

PARISH OF CLONDUFF

by Dean Anthony Davies

Clonduff Parish is situated in the barony of Upper Iveagh (Lr. Half). The parish borders five parishes in the diocese of Dromore, namely: Kilbroney, Mayobridge, Drumgath, Annaclone and Lower Drumgooland, and two in the diocese of Down & Connor, Kilcoo and Upper Mourne. Hilltown, its only village, takes its name from the Hill family of Hillsborough, descendants of Sir Mayses Hill, a Devonshire man who came to Ireland in the army of the Earl of Essex 1573, settled in the lands of Iveagh in Down and greatly increased their possessions until their estates reached from Lisburn to the Mourne Mountains. Wills Hill erected a market house, now the Downshire Arms Hotel, and a number of houses as well as the Protestant Church of St. John's in 1766.

Prior to the Hills coming, the region was known as the Eight Mile Bridge, that being the distance in Irish miles from Hilltown to Newry. It was close to this bridge that Redmond O'Hanlon, the highwayman, was killed on the 25th. April 1681. The parish lies wholly within the county of Down and the local government district of Newry and Mourne. Catholics remain the majority population, their number is estimated to be around 2,700. The modern parish of Clonduff consists of some 24 townlands. In the townland of Carcullion is the village of Hilltown.

CLONDUFF IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN TIMES

The history of the parish goes back to the days of St. Patrick. The locality is rich in the tradition and relics of the pre-historic past. In the townland of Goward (Guth Ard or High Voice) stands a cromlech known locally as 'Pat Kearney's Big Stone', and is said to weigh some fifty tons. Legend asserts that it marks the burial ground of Fionn Mac Cumhaill, the Ulster giant. Across the Bannvale footbridge in Ballymaghera, to the left of the river, are the remains of an earthen mound locally called 'The Mount' - a relic of the Bronze Age. Bishop Reeves in his work *The Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down and Connor and Dromore*, gives much interesting information regarding Clonduff's early history. He mentions that the townlands of Ballyaughian, Ballymaghera, Ballynanny and Leitrim, then mensal lands of the Bishop of Dromore, were known as the 'Four townlands of Clonduff' and it is from this curious source that the parish's name is derived. Joyce gives the old Gaelic name as 'Cluain Daimh' - Meadow of the Ox.

A tradition associated with St. Patrick and his missionary work states that he preached on the Hill of Tamery, which was within the early Christian parish of Clonduff. The ancient monastery of Clonduff which was founded from Bangor Monastery, was situated in the townland of Ballynanny. Its first Abbot was St. Mochommoc of the seventh century who died in A.D. 655. His Feastday is 26th December. The exact site of the monastery is hard to determine but most likely it is the portion of the townland of Ballynanny which adjoins the Hen Mountain and is still called Ballychommoc. The old name of the townland was Baile Chaisil, site of Comgall's castle. The monastery was visited by King John of England during his Ulster tour in 1210. It appears that, at the dissolution of the monasteries in King Henry VIII's reign, the lands of the Rectory of Clonduff claimed by the Abbot of Bangor who still

appointed the vicar of Clonduff, were extended to twenty-two townlands. The monastery was suppressed and its revenues confiscated about 1538. However, as Clonduff lay in the Magennis country which was still under native rule, Acts of Parliament passed either in London or Dublin had no effect here until many years later.



The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Ballymaghera is an imposing edifice on the outskirts of Hilltown. The church was extensively renovated in 1998.

LANDS OF CLONDUFF

Forty years afterwards, Queen Elizabeth I granted the parish of Clonduff to Thomas Smith to colonise, but the grant lapsed to the Crown as the O'Neills prevented Smith from taking possession of the lands. Under the reign of James I, the tithes of Clonduff were granted to James Hamilton, but as his successor sided with the King against Parliament, the tithes of Clonduff were taken possession of by Sir George Acheson from Markethill, then by Magill of Gilford, then by Meades and the Earls of Clanwilliam who continued to hold them until the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869. But whereas the tithes of the parish had been confiscated and granted to adherents of the Established Church, the lands of the ancient parish of Clonduff remained in the hands of the native Catholic inhabitants. The four townlands of Clonduff-Leitrim, Ballymaghera, Ballyaughian and Ballynanny were See lands of the Dromore bishopric. In 1610, the occupants claimed tenant rights and the King granted them leases for ever, subject to a rent of £2 per townland paid to the Protestant Bishop of Dromore.

