

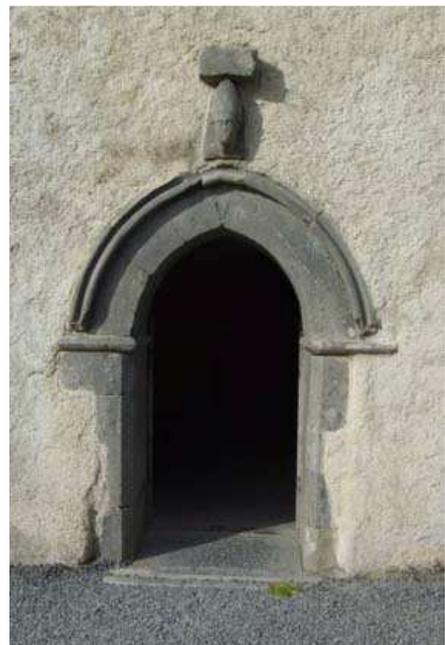
St. Fachtnan's Cathedral

Kilfenora Cathedral is dedicated to St. Fachtnan, who founded an abbey here during the sixth century. First mention in history is when it was plundered by Murrough O'Brien in 1055. It was renovated between 1056 and 1058 but plundered again in 1079 and was accidentally burned down in 1100. The present building was erected sometime between 1189 and 1200. Samuel Lewis in his book "Topography of Clare" describes it in 1837 as "a very ancient and venerable structure with a massive square tower". It cannot be described as architecturally beautiful but it does have a charm. Perhaps it might be best described as a "naive" structure. However, it does have quite a few endearing features. A good part of the building is roofless since the early 1800's, the remainder is roofed and being used occasionally for worship.



The cathedral is approached from the west down a narrow road by the side of Howley's shop close to the Roman Catholic church. There is a small car park here in which there is a gate giving access to the ancient graveyard in which the cathedral is situated. Alternatively, one can park in the village square and approach from the east side over grave slabs to the door. The building consists of a nave, the roofed part, and a chancel with a small wing attached to the north-east of the chancel known as the "Lady Chapel". In 1837, the nave portion of the building was adopted for use as the protestant parish church for Kilfenora.

Over the entrance door is the mitred head of a bishop carved in stone. This is remarkably well preserved. It surmounts a carved stone arch in which the door is recessed. Inside the porch there is a door to the nave and another door to the vestry in which there is a stair leading to the belfry. Also inside there are 2 large reclining tomb slabs, one with the carved effigy of a bishop and the other with the carved effigy of a nobleman. We do not know who these carvings represent but it is thought they were crafted in the late 13th or early 14th centuries. Also, there is a large stone slab standing, with the inscribed effigy of a bishop. Again this is thought to be late 13th or early 14th century.



The entrance door



The interior of St. Fachtnan's Cathedral showing the present east window

In the nave there are two fireplaces on the north wall which are usually fuelled by turf and lit in winter when there is a service. There is also under floor heating which was installed in 2003. The most interesting feature indoors is the stone font which is from the 12th century. Another item of interest is the memorial to the McDonagh family on the north wall dated 1685. A second memorial was removed but this one remained when the family challenged the Church in the High Court and won. On the east wall to the right of the pulpit is the carved head of a man or angel. There is a relatively new bishop's throne dedicated in 1981 on the occasion of the installation of Walton N.F. Empey as Bishop of the Diocese. It would appear there are three pulpits. The purpose of these one assumes is a reading desk, a pulpit and a clerk's desk.



The Font



The McDonagh Memorial



Fireplace

Inside the Cathedral



Carved Head



Bishops Throne

The Chancel

Outside again, entrance around the back of the cathedral, the chancel which is open to the elements, contains much which is of interest. The 3 light east window is particularly handsome, its fine arched mouldings supported by carved columns crowned with delicate figure carvings. On the right column condition is good but on the left the heads have disappeared. The whole is set within a carved surround with the overhead arch ending either side with a serpents head.



The chancel showing the original east window



Carving on pillar - east window



Window in south wall



North wall of chancel

To the left of the east window, mounted in the wall, is a large sedile with cusped tracery within an arch above which there is another mitred bishop's head. One leg of the sedile is unfortunately missing, otherwise it is well preserved. Here there are a number of stone slabs inserted in the floor and wall indicating burials over the centuries.

The High Crosses

Kilfenora is well known for its High Crosses a number of which were located in the graveyard and others close to the village. Tradition holds that there were 7 crosses but not all have survived. Some of those surviving were removed to the Lady Chapel for conservation in 2003 and are protected from the elements by a Perspex roof erected over the chapel. This work was carried out by the Office of Public Works.

