

# Coiseanna

The Journal of Clane Local History Group

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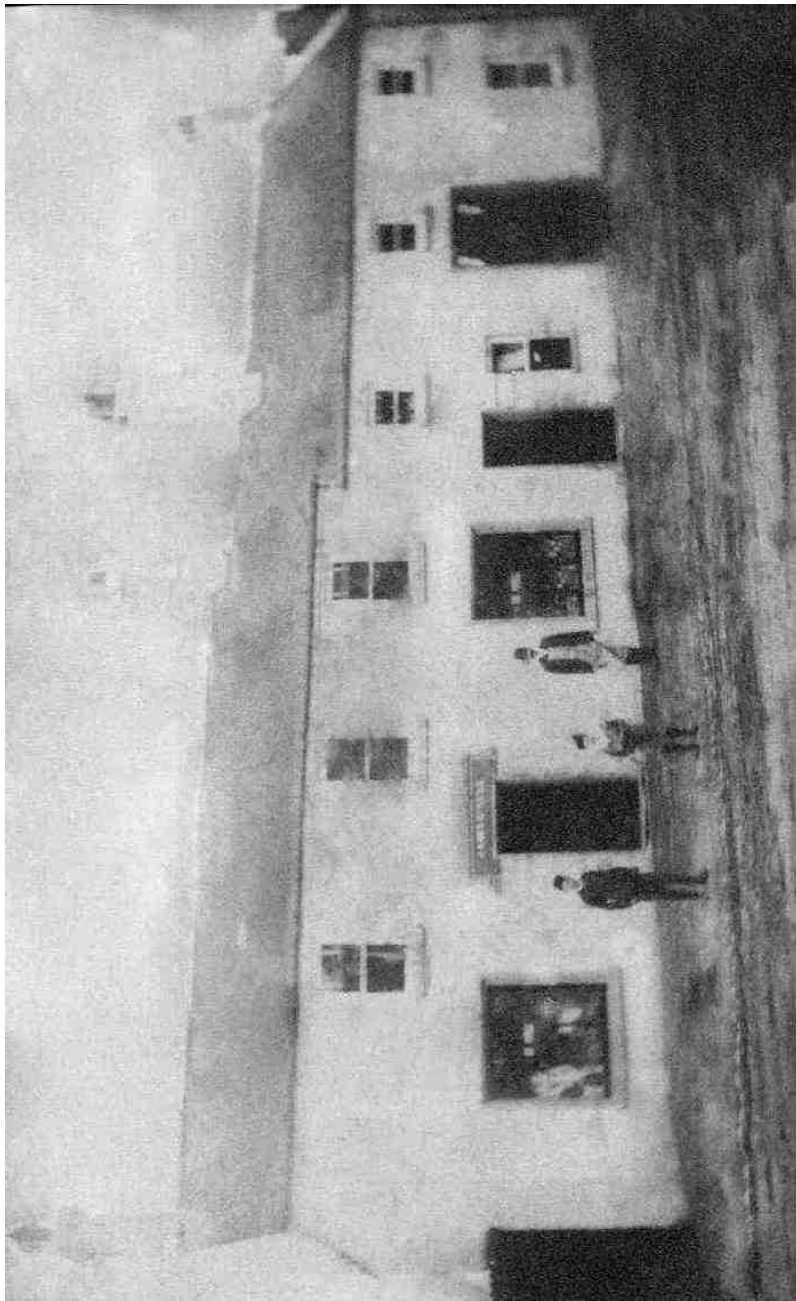
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*Coiseanna ( cois eanaigh – beside a marsh) refers to the high ground north of the village of Clane. This was the site of one of the first battles of the 1798 Rebellion. The cover photograph shows the monument erected by Kildare County Council to commemorate all those involved locally in the Rebellion.*



James O'Neill and his sons in front of O'Neill's public house and grocery, post office and dwelling house in the 1880s. The site is now occupied by Xtra-Vision, the Allied Irish Bank and the Lemon Tree Restuarant

## EDITORIAL

It is a most pleasant duty to bring to you this inaugural edition of Clane's Local History Group's new journal. As you will have noted, it is called *Coiseanna* in remembrance of a sometimes forgotten episode of the 1798 rebellion. This bloody event, a defensive response to the fiery destruction of the militia barracks in nearby Prosperous on that same morning, was fought at this townland on the edge of Capdoo commons. Today an enduring stone memorial seeks to remind passers-by of the many lives lost in that battle in the early morning of 23 May 1798.

We have chosen this simple stone for the cover of the first edition since it provides a physical expression of our group's objective in launching an annual journal. Our intention is to communicate forgotten aspects of our heritage and so protect and help to ensure the survival of that rich inheritance. The journal by fostering awareness of our heritage can also engender a sense of pride amongst all sections of Clane's growing population which will undoubtedly contribute towards better community awareness.

The journal is full of discoveries. For instance, two articles mark centenary anniversaries of Clane notables. One of our early dispensary doctors lost his life on the Titanic in the cold Atlantic waters exactly one hundred years ago in April 1912. In October of that year a Clane man, the great Tommy Conneff after whom the fine GAA premises on the Prosperous Road is named, was drowned in the Pasig River in the Philippines.

In conclusion, we wish to sincerely thank all of our contributors who have so generously provided the many informative articles in this edition. The venture would not have been possible without their valued input and since it is our objective to produce this journal annually we also welcome suitable contributions for future editions.

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## THE ABBEY CEMETERY

*by John Noonan*

Like many other such foundations the site chosen by the Franciscans for their friary in Clane lies close to life-giving water. Much earlier than this close association with Christianity, the historic River Liffey had already provided an important focal point for the inhabitants of Clane. The slanted ford on that river gave Clane its original name while its fast flowing waters provided power and sustenance for its inhabitants. With the coming of the Normans the Liffey and its natural assets ensured a ready site for their new town. Consequently it is very natural that for generations the villagers again turned to this river-side place of spiritual and temporal sustenance as a special location for their dear departed.

The Abbey cemetery lies on the outskirts of Clane, on the Sallins Road, and is distinguished by the fact that it lies in the shade of the iconic Franciscan friary founded there over seven hundred and fifty years ago. Clane people have placed the remains of their most special and precious relatives and friends in the hallowed ground close to the ivy-clad walls and for many years they have continued to lovingly tend the plots and to ensure that the memory and history of their departed is not forgotten.

A brief walk around the well-tended graveyard will yield many valuable nuggets of information. Father Laurence Keogh, died 1948, lies not in the traditional Christian fashion facing east and the rising sun, but at his own request, he faces west allowing his parishioners in their peaceful repose to face him as in life while he dispensed his words of wisdom. Tommy Sammon, who died in 1983 and brother of GAA referee Mick Sammon<sup>1</sup> lies close-by. Let us pray that this true Christian rests in that peaceful

afterlife which he so often requested from the Almighty for those of his fellow parishioners. Tommy, a layman, was regularly required to mark the departure from this life of his less fortunate neighbours and to lead the final graveside prayers beseeching eternal peace on their behalf. Locals have often remarked that his role was not considered necessary at the departure prayers for those more fortunate since their interment was somehow always sanctified by a clerical presence.



**The Abbey Cemetery and Friary ruins**

The attention and up-keep of the graveyard requires coordination and hard work and in order to ensure this work was properly managed it was made the responsibility of a special committee at an early stage. Since then there have been many changes in the personnel of the graveyard committee but because of their hard work and exemplary results the names of the original committee should be recorded. Eamonn Mahoney acted as chairman, with Peter Kenny as secretary, and Fran

Connolly as Treasurer. The Works Committee were Dan O'Connell, Paddy Baker, Pat Ward, Tom Baker (Blackhall), Joe Campbell, Ruban Thomas Heffernan, Michael Doherty, Tony McEvoy, Des Marron, John Delaney, J P Holigan and a very important man in the person of Andrew Davin who provided rent free the indispensable aerial platform and other machines

It is important to highlight that the work of the committee was not confined to those listed above but their work was facilitated by so many local people who lent that very important hand from time to time. So when you visit the Abbey graveyard there is much to see, admire and be thankful for, but remember the many wonderful people whose mortal remains lie buried there. Remember the sportsmen, patriots, poets and soldiers. But most of all remember the wonderful Clane community who welcomed and now protects these interesting people in their final resting place.

There is one interesting coincidence about this tranquil final resting place. An outline of the long history of the Franciscan order in Ireland is contained in the *Brevis Synopsis Provinciae Hiberniae*. A hand-written copy of this volume is preserved in the archives at the Franciscan College of St Isodore in Rome. In that ancient manuscript the foundation at Clane is called *hortusangelorum* or the 'garden of the angels'. Could there be a more suitable place in which to lay Clane's faithful departed?

Notes.

<sup>1</sup> See article on Mick Sammon on page 13.



## **PAST RESIDENTS OF CLANE, (PART 1)**

*by John Noonan*

It is proposed over successive editions of this journal to relate the stories of past residents of Clane. In this issue we discuss some individuals who have played a prominent part in Kildare GAA over the years. Clane GAA is one of the earliest clubs founded in Ireland since our local club was founded in 1884, the year in which the national organisation was established. Clane footballers have always been valuable members of the Kildare county teams and generations of Clane families have contributed at all levels to the game. With such dedication to the game it is no surprise that Clane possesses very fine GAA facilities including floodlit pitches for winter training. The origins of all this success lie in the early Clane personalities some of whom are described in the following article. All but one are buried in the Abbey Cemetery.

### **James Archer (1855-1927)**

Kildare's senior football championship was won for the first time in 1887 when Clane took the honours. James Archer, a resident of Moat Commons is credited with being the first captain of a championship winning team when he captained Clane on that occasion. James Archer also had the honour of being the second Clane man to chair the county G.A.A board, Dr O'Connor being an earlier chairman.

In the 1887 football championship, the first in Kildare's history, Clane beat Maynooth in the semi-final which was played in Punchestown in that year. Immediately after that match on their way back to Clane the players visited Jones' public-house in Naas with the intention of celebrating their victory but their plans were in vain. Upon arrival they were advised that Naas were togged out, ready to play and that Clane were expected to play the final immediately. Jim Archer, a resolute man and

Clane captain, set the scene when he declared ‘we are going to beat the Naas team on the pitch and when we are done we will give them a hiding on the way back to Clane.’ Jim kept his promise and it is said that he won both battles! The secret of his success is said to have been his training skills. Tradition holds that his success lay in his technique of encouraging his team by cracking a whip to obtain that little extra effort.

### **Bill Merriman (1878-1963)**

Bill Merriman was an outstanding footballer and hurler and won almost every honour in the game. Bill was a member of the staff of Clongowes Wood College for over fifty years.

Bill was centre-half-back on the Kildare team which contested the controversial All-Ireland final against Kerry in 1903. The outcome was not finally decided until the game was finally played in 1905 and the medal which he won on that occasion remained one of his most prized possessions. All this time Bill was assisting his club in football and hurling and at that time Clane was one of Kildare’s strongest clubs because of the strenuous efforts of Bill and his colleagues. Although he retired from the inter-county scene before Kildare won the 1919 All Ireland Final Bill continued to turn out for his club. It is believed that he had one of the longest playing careers in Ireland having played for forty years at club level. He won his last county championship medal with Clane in 1916.

Bill continued to follow the fortunes of Clane and Kildare teams up to the time of his death. When Clane won the county championship in 1963 for the first time since 1916 no one was more proud of their achievement than Bill. Fittingly he was given the honour of presenting the trophy to Pa Connolly the Clane captain on that occasion.

After the drawn game in the 1905 All-Ireland Final in Thurles at



**Larry Hussey Cribbin**



**Bill Merriman**



**Mick Sammon**



**Bill Bracken**

the train station after the match, one Kerry supporter jibbed a little too much at Bill Merriman. The Kildare player is reputed to have borrowed a belt and gave the Kerry man the full force of the buckle as the train pulled from the station. It was that kind of day.

At the time of Bill's death aged 85 years, a writer described him as 'a thoroughly trustworthy back who can always be relied on to break up the most combined rush. He is speedy, a very sure catcher and a powerful kicker'. Bill is buried in Mainham cemetery.

### **Larry 'Hussey' Cribbin (1880 – 1962)**

Bill Merriman's mother Bridget Hipps, who hailed from Staffan, produced two outstanding GAA men. Larry 'Hussey' Cribbin of Richardstown, Clane, a son of her second marriage, was one of Kildare's greatest footballers. Born in Longtown he began his career with the Clane club. As a person 'Hussey' is reputed to have been a tough footballer of legendary proportions. In 1901, at the age of twenty-one years he first played for the county. In that game, against Louth, he stood over six feet tall and is said to have weighed fourteen stone. He made his last appearance for Kildare at forty years of age in 1920, having picked up All-Ireland medals in 1905 and 1919 along the way. Playing at national level he won three Leinster medals and also a provincial medal when Leinster beat Connaught in the Railway Shield. In May 1906, 'Hussey' was a member of the Kildare team which captured the Dr. Croke Cup by beating Mayo. With his beloved club, Hussey won four senior football medals between 1901 and 1916. In senior hurling he also won fifteen medals between 1903 and 1919. Tradition locally is that Larry 'Hussey' Cribbin was one of the oldest footballers to win an All-Ireland medal since he was nearly forty years of age when he

played in goal for Kildare when beating Galway in 1919. Other fond memories to survive include the vision of Hussey's custom of smoking his pipe as he strode from goalpost to goalpost and it is said that 'his massive physique made him appear to tear-up the Croke Park turf like a bullock.'