The remainder of the parish was settled in 1611 on various members of the Magennis clan subject to an annual rent payable to the Crown. Even when the lands passed into the hands of financiers of English and Scottish origin, and also during the Cromwellian settlement of Iveagh, there was no appreciable clearance of native peasantry in Clonduff as shown by poll tax returns in 1659.

At the time of the insurrection of 1641, the four town-lands were held by Lady Mary Crosby, an English lady. At her death, these four passed into the hands of the Waring family and were held until 1834, when Rev. Holt Waring sold his interest to Narcissus Batt for £33,000. Finally in 1912, Mrs. Essel, granddaughter of Batt, disposed of the estate to tenants under the land-purchase Acts. The Downshire estate in Clonduff dates from 1638. In that year, Brian

Magennis and his wife, Elizabeth, gave the rents of Cleomack and Carcullion to Arthur Hill in settlement of a debt of £16,000. In 1640, the Hills gained possession of nine townlands in Clonduff. Finally, in 1657, the Hills owned Stang, Lenish, Ballyweely, Mullaghmore, Ballycashone, Goward and Ballykeel. A weekly market on Monday, and two fairs yearly on 25th April and 21st September, were granted in 1669. The remaining lands of Clonduff, Ballygorian and Lisnamulligan were granted to a Cromwellian supporter named Barker on 22nd May 1657, ultimately becoming lands of the Annesley estate.

THE REFORMATION AND PENAL PERIOD



A Mass House had existed in Cabra since 1783. The present St. Mary's Church replaced it in 1865. The adjoining Parochial House was first occupied in 1930.

The ruins of the parish church and the burial ground adjoin the main road to Bryansford about half a mile east of Hilltown. According to an Inquisition of 1657 only the walls were standing then. Local tradition states that the church was burnt by parliamentary forces in 1642 or early in the following year. It is likely that the reign of terror continued until the Restoration in 1660. Mass was said at the Mass Rock on the mountain called `Alt an tSagairt' - `Priest's Mountain'. The position of the stone itself, which stands at a vantage point 1,362 feet above sea-level in a remote and inaccessible part of the Mourne range, is evidence enough of the dangers people had to face on hearing Mass in those times when religious intolerance was the rule. Catholic worship was absolutely proscribed under Cromwell's reign by an edict of 1653 - any priest who failed to quit the Kingdom within 20 days was liable to the penalty of a protracted and gruesome death.

According to tradition, a priest, Fr. Eoghan O'Hagan, was murdered by Colonel Whitechurch and his soldiers along with a number of those who assisted at the Mass on Alt an tSagairt in the middle of the 17th. century. During the Penal Era, in the 18th. century, the constraints were dictated less by religious fervour or fanaticism than by fear and hatred of the Catholic people on the part of the ruling class. There were a number of examples recorded where Catholics were saved from the law by the pitying kindness of their Protestant neighbours. Moreover, the laws against the practice of religion fell into abeyance a generation after the passing of the Code, but not those related to possession of property and political rights. But even after the practice of religion had come to be tolerated, Mass was generally said in private houses and at stations with primitive altars in the open-air.

Concerning the Mass sites in Clonduff during this period of operation of the Penal Code, there appears to be no information in public records but. in addition to Alt an tSagairt local tradition is clear in identifying three other places:

- i. On the Magennis land in Cabra where St. Mary's Church now stands.
- ii. In Ballygorian on the land then held by Owen O' Neill.
- iii. In John O'Neill's corn-mill at Bannvale.

CHURCHES

St. Mary's Church, Cabra.

A Mass House on Magennis lands at Cabra was built in 1783 and enlarged in 1832 while Fr. Bernard Murphy was P.P. In 1865, mainly through the efforts of Fr. McMullan C.C. and Rev. Dr. McLeigh P.P., Cabra Church was rebuilt on a larger scale - much as it now stands. In 1934, the church was extensively renovated and reopened on Ascension Day, Thursday 10th. May. New Stations of the Cross were erected at this time. Another renovation was carried out in 1998. A new granite altar was installed as part of this work, and the sanctuary was re-designed. The walls were replastered and the church received a new roof.

