

# CAPUCHINS

1648

IN

1998

# KILKENNY

(350 YEARS)



## Church of St. Francis

1848

(150 YEARS)

1998



*Silver chalice, inscribed "Ora pro Domino Gasparo Shee  
qui me fieri fecit. Anno Domini 1726"*

*(Pray for Lord Casper Shee who caused me to be made.)*

*This chalice is still used for daily mass in the Church of St. Francis.*

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**CAPUCHINS**

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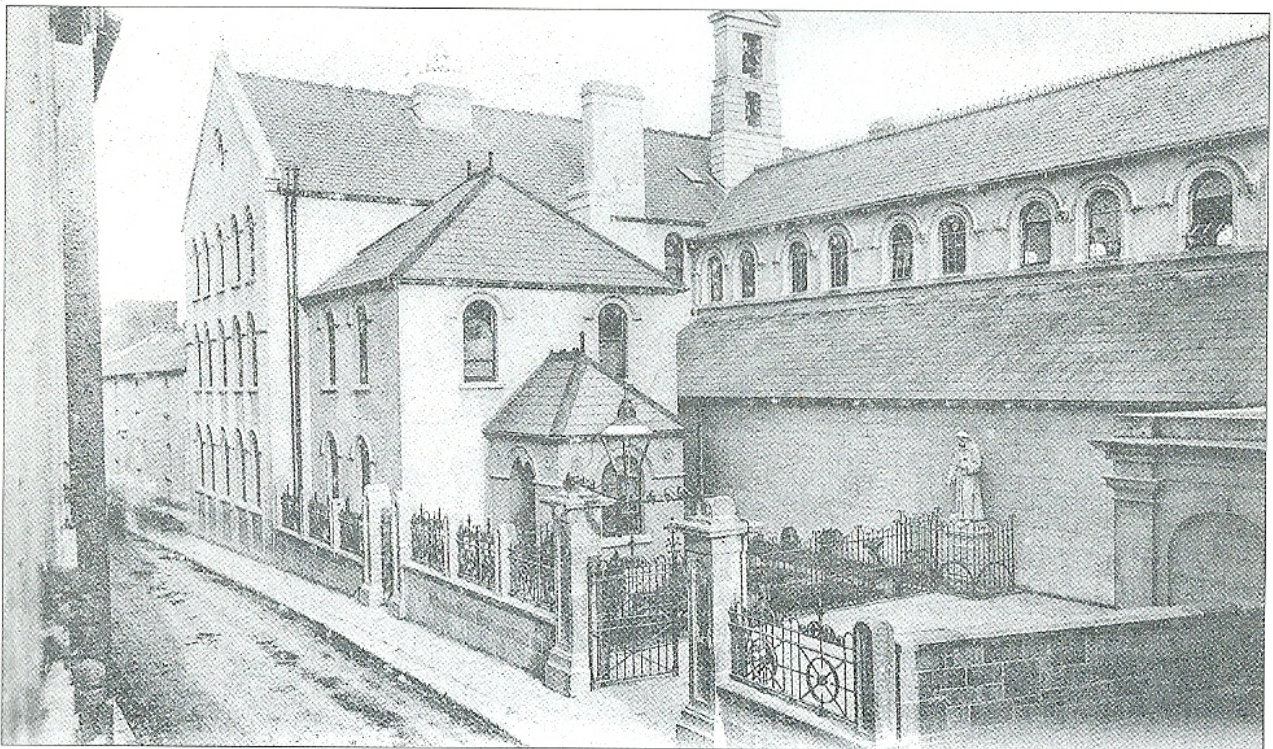
*A group of friars in the garden between 1910 and 1920. In the front row are Fr. Dominic O'Connor (first on left) and Fr. Albert Bibby (second from right) who ministered to the 1916 leaders.*

**1648      Capuchins in Kilkenny      1998**  
*(350 years)*

**1848      Church of Saint Francis      1998**  
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THE Capuchins first arrived in Kilkenny in 1643 after their house in Mullingar had been burned down by “the heretics”. Fathers Peter Nugent and Thomas Tuite received a warm welcome from the Franciscans of the old Abbey (now in Smithwick's) who had come to the city in 1234.

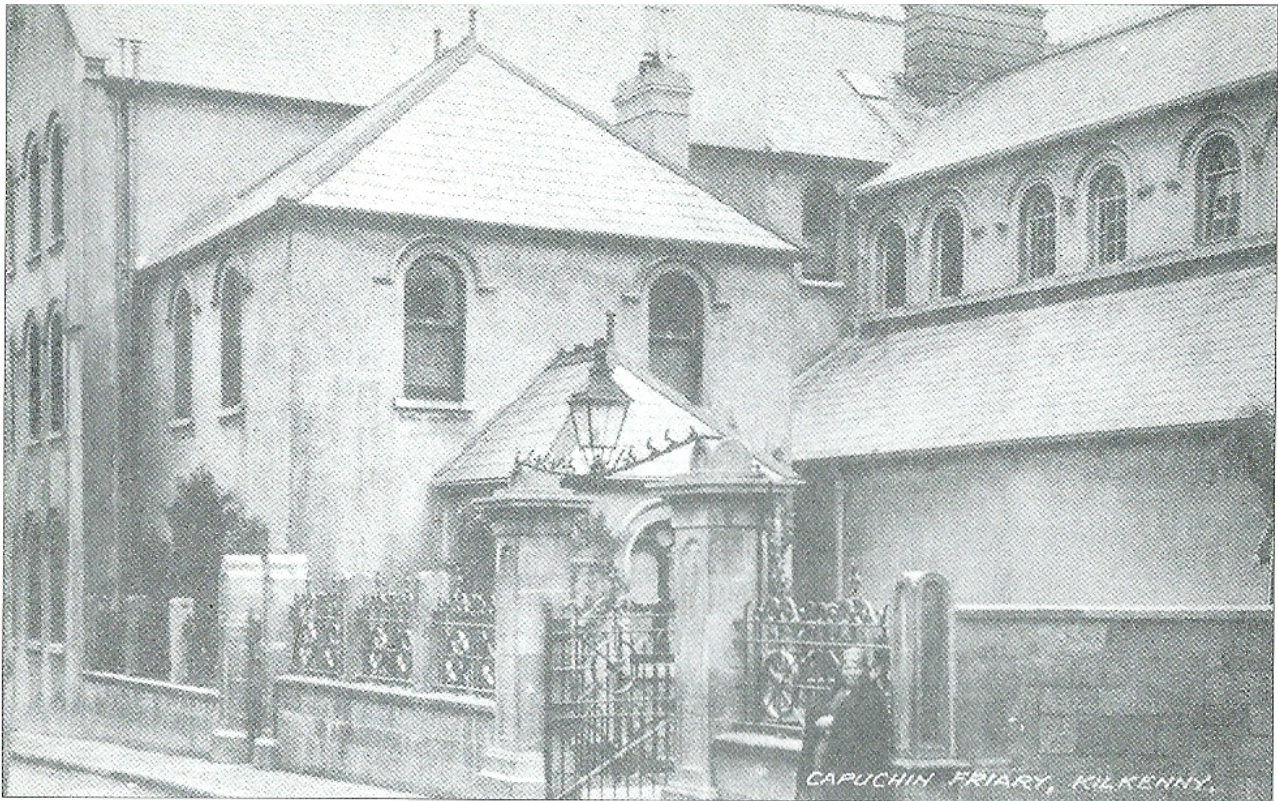
On their arrival the Capuchins first stayed in a rented house near Saint Canice’s Cathedral. The bishop of Ossory, Dr. David Rothe, gave them charge of one of the chapels in the cathedral.



