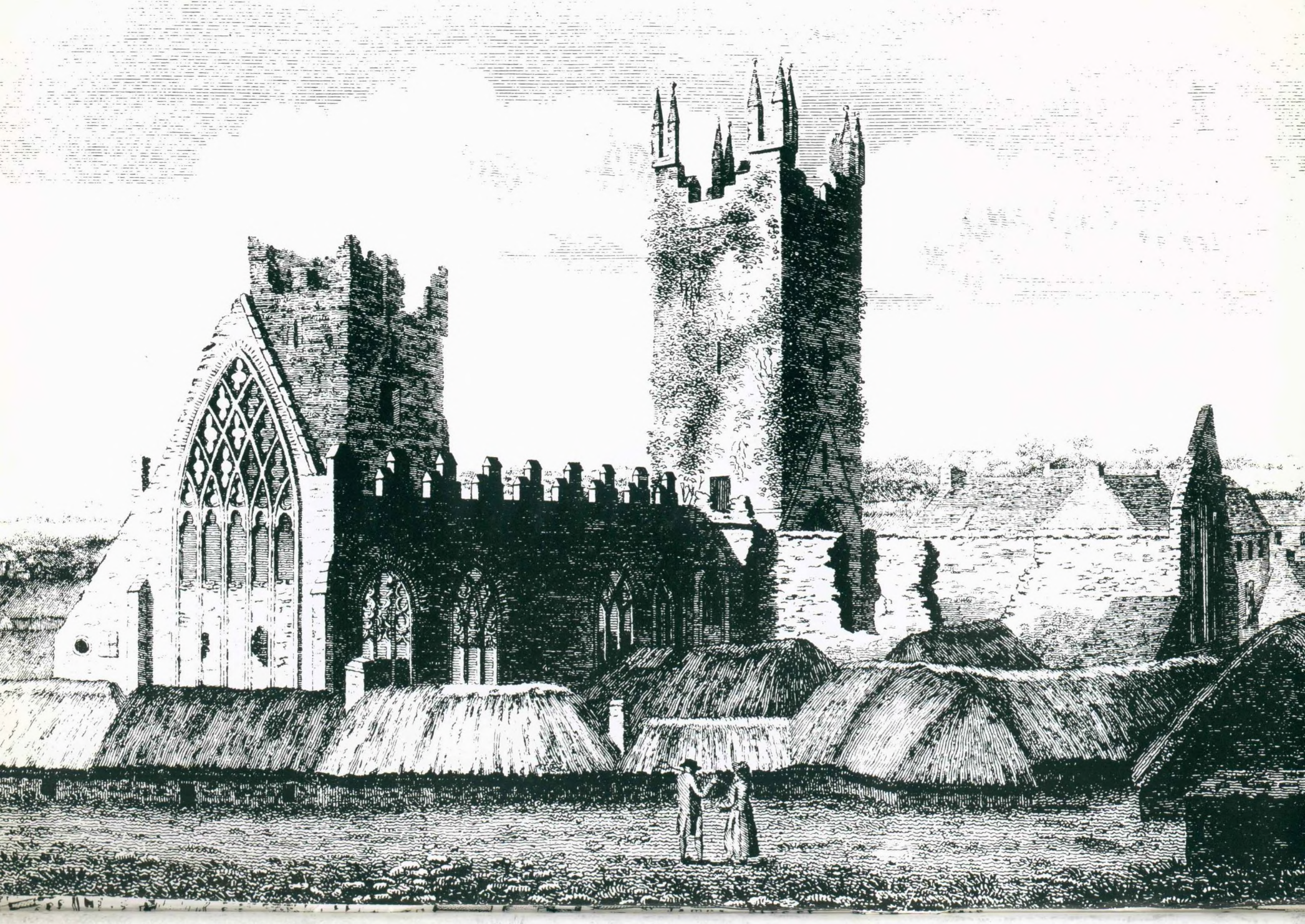
The Black Abbey

The Kilkenny Dominicans 1225-1996

Hugh Fenning O.P.



The Black Abbey

1225–1996

"TO PRAISE – TO BLESS – TO PREACH"

Front cover:
Alabaster statue of the Most Holy Trinity to which the Black Abbey is dedicated. This alabaster statue comes from Bristol, England and dates from 14th century.

Inside front cover:
The ruined abbey, with the former chancel to the right, from Grose, Antiquities of Ireland, *London 1791.*

Inside back cover:
The abbey and its neighbourhood in 1758 from John Rocque's Plan of Kilkenny.

Outside back cover:
The Nativity scene is taken from the newly restored Rosary Window in the Black Abbey, Kilkenny. The Rosary Window was constructed by Mayers of Munich in 1892.

The Black Abbey
1225–1996

By

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with a chapter by

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THE EARLY DAYS

St Dominic's vocation was to preach, at a time when the ordinary people of Europe scarcely ever heard a good sermon. The "hungry sheep", however strong their faith, knew little of Christian doctrine, so that even their genuine fervour often led to superstition or heresy. The parish clergy of the time were poorly educated, the monks bound by rule to stay at home. That is why St Dominic, like St Francis, created a new form of religious life. Their followers, while living in community, set out to spread and deepen a knowledge of Christian teaching by regular preaching, partly in their own big churches and partly from fixed points about the countryside. They won respect for their apostolate by the austerity of their lives. Poverty itself, underlined by the fact that they begged their daily bread, saved them from the reproach of growing fat on the preaching of the Gospel. Constant prayer and study gave depth to what they had to say. They called themselves friars, which simply means "brothers", a word which catches both their early simplicity and strong family spirit.

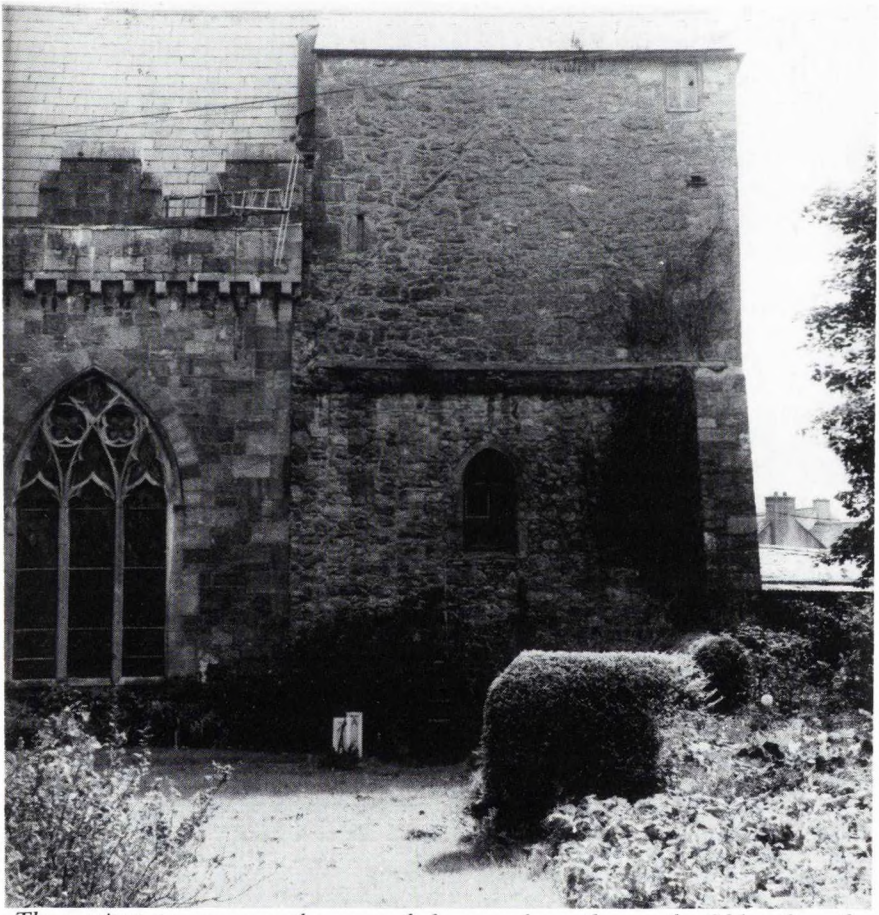
The immediate success of the "Friars Preachers" was extraordinary. Their general meeting or chapter of 1221, the year in which St Dominic died, arranged a mission to England, Scotland and Ireland. London and Oxford had Dominican convents within the year, while the first Irish foundations of the Black Friars (as they were called in these countries because of their black cloaks) followed at Dublin and Drogheda in 1224. Ireland was just as glad to see them as any of the continental countries had been, so they settled in Kilkenny (their third Irish house) in 1225 and at Waterford in 1226, obviously following the natural road which leads from Dublin, skirting the Wicklow mountains, to the south-east. The Franciscans, or Grey Friars, using the same road, came from Youghal through Kilkenny to Dublin.

Other foundations were soon made, without much respect to the political divisions of the country, but since these first Dominicans were Norman-French, and spoke Norman-French, it was natural that their first three houses should have been in Norman towns. That is certainly true of Dublin and Drogheda, but only half-true in the case of Kilkenny. The Normans were, indeed, in full control of the city, the headquarters of William Marshall, Earl of Pembroke and Lord of Leinster. One might say, however, that there were two Kilkennies: the old settlement, Irishtown, clustered about the ancient Cathedral of St Canice, and the High or English town first laid out closer to the Castle about 1203. Between the two, the small Bregagh river made its way into the Nore.

When the Dominicans came, they chose a site between the two towns, a plot on the south bank of the Bregagh, half-way between St Canice's on the north and the ramparts of the Norman settlement to the south. And while this choice may show their impartiality, it also shows their preference for sites outside city gates. Then, as now, there was much to be said for freedom of movement. The new church was dedicated to the Holy and Undivided Trinity, probably at the wish of the founder, William Marshall the younger, head of his family since 1219. In popular usage, the complex of church and friary came to be known as the Black Abbey, because it was there the Blackfriars lived. Before the suppression of the monasteries by Henry VIII, the Dominicans had about thirty-six churches in Ireland, but of them all, only the Black Abbey is still served by Dominicans today.

One wonders, now that the Bregagh has taken to flooding the church every few years (even, in 1968, three times in a month) why the first friars either accepted or kept the site. The answer surely lies, not so much with the shallow Bregagh as with the whole drainage system of a much wider area, modified to the detriment of the Black Abbey since 1800. The site, had, however, one advantage in that it already contained a small square tower, and this they immediately adapted as the main entrance of their church, which left a few rooms above the porch for their own use. That is the accepted opinion on the matter, but it is as well to remember that the staircase within the tower (as it is now) was partly built with old tombstones of the fourteenth century, and that the document describing the Black Abbey on its suppression in 1540 mentions a "small castle *near* the church". From the main door, both nave and choir ran in a straight line from west to east, so that the priest at the high altar within the choir might face the rising sun. The choir or chancel, long since destroyed, was divided from the nave by a rood-screen, an elaborate structure which medieval piety crowned with the rood or cross of Christ. One may still see the nave and its right aisle, an almost square area, with its ancient pillars and their three arches. The pillars look poor and are poor, for they were made from stone rubble rather than from carved blocks. Originally, the aisle probably ended in a Lady Chapel. Later on, the conventual buildings took shape north of the nave, round a quadrangle or cloister garth corresponding more or less to the present priory garden, and extended to the very bank of the Bregagh. The only remnant of that medieval convent is the stone frame of one of its windows, set in the garden wall overlooking the river.

Little now remains of the early church save the lower part of the old castle, the old nave and its aisle, and the thirteenth-century Norman tombstones uncovered nearby at various times since 1836. They now lie on the gravel verge opposite the porch. There are also two old waterfonts of black Kilkenny marble (a third was taken to Tallaght) to which it would be difficult to assign a date. The larger and more elaborately carved of the two now stands within the newly opened entrance to the nave. Excavations carried out in the 1890s uncovered a tiled floor where the ancient sacristy had been. Most of the tiles were red, some "bronze green". A few bore the fleur-de-lis.



The ancient tower, now the organ-loft, seen from the north. Older than the church itself, but greatly lowered in 1789. Notice the lines left by the roof of adjoining conventual buildings, long destroyed.

ST KENNY'S WELL

One of the teething problems of the community was to find a suitable water-supply which would save the brethren walking to and fro with buckets (or paying water-carriers) whenever they needed to wash or cook. They had endured this kind of inconvenience for twenty years before two successive bishops of Ossory came to their rescue. Just three hundred yards away, uphill to the west, there was a holy well dedicated to St Canice or St Kenny: a well which never failed even in the driest summer. The well belonged to the diocese and was used to feed a mill on the Bregagh, but the bishops allowed the Dominicans to avail of it. First, about 1247, by granting them a conduit from

the fountain to the Black Abbey, provided that the circumference of the pipe at the well was no greater than that of the bishop's ring, and that the outlet at the abbey might easily be stopped by the tip of a man's little finger.

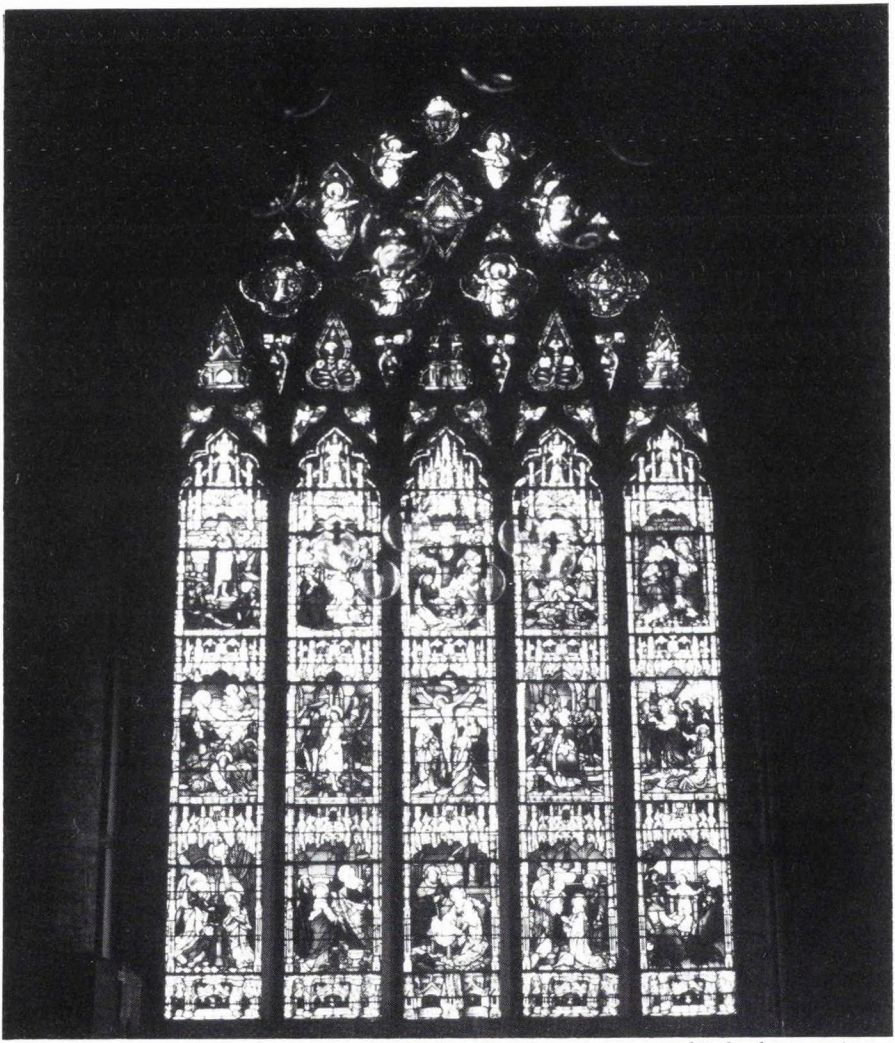
This quaint arrangement soon led to a new field of labour for the friars. St Kenny's well was frequented by pilgrims, many hoping to be cured of their ailments, and all in need of spiritual care. For this reason, about 1255, another bishop granted the Dominicans full ownership, not only of the well itself, but also of the field in which it stood. The original documents recording these concessions are still preserved by the Corporation, because not only this but all the title deeds of the Black Abbey passed to the Corporation at the time of Henry VIII.

