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Timoleague Abbey.

BY DENHAM FRANKLIN, J.P.



Nearing the small town of Timoleague, by the railway which runs alongside the river Arigadeen, the striking ruins of Timoleague Abbey at once arrest the attention.

Father Mooney calls it "one of the noblest houses of the Franciscan Order in Ireland." Popular tradition assigns the foundation, if not of the abbey, at least of an early Christian church, to Saint Molaga, who is still regarded as the patron of Timoleague, and from whom the name of the town is derived—Teach-Molaga signifying "Molaga's house." There is no absolute record of St. Molaga having come to Timoleague, but, from the name and the universal belief, there can be little doubt he did. He was a native of Fermoy, and was born early in the seventh century. His real name is doubtful, and the designation he is known by is said to have been conferred on him by St. David of Wales, who was greatly attached to him. He founded a monastery at a place called Tulach-Min ("the little smooth hill"), which cannot now be identified, but which there is strong reason to believe was near Kildorrery. After much ministry, he crossed over into Scotland, and then went to Wales, where he met St. David. Having been warned by an angel in a dream to return to Ireland, he went to Dublin, where he cured the chief of an illness, who bestowed on him a place in Fingal, on which to erect a church, which he built, and removed there hive bees, which he had brought from Wales, and which seem to have been only then introduced into Ireland. This church is believed to have been near Balbriggan. He subsequently went to Clonmacnoise, where a deputation from

Fermoy waited on him, imploring him to return to his own country, and offering him large rewards, which he decidedly refused; but in the end he yielded to the tears and entreaties of his fellow-countrymen, and returned to Tullamain, where he was received with unbounded joy. A dreadful plague ravaged Ireland in 664, and it is mentioned that St. Molaga remained with his flock all through it and survived it. The exact year of his death is not known, but it took place on 20th January, which is his festival. His church Temple Molaga is considered by Windele to be what is now called Athnacross, near Kildorrery.

I am indebted to Mr. Philip Raymond, of Mitchelstown, for the accompanying sketch and particulars of Labba Molaga, "Molaga's bed, or grave," situate about four miles north-east of Temple Molaga. Mr. Raymond says: "The north wall is about six feet high on the interior, but much less on the exterior. The east and south wall rather lower. A side foundation stone was discovered some time since by me under a quantity of *débris*. The flagstone in the interior is either the penitential bed of the saint, or his tombstone, perhaps both. Numbers get under this flagstone in order to cure rheumatism. The two pillar stones forming the door are precisely similar to the upright stones in a pagan cemetery in an adjoining field."

In the building are a number of oval brown stones, the removal of which is strongly objected to. They are said to have been balls of woollen thread that a thief tried to steal; he lost his life, and the thread was

turned into stone. There is a curious-shaped white sandstone which is now used for a singular trial of strength. The thumb of a man's hand, if small, can be inserted in the hole, and the trial is to lift the stone by the thumb only, and place it on the side wall. A man with a large hand cannot get his thumb into the hole, and a weak man cannot lift the stone with one hand. There are the remains of another building said to have been a monastery, near at hand, but no doorway or window remains.

With reference to the stone mentioned in the foregoing description, the Rev. John O'Hanlon, in his *Lives of the Saints*, says:—"The external angle had been formed into a column, and a cap, with gudgeon holes worked at the joint extremities, seems to have belonged to this door. This rested on the Leabba flagstone, but it has been sketched separately by Mr. Windele." The mention of the pagan cemetery near at hand gives the clue to what the oval brown stones were, such being the usual marks of pagan interments; these flat stones, of whatever kind are common in the district, being thrown out whenever one of the early pagan graves are disturbed. The fair on 20th January at Kildorrery is known as the "Molaga Fair."

So far as to the reputed founder of Timoleague, and we can imagine an early Christian community with the well-known beehive-shaped houses, having existed, at or near the site of the abbey, combating the paganism which still existed broadcast in Ireland in the seventh century. The tradition at Timoleague is that Saint Molaga and his disciples endeavoured to build their settlement elsewhere in the neighbourhood, but that whatever they built in the day fell down at night; judging from this that it was not the will of Heaven that they should continue building at that place, they took a sheaf of corn and placing in it a lighted candle from off the altar, St. Molaga offered up a prayer that the Lord would guide it, when set afloat, to whatever spot he wished the abbey to be built on, and accordingly after floating down the harbour some way, it went ashore just where the present building stands. So far for the traditional founding of the Christian community in the seventh century.

