

at the Black Abbey, has grown into a rather prolix statement of some of the traditionary and historical recollections connected with that interesting building, I do not deem it necessary to make any apology to the Society, as I conceive it was of importance that all the matters treated of should be placed on record, before the old inhabitants who hold them in memory, shall have died away.

NOTES ON THE CASTLES IN THE FRESHFORD DISTRICT.

BY THE REV. JAMES MEASE, A.M.

[*Read at the Meeting of May 7th.*]

The social history of Ireland has yet to be written. It ought to be the object of antiquarian societies to provide materials for this; and among other, the ruined castles, which exist in such great numbers, and in so many parts of the country, cannot be overlooked. A full inquiry into this subject would embrace—1st. the names and localities of such ruins; 2ndly. their style and architecture; 3rdly. the date of the building; and 4thly. their owners. An examination of all these subjects, even though I should limit myself to my own peculiar district, would be much too extensive an undertaking for me; and would occupy more of the time of the Society than I could fairly claim. I purpose, therefore, merely to call your attention to this important subject, by giving a list of their names and localities; adding simply, on the other points, such casual observations as may be necessary to give a little life to an otherwise dry enumeration. I am fortunately enabled, through the kindness of Mr. Edmund Fitzpatrick, to illustrate this paper by several very accurate drawings of one of the ruins referred to.

These castles are of various forms. The most common type is that of a square building, with remarkably thick walls, varying in height from forty to eighty feet; in breadth from twenty to forty. The floors are sometimes supported on arches—sometimes by corbels. These are frequently so close that a very small space could have existed between them, and in such cases the interval could only have been used as a store-room. These stories are always accessible by a stone staircase, either straight or circular, in the thickness of the walls. The roof never projects over the walls, but is protected by battlements, the highest parts of which are, I believe, universally at the angles, except where the chimney is. They are with or without out-works. I need scarcely add, that such castles are found on the borders of England and Scotland, and are always indicative of a troubled state of society.

