

# DROMCOLLOGHER ~“the fine place we have there”

Dromcollogher, one of the best known towns in Co. Limerick, lies some nine miles south-east of Newcastle West and about one mile from the Cork border. Percy French, author of many popular songs such as “The mountains of Mourne” and “Come back, Paddy Reilly”, composed a song about Dromcollogher which begins:

*Have you ever been to Dromcollogher? You have not? - now I declare  
You ought to have been to Dromcollogher and seen the fine place we have there.*

And a fine place Dromcollogher still remains.

The most usual spelling of the name of the town is Dromcollogher, even though the official spelling is Dromcolliher. In this article we shall adhere to the most widely used spelling, Dromcollogher. The origin of the name Dromcollogher is not very clear.

The standard work on the place names of Co. Limerick, *Contae Luimnigh* (prepared by the Place names section of the Ordnance Survey, and published in 1990) gives the original Irish form as Druim Collchailli, which, in modern Irish, would be rendered Drom Collchoille, meaning the Ridge of the Hazelwood. But the first example of the use of the name Druim Collchailli, which is dated to about 1160, and given in *Contae Luimnigh*, is followed by the words “risa n-ápar Áni Cliach”, meaning “which is called Áni Cliach”. But Áni Cliach is the modern Knockainy. Many people maintain that Dromcollogher was never known as Druim Collchailli, or Drom Collchoille, only Drom Collachair.

Westropp (*Ancient Churches in the County of Limerick*) gives the form Drumcollechaellor as occurring as early as 1201. Despite giving the form Druim Collchailli as the original Irish form of Dromcollogher, the compilers of *Contae Luimnigh* obviously bow to popular usage and nominate Drom Collachair as the official Irish form of the name for modern use. The element Collachair in the name may have something to do with hazel (coll), or it may be a personal name.

The ruins of a medieval church in the local burial ground would indicate that this church, which was dedicated to St. Bartholomew, must have served a colony of people in the area. There is a record of the church of Dromcollogher having been destroyed “in the war of 1302”, whatever war that happened to be! It is likely that the present ruined church in the burial ground replaced the one destroyed.

After the defeat of the Munster Geraldines by the English in 1583, the Dromcollogher area was part of a huge tract of Geraldine lands in West Limerick that was confiscated and granted to the English Planter family of Courtenay. About the year 1640, the then Courtenay landlord received a patent for the holding of a weekly market and annual fair in Dromcollogher. A village of Dromcollogher was very likely in existence by then, the village being a creation of the Courtenays.

A plan of Dromcollogher from 1709, drawn up for the owners of the Courtenay estate, is mentioned by Patrick J. O'Connor in his invaluable work, *Exploring Limerick's Past*. Dr. O'Connor says the plan shows Dromcollogher as “small, schematic and compact, with winding streets focusing on a triangular green...” and he tells us that contemporary written remarks interpreting the plan “attest to the presence of ‘about 12 mud wall’d thatcht houses and about 18 cabins’”. Dr O'Connor comments: “This is a settlement which exhibits all the hallmarks of a plantation town or village with its finely made triangular green and curvilinear streets focusing on to it...”

Lewis, writing about Dromcollogher parish in his *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, published in 1837, says: “...about one fourth is under tillage, producing excellent crops, and the remainder is meadow and pasture land; the hills are cultivated nearly to their summits, and there is neither waste land nor bog; they are on the south side of the village, forming a natural boundary between the counties of Limerick and Cork ... The village is a constabulary police station, and has a daily penny post to Charleville. Fairs are held on 15 March, 2 May, 17 June, 24 August, 5 November and 3 December ... The chapel is a small plain edifice”.

The Courtenays were very tolerant landlords in the matter of religion, even in the time of the Penal Laws against Catholicism. There was a Catholic chapel in Dromcollogher in 1710; and a notice advertising





the sale of the interest of several farms, part of Sir William Courtenay's estate, which appeared in the Munster Journal of 3 January 1751, stated that proposals would be received "at the new Market House in Newcastle or at the new Mass House at Dromcollogher". The Catholic chapel that Lewis refers to was built in the 1820's.

