

# Mortuary Chapel



Church of Our Lady and St. David  
Naas

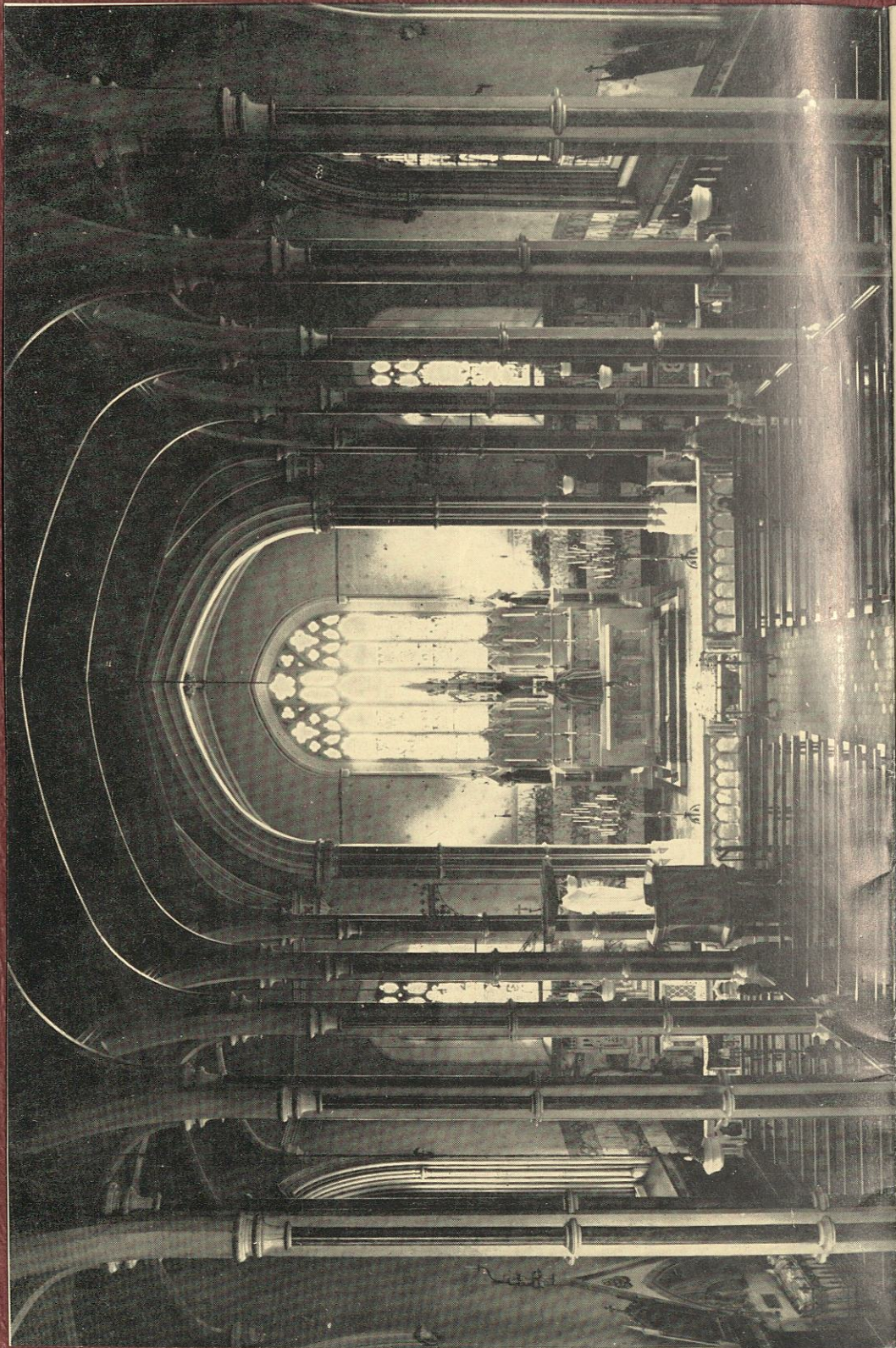
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MORTUARY CHAPEL

