



When the World went on Fire

This poem was written by Raymond Raleigh, Stonepark N.S. and published in Eurochild Poetry Book 2010

Early Christmas morning 2009
St. Mel's Cathedral burst into flames
Like the world was on fire

All its chairs and paintings
Were destroyed in the fire
Along side its lost beauty

But good news we read today
It can all be restored
From the Harry Clarke windows
To the angels on the ceiling

I Was Never Inside

This poem was written by Aiman Azam, Stonepark N.S. and published in Eurochild Poetry Book 2010

I was never inside
The big cathedral
I was never inside
Because of my faith

I'm a Muslim, you see
But I'm still a bit upset
For the building and the people
Who loved it so much

The big, huge building
With the roof all up in flames
And the wind blowing the ash
And the memories away

There's still no doubt
They'll restore
The stained glass windows
The cathedral
And more

It's More Than About Religion

This poem was written by Diarmaid O Nuallain, Stonepark N.S. and published in Eurochild Poetry Book 2010

It's more than about religion
It's who we are
It's a church we pray and sing in
This is our cathedral

The cathedral will be okay
It will be restored
The cathedral is God's home, mine and yours
God will always be happy within
Even when it's burnt

The Cathedral Tapestry – a chance encounter

Standing on the DART platform on the 24th September 2009 waiting for the last train home we got into conversation with a middle aged man who asked directions for the train to Malahide where he was going to visit his son. He told us that he was on route from working with a charity possibly Gorta in Africa and that in a few days time he would be travelling to India on more charity business.

He became very interested when he heard we were from Longford

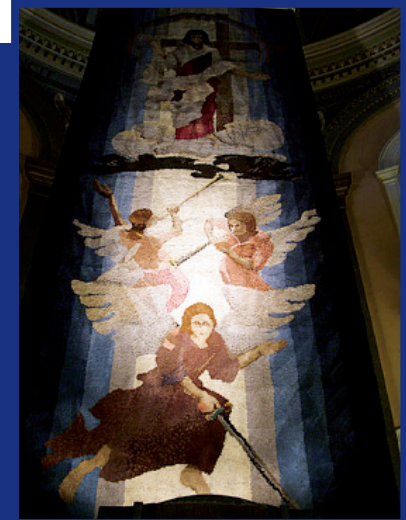
just minutes before the train was due. 'I hope you taking good care of that Tapestry in Longford Cathedral' he smiled, explaining that his firm in Donegal, which had since closed, made the tapestry all those years ago.

We told him how well it looked especially at evening ceremonies when it was flood lit

He went on to explain that weaving it was very heavy work for the girls who worked the looms in the factory. Then he was gone - either

through politeness or surprised by his story I didn't ask his name, but I wondered many times since then where he was or in what part of the world had he heard the Christmas morning news of the demise of his factory's most prestigious creation and of the girls back then, who worked the weave and watched as a Donegal fish lorry drove away from the factory with their creative handiwork on route to St Mel's Cathedral.

– As told by local couple

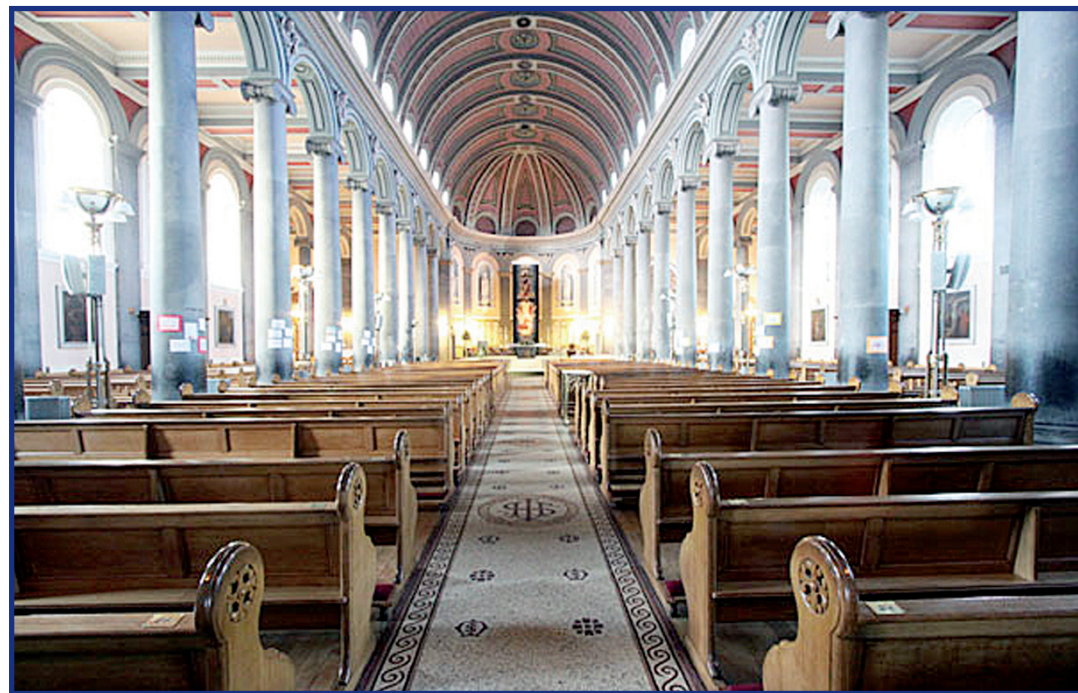


Once Upon a Snowy Silent Night...

