

Here and There in St. Canice's Parish

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THE castles of Holdensrath, Cloranshee, Booleyshee and Bonnettstown are in the parish of St. Canice's but they belonged to the old barony of Crannagh (Crannach, the woodland; place abounding in trees). The Barony of Crannagh is first mentioned in "A Book of the Ploughlands, or Horsemen's beds in the County of Kilkenny." This was a list of the Ploughlands of Kilkenny as they were laid down by the Serjeants of Francis Lovell, Sherriff, in the time of Sir John Perrott's government, 1584-87.

According to a presentment of the Gentlemen of Kilkenny on the 3rd April, 1592, Crannagh had of mountain ground, four ploughlands, and of champion ground, two ploughlands. A ploughland was as much land as a plough with the beasts thereto could till in a year, and varied by estimation from 60 acres to 120 acres.

Included in the Barony of Crannagh in 1587 were the townlands of Keappaghnagearagh, Cloghrane, Bonnestowne and Fenonstowne.

HOLDENS RATH

Keappaghnagearach, also called Cappaghmore or Cappagh, was the manor to which Holdensrath, formerly Fowlingrath, belonged. The names Keappaghnagearach and Cappaghmore have not survived, but a townland near Cloranshee is called Cappagh. Cappagh was purchased by Roger de Pembroke from Walter Marshall, Earl of Pembroke. Then in 1331 Roger de Pembroke granted to Nicholas de Cleyn and his wife, Margaret (daughter of Roger) "common pasturage in all his lands of Cappagh, Ballybrennan and Ballysynan for their cattle of every kind, goats excepted. Also of husbate, heybote and frybote in his

wood at Kynaboule and Abrenewode." Nicholas de Cleyn was probably a member of the same family as John Clyn, the friar of St. Francis Abbey, who described so eloquently the havoc wrought by the pestilence known as the Black Death, which swept Ireland in 1348-49.

Patrick Stafford held lands in Cappagh in 1465, and he granted them by deed to James Fowlinge. The Fowlings held these lands at least until 1544, when there is a record of a dispute over them between Rose Fowling (widow of James, the great-grandson of the first James) and her neighbour, James St. Leger of Ballyfennowe. Thus Holdensrath got the name Fowlingrath from the family Fowling. The family name changed later on to Howling and finally Holden. These Howlings were probably connected with the Howlings of Kilree, now always called Holden, who say that by tradition their real name is Walsh.

Helias Shee, brother of Sir Richard Shee, held one-third of the lands of Holdensrath when he died in 1613. His son, George, forfeited them in 1653. Robert Rothe and the Fitzgerald family held the remainder and forfeited them also in 1653. The whole property was then divided between the two Cromwellians, Overington Blunden and Captain Thomas Evans.

The castle at Holdensrath is beside Mr. Duggan's house. Two entire walls still stand, with most of the arched floor of the second storey.

In the grant, already quoted, by Roger de Pembroke to Nicholas de Cleyn, Kyle-na-boule and Abrenewode are mentioned. Kyle-na-boule is the present name of a townland west of Holdensrath; it means woodlands. It is also called Sutcliffe's Gorse. Abrenewode is no longer known in the district, it may mean Alderwood, and there is marshy land near Kyle-na-boule.

BOOLEYSHEA

Booleyshea (Cuaile Ui Seaghdha: O'Shea's Dairy) was also called Ballendoyne. Sir Richard Shee owned three caru-

cates of land at Booleyshea. His grandson, Robert, forfeited them in 1653 to the Cromwellians, Charles Wheeler and Arthur Crumpe. There are considerable remains of an old castle or castellated house in Booleyshea.

CLORANSHEE

Cloranshee means stony place. It is listed among the ploughlands of Crannagh in 1587 as Cloghrane, but in 1593 it was known as Cloghrane O'Shee. It was forfeited by Henry Archer and Thomas Shortal in 1653. The castle in Cloran adjoins the dwellinghouse of the Rafter family, the walls only of the ground floor remain, but they are in a good state of preservation.

Cloranshee has been occupied by the Rafterers for at least two centuries; the Kerwicks and the Keoghs have been there for generations also. Mrs. Gaffney, of Lacken, the oldest member of the Rafter family, has a fund of stories of Cloranshee. All the Rafterers lived to a great age and are buried in St. Michael's Churchyard in Ballycallan. Mrs. Gaffney's parents spoke Irish fluently and she still has many Gaelic phrases and words. She recalls that forty-nine Rafterers of her generation, from the four houses in Cloran, went to school in Bonnettstown, and were taught by Miss Dody of Dean Street. They were nick-named the forty-nine chickens of Cloran, and judging from Mrs. Gaffney's reminiscences of those days, they were a very happy and high spirited group of chickens.

