Abboydorney Monastery, Co. Kerry:
the Canon Power Manuscript

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Abboydorney—Mainistir Ó dTórna—town in Odorney parish, Clanmaurice barony, Co. Kerry, and diocese of Ardfeart, takes its name from the small Cistercian monastery located in the townland of Knockaunmore, half-a-mile due north of the town’s centre cross-roads and standing at the end of a quarter-mile long gravel causeway running in a north-easterly direction off the Abboydorney-Ballyduff road (O.S. 6-inch sheet 21 for Co. Kerry, 17.4 cm. from the northern margin and 43.3 cm. from the eastern margin; Nat. Grid Ref. Q.852.235—see Fig. 1).

The surrounding countryside is flat and low-lying—elevated scarcely fifty feet above sea level—although two miles or so to the south-east lie the foothills of the Stack’s Mountains, gently rising to a height of a thousand feet or so. The almost shapeless densely ivy overgrown ruins of the abbey can easily be seen from the approach road but, on closer inspection, the remains are a disappointment in the lack of visible building layout and architectural detail.¹

Abboydorney, or Odorney, is the only Cistercian monastery in Kerry and is of early foundation (19 April or 29 June, 1154), being the second daughter-house to Nenagh (Manister, Monasterneanagh or Maigue) in Co. Limerick (founded 1148), itself the third filiation of Mellifont in Co. Louth, the first Cistercian house in Ireland, founded in 1142.² The nearest neighbouring houses of the order to Abboydorney are all in Co. Limerick, namely Feale (Abbyfeale), adopted in 1209 as the fifth filiation of Nenagh, and about seventeen miles distant due east on the Kerry/Limerick border, Nenagh, itself, about thirty miles further on in the same general direction, and Woney (Owney, Wotheny or Abington), founded in 1206 as a colony of Furness in Lancashire, England, and standing about twelve miles north-east of Nenagh.³

In order better to follow the account of Abboydorney monastery which forms the subject of this paper, it may perhaps be appropriate to preface with a preliminary note on the Cistercian order itself and the principle features of their houses.

The Cistercian order was founded in 1098 at Citeaux, Burgundy, in France as a reform of the Benedictine family. St Bernard (1090-1153), an early member of the

¹ The non-descript appearance of the ruins of Abboydorney were commented on during the latter half of the eighteenth century by Mervyn Archdall who wrote; “This abbey is now a shapeless ruin; nothing but old low walls are to be seen, which resemble those of an ancient church without a steeple”. M. Archdall, Monasticum Hibernicum. London 1786, p. 305. In 1856, J. O’Donovan observed that; “The ruins of the church of this abbey are still in a tolerable preservation, but the other buildings are nearly all destroyed”. Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, J. O’Donovan (ed.), Dublin 1856, Vol. VI, p. 1699, note d.
² Leopold Janaschek, Originum Cisterciensium, Vienna 1877, Tom. I, p. 137. Abboydorney is listed as No. 349 in world order of foundation.
community there, was sent in 1115 to found Clairvaux, the third daughter-house to Citeaux, where he became the first abbot and remained in this office until his death. In 1140, (St) Malachy O’Morgair, Bishop of Down, while on a visit to Rome with a small party of pilgrims, turned aside to visit Clairvaux on both the outward and the homeward journeys. On the return visit, he begged St. Bernard to allow four of his travelling companions—including Christian O’Connanchy, future Bishop of Lismore and Papal Legate—to remain at Clairvaux with a view to their gaining experience in order to found a future Cistercian house in Ireland.4

As already mentioned, two years later Mellifont—Honey Fountain—was founded and Christian O’Connanchy became its first abbot. It is to the honour of Kerry that, in 1180, towards the end of a full and holy life, Christian O’Connanchy came to Abbeydorney to spend his remaining years as a simple monk.

In view of its distinctiveness, then, it is surprising to find that no account of the site, buildings or occupants of Abbeydorney seems to have been published. From its immediately apparent diminutive size, it is clear that Abbeydorney must have differed in a number of respects from other Cistercian monasteries built about this time, but, nevertheless, being of an early foundation—almost within the lifespan of St. Bernard himself—it is expected that it will be found to conform with many of the stringent requirements of the order.

In so far as choice of site is concerned, Abbeydorney in its low-lying, damp and bleak location fits in well with the Cistercian tradition. It also conforms with the almost invariable custom of the order in being located on the left bank of running water (the observer looking in the direction of the stream flow), fresh water being required for drinking and cooking but necessary also for washing, driving the millwheel, and finally washing away the sewage in its flow.5

It is well known that the Cistercians were strict in their requirements as to conformity with their “standard” layout for their monasteries and ground plans, therefore, are relatively easy to recover. The usual arrangement at this time (mid-twelfth century) was the hollow square plan with the abbey church, generally but not always cruciform in plan, plain and undecorated, in an approximately east-west orientation and with no central or other tower. Built onto the south wall of the church and accessible from a single doorway at the eastern end of the wall, was the cloister surrounding a central square open space or garth, with ranges of buildings on the other three sides. The eastern range accommodated the chapter-house (usually adjacent—or separated only by the sacristy—to the church) and perhaps a parlour and with the monks’ dormitory above; the frater or refectory and kitchen range lay to the south; and the range accommodating the conversi or lay brothers (where applicable) lay to the west. Other conventual buildings were arranged to suit local requirements and as site conditions permitted.

