

## **POWERSTOWN CHURCH**

By MRS. GRATTAN BELLEW

NOTES taken from the Journal of the Royal Historical and Archaeological Association of Ireland for the year 1873 by James G. Robertson, Architect.

“I have said that Powerstown Church is ‘ancient,’ I believe it to be very ancient, but this fact does not readily appear, as the old masonry is concealed by many a coat of dashing, however, in one or two places it does make its appearance. Although the mullions and jambs of the door and window are all gone, the thick walls speak for themselves, and then on entering the church we find the basin of a splendid early English Font and wonder that it never occurred to any of the incumbents of Powerstown to get it restored and set up in a wide unoccupied space so well adapted for it, near the door? The font is fluted and closely resembles those at St. Canice’s and St. Mary’s Church.

“There is an opening under one side of the Church indicating the existence of a vault. The Loftus family were interred here.”

There is an annual “Patron Day” connected with Powerstown. The first institution of Patron Days in Ireland was an anniversary commemoration of those days on which their parish churches had been dedicated to the respective saints whose tutelary guardianship the people annually implored as their mediators and advocates with the Almighty, which custom also prevailed in England where such annual meetings were denominated “wakes,” and in both countries used to be celebrated one or more days after the octave of the Saint to whom the Parish Church had been dedicated. These institutions seem to have been very ancient in Ireland.

It would appear that the clergy and laity of each parish annually assembled at thier respective churches on those solemn occasions not only to implore the future tutelage of their Patron Saint, but also to offer up prayers and distribute alms for their departed friends, from whose

venerated tombs they cleared the weeds and decorated them with the gayest of flowers of the season, renewing at the same time the mournful funeral dirge in which was recounted every worthy action of the deceased and his relatives as on the day of interment; hence it was necessary to erect temporary lodgings or booths in the neighbourhood of the churches, and procure provisions for the poor, which were distributed to them in charity by the pious of every denomination; as also to find refreshment for strangers, whose devotion often brought them from very remote places on these occasions. Such was doubtless the first institution of Patron Days and such it continued for ages until the Reformation; yet the people, ever tenacious of the religion of their fathers, assembled as usual on each anniversary day.

The point to which I desire to direct attention here in connection with this subject is, that in no one instance in this country do we find a church founded by the English (or Normans) no matter to what Saint dedicated, that has been honoured by the people, after its suppression, by the observance of its "Patron" feast. There was never a Patron day at Gowran, though dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, nor at Kells or Jerpoint, whilst at the comparatively obscure churches of Kilbride, Killaloe, Aughaviller and Powerstown, etc., the Patron was observed until recent times. The Patron at Powerstown is still observed on Trinity Sunday.

### POWERSTOWN

From a Parliamentary return of the state of Popery, made 6th November, 1731, it appears that in Graig there was one Mass-house built in 1728, that there were no private chapels, friars or nunneries, no Popish schoolmasters and that Robert Rossiter was Popish parish priest; that in Powerstown there was a Mass-house built in 1731 and that Robert Rossiter was also parish priest there.

In a similar return made in 1766 it is stated that in Powerstown there were two Protestant families, 130 Popish families and two Popish priests, Robert Rossiter and

Laurence Clooney. The same priests were stated to officiate in Grange Sylvia.

In 1704 Anthony Forstall, aged 48, residing at Pollagh (which adjoins Mount Loftus) is returned as P.P. of Graigue, Grange Silviae, Powerstown and Ullard. He was ordained in Spain in 1675 and his sureties were William Butler, Bramblestown, and Patrick Purcell, Cloghlea, gentlemen.

### AUCHAILTEN

Auchailten or Aca-Cail-tan, near Ullard, is another very ancient church and well. At the 8th of November, the Martyrology of Donegal records — Bairfionn, son of Aedh, of Achadh-Cailltean in the Ui Drona, west of the Berbha, in Ui Reithe, to the south of Leithglinn. He is of the race of Eochaidh Finn-Fuath-Airt, from whom is Brigit. Fr. Shearman says that Bairfionn was undoubtedly the child that was born to Aedh, when St. Fiacre came to his house, and whom he baptised. We may suppose that Bairfionn became his daltha and finally a cleric, and settled at this church. This saint and his brother, Finbar, of Little Island, on the Suir, lived for some time in a monastery in Athclath, i.e. Dublin, which thus appears to have had a monastery church from a very early period.

The base of the granite church can be seen behind the eastern gable which is all that now remains of the ancient church. The upper portion of the cross was removed to Graiguenamanagh by Father Broughal in 1820 and was erected in the churchyard. There is also a well near the ruins which is reputed never to go dry.

These lands have been in possession of the Ryan family, who trace their ancestry back to Dermot O Ryan, Prince of Idrone, for many generations.

Mrs. Grattan Bellew also brought the Society to see the fine Moat of Powerstown and later on spoke of the early history of Ullard where there is a fine Romanesque church.