To come to more recent times. In Edward the Second's reign, "Tamelag" is mentioned as "enclosed with a stone wall," probably a

rath or caiseal—Rotulus Patens de Annis 3 & 4 Edwd. II., Dorss. 135, Rex concessit Ballivis (bailiffs) et plebis hominibus de Tamelag, per 3 annos, consuetudines (customs) per Edwd. I. iis concessas erga dictam Villam, cum muro lapidas claudentam 1 April. Edward III. succeeded to the throne in 1327, and O'Hart, *Irish Pedigrees*, 4th ed., 1887, p. 118, gives the pedigree of MacCarthy Reagh, princes of Carbery, mentioning Donal Caomh (or "the handsome"), son of Donal Maol, lord of Carbery, 1262 to 1310, upon decease of his father, became in 1311 Prince of Carbery, died in 1320, and was succeeded by his eldest son Donal Glas, prince of Carbery from 1326 to 1366, who rebuilt the abbey of Timoleague upon the ruins of the ancient abbey of the same saint (St. Molaga), and in this abbey he was buried in 1366, being succeeded by his eldest son Donal Reagh. In the reign of Henry III., about a century before this, a great battle was fought at Timoleague, when the Hodnetts, who up to that had owned the town, were completely routed, and Lord Philip Hodnett killed, by the Barrys, under Lord Barrymore, who seized on the town, and apparently held it, as in Edward III.'s reign David Barry, Miles, is mentioned as of Tamelagh and Lyslye. The Hodnetts spoken of came from Shropshire, and appear to have dispossessed the O'Cowigs. They were a very powerful family, and owned Belvelly, near Queenstown. In order to assimilate their name to the Irish, they called themselves MacSherry, or the "son of Geoffrey," and it is from this that the name of Courtmacsherry is derived.

In 1578, Elizabeth's reign, lease was granted to Sir James Barry, knt., Visct. Buttevant, of the site of the house of friars of Castlelyons, co. Cork, and land belonging thereto; the site of the friary of Tymolagg, same county; a churchyard called Downe, two gardens on the east and one on the north of the house, and a park containing a watermill; also, site of the house of friars Augustines, of Killanemallaghe, *alias* Botevante, for twenty-one years; rent, 16s. 8d. for Castlelyons; 50s. for Tymolagg, and 36s. 8d. for Buttevant; and to maintain three English footmen, with clause against alienation, without licence. This non-alienation clause was subsequently revoked.

Above is an instance of an Anglo-Norman nobleman taking a share of church plunder. The native Irish chiefs were also not averse

to this. In 1582, and afterwards in 1589, there appear leases from the crown, but the words *site* of the house of friars at Tymolagg

allowed these valuable materials to remain, but he may possibly have had some religious scruples, not shared by the others. When

James I. succeeded, the monasteries of Kilcrea and Timoleague were both rebuilt and renovated, but the respite was short, as in 1612 we read Bishop Lyons was coming down to disperse the friars, and we know from our city history that this reaction,

