

BODYKE IN HISTORY

by John S. Kelly M.A.

With minor exceptions the records relating to the history of Irish parishes prior to 1800 are extremely sparse. What exists in tradition and in brief written references is very incomplete and sometimes contradictory.

The present parish of Bodyke is an amalgamation of the medieval parish of Kilnoe and the southern section of the medieval parish of Tuamgraney. Much uncertainty surrounds the date and circumstances of the amalgamation. Contemporary scholarly evaluation puts it at the early 18th century but the prevailing evidence is not thoroughly conclusive. There is a strong local tradition that Kilgory was sectioned off from Kilnoe and given to O'Callaghan's Mills parish during the episcopate of Bishop O'Shaughnessy (1808-1829), a man much given to a policy of parish boundary realignment! There is a suggestion that the Bishop and Parish Priest, Fr. Dan O'Brien, were in dispute over matters political, especially in relation to the respective merits of the Act of Union! However, no further evidence can be offered on that matter except to add that the Act was very much a contentious issue among many clergy at the time.

No early record of the village of Bodyke exists and even the original Irish form of the name appears to be lost. Westropp suggests that the name was Both-Teig (Teig's Hut). The suggestion is that the contemporary Irish form, Luban Dige has really no authority behind it, and is merely a fairly modern translation of the English form of the name.

In the 16th and 17th centuries prominent Gaelic families in the area, in and around Bodyke, were Macnamara, Mollooney (Moloney), Clancy and O'Halloran. For example in 1641, a Daniel Macnamara owned 1853 acres there. Most of these families lost their lands in the Cromwellian Plantation of the 1650's and were replaced by new owners ie. O'Callaghan, O'Byren (O'Brien?), Bourk (Bourke). However, dispossession did not necessarily mean displacement and it is clearly evident that the descendants of the earlier occupiers managed to survive in the area during the ensuing centuries.

PENAL DAYS

During the 18th century, the century of the Penal Laws, the people of Bodyke seem to have practised their religion with only minor disruption. In general, the laws against Religious practice were not applied either universally or uniformly after 1716. Tradition in this regard is strong in the area and the historical evidence also supports the view that there was unbroken religious practise throughout the century.

There was a cottage chapel (teach an Aifrinn) is Lisbarren on the hill overlooking Coolready lake. In the early 18th century, a Fr. Daniel McNamara is listed as a registered priest and as late as 1941, his name lived in the folk memory of the local people. His hiding place lay beyond the hill on the edge of Lisbareen Bog. The lowlands between church and hiding place were liable to floods (Clonagore) and were covered with rushes and water plants. The path from Church to hiding place is called (1941) "Casan an t-Sagairt". (Bodyke Parish notes in Killaloe Diocesan archives).

Tradition also has it that a mass house existed in Kilnoe. In the 1740's there was a growing fear that the Stuart's, aided by their French Catholic allies were about to make an attempt to recover the English Crown. Fearful of Irish Catholic support for the Stuart cause, Parliament cracked down heavily on the practice of religion here and many Mass houses throughout the country were closed. In 1740 John Westropp of Fortanne and Lismeehan closed the Mass house at Kilnoe. However, it is possible that the Kilnoe and Lisbareen Mass houses are one and the same.

Interestingly, the Mass house in Tuamgraney was also closed in 1744 by John Brady of Tomgraney Castle. He was descended from a branch of the O'Grady family who adopted the Reformed Religion in the 16th century and changed their name to Brady. As a result, the Bradys managed with crown support to oust the rest of the O'Grady clan from Tuamgraney.

When John Brady closed the mass house, "the people immediately assembled, armed with pikes, and reopened the chapel, and defied him to close the chapel again. He did not interfere anymore" (Ref: Parish notes).

