

## Michael Joseph Canon Turner

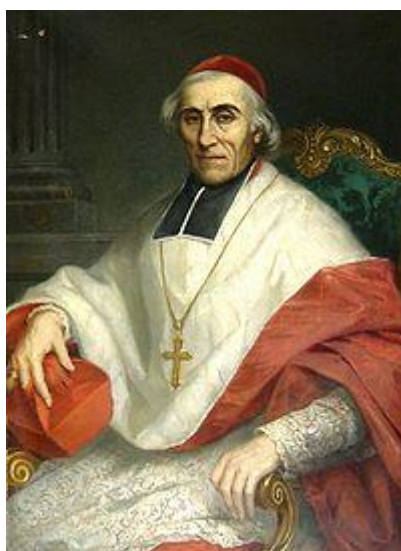
Father Michael J. Turner was born at Penrith, Cumberland, on 29th May, 1855. He entered Blairs Junior Seminary College in Aberdeen on the 18th October 1867 and was then eventually sent to St Edmund's, Douai, France, in August 1872. He then went to the Sulpician Seminary at Issy in September 1873. After spending two years there in the study of Philosophy and receiving the Tonsure from Cardinal Guibert on the 20th May 1874, he entered the Theological Seminary in Paris.

According to the Catholic Directory of 1880 - Ordinations of 1879 section - he '*was obliged to spend the next year of his course (1876-77) at Blairs in Aberdeen to recruit his health*'.

In October of 1877 he returned to St Sulpice at Issy where he completed his theological studies and received Minor Orders from Cardinal Guibert on 15th June 1878. He was recalled to Scotland in December 1878 and was ordained Sub Deacon on the 6th and Deacon on the 12th of that month.

He was ordained Priest on the 26th January 1879 by Archbishop Strain in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral Edinburgh, where he was thereafter appointed for a time as assistant priest of the Cathedral.

Before coming to St Patrick's Kilsyth in September 1890 he was 'Priest-in-charge' at Davidsons Mains and South Queens-ferry near Edinburgh. His appointment to Kilsyth was unexpected after the sudden departure of Fr John Lee back to Ireland. During his time in Kilsyth he was installed as Canon of the Metropolitan Cathedral Chapter of St Mary's in Edinburgh therefor becoming Canon Turner. After spending 13 years in Kilsyth, Canon Turner was transferred to St. Machan's, Lennoxton, in 1903.



**Cardinal Guibert of Paris**

Canon Turner was devoted, not only to the Catholic people of St Patrick's Kilsyth, but very much to those in the surrounding villages who did not have a Catholic Priest of their own.

On foot he visited places as far away as Croy, Twechar, Cumbernauld, Condorrat and Smithston. In his clerical diary for the years 1890-91, he wrote of a sick call at Croy Row, visiting three Catholic families at Turneyhill, near Twechar, calling on a couple in a 'mixed marriage' at Cumbernauld, visiting a partially paralysed man in Condorrat and looking in, on one visitation, on half of the homes at Smithston Row, which he called 'Little Ireland'. Of Croy he wrote 'Croy was my pet lamb for the lengthened period of twelve years'. His visits round the widely scattered parish were usually made on horseback, or with his favourite pony, Roddy, drawing his " phaeton " carriage.



One thing for which he is personally remembered is as a remarkably good singer and his voice was often heard to advantage above the others at social events. He is also remembered with gratitude for his extension of the original St Patrick's Church, which he enlarged by adding a side aisle and erecting a tower and installing a bell.

To improve the social amenities, he built a billiard hall with games room for the youth of the parish. Many children in those early years of the Parish in Kilsyth and the surrounding villages owe their education to Canon Turner and his predecessor Canon Murphy. It was Canon Murphy who was responsible for the construction of the first St. Patrick's School building in 1874 and by Canon Turner's time it was evident that Catholic children not only from Kilsyth but also from Auchinstarry, Croy, Smithstone and Twechar were being educated at St Patrick's school in Kilsyth.

It is also worth mentioning that it was during Canon Turner's stay in Kilsyth that our neighbouring parish of Holy Cross Croy was founded in 1902. This event is a very real indication of the growth of the Catholic population in Kilsyth and district.

It should also be noted that Canon Michael Turner was the author of an important historical book about the Archdiocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh immediately after the restoration of the Hierarchy to Scotland. It is called '*Life and Labours of John Menzies Strain: First Archbishop and Metropolitan of Saint Andrews and Edinburgh in the Restored Hierarchy of Scotland.*' And it was published by Aberdeen University Press in 1922.

Recently we have discovered some newspaper archives which contain letters from Fr Turner to the editor of the Kilsyth Chronicle. They give an insight into not only the activities of Fr Turner working on behalf of his parishioners but also the living conditions in Kilsyth at that time...

