



# **MONEA CASTLE and DERRYGONNELLY CHURCH**

English Translation

## **MONEA CASTLE**

## **and DERRYGONNELLY CHURCH**

County Fermanagh

### **The Plantation in Fermanagh**

Throughout the late 16th Century Queen Elizabeth's attempt to rule Ireland was challenged by the leaders of the Gaelic aristocracy. Nowhere were her generals more fiercely opposed than by the O'Neills, O'Donnells and Maguires in West Ulster. King James's advisers used the Flight of the Earls in 1607 as an excuse to confiscate land, and grant it to those who would undertake to settle and support the royal claim. The undertakers, mainly English and Lowland Scots, finding themselves among a hostile native population, built defensive dwellings. These reflect the varied origins of their builders, from the troubled Scottish borders where castles were still in use, to the more peaceful parts of southern England where the spread of renaissance ideas was already creating new classical fashions. The plantation castles and houses of Ulster are a unique blend of these different contributions. Now they are almost all ruinous, but their remains are among the principal attractions for the visitor to western Ulster. County Fermanagh has important examples, of which several are Historic Monuments in State Care.

### **Monea Castle**

The largest and best preserved of the plantation castles is at Monea. The castle was built by 1618 for Malcolm Hamilton. It stands on a rocky bluff overlooking swampy ground by which it is surrounded on all sides except the north where there is a narrow elevated approach. The presence of an artificial island, or crannog, in the lake to the south shows that the area had been favoured as a place of retreat in earlier times. The combination of a strong castle with a walled enclosure, called a bawn, is typical of plantation settlements, though occasionally either the bawn was omitted, or it provided the principal defence for a less substantial house within. Captain Nicholas Pynnar, sent by the Government to watch the progress of the plantation reported in 1619 that at Monea Malcolm Hamilton had built 'a strong castle of lime and stone'; he added that there was as yet no bawn, and that there ought to be one. Eventually the instruction was followed, for the bawn was being constructed in 1622.

The bawn wall is the first defence which the attacker would have had to penetrate. Originally it was probably about 14 feet high all round, and though much of it has disappeared, the west side, still surviving to about 12 feet in places, gives the visitor an idea of what an obstacle it would have been. Nor would such an assault have been accomplished without harassment; the parapet wall would have been pierced with musket loops for the use of defenders on the raised walk behind. In addition there could have been flanking fire along the walls from the circular towers at the corners. Monea has two flankers, while the castle itself acts as a third and commands the fourth corner.

The flankers would often have been roofed and performed less warlike functions as well. The one on the N.W. corner at Monea, beside the remains of the gateway, has honeycombed holes in its inside walls, suggesting that it was used for some kind of storage, or more probably as a dovecote, or 'dooocot' as its Scots builders would have called it. The present shape of the N.E. flanker is unusual having a flat outer face which can not be justified on defensive grounds. Flankers are not always circular in plan: square, rectangular, polygonal, and even elliptical examples have been found; the curious shape at Monea may, however, be explained by some undetected rebuilding. The reconstruction shows both flankers with circular plans.

At the S.W. angle a full flanker was not considered necessary in view of the commanding position of the castle. Instead there is a solid square block of masonry which may have been the base for a small tower, or alternatively it may have acted as a corner support for the parapet walkway.

Once in control of the bawn the attacker could turn his attention to the castle itself. Three storeys high with tall attics and walls tapering up from a slight batter, it is built of hard carboniferous limestone with sandstone dressings. Even in its ruinous state its strength is apparent; so too is its Scottish ancestry. There is a remnant of the baronial silhouette which gives late mediaeval Scottish castle their characteristic appearance. It results from the use of crow-step gables, and small turrets oversailing the upper angles of the walls on corbelled courses of carved stone. The one at the S.E. angle at Monea is largely intact, and though its counterpart on the N.E. corner has fallen, parts of it can still be seen incorporated in the bawn wall below; it is shown intact in the reconstruction. There is corbelling, too, on Monea's celebrated entrance front where two circular towers rise to diagonally placed, square upper stages, the transition being formed by corbelling. Strikingly similar towers, although placed on opposite corners of the main castle, appear at Claypotts Castle, near Dundee.

The entrance to the castle, which retains fragments of classical moulding, is in the S. side of the N. Tower; approach to it was covered from musket loops in the S. Tower, and from more loops in an arch which spans the gap between the towers at second-storey level. A spiral, or turnpike, staircase in the N. tower gave access to the upper floors, and from its steps musket loops covered the N. wall. The vaulted ground-floor, lit only by splayed musket loops, had three chambers reached by a passage along the N. wall. The first chamber gave access to three levels in the S. tower; the lowest, vaulted and with one slit window, might have served as a lock-up; from the upper levels musket fire could defend the S. wall, the S. bawn wall, and the front door. Beyond the middle storage chamber was the kitchen, with a wide fireplace on the E., and a drain with external sprouting in the S.E. corner. A spiral stair in the N. wall led to the Ball above, where there were large windows with seats in the embrasures, and fireplaces on the E. and N. walls. On the second floor were bedchambers, and latrines with a chute which appears low on the outside of the E. wall. The remodelled N. wall once had half-dormer windows lighting attic rooms, as shown in the reconstruction.

Captured by the Maguires in 1641, the castle was promptly retaken by the planters. In 1688 it was held by Gustavus Hamilton, Governor of Enniskillen. Stone foundations in the S.W. part of the bawn may date from this time. Abandoned after a fire in about 1750, the castle was taken into State Care in 1954.

### **Derrygonnelly Old Church**

About three miles west of Monea, just north of Derrygonnelly are the ruins of a small rectangular church built in 1627 by the planter Sir John Dunbar. The simplicity of the building is typical of the period but its peculiar interest is in the combination of late mediaeval and renaissance classical features.

The small E. window is late gothic of three lights with double-curved or 'ogee' heads. The W. ga-

ble of the church has a typically Scottish belfry, and, beneath a dated, carved stone coat-of-arms of the Dunbar family, is a doorway with a semi-circular arch and a simple classical roll moulding; each stone of the doorway has a prominently cut stud with five facets. Such features derive from renaissance Italy and their appearance in northern Europe (e.g. at Cricton Castle, Midlothian in the 1580s) marks the spread of a fashion for classical architecture, which in Ireland eventually blossoms into the Georgian tradition. Perhaps there is no more simple, nor more explicit, demonstration of the changing fashion which the planters brought to Ulster than Derrygonnelly Church.

### **Further Reading**

Jope, E. M., 'Scottish Style Castles in the North of Ireland' in *Ulster J. Archaeol.* 14 (1951) 32-47.  
Waterman, D. M., 'Derrygonnelly Church, Co. Fermanagh' in *Ulster J. Archaeol.* 34 (1971) 110-112.

### **Access**

Monea Castle (grid ref. H165494) is 1 mile E. of Monea Church of Ireland Church which stands to the E. of the Enniskillen to Derrygonnelly road, 6 miles N.W. of Enniskillen. Derrygonnelly Old Church (grid ref. H120524) lies 1/4 mile N. of the town to the W. of the road to Lower Lough Erne.

Other Plantation Castles in State Care in Fermanagh: Tully Castle near the shore of Lower Lough Erne, 4 miles N. of Derrygonnelly; Castle Archdale 4 miles W. of Irvinestown; Castle Balfour at Lisnaskea; and parts of Enniskillen Castle.