

Le Chêile

Community Magazine



October 2020

No. 387

EDITORIAL

We take this opportunity to keep in contact with readers, a contact which extends over forty six years and which has seen much progress and many achievements. Meeting the Covid challenge has to remain our primary motivation at this time and all else takes a step to one side. Contributors have not been asked to do the impossible and come forward with reports on happenings and events which could not take place in present circumstances.

Our principal focus has to be on doing our best to control and combat the pandemic while striving to protect our own health and that of the community. Social distancing, personal cleanliness, wearing masks in public situations, looking out for vulnerable members of the community and personal fitness have to be at the top of our list.

Our high regards have to be paid to those who are at the front line -the medical and health care workers, the staff in our schools, the staff in shops who are keeping us supplied with food and essentials.

It is inspiring to see the generally high regard which has been given to the rules and recommendations by the majority of the public. People have been more careful with litter and the generous volunteers have kept on top of shrubberies, flowerbeds and areas prone to go into weeds. It is greatly appreciated.

SAINT AILBE & CLANE ABBEY

In our last issue we referred to the fact

that September 12th is the Feast Day of Saint Ailbe The early Christian Abbey in Clane was founded by Saint Ailbe who was Bishop of Emily in the modern county of Tipperary. It is said that he and a number of fellow bishops, including Declan of Ardmore, Ciarán of Saighir and Ibar of Begerin, were among those already preaching Christianity in Ireland when Pope Celestine ordained Palladius, a deacon from Gaul, as bishop and sent, him to Ireland in 431 “to minister to the Irish believing in Christ”. This is documented in Rome. It has been said that Celistine’s concern was more to prevent the spread of the Pelagian heresy to practicing Christians in Ireland than to Christianise them in the first place. Ailbe is said to have appointed Senchell as first abbot in Clane. This would open up the possibility of its establishment prior to the coming of St. Patrick in 432. [See the September 2020 issue of *Le Chéile* for details]

A BLESSING OF THE GRAVES IN THE GRAVE YARD ATTACHED TO THE OLD CHURCH OF SAINT MICHAEL OFF THE GREEN

On Saturday 12th September, the Feast Day of St. Ailbe, at 5pm a joint blessing of the graves was carried out by Fr. Paul O’Boyle, P.P. of Clane and Revd Gregg Ryan as Priest-in-charge of Clane Un-

EDITOR’S DEADLINE

The deadline for receipt of material for the November issue of *Le Chéile* is

Monday 26th October

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ion of parishes. A tree was planted and a wreath was put in place to mark the occasion. Unfortunately, on account of the regulations applying for the control of the Corona Virus Pandemic the attendance had to be limited to the two clergymen and four others.

Hopefully, with improvements in the public health area, this could become an ongoing event into the future.

SAINT AILBE

We are grateful to Seamus Cullen for the following notes on St. Ailbe.

□ St Ailbe is recognised by scholars as the leading pre-Patrician saint of Ireland. He is therefore regarded as one of the four great patrons of Ireland, Patrick, Bridget and Columbkille being the other three. Clane has a connection with three of the four patrons.

□ St Ailbe has a connection with the Romulus and Remus story. Legend has it that Ailbe's mother was the slave of a king who ordered that her baby be killed. However, the baby was abandoned in the wilderness where he was found hidden under a rock and alive by a she-wolf who reared him along with her own cubs. See image of a baby and she-wolf on the St Ailbe stained glass windows in Honan Chapel, UCC, and published on the front cover of A history of Christianity in Clane & Rathcoffey.

□ The name Ailbe is said to be derived from a rock (ail) and alive (beo).

□ According to ancient texts Ailbe was discovered by visiting Britons who took him to Wales where he was later baptised by Palladius.

□ Ailbe's early missionary work was cen-

tered in Wales. However, while early texts suggest he was baptised by St David, the patron saint of Wales this would not be accurate as David lived in the 6th century and Ailbe as recognised by many scholars, lived in the 5th century. He subsequently left Wales to continue his missionary work in Ireland.

□ Scholars differ regarding the date of the establishment of the first Church in Clane by Ailbe. It is now recognised by historians that he belonged to the Palladius mission which pre-dated St Patrick. Pre-Patrician missionaries in history were subsequently given a date later than 432 to boost the primacy of Armagh and also to provide an undisputable reputation of St Patrick's evangelisation of the entire country.

□ Clane takes its name from Claonadh, the sloping place. Other variations include,

Claen Damh, the field of the oxen; Claen Áth, the field of the ford; Claon Áth, the slanted ford; the ford on the bend of the river.

□ There are a number of reasons why Ailbe chose Clane and targeted the general area to convert to Christianity, first, the strategic position of Clane and second, its connection to pre-Christian religious activity.

□ The principal road linking the capitals of Leinster and Meath forded the Liffey at Clane. Strategically, Clane was one of the most important locations between Nás na Riogh and Tara.

□ Clane was a centre of pre-Christian religious activity which included two ritual springs which later became holy wells.

