

The Ecclesiastical History of the Parish of Attymass

The Ecclesiastical history of this parish is bound up with that of the old Principality of Coolcarney which at one time, according to a poem by Mac Firbis, written in 1417, embraced the territory between Beel Lasa (or Foxford) and the Brosnach river in Castleconnor. In course of time, the district of Coolcarney came to be whittled down to what are now known as the parishes of Attymass and Kilgarvan comprising an area enclosed by natural boundaries, having the Ox Mountains on the East. The River Moy on the West and extensive bogs in the North in and South. The Church in both parishes appears to have shared the joys and sorrows of fourteen hundred in the period between the introduction of Christianity Here by St. Patrick and Emancipation.

Whether St. Patrick left any foundation here or not is uncertain. We are credited in the annals and in local tradition with opposition to our National apostle by the clamours and clangers of our arms and shields at the "Fords of the Moy" and that the "Holy Man of God" rebuked his opposers telling them that on account of their "armed resistance to messengers of peace and salvation" they would not in future time have any success in battle. But the people repented, the Saint relented and promised them as victorious future which, according to Mac Firbis they afterwards enjoyed. Of course the scene of this opposition is disputed and Mr. Henry Morris, in "St. Patrick in Sligo" places it in Easkey Parish.

There, according to the Tripartite, St. Patrick left Bishop Rodan, Patricks Hardsman and Mr Morris Conneck this Rodan a Ruadhan with the establishment of the first Church in Kilgarvan, known amongst the older generations as Cill on Rodhain. But it was not unusual to name Churches after the chief in whose territory the Rathreedane, in Bonniconlon parish, derives its name from a large for that townland which in older times was named "Cartha – Ratha – Rodain or the quarter land of the Fort of Ruadhain.

Attymass and Bonniconlon belongs to Achonry Diocese

Foundation was made as in Killala, called after Awley chief of Tirawley. So the name Ruadhain may have been added in compliment to the O'Ruadhains who were sub chiefs of the O'Haras who ruled supreme in Eallen as well as in Leysney before the Norman invasion. The O'Ruadhain's were chiefs of Killasser and A PART OF Foxford but there in proof that their lordship extended in early times to Attymass and Killgarvan. In 1417 those two parishes were under the sway of the O'Dowd's and included in Hy Fiachrach but at the Synod of Rathbreasil in 1118 and again at the Synod of Kells in 1152 they were included in Achonry Diocese with the remainder of Eallon and O'Dowd's claim to them was not sufficient to have them included with his Kingdom of Hy Fiachrach in the Diocese of Killala. Further when the master of the rolls was settling the mearings of Mayo and Sligo, the O'Dowd's claimed both parishes for the latter county but the ruling was that they were part and parcel of Eallon Gallen and would be included in Mayo. The O'Ruadhain's then in early times ruled in Attymass and Bonniconlon and more that likely the names "Cill on Rodain" has come from them. The Church of Kilsheshnan in Killasser was named after Asnan O'Ruadhain of one of the O'Ruadhain chieftains who built and endowed it in reparation for his sins.

Whether or not our Church foundations are Patrician we have the indisputable fact from the Tripartite that St.

Patrick visited the district. On the mearing between the parishes of Attymass and Kilmoremoy (the modern parish of Ballina) and on the banks of the Moy, there is a place called Buaile Phadraig. The Tripartite says that here a great unnatural flood opposed the Saint and he was forced to tarry a while there and, "on the water is a stead called Buaile Patrick" that in Patrick's byre or milking place and that when the Tripartite was written about 700 A.D. the place was marked by "a small mound with a cross thereon". It may seem strange why Patrick wanted a milking place! We may also ask why Bishop Ruadhan Was described as Patrick's chief herdsman and why a poem was written in praise of him as such and how successfully he trained his calves! Patrick it should be remembered did not depend on the natives for anything. Like our modern missionaries in China and Africa, he had to be supported from home. Some modern writers suggest that he was financed from the monastery of Honoratus at Levins. Hence, Patrick, as he moved through Ireland, was accompanied by a self-supporting troupe. They had their own cows and cattle, even goats, and had herdsman to look after them. I have quoted Mr. Morris here. So we can picture our Saint and his retinue approaching the Moy to cross into Tirawley. The flood necessitated some days delay, a buaile or milking place was hastily erected, the sili was still marked by a mound and cross two centuries late and to this day bears Patrick's name. A well, in the townland of Currower in this parish also carries the name of Tobar Padraig of Patrick's Well and there is a tradition that a Celtic Cross rests at the bottom of it. We cannot say, however that St. Patrick had any personal contact with the place but it is quite probable as, apart from the peculiarities of the well itself, a large and important fort, "Traig Buide", stands above it and in very few districts in Ireland are forts as numerous as in the locality, showing how populous was the area in ancient times and what a field lay there for his sacred mission. A small lake near the well is called Lough Ciarain but so many of those are named after Ciorzan, a rowan tree, that it is doubtful if Kiaran, founder of Clonmacnoise and who died A.D. 549, had any connection with it.

Knox, in his "History of the Dioceses of Tuam, Killala and Achonry" says that Tir Fiachra, which included Coolcarney, remained Pagan until the middle of the sixth century or approximately until the time of St. Kiaran's death. Then Christianity was planted in it by Muredach of Innismurray, assisted by Farannan, Cuane, Garbhan and Grellan, Muredach leaving the greatest mark. Muredach, Farannan, Cuane and Garbhan were descended from Niall of the Nine Hostages so that the Tir Fiachra, or modern Tireragh, mission was that of a family party. Several foundations are attributed to Muredach, whose importance at that time is shown by the fact that he is said to have advised Columba to leave Ireland after the battle of Culdremna, 561 A.D. Cuane was honoured in the parish of Screen and Farannan in Easkey. There is no mention of Garbhan's name having been enshrined in the district. Has Kilgarvan derived its name from him? – The Church of Garbhan. It is strange that any writer has not attempted to connect him with this Church although, as we have seen, he laboured in the district with other Church founders whose names have been commemorated. The reason perhaps in the presence of what appears to be the plural form of the Irish article "na" between "Cill" and "Barbhan" in the name as recorded in many old records viz., "Cillnangarbhan". But so many changes occurred in this spelling of Irish place names of olden times that the present tradition name Kilgarvan may be regarded as being the original. That Garbhan was a person of great importance is shown by the fact that he accompanied Baithen, Cuane, Coleman and Farannan when they were sent to invite Columba from Iona to the Convention of Drumcetta A.D. 574, or otherwise that they were sent to Drumcetta to ask Columba to come on to Ballysadare. Dr. Reeves, in his

life of Adamnan and Columcille, placed the date of the letters visit to Ballysadare at 585 A.D. I shall return to Ballysadare later.

Whatever doubt may be placed on Bishop Ruadhan or Garbhan as founders of Kilgarvan, we have a very definite date for the establishment of a Church there in early Christian times. This was the Church founded by St. Fechin who was descended from Eochad Finn, brother of Conn of the Hundred Battles. He was born at Bile, in Leyney, in 625 A.D. was educated under St. Nathy at his famous school in Achonry, was ordained in 650 A.D. and died on 20th March 665 A.D. I may say here that agreement on there date is by no means unanimous, many writers attributing a much earlier date to his life. It is probable that he first founded Bile Church which, according to Dr. Lanigan in his "Ecclesiastical History of Ireland" was known as Bile Fechin but did not survive to Elizabethan times. His next foundation was Ballysodare which was the earliest of the important Churches in the diocese of Achonry and which continued in active being till the twelfth century. It was plundered by the Danes in 844 A.D. and burned in internecine strife in 1178 A.D. and again in 1179 A.D. Columba came to Ballysodare where he met a great assembly of the clergy of Connaught. The meeting was held for the purposes connected with the organisation of the Connaught Churches and St. Columba, owing to his royal descent and missionary renown, had influence with chieftains and clergy. The meeting at Ballysodare goes to prove its importance in those early times and if Fechin was not born until 625 A.D. a church must have existed there before his time and Fechin was afterwards connected with it in the way of organisation. From Ballysodare, St. Fechin is said to have founded the churches of Kilgarvan, Ballynahaghish (almost opposite Buaille Phadraig), Cong, Fore in Westmeath and one on the island of Immagh, near the coast of Galway. Regarding Fore Dr. Lanigan says that Fechin left his own country and erected a monastery there. So great was his reputation, he attracted great numbers of persons and after some time had three hundred monks, all of whom, as well as Fechin himself, subsisted on their own labours. Fechin says the same authority, lived a life of austerity and solitude and he used retire from Fore to the rugged island of Immagh where he spent the time in prayer, fasting and mortification, Many miracles were attributed to him. In this parish of Attymass his name is commemorated in Tobar Fechin or Fechin's well in the townland of Mullahowney, and in the townland of Rathreedane in the parish of Kilgarvan is a well bearing the same name.

Solitary indeed is the site of his foundation in Kilgarvan situated at the foot of the Ox Mountains in the townland of Kilgarvan and enclosed by lilly country, the loneliness of the place strikes one with a feeling almost of awe. It is now the site of a graveyard which will soon be closed to burials as a new one has been provided near the village of Bonniconlon. No trace of the old church remains but on the site now occupied by the Howley vault, a portion of one of the old walls still stood when O'Connor, assistant of John O'Donovan, visited the place in 1837.

Fechin's connection with Kilgarvan may not be as founder, as in the case of Ballysodare, but as organiser, and the name which has survived to this day probably commemorates Garbhan in the manner I have already described.

