



Portumna Castle by John Buchanan Smith 1999 www.scottishcastlesassociation.com/sketchcredits.html

South East Galway Archaeological & Historical Society

Newsletter No 8

Autumn 2011

Lectures - Autumn 2011

Tuesday October 25th

Lecture by Joseph Mannion PhD, entitled; *The Formation of County Galway in the Sixteenth Century: Its medieval Background and Tempestuous Early Years.*

In Donie O'Meara's Restaurant, Portumna at 8.30pm.

In his lecture Joseph will outline the process by which Galway evolved from being a region made up of independent clan based territories to become the county that we now recognise as Galway. In this lecture Joseph will challenge some of the previously held views as to how this happened and posit his own findings based on the fruits of his doctoral research. Joseph is long standing a member of this society and has contributed to our lecture series in the past.

Tuesday November 29th

Lecture by Paul Duffy BE entitled; *Some Watermills of South East Galway.*

In Donie O'Meara's Restaurant, Portumna at 8.30pm.

Paul will provide an overview of the water mills and millers of the region focusing on aspects such as the geographical location, use and reuse of mills and the change in ownership that took place over time. He will deal in particular with Ballyshrul, Ballycahill, Meagheramore, Leitrim, Lisduff, Loughrea, and Ballinasloe mills This lecture promises to introduce us to some previously unknown source material. Paul is one of the Country's leading authorities on industrial heritage and SEGASHS are delighted to have him lecture to our society once again.

Family History Search—Request for assistance - by Dermot Cleary

I am looking for information for a Patrick Cleary born in the early 1800's. He is supposed to have been from around Feaghbeg (Fahy) in Co. Galway. He married one Ellen Rodgers (also born in early 1800's) and supposedly, they emigrated at some point. It is my thought that they had a son who they named Patrick as well. They may also have had a son named George.

Ellen Rodgers father was Peter Rodger Born Ireland (Sorry no dates). Died in US (Chicago). Her mother was one Sheila Boner supposed to be born and died in Ireland. I know that's not much of a help. Ellen, Patrick Cleary's wife is supposed to be born in 1820, and died in 1885.

I have tried the National Library with no luck. More recently I have written to the PP in Fahy Eyrecourt in the hopes that there may be church records. I am hypothesising that the Rodgers/Boner connection is not Galway county at all, and that Ellen and Patrick met in America. I know that the registry of births, marriages and deaths would not go far enough back while the Ellis Island records are too recent also. If you can suggest something I would appreciate it.

Many thanks
Dermot Cleary

If any of our members can assist with this queries please email Dermot at dercleary@eircom.net

New Members: If you know someone that might like to become a member of SEGASHS or is visiting the area and wishes to come along, please invite them to our talks.

Membership Fee: The annual membership fee of €20 is due. This can be paid to the society treasurer Michael Ward or assistant treasurer Edel Connaughton.

Articles: If you have a short article, note, or query of heritage interest that you would like to share with members of the society, we will be happy to publish it here in our newsletter. If you wish to have your article included you can do so by emailing it to the editor chriscun@eircom.net

Notice of 2011 AGM

The 2011 AGM will be held at **8.30pm** on **Tuesday 8th November** in Donie O'Meara's. All are welcome.

Portumna Dominican Priory

Portumna Dominican priory is a good example of a large religious house. While the main structure was erected by the Dominican order after 1414, the initial phase of the building comprising of the nave and choir was built c.1254 as a Cistercian house by the Anglo-Norman baron William de Cogan. The large east window is a fine example of reticulated switch-line tracery. Conventual buildings such as Portumna associated with the various religious orders that worked in the diocese were constructed to accommodate a relatively large number of religious and lay brethren, Some of them also functioned as hospitals and schools. The site is a National Monument in the care of the state since 1951. For a succinct history of the building one should read Michael Mac Mahon's *Portumna Priory*.



Seventeenth-Century Mural Plaques

Wall or mural plaques to give them their proper term are a feature of the seventeenth century but study shows that they also carry on in use to the second half of the eighteenth century. They mainly consist of rectangular limestone slabs and can be either framed by an ornate moulding or plain. They bear an inscription either in Latin or English carved in raised or relief lettering. They are a common feature of the many religious houses throughout the region but also occur in a small number of medieval parish churches. They are a high status monument and require much more scholarly attention. They can bear some very interesting genealogical material generally referring to local Gaelic families. Their presence allows family histories be taken much further back in time than the generally available documentary evidence allows. The example shown here was erected c.1674 to Colonel Dermot Daly of Killimor Daly. It is preserved in nearby Kilconnell Abbey.



Vernacular House

This tastefully restored house in Meelick is a fine example of a locally built traditional house. Buildings such as these are described as vernacular houses due to their being built by local country craftsmen to a traditionally known plan without the aid of an architect. They made use of local materials such as stone, straw or reeds for roofing and lime which was burned locally as a bonding agent and for whitewashing. This particular example is referred to as a direct entry house. The direct entry house differs from a lobby entry house in that it has the door positioned at the opposite end of the kitchen to the chimney, therefore the door can open directly into the room. Lobby entry houses on the other hand are distinguished from outside by the chimney and door being located in the same general position. To overcome draughts and to stop smoke a small lobby or partition is constructed inside the door in these examples. Thus the name lobby entry. Vernacular generally consist of a central kitchen with a room on either side of the kitchen. this example has an additional room added to the right supposedly used by a journeyman craftsman.



