

### Mungret College

When the Bindon estates were sold in 1852, five trustees<sup>i</sup> bought seventy acres at Dromdarrig for a college and a model farm for the practical training of Munster boys as farmers.<sup>15</sup> The college opened in 1858 under the auspices of the National Board. A total number of students dwindling from fourteen to six, of whom only three belonged to County Limerick, caused the school to close in September 1878.<sup>16</sup>

In 1878 in an elaborate report laid before the Lord Lieutenant and the Court of Chancery, the trustees petitioned that as the agricultural school was a failure and could not be made self-supporting except by an unjustifiable waste of funds, a school should be established in the buildings, holding an intermediate place between the primary schools and collegiate institutions, in which a general education (including agriculture) would be imparted and an outlet opened to native talent, and a great and lasting benefit conferred on Irish society.<sup>17</sup> It was found, however, that the Court of Chancery did not have powers to make the required alterations in the scheme under which the school had been previously conducted; and so on August 15th 1879, a local act was passed enabling the Lord Lieutenant, with the consent of the Treasury, to apply the whole property, that was then vested in the trustees as an agricultural school, to any educational purpose he thought fit provided that the agricultural sciences were still included in the subjects taught.<sup>18</sup>

By virtue of powers granted by the Lord Lieutenant in accordance with the Act, the trustees leased the place to Rev. Joseph Bourke. The lease was for twenty-one years determinable at any time upon a year's notice at a yearly rent of £79-16-00. The lease was held under certain conditions imposed by the Lord Lieutenant's orders. The school was to be used as an intermediate school, open to all boys without religious distinction but natives of the city and county of Limerick were to have preference. There was also a conscience clause as well as a clause providing for the teaching of the science and practice of agriculture. The trustees still retained considerable control over management of the school. It was provided that annual income of the trust property, including the rent of the farm, should be applied by the trustees in paying taxes, in giving burses and prizes or in the purchase of scientific apparatus.<sup>19</sup>

Under these circumstances, Mungret College, as it has since been called, was opened on the 23rd of September 1880. Fr. Bourke carried out the conditions of the lease while conducting the college as the Diocesan Seminary.

The college was closed after a year and the lease once more surrendered to the trustees. It is stated that the trustees offered the college to the Fathers of the Holy Ghost (Spiritans) and to other teaching orders but no one cared to take on an institution that had already failed twice. Meanwhile, just at the time that the trustees had leased Mungret College to Fr. Bourke, the Apostolic was started in September 1880, in the Crescent College in Limerick by Fr. W. Ronan S.J., who was superior of that house at the time. The Crescent College was remarkably successful and Fr. Ronan already found his accommodation too small for the increasing number of students. Rev. M. Abbé l'Heritier, Lord Emly's chaplain, was on intimate terms with some of the Jesuit Fathers at the Crescent. It was he who first brought Mungret under the notice of Fr. Ronan and suggested the possibility of finding there a suitable home for his Apostolic School. In consultation with Dr. Butler, Bishop of Limerick, it was decided to re-open Mungret College.<sup>20</sup>

On the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross in 1882, Mungret College saw the beginning of its career as a college of the Society of Jesus. Fr. Ronan became the first rector of the college. Fr. Ronan's lease was similar to that under which Fr. Bourke had previously held the place. The term was now for five hundred years; the yearly rent was £70.

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<sup>i</sup>The original trustees were Bishop Higgins, Sir Richard Bourke, Sir David Roche, James D. Lyons, Esq. and William Howley, Esq. {Source: "The Beginnings of Mungret College" *MA* July 1932. (no author).} Later trustees were Lord Emly, Sir Steven de Vere, Sir David Roche, Edward O'Brien and James Greene Barry. {Source: Moloney, Michael, Revd., L.Ph. *NAMI* Spring 1944}

furthermore, the powers reserved by the trustees to interfere with the management of the school were curtailed.<sup>21</sup> During the years in which the trustees remained with the college, no difficulties ever arose by in that regard. The £7000 was returned every year and distributed in prizes among the students who secured distinctions in the university examinations. The trustees were also able, from funds at their command, to make considerable grants for scientific apparatus amounting to more than £700.<sup>22</sup>

The students' accommodation was poor in the beginning. Classrooms were small and insufficient in number for the complicated courses of study. The Apostolic students were compelled at first to utilise the same hall (afterwards called the small dormitory") as dormitory and study-hall and no hall in the college, except the two already required as dormitories, was large enough for the purpose of a college chapel.<sup>23</sup>

