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Notes on the Parish of Charlestown Union, County Louth by Guy W. C. L'Estrange

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Reviews.

"Notes on the Parish of Charlestown Union, County Louth." By Rev. Guy W. C. L'Estrange, M.A., Rector of Charlestown, Ardee, 1912.

Rev. Mr. L'Estrange has made a very useful addition to our local history by his "Notes on the Parish of Charlestown" published this year. He did not seek to collect or recount the general history of the district or to make a complete survey of the earlier ecclesiastical annals, but he has enumerated the more important events and references, such as the great battle of Clonkeen in 942 in which the heroic Muircertach lost victory and life to the Danes, and he has brought together all the matter relating to these parishes to be found in Mr. Leslie's valuable book of reference—"Armagh Parishes"—the succession of clergy, reports on the state of churches and population, with many additional items of statistics and topography.

The publication of all these details consecutively is of real interest for the inhabitants of the parish to whom the book is offered and for all acquainted with the neighbourhood, but the most valuable of Mr. L'Estrange's work is the transcript of the parish records. These are not very ancient, nor do they contain much matter of outside importance, but some of the entries throw light on social conditions, and all the details of parochial undertakings—however trivial they seem when recent—are the very items that antiquarians of generations hence will be delighted with, as we are with the records of commonplace transactions of earlier times.

The Union of Charlestown in the Protestant grouping of parishes comprises six original parishes—Charlestown, Clonkeen, Clonkeehan, Mapastown, Philipstown and Tallanstown—a district of 25 square miles. The consolidation into the two Unions of Charlestown and Clonkeen took place during the first half of the eighteenth century, and these two Unions were amalgamated in 1886 to form the present Union of Charlestown.

The parochial records that remain are the Vestry Book of Clonkeen, dating from 1745, and the Vestry Book of Charlestown, which begins only in 1823; the Registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages from 1808 and 1822 respectively, and some account books.

As the Vestry of the eighteenth century controlled the imposition of the land cess, the maintenance of roads, the relief of the poor and other public works, as well as the upkeep of the Church, it included all the landholders of both religions, and from 1745 to 1783 there was almost always one Catholic and one Protestant appointed Churchwardens in Clonkeen. In 1783 this friendly system ceased; I cannot find for what reason, as the general powers of the Vestries remained till a much later date.

Most of the families whose names occur in these earliest entries of 150 years ago are represented still either by direct descent or by connections among the landholders of the parish—Caraher, Coleman, Crinion, Dooley, French, Halpenny, Hawes, Lee, Mohan, Philips. The Pound of Tullakeel, the walls of which remain standing, are the subject of many entries for its building and repairs. Sums were voted occasionally for the care of foundling children at home and in Dublin, and the expenditure on the Church from time to time is considerable. The cost of building a new schoolhouse at Clonkeen in 1774 was less than £8, the original assessment of £4 which proved insufficient being reinforced with scrupulous exactness by a levy of £3 19s. 5½d. for this and the repairs of the church.

The obligation imposed on the parishes to supply and maintain men for the County Militia occasions entries of levies in 1795 of £6 for one man, in 1803 of £42 for seven men, in 1807 of £15 17s. 10d., which the Colonel, Thomas Henry Foster, Esq. (son of the Speaker) was to expend in procuring men, and in 1810 £10 10s. per man is assigned to the three parishioners chosen by lot, all of whom found substitutes to take their places—"Stephen Taff put in Bernard Wade," &c.

Many who read this book may not have seen for themselves the interesting marble monument in the wall of Clonkeen Church to the memory of John Chambre of Stormanstown, the original Cromwellian grantee, who died in 1670. His family did not hold this property long, for it was acquired by Archbishop Marsh in 1708 along with other lands in the parish, and the rents of all applied to found the Clergymen's Widows Charity in Drogheda.

The records of Charlestown Parish are of less antiquity—the earliest minute book of the Vestry only dating from 1822. There are details of the erection of Charlestown Church in 1826-28,

for which a cess of £1500 was levied on the parishioners of all religions ; tradition recounts that this was the last church built by an indiscriminate church cess.

The Registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages from 1808 and the earlier inscribed tombstones are also catalogued ; but the author missed the Sweetlove stone in Mapastown Graveyard.

The churches contain some valuable Communion Plate ; the Charlestown chalice is of Dublin make of 1700-1 ; that of Clonkeen (the work of the same silversmith) of 1723-4. The bells bear date 1742 (Clonkeen), and 1766 (Charlestown).

Mr. L'Estrange gives a fairly full account of the Filgate family. We imagine he might have extended it further without straining the interest of his readers, as the name is so long and so prominently identified with this part of Co. Louth. Many will value the characteristic photograph of one universally held in such kindly respect as "the Captain." Genealogical sketches of the other old land-owning families of the parishes would also have been appropriate.

The development of the name Charlestown through the middle form Sherlestown from the earliest Sereleston or Serlystone is illustrated by entries lately found by Rev. Mr. Leslie of a Ralph Serle of Serlestown in 1312, and John Serle, Lord of Gilbertstown and Stormanstown, who presented the Vicar of Clonkeen in 1411.

The book was printed off by Mr. L'Estrange himself with his own fount of type, and the binding as well as the photographs of the churches and the chief residences in the parish are his own work. Its accuracy and neatness could hardly be excelled.

J.T.D.

"Newgrange and other Incised Tumuli in Ireland." By George Coffey.
Dublin : Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1912.

Mr. George Coffey's "Newgrange" published this year is an almost complete account of the Royal Cemetery of Brugh:—a full and splendidly illustrated description of the caves, their construction and style of ornament; a sketch of their history; an examination of their art, and an elaborate argument of its origin and age.

It is a book of 118 pages, containing eight full page plates—the photographs of the interior of the chambers being of special value—and 95 figures of inscriptions. The treatment is so nearly exhaustive that one regrets that Mr. Coffey did not incorporate in it all the matter of his previous memoirs and papers on these subjects, some notes on the topography and on all the other earthworks of the Boyne Valley, and fuller information—from Borlase and his own investigations—of the methods and ritual of pagan burial.

The paragraphs on Brugh in the Dindsenchus and in the Senchus na Relig in the Leabhar na Huidhre are transcribed in full except where they repeat each other ; but we would wish to have also an account of the legendary associations of the place with Angus Og and the other immortal denizens of the green mounds, an extract of all the literary references to them, and an examination of the origin or growth or suggested symbolism of these traditions.

In his Literary History Dr. Hyde tells that down to the nineteenth century Aengus of Brugh was revered as the presiding genius of the spot. There is no population in these solitudes now from whom to seek for legends, even if any such could have survived the decay of the language that had enshrined them through so many centuries. But it would be well that every Irishman who reads of or visits the mounds beside our Sabbath river's flow should be able to blend with his wonder and reverence for these works of our ancestors in the infancy of our history, the romantic memories of the heroes, mortal and immortal, with whom legend peopled them—the "mighty lords invisible" who are to come "thronging out at Brugh" to follow Lugh Lamhfada in his conquering march to restore Ireland's golden age.

These additional features would have made the volume an absolutely complete record from the pen of their deepest and most devoted student of all that ancient lore and modern science has to tell about these venerable and mysterious monuments. But this is suggesting a scope for the book which its author did not intend, and subjects which he might regard as outside his province. It is true Mr. Coffey does not at all consider this a final treatment of the subject, and awaits further research on the Continent into the development of decorative art in the bronze age and earlier. The reader, however, will hardly expect any argument more definite or theory more trustworthy than is explained here. All the accounts of the mounds left by earlier students are reproduced : that of Lhwyd in 1699, shortly after the discovery of the entrance, of Molyneux in 1725, of Pownall in 1770, of Hoare and of Sir William Wilde, and deductions drawn from their descriptions. The only change that seems to have been made in the appearance of the caves since Lhwyd saw Newgrange is the removal of the loose stones