

Portumna Priory



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First Published 1978

2nd Edition (revised) 1985.

Published By: Shannon Books, Portumna, Co. Galway.

Printing By: Kellys' Printing Works, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.

*Cover: East Window in the Choir
(Photo: Tom O'Connor).*

Portumna Priory

The ruins of the Dominican Priory at Portumna stand in a secluded sylvan setting beside the upper margin of Lough Derg on the river Shannon. Less than 'a bow shot from its bower-eaves' are the more imposing remains of the manor-house of the De Burgo Earls of Clanricarde. The proximity of castle and religious house is a feature observable in many Irish towns and is a manifestation of the religious activity which followed the Anglo-Norman colonization of Ireland in the twelfth century.

The first religious house on this site, however, was not a Dominican Priory but a Cistercian chapel affiliated to the abbey of Dunbrody in the far-off diocese of Ferns. Dunbrody itself was among the first religious foundations established under Norman patronage on Irish soil, having been completed as early as 1182. The circumstances which gave rise to the creation at Portumna of a later daughter-house of this abbey, will be traced later. They are, at all events, bound up with the Norman penetration into Connacht in the following century. For the moment, we will take a look at the Cistercian Order itself whose monks were to staff both houses.

The Cistercians

The introduction of the Cistercians to Ireland in the first place was part of a Reform in the Irish Church in the 12th century. After long centuries of Viking wars which had wasted the old monastic centres such as Clonmacnoise, Clonfert and Kilmacduagh, the Celtic Church had drifted into spiritual and moral laxity. This was due in part to the fragmented nature of Irish society which had no central government but a loose political arrangement with whole districts ruled by their separate chieftains. The religious houses or 'cells' were invariably under the patronage of the local ruling family, and this meant that they were frequently embroiled in the wars of rival chieftains. Worse still, the local ruler, in order to retain possession of the monastic lands, frequently chose the abbot or '*comharba*' from his own family and it sometimes happened that the man appointed was not even in holy orders. The Synods of Rathbreasail and Kells in the 12th century set about establishing a central Church based on a diocesan system. This was aimed at lessening the independence

of the monastic houses and bringing the Irish Church into line with international catholicism.

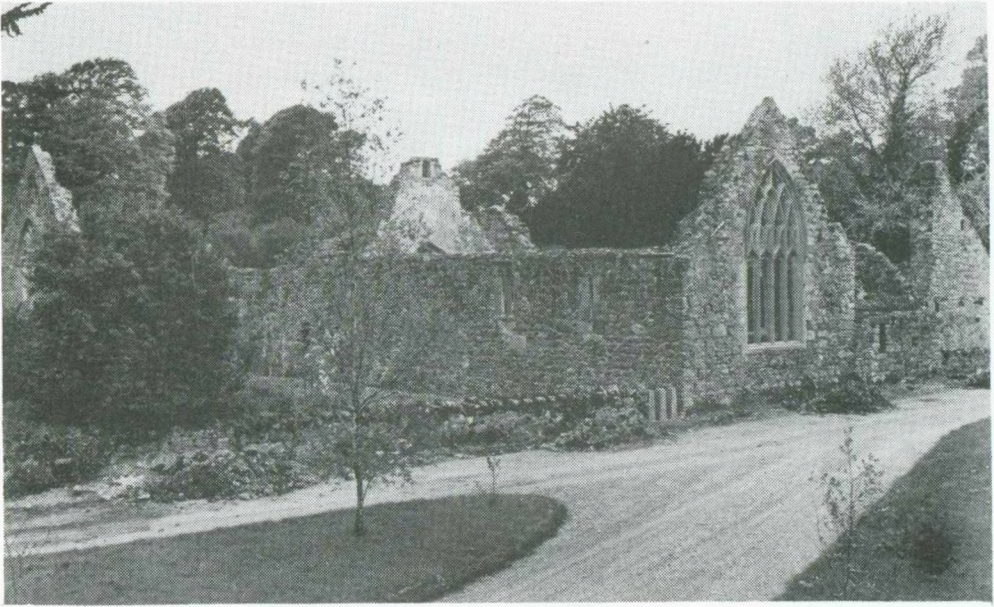
The central figure of the Reform was Malachy Mac Maedoc (afterwards St. Malachy) who was created archbishop of Armagh in 1132. In 1139 Malachy set out for Rome to enlist papal support for his reforms and on his way he stayed for a time with St. Bernard at Clairvaux. St. Bernard had just now revitalized the Cistercians, and Malachy was so impressed with what he saw that he left four of his companions to be trained in that Rule. In 1142 these were ready to return to Ireland, and together with some French monks and architects they began their first settlement at Mellifont in the southern part of the diocese of Armagh. Other Cistercian houses followed at Bective, Boyle etc. and these developments marked the end of the old Irish monastic system.

The arrival of the Normans some thirty years later, in 1169, gave a great impetus to the 'internationalization' of the Irish Church. The Normans were French in their culture and background and the new European Orders readily followed in their wake. As one historian has put it, no other event except the preaching of the gospel by St. Patrick and his companions, has so changed the destinies of Ireland. In France and England many fine cathedrals which survive to this day had already been built by Normans and in Ireland, too, a new wave of religious activity followed their advance. They introduced as well the apparatus of local and central government and this greatly assisted the development of the new diocesan system. Wherever the Normans settled, castles and towns grew up with granges and mills and often a monastery or friary. Large churches in magnificent gothic architecture now began to appear and these contrasted sharply with the small wooden churches and stone oratories which hitherto had dotted the countryside.

