

Ardpatrick, Louth Village, Co. Louth. Ireland

Just outside Louth Village is the hill known as Ardpatrick (in the Gaelic, *Ard Phádraig* - the height or hill of Patrick). Saint Patrick is said to have founded a church and leper hospital upon it, circa 436, and to have left it in the charge of Mochta.

In the 1660's, Oliver Plunkett, Archbishop of Armagh, had a house here, given to him by his kinsman, Lord Louth. The stone base of the church, that he used to offer the Mass and to ordain many priests, remains etched into the hill. Hidden from sight and not easily accessed today, it awaits the intrepid pilgrim who comes to pray. One steps down into the structure, where Oliver stepped long years before, before approaching the stone altar that remains.



Further along the hill, the whole country could be swept for the approach of unwelcome visitors, during the time of persecution . Less than a mile away, the huge oak tree that Oliver used as a hiding place, still stands sentinel today, awaiting men worthy of it.

As one views the gateway and approaches today, it is hard to believe that this was once a great place of pilgrimage; buses were chartered and the people approached the site along a

well-tended surface, now hidden underneath a thick overgrowth and blocked by fences. The ancient Hebrews, who recalled and sang of the great deeds of their past in the psalms, understood something we do not : a people that forgets where it came from, loses its identity.

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