*Front of friary before 1907.*



*Br.o. Alphonsus Ryan, Fr. Benjamin O'Connell and Fr. Dermot Lynch with parents and children in 1985  
before going overseas on a holiday.*



*Front of friary about 1910.*

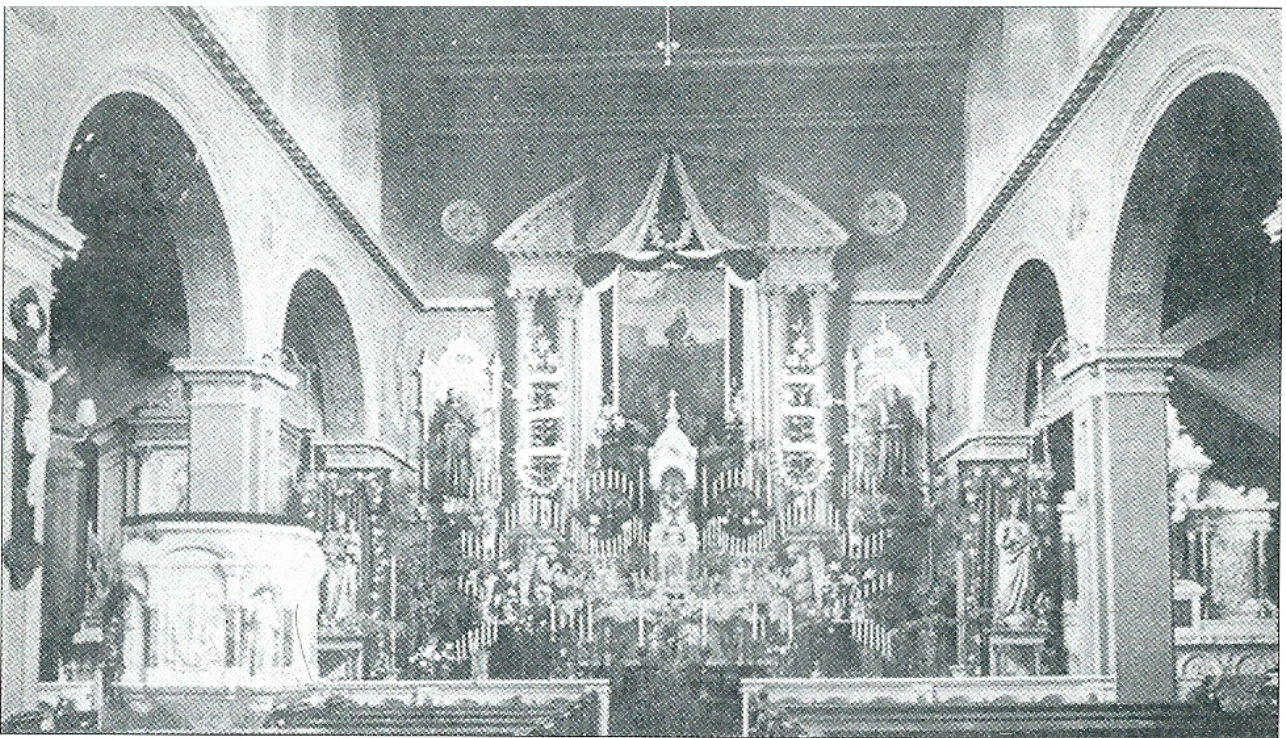
After a short time, they were joined by Fr. Sebastian Butler who had local connections. Through his influence they were able to secure a house and a small church, the sites of which are not known. The papal nuncio to the Confederation of Kilkenny, Archbishop John Baptist Rinuccini, commented after a visit to this house that, “If the Seraphic Father Saint Francis came on earth again, this place would be more pleasing to him than any other in the world”.

Bishop Rothe showed them extraordinary kindness. He gave them a document, dated 8 March 1648, which stated, “For the greater glory of God and the furtherance of the Catholic Faith, we are anxious to advance the labours and the good results of the Friars Minor Capuchins of Saint Francis . . . We willingly permit them to procure and erect a residence or convent in this our city of Kilkenny, where by word and example, their light may shine before God and all the people ...”



