

I gCuimhne
An Athar Séamus Ó Ceallacháin



Fr. James O'Callaghan
Centenary Commemoration
May 15th 2021

Dedication

This booklet is dedicated to the memory of Father James, whose tragic story still evokes sadness and reflection in the hearts and minds of his relatives and inheritors of our shared history.

We find ourselves impelled to appreciate the ideals which cost him his young life, and his Trojan work for the faith and language he cherished.

Curimís chuige in ainm Dé!

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Fr. James O'Callaghan
Centenary Commemoration

Church of the Most Precious Blood, Clogheen
May 15th, 2021

Celebrant: *Right Reverend Monsignor Kevin O'Callaghan*
Concelebrants: *Very Reverend Canon Richard Hurley*
Very Rev. Fr. Gregory Howard Administrator, Clogheen

Order of The Mass

Entrance: *Nearer My God To Thee*

First Reading: *John Davis*

Psalm: *Here I am Lord (Martin McCarthy)*

Second Reading: *Mimi O'Donovan*

Gospel: *Canon Richard Hurley*

Prayers of the Faithful:

Jerry O'Callaghan
Jim O'Mahony, Clogheen
Bridget Sexton
Val Davis
Mary Sheehan

Offertory: *Ag Críost an Siol*

Communion: *Panis Angelicus*

Recessional: *How Great Thou Art*

I gCuimhne An Athar Séamus Ó Ceallacháin

Today, 15th of May is the 100th anniversary of one of the grimmest and most shocking episodes of the War of Independence in Cork, when Fr. James (Seamus) O'Callaghan, C.C. Clogheen was shot dead in the home of Alderman Liam de Róiste at Sunday's Well, Cork, on Whit Sunday morning, May 15th 1921 at 4am.

Early Life

Fr. James was born on the 22nd of April 1883, the fourth of ten children born to John and Mary (nee Hennessey) O'Callaghan, farmers in Laravoulta, Enniskeane.



Birthplace of An t-Athair Séamus Ó Ceallacháin Laravoulta. (Now home of William & Siobhán Hurley) The Beech Tree on the right of the photo is about 200 years old and Fr. O'Callaghan would have played around it as a child

The family included

- Bridget 1879: (m. John Connolly, Canovee)*
- Margaret 1880: (m. William Crowley, Green St. Cork)*
- Timothy 1881: (m. Bridget O'Mahony)*
- James 1883: (Fr. James)*
- Julia 1885: (m. O'Driscoll, Laravoulta)*
- Mary 1887: (m. John Crowley (Draper), Bandon)*
- Patrick 1890 (d. Aged 17 in 1907)*
- Denis 1892: (married in Dublin) Agricultural Instructor*
- John 1894: Laravoulta (bachelor)*
- Humphrey 1896: G.P. Kilbrittain, (bachelor)*

Education

James received his early education in Castletown-Kinneigh National School and then attended the Lordan Classical School in Bandon, where he was a classmate of another famous son of Newcestown, Edward J. (Bishop) Galvin, who co-founded the Maynooth Mission to China.

Sadly, neither of his parents was alive to witness his call to the priesthood, Mary having died in 1896, aged forty and John having died 2 years later in 1898, aged fifty six. Mary and John were buried in Templemartin churchyard cemetery in the ancestral O'Callaghan family grave.

Ordination 1908

In 1901, having attended Farranferris Seminary, James entered St. Patrick's College Maynooth to study for the priesthood. After "a brilliant course" in Maynooth (according to the Irish Independent), he was ordained in 1908 and worked on the English Mission for three years.

Grá don Ghaeilge

Though not a native Irish speaker, James had a great love for the language, and studied it until he became a proficient Irish scholar.

His command of an Ghaeilge was such that in 1911, when Fr. O'Leary PP of the Uibh Laoire Gaeltacht, was in declining health, Fr. O'Callaghan was appointed to assist him.



Fr. O'Callaghan Teaching Gaeilge in Colaiste na Mumhan (at right)

On Fr. O'Leary's death in 1913, James was appointed as the first Curate in Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh. He was soon involved in many activities and initiatives, becoming a Professor of Irish in Colaiste na Mumhan, a leader of the Temperance Movement (the Pioneer T.A.A.) and closely identifying with the Nationalist cause. It was a great disappointment to his parishioners when an tAthair Seamus, as he was affectionately known, was transferred as Curate to the Cathedral Parish Cork in 1917. A very fine illuminated address was presented to their departing Sagart Óg by the Pioneer T.A.A. on behalf of Paróisdánaig Béal Átha'n Ghaorthaidh.

