

Mungret

Temple Mungret - Dooradoyle

MUNGRET may derive its name from *Muine Gairid*, the Short Hill, but this is "a mere etymological guess" on the part of John O Donovan in 1840. In earlier times it was known as *Imungram* and *Moungairid*. John O'Connor, the author of *Mungret History and Antiquities* (1971), accepts Mungairit as an acceptable form because it has the sanction of antiquity and believes it is derived from *Mong Ghairid*, the Short Swamp or Morass, an apt description of the land between Mungret and Limerick.

MUNGRET MONASTERY was one of Ireland's earliest and greatest foundations. John O'Donovan claimed that an abbey was erected here in the fourth century long before the coming of St. Patrick and his appointment of St. Nessan as prior here. According to the long lost *Psalter of Cashel* this monastery had

six churches within its walls and, exclusive of numerous scholars, 1500 monks, of whom 500 were learned preachers, 500 psalmists, and 500 wholly employed in spiritual exercises. The *Psalter of Cashel* disappeared from Cashel in 1647 after Murrough the Burner O'Brien attacked Cashel and killed 3,000 of its inhabitants. Mungret Monastery was raided and plundered by Viking marauders in 820, 834, 840 and 843. In 908 the king-bishop of Cashel, Cormac MacCuilleánáin, bestowed three ounces of gold and a satin chausible on this foundation. In 1080 the abbey was damaged by fire. Donal MacLoughlin and a raiding party of Ulstermen destroyed Mungret in 1088. The Augustinian rule may have prevailed here during the twelfth century although this has never been proved, nor is there any evidence to support a link with the Dominicans. In 1152 Mungret claimed dioc-

san status as it would have been the obvious centre of what later became the Diocese of Limerick. The Synod of Rathbreasail, however, failed to recognise the claim of Mungret since the city had been established as the O'Brien capital in 1106. No bishops were recorded here during the twelfth century and Brictius, the Bishop of Limerick, received the monastic lands of Mungret from Domhnall Mór O'Brien between 1192 and 1194.

ST. NESSAN, St. Nessan the Deacon, or St. Neasan the Leper, was a disciple of St. Patrick, according to the folklore of the region, but as Nessan did not die until 551 or 561 this is extremely unlikely. He is also believed to have been a disciple of St. Ailbe of Emly.

BAUNACLOKA TOWNLAND may derive its name from *Bán a Chloiche*, the Bawn of the Stones or Stone Huts, as the earliest



Mungret Abbey.



The Oldest Church.

monastery probably consisted of a series of *clochans*, huts made of stone, wood or mud and wattle, in which the monks lived, clustered around a small church and other communal buildings located within an enclosure.

ST. NESSAN'S CHURCH, or the Monastery Church, is located on the edge of the road. It contains a monumental east window dating from the twelfth century but the building is much older, possibly dating from the tenth century, and may have been erected before 1100. This tall building with its high walls also contains two blocked-up windows in its south wall and a lintelled doorway in the west wall.

THE OLDEST CHURCH on this site is also the smallest. This is located a short distance south of St. Nessan's Church and is a narrow rectangular building containing two small windows in the south wall and a similar window in the eastern gable. The western gable and original doorway have disappeared, replaced by a modern wall. John O'Connor in *Mungret History and Antiquities* believes it was constructed between 800-1100.

MUNGRET ABBEY was built between 1251 and 1272. This is the largest and most important of the three ruined churches, and is divided into three parts. The eastern section, or chancel, dates from the thirteenth century; the nave is of doubtful date as no details by which it could be dated are *in situ*; and the

western portion probably dates from the fifteenth century as the workmanship is in the style of that period. A Gwynn and R.N. Hadcock described this medieval parish church as partly-fortified in *Medieval Religious Houses Ireland* (1988). The residential quarters, and the unusual square tower at the western end of the church, date from the fifteenth century. The tower, on the northern side of the priests' residence, contains a staircase and belfry, although its topmost storey is more modern than the rest of the building. This church, known as the Abbey, was later used for Protestant worship and remained in use as a parish church until 1822. In 1880 the three ruined churches were vested in the Board of Works and repairs were carried out on them in 1932. The graveyard is still in use. A few yards from the north-eastern end of the church is an old tombstone erected in memory of James Daly (1750-1810), the Loughmore poet, better known as Seamus O Dálaigh, a tailor of Croom. The inscription on this stone is in Irish. Another tombstone about fifteen yards east of the eastern gable of the church was possibly erected in 1811 in memory of Robert MacNamara. This, too, carries an Irish inscription, as well as a crucifixion scene showing the instruments of the Passion. The most interesting inscription in the graveyard, however, is that on the Holohan Stone. This unique memorial