We have not any definite date for the foundation of a Church in Attymnass parish but if there never was a record of the existence of such it's quite evident that no less than four sacred edifices were erected in ancient times. These were situated in the townlands of Bonnifinglas, Kildermott, Kilgellia and in Glendaduff which was once included in this parish but now forms part of the parish of Foxford (anciently Toomore) of the four, Killeen Church

or Abbey, in Glendaduff was most likely the first. It was established by Premonstratennian an order founded by St. John Matha and St. Felix of Valois for the Redemption of Captives taken by the Saracens who having established themselves in Jerusalem in 637 A.D., began the conquest of Africa in 640, completed same in 710, when they invaded Spain and except for the N.W. corner had completed the conquest of that country by 713 A.D. They then crossed the Pyrenees but were thrown out of France in 732. I mention those dates to fix the period of the mission of the Order of the Blessed Trinity or Trinitarians. A very famous abbey of the order was established on Trinity Isle in Lough Ce. Buchlaman, the Spaniard, who functioned in the choir of St. Nathy's of Achonry is supposed to have come from Lough Ce. Killeen in Glendaduff (now called Glan) was a cell of this far-famed abbey. Of the Church or abbey now nothing remains but its site is marked by a graveyard which up to thirty five years ago, was used only for the burial of un-baptised children. It was then walled in and now very urgently requires an extension. Up to that, no wall or fence of any kind enclosed the holy place which was only small, approximately forty four yards by twenty seven. At the time the boundary wall was erected, the contractor says that there was no trace of a building there and no stones were scattered about that he could use for his contract. But there are at least five remarkable stone crosses, one a tall cross with cap measuring 15ft x 9.1/2ft and standing 3ft above the ground with the letters I.S.H. neatly executed thereon and may be of modern workmanship. This cross alone guarantees the antiquity of the place as a church site. The second is a large rudely cut Celtic cross with un-bored arms over 2.1/2ft across, standing 2.1/2ft above the ground but may extend several feet below and if exposed, might be equal in height to any of our ancient high crosses. I may add here that the graveyard is very high and at the end of a long narrow ridge. The reason for setting the Celtic cross so far into the ground is not easily understood unless the church originally stood on a much lower level than the present surface of the graveyard. The contour of the graveyard is unlike the remainder of the ridge and has all the appearance of having been built up particularly on the South side. Perhaps, covered in the mound, are the ruins of the old church since no trace of the stones used in its construction is to be found. On this Celtic cross, there are no figures not inscriptions of any kind and such now decorated and un-inscribed high crosses are said to belong to the early Christian period. The three remaining crosses are Latin in design each cut of a single stone and not very large. Two of them are very rudely shaped but the third is perfectly cut and is probably quite modern. The letters "M.N." are carved on the largest of them.

In the centre of the graveyard lies a remarkable sandstone flag of somewhat oval shape 20" x 18" and about 3" thick. A cross is engraved in the centre and on engraved pattern of most peculiar design covers the spaces not so occupied. Mr. Henry Morris, a noted antiquarian, took a plastic cast of this stone some years ago but neither he nor other authorities have been able to understand its significance. It is definitely Christian, was used probably used as a grave-slab and the mysterious engraving added as ornamentation. But locally, the flag is held in great reverence for grass has never been allowed to grow over it, being kept clean by those who attend funerals there. A rubbing of this slab has now been taken and a copy has been forwarded to the National Museum.

More interesting still is the pillar stone which stands at the West end of the graveyard. It is a large flag about 2.1/2ft wide and 4" thick. The top is quite irregular. The flag contains a seam sizable on the edge and a part of the West face at the top is missing. Immediately below this a Latin cross 9" x 5" is engraved and at an

angle of about 40deg. to the base. The surrounding wall comes quite close to the pillar stone and is carved at this point as if to include it in the graveyard. Only three feet of this stone now stands over the ground but a few feet more were exposed before the wall was built. This is a most important monument and with the slab described is of even greater antiquity than the tall cross. Pillar stones and flat slabs with crosses engraved on them are regarded as belonging to the early Christian period. The number of such pillars and slabs in Ireland is very great and it has been estimated that prior to 1912, accounts of 892 of them had been published. None seem to have the figure of the dying Saviour engraved on them. Some had ogham inscriptions and were long in existence, before the Christian era, as pagan monument. The early Irish Saints engraved the crosses in them with a view to Christianise them as St. Patrick did in the graveyard of League, near Ballina. The missing part, to which I have referred, may have borne some ogham inscription which commemorated a false god, as was usual on such monuments, and may have been purposely broken off at the time the cross was inscribed. Of course, the church or abbey, like as many of the early Christian foundations, may have been of wood which was plentiful in the district at the time and this might account for the absence of likely building stones on the site. The townland of Derreen adjoins and has derived its name from a little oak grave. Herewith, on the opposite page, are drawings of the crosses, slab and pillar stone. Place name in the vicinity of Killeen do not throw any light on the history of the abbey. The fields about are known as the "Killeens" and are said to contain caves. That being so a fort may have existed at the spot and the church may have been established within its ramparts, as in the case of another Killeen in Kilgillia townland to which I shall later refer.

Coolcarney is entered from Co. Sligo by two passes in the Ox. Mountains, one almost at the extreme North of Bonniconlon parish and the other at the extreme South of Attymass. The ancient road through the gap into Bonniconlon passed not far from the old church of Kilgarvan, and Killeen abbey in Glendaduff stood beside the highway into Attymass. Though only locally used now, highway it was in those far off days and for years later, for in 1586 A.D., according to the annals, Bingham crossed the Ox. Mountains here from the O'Hara Castle at Belclare to surprise the Scots at Ardnaree. Here then are one of the two highways to Coolcarney, Fechin either founded a church or organised one already established and Premonstatensians founded another on the second. A similar situation is discovered in Ballysodare Parish, Fechin founding or organising a church there and monks from Trinity Isle Abbey in Lough Ce establishing a church at Enagh in the same parish though in a different principality viz., Tirerill, and the only part of that barony included in the Achonry diocese. Here we are evidence of some land between Ballysodare Abbey and Trinity of Lough Ce. They worked in conjunction in the area now covered by the parish of Ballysodare and again we find them in happy harmony, spreading the light of Faith, in Coolcarney. From this we may conclude that Killeen Abbey in Glendaduff was founded almost, if not as early, as Kilgarvan, that is towards the end of the sixth or the early part of the seventh century.

Nor was Killeen in Glendaduff the only possession of the Premonstatensians in Attymass. Knox in his "History of the Diocese of Tuam, Killala and Achonry" states that the rectory of Attymass was owned by them together with "the quarters of Carrownacargy and Drumcowlog," The farmer in the present townland of Carrick and Knox says the latter has not been identified. But in Cromwilliam times we find one Sir. Francis Annesley, one time Secretary of State for Ireland, getting large parcels of land in Galway, Sligo and Mayo amongst them being "A quarter of Drumscoaba and Carrownecargie or either, being a parcel of the possessions of the Abbey of Temple Attinnesse;

and from Archdall's "Monasticon Hibernicum." I take the following extract, "Killyn, in the barony of Tirawley; this abbey was seized of the chapel or church of Temple – Attinmefs and a quarter of land called Drumscowlog and Carrowneargy with the titles of same". Taken in conjunction, these extracts identifies Drumscowley as the present townland of Drumscoaba which adjoins the townland of Bonnifinglas in which Attymass church then stood. Attymass was not of course in Tirawley but the church or Temple – Attinmass, as I shall explain later, was only separated from that barony by the Moy. Before doing so however, it is not out of place to mention that Glendaduff and Carrick were again coupled in the Cromwilliam Plantations for we find a grant made to Nicholson, a Cromwilliam captain, of both townlands together with the intervening townland of Boyhallagh. Perhaps Annesley, who had got estates in a dozen counties outside Connaught, had more than he needed and sold the townlands mentioned to Nicholson. These lands, one time possessions of the Trinitarians of Killeen in Glendaduff, did not pass out of the hands of the Nicholson family until the advent of our native government and the passing of the 1923 Land Act.

The rectory of Attymass was, as we have seen, owned by the Premonstratensians of Killeen Abbey, Glendaduff. The church was on the banks of the Moy in the townland of Bonnifinglas. The site of the church is indicated on a 16th century map accompanying Knox's "History of Mayo", in Petty's map of Mayo 1683 and in another map in Dr. McParlan's "Statistical Survey of the County of Mayo" dated 1802. The latter is identical with the 16th century map in the "History of Mayo" and was probably a copy for McParlan did not travel the entire county and evidently wrote much of his "Survey" from existing records. But we find the church of Attymass on this site up to the end of the 17th century or a few years before the Orange victory at the Boyne and the ill-fated Treaty of Limerick. Any student of Irish history can picture the fate of the Catholic Church in the dark years that followed when the general policy conquerors aimed at the political and social extinction of the Catholics of Ireland. The first important penal law period against the Catholic clergy was that of 1697 by which all ecclesiastical dignitaries, archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons or vicar-generals, as also all regular priests and members of religious orders were ordered to leave the country. Secular priests were allowed to remain but an act of 1704 required them to register, to give sureties for their good and peaceful behaviour and not to quit the district in which they ordinarily resided without special leave. One priest could be registered for each parish and was generally permitted to say mass without interference. But many parishes were amalgamated and unregistered secular priests and regular frequently came to the assistance of the registered clergy and said mass at some turf altar or mass rock in some well-concealed spot while scouts watched, to warn the congregation, which knelt around, of the approach of the military. The number of registered priests was 1092.

