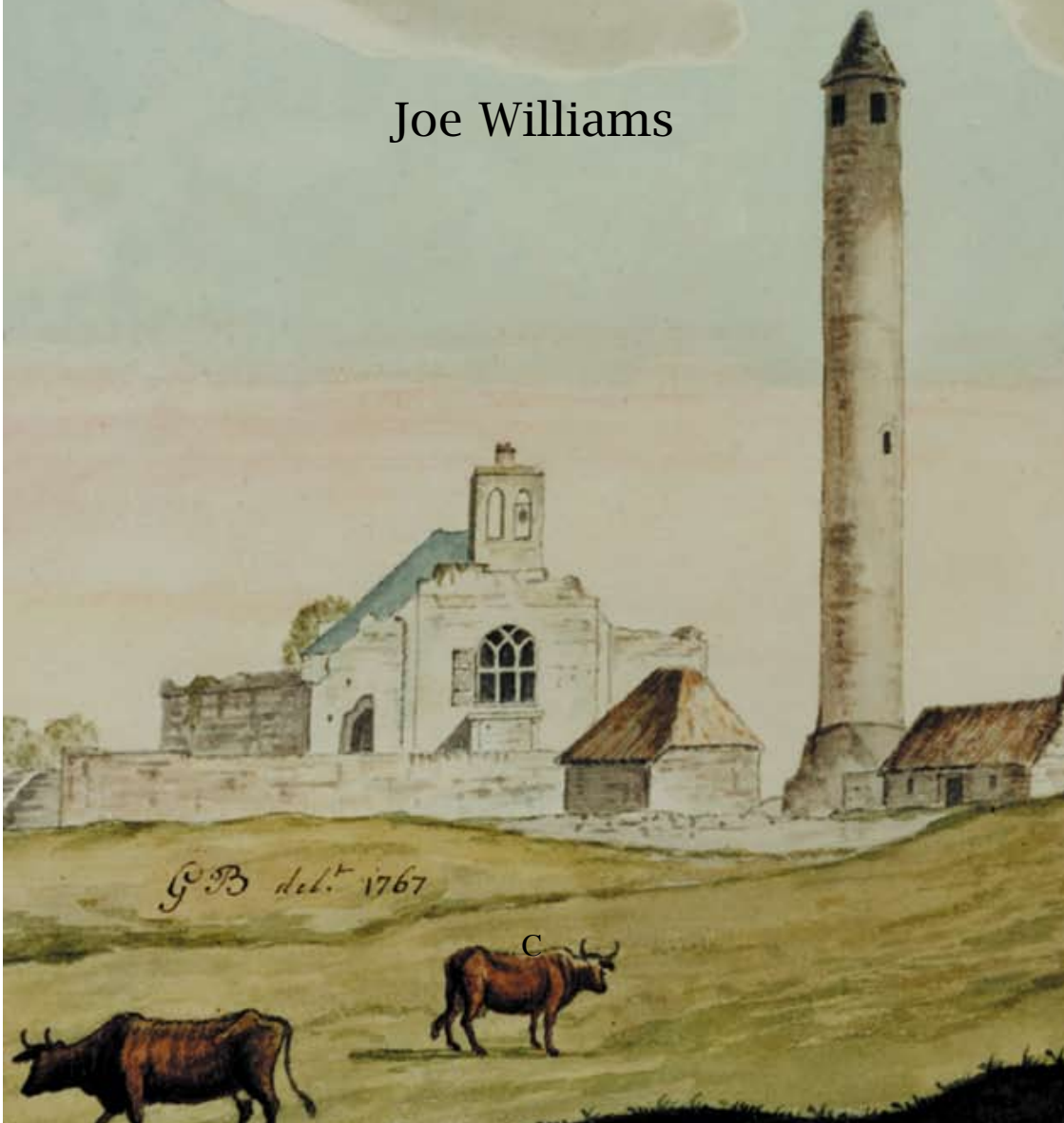


# St. Mochua and The Round Tower

Joe Williams



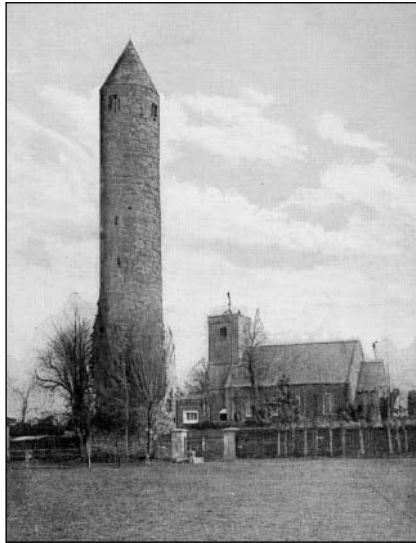


ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER

# St. Mochua and The Round Tower

by

*Joe Williams*



South Dublin Libraries — February 2006

ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER

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*Foreword by*  
*Mayor Thérèse Ridge*



I AM particularly pleased to be asked to pen an introduction to Joe Williams's book on Clondalkin's greatest asset: the Round Tower.

The author has provided a picture for us of Medieval Clondalkin and his painstaking research has added to our knowledge of St. Crónán Mochua and his links to Clondalkin and North Kildare.

A continuum is provided from the construction of the Tower in the 9th Century through to the 19th Century and it would appear that there was a *Rally Round the Tower* group in action in 1866 when an open air lecture was held in Clondalkin on the origins and design of the Tower.

St. Mochua is referred to in O'Hanlon's *Lives of Irish Saints* in the following manner; "Sixtus, a Roman Bishop bore upwards a buoyant troop with Mo Chua, a victorious Prince from multitudinous Cluain Dolcin." This book will be heartily welcomed in the even more multitudinous Clondalkin of the 21st Century.

*Thérèse Ridge*

*Mayor, South Dublin County Council*

## *Author's Introduction*



*Author Joe Williams*

THE author would like to thank South Dublin County Council and South Dublin Libraries for their assistance in the production of this book, especially the staff of the Local Studies Section of the County Library Tallaght, in particular Kieran Swords. He corrected my curious English, arranged clearance of photographs and organised the layout and printing.

Seamus Cullen gave his time and knowledge in driving me around the sites in Kildare and directed me to the documentary evidence.

The genesis of this book was the *Rally Round the Tower* campaign. The enthusiasm of the committee, under the direction of Bernardine nic Giolla Phádraigh, and the total support of the community were amazing.

To them all my sincere thanks and I hope the finished product meets with their approval.

