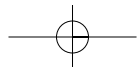
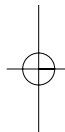
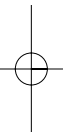


A THOUSAND YEARS
OF CHURCH HERITAGE
IN EAST GALWAY





A Thousand Years of Church Heritage in East Galway

PETER HARBISON


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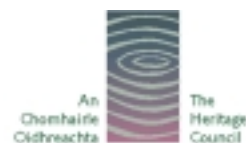
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The Regional Tourism Authority
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Preface

EAST GALWAY CONTAINS a wealth of ecclesiastical built heritage of architectural, archaeological, historical, spiritual, artistic, visual and heritage significance.

The area presents a very fine collection of stained glass, in particular from the Celtic Revival Period. Whereas the stained glass at St. Brendan's Cathedral, Loughrea is recognised nationally, the stained glass of the smaller churches in the other towns and villages of East Galway is more or less unknown outside specialist circles. This wealth of art, which Dr. Peter Harbison describes as "Ireland's greatest gift to European twentieth century art," was commissioned by the Churches, and paid for by local congregations. This great treasure trove of Celtic Revival art has been managed and conserved by both groups over the last century. The support, encouragement, and patronage of this art form, of a uniquely Irish nature, were, of course spearheaded in the West of Ireland by Edward Martyn of Tulira, and by his friends and associates. The clergy of the area also embraced this new art form wholeheartedly and have thereby left us this great gift and heritage resource.

East Galway also contains very important early Christian sites such as Clonfert Cathedral, Kilmacduagh, and Kilbennon.

Magnificent medieval abbeys such as Abbeyknockmoy and Ross Errilly are another facet of the history of the church in East Galway.

The value of this under utilised resource was recognised by the Forward Planning Section of Galway County Council, in particular by Ms. Mary Flynn, Community Planner, during the implementation of the first EU/Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government/Galway County Council co-funded Urban and Village Renewal Programme which took place from 1995 to 1999.

Galway County Council flagged the possibility of developing tourism trails based on this great resource in its application for funding for European Structural Funds in 1998, and also in its funding application under the Pilot Initiative on Tourism and the Environment of the Operational Programme for Tourism 1995-1999 at the same time.

Funding was not forthcoming at that point, but it was decided to continue trying to develop this magnificent resource. The theme was elaborated upon and subsequently expanded upon by the then County Manager, Mr. Donal O' Donoghue into one that would encompass a broader ecclesiastical theme. The Council's Forward Planning Section was asked to look at the whole area of ecclesiastical heritage and potential trail development in the Eastern part of the County. The suggestion of an historically based route selection, comprising early Christian, medieval, and Celtic Revival Ecclesiastical Heritage routes was put forward, and developed with Mr. John Tierney, then Assistant County Manager leading a newly formed steering group which was established on 7th March 2000. The members of the inaugural steering group were Mr. John Tierney, Chair, Mr. Donal Guilfoyle, Bord Fáilte, Fr. Cathal Geraghty, Administrator, St. Brendan's Cathedral, Loughrea, Rev. Canon Trevor Sullivan, Church of Ireland, Aghrim, Ms. Beatrice Kelly, The Heritage Council, Mr. Martin Bradley, Ireland West Tourism, Mr. Paul McMahon, Duchas, and Mr. Gus McCarthy, Forward Planning Section, Galway County Council.

Over the years there have been some changes in personnel representing the various organisations on the steering committee and the following is a list of people who have worked on the project.

In June 2000 Ms. Marie Mannion, was appointed Heritage Officer with Galway County Council and became a member of the steering group and Ms. Mary Flynn, Community Planner, Galway County Council became a member of the steering group in September 2000. Mr. Frank Dawson, Director of Service, Galway County Council took over the role of Chair of the steering group in March 2001. Mr. Enda Thompson, Strategic Projects Officer, Galway County Council became a member of the steering group in March 2001, while Ms. Karen Smyth, Galway East Tourism became a member of the steering group in March 2002.

Galway County Council Heritage Office established Heritage Networks throughout the County in 2002 and it was decided to invite three representatives of the Heritage Networks to join the steering group in March 2002 in order to represent the voice of the local heritage and community organisations. Dr. Tony Claffey was nominated to represent the Tuam and Oranmore Local Area Heritage Networks, Mr. Christy Cunniffe was nominated to represent the Ballinasloe Local Area Heritage Network and Ms. Claire Besnyoe was nominated to represent the Loughrea Local Area Heritage Network.

Mr. Frank Donnelly, Architect, Department of Environment, Heritage

& Local Government and Ms. Jackie Donnelly, Architect, Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government have also served on the steering committee for a period of time. Mr. Brian Flynn, Ireland West Tourism also attended various meetings of the steering group; as did Mr Alan Farrell, Galway County Council.

Ms. Sheena Doyle, Fáilte Ireland joined the steering group in November 2002 and Ms. Anne Melia, Ireland West Tourism joined in June 2004. In November 2002 Dr. Peter Harbison and Ms. Angela Bane were commissioned to undertake a baseline report on the Ecclesiastical Heritage of East Galway that would assess the potential for the development of these sites.

I am extremely grateful to Dr. Harbison and Ms. Angela Bane for the quality of the report which they produced. The steering group considered that it represented a very valuable resource and decided that the information contained therein should be disseminated to a wider audience.

It was agreed that a brochure entitled *Galway East Ecclesiastical Heritage Trail* as well as this book entitled *A thousand Years of Church Heritage in East Galway* would be published.

Funding for this publication has been provided by Galway County Council and by the Heritage Council under Galway County Heritage Plan 2004-2008 and also by the Heritage Council's Publication Grant 2005.

I would like to pay a special tribute to all of the Mayors and elected members of Galway County Council, Ballinasloe Town Council, Loughrea Town Council and Tuam Town Council who have given support and assistance to the project since its inception. A special word of thanks is also due to all of the archbishops, bishops and members of the clergy for their continued support and encouragement.

I also wish to thank Mr. Pat Gallagher, Galway County Manager for his facilitation of the project through staff and resources allocations.

I would like to pay a special tribute to Ms Susan Waine, Ashfield Press for her expertise, skills and attention to detail in helping to ensure that this is a quality publication. Thanks also to Mr. Tony Roache and the Photographic Section of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr. Hany Marzouk, Mr. Jarlath Canney, Mr. Michael Concannon, Dr. Peter Harbison and Ms. Marie Mannion for their photographs which illustrate the pages of this publication, which we hope will serve as an educational, heritage, tourism and community resource, creating an awareness, knowledge and pride in the rich ecclesiastical heritage of East Galway.

The day-to day development of this project could not have taken place without the skill, interest, and professionalism of Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, who gave so generously of her time, to all who worked with her over the years on this Steering Committee.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Peter Harbison for his enthusiasm, dedication and sheer hard work which has ensured that *A thousand Years of Church Heritage in East Galway* will stand as testimony to an appreciation of our cherished ecclesiastical heritage in another thousand years.

Cead mile buiochas o gach einne whose hand touched this work.

MR. FRANK DAWSON,
Chairperson,
East Galway Ecclesiastical Heritage Steering Group

Foreword by PETER HARBISON

EAST GALWAY MIGHT SEEM to many to be a flat and uninspiring plain between Corrib and Shannon, encouraging motorists to speed through it so as to get faster to their destinations farther east or west. The reality, however, is very different. The Slieve Aughty hills in the south of the County offer wonderful opportunities for the walker or cyclist to sniff the mountain air and get away from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, while the undulating countryside further north is full of surprises for the adventure-some traveller, as I discovered myself in 2003 when Angela Bane and I undertook a survey of the ecclesiastical heritage of East Galway for an enterprising and imaginative steering committee, comprising representatives of local government, tourist, church and community interests, whose names are given on the inside back flap. This book is the artistic and architectural fruit of that survey, which opened my eyes as to just how much of a thousand years of Ireland's Christian heritage is concentrated in the eastern half of County Galway.

To a certain extent, East Galway could be taken as a microcosm of the country as a whole, presenting – as it does – a remarkable panorama of medieval monastic buildings and modern churches of a kind found widely throughout the rest of the country. But East Galway has some very special features which are either unique or rarely matched elsewhere. For instance, the quality of its medieval masonry retained a high standard in simple structures like Kiltiernan church, or the more complex Round Tower and O'Heyne's church at Kilmacduagh – Galway's all too often unsung gem that rivals Glendalough both in the variety of its monuments and in its majestic setting at the foot of the Burren. As further examples, the carvings of the chancel arch in St. Mary's in Tuam, and the west doorway of Clonfert cathedral, can be seen as representing the apogee of Irish ornament in the Romanesque style that is almost baroque in the exuberance of its decorative patterns. That same style of architectural sculpture continued with vitality into the thirteenth century at Abbeyknockmoy and, more particularly, at Drumacoo, where it can be seen to merge gradually with the Gothic which had already long replaced it in areas east of the Shannon.



The pre-1200 church at Kiltiernan church has fine-quality masonry, but is not listed elsewhere in this volume because of access.

One of the more notable features of the western landscape of the later medieval period are the abbeys and friaries of the continental religious orders – Cistercians, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Carmelites among others – and East Galway preserves some of the finest of these structures at places like Kilconnell and Claregalway, where their tall slender towers add a welcome vertical emphasis to the skyline. Their churches occasionally display fine flamboyant tombs, and among the memorable spectacles they offer are large east windows, with mullions weaving a variety of curving patterns that are, alas, devoid of the presumably coloured glass which one filled them.

But that loss is more than made up for in their twentieth-century counterparts. It was the realisation of the extent and quality of the stained glass in East Galway churches which surprised me most during the course of the survey, where I had initially expected it only in Loughrea Cathedral, one of the foremost showpieces of Irish stained glass. Loughrea, and the medieval churches already mentioned, have of course been well flagged by guide-books as being among the highlights of a visit to East Galway. But what I hope this volume will make clear to a wide audience – both inside and outside the county – is the surprising richness of East Galway's modern stained glass in more out-of-the-way places where one might not expect it.

The credit for this remarkable state of affairs must be given to one far-seeing and talented layman, Edward Martyn of Tullira, near Ardrahan, who

wanted to counter the widespread import of repetitive foreign-made glass by getting Irish craftsmen and women to be the main producers of church furniture, including glass. His efforts, which started a nation-wide movement in his own parish church at Labane, found their culmination in a felicitous co-operation with churchmen in Loughrea to decorate the newly-built Cathedral there with imaginative Irish-made glass. This was largely supplied by Sarah Purser's An Túr Gloine, 'The Tower Glass', which the Loughrea commissions helped to make into one of the two major Irish stained glass studios, whose products are among the country's greatest contributions to European art of the twentieth century. But what makes East Galway even more remarkable – indeed unique – in this connection is that the distinguished lead given by the diocesan Cathedral percolated with panache down to subsidiary churches of the diocese – and not just into the more important examples such as St. Michael's in Ballinasloe, but also into many of the smaller outlying parishes and indeed, even into the neighbouring dioceses in the county as well. Walking into a small country church and coming upon some unexpected stained-glass gem has been, for me, one of the real joys in working on this East Galway survey, and I can only hope that those who browse through the illustrations of this book will be able to share my own delight by going out and discovering these windows for themselves. It will be a treat that will have been very much worth the effort, and one which will add an unexpected richness to any visit to East Galway.

