

**Cape Clear Island, by James M. Burke, B.L.**

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MAP OF CAPE CLEAR ISLAND.

(Photo of Ordnance Map by Mr. M. P. Garvey.)



DUNANORE CASTLE.

(Photo by Rev. T. J. O'Sullivan.)

## Cape Clear Island.

By JAMES M. BURKE, B.L.



CAPE CLEAR, the largest and most famous of "Carbery's hundred isles," lies about six miles to the south of the well-known fishing village of Baltimore. It is not, however, visible from Baltimore, as Sherkin Island stretches between them, whose forlorn-looking Abbey, built by Finéen O'Driscoll in 1460, and the squat castle of Dunna-long (i.e., the Fort of the Ships), another O'Driscoll structure, standing near each other, close by the seashore, can be easily discerned away to the south-east from the cliffs at Baltimore.

But whilst Inisherkin lies for the most part rather low and flat, with shallow shores, and terminates with a long peninsula running out to the south-west, Cape Clear, when viewed from the latter, appears to tower up like a mountain side; and on its southern portion more especially, ends in lofty precipitous cliffs that descend sheer, like walls, to the sea, particularly in the vicinity of Dunanore Castle.

The Island of Cape Clear is about three miles long and nearly two miles wide. It is divided into 17 townlands, and is about 1,400 acres in extent, and contains but two harbours, known as the North and South Harbours, the former being the principal one, and that nearest the mainland.

Cape Clear, or Inis Cleire, which Ussher Latinizes "Insula Clericorum," means the Island of the Clergy. Dr. Smith and Archdall identified it with Inisdamhly; but the latter is the place now called Little Island on the river Suir. (See "Notes and Queries" in *Journal* for Jan.-Mar., 1905.)

It long formed a portion of Cothluighe More, or Collymore, the patrimony of the O'Driscolls; and is thus referred to by O'Heerin in his Topographical Poem:

"O h-Eidirsceoil, chief king of the land  
Of Corca Laidghe, I speak;  
He assumed possession of the harbour of Cleire,  
The tranquil pillar of the kings."

But "the great glory of Cape Clear," as Sir Jas. Ware wrote, "is Saint Ciaran, who is said to have been born there." Several Irish saints bore the name of Ciaran; but two of them stand forth in special prominence, viz., Ciaran of Saighir and Ciaran of Clonmacnoise. There are several extant lives of the former, such as the "Life of Ciaran of Saigher," by Michael O'Clery, preserved in the Burgundian Library, Brussels; "Life of Ciaran of Saigher, in Hodges and Smith's Collection of Irish MSS. in the R.I.A.; Life of St. Ciaran in the "Codex Kilkennensis" in Marsh's Library; Vita S. Kierani, 4to MS. in T.C.D.; "Life of St. Ciaran," Bodleian Library, Oxford; and two Lives of St. Kieran in Colgan's "Acta Sanctorum." John Capgrave, under iii. Non Mart, notes the acts of St. Piran, Bishop and Confessor; the Bollandists

chronicle him under March 5th, and Bishop Challoner devotes pp. 154-155 of "*Brittania Sancta*" to him. Of the modern writers on St. Ciaran are Alban Butler, Rev. S. Baring Gould, John Hogan, Rev. J. F. Shearman, and Canon John O'Hanlon. One of the ancient lives is to be found in O'Grady's "*Silva Gadelica*," which has also been published (1895: M. H. Gill & Son), with translations and notes by the late Rev. D. Mulcahy, under the title of "*St Kiaran the Elder of Seir*."

The name of Ciaran's father, some say, was Lughaidh; others that it was Brandubh. Ussher in one place states that he was born in Ossory, but in a later work he declares that he was born "in regione Corcu-laigde, videlicet, in Clera insula." Hammer avers that he was born in Ossory, and that his mother was Wingella; but it cannot be seriously doubted that he was born in Cape Clear, and that his mother was a native of Corca Laidhe.

