

90th anniversary of the dedication of the Honan Chapel, Cork

Mass in the Honan Chapel, Sunday 5th November 2006

Text by James Cronin, Project Coordinator

On 5th November 1916, 90 years ago today, the Honan Chapel, was dedicated to St. Finbarr of Cork.

Today, let us remember all those involved in this commission.

The Honan Chapel occupies a special place in the spiritual life of the college community since its consecration in 1916. Although the chapel is dedicated to Cork's patron St. Finbarr its name commemorates the chapel's benefactors, wealthy Cork merchants, the Honan family. This chapel was built and furnished during a period marking the transformation of the Irish political and cultural landscape. April 1916 had seen the Easter Rising in Dublin. Irish brigades sustained heavy losses during the initial phase of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916.

Before Isabella Honan died in August 1913 she charged John Robert O'Connell, the family solicitor, with the disposal of the family fortune for charitable works in a manner O'Connell saw fit. Sir John was on good terms with the college president, Sir Bertram Windle. In 1914 O'Connell, with the support of Windle and the Munster bishops, purchased St. Anthony's Hall for the lodging of Catholic students. O'Connell was largely responsible for the refurbishment of the hostel which reopened on 20th April 1914 as the Honan Hostel. At this time the hostel served the needs of a quarter of the student population of the college. By 1914 plans were underway to design a chapel on the grounds of the hostel. O'Connell gave the stained glass artist, Harry Clarke, his first significant commission with this project in January 1915. He was 26. Coincidentally, this year marks the 75th anniversary of Harry Clarke's death in 1931 at the age of 42.

O'Connell was determined to foster local Cork craftsmanship in building and furnishing the chapel. He included the Cork firm of Egan & Sons in the commission for altar plate and vestments. The names of Cork seamstresses from the Egan workshop in no.32 Patrick St, are inscribed in the lining of the vestments. Students from the Crawford Municipal Technical Institute were involved in the exterior carvings. James Finbarre McMullen was the architect and John Sisk & Son was the builder.

Rev. Sir John Robert O'Connell's collaboration with Sir Bertrim Windle between 1914-17 greatly contributed to the physical expansion of campus. O'Connell was committed to fostering science and technology in education. The Honan Chapel is regarded as a shrine to the Irish Arts & Crafts Movement not just because of its artwork, but because the project generated much needed work in Cork at the time. The project fostered the development of Cork crafts and industry and in this O'Connell and Windle were catalysts.

The Honan Chapel is not only a testimony to premier craftsmanship it also serves a living faith community and so it continues to evolve artistically. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* of the Second Vatican Council calls for the preservation of the Church's artistic heritage while also promoting contemporary sacred art. In accordance with this the Honan Chapel has been renewed between 1983 and 2001. The Dublin architect, Richard Hurley, won awards for his conservation of the chapel. A former chaplain, Rev. Fr. Gearóid Ó Suilleabháin, promoted a new generation of Irish artists in this sacred space. Imogen Stuart; Ken Thompson; Eric Pearse; Evelyn Ross; and Mary Barry have designed furnishings, vestments, and hangings to suit the current liturgy. Since 2001, the chaplaincy team have greatly fostered and expanded the ministry of music in the Honan Chapel. A specially commissioned Honan Mass, composed by John O'Brien, was celebrated in the chapel on Holy Thursday, April 13th 2006.

The Honan Chapel is not a static building, but serves the needs of a university faith community and a new generation. Rev. Fr. Joseph Coghlan, Dean of the Honan Chapel, has commissioned a new website highlighting the chapel and its collection. The *Honan Chapel & Collection Online* is being launched this week. This builds on the scholarship of Paul Larmour, Virginia Teehan and Elizabeth Wincott Heckett. I want to sincerely thank Dr. Sabin Tabirca, Department of Computer Science, University College Cork and his design team, Daniel C. Doolan and Xiaoye Dai, who produced this site. In his guidebook to the Honan Chapel, published in 1916, Rev Sir John Robert O'Connell showed an awareness of the power of photography to popularise this chapel and its collection. I feel he would be gratified to see technology being used in innovative ways to raise awareness of his work 90 years on!

Today, let us remember all those involved in this commission, but especially Matthew, Robert and Isabella Honan. May they rest in peace. *Requiescent in pace.*

James G. R. Cronin,
Project Coordinator,
Cork, November 2006.