

The Franciscans in Clonmel: 1269-1998

By Patrick Conlan, o.f.m.

Saint Francis died, much admired and respected, in Assisi on 3 October, 1226. His followers flocked into orders. Women gathered around Saint Clare, and the laity joined the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, otherwise the Third Order. Thousands of friars spread his vision throughout Europe and the Middle East. Soon after Francis's death they came to Ireland, where the Irish Franciscan Province was formally set up in 1230.¹

At first the friars settled in the ports and towns of South Munster (Cork, Waterford, Youghal), East Leinster (Dublin, Drogheda, Dundalk, Kilkenny) and East Ulster (Downpatrick, Carrickfergus). By 1250 there were 18 friaries in Ireland. Local rulers invited the friars to their areas. In the 1260s the friars turned towards religious centres (Armagh, Cashel) or cities (Wexford, Limerick) which they had missed.

They would have been very happy in 1269 to accept an invitation from Sir Otho de Grandison to come to Clonmel. It was probably the 23rd Franciscan house in Ireland. The date for Clonmel is certain. The Annals of Multyfarnham state, under the year 1269, that the friars got houses in Roscommon and Clonmel, and the Annals of Friar Clyn give the same date.²

We can ignore 17th century speculation about a friary on the south bank of the Suir in or before 1260. Other foundations of that period were Armagh in 1263-64 (by invitation of Archbishop Patrick O'Scanlon, O.P.), Cashel in 1265-67 (by Lord William Hackett), Wexford and Limerick, both around 1267.

The role of Sir Otho de Grandison in the early history of Clonmel has emerged recently. He was the eldest son of 13 children born to Peter, lord of a small town called Grandison, now Graunzun, by Lake Neuchatel in Switzerland. Otho was born in or around 1238.³ After Peter's death, Count Peter of Savoy brought three of the boys to England in 1258 and placed them with patrons. Otho entered the service of Prince Edward, eldest son of Henry III. Edward was named Lord of Ireland in 1254 and retained the title until he became Edward I in 1272.

The de Burgos were lords of the manor of Clonmel until Walter de Burgo was granted lands in Ulster in 1263. It was then vested in Otho, who was Sheriff of Tipperary 1267-70 and was granted "the castle and territory of Ikonagh [Coonagh], the town of Tipperary, the castle and lands of Kilfeakle, the land of Muskerye, the manor of Kilselan, the town of Clonmel and the land of Estremoye [Clanwilliam]".⁴ Otho left Ireland in 1270 and went with Edward on the Eighth Crusade.

Afterwards, at the request of Edward I, he tried but failed to organise another crusade. He received the cross from John Peckham, Franciscan Archbishop of Canterbury and left for the Holy Land in 1290. Otho helped to defend Acre and was lucky to escape when it fell. He lost interest in Irish and English affairs, except for his Lordship of the Channel Islands, and spent the last years of his life beside his native Lake Neuchatel. He obtained papal permission for a Franciscan house at Liserne, Burgundy, in 1290 and introduced the Order to Grandison in 1289. Otho died in 1328 and his tomb is in the Protestant Cathedral at Lausanne.

Otho may have passed his Irish interests in 1270, to his brother, William, born around 1245. He was a military engineer who built castles in Wales. We may see his hand behind the murage



Clonmel Friary around 1840. The choir and tower of the medieval church still stand, with a transept added on the right.

grant for town walls in Clonmel by Edward I in 1298 and again in 1316, 1319 and 1335. The friary was included within the new walls. William died in 1335, and the lordship of the manor of Clonmel was sold in 1338 to Maurice Fitzgerald, 1st Earl of Desmond. Ten years earlier James Butler had been created Earl of Ormond and granted the County of Tipperary as a palatinate, with Clonmel as its capital.

Building takes time. The friars probably lived in a small house and used a local church while the friary was under construction. The church was long and narrow, running east to west with a tower dividing choir and sanctuary from the nave. The main altar stood under the east window. A rood loft on the west face of the tower served for preaching. It seems that the friary was around a cloister to the south of the church. Normally it was to the north, but the arrangement in Clonmel had the advantage that the friary was by the quays.

The nave of the church has vanished under Abbey Street and the carpark, but the tower still stands. Parts of the medieval choir are incorporated into the north and east walls of the present church. Indications are that the east window was of three lancets, typical of the late 13th century. The cloister lies under the present church and friary.

The friars provided Christian witness by their particular style of living. They prayed the Divine Office and said Mass, becoming known as preachers and confessors. Some friars gave the medieval equivalent of parish missions and retreats. They introduced the Third Order and promoted popular devotions such as those in honour of Our Lady or Franciscan saints.

Further building was under way in 1318, when the friars added a Lady Chapel or north transept to the church. William Wall left £40 for this work.⁵ This was kept in his chest in the friary. His son Raymond took it without the consent of the friars. John Nash, "site engineer", successfully sued Raymond in June 1318 before William FitzJohn, Archbishop of Cashel. It was normal for merchants and others to have a chest in the safe keeping of the friars in medieval Ireland; it often gave rise to problems.

