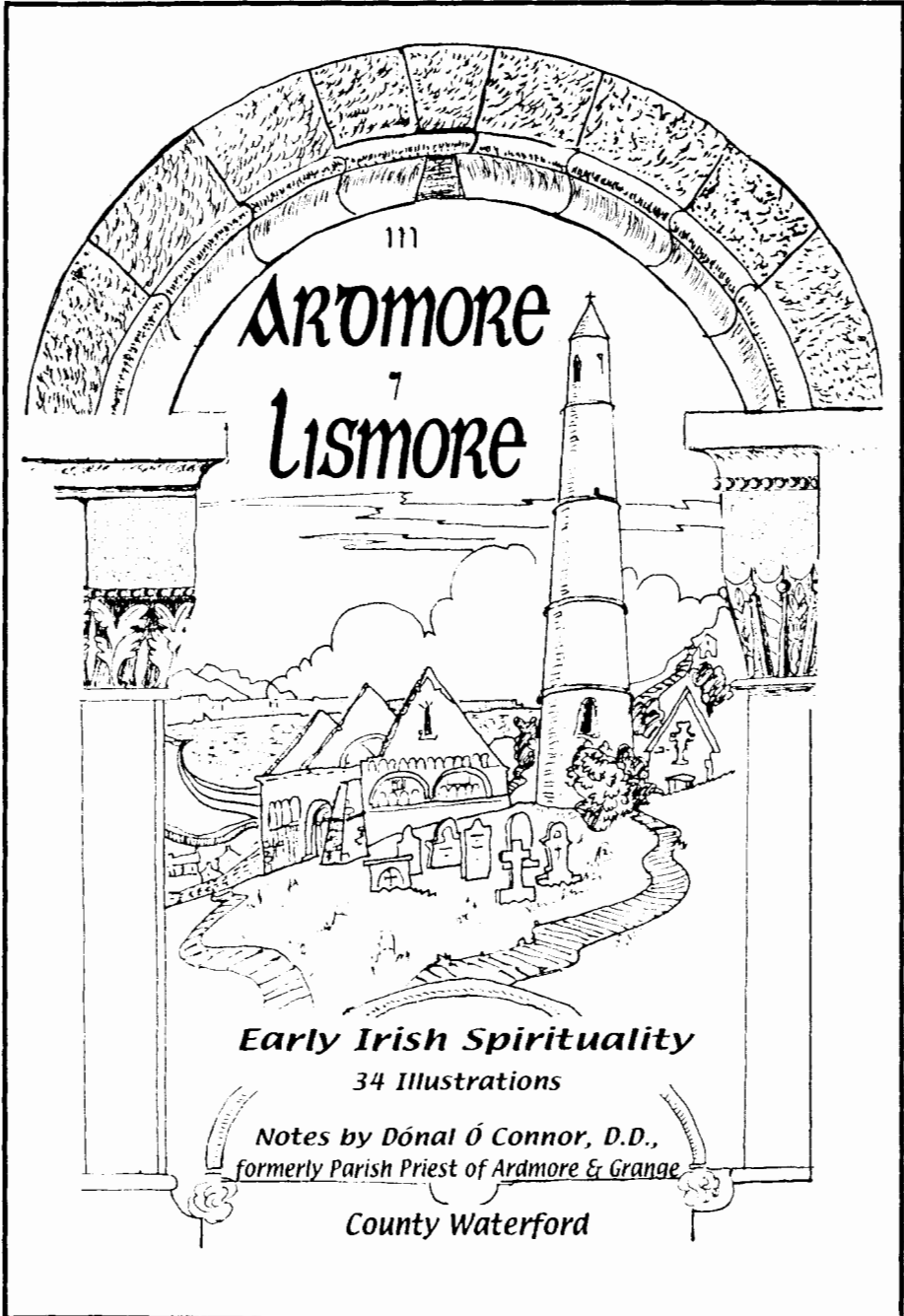


Walking the Holy Ground



111
ARDMORE
7
Lismore

Early Irish Spirituality

34 Illustrations

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County Waterford

Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction & Map	i & 1
The Desert in the Spirituality of the Decies	2, 3, 30
St. Declan's Death and Burial	27 & 31
The Judgement of Solomon, the Magi, the Fall	4 to 8
The Famine Years	11
The Poet Tadhg Gaelach	12
The Round Tower	14
Fr. O'Donnell's Well	24
St. Carthage of Lismore	19
St. Otteran	20
St. Declan's Stone; The Name "Ardmore Declain"	23
Bishop Eugene of Ardmore	15 - 18
Pattern and Stations	25
The Ogham Stones	26
The Splendour of Lismore; The Cathedral	32 & 33
The Cathedral of Ardmore & St. Molana's Abbey	28 & 29
The Anam-Chara (Soul-Friend)	9 & 10
A Pilgrim Poet in Lismore	22
Cashel	34

Front Cover: The large Romanesque arch of the North Doorway, Ardmore Cathedral (12th century)

Back Cover: The Romanesque arch of Lismore Cathedral. The artist has added the two decorated capitals from the other capitals.

Romanesque was still in favour in Lismore when the splendid Catholic church was built (1884) in Lombardo-Romanesque. Séamus Murphy's Archangel Michael—ethereal, majestic—stands guard at the main door. 'Michael' means Who is like God? (Quis ut Deus?).

Ardmore: The City and the Desert

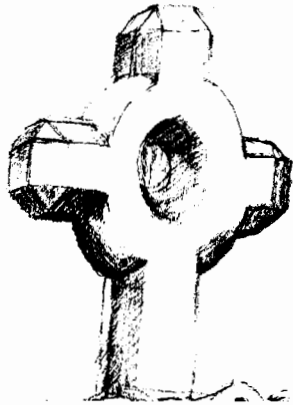
Ardmore to-day is a seaside village 38 miles east of Cork City. It is situated in Co. Waterford, the old name of which was the Déise, after the Déisi people, to whom Declan belonged. The Déise territory (English : The Decies) in its heyday, embraced all Co. Waterford and parts of South Tipperary, and included Ardmore and Lismore as its two most vibrant religious centres.

This booklet seeks to explore, however inadequately, the spiritual richness of two important centres of Christian piety and art, one founded way back in the 5th century by St. Declan at Ardmore, the other founded by St. Carthage (Mo-Chuda) in the 7th century at Lismore.

In Ardmore the whole complex of buildings, whose ruins we see today, must have looked its best in the 12th century, when it was called The City, with its newly constructed Round Tower and its Cathedral with its arcaded stone sculptures which made it a veritable gallery of Christian art. Then there was the Tomb of St. Declan, much venerated by the pilgrims who came seeking favours from God through the intercession of St. Declan - a popular form of piety which Ardmore shared with other great centres of pilgrimage.

Less than a mile away from the City was the Desert (Irish *Dísert*, the Hermitage) perched on the edge of the cliff overlooking the sea. To-day it holds the Holy Well and the ruins of Temple Dysert (the Hermitage Church). This was a place of solitude and prayer to which devout souls came to get away from the normal concerns of the City and to be alone with God in prayer, meditation, reading and fasting.

The Life of St. Declan (of which texts in Latin and Irish survive) consists mostly of miracle-stories, often very extravagant, but it also contains in the final chapters a delightful page on the Déise with its portrait of St. Declan as the big-hearted and kindly man, who, though he loved to retire to his hermitage from time to time to be alone with God in contemplation, would always break off his prayer to welcome those who came seeking his help. This portrait may reflect the tradition of spirituality at Ardmore in the author's day rather than that of St. Declan's. but it presents a distinctive spirituality, at once contemplative and graciously opening out to others, and without the excessive austerity of other Irish hermits.



A. The pilgrim, on arrival at St. Declan's Well (see p. 30), blesses himself with the holy water, and recites his Pater and Ave. Then he walks around the little path clockwise reciting the Rosary, and after three rounds of the path he traces the Cross with his thumb on the east gable of the ruined Temple Dysert (Hermitage Church).

B. The little girl is being lifted up by her mother as she traces the Sign of the Cross on the old stones - a tradition distinctive of the Ardmore Pattern thus

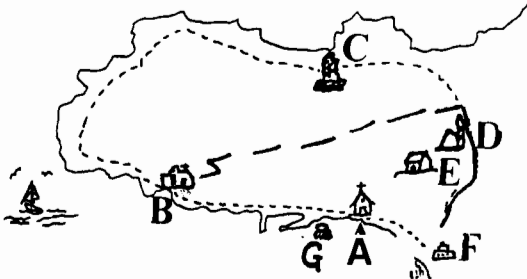


linking this child with the countless pilgrims who came to pray here over the centuries. No prayer is said, no words are spoken. The Cross is the sign of Christ's love, beyond all words. This silent act of devotion so tenaciously preserved in the folk tradition is also seen at wakes when members of the family trace the Cross on the forehead of the deceased. The practice of signing the stones seems to have originated in the piety of the people. Indeed it is the laity rather than the clergy who have maintained the Pattern of Ardmore over the last few hundred years. (But way back in the 12th century it was the monastery itself that promoted Declan's Tomb as a centre for pilgrims, and the Dysert for devout souls seeking solitude and prayer).

