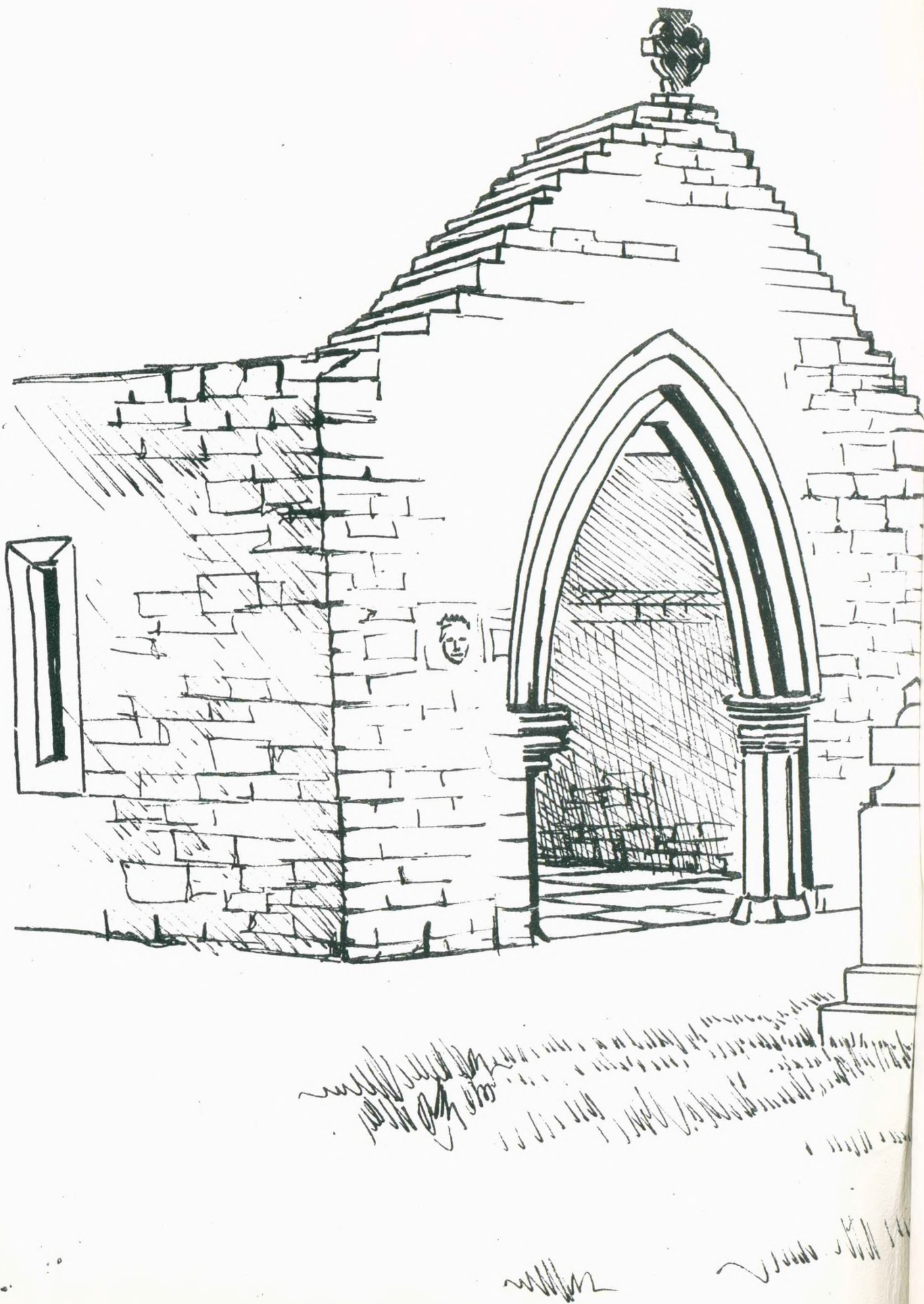


kilcorban priory

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Dominican Order - Irish Province

Kilcorban priory

Hugh Fenning, O.P.



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On the Dominican front, I would like to thank contributors Fathers Valkenberg, Harty and O'Donovan, Sister Rose and the Taylor's Hill community, the Galway Tertiaries and Mary O'Donovan, Cork. I received valuable assistance in my own research from Fr. Kevin Egan, C.C., Portumna; Patrick Milvin, Dail Librarian; Michael McMahon, Corofin, Co. Clare; Sr. Aedan, L.S.U., Banagher, in addition to the contributors listed above, and also from the Killeen-Tynagh community, especially Mary Purcell and Bill Noone, Kilcorban. My thanks to Trudi Killeen, Portumna, and Donal Burke, Eyrecourt for their beautiful artistic impressions of Kilcorban, and to Michael Burke, Oldthort for his local map and drawing to scale of the whole area. To Pdraig Kilduff, Des Conroy, Tom O'Connor and Stan Shields of the Connacht Tribune, our thanks for the photographs, and to Patrick O'Reilly, too, for his invaluable assistance with the proof reading.

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Finally, could I thank our Parish Priest, Fr. Kevin Ryle and Bishop Joseph Cassidy of Clonfert Diocese for their support and encouragement. The dream would never have become a reality without the financial help of the local community, so to them my last tribute for their interest and enthusiasm. May Kilcorban be for them and for all of us a reminder of our glorious history and monastic heritage, and may Our Lady of Kilcorban again "continually confirm the catholics in the true faith and devotion to the Queen of Heaven" (O'Heyne).

CATHAL STANLEY, C.C.

PREFACE

THIS booklet contains a series of articles on various aspects of Kilcorban Priory that will enable the average reader to grasp the notable features of its history and evolution from St. Corban to 1987. Kilcorban has many distinctive features, some of which have only come to light recently as a result of its archaeological and architectural restoration and others following our research for this publication. The first Dominican Tertiary or 3rd Order Foundation in Ireland was established at Kilcorban in 1445 and a glance through their documentation will give some idea of how these Lay Dominicans lived their semi-monastic way of life at that time. This has particular relevance as we approach the International Synod on the role of Lay men and women in the church so that perhaps a revival of Kilcorban Tertiaries might be very appropriate at this time. The great number of wooden figures that originated in Kilcorban is the most remarkable aspect of its history including apparently the Clonfert, Athlone and Mullagh figures, whose origins had not been known hitherto. Not only is Our Lady of Kilcorban the oldest wooden statue in Ireland, it also has an amazing record as the instrument of supernatural cures of healing, which are of considerable contemporary interest at home and abroad in this Marian age. Considerable research has still to be done before we have a complete history of Kilcorban but this publication should bridge many of the gaps and encourage others to pursue its remarkable and unique story by further research.

Slán agus Beannacht dhíbh go léir.

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The Dominicans of Kilcorban

By HUGH FENNING, O.P.

THE story of religious orders in the Church goes back to the hermits and monks of Egypt; back to St. Anthony of the desert, the "father of monks," who died about fifty years before St. Patrick was born at the other end of the western world. The example of these "desert fathers" was quickly followed by others in Italy and France, who wished to live in solitary places as hermits, or else in community (following a rule) as monks. St. Patrick may well have met them in Rome, Auxerre or England. When he finally came to Ireland, no longer a slave but a bishop; he used bishops and priests indeed, but Ireland soon had monks of its own and that monastic element in the Irish church became ever stronger after St. Patrick's death. St. Brendan the Navigator, founder of the church at Clonfert, was himself a monk. Abbots and superiors of the great monasteries came to have more power than the bishops themselves. A number of these Celtic monasteries, among them Aughrim, Clonfert and Clontuskert, lay within the present boundaries of the diocese of Clonfert. Two others, Kilmacduagh and Tuam, though outside the diocese, lie within the modern county of Galway. The fact that three of them, Clonfert, Kilmacduagh and Tuam, gave their names to modern dioceses, within so relatively small an area, gives one some idea of just how influential they were.

Even most of the Celtic saints were monks, including possibly the Corban or Corbran who gave his name to Kilcorban itself. Beyond the fact that his feast-day fell on 19th July and that he was styled "Corbran of Cluana," scarcely anything is known about him. The scholars cannot even say where "Cluana" was. Corban, who is said to have died in 732, probably gave his name to Ballycorban in the parish of Ballinakill, about eight miles south-west of Kilcorban. The church of Nass, Co. Kildare, was dedicated to a St. Corban until the arrival of the Normans, and the kings of Leinster were buried there up to 909. In county Limerick there was a saint, Cuirbhín the Pious, with a feast-day on 20th July, but the experts are unwilling to identify him with our St. Corban. Nor will they grant, for lack of evidence, that there was a Celtic monastery at Kilcorban. Local tradition insists there was, and nothing could be more likely. It is enough to imagine a "cell" with a handful of monks, rather than the swarming crowds at Clonmacnois or Tallaght. It is not, however, listed among those churches of Uí Maine which became part of the 'paruchia' of Clonmacnois according to the registry of that monastery. Nor does it occur in the Clonfert episcopal ventae of 1402, which might have indicated that it was monastic, as the lands of the monasteries were handed over to the bishops in the early 13th century.

With the coming of the Norsemen from about the year 800, these early monasteries were looted time and again, especially since those hardy seamen brought their longships all the way up the Shannon from Limerick into the heart of the country. They were looted also by the native Irish in the course of tribal wars, and in some cases were looted by monks of other monasteries. In these discouraging circumstances some monasteries were abandoned forever. Others survived, shadows of their former selves, until St. Malachy brought a new form of the religious life, a new religious order from France in 1140. These were the canons regular of Arrouaise who devoted themselves to the service of particular churches and ministered to the people of the area. Not being monks, they did not have to till the soil to support themselves. Within the diocese of Clonfert, they took over the old Celtic monasteries of Aughrim, Clontuskert and Confert, besides founding later a new one at Abbeygormican in the parish of Mullagh. Better still, they established four houses for nuns of the same congregation, canonesses regular, at Clonfert, Oghil, Cloonoghil, and Killinmulrooney (Cuilleen near Ballinasloe). The "rule of Arrouaise" came from France, but those who adopted and followed it within the diocese of Clonfert were Irish of the Irish.

When the Normans came to settle, hardly twenty years after St. Malachy's death, at least they came as Christians and left the canons regular undisturbed. They too, encouraged new religious orders, particularly the Cistercian monks whom the Normans valued for their hard work and skill as farmers. Curiously, the Cistercians made no firm foundation in the diocese of Clonfert; although their abbey of Dunbrody in county Wexford owned a chapel at Portumna dedicated to SS. Peter and Paul, it suited their purposes so little that they later gave it away. On the other hand, the Normans brought to Clonfert in 1252 the one and only monastery of Carthusian monks, at Kilnalahan in the parish of Abbey – Duniry (civil parish of Ballinakill) ever to be founded. These austere men, each of whom kept mostly to his own cell and tiny garden, died out or withdrew to England in less than a century.

The most familiar of the new religious orders that followed the Normans to Ireland, are the mendicant friars of "begging brothers" – Carmelites, Dominicans, Franciscans and others – that sprang up in southern Europe in the first half of the thirteenth century, and gained such a following that they reached Ireland almost as soon as they were born. Not being monks, they had no particular interest in acquiring land. Not being canons regular, they left the administration of the sacraments to the diocesan clergy. All sought to recapture the simplicity of early Christian life; all lived on alms; all led a communal life, under a definite Rule, making the usual vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. Yet each group had its own vision and purpose. The Carmelites emphasized the importance of prayer, as they still do today. The Franciscans were eager followers of "Lady Poverty," full of the joy which came from setting their hearts on God rather than on worldly possessions. While sharing the same ideals, the Dominicans took on themselves the task of preaching the Gospel, particularly to the many good Christians of the time who tended to form or join heretical sects, because so many bishops neg-

lected to teach Christian doctrine, so many priests were too ignorant to do so properly, while the monks had their lands to look after and were not supposed, in any case, to leave their monasteries. Hence it was that St. Dominic, a Spaniard and a Canon Regular, created an Order of Preachers: a highly mobile task-force, largely of priests, well grounded in theology and ready to preach the Gospel message wherever they were needed.

Each of these orders had its own distinctive dress or habit, not much different from that worn by the peasants of Europe at the time. Essentially they wore long tunics, held at the waist by a belt or cord. They also wore a hood and mantle, particularly outdoors. With this basic outfit they were popularly and easily distinguished by the colour of the cloth. Thus the Franciscans were styled Greyfriars, the Carmelites Whitefriars, and the Dominicans Blackfriars. Strictly speaking, the Dominican habit was and is white, but they have always worn a black cloak and hood outdoors.

The Dominicans first reached Ireland in 1224, when they established a double beach-head at Dublin and Drogheda. Milo de Bermingham founded a house for them at Athenry in 1241, and Athenry was to remain the most important Dominican house in Connacht until about 1800. On their expulsion from the town, the Athenry community lived at Esker from the 1620's until 1895 when they made a gift of their large house to the bishop.

It is strange but true that long years were to pass before friaries of any mendicant order were established in the diocese of Clonfert. The Carmelites of Loughrea were the first to appear, about the year 1300, under the patronage of Richard de Burgo, earl of Ulster. They are also the only mendicant friars in the diocese today. The next to appear, in 1371, were the Franciscans, who set up house in the Carthusian monastery at Kilnalahan, which had been lying vacant for thirty years. Here again the founders were de Burgos. In 1414, the Dominicans made their first foundation in the diocese by taking over the chapel at Portumna, which the Cistercians of Dunbrody no longer wished to use. The papal document authorizing this new foundation refers to it as "the house of the Blessed Mary and of Saints Peter and Paul." The official founders were the O'Maddens, local chieftians of Uí Maine (Hy Many) based at Longford Castle near Boula. The change from Norman to purely Irish patronage reflects the changing political scene in Connacht, but it is more significant in this context that Portumna was the first new house in Ireland of a movement within the Dominican order aimed at recovering the true spirit of St. Dominic. At much the same time, both the Franciscans and Augustinians had "reform" movements of their own, and it is noteworthy that these attempts to restore "regular observance" were far more successful in Connacht than in any other province.

The same year, 1414, which brought the Dominicans to Portumna, saw the establishment of the Franciscans both at Meelick and Kilconnell. Meelick, another O'Madden foundation, became officially Observant in 1479. Kilconnell, founded by William O'Kelly, lord of Uí Maine, also adopted the observant reform in 1467. None of these foundations could have been made, least of all in the same year, without the consent of the then bishop of Clonfert, who happened to be a Dominican named Thomas O'Kelly.

Each order of friars had a "second order" of enclosed nuns, but for some strange reason there were no Dominican nuns in Ireland in medieval times. Even in England, where conditions would have suited them better, there was only one. The friars also had "third orders" for the laity, men and women, married and unmarried, some of whom lived in communities "of the third order regular" and others not. Membership of these groups was open also, as it still is, to diocesan priests. The creation of religious communities of laypeople, necessarily unmarried people of the same sex, was greatly promoted by the Irish Franciscans who established more than forty of them in various parts of the country. Almost invariably these were communities of men, some of whom became priests while remaining tertiaries. Bishop Thomas O'Kelly, O.P. of Clonfert authorized such a Franciscan community of the third order regular at Clonkeenkerrill (parish of Ballymacward) in 1435. Another was founded at Kilboght before the century was out.

The Dominicans too had tertiaries, "brothers and sisters of the third order of penance of St. Dominic," of whom St. Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) is still the most famous. Thanks to two of her Dominican disciples, Thomas Caffarini and Raymond of Capua, Pope Innocent VII formally approved the Rule of these tertiaries in 1405. Some twenty years later, in the winter of 1426-1427, a few Irish Dominicans were busy at Rome obtaining papal favours of various kinds. Among the documents they brought home were confirmation of the establishment already made at Portumna and an official copy of this Third Order rule. Obviously this text was already needed by tertiaries in the area, or plans were better "afoot" to enroll tertiaries to observe it.

Dominicans at Kilcorban

Another party of Dominicans were at work in Rome in the early summer of 1445, led or inspired by John Fitzrery, "vicar of the preachers in Ireland." They procured indulgences for those who would give alms towards the repair of the Dominican church at Athenry, which had been damaged by fire, or the Dominican house "of observance" at Roscommon, which had been burnt and totally destroyed in warfare. This group also brought home a third document – a document bearing on Kilcorban itself – addressed by Pope Eugene IV to the abbot of Abbeygormican on 15th March, 1445.

According to this important commission, Thomas, Bishop of Clonfert, with the unanimous consent of the dean and cathedral chapter, had freely given to the brothers and sisters of the third order of St. Dominic, the chapel of Kilcarbane hitherto belonging to the parish of Killimor-Bulloge, as bishop Thomas had explained in a recent petition to the Pope. The tertiaries were already resident in Kilcarbane (Kilcorban) where the bishop had also given them "some pieces of land, walls and adjacent property of the chapel in question, with other lands donated by the faithful for their use and habitation." This donation needed papal approval, but although bishop Thomas

had formally asked for it, the Pope did not have the full and definite information he would have liked before reaching a decision. Thus it was that His Holiness gave full authority to the abbot of the Canons Regular of Abbeygormican to settle the whole question of Kilcorban to the satisfaction of all concerned.

Apart from this papal document, we also have one of the petitions which inspired it. From this, two small but interesting details emerge. The bishop's gift, for instance, had been made some time before ("alias" in Latin). It had also been made at the request of the brothers and sisters of the third order of St. Dominic "for their use and habitation." Since foundations of this kind were often made in Ireland before it occurred to anyone to obtain the consent of Rome, the "Thomas, bishop of Clonfert," who gave Kilcorban to the tertiaries may even have been Thomas O'Kelly, himself a Dominican, though dead since 1441. No other "Thomas" occupied the see of Clonfert for more than a century after him. All things considered, the tertiaries were probably in possession of the chapel at Kilcorban from about 1440, and living in the neighbourhood (without owning the chapel) for quite some time before.

And what can one say of the chapel among the woods of Kilcorban as the Dominicans found it on their arrival? At all events, it was a parochial chapel and not a monastic one. One finds it listed in 1305 as one of the six churches comprising the deanery of Duniry: poor indeed, but yet an independent parish church. Kilcorban again appears as a parish church in 1398. By 1445, as we have seen, it had slipped in rank to the level of what we may call a chapel-of-ease within the parish of Killimor-Bulloge. To judge only by the present ruin of the site, one would say that the Dominicans found the place in urgent need of repair. Apart from some rounded boulders of tawny sandstone, called locally "Greek stone," (i.e. grit stone) recently removed from the base of the north wall of the church, just east of the side chapel, Kilcorban appears to be a late fifteenth-century building mostly in limestone, repaired from time to time up to about 1610. It stands some five miles north-west of Portumna on a slight height about fifty yards west of the Ballyshrule river, which later joins the Cappagh river before entering Lough Derg. No trace remains of the "monastery" which local tradition places on the northern side of the church. The immediate area is rolling, pleasant land, which in the 1440's, might have been heavily wooded. Then, as now, it was off the beaten track, south of the road linking Portumna and Loughrea, a factor which enabled it to survive the first confiscations of the 16th century.

Apart from a chapel in dire need of repair, the Dominicans either found on the spot, or brought with them, the famous "Kilcorban Madonna," a statue in oak of the 12th or 13th centuries. Apart from being the earliest wooden statue known to survive in Ireland, it is our earliest example of a type known as the "Enthroned Madonna," intended to portray Our Lady as mother of the divine as well as of the human nature of Christ. Since the back of the figure is flat, it was probably intended to mount it against a wall. The artist, while true to Romanesque tradition, clearly used a local model for the

Virgin's face, but departed from custom by giving both Mother and Child a charming smile.

A second wooden statue in oak, representing St. Catherine of Alexandria, is said to have come from Kilcorban, and since it is of the fifteenth century, may well have been commissioned by the Dominicans there. The statue is associated with the Kilcorban Madonna, if only because both were preserved in recent times by the parish priest of Tynagh. St. Catherine, who is remembered now largely for the "Catherine's wheel," used in fireworks – a strange destiny for the symbol of her martyrdom – enjoyed a great vogue in medieval Europe. The priory of the canons regular of Aughrim was dedicated to her, and one may find her carved in stone over the west doorway of Clontuskert priory. The Dominicans laid special claim to her as one of the protectresses of the Order. This statue too is of local work and the only Irish statue of the saint in wood which has come down to us.

The Rule of the Third Order

The tertiary rule, so solemnly approved in 1405 and brought from Rome to Athenry in 1426, was written for laypeople living in their own homes. Not a word in the text so much as hints at a "third order regular" living in community. The brothers and sisters "of the order of penance of St. Dominic" formed separate chapters or groups ruled respectively by a lay prior and prioress. These superiors were subject in turn to "a master or director" of the first Order: a Dominican priest entrusted with their spiritual care. Even the first paragraph of the Rule implicitly excludes community life since it insists that married women are not to join the fraternity without the consent of their husbands. They wore a distinctive dress, modelled on that of the friars: white tunics and black mantles for all, with black hoods for the men and white veils for the women. Their commitment to the third order, once they had professed to observe the Rule (after a period of probation) was for life, unless they later chose to enter a religious order "professing the three solemn vows."

