

CHAPTER III

King Duibhrea – Daughter - Abbess - Monastic House – Kilkeary Parish – Upper Ormond – Clan O’Keary from Mael – MacGíoha Cheire – Annals of the Four Masters – Book of MacEgans – The Irish Annals – Gildas – Lord of Carbury – The slaying of ‘H Ciardha ri Cairpri.

Saint Ciardha 620–679AD, an Abbess, founded in north Munster – in the area now known as Kilkeary, a monastic ‘house’ for thirteen postulants - a nunnery, in about 645AD. This settlement, in Upper Ormond, appears to have been the only one established during the early Christian era in that area - later defined as ‘in the diocese of the bishop of Killaloe’. The church was elaborately decorated, especially around the altar; the walls painted to depict the apostles and the single roof span covered with split stone slates. For the period, this represented a building of influence and authority, a dwelling that catered for a number of nuns, visiting pilgrims and the needy, particularly women. The land close to the church was adopted as a burial ground for the local clan.

The O’Ciardha clan was one of the family groups who made up the Múscraige Tribe who populated central and south/west Ireland – east of the River Shannon. The aristocratic family Uí Raibne reputedly owned Kilkeary [Cell Cére]. St Ciar who was also of the family founded the church. Cousins held the churches of Dromineer, Toomevara, and Kilaughnane. These religious houses were all situated close to the rich pastures that line the east shore of the river. Other aristocratic branches of the family held smaller foundations whilst some of the family settled at the great monastery of Birr. The Uí Daigre, yet another branch, held the church of Latteragh and claimed that Odrán, its founder, was one of them. Uí Léinéne was a family of Uí Daigre, and as late as 1074, the annals record the death of Gilla Brénnainn Ua Léknine, Superior of Letracha Odráin.

Ireland was provided with territorial bishops, each generally given a diocese close to a royal residence. As more nunneries and monasteries established, their incumbents became bishops, abbesses – and some, great abbots. Most kings sought bishops for their own kingdoms, which gave them added power and influence. Sometimes their requests given other times they were allocated a monk under a bishop. The bishop, who was a monk, remained under an abbot, who was esteemed. As with the king so with the church – there was a difference between the north and southern parts of Ireland. The southern church favoured conformity with Rome the nunneries and monasteries governed by many different groups – some as independent establishments. Unity was urgently needed which took the form of a metropolitan episcopate. The first candidate was put up in 650 in the southern see of Kildare, in northern Leinster. Ultimately, both north and south united under Armagh whose bishop became Ireland’s senior bishopric. It had been founded by Patrick and remained the most important of all his monasteries.

The Irish word for Abbot is comarba – meaning heir. Therefore, his is the heir of the founder. In many instances, the heir was also of the same dynastic family – the same kindred - the link between the founder and the patron... Ciarán, first born of the saints of Ireland.

St Ciardha was a native of this district, her father Duibhrea, was a minor king - descended from ‘the line of Connors’, Kings of Ireland. To her father’s name was sometimes added ‘insula’, an island – this refers to an island now called King’s Island, surrounded by a branch of the Shannon called Abbey River. Loch Derg’s southern side is in the Province of Ormond - where St Ciardha was born. Her great sanctity and many miracles attracted many holy women to share her monastic life. The Abbess – Lady Superior, had administrative power over her mother church and followed the example of her first teacher Columba who was not a bishop but a monk and priest. It is to her that the clan name was drawn - from an abbreviated form of Mael MacGíoha Cheire, one of the devotees - ‘followers’, of Saint Ciardha.