The Pilgrim's Round of Ardmore

The really sturdy pilgrim might start from Cashel, along the ancient path to Lismore and on to Ardmore, or from Cappoquin, in which parish is the reputed birth-place of St. Declan at Drumroe.

But for most people the least demanding pilgrimage is the Round of Ardmore. Park your car in front of St. Declan's Church (A) and walk up the Cliff to the Holy Well (B). The sure-footed will take the Cliff Walk (dotted line in map), the less adventurous may follow the road (broken line) called the New Line, which joins the road leading down to the Round Tower, and back to St. Declan's Church, completing the round. A pause for prayer, meditation or Scripture reading may be made at the following locations ("stations"): Declan's Well, Temple Dysert (Hermitage), The Round Tower, The Cathedral, and the Oratory (St. Declan's Tomb, now empty).



- A. Car-park in front of St. Declan's Church (built 1837)
- B. Declan's Well and Temple Dysert. (12th to 14th century)
- C. Fr. O'Donnell's Well (1928)
- D. Round Tower and Cathedral (12th Century)
- E. Oratory: St. Declan's Tomb (8th to 10th century).
- F. Tourist Office (Open June - September); Toilets
- G. St. Declan's Stone

The Desert in the Spirituality of the Decies

At about the end of the 12th century, as we have seen, Ardmore consisted of two well-defined and separate areas, which the Life of Declan refers to as the City and the Desert; the City was busy and noisy and it was a centre for both clergy and laity, many of the latter being farmers and artisans and their families living in the vicinity. Then there was the Desert (Hermitage) almost a mile away, where the Holy Well and Temple Dysert is today.

In the Latin text of the Life of Declan the penultimate chapter* contains an evocative description of Declan's little hermitage, where he had his beloved cell (*cara cellula*) in a place of solitude. His purpose in selecting this secret spot, hidden away between the hill and the sea, for his vigils, prayers and fasting is twice referred to as "the contemplation of God." **

St. Cathrage of Lismore, in his old age also lead a solitary life near his monastery, living in contemplation for God alone***. But neither Declan nor Carthage were hermits after the manner of Desert Fathers like St. Anthony of Egypt (251-356) who spent 20 years in complete solitude, and suffered his famous temptations which fascinated the sculptors of our High Crosses, and painters like Hieronymus Bosch. Carthage, it is true, is said to have spent the last year and half of his life at his hermitage, where his disciples came to visit him. But Declan used his hermitage for shorter periods of contemplation, after which he would return to his community. A happy blending of the contemplative and the active.

* C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Vol II, 58, xxxviii.

(This corresponds to the Irish text cc. 44,45)

** Op. cit. 58: "theorice vacare Deo"

*** Op. cit. Vol I, 198 "Soli Deo vivens in theoria"

The locale of the Hermitage is a "short mile" away from the City. There is a stream there which is poetically described as "a shining brook flowing down from the hill above to the sea below", and the Saint's beloved cell is in a narrow place hidden away between the hill and the sea. And this "little hermitage" (desertulum) is beautifully surrounded by trees. (There is still a little stream flowing down the side of the hill, but it is no longer shining bright, as it moves under ground, and can be heard gurgling its way into the Holy Well during the winter rain).

Also given notice is the uninvited arrival at the Hermitage of Declan's admirers, including pilgrims (*peregrini*) and "Christ's poor", but Declan, being a big-hearted and kindly man had time for them all, even though their intrusion always cut short his time for contemplation.

But the pericope is also important for what it does not say: there are no miracles performed by Declan in the Desert, either during his life-time or after, no visions of the hereafter and, no wrestling with demons.

In this section of the life of Declan the Desert rather than the City is presented as the authentic centre of the Saint's virtue, where his contemplation of God and his gracious patience with intruding humanity fulfilled the dual command of the love of God and the love of the neighbour. Perhaps this reflects an earlier stratum in the Declan tradition, different from the many miracle stories which occupy most of the Life (which was compiled in the 12th century).

Declan's happy blending of the contemplative and the active is also a feature of the spirituality of St. Carthage (or Mochuda) of Lismore (7th century) who retired to a lonely place in the glen below the monastery to lead a solitary life. But, in his retirement, he continued to help all who came to him: "he was the prop of the aged, the health of the infirm, the comfort of the sorrowing, the hope-giver to the hopeless, and the faith-strengthenener of the doubtful, the moderator and the unifier of the young".



B.S.

The Judgment of Solomon

The biblical story (I Kings 3:16-28) tells of two women who came before King Solomon. One said "This woman and I live in the same house, and each of us gave birth to a male child, but this woman's son died in the night because she lay on him. She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me, while I slept, and she lay her dead son in my bosom." But the other woman said "No, the living son is mine".

Then the king said "Bring me a sword. Divide the boy in two, and then give one half to the one and one half to the other". But the woman whose son was alive said to the king "Please, my lord, give her the boy" - she said this out of the deep compassion she felt for her child, but the other said "No, it shall be neither mine nor yours. Divide it".

Then the king said "Give the child to the one who showed compassion. She is the mother".

The Ardmore sculptor (10th Century?), using one block of stone, captures the moment of truth, showing the king holding up the sword as if ready to strike. The woman nearest to him is moving forward and holding out the child for him to strike it, but the other instantly gives up her right to her son, and in this surrender proves she's the mother.

The enigmatic figure of the Ardmore Harper, perched on a high slanting stool, in a pose familiar to us from the Book of Kells, invites more than one interpretation. Perhaps our artist intends, in a deliberate retrospection, to portray King David, the composer of Psalm 110 "The Lord says to my Lord". Concerning this psalm Jesus also posed the enigma: "If David thus calls him (i.e. the Messiah) Lord, how is he his son?" Read Mt 22 : 41-46.



B.S.

The Ardmore Epiphany

“On entering the house the Magi saw the Child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage”. (Matthew 2:11)

Beneath the Solomon scene comes the New Testament story of the Magi, the Wise Men (or astrologers) from the East, who followed the unusual star that led them to Jerusalem, where they had to ask for directions from the experts in the Hebrew scriptures that led them eventually to Bethlehem.

The scene is set in five arcaded panels. Mary is presented as a queen, crowned and seated on an elevated throne, and holding the Child on her lap. She is facing the viewer, whereas the three Magi, each with crown and sceptre, are facing the throne towards which they are moving in orderly procession, holding their gifts in front of them. (The figure on the right may be Joseph).

The sculptor has embellished the simpler story of Matthew which has no throne, crowns or sceptres. What our sculptor has done is to take the first half of the verse quoted above and to fasten on to it, as in a kind of snapshot of the moment of arrival and discovery. The finding of the Child they had been seeking during their long journey under the stars. Many artists show the Magi kneeling before the Child (as related in the second half of the verse), but our sculptor is using an iconography seen in its most splendid form and colour in the imperial city of Ravenna, in the Magi mosaic in Sant' Apollinare Nuovo (6th century), where again we find the Mother and Child enthroned and facing the viewer, while the three kings, in profile, approach the Child. The moment of Epiphany.



The Harmony of the Testaments

The Judgment of Solomon and the Magi scene are sometimes represented on Irish High Crosses, but the juxtaposition of the two, one above the other and enclosed in one large lunette, is an iconography found only on the West Gable of Ardmore Cathedral. Here we have a fascinating Harmony of the Two Testaments in which the sculptor invites us to explore the similarities between the two scenes.

In both scenes immense interest focuses on the child. And in both scenes there is a royal throne, the right arm of which curves downwards allowing freedom of movement to the sitter's right arm, and providing a hand-rest at the level of the sitter's knee.

All the movement is from right to left towards the throne, the sweep of the women's garments suggesting their agitated state, while the Magi's garments reflect their stately pace, and the vertical flow of the royals' garments betokens their dignity. (The folds on Mary's gown are delicately traced).

The throne is the throne of David (king of Israel in the 10th century) which his son Solomon inherited, and which, according to St. Luke, was promised to Christ: 'The Lord will give him the throne of his ancestor David' (Lk. 1:32). Jesus, though he was a greater than Solomon, was sometimes addressed as Son of David.

Then there is the wisdom motif. The wisdom of Solomon was proverbial, and his judgment in the maternity case showed his deep understanding of the human heart. And the Magi were the 'wise men' from the East. And, of course, for St. Paul, Christ was the Wisdom of God, and in later devotion Mary was hailed as Seat of Wisdom.

There is much movement, physical and intellectual, in both scenes: the intensity of the quest for the truth, the truth of the human child and the truth of the divine Child, and the final resolution of that quest.