The Scholiast of Aengus says "Ciaran was the son of Brandubh, son of Breasal, son of Bran, &c. . . . Liedania, the daughter of Maine Cerr of the Corca Laidhe, was his mother." The "Genealogy of Corca Laidhe" records "Maine, son of Aengus, had two sons, Eanna and Cathra, and one daughter, Lighain, the mother of Ciaran. . . . Eanna was father of Connall Claen. It was this Connall that compiled the Book of Dues for Connall and Fachtna (of Ross), and presented it to them at Ard-na-b-partan (Crab Hill) in Inis-beag (i.e., Inisbeg in river Ilan)."

St. Ciaran is said to have founded a convent for his mother at Killyon (which Ussher writes Ceall-liadhain, barony of Fircall, King's Co.). In the parish of Kilmoe (Co. of Cork) there is a townland of Killeane which some also associate with Ciaran's mother.<sup>1</sup> A connection between Corca Laidhe and Ossory may be explained by the following passage from "Fragments of Irish Annals" (Ed. Dr. John O'Donovan): "Seven Kings of Corca Laidhe assumed the kingship of Ossory, and seven Kings of Ossory assumed the kingship of Corca Laidhe."

The old "Life of St. Kiaran" published by Father Mulcahy states that "it was in the Island of Cleire in Corca Laigde that he was born and bred." The date of Ciaran's birth raises a rather difficult question. The "Annals of Innisfallen," under the year 352, record that "St. Ciaran of Saigher and patron of Ossory was born in the Island of Clear, a promontory of Corca Laighe, in the County of Cork." Very eminent scholars, such as Usher and O'Flaherty, likewise assign his birth to the year 352. Hogan refers it to 375, while Drs. Todd and Lanigan and Father Shearman place it at a much later period. The "Genealogy of Corca Laidhe" says that "Liaghan, daughter of Maine, was the mother of Ciaran. He was born

<sup>1</sup> Father Mulcahy's "Life of St. Kiaran" relates that before this saint was conceived in his mother's womb she beheld a vision in which she saw as if a star had fallen down into her mouth, and she related this vision to the druids and knowing parties of that time. They said to her, "Thou shalt give birth to a marvellous son and great will be his character and virtues to the end of the world." And it was after that Ciaran the holy son was born. This ancient Life also furnishes the following pretty legend of St. Ciaran which well portrays his tenderness of heart and kindness to animals, "One day as he was in Cleire (it was there he did the beginning of his miracles whilst he only a young child), a bird of prey came hovering over his head in the air, and alighting before him seized a little bird that was lying in its nest in the presence of Ciaran and swooped it off and despoiled it. Ciaran, moved to pity for the little bird, felt sorely grieved. Immediately the priachan (bird of prey) returns and lays down before Ciaran the bird in a despoiled half-dead state. Then Ciaran said to it 'Arise, and be made whole;' the bird arose and went to its nest all right by the favour of God."

at Finntract, Cleire; and the angels of heaven attended upon her. The orders of heaven baptised him. Here was the residence of the chieftain who first believed in the Cross, for Ciaran had taken Saigher 30 years before St. Patrick arrived, as the poet says:

"Saigher the cold: raise a city on its brink.  
At the end of 30 pleasant years  
I will meet him then and there."

It was he (Ciaran) who predicted to the progeny of Eidirscel the chieftainship over their race for ever; and it was he left to the King of Corca Laidhe the eniclann of the king of a province for their having first believed in the Cross, and Ciaran is the eldest of saints of Eire, and it was he (Ciaran) that granted the privilege to them for having been the first to grant him Cill-Chiarain" ("Celtic Miscellany," 1849, pp. 20-24). The old life of Ciaran (Ed. Mulcahy) begins "The holy Bishop Ciaran was the first-born of Irish saints"; De Burgo, Bishop of Ossory, refers to him as "primus sanctorum in Hibernia natus"; and the Scholiast of Aengus styles him "primarius sanctorum Hiberniae."