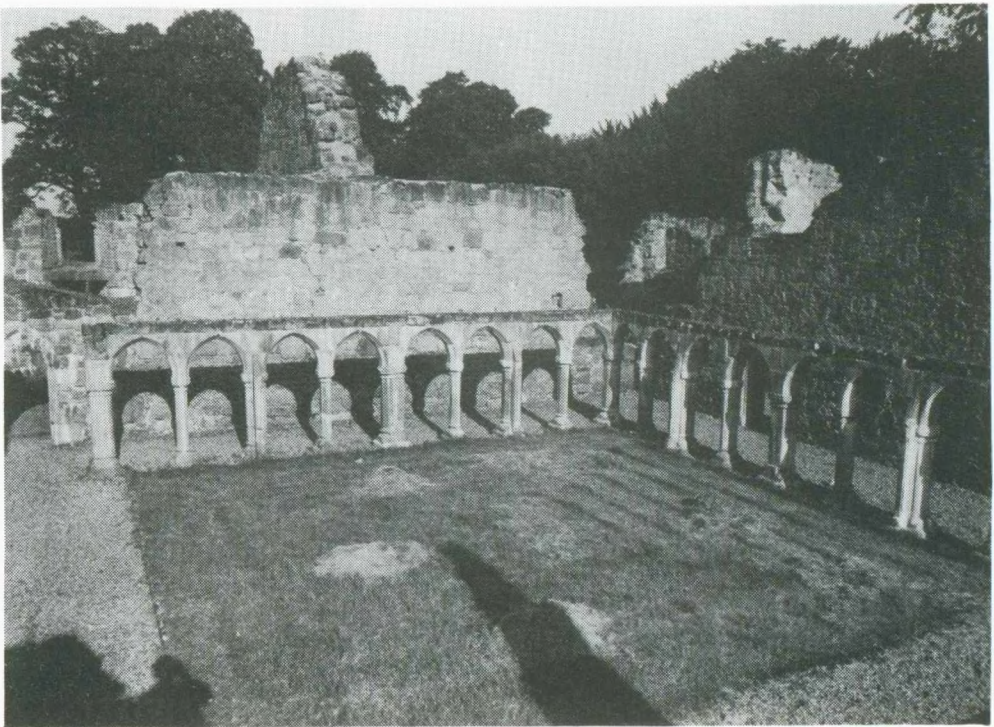
Dunbrody was from the first a prestigious Norman foundation. The ruins are 195 ft. long and 35 ft. wide and its transept is the widest of any Cistercian church, measuring 130 ft. north-south. Its first abbot was Herv De Mont Morris, an uncle of the celebrated Strongbow. In the following century the abbot of Dunbrody was granted by the pope the right of wearing a mitre; he was also created a spiritual lord, sitting as a baron in the Irish parliament. This then was the religious house which later gave a daughter-abbey or chapel to Portumna when the Norman colonization reached across the Shannon in the following century.



Window in south transept.



Priory from south-east.



The Cloisters.

The Normans in Portumna

“The barons of Erin came into Connacht, and commenced to build castles in it.”

—Annals of Loch Cé- 1237.

The founder of the Cistercian house at Portumna was the Norman William De Cogan who, sometime before 1254, granted the patronage of the churches of “Portumna, Lickmolassy and Muintear Maelfinnian” (Kilmalinogue?) to the abbey of Dunbrody in Wexford. De Cogan was one of the tenants of the powerful Richard De Burgo who received a royal grant of twenty-five cantreds in Connacht in 1226. The De Burgos were long before this established on the opposite side of the Shannon where they held, among other lands, a manor at Terryglass. It was on this demesne that Richard De Burgo (‘Red Earl’) later founded the Dominican Priory at Lorrha in 1269.

The De Burgos parcelled out their Connacht lands among the Norman barons, the Berminghams, De Cogans etc. These now began to erect their ‘keeps’ which in the beginning were but ‘earth and timber castles’ or mottes, some of which to this day can be traced at Portumna and Moate near Killimor.

Next, the newly-arrived barons set about putting their estates in order. They established a church economy based on a system of tithes. They were naturally attracted to the new European Religious Orders with whom they had language and cultural affinities. Thus, they put the religious affairs of their estates in the hands of the Cistercians and other monks of their choosing. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that we should view the grant by William De Cogan of the rectories on his estates at Portumna to the Cistercian abbey of Dunbrody. It should perhaps be pointed out that the Irish chieftains, too, welcomed the new monastic orders. Indeed, the first Cistercian lodgement in Co. Galway was not at Portumna, neither was it a Norman foundation, but the establishment at Knockmoy under the patronage of the O’Connor kings of Connacht.

