

Morris, Thomas

by Paul Rouse

Morris, Thomas (1914–97), archbishop of Cashel and Emly and patron of the GAA, was born 16 October 1914 in Kilkennybeg, Killenaule, Co. Tipperary, son of James Morris, farmer, and Johanna Morris (née Carrigan). He was educated in Killenaule national school and in Thurles CBS before entering Maynooth College as a seminarian in September 1932. Ordained a priest (18 June 1939), he remained in Maynooth, studying at the Dunboyne Institute, until he completed a doctorate in theology, awarded in June 1941. In autumn 1941 he taught theology for a few months at Glenstal Priory, Co. Limerick, before assuming (January 1942) the position of teacher in theology at St Patrick's College, Thurles, the Cashel diocesan seminary. He remained in that position until 1960, serving as vice-president of the college from 1957. Between 1947 and 1959 he also served as secretary to the then archbishop of Cashel, Jeremiah Kinane (1884–1959).

He was ordained archbishop of Cashel and Emly in Thurles cathedral on 28 February 1960. Having attended the second Vatican council, he oversaw the development of a modern system of communications for the Irish catholic church. He was chairman of the bishops' commission for communications for many years, oversaw the development of the catholic church's communications centre in Booterstown, Co. Dublin, and was instrumental in the establishment of the Catholic Communications Institute. He retired as archbishop in September 1988 and moved to Holycross, Co. Tipperary, where he spent the remainder of his life.

Morris was a man with a deep interest in Irish culture, history, and heritage, particularly when related to life in rural Ireland. He supervised the cataloguing of the collection of historical papers held in the Archbishop's House in Thurles, and the deposition of a microfilmed copy with the NLI. He was the driving force behind the restoration of the medieval Cistercian abbey at Holycross, which was returned to public use in October 1975. His book *Holycross abbey* was published in 1987. He carried out a modernisation programme at Thurles cathedral which was timed to coincide with the centenary of its consecration in 1979.

He was also a founder member of, and actively involved in, a number of local historical societies. Much of his interest in cataloguing local diocesan records was a desire to further adult education by involving his parishioners in the process. He was deeply committed to the welfare of local communities across his diocese and beyond, and was an ardent supporter, from its inception (1937), of Muintir na Tire, the Tipperary-based rural community development movement organised by Canon John Hayes (qv) in Bansha. He continued to visit Bansha on an annual basis even after retirement, and published the pamphlet *Muintir na Tire: a sketch of its history* (1962), as well as contributing the preface to Liam Maher (ed.), *The mind*

*of Canon Hayes: a collection from the writings and speeches of the late founder of Muintir na Tire* (1961). He served as patron of the GAA for twenty-eight years and regularly attended hurling and football matches until shortly before his death. A fluent Irish-speaker, he spent his annual holidays in the west Kerry Gaeltacht of Corcha Dhuibhne. A big man who smoked a pipe, he was a member of the Pioneer and Total Abstinence Association, and cited reading as his favourite pastime; he was most at ease in the rural parishes that dominated his diocese. He died 16 January 1997 and a large crowd attended his lying-in-state. After a funeral mass in Thurles cathedral, he was buried in Holycross abbey.

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Liam Maher (ed.), *The mind of Canon Hayes: a collection from the writings and speeches of the late founder of Muintir na Tire* (1961); Thomas Morris, *Muintir na Tire: a sketch of its history* (1962); *Ir. Times*, 17, 18 Jan. 1997; *Cork Examiner, Ir. Independent*, 17 Jan. 1997; B. J. Canning, *Bishops of Ireland, 1870–1987* (1988); Joe Dunn, *No lions in the hierarchy: an anthology of sorts* (1994); information from diocesan office, Cashel