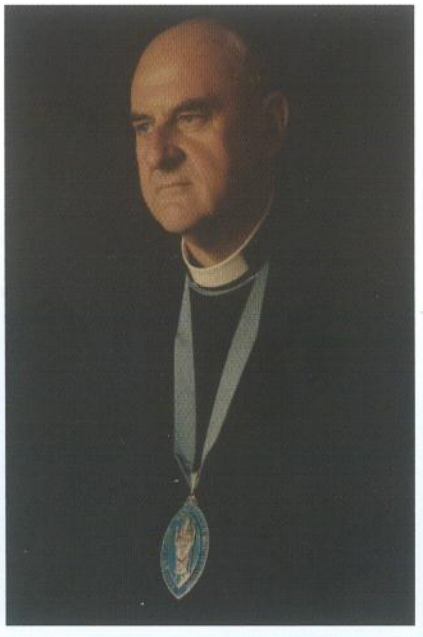
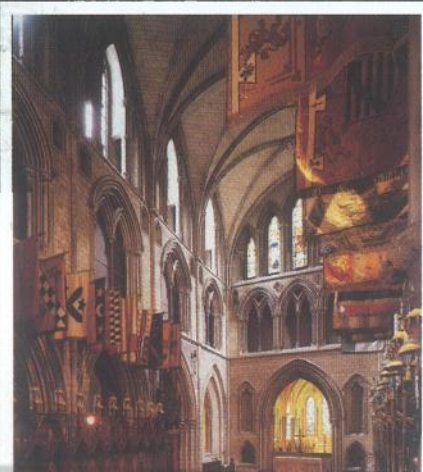
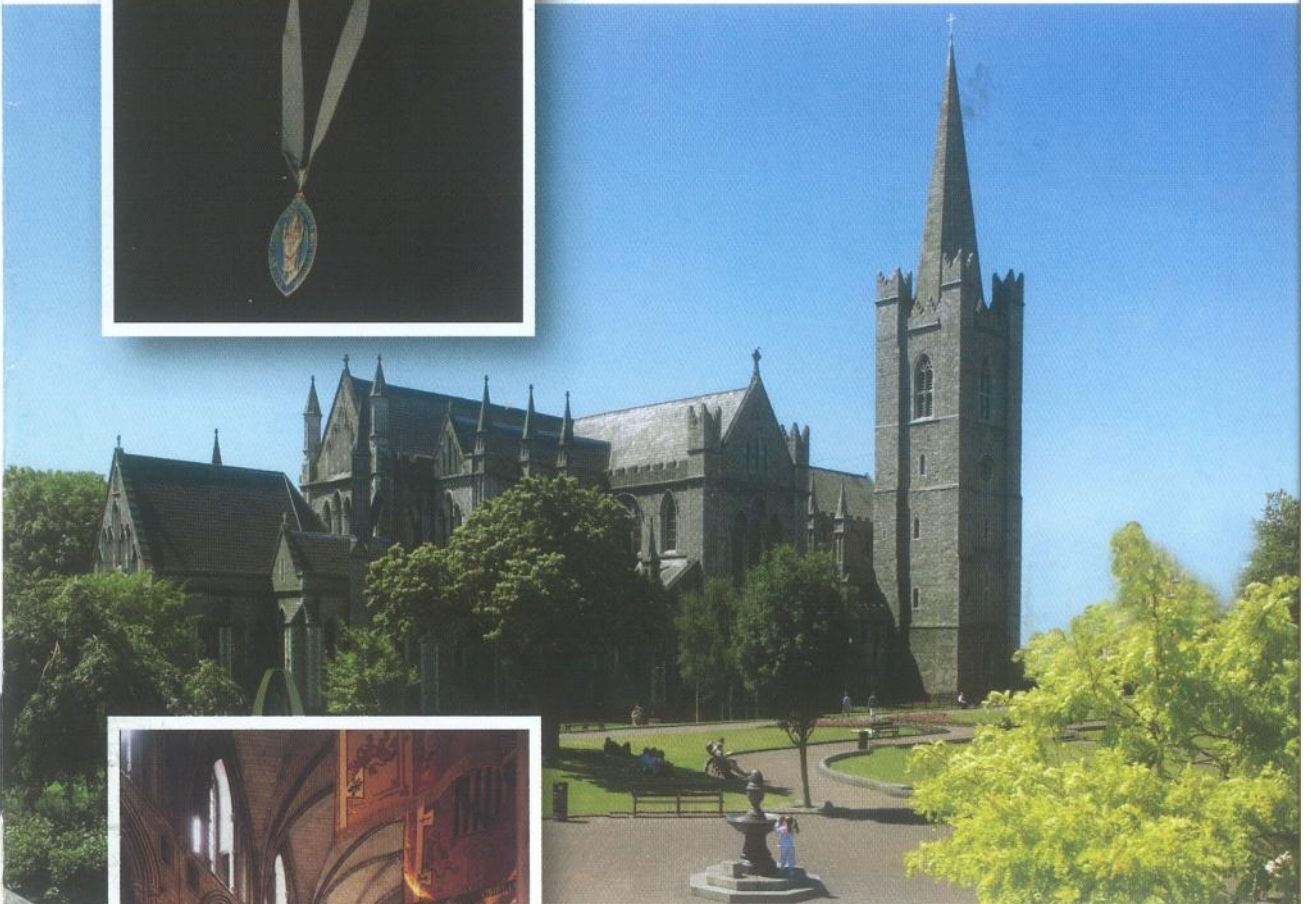