The Cistercian Chapel at Portumna

What kind of foundation did the Cistercians establish at Portumna? Very little physical evidence remains today for the ruins for the most part were absorbed in the later Dominican foundation on the same site. We are not left altogether in the dark however for we know that Cistercian houses of that period followed a fairly strict architectural plan. It was usual for the

highest building, the church, to be built to a cruciform plan on the north side of a cloister. Other buildings in the complex would include cellars, a school, granary etc. as well as dormitory buildings for the monks. All these were necessary, for the Cistercians were a 'self-sufficient' Order whose Rule obliged them to remove themselves from "the distractions of the world". This way of life contrasted sharply with that of their successors on the same site, the Dominicans, who led a mendicant existence and 'quested' for sustenance. It is now not possible, however, to say with any degree of certainty how much of the original Cistercian house survives at Portumna, apart from perhaps the eastern portion of the south wall of the choir which contains a very early window.

The history of the Cistercians at Portumna is also lost in the mists. Scarcely anything more is known about them other than that their church was dedicated to SS. Peter and Paul and that the attaching rectorial tithes were owned by the abbey of Dunbrody. It is reasonable to presume, however, that the foundation would have flourished for a period. South Galway was, after all, De Burgo's chief strength; he had reserved the district around Loughrea for his own manor and he was able to colonize it strongly and maintain townships. There is evidence of this in an Inquisition of 1333 which reveals that William ('Brown Earl') De Burgo had "kept his courts, levied prisage of beer and maintained a ferry" at Portumna. Nothing else is heard about the place until 1414 when we learn that the Cistercian buildings had fallen into disuse and the erection of a Dominican friary on the same site is underway. The failure of the Cistercians here at that period is perhaps a reflex of the widespread decline in Norman influence in the 14th century. This was the century of a general Irish resurgence linked with the Bruce invasion. It was also the century of the 'black plague' which caused its greatest havoc in the Norman townships.

The Dominicans

The story of the Dominicans in Ireland begins in 1224 when members of that Order were introduced to Dublin by the Norman Maurice Fitzgerald. Another house was founded at Drogheda in the same year. They too followed in the wake of the De Burgo conquest of Connacht, and Meyler De Bermingham settled the Dominicans on his estates at Athenry in 1241. Another early Dominican house, as we have already seen, was founded at Lorrha by Richard De Burgo in 1269. By the end of the 13th century the 'Preachers' were widely spread over the country, and at least eight of their members were appointed to Irish bishoprics in the

same century. During all that time, the Irish Dominicans, unlike the Franciscans, remained part of the English Province and it was not until 1536 that a separate Irish Province was created.

We will now move quickly to the second half of the fourteenth century. At that period a general Reform began within the Dominican Order under the influence of Raymund of Capua. The Reform spread throughout the Order but, due chiefly to political reasons, it was resisted by the English Dominicans and also by those in the anglicized parts of Ireland. The Irish resurgence of the 14th century had created a sharp division between the Pale and the rest of the country and this was reflected even in the discipline of the Dominicans in the two parts of Ireland. The Dominican house at Athenry now became a pivotal centre of Dominican activity in the west of Ireland, mainly it seems for the reason that it had the only school where friars of the Raymundine Reform could pursue advanced studies.

Portumna was the first foundation of the Dominican Reformed Observance. It had close connections with Athenry and remained a vicariate of that place until it was created a Priory in 1640. Both houses were dedicated to SS. Peter and Paul. St. Peter is probably St. Peter Martyr, one of the great heroes of the early Dominicans. There is, in any case, in the Clonfert diocesan Collection, a chalice commissioned by Fr. Ambrose O Madden "*pro conventu Sancti Petri Martyrii, Portumna.*"

It is not known how long the Cistercians had left the site when the Dominicans gained possession. The arrival of the Dominicans is indicated by a papal mandate of the 24 November, 1414 which refers to the chapel of the "Annunciation of St. Mary" at Portumna, and granted an indulgence to all the faithful who would assist the friars in the building of the church and Priory. This concession was not uncommon at the time and it merely represents a papal nudge to a local chieftain to give a handsome donation to a new religious house. The indulgence was for ten years and the Dominicans got a renewal in 1426 together with a full confirmation of their rights at Portumna.

The ruins visible at Portumna to-day most likely represent the original Dominican buildings. They contain in any case many typical 15th century features, notably the neat ogee-headed windows in the south wall of the choir. The magnificent east window in the choir is one of the finest examples there is of the 'switch-line' tracery of the same period. The south transept too is lit by an equally fine window which curiously bears the name—'JOH(ANN)ES'—of the mason. Similar work under the same craftsman's signature at Clontuskert has been dated by historical records at c.1470. The elaborate traceried windows at Portumna

are in marked contrast to the plain lancets in the older house at nearby Lorrha.

The buildings at Portumna provide us with a typical example of the architecture of the friars, both Dominican and Franciscan. The churches were plain rectangles, divided into a choir for the friars and a nave for the lay brothers and the general congregation. As the congregations grew large, a south transept chapel became a natural addition and this feature is present at Portumna. The cloister, in common with most other friaries, is located to the north side of the church. The remains of a spacious refectory run parallel with the northern cloister walk. The tower which was obviously sprung on four fine arches has completely disappeared.

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 indicates 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 (Protectress 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.

