

St. Canice's Library

(Continued)

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THE EARL OF ORMONDE'S GRAMMAR SCHOOL (1538-1693)

THIS is the site and the building which housed the Earl of Ormonde's School.

Ledwich states: "The house of the Prebendary of Killamery is converted into an alms house, on the West of the Cathedral, adjoining to the ancient schoolhouse of the Diocese." This, therefore, is the site of that ancient schoolhouse. Hogan supports this assertion. Quoting from Bishop Otway's Visitation Book, he locates the Manse House "which occupied the site of the Library," between "Hacker Hill" to the South, and the "Blind Boothar" to the North. Further, Hogan identifies Hacker Hill with the old earthen rampart on the Western boundary of the Cathedral graveyard, and the Blind Boothar with the lane leading Northwards towards what is now the Loreto Convent. Bishop Otway's Will desired that the library be built on the site of the old schoolhouse.

There is sufficient evidence to identify both the Manse House and the Library with the site of the Earl of Ormonde's School.

Lawless, in the "Pedigree of the House of Ormonde," records the foundation of the School in these words:

"The Lady Margaret Countesse of Ormonde and Ossorye lived some few yeeres after him (her husband) . . . and (at her proper costs and charges) built a schole-house neere the Churchyard of St. Kenny's Church."

The implication is that Lady Margaret founded the School after the death of Piers Butler, 8th Earl of Ossory and Ormonde, in 1539. On the other hand, good sources hold that Piers and Margaret together founded the School. The dates for this joint foundation are usually given as 1538 or 1539. Canon Carrigan is numbered among these good sources, and he also places the school to the West of St. Canice's Cathedral. Since the School is known as the Earl of Ormonde's School as early as 1555, perhaps the puzzle is solved by suggesting that Piers and Margaret planned the school—even commenced to build it—before the Earl's death and that after his decease, his widow turned the plans into bricks and mortar, teacher and pupils. This suggestion could well be correct, since,

supposing that building started in 1538, it would take more than a year to build and furnish the structure, and to find a suitable schoolmaster.

William Johnson was schoolmaster in 1552.

He was succeeded by Peter White, a native of Waterford, a graduate of Oxford, and Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford. Canon White (he was Prebendary of Mayne) was an outstanding teacher and from his school came many distinguished men. The most well known of these was Richard Stanihurst, historian, and uncle of James Ussher, the scholarly Archbishop of Armagh. Stanihurst's description of his schooldays and of his former mentor is well known. By his account, education was imparted in a happy and forceful way. Stanihurst, incidentally gives both Pierce and Margaret the credit for founding the School.

In 1565, Peter White was made Dean of Waterford, and so ended his connection with Kilkenny. Being out of sympathy with the Elizabethan Settlement of Church affairs, he was deprived in 1570 for joining the Church of Rome. The date of his death is not known, but he probably lived almost to the end of Elizabeth's reign.

After his departure, the School went into a decline from which it did not recover.

The Regal visitation of 1615 mentions that a Mr. Penyngton is schoolmaster, minister, and preacher, and adds that there are few pupils in the School.

With the arrival of the Cromwellian troops, the School, if it still existed as an educational establishment, ceased to function. The building suffered severe damage, but was not demolished, as some sources would have it. In a footnote, Graves and Prim give this interesting account of the vandalism of the invaders:

"From the Carte MSS (vol. S.S., fol. 278) in the the church yard of St. Canice wherewith he built a house the free schoole house built by the house of Ormond in "Captaine John Joener tooke away the mayne timber of Bodleian Library, we learn that a Cromwellian Officer, within a myle of Kilkenny comonly called Joener's Folly" — a name which the townland still bears.

It is worth noting that he removed only the "mayne timber" and not all of it, implying that, while flooring, panelling and roofing timbers were taken away, some timber at least remained after their removal. For this reason I contend that the great floor beams, so similar to those in Rothe House, Kilkenny (itself a 16th Century building) are those installed at the building of the School in 1538. There is some support for this in Bishop Otway's



Will, where he directs that his money be spent for the flooring of the upper storey of the old schoolhouse with substantial timber and boards. This may be interpreted as meaning cross-joists and floorboards, rather than beams, joists and boards.

