

The Church of Ireland Parish

CHAPTER

5



The Church of Ireland parish of Clontuskert is in the diocese of Clonfert, lying partly in the Barony of Clonmacnowen and partly in Longford barony. The parish briefly overlaps the main Dublin to Galway road at Urrachry, where it borders the parishes of Aughrim and Ballinasloe. The parish comprises two parochial units, Kiltormer and Glan, with the churches dedicated to

St. Matthew's
Church

| The Parish of Clontuskert - *Glimpses into its Past*

St. Thomas and St. Matthew respectively. Kiltormer was amalgamated with St. Matthew's when it could no longer support a Rector. St. Thomas's was deconsecrated in the 1950s when the population further declined, with all services subsequently held in St. Matthew's church.

Clontuskert is now part of the Aughtrim Group of Parishes, the principal parish of which group is Holy Trinity, Aughtrim, where the rectory is located. The Rector is the Rev. Mr. George Flynn, who was appointed in January 2008 following the retirement of Canon Trevor Sullivan who served as incumbent for some twenty-four years. The Group is some seventy miles long and forty miles wide, stretching from Ahascragh to Ardrahan. Other churches are located in Woodlawn and Ballinasloe.

The Group of Parishes is located in the Dioceses of Clonfert and Kilmacduagh as part of the principal diocese of Limerick and Killaloe. The Bishop is the Rt. Rev. Trevor Williams who succeeded the Rt. Rev. Michael Mayes in 2009. Trevor Williams was the one time Director of the Corrymela Community in County Antrim which did much to heal community divisions in Northern Ireland during the recent troubles.

A long esker which bears a narrow, twisting road, runs close to St. Mathews, the parish Church. This esker runs almost parallel to the Esker Riada, the ancient carriageway from east to west. A portion of Clontuskert parish is within the territory of the O'Maddens, bordering upon the lands controlled in ancient times by the O'Kellys and O'Donnellans and was important enough to be selected by the early church as the site for an Abbey.

St. Patrick and his evangelists organised their converts into areas somewhat similar to modern parishes. Each area was served by a priest, who was under the care of the bishop. Monasteries and parish churches sprang up around the country and in some places

The Church of Ireland Parish

the abbot, not the bishop, became the leader of the local Christian community. Clontuskert, being no different from anywhere else, has been shaped by the presence of St. Patrick's foundation work. Christianity in Clontuskert went through the same ordeals, tribulations and successes experienced everywhere else in the country. It experienced re-organisation, reforms, the Great Schism of two popes, the Reformation, the struggle for succession to the English throne, Plantation and Rebellion, the Penal Laws, the years of Ascendancy, John Wesley's Revival Movement, Disestablishment and Catholic Emancipation. Down the centuries Christianity in Clontuskert has stood the test of time through world and civil wars, through good times and bad. The Church of Ireland has continued God's work by the power of the Holy Spirit and has always made it clear that it is catholic, holding the threefold Ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons because it subscribes to the ancient creeds and because its teaching is rooted in both scripture and the tradition of the Catholic Church. It claims a place in the tradition of St. Patrick and traces its history back to the coming of Christianity to Ireland and Clontuskert in the early centuries.

Church of Ireland records tell us that the first parish church of Clontuskert and Bealelage (Ballagh?) was housed in part of the ruins of Clontuskert Abbey after the Reformation and the first incumbent was Donogh O'Kelle, who was granted the Sacristy of Clontuskert and the Vicarage of Killalaghtan in 1551, during the reign of King Edward VI. He had previously held these livings by Papal Bulls which he surrendered .

There is then a gap of nearly ninety years in the records of the Clontuskert clergy, until the appointment of James Wilkinson in 1636/7. No doubt this gap is due to the death of Edward VI and the succession of his sister Mary to the throne. She had no sympathy with the Reformation and the ensuing upheaval must

| The Parish of Clontuskert - *Glimpses into its Past*

have had an impact here as elsewhere in her dominions. Mary's reign was short and when her sister Elizabeth became sovereign, there was a return to reforming ways. At various times in its history, the parish was united with neighbouring parishes, including Killallaghan, Donanaughta (Eyrecourt) and Kiltormer and was therefore not always as it is currently defined. These amalgamations may sometimes have been made to increase the value of the living for the incumbent, or because of a reduction of tithe income.