Instead of reciting the divine office, as friars and nuns were required to do, the tertiaries were obliged to say the Our Father and Hail Mary at fixed times throughout the day: twenty-eight times in the morning (corresponding to Matins), fourteen times in the evening (corresponding to Vespers) and seven times at each of the other five "Canonical hours." Those who knew the Creed by heart were to say it at three fixed times during the day. One can see that the Rule was framed for the illiterate, but in the matter of prayer it permitted those who could and wished to use the breviary to recite the seven canonical hours instead of the Paters and Aves prescribed for the third order as a whole. The interesting emphasis on the number seven and its multiples was probably inspired by a verse in Psalm 119 – "Seven times a day I praise thee" – which in turn reflects the Jewish idea of seven as a sacred number, signifying completion or perfection. The Rule does not mention the Rosary at all. The tertiaries of Kilcorban may well have used prayer-beads arranged in groups of seven, but the Rosary as we know it today was not developed until after 1475.

Other regulations required the tertiaries to frequent their parish church, to rise at a certain hour, to fast during Lent and Advent, to eat meat only on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Young female tertiaries were never to go out alone; all were forbidden to walk about idly or go to concerts. Special care was taken to visit sick members of the fraternity, to prepare them for death, see to their decent burial and pray for their souls.

Members of the chapter attended separate monthly meetings held by the "master" in the local Dominican church, where they might attend Mass, hear a sermon and discuss some point of the Rule and its observance. While no definite date was set for the men's meeting, the sisters had to assemble on the first Friday of the month.

Such was the Rule followed by the Dominican tertiaries of Kilcorban in the 1440's.

The real question is whether they actually formed a religious community, as so many other Dominican tertiaries were to do some decades later in Germany and Italy, or as so many male Franciscan tertiaries did in Ireland itself from the 1420's. In the very diocese of Clonfert, a Franciscan community of this kind had been established at Clonkeenkerrill in 1435, hardly ten years before the Dominican tertiaries were given Kilcorban. In all likelihood they did form a small community of men, living beside the chapel and working the land attached to it. Why had the bishop and others given them land if not to support a small community? For Mass and other services, they may have employed a diocesan priest, unless one of the tertiaries was already ordained. In any event their "master" or director, a specially designated friar from Portumna or Athenry, came periodically to visit them and may even have resided at Kilcorban. The fact that no trace now remains of any conventual buildings does not prove they never existed. At Drogheda, to take but one example, all that remains of the former Dominican church and prior infinitely more prestigious than Kilcorban, is the lone high tower which formerly separated church and chancel. Nor was Kilcorban the only tertiary foundation in the country. According to papal records there was another house of Dominican tertiaries in the diocese of Tuam in 1475, while in 1489 a certain tertiary wished to build a chapel in honour of Our Lady and St. Dominic in the diocese of Elphin. Besides, the chapel and land at Kilcorban had been given to tertiaries, not to the friars, and although we have an excellent list of benefactions made by the O'Kellys and others to the Dominicans of Athenry up to 1462, there is no mention whatsoever of Kilcorban in that most detailed register. Unfortunately, there is no comparable record from Portumna with which the tertiaries would have had much closer links.

Kilcorban after the Tertiaries

After 1445, we hear little about Kilcorban itself and nothing at all about

Dominican tertiaries there. The tombstones in the cemetery adjoining the chapel, go back to the fifteenth century. Several of these slabs, including the capital of a pillar, were taken from the fabric of the chapel itself, particularly from the south wall which no longer exists. People have been buried there from Portumna, Gortanumera and Killimor. The side-chapel projecting from the north wall, may well have been dedicated to Our Lady in the fifteenth century to honour the Enthroned Madonna. The local overlords were the MacJonack Burkes, who built a castle at Pallas about 1450 and were closely related to the Clanrickard Burkes of Portumna. Both families proved loyal protectors of the clergy, not only at the attempted suppression of the monasteries of Connacht in 1543, but for more than a century afterwards. Thanks partly to their influence, Kilcorban escaped suppression until 1570, and even then its possession, with those of the priory of Athenry, reverted to Richard Burke, second Earl of Clanrickard.

By a curious coincidence, in that very year, 1570, the master general of the Dominicans compiled a list of the convents or houses of the Order in Ireland. And there among the rest, on an equal footing with Limerick and Dublin, one finds "the convent of Kilcorban." The monastery may already have been suppressed, but the more important point is that it had passed from the Third Order to the First. Then or soon after, like Portumna itself, it was absorbed as a "vicarial," or subsidiary house by Athenry.

During the troubled period between 1570 and 1630, the wood-carvers of the neighbourhood were at work again, leaving us with a "crucifical group" of three figures: the crucified Christ, Our Lady and St. John. The group was carved from sycamore in a Counter-Reformation style, and is the only known example of its kind to survive in Ireland. Historians knew nothing of it until 1902 when it was noticed in the parochial house at Tynagh. That presbytery must have been a sort of Aladdin's cave, for yet another wooden figure of Christ crucified came to light there forty years later still. This is thought to be a poor copy of the earlier one and is tentatively dated between 1650 and 1750.

Three priests of the area were pardoned in 1585 for saying Mass. One was Teige M'Knavin of Tynagh. The other two – Murtagh and John M'Knavin – belonged to Kilcorban itself. Since they were styled "priests" rather than "friars," one is inclined to think they belonged to the diocesan clergy. But if so, would such a small place as Kilcorban have required the services of both? There is less doubt about Fr. Ulick Burke, a diocesan priest and pastor of Tynagh, who bought a handsome chalice for that parish in 1637. The nearby priory of Portumna, renamed in honour of the Dominican saint Peter Martyr (d. 1252), got two new chalices at this time: one in 1635 from Dorothy Anslow alias Mulloy and the other in 1645 from Ambrose Madden, O.P., a descendant of the original founders. It has been said that a Dominican of the time belonged to the family of the Burkes of Pallas; this was Oliver Burke, vicar apostolic of Kilmacduagh about 1645.

With the failure of the rebellion of 1641, and the failure of the Catholic Confederation which followed it, Cromwell's armies ruled the land, crushing both the clergy and their Catholic protectors during the ten years known as the Commonwealth. Thomas Burke of Pallas lost much of his property for taking part in the rebellion, and the estate passed to the Nugents of Westmeath. The Burkes of Liskeenard, descended from those of Pallas, held their ground about a mile away from Kilcorban. Both the Nugents and the Burkes buried their dead in the ancient chapel, the former using the lady-chapel (which they eventually roofed in slate) up to 1920. The Clanrickard Burkes, having been more astute during the 1640's, recovered their estates. They enjoyed the favour of Charles II, to whom they had been loyal during the Commonwealth, and remained Catholic until the close of the seventeenth century.

It is said that several bishops and priests lie buried at Kilcorban. Of one at least we can be certain: Thady MacKeogh, O.P., bishop of Clonfert from 1671 until 1687. The Dominican writer, John O'Heyne, one of the bishop's younger contemporaries, describes him so well that it is better to quote O'Heyne's words than to summarise them.

"Dr. Teige MacEogha, bishop of Clonfert, studied very well in the convent of Pamplona [Spain] before his return to Ireland. In his own native convent [of Roscommon] and at Athenry he preached with learning and fluency for many years. He was a knowledgeable and melodious cantor, which is at present not very common among our Irish brethren for want of practice. He was also a man of wonderful firmness, though gentle in his manners, and was most exemplary in all his actions. He stayed for several years with Ulick Burke, marquess of Clanrickard, at London, whence on being made bishop [in 1671] he went home and governed with vigilance the flock committed to his care for at least twenty years. Fortified with all the sacraments of our holy mother the Church, he gave his soul to his creator in 1687 and lies buried in the chapel of the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary, called Kilcortan. Before the ruin of our country this chapel belonged to Athenry abbey, and the statue of the Blessed Virgin, which is devoutly venerated there, is preserved by the noble family of the Burkes of Pallas. The frequent miracles which God works through this statue of the Blessed Virgin continually confirm the Catholics in the true faith and devotion to the Queen of Heaven. It is probable that our venerable bishop, from his profound devotion to the Holy Mother of God, wished to be buried there, for the abbey of St. Peter Martyr of Portumna was almost equally distant from the place in which he died."

While the same writer, John O'Heyne, was a novice at Athenry in 1665, he often read what he calls "an old parchment document" listing the landed property of the convent, and in his old age, as an exile at Louvain in 1706, included as much as he could remember of it in his history of the Irish Dominicans. This old document named some outlying chapels which the friars of Athenry owned and probably served. Among them, in O'Heyne's

account, was "Kellcorbain, with a good farm." But since the author gives the historian Ware as his authority for Kilcorban, it is hard to judge whether Kilcorban was named in the "old parchment document," or was slipped in (as the third of four chapels) by O'Heyne simply on Ware's authority. One way or the other, it is clear that the Dominicans of Athenry owned and cared for Kilcorban. It is equally evident that the figure of the Madonna, although in lay hands, was still being venerated in 1706 at a time when all the bishops and friars had been sent into exile.

Another Dominican historian, Thomas Burke, author of *Hibernia Dominicana* and bishop of Ossory, visited Kilcorban in 1756 but found there only a cabin or two and the walls of the chapel. He also noticed two castles in the neighbourhood both built by the Burkes: one at Pallas, the other – bigger, older and closer to the chapel – at Lisheenard. Without so much as mentioning the Nugents, he simply says that the Burkes of Pallas were an offshoot of those at Lisheenard (the reverse, however, was the case) and that both used Kilcorban as their place of burial. The author, born at Dublin in 1710, then casually adds that he himself, at the time of writing, was head of the Burkes of Lisheenard.

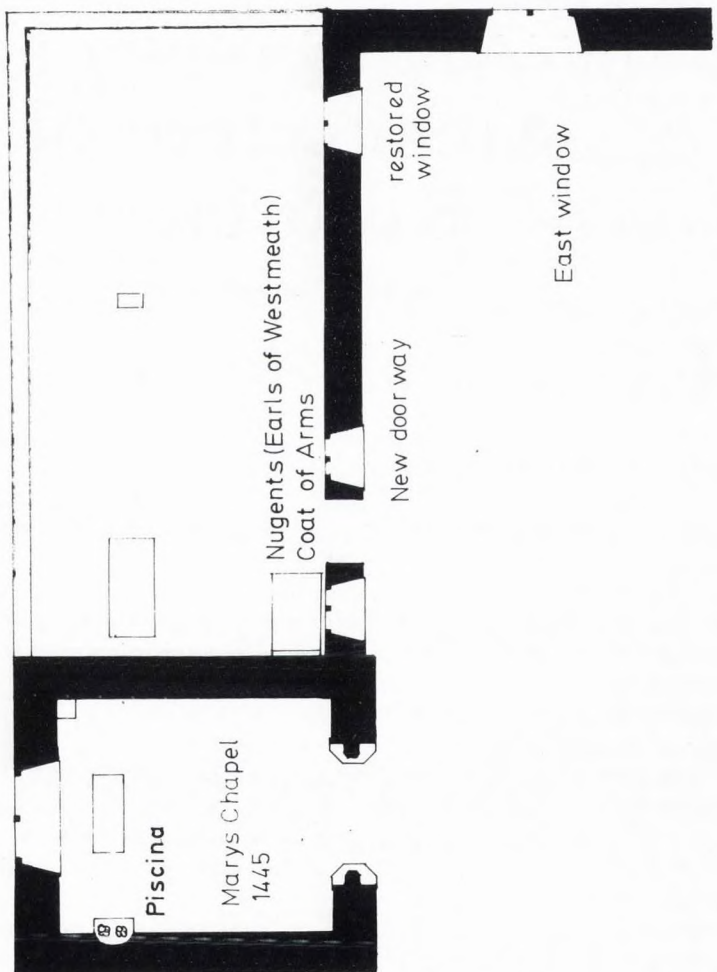
According to local tradition, mass was said at Kilcorban until the church at Killeen was built in 1839. If so, the ruin at Kilcorban must have been roofed in after Thomas Burke's visit in 1756. There was an annual pattern at the holy well nearby, starting on the first Friday of May and continuing through the summer. One wonders whether the "first Friday" was chosen because of a folk-memory reaching back four centuries, since that was the day on which the female tertiaries of Kilcorban held their monthly meetings. Because of the numbers attending this pattern, with consequent damage to surrounding fields and fences, the well was closed in by the Nugents about 1870.

The statues of the Enthroned Madonna and St. Catherine of Alexandria, with the three figures of the "Crucifical group" came from Lisheenard to the parochial house in Tynagh about 1880, but the Madonna was exposed for veneration only on the feast of St. Lawrence (10 August), patron of the parish. A note in the parish Books, about 1902, records the request of an old woman that the Madonna be brought to her bedside, which shows that the memory of miraculous favours was still alive. Subsequently these statues passed to museums in Dublin and Clonfert and were scarcely remembered at Kilcorban.

The old ruin itself became overgrown with ivy. A chapel on the north side, entered by a gothic arch from the nave, was appropriated by the Nugent family as their burial place, the arch being built up and a roof put on which was repaired as late as 1920 by the Earl of Westmeath. Thereafter, the roof deteriorated and the arch collapsed. In 1961 on the recommendation of the National Monuments Advisory Committee, permission being given by the then earl, the arch was excellently restored by the engineering section of Galway County Council. Nothing further was done until the recent restoration work by an A.N.C.O. training scheme, organised by Kilcorban Priory Committee.

Medieval Style Windows
1400-1500

Baptismal stone



West Gable
Door way

A Preliminary Survey of the Archaeology and Architecture of Kilcorban

By JIM HIGGINS, M.A.

THE site is located on relatively flat low-lying land close to the river, in an area where ringforts and other Early Christian sites (like Lickmolaise nearby) are common. Two ringforts are marked in the adjoining townland of Ballynaharry on the Ordnance Survey Map revision of 1947 and several bullaun stones are known from the area.

Very little has been written about the archaeology and architecture of the site. Most of what has been written has summarised (very briefly at that) the known history of the site. (See O'Donovan *et al* (1839) and Gwynn and Hadcock (1937).) Little is known either about the saint after whom the site is named. The rest of what has been written has concentrated mainly on the statue of the KILCORBAN MADONNA or OUR LADY OF KILCORBAN as she is known. This statue which is one of four statues originally at the site, has been described in some detail by McLeod and most recently by Fr. Stanley.

The site has a remarkable collection of stone sculpture, most of which has been organised for display in the Side Chapel or in the Display Area to the east of it. The stones there have had to be properly secured in case of theft.

The stone carvings include some very fine representational sculpture of Our Lady and a miniature carving of a Knights Head on a part of a doorway; both are very fine example of medieval sculpture of 15th/16th century date. Of the grave stones, one has received a brief mention by McNeill, and it and another stone of the same period (late 15th century/early 16th century) are some of the best of their kind in Ireland. A few 16th and 17th century carvings also exist at the site, and there is also a group of late 18th/early 19th century tomb stones decorated with a variety of floral and geometric motifs.

The object of this article is to describe the conservation work which was carried out at Kilcorban Priory during 1986 and 1987 and to describe the archaeological and architectural features of the site. A more detailed study of the archaeology and finds, the architectural features and the art history of the stone sculpture of the site will be published elsewhere.

The writer supervised the archaeological aspects of the site, recorded the stray finds, made records of these finds and the architectural fragments to enable them to be reconstructed. No excavation took place and the finds

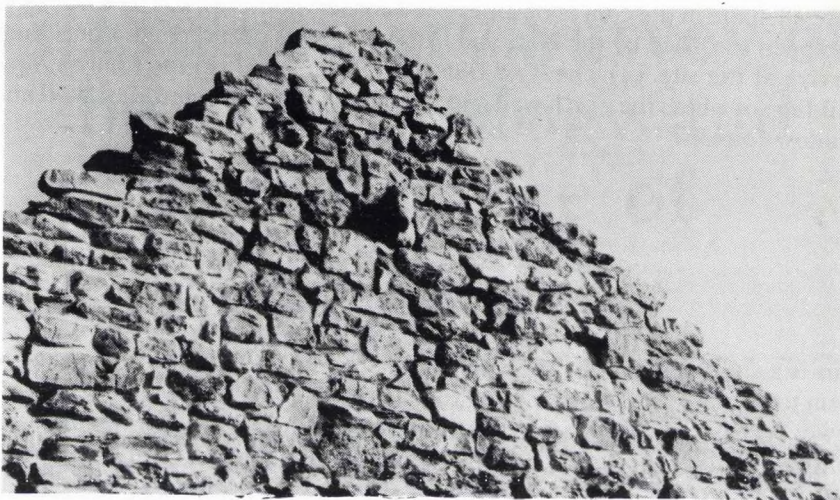
were all made in the course of supervised conservation work. The finds have also been recorded by the National Museum. Parts of three main buildings survive at the site. (a) The *West Gable* (b) *Side Chapel* (c) the *Church Nave* building, of which the north wall and the mainly reconstructed East wall and window remain.

The West Gable

This is a short segment of the west gable of a church building which would seem to predate the other building remains on the site. The wall itself is not, however, easy to date closely. It is built of rough rubble masonry and is a mixture of limestone, granite, conglomerate and sandstone built in irregular courses with numerous small spalls of stone used as pinning. Prior to its reconstruction it was ivy covered and no features could at first be seen in it.

The Inserted Doorway

On removal of the ivy the full extent of the west door could be seen for the first time in years. Unfortunately the ivy had caused the splitting of one of the arched stones of this door. The doorway had been rebuilt at some stage, partly with roughly cut blocks of stone and partly with pieces from another doorway. It had, in any case, been itself an insertion into the wall and the moulding on it and the semi-pointed form would suggest a 15th century date for it. The inside of the embrasure side of the doorway has re-used stones included and some of the stones in the relieving arch above have also been altered. The top of one side of this arched door and the bottom right had been replaced with parts of another door. The original stones were recovered from around the graveyard and were re-inserted in this door, the remaining small areas have been restored in concrete to resemble the original. The interior embrasure of the door has many re-used stones in it. It also retains its "hanging eye" and spud stone in which a heavy wooden door would have hung. The threshold and an area of rough paving around it was pointed during the restoration to prevent the looser stones from being lost. Probing for other pieces of this moulded doorway resulted in the finding of what seems to be a wide wall running below ground beneath this gable and at right angles to it to the right of the doorway. This was not, however, investigated.



The Sandstone Head in the West Gable.

The Carved Stone Sandstone Head

The removal of the thick layers of ivy led to the uncovering of a weathered sandstone head in the upper third of the gable. The stone has a very worn carving depicting a male head with an open mouth, the eyes are small and oval, the nose is badly damaged as is the mouth. Only one large stylized bulbous ear is shown.

The face inclines to the right. This may suggest that it may originally have been one of a pair of such stones which would have been positioned "looking in" from either side of a doorway. The stone is carved from a heavy rectangular block set deeply in the wall and there is no traceable signs of disturbance or insertion.

Both sides of the west gable wall were broken away so that none of the original quoins remained except for the base. There was a fear that the removal of the ivy (which had been cut and allowed to dry out) would weaken this wall, so the corners were restored to the full height of the gable, but were left roughly "stepped" pinned and pointed. The height of the gable was carefully retained. The corners were built up on the foundations of the original wall footings, and stepped so as to support the gable wall.

The ivy had penetrated deep into the wall and much pointing and pinning was required to make it safe. Part of the interior of the wall was left unpointed to show what it looked like before restoration. The area was cleared of ivy, sprayed and gravel was laid down around the wall.

A bullaun stone and a rectangular medieval stone font had lain outside the west gable. The font had been complete according to many of the local people within living memory, but most of two of its sides are now missing. Both of these items were brought, for safety, into the Display Area.

The Chapel

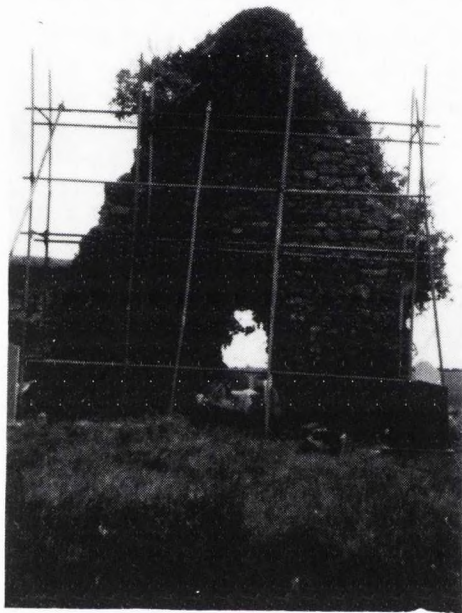
This building has been heavily altered and rebuilt over the centuries. It would appear to have been the side chapel of the main church. The front wall was totally rebuilt after it had collapsed in the 1940's or early 1950's, and the building had previously been restored by the 11th Earl of Westmeath in 1920, when almost all of the top third of each of the side walls was rebuilt. The North Wall was the only one which remained substantially complete, though as with the other walls a thin cement coping and layer of stones had topped the wall.