A most interesting connection with the period of the Penal Days may lie in the chalice frequently used in the parish. Fr. Dan O'Brien (d. 1825) mentioned earlier, lived on the West side of Clonmoher in what is Moloney's property today. Later in the century, the house was sold and when it was being repaired a couple of artifacts were found in the buildings, including this Chalice. It appears from the style of the inscription at the base of the Chalice that it may well belong to the 18th century. The inscription reads:-

"THE GIFT OF MATHEW MCNEMARA AND ANN O
CALLAGHAN TO YE CHAPPEL OF KILNOE
PARRISH PRAY FOR THEM AND THEIR FRENDS.
Amg".

The chalice is goblet shaped with a plain cup and slightly averted lip. It has a spherical central band on the stem which is chased with fine delicate decorations

of leaves. The base is heavily ornamented with motifs of wheat and vines done in repoussé, which is the technique of hammering the design into the metal. John Teehan, The National Museum's expert on 17th and 18th century Irish silver, suggests an 18th century dating for the chalice, but he is of the view that the heavy decoration on the base was added in the early 19th century, circa 1820. A close observation of the chalice indicates a very distinct difference in the delicacy of the ornamentation on the central part and that of the base. Tradition has it that Fr. Dan was paid for his services with sheaves of wheat and "bearts" of oats and that he possessed a quern stone for grinding his own corn. Consequently, he was in a position to provide his own hosts and communion wafers for his flock. According to John Hamilton R.I.P., the second artifact found in the old house was the mechanism for making wafers. This too may well have Penal Day associations but regrettably its present whereabouts are unknown.

Even though the chalice is of silver, it does not contain any silver mark, a fact that may readily be explained by reference to the history of the 18th century. Since 1637 all silver made in Ireland had by law to be sent to the assay office in Dublin Castle in order to receive the stamp of authenticity. During the Penal Days, however, silversmiths were understandably unlikely to send chalices or other religious objects to the assay office because of fear of reprisals at the hands of the authorities. Consequently, very few chalices from the 18th century contain silver markings. The Kilnoe chalice most probably belongs to that category. As for the two donors - we have their names but no other information relating to them.

19th CENTURY CHAPELS

Prior to the construction of the present church an older chapel with the traditional thatched roof existed in the village. It was located on the village side of the present grounds opposite Malone's. The Ennis Chronicle (5th July 1828), carried an account of an interesting incident which took place there and relating to the O'Connell election campaign of 1828. "Some of the zealous advocates of Civil and Religious liberty tore the pew of Mr. George Sampson of Clonmoher, out of the chapel of Bowdike, in the parish of Kilnoe and burned it outside the door, avowedly because he presumed to think for himself and vote for Mr. Vesey Fitzgerald (O'Connell's opponent)". Clearly the Chronicle was no lover of O'Connell!

In February 1903, the present Stations of the Cross were installed by the Parish Priest.

Sometime around 1912, to celebrate his appointment as a Canon, Fr. McNamara erected at his own expense the beautifully carved oak altar and font. On his death in 1923, he left 300 for the renovation of both churches and as a result the Church of Bodyke was extensively renovated.

In 1940, during the ministry of Fr. Dinan (1930-1949), the last major renovation took place. The roof was replaced aided by money donated by Mary Burke, a native of the parish who had emigrated to the U.S.A.

Bodyke has had an illustrious past, a history that is a most significant part of our inheritance and most of it

still remains to be written.

The 1820's and 30's witnessed a remarkable awakening of interest in education. In 1824, The Kildare Place Society opened a school. In 1844, Fr. Patrick Treacy the then Parish Priest (1830-1848) decided to build a new church and he gave over the old building to be used as a school house. The old Church was divided by a screen and the girls were taught in one section and the boys in the other. It continued to be used as a school until the new school was built in 1881.