□ A bullaun stone connected to pre-historic religious activity is sited on the opposite side of a stream called the Butterstream, which marked the boundary of the outer

enclosure of Ailbe's church.

□ Having established the church in Clane, Ailbe passed authority to St Senchell one of

his followers and continued his Christian missionary work in Munster.

□ St Ailbe founded a church at Emily which throughout the early Christian period was

the chief ecclesiastical centre of Munster. He is regarded as the first bishop of Emily,

is known as the patron saint of Munster and also as the Patrick of Munster.

□ Ailbe loved hospitality and is noted for his charity and excellent preaching.

□ His connection and friendship with King Aengus of Munster, enabled him to successfully extend Christianity in the province.

Details mainly from:

A history of Christianity in Clane & Rathcoffey (2011), Page 16-21.

Le Cheile, Community Magazine (Clane), April 1984.

The article referred to above was presented under the title:

“KNOW YOUR CLANE . . .

With the restoration of the Abbey Church nearing completion we have had a number of requests to reprint our historical note of nine years ago (April 1975), following the conservation work on the bell tower.

There has been a church on the Green in Clane for over fifteen hundred years. The Annals record that the Abbey of Clane was founded by St. Ailbe, Bishop of Ferns, who is said to have preached the Gospel in Ireland before St. Patrick's time. He made St. Senchell its first abbot.

The chronology of the early missionaries to Ireland is very confused and it is not helped by the fact that the first written native account was not produced until about 740. This was a compilation made by an unknown monk believed to have been working in Bangor, Co. Down. It is of interest that when Pope Cellistine sent Palladius to Ireland in 431 he sent him “as Bishop to the Irish believing in Christ”. Conceivably the people of Clane were among these pre-patrician Christians.

So when was the church in Clane founded? On the basis that the facts were first recorded in the Irish annals only three hundred years later and this by Northern monks who were who were anxious more, than anything else, to establish the Primacy of Armagh on the primacy of St. Patrick it is particularly difficult to say. Even in regard to St. Patrick there is much confusion. Thomas O'Rahilly, a scholar of the Institute of Advanced Studies, writing in 1942, put forward the intriguing proposal that there were two St. Patricks. Palladius, he claimed, with excellent authority from the manuscripts, was properly “Patricius Palladius”. Briefly he claimed that the Patrick who died in 461 was in fact Palladius who did not die in 432, as was claimed by the annalists over three hundred years later. A fact which had always confused scholars was that “St. Patrick” was sometimes claimed to have died in 492. This date O'Rahilly accepts for the death of “Patricius Secundus”, as a number of annalists have referred to him, or the St. Patrick of Armagh, author of the “Confessio”. In other words the “St. Patrick” we have come to

know might well have been a composite of two men. In circumstances like these it is no more difficult to accept St. Ailbe as founding the Abbey of Clane in pre-patrician times. Whatever its origin, the old Abbey in Clane had a long and interesting career. Among other episodes in its career, it was sacked by the Danes in 1035 and it was the scene of a general synod of the Church in Ireland in 1162. This was attended by 26 bishops and numerous abbots. The attendance included St. Lawrence O'Toole, Archbishop of Dublin and Gelladius, Archbishop of Armagh. It further confirmed the primacy of Armagh when it ruled that nobody could be a lector (Professor of Divinity) in Ireland who had not graduated from Armagh.

In all probability the old Celtic Abbey became suppressed with the coming of the Norman Franciscans in 1258.

In 1542 the Franciscan Abbey itself was disbanded under Henry VIII. The Church of Ireland maintained continuity of worship at the Green until 1883, when the Church of St. Michael and All Angels was built at Millicent. A reference in the Royal Visitation Book described the Chancel as being in ruins in 1615. Petit's map of the Down Survey, conducted in the latter half of that century, seems to show two churches on the site. Taylor's map of 1783 shows a thumb sketch of the church with, surprisingly, a tall pointed spire surmounting the present square steeple. In 1798 part at least, (probably the roof) of the Church was destroyed by fire; and the economy lands had to be mortgaged to raise funds for restoring it and for building a spire to the steeple. The building of the spire seems to have been skimped; for as soon afterwards as 1826, the consent of the Bishop was obtained to

have it taken down in consequence of its very unsafe state, and "the repeated expenses incurred by it". The proposal however, aroused the wrath of the people, who assembled in large numbers and resolved "that every expedient be tried before parishioners resort to the necessity of taking down the village spire." Three surveyors were appointed to report on the state of the spire, but it was ultimately taken down and in the words of the vestry "the steeple was surmounted by pinnacles" which may still be seen, minus their points.

The above article was published in February 1977 when Clane still had a number of residents born in the 1800s. We interviewed a number of them and harvested a flavour of the early years.