The Irish Franciscan Provincial Chapter met in Clonmel in 1322. Two friars got permission to visit the Holy Land after it. Simon FitzSimon and Hugo the Illuminator crossed from Dublin to Anglesea and went to Dover *via* London. They sailed to Wissant, went to Paris and took a boat down the Rhone to Marseilles. They went overland to Bobbio and on to Venice, where they got a boat to Alexandria, where Hugo died.

The next chapter, at Dublin in 1324, was concerned about relations between Irish and Anglo-Irish friars.⁷ By now the Anglo-Irish were in a dominant position. The Irish province was organised in four, later five, custodies. The native Irish houses were gathered in the Custody of Nenagh. It seems that the friars in Clonmel were solidly Anglo-Irish. It is not on a list of Irish houses in 1324. With Kilkenny, New Ross, Waterford and Youghal it made up the Anglo-Irish Custody of Cashel.

The tomb of the Butlers of Cahir is still in the church. It was originally in the choir. Parts of various tombs were dug up south of the church during the early 1830s and put together under the tower in the 1890s. The inscription on the main table tomb tells us that it covered the graves of James Galdy, son of the Earl of Ormond, who died in 1431, Peter Butler (died 1464), Thomas Peter Butler (died 1478), Edmund Thomas, son of Peter Butler (died 1513), and his wife Catherine Power (died 1512). It was erected by Thomas Butler and his wife Ellen in 1534.⁸ The Lords of Cahir began with James Butler the Foreigner (Galdy), son of James Butler, 3rd Earl of Ormond, and Catherine, daughter of the Lord of Desmond. James of Ormond had been granted Cahir by Edward III in 1375 and made it over to James Galdy before his death in 1405. From James the title went to Peter (died 1464), Thomas (died 1478), Edmund (died 1513) and Thomas. Thomas was created 1st Baron of Cahir in 1543 and was buried in the friary when he died in 1558. Many of the later Barons of Cahir were also buried there: certainly Edmund, 2nd Baron, Theobald, 3rd (4th) Baron, an Irish poet for whom the title was re-created in 1583, Pierce, 6th Baron (died 1677) and Pierce, 11th Baron (died without issue in 1788). The line had remained catholic until the end, John, 10th Baron, becoming a Jesuit!

The Observant reform gained ground among Franciscans on the Continent from 1430. It was based on a return to a simple form of life with more time for prayer and less stress on pastoral needs. The Irish province had declined following the Black Death in 1348. A spirit of excitement and inventiveness emerged after 1400.⁹ Friars were attracted to the new lifestyle. Quin was founded for the Observants in 1433, followed by Muckross a decade later. An Irish Observant Vicar Provincial was appointed in 1460. The Franciscan order, including the Irish Province, split in two in 1517. The reform spread mainly among the Irish in small friaries and led to many new foundations, especially in the west and north. Anglo-Irish friars in the larger cities and towns showed little interest. Clonmel provides a typical example. It only became Observant in 1536 on the eve of the Reformation.

Henry VIII's suppression

Suppression of the religious orders in Ireland under Henry VII had more to do with raising funds for the English treasury than changing religious beliefs. The Act of Suppression was passed by the Irish parliament in 1547.¹⁰ Two years later Henry appointed a commission, headed by Sir John Alen, Lord Chancellor, and Archbishop George Browne of Dublin, to accept the surrender of Irish monastic properties and punish those who refused. With revenue as a major priority, the first houses to go were the large ones within the Pale. Then the commission went to the area under the Ormonds in South Leinster and Munster.

They reached Clonmel in 1540. Robert Travers, guardian of the friary, surrendered it to Sir John Alen on March 8. Archbishop James Butler handed over the Cistercian abbey of Inishlounaght on April 8. The monastery of St. Francis, otherwise the Grey Friars of Clonmel, contained a church with bell-tower, a dormitory, three chambers, a kitchen, a stable and two gardens – an acre in extent. There were four properties and gardens, a fishing-pool and weir¹⁰ and other lands amounting to 17 acres, including two acres of arable land in le Newton de la Annor.¹¹

If this seems a lot of property, remember that Clonmel was conventual practically up to the Suppression; these friars believed in having enough resources to support themselves. Observants gained their livelihood from alms, either freely given or in return for spiritual services, and from the quest, a custom whereby the friars went out and asked for alms.

On 15 January 1541 a jury valued all the property at 22 shillings and 6 pence. The process of selling the plots followed. On 9 May 1543 John Striche, sovereign (mayor) of Clonmel, and the commonality (town), were granted a moiety of the friary, along with the church, belfry, dormitory, hall and cemetery, and all the lands within the site of the monastery, and a moiety of all the properties in Clonmel, Newtown-Annor and near to Annours-bridge in the county of Tipperary. Six days later any remaining parts of the church and friary were granted to James Butler, Earl of Ormond. It was up to him and the citizens of Clonmel to divide the spoils between them.

