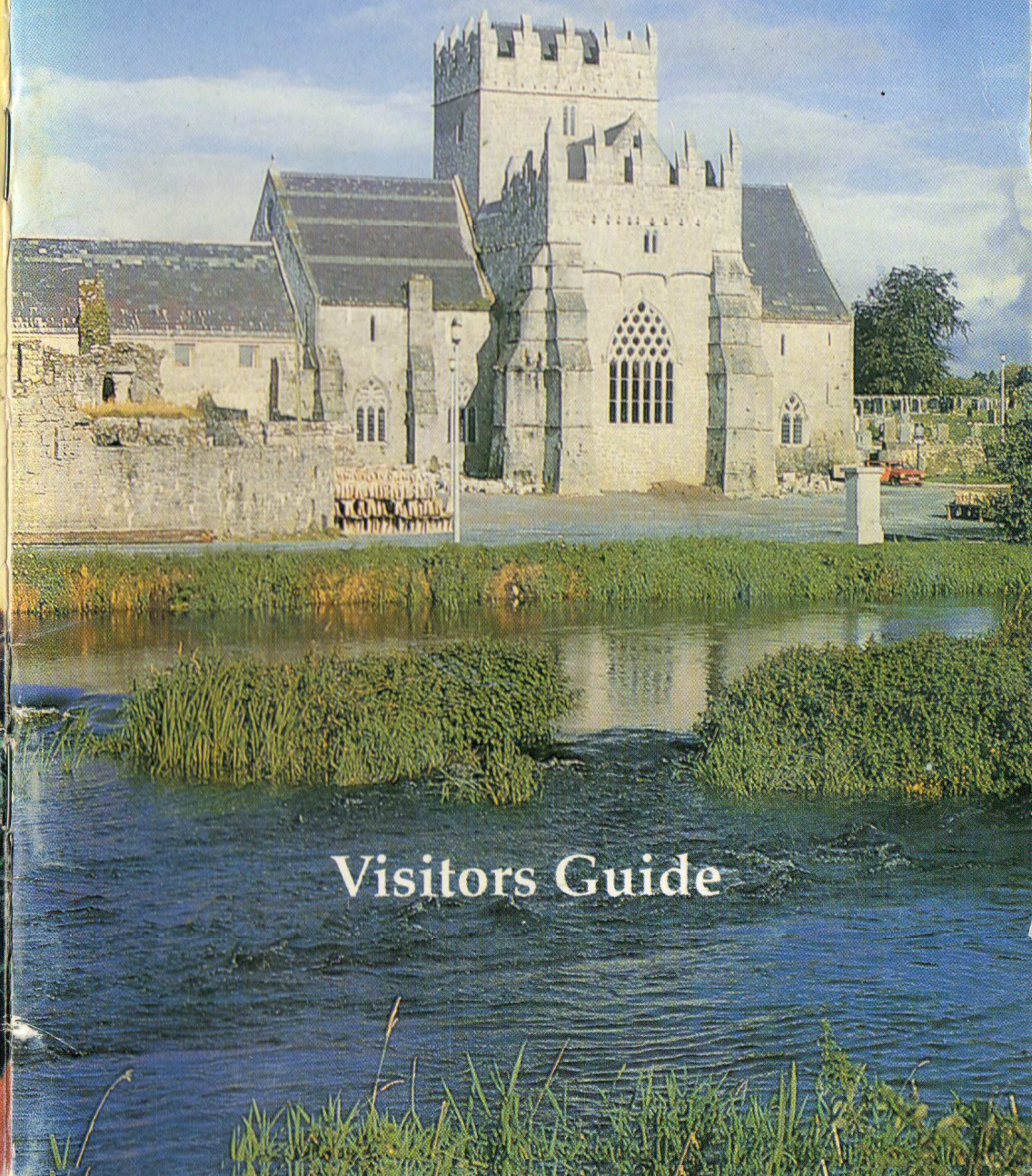
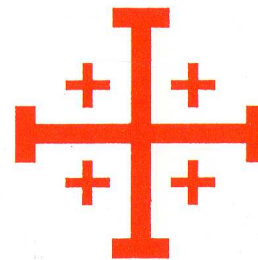