Obviously, it has not been possible to cover here every church in the area covered by the survey, and I hope that I may be forgiven if there are inconsistencies in the periodisation of monuments, and if my choice of sites has omitted items that others might consider more worthy of inclusion. If, furthermore, I may occasionally have erred in my artistic attributions, I might express the wish that this work may lead to further research on the material presented here – which, in turn, might encourage others to reveal the wealth of stained glass in other parts of the county and country.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity of thanking the many members of the steering committee who have been of such great assistance in a variety of ways, not the least of which was bringing some churches to my attention at places which I would not otherwise have visited. A special word of thanks to Angela Bane, who was co-author of the original report, and to Marie Mannion whose tireless efforts have ensured that the original survey format has been successfully transferred to book form with the ever-helpful guiding hand of the publisher, Susan Waine.

Ecclesiastical Heritage Sites – Galway East

EARLY CHRISTIAN SITES

- 1 Clonfert Cathedral
- 2 Drumacoo Church
- 3 Kilbennon
- 4 Killeely
- 5 Killursa
- 6 Kilmacduagh
- 7 Kiltartan
- 8 Tuam: St Marys Church of Ireland Cathedral

LATER MEDIEVAL SITES

- 9 Abbey (Kilnaleghin)
- 10 Abbeyknockmoy Cistercian Abbey
- 11 Annaghdown Ecclesiastical Complex
- 12 Athenry Dominican Friary
- 13 Ballynagilly Abbey
- 14 Claregalway Franciscan Friary
- 15 Clontuskert Augustinian Abbey
- 16 Creevaghbaun Church
- 17 Dunmore Augustinian Friary
- 18 Eglis
- 19 Kilconnell Franciscan Friary
- 20 Kilcorban Dominican Friary
- 21 Loughrea Carmelite Friary
- 22 Meelick Franciscan Friary
- 23 Portumna Dominican Friary
- 24 Ross Errilly Franciscan Friary
- 25 Tuam: Templejarlath / St Jarlath's Church

CELTIC REVIVAL SITES

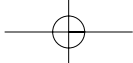
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- 40 Killeenadeema Catholic Church
- 41 Killereerin Catholic Church
- 42 Kiltormer Catholic Church
- 44 Killure Catholic Church
- 45 Labane Catholic Church
- 46 Loughrea: St. Brendan's Cathedral
- 47 Peterswell Catholic Church
- 48 Tirneevin Catholic Church
- 49 Tuam: Catholic Cathedral of the Assumption



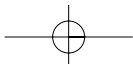
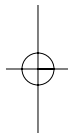
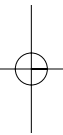
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GEOGRAPHICAL TRAILS

- Ballinasloe / Portumna
- Gort / Loughrea
- Tuam / Athenry



Early Christian Sites





I. Clonfert Cathedral

CLONFERT IS UNDOUBTEDLY the most important church in East Galway and is known far outside the bounds of Connacht and, indeed, Ireland as well. It owes its importance to the internationally-known saint who is traditionally said to lie buried somewhere within its walls – Brendan the Navigator. His reputation rests largely on the *Navigatio Brendani*, an only partially fanciful tale of the saint's island-hopping voyages with his disciples in the north Atlantic, before he returned to Ireland and died at his sister's convent at Annaghdown in 577/583, from where his body was borne to Clonfert for burial. Though in the style of the Old Irish *immrama* (travel tales), the *Navigatio* appears to have been written originally in Latin (possibly on the Continent) around 800 and, in subsequent centuries, was translated into many European vernacular languages – which is how St Brendan's name became widely known throughout Europe.

A long approach-road leads to the Cathedral which can be seen as a gabled structure dominated by an almost incongruously tall tower standing above the famous Romanesque-style doorway in the centre of the west wall. Writing in *The Bell* in 1942, Frank O'Connor noted that the doorway

gets added force from that preposterous and charming little tower which, for all its tapering Franciscan elegance, is far too heavy for the church-front and has an air of intense decorum wildly at variance with the reckless fantasy of the porch. If both were to come alive the tower would go to tea with the rector while the porch got run in for being drunk and disorderly.

The reckless fantasy he refers to is in the exuberant decoration of this sandstone doorway, which must be regarded as one of the great high-points of Irish architectural decoration in the Romanesque style, executed

¹⁰ The richly-carved west doorway of Clonfert Cathedral, of c.1200, makes it one of the most decorative of all Irish churches ornamented in the Romanesque style.



S Given that Clonfert is the final resting-place of St. Brendan, Europe's most famous mariner and ocean explorer of the Early Middle Ages, it is perhaps appropriate that the fifteenth-century chancel arch should bear the carving of a mermaid. She carries a comb and mirror – perhaps a symbol of her vanity.

A tall fifteenth-century tower above the doorway of Clonfert Cathedral adds stature to the much older church with decorative doorway that has been a diocesan centre for many centuries.

around or shortly before 1200 by a group of masons who did St. Brendan proud by leaving scarcely any part of the doorway uncarved (the other great Galway high-points in the style being the chancel of St Mary's Cathedral, Tuam and the window at Annaghdown, where St. Brendan died). The motifs on the engaged columns at Clonfert vary from interlace to chevron (zig-zag), plant and circular designs, and they bear capitals with feline faces and masks, among other things. The arches above stand out contrastingly in a very high relief, with ornamental bosses, animals biting a continuous semi-circular roll and other carvings more difficult to define, and conceived probably not without some influence from foreign – perhaps French – churches of the period. These arches are surmounted



Early Christian Sites

by the most ornamental tangent-gable known from Irish Romanesque, the lower part occupied by an arcade enclosing human heads at the top of the arches and leaving the remainder plain beneath (probably painted originally, perhaps imitating Limoges enamels as Françoise Henry suggested), while the upper part is filled with a network of triangles. These are alternatively in high relief with foliate decoration, or in the form of recesses from which bearded and shaven heads emerge – one in the centre being more portrait-like than the rest. The sides of the sandstone doorway narrow as they ascend, following the old Irish church tradition of inclining jambs, though this became less noticeable when a new innermost order in limestone was inserted in the fifteenth century, featuring two saints.

The richness and variety of the sculpture on the Clonfert Cathedral doorway, of c.1200, displays human and animal masks and other motifs beautifully carved from a colourful but friable sandstone that continues to suffer much from weathering.





The empty vertical slots beneath the heads in the arcade above the rounded arch of the Clonfert Cathedral doorway may once have been painted, perhaps in imitation of enamelled metalwork from Limoges in France which also has comparable heads, leading to the speculation that the whole doorway may once have been embellished with bright colours.

This doorway forms the central feature of the Cathedral's western wall which has protruding *antae* at each corner that have correspondents in what was once the building's original east end – showing that the oldest part of the Cathedral was a simple rectangle. It doubtless had many wooden predecessors, for Clonfert was twice attacked by Vikings from the Shannon in 844 and 845 respectively, and it is recorded as also having fallen a prey to fire on at least three occasions.

As in so many other Irish cathedrals which were faced with the need for more space with an expanding congregation in the thirteenth century, the original twelfth-century rectangular building was extended around 1210-1225 with the creation of a new chancel with a very fine twin-light east window of close-fitting masonry, so typical of the so-called 'School of the West' at the time. The building was described in 1414 as being in need of repair, and this situation brought about further extensions to the Cathedral in the form of a north and a south transept (of which only the former survives in roofless condition), together with the erection of the afore-mentioned tower above the doorway. The arch constructed in the early thirteenth century to separate nave and choir must have been one of the parts of the building that was in need of repair, and it was duly replaced in the fifteenth century by the existing chancel arch bearing, incongruously, the helmeted head of an armed warrior of the period. The *Shell Guide* notes that the Cathedral was wrecked in the sixteenth century, partially re-edified for Protestant use in the seventeenth, and poorly restored in the eighteenth and nineteenth – the activities of the latter including the parapet of the tower and the removal of plaster from the internal walls.

In addition to a fifteenth-century baptismal font, the interior also preserves the earliest monuments surviving at Clonfert in the form of two cross-decorated gravestones – one asking for a prayer for Baclat, and the other recording the name Becgan, both of which could date back as far as the ninth or tenth century. Who these people were, we have no way of knowing, but they do not feature among the list of bishops and abbots that we know of from Clonfert in the early Irish Annals.

When, as part of the twelfth-century Church Reform movement, Ireland was divided up into bishoprics at the Synod of Rathbreasail in the year 1111, Clonfert was given diocesan status, which it still bears in both Catholic and Protestant churches. Air pollution, particularly within recent decades, has caused deterioration in the surface of the sandstone doorway, almost obliterating some of the decoration, and a plan was evolved in 2002 to do everything possible to stop the decay. So far, the doorway has been repointed, but the best method of tackling the stone decay has yet to be decided.

Not far away was an Augustinian abbey of St. Mary *de Portu Puro*, which

is alleged to have stood to the south-east of the Cathedral (according to Gwynn & Hadcock), and there was also a convent of nuns in the vicinity – neither of which have survived. Their nearest modern equivalent is the Emmanuel House of Providence founded in 1985 and standing out of sight behind the Cathedral. Adjoining it is the former Bishop's Palace that goes back to the seventeenth century and which is now in a sad state of disrepair – and beside it is a splendid yew walk which has, regretfully, begun to lose its trees, but is being restored in association with the Tree Council of Ireland.



2. Drumacoo Church

THE SAINT ASSOCIATED with the early monastery (or more probably nunnery) at Drumacoo is St. Sourney, or Assurnaidhe, and the site's proximity to Galway Bay makes it understandable that she was also venerated on the Aran Islands.

The present ruined church there grew out of an earlier church incorporated into it – as can be seen in the small off-centre west doorway with flat lintel. How much earlier is a matter of debate though and, given the comparative lateness of some early-looking churches in East Galway, it could be as late as the twelfth century. Opinions also differ as to what happened when the church was expanded early in the thirteenth century, but it would seem that at least the lower courses of the masonry of the north wall remained intact, while the original east and south walls were dismantled, and their contents re-used in the extended rectangular church. The original stone church thus occupied what is now the north-western corner of the present church ruin. This extended, and much larger, church was built in the first quarter of the thirteenth century. Its east wall was provided with two acutely-pointed lancet windows, both linked and framed by mouldings in the style typical of the so-called 'School of the West' in the period c.1200-1225, though – unlike most other examples of the School's work – the exteriors of the windows lack corresponding mouldings. One of the windows is now blocked up with later masonry, and the capitals, though worn, suggest the form of fluted, perhaps scalloped, decoration on one, and foliate stems on a second – the third being too abraded to reveal its original decoration. There are two aumbrys, or niches, to the north of the window, and only one to the south – the reason for the latter to be explained below.

