County Louth Archaeological and History Society

Duleek and Its Environs

Author(s): Séamus Ua Taillamhain

Source: *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (Oct., 1910), pp. 257-261

Published by: [County Louth Archaeological and History Society](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27727897>

Accessed: 14/06/2014 17:02

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

County Louth Archaeological and History Society is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Photo]

INSCRIBED SLAB BUILT INTO INSIDE WALL OF
ST. CIANAN'S Daim-lias, DULEEK.

[J. Tallon

Photo]

RUINS OF PRIORY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN,
DULEEK.

[J. Tallon

The East Window was erected by Sir John Bellew and Dame Ismay Nugent, his wife, in 1387. Square Bell Tower in background.

Duleek and its Environs.

ALTHOUGH situate outside of County Louth and the district embraced by the plain of Muirtheimhne, Duleek by reason of its interesting and in many ways unique antiquities is worthy of mention in this Journal. Insignificant as the village now is, it was once a place of note. Distinguished mention is made of it in the early annals of our country, and its history must ever be regarded as inseparably connected with the introduction of Christianity into Ireland. Duleek was the site of the first stone church erected in Ireland. In the Office of St. Cianan, which is extant in manuscript in the Library of Cambridge University, we are informed that "St. Cianan built a church of stone in this place, and that henceforth it took the name Daimléagh,* for hitherto the churches of Ireland were constructed of wattles and boards" (*vide* Harris' edition of *Ware's Bishops*).

St. Cianan (or Keenan) was the first bishop of Duleek. He was of illustrious parentage, being descended from the Kings of Munster. It is related that he was baptized by St. Patrick and consecrated Bishop of Duleek by him about 472 A.D. St. Cianan founded the church and abbey of Duleek, and for seven hundred years an uninterrupted line of bishops ruled here, until, in the twelfth century, the ambitious Simon de Rochfort dissolved the See of Duleek, establishing himself sole Bishop of Meath. During the golden ages of the sixth, seventh and tenth centuries the fame of Duleek was great indeed. The Four Masters tell us that its schools and monasteries rivalled the celebrated institutions of Armagh, Clonard and Clonmacnoise. Its hospitals, almshouses, priories and sanctuaries were endowed on a scale of princely magnificence unapproached elsewhere. It had an hospital for the sick and destitute under the protection of St. Mary Magdalen, a priory of the Blessed Virgn, founded by the O'Kellys—the princes of the Hy Cianachta—and a great monastery erected by Hugh de Lacy in 1182 for the Canons regular of St. Augustine. This monastery, the ruins of which stand ivy-grown and desolate within the demesne of the Marquis of Thomond, was, according to the learned Ware, made a cell of the priory of Llanthony in Wales, which was also founded by De Lacy. This abbey was endowed by its founder on a scale

* From *ḍaímh* 'a church,' and *lúas* 'a stone,' in the Gaelic.

of the most lavish munificence. The following inventory of the possessions and revenues of Duleek abbey at the time of its suppression taken from Archdall's *Monasticon* gives us an idea of the princely possessions of the monastery :—

“ On October 1st, and first of Queen Elizabeth, this monasterie (Duleek) and its appurtenances situate and lying in the town and vicinity of Duleek with the townlands of the Grange, *alias*, Rough Grange, Corbally, Calliaghtown (now-a-days Bellewstown Hill), Rudder, Multon or Milltown, Danesland, *alias* Dawsland, and Fowlerstown in this county, and all other possessions thereto belonging, lying in and near Marinerstown, Great Beabeck, Small Beabeck, Beabeck near Kenles (Kells) in the said county were granted to Henry Draycott and his heirs *in capite* at the yearly rent of £40 17s. 7d.”