Ministry in Cork City

In Cork city Fr. James was initially appointed chaplain to the Good Shepherd Convent, Sunday's Well, and additionally as curate to the chapel of ease in Clogheen in 1920. He also conducted the winter Gaeilge classes in St. Patrick's Place, the City branch of Colaiste na Múmhan- being described by the Cork Examiner as having "a distinguished reputation as a Celtic researcher and scholar".

As there was no residence attached to Clogheen, he obtained temporary



lodgings at 2 Upper Janemount, Sunday's Well. This was the house of his good friend Alderman Liam de Róiste who he knew from their mutual involvement with Colaiste na Múmhan.

Liam de Róiste had been elected as an M.P in 1918. However, he and other members of Sinn Féin refused to recognise the British Parliament and had instead declared the First Dáil Éireann in the Mansion House in Dublin in 1919. Due to the subsequent political unrest and violent turmoil, de Róiste did not usually sleep at home, and Fr. James knew that

he himself would be in danger as the house was regularly raided. Additionally, the fate of his relative Mr Thomas Hennessy who had recently been shot by Crown forces in Crosshaven would have been fresh in his mind.

Address to Reverend Father James O'Callaghan (Sagart Óg)
on the occasion of his appointment to the
The Cathedral Cork in 1917, from the Parishioners of Ballingearry

(A translation of the illuminated address)

Dear Father,

We were saddened and dismayed to hear of your departure from the parish; however, we were heartened and glad that your Lord Bishop recognised your devout attributes so well, that he has appointed you as Curate in the Cathedral, Cork.

Having faithfully and steadfastly interpreted and preached the gospel to the congregation, your advice was often sought on worldly affairs. That advice was well grounded, lively, effective and prudent. You were involved in the betterment of the people and encouraged them towards progress in local activities.

Your work on behalf of the Irish Language was valiant and effective, as was evidenced by your teaching, advice, actions and the lively Irish sermons delivered from the altar each Sunday and Holy Day. Accordingly you often exhorted the youth to practise and familiarise themselves with the language by conversing together and advised the fathers and mothers to speak in Irish with their children.

The assistance you gave to Colaiste na Mumhan was invaluable. Under your guidance, with your help as professor, the College went from strength to strength each year. On behalf of the Temperance movement, (Pioneer Total Abstinence) we regret parting from you, as you brought spirit and meaning to the Association; it strengthened and spread through your advice, your regular meetings and your yearly excursions to various beauty spots in the county.

Now, as it is God's will that we must part, it is the fervent prayer of your friends young and old, that God will grant you a long and happy life to enable you to pursue the good works which you have planned for Faith, Language and Temperance.

We are, on behalf of the people of this area, in friendship and in high esteem, members of the Association.

Seághan Ó Muíneacháin,
Tadg Ó Scanaill O.S.,
Liam i Coiltir,
Diarmuid i Coiltir,

Seághan Ó Laoghaire,
Eamon MacSuihbhné,
Donnchadh Ó Luasaigh,
Pádraig Ó Rónáin
(Rúnaire)



Unrest in Cork 1921

On the afternoon of Saturday, May 14th (following the Southern Ireland Home Rule parliamentary selection), members of the RIC patrolling and searching houses in the Blackpool/ Watercourse Rd. area were attacked by rebels hurling bombs, killing three of them and wounding others. Fr. James' good friend and fellow Cathedral curate, Fr. J.C. O'Flynn (who later established the 'Loft' theatre) was quickly on the scene and administered last rites to the fallen policemen.

This bombing triggered a "Reign of Terror" in Cork city as large forces of military and police poured onto the streets in reprisal. Residents hid indoors, terrified at the sound of machine gunfire from the Victoria Barracks. At 10 pm troops swarmed from a military lorry on Patrick Street and systematically raided 'nationalist' houses - one man was shot in his bed.

Newly re-elected Liam de Róiste was warned not to stay at home that night and although Fr. O'Callaghan was advised to do likewise, he refused, having stated "They would not dare lay hands on a priest"

Fateful Night



The coat Fr. O'Callaghan had put on as he left the bedroom

In the very early morning of May 15th, 1921, the four people staying at 2 Upper Janemount were suddenly woken by shouting and banging on the door. A group of drunk, masked Black and Tans dressed in civilian clothes had come armed looking for the T.D. Fr. James, Norah de Róiste, her mother Bridget O'Brien, and Kate Kearney the housekeeper (originally from Inchigeela) scrambled out of their beds to see what was happening.

Fr. James leaned out the upstairs window and told the men "I am only a priest and a guest in this house." However the angry mob continued pounding on the door.