*Joe Williams*

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CHAPTER I

## *The Monastery of Clondalkin*

IN the late 6th Century, St. Crónán Mochua founded a monastery at Clondalkin – Cluain Dolcáin<sup>1</sup>. P.W. Joyce in his *Irish Local Names Explained* translates the placename as Dolcan's Meadow. However, there is no record of any person named Dolcan in the Annals. It seems reasonable to assume that anyone who was important enough to have an area named after him would have appeared in one or more of the ancient records. The Rev. Canon Sherlock, on a field trip to Clondalkin in 1905, suggested that the word Dolcan might be 'Dalkin' which is a corruption of the Irish word 'Deilgne' meaning 'thorns.'<sup>2</sup> Based on this translation the name Clondalkin means 'Meadow of Thorns'.

All that remains of the monastic settlement of Clondalkin is the round tower, a granite erratic font, medieval crosses and the outline of the protective fosse which is still visible on today's streetscape. The layout of a typical Irish monastery is illustrated on the facing page. Orchard Road, with gardens sloping up from street level, formed the boundary on one side.<sup>3</sup> This has been confirmed by the discovery of a pathway, possibly the entrance to a hut, in the back garden of one of the houses. Continuing around Main Street the fosse then curved to the west to include the round tower. During archaeological excavations in 2004, remains of this fosse were discovered.

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The first buildings within this enclosure were built of wood. Venerable Bede, writing in the 8th Century refers to the churches of the Irish as:

*"Made of hewn oak and thatched with straw."*<sup>4</sup>



*Large cross in the grounds of  
St. John's Church.*

except the tradition that this was once a church site, known locally as the 'Chapple Field'.<sup>5</sup> In 1964 when this area was being cleared for St. Killian's Park housing scheme, stone walls and human bones were found. An excavation carried out by the National Museum under the direction of Etienne Rynne revealed the walls of a church within an oval enclosure. A bronze pin dating from the 10th or 11th Century was found against the outside wall of the church.<sup>6</sup>



*Early baptismal font carved from a granite  
erratic in the ground of St. John's Church.*

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER



*Early Christian cross in the grounds of St. John's Church.*

Rynne suggests that a wooden church surrounded by an earthen enclosure had existed from an early date, probably replaced by a stone church in early medieval times. This was probably destroyed during the 18th century when it was replaced by the Catholic Parish church on Monastery Road known as St. Killian's Church. When this church became too small for the growing population, it was decided to build the present parish Church of the Immaculate Conception and St. Killian in 1862.<sup>7</sup>



*Footpath unearthed in the rear garden of a house on Orchard Road, Clondalkin.*

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*The front gardens of these houses on Orchard Road, Clonalkin are above road level. The road follows the line of the fosse of the monastic settlement.*



*An aerial view of Clonalkin village circa 1930. The curve of Orchard Road can be seen at the right of the picture.*

CHAPTER II

*The Introduction of Christianity  
to Ireland*

TO understand the foundation of this monastery and its place in the spread of Christianity through the Leinster area, one has to return to the introduction of Christianity to Ireland. The early stages of the growth of the Christian church in Ireland are not fully documented. Christianity seems to have spread here from Gaul (France) and Britain through contacts made by the Irish, trading with those areas. Another possibility is that the religion was introduced by British slaves captured on raids from Ireland.

From at least the early 5th Century, Christians were to be found in the south of the country and were known to the church in Gaul. They formed the "Irish believing in Christ" to whom in 431 A.D. the deacon Palladius was sent by Pope Celestine. There is no record as to the depth or success of his mission.<sup>8</sup>

Other missionaries took their guidance from the church in Britain. The most celebrated of these was Patrick, the only one who has left documentary proof of his mission. However neither his *Confession* nor his *Epistle to Corotious* was intended to be a historical record. The others, who were later represented as subordinates of Patrick, probably worked

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*St. John's Church viewed from the Round Tower.*

independently of each other. These early Christians were inspired by the lives of the Eastern anchorites, especially St. Anthony. They wished to live their lives in meditation and solitude. However, word of their piety and knowledge soon attracted others who wanted to learn from them and who wished to copy their way of life. One of these was Ciarán, founder of Clonmacnoise, who during his short life was active in the area bordering the Shannon.

St. Kevin, also known as St. Comegan, is reputed to have been born in 498 A.D. His family was of high rank and lived on the borders of east Leinster. He was of the Dalmasincoirb Clan. His father was Coinlogha or Coemlugus from the race Laeghaire Lorc who were monarchs of Erin and from whom all Leinstermen descended.<sup>9</sup>

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His mother was Coenhella or Caenhella, daughter of Cennfhionnen, son of Crisi, son of Lugaidh. It is recorded that they lived near Bray in Co. Wicklow. He was educated by St. Petroc of Cornwall, who lived in Ireland at that time and also by the monks of Kilnamanagh near Tallaght.

Many miracles were attributed to St. Kevin during the time he spent living in isolation at Glendalough. In 549 A.D. he decided to visit St. Ciarán at Clonmacnoise only to discover on his arrival that the saint had died three days earlier. Legend has it that when left alone with the body, St. Ciarán spoke to him and gave him instructions as to his future life.

Returning to Glendalough he founded a monastery there. Many pious men flocked to him and became monks. A number of these men were named Crónán. However, none have been officially connected with St. Mochua. He sent them out to form cells and monasteries throughout the province of Leinster. All were subject to the rule of St. Kevin.



*Glendalough is associated with St. Kevin.*

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER



*St. Ciarán's Monastery at Clonmacnoise is located on the banks of the river Shannon.*



*St. John's Church and Round Tower, Clondalkin.*



CHAPTER III

*St. Mochua of Clondalkin*

**S**T. MOCHUA was the founder of one of these early monasteries. His father was Lugaidh and was of the race of Cathair Mór, monarch of Erin of the Legenians. His mother was Cainer of Cluain da Saileach who was the mother of six other sons of Lugaidh, who also were Saints: Lasrain, Baedan, Garbhan, Baothin, Senchan and Rhuadhan.<sup>10</sup> By saints we mean those who are recognised as leading holy lives devoted to the practice of religion, not those who had to wait for death to be canonised.

