

# HOLY ROSARY CHURCH

## ~~OUR LADY OF FATIMA~~

### LIMERICK

F. M. CORR and W. H. D. McCORMICK

MONSIGNOR MOLONEY'S problem was by no means an uncommon one to-day. His parish, St. Munchin's, Limerick, was expanding rapidly; the final shape and texture was very uncertain, but already there was imminent necessity for increased church accommodation.

An excellent site, of one and a half acres, had already been acquired between two important and parallel roads, for the purpose of building a large and expensive church. Due to the uncertainty about the parish's ultimate size and character, and the pressing necessity for immediate accommodation, Monsignor Moloney decided that it would be more sensible to concentrate on an inexpensive and quickly-erected building, which could, if necessary, later be converted to another use, or dismantled and re-erected in one of the rapidly-growing parts of his parish.

A pleasant row of young trees screened off part of the site, approximately rectangular in shape, and about half an acre in extent. On this plot Monsignor Moloney decided to provide a church with accommodation for 600 people, with one altar, two confessionals, a baptistery, mortuary, and appropriate sacristy accommodation. Although our reverend client was most anxious that the church should not be unduly expensive or monumental, he considered it most essential that every detail of the building, each item of furniture, and all sacred objects, should be carefully considered so as to produce an artistic whole, with a unity of style throughout the appointments of the church.

Our earliest consideration of the problem indicated that a simple rectangular plan, parallel to the boundary

roads, with the altar at one gable and the entrance porch at the other, was likely to prove the best solution. From this the baptistery developed as an extension of the entrance porch, and the remaining accommodation was grouped along the North wall and incorporated a secondary entrance. With this arrangement it was possible to have two recessed confessionals along this side also. To complete the conception the principal approach was marked by a campanile. Through this the entrance path was lead under a light covered way to the main porch.

It may be of interest here to note the final dimensions decided on for the church. The nave is 95' x 34'; the sanctuary which is simply an extension of the nave, is a further 15' 0"; the height to the springing of the roof is 17' 0" and to the apex 22' 0". From these dimensions it will be seen that, while they represent good proportions, they also ensure that at every point the congregation can see the altar and hear the priest. This, of course, meant that a pulpit would not be necessary, and that the altar, elevated on three steps, would be suitably dignified, and easily visible from the rear of the church.

In view of the nature of the problem, a light steel frame, clad externally in weather-boarding, and lined internally with hardboard, seemed a very suitable form of construction, as (a) it could be quickly erected, (b) if necessary, readily dismantled, and (c) it represented an economical and suitably insulated building, which could be made perfectly watertight. Precaution was taken to have the weather-boarding proofed by creosoting under pressure. This process ensures that the material is thoroughly impregnated in all its pores by the protecting liquid. The life of the timber then becomes unlimited. Initially the excess creosote causes the wood to appear a dark brown, but this eventually bleaches to a golden hue. This form of construction also proved suitable for the tower, but here, of course, there was no reason for the internal lining.



We were fortunate at this stage in having the collaboration of Stephen McGloughlin, B.E., M.I.C.E.I., who was then evolving a very interesting type of steel-framed roof which was designed to span from gable to gable, instead of the more usual short span arrangement of side wall to side wall. This was only possible to any economic extent with a low pitch and a light roof covering. There is a very limited choice of the latter in this country, and eventually it was reduced to green mineral grit felt on tongued and grooved boarding. One of the major attractions of Mr. McGloughlin's idea was the fact that the complete roof framework was assembled and welded in its final form on the ground and hoisted up to a position a few inches above its ultimate position, and left swinging until the framework of the walls was in position. It was then dropped into its final position, and the roof covering completed. This meant that the remainder of the work continued under cover.

Mr. McGloughlin read a very authoritative paper to the Institute of Civil Engineers of Ireland, on 5 December 1949. The following is an interesting extract:

#### AN UNUSUAL DESIGN FOR ROOF STEELWORK

*Being a description of the design and erection of Inclined Lattice Roofs of Multiple and Single Span.*

The author feels that in the inclined lattice girder roof we have the answer, or perhaps we should say the counterpart, to shell construction in concrete, which has been claimed as the roof construction of the future.

