

THE CARMELITES
OF
LEIGHLINBRIDGE

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The Conquering Normans

In the Calendar of Patent Rolls for Henry III (1266 - 1272) there is a record of Carmelites in Ireland on 19 August 1271 registering 'simple protection' for them. The Normans who came to Ireland in the previous century were now well established in their own areas and according to the Carmelite historian, Peter O'Dwyer already "had provided Ireland with a central administration." They controlled a large section of the country, and individual Norman families had acquired large tracts of land.

Normandy as we know it today came into existence towards the end of the First Millennium. The Normans had begun a conquest from there and employed the system of law as the basic foundation and preservation of their conquests. Their knights, bound by the pledge of homage to their King with an obligation of military service, were not constrained by moral compunction when a suitable chance offered itself. They seized kingdoms and established their rule as far south as Sicily and even engaged in the first Crusade. In 1066 they conquered the Saxons (England) and in 1154 Henry II, the Lord of the Norman territories in France, had been accepted as King of England, although most of his thirty-five year reign was spent in France. In 1167 the first Norman knights came to Ireland and with little difficulty had established themselves throughout the country. In the chaotic situation of the Irish people at the time in the Church and secular realms, the Normans were already strengthened by a legal system of government that provided for an orderly structure in a changing society.

The old Celtic Church that had given centuries of saints and scholars had become powerful and wealthy and lax in its observances. Later the sea-borne hit-and-run attacks of the Viking raiders on the monasteries made any attempts at reform as in the tradition of the *Ciddees or Celi De* more necessary. The lasting effect of the Norsemen's presence was the establishment of inland bases or settlements and the founding of seaside towns, a phenomenon unknown in Gaelic society. The Irish Church was sadly in need of reform, and by the beginning of the twelfth century a native reform party had established itself, centred in Munster. Pope Gregory VII and the Norman Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury had already approached the Dal Cais dynasty, detailing abuses in the Irish Church and urging that a reform synod be assembled. As a result, the Synod of Cashel was held in 1101; and an extension of it to represent the whole of Ireland met at Rathbreasail in the midlands in 1111. A third synod was convened and met at Kells in 1152 to consolidate what had been achieved, especially in the founding of dioceses, the prevention of lay interference in Church affairs and a further reform of the regulations affecting marriage and the administration of the sacraments. With the coming of the Normans, the Church in Ireland was to be opened more and more to the new influences of Europe. The religious life of the emerging feudal world reflected a knight-service and allegiance to the Person of Christ, modelled on the civil service and commitment to the King. Already too within the Church the changing form of political organisation was being mirrored in the development of theological studies through a new approach and understanding of the truths of faith through rational reflection. This latter movement demanded more educated candidates for the priesthood, which resulted in the establishment and development of the new institutions of the University. Very much in keeping with the social progress at the beginning of the thirteenth century, a new concept

of religious life emerged with the mendicant friars, men committed by vows to the imitation of Christ but dedicated to the active service of the people with preaching and pastoral care at the very centre of their lives.

The Coming of the Carmelites

The Carmelites came to Ireland in 1271 and their first friary was built on the right bank of the Barrow River at Leighlinbridge, Co. Carlow towards the end of the reign of Henry III (+ 1272). The Black Castle, now in ruins, which dominates the river crossing, was an Anglo-Norman fortress built in the previous century when the Normans coming up the coast to the Avoca River from their early base near Bannow Strand had invaded and taken much of the surrounding lands. The Carmelite friars who were to make up the community at Leighlinbridge were Normans from the Carmelite Province of England where the two principal friaries were at Aylesford and Hulne. The Carmelites had appeared in the Western Church only a few decades before, when then living as hermits on Mount Carmel some time between 1206 and 1214 they received a Formula Vitae or Rule of Life from St. Albert, who was the Patriarch of Jerusalem. At the time he was resident at Acre near Mount Carmel, due to the Muslim incursions into the Holy Land. Because of the same invasions the Carmelites about 1238 were forced to migrate to Europe - to Cyprus, Sicily, Italy and eventually to England. It is clear that some Carmelites joined Crusaders returning to their own home countries. In 1242 some were brought to Hulne in England by Sir William Vesey and to Aylesford by Sir Richard Grey of Codnor. The two knights were on the Crusade under Richard of Cornwell who landed at Acre on 11 October 1240 and had set out on their return journey for England on May the following year. The Carmelites were brought by their patrons before the King around Christmas and were granted permission to remain in England and to make foundations. Aylesford Friary and Hulne were then established and quickly followed by others in Kent and Norfolk. The later close connection between the King and the Carmelite Order is clear from grants made to the Carmelite friaries in England and Ireland during the following centuries. A royal mandate was given to the Carmelites to pray for the King and royal family.

