

BROTHER JOHN AUSTIN CAHILL

Frank Keane
1843-1862

FINAL TEXT

John Cahill, son of Matthew Cahill and Honora Burke, was born on 21 September 1843. His baptismal sponsors in Thurles Cathedral were John Burke and Mary Cahill. He had one brother Thomas born on 9 November 1845 and one sister Anne born 22 July 1847. John attended the Christian Brothers' school in Thurles, where Brother Patrick Francis Larkin was Director, and teacher.

The customary routine of life in Thurles was interrupted in 1850 when the Irish bishops held their first National Synod following the reformation. The presiding prelate, fresh with reforming zeal straight from Rome, with the title of Papal Delegate, was Paul Cullen, Archbishop of Armagh. Paul would later be transferred as Archbishop of Dublin. Witnessing the procession of all the Irish bishops, Abbots, senior clergy, all in full formal costume, must have made an indelible on the local population. Such a sight had not been experienced anywhere in Ireland in living memory. An indirect result of the synod, due to the presence of Bishop Francis Kelly of Derry, was the eventual transfer of the Thurles Director, Brother Patrick Francis Larkin, as founding Director in Derry.

Bishop Kelly was so impressed with the Brothers' school in the town that he requested a foundation for Derry. His predecessor, Edward McGinn, writing to the Bishop of Waterford in 1847 seeking Brothers, distinctly requested, 'two of the most distinguished of them.' Francis Larkin, one of the two requested 'very efficient Brothers' took possession of the Bishop's own house at 'The Brow of the Hill' in 1854.

We know that John Cahill attended the Brothers' school in Thurles. He entered the Novitiate, North Richmond Street, Dublin, on 25 July 1859, aged 16. As was customary, no details of his family, names of either father or mother, or a home address, are recorded.

Having entered the Novitiate John received the habit on 1 November 1859, and was assigned the religious name Austin. His Novice Master was Brother Thomas Joseph Hearn. His first (and as far as I can ascertain) and only mission was Derry, to which he was sent on 20 July 1860. This fact is duly acknowledged in the John Ledwidge's excellent History of the Brow of the Hill. In those days the formal novitiate was continued in a house other than the regular novitiate house.

Considering Austin's delicate health, was Derry selected as his first mission as 'The Brow of the Hill is a secluded spot well enclosed with a spacious garden.' Was it expected that the suitability of the location might improve his health, or would he benefit from the paternal care of Brother Larkin his former teacher in Thurles?

Almost exactly a year later Brother Austin was sent to the Brothers' house in Thurles, on 17 July 1861, suffering from consumption. A month later, on 13 August, 'his

father took him to his own house.’ This was normal practice at the time. His mother, in all likelihood, assumed nursing responsibility for her son.

Brother John Austin Cahill died 4 March 1862, aged 19 years. He was buried in Ballycahill Cemetery. The cemetery is on the Thurles/Ballycahill Road, three miles from the former. There is no record of Austin making profession of vows.

Austin’s obituary notice is signed by Brother T J Hearn and J A Hoare. As Michael Paul Riordan had died in office on 17 February 1862, the two Assistants, signed the death notice. The chapter to elect Riordan’s successor was scheduled to be held in April.

An invaluable source of information is a document containing photostat copies of death notices of Brothers, 1816-1885. It should be pointed out that these death notices bear the address ‘Belvidere House.’ In Brother Austin Cahill’s case we must remember that the Generalate did not move to Belvidere House until 13 February 1874. As he died in 1862 the death notice can be confusing. This compilation was obviously put together when the Generalate was in Belvidere House. The last listed death was on 21 September 1885. The Generalate was transferred to Marino in 1882.

John Austin Cahill’s grave is clearly marked on a map attached to the volume, ‘Deceased Brothers.’ At some stage a new headstone was erected on the grave, accounting for later burials. Unfortunately, the original headstone, if there was one, was discarded. Any material recorded on it was lost.

POST SCRIPT

The surname Cahill.

A 1859 subscription list of supporters of the Brothers’ schools in Thurles includes three donors named Cahill and their subscriptions. CAHILL William, Quarry £1; CAHILL Matthew 5s.0d; CAHILL the late James 5s.0d. It seems likely that William Cahill, living at Quarry Street, was related to the Thurles founder, William Joseph Cahill, who owned property at Quarry Street. Also William Joseph’s nephew’s Christian name was Matthew: Was the Matthew here listed father of John Austin Cahill, the subject of this necrology? Just now I see no obvious connection between James Cahill and our Cahills. By the same token a connection is not dismissed. Incidentally the subscriptions of £1 and 5s were very generous in those days.

Speculation on family trees can result in inaccurate, or more often, incorrect information, being disseminated. A reconstruction of Brother John Austin Cahill’s genealogy is suggested: Brother William Joseph Cahill was uncle of Brother Matthew Joseph Cahill. We suggest that Brother Matthew Joseph’s nephew, significantly named Matthew, was father of Brother John Austin Cahill.

In dealing with the history of the Christian Brothers in Thurles one invariably finds the surname Cahill. The Brothers’ Liber Mortuorum lists eight Brothers bearing the surname Cahill. These were David Enda, John Austin, Matthew Joseph, Michael Marius, Patrick Athanatius, Thomas Baptist, Thomas Dunstan and William Joseph. . All eight were born in Ireland. Four were born in County Tipperary; one in Kilkenny, two in County Cork; and one in Cavan. Of the Tipperary Cahills William

Joseph was cofounder of the Brothers in Thurles; later his nephew Matthew Joseph joined the Congregation. The uncle is buried in Thurles; the nephew in Cabra, Dublin. John Austin was from Thurles. He died young and was buried at Ballycahill, four miles from Thurles. Thomas Dunstan hailed from Loughmore, between Thurles and Templemore. Most of his life was spent in Australia. He is buried in Rookwood, Sydney.

Cahills without Tipperary connections: one of the founders of the Brothers in Thurles was Thomas Baptist Cahill, from Callan, County Kilkenny. He is buried in Thurles. Patrick Athanasius hailed from County Cavan. He died relatively young and is buried in Limerick. The remaining two were siblings. Michael Marius and David Enda Cahill came from Millstreet, County Cork. Marius spent his entire life working in India. He is buried in Kolkatta; Enda is mainly associated with St Vincent's, Glasnevin. He is buried in Dundalk.

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