

**The Famed Hill of Clara:  
Its poetry, history  
and  
the heritage of its environs.**

by

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## Introduction.

Clara is the focal point of the parish of Millstreet and can be seen from every direction. Viewed from the west, its smooth hemispherical shape is striking. The town of Millstreet nestles at the foot of Clara and one feels embosomed within its embrace, as if by the wings of a bird. Approaching from the Mallow Road, it is clearly seen as the terminal of the range of mountains stretching almost continuously towards Killarney. From the south, the densely wooded ridge of Mount Leader comes into prominence as it slopes down from the hilltop.

Clara has lent its name to three townlands at its base, Claramore, Clarabeg and Claraghatlea. Clara Road leads towards the town from the foothills of Gortavehy. Local enterprises such as the Clara Inn, Clara Furniture Store and the former Clara Toys took their name from the hill. Finally, the Parish newsletter, which has been in existence for over thirty years, was aptly named The Clara News from the outset. Clara has also entered into the proverbial lore of the area with the adage “Ceo ar Musherá is Clárach lom an cómhártha síonnaine is fear ar domhain”

A hill fort and ruined cairn, dating from the late Bronze Age (12th -10th Century BC), on Clara’s crown give evidence of the first ever settlements in this area.

The oldest literature in Ireland is linguistically dated to the 8th and 9th Centuries. At the time of the Fianna an ancient battle took place on the slope of the hill of Clara. The earliest poem, which recounts that battle, is dated to the 9th Century. Gofraidh Fionn was aware of this poem from his Bardic school days and had it in mind when he composed his own poem, of thirty seven verses, about Clara. In it he alludes to the fact that he was raised at the foot of Clara, but that the hill is a source of much sorrow and tears for him. He mentions two battles fought there, one the legendary Battle of Feic from the Fianaiagheact literature and the other nearer his own time.

Clara itself is a repository of much song and story. By choosing to take the fifteen kilometre tour of the road circuit round its base, by car or on foot, one would pass many places of interest along the way. These include the remains of an early farmstead dating from the 1st Millennium; three ruined churches and burial grounds; an ascendancy Big House; a castle or Tower House of the McCarthys; and the site of the former workhouse. There are also some interesting archaeological sites along the route, as well as many splendid views of the surrounding landscape. For the intrepid walker such a tour would open several new horizons of interest.

Just as we have recourse to a map to help us plot a journey or find directions on route, this guide attempts to highlight the people and places, which make Clara and its environs so interesting. Hopefully it may also open up new perspectives for the reader.

## Section 1. Poems on Clara by Gofraidh Fionn and others.

### Chapter 1. Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh.

Various entries in the Annals of the Four Masters, of Clonmacnoise and Loch Cé refer to Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh. One would have wished for an appraisal of his achievements from the Annalist of Inisfallen, who mainly chronicled Munster events. Unfortunately there is no appraisal of his achievements in the Annals of Inisfallen, which mainly chronicle Munster events. Due to a gap in the Annals between 1326 and 1390 there are no available entries contemporary with his career. Medieval historians also refer to him. M. Richter (1988. p.184) does so in the context of discussing the learned tradition of Irish Society at the time and the high regard in which the poetic profession was held.

Various poets and literary critics since his time, have admired and praised his poetry. The great Bardic scholars, Osborn Bergin and Eleanor Knott, have high praise for him too and see him as the most famous of the Bardic poets.

The Annals of Clonmacnoise refer to a great feast held during Christmas 1351, “to which William Moyneagh O’Kelly invited filidhe, bards, harpists, brehons, gamesters and jesters to his house”. The purpose of the gathering was to celebrate the resurgence of the Gaelic chiefs and the gradual recovery of their lands taken from them by the Normans. The assembled group provided entertainment. One of them thanked the host for his hospitality and wrote a poem to honour the occasion “Filidh Eireann go haoiteach” (The poets of Ireland to one house). That person was Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh.

The Annals of Loch Cé also record this general invitation “to the learned of Ireland and how they all returned fully grateful both high and low” (O.S. Dublin 1939.7).

Both the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of the Four Masters record his death. “On Feria III January 1387, Geoffrey the Fair O’Daly, best ollamh of poetry in Ireland died” (A.U). “Godfrey Fionn O’Daly, chief poet of Ireland and Rory Keenan, a learned historian and ollamh of Oriel, died” (A.F.M. Vol. IV. 709).

It is of interest to note that both annalists refer to him as the greatest poet of his period and not only a local figure, but one of national standing (best ollamh of poetry in Ireland). Whilst the above details may seem rather meagre, it is possible to glean a lot of additional biographical detail from the internal content of his poetry and to gain further insight into the kind of person he was from the assessment of his fellow poets.

Gofraidh Fionn was born in Nohaval, Western Duhallow circa 1300 (Fr. McKenna) or 1320 (others). He wrote a poem about the Hill of Clara, which we will consider more closely presently. In the opening line he refers to it as the hill to the east, close to whose base he was raised - “A chnuic thoir re taoibh Ealla ..... Giodh mud bhruach do hoileadh sin”.

He was educated at the Bardic school of the MacCraith family, in County Clare, who were ollamhs to the O’Briens of Thomond. Each Bardic school was associated with a particular family of poets. The more renowned were the Ó hUiginn in Sligo, the Ó hEodhusa in Fermanagh, Mac an Bháird in Donegal and the Ó Dálaigh in Duhallow. Maelmuire Mac Craith was a fellow student of Gofraidh and, in generous praise, he comments: “In all sincerity Gofraidh’s art is an ornament to our profession. The ornament of his education sits well on him. It might, perhaps, constitute a reason to keep silent about his transgressions”. The concluding comment naturally arouses our curiosity as to what these transgressions might have been. That, however, is a matter for another time.

According to Bergin (1970. p.16), Gofraidh was “looked up to and quoted by later poets as one of the greatest of his period”. For example, Fear Flátha Ó Gnimh, who was professional poet to the O’Neills of Clandeboyne, addressed a poem to Feargal Óg Mac an Bháird, two centuries after the time of Gofraidh. In it he playfully chides Feargal for

breaking the Bardic convention by framing his lyrics out of doors. He alludes to past masters like Gofraidh Fionn who composed their poems whilst lying on couches in dim lit rooms to keep out distractions. He extols Gofraidh's polished style in these words: "Gofraidh never proceeded with a poem without expending effort. Even when it was at an empty shell stage, he was always the very flower of art" (Bergin 1970. p. 119).

Eleanor Knott who, from 1939 – 55, was professor of Early Irish in Trinity College echoes his "flower of art" metaphor. She wrote a short account of the development of classical poetry and said of Gofraidh Fionn "that he was regarded by the poets themselves as the most gifted and accomplished of them all, a reputation that is amply justified by his surviving poems". Elsewhere, she adds this comment "that his poems are amongst the finest specimens of Dán Direach that we possess. He is often referred to by poets of a later age as a model composer and grammarians cite his opinion on syntax". (I.C.P. 1956: 60, 95).

When we examine the content of his poetry, we learn more about him. In a long poem, which was regarded as an authoritative document about the craft and skill of the poet, he informs us in the penultimate quatrain that he is "Gofraidh, grandson of Tadge, from the smooth lofty Mumha of the south". Poetry was regarded as a hereditary calling as well as a learned art. To be a son or grandson of a poet was seen as an entitlement to the highest rank in the profession. It appears from this verse that he is laying claim to such a title.

We also know from his poetry that he had a son called Eoghan, who was learning the art of poetry, but died prematurely. Movingly and with deep sincerity, he expresses his feelings in the lament he composed for his dead son. He apostrophizes the cross, erected on yonder hill, as a memorial to his son. "It is thou, O Cross, of the merry lad, that has made me cheerless this night". Then he adds in a genuine outpouring of grief, "Whilst he lived, such was my affection for Eoghan, I could not endure his absence from me for two nights, though now I endure it for always. I should not feel as I do about his death, had someone else been his teacher" (Knott 1957. p.68).

The hillock, where his son rested, was most likely the ancient cemetery at Nohoval. In the Papal Taxation list for 1302, Nohoval (Nua Congbhail) was named as a parish in the Diocese of Ardfert. It continued to be so until it was joined with Cullen about a century and a half later. Smith, in his History of Cork, said that, in 1750, there was a church and the stump of a round tower there. The cemetery, however, still remains in use. There is a well dedicated to St. Fionan (Feast Day 13th December) in an adjacent field. In all probability this cemetery was the ancient burial place of Eoghan and others of the Ó Dálaigh clan.

In the opinion of John O'Donovan, who worked with the first Ordnance Survey team, the Ó Dálaigh were the greatest Bardic family. In his book 'The Tribes of Ireland' (1852) he pays this tribute to them: "There is certainly no family in Ireland to which Bardic literature is more deeply indebted than the Ó Dálaighs".

Fr. Lambert McKenna S.J. and other authorities claim that the Ó Dálaigh descended from Cuchonnacht na Sgoile, who hailed from Teffia, Westmeath and died in Clonard in 1139. A branch of the family settled in Munster during the middle of the 13th Century. The Annals of the Four Masters record the death of Ragnall Ó Dálaigh, ollamh of Desmond in poetry, in 1161. Branches of the Ó Dálaigh settled in counties Cork, Kerry, Meath, Clare and Sligo. Various branches were differentiated as Ó Dálaigh Fionn, Rua or Buí, presumably on the basis of their hair colouring. The epithet Mór is used of the Clare branch. The Ó Dálaigh Fionn branch settled in Duhallow and have left their imprint on two townlands in this area i.e. Nohavaldaly and Ballydaly. The Ó Dálaigh Rua settled in Muintervara (Sheeps Head), West Cork.

By contrast, Gofraidh Fionn claims a different lineage and traces his poetic ancestors back to Dálach, a pupil and fosterling of St. Colman of Cloyne. Colman was a poet and an athléach (ex-layman). He gave up his previous profession and entered a monastery. He then abandoned poetry and bestowed the art on his beloved fosterling Dálach. In a poem dedicated to Colman Mac Léinin, Gofraidh claims "this melodious sage

of smooth bright hand” as patron saint of the Ó Dálaigh.

In claiming his pupil Dálach as the eponymous ancestor of the Ó Dálaigh, Gofraidh is at once laying claim to the mantle of saint and poet. Some scholars contend that such a claim is a Bardic fiction - “a clever poetic artifice rather than a genuine tradition” (Paul McCotter: 2004.72). Interestingly, however, the ancient name for Ballydaly was Cill mc Illnie. Could this be a corruption of Cill Mac Léinin? If so, it would reflect a genuine devotion to St Colman in this area. A devotion probably fostered by the Ó Dalaighs, who held lands here for several centuries.

The Ó Dálaigh furnished more poets and chroniclers than any other family in former times. Upwards of thirty of them achieved renown. Another famous member of this prestigious family of poets was Aongus Fionn Ó Dálaigh, whose poetry dates from the last decades of the 16th Century. All but four of his fifty five poems, which have come down to us, are on religious themes. These relate to Christ’s Cross, the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady. A Scottish poet, Ó Muirgheasáin, visited various Bardic families on route to the O’Donoghues of Glenflesk in the mid 17th Century. He visited the Ó Dálaigh family of Ballydaly. From this we can conclude that Ballydaly was the home of the Ó Dálaigh poets, at that time.

Gofraidh Fionn has left us several religious poems. A very fine specimen is “Maírg mheallas muirín an t-saoghail” which has a certain homiletic quality to it. He uses the parable of a child born in prison to convey the transient character of the human condition and its ephemeral joys.

The following verse sums up its content:

To barter a great kingdom for sorry cheer,  
life everlasting in exchange for a short season,  
to abandon God for the sake of a fleeting term  
in this miserable world, is a transaction without profit.

The poem “A pregnant girl under Sorrow’s Sign” is sometimes included in anthologies without its prologue. It was the most quoted religious poem for centuries and a favourite poem of Seán Ó’Riada. There is a translation by T. Kinsella (1998. p.107). In another poem “Corrach do shuan a shaoghail” (Restless is thy Repose, O World), written towards the end of his life. He regrets his receding youth and his greatest fear is growing old; He acknowledges his sinfulness and admits in a remorseful note: “I leave my tithe unpaid, I break the Ten Commandments, much I do which I should not, I give no alms” (V. 8).

In the 450 years from the alleged progenitor of this prestigious family, until its final entry, the Annals of the Four Masters has thirty six entries relating to the Ó Dálaig family. It is surprising, therefore, that the achievements of this famous poet and his family are not commemorated in any way in their native place. The poets of Sliabh Luachra are honoured and rightly so, but so should the two famous poets from this area. Although they were highly revered in the past, very little is written about them in local journals nowadays. The only exception is a fine article by Pádraig Ó Coileán on Gofraidh Fionn, which was featured in ‘Seanchas Duthalla,’ in 1986.

### **Gofraidh Fionn’s patrons.**

Gofraidh reminds us that there were two kindreds for whom poetry was composed in Ireland - the Gaels known to fame and the English of Britain’s dewy isle.

I ndán na nGall gealltar linn,  
Gaoidheal d’ionnarba a h-Eirinn;  
Goill do shraoineadh tar sáil sair

I ndán na nGaidheal gealltar.

In poetry for the English we promise the Gael shall be banished from Ireland.

In poetry for the Gaels we promise that the English shall be routed across the sea.

The two great patrons of Gofraidh were the McCarthy Mór of Castlough and Pallice and the Earls of Desmond who settled at Newcastlewest, County Limerick and had their chief residence at Castleisland. As a professional poet, his primary task was to write praise poems (eulogies) and panegyrics for both families. In addition, he would have included in other poems a single quatrain to minor chieftains such as the O’Keeffes, the O’Briens and O’Sullivans.

### **The McCarthys.**

He addresses poems to Diarmuid, Donal Óg and Tadhg Mac Carthaigh and to Sadhbh, daughter of Donal Óg.

Cormac IV succeeded his brother Dermot to the seat of Desmond. After his death in 1359, his son Donal Óg became chieftain. Gofraidh wrote a long poem of seventy eight quatrains (Beir eolas dúinn a Dhómnaill) urging him to return to his clans former patrimony to the lovely yew clad and swan haunted Cashel, which his folks should not have left. “’Twas wrong to prefer wild glens, to exchange wine for small ale” (v.12).

He even outlines the itinerary they should follow. Leave from Iochtár Cua near Waterville, crossing the river Laune and by passing Ciarrai in the south, onward through Magunihy, Sliabh Luachra, Conall Gabhra, Claonglas, Doon, Loch Gur, Emly, Knockgraffon and past the plain of Feimin to Cashel. This reads like a geography lesson for those times.

Another poem is addressed to Tadhg, son of Donal Óg and heir apparent to Clann Carthaigh. He was probably Tadhg na Mainstreach, who built Muckross Abbey. Because he was still a young man, the poet exhorted the people of Ireland to wait until Tadhg was older “Furig go Fóill, a Éire” - Patience awhile, O Eire. He then urges Tadhg to sustain the reputation of his ancestors by good and valiant deeds. In similar tone he tells Diarmuid, Lord of Muskerry, in another poem addressed to him “By deeds is the son of the King valued”. The final poem is a eulogy to Sadhbh, daughter of Donal Óg, dated circa 1376.

### **The Earls of Desmond - His Anglo Norman Patrons.**

The Earls of Desmond well illustrates the assimilation of Irish culture by some Norman settlers. Gofraidh served three Earls, Maurice, Maurice Óg and Gearóid Iarla.

Maurice was created the 1st Earl of Desmond and was appointed King’s Representative in Ireland (Justiciar) during Gofraidh’s lifetime. Maurice was later accused of sedition and felonious deeds when the authorities feared he was creating a breakaway kingdom from England. Early in 1351, he appealed to King Edward III to have the sentence annulled. Maurice, through his attorney, alleged before the King’s Bench that there were errors in the process. It was necessary to transfer all the documents from Ireland to London for review. The king gave judgement in favour of Maurice and ordered the outlawry to be cancelled.

Gofraidh addressed a poem to Maurice Óg, who, in 1356, succeeded the 1st Earl. The King invited Maurice to London and the poet rages against the king for taking him away. “The isle of Erin is a sorrowful woman because her lover is taken from her”. Although he knows that Maurice Óg is enjoying mirth and revelry and the king’s protection, Gofraidh is vexed that he has been detained so long. He uses allegorical material from Irish mythology to compare Maurice’s visit to the court in London to the coming of

Lúgh Lámhfhada to Tara. Maurice is the equal of Lúgh, tall, bright, elegant and excelling in wisdom and valour and sweetness of voice. The poem is entitled “Mor ár bhfearg riot a Ri Saxan” Bergin has the text and translation (1970. p.73,244).

Two poems of Gofraidh are addressed to Gearóid Iarla, the 3rd Earl of Desmond. (1335-98). He was known as the poet Earl and was a leading figure in the Gaelicisation process. During his imprisonment by Brian O’Brien of Thomond, he spent his time composing love poems in Irish. He was witty ingenious and learned.

In the first poem, Gofraidh appeals to him “to plead my cause “Déana mo dháil a Ghearóid”. He asked Gearóid to try and restore peace between the Fitzgeralds and the Irish and to seek his father’s influence towards such a reconciliation. He promised to remain his poet forever if he secured peace. The above quotation about writing for two races belongs to this poem.

In the 2nd poem “Be on your guard against me, O Earl” the poet threatens Gearóid and declares his intention to sever connections with him. It appears the first poem did not win favour with Gearóid.

After Gearóid’s time the Geraldines abandoned French as their court language and spoke Gaelic instead. As it later emerged, they were to become a thorn in the side of the English Crown. Three of the Geraldines were slain following the Desmond Rebellion in 1583.

Gofraidh lived through the time of the Black Death. It reached Ireland in 1348 and wiped out about 20% of the population. He makes no mention in his poetry of this great calamity, as far as I am aware.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Poems on Clara:**

Claragh, a friend thou art to me  
since childhood’s sweet old days,  
Long, long ago I saw thee first  
Bathed in the sun’s golden rays;  
Ah, memories that can never die  
cling lovingly around thee.  
O faithful friend of boyhood’s hours  
thou art ever dear to me.

For the author of the above poem, writing just over a hundred years ago, Claragh evoked memories of happy boyhood days that were dear to him. By contrast, Claragh was a hill of tears for the Duhallow poet Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, writing five hundred years earlier. In a long poem of thirty seven quatrains he lists the reasons why the hill is reminiscent of sadness and regret for him. He laments the many illustrious people who were killed near to the Hill of Clara. These included Feilim McCarthy, Ailill, a king of the Munster Fianna and Fothadh Canann, the leader of a band of warriors from Connaught.

The poem, entitled in Irish “A chnuic thoir re taoibh ealla”, was composed during the second half of the 14th Century. No published English translation is available, as far as I am aware. However, Canon Pádraig Ó Fiannachta has kindly agreed to allow his translation to be used in this publication. He generously provided it on request a few years ago. The poem is rich in historical and mythological allusions. Clara is named at least a dozen times and numerous epithets are used to describe its impact on the poet. The text and translation of the poem follows, together with annotations and comments.

**A chnuic Thoir re taoibh.  
Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh.**

1. A chnuic thoir re taoibh Ealla  
fa dtáid aicme Oilealla,  
giodh 'mud bhruach do hoileadh inn,  
fuath dot oirear im inntinn.
2. Is tú cnoc na ndéar dhúin-ne,  
a thulac ard fhéarnúide;  
is mó théid ar dhéaraibh dhamh  
t'fhéaghain iná ar mhéid mean man.
3. Ní guth oram dimbriogh dhuit,  
a Cláraigh Ealla orrdhruic;  
a-taoi ar n-am chrádh, a chnoic thoir,  
do bhaoi i ndán duit a dhéanaimh.
4. A Cláraigh, is tú an tulach  
mar thuit an Fionn Forbharach;  
mo grádh nó gur thuit red thaoibh,  
a chnuic a-tám do thathaoir.
5. Mac Diarmuda -Dia do chor-  
do tairngireadh go dtiocfadh  
dá lot as bhrú do bhearna;  
is tú cnoc na cinneamhna.
6. An lá tugadh thort a ndeas  
an chreach ler ceileadh m'áineas  
frioth basgadh id chuim, a chnuic,  
is trasgradh do chloinn Chormuic.
7. Don turbhaidh thug ar an dtóir  
i n-ucht Cláraigh i gceadóir  
marbthair 'gun ghéig gach nar ghabh  
gabthair an méid nar marbhadh.
8. Diobhraigis duine don tóir  
mac riogh Mis-mairg dar chusbóir-  
gur bháidh inn tar a déis dairt  
d'éis an áir thinn do thabhairt.
9. Éanghoin duaibhseach na dairte  
ní feas fear a diobhraichte;  
torchair lé flaithbhile Fáil  
achd ré n-aithrighe d'fhagháil.
10. Aithghin an té thorchair ann  
achd an flaith Fathadh Canann  
nior thuit tiomchall do ghleanna,  
a chnuic fhionnchlann Óilealla.