It would seem that in true Irish fashion a blind eye was turned to the continued presence of the friars in Clonmel. We know that the friars of Galbally sought refuge with their Clonmel brethren when their house was sacked in 1570. The church in Clonmel was also used by Catholics. Two Franciscans, Patrick O'Healy, bishop of Mayo, and Conn O'Rourke, both now beatified, landed in north Kerry in 1579 and were betrayed. They were killed in Kilmallock and their bodies eventually removed for burial in the friary in Clonmel. Other priests killed by soldiers and buried in Clonmel friary included Dermot O'Mulrooney and two companions from Galbally friary in 1575 and Maurice Kenrichton, chaplain to the Earl of Desmond, in 1585.

There are few records about the friars in Clonmel during the last third of the 16th century. The friars went to ground, particularly after the formation of the Desmond Confederation in 1569 and the excommunication of Elizabeth I in 1570. There are indications that the community withdrew, perhaps to the area of Kilcash. One friar writing in 1629 about this period says that the friars were expelled from their property "when persecution began ... their church was preserved as a burial place for faithful catholics ... the friars deserted the town until 1616 when a residence was set up with Father Thomas Bray, theologian and eloquent preacher, as superior ... he had a particular gift for reconciling parties in dispute ... his preaching and that of his fellow friars brought a great increase in religion."¹²

Another contemporary Franciscan who wrote about the friary in Clonmel was Luke Wadding, one of whose sisters married into the Baron family of Clonmel. He mentions that the

church had windows of many colours with all kinds of drawings. He lists the principal families buried there – Prendergasts, Mandervills, Walls, Whites, Brays, Morrons and others.

Donagh Mooney was the provincial who sent the friars back to Clonmel.¹³ He visited it in 1615 and found that the old friary was in a corner of the town walls near the river Suir. Some said that it was founded by the Earl of Desmond; but the citizens claimed that they had done so. In fact it had been the de Grandisons. The Earl of Ormond got the friary buildings at the suppression, while the citizens retained the church, burial ground and sacristy. The church was still in good repair. Many illustrious people were buried there, including the Barons of Cahir. Their tomb, built in marble and decorated with statues and icons, stood in the middle of the choir.

In Donagh's time a heretic who held the office of magistrate in the town and who was a notorious priest-hunter selected a tomb for himself in the church and was actually buried beside the place where the priests and ministers sat near the high altar. Some Jesuits and other clerics living in the town consented to this and connived at the profanation. The friars were unable to stop this because they were not living there and were being prevented from returning.¹⁴

The former did not worry that this place, "previously unpolluted, was spoiled". They allowed the burial to go ahead or, as they admitted, remained silent through fear of a greater evil. In fact, it would not have been done if they had spoken even once. Donagh had the body exhumed by night and removed to unconsecrated ground during his visit in 1615. He then purified the place with Gregorian water with permission from the archbishop.¹⁵

Many citizens used the church. Magistrates and citizens gathered there on Sundays and feasts and did stations.¹⁶ They gave offerings or alms for the dead to certain designated people. This money was used for the repair of the building, to support priests or for the poor. This was an ancient custom.

Donagh believed that using the alms for priests and the poor began with the Reformation. Priests had their own property before then; now the alms were given to them quietly. It was easy to believe that this devotion began to keep the friary buildings in repair and to help the friars. This was the reason why some clerics were unwilling to have the Franciscans back in town. Twice, to the best of Donagh's knowledge, friars were appointed to Clonmel but were rejected by the citizens on the advice of these ecclesiastics. It was alleged that Jesuits obtained a papal grant of the property, but their efforts had been and would be opposed.

It was believed (and seemed probable to Donagh) that all the buildings between Kilsheelan St. [Mitchell St.] and the Quays were part of the property. From the way that the secular buildings in the area surrounded the friary, or even incorporated parts of it such as the bake-house, it seemed likely they were built by agreement with the friars. The deeds of one of the houses in Kilsheelan St. which overlooked the cemetery contained a clause guaranteeing free access and passage from the street to the cemetery and monastery.

Also, these houses did not have gardens or yards but were squeezed in between the monastery and the streets. The mill by the gate and the weir alongside, known as the Earl's mill and fishery, also belonged to the friars. The same was true of the large building near the friary known as the Earl's Hall. This probably belonged to the friars because Irish nobles liked to build such large houses within the ambit of monasteries which they founded. They used these for recollection, handing them over to the friars so that they would always be ready for use.

Some citizens claimed that the Earl's Hall never belonged to the friars. All the conventional buildings, except for the cloister and those listed above as in the possession of the town, had fallen into decay. The Earl of Ormond repaired part, including what was the friars' infirmary,

and used it as a residence and an orchard. This came into the estate of Lady Helen Barry, widow of the late Earl of Ormond, later married to Sir Thomas Somerset.

Donagh approached her, asking whether she might like to return it to the friars, but she would not hear him, probably for reasons which he had already mentioned in connection with Cashel.¹⁷ Occasionally Mass was celebrated and sermons preached in the church. Unfortunately a citizen whom Donagh did not like built a tomb in place of the wooden altar in a chapel where Donagh saw Mass celebrated several times. He mentioned this in the hope that when better times came the friars would know what should be done.

Donagh wrote of an image of Saint Francis in the friary which remained in the sacristy for years after the destruction of the statues in the church. Many miracles were reputed to have occurred before it. Witnesses had told him that the Lord would give some sign of the truth to anybody who, strong in faith, swore through Saint Francis before the image.

