

## Appendix A

### The Identity of the Sacred Heart Altar

The description of the original altar in the first church of 1847 given by an eyewitness is published in the Tablet of December 4th, 1847.

It states:

"The altar is of carved stone, representing in the middle a pelican feeding its young , and the Evangelists in the extremities: each of the figures being surrounded by a **quatrefoil**, and otherwise enriched".

This exactly matches the carving on the front of the altar table section of the Sacred Heart altar in our church. The bird depicted in the centre biting its breast to feed its young, is a very old symbol of the Blessed Sacrament and is called the "pie pelicani".

The figures surrounding it are symbolic representations of the four Evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark , St Luke and St. John.

The "angel" figure in the top left - hand area is the "divine man" emblem of St. Matthew, assigned to him in ancient times because his gospel teaches us about the true nature of Christ. If coloured, it should be a gold angel on a red field.

The winged ox in the bottom left hand corner is the symbol assigned to St. Luke because his gospel deals with the sacrificial aspects of Our Lord's life. This should be a gold ox on a red field.

St. John is represented by the rising eagle in the top right - hand corner. This was assigned to him because his gaze peered further into the mysteries of Heaven than any other man's. His colours would be a gold eagle on a blue field.

The final symbol is the winged lion of St. Mark. He is represented in this way because his gospel informs us of the royal dignity of Christ. His colours are a gold lion on a red field.

This information about the Evangelists comes from the book "Signs and Symbols" by W. Elwood Post.

In addition, the Readers' Digest Universal Dictionary defines a quatrefoil as ".. an ornament or tracery with four foils or lobes". The figures on the Sacred heart altar are enclosed within such.

Either our forefathers for some reason best known to themselves chose in 1898, to make a copy of the original altar and installed it as the Sacred Heart altar or the Sacred Heart altar *is the original altar from the 1847 church!*

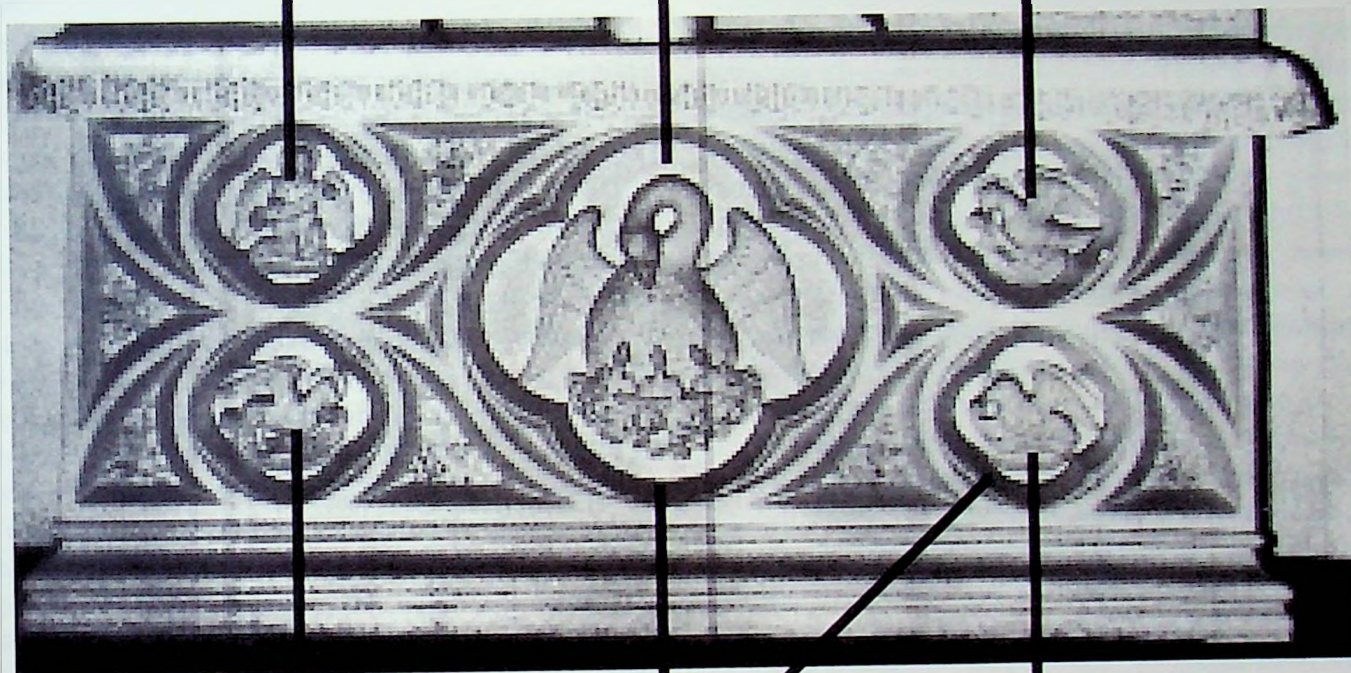
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ANGEL: (St. Matthew)