In this way the friars got a reliable supply of fresh water. They had vegetables of their own from the garden. All they really needed was corn, fuel and fish. For these items they begged or "quested" regularly about the diocese, though their questing area, officially called "limits", must have shrunk with the foundation of another Dominican house at Rosbercon in 1267. When it came to milling their corn, they were helped by Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hertford. Apart from giving them an annual rent, Earl Gilbert exempted them in 1274 from the payment of toll while grinding corn at his mill, and allowed them to have their corn ground before anyone else, even before himself unless the Earl's corn was actually on the mill-stone. Eventually the Domincans acquired a water-mill of their own.

MORE BUILDING

All Kilkenny, not to say all Ireland, has heard of the local witches, especially of Dame Alice Kyteler, and of Richard de Ledrede, the Franciscan bishop who brought them to trial in 1324. The case aroused great interest at the time and caused the bishop himself a lot of suffering. Those accused of witchcraft were closely related to the local authorities, so when Bishop de Ledrede took up the case, the tables were quickly turned and he found himself a prisoner in Kilkenny jail. A demonstration got under way at once, all the people flocking round the jail demanding his release while chanting (under the direction of a Dominican): "Blessed are those who suffer persecution for justice's sake". At this, the authorities took fright and began to treat the bishop more decently. Two Franciscans, two Dominicans and two diocesan chaplains were allowed to remain in his cell day and night until his release. Alice Kyteler escaped to England, but a follower of hers named Petronilla was burned at the stake.

Quite apart from his concern about this "diabolical nest", Bishop de Ledrede (who lived until 1360) was an energetic builder. He did much for the fabric of the cathedral and also built the New Court at Kilkenny with materials taken from three old churches which he demolished outside the walls. It was, besides, a prosperous time for the city, as one can see from the fact that the paving of the streets was begun in 1334, the very year in which the



The Rosary window, the largest of its kind in the country and "the last major work done in Ireland during the first half of the fourteenth century".

Corporation entrusted the keys and custody of the Blackfreren Gate to the Dominicans.

With three churches less outside the walls, the number frequenting the Black Abbey increased, so it is reasonable to suppose that the present transept was built at this time to accommodate them. The transept was opened to the south, beginning at the rood-screen, with an aisle of its own, the arches between transept and aisle resting on pillars far superior to those in the old

nave. As transepts go, it is unusually long, obviously to make room for as many as possible, and all the more so since there is no hard evidence for the existence of any other transept to the north. Since the high altar would still have been in the apse of the chancel, even those seated in the nave can have seen nothing of the Mass save when the doors of the rood-screen were briefly opened for the Elevation. Those in the transept can have seen nothing whatever, unless there was a special altar for their convenience. The pulpit, standing outside the screen, would have been clearly visible to all.

The glory of the Black Abbey transept lies, of course, in its windows: five (of which one was removed before 1791) in the east wall, each having three lights, and the magnificent five-light window, the largest of its kind in the country, which practically fills the gable wall. These windows, which in technical terms belong to the curvilinear phase of the Decorated style, have been classed as the last major work done in Ireland during the first half of the fourteenth century.

Another sign of prosperity is the fact that between 1281 and 1346 the superiors of all Irish Dominican houses held chapters or meetings at the Black Abbey no less than four times. With more than twenty houses represented, this meant an attendance of close to eighty people, all of whom had to be lodged and fed for at least a few days. None of them, of course, would have expected a private room, since it was then normal practice to sleep on mattresses in a dormitory. Prosperous or not, this period came to a brutal end with the terrible plague known as the Black Death which carried away perhaps a third of the population of Europe. At the Black Abbey, no less than eight Dominicans died between Christmas 1348 and 6 March 1349. The Franciscan friar Clynn of Kilkenny, who noted the tragedy in his Annals, left a store of parchment for the continuation of his book before he too died, as he expected, of the plague.

HARD TIMES

After this disaster, the Dominicans of the Black Abbey found themselves in difficulties. Even Kilkenny city was hard-pressed, as the native Irish encroached upon the Pale and some of the Norman settlers adopted Irish ways. This time it was the Corporation which rescued the friars by allowing them in 1352 the rents of two houses to provide hosts and wine for daily Mass. Twenty years later, a careless householder named Philip Leget incurred excommunication for not paying his rent in time. Another benefactor named Benedict, described as "chaplain to the Friars Preachers", made them a gift of premises in Irishtown. Offsetting these gains, they lost yet more of their questing area in 1382 when another Dominican convent was founded within the diocese at Aghaboe in Upper Ossory. Since Aghaboe was in Fitzpatrick territory, the Kilkenny Dominicans would not perhaps have been welcome there anyway.

It is hard to know now, five hundred years later, to what extent the Dominicans of the Black Abbey shared the siege-mentality of the Kilkenny citizens. They belonged, after all, to a religious organisation with many convents in purely Irish areas. A parliament held at Kilkenny in 1310 forbade monasteries within the Pale to admit Irish postulants, but that law was revoked within four months through the influence of a Dominican named Walter Jorz who was then archbishop of Armagh. Then there was the famous Statute of Kilkenny in 1366, almost a last-ditch effort to preserve the English language and customs of the colonists. That too forbade religious houses "amongst the English" to admit Irishmen to profession, but we do not know what success the measure had.

Not only were the Crown and its representatives opposed by Irish rebels, but they had to deal with "degenerate English" as well: powerful families like the Fitzgeralds or Barrets who had simply gone native. Richard II came in person to Ireland to settle the problem, moving about the eastern parts of the country in 1394 and 1395. After a few battles, many chiefs (both Irish and English) saw the wisdom of submitting in feudal fashion to the king, laying aside their belts and weapons and placing their hands in his, before being granted the "kiss of peace". Richard held several of these ceremonies at the Black Abbey — sometimes in the church, sometimes "in a certain dry room" of the convent — to receive the submission of the Barrets and O'Connors of Connacht and other powerful Irish-speaking chiefs from Munster such as Tadgh MacCarthy More or Maurice Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald. It was no doubt in memory of King Richard's visits that one of the priory rooms was later called the "King's Chamber".

TWO GRAVEN IMAGES

No structural alterations seem to have been made at the Black Abbey between the plague-year of 1349 and the end of the fifteenth century, but something may have been done to improve the convent, and more likely still to improve the interior decoration of the church. At all events, there are still two carved figures associated with the church which belong to this particular period.

The first is a fourteenth-century limestone figure of St Catherine of Alexandria, protectress of the order, now kept in the priory museum. The saint, carrying the famous wheel of her martyrdom, is set in a niche about two and a half feet high, bordered by floral patterns cut into the dark local stone. The second figure, a representation of the Trinity in alabaster, stands in a glass case attached to the central tower, facing the great Rosary window. Expert opinion assigns it to about the year 1400. God the Father is shown seated, with the crucified Christ between his knees, and the Spirit descending as a dove from the Father's chin to the top of the cross. Formerly the figure would have hung at eye-level in its own tabernacle above one of the altars: the high altar, most likely, since the church itself was dedicated to the Trinity. The

figures 1264 are clearly cut across the base, but no one seems to know why. Neither the use of arabic numerals, nor the style of the figure itself, would suit so early a date. During the long centuries of the penal era, this alabaster Trinity was walled up in a niche within the church, and came to light again only during restoration work in the early nineteenth century.

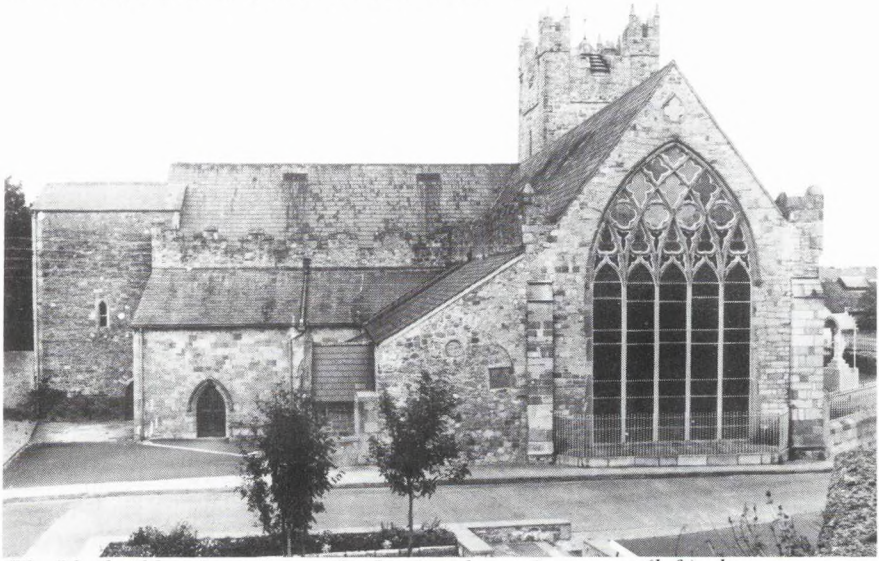
St. Catherine of Alexandria. A fourteenth-century limestone figure of Irish workmanship, about two feet tall. Found about 1825 in a cavity in the Abbey walls.

An alabaster statue of the Trinity, to which the Black Abbey is dedicated. Carved at Bristol about 1400. It may now be seen close to the Rosary Window in a newly made recess protected by laminated glass.

ENGLISH REBELS AND IRISH ENEMIES

Kilkenny during the fifteenth century was practically a city under siege. The century opened with the building of new walls which took in most of the suburbs, though not the Black Abbey, and closed with yet another statute excluding "strangers from the marches or Irish countries". In these circumstances, the Dominicans were lucky to be on good terms with the Corporation. Not only did they hold the keys of the Blackfreren Gate — of which one archway may still be seen — but the Sovereign or Mayor of the city was elected annually within the very convent. This was certainly usual from 1405 to 1516 and may have been the practice long before. Commons and burgesses assembled every year on 29 September, feast of St Michael the Archangel, in the chapter room of the Black Abbey. There they elected the Sovereign for the coming year, gave him his seals of office and listened as he read the formal oath. Four provosts were elected, too, and no doubt the ceremony ended with a good meal for all concerned.

The goodwill of the Corporation was a help to the friars in times of trouble. And when the Corporation could do nothing, the friars sometimes found more powerful benefactors. For instance, they successfully petitioned Henry VI in 1437, explaining that they could not survive on the alms of the city of Kilkenny, while the whole county was devastated by English rebels and Irish enemies. As a result of this request they got part of the tithes of the rectory of Mothel. One would like to know how they fared in 1461 when Kilkenny city itself was plundered by the Earl of Desmond.



The Black Abbey from the south, showing the ancient tower (left), the entrance to the nave, and the magnificent five-light gable window of c. 1340.

Later in the century, in 1487, a Dominican named Oliver Cantwell became bishop of Ossory and held that high office for almost forty years. It is recorded of him that he never laid aside his Dominican habit, preferring it to episcopal robes, and that he was an energetic builder of bridges and castles throughout the diocese. He did nothing, so far as we know, for the fabric of the Black Abbey in which he was laid to rest near the high altar in 1527, but he had close connections with the Shortall family who built the central tower at the junction of nave, transept and choir. An inscribed stone, set into the tower behind the present tabernacle, supplies the names of the generous donors: "Pray for the souls of James Shortall, Lord of Ballylarkin and Ballykeeffe, and his wife Katherine White, who gave the workmen, employed in the erection of this tower, their daily pay from the beginning to the end". The same devoted couple built an elaborate tomb for themselves at St. Canice's Cathedral in 1507, from which one may deduce that the tower was erected about the same time. Nor is it any ordinary tower. Leask describes it as the most perfect of all the surviving square-plan towers in the country. "Its subtly battered walls are topped by four pinnacled turrets in the stepped-battlement tradition: the most satisfying, architecturally, of all the tower tops in Ireland". The building of such an immense tower at the very junction of an T-shaped church must have greatly changed the internal appearance of the abbey. It may have narrowed the width of the chancel by a few feet, displaced the closest window on the chancel's southern side, and left forever "blind" the fine window still to be seen outside the tower's south-eastern corner. But the chancel itself, with its three great lancet lights in the early English style of the thirteenth century, survived for Grose to sketch it before 1791.

It is often said that the friars of the late middle ages had lost their early fervour. Many of the friars thought so too, banding together into "reformed congregations" or groups of "observants" in an attempt to recapture the spirit of a Dominic or a Francis. In Ireland, observant groupings of this kind flourished best in the purely Irish parts of the country, almost as though the cause of reform identified itself with a resurgent nationalism. Within the English Pale, religious houses tended to remain "conventual" and let the tide of "observance" pass them by. In this respect the Black Abbey was exceptional, for it had become officially "observant" by 1524. The fact that Oliver Cantwell, the Dominican bishop, insisted on wearing his habit, may mean that he belonged to the observant party. Some of the Black Abbey community opposed the idea so strongly that the house had no prior whatever for a full year. Peace finally returned in 1536, with the definitive creation of a distinct Irish province of the Order in no way dependent on English superiors, but by that time other and more serious problems were knocking at the gates.

The blow came in 1540 during the priorship of Peter Cantwell, when all the property of the Black Abbey was confiscated by the crown, to be granted three years later to the Corporation. The official documents of suppression make interesting reading, for they tell us something about the conventual buildings and the various properties the friars owned here and there about the

county. There was, for instance, "a small castle near the church", as well as "a castle over the gate". Apart from the "King's Chamber", another room within the priory was called "William Dowlagh's Chamber", perhaps in gratitude to the prior or benefactor who built it. Within the city, the Dominicans owned no less than twenty-four houses and twelve gardens, plus more than fifteen acres under grass or crops. Outside Kilkenny, in various parts of the county, they held more than 170 acres. At that rate, the Black Abbey must have been a sort of rich uncle within the Irish Dominican province, far more wealthy than most friaries. Even the sale of their "chattels" brought in the immense sum of fifty-eight pounds, more than twice what was paid for the moveable goods of any other of the first fifty friaries to be suppressed. Clearly they were caught unawares. Amongst their other assets were some orchards and gardens close to the convent, a cemetery and a water-mill.

At this sad moment in its history, the community of the Black Abbey withdrew, either to the houses of their friends or to other priories beyond the reach of the crown. Meredith Hanmer, in his *Chronicle* of 1571, paints a sad picture of their abandoned church, though the author was solely concerned with Richard Marshall, brother of the Abbey's founder. "Hee lieth buried by his brother William in the Black Fryers at Kilkennye . . . His tombe, with the tombes of eighteene knights that came over at the Conquest, and resting in that abbey, at the suppression of the monasterie was defaced, and the inhabitants then turned them to their private uses; and of some of them they made swine-troughs, so as there remaineth no monument in the said abbey, save one stone, whereupon the picture of a knight is portraied, bearing a shield about his necke, wherein the Cantwell armes are insculpted." The magnificent tower, so recently raised by the Shortalls, no longer looked down on a place of prayer, but on a court-house.

THE PENAL TIMES
1540 - 1776

The Reformation in Ireland had at least one unexpected result: solidly "English" cities like Kilkenny and Galway remained Catholic. Loyal subjects they might be, but the citizens found it hard to credit that their king could also be their pope. Such being the case, they were very happy indeed to see a Catholic queen, Mary Tudor, ascend the throne in August 1553. There is no proof that the Dominicans took part in the celebrations at Kilkenny, but celebrations there undoubtedly were. Bells rang out in all the churches, while the clergy dragged out all the copes, candlesticks, crosses and thuribles they had hidden away. In all likelihood, the Dominicans took their rightful place when the citizens "mustered forth in general procession most gorgeously all the town over, with *Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis,* and the rest of the Latin liturgy".

Just six years later, with the accession of Queen Elizabeth, this joy turned quickly into mourning. During her long reign of more than forty years, the Irish people began to learn what it was to suffer for the faith. One of Elizabeth's many victims was Gelasius Cullinan, Cistercian abbot of Boyle, who was executed at Dublin in 1580 and whose amber Rosary (handed down for generations as a precious relic) was finally entrusted to the Dominicans of the Black Abbey in 1950.

