



**‘At the centre of beauty and history’**

As you enjoy your visit to this lovely part of Ireland in these beautiful surroundings, I’m sure you must wonder about what history or events of significance have taken place in or around Roe Park and the valley of the Roe (the Red River).

Recorded history in the area goes back to AD575 when AEDH (Hugh) the High King of Ireland called all his Earls, Chieftains and Scholars (Bards) to a convention to be held on Mullagh Hill (this is the hill in the centre of the golf course overlooking the Coach House). The meeting always referred to as the Convention of Drumceatt was called to address two major problems facing the Kings:

- That the Bards in Ireland had become a major nuisance because of their pretensions and demands on the people and should be banned from their land.
- That the Irish who had emigrated from Irish Dalriada to Scottish Dalriada be given autonomy under King Aiden of Scotland and stop paying allegiance to the Kings of Ireland.

The Bards were upset and called upon one St Colmcille (Columba) to champion their cause as did the Irish who had immigrated to Scotland and among whom Colmcille now lived and preached.

Colmcille was at the time in Iona where he had gone in voluntary exile after a dispute with the then High King Dairmaid. Colmcille was born in Donegal in 521, was of noble blood being descended from Niall of nine hostages and the Kings of Leinster and because of this was held in respect by both sides of the dispute. He set up many monasteries in the north west of Ulster including the Roe Valley before going to Iona. On leaving Ireland he

swore not to set foot on or look at Ireland again and so legend says that when he came to the convention he wore Scottish sods and was blindfolded. Colmcille worked out a compromise to resolve the problems of the bards by which they could remain in Ireland but in smaller numbers and with much less influence.

On the matter of the Scottish Dalriada, agreement was reached that the Irish in Scotland would pay allegiance to King Aiden of Scotland but would come to the help of the Irish King in time of war if necessary.

Colmcille also took the opportunity to plead the case of Scanlon Mor, son of the King of Ossory who was imprisoned in the castle at Grianan of Aileach but to no avail and he was not released until after King Aedh died in 594AD.

One nice story told of Colmcille's visit was that he was called a crane (because of his tall angular frame) by the king's wife and maidservant because they were jealous of the influence he had over the King. He turned to the two ladies and said they would be cranes and to this day the ford on the Roe (at the northern edge of the country park) is still called the ford of the cranes (Atha-De-Chor) and two cranes are often seen in the Roe in this area.

## **A Recent History of the Roe Park**

In early 1850's the Alexander family hired a music teacher from Alsace-Lorraine to tutor their Daughters – he was Edward Christian Ritter and he and Jane Alexander (his pupil) fell in love and eloped to Australia where they made a vast fortune in the gold trade. They had seven children and when the family returned to Ireland, one of them, John Ritter, married Elizabeth Jane Stanton, a niece of S.M. Alexander, and they inherited Roe Park.

Thus began probably the most famous and productive period of Roe Park's history because it was somewhere in this house that J.E. Ritter developed his ideas on electricity and so made Limavady the first town in Ireland to be supplied by Hydro-electric Power.

The power station still stands in the Roe Valley Country Park with most of the machinery intact and was operational up until 1960. His wife developed the farm and market gardening, and when her husband died in 1901 aged 47 years, she also took on the running of what had become the Limavady Electricity Company – a remarkable lady considering she had 5 children, including twins aged 7 years.

During the period of the Ritter's at Roe Park the estate would have witnessed a wide variety of visitors from sports days, school parties, demonstration, visiting soldiers encamped prior to going to the Boer War, 1<sup>st</sup> World War and 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, with many American troops stopping here, prior to going to France.

The Ritter dynasty ended at the Roe Park in the 1950's, with the estate being sold off to local landowners and farmers. The house then became an old peoples home until early 1995, it was turned into the beautiful hotel as stands today.