

ANTIQUITIES

Abbeys, Castles, Fortresses, Round Towers, Early Churches, Sculptured Crosses, Stone Circles, Ogham Stones, Cairns, Souterrains, Pillar Stones, Cromlechs, Forts, Rath, Moats, Tumuli or ancient monuments of any kind. Exact location of each with short description, noting condition, etc. Relate local legend or tradition associated with building or object. State if in charge of Office of Public Works. Right of way to public? Admission charge (if any). Name and address of caretaker, or where key is kept.

Ruins of Mayo Abbey: Situated in village beside the present Catholic Church.

Right-of-way. Not in charge of Office of Public Works.

There is little of the once famous abbey now standing. There is a west gable to which is attached a fair amount of the north curtain and a small portion of the south. The curtain are almost 3' thick. The south wall shows a projection beyond the west gable - what the original plan of the whole building was cannot be determined.

West gable is 6½' thick. Is perhaps 40' high and has a steep pitch. The doorway, situated nearer to north curtain, is ^{point} headed - plain chamfered and rough picked: is 5' high (at present) and 43" wide. Inner doorway level vaulted.

Through the gable the stairway runs from ground level at south gable end: it averages 25" in width - (for the most part, the 6½' thickness of the gable is really a double wall) - access to the foot of staircase is through inside gable doorway at S.W. angle. The doorway is rectangular, of dressed sandstone, 42½" high, 25½" wide.

The stairway has 21 steps; risers of 8½", treads 8" deep. Top stair is a little over the level of the north curtain top at present - much damage here. At a level a foot or so higher there is a small compartment through the upper gable and which is perhaps 8' long and 3' wide. From this apartment a small square two-light chamfered window looks into the church.

The north wall is approx. 32' long (as it stands) and 20' high. Externally it has adhering to it a remnant of what appears to have been a vaulted chamber.

About 20' of the south curtain remains - averaging about 10' in height. Near the S.W. angle is a pointed cut-stone recess of which because of stones and debris only the head can be seen. Towards the east is another point head which may have been a doorway but which is cluttered up also.

Internal width of church is approx 20'.

HISTORY The history of Mayo Abbey is of much importance. From here the county took its name. It was a famed religious and teaching centre. It is known from early times as "Mayo of the Saxons" and was once the episcopal seat of a diocese that stretched from Kilivine to Achill.

St. Columba was banished from Ireland in 565. He founded Iona and evangelised much of Scotland. In 635 King Oswald of Northumbria asked for missionaries from Iona to instruct his people. St. Aidan left Iona and founded his famous see at

(Plain sheets of foolscap paper to be used, if necessary, for recording additional information).

Windisore. His successor was St. Finian who was followed by St. Colman.

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King of Northumbria in St. Columba's time was Oswy who had been educated at Iona under the Celtic mission regime. His queen and heirs received their schooling under the English Augustinian mission in Kent. The missions had different times for Easter and this much confusion and indignation occurred when Oswy kept the feast of Easter Sunday while the queen and prince observed the day as Palm Sunday.

To settle the contention a conference was held at Whitby in 664. To the sacred cause St. Wilfrid, afterwards Archbishop of York; he pleaded successfully the English custom as to Easter time and Oswy was won to his side. St. Columba refused to accept the change and left Lindisfarne for Iona where he spent two years in prayer.

Columba had under his guidance at Lindisfarne the four sons of Prince Cuspirius and Queen Benetia Gerald, Balan, Benicent and Hubertan. These youths refused, through loyalty to their master, to accept the Easter change and when Columba departed to Iona, they headed a large pilgrimage to Ireland. They landed either at Westport or at the mouth of the river Moy near Mallin.

St. Gerald became the chosen leader of the mission and founded Clithera which he built for his sister St. Segretia and beside it a monastery. St. Segretia and her hundred nuns perished in the "yellow plague" of 664. also fifty of the monks in the monastery.

[There is some difference of opinion as to the site of Clithera - please see Antiquities Roslea, page 6

St. Gerald was elected first canonical Abbot of the oldest Monastery of Roslea in or about 668.

St. Columba, having completed his two years of solitude in Iona, set sail for Ireland, bringing with him thirty Saxon monks and others of Celtic origin. They landed on Bopin Island, six miles from the Loughinane coast. Here he erected a church in Knocktownland, in 665.

The Saxon monks were agriculturalists - the Irish built the monastery and then left for the mainland, to return again at winter time. Contention arose over the sharing of the produce which the Saxons had raised. St. Columba decided to separate the two elements. He brought his Saxons inland and sought a site for his monastery. Tradition says this was revealed to him

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in a dream at "magh-na-trio" - the plain of the great trees - Mayo.

The local chief gave the saint a grant of land and work began. The place grew famous as "Mayo of the Sassen". In time a town grew up around the monastery which was dedicated to St. Michael. Its college became a renowned teaching centre. The foundation by Columba was in the year 668.

Columba appointed a Saxon superior at Mayo and retired to Roslin where he died on August 3rd 674.

