

## Dysart

By W. J. Piłsworth

**T**HE word Dysart (Deesharth) means in Irish a secluded place, and is so appropriate that it has been retained from the earliest times. The first dweller here was a certain St. Colman, who doubtless founded a church here in pre-Norman times, no trace of which remains.

Disert Mocholmoc (i.e. the Dysart of St. Colman) was among the places granted to Kells Priory at its foundation by Geoffrey Fitz Robert circa 1200 and it remained in its possession until the dissolution of 1540.

Throughout these centuries we find a few references to the place. In 1227 Reginald, Prior of Kells and Alured, Prior of Inistioge, came to an agreement about Disert—presumably about its boundaries and in 1435 a certain Robert Caidyf surrendered to the Prior of Kells any claim he might have to the place. For most of this time Dysert seems to have been joined with Fossyth (now Brownsbarn, on the opposite side of the river) to form a separate parish.

In 1306 both places were recorded in a Diocesan Valuation as of no value, but in the next century they were jointly valued as £5, by no means a negligible sum in those days. It is reasonable to suppose that the castle was erected during the 14th century and proved a satisfactory investment. In the valuation of the property of Kells Priory in 1540 previous to the Dissolution, Disert was stated to comprise 10 messuages, 200 acres of arable land, 100 of pasture, 10 of wood and 40 of heath, of the annual value of £3-13-4. I think this must have included part of the adjoining townland of Pleberstown, as in another valuation of the period, Dysert is said to contain 30 acres of arable and pasture, and 30 acres wood and underwood valued at £2 per annum.

In any case together with the other possessions of Kells Priory it was granted to the Earl of Ormonde in 1541. By 1619 it had been leased to Richard Butler who paid £3 per annum for the tithes of Disert and Pleberstown and in 1641 was owned (or at any rate possessed) by Sir Richard Butler. Under the Acts of Survey and Distribution it reverted to the Duke of Ormonde.

In 1703 together with other holdings it was leased by the Duke of Ormonde to Joseph Robbins, of Ballyduff.

But the most interesting part of the history of Dysert remains to be told—the connection of the great Bishop Berkeley with the place.

It has been stated that he was actually born here, but the greatest living authority on Berkeley—the Rev. Dr. Luce—having sifted all the available evidence, is of the opinion that he was born at Kilcreene near Kilkenny in 1685, but his family undoubtedly lived for a number of years at Disert and the good bishop spent the earlier part of his life there.

George Berkeley was educated at Kilkenny College and Trinity where he had a brilliant career and evolved what was practically a new system of philosophy. He entered the Church and became a fellow of Trinity.

After several years in England and on the Continent, he was appointed Dean of Dromore in 1722 and later Dean of Derry. He formed a plan to erect a university in the Bermuda Islands and raised a large sum of money for this purpose. But after spending three years in America he realised that his plan was impracticable and returned to Ireland where he was appointed Bishop of Cloyne in 1734. His best known work, *The Querist*, showing strongly national tendencies, was published shortly after. In the famine of 1739 he did much to help the poor of all denominations. He attributed great medicinal value to the drinking of tar water. He died in 1753.

---

His memory is greatly revered in America. The house occupied by the Bishop when in that country has been turned into a Berkeley museum. He gave a generous gift of books to Yale University which formed the nucleus of the University library. The town of Berkeley in California which now has a population of about 100,000, and is the seat of the University of California, is named after him in particular compliment to his line.

“Westward the course of Empire takes its way.”

In conclusion may I express the hope that the connection of the good bishop with Dysert should be commemorated by the castle and the church, which are not without architectural interest, being taken over and cared for as a National Monument.

---

## Archersgrove Mills

(Extracted from “Kilkenny Moderator,” 1891)

**M**R. ED. FENNESSY, proprietor of the well-known seed warehouse, High Street, Kilkenny, and of the extensive nurseries convenient to this city, has taken the long-disused Archersgrove Mill, for the purpose of converting the premises into bone-crushing and linseed cake-crushing mills and perhaps sawmills. Mr. Fennessy's enterprise will, we hope, soon convert a silent ruin into a busy centre of employment.