The South Wall of the Chapel

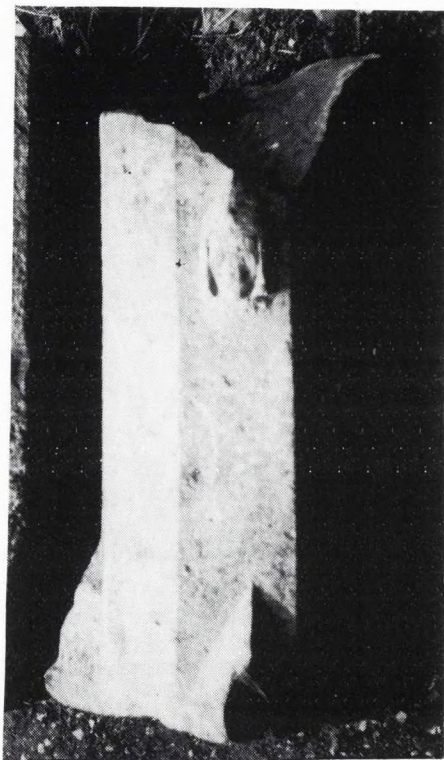
This had been rebuilt after it had fallen in the late 1940's or early '50's by the County Council. Previous to this the Nugent Family had used it as a chapel and tomb and they had inserted a round topped stone archway and a wooden door below the original Gothic Arch.

When the wall fell and was subsequently rebuilt the stones of the late round topped arch were built into the South Wall, front and back and also into the South West wall. Other architectural fragments including some of the coping from the gables and some moulded stones were also incorporated. One stone, with a large wedge-shaped socket in it is still visible in the right of the facade. A large fragmentary stone with a hole hollowed in it was found in the upper built courses and this is now in the Display Area. The wall also has incorporated in it a rectangular block of limestone with a carving of a crowned female face, probably representing the Virgin Mary. This is of 15th century style and the treatment of the carving, especially of the lips, is very similar to that of the miniature carving of the Knights Head now in the Display Area.

The piers of the archway into the Chapel are not of equal height. This is explained by the fact that on the right one stone from the pier, which was recovered from a heap of rubble during conservation, had been omitted. The moulded capitals below the springing of the arch on either side are also different. They do not form a pair, though one of them (that on the right-hand side) is identical to a loose capital found lying loose in what is now the Display Area. It had been taken from the rubble of a destroyed part of the building in the 18th century and used as a grave marker. It bears the date 1709, the initials D.B. and a heart. Interestingly too, it also has a rectangular hole cut in its upper surface. This feature is now termed a "nib hole" or "rynne hole" and would have held the wooden supports keeping the stones and centering of the archway rigid, while it was being constructed. The fact that this is part of a second pair of capitals (its matching stone has not yet been found) shows that there may have been a second aisle with a similar arched entrance.



The West Gable during repair work.



The Stop of a door of 15th, 16th century date with a carved Knight's Head.



The rebuilt North Wall of the Nave.

In restoring the south wall it was decided to bring the wall up in height to match that of the North Gable. While it would have been nice to take this rebuilt wall down completely to extract the re-usable architectural fragments from it, this was not found to be feasible. The architectural fragments which could be re-used immediately including coping stones and pieces of the later round topped door inserted by the Nugents were recovered. The two kneelen stones into which the coping on the gable had slotted, were recovered from the graveyard and were put back in position, using the positions of those *in situ* in the other gable as a guide. The gable was then brought up to the same height as the North gable and repointed. It was hoped to use the later door inserted by the Nugents in the rebuilt part of the North wall of the Nave but not enough of the stones were found.

The North Wall of the Chapel

This had been the least disturbed wall of the Chapel. The whole of the north window had survived, most of its original fabric remained.

The apex had been topped with a concrete cross of recent date which had become severely decayed. The North window was complete although the moulding on the exterior had been shattered in places. The north gable would originally have been a few feet higher than it was before restoration as would the wide walls. The rebuilding of the front (South) wall in the 1940's or 1950's, had been given an awkward looking top.

In the north wall the "kneeler" stones in to which the line of cut stone coping of the gable had slotted had survived in their original position. This allowed us to reconstruct the original profile of the gable and to re-insert some of the coping which had been found lying around in walls and as grave markers. Unfortunately not enough of the coping survived to completely reconstruct it, but an idea of the original profile can be got from the re-inserted pieces.

The tracery of the North window had loosened over the years. Iron bars inserted probably during the restoration of the chapel by the Nugents in 1920 which had held light plain glass had become rusted. These were removed and the tracery was re-lead and re-pointed. This wall was consolidated and pointed, the old plaster which had lined the inside of the chapel had become decayed and it was removed to reveal the stonework. The wall was brought up to the level of the re-inserted coping and stepped so that it can easily be adapted to re-roofing if and when that takes place. The window itself is a fine one with simple plain switch line tracery and a moulding and moulded stops on the exterior. It has glazing grooves indicating that it would have originally held glass.

The South West Wall of the Chapel

This wall was stripped of its modern plaster and the late roughly built restored level and concrete capping were removed.

A narrow ledge had been built by increasing the thickness of both of the side walls resulting in a corbelled out turning. This had been a late addition from the conversion of the chapel into the Nugents family tomb. This gave a vault-like effect on each side wall but no vault had ever been completed.

Decorated Window in the South West Wall

When the modern plaster was removed from the walls it was clear that the inside embrasure of the blocked 15th/16th century window (which is complete) on its exterior had been torn out in order to insert new walling for this corbelled ledge. Only the sill stone and parts of the sidestones had survived. It was clear therefore that if the window was unblocked completely that the corbelled ledge would have to be removed and might collapse, and that it would be difficult to reconstruct the embrasure from the available fragments in any case.

The window, which is a fine late 15th century one, with floral decoration in each of its spandrels was therefore unblocked. In the rubble which had filled it, two pieces of the original mullion of this window and two other fragments were found elsewhere, one in the graveyard and the other built into a wall. The mullion was too fragmentary to pin together, so a new cut stone mullion was inserted in its place and the rest put in the Display Area.

Also found in the blocking of this window was part of the original hood moulding. This was put back in its original position and dyed concrete was used to partly reconstruct the form of the remainder of the moulding. The window opening was then unblocked to about half of its depth and a Liscannor slab backing put in to disguise the remainder of the blocking and to highlight this fine feature. The top courses of the wall were then rebuilt to resemble the original stone work and the top of the wall re-capped. The same was done with the North west side wall.

The North West Wall of the Chapel and its Window

In this wall the sidestones and sill of a fine narrow single light window had survived under a thick covering of ivy on the exterior of the wall. It too had been blocked. The top of the window was missing and this was simply unblocked, a chamfered block was inserted to complete the top of the window. The rebuilt part of the wall was rebuilt in so far as was possible and

architectural fragments which had been re-used in it were rescued for reconstruction or display.

The building of the corbelled ledge on the inside of the church had effectively removed all of the inside embrasure or lining of this window. It was therefore half unblocked from the outside, given a new top stone to replace the missing one, a Liscannor slab backing was inserted and the wall was rebuilt pointed and recappeded.

The west corner of the south west wall had been heavily rebuilt on several occasions, probably most recently when the whole of the north wall was completely rebuilt. Parts of it contained rebuilt segments of late date with large re-used blocks of ashlar. These, in some cases, were removed to act as quo stones elsewhere (their original function in any case) but some had to be left *in situ* and the upper courses of it rebuilt.

A stone with a small circular hole in it incorporated in the north wall may be a reused spud stone.

The Interior of the Chapel

A large late altar on a wide stepped base had occupied almost a third of the interior of the chapel. This dated to the 19th century or perhaps to the Nugents re-use of the area as their burial vault and private chapel. It may also have been inserted as late as 1920 when the area was restored by Anthony Francis Nugent, II Earl of Westmeath. This altar had subsided and the stones had cracked. It was removed and the mensa re-used to form a new altar which was positioned a little further out from the north gable. The stones from the steps were then used to form the new paving of the interior.

The Piscina basin stone was inserted in a gap in the late "skin" of walling built by the Nugents in the South West wall. The interior walls of the chapel were then repointed. A coadstone plaque with the Nugent's coat of arms, which had been displayed on the ledge of the north west wall of the chapel and which dates to the early part of the 19th century was put back there as was an inscribed tablet dated 1690 commemorating the contribution of Ricardo do Burgo to the chapel. The De Burgos, who had been the main power in this area before the Nugents (Earls of Westmeath) took over, had long been associated with this site. In 1446 Thomas De Burgo, Bishop of Clonfert, granted the chapel of Kilcorban to the brothers and sisters of the 3rd Order of St. Dominic and this was later confirmed by Pope Eugenius IV. Gwynn and Hadcock (1971).

The Piscina

The basin stone of the piscina which would have been used to rinse the sacred vessels, after their use at Mass has already been mentioned. It has two circular basins each with a hole in the bottom to allow the water to drain away. This would have been incorporated in a niche in the South East corner

of the now disappeared south wall of the Nave. Two moulded stones from the inner embrasure of an arch which would probably have been positioned above the piscina niche were found in the graveyard and are now in the Display Area.

The Carving of Our Lady

This sculpture can be seen in old photographs of the site in the South wall of the chapel before it fell and was rebuilt. It is carved in relief on a thick block of stone and its original position and function is unknown. It shows a smiling woman's face with a crown, which could represent Our Lady.

The chapel was dedicated to the Holy Rosary or the Blessed Virgin and Holy Rosary according to a document of 1696 (Gwynn and Hadcock (1971) and this would therefore have been an apt piece of sculpture to have been incorporated in it. It is possible also that the carving represents the iconographical motif of Our Lady of Queen of Ireland but this motif did not become common until after 1641.



The carving of the Blessed Virgin in the South Wall of the side chapel.

The Church Nave

The remains of the Church Nave now consist of (1) the North Wall with its aumbrey (II), a series of put-log holes (III), a reconstructed window in the North East corner (IV), a reconstructed segment of the same north wall with two reconstructed windows (V) and (VI) and a new doorway (VII) giving access to the Display Area.

Attached to the North Wall is the original surviving segment of the North East corner, with the reconstructed east window in a largely reconstructed gable. Nothing remains of the south side wall apart from a basin stone of the piscina which would have been incorporated in a niche. The west gable of the Nave has also vanished and the site of both of these walls as well as the interior of the Nave is occupied by graves. A capital which is now in the south wall of the side chapel may have come from a hypothetical matching chapel or aisle on the south side of the Nave.

The piscina fragment was found in what is now the Display Area, the part of the graveyard which later came to be used for the burial of children and priests. Of the south and west walls of the Nave nothing survives. The whole area is now covered by the graveyard. It is difficult to envisage the original west wall of the Nave as having extended as far as the west gable which now stands on its own (and is composed of completely different masonry and geological types). It is obviously not co-eval with the Nave and the rest of the buildings at the site. Is it possible that the Nave incorporated the West Gable (which preceded it) at the stage when the 15th/16th century moulded limestone doorway was inserted into it?

The remaining portions of the Nave which had survived before the restoration were all built of evenly coursed limestone which was obviously quarried specifically for the purpose. It is the underlying rock of the area as can be seen at the river nearby where vast quantities of it were thrown up when the river was deepened some years ago. The west gable by contrast is composed of a variety of geological types, mainly glacially deposited debris of sandstone conglomerate, and limestone which could have been obtained through field clearance.

The North wall of the Nave was almost completely covered with ivy before its restoration and all that was visible was the embrasure of the (now re-constructed) window near the North East corner. The segment of the wall nearest the chapel was falling down and a large dangerous gap had developed in it. That part of the wall was, as will be seen, built of rubble of all sizes. By contrast the original part of the North wall was built of fine evenly coursed limestone specially quarried for the purpose and having no re-used stones. A thin "skin" had fallen away from the outside of the north outer side of this wall in the area beneath the north east window already mentioned.

The Aumbrey

The aumbrey or wall cupboard in the North east corner of the north wall was only discovered when the ivy was cleared and a number of late medieval and post medieval slabs (See below), which had been piled dangerously at a late date against the North wall were removed for secure display in the Display Area. The sacred vessels used in the celebration of the Mass would have been stored in this wall cupboard. In a crevice between the stones at the bottom of this two pieces of lead which would have held stained glass in the large traceried East window were found in the course of pointing. The inside of the cupboard also retains some of its original plastering.

The North East Window

Only the interior stonework of this window survived but enough of the sloping embrasure survived to indicate where the sill would have rested and the gradient of the sloping embrasure could also be reconstructed. None of the original window frame survived. The sill which is now in this reconstructed window space was discovered among the collapsed rubble of the exterior skin of this wall. (This was rebuilt with similar but not identical stone so that what is original and what is new can be easily differentiated).

The sill stone is complete and has the exact same moulding as the slightly larger sill of the main East window. Two stones brought as building material from Flower Hill House nearby seem to have come from an embrasure or window space of these dimensions and these were put back here. Two spandrels with elaborate stylized foliate patterns found in the chapel and in the grave yard have been placed with a matching moulded concrete replica in this window space and a mullion reconstructed from new and old fragments has been inserted to complete this window. The style of the carvings suggests a late 15th/early 16th century date for them, the former date being more likely.

Put-log holes

To the left of this window opening is a series of three or possibly four small holes in the wall. These would have held the wooden scaffolding on which the workmen who built the wall would have stood when building the upper courses of the wall. When the scaffolding was being taken down the ends of the supports were sawn off leaving the stumps in position. These were later covered when the wall was plastered. The wooden stumps would have rotted away leaving the open holes which would have become visible after the plaster had fallen away.

Reconstructed wall segment

About one third of the North wall (that part nearest the chapel) has been completely reconstructed and two windows reconstructed from carved fragments have been built into it to ensure their proper display and preservation. A doorway (also new) between them now gives access to the Display Area. This is built partly from ashlar or cut stone blocks found reused as grave markers and in walls around the area. It was hoped to reconstruct a round topped arch from the late keystones which had been built into the blocking of the original 15/16th century semi-pointed arch at the entrance to the Chapel, but not enough of the stones were recovered (most had been built into the rebuilt wall in the 1940's/'50's when that wall was rebuilt to make this feasible.

An attempt has been made to keep this door and the two windows as near to their original medieval equivalents as possible. The splay of the window embrasures or spaces, the reconstruction of the window frames and such features as the rebate to the door case all copy medieval features. The spud stone of the doorway was found nearby and donated but was not originally at the site. The lintels to the windows and door and the large flagstone threshold are all new, as is the flagging on the sloping interior of the window embrasures. The reconstruction is completely faithful to the medieval original and has the benefit of both preserving the fragments and giving people an idea of how such features would have looked, though without plastering.

The date of the rubble built wall segment

When work began this segment was in a very dangerous and delapidated condition. It consisted of a mixed rubble construction with stones of all sizes. A large gap and numerous cracks had developed in it, and in parts it was shifting away from its flimsy foundations with a narrow plinth about 20 cms in width. As work progressed it was clear that the wall could not withstand restoration, it was crumbling dangerously when ivy was removed from it. The foundation had begun to keel over and while measurements were being made a group of two 18th century coins and a worn token of similar date were found where the plinth had begun to crack. This provided a post 18th century date for this crumbling infill wall. Because of its dangerous condition it was removed and a new wall built in its place.

The reconstructed windows and door

Like that in the North East corner these windows were rebuilt from fragments strewn around the site. There is no evidence that both or either of these windows came from this actual area but given the length of the wall it is likely that one if not two windows would have been necessary to give light to

the Nave here. Similarly there must have been a doorway (one can be hypothetically reconstructed from the fragments which include the chamfered stop with the tiny carving of the Knights Head). This would probably have been of semi-pointed form, but only a single top stone, two stones with chamfered edges and stops and a further stone with a chamfered edge are now known from this site and without more stones a reconstruction of that particular doorway is not feasible at present.

The East Gable of the Nave

This has been almost completely rebuilt. Less than a quarter of it had been in situ before conservation work began and the modern concrete foundation wall of the cemetery had been built on the wall footings of much of it.

The East Window

When the ivy was cleared away it was clear that only a single moulded side stone of the large east window had survived in its original position. The rest of the window and its exterior frame had disappeared. On the inside of the wall less than half a dozen worked stones from the embrasure and one moulded stone from the inside arch of the window were left in place. This latter, however, indicated how high up the spinging of the arch of the interior embrasure would have been and a gap in the masonry at the bottom of the



The Reconstructed East Window.

window gave an idea where the sill would have been. Two pieces of window tracery were visible at the site when conservation work began and various pieces of the sidestones of this fine window also lay around used as grave markers, some were strewn around in the next field and others still had been incorporated in walls of the grave yard. One returned to the site was even used in an old orchard wall in Flower Hill House some distance away!

The demolition of part of the modern cemetery wall produced more architectural fragments and revealed the intact wall footings of the east gable. Slowly, but surely the tracery and sidestones, mullions, parts of the sill and parts of the hood moulding were recovered from the surrounding field, walls and graveyard until eventually over three quarters of the large east window – the main window of the church – could be pieced together and reconstructed. The traceried window as it has been reconstructed is a fine example of its type. It is of 15/16th century style and has grooves in its sidestones and tracery to accommodate lead comes for glass, either stained or coloured glass. the finding of some of the lead in the aumbrey (see above) is therefore all the more interesting.

The East gable and window were completely reconstructed with some new pieces and part of the mullion being new. The original, now missing pieces of tracery, would have had triangular points or cusps like the rest of the tracery. The sill was reconstructed from the small fragments of it which survived.

The gable would probably have had coping stones along its top but not enough remained to replace it, and all of the coping stones found, many of them fragmentary, may have come from the side chapel alone. Some were reused as grave markers others were incorporated in the late rebuilding of the south wall of the chapel.

The reconstructed segment is built of a mixture of stones of various geological types which distinguished it from the original which is of coursed limestone.

The Bullaun Stone

The bullaun stone is a large boulder of granite conglomerate with a large hollow carved in it. It is associated with a cure for warts and a number of "offerings" of pieces of pottery, glass, beads and nails have been found around it.

Bullaun Stones are very common at church sites in Ireland and are invariably found on Early Christian sites and usually have traditions regarding local saints and cures associated with them. Some bullauns have only one hollow in them others have upwards of eight and may have been used for the communal grinding of materials or food stuffs.

In some places as at Glendalough it has been suggested that a group of them found along the valley may have been used for grinding down ore for smelting as there are copper deposits in the area. In other places, however,

they are more likely to have been used to grind food. In some multiple bullauns like one at Feaghna, Co. Kerry, there are eight hollows around the perimeter of the stone and oval beach pebbles which could have acted as pestles in these open air mortars are still lying in them. Often they may have been used communally in the same way that washing and farm work was done. At Leac na bpoll at Cong, Co. Galway, there is a five hole bullaun stone. It has been suggested that they sometimes have been used in pounding food stuffs for animals or humans or for pounding clothes during washing. Invariably they later became part of local tradition and patruins and had traditions about cure stones, cursing stone saints and remedies for ailments associated with them.

The Medieval font

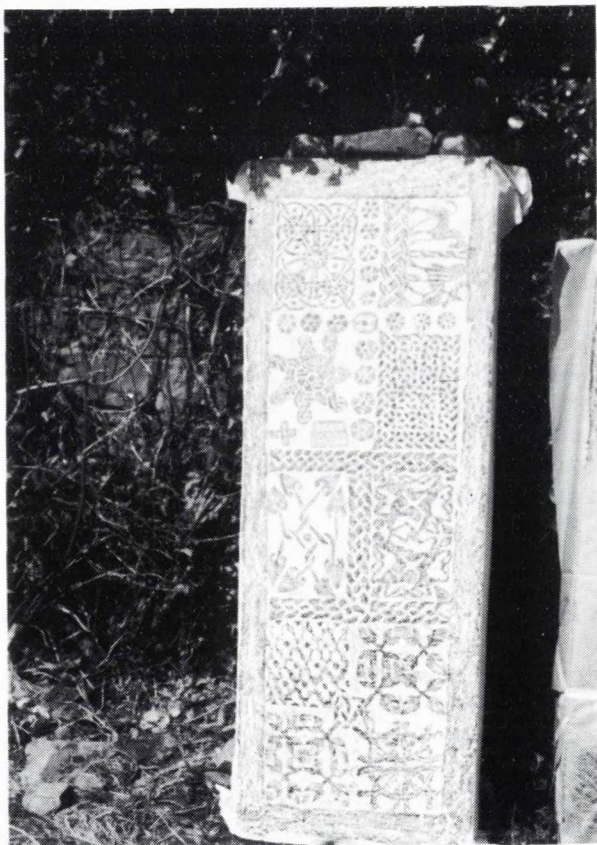
This limestone font is hollowed from a large rectangular stone. It is now fragmentary although it was complete within living memory. It used to be positioned near a heap of fallen masonry beside the West gable and has now been brought to the Display Area for reasons of safety.

