

LIMERICK CHRONICLE

Celebrating
250 years -
1768-2018

INSIDE THIS WEEK



Those were the days at
the crossroads dance

OUT IN THE OPEN: PAGE 39

DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST TITLE



'Castle of Connell', from which the name of the village derives, was destroyed in a siege by the army of General Ginkel, fighting in support of the Army of William of Orange at the end of the 17th century

From ruins to thriving village

From the Limerick Chronicle:
August 20, 1996

Castleconnell Castle - Part 1

THE famous village of Castleconnell grew up around the central institution in the place - the castle.

This fortress, which was originally a wooden structure, was first established by an intrepid adventurer from the Dalcassian territory across the river. He was one of O'Coining or Gunning, whose ambitions seem to have been unbounded for we find that he 'owned' a tract of land stretching between Castleconnell and Carrigogunnell, south of Limerick City.

Although he must be regarded as one of the country's early land-grabbers, his name is enshrined for all time in both these places.

Gunning and his immediate descendants were unfortunate enough to live long before Land Acts and Title Deeds; they received no notice

before being turfed out by the O'Briens, who were loathe to tolerate for too long a rival to their territorial omnipotence so close to Thomond. We are not sure of the date of this grand eviction or how much blood was spilt in the process but the first mention of the O'Brien occupation of Castleconnell spells out the date - 1174.

On that occasion Donal More O'Brien, King of Limerick, while on his way from the vicinity of Thurles where he had defeated a detachment of the 'old enemy,' stayed overnight at Castleconnell as guest of his uncle, Dermot O'Brien and his kinsman, Mahon O'Brien.

During the small hours of that fateful night, the King, with his hangers-on, set upon their unsuspecting hosts and gouged out their eyes.

We are told that Dermot did not survive the mutilation - and small wonder!

This was the self-same Donal who donated his palace, overlooking the harbour in Limerick, as a site for the cathedral and the one who endowed a number of religious houses over a

wide area. While he is best remembered for these acts of piety, his treachery in leading his Dalcassians on the side of the Normans against Roderick O'Connor will never be forgotten.

The Burkes

After a tempestuous occupation of the castle by the O'Briens - they were in almost continuous contention with rival chieftains - King John granted the site to William Be Burgh (Bill Burke, in modern parlance) who rebuilt the fortress in a grand style.

It is certain that Burke, notwithstanding the backing of the good King John, would have found it difficult, if not impossible, to set up house in Dalcassian territory if Donal More was not his father-in-law.

However, this close kinship provided only a transitory immunity from the hostile attentions of the ever rampant O'Briens, although sixty years were to elapse before the castle was attacked and destroyed by another savage, Suidaine O'Brien, who for good measure, slaughtered

the garrison.

But the Burkes were a resilient breed, for we find that Walter Burke rebuilt and extended the castle in a manner that made it the most important stronghold in East Limerick.

The pitiful remains we see today belie the once-great expanse of the complex for we are told that a troop of horse was once accommodated in the great hall.

William Be Burgh was created Baron of Castleconnell in 1578 by good Queen Bess as a reward for slaughtering the dissident, James Fitzmaurice.

This was not a happy occasion; however, for the noble Lord, for he lost his two sons in the skirmish that won him the title and a letter from sympathy from Queen Elizabeth.

This shattering tragedy occurred during an encounter between the Burkes and Sir James Fitzmaurice and his retainers in the area of Garrymore (Barringtons Bridge) and Boher.

It appears that Fitzmaurice was trying to seek an avenue to Connaught through O'Brien and Burke

territory.

He had previously failed to conciliate the regard or otherwise obtain the goodwill of either the O'Briens or the Burkes, both of whose clans had made their submissions to the Queen and thus retained their estates.

Fitzmaurice had the misfortune to seize a pair of plough horses from one of Burke's tenants, who immediately raised the alarm and reported the incident to his master at Castleconnell.

William immediately called his garrison to arms and gave chase, overtaking the Desmonds at one of the Mulcaire river fords, probably at Gurteen-na-Maol, on the main river, is directly in line with the little hill in Killanure where the conflict ended.

James Fitzmaurice, a kinsman of the Burkes, was killed at the first encounter at the Mulcaire ford and in a running battle between that place and the higher ground at Killanure, William's two sons met the same fate.

Concluded next week