On Elizabeth's death in 1603, hopes rose again, for it was thought that the new king, James I, would prove worthy of his Catholic mother, Mary Queen of Scots. This time, there were three Dominicans in Kilkenny to take advantage of the occasion, and we know the names of two: Edmund Barry and Edward Raughter. With the help of some townspeople they broke open the doors of the Black Abbey (then in use as a session-house), pulled down the bars and benches and set up an altar for the celebration of Mass. A man named Bishop, occupant of part of the Abbey, was relieved of his keys and shown off the premises. Edmund Barry, we are told, "was daily guarded by the commons and attended by the Sovereign and his brethren in his processions . . . and some also of the higher calling carried a canopy over his head". The reference can only be to a procession of the Blessed Sacrament. At this time too, some statues were placed in the church; among them, perhaps, the stone figures of the Trinity and St Catherine mentioned above.

Madonna and Child in wood, the work of a Flemish sculptor of the sixteenth century.

Once again, however, the dawn proved false, for James I turned out almost as great a tyrant as Elizabeth. The Dominicans of Kilkenny dispersed and the mayor who had befriended them in 1603, a man named Walter Archer, paid for his convictions by imprisonment and death in exile, "because he would not consent to the profanation of the Dominican abbey, after it has been restored for divine worship by the piety of the citizens, soon after Queen Elizabeth's death". Walter Archer died in August, 1604.

THE CONFEDERATION OF KILKENNY

After this set-back, the Dominicans left no further trace of their doings until 1622 when they had a community of eight under the eye of a prior named Thomas Quirke. Most of the eight were probably novices, for the Order was just then gathering its forces after a long eclipse. Where they actually lived does not appear. Not, in any case, at the Black Abbey, since that was again in use as a court-house. Several citizens are said to have been penalised for their faith by judges seated at what had once been the high altar. Still, the times were peaceful enough for the continued reception of novices. Certainly there were some in training at Kilkenny in 1627 under the care of three priests: the prior, John of the Cross whose real name was Murphy, Gaspar Boyton (of whom we shall hear again) and a Joseph Langton who would often be prior between 1628 and 1642.

Then came Kilkenny's hour of glory, from 1642 to 1649, when it acted as host to the Confederation of Irish Catholics united to save their king, their religion and their country. For three of those momentous years (1645 - 1648) the city was honoured by the presence of a Papal Nuncio, John Baptist Rinuccini. Once again, the Black Abbey was restored to Catholic worship, while the Dominicans entered fully into all the exciting events of the times. They opened a school of theology. One of their own, Thomas Quirke, already prior of Kilkenny in 1622, was summoned a distance of eighty Irish miles to be preacher-in-ordinary to the General Assembly. In 1643, representatives from every Dominican house in Ireland came to Kilkenny for a provincial chapter of which the acts or decisions were printed on the spot. One decision of that chapter led to the establishment at Galway of the first monastery for Dominican nuns in Ireland. And those nuns are still in Galway today. On 19 December, 1646, archbishop Rinuccini raised several young men to the priesthood within the Black Abbey, wishing to give good example to those Irish bishops whom hard experience had encouraged to perform ordinations in private.

Several mementoes of those heady days survive. One is a large Confederate flag, now in the keeping of the Dominicans at Tallaght. At Drogheda, the Dominican nuns have held for two centuries a silver chalice given to the Black Abbey by Catherine Archer in 1645. Above all there is the seven-hundredweight bell cast for "the convent of St Dominic at Kilkenny", as the inscription says, in 1647. Later on, this bell gave long service in the market-

Small oaken statue of a Dominican saint, carved in the penal times and badly mutilated. Now in the priory museum.

house at Dunlavin before returning safely to the central tower of the Black Abbey in 1925.

The bright promise of the Confederation slowly dimmed in a welter of military defeat and internal division. Not all agreed with the Nuncio's policies, though most of the friars stood by him to the end, especially Father Felix O'Connor who was prior of the Black Abbey in 1648-49 and again in 1652. Father O'Connor, probably in line with already established practice, employed women to work within the convent. This drew a horrified protest from his superior general in Rome, but before that protest reached the Black Abbey the time for scruples had passed. Plague stalked the narrow streets long before Cromwell's army camped outside Kilkenny in March, 1650. Hundreds died in agony; thousands fled. After a brief resistance, the city came to terms and the survivors were allowed to leave. Even the aged bishop Rothe of Ossory was treated with unexpected courtesy until his death soon after.

There are two old traditions concerning the Black Abbey in this hour of crisis. One is that Cromwell slept for a few nights in the old castle over the porch of the church, perhaps in what is now the organ-loft, or a higher room since demolished. The room was long remembered as "Cromwell's Bed". According to the second story, some Dominicans and other priests took refuge in a cellar beneath the convent until their hiding place was betrayed by a woman named Thornton who brought them milk every day. She deliberately splashed milk along the ground so that the Cromwellians might follow the trail, but by the time the soldiers arrived the birds had flown. Felix O'Connor, for one, made his way to Connacht and from there was forcibly shipped to the continent. Terence O'Brien, elected as Dominican provincial at the Black Abbey in 1643 and later consecrated Bishop of Emly by the Nuncio, was hanged after the siege of Limerick. Gaspar Boyton, one of the Kilkenny community in earlier days, disguised himself as a farm-labourer, preaching and hearing confessions by night. Even on becoming blind, he had a boy lead him by the hand from one country cabin to the next. Another priest, Cornelius Geoghegan, was prior of Kilkenny in 1651 and in that capacity attended a furtive meeting of the clergy in county Laois. After that, the curtain rises on as terrible a scene of desolation as Ireland has ever witnessed.

FROM RESTORATION TO EXILE: 1660 - 1698

The full horror of the 1650s will never be fully described. At best one can trace the outlines of that decade in a simple history of famine, plague, murder, robbery and transportation. All four Horsemen of the Apocalypse cantered through the land. And yet, even in 1657, more than seventy Dominicans stayed on undiscovered, among them the blind Gaspar Boyton and Patrick Dulchanty, later prior of Aghaboe and of Kilkenny itself. The only tangible trace left at the Black Abbey of that period ironically called "the Commonwealth" is a painted oaken statue of a Dominican saint lacking arms and feet which tradition says were hacked away in true Cromwellian style.

That statue is now in the priory museum. Mercifully, the Puritan regime lasted only ten years before the English monarchy was restored and Catholics drew breath again under the milder rule of Charles II. Milder yes, but still uncertain, for Charles alternately blew hot and cold on his Catholic subjects according as it suited himself. Having reached the throne, he had not the least intention of vacating it on a point of principle.

So the Dominicans came back to Kilkenny. Edmund Prendergast was prior there in 1663 and again in 1667 when a spy reported the existence of a Dominican convent in St Mary's parish. Some years later he was succeeded by Father John O'Meara who was to stay around Kilkenny for another twenty-five years. Once more novices were received, despite the dangers of the time. It happened, for instance, in 1673 that all bishops and friars were ordered to quit the country by the end of the year. Two novices had to leave at once for Spain: John O'Brieken who died at Burgos before the end of his studies, and Peter Rothe who came back home in due course. Despite interruptions of this kind, the community held together, if not in the city, then in a "house of refuge" at Bennettsbridge downriver to the south or near Three Castles on the Freshford road: two places assigned to them by oral tradition. There were still five in community in 1678 when the provincial chapter noted the death of their prior, Patrick Dulchanty. Just one year later, their former prior, Felix O'Connor, who had once escaped Cromwell in Kilkenny, died a prisoner in Sligo jail.

Although, during the 1660s and 1670s, there are various references to a Dominican community "of Kilkenny", there is none to a Dominican chapel within or outside the city. Perhaps they simply said Mass in a private room or at some remote Mass-rock. One has to wait until 1683 to hear the Duke of Ormond complain of the "insolence and indiscretion" of friars who were busily "fitting up" four chapels at Kilkenny. The prior of the time was Anthony Rothe whose undated chalice, probably made for the new chapel, is known to have been at Dundrum, Co. Down, in 1902. In 1670 he was the proud owner of a book now in the Dominican priory, Tallaght: Dominic Soto O.P., *Commentarium in Quartum Sententiarum,* Venice 1589.

Father Rothe was lucky in that the third year of his priorship (1685) saw a Catholic, James II, mount the throne of England. Within the year the community at Kilkenny increased dramatically from six to thirteen. Four of the thirteen were novices, destined (as was then the custom) to make profession for the convent rather than for the province, and to remain "sons" of Kilkenny until death. This is one reason why the high intake of 1685 was not maintained. In any event, increasing hostility towards James II inclined the friars towards caution. There were only eight at Kilkenny in 1689 when William of Orange landed in Ireland and the Protestants of Ulster proclaimed him as their king. One year later, having driven James II from the Boyne, William made his triumphal entry into Kilkenny. That was in July 1690.

Naturally enough, few Dominicans stayed on to welcome the Williamite army. Richard Raggett, described as a priest "much given to vocal and mental

The First

SERMON

Preach'd before Their

MAJESTIES

In Engliſh

AT

WINDSOR,

On the Firſt *Sunday* of *October* 1685.

By the Reverend Father *Dom. P. E.* Monk of the Holy Order of St. *Benedict*, and of the *Engliſh* Congr.

L O N D O N,
Printed by *Henry Hills*, Printer to the King's moſt Excellent Majeſty, for his Houſhold and Chappel. 1686.

Signature of Fr Peter Roth of Kilkenny, 1693, on the title-page of a sermon by Philip Ellis O.S.B. This copy is in the provincial archives at Tallaght.

prayer", fled west to the convent of Athenry where he died that August. Thomas Brennan, a former prior and excellent preacher, served as chaplain to the Catholic or Jacobite troops until his death of fever at Portumna in September. After the fall of Limerick in 1691 and the flight of the "Wild Geese" to France, even the Dominican provincial abandoned the country for ever, leaving Patrick Marshall of Kilkenny in charge of a truly "desolate" province.

If there is anything which emerges from this confused story, it is the extraordinary resilience of the principal characters. One writer explains it by saying that the priests of the seventeenth century were so used to adversity, having been born to it and grown up with it, that they took persecution for granted and scarcely gave it a second thought. Father Marshall stuck to his post until 1698, recreating an Irish Dominican province from the ruins of war. At Kilkenny, or somewhere near it, one finds a community of six in 1693 under the guidance of that Peter Rothe whose novitiate had been interrupted by persecution twenty years before. There were six also in 1695 under John O'Meara, the very one who had been Father Rothe's prior during those earlier troubles. Priests with this background were beyond discouragement.

Finally, the century closed with the hardest stroke of all. Every bishop and friar in the country was ordered to leave the kingdom, under pain of imprisonment and transportation, before the 1st of May, 1698. Those returning from exile were to be held guilty of high treason. Faced with what was, practically, a death sentence about seven hundred friars of all Orders set sail for France and Spain, most of them never to return. Many would perhaps have stayed, but that they feared resistance might lead to the expulsion even of the diocesan clergy. So far as the Dominicans were concerned, at least 118 crossed the seas. Some seventy or eighty took their lives in their hands by staying at home. Many, in consequence, ended their days in jail. Anthony Rothe of Kilkenny was simply too old and weak to travel. John O'Meara, who cannot have been much younger, was still in Ireland a year after the deadline. Both died soon after, presumably while sheltered by friends.

AN OLD STONE MALT-HOUSE

Having disposed of the bishops and friars in 1698, the government turned its attention to the parochial clergy, of whom it compiled a detailed register in 1704. Each parish, accordingly, had a registered priest acceptable to the authorities, and it was part of the plan that when these priests died they would never be replaced. That happy situation did not last long, for when these supposedly tame priests were asked to take an oath rejecting the House of Stuart, practically all of them refused. Thus even they lost their legal status and joined the bishops and regular clergy "on the run". In 1712, the magistrates of Kilkenny were busy looking for thirteen priests, mostly new arrivals from France, Spain and Italy.

This was the Kilkenny to which the Dominicans returned. How early, one cannot say, but there are still two chalices (one dated 1716) in the museum at the Black Abbey, another presented to the convent by Fr Patrick Marshall (then living at London) in 1721, and a fourth (in St John's parish church) made expressly for the convent by Fr Peter Archer in 1722. Father Archer had been a novice at Kilkenny in 1686 and a priest there in 1695. So this was one of the old guard coming back home, and the date of his chalice has been taken as that of the restoration of community life.

The Black Abbey being still in other hands, they lived nearby in what had once been a large stone malt-house. It stood in Irishtown, in St Canice's parish, and since it was said to have been "built since the accession of George I", the friars must have adapted or repaired it after 1714. The date fits in well with that of our earliest chalice of the century. There were five in residence by 1731: Peter Archer, who must have been over sixty at the time; John Newman, prior of the house; Peter Costelloe (a native of Connacht) and Dominic Kelly. The provincial, passing that way four years later, noted that they lived together in full observance of the Rule. He also noted that letters for "Brother Charles" would find him "at the Butt's, Kilkenny", while letters to the community might be safely posted to George Kelly "at the Kelly's Arms", a city tavern. Peter Archer preferred to collect his post from Mr Michael Archer, "merchant in the Penthouse".

Despite the penal laws, it was still possible to make some headway between one bout of persecution and the next. In 1736, the Kilkenny Dominicans got some moral support at least when one of their own, Colman O'Shaughnessy, became bishop of Ossory. The new bishop, a son of one of the noblest families of Connacht and formerly provincial, lived in a small thatched house in Maudlin Street near which he would be buried in 1748. The trouble was that, while the government might be lenient, everything depended on the local application of the law, and it took very little to set the Corporation of Kilkenny on the trail of priests and friars. A widespread scare about Jacobites and French invaders in 1744 — a scare which had no lasting effect throughout most of the country — brought community life for the Dominicans of Kilkenny to an end.

The portreeve of Irishtown submitted a report on this occasion about four reputed friars within his area of jurisdiction. They were John Newman, living with Mrs. Luke Newman (probably his mother or sister-in-law), a Father Leary who lived with a widow named Downs, and two other priests, Morris and (John) Smith who occupied "an old house near Fryers Bridge". All four absconded for fear of arrest and more than half a century would pass before any Dominican community would gather in Kilkenny again. Individual priests remained in the town, helping out in parish chapels here and there, but without a house to call their own.

Two reasons in particular made the extinction of the order in Kilkenny almost inevitable, even though it was a time of recovery for the Irish Church

and friars stood a much better chance of survival in cities or towns than in the open country. One reason was that the Corporation of Kilkenny refused to allow the Dominicans a friary, much less a church of their own. The other was that Rome, from 1751 to 1774, insisted that Irish candidates for the religious life would have to make their novitiate on the continent. These basic causes produced their inevitable effect. Such few Dominicans as lived in Kilkenny after 1744 grew older and fewer with the years.

When Thomas Burke, another Dominican, became bishop of Ossory in 1759, there were still three or four of his order in the city. Ten years later, there were only three in the whole diocese, two of them beyond work. When mentioning this in a report of 1769, the bishop did not say who they were, but it is easy enough to fill in the missing names. They were James Heynes, still active at Rosbercon, Thomas Masterson who died at Kilkenny two years later, and Peter Magennis who had probably been in the city since 1745.

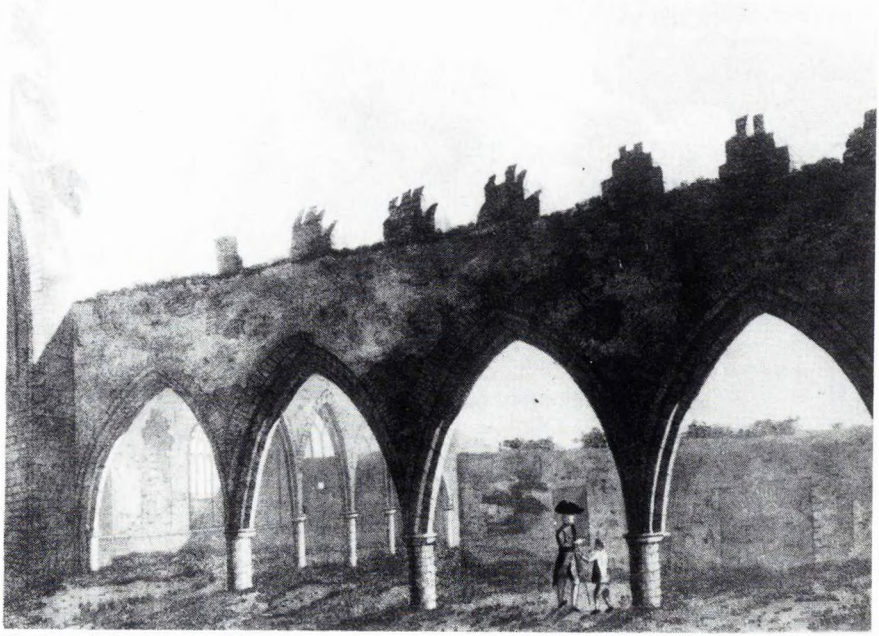
In a series of letters the bishop wrote to friends in Rome between 1770 and 1776, the only confrère he ever mentions is precisely this Father Magennis; a strong indication that the poor old man was quite alone. By 1775, the bishop could describe him as decrepit and living entirely on charity. According to the then provincial, the bishop should have "kept house and supported two or three" of his order, but no one (least of all the bishop) agreed with him. Finally, on 20 April 1776, the bishop wrote: "poor honest Fr Magennis died here in the middle of Holy Week". It was, not only the end of a lifetime, but to all appearances the end of the Dominicans in Kilkenny.

