

A
GUIDE
TO
ST. JAMES' CHURCH
and Surrounding Churchyard
CASTLEDERMOT

By The Rector

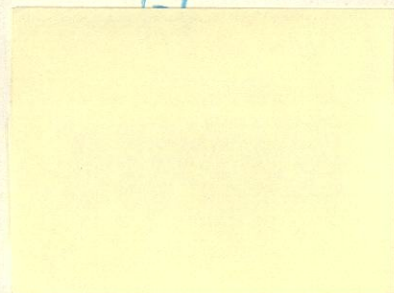
THE REV. R. H. H. WARBURTON

1968

Price 6d.

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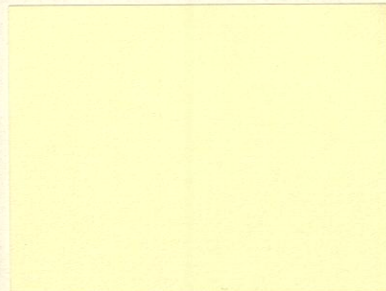


PREFACE

This little book tries to give to the many visitors to Castledermot of the present day some information of the ancient things to be seen around this modern Church of St. James.

My sincere wish is that it may be of some help.

R. H. H. W.



WHEN you enter the Church Gate you have entered on the site of a very ancient Celtic Monastery.

I will endeavour to tell you briefly a little about the history of this site and what can be seen here.

It was on this ground St. Dermot built a cell and lived as a Christian hermit about the year 500 A.D. He was a holy man and other men were attracted to Christ by his teaching and his way of living. Here eventually a monastery of the ancient Irish Church was built.

The archway which you see as you approach the Church is the remains of a 12th century Church dedicated to St. Dermot.

Note the dog tooth carving on the Romanesque arch and also a copy of the same on the present Church.

Beside the archway on the right hand side you will see the base of an old Celtic Cross. The cross itself is missing and is probably lying buried somewhere in the grounds.

Going through the arch and at the present Church steps follow the path on your right and before reaching the South Cross you will see a large cigar shaped carved stone which came to light during clearing and tidying operations in 1967. It had been almost completely buried beneath the grass sod, but now has been raised and supported on blocks of stone.

Experts are very interested in our find. A similar stone is not known in Ireland, but there are 33 similar stones in Scotland.

No date has been given yet as to the age of our find but it could go back to the time of St. Dermot.

The experts have not said that, but they are still trying to find out more about it.

Next we come to what is known as the South Cross. It was erected at the same time as the tower when Caprius was Abbot of the Celtic Monastery. Caprius was appointed Abbot in the year 810.

There were usually four crosses erected north, south, east and west, to mark the boundary of a monastery and inside the boundary anyone fleeing from vengeance found sanctuary.

The North and South crosses are the only two now standing. It could be presumed that the base of a cross (previously mentioned) could be that of the West Cross.

They were also teaching Crosses. There was an ancient prayer in the Celtic Church which was a prayer for the love and protection of Almighty God.

“O Jesus as Thou didst save Noah at the time
of the flood,

Save and protect us also.

O Lord Jesus as Thou didst save Daniel in the
den of lion,

Save and protect us also.”

SOUTH CROSS

These Crosses show the love and protection of God.

Looking at the carvings on the Cross we see on the centre panel of the cross the crucifixion. Note the arms of Our Lord, not extended as we would picture the crucifixion but with arms in such a way as if Our Lord was saying to all mankind “Come unto Me.”

There is an angel on either shoulder and on Our Lord's left hand side the sponge bearer and on his

right side the Roman centurian who pierced his side with a sword.

On the left arm of the cross we see King David with his harp and on the right arm we see Abraham offering up Isaac as a sacrifice and the ram caught in the thicket.

