

## ST. CANICE OF AGHABOE AND KILKENNY

By REV. T. J. CLOHOSEY

**T**HE present parish of Aghaboe, nearly 20,000 statute acres, is one of the large parishes in the diocese and, like the other parishes, consists of several old parishes, Bordwell, Kylermogh, Kyledellig, a large part of Aghaboe and a part of Coolkerry. A good part of the old parish of Aghaboe is now in the parish of Borris-in-Ossory.

The organisation of the Diocese of Ossory was associated with three places in the diocese—Seir Kieran, Aghaboe and Kilkenny. St. Kieran the Elder established the See at Seir or Saighir, while St. Canice built his Monastery and Cathedral on the site now occupied by the ruins here at Aghaboe and later transferred to Kilkenny. Canice was born at Glengiven, in Derry County, about 516. His parents were poor, but his father had the distinction of being a poet. As a boy Canice herded cattle. Soon he showed a desire to become a scholar and monk and left his home and parents. At the age of 13 he set out for the famous monastic school of St. Cadoc in Glammorgan. He was ordained while in Wales. On his return to Ireland he preached and studied.

With the famous St. Columcille he went to Iona and from there made many missionary journeys into the Isles and on the mainland of Scotland. He returned to Ireland to carry on his missionary work and his most important foundations were in Ossory, at Aghaboe and Kilkenny. He ended his life as Abbot of his monastery at Aghaboe. Among writings attributed to him were a life of St. Columcille, a life of St. Patrick in verse, a commentary on the New Testament and some hymns. He died about 598 being prepared for death by his great friend Fintan, the Abbot of Clonenagh.

St. Canice frequently retired from the society of men and went off to some remote place. His favourite retreat was Monahincha or the Holy Island not far from Roscrea.

Here he fasted 40 days; transcribed the Gospels and wrote a Commentary which was preserved for centuries and was known as the Glas Chainnigh, i.e., the Catena or Commentary of St. Canice, and here, it seems, he acquired his remarkable eloquence. He died at Aghaboe and the story of his burial we shall see later.

The Four Masters tells us that in 789 Ferghil or Virgilius, the Geometer, Abbot of Achadh-bo, died in Germany. This famous saint and scholar resigned the Abbacy of Aghaboe about 739 and went with a few companions to France to preach the Gospel. Having spent some few years in the court of Pepin, father of the King Charlemagne, he moved to Bavaria. About the year 748 Virgilius was appointed Abbot of the Monastery of St. Peter at Salzburg and in 1756 he was appointed Bishop of Salzburg. Carrigan quotes Brennan's Ecclesiastical History of Ireland, giving many details of the apostolic zeal of Virgilius. He died at Salzburg in 785 or 789 and was canonized in 1233.

It is probable that the old Irish Order of Monks held on at Aghaboe until the Norman Invasion. After a long interval they were succeeded here by the Dominicans in 1382. Finghin Mac Gillpatrick, Lord of Ossory, founded a house for the Dominicans here, and the first Prior was John O Foelan, evidently of Ossory. In 1540 the Abbey was suppressed and the property came later into the possession of the Barons of Upper Ossory.

On the 11th January, 1541, an Extent was made of the property of the Monastery. The brief details tell us that the site and circuit of the Abbey contained one acre, great measure, and are worth six shillings and eightpence. There are no superfluous buildings, all being necessary for the farmer. Property held included 14 acres arable (g.m.); 2 acres pasture; 2 acres moor; 16/- 12 cottages; 24/- Customs for each tenant and cottier—3 boon days and 2 weeding days, 3/6. Each having 7 sheep or more gives one sheep in autumn and each one gallon of butter. This last custom being uncertain, no valuation is made. Total 43/6. Total of the extent 50/2. James Earl of Ormond is the occupier.

**RUINS—**

**The Abbey Church** dates from later 14th century and is 100 feet long and 25 feet wide, and has no division into nave and chancel. South and west walls fairly well preserved; east gable somewhat broken down and the north wall completely gone. The east window, in good condition, is divided by two slender mullions and is traceried in the flamboyant style; it is contained within a gothic arch with a hood-moulding overhead. Beside the altar is a well-preserved ogee-headed niche of cut-stone, divided by a thin flag into a credence and a sacrarium. The three windows on the south wall are now lacking in any features.

The entrance door in west wall was of cut stone and ornamented at top but is now in a bad state. Over this was a tracery window.