In the same year, and the same letter, bishop Burke described how the Catholics of the city were observing the Jubilee or Holy Year, after the extension of its indulgences to the world. "I was not so much edified since I came to this diocese as at present. The people are visiting the four chapels fifteen times. And that with so much charming piety and with such a spirit of devotion that I am enamoured with them. Though they walk together in the streets, not one speaks to another, but observe profound modest silence. Not a curse or oath can be heard in the town. I want words to express my content and satisfaction".

Heavy work in the confessional, made heavier than ever by the Jubilee, hastened the bishop's death. The author of *Hibernia Dominicana* passed away on 25 September 1776, just five months after Father Magennis, beside whom he was laid to rest in Maudlin street cemetery.

A CHURCH REBORN 1776-1894

By 1776, the Black Abbey was practically abandoned. No longer was it used as a court-house. Some kind of celebration was held there once a year when a festive meal was cooked in the immense fireplace of the medieval convent. And that was all. The roofs of nave, transept and chancel had fallen in. The walls of both aisles were in poor shape; the north wall of the nave completely gone. The pillars were buried to half their height in fallen debris. The great gable window of the transept was partly, one might say fortunately, bricked up, while the central and best window of the five on the transept wall had already been taken to a Protestant church in Dublin. An engraving of the period shows a whole ring of little thatched cabins clinging like barnacles to the church. The Abbey, like the friars, seemed to have reached the end of a long road.



Ruins of the Black Abbey about 1780 from the north-west. The pillars of the nave are buried to within four feet of the capitals. From F. Grose, "Antiquities of Ireland", London 1791.

In point of fact, the fortunes of both were about to take a turn for the better. Just two weeks before the death of Bishop Burke, and by no coincidence at all, a new Dominican curate named Michael Vincent Meade made his appearance at St Canice's. He was a young man, just six years ordained, with all the enthusiasm of youth and a fair share of practical ingenuity. To start with, he became tenant of the ruins at four pounds a year from a Mr Laurence Daly who in turn held a lease from the Tynte family of county Wicklow, just as they did from the Corporation of Kilkenny. Father Meade then put his mind to the building of a convent. Not having either a site or the necessary stone, he found both by simply demolishing the thirteenth-century chancel or choir and putting up a two-storey house in its stead. He was not, we are told, the man to have regard for an old tomb or to take the trouble of putting it out of the way, but at least he provided the order with a house which it was to use for one hundred and twenty years.

Presumably Father Meade lived in the new convent himself and enjoyed the company (from 1783) of Fr Thomas Carbery of Knocktopher. Both earned their livelihood by serving as curates in the Butts' chapel, but yearned for the day when they might say Mass in a chapel of their own. The fact that the new bishop of Ossory, John Thomas Troy, was himself a Dominican must have been a help to them in the circumstances. Encouraged by his presence, they thought of making a chapel of the ruined transept (leaving the nave which was in even worse condition) but Dr Troy was moved to Dublin in 1786 and the two curates left Kilkenny shortly after.

It is a coincidence, mysterious but worth noting, that in 1788 (the very year in which Father Meade left Kilkenny) two other Dominicans arrived at Friar's Hill, Thomastown, where they either built or took over a small thatched chapel and house which remained in Dominican hands until closed by the order in 1829. They were Fathers Francis Ennis and John Gogarty.

Not that the Black Abbey had been vacated, for while Father Meade went away in August 1788, a Father Laurence Shaw reached the city by September. Nor had he far to come, since he was stationed in Durrow for six or seven years before. Like Michael Meade, Father Shaw was something of a creative vandal, for while he succeeded in roofing the transept and repairing the walls of the church, he found stones to do so by knocking down the top storey of the old castle over the porch. The workmen, strange to say, found it easier to break the stones than to break the mortar holding them together.

At that time, with a little extra effort, the transept might have been opened as a public church, but the bishop felt that there were chapels enough in the neighbourhood already. Even the archbishop of Cashel, writing to Rome in June 1789, thought fit to protest against the restoration then under way. It had, he said, aroused a general outcry among Protestants and Catholics alike, apart from the fact that it ran counter to an Act of Parliament forbidding the repair of ancient monasteries. So Laurence Shaw, like Fathers Meade and Carbery before him, found more peaceful work elsewhere and handed over the convent to yet another confrère, Andrew Fitzgerald, in 1791.

Unlike most of the priests mentioned in this story, Father Fitzgerald was a native of Kilkenny. More important still, he possessed great prudence and patience. Almost at once he began teaching at the Old Academy or seminary near St Canice's cathedral, of which he was co-president from 1792 until leaving for Carlow in 1800. That seminary, forerunner of St Kieran's College, stood on the site of the later Loreto Convent. Since revolution and war on the continent prevented the Irish Dominicans from pressing the case of the Black Abbey at Rome, Father Fitzgerald lived quietly with his books of philosophy in the convent, leaving the problem of the restored transept to be solved in God's good time. Cornelius Ryan, who followed him at Kilkenny from 1800 to 1814, adopted exactly the same policy and for exactly the same reason. There could be no question of normal business relations with Rome until the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo.

THE ABBEY OPENED AND CLOSED

This quiet though unsatisfactory situation completely changed in 1815. For one thing, Rome issued what was practically a charter of rights for the regular clergy of Ireland, explicitly stating that they were perfectly entitled to repair and open their former churches. On the other hand, a new bishop was consecrated at Kilkenny: Dr Kieran Marum who strongly opposed the opening of the Black Abbey for public worship. Another Dominican, John Gavin, had in the meantime replaced Cornelius Ryan and was all set to act on the strength of the Roman charter.

No record survives of any alterations made by Father Gavin in the transept — the only part of the church which had a roof — but it may have been he who put a door in the middle of the east wall, exactly at the point from which the central window had been taken long before. This was to serve for many decades as the principal entrance to the church. At some date between 1840 and 1860 it was covered over by a porch, long since removed, but one may still trace the outline of the door from the filling on the outside of the present wall. What we do know is that Father Gavin, having informed the bishop of his intention and receiving no reply, celebrated public Mass on 9 February 1816 to the great joy of the people and even to the satisfaction of the Protestant magistrates. For all we know, it was the first public Mass at the Black Abbey since Cromwell took the city in 1650.

Father Gavin must have been very surprised indeed when his own Dominican provincial, yielding to the wishes of Dr Marum, sent him off to Cork and replaced him by a young priest named John Prendergast who had strict instructions never to open the church again! So unexpected a decision aroused a storm of complaint, not only from other Dominican communities but also from other religious orders who regarded the Black Abbey affair as a sort of test-case. The result was a complete reversal of policy. When the unfortunate, if far-sighted provincial went out of office that summer (1816)

his successor immediately appointed Fr Patrick Moore as prior with a mandate to open the Black Abbey at once.

Fathers Moore and Prendergast set to work on the church in July, trying particularly to lower the transept floor back down to its original level and thus reveal the buried bases of the pillars. In the process they uncovered parts of the original tiling, under which there were brick vaults containing human bones and five empty stone coffins. While they were digging in the south-eastern corner, close to the great gable window, a spring of water gushed up with such force as to knock the workmen to the ground. A heavy stone plate, firmly locked, was recently placed over the spring. Faced by this difficulty, the two priests abandoned their plan and left the floor as it was.

Nonetheless, they pressed ahead with the interior decoration of the church and were able to celebrate public Mass with great solemnity on 25 September 1816. A few days later, Father Moore received a letter from the bishop which deprived him of faculties within the diocese and effectively closed the Black Abbey again until Dr Marum died. The work of restoration must have continued, even if on a more modest scale, because a local mason or plasterer left his autograph — "1818 Patrick Carroll" — on a rectangular piece of white plaster lately found in a scooped-out cavity just above one of the supports of the central tower.

There were still difficulties, even after Dr Marum's death in 1827, although his successor did not object to the Dominicans having a church. Quite simply, the priory fell into the hands of an extraordinary priest, John D. Brookes, whom even his own Dominican superiors could not dislodge. When he finally surrendered, no other obstacle prevented the opening of a public chapel.

PEACE AND PROGRESS

After 1838, the restoration of the Black Abbey made steady, uninterrupted progress. Ironically, the two pioneers of the new departure went to Kilkenny very much against their wishes. On the arrival of Thomas V. Burke as prior from Drogheda in December 1838 he was, as he noted himself, "respectably attended by the good people of Kilkenny, who were long deprived of the convenience of the Abbey, on Sundays and festivals". But he left his heart in Drogheda, and to Drogheda he returned in the following June. People there still remember him for the group of traditional Irish harpists he founded.

The second reluctant prior was Anthony Fahy, a young man whose health had been shattered by a few years' missionary work in Ohio. The air of Kilkenny did him good, for even by December 1839 the Black Abbey was said to be "rising gloriously under his care". This should be taken figuratively, meaning that he improved the services by singing Mass every Sunday to the accompaniment of trombones and a bass fiddle. He cannot have done much to the fabric of the building, although he did intend inviting Pugin, the great apostle of neo-gothic architecture, to "examine the ruins and plan for its restoration". Tradition has it that he got into debt over repairs to the thatched

roof and had to leave. More likely, it was just the pull of the missions. In September 1843 he set off to look after Irish emigrants to the Argentine, succeeding so well that his statue now stands in Buenos Aires.

Father John O'Regan, a preacher of some fame, then took over and held the priorship until his death in 1860. At first he was quite alone, just like Fathers Burke and Fahy before him. All three were priors without communities, and necessarily so, because diocesan faculties were granted only to one priest at the Black Abbey. When Fr Patrick Meadthe came to keep the prior company about 1849 he had to run a school for a dozen boys in the parlour in order to support himself. That explains why so many editions of the Latin and Greek classics, and so many other schoolbooks of the early nineteenth century, filled several shelves of the conventual library until the late 1950s.

One must remember that their church was simply the present transept, completely cut off by a wall from the ruined nave, with the altar at one end and a choir-loft blocking the lower half of the gable window at the other. Two famous tourists of the 1840s, Mr and Mrs S. C. Hall, found the interior decoration dreadful. "The gaudiness and glittering finery of modern taste were oddly and painfully mingled with the solemn grandeur of ancient state". On the other hand, Father Meadthe could sing and his choir of thirty, with instrumental support, made up for the artistic limitations of what was, after all, a poor chapel adorned by the poor for the poor just before the Great Famine. Another visitor, the Dominican Patrick Conway, spent a few days with the two priests. It was the first time he had ever heard Vespers in plain chant sung in Ireland. Father O'Regan and his only subject even sang the *Salve Regina* after Compline, the last part of the divine office for the day.

On Fr Meadthe's departure in 1852, the prior got another companion in the person of Robert Vincent Molloy, a great linguist and book collector. Father Molloy abolished the choir for reasons now unknown, but at least he bought a magnificent bell at the Cork Exhibition and hung it in the central tower on 11 May 1853. This is said to have been the first bell to ring out the Angelus in Kilkenny. After a brief stay of only two years, Father Molloy went as an army chaplain to the Crimea and never came back to the Black Abbey. Many of his valuable books found their way to Tallaght.

There was, all this while, an ever-growing interest in the complete restoration of the Black Abbey, an interest whetted by the gradual discovery from 1838 of old Norman tombs on the west side of Friars' Street. Father O'Regan did all he could to foster it. Some old accounts of the early 1850s show a "Committee for the Repairs of the Black Abbey" already in existence, but its activity was less than hectic until the arrival of Fr William D. Connolly from Athy in 1854. He too, like Father Molloy, was a great lover of books. In fact he must have brought a cart-load with him to Kilkenny, judging by the innumerable volumes in the conventual library in the early 1970s which bore

his characteristic device: a playful dog with a torch in its mouth, one of the symbols of the order.

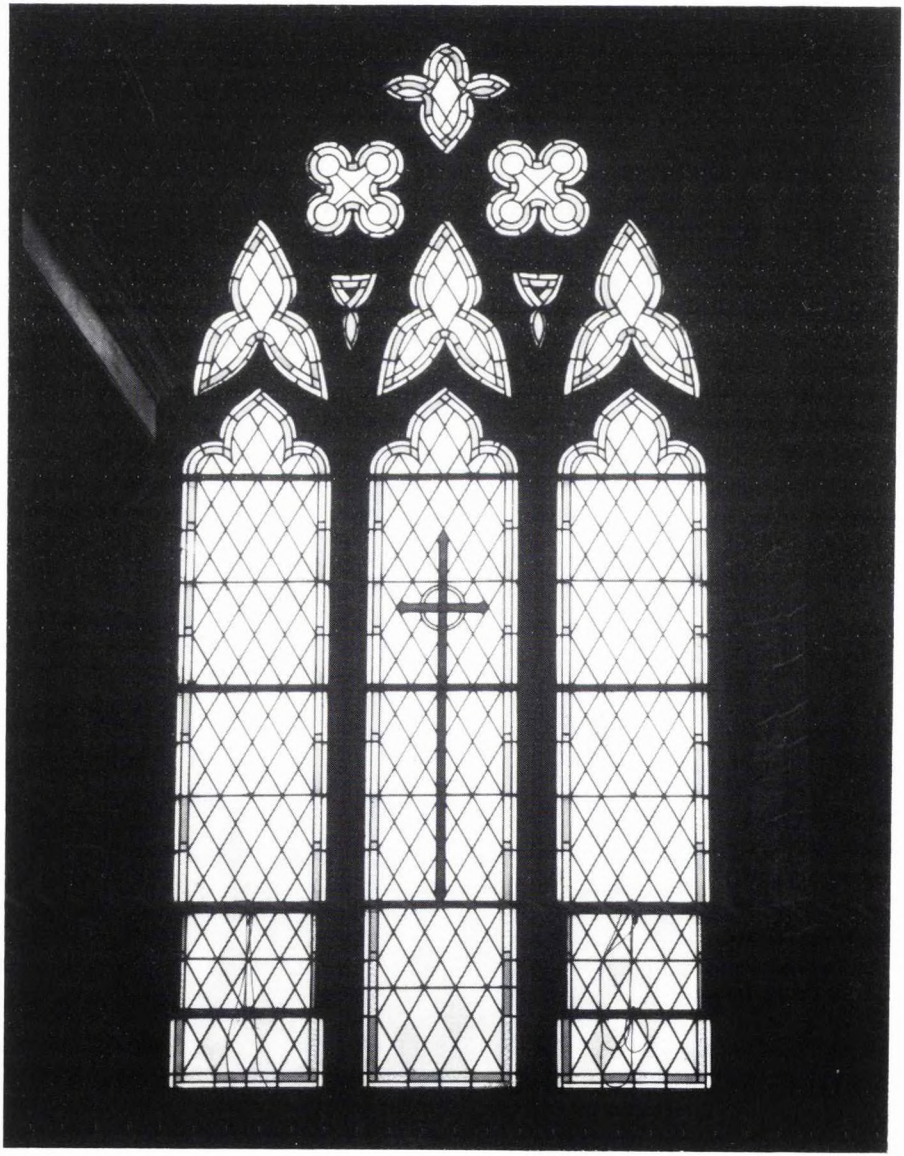
Since by this time the prior was old and sick, Father Connolly had to manage the church practically on his own. How he did so without diocesan faculties it would be hard to say. The problem of getting faculties for a second priest was happily resolved in 1855 through the good offices of the archbishop of Dublin. Strange to say, that peculiar limitation lasted for a century. Even after the Second World War, while the community might number four priests, two of them could hear confessions only when one or both of the other two with faculties were unable to use them.