MARIA DUNN AND THE O'NEILLS OF CLANE

Maria Dunn, or Ria as she is known to her friends, has a rare store of local knowledge and impressions of life in old Clane, particularly the business sphere and the life of the village. Her father, James O'Neill, was an enterprising and successful merchant and built up a small business empire locally. He was born in 1848 during the famine and died in 1931, aged 83 years. The latter half of the last century was an active and interesting period and Ria is richly imbued with its traditions. It is indeed a pity that she doesn't get out and about nowadays but she likes to chat with visitors whom she receives with gracious hospitality. In talking to her one soon realises how different it all was. There is sadly not a family left in the village now from the old days, apart from the O'Neills or Dunns themselves.

James O'Neill was from a background of strong farmers and came from Bodenstown. A branch of the family still lives there on the

family farm and are the owners of the golf course. In his school days James O'Neill rode his own donkey to the Boys' School in Clane. At twelve he went to Mullingar to become apprenticed for a business career. When he returned he went to work for Mrs. Fitzpatrick¹ and afterwards bought out the business himself. This was then a general store cum public house and drapery. He also bought out Miss Corbally's,² where Connolly's now live [across the street from the Manzors', the building which now houses Clane Travel], and thus gained the Post Office. In addition he bought Cribbins',³ in the present location of Larkin's butcher shop, a trade which he also practiced there in those days. He was interested in McKitrick's, where Manzor's is now, but did not succeed here. There is an old saying that "a yard of counter is worth a farm of ground"; James was averse to neither. In all he acquired over a hundred acres in and around the town.

He married Catherine Duggan of Edenderry, who also came from a large farm. Catherine died in the 1950s, aged 95. They had 12 children: Joe (who died at 18), Alfonsus, Kathleen, Anne, John, Resie, Ernie (a retired vet. in Dundalk) and Joe (who lives in Lucan). Three others died in childhood. Ria, Ernie and Joe are still living.

Most of the shopping in those days was done on Saturdays. The family requirements for the week were loaded into the ass and cart. There was no packaging; everything came loose, with bacon by the side and flour, pollard and Indian meal by the bag. James, an affable man of stocky build with drooping mustaches and a hard hat supplied everything for the house, farm and garden. He kept three shop boys, ran the post, supplied fresh meat and slaked the local thirst. On Fridays Susie Doyle, like Molly Malone, brought fish from Naas, and her cry of "herrings alive with their

eyes open" could be heard from the river bridge. James ran an orderly house and never opened on a Sunday. At 10.00 p.m. each night he called time and, curious as it must seem in our eyes, every last man stood up, lifted his hat and departed with a "Goodnight Sir".

Year in and year out, the work went on, with the first man in at 7.00 a.m. and the Post going out even on Christmas Day. What was it like to be a child growing up in a business house? Ria was taught by Sisters Berchmans, Brigid, Anthony and Bernard. The nuns were addressed as "Miss". A Professor Whitehead from Clongowes called to give private music lessons. He cycled out from the hotel in Sallins.⁴ Music ran in her mother's family and indeed comes down to the present generation. They were avid readers and the house is filled with their books. Sometimes the young Ria would sneak out the back way to buy sweets from Lizzie Whelan, whose shop was where Collins⁵ now stands. Afterwards she went as a boarder to Sion Hill. In those days young ladies didn't go out to work and so, when her education was complete, she returned to help at home. She made 40 lbs. of butter a week and cooked for the family, with kitchen help. When the Parish ran concerts in Stevins' Mill,⁶ she was called upon to play the piano.

James was a great enthusiast for horses, of which he kept thirty in Cribbins' yard. On one occasion he won both the Galway Hurdle and Plate. The jockey was Paddy Slator on "Reviewer". Hunting was his particular pastime and he often recounted how he rode alongside the Empress of Austria when she rode through the grounds of Maynooth College. The ladies were very

active in charitable matters, particularly with the outbreak the 'Black Flu'; at the height of the plague people would not enter the houses of the dead and dying. Ria's mother cooked meals for the sick along with Mrs. Sweetman⁷, Mrs. Colgan⁸ and Mrs. Dunne of Ballinagappa.

Ria married Billy Dunn, a Dubliner and an accountant with Craigies. They came to live in Clane in 1950 when Mr. Dunn retired. Billy was a great enthusiast for the fishing line and shotgun all his life, and is affectionately remembered by many. They had two children, George⁹, who needs no introduction and Mary¹⁰, a Loreto Sister whose convent is in Madrid.

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1. Fitzpatrick's': Where the A.I.B. is now
 2. Corbally's': At the top of the street between the Ballinagappa and College Roads.
 3. Cribbins': Where Lakins' Butcher Shop was later.
 4. Hotel in Sallins: Now high blank wall between the turn for Lidyl and the Canal.
 5. Collins' : Now Macari's
 6. Slevins' Mill: Was located on the far bank of the Liffey beyond the Bridge.
 7. Sweetmans': Longtown House beyond Millicent Cross.
 8. Colgans, : Firmount
 9. George Dunn: Was Postmaster. Deceased.
 10. Sister Mary Dunn: Deceased.

