

Father Michael Griffin

Ninety years ago this week, Galway was abuzz with the news that Fr Griffin, a junior curate for the parishes of Bushy Park and Barna, apparently responding to a sick call, went out into the howling gale in the company of three men who were said to have trench coats and rubber boots, and disappeared. The suspicion was that he had been decoyed from his house. It was significant that he did not take the Blessed Sacrament with him. His housekeeper heard very loud knocking as if with the butt ends of revolvers on the front door near midnight, as did one of the neighbours. Apparently Fr Griffin opened his window, spoke briefly to the men, and then left with them shortly afterwards.

Mr Cruise, divisional commissioner, RIC, declared he was confident that no member of the Crown Forces had anything to do with the abduction, and said the RIC would give the search parties every assistance.

The terrible anguish and anxiety which prevailed for almost a week ended when announcements were made from the altar in all Masses on the Sunday that his body had been found. The previous evening a young Barna man saw a piece of material sticking out of the ground in a boggy area at Cloch Scoilte, and later that night a group of locals, by the light of a lantern, were horrified to find the body of Fr Griffin buried about two feet under ground. They managed to take the body under cover of darkness into St Joseph's Church.

The Galway Observer of November 27 reported "Mourning was general when the remains were removed for interment in Loughrea Cathedral grounds. Fr Griffin is the first priest to be murdered in Ireland since the days of Cromwell. Requiem Mass was celebrated, attended by a number of bishops and an enormous congregation. Long queues trailed slowly past the coffin as it lay at the head of the aisle, covered in a pall of black, on which reposed the stole and biretta. Women and children wept as the vast cortege, headed by 150 surpliced clergymen, wound its way from the church through the streets, in which every shop was shuttered and every private house expressed its mute mourning by drawn blinds.

"In the vast crowd that awaited the funeral every section was represented, including the Protestant Rector, his curates, and practically every single member of his congregation, Presbyterians, Methodists, leading landowners, officials, and the humblest citizen. A group of RIC men at the corner of Dominick Street raised their hats as the cortege passed. The priests walked to Moneenageisha Cross-Roads. Here, the coffin was transferred from the hearse to a waiting motor car. The coffin was followed by a motor car carrying wreaths. There was a stoppage of work all day Tuesday and every shop was closed. Many people added to the vast crowds came from the surrounding villages, Barna, Spiddal, Moycullen and Oranmore districts."

In fact it was estimated that the number of people who lined the route was about 12,000, which was half the population of Galway at the time. Our photograph today shows the huge crowd that lined the sides of Forster Street as the cortege passed. It looks as if a group of men playing mourning hymns are leading the surpliced clergymen. The photograph was taken from the Clifden Railway bridge that crossed Forster Street. The camera person was taking a risk, as the Crown Forces did not take too kindly to being photographed.

Our thanks to Margaret Bonar for this image.

TK

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