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CAPITALS PLEASE

THE CHIMNEY stacks of the cement factory are now the first images that come to mind when Mungret is mentioned anywhere.

Towering insolently over monastic ruins, ages of learning and a myriad legends, they have become more than a landmark—maybe something of a symbol for the people of one of the oldest Christian communities of Limerick.

And if anyone thinks that this is a travesty of history, it is most unlikely to disturb the peace of St. Nessan who was once advised by the Bishop of Cashel never to reject the gifts of God.

Very diverse

Mungret, once one of the most important ecclesiastic centres in Munster, is today probably the most diverse parish in the diocese.

Large suburban housing estates mix with small villages still clinging desperately to rural traditions. Raheen industrial estate mushrooms not far from the green fields which feed one of the country's best-known horse training territories. No-one, or everyone, is a blow-in.

The parish for convenience and sometimes for the sake of peace has become three different communities—Raheen, Mungret and Crecora, with one priest living in each.

But even this happy arrangement has its complications. Some GAA supporters believe that if Mungret and Crecora would only stand together they could storm the county. And to add to the complexity, the focal points of Crecora village—the shop and the post office—are not even in the parish. They belong to Mainister, where some old Crecorians inside the Mungret dividing line believe all their allegiances should really lie.

The rivalry probably has something to do with monastic tradition, although neither community will admit to it. By all accounts the monks of Ireland's Golden Age were forever trying to pass each other out as borne out by the legend of the Wise Women of Mungret.

The Mungret monks whose reputation for wisdom and learning was being challenged by some outsiders (maybe from Mainister) dressed up as washerwomen and spouted Greek and Latin to the approaching challengers, who promptly gave up when they heard such erudition from mere housewives and servant girls, centuries before women's liberation.

Many legends

But there are so many legends associated with Mungret that it would be impossible to tell fact from fantasy. Suffice it to say that the first Abbot, St. Nessan, got his instructions from none other than St. Patrick himself and that he later headed the list of distinguished Deacons in the historic Book of

Where legend is a part of living

Leinster.

Mungret's own historian John O'Connor says: "Mungret is of very ancient foundation, but with so few records and so much legend, it is impossible to put a date on its actual foundation".

LIMERICK PARISHES by PATRICIA FEEHILY

But at one time, he says, Mungret had six churches within its monastic walls, and 1,500 learned monks, 500 preachers, 500 psalmists and 500 wholly employed in spiritual exercises. One hundred of them were called "John Loftus". Eat your heart out Crecora.

Crecora, however, has its own legends—the story of the "Golden Bush" which gave the place its name and the memory of a church dedicated to the Apostles Peter and Paul in 1410 and destroyed during the Confederate Wars in 1640's.

Ned Punch is one of the personalities of Crecora. He remembers the currant buns and bread and jam house parties during the war when they danced until dawn at threshings and around Christmas time. "There would be 50 people at those parties", he recalls. "Yes, it was a very close and tightly knit community".

Things have changed now in Crecora. It has become something of a dormitory village for Limerick. People don't mix the way they once did. "Some of them do make an effort, but some of them are awkward about it", he says.

"I remember when those house

parties died out, they were overtaken by what one old timer said was 'a sit-down party', it wasn't the same at all", said Ned Punch.

Rural world

Every house, he said, had a violin, a concertina or an accordion. Although only eight or nine miles from Limerick, they were completely entrenched in a rural world that never really conquered Mungret itself.

"Something of the same spirit and talent still lives on in Mainister", says Ned.

The parish, unlike some neighbouring city parishes, has no huge social problems but the continuing expansion of suburbia could yet present them.

One parishioner, John Jennings, writing in the parish review, makes a plea to stop the "growth of the jungle", pointing the finger at the local authorities. "It is criminal to allow private developers to embark on developments without any proper facilities. Communities need facilities if they are to be communities. Otherwise they will remain developments".

Fr. Liam Enright, C.C., who resides at Crecora and who is a native of Fedamore, with his fellow curate Fr. Tom Mangan—a native of Ardagh and ordained last June in Thurles—is attempting to introduce a new spirit of neighbourliness into places like Raheen and Meadowvale. They visit ten houses and then have a Mass for the neighbours in one, enabling people, especially newcomers, to get to know each other.

There has been a tremendous response to this initiative in the area.

The parishioners, according to Fr. Enright, are incredibly generous and the debt on a new house and a new church are expected to be paid off by the end of the year.

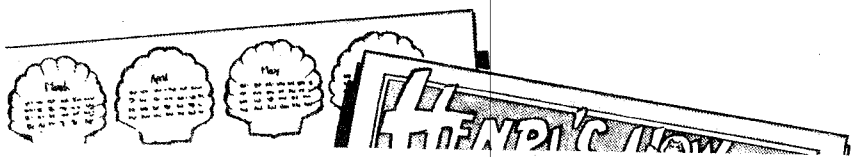
Famous scholars

From the Wise Women of Mungret to the present day, the parish has had an unrivalled reputation for learning. It continued up to the last decade when Mungret College closed its doors for the last time, and the spirit still lives on. From the great scholar St. Nessan, Mungret went on to produce some famous scholars of this century—Cardinal Timothy Manning of Los Angeles and Dr. David Cremin, Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney.

Always a GAA stronghold, Mungret itself has now become even as famous for soccer. Fr. Liam Enright listed 21 active parish organisations. Nearly everyone in the parish is involved in one or another.

It is a comfortable, forward-looking place, steeped in a proud history, and although more than most other places, Mungret and Crecora have reason to look back in anger at episodes such as the Cromwellian Plantation, there are no hang-ups about history.

The Comic & Poster



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