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4 A. Hamilton Thompson, A. W. Clapham and H. G. Leask, “The Cistercian Order in Ireland”, J. Roy. Archaeol. Inst. Gt. Britain and Ireland, 88 (1931), 1-36. Note that Irish Cistercian houses were known by a multiplicity of names (viz. Cistercian (in Latin), locality (in Irish and English), name of river on which founded, etc.); thus in this paper, in order to avoid confusion, I have generally adopted throughout the first preference of name chosen by the authors of this paper.
5 Aibhe S. Ó Loiiddh, Mellifont Abbey, Wexford 1938, p. 21 footnote.
From the beginning, the Cistercian rule was administered from mother-house to filiations by annual visits from the abbots, while every year about September, abbots were expected to convene to Citeaux where the general chapter was held. General chapters were held every year from 1116 and the deliberations made were recorded; recently, these authoritative and informative records have been published.6

With this as a general background and introduction, it will be of interest that, in the 1920s, Dom Maurus O’Phelan, at that time Abbot of Mount Melleray in Cappoquin, Co. Waterford (a modern Cistercian abbey founded in 1832) requested the late Very Rev. Patrick Canon Power, Professor of Archaeology at University College, Cork, to write an account of Abbeydorney. The present writer, staying at Mount Melleray in August, 1948, was shown Canon Power’s manuscript by the late Father Ailbhe S. Ó Loidhch and was permitted to make a copy of it: the manuscript had certainly not been published up to then, and is believed to be put in print now for the first time.7

The manuscript is presented below in almost exactly the form in which Canon Power wrote it—including slight irregularities which are dealt with later or as footnotes—the only alteration worth mentioning being in regularizing the name to Abbeydorney in place of “Abbey dorney” as originally written.

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ABBAYDORNEY

Names and Situation

This abbey derived its name from the unimportant tribe of O’Torna, or the O’Dornneys, in whose territory it lay and through whose munificence doubtless it was originally founded. Other names by which we find the house called are—Odorney and Mainster O’Torna. The Cistercian name is Kyrie Eleison, appropos of which we find a General Chapter (1209) decreeing that any abbeys called by that name, or de Spiritu Sancto, should change it for some other. Notwithstanding the order, however—possibly because it was revoked or dispensed from—Abbeydorney continued to be known almost exclusively as Kyrie Eleison.

Situation of the abbey is unusual for a Cistercian house—at the extreme end of a gravel ridge which juts out into black bog, in the barony of Clanmaurice, Co. Kerry.

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7 Since this article was written, a reference has come to light which suggests that Canon Power’s description of Abbeydorney, may, in fact, be a portion of a much larger MS. account of the Cistercian houses in Ireland. The reference is an article entitled “Seven documents from the old abbey of Mellifont”, by the Rev. Fr. Columcille, O.Cist., J. Louth Archaeol. Soc., 13 (1933), 35-67, in which on page 40, the author refers to the “V. Rev. Canon Power, in his MS. History of the Irish Cistercians, deposited in Mount Melleray Abbey” and to “Fr. Ailbhe J. Luddy in his brochure on Mellifont”. The late Fr. Ailbhe did not mention to the present writer at the time (1948) that the account of Abbeydorney was in fact a section of a larger work, but, as this now appears possible, this would account for the otherwise cryptic remark referring to Christian O’Connanachy being “already alluded to” but in fact missing from the Abbeydorney account.
Our abbey is practically surrounded by the turf bog on three sides and in ancient times the bog level was much higher than today. In the intervening centuries the peat has been cut away and a considerable tract of former bog is now under pasture and tillage. As there are no trees the situation is very exposed. Immediately to south of the abbey enclosure flows a small and sluggish stream which has had its channel altered in recent times; further north this stream becomes the Brick river, a tributary of the Feale. At Abbeydorney the volume of water is hardly sufficient to drive a mill and, owing to lack of fall, the stream would be difficult to dam.

Remains

The abbey remains are disappointing in their extent as well as in their condition of preservation. Much injury has been done them through a local fashion in grave monuments. Unsightly vaults in vilest style occupy and disfigure much of the internal area and in construction of these ugly things, quantities of ancient building stones have been used. Moreover, walls have been pulled down here and there to furnish materials for the vault builder.

Only the monastic church, with some foundations of the cloister buildings survive and destruction even of these is in active progress. The walls of the church are of great thickness—three feet, or thereabout—and the building material is local limestone with some slight admixture of sandstone. Previous use in another and more ancient building is strongly suggested by some squared red-sandstone blocks inserted in the exterior of the west gable.

Plan and scale of the church are unusual for a Cistercian house; the building is only about eighty-one feet in internal length by about twenty-four feet wide and it has neither aisles nor transepts. There is no chancel-arch nor any indication there was ever such a thing; it is possible that there was an arch of wood but if there was it has left no trace. Nor, apparently, was there ever a central, or other, tower.

Everything suggests that the abbey was of very small size—almost certainly the smallest of all the houses which survived to the sixteenth century.