A lady of Clonmel affirmed on oath to him that she had seen a certain woman, who was suspected of receiving stolen garments, deny the charge on oath before the image. Immediately the stolen item fell from her before many witnesses. She admitted her guilt and perjury, saying that the item had been hidden in a distant place and could only have appeared by divine intervention.

Donagh had no information about the friars of Clonmel, other than what he read in an ancient manuscript that they took possession of the convent in 1269. A certain priest named Maurice, martyred in Clonmel about 1589, was buried there. His relics had been gathered together and placed behind the high altar.

As stated above, Thomas Bray was appointed superior in Clonmel in 1616. He was also there in 1629. Thomas Wynne was guardian in 1638-41 and Bray again in 1641-44. Wynne returned in 1644-47. We do not know what work the friars did, but it is unlikely that they were involved in parish ministry. The friars remained in Clonmel up to the siege by Cromwell in 1650.

An indirect victim of the siege was the Franciscan bishop of Ross, Boetius MacEgan. He had become bishop in 1547 and was captured by troops under Lord Broghill. These had gone into Cork to block an army that was marching from Kerry to relieve the siege of Clonmel. The bishop was murdered by Broghill in an attempt to force the garrison of Carrigadrohid castle to surrender.¹⁸

John Kearney was born in Cashel in 1619, joined the friars in Kilkenny and studied in Louvain before returning to Ireland in 1643. He ministered mainly in Waterford, Carrick-on-Suir and Cashel, where he was captured in March 1653. He was tried in Clonmel and condemned for administering the sacraments and saying mass. Dressed in a habit and cord, he was hanged on 21 March. He was beatified by John Paul II; his mother is on the next list of Irish martyrs.

Withdrawal after siege of 1650

The friars abandoned Clonmel after the siege. They moved to Knockanaffrin, or perhaps the Nire Valley. They probably returned to the town at the Restoration in 1660. James Wynne was appointed guardian in 1661, followed by Edmund Burke in 1664. He got a new chalice for the friary or had an old one restored that year. This was a time of confusion in the church in Ireland as Catholics tried to face up to the problems caused by offering loyalty to a Protestant monarch.

The Franciscans in Clonmel were involved in a dispute with the Dominicans in 1668. The latter had been in Clonmel in 1643-50 and tried to return. The Friars Minor pointed out that they had no right to a canonical foundation, and the Order of Preachers had to retire gracefully.

In 1669 the guardian, James White, reported to his superiors that the persecution had not yet reached Clonmel. In all towns throughout Munster every chapel was closed; Mass could be said only in great secrecy. Clonmel was the only exception; the friars there had ample freedom in public. There were two chapels with three altars for sacrifice, large congregations, with sermons on Sundays and Holydays. James feared that they would soon lose these privileges. He had five novices and prayed that they would persevere.¹⁹ Later that year James moved to Youghal, Thomas Wynne succeeding him in Clonmel.

The most famous friar from Clonmel during this period was Bonaventure Baron, brother of Geoffrey Baron and nephew of Luke Wadding, O.F.M. Born in 1610, Bartholomew received the name Bonaventure when he joined the friars in Timoleague in 1627. He began his studies at Saint Anthony's College, Louvain, and continued under his famous uncle at Saint Isidore's College, Rome. He became an expert on the doctrine of the great Franciscan theologian, Duns Scotus. After lecturing in many universities in Europe, he settled at Saint Isidore's in 1680. He estimated that an edition of his works would come to 22 volumes. Bonaventure, the last great Scotist of that era, died on 18 March 1696 and was buried in the vaults under Saint Isidore's.²⁰

It seemed that the friars in Clonmel occasionally used their old church. There were

six living in a residence with a public oratory in 1687. Four of them were approved as preachers. The Banishment of Religious Act came into force in May 1698. The friars had the choice of going into exile, registering as parish clergy or going into hiding.

In Clonmel they withdrew into the obscurity of Irishtown and began working in St. Mary's Church not Old St. Mary's. There they were partly hidden and somewhat legal. While the law did not allow religious to register as parish clergy, the authorities usually turned a blind eye to this.

The friars lost all contact with their old property. The Cromwellians had converted the area into a sort of fortress which the Earl of Ormond reclaimed at the Restoration. The Dissenters got part of the old church from the Earl's agent and were repairing it for their own use in 1705.

A detailed plan of the area was prepared in 1758. It shows that the Dissenters' Meeting House occupied the choir and tower of the old friary, with a large garden, in fact cemetery, to the south. A lane ran from the Meeting House to the river. The Dissenting rector, Joseph Moore, had a garden on the other side of the lane. Alongside it was a hard for storing dung.

Two years later a new street was built through the property. Warren Street was named after



The old Saint Francis Academy in Mary St., now demolished. – Photo M. A. Keating, Clonmel.

Admiral Sir Peter Warren, an Irishman then at the height of his popularity after a series of victories over the French in 1752 off the American coast during the War of the Austrian Succession.²¹ Moore recorded that during the building of the street a vault was discovered containing the body of a priest dressed in vestments and sitting at a table, together with a large chest with more vestments and religious books.

