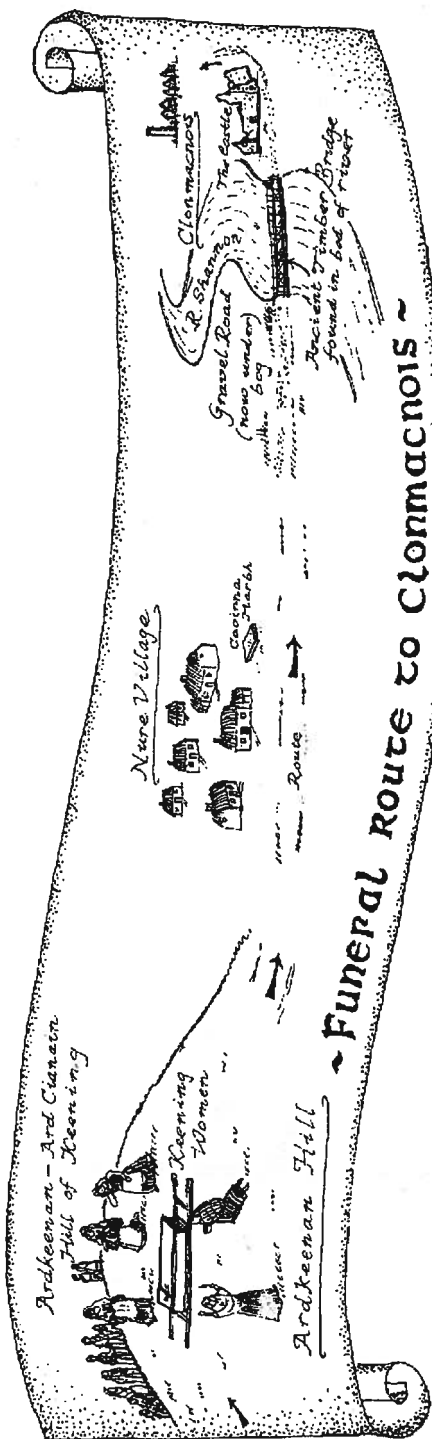


Following his death in 1198, the remains of King Rory O'Connor, the last High King of Ireland, were first interred at Cong Abbey, Co Mayo but eight years later were exhumed and taken for burial at Clonmacnoise. Believed to be the most distinguished member of the O'Connor clan to have been carried along this route, his family are on record as having been generous benefactors of the monastery. They had earlier given a grant of several townlands west of the Shannon in order to secure a mortuary chapel for their clan at Clonmacnoise.

The following excerpt taken from the Registry of Clonmacnoise (MacFirbis" translation), offers some indication why so many high ranking families from all over Ireland chose Clonmacnoise as their last resting place. *"The life of St Kyran thus sett downe that the best bloods of Ireland have choosen their bodyes to be buried in Cluaine McNoise, for that Kyran had such power being a Holy Bishop through the Will of God, that what soules harboured in the bodyes buried under that dust may never be adjudged to dammation"*.

Tisara, a medieval religious house, strategically situated along the ancient "Pilgrim's Route" approximately 12 miles north west of Ardkeen, served as a halfway house for people from the Western regions of Ireland travelling to Clonmacnoise. Folklore describes a vivid account of the funeral corteges stopping overnight there before continuing their journey to lay their loved ones to rest in the ancient ecclesiastical city. One would expect the weary funeral cortege to take a further rest, on getting their first sighting of Clonmacnoise at Ardkeen.

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Souvenir Brochure

of
COMMEMORATIVE WALK

Over
Ancient Funeral Route
from
Ardkeen to Clonmacnois
on
Sunday 20th Sept 1998



Some of the Committee Members of Drum Heritage Group pictured at the Walk Starting Point at Ardkeen Hill.