Abbeydorney is altogether an extraordinary church for a Cistercian abbey. It strongly suggests a secular or an old Irish church taken over and transformed by the original Cistercian community. The north side wall, which stands about twenty-two feet high, is practically entire but densely covered with ivy. Beyond trace of a built-up ope near its west end it has no window or other architectural feature from which dates, etc. might be inferred. Four or five yards from the east end, the usual place for the founder’s tomb, is an elaborate ogee-headed grave monument in limestone. This can hardly be the monument to the founder; more likely it is a Fitzmaurice tomb to replace the original founder’s in the fourteenth century. On the outside the north sidewall is strengthened by six ornamental buttresses, each six feet wide, which run up the whole way to the roof. As these do not bond in the wall they are evidently later additions to counteract a dangerous settlement or outward thrust. At the choir

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8 The actual internal dimensions of the abbey church are 94 feet long by 22 feet 10 inches wide at the western end and 23 feet 10 inches wide at the eastern end. The walls are in fact nearer 4 feet thick (see Fig. 2).

9 Abbeydorney is certainly the smallest of the known Cistercian houses; see note 16.
end are two plain gargoyles which project about two and a half feet. The east gable is also nearly perfect and stands some thirty feet in height approximately. It contains a fairly perfect window in decorated Gothic. Total height of this window is about fifteen feet and its width about three feet eight inches. In its lower part the window is three light—each of the lights being about eight inches in width. The south wall is very ruinous. Near the altar it has traces of three built-up windows—one of them wide and the others narrow. Slightly to west of these are what appear to be bases of the reveals to a sedile arcade. The sedile was very small—about four feet wide—and provided room only for the celebrant, the inferior ministers occupying stools or chairs. Incorporating, or incorporated in, the west gable is a square tower—evidently not part of the original plan. Both position and character of the tower are peculiar; the structure projects on the inside about a foot and a half. Through the basement of the tower was the rather dark and narrow main entrance to the church. Over the door was a chamber about ten feet square lighted by a single fourteenth-century window.

It is just possible to determine that the cloisters were small—about fourteen yards square—in scale with the church. No portion of the arcading stands but carved stones from it are shamefully scattered in scores through the cemetery where they are incorporated in the unlovely vaults.

The east wall of the square stands fifteen or sixteen feet high but, owing to the way in which raised vaults are built up against it, it is impossible to trace door openings, etc. The apartments (chapter-room, etc.) on this side were about fifteen feet in width; the chapter-room, by the way, did not project to the east, but stands in line with its neighbour compartments to north and south. The only further remains of the domestic buildings are a somewhat shapeless mass of masonry near the south-west angle of the square; this last indicates that the total width of the south range must have been about seven yards. Beyond the carved stones alluded to, the surrounding and much-used cemetery does not contain any monument of special note. Richard Hitchcock in *Kilkenny Archaeological Journal*, Vol. II, p. 131, quotes the following inscription from a tombstone here:

Hunc tumulum sibi fecit, Anno 1587.”

An aged Irish-speaking native of the place pointed out the alleged site—three hundred yards or so to the south-east of the abbey—of an earlier graveyard and, presumably, church. This is known as Oileán na n-gé or the townland of Móinteáin na n-gé. The spot is lowlying and wet and altogether an unlikely site for either a church or graveyard.

A search for it failed to reveal the mill site or tradition thereof. It may have been at a spot a quarter of a mile to the south-east of the ruin, where a small mill survived till recently.

Leading from the abbey precincts in a southerly direction is a curious double bank of artificial character about six feet in height by ten feet wide. Rather the

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10 See note 60.
feature may be described as two parallel banks, each of the dimensions just quoted, with the stream already alluded to flowing languidly between; evidently the banks have been formed in course of long ages of the shovelled-up sandy silt from the stream bed.

**History**

The early history of Abbeydorney is very obscure. The foundation was certainly a daughter of Nenay, but by whose bounty it was established there is little to show. Authorities commonly attribute it to the Fitzmaurices, Lords of Kerry, but the attribution must be incorrect, for at the date of the foundation no Fitzmaurice owned a foot of territory in Kerry. More probably Odorney's very name correctly assigns its foundation, scil. — to the O Torna, otherwise the O'Dorneys, chieftains of that territory. Very likely, however, the abbey was restored and partly rebuilt, and had new endowments made to it by a Fitzmaurice in the fourteenth century and hence the unsustainable attribution of the first foundation to the latter.

Our records to illustrate the subsequent story of Abbeydorney are little more satisfactory and enlightening than the authorities which bear on its foundation. Little more than a century from the establishment of house, its abbot, being accused of some defection, was deposed by the General Chapter (1274). He was, however, able to prove his innocence the following year whereupon the Chapter ordered his restoration to office committing to the abbots of Mellifont and Dublin the duty of seeing that the restoration was duly effected and the false accusers punished. When the present abbey of Nenay (or Maigue) fell into disgrace for a short time towards the close of the twelfth century, Kyrie Eleison was removed from its jurisdiction or affiliation and committed to Mellifont. The Holy See gave implicit testimony to the spirit and discipline of Abbeydorney when in 1288 its abbot, Nicholas, was promoted to the see of Ardfern.

The connection of St Christian O’Conarchy with Odorney has already been alluded to.\(^{11}\) Christian, head of the band of monks sent by St Bernard from Clairvaux, became first abbot of Mellifont, whence he was transferred by his former fellow-novice, Pope Eugenius III, to the bishopric of Lismore. Pope Eugenius also created him papal legate. Bishop, or Legate Apostolic, Christian remained a Cistercian at heart and, as soon as a fitting time for doing so offered, he resigned his see and returned again to the cloister. For some reason unknown to us, he chose Abbeydorney, possibly for its remoteness and poverty, as the place of his retirement. Here he died and was buried in 1186 but nothing now survives—not even tradition—to mark his grave.