The friars lived in Irishtown during the 18th century. They kept a low profile, since they were liable, in theory, to arrest and deportation. A report in 1731 stated that there were three friars – John Leo, Michael Dwyer [the guardian] and James Walsh – in Irishtown assisting the parish priest and curate.²² There were two friars in the community in 1766 and the same number in 1801. Along with the parish priest and a curate, they ministered to all the Catholics of Clonmel.

The friars leased the Stone House at 178 Irish Street from John Bagwell on 25 March 1790. They had lost any clear idea of Franciscan ministry during a century of keeping a low profile.

Young men attracted to the Order spent an initial period of over a year living in their local friary. They then went to the Continent and studied for four or five years. On returning to Ireland they normally ministered in their own area. Thus friars from South Tipperary were usually stationed in Aglish, Carrickbeg, Clonmel, Thurles and Waterford.

The friars supported themselves by an annual £90 collection at Saint Mary's church, which brought in about £90, and an oat quest to feed their horses, in the parishes of Powerstown, Lisronagh, Fourmilewater, Newcastle, Ardfinnan, Ballylooby, Grange, Clogheen, Cahir and Clerihan. Except for an area to the north of Clonmel, they kept within the diocese of Waterford and Lismore. This enabled the Franciscans of Cashel, then in Thurles, to quest in south Tipperary, those of Galbally, then in Mitchelstown, to do so in East Cork and those of Youghal, then at Aglish, to cover South Waterford.

The friars of Carrickbeg had a much smaller hinterland and so were allowed to quest as far as Kilsheelan. Five priests of Cashel diocese issued instructions in their parishes in 1813 that the people were not to support the friars of Clonmel. The quest continued in Clonmel into the 1970s. The area covered was the same as in 1800 with the addition of South Waterford, including Dungarvan, after Aglish closed.

At this time the friars in Clonmel became involved with the church, or rather lack of it, in Newfoundland. James Louis O'Donnell was born in Knocklofty outside Clonmel in 1737. He studied in Limerick, where he joined the Franciscans. He did his novitiate in Boulay, France, and studied at Saint Isidore's College, Rome. He lectured in Prague after his ordination in 1764 and was Irish minister provincial in 1779-82.

Shortly afterwards he was invited to go to Newfoundland to organise the church among the scattered Irish emigrants there. He arrived in 1794 and was ordained bishop when the mission became a vicariate in 1796. He retired to Ireland in 1807 and was buried at Saint Mary's, Clonmel, after his death in 1811. The next four bishops were also Irish Franciscans, but linked more to Wexford than Waterford. The last was Bishop Thomas Mullock, whose brother was the organist in Saint Mary's, Clonmel, until his death in 1878.²³

The Catholic Relief Act of 1782 was the first break in the Penal Laws. Friars moved a little more openly. The Dissenters left the old friary church for the Scots Church in 1789, and the building became a grain store. John Coman, acting in trust for the friars, got a lease on it in 1795. The friars were able to buy this out in 1825. The guardian, Charles Anthony Dalton, restored the old choir.

Against the express will of the corporation he built a porch, put a gallery by the tower and re-floored the building. Bishop John Ryan of Limerick re-opened the church for public worship in October 1828. His work done, Dalton resigned as guardian in 1831 to go on the mission in

Newfoundland, where he died in 1861.²⁴ The friars stopped working at Saint Mary's when they had their own church up and running.

The friars gradually recovered more of their old site and extended their chapel when funds allowed. After 1830 the friary chapel remained closed on Easter Sunday. Everyone had to attend their parish churches where dues were collected. As late as 1881 the friars had their knuckles wrapped over this. A transept was added in 1832-34. This involved the destruction of part of the south wall of the medieval choir. A new bell was erected and an organ purchased in 1838-39. At the same time an iron railing was placed around the church yard, where burials still took place. A well-known painting shows the church as it was after these changes.

The Abbe [John] Hackett joined the friars in Cork and studied in Spain. While acting as chaplain to some of the aristocracy in Warsaw, he gave money to the friars, who used it to build a sacristy in 1854. The friars kept tinkering with the old building. A new high altar built in 1867 was later presented to the friars in Waterford; it would not fit into the new church. A new bell weighing 26 hundredweight was installed in 1878 and is still in position.

The lease on the Stone House in Irishtown ran out in 1833. It appears that relations between the friars and Mr. Bagwell were not good. They referred to an eviction and moved residence to Morton Street, living almost opposite the present convent. A year later they got a house at the corner of Bank Lane and later bought the house next door. They rented a house on the present site in 1876 and purchased it outright in 1886.

Franciscan records of those days recall that the population of Clonmel in 1837 was just over 20,000. The 1996 Census gave the population of Clonmel urban area as over 15,000. Fr. Pierce Walsh, parish priest, built new churches in Ballybacon and Grange. A group erected a chapel in Ardfinnan without his permission. Mass was said there for the first time on 6 January 1839.

There is a verbal tradition (but no documentary evidence) that the Clonmel friars worked in this "illegal" church. Famine riots are recorded in Clonmel in April 1846. Bakers' shops were looted. The military brought canon on to the streets to disperse looters. Fr. John Higginbotham, a retired army chaplain, was buried in the friary church in 1882, the Royal Irish Regiment rendering full military honours.

