

Birchfield

BY VERY REV. T. J. CLOHOSEY, ADM.

John Hogan, in his history of Kilkenny, says that Donaghmore and Birchfield were the one townland before the Kells Road was opened, and that after the opening of the road the east side became Birchfield.

But the Down Survey Map does not bear this out. On the map of 1654 Donaghmore was then the same size as now. Where Birchfield is we find Knockbulkin and Scald Furze and also Knockmore. The Down Survey Map also marks a castle or large house roughly in the position of the present house.

The Book of Survey and Distribution gives Knockbulkin's Scald Furz as owned, previous to the confiscations, by David Roth, Henry Archer and others. Knockmore, the southern part of Birchfield, was owned by Henry Archer. The new proprietors of this land are given as James Stopford and William Ivory. I do not know if the new owners ever came to live here.

The Post-chaise Companion of 1803 states that the house was built by Mr. Birch in the latter half of the 18th century and the part of the townland forming the estate was called after him, Birchfield. In Burtchael's History of the M.P.'s of Kilkenny, we are told that Eland Mossom married Hannah, widow of Charles Haydock and daughter of Alderman John Birch of Kilkenny and that his daughter, Margaret, born in 1744 married John Birch of Birchfield but died without offspring.

Alderman John Birch was Mayor of Kilkenny in 1716 — '17 and he may have been the builder of this house.

In 1767 appeared the following advertisement — To be let or sold the interest in the lease (which has 48 years to run) of the house and lands of Birchfield within one mile of Kilkenny containing nearly two hundred acres. The house is in good and thorough repair. A garden of 5 acres walled round and planted: the land is in good heart. The tenant may have the furniture at a valuation. Application to be made to Mrs. Broderick at Millicent near Naas, Co. Kildare, or to Rev. Mr. Broderick at Birchfield, June 10, 1767.

Rev. Laurence Broderick was a grandson of Sir St. John Broderick of Middleton and was appointed Rector of Callan in

1745 by the Crown. His prerogative will proved in 1786, the year he died, mentions that his wife, Jane, was separated from him. His son, John, was later a curate at Ennisnag and married Anne, daughter of John Boyd, Apothecary of Kilkenny.

I do not know who became the new tenant, Mr. Edward Murphy of Annaghs would probably not have got the property until about 1800.

In 1782 St. Kieran's College began its career at Burrell's Hall, James's Street. In 1789 a change was made to St. Canice's where the Loreto Convent is now. This had been the town house of Lord Clifden. In 1811 the ecclesiastical students changed over to Maudlin St. to a house which is still sometimes known as the Seminary. The house opposite it was also taken over. The high cost of keeping the Seminary in Maudlin St. and probably too the unsatisfactory condition under which students worked there prompted the desire to change to new buildings more commodious and more self-contained. On April 1, 1813, the house and demesne of Birchfield was advertised for letting in the "Kilkenny Chronicle". The lands consisted of 70 acres and proposals were to be submitted to Edward Murphy, Esq., Castle Annagh, Ross, or to Patrick Byrne, Esq., Kilkenny. Private subscriptions came in freely from such well known Kilkenny names as Smithwick, Lannigan, Shearman, Langton, Archdekin and Den. There was also public collecting throughout the diocese. The total up to the end of 1814 amounted to £3,648 10. In December, 1813, the property was taken over and a fine of 2,000 was paid to Mr. Murphy for the lease. The fine was a sum demanded of a landlord's agent or a fee for the transfer of a lease.

By September, 1814, £5,544 had been spent preparing the house and in that month the ecclesiastical students moved in while the lay students still were at the old academy in St. Canice's. Dr. Kieran Marum was the first president here until his consecration as Bishop of Ossory in 1815 when he was succeeded by Rev. Thomas Quinlan and then Fr. Shearman. In 1817 Father Patrick Kelly became president. In 1820 he became Bishop of Richmond, U.S.A., and was succeeded by Fr. Walsh who continued president until 1836 then Rev. Gerald Foley and finally, in 1838, Rev. Edward Aylward. The students came from all parts of Ireland and in the early days many of them were already priests.