It was from these friaries, by this time forming the English Province of the Order, that the first Carmelites came to Leighlinbridge and built their house near the Black Castle on a site supplied by the Carew family. From the beginning their situation must have been perilous. Already from 1260 native Irish opposition to Norman control increased in different parts of the country, the Normans holding strongest sway within the Pale. Since the River Barrow separated Irish clans like the O'Kavanaghs from the Norman forces, the Carmelites at the ford crossing would have soon experienced the effects of the military operations by the Irish. Theirs was an anomalous position, serving the peoples on both sides of the river, and as mendicants depending on them for support and in their mission, yet patronised by the Norman overlords whom they also served. From the time of their coming they appear to have been 'Bridge Builders' or maintainers, always ready to repair bodies and souls as well as the wood or stone of the actual bridge.

The first Carmelite friars who made up the community at Leighlinbridge were Normans; but the Irish would have joined them very soon because of the nature of their mission in

the Church. However Irish members were not appointed to higher offices. Before the end of the thirteenth century, at the invitation of local powerful families or individuals, Carmelite foundations had been established at Dublin in 1274, at Ardee about 1280, at Ballinasmale, Co. Mayo about 1288, at Kildare 1290, Drogheda about 1297, Burriscarra, Co. Mayo in 1298 and Loughrea and Thurles about 1300. While the communities were still part of the English Province, they could not have a Prior as such but the leader was called 'Procurator', one who "was not permitted to undertake obligations or incur debt without consulting the Provincial." Peter O'Dwyer, O.Carm., suggests that initially the friars lived in huts about an oratory, dedicated to Our Lady. Later they would have lived in the type of friaries, evidenced from their ruins, as made up of a centre chapel, to which the domestic buildings were attached, including a dormitory (which in the case of the Carmelites contained cubicles for the members), study, kitchen and meeting rooms. According to P. O'Dwyer, the number in the community in Leighlinbridge at the beginning would have been at most twelve and later fewer. The Carmelites took with them from Mount Carmel the Rite of the Holy Sepulchre for the liturgical celebrations. The revised Constitutions of 1357 prescribed that the Provincials were to ensure that all communities had copies of the Ordinals and that the Salve Regina was recited at the conclusion of each liturgical Hour. This is what the first Carmelites did. The Carmelite Order retained the Jerusalem Rite until the Council of Vatican II when for pastoral reasons they accepted the Roman Rite.

In the thirteenth century the Carmelites in Leighlin were reimbursed by the Government for maintaining armed men within their close to protect them against the Irish who had destroyed the bridge in order "to prevent the transit of the King's faithful people." By the beginning of the fourteenth century, the Carmelites like other mendicants had made more foundations throughout the country. In 1302 John Cheffyn wished to give a half acre and William Bolyt a quarter acre to the Carmelites at Leighlinbridge. The Justiciary, John Wogan, had to hold an inquiry on 3 December 1302 to ensure that "such a gift would not be at a loss to the King", indicating that the land was government property.

At the General Chapter of the Order held at Narbonne in 1303, it was decided to divide the Province of England and create a new Hiberno-Scotland Province. The implementing of this in 1304 when the Prior General, Gerard of Bologna, sent William of Newenham and William de Hannaberg as his vicars to enforce the decision, was met with resistance. Various negotiations involving King Edward I, as well as consultations with Rome, resulted in a resolution of the problems at a Chapter held in England in August 1305. William of Newenham was appointed Provincial of Ireland. Some would ascribe the separation to political reasons, that is, to the opposition to English control felt by friars in Ireland. Certainly some friars in Kildare were accused by their Franciscan bishop of spreading the seeds of rebellion, by using the Irish language. In the opinion of P.O'Dwyer, the friars, both Norman and Irish, wished to be independent because now they had sufficient foundations and members. There were at least nine friaries, probably several more, throughout the country and these "drew substantial support from the native race." The separation was further helped by the problem of studies. On the completion of their grammar studies, young Irish Carmelite students were sent to England to pursue higher studies at Oxford,

Cambridge or London. Consequently, an Irish student could spend a period from six to ten years there. After the visitation of the Province in 1325 by the Prior General's vicar, John Bloxham, a studium was founded in Dublin.

At least nine friaries existed when William Newenham who had been Prior of Leighlinbridge was appointed Provincial of Ireland (1303 - 1305). The communities consisted of Norman and Irish friars, showing little evidence of tension between the two, although later royal decrees discouraged the Gaelic language. In 1310 the Parliament of Kilkenny instructed all religious within their territory to refuse admission to all who were not of the English nation. By 1315 when the Provincial Chapter was held the 'problem of the two nations', the animosity between the Irish and Norman peoples, had heightened in different areas of the Norman controlled land. At the General Chapter of 1318 at which William Newenham (Gulielmus de Lechlinia) of Leighlin was confirmed as Provincial, Archbishops and Bishops in Ireland were named and appointed to protect the Carmelites' rights especially those of preaching and confessing.

