



**The Dominicans of Tallaght**  
**1855 - 2006**

Hugh Fenning OP

St Mary's Priory, Tallaght  
July 2006

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# The Dominicans of Tallaght

## 1855-1886

Even fifty years ago there were hardly eight hundred people living in Tallaght. There are more than 80,000 in it now, far more than in ancient cities like Drogheda, Galway or Waterford. Since 1972, the clergy have had to build ten new churches, each with its corresponding national school. Roads, housing estates, secondary and community schools, and other basic facilities have gradually been put in place. By now Tallaght has become the capital of South Dublin County, with one of the finest hospitals in the country, an Institute of Technology, a newspaper of its own, and many other amenities. What was only a village has become a proto-city, and a cosmopolitan one at that.

While the people of the new Tallaght busily put down fresh roots, they can find older ones if they choose in the Protestant church of St Maelruan opposite the entrance to the Institute of Technology. The church and graveyard, still in use, cover the site of a monastery made famous by Maelruan in the eighth century. He arrived, very likely from Rome and the court of Charlemagne at Aachen, carrying 'the relics of martyrs and virgins', and one may wonder why he stopped in Tallaght at all. It was, after all, only a crossroads, a place to pass through on the way from Dublin to Baltinglass or from Clondalkin to Glenasmole, without so much as a river on which a community might rely. However, the land about was good, or could be made so; the local chieftain must have offered a welcome. Perhaps the place appealed to Maelruan's strong Christian sense of being on a journey from this world to the next. Certainly he was an ascetic, a reformer of monastic life, the inspiration of a group known as the Culdees or 'clients of God' who spread out from Tallaght to found or reform other monasteries even in Scotland. One of its leading lights was St Óengus or Aengus, bishop and writer, compiler of the *Martyrology of Tallaght* and the *Féilire of Tallaght*, a book supplying the names of saints to be remembered on each day of the year. Maelruan died in 792, just three years before the

Danes paid their first unfriendly visit to Lambay Island within sight of Tallaght itself. His name was the most recent to be mentioned among the saints in the *Stowe Missal*, the earliest surviving Mass-book of the Celtic church. Óengus died in 830, but the monastery survived up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, owner of wide lands, ruled by abbots who were also bishops, for Tallaght was the chief church of a small diocese (c. 810-962) before the infant city of Dublin had a single church or bishop of its own.

Some traces of the ancient abbey may still be seen at St Maelruan's: a small free-standing granite cross, a broad shallow stone basin called 'St Maelruan's losset', not unlike the square one at St Anne's in Glenasmole, and a supporting bank on the southern side which may be a remnant of the abbey enclosure. There is also a medieval tower, built for defence, to which the former church was attached. Across the road to the east, the archbishops of Dublin from about 1300 had a palace for summer or occasional use which was rebuilt in 1729 but seldom used. Visitors described it as 'long, narrow, but spacious, with little pretension to architectural beauty'. This too was knocked down in the 1820s after the Protestant church authorities leased the place to a Major Palmer. The fine walls of the eighteenth-century garden were spared, with the broad tree-lined avenue known as 'the Friars' Walk', and a fifteenth-century tower-house which stood next to the palace itself.

With the rubble of the palace, Major Palmer built a small mansion for himself, a little north-east of the ancient tower, and called it Tallaght House. This he later sold with its thirty-five acres to Sir John Lentaigne who took a keen interest in the garden where he put some curious carved stones which came to light on the farm. Two of them are bullauns, much larger than another one still used as a holy-water font in the parish church of Rathfarnham. As late as 1821, the Catholic parish of Rathfarnham was dedicated to St Maelruan of Tallaght.



The Celtic monks gave way in Ireland to more recently founded religious orders, most of which came in the wake of the Norman

invaders. Among them were the Dominicans or Friars Preachers, begging friars devoted to preaching, who by the time of the Reformation had about thirty houses around the country. Their first foundation in 1224 was in Dublin and they fared well enough until the Reformation when their convents, beginning with those of Leinster and Munster, were gradually suppressed. Thereafter, especially during the 1600s, they suffered their share of persecution. One of them, Bl Peter Higgins, was hanged at Stephen's Green in 1641; a few others, even as late as 1704, died miserably in the foul prisons of the capital. During the 1700s they made a reasonable recovery in many of their former priories, but after 1750 went into what seemed terminal decline. When Catholic Emancipation came in 1829, there were only about forty of them left. They had even lost after 1794 the colleges at Louvain and Rome on which they relied for the training of recruits. There was still an Irish Dominican college at Lisbon but that too fell victim to revolution in 1832. Even then there were still Italian convents, like Perugia and Viterbo, which most charitably trained Irish students, but the lack of a home-novitiate was keenly felt and a new foundation of the Order was made at Tallaght in 1855 to meet the need.

There were two brothers in the Order at the time, Bartholomew and Patrick Russell, natives of Cork and former students of the college in Lisbon, who played a larger role than others in the making of the new establishment. Bartholomew had the vision, to set up a house in which recruits might be tested and trained during their one-year novitiate before taking solemn vows and going abroad for their studies. Patrick provided the money by selling the college in Lisbon. It was Patrick too who discovered in 1854 that Tallaght House, the property of Sir John Lentaigne, was up for sale and persuaded his brother to drop the lease he had already taken out on Finglas House. The Tallaght property comprised thirty-three acres subject to an annual rent of £100. The house was small enough, but it had room for three priests and four novices. There was also a 'spacious public chapel' adjoining and running south from the tower-house. This spacious chapel was really a barn, at most occasionally used as a chapel by the parochial clergy of Rathfarnham.

The purchase was approved in June 1855 by Fr Vincent Jandel,

head of the entire Order and leader of a reform based on the strictest observance of the original constitutions. Jandel insisted that at least four priests should live the 'regular life' in the new house for two months before any novice was admitted to the habit. In fact only three assembled to form the new community in August 1855: Fathers Thomas Mullins, Thomas Rush and Thomas Burke. All three, curiously enough, were from Galway. Their first step was to turn the porch of Tallaght House into an oratory for divine office and Mass, but after a few months they began to use as a chapel the ground-floor of the tower-house 'which adjoined the barn'. The lancet windows on the northern face of the tower are a relic of this chapel, but the red-brick arch above them was already there in 1770 and the space below quite open. Once the 'Lenten exercises' were over in 1856, more serious work on the chapel was taken in hand. The roof was slated, large windows were inserted at either end with a door and path leading to the village for public access. An altar and choir-stalls were provided too and the walls plastered white. By 1859 they had placed a bell on the tower to the great satisfaction of the villagers. The cost of these improvements was covered by organizing a bazaar. This modest chapel, once the stables of the Protestant archbishop and more recently Lentaigue's barn, ran due south towards the village from the sanctuary on the ground floor of the tower-house and served the community until 1886.

Within their first two years, the small community gave parish missions in Crumlin and Rathfarnham. At Tallaght itself, in 1857, they established the Rosary Confraternity for both men and women, conducted the Forty Hours' Adoration on 4 July, and arranged first communions in the chapel for about seventy boys and girls. There were only three hundred people in the village at the time. The first Corpus Christi procession through the grounds, an almost unbroken annual occasion ever since, was held in June 1858 with the support of a band of musicians from Rathfarnham. The real work of the new convent — styled St Mary Immaculate of the Rosary — began in February 1856 with the gradual reception of the first novices. Eight received the habit in each of the first two years; thereafter, up to 1863, the annual number received varied between three and ten. Theirs was a frugal life of silence, with long hours of prayer even before breakfast

and little or no contact with the world outside. For all that, it brought great happiness to those with good health and a cheery temperament. The experience lasted only twelve months, for the novices had to go elsewhere for their studies after solemn profession. There was no room for them in Tallaght. In autumn 1857, the novice-master Fr Tom Burke accompanied his first charges as far as London on their way to Rome.

