

GLEANINGS FROM LOCAL HISTORY BY AN OLD OBSERVER

Ballintemple or Churchtown is a little village standing on an eminence some 700 or 800 yards north of the town of Newcastle. The first Church in the district was erected in this village, but there are no written records before the year 1298.

Tradition tells us that the Knights Templars, a semi-religious body, settled in Newcastle some time in the 11th or 12th centuries and built a castle beside the River Arra.

If there was no Church in the locality, the Templars would have built one within or near the protection of the Castle walls. But the fact that the Church with its burial ground and accompanying village is so far away from the Castle leads one to assume that it was in existence before the Castle and the Templars finding a Church ready made, built their Castle on the nearest strong point to the Church, namely the River. In the course of time, another Village taking its name from the Castle viz., Newcastle sprang up around its sheltering walls to challenge and in time, surpass the little Village of Churchtown.

Towards the end of the 12th Century the Normans succeeded the Templars and from that period onwards the Church is constantly mentioned in diocesan and other records. There is a pathetic reference in a Diocesan Return of 1306 which states, 'Church of New Grant, Newcastle, Rathkathlague (Killil-destroy-

The Church was rebuilt but again was destroyed and with it the Castle in 1315 during the Bruce Uprising.

Again the Church was rebuilt and in 1326 the priest in charge was the Reverend Stephen de Clynton. He is the first pastor whose name we know and hundreds of years were to pass before the name of another was disclosed. So Father Stephen has a special significance for us here in Newcastle.

On the 1st March 1410, the Church was dedicated to St. David the Patron Saint of Wales, a Norman gesture this and probably jettisoning some Irish Saint to whom the old Church was formerly dedicated. A few years afterwards, in 1418, the Church is referred to in the famous Black Book of Limerick (now in Maynooth College).

After the defeat of the Desmonds in 1584 their property was confiscated and a contemporary document states: 'The late Earl of Desmond was patron of the Church of Newcastle and Monaghadar and of the Chapel of Temple-

monagh, otherwise Mone Church, the temples of which are wholly devastated except for the walls.'

The overthrow of the Earl of Desmond coincided with the rising vigour of the Reformation and gradually Newcastle became a dual town. The Castle side on the northern bank of the river, with Churchtown in the distance tended to become English and Protestant while the Irish and Catholic congregated on the southern side of the river. The ruined Church in Churchtown was remodelled and Protestant Service conducted there until the middle of the 18th Century when a remove was made to the present site in the square. The Catholics were forbidden to exercise their religion and during the 17th Century nothing is known as to how the spark of religion was kept alight. They must have had some centre, however, secret or small, in which to meet some house in which Mass was celebrated and the pity of it is that no tradition whatever now remains.