St. John The Baptist Church, Ballygorian

The first of the existing church buildings in Hilltown dates from 1805. It is St. John the Baptist, Ballygorian. It was opened by Fr. James Gilmore P.P. As the plaque bearing the inscription over the main entrance records, the church was built out of funds subscribed by all denominations. The site of the church was granted by the Earl Annesley. It has been painted and renovated over the years and has had a new heating system installed. St. John the Baptist Church will be two hundred years old in 2005.



The Church of St. John the Baptist, Ballygorian, is Hilltown's 'Old Chapel'. It was originally opened in 1805, during the pastorate of Fr. James Gilmore.

St. John The Evangelist, Ballymaghery

This splendid building was begun in 1844 and completed after the Famine in 1850. Fr. John McLeigh was a very popular priest with all denominations and highly respected by the Batt family who granted the site for the church, the parochial house and Ballymaghery School. Rev. Dr. Kearns erected the handsome tower in 1900 at the cost of £1,600. The organ gallery was erected in 1931 by Fr. Tom McGrath P.P. Fr. Patrick Keenan transformed the church in 1941, when new marble altars and Stations of the Cross were erected and the grounds artistically laid out. In 1982, Canon Hamill P.P. had the sanctuary remodelled and a new altar, baptismal font, chair and lectern installed. The church was also redecorated at this time.

In 1998, when Fr. Anthony Davies was P.P. renovations were carried out with the help of National Lottery funding. The improvements included remedial works to the existing building, along with external environmental improvement to the grounds and a new ramped access for wheelchair users. The church, was also re-roofed and the existing roof structure strengthened. Internally, areas of plaster were removed and replaced on those south-facing walls affected by penetrating dampness. The entire interior was also re-decorated with the replacing of existing electrical installation and the up-grading of the heating system.

CEMETERIES

Ballygorian is contemporary with the church, 1805. Cabra is also contemporary with the church, in 1783. Ballymaghery is contemporary with the church, 1844. A new portion was blessed on 24th. April 1932.

PAROCHIAL HOUSES

BALLYMAGHERY - was built by Rev. John McLeigh after 1850. The newly-constructed house, which replaced it, was officially opened by Rev. Matthew O'Hare P.P. on 29th. March 1985. Its cost was £108,000.

CABRA - was completed on 12th. March 1930.

PAROCHIAL HALL

Ballymaghery Hall was built in the early 1900s during the pastorate of Dr. Kearns and was extended during the 1970s. Cabra old school became church property in 1932 and was made into a hall in the late 1980s.

YOUTH CLUB

St. John's Youth Club, Hilltown, was opened on Wednesday, 28th. November 1986. It was dedicated, at a concelebrated Mass, by Bishop Brooks. The building was originally a public house but a face-lift had given it three main units, a magnificent sports' hall, a conference room and a coffee bar. The Department of Education provided a very substantial grant towards this provision.

HEDGE SCHOOLS

Throughout the period of religious persecution there existed over the country a system of illegal schools which, as recent research has shown, produced results of a comparatively high order. Instruction was provided in the rudiments of learning. According to a State Inquiry of 1731, there were four illegal schools in Clonduff Parish, although the teachers' names were not recorded. As time passed the illegal schools were referred to as "Hedge Schools" from the custom of taking scholars out of doors in fine weather and placing them in rows along a hedge. Three hedge schools are mentioned in Clonduff Parish: Leitrim, Ballygorian and Ballyweely.

LATER SCHOOLS

Kinghill School, was opened in 1834, and was replaced by St. Paul's Cabra in 1964.

St. Paul's Primary School, Ballykeel, was opened and blessed by Dr. Eugene O'Doherty on 6th. April 1964 at a cost of £ 12,800.

Cabra School, was built by Gartland for his workers in 1854 and became church property in 1932.

Ballymaghera boys' and girls' school, opened in 1857 and was extended later. The new St. Patrick's Primary School was opened in 1967, at a cost of £52,700. In 1977, two new classrooms were added. The school's car park was extended in 2003.

