

Clonamery Church

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THE small oratories and churches erected in the early centuries of Christianity in Ireland are architecturally humble, but they have a special interest. They were evolved, unlike those of Western Europe in the same period, in almost entire inadvertence of Roman building traditions. The use of mortar and the knowledge of the round arch, for instance, must have come to Ireland from the Continent.

Early Irish Churches were very simple buildings, simple character structures with no divisions into nave and chancel. The more unusual proportion is the short oblong, that in which the length within is seldom greater than one and a half times the breadth.

The general style of masonry unwrought or roughly dressed stones not laid in regular courses. Many stones are of a massiveness not often found in modern masonry. There was indeed a strong preference for such stones particularly but by no means always, in the lower parts of walls and, as we here see, around the entrance doorway.

A building characteristically observable in Clonamery is the Batter or the slightly inward sloping of the walls. The earth or mud-built cottages of the Irish countryside—survivals fast vanishing of an old and practical tradition—are examples. In the Ireland of to-day there are many buildings of dry stone and the technique of any stone fence or wall building still lives. Stability in such structures is still sought and obtained by battering which gives a measure of security against the slipping or spreading of the stonework.

The battering in the case of Clonamery is subtle—a matter of but a few inches in the height of the walls. In part it is barely perceptible. Though adopted for practical reasons in the first instance the batter seems to have been retained in later works as a grace. The batter is very conspicuous in the round towers and without it they would lack all grace and something in the sense of stability. The battering on the west walls of this Church is on the inside instead of the outside, a most unusual feature.



The sloping doorway was erected to harmonise with the battered walls of the Church. A cross in relief—called *pattee* is heraldry, is chiselled over the ornamental moulding around the door. From this descends, to left and right across the top of the door and down the sides to the ground, a scroll or border, also in relief. In this door the large stones are exceedingly well wrought and fitted, giving to the opening permanence and massiveness, even a degree of majesty.

DESCRIPTION OF CLONAMERY

The ancient parish of this church was a small one consisting of five townlands only and is now united to Inistioge. There is some doubt as to the meaning of the word *Clonamery* and as to the identity of the patron saint. Canon Carrigan states the true patron is a local saint of the name of *Broonahawn*. He suggests that the name of this place was originally — in English the plain of *Ainmire* — a less likely interpretation being the lawn or meadow of the Ridge.

The Church consists of a nave, a chancel and a small side building which may have been a sacristy or mortuary chapel. The nave is probably the original church, the other portions being later additions.

The gable over the entrance is a reconstruction built of small rubble which contrasts strongly with the large stones of the wall below. A relieving arch has been worked over the doorway and over this there is a plain roughly built window. The gable terminates in a bell-cote with space for two small bells—one contained the *sanctus* bell and the other the bell for calling the people to prayer which was a custom in the early church.

There is another window in the south wall near the east end, it is now closed by a monumental tablet inserted in 1860. It is said that the dressings had disappeared before the tablet was erected. In the north wall the only feature is a doorway; it is three feet eleven inches wide and suggests a doorway long built up—likely, an opening into a side building rather than an external doorway. No trace, however, remains of any such building.

The chancel is built of small slatey flag-stones and is bounded to the nave at one point only in each wall; the walls being two feet four inches in thickness. The south wall contains a doorway and a window, the doorway is round-headed—six feet two inches in height and two feet four inches wide, rebated and splayed internally.

In the east wall at the north side is a doorway which opens into the sacristy or mortuary chapel; this doorway is partially destroyed and its dimensions are uncertain. The sacristy or side building is lighted by a window looking east. The walls are not banded to those of the chancel.

Several curved or shaped stones have been found near the church, the most interesting being a pillar-stone of early date. It was found in the graveyard outside. It is formed of greenish slate-rock and bears three crosses and two circular hollows or cup-marks. First a cup, two and a half inches in diameter and finally below this a simple cross in relief. This combination of cross and cup marks has been found on monuments in the district immediately south of Dublin, but not apparently elsewhere. It is therefore, of interest to meet one so far away as the southern half of Kilkenny.