Christian, though he is not mentioned in the Irish calendars, is regarded as a Saint by Colgan who notices him under March 18th, and who promised to give us his Life. Colgan, however, did not publish the Life; probably he failed to find a copy and, now, no Life is known to exist.

We lack record of the Suppression as affecting our abbey. It is likely enough that, situated as it was in the recesses of Kerry, Abbeydorney escaped dissolution for a

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\(^{11}\) See note 7.
time through the connivance or assistance of the Desmonds. Its abbot does not appear ever to have been a spiritual peer or to have been summoned to Parliament notwithstanding the statement to the contrary of the unusually accurate Lewis (Topographical Dictionary). As, to some extent, sustaining the theory of non-suppression there is a curious story in the Four Masters, under date 1577, to the effect that, in course of a faction fight, which the Annals euphemistically call “a war”—between some Desmonds and Mac-Maurices, the young abbot of Odowney, who joined the Desmond side, was shot in the doorway of Lixnaw Castle. Five years from the young abbot’s death—in course of another similar “war”—a gentleman of the Clan-Sheehy was killed in the doorway of the abbey “by the sons of the Bishop of Kerry” (A.F.M.).

vide: Kilkenny Archaeological Journal, Vol. III, pp. 131, etc.
Smith, “History of Kerry”.

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While Canon Power’s notice above can only be regarded as a sketch (the definitive account of Abbeydorney, its buildings, history, list of abbot’s names, etc., has yet to be written), nevertheless it does provide us with a very good account of what he saw in the 1920s and what, to a certain extent, may still be seen today. This account, however, must not be left without a number of references which amplify or correct Canon Power’s observations.

In the first place, regarding the building fabric itself, nothing much requires to be added except that further deterioration has evidently occurred since Canon Power wrote his description. The accompanying sketch-plan (Fig. 2) and photographs (Plates II-V) amplify the written account and show the approximate locations and present state of the conventual buildings. The south wall of the church, described by Canon Power as being “very ruinous”, was evidently approximately 50 feet long extending from the western end when the Ordnance Survey was made in 1898, now about only 24 feet of it is left standing. Likewise, the six external buttresses added at a later date to support the north wall (and which, as Canon Power observed, were not bonded into the wall itself), are being eroded by stones being removed from the footings to the extent that soon the buttresses will fail to perform the function for which they were provided.

One remarkable feature, however, only lightly touched upon by Canon Power, is that of the west tower, which he refers to as being peculiar in regard to both its position and character and suggests that it was evidently not part of the original plan.

To appreciate this, it is necessary to compare Abbeydorney with other monasteries of the order. In all, there were 39 Cistercian houses in Ireland including the minor cells of Feale (Abbeyfeale), Co. Limerick, Clare Island, Co. Mayo, and Stroyny (Abbeystroney), Co. Cork, originally founded by other orders but later adopted. Of this total number, 24 houses were derived from Mellifont. In all, 29 ruins of

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18 Leask, op. cit., p. 63.
14 Leask, op. cit., pedigree facing p. 63.
Fig. 2. Sketch-plan of Abbeydorney, Monastery, Co. Kerry.
Cistercian abbeys are still standing in Ireland\textsuperscript{15} and ground plans of at least 15 (up to now not including Abbeydorney) have been recovered.\textsuperscript{18} Comparing representative abbeys, the internal length and breadth (including aisles where applicable) of their churches are as follows: Mellifont (mother house), 195 feet by 55 feet; Duiske (Graiguenamanagh), Co. Kilkenny (founded 1204 and the largest), 204 feet by 63 feet; Nenagh (the nearest originally built Cistercian house to Abbeydorney), 175 feet by 60 feet; and Corcomroe in North Clare (founded in 1195 and one of the smallest), 132 feet by 24 feet. All of the 15 sites surveyed conform to the normal Cistercian plan except for two with aisleless naves, viz. Shrule, Co. Longford (founded 1150), 146 feet by 25 feet;\textsuperscript{17} and Grey, Co. Down (founded 1193), 123 feet by 25 feet. Abbeydorney, the smallest of all known Cistercian sites, as stated, measures 94 feet by 24 feet. Kilcooly, Co. Tipperary (founded 1184), the next smallest as yet surveyed, most closely compares with Abbeydorney, its church measuring 120 feet by 23 feet (originally with an aisleless nave), and its cloisters about 24 yards square.

Originally, no Cistercian monasteries had towers; an early edict forbade their erection. During the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, however, during a period of active building and reconstruction in Ireland, bell towers came to be incorporated in some churches—usually at the crossing (intersection of the nave, chancel and transepts) or sometimes (but much more unusually) at the west end. Of the 15 abbey plans referred to above, during the fifteenth century, 11 had towers built at the crossing, one (Corcomroe) had a small belfry built above a choir/nave screen-wall, and Shrule (not surveyed) had a bell-cote above the west arch.