The Church of St. Matthew at Glan.

It is not known at what date the parish church removed from the Abbey ruins to its present site at Glan. The church is built upon a small hill and is approached by a road along a pronounced embankment. The form and elevation of the site may signify a pre-existing pre-historic site or the use of a natural drumlin to provide a conspicuous position. The present Church was built in 1818 at a cost of £830. 15s. 4½d., by way of a gift by the Board of First Fruits. No loan was raised. In 1832 Divine Service was celebrated twice on Sundays in summer and once in winter and the sacrament was administered four times a year. A new bell was recorded as having been bought in 1832 and was presumably housed in the bell-hang.

This simple and elegant church, set in its beautiful, slightly raised, rural site, is approached from the north via a long avenue flanked by well built mortared stone walls. It is a tall, gabled, single storey structure, with a projecting rectangular chancel at the east end, and a square bell-tower abutting the west end. The chancel has a round-headed stained glass east window and the main body of the church is lit by two round-headed windows on each side. The tower has a stepped parapet with corner pinnacles and contains the

The Church of Ireland Parish



entrance in the west face. Both tower and chancel are later additions, neither appearing on the OS map of 1838, the chancel dating from around 1906. One of the labourers who worked on the building of the chancel was a young teenager, Patrick Joseph Kelly from Tristaun. He later went on to become a Roman Catholic missionary priest who subsequently became Bishop of Benin City in Nigeria where he doubtless used some of the skills he acquired during the renovation of St. Matthew's Church in the many churches he built in Africa. Local tradition has it that the church was originally built in the early eighteenth century. It appears that it was thatched at one time and the lower sections of the walls were constructed with fairly good cut stone. Rubble stone was later used to raise the rear gable wall so that the pitch of the roof could be changed. During a renovation scheme in 1989, when the plaster coating was removed, the track of earlier gables below the existing level, together with the branch trusses were seen, thereby

St. Matthew's
Church,
Glenloughan

| The Parish of Clontuskert - *Glimpses into its Past*

substantiating this view. The doorway shows evidence of the outline of a double arch of good quality dressed stone, surrounding the present doorway.

The interior is also simple and elegant, containing furniture of a high standard, with a fine stained-glass window and an elegant trussed roof with sheeted ceiling. There is a raised timber floor on each side of the stone-flagged aisle, and solid bench seating with simple carved decoration.



Earlier doorway
with double arch

The walls are of sheeted timber panelling to window-sill height. A fine stained glass east window dated 1908, was the bequest of James Barr, a Church of Ireland parishioner living in Rossgloss, who died in 1907. Mr. Barr also bequeathed another stained glass window to St. Augustine's Catholic Church, Clontuskert. The carved wooden pulpit and prayer desk were presented by the Seymour Family of Somerset house.

Two sanctuary chairs are memorials, one presented by the Sharpe Family, the other by the Cooke Family. The stone baptismal font is at the rear of church. Heating is by means of a cylindrical stove centred in the north wall which replaced an earlier under-floor heating arrangement which utilised a type of sunken 'fire-box' in the central aisle, covered by a decorative metal grill.

The Church of Ireland Parish |



The horizontal flue ran beneath the floor and fed into a vertical flue on the north wall.

A harmonium, originally used in St. Patrick's church Kiltormer, was donated by the parish priest, Rev. Father Sean Slattery in 1980. The electric organ currently in use was given to Canon Sullivan by the Franciscan sisters of Portiuncula Hospital and subsequently donated by him to St. Matthews.