Another version of his family background is given by Mervyn Archdall who mentions that his genealogy is given in the Leabhar Breac as:

Crónán	Mic Connlai
Mac Nathi	Mic Oengusa
Mic Dolbaig	Mic Oililla Cetaig
Mic Setnai	Mic Cathach Mor, R.H.
	<i>Slain by Ced Cathach, AD 177<sup>11</sup></i>

O'Hanlon in his *Lives of the Irish Saints* notes the following stanza:

*'Sextus a Roman Bishop  
Bore upwards a buoyant troop  
With Mo Chua a victorious Prince  
From multitudinous Cluain Dolcin'<sup>12</sup>*

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER

In addition a festival in honour of Crónán, son of Lugdach is recorded in the *Martyrology of Tallaght*, on the 6th August. He is noted as being the same as Mochua of Cluana Dolcain.<sup>13</sup>

The first abbot of Clondalkin was St. Mochua, and according to one authority he was also a Bishop and Confessor. An ancient tradition seems to have prevailed that he was elected Bishop at Clondalkin. Whether he was Bishop to his own community or to the people residing around Clondalkin is not certain. Frequently in the Annals we find the abbatial and episcopal offices united in the same person. Successors of St. Mochua at Clondalkin followed this custom as is shown by the following listings from the Annals of the Four Masters:

St. Ferfugaill	Bishop and Abbot	Died 784 A.D.
Cathal Mac Corbmaic	Bishop and Abbot	Died 879 A.D. <sup>14</sup>

St. Mochua was venerated in Scotland on the 6th August. We find his name in the *Martyrology of Drummon* where he is also named a Bishop and Confessor.<sup>15</sup>

The monastery of Clondalkin most probably controlled the nearby religious houses of Kilmahuddrick, Kilmactalway and



*Remains of Kilmahuddrick Church, Clondalkin. There was a small monastic settlement on this site.*

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*Remains of Kilbride Church near Baldonnel*

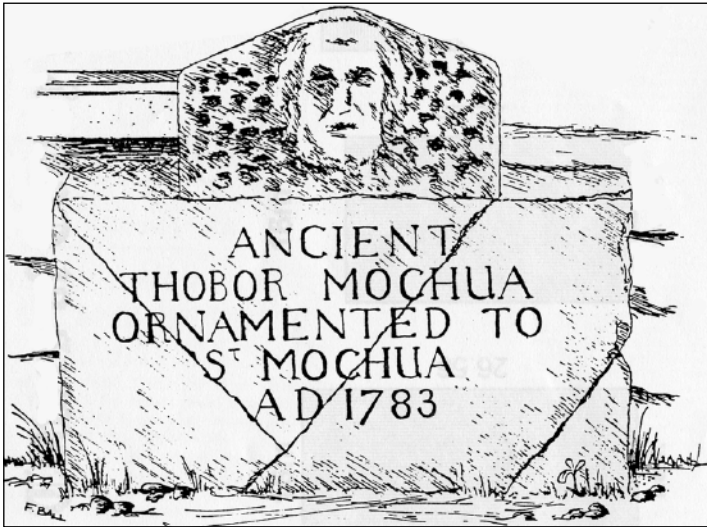
Kilbride. As has been shown, the influence of Glendalough spread throughout the province of Leinster. In the same manner, the influence of St. Mochua spread beyond Clondalkin and into Co. Kildare.

In Celbridge, a stone trough, dated 1783, bearing St. Mochua's name and image stood at the roadside next to the mill. It possibly stood over the "Tober Mochua" which was used by the saint to baptize his converts. Rev. O'Hanlon in his *Lives of the Irish Saints* states that according to local tradition, people living in or near Clondalkin formerly held a patron or festival at St. Mochua's Well near Celbridge in the parish of Kildrought, Co. Kildare.



*Former site of the stone trough from St. Mochua's Well, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.*

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER



*Stone trough which probably stood over “Tober Mochua” and was later relocated close to the mill in Celbridge, Co. Kildare.*

St. Mochua is attributed with the foundation of the church at Kildrought, now known as the Tea Lane Churchyard. An entry in the County Kildare Chancery Inquisition that was taken at Kilcock on the 22nd October 1604, when translated states:

“There is one messuage with close, and two cottages with their closes, and eighteen acres of land in the town land of Kildrought called ‘St. Magho his land’, which were granted in mortmain to the church at Kildrought without license from the Crown, and for that reason they are now in the King’s hands.”<sup>16</sup>

Balraheen Church, now a disused churchyard south of Maynooth, was also dedicated to St. Mochua. Balraheen today is in the Catholic Parish of Clane/Rathcoffey. The local church for this area is situated at Rathcoffey, two miles south of the ancient burial ground. Here the local school, built in 1930, is dedicated to the honour of St. Mochua.

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*Tea Lane churchyard Kildrough, Co. Kildare, the site of a monastic settlement which is attributed to St. Mochua.*

St. Mochua's travels led him to Timahoe, Co. Kildare, which takes its name from Tigh Mochua – Mochua's House. Today the church and graveyard are enclosed by a circular wall. The remains of the outer defensive fosses are visible in the landscape. These features can be found at all the sites attributed to St. Mochua.

Timahoe is built on one of a number of islands within a large area of bog. With modern drainage the surrounding bog has dried out but the islands are still visible as raised platforms. To move around this area of bog the early Christian traveller had to use toghers to transverse these wetlands. A togher consists of wattle or branches laid on the bog surface, which are then covered with marl and gravel until a stable surface is achieved.

These sites are linked to Clondalkin by the ancient Slís or roadways and by raised sand hills known as eskers which were also utilized as paths. One of these eskers runs from Templeogue to Lucan passing through Clondalkin, from where the Slí Mór leads to other monastic sites.

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St. Crónán Mochua died in 630 A.D. The *Annals of Ulster* record that the relics of St. Kevin of Glendalough and St. Mochua of Clondalkin were taken on tour in 790 A.D. These circuits or commutation of relics were a feature of the early Christian church. Their aim was the revival of religious devotion by raising the consciousness of their flocks as well as generating material gain for the monasteries concerned.

It is possible that these circuits of relics resulted in the building of the round tower at Clondalkin. It is now accepted that the main functions of a round tower were the safety and veneration of the relics of the monastery's founder.



*Timahoe, Co. Kildare is the site of a monastic settlement attributed to St. Mochua. The Irish version of the name "Tigh Mochua" means Mochua's house or church.*

CHAPTER IV

*Round Towers*

**R**OUND TOWERS – Cloigthe – Bell Towers are freestanding structures on their own foundations and of fairly similar dimensions. Where they are genuine they are uniquely Irish, at least one thousand years old and a direct link to the early Christian church.

James Ferguson in his *History of Architecture* (1855) states: "as architectural objects these towers are singularly pleasing. Their outline is always graceful and the simplicity of their form is such as to give the utmost value to their dimensions ... they are among the most interesting of the antiquities of Europe."