The common story is that St. Ciaran was born in Cape Clear anno 352; that in 382 he went to Rome, where he spent twenty years; that he was consecrated a Bishop by Pope Celestine; that on his way back to Ireland he met St. Patrick (in the island of Lerins), and that St. Patrick told him to found a monastery at a well called Uaran (or Fuaran). He asked St. Patrick where the well was. St. Patrick gave him a bell which he said would ring when he had reached the well. St. Ciaran returned to Ireland. Having preached the Gospel for some time in his native district of Corca Laidhe, he proceeded to journey to the midland counties; when he reached the place now called Seirkieran (Barony of Ballybrit, King's Co.), the bell rang out, and there he founded his monastery.

The "Annals of Innisfallen" record, anno 402, that "Ciaran and Declan, two Bishops, came from Rome to preach the Gospel in Ireland. Ciaran, having preached in Inis-Cleire and all over Corca Laidhe, founded an episcopal see in Ossory." The Scholiast of Aengus says, "Ciaran was the son of Brandubh, an Ossorian, and of Liadhain of the Ithian sept of Corca Laidhe. He was born in Finntract. The inhabitants of Corca Laidhe were the first to believe in the Cross. Kieran inhabited Saigher 30 years before the arrival of St. Patrick."

Here we find several ancient and modern writers ascribing the labours of Ciaran to a period anterior to the arrival of St. Patrick. It is abundantly evident that there were Christians in Ireland before the time of the great national apostle. This is manifest from the unequivocal language of Prosper (repeated by Bede) in recording the mission of St. Palladius. "He was ordained by Pope Celestine and sent to the Scoti (i.e. Irish) believing in Christ, as their first bishop." From the "Tripartite Life of St. Patrick" we learn that the National Apostle found in the Barony of Tirerril, near Doogarry, "a cave in the mountain, and within it a wonderful stone altar, and in it were four chalices of silver." The Lives of the Irish Saints contain references to four pre-patrician bishops, viz., Ailbe of Emly, Declan of Ardmore, Ciaran of Saigher, and Ibar of Beg-Erin. Furthermore, there was an organised British Church as early as 316. At the Council of Arles, which was held that year, three British Bishops

attended. There were Irish settlements dating back to the 3rd century in the south-west of Britain, and Professor Zimmer asserts that it is impossible to believe that Ireland remained pagan till 432, especially when we remember the intercourse that then existed between the South of Ireland and South West of Britain. That intercourse was of a very close character. It was by British aid that the great hero of Corca Laidhe—Lughaid Mac Con—obtained the sovereignty of Ireland; and we have indisputable proof that long before the fifth century there were several Irish settlements in Britain (vide Cormac's Glossary, sub voce Mugh-Eime). With these facts before us, we need not have much difficulty in assigning Ciaran to a pre-patrician period.

It must be noted, however, that some Lives of the Saints assert that he was a disciple of St. Finnian of Clonard, who flourished 520, while others make him a contemporary of his namesake, Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, who died about 550. To reconcile these dates with the pre-patrician view Ciaran must have lived to a patriarchal age, and some of his biographers do give him an inordinately long life, e.g., the "Martyrology of Donegal" records: "March 5th.—Ciaran of the race of Aengus Ossraighe. Lieun was his mother. He was 360 years when he died"!!!

Dr. Todd's views, as set forth in his "Life of St. Patrick" (pp. 199-203), are that the story of Ciaran having preceded St. Patrick was a forgery invented in the 11th or 12th century for the purpose of laying the foundation of a claim for the establishment of archiepiscopal jurisdiction in the South, though he admits that it cannot be denied that the traditions of the Irish Church speak of isolated congregations of Christians in Ireland before the arrival of St. Patrick. Dr. Lanigan's views practically coincide with Dr. Todd's; while Archbishop Healy is of opinion that Ciaran, Ailbe, and Declan had been consecrated abroad, and were engaged in preaching the Gospel when St. Patrick arrived; that his success eclipsed their labours; and that they recognised his superior ability, and became, as it were, his disciples.

The Island of Cape Clear is still rich in memorials of St. Ciaran. His feast day (March 5th) is observed as a strict holiday by the Islanders. Ciaran is still a not uncommon Christian name amongst them (other ancient baptismal names still preserved in Cape Clear are Mac Con, Heremon, Heber, &c.). His memory is also preserved in Tra-Kieran, Cill-Kieran, Tobar-Kieran, and Cloch or Gallawn-Kieran.