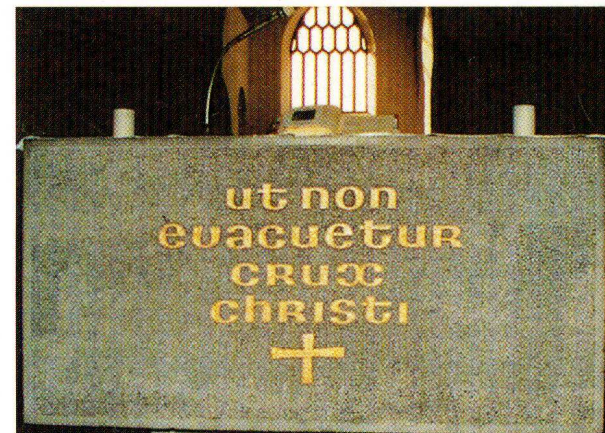
Holy Cross Abbey



Visitors Guide

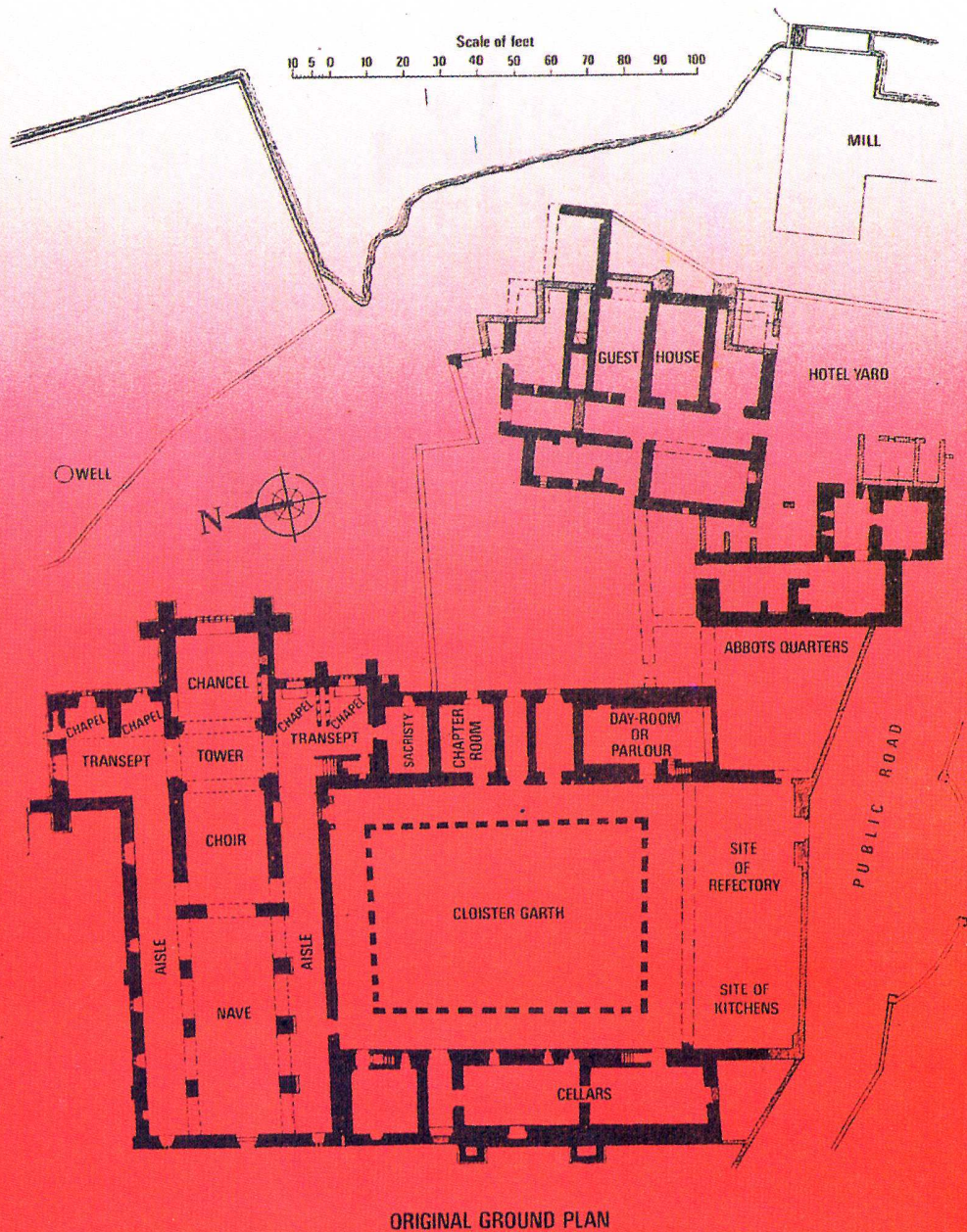


Holy Cross Abbey



That the Cross of Christ may not
be emptied of it's power

Visitors Guide



Founding of Holy Cross Abbey

Tradition presents a picture of a visit by King Donal Mór O'Brien with a retinue of bishops and chieftains to this place, where there was already a monastery or hermitage following a Celtic rule of life. The Cistercian Rule, having spread throughout Europe with amazing rapidity had been introduced to Ireland some forty years previously by St. Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh, and now King Donal proposed to endow a Cistercian monastery with large tracts of land here by the Suir in the country of the O'Fogartys, his mother's people.



St. Malachy. Archbishop of Armagh

The group of monks who founded (or 'colonised') this monastery came from Monasteranenagh (Manister, near Croom, Co. Limerick). Monasteranenagh had been colonised from Mellifont and Mellifont from Clairveaux in France, whose abbot, St. Bernard, was a friend of St. Malachy.

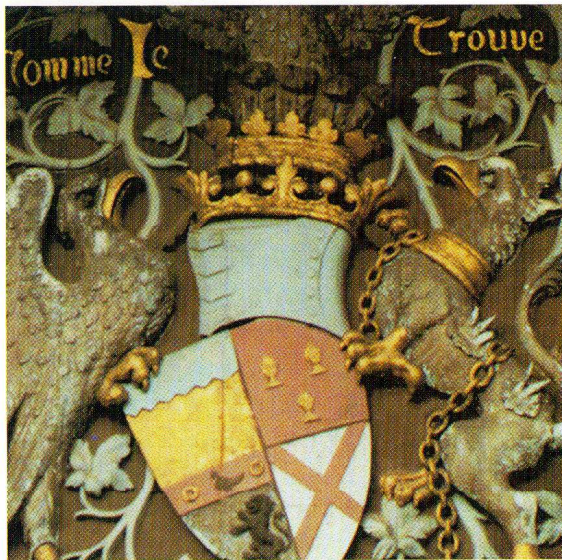
The first Cistercians, aiming at a hidden and silent life, drew up a simple Rule. The monasteries were to be in remote places and the monks were to be self-supporting through

working the monastic lands themselves, hence a sizeable estate was needed. The Cistercian plan grouped the buildings in a square with the church on the north side, an East range including the sacristy, chapter house and parlour, the kitchen and refectory (dining hall) on the south side, and in the West Range the cellars and foodstores. In the centre was the cloister garth, a grass covered square with a roofed-in walk around it. On the first floor in the East Range was the dormitory for the choir monks while the dormitory of the lay brothers was similarly provided in the West range.

