

JULY 1914, VOLUME VII, No. 6.

JOURNAL
OF THE
COUNTY KILDARE ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.



The Tower on the Hill of Allen.

BY CAPTAIN H. E. DE COURCY-WHEELER,
ROBERTSTOWN.

(Read at the Tower on the 24th September, 1913, by Captain Gerald de Courcy-Wheeler, R.D.F., Adjutant, Officers Training Corps, Trinity College, Dublin.)

This Tower was built by Sir Gerald George Aylmer, 8th Bart, D.L., of Donadea Castle, County Kildare, who was born in 1798, and died in 1878.

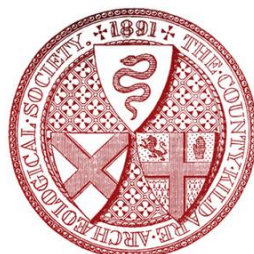
It was begun in the year 1859, and finished in 1863, the work being carried on during the summer months, as the position was too exposed for the masons to be able to remain at it during the winter.

The two masons who built the tower from the foundation to the top were Lawrence and William Gorry, brothers, whose names are cut on the landing at the top of the stairs. There does not appear to have been any architect or engineer. William Gorry is still alive and well. He is 83 years of age, having been bound to the trade at the age of 16 years, in the year 1846. His brother Lawrence died many years ago. Sir Gerald used to examine the work himself as it proceeded, and tested the building with plumb-line, etc., to ascertain if the masons were building true. He told them it was better to spend his money giving work than paying engineers.

There was a cave on the top of the Hill of Allen, measuring 9 feet deep and 21 feet across. There were sticks set across the mouth of it. It was filled with soft clay, which was excavated until they came to the rock, on which the foundation of the tower is laid. This foundation is built up solid for 9 feet to the surface of the ground from which the tower rises. The excavated earth or clay forms the sloping bank all round the tower. When the masons reached the rock at the bottom of the cave, they came upon a number of human bones, a remarkably large skull, four huge bones, each measuring three feet long, and “a barrowful of small bones.” They were thought to have belonged to the skeleton of a giant, and by Sir Gerald’s order all the bones were re-interred in a hollow space under a sloping tongue of rock which rose in a point nearly to the surface of the ground, and is situated under the railing surrounding the tower, about four flagstones to the west of the entrance. There are numerous legends in the neighbourhood of Allen Hill about the giant, Finn McCoul (*Fionn mac Cumhail*), and this skeleton was believed to have been his.

The tower is about 60 feet high, the base of it being 676 feet above sea-level. Each stone is 12 inches high, and there are about fifty-three stones from base to top, which with joints of cement would make that height. The stones, which are limestone, were quarried and cut at Edenderry, and brought from there to Robertstown by canal. They were carted from Robertstown to the Hill by Sir Gerald’s tenants, and, as a reward for doing so, he promised that the name of each tenant who helped would be cut as “an everlasting memorial” on the steps of the tower. There are eighty-three steps, and on each of them is a name cut, and the descendants of all these tenants still occupy holdings on the Aylmer estate. The lining of the tower is built of stone quarried on the Hill of Allen. The granite coping and steps, and the pedestal of the table at the top of the tower, came from Ballyknockan, County Wicklow, and the limestone table from Edenderry. The stones were brought to the top of the Hill on a four-wheeled lorry, the wheels of which were borrowed from one of three cannons formerly at Donadea Castle. William Gorry states that two, if not all, of these cannons were taken to Newbridge by the military during the last (Fenian) disturbance in Ireland, but he did not mention the date. Before their removal Sir Gerald fired a shot out of one of them. “and there was not a window in the castle was not broken.”

The internal diameter of the tower is 9 feet, the diameter of the central pillar, which is built of brick, and into which the steps are fixed. Being 18 inches. The frame of the dome is copper, and the glass ½-inch thick. This, and the railing round the tower, came from Dublin, and were fixed by William Gorry and his brother. The cement which was used cost 9s. a bag of eight stone weight. There has been a great deal of wilful damage done to the dome, and a quantity of the lead has been cut away and removed, consequently the rain has permeated both plaster and mortar to such an extent that, unless repaired, the entire structure will go to ruin.