The Ardmore Madonna and Child
(Detail from the Magi scene; Artist's impression: Anne Carleton)

Prayer

*Source of beauty and goodness,
we thank you for St. Declan and
those who came after him in Ardmore,
and through their skill in the art of stone
illuminated your Holy Scriptures;
may we too seek what is good and beautiful
and share our vision with others,
until we come to its source in you.
Through Christ our Lord.*

The feast of St. Declan is celebrated on 24th July. Declan was patron of the Déise in the early days of christianity in Ireland, possibly even before St. Patrick. On the Sunday nearest the feast, people come to pray "The Rounds" at St. Declan's Well, to visit the Round Tower and the ruined Cathedral and to pray at the Beannachán. The visits continue throughout Pattern Week.



B.S.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil

Genesis is not talking about an ordinary tree here, and certainly not about an ordinary apple. Even its very name is unique: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, which seemed to be:

“good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise” (Gen 3:6)

For the Ardmore sculptor this mysterious tree, with its fruit now the object of illicit and life-threatening desire, surrounds the human pair on every side. His tree occupies two panels, one above the other, the upper one containing three straight stems, each ending in a large round fruit, in a configuration unlike that of any of the fruit trees of Ireland.

Our artist succeeds in conflating three episodes from the Genesis story: the Temptation to distrust God’s goodness (can you spot the serpent?), the Fall (taking the forbidden fruit) and the Shame (covering with the loin-cloths).

The story of the Fall - man’s alienation from God - calls forth a myriad of interpretations from all who reflect on this superbly crafted work.

The Anam-Chara from the Decies

The account of the Hermitage (p.2) with its emphasis on seclusion, prayer and asceticism, has similarities with the spirituality of the Céilí Dé (Servants of God) which flourished between 750-900. The leaders of this strict ascetical movement were Maelruain, (d. 792) founder of the monastery of Tallaght, his disciple Maeldithruib (d. 840), and Dublithir of Finglas (d. 796).

These monks, in their turn, drew inspiration from monasteries in the south of Ireland. Indeed Maelruain himself had been a disciple of Ferdácrích in Dair-inis (Molana's Abbey), only eight miles from Ardmore. And an ascetic of Ardmore, Siadal mac Testa, is quoted in the Céilí Dé literature with approval. *

But one of the most fascinating stories in all that literature concerns Dublithir's anam-chara, who was a bishop from the Decies and died in Finglas in 791. His name was Cainchomrac. **

The story relates how one day Dublithir and his anam-chara (soul-friend) were walking together in the green outside the monastery garden in Finglas when a poor old woman approached Dublithir and begged him to allow her to sleep in the nuns' house. Dublithir, however, notwithstanding his great sanctity, angrily refused her and made an insulting remark to her. Cainchomrac, without saying a word, prostrated himself on the grass. Dublithir, seeing this extraordinary behaviour, asked for an explanation.

The bishop replied: 'Dreadful indeed is the deed you have done to revile the poor old woman'. Straight away Dublithir said: 'I will do whatever you decide on this matter'.

'This is my decision' said Cainchomrac: 'let her go into the nuns' house. and be given a cow and a cloak. And now we will settle on the penance that is proper for you'. And Dublithir said 'It shall be done'.

This superbly crafted story of a bishop of the Decies wonderfully illuminates the function of the anam-chara in Irish spirituality.

* Gwynn, E. J., and Purton W. J., 1911, 'The Monastery of Tallaght', *PRIA* 29C. 142f. Concerning one of their dietary customs the Céilí Dé document acknowledges that 'this was the practice of Siadal mac Testa of Ardmore'.

**Ibid. 130 (par. 7).

The Anam-Chara and the Lady

Among the early Irish lyrics there is a poem by Daniel Ua Liathaiti (d. 863), who was abbot of Lismore in the mid-ninth century, and who was the soul-friend of the lady to whom he addressed this poem. The matter on which he addressed her was delicate: she had become enamoured of him and came soliciting him.

His poem, of seven verses, must be unique in religious literature. Just as she is about to speak the abbot begins, not with a harsh rebuke, nor with the invidious insinuation that woman is the temptress, the Devil's Helper (as some of the Fathers said of Eve) in the fall of man. The good abbot begins with a blessing:

'O Woman, a blessing on you, but do not say (what you have in mind)'.

The blessing is repeated in verse 5 when he asks her not to sell her share in Heaven, but to return home with God's protection, and 'accept from me a blessing'. He is still close to her spiritually; they both should pray:

'I and you, you and I,
pray you, and I shall pray, to the holy King*

The lady was moved by the poem her soul-friend had writtem for her and she followed his counsel from that day on.

The abbot does not humiliate the lady. His gentleness and his respect for her is clear. And he acknowledges his own need to pray to the sinless Christ. His poem is a shining witness to the refined Christian spirituality of the great monastery of Lismore in the first millennium. Where cold prose might have failed, the tender lyric had succeeded.

Lismore, like other Irish monasteries, cultivated the art of poetry in Irish and in Latin, and offered hospitality to wandering poets from far and near.

* Gerard Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* (Oxford 1856) 7.

Two priests of The Famine Years are mentioned in the inscriptions on the walls of St. Declan's Church, Ardmore. The first recalls the building of the Church in 1837 by Fr. P. McGrath, who also built the Church at Grange and in Old Parish - a mighty achievement so shortly after Catholic Emancipation (1829). But the confidence and joy of the people was shattered by the Great Famine. In Sept. 1846 in the Ardmore and Grange area, one quarter of the potato harvest was blighted and the poorer people who had depended on the potato were already suffering from malnutrition.

In 1847 - Black 47 - a new priest, Fr. Garrett Prendergast was appointed Parish Priest of Ardmore and Grange - Old Parish having being joined to Ring after the transfer of Fr. McGrath. During the 'bad times' Fr. Prendergast distributed food on Sundays to two hundred people. When he died in 1857 so great was the poverty of the people that the two Churches were empty shells, and the first task of the next P.P was to furnish them.

In January 1847 the Quakers from Youghal held discussions with the Parish Priest and his two Curates about setting up soup kitchens in Grange and Old Parish, at which good quality soup (made from beef, peas, oatmeal and barley) would be provided. This magnificent gesture of the Society of Friends deserves to be recalled with gratitude - they were only a tiny religious minority, and their work was never tainted with proselytism.

But even during the bad times thousands of people from far and near continued to attend the Pattern of Ardmore. On some occasions, however, the celebrations were marred by drunkenness and by faction fighting — then a feature of rural life in many parts of Ireland. The strong men of a particular parish would travel to fairs and matches and patterns and would take on similarly disposed fighters from another parish. By evening time there could be some 'bloody heads'. These rivalries, however, would take place not at the holy site on the cliff of Ardmore, which continued to be a place of devotion, but down in the village street.

On the 24th July, 1987, to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the two churches, Cardinal Ó Fiaich came to Ardmore and to Grange and the congregation was so large we had to celebrate the Mass in the open air in front of St. Declan's Church. That was a Pattern whose celebration went on into the night so that Compline was later than usual.

A Poet at the Pattern of Ardmore

Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin (1715 - 1795)

A unique cultural relic of eighteenth century Ireland is the 14 lines of Latin poetry on a headstone of an Irish poet in the old graveyard at Ballylaneen, Co. Waterford. The poet is Tadhg Gaelach Ó Súilleabháin and the inscription was composed by his friend, another poet, Donnchadh Ruadh (Red Dennis) Mac Namara (1715 - 1810), a learned Latin scholar and author of the exile song, *Bán Chnuic Éireann Óigh*.

Tadhg was a *spailpín*, a wandering farm-labourer from Co. Limerick, but he was also a master of the Gaelic Tongue, and a member of the poets' circle in *Sliabh gCua*, near Dungarvan, Co. Waterford. In his younger days our poet was a bit of a rake but after his mid-life conversion he devoted his talents to religious poetry. And he loves the words *gile* (brightness) and *geal* (bright) to express the inner glow of the heart which sustained him in the all-pervasive gloom of those times. When he made his pilgrimage to Ardmore for the Pattern of St. Declan each year he saw the thousands winding their way up the cliff to "hold dialogue (*agall*) with the Saint and to meditate on his virtues". These poor people, in Tadhg's eyes, were "God's lovely people" (*pobal geal Dé*); and the Heart of Jesus was "the light of my heart": *Gile mo Chroí*, to quote his *Duan Chroí Íosa* (Poem to the Heart of Jesus), a little gem, with all its daring physicality - the lance-wound so wide as to welcome all humanity through its portals - which has drawn to itself the most tender of all Seán Ó Riada's melodies.

This poem reflects the spirituality of the Jesuit Fathers in Dungarvan where they had established the Sacred Heart Confraternity of which Tadhg was a member.

Duan D'éaglán

Δ Θhéaglán óρθα onóραιγῆ, Δ εασπυίῃ
IS ORT ΘHRIALLAS ῥO ΔIADHA IM Δ NΘREAIMIBH
IOBAL ῥEAL ΘÉ LE CLÉIR NA SALM
IS Δ NῤUÍ ΘHÚTHRACHTACH URHAIΘEACH 'OT AῖALL.