MEMOIRS OF SAINT PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL DURING MY TIME AS DEAN



(1969–1991)
VICTOR G. GRIFFIN



I came to St Patrick's in January 1969, having been elected as dean by the chapter in November 1968. I was reluctant to leave Derry where I had served from my ordination in 1947, but the national chapter wanted 'new blood', one who had experience of life in both the north and south of Ireland. Coming to St Patrick's, I was immediately confronted with many problems and no financial resources to solve them. Where do we live? The old deanery had been allowed to deteriorate for it was felt that in an age of suburbanization with modern residences multiplying outside the city no future dean would want to live in a large antiquated house in Upper Kevin Street, a stone's throw from the city centre. The intention was to sell the deanery or, perhaps, to use it as accommodation for the Grammar School. My wife, Daphne, however, had other ideas. She was determined to reside in the deanery and prevailed on the cathedral board to borrow money from the Representative Church Body to repair and renovate the fabric of what was, in fact, the oldest privately inhabited house in the city.

Having been assured that I would have plenty of time as dean of St Patrick's to read and perhaps write something, I came to Dublin expecting some sort of ecclesiastical sinecure offering at last a degree of leisure that I had previously never enjoyed. I was in for a rude awakening. Soon I was faced with the headmaster of the cathedral grammar school informing me that the staff intended to resign *en masse*. In spite of repeated promises that something would be done to replace the dilapidated, leaking, creaking buildings and an unsanitary shed used as a toilet in the corner of the school-yard, nothing had been done. I was, in fact, given an ultimatum and immediate action was required to save the school. Again I had to approach the Representative Church Body and borrow the necessary finance - £20,000 - to erect prefabricated buildings until a new permanent building could be erected. I was fortunate in that I knew from my days in Derry a manager of the suppliers of such prefabs who expedited the operation. When the staff saw that action was being taken, the threat of resignation was withdrawn. Actually I had to take a risk with the planning authorities and erect the temporary buildings without their consent and afterwards, when I explained to them my plight, they gave permission retrospectively! Part of the deanery stables bordering the school-yard was turned into a toilet block and additional teaching rooms for music were provided. After over twenty years in the prefabs the present school building was erected and opened in 1988 following some years of consultation and negotiation with the department of

education regarding the government's share of the financing and the feasibility of a new school building in such a restricted space. The connection of the school with the cathedral was the crucial factor in gaining the government's support. The assembly hall was extended with new flooring, toilets and showers, and physical education equipment provided.

The choir school in 1969, with one teacher, was housed on the ground floor in what had once been the grammar school headmaster's house on Kevin Street. The cathedral board paid the salary of the teacher and no financial support whatever came from the department of education. It was clear that this situation could not continue. I approached the department of education and eventually reached an agreement whereby the school was placed in the national schools' category with special emphasis on music training of boys for the cathedral choir. The school was transferred to a temporary building erected on one of the sites of the leaking, creaking, damp infested houses (now demolished) on the corner of the cathedral close and Patrick Street which had once housed part of the grammar school and the choir school eventually moved into the present permanent building on the same site. In the cathedral close there was another damp infested building which housed the cathedral verger who asked that he and his wife be housed elsewhere for health and sanitary reasons. This problem was solved by making a verger's flat on the first floor of the former headmaster's house on Kevin Street, with the ground floor turned into an art room for the use of the grammar school.