If Cromwell had not abolished Attymass church at Bonnifinglas together with Killeen Abbey when he seized the lands attached, this law of 1704 probably ended it forever. We shall see when and where it came to be rebuilt. The church site at Bonnifinglas is marked by a graveyard which was no larger than Killeen of Glendaduff until enlarged by the Board of Guardians, through the exertions of the then P.P. of Attymass, now Canon Walter Henry P.P., Killaser, backed up by the energetic local representative on the Board, Mr. Thomas O'Flynn, Carrick. The whole graveyard was then enclosed by a substantial stone wall, prior to this, three separate extensions were made but a straggling hawthorn hedge was the only boundary to ward off the stock grazing in the adjoining fields. The old graveyard was hopelessly overcrowded as may be judged from the fact that, together with Kilgarvan, it

served the whole of Coolcarney and that since then four others have been provided in the same area. The land required for each extension together with that portion of the old roadway passing by the graveyard to the Moy was given free to the Board by Mrs. Perry, the Landlord. The old roadway led by the graveyard to a ford on the river and from this ford Attymass derives its name, At Tize Measaiz – The Ford of the House of Massey. For years there have been various derivations put forward for Attymass but all have been confused by the fact that Attymass Church now stands in the townland of Kilgellia, three miles from the original site and could not have derived its name from its present surroundings. The House of Massey probably stood near the ford, or the large fort near by may have been the site. If of stone, the demesne walls on the Perry estate all around would account for its disappearance.

No trace of the actual church building at Bonnifinglas remains and nobody in the neighbourhood ever heard that one had been seen there. But there is abundant evidence of a sacred building having once existed there. On a height about twenty feet over the level of the Moy and thirty feet East of it is the original graveyard, the centre of which is again some feet above the surrounding ground. Here there are long stones with chamfered edges, several cut or chiselled stones as if used in some building, a door or window lintel with a hole for hangings, gate or shutter, ancient grave slabs, most of them un-inscribed but one dated 1776, and most important of all an ancient roughly cut Latin Cross of granite about 4" high and 2" across the arms on which three small Latin crosses are engraved. Another Latin cross about the size of that on the present church gable in Attymass marks a grave. It bears what can be regarded as a modern inscription: "M.Q., died 26th March 1898, aged 69 years R.I.P." Several grave slabs measure 72" x 3" and are mostly of granite. The cut or chiselled stones are practically all sandstone, the rest granite. The nearest place in which sandstone is obtained is on the Sligo side of the Yellow River, E. of Derreen and not far from the site of Killeen Abbey in Glendaduff.

Before continuing the history of the church in this parish it may be well to give other extracts from old records referring to Kilgarvan, Killeen in Glendaduff and the church of Attymass in Bonnifinglas townland. The earliest of those is in connection with the taxation of Edward 1st. made in 1306. In Reeves "Ecclesiastical History of Dawn and Connor", the tax is described as originally one of the 1/10 of the movable and annual income of all men in aid of the Crusades or to free the Holy Land from the Turks. This soon became a tax on the clergy without much pretence of crusading. It was granted by the Pope to the King or levied by the Pope for himself. It had been repeatedly granted and levied in Ireland. In 1306 King Edward 1st. got from Pope Clement V. a grant for 2 years, afterwards extended to seven, of the ecclesiastical tenths of his dominions for which was made a new valuation. Some churches do not appear in the list for various reasons. Some were too poor to be worth assessing. Others were marked waste or worthless owing to war: the income from others was small because the parishes were small while others were in purely Irish countries and the collectors could not have got anything out of them. Attymass and Kiklgarvan did not fit into any of those categories as we shall see. The assessment was made by two sub collectors who got returns from each Deanery from the rural deans, who in turn had got the assessment made by jurors on oath. Many monasteries having no taxable income do not appear. The ancient monasteries had lost their lands so do not appear unless they had acquired lands later or had other property. Their incomes from rectories were taxed under the parish church. There was a new taxation in the reign of Edward 11. Following Bruce's war and again in 1330 under Edward 111. In the first, viz. 1306, Authigynmessick and

Kilnangarvan (that is Attymass and Kilgarvan) are each taxed 7/6. The total for Achonry Diocese is £35.6.9. Some churches were taxed as low as 2/4 while Straide Abbey, which must have been extremely important, was taxed at 60/- or about 1/12 of the whole Diocesan Taxation. Killeen of Glendaduff is not mentioned and likely had no taxable income except that derived from the rectory of Attymass. In the Valor Beneficiorum of 1585, "Attymass" is set down and valued at nothing but so are several other parishes of the diocese. Kilgarvan, Toomore and even Ballysodare are omitted altogether but may have been included in other lists. In this year also the Fitzwilliams got the entire lands in possession of Ballysodare Abbey which was then in a dilapidated condition. Those attached to the old church at Kilgarvan were, as I have shown, valued at nothing. The estates however did not remain long in Fitzwilliams possessions but changed hands frequently and came into Catholic possession in 1839.

I have gone into some detail in the Edwardian Taxation to show, by way of contrast, the importance of Attymass and Kilgarvan compared with contemporary churches six centuries ago. Bonnifinglas cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as a place of very great importance now but at the time when the parish church was established, and due to the influence of its monks, it had its fishing weirs and fairs, the latter established by patent. The fishing weirs existed at Ballycong not far from Bonnifinglas and according to the annals were in use in 1225 when the sons of Rory O'Connor, last High King of Ireland endeavoured to wrest the throne of Connaught from Hugh, son of Cathal Crovedearg. The baskets of the fishing weirs at Ballycong were found full of dead children whom, in their flight from mHugh who was supported by the English, the inhabitants endeavoured to find refuge in Backs. Fr. Arthur Devine who was curate in Killaser and was interested in such matters, visited Ballycong several years ago and is said to have pointed out the spot on the river where, in his opinion, the fishing weirs referred to in the Annals were situated. He wrote an account of the parish of Killaser but his MS. is not now available.

The Bonnifinglas Fairs, according to "Stewarts Almanack" were held four times a year, 24th. May 7th. July, 15th. Nov. and 15th December. Mr. Keaveney, owner of the only licensed premises in Bonnifinglas, paid £3.00 annually to Mr. Perry, the Landlord, for the tolls and customs. On the establishment of monthly fairs in Ballina, the Bonnifinglas fairs gradually died out but there are people still living who attended them. The "fair green" is still there. In 1801, the number of villages and towns in Mayo was, Dr. McParlan says "46, large and small" and he reckons Bonnifinglas amongst them. Moyne and Straide also had fairs at this time, the former regarded as one of the two principal ones in Tirawley. Crossmolina being the other. Here also we see the influence of the monks in establishing fairs for both Moyne and Straide possessed famous abbeys. To the monks of Attymass on the Moy, Bonnifinglas owed its importance for, hemmed in on the West by the river, it would not otherwise be regarded as an important centre. The patent for the fairs is still valid and some years ago an effort was made to revive them, but in vain. As in the case of Killeen in Glendaduff, place names in the vicinity shed no light on the old church or anything connected with it but as these lands were seized centuries ago and in possession of the Perry – Knox – Gore Landlords up to the spring of this year 1940, the old place names passed away with the people who inhabited those fertile acres by the Moy. Now, with the exception of some wooden ground and a strip along the river, the land has returned to the tenants adjoining, descendants of those who were pushed into the mountains and bogs but who clung tenaciously there as did their fellow sufferers throughout Ireland in all the

plantations from Elizabeth to Cromwell.

In olden times, two other sacred edifices stood in the parish of Attymass viz. one at Killeen in Kilgellia townland, known amongst the old people as Killeen. Faulmore to distinguish it from Killeen of Glendaduff, and the second in Kildermott. Happily, a great part of the ruins of Kildermott Abbey still stands and owing to the exertions of the writer, it was declared a National Monument and entrusted for preservation to the Commissioners of Public Works in November 1939. So that out of at least six ancient church foundations in the whole of Coolcarney the ruins of one will stand preserved, perhaps forever. Local tradition says that the church of Kildermott once stood at Killeen on the east side of Ballymore Lake, was taken down stone by stone and transferred to the site of the existing ruin. Its original stand at Killeen was near the spot where a tan of T cross yet stands to indicate what is locally known as the "Friars Grave". The cross consists of two stones, the upright one standing 24" above ground and 12" in the earth and averaging 6" x 4". The cross stone is of the same style and measures 15" across. There is something uncanny about this cross stone for if falls to earth, it is said that in some mysterious way it is restored to its original position during the night. The fact that this simple monument to some holy Friar has survived for several centuries is no small tribute to the "Faith of Our Fathers" who, in dark and evil days, risked all to preserve any relic of their most valued heritage – the Catholic Faith; and the survival of this cross is all the more remarkable when we find that it was only about sixty-five years ago the graveyard in which it stands was walled in. Previous to this a clay rampart, about three feet high, enclosed a space covered with a growth of blackthorn and only the remains of beggars and travellers and un baptised children were interred there. It was taken over for the purpose of a graveyard about 1872 and the enclosing wall was built by a man named Hughes who lived in a cottage near the railway station in Ballina. The ceremony of consecration took place about four years afterwards. When cleaning out the undergrowth the workman discovered unique holy water font. A large rough stone had a place scooped out in the centre to accommodate a human skull which served as a container for the holy water. The skull was found in the stone and buried in Killeen but the stone itself was taken to the yard of Attymass church and there it lies to this day. There is no doubt that at one time Killeen contained a church or abbey and its antiquity is guaranteed by the fact that it is built inside a fort, the rampart of which being the only boundary of the graveyard up to 1872. Near Killeen and between it and the lake is a little hill called Cnocan Na O'Priosun (or the little hill of the prisons or chambers) which contains so terrains or underground chambers now closed in. But there are people still living who saw them open and knew others who explored them. They were probably connected with the fort but it is said that the Friars used them in penal times as places of refuge. Their portion would serve both Killeen and Kildermot equally well and if there is any truth in the tradition that the Friars sought refuge in them Kildermott must have survived down to the 16th. or 17th. Century. But more to follow in support of

