

THE PARISH OF MONASTERANENAGH.

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SITUATION. This Parish is in three detached portions in three Baronies; one portion lies in the Barony of Coshma, another in that of Small County and the third in Pobblebrien.

NAME ~~The original name of this Parish was Acreach Beg~~

i.e., the Small Fair, but after the erection of the great Abbey in the 12th century the place took name from it. Mainistir an Aonaich signifies the Abbey of the Fair, i.e., the Abbey of Aonach Beag. For a similar name the reader is referred to the Parish of Nenagh in the Co. of Tipperary, which was originally called Aonach Urmhumhan, i.e., the Fair of Ormond.

Fitzgerald in his History of Limerick has taken some pains to describe the Abbey of Monasteranenagh. I shall insert his words here and correct him in some particulars:-

"In that part of the Parish which lies in the Barony of Pubblebrien is situated the famous Abbey of Neany on the banks of the Camoge River. It is one of the most remarkable Monastic edifices in Munster, both for its structure and history. Its front to the river extends about one hundred and seventy (a) feet, at which side is the entrance (b) by two beautiful arches of polished mountain grit of a reddish colour. These arches are separated by a handsome square pillar of the same materials and they curve off about seven (c) feet of its perpendicular height."

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(a). Its front to the river is at least one hundred and seventy nine feet. The nave being ninety feet in length and the chancel eighty one, and thickness of the walls four feet six inches.

(b). The present entrance is by these arches but certainly this was not the case originally, for these arches originally led into the northern aisle, as is evident from fragments of the walls still remaining. It is highly probable that this building originally extended to the very margin of the River Camoge.

(c). This measurement is wrong, for I have ascertained by measuring the square pillar with a tape that these arches do not curve even at the height of ten feet from the present level of the ground. The square pillar is ten feet eleven and three quarter inches from the present level of the ground to the points where the arches spring. It is shameful to give such incorrect measurements in printed books, but I have found that Fitzgerald has not seen half the places which he describes in this County.

"The chancel is seventy five feet (d) in length; the eastern part, being more elevated than the rest, is formed by one of the finest arches in Ireland, thirty feet (e) in breadth; it is constructed of red grit and its shafts rise from the foundation of the walls of the Abbey to an immense height (f). In the walls of the chancel on either hand two other arches of the same description were formed which are now nearly filled up, and at the east end were the high altar and three beautiful

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Gothic windows of polished red grit rising from the floor to the roof" (g).

(d). The chancel is eighty one feet in length and twenty eight feet in breadth on the inside.

(e). It is only twenty five feet from one shaft to the other. This argues great carelessness in Fitzgerald.

(f). The shafts of this arch are about seventeen feet six inches high. The arch is pointed and about thirty five feet in height from the present level of the floor to the vertex of the arch. It is doubtlessly a most magnificent arch and reflects honor on the race of Brian. I had no idea that the Irish had built such splendid arches before the arrival of the English.

(g). These windows are remarkably high and narrow; the middle, which is the highest, is about twenty seven feet high and only two feet in width. The other two are the same width, but some feet lower.

"The nave has lateral aisles separated from the Chancel by a low Gothic arch; at the west end stood the tower, a noble square structure of great height which has lately fallen. The whole of this majestic edifice occupies more ground than all the buildings on the celebrated Rock of Cashel."

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"Tho' want and wildness reign around
Nor earth give soil, nor echo sound
An awe upon the heart will steal
'Tis holy ground."

The nave of this Abbey is twenty seven feet six inches in breadth on the inside and ninety feet in length. There are two beautiful round-headed windows in the west gable at the height of about sixteen feet from the ground, and the same gable contains a semicircular headed doorway now much disfigured.

This Abbey was evidently injured in the 14th or 15th century and afterwards repaired, when the original beauty of the building suffered much from want of skill in the repairer.

A short distance to the north of this Abbey, are near the south bank of the Camoge River, fragments of the walls of a small Chapel and on the south side of it are outer walls of great extent and to the south east of the chancel, the ruins of a Chapel. The following is written to ridicule Fitzgerald! (See Fitzgerald's History of Limerick).

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The conspicuous Hill of Knockfennell situated in that

part of this Parish belonging to the Barony of Small County, is very well fortified in the Cyclopean style. On its north west pinnacle stands a very strong Cyclopean fort, which is three hundred and sixty feet in circumference. Its wall is ten feet in thickness and built of very large stones nearly three feet every way, regularly fitted to each other and the interstices filled up with small ones, but no cement appears. From this fort down to the Lake of Lough Gur walls of similar construction extend at about sixty paces asunder to the north side of the hill. These walls are connected by others of the same kind.

