

WHERE MANY CHANGES HAVE TAKEN PLACE

Corbally And District

INTERESTING PAPER BY MISS E. BENNIS

A VERY interesting paper was read by Miss E. Bennis to the November monthly meeting of the Old Limerick Society in the Hazel Restaurant on Thursday night, 23rd November.

The President, Mr. T. O'Sullivan, presided, and there was the usual good attendance.

The paper, entitled "Corbally and District," was illustrated by some excellent photographs.

Miss Bennis, who was deservedly applauded, after a few introductory remarks went on to say:

It is difficult to imagine what Corbally was like before the present roads and bridges were there, before the railway passed through it—perhaps most difficult still before the canal cut it off from the mountain, though there must have been acres of marsh making it almost into an island.

FERRY AT ATHLUNKARD

There is not much known of the early history of Corbally. It was Desmond property and a castle called "The Castle of Corbally" was known to be in existence up to 1600; but there is now no trace of it or anything known of what became of it.

When the Desmond property was confiscated it passed on to the Gould family, then to Sir William Ingoldsby. Probably it was from him that the Monsees of Tettye bought it.

The Vandeleur family, who had an interest in Corbally, built a bridge over the Abbey River known as Park Bridge. Many here will remember this stirring hump-backed bridge. I have not found out when it was built but it seems to have been in the early 1800s, not long before an attempt was made to build a bridge over the Shannon near the present Athlunkard Bridge. At this time Corbally estate was owned, I have read, by a lady who was a great traveller and gambler. In time she lost all her property except the title deeds of the Corbally estate, which she did not wish to lose so she realised their possession was a sure thing since Park Bridge had been built whenever she was she gambled them away. It was a pack-bridge till about 1820 when Mr. Lincoln Fielder was built and the Commissioners of that became responsible for the upkeep of Park Bridge. Before that there had been Corbally clauses in the leases that if the bridge went out of repair there would be an abatement of 2 per cent in rent for Corbally residents.

When the Lower Harbour at Athlunkard was built the new bridge, named after Bishop O'Dwyer, was erected and Park Bridge demolished. You can see remains of it on the Corbally bank, near the present bridge, with a house and shop beside it and the old road leading to it.

From O'Dwyer Bridge, looking over to your right, you can see the extensive ruins of Lord's Mill, formerly worked by John N. Russell and Son, at the entrance to the old canal, opposite Quinnes's depot. At the time it was considered the most up-to-date mill in Limerick district.

PARK HOUSE

As you pass over O'Dwyer Bridge you see a large handsome old Georgian house facing you. This is Park House, which is now the Parochial House for St. Patrick's Parish.

The road runs straight from where Park Bridge stood to the fine entrance of Park House. There is a double drive with an oval grass lawn in the centre leading to the flight of steps to the hall door. It has extensive grounds surrounded by a very high stone wall. From the sky of building it is conjectured that 1760 was about the time of its erection.

As far as I can find out, it was built as the town residence of a Castlemore family. I would think that before Park Bridge was made it was bought by the Catholic Church and was used as a college.

It became the residence of Catholic Bishop Young, who went to live there from Munster Street. You will all remember his handsome stone house there which has just been pulled down.

His successor, Bishop Ryan, entertained Cardinal Newman here. This continued to be used as the Palace till Bishop Butler purchased the present Palace.

If you follow the road round the side of the house you will come to the railway to Ennis and across it you are in Park. This is an out-of-the-way but unique corner of Limerick. Here are said to be the descendants of the Neasens, venerated for their hard work and thrift. There are acres of cabbages, grown for the Limerick market, with many comfortable cottages and a glorious view up the river towards Castletroy. Originally it was known as Faice Callaghbolane, and references are made in old documents to the vestry of Callaghbolane, but it has been contracted to An Phaire.

KILLEEN CEMETERY

Now let us leave Park and take the road that runs behind Park House to the railway bridge and joins the modern main road. At the V in the road beyond the bridge is a house which used to be the old renalularly built. Behind this there was a little grass mound.

During a cholera epidemic in the early 1800s a pit was dug here. The dead used to bring the corpses of the victims to it, where they were thrown in, covered with quicklime and buried. When the epidemic had subsided a mound was raised over it, but has become level in recent years and there is no sign of it now.

CORBALLY HOUSE

We will go along the mill road just a number of feet leading to the river. As we come to the river the road runs straight to the old gateway of Corbally House, a large and attractive house on the river bank. There used to be an underground passage from the road to the basement of the house for the use of the servants. Matesons, of Portlaoise, took it for their master, Joseph Robinson, when they worked the Lax Weir. You are all familiar with the story of the fire in the old night gown which frightened the fishermen working at the weir one night. In 1821 Corbally House belonged to J. A. Place. Afterwards James Quin lived in it for a time, but I have not been able to find out who built it.