Gold was found in the castle about two hundred years ago. A little boy of the Rafterers was playing in the castle and found a sovereign, and ran to show the beautiful button to his father. It is said that a shovelful of sovereigns were found. The daughters of the house were afterwards endowed with the gold, and it brought luck into every house into which they married, but the finder, the little boy, was accidentally killed.

There is a strong tradition also that there is gold in Booleyshea, many people have searched for it, but are supposed to have been prevented from finding it by some un-

natural force. Mrs. Gaffney tells a "ghost story" about Booleyshee. Long ago an old woman who herded cattle for the Rafterers on their land at Booleyshee, took flagstones from the castle to repair the hearth in her own house, but returned them quickly enough when she found a frog sitting on each of the flags on the following morning.

Ballyfennowe has already been mentioned several times and although it has no connection with the O'Shee family, it is in this locality adjacent to Holdensrath and should not be omitted. Ballyfennowe, also written Ballyfennor and Ballyfinnan, is now known as Newtown. Some centuries ago there was a small parish in Ballyfinnan, impropriate in the Dean and Chapter of St. Canice's Cathedral, and later merged in the civil parish of St. Canice's. No trace of this church remains, but it must have stood in Mr. Madden's land in Newtown., in a field called the "Old Gardens," which tradition says is the site of an old churchyard. The castle of Ballyfinnan was also situated behind Mr. Madden's house, but practically nothing remains of it now. This castle was the residence of the St. Legers, a branch of the St. Leger family of Tullaghbroge, now commonly called Grove.

The St. Leger family was of French origin, Sir Robert St. Leger came to England with William the Conqueror in 1066 and settled in Kent. His descendant, William, came to Ireland with the Normans and was granted the entire parish of Tullabroge and Rosconnell, and thus began the Anglo-Irish family of St. Legers.

GEOFFREY ST. LEGER

One of the most famous members of the St. Leger family was Geoffrey, Bishop of Ossory from 1260-86. Friar Clynn states that "in 1284, Bishop St. Leger recovered the manse of Seir-Kieran by combat." The manor of Seir-Kieran belonged to the Bishops of Ossory from St. Kieran's time, but during the Norman invasion it was seized by some lay usurpers. Bishop St. Leger determined to recover the lands, but the documents supporting his claim not being forthcoming,

the usurpers refused to surrender them. He accordingly appealed to the trial by single combat, in accordance with the jurisprudence of these times, and being victorious in the combat, the manor of Seir-Kieran was restored to the See of Ossory.

Ware was of the opinion that the Bishop himself was not required to engage in single combat and that a champion was appointed by each of the contending parties. But Cardinal Moran thought that it was not at all improbable that the Anglo-Norman Bishops of the 13th century were no less skilful with the sword than the Barons, and that was why it was deemed expedient to issue royal letters in 1284 granting simple protection for three years to Geoffrey, Bishop of Ossory. Bishop Geoffrey was also credited with roofing St. Canice's Cathedral, and is styled the second founder of the Cathedral.

It is not known when exactly the St. Legers came to Ballyfinnan, but they were certainly living in the castle for several centuries. The property was forfeited by the Cromwellians and given to Major Adams, but it was restored to Geoffrey St. Leger in 1661. John St. Leger, who died about 1738, appears to have been the last representative of this St. Leger family.

Sir Richard Shee, who owned these castles of Cloran-shee, Booleyshee and Bonnettstown, was the most outstanding member of a prominent Kilkenny family. The Shees were of pure Milesian stock, being descended directly from Oilíoll Ollum, King of Munster in 250. They were lords of Iveragh in West Kerry and from there came to Cloghran in Tipperary. In the 15th century Robert Shee settled in Kilkenny, and he is commonly supposed to be the first of the Kilkenny Shees.

Sir Richard Shee was grandson of the above Robert. He was a member of Gray's Inn and a Bencher of the King's Inn and considered a lawyer of great eminence. The head of the house of Ormonde at that time was Thomas, 10th Earl of Ormonde, commonly called "Black Tom," who was held in high esteem by Queen Elizabeth, and consequently given

some of the highest positions in the State. Richard Shee must similarly have been held in high esteem by "Black Tom," as he occupied some of the most important public positions in Kilkenny.

Richard acted as attorney for Earl Thomas. He was Seneschal of Irishtown in 1568; Suffran of Kilkenny in 1569; Deputy Treasurer to the Earl of Ormonde (who was Lord Treasurer of Ireland) in 1576, and Treasurer of the Regalities of Tipperary in 1571. The Earl of Ormonde sent him to treat with the rebels in Munster in 1583-84, and he was commissioned to execute martial law in Kilkenny County, as Sherriff in 1589. It was probably through the influence of "Black Tom" that he received his Knighthood about 1589.

