



Attending the opening of the 'In Transition' exhibition by graduates of the Limerick School of Art and Design at the Belltable recently. (LL)

**THE park on Clare Street is becoming increasingly popular with families, particularly since the opening last year of the new playground.**

It is Terence Albert O'Brien Park.

But who was Terence Albert O'Brien?

Simply, he was a Catholic bishop, a Dominican, who had been one of the principal proponents of resistance during the 1651 Cromwellian Siege of Limerick by Henry Ireton. And he was hanged for his pains.

Terence Albert was Irish Provincial of the Dominicans and he first comes to the historian's notice in 1644 when he set off to Rome for the General Chapter of his order.

By MARTIN BYRNES

And on his way home, by sea via Portugal, he learned that he was to be made co-adjutor bishop, in time to succeed to the diocese of Emly.

The Papal Envoy, Rinnucini, twice mentions him as being the episcopal equivalent of 'officer material'.

The country was in shreds at the time, of course, and the church's administration in Rome was in a bit of a crisis as well, dithering about filling appointments, while their own man, Rinnucini, was frustrated beyond patience and blizzed the curia with a variety of very stiff letters, urging them to get on with the consecration of bishops to fill eleven vacancies.

Rinnucini consecrated Terence Albert on Easter Sunday, April 2nd, 1648.

The country was under incredible circumstances. The brief attempt at Catholic emancipation was failing. In-

# O'Brien Park, but who was Bishop Terence Albert?

chiquin was storming through the country pillaging monasteries and killing all around him in places such as Kilmallock. Ormond was trying the sneakier stunt of getting control of the cities by offers of protection from Inchiquin. And in England, the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, was preparing to set sail for Ireland.

In fairness to Cromwell, he was a fair and efficient administrator, had a sense of decency and of public duty, and he rooted out corruption wherever he found it. It's just a pity that his liberal views just would not extend to being in any way tolerant of Catholics:

"I meddle not with any man's conscience. But if by liberty of conscience you mean liberty to exercise the Mass, I judge it better to use plain dealing and let you know (that) where the parliament has power it will not be allowed." — letter of October 1649.

So it was left to people like the new Bishop Terence Albert to make his way to the Confederation of Kilkenny to try to get some degree of unanimity between the Old Irish and the Anglo Irish in the face of imminent national calamity.

Owen Roe O'Neill's army was the Confederation's main strength, but it had, in theory at least, broad support from city and town alike.

Terence Albert's period as

administrator in the Dominicans was not wasted. He was a practical man looking for practical solutions. He suggested that taxes be levied on Munster to help pay for the upkeep of Owen Roe's army, but that was turned down.

So home it was for him, dejected. He held a diocesan synod which was divided about whether to accept the 'Ormond peace', which guaranteed freedom only to Catholic laity, returned some confiscated land and withdrew the requirement of the Oath of Supremacy.

Particularly in Limerick, many voices were for yielding to Ormond rather than face catastrophe as two armies marched on the city.

Things moved quickly after Rinnucini left Rome.

Cromwell arrived in August 1649, and Owen Roe was poisoned in November. The Irish Confederation and its army went west of the Shannon. With news of the terrible atrocities in the towns and cities of the eastern and southern seaboard in his ears, Terence Albert went west too, never to set foot in the Diocese of Emly again.

He, with eighteen brother bishops, met in conference at Clonmacnoise and issued what would today be termed a press release, begging the people not to be deceived by Ormond's blandishments. They quoted the words of Cromwell which I have given above.

They decreed public prayers, fasting, general confessions, receiving of the Sacrament and a general wave of piety in the hope of removing God's anger from the nation.

Terence Albert, now domiciled in Galway, wrote about that time:

"Never was there such a torrent of evil inundating our country. Famine and plague are raging. England has poured the Puritan scum into our land who everywhere forbid the saying of the Mass."

And again:

"A wrathful God is punishing the ungrateful Irish, some by famine, some by pestilence, and now the sword has come."

The bishops met in Limerick and received a petition from the citizens to try to get Catholic morale off the ground:

"We accuse the governors and the commanders of the army of criminal neglect in surrendering the Irish towns that have fallen. They put up practically no resistance. The defence of the country is now reduced to this little corner,

and there is but the space of one winter to prepare for its siege."

Strong stuff!

By the summer 1650, there was a glimmer of hope. Derry had fallen to the Ulster army, as had Enniskillen. Guerilla warfare in Connacht were slowing the Cromwellians to a

painful crawl.

But things were still grim overall, and Terence made his way to Limerick to help defend her just one month before the siege was laid on June 14th. And Terence Albert was the inspiring voice of the defenders from then until the articles of surrender

were signed on October 27th.

He even loudly refused a 40,000 crown (£10,000) bribe and a promise of liberty.

When the city fell, he was captured. He asked for and was granted a confessor.

He asked for the prayers of the sorrowful crowd as he mounted the gallows.

The gallows was erected at where the Good Shepherd Convent now stands, across Clare Street from where the park named in his honour now entertains the children, they of course unknowing of the tragic circumstances of the man who gave their park its name.

The pectoral cross of Bishop Terence Albert O'Brien was donated by the O'Brien family to the Limerick Dominicans, who have it to this day.

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