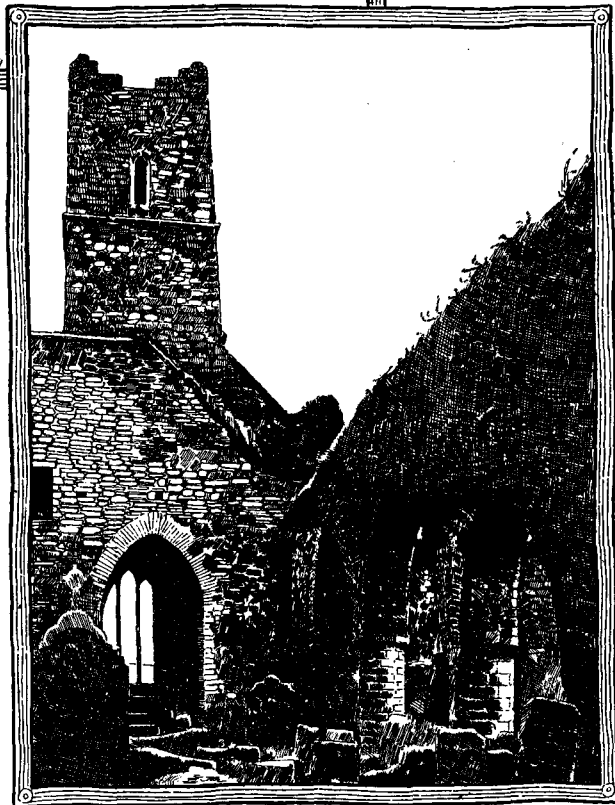


EXTERIOR VIEW.

and appurtenances are always used, from which it would appear the building was either demolished or in ruins. In 1594 a court of inquiry was held at Timoleague, *re* David Barry, owner *in capite*, deceased. The land seems finally to have been given to Lord Inchiquin, and most of the tithes to Trinity College, Dublin. The great destruction of the abbey seems to have occurred in Elizabeth's reign, when 150 English soldiers smashed the stained glass windows and generally damaged church and monastery, and were subsequently cut to pieces by a force under Daniel O'Sullivan, prince of Bere.

Father Mooney states Bishop Lyons removed the stones and machinery from the mill on the Arigadeen, in 1590, and that a Doctor Hammer, an Anglican clergyman, pulled down the oak wainscoting of the friars' cells, in 1596, to build his house with near Cork, but that the vessel was lost at sea.

It seems curious that if so much material existed in 1590, and 1596, that in 1578, in lease, the site only is mentioned, and also singular that Lord Buttevant



INTERIOR VIEW.
TIMOLEAGUE ABBEY, COUNTY CORK.

From Photographs by DENHAM FRANKLIN, J.P.

when James came to the throne, was very short-lived, and only ended in more severity

being shown by the government. Then we learn from the list of chapters held in secret, that in 1629—15th August—there was one held at Limerick Convent; guardian appointed, Eugenius Fildæus, and so on to 1794, numbers of places being mentioned at which chapters were held, as *Loco refugii*, i.e., that chapters met in secret during the penal times, proving that the abbey must have been virtually deserted since 1629.

In the complete absence of any records of the abbey, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to decide between such conflicting accounts. For instance, one authority gives date of foundation as 1240, another about 1340, and different founders even are mentioned, but it is evident portions of the building are of different dates. Of all the valuable library given by Bishop de Courcy, so far as we know, not one page remains, and of all the valuable plate, but one small chalice, which was discovered in a house in Cape Clear about thirty-three years ago in this way:—Rev. Henry Leader, parish priest of Rath and the Islands, was holding a “station” in a house in Cape Clear, when his attention was drawn to a curious-looking old box in a corner of the room, and the owner of the house, when questioned, said it had been there in his and in his father’s time and had never been opened, but that the tradition in the island was—that a priest had left it there in the troubled times. Father Leader and his curate then opened the box, which was found to contain a set of vestments (which fell to pieces on being moved) and a chalice, black with age. On being cleaned the chalice was found to have the following inscription on its stem:

“—’ ff r ü Min; conv de — Thimolaggi.”

There is no date. Father Leader sent it to the parish priest of Timoleague, the late Fr. Edward Mulcahy, and it is now in his successor’s custody. In *Monasticon Hibernicum*, a manuscript said to have belonged to Timoleague Abbey is quoted from, but no clue is given as to where it could be found, and Smith in his *History of Cork* quotes from the *Liber Mortuorum*, or Book of Obits, in a manner that would lead one to infer that he had seen it, and he says it is in Marsh’s Library, King’s Collection, Trin. Coll., Dublin, but the book cannot now be found in either King’s Collection or Marsh’s Library. The ruin itself, since it has been vested in the Board of

Works, who spent a good deal on it, is in a better state than formerly.

