

# From a tiny acorn . . .



## The story of the Latin School and the man who made it

**CHRISTMAS 1987** Leitrim lost one of its most outstanding teachers and revered pastors when Monsignor James Faughnan P.P. V.G., Edgeworthstown passed on to his eternal reward. Born in Aughintass, parish of Annaduff on February 19, 1918, he was educated at the local national school and St. Mel's College, Longford. He entered St. Patrick's College Maynooth in 1936 to study for the priesthood, obtained a B.Sc. degree in 1939 and was ordained for the diocese of Ardagh in 1943.

After a further year's postgraduate study he obtained the Higher Diploma in Education and then went on loan to the Diocese of Lancaster where he spent

two years doing Parish work in Preston. In the autumn of 1946 he was recalled and appointed principal of St. Mary's Seminary, Moyne. The Latin School, as it was known locally, was then a minor diocesan seminary which specialised in the teaching of the classics and the preparation of students for entry to the major seminaries where they would study for the priesthood. The tiny two-roomed school had a mere thirty five pupils on roll when Fr. Jimmy (as he was known to all his students) assumed the principalship, and its growth and development over the next quarter of a century was largely due to his hard work and untiring efforts. It was in fact a labour of love for him during all these years.

### **St. Mary's Seminary, Moyne : School Photo' 1951**

**Front row (sitting)** L. to R.: C. O'Reilly, S. Sorohan, A. Donohoe (R.I.P.), T. Brady, P. Reilly, M. McNerney, S. Heslin, P. Quinn.

**Second row (kneeling):** L. Fay, P. Reilly, J. Brady, P. Halton, J. Corr, Paul Reilly, P. McCabe, M. Kiernan, J. Creegan, S. McGuinness, J. Gillece, P. Brady (R.I.P.), G. Healy.

**Third row:** D. Heslin, J. P. Burns, S. Brady, M. Reilly, S. Charles, M. J. Doyle, F. McKiernan, S. Reilly, T. Taaffe (R.I.P.), D. McManus, C. Harte, S. McTiernan, P. Mulligan, A. McTiernan.

**Fourth row:** A. Deignan, Fr. J. Faughnan (R.I.P.), N. Fleming (R.I.P.), and on right S. Drumm, Fr. P. Bohan (now P.P., Cloone), B. Hughes, P. Beglan, R. Morrow.

**Standing at back:** J. Sorohan, Peter Reilly, Paddy Reilly, S. Doyle, D. King, P. O'Brien, P. Gray and M. Shanley.

**Missing from photo:** Mr. Frank Reilly (lay teacher), P. Molloy and Sean Cooke (students).

Sixteen of the above students were later ordained to the priesthood.

County of origin of students: **Leitrim 17**, Longford 16, Cavan 16, Westmeath 1, Meath 1.



The two years he spent in Preston had been a chastening experience for the young priest. He was appalled by the poor working conditions which Britain's industrial workers had to endure and shocked by the poor housing and general living standards of the Irish emigrants. He returned to Moyne with a vision of a brand new Ireland where he hoped that hard work and honest effort would improve the standard of living and the quality of Irish life far superior to that endured by our emigrants in the industrial cities of Britain. He felt that the key to the improvement lay in education.

Moyne was then the only post primary day school in the North Longford, South Leitrim, West Cavan catchment area but it was not recognised by the Department of Education. Father Jimmy applied to the Department for official recognition but was told the school building was too small. It would require a third classroom. No building grants were then available and the school funds were almost non-existent. Undaunted, he got the names of all alumni serving as secular priests on foreign missions and wrote to each of them. The response was most encouraging, the dollars poured in and in the summer of '49 a third classroom was built and a third teacher (Fr. Peter Bohan) joined the staff. The school was now an officially recognised secondary school. I should add here that all desks for the new classroom were made by Fr. Jimmy after school hours. The number on roll began to increase gradually, if unspectacularly, as a new era dawned for one of the last of the hedge schools.

Towards the end of the forties I began my secondary education there and witnessed all those early changes. A fourth classroom was added in the summer of 1951. Enrolments continued to increase annually and two further classrooms were added in 1956. The advent of the O'Malley Free Secondary Education Scheme led to the school going co-educational in 1967 and increased enrolments necessitated the addition of two prefabricated classrooms in 1969. In July 1970 Fr. Jimmy was appointed president of St. Mel's College Longford. His years of untiring effort in Moyne had seen numbers increase sixfold while school classrooms had increased to eleven including a fully equipped science room. As numbers still continued to rise it was decided to merge with Ballinamuck Vocational School and to build a new community school on a nearby farm. This school was officially opened by the Minister for Justice Mr. Patrick Cooney T.D. on the 10th May 1976 and the Latin School, which, over the years, had given the Church over six hundred priests and six bishops closed its doors for the last time. For most of the seventies Fr. Jimmy, as President, worked unselfishly for St. Mel's College and was then transferred to Edgeworthstown as P.P., a position he held with distinction until his death.