### **Mick Sammon (1892- 1947)**

Mick was born in Loughbollard Commons in 1892 and from his early days he was involved in the movement for independence. He was arrested in Kilcock for reading out the Sinn Fein manifesto and was subsequently sentenced to six months imprisonment. Mick is best remembered as the referee of the fateful game which was being played when the events of Bloody Sunday unfolded. Moments before the shooting started he had been in conversation with the unfortunate Tipperary captain Mick Hogan. In the subsequent gunfire Hogan was killed and Mick Sammon survived by crawling to safety on the sideline. Mick was a prominent footballer for his native Clane and won an All Ireland medal at mid-field with Kildare in the 1919 final against Galway. He was also a member of the standing committee of the National Athletics and Cycling Association and was their track judge for many years at all major meetings. Mick appears in a photograph of the Achilles Club versus Ireland match which was played at Croke Park on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1927. He is buried in the Abbey Graveyard with his wife Elizabeth, née Gill, who was from Butterstream, Clane.

### **William (Bill) Bracken (1882-1958)**

Bill Bracken of Richardstown, as well as winning many championship medals with Clane, won an All-Ireland medal with Kildare in the 1905 final playing at full forward. He was a top class footballer and it is said that 'he never failed to send the ball to its proper location'. Bill was also a member of a tug-of-war team. Local tradition has it that as he and his team came home after a particularly gruelling affair which went against



**Jim 'Kaiser' Bracken**



**James Archer**



**Sergeant Peter Marron and his wife Bridget**

them Bill was asked as to how they got on. ‘Did you win?’ asked someone. ‘No’, said Bill, ‘we brought home the rope!’

### **James ‘Kaiser’ Bracken (1923-1977)**

Bill Bracken’s son, James ‘Kaiser’ Bracken, won an intermediate football medal in 1949 with Clane. He played with Kildare for many years but his burning ambition was to win a senior county championship with his beloved Clane. In 1959 Clane reached the final and the ‘Kaiser’ played at full forward in that game. Sadly, they were beaten by Round Towers and shortly afterwards the ‘Kaiser’ retired without that senior prize he longed for. It wasn’t until 1963 that Clane won the county senior football championship and it is significant that the previous time Clane had taken the title was in 1916 when the ‘Kaiser’s’ father was a member of the team.



**The Clane County Championship winning team of 1901, 1902 and 1903. Jimmy Archer is the official on the right, Larry Hussey Cribbin is on the extreme right of the back row, Bill Merriman is on the extreme left of the middle row and Bill Bracken is fifth from left of the middle row.**

### **Sergeant Peter Marron (1902–1977)**

Soon after his arrival in Clane, as a member of the Garda Síochana, Peter got involved in community life. He and Louis

Dalton founded the Clane Local Development Association which was responsible for many improvements in the village. For instance the trees which adorn our streets were an early and worth-while initiative of the group. A life-long member of Clane GAA he advocated the change of pitch from its former site at Blackhall to the present location at the Prosperous Road. He had the foresight to coordinate the purchase of Kate Kearney's twelve acre field in close proximity to the village for the sum of £2,500. Peter and the GAA members laboured on draining their new purchase while the local community provided the costly materials for the new culvert necessary to carry the stream which formerly divided the property by running through the centre of the field. Peter was trainer of the Clane team for some time and also acted as selector for many years. His sons, Des, Frank, and the late Jackie all played inter-county football with Kildare. One of his proudest moments occurred when Des won a Leinster medal in 1956. It would be fitting if some part of the local GAA club was named after Peter for his foresight and hard work.

Peter retired from the Garda Síochána in 1953. In his thirty-year stint with the Garda the Peter dealt with many interesting cases including the burning of the valuable and uniquely artistic Millicent Church and with his help the culprits were soon brought to justice. Peter's life was eventful and memorable. He was efficient, kindly and fun-loving and his obituary summed up his contribution to Clane life when it boldly stated 'The general is dead.' He is buried beside his wife, Bridget, who died in 1949.

*Many of the anecdotes in this article were taken from the excellent centenary history of Kildare GAA by Eoghan Corry. The book which was published in 1984 is now unfortunately out of print.*



## **THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER, CLONGOWES STUDENT AND REBEL.**

*by Brendan Cullen*

Most Irish people will be familiar with the name of Thomas Francis Meagher from their study of the Young Ireland Rising of 1848 at secondary school. However, few would know that Meagher spent a number of years as a student in Clongowes Wood College in the 1830s and was very familiar with Naas and Clane and their environs. Meagher, whose father was M.P. for Waterford (1847-1857), entered Clongowes in 1833 and remained there until 1839 when he left under somewhat of a cloud and went to Stonyhurst in England where he completed his education in 1842.



**Clongowes Wood College**

Samuel Lewis, in his Topographical Dictionary of 1837 referred to Clongowes as, ‘a college for the education of the sons of the

Catholic nobility and gentry'. The type of education received by the students was based on the classics with an in-depth study of Latin and Greek at the core of the system. It was into this classical system of education that the young Thomas Francis Meagher was introduced when he entered Clongowes in 1833. Meagher was a gifted orator even as a schoolboy. He became the first secretary of the Clongowes Historical Debating Society which was founded in 1837 and which was formally inaugurated by Daniel O'Connell. Fr. Peter Kenney, founder and first Rector of Clongowes, emphasized the study of the classics to the detriment of other subjects. The hierarchy of subjects was made very clear to the students and their parents:

*Geography, History, Writing, Arithmetic are necessary acquirements, yet they are acquirements of which we may say that it is rather a disgrace to be ignorant of them than an honour to know them. You must remember that though you knew (these subjects) in the most perfect manner, you would still not be a scholar, and you could not be said to be a man of liberal education or of a cultivated mind.*

Meagher did not think much of the classical education he received at Clongowes, as is evidenced by his angry outburst against the system in later life:

*That's the fault I find with Clongowes. he wrote, They talked to us about Mount Olympus and the Vales of Thessaly; they birched us into a flippant acquaintance with the disreputable gods and goddesses of the golden and heroic ages; they entangled us in Euclid; turned our brains with the terrestrial globe; chilled our blood in dizzy excursions through the Milky Way; paralysed our Lilliputian loins with the shaggy spoils of Hercules; bewildered us with the battle of the Frogs and Mice; pitched us precipitately into England, amongst the impetuous Normans and stupid Saxons; gave us a look through an*

*interminable telescope, at what was doing in the New World; but, as far as Ireland was concerned, they left us, like blind and crippled children, in the dark.*

*They never spoke of Ireland. Never gave us, even what is left of her, her history to read ..... All this was then to me a cloud. Now I look back to it, shake my hand against it, and say it was a curse.....*

*What true scholars and patriots they might have made, those old Jesuits of Clongowes, had they taken their pupils to the battle fields of William Aylmer's army- skirting the Bog of Allen- or to the Geraldine ruins of Maynooth, or the grave of Wolfe Tone in Bodenstown Churchyard , or to the town of Prosperous, where Dr. Esmonde buried the Red Cross under the hot ashes of his insurgent torch, or to the woods and mansion of Rathcoffey, where Hamilton Rowan once lived, where the bay of his famous bloodhounds still echoed in my time .....What true scholars and patriots, Irishmen in nerve and soul, might they have made us had they taken us to these sites, instead of keeping us within the pillars of the Parthenon, or the forum and shambles of the Tiber.....Ireland was the last nation we were thought to think of , to respect, to love and remember.*

Strangely, Meagher ends his tirade on a positive note when he says:

*But, I can't bear to say anything against Clongowes. It is to me a dear old spot.*

As alluded to earlier Thomas Francis Meagher left Clongowes in 1839, 'under somewhat of a cloud'. In fact, Meagher's time in Clongowes came to a rather sad and inglorious end. Denis McVeagh, who was a contemporary of Meagher's, writing more than fifty years after leaving school, recalls the story:

*It was on Michaelmas Day, when roast goose was supplied to each table. The goose offered to Rhetoricians (i.e. senior students) happened to be a very lean one and Tom Meagher had to carve it. He complained to Fr. Kelly that we could not get a piece off the bird, so demanded another or a fatter one. Fr. Kelly demurred and requested Tom to cut it and see how far it would go, but he refused, and they all put down their knives and forks and sulked, eating no dinner! Well, I was Lector (i.e. reader) on that day, so had my dinner after all the other boys had gone out to the playground. Fr. Kelly still stood at the top of the refectory, when, in about ten minutes after going out, more than half of the panes of glass in the great window were smashed in by stones. All the Rhetoricians were sent to the tower, and an inquiry was held. As no one would peach, (i.e. inform on) they got solitary confinement for a week, as well I can remember.*

At that time, the senior students used to go on long walks on play days (i.e. free days). These walks were usually to an area in the locality and the students were accompanied by a priest. Denis McVeagh continues:

*The first excursion that they were allowed (after their solitary confinement) was on one of these walks to Carton under the charge of Fr. Callan. It was on this walk that the so-called 'Gallant Seven' headed by Tom Meagher, pulled across the Liffey in a boat and ran off to Dublin. It caused a great sensation. We were all instantly hurried back to the College, and a pursuit party headed by Fr. John McDonnell, started off and found them in the height of enjoyment after dinner at an inn in Barrack Street, from which the 'Clane cars' always started for the College. After the rebels were brought back, four, I think were expelled. Tom Meagher was transferred to Stonyhurst through the interest of his uncle, Fr. Meagher, and two were allowed to remain.*

When he left school Meagher joined the Young Irelanders and was involved in the Rising of 1848. Just before the Rising he was instrumental in bringing the national flag, the tricolour of green, white and orange, to Ireland as a gift from the people of France. It was first used as an emblem of the Young Ireland Movement when it was presented by Meagher to the Lord Mayor of Dublin on the 15<sup>th</sup> April 1848. It was previously displayed in Clonmel on March 7<sup>th</sup> of the same year. The green represents the old Gaelic and Norman elements in the population; the orange represents the Planters, the followers of William of Orange. Meagher explained the meaning of the white himself when he said,

*The white in the centre signifies a lasting truce between the 'Orange' and the 'Green' and I trust that beneath its folds the hands of the Irish Protestant and the Irish Catholic may be clasped in heroic brotherhood.*

Thomas Francis Meagher was arrested and found guilty of High Treason in Clonmel in October 1848. He was sentenced to be hanged, drawn and quartered but this sentence was commuted to transportation to Van Diemen's Land. He eventually escaped from Tasmania with the help of his friend, Patrick Joseph Smyth, who was a fellow student in Clongowes in 1839. He made his way to New York in 1852 and when the American Civil War broke out he joined the Northern side and saw battle in several places including Fredericksburg. In 1865 he was appointed Acting Governor of Montana Territory.

In July 1867 Meagher's life came to a tragic and untimely end when he fell overboard from a steamer on the Missouri and was drowned at the relatively young age of forty four. Mystery and controversy surround his death to which there were apparently no witnesses. Despite an extensive search of the river, sadly,

Meagher's body was never found. In 1905 an equestrian statue to Thomas Francis Meagher was erected in front of the Capitol building in Helena, Montana.



**Thomas Francis Meagher**

In his address to both houses of the Oireachtas on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1963, President Kennedy singled out Thomas Francis Meagher for his important contribution to his adopted country. He mentioned that Meagher had founded the Irish Brigade which became known as “the Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>.” He presented the Battle

Flag of the Brigade, which now hangs in Leinster House, to the Irish Nation, as a tribute to the Irish people who lost their lives in the American Civil War.



**Statue of Thomas Francis Meagher in front of the Capitol building in Helena Montana**

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## THE LEGEND OF DAN DONNELLY – REGENCY ROGUE

*by Larry Breen.*

Follow the road out of Kilcullen and you will eventually reach the Curragh and there on your left, you will find, ‘Donnelly’s Hollow.’ In the middle of that natural amphitheatre there stands a limestone monument dedicated to the memory of an Irish sporting hero, often neglected, but never forgotten, ‘Dan Donnelly,’ affectionately known as ‘Sir Daniel’ or the ‘Regency Rogue.’ The obelisk erected in 1888, by public subscription, bears testimony to a man who was unique in the history of world boxing and a national hero in his time. It was on this spot on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1815 that he defeated George Cooper, the English champion, before a huge crowd estimated to be in tens of thousands. Cooper capitulated after eleven gruelling rounds when he was knocked senseless by two terrific smashes from Donnelly the latter of which broke his jaw. Incredible scenes of jubilation followed the Irish champion’s triumph. As he strode up the hill towards his carriage, the fanatical followers dug out the imprints left by his feet. Known as ‘the steps of strength and fame’, these footprints are still evident in Donnelly’s Hollow, leading from the monument which commemorates the scene of his greatest ring victory. In those times when street ballads were still in vogue the most popular and enduring was ‘the Ballad of Donnelly and Cooper’ which was bellowed out in endless verses for all to hear;

*Come all you true born Irishmen, I hope you will all draw near,  
And likewise pay attention to these few lines I have here,  
It is as true a story as you will ever hear,  
Of how Donnelly fought Cooper on the Curragh of Kildare.*

Dan Donnelly’s life was a fascinating tale of poverty, success, fame and failure but not before he became a champion for the



downtrodden poor people of Ireland. Dan was the ninth of seventeen children born to his carpenter father Joseph and his wife Mary in the docklands of Dublin. The family included four sets of twins. The doctor who attended the birth of Dan was so impressed by his sturdy appearance that he told the proud mother; 'Mrs Donnelly, this child will one day be the wonder of the country'. He followed his father into the carpentry trade but found sports like hurling and handball more interesting and rewarding.



