very great indeed. Until 1762, Catholics were excluded from the British forces on the Irish establishment, so that those of the religion of the majority of the population who felt the urge towards the military life had no alternative — political considerations apart — but to seek service on the Continent. The long wars — the almost continuous war of Louis XIV's reign and then the wars of the Polish and Austrian successions and the Seven Year's War — created recurring demands for reinforcements. A writer of the middle of the eighteenth century claims that, during the sixty years preceeding his time, 450,000 Irishmen had given their lives in the service of France.



Rev. Jn. Murphy, Monageer and Boolavogue. 1798.

*Chapels burned in the county of Wexford and diocese of Ferns,
with the dates of their respective conflagration.*

Boolevogue	May 27, 1798	Balleagarret	Jan. 15, 1799
Maglass	May 30, 1798	Ballinamonabeg	Jan. 18, 1799
Ramsgrange	June 19, 1798	Askamore	Feb. 24, 1799
Drumgold	June 21, 1798	Murrtown	Apr. 24, 1799
Ballelmurrin	June do. 1798	Monamoling	May 3, 1799
Gorey	Aug. 24, 1798	Kilrush	May, 15, 1799
Annacurragh	Sept. 2, 1798	Marshallstown	Ju. 8 or 9 1799
Crane	Sept. 17, 1798	Munfin	June do. 1799
Rock	Oct. 12, 1798	Crossabeg	June 24, 1799
Balleduff	Oct. 19, 1798	Killeneerin	June 29, 1799
Riverchapel	Oct. do. 1798	Monageer	July 1, 1799
Monaseed	Oct. 25, 1798	Kiltaley	Oct. 1, 1799
Clologue	Oct. 26, 1798	Glanbryan	Mar. 13, 1800
Killeveny	Nov. 11, 1798	Kaim	Sept. 3, 1800
Ferns	Nov. 18, 1798	Ballinackeeey	Sept. 1800
Oulart	Nov. 28, 1798	Courtenacuddy	Aug. 13, 1801
Castletown	Nov. 1798		

The Protestant church of Old Ross was burned on the second of June, 1798.

322 GOREY Chapel above.

The Chapel Yard" later known as St. Michael's – Cemetery

By Michael Fitzpatrick

Every generation has its keepers, men and women who cherish and preserve elements of our past, our history and culture for this and future generations. Many of these people with a great love of history receive little or no financial recompense for their on-going labour. Amongst these special people are two dedicated individuals, namely Laurence 'Larry' Quigley and Carmel Roice. The old burial register in Gorey was a poor programme, to find a family-grave, and in many instances many graves were not registered. To consider taking on registering each and every grave in St. Michael's Cemetery was a task beyond belief. Visitors attending or visiting the Gorey Cemetery over a five year period must have wondered at (Larry) endeavouring to decipher or interpret and to find out what each character or mark represented. To consider this mammoth work grave after grave, row after row and most of all inclement wet and cold weather which is very much part and parcel of Ireland's cold climate, where 'Larry Quigley' had completed his work in the cemetery. Carmel began her assignment as 'Larry' had taken up residence in Dublin.

In the years 1940 our family numbering five children were residents of 13 Clonattin Road opposite the gate entrance to the cemetery. For the next five year we were constantly in what could be then described as a small cemetery. Quiet apart from the area where the old vaults are situated, the new burial ground had been consecrated in the year 1886, Kilnahue and (Clonattin – the Gorey Parish – Cemetery), most burials were taking place in these ancient Gorey Cemeteries. Circa – 1900 funerals began to take place on a regular basis, as the older cemeteries were quiet a long distance from Gorey town especially when the weather was inclement and at that time the second period of the 19th Century the locals buried their dead at the two former town cemeteries. Not everyone at that time could afford the hire of a horse-drawn carriage or hearse. They were manually carried on the old style 'Coffin-Bier' which was a coffin shaped frame of wood for conveying a 'Corpse' to their family plot or plots. The coffin was carried shoulder high, and during the 'famine' and for many years that followed, many of the workhouse deaths were interred in a cemetery known as the 'Shank-Yard' or workhouse cemetery. Kilnahue graveyard was full to capacity and the clergy made an order, not to inter any persons who died during the 'famine years', and for many years afterwards.