Ralph Kelly, the Carmelite who was Archbishop of Cashel, was ordered by Edward III to contribute ten marks to help in the war against Art O'Kavanagh in 1359. In 1371 which was the centenary year of its foundation, Edward III granted friars of Leighlin Bridge ten marks annually for the repair and the restoring of their house. It was a means of maintaining the English defence at the stone-bridge against the attacks by the Irish which were facilitated in fact by the building of the bridge in 1320. Again in 1372 the Leighlin community received a royal subvention of ten marks. It is clear from these grants that the friary had to bear the brunt of many attacks round this time. Richard II in 1394 was helping the survival of the friars "who suffered from the incursions of our Irish enemies" and were to be paid annually twenty marks for maintaining the bridge and friary. The money was to be supplied from the King's possessions in Castlelyons, Co.Cork. The following year additional lands were granted to the Carmelite community at Leighlinbridge by Edward Carew and confirmed by the King. There is no doubt from these records that for the century following their coming to Ireland the community were under the influence of the Anglo-Norman. The animosity between the Irish and Anglo-Normans was heightened within the mendicant Orders as time passed. In matters of control and in the use of the Irish language disagreements occurred.

In 1315, Edward, brother of Robert Bruce, the victor at Bannockburn, landed from Scotland near Lame with a large army and set about conquering the country. The friars were in the path of the Bruce invasion. The Carmelite friary in Ardee in Norman territory was burnt to the ground. The community would have been mainly made up of Norman personnel and many people had sought refuge within its walls. Earlier that year a Provincial Chapter was held in Ardee. Edward Bruce died at the Battle of Faughart on the 14 October 1318. During his campaign the Irish had supported Bruce but the Normans generally did not. Churches, monasteries, friaries, all had suffered heavily across the country. The Irish and Normans were more separated than ever. There was now deep suspicion and even active hatred between them. In addition and as in Europe, there was a dreadful famine in three successive years 1315, 1316 and 1317. The Black Death struck in 1348 returning for

several years. The Irish chieftains or kings at the end of the century by submitting to Richard II became in a real sense powerful magnates, the same as the Norman lords. It was a time when some Anglo-Irish became Earls, like Gearoid Iarla of Desmond. However no Anglo-Irish lord was ever totally Irish.

Expansion in the Fourteenth Century

An outstanding Carmelite of this century was Ralph Kelly. He was the son of a merchant in Drogheda and was sent to the papal city of Avignon for his studies in both civil and ecclesiastical law. According to accounts he was affable and fearless. He was made Procurator of the Order at the Chapters in 1327 and again in 1339. On 6 February 1344 he was appointed to the See of Leighlin and consecrated at Avignon. On his journey back to Ireland he was arrested and kept in custody at Sandwich in England with another Carmelite Bishop, John Pascal. They were described as bishops lately consecrated by the Pope and with Bulls and Letters prejudicial to the King. Ralph Kelly was vindicated and freed. He was appointed to the See of Cashel in 1346, notification being sent to the Chapter and others as well as the King. Edward III's letter to the Judiciary of Ireland recognises that Ralph has renounced "all words prejudicial to the King or His Crown, humbly submitting himself to the King's grace." But the new Archbishop opposed the taxes imposed by Edward and in turn imposed excommunication and other censures on anyone who paid a tax. The Archbishop and his prelates were prosecuted, found guilty and ordered to pay a fine of a thousand marks. Ralph Kelly was Archbishop of Cashel until his death in 1361. At the time of Ralph Kelly's difficulties with the secular authority, it was decreed that no Englishman in Ireland was to be allowed to use the Irish language in dealing with another Englishman, or allow his children to be fostered by the Irish. According to P. O'Dwyer, an acceptable compromise was evolving between the Gaelic-speaking mendicants "who admit no one into their monasteries unless they are pure Irish." There was a strong English/Norman influence evident in the selection of Englishmen as Carmelite Provincials of Ireland and in the exclusion of Irish friars from holding any. In 1371 (the centenary year of the foundation) Edward III granted the friars at Leighlin Bridge ten marks annually for the repair and the rebuilding there. This was an effort to maintain the English defence against the attacks of the Irish which were facilitated by the building of the stone bridge in 1320. Right into the next century, the Carmelites of Leighlinbridge were given constant recognition for their labours on the border of the Pale and their care of the bridge. Gerald, 5th Earl of Kildare, built the White Castle close to the bridge in 1408, the site of which seems unknown today.