is twelve yards south-west of the south-western corner of the abbey. It depicts a Crucifixion scene on the front, with the legend I.N.R.I. above it, and carries an inscription in both Roman and Ogham lettering beneath. The dedication on the back of the tombstone is in English and commemorates John Holohan (1752-1809), his mother and his brother. I was unable to verify if these monuments still existed. The Holohan and MacNamara tombstones may have been placed in Mungret Abbey which is under the care of the Office of Public Works. The keys of two of these churches, however, are kept in Killarney. A modern *cillín* can be seen in the graveyard of the Abbey

HOLOHAN, *O hUallacháin*, the descendant of *Uallachán*, the diminutive of *Uallach* or the Proud, the name of several distinct families in Offaly and Thomond. Variants of this surname include *O Holohan*, *O Houlihan*, *O Huolighane*, *O Holeghane*, Hoolihan, Houlihan, Holland, in West Cork, and Nolan, in Mayo and Roscommon.

THE MONKS' MILL, or Shannillian Mill, was located about halfway between Mungret and Limerick. By 1971 only one wall remained.

MUNGRET CASTLE, or Castle Mungret, was mentioned as early as 1201. Part of its basement still survives beneath a farmhouse south of the modern corcass road to Limerick Docks. Bishop de Rupefort mentioned the castle in 1336 and it contained two towers in 1583, when it was mentioned in another account. Bishop Adams was in possession before 1621 and in 1655 David Roche and H. Bindon held Castle Mungret and Temple Mungret respectively. The castle remained in a good state of preservation until the early nineteenth century when part of it was demolished. By 1840 only an arch over the ground floor and one wall remained.

THE MANOR OF MUNGRET comprised the lands granted to Briccius by Domhnall Mór O'Brien. In 1201 Donoh O'Brien, as Bishop of Limerick, set up a commission, consisting of twelve Irishmen, twelve Vikings, and twelve Anglo-Normans, to inquire into Church possessions. Colm O'Regan was given the church and district of Mungret by Donoh O'Brien, before 1207. About 1216 Edmund, the Bishop of Limerick, received a royal grant of *Omayl*, possibly the lands of the O'Malleys, near Mungret. When Hubert de Burgo was Bishop of Limerick (1223-1250) he got permission from King Henry III (1223-1272) to have a weekly market, on Tuesdays, here. By the time Hubert died in 1250 the main ecclesiastical positions in the Diocese of Limerick were held by Anglo-Norman clergymen.

THE BRETEUIL LAWS were privileges bestowed on the town of Breteuil, in Normandy, by William the son of Osbair, later the Earl of Hereford. These rights, the *Consaietudines de Breteuil*, were conferred on the burgesses of Mungret by Robert of Emly when he became Bishop of Limerick (1251-1272). This gave them the right to choose their own rulers; hold their own courts; fix their annual rents at a set rate of five pence for each tenure of land in the town; gave them freedom to transfer ownership of tenancies within the town; and the right to levy fines or establish punishments for all but the more serious offences. The burgesses were also allowed a certain independence from the lord of the manor as they could limit the period for which he could have credit, deny him any rights or wardship or marriage, and restrict him from imprisoning burgesses. These inducements attracted a lot of Anglo-Norman settlers into the area, particularly from the Welsh boroughs.

THE PEOPLE OF MUNGRET were divided into three classes by the fourteenth century; the native *Betagi*, *Betags* or *Biadhtaigh*, tenants who were classed as serfs until Bishop Rochefort recognised them as free tenants in 1336; the free Anglo-Norman tenants; and the burgesses of the *vill* of Mungret.