At the same time that the windows were built, the church was

- m The south doorway of the church at Drumacoo shows the masons of 'The School of the West' adapting their late Romanesque decoration of undercut chevrons to the incoming Gothic style with pointed arch. The fearsome animals (see overleaf) on the capitals are one of the most attractive features of this portal, which dates probably from the 1220s.



provided with a new doorway now in the south wall, and which is one of the minor – and latest – masterpieces of the School of the West, probably close to 1225 in date. It shows the School to have been finally influenced by the pointed arch of the Gothic style and – like its counterpart at Cong – has arches decorated with undercut chevron ornament strung out along a filleted moulding and having, inside it, further conjoined chevrons enclosing pyramidal shapes in relief. The capitals show remarkable boldness and inventiveness in the carving, with lively monsters, feline masks as well as stiff-leaf foliage, and the (partially restored) shafts supporting them are banded half-way up. It would appear that the south wall of the extended church became unstable at some period, and had to be replaced with another a few feet inside it – a process also observable in O’Heyne’s church at Kilmacduagh where the two east windows are also off-centre for exactly the same reason. This re-build necessitated the re-siting of the doorway to its present position in the south wall, and the blocking of the second twin-ambry to the south of the east windows, leaving the single one we see today.

To the north of the western end of the church is the burial ground of the St. George family, whose members also built the remarkable family ‘cemetery’ beside it. This is a Gothic structure of 1830 with buttresses on

the outside walls, a ponderous doorway and a large north window admitting light to shine on the large recumbent slabs of the St. George family vault, which take up most of the interior. The last burial they record was in 1877, and the slabs leave space for recording some more, should this ever be required. A plaque outside reminds us that the Irish Georgian Society restored the building – including the roof – in 1990. This acts as a parallel for the meritorious work executed by the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society around 1902 in providing new foundations for the old church described above.

The cult of St. Sourney has left its traces in the area near the church. St. Sourney’s Bed is near the churchyard wall to the north of the church, and her bush lay near the path between the small car-park and the church. But the most noteworthy place of veneration is a well within a circular enclosure also to the north of the church where people may have bathed their eyes in the hope of a cure for which St. Sourney was famous.

3. Kilbennon

ST. BENEN, OR BENIGNUS, ALIAS MIONNÁN, is frequently said to have been a disciple of St. Patrick who followed him upon the episcopal throne of Armagh, and is often depicted in stained glass as a small boy standing beside the national apostle. But it is quite likely that there were two saints of the name, one of them of Connacht origin, who is venerated at the first station on the climb to Croagh Patrick, and commemorated in the smallest oratory in the country on the skyline of the Aran island of Inis Mór. He is also the one whose name is associated with Kilbennon, some two and a half miles north-west of Tuam, and where Tuam’s patron saint, Jarlath, is said to have been his disciple.

The church surviving on the site may have been erected for the parish around or after 1428. It is a rectangular structure with a doorway of more recent vintage in the south wall, and windows in the east and west walls. Putlog holes in the interior of the west wall suggest that there was a gallery in the church there. But placed in the window high up on the west wall is a single sandstone Romanesque vousoir with floral decoration



The ancient monastic site of Kilbennon is marked today by part of a Round Tower (11th century?) and the walls of a ruined late medieval church.

which is the only visible survivor of a stone church which must have stood on the site in the twelfth century.

Close by are the remains of a Round Tower, still standing to a height of about 50 feet, though missing its upper portions. It has a round-headed doorway of sandstone pointing north-eastwards towards the church, its lower stones finished unusually in the 'sparrow-pecking' technique. Though the date when the tower was constructed cannot be ascertained, it may well be older than the sandstone voussoir already mentioned, and making it likely that not even the Romanesque church was the first one on the site – others of wood having existed earlier.

In fact, it is likely that the site was a place of veneration even before the Christian era, as it was the location of a Lughnasa celebration on the last

Sunday in July, known locally as Garland Sunday – the traditional day in pagan Ireland for a festival in honour of Lug, the good god of the pre-Christian Celts. It is perhaps no wonder, then, that the parish priest in the middle of the nineteenth century banned the *patrún* or pattern day here because he felt that it – and the Round Tower – smacked of pagan practices (he was one of those who thought that Round Towers were pagan Fire Temples). The pattern took place at Tober Bannon, St. Benen's well, to the north-west of the church.

The exterior east wall of the church has a niche with the Virgin and Child on top, beneath which there is a large vault of the Browne family. To the north-east there is another, more ancient-looking, stone vault bearing an inscription of the Morris family which has been superimposed in the top right-hand corner with an IHS monogram. The remainder of the churchyard is choc-a-bloc with more modern graves and headstones.

Legends associated with Kilbennon

Folklore associated with the spot tells of Patrick and Benen calling forth the spring for the well by lifting the sod, and baptising and healing lepers there.

Another legend says that the well sprang up where a stone which St. Patrick gave Benen fell out of his pocket. There was, traditionally, an ash-tree at the well.

One final tale tells of Benen and his driver approaching the place in a chariot, and the driver, fearing an ambush, persuaded the unwarned saint to change places with him. When the ambushers beheaded the driver in place of the saint, a well sprang up where the driver's head had fallen to the ground.

4. Killeely

RISH PLACE-NAMES beginning with Kil- usually incorporate the name of an early saint, but because nothing is known of the name

Faoile which forms part of the name Killeely (Cill-Fhaoile), John O'Donovan, the great nineteenth-century *savant* of the Ordnance Survey, doubted whether the place was called after a saint at all.

Tombstones of recent centuries blend in well with the grey limestone walls of the church built at Killeely around 1200, with its large cyclopean masonry in the lower courses and a neat pair of lancet windows in the east wall.



The east/west-orientated church that runs parallel to a road east of Kilcolgan was probably originally a parish church during the later Middle Ages, which is probably why nothing is recorded of its history. The graceful and slender, slightly-pointed lancet windows in the east wall suggest a construction date early in the thirteenth century, which might go against the normal dating of its kind of massive masonry to a period well before 1200. But, if the windows are not a secondary addition, Killeely may be an important example showing the use of such large-stoned cyclopean masonry as late as the early thirteenth century in Galway and elsewhere.

Unlike Kiltiernan, this church has no *antae* – projections at the gable corners on the east and west walls – but was also built on a plinth, though

Early Christian Sites

some windows are, in contrast, round-headed rather than having a triangular top, that in the north wall having a curious hole beside it, the purpose of which is unclear. The quoins at the western end of the church seem to belong to the early thirteenth century, but most of the other masonry in the western third of the church is clearly inferior, jumbled and using smaller stones, indicating that this part of the church was almost entirely rebuilt, probably in the fifteenth century. The change in masonry style is best seen in the exterior north wall of the church. The original church may have had a (flat-headed?) doorway at the western end but, in the re-build, this was entirely removed, and replaced by the present, pointed doorway, which was placed in the south wall, with some surfaces decorated with hyphenated decoration of the kind often encountered on buildings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Noteworthy is the 'eye-loop' inside it which acted as the pivot for the vertical hinge of a long-vanished wooden door. Dating from the same period is a cusped piscina (for pouring away Mass water) that was inserted beneath the original south window near the eastern end of the church. The interior of this eastern end of the church is a symphony in grey – the eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century tombs blending in colour with the splendid masonry of the interior walls. Only a few modern memorials at the western end of the church disturb the venerable ancientness of the church interior.

5. Killursa

KILLURSA IS TWO CHURCHES in one. A small, low flat-headed doorway placed off-centre in the west wall belongs to the earlier of these, a small rectangular church, the slanting gable-walls of which can be seen incorporated into the larger and taller west wall which belongs to the second church. The smaller, older church was built of large stones, some of which are still *in situ*, but when the larger church was built, parts of the older church were presumably demolished, and some of its stones re-used in the bottom layers of the second church. The first church was built some time before 1200, the second probably in the fifteenth century, as its doorway and windows would seem to belong to that period.



Killursa, the church of St. Furse, was built in two periods, the first comprising the part with the door seen on the left, dating from before 1200, and the second a much expanded structure (with traceried east window) which must have served as a local parish from the fifteenth century.

Much of its interior is taken up with small, uninscribed, rude head-stones.

Outside, in the churchyard, the most unusual memorial is a cylindrical, round-topped monument erected to commemorate a priest who died in 1767. But, at the entrance to the churchyard, is a statue to the seventh-century Saint Fursa after whom the church is called (*Cill Fhursa*, the church of Fursa), and who is traditionally thought to have been born in the locality. He left his homeland to spread the gospel, his monastic foundation at Cnobresburgh in East Anglia earning for him renown in the Venerable Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Church and People*. He later worked in north-eastern France, and became famous for visions he had had. On his death, his uncorrupted body was taken to Peronne for burial, and there became an object of veneration for countless thousands of pilgrims who flocked to his tomb – showing that perhaps this small and ruined church in east Galway could become a draw, too, for English and French tourists.

6. Kilmacduagh

THE CHURCH OF THE SON OF DUACH' is the most impressive Early Christian site in South Galway, one of the three most significant in the County (along with Clonfert and Tuam) – and one of the least known of the big monastic settlements of early medieval Ireland. Its name comes from the saintly hermit Colmán son of Duach, who was of local royal stock and kinsman of Guaire, king of the surrounding area called Aidhne – a man renowned in Irish tradition for his hospitality (see below under Folklore). Colmán retired as a hermit to the Burren in the neighbouring county of Clare, and it was around his tomb at Kilmacduagh – marked by yew trees and appropriated in 1852 by Bishop French for his grave – that a monastery grew up. For centuries, the buildings of this monastery would have been made of wood, and no

The ancient Cathedral site of Kilmacduagh is best-known for its Round Tower which leans more than two feet out of the perpendicular. It was probably built some time after the year 1000, and certainly centuries before its more famous counterpart at Pisa.





The fifteenth-century traceried east window of Kilmacduagh Cathedral provides a view through to the chancel arch, as well as to the west wall with its late medieval window and simple ancient Irish doorway that was blocked up centuries ago.

structure surviving on the site is likely to be earlier than the second millennium (i.e. eleventh century). One of the oldest is the Round Tower – at about 112 feet, the tallest in the country – dating probably from the eleventh or twelfth century. It is built of solid ashlar masonry in its lower parts, and its doorway is higher off the ground than in any other tower of

its kind in the country. Its foundations, however, must have been somewhat insecure, as it leans two feet four inches out of the perpendicular – Ireland's predecessor to the leaning tower of Pisa!

Of much the same vintage is that part of the western end of the Cathedral which is made up of large-block cyclopean masonry. The west wall contains a fine trabeate doorway (now blocked) that is topped by a heavy lintel the whole thickness of the wall. It has projecting stone corbels at the base of the roof which once supported heavy wooden bargeboards, and which would suggest a date no earlier than the twelfth century. Its fine-quality stonework is of a kind that continued to be practised possibly into the thirteenth century in South Galway (compare Killeely). Probably around the fifteenth century, the west gable was raised, the Cathedral was extended to form a nave and chancel structure with transepts, and provided with a new decorative doorway near the western end of the south wall (note the well-carved head above the door). The south and west traceried windows are well preserved, and the north transept contains two charming Crucifixion plaques and the figure of St. Colmán, all dating from the seventeenth century.

In a field to the east of the adjoining road is the church of St. Mary (with 9th/10th century grave slab). To the north of the Cathedral is the Bishop's House, an unique thirteenth/fourteenth-century building (recently restored) and the very ruined church of St. John.