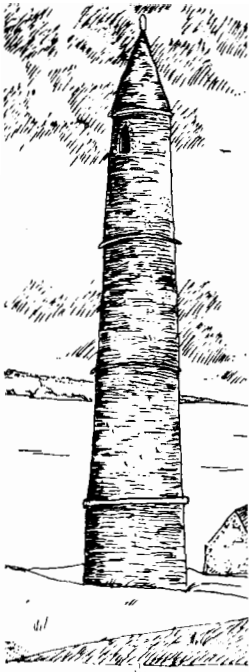
ῤLUAISIO 'NA SLUAITE ῥO ΘTAῖAIO
AN BHAIPTACH SHÉIMH AR ΘHAOBH NA PAILE
ANSAN IS SÁMH ῤRÁSACH DO ῥHABHAIO
'NA ῤCÚRSAÍ ῥO HÚIRÍSEAL CNEASTA.

IS CIAILLIHAR CLÚMHAIL Δ ΘCIÚIM IS Δ ΘTEAῖASC,
IS RIAGHALTA Δ NῤREANN OS CEANN NA MARA,
IS ΘEA-CHROÍOCH Δ N-AITHRÍ IS Δ MACHTANAH,
Δ ΘHéaglán ῥHLÉIGIL AR NAOMHTHACT DO BHEATHA.

Duan Chroí Íosa

ῤILE MO CHROÍ DO CHROÍ-SE, Δ SHLÁNAIΘEOÍR,
AῖSUS CISTE MO CHROÍ DO CHROÍ-SE Θ'PHÁIL IM CHOMHAIR;
ÓS FOILLAS ῤUR LÍON DO CHROÍ ΘOM ῤHRÁ-SA, Δ STÓIR,
I ῤCOCHALL MO CHROÍ DO CHROÍ-SE FÁῖ I ῤCOMHAD.

The light of my heart is your heart, O Saviour mine,
And my heart's greatest treasure is your heart poured out for me,
And seeing that your heart is so full of love, a Stóir,
In the folds of my poor heart leave yours entwined with mine.



The Round Tower of Ardmore

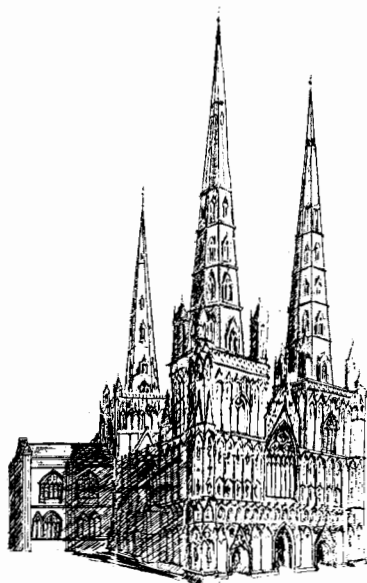
This is one of the wonders of the 12th century Irish architecture which still stands tall (30 metres) and complete in all its parts, the present conical cap replacing that which fell down in the 1800s (and may be seen in the old Cathedral) - It has an exceptional degree of batter, its walls inclining inwards as they move elegantly towards the top. A unique feature is its door four metres above the ground level.

It may have served several purposes: as a bell-tower or **cloig-theach**, to give it its Irish name, to call people to prayer, to alert them in time of danger. The Tower could also serve as a place of custody for precious manuscripts, chalices and relics. The Ardmore Tower has a record "unique in the history of Round Towers, namely that in the year 1642 it stood a regular siege, and artillery was brought to bear on it", as Canon Power records. Some forty men of the Irish garrison with only two muskets took up their position in the Round Tower, while their comrades defended the Cathedral and Ardmore Castle (long since vanished). But when the "great artillery" eventually arrived and was used against them they surrendered to Lord Broghill's forces and most of them were hanged. This was a war between Catholics and Protestants in which cruel things were done on both sides, leaving bitter memories for centuries afterwards. Pray the Our Father at this station for peace and reconciliation in our land. There was a custom of walking around the Tower three times clockwise, and touching the stones of the Tower with the hand as the pilgrims quietly said their prayers.

Corbels inside the Round Tower



Ardmore Bishop at Lichfield



Lichfield Cathedral

The story of Bishop Eugene of Ardmore touches on a momentous political event in Irish history, viz. the invasion of Ireland by King Henry II of England who landed in Waterford with his large army in 1171, thus beginning the long involvement of the English Crown with Ireland. Sadly, the situation in Ireland at that time could hardly have been worse what with the Irish Church in need of reform and civil society without a central authority and rival chieftains warring among themselves.

Eugene, who was a scholar and a gentleman, was the Bishop in the monastery of Ardmore. In the monastic system at that time the abbot was the real authority, the bishop's duties were far less onerous than those of a modern diocesan bishop. We have notice that between 1172 and 1179 a charter of Diarmait MacCarthy was witnessed by Eugene of Ardmore and by Christian O'Conarchy, who was bishop of the nearby and more prestigious see of Lismore, and papal legate in Ireland (1152 - 1179).

In spite of all the difficulties Eugene had time for travel. We have a fascinating account of his acting as assistant bishop in the diocese of Lichfield in England while that see was vacant in 1184, and also in 1185 during the absence of the newly appointed Hugh de Nonant as Bishop-elect of Coventry and Lichfield. Hugh was one of the highly educated clerical elite working at full stretch for King Henry. He had been educated in Canterbury, where he was close to St. Thomas Becket, and actually went into exile with his archbishop. But after Becket's murder in the cathedral, and Henry's repentance, he became reconciled to Henry who then employed him in an important diplomatic mission to the Pope at Verona in 1184. This was the year the Eugene came to Lichfield Cathedral to serve as assistant Bishop, for which service he was paid quite a generous stipend, five shillings a day, firstly for 26 days in September 1184, and then for 60 days until December of the same year.¹ Eugene's life was thus touched by the shadow of Henry II in 1185 when he acted as caretaker bishop for Henry's trusted servant.

Eugene came back to Ireland with the much needed funds for his community and with the very latest news on the English scene, and could tell the builders working all out on the monastery at Ardmore how the Norman cathedral at Lichfield was shortly to be transformed into the much larger Gothic building with its distinctive three spires which we admire to-day. Of the Norman church which he saw only a few traces remain: the choir west part with its lush still-leaf decoration and one trumpet-scallop in another part - these, incidentally, are the only decorative motifs in Ardmore Cathedral.

Notes

1. See the English Episcopal Acta 17, Coventry and Lichfield 1183 - 1208. Ed. M. J. Franklin (Oxford 1998) xxvii.

The information in the EEA is drawn from the Pipe Rolls for 1183-4 and 1184-5 which give detailed accounts of every shilling paid out to our Eugene calculated from the Monday after the feast of St. Egidius (which feast falls on the 1st Sept.) to the feast of St. Michael (29th Sept.) namely 26 days at 5 shillings per day, amounting to £6 and 10 shillings. (Pipe Roll 30 Henry II, p.24). This payment was "by royal mandate" (per breve regis), listed in the Great Rolls of Henry's Exchequer. It seems that Eugene and other bishops went to England to make a living (EEA 17, xxiii, footnote 51). This impoverishment was due, in part, to the frequent plundering of the monasteries by Irish chieftains, who were often at war among themselves. In Lichfield alone we find seven other Irish bishops listed as temporary suffragans between Eugene's time and the Reformation.

See Handbook of British Chronology, Editors Powicke and Fryde, 2nd Ed (London 1961) pp. 269-271. Eugene figures on p. 269. Eugene is the earliest of the 77 Irish bishops to act as suffragans in England from the time of Henry II until the Reformation.

In all, Ardmore is listed three times in the Pipe Rolls. Firstly, as already noted, for 26 days service in September 1184. Secondly, (in PR 31 Henry II, p. 142) for 59 days, for which he received £14.15 shillings. And finally (on the same page 142) for his longest period, 101 days (for £25.5 shillings) ended in March 1185. Immediately after this entry comes the notice of a payment of £20 to Hugh de Nonant to whom is granted the custody and the revenues of the Abbey of St. Werburgh in Chester. Hugh was unashamed pluralist.

A Tribute to Bishop Eugene

"a man of high repute and saintly life, Eugene of Ardmore, ... who confirmed orally what we had already understood concerning the birth-place of Blessed Cuthbert, and who enlightened us on other matters on which we had no previous knowledge ...

**fate opinorut & cond-
fationis uir eugenium
harundinonensem epm
de hybma natū nobis
cōfirmat. quia que p̄
te ortu bī cuthbā p̄p̄e
tamur testificandō uob̄
rauit. & si nulla alia de q̄
b̄ antea nichil nouim̄.
nobis p̄lara relatiōe de
text. Nam uerissime d̄**

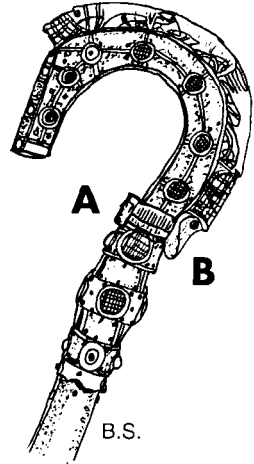
This tribute is taken from a 14th Century manuscript preserved in the York Minster Library (ms XVII 12, folio 71r) and reproduced here by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of York.