The provincial Bartholomew Russell left some notes of his visit to the Abbey in 1855. Vespers were sung in the church on Sundays and feast days. There was public recitation of the Rosary each evening, but not "as yet" a Rosary confraternity. Special "exhortations" were given during Lent, and an "instruction" on the first Sunday of the month. On the material side, the convent had £20 to its credit, took in £1 from the Sunday collection, and paid a nominal rent of 2/6d (12½p.) for the church. With respect to the house, they had only a twenty-one-year lease which Fathers O'Regan and Meadthe obtained in 1850.

Despite an almost empty purse, the prior and Father Connolly decided to take up the final challenge: the restoration of the nave and its aisle. The nave was unroofed, "just a heap of ruins", when they began. All that remained, apart from the bottom of the castle, were the old pillars and their arches. The place had, in fact, done duty as a threshing floor only a few decades earlier. Since even the walls were gone, one of their first tasks was to uncover the foundations of both walls, north and south. Regrettably, we no longer have the "accurate survey of the church and all its surrounding grounds" which they commissioned from J. J. McCarthy, a renowned architect then at work on St Saviour's in Dominic Street, Dublin. From the printed circular sent out by the two priests in 1859, we also learn that Mr McCarthy was "engaged in making plans for the entire restoration". Even that circular mentioned the "present forlorn condition" of the Black Abbey. An unsound roof left pools of water even in the sanctuary after every shower.

Another problem, encountered but shelved forty years before, was that the floors of the transept and nave were almost three feet above their original level, thus throwing pillars, arches and windows out of true proportion. By lowering the floor, the restorers unwittingly brought it level with the bed of the river Bregagh nearby and uncovered another spring (like that found in 1816) at the pillar closest to the high altar. They laid a pipe to carry the spring-water to the Bregagh before it occurred to anyone that the pipe might just as easily carry water into the church as out of it.

After John O'Regan's death in 1860, Father Connolly (his successor in the priorship) pressed ahead with the work. However, it would be a great injustice to think of either of them as merely builders. Father O'Regan, who was much



Neo-Gothic window in the nave, erected about 1862. The Garda Síochána in 1981 presented a replica of it to the basilica at Knock, as a gift from the province of Leinster.

appreciated for his priestly qualities, had one of the largest funerals ever seen in Kilkenny. Father Connolly, for his dedication to pulpit and confessional, was still remembered thirty years after his death as "the Curé of Ars of Kilkenny".

During the final years of the great restoration, Father Connolly was helped by Fr Peter Vincent Skelly, a student of archaeology and something of an artist besides. It was he who designed the high altar, to face down the nave, in 1863 and supervised its erection in the following year. Mr and Mrs John Hudson, constant benefactors of the Black Abbey, bore the entire expense. Some of the larger carved panels of that marble altar, dismantled about 1977, may still be seen attached to the wall in the priory garden.

At last all was ready. The great day came on Trinity Sunday, 22 May 1864, when Dr Leahy O.P., bishop of Dromore, sang a pontifical High Mass for the solemn opening of the nave. Dr Walsh, bishop of Ossory, performed the ceremony of dedication. Many hundreds travelled from Dublin for the occasion. The special preacher, Father Bartholomew Russell, brought back from Cork the old Confederate banner which he himself had taken from the Black Abbey not very long before. It thrilled his romantic soul to think of the flag hanging in the very church in which Rinuccini had ordained priests in the palmy days of the Confederation.

END OF THE FIRST RESTORATION

Father Connolly died within a year of the opening ceremony and was laid to rest in the church to which he had selflessly dedicated the last decade of his life. It was intended at the time to raise a monument: "to commemorate his exalted virtues". Others took over his work, but the essential was already done and it was only a matter of adding a few touches here and there.

Flooding was the most serious problem, and to that everything else took second place. Fr Thomas Michael Taylor, a member of the Black Abbey community for forty years, wrote about it in a manuscript booklet of 1884. With regard to the pipe laid down before 1864 to carry the spring-water to the river, Fr Taylor said: "the remedy proved at times as bad as the evil. For when the water in the Bregach rose to any considerable height, the sewer (instead of conveying the water from the church to the river) permitted the water of the river to flow into the church, so that the floors were not infrequently covered with eighteen inches of water. Once or twice the water rose so high that the seats floated as in a little lake. This state of things continued for several years till at last it was brought under the notice of Mr Walker, builder and C.E., of Castlecomer, who gave plans of drainage and successfully carried out said plans in 1882". Fr Taylor was soon convinced that the problem existed no more, because no water whatever entered the church in March 1883 during "one of the greatest floods seen in the city".

Then there was the question of the old castle or tower at the entrance to the

nave. Even Father Connolly had left it much as it was, no higher than the walls of the church. His successors built it up again in 1882 and 1883, showing proper respect for a building older than the Black Abbey itself, a castle which probably sheltered the very first Dominicans to reach Kilkenny. The same two years saw an immense improvement in the interior decoration of the church, a task necessarily postponed until the danger of flooding was past. Quite a lot of work had to be done to provide new flooring, to put in new seats, to take down what was called: "an unsightly though expensive ceiling". Generous benefactors came forward to meet the cost of one stained glass window after another, culminating with the great Rosary window at the end of the transept which Mr Hudson donated in 1892 as a memorial to his wife. A magnificent organ, installed in the old castle in the following year, replaced the poor harmonium for ever. This organ, built by Mr White of Dublin, was a two-manual instrument with fourteen stops.

The community of the Black Abbey in 1894 at the opening of the present priory. Standing (from left): Fr Michael Taylor, Br Bernard Dunleavy, Fr Pius Boylan. Seated: Fr William Spence, prior, later archbishop of Adelaide.

Having thus spent more than fifty years taking care of the house of God, the Dominicans of Kilkenny finally took up the question of a house for themselves. If nothing else, they had their priorities right. They were still living in the modest two-storey house built by Fr Meade about 1780: a house increasingly expensive to repair and too small for a growing community. One Dominican roundly described it as "a house quite unsuitable for human habitation". This was completely demolished in 1894 when the community moved into the present convent on a site slightly closer to the Bregagh with a ground-floor level deliberately higher than the footpath. A few steps up to the door mean a lot in times of flood. The new building, begun in 1889, owed everything to the generous help of the clergy and people of Ossory and to the initiative of the two successive priors who built it: Thomas Taylor and Robert William Spence, later archbishop of Adelaide.

THE BLACK ABBEY TODAY

In 1864, Fathers Connelly and Skelly obtained possession of "a house and garden adjoining the abbey towards Black Mill Street, in order to improve the approach to the western entrance, under the lesser tower". This must have been the area now occupied by the old Norman tombs outside the church. While demolishing the modern wall between the abbey and the new property in the same year, workmen uncovered one of the finest of these tombs: that of David the Merchant. Another prior, William Madden, secured the lease of a strip of land occupied by cottages in 1878, perhaps the site of St Dominic's Park which was first enclosed by railings in 1922 and first graced by a statue of St Dominic ten years later.

During the last war a more important development took place requiring long negotiations with the Waller family of Derry, successors of the Tyntes as owners and landlords in the area. The first step was to purchase the old malt-house "and adjacent ruins" on Friars' Bridge street between the new priory and the river. This site, running upstream as far as Blackmill Street, largely the original site of the abbey, was thus recovered four hundred years after its confiscation. Throughout this delicate transaction Dr Martin Crotty, solicitor, gave his services to the community free of charge. The second step was to buy out the ground under the church itself, that being still subject to an annual rent of half-a-crown. Early in 1946, the house-chronicler was able to exclaim: "Now, *Deo gratias,* we hold the church in freehold!". Fr Albert Dempsey was prior at the time, but it was only during the term of Fr Patrick Long (1950-1955) that the priory garden was extended into this new property up to the bank of the Bregagh and the present orchard planted. As work progressed, a window of the old abbey overlooking the stream was unbricked in 1954 to reveal itself as a whole for the first time. It is the only part of the medieval priory to survive.

With a growing community - six in 1943 - it was thought necessary to build an oratory for the recitation of the divine office on the northern side of the nave, separated only by a window from the sanctuary of the church as it then was. The same energetic prior, Fr Dempsey, completed this task during the war. The project would have cost much more than it did but for the generosity of Bishop Collier who let the community take stones from the sacristy of the old church of St John near the railway station. These stones, as was thankfully noted, were "of superior limestone and non-porous, by far the best available". The oratory, first used in October 1944, was the only new building

erected at the Black Abbey since 1894. Far more energy and money went to the maintenance of the church itself, which was natural enough considering the age of the abbey and the frequent floods it had to endure.

"Temporary repairs", carried out in 1931 on the roof of the church, kept the rain out for thirty long years, but the roof of the central tower gave way in 1936 and had to be replaced by the present one in copper. Steel girders were inserted under the oaken beams supporting the bells, and the new roof was topped by a steel cross, five feet high, made by John Finn, a local blacksmith of eighty-four who also made the cross over the front of the convent. Fr Kevin Gaffney had to do a far more thorough job on the church itself, so the entire roof had to come off until the work was done. At the same time, the stone parapets were restored and buttresses built against the wall along the aisle of the transept. The entire interior was then freshly painted and decorated.

Although even the high altar was "sinking" by 1958, the only other major work was on the great Rosary window, glazed by Mayer and Co. in 1892. This was "reconditioned at considerable expense" in the early 1920s, but we are not told why it needed attention. By 1955 it was "bulging badly, while many of the glass sections were cracked". Father Long employed Hogan and Co. to dismantle the window completely. About 10,000 pieces of glass were taken from the window, brought for three months to a Dublin workshop, and successfully reassembled.

The above Triptch (once found in the Abbey) depicts Our Lady presenting St. Dominic with the rosary; the Blessed Trinity; Our Crucified Lord speaking to St. Thomas Aquinas " You have written well of me, Thomas".

Another window, that closest to the lesser tower on the northern side, was not repaired but copied in the summer of 1981. The Gardai of the Leinster area had a replica made of it for the new Basilica at Knock with the blessing and encouragement of the present prior, Fr Clement Lavery.

Electric lighting was introduced to the Black Abbey in the late 1920s, but there was no heating system until 1933 when it was thought necessary "both for the preservation of the fabric and for the comfort of priests and people". Nor was there a microphone until 1951, although many earlier preachers were "inaudible in the transept". That little detail helps to explain why the transept was called "the poor side", separated by a railing from the nave or "rich side", which had the further advantage of facing the high altar. The position of the former pulpit at the junction of both left the preacher at a loss where to look or in what direction to project his voice.

FLOODS

One of the most curious things about the Black Abbey is the tenacity with which priests and people have repaired it, decorated it, kept it clean and flourishing as a house of prayer, even though the church has been flooded every three or four years for as long as anyone can remember. November to February are the dangerous months when the swollen Nore pushes back an unwonted rush of water from the Bregagh, and the Bregagh in turn leaves its bed at Blackmill bridge, turns the corner and pours down the slope into the church from the south. The force and speed of this out-flanking movement amaze even those who have seen it time out of mind. The consequent damage has led despairing priors to appeal to the Corporation, and the Corporation to refer the problem to the Government, but happily the worst seems over now thanks to the removal of two weirs and other work to clear the flow of the river.

Some senior citizens probably remember the flood of 1931 when the water reached the table of the high altar. That altar was lower than the present one, but even so the entire church was submerged to a depth of six feet. Worse followed in 1940 when the water in the church reached the sacristy, where the new tabernacle stands, and Mass had to be celebrated in the priory library. In November 1944, "a few people who received Holy Communion had to wade to the altar-rails". The Bregagh surpassed itself in February 1947 when the flood rose to ten feet in the church, burst in the hall-door of the priory, rose four steps up the main staircase and reached table-height in library, refectory and kitchen. The Black Abbey was closed for three weeks afterwards. Nothing quite so bad has happened since, but, leaving minor floods aside, the church was twice under six feet of water in 1960 and 1968. Some pathetic photographs taken in the church on Christmas Day 1968 show heavy pews floating around, the pulpit half-submerged, the flood water lapping against the altar-tables. The resulting mess can only be imagined, but it was cleaned

up time and again by those tenacious, loyal people who have come to look upon the Black Abbey as **their** church come hell, or literally, "high water". Good has come from evil, and no one could express this result better than Fr Francis MacNamara did in 1975.

> "What shines across the darkness in the dismal days of flooding is the heroic self-sacrifice and generosity of the people. The fire brigade, the army, the Gardai and all our neighbours made incredible efforts to repair all the damage. City businessmen, firms and workers brought heaters and extra oil to dry out the church and make it ready again for God's worship. Christian Brothers and nuns were tireless as they worked to restore altar and sanctuary and vestments. It would not be an exaggeration to say that each flood has drawn the people and their Black Abbey closer and closer together. It is with deepest gratitude that we record our debt to all those who down through all the years made so many sacrifices in times of flood. The best expression of our appreciation is to remember our benefactors daily in our prayers and to try to give them the best service we possibly can".

A CENTURY OF SERVICE

As in most old cities, the churches of Kilkenny lie close to each other and, like the cathedral itself, tend to be small. Their congregations are small too, but very loyal. For the same reason, the number of Dominicans at the Black Abbey has never been large. Even the convent, almost a century old, is quite big enough for the present community. Between 1875 and 1894 there were never more than two priests and a brother. Up to the outbreak of the last war the number of priests varied between two and four, while from 1941 there have never been less than four nor more than seven. Many were old and sick, even on arrival, after a lifetime on the missions; for others, the Black Abbey was simply a home-address or base of operations for work throughout the country. Until two years ago there was always a brother in the community, taking care of the church and usually close to the people in a way no priest could hope to be. Br Bernard Dunleavy, who came to Kilkenny in 1879, stayed about thirty years. Another pillar of the abbey, Br Laurence O'Brien, arrived in 1917 and remained until his death in 1938. Most readers will more easily remember his two successors: Br Benedict Larkin (1941-1953) and Br Konrad Boyle. Br Konrad, who first reached Kilkenny in 1955 and left for Rome in 1984, outdistanced all his predecessors in length of faithful service.

Mass, sermons, confessions, with the daily recitation of the divine office, form the heart and mainspring of the community's service to the people. The result appears, not only in the church but at the hall-door, to which an unbroken stream of callers come with troubled hearts or empty pockets. The priests have always been confessors to nuns, even outside the city, and have preached missions all over Ireland. The annual quest for money throughout the diocese can be an apostolate of its own, which blesses him that gives and

him that takes. The "candle-quest", no longer carried out, amounted simply to the gift of candles by the congregation at Candlemas or the Feast of the Purification of Our Lady.

The Rosary confraternity for which Fr Russell longed in 1855, was formed by 1887. In that year there was even a Holy Name confraternity for men, but both groups were already in decline and seem to have died out by 1912. The proximity of other churches and the fact that these sodalities had only two priests to care for them, prevented the vigorous growth such confraternities enjoyed in other Dominican churches. In fact, the only sodality to flourish at the Black Abbey was made up by the ever-numerous altarboys, first marshalled by Fr Henry Gaffney (1947-1963) and well cared for by Br Konrad over the last twenty years.

Whatever about confraternities, the Black Abbey has always had members of the Third Order, both men and women. Although the former "tertians" or tertiaries are now styled "lay Dominicans", neither their Rule nor their spirit has greatly changed. They too were in decline in 1887, but once the prior began to attend their monthly meetings all was well again inside two years. On the altar of the domestic oratory stands a splendid monstrance, heavy yet delicately worked, presented by the tertiaries to the community in May 1919. In 1937, there were seventeen men and sixty-nine women tertiaries in Kilkenny, a figure which remained fairly constant for twenty years. Now there are only about fourteen lay Dominicans at the Black Abbey. Offsetting that loss, there are twenty more at Bagenalstown, a chapter formed in 1941 under the direction of Fr Gabriel O'Dea.

