

The Dominicans

THE PRINCE of Thomond, Donogh Cairbreach O Briain, introduced the Dominicans to Limerick city in 1227. This O Briain prince built and endowed the Dominican monastery of "Saint Saviour's" on the King's Island, in Saint Mary's Isle Parish.

"Saint Saviour's" was an important monastery; several important chapter meetings of the Irish province of the Order were held there. All that survives today is a high wall (with delicate windows) in the Nuns' Garden of Saint Mary's Convent of Mercy, off Nicholas Street.

The Dominicans of Saint Saviour's owned the Lax Weir, probably the most lucrative salmon fishery in mediaeval Europe, and St. Thomas' Island, Corbally. Saint Saviour's was suppressed in 1541, as a result of the Protestant Reformation, but the friars managed to remain there, ministering to the citizens sometimes secretary, but St. Saviour's was demolished shortly after the Cromwellian capture of the city in 1651.

In 1641 a Patrick Sarsfield and his wife, Eleanor, nee White, presented the Dominicans of Saint Saviour's with a magnificent carved statue of Our Lady of the Rosary and the Infant Jesus. This statue, carved in Flanders, Belgium, was pre-

sented by Sarsfield in reparation for the sentencing to death of Sir John Bourke of Brittas, near Murroe, by his uncle, Judge Dominick Sarsfield, in Queen Elizabeth I's time. At the end of the 1500s, Pope Clement VIII proclaimed the first Sunday of October as Our Lady of the Rosary Sunday. To specially celebrate this feast, Sir John Bourke invited a Dominican, Father Halligan, and two of his fellow priests to celebrate Mass in the great hall of Brittas Castle.

Two informers, Theobald Bourke of Castleconnell and Sir Edmund Walsh of Abington, near Murroe, betrayed Sir John Bourke and the three Dominicans, and after a stern fight the Queen's forces captured Sir John and the Dominicans as Mass was being celebrated at Brittas Castle.

Judge Dominick Sarsfield sentenced Sir John to death and he was hanged at Gallows Green, near the present day Good Shepherd Convent, Pennywell, and is buried in an unknown grave at St. John's (Protestant) Church, St. John's Square.

The Patrick Sarsfield who presented the statue of Our Lady to Saint Saviour's Monastery, was of a Limerick family, and not to be confused with General Patrick Sarsfield, the Defender of Limerick in 1690-91.