THE LOFTUS FAMILY were associated with the area from an early date. Folklore relates that, at one stage 100 of the monks in the monastery were named John Loftus and the road from the monastery to Raheen Cross was known as Loftus Road, and was marked as such in the 1844 *Ordnance Survey Map*. The surname Loftus, *de Lochtús*, *de Lofthouse* or *Loftis* is found mainly in Wexford and may have been of Danish or Viking origin as it was derived from *Lofft* or *Lloft*. The surname is also found in England and Normandy but there is a possibility that the family, in Limerick, may have been of Irish origin. In 1434 the *Papal Letters* mention the excommunication of John Loftus who was later appointed Bailiff of Limerick. Piers Loftus served as mayor in the same century. Another Piers Loftus of Mungret sought a pardon from Queen Elizabeth after the Desmond Rebellion. The Loftus family appear to have held the lands of Dooradoyle, Ballykeefe, Sluggary and Gouldavoher for which they paid an annual rent of £80, in the early seventeenth century. The name does not appear in the *Civil Survey* list of proprietors in 1641.

TEMPLE MUNGRET contained one plowland with a thatched house, fifteen cabins, four ruined churches and other stone walls in 1654 when its lands stretched from Mungret to Dooradoyle and from the Shannon to

Ballycummin. Some time before 1865 a coin hoard was discovered in a quarry near the churches. It was hidden around the middle of the tenth century and is the earliest Viking hoard found in Thomond. It contained eight Anglo-Saxon pennies dating from about 905 to around 950; a rare Viking coin struck at York for one of the Hiberno-Norse kings about 942; and seven small ingots of silver. A bell of "very rude workmanship" was found at Loughmore about 1837 and twelve years later a bronze bell was discovered near Mungret Abbey.

MUNGRET MANOR was profitable for the Protestant Bishop of Limerick. On 1 January 1871 an Act of Parliament disestablished and disendowed the Church of Ireland. At that time the bishop owned 3,700 acres of land here from which he derived an annual income of £2,100 in rents and fines. Colonel Gough of Fethard held the former Loftus estate, of 1,570 acres, from the Bishop for an annual rent of £447. He held 100 acres for his own use and sublet the rest at £2 to £4 an acre. Sir David Roche leased 700 acres at Ballycummin from the Bishop, as well as the lands of Ballyhourigan, which he held in perpetuity from the diocese. The Compton family leased 185 acres for £144 and sublet it for £2 to £3 an acre and in 1868 Edward L. Griffin leased the lands of Ballymacashel and Castle Mungret which had been leased to Robert Wogan Studdert in 1850. Tenants at will occupied farms in the townlands of Rathmale and Loughanleigh. These holdings varied from 6 to 84 acres and were let at an average rent of £1 an acre.

MUNGRET COLLEGE evolved from a college and model farm established by the trustees of the Bindon estates after they had purchased 70 acres of land at Drumdarrig in 1852. This model farm closed in 1878 but the college re-opened as a non-denominational school on 23 September 1880. Lord Emly, First Baron Maunsell, and Postmaster-General, became a Catholic through the efforts of a French Jesuit refugee, M. L'Abbe l'Heritier. He used his influence to acquire the model farm for the Jesuits. In 1882 Fr. W. Ronan became the first rector of Mungret College. Lord Emly later lost his fortune, his mortgaged property, and his home, Tervoe House. The college closed over a century later but its front entrance is still adorned by the pillared portico from Tervoe House.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLARS were an international military order established to protect pilgrims after the recapture of Jerusalem in 1099. They operated under the Augustinian rule until 1128 when they adopted a rule similar to that of the Cistercians. The order was introduced into Ireland before 1180 and their

chief house, or preceptory, was located in Clontarf. They were similar to the Knights Hospitallers in many respects but the rivalry between both orders was largely the reason for the fall of Jerusalem in 1187 and the capture of Acre in 1291. After 1312 all of the Irish possessions of the Knights Templars should have become the property of the Knights Hospitallers but this matter was still unresolved in 1329. The Knights Templars are believed to have had a preceptory in Temple Mungret which later became the mansion house of the prior. Samuel Lewis claims that their establishment here was granted to the Augustinians. A hospital for lepers was located on the ruins of a hermitage opposite Ballincurra, near the eastern boundary of the parish in ancient times but no record remains of the founder.