It was during his visit to England (1184 - 5) that Eugene's scholarship was much appreciated by a scholar-monk who was then writing a Libellus (a little book) on the Birth of St. Cuthbert (634 - 687), Bishop of Lindisfarne. The question Eugene was asked was: 'Where was Cuthbert born, Ireland or England'? Eugene favoured Ireland, for which he cited the tradition of the great monastery of Kells, Co. Meath, of which he had first-hand knowledge, he being a Meath man himself. And Eugene went on to speak of his own patron (Declan) and the stories of his many miracles, and of Ardmore as the final resting place of St Declan (folio 76v). And it tells us that Eugene of Ardmore (Hardionensis) was a native of Meath where "he was born and grew up from early childhood to full manhood" (ibid). And Eugene also had the spiritual care of important centres such as Coventry and Chester where St. Werburgh's Abbey held the shrine of St. Werburgh, the Anglo-Saxon princess (died 700 A.D.), a great place of pilgrimage until the Reformation. St. Werburgh even had a church dedicated to her in Dublin in Eugene's time. And she still has her church in Dublin today (entrance in Castle Street, unsigned).

The ms. is a Libellus consisting of fourteen folios written on both sides in Latin, and claiming Ireland as the birthplace of Cuthbert, a thesis not favoured by modern scholarship. Eugene figures three times in the ms, always with honourable mention.

St. Mochuda (Carthage) of Lismore

Carthage, also known as Mochuda, came to Lismore when he was already an old man. He had been abbot at Rahan, where he ministered to a colony of lepers. But he left because of a dispute, taking with him his lepers and some hundreds of monks. He arrived in Lismore about 635, having been granted some land near Lismore, at Roundhill close to the river Blackwater, where he built a small fort or Lis, but later he moved to a large fort, called Lis Mor. Carthage died only two years after his arrival in Lismore. Feast 15th May.



The Lismore Crosier

In the centuries after Carthage his foundation became the site of the great School of Lismore, a centre of learning with thousands of students on its rolls, including St. Cathaldus (7th cent.) who later became the celebrated bishop of Taranto in Italy. But it faded after the Viking raids and the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. see pp. 32 & 33

There is a delightful story in the Life of Mochuda of how as a youth in his native Kerry he was drawn to the priesthood by the beauty of the Psalms: "One day as Mochuda was keeping his herd beside the river he heard the bishop and his clerics pass by, chanting psalms as they went along. He explained later 'I had never heard anything so beautiful as this'. The Spirit of God touched the boys heart, and leaving his father's pigs he followed the procession." This story reflects the high regard for the Psalms in Irish spirituality. See p. 20.

The one remaining treasure from Lismore Monastery is the Lismore Crosier (12th century bronze). Both its maker and original owner have their names inscribed in Irish between A and B in the drawing above: "A prayer for Nial, son of Mac Aeducain". (He was, during 1090 -1113, abbot and later bishop of Lismore); "A prayer for Nectan, the craftsman who made the ornament". Here we see the high respect in which the craftsman was held in that his name shares the place of honour with that of the bishop. The Crosier was discovered during repairs at Lismore Castle in 1814, and is now in the National Museum, Dublin. Also discovered was the so-called Book of Lismore (a 15th cent. compilation of the Lives of Irish Saints).

These treasures are featured in a 30 mins. film at the Lismore Heritage Centre.



St. Otteran (Oran) of Iona, Patron of Waterford

With Otteran Waterford links up with one of the greatest of all missionary achievements - that of St. Columba, or Colum-cille (c.521-597) who, after founding the monasteries at Derry, Durrow and possibly Kells, left Ireland in 563 to set sail for the island of Iona off the west coast of Scotland with twelve companions. His biographer, Adomnán, writing a hundred years after Columba's death, gives no reason for his decision to leave Ireland. One possibility is that Columba went into self-exile to atone for the violent dispute that arose from his refusal to hand over a copy he had made of a biblical manuscript. The verdict against Columba was: To every cow its calf, to every book its copy. The passion for books, especially for the beautifully illuminated vellum manuscripts of the Gospels and the Psalter, was an abiding feature of ecclesiastical culture throughout the Golden Age of Celtic monasticism. St. Columba was copying Psalm 34 and had reached verse 10 when his fatal illness struck, according to Adomnán.

Some think that Otteran was one of the twelve on that boat, but the more likely view is that he preceded Columba there. But one way or the other, there's no doubt about his death in Iona and his burial in the famous graveyard to which he gave his name, Relig Odhrain. The spot is marked today by

the twelfth-century St. Oran's Chapel - the oldest building to survive intact on the island. Like the Beannachán it is a small stone building with a single doorway. Oran's doorway, however, is a really ornate carving in the Irish style and a delight to examine.

Relig Odhrain became the favourite burial place of kings, Scottish, Irish, and interestingly enough, Scandinavian. And the Danes, who plundered Iona, and did the same in Ireland and founded the city of Waterford, and later came to embrace Christianity, chose Otteran for their heavenly patron.

So, the Viking presence whose first impact saw the cruel and bloody destruction of monastic settlements, ended eventually in their coming to the faith they had nearly destroyed, and their adopting Otteran for their diocesan patron.

The first bishop of Waterford was an Irish monk of Winchester, named Malchus, ~~nominated~~ ^{consecrated} by no less a luminary than St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1096, at the request of the Danes of Waterford.

The Danes admit that over the years they had unwisely tried to manage without the guidance of a pastor. But now they acknowledge that just as no army ventures to war, and no ship risks the danger of the sea without someone in charge, so neither can "our little barque" survive the evils of the world without a pastor. And so they asked for Malchus who "is steeped in apostolic and ecclesiastical learning, Catholic in his faith, chaste in his life, sober, hospitable etc".

In the year 1363 the Diocese of Waterford was united with the Diocese of Lismore to form one diocese, as at present. Sometime after 1210 Ardmore was absorbed into the Diocese of Lismore.



St. Oran's Chapel, Iona

A Pilgrim-Poet in Lismore

What a joy to be present at Mass in Ring and Old Parish in the Munster Déise, and to hear the congregation singing the eleventh-century hymn *Deus Meus, adiuva me* (My God, help me). It was written by the best-known poet of that century, Máel Ísu Ó Brolcháin, several of whose lyrics have survived the ravages of the last thousand years, but only one of which - this one - has survived in its continuing usage in the devotion of the people, thanks, in part, to the lovely melody (in one of the old Church modes) which an unknown author composed for it.

Máel Ísu made the long journey from his community in Armagh and arrived as a pilgrim at the monastery of Lismore, bringing with him his wisdom and his poetry, and he ended his days there. The Annals of Inisfallen record his death for the year 1086, adding that he was 'the doyen and chief sage of Ireland'. And the Annals of Ulster describe him as a master of poetry in both Irish and Latin.

The hymn given below is half in Irish and half in Latin and is a petition that God's love would come into the poet's heart. The petition is repeated over and over again, and expresses the urgent yearnings of the soul for God. In fact, one is almost knocked over by the uninhibited audacity in the second stanza: 'I'll say it again' (twice)

For the text see [In Caelo](#) (Veritas, Dublin 1999). Below is an English translation which can be sung to the music.



De - us me - us ad - iu - va - me, Deus meus, adiuva me,
Tabhair dom do sheirc, a Mhic dhil Dé Son of my God, give thy
love to me,
Tabhair dom do sheirc, a Mhic dhil Dé Son of my God, give thy
love to me,
De - us me - us ad - iu - va - me, Deus meus, adiuva me.

2. Tuum amorem, sicut vis, (*Thy love, as thou wishest*)
Mightily give me - I'll say it again,
Mightily give me - I'll say it again,
Tuum amorem, sicut vis (*Thy love, as thou wishest*).

St. Declan's Stone



As Canon Power relates:" This is a block of conglomerate lying on the beach beneath the village. The boulder is really glacial, that is some time in the far away Ice Age over ten thousand years ago, when it was wrenched by ice from its original home in the Comeragh Mountains, and deposited by the melting ice here in Ardmore. Between the boulder and the surface rock beneath there is a little hollow through which devotees of Declan used

to crawl in the hope of cures." (A priest who regarded the practice as superstitious brought along a workman to break up the stone with a hammer. On arrival the man said 'You strike the first blow, Father, and I'll finish the job'. The priest declined).

In the Life of Declan, however, there is a totally different account: Declan was beginning Mass one day in a church when there was sent to him from heaven a little black bell. This was very precious to Declan and he entrusted it to his disciple Runan, who placed it on a large boulder on a beach in Wales while they were waiting for the boat to take them back to Ireland. But Runan forgot to pack it when leaving on the boat. It was only when they were far out to sea that the loss was discovered, but Declan prayed, and lo, the next thing Declan saw was the little bell still perched on the boulder, being wafted on top of the waves towards Ireland. They followed after it and Declan said: wherever it comes to land there will be my city and the place of my resurrection. And soon the boulder with its little companion on top came to land at a beautiful promontory which one of Declan's disciples referred to as "this little hill". But Declan corrected him: "Do not call it Little Hill, my son, but *Árd Mór* (great height)", and that name has adhered to the city ever since - Ardmore Declan.