In the fifteenth century the Irish Carmelites seem to have been experiencing a difficult financial period especially around the 1430s since the contributions asked by Rome were the smallest. For some reason the Province had no representative at some of the General Chapters during this century. At the General Chapter held in Avignon in 1451 John Soreth was elected Prior General and held the post for twenty five years, working indomitably for the reform of the Order. He is acknowledged as one of the greatest Prior Generals of the Order. He was beatified in 1866.

Culture and Religion

The Norman culture gradually dominated both the Church and civil life of the land. The Normans have left us a wealth of documentation but it is all about legal, administrative and government affairs. The friars of Leighlinbridge like other Carmelites and other mendicants elsewhere served the local people on both sides of the river by preaching, teaching and instructing the faithful and especially by keeping alive their Order's flavour of spirituality and devotion. This would have incorporated the traditional Irish forms of devotion to relics, local saints and pilgrimages to holy places and shrines. Croagh Patrick and Lough Derg's St. Patrick's Purgatory survive to our day. At the time the international problem relating to the Papacy and to religious doctrine that had surfaced in Europe, generally affected the quality of Christian life in Ireland as in England. At the end of the century while the Carmelites of Leighlin were being praised for their maintenance of the Bridge, the state of observance among the religious and the practice of religion among the people throughout the country had declined. There were complaints about tensions between the clergy and the friars who claimed that they were better educated but who were blamed for abuse of the sacrament of penance. The friars appear to have attracted many penitents and were consequently accused of 'offering easier terms' of penances, reparation and even of absolving those excommunicated for murder. In general both with the secular clergy and amongst the friars, the problems got worse. Less suitable candidates had to be accepted for priesthood. Since their decimation by the Black Death their numbers had never fully recovered.

As in other places of Europe, a special feature of the fifteenth century was the growth of lay piety that manifested itself in religious guilds, in lay religious associations and in the case of the Mendicants, in their Third Orders. The Prior General, John Soreth, mentioned above, was a holy man dedicated to a reform of the religious life. He was also very active in developing the spirituality of the laity, founding the Third Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel for the laity and also the Carmelite Nuns. The Carmelites in Ireland would have felt some of his influence as elsewhere.

Dissolution and Dispersal

It is clear from the Irish and Roman Archives that the Irish Province failed to send representatives to most of the General Chapters held towards the end of the fifteenth century. However in 1503 when Peter Terrasse was elected General they were well represented. Cornelius Connell was reappointed Provincial. In 1505 William de Castro was made Prior of Leighlinbridge. An urgent need for reform was expressed in the decrees of the General Chapter of 1524. It was not attended by Provincials from Ireland, England, Scotland or from some mainland countries, the latter because of the Lutheran revolt. The Prior General, Nicholas Audet, is reported to have visited the Irish and English Provinces in 1530, at a time when King Henry VIII was trying hard to get a divorce decree from Rome. With his failure, the English Reformation got full legal force in England in the Reformation Parliament 1529- 1536. In Ireland it was passed in the Dublin Parliament in 1536-37. The King proclaimed himself temporal and spiritual head of both countries and denied the Pope's spiritual authority in both lands. This was followed by the dissolution of the monasteries and friaries and the decree concerning their members: "to receive their

resignations and surrenders willingly tendered also to take charge for the King's use, of the possessions of the said houses, assigning competent pensions thereat to the persons who spontaneously surrender." The Suppression in Ireland had already begun by 1538. Some of the Carmelite friaries were suppressed in 1538-39 and by 1540 all of them had been dissolved and the properties annexed by the Crown. The official *Extent* for the Leighlinbridge friary was made on 6 January 1541 and the suppression of the friary is dated as "the Friday after 8 December 1543". It was surrendered by William, the last Prior. There was church belfry, dormitory, hall, two chambers, kitchen, a cemetery and a garden of one acre. Twenty-four acres of arable land and an eel-weir belonged to the friars in the village. In 1546 Sir Edward Bellingham, Lord Deputy, converted the friary into a fort and surrounded it with a strong high wall. This fortress was the centre of all military operations in Leinster. A considerable portion of the wall remains. Despite the dangers some Carmelites continued to minister in the district.

An entry in the State Papers under 1549 records a requisition for pickaxes, shovels, some ordnance, powder and money for the commencement of work at "a very good quarry of slate near Leighlin Bridge". A sketch of the town in part of the Carlow Barony (a map from the Lambeth MSS, London) said to date from 1571 clearly indicates an arched stone bridge and a wall extending from the end of the downstream parapet eastwards and around the town. In the Summer of 1575 there was "an intense heat and extreme drought from 1st May to 1st August" and without rain a plague developed, raging among the Irish and English in Dublin, Naas, Ardee, Mullingar and Athboy. In Leighlin there must have been similar sufferings among the people and Carmelites, after the town was taken and set on fire by Rory Óg Ó Moore, the rebel leader from Laois. Carmelites were still provided refuge there because on 18 August 1576 the site and possessions of the friars were given to Sir Peter Carew. In 1557 Connel Óg Ó Moore was sentenced to death as a stubborn rebel and executed at Leighlin Bridge. Rory Óg was killed in 1578. The Bridge was a vital crossing for army and commerce alike on the way by Callan, Clonmel, and Cahir to Cork.

