

WESTLAND ROW CBS PAST PUPIL'S UNION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

No history of the PPU of any Christian Brothers' school is complete without, firstly, looking at the life and work of Edmund Rice the founder of the Presentation Brothers and the Irish Christian Brothers. At the end of every committee meeting we stand and recite a prayer, reproduced below, to Blessed Edmund.

Edmund was born in Callan Co. Kilkenny in 1762. The Rices belonged to a small minority of Catholic landowners and Edmund enjoyed a loving and comfortable childhood in Callan. At the age of 23 he met and married Mary Elliott in Waterford where he was already established as a successful businessman.

Four years later Mary died in childbirth and the baby, christened Mary Rice, was handicapped. Edmund was known to have been devoted to his wife and the anguish he suffered by her death can only be imagined.

The death of his wife and the handicap of his daughter exercised a profound influence on Edmund and radically altered the course of his future activities. The period was one of the saddest in Irish history. The people were in a state of unrelieved wretchedness. They were almost all illiterate. They had been stripped of their dignity and they lived in conditions of unspeakable misery, poverty and filth. As one chronicler put it: *"public morality had broken down completely. The common people had sunk to a depth of degradation never before experienced."*

The Liberator, Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847) could rightfully predict that future generations *'will not be able to conceive of what a race of slaves I have to endeavour to make men'*.

In 1802 Edmund sold his elegant house and his thriving business and established a school for Waterford's derelict youth in a stable. He himself exchanged his comfortable home for a draughty room above the stable. The going was very difficult due to the state of the children but things improved when two of Edmund's friends from Callan, Thomas Grosvenor and Patrick Finn

arrived to offer assistance. The first purpose built school was built in Mount Sion in 1808 and the Society of the Presentation Brothers was established under the Bishop of Waterford.

The Society expanded rapidly throughout Ireland and problems were encountered with some bishops in different dioceses over jurisdiction. This gave rise to the birth of the Irish Christian Brothers in the 1820s.

Edmund opened his first school in Dublin in a building at East Hanover Street in 1812. Approx 90 schools followed in Dublin in the years up to the early part of this century. The life Centre in Pearse Square was established in 1996 under the leadership of Bro. Paul Hendrick, former pupil and teacher at Westland Row. A similar centre was established in Cherry Orchard in 2005.

The Edmund Rice Schools Trust was established in 2008 to ensure that the work begun in 1808 will continue into the future.

The building at East Hanover Street quickly became too small for the numbers of boys and the school moved to new accommodation next door to St. Andrew's Church Westland Row in 1864. Even though the school entrance is on Cumberland Street, the school was always called Westland Row.

Our great rivals Synge Street was also established in 1864 and they celebrate their Sesquicentennial in 2014 as we do.

This brings us up to more recent years and time to look at the work of the PPU. One immediate link with the past was the erection by the PPU of a bronze plaque on the building in East Hanover Street. This was unveiled by An Toiseach, Charles J Haughey on March 1st 1991. The original building changed hands in the nineties and the plaque was lost but, with the help of the new owners, Bewley Group, and past pupils such as Michael O'Sullivan and the Kealy family, it was found in a builder's yard and restored to its place on the new building where it can still be seen today.

The PPU was established in 1954 with the stated aims of promoting the spiritual, social, intellectual and material welfare of its members.

Among the founding members were many prominent businessmen and academics. One of the early Presidents was Dr. J. F. (Jerry) Dempsey (Row Man of the Year 1979), the first General Manager of Aer Lingus. Jerry joined

Aer Lingus in 1936 as Company Secretary on secondment from Kennedy Crowley, Chartered Accountants. He was appointed General Manager in 1937 in which position he served for 30 years.

The well-known hotelier, P. V. Doyle (Row Man of the Year 1980) was an early member. Vincent and his family have been very good to the PPU down the years with sponsorship and hospitality in their hotels. Our annual dinner has always been held in a Doyle hotel and that tradition continues with our presence in the Westbury every January.

Dermot Quigley (Row Man of the Year 2002) wrote an article on the PPU for the Centenary Magazine in 1964. He said that the Union had been very active since its formation. Externally, it had succeeded in organising many and varied functions such as the Annual Dinner, Dress Dances and “Smokers” (sic). Internally, it had combined a judicious mixture of youth and experience at the helm of its affairs.

The Centenary celebrations in 1964 were an outstanding success. The PPU organised a number of events including an Open Night in the school attended by hundreds of past pupils, a Centenary Ball in the Shelbourne Hotel, a Centenary Banquet in Jury’s Hotel, Mass and Concert in St. Andrew’s and ceremonies at Arbour Hill. The PPU of the day, under President J. F. O’Doherty, are to be congratulated on their hard work and enterprise.



Figure 1 - 1964 PPU Committee

A full list of Presidents and Row Persons of the Year is reproduced below. It is notable that all the "Row Persons" so far have been male even though the school went co-ed in 1988. Many "Pupils of the Year" have been ladies and it is inevitable that they will make the breakthrough to "Row Person" in the near future.

