

Friarstown Abbey

by Liam O'Brien

The balmy August breeze did blow
that fateful night so long ago;
When men on horse with sword by side,
rode hard out to the countryside.

Their orders clear from 'castle sent,
King Henry's fury they must vent.
The holy abbeys of this land
must be reduced and brought to hand.

Along the wood the horde did sweep,
unto the hill where pagans sleep;
They stop and see the shrine beneath
and pluck the steel out of their sheaths.

Inside the warden Friar was stirred,
the pounding hooves he'd overheard;
"Arise my friends and hasty be,
our foe is nigh 'tis plain to see".

So from their sleep the Brethren pour,
down through the cellar's secret door
They find themselves below the ground,
with golden chalice safe and sound.

Then up above the hirelings enter
and find no booty for their mentor.
They curse and swear and grind their teeth
not knowing of the place beneath.

The Friars are gone their torch undimming,
the tunnel means a new beginning,
Far from that cruel and greedy rogue
to follow in St. Francis' vogue.

Today the abbey's walls still stand
unbroken by that fiendish hand;
Forever may the limestone hold
the spirit of St. Francis bold!

Friarstown Abbey is a hidden gem of Limerick heritage between the parishes of Fedamore and Donaghmore/Knockea. It is situated across the fields from the R511 (Limerick to Fedamore road). The abbey is believed to have been originally founded in the thirteenth century for the Franciscan Third Order Regular and there were lay brothers at the Abbey until Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries sometime between the 1530s and 1540s. There is little or no documentary evidence about the abbey and in the absence of such information a lot of local folklore and legend built up through the generations around its history, especially relating to its final years during the tumultuous times of the Reformation. I was born and raised in Friarstown and was lucky enough to visit the abbey on many occasions and be subject to its many tales and legends. It is with this in mind I wrote this poem, which is loosely based on one of these great stories. I would like to dedicate it to all the good people of Friarstown past and present, especially my family and neighbours.