The first co-operative creamery in Ireland was established in Dromcollogher in 1889. The old creamery is now a museum. It has been stripped of all modern equipment, and a steam boiler, separator, butter churn,

pipeline and shafting used at the turn of the century have been installed. A Heritage Centre being built adjacent to the creamery, will house agricultural-related equipment.

The name Dromcollogher became known all over the world in the autumn of 1926 as a result of a disastrous fire that swept through an improvised cinema in the town on Sunday night, 5 September, of that year. Forty-eight people died in the fire. All their names are inscribed on the tall Celtic cross that marks their resting place in the Catholic church grounds. The church, renovated in recent times, has two very attractive glass walled aisles, with beautifully-wrought engravings, and texts in Irish and English, on the glass. The cinema fire is recalled in one of the engravings; another with a local theme

depicts the Dromcollogher Co-operative Creamery of 1889; another still has the Arms of Dr. Jeremiah Newman, Bishop of Limerick, and a native of Dromcollogher. Most of the engravings have religious themes. The texts include a verse from the Offertory Hymn in the O Riada Mass, beginning *Ag Críost an síol*.

Part of the spacious triangular green in the centre of Dromcollogher has been designated a Garden of Remembrance to all those who strove or fell in the cause of Irish freedom. In 1968 Dromcollogher won the premier All-Ireland Glór na nGael award as being the town that had done most in the previous twelve months to promote the use of the Irish language. President de Valera presented the award in the presence of a very large gathering assembled round a platform in the Garden of Remembrance.

It comes as a surprise to many people to learn that the best-known product of Dromcollogher is Dresden porcelain. The original Dresden industry, established by Anton Mueller in Volstedt, Germany, was destroyed in World War II. After the war, Anton's grandniece and her husband, Oskar Saar, came to Ireland, and in 1962 they set up a factory in Dromcollogher.

From the factory, which employs some fifty highly-skilled workers, specially commissioned pieces have gone to the White House, and to Limerick city for presentation to Pope John Paul II on the occasion of his visit to that city. Each of the beautifully delicate pieces is stamped with the traditional Mueller-Volstedt trademark, with, underneath, the words, "Irish Dresden".

So, to partly re-echo Percy French, if you haven't been to Dromcollogher, 'tis time you went there to see and savour all that the place has to offer.