Suppression

When Henry VIII introduced the Reformation to Ireland and became in 1536 "the only Supreme Head on earth of the whole Church in Ireland," Portumna in common with other religious houses became crown property. Dissolution of those houses now followed as part of the anglicisation of the country. Their patrons too, both Irish and Anglo-Irish Lords, were "brought to obedience by good and discreet persuasions." De Burgo humbly besought

pardon and was made Earl of Clanricarde after promising to abandon "the old ways" and live according to English custom.

Curiously the Dominican house at Athenry was exempted from the planned dissolution in consideration of its being . . . "situated amongst the Irishrie . . . and being not surveyed by any of the king's Commissioners etc." Put another way, what all this meant in point of fact was that Henry's endeavours to create an Anglicised and Protestant Ireland made very little headway in the western parts of the country. Not until 1570 at least, with the setting up of the Presidency of Connacht, was any organized English Government brought beyond the Shannon. After Connacht, Ulster now held out as a last bastion of gaelic Ireland and the Elizabethan Lord Deputies made the final assault on that province during the last ten years of her reign. Connacht was on the western approach to the North and there is much evidence of destruction and wars in that province. The northern chieftain, O'Donnell, defending his claim to north Connacht swooped on the Clanricarde territory more than once, coming as far south as Kilcolgan. Bingham, the Elizabethan Governor of Connacht, ravaged the province in his pursuit. Clanricarde remained loyal to the Queen throughout the 'nine years war' but government troops were often quartered within his territory. References to the abbeys of Kilconnell and Ross having been used as barracks for government troops, give us a glimpse of the turmoil of the period. News of destruction nearer home is found in a reference to the abbey of Kilnalahan (Abbey) 'demolished by Bingham during the late wars', and in 1606 we find mention of "four ruinous stone houses, parcel of the estate of the late friary of Portumna."

During the Elizabethan war the Gaelic cause became the Catholic cause, and since religious sites were now crown property the rents were concealed in many cases. English agents and adventurers were actively engaged in exposing this position in the hope no doubt of receiving grants themselves of the lands thus discovered. One of these was a man named John King who is described as a Commissioner of Connacht. In 1605 James I wrote to the Lord Lieutenant:

" . . . we are pleased in regard to the good services done by John King to bestow upon him a grant to the value of £50 by the year of such of our landes as he shall fynde in Ireland, the rents whereof are concealed from us . . . "

and in the patent rolls for the following year there is an entry relating to a royal grant to King of, among other lands, 'parcel of the estate of the friary at Portumna.'

Other abbeys besides Portumna were assigned to King, among

them Kilnalahan, Ross and Cong. As well as these he held a manor at Lough Key in Co. Roscommon on the confiscated lands of the abbey of Boyle. In 1615 he was knighted and made a privy-councillor. In 1637 his fourth son, Edward King, was ordained to the church at Cambridge where he had been a fellow-student and close friend of the poet John Milton. Shortly after his ordination King set sail from Chester to visit his father's estate in Co. Roscommon, and together with all on board he was drowned in the Irish Sea at the youthful age of 25. His drowning was the immediate cause which resulted in his friend Milton giving to the English language one of its most celebrated poems. Under the name *Lycidas* the memory of this youthful minister will forever be preserved.

Sir John King's tenure of Portumna was of short duration and his interest in the place passed to the Earl of Clanricarde who was granted patent of Portumna in 1611. This was Richard the 4th Earl and his acquisition of the monastery must have raised the hopes of the friars at Portumna where Richard's magnificent manor-house was then under construction. He was, after all, the most influential catholic nobleman in the Ireland of his day and belonged to a family which from the first were great patrons of the friars, both Franciscan and Dominican. It was to his late father, the Earl Ulick, that the Dominicans at Athenry had turned for assistance when their convent had gone up in flames with that town in 1597. Further evidence of the family loyalty came in 1615 when Richard's widowed mother, at her own personal expense, roofed the Franciscan abbey at Kilnalahan. Richard himself perhaps could not be seen openly patronising the friars. He was now President of Connacht and was responsible for bringing that province to 'conformity'. Nevertheless, he was the man about whom an English Lord Deputy said that "he is a person so potent in his country as nothing can move here without him," and there is ample evidence to indicate that at least he turned a blind official eye on the activities of the friars and quietly allowed them to occupy their old houses on his estates.

This was the period, moreover, when the Irish Colleges which had been set up for Irish novices on the Continent as part of the Counter-Reformation drive, were now bearing fruit, and priests and regulars were steadily returning to Ireland. Even as early as 1607 the Lord Deputy had noted with alarm that "priests land here secretly in every port and creek of the realm (a dozen sometimes together) . . . most men's minds are infected with their doctrine and seditious persuasions . . . and the people resort to mass now in greater numbers than for many years past . . ."

Two Dominican documents prepared during the first half of that century throw a good deal of light on the affairs of the time. The first was written in 1627 and reveals that from about 1613 onwards the friars began to take over their convents. The habit was worn indoors though they could only show themselves outside in secular dress. There were then 100 Dominicans in Ireland, 50 novices and professed friars in Spain and another 20 in Louvain, France and Italy. The second document relates to the year 1646 and conveys that the Order had 43 Irish houses and 600 friars in that year. From about 1613 therefore until the Cromwellian upheaval it is reasonable to assume that life ran fairly smoothly for the Dominicans at Portumna, and this seems to be borne out by the fact that their convent was created a Priory in 1640 with Fr. Gerald Davock as first Prior. It was around this period as well that Fr. Ambrose O'Madden commissioned the chalice for Portumna referred to earlier.