One word more than any other aptly describes Fr. Jimmy. He was a workaholic — long before that word came into common use. Above all else he was a totally dedicated teacher, generous with his time and expertise. He was proficient in, and taught with success every subject on the secondary school curriculum except, strangely enough, Latin. Those of us who were fortunate enough to have him as a teacher will always remember his expertise in Greek and Mathematics and his enthusiastic approach to the teaching of Christian Doctrine.

Many, who did not know him well, may have considered him shy and retiring but he never gave us that



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impression in class. To some he may have been a strict disciplinarian but to many of his pupils the question of discipline never arose. His enthusiastic approach to all subjects commanded our respect and demanded our undivided attention. Classes always began with a check of the previous night's work. Each day we had to pour forth our newly acquired thimblefuls of knowledge for his examination. His judgment of our efforts was clear and concise — you knew it or you did not, there were no half measures with him. If you were striving for excellence you just had to get things right. Then the most important part of his class followed, namely the introduction of new material. He often worked until midnight to prepare material for a class. His delivery was always loud and clear. I can still hear that powerful voice in a Greek class hammering home a rule from a Greek grammar which went as follows "When alpha is preceded by roe or a vowel the alpha is kept throughout". He never finished a class without giving us a brief resume of the new material he had covered and an exercise for the following day, just in case we might be tempted to forget about it!

He got to know all his pupils extremely well and usually addressed them by their christian names. He could figure out a pupil's shortcomings and weaknesses quickly and had a variety of techniques to assist

Monsignor Faughnan's brother, **Tommy Faughnan**, Annaduff.



pupils. At a very early stage in my first year he figured that I was too selective — I worked well at what I liked and did little or nothing at Greek or Latin texts. A half hour's detention after school for a few evenings convinced me that I had to cover the whole course, playing the percentage game was unacceptable to him. He could coax, praise, cajole, push gently or even shame one into learning something. He hated half hearted effort but never punished for lack of ability.

He read widely and went far outside the prescribed courses in class. He used the Christian Doctrine classes to impress upon us the importance of honesty, integrity, obedience and good neighbourliness. He never failed to impress upon us the dignity of work, no matter how menial it was, and he abhorred the idea of unemployment and the payment of dole. Department regulations required one singing class per week. For those of us who could not sing there was no respite. He took us for elocution, drama, civics, christian etiquette and career guidance. When school ended around 4 p.m. for us, his day's work was only half finished. He always returned to the school after dinner to correct exercises, prepare class notes for the morrow or carry out repairs to the school buildings or furniture as the occasion demanded. At weekends he always returned to the Shannon watered quietude of the Annaduff moorlands, not to rest, but to help out around the house or family farm.

The thoroughness of his preparations meant that he rarely made mistakes but when he did he was willing to accept the blame. I can recall an incident from my last year at school. The Christian Doctrine examination was held on Mayday which was also a noted fair day in nearby Arva. Tom was a student cum farmer with a very poor attendance record, who opted to attend the fair. On the following morning the first class was almost over when Tom arrived to be greeted by

the "Where were you yesterday?" question from Father Jimmy. "At the fair in Arva" came the uninhibited reply. "Go home then and mind the cattle" replied Father Jimmy. To our consternation Tom turned and made a quick exit. Almost a week later they met on the road one evening and Father Jimmy told Tom to forget about what happened and to come back the next day. Today Tom is a well known pastor in an American diocese.

It would be unfair and inaccurate to give the impression that it was all work and no play in the Latin School in those days. Never a boring teacher, our principal was always quick to detect a class becoming tense and tired. In such circumstances he was quick to crack a joke, tell a yarn or make a comment on the state of football in Cloone Grange, which was intended to provoke an argument with me and usually succeeded. It was the only topic on which we always disagreed.

There was a story he loved to tell which merits mentioning here. It concerned an American bishop who visited the school on the advice of some of his pastors, who were alumni of the school. Surprised at the tiny building, he asked the principal to show him the school's "Book of rules and regulations". The principal replied "My Lord, the only rules we know here are the Ten Commandments and we find it difficult enough to keep them at times."

**The present Community School at Moyne is a fitting memorial to Monsignor Faughnan, whose courage and determination in the face of almost unsurmountable odds in the forties and fifties, ensured the survival and development of second level education in the area. Those of us who were fortunate enough to be pupils of his will always remember him as the man who wove a golden thread through the fabric of our teenage years. Ar dheis Dé go raibh sé.**

**Mrs. Bessy Murray, Aughavore, Carrigallen, with her ten sons — re-united during 1988 for the first time in 20 years.**  
**Back row (L. to R.): Peter, Hughie, Bernie, Noel, Joe.**  
**Front row (L. to R.): Terry, Vincent, John, Jimmy, Michael.**

Picture: Willie Farrell.

