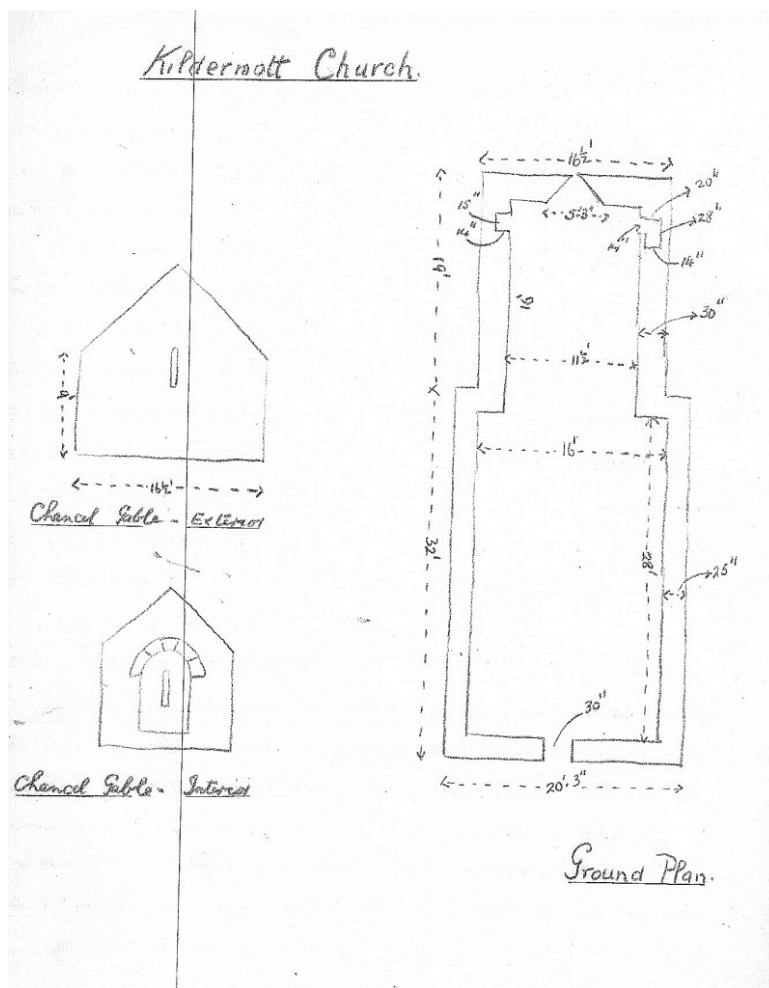


# Kildermott Abbey, Attymass

An extract transcribed from the hand written  
Attymass Parish Inventory

Author: Patrick Flannelly N.T

Date: c1939



# Kildermott Abbey, Attymass

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.

## The moving church

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 or 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.

## The moving cross

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 unbaptised 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.

## Skull Font

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.

## Killeen fort and the Cnocán na bPriosún

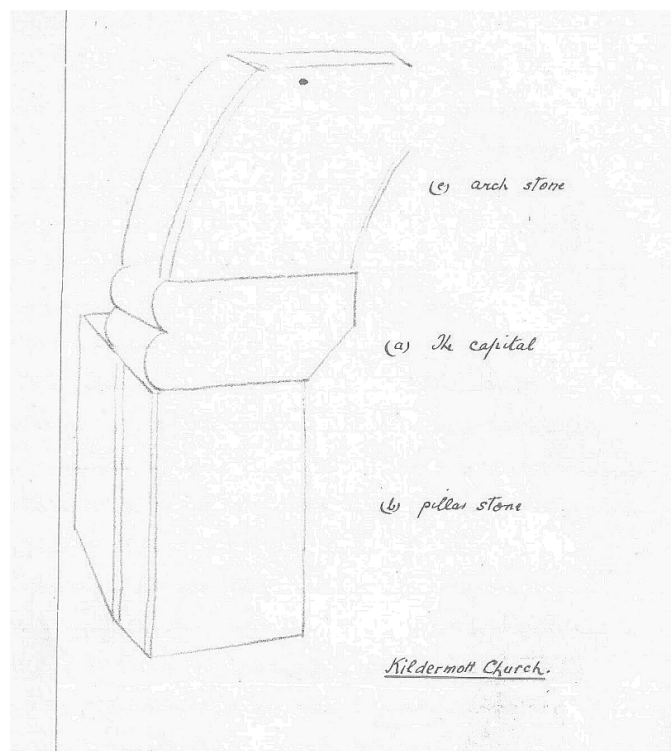
There is no doubt that at one time Killeen contained a church or abbey and its antiquity is guaranteed by the fact that it is built inside a fort, the rampart of which being the only boundary of the graveyard up to 1872. Near Killeen and between it and the lake is a little hill called Cnocán na bPriosún (or the little hill of the prisons or chambers) which contains soterrains 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 position would serve both Killeen and Kildermott 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 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> Century. But more to follow in support of this.

## The ruins

A study of the ruins of Kildermott reveals the Architectural features of a late Reefert or early Romanesque church of the 9<sup>th</sup>. to 12<sup>th</sup> Century. The walls of the chancel are still almost 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.

### **No stones this side of the lake**

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 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.

### **Roof of thatch**

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 ½" 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.

### **Fonts rescued from the lake**

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, Dalton's, 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 Soupers 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 resided minister of that church in the parish, a Sunday service was conducted by a visiting Minister in the house of one Stroger 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.

### **Ancient graveyards**

The ground immediately about the old abbey is used for the interment of un-baptised 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.

### **NOTES:**

*The complete text of the manuscript "The Ecclesiastical History of Attymass" by Patrick Flannelly and higher resolution graphics scanned from the original document can be found at [http://www.attymass.ie/historical\\_documents](http://www.attymass.ie/historical_documents)*