A study of the ruins of Kildermott reveals the Architectural features of a late Reefert or early Romanesque church of the 9th. to 12th century. The walls of the chancel are still almo0st complete but only the foundations of the naïve remain. The naïve measures 28" x 16" on the inside and had walls over 2" thick standing on plinths 7" wider. The chancel is 16" x 11.1/2". The doorway is on the west and is 30" wide at the bottom where only one stone on each side remains and are slightly inclined inwards showing a feature of churches of the early Christian period. Nothing remains to be seen of the wall separating the chancel from the naïve though excavation would likely expose its foundation. The gable and south wall of the chancel are practically entire and about three fourths of

the North wall stand. The complete sidewall is 9" high on the outside, measured from the plinth, and it is six inches wider than those of the naïve. The stones are large, the largest being 43" x 15" x 14", are uncoursed and are embedded in mortar. There are no stones of the kind on this side of the lake, which supports the tradition that they were brought from Killeen, a distance of about six hundred yards across the lake. The window is in the east. Outside it is three feet high to the spring of the arch and six inches wide. The arch and sill are each cut out of a single stone brownish sandstone – and bear no decoration and no accommodation for glass. On the inside, the sides, top and bottom splay to a height of 7" and a width of 4". The arches of opening and splay are semicircular, only five brownish sandstones being employed in the latter and truly cut to arch and splay. On the base and on the inside of each first stone of the arch in a semicircular notch of 3" diameter which would accommodate a pole stretched across the window opening and which might have supported a hanging or shutter which would be necessary if the window was unglazed. In each sidewall 12" from the gable and now at floor level in a niche, one of which is 15" x 14" x 13" and the other in L shape 20" x 14" x 11" in the opening and a further 14" x 13" x 11" concealed in the heart of the wall. The latter may have accommodated the sacred vessels and the other may have been used as a sacrarium, or piscine for carrying away the water used in washing purificators or water used in baptised etc. A growth of ivy prevents examination of the top of the wall and south side of the gable so it is not possible to say if the latter was originally more pointed. It probably was, but if not, the roof was scarcely of stone and timber or thatch may have been used. The fact that the masonry in the gable is narrow by three or four inches, once the arch of the splay is passed, would indicate that the builder was not making provision for a heavy roof.

There only remain three stones of the doorway entrance to the chancel viz., one capital, one used in a pillar and the third which was used in the arch itself. The last two were found in a fence close by while the capital was salvaged from the lake in 1938 by Mr. Thomas Gallagher, on whose land Kildermott church stands and to whom is due the credit of keeping even what is left of it intact. The capital which is 12" x 6" x 6" is beautifully chiselled, has two graceful curves on one end while the other is chamfered. Immediately over the capital there perhaps stood the curved stone of the arch also carefully cut and chamfered on the two inner edges. There are two semicircular notches, similar to those in the window arch, cut in the base of this stone and may have accommodated poles for door or hangings to cut the chancel off from the naïve. The arch stone is 13" x 6" x 11" and is of similar quality to the capital viz., close hard grained sandstone. The pillar stone is of granite 14" high and 10" x 9". Two faces are nicely chiselled which would indicate that the remaining two were built against walls. On each side of the edge between the two dressed faces is a long groove about 1/2" wide and the space between is bevelled and is 2.1/2" wide. All three stones – pillar stone, capital and arch stone – can be placed one on the other in the position which they once probably occupied in the chancel arch, and it is fortunate that although there is no trace of their companions, these should have been saved.

That two holy water fonts which were used in the abbey are still to be seen is due to the power of observation and zeal of Mr. Gallagher to whom reference has already been made here. He was working by the shore of the lake some time ago and saw what appeared to be carved stones in the water some distance from the shore. He succeeded in bringing the stones to land and to his surprise discovered that they were fonts. One is cut out of a rough stone of somewhat triangular shape on top and having a hollow of 9" diameter and 4" deep as water

container. The dimensions of the stone are roughly 17" x 14" x 9" high. The other font is smaller and a part has either broken off or else it rested against a wall as some 2" of the 5" diameter of the hollow is missing. The receptacle for water is only 1½" deep.

How did those fonts reach the lake? Human agencies perhaps following the Act of 1697, when, amongst other laws against the Catholic clergy, members of religious orders were obliged to leave the country. Although not a single Protestant family now resides in the neighbourhood, this was not the case down to about sixty or seventy years ago when the last of a protestant colony of Strogens, Daltons, Potters, O'Neill's, O'Donnells, Hamiltons, Wills, Lynns and Clarkes occupied a large part of the town lands of Mullahowney and Ardrass, adjoining Kildermott. Most likely, these were planters or sopers who inherited the lands of the dispossessed monks of the old Abbey and in their zeal for the new religion, tore down the sacred building and relegated to the lake those emblems of the old Faith which the new has discarded. In 1826 and again in 1834, we find references in old records to this Protestant settlement and we know that while there was never a resident minister of that church in the parish, a Sunday service was conducted by a visiting Minister in the house of one Strogen in Mullahowney where a school was also conducted. A Rev. Mr. Lee from Ballina was the last to officiate. But for various reasons, the Protestants passed out one by one and Catholics once more took possession of the lands. I shall refer to this colony of Protestants later.

The Board Of Works will restore the foundations of Kildermott Abbey and repair the portion I have described so that future generations here will always have a reminder of our glorious past. The ground immediately about the old abbey is used for the interment of unbaptised children although there is a tradition that the remains of a girl in her twenties, lie buried beneath the hawthorn immediately outside the north wall of the chancel. Although Knox gives Kildermott in a list of ancient graveyards I can find no other reference to it in any records I have seen. In a map engraved in 1844 accompanying "Tribes and Customs of Hy Fiachrach". I find that it is marked as an Abbey and this is also the case in the Ordnance Survey, although O'Donovan, who collected information on matters antiquarian, in the course of the Survey in 1838, marks no reference to Kildermott. But the Irish Manuscripts Commission has already dug up some material in connection with dissolved monasteries and perhaps some day light will be thrown on Kildermott, its occupiers, its possessions and what became of them. For the present, this ends the history of the old Abbey and the last ancient building in Attymass connected with the Catholic Church. The monks of Killeen of Glendaduff, of Attymass or Temple – Attinmess in Bonnifinglas, those of Killeen – Faulmore and of Kildermott were silent and their holy places and possessions in the lands of the spoiler but time was to prove that the Faith they had established was more enduring than they could ever have imagined. We shall see how it fared with the standard-bearers of that Faith in Attymass.

The Act of 1704, as I have already pointed out, required all secular priests to be registered, to give sureties for their peaceful and good behaviour and not to quit the district in which they ordinarily resided without special leave. Only one priest was registered for each parish and it was hoped that owing to lack of educational facilities for Catholics here in Ireland, there would be no successors to the then regular clergy and consequently the flock would find itself without a shepherd and prove an easy prey. In this our Protestant rulers were only partly successful. The registered priests for Attymass and Kilgarvan in due time passed to their reward or perhaps the

parishes were amalgamated and had only one such priest. But there were others who received their education abroad or who were surreptitiously educated and ordained at home. These, with a price upon their heads, assisted the registered clergy or looked after the spiritual needs of the flock deprived of its shepherd. They dared not function in a church so the mass rock or sod alter was resorted to. Attymass contains two such monuments of the penal times, one at "Cnoc na haltora" or the "Hill of the Altar", in a quiet spot only a few hundred yards from the present church. The other was situated in "Loz na haltora" or "The Hollow of the Altar" between the town lands of Carracastle and Lisardmore. More secluded spots than those occupied by both altars, it would be difficult to find. They are situated at the foot of the highest points in their respective areas, the former at the base of Trassey Mountain, and a hill, known as Mullac na Craoibe, overlooks the other.