Life was austere and silent, devoted to prayer and work. Community prayer was distributed over seven periods each day, beginning at 2 a.m. and consisted of the chanting of the Divine Office (psalms and readings); there was also the Conventual (community) Mass. The abbey church was bare and plain, with whitewashed walls which reflected light coming mainly from the windows on the north side.

Building for a New Era

During its first two centuries of its existence the Abbey had its difficulties and at times its independence, and even survival, seemed in doubt. There was promise of a happier era when, in 1414, a new patron extended to the Abbot and monks of Holy Cross his special protection. This time the patron came



Arms of the Ormonde Butlers

from the Norman settlers. He was James Butler, fourth Earl of Ormonde, the most powerful nobleman in Ireland. During his long term as Earl (1405-1452) he held the offices of Lord Lieutenant or Justiciar at various periods. Significantly, it was at this time that an ambitious scheme of rebuilding portions of the Abbey commenced. The eastern arm of the church was rebuilt, that is, the chancel, the two transepts, the monks' choir and the massive tower. Of the earlier Cistercian church most of the nave was retained but new windows, including the great west window, were inserted into the old fabric. The East and West Ranges were largely reconstructed, apart from the lower parts of the walls. The cloister arcade was rebuilt, the Abbot's house was added and the infirmary and guest house extensively remodelled.

Suppression of Monasteries Act

Hopes were blighted within a century of the great rebuilding. In England King Henry VIII set in train an investigation of the monasteries of his realm and having established that they were too wealthy and were either badly run or no longer served a useful purpose, he decreed that all religious houses worth less than £200 a year were to be



Henry VIII

suppressed and handed over to him. This was in 1536. The Dublin Parliament immediately rushed through an Act of Suppression. Soon thirteen Irish religious houses were gone, their property given to the Crown. They included five Cistercian houses. In 1539 Henry decreed the closing of the bigger monasteries.

Reprieve for Holy Cross Abbey

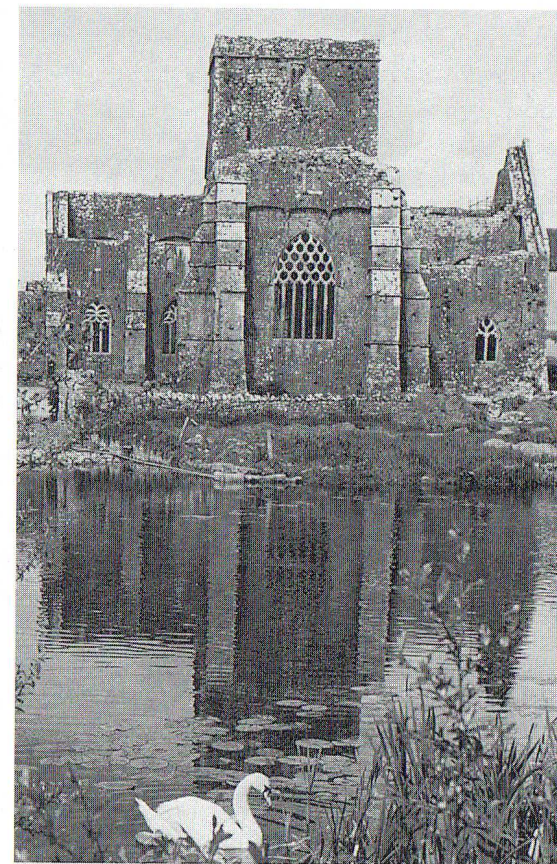
Initially Holy Cross escaped the fate of abbeys of similar size because the monks had foreseen the likely course of events. In 1534 William Dwyer, then Abbot, resigned his office to a married layman, Philip Purcell. Holy Cross became a provostry rather than a Cistercian abbey.

Late in the 16th century a rudimentary Cistercian community still continued in the Abbey. Pilgrims continued to come to venerate the relic of the Cross. Irish Cistercians who had been trained in Spanish monasteries returned to Ireland in the 17th century to live near to the former monasteries and maintain a Cistercian presence. Continued persecution and suppression led the Cistercians to move to private houses in Kilkenny for 15 years with permission from Rome. When they returned Holy Cross was in ruins. By 1685 the unsettled condition of the country and the shortage of vocations left the Abbey with one abbot and one monk. The Abbey was plundered in 1690 during the Williamite wars. Abbot Coogan remained on until his death in 1700. With the death of Fr. Edmond Cormack in 1735 the Cistercian link was broken. People began to bury their dead within the Abbey about 1740.

Part of Ireland's National Architectural Heritage

The Irish Church Act, 1869, which disestablished the Church of Ireland, empowered the Commissioners of the Church of Ireland to transfer all important churches and ecclesiastical buildings into the care of the State, to be preserved as national monuments and not to be used as places of public worship. One hundred and thirty seven ancient buildings, including Holy Cross Abbey, were listed for transfer to the Commissioners of Public Works.