Here an good grounds for assuming that St. Gerald, Columba's former pupil, was already in Roslea when his master arrived to found Mayo. Soon after Columba's arrival to Roslin Gerald was elected Abbot of Mayo. Under his abbacy the community increased; the monastery buildings were added to. The local chief gave more lands, until there were some 2500 acres attached to the Abbey.

St. Gerald died at Mayo on the 13th March, 732. He lies buried in rampart graveyard. The exact site is not known.

Lewis says - "The Abbey was destroyed by lightning in 778, burned by the Danes in 818 and in 908, and plundered in 1204 by William de Burgo; at the dissolution its possessions were granted to the Bishops of Galway."

"Annals of Ulster" ~~also~~ mention that Turgesius the Dane (831-845) destroyed by fire "in contempt of God and of His saints the temple of the church of Mayo which was roofed with lead."

In 908 the Abbey and town were burned, and again in 1169 [but not by Danes as Lewis says]. In 1236 Mac William Bourke raided the Abbey.

"Four Masters" - 768 A.D. "Aedhan, Bishop of Meath Co. died."

"Annals of Ulster" - 1210 A.D. "Cele O'Duffy, Bishop of Meath Co. died."

No further records of Mayo until 1380 when Parliament passed a law prohibiting Irishmen to be professed monks. The decree was not obeyed.

According to Knese (^{page 385} "Notes on Diocese of Meath") - "after the suppression of the bishopric of Mayo the Abbey church was, in the fourteenth century, a secular collegiate church with five or six canons. Archbishop John O'Grady converted them into a monastery of regular canons. On the 8th November, 1411, the Pope confirmed his orders. The ruins which we see in the Mayo graveyard may, therefore be ascribed to the 14th or early 15th century."

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There is a list of Bishops of Mayo Abbey up to 1585 when the last was Adam McGaven. The diocese later was incorporated into that of Tuam under an archbishopric. Of these bishops the most renowned is Patrick O'Kelly of Lennought who was consecrated Bishop of Mayo in 1578 at Rome by order of Gregory XIII.

Bishop O'Kelly was a man of great learning and piety. In the company of a Fr. Lencius O'Rourke of the Buffon priory, the Bishop made his way to Ireland and landed at Dingle, Co. Kerry.

The sheriff of the county sent them to the Earl of Desmond. He was absent and the Countess, though a Catholic and a friend to the Franciscans - being afraid, sent the Bishop and his comrade to Goulden, agent for Queen Elizabeth. Goulden had them thrown into prison and later they were brought ~~prisoners~~ to Kilmallock where Drury, the Queen's magistrate held court over them.

Both prisoners confessed to their faith - and were tortured and executed - Aug. 22nd, 1578. The Bishop before his execution invoked God's justice on Drury who died of a violent disease three days later.

The Earl of Desmond, attempting to atone for his wife's act, caused the bodies to be buried in the Franciscan church of Clonmel. (O'Kelly's case is sub judice by Rome).

In 1569 Queen Elizabeth granted Mayo and its ~~rectory~~ lands to "Edmund Fitz Alexander, gent." Some eleven years afterwards the Abbey and lands were again bestowed - this time to the "burgesses and commonalty of the town of Galway and their successors in fee socage at the annual rent of £26.12.0."

In 1610 Dominic Brown of Galway was granted much of the Mayo Abbey lands and he or his descendants set up at Brownhall - his townland's former name having been Kilticella. - The last of the Brown family there resided until early years of the present century.

St. Adamnan, the great biographer of Iona visited Mayo Abbey at least three times. He spent the year 703 at Mayo and St. Gerald gave him a cell near a holy well. There is a Killowayn at Mayo which ~~perhaps~~ takes its

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name from Adamnan. [There is also a holy well which is called "St. Adam's" well - a name which may or may not derive from Adamnan since at Manulla in the parish adjoining Kesh is a holy well visited by St. Patrick and locally called "Adam's" well - whatever connection, if any, Kesh has.]

Tradition says that fifty saints rest at Mayo awaiting the trumpet blast of the abbey's patron, St. Michael. [Lewis says that "according to tradition Alfred the Great was educated and one of his sons buried here" - the tradition is very doubtful although one of Alfred's sons may be buried here. Lewis also gives St. Gerald and St. Adamnan as succeeding St. Colman as abbots of Mayo. St. Colman was the founder - St. Gerald the first Canonical Abbot. Adamnan was not an abbot at any time.]

The Mayo diocese held jurisdiction over the following parishes some of which are now joined together into the modern parish areas e.g. the parish (present) of Balla and Manulla also includes Drum. — Mayo, Achill, Aghagower, Aghaval, Aghish and Breaghy, Balla and Manulla, Drum, Ballintubber, Ballyheane, Ballyorey, Bussisboole, Carnoon, Crosswayne, Islandeady, Kilvine, Kilmann, Kildaranague (i.e. Keelogue), Kilmenna, Kilgeener, Kilmaclessa, Roslea, Kesh, Turlough, Yeachen.