Church of Our Lady and St. David  
Naas



*A Memento*



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*Interior of Church*

# Mortuary Chapel

*Church of Our Lady and St. David Naas*

FOR several years past this Church has benefited by the distinguished services of the architects in charge, Messrs. Robinson, O'Keeffe and Devane, who were responsible for the lining of the spacious chancel, originally designed by Coleman and Ashlin, with marble and ceramic mosaic, the decoration of its ceiling, sundry repairs of the structure, and the reconstruction and resetting of the confessionals.

Mr. Andrew Devane was requested to design the new Mortuary Chapel. He was assured at the outset that the building and its equipment were to be his exclusively, without any superseding of gratuitous, "gifted amateur" ideas. Actually, all plans were courteously submitted, but no modification of any kind was even suggested. The Parish Priest was prudently mindful of the old adage—"Who pays the piper calls the tune, but he will have a much better tune if he leaves it to the piper." Each feature of the building in structure and equipment is the architect's intact, original design, possibly influenced by the famous chapel designed by Matisse for the Dominican nuns at Venice, in Provence.

Mr. Devane has acquired a reputation as one of the most progressive of our younger architects. He received his early education in North Kildare, first at the Preparatory School of Killashee Convent, and later at Clongoweswood College. Having graduated in architecture in the Dublin College of the National University, he was one of an elect group of architects taken, for an extensive training in every phase of the art, by the internationally famous American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, to whose influence may be well ascribed Mr. Devane's fresh, progressive outlook.

The Mortuary is manifestly an original, modern work, based on sound, professional competence, reverent towards the great traditions of the past, simple in line, austere in atmosphere, humanised by the colour symphony of the glowing glass of the laylight, and the soft radiance of the gold and gradated blues of the mosaic reflecting ceiling, the whole dominated by the redeeming majesty of the great Figure of the crucified Christ. "Not everything new is good, but the good is always new." Here is originality tempered by artistic integrity, disciplined by the restraint of true art.

*To our Architect, Andrew A. Devane*

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Much modern art of the "advanced" school is an arrogant assault on the intelligence and sensibility of the ordinary man of culture, an offensive favoured by a coterie of sycophantic, bemused acolytes, with whom "aesthetic pleasure tends to be more and more identified with the psychological excitement of ugliness" (Desmond McCarthy). "Fortunately it is not always inevitable," wrote Richard Strauss, "that the avant-garde should have a herd of followers, as once at Gadara." Genuine art, soaring serenely above the anarchism, nihilism and despairing pessimism of an age, does not hustle us towards the abyss.

The work began in January, 1953, with the demolition of the south wall of Naas Jail, the finely cut lime-stone of which had been gratuitously acquired owing to the good offices of the County Manager, Mr. Joseph O'Doherty. The Jail, which last had served for the incarceration of leaders of the Land League movement, had proud associations for many of us, remembering that our own father had suffered there, in the struggle for the land of Ireland. The stone was a precious acquisition, admirably in keeping with the stone of the church and its tower. Ortega Y Gasset has reminded us that stone used in a church has ceased to be mere lifeless stone, for now it is charged with the high tension of the spirit. Each stone was carefully and lovingly taken down by hand, and transported to the Church grounds, whence it was transferred again by hand, to the site, on the west flank of the tower.