**Page 36, 4th October 1890 - The Tablet**

*'ST. ANDREWS AND EDINBURGH.*

*ADDITIONAL CLERICAL CHANGES.*

*In consequence of the return of the Rev. John Lee to Ireland, the important mission of Kilsyth has become vacant. His Grace the Archbishop has now appointed the Rev. Michael Turner, South Queensferry, to Kilsyth. The Rev. William Farquhar, Tranent, succeeds Father Turner, and the Rev. Alfred Roche, of the Cathedral, takes charge of the united missions of Tranent, Musselburgh, and the St. Joseph's Industrial School. The Rev. Laurence Keogh, recently ordained in Ireland, with some other young priests, will fill up the vacancies at the Cathedral, Falkirk, &c.'*

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***“St Patrick’s Kilsyth February 4th, 1903.***

*Dear Sir,*

*Will no one suggest to our Town Council and Parish Council a ‘Scheme for the better Housing of the Working Classes in Kilsyth,’ at a cost not exceeding £10,000. We have been reminded repeatedly of the number of one room houses in Kilsyth, and we see for ourselves how families are huddled together for want of proper accommodation. Mr McKillop, M.P., in a recent address, hits the nail on the head when he declares ‘Social problems will be the greatest problems to solve in the coming generation and therefore must claim most attention by the politician. The wellbeing of our nation depends upon the health, comfort and development of the physical, mental and moral life of the nation, and towards this the Housing of the Poor must occupy a leading place.’ I am, yours etc.,  
Canon Turner.”*

**Letter to the editor of The Kilsyth Chronicle, 4th Feb 1903.**

***“St Patrick’s Kilsyth February 12th, 1903.***

*Dear Sir,*

*Referring to a ‘Scheme for the better Housing of the Working Classes in Kilsyth,’ I might take the liberty of suggesting that the ‘Brick Rows’ (euphemistically called ‘Kingston Rows’) should be demolished and replaced by stone erections worthy of the name ‘workmen’s houses’. Apart from the front row, the accommodation in the remainder is totally inadequate to the proper upbringing of a family. So ashamed of the very appearance of the ‘side row’ has someone been that he has placed a nondescript gable to screen the view from passers-by. Surely these huts have served their time, and something better might be provided in the present days of progress? I am, yours etc.,  
Canon Turner.”*

**Letter to the editor of The Kilsyth Chronicle, 12th Feb 1903.**

**A Notice of his death from the 1930 edition of the Scottish Catholic Directory.**

*Pray for the soul of the Very Rev. Michael J. Canon Turner who died at Barnton, Davidson's Mains, Edinburgh on the 14th December 1928 in the 74th year of his age and the 50th of his priesthood.*

The Very Rev. Michael J. Canon Turner was born at Penrith, Cumberland, on the 29th May 1855. He entered Blairs College on the 18th October 1867 and St Edmunds College, Douai, France in August 1872. In 1873 he was transferred to the Sulpitian Seminary at Issey and 2 years later he entered the Grand Séminaire de S. Sulpice in Paris to complete the usual course of studies for the priesthood. The tonsure and minor orders were conferred on him by Cardinal Guibet, major orders by his uncle Bishop (later Archbishop) Strain.

After his ordination to the priesthood, which took place on the 26th January 1879, he was appointed assistant priest at the Cathedral, Edinburgh. His first separate charge was Davidson's Mains and South Queensferry and in the latter place he was able to provide a church and presbytery.

His next charge was the mission of Kilsyth, where a wide district now under the spiritual care of four clergymen gave ample scope for his zeal and enterprise. Whilst at Kilsyth he enlarged and beautified the church and erected a congregational hall. His labours during the period of his career for the betterment of life for the miners are still remembered with gratitude by the public.

Lennoxton was his next sphere of labour and during his stay there he provided of a hall and procured the erection of a church to meet the needs of the Catholics of Balfron. Thereafter for many years he was Missionary Rector of St. Francis Xaviour's, Falkirk, and during his rectorship the district of Camelon was detached and formed into a separate mission.

At this time his health began to fail, and his ecclesiastical superiors placed him in the easier mission of Peebles. Soon however, he was obliged by his enfeebled state of health to relinquish active missionary duty and he retired to live in the nursing home at Musselburgh and in St Mary's hospital at Lanark.

His death occurred at Barnton, Davidson's Mains, Edinburgh on the 14th December 1928.

The funeral took place the following Tuesday. Solemn requiem Mass was celebrated in the Cathedral Edinburgh by Canon Hobin. The panegyric was spoken by Canon Considine. The remains were interred in the Grange Cemetery where the prayers were said by Bishop Graham, assisted by Canon Turner of Dundee, a cousin of the deceased.

**This notice is by kind permission of The Scottish Catholic Directory, 1930 edition, pages 306 – 307.**

## **'OBITUARY**

### **THE VERY REV. CANON M. J. TURNER.**

*The death has taken place, we regret to state, of the Very Rev. Canon Michael J. Turner (retired), of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, in the fiftieth year of his priesthood. He was the nephew and biographer of Archbishop Strain, the first Ordinary of the See on the restoration of the Scottish Hierarchy in 1878, from whose hands he received ordination in St. Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, in the following year. The parishes associated with the late Canon's ministry include Davidson's Mains; South Queensferry; Kilsyth; Lennoxton; Torrance, where he built the chapel, dedicated to St. Dominic; St. Francis Xavier's, Falkirk; and Peebles: at the last-named parish he retained the title of rector Emeritus. Canon Turner was made a member of the St. Andrews and Edinburgh Metropolitan Chapter in 1893.*

*The funeral took place on Tuesday last at Grange Cemetery, Edinburgh, preceded by a requiem at the Cathedral. —R.I.P.'*

**This obituary is by kind permission of The Tablet Pg27, 22nd December 1928.**