

ROSCOMMON CASTLE

Stark and alone stands this grand old sentinel of Coman's town, a stately relic of the storied past, its old grey walls, now fast hurrying to decay, and deeply furrowed by the ravages of unrelenting time, bear sad and silent witness to the apathy and neglect of the present generation of Irishmen, for all that is reminiscent of our glorious and hallowed past, Roscommon's sons, the world over, are noted for the love they harbour for their native sod.

Of the history of the Castle comparatively little is known, and what little we can glean is scattered throughout the documents and records in a disconnected and fragmentary fashion. The building, accordingly to the "*Parliamentary Gazeteer*" (1844) measured, inclusive of its towers, 223 feet in length and 173 feet in breadth. Four towers defended the four angles; and two towers, in the longest side towards the east, protected the principle entrance. The towers are round on the outer side, formed on a radius of about nineteen feet, with about two-thirds of the periphery of the circle advanced beyond the curtain walls, while the inner parts towards the area or courts of the Castle were terminated in various different styles. The towers to the gateway, for instance, were connected with a rectangular edifice on the inner side, which, to judge from the remains of the windows, must have contained the principle habitable apartments of the Castle. Of the other towers deviating from the circle some presented a straight front. In one respect a similarity of plan appears to have been adopted in the construction of all towers, the lowest parts having been devoted to defence and the accommodation of the garrison, and the upper parts to the officers and the superior inmates of the Castle. In the former, the walls were reinforced, and inner bulwarks and narrow passages afforded a safe retreat from the shot which might have been poured in through the loop-holes. The roof of these parts consisted of thick vaults of stone, some of which remain entire to the present day; but others have been broken away and the towers completely gutted from the foundations to the battlements; yet the outer walls stand firm, bidding defiance to time and weather. The windows in the upper storeys are airy and even spacious; the largest were in the storey next the highest; all were rectangular and most were divided simply by a Latin cross, while some possessed two, three, and even four uprights in the compartmented manner of the Elizabethan style. The grand entrance is placed, not in the centre of the east side of the Castle, but about eleven feet nearer the north end. It exhibits a portal with a pointed arch, of medium sharpness in the angle, and still quite entire; and from a few feet, below the summit of the arch it has been breached from tower to tower, so as to have lost all the portion of the wall usually pierced with machicolations. Another but smaller gateway stood on the western side of the Castle, higher above the foundations, and constructed in a rectangular tower or bastion, 28 feet in width, and advanced 25 feet beyond the exterior wall. No traces exist of a barbican (*the outer defence of a castle, a double tower above a gate or drawbridge*) before either of the gateways, nor do any surviving marks appear of an encompassing fosse (*a long narrow fortified trench*).

Remains of field works, however, exist at some distance; yet whether these were constructed to defend the Castle or thrown up by assailants to facilitate attacks upon it as a question not very easy of decision. a large quadrangular enclosure also extends on the east side of the Castle, parallel to its whole length, and is bounded by lofty walls, and has at the angles small, low round towers or bastions, easy of access; but whether this enclosure, which is now called the orchard, was appropriated for military exercise and tournaments, or devoted to the ordinary recreations or to the peaceful pursuits of horticulture, cannot now be ascertained.

Some idea of the splendour of the grand old structure may be gathered from the above detailed description, and it now remains to us to trace its history through the ages that have passed since first it reared its lofty turrets towards the skies.

As to the precise date at which the Castle was erected some slight differences of opinion appear to exist. The bulk of the evidence, however, goes to indicate that the Castle was built by *Robert de Ufford*, Lord Justice of Ireland in the year **1268**. *Ware*, in his annals, tells us that de Ufford commenced the building of a Castle at Roscommon in **1268**, whilst an entry in the Monastic Register of Athenry (“Archivium Hibernicum”) informs us under date - “Anno Domini **1269**..Re Ufford Hibernie sedificavit castellum de Roscomayn.” Although these references point to the erection of our present Castle, it is generally admitted by archaeologists that long prior to this date a Castle existed in Roscommon. It is certain from the frequent references to Roscommon by our ancient analysts that long before **1268** it was regarded by the strategists as a place of no little importance. At the time of the first invasion of Connaught by the Anglo-Normans in **1177**, we are told that “they proceeded first to Roscommon, where they remained three nights”, and under date **1185** the “Four Masters” mentioned that “the English came as far as Roscommon with the son of *Roderick O’Connor*, who gave them 3,000 cows as wages.” Again, from the same source, under date **1225**, we learn that *O,Conor* held away in Roscommon, and we would infer that his stronghold was no mean pretensions when it attracted the attention of one of the great *O’Neills* of Tirowen - “A.D. **1225**. *O’Neill* marched a great army into Connaught to assist the sons of *Roderick O’Conor*. He arrived in the country of the Shell Murry, where he set out to the Fayes of Athlone. He afterwards tarried two nights at Mulleusin Guan and plundered Lough Nen (1), from which he carried away *O’Conor’s* jewels. He then set out for Carnfree, where *Turlough*, the son of *Roderick*, was inaugurated.” In this little escapade of *O’Neill’s* - which we are told he undertook on the invitation of the nephews of the lately deceased King of Connaught in order to secure for them the succession to the throne in preference to *Hugh*, the lawful heir - he was assisted by *MacGeraghty*, the powerful Roscommon chieftain, and although successful in their enterprise - having defeated *Hugh* and placed *Turlough* on the throne - the responsibility for the invasion of Connaught has been placed at their door, because *Hugh*, after his defeat and deposition, appealed to the English, as that time lying east of Athlone, to come to his aid. It did not require a very pressing invitation to induce this foreign host to cross the Shannon, and soon the grassy plains of Roscommon were deluged with the mingled blood of Celt and Briton.