The close connection between the church and the secular head was reflected in the early writing. The church did not suppress Gaelic but retained part of it within Latin. The monastic libraries kept these works and preserved them. Not only was this liberal attitude reflected in the churches writings but in the Christian services. Clerics used Irish in their studies and teaching consulting a written grammar of the Irish tongue. Whether they knew what the outcome would be is not clear but it made secular and clerical writing universal greater than English. The monasteries and nunneries housed the teachers of Latin. Their ringed stonewalls, built on a rampart mound, gave security and isolation from the unsettled land. These cashels were every bit as defensive as the lords castle a place where the whole community could shelter. This was no haphazard arrangement but a place declaring wealth and power. The books were supplied from the continent for there was not just normal trade between the nearest reaches of France and Spain but religious sustenance as well. All religious houses had a scribe who attended to the matters of the day. In other times copied out books of learning so that they could be passed on. A Psalter, known as the Cathach attributed to St Colum Cille, was written at about the time St Ciardha was performing her good works. The Irish missionaries travelled on the continent baptising Germans and Austrians building up the faithful as they went. They went on pilgrimages ‘seeking salvation and solitude’ evangelising pagan people preparing a way for later monks to build on.

Kings of central/southwest Ireland

Muiredach 325-355

I

Eoganacht of Munster

I

Eochaid 356-365

I

Crimthann 365-378

I

Niall Noigiallaig 379-405

I

Loegaire 428-463

From a pagan land to Christian, the age of small kingdoms

I

King Duibhrea 590

I

Kings of Cashel

I

Uí Néill dynasty of southern Ireland

I

‘H O’Ciardha ri Ciarpri, king of Carbury 1168

I

Mac Lochlainn of Cenel Eogain

Treaty of Windsor 1175, south & southeast granted to Philip de Braose

It was not always the case that an Abbot was a bishop governed a diocese or administered a tribe’s territory... there was no such organization these things interchangeable. This company of women who formed the foundation of St O’Ciardha’s community in Upper Ormond was named after her, ‘Cill Cheire’ [Church of Keary]. It was here that she ruled with considerable skill,

increasing the postulants - giving the foundation credence and sanctity. This was no trifling matter. To be officially recognised and canonized means she was accepted by Rome and worthy - of veneration. This allowed St Ciardha to expect obedience particularly in matters of the church and women. Being a daughter of the king added power and prestige. This link between king and church made it easier to assume and hold onto power. This close association between the ruling body, either local or national, and the priesthood is a feature of early religious foundation. It was in both their not only interests to have this close connection keeping power centralized but also greatly assisted religious foundation.

When the nunnery at Kilkeary was well established and capable of self-regulation she left, accompanied by five nuns, to start a new foundation in North Offaly, King's County, where she obtained a site for another nunnery from St. Fintan in Munster. It was in a place now known as Tehelly, in the parish of Durrow, formed in about the year 655AD. This was close to Clonmacnoise and St Ciaran Church. Following the tidal river north, from the mouth of the river Shannon, you come to a loch called Derg - where the river enters the loch was built the settlement of Killaloe. The great river continues through the Lough northwards, to Clonmacnoise, a wealthy, sixth-century fort-like monastery, built of stone, before Lough Ree... Then onwards... to Carrick on Shannon.

It did not matter where St Ciardha travelled her title to property and obedience went with her. She and the bishop, who was son of the king of Munster, jointly ruled the church. An early law tract refers to the bishop of Cork and Emly as uasal-epscop, giving them a status equal to the king of Munster - who was overlord of the southern half of Ireland.

Later, St Ciardha [Canonized Pre-Congregation] returned to Kilkeary where she was reputed to have died of natural causes. Nothing is known of the subsequent history - of the nunnery or her burial place, but her death is recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters, January 5th 679. The following stanza is from Leahhar Breac, the Book of the MacEgans:

‘The call of Semeoin, the sage,
To Christ of purist...;
A new, transitory, gentle sun was
Ciar, the daughter of Duibhrea.’

It was in the middle, and latter part, of the first millennium that proper written records were kept. ‘The Irish Annals’, Book of Kells and ‘The lives of the Saints’ are three sources of early recorded history - written by scribes in Latin - the result of intended missionary zeal by Christian bishops and their scribes.

Gildas developed Latin literature in a style and order fit for publication. His paragraphs, sentences and words were impressions build upon the spoken word – placed together by sound and syllable. The language was from Europe but based upon English. As Ireland was the first large country to become Christian - outside the Roman Empire, scholars had to write the Irish language, in Latin characters. They were compelled to write with an alphabet. Ogam notches became outdated in the seventh century - still not deciphered. Latin preserved the first written records. This is when the K began to be used. Thereafter Latin began to be changed - English, Welsh and Irish adapted and added to – developed into a modern literature.