*Fr. Declan McFadden and a group of boys, possibly on a trip to Holyhead in Wales.*

Before long they moved again to a plot of land in St. Michael's Lane. The land, which had a church and house, belonged to St. John's Abbey. A document in the "Laffan Papers" quotes a resolution of the Corporation: "We the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the City of Kilkenny . . . reserve the Chapel and garden of the poor Capuchins which they have improved on the meanest and craggiest spot in this city ..." However, this property was confiscated in 1697 and the friars had to go into hiding in order to evade the provisions of the Act of Banishment.



*Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in St. Francis Church, before 1906.*

Even before this, however, times had been difficult. A Bro. John Verdon, along with a Franciscan priest, Fr. John Dalton, were arrested on 2 August 1653. The new civil authorities who had taken control of the city after the siege and surrender to Cromwell in 1650, were alerted to their presence in the city by the large number of people who had come to the friars for confession on the feast of the Portiuncula. Bro. John was imprisoned and then exiled to France where he died less than two years later. Fr. Dalton was executed, and two Franciscan nuns, arrested at the same time, were exiled to Spain.



*A procession along Patrick Street including members of the Secular Franciscan Order, probably during the 1960s.*

Similarly, Fr. Fiacre Tobin, a man who had served the people well during the plague of 1649, was arrested and imprisoned for some time before being banished to France in 1653. But he returned to Ireland within a short time. However, he was soon re-arrested and sentenced, along with four other priests, to penal servitude for life on a plantation in Barbados. They boarded a ship in Waterford but Fr. Fiacre became very seriously ill and died in captivity.

Another friar, whose name has not come down to us, managed to evade capture by working openly under the very eyes of his would-be captors. He earned a living selling books at a stall under the arches of the Tholsel, and, in the evenings, gave the sacraments to people in his lodgings.



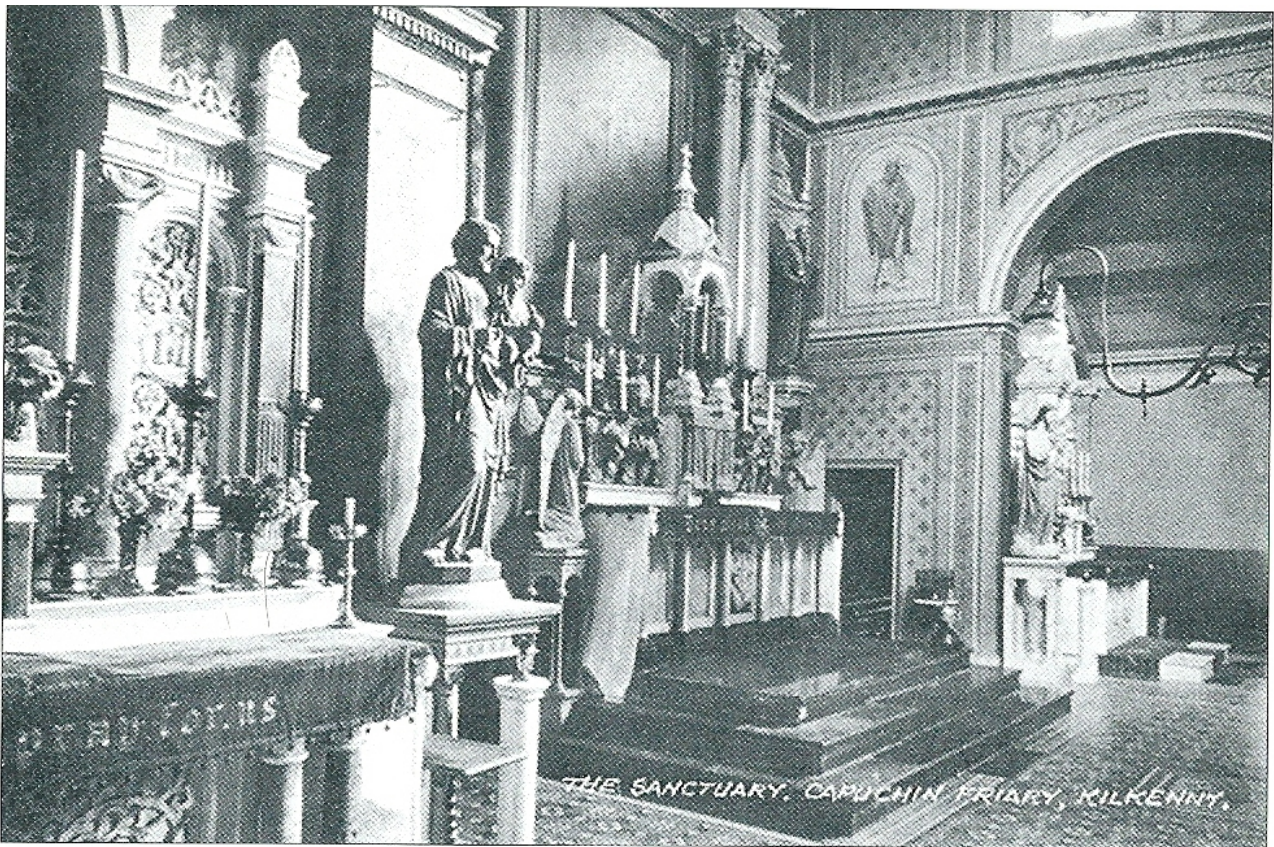
*Interior of friary Church, about 1910.*

Matters began to improve, allowing the friars to move to Lower Walkin St. (now Friary St.) to an Alms House set up in accordance with the terms of the will of Rev. James Tobin of Leyrath, Co. Kilkenny, dated 28 October 1699.



*Fr. Robert Ratigan with a group of altar servers, probably in the late forties.*

It seems that he had received money from a lady with a colourful past who had been sentenced, after some offence, to be transported to Australia. Her ship had been attacked and captured off the North African coast. She and her companions had been enslaved but she was chosen from the harem to become a wife of the local ruler. Towards the end of her life she met an Irish Capuchin and gave him “a considerable sum for the maintenance of twelve old reduced women and the same number of men in her native city”. (*Kilkenny Capuchin Chronicle*)



*Sanctuary of friary Church, after 1912.*

Adjoining the Alms House, where now stands the friary building that links Friary St. to Pennefeather Lane, was a small church. This was served by the Capuchins, and their home was in its attic. It was known as the Poor House Chapel.

