

Some De Burgo Castles

In Eastern Hy Fiachrach Aidhne.

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The subject of my paper refers to a district which comprises a considerable portion of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne. Prince Fiachrach son of Awley, King of Connaught, and father of Dathy the last and perhaps the most famous of our Pagan provincial Kings gave his name to this district, as well as to another in the north of Mayo known as Fiachrach of the Moy. The chieftains of this district traced their descent with pardonable pride from Dathy and Fiachrach through Guaire the hospitable King of Connaught, who holds in our songs and legends a position similar to that which the good King Arthur of Avallon held in the south west of Britain. For a considerable time the O'Clerys held the distinguished rank of Chiefs of Southern Hy Fiachrach. But early in the eleventh century we find that they were superseded in the office by the O'Heynes, another prominent branch of the same sept. Maelruana O'Heyne, Lord of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne, was slain at the battle of Clontarf, A.D. 1014, where he commanded an important wing of the Irish Army. He was father-in-law of the Monarch Brian, who made Mor, O'Heyne's daughter, his first wife. Soon after we find the O'Heynes occasionally referred to as Kings of the territory. We find such a reference in the Annals of Lough Ce, under date A.D. 1121. And again in 1253 they record the death of Eoghan O'Heyne King of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne.

This Chieftain is referred to by O'Donovan as "one of the most conspicuous chieftains that ever ruled that territory." We find him in the opening of the thirteenth century amongst the principal allies of Roderick O'Connor, and inflicting a serious reverse on Hugh O'Connor and his English allies at Ardrahan, in A.D. 1225. Ardrahan was then a town, and O'Heyne had his chief residence there. Their place of inauguration was at the "Red-beech" or Rooveagh near Dunkellin. This historic beech which cast the shadow of its ancient arms over their inauguration stone, was strongly fortified. O'Donovan considered that the fortification consisted of a strong circular stone fort, cyclopean in its character, which was built around the tree. But there is no reason to assume that the O'Heynes ever resided there. We have no exact authority for fixing the date of the erection of the O'Heynes' Castle at Ardrahan. But we may assume that it was erected soon after the battle of Ardrahan just referred to. It is recorded by our Annalists that the Castle of Ardrahan was seized by Mac-William Burke Earl of Ulster, A.D. 1264. Since the death of Eoghan O'Heyne in A.D. 1253, the chieftaincy of Hy Fiachrach had fallen into weaker hands. The prowess of Walter de Burgo was acknowledged throughout Ireland. He had ravaged the greater part of the kingdom ; and like his father the Red Earl, he acknowledged to be the most powerful subject In Ireland. It was therefore not a matter of much surprise that he should have captured the Castle, and retained it, as we are assured, in his own hands ; and with it we find that he appropriated the most fertile portions of the tribelands of Aidhne, which extend to Hy Maine on the one side, and on the other along the Echtge mountains, to the vicinity of Gort-insi-Guaire. As the expulsion of the O'Clerys from the territory synchronises with this event, and as it is recorded that they were driven out by the Burkes, there can be no doubt that their expulsion may be attributed to Walter De Burgo Earl of Ulster.

It is strange that we can find no monuments of this interesting family in our district, where for so long a period they held a position of prominence as territorial chiefs. And this appears

all the more remarkable in view of the historical eminence to which they attained in other territories after their expulsion. In the Prince of Tir-Connell, John O'Clery surnamed the "Comely," they found a generous and powerful patron. The ruins of Kilbarron Castle which look out from the sea cliffs of Donegal on the great Atlantic, reminds us still of the prominence to which they attained under the generous princes of Tirconnell. But in the Annals of our country, the fruit of their learning and their labours, we find a monument more enduring than brass—more honourable than the proudest trophies of the conqueror.

The O'Clery territory thus appropriated was at once divided between two of the Earl's youngest sons, Hubert and Redmond, whose descendants were known as the MacHubert and MacRedmond Burkes. The Kiltartan and Kilbecanty districts were given to Redmond and are referred to in the old indentures of "Composition" as "Oireaght Redmond;" and the rich lands which extend from Ardrahan to Hy Maine were appropriated by Hubert. The Castle of Isser Kelly erected near the old Church of Isser Kelly, was the chief residence of the Mac Huberts. On the south-east and east towards the Hy Maine district there are also two other castles which must have belonged to them.