The foundations four to five feet in depth were laid in reinforced concrete and stone. The walls, two and a half feet thick, are of cut-stone inside and outside, the intervening cavity being filled with concrete, brick and stone rubble. They are eighteen feet high on the inside, and rise five feet higher on the outside, to serve as a curtain to the roof. They carry a parapet of Ballyknocken granite. A steel framework is set into the walls to support the laylight. The roof is constructed of wood covered with felt, and an outer sheath of copper. A layer of sound-insulating glass-fibre is spread between it and the stepped wood ceiling, stained in a tone of neutral brown, which rises five and a quarter feet from the wall-plate to meet the longitudinal span of the laylight, which is four feet wide. The building is forty feet in length, and nineteen in width. A lofty, slim Gothic arch in Ballyknocken granite leads from the Church porch, which is the base of the tower, into the Chapel. In the arch is set a wrought-iron grille of graceful proportions and airy lines, with a predominant, significant spear-motive. The great Cross, in Douglas fir, rising from the rear peak of the altar, is seventeen feet high, the Figure of the Crucified being seven feet and a quarter, a sculptor's devoted labour of twelve months. The laylight

terminates at the apse, giving way to a higher, sloped, reflecting ceiling, irradiating the Crucifix, with a gleaming gold and crimson mosaic monogram of Alpha and Omega framing its apex.

The Chapel was completed in Mid-September, 1954. While specialists were called in for the steel, copper, wrought-iron, stained glass and Venetian mosaic, the main structural work in stone and in wood, a labour of personal dedication, was carried out by only three men, parishioners of Naas, Denis Corcoran, his son, Matthew, and a devoted helper, Paddy Vivash. The stone-work, a perfect mosaic in lime-stone and granite, maintains the finest traditions of the noble craft of the stone-mason, unfortunately threatened with extinction in the age of steel and concrete. Here were men working for their own church, the Temple of God, in which they offer sacrifice and prayer to their Creator and Redeemer.

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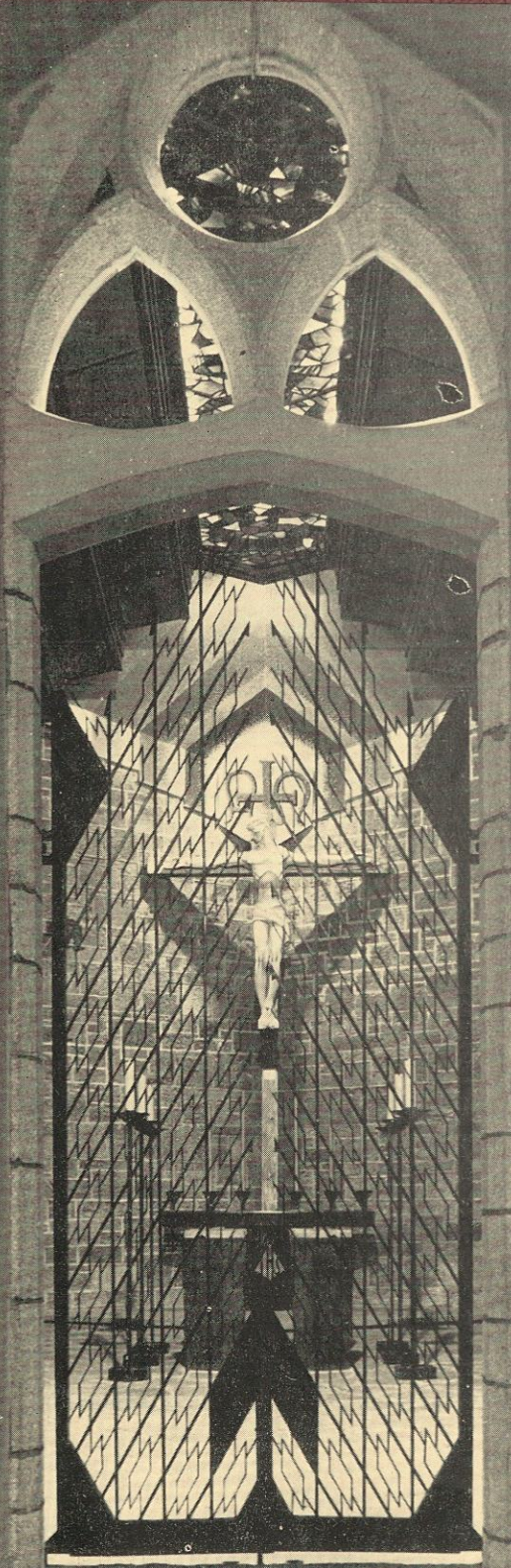
*An impression of the Mortuary was given by the "Leinster Leader," in its issue of October 30th :—*