We can see from the terms of a will made by the Earl, how high in his regard Richard was. The will was made by Thomas in 1576, before he set out on a visit to England. In this will, Richard, with the Bishop of Waterford, and others was constituted an executor, and among the bequests made, Richard was to receive 100 crowns, also "that my feoffees be seized of the towns and lands of Jenkinstown and Mayne by the Dynanside to the use of my well beloved and trusted friend, Richard Shee of Kilkenny, free of all manner of rents and services." Finally, Thomas wished that his brother, Sir Edmund, should be loving and friendly to his base children and that he and Richard Shee be careful to have them well brought up.

During his life, Richard acquired an immense amount of property in the city and county. In 1570, Christopher Gaffney, Protestant Bishop of Ossory, granted him Uppercourt, the former Episcopal Palace, at a rent of £10 per year. All his possessions were set forth specifically in two Inquisitions, one at Kilkenny on April 27, 1609, the other at Thomastown on June 4, 1623.

The death of Richard took place on August 10, 1608, in Bonnettstown and he was buried in St. Mary's Churchyard in accordance with his own wishes, and a monument erected over his grave by his sons, as directed in his will.

His wife, Margaret, erected a cross to his memory,

which is known as the Butts' Cross. It consists of a small, plain Latin cross, fixed into a square pedestal, which rests on a platform of stone, about 3 feet high. The late Mr. Prim made a careful examination of this monument in 1852. The escutcheon on the dexter side was indecipherable, but the one on the sinister side was clearly that of the Fagan family. At the dexter base were the initials R.S. and at the sinister, M.F., so it is certain that the cross was erected to Richard Shee and his wife, Margaret Fagan.

The tradition in the locality is that the cross was erected by a man who lived in Bonnettstown. This man practiced the "black arts," despised the church and went hunting on Sundays and Holydays, so as to show his contempt for religion. On a certain Holyday there was a Religious Procession through the Butts to St. Canice's Cathedral, and so large was it that all the people could not get into the Cathedral, and knelt down in the streets. The gentleman from Bonnettstown rode up with his dogs on his way to hunt and tried to spur his horse through the kneeling people. The animal refused to do his bidding, and kneeling down with the people would not rise again until the religious ceremonies were concluded. This incident was the means of completely reforming the gentleman, he repented the sins and wrong doings of his past life, and erected a cross to mark the spot where the conversion took place.

Whatever the manner of Sir Richard Shee's life, his death was exemplary. It is on record that he was spiritually attended by a member of the Jesuit Congregation for some time previous to his death.

GRACE'S CROSS

Portion of the base of this cross stands at White's Gate in Lacken. Mason, in his "Parochial Survey of Ireland" (published 1819), said the cross commemorated the death of Edmond Grace of Courtstown, who was killed by a fall from his horse two days after his marriage to Catherine Archer. A slightly different version was known in the locality: this was that one of the Cantwells, who was a former suitor of Catherine, pursued the newly-wed couple and

killed Edmond at this spot. About half a mile west of the Cross, at Lacken Crossroads a stone stood, which the old Irish speakers of the district called Cloch Grasach, and said that the funeral cortege of Edmond extended from here to St. Canice's Cathedral, a distance of three miles. The rear of the procession of mourners stood here, while the interment took place in St. Canice's.

In 1819 the entire base and part of the shaft of the cross were in their original position, and Mason described it as follows: "On the west side of the pedestal is a shield with a lion rampant, impaling a chevron between three arrows and under the shield the names of Edmund Grace and Caterin Archer, in raised Gothic characters. On the south side is inscribed: "Cheill is death, remember and think upon this cros when thou dost see, and pray for them that build this cros." On the East side: "12 of Au— 1619 Caterin Archer al'— deceased the — that built this cross."

The only words discernible on the North side are: "Sacr— monumentum."

To-day only a fragment of the base remains. On the West side the shield can still be traced and underneath the two Christian names:

Edmund
Cathrin A

On the East side remains the almost obliterated inscription:

Cathrin Sheth has
Deceased the ()
that bolt this
Cros.

This inscription when entire, must have read:

Edmund Grace deceased the 12th August, 1619, his wyfe Cathrin Sheth deceased the (date left uncut) that bolt this cros.

Catherine Archer married as her first husband, Robert Shee (son of Henry Shee, Mayor of Kilkenny in 1610-1611). Her second husband, Edmund Grace, was the third son of Baron John Grace fitz Oliver of Courtstown.