

O Hely and O Rourke, martyrs

ON Sunday, September 27, 17 Irish martyrs will be beatified in Rome. Four of them — and perhaps even a fifth — had close associations with Co. Limerick.

Bishop Terence Albert O'Brien, who was hanged in Limerick on October 30, 1651, was born near Cappamore in 1601; and Fr. Maurice Mac Kenraghty, who was hanged in Clonmel on April 20, 1585, was born in Kilmallock. Bishop Patrick O Hely and Fr. Conn O Rourke were both hanged in Kilmallock on or about August 13, 1579.

The fifth martyr, who may have a Co. Limerick connection, was Archbishop Dermot O Hurley, who was hanged in Dublin in 1584. Recent publications on the martyrs give his birthplace as Emly — though whether the diocese or town of that name is meant is not clear — but T. J. Westropp in his *Ancient Castles of the County of Limerick* (giving O'Reilly's Memorials as his authority) states he was born in the O Hurley castle in Lickadoon, Co. Limerick.

All five of the martyrs I have mentioned were of old Gaelic stock, as the O and Mac prefixes to their surnames indicate. Today, I would like to write about Bishop Patrick O Hely and Fr. Conn O Rourke who were hanged in Kilmallock in 1579. I use the spelling O Hely rather than O Healy, which many others use, as the spelling O Hely was that favoured by Canon Begley in his *History of the Diocese of Limerick*.

Regarding Fr. O Rourke's Christian name, this should always be written Conn, with two "ns". The old Irish name Conn has nothing to do with the name Cornelius or its abbreviation "Conn" (spelt with one "n"), Conn being in use in Ireland long before the name Cornelius was heard in any part of the country.

Patrick O Hely is believed to have been a native of Sligo or Leitrim, and is thought to have been born about 1543. He joined the Franciscans at Dromahair, Co. Leitrim, in 1561, and the following

year was sent to Rome to pursue his studies. Later he went to Spain to continue his training and education, and it was there he was ordained priest. He was considered not only a deeply religious man but an exceptionally brilliant one as well. He was a very fine linguist and a noted preacher.

In 1575 he was sent to Rome to seek aid for the Geraldine leader, James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald, who was then on the Continent planning to lead a crusade to Ireland in defence of the Catholic Faith which, at that time, was coming under severe pressure as Queen Elizabeth and her representatives in Ireland tried to force the tenets of the Reformation on an unwilling people.

In Rome, Fr. Patrick O Hely made such an impression on the Vatican officials that Pope Gregory XIII appointed him Bishop of Mayo, a see now incorporated in the archdiocese of Tuam. The new bishop's immediate interest now was to return to Ireland and take care of the spiritual welfare of his flock in the diocese to which he had been appointed.

Accompanied by James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald, Bishop O Hely set out from Lisbon in November 1577, but a severe storm forced them to return. O Hely later went to France, where he met Fr. Conn O Rourke, a young Franciscan, who was of noble stock, being son of Brian O Rourke, chief of Breifne. In Gaelic sources Fr. O Rourke is described as Conn Bráthair O Rourke, Conn the Friar O Rourke. It was Conn's grandfather, Eoghan O Rourke, who had founded the Franciscan friary of Dromahair, where both Conn and Patrick O Hely were received into the Franciscan Order.

The O Rourkes were connected with such renowned Irish families as the O Neills, the O Donnells, the Maguires and the O Connors. It was a brother, or half-brother, of Conn, Brian O Rourke, who gave shelter to the survivors of the Spanish Armada in 1588; and a nephew, also Brian, fought beside Hugh O'Donnell at the Battle of

the Curlew Mountains, and later welcomed the retreating O Sullivan Beare and his followers to his castle.