**Dan Donnelly**

Like many famous names in the history of boxing, Donnelly discovered more by accident than design that he had the qualities to become a successful pugilist. He found himself reluctantly launched on the path of a prizefighter by defending a vulnerable old man against the bullying of a sailor in a bar room brawl. News of how he had tamed the bully led to many challenges and soon all of Dublin had heard about this youngster with so much boxing ability.

Around this time one of the followers of boxing, known as ‘the Fancy’, a Captain William Kelly, took Dan under his wing. Kelly ran a racehorse training establishment at Maddenstown, in Co. Kildare. In their search to find an Irish champion who could match the best in England, Captain Kelly and his close colleague, Scotsman Robert Barclay Allardice convinced Donnelly that he had the makings of a champion. Captain Kelly installed Dan at his brother’s house in Calverstown, near the Curragh and it was here he learned the rudiments of fighting and proper training. There then followed his illustrious career as a bare knuckle prizefighter during which time he remained undefeated. He had memorable victories over the top English fighters like Tom Hall, in 1814; George Cooper, in 1815 and Tom Oliver in 1819. During his career a lot of his time was spent engaged in exhibitions in England to the great delight of ‘the Fancy.’

Dan was not so successful in business or with his private life. He was the owner of four public houses in Dublin which, although successful initially, eventually went into debt. Dan started drinking heavily and got involved in the wild living that places like London offered. This put great strains on his marriage and eventually, Mrs. Donnelly had to join him in England to keep an eye on his excesses. When Dan eventually stopped the prize fighting he considered entering politics but changed his mind and concentrated on running his public house in Pill Lane in Dublin. He took ill suddenly on February 15<sup>th</sup> 1820 and after a short illness died in his wife’s arms at one o’clock on Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> February 1820.

The shock of Dan’s death was deeply felt and poets, writers and ballad composers penned their sorrows in great profusion including one by the famous poet Lord Byron himself. Reflecting on Dan’s life there were many myths and legends but none more colourful than that of his supposed ‘kighthood.’ It is

reputed that the then Prince Regent (later to become King George IV) knighted Dan at a banquet given by the Lord Lieutenant in Donnelly's honour. This apparently arose from a conversation between the two men when the Prince Regent referred to Donnelly as the best in Ireland, to which Dan replied, 'I am not that, your highness, but I am the best in England'. The Prince Regent was allegedly so impressed that he conferred on him the honour of knighthood. The story does not end here as Dan was as controversial in death as in life. Just two weeks after



**The author with Dan Donnelly's arm**

being laid to rest in Bully's Acre in Kilmainham, Dan's body was dug up by the body snatchers or 'Sack-em-ups' and sold to a Dublin surgeon for medical research. There was a national outcry at this dreadful crime and Dan's body was returned to his original resting place. However his right arm had been removed and used for medical students' education. The arm has had a chequered career: after travelling to Edinburgh for use in medical school, it was used in a travelling circus in England,

owned by a pub owner in Belfast at the Duncairn Arms and finally in 1953 it was acquired by James Byrne Jnr. the owner of the 'Hideout' public house in Kilcullen. Here it spent many years on view and became synonymous with the County Kildare town. It is currently in the ownership of the same Byrne family.



**Dan's monument and footprints at Donnelly's Hollow**

In Ireland (although it was one of Europe's main social centres for those who could afford it) the majority of the people were illiterate, poor and downtrodden. Having seen several armed rebellions flicker and fail, the poorer classes yearned for a symbolic champion, someone who could lift their jaded spirits in those dark days. They found their champion in Dan Donnelly.

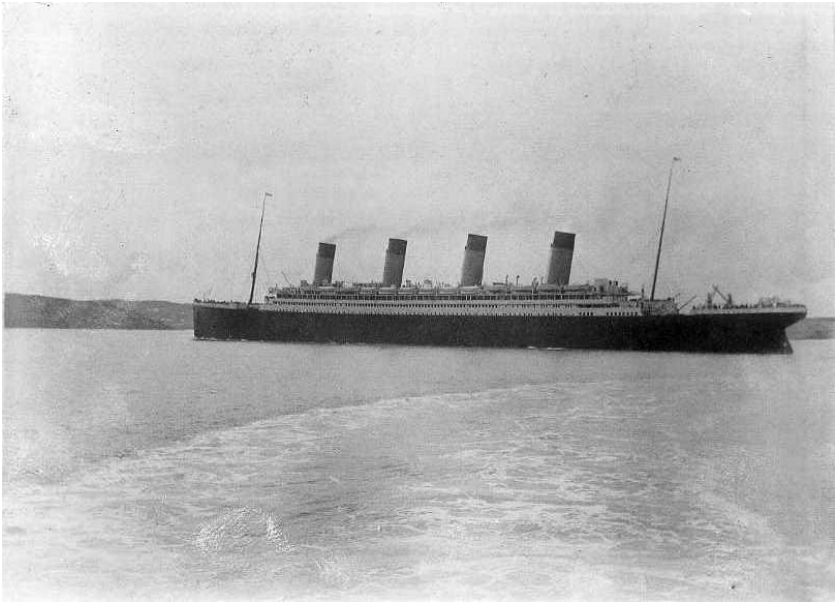
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## CLANE'S LINK TO THE TITANIC DISASTER

*Pat Given*

That wonderful source of information, the *County Kildare On-line Electronic Journal*, maintained by Mario Corrigan and his team, at the Local Studies section of Kildare County Library and Arts Services, carries a very sobering piece on 'Kildare people aboard the Titanic'. In the centenary year of the sinking of that gigantic passenger liner during the course of its maiden voyage, this particular item is essential reading for all residents of the 'short grass county'. Written by Kildare writer, James Durney, the site tells many poignant stories of Kildare natives who died tragically on that fateful night of 14-15 April 1912. Apart from remembering Kildare-born victims, James Durney's meticulous research also provides interesting information on other victims who had Kildare connections.



**The *Titanic* preparing to sail from Queenstown, photo: Father Browne**

For instance James introduces us to the renowned medical officer aboard the vessel, Dr William Francis Norman O'Loughlin, who had started his medical career as Dispensary doctor in Clane and Timahoe.

William Francis Norman O'Loughlin was born in Tralee Co. Kerry and was the second son of William O'Loughlin. The Kerry Sentinel, on Saturday 27 April 1912, reminded its readers that 'some of the older inhabitants may remember his grandfather, the late Mr Benjamin Matthews of Nelson Street, Tralee'.<sup>2</sup> Little is known about his early life but it appears to have been somewhat difficult since there is general belief that he was raised by an uncle while one account states that he was an orphan.<sup>3</sup> There are also a number of references to the fact that William O'Loughlin suffered from ill-health particularly in his youth and Cameron Bell writing in the New York Herald states that this fact persuaded him to pursue a career at sea.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to the Irish Independent on 7 May 1912, Dr Knott of Ranelagh, stated that [Dr O'Loughlin] 'owed his health early in manhood to the sea, and yielded thereafter to its lure'.<sup>5</sup>

In May 1854 and as a response to the foundation of the new Queen's Universities of Ireland, John Henry Newman established the Catholic University of Ireland. Newman's new Catholic institution consisted of five faculties and, in 1855, its faculty of medicine commenced lectures for medical students at its premises in Cecilia Street, Dublin. Soon after its establishment, the new Catholic medical school welcomed the young William O'Loughlin as a student. His decision to attend this particular educational establishment may have been influenced by the fact that his uncle, Very Rev. Dr. O'Loughlin, was dean of a special residence run by the new Catholic University for medical students at 85 and 86, Stephen's Green, Dublin.<sup>6</sup> In 1870, having completed his medical studies there and in St. Vincent's Hospital, he 'took' the Licence of the Royal

College of Surgeons in Ireland. In 1871 he added the Licence of the King and Queen's College of Physicians in Ireland and the Licence of Midwifery from the Coombe Hospital to his achievements.<sup>7</sup>

After qualification, the newly licensed medical practitioner was appointed Medical Officer to the Clane and Timahoe Dispensary District. Rural dispensaries had existed in Ireland since the eighteenth century but the coming of the Medical Charities Act of 1851 ensured their place in Irish medical history by allowing the Poor Law Guardians to further divide the existing Unions into new dispensary districts. They provided the first widespread, locally based, medical care to the Irish population. Cassell, writing with reference to the new medical system of 1851, said that it was then 'the most comprehensive free medical care available in the British Isles'.<sup>8</sup> In Kildare, which contained three Poor Law Unions, this reorganisation fixed the total number of new dispensary districts in the county at eighteen.<sup>9</sup> The Naas Poor Law Union was divided into seven dispensary districts and one of these was made up of the parishes of both Clane and Timahoe.

The minutes of the Naas Union Poor Law Guardians for 3 May 1871 show that the board passed a resolution sanctioning the appointment by the Clane and Timahoe North Dispensary Committee of a qualified 'medical man'. While not naming the appointee, the minutes state that he should be paid £3 per week and its duration was limited to the period of the illness of Dr O'Sullivan, medical officer of the district.<sup>10</sup> At a later meeting, dated 11 July 1871, the secretary of the board read a further communication from the Clane and Timahoe Dispensary Committee, also dated 11 July 1871, which stated:

*Dr Buckley was on that day appointed medical officer of the district on a salary of £100 per annum and requesting the Board*

*of Guardians to have a cheque of £39 drawn in favour of Dr Norman O'Loughlin who had been dispensary doctor of that district for the last thirteen weeks at £3 per week...ordered that a cheque be drawn for the amount proposed.*<sup>11</sup>

When he took up his appointment the newly qualified Willie, as his friends called him, was only twenty-one years of age and little is known about his life in Clane at this time. For instance, one wonders what the Clane people of 1871 thought of Dr. O'Loughlin's pronounced Kerry brogue. Mr Lightoller, second officer, later stated during his evidence to an enquiry into the Titanic disaster:

*Poor Dr O'Loughlin, he used to ask me to telephone for him as he said people couldn't understand his 'French accent'.*<sup>12</sup>

The new doctor carried out his duties without coming to the attention of his employers since the minutes of the Naas Poor Law Guardians do not carry any reference to him other than those already noted. We know too that Dr O'Loughlin appears to have been proud of his time in Clane, since although only thirteen weeks long, he included it in his career details in his entry in the *Irish Medical Directory* for 1876.

In 1871, and very soon after Thomas Ismay's purchase of the bankrupt White Star Line, he employed the twenty-one year old Dr. O'Loughlin as a ship's doctor. It is apparent, that, as Ismay expanded his business, Dr. O'Loughlin's role in the shipping line also developed as the company bought bigger and better vessels for the busy North Atlantic business. Apart from finding his name on the crew-list of the sequence of luxury flagship liners of the White Star line, Dr O'Loughlin's role is variously given to as 'doctor', 'ship's surgeon' and even 'commodore'. Dr O'Loughlin also participated in many social and recreational activities and although small in stature, he was part of SS



Majestic's team when they were beaten in cricket at Morris Park, New York in 1893.<sup>13</sup>

Life at sea was not all about sport and recreation. On Sunday 24 November 1906 the White Star Liner Oceanic was hit by a giant wave which left the captain, John Cameron, lying unconscious on the bridge. 'The unconscious commander was carried to his room. Dr. W. F. O'Loughlin, the ship's surgeon, revived him after fifteen minutes'.<sup>14</sup>

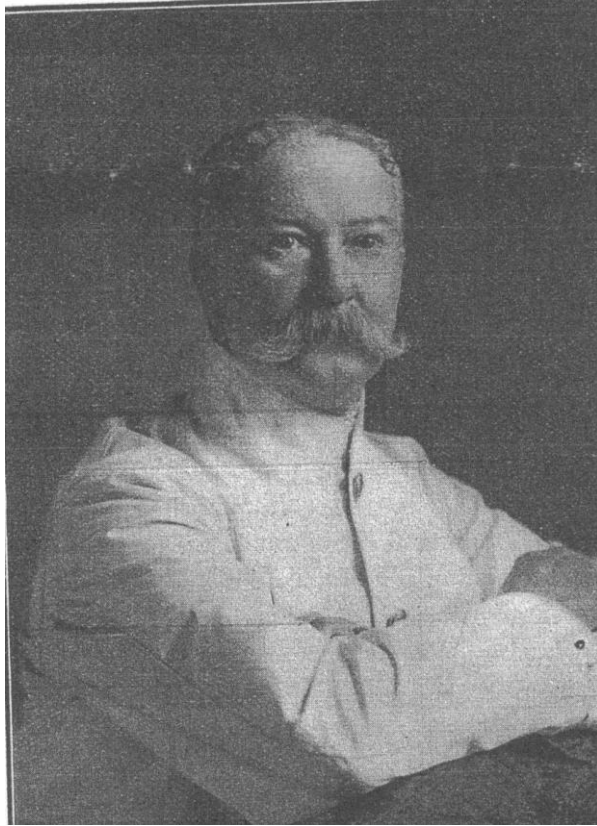
Dr O'Loughlin's position aboard ship did not always save him from the consequences of any rash actions. For instance, during a drive against the smuggling of dutiable goods into the U.S., Captain Smith of the Adriatic and Dr. O'Loughlin, the ship's surgeon while going ashore on three days leave, had a box of cigars and 'a bottle of whisky from the Doctor's valise' confiscated by the customs officers.<sup>15</sup>

As the new century unfolded Dr O'Loughlin's employers were beginning to refer to his age since Edward Titus, Medical Director of the White Star Line later stated that:

*Only recently I said that as he [O'Loughlin] was getting on in years, he ought to make a will and leave directions for his burial...He replied that the only way he wanted to be buried was to be placed in a sack and buried at sea.*<sup>16</sup>

Because of his seniority, Dr O'Loughlin was chosen as senior surgeon when staff positions were allocated to man the newly launched Titanic in 1912. A colleague, Dr Beaumont, later stated that 'Billie' had some misgivings about changing to the new vessel since O'Loughlin had said that 'he was tired at this time of life to be changing from one ship to another'.<sup>17</sup> However, Dr O'Loughlin overcame these concerns, since in early April 1912 he is recorded as examining, in conjunction

with a U.K. Board of Trade representative, the muster sheets in order to assure a healthy crew on the Titanic.