Tra-Kieran (Kieran's strand) is now the name of Finntract (white strand), where St. Ciaran was born. It forms part of North Harbour at the north-west end of the island. A chapel under his invocation is said to have been erected here. This was superseded by the old church of Kill-Kieran (or Temple-Kieran), of which the four walls still remain, surrounded by the only graveyard in the island. The walls of this old church, which probably dates from between the 12th and 13th century, measure about 46 feet long by 16 feet wide, but are only about 6 feet above the soil, owing to the latter having been raised by burials, &c.

In the eastern gable, which is still intact, is a small two-light lancet window whose mullion has disappeared. This gable wall curiously extends for four or five feet to the east of the building—buttress like, but whether it originally formed part of another structure or not the present writer is unable to decide. At the same side of the old church is the round



ST. KIERAN'S STONE,  
*(Photo by Rev. T. J. O'Sullivan.)*



KILKIERAN RUINED CHURCH,  
*(Photo by Rev. T. J. O'Sullivan.)*

arched entrance doorway, one of whose jambs is curiously stepped. There is no indication of a window having existed in the western wall. The only other noticeable feature in this building is that in the north and south walls are aumbry-like recesses, close up to where the altar stood. Thanks to the exertions of the Rev. T. J. O'Sullivan, the priest in charge of the Island,<sup>2</sup> a boundary wall has been erected around Kilkieran graveyard.

Another memento of St. Ciaran, close by the old church, is Tober Kiaraun, or St. Kieran's well, "a mere hollow in the strand of Trakieran, which is covered by the tide at high water, yet on its receding the water in the well is found perfectly fresh, being fed from a deep source from below."

But the oldest and most notable relic of St. Kieran is the Gallaun Kiaraun, or Pillar-stone, standing also on Trakieran strand, which is believed to have been the work of St. Kieran's own hands, and to have been fixed in this spot in order to perpetuate his name. This ancient stone is of greyish colour and uniform texture, somewhat cylindrical in shape, but broader at its base than at its summit. It stands about 4 feet high in front, averages about two feet across, and is firmly embedded in the hillside bordering on the strand, a little to the east of Tober-Kiaraun and Teampul Kiaraun. This stone is still held in great veneration by the Islanders, who assemble round it in great numbers on the 4th of March, the eve of St. Kieran's Day.

On its front and back the stone bears a plain incised cross about 18 inches long; and on its top part, which is slightly convex, there is another plain but smaller cross in relief. It thus forms one of the oldest Christian relics that we possess.<sup>3</sup>

To the south-east of Trakieran are the remains of O'Driscoll's Castle of Dunanore, i.e., the Golden Fort, which is fully described in Dr. Smith's "Cork." Its south and east walls are still perfect; but the little causeway that led to it in Smith's time has since disappeared, and the bold promontory upon which it stands becomes a complete island when high tides prevail. Its central arch and the steps leading to its upper portion remain; but the huge pieces of its eastern wall now lying about show how severely it has suffered from the havoc of war. This wholesale destruction occurred when Dunanore Castle, together with the Island, was captured on the 22nd of March, 1601, by Captain Roger Harvey, following on the defeat of the Spaniards at Kinsale. By means of the artillery he planted on the high ground adjoining it, he battered down the eastern wall and compelled the garrison to surrender, for which and other services (as Dr. Donovan writes in his "Sketches of Carbery") he was granted at the time a commission by Lord Deputy Mountjoy as Governor of Carbery.

Dr. Donovan further relates that when a garrison of soldiers was stationed at Cape Clear in the reign of Queen Anne, one of them made great but vain efforts to discover the gold supposed to be secreted here, whence the place got its name of Dunanore. Close to the castle walls

<sup>2</sup> One of Father O'Sullivan's predecessors, a Father O'Mahony, was author of some Gaelic poems, which are still recited by the natives of Cape Clear.

