

Clashacro

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CLASHACRO is about 7 miles north of Kilkenny and 2 miles south of Freshford. It is an ancient ecclesiastical parish, situated now in the parish of Freshford and the Barony of Cranagh in the Co. of Kilkenny — It is comprised of the townlands of Brownford, Clashacro and Sart and contains 999 acres, 1 rood and 13 perches. It is in the plain of Airgead Ros and the territory of the O Duach (the black or dark people) who gave their name to Oda and Firoda.

Clashacro, small as it is, has many points of interest. First its name about which there is great controversy and which I feel means "The Pit of the Slaughter." Certainly there was a big battle here long ago. Many skeletons have been found. But what battle this was is uncertain. It may have been the Leinster men against the Munster men in 1169 for a field nearby is called Banta na Meena commemorating the Munster men. The "Closh" field is the field across the road down from the entrance to Wellbrook. An old couplet says:

"In Clashacra they were lamented,
In Ballinamara they were all slain."

Ballinamara is neighbouring townland and the name means the town of the slain or dead.

St. Kieran of Ossory is patron of Clashacro. He was of the clan U Duach. His grandfather was Ruman Duach who lived probably in a structure on the high fort in Three Castles. The road by the desmesne gate at Wellbrook is known as Kieran's road according to information given to the writer by the late Tommy McCheane. John Hogan, historian, refers to the little church as "Kilkieran of Clashacro." This is a wonderful honour for Clashacro, for St. Kieran as the old books tell us over and over again was the "first of the Saints of the Gael."

Many mentions are made of Clashacro in the Ormonde Deeds in Vols. III, IV and V.

Vol. III (1413 — 1509) (Page 22).

1—In services of the King in Co. Kilkenny in 1419 a fourth part of a fee in Clashacro, of which a half part is assigned to Thomas Herbryg.

2—Royal Service in Shilleher and Odagh from Glascro 10/- (on the land which is called Smith's land and Thomas Herbryg land). November 1419, page 25.

3—Royal Service belonging to Earl of March in Co. Kilkenny, Glascroo 10/-. Circa 1423.

4—Indenture made in the episcopal Court near Aghour (i.e. Uppercourt), 8th May, 1503 between Richard Smith, Lord of Glascro and Oliver Bishop of Ossory witnesses that Richard gave, granted and to farm let to the said Bishop the towns of Ballyryn, Ballygawin, Ballyboe and Dourode for a term of 24 years, rendering yearly to Richard and his heirs $\frac{3}{4}$ of lawful money Witnesses Master James Cantwell, official of Ossory, Richard Cantwell and others. Page 305.

5—Patrick Cantwell, Rector of Glascro witnessed an indenture dated March 6, 1506. Page 34.

Vol. IV Ormonde Deeds. Page 36.

1—An indenture was made at Glasroe between Walter Lande of Cowlisnal and Richard, son of John Butler, January 31, 1516.

2—An inquisition was held at Kilkenny, October 28, 1546. a witness is John Smythe of Clashacro. Page 302.

3—In a list of lands of the Manor of Kilkenny, Symthe's lands and Herbet's are named. Seemingly name Herbyrg had become Herbet. May 1, 1536, page 304.

Vol. V Ormonde Deeds (Page 154).

In a book of the Ploughlands of Co. Kilkenny otherwise called Horsemens bed, as they were laid down by the sergeants of Francis Lovell, Sheriff of Co. Kilkenny in the time of Sir John Perrot (1584—87). Clashacroe is 6th part of a plough.

Carrigan — Inquisition in Kilkenny, 27th April, 1609 finds that Sr Richard Shee was in possession (or as the mediaeval chronicle says was seized) of the Manor of Glashacro, also of the Advowson of the Church there and of the Chief Messuage (i.e. piece of ground). Where a large house a furnace has been set up, a great gallery, a solarium and that part of the castle on which the said gallery has been erected, a dovecot there and 2 parts of all the lands in the townland of Clashacro (i.e. Brownswood, Clashacro and Sart). The premises are held of Oliver Shortall of Ballylarkin.

