

RATHKEALE PARISH.

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SITUATION. This Parish is situated in Connello Lower and is bounded on the north by Nantenan and Cappa Parishes; on the east by Croagh and Ballingarry Parishes; on the south by Clooncah and Cloonelty and on the west by Grange, Kilsannel and Doondonell Parishes.

NAME. Rathkeale is called in Irish Rath Gaela.

No old Church ruins are visible now at Rathkeale; it is said there was an old one in the Churchyard where the present Parish Church stands, the burying ground attached to which is very extensive. In the east part of the Town of Rathkeale remain the walls of a very extensive edifice which was an appendage to an old Abbey that formerly stood here. This edifice measures ninety feet by twenty four feet and its side walls are about twenty four feet high and three and a half feet thick. (The south side wall is perfect and thirty two feet of the north side wall remain joined to the east gable). At the west end was a square tower whose walls are four feet thick, the eastern one forming (or being used as) the west gable of the large building. Only six feet of the eastern wall of this tower and the whole of the south side wall, both retaining the height of forty six feet, are now remaining. All the windows on the large building are closed up and rough cast so that their forms are not observable. (Part of one window which is visible exhibits a construction of brown stone dressed with a chisel). The materials of the building consisted of regular sized lime stones and lime and sand mortar as cement. The burial ground belonging to this Abbey has fallen into disuse and has been converted into a garden, now planted with potatoes. Of this Abbey we find the following notices in Smith's Collections for Limerick, in Gough's Camden, Archdall's Monasticon Hibernicum and in Doctor Lanigan's Ecclesiastical History of Ireland:-

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Smith's Collections for Limerick (MSS. R.I.A.)
 Religious Houses in Limerick (from Sir James Ware)

"Priory of St. Mary of Rathkeale of the Order of Arosian Canons, founded by one Harvey and endowed by Ellinor Purcell about the year 1200."

Gough's Camden:-

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At Rathkeale, the largest town in the county, a mile long, formerly a Corporation Town on the River Deel was a Priory of Augustine Canons of the Order of Arroasia, whose ruins are still remaining (Farrar. 452-455; Archdall 435).

Archdall Mon. Hib. Vol. II, R.I.A., p.435:-

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Rathkeale was formerly a Corporation Town but is now only a mean village in the Barony of Conillo and situated on the River Deel.

A Priory under the invocation of the Virgin Mary was founded here for Augustinian Canons of the Order of Aroacia by a person of the name of Harvey (Allemande).

John was Prior before 1280, for in that year we are told that Alianora Purcell granted to this Priory the tenth loaf of every baking; the tenth flaggan of every brewing; the tenth pork and tenth mutton and a considerable portion of every ox or cow killed in her name of Mayer, to the due performance of which she bound herself and her heirs for ever; Hugh, her son and heir, was sued by a Prior for the non-performance of this grant, who answered that his mother made the said grant to the Prior, posterior to the settlement she had made upon him of this manor; the Prior rejoined that after the death of Alianora John, then Prior of this house, was put in possession of the said charity by the said Hugh who ratified his mother's deed; Hugh then agreed as a compensation for the same to grant yearly to the Prior two crownogs of head corn and three crownogs of oats on the Feast of St. Michael and four porks on the Feast of St. Marton for ever; the Prior thereupon released and gave up the residue and remainder of his demand (King p. 200-224). The ruins of this Priory are still remaining (Smith's MSS.) St. Michael Chantry. Inquisition 11th March XXXII Q. Elizabeth finds that certain lands in the Barony of Cahir Kinlis (Clan William) containing three acres of the Irish great measure were granted in mortmai to the Church of St. Michael in the said Barony were of the annual value of (Chief Remem.) 3s. besides reprises.

Lanigan's Eccles. Hist., Vol. IV, p.335:-

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XV. *** *** *** In or about the same year, 1200,

Theobald Walter, Butler of Ireland, founded and endowed a Priory at Nenagh, likewise for Canons Regular, with an hospital annexed, where they were to attend the sick that served God there. As it was dedicated in the name of St. John it was commonly called Teach-Eon or the House of John. The Priory of St. Mary of Tristernagh in Westmeath, Barony of Moygoish, was established and endowed for persons of the same Order about this time by Geoffry de Constantine. To these times we might, according to one account (p.336) assign the foundation of the Priory of the Arosian Canons at Rathkeale in the now County of Limerick, under the invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; but it appears more probable that it did not exist until after the year 1200 (128).

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(128) Harris (p.337 Monast.) marks it at about 1200; but neither Ware nor Archdall mentions the time of its foundation. It existed however, in the latter part of the 13th century. Were we to believe Alemand, its founder was one Harvey.

Old Churches in this Parish:-

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Rathnaseer is the name of a Townland in this Parish and is called in Irish Rath na Saer, which signifies "The Fort of the Artificers". About one furlong to the east of the old Church in this Townland is a small fort which is supposed to be the one that gave name to it (the Townland).