The following further possessions were granted to Sir Gerald Moore :—

“ At the annual rent of £9 11s. 7d., and that he provide an archer in saide lands for ever ” : “ The advowsons and presentations to all and singular the vicarages of Duleek and Colpe, the rectory and tithes of Molengar, containing le Grange, Irish-town, Stockstown, Tatestown, Ballyrae, Ballymora, Ballybedwich, Ballyrobin, Ballymabrino, Ballyclare, etc., etc., thirty acres of arable and thirty of pasture and meadow at Ratholland with the rectory and tithes of Julianstown, the rectory of St. Peter's, extending into Drogheda, one cellar on St. Saviour's Dock in Drogheda under the Church of St. Saviour, one couple of corn out of Wilkenstown, half couple out of Bacon(stown ?), sixteen acres of arable land in Carrick-broger, twenty acres in Arbushe, three acres in Longanmane, and eight of arable called Woosterpark, eight acres on the north side of the common green of Duleek, THE SITE OF THE PRIORY with a garden, a close, and half an acre of pasture.”

There are many more gardens, cottages, closes, curtilages, plots and minor possessions which are so numerous that space would not permit their introduction here. Of this celebrated monastery hardly a stone remains standing. There are merely a few fragments of the gables, the ruins of a castellated entrance way, and a few remnants of mullioned windows. These latter and the gateway display some exquisitely beautiful tracery, and the entire abbey when in existence must have been a superb specimen of Gothic architecture. The greater part of the walls have been torn down and carted away to build the stately mansion which stands but a short distance away. Even the tombstones of the dead were not spared by the ruthless vandals nor even the mouldering bones, the poor earthly remains of man, which were, horror of horrors ! carted off *to manure a garden*. Such awful sacrilege, such demonical vandalism is, I believe, unparalleled in the history of any other country except poor, patient, long-suffering Eire. The daim-liag of St. Ceanan (whence the village derives its name from *ḃaile*, a church, and *liag*, a stone in the Gaelic) is still extant. It stands but a short distance from the Priory of the Blessed Virgin in the midst of the town. It is an oblong building of stone and lime cement, about thirty feet long by fifteen wide. There is but one doorway in the eastern side, and there are no traces of windows—but these may have existed, for part of the end and side walls have fallen or have been demolished. There is a large oblong slab built vertically into the wall of the Daim liag inside, across which some undecipherable letters have been traced, and there is a thick oblong stone lying on the ground on which is carved a representation of a cross and which probably formed a keystone in the arch of a window or doorway. This unique building does not seem to have been observed by Cogan, for we find no mention of it in *The Diocese of Meath*.

The great object of interest to the antiquarian in Duleek is the Priory of the Blessed Virgin, which was erected by the O'Kellys in the eighth century. The chancel is seventy-five feet in length and twenty in width. At the western end of

the chancel stands the cloitheach or bell-tower, which is ninety feet in height. There is a winding staircase in this tower leading to a platform on the summit from which a magnificent view of the surrounding country of Cianactha Breagh can be obtained. In the Annals of Duleek we read : " A thunderbolt fell this year (1147) upon the cloitheach of Duleek, knocking off its Beann-chobhair " (roof).*

Dean Cogan states that Duleek formerly had a †*round tower*, but there is no evidence of its existence now, and in all probability there was no other tower than that of the Priory, which is square. That this tower was used as a cloitheach or bell-tower is incontestable, for the bell is actually there still, and is tolled on the occasion of funerals in the village. There is little architectural beauty about the Priory with the exception of the magnificent east window, which is of much later date than the rest of the building, being erected by Sir John Bellewe and Dame Ismay Nugent, his wife, in 1587.‡ There are several members of the Bellewe family interred in the body of the church, as well as the Burkes, Taffes and other local gentry. Here also is buried the pious and worthy gentleman William Bathe, of Athcarne Castle, of whom more anon.

There are several fine intramural tombs in the body of the church, two of which in particular command attention. One is the tomb of Dr. Cusack, Bishop of Meath, who is interred in a vault on the Gospel side. On the horizontal flagstone which closes the tomb is sculptured in bold relief the figure of a bishop life size, in full canonicals, with crozier in hand and the Cusack arms and crest are engraved on the top right hand corner. A short distance over is the Birmingham vault, where is buried Lord John Bellewe, wife of Dame Mary Bermingham.⁹ This Lord Bellewe, it appears from an inscription on the tomb, died in 1692 from a wound received at the Battle of Aughrim.