Just beyond it we come to the river and the foundation of the mill. There must have been a mill here for centuries, part of the time of mills as Corbally Mills are always referred to in the plural. Life and activity must have centred here, where now there are only a few stones. Here the Bindons (Bindens) built a mill. The Bindons must have been related to the Bindons, as there was a Bindon Alton,

THE BINDON MANSION

There is a picturesque description of the Bindon mansion: "A long two-storey building having very stone walls and a roof furnished with large dormer windows. The dwelling stood embowered in the shade of shady trees, and boughs and vines of great girth and height lined the roadway leading to the river." Maybe someone can tell us whereabouts this mansion was.

The undershot wheel of their mill, which was built on their land, was revolving by means of a wide deep stream, which, on leaving the mill, curved to the right and flowed into the river at the "slip" opposite the "liberty stone." I suppose this stone was to mark the liberties of Limerick, but I wonder is it still there, and what was it like?

The wheat for their mill was carried in lighters on the incoming tide from an emporium near the Custom House to a wharf built near the mill. The flour was brought back by the lighters on the outgoing tide to the city. When Park Bridge was built the river route to and from the city became easier, and horses and carts took their place.

GABBET'S GROVE

Later Gabbets became the tenants in Parsonage for the use of the mill, and a long narrow strip of land reaching from the "fall" in the Salmon Weir, which they leased. They reconstructed and widened the mill stream as it can be seen today, except now it is clogged with weeds. The long narrow strip of land between the mill stream and river was laid out and planted, and a cottage built on it. It became known as Gabbet's Grove.

The present mill dam is built just into the river towards Clancy for 600 yards, and now forms part of the new swimming pool. It is a triangular shaped construction of limestone, which was carried in lighters from quarries further upstream. The broad base rests on the river bed, and its apex consists of large limestone blocks clamped together with strong iron bands. This dam is the utmost bound of the Shannon estuary.

The mill dam was constructed when the "new" mill was being built. The milling business then came under the management of J. N. Russell and Sons probably about 1800. A great number of men found steady employment there. The mills kept on working day and night the whole year round, Sundays excepted. When the American roller system was introduced, revolutionising the production of flour, this mill was closed down.

WHO BUILT LAX WEIR

From here we can see the Lax Weir stretching across the river to Parson and St. Thomas Island. It is probable that the Lax Weir was built by the Normans but there is a strong tradition told by the Abbey fishermen that it was built in the 1100s by the Dominican Friars, whose convent reached from Parson to the Nunnery to the King's Island. This building at the time being too small to entertain the number of candidates offering, the Priors of the Order with a view to accommodating them, built a school college for them in St. Thomas Island, and at Ruskin. The students of St. Thomas' Island which then abounded with plenty of wood, betook themselves to the erection of the weir, and succeeded in forming a sort of basket or crib by means of which they were able to take such quantities of salmon as enabled them to supply not only their own tables, but the tables of every religious community in Limerick, including the nobility. But as the Dominican Order did not come to Limerick till 1217 this tradition seems to have no foundation. At the same time in 1185 John granted the Cathedral 4 ploughlands which extended to the Salmon Weir. Thirty years later, the Bishop surrendered the Salmon Weir and some adjoining lands to the Crown, though the tithes of the weir and mill were still reserved to the priories of the treasurer of St. Patrick's parish.

A LONG HISTORY

There is a long and complicated history to the Lax Weir but I am only touching on it.

In 1821 it was neglected and abandoned, and the Corporation, to whom it then belonged, rented it to Thomas Little for £50 a year. In 1831, Poole Gabbet leased it for £300 a year. When he died in 1851 Wm. MacMahon, of Portlaoise, took it over. In 1855 the Corporation sold their interest in the salmon fishing which were required by Alexander Banbury, of Drominey.

Today the salmon go up the tail race and can be seen jumping out of the water at certain seasons.

The Old Weir of Callaghbolane, which I mentioned at Park, stood half a mile above the Salmon Weir where Athlunkard Bridge now spans the river.

HENRY VIII ENQUIRY

There is a report of an enquiry regarding Crown property in Limerick in the reign of Henry VIII, which says that "there belongeth to the said castle 10/- a yearly rent of the old weir which lieth on the east side of Corbally." Now the old can sometimes be seen at the end of Athlunkard, and the salmon jumping in the tail race.

