

Some Places Of Interest Near Gort Visited By
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THE Summer Excursion to Gort and its vicinity, as arranged for out Antiquaries this year, will enable them to visit a district rich in historical and archæological interest. Ancient churches, mediæval castles, cromleacs, and cahers are familiar features of the district, as well as interesting memorials of the past.

The selection of Gort as a centre is judicious, though the town is modern, and the name seems to sound more Saxon than Celtic. But "Gort" is only the Anglicized form of a portion of the original name, which, as we have it from the "Four Masters," is "Gort-insi-Guaire," *i.e.*, the "garden of Guaire's island." Dr. Joyce, with his usual accuracy and scholarly research, tells us that "*Gort* is cognate with the French *jardin*, the English 'garden,' and the Latin *hortus*." Guaire was one of the most celebrated of our provincial kings. He was the friend and patron of priests and poets alike; and his name is handed down to us by bards and historians, as "Guaire the Hospitable." The garden of the hospitable king may have extended by the river's curve at the entrance to the town. And the island on which his palace was situated is close by, and is still enclosed by the rushing waters of the river. It was here that he dispensed, for an entire year, his lavish hospitality to the Irish bards, and their distinguished and gifted chief Seanchan, Torpest.

" Thus in hall of Gort spoke Guary,
For the king, let truth be told.
Bounteous though he was, was weary
Giving goblets, giving gold —
Giving aught the Bard demanded ;
But when for the Tain he called,
Seanchan from his seat descended.
Shame and anger tired the scald."

The king's descendants in the district were known by the tribe-name of Kineal Aedh na Echte, and, as was natural, they cherished the memories of this historic spot. So we find that the chieftains of Kineal Aedh selected "Insi Guaire" as the site of their principal castle and their chief family residence. We have no certain authority for fixing the exact date of the erection of the castle of Gort. But we can have no doubt that it was the residence of Sir Roger O'Shaughnessy, Lord of Kineal Aedh, when he was created baronet by Henry VIII., A.D. 1546; and it was here that the O'Shaughnessy, a few years later, entertained the Lord Deputy and his escort at a banquet almost regal in its ostentatious display. "On the 12th July he encamped near Gort, and dined at O'Shaughnessy's house so worship-fully that divers wondered at it, for such a dinner or the like of it was not seen in any Irishman's house before."

The castle stood within the island. The mansion stood close to the castle, separated from it by the river. In Ludlow's Memoirs the place is referred to as well fortified, and is described as a place of considerable strength. Cromwell's commander-in-chief may be allowed to give us his impressions of the place : —

"I marched with my horse towards Limerick, and came to Gortinsi-gori, a castle belonging to Sir Dermot O'Shortness, who was then gone to Galway, but had left his tenants with some soldiers in the castle.

"On one side of the wall there was an earth-bank about 11 feet high, with a trench of equal breadth without. The wall of the court was about 12 feet high, well flanked. On the other side the place was secured by a river."

Dr. Lynch makes flattering reference to the owner at that time. He tells us that he was most lavish of hospitality and gifts, so much so that the well-known epigram might be aptly inscribed over his gate :-

“ Porta patens esto
Nulli claudatur honesto.”

Though the castle had capitulated to Ludlow, it fortunately escaped destruction, and was given back, on the Restoration, to Sir Roger, successor and heir to Sir Dermot. Loyal like his father to the Stuart cause, Sir Roger fought for his king at the Boyne, and returned from that disastrous battlefield to die at Gort. His son William, by Helena, sister of Lord Clare, was heir to a ruined fortune. He was de-clared attainted and obliged to fly to France with his uncle Lord Clare, where he died A.D. 1744. His property was declared confiscated during his lifetime, and was conferred on Thomas Prendergast by letters patent, in consideration of his good and acceptable services in discovering the assassination plot.

But as the transfer of the property confiscated affected only Colonel William O’Shaughnessy, we find that the next heir-at-law, Coleman O’Shaughnessy, Catholic Bishop of Ossory, instituted law proceedings to recover the family estates. A protracted and expensive lawsuit was the result.

Dr. De Burgo, in his “ Hibernia Dominicana,” makes the following pointed reference to the defence advanced by Sir T. Prendergast : —

“ Acreter se defendit non quidam justitia caussae suae, sed pecunia et potentia.”

In 1760 the case was finally decided by Lord Mansfield against Sir Joseph O’Shaughnessy.

The decision was ruinous to O’Shaughnessy ; and one of the historic families of our country — of whom it was said, “ qui non novit O’Shaughnessy, Hibernia non novit” — was reduced to obscurity and poverty. And very soon after, the historic castle and mansion were levelled to the earth to supply space and building material for the present unoccupied military barrack.