The late Dr. H. G. Leask dealt with the subject of church towers in his comprehensive study of Irish churches and monasteries, although he did not have much to say on Abbeydorney at all. We find no reference to the place in the first two volumes of his work covering the period of building from Romanesque up to 1400, but in the third and final volume covering the last phases of Medieval Gothic he makes a brief reference. This appears in an appendix covering abbeys of “lesser importance” and here the author opines that “no part (of Abbeydorney) appears to be earlier than the fifteenth century”, although he does remark that the buildings have not been closely studied owing to their obscurity by the many burials there: “a few fragments of cloister arcade pillars, of dumb-bell plan, remain”.\textsuperscript{18}

In fact, the tower at Abbeydorney appears to be unique among Cistercian houses. It measures 15 feet on the outside of the church, where it accommodates a central late medieval Gothic doorway, and 13 feet on the inside, with a central entrance passageway three feet ten inches wide, and is 12 feet long, protruding one-and-a-half feet from the inside of the west wall. The northern portion of the tower incorporates


\textsuperscript{16} In “The Cistercian Order in Ireland” (note 4), accounts are given of 37 abbeys (including Nenagh (Massacre), Co. Limerick) and ground plans of 15 sites.

\textsuperscript{17} I am indebted to Mr. Jude Flynn, Hon. Secretary of the Longford Historical Society, for this information.

a semi-oval stairway leading up to the first floor eight feet above ground level and lighted by the decorated Gothic window mentioned by Canon Power. Above this, a second flight of steps leads to the second floor, now fallen, 17 feet above ground level. From this second floor, a covered passageway, approximately six feet high by two feet wide, built into the thickness of the tower and the west wall, leads to a "lookout" position at the north wall. (The corresponding portion of the south side of the tower has fallen and it is now impossible to tell if a similar arrangement obtained there.) The construction and features of the tower suggest that its use may have been for other than regular purposes, and it may well have been built by the FitzMaurices during the period of the Desmond retribution raids into Kerry during the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries.

Canon Power also omitted to mention the curious recess (? tomb niche) built into the inside southern portion of the west wall. The recess, now much broken, evidently took the form of a raised paved table, a foot-and-a-half above ground level and three feet four inches high: in plan, it measures approximately two feet wide by five feet long, the squared off northern end being accommodated in the tower structure. Being devoid of any ornament, no means is provided for establishing its age or purpose.

Concerning the history of the community, perhaps it may first be mentioned that Cistercian houses were customarily dedicated to Our Lady and thus Abbeydorney sometimes appears in records described as "the house of the Blessed Virgin Mary de Kyric Eleison", etc. In 1302, in the Ecclesiastical Taxation of the Diocese of Ardfert, "the church of the monks" in the Deanery of "Othornu and Offannan" was valued at 13s. for tithes, while the revenue of "the house of Kireil of the Order of Cistercians" was valued at 63s., "their spirituals are taxed among the churches of which they are rectors".19

Canon Power remarks on the identity of the original benefac ting founder of Abbeydorney and rightly refutes the attribution to the FitzMaurices, Barons of Lixnaw and Lords of Kerry. This error may have originated or been initially recorded by Alemand in 1690 who wrote "Les Fitz-Moris Mylords Barons de Kery & de Lixnaw, fonderent une Abbaye de Bernardins à Odorney, & des Cordeliers à Ardart dans le Conté de Kery" and elsewhere, "... elle (Odorney) fut fondée en 1154, par les Clanmoris ou Fitzmoris, anciens Barons de Lixnaw".20 These observations were copied by Stevens in his translation of this work into English in 1722.21 Harris in his edition of Ware quoted the claim, citing Alemand as the authority, but disputed it.22 Later writers—except notably Smith23—followed suit in perpetuating the statement but adding a doubt as to its authenticity.

19 Ecclesiastical Taxation of the Diocese of Ardfert, A.D. 1302. 2 Roll Irish Exchequer, 533-9, Roll E.M. 3 and 3 dorso. Details for Odorney are reprinted in J. King, County Kerry Past and Present, Dublin 1931, p. 259.
21 J. Stevens, Monasticon Hibernicum, London 1722, passim.
22 W. Harris (ed.), J. Ware, The History and Antiquities of Ireland, Dublin 1764, Vol. I, p. 274.
There can be no doubt, however, that the FitzMaurices had a powerful influence over Abbeydorney from the time of their settlement in Kerry during the first quarter of the thirteenth century, and unquestionably supplied the Cistercian order with members from their own family as the following entries make plain.

In 1304, while Maurice fitz Thomas, 2nd Lord, lay on his deathbed at Molahiffe castle, he sent the "Abbot of Kyrylelyson" to his son and heir Nicholas on a mission in connexion with lands he intended to leave to another of his sons named Gerald. This un-named abbot of Odorney may well have been a successor to yet another of Maurice's sons, Thomas, whom we are told was "... a Bernardine Monk, Abbot of Odorney, otherwise St. Mary de Kierie Eleson, and also of Fermoy".

Nicholas, above, who succeeded as 3rd Lord, had a son "Gerald (by some named Thomas) a monk, and Abbot of Loughsewdy in Westmeath, of the Cistercian order", living circa 1312. A century later, another Gerald, son of Patrick, 7th Lord, was abbot of Odorney while his brother, Nicholas, in 1420, was bishop of Ardfert.