Let us suppose ourselves in the town of Freshford, and we shall leave

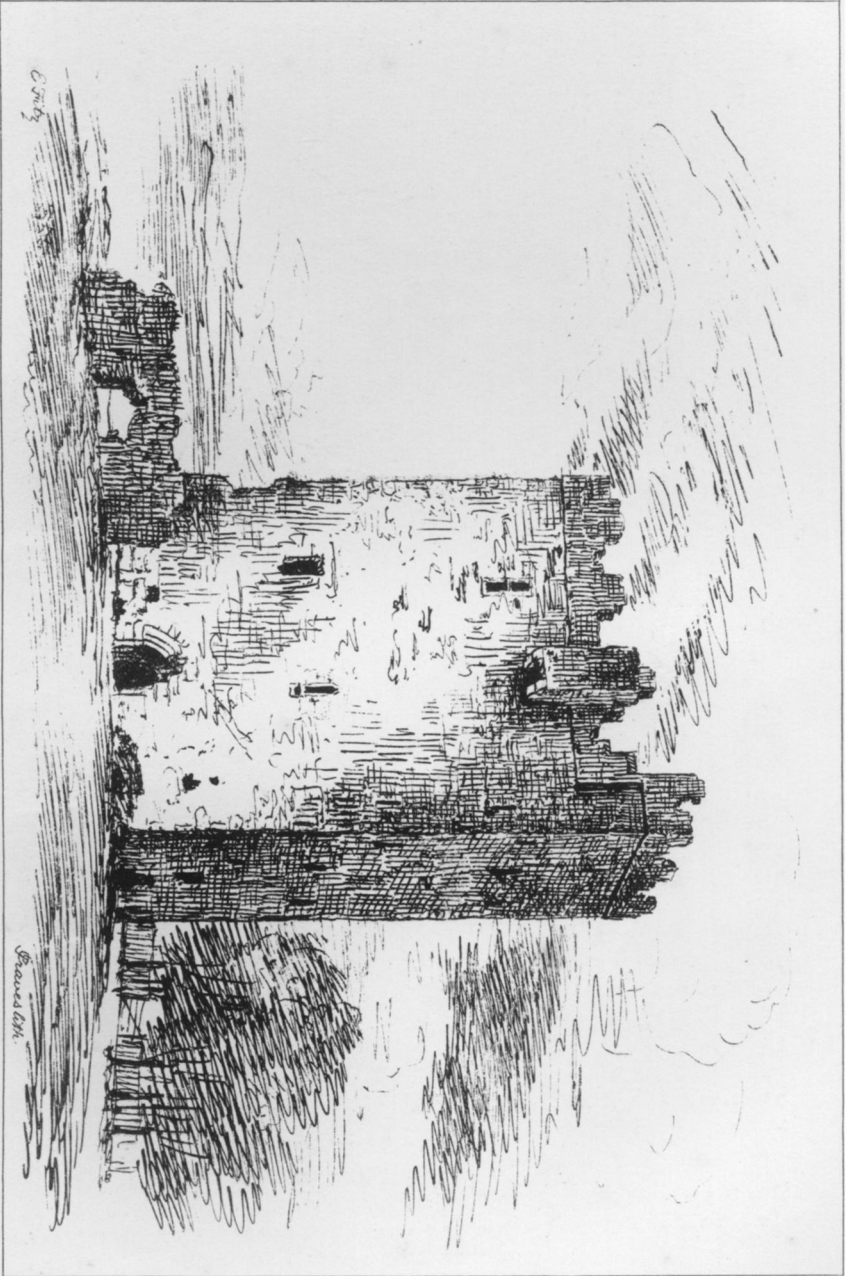
it by passing through the grounds of Uppercourt. I lead you this way for the purpose of expressing my regret at the disappearance of a castle* which once existed here, and a hope that such societies as ours will prevent, in some measure, such wanton destruction. We continue our course through the demesne to the back entrance, and thus come upon the Ballylarkan road. Twelve minutes' walk will lead us past a ruin which seems at a little distance to be one of the castles we are considering, but in reality is the ruin of an ecclesiastical building.† The chapel remains, and an engraving of its sedilia has already appeared in the *Transactions* of this Society for 1849, p. 51. I may add that it is said, and I believe with truth, that the east window of this building was burned into lime within the last forty years! In continuing our journey we shall avoid the descent to the right, and take the direct and less frequented road. This will bring us to the castle of Tubbrid-Brittain, about three miles from Freshford. The name Tubbrid-Brittain signifies the well of Brittain. This name is mentioned in an old Irish poem, called the "Circuit of Ireland," published by the Irish Archæological Society, which was undoubtedly composed about the year 932. The king of Aileach marched with a thousand chosen warriors, in the depth of winter, through a great part of Ireland, in order to overawe those who might question his right to be successor of the chief monarch. We have nothing to say to the rest of his course, but only what relates to this County. This king, named Muirheartach, came to Bealach Gabhran, or the pass of Gowran; then crossed a river called "the clear Fliodais," manifestly the Nore, from its situation. Then he came to "the well of the long-lived Britain"—"now Tubbridbrittain, in the barony of Cranagh and County of Kilkenny, and adjoining the parish of Kilcooly, in the County of Tipperary," observes Dr. O'Donovan, in a note on the passage in question (p. 40). This place, then, the castle of which I am about to describe, has a name of long standing, upwards of a thousand years; and as the castle is only of the date 1596, it will not be considered, I hope, an unnecessary digression to inquire is there any trace of a former habitation on this spot. Now the neighbouring inhabitants state that there was, some time ago, the appearance of three ditches, as they call them, which they dug away for manure. They say they were for the protection of the castle; but I believe the out-works of all such castles, where they existed, were of stone. Next, there is every appearance of the foundation of this castle having been laid bare by the removal of heaps of earth, inasmuch as the stones of the lower part are all rough, not having even the trace of a hammer; while those of the upper part of the castle are all either cut, or at least hammered. Hence I conclude that the ground on which the castle was built, was, at least in part, an *artificial* mound, and the lie of the

* This castle belonged to the bishops of Ossory.—EDS.

† A powerful branch of the Shortall family had a castle here, the site of which may be seen on the road side directly opposite the ruins of the ancient parish church alluded to by Mr. Mease.—EDS.

country favours this supposition. I think, therefore, that taking these two circumstances together, there is much reason to conclude that the castle was built in the centre of a *rath* of ancient date, as it would be quite absurd to suppose that it could have been built on clay just heaped up for the purpose. I think it not a very forced supposition (indeed many antiquarian theories rest on a more sandy foundation) that there was an old habitation here—the resting place, for the night, of the king of Aileach. But we must come to the castle itself. The date is 1596; this is ascertained by a stone, or two stones, formerly in one of the chimneys of the castle, but now found in a neighbouring cottage.

