

Newtown

AN HISTORIC NOTE

Canon J. Brennan

Newtown, in the parish of Callan, got its name from its first Anglo-Norman occupier — Baldwin de Hamptonsford. He came early in the 13th century and he called the place “Nova Villa” or, in English, Newtown. The name remains to the present time whereas de Hamptonsford and his family soon disappeared from the area.

The next important family to come was also Anglo-Norman. They were the De Erlegh’s or D’Erley’s. John de Erlegh came to Ireland with Earl Marshall. He had letters of protection dated Feb. 19th, 1207. By 1215 he had taken secure possession of Newtown. With him it became known as Newtown Earley, or Erleystown or Earlstown Parish. (V. Camfore III p. 526).

This family increased their possessions and grew in importance until they occupied the whole western division of the Barony of Kells. In time they became known as the Barons of Erleye and their territory the Barony of Erleye.

As they had come early in the 13th century in all probability it was they who built the church at Newtown. They surrounded it with a graveyard. Both were dedicated to All the Saints. They worshipped there and buried their dead in the graveyard attached. The earliest coffin-shaped uninscribed tombs there are from the 13th and 14th century. They would be fitting monuments over the graves of such as these. Even later stones could have been theirs because they continued there for almost 135 years — from 1215 to 1350 A.D.

The next great family to occupy Newtown was the Sweetmans. They, too, were Anglo-Norman but of Norse origin. They came originally to Ireland in the 12th century, coming to Newtown in the 2nd half of the 14th century. They produced many important people in Newtown and in other parts of Ireland. They took up residence at Castle Eve, and remained there for 300 years. They were banished to Connaught at the Cromwellian confiscations in 1654. With this they lost their power and property this latter being sold to Captain Henry Baker in satisfaction for his services to England.

Only the rich could afford splendid tombs in those days. Some

of the later uninscribed coffin-shaped stones may have been erected over members of this family. Two with inscriptions are of particular interest.

Walter Kerin carved many well known tombs in this area from Kilcooley to New Ross. Having an example of his work at Newtown is a privilege.

The people of Newtown are deeply grateful to Miss Rita Harte for all her work and her splendid article following.