However that may be, we have now arrived at the point where the present structure is in being. We turn then, to the foundation of St. Canice's Library as a repository for books.

THE LIBRARY

(1693 - 1969)

Founded in accordance with the Will of Thomas Otway, who died on March 6, 1692/93, the Ossory Diocesan Library is the oldest of the Irish Diocesan Libraries. Bishop Otway was a generous benefactor of the two Dioceses, Killala and Ossory, in which he successively served. He was suspended for some time because he refused to pray publicly for King William and Queen Mary, but he overcame his scruples in this regard, and was restored to his See. Apart from his books, he gave a fine set of 17th Century silver gilt Communion Plate to the Dean and Chapter of St. Canice's Cathedral.

A report of the Dean and Chapter, quoted by Ledwich, is in some confusion over the name of the founder of this Library. Presented to Dr. Hartstonge, Bishop of Ossory, on May 31, 1712, it refers to the library founded by Bishop Williams, and locates it on the site of this Library. Griffith Williams, who fled from Kilkenny during the Confederation, returned to his See in 1661. He died in 1673 and by his Will founded an alms house on the site of the Prebendal Manse of Killamery. This, no doubt, gave rise to the mistake which was made by the Dean and Chapter.

There is, however, another reference to Bishop Williams as the Founder of the Library. It is to be found in John Hogan's book, "Kilkenny." He asserts that the library and alms house were built by Archdeacon Driesdale, with monies bequeathed by Bishop Williams. The Archdeacon is known to have misused the funds of which he was an executor. Williams had intended that the alms house should accommodate eight widows. They would have been very crowded in the house built on the site of the Killamery Manse. Hence, it is likely that Driesdale intended both houses to be one single alms house, and ran out of money while building the Library portion of the structure. If this were the case, the house would have

been but partly built during Otway's Episcopate and would explain his direction that only the upper storey of the house be floored and furnished. Driesdale had already erected the lower portions of the structure.

Thus it can be concluded that Williams authorized the beginning of the actual building of the Library House, while Otway made it into a Library by furnishing it with books.

Ledwich gives an account of Otway's Will, as follows :

"Item, I give my books and 200 /. in money, and more if needful, for the beginning of a library for the Cathedral Church of St. Canice, for the use of the clergy about it; desiring the Dean and Chapter of St. Canice to grant for that use, the upper story of the old schoolhouse, joining the alms house throughout, for the flooring of which with substantial timber and boards; roofing and slating it, for desks and shelves and chains for every particular book; for windows, window shuts, doors, and chimney to be built in it. I appoint 100 /. owing me by bill by Agmond Cuffe of Castleinch, Esq., as likewise 47 /. 10s. of Spanish and other foreign gold, be it more or less, now in the hands of George Thornton . . .

"This I would have done as soon as possible after my decease.

"Item, I will that the sum of 100 /. be laid out to purchase 10 /. a year in houses or lands: 5 /. thereof shall be for the library keeper, whom I would have to be one of the Vicars of St. Canice's (but always chosen by the present Bishop), and the other 5 /. to be laid out in coals for weekly fires to be made in the library to preserve the books."

This Will was not fully executed, except for the rebuilding of the Library house and the lodging, but not the chaining, of the books. The first Librarian was the Revd. Giles Clarke (not mentioned in J. B. Leslie's "Ossory Clergy and Parishes") who was left unpaid for nine years, from 26th July, 1694, to 26th July, 1703, by which time he was owed no less than £45 in salary and £30 for coals. No record remains of the result of his plea for re-imburement, and the legacy of Otway, if ever paid, exists no longer.