About this time, too, in 1410, the abbots of Raithruogh (Rattoo) and Otnora (Odorney) were directed to collate Maurice Fitzmorris to the deanery of Ardfert, while on the 15th April, 1422 a mandate was issued to the abbots of St. Mary's O'Dorney and St. Mary's Rathuogh to assign to John Fitzmorris the rectory of Kylorry (Killery).

In 1578, Patrick FitzMaurice, son of Thomas, 16th Lord, asked for "the fee farm of the abbeys of Rathoe (Rattoo) and Kierielezon (Odorney) also for a pension".

As to the question of abbots of Odorney being spiritual peers and being summoned to parliament, Canon Power cites Lewis as his authority although he questions the accuracy of the assertion. But Lewis was not the first to make this statement and, parallelling this claim with that regarding the founding benefactor, in this instance it was not Alemand (1690) who raised the hare, although the view was evidently generally held in the latter part of the seventeenth century. In his description of Kerry in 1687, Sir Richard Cox stated: "The Abbot hereof (Odorney) was a Lord of parliam tho he is omitted by Sr James Ware in his Catalogue of them", and later, "... soo that there were no less than 4 lords in this small barony (Clanmauire) viz the Lord of Kerry, The Bishop of Ardfert and the Abbots of Odorney and Rathoe". About the same time as this, or a little later, the contributor of "Geographical Collections for Kerry" in Samuel Molyneux's Natural History of Ireland stated that "It (Odorney) was a

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26 Ibid., p. 177.
27 Ibid., p. 188.
30 J. King, History of Kerry, London 1910, p. 337.
convent of the Cisternion order and the lord abbot thereof had vote in parliament”.  
Smith (1756) expressly stated: “... its (Odornée’s) abbots were lords of parliament,  
of whom there were many persons of eminence ...” and Archdall following in  
1786 stated simply: “The abbot of this house was a Lord of parliament” citing Ware  
as his authority. The statements of these historians seem to have been copied (with  
or without “authority”) by later writers, e.g. Lewis (1837), Janauschek (1877),  
King (1931), Gwynn and Hadcock (1970).

In a previous volume of this Journal, Dom Hubert J. de Verebeeke, O.S.B.,  
examined in general the question of abbots sitting in Parliament and, while he found  
that Cistercians were largely represented, no specific mention is made of Abbeydorney.  
Among the Cistercian abbots actually recorded as having sat as peers in Parliament  
in Ireland for a period prior to 1375, however, the only mention for the Kerry-  
Limerick area is that of the Abbot of Woctheny or Woney (Awney, or Abington) in  
Co. Limerick.

Looking at the matter again, it would appear that, while Alemand certainly did  
not make the claim, some of the writers quoted may have been influenced by him in a  
statement he made regarding abbots in general being spiritual peers. Regarding the  
Cistercians in particular, he stated that they alone “had more abbots who were Lords  
Spiritual, and as such sat in Parliament, than all the other Orders together; for of  
fifteen abbots who had this Prerogative throughout the Kingdom, thirteen were of  
the Cistercian Order”. Of these thirteen whom he lists, the first mentioned is Mellifont,  
with “Magy or Nenay” (Nenagh) ninth, and “Woney, or Wotheny” (Awney, or  
Abington)—the only other Cistercian house in Limerick, as eleventh, but no mention  
is made of Odornée. As already stated, the total number of Cistercian houses in  
Ireland was thirty-nine.

From what we have seen, it appears possible that writers, noting the influence that  
the FitzMaurices, themselves temporal peers sitting in Parliament and also many  
themselves members of Cistercian communities, had over Abbeydorney, took for  
granted that the abbots of the monastery were themselves spiritual peers. All that is  
required, of course, to settle the question once and for all, is for the citation of any  
one abbot of Odornée in any list of peers attending any one sitting of Parliament.

With regard to the Dissolution, it would appear that Abbeydorney was, in fact,  
suppressed by Henry VIII since, in 1537, along with several other abbeys, it was  
granted to Edmond FitzMaurice, 11th Lord of Kerry, Baron of Odornée, and  
“Viscount of Kilmaule” (Kilmoyles).

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34 Smith, op. cit., p. 218.
36 Lewis, op. cit., p. 2.
37 Janauschek, op. cit., p. 137.
38 J. King, County Kerry Past and Present, Dublin 1931, p. 259.
40 Dom Hubert J. de Verebeeke, “Abbots in Anglo-Norman Parliaments”, N. Munster Antiq. J.,  
41 Alemand, op. cit., p. 163. (=Stevens, op. cit., p. 167.)
In 1541, we read of an “Order of the Lord Deputy and council for a commission to the earl of Desmond [James FitzJohn FitzGerald, 15th earl], Mr Thomas Agarde, Eneas O’Hernan, late master of Any [?] Awney or Woney, and Edmund Sexten, to take inventories of, dissolve, and put in safe custody, all religious houses in the counties of Limerick, Cork, Kerry and Desmond”.

Thirty-five years later, a lease was granted to “Gerald, earl of Dussmonde; of the site of the abbey of Odornay, alias our Lady abbey of Kirkleisayn, co. Kerry, the lands of Clonecan [? Cloghane], Roeryke [?], Dromyconnygemyn [Drumcunnig], Aykre [? Acres], and Ballysine [Ballyshean], Boherroe, Lackymore [Lacka More], Lackeybege [Lacka Beg], and Clonennymetaugh [Cloonamatagh], and Ballybromane [Ballybroman], co. Kerry, the rectory of Odornay, extending to the foregoing lands, except Ballybromane, the rectory of Motahyffe [Molahiffe], the same co. To hold for 21 years; rent £8 13s. . . .”

