

INISTIOGE

By MR. J. J. HUGHES

MONUMENT IN SQUARE OF INISTIOGE

THIS wayside cross was erected in 1621 to David Fitzgerald, otherwise Baron, who died in this year. The cross itself is now missing; tradition states it was deliberately smashed by yeomen in the troubles of 1798. The base long lay neglected near the river side till it was re-erected as an ornamental appendage to the square in the first half of the 19th century. The cross was described by Mr. Prim in 1850 in *Wayside Crosses of Kilkenny*. On the east side of the base is an escutcheon bearing the arms of the Fitzgerald's of Brownsford. The north face of the stone exhibits a shield charged with the emblems the Passion and surrounded by a cock crest wise and an inscription partially obliterated reading "The arms of our Redeemer, Christ Jesus." The south side is blank and on the west side reads (free translation) "Pray for the souls of Mr. David Fitzgerald called Baron of Brownsford, who died April 14, 1621, and his wife Johanna Morres who died 16—". Of the great house of Fitzgerald there were no fewer than three families of minor importance located in the county Kilkenny. The families of Fitzgerald of Cluan and Gurteen would appear to have been branches from that of Burnchurch and the head of the Cluan family was styled Baron of Brownsford and Clonamery. We find Edward Fitzgerald of Brownsford and Cluan returned to sit in the Supreme Council of Confederate Catholics at Kilkenny. His connection with the Confederation would appear to have nearly led to the forfeiture of his family property for though he died before the period of Restoration his son and successor was held responsible for his participation in the insurrection and luckily escaped with the loss of 65 acres which passed to the King who subsequently granted them to the Protestant Bishop of Ossory. In the Parliament held in Dublin on the 7th May, 1689, by James 1. Edward Fitzgerald and James Bolger represented the Borough of Inistioge and Fitzgerald subsequently raised and equipped a regiment of his tenants and retainers at whose head he fought at the Boyne and Aughrim. After the success of William of Orange his estates were forfeited passing to a Captain Sweet on payment of £1,473 and through him descending to the Tighe family. Various stories and traditions have been handed down about the Fitzgerald family but I must leave these for another time when you visit here.

List of property held by Edward Fitzgerald and confiscated—315 acres in the Parish of Clone, meadow and pasture on it, a good castle, three stories high in good repair, 1,099 acres; same parish, arable and meadow and some mountain pasture; 273 acres some pasture with farmhouse and eight cabins, the land joining the River Nore and hath good benefit of fishing. Sold to the Corporation for making hollow sword blades but assigned to Stephen Sweete for £1,473 on June 17, 1703.

BELFRY TOWER OF PROTESTANT CHURCH

((Old Tower of Priory))

The belfry tower is oblong in plan and stands upon four piers connected by pointed arches which opened respectively into the choir, nave and transepts of the Priory Church. Externally the walls have a slight batter and the lines of abutment of the transept roofs can still be seen. There were two lofts above the grained vault as in the keep. The loft contains a fine clock and a bell of 5 cwts. presented by the Tighe family.

THE PRIORY OF INISTIÖGE

This was the only monastic community in the county of Kilkenny founded in the time of the early Celtic Church, and was dedicated to St. Columbkille and to the B.V.M. Professor Stokes states that Columbkille was the most celebrated of the Irish saints. Irish by birth, Irish by education, and Irish in his life's work and devotion. Doctor Joyce states in his Irish Place Names, that Inistiöge is written Inis-Teac in the book of Leinster. We have no records whatever of the early Celtic Monastic Church. Inistiöge is mentioned only once in the Annals of the Four Masters and that is under the date 962 when the Danes were defeated here and many of them killed.

The Priory of Inistiöge was founded for Canons Regular of St. Augustine about 1210. There is a copy of the Original Charter in the British Museum. The founder was Thomas Fitzanthony, Seneschal off Leinster, and the first Prior was Alured from the Priory of Kells.

The original grant to the early Celtic Church must have included a fishery on the Nore, which some years ago was the subject of a Chancery suit, and which the court held must have been in existence before the promulgation of Magna Charta, otherwise the fishery could not have been regranted after the suppression of the Priory by Henry VIII. The Norman community appears to have enjoyed as peaceful an existence as fell to the lot of any monastic brotherhood in Ireland. Not richly endowed they have left only comparatively small buildings behind them, the existing remains of which I shall now refer to.