Stories like this, the fruit of creative imagination, served to remind the community how wonderful, providential, their lot was to live in the most scenic promontory in County Waterford.

Father O'Donnell's Well in Dysert

(See page 1; C on Map)

The stone structure over Fr. O'Donnell's Well was built in 1928 (and never finished) by a Limerick man Mr. T. P. Rahilly who came here while recovering from an illness. It was intended as a grotto for the Blessed Virgin.

Fr. O'Donnell was a priest who used to come to the Well to pray and to recite his Breviary. Beyond that nothing is known for sure. He may have been "silenced" by his bishop, and sought some consolation for his loneliness near the holy ground of Declan's Dysert. The Dysert path still retains its fascination for the many visitors who come here in increasing numbers.

Other buildings you will notice on the Cliff Walk are the Look-Out Post built in 1940 overlooking the sea; the Castle built in 1867 as a signal station and watch tower; the Coastguard Station (also from 1867).

In the sea below, wedged into the rocks, is the wreck of the crane-ship Samson which was blown ashore by the gales in December 1987.

Declan's Dysert has a welcome not only for the walker but also for the wild flowers emerging in colourful profusion from the stony soil in their annual resurrection. In May, the Sea Pink, the Orange Lichen and Kidney Vetch. In July and August, the Sea Aster, the Golden Samphire, the Sea Fern and many others.

There is also a wide variety of wood plants, grass plants and heath plants. Small wonder that foliage (stiff leaf) is the only decorative motif on the capitals in the Cathedral, except for a few scalloped parts, a reminder of the myriads of creatures whose home is in the sea below.

The Irish word Díseart, from the Latin **desertum**, a desert, place of solitude, gives its name, in the anglicised form Dysert, to the whole townland through which the Cliff Walk takes you until you join the road (the New Line).



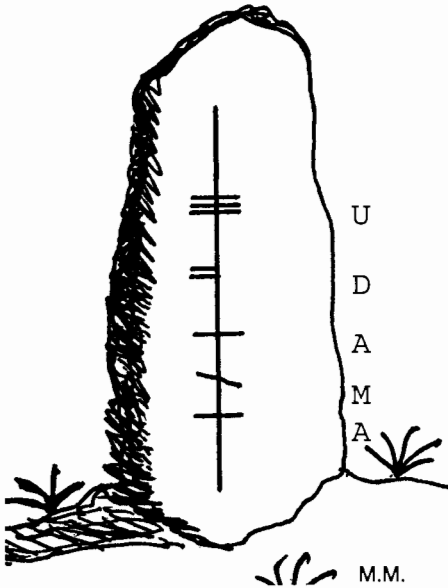
Pattern and Stations

The feast of St. Declan comes around each year on the 24th July. On the Vigil a small group usually gathers at the Holy Well at midnight to welcome St. Declan. On the 24th and on the nearest Sunday (Pattern Sunday) people come throughout the day to make the traditional Rounds, reciting the Rosary as they walk, clockwise, around the path there.

But pilgrims arrive in Ardmore not only during the pattern but all throughout the year. The pilgrim's Round of Ardmore (see map on page 1) includes the following six Stations (Stopping Points) for prayer, reading (of Gospels, Psalms) and meditation:

- Station 1. **The Holy Well:** Sprinkle oneself with the water, recalling the waters of Baptism and the Promises. "Unless you be born again", as Jesus said to Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-16). Pray for healing of body and soul.
Do a 'Round': walk three times around the path, clockwise, reciting the Rosary or some other prayer, meditating or reading.
- Station 2. **Temple Dysert:** Trace the Cross on the stones of the East Wall of the old Hermitage Church (page ii). Jesus also went into the desert to pray and to fast. Dysert (desert): a place of solitude and meditation.
- Station 3. **The Round Tower:** Recall the war of 1642 between Catholics and Protestants. Pray the Our Father for reconciliation and mutual forgiveness. Place your hand on the stones of the Tower (p.14).
- Station 4. **The Cathedral, West Gable:** Pray for true wisdom (Solomon); Follow your star towards the truth of Christ (Magi), then pray for the grace and wisdom to overcome temptation (Adam and Eve) (pp.4-8)
- Station 5. **The Cathedral, entrance through North Doorway:** We thank God for the Eucharist celebrated in this Church over so many centuries (pp. 26,28).
- Station 6. **The Oratory, Tomb of Declan:** We thank God for Declan and the countless men and women who followed his footsteps in faith and love (p.27).

The Ogham Stones



The earliest writing in Ireland (from c.300 A.D.) seems to have been done on stones in an alphabet called Ogham. This alphabet, shown below, is made up of four sets of strokes, each set ranging from one to five little strokes.

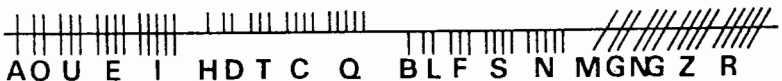
Among the treasures of ancient pre-Christian Ireland preserved in Ardmore Cathedral are two Ogham stones. The standing stone which has clearly incised lines was found embedded in the east gable of the little Oratory outside the Cathedral, and it commemorates Lugaid, the son or grandson of Nia Segmon, persons

unknown. The other stone (now on its side) has the brief but affectionate message AMADU (The loved one). To write a love letter in Ogham could take days, so one word has to say it all.

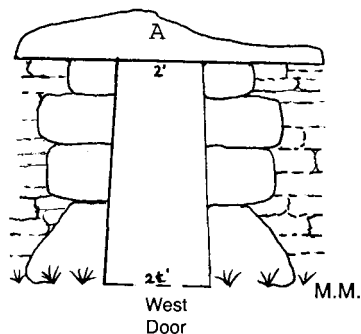
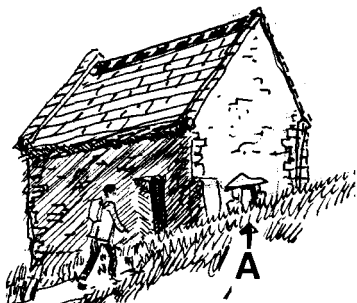
The Ogham letters are written on either side or diagonally across the edge of the stone which serves as a central line. Ogham letters are easy to read. Begin at the bottom and work up to the top, and if necessary, continue downwards on the opposite edge.

Ogham may have been easy to read but it was cumbersome to write, and one of the benefits which Christianity brought to Ireland was the (Roman) alphabet we use to-day.

The Ogham Alphabet



The Oratory (The Beannachán)



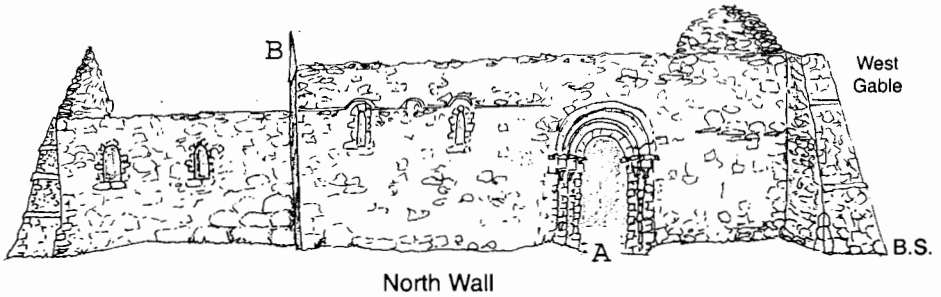
(The hidden treasure of

The Oratory seems so small and insignificant that one hardly pauses to look at it. It is like Cinderella compared to its two sister buildings in the same enclosure. And yet it has known more glory than the other two: it once contained, according to tradition, the tomb of St. Declan (see the large cavity in the floor), and is the oldest building in Ardmore, its lower stones going back to the 8th cent. And it retains to this day the oldest doorway in Ardmore, set in the Western Wall, but so completely covered up with clay from the adjoining graveyard that you can just see its large stone lintel (76 inches in length) only a foot above the ground. This was originally the only door into the Oratory; the present door in the North Wall is recent. The old door was, and is, $5\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, its base is $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet across, and the top, which you can see just emerging from the soil is 2 feet across.

This door is the hidden treasure of Ardmore, but you can catch a glimpse of its interior if you look in through the iron gate and there on the right you see the fine lintel which is parallel to the exterior lintel, and also the well-cut stones of the jambs.

In 1716 Dr Thomas Milles, Church of Ireland Bishop of Waterford and Lismore (1708 - 1740) restored the oratory and added a slate roof. A token of Milles personal piety was his practice of wearing a crucifix at his breast - an intimate detail revealed by Dean Swift, who took a dim view of Milles and indeed of many other people as well. But Milles was a greater theologian than the Dean. He had been regius professor of Greek at Oxford where he published a folio edition of the writings of St. Cyril of Jerusalem. Only for Milles the little Oratory would probably have been buried forever under the mounting soil of the graveyard.