On the east point of the same hill, which is very high, there is a smaller fort and along which (lies between these two pinnacles (shoulders) of the hill) the remains of walls can be traced terminating in like manner at the lake to the south and deep grounds to the north. On an eminence joining Lough Gur on the east similar fortifications are found surrounded with immense rough rocks, the ascent to which from the lake side is very rugged, difficult and high. Such was one of the strongholds of Brian Boru, who, according to the Irish Historians, fortified Lough Gur and who from being a Provincial Prince of a barren Territory, raised himself to the Monarchy of Ireland! There is nothing on Knockfennell but a small mound on its east point. 386

In the Townland of Rathmore in that part of this Parish belonging to the Barony of Small County are the lofty ruins of the Castle of Rathmore, which is mentioned in the Annals of the VI. Masters at the year 1579 as one of Desmond's Castles. It is a square Castle of remarkable height about seventy feet and measuring thirty feet six inches on the outside from north to south and thirty six feet four inches from east to west. Its walls are six feet nine inches thick and remarkably well built. There seem to have been outworks but they are not now traceable. It is said traditionally that this Castle was stormed by Cromwell, but I have no written historical account of it.

August 10th 1840.
Brugh na Deise.

J. O'Donovan.

Aonach-Beag (now Monasteranenagh) - Annals 4 Masters. 387

A.D. 1579. *** (See Limerick at this year, p.455, for the whole of this article).

With regard to Capt. Maulby, he, after the death of the Lord Chief Justice, proceeded to Limerick to obtain a new supply of Artillery and to procure provisions for his soldiers. From thence he marched to Eas-Gebhtene (Askeaton). On the same day the young sons of the Earl of Desmond came to look

for arms or spoils in the Co. of Limerick and they and the Captain met each other face to face, although they had sought to avoid instead of to meet him. A battle was bravely fought between both parties, in which the Irish army were so resolutely pressed by the Captain's forces that they were finally defeated with the loss of Thomas, the son of John Oge, who was son of John, who was son of Thomas, who was son of the Earl, and Owen, the son of Edmond Oge, who was son of Edmond, who was son of Torlogh Mc Sheehy, and a great number of the constables of the Clan Sheehy, as well as a great many of the forces of the sons of the Earl. Considerable spoils consisting of weapons and military accoutrements were left on this occasion to the Captain's people. This battle was fought at Aonach-Beag. The Captain after this remained almost a whole week at Askeaton, the Geraldines threatening every day to give him battle, although they did not. The Captain destroyed the Monastery of that town and then proceeded to Adaire, where he remained subjugating the people of that neighbourhood until the new Chief Justice, Sir William Pelham, the Earl of Kildare and the Earl of Ormond, came and joined him.

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Gough's Camden:-

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At Monasteranenagh in Poble O'Brien Barony, was a Cistercian Abbey founded 1148 (H. 432, Wilson 163).

Archdall's Mon. Hib., V.II, p.432, R.I.A.
Monasteranenagh (called also Nenay and Maig).

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In the Barony of Poble O'Brien. An Abbey was founded here to the honour of the Virgin Mary, A.D. 1148 or 1151, by O'Brien who furnished it with monks of the Cistercian Order from the Abbey of Mellifont in the Co. of Louth; the Cell of Feal (Abbey-feale) was afterwards annexed to this house.

A.D. 1174. Donatus, Abbot of this House, was a subscribing witness to the grant made by Dermot, King of Munster, to Gill-Abbey in Cork (King p.336).

A.D. 1295. It appears that Adam De Dermogho was Abbot before this year (Id. p.343).

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A.D. 1304. Isiac was Abbot, for we find that on the 7th of March in this year, he granted to John Bathe, the son of Simon, the whole Grange of Grangenan, for the space and term of thirty years, paying annually thereout forty crownogs of bread corn, twenty of peas and beans and twenty of oats, all properly cleansed and winnowed; and also that he should pay suit and service at their Court of Mage twice in every year; and if the said John, his heirs or assigns, should at any time be amerced in the said court, the fine should not exceed sixpence (Id. p.225).

A.D. 1307. William, the Abbot, granted to Robert, Bishop of Limerick, all the land which Laur. Osenyk held from him in Camysheg, for the term of twenty one years at the annual rent of fifty shillings.

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It is recorded that Isaac was Abbot the same year and that in 1311 he alienated several lands belonging to this Abbey.

A.D. 1313. In this year John, the Abbot, petitioned the King to be restored to the lands which Isaac had alienated and which had been seized into the King's hands, this Abbey being a royal foundation (King p.225).

A.D. 1317. The Abbot recovered the Grange of Mahunaun in this County, from Maurice Fitz-Thomas (Id).

A.D. 1365. Henry was Abbot some time before this year (Id p.343).

A.D. 1370. On the tenth of July in this year, Gerald, Earl of Desmond, together with the Lord John Fitz Nicholas, the Lord Thomas Fitz-John, and several of the nobility, were taken prisoners near this Monastery, where many other nobles were slain by O'Brien and Mc Comar of Thomond (Pembrige Ann.).

