

The Mac Egans of Duniry

The MacEgans belonged originally to the family groups of Hy Many having common ancestry with the O'Kellys, O'Maddens, O'Naughtens and a host of others, all tracing their ancestry from Maine Mor. However, by reason of the profession of law, which they adopted in the 14th century or before they became scattered in various territories throughout the land, teaching and administering the Brehon Law.

After the Norman Conquest part of the Hy Many became de Burgo territory and when Norman institutions collapsed in the 14th century, the de Burgos adopted Brehon law with reservations. Thus a branch of the Mac Egans, the clann Diarmada, became ollavs and brehons to the Clauricard Burkes and were known as Ollamhain Cloinne Riocaird. They were seated at Duniry between Portumna and Loughrea and had a law school there, certainly in the fifteenth century. Carbre Mac Egan and 'ye brehons' occupied the castle of Clonecastle alongside Duniry in 1759. Two important medieval manuscript compilations are associated with the School of Duniry.

The Leabhar Breac and the oldest fragments of the Senchas Mor. The former, also known as Leabhar Mor Duna Doighre is our greatest repertory of ecclesiastical lore. The latter was written probably by Conor Mac Egan at Duniry in the early 14th century and was still there in 1575, while the Leabhar Breach was in the vicinity, in the Abbey of Kilnalahan as late as 1629. Many of the Mac Egans were then scattered, traditionally as a result of their complicity in the O'Neill Rebellion. Some remained, however, and Nehemias Egan is recorded as having a "freehold in Duniry" in 1608 and in 1780 Carbery Egan held a farm from Clanricard in Kylegan, part of a townland adjoining Duniry. With the signing of the Composition of Connaught in 1585 the MacEgan's found their profession coming to an end. Only the commanding site of their castle still remains.

The Birds of the Forest of Wisdom: The MacEgans contributed three poems to an old book of Irish poems called "The contention of the Bards". In one of these poems Anluan MacEgan addressed the MacEgan clan as "the birds of the Forest of Wisdom". It is for this reason that we have adopted the birds as our emblem for our present documentation.

CLONMACNOIS (Co. Offaly)

Clonmacnois is the remains of an early monastery founded by St. Ciaran around the year 545 where a major east-west roadway crossed the Shannon. At this great centre of learning and the arts in mediaeval times, there still survive six churches, two high crosses, two round towers and the finest collection of old Irish gravestones in the country. Its importance was underlined by the fact that it was the only Irish monastery which Pope John Paul II visited during his stay in Ireland in 1979.

CLONFERT CATHEDRAL (Co. Galway)

Founded in 563 by St. Brendan, the present 12th century church has perhaps the finest and most detailed example of a doorway in the Irish Romanesque style.

ROSCREA (Co. Tipperary)

Damer House

Damer House is a fine early Georgian residence built within the curtain walls of Roscrea Castle. The centrepiece of the house is a magnificently carved pine staircase, expertly restored, and an example of the best of 18th century and modern craftsmanship.

Damer House contains the fine collection of the Irish Country Furniture Society supplemented by pieces from the National Museum. This is the largest exhibition of traditional furniture in the country. Further exhibitions and crafts shop.

Roscrea Heritage Centre is attached to Damer House and is open to the public.

St. Cronan's Monastery

This is unique in that the main Limerick/Dublin road divides it in two, leaving the round tower to the west and the remains of the cathedral church - the west gable - and high cross to the east.

High Cross

The 3 m (10ft.) high cross south of the west gable is very much weathered and has had some modern stones inserted in the shaft. On one side of the cross is a figure of Christ crucified, covered by a long dress, and on the other a figure, presumably St. Cronan. On the north and south side of the shaft long figures modify this high cross and are interpreted as Mary and John at the foot of the cross. The ornamentation dates the cross with certainty to the 12th century.

Round Tower

The 10th century tower is one of the oldest buildings in the town. It now stands at 18 m (60ft.) high but its original height would have been some 24 m (80ft.)

Monaincha

The monastic settlement stands 3 km (2 mls) south-east of Roscrea. Monaincha has a recorded history of 1,300 years. In the middle ages it was the most famous place of pilgrimage in Munster. Pilgrimages were again revived in 1974. To-day the visitor can see the remains of the 12th-century church with its 16th century additions and a much weathered, but interesting high cross.

Mount St. Joseph's

This Cistercian monastery 3 km west of Roscrea, it is sited on land which was owned by the monks of Monaincha. The Cistercians came here from Mount Mellery in 1978, to an estate in Ballyskeragh, purchased for the purpose of a monastic foundation by Arthur Moore.

Roscrea Tourist Trail

There is a tourist trail guide book on sale giving information on the signposted walking tour of Roscrea and it includes most of what is of historical interest.

NENAGH

Nenagh Castle

The principal feature of the town is the Butler Castle, one of the finest of its kind in Ireland. It formed part of the larger castle built around the year

1200 by Theobald Fitzwalter, ancestor of the Butlers of Ormond. The castle, which is open to visitors is 100 ft. high but the uppermost 25 ft. date from 1860.