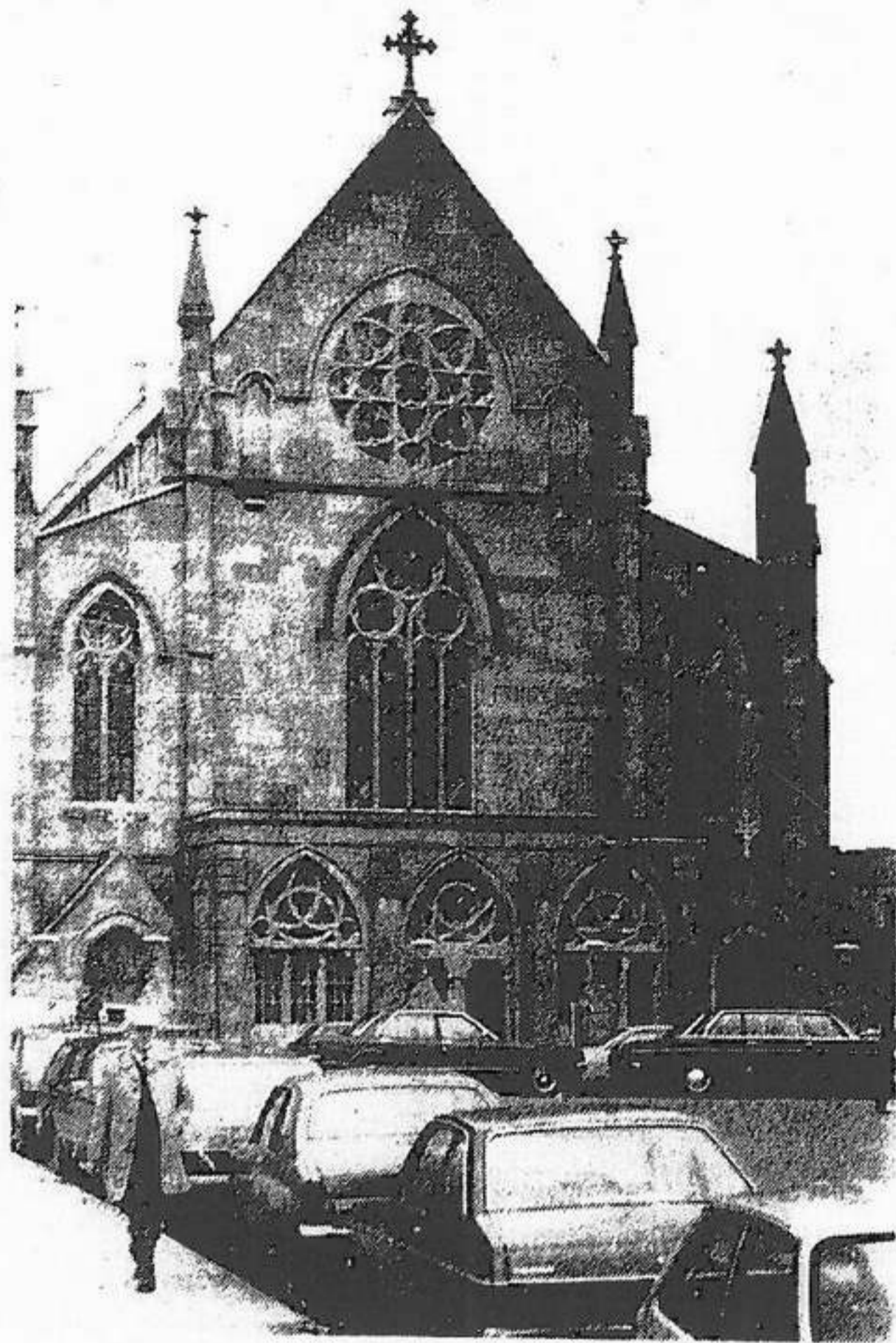
After the Cromwellian suppression, the Dominicans hid this magnificent statue in the monastery's grounds, according to tradition, in the tomb of Prince Donogh Cairbreach O Briain.

Despite persecution and the Penal Laws (after the 1691 Treaty of Limerick) the Dominicans stayed on here secretly ministering to the citizens.

In 1735, a relaxation of the Penal Laws allowed them to open a chapel at the back of the Roche (Catholic merchants) house in Mary Street. The entrance to this Penal times chapel was through a door at the Fish Lane side, so it became popularly known as the Fish Lane chapel. The friars had their priory upstairs in the Roche house.

The Dominicans disinterred the statue of Our Lady, brought it to their humble Fish Lane chapel, where it was the most prized feature of the chapel and venerated by the congregation.

Indeed, this magnificent



statue became lovingly known as Our Lady of Limerick; in it the Mother of God can be seen holding the Rosary in her outstretched hands.

The congregation continued to grow and the Fish Lane chapel became too small. So, in 1835, when the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act inaugurated real freedom for Catholics, the Dominicans acquired a plot of ground at Glentworth Street and built a church there.

In 1860 they started the building of the church in the above photo. The initiating architect was J. J. McCarthy, then a leading Irish architect. McCarthy designed Cahermoyle House, near Newcastle West, for Edward O'Brien, 4th Baron Dromoland, in 1870. His cathedrals include: Turles and Derry, and he designed Kilmallock's church. He was a distinguished disciple of Pugin, the English father of the 19th century Gothic Revival style of architecture.

The other architects were George Goldie (of London), whose fine church enhances Monaleen Hill, near Castlet-

roy Golf Club, and Maurice Hennessy and Mr. Cox.

The Dominicans brought the Statue of Our Lady of Limerick from the Fish Lane chapel and installed it with due honour in a special side altar in their new church at Glentworth Street.

In the past twenty years, Rev. Father Aengus Buckley, an outstanding artist, a member of the Saint Saviour's Glentworth Street community embellished the church interior with a beautiful fresco above the high altar. Father Buckley died some years ago and his loss was deeply felt in Limerick and Irish art circles. The Dominicans at Saint Saviour's of Glentworth Street now have parochial status and role. Their large flock appreciate their dedicated ministry. After 150 years of persecution, the white robed friars of St. Dominick, who ministered to our citizens with a fearless, faithful tenacity, came into their own again.

□ Photo: JOHN WRIGHT
□ Text: SEAMUS O CINNEIDE

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