On the outside of the tower there are ten mottoes, one of which is enigmatical, or, at all events, not intended to be understood by everyone. The inscriptions are as follows:

N.	Over the entrance	...	“HALLELUJAH. A.D. 1859”
N.E.	Over opening in the shape of a cross	...	“SINE CRUCE SINE LUCE”
	Under this opening	...	“LUX VENIT AB ALBO”
	Between two openings	...	“GABAON”
S.E.	Over opening	...	“QUALIS VITA FINIS ITA”
	Under this opening, and over the lower opening	...	“SI DEUS QUIS CONTRA”
S.W.	Over Opening	...	“TRA NUMEN LUMEN”
	Under the above, and over the lower opening	...	“NISI QUIA DOMINUS”
W.	Over Opening	...	“OMNE BONUM DEI DONUM”
N.W.	Over Opening	...	“QUOD TIBI ID ALTERI”

And on the flags between the iron railing and the tower, towards the S.E., the visit of the then Prince of Wales, afterwards Edward VII, is recorded:

**“SEPT. 16 A.D. 1861 H.R.H. THE PRINCE OF WALES
ASCENDED THIS TOWER.”**

William Gorry’s account of this visit is interesting. These are his own words: “The Prince of Wales ascended the tower on the 16th September, 1861. I was on top. The Prince took out a black scut of a pipe with a shank half the length of his finger and a pouch. Two officers were along with himself, and they smoked and sung. The prince asked me who was getting it built, and I said Sir Gerald. One of the officers gave me a shilling. The Prince did not give me anything. The Prince forgot his silver match-box on the stone table, and I kept it and had it for a long time, but someone took it off me.” The Prince was stationed at the Curragh during the year 1861, and on August 24th of that year Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort reviewed the troops at the Camp.

On the inside of the tower, round the edge of the opening at the top of the stairs, is the following inscription: “In thankful remembrance of God’s mercies, many and great – Built by Sir Gerald George Aylmer, Baronet, A.D. 1860”; and on the top landing: “Lawrence and William Gorry Bros. Masons,” from which is separated the inscription S. J. N., and on the top step are the words “assisted by,” followed by the names of the tenants on the steps of the stairs. I have now no doubt since a recent visit that S. J. N. was added later, as the letters are quite different in size and form from the rest of the inscriptions and were obviously cut by a very inferior workman. At first, I thought they might stand for “Senior Junior Nati,” referring to the elder and younger brothers, but I now am of the opinion that they are the initials of some unauthorized person who had nothing to do with the building.



In reference to the word “Gabaon,” the mason, William Gorry, states that Sir Gerald told those present, when the word was being cut (which was not done until the building was nearly complete), that “anyone who can read this can tell who got the tower built.” The mason might, however, have mistaken what Sir Gerald said, as the inscription on the top of the tower tells who built the tower, unless Sir Gerald said “anyone who can read this can tell why I got the tower built, “ and in that case the meaning of “Gabaon” is clear enough, being the Latin form of I’asawv, a city of Judaea, which is frequently mentioned in the Old Testament as “Gibeon,” meaning in the Hebrew “pertaining to a hill” (see Joshua ix and x, 1 Chron. xvi. 39 and xxi. 29, 2 Samuel xxi, and 1 Kings iii, 4 to 14). The latter is evidently the passage from which Sir Gerald adopted the name for his tower which he built “in thankful remembrance of God’s mercies many and great”, words which bear a marked resemblance to the words used by Solomon in reply to the Lord when He appeared to him in a dream, as described in that passage. As Sir Gerald had an only son, Gerald George, the ninth Baronet, who married in 1853, and at the date of the completion of the building of the tower in 1863 had also an only son born in that year, this inscription may possibly refer to it.

I questioned Gorry as to the reason why Sir Gerald built the Tower. Gorry used to work for him at Donadea, and he said that Sir Gerald used to look across from there to Allen Hill, and say, “I’ll build something on that,” and he was long enough talking about it.

Appended is a list of the names of the tenants on the steps referred to above, beginning at the bottom step:

James Dowling, Allen Wood.
 Anne Healy, Allen Wood.
 Wilson Symonds, Allen Wood.
 Thomas Baker, Allen Wood.
 Patrick Logan, Allen Wood.
 John Tiernan, Allen Wood.
 Michael Gannon, Allen Wood.
 Thomas Culleton, Allen Wood.
 James Walsh, Allen Wood.
 William Flynn, Allen Wood.
 Denis Healy, Ballentine.
 John Tiernan, Ballentine.
 William Lazenby, Ballyteague.
 Michael Somers, Ballyteague.
 Christopher Healy, Ballyteague.
 Peter Healy, Ballyteague.
 Thomas Hynes, Cloncumber.
 Robert Strong, Coolagh.
 Thomas Carter, Coolagh.
 Joseph Strong, Coolagh.
 John Rochford, Coolagh.
 Patrick Callan, Derrymullen.

Edmond Hogarty, Ballyteague.
 Edward Payne, Ballyteague.
 James Doyle, Ballyteague.
 John Thornton, Ballyteague.
 James Hennigan, Ballyteague.
 Patrick Moran, Ballyteague.
 Francis Dowling, Barnecrow.
 James Carrol, Barnecrow.
 Francis Dowling, Baronstown.
 George Low, Baronstown.
 Thomas Flood, Carrick.
 James Walsh, Carrick.
 George Wilson, Carrick.
 Elizabeth Knowles, Carrack.
 James Doogan, Carrack.
 Patrick Lennon, Cloncumber.
 George Price, Grangeclare.
 William Tyrrell, Grangeclare.
 Lawrence Behan, Grangeclare.
 James Brennan, Grangeclare.
 John Lazenby, Grangeclare.
 William Ormsby, Grangeclare.