The Irish Workhouse Centre

Locals turn out in force to remember

The Irish Workhouse Centre, Portumna opened on Friday, 15th July at 10 a.m. A large crowd of local people came to acknowledge the event. The aim of the project is to tell the story of the Irish Workhouse and to find new, sustainable uses for all the old buildings and the site. Mick Fogarty, Chairperson of SE Galway IRD welcomed the large attendance. SE Galway IRD was set up by members of the community in 1997. The purpose of the company is to promote, support and engage in local development initiatives that benefit the area. While SE Galway IRD is heading up this project, the chairperson stated that the Irish Workhouse Centre would not be open, without the help of a large number of dedicated local volunteers, the Rural Social Scheme and organisations such as Galway County Council, Galway Rural Development Ltd. and the Heritage Council, who provided funding.

Ursula Marmion, IRD manager and co-ordinator of the Irish Workhouse Centre acknowledged the work of all concerned. She gave an overview of work done to date. The buildings were in a very vulnerable condition when this project started. Work so far has concentrated on carrying out essential conservation works, in particular re-roofing the buildings. She stated that today was a significant milestone in the life of the project and added that a lot more work needs to be done, before the full potential of the complex is realised. She continued that there is still significant unused space. Two things will underpin any future works. New uses will need to be appropriate to the site and will need to be sustainable financially.

The Reverend Patrick Towers, Church of Ireland, Fr. Brendan Lawless, Parish Priest Portumna and Reggie Goodbody, Society of Friends (Quakers) blessed the complex, remembering in particular people who had gone before us. Little physical evidence remains of people ever having occupied the workhouse, with the exception of three leather boots, two belonging to women and one small child's boot, that were found during the clean up of the complex. However, as pointed out during the blessing, these people, who were in dire poverty from the 1840s onwards, live within us, in memory and genetically.

Volunteer Guide, Pat Madden, then gave a presentation on the Irish Workhouse. This was followed by a short film, which was made in Portumna Workhouse last year, with the help of the Galway Film Centre.

The Irish Workhouse Centre was open 7 days a week, 9.30 to 6 p.m. until the end of August. In 2012, the centre will be open from April to October. No booking is required. Visitors enter the centre via the waiting room, the actual room that people would have come in if they were seeking admission to the workhouse. The short film is then shown in what was the girls' classroom. After this visitors can go through the girls' yard, the women's dormitory block, including the matron's quarters, the nursery and the women's workroom. The tour then proceeds into the laundry building. Visitors can guide themselves by following the numbered story boards or can be accompanied by a local, volunteer guide. Admission fees are Adult €5, Seniors/Students €3 and Families €12. Group discounts are also available. For further information or if you would like to become a "Friend of the Irish Workhouse Centre" tel: 090-9759200 www.irishworkhousecentre.ie

Ursula Marmion.

(Eds. Note) This project has been getting tremendous praise and acclaim since it opened. The work undertaken on the historic workhouse fabric and the way in which the story of the workhouse is presented to the public is very professional and most effective. If you have not managed to visit the Irish Workhouse Centre yet please put it in your diary for next year. Also if you would like to contribute time as a volunteer guide make contact with Ursula – full training will be provided.

This project promises to be a flagship project for tourism and heritage in East Galway and already is making its mark. Visit the web address shown above for some of the comments.

The Portumna Workhouse minute books are missing making it very difficult for the historical research team to build up a comprehensive human history of the place. However, the public have been very good in coming forward with snippets of information. Please keep this material coming in and if by chance any of our members or readers out there know of the whereabouts of the minute books please let us know. There may also be other interesting published material that you are aware of that pertains to the workhouse or perhaps objects of cultural value related to the workhouse that you might have and be willing to donate or lend. If so the Irish Workhouse Centre would welcome them.

This year for National Famine Day which was celebrated on Saturday September 10th over thirty members of the Western Archaeological and Historical Society (WAHSoc) enjoyed a wonderful trip to the Irish Workhouse Centre guided by Pierce Joyce. Also present on the day was Dr Maggie Roynane lecturer in archaeology at NUI Galway. Maggie had with her a number of her students some of whom are working on aspects of famine related archaeology. Their presence here was significant as it highlights how the Irish Workhouse Centre can contribute and be of benefit to all levels of education. WAHSoc members were very impressed by what they heard and saw on the tour. WAHSoc chairman Aiden Clarke complimented Pierce on his professionalism and deep knowledge of the workhouse and congratulated South East Galway IRD on their foresight and determination in developing such a valuable project.

The History of Ballinasloe Canal: An appeal for Source Material

The Ballinasloe branch of the Grand Canal was built in a relatively short period of four years. Between 1824—28. although the line was closed fifty years ago in 1961 and since 1966 Bord na Mona has constructed an industrial railway along more than half of its length there is still much of the architectural fabric which survives, most of it in fair condition. For example four of the five original bridges are still extant at Cuan na Canalach and Poolboy, near Ballinasloe, and at Lismanny and Kylemore near Laurencetown. The stone work of the original two locks at Fannings Lock (in Riasec, across the River Shannon from Shannon Harbour) and at Kylemore is still mostly intact. The line's only large aqueduct one kilometre west of Lismanny Bridge, (over the Cloonascragh/Ballinure River) is very much complete. A sure testimony to the superior stonework invested in its construction.

Several of the bridges have benefitted from restoration work undertaken by St Brendan's Rural Social Scheme but the aqueduct is completely overgrown and would benefit from a sensitive clean up which would reveal the high quality of workmanship employed during its construction.

Much primary source material is available for the canal during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. But there is a shortage of photographic material, business records, newspaper clippings and such sources. Some folk memories of then line have been collected by many are outstanding. If anyone is willing to share information on the canal, no matter of what kind, I would be greatly obliged if they would make contact with me at 085 710 75 7569 or get in touch with any member of the society. Whatever material is furnished will be acknowledged,. All my research will go towards a visual presentation of the Ballinasloe line during 2012.

James Scully.



Some of the many visitors present at the Irish Workhouse Centre open day on Sunday August 21 for Heritage Week 2011.