In cost, lightness and, therefore, foundation cost, rapidity of construction and general adaptability it will more than compete with this or any other form of construction within its proper sphere. In appearance, whether we consider it in a roof of one or many bays, in the author's opinion it is an improvement on any of its predecessors. It is not restricted to straight slopes, as it would be quite possible to construct a

roof of parabolic sections by this system and to stand it on top of a thin-walled building so that even the wind loads are transmitted to the gables, where they can be adequately dealt with.

This form of roof construction produced a pitched ceiling internally, which adds considerably to the height of the church inside, without adding to the vertical dimensions, nor, therefore, to the cost of the external walls.

The ceiling was also covered with hardboard of a thinner and less expensive nature than that on the walls. Hardboard in various thicknesses and finishes is now a well-established building material, and, if used correctly, gives satisfactory service. Considerable care is necessary to prevent buckling, which, if the material is rigidly fixed, will result from changes in the moisture content of the atmosphere.

At Limerick we decided to use these sheets in their maximum length of 12' 0" to avoid cutting and waste, and to leave the ends and sides unsecured behind cover fillets of wood. This also meant considerable economy in cover fillets, as there was no necessity for horizontal strips, and at the same time the continuous vertical strips produced a very happy rhythm along both sides of the church. The sheets were glued at the back in the middle only to timber framing, which meant that  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to  $\frac{1}{8}$ " of movement was possible without being apparent in any way whatsoever. The use of these sheets in their 12' 0" length suggested using horizontal windows along the remainder of the walls along the top. This also suited the site conditions as the proximity of large trees tended to exclude a considerable amount of light. Under these conditions windows near the top of a building are always more useful.

The sanctuary has been effectively distinguished from the rest of the church, and suitably enriched by substituting polished oak plywood on side walls, gable and ceiling.

As the use of timber was now the dominant characteristic of the design, it appeared essential that this material



should be allowed to play its full part in the completion and furnishing of the church. A timber altar, faced with clear polished plywood, to match the walls of the sanctuary, was designed with cantilevered *mensa*, and with recessed toe-space along the bottom.

The tabernacle and altar furnishings are simple and carefully proportioned silver plate, and the altar front is marked by a *chi rho* symbol, also silver plated. The silver ware and the clear polished oak form a very happy combination, and a large and generous dossal in maroon and gold, hanging from a tester at ceiling level, provides a rich and becoming background to the almost severely simple and dignified altar. Monsignor Moloney was fortunate to have a fourteenth century ivory crucifix presented for inclusion over the tabernacle, and this, both in scale and workmanship, proved a suitable contrast to the more contemporary character of the altar furniture.

The floor of the sanctuary is covered in polished plywood tiles, and the timber motive was carried to completion in two refectory-table-like altar rails, through which the central aisle flowed unimpeded into the sanctuary.

At either end of the altar, two cantilevered brackets in oak, have been provided for full size figures in timber of Our Lady and the Sacred Heart, by contemporary Irish sculptors. Until they are complete, their positions are occupied by two remarkable sixteenth century wood carvings of Our Lady and St. John, of which Monsignor Moloney has been fortunate to obtain the loan. They were designed originally for a church near Strasbourg, but passed long since into private hands.

The Stations of the Cross, unframed carved groups in lightly painted wood, were made in Oberammergau, by craftsmen, including several of the actors in last year's Passion Play. Their services were secured by the widow and family of the late Anton Lang, the famous Oberammergau Christus.

Church seating, frequently cumbersome and uncomfortable, in this case, was constructed in moulded plywood, a new development in furniture manufacture, particularly suitable to mass-produced units. These seats, low, comfortable and economic, produce a flowing pattern of curves below eye-level. We were anxious to achieve this effect as the customary type of solid seat would have been so out of character with this church.