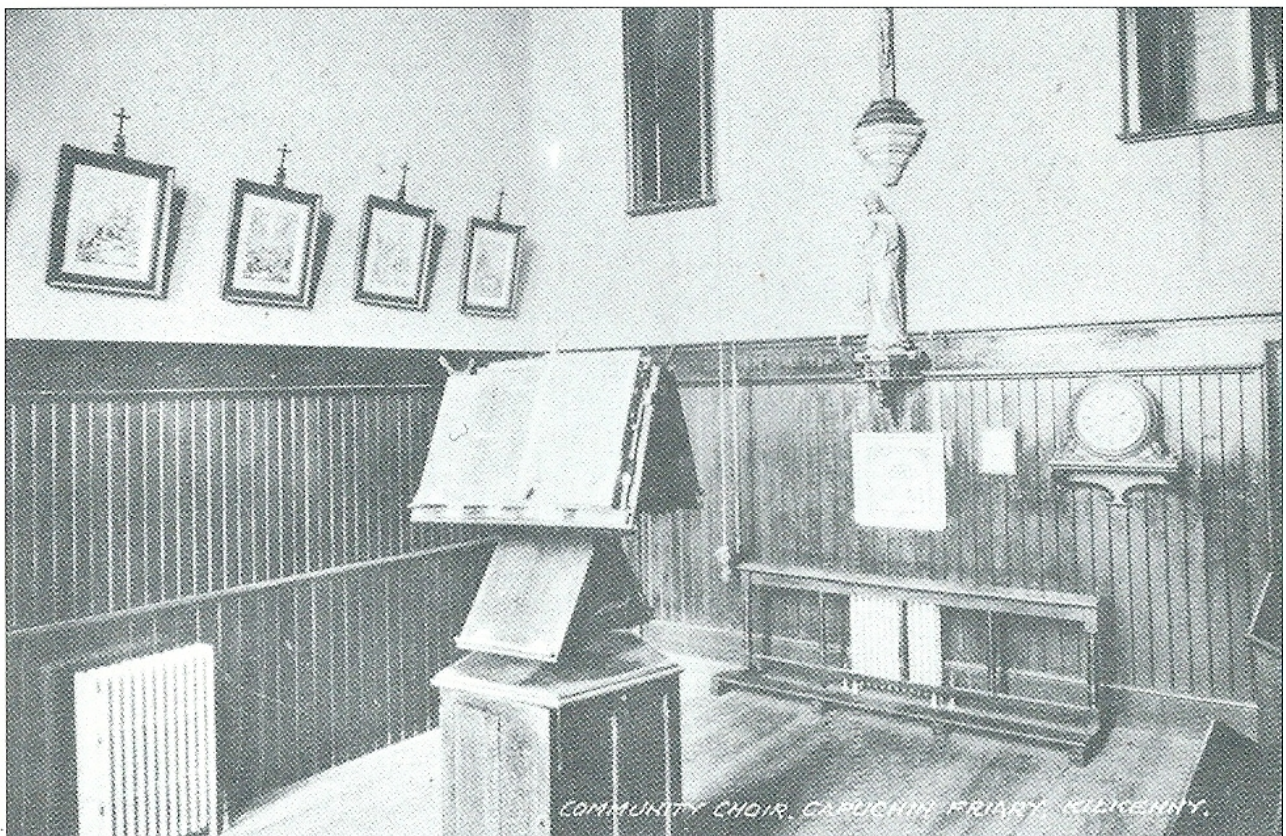
Little is known from the 18th century save for the names of two friars, Fathers McDonnell and St. John who were buried in St. John's cemetery,



*Fr. Patrick Dowling and altar servers.*

near Bishop De Burgo's tomb, and Fr. Simon Eustace who died as parish priest of Myshall, Co. Carlow, in January 1783. A silver chalice, bearing the inscription Ora pro Domino Gasparo Shee qui me fieri fecit. Anno Domini 1726 (Pray for Lord Casper Shee who caused me to be made. The year of Our Lord 1726) is still in regular use in the friary church. And a stone slab, inscribed "This market was built by Buckley Butler, Anno Domini 1732" is set into the south-eastern face of the wall which separates the friary garden and novitiate from Pennefeather Lane. Almost certainly, however, it did not originally belong there.

Some better-known names come to us from the nineteenth century. Fr. Theobald Mathew who became known as the Apostle of Temperance was educated in Kilkenny in the Academy where the Loreto convent now stands, and he was stationed in the friary for some years. Fr. Jeremiah Joseph Purcell O'Reilly was in Kilkenny when he was asked to go to New Zealand in 1843. He became the first resident priest in Wellington and remained there until his death in 1880. Fr. Edward Tommins was the first of the friars to wear the habit in public since the Reformation, and was



*The choir, where daily Office is said, about 1910. The clock, by Willoughby of Kilkenny, is still in use.*



*A group of friars, including the late Bro. Seraphim Daly, Spring 1991.*



*Bro. Seraphim Daly helping an altar server to place the figure of the infant Jesus in the crib at Christmas.*

responsible for the construction in 1874 of that part of the friary which runs parallel to Friary St.

Fr. Peter Joseph Mulligan was guardian of the friary in the mid-19th century. It was while he was in office that the present church of Saint Francis with seating accommodation for about 350 people was built in 1848. A remarkable feature of this work was that it involved building the new church over the old one, which stood within the pillars of the present church, while religious services continued in the old church on a regular basis,

The pillars, pediments and cornices of the altar came from the old Saint Mary's Cathedral and were put in place by a Mr. Pat Leahy "the most accomplished carpenter and builder of his time". The large oil painting of the crucifixion by the Italian painter, Guardocini, was a later addition, being inaugurated on 23 September 1868.