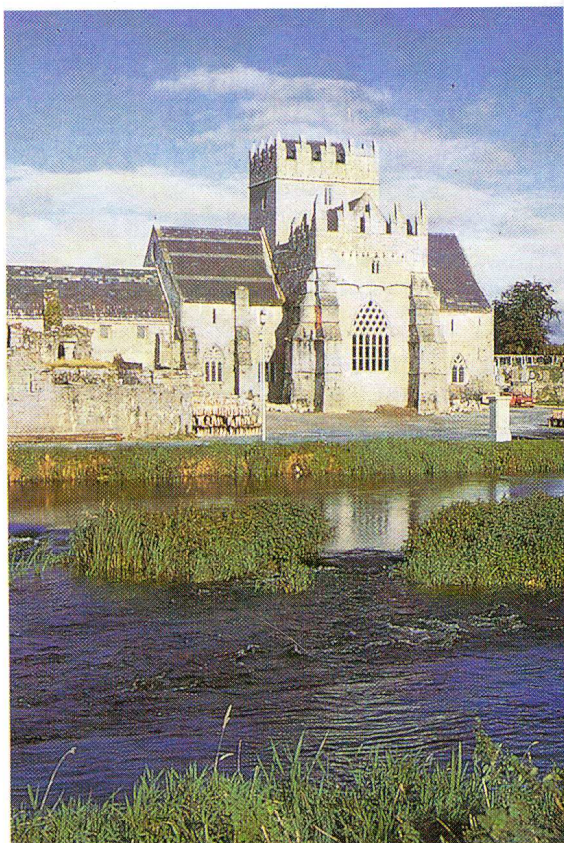
The technicalities of ownership of buildings and sites were not investigated at the time by any authority. The paramount consideration was the saving of the nation's architectural heritage. The vesting order was dated Saturday, 30th October, 1880. On that day, Holy Cross Abbey became a national monument.



Holy Cross Abbey (1969)

A New Dawn

In 1967 a new destiny opened up for Holy Cross. A move was initiated locally to restore the Abbey church and bring it back into use as the parish church for the local community. The move gathered support and the Government was approached to remove the hindrance contained in the Irish Church Act in order to allow the National Monument to be used again as a place of public worship. The following year the Government announced its intention of introducing the necessary legislation and on the 21st January 1969, at a commemorative meeting in the Mansion House, Dail Éireann began the First Stage of the Holy Cross Abbey Bill, 1969. The Bill, entitled "An Act to enable the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland to restore for ecclesiastical purposes Holy Cross Abbey in the County Tipperary" was passed, without opposition, by the Dail. The Act of 1869 was amended to make this an exception. Archaeological excavations began in the Abbey shortly afterwards and restoration began in 1971. A celebration of the restoration was held in October 1975.

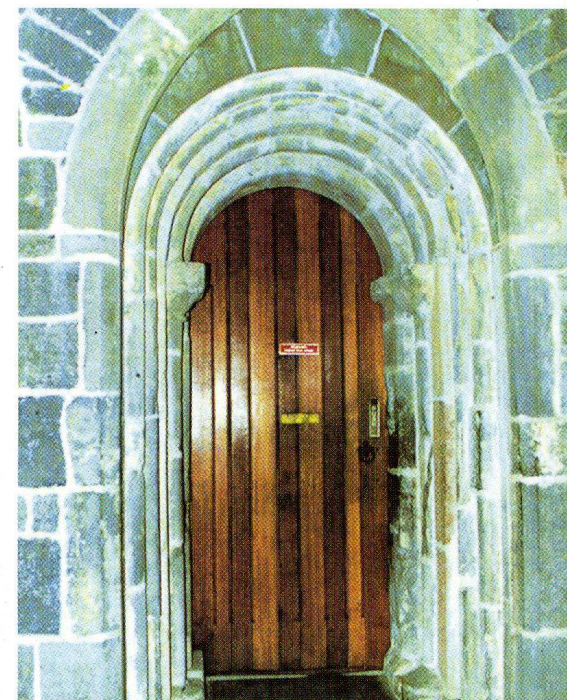


Holy Cross Abbey

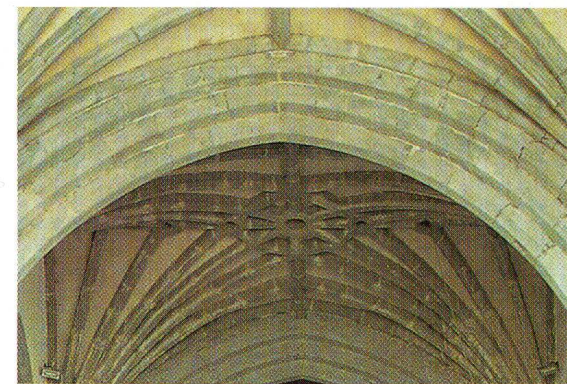
The Church

This guide follows a particular route for a visit to the Abbey; if you follow a different route you will need to locate the features.

The Processional door gives access to the South aisle of the church. To get an overall view of the plan of the church it is best to go right on entering and then immediately left under the great transept arch. Stand facing the body of the church, your back for the time being to the altar. You are at the centre of the church, the "crossing", where nave (in front of you) and transepts (south to left, north to right) meet. The church follows the cruciform pattern generally found in Cistercian houses. Overhead is a delightfully groined roof with stone ribs springing from points within the arches. The ribs fan out and meet above where you can see holes for bell ropes. The vaulting here



The Processional Door



The Groined Roof

and over the transepts and presbytery (at your back) combine to make a pleasing study. The four arches support the great Tower overhead, where the bells are placed. All the stone work was done with chisel and mallet and the skilled masons carved their personal marks on the pillars. On the pillar to the north (right) an owl was carved.

Looking straight ahead you find first an area with a level floor (the choir), then a dividing wall broken by an arch and

steps leading to the sloping floor of the nave which reaches back to the West gable containing the doorway (not quite central) and the West window. The slope is due to the bedrock underneath. The area West of the dividing arch was allocated to the lay-brothers, who did not have the obligation of taking part of the choral services. Lay people also occupied this part. For almost 200 years, when the Abbey was in ruin, the church was used as a burial ground, there are some old pictures in the display case.