This castle of the Mac Huberts is one of the best preserved in the county. It may be also said to be one of the most imposing. It is situated near the old Church of St. Callach at Isser Kelly, where the holy son of Eoghan Beul may have had a cell amongst his kinsmen for a time. But though the incident referred to may not have suggested the selection of this particular site, it is noteworthy that the de Burgos frequently selected as sites for their castles, places otherwise remarkable in the history of the country. Accordingly we find Redmond Burke building one of his castles near Kilbecanty, at Ballyconnell, the field on which King Guaire suffered his memorable defeat at the hands of the King of Munster. And when historical interest may be wanting we usually find that the sites selected had much of the picturesque to recommend them. This I think applies in a special manner to the sites selected for the Mac Redmond castles at Ballyturrin and Ballinamantane; and Hubert de Burgo could hardly have selected a finer site than that on which his castle stands at the foot of the Echtge hills. Its beautiful Tudor windows and its general ornate style of masonry would seem to indicate that the present imposing structure is much more modern than the Mac Redmond Castles, and the existing remains at Kiltartan and Kilbecanty. It may probably have been erected on the site of the original castle built by Hubert de Burgo in the fourteenth century. An inscription and date, still legible on one of the beautiful mantelpieces of the castle, would seem to give some support to this opinion. The following inscription and date are in raised letters and perfectly legible:

"Titulus triumphalis defendat nos periculo animæ et corporis—1603."

The Castle of Ballinamantane is still imposing. It stands about two miles north of Gort, on a bold eminence past which the Gort river rushes rapidly, as if eager to enter on its underground course to the ocean, through the adjoining deep and gloomy cave. On the west and north it had a strong inclosure flanked by towers. That on the western angle is almost completely shattered. But the vast masses of masonry with which the place is piled, still proclaim the strength of the building, and the massive character of the masonry. The large gate-way fronted the castle on the north-west, and was flanked on either side by circular towers, which though dismantled are still fairly preserved. It may be noted here that we have no trace of a similar enclosure in connection with any other of the castles referred to. Though the castle is much ruined, enough remains to indicate its massive strength. The masonry is of enormous thickness, having narrow passages connecting several chambers, and quite independently of the principal stairway. And those massive walls seem to derive their strength chiefly from the

character of the concrete of which it is constructed. The windows were neither large nor numerous, and the structure seems to have been erected more for defensive purposes, than for domestic comfort. But it has all those features in common with the ruined castles at Ballyconnell and Ardrahan ; and these facts may perhaps justify the opinion that the Earl of Ulster rebuilt O'Heyne's castle at Ardrahan, at the same time that his sons were engaged in erecting their strongholds in Kiltartan district. It is certain that the existing remains speak of a structure much larger than any of the O'Heynes' castles which remain. Walter de Burgo was not the man to forgo without adequate cause a fortress so conveniently situated as Ardrahan for the purposes of defending his newly acquired territory. He held besides Ardrahan the Castles of Gal way and Lough Mask and we are expressly told by the annalists that betook the Castle of Ardrahan " into his own hands." But it should be noted that the existing remains at Ardrahan do not give a casual observer an adequate idea of the extent of the original structure. The existing remains consist of two sides of a massive square structure forming a right angle at their junction. The projection of the western wall southward, beyond this angle, and other indications, show that the existing south wall was but an inner wall in the original castle. The utter destruction of the rest of the castle, the absence of door and windows, add to the difficulties of fixing the exact outline and particular features of this ancient and historic monument. We have searched O'Donovan's letters for some additional help to solve the puzzle, but without success. He contents himself with some interesting reference to the mound on which the castle stands. He tells us that the fort or mound within which the castle stands was made of earth. The ditch in the east and partly on the south, is still visible. The inner mound is seen in the south and south-west sides. The only part remaining of the mound in the outside of the ditch, is that which incloses it in the east. It is perhaps to be regretted that nothing has been hitherto done to verify or refute those statements by actual excavation. Hitherto the structure has attracted but comparatively little attention : and it is much to be regretted that the existing masonry has been so far weakened towards its foundation, as to leave it exposed to the danger of complete ruin in the near future.

As to the subsequent owners of Ardrahan Castle, our Annals say but little. Our Inquisitions however show that it remained even to the seventeenth century in the hands of the de Burgos.

An Inquisition taken at Athenry before John Crofton on the first of October, 1584, found that Richard second Earl of Clanricarde was seized in fee of the Castle of Ardrahan and three and a half quarters of land there.

An Inquisition at Galway in 1608 before Geoffrey Osbaldstone, found the son of Richard and third Earl of Clanricarde seized of the Castle of Ardrahan with one quarter of land.