The bullet hole in the shoulder of Fr. O'Callaghans coat



Kate (Kearney) McSweeney
(Photo from seosamhgrangraf.com)

When the housekeeper explained that Liam de Róiste was not home, and there were only three women and a priest present, the men outside demanded that they open the door anyway. They then smashed the glass with the butt of a rifle, blew the lock off the door and rushed upstairs, where Fr. James had come out onto the landing.

The housekeeper reported that he shouted "I am a priest, for God's sake don't shoot me!" while grappling with the intruder.

De Róiste's mother-in-law Mrs. O'Brien informed the Irish Independent that "the man threw his left arm around Fr. O'Callaghan's neck, pulled him towards himself, and hooking his right hand to the back, discharged a shot which entered Fr. O'Callaghan's body above the shoulder blade." Years later, the housekeeper (Mrs. Kate McSweeney of Carriganine, Macroom) described how she managed to grasp the revolver by the muzzle and direct a second shot away, but the Black and Tan quickly regained control of the gun. One of the bullets hit her on the finger, a mark she took with her to the grave.

Having already fatally shot the priest through the spine, the assassin fired again at Fr. James' body on the ground before turning and running away. An ambulance was summoned but owing to the very steep, hilly terrain, the attendants had to wrap him in a blanket, put him on a stretcher and carry him some distance down the hill until they reached their vehicle. The mortally wounded priest was removed to the North Infirmary where it was discovered he had extensive internal and spinal injuries. There was no hope for his recovery.

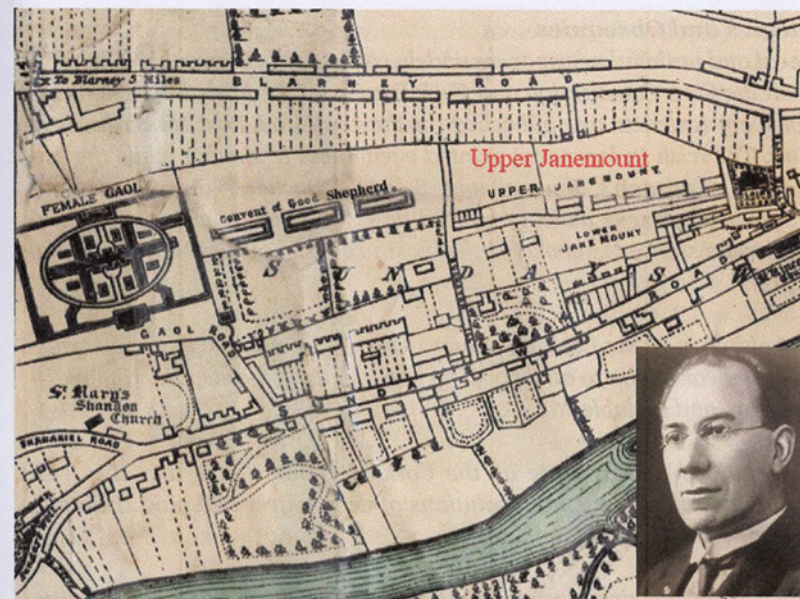
Final Hours

Prayers were requested at all Masses in the diocese. Fr. James was visited in the hospital during the day by Bishop Coholan as well as many priests and members of his family. Fr. O'Flynn recalled afterwards that Fr. James was quite conscious and conversed in Irish with them until the Lord called him at 6 pm that evening.

Before he passed away, he identified his assassin to his PP Canon O'Sullivan, who later swore an affidavit that when asked if he knew who shot him, Fr. O'Callaghan answered, "I do, he is a tall lanky fellow with a clean shaven face, a Black and Tan I've often seen at the North Gate Bridge".

Inquiry Abandoned

Despite this and other eyewitness statements, no-one was ever charged with his murder. All present in the house that night refused to attend a Military Inquiry held at Victoria Barracks, and the RIC head constable dropped proceedings as a result. When this lack of investigation was raised in the Westminster House of Commons, Sir Hamar Greenwood (Secretary of State for Ireland) denied allegations that "these courts were a farce", and disparaged Fr. James' account. Given that the standard findings in comparable cases were that "the deceased was murdered by some person or persons unknown", it is hardly likely justice would have been served had the inquiry gone ahead.