The graveyard accommodates burials of people from the nearby locality and more distant parts including Achill Island and Scotland. Military and medical personnel are included and no

(Above)
Church Interior

East Window
Inscription



| The Parish of Clontuskert - Glimpses into its Past



(left to right)
Heating Stove
Baptismal Font
Carved Pulpit

(below right)
The Old
Harmonium

doubt the reason for the choice of this burial place was the assumption that this would remain a perpetual Protestant burial ground, which would be maintained by the loyal and faithful members of the Church of Ireland. Currently, the well maintained grounds and building reflect the commitment of the Church of Ireland parishioners, with the support of Roman Catholic friends who have family links to the deceased interred in the churchyard.

The parish has had many surnames associated with it. Many of the parishioners names are of English or Scottish origin and predominant among them are Bonney, Brown, Butler, Colly, Cooke, Deacon, Eyre, Galbraith, Goode, Hall, Hansberry, Hardy, Johnston, Joseph, Moorhouse, Naughton, Nicholson, Ogle, Quilty, Reddy, Seale, Sharpe, Sinclair, Stenson, Taylor, Wakefield, Walsh and Weily.



The Church of Ireland Parish

A proportion of the local population were survivors of the battle who settled in the district and some of the displaced population was replaced by soldiers as part of the political and demographic changes brought about in the post-battle settlement.

East Window
in St. Matthew's
Church

In pre-Famine times, the road, on the site of an esker stretching across Glan to the east, was dotted on each side with small, thatched mud cabins, housing people surviving on small holdings by cultivating the humble potato. Folk memory recalls the 'women's way', a path which was followed by the farmers' wives when taking their poultry and other goods to market in Ballinasloe.

The Established Church in both Ireland and England was inert in the early to mid eighteenth century, the period when 'sporting clergy' became a feature of the pulpit. Many were known to be 'booted and spurred', so that they could go straight from church services to participate in hunting and other worldly pursuits. During the evangelical revival of the mid eighteenth century, led by Rev. John Wesley, an ordained Church of England vicar, the Methodist connection was established and the



| The Parish of Clontuskert - *Glimpses into its Past*

inhabitants of Clontuskert and the surrounding areas came under the influence of Methodist teaching. The early Methodists continued to attend their parish church for all the sacraments, but went to additional prayer and Bible study meetings as a Methodist congregation. This practice was continued by the Primitive Wesleyan Methodists, when the break-away Wesleyan Methodists separated from the Established Church in 1816. They began to ordain their own ministers and to celebrate the sacraments themselves, separately from the Church of Ireland. Throughout this period, the parish church of Clontuskert remained a Church of Ireland establishment, although the Methodists had meeting houses in the vicinity.



Rev. John Wesley

John Wesley, travelled the length and breadth of Ireland and England recruiting new preachers and preaching the Gospel to those who would listen. We know from his own journal that on his second visit to Ireland in 1748, he stopped in Athlone before his visit to Aughrim and the general area, on Sunday May 8th. He said himself he could not have arrived at a better time because the service of Morning Prayer had just commenced in Aughrim parish church. However, having been refused permission to preach inside the church itself by the incumbent, his address was welcomed by an attentive crowd at close of service, when he preached in Church Lane to those who wished to hear the famous evangelist. Wesley dined with Samuel

The Church of Ireland Parish

Simpson, a Justice of the Peace, at his home in Oatfield. He was also greeted and welcomed by Mr. David Wakefield of Urrachry and Mr. Thomas Wade of Aughrim. These gentlemen's homes became the focal point around which Methodist endeavours commenced in Clontuskert and Aughrim.

A Mr. Thomas Walshe accompanied the Wesley brothers on many of their trips in the area, some as far away as Ennis and Galway. Up to the early 1900s, family homes were used for meetings and prayer in Aughrim, Attibrassil and Woodlawn. The Primitive Wesleyan Methodist chapel in Aughrim was closed in 1923. It was situated where the grotto now stands in the grounds of St. Catherine's Catholic church.

During the split in the Methodist Connection in 1816, due to conflict over the administration of the sacraments, there were both Wesleyan and Primitive Wesleyan congregations in the vicinity. Mr. William Seale, later to become a resident of Urrachry, then had a farm and residence where the School-House Restaurant now stands in Aughrim. He facilitated the Wesleyans and founded a school there. However, he was evicted and the building was handed over to the Established Church.

