
THE PARISH OF ASKEATON.

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SITUATION. This Parish is situated in the Barony of Lower Connello and is bounded on the north by the River Shannon and the Parish of Iveross; on the east by the Parish of Kilcornan; on the south by the Parishes of Nantenan and Lismakeery and on the west by the Parish of Toomdeely.

NAME. The name of this Parish is written *Eas Gephtene* in the Annals of the Four Masters and other Authorities. It is not of ecclesiastical origin, but derived from the name of the

Towland in which the original Parish Church was built, which Townland derived its name from a small cataract on the River Deel, a short distance to the south of the Village of Askeaton. Eas Gephtene signifies the Cataract of Gephten, a man's proper name in pagan times. We could, however, point out an instance where Dr. O'Connor turned the name of this place into a sentence, just as the Ulster King made a sentence of Gadius Grandivocus! At these things we shall only laugh for the present, but hereafter we shall make them tell.

Of the original Parish Church of Askeaton, which seems to have been a large one, only the tower and one gable remain; the site of the other part of it is occupied by a neat modern Church.

The Abbey of Askeaton is a very extensive and beautiful building, but it would take a more skilful architect than I to describe it scientifically. Its cloisters are still in beautiful preservation and are of very curious workmanship. They form a square, the sides of which are thirty seven feet six inches in length and each of which consists of twelve arches. Each of these arches is four feet nine and a quarter inches in height and two feet seven and a half inches in width and constructed of a kind of dark marble said to have been brought from Canon Island (Inis na gCananach) in the River Shannon. Their pedestals are in beautiful proportions and three feet four and one eighth inches in height. The pillar stones of two of the cloisters on the west side have disappeared, having been stolen by French antiquarians about fifty years since. The great Church of this Abbey is one hundred and nineteen feet eight inches in length on the inside and only twenty two feet nine inches in breadth. Its east window, which is pointed and divided into five rays or lights, is about twenty feet in height and nine feet five inches in width. The south wall contains three pointed windows of considerable size and divided each into three rays or lights. There is another large window in the west gable, but its divisions are broken except one mullion. 454

Inserted in the south wall of this Church near the south east corner is a monument to the family of Stephenson now much mutilated. It exhibits the following inscription in very rude raised letters:-

"Maritis suis D. Richardo Stephenson ejusque filio Olivero Stephenson ac posteris suis hoc bustum fieri fecerunt D. Margarita Ni-Brien et D. Elinora Browne, Ano. Doi. 1646."

Under the west window in the same Church is the following inscription on a small stone inserted in the wall, the monument of a poor man of the name O'Driscoll. This inscription I would deem not worth copying were it not that a part of it is Irish and that I fear it might be made the same use of as Thomas Moore 455

made of an Irish inscription of the same age in the Abbey of Multyfarnham:-

"This monument was erected by John O'Driscoll in memory of his father, Edmond Driscoll, who departed this life January 3rd 1780 aged 45 years, and also Edmond Driscoll, Junior, who departed November 15th 1808, aged 36 years. Requiescant in pace, Amen." Cut by Patk. Nunan.

Mo léun a leac is maith do chéile gúmhád (ocúmhád)
 Dá thréine fear go mbeadh go faon sa núir
 Níl triath ná flaith ann gaisge, léim ná lúith
 Sa tSuinionn seag ó thaisgloch Ramonn fúit.

Will anyone ever deny that I know the meaning of this verse and if it be defective in its composition will any one ever be so great a fool to say that I should have corrected this defect in my translation.

"Alas! O flag, good is thy treasured up (reconditus)
 companion!

Though strong a man he must be one day weak in the clay;
 There is no lord or chief in (the enjoyment of) action,
 leap or agility

And the Shannon is barren since Edmond was laid under
 thee."

These lines are decidedly wrong (bad) but I have not the slightest notion of representing them as poetical. They remind one of the following lines, which are truly poetical:-

"Yet even these bones from insult to protect
 Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
 With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture decked,
 Implores the passing tribute of a sigh."

The other divisions (chambers, chapels, black holes, etc.) of this Abbey are too numerous and complex for minute description. I leave them to the artist. Huge fragments of its once magnificent tower and other parts lie scattered on the ground.

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The Castle of Askeaton, which is situated on a rock of considerable height and extent, is in its ruins a splendid specimen of a Geraldine fortress. It was surrounded with a strong and high wall which was encompassed by the River Deel, the entrance being by a drawbridge.

The part of this Castle which still remains is at least ninety feet in height and consisted of six storeys and presents a most magnificent appearance from every side you approach it.

The east side is totally destroyed. Parts of the two arches which formed the second and third floors remain; over the first of these arches is a small room commonly called Desmond's Gaol, to which the ascent is by many steps, which measures eight feet two inches by seven feet one inch. You enter it by a semi-circular headed doorway formed of chiselled lime stone and measuring five feet two and a half inches in height. The old oak door of this still remains hanging by iron cramps and entirely studded with broad-headed nails; it is five feet eight inches high, two feet eight inches wide and three inches thick. The timber is nearly rotten. The north wall of this Castle is only four feet thick; it is built of stones of good size cemented with lime and sand mortar mixed with cockle shells and periwinkles.