Since even San Clemente in Rome could not support this annual influx of recruits, the professed novices were soon sent to study, some to Esker, Co. Galway, others to Pope's Quay in Cork. During 1862 there were no fewer than sixteen students at Esker and three in Cork. At Tallaght itself, even the reception of novices had to be discontinued for some years until a more suitable and much larger priory could be provided. The architect engaged was J. J. McCarthy, the builder Matthew Gahan and his son Michael of Whitechurch above Rathfarnham, and the price about £4000, to put up 'one wing' of the new convent. The whole plan, never fully executed, was for a quadrangle of buildings with the church to the south. Fr Tom Burke issued a printed appeal for funds in March 1864: 'to build the new novitiate and college of St Mary of the Rosary' since 'the hour has come to provide for the education of our students at home'.

Fr Bernard Goodman, prior provincial, laid the foundation stone of the new priory on 29 May 1864 and it was ready for occupation on 14 September 1867. For visitors today, it is the hall-door wing, a three-storey building extending from the tower-house towards the west. It had three great lateral chimney stacks — one close to the tower at the back, two others in the front at either end — which gave some architectural distinction to the building.

While building was still in progress, there was some local excitement on the night of 5 March 1867. Several hundred Fenians heading up the Greenhills Road in heavy snow towards the mountains found their path blocked at the entrance to the village by eighteen policemen. A second group of rebels came later from Templeogue. Fr Dominic Scanlan, a young priest of the community, gave the last sacraments to some wounded Fenians, of whom one died in the encounter. The police themselves had gone to confession beforehand.

One rebel escaped capture by hiding for some days in the tower-house; the rest fled to the hills. Fr Scanlan, having spent the harsh winter caring for the poor of the neighbourhood, died before Christmas.

Meanwhile, three thousand books for the priory library arrived safely from Lisbon and novices were again received during 1867. A new prior, Fr Patrick Conway, who was also master of novices and students, immediately made his mark. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was given for the first time in the chapel with the intention of having it weekly in future. Ritual must previously have been rather low church, for the practice of having sung Compline each evening was also introduced and 'sung Mass and vespers very often'. The prior, who was incidentally tone-deaf, even invited Mr T. D. Sullivan, organist of Pope's Quay, Cork, to teach plain chant to the new recruits. This revival owed most to Br Dominic McCarthy, a student at St Mary's between 1868 and 1873, who mastered all the continental texts on Gregorian chant before teaching the friars how to sing it; for several years he had charge of the choir.

The more specific task of the community was to attend to formation and studies. They rose at four o'clock to pray and had dinner only at three in the afternoon. Most of the teaching devolved on Frs Thomas O'Callaghan (later bishop of Cork), Thomas Hyland (later a bishop in Trinidad), followed by Louis Hickey and Augustine Coveney, at a time (1867-73) when there were only four or five priests in the house. One of them, Fr Burke, was the most famous Irish preacher of his day. All of them took part in giving parish missions throughout the country.

By way of diversion and exercise, the students went for a walk every Thursday and on special occasions made excursions further afield. In 1868 they attended the laying of the foundation stone of the present church in Bohernabreena. Three years later they went farther up the valley of Glenasmole to dine with the Carmelite brothers at Castlekelly. Once they walked all the way to Enniskerry: 'a very long march'. Other trips took them to Delgany, Glen of the Downs and Newbridge.

The debt on the priory, of course, had still to be paid, but this problem was solved in 1873 when Fr Thomas Burke returned from a

preaching-tour in the United States with £2000 collected for Tallaght. Even at that stage, the new priory was too small for a growing community. Although the 'Old House', later called the White House, was used as an overflow, especially to accommodate the laybrothers, eleven students and two of their teachers had to leave Tallaght for Cork, much against their will, in autumn 1873. It was not until 1877, after the laybrothers had put a floor and eight cells into the attic, that the whole community could sleep under the same roof for the first time.

The chapel was improved at this time by the erection of Stations of the Cross (1869) and by the addition of a side-door and sacristy. Even then it was usual to adorn the altar in honour of Our Lady during the month of May. In 1873 a harmonium was acquired to support hymn singing. A Mrs Margaret Murphy donated a new silver monstrance for Benediction in 1877. The Rosary confraternity, long established, was divided in 1880 into separate confraternities for men and women. A public library in the chapel was also provided from 1876. Processions through the garden in the month of May, much loved by Fr Tom Burke, were by now an annual event. In the village, Fr Francis Purcell put an end about 1874 to the annual 'patron' of St Maelruan, turning 'what had unfortunately become a day of drunkenness, a disgraceful annual demonstration on 7 July, into a religious celebration of which any parish might be proud'. The first community cemetery, under what is now the 'back cloister' of the church, was solemnly blessed in 1876. Fr Burke, who used to refer to it as 'God's acre', now lies there himself. To broaden the horizons of the living, an astronomical telescope and some twenty-five paintings were gifted to the community from Lisbon and Rome. The 'Confederate Banner' of the 1640s, now in the reception area, and a Flemish triptych on wood, both came to Tallaght in 1873 from Kilkenny. The more valuable paintings are now in the National Gallery.



Long before 1875 the community had thought of building a church in

keeping with the size of their new convent, but Fr Burke was no businessman and spent his energies preaching to raise funds for any and every church other than his own. A large residue from the money he collected in America was used in 1878 to buy the freehold of the priory land in Tallaght from the trustees of the Church of Ireland. Finally, after a positive command from the head of the Order, the famous architect George Coppinger Ashlin, was commissioned in 1882 to draw up the plans. He had already designed the Dominican church in Drogheda and the parish church in Rathfarnham. Joseph Meade and Son, contractors, undertook to build the church within three years. Fr Burke was to raise the funds, helped by Br Joseph McElligott who also acted as clerk of works. Cardinal MacCabe, archbishop of Dublin, laid the foundation stone on Rosary Sunday, 1 October 1882. After Mass in the old chapel, two hundred men of the Rosary Confraternity, wearing medals and bearing banners, led the procession to the foundation of the walls and Fr Burke preached, his voice rising above the wind and the rain. Already gravely ill, he died at Tallaght in July 1883 while the new church was still 'only a mere outline'. Such enormous crowds came to his funeral that the builders were told to put an awning over the church and provide a temporary floor. There he was laid to rest under what would become his mortuary chapel.

If the church was completed three years later, it was largely due to a new and efficient prior, Fr Patrick Flood, who went to America for a full twelve months to raise the necessary funds. A bazaar and lottery at the Mansion House helped to complete what was now styled 'the Memorial Church over the grave of Father Burke'. The Royal Irish Constabulary contributed handsomely, especially to the cost of the elaborate altar constructed to Ashlin's plan by a Mr Ryan of Dominic Street. Dr William J. Walsh, archbishop of Dublin, consecrated the new church on 10 October 1886. In the following summer Father Flood resigned the priorship on being named coadjutor bishop of Port of Spain in Trinidad. His appointment to that bishopric in the West Indies was to lead not very long after to a further extension of the priory in Tallaght.