It is unusual in its form and is a good example of a not too common type which was in use from the 15th to the 17th centuries. It measures a maximum of 40 cms. in height is 43 cms. wide and 58 cms. long. It is roughly hollowed to an average depth of 14 cms. There is a chamfered edge to each corner which gives way to a long tapering triangular stop. The chamber over all is 4 cms. in width. Two of the walls of the font are broken away almost completely. At Licmolaise there is an octagonal font with four small legs similar to the Kilcorban one. The Licmolaise stone, however, is more ornate and has agee shaped openwork arches carved between the legs. Both fonts are of 15-16th century type.

The Grave Stones

While the majority of the grave stones are modern there is a fine group of 18th and early 19th century monuments. Many of these are the products of the same masons workshop and identical examples are also found spread over a wide area including the cemeteries at Portumna, Terryglass and Licmolaise nearby.

A few 17th century slabs are found at Kilcorban and a number of very fine late medieval examples datable to various parts of the 2nd half of the 15th century and well into the 16th century on the basis of parallel in art and historical criteria and resemblance to dated stones elsewhere are also found. The earliest date which occurs on any stone is the date 1616 (which is found on two very similar slabs), but some of the undated stones are earlier and date to the late 15th and early 16th centuries. Some of these are notable for their use of elaborate Celtic Revival ornament and have close parallels elsewhere, with close similarities to stones at Sligo Abbey, Doe Castle and



A late 15th early 16th century grave stone. Perhaps the tombstone of a cleric.

Killbegs, Co. Donegal and in Scotland notably with late 14th and 15th centuries slabs of Steer and Banner man's (1977) Iona and Kintyre Groups.

A few stones of medieval form but indeterminate date are also found here, but so far no early Christian examples have been found.

The stones are discussed in detail in roughly chronological order below but a full record of the grave stones of all dates has also been made available in the form of a list.

All the early (pre 18th century) stones on the site have been displaced from their original positions. Some of those which were lying loose in the grave yard and against the North wall of the Nave were still in use over modern graves when McNeill wrote his report. These stones were therefore brought for safety and display in the Display Area. A full catalogue and a discussion of the Art History will be published by the writer elsewhere.

The Display Area

The part of the graveyard to the east of the chapel was formerly used as a children's burial ground and before that was part of the cemetery proper. The Display Area had been completely overgrown and filled with rubble before reconstruction. After the North wall of the Nave was reconstructed the remaining rubble was spread over this area and this was then covered with a thick layer of gravel.

The loose grave slabs and architectural fragments found during the conservation of the site have been put on display here. It is hoped to mount the grave stones on plinths against the walls so that they will no longer be worn by people walking on them and to prevent them being stolen. The rest of the architectural fragments will also be secured and where possible will be placed in the manner in which they might be reconstructed if further portions of them are found. A plaque and a pamphlet listing the items on display and a brief explanation of their significance is soon to be produced.

The Knights Head Carving and Doorway

Only five stones from this doorway survive: (a) a stop stone from the left of the base of the door with a miniature carving of a helmeted knight's head some 10.5 cm high and 5.5 cms wide carved in relief on it; (b) the equivalent but plain base stone from the right of the doorway; (c) and (d) two pieces of side stones from the door (one had been re-used in the west gable, another had been found in the graveyard) and (e) a curved segment from the left side of the top of the door.

The doorway had finely worked stonework and chamfered sides with triangular stops on each side of the base stones.

Small carved human and animal heads are frequently found on edges of windows, doors, fireplaces and rib vaulting. A small head, though not of a knight's is found positioned upside down on a doorway at Portumna Priory, Co. Galway and another little head is found on the chamfered edge of a doorway at Coulnamraher Leana, Co. Clare.

The knight's head is delicately carved and is shown wearing a Bascinet – a type of steel helmet with a pointed or egg-shaped form and without a visor (or face guard) or a ventail (neck guard). The top of the helmet in this case seems to have had a decorated ornament on top but most of this is broken away. The small pairs of holes around the edges of the helmet represent the rivets which held the leather lining of the helmet in position. Chain mail appears to be represented around the neck. Stylistically the face is very similar to the features of the carving of the Blessed Virgin on the South wall of the Chapel.



The North Window of the chapel.



The Restoration nearing completion.

Other Features of Interest

The writer avoided mention of the well and the Statue of Our Lady of Kilcorban because these have been dealt with more than adequately elsewhere in this book. What has been described above is just the outline of the architectural history of the site. The grave stones alone will be the subject of a special study in the future. The inscriptions on the tombstones will also be made available and will be of use to historians and anyone interested in sculpture, art, history or family history. A specialist report on the finds will also be prepared and a short guide/pamphlet to the features of the site is in preparation. A detailed study of the earthworks which abound in the fields to the east of the Priory and aerial photography may yet reveal even more about the site.

Inevitably more architectural fragments will be found during grave digging and general maintenance of the site and hopefully we may be able to reconstruct further the fragments now gathered in the Display Area.

Archaeologically and architecturally the site is a rich one and the restoration work done here will hopefully serve as an example to others of what can be done to restore some part of our national heritage and make it accessible to everyone.

The Finds

Small finds were made all around the graveyard. Some medieval and post medieval pottery as well as more modern pottery was found in the area of the West Gable. Also found in this area was a small partly hollowed stone with a "spout" carved in one side. It seems to have been used for grinding some substance – perhaps pigment of some sort. The lead from the Aumbrey already mentioned is probably from the East window. A small and very worn and fragmentary piece of a qyern was found in the field to the north of the chapel. A rubbing or smoothing stone in the form of a very smooth beach pebble with obvious signs of wear was found near the west door and numerous pieces of crockery, glass and bits of white quartz came from the area of the bullaun stone outside the West gable.

Hundreds of slates were found around the side chapel, ridge tile fragments were also found. Besides coffin fittings and nails there were numerous pieces of glass, clay pipes and bottles found everywhere.

Human bones which were often left around after a grave had been opened for a new burial had often been thrown into the bushes along the boundary walls. All human bones and coffin fittings found were collected up and re-buried at the end of the restoration work and where architectural fragments were removed from their position as grave markers stone and wooden markers were placed to replace them.

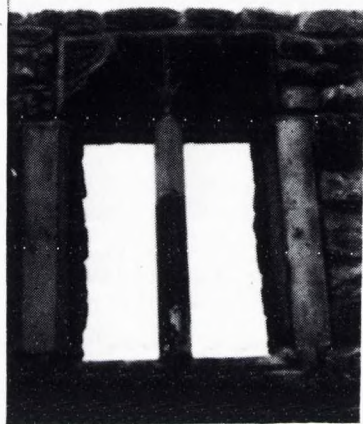
The most interesting finds were a Neolithic flint tool. This is likely to have been a scraping tool of some sort. It was a surface find from the graveyard.

A small rounded pebble with a cross carved on it is of great significance since it would appear to date to the Early Christian period it has the form of a cross composed of a chi-rho monogram incised on it and may date to some time between the 8th and the 10th centuries. Various functions and names have been given to such pebbles including priests stones, cursing stones, prater stones. There are a number of these stones from Ireland and there are numerous mentions of such stones being brought back to Ireland from pilgrimages (See Higgins (1987).)

The three coins found in the northwall have already been mentioned. All are very worn. One is a penny of George III dated 1775, the second is a penny of George II but the date is illegible, and the third is either a coin or a token but is too worn to make out the design on it.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Ordnance Survey 6" Sheet No. 117, Townland Kilcorban at 18.9 cms from S. and 46.5 from E. The site is marked on the 1917 Edition as "*Church in Ruins*", "*Graveyard*". The 1947 Edition shows it as "*St. Corbans' Church*" (in ruins) and the presence of a *Bullaun* is also indicated.
- (2) From the distribution of ringforts on the last Edition of the Ordnance Survey Map (1947) has several dozen ringforts marked perhaps indicating that the area was settled intensively in the Early Christian Period.
- (3) Lickmolaise is the nearest of these sites, but there are numerous early Church sites and Childrens' graveyards. For Licmolaise see O'Donovan *et al* (1839), p. 24 entry 69.
- (4) Four stones are known from this area. There is a bullaun stone in Moat townland near the medieval motte at Moat or Riverstone Bridge on the O.S. Sheet. Another is located in Treannanearla Townland beside the Childrens Burial Ground (now disused).
Another bullaun stone not marked on the O.S. map was formerly in an area of woodland in the grounds of Flowerhill House in Bouluskeagh or Flowerhill townland from where a stone carved with a cross (or anchor) was also discovered. This bullaun stone is now lost.
- (5) O'Donovan *et al* (1839), entry 488 and ff. pp. 199-200, *passim* O'Donovan concentrates on the identification of Saint corban.
- (6) Gwynn and hadcock (1971), 225-6 for a brief historical summary and list of sources.
- (7) For the identification of St. Corban see O'Donovan *et al* (1839), 199-200 and also O'Corrain and Maguire (1981), 59.
- (8) McLeod (1947).
- (9) Elsewhere in this book



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The Kilcorban St. Catherine

By CATRIONA MacLEOD

THERE are few saints of whose history less is known than St. Catherine of Alexandria. Yet, from the early middle ages until the end of the Renaissance she enjoyed a wider popularity than almost any other saint. Her cult, first celebrated on Mount Sinai, where the Church's liturgy acknowledges her sacred remains to be, is alleged to have first come westward in the 11th century. Then, Simeon, a monk of Sinai, seeking alms from Richard, Duke of Normandy, left in Rouen a relic of the saint. Through public veneration of this relic, devotion to St. Catherine spread, from Normandy, as the appeal of her legend stirred the fervour of Europe and inspired artists for six hundred years, while medieval philosophers, theologians and orators chose her as their patron.

In Ireland by the early 13th century, Norman patrons had already endowed Augustinian abbeys to St. Catherine, outside the walled cities of Waterford and Dublin. Near Lough Gur in County Limerick canonesses of the same Order placed their convent, Mainistir na gCailleach, under her protection. Mediæval churches in Wexford and Cork were dedicated to her name. Even to the Gaels with long established native saint cults, Saint Catherine quickly made an appeal. A poet as early as the great Donnachadh Mór Ó Dáligh invoked her aid:

Féa chabhair Caitir-Fhíona
do mhúchadh mo mhíghníomha
ní beag an daingean damhsa
m' aingeal is m' éarlamhsa.

The protection of Catherine
to suppress my evil doing
sufficient guarantee
is my angel and patron.

To-day in Ventry Gaedhtacht pilgrimages are made on November the 25th to Teampall Chaitríona, and a special prayer against sickness is said to "Caitlín Naomhtha."

In mediæval Ireland, St. Catherine was a favourite Norman saint. There, as on the Continent, art followed popular devotion, so her image is most frequently found within the Anglo-Norman Pale. But it is especially on Anglo-Norman tombstones that St. Catherine's widespread popularity is manifest. As intercessor on nearly every altar tomb as those at Duleek, Howth, Jerpoint, Kilkenny and Waterford her well-known figure may be seen clad in late Gothic drapery, carrying in one hand her sword, in the other the spiked wheel of her martyrdom.

The Annals of Ulster record under the year 1538 that the image of St. Catherine was carried off by the Saxons from Downpatrick. To-day at Kilkenny Dominican abbey a Continental statuette in stone is preserved, but so far the only surviving St. Catherine carved in wood is the Kilcorban figure.



THE KILCORBAN ST. CATHERINE.

Preserved in St. Laurence's, Tyngagh, Loughrea, Co. Galway.

*Photo : National Museum,
Dublin.*

It is of oak, hollowed out behind and measures thirty inches high. The hair is covered by a short head-veil and circlet crown. Over a belted tunic there is a cloak fastened at the neck by a ring-and-pin *brooch*. Similar *brooches* occur until the 16th century on Anglo-Norman sculptures in Ireland as on tombs at Jerpoint, in St. Canice's, Kilkenny, and in Gowran church. But the sword upon which St. Catherine's right hand rests is almost certainly a 15th century sword. It therefore serves to date this figure. The languette or tongue, a feature which first appears in the 15th century, is clearly shown. The quillons are straight. The grip which does not appear above the hand seems short and thick. The blade is flat and double-edged. These are the characteristics of the 15th century sword.

Unfortunately the left hand is missing. It should have held a book to symbolise St. Catherine's wisdom or else her martyr's wheel. The whole statue has been recoloured several times. Under the thick brown surface paint of the cloak traces of red appear. The tunic, now brown, was first blue, then black. The sword and cloak were once white. As an art work the statue is of little value. The face is heavy and expressionless. The eyes and brows are merely painted on to the flat unmodelled surface of the wood. The general proportions of the figure together with the veil and circlet crown seem to have been copied from the Kilcorban Madonna. In spite of its poor quality, this statue has a definite attraction for us apart from its iconographical interest. Its stiffness of form and stylised treatment of drapery – quite unlike contemporary Continental or English work – show that it is native. It is interesting to compare it with the St. Catherine sculptured above the portal of Clontuskert Abbey, only fifteen miles north-east of Kilcorban church. The cloak of the Clontuskert St. Catherine is looped up under the arms in the same design and falls in the same type of fold as that of the wooden figure. It is fastened at the neck with the same type of Irish ring-



*Enlarged drawing of figure
on Clontuskert portal.*



*Clontuskert portal,
Ballinascloe.*

and-pin brooch. The Clontuskert sword, too, has a similar short handle and straight quillons. The Clontuskert portal was erected by Bishop MacCraith of Clonfert. It is dated by a Latin inscription to A.D. 1471. The Kilcorban St. Catherine belongs to the same period. Local tradition claims that the St. Catherine together with the Enthroned Madonna came out of Kilcorban chapel. In the early 14th century the chapel was a poor one, judging from the fact that its valuation was only 5s. 4d. This may be because the local lords and church patrons, the O'Kelly's of Maenmagh, had been already ousted from their rich lands by the invading Burkes.

It was in 1445 that the Dominicans from Athenry obtained possession of Kilcorban through Thomas De Burgh, bishop of Clonfert. There they built a monastery for the Preaching Fathers. Members of the third Order of St. Dominic were also ministering in the district. St. Catherine, patroness of wisdom, had a special appeal for the theological Dominicans. It may be that, wishing to popularise among the Irish a favourite cult, one of the Fathers had this statue made at Kilcorban some time in the second half of the 15th century. The artist, seemingly an Irishman, was an amateur and drew his inspiration from local figures he had seen.

Bishop De Burgh's association with Kilcorban at this period is of interest. The Clanrickarde influence in Connaught and their liberality to the religious orders after the dissolution of the monasteries is an important factor regarding the preservation of the statues. Their kinsmen and retainers, the Pallas Burkes, built their stronghold Pallas Castle close beside Kilcorban in the 15th century. This castle was to become the home of the statues during the penal days.

In Connaught the Burkes founded many monasteries. Thus, they gave Tuam to the Prémontré Canons, Galway to the Franciscans, Crevebane and Loughrea to the Carmelites. But the Dominican monastery at Athenry, founded by the Berminghams with whom the Burkes intermarried, became the special recipient of their patronage. To Athenry they frequently made gifts of land and money and later it became the special burying place of the Clanrickarde Burkes.

The Kilcorban Calvary

A further group of statues, which are believed to have come from this monastery (and which are preserved in the Clonfert Museum, Loughrea to-day) consist of a calvary group, i.e. a crucifixial figure for which the cross is missing and figures of Our Lady and Saint John the Evangelist to stand on the right and left of the Cross. There is, in addition, a second crucifixial figure, a close copy of the first. Great wooden roods painted and illuminated by candle light were once usual above the chancel screen of mediæval churches. These alas, have all perished. On metal shrines and reliquaries and on stone altar tombs many representations still remain, but the Kilcorban calvary is the only known surviving example in wood, and for us it has a

special interest because the figures bear within themselves the marks of Irish workmanship.

All three figures are made of sycamore. It was a popular wood for carving and turning domestic utensils because of the facility in cutting it and especially because of its smooth texture. The cross is unfortunately missing. The Christ is the longest of the figures and measures twenty-seven inches. Incised lines suggest the ribs. Their direction, incidentally, is inverted and they fall instead of rising towards the sides. The pectoral muscles are carved with emphasis. The chest comes too low down and the legs from the knees are disproportionately short. A crack in the wood, from the collar-bone to the end of the perizonium, has been repaired with plaster. The perizonium is ample and simply draped. The whole figure has been coated over with putty-coloured paint. Through its scaling flakes, traces of the original flesh tint appear over a thin gesso foundation on the wood. Red paint marks the wound in the right side, and faint streaks trickle from under the hair on the brow. Dowel marks in the shoulders show where the missing arms were attached, first by wooden pegs and afterwards re-fastened with modern screws. The left leg is broken from below the knee and the toes of the right foot are missing. From the position of the legs, also from the almost intact feet of the "copied" Christ, it is clear that the feet were not crossed. Therefore, the figure was attached with four nails instead of three, a custom though not a rule which was revived after a lapse of three hundred years, following erudite discussion on the Crucifixion in the 16th century.

The Kilcorban artist was chiefly interested in the head and concentrated upon it all his devotion and skill. It leans back on the neck to the right side. The wide eyelids, closed as in death, are deep set under a low straight brow. The lips are half open and still retain traces of carmine paint. The hair, treated in fine incised lines as though following an ivory or metal work technique, falls to the neck in two pointed curls. Both hair and forked beard are painted dark brown, a presentation not so far removed from the description of Christ in the Book of Ballymote: *i.e.* "dark brown His hair and a long curling forked beard on Him." The reverence and dignity expressed in the Kilcorban Christ recalls that counsel of St. Benedict:

"*Artifices si sunt in monasterio, cum omni humilitate et reverentia faciunt ipsas artes.*" Its ascetic spirit too reminds us of the 14th century sculptor at the Cistercian Abbey of Meaux, who, when making a new crucifix, "carved no specially comely or notable lineament save upon Fridays only, on which days he himself fasted on bread and water."

The figures of the Blessed Virgin and St. John the Evangelist are also of sycamore. Each measures twenty inches high, and both faces resemble the face of the Christ. The barefoot Virgin stands with resigned acceptance, her delicately-carved hands placed to pray and eyes lowered as though away from the cross. The position of the hands suggests that the statue is no earlier than the late 16th century. Over the long and stiff robe the mantle falls in a stylised linear design. Underneath there is no movement; even at this late date, the end of the 16th or early 17th century, the form is ignored as a means of art expression.

The Saint John, also clad in a long stiff tunic, stands in a similar rigid pose. The head is copied from that of the Christ. Both faces have the same deep set eyes under a low straight brow. They have the same fine nose and long upper lip and the same treatment of hair and beard. St. John's ear is prominent, a characteristic of native work. Indeed these three faces with low straight brow, high cheek bones and fine, almost tilted nose present a definite Irish type.

In addition, St. John is usually represented in mediæval art, standing near the Virgin, "in sorrow, his cheek resting on his hand" as directed in the Byzantine Guide. Thus he appears on the Breac Maedoc and on later shrines such as the Stowe Missal, St. Conall's Bell, the Cathach and the Clogher Cross. In the same way he is depicted on stone monuments such as Dunsany font, Athenry Market Cross and a later tomb at Gowran. The Kilcorban St. John is quite unlike these figures in pose, treatment and dress. The position of the hands suggests that it is no earlier than the late 16th century. The features and the whole spirit of the carving show it to be Irish.

Crucifixial Figure

In the sacristy at Tynagh Church, where these statues were preserved, a second crucifixial figure came to light quite unexpectedly in 1942. Unfortunately it is in very bad condition as a result of damp and dry-rot. Its chief interest lies in the fact that it is a copy of the crucifixial figure just described. Seven inches longer than the original, it has a superficial elegance; but where the torso of the model is slightly arched and vibrant, the copy is flat and lifeless. The ribs are suggested by the faintest incised lines. The neck is shorter. The features lack expression and wherever possible the artist has contented himself with using a paint brush instead of a chisel. Thus the beard is painted on to the face instead of being carved, while on the head a few thin strokes suggest the hair. Fortunately the arms and feet are sufficiently intact to show the position of the missing arms and feet of the original figure. The arms are asymmetrical as though the drooping head carried the weight to the right side. Their almost perpendicular position proves the head to have been much below the transverse beam of the cross. This is a sign of the Counter Reformation Crucifix, the type which has survived to-day. From the small and finely-carved hand and foot of this figure we must surmise that the hands and feet of the original were likewise small and fine – similar to those of the Virgin and John. These characteristics in addition to the long head and delicately-carved features form a striking contrast to the stone Calvaries illustrated. There, as well as on earlier groups in Kildare Cathedral and on Athenry Market Cross, the Christ has a huge head and large wide open hands. These are distinguishing features of English sculpture especially 15th century alabasters. (They are clearly shown in a panel from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and also in an English retablo now in the Puy de Dome.) It is evident that the Kilcorban figures derive from quite a different tradition. They are unlike Continental work. From their Irish faces and their rigid stylised anatomy they appear to be in creation distinctly Irish and local. They date, perhaps, to the late 16th or early 17th century. The copied Christ is later.

