

LEISURE EXTR

Editor: HELEN BUCKLEY

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Memories of Archdeacon John Begley revived

WITH the launching of a reprinted edition of Archdeacon John Begley's "History of the Diocese of Limerick," which will take place at Mary Immaculate Training College, on Wednesday next week, memories of the great historian will be revived.

John Begley, the second of four children born to Daniel and Bridget Begley of Gardenfield, Monegay, was baptised on the 1st of September, 1861.

His mother, formerly Bridget Moloney, was a native of Mohernagh, Ballyhahill, although her father, John Moloney, had originally hailed from Clare before marrying into the farm at Ballyhahill.

From an early age John Begley showed a great aptitude for learning and he was regarded as the outstanding scholar at the local National School.

When he had completed his primary education he decided that he wanted to enter the priesthood. However, as times were very bad the cost of keeping a son in training for the church bore heavily on the financial means of the family.

It was said that his brother Jim, who was an excellent shot with a rifle, raised the money by shooting grouse, pheasant and all type of game across the

hills and glens of West Limerick, North Cork and East Kerry, which he then sold and took home the proceeds which funded his brother's education.

Upon his ordination to the priesthood, at Maynooth, in 1887, he went on mission work to the diocese of Argyll and the Western Isles in Scotland. Upon his return to Limerick Father Begley was appointed as Curate in Tournafulla.

It was whilst in Tournafulla that he first displayed an interest in history and antiquities. It was said of him at the time that he had a reputation of knowing more about graves and memorial stones and tracing families than, in the words of an old man who knew him, "the devil himself."

It was, also, while he was in Tournafulla that he first came in contact with Michael McEnery, who was a native of Ballintubber, Newcastlewest and who worked in the State Record Office in Dublin Castle. This meeting was central to Father Begley expanding his interest into the production of a history of the diocese. Over the next forty or so years Michael McEnery ensured that John Begley was furnished with all material of relevance to the Limerick diocese.

After some years in Tournafulla, Father Begley was transferred, for a short period of time, to Coolcappagh and from thence to St. Munchin's parish in Limerick city, in 1900.

It was while working as a curate in Saint Munchin's parish that the first volume of his work relating to the ancient and medieval period was published. The preface was written by Dr. Thomas Edward O'Dwyer, then Bishop of Limerick, who was not noted for being easily impressed, but in the case of Fr. Begley's work he was very fulsome in his praise.

In 1915 John Begley was made a Canon of the Cathedral Chapter and appointed as parish priest in Cappagh, where he was to remain until 1917. After his short stint in Cappagh, the now Canon Begley was transferred to Dromcollogher where his very happy tenure was shattered by the tragic cinema fire, in 1926, which claimed the lives of 48 of his parishioners.

It was an experience which had a terrible effect on Canon Begley and soon afterwards he was transferred to Kilmallock.

1927 saw the publication of the second volume of his work and as if to add further infliction upon him the plates for the volume were burned in a fire at Browne and Nolan when only a relatively small number of books had been printed. Because of this fire, Volume II, dealing with events in the diocese in the 16th and 17th centuries, was to become an extremely rare item.

On the 27th of March, 1932, Canon Begley was appointed Archdeacon and transferred to Bruff. It was while he was ministering at Bruff that Volume III, dealing with the history of the diocese from the Treaty of Limerick up to the Twentieth Century was printed.

Sadly, on account of the fact that Volume III did not sell nearly as well as the other two volumes, Archdeacon Begley was forced to sell off much of his fine library to pay for its printing. Nonetheless the National University of Ireland recognised his achievement when, in 1939, he was awarded a Doctorate of Literature.

On Monday, the 10th of June, 1941, Archdeacon John Begley, then in his eightieth year, died at his residence, in Bruff, and he was laid to rest on Wednesday, the 12th.

The reprinting of his work, which covers over 1,700 pages, in three volumes, should ensure that the memory of this great historian and cleric and indeed his close friend and aide Michael McEnery, will be saved for future generations. The books, which are being reproduced in numbered, matching sets, are a must for people who have an interest in the heritage of County Limerick and will make the ideal Christmas gift to book lovers in Limerick city and county and indeed much further apart as well.

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