Bridget Mulhall, Derrymullen.
Thomas Harbert, Derrymullen.
Joseph Payne, Drimshree.
Peter Cribbin, Drimshree.
Michael Thorpe, Drimshree.
Samuel Strong, Dunburne.
William Wilson, Dunburne.
Hugh Kelly, Dunburne.
James Dowling, Dunburne.
Patrick Dunn, Dunburne.
Charles Ryan, Dunmurne.
James Norton, Grangeclare.
William Price, Grangeclare.
James Carter, Grangeclare.
John Fitzpatrick, Grangeclare.
Michael Connor, Grangeclare.
Joseph Nevitt, Grangeclare.
Joseph Carter, Grangeclare.
Thomas Carter, Grangeclare.

Christopher Hickey, Grangeclare.
John Cribbin, Grangeclare.
Edward Nowlan, Grangehiggin.
Mathew Nowlan, Grangehiggin.
Peter Nowlan, Kilmeague.
William Curtis, Kilmeague.
Stephenson Haslam, Kilmeague.
Mathew Lazenby, Kilmeague.
John Healy, Kilmeague.
Christopher Quin, Littletown.
Marcella Cribbin, Lowtown.
Lawrence Cribbin, Lowtown.
Mathew Knowles, Pluckerstown.
Denis Dunny, Pluckerstown.
John Dunny, Pluckerstown.
Patrick Hickey, Rathernan.
Richard Kelly, Rathernan.
Catherine Healy, Russellstown.
Peter Healy, Russellstown.

Note: Information obtained from William Gorry, mason, on the 31st March, 1913.

