

# The Penny Journal

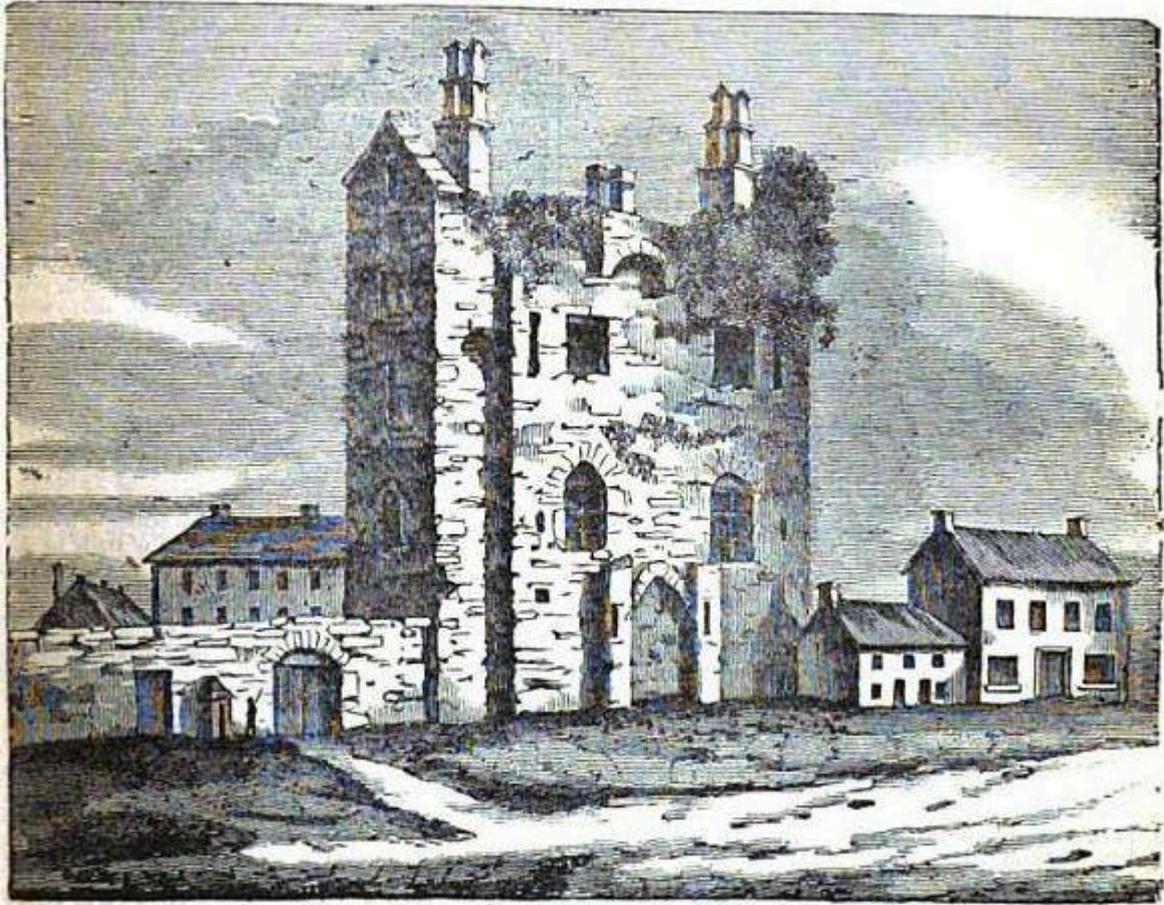
---

**This is a transcript of a story of a traveller to Roscrea describing his journey in to the town in 1823 from the Dublin Penny Journal of the time.**