The purposes of selecting such sites is readily understood. On those heights and in view

Of the Holy Sacrifice, the scouts concealed themselves to give warning to the faithful of

the approach of the priest- hunters. Unfortunately, within the past ten years, the altar of "Log na hAltora" was removed by the owner of the land on which it stood. The site of the second altar near the church is not easily discernable. By 1727, there was a gradual diminution of hostility towards the Catholics. The generation which remembered the Williamite wars had passed away and the schemes of France were no longer feared. The laws remained unchanged but there was scarcely even a pretence made of enforcing those which related to religious observances or the clergy. "Titular" bishops exercised their functions openly, there were numerous "Popish" schools and boys were sent to study in catholic Colleges abroad returning as ordained priests with hardly an effort at concealment. Consequently in 1731 when most Rev. Dr. Daly ruled the Sea of Achonry, he occasionally "ordained priests in Eallen", the clergy being recruited from country families who could afford to have them educated on the continent. There were forty priests in all Achonry, thirteen churches and six public schools, but private and "gentlemen's houses served as churches and schools". One academy, a School of Philosophy was kept open at Achonry. In the same year, the Protestant Bishop of Killala reported that Kilgarvan and Attymass had "one mass house, one priest and no school". So by this time, Attymass and Kilgarvan were amalgamated and they continued so for a century afterwards. The size of such amalgamated parishes gave rise to our present October and Lenten Stations. The priests visited the people on these occasions when for the aged and feeble, it was their only opportunity of attending the Divine Sacrifice. Regarding the statement that in 1731 "gentlemen's houses served as churches and schools", we have still the tradition that the O'Dowd's of Bonniconlon, the last Princes of Hy Fiachrach facilitated their fellow Catholics by placing at the disposal of the priest, for the purpose of a church, a large barn which stood by the river at the back of the old O'Dowd residence, a short distance South of the village of Bonniconlon, but which was pulled down in 1939 to provide metal for the steamrolling of the Bonniconlon – Bofield road. The O'Dowds lost all in the Cromwilliam Plantation but by a deed made at Loughrea on 4th August 1656, large grants of land were made over to David O'Dowda. But these with the greater part of Attymass were in the hands of the O'Dowda's in 1302 when William O'Dowda was Bishop and had care of the churches in O'Dowda territory. Glendaduff, Carrick and Dromscoba which I have mentioned were included in the Attymass lands in O'Dowda's possession. Evidently the O'Dowd's made a present of those lands to the Trinitarians of Killeen in Glendaduff. In 1837 Bonniconlon was known as O'Dowda's town and in 1844,

O'Donovan records Thaddaeus as living there. The O'Dowd's remained Catholic and after Fechins church at Kilgarvan fell into ruins they probably provided one until 1800 when a church was erected on the site of the present parish church of Bonniconlon. I shall refer to this later.

The names of the early priests of the united parishes are not recorded but in 1774 a Rev. Patrick McNicholas, ordained in Kiltimagh in 1771, was registered and ministered in his native parish of Kilgarvan. This was twenty years before Maynooth college was founded. Lewis "Topographical Dictionary" erected in Bonniconlon in 1800 and the fact that it was slated is all the more surprising when we find that a quarter of a century later practically all the churches in the Archdiocese of Tuam were thatched, only sixteen out of a total 106, being slated. This was the church which probably existed in 1824 when according to the report of the "Irish Education Inquiry" dated 1826, a Royal Commission was appointed to enquire into the state of education of the poor in Ireland and in pursuance of that object both the Catholic and Protestant parochial clergy were called upon to furnish a return giving particulars of the various schools in operation in their respected parishes for the year 1824, and it was enjoined that each return should be accompanied by a sworn declaration setting forth that the information thus supplied was, as far as possible, correct". In the report embodying these returns, the following entry appears: "Bonniconlon school, not in connection with any Society, while Scriptures were not read, was conducted in the parish chapel". Teacher was Michael Loftus, R.C. There were two other schools in the parish and in Attymass there were three viz., Mullahowney Kilgellia and Currower and the teachers were R.C.'S. Both Mullahowney and Kilgellia were in connection with the Baptism Society of Ireland and extracts from the Avowed Version of the Scriptures were read daily. The Catholic return gave 8 Protestants in attendance at Mullahowney and 74 Catholics while Kilgellia had 86 R.C.S and no Protestants. More detail in connection with those schools will be given under the heading of "School Buildings" in this Inventory. From this it is evident that, as yet, Attymass had no Catholic church and that the church serving both parishes was in Bonniconlon for in that area no society interfered in education while in Attymass parish, the school nearest Bonniconlon, viz., Currower, did not come under the influence of the Baptism Society as the others more distant did and had in addition "Extracts from the Avowed Version of the Scriptures read daily". Kilgellia school was housed in a bad thatched cabin" says the same report. This cabin probably served as the first church in Attymass following Emancipation in 1829 for as we shall see later a church did exist on the site of the present one before the latter was erected in 1835.

The last parish priest of the united parishes was Fr. Dalton who ministered to the spiritual needs of the old Principality of Coolcarney for twenty years. The foundations of the house in which he lived and died still stands on the Bonniconlon side of the road separating the townland of Lisardmore, in Attymass parish, from Carracrum. This site was considered the centre of his huge parish which stretched six miles north and as far south. An ordinary three roomed thatched house served as his dwelling. The kitchen was 12" x 12" and each room 12" x 9". This he shared with his curate when he had one. It is recorded that a Fr. McHugh, a Fr. Gallagher and a Fr. Brennan acted as such during Fr. Daltons time. In the folklore of the district Fr. Dalton is remembered kindly. His piety was outstanding even in his time, and his generosity unbounded for like the poor widow in the Temple, he gave "all he had". It is related of him that on Saturdays the children flocked to his house from even the most distant corners of the parish. To hear the Confessions of the multitude was out of the question so he used get them to kneel on the floor and outside on the roadway and pronounce General Absolution. Then he used pick

out the poorest of the poor (for these were the days of chronic famine and consequent starvation) and give them bread. His death was remarkable. The neighbours gathered around his deathbed. He was loath to leave his poor but beloved flock and towards midnight, he used ask every now and again for the time as he said that if he survived the midnight hour, he would be with them another day. Such was the love of the old soggarth aroon for his people. His prayer was answered and the belief of surviving the hour of midnight and living another day still survives in the district.

Fr. Brennan was the last curate to serve with Fr. Dalton in the united parishes and he was appointed the first Parish Priest of the reconstituted parish of Attymass between Emancipation year, 1829, and 1831. Local Tradition gives 1832 as the date of his appointment but according to "The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland" of 1846, Attymass was treated as a separate parish in 1831 when a census was taken and when the population was 3,276 or a little over double that of this present year 1940. At least we can see that much time was not lost following Emancipation until arrangements were made to have the spiritual needs of the parishioners served by their own parish priest and from their own church. "The bad thatched cabin" which served the Baptism Society for its school was most likely the first building used as a church for a small thatched church stood on the site of the present one which was not built until 1835. It was on the property of Mrs. G. H. Moore, Landlord of Kilgellia townland, a most likely place for the site of the Baptist school and when Mrs. Moore presented the plot free of charge to the Parish Priest, the old school went with it. The present church was built by Fr. Denis O'Kane who succeeded Fr. Brennan in 1835 and who was sent here specially to erect sacred edifice suitable for the accommodation of the large population the parish then had. Fr. O'Kane ministered here for ten years when he was transferred to the more important parish of Carracastle where he died about four years afterwards. His energetic character and commanding presence and influence left a lasting impression upon the generation now gone to its reward. Supported by a faithful people, now freed from the worst of the Penal Enactments, he began the building of the new church about the old, which was not disturbed until the new roof was secured. Free labour, coupled with Fr. O'Kane's zeal,

contributed to the early accomplishment of the work. One Nathy McNulty was contractor and when coming to Devine Service on Sundays the men carried stones on their shoulders and piled them up beside the building and even collected others when their duty of hearing mass had concluded. In Fr. O'Kane's time the church had no furniture or decorations except the Stations of the Cross. A wooden altar was placed along the North sidewall between two windows where the pulpit now stands. The only entrance was that now used to cement the sacristy with the sanctuarlishedy. There was no gallery, porch or sacristy then just an oblong building 107" x 34 – 8". But the raising of a basilica in Attymass at the present time would scarcely bear comparison to the great work accomplished by Fr. O'Kane and his willing flock who were ground down under chronic famine, rock rents and tithes for the support of the established church. The amount of the latter, towards the end of Fr. O'Kane's ministry, here, was £90 – 3 – 2.1/2 and this sum according to "The Parliamentary Gazetteer" from a parish described therein as follows: "the surface has a northern exposure, is bounded on the west by the River Moy, on the east by the Ox Mountains, and exhibits a chilling predominance of bog, marsh, moor and unprofitable upland", The parish was then a vicarage in the Protestant Diocese of Killala and formed part of the benefice of Ardagh. The rectoral titles which were improper and belonged to Sir William Palmer were included with those of

Kilgarvan parish and jointly amounted to £231-2-7. Kilgarvan was part of the benefice of Kilmoremy and the Vicarial tithe composition amounted to £140.18.10.1/2. So that from the parish of Attymass also the sum of approximately £180.00 was collected in tithes annually at the time Fr. O'Kane was endeavouring to erect his church. In 1837, "Lewis Topographical Dictionary" gives the amount of tithes collected in Kilgarvan parish as £281.17.9. Per. annum

equally divided between the impropiator (Sir.W.H. Palmer, Bart) and the vicar." There is no reference Attymass. The "Gazetteer", continuing its account of Attymass states: "the Roman Catholic chapel has an attendance of 727 and is served by one officiate. In 1834 the Protestants amounted to 34 and the Roman Catholics to 3,478; and three hedge schools had on their boards 153 boys and 100 girls." There were at the time 644 houses in the parish.

Some of the harmony restrictions attached to the Act of Emancipation still remained, one of which provided that the Priest should obtain leave from a selector Protestant before offering mass in places of worship newly set up. Fr. O'Kane was supposed to seek permission from the D'alton family of the Mullahowney Protestant colony to which I have already referred. D'alton was to arrive every Sunday to give the necessary permission and perhaps hear the sermon to guarantee that sedition was not spread amongst the newly "emancipated." On one particular Sunday Fr. O'Kane waited patiently until 12.O'Clock for the arrival of D'alton and then, in the latter's absence, proceeded to offer mass. But the protestants arrived in full force and Fr. O'Kane was compelled to fly to the mountains to escape capture and there prophesied that a blight would soon fall on the standard-bearers of the alien faith in Attymass. Decay soon set in that quarter and although they had a school in Mullahowney in which a Protestant Service used to be conducted in its last years by a Rev. Mr. Lee, not a single Protestant now remains in the parish, if we exclude one family who purchased a small holding of land in Carracastle about ten years ago.

