

## KILLEEN FAULMORE, KILGELLIA, ATTYMASS

It seems almost certain that an ecclesiastical building once stood at the site of the present graveyard in Killeen, Kilgellia. Flannelly writing in the 1930s <sup>1</sup> states:

*"We have not any definite date for the foundation of a Church in Attymass 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. . ."*

*"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. . ."*



Writing in 1848, John O'Donovan <sup>2</sup> comments:

*"There is also an old burying place in Killgella Townland in the north of the Parish. It is called Cill Geille in Irish, and gave name to the townland.*

*Archdall, in his Monasticon, under Killyn ... says:-*

*'This Abbey was seized of the Chapel or Church of Attinmess, and a quarter of land called Dromskowlog and Carrownecargy, with the Tithes of the same.'*

*The probability is that it was at the Killeen mentioned here this Abbey stood ... for Attinmess is most undoubtedly Attymas..."*

The site of the church or abbey is said to be close to a T shaped cross in the graveyard which has two interesting folklore tales associated with it. Flannelly <sup>1</sup> again:



*" 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 T stone itself is credited with mysterious properties:

*" 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. "*

It is believed that the church or abbey was built on the site of an ancient fort:

*" . . .only sixty-five years ago the graveyard in which it [the T stone] 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..."*

*"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."*

A fascinating discovery was made at the time the new graveyard wall was being constructed c1872:

*" 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."*

The find may not be quite as unique as Flannelly suggests. Janet & Colin Bord <sup>2</sup> record the practice of drinking holy well water from skulls as practiced in Wales "until recent times" and quote other examples from Ireland & Scotland. The most famous example was at St Teilo's well in Pembroke, Wales, where cures for illness could be obtained by drinking the water from the remains of St Teilo's skull. Francis Jones in his Holy Wells of Wales suggests that water was drunk from skulls to acquire the desirable qualities of the original owner. Could the Killeen skull be a holy relic?

Unfortunately the stone which contained the skull was removed with rubble from the church yard during the renovations of 1957-58.

Underground passages are said to have run from a small hill close by Killeen through the fort & to Ballymore Lough. Such passages are often associated with ring forts in the area. Flannelly<sup>1</sup>:

*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 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.*

**Sources:**

<sup>1</sup> P. Flannelly's handwritten manuscript The Ecclesiastical History of Attymass. Full transcription in the Historical Documents Archive.

<sup>2</sup> Ordnance Survey Letters of Co. Mayo 1838 Vol 1 – John O'Donovan. Full transcription in the Historical Documents Archive.

<sup>3</sup> Sacred Waters by Janet & Colin Bord [1985 ISBN 0-246-12036-3] the history & folklore of holy wells.