EAGLE: (St. John)

"PIE PELICANI"



QUATREFOILS

WINGED OX (St. Luke)

WINGED LION (St. Mark)



## Appendix B

### "...the unfortunate affair at St. Patrick's..."

Even in present times it has been heard that once there was an English parish priest of St. Patrick's who was driven out by agitation from his Irish parishioners.

The research for this work turned up evidence from the diocesan archives that show that to be a somewhat distorted view and this account is written to help restore the balance.

Fr. Banks, an Englishman, was joined at St. Patrick's in 1878, by two Irish curates Fr. John McGrath and Fr. Ryan. From the available evidence, it does look as though Fr. McGrath did attempt to stir up agitation against Fr. Banks on some kind of nationalistic basis. Whether nationality was an excuse to cover more ulterior motives or indeed whether Fr. McGrath had just cause to resent Fr. Banks the evidence does not show.

The evidence is very fragmentary, but nowhere does it suggest that either Fr. Banks or Fr. Ryan played an active part in the controversy or that Fr. McGrath's agitation evoked any very profound response in his Irish audience. Nevertheless, Bishop O' Reilly took the extraordinary step of removing all three priests from the parish on 13th December, 1879. Fr. Banks went to Our Lady's, Eldon Street, Liverpool and the curate from there, Fr. Joseph Fagan took over as rector of St. Patrick's.

Frs. McGrath and Ryan went to Bishop Eton, a retreat house near Liverpool on the night of 13th December and both must have asked the rector to intercede for them with the Bishop. He reports in a letter sent the following day to Bishop O' Reilly that he had promised to write on their behalf but that the Bishop would have had "weighty motives" for removing them from Wigan.

Fr. Ryan, he reports could not admit that he was blameworthy in any way and felt that he would be hard done by if he did not receive an appointment and Fr. Banks did. (interestingly, he does not seem concerned with the fate of his fellow curate, Fr. McGrath).

Fr. Ryan conceded however that his own removal was for wise reasons.

As for Fr. McGrath, the rector asked if there was any use in interceding for him. Fr. McGrath had pleaded his youth and inexperience (in excuse of whatever he had done) and pleaded that if he had to return to Ireland with a blot on his character, it could injure him for life. The rector states that he had "found the poor man in tears", he denied many of the charges and might feel badly done by if he were not given another chance. The rector then adds significantly "Of course I did not mention to Fr. McGrath that you intend to send him back to Ireland".

This at least tells us who Bishop O' Reilly considered the villain of the affair but it does not tell us what he is specifically accused of.

The two curates also wrote to the Bishop. Fr. Ryan wrote in resigned matter-of-fact terms. He was going on a short retreat and he hoped it would do him some good. He also hoped the Bishop would find it convenient to appoint him to some mission.

Fr. McGrath's letter is couched in altogether more emotional and figurative terms. "All the charges brought against me by you *of which I am guilty*, I grieve for" he says. (But is he implying that there are false charges which he does not grieve for or is it an admission of guilt) "my heart is as crushed as if the Rock of Cashel fell on me" "grief abounds in my heart". His letter is full of such highly emotional phrases and imagery.

In a later letter, he again says "... I know very well that I deserve more punishment on account of my sins and offences *against God*" Again this could be an admission or a clever evasion.

In the meantime back in St. Patrick's, the "fun" was just about to start!



While in the 19th century, deference could be most fulsomely expressed, 19th century man had a vivid and independent sense of what was right and what was wrong, the mailed fist in the velvet glove so to speak.

This explains why no sooner had Fr. Banks left than the reaction among his erstwhile parishioners began. It started with a meeting the day after his departure on Sunday, 14th December, 1879.

We are indebted to Fr. Henry Lamon, for a report which he wrote at Bishop O'Reilly's request on "the unfortunate affair at St. Patrick's". Father Lamon had been a curate at St. Patrick's in Fr. McCormick's time and was now the first rector of the new parish of St. Joseph's.

His report dated Tuesday, 23rd December, tells of the said meeting of about 20 men and youths in a public-house in the St. John's district kept by Mr. Wm. Millington. (Since Mr. Millington's address turns out to be Market Place, we may conclude that the meeting was at the "Legs o Man").