In the cathedral urgent repairs had to be undertaken to the Minot Tower, which was taking in water. A new oil-burning heating system, new interior lighting, the re-roofing of the Lady Chapel and east end of the quire, and the removal of some box pews from the crossing to give more space for choir and orchestral concerts, were completed. The colours of defunct Irish regiments of the British army still adorned the nave of the cathedral and gave the impression to visitors that St Patrick's was a branch of the British establishment. These colours were appropriately removed to the north transept where the cathedral's war memorials are located. The organ was renovated and security grills were affixed to windows, the boys' and the clergy robing rooms were improved, along with new choir robes with cassocks in St Patrick's blue. To finance all this considerable expenditure the cathedral board launched an appeal for £250,000 in 1972 that involved my travelling widely in Ireland, England and the USA, addressing many meetings of influential bodies whom I thought would be sympathetic and

supportive of the cathedral and its mission. I also initiated an annual gift day and personally solicited the financial support of many organisations and individuals at home and abroad as well as having the wholehearted support of the Society of the Friends of St Patrick's. All in all, I was impressed by the extent of goodwill shown to our national cathedral.

As I looked around the cathedral shortly after my installation in 1969 I could not help noticing that all the great historic traditions which fashioned the history and heritage of Ireland were enshrined within the walls - the Celtic, the Gaelic, the medieval, the Anglo-Norman, the Anglo-Irish. The Huguenots worshipped in the cathedral from 1666 to 1816 and John Wesley visited in the 1770s. All these great traditions co-exist with its walls, an object lesson in reconciliation, with each tradition enriching the other. With all this in mind, I offered to share the cathedral on an ecumenical basis with other Christian denominations thereby making it a truly national cathedral involving all the main religious traditions in Ireland - Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist as well as Church of Ireland. Alas, only the Methodists displayed any interest in my proposal. Others, perhaps, thought there was some 'catch', a hidden agenda, to entice them into supporting the cathedral financially! I invited Fr Michael Hurley SJ to preach in St Patrick's Cathedral on 'St Patrick's Day 1970, the first Roman Catholic priest to preach in any Church of Ireland Church since the Reformation.

In the early 1970s tourism was beginning to take off in a big way in Ireland so I approached the tourist board and tour companies, invited their representatives to meet me in the cathedral and I pointed out to them the immense history embodied within its walls, especially the importance of Dean Jonathan Swift. Afterwards we had a reception for them in the deanery and so began the influx of tourists (or, if preferred, 'visitors') to the cathedral, by the bus load. We were graciously given the use of a small office in Marsh's Library and Marjorie Hampton, single-handed, dealt with tour companies and with their important financial contributions to cathedral funds.

I was anxious to spend as much time with visitors in the cathedral as possible, talking to people from many different lands and frequently arranging to give guided tours around the cathedral. All this helped to build up a fund of goodwill which found expression in a marked improvement in the finances of the cathedral board which, eventually, allowed us to pay off our debts and leave us with surplus funds in hand.

To my dismay one morning I found that Dublin corporation had banished all tour buses from the cathedral close and, on enquiry, I was told that hence-forth they would have to park in Heytesbury Street, some distance from the cathedral. No warning was given, so I promptly informed a corporation official that I was seeking a high court injunction on the grounds that free and direct access to the cathedral was being interfered with and an obstacle was being placed in the way of those who wished to enter the cathedral, thereby raising the whole question of religious discrimination. I indicated that I was prepared to fight this in the courts if necessary. However, Dublin corporation gave in and the buses returned to the cathedral close!