The dedications of these two churches suggest a date unlikely to be earlier than 1200, and probably later. Both may well have been built to cater for pilgrims, as Kilmacduagh continued to be an important centre of pilgrimage throughout the later Middle Ages – with the now-lost saint's belt as one of the relics which pilgrims would have come to venerate.

The other building of note is O'Heyne's church, reachable down a laneway to the west of the main complex of buildings. As its name implies, it was founded by the O'Heyne family for the Augustinians, in whose hands it remained until 1584, long after the Dissolution of the Monasteries had taken its toll of other religious foundations in the country. The stonework of this church belongs to what is known as 'the School of the West' – a school of masons that worked on various churches west of the Shannon in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, and which is characterised by superbly-fitting stonework, evidenced here in

the twin round-headed east windows, and the chancel arch. Both have good-quality carving of leaves and plants – some almost naturalistic – and one capital of the chancel arch bears two beasts biting each other, the significance of which escapes us. At some time around the fifteenth century, the north wall of the nave must have become unstable, at which stage a new one was built inside it – and provided with a pointed north doorway. This necessitated moving southwards by a few feet the north side of the chancel arch, which gives the church interior an asymmetrical look when seen from the western end. Some of the exterior corners of the church preserve engaged columns on bases – a rare feature found on some West of Ireland churches of around 1200 which, within a few decades, is likely to be the date of O’Heyne’s church. To the south of the chancel are now inaccessible buildings that formed part of the claustral ranges (including a presumed Chapter House), and there may have been a lean-to cloister built up against it, which has left no traces. In what would have been the south-west corner of the cloister garth, a rather rude building was erected probably some considerable time after the cloister would have gone out of use.

Folklore

According to legend, St. Colmán’s kinsman, Guaire Aidhne, was so impressed by the holy man’s sanctity that he offered him a site for a monastery. The saint thanked him, but left the selection of the site to Providence. The choice was made when the saint dropped his belt during a walk through a wood and, taking this to be a sign from heaven, he decided that this should be the chosen site for his monastery. The belt survived in the hands of its hereditary keepers, the O’Shaughnessys, until at least the seventeenth century. They were intermarried with the O’Heynes, who built the church named after them, and whose coat of arms included a wasp and a horsefly, both of which used to be prevalent in the locality.

The other, and more famous, story that concerns St. Colmán relates to the famous ‘Road of the Dishes’ near Keelhilla in the Burren. One Eastertide, we are told, St. Colmán ran out of food in his cave hermitage and sent his servant out to find some sustenance – which he signally failed to locate. But the Lord looked after his own for, at that same



The hills of the Burren provide a scenic backdrop for St. Colmán’s venerable monastery at Kilmacduagh near the southern end of the County.

moment, the saint’s legendary kinsman, Guaire Aidhne, famous for his hospitality, was having a great banquet where Gort now stands. But the friends he was entertaining were amazed when the dishes rose up from the table and started heading off in one particular direction – together with whatever culinary delights they bore. Guaire ordered his men to follow the plates as they wafted through the air – until they came to Colmán’s hermitage, whereupon they were surprised to find the saint and his acolyte with the plates in front of them, but not eating anything on them. Colmán said that he did not want to partake of the food until he learned from whence it came. So Guaire, who had started off the conversation by saying ‘You are caught’, came to recognise his cousin, and bade him eat what he had provided by the grace of God. Thereupon, he offered the spiritual care of his life to Colmán, and his body to buried in Colmán’s monastery when the time should come. In addition to land, the king gave the holy man sixty cows, together with men and maid servants to complete the building.



7. Kiltartan

KILTARTAN IS A NAME that became widely known through Lady Gregory, who is commemorated in a Heritage Centre near the main Gort to Galway road, but the name goes back many centuries before her, to a saint named Tárten or Torten, about whom little or nothing is known, though the name could be a corruption of Atharach, or Attracta, a female saint honoured at a famous well near Coolavin in County Sligo.

The medieval church bearing the name would not appear to have been monastic, and probably served as a parish church in the Middle Ages. While it may conceivably replace an older (wooden?) one on the site, this



The interior of the medieval parish church at Kiltartan, with an interesting canopied tomb in the wall on the left.

long, rectangular church (65 x 25 feet) is unlikely to be much earlier than 1200. In conformity with a number of other South Galway churches of roughly the same period, the structure is characterised by the use of fine, large-stoned cyclopean masonry. Typical of the period around the early thirteenth century are the narrow inward-splaying windows in the north wall. But, as was sometimes the case in South Galway, the western end of the church appears to have been entirely re-built from the ground up sometime around the fifteenth century – and in masonry inferior to that of the eastern portion. Whether the church was lengthened in the process – possibly to cater for an expanding population – is difficult to know. It is likely that (as was probably also the case at Killeely) a west doorway which originally provided the entrance was replaced by a new one inserted in the north wall. At the same time, the upper portions of the north and south walls were heavily rebuilt, creating a triple-cusped east window, but also inserting some of the narrow windows of the old church in the side-walls. A notable feature is the seemingly late-medieval simple arched tomb-niche with cusped (but otherwise undecorated) frontal. The interior is covered with modern grave memorials which are in bad need of care and attention, but the roots of ivy engulfing the walls have recently been severed.

Folklore

Outside the church was a stone which is said to have been tied around the neck of the mother of St. Colmán mac Duagh when she was thrown into a hole to drown her. But when she said “God help us”, the hole henceforth became known as Poll Dia Linn.

- 📌 A modern crucifix occupies the niche of a fifteenth-century canopied tomb in the church at Kiltartan. The undecorated arches above ground level may once have been painted.

~ A THOUSAND YEARS OF CHURCH HERITAGE IN EAST GALWAY ~

8. Tuam: St. Mary's Church of Ireland Cathedral

TUAM, THE SITE of a monastery founded by St. Jarlath in the sixth century and seat of the O'Conor High Kings of Ireland in the twelfth, became the centre of a new diocese in 1111, and was raised to the status of archdiocese in 1152. The present Protestant Cathedral must have had at least one predecessor, which collapsed in 1184, and it is reasonable to presume that the earliest part of the present Cathedral was built shortly after that. This is what was then and is now again the chancel of the Cathedral, a square area entered beneath an arch and with three windows in

The Protestant Cathedral in Tuam preserves parts of a late twelfth-century church with highly-decorative carving in sandstone, including the chancel arch which is the broadest of its kind surviving in Ireland.



Tuam possesses parts of four separate twelfth-century High Crosses, two of which are seen here mounted one on top of the other in the north transept of the Protestant Cathedral. Both may have been commissioned by the great Turlough O Conor, who made Tuam the base for his High Kingship of Ireland in 1119.

the east wall. The arch is one of the great glories of Irish Romanesque architecture, its span of about 18 feet being the largest of its kind known in the country. In five orders, it is richly decorated with a great variety of ornament, and its capitals have some superbly-carved stylised human faces, which were partially damaged in a fire of 1787. The three east windows are equally well carved in low false relief with animal ornament of ultimately Viking origin, and with a small Temptation scene which has never been satisfactorily explained. Not having been exposed to the elements, the carving on the windows has kept its pristine crispness.

In the later Middle Ages, a much more extensive chancel was built immediately to the east. Though ascribed by some to William de Bermingham, archbishop from 1289 to 1312, on the basis of historical references, it may, however, be up to a century later in date. It is a long rectangle in shape with triple (partially restored) windows in the north and south walls that alternate with external buttresses, and having an extensive five-light window (now with modern glass) in the east wall. The nave which was presumably intended to accompany it was never built, which is as well, as it would have entailed the destruction of the Romanesque chancel. Thus, from the time of its construction until the second half of the nineteenth century, this structure served as the main area of worship in the Cathedral. Access to it was through the

Romanesque chancel which then served as a porch, and entrance from it to the chancel was created by knocking out the lower part of the central window in the east wall. Where the two chancels, old and new, met, a tower was constructed which was repaired in 1688 but was demolished when the third and final stage of building the Cathedral was reached in the 1860s.

It was then that Sir Thomas Deane, one of the most prominent architects of the period, was commissioned to design a new Cathedral in the neo-Gothic style, but with instructions to leave the existing Romanesque and Gothic chancels intact. What he constructed was a new nave (doubtless much larger than the old Romanesque one had been), with west doorway, side aisles, a north and south transept and an impressive tower with spire at the crossing. The construction lasted until 1878, and Tuam now had the largest Protestant Cathedral in Connacht, a consolation to make up for the loss of archiepiscopal status which it had suffered almost forty years before. Deane's only alteration to the Romanesque chancel was to repair the damage done to the central east window, and blocking up the late medieval doorway in a way that makes it almost seem as if it were never there. The altar was now back beneath the east window, and to link the chancel to the crossing, he built a choir, where red sandstone was chosen for the inner walls to blend in with that of the Romanesque arch. In fact, Deane used sandstone widely throughout the building, leaving a gap between it and the outer limestone shell to prevent damp – but to no avail, as the Cathedral still suffers from the rain.

The entrance is now usually through the north transept door, rather than through Deane's west doorway, which is normally kept locked. The late medieval chancel, having acted as chapter house (with eighteenth-century Piedmontese choir stalls now returned to Italy), library and synod hall, is now suitably restored as a community centre / display area. The ecclesiastical furniture is not of major interest, the bishop's throne and chapter stalls detracting, if anything, from the interior appearance, and the largely late-nineteenth-century stained glass erected to various Victorian worthies is more notable for the flowing moustaches of its male figures than for any particular artistic interest.

JM Synge's grandfather is buried in the graveyard.

Medieval Sites



~ Medieval Sites ~

9. Abbey (Kilnaleghin)

ABBEY, BETWEEN PORTUMNA and the eastern foot of the Slieve Aughty hills, is the site of the only Carthusian house in Ireland, though not a trace of it remains. This was a foundation independent of the seventh-century Irish saint Feichín, whose cult is still practised in the locality. The original name of the Carthusian monastery was Kilnaleghin, and the charterhouse was founded around 1252 by John de Cogan, who probably introduced the Carthusian monks from Somerset – and who was probably also responsible for founding the Franciscan house at Claregalway.

The priory is said to have been destroyed in 1279, but was probably soon rebuilt – perhaps in wood, which would help to explain why no traces

caption to come

of the Carthusian monastery survive. It is also said that the Priory was sold to the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem in 1306 but, while the Knights continued to hold the tithes and rectory right up to the Reformation, the actual sale of the monastery to them was apparently never completed. In 1321, the English Carthusian priors decided to send no more monks to Kilnaleghin because they could no longer get any rents from the Irish house, which would seem to have been finally abandoned some twenty years later. Certainly, by 1371, after the Carthusian cells had remained deserted for thirty years, it was proposed that the site should be granted to the Franciscans, for whom the de Burgos then founded a monastery. In 1400, Pope Boniface IX granted an indulgence to penitents visiting the house and giving alms for its conservation and repair – and many of the surviving buildings would fit in well with a fifteenth-century date.