The Irish friars had managed some primary schools early in the nineteenth century. They now turned to secondary education, opening two schools: Saint Bonaventure's Academy in Athlone (1871-78) and Saint Francis's Academy in Clonmel. This later was strongly promoted by Bishop John Power of Waterford and Lismore. It opened in a house in Mary Street in September 1873 and closed in July 1881.

The friar most closely associated with it was Fr. Richard Augustine Hill from Tallow, Co. Waterford, a convert. He was president of the academy from 1874 until elected provincial in 1879. He was unhappy to order the closure of the school due to lack of students. Its most famous pupils were Mgr. John O'Connor, the "Father Brown" of the Chesterton novels, and Canon William Burke, the historian of Clonmel.²⁵

Patrick Cuddihy, born in Clonmel in 1809, received the name Joseph when he joined the Irish Franciscans. He was ordained in Rome in 1831. He returned to his native town in 1834 and was guardian from 1837 to 1840. He moved to Waterford as guardian in 1843-49. He went to the diocese of Springfield, U.S.A. in 1852. He was pastor of Saint Joseph's, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, until 1857, when he moved for the sake of his health to Milford, south of Boston, also in Massachusetts. He remained there for 40 years until his death in 1898. He gave £1,000 towards building a new friary church in Clonmel, £1,200 for a house and left the Order £1,000 in his will.

Joseph Cooney, born in Dundalk in 1842, received the name Bernard-Marie when he joined the friars in Drogheda in 1863. He studied in Rome and was ordained in 1868. After a few years

in Dublin, he was guardian in Drogheda 1876-76 and in Dublin 1876-79 before going to Ennis as master of novices 1879-82.

He then came to Clonmel, where he remained until his death in 1906. He was guardian in 1882-95 and 1899-1906. He was vicar provincial during 1895-1906, the recognised leader of the Black Friars, and died in Ennis while attending a meeting of the provincial council. His remains were brought back to Clonmel for burial.

Cooney's first priority was the church. He began by re-introducing in 1883 the Third Order, which had been in decline. He arranged the purchase of more ground in 1884 and got a freehold lease on the old church and tower in 1885 from the Bagwell family, whom he found extremely co-operative. Cooney then halted burials in the friary graveyard. Daniel Hearne, chief coachman to Charles Bianconi, who died on 6 March 1886, was one of the last buried in the friary.

Preparations continued for the construction of a new church. The chosen architect was Walter G. Doolin of Ely Place, Dublin. He wished to repeat the impression of the original church and so opted for a revival of the Early English or Norman style.²⁶ It was clearly impossible to keep to the dimensions of the medieval church, but Doolin copied the style of the windows and arches.

The church has an English groundplan, more wider than longer, which has turned out to be well suited to modern liturgical requirements. Doolin also designed the present friary in Carrick-on-Shannon, which opened in 1896, and helped with the Chapel of Saint Anthony at Merchants' Quay, Dublin, in 1912.

The lowest tender, that of John Delaney of Cork for £5,000, was accepted. Work began on the foundations on 24 August 1884. Mass was celebrated in the old church for the last time on November 5. Alderman Cantwell kindly lent the friars part of a brewery around the corner from the friary. They said Mass there for two years, giving rise to obvious witticisms.

Funds were collected through the usual methods. Weekly door-to-door collections were organised. Those who could afford it were encouraged to make a major donation or leave funds in their wills. A Grand Concert was held. A major bazaar raised £1,500. One of the major prizes was a cameo presented by Pope Leo XIII. Then the Munster Bank, the contractor's bank, failed and the friars had to undertake the work themselves.

New church in 1886

The first Mass was celebrated in the new church on Sunday, 1 August 1886. Bishop Pierce Power, co-adjutor in Waterford, performed the official blessing and opening on 19 October. Bishop Reville, O.S.A., co-adjutor in Sandhurst, consecrated the new high altar on 7 July 1889. The friars installed stained glass windows in 1890. A debt of nearly £3,000 was cleared in 1904.

The thoughts of Fr. Cooney now turned towards the friary and accommodation for the two or three friars usually stationed in Clonmel. They also had a lay staff, e.g. two housekeepers in 1864. Mr. Doolin prepared the plans, and the tender of George Nolan of Waterford for £1,900 was accepted. The friars rented rooms over Byrne's Shop in Mitchell Street until they were able to move into their new house in June 1892.

As previously stated, the Irish Franciscans emerged from the Penal Period a little unsure of what their vocation should be. The order on the Continent had been decimated during the French Revolution and was re-built during the first half of the 19th century on the basis of strict community life and regular observance. In particular friars wore the habit in public and did not handle money.

Irish Franciscans lived like diocesan clergy, dressed in black, wore top hats and used cash

moderately. Various efforts were made to introduce the continental ideas into Ireland. A group trained by German Franciscans arrived in Ireland in 1896. These Brown Friars gradually replaced the Black Friars house by house.²⁷

The three Black Friars in Clonmel lived in a "neutral zone", unwilling to undertake major developments, until the friary was taken over by the Brown Friars in April 1918. Fr. Benignus Gannon came as guardian, Fr. Aedan Roberts as vicar, with Frs. Kevin O'Regan and Marcus Connaughton. The old community withdrew to Carrick-on-Shannon and Waterford.