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A.D. 1579. This year Marshal Malby, at the head of one hundred horse and six hundred foot, defeated two thousand of the Irish; although they fought valiantly at first, yet were two hundred and sixty of them slain, amongst whom we find Dr. Allen, the famous Legate (War. Mon.) from the See of Rome (Cox p.358). The action happened near this Monastery.

The Abbot was a Baron of Parliament. At the general suppression the Abbot of this house was found in possession of the site of the same together with five ploughlands; one adjoining the site called the Ploughland of Abbey; another called Bally M'Straidin, and Grange alias Gransey; two ploughlands called Barmean and one called Boosallyboord; Cloghnamanagh, and with all the tithes, oblations, etc., of the said ploughlands; the entire Parish of Nenay belonging to the said Abbey and extending to the Towns of Granshelath; Cammas; Garranamanagh; Knocknegrally; Cahirduffe; Cloghmenagh; Kilkereby; Bowharany and Lackangrenagh, with the presentation of the aforesaid Rectory, a mill-seat and water-course and weirs for eels and pikes on the River Comeage; six shillings rent issuing yearly from Garranamanagh and £1 and 8d. arising from Grottensillagh (King page 344). Inquisition 8th March XX Q. Elizabeth, finds that the Chappel of Cannis (or Connis) in ye Diocess of Limerick, was appropriated to ye (this) Abbot and was of ye annual value of 13s. and 4d. This Abbey and its possessions were granted to Sir Henry Wallop, Knight. See the Trinitarian Friary, Adaire.

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A.D. 1597. (See Limerick at this year for the whole of this article, page 455).

With regard to Capt. Maulby, he, after the death of the Lord Chief Justice, proceeded to Limerick to obtain a new supply of artillery and to procure provisions for his soldiers. From thence he marched to Eas-Gebhtene (Askeaton). On the same day the young sons of the Earl of Desmond came to look for arms or spoils in the County of Limerick and they and the Captain met each other face to face, although they had sought to avoid instead of to meet him. A battle was bravely fought between both parties, in which the Irish army were so resolutely pressed by the Captain's forces that they were finally defeated, with the loss of Thomas, the son of John Oge, who was son of John, who was son of Thomas, who was son of the Earl, and Owen, the son of Edmond Oge, who was son of Edmond, who was son of Torlogh Mc Sheehy, and a great number of the constables of the Clan-Sheehy, as well as a great many of the forces of the sons of the Earl. Considerable spoils consisting of weapons and military accoutrements were left on this occasion to the Captain's people. This battle was fought at Aonach-Beag. The Captain after this remained almost a whole week at Askeaton, the Geraldines threatening every night to give him battle, although they did not. The Captain destroyed the Monastery of that town and then proceeded to Adaire where he remained subjecting the people of that neighbourhood until the new Chief Justice, Sir William Pelham, the Earl of Kildare and the Earl of Ormond came and joined him. They all encamped together in Hy-Conillo. The Earl of Desmond did not proceed to meet them on this occasion, because his territory had been ravaged and his people destroyed, contrary to their promise to him that these should not be molested. The English, seeing that the Earl had joined his relatives, consulted together and resolved to station warders in his towns, viz., in Lough Gur; Rath-Mor; Castlemorrison; Adaire and Kilmallock, and depart themselves for their respective homes.

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In the Townland of Grange, which is situated in that part of Monasteranenagh belonging to the Barony of Small County, there are very curious stone circles, which seem to have been placed there in memorial of some remarkable battle in which many Chiefs had fallen. The most perfect of these is one hundred and fifty feet in diameter. It consists at present of sixty six stones, reckoning large and small ones, and of these twenty three are remarkably large. On the north east side stands the largest, a mighty stone measuring eight feet four inches in height, seven feet in breadth and four feet in thickness.

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About forty paces due north of this, in the next field

now (Aug. 10th 1840) a field of wheat, there is a larger circle measuring one hundred and sixty feet in diameter. Of this only forty stones are now left (in the Revd. Mr. Beauford's time there were sixty) in some parts standing very close together, in others a wide gap between. These stones are all about three feet in height and the ground around and within the circle is perfectly level.

About sixteen paces to the north east of this stands a smaller circle than either of the two just described, it being only forty five feet in diameter. It is a perfect circle formed of stones of large size, placed at intervals, all from four to five feet high and several of them with square flat tops.

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Outside this field at the base of a small hill is a liagan or standing stone of an irregular conical form, about four feet in height, and at the distance of about fifteen paces to the east of it there is another stone of an oblong form lying prostrate, which seems to have once stood erect and to have belonged to the group of monuments above described.

In the field of wheat above mentioned there was a Cromlech which was destroyed some years since. There are people still living who often saw it and could point out the very spot where it stood. This group of monuments is about two miles Irish to the north of the Town of Bruff.

John O'Donovan.

Bruff.

Aug. 10th 1840.