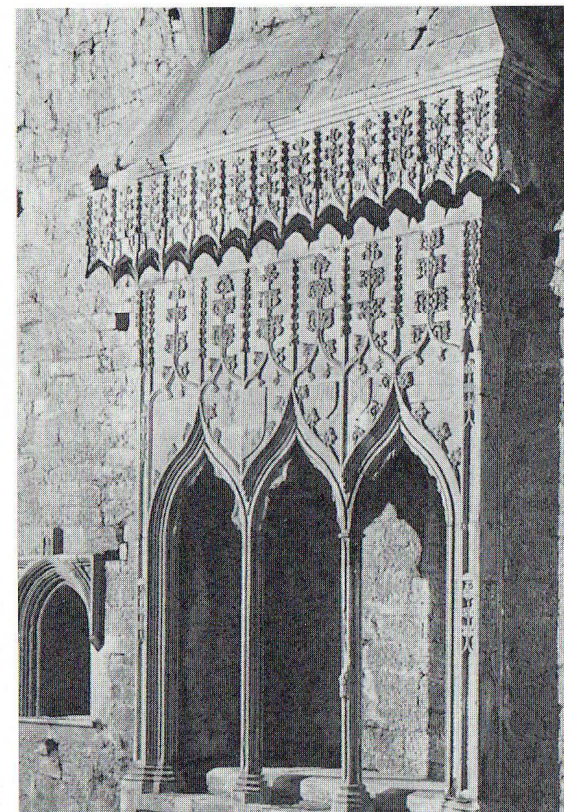
Church as a burial ground

Turning around, you face east towards the fine window through which the morning sun shines on the altar. On the south (right hand) wall is one of the special features of the Abbey, the Sedilia.

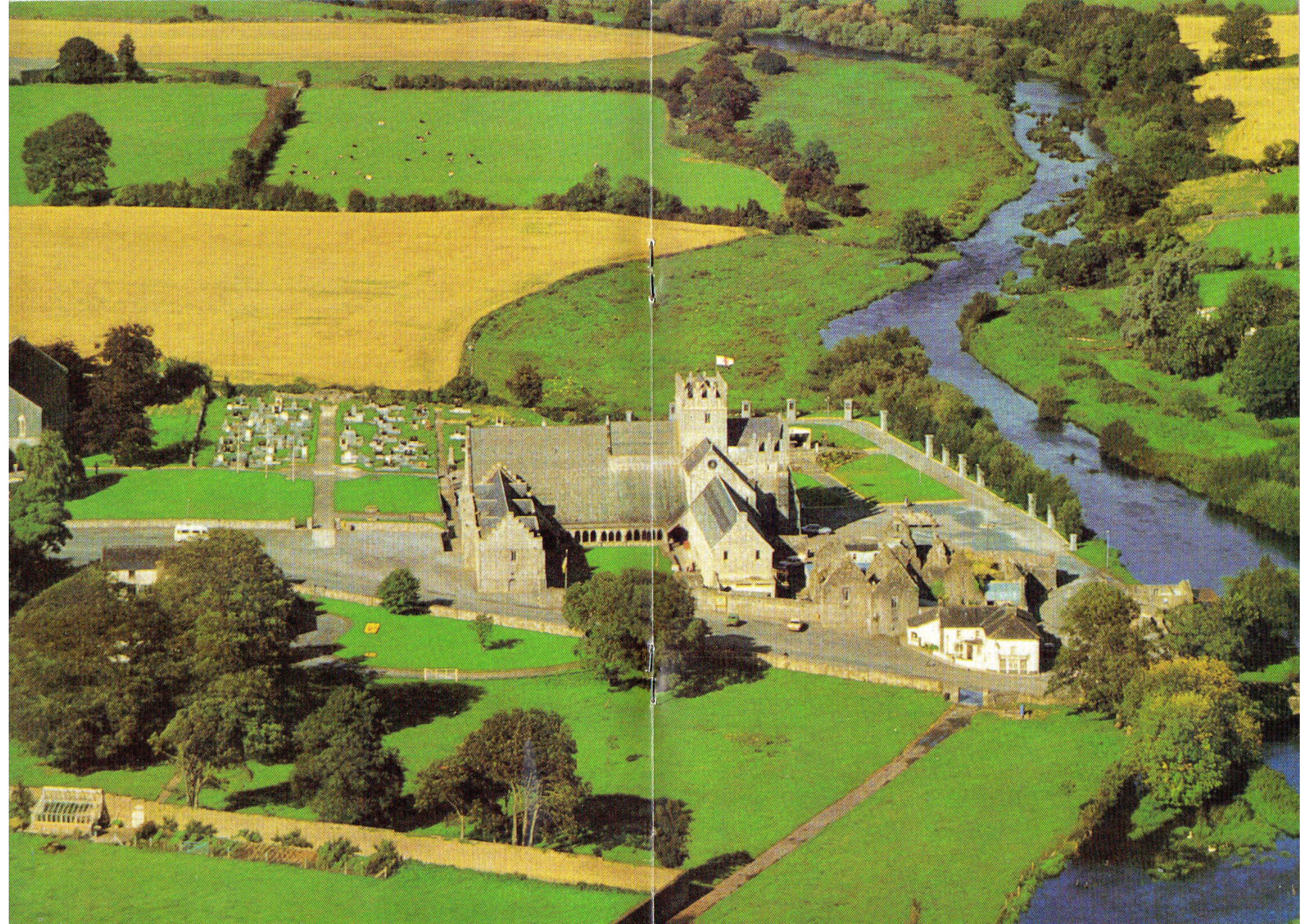
The Sedilia

"The most sumptuous of all Cistercian fittings, indeed the finest piece of church furnishing in medieval Ireland, are the sedilia in the chancel at Holy Cross" (Stalley: Cistercian Monasteries of Ireland). The structure provided seats for celebrant, deacon and subdeacon at Mass; sedilia (sedes, seat) are found in most monastic churches. The structure is 17 feet high, there is a richly carved base with leaf ornamentation and the structure is surmounted by a roof with a canopy. Slender pillars separate the seats, on one the figure of an angel has been sadly displaced.

