

## **The O’Kellys, Mullaghmore and Moylough**

After siding with Gearóid Mór Fitzgerald in the Battle of Knockdoe in 1504 one branch of the O’Kelly clan became established at Mullaghmore in the Parish of Moylough. They claimed the existing castle at Moylough and by 1574 they had built a third fortress in Cloonoran Iochtar.

The Castle of Cloonoran was a typical Hall House of its time – a two-storey building with a footprint 9m by 7m and walls 1.8m thick. It stood within a well-protected compound covering 12 acres. The south-eastern approach was a marsh prone to flooding in winter and on the western and northern flanks were wide ditches providing a moat-like defence. A surviving network of low mounds suggests there was a cluster of small rectangular fields, or haggards, in the western section of the compound.

### **Arrival of the Bellews**

When Teige O’Kelly of Cloonoran murdered his brother Loughlin of Moylough Castle in a succession dispute upon the death of their father William of Mullaghmore in 1646, the Cloonoran fortress and lands were made forfeit.

The subsequent Cromwellian Plantation installed John Bellew, previously Sheriff of County Louth, as the new proprietor in 1655. After the monarchy was restored, in the person of Charles II, Bellew eventually recovered lands in his native Louth and returned to live at Barmeath Castle until his death in 1679.

Because of the family’s traditional support for the Stuart regime, John’s eldest son and heir Patrick was granted letters patent to establish the Manor of Castle Bellew in 1684. He was later created Sir Patrick, Baronet of Castle Bellew and Barmeath, by James II. In the War of the Two Kings the Bellews naturally took to the field on the Jacobite side and were involved in action from the outset until the Treaty of Limerick in 1691.

### **After the Battle of Aughrim**

In the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Aughrim on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July 1691, a party of dragoons, led by the Williamite commander Godert de Ginkel, made a lightning raid on the fort of Castle Bellew. Fortunately for the then owner John, son of Sir Patrick, he was detained by the Jacobites in a prison in Athlone and the rest of his family was resident in Dublin. The raiders, finding no occupants to molest, plundered household goods and slaughtered animals to a value of £443. They also desecrated the nearby Holy Well of Cloonoran – which would later miraculously reappear in the hollow trunk of a nearby tree.

The Williamite raid was a signal attack on the home of a leading Catholic family that had supported and been patronised by the Stuart regime and the message was clear – the Catholic revival under the Stuarts was finished. From this point on Castle Bellew itself began to fall into decline. Upon his release, John returned to his family in Dublin and only paid infrequent visits to Castle Bellew. He would eventually succeed his father Patrick and take up residence in Barmeath in 1715.

A cadet line of the family, living at nearby Mount Bellew House, took on management of the Castle Bellew Estate boosted by earnings from their milling business. Michael of Mount

Bellew purchased the lands and manorial rights of Castle Bellew from his Louth cousins in 1784 for something in the region of three million pounds Sterling at present values. By that time the old fortress was abandoned and in ruins.

The site is preserved today, identified as Site 3918 in the Dúchas Archaeological Inventory of County Galway.