As we have already seen, the Castle owes its origin to the desire of the English Justisary, *de Ufford*, to erect a fortress for himself in Connaught, and seizing the opportunity of the illness of the then reigning King of Connaught, *Hugh O’Conor*, he commenced its erection in **1268**, and presumably brought the project to completion in **1269**. The Castle was originally built upon land belonging to the Dominican Priory at Roscommon, and we find in the State papers a record of a payment of fee of fifteen marks to *Brother Maurice*, *Bishop of Elphin*, for the site of the Castle. This *Brother Maurice* was an *O’Conor*, son of *Niall*, and he entered the Monastery at Roscommon, afterwards in **1265** being consecrated Bishop of Elphin.

The State papers of the period - **1270-72** - contained numerous records of payments made for the upkeep, of the Castle. Amongst others we find payments of 40/- for the support of the Castle for the period mentioned, and for “ten pounds of iron bought of *Richard de la More*, and delivered by him, for the fortifying of the Castle.” Again, we find one *Richards* being paid 46s 8d for his “cart and two horses, lost in the King’s service whilst vietualling(supplying with food) the Castle of Roscommon,”and yet another entry in the calendar runs thus: “For the purchase of wheat, oats, meat, wine, and salt for the King’s Castles at Roscommon, Randown (St. Johns), and Athlone, and for the carriage of same from divers parts of Ireland, with pay and garments for the constable, and drink money and pay for the mercenaries - 1,601 Pounds 18 shillings and 8 pence. Another item from this varied list reads: For 18 bogshedsof wine bought of *Lambert Denaunt* and sent to the Castles of Roscommon, Randown and Athlone, 36 pound 18 shillings and 8 pence.”

De Ufford succeeded in erecting his stronghold at Roscommon without opposition, because of the illness and consequent incapacity of *Hugh O’Conor*, but the spring of the year **1272** saw *Hugh* again restored to health, and he was not long in showing his resentment at the presence of the English invaders. To mark his disapproval of *de Ufford’s* encroachment on his territory he marched his army against the Castle, now occupied by *Maurice*, the new Lord Justice, and we are told that he “razed and destroyed” the building. Some doubt appears to exist as to the truth of this account of *Hugh’s*

exploit, as the next record bearing on the castle, and dated **1276**, only four years later, describes the capture of the fortress by the Irish by means of scaling ladders, and their complete rout of the English garrison. No evidence is, however, forthcoming to show that the English had regained possession of the Castle since *Hugh's* victory in **1272**, or of the rebuilding of the "ruined" edifice. The probabilities are that *O'Conor's* victory was not as complete as the chroniclers would have us believe, as it is hardly likely that if the Castle was "razed and destroyed" in **1272** there would be any need for "scaling ladders" in **1276**.

Hugh O'Conor, being in the neighbourhood, would probably have something to say to the rebuilding of the Castle by the English. The "annals of Clonmacnoise," treating of *Hugh's* attack, tells us that "the Castle was broken down by *Hugh* in **1272**," and undoubtedly this noble warrior entry in the state documents would show:—"1276-Paid to *John Garget* the sum of 57 pounds 18s 3d for victuals and for building the Castles of Roscommon and Randown." Probably the word "building" here refers to some repairs to the masonry necessitated by the action of *O'Conor's* battering rams, as the smallness of the amount would indicate. These, indeed, must have been stirring times in old Roscommon. In the following year (**1277**) *Thomas de Clare*, an English soldier flying from the Battle of Quinn, and pursued by the *O'Briens of Thomond*, sought the protection of his father-in-law, *Maurice Fitzmaurice*, at Roscommon. *Fitzmaurice* and *de Clare*, with their united forces, were surrounded on the slopes of SlieveBawn mountain by the *O'Briens*, assisted by the Connaughtmen under *Felim O'Conor*, and by *Donnell O'Donnell* and his gallowglasses, and were forced to surrender. *Fitzmaurice* and *de Clare* purchased their lives by yielding up to the Irish the fortified Castle of Roscommon.

Again we are left to surmise how the Castle came to be in the possession of the English in **1277**, seeing that in the previous year it had fallen into the hands of the Irish. In **1280** we once more find the English garrison in possession of the fort, and one *Robert McCarrig* receiving "22 marks for five hogsheds of wine supplied to the English garrison in Roscommon Castle," and in **1281** *Adam Gaynard* is installed as *Constable* of the Castle by the English. An interesting document is in existence bearing date **1280**, and purporting to be a grant from the King of England to the *Prior* and community at Roscommon and to their successors for ever, permitting them to water all their animals in "the lake under the King's Castle at Roscommon."