The Cromwellian Period

And when thy sons to fetters are consign'd,
To fetters, and the damp vault's dayless gloom,
Their country conquers with their martyrdom,
And Freedom's fame finds wings on every wind.

—Byron.

The Earl Richard ('Kinsale') was succeeded by his son Ulick, 5th Earl of Clanricarde. In 1644 he was created Marquis and made Commander-in-Chief of Connacht, and in 1650 he succeeded Ormond as Lord Deputy. During the Confederate Wars Portumna castle was his principal base as leader of the royalist cause in the west. By June of 1652 however the castle was under Cromwellian gunfire and was surrendered after only one assault. The Earl managed to fight on in Connacht for some time longer and finally surrendered upon terms in June of 1653 and was permitted to go into exile. His entire estates were forfeited and the castle at Portumna was settled upon no less a person than Henry Cromwell, the Protector's second son.

The Dominicans no doubt took to the woods and the islands in Lough Derg before the Cromwellian guns, but one of their number, Fr. Christopher Walsh, was discovered by the soldiers and tortured. He had remained in the vicinity "hiding in a hut in a gloomy and dense thicket." The hut we are told was constructed for him by his sister's husband, and local tradition places the site in the townland of Stoneyisland.

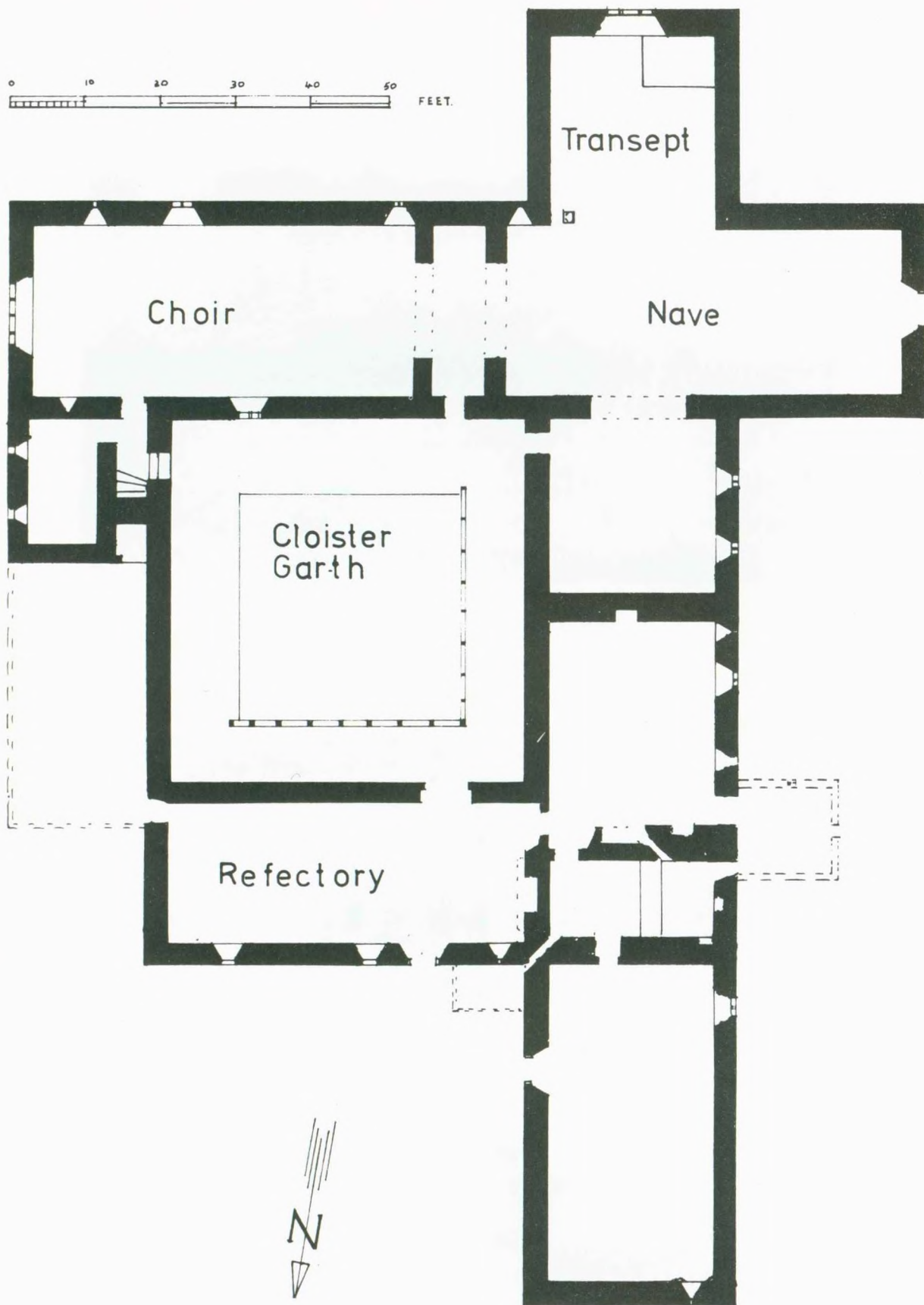
Portumna was the sphere of much government activity at this period, being now the seat of the newly-appointed Lord Deputy Cromwell. A scheme was commenced as well to settle the surrounding district with English tenants. The castle was used as an arms store for a period, and Richard Grace who conducted a guerilla campaign against the Cromwellians, burned Portumna 'town' in June of 1652.