## Unique Features of Mortuary Chapel

THERE has been added to the Church of Our Lady and St. David in Naas, a Mortuary Chapel, beautiful, dignified and devotional. It would seem—indeed it might be affirmed—that the designer was inspired not by the customary conventional plans for such a building, but by a determination to create something which would remind us that the solemnity of death was the prelude to a greater glory beyond this life.

Perfect harmony has been achieved. Every detail blends to make this Chapel a work of art; the subdued beauty of the whole directing one's eyes and attention to the figure of the crucified Christ above the altar. Although the walls are without windows there is no sense of gloominess within the building. Lit by a stained-glass laylight in the roof, the light shines directly upon the Crucifix and is reflected back from the Venetian glass and gold mosaic above and behind it.

On either side the ceiling is stepped up to a centre of stained glass of deep reds, blues, purples, rubies and gold in irregular diamond-shaped pieces, which appear to flow together making



*Entrance to Mortuary Chapel*

a scintillating river of colour. Above this laylight there is an outer roof of corrugated Perspex, not seen from within, to admit the rays of the sun. Concealed rows of Neon lamps below the Perspex supply the illumination, when artificial lighting is necessary.

Every detail of the work that has gone to the making of this Mortuary Chapel is perfect in its craftsmanship and deserving of separate mention. But they are—each one of them—from the individual stones in the side walls to the smallest item of furnishing, essential parts of the whole structure, so blended and combined that the very atmosphere itself seems like a silent prayer.

#### THE CRUCIFIX

Whatever may for a moment attract attention, it is towards the crucifix the eyes of the visitor will most often be directed. Suffering is shown in this figure on the Cross, as it might have been seen by those who stood at the foot of that which was erected on the hill of Calvary. The sculptor, Mr. Laurence Campbell, R.H.A., has achieved the seemingly impossible by making a piece of carved obeche wood assume the very semblance of agonised human flesh, every vein and muscle, every bone and sinew of which was tortured for the salvation of mankind.

The catafalque and candlesticks were the work of Mr. Ferguson Peacocke, son of the late Archdeacon Peacocke, Kill, Co. Kildare. Here also art and devotion have produced something of exceptional dignity, combining austere beauty with utility. Projecting from the smooth sides of the candlesticks are representations of thorns, and this triangular motive runs through the whole design of the Mortuary Chapel and its furnishings. In the entrance grille a diamond and spear pattern make an unusual but impressive combination. There again design and highly skilled craftsmanship are admirable in the result achieved.

#### NATIVE MATERIALS

In the selection of materials as in the workmanship, nothing less than the best was acceptable to those responsible for the Mortuary Chapel. The altar and the pillars of the catafalque are of polished Kilkenny limestone. The Eucharistic designs carved in the teak tops of the catafalque pillars were done by Mr. Laurence Campbell. Unpolished Kilkenny marble was used for the floor of the altar, while the floor of the chapel itself is Liscannor slate, in crazy paving pattern. The kneelers are of teak and were made by Messrs. Scott and Son, Dublin.

The entrance to the Mortuary Chapel was made by breaking an opening in the wall of the porch where there has been a

stained-glass window of the Resurrection, now rebuilt over the main staircase of the church. The window-head was retained as part of the Gothic arched entrance, edged with Ballyknocken granite.

This Mortuary Chapel is something to compel admiration. It is a worthy and necessary addition to the Church of Our Lady and St. David. Long after each of us has found a temporary resting place within it, this gem of modern Irish church architecture will continue to reflect credit on all those who designed and made it.