11. Ar ngabháil ghiall an domhain  
dó go hÉirinn n-éarlambaigh  
'mud chaomhachadh, a chnuic thall.  
do thuit caomhFhathadh Canann.
12. Do thuitsead re taoibh th'imil  
Fathadh agus Féidhlimidh;  
tugais d'Éirinn, a chnuic, cor  
'nar thuit Féilim is Fathadh.
13. Féidhlimidh mac mheic Domhnaill  
fuair goin 'n-a guin anfhorlainn  
ar an bhfánaidh uaid i-le,  
a Chláraigh, 's a ruaig roimhe.
14. Fathadh Canann ceann an tsluaigh  
ar an uilinn uiad sor-thuaidh  
do thuit ar gcaithimh a chleath,  
a chnuic, le maithibh Muimhneach.
15. Beann Oilill airdriogh Mumhan  
- toisg dá dtáinig mórphudhar -  
rug Fathadh - ni feis gan bhrón -  
leis ar athadh 's ar éalódh.
16. Táinig is an gcnuic ad-chi  
i n-a aghaidh an t-airdri;  
do bhaoi brath 'gun fhoirinn air  
gur laoi is Oilill cath Cláraigh.
17. Caoga mac riogh na rosg mall  
leathtrom é d'Fhathadh Canann  
gér chalma neart flatha Fáil  
's na seacht gcatha 'n-a chomhdháil
18. Gá dú achd fuair Fathadh Canann  
bás ann d'éis a mhórtharann;  
ni dhó géir dhuigh a chaoine  
as mhó fhuil ar n-eagcaoine.
19. Do bhi i ndán i n-a dhiadh soin  
an dara gleo ar ghurt Cláraigh;  
an céadchath nior theo géir the  
iná an gleo éachtach eile.
20. Fear croidhe náraigh neimhmin  
mac na flatha Féidhlimidh;  
fachain anfaidh d'fhás ar loch  
bás I Charthaigh I gClárach.
21. Dursan leam a los Fhéilim  
na tréidhe tá ar seinÉirinn;  
milleadh fás a craobhchall gcuir

bás a saórchlann ‘ma sliabhaibh.

22. Re bás an churadh Con Raoi  
ar Sléibh Mis- mana déarchaoi -  
bás an fhéil chreachnáraigh dhuinn  
ar Sléibh seanChláraigh samhluim.
23. Ar Sléibh fuaid fuair a roghuin  
Cúmhsgraidh Meann mhac Conchobhair;  
Do thuit ionnshamhail an fhir  
Ar fhionnghaidh chnuic Chláraigh.
24. Diarmuid ar Beann Ghulban Ghuirt  
do thuitim re péisd bpríomhthuirc  
[cointinn] is géirrin dá ghoin  
Féilim ar chnoicbheinn Chláraigh.
25. Muircheartach Mór mhac Earca  
is Féidhlimidh finnEachtgha  
frioth a n-árach leath ar leath  
im Chlárach is im Chleiteach.
26. Ri Éireann dar b’ainm Dá Thi  
marbh ar Sléibh Alpa an t-airdri  
frioth oilbhéim re samhluigh soin  
ar coirShléibh challghoin Chláraigh.
27. Tri meic Tuireann - tearc nar chaoin -  
tuitsead im Chnuc mac Míodhchaoin;  
mó chaoinim do thuitim thoir  
ar maolinn chnuicfhinn Chláraigh.
28. Créad fa mbeinn ar bruach t’imil,  
A chnuic thall, d’éis Fhéidhlimidh?  
San chnuc thealghlas nó gur thuit  
Níor deaghlas rut, a rochnuic.
29. Do shíol Bhriain do bhuing Teamhraigh  
lucht marbhtha mheic Thoirdhealbhaig;  
tug fhás ar orchradhaibh slóigh  
bás Conchobhair i gCaolmhóin.
30. Go dtorchair tighearna an chnuic  
Art Ó Caoimh cneas mar bhánchuip  
frioth an-allan bruit is ba  
it fharradh, a chnuic chéadna.
31. A Cláraigh, ceileabhradh dhuit;  
ag súd mé uait, a ardchnuic,  
fear nach seachnann comhlann cleath.  
go Domhnall gcleathchorr gCairbreach.
32. Gé taoi, a ThéaGhaimh, a chnuic thiar,

eadrainn is an fhionn foiltfhiar  
go hEoghan dleaghair dola  
leomhan Bhealaigh Bhóromha.

33. A chnuic thiar ga dtá Buadhach,  
is tú an dumha deaghdhuanach;  
samhail Chrot gCliach ar chaoimhe  
an cnoc ós iath Fhormhaoile
34. A chnuich ós chionn Locha Léin  
gá bhfuil Tadhg na dtreas n-aigmhéil,  
gar dhuit is dóigh mo thochta  
a chnuic mhóir, a Mhangarta.
35. Sealbh Dhileas Domhnaill I Chaoimh  
tú, a chnuic uaine an fheoir bharrchlaoin;  
mo chean duit tre robhaidhbh rath,  
a chnuic dan comhainm Clárach
36. A Shléibh Luachra don leith thuaidh  
i riacht Mór min an bhanshluaigh,  
id ghoire 's dóigh mo dhola  
tre Mhóir Mhoighe Mhucromha.
37. Freagarthar linn lion ar slóigh  
o shlóighheadh go Sliabh Si-óin;  
Mhichéal oirn bhus fhear garma  
seadh 'n-a mhoirn ni miotharbha.  
A chnuic.

**O Hill yonder near (Duh)allow).  
Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh.**

- 1 O hill yonder near (Duh)allow around where the scions of Aillill dwell, though we have been reared close to you my mind is full of hatred of you.
- 2 O lofty grassy hillock, you are the hill of tears for us. The sight of you cause tears to me instead of giving me an uplift.
- 3 O illustrious Clara of (Duh)allow, I am not to be blamed if I show you no respect; O hill in the east, you have tormented me - that was your destiny.
- 4 O Clara, you are the hillock where Fionn Forbharach fell; now that my love fell at your side, O hill, I complain you.
- 5 It was foretold that the sons of Dermot - mishap enough - would come to be slain in the middle of your gap! You are the hill of destiny.
- 6 The day that the “creach” which clouded my happiness came about you from the south, destruction occurred in your embrace, O hill, and the family of Cormac was laid low.
- 7 In front of Clara at first the youth by his attack killed all whom he did not seize; all who were not killed were captured.
- 8 When the bloody slaughter had been wrought, one of the rout shot a dart at the son of the King of Mis, and the driven dart overwhelmed us.
- 9 By the one accursed wound of the dart - nobody knows who shot it –

- the princely scion of Inis Fáil fell, with only time to do penance.
- 10 O hill of the fair family of Aillill, nobody like the one who fell, save only Fotha Canann, ever fell about your glen.
  - 11 Beautiful Fotha Canann brought hostages from all over the world to Ireland of the patrons, and yet he fell in your fair field, O yonder hill.
  - 12 Fotha and Feilim fell at your side; you tricked Ireland, O hill, by the fall of Feilim and Fotha.
  - 13 Feilim, the grandson of Donall was wounded grievously, on the slope his side of you, O Clara, as he pursued the enemy
  - 14 Fotha Canann, the leader of the host, in the nook north east of you, fell having cast his javelins, O hill, at the hands of the Munster nobles.
  - 15 Fotha carried off the wife of Aillill, High King of Munster-a sorrowful assignation-with him for some time; great misfortune resulted.
  - 16 The High King came to fight him on the hill you see; He had been betrayed by his enemies; He and Aillill fought the battle of Clara.
  - 17 There came in seven battalions to meet him, fifty sons of the king of steady eye; It was an unequal contest for Fotha Canann, though the warrior of Fail was brave.
  - 18 To cut the story short - Fotha Canann fell, having been severely wounded. Though he deserves lament, he is not the chief object of my weeping.
  - 19 Thereafter another battle was due on Clara's field; though the first battle was hotly contested, not hotter was it than the other
  - 20 The son of the Prince Feilim was a man of modest heart, yet doughty the death of the son of O'Carthach at Clara caused tempest on the lake.
  - 21 Because of Feilim, I am saddened by the three accomplishments of old Ireland - destruction, the laying waste of its hazel branches and the death of its noble families on its mountains.
  - 22 I compare the death of the noble generous swarthy, one on the hill of old Clara to the death of Cú Ráoí on Sliabh Mis - token of woe.
  - 23 Cúmhsgraidh Meann, son of Conor, was seriously wounded on the Fews. one like him fell on the fair surface of Clara hill.
  24. Diarmuid fell on Benbulben's slopes by the monster primal boar. Feilim fell on the mountainside of Clara, having been wounded by a sharp point.
  - 25 Muirheartach, son of Earc and Feilim of bright Aughty fell, respectively, at Clara and at Cletech.
  - 26 Dáithi, High King of Ireland, died on the Alps: A similar blow occurred on the jagged mountain of Clara with its fair hazels.
  - 27 Few have not lamented the death of the three sons of Tuirenn on the hill of the son of Midchaoin. I lament more earnestly the one who fell on the slope of the fair eastern hill of Clara.
  - 28 After the death of Feilim, why should I linger at your borders, O yonder hill? I never parted from you, O noble hill, till the lamented fell on your green mossy slope.
  - 29 The killers of the son of Torlough were of the seed of Brian who razed Tara; The death of Conor at Caolmhóin increased the havoc wrought on multitudes.
  - 30 Till Art O'Caoimh, of skin froth - white fell, raiment and kine were

- available close by you, O hill already mentioned.
- 31 O Clara, I salute you; I am off away from you, O high hill, off to one who does not refuse battle, Dónal of the polished spears of Carbery.
- 32 Though you are, O western hill, O winter Tara, between us and the fair sleek-haired one, I have to go to Eoghan, the lion of Ború's path.
- 33 O western hill, where Buadach resides, you are the well sung abode, the like of Crot Cliach, for beauty, you hill which dominated the land of Formhaoil.
- 34 O hill above Lough Léin, by which Tadgh of the valorous feats resides, O mighty mountain, O Mangerton, I hope to reach you.
- 35 O green hill of the leaning verdure, you are the rightful property of Dónal O'Keeffe, hail to thee with many prayers, O hill named Clara.
- 36 O Slieve Luacra to the north in the region of Mor of the female hosts; I may go to thee through the expanse of the Plain of Mucroimhe.
- 37 Let us answer the call to the muster of Mount Sion in full number. (St) Michael(The Archangel) will be the one to call us! To answer his call is most profitable.

### **Comments on the above poem:**

To appreciate more fully Gofraidh's poem on Clara it is helpful to be acquainted with the historical events to which it alludes and the mythological stories, which are weaved into the narrative theme of the poem.

“There fell near thy side Fothadh and Feilim” V.12.

Feilim, grandson of Donal McCárthiagh was grievously wounded on the slope this side of Clara, probably during the lifetime of Gofraidh (V.13). Fothad Canann, leader of a host of warriors from Connacht, fell on the northern shoulder of the hill, when all his captains had fallen (V.14) He had eloped with the wife of Ailill, Mumha's king. The enraged husband pursued him and they fought a fierce battle on the hill of Clara in which they both died by each other's hand. He promised to return to his lover after the battle. The headless warrior kept his promise and the tryst after death on Clara's hill is the basis for the 9th Century Fianaighecht poem. The following is a translation by Kuno Meyer.

### **The Tryst after Death.**

Hush, woman, do not speak to me! My thoughts are not with thee.  
My thoughts are still in the encounter at Feic.

My bloody corpse lies by the side of the slope of two Brinks;  
My head all unwashed is among warrior-bands in fierce slaughter.

It is blindness for any one making a tryst to set aside the tryst with death:  
The tryst that we made at Claragh has been kept by me in pale death.

It was destined for me, - unhappy journey! At Feic my grave had been marked out;  
It was ordained for me - O sorrowful fight! to fall by warriors of another land.

'Tis not I alone who in the fullness of desires has gone astray to meet a woman -  
No reproach to thee, though it was for thy sake - wretched is our last meeting!

From afar I have come to my tryst; my noble mate is horror stricken:  
Had we known it would be thus, it would not have been hard to desist.

My men, the noble faced, grey horsed warrior- band have not betrayed me.  
Alas! for the wonderful yew-forest, that they should have gone into the abode of clay!

Had they been alive, they would have revenged their lords;  
Had mighty death not intervened, I ween this warrior-band had not been un-avenged.

To their very end they were brave; they ever strove for victory over their foes;  
They would still sing a stave - a deep toned shout - they sprang from the race of a noble lord.

That was a joyous, lithe-limbed band to the very hour when they were slain:  
The green leaved forest has received them - it was an all fierce slaughter.

Well-armed Donall, he of the red draught, he was the Lugh of the well accoutred hosts:  
By him in the ford - it was doom of death - fell Congal the Slender.

The three Eoghans, the three Flanns, they were renowned outlaws;  
By each of them four men fell, it was not a coward's portion.

Swiftly Cu-Domna reached us, making for his namesake:  
On the hill of the encounter will be found the body of Flann the Little.

With him where his bloody bed is thou will find eight men:  
Though we thought them feeble, the leavings of the weapon of Mughirne's son.

Not feebly fights Falvey the Red; the play of his spear-strings withers the host;  
Ferchorb of radiant body leapt upon the field and dealt seven murderous blows.

Front to front twelve warriors stood against me in mutual fight:  
Not one remains of them all that I did not leave in slaughter.

Then we two exchanged spears, I and Alill, Eoghan's son:  
We both perished - O the fierceness of those stout thrusts!  
We fell by each other, - though it was senseless it was the encounter of two heroes.

Do not await the terror of night upon the battle-field among the slain warriors:  
One should not hold converse with ghosts! Betake thee home, carry my spoils with thee.

There are around us here and there many spoils of famous luck:  
Horrible are the huge entrails which the Morrigan washes.

From the edge of a spear she came to us, 'tis she that egged us on.  
Many are the spoils she washes, terrible the hateful laugh she laughs.

She has flung her mane over her back - it is a stout heart that will not quail at her:  
Though she is so near to us, do not let fear overcome thee!

In the morning I shall part from all that is human, I shall follow the warrior-band;  
Go to thy house, stay not here, the end of the night is at hand.

Someone will at all times remember this song of Fothad Canann;  
My discourse with thee shall not be un-renowned, if thou remember my bequest.

Since my grave will be frequented, let a conspicuous tomb be raised;  
Thy trouble for thy love is no loss of labour.

My riddled body must now part from thee awhile, my soul to be tortured by the black  
Demon.

Save for the worship of Heaven's King, love of this world is folly.

I hear the dusky ousel that sends a joyous greeting to all the faithful:  
My speech, my shape are spectral - hush, woman, do not speak to me!

### **Further background to Gofraidh Fionn's poem.**

It may be of interest how I first came upon this poem. Some years ago I was casually perusing a book by Dáithí Ó h-Ógain entitled 'Myth, Legend and Romance', when I came across an entry, which mentioned a battle at a place called Feic, apparently near Millstreet (p.233). This intrigued me, as I had never heard of the Battle of Feic. I endeavoured to track down the source of this reference. One of those mentioned briefly, as an adjunct to the entry, was Thomas O'Rahilly. In his book 'Early Irish History and Mythology' (1946. p. 10, 34) he has two brief footnotes, which read "Fothadh was among the ancestral deities of the Uaithne people of East Limerick, which divinities were given human form in remote times". The other footnote read: "Fothadh was slain at the Battle of Feic which Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh locates at Clara near Millstreet (p.34).

The next step was to secure a copy of the poem which Fr Lambert McKenna published in 1938, as poem No 64 in "Diogluim Dána", entitled "A Chnuic thoir re taoibh Ealla". I struggled with the Irish text so my brother kindly requested An Canónac Pádraig Ó Fiannachta to translate the poem. He very kindly agreed and by a strange, if almost fortuitous, co-incidence, he completed the translation on Lá le Ide. Thus the jigsaw was coming together. The final piece which completed the picture was the chance discovery of a 9th Century poem called "Tryst after Death" in Hoagland's 'Anthology of a thousand years of poetry.'

It is entitled "Reicne Fothaidh Canainne" in the ancient literature and in the poem itself (V.46) the word "reicne" is translated by Dinneen as an extempore poem. The poem recounts the strange meeting between the phantom-hero Fothadh, who was slain at the Battle of Feic, with his paramour (Ailill's wife) on the hill of Claragh after the battle. The decapitated head of the dead warrior addresses his lover in a kind of dramatic monologue, close to the battle site. Faithful to his promise he keeps tryst with her at Claragh.

The poem was first edited and translated by the great German scholar Kuno Meyer, in 1910. His book 'Fianaigheact' was reprinted in Dublin in 1993. Eugene O'Curry (1873. p.590) lists this strange preternatural tale amongst the collection of elopement stories, which he gathered from the Book of Leinster and other MSS. It is entitled "Aithed mná Ailella mhic Eoghain re Fothad Canann"

Gofraidh Fionn would have become acquainted with this poem as part of his Bardic training when he was expected to study approximately 250 major tales and additional minor tales from the heroic past. Awareness of this earlier poem informs his poetic recital of the events at Feic. He has no hesitancy linking the Battle of Feic with the hill of Clara and located the site and the place Fothad fell as the nook on the NE slope of the hill between two brinks. Meyer locates Feic as a pool in the Boyne but this clearly doesn't cohere with the topography of the poem, nor does it seem a likely setting for a battle. Summarising the story of the Tryst helps to elucidate Gofraidh's poem on Claragh.

The lovers had agreed to meet after the battle. The pact is kept at Claragh. The spirit of the slain warrior asks the woman not to speak to him since he is preoccupied with the dead on the battlefield. He bemoans their mad passion, which led to his death but doesn't blame her for her part in it. Although they are meeting in wretched circumstances, he is proud of his faithful warriors. He names them and details where they fell. Eventually, all stood still on the battlefield when he and Ailill met and fell by each other's sword. Out of consideration for his lover he urges her not to delay on the field of battle but to hurry homeward, avoiding any ghostly converse on the way. He warns her against Morrigan, the demon Goddess of War. He asks her to build a tomb as a monument to their love and tells her where his weapons and treasures are to be found. A Christian touch is introduced in the penultimate verse when he tells her that his body must earthward pass and his soul alas to the torturing fire (of Purgatory).

How are we to understand these rather fanciful and incredible tales? Some would consign them, without hesitancy, to the world of myth and legend. Other scholars would contend that these stories contain genuine memories of war and conflict from the heroic past but have been embellished with fantastic elements. Because they have a foundation in history, one might characterise them as "history leaning towards legend". Whichever viewpoint is adopted, these tales are, nevertheless, significant in that they provide us with a window into the world of prehistoric belief and outlook.

### **A chnuic thoir re taoibh Ealla.**

Turning now to Gofraidh's poem, we notice that Clara is mentioned over a dozen times, often with qualifying epithets that are both positive and negative in reference content. The poem opens with the words "O Eastern hill near Ealla". The author then goes on to specify why the hill of Clara is a source of lament and tears for him. It is the hill of fate where Feilim died and where Ailill and Fothad fought to the death, a cause for lament because so many noble families have died on the spot. He speaks of Clara's fair slope of the green browed hill and the famed hill of Clara, which is the rightful property of Art and Donal O'Keeffe. It is the source of sorrow and shame because of the two great battles fought on its slope where so many died. One battle was fought, at a time contemporary with the poet, in which Feilim McCarthy died. What do we know about Feilim?

### **Feilim McCarthy.**

The chronicles do not give a clear picture of how affairs of the McCarthy clan unfolded after the Norman invasion. We get glimpses of happenings here and there but the absence of contemporary annals leave us with vague general impressions. Some connect Feilim with the McCarthys of Kerry while others link him with the Muskerry sept. Fr L McKenna suggests that the person who best fits the above indications may have been Feilim, a son of Diarmuid MacCárthaigh (slain at Tralee in 1325), who according to early genealogists was a son of Donal Óg (d.1303).

There is an entry in the Annals of Inisfallen (1320/5:2): "Diarmuid Mac Cárthaig i.e. king of Deasmun, was slain by the son of Nicholas Fitzmaurice and other septs in the monastery at Tralee and was buried at Inis Faithlinn a fortnight after his death. Cormac Mac Cárthaigh, his own brother, was proclaimed king in his stead" (A.I.1977.433). This Cormac and his son Dónal Óg were the patrons of Gofraidh Fionn (cf supra).