By the time I arrived as dean the City and Town Parishes Commission was completing plans to unite two groups of city parishes with the two cathedrals and the legislation was passed by general synod in 1970. Each parochial group, one on the north side of the city and the other on the south side, would have a vicar, and the dean of Christ Church and the dean of St Patrick's would be 'incumbent for constitutional purposes'. I was aware that in the group of parishes on the south side of the city, what was to become the St Patrick's cathedral group, a number of churches would have to be closed in the short term. I remembered only too well the almighty row that erupted in the late 1950s, with headlines in the press, when it was announced that St Matthias' church, Adelaide Road, was to close. I expected that putting matters into effect would be difficult. In the early 1970s with no decision forthcoming from the Dublin diocesan council, I was saddled as dean with having to tell the Easter vestries of St Kevin's, St Luke's and St Peter's not to spend any money on their churches as they were to close. St Catherine's and St James' Church, Donore Avenue, and St Audoen's Church, Cornmarket, would remain in use. It caused a bit of a rumpus at the time and I was accused of empire building and pocketing the proceeds from the parishes for cathedral funds. But with the assistance of the vicars who worked with me, Gordon Linney, Des Sinnamon and John Crawford, all turned out well in the end and by the time of my retirement in 1991 the parishioners of the cathedral group of parishes were happy with their lot and that rationalization had been achieved when it was. I was obviously forgiven for closing their churches as Daphne and I received a splendid presentation from the select vestry to mark my retirement.

In the late 1980s a question arose with regard to road widening on Patrick Street close to the west end of the cathedral causing increased flow of traffic with the potential danger from vibrations to the foundations of the building. This was eventually resolved by the taoiseach, Charles Haughey, when he met me with representatives of the cathedral board and officials of Dublin corporation at his residence in Kinsealy at which it was agreed to have a narrower road and to leave a distance of 45 feet from the cathedral railings, with the intervening space pedestrianized. All this was achieved by a series of protest meetings wholeheartedly supported by the people of the Liberties parading with bagpipes and loud hailer to lobby members of the corporation at their Monday evening meetings in the City Hall.

As dean of the national cathedral I had no hesitation in publicly airing my convictions on moral, social and political issues, advocating pluralism, the separation of church and state, joining in protest marches against, for example, the injustice of apartheid in South Africa, or paramilitary violence in Northern Ireland, or as chairman of the Dublin Crisis Conference. I took my stand on public platforms with others in places like Liberty Hall and throughout Ireland to protest against the proposal to insert in the constitution of Ireland a total and absolute prohibition on abortion and, later, the removal from the constitution the prohibition on divorce. This public speaking led to much media interest and comment both favourable and, occasionally, hostile. But I had the satisfaction of knowing that the moderate Church of Ireland voice was being taken seriously and gaining cross-community support.

Coming, as I did, to St Patrick's from the largest parish in the diocese of Derry, which included two primary schools, two grammar schools and Magee University College, I was acutely aware first and foremost of my pastoral role as a priest and minister of the gospel. I, therefore, made a point of teaching religious education to the senior pupils in the grammar school every Monday and conducted the choir school assembly on Thursdays and another one for the grammar school on Fridays. I also prepared candidates for confirmation and first communion.

As dean of St Patrick's I had the privilege of working for the good of the cathedral with many committed clergy and laity. What was achieved in developing the ministry of the cathedral would not have been possible but for their help, guidance and encouragement.

Among the clergy I particularly remember is Arthur Aston Luce, precentor and professor of metaphysics in Trinity College, renowned for his exposition of the philosophy of Bishop George Berkeley. He told me that as dean and ordinary I had to give the orders in the conduct of public worship even when archbishops and bishops were taking part. In fact, George Simms, when he was archbishop of Dublin, said to me, "Victor, when I am in St Patrick's you must tell me what to do, for you are the ordinary.' Once when he was archbishop of Armagh I forgot to ask him to give the blessing at the service to mark the opening of the general synod and he remained in his primatial stall until I sent my verger to request him to do so. With a discreet nod and smile, he complied. Archdeacon Raymond Jenkins, who was chancellor, fully supported me in all my efforts that, alas, did not succeed, in our endeavour to have one choir school for both Christ Church and St Patrick's cathedrals. Canon Dickie Dowse, rector of St Peter's and later precentor, was, with his wife, Marjorie, 'given to hospitality, first in his Earlsfort Terrace rectory and later in the deanery basement flat. The welfare of the cathedral was high on his list of priorities as was his care and love for the Adelaide Hospital of which he was chaplain for many years. Canons George Nolan of Rathfarnham, Denis Hilliard of Zion church, Rathgar, and Aidan Olden of Kells, Co. Meath, were stalwart supporters of my programme for safeguarding the cathedral and its schools and renewing the cathedral's life and witness. Canon John Simpson Brown, precentor and the highly esteemed warden of the Divinity Hostel (later the Theological college), was a master of the *bon mot*, who by his quiet presence, wise counsel and erudition, dealt effectively with difficult matters brought before the chapter and cathedral board. Canon Maurice Stewart, precentor and vice-principal of the Theological College, who succeeded me as dean in 1991, was mighty in the scriptures and theology and greatly enriched the liturgical worship of the cathedral by appropriate ceremonial, giving worshippers the sense of the numinous and transcendent in the presence of the all holy triune God.