Reading through the old house-chronicle, one is struck by the attention given to three solemn annual processions which began in the church before taking to the streets outside. On the last Sunday of May, and again on Rosary Sunday in October, the procession, which could include up to a hundred children dressed in white, headed for "The Lady Park", the railed garden south of the priory where a statue of Our Lady still stands. Another procession of the Blessed Sacrament, held on the Sunday after Corpus Christi, made its colourful way to "St Dominic's Park" on the far side of the road. Fr Benignus Whelan, while prior in 1963, began an annual novena to St Martin de Porres which has flourished so well as to merit the description of "an annual retreat".

The annual sequence of processions and novenas was enlivened from time to time by days of special celebration. The greatest, perhaps, was in 1925 on the abbey's seventh centenary when the old bell, cast for the Black Abbey in 1647, was brought back again to its rightful place from the market-house in Dunlavin, thanks to the late Senator de Loughry and a dedicated committee. Three distinguished Dominicans were made freemen of Kilkenny: archbishop Robert Spence of Adelaide in 1920, archbishop John P. Dowling of Port-of-Spain in 1932, the year of the Eucharistic Congress, and Fr Michael Browne, the first Irishman to become master general of the order, in 1955. All three

had particular claims on Kilkenny, for while Dr Spence had completed the priory, archbishop Dowling was a native of Freshford, and Father (later Cardinal) Browne made religious profession as a "son" of the Black Abbey when the law still required profession for a particular convent.

Photo of Central Bell Tower from 15th Century, Priory 1894 and St. Canice's Parochial House in background.

The year 1979 witnessed the revival of a medieval custom when the new mayor, Mr Thomas Martin, with the members of the Corporation came in their robes of office to a special votive Mass at the Black Abbey, before their inaugural meeting. The traditional date, the feast of St Michael on 29 September, was observed in 1981 when the out-going mayor and mayoress, Alderman and Mrs Luke Boyle, accompanied by the sword and mace-bearers, the clerk of the Corporation and a representative group of aldermen, attended an evening Mass, before which the mayor presented his chain of office to the prior, Fr Clement Lavery, who in turn placed it on the altar for the duration of the Mass, acknowledging by this gesture that the Holy Trinity is the ultimate source of all human authority. At the end of Mass, Fr Lavery blessed the mayoral chain and invoked the intercession of St Michael on the people and city of Kilkenny.

WRITERS AND TEACHERS

The valuable historical work of Fr Ambrose Coleman will be mentioned later. To his name one may add that of Fr Henry Gaffney,a prolific author of religious plays and lives of saints, most of whose work lay behind him in 1947 when he came to the Black Abbey for the second time. Yet still he summoned the energy to write four more booklets, apart from a pamphlet on the Abbey, before his departure in 1963: a life of St Catherine of Siena, two lives of St Martin, and "Jesus: a Manual for Youth". Fr Gabriel Harty published "Rediscovering the Rosary" while stationed at the Black Abbey in 1979. The front and back covers of that handsome book bear excellent photographs of the Rosary window and the alabaster Trinity. Other members of the community were not authors but editors, which may be a nobler distinction. Fr Whelan took care of the *Imeldist,* a pocket-magazine for girls, from 1963 to 1965. Fr Francis MacNamara edited the *Lantern,* a somewhat larger periodical for adults, from 1966 to 1970 when the long-shining *Lantern* went out forever. Fr Philip Rice, creator of the much more ambitious *Irish Spotlight,* edited it from Kilkenny between 1966 and 1968 before handing over the task to Fr Joseph Bergin of the same community who kept the publication going until its demise in 1970. So the Black Abbey was quite a literary power-house in its time. Nor has the flame gone out, if one thinks of Fr MacNamara's regular contributions to the local press.

There have been teachers at the Black Abbey too. Fr Pius Cleary taught both philosophy and theology at St Kieran's from 1916 to 1923, while Fr Mannes Cussen taught philosphy to the seminarians there in 1926-27. Later still, between 1943 and 1954, Fr Stephen Conlon taught moral theology in the same college. "A school of philosophy for the laity" flourished briefly in the early 1940s under the care of Fr Gregory Kirstein: a sort of Thomistic study-circle of a kind then popular in Dublin. Between 1965 and 1967, Fr Andrew Kane took on the more unusual and daunting task of teaching philosophy at the military school on the Curragh.

KILKENNY DOMINICANS

It is surprising that from 1800 to the present day, so far as one can determine, only about twelve young men from the city or county of Kilkenny have entered the order and persevered in it. The first, John Pius Dowling, later archbishop in Trinidad, came from Freshford, as did his nephew Augustine Dowling, called "Gene" by the brethren for his unfailing geniality. Fr Thomas Crotty, though born in New Ross, was described in 1893 as the "first and only native of the city" to enter the order during the nineteenth century. The writer, Fr Henry Gaffney, came from Cuffe's Grange, and Fr Finbar O'Shea, who died young, from Knocktopher. Fr Bede McEnery, a native of Ballyhale, was a student at St Kieran's and a diocesan priest in England before joining the order and spending long fruitful years in Trinidad. Fr. Stephen Murphy of Ballyhale died in 1991 at Newry where he spent the

autumn of a long and active life. Four others came from the city of Kilkenny itself. Fr. Raphael Ayres spent all his life in Ireland, particularly in Tralee where he is still remembered with affection. Fr. Gabriel O'Dea spent the war-years at Kilkenny between two long spells in Trinidad. Kevin de Loughry is a missionary in Trinidad and Noel MacCauley, formerly in the Argentine, has been in Trinidad now for several years. The youngest, Fr. Liam Walsh of Kilmacow, has exercised his priestly ministry at Newry and Limerick.

A NEW SANCTUARY: 1975 - 1979

When Fr Denis Clifford became prior of the Black Abbey in April 1975, he lost no time in taking stock of the situation. Necessary and urgent work on the central tower was needed to prevent damp from seeping into the walls. Inside the abbey, the new prior had to choose whether to paint the walls yet again or strip the plaster entirely to reveal the stonework beneath. Though ten years had passed since the close of the Second Vatican Council, scarcely any of its ideas had affected the sanctuary of the church. Above all, how could the altar be turned around so that the priest might face the people during Mass?

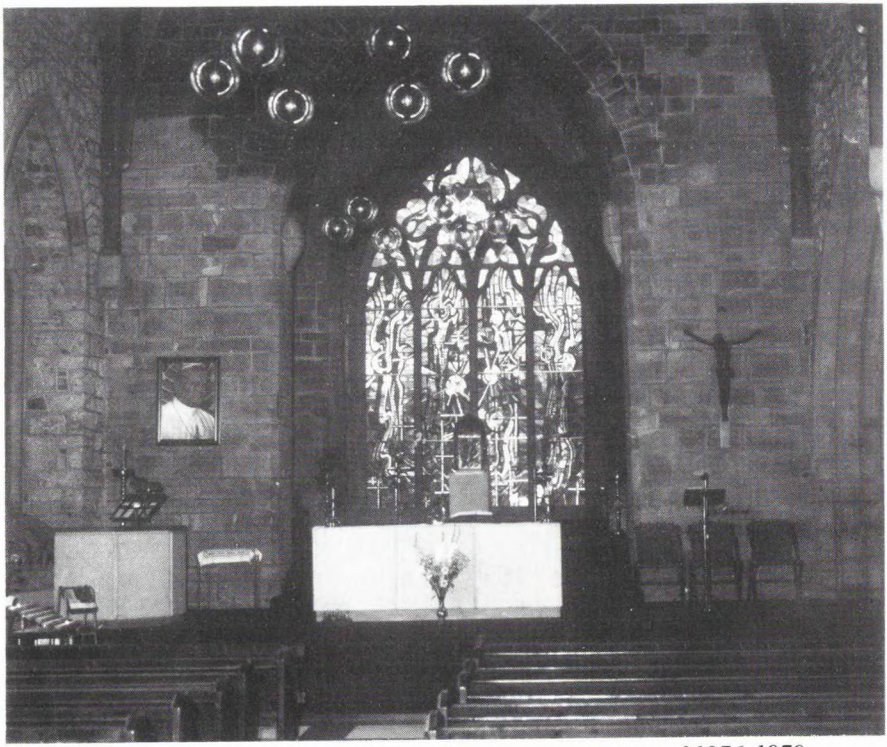
Five months later, Fr Clifford invited an architect, Mr C. Harvey Jacob of Waterford, to carry out a complete survey of the church. In autumn 1976, Messrs P. Cantwell and Sons, contractors of Kilkenny, began work on the tower. At that stage it was simply a question of repointing the stonework and keeping out the rain, but in February 1977 it was decided to give the tower a central part in the daily liturgy which it had not played since the Reformation. The area within its four arches had long served as a sacristy, screened by thin plaster walls both from the transept and the nave. The time had come to remove the altar of 1864 (an altar no longer in the best of repair), to reveal and use the arches by removing the plaster walls, to erect a simple granite altar and put new glass into the large neo-Gothic window behind the tabernacle: a window which no one had ever seen from the church before.

All this involved much sentimental sacrifice for those who had prayed in the Black Abbey for decades. Not only had the high altar to go, but also its two flanking side-altars, as well as the altar-rails and the fine marble pulpit. Great financial sacrifice was called for too, since the cost of the entire restoration would eventually draw close to a quarter of a million pounds. Thanks yet again to the unfailing generosity of the people of Kilkenny, the entire cost has already been defrayed.

The architect's intention and achievement was "to clear the church and then restore the liturgical priorities. An altar dominating by its size and simplicity; a tabernacle raised to draw the eye in the empty church; a lectern placed so as to command the two congregations of the L-shaped interior. As a setting for these sacred objects, a warmly carpetted Sanctuary was created contrasting with the stark simplicity of the stone walls and graceful arches. Statues were discreetly placed away from the Sanctuary to avoid distractions

but encourage devotion. The result is an interior in which there is no confusion. The Sanctuary is now emphatically the focal point of the whole interior".

The large east window behind the sanctuary, glazed in an abstract pattern by the Dublin Glass and Paint Company, floods the whole altar-area with welcome morning light. The pattern of the window is reflected in the copper-domed tabernacle, designed by Peter Donovan of Kilkenny, which stands on a tall granite base and actually encases the tabernacle from the former high altar. This "Blessed Sacrament chapel", directly underneath the tower, is now used by the community for the public recitation of the divine office. The most remarkable part of it is the ceiling, for the delicate stone ribs, which one would take to be the work of some medieval craftsman, were constructed only a few years ago by master-joiner Jimmy Dunlop of Kilkenny. When he set to work, only the very lowest parts of the original vaulting remained, but those few inches of stone were enough to point the way to St Canice's and Jerpoint and there recapture the former design. The original foundation-stone of the tower may still be seen close behind the tabernacle; it was moved further up the arch so as not to remain unseen beneath the new and higher floor.



The new altar and sanctuary after the great restoration of 1976-1979.

The present altar, five steps lower than the tabernacle, is itself four steps above the floor of the nave, so that little damage can be done by future floods. It should suffice to roll back the carpet, as far up as the tabernacle if necessary, to avoid even minor damage, unless the Bregagh chooses to repeat its star-performance of 1947 by breaking into the priory itself.

The second and more ambitious stage of this great restoration began in summer 1977. All the walls were stripped of plaster, patches of brick infill were replaced by stone, and the whole inner surface repointed. The wooden floor and tiled passage-ways were replaced by concrete tiles under the seats, with white marble and black slate slabs from Liscannor, Co. Clare, in the aisles. The doors and porches, both in nave and transept, were rearranged. Even the Rosary window got new stone piping on either side. Heating and lighting systems were completely overhauled or replaced. The organ and organ-loft too were repaired at immense expense. The old confessionals gave way to new ones, while the painted Stations of the Cross were replaced by a set carved in wood, the work of Fr Henry Flanagan O.P. of Newbridge.

At last all was ready for the great day, 11 February 1979, on which the bishop of Ossory, Dr Peter Birch, would dedicate the Black Abbey in the presence of the papal nuncio, Dr Gaetano Alibrandi, the President Dr Patrick Hillery, the Taoiseach Mr Jack Lynch, Dr Armstrong bishop of Cashel and Ossory, with the mayor and corporation and many other illustrious visitors. One of them, the Dominican provincial, Fr Damian Byrne, has since become Master of the entire Order.

The Black Abbey was built by the people of Kilkenny. The people of Kilkenny have restored and repaired it time and time again down the centuries. If the Dominicans have looked after it since 1225, they have been custodians rather than owners, glad to serve their people and their God in one of the oldest and most historic churches in Ireland.

SOME RECENT IMPROVEMENTS: 1990-1995

The chief point and purpose of the renovations carried out at the Black Abbey between 1976 and 1979 was to adapt the altar and sanctuary to modern needs. Much else was done at the time; even the organ was overhauled. Other items were put on the long finger, either because one cannot do everything at once, or because they did not then call for urgent attention. Little more than ten years later, the organ was again improved, every stained-glass window in the church had to be dismantled and repaired, while many other minor improvements were made to church and priory. Throughout all this there has been one great blessing. The river Bregagh, which used to swirl into the church every three or four years, has given no serious trouble since 1968. Even in January 1995, when there was bad flooding in Irishtown, the Black Abbey thankfully escaped.

About 1990, the priory garden, once an orchard and home to several ducks, was largely cleared and newly laid out in a classical and rather French style. Fr. O'Donovan, who was prior at the time, showed also his interest in fine music by

employing the firm of Derek Verso and Company to overhaul and 'revoice' the church organ.

Father Francis Downes, prior of the Black Abbey from 1993, undertook even more ambitious projects. The piazza or open space before the front door of the church has now been paved with Wexford brick. The small garden plot along the eastern wall of the transept, leading directly to the tower, was lowered to keep that wall dry. An archaeological probe in the area, much of which had been disturbed in the recent past, brought nothing significant to light. It would have been interesting had the archaeologist turned up another Norman tomb!

The question of damp was also a problem within the priory. This too was solved, at no small expense, some new furniture bought and better vestments provided for the sacristy. Even the church-bells began to ring again in 1993, thanks to an automatic device. They had not been heard for quite some time before. By far the most ambitious and expensive part of all this recent work was the repair of the Rosary window and of all the stained glass in the church, between Nov. 1993 and March 1994. Even the Rosary window, with its 10,000 pieces of glass, had to be completely dismantled and reassembled in 1994, for the second time in only forty years. The cause of the trouble is that the window faces south, taking the full force of the summer sun, so that the lead sags by day under the weight of the glass but does not revert to its proper shape during the night. The slow and delicate work of repair was carried out by The Abbey Stained Glass Studios of Kilmainham, Dublin, at a cost of £66,000. The great window is now covered by storm-glass, which will at least prevent malicious or accidental damage.

THE CULLINAN ROSARY BEADS

From 1950 to 1994, one of the greatest treasures of the Black Abbey was the rosary of Gelasius Cullinan, Cistercian abbot of Boyle, a martyr for the faith at Dublin in 1580. Much larger and finer than our modern rosaries, this is the five-decade Spanish rosary of the sixteenth-century, with large amber beads strung on silver wire, which the martyr held tightly in his hands throughout his final agony. Passing down through successive generations of the abbot's blood-relations, the precious relic was finally entrusted by a solicitor to the Black Abbey. For more than thirty years it was on public display in the abbey museum, and at some slight risk of being stolen. Once the beatification of Abbot Gelasius came under active consideration at Rome, it was thought best to give the martyr's rosary to his Cistercian brethren. On 17 June 1994, after vespers at Mount St. Joseph's abbey, Roscrea, Fr. Francis Downes, on behalf of the Black Abbey community, presented the rosary to Abbot Colmcille O'Toole.