During the first year, an ambulatory was built on the playground southeast of the house and a new system of sanitation established at its southern end at a cost of £1,000. This ambulatory, resting on pillars and with open sides, was afterwards found by experience to be unsuitable for the breezy climate of Mungret. Six years later, in 1888, it was altered and perfected by having the side-walls built. It was a large hall, some 33 yards long and 8 yards wide. Besides serving the purpose of an ambulatory, or enclosed playroom in wet weather, it was now utilised as the college theatre and Aula Maxima.<sup>24</sup>

Many other necessary improvements were made in the buildings and surroundings in the early days. Among these, a walk was made around a portion of the grounds on the western side of the avenue and 5,000 young trees were planted over the whole farm. In 1888, Bishop O'Dwyer (appointed 1886) withdrew his students from Mungret and set up his diocesan college in Henry Street in Limerick City, the former residence of Lord Limerick. St. Munchin's Diocesan College, as it was named, remained in Henry Street until its transfer to the purpose-built college in Corbally.<sup>25</sup>

In 1899 a new wing was erected at Mungret College, capable of accommodating a hundred pupils. Other important additions were added at a cost of £13,000. Several spacious, well-lighted, well-ventilated, dormitories, lecture halls, classrooms, lavatories and bathrooms were constructed. The natural philosophy department had a very large and valuable collection of books.<sup>26</sup>

The construction of the boys' chapel began in 1884 and to it Lord Emly and Bishop Butler devoted £2,000 left in trust to them by Lord Dunraven of Adare. Three stained glass windows above the high altar were gifts of Count Rudolf de Saxe; the fourth window was a gift from Mrs. Tully of Boston, Massachusetts. Miss Kelly of Newtown, County Wick, presented the High Altar; her sister Mrs. Green of Newcastle, the Altar of St. Joseph. Mr. Egan of Limerick contributed a large sum of money for the Altar of the Blessed Virgin and Mrs. Flinn of Kinsale gave a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a votive offering to Our Lady of Lourdes. Mr. Vincent Dowling of Templemungret presented Stations of the Cross.<sup>27</sup>



Fig. 14. Interior of the Boys' Chapel in Mungret College.  
From the Mungret Annual, 1939.

On December 8th 1886, a dreadful storm raged all day. Several windows were burst and about a hundred panes of glass were broken. Part of the building became unroofed; the new boys' chapel was badly damaged.<sup>28</sup>

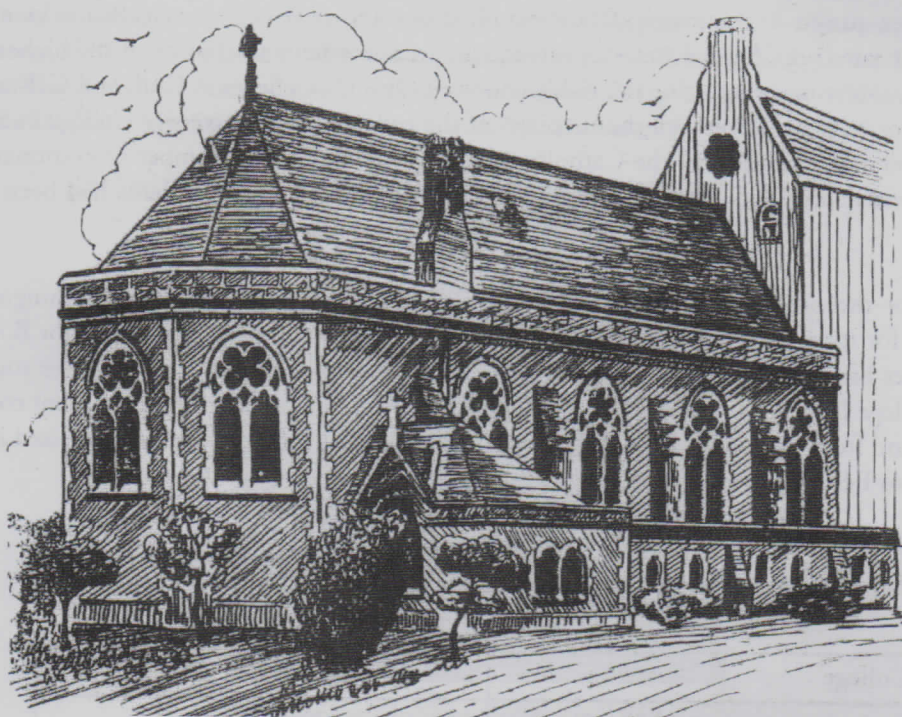


Fig. 15. Exterior of Mungret College Chapel.  
From the Mungret Annual, 1939.