The ruins consist of the nave, tower and Lady Chapel and an ancient tower or keep known as the Black Castle. The Chapel was thrown down in 1824 and the present Protestant Church erected on its site. The nave of the Church is unusually short, and it must have entered into the plans of the last Prior to extend the old nave considerably to the west, had not the suppression taken place. Very likely a south transept must have entered into his plans as the tower is raised on four Gothic arches each facing one or other of the four cardinal points. The tower is in a perfect state of preservation, but unfortunately the site of the cloisters has been entirely obliterated. These were roughly on the site now occupied by the Catholic Church. Later on we will come to view in the surrounding wall of the Catholic Church a few fragments of cloisters—one piece particularly depicts half man and half fish, and this refers to an incident that happened in the 13th century, when a merman was taken in the River Nore close by. We have in the nave the most ancient monument here, a great floor slab with the figure of a prior incised thereon. The top, unfortunately, has apparently been deliberately chiselled off, making it impossible to identify the ecclesiastic to whom it belonged. It reads: "Here lies of good memory, formerly Prior of this place." Very probably this monument, judging by its age, belongs to Alured, the first Prior. The other monument, a floriated cross of eight points (originally in the Lady Chapel) commemorates the family of Bosser or Busher, date 1650. We now turn to the font (12th century) of Somersetshire stone: the bowl is square in plan and was evidently lined with lead originally; this was restored when it was placed here. It stands on a single circular shaft which is encircled at foot with a well executed rope moulding. Until about 50 years it lay in the old Protestant Church of Kells in this county and it was given by the Rector, Rev. Mr. Darby, to St. Canice's, Kilkenny. Only one side of the bowl had then any carving on it, the others had been left plain, as if the font had been intended to stand close into an angle of the church or some other reason had caused it to be left unfinished. When stone carvers were working at St. Canice's, the Rev. James Graves got one of them to carve the other three sides with the designs now thereon. The font having been found to be superfluous, it was presented to the Tighe family, who had it installed here.

THE BLACK CASTLE

We shall now turn to the Keep or Prior's Tower, locally called the Black Castle. Up to 1874 this was in a very dangerous condition, being split from top to bottom on the east and west sides, and seriously undermined at the foot of these breaches which gaped widely. The vaulting was also seriously damaged and in danger of falling in. The Tighe family conceived the idea of turn-

ing the place into a family mausoleum, and had it repaired. The two coffins are of Frederick Tighe and Lady Louise Tighe, who as a child was at the famous Brussels Ball before the Battle of Waterloo, and received the gift of a watch from the Duke of Wellington. This Keep was probably used as a residence by the Prior; it had several chambers and was entered by an ancient doorway through the church, which was the only entrance. There were two storeys in the basement and three storeys above, which were reached by a spiral staircase in the north-west angle. Steps also gave access to the tower of the church.

THE LADY CHAPEL

The Lady Chapel was used for Protestant worship for a considerable time. Mr. William Fownes was said to have fitted it up for that purpose, and it continued to be used until the so-called restoration of the choir was carried out to replace it. Since 1820 it has been allowed to fall into decay and if not soon attended to, there will not be much of it left in a few years. A crypt of unknown dimensions runs from here under the modern church. It was the burial place of a family named Garvey, who lived at Brownsford, adjacent to Woodstock, the residence of the Tighes. The monument you notice on your right is an altar tomb with a floriated cross of eight points. A salmon in relief carved in one corner; capital letters very richly wrought. Also the sacred monogram I.H.S. Date about 1580. The carving of the salmon was cited some years ago in a lawsuit to prove the monastery had certain fishing rights conferred upon it by Charter. The monument is probably one of the last erected to a Prior of the Monastery of the Joyce family, once well known here.

The last important religious ceremonial witnessed in the Priory of Inistioge was the consecration there of Tonory as Bishop of Ossory in 1553 by order of Queen Mary in room of Bale, the Protestant Bishop, who she deposed and sent into exile. The last Prior was Milo Fitzgerald, and he surrendered in 1535 the monastery and all its possessions, receiving an annual income of £20 per year for life. He gave to Kilkenny Cathedral a marble table for the altar and a crozier staff of silver, and died of grief around 1550. The confiscated property was handed over to the Ormonds, and most of it eventually passed to the Tighe family by purchase and intermarriage. Before I leave the subject of the Priory, may I say that the Annals preserved are meagre and uninteresting. A floor slab at the west end of the Lady Chapel with raised cross of eight points down to centre has an old English inscription in relief round the edge to the family of Bossor or Buscher.