In place of the 'rustic chapel' which had served them for thirty years, the Dominicans of Tallaght now had a fine church, 150 feet

long, 28 feet wide and 64 feet from the floor of the nave to the roof. It was in that austere Gothic style called 'early English' with three lancet windows above the western door, seven on either side of the nave, and three in the apse. Quarries at Clondalkin supplied the grey stone facing of the building, while the buttresses and dressings were of white Ardbraccan stone.

The interior decoration of the new church, largely removed in 1971, can be appreciated now only from photographs. A high wooden rood-screen, surmounted by a crucifix with flanking statues of Our Lady and St John, separated the nave from the choir and sanctuary. A door in the choir gave access to the wooden pulpit. Two wooden altars, set against the rood-screen, faced down the nave, each with a finely carved statue in Austrian oak, one of St Dominic, the other of St Catherine. There were six other side-altars, recessed, on either side of the nave, four on the north side and two on the south.

Behind the high altar there were a number of mosaic panels 'with flowers enamelled on a gilt ground'. On either side of the sanctuary stood, each in its own elaborate niche, the statues of SS Aengus and Maelruan of Tallaght as well as of some Dominican saints: Antoninus of Florence, Louis Bertrand, Pope Pius V and John of Cologne. St Aengus, perhaps by way of compliment, is wearing the Dominican habit. High above the organ on the northern side of the sanctuary two oval medallions show in relief the winged figures of SS Vincent Ferrer and Hyacinth of Poland. Each of the three stained-glass windows in the apse, designed by a Mr Powell, shows two episodes in the life of a Dominican saint: respectively SS Thomas Aquinas, Dominic and Catherine of Sienna. The present panelled sacristy and the chapter room above it, originally a night-choir, were built at the same time. The spire was never built, but the bell was moved from the tower-house to the base of the intended spire.

## To Trinidad and Australia

### 1887 – 1897

During this decade, St Mary's consisted of only two parallel buildings some fifty yards apart: the three-storey priory of 1867 and the new church of 1886. Yet the old barn-chapel was allowed to stand for a few years more; an old postcard view shows the new church with the old chapel in the background. Usually there were about thirty in community, of whom fourteen were students and four novices. Some laybrothers managed the farm, cooked meals or quested about the city to support the priory. Of the six priests, four taught the students until they were ready to continue their theology at San Clemente in Rome where, until the 1920s, most of them were ordained.

Tallaght drew a little closer to Dublin, just as Tallaght became better known and more accessible to Dubliners, with the start in 1888 of the Blessington Steam Tram which had its terminus in Terenure. Previously the friars had their own gig or jaunting car to get about, whether to hear the nuns' confessions at Firhouse, attend church services at Bohernabreena and Rathfarnham, or collect visitors at the railway station in Clondalkin. Between 1890 and 1892 they also improved the grounds by laying a lawn and putting in some flower beds between the priory and the new church. A fine statue of St Dominic appeared in the front garden and another of St Joseph on the Friars' Walk. They owed a lot to St Joseph, for the house was declared free of debt in 1891 and a *Te Deum* sung in thanksgiving. A new community cemetery, the present one though not yet so large, was also opened in 1892 for the deceased brethren. Displaced by the building of the church, they had spent the intervening nine years buried on the Friars' Walk itself. The granite cross over the cemetery entrance is said to have come from the old barn-chapel on its demolition.

As for the new church, there was still a public library in the back cloister. An unusually studious burglar made off with some of the books in 1894: he also took a pair of old boots from the former sacristy. The

library continued to serve the congregation until about 1926. The major acquisition was a church organ, at second hand, bought from the Dominicans of Waterford in 1894. The Steam Tram enabled the friars in 1895 to take on the obligation of saying a public Mass at Blessington on all Sundays and feastdays. This was the condition under which they accepted various parcels of land, mostly around Tallaght, from a Mrs Mary Anne Boothman in 1895. The land, once the property of the Protestant archbishops of Dublin, included thirty-three acres called Castle Bancroft Farm which presumably took in the present housing estate of that name. Availing of the Wyndham Land Act of 1904, the Dominicans bought the freehold of these properties from the Church Temporalities Commission.

By training priests from 1856, St Mary's had provided men to staff the various Dominican houses about the country and thus ensure their survival. There were two losses, Esker and Boula in Connacht, which closed down in the late 1890s after centuries of usefulness. Their assets, some £6,000, came to Tallaght. On the positive side, the supply of fresh recruits led to the re-establishment of the houses at Tralee in 1861 and Waterford in 1867. There was even a new foundation made in 1871 at Newry. In tandem with this community life, almost every priest took part in giving missions and retreats. The more capable among them were always said after their deaths to have given missions 'in Ireland, England and Scotland'. A new quickening of life is discernible from 1897 when for the first time the Irish Dominicans began to send missionaries overseas. Three went that year to Adelaide in Australia: an initiative which culminated in 1950 with the establishment of an Australian province of the Order. Also in 1897, the priory sponsored what was to prove a long-lived monthly publication, *The Irish Rosary*. That sponsorship, for financial reasons, lasted only two years, but the monthly flourished until the 1960s.

From 1882, Tallaght also supplied successive bishops to Trinidad in the West Indies, but few if any priests were sent there until Archbishop Patrick Flood arranged the allocation of Trinidad to the Irish Dominicans as their mission field in 1897. The number sent out there from Tallaght grew slowly, reached a peak of almost sixty in the 1960s, and is still considerable today.

## The New Wing of 1901

The architect's plan of 1882 envisaged a complete quadrangle, with the priory of 1867 along the northern side and the church parallel to it on the south. Since the church alone was built in 1886, without a link to the priory, the brethren had to brave the elements several times a day to reach it. Meanwhile, the priory was becoming too small for a growing community, and after 1897 it was clear that more young Dominicans than before would have to be trained to serve in Trinidad. A 'providential increase in numbers' was noted in 1899. The community had in fact increased from twenty-nine in 1885 to forty-two in 1901. Previously the annual intake of novices had been about three or four, but that figure surged to ten in 1898 and stayed at that level for three years before falling back again. Pressure on space was considerable. Plans for a connecting wing between the tower-house and the new sacristy were first discussed with an architect, Samuel F. Hynes, in July 1898. Those of Ashlin were now set aside, for the new building would rise three stories, with an attic, instead of two. There would also be a sanitary block east of the tower and a small quadrangular complex east of the kitchen. The new east wing would provide thirty-two extra cells, a larger kitchen and refectory, plus three classrooms. The former refectory and kitchen, besides three large ground-floor rooms of the 1867 wing, were thus freed for other uses. One of them became the conventual library.

The contractor was Joseph Meade of the firm Michael Meade and Son of Great Brunswick Street, probably of the same firm and family which had recently built the church. For reasons of economy, only the western front could be faced in cut stone; the eastern side and the entire sanitary block were faced with cement to make a saving of £900 on a total cost of £10,500. One can still regret the economy. In the course of building, electric lighting was introduced into church and convent for the first time. There was central heating too for the church, but the provision of hot-water pipes for the convent ran into difficulties. Each of the first two boilers installed broke down. Whatever the outcome, the students even in the 1920s had no heating at all in their

rooms. Whenever the cold became too much, they ran to thaw out at the fire kept going in their recreation room. Each of the priests had an open fire for himself. The dormitory of the new wing was first occupied in August 1901 and the refectory first used at Christmas. As a further economy, future postulants, if they could afford it, would have to pay for suitable furniture for their cells so that eventually the whole novitiate might be adequately and uniformly furnished. As a final improvement at this time, the present granite platform and steps up the hall door were added to the priory in 1902.

In the church, where the electric lights were first switched on for vespers on Christmas Eve 1901, there were improvements from time to time. The first was the purchase of a fine monstrance, 'inset with donated jewels' in memory of Fr Thomas Burke on the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of St Mary's in 1905. It is still in constant use a century later. The side altars, of which there were two (Our Lady and the Sacred Heart) on the southern side of the nave and four to the north, were gradually furnished or improved. That dedicated to the Holy Cross was the first to receive attention in 1905 when it received a memorial altar to Fr Burke in black and white Galway marble. Those of SS Patrick, Thomas Aquinas and Joseph are also mentioned in the records between 1908 and 1911. These recessed altars had matching statues in white marble, about forty-five inches tall, which now stand on the window ledges of the back cloister. A new organ was erected in the church by Messrs Evans and Barr of Belfast in 1929.

Another fresh idea of 1901 was to install a laundry in the 'White House', the first priory, which had lacked any particular role for some time. The laundry was duly installed late in 1906, but only six months later the entire building was practically destroyed by fire due to the overheating of machinery. The dramatic newspaper report of the event, which involved sending a boy on a bicycle to summon the fire-brigade in Rathmines, uses the old name 'Tallaght House' and usefully gives its dimensions as of three stories, forty feet long and twenty broad. Fortunately the new laundry machinery was only slightly damaged. From 1907 the building also served as an infirmary, a store and a vestuary. After the laundry was decommissioned in 1930, the building was scarcely used until 1935 when it was reconstructed to provide

more rooms, though only for a year, for a growing community. On the suggestion of the Legion of Mary, Fr Francis Flavin, then set it up in 1936 as a retreat house dedicated to St Joseph. The first group of thirty men arrived for a 'silent day-retreat' on Sunday 1 November 1936. On the material side, the whole operation, even to the provision of cooks, food and delph, was the work of legionaries from Dublin of the praesidium called 'Tower of David'.

After 1901, the house records often refer to a few houses the community owned in the village and to lands in the neighbourhood rented or purchased. Five and a half acres north of the priory were requisitioned by the government before 1918 to extend an aerodrome attached to a Tallaght Military Camp long since forgotten. The community still had a small annual rent from this 'old airfield near Urney's factory' on the Belgard Road in 1961 when it sold its interest to the government for £330. Their own farm provided milk, meat, potatoes, vegetables and eggs but they had to lease more land for grazing. For this reason they bought the Loughlin Meadows, thirty-seven acres on the eastern side of the Greenhills Road, in 1919 and the adjoining eighty-nine acres called Healy's Farm near Tymon in 1948. Also about 1918 they bought their first motorcar for the use of the house and in 1925 installed the first telephone in St Mary's.

So far as studies were concerned, some of the students began to attend the Royal University on Earlsfort Terrace. Three took the B. A. degree there in 1901 but the practice was largely discontinued about 1918 because several students sickened as a result and some actually died young soon after graduation. Only the strong could cycle into town and out again in all weathers to attend lectures on a practically empty stomach. The graduates, with all the other students, set off for Rome to begin theology at the end of the philosophy course. The master general insisted in 1906 that Tallaght was not a formally constituted house of studies; rather than having a 'regent of studies', the prior was to take care of studies as 'first lecturer'. From 1917 the students went for the month of July every year to Newbridge College, a practice which continued into the 1960s. This gave them a chance of cycling to every corner of County Kildare, though July always seemed to be very wet; when the people of Newbridge saw the students arrive on their

bikes they would say: 'Here comes the rain.' On the literary side they produced a fine in-house magazine called *The Tallaght Record*, which was launched in 1919 but folded in 1921 when the prior provincial of the time withdrew his support. Years later, a similar venture called *The Watchman*, begun in 1935, appeared twice yearly until 1968.

Instead of rising, as had been expected, the number of students at Tallaght steadily fell from twenty-two in 1905 to sixteen in 1922; in 1915 it dropped to only eight. Yet over the same period about five novices a year were steadily received. It seems to have become a policy to admit only as many as were needed to replace those lost to the province by death. Some deeper reason may lie behind the figures, for even the Franciscans in Ireland showed no increase in the number annually received between 1900 and 1919. As late as 1922, the mission to Australia still amounted to only six priests in the one house at Adelaide. In the same year, only fourteen Irish Dominicans shared the Trinidad mission with twelve priests drawn from other provinces of the Order. These years of relative stagnation ended in 1924 when the provincial Fr Finbar Ryan insisted on receiving fifteen novices, one for each decade of the Rosary, on the same day. Thereafter numbers rose again; to twenty-eight students and fifteen novices in 1930; to forty-one students and thirteen novices in 1935. At that point, with a total community of seventy-one, accomodation within St Mary's again became a problem.

## Studies and Retreats

### 1933 – 1957

The first part of the solution to the problem of space was the creation of cells along the whole length of the old priory attic, with dormer windows matching those on the 1901 wing. The three massive lateral chimneys were removed in the process. By December 1933 this work was complete and the fourteen rooms occupied by novices. For reasons unknown, their attic quarters have always been called Mount Rascal. The second part of the solution was the opening in autumn 1936 of a custom-built novitiate adjoining St Mary's in Cork. The definitive departure of novices from Tallaght enabled many students to move into their vacated attic corridor in summer 1938.

The old custom of sending all students to Rome for theology gradually declined in Tallaght's favour, if only because San Clemente in Rome could take only about ten students at a time. Although there were nine theology students at Tallaght as early as 1926, five of them belonged to other provinces of the Order: those of Germany, California and the Philippines. That number increased to eleven in 1934 and rose even higher thanks to Fr Aegidius Doolan who was given charge of studies in 1932. A papal encyclical of 1931 and a new plan of studies for the Order, issued in 1935, gave a much needed stimulus to ecclesiastical studies and especially to the study of St Thomas Aquinas. St Mary's, on 17 September 1935, became for the first time a *studium generale* of the Order, under a regent of studies, with faculties both of philosophy and theology and the authority to confer the basic theological degree known as the lectorate which qualified the recipient to teach. Fr Doolan was the first regent, and Fr Ignatius O'Brien, in 1937, the first since the 1880s to take the lectorate at Tallaght. Both philosophy, in three years, and theology, in four, were now taught at St Mary's, though from 1941 the first year of philosophy was taught only at Cork. This last was also a space-saving measure so far as Tallaght was concerned, all the more necessary after 1939 when the outbreak of

war prevented the departure of students for Rome for several years.

As early as 1937, the idea was floated of extending the Retreat House to cater for weekend retreats, but there the matter rested until 1951 when 'a representative group of Dublin businessmen' declared their interest in furthering the project of a new and more extensive retreat house. After long debate, Fr Ned Foley's plan to enlarge the actual building was accepted in 1954. An architect named Nevin was engaged and the lowest tender, from Sisk and Co. for £45,000, accepted. Sisk began clearing the site on 23 May 1955 and the foundations were blessed on 30 June. Fr Foley still recalls that the concrete blocks required were made by hand on the spot by a man from Blessington. Finally Dr Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin, formally opened and blessed the new St Joseph's Retreat House, with rooms for thirty retreatants, on 4 August 1956. Fr Joseph Moran, a longtime supporter of the venture, brought out a booklet for the occasion. The western end of the four-storey building incorporates and forever hides the White House, the original priory of 1855. One highly practical by-product of this development was the opening of a wide handsome entrance in red brick from the Greenhills Road, still in constant use.

