



South East Galway Archaeological & Historical Society

Newsletter No 9

Spring 2012

Lectures - Spring 2012

Tuesday February 28th

Lecture by Rory O'Shaughnessy BA, entitled; *St. Colman of Killmacduagh, uncovering the legend, folklore and archaeology.* In Donie O'Meara's Restaurant, Portumna at 8.30pm.

In his lecture Rory will look at a number of sites associated with St. Colman MacDuagh and also examine the rich legends and folklore surrounding the saint. St Colman was founder of Killmacduagh, with its 112ft round tower, the tallest surviving example in the country and its large collection of buildings. It is the least known major early monastic site in Ireland.

Tuesday March 27th

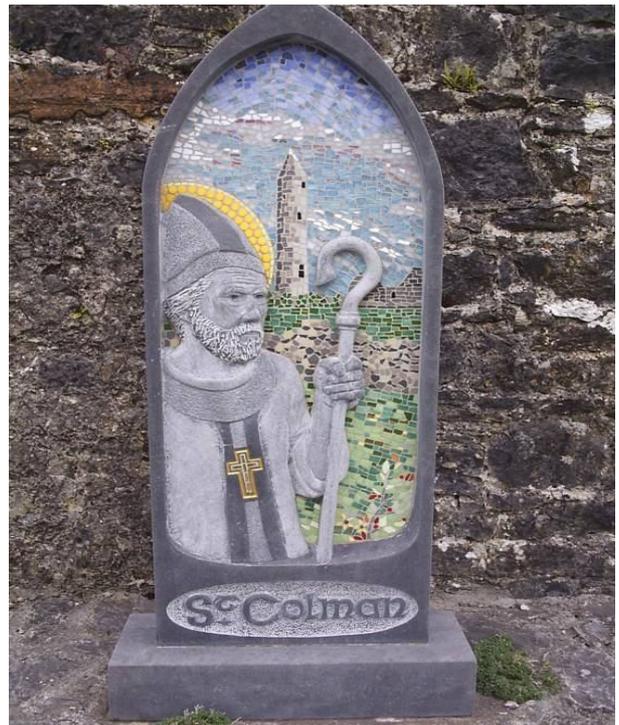
Lecture by Dr Conor McNamara entitled; *The Irish Republican Army at war: the evolution of guerrilla warfare in county Galway, 1920-21.*

In Donie O'Meara's Restaurant, Portumna at 8.30pm. Dr Conor McNamara works for Notre Dame University, Irish Studies Department and is a native of Athenry, County Galway. His study of the War of Independence in county Galway will shortly be published by four Courts Press.

Tuesday April 24th

Lecture by Dr Brian Casey entitled; *Matt Harris and the Irish land question 1878-90* In Donie O'Meara's Restaurant, Portumna at 8.30pm.

The Irish land question dominated discussions in the late nineteenth century, with Michael Davitt and Parnell dominating debates around land reform for farmers in Ireland. This has resulted in the marginalisation of significant regional figures, such as James Daly and John O'Connor Power. While they have been subjected to historical research in recent years, the same cannot be said for Matt Harris, who was one of the most significant regional leaders of the Irish Land League. This lecture will explore some of his ideas and activities regarding the Irish land question from 1876 until his death in 1890. It will show how radical his thought was and how suspicious he was of unity of action because of the harm it would pose to the lower classes in the west of Ireland.



Effigy of St Colman by Colin Grehan sculptor at Gort library

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

Getting to Know Your Monuments

Christy Cunniffe

Fulacht fiadh

A previously unrecorded fulacht fiadh recently discovered in Bohabui townland in the Slieve Aughty uplands is just one example of the monuments awaiting discovery in quiet places such as this. Traditionally regarded as cooking places, these monuments of Bronze-Age date appear on the landscape as horse-shoe shaped mounds of burnt stone and other fired material. They are found either in wet places or adjacent to streams. Stones sometimes referred to as pot-boilers are first heated in a fire and when hot enough transferred to a water-filled trough cut into the earth. By the continuous addition of heated stones to the water the temperature is eventually raised to boiling point and can be used for cooking and other functions such as bathing. They are easily identified in the landscape by their crescent shape and by their appearance in otherwise poor vegetation as rich green fertile mounds of earth and stone.



St Brendan's Tree, Clonfert

Devotion at holy wells and sacred trees is still quite common throughout rural Ireland. This example in the woodland near the cathedral at Clonfert consists of a holy well dedicated to St Brendan. It manifests itself in the form of a horse chestnut tree with a small opening in its northern side. In its original form St Brendan's Well consisted of an actual well in the ground located in the corner of a field some three hundred metres south east of here. According to tradition the well was desecrated when a dog drowned in it. It then dried up as is usual for wells that are interfered with in some way. It moved to a new location in the bough of a large ash tree growing on the 'hill of the abbey' about a hundred metres away. The folklore attached to this latter well relates that two young boys climbed the tree and that one of them 'peed' into the waters of the well causing it to fall in a subsequent storm. So once again because the well was desecrated it went dry and was forced to move. The well that people now recognise as St Brendan's Well was only discovered in the earlier part of the twentieth century and was recognised as such due to it resembling the shape of the nearby Romanesque doorway of St Brendan's Cathedral. Pilgrims and people seeking cures for illness visit here and leave votive offerings and requests for cures. In earlier times it was used only for the cure of warts, but in more recent times is used as a place to seek cures for sick children, thus explaining the particular array of votive offerings left by believers. To effect a cure it is commonly believed that one must make three visits and leave something by way of an offering at the tree.