The church would have been a long hall-type structure, but with an additional south aisle linked to it by an arcade supported on angular columns. It resembled Meelick in this, but also in having side chapels to the south. Careful inspection shows both to have windows restored in modern times, that in the eastern side-chapel at Abbey ingeniously so, and that in its more westerly counterpart making clever, if wrong, use of old tracery in its upper part which is surmounted by a stone head. A small building was later inserted between these two side-chapels, necessitating the blocking up of a window in the west wall of the east chapel.

The buildings were devastated after the Suppression of the Monasteries around 1540, but Richard de Burgo, Earl of Clanrickarde, bought the buildings from Queen Elizabeth and repaired the dormitories and other parts of the old monastery. It may have been he who built in the fine first-floor fire-place in the western wall of the otherwise poorly-preserved domestic quarters, together with the diamond-shaped chimneys typical of the late sixteenth century or the period around 1600. A sixteenth-century tombstone survives near the south-western corner of the old cloister garth.

The friars held a chapter in a neighbouring wood in 1609, and seem to have returned to the friary in 1615 to occupy and restore it. Sometime before that, the Dowager Countess of Clanrickarde had roofed the church, but her pious work does not appear to have survived the Cromwellian period, when the friars had to abandon their house again,

only to return once more after the restoration of Charles II in 1660. When the friars finally abandoned the monastery is not recorded, but it was probably before the end of the eighteenth century. Certainly, three eighteenth-century chalices have managed to survive from Kilmaleghin, and a fifteenth-century chasuble now in the Museum in Loughrea may have also come from here.

The noted Franciscan Micheál O'Cleirigh, one of the famous Four Masters, copied out here a life of St. Ceallach from the manuscript known as the *Leabhar Breac*, which the MacEgans of Duniry nearby may have loaned temporarily to the monastery, and this laudable act is recorded in a carving in Loughrea Cathedral as one of the important events in the history of the diocese. Frank Burke's book on *The Abbey of Kilmalahan* records that another event similarly commemorated in stone in the same Cathedral was the consecration of John de Burgo as bishop of Clonfert at Kilmaleghin in 1642. It may also be noted in passing that the modern Catholic church in the village of Abbey nearby has stained glass windows which neatly sum up the history of Christianity in the area – the figure of St. Feichín, and the arms of the Carthusians, the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem and the Franciscans.

One of the most interesting aspects of visiting Abbey is viewing the collection of seventeenth- to nineteenth-century tombstones in the two side-chapels. The roof over the eastern chapel, perhaps part of the rebuilding recorded in a plaque as having been undertaken in 1741 by Edward Burke of Meelick, has helped to preserve for posterity a number of Burke tombs. The largest, but not the most attractive, of these is that occupying much of the centre of the chapel and which was erected to commemorate the family of Sir John Burke of Marble Hill, who died in 1847. Of more artistic merit is that of Thomas de Burgo of Pallas, dating from 1649, with its two-tiered classical design and mason's initials. Also classical in inspiration is the monument to John Burke of Reaghan erected against the south wall of the western side-chapel in 1745. The quality difference between the eighteenth-century hand-carved tomb inscriptions and those executed by template in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be seen by comparing headstones of different types in the churchyard. A walled enclosure near the road houses a family vault of the Nugent family.

10. Abbeyknockmoy

KNOCKMOY ABBEY is the only Cistercian house in our chosen area, but one of the most important of East Galway's ecclesiastical monuments. It had royal origins, having been founded from Boyle in 1190 by Cathal Crobhderg O'Connor, king of Connacht, who ordered that he be buried there in the habit of a monk upon his death, which occurred in 1224. In doing so, he set a trend for many of his descendants who were also interred there, though not as monks. During the controversy surrounding the Conspiracy of Mellifont in 1228, Knockmoy became affiliated to the famous French abbey of Clairvaux, where both St. Malachy of Armagh and the great Cistercian preacher, St. Bernard, are buried side by side in front of the high altar. But Knockmoy was disgraced twelve years later when the abbot allowed his hair to be washed by a woman! By the early fifteenth century, Knockmoy had become so poverty-stricken that its monks could not be maintained properly, though things can't have been too bad, and must have been worth fighting for, because we know that, in the second half of the century, squabbles broke out as to who should become abbot of the community. The Abbey was suppressed at the Reformation when Hugh O'Kelly (apparently a layman) acknowledged the supremacy of king Henry VIII, and promised men and arms in return for a life grant of the property which, some forty years later, is known to have included 1260 acres of land – and Clare Island off the Mayo coast.

The Abbey buildings conform to the typical Cistercian lay-out – a church on one side of a cloister garth with lean-to cloister, the other three sides being formed by chapter-house, refectory and kitchen, and stores and dormitories. The somewhat severe nave, with pointed side-aisles, survives only in part, though it has some interesting carvings, particularly on one of the supports of the south aisle arcade. Each of the transepts has two side-chapels with some foliate capitals, but the main interest of the abbey lies in the chancel, which is locked. It is vaulted with undecorated stone ribs, but the pointed arch at the crossing has recently been rebuilt. The east wall has a set of three windows, joined on the outside by a string course typical of a western Irish school of masons active mainly in



Connacht during the first quarter of the thirteenth century. It was they who carved the attractive decoration on the exterior arches above the string-course level.

The take-over of the monastery by the O'Kellys of Uí Maine is illustrated by a large canopied tomb in the north wall of the chancel that was inserted as a memorial to Malachy O'Kelly, who died in 1401, and his wife Fionnuala, whose death is recorded two years later. The most unusual feature, however, is the late Gothic painting of c. 1500 beside it, depicting a Crucifixion, St. Sebastian and a representation of the tale of *The Three Live Kings* and *The Three Dead Kings*, accompanied by a now no-longer legible Gothic, so-called 'black letter,' inscription to the effect that 'as you are now, so once we were; as we now are, so shall you be'. Time has not dealt kindly with the colours, which have almost entirely disappeared, though the black outlines have been preserved. The choir also preserves some nineteenth-century and earlier memorials, and the tower (or what remains of it) was probably inserted in the fifteenth century.

The east range of the claustral buildings still survives, having been built – like the church – in the decades between 1210 and 1230. The five lancet windows of the chapter house were finely decorated inside with heavily-undercut chevron ornament, but the whole interior space was ruined by the insertion of an internal wall in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. The remainder of the buildings around the cloister garth survive partially up to first floor level, but have no further features of particular interest. Portions of the 'Dumb-bell'-style piers of the fifteenth-century cloister arcade were uncovered during excavations in the 1980s, but are not on public display, though the visible wall-foundations give an adequate idea of the extent and layout of the cloister.

One final point may be mentioned. Abbeyknockmoy can lay claim to having had a professional scribe within its walls – Diarmuid O'Culechain, who is known to have written a missal for the abbey – one of only two such scribes known in the records of the Irish Cistercian houses though, sadly, none of his products can be identified today.

- The recently-restored wall-painting of c. 1500 on the north wall of the chancel of Knockmoy Abbey depicts the *Three Live Kings* and the *Three Dead Kings* in the upper register, and *The martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* beneath.



II. Annaghdown

ST. BRENDAN IS THE ONE SAINT who spans the whole geographical arc of our chosen area. He is said to have been buried in Clonfert on the eastern edge beside the Shannon's shores, but died at Annaghdown in 577 or 583 on the western fringe beside the waters of Lough Corrib. It was at the latter place that he had founded a convent of nuns for his sister Briga. But Annaghdown was much more than just a convent. It was a Cathedral and seat of a bishop from the twelfth until at least the fourteenth century, when the diocese was amalga-

An aerial view of Annaghdown shows its rich collection of churches, two in the centre of the picture, the Cathedral near the left and the Augustinian priory close to the lakeshore at the top.



SA detail of the bottom of the window in Annaghdown Cathedral (seen in full on the right), showing a beast emerging from a moulding that is flanked by zig-zag chevron ornament bearing floral motifs, showing the high standard of architectural sculpture in East Galway in the period around 1200.

The Romanesque window of c.1200 in the east wall of the Cathedral at Annaghdown is one of the most profusely decorated of its kind anywhere in Ireland.

mated with Tuam. It also had separate monasteries for the Augustinian and Premonstratensian canons and, in the sixteenth century, it is known to have had a secular college secretly run by four priests or vicars.

Little is known about the early history of the convent. We can only presume that its existence continued for centuries until it was subsumed by the Arroasian Canonesses of Clonard, in County Meath, during the course of the twelfth century, but when the Canonesses got a new head house for Connacht at Kilcreevanty around 1223, the Annaghdown nuns may have moved to the island of Inishmaine on Lough Mask. It was probably at that stage that the vacuum was filled by the arrival of the Premonstratensians, whose foundation had almost certainly become the

Abbey of St. John the Baptist by 1236, bearing the name *Cella Parva* ('poor cell'), and continued – not without a number of disputes – until it was suppressed during the reign of king Henry VIII in the 1540s. The northernmost of the three clusters of buildings at Annaghdown has one long church which may well have been that of the Premonstratensians. One smaller building close to it, still displaying elements of cyclopean masonry though reduced to little more than its foundations, could conceivably have belonged to the nunnery which preceded them. The long church itself is a nave-and-chancel structure with remains of a chancel arch, but few other features of interest remain other than a pointed doorway in the north wall.

The second building focus is the Cathedral, located further down the slope. This is a tall rectangular building with Gothic north doorway, with capitals resembling the carving on Kilfenora cathedral of c.1200, and with broad south windows inserted when the Church of Ireland restored the church for divine worship in 1798 at a cost of £461-10-9. The present east window may have been inserted at this time. It has the same dimensions as a gap that exists where an east window ought to be in the priory by the lakeshore to be mentioned below, and this has given rise to the oft-expressed view that the Cathedral window was taken from the priory – which is certainly a possibility. But, because masons have rarely succeeded in correctly re-assembling Romanesque doorways or windows centuries after they were originally carved, the comparatively good fit of the Annaghdown Cathedral window stones could negate the suggestion, and argue in favour of the window being in its original position, for although its style may differ from that of the north doorway just mentioned, the two need not be very far apart in date.

Whether in its original position or not, the window is undoubtedly the finest late Romanesque-style window to survive in Ireland from the period around 1200, and one of the greatest masterpieces of sculpture in Connacht before it was overcome by the Normans in 1235. Its decoration consists of a central roll with pointed bowtell moulding which starts at the bottom and continues without interruption around the arched top and down the other side, with the base of the north side ending in a splendid monster with contorted neck, found also on a window at Rath in central Clare where the mason would also appear to have been at work. The roll

is approached from each side all the way round by triangles with pellet ornament and carved with stylised foliage and animals in very subtle low relief. All of this is, in turn, framed by a raised moulding with foliate block capitals, above which is a kind of pyramidal decoration.

The final group of ecclesiastical buildings is down near the lakeshore – the priory of the Augustinian canons, known as St. Mary *de Portu Patrum*, which may have been founded by Turlough O'Connor at the instance of the reformer St. Malachy some time in the 1140s. It is possible that its church may have been used also by the Canonesses of the same order. Like the Premonstratensian foundation, it was not without its contentious claims and counter-claims inside and outside the community and, like it, was closed down at the Reformation. Thereafter, it came into the hands of Richard, Earl of Clanrickarde, in 1562, and a lease in reversion was granted to the warden and vicars of King's College, Galway, in 1578. The buildings consist of a church, with a cloister attached, that still has some of its domestic buildings surrounding it. The cloister was of the lean-to variety, and the stone finish of some of the windows suggests a thirteenth-century date at least for some of the buildings. The only interesting feature in the church is the south window of the choir, which has decoration in the Transitional style of around 1200.