In 1952, a statue of Our Lady of Fatima cast by Deghini of Dublin was set up between the church and the village in thanks for Ireland's preservation from attack during the recent war. The Blessington Brass and Reed Band enlivened the unveiling ceremony. The statue is there yet, though without its original pedestal, four feet high. During the Marian Year, 1954, Fr Gabriel Harty set up the Rosary Office at St Mary's. For the next fifty years this was the headquarters of the Rosary Crusade: a publishing house, a religious repository and Fr Harty's base of operations for preaching the Rosary throughout Ireland.

## **The Library and New Wing 1953-1957**

Even before the opening of the extended Retreat House, discussions were underway to provide not only a proper conventual library but yet another, third, wing of the priory. It was a time of confident optimism when Catholicism in Europe seemed to grow stronger every day and there was little reason to expect any setback in the years ahead. Curiously, there was no increase in the size of the community, about seventy-seven, between 1940 and 1956, but it rose sharply to eighty-nine in 1957 and was to climb much further. The entire decade of the 1940s, numerically static for the Dominicans, was actually one of decline for the Franciscans; their recruitment dropped by a quarter on the figure for the 1930s.

A strong body of opinion favoured the purchase of another large house elsewhere, of which there were many on the market, exclusively for students of philosophy and their teachers. This would have eased pressure on St Mary's while such a house might later be sold should numbers drop again. Those in charge of studies took a different view, claiming that philosophy and theology formed an integral intellectual whole, not to be divided without injury to both; besides, the one library served both faculties and would cost an immense sum to duplicate. The latter view prevailed in 1953 when Emmanuel Suarez, master of the Order, came to Tallaght and called for the provision of 140 cells in keeping with the expansion he had witnessed in many other provinces. Thus encouraged, the regent of studies, Fr Conleth Kearns, proposed the completion of Ashlin's quadrangle on the front of the house, but during 1954 it was decided to build a new wing running from beside the old tower-house towards the north plus a library-wing on an east-west axis near the sacristy.

On 17 August 1955, exactly a hundred years after the foundation of St Mary's, the site of the new wing was blessed and the first sod cut, though a full year passed before the tender of the contractors Maher

and Murphy was accepted. The plans had been drawn by Mr C. Q. Ashlin Harrington, architect, while Fr Ned Foley played a large part in furnishing the structure. Certainly the building was a great acquisition, for it provided an immense refectory and kitchen area, an almost equally large student oratory and recreation room on the third storey, and twenty-four cells for students on the fourth. The basement or ground-floor area contained about fifteen utility rooms, many quite large, and had an open cloister with arches in red brick running along half the western or garden side. One of the advantages for students was that they could now use a broad modern staircase rather than the narrow spiral stairs of the medieval tower. The formal opening took place on 4 August 1958 with High Mass in the new oratory and dinner in the refectory. At first, the flat roof was not thoroughly waterproof; rain also continued to seep through the face of the projecting bay on the western side until it was clad with overlapping red tiles. Maher and Murphy, who cannot have made much profit on the building, were not finally paid off until 1961. Meanwhile, the former refectory made an excellent *aula magna*, still in use, capable of seating at least eighty people. The former *aula magna* directly facing it remained a classroom for many years but was turned eventually into a reading room, furnished with books of reference and current periodicals.

Yet another wing, for a custom-built library, was also the brainchild of Fr Conleth Kearns whose plans were approved in 1954, but the task of carrying it forward fell to the meticulous Fr Ailbe Ryan who died young just three years after its completion. Here again, as with the new northern wing, the architect was Cyril D. Ashlin Harrington and the contractors Maher and Murphy. The first sod was cut in March 1957 and the rooms first occupied in October 1958. The library runs parallel to the village, east of the church, a handsome functional building of two storeys. On the ground floor and the mezzanine on four sides above it, there was more than enough room for the books in widely spaced bays. Above the library, the second floor provided eleven large comfortable cells for teachers, for which reason it was long called 'the lectors' wing'. The former library on the ground-floor of the 1867 wing was at once requisitioned as yet another large classroom

The centenary of St Mary's, though marked to the day by the cutting

of the first sod for the New Wing, was not celebrated until 1956 when Dr Charles McQuaid, archbishop of Dublin, came specially to Tallaght to ordain six young Dominicans. Usually candidates for ordination went in to Clonliffe College. The occasion was also marked by the publication of an historical booklet and a lecture on the priory. The next ten years were harvest time for St Mary's and for the Irish Dominican province, personified in the career of one of its own, Fr Michael Browne. He had been a novice and student at Tallaght from 1903 to 1908 and master of students during the First World War. After long years teaching in Rome he became in 1951 the official theologian of the Pope and in 1955 master of the entire Dominican Order. No Irishman had held these posts before. It was he, therefore, who gave the ultimate sanction for all the new buildings at Tallaght between 1955 and 1962. Intellectually, he was also a great exponent of Thomistic theology which since 1935 if not earlier had dominated the teaching of all subjects at St Mary's. On his being named cardinal, again a first for the Irish province, Tallaght gave him a great reception on St Dominic's Day 1962; the law of monastic cloister was relaxed for the day and women permitted to see the inside of St Mary's for the first time.

This Indian summer was rounded off by the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) after which a terrible beauty was unexpectedly born. The number in community at Tallaght, which stood at 85 in 1958, rose to 102 in 1960 and to an all-time high of 119 in 1965, only to fall back dramatically in the final year of the Council itself. The figure for 1967 was eighty-eight, back once more to the level of ten years before, but this time falling year by year.

The ordination of so many young priests led to missionary expansion, particularly in Trinidad where by 1965 there were sixty-five Irish Dominicans staffing most of the parishes on the island. There were fresh missions too, to India, Iran and Argentina. Four Dominicans set out in 1959 to staff the seminary at Nagpur in central India, to be followed by many another down the years. Soon they had a priory of their own on the seminary campus and after several years began to admit Indian recruits to the Order. From that small beginning other priories too were formed, becoming numerous enough to constitute

from 1997 a new Indian province of the Order. There had never been another before, though there may yet be a second Indian province in the future.

The mission to Iran in 1962 was led by Fr William Barden who had just spent thirty years teaching theology in Tallaght. His first two companions had also just come from St Mary's. In 1966 they opened St Abraham's in Teheran, which was at once a chapel, a priory and a student-centre. Fr William became in time archbishop of Ispahan of the Latins, but he and his companions were all expelled for political reasons in 1980. As for Argentina, the first Irish friars set out in 1965 for the remote town of Recreo. All three had recently been officials in St Mary's itself; two in particular, Frs Damian Byrne and Flannan Hynes, were destined for much higher promotion. They too were soon followed by others, but the mission shifted after several years to the city of Parana where the brethren devoted themselves to another neglected but more compact parish. More recently they dispersed to various South American countries but in 2006 regrouped again in a new house at Maldonado in Uruguay called the *Casa Misión Damian Byrne*. No other Irish Dominican ever had a house of the Order called after him.

## **Caring for the New Tallaght**

### **1942-1971**

The community of St Mary's took care of the spiritual needs of the neighbourhood from 1856, with public Masses every day and confraternities which from the 1860s drew members even from forgotten hamlets such as Cunard in Glenasmole and Harlem near Ballyboden. For the parochial sacraments, baptism, weddings and funerals, the villagers had to go to Bohernabreena or Rathfarnham. When the time came to build a new national school, St Mary's on the Greenhills Road, the Dominicans donated an acre to provide a site at the request of the parish priest; the school opened in 1960. In 1966 they undertook to say daily Mass at the nursing home in Crooksling and have done so ever since. This quickly led to the purchase of a 'second' house car when the priests found how hard it was to reach Crooksling in time by bus.