Bishop O Hely and Fr. O Rourke sailed for Ireland from Brittany in the summer of 1579 and landed in Kerry. Disguised as sailors they planned to travel northwards through Limerick to their native district, and decided that on the way they would visit the Earl of Desmond, cousin of James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald, at his castle in Askeaton. The Earl was absent, but his countess received them hospitably. Fearful, however, that news of her having received two clerics just arrived from the continent might compromise her husband, she sent word to the English authorities as soon as the visitors had set out for Limerick. They were arrested on the road, and imprisoned for several days in Limerick before being sent to Kilmallock for trial by Englishman, Lord Justice William Drury, who was also Lord President of Munster. It is unlikely that the countess ever thought that her action in informing the authorities would have such tragic consequences.

Drury, in order to obtain the verdict he wanted, set aside the common law, and invoked martial law, trying the prisoners by courtmartial. Both prisoners were closely examined by him. Bishop O Hely said his sole purpose in coming to Ireland was to exercise his episcopal function. At first Drury decided to try persuasion rather than force. He told the bishop he would set free and reward him well and also allow him retain his post as Bishop of Queen's Church if he would renounce his Faith. This he refused to do. He was then cruelly tortured in a vain attempt to extract information from him about Fitzmaurice's Catholic crusade. Both he and Fr. Conn O Rourke were sentenced to death by hanging.

It is almost certain that the English did not know how important a person they had in Conn O Rourke, son of the chief of Breifne. The Jesuit, Fr. James Archer, who somehow

managed to see the prisoners before their execution, described Conn O Rourke as young, good-looking and soft-spoken — he was then about 30 years. On or about August 13, 1579, Patrick O Hely and Conn O Rourke were hanged on a little mound called Corchta, outside the old town walls of Kilmallock at the rear of the present Catholic church. Their bodies were left hanging for some days on the gibbets while they were ill-treated by the English soldiers. The bodies were then reverently taken down by John of Desmond, brother of the Earl of Desmond, and taken for burial to Askeaton Franciscan Friary. A few days after the friars had been hanged in Kilmallock, on August 18, to be precise, James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald was killed in a skirmish at Ballyvorheen near the present Glenstal Abbey.

Fined

A CORK lorry driver, Liam Bickerstaffe, 60, Loretto Park, Friars Walk, was fined £50 at Newcastlewest Court for having no certificate of road worthiness, and a further £50 for not having a tachograph working when he was stopped at Killaready, Castlemahon last February 12.

A charge of failing to produce the certificate of road worthiness was struck out and other charges of having no certificate of road worthiness and failing to produce it for the semi-trailer and of having no marks on the trailer and the trailer marks not exhibited were taken into account.

Disqualified

ROBERT Reidy, Adamswood, Croagh, was convicted at Newcastlewest court of driving with excess alcohol at The Square, Newcastlewest, last January 3. A blood sample gave a reading of 204mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood.

Mr Reidy was fined £100 with his licence endorsed and disqualified from driving for 12 months, effective from November 1. Charges of having no insurance or driving licence and of failing to produce both were struck out.

take place at the Jesuit Church, The Crescent, on Tuesday at 8pm.

Fined

JIM Keane of 25 Dromore Rise, Raheen was fined £ at Adare Court for driving at 45mph in a 30mph zone at main Street, Patrickswell on September 19 last year

Too fast

LARRY Lyons of Dromore Rise, Raheen, was fined £20 at Adare Court for driving at 45mph in 30mph zone at Barnakyl Patrickswell, last December 21.

Anir

By PATRICIA

AN award-winning project has brought joy to the children through his education farm has become an asset to the University of Limerick.

The future of John Rivers at Rivers, Lisnagry, and the balance as colleges decide the future of Thomond College farm is sited.

All farm activities on the land at Rivers, worth millions of pounds were pumping one of the most best equipped farms in Ireland for Thomond research.

But as the University of Limerick which now incorporates Thomond College, plans to do with the extreme land, Mr Wray, who has a lot of animals on a single farm himself caught in the net.

"There is no threat to the farm," said Jim Quigley of the University of Limerick said, "but Mr Wray is going for somewhere else."

Mr Wray says: "Normally I told me to get out of the farm as it is coming to a halt all work on the farm has stopped and the men have been



Animal farewell week. Picture: [unclear]