Round towers are located in all but two of the counties of Ireland. There are sixty-five of which all or portions remain. The sites of another twenty-three, which have been destroyed, are known. Outside of Ireland there are only three other towers, two in Scotland and one in the Isle of Man. It is possible that earlier belfries or towers were built of timber, as were the churches, this would explain the record in the Annals of Ulster that the bell house at Slane was burned by the foreigners of Áth Cliath in 949 AD. Round buildings in stone have existed in Ireland from early times. Small roofed examples are clocháns or beehive huts of the Dingle peninsula and of the west coast islands.

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*Clondalkin Round Tower circa 1890 from the Chapman Livingstone collection.  
(Courtesy of the Irish Picture Library)*

H.G. Leask, commenting in his *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, on the dating of early ecclesiastical buildings stated that precise dating was difficult and often impossible and concluded that if the date of the introduction of mortar was known the task might be made easier. The building of structures of the size of round towers only became possible after the introduction of mortar. Mortar was a mixture of burnt lime and sand mixed with water or, in this early period, ox blood.

The Romans introduced mortar to northern Europe and Britain. Therefore, early Christians who came to Ireland from areas of Roman influence were familiar with masonry, which used mortar as a bonding material. Certainly, there is no record of the use of lime mortar in Ireland before the arrival of



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Christianity in the 5th Century. To produce lime, limestone is reduced to small blocks which are then burned in kilns. These kilns are shaped like inverted hollow cones with an opening at the bottom. They are usually built into banks thereby allowing filling from the top. Kindling is placed at the bottom, covered by alternating layers of stone and turf, until the kiln is filled. Once lit, large kilns were kept burning for years, with the burnt lime being continuously extracted from the bottom. This was a dangerous business as at a later date an extract from the Record of Burials of St John's Church shows;

*April 12th 1829. Edward Kelly – burned in Lime Kiln<sup>17</sup>*

Limestone was quarried throughout the Clondalkin area. The main quarries were at the top of the Monastery Road. Limestone is the bedrock that runs throughout the village at times less than 20 cm below the surface. Stone used in the construction of the round tower is thought to have come from an area immediately to the west of the tower.

There have long been arguments as to the origins and functions of round towers. The wilder theories credited them to Druids, Persian Fire Worshipers, African Sea Kings, Phoenicians and Indians.<sup>18</sup> One writer saw them as phallic symbols, associated with a fertility cult as is the case in other areas of the world where similarly shaped monuments are located. In many countries and with many creeds, towers mark major religious sites and point to Heaven as an expression of religious fervor. Could not the early travellers have brought this custom with them from Europe or from even further afield?

The first historian to concentrate on round towers was Dr. Thomas Molyneux in 1725, who argued that they were of Danish origin.<sup>19</sup> However, George Petrie, in his prize winning essay to the Royal Irish Academy in 1833, refuted this

suggestion and stated that they were ecclesiastical buildings of the early Celtic Church.<sup>20</sup> He suggested that they were used mainly as bell towers, housing the most valued possession of the monastery, the bell of the founder.

The argument as to their origin was the subject of an open-air meeting at Clondalkin Tower arranged by Caleb Palmer and John Darling on Thursday 24th May 1866. They gave seven reasons for maintaining their Eastern or Phoenician origins and were prepared to defend their theories against those of Petrie. Charles Vallancey wrote a long poem in praise of those 'men of true genius and sterling worth'.<sup>21</sup> Although there is no record of the outcome of this meeting it is now accepted that Petrie was correct.

From a Breton tract we know that the three main ecclesiastical buildings of a monastery were the oratory, the church and the round tower. References in the Annals suggest that round towers are only associated with churches. It is reasonable to assume that the towers were erected soon after the foundation of monasteries and were a symbolic central feature of the Christian community.

One theory proposed that they were built as watch towers as a consequence of Danish raids. This is hard to accept as both Clondalkin and St. Michael le Pole, in Dublin, adjoined Danish settlements and were allowed to remain.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, other towers are located far away from rivers and the coast which are obvious lines of attack. Some towers are built close to each other or are in valleys with restricted fields of observation.

**PROGRAMME OF LECTURE.**

Round Tower



Clondalkin.

**OPEN-AIR LECTURE AT CLONDALKIN**  
ON THURSDAY, MAY 24, 1866.

**THE  
ROUND TOWERS  
OF IRELAND.**

To the Members of the Royal Irish Academy specially and the Antiquarians of Ireland generally.

**Seven Reasons for maintaining their Eastern, or Phœnician Origin,**  
*Proving them to have been the Mystic Pillar Temples of Baal, dedicated to the service of Apollo, Phœbus, or the Sun.*

**FIRST.**—Scripture proves that those Towers, or Mystic Pillar Temples, were originally erected in the East by the recreant kings of Israel and Judah, upwards of 1000 years previous to the Christian era, for the worship of Baal, Apollo, Phœbus, or the Sun, and other deities.

**SECOND.**—Profane History sustains their Pagan Origin, and shows the connecting link between the tide of Emigration from the East through the Western nations of Europe, and places beyond all doubt their contemporaneous erection with the Phœnician rule in Ireland.

**THIRD.**—Traditions existing in this Country derived from Eastern fable, manners, and customs substantiate the analogous evidence between the habits and predilections of the Irish and Eastern peoples. The Patterns and Pilgrimages, Particular Holy Wells and Fountains, the celebration of the *La Dood-tiane*, the Irish Ullagoue, the lighting of fires on St. John's Eve, the Baalist names of bridges, towns, mountains, brooks, rivers, &c.

**FOURTH.**—Coins in the British Museum, Levite horns for proclaiming festivals, sun images, lunettes, Egyptian symbols, cairns, cromlechs, sculpture, monumental remains, mortuary urns, antique figures on crosses, &c.

**FIFTH.**—The similarity of architecture in our Round Towers and those erected in former ages and now existing in the East.

**SIXTH.**—Devices on the old buildings of serpents and wolves, which were sacred to Apollo and the Romans; skeletons found buried facing the East; the sepulchral argument considered.

**SEVENTH.**—General Summary, irrefutably proving the Pagan origin of the Round Towers of Ireland, and showing the only true way by which the mystery can lucidly be cleared up.

We are prepared to maintain everything contained in the above evidence against all supporters of the Petrie theory, and respectfully challenge inquiry, either at the Bar of the Royal Irish Academy, on the platform, or through the columns of the Press.

CALEB PALMER & JOHN DARLING.  
*Clondalkin Round Tower, 24th May, 1866.*

Notice of an open-air lecture at Clondalkin in 1866.

