

Faunarooska Castle

Faunarooska Castle is a name that comes up every now and then in the Peter Carrucan - Hannah Woods line. In her later years, Hannah had expressed the wish to return to Ireland and lay claim to it. So what was the family connection to this mysterious 'castle'?

Faunarooska Tower House was one of three round tower houses in the Burren region. It was not mentioned in the 1580 list of castles within the county and the first mention of it, in 1641, referred to Fernandus MacFelem as its owner. Hence we surmise it was built some time after 1580. It was later granted to James Aylmer and Henry Ivers. It was situated on the slopes above the town of Fanore, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and the Aran Islands and on a clear day must have presented a beautiful and commanding view.

Walled keeps were a feature of the Irish landscape of centuries past and are discussed in http://vmserver14.nuigalway.ie/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10379/454/MED_08.pdf?sequence=1

This photo, taken between 1890 and 1915, shows the keep still more or less in its entirety although missing its roof.¹



Faunarooska Castle circa 1900

¹ See http://www.limerick.ie/WebApps/Museum/museum_details.aspx?RowID=4320

The following photo, taken from a different perspective somewhere around the same time ², shows the commanding position of the castle, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.



Faunarooska Castle somewhere in the period 1890-1915

The following photo, taken in 1943, shows the rudimentary building style, using whatever small rocks were available and roughly fitting them together.



Faunarooska Castle in 1943

The Clements sisters were the first Australian family members to return to Ireland and they were keen to investigate the family connection, if any, to this castle. Mary Clements explained:

My sisters Margaret, Kathleen and I decided to go overseas in 1965 and, on our travels, to visit Ireland.
My mother, Kathleen Clements (Carrucan) remembered that her grandmother Hannah Carrucan

² See http://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/Object/Show/object_id/2517

(Woods) had told her that if she went back to Ireland she could claim Fanarooske (?) castle.

When we arrived in Ireland, we went to the Records Office in Dublin where, by looking through files, we finally found a name of only one castle which had any similarity to 'Fanarooske' so we decided to follow this possibility. The castle, called Faunarooska Castle, was located in Lisdoonvarna, a village north-east of Galway on the west coast. This was the correct location as we met Jim Carrucan and his wife Nancy there and the connections gradually fell into place. Jim was a distant second cousin to the Carrucans in Australia.

The 'castle' itself turned out to be a crumbling Norman keep, constructed as a defence against the Vikings as, at that time, it provided an opportunity for the Irish inhabitants to enclose themselves, their families and animals, against the marauders. Interestingly, the house of John Woods, father of Hannah Carrucan (Woods) was still standing and it was built firmly in contrast to the poor hamlets of the Irish. Apparently John Woods collected rents for the English landlords which could explain his stronger position in the village, but this is only hearsay.

In 1969, Mary's brother Kevin Clements travelled to Ireland and also visited Faunarooska Castle. The photo below shows that it was still relatively extant at that time.



1969 - Kevin Clements at Faunarooska Castle

In 1970, John and Estelle Simpson travelled to Ireland and their report confirmed the connection:

After a couple of days touring as far as Killarney, we returned to Fanore to pick up my folder containing all the family history. Nancy took us up the hill to show us the Wood's family cottage and the remains of Faunarooska Castle on their property.

So the connection is clearly a Woods family connection.

At some time in the past the farming property which included the Faunarooska Castle had passed into the hands of the Woods family. John Woods, Hannah's father, is mentioned as residing in Faunarooska in the 1855 Griffith Valuation. It was there that Hannah was brought up, within sight of the historic keep on the family property. Presumably it was still in reasonable repair when she emigrated to Australia in 1857 and, in her last years, she remembered it like that and expressed a desire to return to Ireland and lay claim to it. Alas, by then, it was no longer capable of habitation.

The final catastrophic piece of the story occurred in 1985 when a further collapse left the keep as a ruinous pile of rocks ³



Faunarooska Castle circa 2000

When I visited Fanore in 2012, the site was for sale ⁴ and the sales blurb read as follows

Faunarooska Castle, Fanore, Co Clare

A crumbled North Clare landmark with stunning sea views; this old Castle is now in ruins and would need rebuilding from new.

The ruins of Faunarooska Tower House, one of three round tower houses in the Burren region, lies about 100 metres below the old green road, on the slopes above the town of Fanore. It overlooks the Atlantic Ocean and the Aran Islands and on a clear day presents a beautiful view.

Faunarooska Castle, which was built somewhere around 1641, is now in a ruined state, after its collapse in 1985. It would be of interest to someone who would want to bring the castle back to its original state. It is very reasonably priced and stands on one of the most beautiful sites in a much sought after area.

Location:

Situated approx. 2 miles off the main Fanore – Doolin – Lisdoonvarna Coast Road. Going towards Ballyvaughan, turn right at O'Donoghue's Public House and keep on that road for approx. 2 miles and you will see our sign on the site.

Guide Price: €25,000

For further details e-mail or phone 065 7074273

It was indeed a sad end for this old castle.

Tim Erickson, 16 July 2013

³ See <http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2332184>

⁴ see http://homepage.eircom.net/~jtcasey/new_site/properties/1-0019.html