On my way from Birr I arrived at the summit of a hill, between Drumakeenan and Roscrea, which overlooks the latter place. The view from thence struck me with awful recollections of by-gone times. The aged Round Tower and Saxon gable end of St. Cronan's Abbey on the left, and the venerable steeple of the Franciscan Monastery on the right presented on both extremities of the view object claiming the attention of the antiquary and traveller while the middle space was diversified by the ruins of a round castle of King John's time, and those of a less ancient one of the days of Henry the Eighth. In the distance, reviving the long dormant spirit of Irish chivalry, appeared Carrick Hill, anglice, the Hill of the Rock, from which is taken the title of the Earl of Carrick. The modern church and steeple, and Roman Catholic chapel exhibited a neat but humble contrast to –as they were placed by the sides of– their respective venerable neighbours– the ecclesiastical ruins first mentioned.

Descending from the eminence which afforded me the view just described, I own I was both disappointed and disgusted on entering the town through a long and dirty lane, skirted on both sides with wretched and unseemly cabins, and having on the left hand a deep fosse well calculated to overturn the hapless traveller that might enter the town by night. From the lane I proceeded through a wide street leading towards the market house. The appearance of this street convinced me that individual industry and uncombined exertion, without the aid of general design, or the fostering hand of a landlord had produced what I beheld. Although many of the houses were good, there was neither regularity nor order. Some of the edifices were high and well built– others low and homely. Here was a paved footway– there a rugged declivity ready to snatch the feet from the unwary. On this side lay rubbish and heaps of manure, and on that drays and logs of timber, while the highway in the centre was scarcely passable from innumerable large stones, ruts and pigs. On enquiry I found that the town had the misfortune to belong to absentee landlords. I was told that it had been the property of the late Lady Caroline Damer, who devised it and her other county Tipperary estates, to a nobleman residing abroad, who in a short time sold or mortgaged the whole to either London Jews or bankers, for a sum of £400,000. Several of the houses in the town being out of lease, the mortgages cannot give encouragement for improvement, and the present ground landlord, if he had the mind, has not himself the power to do so. At present Roscrea is inhabited by a most deserving and industrious race of people, worthy a benign and encouraging landlord.

The gloom the foregoing relation is calculated to cast upon the sensitive reader, cannot, however, overshadow the bright hours that have gone by, for former benefactors, unlike the heartless proprietors of modern times, have left works behind them serving as sad memorials of the contrast.



ROSCREA CASTLE.

Roscrea is situate in a vale in the barony of Ikerrin, and county of Tipperary, distant sixty nine miles from Dublin. The old name of this place was Roskree as it is written in the patent granting it to the Ormonde family, and dated the 29<sup>th</sup> year of King Henry the Eighth, that is from *riase*, a marsh and *cre*, the creed. In the life of St. Cronan it is called *Stagnum Cre*, which means the same thing. Usher (Primord, 1065) calls it *Insulam Roscree* and Burke (offices) designates it *Fluminus Insulam Roscre nsem*. Roscrea formerly gave title to a bishoprick, but was united to that of Killaloe, in the year 1318, surrendered it to the crown as such, receiving other possessions in lieu. The record of this surrender is extant in the Rolls Office, Dublin, on the 6<sup>th</sup> membrane of the Patent Roll of the 11<sup>th</sup> year of Edward the second. It is there spelled *Roshre*.

The engraving as given above represents a large square castle, built here by the Ormonde family in the reign of King Henry the Eighth. It now serves as a store-house for the military, who are lodged in the barrack at its rere. Adjoining the

barrack, formerly the residence of Damer, ancestor to the late Earl of Dorchester, and on the street leading along the river, is likewise another castle of a circular form, built in 1213 (King John's reign) as a barrier against the natives by the English, who after some contests with Murtoogh, King of North Munster, possessed themselves of his place. The remnant of antiquity has been recently repaired and roofed.

St. Cronan founded an abbey here for regular canons, around which the town sprung up, or at least, increased rapidly. He was a native of Ely O'Carroll, being son of Odran, of that territory, by Coemri, a woman from Cabasckin, in the now county of Clare. The abbey must have been founded subsequent to the year 606, and prior to 626, for the saint is said to have died the 28<sup>th</sup> of April, in the reign of King Fingen.

