

# Who is Croke of Croke Park?

~ Who is the Croke of Croke Park and how he has left a  
‘selfie’ of himself in the cathedral he consecrated and is  
buried in ~

Let's start at the end! as Archbishop Thomas Croke is buried in the mortuary chapel of the famous Pisa like Thurles Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Cashel and Emly. Here since 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1902 many a Thurles man and women and child were waked on the grave of Archbishop Croke. There is a white stone bust still to be seen but the beautiful mosaic of Croke with mitre and crozier has been carpeted over as the chapel is now used for Blessed Sacrament adoration.

He is best remembered worldwide today when the name Croke Park (Páirc an Chrócaigh,) is mentioned. Ireland's 'premier' sporting venue is named in honour of Archbishop Croke, it is often called Croker by some GAA fans and locals. It serves both as the principal stadium and headquarters of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA). His most famous statue is at the top of Liberty Square where s Archbishop Croke looks over the town of Thurles. To his left is the famous Hayes Hotel where at 3.00 p.m. on Saturday, 1st November 1884, the Gaelic Athletic Association was founded. The aims were set out, to foster and promote native Irish pastimes, to open athletics to all social classes, to aid in the establishment of hurling and football clubs which would organise matches between counties. Within a few weeks of the organisation's foundation, the then Archbishop of Cashel, Thomas, gave this organisation his approval and became its first patron and that tradition continues to the present day with Archbishop Kieran O' Reilly.

## EARLY LIFE AND HOW HE BECAME BISHOP OF AUKLAND IN NEW ZEALAND

Thomas William Croke was born in the parish of Ballyclough, County Cork, Ireland, probably in 1822 or 1823. He was the third of eight children of William Croke, an estate agent, and his wife, Isabella Plummer, daughter of an aristocratic Protestant family who disowned her following her Catholic marriage in 1817. After William Croke died in 1834 his brother, the Reverend Thomas Croke, supervised the education and upbringing of the children. Two of Thomas's brothers entered the priesthood, while two sisters became nuns. In retrospect his own ecclesiastical career seems almost predestined.

Sent for his clerical education to the Irish colleges in Paris and Rome, Thomas Croke won academic distinctions including a doctorate of divinity with honours. After ordination in May 1847 he spent the next 23 years working in Ireland. In 1858 he became the first president of St Colman's College, Fermoy, then served as both parish priest of Doneraile and vicar general of Cloyne diocese from 1866 to 1870. He gained the good opinion of the Irish ecclesiastical authorities and was rewarded in 1870 by promotion to the see of Auckland, in New Zealand. His former professor, Paul Cullen, by then cardinal archbishop of Dublin, was largely responsible for filling the Australasian Catholic church with fellow Irishmen. His strong recommendations led to Croke's appointment, and that of Patrick Moran to Dunedin in 1869.

Croke arrived at Auckland on 17 December 1870 on the City of Melbourne. During his three years as bishop he restored firm leadership to a diocese left in disarray by his predecessor, Bishop J. B. F. Pompallier. As well as devoting some of his considerable personal wealth to rebuilding diocesan finances, Croke took advantage of Auckland's economic growth following the development of the Thames goldfields to further his aims. He ensured that all surplus income from parishes at Thames and Coromandel was passed on to him, and he instituted a more rigorous system for the Sunday collection at St Patrick's Cathedral in Auckland. He imported Irish clergy to answer the spiritual needs of a growing Catholic community, and with Moran tried (unsuccessfully) to secure an Irish monopoly on future episcopal appointments in New Zealand. In his intolerance of non-Irish Catholic traditions, represented in New Zealand by the Marists and Benedictines, Croke was typical of Irishmen appointed to bishoprics in Australasia from the 1860s. Under him the energies of Auckland Catholicism were devoted to saving the souls of the Irish immigrant rather than to converting the Maori.

Croke spent much of the first two years travelling through his extensive diocese; from 1873 ill health curbed his activities. During these years he spoke out in support of separate Catholic schools and their right to state aid, and voiced his opposition to secular education. He was reported as saying, in a sermon on St Patrick's Day 1872, that 'any system of education from which religion was eliminated was detestable.' His public remarks on this subject were less combative in tone than Moran's pronouncements, despite the fact that Auckland's Catholic schools were threatened by the provincial council's Education Act 1872, which helped to create a free, secular and compulsory education system. Croke's image was uncontroversial; there was also little sign of the strongly Irish nationalist line he would adopt during his subsequent career in Ireland.

On 28 January 1874, after barely three years in office, Croke departed for Europe, on what was ostensibly a 12-month holiday. He did not return. Promoted archbishop of Cashel and administrator of Emly, Ireland, in June 1875, he became an outspoken supporter of Charles Stewart Parnell, Irish home rule, and of Gaelic games and the

Irish language. He died at Thurles, County Tipperary, on 22 July 1902. Croke's distinguished career of latter years owed much to the perceived success of his mission in Auckland, a perception he did not discourage. However, the stability his brief leadership provided was sorely lacking in the six years which were to elapse before Auckland Catholics had a bishop once again.

As mentioned earlier the cathedral with its façade modelled on that of Pisa Cathedral, in Italy was built between 1865 and 1879 (consecrated by Archbishop Croke). In my opinion it looks the full very impressive Romanesque Revival architecture building from the garden of the Archbishop's House and Convent Gardens.



Thurles Cathedral 2017. Gerry Molumby Photographer





Thurles Cathedral 2017. Gerry Molumby Photographer

Archbishop Croke left his mark on the town of Thurles in many different ways. Gerry Molumby – July 2017.



Not only is Archbishop Croke buried in the Cathedral but he left a daily shining light of himself as his head features are imposed on St. Thomas Aquinas. This window can be viewed on the right of the sanctuary just above the sacristy entrance. It is the 18<sup>th</sup> stained glass window in the ambulatory.

Manufactured by Wailes of Newcastle and donated by the Croke family.

Gerry Molumby Photographer



Dome of Thurles Baptistery – where I was baptized Gerry Molumby Photographer





Portrait of Archbishop Croke in the hallway of Archbishop's House. It was donated by the people of Thurles on the return of Thomas from a visit to Rome in 1883. I do not know the artist?

Gerry Molumby Photographer

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