**Dr William Francis Norman O'Loughlin**

Life aboard the newly launched opulent vessel reflected the life led by many of its rich passengers. According to a steward in the first class saloon, on Sunday evening, 14 April, he received orders to make that evening's dinner 'the finest ever served on a ship, regardless of expense'. The wealthy Astors, Bruce Ismay, son of the man who had saved the White Star Line, the ship's

captain and Dr O'Loughlin dined together. The wine flowed and at one stage, Dr O'Loughlin stood up and raising a glass of champagne cried, 'let us drink to the mighty Titanic' and with cries of approval everybody stood up and drank the toast.<sup>18</sup>

The dinner broke up about 9 o'clock and later that night the ship struck the iceberg. There are numerous eye witness accounts of Dr O'Loughlin's contribution towards saving many of the passengers aboard the Titanic. In an editorial in American Medicine in May 1912 it is stated that:

*...he paid no attention to his own danger but he went from one group to another, soothing the frightened, encouraging the weak and striving in every way to prevent panic and hysteria...with the same smile on his face that had endeared him to countless travellers.*<sup>19</sup>

This is confirmed by survivors' accounts. Mr and Mrs Frederick Hoyt, for instance, specifically attest to Dr O'Loughlin's bravery and his efforts on their behalf. The last time he was seen on board he had a life preserver in his hand and would not put it on. He is reported to have said to a friend 'I don't think I will ever need this'. *The Lancet* later referred to the loss of the two doctors aboard the Titanic, both of whom were Irish:

*Dr O'Loughlin and Dr John Simpson were men whose devotion to duty gave the Irish medical profession reason to be very proud.*<sup>20</sup>

Dr Knott in his correspondence to the *Irish Independent* later referred to the fact that the Board of Trustees of St Vincent's Hospital New York proposed to endow a pathology laboratory in their hospital in honour of Dr O'Loughlin.<sup>21</sup> Dr O'Loughlin, when in port in New York, regularly sent any patients requiring medical treatment to this institution. Knott describes the proposed design of the memorial plaque:

*The memorial tablet has its lower margin submerged beneath the artistically wavy water-surface, while its face is partly (on the reader's right) concealed by the exquisitely graceful figure of the spirit of the waters- which has evidently emerged from her oceanic mansion for the purpose of honouring the arrival of her latest and worthiest visitant by dropping a wreath on the spot through which sank the body of W. F. N. O'Loughlin.*



### **Dr William Francis Norman O'Loughlin's memorial in New York**

This hospital, which played a major role in helping survivors of the Titanic, and although another of its roles was to provide assistance during the 9/11 tragedy, is now closed. On April 30, 2010, at 8am, the emergency room at St. Vincent's closed, officially shutting down the hospital after 161 years of service to the residents of New York. Unfortunately, there is no evidence of the final fate of this single memorial to Clane's link with the Titanic.

### **References**

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.kildare.ie/library/ehistory/2009/05/post\\_31.asp](http://www.kildare.ie/library/ehistory/2009/05/post_31.asp)

<sup>2</sup> *Kerry Sentinel*, Saturday, 7 April 1912.

<sup>3</sup> *New York Herald*, Monday, 22 April 1912.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Herald*, Monday, 22 April 1912. ‘Although rather weakly in his early years ...as a ship’s surgeon [he] rapidly gained health and vigour’: Editorial comment, *American Medicine*, new series, vii, no. 5 (May, 1912), p. 237.

<sup>5</sup> *Irish Independent*, 7 May 1912.

<sup>6</sup> *Tuam Herald*, 21 Oct. 1871. See also, Senan Molony, *The Irish aboard the Titanic* (Revised edition, Cork, 2012), p. 271.

<sup>7</sup> *Irish Medical Directory 1876* (Dublin, 1880), p. 129. I am grateful to Robert Mills, Librarian at The Royal College of Physicians in Ireland for providing me with this extract and for a number of other press extracts on Dr O’Loughlin contained in the Kirkpatrick papers in the College’s archives. It should also be noted that the former King and Queen’s College of Physicians in Ireland is now the Royal College of Physicians in Ireland.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald D. Cassel, *Medical Charities, Medical Politics: The Irish Dispensary System and the Poor Law, 1836-1872* (London, 1997), p. 128.

<sup>9</sup> *A return of the number of dispensaries, fever hospitals, and infirmaries in Ireland...1851*, H.C. 1851 (113) and (113-ii), L, 505, 533 and *Medical Charities (Ireland). Abstract of returns of the number of dispensaries, fever hospitals, and infirmaries in Ireland...1852-3*, p.4, H.C. 1852-3 (979), xciv, 619.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Minutes of the Naas Poor Law Union Guardians’, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1871, (Kildare County Library Archives, Plun /M/53, p. 16).

<sup>11</sup> ‘Minutes of the Naas Poor Law Union Guardians’, 11<sup>nd</sup> July 1871, (Kildare County Library Archives, Plun /M/54, p. 20).

<sup>12</sup> Senan Maloney in *Titanic Research*, <http://www.encyclopedia-titanica.org/print/portrush.html> accessed on 22 Nov. 2011.

<sup>13</sup> *New York Times*, 15 Aug. 1893.

<sup>14</sup> *New York Times*, 29 November 1906.

<sup>15</sup> *New York Times*, 17 August 1909.

<sup>16</sup> *New York Herald*, 22 April 1912. Dr O’Loughlin took this advice since the *Irish Independent* later stated that he left personal estate valued at £2,412 to Mr Bryan Augustine McSwiney of 165, Waterloo Place, Dublin. He asked that McSwiney should ‘carry out the wishes of the testator’ contained in a letter deposited with his will: *Irish Independent*, 15 Aug. 1912.

<sup>17</sup> Donald Hyslop, *Voices from the Titanic: Memories from the fateful voyage* (London, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> *Washington Herald*, 21 April 1912.

<sup>19</sup> *American Medicine*, xviii (May, 1912), p. 237.

<sup>20</sup> *The Lancet*, 11 May 1912, p. 1307.

<sup>21</sup> *Irish Independent*, 19 June 1912.

## **CHARLES WELD THE GENTLEMAN SOLDIER**

*by Joan Weld-Moore and Lisa Newnham*

The Weld family has been in these parts for many generations. A very charismatic family, we have seen many notable characters. The Weld children of the late 1800s were no exception. There were 9 siblings, of whom 8 survived – one sister, Ellen, died at 3 years of age. The family was raised in ‘Somerton’, Goatstown.

One of the brothers was Dagg Weld, of pub fame. Dagg was the father of David Weld, known all his life as Dell Weld – apparently after his birth the housekeeper, Biddy Tracey, told an over-interested neighbour that the new child was named Victor Sylvester Delahunt – 'and we're calling him Dell for short!' Dell is the father of Joan Weld-Moore (author) and Loretta Carr, businesswomen of Clane. Another brother was Sidney Weld, who was big in the GAA. Another was Bury Weld, father of John Weld, who now resides in "Somerton" in Goatstown, having raised his own family there. The brother we will focus on is Charles Weld, a Captain in the Leinster regiment in World War I.

Charles Weld was born on 21 August 1895 in Downings, Prosperous and later moved to Goatstown where he was raised with his siblings. Charles was educated in the UK from a young age, so became accustomed to being away from his mother, and developed a long-standing habit of writing to her. Throughout his army years, Charles not only continued to write to his mother but also kept a journal, which is a wonderful historical record containing some narratives of famous battles; but also giving us an insight into Charles himself and the kind of man he was. A good friend and brother officer known as ‘Basso’ also wrote notes on the diary after Charles' death, which provide extra details.

At 19, Charles enlisted in the British Army. He joined the war in June 1915. His friend Basso wrote of him 'No. 1489 Trooper Charles Weld of 2<sup>nd</sup> King Edward's Horse landed in France in June 1915'. With their training unfinished, Charles and his fellow troopers were dropped into the thick of war, as there had been heavy Canadian casualties and extra manpower was needed. They were young and enthusiastic but unprepared, in Basso's words 'lacking in most of the arts of war, but made up for this by keenness'.

Early entries in Charles' diary show this enthusiasm for 'winning' the war. These snippets come from September 1915, at the opening battle of Loos.

*September 25th [1915]... one of our naval guns ... trained on the village opposite. Good shooting. This annoys Jerry ...*

However we can also see the seed of sadness at even the relatively small numbers of casualties encountered early in his career.

*September 24th [1915]... Bombardment continues... Unfortunately Fred Rowan is hit. A good pal gone.  
September 26th [1915]... [Fred's] death has worried me a great deal. My first experience of losing a real pal. Four killed and twenty-five wounded altogether.*

On October 26<sup>th</sup> 1915, Charles writes that he has been recommended for a commission. His friend Basso's notes tell us that by January 1916 he was in an Officers Training Corps and by March 1916 was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant.

It was around this time that Charles' family received a postcard from him, which is still in the possession of his descendants

today, expressing grave concern about the events taking place in Ireland at that time.



**Charles Weld with his mother Eleanor (née Ireland), also in the photograph are his sister Helen and her husband Sid Heyworth.**

Meanwhile, his own war experience continued. One incident which stood out for Charles occurred on May 14th 1916:

*Had a lucky escape this afternoon when standing outside dug-out a German shell struck the parapet over my head. The force of the explosion knocked me down and buried me in debris but for some extraordinary reason I escaped unwounded. .... they started to shell again. ... Once more although hurled to the ground and buried my good fortune remained, and except for feeling dazed and shaken I was none the worse. As one of my men remarked – I had someone's prayers!*



Later in 1916, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, Charles witnessed the explosion of mines under the enemy's trench. His description of this is detailed and quite beautifully written:

*At 12.15 a.m. we exploded the mine under the enemy's trench. It was a terrible yet glorious sight to see the huge tongue of flame burst into the black night at the same time hurling hundreds of tons of earth upwards.*

As time moves on, battles got bigger, casualties became greater, and Charles' writing expressed more and more pain at the futile loss of life. Later entries were deeply distressed by multiple casualties, and the futility of war is brought home to the reader. One cannot help but consider the sights and sounds, the memories which he, and all who were there, carried for the rest of their lives.

*Never will I forget that race as long as I live ... Out of our original party of 3 officers and 60 men only myself and half a dozen men escaped from being either killed or wounded. I wandered down to Loos feeling absolutely worn out and miserable at the thought of the number of fine fellows gone west. I suppose our daily papers will merely state that we carried out a raid on the enemy's line. I often wonder if the people at home have the slightest idea what a bloody hell the men have to go through – yet the game has to be played to the last.*

Charles writes that during battle he is very focussed on the task at hand and believes that at times, a primal instinct is taking over, robbing them of their humanity:

*In the heat of the fight a mad lust takes possession of one, a burning desire to kill being uppermost in every man's brain. I should say it is the sinking to the level of the beast that carries one through such frightful carnage. When looking back over the*

*past weeks one wonders that civilised man should sink to such depths.*

Later in the diary, the war has progressed and the responsibility upon Charles himself has increased. He was living in such nightmarish times that he almost treated it casually. For the sake of his own sanity it seems, the entries later in the diary are brief and factual, giving no personal opinions or feelings.

*October 13th [1917] On patrol last night, lost direction, ran into Boche sentry and was bombed.*

*November 14th [1917] Relieved C. Company in front line*

*November 22nd [1917] Holding front line*

### **Living Conditions**

Throughout, we notice Charles only gives occasional and minimal information about the appalling conditions he is enduring, in the trenches. He accepts his situation and does not wish to waste time writing his complaints about it. However he does with great frequency mention what the weather is like, reflecting the importance of weather conditions to the condition of the trenches, to the chance of being seen by the enemy. These kinds of comments are seen throughout the diary:

*Rain for the last few days. Trenches knee deep in mud and water. Everyone drenched.*

*Weather fine.*

*Rain again.*

*Rain continues.*

*Day fine and warm.*

Hygiene and cleanliness were difficult to achieve for a soldier living in the trenches. On occasion Charles would visit a convent, where they could pay the nuns to have a hot bath:

*December 2nd [1915] Walked to Neuve Eglise for a bath which is a blessing in this country. At times a biscuit tin has to do duty as a bath while if lucky a tub.*

Charles, along with his colleagues, had to work extremely hard in between battles. It is hard to imagine they ever slept:

*December 29th [1915]... We went on night fatigue and are all fed up with this continual night work. We have to march 5 miles then work six hours arriving back about 4 a.m. feeling worn out and generally drenched to the skin. Yet I suppose it must be done.*

As an Irish Gentleman in the war, Charles had a private assigned to take care of his needs. He is referred to in the diary as 'my batman'. This man was from the locality (the 'Doghole' Road) and his name was Hugh Reilly.