THE CHURCHYARD

The Churchyard contains two graves of interest; the first is a monument by Flaxman erected to Mrs. Mary Tighe, the poetess,

who wrote poetry under the name of Psyche. She was the daughter of a Protestant clergyman, and was born in 1773 in a large mansion, which may still be seen on the Dublin-Wicklow road. Tom Moore wrote verses in her honour, and Leigh Hunt quoted some of her stanzas as the most faultless ever produced by a woman. These judgments have not withstood the passage of time, and today "Psyche" is forgotten. The monument represents her as she died in her sleep and the figure at her head represents the muse. Her portrait, painted by Romney, hung in the National Gallery, and was sold recently for a large sum. The other grave of note is that of James Freny, the outlaw. He was born near here, and in his early days was servant in a gentleman's family, but this mode of life was too tame for him and he eventually became leader of a gang of outlaws. He was known and feared around this district and robbed the rich and gave to the poor.

By the influence of the Tighes and Ormonds he was pardoned, giving himself up to the law in Inistioge, subsequently becoming a Tide Waiter under the Board of Excise at Ross. His widow drove the body from Ross to Inistioge on a donkey cart and he now sleeps peacefully by the banks of the Nore. The stories told about him are legion. One of them describes how after waiting at table where he was employed he held up the guests on their departure and relieved them of money and jewellery.

ST. COLUMBKILLE'S WELL

We now turn to the Holy Well of Columbkille, whose pattern day was on June 9th. Within living memory a pattern was held here, but this practice has fallen into disuse and the well is now mostly used to supply water to nearby cottages. The annual pilgrimage was at one time of major importance. When the pilgrims commenced their devotion in the village and crawling on their knees through the sharp and shingly stone of the stream which forms its bed, they at length painfully reached the little streamlet which conveys the water to the large brook; up the hillside through the bed of this smaller water source they reached the blessed well. Their self-imposed task had ended. Tradition states there was a wooden image of great age enshrined beside the sacred fountain, but during the disturbance of 1798 a Yeoman broke it up and threw the pieces into the river.

THE MOTE OF INISTIOGE

When King John visited Ireland in 1210, on his way from New Ross to Kilkenny, he made certain payments at a wood beside the land of Thomas Fitzanthon. This was probably the demesne of Woodstock. The Mote of Inistioge is piled upon a rock which juts out from the high ground above the river valley. The Nore is

navigable nearly up to Inistioge, and the mote guards the ford. On the river side it is quite inaccessible and on the landward side, where it is not so high, it was defended by a deep trench. It is now so surrounded by houses that it is difficult to examine it properly or to detect original features. There is a slight wall, likely modern, round the top. Probably no stone castle was ever built in connection with the earth works, though the town was long afterwards walled and defended by guard houses and the walls appear to have run up the mote.

THE HUNDRED COURT

The civil history of Inistioge contains interesting memories of the town. The Charter of Incorporation of the Borough was derived from the Prior and not from the Lord of the Soil. The original grant to Inistioge is fortunately on record and was made within the first twenty years of the 13th century. Extracts from the Charter read:—

“That no Burgess shall be impleaded in any cause which arises within the boundary of the Borough in the Prior’s Court or elsewhere, except in the Hundred Court of the town.”

“That it may be lawful for the Burgesses to hold said Hundred Court in their town one day in each week, where they may plead without vexacious delay and that none of them shall be fined except by the consideration of the Hundred Court; and that if any Burgess shall be fined he shall give security to us for 12d. of which 6d. is to be paid to us and the other 6d. forgiven except in the case of old offenders.”

“That no foreign merchant shall be permitted to cut cloth or hold a wine tavern in the town of Inistioge except for thirty days, and if he wishes for a longer space he can only obtain it when it appears to be for the profit of the town. The said Burgesses be permitted to have a Merchants’ Guild and other Guilds, and to take customs and tolls with all the liberties to them belonging as is the privilege of other towns.”

“That no Burgess be compelled to supply cattle to the Priory unless he first have security for payment at a certain date.”

One item from the Corporation Record Book of Inistioge under date October 6th, 1718, is worth repeating: “Upon a full assembly of ye Corporation, it was ordered that no person be for the future made free of ye said Corporation unless he then drink ye glorious member on King William, in a bumper.”

Before I finish, may I remind Kilkenny people that the Banim Brothers laid the scenes of some of their novels around Woodstock and Charles Lever resided for some time in a house across the river where he wrote “Bloomingdale”—a book which I have never been able to get hold of.