Michael Cox, who was responsible for building Castle-town House in County Tipperary, was translated from the See of Ossory to the Archbishopric of Cashel in 1754. He was succeeded in Ossory by Edward Maurice, third son of Peter Maurice, Dean of Derry, and brother of Theodore Maurice, Archdeacon of Tuam. Otway had come from an ancient English family and had been educated at Cam-



bridge. Maurice, of Irish birth, was a scholar and graduate of Trinity College, Dublin. He died in 1756 and is buried in Attanagh Church, near Durrow. Bishop Maurice bequeathed his books, and ten cases of Danzig oak to the Library which Bishop Otway had founded. These books form the major part of the present collection. Seven of the presses still stand in the Library room, two are in the library of the Bishop's Palace, and the lower part of the tenth press is in the Cathedral Deanery.

Maurice seems to have learned from the mismanagement of Bishop Otway's bequest, for his Will is worked out in some detail. The librarian is instructed to exhibit the books once a year, to the Bishop, or to two persons appointed to deputise for him. He is also ordered to catalogue the books; he is neither to embezzle nor deface any of them but "to give due attendance to such clergymen and gentlemen as may be disposed to read there, from six o'clock in the morning to the tolling of the bell for morning prayers in the Cathedral of St. Canice, Kilkenny."

The Will continues, "I bequeath to the Librarian and his successors appointed by the Bishop, 20 /. a year to be paid out of my estate at Miltown in the County of Kilkenny." The changing values of money have reduced this sum, which is still part of the Librarian's Stipend, to £13 9 2 per annum.

Bishop Maurice requested Dr. Lawson, senior fellow and first Librarian of Trinity College, Dublin, to "lend his hand, to transport, lodge and place them (the books) to advantage: for which trouble I bequeath him the silver candlestick, now in my study, and 20/. to buy him a mourning ring."

Among his possessions were many MSS; these he left to Dr. Lawson. They included a poetical version of the Odyssey and Iliad, translated into blank verse. These MSS are now in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin.

Into all this generosity, the Bishop wrote a condition which has ensured that the Library still survives today. He ordered that if it proved impossible to use the books to form a Cathedral Library, then they should be sold. The money thus gained, together with the Librarian's salary, was to be used for the "raising or adorning of the imperfect steeple" of the Cathedral itself.

Of the Library House, its uses and abuses, from the time of its foundation, we have little knowledge. The Dean's report of 1712 states that the lower storey is "a convenient habitation for the library-keeper, and a chamber for the preaching dignitaries and prebendaries

to lodge in, in the week of their attendance in the Cathedral." Ledwich describes the library room as handsome and adds that underneath is a comfortable dwelling for the librarian.

It is certain that the house today is not as it was built and furnished by Maurice's executors. The ground floor is impossible to reconstruct and may have seen a number of changes. The partitions are rude, and some doors have been closed up. I have been told that the marble fireplace in the centre room is from 18th century. If so, then the layout of the ground floor could be the same as that planned in 1756.

Parts of the staircase are from the same period, and the first floor was originally one long room. The great curved ceiling re-appears over the staircase. There are signs that there was once a balcony or gallery around the stair-well. If this was the case, then the upper floor would have had an exceptionally graceful line and would have been spacious and airy.

A sketch from the 1860s shows the front of the house with a second door and smaller window openings. The large window over the main door was added within the last hundred years. One librarian, Canon Mervyn Clare, while resident in this house (1907-1911), used the room to the south of the hall as his study; it is now part of the organist's house. Probably this room was taken over by the organist, after Canon Clare left, resulting in the construction of the two additional upstairs rooms.

In the Library itself, the case of shelves on the south wall appears to date from Bishop Otway's time. The two other sets of shelves, on the west wall, were installed for Bishop Maurice's books. As there is a fireplace behind the southernmost of these, the case is not in its original position. Three-quarters of the west wall has a false face with rough unfinished stone two to three inches behind the apparent surface of the wall. This coincides with the upper wall of Blackrath Castle. The existing fireplace is a modern addition, put in by Mrs. Cicely Day, when her husband, the Right Revd. Godfrey F. Day, was Bishop of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin.

In 1842, as mentioned already, repairs were carried out on Blackrath Castle. This work was subsequent to a major renovation which took place in 1836. The Catalogue compiled by the then Librarian, Revd. Francis R. Sandys, opens with the statement: "This Library was newly-roofed and repaired in the year 1836." There follows a list of subscribers to the repair fund. The Bishop, Robert Fowler, gave £50: the librarian gave £20. Also among the

contributors was the Revd. Richard G. Graves (£2), father of the Revd. James Graves, the historian.