The Mullagh Crucifix

A few miles north-east of Kilcorban in the neighbouring parish of Mullagh, formerly Abbey Gormacon and once an important monastic centre, we find another link with the Kilcorban crucifix. There, upon the high altar in the parish church stands a carved wooden crucifix. This figure measures only sixteen inches in length. Its quality is poor; and apart from the position of the head which falls forward, it is a close copy of the second and later Kilcorban Christ. It is painted white and there is no sign of any gesso preparation on the wood. An inscription on the wall of Mullagh church tells that it was built in 1839. For this new building a local artisan may have made the crucifix from the figure which he saw in the neighbouring church at Tynagh. The Mullagh crucifix is of interest as illustrating a last phase of the long lingering tradition of local wood-carving fostered in its early stages by the mediæval Dominicans in Connaught.

Conclusion

It has been suggested that some of the Kilcorban figures were brought to that monastery from Athenry. We only know that after the dissolution of the monasteries, a special Fiat of the Lord Deputy, Sir Anthony St. Leger, in 1541, ordered "that the monastery of the friars of Athenry, being situated amongst the Irishry be not dissolved." Because of Clanrickarde's influence and at his special request it was spared "for the burial of his house." In 1574 when the religious situation had become more acute and Athenry was finally suppressed and granted to the civic authorities, many monasteries in Connaught had already passed into the hands of Richard, second Earl of Clanrickarde, Kilcorban monastery was one of these. In 1543 Richard's father, Ulick, had accepted an English title and the confirmation of the "usurped" lordship of his race under the Tudor policy of Surrender and Regrant. Henry needed support to turn the lordship of Ireland into a kingdom and to secure assent for the breach with Rome. The new policy was designed to win over the Gaelic chiefs and "degenerate English" who could prove no legal claim to their lands. Henceforth the Earls of Clanrickarde supported the political interests of the English crown, but they were to remain Catholics for many generations. All authorities agree that Richard accepted the monasteries from Elizabeth in order to prevent their falling into the hands of heretics, and that the later Clanrickardes continued their generosity, as far as possible, to the friars. So that under their protection "religious communities in county Galway were able to maintain themselves and officiate, as in the difficult circumstances of that time, they never otherwise could have done."

During Fitton's campaign in the west "many of the idols and images in their churches" had been burned. Yet because of Clanrickarde's influence and because he had possession of Kilcorban, on the estate of his kinsmen, the Pallas Burkes, it is probable that religious ceremonies continued there undisturbed for some time. Pardons granted to Murtagh and John M'Knavin, priests of Kilcorban, and to Teigue M'Knavin, priest of Tynagh in 1585,

suggest that in these places, one mile apart, Mass was still allowed. Tynagh Castle and lands, it is of interest to note, came into the third Earl of Clanrickarde's possession in 1580, on the death of his grandfather's cousin, Roland de Burgh, the apostate bishop of Clonfert. Bishop de Burgh died a Catholic and was buried at Tynagh. A Catholic at heart he may well have chosen to overlook the observance of Catholic rites suppressed elsewhere. A dated chalice offered by Ulick Burke, priest of Tynagh in 1637, and the local tradition that one of the Pallas Burkes was a Dominican ministering about that time testifies to the continuity of the Mass and the Burkes' support of the district churches. For taking part in the great Rising of 1641, Thomas Burke of Pallas castle forfeited his estates to the Crown. But the Pallas Burkes lingered on as tenants to the new owners, the Nugents from Westmeath. Father John O'Heyne, the Dominican historian, in his reference to Kilcorban chapel and the preservation of the venerated Madonna statue, indicates that the Pallas Burkes were still in the district towards the end of the 17th century:

"et statua Beatae Virginis, quae colebatur veneranter ibidem, servatur apud familiam nobilem Burgorum de Pallis." Living in times punctuated by spells of bitter persecution, Fr. O'Heyne adds:-

"Crebra miracula quae patrat Deus peristam statuam Beatissimae Virginis confirmant continuo Catholicos in fide vere et in cultu Reginae Coelorum."

Bishop de Burgh writing half a century later also refers to the statue of Our Lady venerated at Kilcorban as the "Devotissima Deiparae Imago."

In his appendix to O'Heyne's history the late Father Ambrose Coleman again mentions the statue of Our Lady and two others which he suggests may have come from Athenry abbey.

Father Coleman testified to the people's regard for the Kilcorban statues in his own day:- "Within recent years they are preserved under lock and key in the sacristy of the Parish Church and are exposed for veneration *only* on the feast of St. Lawrence, the patron saint of the parish (Tynagh).

Lack of comparative material has made it difficult to place these statues in their artistic context as they are quite unlike Continental or English work. Absence of local records caused the same difficulty in trying to trace their history.

From the register of Athenry monastery it is clear that statues were made for the Dominicans in that city. It is therefore reasonable to assume that statues were also made for Kilcorban, the daughter house. Our statues believed to have come from that monastery, bear within themselves the sign of individual craftsmanship and local work. They seem to date thus:-

The Enthroned Madonna to the early 13th century, the St. Catherine to the late 15th century and the Calvary to the late 16th or early 17th century. The copied crucifixial figure is later; while the Mullagh crucifix seems to belong to the late Penal period. To Kilcorban monastery the de Burghs were patrons. Through their loyalty to the friars after the Dissolution and later we owe the preservation of these statues which include the earliest and perhaps most important Irish wood-carving in the country.

Athlone and Clonfert Statues

The Athlone Madonna

ONCE again in 1630, the religious houses in Dublin had been closed by order of the government. Among these was the newly-founded Poor Clare Convent on Merchant's Quay. So in January of that year Sister Cisly Dillon, the young Abbess, resolved to make a new home for her disbanded community. From Dunkirk to Nieuport and thence to Dublin her efforts to found a house for Poor Clares, exclusively Irish, had hitherto met with ill luck and finally suppression.

She and her sister, Mary Joseph, were daughters of Sir Christopher and granddaughters of Sir Theobald Dillon, the first Viscount, whose vast estates spread through Mayo, Sligo, Galway and Roscommon. Down to the Dillon country by the shores of Loch Ree above Athlone now came the young nuns, there, "on a solitary neck of land without inhabitants" six miles above the town, "a poor house was built for their habitation."

In its quietness and isolation they believed that they had at last found a refuge from the world and persecution. Their strict observance of St. Clare's Rule, their manual labour and continual prayer, their silence and their mutual charity inspired many postulants to join them. The fame of their heroic lives drew such distinguished visitors as Lady Wentworth and the Duchess of Buckingham from Dublin, sixty miles distant, "to see them and to hear their delightful conversation."

All went well for ten years. Then in 1641 the protest by arms for civil and religious liberty broke out and soon the Dillon country was involved in the war. Just before the soldiers, many of them gaol-birds, arrived the nuns escaped to an island in the lake. the troopers remained for three days and nights in the convent and there passed the time "devouring all the provisions of ye poor sisters and making their sport and laughter of the altars, pictures, ornaments and sacred things which were therein . . . they lastly set fire to the convent and burnt it with all that was therein, onely that God preserved miraculously the tabernacle in which the most Blessed Sacrament was when they prayed before it . . . and likewise an old *image* of Our Lady, both made of wood."

Here one wonders how these 17th century religious had in their possession an early Gothic Madonna and how they saved it from the flames. Did they carry the statue and the tabernacle with them in their flight from the convent down to the boats a short distance away? Or did their rescuer, Sir James Dillon, uncle of the mother abbess, also save these treasures from the wreckage a few days later?

The Poor Clares ultimately reached Galway, where some of them formed the nucleus of the present house on Nuns' Island in whose cloister the statue of Our Lady of Bethlehem is now preserved. It is of oak and measures three feet high. Like the Kilcorban Madonna this figure is also very much 'in the block,' but the carving is freer and the decoration more stressed. Curves are less emphasised and there is instead an insistence on vertical lines which gives the statue a sense of weight and shows at the same time a distinct Gothic tendency.

The head of the statue resembles the long head of the Kilcorban Madonna and it is set on the same type of thick wide neck; but at the sides the hair and veil knit gracefully with the main mass of the head and achieve a better line. The shoulders are broader, more upright and show no sign of that Romanesque stoop, noticed on the Kilcorban Madonna. The figure is longer to the waist and the modelling is more natural. The hair falls in loose strands. The nose, unfortunately, is damaged. The eyes, eye-brows and lips are spoiled by uninformed repainting and therefore the whole expression is distorted. Yet the contour of both faces is similar and there is a definite resemblance especially about the lower part. About the lips lingers the very same smile.



Head of Athlone Holy Child showing treatment of hair

The artist of the Athlone Madonna also uses the form – in what seems a peculiarly Celtic way – as a structure for the free play of design. Over strong knees the drapery falls in graceful plastic folds. This type of fold, borrowed from classical sculpture, was popularised through the art fostered at Cluny, the great Benedictine monastery in Burgundy. Cluny possessed many priories along the pilgrimage route to Compostella and during the 12th century it ranked second only to Rome as a centre of Christian culture. In the Athlone Madonna the treatment of the Cluny fold has become a work of conscious design especially at the sides where the deeply hollowed curves and crisp zig-zag drapery, edging over the side of the seat, lose their character of folds and become pure decoration.

The Holy Child is supported by the Madonna's left hand – so stylised as to surrender realism to design. The Infant resembles His Mother in features and expression and the folds of His tunic repeat the pattern of her dress. Both arms are missing. The hair is treated in the same very decorative technique of fluted ripples, already noticed on the Kilcorban Child. The face has the same softly modelled contour of cheek and chin. In it the little nose is

also rubbed almost flat, perhaps by the reverent touching of the faithful. Like the Kilcorban Child its most striking feature is the smile. Here, the resemblance is so marked as to suggest that the artist of the Athlone statue must have seen the earlier figure, or else he must have been familiar with a very similar type of statue possessing these affinities of pose, features, and expression.

The original polychrome of the Athlone statue appears to be worn away and the whole figure has been repainted in recent years. Beneath the dark green surface paint of the Madonna's drapery traces of blue appear. The flesh tints have also been retouched and there are different shades of red on nostrils and lips.

The smooth texture of the Child's face suggests a gesso base to the paint but elsewhere the grain of the wood is fibrous and streaky as though it had been exposed to the weather or even immersed in water. The Poor Clare religious in Galway, who pass on the tradition of the statue, say that at the time of the destruction of the convent in the 17th century, the statue "was in the lake." But of its origin they know nothing.

During their stay at 'Bethlehem,' the Poor Clares were in touch with the Athlone Franciscans whose convent, first built by Sir Henry Dillon in A.D. 1241, had been re-established in 1626 at Killinure some miles further down Loch Ree. There, Father George Dillon, uncle of Sister Cisly, the Poor Clare Abbess, was Guardian. After the Dissolution it came into the possession of Sir Lucas Dillon, chief baron. In the early part of the following century the site was held by Sir James Dillon. This close connection of the Dillons with the Athlone Franciscans and with their neighbours, the Bethlehem Poor Clares, may account for the fact that these 17th century religious obtained possession of such an old statue, when Sister Cisly Dillon came to build the convent on her grandfather's estate by Loch Ree.

The Athlone statue must have been carved by someone who had seen the Kilcorban Madonna or who was familiar with a very similar type. Athlone is only thirty miles distant from Kilcorban. Therefore, it would seem that there was a distinct type of carved wood Madonna in that region. The Athlone Madonna is later than the Kilcorban figure. From this it would seem that the type persisted and developed from Romanesque to early Gothic times.



*Head of
Athlone Holy
Child.*

The Clonfert Madonna

In addition to these two Madonnas, belonging to the same school, there is a third figure resembling them both in several ways. It is now preserved in Eyrecourt chapel, and is said to have come from the old Cathedral of Clonfert, a few hundred yards away, and midway between Kilcorban and Athlone.

The Clonfert Madonna is not shown in solemn distant majesty representing a theological doctrine. Here the Mother of God has become also Mother of the Human Race. She has left her remote throne and stands, as it were, within reach of all, like the living Virgin of Nazareth clasping her Child who turns to caress her with his hand.

The change of sentiment, the tenderness here displayed reflect that humanism which was introduced to art through the influence of St. Francis. By reconciling nature and religion, by finding in passing things an image of the eternal, by indicating the beauties of nature, of love and of life as manifestations of Divine grace, St. Francis stands as the forerunner of the Renaissance. By contemplating Christ's humanity men came to know His Mother, not as a distant Majesty but as the merciful mother of mankind. Then the artists, faithful exponents of the people's sentiments, conceived those charming, lifelike Madonnas which, from the 13th century, stood gracious and smiling at the portals of Western Europe's greatest churches.

The Clonfert Madonna was carved under such an early Gothic influence. Made of oak, it measures four feet high and the back is deeply hollowed. The pose, a firm balancing on both feet, the clasp of the Child in sharply bent wrist, the elongated fingers, the deeply-curved drapery folds at the side and the zig-zag edge down the front, are all signs of early Gothic work. Were the statue carved in the full 14th century it should be less narrow in outline and the drapery should be treated in a broader, freer way. We should also expect to find in the figure some suggestion of the affected pose called the 'Gothic twist,' or 'Ivory bend,' an attitude of studied grace that was the chief characteristic of the 14th century Madonna. The Clonfert Madonna, on the contrary, is quite erect and 'frontal.' Beneath the robe there is no hint of movement, which is another early sign. The narrow form, erect carriage, shallow, pleated robe and mantal folds curving deeply at the side are characteristics of late 13th or very early 14th century figures. The pose and general style of the drapery may be compared for want of a better example, with a stone Madonna at York Minster which is dated to c. 1300. But there the form has movement from side to side and the drapery is so deeply cut as almost to violate the understructure. The Clonfert Madonna has a static quality. It gives the impression of being one underlying block and no attempt has been made to suggest movement. The form itself has no plastic eloquence; it is rather, as in the Kilcorban and Athlone Madonnas, a scaffolding upon which the artist's innate love of design plays in the rich treatment of the drapery's shallow vertical lines and deep horizontal curves.



1

THE ATHLONE MADONNA.

FIG. 1.—Frontal view.

FIG. 2.—Side view.



2

THE CLONFERT
MADONNA.

FIG. 3.—Side view.

FIG. 4.—Frontal
view.



3



4

The Holy Child is fully draped as was customary in the early 14th century. Unfortunately most of the face and the top of the head have been restored with plaster. The right arm is broken off and the two feet are worn away. The Madonna's arm has been sawn off. Other parts are decayed and the appearance of the whole figure has been spoiled by recent repainting. On this statue there are at least ten coats of paint. Beneath the surface blue of the robe there are yellow, white, dark red, white, vermillion, brown, white, pink, and lastly yellow upon a gesso base. The flesh tints have also been retouched. Through the modern dull pink on the cheeks appears a hint of rose; and under the dark red of the lips shine specks of bright vermillion. Two black patches blot out the eyes and the broad forehead is now mostly covered with paint to simulate hair.

In spite of these disadvantages, the fine quality of the head is still apparent. By concentrating upon it all the skill and knowledge of his craft the artist has achieved a naturalism which he disregarded in the figure. The head is long and very similarly shaped to that of the Athlone Madonna. It is also set on the same type of thick wide neck that comes straight down into the chest. The arrangement of the veil and circlet crown are treated in similar manner. This resemblance is best seen from a side view. The prominent eyes, the straight forehead, but especially the soft contour of cheek and chin recall the Kilcorban Madonna. About the mouth (now spoiled by paint which does not follow the natural line) there is the same expression noticed on both other Madonnas.



St. Corban of Naas

By CON COSTELLOE

DESPITE research by scholars over the last hundred years, little has been discovered about St. Corban of Naas. Just a century ago the diocesan historian and parish priest of Monasterevan, Rev. M. Comerford, had only this to note on the saint: "Cill Corban or church of Corban, the burial-place of the Christian Kings of Leinster, was at Kill, near Naas. The name of Corban, who probably was one of our early Irish saints, is still preserved in the name of a back street in Naas, called *Corban's Lane*." Fr. Comerford also quoted this extract from the *Fragments of Irish Annals*:

“There are nine kings of famous career, in Cill-Nais of shining lustre;
Muiregan, a hero without mistake, Ceallach, and Cearbhall the ser-s-
ible,

Colman, Braen and Bran the lively, Finn, Gaelan, Dunchadh the
bold,

In Corban's Church, I have heard, their warlike graves were made.”

The next historian to consider Corban was Canon Carrigan, the historian of the Diocese of Ossory. He wrote: “Nine successive Kings of Leinster, the last of whom died in 909, had their royal residence in Nas. The question now is as to their place of sepulture. Kill, a few miles from Naas, is by some supposed to contain their earthly remains, and no other place is mentioned as having any claim to that honour. I myself believe that their resting place is in Naas, in the old parish churchyard there, where I presume the Protestant church now stands. My reason for believing so is this. In one ancient poem written into the Book of Leinster about 1150, the above nine kings are stated to be buried in Cill-Nais, that is, the church of Nas. Further on in the poem the same church (in which they were buried) is called Cill-Corbain, or St. Corbain's church. From which only one conclusion can be drawn, namely, that the kings were buried in the church of Naas, and that at that time Naas church had St. Corban as its patron.

St. David is now patron of the parish church of Naas and has been so from the Norman Invasion. When the Anglo Normans came over here, they put aside the Irish church patrons and put their own favourite saints in their place. This was their well known custom and it is easy to see how St. Corban could have ceased to be patron of Naas and his name to be obsolete there.”

Fr. P. J. Doyle, parish priest of Naas, in his parish year book for 1954, confirmed that the name of the saint was well remembered in the town: “. . . a well known back thoroughfare in the town is called Corban's Lane. St. Corban's Mill was shown on the Ordnance Survey map at Millbrook, and it was mentioned in the journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society, that St. Corban's gate had been pulled down in 1680, and re-used for repair of St. David's Church; and there was also a tradition of Corban's ford (which could not then be located). In recent years the New Cemetery has been entitled St. Corban's Cemetery, and a large group of working-men's houses entitled St. Corban's Place. A new school for boys is being erected under the title of St. Corban.”

A church dedicated to St. Corban, in the parish of Killeen and Tynagh, some four miles west from Portumna in county Galway, long in ruins, is now being conserved. It is especially remembered as the site of the Dominican friary, where the mediæval statue of the Kilcorban Madonna was venerated. The statue is now in the Clonfert Museum, Loughrea. In penal times, tradition holds, the friars returned to their abandoned house to celebrate mass beside Kilcorban holy well, and they placed the wooden statue of the madonna and child on an ash tree nearby. In the 17th century a Dominican historian observed that frequent miracles were worked through the intercession of the Kilcorban Madonna.

Kilcorban Statues

The Kilcorban Madonna

KILCORBAN Priory stands on a low rise off the main road between Loughrea and Portumna in Co. Galway. Some of its architectural features may date to the 15th century when the Dominicans of Athenry took it over and built a monastery on the site. The original foundation goes back, however, to the 7th century.

From the chapel, according to tradition and circumstantial evidence, come an important group of wood sculptures. There are in all six figures. These vary in quality and in date from early mediaeval to perhaps the late 16th century. At present they are preserved in the Clonfert Museum, Loughrea.

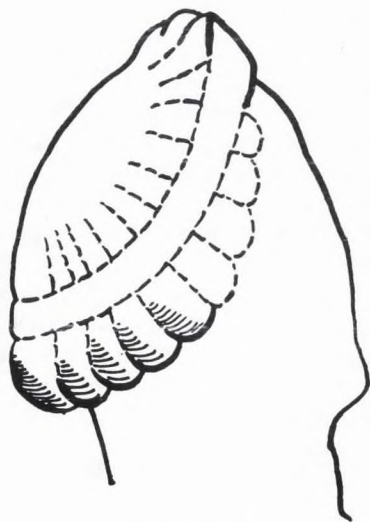
The earliest represents the Enthroned Madonna. This type of statue was first adopted in Christian art in order to portray Our Lady as Mother of the divine as well as of the human nature of Christ. Its origin derives from the doctrine formulated at the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. There the Church condemned Nestorius as a heretic and publicly approved the title *Deipara* — Mother of God — for the Blessed Virgin, attacked by the heresy.