Involvement in the social needs of the neighbourhood grew more slowly, in tandem with the growth of the village. As early as 1907, some Dominicans took an interest in the Thomas Davis football club; the shield now used by that GAA club includes elements taken from the Dominican coat of arms. Yet on a wider front, especially as the population grew, there was no place to hold meetings in the village, nor any social amenities to speak of. To fill the gap, St Dominic's Hall came into existence, certainly before 1942, a cottage or two adapted as a hall beside the Dragon Inn adjoining the priory garden on the eastern side of the Old Blessington Road. Br Bertrand Naughton re-roofed and extended the building in 1955 because many local groups were already meeting in the 'large parlour' of the priory and it was thought best not to use the assembly hall of the new Retreat House. During the 1950s the hall served at different times for catechism classes, for a boxing club, for showing films, holding dances, and for a game called pango, an early form of bingo. Even so, associations of all kinds continued to meet in the priory itself, as they do to the present day. At

one point, as many as thirteen different groups held meetings in the priory every Wednesday night.

From 1968 Fr Stephen Doyle was director of St Dominic's Youth Clubs, junior and senior, which had already been using St Dominic's Hall for some time, even from 1946. He was also, with Frs Andrew Kane and Pat Lucey, a valued supporter of the Thomas Davis football team. Fr Paul Hynes, a young prior of great vision, met the wider needs of a rapidly expanding Tallaght in 1968 by asking Fr Pius Doherty to set up a Credit Union for the area. Its first members, after a year's study, held their first meeting in St Dominic's Hall and continued to meet there until 1977. The organisation is now one of the most successful of its kind in the country. Another of Fr Hynes' initiatives was the foundation of the Tallaght Welfare Society in 1969 to help the poor in a permanent and professional way. With the help of Fr Pat Lucey he found the right man, Charlie O'Toole, to act as organising secretary. The first offices of the TWS were, once again, in St Dominic's Hall. The programme of the Society was enormous, for at that time state-funded social services lagged far behind the needs of the people. Fittingly enough, there is an inscription in granite to the memory of both Fr Hynes and Charlie O'Toole 'whose compassion and foresight created T. W. S.' on the present premises of the TWS opposite the priory entrance.

Another initiative of those times was the foundation in 1967 of the Tallaght Choral Society, developed from a small church choir by Fr Donal Sweeney into what is now a highly accomplished musical society of international repute.

## Extension of the Priory Church

### 1969

Long before the emergence of the new Tallaght, now the third largest urban area in the country, the priory church proved to be too small, whether for the brethren in choir or the congregation at Sunday Masses. The plans of Fr John Heuston to extend the church, drawn up as early as 1940, actually included the solution — a southern transept — adopted after much debate thirty years later. By 1952, the number of Sunday Masses had to be increased from five to six because the church was simply too small; at most it could accommodate only 240 people. By 1959, there were not enough places in choir for a community of eighty-eight. At that point no fewer than seven different ways of extending the church were under discussion, yet nothing was done even though the number in community rose to its all-time peak of 119 in 1965.

The election of Fr Paul Hynes as prior in November 1966 immediately turned talk into action. At that point, the congregation had grown to 900. By May 1967 he had appointed an architect, Edward W. Brady of Blackrock, under whom Ray Hosty was to spend a year on site as 'architect in charge'. By June the long-mooted ideas of building a second church or of lengthening the old one by two bays had been set aside. The archbishop was opposed to a second church; the cost of lengthening the nave, faced in cut stone, would have been prohibitive. The compromise solution was to build an extremely wide transept capable of holding 600 on the southern or village side of the nave. The contract went to Messrs E. Stone and Co. who began work in November 1968 and finished exactly twelve months later. For choral office, the brethren betook themselves to the large oratory of the new wing; the congregation had to make do with Mass on the ground-floor of the library, after the bookshelves had been removed. Finally, the extended church reopened on 30 November 1969. Even passers-by could see the arcaded concrete façade to advantage, for part of the wall between the church and the village had been lowered.

While providing extra space for the congregation, the architect also took into account some recent church decrees on the fitting celebration of the Eucharist. The essential element in the extension was the removal of most of the lower southern wall of the nave, the shortening of the lancet windows above it, and the insertion of reinforced concrete beams and pillars to support the wall of the church above. This was the achievement of John Vincent O'Connor, a young structural engineer. The only altar in the middle of the nave held a central position, from which the priest facing the people looked straight into the extension or transept before him. The tabernacle, designed by Richard Enda King, was set to one side on a polished limestone pedestal so as not to obtrude on ceremonies. The six confessionals, three on each side, were recessed. George Campbell made the stained glass windows which are intended to create a mood rather than tell a story, while Ray Carroll designed the altar, seat and ambo, all in teak. The ambulatory on three sides of the extension, partly in dressed limestone, encourages people to speak to each other before or after church services. The organ too was completely overhauled; additional pipes were added and its obsolete mechanism replaced by C. Grady. The total cost, to which the people of Tallaght contributed generously, was £140,000.

The old nave of 1886 provided ample room for the new altar and sanctuary area; also for the community choir with a small altar for the conventual Mass in the apse and seating for concelebrants west of the sanctuary as occasion required. The fine wooden panelling of the ceiling survived untouched. Other features removed in 1969 included the original high altar with its sanctuary lamp, much of the wall decoration on three sides of the altar, the fine wooden choir and pulpit, the rood-screen itself with its two altars, and five side-altars in the body of the church. The recesses of four chapels on the northern side were ingeniously preserved by turning them completely around so as to face onto the back cloister. The actual altar-tables, however, save for that above the tomb of Fr Burke, were replaced by simple altars in teak; their corresponding statues in white marble are still in the back cloister. Even the proportions of the nave underwent a change, the lancet windows on the right being now noticeably shorter than those on the left.

The extended church and the New Wing soon proved their worth, for they were needed during 1971 for two extraordinary events in the life of the priory: the burial in the back cloister of Cardinal Michael Browne, attended by the highest dignitaries of church and state, and the holding in Tallaght for the first time of a general chapter of the Dominican Order attended by thirty-eight delegates from every part of the world. Some years later the church extension won the 'Cembureau Award 1975' when submitted by the Irish Concrete Society, with five other buildings, for the European Architectural Heritage Award. Also in 1975, Ray Carroll undertook to design two shrines of Our Lady and St Martin de Porres for the vacant spaces near the door of the extension already intended for them, and also to erect Stations of the Cross near the entrance to the nave. The statues now in the shrines were put in place only in the past few years.

## **Priory and Retreat House**

### **1970-2006**

The priory itself got some improving touches and amenities from time to time, such as the first TV set 'for all three channels' bought in 1962 and the first computer acquired in 1983. Fr Paul Hynes greatly improved access to the house in 1970 by opening a back door and steps near the tower which has long since become the usual way for the brethren to come and go. Just inside it, Fr Joseph Kavanagh installed a lift in 1973, now almost a necessity for the weak in wind and limb. He also embellished the oratory in the tower, particularly in 1975 with an enamelled tabernacle set on a black marble plinth to the design of the Dominican sculptor Henry Flanagan and an enamelled crucifix by the same artist. The large student oratory of 1958 evolved into a chapter-room by 1971 and a common-room, which it still is, in the 1980s. By some oversight, the room originally spanned the entire width of the wing; modern adjustments in wood and glass have created the corridor needed to reach the other rooms beyond.