Tadhg O'Keeffe in his recent books *Medieval Ireland* and *Ireland's Round Towers*, while accepting that they were bell-houses, considered that they must have had a more important use to justify the effort and cost of their construction. He suggests the only other function for which we have documentation is the storage and veneration of relics.

As already mentioned, the *Annals of the Ulster* record that in 949 A.D. the belfry at Slane "was burned by foreigners with its full of relics and distinguished persons". Likewise the burning of the bell tower of Monasterboice with its books and treasures is recorded in 1097 A.D.<sup>23</sup>

CHAPTER V

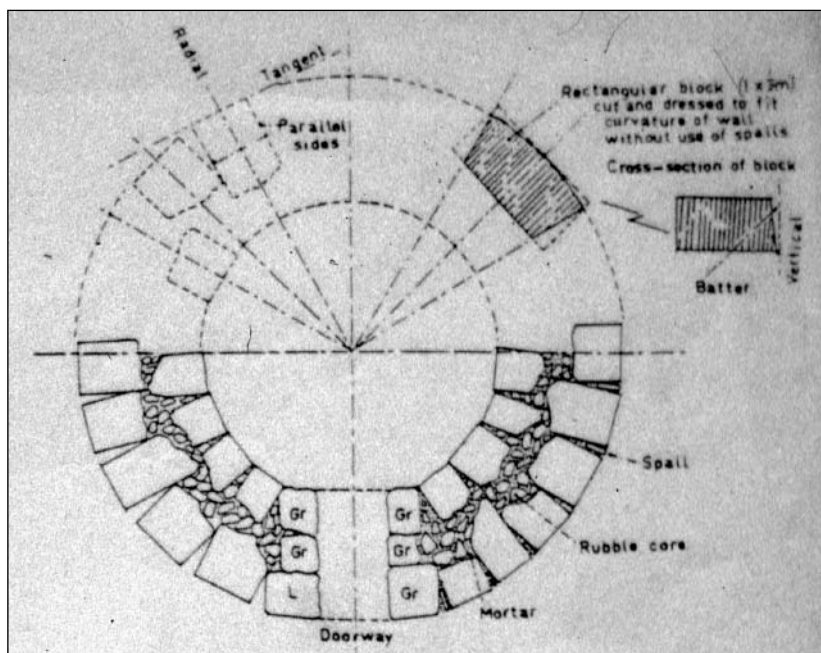
*Clondalkin Round Tower*

THE actual method of building round towers varied very little, a circular trench was dug and a foundation of roughly dressed stones was laid in it. Where they have been measured, foundations have been found to be less than one metre deep. On this the walls were built. The same method of construction was used in all cases, with external and internal walls laid and bound together with a core of rubble and mortar. As they rose the external face was inclined slightly inwards. The effect of this was that the whole circuit of the wall leaned in on itself thus giving it extra strength.

Clondalkin Round Tower is of a very early style. This is shown by the rough stones used in its construction, which have no sign of being shaped or worked by a mason. Consequently the wall is poorly coursed with a great many spalls. It is built from the local calp limestone, with the door frames being formed by Leinster granite erratics. The tower also includes small quantities of sandstone.

The tower is complete and, so far as can be ascertained, has never been repaired. A unique buttress of rubble and small stones surrounds the lower portion. The height of the tower is calculated at 27.5m and the circumference immediately above the buttress is 12.7m.<sup>24</sup> This makes it the most slender of all

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER



*This plan illustrates the method of construction used for round towers with external and internal walls laid and bound together with a core of rubble and mortar.*



*Clondalkin Round Tower is built mainly of uncoursed, uncut calp limestone.*

round towers, the circumference of the other towers ranges between 15 and 17 metres.<sup>25</sup> This combined with the fact that it is almost cylindrical gives it the appearance that it is about to take off. (see p. 34).

The doorway at the top of the bulge faces east towards the present parish church; it is 3.9m above street level. The doorway is square headed and has four jambstones on either side; these



*The doorway of Clondalkin Round Tower is formed of granite erratics.*

along with the sill and lintel are of granite. This is one of only thirteen towers that have flat-lintelled doorways.<sup>26</sup> Round-headed doorways first appeared towards the end of the 11th Century when the arch became an important feature of Romanesque architecture.<sup>27</sup> There is no sign of any decoration around the doorway, which is 1.63m in height and tapers, bottom to top, from a width of 64cm to 55cm.

The first floor is at the level of the doorway with a basement level below. The floor of the basement is of rough rubble and is a little above the level of the outside pavement. Below the doorway the wall is set back approximately 5cm forming a ledge on which the joists of the first floor rests. Originally there were a further four floors above this level, however when the present floors were installed this was reduced to three by placing one floor between the old second and third levels. At the same time long ladders were installed to provide access to the top level.

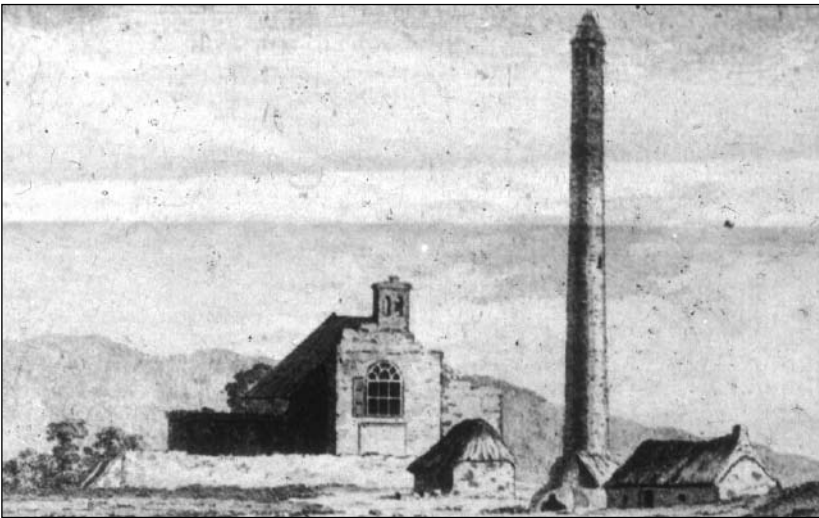
There are six windows in the tower, one on the first floor facing south, one on the second floor facing west and four just below the cornice facing north, south, east and west. These four were fitted with perspex in 1972, which became discoloured and was replaced with glass in recent years. The cap which sits on the cornice is reputed to be original although local lore states that lightning, in the 1930s, knocked off some of the stones. It is at a less acute angle than most other towers.