The Cathedral



B = Chancel Arch

A = Door

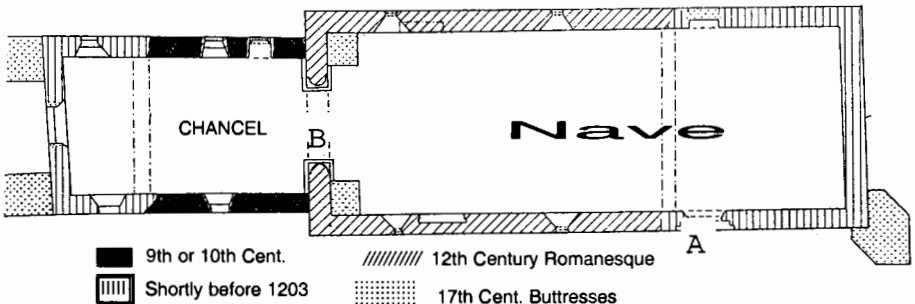
The most rewarding approach for the first-time visitor is from the North, when you climb up Tower Hill. First to greet your eyes are the two large buttresses (17th cent.), and then the cathedral proper. It was not originally built as a cathedral but as a small one-cell church in the 9th or 10th century, and its well-built masonry stands out clearly in the lower courses of the North Wall. You can walk along close to the wall and admire the large stones.

In the second phase of construction this church became the chancel (containing the altar) to which a nave was added towards the West (see plan below). This was in the second half of the 12th cent. when the church had a bishop (Eugene). The final phase took place just before 1203.

“A.D. 1203. Mael Etain Ua Duib Rátha,
 uasalshasart na h-áirde móire (noble priest of Ardmore)
 died after he had finished the building of the church of Ardmore”.

— The Annals of Inisfallen.

Plan of Cathedral



■ 9th or 10th Cent.

//// 12th Century Romanesque

||||| Shortly before 1203

..... 17th Cent. Buttresses

(from J. T. ⁽²⁸⁾Smith, JRSAI 1972)



St. Molana and the Little Bird

Delightfully situated on the island of Dairinis on the river Blackwater before it reaches the sea at Youghal are the ruins of the 12th cent. priory of the Augustinian Canons Regular. The Norman knight, Raymond le Gros (d.1186) is regarded as the patron of this foundation and is believed to be buried there. The property later came into the hands of Sir Walter Raleigh and then of Richard Boyle.

But way back in the early 7th cent. Dairinis was where St. Molana (Maellanfaidh) founded his little monastery. We may recall two of its famous members: the abbot Fer-dá-Chríoch (man of two districts), who was the tutor of the great ascetic Máelrúin (see p.9); secondly the scholar Rubin (d.725) who, together with Cú-cuimne of Iona, compiled the Canons (rules) dealing with Irish church discipline etc.

But the spirit of the founder, St. Molana, soared high above rules and regulations to the mysteries of animals and birds. In the following charming story we find him listening to the lamentation of a little bird and learning that the bird is sorrowing for the death of a human being who was kind to all creatures.

The story, written in Irish around 800, is taken from the Féilire (Calendar) of Oengus, a pupil of Máelrúin at Tallaght:

“On a certain day Molana saw a little bird weeping and lamenting, and he exclaimed, ‘O My God, what has happened to that creature? I swear I will eat no food until it is revealed to me’.

So standing there he saw an angel approaching. And the angel addressed him ‘Greetings, cleric. Let the trouble of this little creature distress you no longer. Mo-Lúa, son of Oche, has died. And the creatures lament him because he never killed any creature, small or great. And men bewail him no more than do the other creatures, including the tiny bird you see”.

In a short Irish poem from the same early period we humans are exhorted to praise the Lord

“Since the little birds must praise Him—
they who have no souls but air”.



In The Hermitage

There are various reasons why people visit the antiquities of Ardmore. Those of the traditional faith come to pray especially at the time of the Pattern Week (around the Feast of St. Declan, 24th July); to make the Rounds reciting the Rosary as they walk around the little path by the Well. Some have preserved the age-long popular belief that people are cured of various ailments when they pray at the Well and the Beannachán. And those who have experienced healing there, even if it was not miraculous, are grateful for the grace received. (The Church authorities have neither confirmed nor denied the validity of such claims). But many pilgrims also come to pray for God's grace, to meditate on holy things. Such sentiments were expressed by the poet Tadhg Gaelach in the poem referred to above, which is a relic of the Irish spirituality of the 1700s and is in harmony with the earlier spirituality of the Hermitage which we saw in the life of Declan.

Some of the cures reported in the Hermitage may have resulted from nature's own healing powers being activated by the sufferer's faith and lively hope.

An early Irish theologian (probably from Lismore monastery around 655) wrote a Latin treatise on the Miracles of Holy Scripture, seeking to explain the miracles as issuing from 'the hidden recesses of nature'. This did not exclude God from the picture, since it was from His creative hand that all nature and its hidden depths issued forth.*

*See John Carey, King of Mysteries, Early Irish Religious Writing (Dublin 1998) 51.

Death at Last: Departing to Christ



If you linger for a while before the open page of the Book of Kells in Trinity College you may, in your mind's eye, see the scribe's hand patiently guiding his little pen along the lines of the page. And if your inner ear is tuned to quietness, you may catch him complaining of his weariness, as the saintly scribe Colum Cille is supposed to have done in his poem:

IS SCÍTH MO CHRÓB ÓN SCRÍBÁINN
(my hand is tired from writing).

Such also were the sentiments of the author of the Life of Declan. He too complained that he was weary after finishing the thirty-seventh chapter on the many fantastic miracles of our Saint. And, being a kindly man, he went further: out of consideration for the reader, and to spare him any possible tedium, he omitted the remaining miracles and devoted the concluding chapters to a profoundly theological meditation on the death of the Saint as his joyful departure to Christ:

St. Declan happened to be dwelling in his beloved Hermitage when he realised that the day of his death was approaching, and so he returned to his own city on the Hill of Ardmore, just half a mile away. It was there he wished to be buried in the spot where his Oratory now stands. May pilgrims have come here over the centuries and have taken away a fistful of soil from Declan's grave.

For Declan death was not a dreaded moment of terror; it was his departure on the journey to Christ, the final goal of his earthly pilgrimage. And while his friends lamented his going, he himself, though deprived of bodily strength, was happy and cheerful, and even found words of consolation and good advice for those who were gathered around him.

And his final reception of Holy Communion was very special. His dear friend Bishop MacLiag came in good time to administer to him the Holy Viaticum - the food for the journey to Christ.*

* C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Vol. 2 (repr. Dublin 1997) p. 58

The Splendour of Lismore: Saints and Scholars, Kings and Bishops

St. Malachy. In the year 1121 we find Bishop Malchus (p.21) residing in Lismore, bringing with him the gentle Benedictine spirituality in which he had been trained. There he acted as spiritual guide to a young man from Armagh named Malachy who was to become the foremost reformer of the Irish Church, and the Papal Legate for Ireland (1140 - 1148). He was later remembered as St. Malachy of Armagh. Malachy had visited the Cistercian Monastery of Clairvaux in France, and studied there under the famous St. Bernard who was very impressed by his pupil. It was at Clairvaux also that Malachy, on his final journey to Rome, died in the arms of St. Bernard in 1148, who later wrote the *Life of Malachy*. In this book Bernard also sings the praises of Bishop Malchus for his holiness and his healing of a deaf man, a mentally deranged boy, and a sick man named Malchus "the brother of our Christian, the Abbot of Melifont".

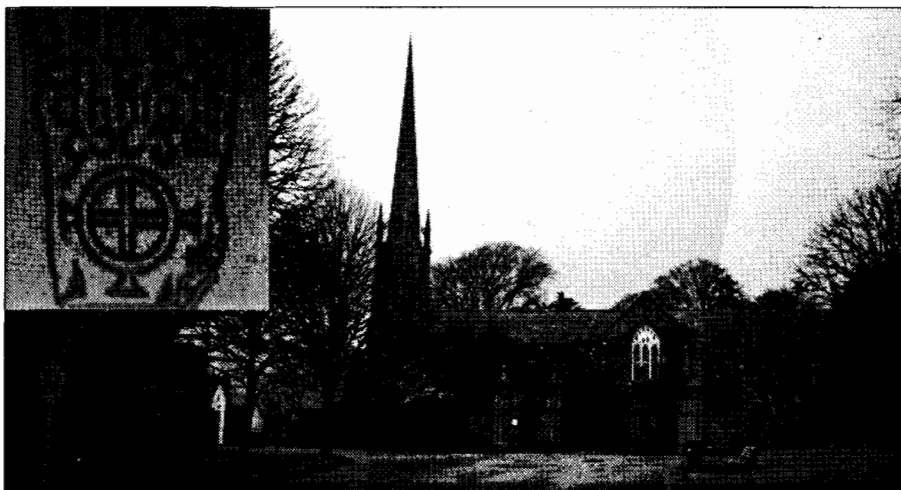
King Cormac. Another distinguished guest to Lismore was the King of Desmond, Cormac Mac Carthaig, always remembered for building Cormac's Chapel on the Rock of Cashel - today the best preserved Romanesque church in Ireland. In 1127 Cormac, due to political turmoil, sought refuge in the Monastery of Lismore, where he insisted on being treated as an ordinary pilgrim, observing the penitential diet of bread, salt and water.** The King was blessed, however, in having as his spiritual guide the future St. Malachy who was then making his second visit to Lismore. After a short stay the King was enabled to return to his kingdom. As a token of gratitude he built two churches in Lismore, of which, however, no trace remains today, except perhaps the fragmented frescoes (12th century) discovered in 1989 in the 17th century Cathedral (C of I).