I have called these castles square—a more correct term, perhaps, would be rectangular, for accurate measurement shows considerable difference between the length and breadth. The length of the wall of this castle which contains the entrance is thirty-six feet; the other wall is twenty-nine feet. The height I had no means of ascertaining, but I should think it is about seventy feet. The highest point is called by the country people Mairgreed Gearoid's bed, as far as I could ascertain the spelling from the pronunciation. Evidently the Peg Garret of tradition, as Margaret Fitzgerald, wife to Piers earl of Ormonde, is termed. There was, I think, only one entrance, but I shall recur to this again. Going in by this entrance you perceive that this door led to the kitchen. Before you go into the kitchen you find a turn to the right, and a straight flight of, at present, five steps; and then at right angles to this another flight of thirteen steps; and then you get into a large room twenty-five feet by eighteen. Looking back at the door by which you entered you perceive an open in the wall. There are three other windows in the room. Two of these have seats in them, on each side, obviously for the enjoyment of the prospect, and where often, perhaps, the ladies of the family killed time, as they do at present, in various useful or useless occupations. The stories of this castle were separated by plain well turned arches running in length the longest measurement of the building. These arches were turned on wickerwork, the traces of which are still very visible in this and I believe a great many other castles. The large windows were divided into two parts, upper and lower, as may be seen in the lithograph of this castle which is given on the opposite page. The upper division was sometimes re-divided into two parts. The corbels in this castle puzzle me exceedingly. In the room I have described there are corbels running along the wall, but if there was a floor resting on them it would divide one of the windows into two parts. This seems strange, yet I am of opinion that the upper room must have been lighted in that way, and also that the access to that room, which I suppose to have been a store-room, though I am not certain, must have been by means of the window which lighted both rooms. But we must proceed to the top. It is through this room that you have access to the next story, and there is in the door-way the means of effectually separating the stories, so that if the one floor were surprised the next would be still defensible. The same



CASTLE OF TUBBRID-BRITAIN. CO. KILKENNY.

observations may be made with regard to the next story, but when you come to the top there are more puzzling corbels than before. There is a set which goes round the entire building. Those of this set which are on the shorter side of the castle, still support in part the gable. The others along the remaining walls may have supported a floor, between the roof of the castle and which there was a considerable space. This is so far easy of explanation, but here comes what is to me the difficulty, though perhaps I may only be showing my ignorance by mentioning it. Under these corbels, at about one foot or one and a-half feet distance, there is another set going more than half way round the walls. What was the object of these I cannot comprehend. Neither of them had any thing to do with the support of the roof; or one might conjecture that one set supported the floor, and another the roof, but it appears to me, from the marks of the roof, that it rested on the walls. If it did not it must have been much thicker than we would suppose necessary. But I believe I must descend, and make a few observations on what appears to be another entrance into the kitchen from the outside. A little examination will show, I think, that this is not the case. It is obviously a breach, whether effected by time or wanton destruction, or by an attack on the castle, I cannot conjecture. There was a cannon ball found when digging the clay of the trenches, before alluded to. It is not large, but there is no appearance in the castle of any place where cannon could be mounted. This, therefore, was more likely to have been used for offence than defence. But it is too shifting and rolling a foundation to build any theory upon. I must now leave this place, mentioning, in conclusion, that there are two wells, one near the castle, carefully built with steps down to it; the other some way from it. The water in the latter case gushes in great abundance from a rock, and it is, probably, from this one that the name of the place is derived. I have been particular in describing this castle, as it is the first we met, and as I am fortunate in being enabled to illustrate it by the assistance of Mr. Fitzpatrick, as also because we are certain of its date.*

If we were to go into the County of Tipperary, we would find such a multitude of these castles that their very names would occupy a long paper. It is said that a hundred are visible from the Rock of Cashel alone. I would, therefore, proceed no further, only that I am tempted by the name of Kilcooly abbey to go a little out of the way in order to express a hope that some competent person will undertake the illustration of this most interesting ruin. I believe it to be perfectly new ground, at least I have never seen an allusion to it. At Grange Kilcooly there is a square castle, and returning to Urlingford we observe the ruins of another on the top of Fennar-hill. On reaching Urlingford we find another castle, formerly a stronghold of the Mountgarret

* Tubbrid castle also belonged to the Shortall family, but to a different branch from that settled at Ballylarkan. It was held by them under the Ormonde family.—EDS.