#### PRINCIPAL CONTRACTORS

Contractors : Messrs. Coreoran Bros. (Naas).  
Stained-Glass Laylight : Hogan Studio (Dublin).  
Reflecting Ceiling in Venetian Glass and Gold Mosaic :  
Messrs. Crean and Son (Roscommon).  
Altar and Catafalque Pillars : Earley Studio (Dublin).  
Entrance Grille : Messrs. J. and C. McGloughlin (Dublin).  
Candlesticks of Altar and of Catafalque : Mr. Ferguson Peacocke (Dublin).





*Interior of Mortuary Chapel*



*An account of the Solemn Blessing of the Mortuary and of the new Primary School for boys was given in the "Leinster Leader" of November 13th :—*

## Bishop Blesses Mortuary Chapel and Schools

### Minister Attends Naas Functions

ON Sunday, His Lordship, Most Reverent Dr. Keogh, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, was the central figure of inspiring ceremonies which marked the culmination of praiseworthy parish effort in Naas.

His Lordship presided on a crimson draped throne at Solemn High Mass in the Church of Our Lady and St. David before blessing the beautiful new Mortuary Chapel which has been added to the church; later he visited and blessed the new St. Corban's Primary School for boys.

Large numbers of parishioners and visitors formed the congregation at the High Altar; schoolchildren and their parents thronged the grounds of the New Schools as His Lordship solemnly blessed the magnificent new building. The town was specially decorated for the occasion, and religious emblems, flags and bunting waved from business premises and private residences along the principal streets.

It was a proud and memorable day for the priests and people of Naas and particularly for the Parish Priest, Very Rev. P. J. Doyle, P.P., tireless worker towards the goal so ceremoniously and impressively fulfilled on Sunday. Describing the new chapel, at a luncheon subsequently, His Lordship said it was something of which not only Naas, but the whole of the Diocese might be proud. Minister for Education, General R. Mulcahy, referring to the schools, said that what had been done in Naas would be an inspiration to others elsewhere; it was magnificent to see that a constructive idea could gather so much art and talent and industry around it as had been evident in Naas.

Very Rev. Father Doyle, referring to the figure of the Crucified Christ in the Mortuary Chapel, said that in it Mr. Campbell,

R.H.A., had given to Naas and the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin a piece of sculpture that was worthy to take its place beside Hogan's masterpiece, the "J.K.L. monument, in Carlow Cathedral.

### THE HIGH MASS

Celebrant of the Solemn High Mass was Rev. G. Brophy, C.C., Naas; deacon, Rev. P. J. Brophy, St. Patrick's College, Carlow, and sub-deacon, Rev. L. Newman, C.C., Naas. Rev. E. Shine, C.C., Droichead Nua, was Master of Ceremonies, and the assistant at the throne was Right Rev. Monsignor W. Miller, P.P., V.F., Droichead Nua.

A noteworthy feature of the Mass was the excellent choral work of the parish choir, under the Choirmaster, Very Rev. P. J. Doyle.

This was artistic singing, studiously delivered and enhanced by first-class offerings in the upper register. The organist played with delicacy and grace, lending full support to the choir.

The Proper of the Mass was sung in Plain Chant, while the Common sung was Griesbacher's *Missa Stella Maris*, frequently heard in Germany on festival occasions. The Offertory motet was Mozart's *Adoramus Te, Christe*, with organ accompaniment written by Michael Van Dessel.

At the ceremony of blessing the Chapel, Most Rev. Dr. Keogh was assisted by Right Rev. Monsignor Miller, Very Rev. P. J. Doyle, Rev. L. Newman, C.C., and Rev. G. Brophy, C.C.

The new Mortuary Chapel is indeed a work of art, the perfection of design and craftsmanship. The chapel opens off the main entrance to the church and harmonises with the main building, which dates from 1827. Perfect harmony has been achieved, with a blending of each and every detail into a beautiful whole.

