

Mullaghbrack

by Revd. Canon F. A. NOEL

When I say, Mullabrack or more correctly, Mullaghbrack, the parish of my forebears, it is because it was the parish in which my great grandfather, my grandfather, Samuel Dobbin, and my great aunts were born and baptised. By a happy coincidence, it was also the parish to which I was instituted to the cure of souls for some twelve years.

My talk will be divided into three main parts. (1) Origin — the Celtic period: (2) The middle period: (3) The landed gentry

The Celtic period: The monastic church founded by St. Patrick in Armagh in 444 was, after his day ministered to by the Culdees, a group of dedicated men who came over from Scotland c.700. It is said that the name Culdee means 'a servant of God'. They ministered in Armagh in particular and then moving out from the 'Mother House,' they served the parish of Mullaghbrack and held the parish lands. Their successors today are known as "The Vicars Choral". After the Norman invasion, they continued to serve in the parish. Their head was known as the Prior of Armagh and Parson of Mullaghbrack. The list of priors dates from 779 to c.1600.

Irish Church act 1869: At this time the church lands were transferred to the state. It is interesting to note that the parish is mentioned in the Papal Tax of 1291.

The middle period: From 1600 to 1630 the Church of Ireland was at a low ebb. There are many reasons for this state of affairs, which we will not deal with here. The land leases were being abused and in some cases being sub-let. 1609 — The royal Visitation stated, "Church was not wholly rebuilt," from which we may infer that there was no place of worship at all. 1641 — The church severely damaged as a result of the 1641 rebellion. 1657 — The church is again out of repair. 1693 — The Primate's Visitation stated that the church was in good order. 1777 — The church continues to be in good order. 1814 — The tower is added (prior to this there was a bellcote). The church up to this period was cruciform (shaped like a cross). The only picture we have of that building is one etched on an old chalice and paten. 1830 — The church is enlarged, side aisles are added over the vaults of the Achesons and Hamiltons. The Revd. Dr. Blacker, the Rector donated £1,035. It would be interesting to calculate the relative amount today. He also presented a silver chalice and paten.

Plaques. The oldest is in memory of Sarah Hamilton of Hamiltonsbawn 1633, then John Hamilton 1635.

Due to disfiguration, the result of bullets fired during the 1641 rebellion, the lead is embedded in the marble, making it difficult to decipher the letters. The Achesons (Gosford) have also some plaques. One in memory of George Lambert who won a V.C. in 1868 is worthy of note.

Vaults: The Gosford vault is under the North aisle, where the choristers now sit, thus the living sit on the mortal remains of the departed! Some of the coffins are still in reasonable condition, being lead lined, with oak exterior covered in purple velvet. Some of the dates I was able to make out, read as follows:— 1741, 1807, 1811, 1825, 1849, 1864, 1872, 1876, 1854, 1967 and one in the present decade. As the Hamiltons appear to have left the area, having sold out to the Gosfords, the present holder of this title Lord Holmpatrick has no connections with the parish. Their vault is under the South aisle. The Gosford pew is over this vault.

Churchyard: The churchyard is on the site of an ancient fort, the first church of wood would have been built on the centre eminence. A portion of a pre-reformation altar slab was dug up some years ago and is now in the Chapter room of the Cathedral. The oldest headstone would appear to be that of James Galbraith 1618. The first minister of Markethill Presbyterian



St. James', Mullaghbrack.

Church, the Revd. Archie Maclaine (said to be a fluent Irish speaker) has a headstone dated 1734. Another interesting one is to Dr. David McNally who having saved the lives of over 200 people died of fever in 1818. There was a fever hospital in Markethill during that period.

The Rectory: or Glebe House. First reference is to "a comfortable house" on the glebe lands which amounted to 1100 acres 1622! It was rebuilt in 1767 and altered extensively in 1829 at a cost of £6,216 — the present rectory cost in the region of £60,000. After distabishment (1870) the representaive body of the Church of Ireland bought back the Glebe house and 187 acres. It was later sold to Lord Gosford. The present owner is Mr. Cyril Morgan. The second rectory on the main street, Markethill, was bought from the Gillis family. This house remained the home of the clergy from 1870 until 1986 when the present rectory adjacent to the parish church was built.

The landed gentry: During the Ulster Plantation Henry Acheson was granted the lands around Markethill in 1610. He bought in more land in 1611. Later he sold to his brother Archibald who built a 'bawn' probably near the present car park in the demesne. **Gosford Castle:** The first Norman Revival castle in the British Isles, a massive widespread pile in granite, by the English architect Thomas Hopper. Built 1819-20 for Archibald Acheson 2nd Earl of Gosford, afterwards Governor of Canada, replacing a Georgian house burnt 1805. It was largely paid for

by his wife, the daughter and heiress of Robert Sparrow of Worlingham Hall, Suffolk. In 1921 the 4th Earl, who maintained a rather lavish way of life, had to sell the contents of the castle, having sold the library some 30 years earlier to pay a racing debt. The castle remained in the family until post World War II, when it was sold to the N.I. Forestry Commission. At one time the castle was used to house a circus of lions.

Hamiltonsbawn: The name is derived from John Hamilton, again 1610, who built a fortified bawn 60' by 12' high. Burned in 1641, the lands were sold to Lord Gosford in 1704. Dean Swift posed the question — "The grand question is whether it will be a Malting House or a Barracks" It was a military establishment from 1731 - 1787.

The clergy of Mullaghbrack: A list of Rectors is extant from 1613 to the present — 22 in all and 44 curates. One of the most famous, if not the most godly, was Lord John de La Poer Beresford (his wife was a Leslie of Glaslough, Co. Monaghan). In order "to get me to the church on time" he was driven from the old rectory in a coach and four with a footman on either side, with powdered wigs. He bought the old courthouse in Markethill 1851 and gave it to the parish to become the Chapel of Ease. His elder brother having died as a result of a hunting accident, he resigned from the parish on succeeding to the title of Marquis of Waterford.

A personal note by way of conclusion: On Sunday, 17th January 1864, during divine service conducted



St. James', Mullabrack—Interior.



The Acheson (Earl of Gosford) Memorial in
St. James', Mullabrack.

by the Revd. Mr. Flavell, a parishoner, Samuel Collison discharged a pistol shot into the body of the church. At his subsequent trial in Armagh, the defending solicitor stated that his client was so upset that the lady of his affections, sitting near the front of the church, would not respond to his overtures, so in frustration he had fired the shot. Collison served a prison sentence. A ballad was composed on the affair. The closing lines of which are,

“.... and because of Annie lovely Annie,
I now lie in Armagh jail”

That “Annie lovely Annie” was my great aunt.

*“Let us now sing the praises of famous men,
the heroes of our nation’s history, through whom
the Lord established his renown All these
won fame in their own generation and were the
pride of their times. There are others who are
unremembered; they are dead, and it is as though
they had never existed, as though they had never
been born.”*



A rather macabre tombstone in St. James'
Churchyard.



Collection Plate : "He that giveth to the poor,
lendeth to the Lord".



Silver Communion plate and jug.