The description given in Smith, which I will not repeat, as it will be republished in our Magazine, is fairly accurate, but as it was written in the last century I may add that the inscription he mentions on a tomb, viz.:—
“Hic jacet bonus vir dominus Thade O’Cul leane, al Totan, cum suis filiis eorum, et successoribus. Requiescant in pace. Amen. A.D. 1635,” is now very nearly obliterated. I understand a small farmer named Collins, the last of this family, who, to judge from above inscription and the position of the tomb, were once people of distinction, was interred in it about three or four years ago. Smith says, south window of transept is three lancet-shaped lights, which is correct, but adjoining this window to the east is a long opening, sixty-three inches high by twenty broad, which has been recognized as the Lepers’ Hole, through which these unfortunates, who were not allowed to enter the church, could see the priest officiating, hear the service, and probably receive the sacrament. The leper hospital was about a mile away, and gives its name still to the townland of Spittal. A ruined ivy-covered arch is all that remains of it. Smith goes on to say:—On the east side of south transept is an oratory with light and elegant windows. These are gone, but under this oratory lie the remains of a very distinguished man, Edmund de Courcy, who was a monk in the abbey, and was subsequently made bishop of Clogher. In Sept., 1194, he was translated to the bishopric of Ross. He stood so high with the government during Perkin Warbeck’s rebellion, that when Sir Richard Edgecomb arrived in Dublin after it, to administer the oath of allegiance to leading persons there, he sent for Bishop de Courcy to confer with him, and said it was unnecessary to take *his* oath, he stood so high with the crown. This bishop was enabled by his influence with his nephew, James Lord Kingsale, to build the fine gothic tower, seventy feet high, which still stands in an excellent state of preservation, also the dormitory, infirmary, and library. In fact, he almost built the abbey, which probably accounts for the different architecture, and besides endowed it with many valuable books and much plate.

His remains were interred in 1518 in a vault under the south side of the oratory, in the centre of which a very beautiful Celtic

cross has been recently erected to the memory of Mrs. OHea, of Clonakilty. In this chapel is a peculiar architectural design, viz. :—Two arches springing from a pillar, and another starting from same pillar at a right angle to the other two. Bishop de Courcy's successor, John Imurilly, is also buried there, having died only a year after; also, Allen Patrick O'Fihelly, of the Order of Friars Minors, famed for his great learning.

In the north-western angle of cloister is buried a very remarkable man in his day—Eugene MacEgan, bishop-elect of Ross, and the Pope's apostolic vicar, who was killed near Bandon in 1601, by the English forces. The Irish were defeated, but carried off his body and buried it here. The account of the action is given as follows in *Pacata Hibernia*, and it will be observed what importance the writer attached to Bishop MacEgan's death :—

"Pacata Hibernia, vol. ii., page 662.

"Captain Taffe with 440 foot and some horse was sent in 1602 into Carbery against the MacCarties, and on 5th January drove off 2 or 300 cows and horses." It goes on to say :—"The rebels in pursuit of their cattle gave them so brave a charge, as they were disordered, whereby some of them were slaine, which Captain Taffe perceiving, being in the head of his horse troope in the skirt of the fastnesse and espying some of their horsemen to doe much hurt upon our foote, charged them into the wood, slew foure of their horsemen, and put all the rest to rout, wherewith our men being encouraged, pursued them. Owen MacEggan (the Pope's Apostolike Vicar, so often before mentioned), to put fresh heart into his company, with his sword drawne in one hand, and his *portius* and beades in the other, with one hundred men led by himselfe, he came boldly up to the sword, and main-tayned a hot skirmish, untill he was slaine with a shot, whereupon his men (together with a fresh charge of our horse), were so amazed and terrified, partly by his death and partly by their owne danger, that they broke instantly, and for better expedition throwing away their armes, leaped into the river Bandon, hoping by that meanes to escape, but that little availed them, for they all for the most part were either killed or drowned in the river. There were slaine in this service (besides Owen MacEggan, who

"was of more worth than all the rest) above 120 rebels, and of the provincially rising out of our part, a good number lost their lives, and many of Capt. Taffe's horses hurt; wee got the armes of 100 and fourtie, and all their horses, cowes, sheepe and garrans that were in the country neere adjoining. There was also taken a Papist priest, being as it seemed a chaplaine to MacEggan, whom the president (shortly after) caused to be executed in Corke."