The Retreat House too has been improved down the years since its extension in 1956. Considerable work was done at great expense to alter and modernise it, particularly in 1973 when the architect Edward Brady was appointed to draw up plans. Somewhat later its assembly room was turned into an oratory, railings along the path from the Greenhills entrance were put up and a ramp giving access for the disabled installed. Although the Retreat House has never paid for itself, the priory has always gladly supported it as a valuable apostolate especially to religious sisters and increasingly to schoolchildren for day-retreats. That role has now become even more important as the number of such retreat houses in the Dublin area declines.

As the number of students in St Mary's continued to fall, there were by 1970 only thirty-three, a figure which looks utopian today. The New Wing, however, continued to be useful, much more so and for longer than some similar student houses built by other Orders during

the 1950s. Four Irish seminarians for the diocese of Parana, in consequence of the mission in Argentina, came to study in the priory in 1970. A little later two Dominican students came from Trinidad; others from the Holy Rosary Province arrived from Spain, maintaining a tradition going back to the 1920s. Student-numbers steadied a little from 1972 when Dominicans in their first year of philosophy ceased for good to study in Cork and came to Tallaght instead. One year later the provincial and his team left St Saviour's, Dublin, to occupy an entire corridor at St Mary's, which their successors have done ever since.

The gradual decline in the number of Dominican students, from twenty in 1983 to sixteen in 1993, created the opportunity of inviting lay students to study at the priory. Theology for lay people was also a worthy apostolate in its own right. In 1986 Frs Jordan O'Brien and Peter Kirke launched an Adult Education Course at St Mary's which was given a more formal structure in 1991 by Fr Redmund Fitzmaurice. This soon became 'Faith Today', a theology programme for adults meeting on one night a week over a two-year period. Also on offer was a one-year diploma course with classes on four mornings every week. Dominican students went increasingly to study philosophy at UCD, Maynooth or the Milltown Institute before beginning theology at St Mary's. Finally a domestic debate thirty years old ended in the year 2000 when the seven remaining students moved into St Saviour's in the city. That same pivotal year witnessed the birth of the Priory Institute at St Mary's under the direction of Fr Joseph Kavanagh. While maintaining the original adult education programme, the new Institute is also dedicated to third-level distance learning in theological and biblical studies with the aid of substantial textbooks specially prepared. It offers an extensive programme of seminars and courses, and even a degree in theology in association with the University of Wales and other institutes. At the moment there are about 250 enrolled students who meet at St Mary's from time to time.

## Priory Farms

### 1964-1995

The original priory farm, about thirty acres adjoining the garden to the north, provided basic foodstuffs for the community for more than a century thanks to a succession of devoted laybrothers. Another eighty acres or so between the Greenhills Road and Tymon North, acquired or leased much later, was used for grazing. However, as the surrounding area became built-up, farming became less profitable; as early as 1964 it was intended to sell part of the land to help pay for the intended extension of the church. In the same year St Mary's purchased ninety-five acres at Killinarden, still open country, to replace what had been sold. The publication of the new *Development Plan for Tallaght* in 1971 raised problems for both parts of the farm, at Greenhills and Killinarden, because the County Council wanted thirty acres of the Greenhills land and a third of that at Killinarden to put a 'national road' through it. Eventually the community gave the thirty acres at Greenhills to the Council for a nominal £1000, to be used only for sporting activities, lost one third of the Killinarden land under a Compulsory Purchase Order, but compensated for both by the purchase in 1972 of 250 acres at Friarstown near Straffan, eventually sold in 1989. Smaller plots along the Belgard Road were disposed of in the 1970s for a telegraph exchange, a few bungalows or 'settlement' for the Travelling Community donated by the priory, and a long strip needed for the eventual widening of the road itself.

At Killinarden, most of the remaining sixty-eight acres were sold to the County Council at a low rate in 1989 for social housing and public recreational use. Much of the original farm in Tallaght, twenty-five acres bought so long before with funds from Portugal, was sold to the Department of Education for a Regional Technical College (now the ITT) at well below market valuations in a process which began in 1981 and was finalised only in 1997. The future of Tallaght as a centre of studies has certainly been secured.

## **Dominican Parishes in Tallaght**

### **1972-2006**

In less than twenty years, the inexorable growth of Tallaght led to its separation from the parish of Rathfarnham to which it had belonged for centuries. For a short while during the 1960s Tallaght lay within the newly created parish of Bohernabreena-Firhouse; the new parish priest even opened a prefabricated church dedicated to Our Lady of Loreto at Millbrook Lawns shortly after the extension of the Priory church in 1969. The Dominicans were willing to cooperate but it was not until September 1972, under another archbishop, Dr Dermot Ryan, that they were entrusted with the entirely new parish of Tallaght comprising four administrative districts. The challenge was tremendous, for it would immediately require the building of three new churches and many more schools, but it was a challenge willingly taken up and carried on by a succession of dedicated Dominicans to this day.

For two years the first Dominicans entrusted with parish duties continued to live at the priory while attending to their districts. The pioneers even took care of Kilnamanagh until that too was hived off as an independent parish in 1974. When the first secular parish priest of Kilnamanagh was being inducted, the ceremony had to be held at St Mary's; on formally giving him the key of his parish church, the presiding prelate apologised for not being able to give him also a church-door to open. Pending the building of Kilnamanagh church, the parish priest used to say the mid-day Sunday Mass at St Mary's, after which he performed marriages and baptisms for his parishioners.

The next step, in July 1974, was the setting up of three parochial houses to bring the Dominicans closer to where they worked. These were simply private houses, each occupied by two or three, at 232 Balrothery Estate, 22 Millbrook Lawns and 39 Pinelawn, Old Bawn. Three new churches opened in these areas between 1975 and 1976: St Dominic's in Millbrook, St Aengus's in Tymon North and St Martin's

in Old Bawn. A small residential unit attached to each church enabled the priests to quit their private houses for more convenient quarters. The amount of work involved, not so much in church-building as in the provision and management of schools for each area, is best left to the imagination. At St Mary's itself, now a parish church, the community donated some land in 1977 for an extension to St Mary's National School on the Greenhills Road.

In March 1982 the Dominicans serving the three new churches became independent religious communities, no longer subject to the prior of St Mary's. The final stage in the process came on 11 July 1985 when all three were constituted independent parishes. Each now had an independent life of its own while continuing to turn to St Mary's for moral and often practical support. In 1999 the parish of Old Bawn was returned to the care of the diocesan clergy; although the Dominican community then withdrew, its dedication to St Martin de Porres leaves a Dominican seal on that prayerful church. The people of Old Bawn certainly respected the Dominicans who worked among them; at least twice they walked all the way behind their coffins to bury them at St Mary's, the Gardai stopping all traffic on the busy Tallaght by-pass in deference to the cortège. After the death in 1977 of Fr Basil Turner, curate of Old Bawn, the former national school opposite the Retreat House entrance, built in 1930, was dedicated to St Basil in his memory and there is a plaque on the wall to that effect. Under a FÁS scheme it is now a technical and vocational school for the Travelling Community.

## **St Mary's in the New Age**

### **1972-2006**

For more than thirty years now, the Priory church has been the hub of a small parish with a sizeable congregation, frequently the scene of baptisms, marriages and funerals. A large car-park, mature trees and the front garden attract many from outside the parish, both for the rites of passage and for daily Mass. Parochial status lends another dimension to the daily round of choral office, liturgy and study. While prayer, sacramental life and preaching are still the basic and most important duties of the community, an impressive number of other apostolic and social initiatives has grown up and flourished around it.