<sup>3</sup> In the genealogies of the Hy-Fiachrach reference is made to a similar cross sculptured on a pillar stone by St. Patrick at Ballina Tirawley; and Marcus Keane ("Round Towers of Ireland") observes that St. Kieran's pillar stone is of the same shape as the stone of Bel-Pear at Tara.

was formerly fixed in the solid rock a large iron ringbolt, to which the O'Driscolls used to moor their galleys riding in the little creek adjacent to it. The Islanders, he adds, believe the castle to be haunted by a phantom ship's crew, who have been heard singing and carousing at night, but disappear like magic at daybreak.

But though there are neither coastguards nor police in Cape Clear Island, the inhabitants have now but little chance of indulging in the brandy drinking alluded to by Dr. Smith. As in his time, the priest of the Island is as much their temporal as their spiritual ruler. There is a little whitewashed chapel here, as humble in its appearance as that described in Smith's "Cork." But though there are now national schools here, the Irish language is still spoken to a great extent by the inhabitants. The latter, as when Dr. Donovan wrote of them over thirty years ago, in complexion and features bear a strong resemblance to the people of North Spain, whence their progenitors originally migrated to Carbery, with which part of Europe they maintained a close communication down to the 17th century.

Fishing has always been the great source of employment on Cape Clear Island. Long before the Battle of Kinsale (1602), the Spaniards frequented the vicinity of Baltimore and the Cape in great numbers, and occasionally resided on the Island. A portion of the mainland near Baltimore got on that account, and still retains, the name of Spain; and the island west of Inisherkin is called Spanish Island. During the 18th century the Kinsale fishermen were also in the habit of building huts on the island during the fishing season, where they cured the fish they caught off its shores. A good deal of fish is still cured here and packed in barrels for the foreign markets. A prevalent surname on the Island for centuries is O'Driscoll. Lewis's "Topographical Dictionary" records that till about the year 1710 the Cape Islanders had a resident king chosen by and from amongst themselves, and an ancient code of laws handed down by tradition, which it was his duty to administer; and though the king had neither funds for the maintenance of his dignity, nor officers to enforce his authority, the people generally submitted voluntarily to these laws, and were always ready to carry his judgments into execution. The greater number of the laws are become obsolete; but some still (1837) remain, and are enforced with vigour."

The last of these titular kings was an O'Driscoll whose grave is still pointed out at Kilkieran, as is also that of another famous O'Driscoll, who lived in the 18th century, whose name was Conchobhar, or Crohoor O'Carevaun, in English Conor, son of Hermon (O'Driscoll). He is said to have been eight feet high, stout in proportion, and of incredible strength. "As strong as Crohoor O'Carevaun," is a prevalent saying in West Cork. Dr. Donovan states that a short time before his death he retired, hermit like, to Dunanore Castle, where he died. There is no inscription over his grave, or that of his kinsman, the last Island King in Teampul Kiaraun.

In 1862 Cape Clear suffered severely through a failure in the potato crop, a bad harvest, and a scarcity of fish; but owing to the exertions of the then Parish Priest, the late Rev. Henry Leader, funds were raised for the relief of the distressed Islanders, and several families were helped to emigrate to Canada and the United States. A benefactress of that



time was the late Baroness Burdett Coutts, who more recently still substantially aided the late Rev. Charles Davis, P.P., in providing the Cape Islanders with suitable fishing boats.

The eastern part of Cape Clear Island, near the South Harbour, was for a time the terminal station of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable; and during the American war (between North and South) was, as Dr. Donovan wrote, a place of considerable importance, the first spot in the Old World whence the news from America was telegraphed for the information of millions. When the transatlantic steamers from New York approached the Island rival crews of hardy natives launched their boats and set out to meet them, the first boat's crew to reach the steampacket being rewarded with a sovereign. The despatches were thrown overboard in a buoyant waterproof case, quickly picked up, and conveyed on shore, whence all important telegrams were, without further delay, wired to London.