A special area for the famine-dead would be brought by horse-carts from the Gorey workhouse down Gorey Main Street to Gorey's old Parish Cemetery – situated in the field at Clonattin. Both Kilnahue and Clonattin cemeteries were attended to by local people throughout many decades, who wished to see these old graveyards clean and tidy, but in a short time the condition of weeds once again spread throughout the cemeteries.

St. Michael's R.C. Gorey Cemetery is currently maintained in immaculate condition throughout, a credit to all those concerned. This continued good work is surely a dedication and labour of love. The burials on the right hand side of the cemetery (close to the Courtown Road), commenced circa 1900's, as this area filled with graves a new section was opened.

C. 1940's and section followed section as the new land was required and the overall cemetery is now quite an extensive site. Note: - Kilnahue and Clonattin were still in use for many years during the 20th Century.

In those early years prior to the burials in much of the cemetery, the 'cemetery – field' was a meadow and the local children used the 'cocks of hay' for daily playtime. A century ago many families could not afford to erect a memorial headstone, it often involved two generations of family before a headstone was erected.

The four dominant travelling families of County Wexford include, O' Brien's, O' Connor, Berry and Cash, and in later years spared no expense on their family memorials in Gorey.

In the early years of the 20th Century St. Michael's Cemetery was the site of two R.C. Chapels – the first was in usage pre 1798, and the Chapel that was built to replace the first chapel was used until Pugin's masterpiece St. Michael's Church, Gorey was completed in 1843. Pre any burials until the early years of the 20th Century, the old people of that time referred to the Gorey Cemetery as the Chapel Yard. Also interred in St. Michael's Cemetery are titled families, Esmond's of Ballinastragh, great benefactor of the R.C. Chapels, and Church. Moore O' Farrell a former owner of Ramsfort House, who helped financially on many Gorey town projects including 'The Old Town Hall' which was cited on the Arklow Road.

Mai Travers Fitzpatrick, born 1900 heard from her grandfather, Edward Travers born pre -famine 1st May 1840 and died 1929, that the first burial to take place was a 'Mr. Tyndal', The Ballingarry family of 'Tyndal' were members of the C. O. Ireland faith, and it's possible that this man Tyndal embraced Catholicism. One major problem of undertaking an inventory of the Gorey Cemetery is the 'repeat' of Christian and surnames and many of them blood related.

Related - some related families

Redmond's Butchers	Larry and Peter Browne
Breen's Poultry Dealers	French's Publican
Webb's Undertakers	Hunts Business Family
Kavanagh's Undertakers	Thomas Williams
Rams Arms Undertakers	Many Travers Businesses'
Bates Undertakers	David Roice Chemist
Duncan Undertakers	Flusk Families
Laurence & Aidan Murphy Undertakers	Master M. Redmond
Patrick and John Flood Undertakers	Bolgers Hardware
Percival Undertakers Ballycanew & Gorey	Brennans Hardware
John & Patrick O'Connor 82 Main Street	Mulligan Farmers & Business people
Miss Annie Redmond Main Street	
The Cooke family 3 Business families, Main Street	

This modest list is far from completion and we look forward to the inventory on-line.

**D/ Consecration of the New Cemetery at
Gorey Bridge — Saturday 2nd Oct. 1886.**

The Catholic Cemetery at Gorey Bridge, having become entirely filled by the succeeding burials of over thirty years — steps were taken some months ago to procure an adjoining plot of ground for the purpose of enlarging it. The land required was kindly given by the Earl of Courtown at a nominal rent. A new wall was then build around almost the entire graveyard, after plans and specifications by Mr. Charles Kavanagh, Gorey. The work was done in a most satisfactory manner, by the contractor Mr. John Byrne, Gorey Hill. The grounds inside tastefully laid out by Charles Kavanagh. It rained heavily in the forenoon and cleared enough to permit the carrying out of the Consecration Ceremony, by Right Rev. Dr. Brown, Bishop of Diocese, assisted by Rev. Fr. Furlong, Rev. Fr. Hore and Rev. Fr. Keating, in the presence of a vast crowd. This most interesting ceremony lasted for nearly an hour and was the first of the kind witnessed in this part of the country for hundreds of years. At the evening service at St. Michael's Church, the Rev. Dr. Brown, preached on the significance of the ceremony of the afternoon to an immense congregation.