THE BLACK ABBEY TOMBS

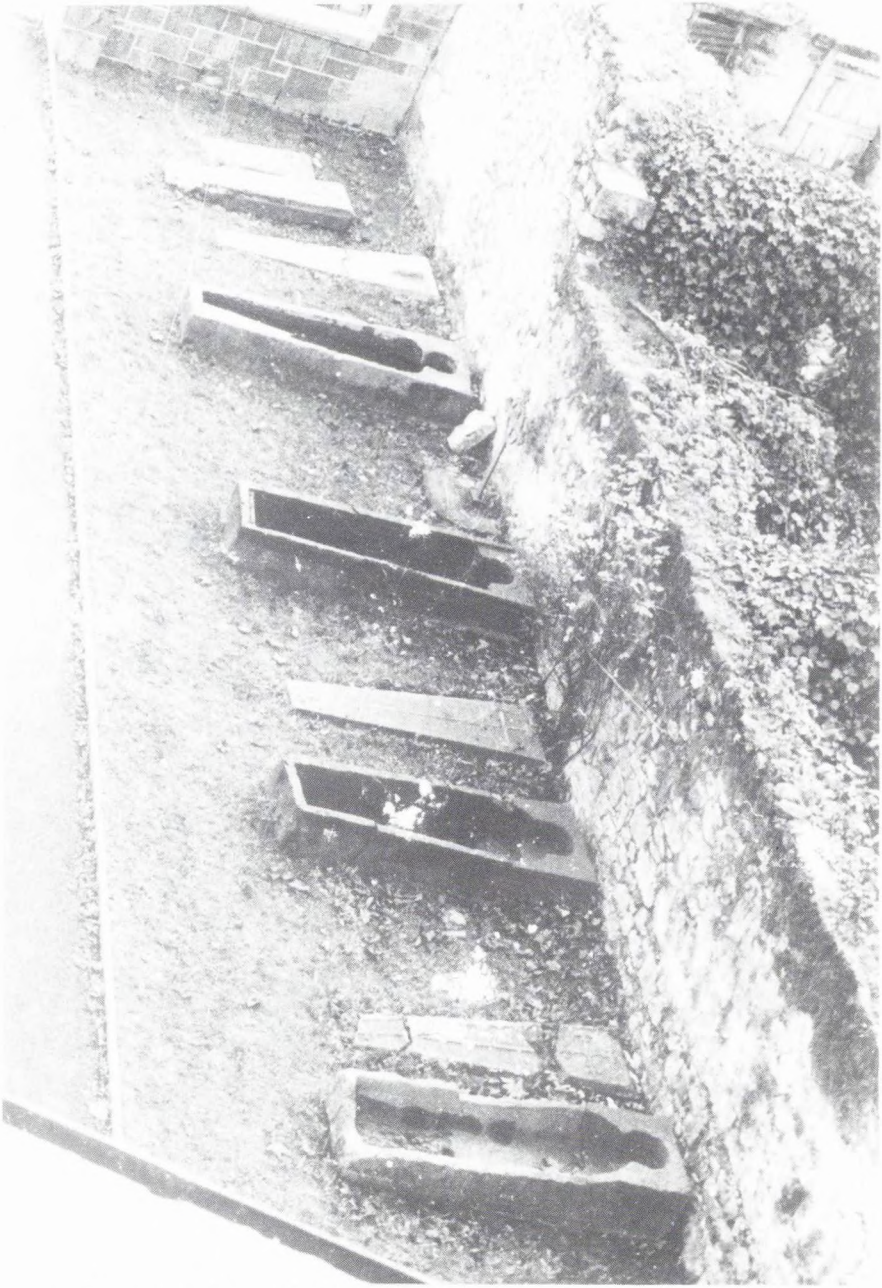
By
Margaret M. Phelan

In 1975 for the 750th anniversary of the founding of the Black Abbey this writer wrote an article for a booklet honouring that historic commemoration. Since then, in 1977, another inscribed tomb has been found as well as an uninscribed one and some fine carved fragments of stone work, column heads and bases etc. This article will describe these antiquities and correct some errors in the 1975 book.

The visitor to the Black Abbey must be interested in the line of monuments to the left of the main entrance to the Church. The monuments are all of stone, all horizontal and consist of coffins and slabs, which may have been coffin lids. There are eleven slabs and four stone coffins. These, with a limestone water-trough and a small iron cross dedicated to Mr. Flynn who died in 1913, comprise the total.

The slabs are not all perfect but seven of the lids are almost so and two of the coffins. There are only three inscriptions and two coats of arms — so we don't know to whom most of them belonged. Their style places them hardly later than the thirteenth or early fourteenth century. Hanmer (quoted by Prim and Carrigan, vol. III, p. 177) says that eighteen of the original Norman conquerors of Ireland were interred in the Black Abbey. If so, it must surely be possible that these are part of their sepulchres or the sepulchres of their immediate descendants.

It is interesting to learn how these stones were found and how they excited the attention of the old Kilkenny Archaeological Society. The date was September 10th, 1851. John J. Prim wrote up the story for the journal of K.A.S. 1851 (vol. I, p.453) and illustrated it with drawings of four slabs. Probably the drawings came from the graceful pencil of Rev. James Graves. Richard and Henry Preston, sons of Richard Preston, who was agent of Mr. Hare of Durrow, were investigating property at the west side of Friar St. A hole in the ground disclosed a sculptured stone about a foot below ground level. This was raised carefully and is number XIV in today's sequence and number one in Prim's article. Next day two more were brought to light and carefully placed within the Abbey grounds. A month later still another monument was found (number XIII) and, no doubt, there were, and are, many more. Graves and Prim were anxious to investigate the area thoroughly. But it was impossible, on account of the strength of the water that sprang up at the removal of every spade of earth.



Norman coffins and slabs, unearthed in and near the Black Abbey.

The area in which these monuments were found (the west side of Friar's Street) is believed to have been the old cloister garth of the Abbey.

Besides these four tombs found by Prim, the tomb of Walter Cluay was discovered five years earlier in 1846 when workmen were making a sewer a few yards away from where the tombs were found in 1851. It was in its original position. A perfect skeleton was found underneath it. The tomb is illustrated in the Kilkenny Archaeological Journal for 1851. The slab decorated with the head of a knight was found in 1838 or '39 when workmen were digging in the present Friar's garden (number III).

The tomb of David the Merchant was not found till 1864. Its find place is not quite clear. The story just says that it was found when removing the modern boundary wall on the west, towards Blackmill St.

These (as far as this writer is aware) are the only accounts of the findings of the monuments, so that more than half the find places are not known. No doubt, all came from the precincts of the Abbey and did mark the final resting places of the ancient high-born families who were the patrons of the Dominican Abbey.

Here is a short description of the monuments as they are today (1986) and their sequence from the roadway to the main door of the Church.

(I) Coffin lid, or slab, with raised graceful floriated cross but minus the last sixth part of the stone, uninscribed.

(II) Slab quite similar to (I) but complete. The cross ends in fleur-de-lis, not inscribed.

(III) Slab with knight's head at top in high relief and incised floriated cross. Perfect and very like the Ennisnag slab illustrated in Old Kilkenny Review for 1974.

(IV) Stone coffin, quite plain, width at top thirty-one inches, width at end twenty-one inches, length ninety-six inches.

(V) Iron Cross to Mr Flynn (1913), no doubt a benefactor of the Abbey.

(VI) Stone coffin with a little recess at head end, width at top twenty-eight inches, width at end twenty-three inches, length ninety-six inches.

(VII) Robert de Sardaloue slab. This was the third tomb to be discovered in September 1851. It is perfect, with raised floriated cross and inscription in Norman French and in Lombardic lettering. "Robert de Sardaloue ici git - Deu de sa alme ait merci. Pater" (translation: Robert de Sardaloue lies here. God have mercy on his soul. An Our Father). In the White Book of Ossory, a Canon of St. Canice's Cathedral Robert de Sardaloue witnessed a grant. Date between 1245 and 1250. Illustrated in K.A.S. for 1851.

(VIII) Stone Coffin quite plain but broken in two places. Length ninety inches, width at top thirty inches, width at end twenty-three inches.

(IX) A coffin-shaped slab ornamented with cross in relief gracefully designed and floriated at the points and carrying inscription David Mercator git ici Deu de sa alme ait merci. Amẹn. This slab was found in 1864 by Rev. P. V. Kelly of the Black Abbey on the widening of the entrance to the church. It translates "David the Merchant lies here. God on his soul have mercy. Amen". Probable date 1250-70 (see vol. VIII, Journal of Kilkenny and South East Ireland for 1865, p.230). This slab is much broken.

(X) Ornamented stone coffin much damaged with a good deal of right side broken away. The ornamentation includes arches and quatrefoils and is the only decorated coffin known to this writer anywhere. Length eighty-seven inches - Width at top twenty-six inches - Width at end twenty-two inches.

(XI) Slab inscribed "Hic jacet Walterus Cluay". Found in 1846 and illustrated (four) in K.S.A. article 1851. This slab is quite perfect and resembles closely the monument to Jose de Kytler (father of Alice) now in St. Canice's. The incised cross is practically the same but the inscription on the Kytler tomb is in Norman French, dated 1280. There is no date on Walter Cluay's tomb and nothing is known about him.

(XII) Large and clumsy looking slab with heater shaped shield charged with three roundels or besants. It was discovered in 1851, was the second tomb in fact and was lying right beside number XIV which also has a shield with the same heraldic device. Prim, in his article, discusses whose the two coats of arms could be, and with the learned genealogists of the time came to the conclusion that Courtney was the family. Apparently the Courtneys were intermarried with the De Spencers, owners of Kilkenny Castle in the fourteenth century.

(XIII) Tapering slab with triangular top and fine floriated cross with foliage springing from the shaft. No name, or heraldic devices. It is illustrated also in K.A.S. (1851), p.453, and was the fourth monument to be unearthed by Prim and Graves in October of that year.

(XIV) Slab with floriated cross at top and lower down heater shield. Charged with three roundels or besants. Probably, like number XII, it commemorated a member of the Courtney family. This slab was actually the first to be unearthed by Graves and Prim in October 1851, but it is clumsier than the others and they did not illustrate it.

(XV) Effigy of a Lady in the beautiful ample clothing of the sixteenth century almost similar to the tomb of Margaret, wife of Piers eighth Earl of Ormonde, and the tomb of Honoria Grace, both of which are to be seen in St Canice's Cathedral. Prim says (in 1851) that her head was detached, so it must have been lying near. Not today. No inscription.

(XVI) Narrow slab, apparently end of a coffin lid with raised cross shaft, not finished.

(XVII) Drinking trough of rough limestone.

This list completes the number of slabs that were present when the original text was written in 1975.

In 1977 two more slabs were brought to light and some fine carvings from heads of columns. Hopefully these antiquities will soon be added to this fine line of ancient tombs and placed where all may see and enjoy them outside the main entrance to the Abbey.

At the moment the two tombs noted now and the other fragments are in the garden behind the high altar and by the side of the priory (in the grass plot where the statue of Our Lady presides).

One of these slabs is entirely free from ornamentation or inscription but the other is both decorated and inscribed with a raised band around it. It is almost entire and has been illustrated in "History and Architecture of Kilkenny" by Katharine Lanigan and Gerald Tyler.

In the 1980 issue of the Old Kilkenny Review (pp.77,20) John Bradley has drawn this inscribed tomb and transcribed and translated the inscription. This inscription is in Norman French and this writer's transcription of it is: "Isomein del Marmpole, refulm, femme du . . . gist ici - Dieu de sa alme eit merci". In other words: "Isomein del Marmpole, refulm, wife of - - - - rests here. God on her soul have mercy". So far some of the inscription has defied interpretation. The word "refulm", obviously descriptive, has not been satisfactorily translated. It may be "relict" - or "widow".

The stone breaks before the name of Isomein's husband is revealed. This is very disappointing and again there is no date. But it is a monument to a woman and that is surprising indeed and very interesting.

Some day, perhaps, the family will be found and their connection with the Abbey explained. So far nothing seems to be known about the Marmpoles.

This slab and the other found in 1977 were actually used in the tower of the Abbey draining water away. The uninscribed slab is hollowed out for that exact purpose. So the find place of these tombs was aloft!!

Unlike all the others which were found buried in the ground, the builder described them as being in a void between the south transept and the tower and probably put there during the restoration of the early nineteenth century.

The inscribed grave slabs from antiquity in Ireland may be divided into those in the Irish language, those in Norman French and those in Latin. Not till the seventeenth century were any inscriptions written in English, and even then, not many.

The slabs inscribed in Irish, dating from the eighth and ninth century, are hardly represented in Kilkenny at all. There are only two in Killamery near the Tipperary border. The greatest concentration of slabs engraved in the Irish language is at Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly, where they may be easily seen under partial cover. We marvel at the quantity of them and the diversity and beauty of their carvings. They are very similar to each other in character, yet never identical. The inscription usually starts off with a prayer "Or do —".

The slabs incised in Norman French come next in dating, but none earlier than the thirteenth century. Our only dated one in Kilkenny is the Kytler slab now in St Canice's Cathedral and it is 1280. There are quite a few with Norman French inscriptions in City and County, but a list has never been made (as far as this writer is aware). In Kilkenny itself, there are two in St Canice's Cathedral (Jose de Kytler and de Lyuns), one in St Patrick's graveyard (Aleyn Lovel), one in St Mary's graveyard, (Helen, wife of William of Armoyle), and now three here in the Black Abbey, one to Robert de Sardaloue, one to David the Merchant and one to Isomein del Marmpole. Outside the Oratory of St Francis Abbey, now lies the incised slab "Ici git Richard Purcell" — which was once used as a lintel stone (Carrigan, vol. III, p.110).

The inscriptions of the Norman French incised tombs invariably begin with a small Maltese cross. This, too, occurs on the Latin incised tombs of roughly the same date but is not invariable. Another characteristic of the French inscribed tombs is the dotting that occurs between each word, sometimes two dots one over the other, sometimes three, and this dotting also occurs in the early Latin inscribed tombs.

The early Latin inscriptions, i.e. those in incised Lombardic lettering, would be contemporary or nearly so with the Norman French. Thus Walter Cluay's stone in the Black Abbey might well be as early as Robert de Sardaloue's (mid-thirteenth century), though the languages are different. On examining these early slabs, what has been said about the early Irish inscribed slabs is equally true: though all have a certain similarity, none is really the same as the other. It is said that early workers in metal and manuscript in Ireland never copied even their own work. The same could be said of the finely carved and incised stones of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries that we see in our churches and graveyards.

As regards the use of the coffins, John Hunt writes "that they were made for important persons and not confined to clerics. Many of them were free standing, i.e. not buried in the ground, but laid upon the floor of the church in front of the chancel with, of course, a carved stone lid upon them. They were

not for use outside in the graveyard. The one with the arcaded sides in the Black Abbey must have been of a specially important person".

Since writing these notes in 1975, this writer has seen stone coffins in the ruined church in Holyrood, Edinburgh, in the position John Hunt describes, and in the Cathedral at Granada, Ferdinard and Isabel, the great "Catholic Kings" are resting in death in a recess before the high altar, in unburied coffins. But in Granada, unlike Kilkenny, the coffins are of oak.

Two other stone coffins survive in Kilkenny, one in old St Mary's and one in St Canice's Cathedral.

Sources:
Kilkenny Archaeological Journals for 1851 and 1865.
Old Kilkenny Review for 1980.
William Canon Carrigan, History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory, vol. III (1904).
The Story of the Black Abbey *(Irish Rosary* for 1897 by Fr. Ambrose Coleman, O.P.).
The History of the Black Abbey by Fr. H. Gaffney, O.P. (1950).
Letter to the writer from John Hunt, Drumlech, Baily, Co. Dublin. (Author of "Figure Sculpture in Ireland 1200-1600").

The rosary beads of Gelasius Cullinan, Cistercian abbot of Boyle. He held them in his hands during his martyrdom at Dublin in 1580. This precious relic, formerly at the Black Abbey, was presented to the Cistercian Abbey of Roscrea in 1904.

RELICS OF TIMES GONE BY

A fourteenth-century limestone figure of St Catherine of Alexandria, of Irish workmanship and about two feet tall. The saint, protectress of the Dominican order, bears the wheel of her martyrdom, is set in a niche and is bordered by incised floriate patterns. The figure, quite perfect and unmarked, is said to have been found in a cavity of the Abbey walls about 1825. The National Museum made a cast of it in 1886. The original is now in the conventual museum.

An alabaster representation of the Trinity, to which the church is dedicated, bearing the figures 1264 on the base, but thought to have been carved at Bristol about 1400. It came to light, with the figure of St. Catherine, during restoration work on the abbey, and may now be seen close to the Rosary Window in a newly made recess protected by laminated glass. For an excellent account and illustration see Helen M. Roe, in the *Old Kilkenny Review*, no. 24 (1972).