The Chapel was decorated in 1900 and oak panelling added in the nave at the expense of Mr. Llewellyn Blake of Cloughballymore, Galway. Some years previously, the Sacristy was furnished and lined with oak panelling and the cloisters entering it furnished with presses. This was undertaken by Rev. Francis Daly S.J., the funds for the purpose derived from the sale of his well-known prayer book entitled "The Child of Mary Before Jesus Abandoned in the Tabernacle." W. Hague of Dublin was the architect of the Chapel.<sup>29</sup>

Within the college there were two divisions: Seminary and Apostolic School. From the beginning these had distinct quarters and were under different systems of discipline. The Seminary, from which the lay school later developed, included the lay element and was (like the ordinary diocesan seminaries in Ireland) to all intents and purposes, an ordinary Catholic lay college. However, a considerable number of its pupils intended to become priests and the tone, discipline and system of studies in the college were influenced to a considerable extent by that fact.<sup>30</sup>

The apostolic school consisted exclusively of pupils preparing to become priests on the foreign missions and received only on the condition that they had a decided vocation to that state in life. The union (such as it was) of these divisions in the same college worked sufficiently well; both schools reaped many advantages from it and the tone of the school benefited much by it.<sup>31</sup>

From the beginning of Mungret College, students were prepared for the arts degree of the Royal University of Ireland, although a small number of students competed in the intermediate examinations at the end of the first scholastic year. Gradually, various classes from rudiment classes to B.A. classes were formed. The college throughout was uniformly

very successful in pre-university examinations; even in the first year, all the candidates who presented themselves, twenty four in number, passed in the matriculation examinations and there were seven distinctions recorded to the credit of Mungret that same year. Several times in subsequent years, students won some of the highest distinctions in the arts examinations, sometimes surpassing the richly endowed Queen's Colleges in Cork and Galway.<sup>32</sup> In 1904, Fr. O' Donnell, Moderator, gave an account of the successes of the college. After University College in Stephen's Green, Mungret College stood at the head of all the Catholic colleges of Ireland in the number of examination successes in the Royal Irish University; it gained 196 Exhibition Honours, 580 passes and 58 students had been admitted to the Degree of B.A.<sup>33</sup>

In 1909 standards for the pre-university examinations were equally high. Besides the 45 Mungret students who presented themselves for matriculation, there were 18 for First Arts, 14 for School Arts and 7 for B.A. examinations. Furthermore, Mungret had university success greater than that of any other college in the three southern provinces except University College Dublin and the Queen's Colleges all of which were becoming constituent colleges of the new National University and from one point of view, surpassed Magee College in Derry, which professed itself not content with mere affiliation to Belfast University and claimed to become at least a constituent college.

Number of students to pass the Arts Examinations 1886-1901, by college.

College	Total Number of Passes
Queen's College, Galway	682
Mungret College, Limerick	580
University College, Blackrock	453
Queen's College, Cork	438
Holycross, Clonliffe	433
Clongowes College	427
St. Malachy's College, Belfast	380
Carlow College	340
Castleknock College, Dublin	393
Rockwell College, Co. Tipperary	92

From 1882 the college went from strength to strength under the guidance of the Jesuits until 1974 when it was forced to close for the fourth time. The reasons for the closure were many and intricate; one was the fact that the Jesuits were few in number now; another was lack of finance, one of the main reasons why it failed previously.<sup>34</sup>

### **Eamonn de Valera's Visit**

Rural Week was held at Mungret College from the 8th to the 15th of August 1942. An Taoiseach Eamonn de Valera, Lieut. D. Mc Kenna, Chief of Staff, Rev. John Hayes, founder and President of Muintir na Tire, were among the prominent guests. The American Ambassador and envoy of President Roosevelt and Mr. William Bullett arrived here with the American Minister, Mr. David Grey, to confer with Mr. De Valera.<sup>35</sup>



De Valera at Mungret College in 1942.

### **Mungret College Workers**

Jack Dillon, the college handyman, lived near the old churchyard.<sup>36</sup>

Dan Mc Knight worked at the college as a tailor and sometimes as a boatman.

Frank Nash, college retainer and handyman, died Easter Sunday March 30th 1921 and is buried in Mungret graveyard.<sup>37</sup> During the armed conflict in Limerick in 1922, three priests and five lay-brothers housed and fed five hundred women and children in the college.<sup>38</sup>



Four local employees of Mungret College pictured in 1922.

**Standing from left:**

Joe Walsh (Butler),

Bill Donovan (Painter).

**Seated from left:**

Jack Dillon (Carpenter),

Natt. Hallinan (Handyman).