A short distance (thirty two paces) to the south west of the Castle is the Banqueting Hall, the lie of which is nearly north and south and the walls of which are in tolerable preservation. The room is seventy one and a half feet in length and thirty and a quarter feet in breadth; there are four large Gothic windows on each side wall and two on the north gable. The two windows near the south gable are much larger than the rest, being twelve feet in height and five feet six inches in width, while the others are only ten feet in height and three feet in width. Of the two windows in the north gable, one is in its middle and exactly of the same size and form with the smaller ones in the side walls, but the other, which is placed between it and the north east corner, is rectangular and measures about five feet in height and only eight inches in width. The walls of this house (the Teach Midhchuarta of Askeaton) are about forty feet in height and four feet ten inches in thickness and built of lime stones of good size cemented with the same kind of mortar as that with which the Castle is cemented. Beneath the hall are vaults of great extent and are called locally "Desmond's Wine Cellars." 457

Let us now return to the Castle. Besides the tower above described as being ninety feet in height, there remains of that Castle thirty feet of the west wall of a court or dwelling house connected with the tower. This wall is about fifty feet in height and five feet in thickness and built of the same materials with the tower. It has windows for three floors and has a large chimney still remaining in good preservation. Over a fire place in the third story there is a chimney piece of black marble beautifully ornamented.

At the distance of twenty seven paces from the high tower of the Castle there is another strong dwelling house, of which the north and west walls remain to the height of about forty feet, but of the height of the other two walls only eight feet remain. This building is twenty three feet two inches in length and fifteen feet nine inches in breadth. The first floor over 458

the ground one was arched. The walls are four feet in thickness and built of the same kind of stone and mortar as the other buildings.

These buildings are said to have been erected by Gerald or Garrett Fitzgerald, 7th Earl of Desmond. It is also said that Askeaton was enclosed by a wall of great ambit, height and thickness, but I could not discover one fragment of it, nor meet any one that could point out its outline or the space it enclosed.

Besides the ruins already described, which are all situated in the Town or Village of Askeaton, there are two others in the rural parts of the Parish, one in the Townland of Ballyengland Upper and the other in that of Court-Brown; both are Castles; the former is in good preservation and called Castle-Hewson; the other is a mere fragment (one conspicuous gable only remaining) and called Court-Brown. It does not appear to be very ancient.

I here insert what the Irish writers have collected of the history of Askeaton:—

Eas-Gephtine (Askeaton) — Annals 4 Masters.

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A.D. 1420. The Monastery of St. Francis at Eas-Gephtine* in Munster, on the margin of the Shannon in the Diocese of Limerick, was founded for Franciscan Friars by the Earl of Desmond, who erected a tomb for himself and his family in it.

* Eas Gephtine, now anglicised Askeaton, an ancient borough town in the Barony of Conillo and Co. of Limerick. It is now a Vicarage in the Diocese of Limerick, situated near the River Shannon at the influx of the River Deel.

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 the 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

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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 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 462

A.D. 1580. The Lord Chief Justice, Sir William Pelham, wrote to England after Christmas requesting that the Queen would send her Admiral and fleet with a sufficient quantity of provisions and the great Ordnance to Ireland for the purpose of taking from the Geraldines all the towns in their possession. These were Askeaton, Baile Ui-Gheilleachain and Carraig-an-Phuill. The great forces of Meath, Fingall and Leinster and all those who were subject to the Laws of England, from the Boyne to the Meeting of the Three Waters, were mustered by the Lord Chief Justice and the Earl of Ormond about the Festival of St. Bridget for the purpose of being marched into the Territory of the Geraldines. The number of forces that accompanied the Earl of Ormond on this occasion was truly prodigious. He made no delay until he had reached Cork. The Lord Chief Justice proceeded with his forces to Limerick. *** (See Limerick at this year, p.466). 463 464

The Lord Chief Justice then resolved upon passing into Kerry and proceeded to Teamhair-Luachra, thence to Tralee and along the base of the Mountain of Mis, daughter of Muireadhach, the son of Caireadh. The Earl of Ormond (also) marched from Cork to Kerry to join the Lord Chief Justice *** 465

