

# Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

North Mayo Heritage Centre

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YouTube



*On the anniversary of the birth of one of the greatest Mayo men of all time, we celebrate*

**Monsignor**

**James Horan**

Monsignor Horan pictured boarding the first flight to Rome from Knock Airport in 1985

(Image: irelandwestairport.com)



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**TRACING YOUR MAYO ROOTS?**

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The  
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Heritage  
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Rialtas na hÉireann  
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# Monsignor James Horan

May 5th is the 113th anniversary of the birth of Monsignor James Horan in the tiny village of Tooreen in the parish of Partry.

The son of Bartley and Catherine Horan (*née* Casey), he attended Partry National School, St. Jarlath's College, Tuam and St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1936. After serving a number of years in Glasgow, he returned to his native archdiocese of Tuam. He was appointed to Knock in 1963, first as curate and then parish priest in 1967. He was responsible for the transformation of Knock Shrine including the erection of the new church in 1976, which was later designated the Basilica of Our Lady, Queen of Ireland.

Knock was the scene of an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph and St. John the Evangelist, together with an altar, a cross and a lamb surrounded by angels, on 21<sup>st</sup> August 1879. The apparition was witnessed by several local people and after two Commissions of Inquiry in 1879 and 1936, Knock Shrine was recognised by every Pope from Pope Pius XII onward. The founding members of the Knock Shrine Society suggested the idea of a Papal visit and the provision of an airport to facilitate pilgrimages to Knock Shrine as far back as the early 1950s. It was Father James Horan who was able to turn those dreams into reality.

On September 30<sup>th</sup> 1979, Pope John Paul II made his visit to Ireland and Knock. In his homily that day the Pope said: "*Here am I at the goal of my journey to Ireland, the Shrine of Our Lady of Knock.*"

**Right:** Monsignor Horan enjoying the celebrations prior to the first flight to Rome from Knock Airport in 1985  
(Image: irelandwestairport.com)



Monsignor James Horan in the control tower of Knock Airport 1986  
(image Con-Telegraph.ie)

The Pope elevated the new church in Knock to the status of a basilica and promoted Father James Horan to Monsignor. Monsignor James Horan was totally committed to the development of an international airport in the west of Ireland. A long, and at times controversial, campaign was led by Monsignor Horan for the approval of the airport with the go-ahead being given by the then Taoiseach Charles Haughey in 1980.

The political upheavals of 1981 and 1982, a new government, the risk of recession and a crisis in national finances saw the withdrawal of support for the project after an initial commitment of over £9m.

Monsignor Horan and his supporters began the task of raising nearly £4m in private subscriptions in the west of Ireland, the USA and Australia.

With state funding, private fundraising and some borrowing the airport was completed on schedule and within budget. The airport was officially opened on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1986 by Charles Haughey TD. On October 25<sup>th</sup> 1985 it was first used by Aer Lingus for three flights to Rome.

Monsignor Horan passed away suddenly on the 1st August 1986 on a religious pilgrimage to Lourdes, just a few months after the official opening of the airport. His remains were flown into Knock, the first funeral to fly into the airport. He was buried four days later adjacent to Knock Basilica.

Today a bronze sculpture of Monsignor James Horan stands at the entrance to Knock Airport in his honour. How proud he would be today!

Source: Exploring Mayo  
by Bernard O'Hara



## Taking a Chance

Extract from Monsignor Horan's interview with RTE's Jim Fahy at the start of construction of Knock airport 1981.



**Jim Fahy:** "*Monsignor Horan, what on earth are you doing?*"

**Monsignor Horan:** "*We are building an airport – now don't tell anybody. We've no money, but we're hoping to get it next week or the week after!*"

**Jim Fahy:** "*Do you have planning permission?*"

**Monsignor Horan:** "*I'm not sure whether I have permission or not but I'm going ahead anyway, just taking a chance!*"

Source: rtearchives.ie



## Did you know?

Monsignor Horan's life and work were chronicled in a musical written by Terry Reilly and broadcaster Tommy Marren, entitled *On a Wing and a Prayer*