Mr. Millington was the brother-in-law of a Fanny Richards, whose family lived at 133 and 135 Scholes. She seems to have been one of Fr. Lamon's sources of information.

It should be mentioned that in the time intervening, the Bishop had been bombarded with letters containing accusations and counter-accusations which was why he had asked Fr. Lamon to see what he could find out.

At the meeting, a "draught" petition calling for the restoration of Fr. Banks was read out and according to Fr. Lamon, it was unanimously rejected as being "too violent and calculated to create great disunion in the town". When some of its statements are considered, this seems like a fair assessment.

This version tells how the church had doubled its attendance due to Fr. Banks's exertions in bringing indifferent Catholics back to their religious duties. Fair enough, but then goes on to say, "..... his enemies had never been seen to enter a church ... and that his departure was a triumph for those whose conduct was a disgrace to their religion and their country. They had never subscribed a shilling to the

new church ..and were ignorant, misguided, and led on by Fenians who were out of jail on ticket-of-leave".

Phew! no wonder it was rejected. Father Lamon wrote that he had seen the original in the hand writing of Father Austin Powell of Birchley, Billinge, (who also wrote independently to the Bishop on 23rd December). Fr. Lamon reports that it had been given to Mrs. Richards, Fanny's mother by Fr. Powell. He says he is forwarding a copy to the Bishop.

The meeting resolved to meet again at 8 pm the following day. 23 people attended this one and it was resolved that Mr. Doran (spelled Dorrans) the headmaster of the Boys' school, draw up a more acceptable petition and that a committee be formed to collect signatures. Another meeting was held on the following Sunday, again at the Legs o' Man, 34 persons being present at this one. According to Fr. Lamon, 28 of them were of the choir or were altar boys or ex-altar boys. It was stated that 3,500 signatures had been obtained.

Support for Fr. Banks was clearly considerable and as we shall see, it included both "establishment" and the "rank and file" and it cut across "national" lines.

There had been an accusation that the signatures had been obtained under false pretences, namely on blank pieces of paper and under the pretext that the petition was for the restoration of all three priests not just Fr. Banks.

Fr. Lamon reported that as far as he could ascertain, this only applied to one canvasser, a Mr. Edward Manley who had obtained about 30 signatures out of 500 by this deception.

Fr. Banks had returned briefly to Wigan on the 17th and 18th of December. He gave an interview to the "Wigan Observer" and left at about 11.20. seen off by some of his supporters. Fr. Lamon attached a cutting of the report which appeared in the Friday edition (19th December). It announced Fr. Banks "surprise" transfer to Liverpool and stated that his departure had elicited a remarkable expression of the esteem in which he was held ... All classes and creeds had united in an endeavour to induce the Bishop to reconsider.



Reverting to Fr. Lamon, he had heard it stated in several places that Father Banks had been persecuted and removed because he was *an Englishman* (Author's italics) and that persecution was got up not only by his own priests but by other secular of the town and surrounding districts. It is not clear what Fr. Lamon means by this last phrase.

Fr. McGrath had also re-appeared on the scene meeting certain of his friends. The O'Leary's of Rupert Street were apparently among them. Fr. Lamon informs the Bishop that he is "credibly informed" that a petition had been got up on his behalf to the Archbishop of Cashel (it seems as though Fr. McGrath hailed from this diocese). In Fr. Lamon's words, this petition "pretends that Fr. McGrath is the innocent victim of English tyranny". This seems a strange view seeing that it was an Irish bishop who was sending him back to Ireland.

Fr. Lamon could not advise the Bishop of the wording of the revised petition supporting Fr. Banks as Mr. Doran had not yet drawn it up (this minor detail had apparently not stopped 3,500 people from appending their signatures to it!).

Fr. Lamon concludes that the Bishop should have received another letter asking him to receive a deputation on behalf of Fr. Banks. The letter from a William Berry had been received and the deputation was duly seen. Bishop O'Reilly completely took the wind out of their sails by revealing that Fr. Banks had been removed not as a punishment, but at his own request, a request he had "thrice repeated". The deputation left in no little confusion.

Supporting letters for Fr. Banks continued to come. An old friend of Father McCormick's, a Cheshire gentleman named Thomas Knowles wrote to Robert Richards of 133, Scholes asking that his name be added to the Fr. Banks petition as he felt he had been a worthy successor to his old friend.

On Sunday, the 28th December, the C.Y.M.S. met in the Prince of Wales, Wellington Street and resolved that a testimonial be organised for Frs. Ryan and McGrath.