But it was not quite the end of the Black Friars in Clonmel. Fr. Peter Bonaventure Bradley had been guardian in Clonmel 1895-1900, when he got permission to go to South Africa as chaplain in the British Army fighting the Boers. He did this in opposition to the Brown Friars. He continued as chaplain during World War I, when he was injured at the Battle of Loos in 1915.

He retired to a flat in Clonmel when his chaplaincy ended. Living on his own, he maintained a polite relationship with the friars, helping them occasionally. He died in 1948 and was buried in his own plot in Saint Patrick's cemetery. Friars in Clonmel were buried in a vault under the church until 1914, then in the friary graveyard in Carrick-on-Suir and more recently in a special plot in Saint Patrick's Cemetery.

There are occasional glimpses of the attitude of the Clonmel friars towards the national movement. Generally they favoured first the Parliamentary Party and later the Free State. The mayor and corporation of Clonmel attended a solemn requiem Mass in the friary for Sean Treacy on 25 October 1920. Fr. Mark Connaughton, the celebrant, had family connections with the R.I.C. Fr. Ferdinand, the deacon, was a friend of well-known republicans and attended the wedding of Dan Breen. Fr. Aedan Roberts, subdeacon, left Clonmel in 1924 and returned in 1930. A dedicated swimmer, he taught a generation of Clonmel people to enjoy the water and has a diving board at The Island named after him.

Little happened during the 1920s. The Brown Friars continued the apostolate of confessions, preaching and special devotions such as those to Saint Anthony. The Third Order entered a period of growth. Electric light was installed in 1925. The leading friar was Fr. Leopold O'Neill, well known for his musical talents. He brought the friary choir to new heights. They gave several recitals at the Oisín Theatre and later on Radio Eireann. A new organ was installed in 1939. This musical tradition continued into the 1950s, with the friary choir taking part in concerts and recitals.

The Suir flooded Clonmel during the winter of 1931-32, the waters reaching the door of the friary church. This was the decade of Franciscan Third Order outings and pilgrimages. Eight hundred went to the old friary at Adare in July 1933. The excursion in 1934 was to Muckross and Killarney. Twelve hundred travelled to Galway in June 1935. The old friaries of Askeaton and Galbally were visited in 1936.

Fr. Colga O'Dea arrived as guardian in 1939. He spent three years raising funds and sorting out property rights. The original friary had been built to accommodate three or four friars. Fr. Colga decided to expand it to hold eight. More vocations to the friars had led to larger communities.

He also built a new sacristy. Work began in the middle of the "Emergency" and was finished in 1945. He then undertook preparatory work on extending the church by adding a new sanctuary behind the old. Fr. Colga moved on in 1945; his plans were quietly forgotten.

Fr. Cyril O'Mahoney first came to Clonmel in 1930 and returned as guardian in 1948 and again in 1954. He decided that a new shrine should be built in honour of Saint Anthony. This little gem, in modern style, was ready in June 1958 but not officially opened and blessed until June 1959. Fr. Cyril also installed new stained glass windows in the church in 1960.

John XXIII was now opening the windows of the church. The Latin liturgy went out and the vernacular came in. The first signs were seen in Clonmel friary in 1965. In February the friars prepared for Mass in English. Rehearsals were held and a temporary altar and lectern placed in the sanctuary. Plans were drawn up under Father David O'Reilly for a new sanctuary but were allowed lapse.

In an early ecumenical gesture in February 1966, Fr. David addressed the bishop and chapter (about 25 people) of the Church of Ireland Dioceses of Emly, Waterford and Lismore on religious life in the Roman Catholic Church. The friars also co-operated with the parish clergy in various projects. They helped to provide religious instruction in Clonmel Technical School on several occasions. One friar wrote a religious column for the local newspaper for a decade. The community sold property across the street from the church to the corporation in 1970 for a car-park.

A period of major rebuilding began in 1974 as Fr. Jude O'Riordan undertook the re-organisation of the church. The back of the sanctuary was decorated with marble, side-altars were eliminated, a permanent altar placed facing the people, the seating was re-arranged around the sanctuary and new heating was installed – all at a cost of £28,000. The front of the buildings was sandblasted and cleaned in 1977.

Fr. Crispin Keating came as guardian in 1978. He signed an agreement by which the friars took over the chaplaincy of St. Luke's Hospital from 1 January 1979. A major problem forced the replacement of the roof of the church during 1980-81 at a cost of £45,000. This also led to redecoration of the interior of the church, and the opportunity was taken to renew the organ, particularly by placing a console by the sanctuary. The community choir was re-arranged.

Fr. Vincent Gallogley became guardian in 1981 and tackled the friary. He solved long-standing problems with dampness, eliminated flooding in the cellars and installed a lift for older friars. He also reviewed the pastoral areas between church and house, changing the parlours and installing a reconciliation room in 1982.