But, of finer quality are the twelfth-century Romanesque-decorated fragments and face-mask capitals that are now assembled together near the south-western end of the domestic buildings. Together, these may have formed part of a chancel arch of an earlier church on the site and – like the east window in the Cathedral – show the high quality of stone carving in the area in the decades on either side of the year 1200.

One building no longer extant at Annaghdown is the Round Tower known to have been built in 1238 – the last of its kind to have been erected in Ireland.

While the surviving buildings at Annaghdown are diffuse, the stone-carved architectural sculpture, the association with St. Brendan – and the lakeside location – make this one of the most attractive sites in the whole area covered by this survey.

12. Athenry Dominican Friary

MORE THAN A THIRD of the Irish medieval friaries of the Dominicans were located in Connacht and, of the five in Galway, that at Athenry was one of the most richly endowed – and is still one of the best preserved (though see also Portumna). The priory of SS. Peter and Paul at Athenry was founded in 1241 by Milo de Bermingham, who provided land and money for the building of the church where he was buried in 1252. Many of his descendants chose to be interred there also, as did several bishops of Clonfert and Kilmacduagh. The founder's son, William, who was archbishop of Tuam from 1289 until 1312, was interred in a splendid tomb in the friary, but there is no

An anonymous copy of a drawing by Angelo Maria Bigari, now in the Royal Irish Academy (Ms.3.C.29, p. 34), shows how the Dominican Priory in Athenry looked more impressive before its tall tower collapsed not long after the original was painted in 1779.



inscription to indicate which of the surviving tombs may have been his. The church was re-edified in 1327-45, and restored after a fire sometime around 1420. It may have been at that stage of its development that the tower was inserted, thereby adding an air of elevated distinction to the buildings, but it collapsed sometime after 1779.

The church consists of nave, choir, north aisle and transepts, built over a period of some two centuries – together with a sacristy of later date. Of Milo de Bermingham's original church all that survives are the south wall of the nave and good parts of the north and south walls of the choir, where the tall, thin lancet windows are typical thirteenth-century features. The eastern end of the church must have been in need of repair by the following century, and its two eastern corners were heavily re-built with the addition of stout buttresses in the re-edifications executed in the period 1327-45. At the same time, the church was extended northwards to include a new transept and adjoining aisle (through which entrance is currently gained), though the existing pillars supporting the aisle arcade are a re-build of the fifteenth century. Probably fourteenth-century in date are the fine series of niches, grouped in threes, beneath the fine north window of the transept, which were sadly vandalised some decades ago and re-built partially in stone, but also in part replaced by unsightly re-enforced concrete. H.G. Leask attributes the cusped windows of these additions to the fourteenth century, but the surviving west window would seem to belong to the following century. It was probably after the fire of around 1420 that the original east window was dismantled, except for its outer case, and replaced by one with switch-line tracery, which has some fine heads carved on the exterior.

The church, of course, did not stand-alone, and was accompanied by domestic claustral buildings to the south of the nave. Unusually, we know the names associated with the building of certain parts of them – Phelim O'Connor the refectory, Eugene O'Heyne the dormitory and Cornelius O'Kelly the chapter house – all useful patrons to have had, each contributing a portion as donors of stained glass windows do in churches of our own day. However, of these domestic buildings, sadly nothing remains.

The friary is distinguished by its collection of medieval tombs, many trodden upon unnoticed on the ground. But those in the walls are worthy



A delicate arcade supports an imposing window which must have let in wondrous light into the north transept of Athenry Dominican Priory when first erected during the fourteenth century.

of inspection, including some on the south wall of the nave dating from the thirteenth century (there is also a support with a finely-carved fifteenth-century angel among them). In the north wall of the church there is also a fine tomb with a carved mitred head (resembling another on the outside wall) and, closer to the east wall, there is a further tomb in the western style with a cusped upper canopy, and a lower part consisting of five cusped niches (without inscription) – and decorated with a *Virgin and child* arched over by bodies of slender animals. In the south-eastern corner of the choir is the massive and intrusive limestone vault of the de Burgh family, earls of Clanrickarde, but – while equally intrusive – much more attractive is the tall monument in the choir erected to the memory of the Rt. Hon. Matilda Bermingham, who died in 1788. It is decorated in fine classical style with London Coade stone, dated 1790, and is surmounted by an urn bearing in relief a likeness of the deceased. It was, sadly, vandalised in late 2002.

An interesting stone of 1631 is placed up against the wall not far from the entrance. Finally it may be mentioned that – as recorded on a stone near the churchyard gate – Mass was celebrated again in the friary in 1991 – 750 years after its foundation, and some 450 years after the foundation was closed at the time of the Reformation.

13. Ballynakill Abbey

BALLYNAKILL ‘ABBEY’, about half a mile from Glinsk Castle, is a rather ruined structure. A century ago, H.T. Knox remarked on two windows in the east wall (now vanished) which suggested to him that the east/west-orientated hall-like church, 71 x 20 feet in extent, dated to around the thirteenth century. Around the fifteenth century, a (chantry?) chapel was added to the south, near the eastern end of the church, without the walls bonding into each other. The original floor level must have been considerably lower, as the doorway joining the two is unusually low, as is also the fine and well-preserved flamboyant window in the south wall. Note on the exterior of this window the foliage which emerges from the hood-mouldings, bitten on the east side by a human head.

The chapel underwent considerable changes in the early 1720s, as is seen by the broad windows in the east wall but more particularly in the monuments it contains – the creation of the largest of which has blocked



An early seventeenth-century Crucifixion plaque was built into the pediment of a memorial about a century later in the church of Ballynakill.

the interior of the south window. This monument was erected to the memory of John Burke, a most noble and illustrious man who, according to the inscription, died in 1721 at the age of 63, mourned by his widow Joanna Dillon. His are presumably the coat of arms that are placed above the long Latin paeon of praise that honors him, and this classical monument is capped by flutings that enclose an attractive Crucifixion plaque that was almost a century old when it was inserted and had its two top corners clipped to have it fit in.

To the left of it is the most important monument in the whole building – the effigy of a knight in armour which was taken from its former recumbent location (probably within the chapel) and placed up against the wall, in surrounds which were not originally made for it, but were assembled for the purpose in 1722. The inscription beneath it, in attractive English script, states that

*Here stands
ye effigy of Will
iam Burke ye First
of McDavids Fam
ily who dyed in
1116 & erected by
Henry Burke 1722.*

The date of death is manifestly wrong, as is the identification of the knight, because the armour of the knight prompted the armour expert John Hunt to ascribe the figure to the early sixteenth century. Its importance lies in the fact that it is one of only two medieval effigies known to survive in Connacht and the only one of a knight in coat of mail of around this period.

Underneath his coat of mail, the knight wore a skirt over a padded garment, and on his head he wears a pointed bascinet over a leathern cap, his neck protected by a pisane of mail. Hanging from his belt is a sword with a peculiarly Irish form of pommel. His feet rest on a dog.

The family tradition, as recorded by Knox in 1902, was that the effigy represented William de Burgo, founder of the Augustinian Abbey of Athassel in 1205, and that it was sent to MacDavid as the head of the senior line of all the Burkes after the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1540. The



The effigy of a sixteenth-century Burke (?) knight was given a special niche in the wall of the church at Ballinakill in 1722. It is one of the only two medieval knightly effigies west of the Shannon, this one wearing a coat of mail that may have been a family heirloom.

local tradition, as recorded by John O'Donovan in 1838 and much more romantic, has it that William was killed in a battle in France, where he had been loved by a lady who commissioned the effigy in his memory, and whose descendant sent it to Harry Burke as a 'striking likeness of the warrior'. Both stories may echo a tradition that the effigy came from elsewhere, which would help to explain why it is the only effigy of a knight in armour to survive anywhere in Connacht from the medieval period, but which still does not in any way help to elucidate whose effigy it was.

~ A THOUSAND YEARS OF CHURCH HERITAGE IN EAST GALWAY ~

The Ballynakill Madonna and Child

According to a local booklet *History in Glinsk*, a stone sculpture of the *Madonna and Child* was discovered on the site of Ballinakill Abbey in 1998. Experts have viewed the sculpture and believe that it dates back to 1500AD. While images of the Madonna and Child are found throughout the world both on stone and in canvas, this presentation of the child Jesus in a standing pose is believed to be unique. The sculpture now adorns the porch of the present Catholic Church in Glinsk.

14. Claregalway

CLAREGALWAY IS UNDOUBTEDLY one of the best examples of what an early Franciscan friary church looked like in Ireland, as the house was founded around 1252, only a quarter of a century after the death of St. Francis himself – the Norman John de Cogan I having probably been the founder. Much of the surviving church dates from the thirteenth century, with its serried rows of lancet windows in each side-wall of the choir.

The original east window of the church was a cluster of five (or perhaps even seven) tall, lancet windows, but these were removed in the fifteenth century and replaced by a five-light window with more glass and less wall which allowed more light into the friars' choir. Inserted into the south wall of the choir, under the first and second lancets from the east, was a triple sedilia which, to judge by the dog-tooth moulding on one of the capitals, can scarcely be more than half a century later than the construction of the original church. Opposite it, in the north wall, is a fine thirteenth- or fourteenth-century tomb-niche with cusped tracery with a male and female head as label-stops. Adjoining it to the west is a monument carved with a chalice and erected to the memory of two Franciscans, Gildas Bruodar and Loughlen Quealy, in 1676.

The tombstones laid flat in the choir include some wedge-shaped examples going back to the period not long after the foundation, while in the nave are much later recumbent memorials which are unique in giving us representations of ploughs used by the farmers they commemorate.



The thirteenth-century Franciscan church at Claregalway, with its fifteenth-century east window and tall tower, gives an inspiring vertical axis to the East Galway skyline.



A sideways glimpse of the nave of Claregalway friary offers an interesting study of graceful arch forms.

The late Kevin Danaher pointed out that these were rather old-fashioned ploughs of the kind used in Ireland before the introduction of the Scottish swing-plough.

The original church did not have a tower, and that which now makes such an impression on the passing traveller was an insertion of the fifteenth century – as in so many other Irish Franciscan houses of the period – but so much better preserved than most. The arched lower part has lierne vaulting, the keystone of which is carved with a lively ape-like

head. The bottom part of the consoles supporting the arches bear small animal heads and other motifs. Protruding from the tower's western side, and somewhat above eye-level, are wall-brackets on which statues of saints would originally have been placed. The upper levels of the tower are defined by three horizontal string-courses, of which the topmost one has gargoyles acting as water-spouts, and the top is battlemented.