The Commonwealth collapsed in 1660 and the catholic Charles II was recalled to the throne in England. The Clanricarde estates were restored to earl Ulick's widow in the following year, and in all probability the Dominicans quickly returned to their Priory once more. The records mention a Fr. Richard Madden at this period: he had studied abroad and became at various times Prior of Portumna, Limerick, Roscommon, Lorrha and Dublin. He died in tragic circumstances in the vicinity of Portumna as we shall see later. From now until 1691 when the Clanricarde fortunes suffered another reverse at Aughrim, the Dominicans would have worked openly at Portumna. From the writings of the Dominican historian, O'Heyne, we get occasional glimpses of a thriving community serviced from continental schools. He mentions a Fr. Pierce Larkin, a theologian, and a Fr. Malachy O'Loughlin among the staff at Portumna. The novitiate and school at Athenry was also revived around this period. The school had increased greatly by 1678 and drew students from all over the country. They lived in little wooden huts in the vicinity of the school.

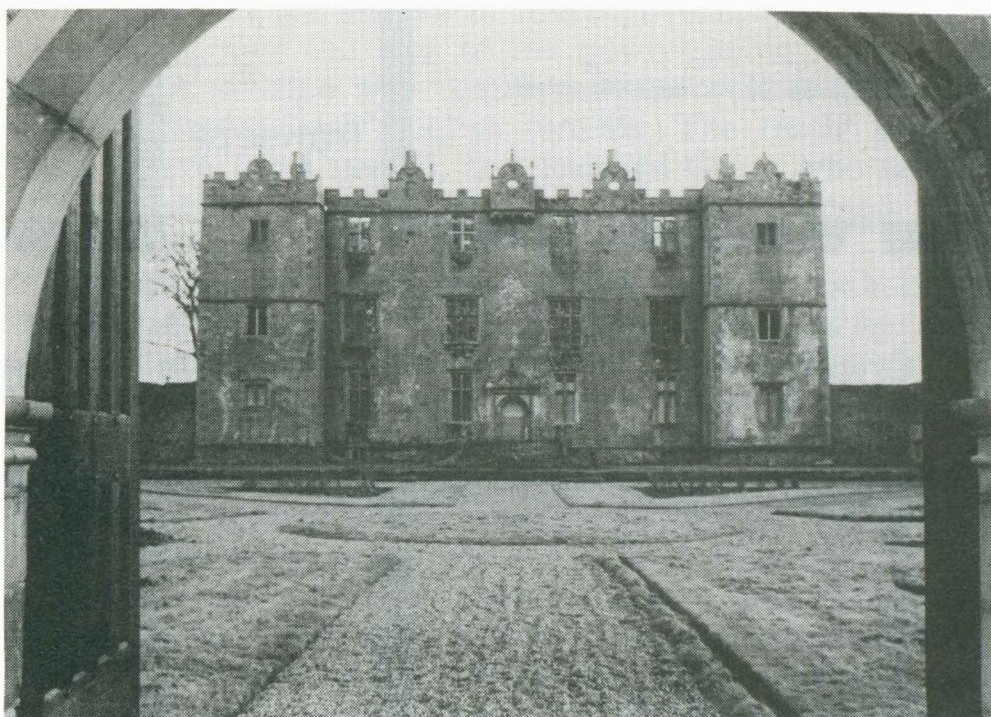
After Aughrim . . .

The passage of the victorious Williamite army on its way from Aughrim to Limerick brought disaster once more to the friars at Portumna. The castle was occupied by Major Malcolm Hamilton, and troops made forays into the surrounding areas in pursuit of the scattered Jacobites. The Dominicans fled from their convent and the Prior, Fr. Richard O. Madden, while hiding from the soldiers, died of starvation in "an impassable bog."

The Clanricarde family, too, shared in the misfortunes which befell the Irish catholic nobility after the Aughrim defeat. Richard the 8th Earl, however, escaped the political consequences by capitulating at Galway and obtaining the benefit of the articles for the surrender of Limerick. His brother and heir, John Lord Bophin, was less fortunate. He was captured on the field at Aughrim, taken to England and attainted of treason. To obtain a pardon he had to pay a fine of £25,000 and his estates were put into the hands of trustees for the benefit of his children who were to be brought up in England as protestants. The eldest of these, Michael Lord Dunkellin, succeeded to the earldom in 1722. Lord



Portumna Priory, ground plan.



Portumna castle, seat of the Earls of Clanricarde.



Former Dominican church and convent at Boula.

Bophin's sister, Honora, married the famous Jacobite General, Patrick Sarsfield, probably in the winter of 1690 - 91. Sarsfield appears to have spent a good deal of time at Portumna and this circumstance gives historical credibility to the strong tradition concerning his marriage in Portumna Priory.

