

# Glasgow's Irish input

THE contribution of Glasgow's Irish community to the vibrant Catholicism of the city over the previous 500 years is being celebrated at Glasgow's People's Palace in an exhibition which looks at the history of the archdiocese of Glasgow from its creation in 1492 to the present day.

The exhibition is entitled Glasgow's Good News and marks the re-opening of the top floor of the popular City Museum on Glasgow Green. It is also the first major project produced by the Glasgow museum's social history department under Irishman Mark O'Neill. The exhibition's curator, Harry Dunlop, who is the assistant keeper of social history at the People's Palace, spoke to *The Irish Post* outlining his objectives in staging the exhibition.

"I was particularly interested in the period from the banning of the archdiocese in 1560 by the Reformation in Scotland until the archdiocese was re-established in 1869. I wanted to find out what happened to Catholics and to Catholicism in the city during those years when it officially didn't exist."

Easily the most fascinating part of the exhibition is the section called The Irish Factor. There are a few surprises in the accounts of oppression and discrimination suffered by the Irish Catholics when they arrived in Glasgow, which are still part of the city's folk memory.

However, within this section there is documentary evidence of an intriguing power struggle for the soul of the Catholic Church in Glasgow, in which Irish clerics and the Irish community played a pivotal role. It shows that the hostility to Irish immigrants was not a matter simply of religious difference. Catholic Scots also objected to the arrival of the Irish.

During the 1860s Glasgow was, in church terms, the "western district with a Vicar Apostolic (VA)" rather than an archdiocese with a bishop — there had been no see in Glasgow since 1560. The then VA was a Scot called John Gray who found himself ministering to a rebellious flock who looked to turbulent priests. The Irish priests of Glasgow and Lanarkshire demanded an Irish VA.

Gray and his supporters feared the loss of the Catholic Church's Scottish character and he was convinced that if the church in Glasgow became a branch office of the see of St. Patrick, then the hostility of Protestant Scotland would have an "ethnic" as well as a religious edge to it. Clerics

## PHIL MacGIOLLABHAIN has been checking out the substantial Irish input to a Glasgow exhibition on Catholicism's deep roots in that city.

in Ireland were certainly involved in machinations and the Archbishop of Dublin Michael Condon helped to secure for Patrick Lynch the post of assistant VA in 1865.

The conflict with Scottish Catholics began even before he had started in his post. He refused to be consecrated in Scotland. Instead, the ceremony was carried out in the Irish College in Paris.

Lynch's sermons were often more political than theological as he addressed the congregation as "we Irish" and "fellow exiles", causing a furore among the Scottish members of the congregation. Lynch had much backing in the Irish community of the day, especially among journalists. The Irish Free Press was making constant demands that backed up Lynch. The paper was subsequently proscribed mainly due to the lobbying of an influential group within the Scottish Catholic Church.

Clearly the church leadership was split into two warring factions and Rome could not allow this to continue. Archbishop Manning of Westminster, an Englishman, was sent north to mediate between the warring Celts. In his report he clearly felt sorry for the plight of the Irish Catholic immigrants and had some sympathy for Lynch's position (which was simply that the vast majority of the city's Catholics were Irish and should receive the pastoral care of a bishop who understood them). However, the Englishman had little fondness for Lynch's tub-thumping tactics, which were, of course, directly imported from the Ireland which remembered Daniel O'Connell and was experiencing the start of the Land League agitation. Gray and Lynch were asked to resign. Lynch

was "bought off", some thought, by the receiving of a see in Ireland which he accepted. Gray, already failing in health, went quietly. Gray's successor was Englishman Charles Eyre, the Vicar Apostolic of Hexham in the north of England.

Some of the objects on display are impressive visually, although there are many gems for the social historian that would escape the cursory glance of a quick visit. There is much to see



**A PROUD TRADITION:** Among the Irish items at the Glasgow exhibition is this Ancient Order of Hibernians banner, pictured by TOMMY MAIN.

in the exhibition as a whole and in the Irish section in particular. One of the most imposing pieces on display is the large statue of St. Patrick from St. Joseph's of North Woodside Road which closed in 1986 due to a lack of parishioners.

The politics of Irish Catholicism is also represented. There is a well-preserved Ancient Order of Hibernians banner from Calton, one of the areas of Glasgow's East End that saw the heaviest Irish settlement and an area that is still proud of its Irish roots. The banner was, for a time, an Irish National Foresters' banner due to the banning of the AOH by the archdiocese from 1898-1909.

There are also two AOH sashes from the St. Luke's branch in the Gorbals. In terms of the Scottish Catholic community the exhibition indicates a view of their faith and a view of their position in Scottish life that would be anathema to the street militancy of the AOH.

A far more quiescent form of Catholicism seems to have prevailed among the Scottish Catholics. We learn of the Scottish colleges abroad that trained Scottish priests during the 1560-1680 period of repression and the survival of Catholicism in lowland Scotland.

There are exhibits dealing with the martyrdom and canonisation of St. John Ogilvie, a Scot from Banffshire in the north east of Scotland who was hanged, drawn and quartered in 1615 at Glasgow's Cross, a few hundred yards from the exhibition.

They don't seem to have played then a comparable role as, say, Fr. Murphy of Boolavogue fame.

It would appear that Scottish Catholics, in the main, made little collective impact on the city, probably because of their limited numbers, but also because of their preference to lead a quiet life, attempting to acquire influence cautiously rather than attempting to contend for power openly. This is exactly the Realpolitik that Scotland as a nation was exercising after Culloden in the face of England's physical dominance.

There are intriguing insights into how the Highland Catholics of the late 18th century, cleared to the lowlands, were the subject of a "deal" involving their own clerics and Protestant cotton barons.

The deal was simple quid pro quo — labour for church. Highland priest Fr. MacDonnell, who co-ordinated the migration into Glasgow, delivered Highland labour, hungry and eager for work, and the cotton bosses guaranteed freedom to worship openly for the Highlanders. The minute book of the chapel managers of the first Catholic Church in Glasgow since the Reformation shows that the first principal contributors to this Catholic parish were all Protestants, all cotton barons.

This approach of the Highland Catholics, crushed by Culloden, broken by clearance, to attempt to quietly carve out a liveable niche in a hostile environment seems to have been upset by the arrival of the Irish who wished to contend for power.

The clash of the two approaches can be seen in the two personal styles of Gray and Lynch. The letter from Assistant Archbishop of the Lowland District, John Geddes, contains his view that the Irish were too extrovert in their faith for his liking and that he felt that the Irish community, if it were to grow, would bring unwarranted attention on Catholics from Protestant Scots.

Grow it did and by 1850 there were 42,000 Irish Catholics in Glasgow. It continued to grow in size and influence, making a huge contribution to shaping the modern city of Glasgow. It is hard to imagine any attempt to tell Glasgow's story without telling the story of the city's Irish.

Similarly it is inconceivable that Catholicism in Glasgow could be examined without surveying the Irish community's contribution.

This exhibition, thankfully, has not attempted to do this. The history of any oppressed people has got to be rescued. This exhibition is clearly a part of that process and Dunlop and his colleagues should be rewarded with everyone's attendance.

The exhibition runs until January 17, 1993, from 10.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m., Monday to Friday, and from 11.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. on Sundays. Admission is free and there is wheelchair access.

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