The nave had a northern side-aisle joined to it through an arcade of graceful arches resting on round drum-pillars with simply-moulded capitals. Next to the north-western corner of the tower, a very much smaller arcade has been reconstructed, the original purpose and placing of which is unclear. At roughly the same time that the tower was inserted, what was probably a chapel-cum-sacristy was added at its northern foot. In the tower wall is a piscina for pouring away the unused wine and water of the Mass, together with an eighteenth-century Franciscan inscription saying, in so many words: as you now are, so were we; and you will be as we now are.

To the south of the nave is an extensive cloister-garth which is now a grassy void, but which corner arches show to have had a cloister leaning up against what were once two-storeyed domestic buildings. Fragments of the cloister which are preserved in the adjoining buildings show that it was supported by pillars of the so-called Dumb-bell variety, so typical of the fifteenth century. The domestic buildings include at least one chimney mantelpiece, now without its original lintel – but this belonged to the period after the friary had been closed at the time of the Reformation.

Though only snippets of information are recorded of the history of the Franciscan friary after its foundation but before its suppression under king Henry VIII, the Franciscans nevertheless remained active throughout the intervening three centuries. We do know that Philip le Blound, archdeacon of Tuam, was indicted for removing the pontificalia of the bishop of Annaghdown from the friary, but no explanation is forthcoming as to why they should have been in Claregalway in the first place.

Claregalway was one of those Franciscan houses which was strongly Irish in the make-up of its community – in contrast to many others which saw themselves as Anglo-Irish – and this is shown in the report of a papal commission of 1324 which described the loyalty of Claregalway as 'suspect', and it was one of only two houses (the other being Galway)

which was allowed to have a Gaelic friar appointed as guardian in charge. The report of the same commission gives the impression that Claregalway was also one of the Franciscans' houses of study in Ireland. One of the community was granted a dispensation just over a century later for having wounded a layman in a game, which subsequently led to his demise. Could it have been hurling they were playing?

By the late sixteenth century, the friars' possessions were six cottages and gardens, 24 arable acres, pasture for a like number of cows, and a water-mill, all of which were probably handed over to Richard de Burgo in 1570. He, however, allowed the friars to remain in the vicinity, which they did, until they were driven away by Sir Richard Bingham, Queen Elizabeth I's Governor of Connacht, who converted the buildings into a barracks – probably around 1589 – which was probably when the fireplace mentioned above was inserted. The friars were subsequently allowed to use the buildings before being ejected for a second time. They tried to restore the monastery after 1641, the two friars Bruodar and Quealy mentioned above doubtless having helped in the process, and the inscription in the sacristy/chapel beside the tower referred to above shows that the Franciscans were in occupation again until at least the eighteenth century, but when they departed for the last time is not recorded.

15. Clontuskert

CLONTUSKERT IS SAID to be the site of an early Christian monastery associated with St. Baetan (Boedan), who died in 809, but no trace of it survives. All that is visible today formed part of a house of the Augustinian canons, founded by the O'Kellys some time after 1140, and which consisted of a long church with undifferentiated nave and chancel, and domestic buildings to the south. The chancel is the main survivor of that church – with its original lancet windows still intact in the south wall, though the inner and outer walls of the eastern range of domestic buildings also belong to this early period of Augustinian occupation.

For 200-250 years, there was little of any moment that happened to disturb the peaceful routine of the monastery, and it is not until the late



~ Medieval Sites ~

fourteenth century that snippets of its history are recorded again, often concerning unfortunate incidents, such as the prior being removed by the bishop, whose successor was to tax it unlawfully in the fifteenth century. An O'Kelly prior fell in battle in 1444, and another was accused of killing a layman after one of the canons had received papal absolution for a similar crime. The O'Kellys, in fact, had virtually become hereditary priors during the sixteenth century. The Pope had taken the prior under his protection in 1443 and, three decades earlier, a papal indulgence had been granted for the rebuilding of the church which had been burned down in 1404 along with its 'books and jewels, ecclesiastical ornaments and other precious things'. This was the catalyst for the construction of most of the remaining part of the buildings that we see today – the nave, rood-screen, west doorway, the cloister and most of the rest of the domestic buildings surrounding it that do not belong to the earlier period. The north transept was an addition of the sixteenth century, while the cross wall erected in 1637 reduced the church to the size of the chancel to serve a smaller community of canons who had returned to inhabit the place just less than a century after the priory had been suppressed at the Reformation.

Clontuskert is one of the most decorative late medieval priories of Ireland, its ornamental features giving no inkling of the occasional unhappy incidents that had bedevilled this Augustinian foundation in the fifteenth century. Its sculptural pride and glory is the west doorway which, along with the north doorway of the Cathedral at Clonmacnois, can be counted as the finest of its kind surviving in Ireland. A Latin inscription running along the top tells us that 'Matthew, by the grace of God, Bishop of Clonfert, and Patrick O'Naughton, canon of this house, caused me to be made Anno Domini 1471'. Beneath the inscription there is a frieze of four figures:

1. The winged St. Michael the Archangel, with youthful beardless face, sporting a great head of hair topped by a cross-shaped diadem, his body covered in feathers, brandishing a sword in his right hand, and holding an evenly-balanced scales in his left. Its left-hand pan holds a soul threatened by a long-eared devil, while the right-hand pan is

2. The restored reredos and 1637 wall of the church of the Augustinian monastery at Clontuskert can be seen through the west doorway of 1471, one of the most decorative of its kind to survive from the Middle Ages in Ireland.

entirely occupied by another devil, trying to win the soul for itself as St. Michael weighs the souls on Judgment Day.

2. A bearded John the Baptist wearing a lambskin and with his finger pointing to the lamb on a disc which he holds in his left hand.
3. St. Catherine of Alexandria – a saint to whom all in need could pray for help – bearing a sword (point downwards) and with a wheel as her identifying attribute.
4. A mitred bishop holding a decorative crozier diagonally across his body. His identity remains uncertain, though the names of Saints Patrick, Brendan and Augustine have all been put forward as possibilities.

Beneath the latter two is an elongated animal growing out of a leaf, its long-outstretched front legs pointing towards a tree which separates the adjoining figures into two pairs of two and which emerges from an arc of similar foliage surmounting the arched moulding of the doorway. There is an angel in each of the resulting spandrels, that on the right having a hammer, two dice and a pincers (symbols of the passion) on a shield it bears. There are further angels on top of the side-crocketts, from the bottom of which animal-heads emerge.

The sides of the doorway are also intermittently decorated on the left with a variety of motifs. Going from top to bottom on left, we have a heraldic rose, two animals (griffin and lion?) facing one another, and a pelican vulning or piercing its breast, symbolising the church bleeding itself to feed its flock. Correspondingly on the right we have, at the top, a human face biting foliage and then, further down, the IHS symbol for Christ, a 'foliage service', a mermaid with comb and mirror, two quadrupeds with interlocking necks and, finally, a bird biting its back, back-to-back with a quadruped eating its tail. The precise symbolism contained in the various elements of this doorway is difficult to ascertain, but the weighing of souls by St. Michael suggests the battle of good versus evil as a possible theme, with the mermaid (or siren) being emblematic of a temptation towards the latter. The animals with interlocking necks have been interpreted tentatively as a sign of warding off evil, though their action could also suggest discord but, on the whole, the rich animal imagery of the doorway is now sadly beyond our ken. The unusual choice

of the four saints and their varying sizes has led to the suggestion that the doorway is not as it was originally designed, but it is probably unnecessary to adopt this extreme view. The bishop and St. Catherine make a second appearance on a font just inside the door on the left.

After its foundation in the twelfth century, and its suppression in the sixteenth, the third major event in the priory's building history was its being taken over into guardianship by the Commissioners of Public Works in 1970. At that stage, many of the walls were covered in ivy and in bad need of repair. St. Catherine must have had their interests at heart because, after excavation by Tom Fanning in 1971, the monastic buildings were extensively repaired and restored. All except two pieces of the splendid east window that had fallen in 1918 were recovered among the rubble, permitting the admirable restoration that we see today.

But even more remarkable was the restoration of the rood-screen which had been already in ruins when the canons returned and built their wall across the western end of the chancel in 1637, as some fragments from the screen were found in this later wall. In fact, the screen had originally stood where the cross-wall now stands, and the decision was taken to re-build the rood-screen immediately to the west of the 1637 wall, using the many fragments that could be assembled for the purpose. The screen is a triple-arched stone structure with gallery above for a rood, or Crucifixion group (presumably of wood, and no longer extant). This is the most complete medieval rood-screen in the country, that in Sligo Abbey being one of the few other examples known which could have rivalled it. It is a fine piece of Gothic vaulting, its keystones decorated with floral motifs. Further small sprigs of foliage sprout from the stone here and in other places, such as on the column base of the partially-reconstructed cloister – some of the pleasant surprises afforded by a closer inspection of the stonework which also provides us with a number of masons' marks.

But perhaps the greatest surprise of all on the rood-screen is the name IOHES (an abbreviation for Iohannes – John) carved at eye-level on the southern respond. One of the very few examples where a mason has signed his name rather than just making his mark on a late medieval building in Ireland, it shows how his achievement of erecting the screen must have been seen as something exceptional for the Augustinian community to

have allowed him sign his name in such a conspicuous position. He is probably the mason who signed the same name much higher up on a window in the Dominican priory in Portumna, suggesting that he is more likely to have been a secular mason rather than a canon or friar.

The monastery stands among a number of earthworks, the most obvious of which is a mound to the west of the building complex, but their date has yet to be established satisfactorily.

Creevaghbaun caption to come



16. Creevaghbaun

CREEVAGHBAUN CHURCH, at first sight, seems like a normal small medieval parish church, though with the unusual feature of having a doorway in both the north and south walls. It also has a single cusped window in the east gable wall, and another in the south wall. What is unexpected is not only the rectangular building controlling entrance to the north doorway but, more particularly, the large vaults which take up a considerable portion of the eastern half of the church, which must have been inserted after the church had gone out of use. One, with the doorway facing north, is a massive limestone structure, with two heads on the roof-line guarding the door.

The second vault, beneath the east window, still bears the inscription:

I.H.S. This tomb was erectd for the rev. Frs of Criuaughbane by ye Rev. Willl Barry, Grand Nephew to ye Revd James Barry Foundr of sd Convent Anno Domino 1780.

The Reverend friars referred to are the successors of the Carmelite friars who are said to have founded a house here in 1332, and which seems to have flourished until the friars left at some date unknown and went to Clare Island. It has been suggested that this happened during the Penal Days, but it is likely to have happened earlier, as it was during the Penal Days, sometime around 1730, that a new convent was founded by the Rev. James Barry mentioned in the inscription. Historical sources of the Carmelite order state that John Burk was elected prior in 1741, and he appears to have had a chalice made for Creevaghbaun, which is now in the possession of the Archbishop of Tuam. The community of friars would scarcely have numbered more than half a dozen, and continued in operation well into the nineteenth century. Two friars were professed in 1820, but only one in 1835. Some time before 1840, the prior left the contents of the friary to his nephew who, he believed, would become a Carmelite, but when he became a secular priest instead, his family took possession of half the land and half the convent, after which it presumably declined to its present ruined state.