The English now appear to have been left in undistributed possession for some years, as the next record we find bearing upon Roscommon is dated **1288**, and refers to the visit of *John Sandford*, *Archbishop of Dublin*, and head muster keeper of Ireland, to Roscommon, for the purpose of inspecting the Castle. In this same year the Four Masters record the visit of *Richard, son of Walter, Earl of Ulster*, who led an army against Connaught, but on arriving at Roscommon he was opposed by *Manus, son of O'Conor Roe*, King of Connaught, and by *Fitzgerald* and "the people of the King." The combined forces defied *Richard* to proceed any further, and the wily Northman, deciding discretion the better part of valour, wisely withdrew his forces and retraced his steps over the Shannon.

The year **1290** finds donok Apdavid with twenty-two Welshmen guarding the Castle's of Roscommon and Randown at the not over-generous wage of 3d per day to the captain and 2d of his subordinates. These gentlemen appear, however, to have made up any deficiency in their exchequer by pillaging and plundering their defenceless neighbours in and around Roscommon, as we read in the annals of the period of grave complaints to His Majesty of England from natives, setting forth the pains and penalties they suffered at the hands of his soldiers. In **1304** the Castle appears to have undergone extensive repairs, as amongst the payments made by the State in that year are several; grants to tradesmen for work done on the Castle walls, "and strengthening it with stone of the thickness of three feet," and further, "for repairing and perfecting of three drawbridges, and portcullising of two gates at the Castle." The building was destroyed by fire in **1315** by the soldiers of *Rory O'Conor*, son of *Cathal Roe*, the chief of the Sept. Olan Murtough. *Bruce* had authorized *Rory* to make war upon the English, but instead he availed himself of the opportunity of attacking his own kinsmen in Connaught, and having destroyed the Castles of Roscommon and Ballintubber he caused himself to be crowned King of Connaught on the historic mound in Carnfree, near Tulsk, in place of

Felim, whom he deposed, and who had been deserted by his allies, with the exception of *MacDermott*, of Moylurg. *Rory's* reign, however, was a short one. He was defeated and slain in the following year (March, **1316**), at the battle of Ballymoe, by *Felim*, who on this occasion was assisted by *Birmingham*, of Dunmore, as well as his old ally, *MacDermott*. Although *Rory* is credited with "burning and destroying" the Castle in **1315**, one is inclined to believe that there must have been more smoke than fire, as in **1319**, precisely three years after *Rory's* downfall, according to the "Calendar of Fire Rolls," the Castle was placed in charge of one *Hargar de Martoe Marl*, an English officer, by the King of England.

Felim was slain at the battle of Athenry on August 10th, **1613**, where the Irish were completely routed by the English under *William de Burgh* and *Richard Birmingham*. This famous contest had, no doubt, a far-reaching effect upon the future history of our western country; it may, indeed, be described as the greatest battle that had yet taken place between the native soldiery and the English invaders. By the death of *Felim* Connaught lost one of its greatest and most illustrious soldier Kings, and the province lay helpless at the feet of the Saxons.

On the death of *Felim* his cousin, *Rory*, proclaimed himself King; but this was not at all the liking of *de Burgh*, who after his victory at Athenry led his army into Roscommon, where he soon brought pressure to bear on *Rory* and compelled him to surrender. After *Rory* came *Turlough*, but his reign was short duration, and he was succeeded by *Cathal O'Conor*, who ruled the province till **1325**, when he was slain by his immediate predecessor, *Turlough*, who again assumed the sovereignty of Connaught.

Turlough's second venture was more successful than the first. He appears to have reigned about 20 years, during which time he must be controlled the Castle of Roscommon, because in **1340** we find him making a prisoner of his nephew, *Hugh*, son of *Felim*, and confining him within the Castle walls. This attack upon the liberty of *Hugh* appears have greatly enraged *MacDermott*, of Moylurg, who there upon marched a great army against *Turlough*, whom he defeated, compelling the fugitive monarch to seek shelter within the Castle of Ballymote. *Turlough* was afterwards killed in battle, and was succeeded by his son, *Hugh*, in **1342**. *Hugh* was slain in **1356** by one of the *O'Kellys* of County Roscommon, and after him came *Hugh*, son of *Felim*, who reigned till **1368**. *Hugh* was succeeded by his first cousin, *Roderick*, who occupied the Castle in **1375**, and continued to war against his kinsmen instead of protecting his kingdom against the marauding English soldiery. In **1375** *Roderick* exchanged his Castle at Ballintubber for that of Roscommon, which was then held by his cousin, *Turlough Roe O'Conor*. He appears to have soon repented of his bargain, for we read that in **1381** he again took possession of Ballintubber, driving out his cousin and seizing his belongings. During the time he resided at Roscommon *Roderick* engaged in battle at that place (**1377**) with *O'Kelly*, of Hymany, who assisted by *MacWilliam Burke*, but *Roderick* was victorious, and many of the *O'Kellys* and *Burkes* were slain. When *Roderick* died in **1384** another war of succession arose between two members of the *O'Conor* family, each of whom were between two members of the *O'Conor* family, each of whom were named *Turlough*. Bloodshed was, however averted, and a compromise arranged by which *Turlough Roe (the Red)* was to rule over the Sligo *O'Conors*, whilst his rival, *Turlough Don*, was to assume the chieftancy of the *O'Conors* of Roscommon. *Turlough Don* resided at Roscommon, as a letter written by him from that place on April 3rd, **1395**, goes to show. *Richard II, King of England*, and "Lord of Ireland," being at Kilkenny about this time, *Turlough* wrote to him offering submission and declaring his loyalty, and furthermore announcing his intention, if His majesty so willed, of proceeding to Kilkenny, and there making his public submission to Richard. The English King accepted this offer of *O'Conor's* and accordingly *Turlough* set out for Waterford, whither Richard had repaired, and there, on bended knees at the feet of England's King, he declared himself a "faithful liegeman" to Richard and his heirs. As a reward for his act of homage *Turlough* was created a Knight. On his return to Roscommon he was coldly received by his kinsmen, and even his subjects. It was not customary for an *O'Conor* to bend the knee, even before an English King, and this act of servility of *Turlough* cost him dear. *Turlough Roe* seized the opportunity of his kinsman's unpopularity to once more assert his claim to the chieftancy, and war soon broke out, which

