

# DROMAHAIR

Seat of the O'Rourke Prince of Breffni

DROMAHAIR is one of the most historical localities in Leitrim, if not indeed in Ireland. Despite its fame, many historians endeavour to record tales of Dromahair which are contrary to all historical fact. No greater historical inaccuracy emerges anywhere than that which attributes to Dervorgilla, by her alleged elopement from Dromahair, the infamous privilege of having caused the Anglo-Norman invasion. Thomas Moore, in his composition, *The Smiling Valley, or The Valley Lay Smiling Before Me*, immortalizes the inaccuracy that Dervorgilla eloped from this locality, and now modern historians justify their claims of the fact of this happening with Moore's lovely lyric. Moore, however, was a poet and not an historian, and Dervorgilla never saw or heard of Dromahair, having been forcibly abducted (rather than eloping)—from the midlands—some three centuries before Dromahair even became an O'Rourke seat.

The "Smiling Valley" lies off the north-eastern end of Lough Gill and is of unsurpassed beauty and historic interest—the poem being completely unhistorical. Lough Gill itself is one of the loveliest lakes in Ireland. A whole range of verdant slopes and wooded hills encircles the peerless expanse of water below. A serene loveliness, an incomparable beauty here replaces the wild grandeur of other districts. In the western region of Lough Gill there are three historic islands. The best known of these is that which has been im-

mortalised by the poet, W. B. Yeats, in *The Lake Isle of Innisfree*. However, before the labours of Yeats, this island was famous in history. As early as AD 1217 it was the seat of Mac Kagadhain, or Keegan, chief of the tiny statelet of Killery or Kilanumery, and which did not become part of the O'Rourke Kingdom of Breffni until AD 1228. "Inis Mor" or "Church Island," contained the sixth century religious foundation of St. Loman of Loch Gill, replaced centuries later by the medieval church, destroyed by fire in 1416 with the loss of the O'Cuirnan's family manuscripts which were priceless. This family of O'Cuirnan were the hereditary poets of the O'Rourke Princes of Breffni. The remains of a medieval chapel, belonging to the Premonstratensian Church of Kilross, founded in 1233, lies on "Cottage Island."

On a point of land stretching out into Lough Gill are the scant remains of "Newtown O'Rourke" fortress, first mentioned in 1546 and pulled down in 1581 by Brian na Murtha O'Rourke, for fear the Saxons would occupy them. West of "Newtown O'Rourke" stands the picturesque ruin of the early seventeenth century Plantation Castle of the Parke family who received part of the confiscated lands of O'Rourke. On his way to burn Sligo, Sir Frederick Hamilton, the monstrous ruler of Manorhamilton, in 1642, garrisoned this castle. It surrendered to the Royalists on July 10, 1649, and to the Parliamentarians on June 3, 1652. Near the Parkes Castle, on the northern side, lies the ruined medieval church in which Robert and Mary Parke, children of Captain Robert Parke, were interred in 1677.

Alongside the road which ascends the hill of Carrickanerroo runs one of the loveliest "Alts" or glens in Ireland. The view of Lough Gill from here is just superb.

On the way to Innisfree is the ruined church of Killerry, famous for its "Straining Thread" cures. In 1346 this church was set on fire by Maelrooney Mac Donagh, who saw Ualgarg O'Rourke, Prince of Breffni, as he rushed from the building to which he had fled for protection after his defeat at Calry.



The Smiling Valley

Courtesy Keaney, Photographer, Carrick-on-Shannon

*Immortalised by the poet Moore.*

### Creevelea Abbey

By far the most historic structure in the Dromahair district is the well preserved ruin of the First Order Franciscan Friary, of strict observance, of Creevelea. It was founded by Owen O'Rourke, Prince of Breffni and his wife, Margaret O'Brien of Thomond, in the year 1508. The first Friars came from Donegal Friary. It was consecrated in 1511 by the Bishop of Kilmore, Bishop Thomas Mac Brady. Margaret was interred there in 1512 and Owen in 1528. Accidentally burned in 1536, it was later partially restored by the founder's son, Brian Ballach Mor. It was legally suppressed in 1539, but the suppression decree could not then be enforced. The Friars were still in possession in 1574. In 1590 Sir Richard Bingham stabled his horses in the friary. In 1598 the friars were driven out and the friary wrecked. The friars returned about 1601. Captain Harrison was in possession in

1617 extorting large sums of money for burials, but during the 1641-49 period, the friars were again in possession.

Like beautiful and neighbouring Glencar, Dromahair inspired the poet Yeats, greatly. At a fair in the town of Dromahair, Yeats found inspiration for his composition, *The Man Who Dreamed of Fairyland*, and his host on many occasions in Dromahair, Father Peter Galligan, is depicted in the lovely lyric *The Ballad of Peter Gilligan*.

Steeped with history, adorned with beauty, Dromahair has no equal for loveliness in Ireland.

*(Our thanks to Dr. Owen F. Traynor, pp, Dromahair, for permission to publish the historical facts contained in the above article.)*