Midnight Mass in Mel's, much loved event, had ended
And through the magic Christmas snow, key turned in door,
The shepherds had gone home - now what might the Magi bring?
There was that other Bethlehem tale – premonition, pattern, paradigm?
Not at all! – tomorrow is Christmas day, so let's turn in.
Then - News Headlines upon the stroke of eight.
Am I dreaming? - do I sleep or wake?
'Two bishops gone, the pope pulled to the ground'
A report of fire at St Mel's had a far fetched, off hand sound
Still cold comfort, unsettling in this whitest Christmas dawn;
Black frost gripped window-sills of silent Longford town.
Ah well, shur with all this recent rain, barrel-fulls of it around,
Brave fire fighters roused from out their sleep will soon
Put paid to that. Let's just turn over, curl up, and fall fast asleep.

But all the while a flame was creeping, steadily stealing
Through sacristy, museum and glorious plaster ceiling.
A midnight Mass, a smoke filled dawn of flame, a day of grief
In every street and terrace a great sorrow is unleashed.
Doors open down St Mel's Road, shock, disbelief -
'Our cathedral is on fire! smoke pouring from the roof.
Was ever a Christmas day anywhere near like this?'
By midday blank rear windows gape, their clear glass gone
Helpless men and women murmur a prayer down town
And reel beneath an irretrievable sense of loss
'O Mel and Michael help our poor bishop and presbytery priests;
The cathedral only last night aglow with festive light
Will we ever live to attend Mass there again on Christmas night?
And watch the great candle light procession pass,
The thurible send its sweet scented incense prayer aloft?
For infant, ox and ass forlorn and mangerless are gone
All we have said farewell to whether knowingly or not
Consternation, confusion, fear and sorrow all around;
If only tears could put out flames, and love restore lost ground

And indeed little by little the extent unfolds of this great loss.
Outside all seems well, pillars strong, converging curve of arch
Soaring bell-tower with legend of the ill fated father's son
Planting on its dizzy heights that twelve foot cross, fell to his doom.
High over entrance triangular enthronement scene of Mel
Hardier outdoor saints well used to rain and frost stand so sedate,
While fragile indoor plaster ones, from Froc in France, asphyxiate,
And names inscribed in gold, from high niches fall from grace.
O winged guardian angels, scorched black at arch and pillar top,
Fly down and comfort red eyed, tearful men and women
Down Michael's Road, Bannon Terrace, Dublin and Water Street.



Save, save, at least, those mystic windows, gems of Harry Clarke:
Christ Risen, St Anne, spectacular in blue, gold, ruby red and green.
For much, we fear is lost – priceless museum pieces turned to ash
The thousand year old Staff of Mel, Book of Fenagh 's ornate shrine.
A thousand lovely things we knew so well, admired, all are gone:
Sweet scent of chrisem, confirming girl or boy; deacon raised to priest.
Eucharistic Emmaus scene, altar to the Breaking of the Bread
Rare woven tapestry - Cardinal Daly's gift - of Christ in glory come;
(Won't it go as hard on +Cahal as on +Colm when he hears the news?)
You seek and seek in vain the well loved Stations of the Cross,
Confessional door, whose every click signalled a sheep no longer lost.
Creations of vanished hands we loved to gaze and dwell upon
Daylight and starlit December sky both ceiling now and roof
Thank God the Holy Family painting though faded, made it through;
Fears for founder bishops Higgins and Kilduff last resting places grow,
As burned out carved seats, floor boards echoing tread of pilgrim feet
Crash into the desolate Valhalla regions of the crypt far down below .

This inner yen we all seem to share for place of permanence,
When some great edifice we set our eyes and hearts upon,
In wonder at the awesome grandeur of Pyramid or Pantheon
Are they destined to be eternal, or must they too succumb

To some unforeseen ill hour, accident, mishap or fall?
And didn't we somehow assume St Mel's to last forever
A reassuring, welcoming, symbolic eternal sacred space,
Not some passing earth bound pleasurable Camelot dome,
But earthly threshold to our many-roomed heavenly home.

Jesus, you who once wept over your own city's plight
From ruined organ loft, we pray, reach down to us tonight
Veronica's towel to heal and dry the sorrow of our town;
In God's good time, may all pull through, never know despair
And in the end achieve a worthwhile restoration and repair,
But not just yet; for one needs pause, allow things time to heal,
Come to grips, grasp straws, commiserate, and cope with loss;
And then grant bishop, man, woman, nun, child and priest
The entire length and breadth of Ardagh and Clonmacnois
Grace to put a brave face on yesterday's, tomorrow's cares,
With Michael's aid and Mel and Ciaran's prayers,
Somewhere within the inner soul's serene pure light
Relief from what befell us once upon a snowy Silent Night.

This poem was written by Fr. Owen Devaney on the Feast of the Epiphany 2010

Account from Freeman's Journal, 1868

'When the late Dr. Kilduff was appointed to the pastoral care of the diocese of Ardagh, fourteen years ago, the only Catholic chapel in Longford was a ruinous hovel, of which a miserable remnant still remains to show by the side of the present noble structure a material type of the progress

and the labours of those fourteen years. The cathedral, begun by Dr. O'Higgins – was an almost acknowledged failure. The famine of '47 had stopped the progress of the work, and the rains of heaven trickled down its unroofed walls. The wild nettle and luxuriant weed twined round the half

raised columns, or covered the prostrate pillars lying scattered all around. The weather-beaten walls, prostrate columns, and roofless waste all overrun with weeds, spoke rather of a ruin than of a work progressing to completion. It was, indeed, a task to discourage the stoutest heart and deter the

noblest zeal; yet a very few years sufficed to carry the work almost to completion, and it stands today a noble and glorious monument of his labours and his zeal."

June 29 1868 Freeman's Journal
– account of Anniversary Mass of Bishop John Kilduff