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER



A unique feature of Clondalkin Round Tower is the buttress of rubble and small stones which surrounds the base of the tower. It is approximately 1m deep, rising to a height of 3m, from where it curves inwards to the original surface. This feature does not appear to be bound into the main structure, and as it is built from different materials, most probably was added after the tower was completed.

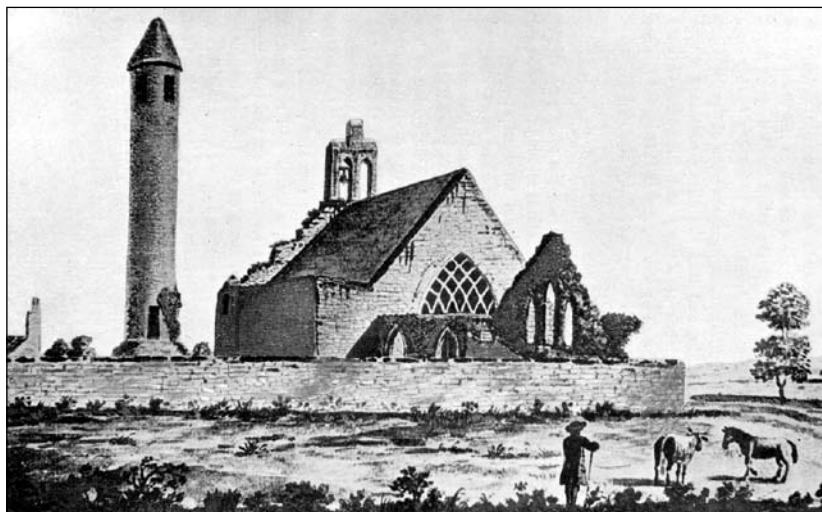
It is reputed that William Caldbeck of Moyle Park, on whose land the tower stood, built it. However as Caldbeck only purchased the land in 1780 this cannot be correct as it is clearly shown in the drawings of Samuel Molyneaux (1725), Gabriel Beranger (1767)<sup>28</sup> and T. Archdeacon (1770).



*Molyneaux print of Clondalkin Round Tower circa 1725.*



## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER



*Archdeacon's print of Clondalkin Church and Round Tower circa 1770 taken from Ball's A History of the County Dublin is obviously based on a 1767 Beranger print.*



*Clondalkin Church and Round Tower in 1791 from Grose's Antiquities of Ireland reproduced in Ball's A History of the County Dublin.*

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER

The confusion most probably arises from the fact that during the 1880s steps were cut in the buttress and floors and ladders installed to facilitate access to the top of the tower. Proof of this may be had from the following extract of a speech made by Patrick Gogarty at a National League meeting held in Clondalkin on Sunday 15th November 1885. Gogarty, who was secretary of the Clondalkin Branch of the league, was protesting against evictions carried out by Mr. Roper-Caldbeck who then owned Moyle Park.



*Steps to the tower as they are today.*

The following is taken from the short hand notes of Sgt. T. Keaveny R.I.C who had been instructed to record the proceedings of the meeting.

“The Senior Roper came to live in the town, he had an idea to give two entrances to his very secluded lawns, he must have had it in his ideas to cut off all mode of ingress with the tower. For he placed the steps so high, that unless you were very agile in the nether limbs you could not gain admittance to it.”<sup>29</sup>

This then leaves one puzzle. Why was the tower built with such a narrow circumference and why was the supportive buttress added?

It may be, that it was based on earlier slim wooden towers that have not survived. Another possible explanation is that when the foundations were being dug out the underlying limestone bedrock was discovered. It was then decided that a narrow circumference would give sufficient stability on such a firm base.

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER

However a series of natural disasters were to occur which would upset these calculations. The Annals of Ulster record that a series of earthquakes occurred between the years 707 to 769 A.D. detailing them as:

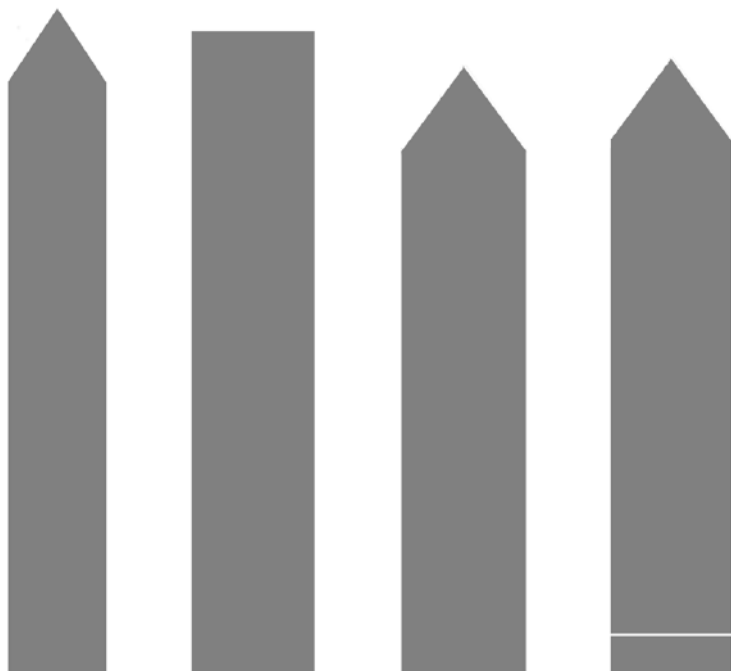
- 707 A.D. Two in the same week in December<sup>30</sup>
- 720 A.D. One in October
- 740 A.D. In Ile on the second of the Ides of April<sup>31</sup>
- 769 A.D. An earthquake and famine

Perhaps one or more of these earthquakes could have destroyed the earlier towers or caused Clondalkin Round Tower to sway or even partially collapse thereby requiring the addition of the buttress?



*Clondalkin Round Tower from Clondalkin Park.*

### *County Dublin Round Towers*



Clondalkin

d = 4.04m

h = 27.5m

Lusk

d = 5.09m

h = 26.56m\*

Swords

d = 5.09m

h = 26m

Rathmichael

d = 5.01m

h = 26m\*\*

d = diameter (based on maximum measurable circumference of round tower)  
h = height of round tower

\* The roof of Lusk round tower is missing, height given is to cornice.

\*\* Only a 1.6m stump remains.

The estimated height of the round tower, based on diameter was 22 - 26m.

CHAPTER VI

*To the Present Day*

**A**S the building of a round tower was related to the foundation of a monastery, it is reasonable to see them as the symbolic central feature of the Christian site.

While they may have doubled as bell towers, their primary function was the housing, protection and veneration of the monasteries' treasures, which included the relics of the founder.

