

BOURNEA

In the eighteenth century Bournea was combined with the adjoining parish of Corbally, and both together were known subsequently as the united parishes of Bournea and Corbally. This arrangement lasted until 1846 when a radical realignment was made, in which most of medieval Bournea together with a few townlands from medieval Corbally became the parish of Bournea or Couragneen. The boundaries have not changed since this realignment.

In 1704 the registered priest for Bournea, Corbally, Roscrea and Rehill was a Fr. Laughlin Cunane. During 1782 and for some time afterwards, during a period when there was a great shortage of priests in Killaloe diocese, two Franciscans named Hogan discharged parish duty of Bournea, although it is uncertain whether either of them was parish priest. No other example of a Franciscan parish priest is known from Killaloe in the post-Reformation period. For a short time during the 1860s the future bishop of Killaloe, Dr. Thomas McRedmond served as curate in Bournea. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Clonakenny village was the location for the parish church, at first a typical mass house, which was later replaced by a thatched chapel and later again by another larger building. Construction dates for these successive buildings are uncertain and of the last of the three, which was dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady, all we know is that by early 1890s its roof was in a dangerous condition. Alarmed by the state of what he called a "wretched barn called a church," the parish priest, Fr. Michael Curry, embarked on the construction of a new building on the same site.

After the demolition of the old church, during 1898 and 1899 a new building arose in its place, a simple nave-and-chancel style Romanesque revival building designed by W. P. Doolin, a well-known Dublin architect noted more for his Gothic style churches.

Construction was funded by contributions from outside the parish, notably Fr. Curry's native county of Clare. Built by Sisk and Company in a record nine months, the church was dedicated, the dedication being changed, however, from Our Lady to St. Brigid. The church was renovated in 1981 to include heating, lighting and other improvements, as well as a re-ordered sanctuary in line with Vatican II liturgical requirements. The roof of St Brigid's was replaced in 1998 in time for the church's centenary celebrations, and the rededication later that year by Bishop Willie Walsh. All this external and internal refurbishment was discreet, and St. Brigid's retains a very pleasing appearance and atmosphere.

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Couragneen side of the parish has been the location for the second church in Bournea. In 1812 a church at Shanballynahagh, which for that time was unusual in being architect-designed, by a local man named Bergin who was probably the builder also. Bergin's name appears along with that of parish priest Fr. Joseph Downes, in an inscription over the front entrance. The facade design is exceptional according to Maurice Ciaig, in being based on the twelfth Century St. Cronan's ruined church at Roscrea, a few miles away. A cruciform barn-shaped building typical of the period it stood until recently beside the modern church. In 1999 it was discovered to be in such a dangerous structural condition it had demolished, although, commendably, the facade noted by Craig has been preserved.

Work began the new building in 1982 on a site donated by the Buckley family, and to the design of Ennis architects, Merry and Company. Construction work was done entirely by the voluntary labour of the parishioners in their spare time. The altar and reredos from the older building, by Earley and Powell of Dublin, were re-erected in the new church and a marble lectern in an appropriate style placed in front of the altar. Completed in 1983, the church was dedicated by Bishop Michael Harty as St. Patrick's Church.

Extracted from "The Diocese of Killaloe – An Illustrated History" by Ciarán Ó Murchadha