The Mac Hubert Burkes of Isser Kelly retained a position of prominence for several centuries. They seem to have cultivated successfully relations of friendship with the other territorial lords of the district. We find Redmond Mac Hubert Burke fighting at the battle of Killiagh in the barony of Athlone and made prisoner there in A.D. 1407. It was a battle at which the Annalists tell us " many horses and coats of mail" were abandoned by the defeated troops. Though it does not appear from our records that the Mac Huberts took a prominent part in the eventful movements of the sixteenth century, yet we have evidence to show they still occupied a position of prominence. Consequently we find that when the O'Donnell had organised and effected his punitive incursions into the Clanricarde territories at the close of that century, the Mac Hubert Burkes of Isser Kelly, like their kinsmen of Renvyle and Derry O'Donnell, were special objects of the hostility of the invading army. The Annalists give us a graphic narrative of the destructive raid on Clanricarde, that was effected so successfully by the northern prince in A.D. 1598. He " marched silently and quietly" through the territory, and arrived unnoticed and unobserved at the gate of Kilcolgan by the break of day.

Having escaped the vigilance of the inhabitants who we are told dreaded his coming, he at once “ send out marauding parties in every direction around him, through the level part of Clanricarde.” One party went through the Kinvara districts “ committing lamentable deeds” while another proceeded to the borders of Oireacht Redmond. And here Mac Hubert Burke of Disert Ceallaigh was taken prisoner by O’Donnell’s brother, Manus. From the Inquisitions of the Rolls office, we find that W. Mac Hubert Burke was owner of three cartrons at Castleboy in 1617.

We find in O’Heyne, that Rev. William de Burgo a member of this distinguished family, proved himself an equally distinguished member of the Dominican Order. After completing his studies in Spain he laboured in the Dominican Convent of Athenry till 1650, when he was exiled to France, where he died. From an Inquisition held at Loughrea before Carew in 1617, we find that the Mac Redmond Burkes were still owners of their Castles at Castletown, Ballyconnell, and Ballyturrin. At that particular period we also find Edmond Oge Mac Edmond Burke was then owner of Ballyconnell Castle, and three cartrons of land. We find by the same Inquisition that Sir William Burke was owner in fee of Ballyturrin Castle and lands. It also appears that Ullick Oge Burke and Thomas Leigh Mac Henry Burke, were also extensive land owners in that district at the same period. And as regards Castletown, we find by the same Inquisition, that Hubert Boy Mac Edmond Burke was seized of fee of Castletown manor and lands.

These are the latest entries that I have been able to find regarding the owners and occupiers of the castles erected in Hy Fiachrach Aidhne, by any of the direct descendants of Walter de Burgo Earl of Ulster.

I have abstained from making any reference to the several other castles in the neighbouring districts which were erected by other branches of the same distinguished and historic family.

But the history and features of those castles also, may form at some future time the subject-matter of another paper.

A few other interesting castles there are in the Mac Hubert territory, to which I have not yet referred ; only because I am unable to show by direct evidence, that they belonged to the Mac Hubert family. There is however evidence to show that they were de Burgo castles ; and as they were erected in the Mac Hubert territory, it is natural, if not quite logical to assume, that they belonged to the proprietors of that territory. I refer to the castles of Tullyra and Rahealy.

The Castle of Rahealy is situated in the parish of Kiltomas about a mile east of Tullyra. It is a fine structure. Its features are those common to most of our sixteenth-century castles, with the exception of minor details. Its spiral staircase is of black limestone, as capable of a rich polish as marble of the same colour. A narrow loop window which lights this stairs on the second story in the eastern angle, is surmounted by a well sculptured cherub. The work is that of an artist. On the opposite angle there is a similar figure, though of much less artistic character. Attached to the Castle is a large ruined residence more in harmony with modern requirements, and certainly of a much later date, than the castle with which it is connected. The arched gateway of the courtyard still remains; and has clearly inscribed on its keystone the figures 1737. There can be but little room for doubting it was still occupied when those figures, which probably indicate the date, were inscribed. It was certainly a de Burgo castle, as we find in one of the Loughrea Inquisitions that at the close of the sixteenth century it was

the property of Richard Mac William Burke. In the opening of the next century, A.D. 1617, it was with one hundred and twenty acres the property of a certain Richard Burke. But most likely these gentlemen were kinsmen of the Mac Hubert family of Isser Kelly.

The situation of Tullyra Castle, its features and beautiful surroundings, are fortunately so well known, as to relieve me of the necessity of describing them. It was a happy thought to connect the old Castle with the beautiful new Mansion. And this connection has been so effectively carried out, that the old structure forms an effective feature in the imposing outline of the whole attractive pile. I have been unable to find the date of its erection ; but we find reference to it as early as the middle of the sixteenth century. It probably dates from the fifteenth century. And its proximity to Ardahan Castle, and its erection within the Mac Hubert territory, leave no room for reasonable doubt, that it is a Mac Hubert Castle ; and that it has come to its present distinguished owner, who is maternally a de Burgo, by direct transmission through a period of five hundred years. Ulick third Earl of Clanricarde was married to a Burke of Tullyra Castle, about the middle of the sixteenth century. It was then a de Burgo Castle. But from the "*State of Ireland in 1598*" we find that Tullyra Castle was at that time in the possession of the Martyn family. There can be little doubt that the castle and estates passed into their possession by intermarriage with the preceding owners, though I cannot fix the particular date. Neither the sculptured shield with the armorial bearings of the Martyn family, placed over the entrance, nor any extant inscription on the Castle, throws any light on the event.