The narrowness of Clondalkin Round Tower and the subsequent addition of the supporting buttress most probably resulted from building directly on to the limestone rock base, an error, which was compounded by the earthquakes of the 8th Century. Taking into consideration the dates of the incidents already detailed the most likely period for the construction of Clondalkin Round Tower is circa 750 A.D.

The Celtic influence in the monastery of Clondalkin seems to have declined after it was plundered by the Heathens in 832 A.D. Olaf the White, a Norse king, established his fort, Dunaley, at Clondalkin around 850 A.D. This was attacked and burned by the Irish under Gaithine in 866 A.D., while Olaf was invading Northumbria. Olaf returned to Dublin in 870

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER

A.D. Clondalkin was again burned in 1071 but by 1086 A.D. it is recorded that the last Abbot mentioned in the Annals, Fiachna Ua Ronain, fell asleep in peace. This may have coincided with the adoption of Christianity by the Norsemen.

In 1186 the parish was united with Kilmahuddrick by Master Osbertus, who is described as Master of Clondalkin. Later the parish of Kilmactalway was added to the union.

There are no records showing when the mediaeval church was built. It is described in Mason's *History of St Patrick's Cathedral* as being one of the finest in Co. Dublin. It measured 36.6 metres long and 15.2 metres wide and had three altars dedicated to Mary, the Blessed Virgin, St. Bridget and St. Thomas. It was known as St. Mochua's Church. By 1649 the church was in a very poor condition and it was decided to close St. Mochua's and merge the parish with that of Tallaght.

The church was partially restored and reopened circa 1729. Permission to demolish this building and build a new church in its place was requested in 1785. Building was completed and services seem to have resumed in this new church, now named St. John's, by 1789 where they continue to this day.<sup>32</sup>

*The Round Towers of Ireland triumphant shall rear  
O'er land blessed by nature so fertile and fair,  
Clondalkin that flourished for ages of fame  
Awakes from her slumbers her rights to maintain.*<sup>33</sup>

## *Endnotes*

- <sup>1</sup>Clondalkin can be located on sheet 17 of the 6" Ordnance Survey mapping
- <sup>2</sup>*Journal of the Kildare County Archaeological Society. (J.K.A.S.)* Vol 5. 1906-8.
- <sup>3</sup>See Appendix 2.
- <sup>4</sup>*Medieval Ireland.* p. 128.
- <sup>5</sup>*Archaeology Early Christian Remains and Local Histories,* Paddy Healy's Dublin p. 27
- <sup>6</sup>*Excavation of a Church Site at Clondalkin Co Dublin.*
- <sup>7</sup>*A History of Clondalkin's Catholic Parish.*
- <sup>8</sup>*Ireland before the Vikings.* p. 22.
- <sup>9</sup>*Lives of the Irish Saints.* Vol VI. p. 31.
- <sup>10</sup>*Lives of the Irish Saints.* Vol III. p. 99.
- <sup>11</sup>*Monasticon Hibernicum.* Vol I. p. 296.
- <sup>12</sup>*Lives of the Irish Saints.* Vol III. p. 99 Article 1.
- <sup>13</sup>*Lives of the Irish Saints.* Vol III. p. 99.
- <sup>14</sup>For full list of Abbots see Appendix 1.
- <sup>15</sup>*Lives of the Irish Saints.* Vol III. p. 102.
- <sup>16</sup>*J.K.A.S.* Vol II. No 5. (1898). p. 324.
- <sup>17</sup>*Select Vestry Records of St. John's Parish Clondalkin.*
- <sup>18</sup>Charles Vallancey (1721 – 1812) and see notice on p. 25.
- <sup>19</sup>Molyneux T. *A Discovery concerning Danish Mounts.*
- <sup>20</sup>Petrie G. *The Round Towers of Ireland.*
- <sup>21</sup>See broadsheet attached at Appendix 3.
- <sup>22</sup>Barrow G.L. *The Round Towers of Co. Dublin.*
- <sup>23</sup>*Annals of Ulster.* p. 397 & p. 533.
- <sup>24</sup>Barrow G.L. *The Round Towers of Co. Dublin.*
- <sup>25</sup>See diagram at p. 34.
- <sup>26</sup>*Interpretation of Round Towers.* p. 25.
- <sup>27</sup>*Interpretation of Round Towers.* p. 26.
- <sup>28</sup>*Beranger's Antique Buildings of Ireland.*
- <sup>29</sup>State Paper Office – GSOR Paper 20938 for 15th November 1885.
- <sup>30</sup>*Annals of Ulster.* p. 165, p. 175, p. 740 & p. 769.
- <sup>31</sup>It was in the area of South Offaly/North Tipperary.
- <sup>32</sup>*From Generation to Generation.* p. 8.
- <sup>33</sup>Extract from broadsheet attached at Appendix 3.

## *Glossary*

ANCHORITE	A religious recluse.
CLOCHAN	Circular dry-stone structure with corbelled roof.
CORBELLED	Dry-stone roofing made of courses slightly inwards of those below and sloping outwards.
CORNICE	Projecting ledge or capping, usually at top of wall.
DRY-STONE	Stone structure built without mortar.
ERRATIC	A rock which is foreign to the area in which it is found, which has been transported by ice age movement.
ESKER	Sand and gravel deposited along the bed of sub glacial streams. When the glacier withdraws this leaves ridges of dry ground which are utilized as pathways.
FOSSE	Ditch or trench.
JAMB STONES	Vertical sides of a door or window.
JOISTS	A length of timber supporting a floor.
LINTEL	Horizontal stone spanning the top of a door or window.
NATIONAL LEAGUE	Irish parliamentary party founded in 1883.
PUTLOG	Short horizontal pole projecting from wall.
RELIC	Something remaining as a memorial of a saint.
R.I.C	Royal Irish Constabulary
SILL	Horizontal stone base of a door or window.
SPALL	Splinters of stone used to pack masonry joints.