The North Cross was located to the north western corner of the graveyard hence its name. In the centre of the head there is a boss or protuberance and a line surrounds the head culminating in reversed spirals at the top of the shaft. On the reverse side are knot work panels with twin spirals towards the top of the shaft. Local legend holds that this cross came from Ballyshanny and was placed at the head of the grave of the landowner “Quinn” by his family after his death.



The North Cross



The Doorty Cross

For centuries the Doorty Cross lay in two pieces at Kilfenora, latterly the shaft covered the Doorty grave and the head was located within the chancel of the cathedral. In 1946 a Mr. Luba Kaftannikiff came to the conclusion that the two pieces belonged to the same structure. In the mid 1950's Mr. Liam de Paor was instrumental in having the cross repaired and re-erected by The Office of Public Works close to the Doorty grave. It then became known as The Doorty Cross. There it remained until it was brought indoors in 2003. Every facet of this cross bears a carving and is a wonder of the ancient carver's craft. The principle carving on the head of the cross is thought to be that of St. Fachtnan. On each of his shoulders are what looks like angels with human features reclining into the cross. Underneath are two figures holding croziers resting on a large bird which seems to be fighting two other figures on which it stands. There is a lot of symbolism here which takes an expert to decipher. Unfortunately, the cross is rather weather worn.



The West Cross

Situated in a field close to the Roman Catholic church is the West Cross, the tallest of Kilfenora's crosses. Access to the cross is obtained through a stile in the wall of the lane on the approach to the Cathedral. This cross measures 4.5 meters high and is heavily ornamented on two sides with lace work and knot but is quite weathered especially on the west side. The east face at the head features a crucified Christ above a heavily ornamented shaft.

The Killaloe Cross.

The Killaloe Cross or Hill Cross now stands in St. Flannan's Cathedral Killaloe. Up until 1820 it stood on a hill south of Kilfenora on the Ennistymon road a quarter mile from the village. Unfortunately it fell, and Dr. Richard Mant, newly appointed Bishop of Killaloe on a visit to Kilfenora, accepted a gift of the cross from a clergyman of the parish and in 1821 had the cross erected in the grounds of the Bishops Palace at Clarisford, Killaloe. It fell again, was moved again, and finally was moved to St. Flannans Cathedral where it has remained since.

Ballykeal Cross

Nothing remains of the Ballykeal cross which once stood near Ballykeal Manor a quarter mile from the cathedral. Crosses were often used as land markers to denote the boundary of property. It is also thought that landowners around Kilfenora were encouraged to erect crosses in order to give importance to the poorest and smallest diocese in the country. In fact, it was so insignificant that the synod of Rathbrazil in 1111 did not recognize it and not until 1152 at the synod of Kells did it achieve the recognition it craved.

The Eastern Cross

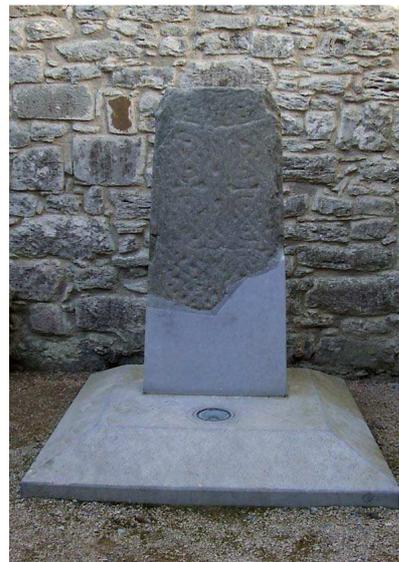
There are no remnants of the Eastern Cross to be found but history records that a cross stood at the eastern entrance to the village but fell in 1818 and was destroyed.



The South Cross

The South Cross

What remains of the South Cross is now erected in the Lady Chapel. This cross remnant stood at the door of the Cathedral for many years where it was previously found and was in 2003 removed to the Lady Chapel for safe keeping. There is no trace of the head of this cross. It is thought that it would have been 4 meters tall if intact.



Cross Fragment

Cross Fragment

This Cross Fragment erected in the Lady Chapel was found during work on the site in the 1950's. It may be part of one of the missing crosses mentioned above.



Chancel window



West window

The above information is just an overview of St. Fachtnan's Cathedral and the High Crosses of Kilfenora. Should one wish to know more there is much to be gained by looking at other web sites. Search on the internet for "Kilfenora High Crosses" and see what is available.