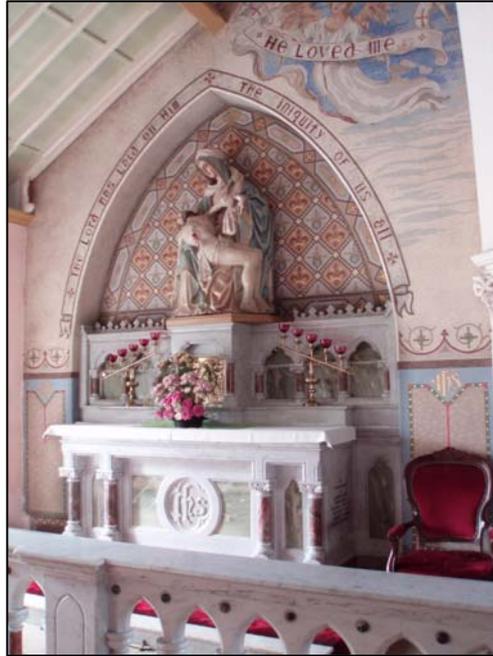


## HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

By Declan O'Connor



### THE KILCORMAC PIETA

A drive from Tullamore to Birr brings you through the town of Kilcormac (formerly Frankford) where, in the Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is a Pieta which deceptively looks like a painted Statue. The Pieta scene was a very popular subject for Sculptors in the Middle Ages in Europe, the most famous by Michelangelo in St. Peter's in Rome, being a statute of Our Lady holding the body of Jesus, after he had been taken from the Cross. The Kilcormac Pieta is deceptive because, instead, it was carved from a block of solid oak and is believed to be unique in Ireland in the context of its kind and its era. Local folklore says that it was donated to the Parish in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century by a rich lady benefactor when the Parish Church was then in Ballyboy about a mile from Kilcormac. Cromwell's suppression of Ireland saw his army advancing towards Ballyboy from Kilkenny in 1650. Local people prepared themselves to take refuge in the woods and forests in the nearby Slieve Bloom Mountains when two women, remembering the Pieta, removed it and buried it as best as they could in a heap of rubbish. Both churches at Kilcormac and Ballyboy were destroyed by the invading army and later, under cover of darkness, a number of men retrieved the Pieta and buried it in a bog. Between 1700 and 1720 only one person remained who remembered the burial location, and this old man identified the exact location having been carried there on his death bed. The Pieta was exhumed, found to be in a perfect preserved condition and then placed in the recently restored church in Kilcormac, as the restored church in Ballyboy was now the property of the Established Church.

The last highlight of its eventful history was when a Curate removed it with him when he was transferred from Kilcormac to Borrisokane which led to a party of Kilcormac Parishioners making a "tourist" visit to Borrisokane, and returning home with their Pieta.