MOUNT MUNGRET was built as the Church of Ireland glebe house in 1832. This is a neat three-storey structure.

THE CHURCH OF IRELAND CHURCH was a small handsome cruciform structure with an octagonal tower. This was built in 1822. It was closed down in 1877 and the roof was removed in 1900.

CONIGAR HOUSE was originally built as a county residence for the Protestant Bishop of Limerick, in 1774. In 1827 a new two-storey farmhouse was built near the old mansion which had fallen into ruin by then. By 1837 Conigar House had been sold to Charles Wilson. *The Griffith Valuation* states that a Mrs. Wilson leased 200 acres at Conigar Farm from the Bishop in 1855. In 1837 Lewis reported that the constabulary police had converted the entrance lodge into a barracks. Conigar is an Anglicised form of *Coinicear*, the Place of Rabbits.

BALLYCUMMIN derives its name from Baile Uí Chomáin, the Townland of Commons, Comane or Hurley.

BALLYCUMMIN HOUSE is a fairly modern castellated house. It is now the property of Joe O'Brien.

DOORADOYLE derives its name probably from *Tuar an Daíl*, the Tribe's Bleach Green. Other explanations given are *Tír an Daill*, the Blind One's Tower, or *Turradh an Daill*, the Blind One's Crypt or Souterrain. The Limerick Regional Hospital is located in Dooradoyle.

THE MORMON CHURCH, in Dooradoyle, was erected in 1982-1983. The building may be new but the Church of the Latter Day Saints, in Limerick, can trace its history back to the dissenting Protestant Palatines of Rathkeale. These Palatines contributed to the establishment of the Mormon faith after they left Ireland to start new lives in England and America during the 1830s and 1840s. A few

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Mormon missionaries arrived into Limerick in the late 1960s. They left but returned to open a meeting-place in Thomas Street, Limerick City, in 1972-1973. The Church of the Latter Day Saints in Limerick had 130 members in March 1989. Robert Kearney was its branch president, or church leader, in that year.

GENEALOGICAL RECORDS play a major role in the Mormon faith. Records are

compiled and kept but not for the usual bureaucratic reasons. Special ceremonies are held in their temples in order to baptise the dead and to "seal families for time and eternity". Temples should not, however, be confused with churches. The nearest Mormon temple, to Limerick, is in London, and the nearest collection of records is in Cork. One of the earliest Mormon churches established outside of America was founded in Rathkeale in the early nineteenth century, by Palatine converts.

SLUGGERY RING FORT is located almost directly behind the Limerick Regional Hospital. This fort, about an acre in size, was polygonal in plan and consisted of two concentric sets of banks and ditches with a third dry-stone built bank on the outside. Dr. Elizabeth Shee, University College Cork, and Liam Irwin, Thomond Archaeological Society, excavated here in 1973 and 1974. They found an ornamented bone comb, a bronze ring-headed pin, nails, pins, iron knives, a central cist-like heart, and numerous post holes and pits. The fort has been preserved and landscaped. *Slogaire* has been translated as a swallower, a glutton, a gulf, a quagmire or as