A short distance westward, on the summit of Foil Cahill, the highest cliff on the Island, 480 feet above the sea, was formerly a lighthouse with revolving lights visible in clear weather at a distance of 28 nautical miles. But as in foggy weather the light was found to become obscured by cloud and mist, the lighthouse proved to be comparatively useless. It was therefore condemned, and a new lighthouse erected on Fastnet Rock (Carrigeena, or Carrig aonar, the lone rock), five miles to the south of Cape Clear. It was from the vicinity of the Fastnet that about forty years ago the famous Captain Paul Boyton swam ashore from one of the American mail steamers; and after a seven hours' swim, landed safely at Trafaska Bay, in the neighbourhood of Baltimore.

Close to where the old lighthouse stands a Signal Tower of fortress-like appearance was erected immediately after the arrival of the French at Bantry Bay in 1798. Owing to its exposed situation, it was found a matter of great danger to occupy it.

About the time that this Tower was erected the long upright stones, known as Fir Breige (in English, False Men), were set up on a prominent position at the south-west end of the Island, close to the high cliffs overhanging the sea. They were intended to scare away any hostile force, and it is said were each provided with a scarlet uniform, so that when observed from the sea they might be mistaken for a company of soldiers on the alert.

In the south-west end of the Island are some fresh-water lakes, one of which, called Lough Erral, or Reen (from righin, stiff or adhesive), is nearly a mile in circumference, whose water, owing to the quantity of subcarbonate of soda which it contains, possesses cleansing properties to a remarkable degree.

Amongst the place-names on Cape Clear Island are Ballyieragh (Baile iarthach, i.e., western land, in which the stones called Fir breige, or False Men, are situated. In Coomillaun (Cum Oileain, i.e., hollow of the island) is an old disused burial place, called Kil-vroon, and near it a well named Tobar Kilvroon. Near here is a gallaun, or pillar-stone, with a hole through it, where lovers, it is said, used to plight their troth by joining hands through the aperture, whence the stone is called Cloch na Geallamhna, i.e., the stone of promise.

In the South Harbour is a little cove called Ineer-beg (Inbhir-beag, i.e., small haven). Other places in the same townland are Blananarra-

gawn (Blatha na n oragun, i.e., blossom of the wild marjoram, or, more probably, Creek of the Bream); Coosnaganoge, i.e., Puffin's cove; Car-rigacuskeam, i.e., rock of the footstep; Foilnateuda, i.e., rock of the rope; Foilder moty Cronacane, i.e., the cliff of Dermot Cronacane O'Driscoll, Cronacane being a sort of nickname of the O'Driscolls.

In the townland of Glen there is the pillar-stone called Gallaun-nam-bawnoge, i.e., the stone of the small barns. Here also is Illaunfaha, i.e., island exercise-green.

In Lisamona is Gortalassa, the field of the lios, which marks the site of the Lis which gave its name to the townland.

By Knockanenamaurnagh, or Limpet Hill, is Tradoon Cleara, i.e., the strand of the fort of the Cape Clear. Other townlands are Carhoona, quarter lands; Cummer, a ravine, valley, or meeting place; Ardgort, i.e., high field; Croha, round, ricklike hills; while at the eastern end of the Island is the strand called File Coagh, i.e., the Cliff of the Cuckoo, the point most adjacent to the mainland. Among other place-names are Illauncana, i.e., Bird Island; Cooslahan, i.e., Broad Cove; Pointabullig, Point of the Eminence; Ardatruha, Hill of the Stream; Pouladirk, Hole of the Cave; and Foil nee Cahill, the Cliff of Cahill's Daughter. The channel which separates Cape Clear Island from Inisherkin is called Gasconane Sound, an appropriate name (meaning petulant or saucy), as this Sound is usually stormy or agitated, and often dangerous for small vessels to cross. Another derivation of Gasconane, besides that of Dr. D. Donovan, just given, is from Gaiseach, abounding in currents, or Gasach, branching, or impetuous. There was an old custom that whoever crossed it for the first time should make a couplet in rhyme.

The post boat, which leaves Baltimore in the afternoon each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, forms a safe and inexpensive means of reaching Cape Clear Island; but the limited hotel accommodation precludes a prolonged stay on this otherwise very primitive, interesting and attractive Co. Cork island.

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