

Fr James G. Harold



Fr James G. Harold (Left) and Fr Daniel Murphy (right) at the funeral of 18 year old Daniel Coyle who was one of 8 men killed in the Gartshore Pit Disaster in July 1923.

James Harold was born on 16th June 1897 in Killygordon, County Donegal, Ireland. He was educated at St Columb's Derry from 1911 to 1916 and then at St Keiran's Kilkenny from 1916 to 1922. He was ordained a Priest on 15th June 1922 at St Mary's Cathedral Kilkenny by Bishop Matthew Bodie of Christchurch, New Zealand for the Diocese of St Andrew's and Edinburgh in Scotland where he was to spend all of his life as a Priest.

His first position was as assistant Priest at St Patrick's Edinburgh from 1922 to 1923 from where he was transferred here to St Patrick's Kilsyth and worked as assistant Priest to Patrick Canon Macnamara for five years from 1923 to 1928.

The centenary brochure says about him *“Father Harold, a friendly and forthright personality was very interested in the young people of the Parish, particularly those attending secondary schools or at University. He will long be remembered for the enthusiasm and energy with which he tackled any project he undertook and especially as Chaplin to the boy's guild.”*

Centenary of St Patrick's Kilsyth 1865 – 1965 p26

During his stay in Kilsyth Fr Harold and Fr Murphy worked together during a short overlap as assistant priests to Canon Macnamara and can be seen in the photograph above leading the funeral procession from St Patrick's front door into the Low Craigends in late July 1923. Eight men had been killed and three injured in an explosion in the Gartshore no. 3 pit owned by William Baird and Company. One of the men was 18-year-old Daniel Coyle from St Patrick's and his funeral procession can be seen in the photo above. No doubt because of the trauma that he experienced during this tragic event in Kilsyth, Fr Harold was to make an emotional return to Kilsyth many years later in the aftermath of yet another mining disaster at Dumbreck pit.

"Impressive Scenes at Funeral

Impressive scenes were witnessed at the funeral of Daniel Coyle (18 years of age), which took place yesterday. A service was held in St Patrick's R.C. Church. The church was crowded, and hundreds waited outside. Provost Freebairn and several Town Councillors attended. The service was conducted by Father Harold, Kilsyth, and Rev. Professor D. Murphy, Fermoy College, Ireland. Former school companions carried the coffin from the church to the cemetery. The members of the Boys Guild, of which the deceased lad was a member, walked immediately behind the relatives. All places of business along the route were closed. Scotsman 31 July 1923.

Fr Harold left St Patrick's Kilsyth in May 1928 to become the Parish Priest at St. Ninian's Bowhill Cardenden in Fife however he nearly never survived to take up his first post as PP as he was involved in a serious car accident when the car in which he was travelling burst into flames on his journey from Kilsyth to Bowhill.

"Fr James Harold nearly lost his life in an accident last month when a car that was conveying him from Kilsyth to his new appointment at Bowhill caught fire. The car burst into flames near Crossgates and 'there was some difficulty in opening the doors' and one of the men smashed a window and jumped through it. Sand was procured but the car burned fiercely and was soon completely destroyed. A fine cat that the House Keeper had been taking with her, went missing but whether it was burned or went missing is not known." Glasgow Observer 9th June 1928 p11.

It was during Fr Harold's posting as PP in Bow Hill that the new church of St Ninian was built in 1932. From Bowhill in 1934 Fr Harold was transferred to St Marie's Kirkcaldy in Fife where he was to remain PP until 1938.

At this time there was another great mining disaster in Kilsyth in which nine men in total were killed in a fire at the Dumbreck Pit on the 30th January 1938 - seven of them Catholics from St Patrick's and the neighbouring Parish of Croy. Fr Harold came back to Kilsyth from Kirkcaldy and descended into the pit that evening with the rescue workers to administer the last rights to the men who had by then been found dead. Fr Harold stayed on in the parish and attended at the Funeral Mass for seven of the men at St Patrick's church and the communal grave in Kilsyth Cemetery.



“Scottish Pit Disaster - Funeral of Victims at Kilsyth - The nine victims of the Dumbreck Colliery disaster were buried in Kilsyth Cemetery yesterday. Almost all the public works and places of business were closed for the afternoon. The coffins of the seven Roman Catholic victims were carried from St Patrick's Church to the graveside by miners and relatives, and were interred in one grave. Several thousand-people lined the funeral route. The funeral of the two Protestant victims, James Kelly, of Twechar, and Peter Walker, of Kilsyth, took place from their homes. A service which was held in St Patrick's Church was presided over by the Rev. Father Harold, who descended the pit on Sunday evening, and administered the last rites. The funeral procession of the Roman Catholic victims was preceded by Croy Band. The mourners included relatives, Magistrates, and other members of the Town Council of Kilsyth miners' Union representatives, and mining officials.” **Scotsman 3 February 1938**

Other sources show that Canon Macnamara in fact presided at Mass in St Patrick's Church on the day of the Dumbreck funeral..