Early representations of the Enthroned Madonna are rare, but among some famous mosaics in Ravenna executed during the first golden age of Byzantine art, there is a well known *Deipara*. There and in the Haghia Sophia, Constantinople, the Virgin is shown nimbed and clad in *sacerdotal dalmatic*, seated upon a richly cushioned throne. From her lap the Holy Child points to her with raised fingers, thus symbolising the theological doctrine of the divine motherhood of Our Lady, the divine and human nature of her son. This conception made a strong appeal to the eastern mosaic workers and inspired a magnificent interpretation in art, which is shown by the craftsman's concentration on the richly decorated throne and its setting of glittering gold tesserae.

Most European countries today still preserve in museums or old churches Enthroned Madonnas of native workmanship dating from the 12th or 13th century. In the treatment of the drapery and design of the chair some of these display a classical influence. Others represent a homely, country Madonna and appear to be creations of independent, self-taught artists. But wherever these statues were made the early impetus from France is uncontested.

In Ireland mediæval church burnings and especially repeated waves of iconoclastic persecution since the 16th century systematically destroyed nearly every wooden statue in the country. Yet there have come to light within the last few years three Enthroned Madonnas carved in wood and originally polychromed.

Of these the Kilcorban Madonna appears to be the earliest. It is of oak and measures three feet high. The back of the wood is hollowed out from the shoulders to the worm-eaten base. The head is flat behind as though the figure were designed to be placed against a wall. On her high-backed chair, a humble souvenir of the Byzantine throne, the Madonna sits up stiffly. Her large head, set on a thick wide neck, leans slightly forward from the much-too-narrow shoulders and short, sunk chest. The arms, disproportionately short above the elbows – another characteristic of Romanesque sculpture – are tightly sleeved to the wrist. The left hand is pressed flatly against the cloak whose curved folds drop over the low sides of the seat. Between her widely parted and sharply defined knees – a classical borrowing and a sign of early work – the Holy Child sits forward almost eagerly. His arms are unfortunately missing and the circlet crown and the back of the head are much damaged. But part of the hair behind the right ear and along the nape of the neck remains to show the treatment of fluted ripples, which once covered the head like a tight fitting skull cap. It is an early technique popular in manuscripts, on ivories, bronzes, and stone sculptures of the 11th and 12th centuries. The most significant feature of the face with its little nose almost rubbed flat is the charming smile. This smile is unusual in Romanesque groups where the Child, in appearance nearly always old beyond His years, resembles the mature and serious Madonna.



*Head of Kilcorban
Holy Child showing treatment
of hair*

Unfortunately the statue has been coated over with many layers of modern paint. Where the paint is thin or has flaked away, traces of gold glitter on the Madonna's hair and crown. Under the brown paint of the robe there is black or very dark blue laid on a gesso base. Beneath the muddy yellow colour that mars both faces, traces of a fine matt flesh tint appear, while on the lips touches of bright carmine show through the modern dull red.

Viewed from the front as well as from the side the Kilcorban Madonna is very much a block of wood. From head to shoulders and from arms to side the carving is close and compact. The folds of the drapery are sculptured in shallow relief. These features, in addition to the large head, narrow shoulders, and sharply defined knees already noticed, are characteristic of 12th century Madonnas. They are all clearly illustrated in statues of this period from Switzerland, Flanders and Catalonia.

While possessing in common with these dated statues certain acknowledged features of Romanesque art, the Kilcorban Madonna has at the same time its own individuality. The man who made it had a fine selective sense; hence his arrangement of the forms in an almost abstract way lifts this figure above the commonplace. The form itself is not a means of expression, as in the classical world, but it is here a strength or order on which the sure, clear lines as of hair and drapery exist almost on their own value as pure decoration. The features and expression suggest that the artist was at least inspired by a chosen model. The soft contour of the face, contrasting with the usually mature visage of the continental Romanesque Madonna, is that of a young girl. The wide, archaic eyes are serious, but the lips unfold in a smile, noticeable especially from the side. From this aspect also the curving lines of neck, arm and cloak bind the forms together into a united design.

At the time when the Kilcorban Madonna might have been made there was a great resurgence of spiritual and artistic forces in Ireland. This movement under the leadership of native churchmen and especially of St. Malachy, enormously increased church discipline, stimulated devotion and inevitably led to a widespread enthusiasm for church building. Connaught, during the reign of Turlough Mor O'Connor, also High King of Ireland, stirred with the same religious and artistic fervour and a tremendous movement of native creative art developed in the West, one, however, which was to be so swiftly eclipsed by the advancing tide of Norman invasion.

Meanwhile St. Malachy, the great reformer, had brought Ireland into contact with St. Bernard and the Cistercian monks of France. From Melifont in County Louth the Cistercians spread throughout Ireland. Wherever they went they brought with them their efficient drainage systems, their new building methods and advanced agricultural schemes. In addition, they also brought a great devotion to Our Lady, inculcated in their Order by St. Bernard, whom Dante called the chevalier of the Blessed Virgin. From Citeaux and through St. Bernard's famous sermons on the union of Mother and Son, devotion to the Virgin Mother spread. In accordance with the early austerity of the Order sculptures and images were at first forbidden in Cistercian churches. Thus the Cistercians had no Madonna sculpture in their own early churches, but it is claimed that the fervour inspired by St. Bernard's teaching, indirectly influenced the artist-builders and explains the popularity and persistence of the Enthroned Madonna in monumental sculpture during all the 12th and early 13th centuries.





*Carved stone once in the Abbey of
the Holy Trinity, Loch Cé, Roscommon*

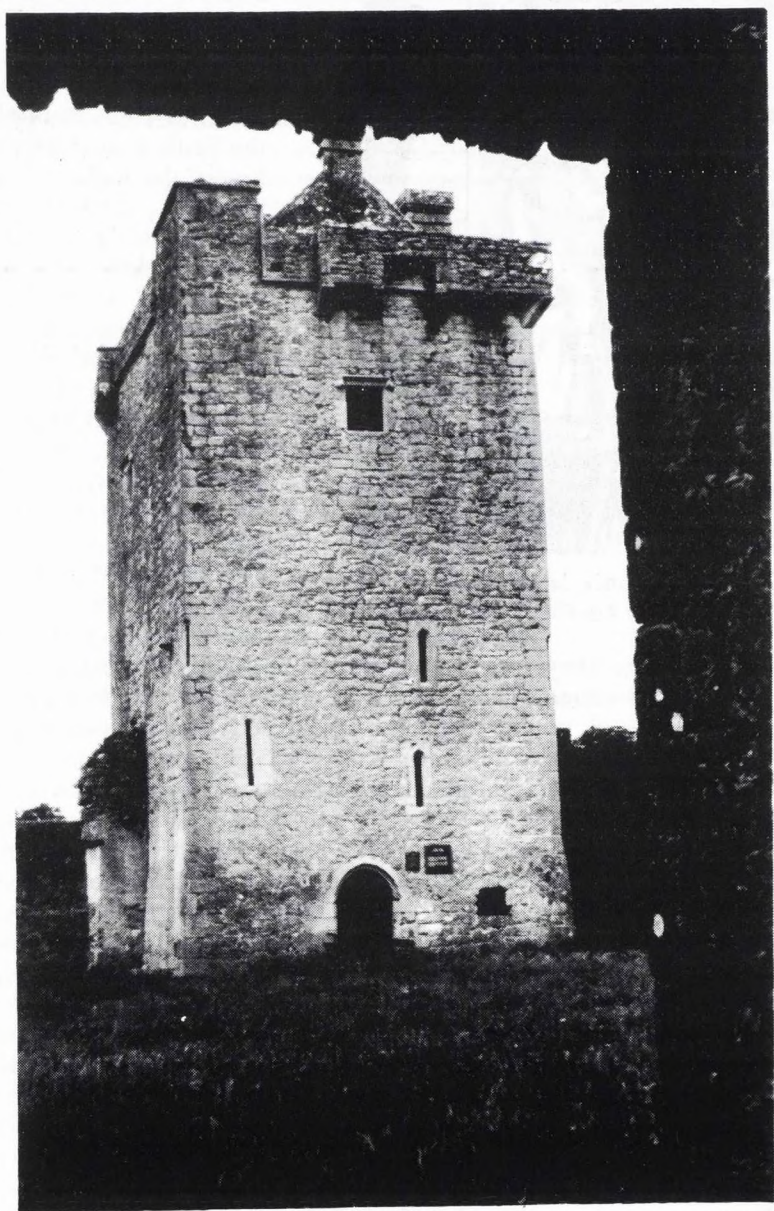
The Dominicans had a special claim on the Blessed Virgin. To her intercession St. Dominic attributed the victory over Albigenses at Muret in 1213, and the triumph of the Faith attacked by that heresy. In 1224, the first members of their Order reached Ireland. Unfortunately almost nothing is known of their history here. The fact that a 13th century Waterford friar was a master of Greek, Arabic, Latin and French indicates that highly educated men were chosen for the Irish missions. Before the middle of the century, the Dominicans reached the West where they founded a convent in 1214

at Athenry, whence they spread through the province. Eventually, in 1445, they reached Kilcorban. There they may have found the Romanesque Madonna – the work of a local artist, familiar with outside ideas through native monastic schools. On the other hand, the statue may be the creation of a 13th century Dominican in Ireland, influenced by Romanesque traditions from the Continent.

In the history of European art the Dominicans hold an important place. Like the Cistercians and Franciscans they gradually set aside their first stern rule prohibiting rich churches and sculptured images. By the middle of the 13th century they too built splendid churches; and soon their convents offered an incentive field to contemporary artists. Many of the preachers themselves executed works of art.

As educated men coming to Ireland on a special mission, it is likely that, in order to promote a cult so popular from the 12th century among religious communities abroad, they would introduce statues of a type with which they were already familiar. The ravages of invasion and the destruction of monastic schools left the new monks much to do in the restoration and decoration of churches.

Kilcorban was a poor chapel at the beginning of the 14th century. If it lacked an image when the Dominicans took possession, they may have brought the Enthroned Madonna, already old and perhaps already venerated, from one of their older foundations. The chapel became known later as *capella Beatissimae Deiparae sacra*



Dominican Tertiaries or Dominican Laity

By RAYMOND O'DONOVAN, O.P.

THIS is the year of the laity and next autumn the Synod of Bishops in Rome will discuss the rôle that lay people are being called on to fill in society today. Of course most Christians are lay people and what we are witnessing today is a greater realisation that all Christians share the duty of handing on the faith to others and of being the light of the world.

The Order of Preachers is now some seven hundred and fifty years in existence, and for most of this time lay people have been actively involved in its apostolic work. To be precise, it was in 1285 that the Third Order of St. Dominic was set up to enable lay people to become part of the Dominican Order, and to share its work and its ideal. During the succeeding centuries the Order grew and developed, having its moments of greatness as well as its periods of decline and crisis. The same may be said of the Third Order as it too waxed and waned and waxed again.

There is no doubt that Tertiaries flourished in Ireland even in the early years of the Order. The celebrations in Kilcorban bear witness to this. We know that documentary evidence exists to show that Kilcorban Priory was originally a Tertiary foundation set up in 1244 by Dominican Tertiaries, both men and women. For Tertiaries then, Kilcorban is of special interest.

The ancient tradition of Dominican Tertiary life in Ireland has been kept up, and there are now thirty-three groups or chapters of Dominican Tertiaries in Ireland. These chapters are found in Athy, Belfast, Cork, Downpartick, Drogheda, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, Kilkenny, Limerick, Muine Beag, Newbridge, Newry, Portstewart, Sligo, Tallaght, Tralee, Waterford and Wicklow.

What then is a Dominican Tertiary, and what does he or she do? Nowadays Tertiaries are often called lay Dominicans, because they are, precisely, lay people who share the life of Dominicans while remaining lay people. It is important to stress that Tertiaries remain lay people, as at one period the aim was rather for lay people to try and live the religious life as far as they could, while still remaining lay people. So there was great emphasis

on wearing a habit and leading a semi-conventual life. Nowadays it seems more important to try to identify the essentials of the Dominican vocation and then see how these can be adapted to a fully Christian lay life.

St. Dominic founded the Order of Preachers, that is a group of people whose care and purpose was to study and preach the Gospel. However, he realised from the start that people like this must have a community of life and fellowship, and must be rooted and founded in prayer. The essentials of the Dominican vocation then, are community, prayer and preaching, and these are the basis and ideal of the life of a Tertiary, a lay Dominican.

Tertiaries do not live in communities, but they meet regularly so that they may grow together in friendship and understanding. We sometimes forget the fundamental part that fellowship plays in Christian life, and these regular meetings are meant to develop a sense of community, of sharing joys and sorrows, but above all of sharing an increase in faith. It is through community meetings, like the regular chapter meetings, that Tertiaries grow in faith as they share the problems, the challenges and the joys of growing in trust and confidence in the Lord. Some find the most attractive element of Tertiary life to be precisely the help that comes to them from meeting other people, who want support in believing and who are ready to share their own experience of the challenge of faith in our days.

Naturally, as faith and prayer go hand in hand, when Christians meet, they pray and so prayer is an essential part of Tertiary life. Great flexibility is available in how we pray, but Dominicans have a long tradition of liturgical prayer dating from Saint Dominic, who himself for many years lived as a canon regular and remained enthusiastic about the importance of the liturgy in understanding and preaching the faith. Tertiaries then, are encouraged to pray together the great Prayer of the Church. They like to prepare for a celebration of Mass together, in which reading and singing and ritual will help to stir up faith in the presence of the Lord.

Finally, we come to what is perhaps most specific to Dominicans and that is preaching, spreading the Gospel. For Tertiaries, as indeed for all Dominicans, this means first of all getting to know the Gospel message. When they meet, Tertiaries are urged to read the Gospel together, to discuss it, to argue about it, to air their differences, to become informed and educated in their faith. There are plenty of opportunities to spread the faith they have studied, be it at home with their own children, or in factory, office, or workplace.

Surely the Tertiary, the lay Dominican, has a special place in today's world? He or she is doing just what Vatican II hopes lay people will do. He or she is striving to know the Gospel, to live the Gospel and to share the Gospel. May the happy restoration of the Tertiary foundation of Kilcorban Priory be a new inspiration to them, and may the venerable tradition of lay Dominican life continue to flourish and find new ways of helping people discover the saving message of the Lord Jesus.

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Statutes of Fraternities of Lay Dominicans

I Fundamental Constitution of Lay Dominicans

1. LAITY IN THE CHURCH

Among the disciples of Christ, there are men and women who live in the world, participating actively through Baptism and Confirmation in the Royal, Priestly and Prophetic Mission of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and have as their vocation to shine forth the presence of Christ in the heart of humanity in such a way that through them "the divine message of salvation be known and accepted by all men."

(Apost. Act. 4,3)

2. DOMINICAN LAITY

Some among them, moved by the Holy Spirit to live according to the spirit and charism of St. Dominic, are incorporated into the Dominican Order through a special commitment in accordance with their own statutes.

3. DOMINICAN FAMILY

These seculars form communities and constitute one Dominican Family with other groups of the Order.

(LCO. 141)

4. SPECIFIC CHARACTER OF DOMINICAN LAITY

They are characterized by a particular spirituality and by dedication to the service of God and neighbour in the Church and, in as much as they are members of the Order participate in its apostolic mission through prayer, study and preaching in accordance with the state of the laity.

5. APOSTOLIC MISSION

Supported by fraternal communion and the example of St. Dominic, St. Catherine and others who have influenced us and continue to influence us in the life of the Order and of the Church, they give testimony to their faith, conscious of the Church of their time and in this way they are of service to Truth.

6. Taking into account the principal objectives of the contemporary apostolate of the Church, they are dedicated in a special way, with authentic mercy, to remedying the different forms of suffering, to the defence of freedom, to justice and peace.

7. Animated by the particular charism of the Order they know that their apostolic mission springs from the abundance of contemplation.

II. Life of the Fraternities

8. LIFE OF THE FRATERNITIES

They have to make an effort to live an authentic fraternal communion according to the spirit of the Beatitudes which will always be manifested in acts of mercy and participation in good works among the members of the fraternities, above all, with the poor and infirm and through prayer for the dead in such a way that all be of one heart and one soul.

(Act. 4,32)

9. The members of the fraternities collaborating with all their heart in the apostolate of the brothers and sisters of the Order will participate actively in the life of the Church being always available to co-operate with other apostolic groups.

10. To progress in the fulfilment of their inseparably contemplative and apostolic vocation, the laity of St. Dominic have recourse principally to the following sources:

- (a) listening to the Word of God and the reading of scripture, especially the New Testament.
- (b) active participation in the celebration of the liturgy and in the daily Eucharist if possible.
- (c) have frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- (d) conversion of heart through the spirit and practice of evangelic penance.
- (e) liturgical prayer in union with all the Dominican Family, also private prayer, meditation and rosary.
- (f) assiduous study of revealed truth and constant reflection, in the light of faith, on contemporary problems.
- (g) devotion to the Virgin Mary, in accordance with the tradition of the Order, like that of Our Father St. Dominic and of St. Catherine of Siena.
- (h) periodical meetings on spirituality.

11. FORMATION

Its object is to form adults in the Faith who are capable of receiving, celebrating and proclaiming the Word of God. With this end in view each province will establish a programme:

- (a) for formation in stages for new members;
- (b) for permanent formation for those of its members, including those who find themselves isolated.

12. A Dominican must prepare himself or herself to preach the Word of God. This preaching is the exercise of the prophetic function of the baptised and strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation. In the present world the preaching of the Word of God implies especially the defence of human dignity. Promotion of the unity of christians and dialogue with non-christians and non-believers are part of the Dominican vocation.

13. The principal sources of Dominican formation are:

- the Word of God and theological reflection.
- liturgical prayer.
- the history and tradition of the Order.
- contemporary documents of the Church and of the Order.
- study of the signs of the times.

14. PROFESSION OR COMMITMENT

In order to be incorporated into the Order, the laity must make profession or commitment, which consists of the formal promise to live according to the spirit of St. Dominic and in accordance with the way of life indicated in their own Statutes.

This profession or commitment can be temporal or perpetual.

It will be made through this formula or another that is substantially the same:

“In honour of God all powerful, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and of the blessed Virgin and of St. Dominic, I (Name).....before you Prior(ess)/President and Religious, promoter of the fraternity representing the Master of the Order of Preachers, I promise to live according to the Statutes of the Laity of St. Dominic for three years (for my whole life).”

III. Structure and Government

15. The fraternity is the special source through which the commitment of each one is nourished and sustained in his/her vocation. The rhythm of meetings will vary according to the fraternities. Assiduous participation at these meetings gives testimony of the fidelity of each one.

16. The admission of new members will be in accordance with the guidelines established in the directory where conditions and stages of admission are explained. The lay person responsible for the Fraternity, after the decisive vote of the Council, proceeds with the religious promoter to receive the candidate in accordance with the way prescribed by the directory.

17. After a time of experience and of testing determined by the Directory and with the vote of the Council of the fraternity, the person responsible will receive with the religious promoter the temporal or perpetual profession of the candidate.

18. JURISDICTION OF THE ORDER AND AUTONOMY OF THE FRATERNITIES

- (a) The fraternities are under the jurisdiction of the Order; nevertheless they enjoy the special autonomy of seculars, governing themselves.

19. UNIVERSAL LEVEL OF THE ORDER

- (a) The Master of the Order as successor to St. Dominic and head of the Dominican Family presides over all the fraternities throughout the world. It is his task to maintain intact the Dominican spirit, to establish practical rules according to the demands of the circumstances of time and place and to promote the spiritual good and apostolic zeal of members.
- (b) The promoter general represents the Master of the Order in all fraternities and transmits to the Master of the Order and to the General Chapter the proposals that the fraternities themselves present.

20. PROVINCIAL LEVEL

- (a) The Prior Provincial presides over the fraternities within the territorial limits of the province and with the consent of the Ordinary of the place, he erects new fraternities.
- (b) The Provincial Promoter, brother or sister, represents the Provincial Prior and is an "ex-officio" member of the Provincial Council of the Laity. He is appointed by the Provincial Chapter or by the Prior Provincial with his council, having listened to the Provincial Council of the Laity.
- (c) A Provincial Council of lay Dominicans is to be established within the territory of the Province, whose members are elected by the fraternities and who function according to the norms of their particular directory. This council will elect the Provincial President of the Laity.

21. LOCAL FRATERNITY LEVEL

- (a) The local fraternity is governed by the president with his council; these are fully responsible for the government and administration of the fraternity.
- (b) The Council of the Fraternity is elected in accordance with common law, and for the determined time in the particular directory. The council will elect the president from among its members.
- (c) The religious promoter (brother or sister) must give doctrinal and spiritual assistance. He is appointed by the Prior Provincial after listening to the Provincial Promoter and the local council of the Laity.

22. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL

- (a) When there are different provinces in the territory of the same country, a national council can be established, according to the norms established in the particular directory.
- (b) In the same way an international council, if it is deemed useful, after consulting with the entire Dominican Laity may be set up.

23. The councillors of the fraternities can send petitions and suggestions to the provincial chapter of the friars; the provincial and national councils of the Laity can present them to the General Chapter.

It is recommended that Lay representatives be invited to and welcomed at the above Chapters to deal with matters pertaining to them.

24. STATUTES OF THE FRATERNITIES

The laws by which the Dominican Laity are governed are as follows:

- (a) The fundamental Rule of the Laity (Fundamental Constitution, norms of life and government of the fraternities).
- (b) the general declaration of the Master of the Order and General Chapters.
- (c) Special Directories.



Sister Rose, O.P. – Mother of St. Dominic

BLESSED JANE of Aza was born in the first half of the 12th century at the Castle of Aza near Arnda on the river Doure in Spain about 200 miles north of Madrid. She married Don Felix de Guzman who lived in a castle in



Our Lady of Galway

Calaruega in Old Castile, Spain. He was a very saintly man and everybody in his household lived good and honest lives, and joined in the family prayers.

Jane was very beautiful and very devoted to her duties as a wife and mother. She spent time in prayer when she was very busy during the day. She spent part of the night in prayer and so shortened her time for sleep. She visited the poor and needy in their humble dwellings and attended the sick no matter how ill they were. On one occasion Jane had given away to the poor all the wine in a cask in the cellar. She was afraid her husband would be annoyed. She went to her room very downcast and prayed earnestly that God would come to her assistance. After some time she noticed a trickle of wine coming through the side of the cask and on opening it, to her great amazement, she saw that it was full to the brim. She fell on her knees thanking God and from that time on she never ran short of wine.

Her eldest son, Antonio, became a priest. Towards the end of his life he gave all his money to the poor and retired to a hospital. There he spent his days ministering to the sick. Mannes also became a priest and was destined at a later date to join his brother as one of the first Dominicans and a Saint.

When her two sons left her, Jane prayed that God might give her another son, as they had no heir to inherit their lands. About 15 miles from home there was a famous monastery of Silos and many pilgrims came there to pray at the shrine of Saint Dominic, a saint who was renowned throughout Spain for his miracles. She went there for nine consecutive days and completed her novena. Some nights she did not return home, but slept on the hard pavement. On the seventh day the Saint appeared to her – told her that her prayers were heard and that she would become the mother of a son, who would do great things for God. She was so happy that she promised she would call her child Dominic.

One night she saw in a vision a black and white dog holding in his mouth a torch, which set the whole world on fire. When her baby was a few weeks old she, with her husband, Don Felix, took him to the Abbey of Silos and the abbot offered a Mass in thanksgiving. Later she carried him to the tomb of her uncle, Blessed Peter. In the adjoining garden there is a hermitage, which still bears her name. Nearby is the fountain and garden of St. Dominic.

They took the child to be baptized in the Parish Church. His godmother held him over the font and as the water was being poured on his head she saw a star over the Dominican crest. She died in 1194 and was buried in the Church grounds of Calaruege.

Dominic pursued his education in the university of Palencia, was ordained priest in Osmá. He went to the south of France where he fought the heresy of the Olbigenses. In Toulouse he founded the order of preachers of Dominicans. He it was who preached the "Rosary" in the form that we know today.

St. Dominic and the Rosary

FR. GABRIEL HARTY, O.P.

The Dominican Legend of The Rosary – “The Barren Land”

THE Dominican Order was born into a barren land: dichotomised humanity, with flesh warring against the spirit, with woman downgraded and life itself despised, was unable to accept the reality of the Word made flesh, dwelling in the midst of us.

There was only one answer, and it was summed up in the simple words: “Hail . . . the Lord is with you . . . you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son . . .” (Luke 1: 28-31).

Whatever critical historians may have to say about the Legend of the Rosary, it bears witness to the charismatic gift entrusted by the Church to the Order of Preachers, a gift which we must exercise by reason of profession, by our legislation and by constant exhortation of the See of Rome.

The Legend, as such, is worth recalling in these days of renewed insistence on our preaching ministry: After much fruitless labour, tradition has it that the Mother of God appeared to Dominic in the forest of Bouconne near Toulouse:

“Wonder not that until now you have had such little fruit from your labours. You have spent them on a barren soil, not yet watered with the dew of divine grace. When God willed to renew the face of the earth he began by sending down the fertilising dew of the Angelic Salutation. Preach my Rosary composed of one hundred and fifty Aves, and you will obtain an abundant harvest.”

True Devotion to Mary

The Hail Mary places Mary in her true ecclesial context – waiting herself in the barren land with the broken, the wounded and the little people of God. The heavenly Ave comes first on her; for in truth the Hail Mary is not so much an ascending prayer, as a downward divine blessing poured out on all flesh. Mary stands in the desert on behalf of all humanity, so that it may blossom once more like the rose. The word addressed to Mary is addressed to all: “Rejoice . . . the Lord is with you.” Here, we all draw waters from the springs of salvation, as the fertilising rain of the Ave renews our land.

A School of Prayer

There is a healthy plurality about the Prayer of the Rosary, for its long and varied history has produced many approaches: it has its rich Marian tradition, as witnessed at thousands of Marian shrines, in processions and in rituals where Mary is crowned as Queen. It has too, its Christological orientation as a "compendium of the Scriptures;" it is a powerful vocal prayer and it is a many levelled way of contemplative prayer. It can be prayed in a group or alone. In a word, the Rosary is a School of prayer, providing for body, soul and spirit.

One thinks of the vast collection of Rosary spirituality from the renowned Alanus de Rupensis, Michael de Insulis and William Pepin down to modern times, embracing the wealth of Papal teaching and the untold wealth of Dominican libraries such as that of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. One word which deserves special mention is "Le Triple Rosaire" by Pere Bernard, the seventeenth century Dominican of Toulouse:

Pere Bernard deals with the classic three ages of prayer in the Rosary:

"The Rosary of meditation, or of serious reflection;

The Rosary of intimacy, or of looking in love;

The Rosary of union, of resting in the Lord and listening in the heart."

Many who abandoned the Rosary as not in keeping with their spiritual development, would be greatly surprised by rediscovering this original dynamic. Directors of the Rosary would do well to return to these well-springs of our Dominican heritage.

A Method of Preaching

St. Dominic is above all the "Man of the Book." Art may show him without the beads, but never without the Scriptures. It would be well to study the analysis of the Rosary method of preaching set out in *Marialis Cultus* of Pope Paul VI:

"The Rosary is thus a Gospel prayer, as pastors and scholars like to define it, more today perhaps than in the past."

"It has also been more easily seen how the orderly and gradual unfolding of the Rosary reflects the very way in which the Word of God mercifully entering into human affairs, brought about the Redemption."

"It has also been observed that the division of the mysteries of the Rosary into three parts not only adheres strictly to the chronological order of the facts but above all reflects the plan of the original proclamation of the faith and sets forth once more the mystery of Christ in the very way in which it is seen by Saint Paul in the celebrated 'hymn' of the Letter to Philippians – kenosis, death and exaltation (2: 6-11)."

An Instrument of Healing

Early preachers of the Rosary were concerned not merely with preaching a devotional exercise. They were mindful of the Acts of the Apostles: "Grant to your servants to speak your word with boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." (Acts 4: 29-30).

Among the classic texts of their preaching was the story of the woman with the issue of blood. She touched the Lord and experienced power to go out from him. Healing was a very real part of the Rosary apostolate of former times. The Preacher would hold up the beads, and invite his hearers to touch the Lord in faith, as they reverently called on the name of Jesus in each Ave. "The Beads," they would say, "are like the tassel of his robe. Reach out and clutch them in faith and you will be made well."

Bernard of Toulouse would encourage the members of the Rosary Confraternity to do as members of the Milan confraternity did: "anoint themselves with oil from the lamp burning before the Rosary altar, repeating often the names of Jesus and Mary." He goes to the trouble of setting down a form of words to be used by the laity themselves when they anoint the sick members in the course of their visits.

The Spanish apostle of New Granada, St. Louis Bertrand, gives a graphic account of the miracles performed through his own use of the beads which he was accustomed to place around the neck of the sick person. After his return to Valencia he gave a Rosary to a friend and told him to preserve it with reverence, "because in the Indies, this Rosary cured the sick, converted sinners, and I think, also raised the dead to life."

In these days of the new flourishing of the ministry of healing, it would be remiss of us Dominicans to fail in the healing dimension of the Rosary, which is an integral part of our tradition.

A Fraternity of Faith

As early as the year 1486, when Michael de Insulis (Francois de Lille) made his defence of the Rosary Confraternity at the time of public debate in the University of Cologne, the Order of Preachers had espoused the concept of a fellowship in the spirit, as the basis for a solid Rosary devotion. However vague and undocumented the involvement of the Order with the Psalter of Mary itself, its concern for community, for sharing and support has always been part of its Rosary tradition.

Michael de Insulis often used the Vulgate text: "I share with all those who keep your law." Psalm 118: 63, while Pepin quoted the words of the Prodigal's father: All that is mine is yours . . ." Membership of the Rosary Confraternity implied a great deal more than having one's name in a register and promising to say certain prayers. It meant assuming the authority of an

elder brother, of knowing how to put the robe of mercy on your brother's or sister's back; how to put the shoes of freedom on their feet and the ring of covenant friendship on their finger. Henceforth all would be one and walk like a prince in the royal household. Cf "Alanus Redivivus."

Small Group Apostolate

While we may not be able to rival the great confraternities of the past, we do have in these times a veritable explosion of small Rosary Groups all over the world. Strong in faith and bound together by bonds of love and service, these groups display many of the qualities of committed covenant community. In keeping with the terms of *Marialis Cultus* (Par. 51) they have learnt to integrate into their prayer the four elements mentioned by Pope Paul VI: Scripture, Silence, Song and the Sharing of their contemplation. A wealth of meditation literature, and other Scripture-based material has sprung from these groups. They have endeavoured in many instances to build their Rosary around the Eucharist, using the traditional Jesus-clauses in each Hail Mary, so as to make of their prayer a deep communion with the Lord.

Directors of Confraternities would do well to encourage and help these groups and in turn to learn from them. In many instances it may be feasible, in accordance with the norms of the Apostolic Constitution of Pope Leo XIII, to invite the group to become affiliated to the legally constituted Confraternity in the local district.

Addressing the Issues of the Day

In the context of this small group apostolate, as well as in the preaching which must accompany any true Dominican Rosary apostolate, many of the issues of our day can be faced up to.

The wounded ones can come for healing; it is good to know that many of our Dominican colleagues are once again using the Rosary as did St. Louis Bertrand; the spirit of St. Martin who went about with the beads in one hand and bread in the other, is still alive! We hear of women being comforted and strengthened as, like the woman of the Gospel, they find that power goes out from the mysteries of Jesus, in our day as in the days when the Lord walked the earth in the flesh.

It is encouraging to observe that where social and political ideologies may fail, the true devotion of God's own people brings enlightenment and strength. Genuine Rosary fraternity in our day is manifesting itself as another "Upper Room" experience, as men and women and little children wait with Mary and the disciples once again for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, with all the gifts and the fruits of that same Spirit.

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Tadhg Keogh

Bishop of Clonfert

1671 – 1687

AMONG those buried in Kilcorban there is at least one bishop, namely Bishop Tadhg Keogh, who was bishop of Clonfert from the year 1671 to 1687. He was a Dominican priest and so it was fitting that he was laid to rest in the Dominican foundation of Kilcorban. As this year we commemorate the third centenary of his death, it is opportune for us to recall something of his life and work.

Bishop Keogh lived during a very troubled period of our country's history, and had to carry on his work as bishop under very difficult conditions. He was born in Skyvalley, in the parish of Taughmaconnell, in County Roscommon, early in the seventeenth century. The exact date of his birth is not known. He belonged to an important family. The Keoghs were descended from a branch of the O'Kelly dynasty who were the hereditary rulers of Uí Maine (Hymany) in former times. He received part of his early education under Archdeacon John Lynch who, at that time, had a famous school in Galway. He then entered the Dominican convent in Mullingar, where he completed his noviciate. He next went to Spain to study for the priesthood and entered the Dominican convent of Pamplona. Having completed his studies there, he was ordained priest. He then returned to Ireland and was appointed to the Dominican convent in Roscommon. Here he began his priestly ministry.

This was the period following the Rising of 1641 when the Catholics were striving to gain religious freedom and win back the lands and civil rights that had been taken from them. The catholic struggle was at this time being carried on by the Catholic Confederation formed earlier in Kilkenny. At that time the most powerful of the catholic landlords was Ulick, 5th Earl of Clanrickard, whose principal seat was in Portumna. He supported the king, Charles I, in his fight against the Parliamentarians, but did not join the Kilkenny Confederation. Although a catholic he was the king's representative in Galway and so while in agreement with the aims of the Confederation, he wanted to remain loyal to the king.

He had at this time a chaplain, a Dominican, Fr. Dominic Burke. On his death, about the year 1648, the Earl selected Fr. Keogh to take his place. So Fr. Tadhg Keogh left Roscommon and came to take up residence henceforth with the Earl. By this time the catholic cause had begun to fail. With the arrival of Cromwell in August 1649, and the death of Owen Roe O'Neill, the ablest of the catholic leaders, and because of disunity among the Confederate leaders, the catholic struggle finally collapsed. By that time Clan-

rickard had assumed leadership of the remaining royalist and catholic forces, but he had eventually to surrender and was allowed to go to England. Fr. Keogh went with him and stayed with him as his chaplain until the Earl's death in 1657. He remained in England as chaplain to Clanrickard's widow.

In due course the monarchy was restored in England, and Charles II came to the throne. His wife, Catherine of Braganza, a catholic, was then in Portugal, and Fr. Keogh was one of those who was sent to Portugal and entrusted with the task of escorting her to England. Later he was appointed one of her chaplains, and remained on in London.

By this time the diocese of Clonfert had been without a bishop since the death, in exile, of Bishop Walter Lynch, who died in Győr, in Hungary on 14th July, 1663. In fact the diocese had had no resident bishop since Bishop Lynch went into exile in 1652. In response to appeals from Ireland, Rome was now preparing to appoint to a number of the vacant dioceses, including Clonfert. In a despatch to Rome, in February 1669, the Internuncio in Brussels recommended Fr. Keogh as a suitable candidate, saying that he had a very favourable report of him from reputable sources in London, that the clergy of Clonfert would favour him, that he had many influential friends among the people of Clonfert, and that the king would be glad to have him appointed. In a letter dated 17th December, 1669, written by Archbishop Oliver Plunkett in London, while he was on his way back to Ireland to take possession of his diocese, Armagh, he recommended highly the appointment of Fr. Keogh to the diocese of Clonfert. Here is what he wrote:

"The clergy of the diocese of Clonfert wish to have as their pastor Father Tadhg Keogh of the order of Saint Dominic. This I know from the testimonial signed by them. The marquis of Clonrickard, a catholic gentleman who is most outstanding as regards wealth and power in that province also desires to have him as the bishop of that diocese. In my own poor judgement this father is worthy of this promotion. He is of grave and venerable presence, learned, modest, and of exemplary life, and he has contributed greatly towards keeping this noble family on the straight and narrow path. So that, all things considered, if a religious is to be appointed in the province of Tuam, he is the suitable candidate; and a very important factor is that the man appointed enjoy the favour of the marquis of Clanrickard, who is able to protect him and come to his help in every eventuality."

The following year, 1670, at a meeting of all the resident bishops in Ireland at that time, held in Dublin on 18th June, the name of Fr. Tadhg Keogh was put forward and sent to Rome as the most suitable candidate for Clonfert. A month later on 18th July, 1670, in a letter to the Secretary of the congregation of Propaganda, Archbishop Oliver Plunkett again recommended Fr. Keogh saying "now the bishops here would prefer for the diocese of Clonfert Father Thady (Tadhg) Keogh, the Dominican, who suffered imprisonment in London because of the Walsh affair. He was the cause of Walsh's losing credit."

It is no wonder, then, that Tadhg Keogh was the one who was appointed to Clonfert on 12th May, 1671. He left England for Ireland immediately on

receiving his appointment and was consecrated bishop in Dublin in September, by Archbishop Oliver Plunkett, assisted by the bishops of Meath and Waterford.

The life of a bishop was not an easy one in those days in Ireland. While there was some degree of toleration for catholics, they still suffered many disabilities. There had been no resident bishop in Clonfert for 19 years, since Bishop Walter Lynch was forced to go into exile in 1652. With the improvement of the lot of catholics after the restoration of the monarchy in England, Bishop Lynch was preparing to return to Ireland and resume his diocese when he died unexpectedly. So Bishop Keogh found a very formidable task awaiting him on his coming as bishop of Clonfert. He immediately set about re-organising the church, providing priests where needed, administering Confirmation, visiting the various parishes and revitalising religious life and restoring church discipline. He probably had no permanent residence of his own but depended on his family and friends to support him. One advantage he had was the existence of a good number of catholic gentry in his diocese and especially the powerful and influential Earl of Clanrickard who had welcomed his appointment as bishop. It was William, the 7th Earl, who was in Portumna, at this time, and his friendship must have been of great help to the bishop in his work in the diocese. Even though he was a catholic, the Earl seems to have been in good standing with the government, his brother, Richard, the 6th, Earl, having had the Clanrickard estates restored to him under Charles II.

Despite not having a resident bishop in the diocese, there doesn't seem to have been any great shortage of priests in Clonfert. There were more regular clergy in the diocese at that time than there are at present. There were Franciscans in Meelick, Kilconnell and Abbey. There were Dominicans in Portumna, Esker and, maybe Kilcorban. There were Carmelites in Loughrea. If there was a scarcity of diocesan priests, there seems to have been plenty of religious to keep the faith alive in the diocese. In 1704 the Government issued a proclamation which required all the priests and religious in the country to be registered. From the records of the names and location of those registered we can get a good idea of the great number of priests Bishop Keogh ordained during his sixteen years as bishop. Some of those he ordained were from dioceses other than Clonfert. The year after he came as bishop, 1672, he had ordinations in Kilconnell. Among those whom he ordained on that occasion is the name of Denis Egan, who was then, in 1704, parish priest of Dun an Uchta (Eyrecourt) and Clonfert, and who was living in "Finagh."

In 1673 he had ordinations again in Kilconnell where he ordained, among others, Walter Dillon, who in 1704 was parish priest of Fohena and Kilgerril, and who was living in Clonbrock.

In 1674, in "Deareen," he ordained, among others, Lochlann Madden, who in 1704, was P.P. of Kiltormer and "Killyna," and who was living in "Killinane." That same year, 1674, he had ordinations in Kilconnell, and there ordained Patrick Keaghry, who in 1704, was P.P. of Kilconickny and Lickerrig and living in "Isserclarin."

In 1778 Bishop Keogh had ordinations in "Clonkelagh," where he ordained Thomas Keaghry, who in 1704, was P.P. of "Knockmoy," and Derrymacloghny"; Edward Burke, who in 1704 was P.P. of "Killconeerin"; and Hubert Burke, who in 1704 was P.P. of Annaghdown.

In 1679 Bishop Keogh had ordinations in Ballyluoge, in the parish of Killoran, in a quiet place now known as "The Bishop's Chair," and where recently a memorial was erected to mark the site. Among those ordained on that occasion were Edward Burke, who in 1704, was P.P. of Killalachtan, and Brian Larkin who in 1704 was P.P. of "Bolane" (Bullaun).

That same year he also had ordinations in Cloncorton, in Co. Roscommon.

In 1680 he had ordinations again in Ballyluoge, where he ordained a priest who in 1704 was P.P. in Kilmacduagh, "Daniel Agan," who in 1704 was P.P. of Lorrha. That same year he had ordinations in Portumna. There he ordained "Darby Dorney," who in 1704 was P.P. in "Glankene and Inch" in Tipperary. "About 1680," he had ordinations again in Kilconnell, where he ordained Fr. Kelly, who in 1704 was P.P. of Lickmolassey and Kilmalinogue.

In 1681 Bishop Keogh had ordinations in "Creggin," now known as Marble Hill, in the parish of Ballinakill. It was the seat of a branch of the Burkes. Here he ordained James Butler, who was P.P. of Clondalkin, Co. Dublin, in 1704. The same year he was back in Ballyluoge, where among others he ordained Edward French, who in 1704, was P.P. of "Spidle and Seaside." On the same occasion he ordained Jeremiah Dolan, who was P.P. of Killoran in 1704 and living in Killoran. Again in 1681 Bishop Keogh had ordinations in "Killene" and there ordained "James M. Ingowne," who in 1704 was P.P. of "Ardcrony, Modereny, Kilruane and Ballygibon."

