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“The Prior’s Tomb” in Templemore Old Church

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Recent conservation work on the old church ruins and graveyard in Templemore Town Park, sponsored by the Sr. Áine Historical Society, included the restoration of the altar tomb of Father Edmund Dullany, who died in 1632. This is the oldest dated tomb on the site, and as far as can be ascertained it is also the oldest known dated tomb of a priest in Tipperary in the post-Reformation period.

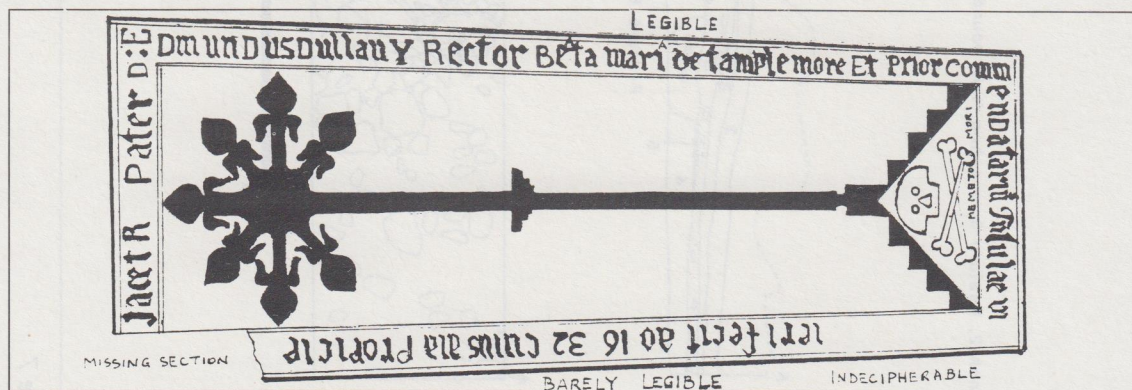
It is known as “the prior’s tomb” because the Latin inscription titles Fr. Dullany not only as rector (i.e. parish priest) of Templemore, but also as a *prior commendatorius*. Before restoration, the 6’ 9” long tomb was in a state of partial collapse, and the elaborately inscribed and decorated top slab had suffered some fragmentation, as well as a great deal of wear and erosion.

The tomb, which was fitted into the NE corner of the chancel of the medieval parish church (which is dedicated to Our Lady and after which the town of Templemore is named), has dressed limestone side-panels on its south and west sides, under which is a stone plinth. The restoration of the tomb in April 1993 provided an opportunity of accurately deciphering the surviving sections of the inscription, and checking this against previous readings — that done in 1840 by John O’Donovan, (who recorded only the beginning of the inscription),¹ and those recorded for the Journal of the Memorials of the Dead in 1897² and in 1902.³

The surviving sections of the inscription, an interesting mixture of black or Gothic lettering and English capitals, read . . . JACET RD : PATER D : EDMUNDUS DULLANY RECTOR BEATA MARIA DE TAMPLEMORE ET PRIOR COMMENDATORIUS INSULAE . . . FIERI FECIT AO 1632 : CUIUS AIA PROPITIE . . .

[Here] lies Rev Father D Edmund Dullany, Rector of St Mary’s of Templemore, and Prior in Commendam of the Island . . . who had (me) made in the year 1632: on whose soul may [the Lord] have mercy.

The only section of the inscription about which there remains some degree of uncertainty is the word which followed the word *Insulae*. As can be seen from the accompanying scale drawing of the top slab, this crucial word was carved around the SE corner at a point where fragmentation has made it illegible.



The top slab of Fr. Edmund Dullany’s tomb.

Of what island was Fr. Dullany the prior *in commendam*, a title which gave him right to revenues? Various scholars have given their own versions of what they thought was the likely word — Clonoulty (Carrigan), Inishlounaght (Lord Walter Fitzgerald), Inis Siolláin (Canon F. Fogarty), and Insula Viventium (Father Walter Skehan).⁴ Fr. Skehan had no doubt about his interpretation, *Insula Viventium*, the Latin version of *Inis na mBeó* (Island of the Living) — an alternative name for Monaincha, the Early Christian monastic site set in a bog island near Roscrea. This became a priory of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine in the 12th century.