The meeting while "regretting" the removal of the curates wished to express its approval of the "fair and impartial decision of His Lordship, the Bishop in the late unfortunate occurrence", and took "the opportunity to testify to the good impression already created in the parish by the reverend gentlemen recently appointed".

Here it has to be said, your authors differ. One takes the view that the C.Y.M.S. were engaged in an attempt to calm things down and their actions were intended more as a support for Fr. Fagan (who was certainly in an invidious position) rather than a taking of sides against Fr. Banks. The other, while agreeing that there was some element of that about it, takes the affair as being evidence that some at least of the C.Y.M.S. were in the Fr. McGrath camp, particularly as no equivalent presentation was organised for Fr. Banks.

The most open attack on the supporters of Fr. Banks, (though it has to be said it was not against Fr. Banks himself) came from a Mr. Richard Barrow of 8 McCormick Street. On 17th December, he had written to Bishop O'Reilly: "A petition is being hawked around this parish by a clique dissatisfied with your just and impartial decision in the late unfortunate dispute". He goes on to say that the decision had given general satisfaction and received obedience from "that portion of St. Patrick's congregation (which for practical purposes means the whole) whose members as well as their forefathers have ever remained faithful and dutiful children of Holy Mother Church since they received the faith from the titular saint of this parish". There can be no doubt he means the Irish.

Mr. Barrow's letter is the one containing the accusation about signatures being obtained under false pretences on blank sheets of paper. He also refers to the petition being got up by a few persons who held a meeting in a public house outside the parish.

The frustrating thing about all this to the researcher, is that once again the business is referred to as "the late unfortunate dispute" but we are given no details as to what the dispute was about.



On Tuesday, 11th March, 1880, the C.Y.M.S. made their presentation to Frs. Ryan and McGrath. This consisted of an address and a "purse of gold" subscribed by the parishioners. The address concluded with the words "You are the true disciples of the patron of this parish, who is also the patron saint of ..... the isle of saints and scholars, which has supplied a long roll of saintly missionaries ..... yourselves reverend fathers among them..."

In reply, Frs. Ryan and McGrath referred to St. Patrick's being their first mission and stated how they would retain a deep interest in it for that reason. They paid compliments to Fr. Fagan who had made the presentation and reminded their listeners that the imminent opening of the new church would give them, the parishioners, an opportunity to show their appreciation of Fr. Fagan. As a parting gesture, they donated their purses to Fr. Fagan to defray the burden of debt on the new church and presbytery.

Curiously, there is no mention of Frs. Ryan and McGrath in Plumb's "Found Worthy". They were not present six days later at the opening of the new church and it looks as though they were both sent back to Ireland.

Of course, when the iron was no longer hot, conventional loyalty to Fr. Banks translated, intentionally or not, into disloyalty to the new rector, a fact which may not have been lost by the C.Y.M.S., and the longer it went on, the worse it got.

That fact, the rebuff it had received at the Bishop's hands, and a reluctance to cast a shadow over the opening of the new church, seemingly induced the petitioners to delay action. They returned to the fray on the 21st of April with the despatch of what seems to be the delayed petition which was now united at last with its 3500 signatures (It is quite possible that many of the December signatories, given a chance to reconsider, might have felt that April was a little late in the day).

The petition took the form of a long letter by a Mr. John Riley of 23, Cambridge Street. It stated that since Fr. Banks had been appointed, the congregation had increased so

greatly that "a larger edifice" had to be built. He had laboured zealously to plan it, raise money for it, and build it, and as it was about to be opened, "the proposer, founder and almost completer, has been removed suddenly from amongst us". The majority of the signatures preserved on it are Irish ones - Mr. Riley himself, John and James Doran, and various Cosgraves, Devlins, McCarthys, Morans, Murphys, O'Connors etc.

Whether pursuant to a concerted plan or otherwise, A. Thomas Arkwright and a Thomas Burton wrote in more abrasive terms on the same date from the address 48 Platt Lane. They spoke of "great injustice to Fr. Banks and of his being kept like a prisoner in exile". He was, they said, highly respected and venerated by his own congregation and other religions. It was "a great trouble and loss to the church that ever Fr. McGrath was sent amongst us.....he has been the cause of all the trouble in this congregation.....he gave more scandal than any good he ever did here". (We may safely take it that they did not contribute to his going - away present). They referred to 4,500 signatures and pleaded with the Bishop to send back Fr. Banks. If he would honour the petitioners with his presence and "tell us our duty to our priests", all the unpleasantness would be forgotten. "They sign themselves in suitably humble terms as His Lordship's humble and obedient servants in Jesus Christ" say that they are not forgetful of the respect due to the clergy presently at the parish.