Thomas Shortall old proprietor forfeited the land in 1654 to Sir George Askew and the Countess of Mountrath.

This most interesting reference to Clashacro is quoted by William Canon Carrigan from the *Lagenae Inquis* and is to be found on page 264 Vol. II of "History of Diocese of Ossory."

After 1609 at the death of Sir Richard Shee we don't know what happened his mansion, his dovecote and his other possessions or if the present home of the McCheanes



Dove Cote at Clashacro

occupies the site of the old Shee house. It has been suggested that the old castle in Bergin's field may have been this Shee house. Nothing remains of it. There is a rumour of an underground passage from the old church to this field.

In the distribution of lands after the Cromwellian conquest, Clashacro went to Sir George Askew and the Countess of Mountrath, the latter getting Sart. Thomas Shortall was the forfeiting proprietor. (See Healy, page 71 appendix).

Today there are three structures in Clashacro worth looking at and talking about. They are the church, the dovecote and the Georgian mansion, Wellbrook House and here are some notes on all three in that order :

Carrigan (page 265 - Vol. II) gives church as 13th or early 14th Century. Its round headed E window and remains of S window point to an earlier dating. It is extremely small, $22\frac{1}{2}$ ft long x 18 ft wide, hardly bigger than a modern room. Walls 3 ft thick. The tower at the end was used as a residence for priests, a fairly usual custom in his locality (Three Castles, Rathbeath etc). It may be a later date than the church but is certainly beautifully built, undercroft in fine condition and stairway too. The little church has a nice piscina on the epistle side and is equally well built. But the north side is a modern rebuilding. It is all beautifully kept by the

McCheane family who use it as a burial ground and fernery. The tombs will be noted later on when the mansion and the families who occupied it are dealt with.

The old yews are well worth noting here, usual accompaniment of a monastic garden. Underneath one, the opening to the underground passage may be seen.

The Dovecote — this structure is mentioned as belonging to Sir Richard Shee in 1609. How long before that date it was built I am not able to say. Dovecotes are usually associated with monastic buildings but were really used to provide food by any large establishment in mediaeval and possibly earlier times. They were an accompaniment of fine and luxurious living and provided fowl and eggs for our ancestors. The best in County Kilkenny are Pottlerath and Wellbrook, and the one in Kilcooley is so near us that perhaps it may be included too. Others in Foulksrath and Pigeon Park date from ancient times. The ones in the Rothe House and John's Bridge House have disappeared. The best example in the country is in Ballybeg near Buttevant, Co. Cork which members of our Society saw on the Mallow trip in 1966. A splendid article on this dovecote is in the *Old Kilkenny Archaeological Journal* for 1852, page 266 by Richard Rolt Brash, and anyone interested can see that number in the Rothe House.

Our Wellbrook dovecote follows the usual pattern, a square headed entrance door for unfeathered entrants and square headed entrance window for the birds to right of door. Outside this there would have been a wooden platform for the birds to land and enter. A large circular hole in the roof (about 3 ft diameter) allowed them an exodus. The whole building is splendidly built and still nearly perfect. The pigeon nests are intact up to a height of 5 feet, the corbelling and string course outside are in position. The little building is to the immediate left as you enter Wellbrook avenue (see illustration p 49).

Now the dating of the Georgian house is not easy. Perhaps 1780 would be fairly near but no architect bills remain or name of builder or first occupier to help us. In 1824 Rev. Luke Fowler was appointed as Rector of Clashacro, Clomanto, Rathbeagh and he may have come here to live then. Certainly he was here in 1849 when he was a founder member of the Old Kilkenny Society. He was second son of Dr. Robert Fowler, Bishop of Ossory and grandfather of the late Sir Otway Wheeler Cuffe of Leyrath. A very well liked and humane man, he was connected with Fr. Martin Doyle, P.P., of Graigue in Famine Relief and was praised by the historian John



Hogan in 1870 for the splendid way he maintained the little church here. At his death in 1876, he was succeeded by Rev. Joseph Bradell McCheane who had been his Curate and who had lived in Freshford up to then.

