

FR. GERRY COMISKEY writes about

The Whytes of Newtownmanor

The Catholic Church, dedicated to St. Mary, in the Newtownmanor area, is the third place of local worship since Saint Patrick's visit to the locality. His church — a wooden building, was erected in Carrickatemple where the local graveyard is still in use. The second church, built a short distance west of the original, was a thatched building. While the present church is only a short distance still west of the other two situated in the townland of Doonmorgan and the Parish of Killasnet. This church was originally known as the chapel of Bo and it is interesting to note that the high hill overlooking the church is called Benbo. A townland close by is called Bohey. This would point to the fact that Bo was a Chieftain in the locality. St. Mary's Church was built in 1826 at a cost of £25.



Fr. Gerry Comiskey, C.C. Doobally at the memorial in Newtownmanor Churchyard which the tenant farmers of that area erected to the memory of their landlord's wife in 1874.

In those days it had to accommodate a much larger congregation than it has today. It had two side galleries as well as its present capacity and an interesting addition was a room known as the "Ladies Room". The ladies in question being the Catholic members of the Whyte family — the local landlords. The Manor Church is unique in that within its surrounding grounds there is a larger memorial cross erected to the memory of a lay person.

The person was the distinguished wife of John James Whyte. He was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the British Army, born in 1806, the son of James, the squire of Pilton, North Devon, and Frances Honoria Beresford, the niece of the first Marquess of Waterford. One of his ancestors was married to one of the Hildyards of Winestead, who had fought for Charles the first in the Civil War.

On the 11th October, 1842, in Montreal Cathedral Lieutenant - Colonel J. J. Whyte, was united in holy matrimony with Marianne Jesse de Montenach, daughter of Charles Dieudonne de Monterach, patrician of Friburg, Switzerland, and his wife, the daughter of the Baronne de Longueuil. The de Longueuil's had been one of the most illustrious families of 'New France'. The first Baron, Charles le Moyne, having been awarded his patent of nobility by Louis XIV himself for his military services against the English in North America. The bride's grandmother owned large tracts of land around Montreal. It was undoubtedly a brilliant match in every sense of the term. Because the bride and bridegroom were of different religions — he Protestant, she French-Canadian Catholic — the ceremony in Montreal Cathedral was a double one, conducted first by the Vicar General, Reverend Messire Manseau, and afterwards by the Reverend Mr. Ramsey. In 1851, John James Whyte bought 6,500 acres for £10,025 and eight shillings from the temporarily financially embarrassed Gore-Booths. He later added to the estate that became known as Newtownmanor.

The Lieutenant-Colonel's career in the army was wrecked because of the death of Private Frederick John Whyte of the 7th Hussars. This young soldier died on the 11th of July, 1846, from the mortal effect of a severe and cruel flogging of one hundred and fifty lashes from the cat o' nine tails inflicted by order of a court martial a few weeks earlier. John James Whyte was present when the "Unfortunate Occurrence at Hounslow" — as the then War secretary called it — took place. The inquest into the death of the soldier forms a landmark in the long struggle to win basic human rights for the common soldier — a neglected, yet critical area of socio-political history, fully charted in a book published in 1977 entitled "The Strange Death of Private White — a Victorian scandal that made history" by Harry Hopkins.

Soon after the unprecedented publicity surrounding the protracted inquest, Lieutenant Colonel J. J. Whyte and his family came to live in Ireland. His wife died in 1874 and it was then that the tenant farmers of his North Leitrim estate erected the memorial "as a testimony of their regard and affection!" and in recognition of "her unfailing kindness, her great charity, and her many Christian virtues."

He died in 1889 at the age of eighty-three. His only son, Cecil Beresford inherited Newtownmanor. The "Leitrim Advertiser" did the Colonel proud. Soon after his death the paper reads,

"He and his good lady (who predeceased him) as well as his family were highly popular in the county. He was a most active country gentleman and magistrate and grand jurors discharged his duties with firmness and efficiency."

The article mentions that his son succeeded to the property but failed to mention that, as far as the more insubordinate tenants were concerned, he also succeeded to the title "Flogger Whyte".