Fr. Michael O'Flynn was next Parish Priest and ministered here for ten years. He took over Fr. O'Kane's house and lived there with his married brother who was the father of Mr. Thomas O'Flynn the present owner of the property. Fr. O'Flynn's lot was a hard one for he

served here during the great famine and lived to see the flower of his flock dying of starvation or of fever, or hastily deserting their homes to join the emigrant ship.

In black 46 he and Fr. Bernard Egan P.P. Bonniconlon who lived in the house now occupied by Mr. Martin Durkan near the bridge leading, from the main Bofield-Bonniconlon road, to Kilgarvan attended the Relief Committee meeting in Ballina when allotments of Indian meal were made for the surrounding parishes. Fr. Egan, fired by the terrible plight to which famine through misrule had reduced his people threw diplomacy to the winds and demanded substantial relief for the 769 families then in his spiritual care, but the ire of the ascending committee was roused and he fared badly. He ruled long in Bonniconlon, figuring as P.P. there in a list of Achonry priests in 1859, at the time his successor Fr. Martin Soden was C.C. of Achonry. Fr. O'Flynn, more diplomatic than his fellow churchman from Bonniconlon, made no demands for Attymass but bided his time in patience until he found an opportunity for his question? "Gentlemen, what are you going to do for poor Attymass." He struck such an

appealing note that it seemed to touch even the hearts of those who knew not hunger and he secured a generous weekly allowance of yellow meal for the parish. This was put up in three hundred weight sacks and conveyed weekly from Ballina to Fr. O'Flynn's home in Carrick. Here the parishioners gathered on the appointed day for the distribution of the meal and took with them bags or vessels for their weekly allowance. Very often all the members of the same household arrived, each to claim his or her own share. Fr. O'Flynn assisted in the distribution, while other members of his house served porridge from a large pot, always kept boiling, to feed the multitude awaiting their allowance of meal. An outhouse in the farmyard of

Mr. Thomas O'Flynn still carries the chimney erected in 1747 by waiting stone masons for the purpose of preparing of the porridge.

Night and day Fr. O'Flynn worked amongst his flock attending to the spiritual needs of the dying and to the temporal and spiritual wants of those who survived. A neighbour of his had the contract for the conveyance of the fever-stricken to what is now called "The Big Store" in Ardnaree, then an auxiliary workhouse. The patients were placed in long sacks at home, a label was attached to each giving the name and address of the unfortunate victim who was then placed on a common cart with others destined for the workhouse. What heart-rending thoughts must have crossed the mind of Fr. O'Flynn as he heard the rumbling of that cart pass by his door realizing that it meant only so many more of his parishioners leaving their homes, never to return? One must wonder at the fact that in spite of the famine and consequent ruin of the people's strength a man was capable of carrying a 3cwt. Sack of meal from the main roadway up the hilly avenue to Fr. O'Flynn's, for a distance of about one hundred yards. The ten years of Fr. O'Flynn's ministry in Attymass must have been the hardest ever endured by priest and people in this or any other parish. Still regarded as a congested area, with only 336 families, what must have been the plight of the 644 homes which the parish had up to the famine? And apart from the records, we have ample evidence still of the enormous population here in pre-famine days – traces of tillage on the mountain sides where goats can scarcely graze now, the ruins of entire hamlets and the tradition that many more existed, and the attendance at the schools. "The Parliamentary Gazetteers" of 1846 states that Attymass had "three hedge schools and had on their books 153 boys and 100 girls." This considerably more than the rolls of four schools of the parish now show in this enlightened age and with compulsory education. And the number given must not have included the attendance at Treenlaur school towns the erection and fitting of which the National Board granted the sum of £74-3-4 in the year 1840. On the 19th October 1855, Fr. O'Flynn passed to his eternal reward at the comparatively early age of sixty two. His were the first remains to be interred in the church and a tiled Cross on the floor marks their resting place, near the pulpit and the original site of the altar. Fr. James Hurst was next appointed Parish Priest of Attymass. His name appears on the list of Achonry priests as serving here in 1859. On his arrival there was no parochial house as that of the late P.P. passed to the O'Flynn family. Fr. Hurst purchase a small holding, which now form the present parochial lands, from one Moore, grandfather of Mr. Hugh Moore of Ballymore and on this he built a residence where the business premises of Mr. U.J. Flannelly now stands. For twenty years, he fulfilled his priestly duties here and died on the 5th March 1875, aged 62 years. For some time he was assisted here by Fr. Ivers who is mentioned as C.C. Kilmactigue in 1859.

After Fr. Hurst's death, Fr. Gunning (later Canon Gunning of Tubbercurry) officiated here for less than a year and although his mission here was a short one he is kindly and gratefully remembered still by the old people who were fortunate enough to know him. The term of his service here is called locally "the year of the pock". It was then that terrible outbreak of small-pox wrought havoc amongst the people and in this parish alone scores succumbed to the awful malady. That the case was not much worse, the people believed, was due to the intercession of the saintly Fr. Gunning who was most sympathetic and who received his parishioners at his lodgings at any hour or visited the stricken in their homes. So great was the people's faith in his prayers that long after his transfer from Attymass, they used visit him in their troubles to seek his intercession, and did not cease doing so until the name of Fr. Gunning travelled far and wide amongst the unlearned as having "power to cure" and until he was compelled, on the Bishop's advice, to abandon the practice of interviewing other than members of his own flock. Following the transfer of Fr. Gunning, Fr. John O'Grady (late canon O'Grady P.P. Bohola) took pastoral charge of the parish. He made the first change in the external structure of the church by providing a sacristy and he also changed the position of the altar from the North sidewall to the East gable and he had the sanctuary ceiled. He lived in a room rented from Mr. Anthony Hurst, brother of Fr. James Hurst, as there was still no parochial residence or lands, those of Fr. Hurst's being private property and passing to his brother Anthony on the farmer's death. But Fr. O'Grady soon set about procuring a plot on which to build. This he purchased from Anthony Hurst for the sum of £12.00. The plot contained only one road and comprised the present lawn and garden together with the parochial house site. Here the presbytery was built 1880 – 1882, under the Glebe Loans Act. There was no levelling of the grounds attempted and no boundary walls separated the plot from the roadway. An old dwelling, belonging to a man called Kavanagh stood on the opposite side of the roadway from the church gate and this Fr. O'Grady also purchased for use as a school to replace that conducted in the church since the Baptism Society ceased to function about 1831. New National Schools were provided for Attymass – Male and Female in 1879, Dereen N.S. and teacher's residence were built by him in 1876 and in the same year the school the school and residence at Bonnifinglas were erected. The addition of a sacristy to the church, alterations made there, and the provision of a parochial house, four schools and two teacher's residence were a remarkable accomplishment in the short space of five or six years, especially when we consider that both Dereen and Bonnifinglas schools were built out of private funds, the National Board contributing nothing towards their construction. The parochial house was originally planned as a bungalow but in course of construction, it was decided to erect a two-story building and it is alleged that this change of plan led to many defects in the chimneys and lay-out of the rooms which have yet been only partially remedied. During all this time Fr. O'Grady never neglected the spiritual needs of his parishioners and the oldest of those living now remember him best for having revived devotion to the Sacred Heart, and in some homes of the parish there are still the consecration pictures provided by him, bearing his signature and dated 1876. From Attymass, Fr. O'Grady was transferred to Bohola, was made Canon and died there in the autumn of 1926. He spent eleven years in Attymass.

The learned and saintly Fr. Meehan, so affectionately remembered amongst the older generation in the parish to this day, succeeded Fr. O'Grady. As yet no lands, except the rood on which it stood, were attached to the parochial house. Fr. Meehan purchased the entire Hurst holding, to which I have already referred, but the land remained his private property. During his time the roof of the church suffered to such extent in a storm that he

was obliged to appeal to the people for funds. The West side of the roof was renewed and the stone cross on the w. gable was fitted. Fr. Meehan endeared himself to a remarkable degree to his people. He left a manuscript which gave an account of their trials and showed how deeply he sympathised with them. After his death the MS. Was put up for auction amongst the other effects, was purchased by the Henry's, teachers in Attymass, who passed it on to Fr. Connington (late Dean of Achonry) on his coming to the parish. In time it passed into the hands of Canon Loftus of Ballymote and eventually reached Fr. Dan Gallagher P.P. Coolaney. The latter died of fever and it is thought that, as a precautionary measure, the document was destroyed with his papers. Fr. Meehan died at the early age of fifty-four on the 23rd January 1894 and his remains were the last to be interred in the church where a commemorative slab, erected by Fr. Martin Henry (late Canon Henry P.P. Kilmovee) bears his name and those of his predecessors, Father O'Flynn and Hurst and thus saves for posterity the name of those servants of God who ministered to our fore fathers here in the dark and evil days.