In 1682 he ordained in Marble Hill Seonach Mac Ugo, who was P.P. of Kiltesskill, in 1704. The same year he ordained again in Kilconnell, and there ordained Denis Kennedy, who in 1704, was P.P. of Killimor and living in Killimor. In 1683 he was back again in "Crigin" (Marble Hill) where he ordained John Byrnes, who in 1704 was P.P. in Sego, in Co. Armagh; Francis McNally, who was P.P. of Kilconly and Kilbannon, in the diocese of Tuam; and Edward Dolan who was P.P. of Aughrim and Kilconnell in 1704; George Lovelock, who in 1704 was P.P. of Lachagh; and Tadhg Donnellan, who in 1704 was P.P. of Kilcooley.

In the years 1684 and 1685 Bishop Keogh had ordinations again in "Creggeene" (Marble Hill) among whom were Patrick Parlan, who was P.P. of Loughgall, Co. Armagh; and Hugh Madden who was P.P. of Clontuskert in 1704. Also ordained in Marble Hill was Edward Butler who in 1704 was P.P. of "Kilgrant," Co. Tipperary.

In addition to those given above there are others whose names are not given, but it is obvious from the number given what great work Bishop Keogh accomplished for the church in Clonfert, and indeed for the church in other parts of the country as well.

Two years after his appointment to Clonfert, the government issued a proclamation banishing all bishops and regular clergy. Two of the bishops went into exile, others went into hiding. The Archbishop of Tuam was arrested and lodged in prison. Four years later with the Titus Oates or "Popish" plot in England things became still more difficult for Catholics. However, west of the Shannon things seem to have been less difficult. With the help of the Catholic landlords from whom he seems to have received hospitality and support, Bishop Keogh was able to carry on his work for the church unmolested. According to the folklore around Ballyluoge where he had ordinations, Bishop Keogh used to come and stay with the Donnellans in their residence at Ballydonnellan, where, it is said, he had a special room with a secret exit in case of danger of arrest.

One would like to know what kind of person Bishop Keogh was. Nothing that he said or wrote himself seems to be extant. In the Spring of 1673 the Primate, Archbishop Oliver Plunkett, visited Connacht and spent five weeks here. In a report afterwards to Rome of his visitation he wrote: "I also spoke with the bishop of Clonfert, a man of gravity and wisdom, beloved by all." In an earlier letter to Rome, written on 19th July, 1672, he spoke of the bishop of Clonfert as follows: "All speak highly of the bishop of Clonfert, he is a sensible man."

There in brief is some of the lifestory of Bishop Tadhg Keogh, who administered the diocese of Clonfert for 16 years during a very critical period of our history. When he was dying he asked to be buried in front of the statue of the Blessed Virgin and Child which at that time was venerated in the chapel of the Dominican Tertiaries in Kilcorban, a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin of the Rosary. Let us thank God for having given such a great and holy bishop to the diocese of Clonfert in time of need; and let us honour his memory by remaining true to the faith of our fathers he worked so hard to preserve.



An Choróin Mhuire

SIN an t-ainm is deise don urnaí iomtach seo. Ach i mbéal na ndaoine is minicí “an Paidrín Páirteach,” mar go mbíonn an teaghlach páirteach sa phaidrín. Ar an ócáid aoibhinn seo, Iúl 1987, agus pobal Chill Chorbáin, paráistí Chillín, Cill Íomair, Gort an Iomaire agus go deimhin an tAichréidh ar fad go Soineann soir ag teaspáint a ndílseacht do Mhuire, níor mhiste stair agus déanamh an Phaidrín a mheabhrú dúinn féin.

San diú haois déag bhí eiricheacht na nAilbíseach ag milleadh go mór faoi na Críostaithe i ndeisceart na Fraince. Ach nuair ba mhó an gábh isea ba ghaire an chabhair. Thaibhsigh an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe do Naomh Dominic agus d’ordaigh dó an Paidrín Páirteach a mhúineadh dona daoine. Chuirfeadh an Paidrín ag machnamh iad ar bheatha ár Slánaítheora, agus ar a bhás agus a aiséirí. Mhúslódh an machnamh sin grá Críost ina gcroíthe, agus aithrí ina bpeacaí. Bhéarfadh sin orthu cabhair Dé a iarraidh trí impí na Maighdine Muire. Riamh ó shin is é an Paidrín sciath dídin na gCríostaithe.

Ag seanmíreacht díbh in Eirinn dhéanadh na Doimnicigh an Paidrín a chraobhscaoileadh chomh díograiseach sin gur tugadh mar ainm orthu “Aithreacha an Phaidrín.” Sa gcomharsanacht seo ba chos’uil gur as Port Omna agus as Baile Ath an Rí a thagaidís ag seanmóieacht, mar bhíodh mainistir Doimnicánach sa dá bhaile sin. Thart faoin am céanna isea thug siad aghaidh ar Chill Chorbáin, áit ar mhéadaigh siad deabhóid do Mhuire. Aimsir na bpéindlíthe bhí an tAifreann crosta, bhí tóir ar na sagairt. Fearacht áiteanna naofa eile lomadh Cill Corbáin. Ach ní fhéadfaidís an Choróin Mhire a bhaint d’ár sinsir. Is í a choinnigh an creideamh beo ina gcroíthe.

Gach bliain ceiliúránn an Eaglais, ar 7 Deireach Fómhair, Féile Paidrín Páirteach ma Maighdine Glórmhaire Muire. Is maith mar a chuireann paidir na Féile sin brí agus éifeacht an Phaidrín in iúl dúinn. Seo é. “A Dhia, arbhé d’Aon Mhac a cheannaigh dúinn luach saothair na beatha síoraí lena bheatha, lena bhás agus lena aiséirí: tabhair dúinn, impímíd, ag machnamh dúinn ar na rúndiamhra seo sa choróin rónaofa Muire, go leanfaimis a bhfuil le fáil iontu agus go bhfaighmis a bhfuil geallta acu: tríd an Íosa Críost céanna ár dTiarna. Amen.

AIBHISTÍN VALKENBURG, O.P.

The Irish Madonna In Hungary

By MGR. LOUIS PAGE, P.P., V.G., Fahy

IN a side chapel of the cathedral of the Diocese of Győr, in the city of Győr, in Hungary, is a beautiful picture of our Blessed Lady and Child, which the people of that country call The Irish Madonna, and which they venerate under the title of Comforter of the Afflicted. It is there since the seventeenth century, and was once the cherished possession of an Irish bishop, Dr. Walter Lynch, who was bishop of the diocese of Clonfert from the year 1647 to his death, in exile, in Győr on the 14th July, 1663.

Who was this bishop Walter Lynch, and how did he happen to die there so far away from his diocese in Ireland?

While there is no precise recorded knowledge as regards the date of his birth or of his family, it is accepted that he belonged to an important Galway family of Norman descent, and that he was born in the early part of the 17th century, in the city of Galway. He received his early education in Galway and then, because it was not possible in those days in Ireland, he had to go to the continent of Europe to train for the priesthood, where in due course he was ordained a priest. He returned to Galway and took up his priestly duties in his native city. At that time there was no diocese of Galway. Instead there was in the city what was known as the Wardenship of Galway, centred on the Collegiate church of St. Nicholas to which a number of neighbouring parishes were attached. The principal priest was known as the Warden. In due course Dr. Walter Lynch was appointed Warden. On the diocese of Clonfert becoming vacant, following the transfer of Bishop John Burke to the Archdiocese of Tuam, Walter Lynch was appointed bishop of Clonfert in March 1647.

It was a very disturbed and difficult time in Ireland in those days. A state of war was in existence since the Rising of 1641, when the Catholics began their attempt to gain religious freedom and to try to win back the lands taken from them in the plantations of the previous years. At this time the struggle was being carried on by the forces under the direction of the Catholic Confederation formed earlier in Kilkenny. Bishop Lynch soon became involved and took an important part in the deliberations of the Kilkenny Confederation. He appears to have been highly esteemed among that body. However, owing to disunity and divisions within the Confederation, and the arrival of Oliver Cromwell with an army of 20,000 men, and the untimely death of Owen Roe O'Neill, the ablest leader of the Confederate forces, the Catholic cause began to fail and eventually collapsed. Bishop Lynch was forced to leave his diocese and took refuge in Galway city. After a fruitless

resistance, Galway had to surrender to the Cromwellian army. Meanwhile, to avoid capture, Bishop Lynch had left Galway and made his way to Innisbofin, from where he eventually succeeded in getting away on a ship to the Continent of Europe, and eventually found asylum in Belgium.

It is not known how long he stayed in Belgium, but it is on record that during his time there, he ordained a number of his fellow countrymen in the priesthood.

Little else is known about his movements or how long he remained in Belgium, but in 1655 he had come to Vienna. It was here that he met a Hungarian bishop, who was to befriend and invite him to come to his diocese. This was Bishop John Pusky, Bishop of Győr. On his coming to Győr, Bishop Pusky appointed Dr. Lynch a canon of his Cathedral Chapter, and also had him assist in the work of his diocese.

Meanwhile conditions had begun to improve for Catholics at home in Ireland. Cromwell died and the king, Charles II was back on the throne in England. There was some relaxation of the laws against Catholics, so that Bishop Lynch decided to return and resume his diocese. Sadly, however, he was destined never to see his native land again. As he was preparing to set out on his journey home to Ireland, he died unexpectedly on the 14th July, 1663, in the city of Győr, which had given him welcome and hospitality in his exile, and there his body now lies. Amongst the few personal possessions of Dr. Lynch at the time of his death was a beautiful painting of the Madonna and Child. He is said to have had a great love and devotion for this picture. After his death the picture was placed over a side altar in a side chapel in the Cathedral. It is still in the same place today, but now in a beautiful shrine richly adorned. It would, probably, have remained there without receiving much notice or honour, were it not for a very wonderful occurrence there on St. Patrick's Day, thirty-four years later. What happened on that day was to gain for the picture nationwide attention and make it a source of great devotion to Mary, Comforter of the Afflicted and its shrine a place of pilgrimage ever since. This is what is believed to have happened. Early on the morning of the 17th March, 1697, as Mass was being offered in the Cathedral, what appeared to be a sweat of blood or of tears was noticed on the picture. Naturally this caused great excitement and a feeling of awe among the people who were present. To examine the picture more closely, to see whether it was real or imaginary, it was taken down, and according to the recorded testimony of some of those who witnessed the event and who examined the picture at close range, there was a liquid substance like sweat or tears and the colour of blood on the picture. A linen cloth was used to dry the liquid which, it is recorded, continued to appear for about two hours. The cloth used to dry the liquid is preserved in a silver and glass casket in the Cathedral, where one can see it to this day. A discolouration on the linen cloth does appear like a blood stain. An inscription on the casket reads: "This is the true cloth which was used to dry the blood, which this picture shed in this church on St. Patrick's Day, 1697."

Following this strange and seemingly miraculous event, devotion to the Irish Madonna, as it came to be called, grew greatly. A special shrine was made and adorned for the pictured. It was only then, since now it had become a much honoured shrine, that the crowns were added to the heads of each of the figures. The centenary of the occurrence was celebrated in 1797, and the second centenary in 1897, and in 1947 the 250th anniversary was celebrated, when it is estimated 100,000 pilgrims visited the shrine. If one accepts as real and true what is recorded to have occurred in Győr Cathedral on St. Patrick's Day, 1697, one might well ask why such a thing should happen, or wonder was it a sign from heaven. God alone knows. There is, however, a strange and significant fact that would incline one to think that it was a sign from God. The fact is that on that very day and date, the Protestant Parliament, then in power in Ireland, convened in Dublin and began to introduce and pass the most iniquitous laws, known as the Penal Laws, which were designed to put an end to the practice of the Catholic religion in Ireland and deprive the Catholic people of all their civil rights. Was it, then, a sign of our Blessed Lady's concern and sorrow for the people of Ireland who were to suffer so much during the years that were to follow. Who knows? All we can do is wonder why such a thing should happen, and thank God and His Blessed Mother that, in spite of all they had to endure, they survived and remained true to their faith.

The people of Hungary, too, have had to suffer for their faith in later and in more recent times, and they, too, have remained faithful. Devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, is a notable feature of both our nations. May they and we continue in our devotion to Mary, and may her shrine in Győr continue to remind us, how an exiled Irish bishop found welcome and hospitality in a foreign land in those far off unhappy days.



Local Dominican Monasteries

By DAPHNE POCHIN MOULD

Tertiary Dominicans – Kilcorban

The Dominicans did not, like the Franciscans, have a large-scale development of Tertiaries living in community, though there were Third Order members continuing to live in their own homes. At Kilcorban (Co. Galway), however, the Dominican Tertiaries of the area seem to have had the use of a chapel there, in which was already a much venerated wooden statue of the Mother of God, perhaps as old as the first half of the twelfth century. This figure, together with several other medieval wooden statues from Kilcorban, still survives. The others include a St. Catherine of Alexandria, in which her cloak is fastened by an Irish ring and pin brooch, and her hand rests on a fifteenth-century style sword.

Clontuskert, Co. Galway

On the site of a monastery founded by St. Baedan (+c. 809). The Canons of St. Augustine were introduced by the O'Kelleys some time after 1140. The place was burned in 1413; most of the present interesting remains are of the rebuilding. The fine west door is dated (inscription) 1471. Over the door, St. Michael weighing souls, St. John, St. Catherine of Alexandria and a bishop (? St. Augustine). At side, panels with mermaid, the pious pelican, animals and abstract patterns. Inside, a holy water stoup with Catherine and a bishop carved on its cover. The rood loft looks peculiar, as in a seventeenth-century rebuilding a wall was built across the church here. The cloister arcades have been partly re-erected (1974).

Portumna, Co. Galway

Of our Lady and St's Peter and Paul. Founded 1414. Well-preserved remains of church and priory, with very fine traceried windows in the church; that of the transept with its small comma-shaped apertures is of a design unique in Ireland. 'Johanne' is signed on it, a name which also appears on the c.1470 rood screen at Clontuskert (Augustinian Canons).

The Dominicans continued to work in the area and moved to Boula north of Portumna, where their nineteenth-century church still stands and serves the local people, though the friars themselves gave it over to the secular clergy in 1899.

The Monasteries of Ireland – Daphne Pochin Mould (1976). B. T. Batsford, London.

Portumna Priory

By MICHAEL McMAHON

The foundation at Portumna, being the first house of the Reformed Observance in Ireland, was established at a time of great activity and renewal in the Dominicans, particularly in the West. In 1426 when the indulgence for the building of the church was renewed, papal authority for two new foundations was granted to the Dominicans at Athenry, together with an official copy of the Third Order Rule. All of this indicated that the Dominicans were enjoying great popularity among the public at large. We get further evidence for this in 1446 when Rome approved the grant of the chapel of Kilcorban by the bishop of Clonfert to the brothers and sisters of the Third Order of Penance of St. Dominic "living at that place."

Kilcorban is about four miles from Portumna and just off the old road to Loughrea and Athenry. It apparently had an ancient chapel on the site at that time, for a medieval wooden statue, now in the diocesan collection, is reputed to have come from that place. Later wooden statues of St. John and St. Catherine of Alexandria (Portectress of the Dominicans) reflect the association with Portumna and Athenry. Very little else is known about Kilcorban apart from the fact that it had a farm attached.

The records relating to Portumna itself are almost equally thin. Aside from the papal mandate of 1414 there is hardly any other mention of the place during the medieval period.



Boula

When the Clanricarde house, however, conformed to the Established Church, the friars did not long remain in the shadow of Portumna castle, which was soon to be occupied by a Protestant Earl. Instead they removed themselves some few miles away to a secluded place at Boula, and settled in a house which they rented from one Redmond Dolphin. But government spies were everywhere and in the Spring of 1715 the Grand Jury of Galway stated:

“We are credibly informed and verily believe that great numbers of friars have within these very few years come into this kingdom and settled themselves in the following places in this County, viz. – Kilconnell and in another place near Portumna. And that the great discouragements that in the close of the last Reign were given by the men in power to such as were active in suppressing all friaries have contributed greatly to their settling in this county in defiance of the laws.”

It appears that the Establishment hadn't the political will to endorse the statutes, for we learn from a letter from Stratford Eyre of Eyrecourt to the Protestant primate Boulter, that the friars were still at Boula in 1732. Their story for the remainder of the century presents the picture of a much weakened community living in the neighbourhood of their former Priory, which was now being used as a Protestant Church.

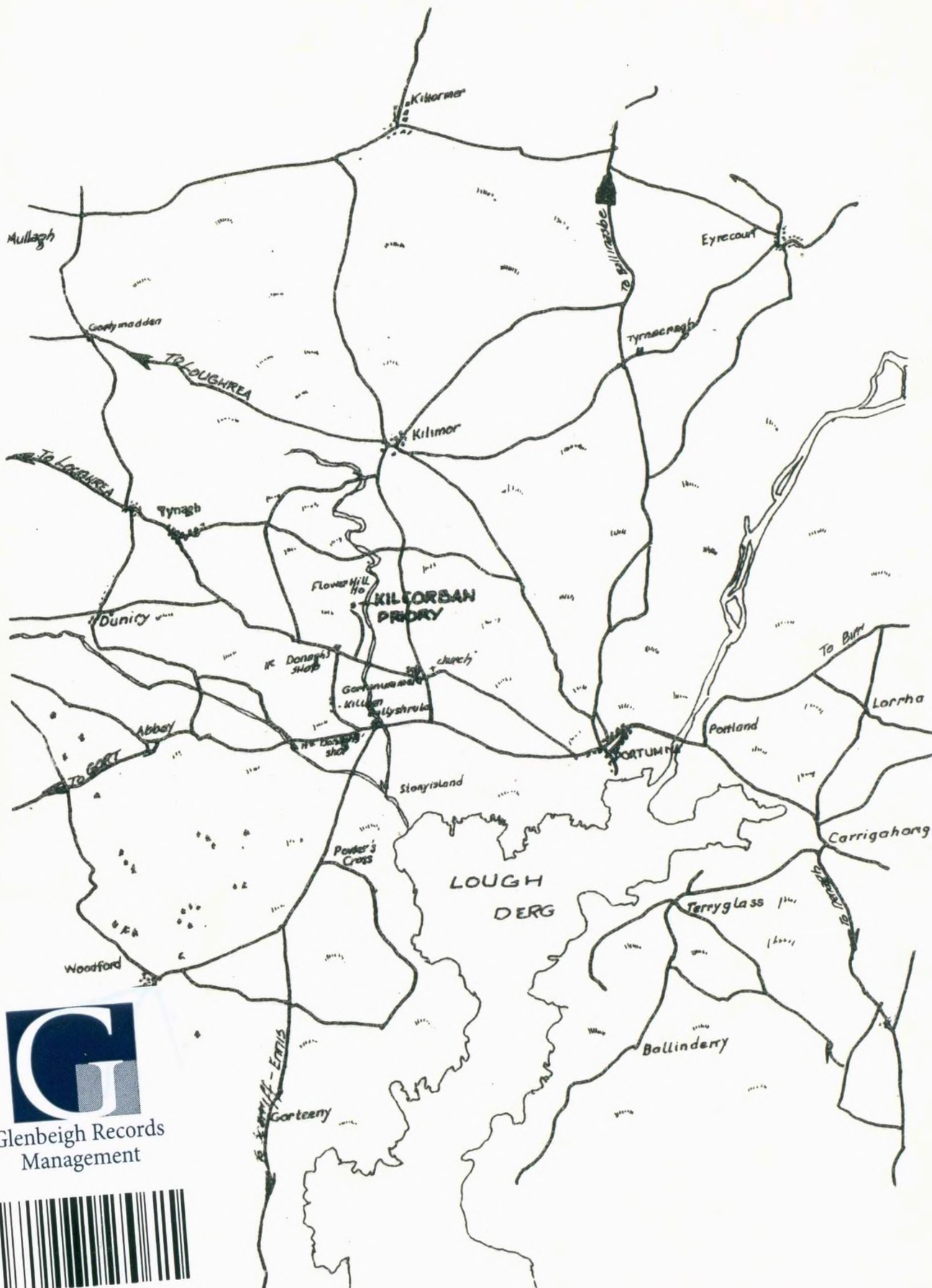
In 1843 the present Boula Church was commenced by Fr. Taaffe, O.P., and completed with the aid of a grant of around three hundred pounds from the Roscommon Dominican Fund. The church which is in the neo-gothic style was dedicated to St. Dominic and stands near the site of an earlier thatched chapel. Shortly after its completion, Fr. Taaffe volunteered for missionary work in America where he died in 1868. He was succeeded as Prior at Boula by Fr. Peter Rush. During all that period the Dominicans from time to time acted as parochial clergy. In the Spring of 1899 the Dominican Order decided to close most of its smaller houses in Ireland. Boula was included in the list, and so the Dominicans' long association with Portumna came finally to an end.

Portumna Priory – Michael McMahon.

Shannon Books, Portumna, 1985 (2nd Ed.).







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