The modern church stands near the site of the ancient abbey, of which the only remains are a curious gable-end, now converted into an entrance way to the church-yard. The gable displays several arched niches ornamented with chevrons, and of the Saxon style, and presents over the doorway a full length figure of the patron saint. The engraving at the head of this article is a representation of it.

Heretofore a grave-stone used to be pointed out in the churchyard as the tomb of St. Cronan. However, when I saw it was broken and there did not appear anything to identify it as such, and I was also shown another monumental stone as the neighbouring monastery of Moanaincha, as a commemorative of the same person but when I came to examine it, the inscription on the Irish language and character was to the following effect- "pray for black Bran." The latter, therefore, is certainly not the tomb of St. Cronan, but that of Bran Mc Colman, who was abbot of Roscrea, and died in 926. In the church-yard of Roscrea there still remains a stone cross, which, with another stone now forming part of the church yard wall, the inhabitants call the shrine of St. Cronan. The following is a representation of this cross.

On the opposite side of the road the church stands on the brink of a mill-pond formed by the river, one of those ancient round towers so common in Ireland, and which afford an inexhaustible subject for antiquarian discussion. It is said to be eighty feet high and is capped with a wooden umbrella-like roof. Towards the Limerick end of the town in the venerable steeple of a monastery, founded in 1490 in Bibiana, daughter of O'Dempsey, and widow of Mulroony O'Carroll, nicknamed, na feasoge, or with the beard. This steeple serves at present for a belfry to the Roman Catholic chapel, to which it forms the entrance from the street.

The fair held at Roscrea are very ancient. It is a well authenticated fact, that the Irish assembled at one of these fairs, on the festival of Saints Peter and Paul, in the year 942, beat Danes, who had concentrated their forces from Limerick and Galway with intent to surprise and plunder the natives. On that occasion the people who resorted to the fair, although congregated from different parts of the country,

and of course strangers to each other, did not want to be attacked in the town, but sallied out, and after a sanguinary conflict which took place near Carrick Hill, defeated the invaders, killing Olfin, the Danish chieftain, and four thousand of his men. It is from this circumstance that the hill of Carrick became so remarkable as to be selected to give a title to the noble house of Butler.

Roscrea was famed in former times not only for the magnificence of its buildings and valour of its inhabitants, but as a seat of practical religion also. Accordingly we find that St. Canice, who was born in 516 and died in 599, wrote a copy of the four gospels here. It was called glass Kennic, or chain of Canice, and Archbishop Usher tells us it was preserved in this town until his time. There was also a copy of the gospels written by Dimma, a scribe, the son of Engus, son of Carthin, which possibly is in the MS, in the possession of Sir William Betham, which latter certainly was preserved at Roscrea in a most enviously wrought and ornamented box. The reader may consult a paper by Henry Joseph M. Mason, Esq., published in the transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, and is the Irish Antiquarian researches, by Sir William Betham, and a letter from Mr. Cooke to that author published in the Dublin Philosophical Journal, for much information relative to Roscrea, as well as on the subject of the copy of the gospels just mentioned which found its way to Sir William Betham in the following manner.

The late Rev. Philip Meagher, formerly parish priest of Birr, found it amongst the books of an uncle who had been a clergyman in Roscrea, and handed it to a Dr. Harrison of Nenagh, (since dead) who sold it to MR Mason, librarian to the Kings Inns' Society, and he parted with it to Sir William Betham. Since being the history of the MS., it is strange how Sir William could have supposed this relic to have been found by boys seeking birds' nests in the Devil's Bit Mountain, as he asserts it was, in the Irish Antiquarian Researches.

The ground about Roscrea is exceedingly fertile and the town is still the grand emporium of trade to all surrounding towns and districts.