family. It may be asked, what is the use of this dry list? My answer is, that their number, as well as their localities, must help us to form some idea of the state of society which rendered such buildings necessary; and I also hope that others may be tempted to contribute any interesting particulars that they may happen to know about any of these buildings. In proceeding from Urlingford to Johnstown the eye catches a large building, or rather two, conspicuously situated on the right towards the bog. The upper of these is the present house of Foulkscourt, the residence of Charles Hely, Esq. The lower is the old castle of Foulkscourt. This is one of the largest castles in the County. I regret that I have not examined it with sufficient accuracy to be able to give a detailed account of it, but I hope to be able to do so at some future time. Meanwhile, I shall put down, in as few words as possible, what I know of it. It (as well as Foulksrath) takes its name from the family of Foulkes, formerly very powerful in this County, but now I believe, totally extinct. There is a monument of a Mrs. Foulkes in the Cathedral of St. Canice, dated 1685.* This castle has outworks and a moat, and must have been of great importance. Its date, I believe, is of the reign of Henry VII., or before. Whoever wishes to study the military architecture of Ireland, will find good examples in this castle, Foulksrath, Balleen, and Cullahill. I pass on towards Ballyspellan castle, of which I know nothing but the name.† Near this was found the celebrated Ogham brooch, now in the museum of the Royal Dublin Society. But I would beg the lover of mountain scenery and extensive views to accompany me to the top of the hill, and he will be fully repaid for the trouble of the ascent. He will behold the greatest circuit of mountain scenery which I think he could witness from any part of Ireland. He may observe, in succession, Mount Leinster, Blackstairs, and Brandon—then Slieve-na-man and the Cummeraghs—then a range commonly called the Knockmeledown hills. Then the Galties, and, in succession, the Keeper, and the Devil's Bit, the whole terminating with the Slievebloom range towards the north. These are the more distant; and the nearer ground is filled up with the Kilcooly range, Killough, Knockahaw, Knockeil, and a multitude of others. We must, however, descend from our altitudes, and strike for the round castle of Balief. It would be most presumptuous in me to venture on any description of this. I may observe, however, that there appear to be two kinds of round castles. One kind where the castle was a wing of a larger building. The other kind where it was complete in itself. Of the former kind the castle of Killenure, near the Rock

* Mr. Mease is here in error; the Foulkes family settled in Ireland at the period of the Commonwealth, and this castle bore the name long before. It belonged to the Ormonde family. Foulksrath was a castle of the Purcells.—EDS.

† The name of this castle is Ballycuddihy. We have been unable to identify the owners of it, but it probably belonged to the Ormonde family.—EDS.

of Cashel, is a specimen, the entire ruin being complete, and having two round wings connected by a building, a parallelogram, as usual. The castle of Balief is perfect in itself. The round castle of Grants-town,* in the Queen's County, was, I believe, of the former class. At least, I was told by a gentleman that he had seen a plan of the old residence in which the present castle formed only one wing. We must leave this, however, and go on to Cloghmanty castle,† of which I shall merely mention that it is still inhabited. On a hill above Cloghmanty is the castle of Killoshulan: this is a round castle. But I know too little to venture on any further observation. The last castle I shall mention in the present ramble is that of Kilrush. Of this I shall remark that it is the only one which has the appearance of a carved figure upon it. There is one stone cut into the shape of a human head, the face being quite flat. I only remark this for the purpose of expressing my surprise that some kind of carving is not more frequently met with. Having thus led my readers nearly back to the point from which we set out, I must bring my first tour to a conclusion; and ask them to accompany me on another excursion in the same neighbourhood.

Leaving Freshford by the Johnstown road, we take the first turn to the right, and continuing in this direction for about a mile we find to the right, on the banks of the small stream which drains the valley at Lodge Park, the castle of the Warrens. It seems a more modern building than any of those formerly mentioned, and is, I believe, truly Cromwellian. About a mile beyond this we come to the castle of Balleen, a full description of which extensive ruin would occupy more space than I purpose giving to the entire list. I must content myself with observing that the different ends of the building are clearly of different dates—the windows afford sufficient data to prove this—that part of the foundation of the outside wall is supported by arches, and that it formerly belonged to the Mountgarret family as a habitation. To this day, indeed, it belongs to them, and I have heard it said, with what truth I know not, that their right of appointing the seneschal of the manor court depends upon its possession. This ruin is well worthy of a visit from the lovers of the picturesque, and of a detailed description from an antiquary capable of doing justice to the subject.

Proceeding still by this road, which must once have been an important pass between Kilkenny and the Queen's County, we come next to the castle of Glashare.‡ This is still inhabited. There are a great

* We believe that Grantstown appertains to the second class of castles described by Mr. Mease; it belonged to the Fitzpatricks; Balief to the Shortalls, according to tradition.—EDS.

† Cloghmanty castle presents a very perfect specimen of the tall square keep, with bawn or court-yard, defended at the angles by stone-roofed circular turrets. It belonged to the Mountgarret family. Killoshulan and Kilrush belonged to the Shortall family.—EDS.