A small 18th century tombstone is mentioned by Carrigan. This is from the chisel of a stone-cutter named Darby O'Brien of Rathpatrick, who flourished during the first quarter of the 18th century. It bears a cross and border in relief, also the inscription "Here lyeth ye body of Silvester Wh(it)e." The name is White, two of the letters which are in relief having been sealed off.

It seems curious that this church, though of the most remote antiquity, and possessed of so much interest, has been altogether overlooked by the careful and laborious Petrie in his great work on early Irish ecclesiastical architecture.

THE MERMAID

Up the river is a townland one time owned by the Dobbyn family and forfeited in 1653. Under date 1118 the



Four Masters record that a mermaid was taken by the fishermen in the weir. Inside in the walls of Inistioge Church is an effigy of a mermaid, probably from the cloister of the monastery of Inistioge. This likely commemorates the incident.

The patronage of the Church of Cloone must be assigned not to St. Brendan, whose name and fame are celebrated in all our martyrologies, but to St. Broonahawn, whose name survives only in the traditions of this locality. His pattern day was held on the 16th of May, but I am sorry to state that his Holy Well was destroyed over 100 years ago. Its remains I am told are quite close to another road leading to the Quay at Clonamery.

In some of the single chamber churches chancels were added at a period subsequent to their erection. The date of the first appearance in Ireland of this type of church is a matter of doubt. It has been suggested that it was in the 11th century at the earliest that it may be a logical result of the Reform movement which gained impetus about the beginning of the 12th century. Possibly, the change points to a steady increase in population bringing with it larger congregations and an increased necessity for marked differentiation between the space for the people and the sanctuary. It seems not unreasonable to assume that the earliest churches with severed nave and chancel may belong to the 10th century and that the addition of chancels to single chamber churches has an equal antiquity.

Tradition states that the church continued in use till 1691, when Edward Fitzgerald of Cloone Castle, fell in the Battle of Aughrim.

CLOCHANS

The Irish Church speedily developed monastic centres not only evangelistic, but also educational in purpose. From these settlements went forth those missionaries, teachers and servites to Britain and the Continent who are still remembered in places remote from the homeland. The monastic centres of the early Irish Church were very similar to those of the earliest monastic societies of Syria and Egypt.

That is to say, associations of monks, each dwelling under self-imposed discipline in the separate cell grouped with others around the church.

The most austere among Irish holy men sought even greater isolation as hermits and built their cells and oratories in relatively inaccessible and often inhospitable places. A constant feature of these early hermitages and monasteries, small or large, was its enclosure, an encircling rampart of earth and stone. This was as necessary to a monastery as to a farmhouse of the times and, for the hermit is served also to shut out everything but the heavens from his sight and thoughts.

In hagiographical literature there are numerous references to the gifts of forts or duns given to the Church by newly converted chiefs. An erroneous impression exists that this work was carried out by young and virile men. In the to look around at the amount of laborious work involved, even in the remains of the buildings here to appreciate that this work was carried out by young and virile men. In the early centuries life was stronger and religion was more of a driving force in the life of the ordinary man.

Survivors of stone architecture of early Christian times are the beehive huts or clochans. They were built upon the castle principle; a structural method of great antiquity first practised in Ireland as far as we can judge by the Bronze Age builders of great passage graves of Newgrange. In the typical clochan the corbel principle is well applied. Each course of stone work was laid without mortar and nearly horizontally overhung by a little, the course below. As it rises the building gradually narrows until its arch can be closed by a single slab and the dome then be finished by more stones to secure the closer in position and complete the beehive outline.

One of these clochans was 14 feet in diameter, the other 11 feet. There is a tradition here that a monastery existed at this spot in ancient times. Should this have reference to some period anterior to the 13th century, when the Church of Cloone became prebendal, it is no doubt correct. No monastery it is plain can have existed after this.