The surrender at Limerick marked the defeat for the catholic cause and the penal laws were quickly introduced to buttress the protestant ascendancy in all walks of life. An act of 1697 proclaimed that all the regular clergy were to leave the country before the 1st of May following. The friars at Portumna shared in the general expulsion, but Fr. Christopher Walsh, probably on account of his age, was allowed to remain behind. A Fr. Edmund McEgan who had studied in Spain before coming to Portumna was once again forced into exile and died in France in 1702 at the age of 73. The Prior, Fr. Bartholomew O Heyne, a graduate of Palencia, went to France and was ministering there in 1706. But perhaps not all the friars 'departed the kingdom'; some no doubt were concealed by loyal friends to await a more favourable political climate. It was the age of the disguised priest and of the mass-rock in the woods, and isolated places in the neighbourhood which to this day bear such names as 'friar's island' and 'friar's rock', tell their own story.

By the end of the first decade of the eighteenth century the penal statutes in relation to religious worship were relaxed somewhat and the friars were turning their footsteps homewards once again. They would appear to have occupied their Priory for a short period under the Prior, Fr. Anthony McHugo, who was appointed on 24 July, 1711. He died at Portumna on the 28 September in the same year and was buried at Athenry on the following day.

Boula

The Clanricarde house had now, however, conformed to the Established Church and 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 fryars have within these very few years come into this kingdom and settled themselves in the following places in this County, viz.— Kilconell 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 fryaries have contributed greatly to their settling in this county in defiance of the laws."

By this time, however, it appears that the Establishment hadn't the political will to enforce 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.

Dominican Life in the 18th and 19th Centuries

A contemporary account written by a Dominican throws a flood of light on the life of the Irish friars in the 18th century. In the Summer time, Easter to October:

"After the fast and prayer of Lent proceed about Low Sunday to a particular diocese, and having received the necessary faculties and the blessing of the Superior you are to go from parish to parish, village to village and when necessary from house to house to teach them what is necessary for salvation. Rise early, say your office and hear confessions. About nine or half-past, having prepared the altar and blessed the water, begin to teach the catechism and continue at this work until twelve o'clock if necessary. Begin Mass at twelve, and having said the epistle resume the catechism until the poor people who are travelling long distances arrive, lest they should be disappointed at losing Mass. When all have gathered begin the Gospel and finish the Mass if there are any who wish to confess hear them patiently. Furthermore if any ignorant or shy people need and ask for individual instruction, give it."

In Winter time the Missions still went on. Instructions were given to persons gathered in the house where the friars were staying "teach them how to pray and how to do everything for the glory of God."

The friars quested for alms throughout the countryside in which they preached. Each Dominican house had its own territory in which it had the right to beg. The quests were usually in kind, corn, wool and butter. Miss Pochin Mould in her book, *The Irish Dominicans*, noted a last relic of the wool quest in the custom in the parishes of Oranmore and Craughwell of the farmers each year giving a fleece to the Galway Franciscans. She goes on:

“At Boula which the friars [Dominican] only gave up in 1899 the oat quest went on up to the end or nearly up to the end. Michael Horan who worked for the friars, told me (1956) how he and the lay brother had one day in Spring come to a poor but very neat cabin. It was getting dark and they went in. It was clean and tidy, a fire on the hearth, the bed alongside and the cattle tied at the opposite wall. The lay brother asked the man of the house for alms, sixpence surely or some oats. He said he had nothing to give. It was a very bad season, and all that was in the house was the little stock of oats for seed, all of which he would need. The Dominican went on begging and eventually the man went to his kist and gave him some of the seed oats. Then the lay brother thanked him. The next season they were again on quest and passing this house. Out ran the owner and nearly fell on their necks. After what little seed he had left after giving to them, he had such a crop as he had never seen before nor expected to see again.”

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. On the third Sunday in April, 1899, the Mass in Boula was celebrated by a Dominican for the last time. On the following day the three remaining friars — Fathers Hughes, Hamersly and Corbett — left Boula for St. Xaviour's Priory in Dublin. The Order presented its church to the parish of Portumna and shortly afterwards the convent and attaching lands were sold to the Royston family.

As for their old Priory at Portumna, it was being used as a Protestant Church in 1786 and it continued to serve that purpose until the present Protestant Church was built around 1831. An interesting account of the place in the first decade of the 19th century is found in the diary of Louisa Beaufort who did a tour of Ireland in 1807-10:

“Portumna: a small door in a wall close to the road led us immediately into the ruins of a large Abbey—the Choir of

which is roofed, and fitted up as a Church—the East window in good preservation—the Tracery handsome, there is a small gallery opposite to it in which a few soldiers sat, the church is small—but full large enough for the congregation—it is fitted up very plain, and has a gloomy light, we were shown into Lord Clanrichard's seat, in which sat Lady Catherine, the eldest daughter, about ten years old, rather pretty, the little Lord, not more than five, a sweet lively looking boy, and a large lady dressed in a black satin pelice who I afterwards learned was a Swiss governess—I expressed to her my surprise (for she chatted very freely) to see the children particularly the little Lady at Church. She said it was an odd thing for my Lady had her Chaplain at the Castle—the curate, Mr. Travers, who told us it was the late Lord's dying request to his Lady to bring the children up to be Protestants, and she religiously observes his directions. This old church is covered with ivy—some of it has penetrated through the roof and come out on the ceiling”

For almost another one hundred and fifty years the ivy had its way until the Priory was taken into State Care in 1951 for preservation as a National Monument. Preservation works to the buildings and the cleaning of the site were completed by the Officers of Public Works in 1955.