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**APPENDIX 1**

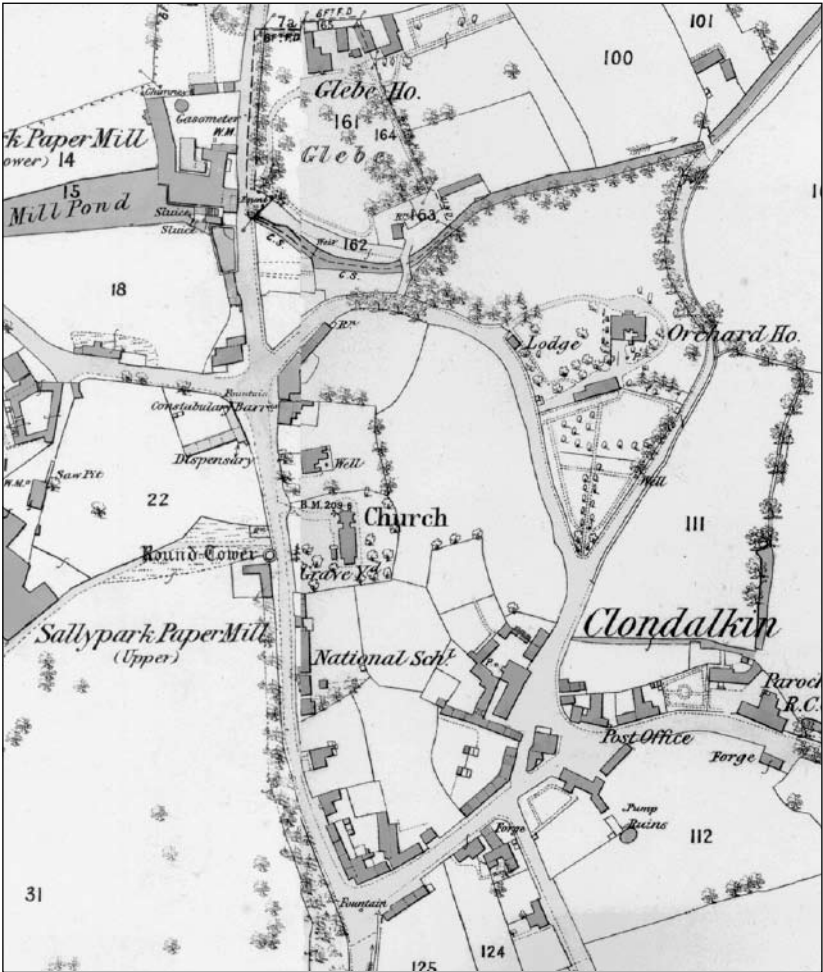
*Abbots and Bishops of the  
Monastery of Clondalkin*

<b>A.D.</b>		
<b>630</b>	St Crónán – Mochua died	Founder
<b>776</b>	Aelbran nua Lugudon	Abbot
<b>784</b>	Ferfugaill	Bishop
<b>796</b>	Feidlimid ua Lugudon	Abbot
<b>828</b>	Tipraite Mac Rectabrat	Abbot
<b>879</b>	Cathal Mac Corbmaic	Bishop
<b>885</b>	Ronan Mac Cathail	Abbot
<b>920</b>	Maolionmain Ua Glascon	Abbot
<b>938</b>	Dubindirect Mac Ronain*	Abbot
<b>1070</b>	Ua Ronain	Abbot
<b>1076</b>	Mac Maeldalua	Abbot
<b>1086</b>	Fiachna Ua Ronain	Abbot

\*Dubindirect – A church officer, Stewart of church lands.

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER

## APPENDIX 2



*Ordnance Survey map of Clondalkin Village circa 1865 (1:2,500)*

APPENDIX 3

THE  
Round Towers of Ireland

Written in commemoration of the Great Open-Air  
Meeting held at the Round Tower, Clondalkin, by  
MESSRS. PALMER AND DARLING.

The Round Towers of Ireland, long cherished in song  
Have called forth the muses of many a bright one,  
As shown in the lays of MacCarthy and Moore,  
United with all that is noble and pure!  
Those time-honoured structures majestic still stand,  
The glory and pride of our dear fatherland;  
The sacred memorials of ages gone by,  
They're linked by the weavelet of historic tie  
Round the heart of the patriot gifted and brave,  
Whether in his dear Island or far o'er the wave;  
The strongholds of refuge in peril or war,  
From which were seen floating proud banners afar,  
When her chieftains bright laurels for Erin had won,  
And their heroic deeds were by minstrels sung;  
When the brave kings of Tara arose in their might,  
Ever foremost and brave on the red field to fight;  
When the wild harp resounded in soul-thrilling strains,  
Breathing liberty's lays on the fierce battle plains;  
When the faith of St. Patrick, like morning's first ray,  
Blest the Emerald Isle, showing man the true way,  
And bidding his thoughts to that bright Heaven soar,  
And turn from idols he knelt to before.  
Oh, they carry us back to each well-beloved scene  
Where warriors, sages, and poets have been,  
And they speak to the heart of the good olden times  
When Irishmen first knelt at holy shrines!  
Why care for the sceptic or fool who but raves  
Of the fanciful stories of Fétis and Graves,  
Who say the Round Towers by Christians were raised,  
From which Baal's fire for ages had blazed,  
They have lived in dark ages when light was unknown,  
Ere man bent his knee to the Christians' high throne,  
And they still stand to-day, tho' Ireland is bereft  
Of all but the faith St. Patrick has left;  
In vain the wild storms of ages have roiled  
O'er the Round Towers of Erin so lofty and bold—  
They have nobly withstood every rude Winter's blast,  
And in beauty and grandeur remain to the last;  
They tell of the great men who flourished of yore—  
Of the cross and the shamrock our forefathers wore,  
Till the full tide of rapture within each breast swells,  
As in fancy we list to the Round Tower bells.  
Oh! talk not to me of the marble of Rome—  
I love the old Towers of Erin as some;  
By the mountains, and rivers, and lakes of our clime  
They stand still proclaiming a nation sublime!  
The days of Baal worship for ever are o'er—  
The Druid's bright fire shall burn no more;  
The sun in full radiance and splendour may beam,  
But man feels and knows there is One that's Supreme.  
The warriors and sages have long passed away,  
And castles have crumbled to ruin and decay;  
The fire that rose in the poet's fond breast  
Has been quenched by a hand that's sadly oppress;  
The alien invader has ruthlessly tread  
O'er the green graves where moulder'd the patriot dead,  
But while men of true genius and sterling worth  
As PALMER and DARLING are found to stand forth,  
The Round Towers of Ireland triumphant shall rear  
O'er a land blessed by nature so fertile and fair;  
CLONDALKIN that flourished for ages of fame  
Awakes from her slumbers her rights to maintain,  
Proving truth that was never deflected before—  
Leaving scandals to sleep in the shade evermore!

VALLANCE.

*The Round Towers of Ireland — Written in commemoration  
of the Great Open-Air Meeting held at The Round Tower,  
Clondalkin, by Messers Palmer and Darling.*

## ST. MOCHUA AND THE ROUND TOWER





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