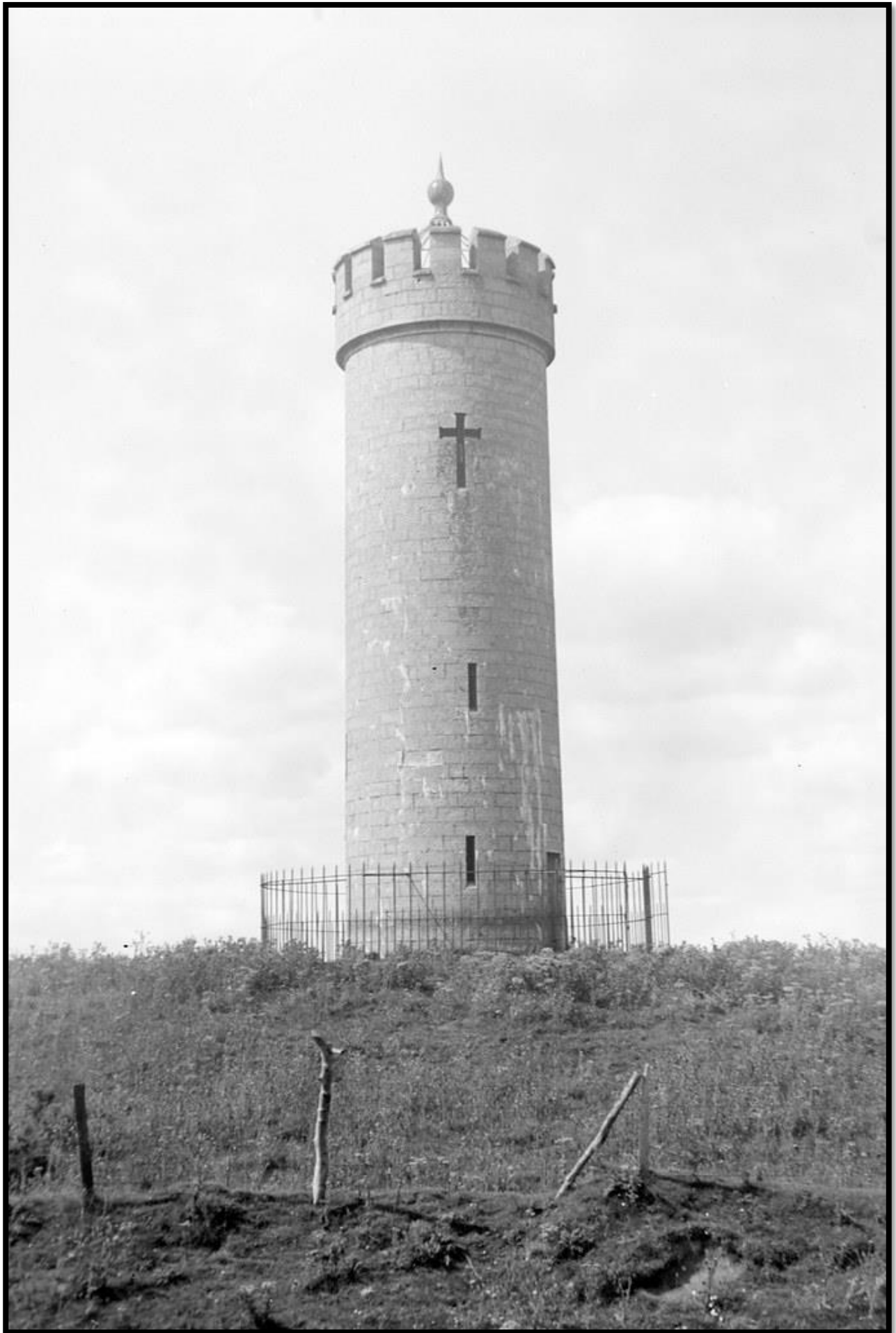


THE TOWER ON THE HILL OF ALLEN.
[From a photograph by Capt. H. de C. Wheeler.]



County Kildare
Archaeological
Society

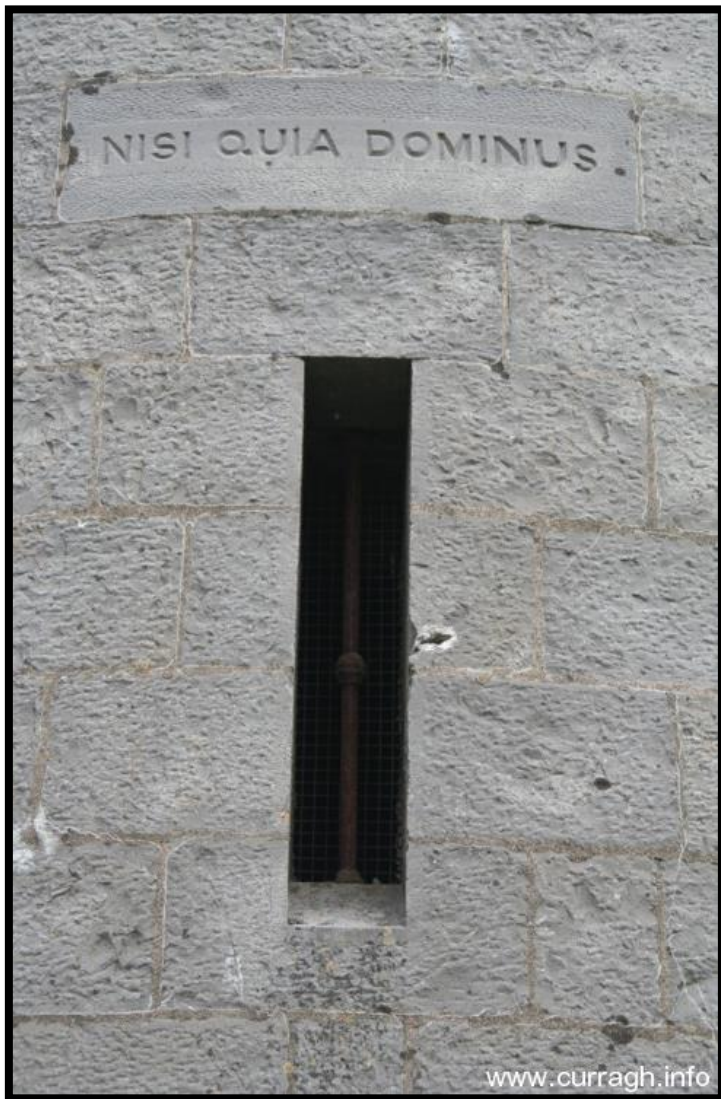






www.curragh.info







Donadea Castle in the early 20th century.

It was left to **Sir Gerald George Aylmer** (1798-1878), 8th bt., to give the Donadea demesne the shape it has today. He was an enthusiastic amateur architect 'with a great taste for building' and began in the 1820s by re-routing public roads away from the castle and constructing a high brick wall around the grounds, with gate lodges at all the entrances; one at least seems to have been designed not by Sir Gerald but by George Wilkinson, an English architect specialising in workhouses who settled in Dublin in 1839.

A new formal lime avenue was laid out leading to the house, which he had 'modernized, none too wisely' by 1837. Sir Gerald continued his improvements by creating a lake and an icehouse, removing the village to a new site, carrying out extensive planting in the park, and building a 60-foot-high beacon tower on top of the **Hill of Allen** as an eyecatcher as late as 1859-63.



Donadea Castle in its present ruined state.