The gable wall of the baptistery has a very fine full length stained glass window by Evie Hone, of the Baptism of Christ. Against this is silhouetted a font in Hopton Wood stone carved by a local craftsman. Both the font and the low baptistery gates are further enriched by gilded plaques of excellent design and execution.

The entrance facade of the campanile was chosen as a suitable background for a magnificent life-size teak figure of Our Lady of Fatima, by Oisín Kelly, who was also responsible for the design of the baptistery plaques, and co-operated in the design of the altar furnishings.

The internal decoration scheme was carried out in pastel shades. The walls are biscuit, the ceiling and steel-work pale blue. Variations in tone value and in matt and gloss finishes pick out the particular materials. The colour scheme has been devised to emphasize, and, as it were, to direct attention to, the altar.

For general lighting, fluorescent tubes in white enamelled reflectors have been fixed at ceiling level. These produce a good overall effect, but for private devotion, a more intimate effect can be obtained by using the floods on the altar, with the seven pools of light on each side, from the concealed tubes in the projecting hoods over the Stations of the Cross; the hidden light over the dossal enhances its rich folds and textural quality.

No more suitable form of heating presented itself than the recently-introduced thermal storage heaters. These are designed to store heat during the night at the remarkably



low cost of o.r.d. a unit, and to dissipate their heat automatically from 8 a.m., onwards. It will be readily understood how suitable these are for churches.

The building has been further related to its pleasant site by careful attention to landscaping, and large, circular, concrete flower pots have been used in groups and rows to help to achieve this.

Until such times as the final accounts are settled, the following figures are sufficiently indicative of the cost:

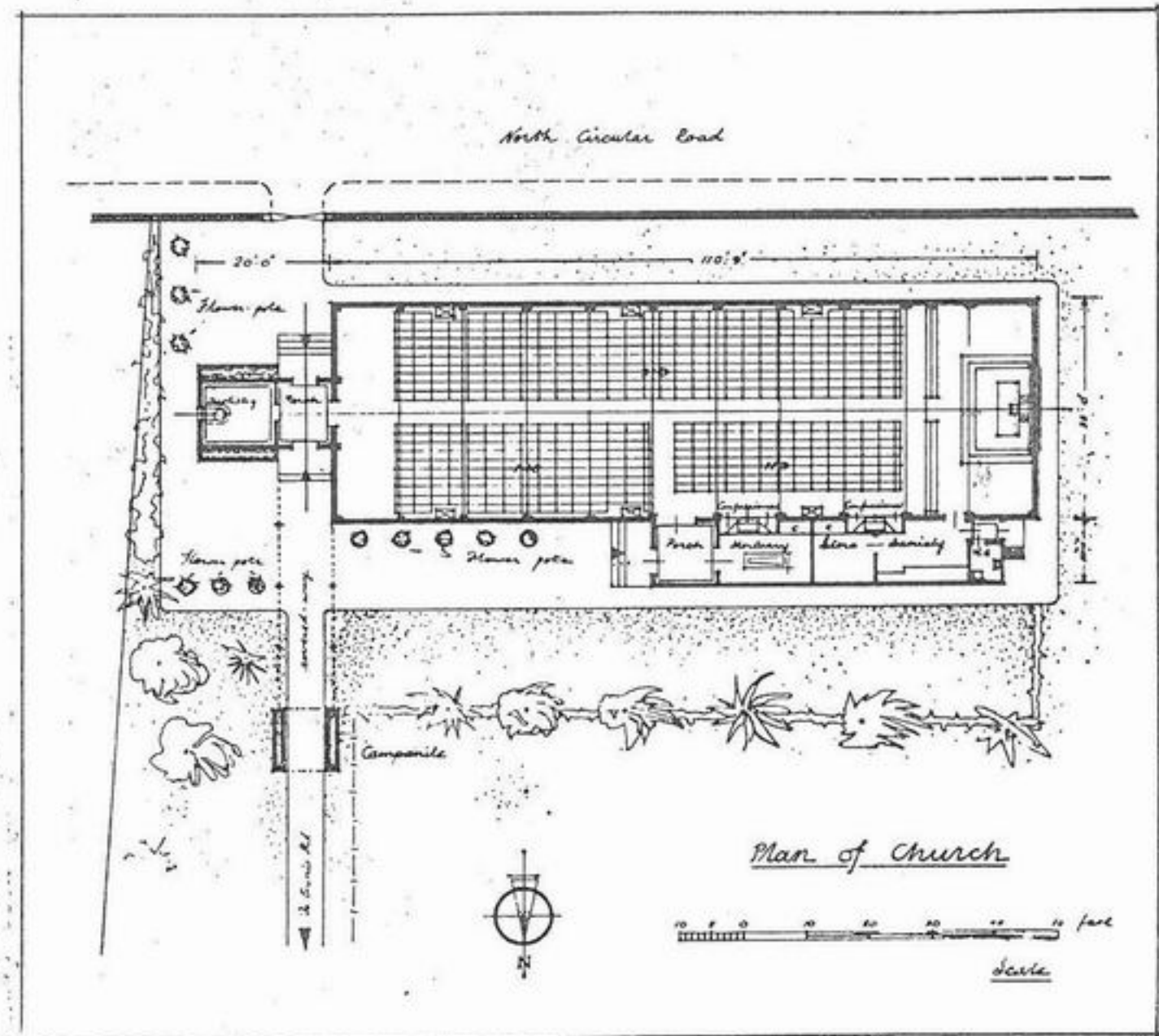
The church complete with campanile ..	£11,000
Fittings, furnishings, plate etc. ..	£2,500