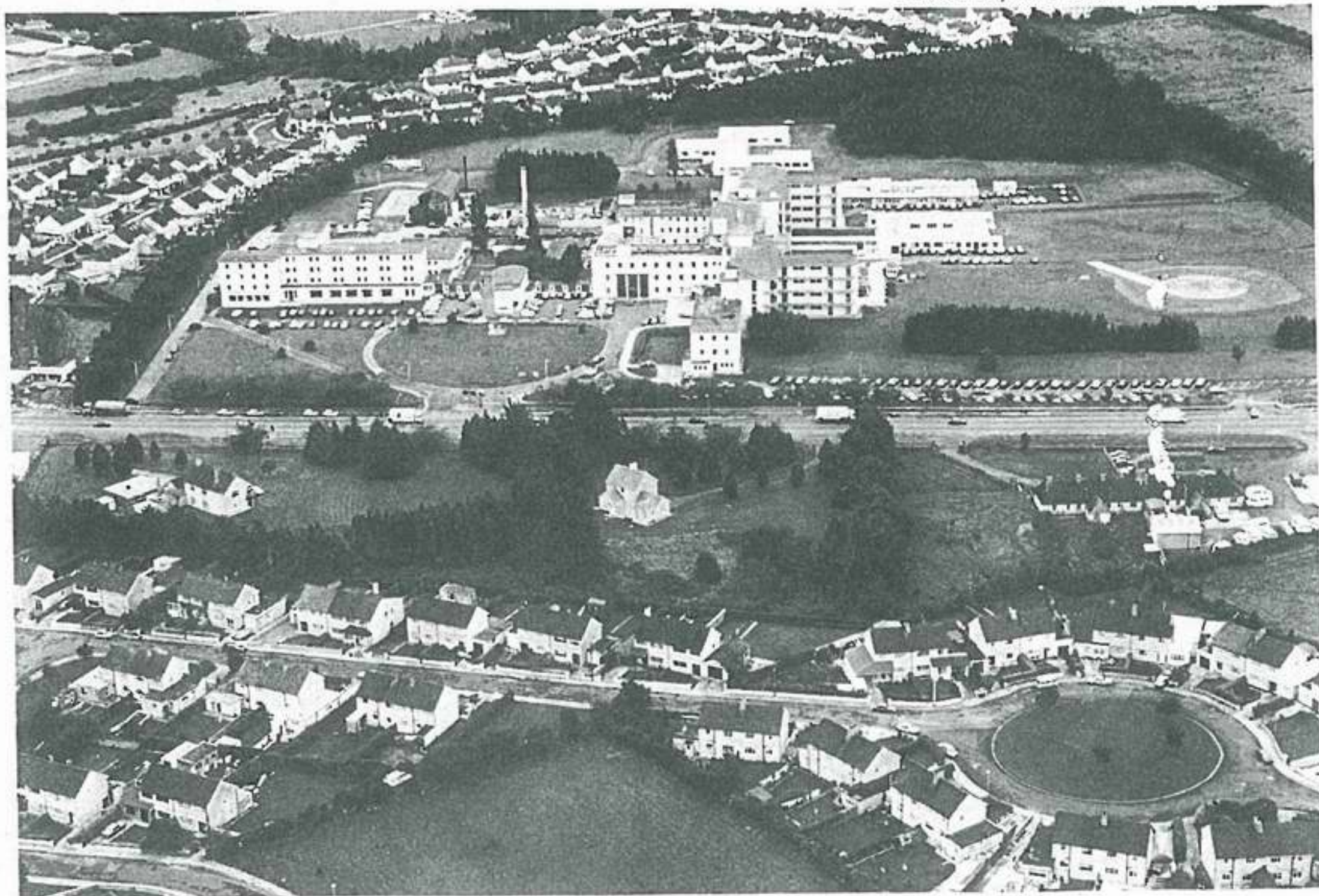
a common river-name.

LOUGHMORE derives its name from *A n Loch Mór*, the Big Lake. This is supposed to be an enchanted lake which disappears every few years. Grattan's Volunteers trained here and it was used for military tattoos or musters into the early twentieth century. Loughmore Catholic church was a small thatched building in 1837 and the parish was known as Loughmore rather than as Mungret because both the church and the priests' residence were located here.

RAHEEN CATHOLIC CHURCH was partly built and roofed by Fr. Jeremiah Halpin, who was parish priest here for only one year, before he died on 5 October 1845. The church was later completed by Fr. Michael Casey and his parishioners in 1862. Between Raheen Cross and Willow Park the remains of another earth fort can be seen in the centre of a built-up area.

SOURCE REFERENCE NUMBERS

- 18 47 48 76 86 120 129
173 186 192 213 227 238 242 252 264 282
P. 225. *The stark landscape on the road to Athea.*
P. 226. *Lough Gur.*
P. 227. *Adare Village.*
P. 228. *Tranquil scene near Dromcolliher.*



Regional Hospital, Dooradoyle.