

St. Coman's Abbey – Some Brief Historic Notes.

A.D. 778. The Law of St. Coman was preached this year by Aidobhar, Abbot of Roscommon, and by the Muirgheas, and was received throughout the three divisions of Connaught.

A.D. 802. At an early date, Roscommon became to the Danes an object of plunder. Having in this year burned down the monastic buildings and the houses of Island of Innishmurry, County Sligo, they crossed the country until they arrived at St. Coman's Abbey which they attacked.

A.D. 807. The Danes again plundered and sacked Abbey.

A.D. 1028. Gillachrist, spn of Dubhchuillin, a noble priest of Armagh, died while on a visit at Roscommon.

A.D. 1050. While on one hand Clonmacnoise was plundered this year no less than three times in the course of three months (once by Maddens of Southeast Galway and twice by Foxes of Teffia in Westmeath). The church of St. Coman, on the other hand, suffered from the men of Breffni. The Four Masters state that in this year the church of St. Keelan, at Tarmon, Castlerea, and round tower belfry of the church of Roscommon, were burned by the Breffni men.

A.D. 1123. A piece of the Holy Cross was presented to this abbey by King Turlough Mor O'Connor. In the "Annals of Innisfallen" it is stated that a portion of the True Cross came from Ireland and was enshrined at Roscommon by Turlough O'Connor. It is elsewhere stated that the Pope Callixtus II, at the close of the first General Council of Lateran, held in 1123, sent by two of the Irish Bishops a portion of the True Cross to Turlough, King of Connaught. By the King's order a reliquary was made at the Abbey of Roscommon to enshrine this precious Papal gift. It is conjectured that the Shrine was in Penal times taken for safety to the Abbey of the Canons Regular at Cong. It was found at the beginning of the 19th century in an old oaken chest in Cong by Father Prendergast, the last abbot. Professor McCullagh secured it for Dublin Museum in 1839. It is said to be the most beautiful specimen of Celtic Art in existence.

A.D. 1133. Gilla nanaemh O'Birn. "the good, Royal Judge of Ireland" was interred here.

A.D. 1134. The Abbey was plundered and partly destroyed by the people of Munster. Two years after the death of Tipraid, his namesake Gilla na naemh O'Breen, Brengah of Roscommon and Mulpeter O'Carman Master of Roscommon died.

A.D. 1135. This year all the midland and northern parts of the county, as far as Curlew Mountains and Corran, were ravaged by fire and sword by the men of Longford and South Leitrim. On this occasion Roscommon did not escape, its houses and churches been burnt by the same party being plundered of all their valuables. It was at that time Gilla Colman O'Coughaly, professor, scribe and commentator of this Abbey was slain.

A.D. 1143. In this year a Synod of the clergy of Connaught presided over by Muireadhach O'Duffy, was held at Rathbrennan, for the purpose of bringing about peace between Turlough Mor O'Connor and his son Roderick. On this occasion they did not succeed in the object they had in view; but, fortunately a reconcilliation between father and son took place a short time afterwards.

A.D. 1156. Turlough Mor O'Connor died this year and was buried beside the alter of St. Ciaran at Clonmacnoise. During his life he was a liberal benefactor of St. Coman's Abbey, Roscommon, and largely augmented its possessions. He caused the Sacred Host to be carried in procession with great solemnity, attended by many of the clergy and religious men throughout the kingdom, and then to be disposed in a tabernacle of immense value prepared for it in this church.

Two years after the death of Turlough, a Synod of all the clergy of Connaught was held in this Abbey when many good and explementary decrees were made.

A.D. 1170. In this year Abbot Dermot O'Braoin, a man of extraordinary erudition died at Quaker's Island, Lough Ree, in the 95th year of his age. In the same year his successor Gilla Iarlaithe O'Carman removed from the earth the relics of St. Coman and had them enclosed in a shire richly ornamented with gold and silver.

A.D. 1177. Murrough, son of Roderick O'Connor, brought Milo de Cogan and his knights with him to Roscommon. This he did in order to ravage Connaught and annoy his father. On this occasion the churches of Elphin, Emla Brotha, Emla Fordaragh, Fert-Geige and many of the churches of West Connaught were burned down, and the battle of Tempitogher between Ballymoe and Williamstown and the battle of Athleague were fought.

A.D. 1185. We again find the English at Roscommon Abbey, being brought thither by O'Connor Moinmoy, son of Roderick, who gave them on this occasion 3000 cows as their wages.

A.D. 1204. William Fitz Adelm de Burgo, called "the conqueror of Connaught" destroyed many of the churches of Connaught, amongst them being the church and abbey of Roscommon. He died the same year and was buried at Athassal, Co. Tipperary.

A.D. 1236. Cathal Crovderg O'Connor, fleeing from the English at Ballyforan, was pursued by Maurice Fitzgerald, the Lord Justice of Ireland, through Roscommon, as far as Sligo.

A.D. 1247. Roscommon and Ardcarne were burned by the English

A.D. 1260. In this year we find McWilliam Burke undering the country until he reached Roscommon. He dared not however, pass that place because Felim O'Connor and his son Hugh had an army drawn up at the foot of Slieve Bawn. As a consequence. Peace was declared between the Irish and English, and McWilliam returned home.

A.D. 1262. The English arrived at Roscommon and plundered the whole country including the triangle between Elphin, Tuam and Athlone.

A.D. 1271. Robert de Ufford wrote to the Bishop of Bath and Wells that having lately, while Justiciary of Ireland, given, by consent of the King's Councillors in that country, to the Prior and convent of St. Coman, Roscommon, by charter under the seal of Ireland (which charter he sends for inspection) certain demesne land of King Edward I in exchange for certain lands belonging to the Prior and Convent of St. Coman, he prays the Bishop to "cause the King's charter under the Great Seal, according to the tenor of the charter aforesaid, to be granted to the Prior and Convent". This was done. The lands so exchanged were, as we are told in the "Hibernia Dominicana" Rathbrennan and Lisrenenery. The deed to be dated 28th November, 1282. A further grant was made to the same community of "A weekly free market on Saturdays in their 'Irish vill,' between their house and that of the Dominicans in the same vill." That market used to be held where Henry Street now stands. Furthermore "a grant" was made to the Prior and Convent, and the successors, that they may forever water all their animals in the lake under the King's Castle at Roscommon.

A.D. 1360. Roscommon destroyed by fire.

A regular succession of Abbots of St. Coman's continued until the twentieth year of the reign of Elizabeth I., its possessions, consisting of thirty quarters of land and various rectories were granted, at an annual rent to Sir Nicholas Malby. This man took care to come in for a large share of confiscated church property at that period, having got, also, the property belonging to the Dominican Abbey there, together with the tithes and appurtenances belonging thereto. A second inquisition was held under James I., with reference to the old Abbey of St. Coman when other property, together with the tithes of eighteen parishes, were seized upon and held from the King in pure and common soccage.