continued till **1406**, in which year *Turlough Don* was treacherously murdered at Croghan by **Cathal Dew**, son of *O'Conor Roe*.

Notwithstanding the unpopularity of *O'Conor Don* this foul outrage, always so abhorant to the Irish nature, found little favour amongst the Connaught clans, and did much to harm to the cause of *O'Conor Roe*, and little opposition was offered to the followers of the murdered *Turlough* when they crowned his cousin *Cathal* on the mound of Carnfree. The death of *O'Conor Don* did not end the fierce family feud. *Turlough Roe*, assisted by the *MacDermotts* and other local chieftains, resisted the claims of *Cathal*, and the fertile plains of Coman were deluged by the blood of the rival clansmen. *O'Conor Roe's* Castle at Tulsk was destroyed, and he in turn laid siege to the Castle of Roscommon, and with the aid of *O'Kelly* plundered the town, destroyed the crops, and ransacked the Monastery in order to prevent the monks from succouring the besieged garrison in the Castle. Nor did the death of *Turlough Roe* in **1426** end the strife. For generations these family feuds were continued, and the rivalries were transmitted from father to son up to the end of the fifteenth century.

Another *O'Conor Roe* (Taige, son of *Turlough Roe*), died in **1464**, a man universally respected, who might have ruled wisely in Connaught after the death of *Hugh*, but being disgusted by the family dissensions amongst his own clan, he gave up all claim to the headship of the *O'Conors* and retired into private life. At his death in **1464** his obsequies at Roscommon were attended by the nobility of Connaught, and according to the "Book of Kilronan" "not one of the Connaught Kings, from the reign of *Cathal* of the red hand, was honorably interred." The scene in old Roscommon on that bright August morning in **1464** has been vividly portrayed in the "Annals of Connaught". "Their cavalry and gallowglasses were in full armor around the corpse of the High King, and in the same state as if they were going to battle. Where their green levies were in battle array, and the men learning and poetry, and the women of Sil Muriedhaigh were in countless flocks following him." A reverend and distinguished historian, who, happily, is still with us, writing over the nom de plume of "Coman," in **1871**, describes the scene by the bier of Teige in the following beautiful lines:—"he was buried like a hero, chiefs and soldiers stood around, none of all the race of Croo dearg funeral rites so noble found; Monk and Ollamh, bard and chieftain, wept over Tadhg, the true and brave- The fair maidens of Sil Murray sang the caoine above his grave. Priests their holy Masses chanted, great and countless was the dole given to the poor to pray for God's sweet mercy on his soul. Still he sleeps where then they laid him, sculptured effigy above, while his gallowglasses round him guard the hero-King they love."

In **1476** we find another *Teige O'Conor* residing in the Castle of Roscommon, but in the same year he suffered death at the hands of his own followers, who took possession of the Castle, but only held it a short while. In **1490** the *Earl of Kildare*, the English Lord Deputy, at the request of *O'Conor Don*, marched a great army into Connaught, and proceeding first to Athleague defeated *O'Kelly*, of Hymany, and captured his Castle by the Suck; then on to Roscommon, where *O'Conor Roe* held the fort. Once more the town was plundered, and the Castle captured and handed over to *O'Conor Don*. Afterwards *Kildare* pursued *O'Conor Roe* to Tulsk, defeated him, and captured his stronghold. The year **1512** again saw *Kildare* in Roscommon, and again he took possession of the Castle, this time in the King's name. He now placed an English garrison within its walls, and departed northwards to punish the *McDonnells*, of Antrim, whose stronghold he also captured.

Roscommon Castle did not long remain with the English, the *O'Conors* soon regained possession of their old stronghold, which they held against many a bold invader, till the coming of *Sir Thomas Cusack* in **1552**, when the nobleman took possession of the place for *Queen Elizabeth*. In **1544** *MacWilliam Burke* petitioned *Sir Anthony St. Leger*, the Lord Deputy, that he be granted the Castle of Roscommon, which, he stated, was in the King's own gift. The petition was granted, but as the Castle was at that particular time in the hands of one of the most warlike and dangerous of the great *O'Conors*, the avaricious, yet timorous, *Burke* never came to claim his prize, the task of driving out the sturdy *O'Conor* being not altogether to his liking.