All past Presidents have their own special memories of their time in office. I was fortunate to be President in 1996 when Edmund Rice was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Rome. I will never forget that extraordinary day, Sunday, October 6th when we gathered, along with thousands of pilgrims from all over Europe, to hear the Pope say the Mass and proclaim Edmund, Blessed.

The work of the PPU has continued under various Presidents in the years since the Centenary. Our main activities have been to elect a Row Person of the Year, organise the Annual Dinner, provide awards for Pupils of the Year, help with career guidance and provide Gaeltacht scholarships. We have also assisted with fund raising for various projects such as refurbishment in the school and the display cabinets for trophies and the Pearse Room.

The PPU set up a Golf Society in the 1970s. The exact date of establishment is not clear but the Minutes of a meeting of May 25th 1975 said: *"S Fitzsimons announced that he had succeeded in booking Abbeylax Golf Club for 14th June". It was agreed that a mini bus be booked for the day and the all-in charge be £5 per person*".

Minutes of the meeting of February 9th 1981 mentioned the Treasurer's (Liam Browne) Report for 1980 and said that *subscriptions had risen to £45 mainly due to the Golfing Society*.

Happy days indeed!!

The golf Society has proven to be a great social outlet for past pupils over many years. In the nineties and earlier the society was greatly served by stalwarts such as Bill Doran, Des Coburn, George O'Hara and Michael Hargedon all, sadly, no longer with us. Cyril Stirrat, who thankfully is still very much with us and plays in most of the outings, served as Treasurer for many years and kept the society afloat through difficult times. The modern team of Des Donnelly (President), Brian Donnelly (Treasurer) and Tony Kenny (Secretary) continue to provide sterling service and make the society a great asset to the PPU.

And so we are up to date and can look forward to the events planned to celebrate the old school's Sesquicentennial (150th. Birthday). These are all set out elsewhere on the website. As I write we are just into the month of November and looking forward to the visit of An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, to the school on November 20th. The annual Mass for deceased past pupils will be celebrated by Archbishop Dr. Diarmuid Martin on November 30th.

When all the celebrations conclude in 2015, it will be great if I, as Hon. Sec. can report on them in glowing terms as Dermot Quigley did of the Centenary events in 1964. I know that the committee is working very hard and the school under Principal Kate Byrne and Vice Principal Eddie Kelly are co-operating enthusiastically. We need support from all past pupils and I have no doubt that the "Row Spirit" will come to the surface and that we will make this another famous chapter in the story of this historic school.

Jim Conway, Honorary Secretary 2014.

CBS Westland Row Past Pupils Union Presidents –

W. Blackbyrne (1954), J. F. Dempsey (1955/56), W.J. Meagher (1957/58), J. O'Reilly (1959), L. O'Cuinn (1960), W.J.Meagher (1961), C. O'Neill (1962), J. P. O'Doherty (1963), E. Saul (1964), J. O.Reilly (1965), W. J. Meagher (1966), W. O'Reilly (1967), G. Doyle (1968), D. Quigley (1969), B. Hogarty (1970), G. Bolger (1971), T. Keogh (1972), T. Keogh (1973), J. Byrne (1974/75), V.T. Lynch (1976/77), L.P. Browne (1978/79), T.D. Coburn (1980/81), T.G. Kealy (1982/83), P.C. Costello (1984/85), D.J. Blayney (1986/87), M.J.Coady (1988/89), P.Finn (1990/91), J.C.Sheridan (1992/93/94/95), J.Conway (1996/97), K.J.McGinley (1998/99/2000/01/02), B.O'Higgins (2003/04), D.Kane (2005/06/07),M.O'Sullivan (2008/09), J.Murray (2010/11), J.Costello (2012/13), J.Cullen (2014).

Row Person of the Year -

Jerry Dempsey (1979), P.V. Doyle (1980), Jim O'Doherty (1981), Chris Kane (1982), Shay Healy (1983), Bill Doran (1984), Cyril Cusack (1985), Joe Taaffe (1986), Jackie Carey (1987), Ken Beaton (1988), Gerry Mackey (1989), Paddy Dowling (1990), Harry Hill (1991), Brian Duncan (1992), Fr. Eugene McCarthy (1993), Ken Doherty (1994), Tommy Kealy (1995), Ray Treacy(1996), Bryan O'Higgins (1997), Ian McGarry (1998), Joe Doyle (1999),Noel Clear (2000),

Denis Kane (2001), Dermot Quigley (2002), Jim Conway (2003), Fran Rooney (2004), Jim Bradley (2005), Francis Brennan (2006), Alex Montwill (2007), Brendan O'Brien (2008), Br. Paul Hendrick (2009), Des Donnelly (2010), Shay McConnon (2011), Jerry Carroll (2012), Vincent Kennedy (2013), Des Byrne (2014)

Blessed Edmund Rice Prayer –

O God, we thank you for the life of Edmund Rice,
He opened his heart to Christ present in those oppressed by poverty and
injustice,
May we follow his example of faith and generosity.

Grant us the courage and compassion of Edmund as we seek to live lives of
love and service,
We ask this through Christ our Lord,
Amen.