The number of Franciscans in Ireland had begun to drop after 1980. The size of the community in Clonmel fell from ten in 1970 to five by 1990. Apostolates had to be cut back, particularly the quest. However, friars continued as chaplains at St. Luke's. Most recently they have taken part in rationalisation of Mass times in Clonmel.

As happened several times in the past, for example in 1616, 1828 and 1918, the friars are re-organising their life-style and works as they seek a fresh vision. The vitality of their life in the past is shown through the number of vocations to the order from Clonmel. Fr. Edmund Dougan became a professor of sociology and died as pastor of the English-speaking parish in Brussels in 1995. Fr. Benignus Millet is an expert on Irish history who has been heavily involved in the process for the beatification of the Irish Martyrs. Fr. Greagóir Ó Seanacháin recently finished a doctorate on medieval theology.

Fr. Silverius Condon served many times on the provincial definitory or as a local superior. Fr. Michael Harris is guardian in Killarney. Fr. Eugene Barrett works as a missionary in Zimbabwe. The friars and the people of Clonmel have known and appreciated each other for seven and a quarter centuries. Such a tradition is appreciated by and enriches both parties. As the friars re-organise once more, may that tradition be re-enforced and continue as beneficial as ever.

Footnotes

1. For the early history of the Franciscans in Ireland. See: Patrick Conlan, o.f.m.: *Franciscan Ireland* (Mullingar, 1988), pp. 7-11; Francis J. Cotter, o.f.m.: *The Friars Minor in Ireland from their arrival to 1400* (New York, 1994), pp. 11-30.

2. Aquilla Smith, ed.: *Annales Domus Montis Fernandi* (Dublin, 1842); Richard Butler, ed.: *The annals of Ireland by Friar Clyn* (Dublin, 1849); the former was written about five years after the founding of Clonmel, the latter about 50 years later.
3. C. L. Kingsford: "Sir Otho de Grandison", in *R. Hist. Soc. Trans.* 3rd series (1909).
4. William P. Burke: *The History of Clonmel* (Waterford, 1907), p. 128.
5. John R. H. Moorman: *Medieval Franciscan Houses* (New York, 1983), passim.
6. FitzMaurice, E.B., o.f.m., and Little, A. G.: *Materials for the History of the Franciscan Province of Ireland, 1230-1450* (Manchester, 1920), p. 221; Cotter, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
7. On the general problem, see J.A. Watt: *The Church and the Two Nations in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge, 1970); on the Friars Minor, see Cotter, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-50.
8. D. Murphy; "Among the Graves - Clonmel", in *I.E.R.*, vii (1866), pp. 535-6.
9. Conlan, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23.
10. Bradshaw, B.: *The Dissolution of the Religious Orders in Ireland under Henry VIII* (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 119-21.
11. Some claim that this pond and weir was at Dudley's Mills and that the Ragwell was diverted to fill it: others say it was near the church of S. Nicholas.
12. Gwynn, A., and Hadcock, R. N.: *Medieval Religious Houses in Ireland* (Dublin, 1970), p. 246; Newtown was *Inchnambrather*, the island between the two branches of the Anner and the Suir; note the older spelling Annor.
13. Adapted from Francis Matthews (als. O'Mahoney): "Brevis synopsis provinciae Hiberniae fratrum minorum", in *Anal. Hib.*, 6 (1934), p. 149.
14. The following is a fairly complete translation from Donough Mooney; "De provincia Hibernia S. Francisci", in *Anal. Hib.*, 6 (1934), pp. 78-80; I have given most of the text since it is not readily accessible.
15. The implication is that it was the Jesuits and other ecclesiastics who were preventing the return of the friars.
16. David Kearney of Cashel; Waterford and Lismore was vacant; Gregorian water is a mixture of water, salt, ashes and wine prepared by a bishop for use in consecrating churches and altars.
17. Irish stations or rounds, rather than Stations of the Cross.
18. The occupier in Cashel, a Catholic named Cooney, also avoided meeting Mooney; the provincial was convinced that some clerics or Jesuits had persuaded Cooney that in conscience he was under no obligation to return the buildings to the friars.
19. C. Mooney, o.f.m.: *Boetius MacEgan of Ross* (Killiney, 1950).
20. Franciscan Library, Killiney, MS D 1, 896.
21. B. Millett, o.f.m.: *The Irish Franciscans 1651-1665* (Rome, 1964), pp. 469-73.
22. Warren St. was renamed Abbey St. in 1839 at the request of the friars.
23. See *Archivum Hibernicum* 2 (1913), p. 155; Thomas Hennessy was PP and Patrick FitzGerald CC.
24. On the Newfoundland mission, see P. Conlan, o.f.m.: "The Irish Franciscans in Newfoundland", in *The Past*, 15 (1984), pp. 69-76.
25. Information from this point on has been taken from Clonmel friary account books now in the Franciscan Library, Killiney, and other material in the Clonmel Friary Archives.
26. Anon., Saint Francis's Academy, Clonmel, in *Franciscan College Annual* (Multyfarnham, 1951), pp. 93-6.
27. See *The Irish Builder*, 593 (September, 1884), p. 265; 601 (January, 1885), pp. 9 and 15; 607 (April 1885), pp. 99 and 105.
28. Outline history of this reform in Conlan, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-7.