Dominant feature is Mr. Campbell's sculpture of the Crucified Christ above the altar, and it is to the Crucifix that one's attention, momentarily distracted, must perforce return. Silently, yet nonetheless forcibly and persistently, the carved wood compels contemplation on the sufferings of the Son of Man.

If the sculptor of the Crucifix has achieved a remarkable success, all of the other work which went into the making of this Chapel is first-class craftsmanship and design. In it has been created something original; something to remind that the solemnity of death is the prelude to the greater glory beyond this life.

### THE NEW SCHOOLS

Immediately after the blessing of the Chapel, His Lordship drove to the New Schools building, near the Fair Green. Here



*Crucifix of Mortuary Chapel*

Most Rev. Dr. Keogh and General Mulcahy were received by Rev. Bro. E. McKenna, Superior, Irish Christian Brothers, Naas, and members of the Community.

The school was officially opened when Mr. Boyd Barrett, the architect, presented to General Mulcahy the keys of the new building. His Lordship, assisted by the clergy, then solemnly blessed the interior and exterior of the school. As the keys were being presented, the bell pealed jubilantly as if to add to the joyfulness of the occasion.

The new schools, built at a cost of £21,000 and accommodating 306 pupils, are most modern in design, and incorporate all the latest developments in fittings, furnishings, etc. There are seven large classrooms, teachers' rooms, cloakrooms and toilets. There is a fine bell tower at one end, and the building is fronted by a paved playground and seeded lawns; there is also a large sportsfield adjoining.

The school is equipped with thermal storage heating, and the interior is finished in light pastel shades. Windows are large and ideally sited, and there is a commodious corridor running the entire length of the school.

Mr. B. Boyd Barrett of the Office of Public Works was architect for the school and Mr. G. Tyrrell, Naas, was contractor.

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## *Tributes of the Speakers*

At the luncheon held subsequently in the Nas na Riogh Hotel, Very Rev. P. J. Doyle, welcoming Most Rev. Dr. Keogh and the Minister, said that from the day His Lordship was consecrated Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin he had been unsparing in his work and in devotion to his priests and people. Father Doyle also expressed thanks for the helpful interest shown by General Mulcahy.

Most Rev. Dr. Keogh, congratulating the priests and people on what had been achieved, described the new Mortuary Chapel as a work of art, and all concerned with its construction had reason to be proud. Good, honest stone building in a church is a beautiful thing, said His Lordship, but unfortunately the craft is in process of being lost. In the Mortuary Chapel they had an example of all that was finest in the craft; Mr. Campbell's Christus was a splendid and inspiring piece of work.

Referring to the schools, His Lordship thanked the Minister for Education for the financial assistance given by his Department and also referred to the personal interest shown

by General Mulcahy in the project. He was aware, he said, that the Minister had difficulties to contend with and could not always be as generous to school managers as he might like to be.

From the point of view of the interest of parents and parishioners, however, it was possibly a good thing that a local contribution should be required in the erection of schools.

Clergy anxious to build schools also had their difficulties to overcome, and it was a source of wonderful encouragement to them to have the sympathy and understanding of people like General Mulcahy.

### ARTISTIC RESTRAINT

Very Rev. P. J. Doyle said that the Mortuary Chapel was a striking building which showed artistic restraint throughout; in the figure of the Crucified Christ they had been given one of the finest works of sculpture to be executed in Ireland for a considerable time.

The reflecting ceiling in Venetian gold and glass mosaic was, he said, important from the national as well as the artistic point of view. Until very recently such work was made wholly abroad and imported in sections; in this case it was the work of an Irish firm, Messrs. Crean of Roscommon, who, three years ago, brought three mosaic artists from Venice to initiate this great art industry in Ireland.

Father Doyle said that the walls of the Chapel had been constructed from cut limestone blocks from the walls of the old Naas Gaol, a building which was last used to house prisoners of the Land League days.

He expressed his thanks in this connection to the Kildare County Manager for making the stones available; he also paid a tribute to Messrs. Crean, Roscommon for the efforts made to establish mosaic work in this country by bringing Italian artists here to teach the craft to Irish boys.