An unusual feature of the sedilia, one which has given rise to much discussion among students of the abbey, is the set of five shields between the pointed arches. Reading from the left, the first is a plain cross, possibly the coat of arms of the Abbey. The second and largest, carries the royal arms of England in a form adopted after 1405. The third shield carries the arms of the Ormonde Butlers, an acknowledgement of the patronage of the earls of the period and the arms of the fourth seem to be those of one of the Desmond Geraldines. The fifth shield is blank; like the first shield it is only cut into the face of the sedilia, not



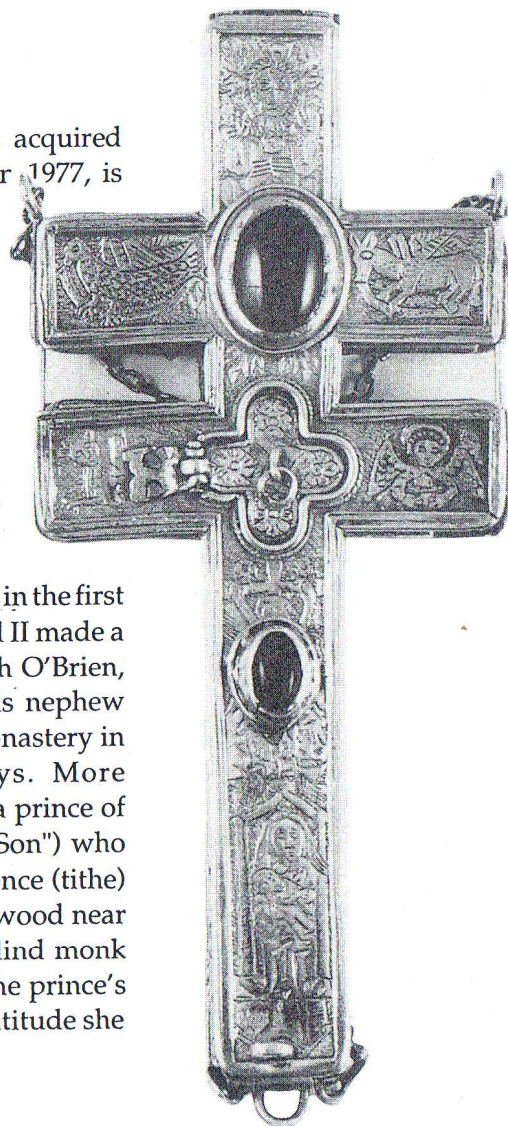
The Sedilia



in bold relief like the other three; possibly those shields were not part of the original design. The sedilia has been popularly and traditionally known as the "Tomb of the Good Woman's Son". A tradition still surviving claims that this is the burial place and monument of an English prince who was murdered locally.

Relic of the Cross

Nowadays the authenticated relic, acquired from St. Peter's Basilica in Rome in 1977, is displayed for veneration in the North transept. Between the chapels in the South transept, on the way to the sacristy, is a structure which has given rise to much discussion. It is disappointing that so much uncertainty surrounds the original relic of the Holy Rood which brought fame to the Abbey. There are different stories about how the relic came to the community in the first place. One story is that Pope Paschal II made a gift of a large relic to Muirheartach O'Brien, High King, and that Donal Mór his nephew wished to enshrine the relic in a monastery in the territory of the O'Fogartys. More picturesque is another story about a prince of royal blood ("The Good Woman's Son") who came to Ireland to collect Peter's Pence (tithe) but was murdered and buried in a wood near the Abbey. Following a vision, a blind monk discovered the body and brought the prince's ring to the queen, his mother. In gratitude she



presented to the Abbey the large relic of the Holy Rood which had recently come to England.

The history of the relic after the 17th century is also disputed. In the show case in the North transept, to the left of the authenticated relic, is the Ormonde reliquary, the history of which is documented from 1632 when Walter, the 11th earl, gave it in trust to his physician. In the documentation there is a suggestion that the relic belonged to some religious institution (the Abbey?) and might at some time in the future have to be given back. Having passed through several hands, this relic reached the Ursuline Sisters in Blackrock, Co. Cork, who noted in their annals that this was the relic of Holy Cross Abbey.

In the South transept the lower part of the dividing wall between the chapels is replaced by a shrine of high quality workmanship; no similar structure is found in any of the Cistercian abbeys, so the suggestion is made that it was built for some exceptional purpose. Tradition gives it the name of "the Waking Place of the Monks", a name which is given in the "Triumphalia", a chronical of the Abbey by Father Malachy Hartry, dating from 1640. "It is an ingenious design, turning what would otherwise have been a solid wall into a miniature piece of architecture" (Stanley, op. cit.). The lower part of the shrine resembles a tomb chest - was it intended as a tomb?

