

DEAN TERENCE O'SHAUGHNESSY

Terence O'Shaughnessy was born circa 1761, but there is some uncertainty about the place of his birth: the late Canon John Clancy argues strongly in favour of Broadford, Co. Clare. It is certain, however, that he went to Paris in early 1780s and was a priest (and student of theology) at the Lombard College, one of two Irish colleges in Paris, when the Revolution broke out. When most of the students returned to Ireland, he stayed on with the rector, John Baptist Walsh, who was also a priest of Killaloe diocese.

In 1793, Terence O'Shaughnessy was present at the execution of Louis XVI, wearing the uniform of a National Guardsman for disguise. The grisly spectacle was to trouble his mind until his death, 53 years later.

He returned to Ireland about 1795 and, shortly afterwards, became parish priest of Broadford, Co. Clare, where he remained until 1806. In 1799, his uncle, James O'Shaughnessy, was consecrated coadjutor bishop and succeeded as Bishop of Killaloe in 1807 (until 1829).

In 1806, O'Shaughnessy was transferred to Kilrush as parish priest and, in 1820, became dean of the diocese and parish priest of Ennis. He was to spend the next 28 years ministering in the Co. Clare town.

At the time of his appointment to Ennis, proselytising schools were strong in the town. Terence O'Shaughnessy opposed their activities vigorously, establishing Catholic parish schools for poor children. As part of this policy, he introduced the Christian Brothers to Ennis in 1827.

Terence O'Shaughnessy was absent from Ennis during the Clare election of 1828, and came in for a good deal of criticism for his failure to support O'Connell. Up to this time, he had been a strong supporter of the Catholic Association. However, the other candidate, Vesey Fitzgerald had been very generous in his help to the Catholic parish of Ennis, and O'Shaughnessy had not the heart to support him. They were certainly good friends, and it was also alleged at the time that O'Shaughnessy was a distant relation of Fitzgerald.

Soon after the election, O'Shaughnessy and O'Connell patched up their differences. The dean appears to have had very little involvement in politics afterwards.

In 1828, he began the major project of his life – the building of a new parish

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church in Ennis which, he hoped, would one day become the cathedral of the diocese. There were many problems after the work began, financial and otherwise, with the result that the Church of SS. Peter and Paul was not ready for use until 1842, and even then it was little more than four walls and a roof.

Dean O'Shaughnessy said the first mass in the new church on 4 September, 1842, and it was dedicated by Bishop

Patrick Kennedy on 26 February, 1843. Father Mathew preached on the occasion.

O'Shaughnessy was frequently in conflict with his uncle's successor as bishop, Patrick MacMahon (coadjutor 1819-29; bishop 1829-36) and these clashes led to many uneasy situations and sometimes tense confrontations between the two men.

He got on better with Bishop Patrick Kennedy, MacMahon's successor.

Dean Terence O'Shaughnessy died on 4 October, 1848, and is buried in the Church of SS. Peter and Paul, which is now, as he had hoped, the pro-cathedral of the diocese.



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