Ciardha is the Gaelic spelling of the family name - used by scribes in about 650AD. Later writers increasingly used Cary or Carey, as a more identifiable written form. The written Irish-language was mainly derived from Latin and assumed closer integration to the accepted form of spelling and pronunciation in the sixth century - probably when the K was first used in some written texts. In its softer anglicised form of Cary or Carey, it is natural not to make the difference so hard. What era or part of the country ‘K’ rather than ‘C’ used, is unclear...perhaps the use of K [as in

kick, or quick, in the Gaelic Q form] happened when the Gaelic Cill [church] was replaced by the Latinized Kil - for place-names on maps – hence, Kilkeary and Kilkenny. Most place names are in that form. The method of spelling might indicate who commissioned the work, when, and for what purpose.

The history about the right language and spelling of a family name explains what happened in Ireland that caused such disturbance and distress. The clan chiefs, Anglo-Irish aristocracy, their upstarts, the invaders, clerics and politicians may deserve censure, for the chaos that marks the islands history, but the people certainly do not. The derivations of a name throughout the centuries give proof to the matter... from Ciardha to Ciara, Cheire to Carie, Carey, and Keary & Kearey.

This unity under Gaelic kings, represented by Ui Neill, continued for nearly two-hundred years, until the Normans were invited to save the then ruling body. From this moment, Gaelic Ireland began to lose its identity and power base. This call, on an outside body, was to have far-reaching effects and was not reversible.

The O'Ciardha [O'Cary or O'Keary] clan were a senior branch of the Cenel Cairpri, descended from Cairpre... populated the central southwestern areas of Ireland, an ancient Gaelic warrior kingdom speaking Gaeltacht... The chiefs of clan O'Ciardha were closely related to the supreme ruler of southern Ireland... they were minor kings, ruling that part of southern Ireland located just below Loch Derg... in today's northern Tipperary.

‘O’Cary rules over Carbery of bards,
He is of the tribe of Niall of the nine Hostages,
There are none but themselves there,
Of the clans of Niall over Leinster.

The main clan lands were Slievefelim or the Silvermine Mountains and Hills in the kingdom of Munster, not far from Ossory... They were a senior group controlling a vast area related to Ui Neill. Another branch of O'Ciardha – further east, inhabited Carbury, Co Kildare. This extended family grouping - Cairbre Ua gCiardha, were also a prosperous family with many cattle.

The ancient place of St Ciardha's monastic house. Situated in a valley between two towns - Nenagh and Toomyvara, and two mountains – Slievekimalta and Devilsbit. To the north lies The Central Lowlands: an area of farms, market towns, peat bogs, glens and lakes. Before intensive cultivation, the land was heavily forested. As with the growth of many settlements the nearest navigable river influenced its development; in this case it was the River Shannon and in particular Lough Derg, five miles north of Nenagh; it's southern banks bordered Lower Ormond and Arra and Owney.

The main family territory was roughly in the centre of the country and conforms to an area of hill and lowland. It was bog-free downland, rich in minerals and well drained and hedged. This part of inland central-Ireland is bordered by several clan territories and like all such lands continually fought over.

These early Munster tribal lands were divided by between cousins, into east and west groups. Unfortunately, both groups suffered from several competing branches, which weakened the power base. The eastern cousin's centre was at Cashel, and the other, the northern group of lower Shannon; it was to this area that O'Ciardha was clan chief - becoming king of Thomond. He later included over lordship – suzerain, of the Ostmen of Waterford and Limerick, including their two important cities. This large area approximately conforms to today's Co Tipperary.