Padraig Ó Coileán (S.D.1986) proposes an alternative identification. He regards Feilim as the third son of Diarmuid, Lord Muskerry. This Diarmuid was slain at Inchirahiilly by the O'Mahoneys in 1367. He had three sons: Tadhg, Cormac and Feilim. The third son became lord of the area by slaying his nephew but was slain himself in retribution in 1382 in the Clara area. It is his death that the poet laments. In V.4 he is called "The Forbharach", or "fair son of Forbhair" in one translation. This suggests he was a

descendant of Richard an Fhorbhair De Burgo from whom the Earls of Clonrickard in Galway derived. In the contention of the Bards “one of these Earls, the fifth was labelled Flaith Fhorbhair”.

### **Oilealla.**

Oilill or Ailill Olum in V.1 was the mythical leader of the Eoghanacht tribe of Munster. He was slain with his brother in law Art at the Battle of Magh Macrumtha near Athenry.

### **Fothad Canainne.**

The story of Fothadh’s death on the gentle slope of Clara is alluded to in V.11. As we have seen from the earlier poem, his death came about as a result of his love affair with Ailill’s wife. His return to meet her after the battle gave rise to the fabulous and incredible Fianaigheact poem “The tryst after death”.

Fothad was the best known and most ferocious of the three sons of Mac Nia and Fuinche, divine daughters of Daire Dearg. The three sons are sometimes represented as a triplicate deity, common in the Celtic Pantheon. According to Ó h-Ógáin (2006.260) he is the “ancestral deity of the Uaithne sept in NE Limerick”. He thinks Canann may be a corruption of Danann. According to the ancient mythological history the Tuatha De Danann lost their sovereignty over Ireland to the people of Mil, so that would locate Fothad among the pre Celtic deities, if the link is correct.

In the Fianaigheact stories he is represented as the warrior leader of the Connacht band of Fianna. He eloped with the wife of Ailill Flann Beag, who was leader of the Munster Fianna. Ailill and his warriors pursued him to Clara and the fierce battle took place at Feic, where both died. In later oral tradition Fothad is often in conflict with Fionn Mac Cumhail. There was undying hostility between them. Fionn slew his half-brother Curreach Life. When Fionn invited him to an ale feast of peace close to the Paps of Anann (presumably Cathair Crobhdearg), Fothad responded that he would not sit down to eat or drink at a feast except in the presence of heads of recently slain warriors. Whereupon, Fionn slew his sister Teite’s husband. This act renewed their enmity and conflict. Gofraidh Fionn bemoans the death of Fothad at Clara and underscores two outstanding qualities of his, which were highly regarded among the Fianna i.e. his faithfulness to his promises, his strength and bravery.

### **Diarmuid Ui Duibhne.**

Diarmuid in V. 24 was the handsome young hero of the Fianna who eloped with Gráine, wife of Fionn Mac Cumhail. He was killed while hunting a boar on Beann Gulbáin (Benbulbin, Co Sligo). His name connects him to the Corca Duibhne sept of the Dingle Peninsula. There are many similarities between him and Adonis of Classical Mythology (Ovid).

### **Muircheartach Mac Earca.**

Muircheartach in V. 25 had been High King of Ireland for twenty years prior to his death in 534. He married Duaibhseach, daughter of the King of Connacht. His palace was at Cleitheach, near Newgrange. He was later beguiled by Sin, who confused his senses by creating in his mind illusions of strange battles. A medieval saga tells how he was converted to Christianity by Cairneach but later drowned in a vat of wine. His wife died of grief and they were buried side by side at Brú na Bóinne.

## **Dáithi.**

Dáithi in V.26 was known as Daithi mac Fiarach to distinguish him from others of the same name. He was King of Connacht and had his seat at Cruachan Ai (Rathcroghan, Co Roscommon). He made brief raids on the coast of England and Scotland. Medieval texts also refer to his expedition to the Alps where he and his men demolished the tower of Formenus, a Christian who had gone there on pilgrimage. Daithi was killed by a thunderbolt when Formenus prayed against him for knocking the tower.

## **Ailill Flann Beag.**

Ailill in V. 16 is a popular name in early history and mythology. It is a name borne by two saints, ten Fenian warriors and a host of petty kings. The best known perhaps is Ailill mac Máta, the husband of Medhb in the Táin Bó Cuailgne. The Ailill of the poem is Ailill Flann Beag, a Munster warrior.

## **Art Ó Caoimh.**

Art Ó Caoimh, whose death is referred to in V. 30 was Lord of Pobal Ui Caoimh (around Cullen) in Duhallow. In the poem he is also Lord of the famed hill of Clara. It is not known how and when he died. His son Donal, who is mentioned in V.35, was ruling at the time.

## **Donal Cairbreach, Eoghan, Buadach and Tadhg mentioned in dedicatory verses.**

Donal Cairbreach, mentioned in V. 31, died according to the A.F.M. in 1414. Eoghan “the lion of Bealach Bórainhe” V. 32, is probably Eoghan son of Donal of Dún Iomdhan. Eoghan’s father, Donal (died 1309) married a daughter of Turlough O’Brien of Thomond.

The dedicatory stanza to Eoghan is immediately followed by stanzas to Buadach (O’Sullivan) and Tadhg (O’Donnachadha) of Mangerton. Regarding these dedicatory verses, Gofraidh tells us in one of his poems about a pact he made with Conor O’Brien of Thomond. His due, by that compact “was a verse of every poem of my art, a horse each year was my due.”

A reading of the poem throws light on where Gofraidh himself lived, on social conditions of his time (intertribal strife), on the genealogy of some of the chieftains mentioned and on the interweaving of history and mythology in understanding the story of the landscape context of these events i.e. the famed hill of Clara.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Clara as a symbol of Human Endeavour – Climbs and Walks.**

A mountain or hill is a potent symbol for challenge and human striving. To scale high peaks is an ambition for lots of people and the supreme challenge for human endeavour is to scale Everest. Pat Falvey, of Beaufort, has successfully climbed the highest peaks of all five continents. Climbing to the top of Clara, by contrast, is a modest endeavour. It is only 452 metres above sea level and yet, over the years, it has proved to be a popular attraction for visitors to the town and those who live locally.

One of my textbooks from my school days was “Mo Scéal Fein”. In p.65 an t-Athair Peadar describes how he got sidetracked and was prompted to climb to the top of Clara, as he journeyed by foot from Carriganima to Kanturk. His effort was rewarded by the

beautiful view of the surrounding countryside that it afforded. He was also impressed by the splendid view of the hills to the West “ag bagairt a gcinn thar droim a chéile”. Other visitors to the town have described the invigorating experience of their efforts to reach the summit.

### **Poem by Bernard O’Donoghue.**

Bernard O’Donoghue, in his poem on Clara, describes a possible way of climbing to the summit from the reservoir behind Mount Leader.

#### **Clara.**

#### **Bernard O’Donoghue.**

To climb the mountain it is necessary to cross  
from the reservoir behind Mount Leader  
through a walled corner which appears to be  
both house and trees. You have to negotiate  
a small window into a kitchen copse  
where a sycamore is growing through  
a heart-stone. No one seems to know  
who lived here, not even the old people  
whose grandmother remembered where they were  
nine houses in the half acre of elders  
behind the old screen. In the Autumn  
if you stand still and listen  
you can hear, you fancy, behind the rustling  
of the leaves in the endless westerly  
wind, voices quietly about their business.

Written in an easy conversational style, it evokes memories and reflections on earlier times. The ruined overgrown house, through which the climber passes, conjures up memories of former inhabitants. The poet emphasises how, even deserted, the landscape, where nine houses formerly stood, can engage our imagination and fancy.

### **Topography of Clara.**

Clara, which probably gets its name from the smooth level appearance of its surface, is linked by a shoulder to the Cahirbarna range. It is the eastern terminal of that range which fronts the Derrynasagart Mountains. Geologically, it is part of old red sandstone foldings thrown up at the end of the Carboniferous Period of mountain building. The smooth contours of Clara contrast sharply with the furrowed and fissured northern slopes of Gortavehy and Cahirbarna hills, the trademarks of the receding Ice Age of long ago. These form the E/W axis of foldings of the earth’s crust stretching from County Waterford to the Kerry coastline.

There is a summit cairn on top of Clara, which is probably Bronze Age; a hill-fort; a Holy Year cross and the icons of modern communications - Broadband masts. Corrin Hill, near Fermoy, is also a hill fort like Clara with a cairn on top and a cross, which was illuminated for the Millennium. The cairn on Clara is in ruin. Much more prominent examples are the Stoukeen and the cairns which crown the twin peaks of the Paps.

Hill-forts are enclosures of earth or stone embankments, which encircle the crown of a hill. Usually they are not less than 150 metres in diameter. The fortified bank on Clara is relatively easy to identify. Hill-forts are very different from ring forts in size, in date and

in function. They are much more rare. There are about fifty or sixty, in all, in Ireland with a high concentration in North Munster. Clara is one of four in County Cork. The sites, which have been excavated suggest they are late Bronze Age i.e. 12th to 10th Century BC.

Clara, as with other hilltop fortifications, may have been occupied by tribal groups permanently or intermittently during the first half of the final Millennium before Christ. These pre Celtic people may have used it as a defensive response if they were under attack or at a time of social disturbance caused by severe climate change. Experts conclude they may have functioned as sacred ritual enclosures because of ritual deposits such as weapons or ornaments left behind at some sites. Here, on top of Clara, we have tangible evidence, going back 3000 years, of some kind of settlement, permanent or otherwise. Located nearby is evidence of continuing human activity from the first decade of this new Millennium.

### **Hill walking on Clara.**

Walking is the most ecologically friendly and least expensive recreational pursuit of our time. This form of exercise is greatly encouraged by health enthusiasts, tourism promoters and the Green Party. Evidence of the increasing interest in this pastime is illustrated by the thirty or forty marked walkways, which are now listed in guidebooks. Two of these walkways intersect at Liscahane Grotto: the Blackwater (Duhallow Way) and the Breffni Way.

### **The Blackwater (Duhallow Way).**

The Blackwater (Duhallow Way) is a sixty five kilometer walk from Beeing to Clonkeen, at the end of the Clydagh valley near Glenflesk. The route was a Leader funded project laid out by I.R.D. in the 1990's at a cost of £55,600. The route crosses Musherah and skirts the Country Park via Knocknakilla to Liscahane Cross. At the grotto it turns left along the N582 until it reaches the entrance to Mount Leader. From here it climbs up the dense tree clad slope of Clara. It follows a grassy track around the North face of the hill and continues along the road leading from Bealach to Croohig's Cross. The route passes the supposed site of the ancient Battle of Feic, on the NE nook of the hillside, then past the reservoir, in the upper recesses of the slope. This reservoir takes piped water from Tubrid to supply Millstreet town.

The circuit of the hill on foot, as envisaged in this publication, could be attached as a looped link to the Duhallow Way.

### **The Breffni-Greenways trail.**

The Breffni-Greenways trail for "walking, cycling and heritage" was begun in 2003 to mark the fourth centenary of the epic march of O'Sullivan Beare. It is the longest marked way in Ireland and touches all four provinces. The Heritage Council is developing it as part of a European Greenway trail. The route traces the epic march of Donal Cam O'Sullivan, chief of Beara, from his home at Dunboy to the Leitrim home of the O'Rourkes of Breffni. After Dunboy was destroyed in 1602, his forces engaged in guerilla warfare for a while until they were attacked near Glengariff by Crown Forces under Wilmot. Four thousand cattle and two thousand sheep were taken. Faced with overwhelming odds and the prospect of starvation, he left for O'Rourke's territory in Breffni with a thousand men, as well as women and children. Only thirty five reached their destination.

The segment of the trail that is of interest to us is the stage of the march from Ballyvourney via Mullaghanish and by the side of the hill of Clara to Millstreet. The marchers crossed the Blackwater at the Boingng ford, near Dromsicane, and headed on to Kanturk. The McCarthys of Drishane and Kilmeedy tried to ambush them but failed. An information board on the route followed is displayed at Liscahane. A more detailed

description of the itinerary can be seen near to the Carnegie Hall, at the West End, Millstreet.

### **Woodland Walk.**

A new woodland walk runs from Clara Road, fifty metres west of the Grotto, to a viewpoint at the foot of Clara. This short walk of 775 metres has been laid down in 2009 and is promoted by Millstreet Tidy Town and Tourism Association. It follows along Singleton's Road for about 350 metres. To the yellow man marker and ascends through a steep forest path to a viewpoint affording fine panoramic views of Cloughboula Mor and Céim Carraige. There are some resting places along the way where one might savour the views, the flora and the sounds of nature. A route map is displayed at the starting point. It underscores the importance of adhering to the Country Code by showing respect for the environment, livestock and property by keeping to the marked paths. As we look back towards the town from the starting point we can clearly see St Patrick's Church, the tower of St Anna's, the Industrial Estate and Clara Road.

## **Chapter 4. Clara as a symbol of inspiration and spiritual uplift.**

“I lift up my eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help” Psalm 121.

A hill can be a source of inspiration and spiritual uplift, not only because of its enduring aspect and the awe inspiring view from its summit, but also because hills and mountains have sacred associations in many cultures. One need only think of Mt Ida, the home of Zeus and Mt Parnasus on the side of which was the Delphic Oracle. There are many sacred mountains in the Bible e.g. Mt Sinai, Mt Nebo, Mount Tabor, Mount of Beatitudes, Mt Olivet, Mount Carmel and Mount Zion.

Ireland has its share of hills with religious significance, Tara, Slane, Allen, Croagh Patrick and Mount Brandon. Clara, like these famous examples, focuses our attention in a more modest way on aspects of religious significance. It may have functioned in the remote past as a ritual enclosure. In 1950 a cross was erected on the summit to honour the Holy Year. It has been replaced twice since, the last time, in 1984, with a steel cross. The Murphy family of Clara transported the first cross to the summit using horse and cart. On July 17th 1950 Fr Arthur Moynihan celebrated Mass on the hilltop and blessed the new cross. The occasion is featured in Picture Millstreet Pg.170, 178.

When first erected, the wooden cross was clearly visible from all directions. Since then the locus was slightly changed so that is no longer in view to those approaching the hill from the West. The cross is the central symbol of Christianity and focuses attention on the mystery of our redemption. The first sign marking us out as Christians was the sign of the cross marked on our foreheads by the priest and by our parents and Godparents at Baptism. An early Irish poem refers to Christ as King of the Friday. On the cross he suffered the bruises, the wounds and the loss but it also symbolises His victory and the fruit of His passion.

For half a century it was the solitary emblem on Clara. Today it competes with other icons for our attention, the signals of speedy communication. A poem by Diarmuid Ó Criodáin of Leacht eloquently reminds us of the significance of the Holy Year Cross.

“They had a dream they would put  
on Clara's top, a cross  
that could be seen from far and nigh.

Today it stands, a sign against the sky.  
a sign for us to follow - Christ's way  
all else is hollow." (1993; p.39)

J J Callanan is famous for his poem on Gougane Barra. From 1820-2. He was private tutor to the McCarthy family of Rathduane. His two years here were special to him. He wrote the following poem which was published in the 'Literary Magnet' in 1827. It shows a great fondness for Clara and the surrounding area and also indicates a romantic encounter while he was here that was unfulfilled.

**Sweet Avondu.**  
**J J Callanan 1827.**

On Cleada's hill the moon is bright  
Dark Avondu still rolls in light,  
All changeless is that mountain's head  
That river still seeks ocean's bed.  
The calm blue waters of Loch Lene  
Still kiss their own sweet isles of green,  
But where's the heart as firm and true  
As hill, or lake, or Avondu.

It may not be, the firmest heart  
From all it loves must often part;  
A look, a word, will quench the flame  
That time or fate could never tame;  
And there are feelings, proud and high,  
That through all changes cannot die;  
That strive with love, and conquer too —  
I knew them all by Avondu.

How cross and wayward still is fate;  
I've learn'd at last, but learn'd too late;  
I never spoke of love—'twere vain ;  
I knew it, still I dragged my chain.  
I had not, never had a hope :  
But who with passion's tide can cope ?  
Headlong it swept this bosom through,  
And left it waste by Avondu.

O Avondu, I wish I were  
As once upon that mountain bare  
Where thy young waters laugh and shine  
On the wild breast of Meenganine.  
I wish I were by Cleada's hill  
Or by Glenluachra's rushy rill  
But no! I never more shall view  
Those scenes I loved by Avondu.

Farewell ye soft and purple streaks  
Of evening on the beauteous Reeks.  
Farewell ye mists that loved to ride  
On Cahirbearna's stormy side.  
Farewell November's moaning breeze,  
Wild minstrel of the dying trees,  
Clara! A fond farewell to you  
No more we meet by Avondu.

No more – but thou, O glorious hill!  
Lift to the moon thy forehead still,  
Flow on, flow on, thou dark, swift river,  
Upon thy free wild course forever  
Exult, young hearts, in life-time's spring,  
And taste the joys pure love can bring,  
But, wanderer, go – they're not for you  
Farewell, farewell, sweet Avondu.

## Section 2. A Circuit of Clara highlighting Heritage features.

### Chapter 5. Liscahane ring-fort.

Travelling south along the Macroom Road, about 1km from the town square, can be seen one of the most numerous and widespread field monuments in Ireland - a ring-fort. It is located just inside the road fence on a westward sloping field overlooking Mount Leader and the Finnow River. It is one of four ring-forts in the Liscahane town-land and Fr. Ferris recorded one hundred and fifty six in the Millstreet/Cullen area in 1937 (Broker 1972 p.38). It is obscured somewhat by the high road fence but a good view can be had when travelling by bus. A recent estimate gives the overall number of such ring-forts as 45,119 (Mathew. Stout 1997. p.53), which is a considerable increase on the 30,000 given by Bord Failte in their inventory published in 1964. The increase is due to the identification by aerial photography of additional sites and the carrying out of more detailed archaeological surveys in recent years.

These monuments are commonly referred to by the Irish terms “lios” and “rath” A number of the sites incorporate one or other of these terms as an element in their names. Thus in Millstreet Parish we have the following:

|                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Lios Catháin (4)   | Ráth Dubháin (4) |
| Lios Craobhach (6) | Ráth Rua         |

Lios Liatháin

Lios na Buidhe

Lios an Uisce

Lios na Saorseán

|                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| In the adjacent parish are | Ráth Mhór  |
|                            | Ráth Bheag |

These terms are used of earthen-banked forts while cathair and caiseal refer to stone forts. Many of these are located on private land. Only about twenty are in state care. Upward of two hundred have been excavated.

#### Description of the site.

It consists of a circular earthen bank or rampart with an external fosse or trench, dug out to create the bank. It is approximately thirty five metres in diameter and the interior enclosure has been raised to the S/W to compensate for the slope. A gap in the bank and a causeway over the trench on the S/E side of the enclosure indicates the entrance. Mature deciduous trees crown the bank and there are also some pine trees growing inside.

The majority of these forts were enclosed farmsteads of the more prosperous farmers during the Early Christian period, 500-1,000AD. The small size of these sites suggest they were occupied by a single family, of about six to eight people, with the dwelling house and farm buildings located within the enclosed space. The dwelling house would have been in the centre of the enclosure. Typically this would have been a wooden structure of which, understandably, there are no visible remains. From excavated sites it is concluded it would have been circular in shape. It would have consisted of a circle of posts set in the ground with interweaving branches and twigs (wattle) covered over with clay - hence a wattle and daub structure. It would have been approximately seven metres in diameter and would have looked like a giant sized wicker basket with a conical roof made of reeds or rushes. In order to help us visualise what it looked like, there are reconstructed ring-forts in such places as Craggaunowen in Co Clare and Ferrycarrig in Co Wexford and nearer home on the crannog in the Millstreet Country Park.

It would have been a single chamber dwelling, possibly segmented into different

purpose areas and would be very similar to the rondavels still used today as a dwelling in rural parts of Africa. The gradual subdivisions of houses into rooms and lofts only came later. In some instances the dwelling was rectangular shaped.

Other buildings would be used to house cattle or pigs or for other storage purposes. The terms ráth or lios are used interchangeably nowadays for the site in toto but in the past their meaning was differentiated. Ráth referred to the earthen rampart surrounding the enclosure, whereas lios was used to denominate the space within the enclosure and by extension to the dwelling house. In one of his poems Gofraidh Fionn used the word lios to describe his dwelling “Tearc trá ón lios a luighim” (MBBF p. 53).