Lord Chancellor *Cusack*, in **1552**, made an exhaustive survey of Ireland, and visited in person the various troubled areas throughout the country. Everywhere he went he succeeded by peaceable means

in restoring order. His greatest difficulty was in the country of Hy-many. Here the *O'Conors*, *O'Kellys* and *McDermotts* refused to be cajoled by the amiable Chancellor, and we are told that at Roscommon he was obliged to have recourse "sterner measures." With the aid of *Clanricarde* he eventually succeeded in restoring order in Connaught, and seized *O'Conors* stronghold at Roscommon, garrisoning it with English soldiers. Soon, however, the fortress reverted to the *O'Conors*, and an entry in the State Papers under date **1560** tells of the restoration of the castle by *O'Conor Don*. But again in the same year it was destined to change hands.

Sir Henry Sidney, the Queens deputy in Ireland, seized the castle in Her Majesty's name, and placed *Sir Thomas L'Estrange* in residence as Constable. *L'Estrange* appears to have made himself particularly obnoxious to the native chieftains and more especially to the *O'Conors* - sons of a Royal line, yet outcasts from their ancestral halls. Old times indeed were changed, "old manners gone." One can, without difficulty, analyze the feelings of the noble Don of that day as he watched the stranger pace the court - yard of *O'Conors* Royal Castle.

The fiery blood of Connaught's rightful King could not long brook this insult, and so in **1573** we read of an attack being made by *O'Conor* on the castle, which ended in the overthrow of *L'Estrange* and burning of the castle. *O'Conor* preferred to see his old home reduced to ashes rather than that it should afford shelter to the minions of an alien Government. *L'Estrange* suffered grievous loss by this destruction of his property, and appealed to *Queen Elizabeth* for compensation, alleging that he had sustained personal losses amounting to over 1,000 Pounds.

In **1576** *Sir Henry Sydney* made a grand tour of Ireland, during which he received submission from almost all the Irish chieftains, in some cases receiving from them large sums of money in the nature of fines levied from them for their former misdeeds and disloyal actions. Arriving at Roscommon this grand inquisitor took possession of the Castle for the second time, and on this occasion received the submissions of *O'Conor Don* and *MacDermott*. In a "Plot for the saving charges for the Queen in the repairing of the towns of Roscommon and Athlone" we find the following proposal by *Malby*: - "Athlone and Roscommon are chargeable to Her Majesty in the yearly sum of 500 pounds sterling. If it may please Her Majesty to bestow on me and my heirs in fee farm, these two houses, with the two Abbeys being now in my hands, I will build up the town at Roscommon." This request of *Malby's* appears to have been granted, as we find him some short time after (in **1580**) writing to his friend the *Earl of Leinster*, and making the suggestion that Her Majesty should appoint him seneschal of Roscommon, as a reward for his having rebuilt the fortress of Roscommon. Whether as a result of this petition or the good influences of *Leinster* we find *Malby* acting about this time in the capacity of Lord President of Connaught, a position which could hardly be described as a sinecure in those troubled times.

Roscommon appears to be in a particularly disturbed state about this period. In **1577** *O'Conor Don* made a foray into Co. Roscommon, and ravaged the property of *MacDonagh* (otherwise O'Donnell) of Corran. *Queen Elizabeth* hearing of those disturbances directed *Malby* to interfere and bring about a settlement and restore order. *Malby* was also approached by *O'Conor Sligo*, who complained of *MacDonagh* for retaining his (*O'Conor's*) Castle Bundrown in Co. Sligo, although he had been ordered to yield it up to its rightful owner. *Malby* got out from Roscommon, and marched in one day from there to Cull Ciara, between Boyle and the Curlew Mountains, and next day crossed the mountains to Ballmote, where he joined forces with *O'Conor*, and the combined armies compelled *MacDonagh* to surrender Bundrown.

In **1582** a great council of the Connaught chieftains assembled at Roscommon for the purpose of devising some plan to put an end to the disorders and disturbances so prevalent throughout the province at that time. *Captain Brabazon* presided over the assembly - he was acting Governor of Connaught - and the meeting was held in that part of the Castle known as the "Tower of the Narrow Passages." It is related that during the progress of this conference joistings of the floor gave way and

the whole party was precipitated into the hall below. Many of the chieftains were injured, and we are told that Chief *O'Flanagan* subsequently died as a result of the injuries he received.

Malby died in **1584**, but his family continued to reside at the Castle for many years ; as late as **1600** we find his widow making application to the English Parliament that she be granted an allowance for having put the Castle in repair after the depredations caused by the various garrisons quartered there by *Sir John Norreys*. *Sir John Perrot* arrived in Ireland as Deputy in June, **1564**, and shortly after him came *Bingham* to fill the part of President of Connaught. When Her Majesty offered *Bingham* the Castles of Roscommon and Ballymote as residences in the west, he considered himself slighted ; his predecessors occupied the grander Castle of Athlone, and why should not he be given the best that was in the Queen's gift.

Things were becoming so bad under the rule of this despot in Connaught that the Parliament of England advised his recall, and he was accordingly withdrawn for a short time ; his influence at the Court was, however, great, and he soon had himself restored to his governorship, with the Castle of Athlone as residence. This triumph had the effect of making him more tyrannical than ever, and soon we find the Connaught chieftains up in arms against him.

