

# St Mary's Church Saggart

175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (1849 to 2024)



Illustration by Kathleen Dowling (Saggart)

Dear reader, whether a local or a visitor, we hope you'll take a few minutes to read this pamphlet which looks back on the 175-year history of St Mary's church in Saggart.

It provides a short summary of some important events in Irish history leading up to the time the church was opened in 1849. It mentions some of the main features of the church and provides some important sources with more details.

It also reminds us of the gratitude due to all those, past and present, for making St Mary's such a holy place. And of the need for new volunteers to sustain it in the future.

## Brief History and Context - Up to 1849

Early Christian Period in Ireland      St Patrick arrived in Ireland the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Many monasteries were setup around Ireland in the following centuries. St Kevin setup the famous Glendalough monastery in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. A monk called Mosacra setup a monastery in Saggart in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

For six centuries the monastic settlement at Glendalough flourished. It was destroyed in 1398.

1500's      King Henry VIII broke from the Roman Catholic Church and became head of the official (Protestant) Church in Ireland in 1541.

1600's      The Williamite Wars including the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 reinforced protestant dominance in Ireland. Penal Laws were enacted in 1697. The Banishment Act banned Catholic priests and bishops from Ireland.

1700's      In 1780, Saggart Paper Mill was established. It became an important employer in the area. The McDonnell family owned the mill and their son Joseph became a Catholic priest. They would help to finance construction of the new church in the 1840's.

In 1788 Rev Simon Barlow became the first parish priest in Saggart. He died in 1794 and is buried in Saggart graveyard.

A rebellion in Ireland in 1798 led to increased military repression and sectarian tension. Dublin parliament was transferred to London in 1800.

1800's      In 1812, Rev Andrew Hart became the first priest educated in St Patrick's College Maynooth (established in 1795) to serve in Saggart. He died in 1815 aged only 30.

In 1829, Catholic Emancipation was granted following campaign led by Daniel O'Connell, leading eventually to equal rights for Catholics in Ireland.

Famine in Ireland from 1845 to 1852 due to failure of the potato crop. It peaked in 1847 and the worst affected areas were the west and south of the country. It had a major impact on Irish society and history.

The new church in Saggart was officially opened (dedicated to St Mary) on 19 August 1849. The ceremony was led by Archbishop Daniel Murray and mass was celebrated by Rev John Dunne.

## Church Architecture and Features

Most Catholic churches in Ireland were built during two significant periods: the early medieval period (5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries) and after Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

Gothic revival architecture became popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century leading to the construction of many iconic Catholic churches and cathedrals throughout Ireland.

Saggart church was built in the Victorian Gothic style which is common to well-known Irish cathedrals in Enniscorthy and Killarney and to some smaller churches along the east coast.

The walls are made of granite stone from Co. Wicklow. The columns and the vaulted ceiling that help give the church its unique character were made by master craftsmen.

The altar rails, table and baptismal font were donated by the parish of Rathgar in 1926. They were designed and made by Dublin artist and stone cutter Albert Power.

The stained glass window over the altar was made by brothers John and David Casey from Marlborough Street in Dublin who worked on many churches during that era.

Inside the church on the right hand side is a memorial effigy of Fr Andrew Hart. The effigy is located above his tomb. Nearby on a stand is a tribute by Donal McMahon.

A brass plaque in the church porch, dedicated to the McDonnell family of Saggart Mills, was installed by Rev Joseph McDonnell SJ in 1927 in memory of his family.

Another brass plaque lists the 26 parish priests who served in the parish from 1788 to 2016. The next name will be our current parish priest Fr Joseph Ryan.

### Sources and Further Reading

*A History of Saggart and Rathcoole Parishes* by Maeve Mulryan Moloney, published in 1998. Available to download free from the Internet.

*Saggart Parish Church 1849 to 1999 - A History* by Liam Roche, published in 1999 to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Available on Saggart parish website [SRBNparishes.ie](http://SRBNparishes.ie)

*Saggart Parish Blogspot*, maintained by Donal McMahon over many years. Available at [saggartparish.blogspot.com](http://saggartparish.blogspot.com)

# Looking to the Future

We are blessed in Saggart that so many volunteers stepped forward over the past 175 years to support the priests and keep the church open as a place of worship, prayer and reflection for locals and visitors alike.

Behind the scenes, many volunteers spend many hours contributing their talents in many ways as Deacons, Sacristans, Choir members, Collectors, Readers, Eucharistic Ministers, Funeral Ministers, Flower Arrangers, Altar Servers, Finance Committee, Parish Pastoral Council, Child Safeguarding Officers, and helping with cleaning and maintenance of the church and the graveyard and in many other generous ways.

Looking back, there was a time, especially during the Irish famine, when many Irish people emigrated and took their faith to far-away places and helped to build parish communities in their new homelands.

In recent years we have welcomed many people of faith from all over the world to this parish community in Saggart/Citywest.

Looking to the future with hope and optimism, our new diverse parish community will provide many volunteers, with multiple talents, to support the priests and sustain the parish and the church with strong faith for many years to come.

For the future success of this parish we look to a few well-used phrases from the Irish language:

Ní neart go cur le chéile	There is no strength without unity
Bail ó Dhia ar an obair	Prosperity from God on the work
Le Cúnamh Dé	With the help of God

Finally, as St Mary is also referred to as 'Queen of Peace', and peace is badly needed in war-torn countries in 2024, we look to the words of Pope Francis:

Keep alive within us the flame of hope, so that with patience and perseverance we may opt for dialogue and reconciliation. In this way may peace triumph at last, and may the words "division", "hatred" and "war" be banished from the heart of every man and woman. Lord, defuse the violence of our tongues and our hands. Renew our hearts and minds, so that the words which always bring us together will be "brother and sister", and our way of life will always be that of: Shalom, Peace, Salaam!

Amen.