A history of local Methodism was found by Canon Trevor Sullivan during 1989, in St. John's church in Ballinasloe. It quotes an incident involving a visiting Methodist preacher who was on his way to a Methodist home meeting in a local house, led by a Methodist guide from the district. Whilst passing through Urrachree he asked of his guide, "Who are the gentlemen playing ball on the Sabbath?" His guide referred to them as 'Protestants'. The minister answered as follows, "I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet but if this continues on the Lord's Day there will not be a Protestant left in Glan". The field in question was opposite Sinclairs in Wakefield's bog field and the game, which we now

| The Parish of Clontuskert - *Glimpses into its Past*

The
Glebe House,
Somerset

know they were playing, was cricket. Cricket continued to be played down to the early 1900s opposite Sinclairs in the same bog field. The Josephs, Goodes and Sinclairs were enthusiastic players. Charles Wakefield of Urrachry married a Miss Wade of Fairfield and she later became one of the first Methodist ministers in America.¹

The Glebe House² - the residence of the Church of Ireland Rector was built in 1822 at a cost of £738 9s 3d granted by the board of First Fruits. £323/1/6 of this was by way of a gift, £415 7s 1/2d by way of a loan and the remaining amount of £282 2s 9d by means of an outstanding loan in 1832, payable by annual instalment of £16 12s 4d. The Census of 1832 states that four thousand and one people, Catholic and Protestant, were then residing in Clontuskert parish. An earlier Glebe House appears to have been situated on

¹ Information from Jennifer Wakefield.

² This glebe house was later bought by Gerald Cooke and lived in by himself and his wife Gwen, the daughter of the late Dean French, until they moved to Dublin. Another branch of the Cooke family lived at Cornfield in a house partly built with bricks from Pollok's brick kiln.

The Church of Ireland Parish |

the western edge of Somerset townland, which is shown on the 1838 OS map, together with four glebe fields.

It is not known what effect the troubles in the 1920s had on the Church of Ireland community in the parish but an article in the *Church of Ireland Gazette* of June 16th 1922 speaking of East Galway, stated:

If the campaign against Protestants, which has been carried on there since last month is continued in similar intensity for a few weeks more, there will not be a Protestant left in the place. Presbyterian and Church of Ireland, poor and well-to-do, old and young, widows and children, all alike have suffered intimidation, persecution and expulsion.

Over the years many people have held the position of sexton (caretaker) of the church, one of them being Ralph Walshe of Mackney. The most important task prior to service on Sundays was getting the stove working. Mr. Walshe would walk from his home to the church with a bucket of hot coals, which he had taken from his open fire at home, so that the church would be heated when people arrived for service. Another sexton was Isaac Walshe. Isaac was known to ring the church bell during the night in order to keep the foxes away from his sheep, much to the amusement of people in the locality. In later years, the position was held by Mrs. Mary Sinclair, who looked forward to her cup of tea with Mrs. Deacon on the way home from cleaning the church! While they were enjoying the cup of tea, Mrs. Sinclair's young son watched *Wanderly Wagon* and the *Beverly Hillbillies* on Mrs. Deacon's television set.

The Rector of Clontuskert cycled from the Glebe in Somerset to Glan passing Sharpe's of Cornfield, where he was fed

| The Parish of Clontuskert - *Glimpses into its Past*

Commissioning
service four lay
Readers,
Robert Cooke,
Norman Sinclair,
Tom Seale
and
Robin Newton.
Rt. Rev. Walton
Empey & Rev. J.L.
Howarth
officiated. 28th
February 1982



and watered for many years following Divine Service. Passing through Sharpe's and Cooke's over the Ballinure footbridge and using the right of way across the field now owned by Francis Walsh, the Rector accessed the churchyard through a stile near Walsh's grave.