‡ Glashare was a manor and castle of the Ormonde family.—EDS.

many castles in this part of the Queen's County, which we must enter if we continue along this road, but as I limit myself to those which I have seen, I shall barely mention the names of Clonburne, Aughmacart, and the round castle of Grantstown. With regard to castles of the latter type, I must make one observation, and that is, that a fire-place never seems to have been a part of the original plan. In some it appears to have been added afterwards, and in others not a trace of one can be found. The only conjecture which can be offered on this subject is, that the fire must have been in the centre of the building.

Continuing along the old turnpike road, we next come to the castle of Cullahill.* This is also in the Queen's County. It differs much in architecture from the other castles. Whether the traveller be an antiquary or not, I would strongly recommend him, if he have the opportunity, to enter the County of Kilkenny by this road. He must, I think, be pleased with its beauties. Along the way there is a lovely valley, with the green fields of Tinna-slatty, Aharney, and Seskin, and beyond, the rich meadows of the Nore; the whole terminating with Mount Leinster, Blackstairs, and Brandon, in the distance. I have recommended many to travel this road, and I never knew one to be disappointed. But we must restrain ourselves, and descend to the business in hand. Near our way *was* the round castle of Seskin, but it has quite disappeared.

On this road the inquirer will hear of a place called "the field of stakes," and of a battle fought thereat. Connecting these together, I do not envy the imagination of that antiquary who would not at least ask the question, "could this have been the spot where the well known event in Irish history occurred after the battle of Clontarf?" I am, however, obliged to answer this inquiry in the negative. The place is entirely out of the line of march of the returning army. The tradition of the people also is, that the battle was fought against invaders from the south; neither do they in the least connect it with the name of Brian, though they are acquainted also with that tradition. There is, however, a stronger argument, which is, that a place in the Queen's County has better claims to the honour. This place is Gurtnacleagh (i.e., Gort-na-cleath, the field of the stakes), about three miles from Aghaboe, on the road to Abbeyleix. The name, the tradition, and the situation, all combine to point it out as the *locale* of that remarkable event.

But continuing our journey, we come to the remains of the castle of Clone, and two miles further to that of Ballyragget.† This latter is in good preservation and easy of access, and I hope this notice may induce many a visit to it, and many a lady to sit in Peg Garret's chair—to which ceremony a particular virtue is attached.

* Cullahill belonged to the Fitzpatricks.—Eds.

† Clone belonged to a branch of the Purcells, and was held under the Ormonde family. Ballyragget was a chief castle of the Mountgarrets.—Eds.

Continuing the route towards Kilkenny, we come to the castle of Foulksrath. This is still inhabited, having been fitted up as a residence by the late Stephen Wright, Esq. We are enabled to understand from an examination of this castle in its present state, how a family could have been accommodated in one of these mansions.

Going somewhat back on our journey and descending towards the Nore, we come to the castle of Lismaine,* which formerly commanded the pass over the river there. We pass it without further notice, and continuing down the river come to Three-Castles,† a place deriving its proper name from the former existence of three castles there. I know nothing of their history, but it is obvious that they served a similar purpose as the castle of Lismaine, namely, to guard a pass over the river Nore. The last castle I would mention is the one at the confluence of the Nore and Dinan, named Ardeloe,‡ adjoining which are the ruins of a church. In conclusion, I would call your attention to the number of these buildings. All bear a military character. In two journeys, each not much exceeding twenty miles, in the same locality we meet with *twenty-eight* of these fortified places. Whatever may be said of our ancestors, we must condemn either the necessity or the inclination that induced the building of abodes which by their nature declare that every man's hand was against every man. I conclude with the names of the castles—Uppercourt, Tubbrid, Killaghy§ (omitted in the first list), Grange, Fennar, Urlingford, Foulkscourt, Ballyspellan, Balief (round), Cloghmanty, Killeshulan (round), Kilrush, the Warrens' Castle, Balleen, Glashare, Clonburne, Aughmacart, Grantstown (round), Cullahill, Seskin (round), Clone, Ballyragget, Foulksrath, Lismaine, Three-Castles, and Ardeloe.

* Lismaine castle belonged to a branch of the powerful family of Purcell.—EDS.

† Three-Castles, or Castledogh, was one of the first fortresses erected in Kilkenny by the Anglo-Norman invaders. It passed through many hands to the Shortalls of Ballylarkan.—EDS.

‡ Ardeloe was a manor and castle of the Ormonde family.—EDS.

§ Killaghy belonged to Grace, baron of Courtstown.—EDS.