

Pottlerath and Kilmanagh

BY MAI SPARKS

RATH an Photaire, that is Potter's Rath or maybe the Rath of the Potter.

The ancient name of Pottlerath, according to Dr. O'Donovan was Dun Aengusa Mic Nadfraoich, that is the Dun or royal residence of Aengus Mac Nadfraoich, King of Cashel. He was slain in the year 489.

In the 15th century, Edmund Mac Richard Butler, grandfather of Piers Ruadh, Earl of Ormond had a residence at Pottlerath. He built a Church quite close to the Castle.

The Church is believed to date from about the year 1450. When Rev. Fr. Holohan visited Pottlerath in 1883 he paid a tribute to Mr. J. Waring, who then lived in Pottlerath House for the way in which he preserved the Church and to-day the Kilkenny Archaeological Society would like to thank the present owners, Mr. and Mrs. Thompson who came to Pottlerath in the year, 1947, for the good work they have done in cutting down ivy and otherwise trying to preserve the old Church of Pottlerath.

In the year, 1453 Edmund Mac Richard Butler, then resident in Pottlerath, had a copy of the celebrated Psalter of Cashel, made at Pottlerath by a famed Irish scribe named Seaghan Buidhe O Cleirigh.

There was a battle fought between the Butlers and the Desmonds in the year 1462 at Baile an Phoill (Piltown), Co. Kilkenny, on the site where Our Lady's Scholasticate now stands. Mac Richard Butler was defeated and made a prisoner and in order to obtain his liberty he had to deliver up his Psalter of Cashel and the Book of Carrick to his captor, Thomas Earl of Desmond.

Mac Richard Butler's copy of the Psalter of Cashel is now in the Bodleian Library Oxford.

Dr. Carrigan says that Mac Richard Butler was one of Anglo-Irish nobles of the 15th century who became ' Irish

of the Irish." He married Catherine O'Carroll. Mac Richard died at the Castle of Pottlerath in the year 1464 and was buried in St. Francis Abbey, Kilkenny.

THE PSALTER OF CASHEL

The Psalter of Cashel was written at three different periods of time. It was begun in the fifth century by St. Benignus. Three hundred and fifty years afterwards it was enlarged and brought up to date by Cormac Mac Cullinan, who was a wise ruler and a learned scholar.

One hundred and fifty years later, King Brian 'Boru added to it bringing it up to his own date.

The original manuscript has been lost. Irish and Latin are the languages used.

The Psalter of Cashel contains amongst other matters the 'Book of Rights, Cormac's Glossary, the Felire of Angus, a list of the Bishops of Armagh, a list of the Kings of Cashel, a miscellaneous collection of historical, genealogical, theological and poetical works, a legendary history of Ireland, the genealogy of the Kings of Rome, Egypt, Syria and Israel. It also contains tales of the Fianna and numerous other matters of national importance. It also gives quotations from Irish Bards and Ollamhs, Irish chronicles and Latin authors.

In the Psalter are recorded the sub - divisions of the Kingdom of Ireland, the rights and privileges of the sub kings and lords of cantreds or baronies, the gifts which they received from the King of Cashel at his Coronation, the boundaries of their territories and many other matters of great national importance.

One eminent authority, Archbishop Healy, has described the Psalter of Cashel as the Domesday Book of the South of Ireland.

CORMAC'S GLOSSARY

The Glossary consists in marginal notes or interlineations which explain the meaning of a book. In this work Cormac proves the solid education which was given in the ninth century of Ireland by his use of Hebrew, Greek,

Latin and Pictish words in his elucidation of the Irish text of the Glossary.

The word "Psalter" as applied in this case means political history etc. not religious like "The Psalter."

Several eminent scholars have described the Psalter of Cashel to be one of the most important of the old Irish Books.

Portions of the Pottlerath Psalter are missing.

The Psalter now in the 'Bodleian Library is in a somewhat imperfect state. It went through a lot since it left its home at Pottlerath. Given as ransom by Edmund Mac Richard Butler (who had it made) to the Earl of Desmond it was next in the hands of Carew; then it came to Sir Thomas Stafford who inherited from Carew in 1629, next it came into the hands of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury (who was beheaded in 1641). The Psalter of Cashel is part of Archbishop Laud's bequest to the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The following entry, translated from the original Irish appears in the margin of folio 110 and was written into the Psalter, while it was in the possession of Thomas Earl of Desmond: "This was the Psalter of Edmund Mac Richard Butler until the defeat of Baile an Phoil (Piltown); was given to the Earl of Ormond and to Mac Richard by the Earl Desmond (Thomas) when this book and the Book of Carrick were obtained in the redemption of Mac Richard. And it was this Mac Richard that had these books transcribed for himself and they remained in his possession until Thomas, Earl of Desmond wrested them from him."

An entry made in the Psalter of Cashel while it was at Pottlerath, translated from the Original Irish reads as follows:

"A blessing on the soul of the Archbishop of Cashel i.e. Richard O'Hedigan (Hayden), for it was by him the owner of this book was educated, namely Edmund, son of Richard son of James, son of James. This is the Sunday before Christmas (1453) and let all those who shall read this give a blessing on the souls of both.

“This is the Friday before Christmas and heavy is the rain now in the beginning of the night. May the son of the proprietor of this town return safe i.e. James Butler, son of Edmund, son of Richard, son of James, son of James, for he left us early this morning.

“We are at Rath an Potaire (Pottlerath) and within five days of Christmas, by God’s permission.

“They were erected this year i.e. 1453 the Bawn of Dunmore, and two castles at Durlles (Thurles) and the castle of Buaidhlic by Mac Richard in the same year.”

My friend, John Keane, was in Oxford last month and at my request he visited the Bodleian Library for the purpose of inspecting the Psalter of Cashel there. He made several notes which have been very useful to me.

Amongst the works I consulted relative to this celebrated Psalter were Very Rev. Canon Carrigan’s “History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory;” “The Transactions of Ossory Archaeological Society;” Eleanor Hull’s “Text Book of Irish Literature;” Mr. J. Gleeson’s “Cashel of the Kings;” Archbishop Healy’s writings and other authorities.

WILL OF PIERS RUADH BUTLER

Piers Ruadh Butler the eighth Earl of Ormond and grandson of Edward Mac Richard Butler, made his will at the Castle of Pottlerath about three months before his death. It begins thus :—

“In the name of God Amen. In the year 1539 on the 28th May at Pottlerath, I, Piers Butler, Earl of Ormond and Ossory, although sick of body yet sound of mind, make my will in manner following :— I leave my soul to Almighty God, to the Blessed Mary, the Virgin, and to the whole celestial court and my body to be buried in the Cathedral Church of St. Canice, Kilkenny. I appoint and constitute my eldest son, James Butler my heir. I appoint and constitute Margaret Fitzgerald, my lawful wife, James and Richard my sons, my joint executors. I leave to my son James my best gown and to my son, Richard, my second best gown. I leave to be divided between the Churches and specially

the Church of the Blessed Mary of Callan and of Ballygowran (Gowran) according to the discretion of my supervisors and executors. I leave to the said James my coat of mail and my horse. I leave to my son, Richard, my other horse. I leave to the said James my great collar of gold. I leave to Richard my small chain of gold.

“I leave to each plough within the County of Kilkenny one stone of wheat.

This last bequest shows that the testator must have been a keen agriculturalist and must have had great faith in the wheat growing properties of Kilkenny soil.

Piers Ruadh Butler, the 8th Earl of Ormond, died on the 26th August, 1539. He is buried in St. Canice's Cathedral Kilkenny.

Columbarium, dove cot or pigeon house was a very general appendage to ancient religious houses. Much variety existed in the construction of pigeon houses. Walls were of stone, four or five feet in thickness with numerous ranges or holes for pigeons. The house is usually covered by a vaulting of stone presenting a concave surface internally and externally. A circular opening in the centre of the vaulting affords the means of ingress and egress to the pigeons.

In an article in an *Archaeological Journal* of 1852, there is a very interesting account of dove cots in which the Columbarium of Pottlerath is mentioned. It is very ancient and probably was built early in the 15th century when the Church and Castle were being built or it could have been erected earlier than that as there is a tradition that there was a monastery at Pottlerath in the very early days. I have not been able to get any conclusive information as to this.

There is a dove cot at Kilcooley Cistercian Monastery.

When the confiscation of the property of St. John's Priory in the City of Kilkenny took place in 1540 a pigeon house was listed.

Pigeon houses in olden times were common to private houses.

BRITTAS MASS PIT

On the occasion of the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the late Very Rev. Canon Murphy (a very distinguished archaeologist) who was P.P. in Kilmanagh in the year 1915, the special preacher was the Right Rev. Monsignor C. Cavanagh, P.P., V.G., Dean of Ossory. In the course of his sermon he said : "It is not so long ago since the Catholics of the district met in secret at Pottlerath and Brittas to celebrate the Divine Mysteries. The Mass Pits are still held in veneration and may it long be so for it would be ungrateful of you to forget or neglect the sacred shrines consecrated by the celebration of Holy Mass and by the prayers and tears of your forefathers. From the Mass pits they came to the little thatched chapel which stood at the avenue gate at Kilmanagh Parochial House. From the thatched chapel they came to the beautiful church in which we are assembled today. It was built in the year of Grattan's Parliament, 1793, and restored in the year of Ireland's resurgent nationality."

KILMANAGH

Cill Mhanach (Kilmanagh) that is the Church of the Monks. The ancient form of the name is Cill Manach Droichit, or Kilmanagh of the Bridge.

St. Natal, a son of Aengus Mac Nadfraoich King of Cashel, founded a monastery here about 500.

Dr. Lanigan states that little or nothing would be known concerning St. Natal were he not highly praised in the lives of St. Senan, who when young, was a pupil of his, having been directed to his monastery and school by the Abbot Cassidus.

In the following passage from the metrical life of St. Senan it will be seen that St. Natal is very highly praised :—

"In a vision an order is given

By the Lord of Heaven to the Abbot Cassidus

To send the novice Senan to the illustrious Abbot Natalis

To be fully instructed under his rule and discipline.

Even at that time Natalis' name was well known to
fame
With him a large community dwelt in religious
unity,
A hundred and fifty brethren learned and holy men."

Rev. Fr. Holohan, writing in 1883 said that the number of monks must have increased very much if there is any truth in the following story : " It is said that the monks of Kilmanagh paid a visit to their brethren at the monastery of Gortfreagh, about two miles distant. The Abbot, when he arrived at Gortfreagh, observed that he had forgotten his breviary. Word was immediately sent back from one to one by the monks who were in single file and whose long line reached to Kilmanagh and the breviary was forthcoming without delay, as the last monk in the line was walking over the threshold of Kilmanagh Monastery when he got the word about the breviary."

The monastery is believed to have been near the site of the present Protestant Church.

According to the Rev. Fr. Holohan there are two patron saints St. Edan and St. Natal.

St. Natal's wooden statue, which is seven centuries old, was preserved in Kilmanagh until about the year 1875, when it was transferred to the museum at St. Kieran's College, Kilkenny. Kilmanagh was a place of great distinction and importance in ancient times.

Rev. Fr. Holohan says of Kilmanagh :—

"Once thou wert a 'city of song,'
And glorious memories to thee belong,
For from thy renowned monastery in ages long
gone by
Songs of praise daily ascended to the Throne of
The Most High."