Somehow, incredibly, Charles was able to get food delivered from Somerton. How this was achieved in the middle of World War I, I cannot guess!

*December 26th [1915] Great joy in our section as I received a huge round of spiced beef from home.*

### **Character**

Aspects of Charles' character come through in his writing. He was a man who accepted his duty, who realised the war was bigger than him, who tolerated miserable conditions without complaint. He was honourable and he was well-liked by his men and his peers. He was also an orderly and organised person, as can be seen from the keeping of the diary itself, his attention to recording his war experience. One entry is particularly interesting, in the context of orderliness:

*October 22nd [1915] ... After digging all day moved nearer the line and stayed at dirtiest farm I have ever seen and slept in the open rather than in filthy barn.*

We don't read complaints about the dirtiness or smelliness of the trenches, but Charles apparently had no patience with a disorderly and dirty farm, which had no excuse for not being organised and clean. There is also very little noted about his own decorations, honours and awards. Once again, it is his friend Basso's typed notes, which tell us he got his captaincy in September 1917 and was demobbed in January 1919. Basso also notes that he was awarded his military cross on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1918. His family still possesses his citation presented with the military cross. Wherever Charles was, if he had the opportunity to attend a church service, he loved to do so. His friend Basso said, it was his devotion to church and worship which led to his 'high morale which in turn inspired his men with whom he was most popular'.



**Charles Weld at the Front**

## **The German Spring Offensive of 1918**

There are entries in the diary of Charles Weld, describing the days before, during and after the German Spring Offensive of 1918 in Picardy, which began on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1918. After this battle Captain Charles Weld was wounded.

*March 16th [1918] Moved by bus to Villiers Faucon in early morning. Very heavy shell fire on front.*

*March 17th [1918] Church in Villiers Faucon. Sports in afternoon.*

*March 20th [1918] Played Bridge till after midnight. Enemy attack expected.*

*March 21st [1918] Enemy attacked this morning after heavy bombardment with H.E. and gas shells. Ronsoy lost, the Royal Munster Fusiliers and Connaught Rangers counter attacked and retook village, but afterwards were compelled to give it up.*

*March 22nd [1918] Bombardment continues and enemy attacks on a large scale.*

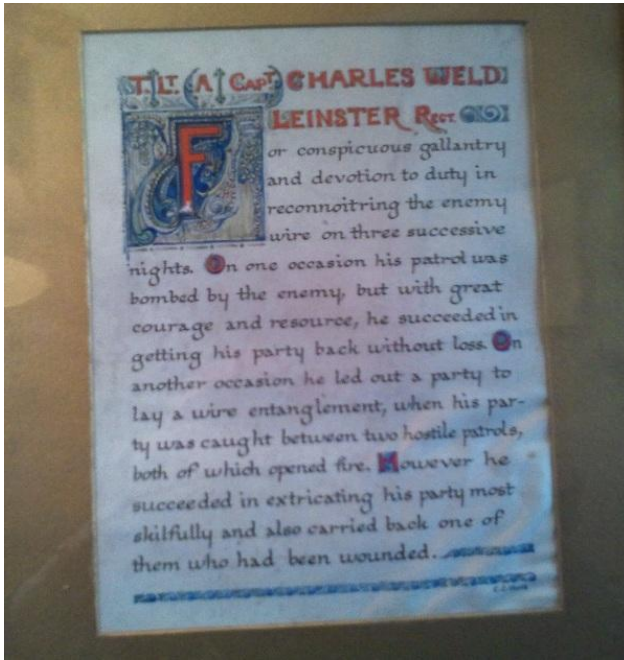
*March 23rd [1918] In Red Cross train to Rouen and No.8 General Hospital.*

*March 24th [1918] On Hospital ship.*

The 16<sup>th</sup> Irish Division ceased to exist after the last great German offensive of March 1918, so great were the casualties. Charles had been a front line soldier for over three years and engaged in the battles of Loos, Somme, Messines, Paschendale, Cambrai and the last great German offensive of March 1918 in Picardy.

After leaving the army, Charles returned home and lived in Enfield, where he remained involved with farming and his local church. *The Kildare Observer* of 19/08/1927 reports that Charles was part of a choir which won a competition at a fête in Millicent on Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> August 1927 – a wonderful article to find, especially as so many of his descendants are active to

this day in the organisation and support of Clane Union parish fête held in Millicent.



**The Citation for Charles Weld's Military Cross**

Charles Weld was a man with strong family roots in the local area. Many of his remaining relations still remember him kindly and have some tales to tell, but even more revealing was the journal Charles kept throughout his army years. From his diary and his surviving family members, we see a brave and kind man, one who loved his mother enormously, who was loyal to his family, to his fellow soldiers and to his church and parish. Charles passed away in 1963, R.I.P.

Acknowledgments: Muriel Foster, Dell Weld.

## **MAINHAM; IN THE 1940s AND 1950s**

*by Brendan Cullen.*

Life in Mainham during this period revolved around the forge, the Royal Oak pub, the post office at Clongowes Wood main gate and Clongowes Wood College and farm.



**Mainham**

The forge run by Pat Dunne, ably assisted by his brother Bill, was a hive of activity and was regarded as one of the most important service centres in the locality. The forge was well frequented partly by those who wanted to get work done and partly by those “at a loose end” who, attracted by the warmth of the fire, assembled to meet socially and chat and to share the local news. The Dunes were blacksmiths in Mainham since the 1850s. The forge had an interesting history because it was originally a Mass house which was used during penal times. Bill and his family lived in the forge/Mass house while Pat and his

family lived in the post office at the Clongowes main gate just across the Green.

The main work of the forge was shoeing horses - principally work horses and to a lesser extent ponies for pulling traps. Other work like repairing the local farm machinery was also carried out. Bill would rise at 7.30 am to get the fire stoked and lit so he could get it red hot in order to bend the metal on the anvil. Bill took the shoes off the horses and pared their hooves; Pat made the shoes and fitted them. All the shoes, of different sizes, were made at the forge and on completion were hung on pegs on the forge wall in readiness for the prospective customers. At times there could be as many as a dozen horses waiting outside to be shod. At this time Clongowes farm had about 14 horses and a few ponies and all the farmers from the locality and from as far afield as Rathcoffey, Donadea and Baltracey frequented Mainham forge. Horses involved in drawing turf from the Bog of Allen to the Phoenix Park during the war years, were also shod at Mainham.

Work at the forge varied according to season. Spring was the time to repair the ploughs, harrows and seed-sowers. Early summer saw the mowing machines, the hay turners and the hay rakes coming in to be fixed. At summer's end the scythes and the reaping implements were also mended. Summer was also the time to repair cart-wheels. The iron bands on the wooden wheels would become loose over time due to the shrinkage of the wood. So the band had to be shortened, welded together again and put back on the wheel. The day started early with perhaps a dozen bands being placed in a designated area on the Green. Small pieces of turf would then be built up around the irons and set on fire. It would take a good while for the fire to get really red hot, hot enough to make the bands malleable. Meanwhile a large water tank nearby would have abundant water for cooling the bands after having their circumferences shortened.





**Mainham Forge**

The wheels would be placed on a concrete circle near the fire and water. The centre of the circle had a recess for the hub so that the wheel lay flat. When the band was red hot it would be put on an anvil. A piece of it would be cut off, the band rejoined and placed over the wooden wheel and hammered on with sledges and lump hammers. Buckets of cold water would then be hastily thrown over it to cool it before it would damage the timber of the wheel. Vast clouds of steam would rise from the wheel until it cooled down.

Among the clients who received special treatment at the forge was Peter Shortt, the local Boland's bread deliveryman. He collected the bread from Sallins railway station and three days a week his round took him through Mainham. His horse did so much travelling that his shoes had to be changed every week. In winter they were fitted with special studs to improve traction on the icy roads. When Peter arrived at the forge he got priority over everyone else who would be waiting as he had to complete

his round because commercial customers i.e. shopkeepers, would be awaiting his arrival and expected him to be on time.

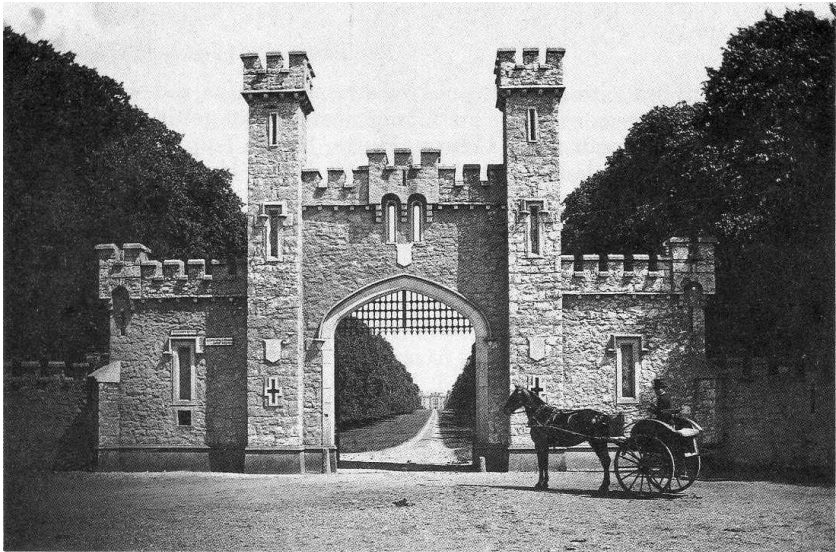


**Denis and Liam Dunne with their sister, the future Mrs Esther Kenny, sitting astride a donkey under the watchful eye of Jimmy Anderson. Pat and Bill Dunne are standing inside the forge.**

A frequent visitor to the forge was the postman Joe Corr from Clane. Joe brought the newspaper each day and would be near the end of his deliveries when he reached Mainham. He would sit on the bench in the forge and read the main news items before cycling back to Clane. Pat and Bill Dunne would take their break to coincide with Joe's arrival and one can picture them drinking mugs of tea, reading the paper and discussing the momentous events of the war years in the tranquillity and warmth of the forge beside the fire.

Business at the forge began to decline in the early 1950s when tractors made their appearance on the local farms. The forge struggled on for some years but eventually closed down in 1965.

Another vital service in Mainham at this time was the post office which was located at the main gate of Clongowes Wood College. As well as serving the college it also covered the district between Clane, Prosperous and Donadea. The postmistress was Mrs Josephine Dunne, wife of Pat Dunne, the blacksmith. She always employed an assistant to help out, as the post office was a very busy place.



**The main gate of Clongowes in the late nineteenth century. Mainham post office was in the lodge on the left of the photograph. *Lawrence collection, National library of Ireland***

Unlike the post offices in Clane and Prosperous, Mainham was a ‘telegraph office’ which meant that you could send and receive telegrams there. The delivery area covered Clane, Prosperous, Loughanure, Painstown, Rathcoffey, Donadea and all intermediate areas as well as Clongowes Wood College itself. The assistant delivered the telegrams on her bicycle. On Saturdays and during school holidays family members were enlisted to help out. At such times Mrs Dunne often sought the

help of her niece and nephews who lived across the Green at the forge, when a telegram came for delivery to some house in the vicinity. Her method of communication with the youngsters was a rather unique one. She used to hang a white sheet on the door to indicate to the young Dunnes across the Green that there was a telegram waiting to be delivered. Immediately they spied the sheet the youngsters knew what it meant. They would make their way to the post office and head off on their bicycles to make the delivery. In an age when most people didn't have telephones, telegrams were the only means of sending urgent messages. Mainham Post Office was established in 1888 and continued to exist until 1970 when it closed down.

Alas, today, the forge is no more: it has vanished completely; the post office lies empty and derelict; the Royal Oak, sold some years ago, is vacant and forlorn on the side of the road. The vibrant community of the 40s and the 50s has disappeared. Perhaps, the following lines from 'The Deserted Village' by Oliver Goldsmith are appropriate:

*Sunk are thy bowers, in shapeless ruin all,  
And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall;  
And trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,  
Far, far away, thy children leave the land.*

***This article was compiled from notes, written by Liam Kenny in 2003, of conversations with the Dunne family and the late Sean Cribbin.***

# THE GRIFFITHS OF MILLICENT

by Jim Heffernan

## **The Griffith Family and Millicent House**

Three generations of the Griffith family lived in Millicent House although they only occupied the property for a short period of 27 years from 1782 to 1809. All three generations of Griffith men were named Richard. The second of these was prominent locally in opposing the 1798 insurgents and the third, Richard John Griffith, is well known to local historians and genealogists through his *Valuation of Tenements*.