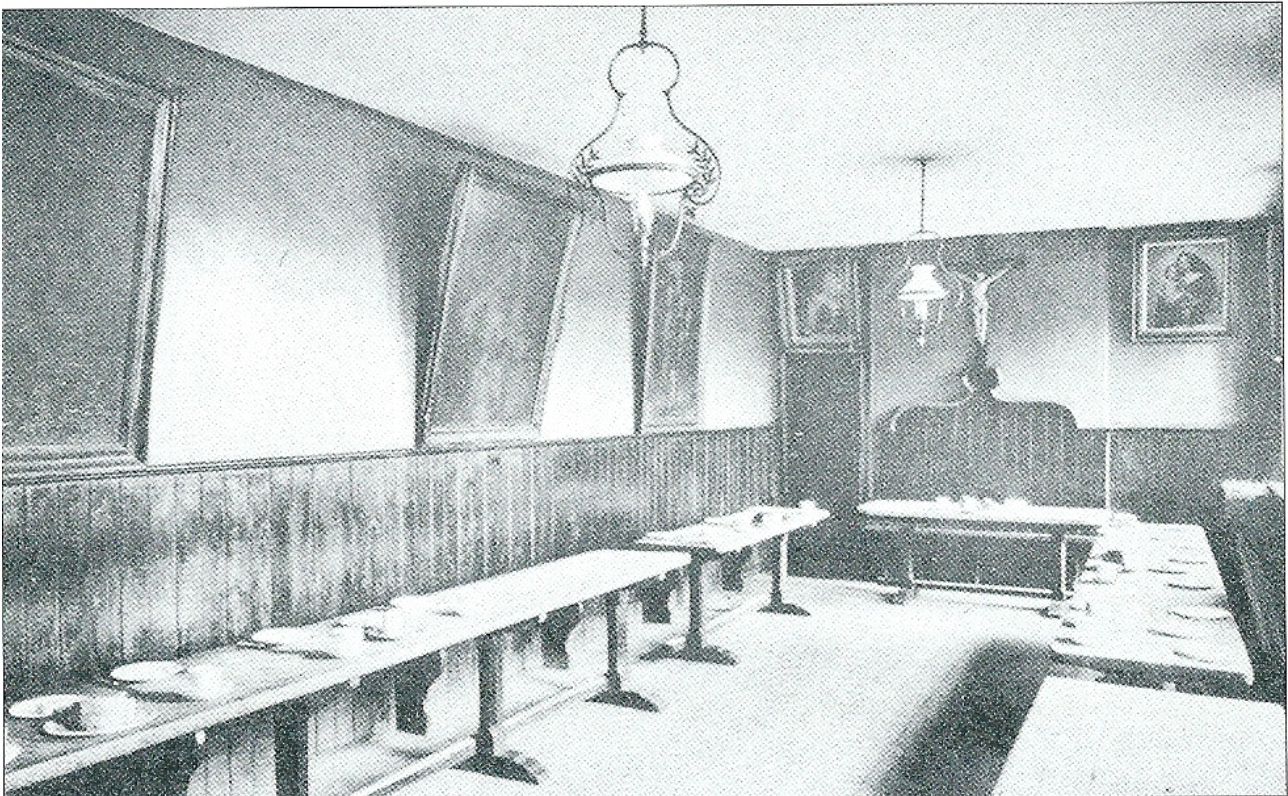
*The friary garden, about 1910 to 1920. The friars are unknown.*



*Fr. Dermot Lynch (now Provincial) and altar servers.*

The new church included a bell-tower surmounted by a cross, said to be the first erected in Kilkenny since the Reformation. In accordance with the custom of the time, the bells were given names, the large bell, used for calling the public to prayer, named O'Connell, after Daniel O'Connell the Liberator, the smaller, named Shiel, for calling the friars to community activities.

In 1875 a novitiate was established for the first stage of formation of young Capuchins. From there in subsequent years, Irish Capuchins went to serve God's kingdom in the United States, South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, New Zealand and Korea as well as other countries. One well-known Kilkenny man among them was Fr. Albert Bibby who, with his confrere Fr. Dominic O'Connor, ministered to the 1916 leaders; he died in the USA in 1925. In 1897 the large three-storey building between Friary Street and Pennefeather Lane was constructed to provide, among other things, accommodation for novices.