Lime Kiln

Joseph Mannion and James Scully examining one of the many lime kilns scattered throughout the Slieve Aughty region. One of the interesting features of the Slieve Aughty kilns is that they are all situated adjacent to roads. The reason for this is that the underlying geology in the region comprises of old red sandstone, therefore, limestone was non-existent and had to be imported from the lower limestone rich areas, thus necessitating a good road system. When burned, the lime was used to improve the mainly acid rich blanket bog and peaty soils of the region. Lime Kilns are marked on the first edition OS maps of the 1840s and can be identified by means of a small circle with a black dot located in the bottom. Quite a number of lime kilns still survive in the landscape though, they are by-and-large in a poor state of preservation. However, they should all be recorded and photographed before they fall into total decay.



THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN PARISH CHURCH OF KILTORMER.

By Christy Cunniffe

Introduction

The modern parish of Kiltormer was formed by the amalgamation of the former civil parish of Kiltormer with part of the civil parish of Clonfert. The latter portion equates to the half-parish of Laurencetown. The medieval parish of Kiltormer upon which the civil parish was based is likely to have evolved in the thirteenth century when we first see formal parishes occurring in Connacht. It is first recorded in the Ecclesiastical Taxation 1302-06 as *Killermore* in the Deanery of Clonfert and is valued at 15s with a tithe payable of 18d. We hear of it again in the 1417 Rentals of Clonfert, where it is rendered this time as *Kyltormoyre* and is recorded as paying 1 mark to the bishop. A papal bull of 1463 identifies a Nicholas Ofathyd (O Fahy) as holding the position of vicar of *Kylcromhyr*. The Episcopal Visitation of Roland Bourke of c. 1571 records that the benefice of *Kyltormoyre* was collated to Willelmus Pindrogas (William Prendorgast) the vicar of the parish at that time.

John O'Donovan notes in the Ordnance Survey Letters of 1838 that the name 'is pronounced in Irish by the people' as 'Cill Tormóir'. He also records that in the 'townland of Kiltormer East is an old grave-yard still in use, in which stood the old Protestant church of the Parish, in which service was performed until a few years ago, when it was thrown down; the foundation of it merely is now discernible'. His locating it in the townland Kiltormer East is erroneous it is in fact situated in Kiltormer West, the entry itself is interesting as it shows that Kiltormer was one of the churches that continued in use as a post Reformation church by the Established Church. Most medieval churches abandoned and fell into disuse and over time became derelict as there was only a small Protestant population to take them over, while the majority Catholic population was prohibited under pain of the Penal Laws from using these old sites.

The medieval church fell out of use and was pulled down and replaced by a new Protestant church on an alternative site in the townland of Newtown Eyre. The first mention of this building in a published document is by Samuel Lewis in 1837. He notes that there was a 'parish church, Roman Catholic chapel and a national school' in Kiltormer at that time. The parish church as noted by Lewis was for Protestant use and was built in 1815 on a site given by T. Stratford Eyre, Esq. It was erected with the help of a gift of £600 and a loan of £200 from the Board of First Fruits. It is described as 'a neat edifice with a square tower, enclosed in a planted area'. It was taken out of use for public worship in the 1960s and now lies as a sad semi-ruined building within its tree-covered graveyard setting. Members of local Protestant gentry families such as the Eyre's of Newtown Eyre are buried here. Undoubtedly the 'parish church' referred to by Lewis is this ruined Protestant church, and the 'chapel' is the current Catholic parish church.

The Catholic church consists of a T-shaped structure that seems to have started its life as a simple single-chamber barn church. It has a set of three very interesting stained glass windows by Clarke of Dublin. The colouring and style is very much in keeping with the work of Joshua Clarke, father of the famous stained glass artist Harry Clarke. The double-light window to the rear of the altar bears an image of 'The Sacred Heart' and 'Our Lady' with a small inset of St Patrick above in the point of the window. The windows in the transepts depict St Brendan, the patron saint of the diocese, and St Columkille.