Fr. O'Connor (now Dean of the Diocese of Achonry and P.P. Gurteen) did duty here during Fr. Meehan's illness and filled the vacancy created by the latter's death. His period of office however was too short to be remembered for anything accomplished. He was succeeded by Fr. Connington (late Dean of Achonry and P.P. Swinsford) who did not waste much time in having the necessary improvements made in the grounds of the parochial house. He raised money on loan to have the lawn terraced, boundary walls and gates erected and, before his transfer, had actually marked out a drive extending from the hall-door to the bridge N.W. of the house at the entrance to Mr. Flannelly's business premises. The garden with its splendid enclosing wall, was drained and laid out. The old school in Currower which functioned in 1824 was rebuilt out of private funds in 1848 and opened as a National School in 1856 or the first year of Fr. Hurst's ministry. It was a thatched structure and sadly required replacement in Fr. Connington's time. He consequently commenced operations on a new school on a different site in 1895 and this was opened in 1896, with separate apartments for boys and girls. Soon afterwards, Fr. Connington was transferred to Bonniconlon to replace Fr. Dan Gallagher, a native of Killasser, who served only a short time in Bonniconlon. He Fr. Dan lived in Bofield House, as his predecessor, Fr. Peter Harte, died of fever and the parochial house was left vacant for a while. For some reason, Fr. Dan used officiate in Attymass now and again, probably during the ministry of Fr. Meehan who was in delicate health, and most likely in 1892 when the first General Election, following the Parnell Split, was held. He found that the majority of the people of Attymass did not spare his political views and during the fierce election contest there was not the same kindly feeling between priest and people as existed here before and subsequent to his time. He is best remembered for his fight against Landlordism and evictions and on one occasion he led the men of Coolcarney to Kilgarvan to prevent an eviction there. There was great commotion and blood spilled and next day Fr. Dan got notice of his transfer to another parish, perhaps Coolaney, where he died later and where, in spite of church regulations, his parishioners had his remains interred before the altar.

About 1896, Fr. Martin Henry (Late Canon Henry P.P. Kilmovee) succeeded Fr. Connington. He soon found a warm corner in the hearts of the people as he did amongst all those with whom, and for whom, he laboured. He left indelible traces of his untiring zeal and energy not only in the church here but in the parish. He replaced the wooden altar by a magnificent marble one, erected by Messrs William Taylor & Son, Dublin in 1898. At the back of the altar he installed a large window, removed a timber ceiling which Fr. O'Grady had placed over the sanctuary

and sheeted the gable of the latter with wood exquisitely painted. The wainscoting of the entire church, the gallery of best pitch pine, a splendid organ, and seats practically occupying the whole church as they are today, were furnished by him. He also erected the memorial slab to which I have referred. The first mission ever given in Attymass followed this complete overhaul of the church and was conducted by the Vincentian Fathers of which order Fr. John, brother of Fr. Martin, is a distinguished member. At this mission the Sacred Sodality was established in the parish and how

firmly, can be judged from the large membership down through the years until today, forty-two years afterwards, practically every seat in the church is occupied on the occasion of a meeting. Apart from a small tax levied on each family the huge sum necessary for the renovation of the church came in response to an appeal made by Fr. Martin to exiles in America. He visited each house in the parish to collect addresses and personally undertook the laborious task of issuing this appeal. How well the exiles responded is borne out by the fact that when suddenly called away by the Bishop, Dr. Lyster, to raise funds in America for the building of the Cathedral spire in Ballaghaderreen, his brother, Fr. Walter, who did duty here in his absence, wiped out the debt on the church by raising a further £60.00 within the parish. So successful was Fr. Martin in his American mission that he was chosen a second time for similar work, but this time on behalf of the parish church in Foxford to which he was transferred from Attymass about 1900. Next to his work of beautifying the church was his success in providing roads, and incidentally work and money, for his parishioners. He personally attended meetings of the Board of Guardians, which was set up by Act of Parliament, shortly after Fr. Martin's advent to this parish, and by his powers of persuasion, coupled with his remarkable personality, gained many grants for improvements in Attymass. The roads running by Currower School to Carradoogan with branches to Pollaphooka and Ballymore, the Cullane and Kilgellia roads, that passing East of the church to Byhalla the Kildermott-Mullahowney, Crenane, Derryvicneill and Kildermott roads were all begun in his time. Prior to that only tracks suitable for donkeys and creels existed in those places. Ever the champion of the oppressed tenants, he earned for himself the hatred of the ascendancy and the watchful eye of the law but was rewarded by the love and devotion of his faithful flock.

Not only

did he prevent evictions within the confines of his own parish but on one occasion he saved the homestead of a poor widow in Ellaghmore, in Bonnicconlon parish, by seating himself in the house and refusing to move at the command of the sheriff. Today, more than forty years after his departure from Attymass, the name of Fr. Martin is one mentioned with pride and affection. What a wealth of meaning lies behind the simple but sincere expression: "Ah, but he was a great priest".

As I have already stated, Fr. Walter Henry (now Canon Henry P.P. Killasser) did duty here during Fr. Martin's absence in America. On his arrival home, Fr. Martin returned to Attymass for a short while was then transferred to Foxford and Fr. Walter was appointed to succeed him as parish priest here. The parochial residence was then in a very unsatisfactory condition. These defects Fr. Walter set himself out to remedy and his success can be measured by the fact that when he vacated the house on his transfer to Killasser in Dec. 1920, it was one of the best parochial residences in the diocese. His devotion to the Spiritual wants of his people did not blind him to their pressing material needs. Consequently, he was not slow to take advantage of the grants then being made

by the C.D.P. for the development of industry and the betterment of the people in congested areas. He secured the services of a lace-knitting instructress and gave the old parochial residence, built by Fr. Hurst, free of charge for the class. It was fitted up with a stove for the comfort of the girls attending and with lodging accommodation for the instructress. Girls attended from all parts of the parish and for ten years of its existence, large sums of money were earned and in some homes these far exceeded all that could be derived from the land. Sales were made by the instructress in markets found by the Congested Districts Board and private orders were executed. The fashions however changed, the demand for lace diminished, prices fell and eventually the lace class was discontinued. But long afterwards, orders for table doyleys, centrepieces etc., were executed by some of the girls for people abroad and I have seen orders and testimonials from such notable people as Mrs. Wilson, The White House, Washington, wife of the then President of the United States. No small compliment to the work of the class which Fr. Walter was responsible for founding!

No less energetic was Fr. Walter than his distinguished brother and predecessor in securing grants for the completion and improvement of roads. All those commenced in Fr. Martin's time were completed in his. Extensions were secured for Bonnifinglas and Killeen graveyard, and the avenue leading to the farmer was planted as was also the church yard; and this plantation now shelters the roof which for years suffered so much from storms, particularly on the western side. Another praiseworthy scheme for the amelioration of people in congested areas was that inaugurated by the C.D.B. to encourage improvement of dwellings and the erection of out-houses. Fr. Walter soon had the necessary machinery, in the shape of a Parish Committee, in motion. He obtained large grants for the parish and sums up to £5.00 were given to householders for improvements made which passed the committee's overseer, Mr. Thomas O'Flynn of Carrick. The main purpose of the grants was to have live stock removed from the homes of the people and due to continuous advice from Fr. Walter and the sympathetic consideration of all applications, this object was secured. When the committee ceased to function there was scarcely a dwelling house in the parish where cattle, pigs or fowl were accommodated.

The Attymass Male and Female schools were enlarged and folding partitions, additional furniture and more hygienic lavatories, capable of being flushed, were installed. New floors and windows were provided for Dereen and Bonnifinglas schools and all this, following laborious correspondence with the National Board, at not a penny cost to the parish except in the case of Bonnifinglas where a tax of 5/= per. household was levied. The flight then made to avoid a local contribution served his successor the late Fr. Roger O'Donnell when further improvements were necessary in those schools. But the most enduring monument to Fr. Walter's labours here is to be found in the improvements he effected in the church. A ten hundred-weight bell was erected out of funds raised in the parish. In the last years of his ministry here a new porch with baptistery, fitted with ornamental iron railings and mosaic tiled floor, was added. This necessitated the removal of the usual entrance door and alterations in the gallery stairs. The position of some of the windows in the side-walls were changed, new ones added and stained glass, in best seasoned wood frames, replaced the plain lights previously in existence. The large stained glass window in the sanctuary was donated by Fr. Walter, Fr. Martin and the Sacred Sodality; the four on each sidewall, as well as both in the porch, were donated by parishioners, while the large gallery window and pitch pine confessional were installed out of what remained in church funds when the rest of the work was completed. The raising of funds, which must have amounted to several hundreds of pounds, necessitated more trouble and

energy than one would think possible for any one man to undertake. Although Fr. Henry gives the parishioners credit for having responded generously to his appeal, it would be an utter impossibility to accomplish all that work in a poor parish such as this and in the years immediately following 1918, when prices of building material reached their highest peak, without the spontaneous response to his appeal to his larger "parish" in America. The majority of the girls, for who he had provided work in the lace school, were now in the U.S.A. and they did not forget their benefactor. Concerts, raffles, dances and collections were organised by them and their fellow exiles and money poured in to aid the food work so willingly undertaken by Fr. Walter. So the tax on the parishioners fell lightly, everything was completed and as credit balance left in the church account when Fr. Walter was transferred to Killasser. Notwithstanding the amount of time spent in advancing the material interests of his flock and in the improvements of the schools and church he did not slacken in carrying out his ordinary spiritual duties but rather increased them by establishing the First Friday Devotion and encouraging Devotion of the Holy Hour also begun here in his time. Though advanced in years now, he is still capable of attending to the parochial affairs of Killasser but he has never forgotten the people of Attymass. I cannot do better than quote from a recent letter from him in which he refers to the "long period of my life which I had the great happiness to live with the good people of Attymass."