The name, St. Kyran's College was used for the first time on the change to Birchfield. The Commissioners of Irish Education reported that in 1824 the establishment was called St. Kieran's, the Master was Edward Walsh and that boarders paid £25 and day scholars £6 16 6. The building is said to have been "a large dwelling house consisting of many departments, would cost £1,500 or £2,000 and the number on roll was 26 or 27. The Titular Bishop of Ossory, they said, receives £460 the income of the school, out of which he pays the masters and other expenses of the establishment".

Two of the best known students of Birchfield were the Callan curates, Fr. Matt Keeffe and Fr. Tom O'Shea. They founded the Callan Tenant Protection Society and this led to the powerful nation-wide Irish Tenant League of North and South.

Some time after 1830 the ecclesiastical authorities began to think of building a new college for various reasons. A document written by Dr. Kinsella, Bishop of Ossory, summarises the reasons for changing. The dilapidated state of Burrell's Hall, the uncertainty of tenure by which Birchfield was held, and still more the manifest advantage of having the professors of both establishments living together and thus combining their talents, learning and exertions for the support of a more extensive and perfect system of education induced the Diocesan Trustees to commence the erection of a new college.

In 1838 Richard Smithwick bought Birchfield and the college authorities paid the rent to him for the year 1838. I presume he took up residence soon after the college gave up possession. He was born in 1804 and married Margaret Delaney of Durrow but there were no children. He was a J.P. for the county and served as High Sheriff of the city in 1850. He was returned without opposition as a Repealer in August, 1846, and sat until Parliament was dissolved in July of the following year when he did not offer himself again. He died November, 1860, and his wife a few years later in 1864 married George Reade of Archer's Grove who came to live at Birchfield. On her death in 1888 John Francis Smithwick, a nephew, came to live at Birchfield. He acted as M.P. from 1880 — 1886. He lived at Drakelands but by 1888 was living at Birchfield. Isaac Bell lived here from 1908 to 1918. Then John Francis' son, Richard Smithwick lived here till his death in 1924.

The Smithwicks lived at Kilcreene House, Kilcreene Cottage

and Kilcreene Lodge, Tennypark, Orchardstown, Drakelands, Birchfield and Prospect — all in St. Patrick's parish.

The Sullivans lived at Castle Bamford and Rose Hill in St. Patrick's parish. James Stopford who acquired lands at Birchfield at the time of the Cromwellian Plantation, also obtained lands in other counties and took up residence in Wexford at Tara Hill. From him descended the Earls of Courtown and I think, Captain Montagu Stopford of Kilfera.

Gleanings of Local History

Knocklegan Pillar Stone

We know little of the story of this uninscribed Liagan other than it gave its name to the townland which is now locally known as Bamford and that it is recorded in the Ordnance Survey Letters as follows: "In the townland of Knockaliagain, i.e. the Hill of the Standing Stone, is a large rock reclining against a wall or ditch, measuring seven and a half feet in height over the ground, two feet ten inches in breadth, at the bottom and one foot in thickness." It is still reclining against a fence in this townland.

In connection with the ancient and historic townland of Donaghmore lying south-east of Knocklegan and south of St. Patrick's Industrial School Canon Carrigan records that "Bisop Rothe writes that the church of St. Patrick's, Kilkenny, was first known as the Ecclesia B. Mariæ Domhnaghmore: that it retained this name till the erection of St. Mary's church within the city, when it received the new name of St. Patrick's." He also states that "there can be no doubt that St. Patrick's is the Domhnaich Moir Roighni or Donnoghmore of Magh Roighne mentioned in the Life of St. Canice and which was a seat of a monastery of some importance prior to the year 600." The retention of the name on the townland is, I feel, ample evidence of a Patrician foundation.

Out Rath Civil Parish:— Donaghmore has therefore been within the bounds of St. Patrick's parish down through the ages, while Foulkstown was part of the Civil Parish of Out Rath. This old parish was made up of five townlands as follows: