Castles and Schools in the Roxborough Area
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In 1985 the late Seán Marrinan [see this Journal, 29(1987), 113] prepared a forty-page “Set of Information Sheets on the History of the Locality, compiled for Roxborough School”—Roxborough is about four miles south of Limerick City. While most of these notes are of a fairly general and well-known nature, some of them, when combined and with a little judicious editing, merit printing in a more permanent form. It is, therefore, with Mrs. Ann Marrinan’s kind permission that the two following items are published here. (E.R. Hon. Editor)

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CASTLES IN THE ROXBOROUGH AREA

These castles were not military castles, although some of them were used for military purposes from time to time. They were fortified houses, the residences of the landowners in the area who felt the need for the protection they provided in an age of unrest and instability. A more correct name for them is, probably, Tower-Houses, but they are invariably called castles in every part of the country. There were several hundreds of them in County Limerick. The castles included in the following list are those which stood in the area of the modern united parishes of Donaghmore-Cahernarry-Knockea, as well as some that stood in adjacent parishes. Most of those in the list are no longer to be seen, and in more than one case not even the location of the site is known (references below as to whether marked or not marked refers to the Ordnance Survey 6-inch scale map).

1. BALLYCLOUGH: The site of this castle is marked as having been near Ballyclough House. It belonged to John Arthur in 1654.
2. BALLYSHEEDY: There is no trace of the castle left and the site is not marked. It belonged to James Fox in 1607.
3. RATHURD: This is a round castle with four storeys, square inside. The castle still stands.
4. CAHERNARRY: This castle belonged to the Burkes of Clanwilliam. The site is not marked.
5. BALLYNEETY: This castle belonged to Laurence Comyn in 1654.
6. LICKADOON: This castle belonged to the Hurley family and later was held by the Roches. The great Archbishop of Cashel, Dermot O’Hurley (1530-1584) is said to have been born here. Part of the ruin, only one wall, still stands.
7. PARK DROMBANNY: This castle belonged to the Mac Canna family.
8. DROMBANNY: The site is marked to the south of the above castle (no. 7). It also belonged to the Mac Canna family.
9. RAHEEN: Also called Cahervally Castle. The foundations are on high ground opposite the entrance to Raheen graveyard. The castle belonged to the O’Caseys and later to the Roches.
10. BALLINAGARDE: The site is not marked. The castle belonged to the Burkes of Clanwilliam, but was forfeited to Cromwellians in the mid-17th century and later in the same century came into the possession of the Croker family. In 1774 the Crokers
built Ballinagarde House at a cost of £10,000, and lived there until early in the present century. The Land Commission divided the land among several families, and units of the Irish Army were based in the house during World War II, after which it fell into ruin.

11. WILLIAMSTOWN: This castle also belonged to the Burkes and later to the Crokers who repaired it. The ruin still stands.

12. ROCKSTOWN: The castle likewise belonged to the Burkes of Clanwilliam. The ruin is a prominent feature of the landscape.

13. FANNINGSTOWN: This castle belonged to the Fannings until the end of the 16th century; it was later granted to the Earl of Thomond. Traces of the ruins existed in 1840, but are no longer to be seen.

14. FEDAMORE: This castle belonged to the Earls of Desmond and later it was granted to the Earl of Thomond. The site is marked in the townland of Castlequarter, but no trace of the castle itself remains.

15. ROCHESTOWN: The site is not marked. The castle belonged to the Burkes of Clanwilliam.

16. KILPEACON: The site is not marked but the castle stood between the site of the church and that of Kilpeacon House.

NOTES ON ROXBOROUGH SCHOOLS

The first school at Roxborough was set up by Alexander Shaw in 1889. ¹ A former dwelling-house, the property of Mrs. Kirby of Roxborough and situated to the south of the site of the school-house vacated in 1985, was renovated by Shaw. He had the roof slated and a new timber floor laid down. The partitions between the rooms were removed so that there was one classroom, 25 feet long, 19 feet wide and 8 feet 3 inches high. He also had two outside toilets erected. The school opened on the 2nd January 1889, and on that first day 64 pupils were enrolled, 40 girls and 24 boys. The teacher was Bridget O’Brien, who had previously been an assistant in nearby Knockea Female National School. Some of the teacher’s salary was paid from fees paid by the pupils. The proceeds from these fees were expected to amount to £20 a year, of which sum Shaw guaranteed £12.