The Hunting Scene Mural

On the plastered wall of the North transept, opposite the chapel of the relic, is a barely discernible wall painting of a hunting scene. This was discovered during cleaning operations by the Board of Works around 1911. It is one of the few surviving murals to be found in Ireland dating from the pre-suppression period, and it adds another puzzling feature to the Abbey.

On the West wall is the main part of the scene. A huntsman, showing traces of brown on his doublet and the edges of his hood, is blowing a horn and holding a straining hound on a leash. On the left and at a slightly higher plane, are two people getting their bows ready. Here the mural is particularly mutilated. In the space between the corner (north-west) and the window a stag can be seen, crouching behind the oak tree, and there is another tree behind. Light coming from the window usually makes seeing difficult. The costumes are those worn by ordinary people from the 14th century onwards. The huntsman with his hound has a hood which come down over his shoulders, the other two have plumed caps. The black lines on the shoes are probably meant to convey that the hairy side of the skin from which the shoes were made is on the outside. The painting retains some of its original colouring but probably faded. The figures are outlined in black.



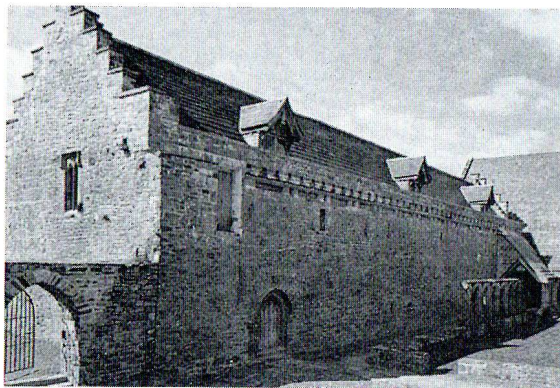
The Hunting Scene

The West Range

Returning to the cloister garth outside, the West Range is on the right as we leave the church. In the main it is a fifteenth century rebuilding. On the ground floor there is a large vaulted chamber which now serves as an office and shop. It was used originally as a cellar and store room. The first floor was reached by a stairs in the thickness of the wall. A circular stairs from the shop was constructed since the restoration. The division of the dormitory into smaller



apartments and the fireplaces, show a departure from early Cistercian austerity which had crept in at the time of rebuilding. It is likely also that this wing was used by the choir monks themselves when their numbers had dwindled and lay brothers had almost entirely disappeared, as happened in most Cistercian houses by the 15th century.



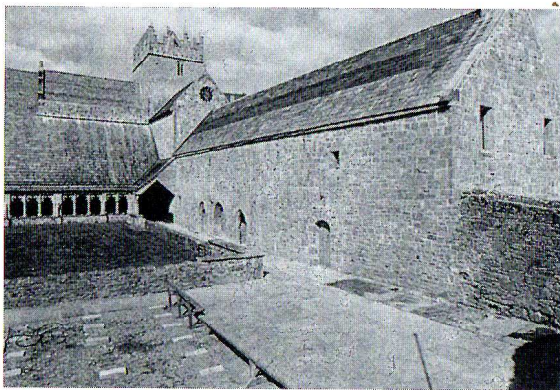
The West Range

The West Range was restored between 1980 and 1983 to provide facilities for pilgrims and visitors to the Abbey. A shop for souvenirs and religious goods is located on the ground floor and upstairs are the tourist information centre, audio-visual centre and a coffee shop.

The range on the south side of the cloister, along the road, has completely disappeared. Here were located the kitchen and refectory.

The East Range

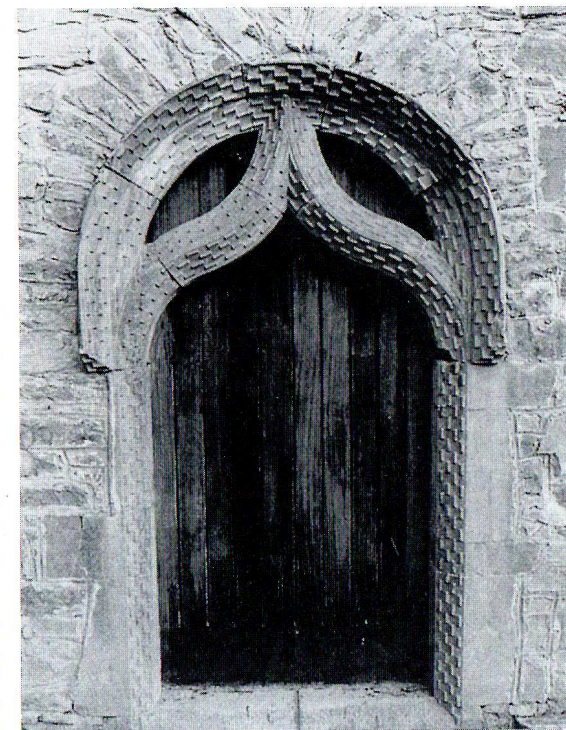
Entering from the road through the main gate and following on the right the east wall of the cloister, one passes first of all the day room for the monks, the medieval equivalent of the modern common room. The doorways are of modern construction. There is a vaulted roof and probably there was a window formerly in the south wall.



The East Range

The stairway leads to the dormitory; this was called the day stairs; the night stairs provides access directly to the church in the south transept.

Beside the day room is a vaulted passage through the building leading to the Guest House and Abbot's Quarters; there is a similar passage (slype) through the West Range. Next comes a small chamber, the purpose of which is now obscure. Next is the Chapter Room, or Chapter House, which is unusual in design and decoration. The arch and jambs have billeted decoration, which gives the whole doorway an ecrusted appearance. The room is roughly vaulted and is now



The Doorway to Chapter Room

used as a sacristy. In the Chapter Room the Abbot and community assembled daily for the reading of a chapter of the rule of the Order. Here the business of the monastery was conducted. This room appears small for a Chapter Room, measuring only twenty feet by sixteen; it would seem to indicate that the community was small at the time of the rebuilding of the Abbey. In many other Cistercian abbeys the Chapter House projects impressively eastwards from the range and gives the impression of being a house in its own right, as the names suggests.