The central/southern Uí Néills, Ui [*means' children of'*], a term of gentility - denotes those of the ruling family. This is a much older form than Ó or more strictly 'Ua'. It was to this branch of the Ó

Neill's that the Ó Ciardha clan became indelibly linked. The Kearey clan were a 'sept'... a corruption of the word 'sect' adopted by the English settlers, to describe Gaelic ruling families or clan groups. This allegiance between the O'Neill's and the O'Ciardha continued until the latter lost all their clan lands over a period of six hundred years, ending at the same time as the restoration of Charles II, after Cromwell's death.

Edward MacLysaght's, *More Irish Families*, 1982, pp50, agrees that the majority of those called Carey [or Keary] belong to the O'Ciardha sept - are a senior branch of the Cenel Cairpri. It can be seen that whether C or K used it refers to the same people.

Kilkeary, in Co. Tipperary today, is a small parcel of land seven miles southeast of Nenagh, in Toomevara RC Parish. This is a relatively modern name forming a link with its more ancient past. Originally, the ecclesiastical name was Templedowney [Teampul Domnan the church of St. Domnan]. Toomevara is derived from Tuaim ui Mheadhra, O'Meara's Mound or tumulus. The parish was an area of many hundreds of acres; Kilkeary was spelt Kylkeary in the first quarter of the first millennium, a place of pilgrimage and substance.

In all research into genealogical connections into the O'Ciardha, [Keary] clan, certain names are always cropping up; in particular, O'Meara, O'Kennedy and O'Carrolls.

Toomevara parish contains the districts of Agnameadle, Ballymackey, Kilkeary, Templedowney and Ballygibbon. It has three ancient ecclesiastical ruins one of which was an ancient foundation for women established by St. Ciardha. There are also several ruined castles, some habitable, others not, being just ruins.

The name of this district was written by 'The Scholar of Aegus', as Cill Cheire, the church of St. Kera or Cera [Church of Keary]; it is situated in the ancient Muscraidhe Thire, the Upper and Lower Ormond. In Aegus written, 'Ciar Ingen Duibhrea,' meaning St. Ciardha, daughter of king Duibhrea, who was a clan chief.

The ancient church of Kilkeary was built about 625AD, 57 feet long and just over 19 feet wide. It is in ruins having all its features destroyed except for a few massive stones – one of several tons. It was built in a semi-cyclopean style of Lange limestone rocks and is believed to be of the seventh and eighth centuries. In the graveyard is a monument to Major General William Parker Carrol of Ballygrenade, a descendant of the O' Carrolls of Ely... Previously, in 1702, an earlier member of the family was buried here

William Carrol was from Lissenhall, on the far side of Nenagh Town and had a very distinguished career in the Spanish Army during the Napoleonic Wars. He was highly thought of in England and married an illegitimate daughter of George III. William was also a Politician who partitioned for the separation of the Northern and Southern Grand Juries in the county, in the 1830s.

The fact that the Carrols used the Kilkeary graveyard – the site of the nunnery, was in keeping with Gaelic tradition. The Carrols, Kennedys' and Meara were all inhabitants of the east side of the Shannon – neighbours..., originally owned by the O'Ciardha. When the O'Ciardha were being harassed and evicted some transferred allegiance to the security of these clans.

Kilkeary nearest large town is Nenagh, seven miles west; an important centre for its Anglo-Norman association and Franciscan Friary, which the Kennedy founded in 1240, and Cromwell destroyed, in 1650. It was one of the new walled towns designed in 1171... the citizens fearing incursions from warring factions lent a hand with the building... the town council passed a law whereby every person – including: shop owners, priests and women. Every person was allotted a day in the week that each had to help in building the town walls.

Toomyvara, a pleasant small market town, lies four miles east, lying astride an important crossroads.

The Vikings, 795AD – Scandinavians called Norsemen, more then likely from Holland, pillaged and plundered coastline and river settlements around Ireland and Britain... building fortresses at Dublin, Waterford, Wexford, Cork and Limerick - the main towns of Ireland... These guardians, of main river inlets, were kings, who were tribal chiefs or earls... in no way could they be described as rulers of large tracks of the countryside. They lived in stone houses with a surrounding wall punctured by fortified gates. Circling this stronghold were a number of ditches and mounds with offset entrances.

