



# CURRAGHAUN HERITAGE SITE

## Láithreán oidhreachta an CURRACHÁN

### early history

Today this area, commonly referred to as Windfield, comprises the three distinct townlands of Windfield Lower, Windfield Upper and Windfield Demesne.

Though townlands have Gaelic origins, and even pre-date the Norman invasion of 1169, many changes to those names could have taken place as a result of those invasions, Cromwellian plantations, Ordnance Survey mapping projects as well as other administrative initiatives to formalise such divisions. The names of many of our townlands, as we know them today, could have changed, perhaps even several times, since their initial naming.

By 1640 this area was known as Turlogharrandana as recorded in the Down Survey. This translates as 'the turlough in the copse' where a turlough is a low-lying area on limestone which becomes flooded in wet weather through the welling up of groundwater from the rock, while a copse is a dense wooded area of either low growing trees or bushes growing in very close proximity to each other. The definition comes from the area known as Polliffrin, translating as 'hell's hole' and this is located nearby. It is referenced and recorded in the first six inch Ordnance Survey maps of 1838. Local folklore has always held that this is a bottomless mass of water, hence leading to hell.

By 1641 the townland was in the ownership of Lord Clanmorris, a considerable Catholic landowner in this locality. Following the Cromwellian invasion of the late 1640s Turlogharrandana was bestowed on the Protestant, and powerful, Earl of Clanricarde who owned much of the land within the entire County of Galway. The disintegration of the Clanricarde estate began with the sales and mortgages of the high-spending 4th Earl and the large unsecured borrowings and unredeemed mortgages of the 5th Earl.

### the Blakes

Ownership of Windfield would pass to another prominent family, the Blakes, when they acquired this area in 1703. Under the will of John Blake, dated February 27th 1786, the estate then passed to his cousin John Blake of The Heath, County Mayo. The Blake family, one of the fourteen tribes of Galway, became established in the west of Ireland in the Anglo-Norman period and reputed to be of Welsh origin. The name derives from Richard Cadell, or Caddle, who was also known by his cognomen 'Niger' or 'le Blak' (i.e. 'the Black'). Their property interests centered mainly in an area in the town of Galway. In this locality, the Blakes initially had their residence in Mullaghmore while they built Windfield House, circa 1771, and established a walled and moated demesne. Mixed marriages and the effects of the Penal Laws were factors peculiar to Galway families and particularly the Blakes. In 1823 Henry Blake, by this time residing in Edinburgh, brought an action for divorce against his wife on the grounds of adultery. The

original family records of the Blakes of Windfield and Mullaghmore had been handed down in the senior line of that family and they almost became a victim of the domestic troubles at Windfield. After the estate was sold in 1824, Henry Blake put little value on his family records and in 1835 he sold these to his friend and neighbour, Michael Browne of Moyne. Browne preserved the collection and presented them, in 1870, to Maurice Blake of Tower Hill in Mayo and these records remain an invaluable source of information as they date back to their first grant of land in Galway in 1278.

### the Jamesons

The Jamesons, who purchased the estate in 1824, were a Dublin family well known in the 19th century distilling and banking circles of that city. James Jameson, who bought the Windfield estate from the Blakes, was succeeded by his eldest son, the Reverend John Jameson in 1847. The family continued to occupy Windfield until the early 20th century, while they also had a residence at the Dublin suburb of Montrose. That house still stands on the grounds of the RTE studios. John Jameson's brother, Andrew, was grandfather to Guiseppe Marconi who today remains an iconic figure in the world of communication as the inventor of the wireless.

The Jamesons were originally from Alloa in Scotland and John, who founded the Dublin distillery in 1780, was a lawyer by profession when he married Margaret Haig. The Haig family was already well established in the whiskey business in Scotland and had extensive whiskey interests in Dublin. John and wife Margaret acquired the Bow Street Distillery in Dublin in 1780, hence the whiskey brand Jameson 1780. By the turn of the 19th century, a mere twenty years later, it was the second largest producer in Ireland and amongst the largest in the world, producing one million gallons of whiskey annually.

Reverend John Jameson leased this demesne to James Lynch for much of his life, as he ministered in the city Warwick, while the affairs of his tenants, for the remainder of the estate in Windfield and Mullaghmore, were managed by the Kirwans of Tuam who acted as land agents to many County Galway estates. Reverend John Jameson was succeeded by his son James Francis Jameson who returned to reside at Windfield House in the 1870s following a military career. James Francis and his wife Helen Maud Jameson, who was also his first cousin, had one child, a son, Maurice Eyre Francis Bellingham Jameson, known locally as 'Master Maurice' and he succeeded to the estate before it was purchased by the Land Commission in 1917 and allocated to local tenant farmers and residents thereafter.