All this got rather short shrift. The Bishop's secretary, Fr. Billington wrote back to Mr. Riley and Messrs. Arkwright and Burton on the 18th June and reminded them of what the deputation of December had been told regarding Fr. Banks. That he had made four requests to be transferred and the deputation had left "satisfied".

It was not the end of the matter and over a year later, in August, 1881, a further petition, this time with a printed text, was submitted to Bishop O'Reilly. It was organised by Mr. John Harold of 130 Hardybutts. It bore only 32 signatures but claimed to represent the thousands whose names had been laid before the bishop in the previous year. This time, the 32 names were predominantly



English. They included William Millington of the Legs o' Man and William Richards Jr. of 135 Scholes, one of the earlier activists and a Mr. William Clarkson (the great - grandfather of one of your authors).

They clearly recognised that twenty months after Father Banks 's departure, any hope of reinstating him called for shock tactics. In appropriately humble and pious terms, and after citing Matthew, Ch.18, vs. 19, 20, the petition implied that Fr. Fagan did not know how to control the debt on the new church and that a scandal was in prospect. It also stated that Fr. Banks had been so popular with the Protestant community that some of them had been on the verge of conversion to Catholicism but this would not happen if he did not return.

We know that he did not return and that St. Patrick's did not go bankrupt. There is no trace of any response to this petition or of any further developments.

Fr. Banks was promoted to rector at his new parish in 1882 where he remained for one year. Thereafter, he is listed in Plumb's "Found Worthy" under "Inexplicable Departures" from the diocese and no further trace of him is recorded.

Happily however, the present writers can remedy this deficiency: Fr. Banks transferred to the Birmingham diocese. He turns up as a signatory to a deed of Assignment of 31st January, 1888, and is described as being "formerly of St. Patrick's Catholic Church, Wigan but now of Birmingham in the County of Warwick, Clerk in Holy Orders".

These then are all the available facts about the "unfortunate affair at St.Patrick's" and though they do not tell us exactly what it was all about, it seems clear that the business was more complex than a simple nationalistic issue.

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# APPENDIX C

## The Irish Dimension

In 1913, speaking at Fr. Swarbrick's Silver Jubilee, Councillor McQuaid denounced those who for their own ends misrepresented the relationship between priests and people in Ireland by stating that the priests ruled the people.

The Home Rule question was coming to a head and the councillor had a political point to make although he also said that politics were out of place at this occasion.

His audience were two or three generations removed from the immigrants of 1847. There was still fresh immigration and the parish fostered its Irish traditions but its population was now largely composed of that grafting of Irish on to native Lancastrian stock that J. A. Hilton tells us of in "Catholic Lancashire".

It was generally a good - tempered assimilation, even the alleged political friction of the "unfortunate affair" of 1879 seems to have been down to personalities.

Fr. McCormick had the bizarre experience in February, 1867, of hearing the confessions of some Fenians escaping from the abortive raid on Chester Castle. We shall never know whether even those confessions touched on matters political, but organised parish politics were entirely non-violent in character.

The Irish were as likely to fall out with each other as with anyone. The Wigan Observer (17th February, 1892) reports the healing of a split between the "William O'Brien" and the "Michael Devitt" branches of the Irish National League, both of which had headquarters in Wellington Street. A safe seat in St. Patrick's ward had been lost through the split in the vote. The rival factions were told by the National Secretary of their entitlement and duty to participate in municipal government.

The themes of constitutionalism, integration and respectability prevailed over sentimental attachments and local Catholic politicians were the embodiment of that fact. They stood up to be counted at St. Patrick's Day Dinners and Irish Demonstrations, but their everyday concerns were to do with Wigan matters. Irish questions did not dominate their lives.

They were there in force at the presentation to V. C. hero Corporal Thomas Woodcock in 1918 and were vehement that St. Patrick's "did not breed either shirkers or conscientious objectors".

Corporal Woodcock, himself of the Irish Guards, wrote to his wife about showing the enemy "a bit of Lancashire style". Parishioners have remained pillars of society, but traces of their Irish heritage remain. Their Lancashire accent (Wigan variety) embodies the odd Irish inflection and they never did take up the Lancashire dialect much.

And when any number of them gathered together break into song, it is as likely to be an Irish song as any.

Gerald Fairhurst.



## *Sources*

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**The Comet (20th August 1892)**

**and**

**Various reminiscences and photographs supplied by parishioners and former parishioners of St. Patrick's, Wigan.**



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