Like Bishop Maurice, the Revd. F. R. Sandys was born in County Derry. He was educated in Kilkenny College under the Revd. Dr. Anthony Pack. After entering Trinity College, he gained a scholarship and graduated in 1815. As Archdeacon's Vicar-Choral in St. Canice's Cathedral, he held the position of Librarian and resided here from 1823 to 1838. It is interesting to note that he also held the Curacy of Blackrath, to which he was appointed in 1826.

The Sandys Catalogue, unfortunately, is of little practical use. A full catalogue was compiled by the Reverend George Warburton Rooke, Librarian, in 1895. The manuscript of this catalogue is lodged in the Library of the Representative Body of the Church of Ireland, in Dublin. Since then, the first floor of the Library has been reconstructed, and all the books moved. There is, therefore no useful catalogue of the books which are in the Library.

In 1929, the Library faced the gravest threat to its life since its foundation. At a meeting of the Ossory Diocesan Council, held in the Diocesan Rooms, William Street, on 12th March in that year, it was proposed by Chancellor Kellett, seconded by Dean Phair, and approved that :

“A sub-committee, consisting of Precentor Wills, Revd. W. T. Willis, Sir Laurence Dowdall, C.B., and the Revd. Chancellor Kellett be appointed to visit St. Canice's Library, to enquire into the conditions of the Library, the catalog(u)ing and insurance of the Books, and other matters connected with the Library, and report to the Diocesan Council.”

The “other matters” which are so innocently mentioned in this motion were moves to proceed to the sale of the books, which some members of the Council had come to regard as redundant. The report of this sub-committee is still in the Library. In this report there are notes on the Wills of Bishop Otway and Bishop Maurice. It was concluded that the condition, in Maurice's Will, that the proceeds of any sale should go to the raising of the steeple in the Cathedral, had no legal force. Ownership was presumed to be vested in the Diocesan Council. I have seen a letter, from the Representative Body of the Church of Ireland, which categorically denies this presumption.

The sub-committee found both the structure and the contents of the Library to be in good condition. No in-

insurance cover was then in existence, and the catalogue was old and incomplete. It would seem that the members did not know of the existence of Rooke's catalogue. This position would confirm the thesis that all the books had been moved after Rooke did his work, and lend weight to the contention that this movement took place because two new first floor rooms were built since that time. As to the Librarian's duties, it was found that they were but ill-defined, the Librarian at the time being the Revd. H. Chillingworth.

The members of the sub-committee did not believe that the appointment of a librarian was limited to one of the Vicars Choral. It is obvious that they had not seen Ledwich's copy of Otway's Will, nor had they fully read Maurice's Will. Maurice's Will requests that the Librarian and his successors be chosen by the Bishop, hence the discussion of his appointment was outside the scope of their inquiry. They also seem to have been ignorant of the then recent dispute between Dean Winder and Bishop Gregg, which was resolved in part by agreeing to lodge the Bishop's Vicar-Choral in the Library.

In their recommendations, the Committee proposed :

1. That Messrs. Sotheby's proposal be accepted, namely, that the books be valued.
2. That a Library Standing Committee be appointed.
3. That the Librarian be requested to catalogue the books.
4. That the sale of the books be considered.

The third proposal is not included in the typescript copy of the report, but it is recorded in the Ossory Diocesan Council Minute Book. The first and second proposals were the only two to be acted upon. Sotheby's valued the books at £1,695. Arrangements were made to insure them, and the relevant motion was passed at the Council Meeting held on 10th June, 1930. The Library standing committee is still in existence, and functions in the selection of modern books for the Library.

The idea of a sale was dropped, and the Library survived. When the Right Revd. H. R. McAdoo became Bishop of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin, in 1962, he initiated the present scheme of purchasing a limited number of modern books each year. Thus the Library has a small but expanding section of current Theology and related subjects, for the use of the clergy and laity of the United Dioceses of Ossory, Ferns and Leighlin.