

Mungret

Temple Mungret · Dooradoyle

MUNGRET may derive its name from *Muine Gairid*, the Short Hill, but this is "a mere etymological guess" on the part of John O'Donovan in 1840. In earlier times it was known as *Imungram* and *Moungairid*. John O'Connor, the author of *Mungret History and Antiquities* (1971), accepts *Mungairit* as an acceptable form because it has the sanction of antiquity and believes it is derived from *Mong Ghairid*, the Short Swamp or Morass, an apt description of the land between Mungret and Limerick.

MUNGRET MONASTERY was one of Ireland's earliest and greatest foundations. John O'Donovan claimed that an abbey was erected here in the fourth century long before the coming of St. Patrick and his appointment of St. Nessan as prior here. According to the long lost *Psalter of Cashel* this monastery had

six churches within its walls and, exclusive of numerous scholars, 1500 monks, of whom 500 were learned preachers, 500 psalmists, and 500 wholly employed in spiritual exercises. The *Psalter of Cashel* disappeared from Cashel in 1647 after Murrough the Burner O'Brien attacked Cashel and killed 3,000 of its inhabitants. Mungret Monastery was raided and plundered by Viking marauders in 820, 834, 840 and 843. In 908 the king-bishop of Cashel, Cormac MacCuilleanáin, bestowed three ounces of gold and a satin chausible on this foundation. In 1080 the abbey was damaged by fire. Donal MacLoughlin and a raiding party of Ulstermen destroyed Mungret in 1088. The Augustinian rule may have prevailed here during the twelfth century although this has never been proved, nor is there any evidence to support a link with the Dominicans. In 1152 Mungret claimed dioc-

san status as it would have been the obvious centre of what later became the Diocese of Limerick. The Synod of Rathbreasail, however, failed to recognise the claim of Mungret since the city had been established as the O'Brien capital in 1106. No bishops were recorded here during the twelfth century and Briccius, the Bishop of Limerick, received the monastic lands of Mungret from Domhnall Mór O'Brien between 1192 and 1194.

ST. NESSAN, St. Nessan the Deacon, or St. Neasan the Leper, was a disciple of St. Patrick, according to the folklore of the region, but as Nessan did not die until 551 or 561 this is extremely unlikely. He is also believed to have been a disciple of St. Ailbe of Emlly.

BAUNACLOKA TOWNLAND may derive its name from *Bán a Chloiche*, the Bawn of the Stones or Stone Huts, as the earliest





The Oldest Church.

monastery probably consisted of a series of *clochans*, huts made of stone, wood or mud and wattle, in which the monks lived, clustered around a small church and other communal buildings located within an enclosure.

ST. NESSAN'S CHURCH, or the Monastery Church, is located on the edge of the road. It contains a monumental east window dating from the twelfth century but the building is much older, possibly dating from the tenth century, and may have been erected before 1100. This tall building with its high walls also contains two blocked-up windows in its south wall and a lintelled doorway in the west wall.

THE OLDEST CHURCH on this site is also the smallest. This is located a short distance south of St. Nessan's Church and is a narrow rectangular building containing two small windows in the south wall and a similar window in the eastern gable. The western gable and original doorway have disappeared, replaced by a modern wall. John O'Connor in *Mungret History and Antiquities* believes it was constructed between 800-1100.

MUNGRET ABBEY was built between 1251 and 1272. This is the largest and most important of the three ruined churches, and is divided into three parts. The eastern section, or chancel, dates from the thirteenth century; the nave is of doubtful date as no details by which it could be dated are *in situ*; and the

western portion probably dates from the fifteenth century as the workmanship is in the style of that period. A Gwynn and R.N. Hadcock described this medieval parish church as partly-fortified in *Medieval Religious Houses Ireland* (1988). The residential quarters, and the unusual square tower at the western end of the church, date from the fifteenth century. The tower, on the northern side of the priests' residence, contains a staircase and belfry, although its topmost storey is more modern than the rest of the building. This church, known as the Abbey, was later used for Protestant worship and remained in use as a parish church until 1822. In 1880 the three ruined churches were vested in the Board of Works and repairs were carried out on them in 1932. The graveyard is still in use. A few yards from the north-eastern end of the church is an old tombstone erected in memory of James Daly (1750-1810), the Loughmore poet, better known as Seamus O Dálaigh, a tailor of Croom. The inscription on this stone is in Irish. Another tombstone about fifteen yards east of the eastern gable of the church was possibly erected in 1811 in memory of Robert MacNamara. This, too, carries an Irish inscription, as well as a crucifixion scene showing the instruments of the Passion. The most interesting inscription in the graveyard, however, is that on the Holohan Stone. This unique memorial

is twelve yards south-west of the south-western corner of the abbey. It depicts a Crucifixion scene on the front, with the legend I.N.R.I. above it, and carries an inscription in both Roman and Ogham lettering beneath. The dedication on the back of the tombstone is in English and commemorates John Holohan (1752-1809), his mother and his brother. I was unable to verify if these monuments still existed. The Holohan and MacNamara tombstones may have been placed in Mungret Abbey which is under the care of the Office of Public Works. The keys of two of these churches, however, are kept in Killarney. A modern *cillín* can be seen in the graveyard of the Abbey

HOLOHAN, *O hUallacháin*, the descendant of *Uallachán*, the diminutive of *Uallach* or the Proud, the name of several distinct families in Offaly and Thomond. Variants of this surname include *O Holohan*, *O Houlihan*, *O Huolighane*, *O Holeghane*, Hoolihan, Houlihan, Holland, in West Cork, and Nolan, in Mayo and Roscommon.

THE MONKS' MILL, or Shannillian Mill, was located about halfway between Mungret and Limerick. By 1971 only one wall remained.

MUNGRET CASTLE, or Castle Mungret, was mentioned as early as 1201. Part of its basement still survives beneath a farmhouse south of the modern corcass road to Limerick Docks. Bishop de Rupefort mentioned the castle in 1336 and it contained two towers in 1583, when it was mentioned in another account. Bishop Adams was in possession before 1621 and in 1655 David Roche and H. Bindon held Castle Mungret and Temple Mungret respectively. The castle remained in a good state of preservation until the early nineteenth century when part of it was demolished. By 1840 only an arch over the ground floor and one wall remained.

THE MANOR OF MUNGRET comprised the lands granted to Briccius by Domhnall Mór O'Brien. In 1201 Donoh O'Brien, as Bishop of Limerick, set up a commission, consisting of twelve Irishmen, twelve Vikings, and twelve Anglo-Normans, to inquire into Church possessions. Colm O'Regan was given the church and district of Mungret by Donoh O'Brien, before 1207. About 1216 Edmund, the Bishop of Limerick, received a royal grant of *Omayl*, possibly the lands of the O'Malleys, near Mungret. When Hubert de Burgo was Bishop of Limerick (1223-1250) he got permission from King Henry III (1223-1272) to have a weekly market, on Tuesdays, here. By the time Hubert died in 1250 the main ecclesiastical positions in the Diocese of Limerick were held by Anglo-Norman clergymen.