

A Past in my Place: Fr. Denis O'Hara

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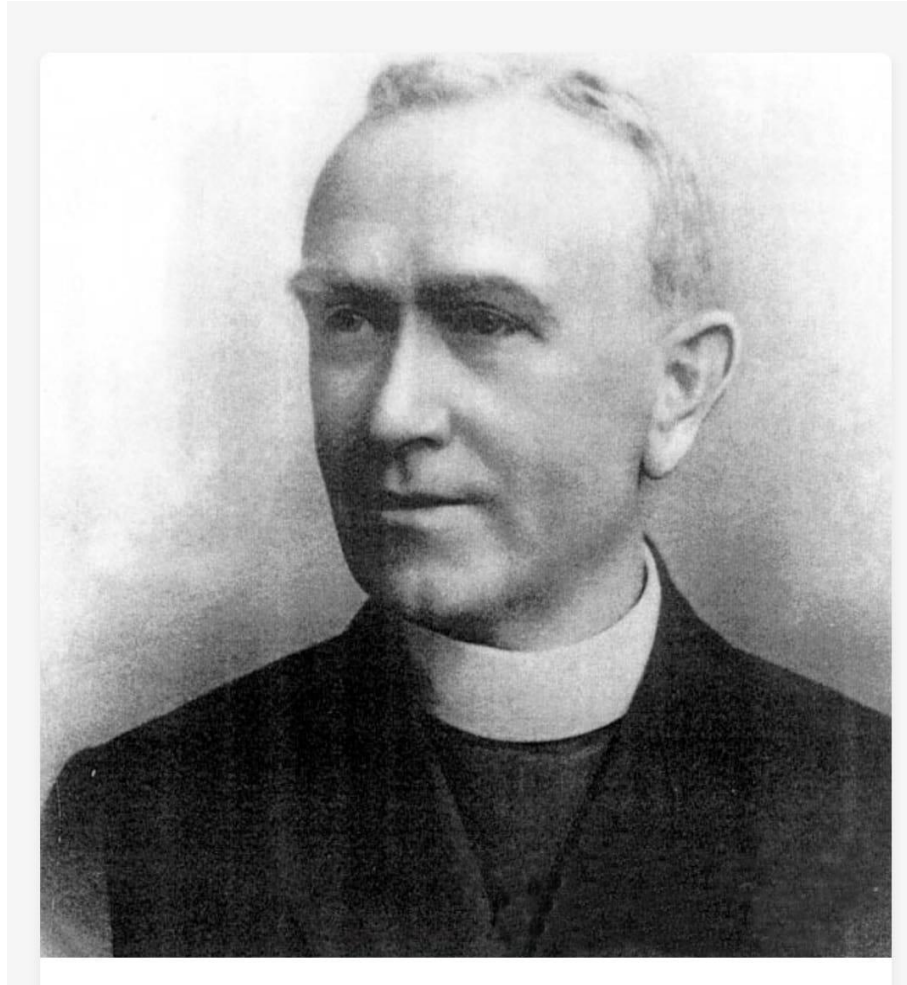
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Early life

Denis O'Hara was born in Cloonacool, Co. Sligo. His birthdate is unknown, but we know for sure that he was born around 1850. He came from a family of nine and had five brothers and one sister. We know his family was well off due to the types of professions the children went into. Denis and one of his brothers both became priests, while his other brothers became a farmer, doctor and successful businessman. There is no record of his early education however, he attended the school attached to Ballaghderreen Cathedral, known as the "Latin" College. In 1875, he was sent to curate in Curry Co. Sligo. He picked up many skills, some he would put to great use in his later career such as organization and dedication.

The Parish Priest

Fr. Denis was determined and dedicated in making the Parish of Killedan and Kiltimagh to the community it is today. He was a great leader and paved the way for so much change and renewal. He was appointed Parish Priest on the 20th of February 1887. Kiltimagh back then was very different from what it is now. It was an impoverished place, death and emigration was commonplace. It was a town with no hope. Fr. Denis offered hope. He was a ray of light in a very dark place.



Visionary

His refusal to take no for an answer saw his first project come to fruition. His vision was to build a church complete with a bell tower raised over it. He contacted a leading architecture firm to design and draw up a plan. With the help of expert tradesmen and most men in the parish, The Church of the Holy Family was born. The people of Kiltimagh finally had a proper place of worship. There is a sculpture there today dedicated in Fr.O'Hara's honour..



The original plans for the church

Kiltimagh railway

If it wasn't for Fr. Denis, the now closed railway in Kiltimagh wouldn't exist. While the railway didn't officially open until 3 years after Denis' death it still had a massive impact on Kiltimagh because it was the people of Kiltimaghs only link with the outside world. The famous train, "Castle Hackett" would bring everything from newspapers and cattle to film reels for the local cinema.



The St. Louis Sisters

It is clear that Fr. Denis O'Hara was a talented man who wanted what was best for his flock. Next, he wanted to secure a community of nuns to teach the parish. So, in 1887, Denis invited six sisters from the St. Louis convent in Co. Monaghan to help around the church and teach at the school they were in the process of constructing. They set up a school for young women to teach them cooking, cleaning, religion etc. The school was named St. Louis after the convent and so it led to the sisters being titled, "The St. Louis Sisters". In the year 1973, boys were finally allowed to attend the school. The sisters then moved out of the school and into private residence in Kiltimagh. The graves of the St. Louis Sisters can be found on the school grounds today. They, as well as Fr. O'Hara had a massive impact on Kiltimagh.



Legacy

Fr. O'Hara was the parish priest of Kiltimagh for 34 years! He didn't retire but passed away in 1922. Instead of being buried on church grounds his final wish was that he wanted to be buried amongst his fellow townspeople in Kiltimagh graveyard. Fr. O'Hara was an honourable, kind and selfless man. His thoughts were always at the heart of Kiltimagh. He practically developed our whole town to what it is today.



Reflection

I am very proud to hail from Kiltimagh. I attend school in a building that Fr. Denis created using his generous spirit and foresight. I was baptised in the church that Fr. O'Hara helped build. It is a beautiful structure that can be seen from every road as you enter the town. He played a vital role in making Kiltimagh what it is today. I picked Fr. Denis as the topic of my CBA because he is such an inspiring person. Without his pivotal role in our local history, Kiltimagh and the sense of community spirit in my town might not be the same. I personally enjoyed researching the topic and I found it very interesting. I'm grateful to Fr. Denis for all he did so selflessly for the town. He improved the social, economic and spiritual heart of Kiltimagh. If I had the opportunity to meet him, I definitely would have been in awe of his generosity, vision and determined mindset. Most of all, I think he was a vital

Sources

- <https://kiltimagh.ie/fr-denis-ohara/>
- Books like, "Church of the Holy Family Kiltimagh"