Even into the next century, the English authorities were still trying to wipe out the religious. In 1611 an Act was passed ordering all friars, monks and nuns to be expelled from their dissolved houses "where for the most part they still keep and hover". If the people to whom the King had given the lands and houses allowed the religious to continue there "as many do" they would forfeit their estate to the Crown and be fined or imprisoned (Cal. Carew Papers 1603-24).

Despite the danger, the Prior General, Henry Silvius, appointed John O'Devaney Commissary General of the Irish Province on 30 April 1610. He was renewed in this post on 30 April 1615. With the defeat in 1601 of the Gaelic leaders O'Neill and O'Donnell who were supported by Spanish allies at Kinsale and their subsequent going into exile in 1607 from the shores of Donegal at the last pre-Reformation Carmelite foundation at Rathmullan, the resistance to English power was at an end. Elizabeth I had died a few weeks after Kinsale but the English forces in Ireland continued her policy of repression. In the 1600s the 'New English', those who had come to Ireland since 1530s, the administrators and soldiers, were overwhelmingly Protestant. There was still the 'Old Irish'

who bore the brunt of the Tudor repression, but there were very few Protestants in their ranks. Most had suffered through the plantations. The middle group in this political structure were the 'Old English', a group much larger than the 'Anglo-Irish' of the towns and Pale and included those of Anglo-Norman origins who held on to their own culture. There were few Protestants among them and most had opted for the Counter-Reformation Catholicism. The disturbances that gave rise to the Civil War in England were reflected in the Irish situation. For much of 1640s Confederate Catholics controlled most of Ireland from their capitol at Kilkenny. In England Charles I was defeated by his opponents, led by Oliver Cromwell, who replaced the monarchy with a quasi-republican regime called the Commonwealth. On 30 January 1649 the King was executed in London and on 15 August that year Oliver Cromwell landed at Ringsend, Dublin with an army for the conquest of Ireland. Massacres followed at Drogheda that began in the ancient Carmelite church in September, at Wexford in October and the other centres showing resistance to him. He was forced to return to England on 26 May 1650 because of the worsening situation there. His son-in-law, Henry Ireton, succeeded him as Commander and continued the operations until 1652 when Galway, the last fortified city, surrendered. The war ended in 1653 without formality. In order to compensate those who funded Cromwell's military operations and to pay the wages of his soldiers as well as the 'adventurers' who were spurred on by religious fervour to fight against the Irish Confederates, plans were made to confiscate all Catholic property in three of the Provinces, the dispossessed to get land grants in the other, Connacht - in Galway, Roscommon and most of Mayo. The confiscation proved very successful though a small minority of Catholic owners got back their estates after 1660. Some merchants went into exile in Catholic Europe. Many families remained as tenants on lands they formerly owned. A new landlord class appeared after the Plantations.

What happened at Leighlin Bridge? While the original friary had been levelled making room for the fortress, a house and a chapel must have existed for the friars. There were still forty to fifty Irish Carmelites throughout the country as well as young friars studying in Europe and older ones who had been forced to go into exile on account of the English laws. The latter are found later as professors and teachers in various universities and schools such as Louvain and Brussels. To Archbishop Rinuccini, Papal Nuncio, who arrived in Ireland in 1645 the Carmelite, Fr. William of St. Patrick, who had attended the Confederation of Kilkenny from October to Christmas 1642, complained that some of the Carmelites had repossessed the friary at Knocktopher (about 25 miles from Leighlin) only to be attacked and driven out by sixty men, Catholics. The Bishop of Ossory gave the Carmelites "neither remedy nor consolation Fr. William had to leave for France, looking for manpower from the members of the Reform at Touraine. Some of the Carmelites of Leighlin would have gone to the Continent while others would have gone into hiding in the neighbourhood.

