

Sligo firemen take Sacred Hosts from church inferno



By Nicola Ryan

The Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. D. Conway, yesterday praised the bravery of the two Sligo firemen, Mr. Paddy Murtagh and Mr. John Neary, who assisted him to take the Sacred Hosts from the tabernacle of St. Joseph's Church, Boyle, which was destroyed by fire on Tuesday.

The fire, which was first noticed shortly after 2.00 p.m., rapidly took hold, and firemen struggled for two hours to put out the blaze. As soon as they had succeeded in getting the major section of the fire under control Bishop Conway donned a fire helmet and protective clothing, and went into the still smouldering building to take out the Host.

He was accompanied by Sligo's Second Fire Officer, Mr. Paddy Murtagh, Rathedmond, and Sligo Station Officer, John Neary, Caltragh, who were wearing breathing apparatus. They made their way across the smouldering floor, littered with beams from the collapsed roof.

Mr. Murtagh explained that acting with special permission from Dr. Conway, they went to the tabernacle to get the Sacred Host.

"I took out three ciboriums and the Benediction Host, and between us, John Neary and I carried them over to the Bishop and he took them to safety," he said.

Firemen later rescued the tabernacle itself, and the sacred relics from the altar.

Commending the firemen, Dr. Conway said they had shown great bravery—it was a very great achievement to go in and take out the Sacred Host as they had done. He also expressed his gratitude to the firemen who had taken out the tabernacle and relics, and said he was impressed by the great work carried out by the firemen at the scene.

About seventy firemen were called out to the fire, which was attended by brigades from counties Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon. Among the brigades were fire engines from Sligo, Ballymote, Manorhamilton, Boyle, Roscommon, Elphin, Carrick-on-Shannon and Ballaghaderreen.

The fire was detected a few minutes after 2 p.m. when smoke was seen pouring from the roof, and the Boyle Fire Brigade was alerted. It is thought the fire, which may have started on the ground floor, quickly reached the timber sheeted roof, where it gained a firm hold. At the time of going to press, the cause of the fire was unknown.

By half past two, it was realised that the building could not be saved. Sligo Fire Brigade arrived at ten past three, and by 3.30 p.m. the roof had collapsed. Firemen fought the flames with water taken from the mains, and from the nearby Boyle river, and by four o'clock had it under control.

Sligo Fire brigade remained at the scene until 9.00 p.m. The damage to the church is thought to be in excess of £500,000 and some estimates have put the cost of restoring and refurnishing it as high as £1,000,000.

Designed by Goldie, who also planned Sligo and Ballaghaderreen Cathedrals, the church was opened in 1882, and was renovated in the early sixties. It had seating for over 1,000 people.

● Pictured above are Mr. Paddy Murtagh and Mr. John Neary