### "SCHOOLMASTERS' REBELLION"

General Mulcahy said that due to his energy Most Rev. Dr. Keogh had done an amount of work that was not only an inspiration to his Diocese, but to the people outside it.

"We have, you might say," he continued, "a practically undeveloped country. One of the things that has held us back was the struggle for our liberty."

Paying tribute to the work of the Irish Christian Brothers, he said that the Easter Rising of 1916 was called the "Schoolmasters' Rebellion." There was no more worthy monument to express the achievements of those who fought for freedom from 1913 onwards than their schools, in which the Irish tradition was safeguarded.

There had been a lot of criticism of the younger generation, but he thought it was unjustified. "Nobody who looks at some of the work that the young people are doing—we have examples of it in Naas today—can be anything but proud of them," concluded the Minister.

Father Doyle expressed warm admiration for the design of the School, with its spacious, airy, well-lit class-rooms, and on behalf of the Priests of the Parish, the good Christian Brothers, parents and appreciative little boys, deep gratitude to Mr. B. Boyd Barrett for the School he has provided for Naas.

Mr. Boyd Barrett, architect ; Mr. John Robinson, architect, and Mr. A. Devane, architect, also spoke.

#### ARCHITECT'S COMMENTARY

"Four basic considerations governed the design of the Chapel : function, available material, situation and the need for economy.

The function of a Mortuary Chapel attached to a Church is to provide space for prayer, where the dead may await burial, and where general obsequies may be performed. As far as is possible, such a place should echo the solemnity of death, with its temporal mystery and sadness—its hope of redemption in the mercy and consolation of Christ crucified—and the glory of resurrection with the joyful adoration of God for all eternity.

In a very limited way—(limited by intellect and by material) this Chapel attempts humbly to express these things—to be, as it were a sombre gateway to God's mercy and love and to the blinding happiness of His Eternity.

The second consideration—literally a material one—influenced the design to a considerable extent—stone from the walls of the ruined Naas Jail made available by the Local Authorities for use in the Chapel. Some of the old Jail walls were demolished and the handsome, square random rubble limestone was carted, cleaned and re-used—at a fraction of what newly-quarried stone would have cost. Expense prohibited the use of windows in the Chapel and the cutstone trim that would be required for them, and so the walls were built (inside and outside) with limestone which rises windowless from floor to roof. The only newly-quarried stones used were some granite coigns and coping stones, which, when compared with the remainder of the stonework, were very expensive.

#### LIT FROM ABOVE

Windowless, the Chapel is logically toplit. A long rooflight of curved corrugated Perspex gives daylight to a laylight of stained glass.