**The Cloister** was on the north side—all now completely gone except for some mounds.

**Phelan's Chapel** on the south side is entered by two gothic arches resting on a solid pier of masonry. It measures 35 ft. by 24. The windows, two in east side and one in south, are all broken but give some idea of what they looked like. There are two niches each divided to form a credence and sacrarium; between is a tall niche for a statue. The chapel, about same date as church or a little later, may have got its name from the first Prior, John O Faellan, or from one of the O'Phelan's of Mach Lacha, who were formerly ancient chiefs of the district.

**Old Parish Church** stood about 50 yards east of the Abbey Church. It was built in the early English style and dates about 13th century. It originally had a nave and chancel. Even before Ledwich's time the nave had been pulled down and the chancel served as a Protestant Church. Ledwich gives us a detailed account of this which need not delay us as it was taken down in 1818 and the present church built on its foundations. The old hexagonal belfry of the early 13th century stands at the north-west angle. It is small and narrow and about 45 ft. high. There is a small gothic door framed with gritstone in the south side. The belfry has three narrow loops and in the west wall a trefoil-headed window with heavy moulding. Since Ledwich

wrote about 11 feet of masonry has been added on to the top.

The ancient Baptismal Font lies in a plot before the church door; it is octagonal and of cut stone but no ornament; it is slightly fractured.

No monuments of special interest—the oldest being dated 1675 of a Robert Hedges of Borris at the east end of church—a horizontal slab.

**Aghaboe Moat**, north of the church, is about 20 ft. high and is surrounded by a very wide fosse. It is 30 yards in diameter at the top where there are some remains of a very thick enclosing wall or coshel. A depression in the centre is probably due to the collapse of a chamber underneath.

**Town of Aghaboe** is said to have had 1,300 houses and lay west and south in the Pigeon Park of Currawn, where extensive foundations still remain beneath the surface.

**Kenny's Well**—Edward Ledwich, rector of this parish, says that the well was in his orchard (he wrote in 1796). This well was about 200 yards S.W. of the Abbey Church, in the Pigeon Park. Later it became a watering place for cattle and lost its old name and was called Kenny's Pond. About 1820 it was drained out and filled up and every trace of the well was wiped out.

**Kenny's Bush** was in the Cross-field. It rotted away and only a stump remained in 1900.

**The Cross** in the townland of Cross, consists of two straight depressions or shallow trenches in the surface of the field, each 30 ft. long, 20 inches wide, and 2 inches deep, the points face the four cardinal points.

Tradition accounts for the Cross in this way (Carrigan). When St. Canice died at Aghaboe the Kilkenny men came in force, as he was being waked in the Monastery Church and bore his remains away. The men of Aghaboe assembled and pursued them and overtook them where the old road to Kilkenny passed by "Kenny's Bush." The Kilkenny men laid down the coffin and prepared to fight. Just when the fight was about to start two coffins, both exactly alike and exactly similar to that for which they were fighting, appeared and the original one disappeared. Recognising in this the intervention of the Saint, both sides ceased fight-

ing and agreed to take away one coffin each: one to Kilkenny and one to Aghaboe, and hence no one can tell where he was buried. The people in Aghaboe believe that he is buried in Kilkenny because from that time the town of Aghaboe declined, while Kilkenny, blessed by the Saint, grew in importance. The spot where the two coffins appeared has been ever since marked by the Cross in the field, which has never been, and, it is believed, never can be, obliterated.

### **BOOKS ON AGHABOE.**

1. Carrigan II, ch. II, a long account.
  2. Parish of Aghaboe by Edward Ledwich, written about 1800 or earlier. Separately or in Statistical and Parochial Survey of Ireland, by Shaw Mason, vol. I.
  3. O'Hanlon and O'Leary's Queen County, vol. I.
  4. On Father Matt Keeffe and the Callan Curates—The League of North and South, by G. Gavan Duffy.
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1855

### **AUXILIARY WORKHOUSE BURNED DOWN**

One of the most extensive burnings remembered in this city for many years occurred on Saturday last in the Friars Bridge Auxiliary Workhouse, the property of Richard Sullivan, Esq., but at present in the possession of the Board of Guardians. A carpenter named Kealy and a pauper assistant who were erecting a partition in another part of the Auxiliary were the first to perceive the smoke and sent messengers for the Fire Engine and the Master of the Workhouse. The fire spread so rapidly to every part of that portion of the Workhouse in which it originated, that before the engine could arrive the entire building was one mass of flame and every effort to stay the conflagration proved abortive — consequently, of the house and everything it contained, nothing save the naked walls remained in about an hour; but providently it did not extend further. Had the wind been in a different direction at that time it is more than probable that the whole of Blackmill St., would have been consumed. We are glad to say that the premises and its entire contents were largely insured.

K. J.