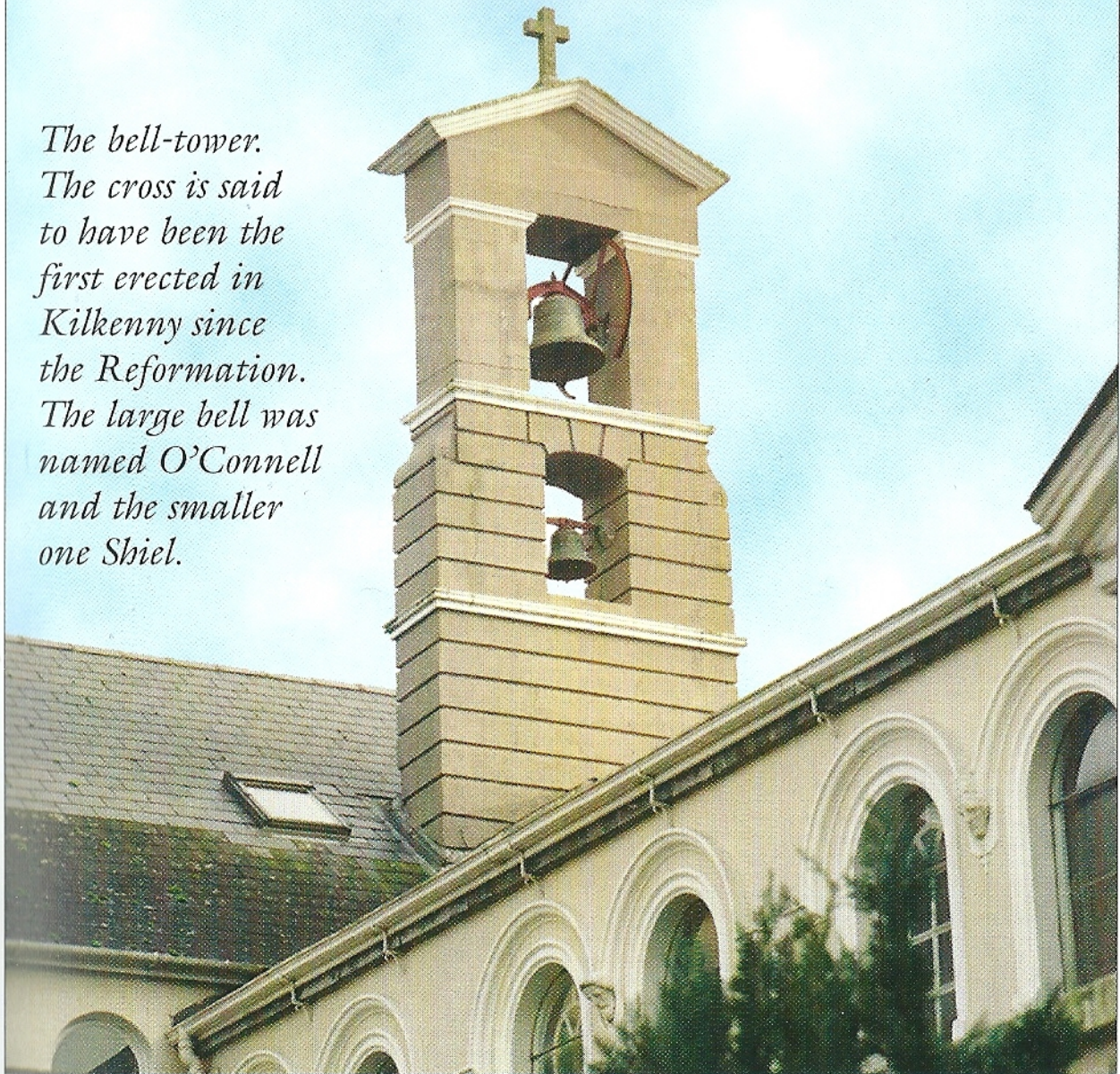


*The friary refectory, about 1910.*

*Stone  
inscribed:  
"This market  
was built by  
Buckley Butler,  
Anno Domini  
1732".*



*The bell-tower.  
The cross is said  
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The 20th century has seen further developments such as the following:

**1902:** A side altar in honour of St. Anthony was erected.

**1912:** Another altar - to Our Lady - was erected. Both were set up through donations by individual members of the Secular Franciscan Order.

**1938:** The side chapels to Saint Anne and Saint Therese were set up.

**1956:** Saint Francis Hall, adjoining the friary, was opened in April. It is now used by youth groups, the ISPCC, for arts and crafts exhibitions, for badminton, karate, dancing, and fund-raising.

**1959-60:** A new novitiate was opened across Pennefeather Lane; it is used at present as a pre-school nursery, and a centre for Young Franciscans.

**1976:** A regular Sunday Mass in Irish was begun.

**1982:** On 10 October, the roof of the friary was badly damaged by fire. A quick response from the nearby Kilkenny Fire Service prevented the loss of the whole complex of buildings, though some items of historical significance were destroyed.

**1985:** The church was renovated. This involved substantial work in the sanctuary, the provision of a new porch, new lighting and heating systems, interior and exterior painting and decorating.

At present as we move towards a new millennium the friars continue to provide services to the people of Kilkenny city and county and also to other parts of the country. In particular, people come to the church for confession, the sacrament of reconciliation, and also for Mass or a period of quiet prayer. The numbers attending Mass daily would be between 250 and 300.

In addition there are prayer groups of various kinds, and meetings of the Secular Franciscan Order. The friars undertake chaplaincy work in St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny, and give missions and retreats around the country.



*Altar servers at the Christmas crib.*



*Bishop Laurence Forristal with Fathers Paddy Dowling and Dermot Lynch on 10th anniversary of the Irish Mass, 1986.*

The future of the friary and its service to Kilkenny depend very much on a continuing intake of new members into the Capuchin Order. In recent years these have slowed to a trickle, much less than that required to replace losses. If the situation changes substantially for the better, the long-term future of the friary seems assured.