Three interesting stoups or holy water fonts bearing initials and dated respectively appear to be from an earlier pre-Emancipation church. The legend on the two stoups in the front porch read: IAK 99 and M:K 1822, while the third one in the right transept reads: T:W:D Jan^r 1824. These stoups are significant as all three are pre-Emancipation in date. The first two appear to be donated by members of the same family whose initial letter was K, Kelly perhaps? This demonstrates that Kiltormer had a Catholic chapel prior to 1829 the year of Catholic Emancipation. The oldest of the three stoups bearing a 1799 date implies a construction date for that chapel at least as early as 1799, though it could be even earlier.

A rectangular enclosed holy well dedicated to St Patrick lies to the west of the medieval graveyard in Kiltormer West.



Pre-Emancipation holy water stoup

According to local tradition it was always visited on Garland Sunday, the first Sunday of August. An incised limestone plaque in the back wall of the well bears the date 1718. The well was restored to its present condition a number of years ago. According to an interesting piece of local folklore a large erratic boulder of granite in the field opposite the graveyard gate is also associated with St Patrick and was supposedly split in half by the powers of the saint. A plain equal armed cross with chamfered edges now used as grave-marker has the appearance of a 17th century cross and is all that survives from the earlier church.



St Patrick's Well with the site of the medieval parish church in the background.



Image of St Patrick banishing the serpents from Ireland carved on a panel on the side of fine octagonal baptismal font within the church.

Biography of Fr. John Fahy – Radical Priest

Jim Madden, Banagher one of our members will publish a biography of Fr. John Fahy 1893-1969 in late Spring.

Fr. Fahy, a Clonfert diocesan priest and a native of Kilnadeema, Loughrea was a noted Republican and agrarian activist throughout his tempestuous and controversial life.

The biography outlines the life of Fr. Fahy from his earliest days in Galway and Maynooth and his gun-running I.R.A. activities as a young priest in Scotland until his final days in Abbey.

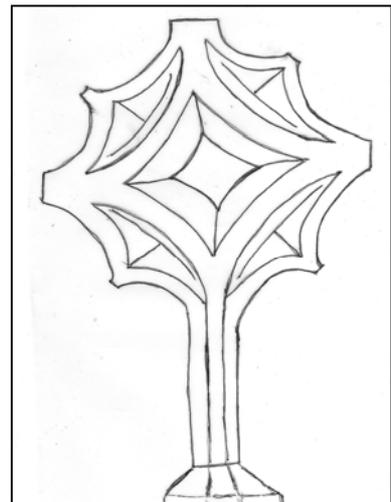
His anti-annuities campaign with Peadar O'Donnell leading eventually to his arrest, trial and imprisonment in Galway Jail in 1929 receive close scrutiny.

In 1957 while serving in Lusmagh he set up Lia Fáil “to secure that all the lands and sources of wealth in Ireland be preserved for the Irish people”. Almost single-handedly he wrote the ten issues of a highly inflammatory newspaper also called Lia Fáil.

Controversial Lia Fáil activities in 1959 resulted in court appearances and jail sentences for some of its members. A highly-charged Garda raid on Fr Fahy's house at that time made national headlines. The raid and the subsequent Dáil Eireann debate are described in detail. Evidence from State Papers, Diocesan archives, Newspaper reports and personal testimonies informs the work throughout which carries a Foreword by Professor Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh recently retired from N.U.I. Galway.

Fr. Fahy is related to two famous Galway hurling families. He is an uncle of members of the Fahy family who hurled for the county and a grand-uncle of the well known Cooney hurling dynasty from Bullaun. He served in Dundee (Scotland), Eyrecourt, Clostoken, Bullaun, Kilconnell, Ballinakill, Lusmagh and Abbey/Duniry.

A recent find at Clonfert graveyard



The above object consists of an interesting section of late medieval tracery found in spoil dumped over the wall at Clonfert graveyard. Its place and mode of discovery highlights a number of important aspects. Firstly, that there is always something new to be discovered, and secondly that graveyard spoil heaps are archaeologically sensitive places but also have great potential. What if this dump of stones was removed during a clean up and this piece went undiscovered only to be dumped into road fill or used for some similar purpose. This is an example of where a careful scan of these dumps can recover something that has the potential to add an important layer to our knowledge of a site. It also highlights the reason why it is prohibited under the National Monuments Act to remove stone from an archaeological monument.

Initial thoughts were that it was a piece of window tracery. However, on closer inspection it was found to have mirrored chamfers on both back and front. It is of too thin a profile to be a part of a window, added to that it has no glazing grooves, dismissing the window option. Close examination shows that the piece was meant to be seen from both sides so the case for it being part of a shrine or alternatively a section of tracery from an ornamental tomb, similar to the example found in the nave of Kilconnell Abbey had also to be dismissed. So then what could it be? While it resembles in many ways all three previous options, the object is clearly consistent with the head of either a late medieval graveyard cross or a cross from a church gable. Either way it is the head of a very elaborate late medieval cross. The preferred option of the writer is a graveyard cross, if only because it so exotic and would have been quite a significant feature in the graveyard at Clonfert. The rather rough sketch on the right provides a conjectural view of how it may have functioned and looked. CC