

7 Killeedy

Glenquin · Tournafulla · Monagay · Templeglantine

KILLEEDY was originally known as *Cluain Chreadháil*, the Meadow or Pasture Land with a Good Depth of Soil. In 1840 John O'Donovan referred to *Cluain Chreadháil* as the Religious Retirement but mentioned that in later ages it had taken the name of *Cill Ide*, the Church of St. Ita, from a nunnery which was founded here in the sixth century.

ST. ITA, *Ide*, *Míde*, *Idy* or *Deirdre*, was known as the St. Brigid of Munster. She was born before 484 the daughter of a chieftain and features in the legends, history and folk-

lore of West Limerick. She is mentioned as a noble virgin of royal blood "who from the font of baptism was filled with the Holy Ghost; for all admired the continence and morals of her infancy and her abstinence on days on which the servant of God ought to fast". St. Ita "succoured many grievous diseases". On one occasion Ita allowed a *daol darbh*, an insect which the people believed to feed on human flesh in the churchyards, to suck her blood until "it grew to a size greater than that of a suckling pig". This account prompted John O'Donovan to note, in brackets, "Poor Idy was an idiot". Further on in his

letters he mentions that "St. Ita should have been put under the care of such a person as Mr. Jackson at Limerick". When her sister Nessa's husband was slain in battle Ita is said to have restored him to life. She is also believed to have suckled Jesus when he came to her in the form of an infant and to have trained St. Brendan the Navigator and St. Mochoemog in her school for boys. She was venerated as the "Fostermother of the Saints" and the "White Sun of the Women of Munster". She died some time between 570 and 577. After noting many details of her life, in his *Ordnance Survey Letters* John



Ashford.



Killeedy Church.

O'Donovan added another postscript "This is all fudge!" St. Ita's hagiography did not impress him.

KILLEEDY CHURCH was established by 546 as a monastery for monks and nuns. St. Ita is generally acknowledged as the founder of this religious settlement at the foot of the mountain in the territory of *Uí-Chonaill-Gabhra*. St. Ita's nunnery gradually evolved into a monastery for men. The names of two of its abbots are recorded: Cathasach, who died in 810 or 815; and Finnachta, who died in 833. The monastery was raided by the Vikings on several occasions. A Romanesque nave and chancel church developed from the original foundation but this has been badly damaged over the centuries, particularly the nave. After the Dissolution it became a Church of Ireland church. During the early eighteenth century the chancel was modernised and the building remained in use as a place of Protestant worship until about 1800. In 1822 the Rockites destroyed both the church and the glebe house. Neither was rebuilt. O'Donovan maintained that it had contained a doorway similar to that in the west gable of Clonfert Cathedral but by 1840 no trace of the doorway remained. The nave was dismantled "by the unenlightened venerated of St. Ida, who are in the habit of pulling out the cut stones of this building to place them at the heads of the graves of their

departed friends". The middle gable was surmounted with a small belfry which was placed directly over the chancel arch. Both the belfry and arch were erected when the church was remodelled. A large statue of St. Ita, is located on the western side of the arch, obstructing the view of the chancel behind it. **ST. ITA'S GRAVE** is located at the junction of the nave and chancel, on the southern side. The custom of strewing it with flowers has continued into modern times.

ST. ITA'S WELL is located opposite Margaret Anglim's tombstone which is about ten paces north of the stile leading into Killeedy Church. The well is a small circular opening in the ground lined with large stones cut in semi-circular sections. St. Ita's feast-day was observed on 15 January into the nineteenth century and the well was "celebrated for curing the small pox in children and other diseases". The well was dry on the occasion of John O'Donovan's visit, prior to 1840, but it contained water on 2 January 1989. St. Ita so impressed the chieftain of *Uí-Chonaill-Gabhra* that he offered her a large tract of land around her foundation but all she would accept was a small spot sufficient for a garden. She fasted so much that, it was said, an angel cautioned her to be less abstemious.

ANGLIM is derived from *O hAnghluinn* or *O hAnghluim*, the Descendant of *Anglann*, the Champion or Hero. Variants of the name are

O'Hanglin and *Anglin*. This is really a Cork surname rarely found outside that county, or this part of south-west Limerick.

THE MULLAGHAREIRK MOUNTAINS form a boundary between Limerick and the neighbouring counties of Cork and Kerry. The three boundaries converge south of Mountcollins where the Feale river forms a border between Limerick and Kerry.

LUACHRA was the name of the district in which Killeedy was located rather than the name of the mountain itself. This part of *Uí-Chonaill Gabhra* was so called, apparently from its abounding in rushes.

KILLEEDY CASTLE north-west of Killeedy Church, may have been built on a *motte*. Tradition ascribes its foundation to either King John or the Knights Templars. Only a fragment of the south wall remained in 1840. This portion was further reduced in 1988 when it was struck by lightning. The tall narrow ruin, resembling a chimney-stack, can be seen from a distance.

GLENQUIN takes its name from *Gleann-a-Chuim*, the Glen of the *Cám* or Hollow. The Anglicised version of this name should be Glenquim rather than Glenquin.

GLENQUIN CASTLE may have been built by the O'Hallinans in 1462. According to tradition it was captured by the O'Briens who put all of the O'Hallinans to death, with the exception of a boy who survived to avenge