The Castle of Ardameelavane is situated about three miles south of Gort, close to the beautiful demesne of Lough Cutra. It was an O’Shaughnessy castle, erected probably in the opening of the sixteenth century. We hear of it for the first time in 1567, after the death of Sir Roger O’Shaughnessy. It stands on the precipitous brow of a deep and secluded valley, and shows well-marked features of late Tudor work. The fortifications have practically disappeared. But the castle itself, owing to its restoration through the enlightened care of Lord Gough, the proprietor, is now one of the most perfect in the province.

This castle seems to have been claimed by Dermot O’Shaughnessy, surnamed the “ Swarthy,” after the death of his brother. Sir Roger. He was the Queen’s O’Shaughnessy, and received an autograph letter from Her Majesty, dated 27th June, 1570, strongly recommending him to the special attention of her Deputy, Sir Henry Sydney. In the Earl of Leicester, O’Shaughnessy had another friend and sup-porter. Dennot Reagh’s special claim on the patronage of the Queen arose from his having had a share in the betrayal of Dr. Creagh, Archbishop of Armagh, who had retired to the O’Shaughnessy forests in Beagh for protection. So Her Majesty did not forget “ to allow right well of the service in bringing to our said deputy an unloyal subject to that land, being a feigned bishop, who not long before broke out of our Tower of London.”

Writing to Sydney in 1570, Her Majesty recommends O’Shaughnessy’s petition for some order to be taken with him on the death of his brother, to place and settle him in the said country. But the acts which secured for Dermot Reagh the support of Her Majesty and her Deputy, alienated the goodwill of his tribe and of the entire district, and excited against him the active hostility of his own family.

Such was the abhorrence with which his act was regarded, that we find it generally stated that all vegetation perished on the spot in which he had Dr. Creagh arrested. His nephew, John O'Shaughnessy, was the popular heir to the title and family estates. An accidental meeting of the rival chiefs near the southern gate of Ardameelavane Castle, led to a conflict in which their rivalry had a tragic solution in 1579. The nephew fell mortally wounded by his uncle. But the uncle, though an accomplished swordsman, and one of Leicester's notorious bodyguard, survived his nephew only half an hour, having received a mortal wound in the sad encounter.

The local traditions have preserved the memory of this event, which is authenticated by historical testimony.

From the train, as it approaches Tubber station in its journey south-ward, one may catch a passing glimpse of this castle on the left. On the right, however, the Castle of Fiddane — another O'Shaughnessy castle — comes clearly into view. It is perhaps most easily approached from Tubber station.

The true name of the adjoining village, from which the station takes its name, is Tubber Riogh an Domnach, *i.e.*, the ' Well of the Lord of the Sabbath.' The spring or well may be easily visited by those who drive to Fiddane Castle. It has long been venerated as one of the holy wells of the district.

Few castles have their fortifications so well preserved as Fiddane Castle. They remain, as does the castle itself, practically unaffected by time. It is interesting to be able to add that it is now in the hands of the Commissioners charged with the preservation of our national monuments. It was probably erected at the same time as Ardameelavane.

At the time of the Kilkenny Confederation, we find it occupied by Sir Roger O'Shaughnessy, son and heir of Sir Dermot, who died A.D. 1606,

An extant letter addressed from Fiddane Castle on the 14th March, 1647, to Mrs. Giles Donovan, of Castle Donevan, settles the question of occupancy at that period. It is of sufficient interest to be given here : —

“ FOR MY VERIE LOVING DAUGHTER, MRS. GYLES DONEVAN,
“ CASTLE DONEVAN.

“ DAUGHTER,

“ I haye received yours of the 18th ffebruarie last ; and as for your troubles, you must be patient as well as others, and for my part I taste enough of that frute. God mend it amongst all, and send us a more happie tyme ;

“ As for the partie lately commanded to the Countree of Kiery who may be expected to return that way, they are conducted by my nephew Lieut. Coll. William Burke to whom I have written by the bearer on your behalfe :

“ I am most confident he will not suffer any wrong to be done unto your Dependants, tenants, or yourself : And if in case you should expect the whole armie, you may certifye me soe much with speed, and I shall take the course that shall be fittinge. In the meane tyme beseeching God to bless and keep you and yours.

“ I am your assured loveing ffather,

“ R. O'SHAUGHNESSY.

“ FEDAN, 14th March, 1647.”