MEDIEVAL RECTORS AND ABBOTS

The first rector of Clonduff whose name has come down to us was **Patrick McGinn**, appointed by the Holy See in 1407. He died in 1423. The Abbot of Bangor then took possession of the rectory. **Fr. Mark McBride**, a priest of the Diocese of Dromore informed Rome that this Abbot held the parish illegally. He succeeded in his claim. The Papal records mentions two other pre-Reformation rectors of Clonduff. **Emerious O'Neill** who held it without a title and was removed and **Arthur Magyn (Jun.)**, appointed on St. Patrick's Feast Day in 1530. The last pre-Reformation rector was **Fr. William O'Dornan**.

PARISH PRIESTS

The first secular pastor of Clonduff was **Fr. Eoghan O'Hagan**. Tradition relates that this priest was murdered while celebrating Mass at Alt an tSagairt. **Rev. Dominic McAvoy** was registered as Popish Priest of Clonduff at Downpatrick. He was a prominent supporter of King James II.

Rev. Patrick Byrne was P.P. in 1704. According to the report of the Protestant bishop in 1731 on the 'State of Popery' in Dromore Diocese, there was one priest and one school but no Mass House in Clonduff in 1731.

Rev. James Pulleine D.D. circa 1744. He was the author of an Irish catechism, An Teagasc Criosdaidhe, published in 1782.

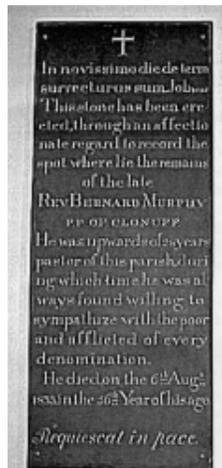
Rev. Edmund Derry, was appointed Administrator of Clonduff on 5th. April. He was appointed Bishop of Dromore in 1801.

Rev. William Fegan, a native of Stang, succeeded Dr. Deery as P.P. on 26th. July 1796. He died in 1804. Rev. James Gilmore was appointed P.P. in 1804. He erected the church in Ballygorian in 1805. He was transferred to Kilbroney in 1808.

Rev. Bernard Murphy, born in Drumgath Parish, was appointed P.P. in 1808. He erected the Mass House in Cabra. He died on 6th. August 1833.

Rev. John McLeigh, was appointed Administrator in Clonduff in August 1831 when Fr. Bernard Murphy was ill. He was born in the parish of Magheradroll and appointed P.P. on 28th. August 1833. He was responsible for the building of the Church, parochial house and school at Ballymaghery. Rev. J. McLeigh was appointed Vicar General in 1867 and later died on 4th. March, 1872.

Rev. Patrick McKay was appointed R.P. on 16th. April 1872. He was born in Lenish in the parish of Clonduff. He died 31st. May 1876.



This former pastor of Clonduff is faithfully remembered in St. Mary's Church, Cabra. Fr. Bernard Murphy was parish priest from 1808 until 1833.

Rev. John Mooney, was appointed P.P. on 17th. July 1876. Born in Tamery, parish of Drumgath, he died on 13th. February 1888. During Fr. Mooney's time as Administrator in Upper Drumgooland, the notorious 'Battle of Dolly's Brae' was fought on 12th. July 1849.

Rev. Thomas McGivern, D.D. was appointed P.P. on 16th. February 1888. He became Bishop of Dromore in 1891.

Rev. Joseph Kearns, was appointed Administrator on 16th. February 1888 and succeeded Bishop McGivern as P.P. He was born in Derrytagh in the parish of Seagoe. He erected the tower at Ballymaghery Church and built the Parochial Hall. He founded a bursary for the education of Dromore students in the Irish College, Rome, and was a generous benefactor of St. Colman's College, Newry. Through his generosity, too, the office of Ecclesiastical Inspector of Schools was set up. He died on 1st. May 1923. During the transfer of the lands

of the parish to the people of the parish, the Archdeacon was their great counsellor and friend securing for many of them much cheaper transfer rents than they might otherwise have obtained. He organised the pilgrimage to Alt-an-tSagairt.

Rev. Daniel Grant, was appointed R.P. on 23rd. June 1923. He was born in Mayobridge in the parish of Clonallon. He died two months after being appointed, on 20th. August 1923. Fr. Grant was associated with Dr. O'Neill's big improvement and extension scheme to Newry Cathedral and toured the north of England and the Dioceses of Down & Connor, Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Killaloe in order to raise funds for the project.