Suggested further reading:

The Irish Dominicans: D. D. C. Pochin Mould (Dublin), 1957.

The Irish Dominicans in the Seventeenth Century by Fr. John O Heyne, O.P., edited by Fr. A. Colman, O.P. (Dundalk), 1902.

Medieval Religious Houses in Ireland: A. Gwynne & N. Hadcock (London), 1970.

Guide to the National Monuments in Ireland: P. Harbison (Dublin), 1970.

Irish Priests in the Penal Times: W. P. Burke, reprint (Shannon), 1968.

The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland: B. de Breffny and G. Mott (London), 1976.

‘*The Abbey of Kilnalahan*’: J. P. Dalton, Jrnls. Galway Archaeol. His. Soc. (1909-12).

Note: For an account of the Clanricarde Burkes, see Mervyn Archdall's edition of Lodge's *The Peerage of Ireland* (1789).

Portumna Castle Gardens, & Tea Rooms

GALWAY



The great semi-fortified house at Portumna was built before 1618 by Richard Burke or de Burgo, 4th Earl of Clanricarde. It was the main seat of the de Burgo family for over 200 years, until it was gutted by fire in 1826. The ground floor of the house is now open to the public. To the north of the house are formal, geometrically laid out gardens. Exhibitions in the Castle and Gate House. Portumna Castle now includes the recently restored 17th century walled kitchen garden - a treat for the senses.

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TeaRoom +353 (0)909 741 667

Fax No: +353 (0)909 741 889

Email: portumnacastle@opw.ie

Instagram Facebook: www.facebook.com/portumnacastle

Website: www.heritageireland.ie

Location: Portumna town - adjacent to lake, The River Shannon and Portumna Forest Park

Average length of Visit: 1.5 hours

Facilities: Exhibitions, gardens, public car/coach parking close to the site.



Thóg Risteárd de Búrca nó de Burgo, 4ú Iarla Chlann Riocaird an teach mór leathdhaingean ag Port Omna roimh 1618. Ba é príomhshuíochán chlann de Burgo é le breis agus 200 bliain, go dtí gur loisceadh é i tine sa bhliain 1826. Tá urlár na talún sa teach ar oscailt don phobal anois. Ó thuaidh ón teach tá gairdíní foirmiúla leagtha amach go céimseatóil. Reáchtálar taispeántais sa chaisleán agus sa Teach Geata. Tá an garraí glasraí faoi bhallaí a athchóiríodh le déanaí mar chuid de Chaisleán Phort Omna anois - aoibhneas do na céadfaí.



OPW

Oifig na nOibreacha Poiblí
Office of Public Works



Construite à Portumna par Richard Burke (ou de Burgo), 4e comte de Clanricarde, avant 1618, cette belle demeure à demi-fortifiée fut le domicile de la famille de Burgo pendant plus de 200 ans jusqu'à sa destruction par un incendie en 1826. Le rez-de-chaussée est maintenant ouvert au public. Au Nord de la maison se trouvent des jardins à la française de disposition géométrique. Des expositions sont organisées dans le château et à l'entrée. Le potager clos du XVIIe siècle a été récemment restauré et est un plaisir pour les sens.



Das großartige, halbbefestigte Haus bei Portumna wurde vor dem Jahr 1618 von Richard Burke oder de Burgo, dem 4. Grafen von Clanricarde, erbaut. Es galt über 200 Jahre lang als der Hauptsitz der Familie de Burgo, bis es 1826 von einem Feuer zerstört wurde. Das Erdgeschoss des Hauses ist nun der Öffentlichkeit zugänglich. Im Norden des Hauses sind formale, geometrisch ausgerichtete Gärten angelegt. Sowohl in der Burg als auch im Gate House können Ausstellungen besichtigt werden. Portumna Castle weist nun auch einen vor kurzem renovierten ummauerten Küchengarten aus dem 17. Jahrhundert auf - eine wahre Sinnesfreude.



La grande casa semifortificata di Portumna fu costruita prima del 1618 da Richard Burke (o de Burgo), 4° Conte di Clanricarde. Fu la residenza della famiglia de Burgo per oltre 200 anni, fino a che nel 1826 fu distrutta da un incendio. Il piano terra della casa è ora aperto al pubblico. Sul lato nord della casa si trovano giardini formali, disposti in modo geometrico. Il Castello di Portumna comprende ora l'orto del 17° secolo, recentemente restaurato. Nel maniero e nell'edificio della portineria vengono allestite mostre.



Antes de 1618, Richard Burke (o de Burgo), cuarto conde de Clanricarde, mandó construir esta gran casa semifortificada en Portumna. Durante más de 200 años fue la casa solariega de la familia de Burgo, hasta que, en 1826, un incendio destruyó su interior. Al norte del edificio hay unos jardines de diseño geométrico. En el Castillo y en la Casa del Guarda se celebran exposiciones. El Castillo de Portumna incluye ahora el huerto tapiado del siglo XVII, restaurado recientemente, que es un regalo para los sentidos.

Further information on sites under the care of the OPW is available from Visitor Services Section of the OPW at
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