## **CONCLUSION**

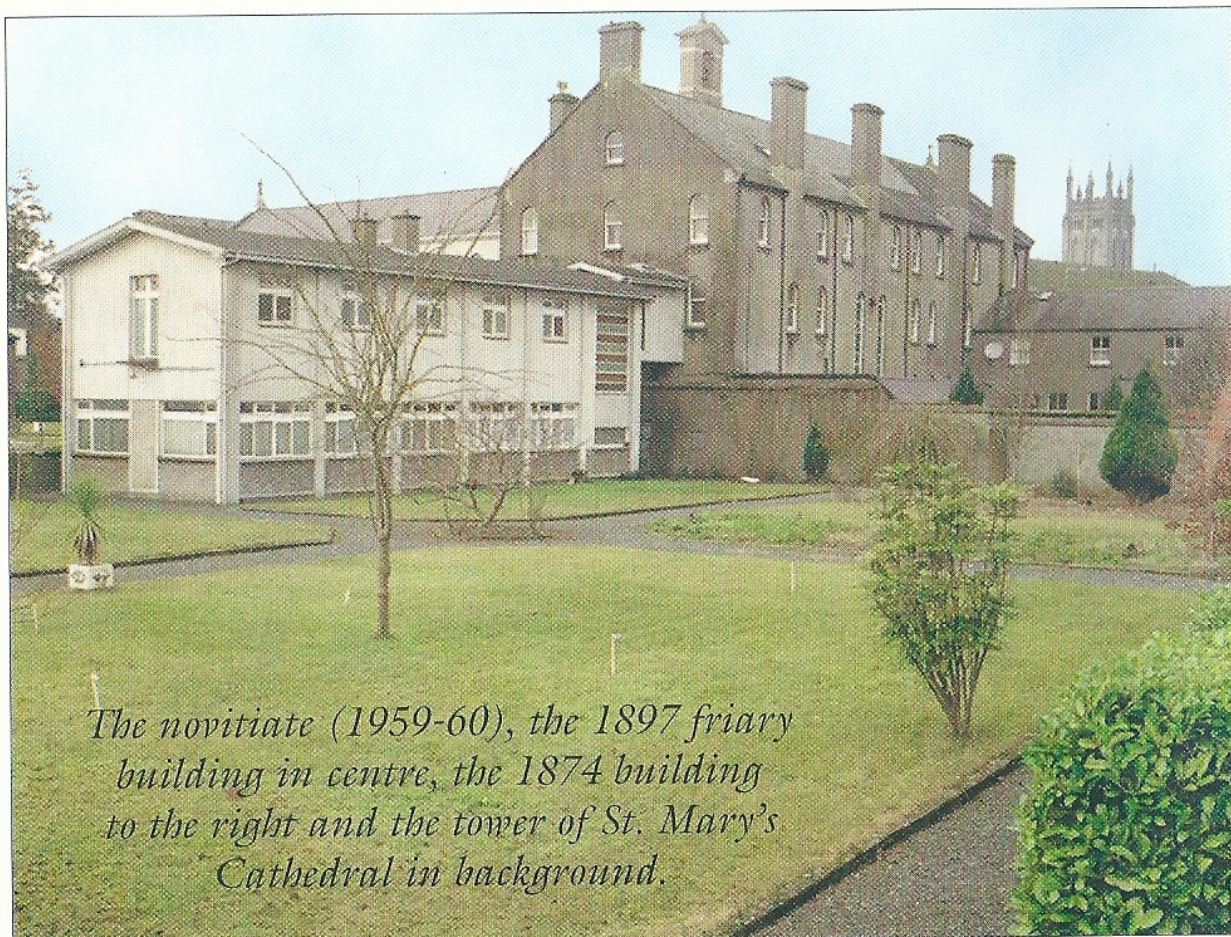
The friars in Kilkenny, both past and present, wish to express their thanks especially to the people of Kilkenny but also to those of the surrounding counties for their constant support in many ways over the last 350 years. Their financial support has been outstanding: in 1985, when £100,000 had been raised for the church's restoration, the friars had to publicly ask the people to stop giving money as more than enough had been received. And in the previous November £5,000 was raised at one Sunday's Masses for famine relief in Ethiopia. Finally, the Capuchins wish to place on record their esteem for and gratitude to Bishop Laurence Forristal and his predecessors, and clergy and religious of the diocese of Ossory for their understanding cordiality which nourishes hope. "How good and how pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to live in unity." (Psalm 132.1)

Go mbeannaithe Dia uilechumhachtach sibh, Athair, Mac agus Spiorad Naomh.

## ***St. Francis' Prayer before the Crucifix***

*All-highest, glorious God, cast your life into the darkness of my heart.  
Give me right faith, firm hope, perfect charity and profound humility, with  
wisdom and perception, Lord, so that I may do what is truly your holy will.*

Amen.



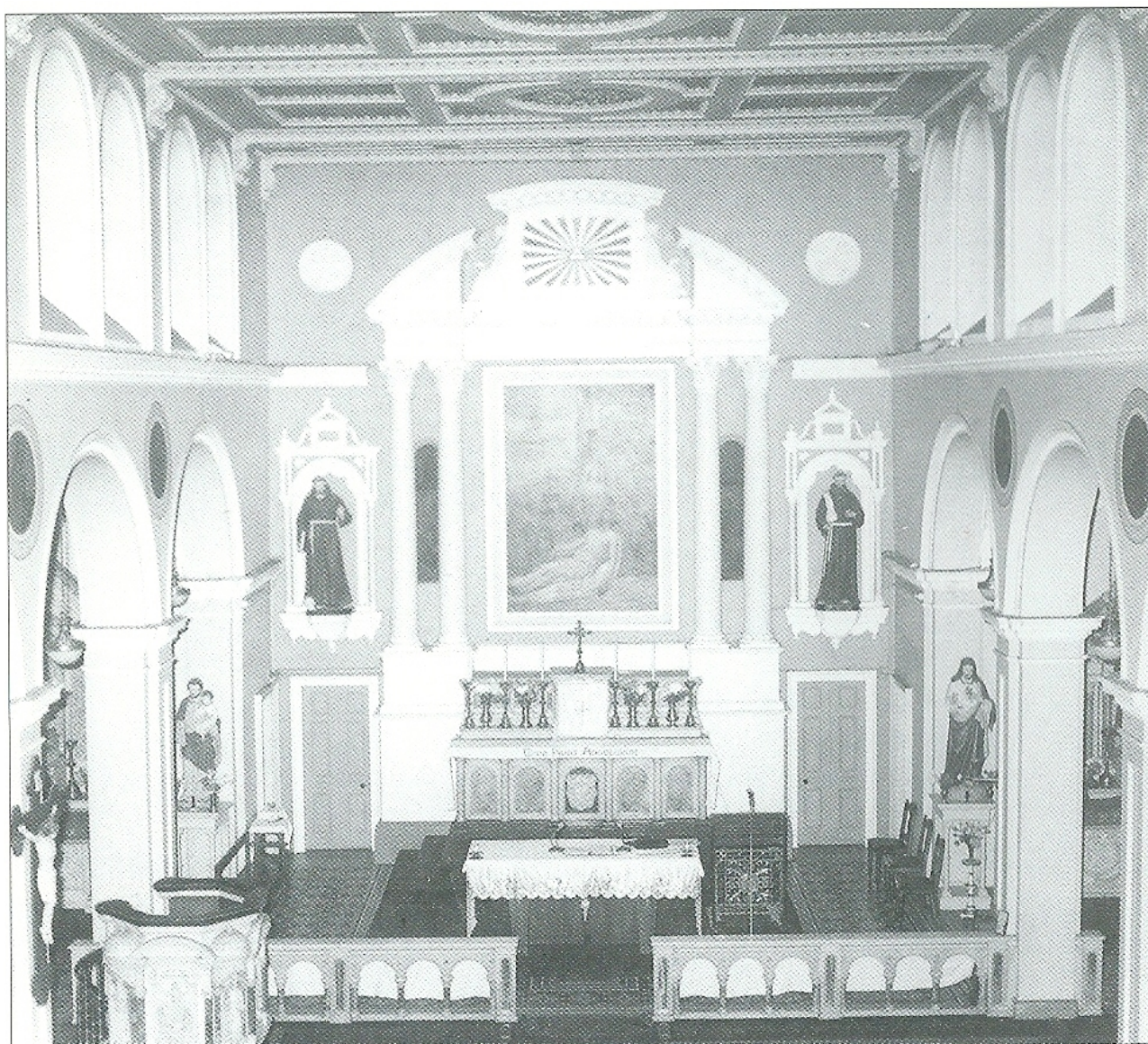
*A group of postulants, novices and newly professed with Fathers Fintan Whelan, Conrad O'Donovan (Minister Provincil) and Berchmans McCarthy (Novice Master) on 4th October 1962.*