This Sir Roger had taken an active part in the Confederate movement. At Ormond Castle, Kilkenny, his portrait is preserved. He is represented as arrayed in a suit of armour. His arms — as shown by his seal — were an arm embowed holding a spear.

From Fiddane Castle to Kilmacduagh the drive is by Clonowane Castle, situated on the borders between Clare and Galway.

The entire district looks barren ; and dreary sheets of limestone seem to extend themselves on all sides. There is scarcely a tree ; and yet the Kilkeedy forests, which once extended here for miles, at the close of the sixteenth century afforded shelter to O'Neill and his numerous troops, on the occasion of his memorable raid, on north Thomond and Clanricarde. Kilkeedy is but a short distance south-ward. It was the home of the Mac Brody, whose approbation of the "Annals of the Four Masters," dated 11th November, 1636, remains to us as an evidence of the character and extent of his learning, and of the accuracy of his judgment.

In our day only a small portion remains of O'Brien's splendid strong-hold. It is referred to in Dowcra's narrative as a "splendid pile," and one of the strongest in Thomond. Its destruction by Sir Richard Bingham at the close of the sixteenth century is described both by Dowcra and our annalists. At the time the local chieftains were, no doubt, familiar with the scenes of carnage by which Bingham enforced his "vigorous policy." In Galway, Barren, and Thomond, these lessons were ruthlessly enforced. Hence Donald O'Brien of Clonowane was left to his fate by the neighbouring chiefs of Clare and Galway. A protracted siege of twenty-one days showed the spirit with which O'Brien defended himself against his powerful enemy. The garrison surrendered only when they saw their chief shot on the ramparts. Though expecting quarter, they were all massacred in cold blood, and the chief portions of the castle were razed to the earth. About a mile to the north, the conical summit of the round tower of Kilmacduagh is clearly visible, seemingly guarding the venerable ruins clustered round, which eloquently proclaim to the twentieth century the pathetic story of St. Colman's holy labours in the seventh century. As a Paper specially prepared for this occasion deals at some length with the general history and some of the most striking features of those venerable ruins, further special reference to them is unnecessary here. The undulating and rocky ridges that run on the western side of the ruins between the marshes are bare and treeless now. It was not so in the year A.D. 1200. They were then overgrown with a thick wood, which was in part the scene of the decisive battle which secured the sovereignty of Connaught for Cathal Crovedearg against the ambitious efforts of his kinsman, Cathal Carragh.

Proceeding northwards, the extensive woods of Garryland rise above the bare and rocky landscape. And soon there are glimpses of sparkling lakes and steep crags through the broken outline of dark pine groves, and soft green birch, and hazel dells, extending for miles on the eastern side of the public roadway.

On the summit of one of those crags stand the remains of a vast fort built of uncemented stones. Its name, Dunowen, gives its designation to the townland. But unlike Dun Aengus and the ordinary cahirs, it is not circular. It follows the irregular outline of the precipitous plateau on which it stands.

While those woods are seen stretching away north and east, the public roadway skirts the remains of another large stone fort known as Cahir Cugaela. In most of its features it resembles the cahirs of Clare and the duns of Aranmore, so ably described by one of the gifted members of our Society, Mr. T. J. Westropp, M.A. But it may be added that it also possesses, some features of special interest. Unfortunately it is much ruined, so much so that the massive circular fort does not now stand higher than 13 feet at its highest point. The width of this stone enclosure would be about 12 feet at top, but at the base much wider. It had a wide entrance looking east. Two massive piers built in concrete formed the entrance. They are now much ruined ; but enough remains to show their massive character. Men still living remember when they were much higher. This entrance seems to have taken the place of the usual cyclopean entrance seen at Dun Aengus and other similar structures, and may

have been a mediæval addition to the fort. From this entrance a raised surface leads to some rained stone structures, or cloghans, within the fort.

On the outside, and surrounding the cahir, are the remains of two concentric stone enclosures. The outer enclosure stands a considerable distance from the fort, and seems to have been of considerable strength.

The remains of some circular structures may still be traced within this enclosure. The one on the south side of the cahir is the most perfect. Its strong circular wall consisted of massive stones uncemented, but hammer-dressed to the round. It should be for our antiquaries to determine the probable purposes of those structures, and the periods to which they may be referred. Is it one of the several monuments which speak to us still of the presence of the Fir Bolg tribes in Aidhne when Maeve was Queen of the Western province ?