The old Church ruins here consist of a nave and choir, the former of which measures thirty seven feet by twenty three and a half feet and the latter nineteen feet two inches by sixteen and a half feet. The west gable has been entirely destroyed. On the east gable is a round topped window, built with chiselled brown stone and measuring seven and a half feet by four and a half feet inside. It is five feet from the ground and measures three feet nine inches by four and a half inches at top and five and a half inches at bottom on the outside. The semicircular arch at top is formed by one stone. At the distance of two feet nine inches from this gable, a window, now nearly defaced, is seen on the south side wall. It was built with the same kind of stone as the one on the east gable and is the same breadth with it on the inside and at the semicircular arch on the outside, which still remain. The choir arch on the middle gable has been totally destroyed. Distant three feet from this gable on the south wall of the nave is another window which measures five feet by four feet ten inches and has a handsome round arch of brown stone on the inside. Only two stones of the same quality are to be seen outside. The side walls are about fourteen feet high; two feet eight inches thick and are built with lime stones of large size, irregularly laid. Cement was lime and sand mortar. The quoia stones of nave and choir are of the brown quality. There is a small graveyard here much in use.

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About three hundred yards to the east of Ballyallinan old Castle are the ruins of a small edifice which is called Teampall Beinid, that is, the Church of Beinid (Benedict?) Of the side walls fourteen feet in length remain, as does also the east gable. The breadth of the building is eleven feet. On the gable is a window covered with ivy on the inside; is round at top on the outside measuring three feet nine inches by six inches, constructed with chiselled brown stone. At the distance of three feet from this gable there was on the south side wall a window. Of the stone which composed it only one remains on the inside which is of the brown quality and chiselled. The side walls are nine feet high and two and a half feet thick. The materials of the building were lime stones, round and small, and cement was lime and sand mortar. Only children are buried here now. About thirty yards to the southwest of this building is a well called Tobar Beinid, that is Beinid's Well, which is a strong spring with a large ash tree standing over it and is much frequented as is evident from the number of rags on the tree, being half covered with them. It cures sore eyes

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There was an old Church in the Townland of Kilcolman of which only a side wall twelve feet long and nine feet high now remains. This wall is made of large field stones cemented with lime and sand mortar. There is a large burial ground here, at present much in use. This name Kilcolman, in Irish Cill Cholmáin, signifies the Church of S. Colman. S. Bernard's Well lies in the Townland of Ballyallinan North.

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Castles.

About one furlong to the north of Rathnaseer old Church stands the old Castle of Rathnaseer in ruins. It measures fourteen feet by eleven feet in the clear. An arched floor is seen over the ground one. The walls which are six and a half feet thick are at present about thirty five feet in height. It appears a strong old building and is said to have belonged to the Earls of Desmond.

A castle stands on the Glebe of Castlematrix, which commonly goes by the name of the Glebe Castle. It measures twenty one feet by thirteen feet in the clear and has three stories. The walls are forty feet high and six feet thick. This had no arched floors and is in good preservation, being inhabited.

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About one furlong to the west of the last one stands Castle-Matrix old Castle, lately repaired by John J. Brown, Esq. It is forty four feet three inches by thirty five and a half feet on the outside. It has four stories; the walls are six and a half feet thick and sixty feet high. It

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belonged to the Earls of Desmond as local information tells us.

Gough's Camden, Vol. IV, p.290, Col.b:-

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Castle Maltres.

"Castle Maltres gives title of Viscount to the Southwells so created 1766, being before Barons of it 1717. The present and second Viscount, Thomas Arthur, succeeded his father 1780.

"Lord Southwell's house and Improvement at Court-Matress are on the west side of the river; and the Palatines settling on his estate are a great advancement to the trade and markets here (Farrar 455-456). James, 9th Earl of Desmond, was murdered by his servants at his house at Court-Matress, December 7, 1487; but his brother and successor, Maurice, apprehended and executed them all." (Farrar 453).

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"The Castle of Ballyallinan stands in ruins in the Townland of this name on a rising ground in the middle of a large plain and about three miles to the southwest of Rathkeale Town. It measures thirty five feet by sixteen feet eleven inches; has five floors, the two above the ground one being arched underneath. The walls are fifty five feet high and seven feet thick and lost part of their original height. It is said it belonged to the Earls of Desmond."

Gough's Camden:-

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Balyalenan.

"Two miles beyond Rathkeale are the ruins of Balyalenan Castle (Wilson 165)."

In Fitzgerald's History of Limerick, Vol. I, p.357, we find the following reference to this castle:-

" *** And about two miles to the south" (viz., of Rathkeale) "is Ballyallinan Castle, situated on the east bank of the River Deel, built by the O'Hallinans. In the year 1600 Dermod O'Connor having in concert with Sir George Carew treacherously seized on James Fitzgerald, the pretending Earl of Desmond, and having conveyed him together with Thomas Oge of Kerry and two brothers of the Sheehys prisoners to Castleishen, took Ballyallinan Castle from Rory Mc Sheehy (Mac Sheehy) father of the two brothers above mentioned, and there settled himself."

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There was a castle on Ballywilliam West Townland, of which only a confused heap of ruins now remains. Its dimensions could not be taken.

Rath Gaela, of which Rath-keale is the present anglicised form, is mentioned in the Annals of the Four Masters at the year ?

Thomas O'Conor.

Ballingarry, 28th July 1840.

This Parish was examined by Mr. A. Curry and his notes put into the present form and other historical notices arranged by Mr. T. O'Conor.

J. O'Donovan.

Aug. 18th 1840.