The cross and star which stand out prominently on this shield are said to have been granted by Richard the Third to Oliver Martyn, who accompanied his Majesty to the Holy Wars, and distinguished himself there by his valour. The family ranked amongst the most distinguished of the Galway tribal families. Oliver Martyn who was unanimously elected Mayor of Galway in 1642 was owner of Tullyra. He also resided for a time in the fine Castle of Dungaigue. He was a distinguished man. and was sometimes referred to as a "rank papist." Mr. Hardiman seems to think that he may be regarded as the founder of the Martyn family at Tullyra.

As in the districts of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne to which I have referred, so in every part of Galway, and in several parts of Ireland, we are face to face with memorials of the history and power of the de Burgo family. Unlike other families that have risen to eminence to retain it for a period and disappear, they retained for centuries the conspicuous positions which they secured at the beginning. And so for many centuries the public acts of the de Burgos constitute a large portion of the entries of our Annals. In church and state they were conspicuous. They did not hesitate at times to wreck our religious houses. But the monasteries which they founded and endowed often surpassed in beauty of design and in the extent of their endowments, those that they had destroyed. And though they seized and appropriated the estates of many of the old native chiefs, yet did they secure and hold in popular esteem, a place as enviable as did the native chiefs—adopting native customs, and with them the language of the country.

William Fitz Adelm de Burgo, the founder of this remarkable family in Ireland, was himself a very remarkable man. His ancestor Serlo de Burgo had married Arlotta mother of William the Conqueror. William de Burgo born of this marriage married the daughter of Louis the Seventh of France ; Adelm was a son by this marriage. The remains of the beautiful castle which he erected at Knaresboro' in Yorkshire, may still be seen on its giddy eminence over-looking the picturesque valley of the Ouse, as a monument of the power and magnificence of the founder.

William Fitz Adelm de Burgo was his son and representative. His marriage with the sister of Henry the Second of England enables us to understand his influence in the English Court. It also casts an interesting light on his subsequent career in Ireland.

The conquest of Ireland as it is called, by Henry, was not a military conquest. It was more the result of astute diplomacy. But this diplomatic astuteness may be regarded as one of the most prominent features in the character of William Fitz Adelm. Having lost his first wife, he soon found solace for his affliction in a marriage with the daughter of Donald O'Brien, King of Munster. On this occasion he received extensive grants of territory ; and erected at Castleconnell on the Shannon, one of the most picturesque spots in Munster, a fortress more beautiful—perhaps—than that of his father at Knaresboro' on the Ouse. He was soon appointed Viceroy of Ireland—more a position of honour than of official duty then. He also received a royal grant of the Province of Connaught, though the grant was made in direct violation of Henry's treaty with the " Last Monarch of Ireland," known as the Treaty of Windsor. But subsequent events in Connaught showed this grant to be as visionary and valueless, as it was unjust.

William de Burgo was succeeded by his son Richard, who married the grand-daughter of Cathal O'Connor—the " red-handed" King of Connaught. In 1215 Richard received from Henry the Third a grant of the Western Province, similar to that made by Henry the Second to William Fitz Adelm. In 1225 the Earl Marshal of Ireland received his Majesty's instructions to have de Burgo placed in immediate possession of the Province. But the Earl Marshal wisely regarding the time as inopportune, took no steps to have his Majesty's instructions put into effect. In 1227 de Burgo was appointed Governor of Ireland, and in this position he was able to accomplish some portion of his ambitious schemes. He took possession, of the territory of Moy Soela, and drove the original owners, the O'Flaherties and O'Hallorans, beyond the Corrib, into the mountain wilds of Connemara, Richard de Burgo died in A.D. 1245. He was succeeded by his son Walter who married the daughter and heiress of Hugh de Lacy Earl of Ulster. By acquiring the Earldom of Ulster he became the most powerful subject under the English Crown ; and we have seen how successfully he carried out in Hy Fiachrach Aidhne the same policy which was carried out by his distinguished father in the O'Flaherty Territory of Moy Soela.

Such were the ancestors of the de Burgo family, of whom Sir John Davies wrote many centuries ago—" There more able men of the surname of Burke than of any other name whatsoever in Europe."

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