In recent years the church of St. Matthew at Glan has hosted a service of remembrance, healing and reconciliation, sponsored by the Aughrim Summer School. This service was initiated in the year 2000 and for the last five years, the service, led by the Rev. Robert Dunlop of Brannockstown Baptist church, Kildare, and Canon Trevor Sullivan, has been broadcast worldwide by RTE radio on the National Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation. Rev. Robert Dunlop had previously ministered in the area, whilst serving as a Baptist minister in Athlone.

This inter-demoniational service became a regular feature during the last five years of the incumbency of Rev. Canon Trevor Sullivan, Rector of Aughrim, Ballinasloe and Clontuskert. It was designed to facilitate a healing of the bitter national memories which had arisen from the time of the battle of Aughrim.



Canon Trevor
Sullivan, Rev.
Robert Dunlop
and Very Rev.
John Marsden,
Dean of Kildare.

Church of Ireland Clergymen who ministered in Clontuskert since 1551

O'KELLE, Donogh

1551. Chaplain, granted the Sacristy of Clontuskert and the Vicarage of Killalaghton which he had held by Papal Bulls 'now surrendered August 11th 1551. In 1577 the site of the Priory contained certain ruined buildings and a church which was the parish church of Clontuskert and Bealelage.

| *The Parish of Clontuskert - Glimpses into its Past*

WILKINSON, James

1636/7 Collated on the 21st March as Sacristan of Clontuskert or Perpetual Vicar of Abbeygormican, alias Fenore and Leitrim.

KERR, John

23rd April 1661 Collated Vicar of Clontuskert, also vicar of Creagh, Kilclum, Kilconnel and Kilgerill as well as Clontuskert, was a Prebendary of Tyholland and later an Archdeacon.

FRENCH, John

1663 Collated Vicar of Clontuskert.

BANKES, Richard

Noted as being Vicar of Clontuskert but was dead by 1730.

EYRE, Giles

1730 Noted as being Rector and Vicar in that year. He died in 1749.

GREENE, Marlborough

He died in March 1784.

HACKETT, Thomas

c. 1784 Rector and Vicar of Clontuskert and Donanaughta (Eyrecourt) and still Rector and Vicar in 1807.

BUTSON, James Strange

Son of Bishop Christopher Butson, baptized 1777. Appointed to Clontuskert 1813. Archdeacon of Clonfert and vicar of Clontuskert,

The Church of Ireland Parish |

died in Dublin 29 January 1845, buried at Clonfert. His son, Christopher Henry Butson also became Archdeacon of Clonfert.

LOWE, Josiah Beatson

Appointed Rector of Clontuskert 1845. Previously curate of Creagh from 1840. Son of Josiah Lowe, gentleman. Born in London. Entered Trinity College Dublin 4th November 1833 aged 18. Author of eight books published between 1847 and 1855. MA, BD and DD1860.

NASON, William Henry

Appointed Rector of Clontuskert 1847. Born in Cork 8th March 1815 Fourth son of John Nason, gentleman. Ordained deacon 1838 and priest 1839. Curate of Ardrahan (Cloyne) 1843-4 and Rector of Clontuskert 1847-55.

DROUGHT, Adolphus Theodore

Appointed Rector of Clontuskert 1855. Son of Thomas Drought gentleman of The Heath, Kinnitty. Entered TCD 5 November 1821 aged 15. BA in 1827, MA 1832 and ordained deacon 1831.

GRIFFITH, William Daunt

Appointed Rector of Clontuskert 1872. Born in Cork, son of Edward Griffith and entered TCD 20th October 1828 aged 22.

| *The Parish of Clontuskert - Glimpses into its Past*

Graduated BA in 1835 and ordained deacon 1838 and priest 1839.
At Clontuskert until 1878 when he resigned.

CARR, Edward

Appointed Rector of Clontuskert 1878. Son of Andrew Carr an actuary and educated by Mr Flynn. Entered TCD 1st June 1847, aged 17. Graduated BA in 1853 and MA 1874. Ordained deacon 1853 and priest 1854 at Lichfield.