O'Conor Roe attacked him at Roscommon and completely routed his forces under *Richard Mapether*, high Sheriff, in **1588**. *Hugh O'Donnell*, roused by the butcheries of *Bingham*, resolved to go to the aid of his countrymen in Connaught, and collecting a large army, entered the western province through the country of the *O'Rourkes*. The Queen becoming alarmed by the turn of events sent over an army under *Sir John Norreys* to quell the disturbance in Connaught and reduce the turbulent chieftains to subjection.

Norreys, who was joined near Athlone by *Clanricarde*, marched to Roscommon, where the united forces rested for some days. Some minor skirmishes took place in the neighbourhood of Roscommon between *Norreys* army and that of *O'Donnell*, but nothing definite came of them, and *Norreys* retired again to Athlone.

Bingham was relieved of the of the Governorship for the second time, in **1596**, and was succeeded by *Sir Clifford*. The new Governor was the direct antithesis of his predecessor, kindly, brave and consolatory ; he succeeded in winning over many of the revolting chieftains to the English side, foremost amongst there were *O'Conor* and *McDermot*, of Moylurg. *O'Donnell* was greatly incensed by the succession of his allies, and now turned his armies against his former friends. The northern portion of Roscommon was ravaged from end to end, and ruin and desolation followed in the track of the sturdy Northman, who when fully revenged upon his Roscommon allies, retreated to Ballymote where he entrenched himself within the castle of that town.

Clifford felt impelled to punish this conduct of *O'Donnell's*, and in June, **1599**, set out from Roscommon with a large army, accompanied by *O'Conor* and other chieftains, determined to attack *O'Donnell* in his fortress. The first days march was to Tulsk, where the army rested for the night, starting early next morning in the direction of Boyle. Truly a grand sight must of been this mighty host weeding its way across the desolate plains of Coman on that fateful expedition against the noble son of old *Tyroonnell*, and *O'Conor* in the van, surrounded by the Saxon soldiery.

O'Donnell learning of the advance of this Anglo-Irish army made ready to receive them. He sent his heralds away into his own north country to summon to his aid his early kinsmen and trusted allies from Ulster's hills, and right loyalty they responded.

On the fifteenth day of August, **1599**, the two great forces met at the pass of Coraliabh in the Curlew Mountains, where one of the greatest battles recorded in our Island history was fought

O'Donnell completely routed the Queens army, *Clifford* was slain, and the *O'Conors* fled from the field and took shelter in Boyle. Later on we find that *Lord Dunkallan* and *Sir Arthur Savage* were debuted by *Essex* to take joint control in Connaught, and elaborate instructions were issued for the proper garrisoning of the province. Roscommon was marked out for special attention owing to its strategic position, and the strength of its battlements. "You shall place a sufficient ward at Roscommon," writes *Essex*, "a garrison of horse and foot, if you find that they may live well there, and that there is any part of the country there, not wanted, which deserves the employment of such troops, you shall send away my *Lord Southampton's* company of horse, and as many more as cannot be provided for there."

The brunt of the work of defence apparently fell to *Savage*, and although he appears to have carried out his orders faithfully and well, he received little or no support from his superiors, Shortly afterwards, in **1611**, we find one *James King* - not King James as is elsewhere stated - acting as constable or gaol or of the Castle, with apartments allotted to him within its walls.

The duties appertaining to the office of gaoler do not appear to have been of a very arduous nature, as at the time the country was in a very peaceful state, a fact which was testified in a letter to *Lord Salisbury* in **1600** from *Sir Robert Jacob*, a Judge of Assizes, who had recently conducted a tour in Connaught. "In all that circuit", he writes, "there were not above two or three notable male factors arraigned before me for any heidous crime; the roat, and that but a small number, were for petty stealth's and felonies." The testimony of an Englishman is all the more valuable when taken in conjunction with the report of *Sir Oliver St John* on the Co. Roscommon.

Sir Oliver was Lord Deputy in Ireland, and in **1614** he wrote for the benefit of his English employers a "Description of Connaught." "The County Roscommon," he says, "hath none of the English races, only a little on the east portion of the River Suck, belonging to *McDavy*, one of the *Burkes*. Of the new English there are *Henry Malbye*, who has the manor of Roscommon; *Sir John Kinge*, who has the Abbey of Boyle; *Anthony Brabazon's* son, who has Ballinasloe; *Sir Thomas L'Estrange's* heirs, who have the Lordships of Athleague; and some others seated there since the wars." This peaceable state of things continued for many years in Connaught, occasional conflicts between minor chiefs flared up, only to die away again under the benign influence of the clergy, who at all times strove to reconcile the warring factions, and whose main endeavour was to have peace and goodwill everywhere throughout this fair land of Connaught.

The accession of *Charles I* to the English throne in **1625** did not tend to improve matters. Much was expected of him, but the hopes of the people were not realized; narrow minded, bigoted, and cruel his oppression of the Catholics soon gave rise to feelings of distrust, and nowhere were these feelings more justified than in Connaught. The King's Deputy *Lord Wentworth*, or, as he is better known in history, *Earl Stafford*, was bitterly anti - Irish and anti - Catholic, and when in **1635** he arrived at Roscommon he set himself to confiscate in the name of the King the lands and properties of the inhabitants, his idea being to effect a plantation of the whole of Connaught, but on the advice of *Clanricardo* this project was abandoned as dangerous and likely to lead to rebellion.

During the troubled period of the great rebellion which broke out all over Ireland in **1641** Roscommon came in for its own share of the fighting, and our old Castle was destined to bear the brunt of some of the most vigorous assaults.