### **What function did they serve?**

Each day on my way to school I passed a ring-fort in an adjacent farm. In those days it was popularly referred to as a fairy fort and the abode of the wee folk. There was also a strong taboo against interfering with them for fear of incurring misfortune. A perusal of the 1938 contributions, submitted to the Folklore Commission by various schools in the parish, confirm that this was a widely held view. There are lots of references to these fairy forts. In some instances they are called Danish Forts. This may reflect a corruption of Danann since, according to the ancient myths, the Tuatha Dé Danann were believed to have gone underground to escape from invading Fomorians.

Reverence for these fairy forts as the home of the “good people” served to ensure their preservation over many centuries. Ironically, with the advent of the mechanical digger and the increased sophistication of outlook, many were ploughed out in the 1960s and 1970s in pursuit of more profitable farming. However, the more recent increased appreciation of heritage is serving once again to ensure their survival and preservation. On the circuit of Clara we will pass about a dozen sites in all.

The popular misconceptions of the past are now abandoned and the term ring-fort is seen as a misnomer. They did not serve a military defensive purpose but were defended homesteads. The earthen bank surmounted, possibly, with a palisade would have afforded protection from cattle raiders and marauding wild animals such as wolves and foxes. According to the sagas and annals cattle raiding was common in those times but they would have been swift incursions rather than sustained attacks. The enclosing embankment would have served a purpose somewhat similar to the surrounding wall of a modern day farmyard. Most forts were univallete (had a single embankment).

### **Date of construction and occupation of ring-forts.**

Excavations, literary texts and law tracts all help to date ring-forts. A number of ring-forts in Co Cork have been excavated - Garranes 1942, Garryduff 1962, Lisleagh 1980s and the Lislehane souterrain in 1982. Earlier dating techniques were based on stratification - the finds in the lowest strata being the oldest. Considerable refinement in dating techniques took place during the second half of the 20th Century, especially the use of radiocarbon dating and dendrochronology.

All organic material contain the chemical carbon and when it dies there is a gradual depletion in the radiocarbon level, which can be used as a measurement for dating tree stumps, charcoal, bones etc. Dendrochronology is a method of dating by counting tree rings. Professor Baillie of Queens University has developed a calendrical template, based on the varying annual growth of oak tree rings, which provides a time scale stretching back to 5289BC. This is an extremely accurate dating technique if suitable oak-wood is available from the postholes of dwellings or other buildings in the ring-fort.

The widely held view of scholars is that ring-forts date from the Early Christian Period i.e. 500-1000AD.

In the seminal work on ring-forts by Matthew Stout, a historical geographer from

UCD, his firm conclusion is that the majority of ring-forts were occupied and probably constructed during the 300 year period from the beginning of the 7th to the end of the 9th Century A.D. (Stout 1997.24)

Mention of ring-forts is common in the early Irish sagas and legends, which were written down in the Eight Century and connect us with the heroic past. Similarly, lives of the Saints and early Irish law tracts give us a fascinating insight into the structure and economy of society in those days.

Law tracts such as the 8th Century Crith Gabhlach contain a wealth of material about the countryside, the tools used and the buildings. It analyses the different grades of farmers and gives the “honour price” for the different professions using cattle as the value index.

### **What kind of farming did they engage in?**

The various historical documents, already mentioned, provide a glimpse into the kind of farming pursued. Cogitosus, who wrote on the life of St Brigid in 690, tells us that, before she entered the convent in Kildare, she was involved in cattle and sheep herding and in churning and the making of butter. From the law tracts it is evidently clear that cattle were the most important commodity and were used for ploughing as well as for milk and meat. Other livestock included sheep and pigs. In this area it is likely that sheep herding would have occurred on the extensive mountain pastures close to the farmsteads. The most prosperous farmers would have a complete plough-team of four oxen (castrated bulls), whereas the free commoners (ocaire) would have one plough ox. From about 600 A.D. onwards a significant advance in agriculture took place with the introduction of the mould-board plough and coulter which enabled the sod to be turned. So long narrow fields replaced the more rectangular shaped ones. We get the measurement furlong from the length along which a team of oxen was made to cut a furrow.

Cooperative farming was common at harvest time (hence the notion of meitheal) and in shared herding of livestock. A consortium of neighbouring farmers would own flat watermills. As well as dairy farming, tillage or wheat growing the farmers of those days engaged in other activities such as weaving, metalwork and the making of bone combs, beads etc. Large amounts of calfskin (vellum) were needed in monasteries for the illuminated manuscripts, which are the glory of Ireland’s Golden Age.

Stout sums up the position as follows “despite evidence of tillage and manufacture it can be concluded those ring-fort dwellers were principally cattle farmers and that dairy farming was their chief economic pursuit” (1997.38). His conclusion, regarding the dating of these sites and their primary function, is based on data obtained from about fifty excavated sites and his assessment of the results of some local surveys.

## **Chapter 6. Marian Grottos - Liscahane and Clara Road.**

“Clinging to Mother Mary is my way to God” (Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dalaigh).

During the Marian Year in 1954 a number of roadside grottos to honour Mary Immaculate were erected throughout the country. That Marian Year was especially dedicated to commemorate the centenary of the solemn definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in 1854. Pope Pius IX had solemnly declared, a hundred years previously, that God had specially prepared Mary to be a worthy mother of His Son by preserving her sinless from the first moment of her conception. Eight years before that event the Bishops of the United States had made the Immaculate Conception the patronal feast of that country and in Washington DC a national shrine was erected in her honour.

Four years after the dogma was proclaimed Our Lady appeared to Bernadette in Lourdes and announced to her “I am the Immaculate Conception” as if to show heavenly confirmation of the event.

The feast of the conception of Mary by St Anne was already being celebrated in Europe from the year 1050 and devotion to Our Lady under this title spread after the Franciscan theologian Duns Scotus defended the doctrine in 1263.

Two grottos were erected in Millstreet parish to honour the centenary, one at Liscahane and the other on the Clara Road. Both events are featured in Picture Millstreet. (p.172). A committee was formed in February 1954 to undertake the erection of the Liscahane Grotto. Funds for the project were collected on a house-to-house basis. The site was donated free of charge.

### **Description of Liscahane Grotto.**

The grotto at Liscahane cross has some aesthetic appeal and is different from the traditional Lourdes type grotto we see at Clara and Tubrid Well. A graceful figure of Our Lady is set in a circular concrete niche surmounted by a cross. This niche arcs out to form an extended base terminating in twin piers which are topped by urns with green plants. A wrought iron railing with a double gate fronts the crescent shaped grotto and there are seats, plants and flower-pots to enhance the sacred space.

The erection of these grottos is a reflection of the strong devotion to Mary, which has been a characteristic feature of this parish. Already, two of the three churches in the parish are dedicated to Mary. Cullen honours the Nativity of Mary while Ballydaly is dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes. In addition there are a number of fine stained glass windows in St Patrick’s Church Millstreet, honouring Our Lady under various titles, including a window commemorating her Immaculate Conception. In the Irish language a special name has been reserved for Mary. She is known as Muire and the Primary School in Millstreet is entitled Scoil Mhuire.

Local devotion to Mary finds strong expression in the many people of every age who visit Tubrid Well and grotto, throughout the year, to honour Our Lady of Lourdes. During the month of May, particularly, a constant flow of people gather there to pray and pay rounds.

I remember a Carmelite priest being once asked how he might account for the strong devotion to Mary which appears to be a special strand of Irish spirituality and almost gives her the status as a fourth person of the Trinity. “It is not” he responded “ that we want to put Mary on the same basis as the Holy Trinity but rather that we see ourselves as related to the Trinity on our mother’s side.”

When I was perusing the submissions by the local schools to the Folklore Commission in 1937, I came across this prayer, in page 213, which was submitted by Máire Ni Corcora of Seancnoc:

“Ar chomairce Muire do cuireas aréir mé. Cuirim mé féin anocht  
Faoi chomairce a h-Aon Mhic, go mislaid Peadar an Geata go  
Réidh, nár leigidh Michael ar a láimh clé mé, go mbeiridh an  
Maighdean Mhuire ins na fláthais léi féin mé”.

## **Chapter 7. Mount Leader – The Big House of the Gentry.**

“Low and lovely is Mount Leader; ’Tis for all our eyes a treat  
With mountains high above and the river at its feet”

Situated on the side of a ridge, which slopes down from Clara to the Finnow River, Mount Leader is surrounded by picturesque woodland. Viewed from a distance it looks desolate and abandoned whilst retaining something of its former elegance. Close up, however, the extent of the decay and dilapidation becomes much more evident. Great Houses, like Mount Leader, were a dominant feature of the rural landscape in the 18th and 19th Century. The prestige and impact of these houses with their well-appointed demesnes is well illustrated in the Taylor Maps of 1778 and the Grand Jury Map of 1811. The elegant Georgian architecture of the homes of the Ascendancy Class has certainly enriched our cultural heritage. Although these monuments represent a dominant and much despised class and an oppressive era in our history, they are, nevertheless, a priceless part of our multicultural legacy. They have outlived their term of existence, yet one cannot but rue the gradual decline of such fine buildings and feel saddened by the fact that floor by floor and stone by stone these stately edifices “fall and fade in passionless decay”.

Mount Leader was home to the Leader family from the last quarter of the 17th Century until the first quarter of the 20th Century. Two brothers, John and Henry Leader, acquired the land after their father, a Cromwellian soldier, had settled in Kinsale. The Leaders continued to live in this area for about six generations.

The present house replaced an earlier structure referred to by Smith in ‘History of Cork’ (1750. p.188).

“To the North (of Caum Carrig) is the lofty cone called Clara Hill. At the foot of it is Mount Leader, a good house and plantation of Mr. Edward Leader”. Prior to the arrival of the Leaders the ridge was known as Droimin Ui Scannlain but the renaming of it was an assertion of their cultural dominance.

### **Description of the House.**

This fine Georgian House is situated on an elevated (160 metres) location against a background of dense plantations and fronted by fine parkland, which offers a commanding view of the surrounding countryside. The house is a two storey building of six bays and eaved roof. It rests on a basement, half of which is visible above ground level. Two of the central bays form a pedimental breakfront, the lower half is a portico supported by four Ionic columns. Twelve stone steps lead up to the portico and the entrance door, which is flanked by tall sidelights. Until recently the pediment carried the armorial bearings of the Leader family. It is now missing, having been removed or else having collapsed among the rubble of fallen masonry.

The rear elevation has five bays with a central tall pointed window. The house width is two bays deep. The roof has fallen in, as have the wooden floors and the plaster cornices are either dangling in fragments or strewn among the rubble. To the rear of the building there is a courtyard with a range of abandoned buildings, including a two storey coach house and farm buildings with diamond shaped building. There is another enclosure to the rear of the farm buildings with about a half dozen kennel like structures. These were used as stands for corn.

Mount Leader is typical of the Big Houses, set in demesne lands during the 18th and 19th Century, which were held by the landlords for their own use but dependant on surrounding tenant farmers. They evolved as distinct socio-economic areas with a layout incorporating the Great House, gardens, orchards, woods, ponds and farmland. They were a dominant feature of the landscape, reflected in the maps of the time. They survived into the early decades of the 20th Century. Inspired by ideas from England, the gentry designed the landscape around the house to give it a natural feel. The “natural” parkland appearance was achieved with the assistance of a landscape designer and with considerable labour and effort.

The design layout took full advantage of the terrain. Noble trees were dotted here and there to create an imposing setting and reflect the owner’s power, status and wealth.

The centrality of the house was further emphasised by the long approach via tree-lined avenues from two directions.

From the Macroom Road Mount Leader is approached by a long avenue lined with elms, chestnuts and other specimen trees and rhododendron hedges. There is a gatehouse at this entrance. A similar avenue led from the Clara Road at Inchileigh, where the Industrial Estate is now located.

Other elements to be seen at Mount Leader are the orchards, kitchen garden and grass tennis court to the front of the gardens, the layout of which can still be identified on the lawn to the left of the house. An artificial pond was created to the right close to the Industrial Estate.

The present house was built around 1840 if the wall plaque to the rear can be taken to indicate the construction date. Another suggestion puts it slightly earlier, at 1828.

I do not know the location of the original house, which was replaced by the present mansion. In 1750 Smith noted its existence. Rev Stanley Craven, who witnessed the Will of Henry Wallis, was living there in 1734.

### **The Leader Crest.**

The Leader Crest bears the motto: “*Probum non poenitet*” which means “The honest person does not repent”.

A surrounding stone wall is a feature of many demesnes and it survives almost intact at Mount Leader. The two photographs featured illustrate the sharp contrast between the house in its heyday and its present melancholic neglected appearance.

“The House of the Planter is known by the trees”(Bord na Móna TV ad).

Great houses, such as Mount Leader, Keale and Drishane, are surrounded by vast woodland. The landlords planted the many mature and ageing trees we see today. Up to the middle of the 18th Century there was little incentive for the tenants, who leased land from the owners, to plant trees for these were legally the property of the landlord. However, a series of Parliamentary Acts progressively improved the tenants’ position in that matter, so they became entitled to all the trees or their equivalent value when their leases expired.

By the 1800’s tree planting got underway in earnest. Cork was reckoned among the most densely planted counties, where tenants had planted nine and a half million trees over a seventy year period. It was necessary for them to register the number planted in order to prove ownership. Fortunately, the Register of Tree Planting in Cork survives. The pattern of planting is illustrated in the case of John Leader of Keale who planted 2,500 trees (a mixture of fir, oak and alder) in 1813. Others recorded include J H Orpen, Cloughboula (5,200); Phillip Rubic, Aubane and Gortavehy (19,200) and Rev John C Mongan, Tullig (36,700). No figures are available for the Mount Leader family but the evidence of abundant planting is still clearly to be seen today.

### **The fate of the Great Houses.**

One of the greatest transformations of land ownership resulted from the Cromwellian settlement. As a result, Catholics, who constituted 75% of the population, owned only 5% of the land. The Act of Settlement identified the rebel landowners who were banished or transported. Charles McDonagh McCarthy forfeited Kilmeedy Castle and surrounding lands. What happened in the immediate generations is unclear, but according to Burke’s Landed Gentry, two brothers Henry and John Leader purchased lands in Tullig, Mount Leader and Keale, around 1680, and their descendants continued to live in the area for the next 220 years or so. The Leader family were of English origin. They arrived in Kinsale as Cromwellian settlers in the mid 17th Century, where John married an Irish lady named Alice.

The Leaders lived in the area throughout the Golden Years of the Protestant

Ascendancy and built large palatial houses at Mount Leader and Keale. They enjoyed a privileged lifestyle until the second half of the 19th Century. They were supported by tenant farmers' rent. The prevailing economic conditions were largely dictated by the policy of the London Government, which, in the mid 18th Century, reduced the growth of grain and amount of tillage in Ireland to protect the produce of the farmers in England. In 1760, the ban on cattle export was lifted so that landowners switched to dairy pasture.

The second half of the 19th Century was a time of turmoil. It saw the rise of Fenianism with the establishment of the IRB in 1858 and the increase in land agitation. The tenant farmers had no security of tenure on rented land and could be evicted if they failed to pay the rent. In 1879 Michael Davitt founded the Land League and Parnell was its first president. The winter of 1878/9 was severe and the prospect of another famine loomed. Many tenant farmers found themselves in difficulty because of crop failure and unpaid rent so the Land League organised rallies and demonstrations and effectively used tactics, such as boycott, to further their aims.

Davitt used official statistics to show that fewer than 20,000 persons owned the whole of Ireland and fewer than 2,000 owned 70% of the land whilst 3,000,000 tenants and labourers owned nothing. As the unrest grew, it focused the minds of the English liberal politician Gladstone to deal with problems in Ireland. In 1881 he passed the Land Act, which introduced the 3F's (fair rent, free sale and fixity of tenure) to meet the demands of the Land League. The Land Purchase Act of 1885 allowed tenants using Government loans to purchase lands.

The Wyndham Act of 1903 completed the process. The radical mass action resulted in a redistribution of land that saw the demise of the Protestant Ascendancy because without regular income their economic base was undermined. Many of the Big Houses entered the final chapter of their existence and the memorable and gracious lifestyle of their inhabitants. The land agitation and the process of redistribution, which followed the Land Acts greatly accelerated the demise of the Great House and all it stood for. By the 1920's more than half the country was affected by the reforms. The fate of the demesnes and great houses varied. Some were un-saleable assets and were abandoned and later demolished, as happened at Coomlegane.

Some thirty or so in County Cork were targeted and burned down by the IRA during the troubles and a much greater number suffered the same fate during the Civil War. Some survived as hotels, schools or convents, as was the case with Drishane. In other instances, people who purchased the properties were only interested in the land and left the houses fall into decay to become haunting ruins.

Matthew Catie Kelleher returned from San Francisco, USA, in 1910 and bought Mount Leader from Henry Williamson Leader. He sold it a few years later to the Pomeroy's. James Pomeroy, a veterinary surgeon, lived there until the 1970's. Noel C. Duggan was the next owner and he in turn sold it to John Murphy of Cahirbarna, its present owner.

### **The Image of the Big House.**

The responses evoked by the "Big House" have changed over time. It is not difficult to see why the Big House was perceived in the past as a symbol of the oppressive landlord system and of the wealth, privilege and social distance that accompanied it. But the active disdain and resentment it generated has given way in recent times to a more positive recognition of the social and cultural significance of the landed gentry during that era of our history. The remaining houses are architecturally imposing buildings on the landscape. It is sad to witness their ruin and decay. They are worthy of preservation.

### **History of the Leader family.**

All the directories of the 19th Century (Pigotts, Slaters, Guys) refer to the propertied

classes and the owners of the Big House as “the landed gentry”.

Mount Leader was one of about ½ dozen such houses in the hinterland of Millstreet. Two brothers, Henry and John Leader, who were descendants of a Cromwellian settler in Kinsale, purchased lands here in the last quarter of the 17th Century. Henry settled in Mount Leader and John at Keale, about four kilometers to the NE of Millstreet. In the period between the arrival of the two brothers and the death of Mary Isabella Faber in 1958, at least six generations of the Leader family have resided in this area. She was the last member of the family to have lived here.

The other residence associated with the Leaders is Tullig House. Abraham Morris of Dunkettle leased adjacent lands to the Leaders of Tullig. When Henry, the last member of that line, died on September 1st 1836 Morris withdrew the lease. The Southern Reporter, at that time, recorded the widespread expectation in the Millstreet area that Morris intended to expel all the Catholic tenants on these lands and replace them with Protestants. It seems that the Nash family was the next to live there. The O’Riordans followed them and then came the Cashmans who are the present owners.

Through marriage links the Leaders extended outwards from here as they succeeded to other estates at Dromagh, Rosnalee (near Kanturk) and Clonmoyle.

A detailed pedigree of the Leader family is to be found in Burkes Irish Family Records (Vol. II Pg. 700-703). Supplementary information on the family can be gleaned from church records, wills, newspaper reports and tombstone records.

### **The following is a synopsis of their history.**

Henry, who settled in Mount Leader, had three sons and three daughters. The sons were John (born 1698), Thomas (born 1700) and Henry of Tullig (born 1705). John married Margaret Herbert of Muckross and was succeeded by Edward. Thomas married Frederica St Leger and was murdered by his cousins the O’Keeffes. Henry Married Christabella Philpot, daughter of William of Dromagh.

They had four sons and four daughters. The sons were John (born 1742), William (born 1743), Henry (born 1745) and Nicholas, who emigrated to the USA.

The second son, William, purchased Mount Leader from his cousin John, son of the above named Edward. William married Margaret St Leger who bore him four sons and four daughters. He died in 1828. His eldest son Nicholas Philpot Leader (born 1773) succeeded to his grandfather’s estate. In 1807 he married Margaret Nash, daughter and heiress of Andrew Nash, Rosnalee. Nicholas was a Barrister-in-law and was MP for Kilkenny from 1830-2. He was very influential and expended a large amount of capital in developing the coalmines at Dromagh and Dysert, which offered constant employment to a considerable number of people in the half century before the Famine. He provided the site for the new Catholic Church at Dromagh and donated £150 towards the building fund. There is a commemorative plaque on the external wall of the church, which features his coat of arms and makes reference to the bequest.

The mining output was sufficient to meet the extensive demands for coal but Nicholas was eager to develop more efficient ways of transporting it to Youghal for export. In June 1800 he attended a meeting in Dublin, which sought to reawaken interest in a navigation canal. In 1755 the Irish Parliament heard a proposal from County Cork landowners to make the Blackwater valley navigable from Kanturk to Youghal. In 1756 an initial grant of £6,000 was passed to the Commissioners to begin work. Wilham Ockenden, a Dutch engineer, was engaged to supervise its construction. Three and a half miles and two canal locks were constructed but the project ran into difficulty when the Parliament refused a further grant. It suffered an additional setback when Ockenden died in 1763. Nicholas P. Leader was keen to restart the project, as the transport of his coal was the basis for the scheme. Some years later (1834), there was another attempt to revive interest in the canal. His cousin John Leader of Keale gave the opening address at a meeting convened in Cork

for that purpose. Because of opposition from some landowners, the project was abandoned. Today, the only evidence of the scheme is the three and a half miles of canal and the locks still to be seen at Dromineen, near Mallow.