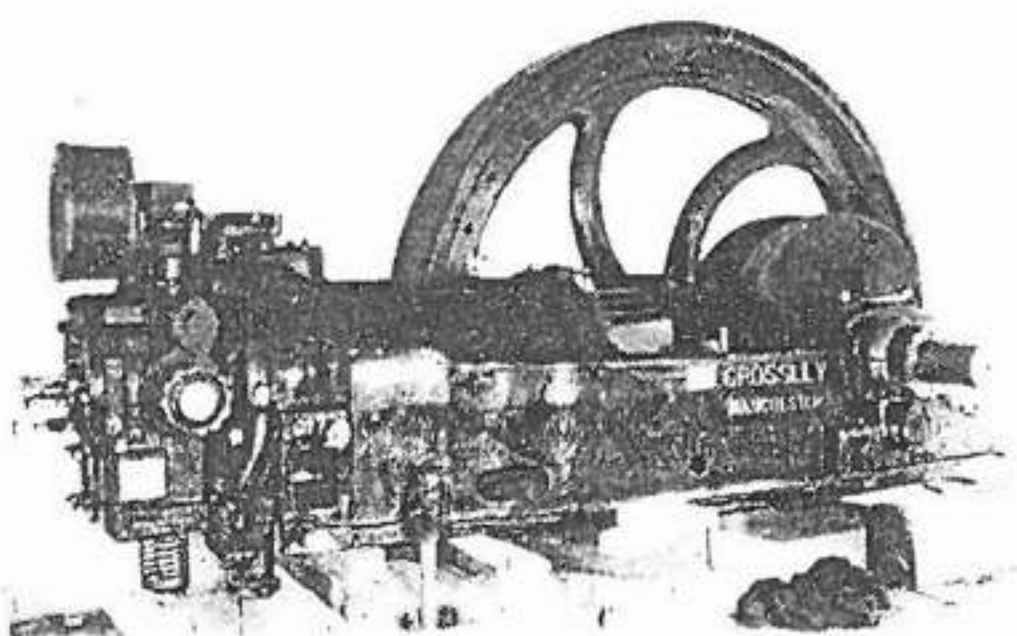
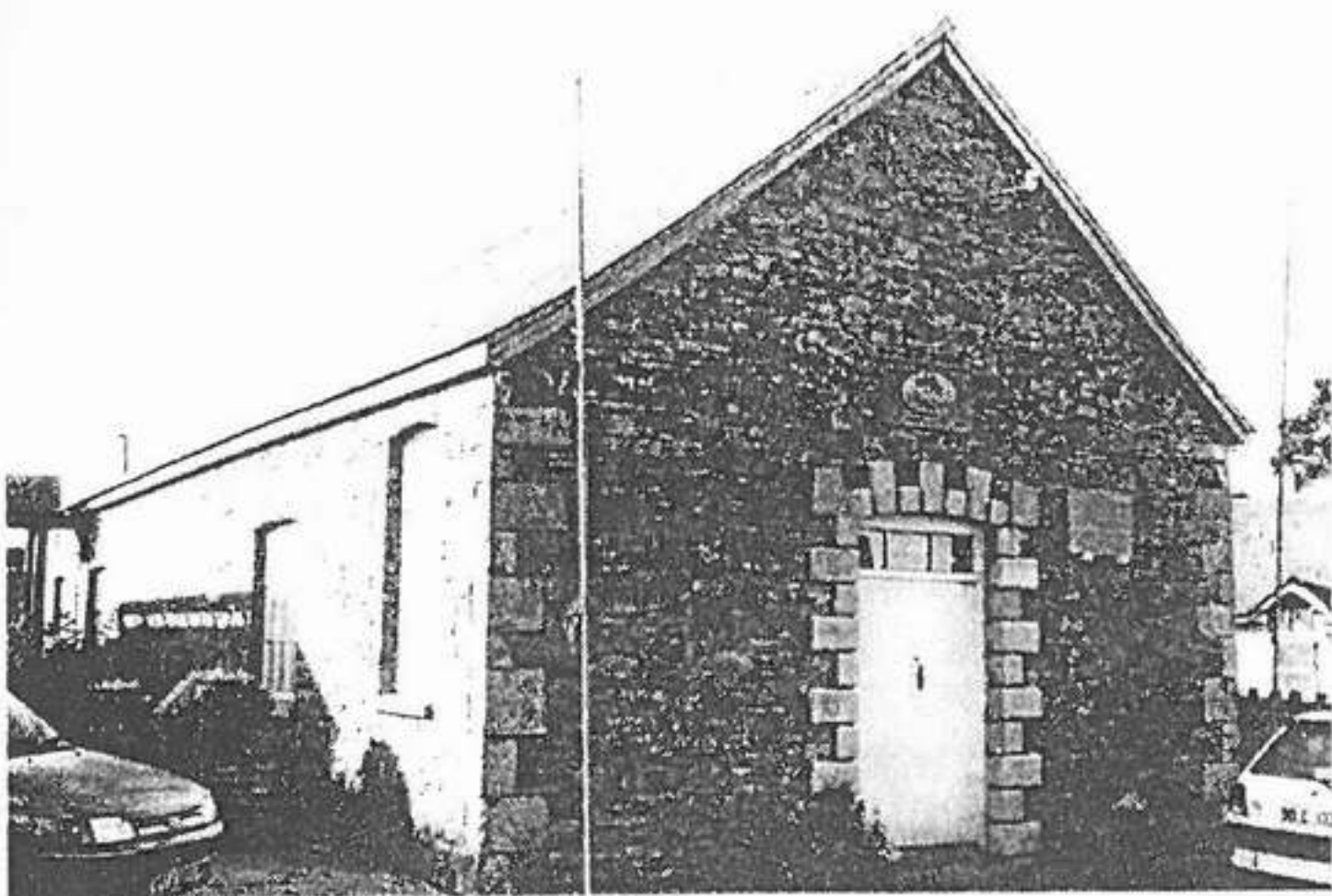


Photo Page 46: A porcelain figurine from the huge range exquisitely crafted at Irish Dresden, Dromcollogher.  
 Photo Page 47: (top) The creamery of Ireland's first co-operative society now a museum, at Dromcollogher.  
 (bottom) The old Crossley power plant for the creamery on display at the museum.

3) County Limerick: It's People & Places  
Maureen Doighe.