The recent survey of the tomb prior to its restoration bears out Fr. Skehan's interpretation. The first two letters of the word that follows *Insulae* are partially legible and these appear to read *Vi*. The remainder of the word, *-entium*, would fit well into the available space around the corner of the slab.

Other considerations lend their support to this interpretation. The most important of these is that Fr. Dullany is given the title *Reverendus Pater*, a title in those times generally reserved for ordained members of religious orders. That he was a member of a religious order is further backed up by one of his other titles, that of *prior in commendam*. If *Insulae Viventium* is the correct reading on his inscription, this would verify that he was a member of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine.

Although Monaincha continued to be a popular pilgrimage site and a Mass centre up to at least the time of Fr. Dullany, there was then no religious community attached to the site. It would appear that Fr. Dullany exercised a roving apostolate in the area of the former parish going with Monaincha, namely Corbally in Killaloe diocese, and as *prior in commendam* he could claim whatever revenues he could manage to get from the parish.

There is also some historical evidence that he exercised his ministry in the Templemore region, as he was a witness to (as well as a beneficiary of) the will of Redmond Morris of Templemore in 1623.⁵ He was left a young colt and some money "for a special use" in the will.

Another beneficiary was Walter Barron, who was also working as a priest in the Templemore region and was probably parish priest of Templemore at the time. Fr. Dullany may have been his successor as parish priest. The fact that he was a member of a religious order would facilitate his ministry across diocesan borders — his commendatory priorship of Monaincha in Killaloe diocese and his rectorship of Templemore in Cashel diocese.

There are two other contemporary and impressive tombstones, in the chancel of nearby Loughmore old church, to members of the Dullany family. These are dated 1643 and 1644. The 1643 slab is for Donough (Donatus) Dullany and has a strikingly similar floriated cross with *fleur-de-lis* terminals like the Templemore slab. The fact that these two tombs are among the Purcell tombs in Loughmore indicates close family ties with the barons of Loughmore. The Civil Survey of 1654 lists an Edmund Dullany, Gent., of Thurles, among the jurors of the barony of Eliogarty, implying that he was a person of some standing.⁶ The 1659 Census records 17 Dullanys residing in the baronies of Eliogarty and Ikerrin.⁷

It seems likely that Fr. Dullany was connected with those Dullanys of Loughmore and Thurles, who were obviously of some social standing. His own finely crafted and ornamented altar tomb also indicates that he belonged to such a family. It was no easy thing for a Catholic priest to have the honour of an impressive tomb in 17th century Ireland.

O Dullany is an early anglicised form of *Ó Dubshláine*, the later and modern version of which is Delany, a sept which was formerly associated with the Upperwoods region of Co. Laois.⁸

FOOTNOTES

1. O'Donovan O.S. *Letters*; Tipperary, Vol. I, p. 182.
2. *Journal of the Memorials of the Dead*, Vol. II, p. 361.
3. *Ibid.*, Vol. V, No. 2, Part II, p. 264.
4. *Priests of Cashel and Emly, The Skehan Index* (Cashel and Emly Diocesan Trust Ltd., 1990), p. 104. Skehan refers to the versions of Rev. W. Carrigan, Lord Walter Fitzgerald and Canon Fogarty without giving his sources. I have been unable to trace where he located Carrigan's version. Fitzgerald's is in *Journals of the Memorals of the Dead*, Vol. V, 1902, No. 2, part 11, p. 264. Fogarty's is in the unpublished *Fogarty MS Papers*, No. 29 (unpaginated), deposited in St. Patrick's College, Thurles. Skehan's own version is in the *Skehan MS Papers*, No. 4, pp. 64-65, St. Patrick's College, Thurles.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 104; also *Skehan MS Papers*, No. 4, pp. 64-65.
6. Robert C. Simington, ed.: *The Civil Survey of Tipperary* (Dublin, 1931), Vol. I, p. 36.
7. Seamus Pender, ed.: *A Census of Ireland Circa 1659* (Dublin, 1939), p. 319.
8. Edward MacLysaght: *Irish Families* (New York, 1972), p. 113.