Nicholas Philpot had three sons, Nicholas, William and Henry. Mr Vaughan of Kanturk tutored them privately. He was a graduate of Trinity College. Tragically, he was drowned in a boating accident in Killarney Lakes in July 1825 while the children were still in their teens.

Two brothers of Nicholas became clergymen - Warham, who became a Rector of St Anne's, Shandon and the other a Curate at St Peter's, Cork. His youngest brother, Henry, married Elizabeth Ann Eustace of Robertstown, Co Kildare in 1829 and they lived at Mount Leader. About this time a meeting of the new Kerry Coach Company was held at Buckley's Inn, in Millstreet, and Henry was co-opted on to the Board of Directors. This couple had one son, Henry Eustace, born in 1833. He was a JP and joined the British Army, becoming a Captain in the 16th Lancers. When Queen Victoria passed through Millstreet on route to Killarney, in 1861, the train slowed down at the station. Henry was among the welcoming party that greeted her.

According to Returns of Landowners, published by the UK Government, in 1872, Henry Eustace Leader owned 1,597 acres at Mount Leader; his cousin John owned 1,376 acres at Keale; Nicholas Philpot Leader owned 5,632 acres at Dromagh and Henry of Clonmoyle owned 2,418 acres.

Captain Henry Eustace had four sons from his marriage to Helen Augusta Williamson in 1868. The eldest, Henry Williamson, was a GP and Member of the Muskerry and Blackmore Hunt. Next eldest was Lionel (born 1870) who became a Lieutenant Colonel in the King's Regiment. He fought in WW1 and was mentioned in dispatches. He died in 1969. The other two died at a relatively young age and were unmarried.

After Henry Eustace's death in 1876, his widow Helen married Charles Arthur Duncan, a Barrister. Sadly, in 1890, Charles sought a dissolution of their marriage in the London Courts, on the grounds of an alleged liaison between his wife and a Colonel Engelheart. She acknowledged that she kept an open house at Mount Leader but denied any impropriety. When her son returned home from London after the proceedings he received a warm welcome as a gesture of support for him and his mother. "The whole population turned out en masse to do honour to this worthy scion of a noble house. There was a torchlight procession from the town to his house at Mount Leader". When the crowd had assembled in front of the door Henry and Dr Richard Radley Leader stood on the steps to greet them and thanked them for their enthusiastic reception. Henry hoped they would continue to be his friends for the future. All then proceeded back to Millstreet where Henry was chaired from end to end of the town and conveyed to Dr Leader's home at Westbourne. (Cork Examiner Report. 14<sup>th</sup> July 1890).

### **The Culture and Lifestyle of the Leader Family.**

We know from schooldays that some of the Normans became Gaelicised after a stay in Ireland. They became more Irish than the Irish themselves (*Hibernes ipsis Hiberniores*). However, this was not the case with the later Munster planters (Raleigh, Spenser and St Leger) and with those who settled here following the Cromwellian and Williamite Wars. All of these continued to retain their language, religion and loyalty to the Crown. The Leaders too maintained their English habits, customs and interests throughout the two hundred years or more that they lived in this area. They pursued foxhunting, horse riding and other sports. They entertained their friends with regular house parties, dances and tennis.

Visitors to the country and Anglo-Irish novelists have contributed a store of legends about the lifestyle of the Ascendancy Class. One habit that provoked widespread comment from visitors was their huge consumption of wine. Lord Chesterfield remarked that many

were impoverished by the great quantity of Claret they thought necessary to drink, because of mistaken notions of hospitality and dignity. We know from the divorce account already mentioned that the Leaders kept open house and entertained lavishly. This was in line with incidental documentary accounts that we derive from the Anglo-Irish novelists such as Maria Edgeworth, Somerville and Ross, Elizabeth Bowen and others who described different phases of history of the “landed gentry”.

Marriage within a family network (i.e. to those similar in religious background, status and outlook) was characteristic of these families. Thus we find marriage links between the Leaders and the Herberts of Muckcross, the Eagers of Ballymalis Castle, the St Legers of Cork, the Puxleys of Dunboy, the Nashs and Philpots of Dromagh and Burke Roches of Trabolgan. One notable exception was the marriage in 1795 of John Leader to Johanna McCartie of Rathduane, a Catholic. Marriage between first cousins was also frequent. I have noted three instances of this in the Leader Family Tree. One reason for this may have been that Protestants were thin on the ground.

Undoubtedly, an air of superiority prevailed in the attitude of landlords towards their tenants and workers. This sometimes found expression in contempt, mixed with amusement about the foibles and the droll ways of the peasants, as they called them. The Leaders worshipped, married and were duly buried in the established Church of Ireland at St Annas, Pound Hill. A number of them are listed amongst its church wardens. At least four of the women married Protestant clergymen and Warham and William, as noted already, became clergymen themselves.

The recurring names amongst the male members of the Leader Family are Henry, William, Nicholas, John and Richard, which have an English ring to them. The female names are even more indisputably English in tone viz. Elizabeth, Henrietta, Albina Charlotte, Constance, Harriet, Emilia, Sarah Jane, Maud, Ada and Alice.

Some of the family, as already noted, became officers in the British Army. I have identified the following: Captain Henry Eustace of Mount Leader; his son Lionel in the King’s Regiment; John of Keale, a Colonel in the Bedford and Herts. Regiment, who was wounded in World War 1; another John of Keale who was Surgeon Major with the Royal Battalion in 1842 and Henry Peregrine of the Sixth Dragoons who fought in the Boer War and in India.

One interesting feature of their naming patterns was that successive descendants of the males took the maiden surname of their mother as their middle name.

When the Poor Law Unions were established in the mid 19th Century they, invariably, served as ex-officio members of the Board of Guardians. Some functioned as JPs and County Sherrifs also. The Leaders of Keale House especially, produced a number of doctors. John Leader and Richard Radley Leader were medical officers to the Workhouse and they and other members of the family served as dispensary doctors during the late 19th and early 20th Century.

Various people, who made comment about them as landlords, say that “they were not a bad lot”. As far as is known, no evictions were made from their lands. We do know, however, that towards the end of the century, tenants of Mr. Henry Leader applied to the Commissioners for a fair rent to be fixed. James Connell, who rented thirty four acres and Mr. McCabe, who had ten acres of tillage and the rest in arable land were amongst the applicants.

The enterprising spirit of the Leaders is evidenced in their efforts to develop local industry. Coalmining, linen production and corn milling were some of their endeavours. We have an accounts record from Leader’s Mill near Banteer for the year 1837-8. These are amounts paid out by Mr. Leader; Value of wheat purchased, £4,818; payment to William Leader £3,262; mill wages £150; running expenses etc. £162. It seems that workers were paid five shillings a week. It is very difficult to judge from our vantage point today whether or not that was a fair and just wage.

The Leaders too had their share of tragedy. Two were murdered and one was lost at

sea.

In conclusion, we must never forget that whilst the Leaders lived in the grandeur of a Big House that stood out in landscaped grounds, with neat gate lodges at the end of each avenue, their workers lived mainly in mean hovels and botháns made of mud and earthen sods. One is left to ponder what awareness, if any, the Leaders and landlords generally had of the dreadful living conditions of their workers.

## **Chapter 8.** **Kilmeedy Ecclesiastical Site – Cradle of Christianity.**

Kilmeedy is the name of an ancient ecclesiastical site just off the Macroom Road. It is also the name of a townland divided into East and West. The name is an anglicisation of Cill mo Ide. Cill is an Irish loan word for the Latin word “cella“, meaning church or monastic habitat. “Mo Ide“ is a hypocoristic or affectionate way of addressing the saint, known in English as, Ita. She was a 6th Century abbess who founded a community at Cluain Chreideal in County Limerick.

Cill was the most prolific of ecclesiastical place-names before the 12th Century and its usage may go back to the earliest stages of monastic development, e.g. Cill Dara - the foundation of St Brigid. Kilmeedy was very likely the original name of the parish of Millstreet, which later became Drishane by which name it continued to be designated until the first quarter of the 20th Century. In the Papal Registers there are a number of 15th Century reference to Drissean alias Kylmide or Killmide. Cill is also a prominent element in many parish names. It accounts for one fifth of the total number of which there are 50 in County Cork and 572 nationwide. Formerly there may have been many more.

Cill has extended its range to also designate many town-lands throughout the country. There are 3,375 in all (P O’Connor 2001:47). Killmeedy is the only one in the parish of Millstreet. Nearby are Kilcorney, Killowen, Kilmacrane, Kilnamartra, Kilcummin and Killarney. The majority have the generic element Cill to which is added the name of the founding saint. Killeedy, 10 kilometres south of Newcastlewest in Limerick is the ancient Cluain Chredail, which marks the site of the nunnery founded by St Ita. It consists of a sacred well, the burial place of St Ita and the fragmentary remains of a Romanesque Church.

St Ita is venerated in many places throughout Munster. There are two places called Kilmeedy in County Cork; one here in Millstreet parish and the other near Ballymartle. There is Kilmeedy near Ballingarry in Limerick and Kilmeaden and Rosmide in Waterford.

### **Fame of St Ita.**

After St Brigid she is the most famous of Irish female saints. Amongst her many titles by her biographers, she is called a “second Brigid” or “Brigid of Munster”. Féilire Aengus (Pg 36) refers to “the white sun of Munster’s women, Ita of Cluain Chredail”. She founded a school for the education of young boys and she evidently had many pupils for she is known as “foster mother of the Saints of Erin”.

Cuimin of Coindeire states in a poem that she never laid her cheek for rest for love of the Lord:

“Mide loved great nursing  
Great humility without ambition;  
Her cheek on the pillow she never laid  
for love of the Lord”

Listed among the great saints she fostered were, St Brendan (Feast Day May 16th), St Mochoemóg (Pulcherius) of Liathmór (March 13th), St Cuimine Fóta (November 12th) and St Fachtna of Rosscarbery (August 14th). An entry in the Annals of Inisfallen for the year 570 refers to the repose of Ita of Cluain, foster mother of Jesus Christ and Brendan of Clonfert.

There are various sources of information on the life of St Ita. The task of writing the lives of the Saints of Ireland was undertaken by Fr John Colgan of Louvain and was completed by 1645. He used an ancient life of Ita, extracted from Codex Kilkenniensis, now in the Marsh Library in Dublin. This he considered was composed soon after her death. The life comprises six chapters. In 1910 Charles Plummer published 'Vitae Sanctorum Hibernae' in Oxford and used a medieval life of St Ita as his basis (12th Century). The chief particulars of her life are also to be found in John Hanlon's 'Lives of the Saints' (Vol 1 p. 200-216) and in the 'Wisdom of the Irish Saints' by Edward Sellner, Ave Maria Press, 1993, in 'A life of St Ita' by Ide ni Riain, Clonmore and Reynolds 1964.

### **Life and Ministry of St Ita.**

Ita, initially known as Deirdre, was born into a noble family of Clan Deisi in Waterford around 500 AD. Her father was Kennfeolad, son of Cormac, and her mother was queen Nechta. As a young person she dreamt that an angel of the Lord approached her and gave her three precious stones. When she awoke the angel explained that the stones signified the coming of the Blessed Trinity to her. When she expressed a desire to consecrate her life to Christ her father was defiantly opposed to the idea. He was disappointed that she had turned down a suitor for marriage and he allowed her further time to think. Her mother and her priest Fintan tried to persuade her father to allow her take the veil. They called on an influential local chieftain to intervene in the hope that he might be more ready to listen to him. Her father still vehemently refused so she said "Leave my father alone for awhile and eventually he will be compelled by Jesus Christ to let me go wherever I wish to serve God".

As the end of the waiting period allowed for the hoped for marriage by her father drew close, Ita fasted for three days and three nights. On the fourth day her father came to her and humbly spoke "I know God has planned great things for you and that on the Day of Judgement you will stand before him as the mother of many. Go to the priest and receive the veil of virginity". He told her he had sent for Connla to escort her on her journey. So she went to her priest Fintan who bestowed on her the veil. She said her goodbyes and set off with two maidens in Connla's chariot for Conall Gabhra in west Munster.

Ita prayed to the Lord to show her the place where she should serve him. The angel told her she would be patron of the area called Ui Conaill, at the foot of Sliabh Luachra. When she reached the place assigned to her, the local chieftain welcomed her and offered her a large tract for her nunnery but she said that all she needed was a small plot to grow vegetables. So in imitation of her master, who voluntarily chose a life of poverty, she accepted four acres near a stream and established her monastery at Cluain Chredail (Kelleady).

She and her community devoted their time to prayer and to the education and nurturing of young boys placed in her care. Fosterage was common in those days and boys were sometimes entrusted to foster parents at a very young age. At other times they were placed from the age of six or seven up to adolescent years.

We know from the Life of St Brendan that Ita cared for him from the age of two until seven. Cuimin Fóta was left in a little basket (cuimin) at the church of Cell Ita by his mother, Fiachna's daughter, because he was the child of an incestuous relationship. Ita nursed him until eventually his mother came to visit him and revealed who he was. He succeeded Brendan as Abbot of Clonfert.

On another occasion, Beanus, an artisan in wood and stone, came to the territory of

Ui Conaill from the province of Connacht. He was engaged by Ita to build some addition to the monastery. Beoanus became captivated by the beauty of Ita's sister, Nessa who had dedicated her life to celibacy. He sought Nessa's consent to the proposal of marriage and Ita encouraged her to become his wife and blessed them. Subsequently, Nessa gave birth to a son who was to become the great St Mocheomóg of Liathmore.

Ita was the source of numerous miracles wrought through her intercession. Fergus, afflicted with eye trouble, was cured of his malady. Her prophetic insight helped her to expose secret transgressions leading people to repentance. She herself suffered a meritorious martyrdom for the Lord. She endured a large stag beetle, which burrowed into her side and bore her bodily pain and affliction with great patience.

When a sister asked her what three things were most pleasing to God, she replied:

1. Confident resignation of a pure heart.
2. A simple religious life.
3. Magnanimity with charity.

Many people had great confidence in her intercessory prayer. The Annals of Inisfallen (553) and the Four Master (546) attribute the victory, gained by her people over the Corcu Oche at the Battle of Cuilen, to her powerful prayer.

In the Féilire Oengus Pg.45, there is a lovely legend recorded about her. She is reported to have said to her sisters in the community:

"I will not take aught from the Lord until he gives me His Son out of Heaven, in the shape of a baby to be fostered by me". An attending angel told her that what she asked of the Lord would be granted her. So Christ came to her in the form of a baby and she composed a lullaby called Isucan.

Practically every anthology of Irish poetry contains this lovely hymn and there are two translations of it in K. Hoagland's "1,000 years of Irish Poetry". Although attributed to Ita, it is in fact dated to the 9th Century. The following translation is in the metre of the original. St Ita uses Isucan, an endearing diminutive of the name of Jesus. Isa is the ancient form of Iosa, which becomes Isucan in the poem (Jesukin).

**Jesukin.**  
**St Ita (B 480 D 570)**

Jesukin  
Lives my little cell within;  
What was wealth of cleric high -  
All is lie but Jesukin

Nursling nurtured, as 'tis right -  
Harbours here no servile spright -  
Jesu of the skies, who art  
Next my heart thro' every night!

Jesukin, my good for aye,  
Calling and will not have nay,  
Kings of all things, ever true,  
He shall rue who will away.

Jesu, more than Angels aid,  
Fosterling not formed to fade,  
Nursed by me in desert wild,  
Jesu, child of Judah's Maid.

Sons of kings and kingly kin

To my land may enter in;  
Guest of none I hope to be,  
Save of Thee, My Jesukin.

The opening line of an early poem addressed her as “Carias m’Ita mór altrom” - My Ita loved a great fostering. In her special vocation to nurture and form young boys in the ways of faith and her wish to nurture the Child Jesus in the form of a baby, she is an example for all involved in childcare. It would seem most apt to invoke her intercession on behalf of all children and younger people who have suffered abuse or maltreatment in religious institutions during the 20th Century.

### **Other qualities that inspired her religious life:**

- Her holiness and her dedication to heeding the voice of God when He spoke to her in dreams. It was because of her thirst (iota) for holiness that her name changed from Deirdre to Ita. She was fully aware of the Lord’s promise “If anyone thirsts, let that person come to me and fountains of living water will spring up within him/her” (John 7.8).
- The importance of prayer and meditation on the Holy Trinity was emphasised by Ita. One day a holy man asked her why she was more loved than others. In her reply she quoted back the words of a nun to her “you persevere in prayer and in meditation to the Holy Trinity” and then added her comment “that if anyone acts in that way, God will be ever with that person”.
- Devotion and reflection on the mystery of the Holy Trinity was a strong feature of her spirituality. In that regard she was very much in tune with a core feature of contemporary liturgical spirituality, which stresses the Trinitarian Pattern of Christian prayer. Liturgical prayer is addressed to God the Father, through Jesus Christ and in unity with the Holy Spirit. Conversely, all life and holiness comes to us from the Father, through His Son Jesus Christ and by the working of the Holy Spirit.
- Ita had a gift of prophetic insight, which enabled her to penetrate the secrets of peoples’ hearts. It helped her on one occasion to deflect suspicion away from a sister in another community who was wrongfully accused of stealing. She also used this gift to guide and direct people to make right choices and to point out to people their transgressions in order to lead them back to the right path. She was a compassionate and wise counsellor and there are various accounts of cures achieved through her intercession.

During the Middle Ages there was a widespread veneration of Ita as evidenced by the many churches dedicated in her honour. The devotion has persisted down to the present time. Coláiste Ide in Dingle recalls her memory and there was a school of distinction in Cork, Scoil Ite (1916-1954), founded by Eithne and Mary MacSwiney (sisters of Terence MacSwiney). A stained glass window in Loughrea Cathedral depicts her as a gracious gentle lady with Brendan and an angel at her feet. In the Honan Chapel at UCC Harry Clarke has executed a splendid window in her honour, using a deep rich blue as a dominant colour to suggest her ascetic way of life. A sculptured figure of St Ita adorns the facade of the church in Bantry.

As a sign of affection our ancestors were accustomed to add “mo” to a saint’s name, thus Ita’s church was rendered Cill mo Ide or Mide.

## **Did St Ita have a connection with Kilmeedy?**

Fr Ferris and other writers since his time have related her sojourn in this area for the purpose of evangelising the local community. However, there is no reference to this in any of the lives, which have come down to us, nor in the accounts of her life and work recorded by O'Hanlon, Ryan, Sellner and others. Her primary vocation was to foster young boys and to nurture their early religious formation. This was undertaken at her foundation at Cluain Credail and required stability of existence and thus precluded her from moving about from place. Following the direction of an angel she had left her family home in the county of the Déisi (Waterford) and settled in the Conaill Gabhra. It is here that the annalists record her death in 570. Her grave is marked and continues to be a place of pilgrimage on her feast day January 15th.

There are a various reasons to counter the assertion that she founded a convent at Kilmeedy.

Firstly, the evidence of Kilmeedy is of a stone church of which the foundation wall is extant. According to St Bede (111. 25 P.186), writing in 731, "the custom of the Irish was to erect churches hewn of oak with reed roofs". The earliest mention of stone churches in the Annals is after 800AD. So the foundation wall at Kilmeedy is later than 800 and might even be as late as the 12th Century.

Secondly, the foundation of St Ita in Limerick was known as Cluain Credail during her lifetime, It was only later known as Kileedy. Cill with an associated saint's name is not evidenced in primitive naming of ecclesiastical sites founded by them. It represents a later veneration of the particular saint by posthumously dedicating a church in her honour.

To conclude, there are certain features associated with Kilmeedy which point to it being an early ecclesiastical site, viz. sub-circular enclosures, evidence of burial including infants, some structural remains of a church, a holy well with associated ritual and bullaun stone. All these suggest it was an early church site, which was a centre of pastoral care. The strong indications are that it was the cradle of Christianity in this part of the parish of Millstreet, south of the Blackwater. It is not easy to determine when it first began to function as a church but there is converging evidence that it was the first location of the parish of Millstreet, following the diocesan re-organisation of the mid 12th Century.