In 1581, however, the same lands and “the site of the abbey of Odornay alias our Lady of Kirleisayn, co. Kerry” were assigned under lease by the commissioners of Munster to “John Zowche, or Souche, esq.” and again in 1588-9 to “John Champen, gent” but with the addition of the abbey of “Rathetowye” (Rattoo). In 1597, under grant to “the provost and fellows of the college of the Holy Trinity by Dublin”, among other lands in Kerry we find “Meneerie 1/6 carucate, parcel of the lands of the abbey of Odornay, alias Kirialeison, in said co. (Kerry) (16d)”

In 1603 we find a further account of “the late abbey of Odornay, called Our Lady’s Abbaye de Kerielizon” which is more informative: we are told that the property contained 1 church, 2 churchyards, 2 acres arable, 1 water-mill, and 170 acres in the parish. The abbey lands included 60 acres in “Cloghan, Roeryke, Dromcounygenyn, Monacric [Montanagay], and Ballyysane [Ballysheen], 80 acres in Lackimore, Lackibegg, and Clonenymateagh, and 30 acres in Ballybroaine”, all in Odornay parish.

The reference to the water-mill is interesting and so also is that to the two churchyards. From the Ordnance Survey taken in 1841-42 and revised in 1909, the monastery is shown to be located between two streams, flowing generally in a north-easterly direction, and converging some half-a-mile to the NNE as tributaries of the river Brick. In the map included as a frontispiece to Smith’s History of Kerry (1756), Odornay is marked as a “ruined church”, approached by a left fork off the Ardsfert-

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49 Ordnance Survey, one inch, 1841-2 revised 1909, Sheet 162.
50 Smith, op. cit., frontispiece.
Lixnaw road (between Tubrid and Rathkenny and bearing north), and on the left (or western) bank of the river Brick. Since on this map no stream is shown to the north of the abbey, then evidently this sole stream to the south was at that time the original bed of the river Brick or one of its tributaries. On Speed’s map of 1610,\(^51\) the abbey is marked as “M. Eyreyson”, located immediately to the south-west of the confluence of three streams running approximately NNE, E and SE, the combined flow curving northwards and which, although not named, is clearly intended to be the river Brick emptying into the sea between “C, Manian” (Ballybunion) to the north and “Cadone” (?) to the south. Thus in Smith’s map, Abbeydorney is shown still to be on the left (or north) bank of the stream although the geographic representation is very crude.

Referring to the larger scale survey of 1898,\(^52\) the walled area of the monastery precincts (1.214 acres) is seen to stand in the present-day townland of Knockanmore and close to the boundary with the adjacent townland of Boherroe. To the south-east lies the townland of Montanagay, doubtless the Móinteáin na n-gé of Canon Power’s local aged informant as to the site of an earlier graveyard and church.

Regarding some of the personages referred to by Canon Power in connection with Abbeydorney, he does not mention that the bishop of Kerry whose sons slew one of the Clan-Sheehy was, in fact, James FitzMaurice, later to be known by the surname FitzPiers or Piers, a former abbot of Odorney.\(^53\) James was born about the year 1511, the illegitimate son of Richard fitzJohn FitzMaurice, a religious himself (and possibly even a Cistercian in Abbeydorney), who was born about the year 1470, many of the FitzMaurice family—as we have seen—having entered the community there. At the age of 25, James FitzMaurice was abbot of Odorney prior to his promotion in May, 1536 to the see of Ardfert.\(^54\) The bishop evidently had a number of children by a concubine, of whom two sons were themselves slain by the Sheehys in revenge, although it would appear that the names of these were not James and Gerald, as reported by the Four Masters,\(^55\) but more likely their brothers Maurice and Richard.\(^56\)

The final comment is in regard to the reference to the tombstone of Ambrose Piers. Ambrose was another ecclesiastic member of the Piers family of North Kerry. He was born circa 1608, became a priest, was Doctor of Theology at the University of Bordeaux and onetime Professor of Philosophy at Boulogne, and was later promoted Vicar-General of Ardfert by William Burgat, Archbishop of Cashel.\(^57\) He was “a native of the diocese, [and] a person respected and skilful in administration, of

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\(^{52}\) See note 12.


\(^{55}\) Annals of the Four Masters, s.a. 1582 (v. 1787) and Carew MS. Vol. 597, f. 445.