Practical help for the poor has perhaps been the most important element in all this activity. Two distinct branches of the St Vincent de Paul Society have long held meetings and even have premises in the priory for the distribution of clothes and furniture. The Tallaght Welfare Society and the Tallaght Credit Union, both born and nourished at St Mary's long ago, continue to help the underprivileged of the area. St Dominic's Hall, leased by the Post Office (1974-86) and later by TWS, is now used partly by Alcoholics Anonymous, which helps even those addicted to drugs or gambling, and partly by the Centre for the Unemployed which offers training in the use of computers. Another priory building, the Scouts' Hall, built in 1973 between the garden and the farm, with a wicket-gate onto the Old Blessington Road, still serves its original purpose, though sandwiched now between the grounds of the ITT and the garden wall of the priory.

St Catherine's Counselling Service, still very much a going concern, began as a parish project about 1980 under Fr Michael O'Regan in collaboration with the Eastern Health Board. At first it used St Catherine's, a bungalow owned by the Order opposite the church of St Maelruan. Since 1988 it has worked with growing success under the care of Fr Martin Boyle in the priory itself. Another group with premises in the priory for a long time now is Helping Hands, a society which

helps the mothers of handicapped children to find a path through the legal complexities of the social system.

Fr Leonard Perrem, curate and school chaplain, played a large part in the foundation of four different musical bands, particularly of the Tallaght Youth Band, a rugby club, the Theatre Group and the Arts Council, between 1974 and 1988. The rugby club lasted about twenty-five years; Tallaght Theatre Group continues to thrive with a theatre of its own opposite the Cuckoo's Nest; the Arts Council became an umbrella organisation caring for many interests; and as for the bands, the roll of native drums from the Greenhills Road may still be heard in the priory on a summer's evening. During the 1990s the church itself was used once a year by the *Now & Then Production Company* under the care of Fr Gerard Dunne to stage musicals of a religious cast such as the lively *Joseph's Amazing Technicoloured Dreamcoat*. The Tallaght Choral Society has often performed there too, offering more sober classical or religious music. In 1983, Fr Thomas McCarthy of St Mary's founded the Tallaght Boys Choir which he continued to direct, with marked success, into the 1990s. These choristers, some only eight years of age, brought to the congregation the finest church music of all periods sung to the highest standard. For the past several years, a small but professional adult choir directed by Desmond Earley has sung at the vigil Mass every Saturday evening.

Two initiatives of a literary kind have also been made in the recent past, quite apart from the publications of the Rosary Centre. Br Martin Cogan first set up the Rollebon Press in 1980 in what had once been the kitchen of the 1901 wing. He alone has been the printer, publisher, distributor and often the author of a constant stream of everything the priory needed from choir leaflets to books. For twenty-six years now his basic work has been the production and distribution of parish Mass-leaflets and catechetical material used all over the country, but Rollebon Press has done very much more down the years, not least for the new Priory Institute. Another Dominican, Fr Brian McKevitt, launched *Alive*, a free monthly newspaper with a religious take on current events, in 1996. The first two issues were simply inserts in the *South West Express*, a Tallaght newspaper, but since then it has progressed from an initial independent run of 17,500 to its present nation-wide circulation of 302,000.

Nor have studies languished in St Mary's, even with the departure of students of the Order. The new Priory Institute has been noticed already, but not Fr Wilfrid Harrington who has by now published almost fifty books on various aspects of Scripture. Other members of the community continue to make their mark as writers in the fields of biblical scholarship, liturgy and Irish church history. Fourteen actual and former members of the community contributed in 2006 to a book called *Watchmen raise your voices: A Tallaght book of theology* to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of St Mary's.

There have been so many 'watchmen', hundreds of them, who trained or worked at St Mary's since 1855, and left it to preach the Gospel of God's grace throughout the world. These few pages have done little more than trace the material development of St Mary's from its humble cradle in Tallaght House to the fine church and extensive priory buildings of today. Yet there is another and more important part of the story which can never be told: the inner religious life and efforts of so many Dominicans, their personal trials and achievements. One can only say of them, as St Paul said about himself, that they fought the good fight and finished the course.

## Priors of St Mary's, Tallaght

1855-1862 .....	Patrick Thomas Mullins
1862, Feb-July 1863 .....	Thomas N. Burke
1863-1866 .....	William D. Madden
1866-1867 .....	Dominic Scanlan, vicar
1867-1870 .....	Patrick T. Conway
1870-1871 .....	Patrick T. Mullins
1871-1873 .....	Louis Hickey
1873-1876 .....	Thomas N. Burke
1876-1882 .....	Patrick T. Conway
1883, Jan-July .....	Thomas N. Burke
1883-1887 .....	Patrick V. Flood
1887-1890 .....	Gabriel M. O'Farrell
1890-1893 .....	Humbert M. Donegan
1893-1896 .....	Ceslaus J. Lyons
1896-1902 .....	Michael Moore
1902-1905 .....	Jordan Powell
1905-1908 .....	Benedict Duggan
1908-1911 .....	Humbert Donegan
1911-1914 .....	Alphonsus T. Tighe
1914-1921 .....	Humbert Donegan
1921-1927, Nov .....	Paul McKenna
1928, Mar-1929 .....	Thomas E. Garde
1929, Nov-1932 .....	Pius Cleary
1933-1939 .....	Francis Flavin
1939-1945 .....	Hilary O'Neill
1945-1948 .....	Aegidius Doolan
1948-1951 .....	Aengus Byrnes
1951-1954 .....	Bertrand Farrell
1954-1960 .....	Jerome Toner
1960-1966 .....	Finian Lynch
1966-1972 .....	Paul Hynes
1972-1975 .....	Joseph Kavanagh
1975-1978 .....	Mannes Fields
1978-1983 .....	Laurence Collins
1983-1986 .....	Thomas Cleary
1986-1991 .....	Raymund Watters
1991-1997 .....	Augustine Doherty
1997-2000 .....	Gregory Carroll
2000-2006 .....	Edward Conway
2006- .....	Gerard Norton

## **Dominican Parish Priests of St Mary's**

1972-1975 .....	Joseph Kavanagh, prior
1975-1978 .....	Mannes Fields, prior
1978-1984 .....	Vincent Travers
1984-1986 .....	Thomas Cleary, prior
1986-1991 .....	Raymund Watters, prior
1991-1997 .....	Augustine Dogherty, prior
1997-2000, Dec .....	Gregory Carroll, prior
2000, Dec-2002 .....	Bernard McCay-Morrissey
2002-2006 .....	Edward Conway, prior and parish administrator

## Regents of Study

1872-1873 .....	Louis Hickey
1878-1880 .....	Thomas J. Deely
1935-1944 .....	Aegidius Doolan
1944-1955 .....	Conleth Kearns
1955-1962 .....	Joseph Collins
1962-1968 .....	Ignatius O'Brien
1968-1971 .....	John Cahill
1971-1973 .....	Myles Nolan
1973-1979 .....	Benedict Hegarty
1979-1985 .....	Archibald Byrne
1985-1992 .....	Redmond Fitzmaurice
1992-1996 .....	Vivian Boland
1996-1999 .....	Paul O'Leary
1999-2000 .....	Thomas Brodie







Glenbeigh Records  
Management



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