



1808



1971

To mark the 50th Anniversary of Killeigh Church Opening in 1971.

In 1808 the landlord, Rt. Hon Edward Earl Digby gave a site in Killeigh to 'his Catholic tenantry for their Religious use only'. Within a few years the 'old church' in Killeigh was built.

Before 1808, during the time of the Penal Laws when Catholics were not allowed to have schools, churches or priests, the faithful people met secretly out of sight in Mass-houses and at Mass-rocks. The last such Mass-house in the Killeigh area was on land owned by the Kelly Family on the Finter Road. The family have respected that site ever since, leaving it unploughed, untilled and unreclaimed. They have allowed nature take its course on that 'Sacred Place'. We thank Fintan Kelly and his family of Ballinvalley, who continue that tradition today.

The first church after Penal Times in the parish was in Killeigh. It was cruciform in shaped, with three galleries maximising the capacity in a limited space. Inevitably over time repairs, alterations, and upgrading took place, such as

- The church was reroofed in 1898, and the walls were raised by 12".
- The original building did not have a main door at the end, but one half way along the side wall. It was probably given its main door and entrance hall when reroofing.
- The High Altar was added in 1941, and was blessed and consecrated on the 12th November 1941, i.e. 80 years ago, and just 30 years before the new church was opened.

In 1963 the Parish Priest, Fr Dan Kennedy, and his parishioners became concerned for people's safety because of major cracks in walls, poor lighting and the lack of any heating system. As a result of this, Mr Patrick J. Sheahan, Architect, of 47 O'Connell Street Limerick was consulted. He examined the church in detail on the 2nd Oct 1963, and then drew up an assessment of the whole building. It is a 12 page document dated 8th November 1963. Having listed in detail every aspect of the building, he then focused on the many changes which needed to be made. Initially, he drew up plans to repair



and enhance the existing building. He estimated that the plan would cost between IR£27,000 and IR£30,000. According to this plan, the original stone walls would be retained without foundations or damp course. At this time, it was discovered that the wall on the village side of that church was 4" off plumb, leaning outwards, and the other side was 1" out.

DRAWING FROM THE PLAN OF PROPOSED RECONSTRUCTION OF KILLEIGH PARISH CHURCH

The then bishop's advice about the proposed reconstruction was sought in November 1963. Bishop Tom Keogh replied on 5th Dec 1963, indicating his preference for a new building. Some locals were also consulted. The dominant opinion was in favour of a new building on a new site. Thanks to the Mathews Family, a site was gifted to the parish.

The Architect then drew up his plans for a new church, modelled on the style of churches built before Vatican II. He estimated that it would cost £42,000. In his plan, the High Altar would be 100 ft. from the entrance.

PROPOSED NEW CHURCH FOR KILLEIGH, 1st edition.

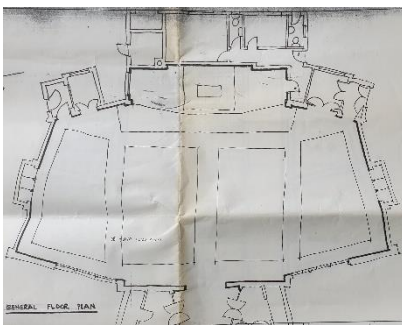


This was the architect's first presentation.

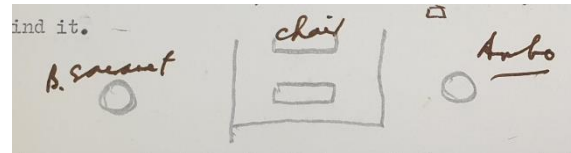
Bishop Tom Keogh retired on 25th September 1967 and Bishop Patrick Lennon was his successor. He was strongly of the opinion that a new church should be built according to the requirements of the Liturgical reform after the Vatican Council (1962 -65.)

Accordingly, a 2nd edition of plans for the new church were produced which were for a similarly large building. After further consultation with Bishop Lennon, the plans were revised again and these final plans gave us the building we have today.

GENERAL FLOOR PLAN OF NEW CHURCH 3rd edition



In a letter to the Parish Priest, Fr Dan Kennedy, dated 30th Nov 1969, Bishop Lennon specifically detailed where the Altar, the Ambo, the Tabernacle and the Presider's Chair should be placed. He specified that the priest would be celebrating Mass facing his congregation.



The original estimate for this plan in June 1969 was £54,000. The final figure was £649.1s.6d more. Not bad!!

In the old church, as was the custom at the time, the priest stood at the head of his people, with them looking up to God. While he read the prayer of the Mass in Latin, people prayed privately. In a sense the priest was praying on their behalf.

The present layout of the altar, in keeping with the liturgical reforms of Vatican Two, with the priest facing the people, enables a far greater participation by the congregation, gathered as one family around the 'Table of the Lord' and praying together in the language spoken by the people. The priest still leads his people in prayer, giving praise and honour to God.

The present church in Killeigh was opened on 12th September 1971.

We had begun to discuss and plan for the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the opening of St Patrick's Church before the pandemic struck last year. All plans have had to be put on hold for now.

Many thanks to the Editorial Committee for giving me this space to reflect a little on the history of Killeigh Parish Church.

John Stapleton P.P. Killeigh, Christmas 2021