\(^{56}\) It would appear that the bishop had at least four sons; see Appeal to the Lord Justice in 1580 of Edmond FitzMaurice (son to Thomas, 16th Lord of Kerry and Lixnaw), James oge FitzPiers, Edmond fitz James FitzPiers, Richard fitz James FitzPiers, Garret Fitz James “of the same” (i.e. FitzPiers) and James fitz Thomas, in Carew MSS., Vol. 597, f. 445 (Cal. Carew MSS., Vol. II, p. 306) and subsequent pardons in Eliz. Fiants No. 3752 (1581) and No. 4716 (1585).

singular zeal for the propagation of the Catholic Faith, and esteemed by both clergy and people”, according to John Brenan, Archbishop of Cashel, in 1678.\(^5\) Ambrose was proposed by his clergy to be their bishop, but the appointment was not made, probably due to his age, 70, at the time. On the 4th January, 1681, Ambrose Piers or Pierse was reported to be a “popish priest now resident in County Kerry [who] doth exercise popish jurisdiction” and was required to be apprehended (letter to John Blennerhasset in Tralee).\(^5\) As the inscription on his tombstone in the chancel of Abbeydorney indicates, he died six years later, circa 1687. Regarding the date of his death, Canon Power correctly quoted his “authority”, but Richard Hitchcock or, more precisely, his informant, the Rev. A. B. Rowan, D.D., of Belmont, Tralee made the original error. Hitchcock quoting from a letter sent to him from the Rev. Rowan states: “I send you an inscription from Abbey-dorney church more ancient than any you have been given [my italics, J.H.P.]—AMBROSIVS PIERS. VIC. GEN. DIOCES. ARDFERT. HUNC TUMULUM SIBI FIERI FECIT, ANNO 1587.” Seen in its original context, it is clear that the mistake was one of simply misreading 1587 for 1687 since the other inscriptions referred to by the Rev. Rowan are to dates later than this.

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to the late Patrick Canon Power, D.Litt., M.R.I.A., (b. 1862, d. 1951), historian and archaeologist, but for whose painstaking industry and scholarship we should be still lacking an account of Abbeydorney, and to his friend and fellow historian, the late Fr. Ailbe S. Ó Loidhich, Ord. Cist., “the great expert on St. Bernard in these islands”, who kindly drew my attention to Canon Power’s manuscript at Mount Melleray in 1948. I would also like to record my thanks to the Most Reverend Dom Edward Ducey, Ord. Cist., present Abbot of Mount Melleray, for kindly giving permission to publish Canon Power’s MS., to Br. Hugh, Librarian of Mount Melleray, for biographical notes on Fr. Ailbe Ó Loidhich, and to Professor M. J. O’Kelly, M.A., D.Litt., F.S.A., M.R.I.A., present Professor of Archaeology at U.C. Cork, who kindly sent me biographical notes on Canon Power. Finally, my sincere thanks to Mr. John D. Pierse, of Listowel, Co. Kerry, who has gone to considerable trouble to obtain the detailed dimensions necessary to produce the site plan (Fig. 2) and who also kindly took the photographs used in illustrating this paper.

Addendum

During the time that this article has been with the printers, two further references have come to hand.

The first is to a work long regarded as source material on the Cistercians if for no other reason than that of its age and size: *Annales Cistercienses*, by Angel Manrique, published in four volumes between 1642-59 at Lyons. Odorney has two mentions,


\(^5\) Ibid., p. 51.

\(^5\) R. Hitchcock, “Gleanings from Country Church-Yards”, *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 6 (1861), 131. Note that another copy of this inscription and with the correct date (*i.e.* 1687) is given by Archdall in *Monasticon Hibernicum*; see note 1.
viz. Vol. II, p. 265, where it is stated: "Anno M.C. LIV. III Kalendas Iulii, fundata est Abbatia de Kyrie eleyson", and Vol. III, p. 165, stating: "Eodem anno (Christi, nimirum, M.C. LX XXVI.) Christianus, Lesmoriensis Episcopus, . . . post peractam obedientiam, in Monasterio de Kyrie, eleison, feliciter migravit ad Christum." In addition, there is also much detail already given above, but it is noted that there is no attribution of the foundation to the FitzMaurices from which it can be surmised that the controversial statements on this and other points originated sometime between 1642 and 1690.

The second reference is to the Ordnance Survey Letters written about 1830-46, now in the Royal Irish Academy; copies are in the Name Books in the National Library, from which the following extracts have been made. The letter on "The Parish of Abbeydorney" (pp. 20-1), subscribed "Antiquities examined by me, John O'Donovan. Tralee, July 22nd 1841", notes details similar to those given by Canon Power, but also informs us that the limestone slab bearing the inscription to Ambrose Piers then lay in the chancel opposite the ogee-headed tomb in the north wall. Also that "there was a doorway on [sic] the South wall at the distance of about thirty-five feet from the East gable, but it is now . . . reduced to a shapeless breach. It led into the cloister", which confirms as fact the conjectural location shown in Fig. 2. The final point is that "about sixty-nine feet of the East wall of the cloister remains extending southwards at right angles to the South wall of the church, but its features are destroyed. There is also yet remaining the West gable of a house which extended East and West at the distance of about sixty-nine feet to the South of the church, but the dimensions of this building cannot now be ascertained"; this latter feature appears to identify with the mass of masonry shown as of "Indeterminate character and age" on Fig. 2. (I wish to thank Nóra Ní Shúilleabháin, Dublin, for this second reference.)
PLATE II

1. View from south

2. View from north-west

3. View from south-east
1. West wall and doorway viewed from outside.

2. West wall and tower viewed from inside.

3. Ogee-headed wall tomb in eastern end of north wall viewed from inside.

4. East wall viewed from inside.

ABBEYDORNEY MONASTERY, CO. KERRY

[Photos: J. D. Pierse]
1. East window viewed from inside.

2. Window in tower upper chamber viewed from inside.

3. West wall and doorway viewed from inside; note wall recess on left-hand side

ABBEDDONER MONASTERY, CO. KERRY [Photos: J.D. Pierse]