Heritage Centre

Across the road from the castle, is the County Gaol's facade, gatehouse and Governor's House which have become a Heritage Centre. The Centre's 'Lifestyles in North West Tipperary' Exhibition is open to the public. As part of the Nenagh Heritage Centre tour the visitor will see the Gatehouse to the former County Gaol, it incorporates guardrooms, condemned cells, rooms for hangman, chaplain and press, and exercise yards. These are now part of the Nenagh District Heritage Centre and also accommodates Shannonside Tourist Information Office.

Portumna Castle

This national monument on the edge of the town is the castle of the Earls of Clanrickarde. It was built in 1609 and accidentally destroyed by fire in 1826. Restoration by the Office of Public Works has been in progress during the past decade.

Of interest are the Jacobean gable like features on the roof, the square towers at the corners and the Renaissance doorway with gun-holes at one side. Some of the work, notably the north entrance gate, was designed by Adams.

Portumna Priory

Originally, this church, dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, was granted by De Cogan, to the Cistercian monks in 1254. The present structure, a national monument dates largely from the 15th century, and was built by the Dominicans when it came into their possession in 1410.

Birr Castle Demense

Open daily throughout the year 09.00 - 13.00 and 14.00 - 18.00 hrs.

Home of the Early and Countess of Rosse. The gardens are laid out around a lake and along the banks of two adjacent rivers above one of whose waterfalls rises the early 17th century castle. (The interior is open only by special arrangement). The pleasure grounds cover over 100 acres and contain over 1,000 different species of trees and shrubs already catalogued. The

gardens are particularly noted for spring flowering magnolias, cherries and crab apples, autumn colouring maples, chestnuts and weeping beech, as are the formal gardens' hornbeam alleys and box hedges which feature in the Guinness Book of Records as tallest in the world.

The park contains the remains of a giant 72 inch reflecting telescope built in 1845 and the largest in the world for three-quarters of a century.

LACKEEN CASTLE

(2 miles from Lorrha)

Access: Through one field. Signposted.

A four-story tower-house standing in a bawn with a round-headed doorway. The second storey has a good fire-place, and the third floor is vaulted. An unusual feature is the the window with remains of tracery on the third floor above the doorway. The ground floor is at present used as an agricultural storage place. The Castle belonged to Brian Ua Cinneide Fionn, Chieftain of Ormond, who died in 1588. His son, Donnchadh, the last Ua Cinneide chief of lower Ormond, forfeited it to the Cromwellians in 1653.

LORRHA CHURCHES

Dominican Priory

Founded around 1269 by Walter de Burgo, Earl of Ulster, for the Dominicans. The Church has a nave and chancel of almost equal width, with the remains of a five light east window. The north and south walls have a number of lancet windows, and there is a good doorway in the north wall. The door in the west gable was mutilated when the Catholic Church was built near it in 1812, and an angel and heads from the priory were built into the west wall of the Catholic Church. The Church houses among others the tombs of the O'Kennedy family and that of the MacEgans sculpted by Patrick Kerin. A tower standing on the modern church side of the old church was probably linked by other building to the older church.

St. Ruadhan's Church

A 15th century church with fine east and west windows. It is entered by a very ornate west doorway. There is a vaulted sacristy attached to the church.

Church of Ireland Church

To the south of the previous church is another, part of which is still used. It has antae, a 13th century doorway into which a 15th century doorway was inserted. The 15th century doorway has floral designs, and a pelican cutting its breast to allow blood to flow from it to provide nourishment for its young - a symbol of the church feeding its flock. The church probably stands on the site of an ancient monastery founded by St. Ruadhan, who was a disciple of St. Finian of Clonard and who died in 584. The monastery was plundered by the Viking Turgesius in 845, and was burned in 1154, 1157 and 1179. In 1589 it was granted to John O'Hogan who later forfeited it because of non-payment of rent. There are remains of 9th century (?) crosses in the churchyard.

KILLALEIGH CASTLE (Sopwell Hall)

Killaleigh Castle is situated in the townland of Sopwell. It belonged to Constance Mac Egan at the time of the Down Survey, but it was made over to Thomas Sadlier. It is a modern castellated house, measures 51 feet 6 inches by 31 feet and was four storeys high. It had thirty-four windows with label mouldings over them and a large square tower at the south-west corner.

The name, Killaleigh, resembles Killeigh (Irish Cillachaidh), the church of the field, or the field of the wood, Killahy.

DRUMNAHANE CASTLE (1½ miles from Killaleigh Castle)

It belonged to Stephen Mac Egan and was made over to Nicholas White at the Cromwellian settlement. It is a square castle 47 ft by 35 feet 6 inches; its walls are 7 feet thick and it belongs to the fourteenth century. The second floor rested on a stone arch and the original building was five storeys high. The staircase passed through the thickness of the south and east walls. The windows were rectangular and constructed of chiselled limestone.

The name, Drumnahane, may be derived from the Irish words; Drum-na-huamha - the ridge of the cave.