17. Dunmore Abbey

THE AUGUSTINIAN FRIARY of Dunmore was a somewhat neglected National Monument until it came into more public notice recently when a large supermarket was built close to it. It was founded by Walter (Mór) de Bermingham, Ninth Baron Athenry, in 1425. The O'Kellys were also considerable benefactors, and, in 1430, indulgences were granted to those helping to build and furnish the friary. The founder's descendant was able to prevent its closure at the Suppression of the Monasteries, though the friars were forced to adopt a secular habit in 1547. It came into private hands later in the sixteenth century, but it was again a fully organised monastery with a congregation of over 30 in 1641. During Penal Times, the friars stayed in the locality but, in 1809, they finally left and moved to Athlone.

Angelo Maria Bigari's drawing of the church at Dunmore as it was in 1779 (National Library, 2122 TX(3), p. 20) shows the open arches of the medieval nave arcade which have since been blocked up.



The church is a long rectangle in plan, interrupted by a tower at mid-length which probably formed part of the design from the beginning, and which is squat in comparison to other contemporary towers of the order. Its internal staircase survives intact. The main attraction of the friary today is the decorative west doorway of three orders with fluted chamfers and moulded capitals. The hood above has tall crockets ending in poppy heads. To one side, above the arch, is a panel bearing the de Bermingham coat of arms and a no longer perfectly-legible inscription probably commemorating the founder, who died in 1428. Above the doorway is a two-light window. The eastern end of the church was converted to function as a Protestant parish church, probably early in the eighteenth century, but it is now roofless – as is the part of the friary west of the tower, whose pointed arcade in the north and south walls, originally separating nave and aisles, have long since been blocked up.

18. Eglish

THE RUINED FRIARY at Eglish near Castlegar in the parish of Ahascragh stands on a long hill sloping down to boggy terrain to the east, which makes understandable the various names it went by in the medieval period which include the word for hill – Monteceancohe, Sleushancough, and the monastery of Isleibhe (from Sliabh).

In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources, it is said to have been a Franciscan friary, but older accounts make it clear that this was a foundation of the Carmelites, one of the lesser-known of the four orders of mendicant friars who did so much for religion in rural Ireland during the later Middle Ages. Extrapolating from various pieces of information, it is likely that the friary was established when William O'Cormacain was bishop of Elphin in the years between 1393 and 1398. He, and Donald O'Kelly, lord of the area, gave the friars for their monastery an oratory which had been erected by local people after the discovery of a venerable cross around 1377 – a good reason for dedicating the monastery to the Holy Cross. In 1436, Pope Eugene IV granted facilities and privileges for



The window in the recently-repointed west wall of the former Carmelite church at English would suggest a date around the fifteenth century for much of the surviving masonry.

the repair of the Carmelite house, and for the building of a monastery and church, with bell tower, bell, dormitory, refectory, cloister, cemetery, gardens, orchards, etc. A date in the middle third of the fifteenth century would seem appropriate, therefore, for the existing buildings which, however, offers only a small and fragmentary west window as possible dating evidence. It stands above a long-blocked west doorway of a rectangular church which must have been the focal point for the Carmelites' religious activity, though no trace of the bell-tower mentioned in the historical sources can now be seen.

A lean-to altar-shelter with corrugated iron roof has been built up against the interior west wall (now whitewashed), and the originally four-light east window is now nothing but an ivied gaping hole. There is also one small window in the south wall, which, along with the north wall opposite, has suffered much demolition down the centuries.

The graves within the church date from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but are undistinguished. The north-eastern corner of the church has been appropriated by the Mahon family as the vault for their dead, who are listed on a nineteenth-century headstone above it. Adjoining it, but outside the wall of the church and within the area of the former cloister, is an attractive early nineteenth-century monument erected in memory of members of the O'Daly family, as is made clear in an inscription on the top of the memorial. The exterior walls of the east and north sides of the domestic buildings of the cloister still survive to a remarkable extent – visible, not from the inside (where they are covered in ivy, but from the outside, where impressive remains of the masonry (including a gable) survive.

To the south-east of the church there is what appears to be a memorial chapel for the burial of members of the Mahon family, as it contains a number of their nineteenth-century memorials – among the shrubs which would need to be cleaned to make this into a visible monument.

The monastery was suppressed by king Henry VIII in 1537, when it passed to Sir Francis Sannes, but later returned to Crown ownership and, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, seems to have changed hands a number of times. Its owners were people of no particular note, and it was not until the mid-seventeenth century that it came into the hands of someone better-known in the form of the Earl of Clanrickarde – but at that stage, the church was probably only a little less ruinous than it is today – and it was the lands rather than the monastic ruins that were the valuable part worth obtaining.

Funding from The Heritage Council has helped to conserve the fabric of the building.

19. Kilconnell

IN THE VERY FIRST NUMBER of *The Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* just over one hundred years ago, the Ulsterman Francis Joseph Biggar said of Kilconnell that it 'is perhaps the most perfect of the Franciscan houses at present remaining to us in Ireland'. It is also one of the most important of the ancient ecclesiastical monuments of East Galway, and appreciated as such at least by those travelling on the Athenry-Ballinasloe road. Historical sources are at variance about the date of its foundation by the O'Kellys of Uí Maine – *The Annals of the Four Masters* plumping for 1353, while other manuscript sources prefer a date of 1414.



The latter is more likely, however, to judge by the surviving remains, none of which looks earlier than the fifteenth century.

It is, indeed, one of the best preserved of all the Franciscan friaries which have come down to us from late medieval Ireland, its majesty and beauty heightened by the various tombs of the period which are let into its interior walls. The original buildings consisted of a long nave continuing into a choir of equal width. There is also a cloister (of which only three sides may have been built) and, adjoining it further east, two storey-buildings containing domestic areas, with dormitories above. What is called the sacristy may have been some kind of writing room. The cloister and refectory building were probably built with assistance from William O'Kelly, who died in 1420. But about half a century later the finest parts of the abbey were built – the tall and graceful tower inserted almost exactly in the middle of the church and seeming to emerge out of its roof, the south aisle joined to the nave by an arcade, and the south transept that is accessible from both nave and choir. The tower is one of the best of its kind, and underneath its vaulting it has fine carvings of a shield-bearing angel and an owl, whose nocturnal vigilance was perhaps a reminder to the friars to keep awake during the night office. The flamboyant and cusped windows of the aisle and transept are of a high quality, but the flamboyant west window above the doorway may be an insertion of the sixteenth century.

The church has one of the most significant collections of late medieval tomb-niches anywhere in the country, of which the most important is that near the western end of the north wall. Its upper parts are taken up with an ogee canopy with wonderful flamboyant tracery, capped with crocketed finials bearing sculptured angels and human figures. But more significant are the six saints on the bottom, who are contained within a series of ogee-headed arches, each with its name inserted above – St. John the Evangelist, St. Louis of Toulouse with a Franciscan habit and crozier, The Virgin with a book, St. John the Baptist wearing a camel-skin and holding the Agnus Dei on a book, St. James Major, with his typical attribute of a scallop-shell adorning both hat and wallet while bearing the tau cross of the pilgrim to Santiago de Compostela, and

☞ The imposing fifteenth-century Franciscan friary church at Killconnell is dominated by the tall tower at its centre.



Kilconnell Franciscan friary contains the best collection of western Irish tomb-niches of the period around 1500, including that near the western end illustrated here. Beneath a pointed arch with tracery evocative of the flames of a fire are carvings of *The Virgin* surrounded by various saints which, surprisingly, include two from France – *Louis of Toulouse* and *Denis of Paris*.

finally *St. Denis of Paris* wearing a monk's habit and scapular. What surprises here is the presence of two French saints *Louis* and *Denis*, who do not feature elsewhere in Irish medieval iconography, and suggest a French connection which may have come through the city of Galway. *Louis's* presence is understandable because he was one of the most prominent people ever to have joined the Franciscans, but the presence of *Denis of Paris* (who lived centuries before *St. Francis*) is less easy to



One of the figures on the front of the canopied tomb in Kilconnell friary is that of *St. James Major*, with the characteristic shell attribute on his hat and pouch, and holding the T-shaped staff of the pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, where the Apostle is said to have been buried.

caption for detail *St. Patrick* and *St. Francis*



explain. The tomb dates from the second half of the fifteenth century, but the family that erected it is not known.

Another tomb, of roughly the same date but located in the choir, would appear to have been associated with the O'Dalys, though the plaque within bearing their name is modern. Probably older is the O'Kelly tomb in the south wall opposite, with an ogival canopy and – like the O'Daly tomb – plain in front. The friary also contains some remarkable

~ A THOUSAND YEARS OF CHURCH HERITAGE IN EAST GALWAY ~

seventeenth-century memorials with well carved and, on the whole, well-preserved lettering, including the Bytagh stone in the south wall of the choir, and an O'Daly memorial of 1674 in the north wall.

But the most interesting of all from an historical point of view is that of Matthew Barnewall, twelfth baron Trimleston who, as the inscription records, was 'transplanted into Connaght with others by orders of the usurper Cromwell and who died in 1667'. It is located in the Guardian's house to the north of the choir.

Only the east range and part of the south range of the cloister arcade survive, and these are notable for the wide variety of mason's marks carved into them. There is also a very large stone water basin in the cloister which must have come from the choir of the church. There are also the remains of two late-medieval tombstones in the transept, but these are uninscribed. A chalice of 1738 from Kilconnell was brought clandestinely to Louvain, but is now preserved in Dublin.

20. Kilcorban

THREE MILES EAST of Duniry is the Dominican friary of Kilcorban, where Thomas de Burgo, bishop of Clonfert, had granted a chapel and land in the fifteenth century to the brothers and sisters of the Third Order of St. Dominic, which at the time was not yet an organised religious order. The chapel was dedicated to the Holy Rosary, or the Blessed Virgin of the Holy Rosary. The remains comprise a church and side-chapel, with moulded west doorway and simple, but well-preserved traceried east window. There are also some good and well-carved exterior two-light windows with decorated spandrels.

One plaque on the interior wall commemorates Teige mac Eoca (Tadg Keogh, O.P.), bishop of Clonfert from 1671 to 1689, who revitalised the Diocese and asked to be buried in the friary. This was because of his devotion to Mary the mother of God and his reverence for the miraculous wooden statue of the Madonna venerated there at the time, and now – along with other statues probably from here – preserved in the Clonfert Diocesan Museum in Loughrea.

Another plaque records the restoration of the chapel in 1920 by



The Madonna and Child from Kilcorban, now preserved in the Diocesan Museum in Loughrea, is perhaps the most serene wooden sculpture of this subject to survive from medieval Ireland, probably continuing a late Romanesque style into the thirteenth century.

Anthony Francis, Earl of Westmeath and Baron Delvin, whose family burial place this is. His ancestors had been transplanted by Cromwell from their estates in Meath, and were lords of the castle of Pallas nearby until around 1960. The fine coat of arms (of Coade stone?) mounted in an outside wall is presumably that of the Nugent earls.

21. Loughrea Friary

ADJOINING THE ATTRACTIVE COMPLEX of the house and church of the Carmelite friars in the town is the ruin of the friary said to have been founded for their medieval predecessors by Richard de Burgo, Earl of Ulster, around 1300. However, the eastern end of the ruined church shows traces of what was probably a lancet window of five or seven lights which, together with the windows in the eastern end of the