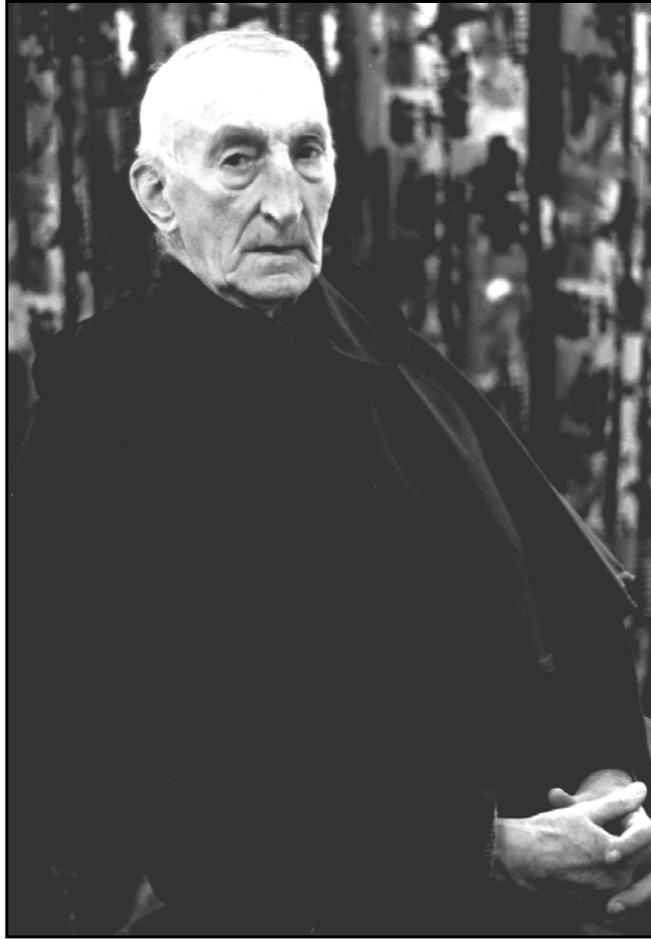


## Patrick Geary, O.Carm., 1908-92

*by Wilfrid McGreal, O.Carm.*

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*Fr. Patrick Geary, O.Carm.*

It's almost twenty years since Patrick (Pat) Geary died. It's important that we keep his memory fresh, as he did so much in enabling the rebirth of the Carmelite Order in Britain.

Pat was born, on St. David's day 1908, at Ballinacurra near Kinsale, where his father managed a farm for a Protestant landowner. The Gearys lived comfortably in this beautiful part of County Cork. Pat started his education at the local National School and then went to the Christian Brothers School. The serenity of that world was shattered by the Great War, then the War of Independence, and the Civil War saw death and violence stalking the Cork countryside. Kinsale was in the thick of things as Michael Collins came from nearby Clonakilty.

In 1922 various religious orders came to the Brothers School at Kinsale, and a Carmelite – Fr. Flanagan – caught Pat's imagination, and he decided to try his lot with the Carmelites. This meant heading for Terenure College in Dublin. The journey to Dublin was by boat as the Dublin-Cork railway line was a victim of the Civil War. After a year at school in Terenure, Pat was told he could start the novitiate, even though he was only fifteen. I remember him telling me how surprised he was at that decision. Pat began his novitiate at Ardavon in 1923 and another fifteen-year-old aspirant was Tony Gallagher. While the novitiate year had its lighter moments, conditions were Spartan with poor food and plenty of manual work. After profession he went back to Terenure to finish his secondary education and begin a General Arts degree at University College Dublin.

Ardavon became the house of students, so Pat and his class moved back and found the new regime under Elias Lynch much more benign. Elias believed in treating people well and being generous.



*Fr. Elias Lynch, O.Carm.*

In 1927 Pat and Tommy went to Rome and found life at Saint Albert's College "Strict but fair". Pat appreciated the excellent faculty, especially Fathers Xiberta and Brenninger. Pat took to studies with enthusiasm and gained a doctorate in Theology. Ordination came in 1931 when Pat was only twenty three years old.



*Left: Saint Albert's College in Rome (now CISA), photographed in 2007.  
Right: Whitefriars Street Carmelite Church, Dublin, photographed in 2008.*

On his return to Ireland Pat became chaplain to the South Dublin Union and a member of the Whitefriars Street community. The South Dublin Union had been a work house but had evolved into a general hospital. However in 1932 a formal visitation of the Province by the Assistant General, Brocard Taylor, caused most appointments to be changed and Pat found himself back in Ardavon as master of students. This gave him a chance to finish his B.A. and gain the Higher Diploma in Education. However, Pat found himself responsible not just for the students but for the day-to-day running of the house; quite a responsibility for someone in his mid-twenties. Nonetheless, he did find time to watch rugby internationals!