## **Richard and Elizabeth Griffith**

The first Richard, born on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1716, was a minor writer and gentleman farmer. He was overshadowed by his more talented wife Elizabeth an actress and writer. She was born in Dublin in 1727 to Thomas Griffith, the Dublin born son of Welsh parents, who was actor-manager of the Smock Alley Theatre and Jane the daughter of the Reverend Richard Foxcroft of Portarlington.<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth first came to notice as an actress in October 1749 performing the role of Juliet in Romeo and Juliet in the Smock Alley theatre. She subsequently performed in both Dublin and London. She later embarked on a writing career writing a number of plays and books which were well regarded at the time but do not appeal to modern taste. In a period where women were denied access to formal literary education available to gentlemen Elizabeth's familiarity with the roles she played as an actress was an important preparation for her career as a writer.<sup>2</sup>

Richard and Elizabeth had a long courtship during which Richard, whose father wished him to 'marry money' as he himself had done, had tried to persuade Elizabeth to become his mistress before marrying her secretly after five years.<sup>3</sup> Wisely perhaps given Richard's philandering reputation Elizabeth had

her friend Lady Orrery as a witness to the ceremony which took place in Dublin in 1767. The couple had two children, a son Richard born in 1752 in Elizabeth's Aunt's house in Abbey Street, Dublin and a daughter Catherine who married the Reverend John Buck rector of Desertcreat, County Tyrone.<sup>4</sup>

After their marriage the couple were separated for long periods. Elizabeth moved to London to pursue her writing career and took the children with her. Richard undertook an unsuccessful linen manufacturing venture at Maidenhall, County Kilkenny<sup>5</sup> and briefly in 1760 he worked as a customs official in Carrickfergus. As a consequence the couple exchanged a large number of letters before and after their marriage. Richard's debts forced him to dispose of Maidenhall and to overcome their financial difficulties they published an edited version of their correspondence in a series of six volumes between 1767 and 1770 entitled *A Series of Genuine Letters between Henry and Frances*. These proved popular and provided a modest source of income.<sup>6</sup>

The marriage appears to have been troubled as, apart from financial problems, the couple lacked a settled home and Richard appears to have been less than faithful with, on one occasion, allegations of an elopement. In their later years the couple lived at their son's home, Millicent House, both dying there, Richard in 1788 and Elizabeth in 1793.<sup>7</sup>

### **Richard Griffith of Millicent**

Richard and Elizabeth's son Richard secured a position with the East India Company with the help of influential friends of his mother in London. While serving in India from 1770 to 1782 he obtained a lucrative licence to trade in opium on his own behalf amassing a fortune estimated to be between £60,000 and £90,000 (worth perhaps £6m to £9m in present day values).<sup>8</sup> Returning to Ireland he acquired Millicent House in 1782.<sup>9</sup>

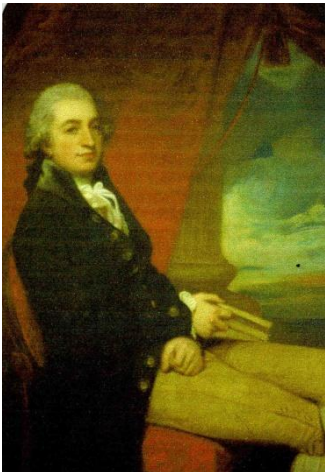
Richard married twice, his first marriage to Charity Yorke Bramston daughter of John Bramston and Elizabeth Yorke of Oundle, Northamptonshire produced a son, Richard John and three daughters. Richard's second marriage to Mary Hussey Burgh produced seven sons and four daughters.<sup>10</sup> Many of the children of the second family emigrated to Australia.

Richard was Member of Parliament for Askeaton from 1783-1790<sup>11</sup> and was Sheriff of Kildare for the year 1788.<sup>12</sup> As Captain of the Clane Yeomanry in 1798 he defeated a group of rebels in the village of Clane but subsequently had to withdraw to Naas. In the aftermath livestock was driven off from Millicent House and considerable damage was done.<sup>13</sup> He became a director of the Grand Canal Company in 1784 playing a central role in its operations. He lost most of his personal fortune when the company accumulated considerable financial losses after encountering engineering problems when extending the canal west of Sallins. He was dismissed from the board with other directors at an extra-ordinary meeting of shareholders in February 1810.<sup>14</sup> He sold his Millicent estate, which was by then heavily mortgaged, in 1809.<sup>15</sup>

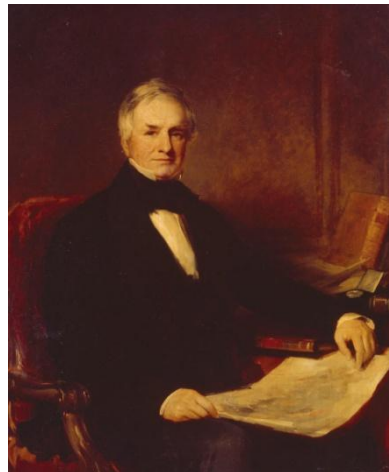
In 1813 Richard moved to England where he had obtained the post of Postmaster of Sheffield. Two years later he was appointed Post Office Packet Manager in Holyhead.<sup>16</sup> His will made in Holyhead dated 30<sup>th</sup> April 1819 made provision for his wife and the young family of his second marriage as best he could from his reduced resources. He referred affectionately to Walter Hussey the eldest son of his second marriage but made no provision for his first born son stating that Richard John had the means to provide for himself.<sup>17</sup> This was very true as, apart from embarking upon an illustrious career, he had married an heiress! Richard died on 27<sup>th</sup> June 1820 and is buried in St. Cybi's Churchyard Holyhead. In later years a Holyhead Town Council landscaping project destroyed a number of older graves



**Millicent House in 2010**



**Richard Griffith of Millicent**



**Sir Richard John Griffith**



including Richard's and only its general location is now known.<sup>18</sup>

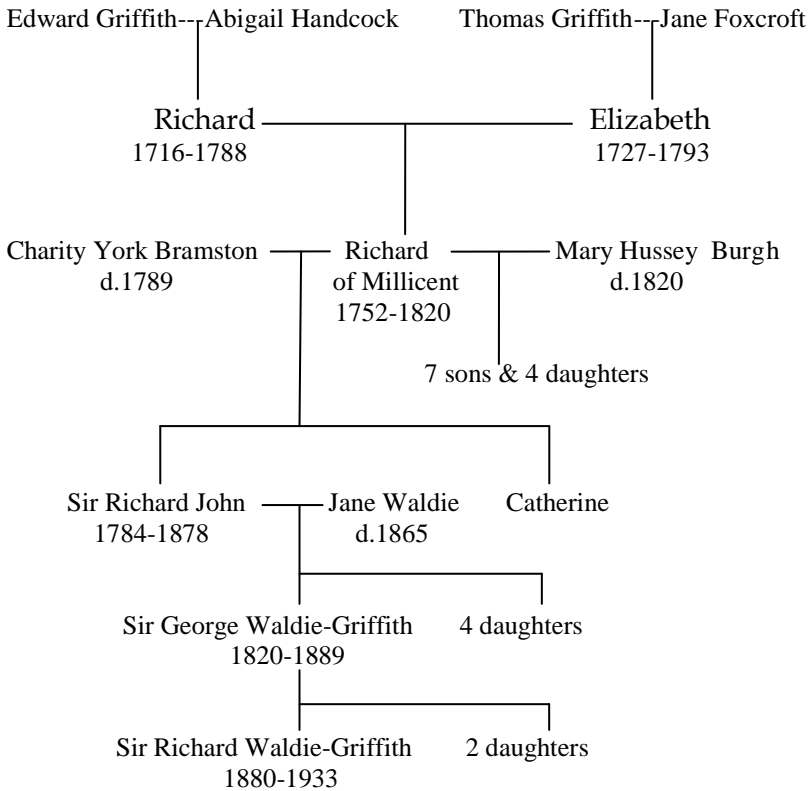
### **Richard John Griffith, Engineer & Geologist**

Richard John Griffith was born at No.8 Hume Street on 20th September 1784 but he appears to have spent much of his childhood on his father's estate at Millicent.<sup>19</sup> After attending schools in Portarlinton, Rathangan and Dublin he served for less than a year as an ensign in the Royal Irish Regiment of Artillery before studying Engineering and Geology in England and in Edinburgh where in 1807 he was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh. It was in Edinburgh that he met Maria Jane Waldie, daughter of George Waldie a wealthy mine owner of Hendersyde Park, Roxburghshire, whom he married on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1812. A son George Richard and three daughters Elizabeth Charlotte, Charlotte Jane and Ann Maria were born to the marriage between 1814 and 1821.<sup>20</sup> It has been suggested that a further daughter Jane had been born in 1813 but was disowned after eloping with the gardener of her boarding school when aged 16. Sir Richard is said to have refused her when she approached him seeking help for her six children after her husband died young.<sup>21</sup>

From 1809 to 1829 Richard was employed by the Dublin Society (it became the Royal Dublin Society in 1820) as Mining Engineer. During this period he began work on his Geological Map of Ireland which he first published in 1839. In 1822 he was appointed to build roads in Cork, Kerry and Limerick for famine relief. He held the post of Conductor of the Boundary Survey from 1825 until the 1860's. From 1828 until his death in 1878 he lived at No. 2 Fitzwilliam Place Dublin. He was a founding member of the Geological Society of Ireland (it became the Royal Geological Society in 1864) of which he was president for many years.

Meanwhile in 1827 Griffith had been appointed Commissioner for the Valuation of Ireland. Griffith used the work of his valuers to enhance his geological map which was published in its final form in 1852. Amongst many other activities he was, between 1846 and 1864, Deputy Chairman and then Chairman of the Board of Works and he was twice president of the Institution of Engineers of Ireland. In 1854 he received the Wollaston Medal from the Geological Society of London for his work on the geological map. His pride in this is seen from the

### The Griffith Family Tree



fact that both map and medal are displayed in the portrait which was commissioned for the occasion of his seventieth birthday in 1854. He adopts the same pose in a photograph taken twenty years later on the occasion of his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. In 1858 he was created a baronet in recognition of his services to the State.

Professor Herries-Davies suggests that Griffith may have been a self-centred ruthless man, reluctant to give due recognition to subordinates and not personally liked by his peers. He cites Griffith's memoirs which consist mainly of trivia with Griffith himself as the centre of attention and the fact that, despite his considerable achievements, he was never proposed by his peers for fellowship of the Royal Society of London. He speculates plausibly that this and his drive to achieve could have been a legacy of feeling supplanted when his father remarried, starting a new family when he was only eight years of age.<sup>22</sup>

Richard and Jane benefited substantially from the will of Jane's father George Waldie who died in 1825 and it is perhaps at this point that Richard purchased the Pencraig Estate in Anglesea which remained in the family for over a century; he was certainly well established there by 1842.

Richard's only son George Richard inherited the Waldie estates in Roxburghshire, Scotland together with a considerable fortune when his mother's only brother John Waldie died unmarried in 1865. George Richard and his only son Richard John adopted the name Waldie-Griffith under the terms of John Waldie's will.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps the family's Kildare connection is reflected in the fact that Richard John was a prominent owner and breeder of racehorses and long serving member of the Jockey Club. Sir Richard John was the 3<sup>rd</sup> and last baronet. Although he married

three times he died childless in 1933 and the baronetage died with him.

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## ALEXANDRA BRIDGE, CLANE

*by Brendan Cullen*



**Alexandra Bridge**

The present bridge, called Alexandra Bridge, a fine strong masonry structure, which spans the river Liffey at Clane, was built in 1864 and replaced a medieval stone bridge which was constructed in the 1390s. The ancient bridge which consisted of six arches and a very narrow roadway was familiar to Thomas Francis Meagher, the writer and patriot, who was a student in Clongowes Wood College from 1833 to 1839. In his description of Clane village in the 1830s he wrote that:

*At the southern end of the street (i.e. the main street), a quarter of a mile from the houses, ..... the Liffey..... threw itself under the arches of the quaintest, queerest, crookedest, most broken-backed bridge that ever flung shadows on the flashing path of*

*the speckled trout and red salmon, rushing away..... into copper-hued darkness of Irishtown Wood.*

It was decided by the Grand Jury in February 1864 to rebuild this older bridge at a cost of £2,100.

A close examination of the stonework of the present bridge indicates that only the central part of the new bridge, i.e. three arches and two piers, was constructed in 1864 and that parts of the older bridge were integrated into the new structure. The county surveyor who supervised the design and construction of the new bridge was John Yeats from Drumcliffe, Co. Sligo who was a grand-uncle of the poet W.B. Yeats.

The building of the bridge was a relatively fast affair as Yeats reported at the spring assizes in March 1865 that the new bridge had been completed the previous November, although not to his complete satisfaction. One of the arches was defective in appearance due to settlement when the centring (a temporary timber structure used to support the arch during construction) was removed. The defect did not affect the stability of the bridge but owing to a misunderstanding with the contractor, who initially refused to rectify the defective arch, the Grand Jury wanted to dismiss Yeats from the project. However, they relented when he undertook to put matters right to the satisfaction of an architect designated by them.

Yeats arranged with James Bell, a Dublin surveyor, to inspect the bridge with Henry Brett, the Wicklow County surveyor and a Dublin architect named Thomas Drew. Bell reported to the Grand Jury that although the bridge *was not a very handsome one* and that there was a certain degree of settlement at the centre of one of the arches it would take only a small amount of work to correct the defect. The arch was repaired and the bridge

was reopened but the centring remained in place for some time to support the arch as a precautionary measure.