May we conclude by explaining that we allowed our approach to the problem to be determined almost entirely by the problem itself. We endeavoured to let the solution evolve without any efforts at stylistic trimmings or clichés, either traditional or modern.

We consider ourselves fortunate to have had as our client one who entrusted to us full control over the complete building and its appointments. This we interpreted as an opportunity to achieve complete unity in scale and character throughout, an opportunity not often afforded to architects. For example, the emphasis on the use of timber persisted into the altar, and the sacred figures, both inside and outside the church. The technique of flush plywood finishes in the sanctuary, and the seating assists in relating the whole. Having designed the altar, we found it very satisfying to be able to design also the silver plate. The clean, severe, repetitive lines of the steel frame are echoed in the severity of the candlesticks.

One section of the excellent "Directives for Building a Church" by Rev. Theodor Klauser, in the August 1950 issue of *The Furrow*, was a remarkable echo of our own attitude to this problem:

*The church edifice today is intended for the people of our times. Hence it must be fashioned in such a way*



Photos: Fergus Studios

## CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA

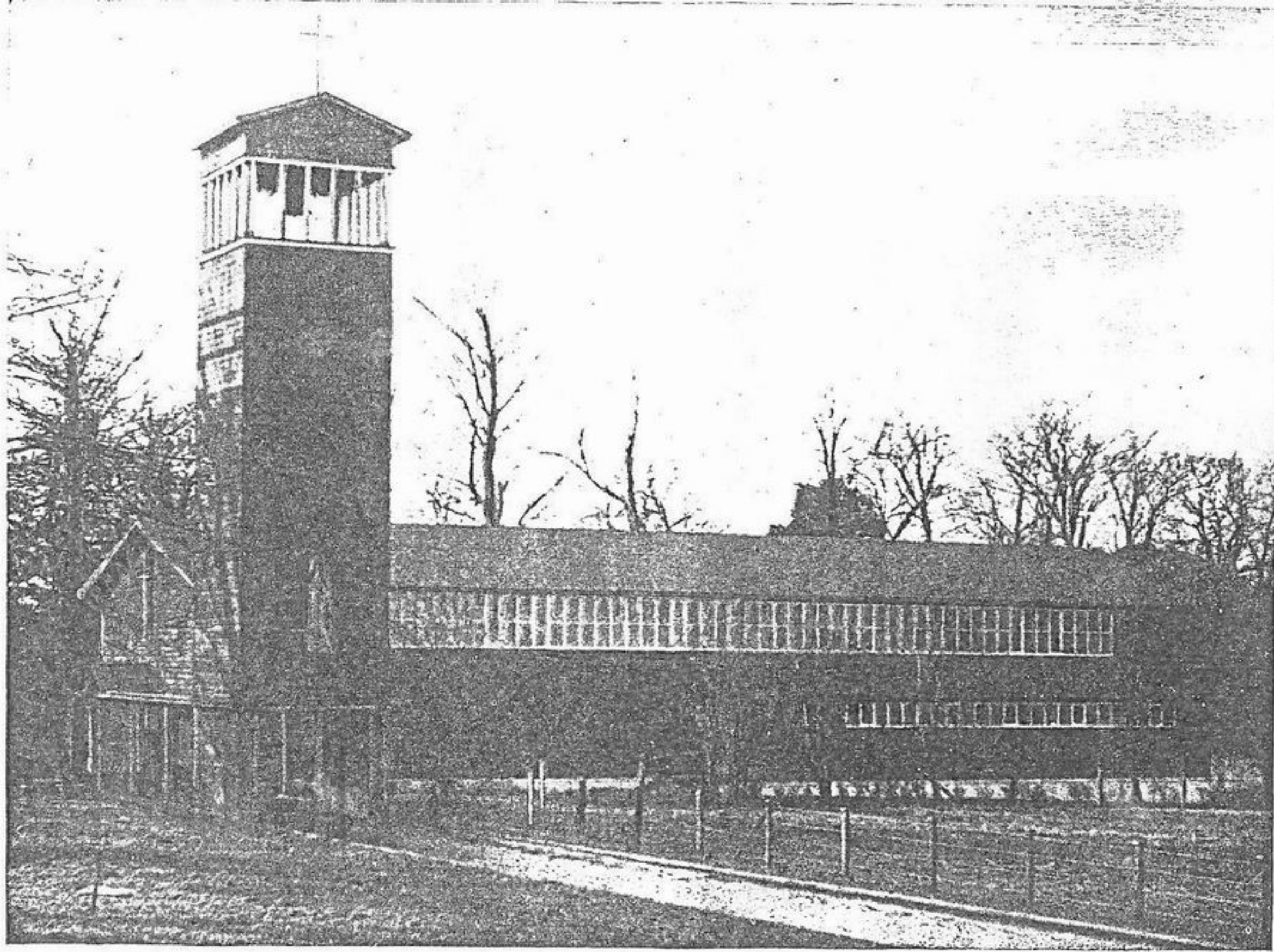
Parish Priest: Monsignor Moloney

Architects: F. M. Corr and W. H. D. McCormick

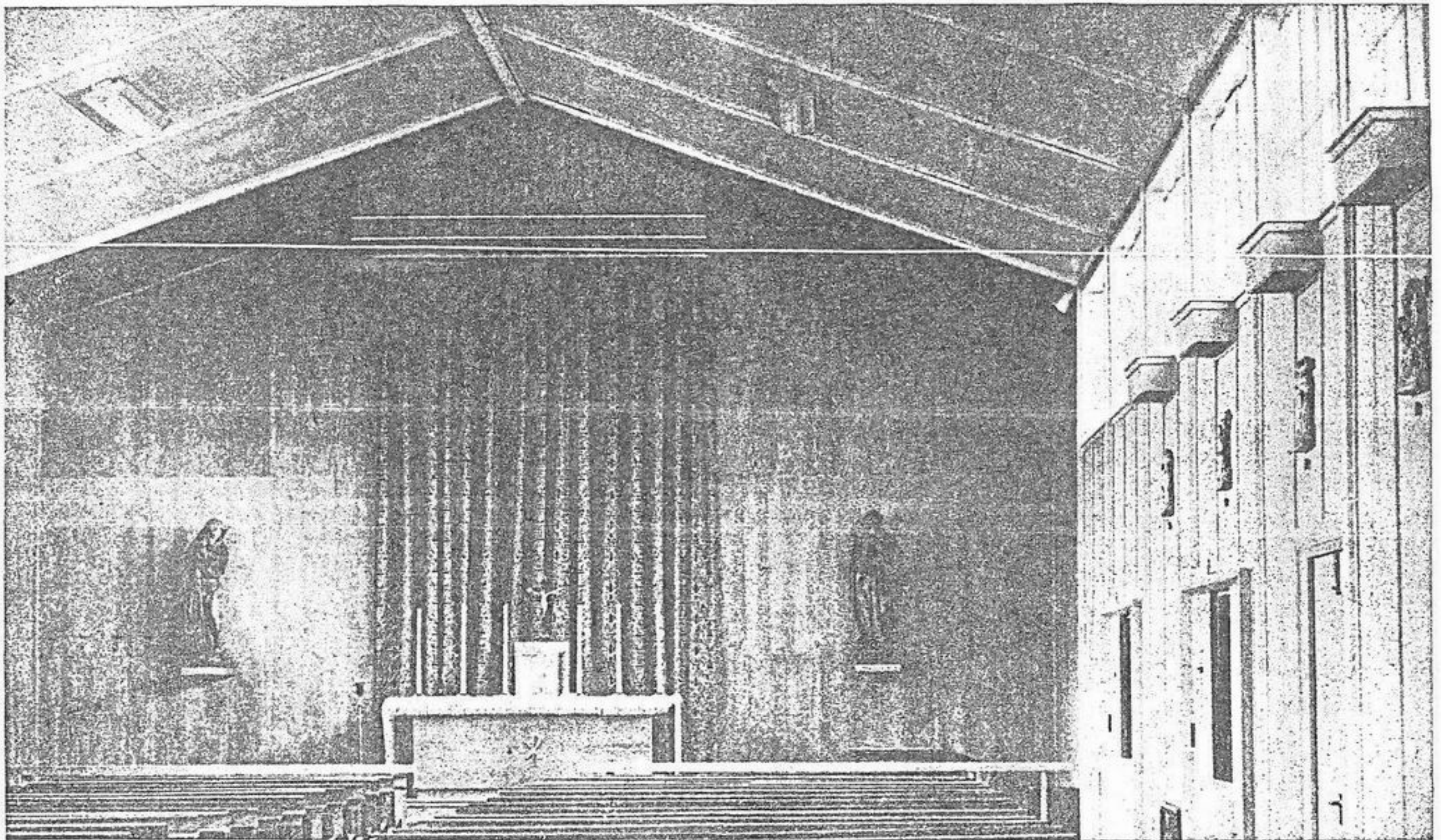
Contractors: Messrs. Molloy and Sons

Cost: £13,500





*The Church seen from the Ennis Road elevation*



# INTERIOR

*The use of timber is a dominant characteristic. Note the placing of statues ; stations of carved wood with hooding which conceals artificial light ; simple communion rail ; well-recessed confessionals ; toe-recessing of altar ; natural and artificial lighting.—Editor*