Finding Ireland particularly accommodating the Norsemen chose the best land and settled... marrying into the population, becoming known as Ostmen. They felt at home... in this pagan land... a land of tales, songs, myths and legend - it was much like their own former homeland.

Through the ages, this settlement, on the river mouth, was important. Later it was called Limerick and came to play a vital role in the development of the country... a place well known for its salmon fishing and its access, up the river, into the heart of the country.

In Loch Derg, longboats are at anchored, close to the shore... some drawn up on the beach others hauled up onto logs - under repair. These are the property of Viking raiders, who are frequent visitors – their coming and going accepted by the inhabitants. A number of the Vikings strike up relationships with the inhabitants, marry, and have children... They remain working the land and fishing. This was a convenient fraternization, which ensured a safe harbour and a place where boats could be restocked, and take on water. Like many immigrants to a new land, they took an active part in its development becoming more committed to its survival than the original inhabitants, which the incoming Normans found to their cost...!

In the 830s, the Viking raids became even more extensive defeating the Uí Néill in battle and plundering widely... the clergy were at this point part of the nobility and church property protected by law. Monks could not act as security nor make bequests without his abbot's consent for the abbot was the administrative head of the church.

The Norse raids lasted until the 870s... died out, and erupted again. Ten years later 'the great Norse tyrant' Barith was killed... not before destroying Cianan of Duleek's oratory.

The kingdom of Uí Failge comprised the baronies of Offaly in County Kildare and part of the diocese of Kildare... their kings related to the ruling Laigin dynasty. However, the southern Uí Néill maintained precedence in Munster until the reign of Feidlimid mac Crimthainn in AD886. In the latter part of the first millennium, the Uí Néill was probably the most important family grouping – dominating both the northern and southern parts of Ireland. They were descended from Niall Noígiallach who themselves were from Conn.

The Vikings at the battle of Dublin 919AD killed Niall Glundub, ancestor and over-king of the Uí Néill. During the battle, five other kings and many other nobles killed. Glondub was related to Niall, the last of the kings of Tara, the legendary seat of the high-kingship, and ejected by Brian Boru when he rose to power.

In 920, a Norse settlement was enlarged at the mouth of the Shannon, which became the city of Limerick. It was the start to a flourishing trading place, the beginning of the salmon industry and the vitalling of many Viking boats. In 937, the Limerick Vikings clashed with those of Dublin on Lough Ree and were defeated. The Shannon was of major importance in military campaigns in all of Ireland's history. The association with the Norse never diminished – eventually they become integrated into the Irish community. The city was criss-crossed by wooden streets, houses and workshops. Mathgamaim sacked the city in 964 after previously capturing Cashel from the Eoganachta. All those fit to fight were killed the others enslaved. His brother Brian later killed him.

The monastic movement established great ecclesiastical centres and one of these was at Kildare, in the early ninth century, where Uí Néill appointed provincial governor by the monasteries and king of Leinster. He lived there with his brother the abbot and his sister the abbess. The

heartland of Leinster was the vale of the Liffey, and the valleys of the Barrow and the Slaney. At Domnach Sechnaill generations of the same family reined as abbots; this fact gives light how leadership of the church was passed onto succeeding generations.

The Irish chieftain's allegiances fluctuated depending on what thought to their advantage. In this, the Ciardha clan was no different. They were frequently mentioned in the Annals of the Four Masters from 952 onwards to the death of Ua Ciardha tighearna Coirpre [O'Keary lord of Carbury]. Again in 993 when Mael Ruanaig O'Ciardha, king of Carbury was killed by the Teftha. This killing went on... the tribes were continually seeking a way to gain territory. Even in 1128, we finally read of the slaying of 'H Ciardha ri Cairpri, another king of Carbury.

It is important again to stress that confirmation about name, place and time is impossible to confirm. Not only does the language change but the spelling within that language. Family groups within a tribe split into clans, and clans into septs. Kings described as lords, and lords as kings However, that should not present a problem. It is not a question of trying to change history or give credence but present a picture where the Ciardha fit into early Christian Munster.