The Rev. J. B. McCheane was son of the Rector of Kilmoganny, the Rev. Jeremiah McCheane and became a Canon and treasurer of St. Canice's Cathedral. Though he died in 1926 he is still very well remembered in Freshford for his great eloquence in the pulpit, stock of stories and his love of animals, especially horses. These characteristics too were shared by the late Captain "Tommy" McCheane who regrettably died in 1968. Only two families have occupied this house perhaps since 1824, certainly since 1849, the Fowlers and the McCheanes. They were not related but followed each other in their sacred ministry.

In the graveyard in the old church the following members of the McCheane family are interred:

Joseph B. McCheane, born 1837 died 1926; Margaret (wife of above), born 1842, died 1935; Edith J. McCheane, born 1873, died 1876; Joseph McCheane, born 1875, died 1878; W. J. McCheane, born 1869, died 1888; S. E. McCheane, born 1868, died 1916; F. E. McCheane, born 1866, died 1942.

Captain Tommy McCheane joined his kindred in summer of 1968. No child of the late Canon McCheane is now alive save Mildren Somerville of the Castletownsend family. She married as his second wife, Colonel John Somerville. The McCheanes are related to the well known Kilkenny families of the Poes and the Pilsworths.

The Georgian mansion of Wellbrook now houses the splendid printing works known as the "Wellbrook Press." It was named from the numerous nearby springs. It is owned and managed by Desmond McCheane, son of the late Captain Tommy McCheane and Mrs. Betty McCheane, kind and charming hostess to the members of the Archaeological Society on their visit, August 25, 1968.

The following members of Clashacro families are interred in the old burial ground at Three Castles:

Michael Kelly and wife Eleanor Dalton, 1829; William Kelly and wife, Eliza Maher, 1851; Edmond Brennan and wife Margaret Kelly, 1851; Thomas Brennan and wife Catherine Walsh, 1891, and second wife Teresa Mansfield, 1949; Patrick Clear and wife Judith Dooley, 1867.

The visit to Clashacro was made possible by the kindness and help of Mrs. Betty McCheane, the present owner of Wellbrook. The writer of these notes would like to acknowledge gratefully her indebtedness to Mrs. McCheane and to her sister-in-law Mrs. Somerville.

The late Miss Brown Clayton lived in Clashacro in the house later occupied by Colonel and Mrs. Charles Fowler and now the residence of Dr. Martin Beckett.

There are 10 inscribed tombstones in the old churchyard of Clashacro, immediately behind the old church. These stones commemorate the Bowdens of the Dinan, (1833-35); William May and Mary Delaney, Nicholas Cass 1824; James Clear of Carrigeen, 1913; Richard Butler, 1721, and wife Elizabeth Kyravan, 1740; Judith Keoghan, Alias Henecy 1800; William Keoughan and wife Mary Treacy, 1788; Richard and Lawrence Keoughan, 1767; Pierce Keoughan and wife Margaret Lanigan, 1766 and Thomas Warring, 1818.

The writer of these notes owes much to Professor Padraig Mac Carthy for his help and advice. His enthusiasm for the valley of the Nore was an inspiration at all times.

The Professor was born in the same parish as St. Lachtain, Donoghmore, Co. Cork. This fact may be the reason for his love and loyalty to this area, and his deep and scholarly interest in its history.

SOURCES

Calendar of Ormond Deeds (Editor Edmund Curtis, D.Litt., 1932).
History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossery (William Canon Carrigan, 1904).

History and Antiquities of Kilkenny by William Healy p.p. 1893.
Manuscript Notes of Professor Padraig MacCarthy, Freshford.