Across the river from the new swimming pool can be seen the ruined Church of Kilquade, the Church of St. Cuan, and the graveyard with large yew trees. When I used to get to it the little road leading to it turned into a river of mud, and as I could find no ford through it I had to turn back. There must have been a church from very early Christian times, from soon after St. Patrick's visit to Sionland, I think. In Kilquade graveyard is the grave of William the traitor, who showed the Willimite flag across the river.

FIRST TO DRIVE A CAR

Where the Limerick Estate now was Gibson's large house recently pulled down, St. Clare Hospital was celebrated as being one of

"Here lies the body of Philip, the traitor."

Who lived a fisherman and died a deceiver."

A curse was put on the family and it was prophesied that the genus would never grow on his grave.

The parish of St. Patrick, originally, extends across the Shannon to the opposite side of the river. As this boundary was fixed before there was a bridge, there must have been a ford to give easy communication. The name Athlunkard means the camp of the ford. There is mention centuries ago of a northern chief fording the Shannon near Limerick, on his way to Cratloe and of Muireachairb, avoiding Limerick, when the Danes were in their prime and fording the river here.

Here in the time of the siege of 1689 the Williamite forces persevered till they were shown the ford. Richard Hayward says in his book of the River Shannon that one night William's soldiers appeared at the house of Moalabs, bearing with them a lot of gold, a black and red, and crimsoned Maude, asked him whether he preferred riches in life, or honour in immediate death. He chose the gold and left the English soldiers down the river to a spot where they could pass over. At this spot is a great rock where the soldiers fixed chains to support a bridge.

This rock is known as Carrig na Chauragh, the rock of the chain.

ST. THOMAS'S ISLAND

But to return to St. Thomas's Island. You can see the ruins of a house on it with a high stone garden wall. This was the residence of J. Tuthill, Esq., later a gentleman bred on the island who only came to the mainland on Saturday, for fear of being served with writs on his debts on a week day.

The last inhabitants were a pair of bank clerks, who set up home there. This worked satisfactorily till one stormy night, when the flood they could not possibly reach house and they had to find shelter in Limerick. Now you can see sheep grazing there.

We now come to that magnificient structure, Athlunkard Bridge. Its building was begun in June, 1826 and finished in December, 1828. Before this a wealthy gentleman named Kennedy undertook the building of a bridge across the Shannon a short distance downstream from where this stands. Unfortunately the winter floods swept away the half-finished erection. It is said that the roadway leading to where it was to have been still will be traced on both sides of the river while two arches remain on the Corbally side. Then I haven't found them.

There is a stone inscription on one side of the bridge wall. The bridge was designed and built by James George, Richard and Architects, commenced June, 1826, finished, December, 1828.

And on the opposite wall the bridge was erected by commissioners, now under an act of the IV. of George the IV. Thomas S. Rice, Esq., M.P., for the City of Limerick, James and George Hall Architects, commenced June, 1826.

These commissioners became responsible for the upkeep of the bridge as well.

When it was opened first a toll bridge for a short time, and you can see the little toll house at the Limerick side end of it.

THE SHANNON FAMILY

Early last century the Shannon family enter the history of Corbally. These Shannons was a substantial merchant in Cormac's Row, where he made a fortune in iron and metal stores. He was ambitious to get into society, but as a business man was dubious. However, in 1826 he bought the Coffey Estate from Col. William Coffey, Macmillan for £22,000, and so became a landed gentleman. He built a very beautiful house which you know now as the Catholic Chapel, Palace, stretching beside Minihan's Bridge. He was evidently an active man, and he and his wife built several large houses standing on their own grounds.

There is a quotation in what is said to be the original notes from their foundations to be approached by wide stately carriage drives through lawns and green pastures, orchards and gardens and young plantations were being planted which, in the course of a few years, would enhance the beauty of the surroundings.

Anyways, whenever you go to Corbally, you see the most attractive road with their backs to the road and the front facing mostly to the river, looking across over cliffs. It is said that the present bridge is 100 yards long, which shows an enormous amount of work. However, he tried to compensate the owners by giving them compensation on his building and estate scheme. In 1831 he was elected Mayor and it was during his term of office that Corbally was brought within the city boundaries. Six months after his election in May, when pronouncing an address in favour of the Poor, O'Connell, he died suddenly while sitting in "Mayor's Chair" and was buried in St. Mary's Cemetery.

He was succeeded by his son, Alexander, who became a member of the Corporation in 1834, and was elected Mayor in 1840. He was succeeded by his son, Alexander, who became a member of the Corporation in 1834, and was elected Mayor in 1840.

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the first men to drive a motor car in Limerick.