Rev. John Rooney, was appointed P.P. on 1st. September 1923. He was born in Mayobridge in the parish of Clonallon. While Administrator in Newry, he went on a lecture tour to the U.S. on behalf of Newry Cathedral Building fund. He died on the 20th. June 1930. Canon Rooney had a wide reputation as a preacher and lecturer and was well-known as a temperance advocate.

Rev. Thomas McGrath, was appointed on 7th. July 1930. He was born in Ballydesland in Clonallon Parish. He was the first P.P. of the new parish of Saval 1920. He died on the 10th. March 1941. Fr. McGrath erected the organ gallery in Ballymaghera Church. He was a noted temperance advocate and he began the annual pilgrimage to Ballyholland Mass Rock, Newry.

Rev. Patrick Keenan, was appointed Administrator on 30th. November 1936, then P.P. on 13th. March 1941. He was born in Drumlough in the parish of Drumgath. He was appointed Army Chaplain in August 1916, and saw action in India, the Middle East, and Rhine Valley. He retired from the army with the rank of Captain. He died on 28th. February 1951. Fr. Keenan transformed St. John's Church, Ballymaghera, making it the finest parish church in the diocese.

Rev. Michael H.O'Hare, D.D. was appointed P.P. on 2nd. April 1951. He was born in the parish of Donaghmore. He was transferred to the parish of Dromore in 1952.

Rev. James Murney, a native of Killowen in the parish of Kilbroney, was appointed P.P. on 6th. November 1952, He died on 7th. January 1960.

Rev. James Burke, was appointed P.P. on 1st. February 1960. He was born in Lurgan in the parish of Shankill. He died on 4th. December 1967. He had a fine baritone voice and for many years was one of the official diocesan chanters.

Rev. Michael McConville, was appointed P.P. on 2nd. January 1968. He was a native of Saval parish. He resigned as P.P. in October 1981 and was appointed C.C. in Cabra. He died on 30th. December 1987.

Rev. Edward Hamill, was appointed P.P. in October 1981. He was a native of the parish of Magheralin. Canon Hamill remodelled the church at Ballymaghera. He erected a new altar in 1982, placed the baptismal font within the sanctuary and redecorated the church. He was transferred to Clonallon parish as Administrator on 25th. January, 1984.

Rev. Matthew O'Hare, was appointed P.P. on 26th. January 1984. The new parochial house was being built during his time and he took up residence in it on 29th. March 1985. He was transferred as P.P. to the parish of Seapatrick on 17th. January 1988.

Rev. Malachy Finegan, was appointed P.P. on 17th. January 1988. He was a native of Newry Parish. He was on mission in the diocese of Kildare & Leighlin at Mountmellick, 1973-76. Fr. Finegan was President of St. Colman's College 1976-87. He died on 15th. January 2001, having retired in September 1995.

Rev. Anthony Davies, was appointed RP. on 8th. September 1995. He is a native of Tandragee in the Parish of Ballymore and Mullaghbrack in the Archdiocese of Armagh. He undertook renovations of Cabra and Ballymaghera Churches. With the help of National Lottery money, the two projects were carried out successfully.

CURATES IN HILLTOWN

Rev. Patrick Morgan, 1771; Rev. Edmund Derry, 1771; Rev. William Fegan, 1796-1801; Rev. Bernard Magennis, 1798; Rev. Daniel Magennis, 1826; Rev. Thomas McGivern, 1826-1831; Rev. Bernard O'Loughlin, 1831-4; Rev. Thomas Brady, 1835-6; Rev. John MacHugh, 1836-8; Rev. John Keaney, 1838-40; Rev. John Bryne, 1839-44; Rev. Patrick McKay, 1840-3; Rev. John Mooney, 1844; Rev. Terence Fegan, 1844-8; Rev. Michael Maginn, 1848-51; Rev. Eugene McMullan, 1850-69; Rev. John McGrath, 1869-74; Rev. Edward McCartan, 1869-81; Rev. John Lowry, 1874-6; Rev. James Lowry, 1876-8; Rev. Joseph Kearns, 1881-8; Rev. John Savage, 1885-1903; Rev. Francis J. O'Hare, 1890-95; Rev. James Grangle, 1899-1907; Rev. Peter McEvoy, 1903-4; Rev. George McCorry, 1904-20; Rev. Edward McGivern, 1907-20; Rev. James McMurney, 1920-24; Rev. Michael McCartan, 1920; Rev. Michael McClorey, S.T.L. 1920-30; Rev. Hugh Francis Gallagher, 1924-31; Rev. Michael F. Gallogly, 1924-31; Rev. Patrick Keenan, 1931-6; Rev. Bernard J. Murney, 1941-56; Rev. James Murtagh, 1956-60; Rev. Bernard Treanor, 1961-72; Rev. Oliver Mooney, 1972; Rev. Seamus Laverty, 1972-5; Rev. Arthur Bradley, 1975-83; Rev. Kieran McPartland, 1983-88; Rev. Peter Lennon, 1988-89; Rev. Peter McNeill, 1990-97; Rev. Tony Corr, 1997-2000; Rev. Martin McDonagh CSSp. 14th. August, 2003 - ad nunc.

