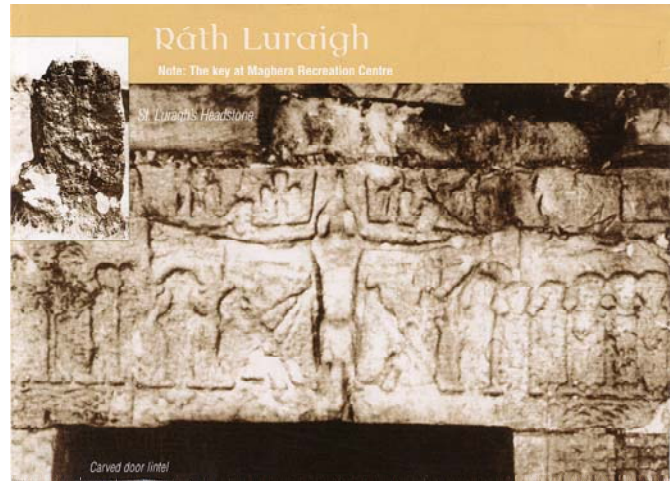


BELLAGHY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



ST LURAGH'S OLD CHURCH Maghera

St Luragh, patron saint of Maghera, was of the royal line of the Ui Tuirte, the sept that dominated mid-Ulster in the early Christian period. He founded his monastery in the sixth century, around which the settlement of Maghera grew up. In Irish the town is called Machaire Ratha Luragh, "the plain of Luragh's fort". St Luragh's headstone, a cross-inscribed upright slab and the earthen ramparts of his rath, can still be seen in the old graveyard to this day. The beautiful carving of the crucifixion which adorns the stone doorway, dating to the eleventh or twelfth century AD, has been described as the most important single Romanesque (12th century) monument in Ulster.

The church has a long and chequered history. One of its monks, Fearghas, was abbot of Finglas around 800 AD and a leader in the Ceile De sect which flourished at this time. In 831 AD Vikings led by Turgesius plundered the monastery. In 1135 it was attacked again, this time during inter-dynastic warfare. The year 1150 AD saw Maghera become the diocesan seat with Muireach O Cofaigh, a native of Carntogher, as bishop.

During the wars between Irish and English forces in the 17th Century, when the tower was added, the church was attacked three times. Tobar Luragh, St Luragh's Well, was located in an entry off Main Street and it was said that anyone who drank from this well would always wish to return to Maghera.