

## Tullaroan

By REV. SEAN O'DOHERTY, Member

**T**ULLAROAN either means Tulach Ruain, Hill of St. Ruan of Powlrone in Mooncoin, or designates land of a reddish colour. The parish emerged as an independent entity in 1843 when the union with Freshford was broken.

The parish is 13,600 statute acres in area and has at present a population of 1,800. It has also been called Grace's parish after the great Grace family who lived there since the end of the 13th century.

The church, which is dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, consists of nave and part of the chancel. The west gable and south side wall are gone. The Sedelia in the south wall has only two compartments, like Kilfane church and Muckcross Abbey.

There is a built-up arch leading to the chapel on the site of Grace's chapel. A window of two lights (7' x 3' 6") in the east wall is now gone. A small Gothic doorway opens into Grace's chapel from the church.

### *PERFECT*

A parochial survey of Ireland in 1819 stated that the church was substantially perfect, but the western gable was "nodding to its ruin."

Grace's chapel, which was founded in 1543 by Sir John Grace, Baron of Courtstown, measures 27' x 17' and contains south gable, cut-stone windows of three lights with square external moulding. It has a Gothic door measuring 5' 10" x 3' 7" decorated with foliage and Tudor roses, lion rampant of the Graces and the inscription "Ora Pro Animus, John Grace, Fili Oliver and his wife Noreen Brennagh AD 1543."

*COURTSTOWN AND THE GRACE FAMILY*

The Grace family do not, as it is commonly thought, spring from the famous Raymond le Gros who died without issue. Our Graces are of the Le Gros or Le Gras family in Sodbury, Gloucestershire, whose origin is traced to Odo, Earl of Abbermarle and Count of Champagne. He was married to Adeliza, sister of William the Conqueror, whom he accompanied in his invasion of England.

The son of Odo and Adeliza, Stephen, died in 1127, possessed of the Manor of Sodbury as well as his father's other possessions. Stephen's heir, William, was surnamed le Gros or le Gras (the Fat). William died without an heir and was succeeded at Sodbury by his nephew, William II, who kept up his uncle's surname, le Gros.

William II had four sons, William senior of primo genitus, who married a de Clare and built a castle in 1200 A.D.; William junior who owned Ballyregan in Tipperary; Hamo, and Anselm, Bishop of St. David's.

William II made grants to the Prior of Baden Stoke in Wiltshire. This was witnessed by his brothers Hamo and William jnr. There is also a charter to the Burgesses of Sodbury. Also in 1211, the Sheriff of Gloucestershire was commanded to allow William Crasass, the elder, to hold a market at Sodbury every Monday.

From these grants we can see the importance of William III as a consolidator of the family fortunes and a man of considerable power. But now the seat of power was in the process of transfer. Attracted no doubt by the power of their relatives, the Earls Marshall, they began to reside in Ireland.

William III snr., William jnr. and Hamo lived almost entirely in Ireland and were witnesses of several charters granted by Marshall. William snr. was referred to in a document of 1224 as the cousin of the junior William Marshall. William III was succeeded by his brother, William IV, as Lord Sodbury.

*OFFERLANE*

William IV is described as being in possession of the lands of Offerklan (Offerlane), Upper Ossory, valued at half a Knight's fee, and lands at Tullachrothen (Tullaroan) then valued at quarter a Knight's fee.

Having spent many years in Ireland, he transferred all his rights to his English property in Sodbury to the Welonds in exchange for their interest in Tullaroan which had been granted to them as original grantees.

William had some title already but the Welond land enhanced his property considerably. So the Graces settled in Tullaroan and Graces' country became a palatinate of some 80,000 acres, extending from Kilkenny and the Nore to Leix and south to Callan. The Graces held their land unconditionally so that they were the supreme rulers, owing obedience to none but the King (the palatinate of Tipperary was held in this fashion by the Ormonds).

Being central, Tullaroan easily became the seat of power. The castle at Courtstown was one of the finest baronial residences in the country with all the features of a minor court.

Clyn mentioned a great fire in 1327 which destroyed the castle and lands of Courtstown after raging for eight days. I mention this because it was by fire that the patrimony of the Graces was finally destroyed.

The family went from strength to strength. In 1302 they were ordered to prepare to go to war with the King of Scotland. In 1320 they gave securities to one Alice Kyteler in her loaning deals with William Outlaw. In 1385 a special licence to marry Tibina O Meagher was obtained. Almost a century later Sir Oliver becomes 12th Baron Crusader.

In 1516, John FitzOliver arranged for coign and livery, marrying his son Robert to a daughter of Fitzpatrick.

*DIED YOUNG*

Oliver Grace, heir of Robert Grace, married a daughter of Sir John Horsfall, Protestant Bishop of Ossory. He died young, however, and his heir, John, was given to his grandfather Cyprian and reared as a Protestant. He succeeded his grandfather as Courtstown. John Grace, as a Protestant, did not suffer under Cromwell and was a minor during the Confederacy. In 1689, as MP for Kilkenny, he was among the first to be commissioned by the Earl of Tyrconnell after his appointment by James II, for whom he raised a regiment of foot and a troop of horse. James intended to create him a peer and when his Majesty fled the land a patent for the purpose was found in Dublin.

*“GRACES CARD”*

The Duke Schomberg was sent as emissary to Baron Grace to try to persuade him with blandishments to throw in his lot with William of Orange and thus arose the legend of “Grace’s Card.” In reply to Schomberg, Baron Grace wrote “Go tell your master I despise his offer. Honour and conscience are dearer to a gentleman than all the wealth and richness a Prince can bestow.” The card on which the message was written was the six of hearts—since known in the Tullaroan district as Grace’s Card.

John was succeeded by his son Robert, a Colonel in his father’s regiment. Robert was outlawed by the Williamites, wounded at Aughrim and died at Limerick in 1691.

*TWO SONS*

Oliver, the Colonel, had two sons—Oliver, who was a major in James’ army and who emigrated to France, and John, a Jacobite captain who was aide de camp to Sarsfield. John was included with his father in the articles of Limerick. His brother was not.

When the father died, Oliver inherited, but he died after nine days, leaving the Courtstown land and defective title to brother John. He continued in possession until 1701. When his uncle Sheffield's wife, Viscountess Dillon, on his refusal to pay her £500, filed a bill against him, he had to show title in the Court of Claims.

The estates were pronounced forfeited by his brother Oliver, an adherent of James II. And so the lands of the Graces passed to the trustees of the forfeited estates and were sold in 1701 to a company for making hollow sword blades.

The castle was razed, the roof sold and the woods burned. So the saga of Courtstown ended after 530 years. The ruins of the castle remained for 100 years, but in 1800 were finally cleared away, so now nothing remains except a few earthen mounds.

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## 50 Guineas Reward

James Bryan, Jenkinstown, County Kilkenny, inserted the following advertisement in the issue of Finn's Leinster Journal, April, 22-25, 1801" — "Whereas several large Oak, Ash and Elm trees lately grown in the plantations and woods of Jenkinstown and Graigeraw have been cut down and stolen; and from some circumstances there is reason to believe that are not (as yet) removed far out of this neighbourhood—I hereby promise to pay fifty guineas to any person that will discover where the whole parcel (or a reward in proportion where any part) of said trees are concealed, on conviction of the thieves and their accomplices.—Whoever gives information as above may depend on having his name kept secret."