In the main street of Duleek there is a venerable and unique wayside cross which was erected by one of the Dowdalls—the great cross builders of Meath—a family conspicuous for piety and devotion, and who have left many similar records of ancestral reverence throughout Meath. This cross is erected on a platform of masonry ten feet square and six feet high, which is ascended by a flight of stone steps on the north side. The cross, the erect shaft of which has four sides, stands slightly over nine feet in height and instead of having a cross-bar it is encircled by a belt of stone. On each side of the shaft there are four panels one above and three below the belt. On the panels above the belt are sculptured incidents from our Saviour's Passion. On the west side is represented the Crucifixion. On the belt are figures of Angels, armorial ensigns, etc. On the east side, on the panel immediately under the belt is a figure of St. Peter, who is represented by a Bishop in canonicals holding the Apostolic keys over whom is inscribed : " Sance Pere." On the next panel is a figure of a Bishop with a cross in his hand, over whom is written " Sance Patrice," and on the bottom panel is a mitred abbot with a crozier in his hand, over whom is inscribed " Sance Kienane," the name of the first abbot and bishop of Duleek. Those representations are beautifully appropriate, typifying, as Cogan states, " the beautiful subordination of the various orders and offices in the Church," from Christ Himself the Supreme Founder, on through Peter his Vicar on earth, and Patrick and Cianan, who in turn derive jurisdiction through him. On the south side are figures of St. Andrew, St. Catherine and St. Stevin, and on the north side are St. Mary Magdalen, St. Jacobus or James, and St. Thomas. On the belt facing the west is a representation of a small heart encircled by a ring,

* O'Donovan's "Four Masters."

† "Diocese of Meath," Vol. I., p. 21.

‡ See "Bellew's Bridge, *L.A.J.*, Vol. I., Pt. 2, p. 23."

which, according to Cogan, typifies "The Sacred Heart."* This theory, however, is hardly admissible, because devotion to the Sacred Heart was not practised to any great extent until 1675, when our Lord appeared to Blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque and instituted this form of devotion which was not introduced into Ireland until 1873, whereas the cross was erected in A.D. 1601 by Dame Jenet Dowdall, wife unto William Bathe, of Athcarne.† It is more probable that the heart in question is symbolic of conjugal love.

When we consider the numerous instances which are to be found throughout this parish of the piety and devotion of this family and the inseparable connection of the names of W. Bathe and Jenet Dowdall on several monuments, wayside crosses and bridges in Duleek, we have little doubt that the heart referred to by Cogan as representing the "Sacred Heart" is rather emblematic of that deep love which must have united this pious couple, and the ring with which the heart is encircled in all probability typifies the matrimonial union—the binding together in one of their two hearts. An additional argument against Cogan's theory is the shape of the heart, which is totally different from the recognised form of the Sacred Heart, which is invariable represented by a heart surrounded by thorns, surmounted by a cross and pierced by a lance thrust, from which drops of blood ooze forth.

Underneath the heart on the west side of the belt are inscribed the names: W. Bathe, J. Dowda, and under these are the Bathe-Dowdall arms on a shield, under which is the following inscription:—"This cross was builded by Jenet Dowdall, wife to William Bathe, of Athcarn, Justice of Her Majestie's Court of Common Plees for him and her, Anno 1601. He deceased the 15 of Oc. 1599. Buried in the church of Duleeke, whose soules I praye God take to His mercie."

There is another slender wayside cross on the Dublin road at Annesbrook, about a mile from Duleek. It stands on a platform of masonry six feet high, which is ascended by a double flight of stone steps, and, like the Duleek cross, instead of having a cross-bar, the shaft is encircled by a belt of stone. Above the belt are figures of the Crucifixion and the Scourging of our Lord at the Pillar. The belt itself is a beautiful work of art. At each corner is the figure of an angel with a wing extended on either side. On the north and south sides, between the angel's wings, is the figure of a pelican between two harps, and on the east and west sides is sculptured a bunch of oak leaves intertwined with shamrocks, the whole forming an exquisitely beautiful and delicate work of art. On the west side, facing the road, are the Bathe-Dowdall arms on a shield, over which are the initials W.B. J.D. Underneath is the following inscription:—"This cross was builded by Jenet Dowdall late wife unto William Bathe, of Athcarne, Justice, for him and herself in the yeare of oure Lorde God 1600. Which Justice deceased the XXV of October, 1599, and buried in the church of Duleeke, whose soules I praye God take to His mercie. Amen. I.H.S." Unlike the Duleek cross there are no sculptured images on the shaft, but there is a touchingly beautiful inscription moss-grown and obscure on the back of the shaft which has escaped the notice of Cogan. It is as follows:—"Haile Marie, full of grace, oure Lorde is with thee, haile Swete Virgin, the blessed mother of God, the very excellent Queene of heaven, praye for us poor soules. Amen. I.H.S." Above this inscription, which is on the lower part of the shaft, is written I.H.S. MARIA. Amen. This cross would seem to have been dedicated especially to the Blessed Virgin.