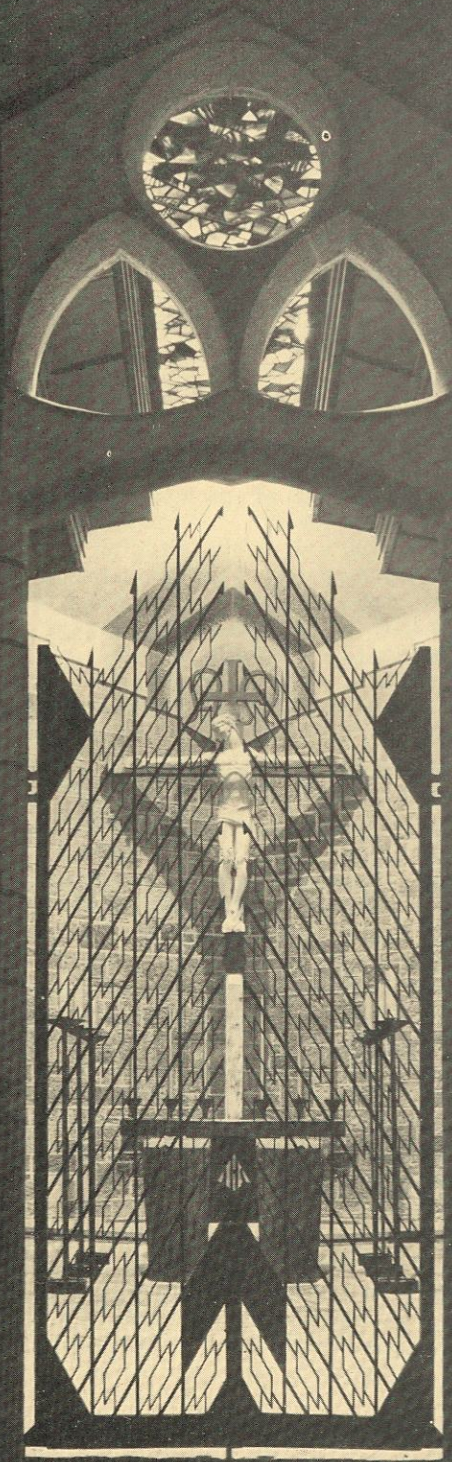
The stone walls give the interior sombre strength and integrity that would be impossible with an applied veneer of plaster or marble. They form a background in the pointed apse for Laurence Campbell's splendid Christus, and a rugged complement to the colour and light of mosaic and stained glass overhead, and to the polished facets of altar and catafalque beneath. The mosaic work was done by Italian artists brought to this country by Mr. Crean, Rosecommon, to teach the art to Irish boys.

The site chosen for the Chapel was decided by the existing church and its environs, opening off the main entrance porch on the principal east-west axis of the church, at the foot of the tower. Its situation dictated, to a certain extent, the general proportions of the Chapel and their relation to the church proper and to the entrance from porch to Mortuary in particular. It influenced the many problems of daylight and sunlight to the Mortuary Chapel, as well as the siting of the Crucifix, altar, catafalque and entrance gates. Perhaps most of all it dictated the harmony in space, proportion and pattern, and in texture and colour between the different elements and materials—(from the colour-stained rooflight to the Liscannor paved floor) that make up the Chapel as one sees it for the first time through the old trefoil window arch with its barbed entrance gates.

#### PLANNED EXPENDITURE

The fourth basic consideration which governed the design was economy—not the economy of cheap materials and slipshod methods—but the discipline of a basic overall budget which decided the scope of the design, the construction and the components. The entire project—(with the exception of the ceiling mosaic and the benches)—but including altar, Crucifix and all furnishings, was conceived as a unit within a definite budget figure, out of which allocations were made to all items, *in proportion* to each other, and in relation to the design as a whole. Such economic discipline would, without doubt, be of great benefit in church building today, where very often inordinate disproportion occurs between various sections or parts of the building and its finishings. For example, the pebble-dashed church with a sanctuary of marble, like a Roman forum in a Railway Station.

These very inadequate attempts to explain the basic reasoning from which the design of the Chapel evolved, may help to eliminate some doubts and answer some queries. In a limited and elementary way, a sincere attempt has been made to create a simple Chapel with integrity and reverence, which is not camouflaged with potted palms, nor embalmed in traditional



shroud of plaster or marble, but which, for better or for worse, is a product of our own age, where an empty civilisation is dying and an unknown one is being born."

Such is the story of the conception and realisation of a noble building, the tribute of the parishioners of Naas, in honour of their dead.

P. J. D.

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*O God, lovingly generous of forgiveness, lover of the salvation of man, we beseech thee of thy clemency to grant that the brethren, friends and benefactors of our congregation, who have passed out of this life, may by the intercession of Blessed Mary ever virgin and of all thy saints come to the fellowship of perpetual happiness.*

*To these, O Lord, and to all that rest in Christ, grant, we beseech thee, a place of refreshment, of light, and of peace. Through the same Christ, Our Lord. Amen.*

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(Photographs by Thomas P. Gunn, 169, Fortfield Road, Terenure, Dublin.)

*Impression of Mortuary Chapel*