The writer goes on to say that immediately after all Carbery was reduced to subjection—"no one open traytor remayning therein." "A principall meanes of this suddaine & universall reduction was the death of that traitorly Priest, Owen MacEggan, which doubtlesse was more beneficiall to the state than to have gotten the head of the most capital Rebelle in Mounster." Furthermore, he states that the livings given him in Munster by the Pope's grant were worth £3,000 a-year, but adds, "if he might quietly have enjoyed them." A long description of him then follows, in which it is said—"A more malicious Traytor against the State and Crowne of England never breathed, and that if any Irish were taken, if they had served the Queen (Elizabeth) he caused them first to be confessed, and absolved, and instantly, in his own sight, to be murdered."

It was a charge of conspiracy with this Bishop MacEgan, heard before the Lord President and Council sitting at Shandon Castle, that caused Cormack McCarthy to surrender Blarney Castle, as a pledge that could justify him from the indictment, the terms being that, if he could prove his innocence, the castle should be restored to him. Bishop MacEgan had brought £12,000 from Spain, and seems to have been a most stirring prelate, to judge from a letter of his to Richd. MacGeoghegan, commander of Dunboy, wherein he tells him that 14,000 men are coming from Spain, with an Italian Nuncio, who "shall give all a benediction, yea, I hope within your castle there, spite of all the devils in hell." This warlike prelate sleeps peacefully now in Timoleague; his grave was once marked with a small cross, scored in the plaster over it, which has long since disappeared. It seems as if the niche was intended for a tablet, but none appears to have been ever erected. In the choir, on the left-hand facing the east is an

arched recess, which seems once to have contained either a tablet or a monument of some kind. The crown of the arch is covered with the remains of some beautiful cut stonework, and there is evidently a vault underneath. The preservation of the abbey is mainly due to the care bestowed on it by the family of the present proprietor of Timoleague, Mr. Robert Travers, who did not allow the depre- dations unfortunately too common on our ancient buildings. The ruin is now protected by the Board of Works, in whom it was vested under the Ancient Monuments' Bill.

Last year Mass was celebrated in the abbey after a period of nearly two centuries and a half, and the chalice mentioned above was used on the occasion. The sermon was preached by the Rev. Father Jarlath, of Kilarney, to whom, as well as to Rev. Father O'Reilly, of Dublin, I am indebted for much valuable information, as also to our Council Member, Mr. H. W. Gillman.

In my opinion it is to be regretted that a suitable burying-ground is not provided elsewhere, and the abbey ground—which is frightfully overcrowded—closed, levelled and neatly kept. It is impossible to see these venerable ruins without reflecting how splendid the building must have been in its prime, and with what appreciation of the beautiful site was chosen, just where the Arigadeen flows into Courtnacsherry bay, in the days when ships came up the harbour as far as Timoleague, laden with wine from Spain, an account which is strangely verified by the discovery near the castle, which is about 500 yards from the abbey, of a bronze hair-pin, said to be of Spanish manufacture, which has been intrusted to me for inspection, by Mr. Travers. The size and strength of the ruins attest what violence must have been used to reduce them to their present state. Four friars were living in the ruins in 1696, but since then they have been deserted, and as Mangán says—

“Tempest and Time—the drifting sands—
The lightning and the rains—the seas that
sweep around
These hills in winter nights, have awfully
crowned
The work of impious hands.”