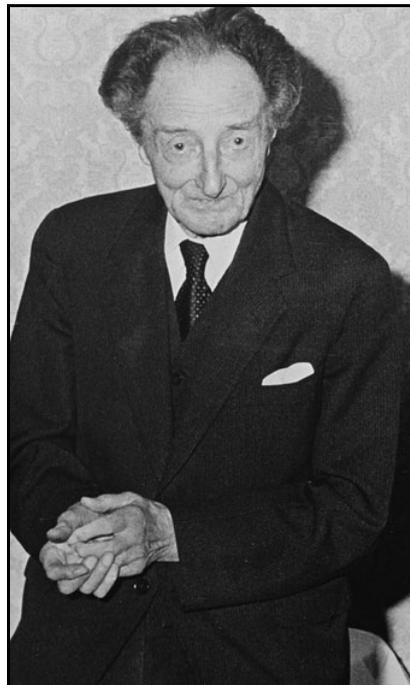
*Fr. Brocard Taylor, O.Carm.*

In 1936 the Carmelites answered the call of Dr. McGrath, Bishop of Menevia, to take on the parish of Aberystwyth and St. Mary's College. The College was run down and the parish covered a huge area with few Catholics. The pioneers for this project were Malachy Lynch, Bonaventure Fitzgerald, Pat Geary and Michael Kiely. The change from Catholic Dublin to Nonconformist Wales was a real culture shock. For the next thirteen years Pat was to help run the College and the parish, being the stable centre, while Malachy raised money, built up the student body and developed a parish at Lampeter. The Second World War changed the tenor of life at Aberystwyth as it welcomed evacuees from London and the big cities. By 1942 Pat was running the parish, teaching in the college and acting as chaplain to the local Air Force base.



*Fr. Malachy Lynch, O.Carm.*

One of the highlights of that time in human terms was the presence of Saunders Lewis in the College. He was a gifted teacher, a creative writer and a dedicated Welsh nationalist. He had been imprisoned for attacking an Air Force base; once out of prison, when all academic doors were closed, Malachy generously employed him. Pat remembered with delight Saunders Lewis' culture and good company.



*Saunders Lewis.*

At the end of the war the pupils at St. Mary's College went to a more spacious setting at Llandeilo, and St. Mary's became a centre for late vocations. Pat almost single-handed took on this work; little help was possible from Ireland as the mission of Rhodesia had just begun. 1949 saw another change for Pat as he replaced Malachy Lynch as Prior at the new college at Llandeilo – Malachy had been appointed Prior of Aylesford. Pat proved a popular figure at the school, firm but fair, and he helped mould the community and teaching staff into an efficient team. Tregeyb, the site of the school, was quite idyllic and life was very enjoyable.



*Tregyb Mansion, the Carmelite community at Llandeilo.*

However more changes were in the offering. A process that began with the Irish Province Chapter in 1949 led to the communities in England and Wales being separated as a General Commissariat in 1952. Pat was appointed the first superior of this new entity, a role he was to fulfil for seven years. It was not an easy task with the anomaly that Aylesford, the largest community, was directly subject to the Prior General. However, progress was made, and a novitiate was started with a steady flow of candidates. This period also saw Pat having to combine his role as Superior with that of Prior in Aberystwyth. During Pat's time as Superior; a foundation of our nuns was made at Blackburn, the Third Order began to grow, and the foundations of The Leaven Secular Institute came into being.

Pat became aware that the school at Llandeilo was too remote and had little chance of increasing in numbers. It was largely his work that led to the establishing of Whitefriars School in Cheltenham which opened in 1958. Prior to its opening there was some adverse publicity when an anti-Catholic element claimed we were evicting an old lady who lived in a cottage on the site. Pat was worn out by his efforts to establish the school plus all his other responsibilities and his health gave way.



*St. Edward's School, Cheltenham, which developed from Whitefriars School.*

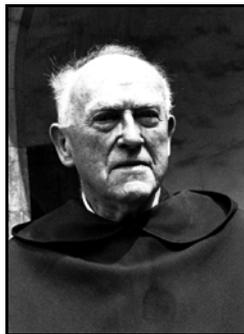
Happily in 1960 Pat was back in Llandeilo looking after the parish. For a while Llandeilo was a formation house, but by 1966 the property had been sold and this enabled Pat to return to Aberystwyth working with the late vocations students. From 1969-72 he was to be Prior at Aberystwyth.

1972 was a milestone and a great change when Pat left Wales and became Sub-Prior at Aylesford. He was to live on at Aylesford until his death in 1992. He became a pivotal figure in the life of Aylesford. His great gift was his availability; for those twenty years his consistent presence and his patience as a councillor and confessor was of inestimable value. He took a pride in the grounds, caring for the gardens and often to be seen striding out enjoying the Kent countryside.



*Aylesford Priory c.2000.*

In these last years Pat's health was not of the best, but he was faithful in his observance and his dry humour could diffuse tense moments. He never imposed his views but his presence itself was eloquent. From the 1980s onwards his novitiate companion Tommy Gallagher was part of the community and if Tommy said anything too outrageous Pat could gently call him to order.



*Fr. Tommy Gallagher, O.Carm.*

Pat worked hard, he had immense realism, and his whole life was lived doing the will of the one to whom he had given his allegiance. Let's thank God for Pat and may his memory serve as an inspiration.