INFORMATION: chiefly from "Mayo of the Sevens", a booklet published some 20 years ago (Vallet Press) and written by Rev. T. Brett C.C. of Kilmaine. Notes from Rev. Fr. Higgins P.P., Mayo Abbey; Mrs. P.E. Mullen N.T., Balla; African Fathers of Ballinacorney College; Rev. Fr. Mangaw C.C., Belconn. — A précis only of the booklet is given.

[] personal note which in full instance is also given in Fr. Brett's booklet. Abbey with details personal work.

"Elithenia": In Roslea in the townland of Rathmacreevagh is the site of a church concerning whose history tradition is strong locally. Land of Henry Huskins. No right of way but a rough path leads to the field. All that is to be seen is a well-built vault underground, and "stepped-up" externally - with an inscription that tells of its erection. It is possible to enter the vault which is about 10' x 10' x 7' and now contains nothing but some bones and two skulls. The outside inscription reads: "This monument was erected by Richard Golding as a last sad tribute to the memory of his mother Alicia Golding alias Bourke who when living joined to good sense orthodox love of God. She departed this life on the 4th day of June anno Domini 1817 aged 57 years." CO. 570. Part 7

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Sacred to the memory of Margaret Golding alias Oanelan who departed this life on the 19th day of May Anno Domini 1825 at the early age of 27 years. This monument was erected as a last sad tribute of affection by her beloved husband Richard Golding.

The Golding's were apparently landed gentry of the district or near it. They are said to have removed the coffins to a new resting place when leaving the area. Accounts are contradictory but Ros is one which says that the people because of the long-lived tradition of the "yellow plague" (664) refused to allow any removal and most of the coffins had to be removed by stealth.

Ros is not even a wall enclosing this vault and church site around which was a burial ground.

This is the spot where it is claimed Clithera existed - where St. Gerald built a nunnery for his sister St. Segetia. Not far distant is the site of a church (marked on Ordnance as "Roslea Chapel") where St. Gerald's monastic foundation may have been. Townland of Ballynamuddagh. Land of James Hughes. No right-of-way. The "yellow Plague" swept away St. Segetia, one hundred of her nuns, and fifty of the monks.

Mr. Butt's booklet advances the following arguments in favour of this location for Clithera.

'Roslea' means "Pilgrims' Plain". Rosobronig = Roslea. otherwise = Clithera. There is the similarity.

also St. Gerald was dwelling with the Abbots in Roslea in 668 and was elected first Canonical Abbot in that title.

There are of course the joining sites themselves and the strong Plague tradition.

Castle ruins at Breige. Land of James Kelly. No right-of-way. Of these ruins Ros is nothing to be seen except the piled up remains of the walls. The castle stood on an eminence. Of its history not a lot is known. It was originally the stronghold of the Prendergast family who were horsemen and who became "more Irish than the Irish themselves". The family was partial to the name 'maoris' or 'mauris' and it from this clan that the barony gets its name. The Prendergast's were dispersed - by tradition they were ousted by a family called Moore, in Cligaleth's time. Roslea fair was originally held at Breige.

Castle remnants in Knockanabill. Edw. Conover's. No right-of-way.
Said to have been another Pendergast castle - nothing now
remains but a small featureless portion of one wall.

Castle Luras In T. Jordan's. No right-of-way. This castle which
apparently gave its name to the townland in which it stands,
has nothing of history except that it is said by some to have been
a de Burgo erection. Very little remains of it now. It would
appear to have been a not very imposing building. Portions
of the walls which were 4' thick, remain at two points. By matter
internally it was but 20' by 15'. The castle is situated in a fort
of rock diameter 40 yds.; the rock level being 6' above outer ground.
There is a 15' wide fosse and a vallum in parts 8' high.

Megalithic structure in Ardarahey. James Keane's.
No right-of-way. (Not on 6" Ordnance sheets)
* Credit for discovery of this antiquity belongs to Dr. Murphy
of Balla who aroused some local interest in it over a year
ago.

The antiquity appears to be a large cairn which has had
many of its cairn stones removed. There is one chamber
which has three sides standing - a second has its walls
fallen flat and it would appear as if more chambers exist
under the remaining cairn stones. Interesting feature of the
structure is that the outer edge of the cairn, except to the south
side, is marked by boulders on edge - laid in roughly
circular fashion - enclosing whatever exists below.

The cairn is somewhat obscured by scrub. It is perhaps 30 yds.
long and 20 wide.

Post-recent Church ruins along roadside near Mayo Abbey village
have and 8' sq. (internal) tower to west gable. Roof & windows and
doors gone. nave (internal) is 38' x 20'. North wall has remains of
point lead apex. South wall has three. All limestone. East gable
has narrow rectangular doorway, a broken recess and a circular
light. Vestry off this gable also in ruined state. Tower is high &
has some ventilation.

A comparatively modern structure fallen into ruin.

Parish: Mayo Abbey, Co Mayo
(Extract from list. by DA Faughnan
filed with his letter of 12/19/45)
1206)

"Brize (or Brees) Cas., headgrs. of
Blann Morris. Red Hugh
O'Donnell, after the inauguration
of the Mac William at
Ransakeera near Kilmaine in
1595, spent a few days as
guest in this cas.