

# Oblate Fathers leave Cahermoyle

THE 67-YEAR-OLD link between the Oblate order and Cahermoyle House, Ardagh, comes to an end this weekend.

The house has been sold and the lands broken up among purchasers. The last five members of the community will now leave for Dublin.

At its peak in the 1950s, the novitiate put upward of thirty young students through its spacious halls each year. When it was decided to discontinue its use as a training establishment, the average annual intake had dropped to seven.

## Nursing home

The house is now to be used as a private nursing home by its new owner, Mrs Marie Richardson of London. Mrs Richardson is sister of Mrs Nora Raleigh, who similarly operates Beechwood House at Newcastle West.

Cahermoyle House, as it presently stands, was developed in a number of stages. It was the home of William Smith O'Brien, MP. He was a Young Irelander, and was transported to Van Diemen's Land following his conviction for high treason after the abortive skirmish at Ballingarry, near Thurles, in 1848.

The house was substantially rebuilt in the 1870s by his son, Edward, to whose benefit the estate had been signed over prior to the treason trial. The faintly Moroccan style of arches in the new reception hall lent a particularly individualistic feel to the whole.

The family also caused a number of extremely unusual stone capitals and bases to be carved, in situ, for several pillars. The sense of architectural humour was evident, as the classical formalities were jovially but systematically mocked.

When the Oblate fathers and brothers took over in 1922, the large farm and spacious house seemed perfect for their uses. As the community grew, members specialised in specific areas of the management of the place.

There was idyllic peace, and Cahermoyle was a totally self-sufficient haven. To the outside world, it may as well have been a Trappist community, such was the serenity and limited contact with the surrounding parishes.

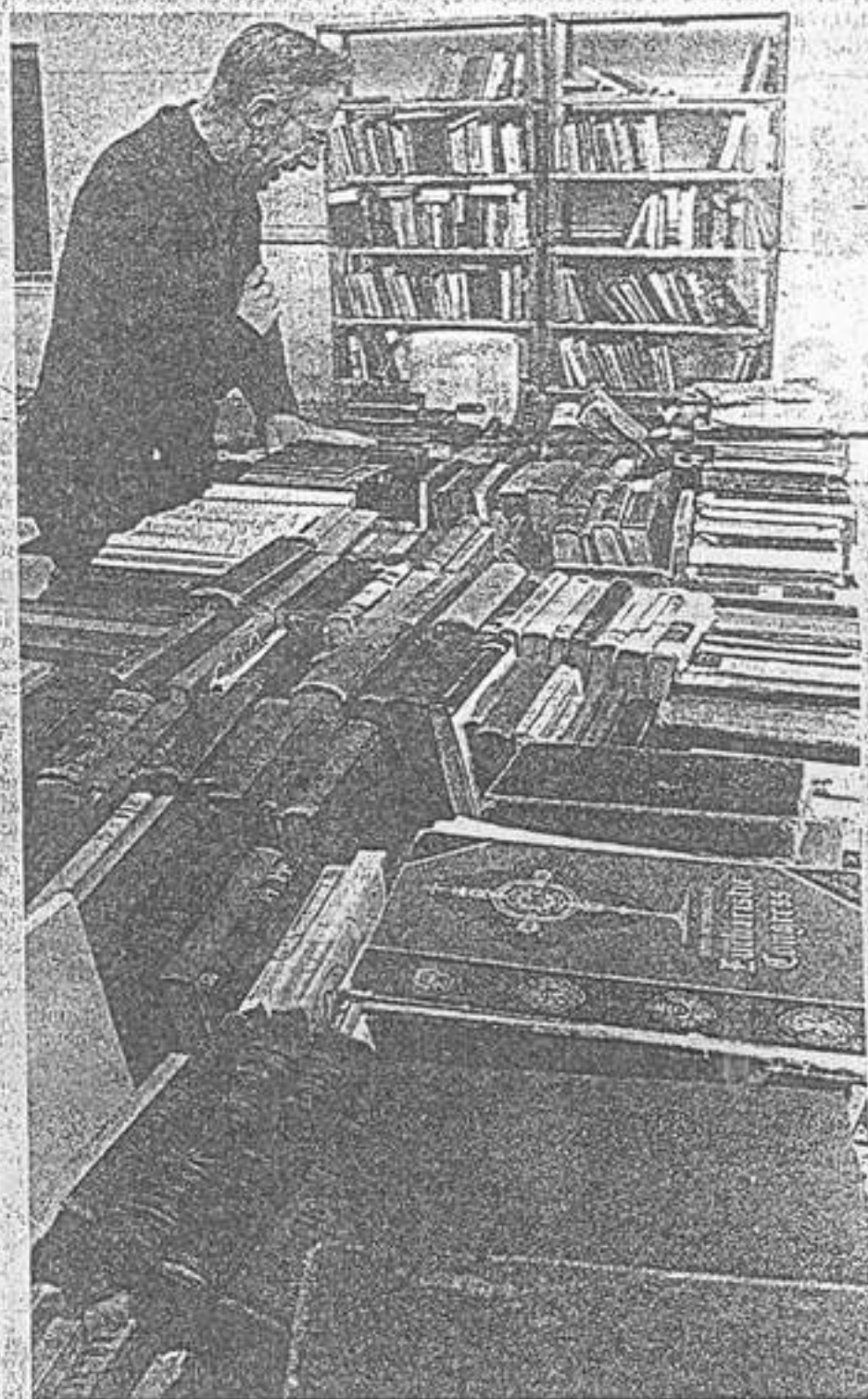
An extra block of 20 rooms was added in 1969, along with a new refectory and other communal facilities. The community was booming, and was running a model farm.

It was considered educationally sound in those days that young men should develop a pastoral attitude in both senses. The country was more rural then.

But as vocations progressively fell away, it became clear to the Oblates that the urban profile of a changing world could not be ignored. Training resources were pooled with other orders, and a new place in the world was worked out.

Cahermoyle, in consequence, became surplus to requirements and crippling difficult to maintain.

In recent years, its only public claim to fame was during the 'moving statues' sightings of the mid 1980s. Crowds flocked to the magnificent Lourdes-style grotto which was created near the main gate some 40 years ago by Brother McEntee.



Last chapter ... taking stock of the many books from the library.

## By MARTIN BYRNES

The members of the Oblate community chose not to get involved in the question of whether phenomena had been detected or perceived at their or at any other shrine. Fr Matt O'Shea confined himself to leading the crowds in prayer for the benefit of all their neighbours.

It was Fr O'Shea who this week surveyed the emptying of the great house. The books were last to go, crated or piled awaiting removal.

He walked through the various phases of the house's development, pondering as he went on the mind of William Smith O'Brien, the character of his daughter and the circumstances of his death in Wales.

Smith O'Brien got a triumphal funeral, he observed, but this may have been akin to that accorded to

O'Donovan Rossa. Both men had outlived their effectiveness, he said, but had somehow managed to act as a bridge to a second generation of nationalism.

Cahermoyle House is not going to die, so a funeral would be inappropriate. But it has managed to span the generations with its inspiration.

## Touching lives

It has managed to touch the lives of a thousand clerical students as well as contributing to mould the mind of a nation.

The new owners are content to fully respect the character of the house.

"Orders in Germany got rid of many properties some years ago, but now, with an upswing in vocations, they are regretting having done so," said Fr O'Shea. "I wonder if we will regret leaving here?"