CURATES IN CABRA

Rev. M. McClory, S.T.L. was the first resident priest in Cabra in 1930. Rev. Michael Gallogly, 1930-1; Rev. Patrick Keenan, 1931-6; Rev. James Murney, 1936-41; Rev. Patrick McCartan, 1941; Rev. Peter Campbell, 1941-51; Rev. Patrick Francis Boyd, 1951-58; Rev. Anthony Owens, 1958-62; Rev. John McCauley, 1962-67; Rev. Patrick McAnuff, 1975-80; Rev. Gerard Conway, 1980-81; Rev. Michael McConville, 1981-86; Rev. James Masterson, CSSp, 1986-87 (on loan); Rev. Joseph O'Hagan, 1987 ad nunc.

HISTORIES OF CLONDUFF PARISH

Clonduff Parish, Past and Present by Francis McPolin M.A. Ph.D. A pamphlet of 48 pages (illustrated) was published in 1936.

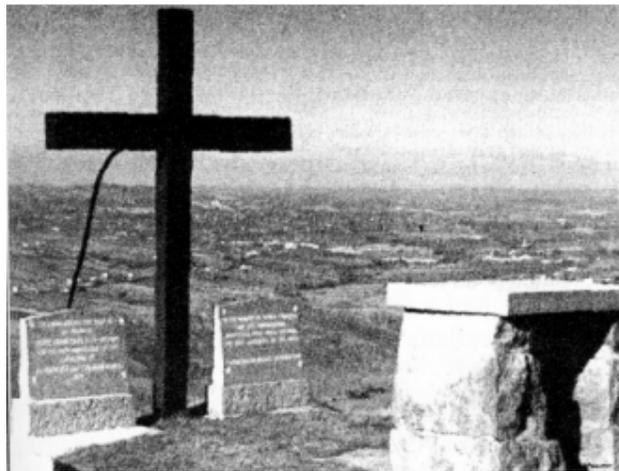
A brief Historical Sketch of the Parish of Clonduff by Padraic Keenan, Newry. A pamphlet of 32 pages (illustrated) was published in 1941.

The Clonduff Story '1887-1984' by Mr. P. D. Kearns, Newry. Published in 1984, it gives an account of G.A.A. activities in the parish.

CHAPLAINS AT CABRA CONVENT

Rev. James Dargan, 1935-8; Rev. James B. Mooney, 1939-41; Rev. James B. McCartan, 1941-46; Rev. James Fitzpatrick, 1946-8; Rev. Aloysius Joseph Sweeney, 1948-49; Rev. Bernard Treanor, 1949-55; Rev. James Fitzpatrick, 1955-62; Rev. Peter McConville, 1962-68.

The Sisters of St. Joseph of Newark known as St. Joseph's established a convent at Cabra in Clonduff Parish. Their convent was blessed and formally opened on 19th. March, 1935 by Dr. Mulhern. The new convent was under the leadership of Rev. Mother Mary Aloysius and was formerly known as 'Cabra Towers'. It had been purchased, at the cost of £500, from the representatives of the late John McKay in October 1934. The object of the foundation was to provide members of the Order with a preliminary training prior to embarking upon their labours in the U.S.A. and elsewhere. The Sisters of Joseph left in 1968.



A legacy of the Penal era in Clonduff Parish is Alt-an-tSagairt: 'The Priests' Mountain.' Local tradition associates this sacred site with the martyrdom of Fr. Eoghan O'Hagan in the seventeenth century.



The original parochial house at Ballymaghera was built c.1850. The present house replaced it in 1985.