It was precisely at this time that the Queen's fleet reached the coast of Ireland. This fleet entered the Harbour of the limpid waded Shannon and cast anchor directly opposite Carraig-an-Phuill (the Rock of the Cavern). The Lord Chief Justice and the Earl of Ormond went by land to the same town and the town was thus surrounded by two camps, one on land and the other on sea. Sir Nicholas Maulby, attended by the Chiefs of Connaught and a countless number of Englishmen, then set out for Thomond in order to prevent any attack either by sea or land, which it might be in contemplation to make on the Chief Justice while he should be preparing to storm the Towns of the Geraldines. As to the Lord Chief Justice, he ordered the great Ordnance sent to him to be conveyed on shore, and he placed five great guns opposite the Rock (i.e., Castle on the Rock) to play upon it without mercy. It was said that the least of these guns was half a cannon. He then began to storm the town and there was not a solitude or wilderness, a declivity or woody vale from the Carn of Breas, the son of Ealathan, 466

who was son of Ned, in the south west of the Province of Clann Deirgthine, to Cnoc-Meatha-Siuil in Connaught, which the sound of these unknown and wonderful cannon was not heard in. The western side of Carraic-an-Phuill was levelled with the earth and the warders of the town were crushed to death under the ruins. The Lord Chief Justice then took the town and remained 467 five days in it after having taken it, and at the end of that time he went to Askeaton. As soon as the warders of Baile-Ui-Gheilleachain and Askeyton heard the tremendous and terror awakening roars of those unknown guns, the like of which they had never heard before, they proceeded to demolish their own Castles and succeeded in destroying Baile-Ui-Gheilleachain, but as they were not able to destroy Askeyton, they left its gates open for the Lord Chief Justice, upon which the Castle was proclaimed the 468 Queen's property. The Lord Chief Justice then proceeded to Limerick where he remained forty days to rest after his fatigue and recruit himself, during which time his servants and horses were in safe quarters throughout Thomond. At the expiration of a fortnight afterwards, he returned to Askeyton where he spent a considerable part of the summer, by day and night constantly persecuting and dreadfully slaughtering the Geraldines *** **

Countless and indescribable were the evils perpetrated by the English and Geraldines during this time. The Lord Chief 469 Justice proceeded with his army to Kerry, making no delay until he had arrived at Daingean-i-Cuis, on which occasion he devastated a great portion of the Territory of the Geraldines. He then passed by a circuitous course through the intervening territories to Cork, came back to Askeyton and from thence to Limerick.

A.D. 1599. *** ** When the Earl of Essex had taken Cahir, he, accompanied by the Earl of Ormond and the other Chiefs, proceeded with their army to Limerick and pitched his camp outside the town. Here he was visited by Sir Conyers Clifford, 470 Governor of Connaught, by the Earl of Clanrickard (Ulick, the son of Richard Saxonach) and by the Earl of Thomond, Donogh, the son of Conor O'Brien. When these nobles had advised with one another for some time and came to fixed resolutions, the Governor and the Earl of Clanrickard returned back to Connaught and the Earl of Essex, the Earl of Ormond and the Earl of Thomond proceeded into Munster to see whether they could invade (subdue) the Geraldines. On the first night after having left Limerick, in the month of June, they encamped upon the banks of the River of Adair and as they advanced on the next day, Saturday, through Robhair, the soldiers and youths of the Earl of Desmond and 471 the Geraldine troops met them face to face. The reception which they (the Geraldines) gave to the representative of their Sovereign on his first visit to them was a very fierce and disagreeable one; for they discharged into the eyes of him and his army the fire and black smoke of powder and showers of balls from straightly pointed (aimed) guns, and he heard the fierce

and outrageous shouts of soldiers and champions eager for battle, instead of the mild language of courtesy, obedience and submission with (in) which he should have been addressed. 472

The result of this attack was that great numbers of the Earl of Essex's men were slain and that he was not suffered to pass much farther on that day.

He pitched his camp a short distance to the east of Askeaton and on the next day, Sunday, he and the Earls of Ormond and Thomond resolved to send a party (body) of cavalry to lay (place) up ammunition in Askeaton and not to pass themselves any farther westwards into Munster on that occasion. 473

Gough's Camden:— 474

Askeaton on the River Deel in the Barony of Conillo, sixteen miles south from Limerick, formerly a large walled town and a borough; now a depopulated village; had a Castle belonging to the Earl of Desmond partly blown up by the garrison retiring from Sir George Carew, 1580. James, the last Earl, died 1608. His predecessor James, 7th Earl, founded near it 1420 an house of Conventual Friars, which was reformed 1490 by the Observantines. James, 15th Earl, died and was buried here 1558. A Provincial Chapter of the Order was held here 1564 (Archd. 418. Wilson 184. Farrar 534). It ceased to have representatives at the Union. 475

Archdall's Mon. Hib. V.II, p.418, R.I.A. 476

Situated in the Barony of Conillo and on the River Deel. This was formerly a large walled town, but is now a small depopulated village; still however, it retains the privilege of a borough and sends representatives to Parliament. There was a Castle here in the last century which had belonged to the Earls of Desmond; James, the last Earl, died in 1608, whose predecessor James, the 7th Earl, founded a Monastery adjoining this Castle in the year 1420 for Conventual Franciscans (War Mon.) which was reformed in 1490 by the Observantine Friars (Allemande). James, the 15th Earl, died and was interred here in 1558 (Lodge, V.I, p.17). The Monastery of Askeaton was of such consequence that a Provincial Chapter of the Order was held there in the year 1564 (War. MSS. Vol.34, p.155). 477