

Canon Timothy Brosnan



Social campaigner, visionary and unsung hero of Cahersiveen

It should be noted that the O'Connell Memorial Church stands testament not only to its namesake but also to the remarkable Canon Timothy Brosnan. Born in Castleisland in 1823, Fr. Timothy Brosnan was a professor of the Irish language and lectured in Physics in Maynooth for some years before he began his career as a priest in the diocese of Kerry.

He was appointed Parish Priest to Cahersiveen in 1879 a time of great social distress and being aware of at least 800 destitute families, he set to work immediately on improving the welfare of his parishioners, securing large sums for the relief of the parish through the support of the Nun of Kenmare (Miss Cusack).

Raising the money to build the Memorial Church

At that time, Cahersiveen had only a tiny chapel wherein Daniel O'Connell himself would have worshipped and thus the building of a new parish church for Cahersiveen was one of the first tasks to preoccupy the Canon. The suggestion of building the new church as a memorial to Daniel O'Connell came from a visiting Irish American Pastor whom he met in Killarney. On securing the support of Bishop McCarthy, the Rev. Dr. Croke, Archbishop of Cashel and Cardinal MacCabe, Archbishop of Dublin, the Canon began an intense press and personal campaign to raise the funds to start building.

Canon Brosnan invited the well known architect, Cork man, George Ashlin to draw plans and his vision was a tall-spired Gothic edifice which would hold about 2000 people. The estimate of building cost was an enormous (at the time) £23,885.

The Canon mobilised many priests to collect and money came from Ireland, the Irish in America and Australia but it was difficult to secure the full amount and the Canon died before the building was completed.

Not only the Memorial Church....Canon Brosnan was a very busy man.

During his time as Parish Priest, the Canon oversaw the building of a new convent and school for the Presentation Sisters, a new presbytery designed by George Ashlin, a number of teacher's residences, the erection of the Stations of the Cross on Cnoc na Tobar (where the cross on the 2,267' summit is still known as the Canon's Cross) and at Foilmore, a new school and the addition to the 'Long Chapel'. Incredibly, in 1880, as a Baronial Director of the Great Southern and Western Railway, he travelled to Dublin Castle and the House of Commons and secured a government grant of £85,000 to initiate the extension of the railway from Killorglin to Valentia. He turned the first sod at the Valentia end of the line, laid the foundation stone of the Cahersiveen railway bridge and the first stone of the new pier. The maiden train journey from Valentia included the Knight of Kerry and the Canon.

He was a man of vision, compassion and zeal who was much mourned by the people of Cahersiveen and throughout the Catholic world, when he died in 1898. Cahersiveen is right to be proud and grateful to have had Canon Brosnan as Parish Priest for the last twenty years of his life. His remains are interred within the O'Connell Memorial Church.



To be found near the Nun's Chapel on the left hand side wall.