

# Curragh History Archives



## St Paul's Garrison Church

### Curragh Camp

Until 1922 and the departure of the British army, Anglicans worshipped in St. Paul's Garrison church. (St. Paul, the Apostle with his robust faith and fighting spirit has long appealed to soldiers. It was Paul who urged Timothy to 'fight the good fight of faith!'.") The building was a huge wooden structure twinned architecturally with the Roman Catholic Church. Here English soldiers met for worship, though they were free to attend local Church of Ireland parish churches. Apparently some abandoned the garrison church during the chaplaincy of a late nineteenth century long-winded preacher who was once stripped by several Officers in good humored punishment for a notably exhausting ceremony!

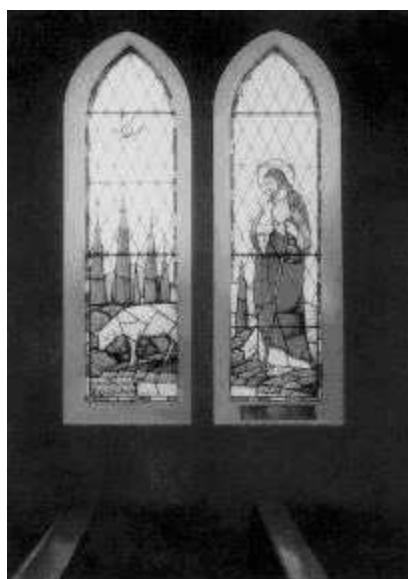
The church looked after the spiritual and social needs of soldiers through the Church of England soldiers and sailors home and the Church of England's men's society. Surviving records of the latter are fascinating. The membership was entirely made up of ranks from private to sergeant and led by a chaplain. Events included musical evenings, chess and draughts tournaments and lantern slides of distant lands such as Life on a Canadian Farm and Poland Today. The religious need — or curiosity — of the men was met by a diverse diet of discussion topics such as 'Hell - Is it everlasting?', 'Cardinal Newman —What a loss to the Church of England', and apparently endless talks on the challenge of Islam. Patriotic discussion rose at the beginning of World War One. The elegant Private Wade of the 4th Hussars delivered a stirring address on Germany and the Germans leaving little doubt that their defeat was guaranteed.

The more evangelically inclined Anglicans joined in the social and spiritual facilities of the Sandes Home and the Newbridge YMCA. They prayed and played with Presbyterians Methodists, Baptists and other Protestants and were encouraged to exercise a simple and personal Christian faith, and to be of some spiritual help their fellow soldiers. In 1922, with the departure of the British army, the present Anglican Church, the attached soldiers' home and manse, or clergy house, were handed over by the Wesleyan Methodists to the Church of Ireland. These buildings date from 1900.

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After the British left an Anglican presence continued through the Church of Ireland. The Garrison church, had it not been burned out, would have proved overwhelmingly large for the small community. The Wesleyan church was just the right size. However, its interior had to be altered to suit Anglican worship and the enormous pulpit which stood in the centre of the sanctuary was replaced by a holy table and a small pulpit placed at the side. About twenty years ago the interior was courageously changed from brown to blue. This helped create a cheerful and sunny atmosphere which some other churches might be wise in copying. There is only one (double) stained glass window, now about forty years old, erected in memory of Major Kenneth Harbord and his son, Captain Paddy Harbord. The first Church of Ireland chaplain was Canon Dick Madden who also served as Rector of Ballyshannon and Ballysax. The dual function of rector of these parishes and chaplain continued until the ministry of Canon Freddie Knowles who arrived in 1947 and served for twenty-four years. Canon Knowles was a universal friend. He loved the army and its life. He and Mrs. Knowles kept an open house for all who needed help. He was proud of the army and on his tippet (a sort of broad black stole) he wore the army ensignia with the embroidered letters CF - Chaplain to the Forces. After his retirement he continued to take services. At his funeral on St. Brigid's Day 1980, he was given full military honors, his coffin being draped with the tricolour and his tippet on top of the flag. Since 1979, the Dean of Kildare has served as an army chaplain and many readers will recall with affection Deans John Patterson and Mathew Byrne.

The congregation continues to welcome anyone with a Defence Forces connection. The increasing international profile of military training programmes is sometimes reflected in the Sunday congregation, including in the recent past Zambian cadets and Americans. In fact, anyone is welcome and we recognize Christian of any denominations as brothers and sisters in the universal church of which the Church of Ireland is a small but unashamed member.



**Stained Glass Window in St. Pauls Garrison Church**