On the very top panel we see Moses with his arms upheld by Aaron and Hur. This was the time the Israelites were fighting the Amalakites. When Moses held his arms up Israel were getting the better of the battle and when Moses' arms dropped from tiredness the Amalakites were doing better, so Aaron and Hur supported Moses' arms. There are three figures under this panel which the author does not know.

Under the Crucifixion you can see a broken panel. This is said to have originally represented the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Below this you see the non-canonical story of St. Anthony and St. Paul of Thebes in the desert. Both dwelt in the Egyptian desert and St. Anthony thought he was the most pious hermit of his time and was sent by the Spirit to visit St. Paul who he found was fed each day by a raven who brought bread to him. The day St. Anthony arrived with St. Paul the raven is said to have brought a double portion of bread.

Below St. Anthony and St. Paul you see the fall of man. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden with the tree of knowledge and the serpent climbing the tree.

Next below we see the Deadly Sin of Avarice or Extortion—the figure of a man surrounded by demons. A man who has given himself to evil. Then below we see Daniel in the den of lions.

The base of the cross depicts Noah and one of his sons driving the animals into the ark.

On the right hand side of the cross we can see the twelve apostles with the miracle of the five loaves and two fish depicted on the base. On the north side of this cross starting at the top panel we see Jacob wrestling with the angel. This is repeated again on the base of this side.

The second panel on this side represents King Herod who ordered the slaughter of every male child of two years old and under at the time when Jesus was born.

Below Herod we see a Roman soldier and one of the innocent children.

Next we see another Roman soldier and one of the children.

Then is shown Rachel, "Rachel weeping for her children for they are not."

The east side of this cross bears patterns of ornament in relief.

SWEARING STONE

Go down the small path from this cross and you will see an old swearing stone, where people used to swear truth to each other by shaking hands through the hole.

NORTH CROSS

Now going to the North Cross starting on the east side we see in the centre panel the Crucifixion with the positions of the sponge bearer and sword piercer reversed from that shown on the South Cross.

These two crosses are rather similar and we see repeated much of what we saw on the South Cross.



Round the Crucified figure of Our Lord we see the twelve apostles.

Then below a repetition of St. Paul and St. Anthony in the desert. The lower panel shows two figures unknown.

On the west side the Fall of Man is in the central panel, with what maybe the crucifixion of St. Peter on the very top panel. King David with his harp is on the left of the cross and the sacrifice of Isaac on the right.

Down the shaft are — Daniel in the den of lions; the miser surrounded by demons; and three men unknown.

On the base at the south side we can see the miracle of five loaves and two fish as it were in action. Note the five tiny loaves before the miracle as well as five which are shown getting larger and larger as the miracle is being worked.

On the north side of this cross we see at the base the figure of a man crouched and bound as the heathens used to bury their dead.

It gives the teaching of the Cross as Lord of the living and the dead.

On the way back to the Church note the flat stone between the tombs surrounded by railings. King Cormac MacCullenan of Munster and Archbishop of Cashel who was a former student in the Celtic Monastery here is said to be buried. He died in battle when fighting against the forces of the King of Leinster and the High King of Ireland at a place called Ballaghmoone about half way to Carlow from this spot in the year 903 A.D. Cormac was the builder of Cormac's Chapel at Cashel.

After you enter the Church the door on the north side of the Church leads to the tower. The floors and ladders of the tower are rotten with the corroding hand of time and it is not safe to climb the tower.

Note the ceiling in the passage way from Church to tower. You see the sign of the old way in which the Celtic monks used to build with mud and wattle. The marks of the wattle are still plain to be seen.

The wall on the south side of the Church is part of the wall of the old 12th century church. The present Church was built between 1650 and 1683 and it was renovated and repaired in 1967.

When the Normans came to Ireland they changed the dedication of the old 12th century church from St. Dermot to that of St. James. The present church was dedicated to St. James.

Note the Celtic carvings on Communion rails.

Before leaving this ancient place please put your name and address in the visitors' book on the table at the west end of the Church.