On the 5th of January, Shaw wrote to the Commissioners of National Education ² requesting that the newly established school be recognised by them. On the 22nd of that month the local inspector, James J. Hynes, visited Roxborough. By now the number on the roll had risen to 35 boys and 51 girls, a total of 86, while the average daily attendance figure was 69. In his report following the visit the inspector remarked that this average was expected to drop to 50, as some of those on roll had “been attracted to Roxborough by the novelty of the school there”. These, he believed, would return eventually to their former schools. The inspector complained that “the ceiling and windows are low and the ventilation in consequence is imperfect”. He also found that a portion of partition wall had been left in the middle of the room. In spite of these defects, the inspector recommended that official sanction should be granted to the new school. He had an interview with Mr. Shaw who had stated that he intended to build a new school-house if the venture proved a success.

¹ See this Journal, 26(1984), 106-107 for a brief biographical account of Sir Alexander Shaw (he was knighted in 1906).

² The Irish national school system was established in 1831. A Board of Commissioners was set up to implement the new scheme. The Commissioners continued to administer national schools until 1924, when their functions were taken over by the newly created Department of Education which became responsible for education at all levels.
As a result of the inspector’s report the Commissioners agreed to accept the new school and they sanctioned a sum of £27. 10s. 0d. to be paid as salary to Miss O’Brien. In addition, a grant of free equipment, to the value of £4. 10s. 0d. was allowed to the school on condition that equipment to the value of £1 7s. 6d. was purchased locally. The Commissioners accepted also that Alexander Shaw should be Patron of the school and that Fr. Timothy Halpin, the Parish Priest of Donaghmore, should be Manager.

From the outset the school-house which had been provided in 1889 had been less than satisfactory and in the years that followed it became obvious that a new building would have to be provided. Alexander Shaw had indicated that he would do this but it was Fr. Michael McCarthy, the new Parish Priest of Donaghmore, who took the initiative. He had succeeded Fr. Halpin, who died in 1900. In 1902 a plot of land was acquired from Mrs. Anne Kirby and negotiations with the Commissioners resulted in a grant of £204. 7s. 10d. being allowed by them for the building of the new school. Since the total cost was £306. 11s. 8d. the balance, a sum of £102. 3s. 10d., had to be contributed locally. The school was vested in four trustees, Bishop O’Dwyer of Limerick, Maurice Kirby of Roxborough, Fr. McCarthy and Alexander Shaw. The original plan proposed in 1902 was for a building to accommodate a maximum of 60 pupils. In 1903 a new plan was proposed but by 1906 no decision had been made on this new plan. Meanwhile the condition of the original school-house was deteriorating: in 1904 repairs had to be carried out to the roof and other parts of the building. Finally work began on the new school and continued until 1911 or 1912. Although the date on the building is 1911, the change was not made to the new school-house until the 6th of May, 1912.

The inevitable inspection took place on the 26th of June, 1912. The inspector was J. A. McMahon. The principal teacher was Mrs. Bridget Barry, the former Bridget O’Brien, who had been in the old school since its inception in 1889. By now she had an assistant, Mary Fitzgerald, who had taken up duty in the old school in April 1907. There were 64 pupils on rolls, 31 boys and 33 girls. The average daily attendance was 48, although, on the day the inspector called, there were only 40 present, 21 boys and 19 girls.

Commenting on the new building, the inspector drew up the following list of complaints:

1. The windows in the porch could not be opened.
2. The side walls of the privies [toilets] were badly finished under the roof.
3. The roof tiles were not properly cemented and needed pointing.
4. The cement barge was broken at the back of the northern room.
5. Two of the catches at the foot of the folding door were not working.
6. Four more forms were needed.

Evidently the Commissioners took note of the inspector’s report because the formal transfer of grants to the new school did not take place until the 3rd of February, 1914, when, presumably, the defects had been remedied to their satisfaction.

The Police Barracks stood at the cross near what are now the grounds of Limerick Golf Club. Later the Power family lived in the house and the cross became known as Powers’ Cross. In 1969 the house belonged to Miss Carroll, at which time the numbers in the school were increasing and a new classroom was needed urgently. Miss Carroll gave the use of one of the rooms to the school as a temporary classroom. For several months Mrs. Ryan taught second and third classes in this room. The children assembled in the Roxborough school yard every day, and walked in single file to Carroll’s house, about 150 yards to the North. They returned to the school playground for lunch and play, and at the end of the play period they walked up the road once again to their classroom. This continued until a prefabricated classroom was built in the school yard. The old building at Powers’ Cross was knocked in 1973 and a new house has been put up in the grounds.