*The inner garden, January 1998.*



*Our Lady's garden, looking westward.*



*The sanctuary of the church before renovations of 1982.*



*A winter scene*



*Fr. Declan McFadden with a group of altar servers in the friary hall.*



*Our Lady's Altar, built in 1912 through the generosity of Misses Walshe, O'Connell and Hennessy of the Secular Franciscan Order.*

## **Acknowledgments**

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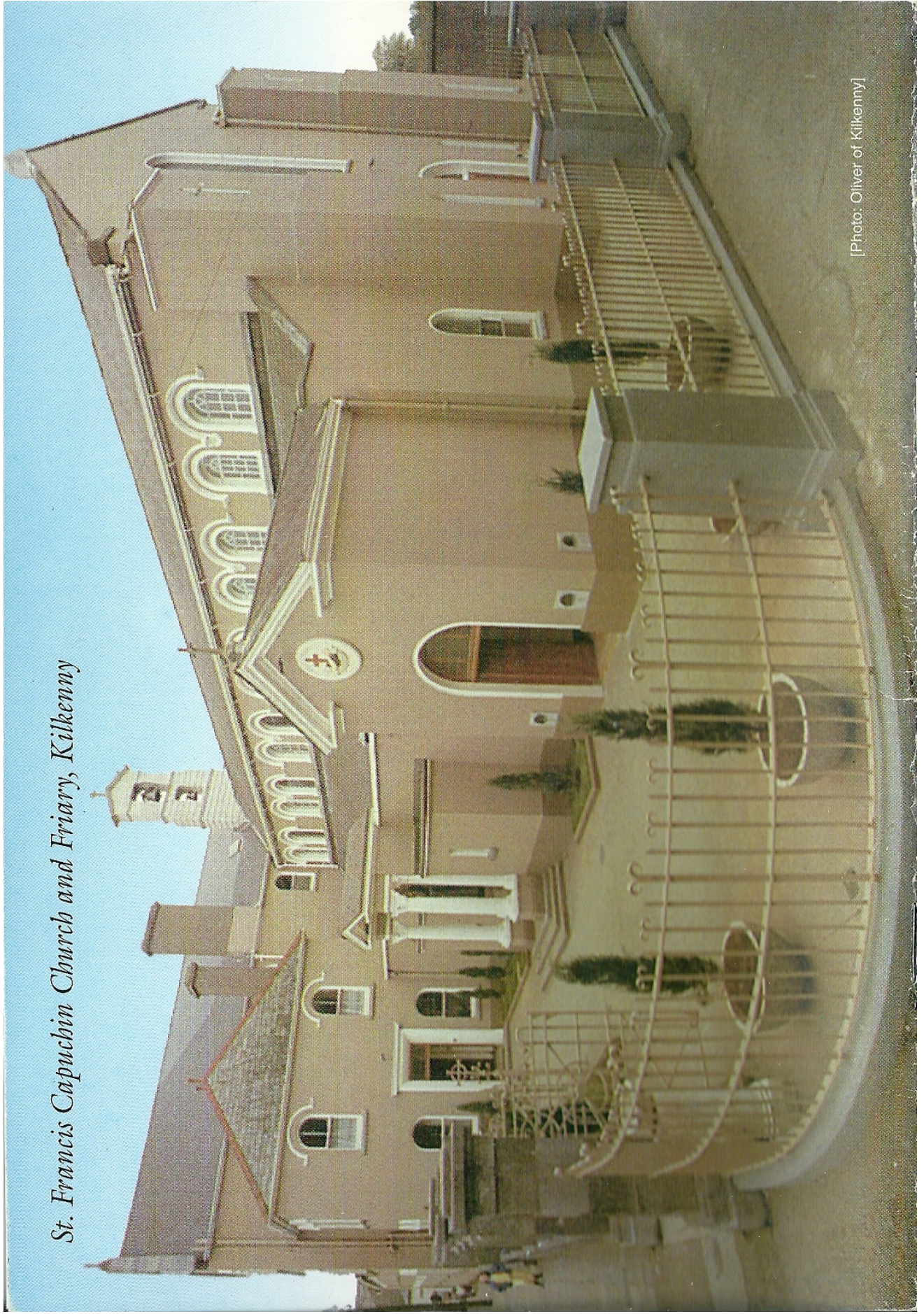
Canon John Brennan of Callan, Co, Kilkenny, for the photos on pages 5 and 9.

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Messrs. Seamus Costello, Michael O'Dwyer and Kieran White for the photo on page 18 drawn from their book *Kilkenny City and County – a photographic record*.

The other photos are from the friary's own collection.

*St. Francis Capuchin Church and Friary, Kilkenny*



[Photo: Oliver of Kilkenny]