The rest of the century was a time of frustration and anxiety for Catholics. The Archbishop of Dublin, Peter Talbot, died in prison and Oliver Plunkett was hanged at Tyburn in 1681. In "The Irish Franciscans 1651-65", B. Millett, O.F.M. states that there was only one Calced Carmelite in Ireland in 1665. Writing to Rome from Dublin on 22 December 1683, Fr. William Shee (Shea) requested the Prior General for faculties to receive four youths into

the Order, acknowledging that he himself was the only Carmelite in Ireland. The General, Angelo Monsignani, replying on 8 April 1684 gave the necessary faculties but also sought more information about the situation of the Order. William wrote on 1 April 1685 seeking faculties to profess four youths. In his reply, the General appointed him Commissary General for Ireland. William wrote again to the General asking for helpers from the Continent since he wished to reoccupy the old foundations. Aspirants had been going to the Continent for years. It was time now to get missionaries from the Provinces such as Belgium or Touraine. Fr. William was accused of being a poor correspondent in replying to letters sent him while in fact "letters had been sent to the General but he failed to receive them." After the Battle of the Boyne and the Treaty of Limerick, a decree banished all the regular priests (members of Orders) from Ireland. In fact some priests still held on in the neighbourhood of their friaries and priest-hunters were active throughout these areas over the following years.

On 1 May 1715, Anselm Jackson was appointed Commissary General of the Carmelite missions in Ireland. While the pursuit of the friars was ruthless and untiring, many by registering as secular priests continued to be able to minister to the people. After 1720 with an abating of the persecution some friars were able to come together and form small communities. With the help of alms collected in the country round about, they rented farms and took on novices as servant boys'. The Penal Laws were still in force and the 'priest-catchers' were active in 1721-22. However, the situation for the Order in Ireland must have been improving for a petition was made in the General Chapter of 1728 that the Irish might be allowed to pursue their studies in other Provinces on the Continent.

The Leighlin friary was restored in 1730. The Irish petitioned the General Chapter 1731 to be given the status of Province because there was now a sufficient number of convents, residents and religious. The Province was officially restored by Pope Clement XII on 10 October 1737. The first Provincial Chapter of the newly erected Province was held in Dublin 25 - 31 May 1741. The Friary at Leighlin was inhabited and Raymond Burk was elected Prior. The programme for the clergy at the time was to teach Christian doctrine to the young, celebrate Mass and hear confessions, visit the parish or village and by going to the houses teach what was necessary for salvation.

Once again considerable animosity developed in the early part of the century between the secular clergy and the mendicants. There were complaints that there were too many mendicants, that many were lazy and of dissolute life, that they disguised their questing under pastoral ministry, that they used faculties for missionary countries not in keeping with a Tridentine pattern of pastoral care. The Hierarchy promulgated the Holy See's decree of 1751 that postulants were no longer to receive the habit in Ireland and that the canonical year for novitiate was to be made on the Continent. Since the Carmelites had no Irish houses in Europe, though a number of Irish were now part of local Provinces, the need to establish a novitiate or use one of another Province was very difficult for them. They voiced their worry to Rome, pointing out that with this problem in recruiting aspirants, there was a danger of the Order's extinction. The decline in the number of mendicants in 1750 was alarming. Statistics compiled together by the Religious Orders for

1767 to determine the decline since 1750 showed that the Carmelites had dropped in number from sixty-four to thirty-four. The other Mendicants were in the same plight. A letter to Rome from the Provincial, Francis Mannin in a plea for help points out this danger of extinction. Towards the end of the century, Catholics were allowed to have schools but only with the permission of the Protestant bishop. "The regulars of Ash Street", an educational system report states, had taken on another "popish school where twenty boys are clothed and instructed only." In 1806 the Dublin friary had to move to French Street, which was off Cuffe Street, apparently because the landlord would not renew their lease. They continued to use their chapel in the Liberties.

Despite the removal of many disabilities in the later eighteenth century, Catholics were still subjected to serious forms of discrimination. They could not sit in parliament. They had to pay tithes to the Established (Anglican) Church. They were excluded from many positions of authority. The influence of the French Revolution resulted in a rebellion in 1798 by Ulster Presbyterians, who also suffered a degree of discrimination. This was quickly suppressed but it was soon followed by a rebellion of Catholics in Kildare, Carlow and especially Wexford where it had a sadly sectarian character and was marked by ferocity on the part both of the rebels and the government forces which put them down. A parliamentary union between Great Britain and Ireland was passed in the British Parliament on 2 July 1800 and in the Irish Parliament on 1 August 1800, coming into effect on 1 January 1801. With the Act of Union people now began to speak of 'Catholic Emancipation', feeling that for them admission to the higher offices of State could be soon realised. P.O'Dwyer points out that "while the legal standing of the Catholic Church improved, the curtailments imposed by the Hierarchy on Religious Orders had a very damaging effect on them", not least of all on their morale. Amongst the poor and destitute to whom the Order priests ministered the standard of living and the level of piety were very low. For the Carmelites themselves to survive there was need for a morale boost. In 1801 there were ten friaries manned by twenty-eight priests. Some of the friars, who went to Europe in the turbulent times of the Napoleonic period expecting to return, in fact joined the local Provinces and stayed. Despite the hopes of Emancipation during the early decades, the Religious Orders were experiencing great hardship from the Hierarchy and in 1815 several complaints were made to Rome against certain bishops "who continue to harass the regular clergy". However the Orders were not always free of blame. There were problems of poor discipline and observance where the communities were small and in some cases members were not living together. English Law did not recognise the legal existence of friaries or the possession of goods in common. Hence in the case of the Carmelites as with other Orders, whatever they possessed in buildings or lands was considered in law as belonging to one person and it had to be left by will to another named person. If the recognized owner died intestate, the property would go to his next of kin, which sometimes occurred with the loss of houses and land to a member of a natural family. The will of Fr. Patrick Farrell made on 6 June 1817 at White Abbey, Kildare was a typical acceptable form at the time. It states "Lastly I leave and bequeath my title of that house and land near Leighlin Bridge to Mr. Michael Coleman now residing therein with the land adjoining and to Mr. Myles Prendergast of Moate." Fr. O'Farrell was Provincial and Myles Prendergast was named Vicar Apostolic of Malabar in 1818 and consecrated in Rome as titular Bishop of