There is an original parchment listing all the parishes named in the Papal Taxation of 1302-6 preserved in National Archives at Kew in London. The parishes of Nohoval, Cullen, Dromtarrife and Kilmeen are included within the Deanery of Hacudes (Aghadoe). Two parishes are included among this list, the names of which are now undecipherable. Jack Lane and I have scrutinised this document with the aid of ultra-violet light in the hope of deciphering the names but we were unsuccessful in our efforts. Our expectation that Kilmeedy might have been one of the names did not materialise.

The only firm documentary evidence in support of Kilmeedy being the earliest location of the parish is from the latter half of the 15th Century.

There is evidence among the early Irish church people of ardent devotion to saints of their own race. St Ita inspired such devotion in this area in the past. Her Holy Well used to be visited more frequently in former times. If this site is the cradle of Christianity in this area, it is regrettable that its significance is not highlighted in some way. The well is located on private land but the owner Gerry McCarthy has indicated his willingness for people to visit this sacred spot.

While the available evidence does not link her physically with this site, nevertheless, there must have been a strong devotion to her in this area throughout the centuries. Hence, her widespread fame throughout the counties of Waterford, Limerick, Cork and Kerry has undoubtedly merited for her the title "Brigid of Munster". Her memory lives on into modern times in the parish town-land named Kilmeedy.

## **Chapter 9.**

### **Kilmeedy Tower House.**

Kilmeedy is listed on Ordnance Survey maps as a castle and in the Archaeological Inventory for the county as a Tower House.

Kilmeedy Tower House is located about 3 kms south of Millstreet, just off the Macroom road. It is reached by taking the road marked L5223, which is a junction to the right just before coming to the Finnow Bridge. The tower is about 250 metres further along on the left having passed about a half dozen modern residences on route. It is situated on private land belonging to Jonathan Buckley, who lives in the adjacent farmhouse. Earlier this year, during the month of April, Eily Buckley took my brother Eddie and I on a tour of the castle, thus affording us the privileged opportunity to view the interior of the building as well.

Setting: Kilmeedy is a five storey rectangular structure built on low lying level ground overlooking the Finnow and affording a pleasant vista of Adrivale stretching away to the south west. There is a busy building yard to the rear and the tower front faces Clara and Mount Leader.

On reaching the castle (tower) it is worthwhile to pause and gain an overall view of the structure. The immediate impression is one of massive strength. As the mind wanders back to the time when it was built, one cannot but wonder at the immense effort involved for the stonemasons and labourers who raised this structure stone by stone to an impressive height. All the more so, because at the time there were no mechanical hoists or tubular steel scaffolding and all the heavy stones had to be manipulated into position by hand. The tallness of these vertical residences would be visible for miles around and would have served as a kind of icon of the status, impregnability and security of their owners.

#### **Description of exterior.**

The eastern façade, with entrance door, faces the road. One notices immediately that the tower is almost entirely denuded of the dressed stone of its window facings and door surrounds. There are six window openings on this face, arranged in a stepped pattern to the middle and left of this facade. One window at second floor level retains its sill lintel and dressed stone facing on the right side.

It is interesting to compare its present state with the Lawrence photo taken a 100 years ago, which shows that it was already devoid of its dressed openings even then and looking dilapidated. Lee, writing in 1914 says that a neighbouring farmer had removed the dressed stone some years previously. Eily Buckley was able to point out where about six of these stones were utilised as quoin stones in the building, which appears to the rear of the building in the Lawrence picture. This was formerly a dwelling house but is now used by its owners as an out-office.

The other notable feature is the projecting right-angle chamber in the NE corner at second floor level. In fortified buildings this is known as a Bartizan. It rests on five stone corbels and has an inclined stone roof. At the end of each angle there is an arrow or gun loop, which allowed for flanking fire to protect each facade. There are also openings in the floor of this chamber, which allowed the defenders to pour boiling liquid or drop missiles on assailants underneath. This defensive feature is popularly called a sniper box and a similar one in the SW corner has collapsed, although the supporting corbels are still in place.

Another feature that strikes one is the noticeable way in which the walls of the tower incline outwards at ground floor level. This is called batter and added strength and solidity to the base of the building. A particular subtlety of the architecture of the building is a slight rounding of the corner edges. This feature occurs in some Cork and Tipperary

towers and adds to the defensive strength and beauty of the structure.

The southern facade has a pair of windows at each floor level but only a single narrow light at ground floor level. The rear or west-facing wall has six windows placed at first, second and third floor levels. Also visible on this side is the sluice exiting from the latrine or garderobe located in the mural passage at second floor level. The fireplace takes up a major portion of the northern wall so as a result there is only one window on this façade. This is the only window that illumines the main hall and living quarters at second floor level.

Having completed the view of the exterior it remains only to consider the roof defences. Originally, one presumes, the tower was crowned with a battlemented top with alternating solid portions and gaps for shooting arrows or musket fire. The common Irish style was to have a stepped battlement i.e. raised at the corners. One can only surmise this was the case with Kilmeedy. One can but marvel that this solid pile of stonework has substantially survived for nearly 500 years, despite erosion by the weather, little maintenance and other vicissitudes of time.

### **Description of the interior.**

The entrance is a single arched door facing east, leading into a small vestibule or lobby. Much of the masonry around the doorway and over the arch is missing. On the north side of the lobby there is a sentry box or guardroom two metres square, where a guard would be on duty on a Rota basis. The entrance to this room has been re-edified using concrete blocks and is clearly visible from the road. Opposite on the south side there is a short straight staircase within the wall, giving access to the spiral staircase in the S E corner which climbs to the fourth floor and gives access to the chamber at each level. Just beyond the third floor level the spiral staircase is broken so that currently it is not possible to gain access to the fourth floor.

Directly over the lobby is a murder hole through which boiling liquid (e.g. tar) or other missiles could be dropped to deter unwanted intruders. The inner door of the lobby leads into the main ground-floor chamber.

### **Ground floor.**

The ground-floor room measures 7.8 metres by 6.1 metres. Its wooden ceiling is missing although the stone corbels which would have supported the oak beams are still in place, embedded in the north and south walls. The only light is from a single slit window in the south wall as it would have been dangerous to have wide opening lights at this floor level. Inset in the NW corner is a wall cupboard. Overhead can be seen the wicker centred vault of the first floor rounded ceiling which is oriented on an EW axis and shows sign of obvious repair in the centre. Wicker centring refers to the interwoven branches and twigs which were used as a structural support for the barrel vaulted arch whilst it was being constructed and was then taken away, but sometimes left its impress on the mortar. This room would have been used for storage purposes and as living quarters for the servants.

### **Main living quarters.**

The room above the vault, again accessed via the spiral staircase, would probably have been the main living quarters of the chieftain's family. It has a large fireplace in the North wall which is missing its lintel and two square set windows in the North and South walls towards the western side of the room. Each window embrasure has a door in the wall thickness leading into a mural passage. The narrow passage in the North wall leads to the West end and down a short flight of steps to a mural passage along the West wall, at the end of which is a garderobe or latrine. The external chute of this exited, as we saw, at

ground level on the west wall.

The wall passage in the south wall leads to the partially collapsed bartizan or angle chamber projecting from the SW corner, of which only the supporting corbels remain. This main chamber would have been the nerve centre of the dwelling. Here the chief and his family would have entertained honoured guests. It would have been furnished with oak tables and chairs. Meat would be cooked on a rotating spit in the fireplace and the walls would have echoed to the sounds of the music and conversation when a celebration was in full swing. There would have been no curtains, carpets or painted walls and rushes would have covered the floor. Candle rush torches would provide lighting in this dim lit chamber. Here births, marriages and deaths would have been celebrated.

Again the oak ceiling of this room is missing and our view is of the wicker-vaulted ceiling of the third floor level (fourth storey). There is access from the spiral staircase at the main chamber level to a mural passage in the east wall that leads into the NE bartizan.

### **Domestic sleeping quarters.**

The spiral stairway is broken beyond the third floor level so that it is not possible to gain access to the fourth floor chamber nor to the mural chamber in the north wall that is reached through a door in the embrasure of the single window in that chamber. This would have been the principal bedroom of the tower house and together with the chamber underneath would have been the private domestic quarters of the building.

Despite its much ruined state, a visit to the castle is really worthwhile as it helps one to visualise more accurately what living conditions were like during the 200 or so years during the heyday of tower living.

3,500, or so, castles or tower houses were constructed in Ireland in late medieval times, about half of which survive. They were erected by Gaelic and Anglo Norman chieftains during the 15th and 16th Centuries. Some modern scholars question this dating in an attempt to push back the origins of tower houses to the 14th Century but as yet there is no concrete evidence to support this. Commenting on the search for the formal origin of the tower house, Tadgh O'Keeffe (2000. p.51) has this to say "It is likely that tower houses were being built in the 14th Century but this is simply a readjustment of chronology and not a resolution of the problem of origins". The crux of the matter is that very few can be accurately dated. There is a heavy concentration of these towers to the south and west of the country, especially in Limerick, Cork, Clare, Galway and Tipperary. Limerick has approximately 300 and Cork about 200. They are by far the most conspicuous of vertical monuments dating from that period. There is some suggestion they may have originally been whitewashed, in which case they would have stood out impressively on a medieval rural landscape.

Typically, they are rectangular stone built towers, four to five storeys high. Although tall, they are compact in size, consisting of one room per floor accessed by a spiral staircase at the corner of the building. Usually they have two vaulted ceilings over the first and third floors (as at Kilmeedy) or over the ground and second floor. The main hall or living room and the principal domestic quarters are always over the vaulted levels, as a safeguard against fire. The intervening ceilings were of oak beams. The defensive elements included battlemented top and projecting chambers (bartizans) and narrow slits used as arrow loops or gun slits for muskets, etc.

Popularly known as castles, these structures are listed in archaeological surveys of recent years as tower houses. This label more accurately defined their function for they were essentially the fortified homes of Gaelic or Norman lords, erected to safeguard inhabitants rather than for a military or strategic defence purpose. There are a number of large tower houses from the mid-15th Century. They are also the most widely known and frequently photographed e.g. Blarney and Bunratty. William Butler Yeats renovated one of these towers, called Thoor Ballylee, near Gort in County Galway. He lived there

intermittently for about ten years from 1916 onwards and the tower became a metaphor for the corpus of his poetry, which emanated from those years.

Castles were Norman innovations, widely introduced into England after the conquest in 1066 and into Ireland about one hundred years later. The original structures were of the motte and bailey type but these were replaced in the 13th century by large defensive strongholds, consisting of an interior tower or keep surrounded by a series of defensive walls which were reinforced by angled towers and stoutly defended gatehouses

In Ireland the Normans erected castles to safeguard river crossings such as at Kilkenny, Trim, Limerick and Cahir or to protect harbour entrances such as Carlingford, Carrickfergus and Dundrum. They also erected castles inland e.g. as at Roscommon, Liscarrol etc. The Norman lords had their living quarters in the keep. In addition the castles accommodated garrisons of foot-soldiers, archers, men at arms and a resident constable. The castles were strong defensive bastions safeguarding key strategic areas.

Tower houses by contrast had limited defensive capabilities. Kilmeedy and Drishane etc. would not have housed garrisons. At most they would have stationed one or two guardsmen. Their defences were mainly to provide security for the inhabitants within and their stock rather than providing strategic control of a territory or a key position. They would only have been capable of repelling minor incursions and not a sustained military assault. Lewis, in his topographical dictionary, says that Kilmeedy was erected “to guard the pass on the old route from Cork to Killarney”. This has often been repeated in write ups about Kilmeedy. But one has to firstly ask, which pass is envisaged? Is it the pass at Ceimcarrige or the pass over the ridge between Clara and Gortavehy that leads down to Ballydaly?

According to Leask cannon was first used in Ireland in 1488. Tower Houses built earlier than that date commonly used arrows and muskets as defence weapons. They were much more vulnerable to cannon fire when it was introduced.

### **What was it like to live in a Tower House?**

If we were to travel back to those days when people lived at Kilmeedy what would their life have been like? We have no direct accounts from Kilmeedy but there are some descriptions by 16th and 17th Century writers as to how guests were received and what happened in these castles.

A poem by Hugh MacGuaran, entitled “Pléaraca na Ruarcach” describes a feast in Brian O’Rourke’s castle. He lost it and again regained it from the English in 1581. The poem was set to music by blind harper Turlough O’Carolan (1670 -1738). It was translated into English and included in Swift’s collected poems in 1720. The opening verses describe the rich fare at the unforgettable feast:

His revels to keep, we sup and we dine  
on seven score sheep, fat bullocks and swine.  
Usquebagh to our feast in pails were brought up  
a hundred at least and a mether our cup (lines 5-12).

Later on it refers to sleeping arrangements.

Bring straw for our bed; shake it down to the feet  
then over it spread the winnowing sheet (line 49).

Later still some fighting and arguing erupts in the course of the feast.

Let us consider another description by Luke Gernon of the interior of a castle and how guests were received. He is writing in 1620: “They were built very strongly with narrow stairs for security. The hall is the uppermost room. Let’s go up-we shall not come down again until tomorrow. Salutations passed, you shall be presented with drinks on the house. The table is furnished with a variety of meats - They feast together with great jollity. Towards the middle of supper the harper begins the tune and singeth Irish rhymes of ancient making” (Harbinson 1997.83).

Every summer evening during the tourist season, the great halls of Bunratty and Dunguaire come to life when guests participate in medieval banquets and celebrate late into the night accompanied in music and song. They are attempting to recapture, one might say, the gracious living described by Luke Gernon above.

How representative are these descriptions of what might have happened in places like Kilmeedy or Drishane or the more modest tower houses of those days? We have an impression from an early 17th Century traveller who wrote: "The nobility lived in rectangular towers with thatched roofs and no more light than came through the narrow slits. These houses are sparsely furnished and lacking in comforts. The inhabitants slept on beds of rushes on the floor". This may capture more aptly the frugal lifestyle and stark character of a building like Kilmeedy.

A visit to a restored 15th Century tower house, like Ross Castle in Killarney with its allegedly authentic furniture and decor, gives a very different picture. It features tapestries, four poster canopy beds, superbly restored oak tables and chairs, with clocks, chests and household utensils in silver, brass and pewter.

With such divergent descriptions of the lifestyle of those days it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion about Kilmeedy. Suffice it to say that, once annually, Kilmeedy has its own moment of glory. During the month of July about sixty five members of the extended Buckley family come together in Kilmeedy for their own banquet. They step back in time as they partake of a prepared meal and refill their glasses from decanters of red and white wine. At the end of the evening they re-enter the present century and with family links renewed, they disperse for another year to their various homesteads. Kilmeedy again becomes home for the pigeons and other birds.

### **Other aspects of castle life.**

As well as the chieftain and his family, the castle would have accommodated servants and other retainers to work the land and assist with security. We don't know how much land the chieftain owned. We know that some castles had a surrounding wall, called a bawn, which served as an enclosure to protect cattle from raiding parties of other tribes. Cattle raids were commonplace events, as we know from history, and indicate that their principal occupation was cattle rearing. The occupants would have enjoyed a high status in local society.

### **Religious affiliation.**

Up to the time of the Reformation, the chieftain and his family would have been Catholic. Presumably the family would have worshipped in the local church of Kilmeedy until the McCarthys, who built Drishane castle, endowed a new church at that location.

### **Owners of Kilmeedy.**

Kilmeedy is in the Barony of West Muskerry and is one of three Tower Houses, which were erected in Millstreet parish south of the Blackwater. Only two of which survive, Drishane and Kilmeedy. A third is featured in the Pacata Hibernia map of 1601 as located in Duneen but no material remains of it survive today.

It is not easy to unravel the history of Kilmeedy and form a clear picture of the succession of ownership but the following is an attempt to do so in some kind of chronological sequence.

Tradition had it that Dermot McCarthy, 2nd son of Teig, Lord of Muskerry built Kilmeedy in 1436 and Drishane some years later. Lee (1914. p. 63) supports this tradition. Lewis on the other hand, in his Topographical Dictionary, gives a slightly different date and states it was built by one of the McCarthy family in 1445 to command the wild mountain

pass from Macroom to Killarney (1837 Vol.1. 498).

It is mentioned in the Carew Papers 1601, as 1 of 3 castles in this area. O'Sullivan Beare, in his famous march from Dunboy to Breffni, passed through here but the McCarthys of Kilmeedy and Drishane were hostile towards him. They were on the side of the English at the Battle of Kinsale.

### **1637 - the next significant date.**

On November 10th 1637 Donough Mac Owen McCarthy inherited the castles and townlands of Drishane, Kilmeedy and Carrigaphoooca and other lands granted initially by Teig, Lord of Muskerry, when Donough's father Owen died at Drishane. An inquisition in 1638 gave Donough mac Teig of Kilmeedy and Curleigh and his son Cormac as the owner but says that Donough Mac Owen of Drishane claimed the premises. In 1641, Donough Mac Owen of Drishane mortgaged Carrigaphoooca and townlands to Dominic Coppinger of Cork to raise money for the rebellion and his property was confiscated after the rebellion.

Butler, in his 1641 map of the parish of Drishane, gives Charles McDonagh as the owner of Kilmeedy and lands to the south stretching to the Kerry border. Charles was killed during the parliamentary wars. A contribution from Amlaoibh O'Loingsigh to the Rathduane School's submission outlines the circumstances of his death. He records the incident thus: "Charles McCarthy was entertaining Col. Phayre (Governor of Cork) at a party at the gate of Kilmeedy when Colonel Ingoldsby rode up and with a pistol and shot him dead. Colonel Phayre was much dissatisfied as he was the convener of the party" (Dept. of Folklore Schools Submission MSS 101a p.16).

In 1701 Parliament decreed that Sophia, Electress of Hanover, and granddaughter of James 1<sup>st</sup>, should succeed Queen Anne. When Queen Anne died in 1714 George 1st, son of Sophia, came to the throne. Nine days later i.e. 10th August 1714 the proclamation of his accession to the throne was made in Macroom. The magistrate, Captain Richard Hedges, began to organise the local ceremonies. Next day he was on the road to Kilmeedy where he proclaimed His Majesty's accession with all the solemnity he could. He then travelled on to Millstreet where he treated the company of soldiers to claret and other liquid beverages and left them money to close the evening in the barracks.

Smith in his History of Cork (1750.188) has this to say: "About 6 miles west of Macroom is Caum Carraig, a rugged hill, which must be passed over before arriving at Millstreet. On the left one is entertained by various aspects of the Kerry Mountains and to the north the lofty cone called Clara hill. At the foot of Clara is Mount Leader, a good house and plantation of Mr. Edward Leader. On the left is Kilmeedy, a small castle of the O'Donohues' now in ruin, near which was a redoubt for half a foot company". He concludes the passage by referring to a new turnpike road which runs through Millstreet, the last village of any consequence in this part of the world and some manufactures in the linen trade intended to be set up there will soon make it a place of note.

Donough Mac Owen, mentioned above, lived to an advanced age and died in Drishane in 1719, aged 122 yrs. In his will he left some lands to his nephew Teig Donohue in the Cloughboola area. Could this be the O'Donohue whom Smith described as the then owner of Kilmeedy.

O'Murchadha (1985. P. 232), in his book on the family names of County Cork, says a branch of the O'Mahoneys owned it in the 17th Century. When the two Leader brothers moved here at the end of the 17th or in early 18th Century, Henry may have occupied it until he built his residence at Mount Leader (noted by Smith above), which was replaced by the present Georgian building in 1840.

In 1812 Robert Johnston did a tour of Ireland. In his journal of the tour he refers to a "solitary castle" he passed on a coach journey from Macroom to Killarney. This is what he wrote: "Leaving Macroom, much refreshed with a good breakfast we passed through a country of twenty miles without anything to arrest our attention. Only one

solitary castle, feebly outliving the wreck of its once rude defenders, was to be seen, the name of which we could not learn. We also passed through the decaying village of Millstreet (without stopping) to a solitary inn on the boundary of Cork and Kerry, the landlord of which was a native of Germany. Here we changed horses and drove to Killarney” (Quoted from ‘Millstreet Miscellany’ (AHS) 2003. p.3).

The “solitary castle” referred to is undoubtedly Kilmeeady and the inn referred to at the county bounds was featured in the 1842 O.S. map as Shane’s Inn and is now the farmhouse owned by Tim Herlihy and family on the Kerry side of the Ownaskirtane River. The Buckley family now own Kilmeeady Tower House. They live in the farmhouse just north of the building. Other members of the family live close by.

## **Chapter 10. Townlands and their significance.**

Townlands are a familiar and essential feature of the local landscape and the importance of townlands in the poetry, folklore of our culture is well recognised.

A townland is an ancient land division of the country and the smallest recognised territorial unit of rural areas. It is now the smallest administrative unit and originally it comprised subdivisions such as plowlands, gneeves and catrons. Townlands represent divisions, which are essentially Irish. The term townland is not used in England whilst recognised in all parts of Ireland, north and south. Despite its urban sounding name it is essentially a rural division.