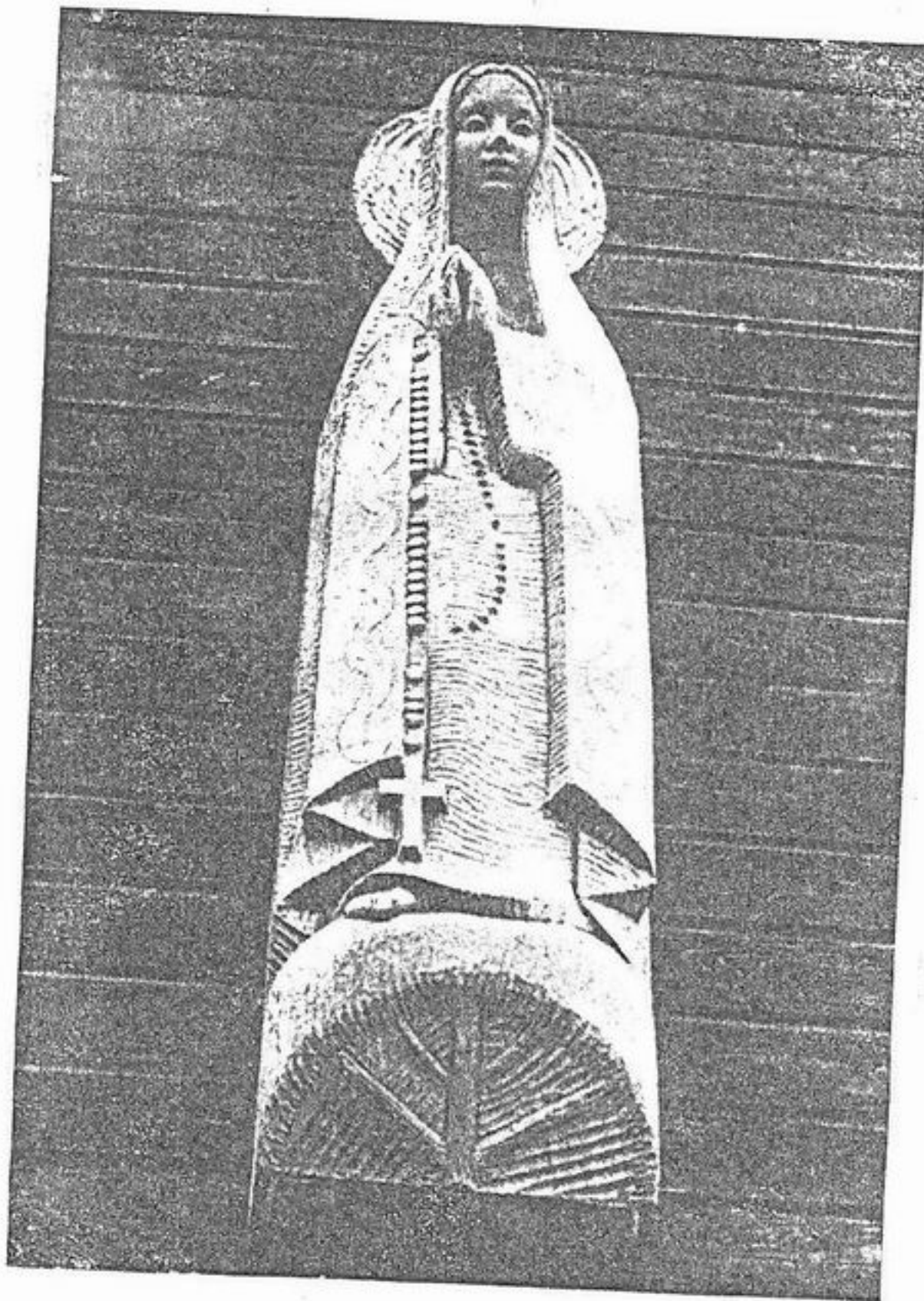
*that the people of our times may recognise and feel it is addressed to them. The most significant and the most worthy needs of modern mankind must here find their fulfilment : the urge towards community life, the desire for what is true and genuine, the wish to advance from what is peripheral to what is central and essential, the demand for clarity, lucidity, intelligibility, the longing for quiet and peace, for a sense of warmth and security.*

The successful completion of this work was the result of the painstaking efforts of a group of enthusiasts under the inspired leadership of Monsignor Moloney. It is only as a result of such excellent team spirit that architecture is achieved. Tribute must be paid to the co-operation and understanding of Evie Hone, Oisín Kelly, Stephen McGloughlin, Barney Heron and particularly Messrs. Molloy & Sons, the general contractors.

F. M. CORR

W. H. D. McCORMICK

*Ferryquay Street,  
Derry.*



*This life-size statue in teak of Our Lady of Fatima  
is the work of Oisín Kelly*

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#### THE OFFICE

*The useless individual reciting a disregarded book in the same language the world over, being occupied with the Unseen in the midst of human affairs, is no social parasite : at every minute his prayer is directed to transfiguring and saving society.*

*—Cardinal Suhard*