In the appendix to the *Rev. C. P. Meehan's* "Memoirs of the Irish Hierarchy," an account of this siege of Roscommon is given which treats of the affair from the Irish side, and is worth quoting if only for the minuteness of its detail, and the interesting description given of the town and fortifications at that period. "The place," the writer tells us, "is situated in the heart of Connaught and gives its name to the county. A few years previously *Jones*, then Governor of the province, and full of the poison of heresy, built a very strong Castle a short distance north of the ancient town, where stood a Convent of the Dominican Fathers, and the Church sacred to St. Coman, but during the Elizabethan

wars the heretics transferred Roscommon from an Assizes town into a Garrison, strengthening it with out - works, ditches, masked pits, demi - luros, barracks, covered ways, &c., &c., so that the circuit of the ramparts extended fully two heavy gunshots. Within these fortifications the heretics bands of plunderers, who, from the very commencement of the war, preyed upon the entire neighbourhood, living on the blood and tears of widows and indulging their depravities at the expense of the Catholics.

Preston occupied the Dominican Convent, and after a few discharges, on the third day of the siege possessed of all the outworks except those nearest the ditch.

Meanwhile the Scots, who scarcely a month before escaped death on the field of Benburb, took council together and dispatched a trumpeter to *Preston* challenging him to fight; but when he appeared with his ordered ranks the enemy sounded the retreat. Ashamed of this, three Scottish cavaliers rode out to do battle with as many of the Catholics. They were not by *Lieutenant General Williamson*, *Barnwall*, and *Finglais*, captains of ours, but before they could come within swords length two of the Scots fled, one, however, remaining behind, inviting who so wished to measure weapons with him. All eyes were fixed on this one, and *Barnwall* was elected before every other to meet him. Having discharged their muskets without inflicting a wound they came to close quarters and *Barnell* killed the Scotch champion. No other feat signalized the day.

Pressing the siege, *Preston* erected a battery looking east, and in the course of two days, after firing 238 heavy shots, he destroyed not alone the remainder of the out - works, but everything that came within range of his guns.

The Castle itself, rampart and wall, were so breached that everything was ready for the assault. Seeing this, the garrison, who had already lost 13 officers and hundreds of their men in various sorties, bethought that they ought to make terms. Now this occurred on the ninth day of the siege (2) and 18th of July, 1646, when it was agreed that (1st) the garrison should march out safe with arms and baggage; (2nd) that those Scots residing in Roscommon should have a month to remove with their chattels and livestock; (3rd) that their heavy guns (one of which burst at the first fire) should be ours; (4th) that on the 10th of July the garrison should evacuate the place, 500 of ours marching into it, 100 of them were to take possession of the Castle.

But on the very day, and while the enemy was preparing to quit, *Preston* learned two of our scouts had seen the Scottish cavalry approaching rapidly. Besides some of those we made prisoners informed us that the enemy had resolved to attack our camp that night and relieve the besieged. . then ordered that we should stand to our arms all that night.

The Scotch did not appear till daybreak, and when they wheeled roundabout that part of the camp where our artillery was parked, contented themselves with an onfall on our horse quarters, causing us to lose seven or eight killed, and then retreating when they found we were on the alert. Seeing what they were about *Preston* sent his cavalry by another road to cut them off at a place which he named. Falling on the rear guard of the Scotch ours met with about , for the heretics fought bravely, till at length we put them to flight and pursued them fully nine miles, killing the fugitives and stragglers as we came up with them.

This body of Scotch horse consisted of about 13 troops, i.e, about 800 men, 355 of whom - as the Nuncio wrote to Cardinal I'anfilio - were slain. Massara, Dean of Fermoy the writer of this dispatch, who must have been better acquainted with the details of the fight than the Nuncio could possibly have been, declares that besides the killed the rest were either made prisoners or wounded.

The account goes on to relate how the Scotch commander, although seriously wounded, made his escape; and further, he tells of a remarkable man - a Puritan Minister - who was captured by the Irish,

“he was thought much of by his people, and was of English blood - a proud, morose, and melancholy sort of man, whom I visited and found very chary of his words, which, indeed, were solemn.” This latter fact is not in itself very surprising, as the occasion was hardly one to inspire levity, even in the mind of a Puritan Minister, and a prisoner withal. However, we are told he was a brave man, and was to be seen in the forefront of the battle, sword in hand, urging his men to the attack.

A remarkable incident is recorded by this chronicler of the fight at Roscommon, “a cloud of ravens,” he tells us, kept wheeling over the road by which the heretics were retreating. Then again almost everyone of the killed had his eyes picked out by these birds, and I myself saw not only on the very battlefield but along miles of the road a number of corpses which lacked eyes and bore upon them some four or five wounds.” The Irish, we are told, lost but eight killed and 24 wounded throughout this whole engagement.

This repulse of the Scotch troops was the final act of the great siege of Roscommon. Immediately the news of the defeat reached the besieged they surrendered, and were sent as prisoners to the monastery of Boyle. Although the wholesale slaughter of the fugitives and stragglers detailed above may not be in accord with our modern ideas of civilized warfare we must not conclude that the combatants in this memorable fight were devoid of the finer qualities which constitute the brave soldier.