### the CURRAGHAUN

Curraghaun translates from the Gaelic word, 'Currachán' with 'Currach' meaning a 'moor or a place of heather and heath' and 'Curraghaun' further translating as a 'small moor'.

The Curraghaun Heritage Site is situated on grazing land at an elevated location, due east from this information point. The earliest known activity at this location is marked by the footprints of an ecclesiastical settlement or those of a monastic site. As this was a sacred place it later became the site of a Children's Burial Ground or 'Cilleachán' and subsequently chosen as the burial place of James Francis Jameson. The latter may have been chosen because it was a sacred place or perhaps that it was the highest point on the estate and with an unobstructed view to the family residence at Windfield House.

### ecclesiastical remains

The footprints of at least three rectangular stone enclosures remain on the site in addition to an outside enclosure boundary, all of which are clearly visible. The largest of the buildings measures 50' X 30' externally. The deliberate East/West positioning of the building suggests that this was the church with the altar on the east wall. Another rectangular enclosure with a dividing wall, which is clearly visible also, measures 20' in length. There is a concentration of graves on each side of the dividing wall. South of the wall two undecorated pillar stones, 3' and 2.5' high respectively, are placed side by side and stand in an area of stone settings which indicate grave markings. North of the wall there are several other settings of stone nearly all of which are defined by little upright pillars which are grave memorials.

### children's burial ground

A Children's Burial Ground, or 'cillín', is recorded at this location on the very earliest maps. This has been very well preserved and many of the memorial markings are clearly evident with some being identified by erect stones, many are marked by rectangular formations of smaller stones while others are identified by individual loose stones. It is likely that stones used for memorial markings were sourced from the adjacent monastic buildings after they became defunct.

Sites, such as this one, while mostly reserved for the burial of children who died before they were baptised, were also used for the burial of older people who may have died in varying other circumstances or where their baptismal circumstances were ambiguous or unknown.

It is difficult to fully appreciate the depth of grief and despair that bereaved families underwent at such a time, worsened by the knowledge that they were to be denied the consolation of a funeral mass and dignified burial in consecrated ground. The long and sad journey to this 'cillín' was probably conducted by a male member of the

family and under cover of darkness, though perhaps with the guidance of a lantern light. Other family members were often discouraged from recognising the birth of these children or to accompany their remains on its final journey.

Thankfully attitudes and practices have changed, we have moved on, and we now find ourselves in a much better place in this regard. That said we must always recognise, be mindful of and correct, in some small way if that is possible, those former attitudes and past practices and remember the many remains now at rest in this sacred place.

### Jameson memorial

The remains of James Francis Jameson are interred in the Jameson enclosure. He was the son of Reverend John Jameson and Isabella Anne Jones and was born on June 5th, 1848, at Windfield House in this townland. He was the great grandson of John Jameson who founded the Jameson Distillery at Bow Street, Dublin, in 1780. James Francis, educated at Wellington College, Berkshire, held the rank of Major in the Connaught Rangers and later that of Justice of the Peace at Windfield. On April 24th 1879, he married Helen Maud Jameson, his first cousin, at the Parish Church of Donnybrook, County Dublin. Their only child, a son, Maurice Eyre Francis Bellingham Jameson was born on May 9th 1888 became known locally as 'Master Maurice'. James Francis Jameson died on December 6th, 1896.

In 1901 James Francis' widow, Helen Maud, remarried William Pugin Thornton, a retired surgeon from Kent. They resided at Windfield before relocating to Castlebellingham, Co. Louth in 1909. William died in 1913 while Helen Maud was lost at sea following a torpedo strike on the *RMS Leinster* on October 10th 1918 by German U-boat, *UB123*, in the Irish Sea.

### Curraghaun restoration project

The restoration, rejuvenation and transformation of this Heritage Site, facilitated by the Skehana & District Heritage Group, commenced in 2018. A special thanks to the members of our community who have supported us financially, the many volunteers who gave of their time and talents to make these enhancements possible, Galway County Council and The Heritage Council for their financial, moral and advisory support. We reserve a special mention for the Mannion family and their ancestors, as custodians of their area, who at all times embraced the project with their kind permissions. We acknowledge our partnership with Irish Distillers, as our main sponsors and current owners of the Jameson brand, whose generous financial support and encouragement made this initiative possible.