Fr Harold then went to Peebles in 1938 and throughout the war years until 1953, a period of 15 years he was the Parish Priest of St Joseph's. From 1953 to 1958 he served as Parish Priest in Restalrig, Edinburgh at the Church of Ss Ninian and Triduana. The final posting of his mission in Scotland was to Our Lady of Lorretto and St Michael in Musselburgh starting in 1954 where he served until his retiral in 1972. Fr Harold was made a Canon of the Chapter of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh in 1954 by Archbishop (later Cardinal) Gordon Joseph Gray.

Canon Harold retired to Dublin at the age of 75 to the Raheny Sacred Heart Residence for retired Priests where he died on 10th of May 1973 whilst preparing to offer Mass. At his own request he was buried in the convent cemetery of the Little Sisters of the Poor, Kilmainham, Dublin.

Wladyslaw Raczkiwicz was the President of the Polish Government in exile in London and the internationally recognised Polish Head of State during World War 2 publicly commended Fr Harold for his work in St Joseph's Peebles in support of the large number Polish exiles which were based in Scotland during the war. He said...

“Among those who have earned the warm thanks of the Polish people for many acts of kindness and friendship is genial Fr. J.G.Harold parish Priest of Peebles.’ Of Fr. Harold the President stated that he had followed for a long time with deep appreciation his consistent and continuous acts of friendliness towards Poland and his activities in defence of the Polish cause. He spoke not only for himself but for all Poles and assured Fr Harold that his name would be kept in grateful memory by Poles everywhere.” **Glasgow Observer 8th February 1946.**

On the occasion of his Silver Jubilee as a Priest the following article also appeared in the Glasgow Observer.

“One of the most sincere and at the same time unusual tributes to Rev James G. Harold of St Joseph’s Peebles at his Silver Jubilee presentation last week was given by Rev Barry Preston, Peebles Minister, who said ‘It used to be said of certain clergymen that they were invisible all week and incomprehensible on Sundays. Well Fr. Harold is visible all week!’ Rev Preston said that Fr Harold was staunch and loyal to the doctrine of his Church and because of this they all thought the more of him. They found him helpful in all things pertaining to the community. He was indefatigable in his work for the town and that he was held in the esteem and respect of the entire community. [Neighbouring Priest and future Cardinal] Rev Gordon Gray of Ss Mary and David, Hawick said that Fr Harold was a trusted friend and a Priest of tireless energy.”
Glasgow Observer 27th June 1947 p3.

St Kieran’s College Kilkenny, Fr Harold’s alma mater, ordained many priests for the various Diocese in Scotland and Fr Harold always retained an interest in the welfare of the younger Irish Priests who came to Scotland building upon the foundations here, laid by earlier generations of Priests. Drawing upon his experience of leaving his own country and giving service in Scotland he was always available to others who followed him as the Scottish Union President of St Kieran’s College.

“It must be recorded that the Canon was a founder member of the St Kieran’s College Scottish Union and its President for over 17 years until his retirement. His interest was not confined to a mere annual meeting. His practical interest and concern for St Kieran’s Priests showed itself in many kind ways. A simple thing, perhaps, but a very consoling one was his thoughtfulness for those Priests who lost a parent or someone near and dear. He was always ready with a sympathetic word and gesture’. **St Kieran’s College Record 1974 p29**

Canon Harold throughout his long life was quite outspoken when it came to injustice especially when it was shown to Ireland or the Irish people. At a time when Irish immigration to Scotland was being attacked by some factions within the Church of Scotland in 1927 he said whilst serving as assistant Priest at St Patrick’s Kilsyth...

“If these attacks on the Irish people in Scotland continued, means would have to be taken to deal with them. We recognise the rights of other people and we will maintain our own...”
Glasgow Observer 3rd Dec 1927 p2.

On the more recent Troubles in Northern Ireland Canon Harold, himself an Ulsterman, called for a new attitude in Ulster.

“Canon James Harold has called for a new attitude towards Roman Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Canon Harold made his pleas at the Christian Unity meeting in the Brunton Hall Musselburgh. Speaking about the current situation in Northern Ireland he said that it ‘had to be seen that justice was done’ and ended by calling for reconciliation between Roman Catholics and Protestants.” **Musselburgh News 28th Jan 1972.**

Bishop James Monaghan, Bishop Auxiliary of Saint Andrews and Edinburgh said at Canon Harold’s funeral Mass, *“Like so many Irish Priests of his time and of the years that followed he came to work in Scotland in the Archdiocese of St Andrew’s and Edinburgh. We in Scotland appreciate the valiant and apostolic work carried out in our midst by so many priests, then and now, who like Canon Harold, came to work in our country. The Church in our country would*

never have been built up to the state that it now enjoys but for the unselfish, dedicated hard work of Priests like Canon Harold. It is not often we get to the opportunity to express this gratitude and I am happy to have this chance to do so today on Irish soil.” **The Catholic Directory for Scotland 1974 pp 341 – 343.**