We have evidence that officers were released on parole and that prisoners were given in exchange, facts which are clearly shown by the following letter written by the besieged commander to *Preston* during the early days of the siege: - “*Robert Saunderson* and - *Coote*, besieged in Roscommon to the Commander - in - Chief of the Irish army lying before Roscommon.

We have sent away 104 of our men on the parole of your officers, and if in our paroles we cannot have 32 soldiers (whose ransoms are to be deducted out of as many of ours) returned to us, we conceive we have very hard measure, and doubt not, by God’s assistance, to requite you in like manner hereafter. As for the officers you say you have, we have not any of their quality here to exchange for them. Moreover, we do not think these officers fit to be taken back till we first hear the grounds of their surrendering their holds. We, therefore, desire you will send off the common soldiers, and keep the officers till performance of our paroles be made. Otherwise let the blood of such as perish light on your heads, so concludes your servants.” A few days after the fall of the Castle *Preston* attacked and defeated a large English force in the neighbourhood of Roscommon, at a place near where the Two - Mile - Bush now stands. That the downfall of Roscommon and the subsequent defeat of the Parliamentarians was regarded as a severe blow by the English is shown by the following extract from a letter written at the time by *Sir Valentine Savage* to a friend in England: “For news I can send you none but sad; on the 8th of the last (July) Roscommon was yielded up, and all the English horse seeking to relieve it were defeated, since which time Carrickdrumriske and Boyle are yielded up, and now *Preston* lies before Sligo.” The Castle having now passed into the hands of the Irish, it was retained by them till 1652, when, on the 3rd of April in that year, it was surrendered to Commissary General *Reynolds*, of the Cromwellian army, by the Governor *Captain Daly*, and on that date may be said to have passed finally out of the hands of the Irish. The articles of surrender drawn up between the representatives of *General Reynolds* on the one part and *Captain Daly* on the other part are still preserved in the manuscript collection of the Royal Irish Academy, and were as follows: “The articles of agreement between *Lieutenant Colonel Francis Gore* and *Major John Disbrow*, on behalf of the Right Honourable Commissary General Reynolds, on the one part, and *Captain Edmund Daly*, on the other, concluded April 3rd, 1653: - (1)

That the Castle of Roscommon, now under the command of *Captain Edmund Daly*, shall be surrendered to Commissary *General Reynolds*, or to any other whom he shall appoint, by five of the clock in the afternoon, (2) That all stores of ammunition and provision shall be delivered unto Commissary *General Reynolds*, or to any other whom he shall appoint, without embezzlement. (3) That *Captain Daly*, *Captain Meed*, and their officers, shall have their horses, pistols and swords; the soldiers their swords and skeenos; and two servants belonging to said Captain their horses and arms. (4) That they are to have liberty, for the space of 28 days, to carry such goods as are properly their

own unto such places as they shall think convenient, and enjoy their crops now in ground; provided they come under protection and pay their proportions of contributions, their chaplain and chirurgion have liberty to go with him. (5) That such goods as do belong unto *Colonel Richard Burke*, except store of ammunition and provision, shall be disposed of by the said Captain, and conveyed to such places as they think fit; and such corn as shall belong unto the aforesaid Colonel shall be preserved for his use to make sale thereof to the parliaments party, provided he come under protection within twenty - eight days and after the date hereof. (6) That the said *Captain Daly* have liberty to make use of the barn within the bawne, to lay in his goods for the time above mentioned, and his wife, *Ellis Nirine*, alais *Daly*, is to be freed from any debts until there be a settlement. (7) That Ensign *John McCooge*, now in restraint with *O'Conor Roe*, shall have his enlargement, provided the commissary General consents thereto, and shall enjoy his crop now in ground, provided he come under protection and pay his proportion of contribution. For the due performance of the above mentioned articles I have hereto set my hand the day and year above written. - **Edmond Daly.**”

After the surrender of the Castle very little of its subsequent history has been recorded, and careful search amongst the various State documents of the period has failed to throw any light upon the subject of its final abandonment as a residential fortress. A romantic account of the destruction of the Castle is given in a “Tale of the Wars,” from the “Dublin Penny Journal,” but we have no historic evidence to confirm the view of the writer of this interesting story.

It has been alleged that the Castle was burned by the Irish after the battle of Aughrim in order to prevent it falling into the hands of the Williamites. No mention of Roscommon Castle appears in the State documents after **1670**, and hence we may assume that at least there is foundation for the assertion that the Castle was destroyed about the date of Aughrim’s fight in **1691**.

After the surrender of the Castle to the English in **1652** steps were taken by the Irish Government to have the place handed over to Ranelagh, who, in **1546** had made over the Castle to the English on payment of 200 Pounds for the purpose of having it fortified. **Ranelagh** produced the receipt he received for the Castle, which was signed by *Richard Coote* and *Edward Ormsby*.

On the 19th June, **1654**, a letter was ordered to be sent to the Commissioners for managing the affairs of Ireland demanding the restoration of the Castle and lands to *Lord Ranelagh*, and in October, **1661**, we find an order for the appointment as Constable of the Castle of *Richard Jones*, son of *Lord Ranelagh*. This warrant of appointment was ordered by the King (Charles II).

The Castle, land, and manor of Roscommon were conveyed to *Lord Ranelagh* by order *King Charles II* in **1664**.