OLIVER, Hugh Alexander

Appointed to Clontuskert 1896. At RUI (Belfast) BA 1882. Ordained deacon 1883 and priest 1884 at Co. Down. Curate of St Andrew Belfast, 1883-4 and Bangor, Co. Down 1884-9. Incumbent of Aughrim 1889-96 and Incumbent of Clontuskert and Kiltormer from 1896 until 1911, when he transferred to Creagh.

GRIFFIN, James Jackson

Appointed Rector of Clontuskert 1911. TCD BA 1896 and Divinity Test 1897. Ordained deacon 1898 and priest 1899 at Kilmore. Rector of Clontuskert with Kiltormer until 1919 then Ennis Co Clare.

ABRAHALL, Thomas Haines

Appointed Rector of Clontuskert 1919. TCD BA 1880 and MA 1886. Ordained deacon 1881 and priest 1882 for diocese of Down.

NOTE: Since 1920 the Rector of Aughrim has also been appointed as Rector of Clontuskert.

SHANNON, Richard

Appointed Rector of Clontuskert and Kiltormer in 1920 in addition to Aughrim, where he had been Rector since 1897. TCD BA and Divinity Test 1887, BD 1902. Ordained deacon 1887 and priest 1888 for the diocese of Ossary. Curate of Stradbally, Queen's Co. 1887-95, Curate of Thurles (Dovea), Co. Tipperary 1895-96 and incumbent of Lismalin, Thurles 1896-7. Later Archdeacon of Clonfert. Retired in 1933 and died 1934.

JAMESON, Francis Bernard

Born in Yorkshire. Appointed Rector of Aughrim, Clontuskert and Kiltormer in 1934. Ordained deacon 1914 and priest 1915 at Wakefield, Yorkshire. He retired in 1960 and died October 25th that year. His widow died at Killiney 22nd May 1977.

McCULLAGH, Herbert Alexander

Appointed Rector of Aughrim, Clontuskert and Kiltormer in 1939. TCD BA and Divinity Test 1932. Ordained deacon 1933 at Malmesbury for Bristol and priest in 1934 at Bristol. Rector of Aughrim etc. until 1942 and then Rector of Creagh 1942-45.

CLARKE, Leslie Reginald Minchin

Son of Robert Minchin Clarke of Glasnevin. TCD BA and Divinity Test 1940. Ordained deacon 1940 and priest 1941. Curate of Kilnamanagh (diocese of Ferns) 1940-43. Was Rector of Aughrim until 1946.

| *The Parish of Clontuskert - Glimpses into its Past*

STRONGE, John Stafford Cecil

Appointed Rector of Aughrim etc. in 1946, later Incumbent of Corbally (diocese of Killaloe).

CHAMP, Cyril Bruce

Appointed Rector of Aughrim with Clontuskert and Kiltormer 1953. Son of Albert and Jessie Champ of Tullamore. TCD BA 1942. Awarded Bishop King's Prize. Ordained deacon 1944 and priest 1945 at Dublin. Curate of St George, Dublin 1944-47 and Rector of Baltinglass and Ballynure Union 1947-53. He also became Rector of the Kilconnel Union on 2nd December 1956. Dean Champ was instituted to the new Union of Loughrea with Aughrim on 31st December 1972. He was the Rector of Shinrone Union from 1975.

TALBOT, Edgar White

Appointed Rector of Aughrim and Clontuskert in 1972. TCD BA 1943, MA 1964. Ordained deacon 1944 and priest 1945 for the diocese of Ossary.

HOWARTH, John

Rev. John L. Haworth served in Clontuskert until 1984. He was ordained in Kilmore Cathedral, Cavan in 1965

SULLIVAN, Trevor

Canon of Clonfert 1989 (Rtd). Church Army 1959-69. Curate Shankill, Lurgan, Co. Armagh 1970-72 . Curate Tralee, Co Kerry 1972-74. Industrial Chaplain 1974-79. Incumbent of Dartry, Co Monaghan 1979-84. Incumbent of Aughrim 1984-2007.