DATE OF CHAPTER.	HELD AT.	TIMOLEAGUE GUARDIAN APPOINTED
15 Aug., 1629..	Limerick Convent ..	Eugenius Fildæus.
8 Feb., 1645..	Kilconnell	Daniel Crualy.
5 Sept., 1647..	Roserilly	Daniel Crualy.
4 Feb., 1648..	Cavan	Francis Sullivane.
4 Aug., 1650..	Kilconnell	David Hodnett.
9 Oct., 1658..	Conv. of John Baptist	Vacat.
26 Feb., 1659..	Bæ. Mariæ or Conv. of Jamestown	Eug. Fildæus.
8 Sept., 1661..	.. ..	Eug. Fildæus.
18 Oct., 1669..	Meelick 'Convent' ..	Carolus Carthy.
5 March, 1670..	Athlone	Dermitius Croly.
21 Nov., 1672..	Elphin	Bonaventura Croly.
23 Aug., 1675..	Athlone	Keallaghanus Carty.
23 Jan., 1676..	Killihy	Keallaghanus Carty.
24 Aug., 1678..	Athlone	Antonius Carty.
28 April, 1680..	(1) Loco refugii ..	Antonius Carty.
4 March, 1681..	.. ..	Finianus McCarthy.
13 Jan., 1683..	.. ..	Finianus McCarthy.
23 Aug., 1684..	Athlone Convent ..	Finianus McCarthy.
27 Jan., 1685..	Kinalfrilim (Kinal- phin)	Finianus McCarthy.
15 Aug., 1687..	Roserilly Convent ..	Joannes Callanan.
5 May, 1689..	Kilconnell	Dionysius Drisceoil.
24 Aug., 1690..	Galway	Dionysius Driscol.
18 Feb., 1693..	Dublin	Joannes Galvan.
25 July, 1697..	.. ..	Antonius Murphy.
26 July, 1699..	Louvain	Antonius Murphy.
17 Oct., 1700..	.. ..	Eug. MacCarthy.
9 June, 1702..	Cavan	Eug. MacCarthy.
13 Nov., 1703..	Loco refugii, Dublin.	Francis O'Donellan.
9 June, 1705..	.. ..	Francis Donovan.
13 Nov., 1706..	.. ..	Joannes Browne.
12 May, 1708..	.. ..	Antonius Martin.
12 Oct., 1709..	.. .. Conv. Dublin	Francis Donavane.
7 Jan., 1711..	.. ..	Francis Donavane.
13 Oct., 1714..	.. ..	Joan. Browne.
10 May, 1716..	.. .. Kilconnell	Franc. Donevan.
16 Oct., 1717..	.. .. Dublin	Franc. O'Breyn.
17 Nov., 1720..	.. ..	John Ryan.
8 Oct., 1739..	.. ..	Mich. Kerin.
24 July, 1741..	.. ..	.. ..
25 May, 1741..	.. ..	Antony Considen.
16 Aug., 1742..	.. ..	Antony Considen.
16 April, 1744..	.. ..	Franc. Gallagher.
12 Aug., 1745..	.. ..	Franc. Gallagher.
12 Feb., 1747..	.. ..	Mich. Kerin.
22 Aug., 1748..	.. ..	Mich. Kerin.
16 Feb., 1751..	.. .. Athlone	Franc. Godfry.
26 Aug., 1751..	.. .. Dublin	Mich. Kerin.
19 Feb., 1759..	.. ..	Mich. Kerin.
18 Aug., 1760..	.. ..	Francis Gallagher.
19 Oct., 1761..	.. .. Athlone	Francis Gallagher.

The Acts of the Chapters are wanting in this collection from the last date until 1784.

12 May, 1784..	Loco refugii, Athlone	John Prendergast.
25 July, 1785..	.. .. Dublin	John Prendergast.
9 May, 1787..	.. .. Athlone	John Prendergast.
14 July, 1788..	.. .. Dublin	Bonav. Tobin.
18 May, 1790..	.. .. Athlone	Anthony Fleming.
11 July, 1791..	.. .. Dublin	Bonav. Tobin.
23 July, 1793..	.. .. Athlone	Bonav. Tobin.
14 July, 1794..	.. .. Dublin	Bonav. Tobin.

(From a "Report made by His Grace the Lord Primate from the Lords' Committees appointed to inquire into the present state of Popery in the kingdom of Ireland," &c., 1731. Reprinted 1747, and again, 1842.)

The foregoing is authenticated, with the exception of the printed Report last mentioned, which has more than one error.

(1) *Loco refugii* means that during the penal times they could not meet except in secret, and at the risk of their lives. The convents of Dublin, Athlone, Kilconnell, &c., are given as such *loci*, but it may be that they could not meet in these convents and had to come to some neighbouring place.