Sundays Well area of Cork city including The Good Shepherd Convent and Upper Janemount, home of Liam de Róiste, (Insert) where Fr. O'Callaghan was shot



Black and Tans searching civilians

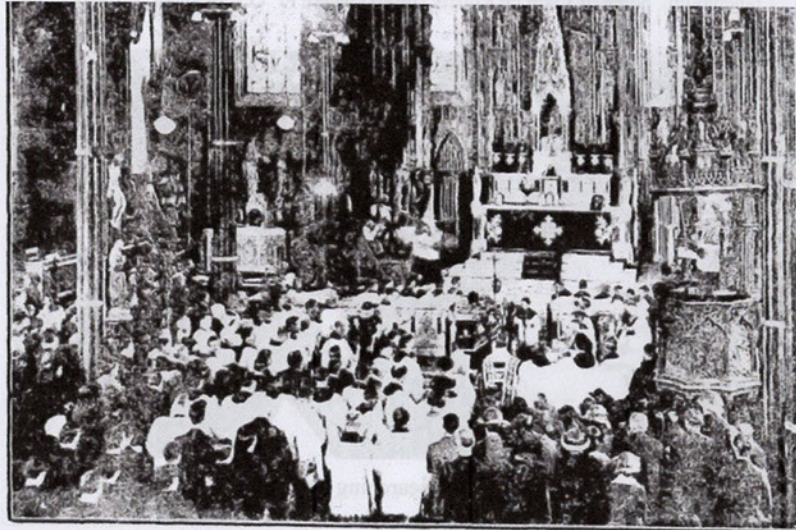
Elegies and Obsequies

Local and national newspapers widely covered this despicable killing. Both the *Cork Constitution* and *Cork Examiner* chronicled the events extensively (extracts are published on the Cork and Ross diocesan website). The *Irish Independent* printed eyewitness testimony while the *Anglo-Celt*, *Freeman's Journal* and *Belfast Newsletter* also carried the tragic news. It was widely reported that "His death under such shocking circumstances ... evoke[d] the most profound feelings of horror and regret."

His obituary in the *Cork Examiner* declared Fr. O'Callaghan had traits that "endeared him to all who knew him, gentle in manner, kindly in disposition, and amiable."

Associations as disparate as the Cork Harbour Board and the Irish Teaching Colleges passed resolutions of deep regret and paid tribute to his work for the Irish language.

The North Cathedral was at capacity for his funeral, filled with numerous members of the clergy including Bishop Coholan, public



representatives from the Corporation, Harbour Board & County Council, and members of the general public. A large crowd unable to gain admission joined reverently in prayer outside, and up to 1,000 schoolchildren outfitted in black armbands lined the route.



UCC research claimed that the procession afterwards was "one of the largest funerals ever witnessed in Cork city or county during the entire War of Independence. Besides throngs of the laity, practically all the priests of the diocese

turned out, to judge by the extremely lengthy list of their names appearing in the *Cork Examiner* the next day."

As the cortege passed the Good Shepherd Convent, the Sisters and pupils could be heard reciting the Rosary in Irish. The huge numbers paying their respects were described as "an impressive demonstration of grief" attesting to a "general feeling of revulsion and horror at the tragic circumstances of his death."

Interment in Clogheen

While the interment was originally fixed for St. Joseph's Cemetery, at the request of his parishioners, Fr. O'Callaghan was laid to rest in the grounds of Clogheen Church where a Celtic cross stands in his memory.

Solas na bhFlaitheas ar a Anam Dhílis

A Family Tradition of Faithful Service to the Church

Fr. O'Callaghan's predecessors in the priesthood were listed as

Rev. Fr. Daniel Lordan, Australia (Granduncle) 1812—1879

Very Rev. Fr. Patrick Hennessy PP VF, Rosscarbery

Rev. Fr. James Hennessy, Australia Died in a train crash in 1910

Rev. Fr. Tim O'Callaghan, Australia

Rev Fr. Denis O'Callaghan, Australia (Brother of Fr. Tim.)

Subsequent generations included

Rev. Fr. James Hurley (Diocesan Secretary) (dec.)

Rev. Fr. Jerome Hurley (Dublin) (dec.)

Very Rev. Canon Daniel Connolly (dec.)

Very Rev. Fr. Jerome Hurley (dec.)

Very Rev. Canon Richard Hurley (Brother of Fr. Jerome)

Right Reverend Monsignor Kevin O'Callaghan

In Memoriam (Photo of 3 Deceased)

Fr. James was the third priest murdered by the Black and Tans at that time. Fr. Michael Griffin (1892-1920), a young curate in Rahoon,



County Galway had been taken from his house and killed in November 1920, the first priest to meet with this grim fate during the war. A month later Rev. Canon Magner (1850 - 1920) was gunned down by an Auxiliary Cadet on the roadside outside Dunmanway. A composite picture of all three martyrs was popular at the time

Commemoration



50th Anniversary of the Commemoration in 1971 (Pic Cork Examiner)

Fr. James' memory has been kept alive by successive generations - and today's ceremonies echo previous events held on the 50th, 70th, and 75th anniversaries of his death.