ARDKEENAN

(THE HILL OF THE CRY)

ON THE

ANCIENT FUNERAL ROUTE

TO

CLONMACNOISE

(Retraced by Drum Heritage Group)

While locating and subsequently mapping the Mass Paths which Mass goers used in bygone days to get to Sunday Mass at Drum, the members of Drum Heritage Group also undertook the tracing of a locally known "Pilgrim Route" or funeral path, which passed through Drum, leading to the ancient ecclesiastical city of Clonmacnoise. It is on record that in early Christian times many noble families carried the mortal remains of their loved ones for burial within the hallowed ground at Clonmacnoise.

Oral tradition handed down from generation to generation relates that the coffin bearers got their first sight of Saint Ciaran's Holy City on their arrival at Ardkeenán (the Hill of the Cry) in the parish of Drum and there rested, whereupon the local keening (crying) women gathered to lament the passing of the deceased. Sadly, the actual hilltop was removed in the latter years of the last century by the opening of a gravel pit.

A matter of considerable historical interest came to light when the late Brian Devine, a senior resident of the area, pointed to the location of a timber causeway, which he discovered during drainage operations some years ago on the lowlands beneath Ardkeenán Hill. It is thought likely that the neatly placed timbers

were laid to provide dry footage for the funeral cortege. In the immediate vicinity, a small stream rises, which flows in an almost straight line, through the marshy wetlands at Doohan, Cloonark, Derrylahan and Nure and enters the Shannon on the Western bank opposite Clonmacnoise. There is a strong belief that the funeral cortege used the banks of this stream as a guide to their destination.

Further folk tradition refers to a cabin in the village of Nure which, it is said, was frequently used as a "Wake House". Although the cabin is long since demolished the field, where the cabin once stood, is known to this day as the "Caoinna Marb" (Crying of the Dead).

After leaving Nure, the funeral route in the form of a gravel roadway appears to have crossed over what, at that time, was virgin bog and has over the years become submerged to a depth of five feet beneath the bog's surface. Some sections of this gravel roadway were uncovered by Bord na Mona bog workers some years ago and although bog development has been carried out on either side, the actual roadway remains untouched. This will probably be investigated by archaeologists from the Office of Public Works at some future date.

At a point where the gravel roadway ends divers found a massive timber bridge (believed to be the oldest medieval one in Western Europe), which for hundreds of years had lain undisturbed imbedded fast beneath the waters of the river Shannon. Needless to say, its existence had faded from memory with the passage of generations. It spanned the river, a distance of 170 metres, to the opposite point on the east bank at the now ruined castle. A report written by Mr Donal Boland, leader of the underwater archaeological team, states that the bridge was constructed on two rows of parallel oak timbers, which were pile-

driven into the bed of the river. One of the timbers, believed to have been supported by the vertical piles, measures 45ft in length and contains carved joints, on which 12ft lengths of oak planking were evidently placed to form a smooth surface for travellers using the bridge. Six log boats, each measuring more than 10ft long were also discovered and are assumed to have been moored to the piles, at the time the bridge collapsed into the river.

Clonmacnoise, founded by St Ciarán in the 6th century, survived as an ecclesiastical city for just under a thousand years. It was situated at the intersection of the Shannon and a passway called the "Slighe Mor", an ancient Irish route, running east to west along a huge esker - a gravel ridge - deposited during the Ice Age. It is believed that the monks at the monastery may have received royal patronage, which enabled them to undertake the construction of the bridge, which then provided a vital crossing point on the Shannon, long before the Norman invasion of Ireland. Local legend on the east side points to the castle as the exit point for users of the bridge, who were obliged to exchange their coinage here, before entering the Kingdom of Connacht. Therefore, there is every possibility that some type of toll house existed at the site of the castle in earlier years.

The Registry of Clonmacnoise, edited by Sean O'Donovan L.L.P., contains a contemporary account relating to the castle, which states that it was built by Sir Hugh de Lacy, a Norman chieftain and that near it stood the Bishop's Palace or Mansion House. Annals for the year 1158 A.D. refer to an incident in which the Bishop of Connacht, Archbishop of Tuam and his followers were held up and robbed as they approached the "joists or wooden bridge of Clonmacnoise".