There is a third cross more massive and imposing than either that at Annesbrook or Duleek at Athcarn. It is built into the gable of a house at the entrance avenue to Athcarne Castle. It is over twelve feet high and has got a cross-bar,

* "Diocese of Meath," Vol. I., p. 187.

† See "The Bathe House," *L.A.J.*, Vol. I., Pt. 2, p. 32.

Photos]

WEST SIDE OF DULEEK CROSS.
Heart in circle at top, Coat of Arms
and Inscription.

ATHCARNE CROSS.
Virgin and Child.

EAST SIDE OF DULEEK CROSS.
St. Peter, St. Patrick, and
St. Keenan.

[J. Tallon

WAYSIDE CROSSES AT DULEEK.

Photo]

[J. Tallon

**WAYSIDE CROSS AT ANNESBROOK,
DULEEK.**

Photo]

[J. Tallon

RUINS OF THE ORATORY OF ST. CIANAN, DULEEK.

Photo

[J. Tallon

WAYSIDE CROSS, MAIN STREET, DULEEK.

unlike either of the others. On one side of the shaft is an image in bold relief of the Virgin and Child and on the other an image of the Crucifixion. The images are very well defined, but the inscription on the shaft is very much worn and obliterated, but it is beyond doubt that this cross also was erected by the Bathe family, for the name Bathe is discernible and the armorial ensigns are identical with that on the other crosses.

There is yet another cross at Balrath, but it is devoid of inscription or ornament, and still another in the churchyard of Duleek, which latter, however, is of the Celtic type with a cross-bar and ring, but it is broken and dilapidated. A peculiar tradition relative to the Athcarne cross, is that no person has ever been known to die the house where the cross is. The occupants of this house for generations have invariably died out of the house, and a death has never yet been known to have occurred in it.

A short reference to the illustrious founders of those beautiful wayside crosses may not be out of place here. William Bathe, of Athcarne, came of a celebrated English family ;—the Bathes of Bathe House, Devonshire,—who settled in Ireland about the thirteenth century. Three of his ancestors were Lords Justices of Ireland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. His father, John Bathe, of Drumconrath and Athcarne, was Attorney-General for Ireland in 1564 and subsequently Chancellor of the Exchequer. His cousins Luke and William Bathe were ordained Jesuits at Salamanca in 1581, in which year also William Bathe himself was constituted a Justice of the Common Pleas by Sir John Perrot, Queen Elizabeth's Deputy. Wm. Bathe died on 25th October, 1599, and was interred as previously mentioned in the church of Duleek. Athcarne Castle and the Bathe estates were subsequently confiscated after the Cromwellian Settlement, and were granted to Thomas Somerville. Dame Jenet Dowdall, wife unto William Bathe, was a daughter of Dowdall of Athlumney, near Navan. She was widow of Oliver Plunket, Baron of Louth, and was subsequently married to Nicholas St. Lawrence, 21st Lord of Howth, whom she also survived. She married William Bathe, of Athcarne, in 1590, and also survived him, dying on 3rd July, 1619.

Duleek, like so many other centres of religion and learning in Ireland, survived not the Reformation. Its abbey, priories and sanctuaries are deserted and desolate. Of its Magdalen asylum and Domus Infirmorum not a trace remains. Ivy-grown and desolate the once great monastic city of St. Cianan tells a pitiful tale of the ruin and devastation wrought by the Penal Laws.

SÉAMUS NA TAILLAMAÍN.

SLIAB NA gCAILLEAC,
i gCúige na Míobé.

H