*The Freeman's Journal* reported that on July 21<sup>st</sup> 1864 a trainload of invited parents and guests to the end of term celebrations in Clongowes Wood College were met at Sallins railway station by numerous cars which were to transport them to their destination. However:

*Owing to the rebuilding of the bridge across the Liffey, near Clane, the cars had to go round by Millicent.*

The bridge at Clane is a strong well-built limestone structure and consists of three main arches resting on sturdy footings and a small flood arch. It was named Alexandra Bridge after Princess Alexandra of Denmark who married Edward, Prince of Wales in 1863.



**Princess (later Queen) Alexandra 1844-1925**

Local tradition in Clane suggests that Princess Alexandra formally opened the bridge in 1864. But this is doubtful as there is no evidence that she was in Ireland in 1864 when the bridge was completed. However, she did accompany her husband Prince Edward on a Royal Visit to Ireland which began on April 15<sup>th</sup> 1868. Although the Royal Visit largely centred on Dublin the Royal Couple visited several places in County Kildare including Maynooth College, Carton House, Naas and Punchestown. Despite the fact that they arrived by train at Sallins railway station en route to Punchestown races, there is no evidence that they actually visited Clane. So the bridge may have been named Alexandra Bridge to mark the occasion of Alexandra's marriage to the Prince of Wales in 1863 or it may have been named several years later to mark the Royal Visit of 1868.

In 2014 Alexandra Bridge will celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The bridge, unchanged over the past one and a half centuries and which has the capacity to accommodate large volumes of heavy 21<sup>st</sup> century traffic stands as a monument to the expertise and knowledge of bridge-building of the Kildare County surveyor, John Yeats, who oversaw its design and construction in 1864.

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## STRANGE HAPPENINGS IN CLANE

*by John Noonan*

Ghosts and ghost stories have always been an important part of Irish life. Their origins probably lie in the extended pre-ESB evenings which drove our creative ancestors to organise long story-telling sessions to while away the boring hours of winter darkness. It was here in that candle-lit gloom that the legacy of exciting ghost stories was born and that tradition has continued down through the years.



All areas of Ireland have their own ghostly traditions and Clane is no different. So for me as I grew up on the Millicent Road I remember many ghost stories being told as I sat around the fire with my parents, grandparents, and neighbours. The stories I'm about to tell are ones which I first heard at that fireside and right up to the present day they live up to their ghostly reputations. Even now I shiver as I remember them.

The first story is based on the Millicent Road where, as children, we spent many hours playing and working in the surrounding fields. Today, a modern and popular golf club is situated on some of this very land but in my youth an ancient farm house, owned by a well known local family, once stood in those green fields. This old house was known to be haunted and you can be sure that we always stayed well clear of it since our neighbours swore that, at night, a man with a top hat and cape could be seen walking the land on which the golf course is now laid out. Tradition had it that the ghost was formerly a school-teacher who lived many years ago in a near-by house. Even today, this robust, two- storey, stone-built and former estate cottage is reputed to bring nothing but bad luck to families who live in it. The origin of this terrible curse was always explained by my older and much wiser neighbours as arising from the fact that the house was built on the track of a fairy path. To explain this, we were told that, in travelling between their abodes, the ‘good people’, from time immemorial have used regular paths and if anybody should dare to obstruct a fairy path, the intruder would very soon feel the disapproval of its real owners.

The basis for this and many other ghost stories may be found in long-held beliefs which generations of Irish people have passed down through the ages. For instance, there is an old saying in many parts of Ireland which states that men dying while owing money or women leaving newborn infants will ‘never be quite in the grave’. In the long list of reasons leading to an unhappy after-life, the worst outrage of all was to build a house on a fairy path. Occupants of such a building would experience all kinds of ill-fortune which would forever plague these unlucky people. This revenge of the ‘good people’ extended from constant and horrible noises in the night to bodily injury to man and beast. But worst of all, the builder of such an obstruction was cursed even in his next life to make frequent nightly appearances to

display his difficulty in ever finding that peaceful rest to which we all aspire.

Displays of displeasure by the ‘good people’ do not easily end, even with the coming of modern inventions, like electricity. Recently, a local woman who did housework, for a short time, in this particular house told me that she regularly heard footsteps going up the stairs and across the landing even when there was no one in the house but herself and the dog. She also had a very bad dream one night about the dog; his head was spinning around and fell off. While out walking the next day she met the owner of the house. He stopped his car to tell her that the dog had died during the night for no apparent reason.

However, with a little appreciation of these traditions there were known ways to accommodate the ‘good people’ and, for instance, a wise man made sure to select the site of his intended new house with this in mind. One method was to go to the proposed site on a windy day and throw one’s hat in the air. The good people, recognising the honest desire to placate them, would blow the hat along to a more acceptable site and where a new house would not hamper their movements, and it was there that the wise man would build his house. Could the local tradition be true? Is the ghost uneasy in his grave because he built a house on the ‘good peoples’ track? Or is there some other reason which drives the poor man, forever unhappy in his eternal rest, to nightly walk the fairways of a modern golf course?

Like me, many of you may remember the Archer family who for generations lived on Moat Commons. They were well known since they often held very popular story-telling sessions by a big open fire in their thatched house. One of the spooky stories which I remember so well concerned a basket maker who came to Clane, twice a year, spring and autumn. He made baskets for

sowing and harvesting potatoes and for bringing home the turf. He did his work in a shed at the back of Archer's house on Moat Commons, and he slept there at night. During one of the visits, he was found dead in the out-house. After that sad event, none of the Archer family would enter that shed after dark since the basket maker's ghost was said to haunt the place where he drew his last breath on this earth.

The Archers knew all the local traditions and they often told of a Mrs Farrell who was reputed to appear regularly in a ruined house which was sited across the road from them. Even though this woman had died many years before many of the Archers were born, her story had lived on in their story telling. In fact it lives on even to the present day, since people passing this spot still say they experience a bad feeling - even though they have never heard the story. Many of us would like to know the full truth behind this tale.

There are many ghost stories which concern the venerable Clongowes Wood College. A local tradition tells of Willie Connolly from Mainham who was out walking his two greyhounds one winter's night. Walking up the front avenue of Clongowes he saw a headless priest approach. Immediately his two dogs bolted, never to be seen again and Willie still insists that 'he saw what he saw'.

Another story relating to the Clongowes' area is of a stage coach with a headless driver. At midnight, this coach is said to go through the front door and out the back door of the Jolly Farmer's at Castlebrown, better known to myself and other locals as Hubbards.

Many of the stories tell of a time now long gone and must have been handed down over many generations. Documents such as the map of county Kildare produced by Lieutenant Alexander

Taylor in 1788 show that our current road system is really quite a modern creation. For instance, the arrow-straight road which today runs from Barberstown to Derrinturn was built in the 1750s as part of an unfinished larger scheme intended to link Dublin with Tullamore. Before the coming of this modern road, which many of us know as ‘Mosse’s road’, the earlier ‘back’ road to Prosperous ran via Killibegs where there was an old coaching inn or hotel. It was here that the Dublin-bound stagecoaches stopped and both man and horse welcomed a rest and a bite to eat after crossing the bleak Bog of Allen. The inn’s ruined remains exist today and in the shade of its lengthening evening shadows many people still swear it is possible to hear the sound of passing horses and carriages. As the saying goes: ‘this story was told to me by people, sound of mind and sober, and who am I not to believe this tale?’

Perhaps the most famous local ghost story is one which is associated with Clongowes. This is the story concerning the death of Marshal Browne who emigrated to Austria, joined the Austrian army and was killed at the Battle of Prague in 1757. At the time the castle was lived in by his two unmarried sisters, Rose and Elizabeth. One of the ground-floor rooms to the left of the main entrance hall was then used as an ironing room in which a fire blazed all day. Because of the warmth many of the servants gravitated towards this room to meet other members of the staff and to involve themselves in idle gossip. On one occasion the door of the room was left open because of the heat and the servants who had gathered in the room were astonished to see an army officer enter the hall through the front door. He was dressed in a distinctive white uniform. As he proceeded to go up the stairs they noticed that his hands were pressed to his chest from which blood was flowing through his fingers and staining his white uniform. Recovering from their initial shock, they ran from the room and hurried up to the Round Room where the Misses Browne were sewing by the fire. They had

seen and heard nothing. On hearing from the excited servants the description of the figure they were certain it must be the ghost of their brother and that he had been killed in battle. The whole house went into mourning, a wake was held in the castle and masses were said for the repose of his soul. Two weeks later came the official news that the Marshal had died on the day and the hour at which his ghost was seen on the stairs of Castle Browne.

Clane residents will know the location of my next story which is the wart-stone on the Millicent Road. This spot is said to be haunted by a black dog. Because of its location I have passed this spot many times without seeing anything. However, on one winter night, about 11.10pm, when I was coming home from work I clearly saw the late Dick Coffey cross from the 'twelve acres' to the field at the back of his house. Dick had then been dead about ten or twelve years before that night and I swear that this is a true story, and I hope that I will never repeat the experience!

I hope to make this column a regular feature of our new journal and if you have any stories that you would like to share with us why not contact me. Clane has always had a wealth of ghostly traditions and many members of Clane's long established families have some wonderful experiences to relate. One such person is Bernadette Plunkett, née Byrne who has an unforgettable store of treasures to relate. She has been telling me about some of her experiences and I hope to relate some of these in our next edition. Apart from the fact that her recollections will whet your appetite for more folklore, by using the pages of *Coiseanna* we can also ensure that Clane's valuable traditions are shared with our newer residents. More importantly, we will be ensuring that Clane's valuable legacy of local folklore will be passed on thereby enriching the venerable heritage which we hope one day to bequeath to our youth.

# VISCOUNT DONGAN OF CLANE

by Pat Given

The formative seventeenth century commenced with the flight of the earls and it ended with the battle of the Boyne. In the interim, Ireland and Britain experienced many important events, such as the 1641 rebellion, the Confederacy of Kilkenny, the English Civil War, Cromwell's coming to Ireland, the regicide of Charles I, the restoration of the monarchy and eventually the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1690. There are very few other centuries with such a sequence of signal events occurring over such a short period. But for us in Clane, there is a further and not often acknowledged reason which links these important events of the seventeenth century with our village. The title, Viscount of Clane was created in 1686 when the British monarch bestowed it on a prominent Kildare family in recognition of the latter's participation in many of these historic milestones.<sup>1</sup> However the title, Viscount of Clane, like a number of the political causes which the family espoused, unfortunately died out in the early eighteenth century.



**Castletown House at Celbridge**

The idyllic rural estate of Castletown at Celbridge county Kildare is normally associated with the Conolly family or its later owners, the Carews.

However, prior to coming into the ownership of these families this historic property had been owned by the Dongans and unfortunately this earlier link is sometimes omitted in the telling of the Castletown story.<sup>2</sup> The Dongans are particularly noteworthy since they resided at Castletown during the seventeenth century and various members of the family participated in many of the landmark events of that time.

Smith states that Castletown came into the ownership of the Dongans in 1616 when King James granted them the estate for the princely sum of one red rose per annum.<sup>3</sup>

Today, little remains of the original Dongan's castle except some remnants of old stone ramparts, a tower with some arrow slits as well as parts of a vaulted-roofed cellar. The ruins adjoin



**The Ruins of Dongan's Castle**



the farm buildings of the modern Castletown home. Close by is thought to be the site where the Dongans built their replacement residence after the castle was burned down in 1641. The modern Castletown residence was built in its present imposing setting, in 1722, by William Conolly. The importance of the Dongans was reinforced by marriage allegiances with other major and influential Irish families of the time. Thus, William Dongan, 1630-1698, was the second son of Sir John Dongan and his wife Mary who was a daughter of Sir William Talbot who resided in the nearby Carton estate. Sir William Talbot's son, Richard, later became the Earl of Tyrconnell and Lord Deputy of Ireland (1687-8). Although influential in his own right, the fact that William Dongan's maternal uncle was such a powerful figure as the Earl of Tyrconnell must have ensured the future success of the man who was to be the viscount of Clane.<sup>4</sup> For instance the fact would have undoubtedly contributed to his later appointment as governor of Munster.

William's elder brother, Sir Walter Dongan, was involved with the confederate Catholics in 1646, and, as a result, he was transported to Connaught where he later died in 1660. Tragedy was never far from the lives of the Dongans, since in 1651, Sir John's youngest son, John (the boy) Dongan, at the age of seven, was tortured by and subsequently died from, injuries inflicted by Cromwellian soldiers.

Such active participation by the Dongans in the momentous events of seventeenth-century Ireland, and particularly their support for King James, saw William Dongan created viscount of Clane. During the 1689 parliament he sat in the House of Lords while his only son, Walter, was a member of parliament for Naas.<sup>5</sup> Walter died on 1 July 1690 leading a Jacobite attack during the Battle of the Boyne. His body was taken home and is buried in the local graveyard at Celbridge.

After the siege of Limerick and like so many others, the Viscount of Clane, William Dongan, and his wife travelled to France. His estates at Celbridge and elsewhere in Ireland were granted to General Ginkel, Earl of Athlone. When William died in 1698, his brother, Col. Thomas Dongan returned to Ireland following a very successful career in America and petitioned for the return of the Celbridge estate. He was successful in his objective but the very severe financial terms and conditions attached to the agreement forced him in 1704 to sell Castletown to Speaker Conolly and a new era began for this estate.<sup>6</sup> Thomas died in 1715 without leaving an heir and his earldom became extinct.