The late Fr. Roger O'Donnell succeeded Fr. Henry and for thirteen years served as parish priest till his death on 13th May 1934 at the comparatively early age of 65 years and the 38th of his Sacred Ministry. Having suffered from heart trouble for many years his end came suddenly. His is the only remains interred in the church yard and a marble headstone, erected by his sister, marks his grave. He was brother of the late Very Rev. Hugh O'Donnell, P.P. Bonniconlon who was for many years connected with the Diocesan College, Ballaghaderreen as professor and president. Fr. Hugh felt the death of his brother very keenly and only survived him a few months. Although Fr. Roger had not any improvements to attend to in the structure of the church, he spent considerable sums annually in having the roof examined and pointed by competent workmen, and in having the woodwork painted. During his time here, the Sisters of Charity, Foxford took over the care of the altar and provided valuable additions to church lines and vestments, laid new carpets in the sanctuary, sacristy and church aisles, replaced the rather antiquated pulpit by a more handsome one, installed a press in the sacristy and gave at all times to the sanctuary an air of cleanliness and beauty. The crib now an annual institution at Christmas was presented by the nuns and there are numerous articles which the church now possesses and which are listed in the appropriate section of this Inventory, all presentations from the Sisters of Charity. Two candelabra and a clock were donated to the church in Fr. O'Donnell's time. A caretaker was appointed and he has since been responsible for the ringing of the church bell and the cleanliness of the body of the church and churchyard.

Of Fr. O'Donnell it may be said that he was a martyr to duty. The ordinary spiritual care of a single parish of the size and physical features of Attymass would be difficult enough for a priest of more robust character than he, but not content with everyday duties attached to his sacred office he encouraged the First Friday Devotions and exhorted as many as possible to participate in them. The Sodality of The Sacred Heart was his special care and the success attending his efforts in both directions could be judged by the huge numbers of Communion on First Fridays and Sodality Communion days. The schools of the parish also received his attention. He obtained a grant of about £445.00 for the complete renovation of Dereen N.S. where a new porch was added and new

lavatories and turf shed provided. Over £200.00 was spent on similar additions in Bonnifinglas N.S., over £400.00 in alterations and improvements in Currower N.S.; and the Attymass Male and Female schools were kept in good repair, the south gable of the latter being re-plastered on both sides, the former having a new ceiling fixed in the north room, and the front of the entire building as well as the boundary walls of the school, church and parochial house were newly plastered.

In July 1934, the present pastor V. Rev. J.P. Jordan was appointed parish priest of this parish coming here from Killasser where he served as curate for sixteen years. Educated in Silamanca 1900 – 1906 and ordained in his native Ballaghaderreen, he served as C.C. in Swinford, Foxford and Curry, collected funds in the Argentine for the Diocesan College and in the U.S.A. to clear the debt on Foxford church.

This then is the history of the church in Attymass so far as the records which I have examined and local tradition can supply. We have seen that if the church here does not date from Patrician times, it was at least an early Christian foundation. Originally it was probably united with Kilgarvan but soon became a separate parish and remained so till the end of the 17th century. Penal laws then brought it under the jurisdiction of the parish priests of Kilgarvan, up to 1831, when it appears again in the records as a distinct parish. We have the names of our National Apostle and noted missionaries like Fechin, and perhaps Ciaran and Diarmuid, enshrined in its place-names. In turn, Attymass has given its complement of missionaries to spread the light of Faith in foreign lands. Fr. William Gallagher, son of the late Mr. and Mrs. Gallagher, teachers, Derreen N.S. died on the Australian mission in 1911, Fr. John Francis Gallagher of Cullane labours in the Diocese of Losangelas, Fr. Quinn of Kildermott is a member of a missionary order in England and at least six nuns from the parish are serving with their respective orders in Ireland and America. When further investigations are completed, I have no doubt that there will be much more material brought to light concerning this historic parish. To delay recording what is already gleaned would mean perhaps its irreparable loss. It was at the regard of His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Morrisroe, Bishop of Achonry that this survey was undertaken and the writer is only too conscious of its many shortcomings and regrets that a work of such importance was not entrusted to one more capable of achieving the object His Lordship had in mind, that of preserving for further generations history of our Church and the miraculous survival of our Faith down the centuries so many of which, alas were drenched in blood and tears.

Feast of the Ascension, 2nd May 1940

Padraic O'Flaimghaile

I desire to express very of thankfulness to Mr Flannelly for their valuable notes on the Ecclesiastical History of this parish of Attymass and my appreciation of the skill in which the notes have been compiled.

P. Morrisroe

May 9th 1940

Oct. 4th 1945

Following brief illness the Very Revd. Fr. Jordan P.P. died at Grovedale Nursing Home, Ballina on 4th Oct. 1945. Contracting pneumonia suddenly about three weeks before his death, he was removed immediately to the Nursing Home. Complications set in resulting in death, in spite of expert medical attention. Office and Requiem

Mass presided over by His Lordship, Most Revd. Dr. Morrisroe, was celebrated on Sat. 6th Oct. and interment took place in the Church Grounds on Saturday 7th.

Steps were taken immediately to raise funds within the parish to have a suitable memorial erected over the pave and in one week a sum of over £70.00 was subscribed. The Celtic cross now standing over the3 pave was erected, with a limestone kerb and marble chips and a neat kerb in concrete was set around both paves and bell.

In addition, the funds allowed the purchase of a Holy Water Wall Font in Stone with suitable inscription and this was erected in the parish. A container for Holy Water for General use was also provided from the funds and the balance of £4.00 odd. Was by consent of the Memorial Committee, lodged to the credit of the Church A/C

A Rev. P. O'Callaghan

Very Revd. Fr. O'Callaghan P.P. was appointed P.P. of Attymass on 23rd Oct. 1945. He said his first mass here on Sunday 28th Oct. 1945 and was inducted by V. Revd. Fr. Leonard P.P. Bonniconlon, acting for His Lordship, The Bishop, on Sunday 4th November.

Fr. O'Callaghan was born Gurteen, Co. Sligo on 28th October 1883 and was educated in the Diocesan College, Ballaghadereen and Carlow College.

On 21.12.1910 he was ordained in Loughrea by the Most Revd. Dr. Gilmartin, Archbishop of Tuam. A record of his sacred ministry to date is as follows:

1911 - 1913 Curate in St. Mary's, Woolton, Liverpool Diocese

1913 - 1916 " " " Oldham, Lancs, (Salford Diocese)

1916 - 1918 Chaplain, Kiltimagh Convent

1918 - 1922 Curate in Curry, Co. Sligo

1922 - 1932 Curate in Carracastle Parish

1932 - 1945 Curate in Bahola Parish

Appointed Parish Priest of Attymass 23.10.1945.

Appointed Cannon and Member of the Diocesan Chapter, July 1951.

Died in Convent of St. John of God, Ballinamore, Kiltimagh on Sunday 20th December 1953 (Marian Yea)

Canon O'Callaghan became ill while on retreat in St. Nathy's College in July 1953 and had a priest to supply for him on Sunday July 12th – the first supply since his appointment to Attymass. On the following Wednesday, he entered Garden Hill Nursing Home, Sligo where he stayed almost a week and transferred to the consent of John of Gods, Ballinamore. In September, he spent a week in The Richmond Hospital Dublin where nothing could be done for him and he was sent back to Ballinamore.

The following extracts from "Western People" report of Cannon O'Callaghan's death are worth recording:

"Attymass Loses Beloved Paster"

For beyond the confines of his own parish or even his own diocese, there is mourning for the passing of one of Achonry's most popular priests, the Very Rev. Canon Peter O'Callaghan P.P. Attymass. His death occurred at

the convent of St. John of God, Ballinamore Kiltimagh, on Sunday following a prolonged illness, borne with complete submission to the Will of the Divine Master in whose sacred ministry he had laboured so sedulously for over 40 years. Canon O'Callaghan's friends were legion, for he possessed a very happy, indeed convivial disposition. An excellent priest, he was thoughtful and considerate in his dealings with the flock.

Though a man of fine physique he had suffered severely for many years from asthma. He had been a patient at the Sister of St. John of God Home in Ballinamore where he was frequently visited by his Bishop (Most Rev. Dr. Fergus) who entertained a great affection for him as indeed did all his fellow priests.

The remains were removed to his parish church of St. Joseph's, Attymass, via Bohola and Foxford on Monday, the cortège being of vast size.

In Kiltimagh two lines of School children lined the streets in prayer with nuns from the Convent as the funeral went past.

On Thursday morning His Lordship, Most Revd. Dr. Fergus, Bishop of Achonry, presided with His Lordship Most Revd. Dr. P. O'Boyle, Bishop of Killala, at Solemn High Mass.

About 70 priests attended the obsequies.

The Month's Mind Mass was celebrated on Thursday 21st January 1954 and on that day Very Revd. Gerard Hannan C.C. Kilkelly, had his appointment as Parish Priest, Attymass, and was inducted by His Lordship, Most Revd. Dr. Fergus on Sunday

24th January.

Note: Following supply by Rev Father Leonard, St. Patrick's College, Swinford, on Sunday 19th July, Revd. Padraic O'Grady C.C. Bonniconlon was in sole charge of the Parish, his Parish Priest, Very Revd. J. Shryane kindly volunteering to undertake Fr. O'Grady's duties in addition to his own.