King Henry II. Another royal visitor to Lismore was King Henry II of England, shortly after his arrival in Waterford in 1171. His purpose was to confer with the Papal Legate of Ireland, Christian O'Conarchy, Bishop of Lismore. It was the meeting of the hawk and the dove. The King, noted for his violent temper, had shocked all Christendom two years previously when his knights murdered Archbishop Thomas Beckett in Canterbury Cathedral. No record of the Lismore deliberations which took two days has survived, but the Anglo-Normans from Waterford plundered Lismore in 1173, and caused further violence there in subsequent decades with the result that the splendour of the great monastery faded away, never to return. The legate's hopes for the reform of the Irish Church came to nothing. In 1179 he resigned as bishop and legate, and he retired to the monastery of Odorney in County Kerry where he ended his days.

* Aubrey Gwynn, S.J., *The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th Centuries*, (Dublin 1992) 199; St. Bernard, *The Life of Malachy*, IV.8,9. Abbot Christian later became bishop of Lismore and papal legate.

** Aubrey Gwynn, S.J., op.cit. 206.

Lismore Cathedral



When one draws near to Lismore, travelling on the main road from Cappoquin one is greeted by the lovely view of the spire of the Cathedral emerging above the trees. The spire and the tower on which it rests were built in 1827, and while the foundations were being dug several stone artifacts came to light which are now set into the interior West Wall. Among these are five grave-stones of members of the famous monastic school of Lismore, the earliest being that of Colgen, an eminent ecclesiastic who died 850. The Irish inscription invokes 'a blessing on the soul of Colgen' (Bendacht for anmain Colgen). Underneath is the Celtic Cross. Another Celtic Cross graces the memorial of Suibhne (d.854).

Many other distinguished clerics were buried in the monastic graveyard, including St. Carthage and the saintly Ceallach (Celsus), Archbishop of Armagh, of whom the Annals of Ulster relate that when he was dying at Ardpatrik in 1129 he requested to be buried 'in the tomb of the bishops' at Lismore. But we have no trace of these tombs.

The present Cathedral (C. of I.) was built in the 17th. century on the site of the ruined 13th. century Cathedral. In 1989 when a doorway was being cut through the North Wall of the chancel, two fragments of painted plaster, dating from the 12th. century, were revealed. The only other example of such 12th. century art is that on the walls of Cormac's Chapel in Cashel, which was consecrated in 1134, just a few years after Cormac's visit to Lismore (see p. 32).

The Cashel Connection



The artist's drawing shows us Cormac's Chapel (p.32), the Round Tower - the oldest surviving building on the Rock, and St. Patrick's Cross.

The Rock of Cashel was the seat of the overkings of Munster, and, in the 12th century it became the seat of the archbishop of Cashel - the first archbishop being Malchus bishop of Waterford whom we have met already when he arrived in 1096 as the first bishop of the Danish City of Waterford (p.21). Later we found him in Lismore and in the writings of St. Bernard (p.32). This good man now deserves to have his Irish name revealed: Maol Iosa Ua h-Ainmire. He worked hard for the reform of the Church and he died in Lismore in 1135, at the age of 88.

In a papal letter (1210) Waterford, Ardmore and Lismore are listed among the suffragans of Cashel.

But travelling back through the mists of time to the 5th century — to the age of Patrick and Declan and Ailbe we find, in the 12th century Life of Declan, St. Patrick visiting Cashel where he baptised the sons of the king. This was also the occasion of his meeting with Declan of Ardmore, and Ailbe, the founder of the famous monastery of Emly, Co. Tipperary. It becomes clear that there were several regions of Ireland never visited by St. Patrick, and where local saints like Ailbe and Declan and Ciarán and Ibar — the four pre-patrician bishops, as they came to be called — had established the Christian faith. St. Patrick himself is presented as acknowledging this fact:

Then St. Patrick, patron of all Ireland, recited the following verse in the Irish language to define the status of the two bishops, Ailbe and Declan:

"Ailbe umhal Pátric Muman, mó gach ráth;

Declan Pátric na nDéisi, na Déisi ag Declan go bráth."

(Humble Ailbe is the Patrick of Munster, greater than any pledge;
Declan is the Patrick of the Déisi, the Déisi will always be Declan's)

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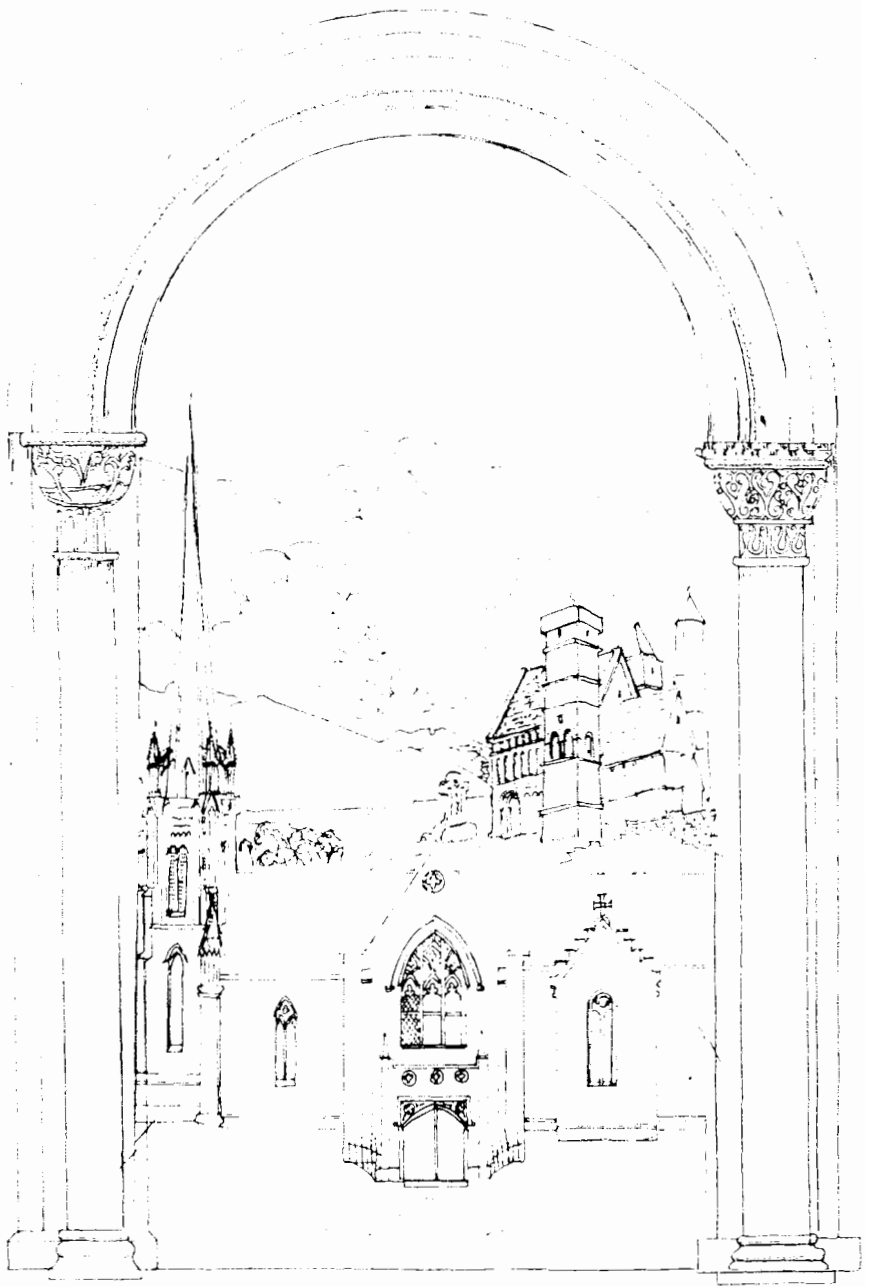
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An Sagart
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*Lismore: Cathedral Spire and South Porch;
(Above) Cashel: Cormac's Chapel, the Round Tower, and St. Patrick's Cross*