

ODDS AND ENDS

AN MANGAIRE SUGACH

Magic in Knocklong

THERE was a time when I'd get more parish journals from West Limerick than from East Limerick; this year, however, the majority of such journals came from East Limerick — Fedamore, Doon, Kilbenny-Anglesboro and Knocklong-Glenbrohane. Today I am dealing with the journal from Knocklong-Glenbrohane, a parish that is in the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly. A large part of East Limerick is in the archdiocese of Cashel and Emly, and I have a feeling that the Limerick parishes in the archdiocese are not as well known by the people of Limerick diocese as are the parishes of their own dioceses.

The boundaries of the dioceses were drawn before counties came into existence, and in most, if not all, cases the diocesan boundaries were made to coincide with the boundaries of the tuatha, the ancient territorial units of Gaelic Ireland. The diocese of Limerick, for example, is coterminous with the old and very important tuath of Ui Fidhgeinte.

But to get back to the parish of Knocklong-Glenbrohane — I think all my readers know where Knocklong is situated. Knocklong is well known for a number of reasons, among them the daring rescue of Sean Hogan at its railway station in May 1919. Glenbrohane comprises that part of the parish which lies south of Knocklong.

Fr. Sean O Duinn, OSB, Glenstal Abbey, contributes a fascinating article to the Knocklong-Glenbrohane Journal. The article, which is entitled "Knocklong in Ancient Saga", gives a summary of a wonderful tale of mystery and magic called Forbhais Droma Daimhghaire. Translated, those Irish words mean "The Siege of Knocklong", Drom Daimhghaire (the Hill of the Shouting Crowd) being a name given to the Hill of Knocklong during

the siege of which the story tells.

The sole surviving manuscript containing the ancient Irish epic, Forbhais Droma Daimhghaire, is contained in the Book of Lismore, an invaluable collection of Irish manuscripts dating from the 15th century which was found in 1814 in a secret recess in Lismore Castle. The story is written in mediaeval Irish, and there is evidence in the Book of Leinster that it was known at least as early as the 12th century.

Fr. sean O Duinn, the author of the article in the Knocklong-Glenbrohane Journal, produced a modern Irish version of the tale, together with an English translation, which was published by the Mercier Press in 1992.

The story tells how Cormac Mac Airt, Ard Ri, or High King, of Ireland, invaded Munster with the intention of extracting taxes from its people. Apart from his formidable army, the Ard Ri brought with him a group of magic-working women warriors. He pitched camp on the Hill of Knocklong. Fiachta Moilleathan, the Munster king, marched against him, but soon Cormac's magic-working women warriors wrought havoc on Fiacha's army. The final blow came when Cormac had his druids dry up all the wells, streams and rivers in Fiacha's territory.

In desperation Fiacha appealed to the great druid, Mogh Roith, who lived on Valentia Island, to come to his aid. He came. First, he cast a spear into the air, and where the point of the spear sank in the ground a torrent of water gushed forth. "Then Mogh Roith lit a druidic fire to the south of the hill and sang a spell calling on the wind from the south to carry the flames northwards so that Cormac Airt and his army would have to flee before them. A fierce conflagration followed, sometimes rising to the clouds, sometimes

searing the vegetation on the ground. Mogh Roith could be seen rising in the air and fanning the flames as Cormac and his army fled for their lives out of Munster back to Tara having failed to collect any taxes."

Mary Murphy writes a very fine article on The Ballingarry Moat. The Ballingarry in question is a townland in the Glenbrohane part of the parish of Knocklong-Glenbrohane. 'Moat', of course, is the term commonly used in Co. Limerick for those ancient earthworks known elsewhere as ringforts or lisses. These moats or ringforts were the farmsteads of early times in Ireland, the dwelling house and out offices — such as they were — being, in practically all cases, constructed of wood.

The Ballingarry Moat was excavated over a period of three years in the early 1950s by John Hunt (whose priceless collection of archaeological and art treasures will be housed in the Hunt Museum in Limerick), and Professor Sean P. O Riordain and Michael J. O Kelly. Many local people were employed in the excavations.

Mary Murphy tells us that the remains of a rectangular medieval house were found on the summit of the moat, and that evidence was found of several successive houses built over the remains of previous structures. The archaeologists believed that the moat was built about the 8th century, and that it continued to be the site of a habitation until the 14th century.

Mary Murphy further states that many other finds at the Ballingarry site provided information on the periods of occupation and the customs and way of life of the people who lived on the moat. Fragments of pottery, some coins and combs, fashioned from animal bones, were found. The combs had intricate designs and needle point serrations. A small vessel was found

which may have been used for melting bronze; also found were tow pins of definite Norman design. Other finds included a beautifully designed spear, and a brooch of the Tara brooch type.

Among other items of a historical nature in the Journal is one giving a list of the townland names in the parish, with their correct Irish forms and their meanings. There is also a list of the inscriptions on the headstone in Laraclaw burial ground in Glenlara townland. The oldest inscription commemorates a de Burgo who died in 1736. And there are interesting contributions about the recent renovation of Knocklong Catholic Church, and the proposed building of a new church in Glenbrohane.

Thady Ryan shares with us his Reflections on coming back for a visit to his old home at Scarteen from his new home in New Zealand, also named Scarteen. Drama, we learn from the Journal, is thriving in the parish, with active groups in Knocklong and Ballinvreena. The latter group call themselves the Canavour Players. Canavour is the name of a famous local well; it is, in fact, the well that is mentioned as being a well of magic origin in the article on "Knocklong in Ancient Saga", by Fr. Sean O Duinn, which appears in the parish journal.

Tom Duhig tells about a poetry reading group in Knocklong that was a kind of modern cuirt eigse. And there are items on Glenbrohane school, by Michael Kirby; on Taize, by Pauline Walsh; on his first twelve months as a priest, by Fr. T. O'Brien; and many many more. There are contributions by school children, reports on parish activities and organisations, and numerous pictures.

Knocklong-Glenbrohane parish Journal costs £3; and I can recommend it as a very good read.