His death was also commemorated in song. Under the nom de plume of 'Glenanaar', the author of 'The 3rd West Cork Brigade' composed a stirring ballad entitled "An tAthair Ó Ceallachain".

AN t-ATHAIR Ó CEALLACHÁIN

By 'Glenanaar' - author of the "Third West Cork Brigade"
Air "Galway Bay" or "Irish Molly O"

(1)

In Ireland's triumphs we shan't forget the great and glorious dead,
Who in the dark and troublous days for Ireland nobly bled,
In Rebel Cork a priest was shot by a cowardly Black and Tan,
And we lament a thorough Gael - an t-Athair Ó Ceallacháin.

(2)

No son of Erin ever worked with greater love and pride,
To have the language of the Gael be spoken far and wide;
He prided in the mother tongue - in freedom's early dawn,
We'll miss the help and moral power of an t-Athair Ó Ceallacháin.

(3)

When direful threats, signed Black and Tans, were served as thick as
rain,

He proudly wore the emblem of the Irish speaking Gael,
Though gentle as an infant child yet he'd not cringe or fawn
On Greenwood's crew, and so they slew an t-Athair Ó Ceallacháin.

(4)

The cruel assassins came at night to do their cowardly work,
Oh! Men may talk of Indians fierce or the cruel and bloody Turk,
But Turk or demon could not match the callous Black and Tan,
Who murdered our dear holy priest - an t-Athair Ó Ceallacháin.

(5)

When Black and Tans are from us gone their memory
we'll revile,

We'll loathe their name and curse their deeds in
Erin's lovely isle;

But all true-hearted Irishmen of every tribe and clan,
Will think with pride of him who died - an t-Athair Ó Ceallacháin.



Clogheen Church with Fr. O'Callaghan's Grave on the right

The Church of the Most Precious Blood is the Catholic Church in Clogheen. It was built in 1984 on the site of an older church, the Chapel of Ease which was built 177 years



earlier in 1807. The new church was dedicated on the 9th May 1984 by the Most Rev. Michael Murphy, Bishop of Cork and Ross. Barry Wallace designed the Church and it was built by Michael O'Mahony.

The bell tower on the left is the only surviving part that still remains of the Church where Fr. O'Callaghan would have said mass.



Staff in front of Coláiste na Mumhan building in c1909. An t-Athair Conchubhar Ó Laoghaire S.P. seated center. An t-Athair Séamus is on left. (Credit Coláiste na Mumhan)

In Safe Hands

Relics of Fr. James including the blood-stained coat he was wearing when he was shot were returned to his sister Bridget Connolly, and have been preserved by her descendants the O'Brien family ever since. The Cork Public Museum in Fitzgerald's Park will mount an exhibition including some of these artefacts in the coming months. The illuminated address or Dileagra will be returned to Cumann Staire Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh for display in their forthcoming museum which will be based in the original Coláiste na Mumhan building.

*We wish all involved in this endeavour every success
Go n-éirt go geal libh!*



Sources and Support

A succession of scholarly articles on Fr. James' life and death have been produced over the decades, all of which have contributed greatly to the compilation of this account. Special mention must be made of the work of JF Conlon (Southern Star, 1971), Sam Kingston (The Fold & Southern Star, 1996), Seán Crowley ("From Newce to Truce", 2005) and Brian Heffernan (PhD Thesis, Maynooth, 2011).

The author also acknowledges the invaluable contributions of family historians Mime O'Donovan, Maureen O'Brien, Mary O'Brien Healy, Mary Sheehan and Cumann Staire Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh in allowing reproduction of photographs from their archives

Sincere Thanks to

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Ellen Sheehan: Mise Éire, Mandolin

Peter Scanlon - Photography, printing and design



Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí Cork City Council



On behalf of Cork City Council,
Lord Mayor of Cork, Cllr. Joe
Kavanagh
will lay a wreath in commemo-
ration at Fr. O'Callaghans
graveside

In a statement issued by his office, the Lord Mayor stated:

"We often think of 1921 in terms of the famous patriot figures whose names appear in our school history books, but the loss of civilian life is rarely given as much thought. Father James O'Callaghan was an innocent victim of the conflict, a beloved priest shot dead by Crown Forces in a case of mistaken identity, but the impact of his untimely death on his family, friends and locality was felt as keenly as any. I'm most gratified to be given the opportunity to honour his memory here today."

Cllr. Joe Kavanagh



Please pray for the soul of Fr. James O'Callaghan and for all
who died for Irish Freedom