Last, but by no means least, among the clergy I worked with was Cecil Bradley, affectionately and aptly known as "Father Bradley', who was already dean's vicar when I arrived in St Patrick's and continued in this office after my retirement. We had been friends since ordination in Derry diocese and, in fact, Cecil introduced me to my wife, Daphne, then a parishioner of All Saints', Clooney.

As dean's vicar, I never saw Cecil in a hurry or in a temper. He hated unpunctuality. I remember him saying to the choirboys, as they lined up prior to a service, 'Now boys, its nearly time and we must not keep God waiting.' In the organizing and arrangement of special services he had few equals. Those taking part knew exactly what to do, where to process and nothing was left to chance. I can still picture him walking (or rather gliding) with unhurried step through the Close, black-hatted, cassocked and cloaked for the daily Eucharist at 8.30 a.m. and later for daily matins and evensong. He was a great favourite with the ladies of the Flower Guild on Saturday mornings, always approachable, helpful, humorous with time for people. Many 'down and outs' in Dublin were regular callers to the vicarage and few were turned away empty-handed. Recently one of our bishops said to me, 'Cecil was always there for us in St Patrick's.' I can echo that, for when I was absent on external engagements, I knew that Cecil was there and that the cathedral was in good hands.

Of the laity certain names of those no longer with us come to mind. Rupert Dillon, a wine merchant, devoted to St Patrick's, who during my first weeks in the cathedral gave me money to supply equipment for the grammar school science laboratory and to help restore some pictures in the deanery. William Cunningham, a sound financial advisor, was meticulous in caring for the Board's finances, as was Archie Hampton, investment manager with the Representative Church Body. Minchin Clarke took a keen interest in all matters relating to the fabric of the cathedral and the choir while Bill Stuart helped organize and enthusiastically promote our gift days. Ewart Grace and Reggie Hall were particularly interested in maintaining our unique choral tradition with daily choral matins and evensong, while Victor Jackson, the cathedral's historian and archivist, organized lectures on every aspect of St Patrick's history and produced a guide in the Irish heritage series in 1984 which was a best seller and only superseded by a new guide in 2006. Sidney Greig was organist and master of the choristers and continued the musical tradition of his predecessor, George Hewson, to whom he had been assistant organist. He was a gifted teacher and every Saturday on the organ of the Lady Chapel he gave free organ lessons to the choir boys. Following his retirement in 1976 the cathedral board decided to look for someone who had experience of English cathedral practices and to extend and revitalise the music at St Patrick's and in 1977 the board appointed John Dexter who was then assistant organist of St Paul's cathedral, London.

When Daphne and I left the cathedral after 22 fulfilling years, we were deeply conscious of the unfailing support and loyalty of so many good friends without whose constant help and reliability what was achieved would not have been possible. Above all was a great sense of gratitude to Almighty God for his help and guidance over the years and the strength and solace experienced, both in good times and in bad, in the beauty and solemnity of the daily worship in St Patrick's cathedral, a building full of the rich history of both our country and of the church in Ireland over more than 800 years.

“Victor Griffin, who assumed office in January 1969, tackled the problem of the schools and embarked on a substantial programme of fabric repair and internal re-ordering. A public appeal, fund-raising in America, the introduction of an annual gift day and a more professional approach to the tourist trade provided the resources. Griffin, however, became best known for his willingness to use his position as dean of the national cathedral of the Church of Ireland publically to address controversial issues. He spoke widely on issues such as abortion, divorce, apartheid, and violence in Northern Ireland. Within St Patrick's he was an unapologetic defender of the rights and privileges of the dean, a doughty opponent, when necessary, of Dublin corporation and a staunch supporter of the cathedral's choral tradition. By the time he retired, in 1991, St Patrick's was once again firmly in the public eye.”

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Victor G. Griffin



*Dean of Saint Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin.
1969-1991*