A very early printed book: the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* of William Duranti, Bishop of Mende in France, printed at Paris by Martin, Ulric and Michael in 1475. This famous work, written in 1286 and first printed in 1459, describes the laws, ceremonies, customs and mystical interpretation of the Roman rite. How this copy came to the Black Abbey is unknown.

Three holy-water stoups of black stone, possibly medieval. One of these, which is square, was taken long ago from the Black Abbey to St Mary's, Tallaght, where it is in daily use. A similar but mutilated one is still in the convent; another, richly carved, may be seen in the porch at the entrance to the nave. In the conventual museum there is also a small stone tray, variously described as a cruet-holder or an ink-stand.

A wooden Madonna and Child of the sixteenth century, now in the conventual museum. Catherine McLeod illustrates and describes this statue in the JRSAI, vol. 70 (1947), saying that "it displays in its superb quality and beautiful polychrome, intact under the modern paint . . . the skill and fine taste of a contemporary Flemish sculptor". Since the Madonna does not seem to have been long at the Black Abbey, it may be identical with that given by a

daughter of Lord Shrewsbury to the Dominicans of Esker, county Galway, about 1835. The Dominicans left Esker in 1895.

A five-decade Spanish rosary of the sixteenth century composed of large amber beads strung on silver wire. It belonged to Gelasius Cullinan, Cistercian abbot of Boyle, a martyr for the faith at Dublin in 1580 who held these beads in his hands throughout his final agony. Passing down through successive generations of the abbot's blood-relations, the rosary was finally entrusted to the Black Abbey by a solicitor in 1950. For an illustrated historical account, see Fr Henry Gaffney, in the *Kilkenny People,* 27 January, 1961.

A small oaken figure of a Dominican saint, now in the conventual museum. Modern opinion ascribes it to the penal times, for it belongs to no established artistic tradition. The arms, ears, eyes and feet are missing; the nose and lips have been hacked and broken. This mutilation is presumed to have taken place in Cromwellian times. There is a good illustration in D. Mould, *The Irish Dominicans,* 1957.

A Confederate banner or double-pointed pennant of green tasselated cloth, bearing the image of Our Lady, surrounded by a rosary chaplet. Curiously, it corresponds in design to none of those known to have been used by the Confederate armies. The banner came to the Black Abbey in the 1850s and perhaps formed part of the effects of Bishop Rothe (d. 1650) given at that time by the Bryan family of Jenkinstown to St Mary's cathedral. For the past century the flag has been in St Mary's, Tallaght, hanging framed and glazed in the main entrance-hall.

The seven-hundredweight bell cast for the Abbey in 1647. A tracing of the inscription — *Est conventus S. Domici Kilkennae 1647* – is given in the Journal of the Society for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead, vol. 8 (1911). For about two centuries this bell hung above the court-house (later the market-house) at Dunlavin until restored to the Black Abbey through the efforts of Senator de Loughry on the occasion of the seventh centenary in 1925. The Tynte family, lessees of the Abbey, were responsible for the building of the court-house, which probably explains how the bell got to Dunlavin in the first place. The larger bell, bought by Fr Robert Molloy at the Cork Exhibition, is inscribed: H. Lee & Sons, Limerick, 1852. There is also a very small bell, perhaps that used before 1852. All three bells are in the belfry.

Some old chalices. The oldest, now in Siena Convent, Drogheda, was presented to the Black Abbey by Catherine Archer on 27 March 1645. Another undated one, inscribed "Ora pro fre Anthonio Rotheo f. ord. praed. Kilken", may be ascribed to 1683, the beginning of Anthony Rothe's priorship. When last heard of, in 1902, it belonged to the parish of Dundrum, Co. Down. At the Black Abbey itself there are three old chalices in the museum: an undated silver one inscribed " + Ecclesiae SS. Trinitatis vulgo dicta Abbatea Nigra Kilkeniae", another of 1716 made by a certain Joseph Bowen, and a third presented by Fr Patrick Marshall in 1721. Finally, in St John's parish church, there is the chalice made for the Kilkenny community by Fr Peter Archer in 1722. The modern altar-plate of the abbey was listed in 1894 by Fr John Ryan in the third volume of his historical notes, now in the provincial archives.

Old chalices preserved in the Abbey. One is dated 1716. Another was presented by Fr Patrick Marshall in 1721.

SOME NOTABLE DOMINICANS

John de Tatenhall, Bishop of Ossory from 1361 to 1366, and the first Dominican to occupy the see. At the time of his promotion he was provincial of his order and resident at the papal court in Avignon. There is no evidence that he ever visited his diocese.

Oliver Cantwell, Bishop of Ossory from 1487 to 1527. Throughout his episcopate he always wore his Dominican habit. He built two or three castles, besides repairing "the larger bridge in the Irishtown of Kilkenny, to a great extent broken down by the floods". His body was laid to rest near the former high altar in the chancel of the Black Abbey.

Phelim or Felix O'Connor, prior of the Black Abbey in 1648, escaped from Kilkenny on Cromwell's arrival to become prior of Burrishoole in County Mayo. Twice he beat off the attacks of Cromwellian soldiers on this remote priory, and then fled in a canoe to Clare Island where he was captured and exiled. On his return from the continent he ruled the convents of Roscommon and Sligo before dying a prisoner for the faith in Sligo in 1679.

Patrick Marshall, vicar-provincial of Ireland from 1691 and prior provincial from 1694 to 1698. A native of Kilkenny, twice prior of the Black Abbey, whose task it was to reorganise the Irish Dominicans between the fall of Limerick in 1691 and the exile of all religious in 1698. He went into exile himself, eventually settling at London where he died in 1725. Two chalices he presented in 1721 to the Black Abbey and to the convent of Waterford are still preserved. For an account of his career, see *Arch. Frat. Praed,* vol. 38 (1968).

Colman O'Shaughnessy, Bishop of Ossory from 1736 to 1748. One of the O'Shaughnessys of Ardmilevan castle, County Galway, who claimed direct descent from the high king Dathi (d.427). As a young man he served with the Wild Geese in the Low Countries, but joined the Dominicans at Louvain about 1700 as a "son" of Athenry. A missionary in Ireland from 1708, and prior of various western houses until his election as provincial in 1726. As Bishop of Ossory he lived in a small thatched house in Maudlin Street. There are good accounts of his early life in *Arch. Frat. Praed.,* vol. 42 (1972) and of his episcopate in Carrigan's *Diocese of Ossory.*

Thomas Burke, Bishop of Ossory from 1759 to 1776. A Dubliner of county Galway stock who joined the order at Rome and spent twenty years teaching there before returning to Dublin in 1743. Author of an Irish supplement to the breviary and of a monumental history of the Irish Dominicans, *Hibernia Dominicana* (1762) to which he issued a supplement in 1772. Since he wrote in Latin, his name appeared on these books as *de Burgo,* and so he is known to the present day, although he was simply *Burke* in daily life. Fr Ambrose Coleman wrote four articles about him in the *Irish Eccles. Record* (1892) and Carrigan has an excellent account of his episcopate, but no writer has done full justice to his memory.

John Thomas Troy, Bishop of Ossory from 1776 to 1786. The most important figure the order has given to the Irish Church in recent centuries. Not so much for his work in Ossory, to which he came after twenty years in Rome, as for his later influence as Archbishop of Dublin from 1786 to 1823. While living in Dean street, Kilkenny, he took a strong stand against the Whiteboys, established a Catholic college in Burrell's Hall, and did all he could for the improvement of priests and people. Like his predecessor Thomas Burke, Dr Troy still awaits a biographer.

Andrew Fitzgerald (1766-1843), a native of Kilkenny and a leading figure in the development of Irish diocesan seminaries. From 1791 to 1800, while living apparently at the Black Abbey, he taught in St Canice's seminary, being the first priest of his time to offer a public course in philosophy. From 1800 he taught in Carlow where, from 1814 until his death, he was also president of the seminary. For part of this time (1828-32) he was concurrently Dominican provincial. It was said of him that "he loved money so well as to be worth, on his death, precisely nothing". There is an excellent account of his life by Fr P. Brophy in *The Carlovian* (1949).

Thomas Vincent Burke, prior of the Black Abbey in 1838 and 1839. Although born in Kildare, he spent practically all his priestly life in Drogheda. A great enthusiast for the Irish language and the temperance movement then being led by Fr Theobald Mathew. Inspirer also of a school for Irish harpists at Drogheda where his own room was usually full of harps. In 1843, the year before his death, he organised an Irish Bardic Festival there, forerunner of the Oireachtas. Fr Fiontán O Murchú devoted an article to these activities in *The Watchman* (summer 1965).

Anthony Fahy, prior of the Black Abbey from 1839 to 1843. Previously a missionary for some years in Ohio; subsequently chaplain to the Irish of the Argentine from 1844 until his death in 1871. His work for the emigrants was

so successful that the descendants of the first settlers erected a statue to his memory in Buenos Aires. There is a more lasting memorial in the biography by J. M. Ussher, *Father Fahy, Irish Missionary in Argentina,* Buenos Aires, 1951.

Peter Daniel Hickey of Kilkenny took the Dominican habit at Santa Sabina, Rome, in 1865 and made profession there "for the mission in Trinidad". From 1877 until his death in 1897 he worked at Corpo Santo, Lisbon, of which he was often rector, and played an important role in its affairs at a time when all Portuguese religious houses had been suppressed. He was a deeply spiritual man, tutor of Portuguese princes, and correspondent of the leaders of Dominican reform in Ireland, France and Italy.

Thomas Crotty sang the High Mass for the opening of the new organ at the Black Abbey in 1893, being then described as "the first and only" native of Kilkenny to be professed in the order during the nineteenth century. At most he grew up there, for he was born at New Ross. Although prior of the Black Abbey (1902-1904), most of his life was spent in Rome, partly at San Clemente and partly as a penitentiary or confessor at St Mary Major's. During the First World War he cared for Irish prisoners at Limburg in Germany where he met Sir Roger Casement. A detailed newspaper obituary appeared at Newry in the *Frontier Sentinel* on 27 December, 1930.

Michael Thomas Taylor was born at Ballingarry, Co. Limerick, in 1839, entered the order at Tallaght in 1861, but was ordained in Galway where he spent nine years. A member of the Black Abbey community from 1875 until his death in 1915. He was twice prior (1880-85, 1889-93) and began the building of the present priory. His tombstone under the Rosary window still attracts those who remember his kindness and others who still pray to him for relief from headache.

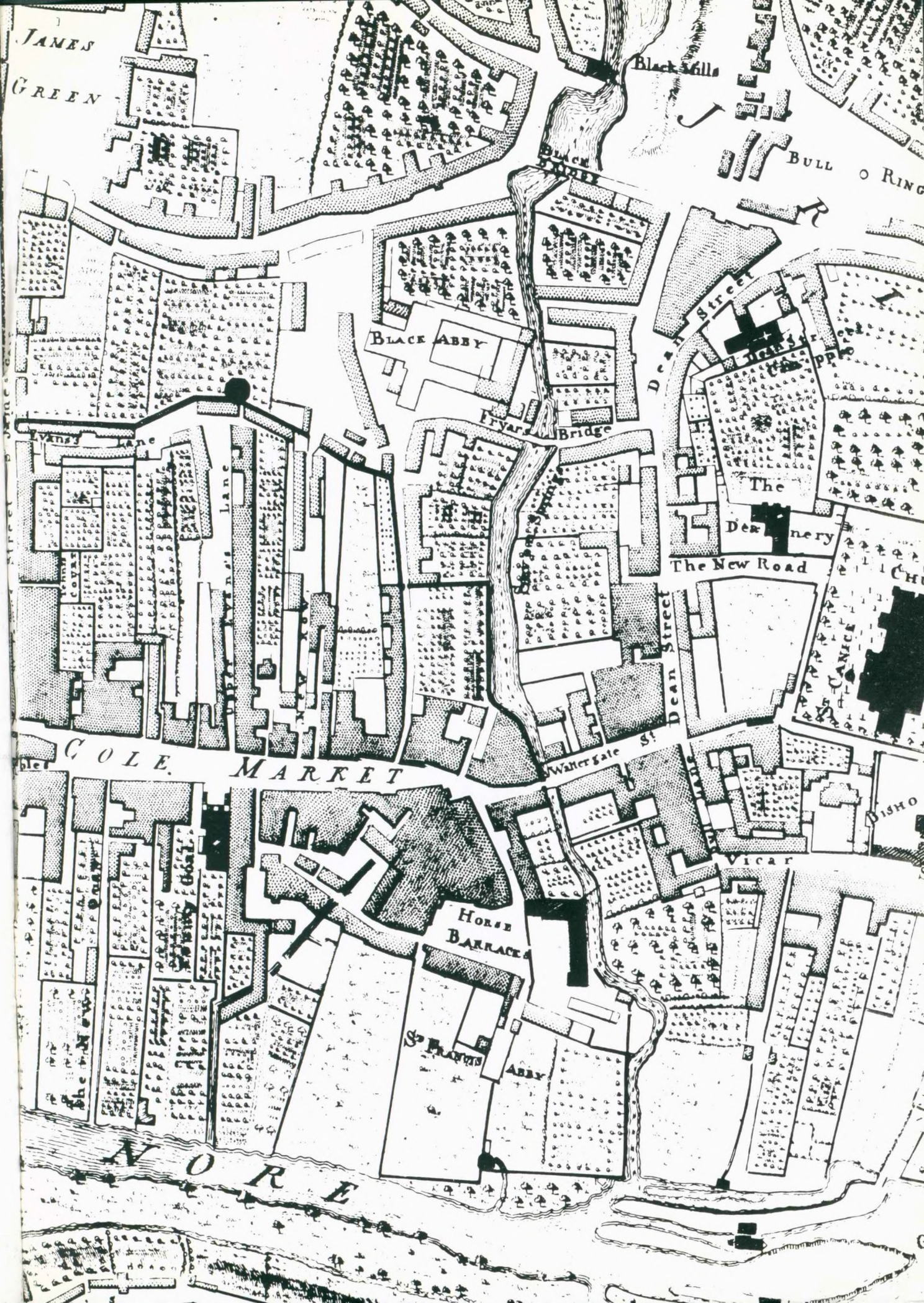
Robert William Spence, archbishop of Adelaide from 1914 to 1934. A native of cork, prior of the Black Abbey from 1894 to 1898, he completed the building of the present priory and (with the help of his family) raised the money to pay for it. From Kilkenny he was called to lead the first group of Irish Dominicans to Australia, and to that extent may be regarded as the founder of the present Australian province of the order. On his return to Kilkenny as archbishop in 1920, he was granted the freedom of the city.

Ambrose Coleman (1858-1942), preacher and historian. When stationed at the Black Abbey in 1892 and 1893 he found his true vocation, taking to

history rather than theology. He began by writing on bishop Thomas Burke and at this time formed a friendship with Canon Carrigan whose life he later wrote but never published. Two articles from his pen on the "Story of the Black Abbey" appeared in the *Irish Rosary* in 1897. In 1925 he was the first to publish a pamphlet (though a modest one) on the same subject. Later on, from 1922 to 1932, he spent a longer period in the convent. His principal works were an edition of Stuart's *Armagh* and an edition, with extremely useful notes, of O'Heyne's *Irish Dominicans of the 17th century.* An appreciation of his character and achievements appeared in the *Irish Rosary* in April 1942.

Henry Gaffney (1895-1974), a native of Cuffe's Grange, stationed at the Black Abbey in 1939, and again from 1947 to 1963. A priest, poet and playwright of whom a contemporary said: "He knew what the Dominican order was all about". Author of perhaps twenty plays and pamphlets, and also of a futuristic book, *The Boys of Ben Eadar,* of which he was very proud. He was proud too of the fact that when he completed Canon Sheehan's unfinished novel, *Tristam Lloyd,* no one could tell precisely where the Canon stopped and Father Gaffney began. During his sixteen years at Kilkenny he wrote an historical pamphlet on the Abbey (which went into several editions), created a small museum, and devoted himself both to the library and the welfare of the altar-boys.

"TO PRAISE – TO BLESS – TO PREACH"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Vicar
Horse Barracks
St Francis Abby
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