The etymology of many of the 60,000 or so townlands indicates the ancient Gaelic reverence for features of the landscape such as mountains, rivers and woodlands and for man-made features such as farmsteads, standing stones and stone fortifications and the heroes associated with them.

The word townland is considered to have a substantial background in the Irish word “baile” and the lore of place names were considered a valued type of knowledge in Early Ireland. A metrical Dindsenchas (lore of place names) dates from 900-1000 AD. Many of the early place names were fossilised in their present form when the original O.S. maps were being prepared in the 1840’s. The collectors of data made a good stab at their pronunciation. Over time, Danish, Norman and English colonies have, of course, added new names to the landscape the prefix mount being an obvious case in point (e.g. Mount Leader). Townlands vary in size from about 10 acres to 7,000 acres. The largest in Ireland is Sheskin, County Mayo.

In the circuit of Clara we will traverse the smallest townland in the parish of Millstreet viz. Geararoe (76 acres) and the largest, Ballydaly (1,089 acres), excluding those which include mountain pastures such as Cahirbarna, and Caherdowney.

Townlands, today, provide a strong sense of local identity and allegiance as well as demarcating residential addresses in rural areas. Some years ago, an attempt was made to remove town lands from the postal addresses of people who lived in rural areas of the North of Ireland. The authorities tried to substitute road and house numbers instead. The attempt was strongly opposed and had to be abandoned. We tend to feel a strong attachment to the townland of our birth and where we now live. Each day we traverse different townlands in our daily journeys for work and leisure, so they constitute a very intimate and tangible part of our environment.

At the annual Celtic Congress held in Sligo in July of this year, (2009) delegates from the various Celtic Lands (Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Brittany) expressed at the erosion of our placename heritage. They emphasized that placenames are infused with history and meaning and are part of our identity. They strongly recommended that much greater effort be made to preserve and promote them, including political initiative.

Naming a place constitutes a geographical appropriation of that territory and

renaming it is an indication of a dominant prevailing culture. The Normans named areas of conquest. The planters of Laois and Offaly renamed them Queen's County and King's County respectively. Mount Leader replaced Droimin Ui Scanláin and Ballydaly, so named after the O'Dalys who held lands there, replaced the early name Kilmicuyn.

In the circuit of Clara Mountain we pass through ten townlands.

## **Chapter 11.**

### **Places of scenic beauty – Adrivale – Coumatrush Lake.**

Past Kilmeedy Castle, the road skirts around the base of Clara as it climbs slowly upwards to curve in a NW direction. It crosses the ridge that connects the hill of Clara with the next range, the Stoukeen overlooking Gortavehy. Approaching the top of the ridge there is a road junction to the left that leads down to the townland of Adrivale. This is a good place to halt as it affords a spectacular view of the valley stretching southwards towards Cloughboula and Ceim Carraige. This valley is bounded on the right by a series of hills, which form part of the Derrynasagart range. In the distance, in the townland of Curragh, it is possible to get a glimpse of the waterfall cascading over the hill into Coomathrush Lake beneath. The Coomathrush stream flows outward from the lake to join the Finnow River close to the Macroom Road. A poem by Bernard O'Donoghue describes this waterfall.

#### **The Iron Age boat at Caumatruish.**

If you doubt you can put your fingers  
in the holes where the oar-pegs went.  
If you doubt still, look past its deep mooring  
to the mountains that enfold the corrie's  
waterfall of lace through which they say,  
you can see out but not in.  
If you doubt that, hear the falcon  
crying down from Gneeves Bog  
cut from the mountain top. And if you doubt  
after all these witnesses, no boat  
dredged back from the dead  
could make you believe.

In September 1992, a local farmer, in the process of dredging the lake at Coomathrush, discovered an ancient dugout canoe. The lake was bounded by lands owned by Ted Mullane, who hoped to open up the property to tourism. The logboat (canoe) was hollowed out of an oak tree trunk. It was about 4.15 metres long and 0.8 metres wide. The stern was well preserved but the bow was damaged and part of it was missing. The boat had fitted dowel holes for securing the paddler's bench. It was dated to the late Iron/early Christian period probably 400-537. Evidence of a settlement in the Gneeves/Curragh is sparse but this may be due to lack of visible material. Logboats like this are uncovered from time to time; the most recent find was in the Strabane area in February 2009.

It was initially thought that the boat was two thousand years, or so, old. A carbon sample was taken to Queen's University in Belfast to establish its date. After a detailed investigation it was concluded that the canoe was found to be about fifteen hundred years old. Sometimes, finds such as these can be freeze dried and pumped with resin. Left untreated, it would warp and shrink and become subject to fungal growth.

The Archaeological Field Officer from UCC advised the farmer to re-submerge the canoe as this would afford a much greater likelihood of its preservation. This was the decision taken.

## Chapter 12.

### Ballydaly Upper – Ruined Penal Church and Burial Ground.

As the road weaves down from the ridge towards Kippagh one gets a fine panoramic view of Ballydaly and the town lands stretching beyond to the Blackwater valley and the hills of Sliabh Luachra in the distance. Looking to the west, the range of hills embracing the peaks Gortavehy and Cahirbarnagh and the twin Paps form an almost continuous chain reaching to Mangerton and the Lakes of Killarney. Three distinct depressions on the northern flank of the nearest range (Cahirbarna) were carved out during the receding Ice Age to form the three mountain tarns Kippagh, Gortavehy and Lake Murtagh, the most westerly of the three. As one surveys the expansive landscape distinctive landmarks such as Ballydaly Church, Cadbury's Chocolate Factory, the villages of Cullen and Knocknagree, the railway line between Millstreet and Rathmore and many other places can be clearly identified.

This way that leads down to Ballydaly is known as Bealach na Mná. I am unsure as to why it was named thus. One view is that the group of women and children who accompanied O'Sullivan Beara on his epic march crossed this way on route from Ballyvourney towards the Blackwater whereas the men folk went on to Millstreet by way of Kilmeedy.

Here it is possible to pick out at least three ring forts to the left and right of the road before it reaches its first junction to the right, which leads back into Millstreet following the base of Clara hill. Our tour will proceed as far as Croohig's Cross and join the alternative route leading back into town. About 250 metres prior to reaching the cross we pass by the ruined site of Ballydaly Old Church and Burial Ground. The site is located on farmland belonging to Mr. O'Shea from Kilcorney. The location of the site is beyond a deep hollow or depression surrounded by much vegetation and is clearly visible from the road. It is on the opposite side of the road from the O'Riordan farmhouse.

The burial ground is in a D shaped enclosure immediately south of the ruined church. On visiting the site in 2007, I counted forty to fifty un-inscribed upright stones of modest height. These grave markers are strewn around heavily overgrown pasture. This site is marked Children's Burial Ground in the 1842 Ordinance Survey. Its dimensions are given in the Archaeological survey for Mid-Cork Vol. III, as eighteen metres E-W and eight metres N-S (Ref No 7314). Access to the site is difficult so the most convenient means is through the field gate opposite the O'Riordan family farmhouse.

The ruins of the church are on slightly sloping ground about thirty metres from the road fence beyond the depression referred to above. The ruin is clearly identifiable as the foundation and base structure of a rectangular dry stone building. The base wall is about one metre at its highest and 1.4 metres in thickness. The ground rises noticeably to the west and the walling level diminishes. There are no apparent openings for windows or door and the location of the altar is not determinable. The interior is littered with stones from the collapsed walls and is heavily overgrown with trees. There are about nine silver birch as well as a few pine and thorn trees.

Listed in the Archaeological Survey (Ref 9489) its interior measurements are quoted as 17.14 metres E-W and 7.8 Metres N-S. Exteriorly it measures approximately 19 metres by 9 metres.

This church is referred to as a Penal Church and may have been the place of worship in the parish of Drishane during those times. In the reign of William and Mary 1697, an act was passed to prevent the growth of Popery. Bishops and regular clergy were banished from the country and penalties were attached to those who returned from banishment and rewards were made to those who discovered such offenders. As a pendant to that act a bill was introduced on 28th February 1704, in the reign of Queen Anne, for the registering of Popish Clergy.

Secular priests working in the diocese were ordered, at their peril, to send to the High Sheriff, within 21 days, their name, abode and how long they had been in the parish in which they officiated. They were also expected to notify any removal to a new abode. Amongst the priests listed by the Lord Lieutenant and his Council, in 1705, was Fr Owen Ferris. The relevant extract reads:

Fr Owen Fferis Ballydaly, aged 40.

Parish of which he pretends to be P.P.: Drishane.

Time of his receiving orders - 1687.

By the Bishop of Antwerp in Brabant.

He is reputed to have brought the Bull of Pope Innocent XII, appointing Dr Edward Comberford as Archbishop of Cashel, to Ireland.

On 21st June 1714 Richard Connell and Patrick Trant supplied information to Joseph Kennington and John Blennerhassett in Kerry about Owen McFineen Fferis, a Popish priest, who was officiating in the parish of East Fractions. At the Assizes in Tralee, on 17th July, a warrant of *capias* was issued for twelve priests, which included Owen Fferis and Denis Moriarty, exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction. No details are available as to how the warrant was pursued.

On 2nd April 1715, at a General Assizes held at Tralee, information was presented that Owen Fferis, a Popish priest, registered for Ballydaly, had succeeded Anaeas Lyne, deceased, in the parish of Kilcolman. We know from the Civil Survey of 1654 that Ballydaly was included in the Barony of Magunihy and referred to as the East Fractions of Kerry. It was still included amongst the East Fractions by 1714.

We can fairly confidently assert that Fr Owen Fferis would have celebrated Mass in this now ruined church during the first decade of the 18th Century. Furthermore, Denis Paul O'Sullivan P.P. Drishane 1774-7 and Thomas Plunkett P.P. of Drishane 1777-1812, who resided at Kippagh, would also have celebrated Mass there.

### **For how long did it continue to be used as a Church?**

It is difficult to say for certain. It seems likely it was closed for worship when Fr Fitzpatrick completed the new church in Millstreet in 1838. The church in upper Ballydaly was replaced by a small and neat chapel in Rathduane, the remnants of which are still visible as an adjunct to Tom O'Sullivan's residence. Bishop Moriarty said Mass for the first time there on 13th August 1864. He noted in his diary that this new chapel would be a great advantage to the people of the district whose former chapel (*viz.* in Ballydaly) was closed by Fr Fitzpatrick when he commenced to build the present church in Millstreet.

## **Chapter 13.**

### **Poverty - The Poor Law: The Workhouse, Millstreet Hospital, Site of the Workhouse.**

It is difficult for us who have lived through a period of great affluence, dubbed the Celtic Tiger, to envisage the extent and misery of the poverty, which prevailed in Ireland during the 18th and 19th Centuries. A severe famine hit Ireland in 1726 and in its wake Jonathan Swift, Dean of St Patrick's, wrote: "Whoever travels this country and observes the face of nature, or the facts and habits and dwellings of the natives, will hardly think himself in a land where law, religion and common humanity is expressed. The miserable dress, diet and dwellings of the people, the general desolation of many parts of the kingdom, the families living in filth and nastiness upon buttermilk and potatoes, without a single shoe or stocking to their feet or a house so convenient as an English pigsty to receive them". (Short view of the state of Ireland, 1727 p281).

The high number of paupers, vagrants and unemployed was a cause of concern to

the Government authorities for some time previously. So a commission was set up in the 1830's under the chairmanship of Dr Whateley, Protestant Archbishop of Dublin, to investigate the extent of the poverty and make recommendations for relief. They had used questionnaires and public hearings to collect a huge mass of information about the extent of poverty in the country. The commission suggested a wide range of reforms, which included large-scale public works, state sponsored emigration, improved diet etc. The report did not suggest the adoption of the English system, which was introduced in 1834. They advised, that in the peculiar situation of Ireland, relief should be offered merely to the aged, infirm and impotent paupers, but not to able-bodied labourers. The establishment of workhouses or poorhouses was not regarded as suitable for the conditions in Ireland. They estimated the number of persons out of work in Ireland or in great distress as in excess of 585,000 and the number of persons dependent on them as 1,800,000, making a total of 2,385,000. It would be morally and physically impossible to provide accommodation in workhouses if such a large multitude was to be relieved. They estimated that the cost of erecting and fitting out the buildings would be in the region of £4,000,000 and their maintenance costs would be prohibitive. The means of the country were deemed inadequate to meet such an outlay.

They recommended, instead, that another board should be formed with a view to facilitating the employment of able-bodied labourers, whose numbers they calculated at about 500,000, more than twice as great as in Great Britain. They could be involved in carrying out national improvement, reclaiming wastelands etc. It was also hoped that the railways envisaged would absorb a large portion of surplus labour and lead up to pacification in Ireland.

The legislative measures and framework for an Irish Poor Law system were laid before the English Houses of Parliament for discussion in April 1836. Regrettably, the recommendations of the commission were not adopted, even though they were sensible and well researched. Following their rejection, an Irish Poor Law System was introduced in June 1838 and George Nicholls, one of the English commissioners was appointed to implement it.

The picture of abject destitution presented in the report of the Irish Commissioners in April 1836 makes for sad reading. About two thirds of the total population of Ireland were engaged in agricultural labour. "A great proportion of them were insufficiently provided for at any time with the commonest necessities of life. Their habitations were wretched hovels, several of a family sleep together upon straw or bare ground, sometimes with a blanket, sometimes without even so much to cover them. Their food commonly consists of dry potatoes and with these they are, at times, so scantily supplied as to be obliged to stint themselves to one spare meal a day. There are even instances of people being driven by hunger to seek sustenance in wild herbs. They sometimes get a herring or a little milk but they never get meat except at Christmas, Easter and Shrovetide. Some go in search of employment to Great Britain during harvest or wander through Ireland with the same view. Their wives are, occasionally, obliged to beg. They do so reluctantly and generally go distances from home in the course of doing so" (Southern Reporter. 7/4/1836).

### **What was the situation locally?**

From the comments of visitors to the town and of observers locally we are able to form a reasonably accurate picture of conditions in Millstreet and surroundings areas during the famine period. An anonymous traveller from the North known as J K reported on his travels in a book published in 1837. He sent a letter from Millstreet stating that he was denied a horse to travel on with by the local landlord. In a letter dated 28th September 1837, written from Millstreet, he commented "We set out for Killarney by Macroom and Millstreet through a country possessing less beauty and more wretchedness than I have yet seen in the South" (Quotation in "Millstreet - a considerable Town" A H S 2003. p. 4)

In 1848 Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish novelist and social historian, visited the town

and described it as a pleasant town from the outside but inside a mass of mendacity. After lunch the street was filled with beggars.

In a rare expression of ecumenical concern for those days, the Vicar of Drishane, John Mongan and Patrick Fitzpatrick P.P. co-signed a letter, which was published in the Cork Examiner in 1847 and prompted a controversy. The following extract highlights the alarming condition of the people of the parish, as the famine took its toll “It is pitiable to behold the households of famishing children nestling together in corners of roofless hovels, shivering with cold, naked and weak from hunger, parents frantic with despair and unable to assist them and fainting themselves from grief and wretchedness. In short we expect to lose half the population”.

In February of the same year, 1847, Capt Brooke, an inspecting officer for the Kanturk Union, reporting on the Millstreet area, declared that “All farming operations seem to have been suspended due to the severity of the weather. Destitution is still increasing and deaths are more numerous in the locality. In Millstreet the poor are in a miserable state from disease and destitution”.

The workhouse in Millstreet was not yet operational but a fever hospital was temporarily set up at Altamount, Tullig. I have not been able to establish when Keel cemetery on the Clara Road was opened for pauper burials but the traditional dignity attached to the burial of the dead had vanished according to the folk memory recorded by the Folklore Commission. A hinged coffin was repeatedly used to transport dead bodies to their place of burial and many were interred “un-knelled, un-coffined and unknown”

### **The Poor Law Act (Ireland) 1838: Legislative and Administrative framework.**

Despite the widespread proposals of the commission, which investigated poverty in Ireland, the Act for the effective relief of the Destitute Poor (1 and 2 Vic. chapt.56) was passed in the English Parliament and proposed a system of relief similar in many respects to the English prototype of 1834. It proposed dividing the country into 130 unions, which consisted of an amalgamation of a number of townlands centred on a market town and within a ten mile radius. Each union was to have a workhouse administered by a Board of Guardians, which was to meet weekly and be responsible for admissions, discharges, managing funds, appointments etc. Day to day management of the workhouse was entrusted to a Master, Matron and a Medical Officer. A chaplain was appointed and a store man had responsibility for provisions.

Kanturk Union was the sixty fifth to be declared on 31st December 1839 and the first to serve this area, which stretched from Ballydaly to Newtownshandrum near Charleville, with a population of 71,844. The first workhouse to open was Cork City, in 1840.

Initially, there were eleven unions within the county of Cork but in 1850 a further six were added. Millstreet Union was split off from Kanturk and the workhouse, with the fever hospital attached, was opened in 1850. John O’Connor (1995.262) gives the date of Millstreet workhouse as 1852. This is incorrect as it was already functioning in 1850. It was built on six acres of land at a cost of £5,950 with fixtures and fittings costing an additional £1,215. A workhouse school was also opened and remained in use until 1908.

The Irish poor law system was modelled on the English counterpart but differed from it in one respect - relief was administered solely in the workhouse in Ireland. There was no outdoor relief. But this singularly inappropriate system underwent several modifications.

Expenditure for 1845 was only £316,026 and the number receiving relief was 43,293. In 1848, under recurrence of the famine and attack of cholera poor rates rose to £1,627,000 and the number assisted was 932,284. In 1850, £2,177,651 was distributed for relief of the poor and the numbers assisted were 805,700. A number of new workhouses opened that year.

In 1847 the relief Extension Act empowered guardians to acquire extra land for use as graveyards. These became known as paupers' plots.

Post 1857, under 10 Vic. Chap 51, the system of outdoor relief was permitted under certain restrictions and gradually the system assimilated to the English pattern. During the worst years of the famine, since relief was only indoors (i.e. within the workhouse), this led to a massive overcrowding and spread of cholera so temporary fever hospitals were set up in Kanturk, Boherbue, Freemount and Millstreet.

### **How many inmates were catered for in the workhouse?**

According to figures recorded in the Cork Examiner for May 1851 the number of inhabitants in the Millstreet workhouse was 1162. For a corresponding period a year later, the total was 1064. Some of the residents were discharged and some had died. A letter to the Editor of the Cork Examiner, dated 2nd April 1851, criticised an earlier report of the Board of Guardians because it combined those discharged and the number who died under one heading, thus disguising the fact that twenty to thirty people had died during the relevant period. It added that the mortality rate in the workhouse had not perceptibly decreased since then.

The correspondence also instanced a poor family of five in the Cullen area, one of whom had spent a short time in the workhouse but left it. A few days previous to the letter, the family in question, who are named, gained possession of the carcass of a horse and took it to their cabin to be used as food, illustrating the desperate straits in which people found themselves.

Newspaper reports of the Poor Law Guardian meetings provide us with some of the most detailed insight into the circumstances of the time, giving us harrowing details of the living, walking dead. In additional accounts we learn of dogs devouring half buried dead and rats attacking those too weak to cry for help and of whole families, intent on maintaining some vestige of self respectability, laying down within their own homes to await a merciful release.

Many of the minutes of the Board of Guardians meetings are preserved in the County Archives for Cork but unfortunately those pertaining to Millstreet Union are lost. One story, however, relating to the Millstreet Workhouse, offers some light relief in the face of all grim happenings of those times. It relates to an application by Rev Francis Young, Church of Ireland curate living in Drominahilla, who applied to be appointed Protestant chaplain to the union. Fr Fitzpatrick was the acting chaplain and was in receipt of £50 per annum there.

His grounds were that Mr. Eccles, a process server in the district for three to four years was lately dismissed and left Millstreet with his wife, leaving behind two young children, a girl aged eight and a boy aged three. The father landed up in a lunatic asylum and the mother in gaol. Eccles was a Protestant and the children left in Young's care were placed in the workhouse after a few weeks. The girl was reared a Catholic but the mother was written to in order to determine the question of her religious upbringing. In reply, the mother indicated her wish that the child be educated as a Protestant. The children being the only Protestant inmates, Mr. Young applied to be appointed chaplain. The Board of Guardians discussed the matter and one of them expressed the opinion that Mr Young's object in sending the children to the workhouse was to get appointed Chaplain and thereby secure a salary for himself. When he was invited in he admitted that it was entirely so. Mr. H. Wallis, who was in the chair, was surprised by his artless admission so Mr Young qualified it by saying it would be too much for him to bear the burden of their support.