Centuria.

At the Provincial Chapter in 1823 Patrick Berry who was Vicar Prior of Leighlin was elected Prior of Leighlin. There were at least three other Carmelites in the community, two aged about thirty and another Michael Coleman who was sixty, "living in the district of the convent." Two others, William Britton and Richard Whelan, were to be conventuals, assigned to live in the friary. In Fr. Colgan's Relatio or report to Rome in 1840, it states that the convent was owned not by the Carmelites but by a landlord who was demanding £40 rent which the Provincial refused to give. According to the Diocesan Archives of Kildare and Leighlin, the Carmelite convent was suppressed by Bishop Doyle in 1826. P.O'Dwyer in "The Irish Carmelites" felt that the references from the Kildare and Leighlin archives "need further investigation" in the light of Colgan's report in his Relatio of 1840.

Before his elevation to the episcopate, Bishop Doyle was an Augustinian friar working at Carlow College. It was indeed singular that in 1819 at the age of thirty-two and a member of a Religious Order, James Doyle was made Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. As a Church leader he proved himself outstanding, particularly in his work with Daniel O'Connell for Catholic Emancipation and in the administration of the diocese. But he was intent on implementing the Trent model regarding the position of bishop - as with the Pope for the world, so with the bishop for the diocese. He wished all faculties, permissions etc., to be reserved to him. For the old Orders, 'exempt religious' with Prior Generals in Rome and a source of plenary authority at mission level, there was the making of conflict and contention. It was a time of emergence from the penal era of suppression, a time when unassigned friars few in number still lived close to the people with no community discipline and poor observance but still with the dedication to the religion that preserved the faith of 'our fathers. Bishop Doyle's unrelenting attitude seemed inexorable.

The Religious Orders had suffered a great deal because of the prohibition of having their own novitiates in Ireland. In the 1820s there were only 30 Carmelite priests left who served in eight friaries. The opening of houses on the Continent after the revolutionary wars gave new hopes to the Irish Province but these were soon dashed. In the publication of the Catholic Emancipation Act 1829 there were a series of clauses describing what was effectively a new penal code that aimed at "the gradual suppression and final extinction" of the Jesuits and Mendicants. Religious priests were to be compelled to register, foreign members of Religious Orders entering the United Kingdom were to be refused, and those responsible for receiving novices and the novices themselves were to be prosecuted. The Tithes remained. Before the Emancipation Bill was published in 1829, the Provincial of the Augustinian friars, Fr. D. O'Connor, O.S.A., informed Bishop Doyle of the great fears of the regular clergy "that they might be sacrificed for Emancipation". Fr. O'Connor with other Superiors, Fr. John Spratt, O.Carm., and Fr. Leahy, O.P. met with the Bishop on 20 March 1829 to stress their fears and to make a petition against the penal clauses affecting their people 'who were blameless and entitled to the protection of the State.' through the work of Bishop Doyle and others this plea was presented to the House of Lords on 1 April 1829. The Emancipation Bill was passed into law on 13 April 1829. The new penal legislation was never invoked but the Emancipation Act did not put an end to injustices to

Catholics. Afterwards we find Carmelites having to register themselves under pain of heavy fine for failure to do so. Bequests made to them became invalid and the Courts did not recognise funds bestowed on Catholic charities. The effect of the Bill was to reduce the membership or enrolment of candidates for the Orders. In the case of the west of Ireland, especially Connacht, the Carmelites had left all their friaries and traditional areas such as Knock, Co. Mayo before 1870.

The demise of Leighlinbridge had already occurred.