Restoration of the East Range began in August 1983 and finished in March 1985. On the first floor, which was formerly the monks' dormitory, priests are again in residence, providing daily religious services and pastoral care for pilgrims and visitors to the Abbey.

The Abbot's House

The vaulted passage (slype) through the East Range leads into a courtyard on the river side of the Abbey. On the right are the ruins of the Abbot's House or Abbot's Quarters. This was a self-contained residence for the Abbot whose office had assumed considerable importance by the 15th century. Not only was he head of the community; he was a secular Lord and member of the local parliament. The buildings on the river side were not included in the scheme of restoration and are in a ruinous condition.

On the ground floor was a small courtyard; overhead were bedrooms, library and dining room.

The upstairs floors are well supplied with fireplaces, ample windows and window seats.



The Abbot's House

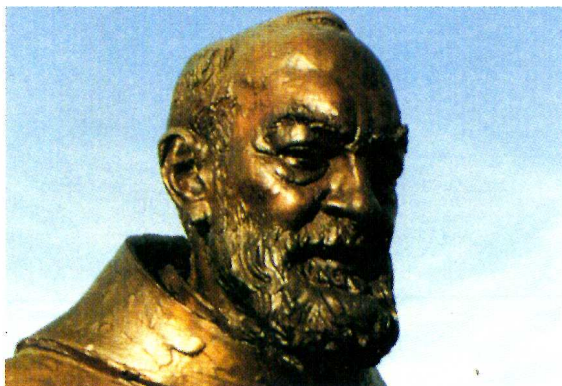
The Guest House

East of Abbot's House, nearer the river, is another much dilapidated maze of buildings. This provided accommodation for laity who came to the Abbey on pilgrimage in large numbers especially in the 15th century. The first part of this block is a narrow building under which a large sewer, running its full length, was discovered. Part of this building must have provided toilet facilities for the guest house. Between the narrow building and the rest is a long passage which has a lean-to roof and doorways leading into vaulted chambers. Accommodation was also provided here for the sick, a section often called the Infirmary.



Padre Pio National Monument and Gardens

To commemorate the Papal visit to Ireland in 1979, the devotees of Padre Pio in Ireland donated the outdoor Stations of the Cross to Holy Cross Abbey. The bronze stations were designed by Italian sculptor, Enrico Manfrini. A second set of bronzes was presented to the Pope and these were mounted above the Papal apartments in the Vatican. The outdoor altar was constructed in 1983 and the Padre Pio Gardens were landscaped in 1984.



Padre Pio



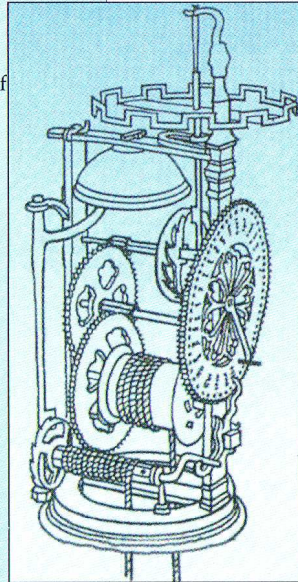
The Outdoor Altar



Bridging the Centuries of Time

- c. 1148 Monasteragh, mother house of Holy Cross Abbey founded.
- 1180 Holy Cross endowed by Donal Mór O'Brien.
- 1195 John, Lord of Ireland (later King) grants charter.
- 1234 King Henry III grants charter.
- c. 1400- Extensive renovation of 1425 the Abbey.
- 1489 First recorded reference to pilgrimages to Abbey.
- 1540 The Abbey is legally dissolved.
- 1563 Abbey and lands granted to Thomas Butler, 10th Earl of Ormond.
- 1600 Hugh O'Neill visits the Abbey for blessing.
- 1601 "Red" Hugh O'Donnell visits en route to Kinsale.
- c. 1620 Small groups of monks return; a novitiate is established.
- c. 1640 Brother Malachy Harty wrote the "Triumphal Chronicle of the Abbey of the Holy Cross; attempts were made to re-roof the church.
- c. 1650 Cistercian community abandons the Abbey.
- 1671 Abbot and one monk again in the Abbey.
- 1685 Abbot Thomas Cogan attends the diocesan synod at Cashel.
- 1700 Death of Abbot Cogan, the last abbot of Holy Cross.

- c. 1735 Death of Father Edmund Cormick, the last Cistercian to minister in the Parish.
- c. 1840 Preservation work by Dr. Charles Wall, Vice Provost of Trinity College, Dublin.
- 1869 Irish Church Act transfers the Abbey to Commissioners of Public Works.
- 1880 Abbey became National Monument.
- 1928 Preservation work by the Office of Public Works.
- 1969 Holy Cross Abbey Act enables restoration of church for worship.
- 1970 Archaeological excavation of the church.
- 1971 Restoration of Holy Cross Abbey commences.
- 1976 Restoration of church and cloister completed.
- 1980 West Range is restored to provide facilities for pilgrims and visitors.
- 1983
- 1983 East Range is restored,
- 1985 priests are again in residence, providing daily religious services and pastoral care for pilgrims and visitors to the Abbey.



15th Century Monastery Clock

An early form of alarm clock used in monasteries to give warning to a monk to ring a bell to summon to prayer or duties