At this time, Bodyke was also obviously deeply interested in the politics of the day if one is to judge by the numbers who attended a Repeal Meeting in 1841. The Limerick Reporter of the 21st May of that year wrote that one hundred thousand people were present at the meeting held on Kilnoe Hill the previous week. Even allowing for a gross exaggeration of numbers it still must have been an awesome sight. It appears that most of the speakers were priests including the Parish Priest, Fr. Pat Treacy, a native of Moynoe. Concern for repeal however, was shortly to be replaced by the spectre of the Great Famine and the same Fr. Pat was evidently closely involved in helping to alleviate hardship among his parishioners. The workhouse was located within the confines of his own parish as was the inmates' cemetery - the "Cath Siar Iad" in Coolawn. The institution had been built in 1842-43 and was designed to cater for 500 inmates approx. By 1848, its numbers had swelled to over 4,000 and many others were being catered for in outside relief centres. It is difficult to gauge the precise impact of the Famine on Fr. Pat's parishioners but a glance at the population change in the Parish between 1841 and 1851 shows a very remarkable decline in a number of townlands. Fr. Pat himself fell foul of the dreaded fever and died in 1848. The sad and neglected state of the workhouse cemetery is a stark reminder of how easy it is to forget the sufferings of many of our own people who have gone before us!

The Bodyke Parish Notes provide the main information regarding the building of the new chapel in 1844.

The foundation stone was laid in August 1844 by Donatt G. Sampson of St. Catherine's, son of the George referred to earlier. In addition, the family apparently donated a respectable sum towards the building costs.

The stones used in the building were quarried in Coolready and the sand got from Coolreagh. The materials were horse drawn to the site by the parishioners and workmen were paid at the rate of sixpence a day - the going rate at the time. The Parish notes suggest that the walls were built for 28!! By taking the daily labour rate of sixpence and comparing it to the current rate today, some sense of comparative costs can be gleaned. The church had a mud floor which was retained until the 20th century. In addition, a timber belfry was built on the gable adjacent to Gleeson's house.

In the pre-mass communication days of the 19th century, church bells had functions other than calling the faithful to prayer. During the period of land agitation in Bodyke in the 1880's, this bell was often rung in order to gather the people from the surrounding countryside and to warn them of impending trouble.



in the vicinity of the belfry and the constant ringing of the bells disturbed them to the degree that they became very agitated and proceeded to attack all and sundry. This did nothing to cool the tempers of either the landlord's party or the tenants and in the ensuing fracas, John Moloney of Caherhurley was fatally injured. Were it not for the timely intervention of Fr. Murphy the situation might well have got seriously out of hand.

That particular bell remained in use until it was replaced in 1904 by Fr. John McNamara (1893-1923) and a new concrete belfry constructed on its present site.

Reference to Fr. Murphy will bring to memory the outstanding leadership which he and his curate Fr. Hannon gave to the tenants during the 1880's. Their astuteness, sensitivity and negotiating skills earned them the respect of all sides during those eventful days.

Fr. Murphy was succeeded by Fr. John McNamara (1893-1923) and there are people in the parish today who can recall aspects of his ministry. The importance of the "mission" in the spiritual lives of the people is underlined by the Wooden Mission Cross erected in the Church grounds to celebrate the mission of 1895 given by the Vincentians from All Hallows. Fr. McNamara himself had the reputation of being an excellent preacher and certainly his sermons left nothing to brevity as his Sunday Mass was reputed to last from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.! It was common for people from Scariff to come to hear him preach.

He apparently had a particular affinity for St. Patrick and on one occasion while giving full vent to the "vita" of the Saint, a young man standing at the rear of the church decided that having "said his bades" it was time to go and examine his rabbit snares. On his way out he met a tardy parishioner sneaking in. "Am I late, John?" "You are in plenty of time, Pat. He has him only on Slemish yet". We are assured that John had every intention of returning before the offertory!!

This was especially so during the main eviction period of the Summer of 1887. However, the bell had also a very definite association with the Summer of 1881. In May of that year, Colonel O Callaghan obtained writs in Ennis Court against twenty six of his Bodyke tenants and the landlord attempted to serve these writs on 1st June. The Parish Priest at the time was the tenant leader, Fr. Peter Murphy who was later responsible for building the new church in Tuamgraney.

As the landlord and his accompanying party of one hundred and fifty police approached the village, the Church bell was rung as a signal to the people of the area to assemble. It is estimated that by the time the landlord reached the village, over four thousand locals had already gathered. It appears that bees were lodging