The Bridge of Leighlin

An excellent book “Irish Stone Bridges” by Peter O’Keeffe and Tom Simington was published in 1991. The authors are civil engineers with a lifetime experience of “giving our old bridges the attention they deserve”. They state that Leighlin Bridge “has been one of the most important river crossings in Ireland for more than a thousand years.” The river Barrow from Muine Beg to the sea has cut a deep valley for its path while up-river it flows through relatively flat country. Roads of ancient origin met at the crossing point of Leighlin. The book stresses this point in terms of the place’s importance. After the Norman invasion, Bealach Gabhrain continued to be the great highway between the south east and the south west of Ireland and the road from Gowran through Bennettsbridge, Ballymeck and Mullinahone was opened as a link with the Norman settlements of south Munster.

According to the authors, there is no record of a bridge of any kind in the vicinity of Leighlin prior to the end of the 13th century. In a book of 1654 by Sir James Ware on Ireland and its Antiquities we have the first reference to “the bridge of Leighlin built by Maurice Jakis, a canon of the cathedral of Kildare who also built the bridge of Kilcullen.” A more detailed reference in a Chronicle of 1577 by Hollingshed states that in 1318 “there hath been a worthie prelate, Canon of the Cathedral Church of Kildare named Maurice Jake (Jakis) who among the rest of his charitable deedes builded the bridge of Kilcoolenne and the next year following he builded in lyke manner the bridge of Leighlinn, to the great and daily commoditie of all as are occasioned to travaile in those quarters.” Neither of these secondary references mentions whether the bridge was of timber or stone. An original mention in the Laud manuscript Annals of Ireland 1162 to 1370, preserved in the Bodleian Library, records “1319, item pons lapideus de Kilcolyn construitur per Magistrum Mauritium Jak, Canonicum ecclesie cathedralis Kildarie” (likewise the stone bridge of Kilcullen is constructed by master Maurice Jak, canon of the cathedral church of Kildare). Since Kilcullen was in stone, it can be assumed that Leighlin was also. Apparently the title ‘master’ was given to the highest grade of stone masons in the order apprentice, journeyman and master. The Irish Penny Journal for 1844 contains an article on the Leighlin bridge which states that the present name of the town is derived from the bridge which was erected in 1320 to facilitate the intercourse between the religious houses of old and new Leighlin, by Maurice Jakis, a canon of the cathedral of Kildare. “According to O’Keeffe and Simington, it is reasonable to assume from this reference that “the bridge was financed by the Bishop of Leighlin and the Carmelite friars, which would explain how Jakis became involved.”

There are many references to the town of Leighlinbridge in the Cromwellian war of the 1640s and in the wars of the 1690s. There is no mention of repairs to the bridge and it was in service in 1656. In the 1683 Benny edition of Petty's General Map of Ireland, Leighlinbridge is clearly indicated as the Barrow crossing on the road from Dublin through Ballymore Eustace, Baltinglass, Carlow, Goran to Carrick-on-Suir, Dungarvan and Youghal, with a branch from Gowran to Kilkenny, Clonmel, Cappoquin and Cork.

From the history of the Barrow Navigation which refers to the legislation of the 1537 Act prohibiting the construction of fishing weirs on the river without leaving a "King's gap" or passage for shallow draft boats, it is clear that below Leighlinbridge the river was tidal. Even before the construction of the 18th century navigation weirs the normal flow of the river was considerably less deep than it is at present. O'Keeffe and Simington add the important conclusion that "the construction of the foundations and piers of Leighlin Bridge was therefore a far less formidable task than it appears today." The river of its early history was also much narrower.

A literature search, to determine if the down river section of the present bridge is the original bridge built in 13 19-20, failed to answer the key question. O'Keeffe and Simington sought the answer in an assessment of the geometrical and engineering characteristics of the bridge prior to the 1976 improvements and the reinforced concrete pathway constructed on the upriver face when the whole bridge was pressure - grouted and gunited. From their excellent examination and detailed analysis of the spans and arches with their configuration as well as the masonry in the arch rings, they concluded that the bridge is not the original one built by Jakis. It would have had pointed segmental arches, thicker piers and smaller spans. They quote the Ordnance Survey Letters, 1839, contributed by T. O'Connor of Leighlin Bridge, which concluded that "the original bridge which gave its name to this town was, it is said, long ago destroyed, and several other bridges erected on its site were at various previous periods carried off by the overwhelming floods of the Barrow."

From their study, O'Keeffe and Simington concluded the bridge was rebuilt sometime between the mid-15th and the mid-17th centuries. The large segmental arc spans of 30ft suggest the later period but the shape of the ring stones and their orientation leave open the possibility that it was rebuilt about 1547 by Bellingham. It is unlikely to have been erected in the last half of the

16th century because, like Carlow, "the arch intrados would then be four-centred Tudor." "This latter feature, involving the rounding of the section where the bridge arch commences, is distinctive and decisive.