



# Medieval Monasteries. Parish of Bagenalstown

CARA DÉ

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**Killoughternane**

Killoughternane or CILL UACHTAR FHIANNÁIN 'the upper church of St Finnian'. A monastery was founded here by St Forchern, bishop and one of the three smiths of St Patrick. He chose this spot, at the foot of Mount Leinster, for its isolation and beauty in the 5th century. His feastday is 11th October.

*"To this retreat as to a school of sanctity and wisdom", writes Colgan, "there came many seeking instruction in literature and virtue, who in after times, were eminent for their piety and learning, amongst whom, to the great lustre of this school, St Fortchern merited to have as his disciple St Finnian of Clonard a \*native of the district about Mt Leinster, who was subsequently the instructor of the greatest Saints of Ireland, and spiritual father of three thousand monks".*

\*St Finnian is said to have been a native of Myshall.Co Carlow.

In the field on opposite side of road may be seen the Holy Well & grotto, with a modern altar in front. Mass is celebrated here every year in July. An inscribed stone in front of the Oratory was erected by a local committee to mark the recent millenium.



East Window Detail

According to local people mass was said in Penal Law times in the woods which cloak nearby Knockscur hill.

In the 19th century a silver chalice and paten was discovered, wrapped in a linen cloth and

embedded in the mud of the holy well. The inscription states that the chalice was made for Fr John Lucar in 1595. It is likely that these articles belonged to the priest of that name who said mass at the penal altar nearby .

Our survey of the site in 2001 found the earliest traces of monastic buildings to be (a chapel and three support buildings) under the present road. The buildings were rectangular, timber framed with clay/wattle walls and thatched roof. The monastic site occupied the area each side of the coach road around Killoughternane Cross. The coach road constructed in the 19th century required that a large volume of clay be excavated and subsequently transferred to the top of the field nearby. *This accumulation of clay had a detrimental effect on our readings in that area.*

Prior to construction of the Oratory (now in ruins } there stood an earlier timber framed church dated to the 8th c. This building was of the same length but considerably wider. Our survey also revealed that beneath the oratory is a neolithic burial.

Attached to the Oratory ruin is a plaque with the following bilingual inscription.  
In this church the men of Leinster venerated its founder , St Forchern who was also the teacher of St Finian of Clonard. The oratory has antae or projecting sidewalls and also has a round-headed window. It was probably built in the 10th or 11th century. There is a square baptismal font inside the church.



So from the earliest time Killoughternane was famous as a centre of learning and remained so for almost a thousand years thereafter.

The monastery occupied the area beneath and each side of present coach road. The only ancient building now visible is the ruined 10th c Oratory, marked with an OPW plaque. *This small church is very similar to another of same date in this parish at Augha.*



font

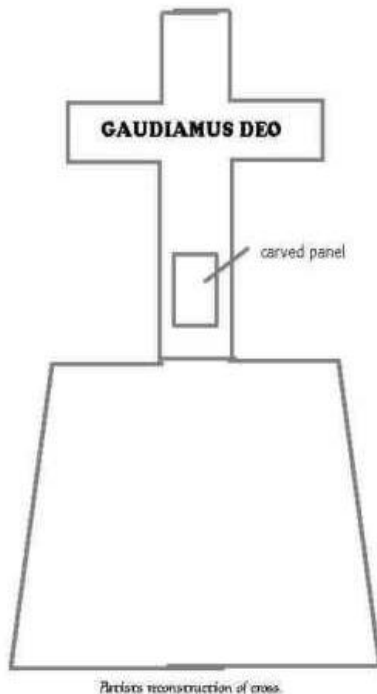
Within the ruin is a stone basin with drain hole .

The monastery boasted a round tower which once stood 21 paces NW of the Oratory E wall. The tower at 96' in height dominated the local landscape until struck by lightning in the 13th c.

At the beginning of the second millennium a major expansion of facilities occurred viz a large stone church with roof of wood shingles, an infirmary, a dormitory and classrooms. The last group of stone buildings were constructed in the 14th c i.e. lecture hall, a washroom and a residence.

*The present landowner (O'Connell) is of the opinion that Killoughternan could have been used as a retreat centre for a large monastery or monasteries in the area.*

*An alternative explanation is that the monastery functioned as a residential college i.e. to train seminarians and or lay students.*



Monastic Latin Cross (2nd millennium est 13 or 14th c )  
Cross on base stood 2.13 m high. Latin inscription reads "Let us rejoice in God"

Original location 20 paces W of Oratory

Markout of 11/12 c buildings in Upper field.



## List of Buildings.

Timber Framed;

- 5.1 Chapel. 35'L x 25' W. Windows 2S,1N,1E. Door;1
- 5.2 Dwelling. 20'L x 15' W. Windows; 3S,2N. Door;1
- 5.3. Workshop. 20' L x 19' W. Windows; 1E. Doors; 1
- 6.2 & 6.3 Sleeping Huts;
- 7.1 Chapel; 18' x 10'. Vestry @ 8' from W wall.
- 7.2 Scriptorium; 9' L x 8' W
- 7.3 Vellum Shop; 12' x 7' W
- 8.1 Chapel; 23' L x 22' W. 14' wall, 21' to ridge.
- 8.2 & 8.3 Sleeping huts; 13' L x 5' W
- 8.4 a; Chapel. (beneath Oratory) 23'L x22' W, Wall, 14', Ridge 21'.
- 9.2 & 9.3; Workshops; 15'L x 10'W & 14' L x 12' W.
- 9.4 Unknown Purpose. 10' L x 8'-6" W

14.2, 14.3, 14.4, 14.5; Huts

Stone Buildings

- 10.1 Oratory (present ruin). 19' L x 12' W (internal dims) .
- 10.1a Oratory; 16' L x 10'W. Apex 21'. Elm roof timbers
- 10.2 Round Tower. Dia 19', Height 96'
- 10.3 Dairy; 12' L x 8' W. 2 windows on N side only. 1 Door @ W
- 11.1 & 12.1 Chapel. 51'L x 21'W . Windows; 2N, 4S, 1E. Door 1W. Window opes 42"x 12"
- 11.2 Dormitory/Refectory. 28' L x 16' W. Wall 15'. Apex 22'. Windows; 9N,9S, Doors; 1 @ either end. Building divided along long axis. On S side are 9 cells. N side is open full length of building for dining / recreation etc. Roofed with wood shingles.
- 11.3 Dwelling (priest's house). 16'L x 11'W.
- 11.4 Hospice; 15'L x 9' W. Stone roof?
- 14.1 Lecture Hall. 30' L x 24' W. Windows; 2N, 2S. Doors; 2 S with porch.
- 14.2 Washrooms. 45' L x 22' W. Wall 20'. Apex 31'. Windows 4S,1N. Central dividing/supporting wall. Doors; 7 (external)
- 14.3 House. 45' L x 22' W. Wall 19'. Apex 35'.

## 490 KILLOUGHTERNANE

OS 19:12:6 (875,159) 'White Chapel (in ruins)'  
OD 400-500 27766,15419

*Ecclesiastical remains* Small, rectangular eighth- or ninth-century single cell church (2.7m x 3.7m) with antae. Of large, well-finished granite boulders. Entrance with restored jambs in W gable. One round-headed window in E gable, with splayed rounded rear arch. Only lower courses of S and W walls preserved. Granite font with rectangular basin with central outlet, single basin bullaun stone. Holy well (no. 641) 100m to E. (JRSAI 1943, 98-100)

19:48

2-9-1988

Extract from Archaeological Inventory of Co Carlow#

Map of Killoughternane Monastic Site