O'Curry tells us of some settlements of the sons of Umor in Aidhne. He specially mentions *Cutra* and *Conal*, who settled in Hy Fiachrach Aidhne when Aengus had erected his fort at Aranmore. The charming district of Lough Cultra preserves the name of the former chief, though there seems to be no trace of a cahir there. It is not stated at what particular part of Aidhne Conal may have established himself. But it is stated that Conal was vanquished in single combat by Cuchulainn. His cahir may, therefore, have been known by the victor's name, Cahir Cuchulainn, corruptly Cugoela. Similarly, Cahir Mugaghane, near Gort, seems to bear the name of MacMugach, who vanquished Fergus, son of Umor.

About a mile north-east of Cahir Cugoela there are two fine cromlechs. Both are situated at Ballinastague, at the northern limits of the Garryland Woods. They are probably amongst the largest in Ireland. One is situated on a solid rock. Those who regard the cromlechs as burial-places will find it difficult to reconcile this fact with their theory.

In the immediate neighbourhood there are several raths and "sotteranea" hitherto unexplored ; and here, too, is a lake interesting in its weird setting. On its western side stands the castle of Caher-glissane, and on the southern shore is an ancient oratory with a small chancel. The chancel window is a small round-headed lancet of the most primitive character. The chancel arch and southern side-wall are completely destroyed ; and as there is no trace of doorway in the existing remains, it must have stood in the southern wall. Though the existing masonry is not cyclopean, it seems to be mediæval. Some traces of old buildings around the church lend probability to the local tradition that it was a branch of the Kilmacduagh Abbey, and served by its canons. Its name "Killomorán" easily lends itself to this interpretation. It may, however, mean the church of the Holy Hermit Marbhan, brother of King Guaire. It would be at least likely that the canons of Kilmacduagh would gladly select the site of that royal hermit's cell as the site for their little community and church.

The adjoining lake is called Lough Deehan. The waters of the lake having sunk very low in A.D. 1785, a wooden house was discovered at the bottom. "It was formed of oak timber of great thickness, the sides and roof of which were formed of wattle work of the same material. It was fully a thousand years old, and may have belonged to one of the early religious establishments of St. Colman's," most probably to the community at Killomorán.

The waters of the lake are regularly affected by the tides of the adjoining sea-coast of Kinvara. The ebb and flow give a regular change of a few feet in the water-level, though its connexion with the sea is by underground passages. Several caverns and forbidding seams in the earth reveal the water's course here and there on its way to the ocean. Many of those seams are said to have appeared for the first time on the occasion of the great Lisbon earthquake, which was so severely felt along this coast as to ruin one of the O'Heyne's castles on the seashore at Corren Roo.

The return journey to Gort ; takes one by Lydecane Castle and Kiltartan.

The Castle of Lydecane is situated in the present parish of Ardrahan. It was occupied towards the close of the sixteenth century by Owen Mautagh O'Heyne, who, in 1578, succeeded "Ruadhri na Coille," as chief of his name. The annalists record his death in 1588 : — "Eoghan Mautagh, son of Edmond, son of Flan, son of Conchobar O'Heyne, Lord of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne, died, and his son Aodh Buidhe was elected in his stead."

This Aodh Buidhe (' the yellow') who succeeded to the chieftainship of his tribe, surrendered his property to the Crown, and received a royal grant of the same on the usual conditions of military service. This " graunte" was dated on the 23rd July, in the thirtieth year of Her Majesty's " raigne." An inquisition taken at Galway, A.D. 1608, shows that O'Heyne's territory contained 8640 acres, which comprised most of the parish of Kinvara, and also considerable portions of Clarinbridge, Ardrahan, and Kilmacduagh.

The O'Heynes were kinsmen of the O'Shanghnessys, and shared with them the lordship of Hy Fiachrach Aidhne. We find that Mulrony O'Heyne, father-in-law of Brian Boroimhe, was Lord of Aidhne, and since that period to the opening of the seventeenth century they were, with their kindred at Gort, chiefs of their territory. The Castle of Lydecane seems to have been their remotest outpost on the east side of their lands.

The ancient church of Kiltartan arrests the attention a few miles further on. Its peculiarities attracted the attention of Sir Denham Norreys, and were treated of by him in a Paper read before this Society at Kilkenny in 1876. " Two curious projections carved on the mullions of the east window attracted my attention ; and on closer examination they appeared to be stone staples for holding bolts. There are no windows on the north wall ; the door is placed there ; and there is also on the same side, and near the east gable, a fairly designed altar-tomb. Of the date of the erection of the church or its history nothing is known. It affords clear evidence of various structural alterations; and there can be but little doubt that some portions of the structure date from a remote antiquity. The old name was Kilattaracht. Probably the church was dedicated to St. Attracta, the patroness of Coolavin, and of other parishes in Sligo."

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