The Board pointed out, that as Fr Fitzpatrick was paid £50 per annum for the large number of paupers he served (2,500), then on a pro-rata basis Mr. Young could expect roughly 6d per head for his contribution, for the two were not on the same footing. The Board resolved that it was unnecessary, in the circumstances, to appoint another chaplain

whilst they would facilitate the education of the children as Protestants. Mr. Young then magnanimously agreed to give his service free of charge if the Catholic chaplain did likewise. The Board decided that, on the basis of the principle of deterrence, the girl, Charlotte, be discharged to a Catholic lady willing to support the two, pending the mother's approval. They also decided that the children should be sent to the Protestant school in the town. (Cork Examiner 26th May 1851).

### **Further changes in the role of the Board of Guardians.**

In 1863 the responsibilities of the Board were extended to include the Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths. The Act (26 Vic. Cap 11) came into effect on 1st January 1864. So, official civil records began with that date. The Clerk of the Board was the Superintendent Registrar from that date. They were also given responsibility for public health and animal welfare. In the Local Government Act of 1895 some of these functions reverted to rural district Councils e.g. public health, animal welfare and levying of rates.

Workhouses had been introduced when the population was twice that of the 1920's so that by then the workhouse accommodation greatly exceeded the needs and the cost of administration was out of all proportion to the value of relief. On 1st July 1923 all Boards of Guardians were abolished and the new Boards of Health took over the responsibility for the relief of the poor.

About midway in 1921, one hundred and twenty members of the auxiliary forces occupied Mount Leader and used it as their headquarters. The house had been unoccupied previously. Then on the night of June 3rd a number of men from Millstreet, A and B Companies of the IRA, set fire to and destroyed a major portion of Millstreet Workhouse because it had also been used by the Auxiliaries. The inmates had been transferred to the remaining portion before the fires were lit.

### **The worst features of the workhouse.**

1. Families were segregated on the basis of gender and age.  
Parents were separated from each other and from their children within the workhouse.
2. The poor law system was introduced in Ireland just before the Famine. Millstreet workhouse opened immediately after the Famine so it became associated in the minds of the people with the hardship and suffering of that period. Conditions were indescribably bad with overcrowding and poor hygiene so many succumbed to fever, dysentery and famine dropsy. The image of the workhouse regime will remain engraved in the psyche of all whose ancestors endured this hostile regime.
3. Its introduction ignored the most sensible recommendations of the commission set up to investigate the extent of poverty in Ireland in the first half of the 19th Century. Some of its main proposals for the relief of the poor were completely ignored.
4. It failed to address the deep-rooted causes of poverty viz.
  - the population explosion in the Century prior to 1845. Population growth tripled from 2.8 to 8.5 million.
  - the tiered system of landownership aggravated by the Penal Laws.
  - the potato famine and over reliance on the potato as staple diet of many.
  - the high level of unemployment and the laissez-faire attitude of the British Government to Ireland's economic plight.
5. It was a notoriously inhumane institution and thankfully long since discontinued. An enduring reminder of the workhouse in Millstreet is that the junction of the road leading to the hospital from the Killarney Road is named the Union Cross. Strictly speaking, however, the union was the catchment area and not the workhouse itself.

## **Keel Cemetery.**

A plaque erected by Presentation Convent Girls in 1995 to commemorate the Famine victims carries the quotation "No pain is lost".

The entrance to Keel Cemetery faces Fitzgerald's modern home on the Clara Road. It has recently been renamed Cillin on the gate pillar. Keel was used from 1850 for burials from the workhouse and is known in common parlance as the paupers' graveyard. It is reasonably well maintained. In November 1965 a large cross was erected in the centre of the cemetery. There are numerous un-inscribed stones (about sixty) and a few metal crosses scattered about the place. Christy Fitzgerald, who was secretary of the Community Council for a number of years, chose to be buried there. He died in 1993 aged 63. Just inside the entrance, on the right, is the grave of Dan Hourigan, one of the two named people buried there.

## **Chapter 14. Some buildings of Architectural merit in the Town.**

We began our tour of Clara on the Macroom Road leading out of town and conclude it by stopping to view some buildings, which are of considerable architectural merit. These include the the Bank of Ireland, the Carnegie Hall, the remnants of St Anna's and St Patrick's church.

### **The Bank of Ireland.**

This was formerly the National Bank and became the Bank of Ireland in 1969-70. The Bank is a two storey structure built in limestone with a darker band across its façade at window level. It was built in the Venetian Gothic style and part of the basement rises above floor level but is hidden from view by a battlemented wall in front of the building.

The ground floor has an arcade of three gothic arched windows. The doorway, reached via an ascent of five steps, is flanked by two narrow lancet styled lights. All the openings are surmounted by a hood moulding which continues unbroken across the length of the façade. Above it is another strip of decorative moulding marking, as it were, the divide between the two floors. The top floor has three large windows with broken arches. A decorative fascia runs under the eave of the overhanging roof. A lower adjunct to the left of the main building has a diaper pattern in brick in the pediment.

The Brett Brothers - John Henry and Henry Charles - were the architects. They carried out an extensive architectural practice during the 1870's and 1880's and took over as architects of the National Bank from William Coldbeck in 1872. They provided new or reconstructed premises for the National Bank in Millstreet, Castlebar, Claremorris, and Carrick on Suir. Millstreet Bank was illustrated in the Irish Builder in 1878 but may have been built a few years before that date.

Daniel O'Connell established the first National Bank around 1830. In the following century it merged with the Bank of Ireland.

### **The Carnegie Hall.**

Andrew Carnegie was born in Dunfermline, Scotland, and at the age of fourteen was taken by his parents to the USA, where he worked as a telegraph boy in Pittsburgh. Subsequently he became a railway employee and rose to become a superintendent. He developed the Iron and Steel Industry in the city of his adoption and built up a vast industrial empire, which he handed on to the United States Steel Trust in 1901. He then moved back to Skibo castle in Scotland and embarked on his many philanthropic

enterprises. He devoted his wealth to endowing public libraries, education and various research trusts.

In the first decade of the 20th Century Timothy O'Connor, West End, Millstreet, made a submission to the Carnegie Trust in the USA for funds towards the building of a library. His request was granted and the building was constructed in 1912 with the £5000 provided by the Trust.

It is a fine imposing building consisting of a three bay edifice each of which is topped with a pedimented gable with a decorative scroll. It currently houses a number of County Council offices. These include the Area Engineer's Office, Tourist Office, the Library and Museum. Over the years, it has been a venue for the District Law Court, Civic services, Local Government, CYMS activities, Legion of Mary and Patrician meetings and Coláiste Pádraig Secondary School. Coláiste Pádraig moved from the AOH Hall to the Carnegie Hall on September 1st 1943 and continued to operate there until December 4th 1956.

The Carnegie Hall was the scene of an incident during the Civil War. On June 5th 1923 a group of Free State soldiers had taken up position within and were besieged by the IRA. The defenders sandbagged the upstairs windows and the door while the IRA continued their siege throughout the night. They attempted to set alight the entrance door but a soldier, who attempted to put out the fire, was shot dead. Ironically he had come through World War 1 unscathed. Picture number 454, in "Picture Millstreet", features the scene outside the Carnegie Hall on the morning after the attack.

### **St Anna's Church: St Anna's Belfry (Pound Hill).**

The belfry is all that remains of St Anna's Church, Pound Hill. We pass it on the left as we proceed out of town on the Macroom Road. It was tastefully restored in 1995 under a FAS Scheme project. Dr Warke, Church of Ireland Bishop of Cork, Cloyne and Ross opened an amenity park in the adjacent grounds on May 4th 1997.

Lewis in his Topographical Dictionary states: "The parish church of Drishane stands on an eminence above the town; it is a handsome edifice, built in 1798 at the expense of J Wallis Esq. of Drishane Castle, the owner of the eastern part of the town" (p. 370).

There was a boom in church building at the end of the 18th and early 19th Century. Realising that the Church of Ireland was in possession of many ruined buildings, the Irish Parliament voted, in 1777, to make annual grants to the Board of first fruits to subsidise the building of Protestant churches. Usually the Board made a grant of £500 towards the building of a new church, so we can assume that St Anna's benefited from this subsidy.

The church was added to in 1809 and a new belfry was constructed in 1814. The square pinnacled tower, typical of so many Protestant churches of the time, is all that survives. A clock has been installed in the upper range. Prior to the erection of St Annas, members of the Established Church worshipped at Drishane in a church taken over from the Catholics during the reign of James I in the first decade of the 17th Century.

In 1794, two companies of the Irish Militia were stationed in Millstreet and at the time Lewis wrote (1837) there was a large constabulary of police, with barracks for six officers and a hundred men, who were stationed there since the Whiteboy riots of 1822. These would have swelled the attendance at St Anna's, which otherwise would have catered for the relatively small number of worshippers among the Protestant assembly, most of whom are buried in the adjacent graveyard. The entrance to the former Rectory, now occupied by the Cronin family, is close by. For a fuller history of St Anna's one can refer to Denis Tagney's History (1995).

## **St Patrick's Church (West End).**

Following the relaxation of the Penal laws during the latter half of the 18th Century and the emancipation of Catholics at the end of the first quarter of the 19th Century, new churches began to be built to replace the humble thatched dwellings so characteristic of the Penal era. This was also the pattern in Millstreet. The first Catholic Church in the town was a small thatched chapel located at the present entrance to St Joseph's Presentation Convent. Lewis in his *Topographical Dictionary* (1837. 370) makes this comment; "Here is also a Roman Catholic chapel which being small and inconvenient is about to be rebuilt on a larger scale". Fortunately, this new church on the site of the present building was nearing completion when the thatched roof of the small church fell in.

Fr Fitzpatrick was Parish Priest at the time. He had come to Millstreet in 1820 and the church, convent and parochial schools are monuments to his enlightened zeal, as the dedicatory slab in the nave of the church records. He spent 45 years in the parish of Drishane, as Millstreet was then called. The original parochial school and the convent buildings are now gone but the substantial features of the church, which opened in 1837, still survive. We can form some impression of its interior and exterior from photographs in *Picture Millstreet* (339A and 369). This church continued in use until it was closed, due to structural defects, in 1931.

During the next two years the building was considerably refurbished and enlarged. The galleries were removed from the transepts and the side walls were extended outwards to create more spacious side aisles. The nave was also lengthened to provide increased space, sufficient to accommodate over 1000 worshippers. The old façade was carefully removed and reconstructed using brightly coloured stone to supplement the old red sandstone because of the extended width. The reconstructed church was officially dedicated and opened on the feast of Corpus Christi June 1933.

There is some disagreement as to who the architect of the original church was. Some maintain that he was Brother Augustus O'Riordan, a Patrician brother from Doneraile, who designed other churches in Kerry. There is also a case for the Pain Brothers who came to Ireland from Essex circa 1813. James Pain was the official Church of Ireland architect for the Southern province while his brother George largely worked in Cork. They worked together on some commissions. Maurice Craig had this to say of them in his 'Architectural History': "They designed small, mainly classical churches (Catholic) in County Cork during the same period e.g. Kinsale, Dunmanway, Bantry, Millstreet, Ovens and the Ursuline Convent in Blackrock" (p. 262).

The design of the present church is classical, copying features of the famous buildings of Greek and Roman times. The beauty of architecture derives from such features as line adornment and proportion of measurements. The Greeks developed three orders known as Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. Each order consists of a pillar or column resting on a base and surmounted by a capital, which was elaborately decorated. The Corinthian order was the most elaborate of the three. Resting on top of the columns was a horizontal beam or lintel called an entablature, which again consisted of a group of features viz. an architrave, a frieze and a projecting cornice. Roofs were flat because it was the Romans not the Greeks who developed the arch. The Romans took over these styles and added two more. One of these was called composite. It was a combination of Ionic and Corinthian features and is the style noticeable in Millstreet.

The Italian Renaissance revived the classical style of architecture but it did not reach Ireland until the mid 18th Century. A century later there was a Gothic revival, as exemplified in Killarney Cathedral and in many churches in the diocese, such as Cullen, Rathmore, Glenflesk etc. Not many churches were built in the Classical Style but Millstreet is a fine example of one.

The following features are striking aspects of Millstreet Catholic Church: The exterior façade, the interior space; the rows of free standing columns on either side of the

nave supporting the lintel and ceiling; the coffered pattern in the ceiling decoration and some fine stained glass windows, notably the Calvary scene behind the high altar, the window commemorating the death of Fr Harding (both of which belonged to the 1838 church) and perhaps most splendid of all, is the Epiphany window from the Harry Clarke studios.

Many people regard the interior of Millstreet Church as elegant and aesthetically appealing. The rich variety of its decor is worth detailed scrutiny. Although comparisons between churches, which are unlike in style are invidious, in my opinion Millstreet Church ranks amongst the finest in the diocese. It is arguably the oldest functioning building in the town and is worth the expenditure and effort needed to preserve it for posterity.

The dozen columns or pillars, which separate the nave from the aisles are said to have come from the 1932 Eucharistic Congress. Each column rests on a high base, has a curved furrowing or fluting along its surface and is surmounted with an elaborately decorated capital. The volutes or spirals of the Ionic style are combined with the stiff carved acanthus leaf of the Corinthian style. Added to these decorative motifs are four crosses, one carved in each face of the capital. Equally decorative are the horizontally arranged embellishments of the lintel or beam resting on the columns. These include dentils, which are the small block shaped mouldings projecting underneath the cornice.

The mosaics on the back wall behind the altar were completed in the 1950's. There are representations of St Patrick, patron of the parish and St Brendan, patron of the diocese as well as Christian symbols such as the Alpha and Omega.

Exterior renovations, now complete, include the felting, insulation and re-slating of the roof, new limestone ridging, hydraulic-lime pointing to all the porous stone of the walls to breathe and let water out and the re-leading of some of the fine stained glass windows. Major capital expenditure is involved but the parish has embarked on interesting and imaginative fund-raising schemes.

On the exterior façade of the church, just above the beautifully carved Celtic cross in Portland stone, are the Latin words *Laus Deo Semper*. They are apt words to end our tour as they invite us to praise God always. In the past, students in Jesuit Colleges traditionally concluded their essays with these words or the letters L. D. S.

## **Epilogue.**

This compilation of poetry, history and antiquities associated with Clara and its environs has been the result of a collaborative effort by a few of us eager to share our interest in our local heritage and environment. It is amazing how much of the country's long history is encapsulated in the storied places of settlement around the hill. By taking a leisurely tour round its circuit one comes across the place where earliest writing in Ogham script was found; the location of two early churches, the ruins of a castle, the grandeur of a decaying Great House, the find site of an early dugout canoe and many other remnants of human activities over the centuries.

Ireland, although small in size, is rich in heritage but we can sometimes be oblivious to the rich legacy of the past right on our own doorstep. The generations who have gone before us have left their stamp on the landscape. Many of the placenames are signatures of people who left their mark – the O'Cahans, Scanlans, the Leaders, Mo Ide, the Ó Dálaighs and others.

This publication aims to stimulate a renewed interest in our local landscape by providing some background information on the monuments of earlier generations. Some of the stories recalled are of sad and painful experiences; feuds, battles, evictions, oppression, famine and death. Others recall the noble achievements of the human spirit in poetry, song, worship and in generosity, caring, community concern and beautiful buildings.

Clara is featured in poetry since the 9<sup>th</sup> Century. The long poem by Gofraidh Fionn, which was translated and commented on, in the early pages, refer to it as a noble and

illustrious hill, albeit for him a hill of tears. His stature as a poet was recognized in his lifetime and his death notice calls him The Ard Ollamh of Éireann. Literary critics and poets since his day have also paid tribute to his poetic greatness, and to the compression and elegance of his style. He belonged to a great Bardic family who held lands from their patron, the McCarthy Mores, in Ballydaly and Nohovaldaly. It is surprising therefore that he has attracted so little local interest.

But what is about Clara that has made it appealing to many over the years. It is an interesting question to speculate on. Perhaps because of its visually impressive features with its smooth shape, modest height and the fact that it is a focal point in the landscape from all directions. It also, as it were, stands aloof from the Cahirbarna Range of hills of which it is the eastern terminus. Like other hills it stands as a symbol of human aspiration and endeavour. It also reflects permanency and endurance and, on the other hand, changing activities on its summit and around its base. These are the polarities of human growth and development.

It forms a comforting backdrop to the town of Millstreet and, as such, has been featured in photographs, postcards and tourist literature. Although some of its past history is now forgotten, e.g. the tribal assemblies on its top and the battles and duels on its slopes, other of the events associated with it are still embedded in the folk memory. It has, of course, entered into the proverbial lore as an omen for good weather “When Musherá is capped and Clara clear it’s a sign that settled weather is near”.

Our own interest in this fascinating hill was first awakened in primary school days by a specimen essay, which read as follows:

From my favourite haunt here by the river I watch the sun sink low over the Kerry Hills. Southward, Clara raises its blue brow against a sky of undescrivable glory. The hill too looks beautiful clothed in a shimmering mantle of deep purple, gold, russet brown and orange. The sky seems to be on fire with flames of a thousand colours. The silence is broken only by the occasional burst of birdsong and the soft murmur of the drowsy river.

A verse from the poem “Storied Avondu”, which was composed locally is an appropriate ending for this publication.

“Once more in purple honey’d heath  
old Clara is arrayed;  
and down the fairy silent glens  
the furze bells are displayed;  
The honeysuckle and violet nod  
Doneen’s green meadows o’er’  
while over Drishane’s arbour green  
the singing skylarks roar “.



## Some other publications by the Aubane Historical Society

- \* **St. John's Well**, by *Mary O'Brien*
- \* **Duhallow: Notes Towards A History**, by *B. Clifford*
- \* **Ned Buckley's Poems**
- \* **A North Cork Miscellany**
- \* **Canon Sheehan: A Turbulent Priest**, by *B Clifford*
- \* **A North Cork Anthology**, by *J. Lane and B. Clifford*
- \* **Local Evidence to the Devon Commission**
- \* **Spotlights on Irish History**, by *Brendan Clifford*
- \* **Aubane: Where In The World Is It? A Microcosm Of Irish History in a Cork Townland**, by *Jack Lane*
- \* **Piarais Feiritéir: Dánta/Poems**, with *Translations by Pat Muldowney*
- \* **Aubane School and its Roll Books**, by *Jack Lane*
- \* **Notes on the history of Millstreet**, by *Canon Michael Costello and Pádraig Ó'Maidín*
- \* **A Millstreet Medley**, by *various authors with rediscovered material by Canon Sheehan and Eoghan Ruadh O'Súilleabháin*
- \* **Millstreet - "the cockpit of Ireland"** (by *various authors*)
- \* **Millstreet- A "Considerable" Town** by *various authors*
- \* **A Millstreet Miscellany** by *various authors*
- \* **Sean Moylan: in his own words. His memoir of the Irish War of Independence.**
- \* **The 'Boys' of the Millstreet Battalion area** by *veterans of the War of Independence*
- \* **All the owners of land in Cork in 1872** (HMSO)
- \* **A Millstreet Miscellany (2)** by *various authors* 56
- \* **Why Millstreet's history needs to be written** by *Jack Lane*
- \* **Around the Cork-Kerry Border – recalling the Rambling House** by *Dan Cronin.*
- \* **The Poems of Geoffrey O'Donoghue** by *John Minahane*
- \* **The story of the Moving Bog** by *Joseph Dinneen*
- \* **Dánta/Poems by Eoghan Ruadh O'Súilleabháin** translated by *Pat Muldowney*
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Clara is the focal point of the parish of Millstreet and can be seen from every direction. Viewed from the west, its smooth hemispherical shape is striking. The town of Millstreet nestles at the foot of Clara and one feels embosomed within its embrace, as if by the wings of a bird.

In this publication Fr. Seán Tucker traces the history of Clara from the time of the Fianna when an ancient battle took place on its slopes and it includes a poem, which recounts that battle dated to the 9th Century. There is a later poem by Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh of 37 verses about Clara. The annalists refer to him as the greatest poet of his time in Ireland. In this poem he alludes to the fact that he was raised at the foot of Clara, but that the hill is a source of much sorrow and tears for him. He mentions two battles fought there, one the legendary Battle of Feic from the Fianagheact literature and the other nearer his own time. Its translation is published here for the first time.

Clara itself is a repository of much song and story. By taking the reader on a tour of the fifteen kilometre circuit round its base Fr. Tucker introduces us to the many places of interest along the way. These include the remains of an early farmstead dating from the first Millennium; three ruined churches and burial grounds; an ascendancy Big House; a castle or Tower House of the McCarthys; and the site of the former workhouse. There are also some interesting archaeological sites along the route, as well as many splendid views of the surrounding landscape.