**Colonel Thomas Dongan**

The story of this Thomas Dongan, whose political initiatives included moulding the evolution of New York, makes interesting history.<sup>7</sup> New York was only a settlement of 270

cabins when Thomas Dongan restructured this part of the newly acquired territory but his influence may still be seen in the administrative divisions of to-day's modern metropolis. Among his many other legacies Thomas created the New York wards or boroughs some of which we now call Brooklyn, the Bronx and he even left an area called Castletown. Although a 'Clane' does not feature among these familiar New York districts, our association with the historic family, so involved in this and so many other facets of seventeenth-century history, should not be forgotten.

### References:

1. There is general agreement that the title was created in January 1686: Éamonn Ó Ciardha, 'Dongan, William Viscount Dongan of Clane 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Limerick', James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (9 vols, Cambridge, 2009). However, John Sheil O'Grady states that the title was created in 1661: John Sheil O'Grady, 'Col. Thomas Dongan of Castletown, Kildrought, soldier and statesman', *Leinster Leader*, 30 Sep. 1905.
2. An exception to this is Smith's account of Castletown estate which gives an excellent account of the Dongans' time at this property: Fifi Smith, *Castletown Estate: A walk through history* (Cornwall, 2010).
3. Smith, *Castletown Estate*, p.5.
4. Ó Ciardha, 'Dongan, William...' Smith, *Castletown Estate*, p.7, states that Mary was the daughter of the earl of Tyrconnell.
5. Ó Ciardha, 'Dongan, William...'
6. Éamonn Ó Ciardha, 'Dongan (D'Unguent), Thomas', James McGuire and James Quinn (editor), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (9 Vols, Cambridge, 2009). The variant of the name (D'Unguent) derives from the fact that Thomas spent a considerable period of his early life in France and this was the French spelling approximation of the way his name was pronounced in that language.
7. See for instance Smith, *Castletown Estate*, p 30.

## THOMAS CONNEFF, THE PRIDE OF CLANE

by Ciarán Reilly

*‘Three non-pareils Kildare can claim,  
Honourable, clean and manly.  
Their names can grace the hall of fame,  
Dempsey, Conneff and Stanley.’*

*Anonymous Kildare Ballad (1929)*

### Early Life

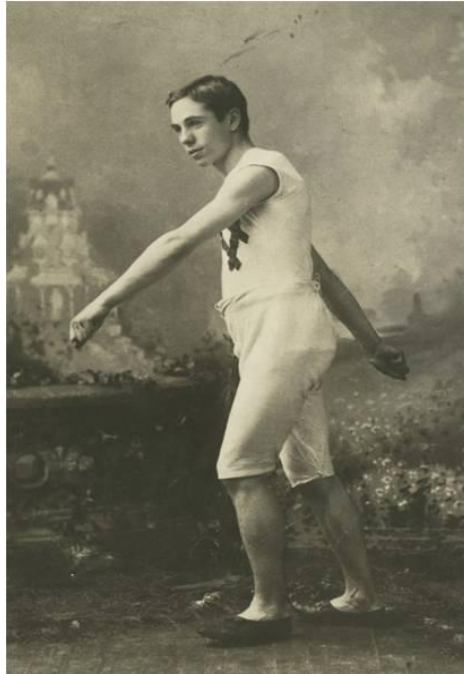
Born in the townland of Kilmurry near Clane, county Kildare in 1866, little is known of Conneff's early life. His father, James rented a one acre holding from Charles White, a middleman renting land on Lord Cloncurry's estate. The Conneff family were noted blacksmiths, plying their trade in the neighbourhood of Clane, in the shadow of the Jesuit College at Clongowes which may have provided regular work. Conneff first came to prominence in the mid-1880s in the local athletic meetings at Clane, Kilcock and Carbury amongst other venues at a time when such competitions were regular features of the emerging Gaelic Athletic Association. It was at these events, organised under GAA rules, that Conneff learned his trade. Here he excelled with such success that within twelve months of his first race he became a household name in Irish athletics. Conneff was present in June 1884 at the first ever sports meet to take place in Clane. The *Leinster Leader* of 14<sup>th</sup> June 1884 reported a highly successful event attended by all classes of people. Such events prompted Conneff to take to the track, while he also received encouragement from his uncle, Patrick O'Rourke. At the same time another 'Clane' native, John Edward Kelly, or as he was better known, Jack Dempsey, the non-pareil, was World Welter and Middle Weight champion offering further inspiration to the young Conneff.

However, his early career was shrouded in some controversy as he was engulfed in the early struggles and disputes which

existed between the GAA and the Irish Amateur Athletic Association. On one occasion he was prevented from competing at a race meeting when a dispute arose as to what rules would govern the event.<sup>1</sup> That it happened in Conneff's native town may have resulted in some dissatisfaction on his part and may have influenced his subsequent move to America. In June 1885 Conneff made his debut upon his home track of Clane 'having the previous year seen for the first time some running, and became ambitious to do likewise'.<sup>2</sup> Although he failed in the sprints 'for which he never possessed the essentials of height and weight', he won the 440 yards and the half mile in a field of Leinster's finest. Later that year he won the half-mile and the mile at Carbury and the mile events at Kilcock and Celbridge. By the end of 1886 he was setting new standards and ran Irish distance champion JJ Manning close at Monasterevin over a half mile. During these races he was described as having 'a pale, motionless face and effortless stride'. However, his major breakthrough came in capturing the half mile at the Caledonian games at Ballsbridge, when in the colours of Haddington Harriers, he won the Irish Amateur Athletic Association Championships at 880 yards and mile flat, on a rain-soaked track. Later that month an even bigger crowd turned up to see the *Freeman's Journal* Athletic Club Sports Day where one of the races saw Conneff, now Irish champion squaring off against his English counterpart Nalder.<sup>3</sup> After a fine showing Conneff was pipped on this occasion by McCabe of Cavan.<sup>4</sup> Victories followed in other provincial towns' athletics meetings including Mullingar, Newbridge and Wexford.<sup>5</sup> Consequently when the Irish Amateur Autumn championships took place at Ballsbridge, where the band of the Royal Irish Constabulary entertained spectators, Conneff was amongst the top billing.<sup>6</sup>

The following year, in June 1887, he secured a 'hat-trick' at Limerick, when he took the 880 metres, one mile and two miles, now being attached to Inchicore Gaelic Club. Indeed, it is said

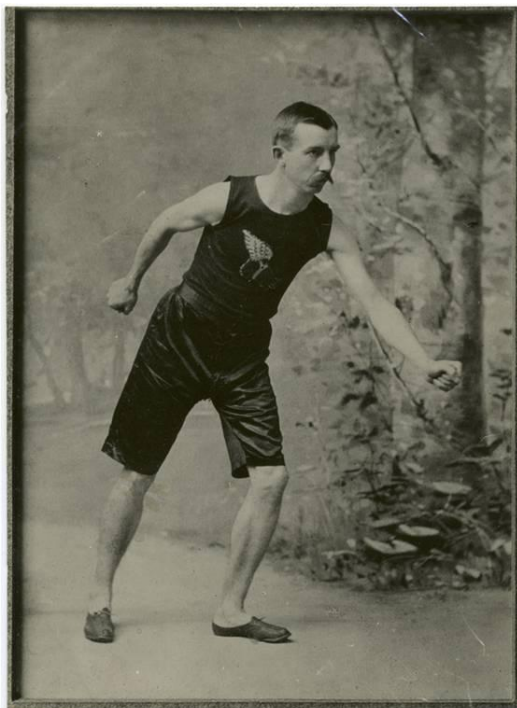
that there is an area in the Inchicore district, known as 'Conneff's Corner'. A month later the Irish Amateur championship was again annexed in a time of twenty minutes and 55.45 seconds, thus setting an Irish record. It was about this time that Conneff was employed by the commercial department of the *Freeman's Journal*, where there was an immense sporting interest in the 1880s. The newspaper duly hailed his victory concluding with confidence, that it was the greatest race ever seen in Ireland.<sup>7</sup>



**Tommy Conneff**

The following month, buoyed by this success, and perhaps owing to the encouragement of Fred Gallagher, sports editor of the *Freeman's Journal* who realised his potential, Conneff went to the north of England championships at Liverpool. The event over steeple took place before an estimated crowd of 40,000

people.<sup>8</sup> Here he took on the English Champion, F. Mills and the visiting Anglo-American ‘wonder’, E.C. Carter. Conneff trailed the leaders for much of the two mile race. When Mills raced away from Carter around the final bend he was hailed by the crowd as the easy winner. Suddenly Conneff made his move passing Carter and catching Mills to win with a remarkable time of nine minutes 45.8secs. It was his first international victory.



**Conneff's great rival E C Carter**

### **Conneff and Carter: The Race of the Century**

Unhappy with the result and seeking a rematch, Carter agreed to come to Ireland later that month to meet Conneff in his home patch to clarify who the world's greatest was. Seizing the opportunity, the *Freeman's Journal* widely publicised the event, dubbing it ‘the race of the century’ and over 20,000 spectators

turned out at Ballsbridge to see it. Thousands took the opportunity to wager on the race and no doubt Fred Gallagher took a special interest in the outcome. In the week leading up to the race it emerged that Conneff had injured his big toe, but Gallagher sought to quash rumours of his demise and hired a doctor for round the clock observation. The International Amateur Athletic Association sanctioned the race and presented a specially struck Gold Cross and Chain for the winner. One writer noted that as Conneff stood waiting for the whistle he could have been a 'choir boy', but his 'barrel legs and a powerful chest' showed that he wasn't.<sup>9</sup> John Purcell, known as 'Honest John', fired the pistol to start the 'race of the century'.<sup>10</sup> In 1950 Dave Guiney recalled in the *Leinster Leader* that Conneff running 5 yards behind Carter on the last of 16 laps ran past him with a burst of speed to win in 19 minutes 44.4 seconds, a new Irish record.<sup>11</sup> Newspapers around the world carried the result that Conneff had triumphed. Taking his leave for America, Carter tried to persuade Conneff to join him there but to no avail.

For him, the following months were spent touring the country and where he didn't race he held the tape or acted as the judge.<sup>12</sup> The *Freeman's Journal* did not want him racing in the build up to their own carnival in September as it would guarantee a bumper attendance. Such was the interest in the carnival that tickets were pre-booked, an unheard of occurrence in Irish sport as all clamoured to see 'the athletic marvel of the age'.<sup>13</sup> He was also deemed important enough to be included in the list of arrivals and departures from Kingstown in the daily newspapers, something usually reserved for lords and ladies!<sup>14</sup>

### **Conneff in America**

In the week following the race with Carter, the Manhattan Athletic Club telegraphed Conneff asking him to travel to America and compete for them, offering to pay his expenses. As



he had commitments to the *Freeman's Journal* Club he declined the offer sending a somewhat curt reply: 'declined thanks. engaged Freeman's carnival 13<sup>th</sup>. Conneff'.<sup>15</sup> But by 1888 the lure of America was too much for Conneff to turn down. He was not emigrating out of necessity, but instead to throw his hat into world athletics, realising that if he was to prove himself as the best in the world he would have to do so on American soil and before an international audience. He was probably disillusioned by the *Freeman's Journal* and the hold they had on him and as word filtered through of the races being won by Carter, he had to go to America where he would prove once and for all who was the world champion.

Before departure, the William O'Brien's GAA club in Clane held a meeting on 12 January 1888 to present an address to the departing Conneff and gave him a bag of sovereigns. Later that month a supper given in his honour at the Burlington Restaurant on St Andrews Street, Dublin attended by eighty people and chaired by Fred Gallagher the editor of *Sport*. Guest of honour was T J Farrell who first brought Conneff onto a running track and was accompanied by a large crowd from County Kildare.<sup>16</sup> In America he quickly established himself and won the mile and five mile races against the GAA Invasion teams of 1888 at Madison Square Gardens.

Conneff ran away with the American title for the five miles, and retained it for the following three years, as well as taking two mile titles and one over the ten mile distance. In 1891 he reduced the American mile record to 4 minutes 21 seconds and two years later, took nearly four seconds off this time when he did 4 minutes 17.8 seconds. He also won the US 15 kilometre road race in 1890. In the same year at Montreal, Conneff snatched the Canadian two miles in record time. 1891 found him

winning the American titles for the mile and five miles at New Orleans. At the Boston Games of August 1893, he broke the world record for the mile. Much was made of the fact that Conneff favoured running spikes which gave him an advantage over other competitors.<sup>17</sup> The knowledgeable track reporter and former athlete Malcolm W. Ford contrasted him with the taller runners who typified the middle-distance fraternity in 1891:

*Conneff stands five feet five tall and weighs 127 pounds in running condition. He possesses a rather big body, which has a large capacity for vital organs. His arms are noticeably stout for a distance runner. He moves with a light, springy action that takes him over the ground without giving the impression that any effort is being used.... There are but few distance runners who combine the staying power, grace and speed of Conneff.*<sup>18</sup>

Conneff was said to have disliked training and did not race for a period in America, although he returned home to Ireland in 1892 while suffering from typhoid, spending three months in Richmond hospital and a long period in Clane. In America Conneff had a number of jobs which included clerical office duties, a car conductor and as a bar manager at Waynard Palace Hotel while he also enrolled as a medical student before quitting that to join the army. Why he chose to remain an amateur for so much of his best years remains a mystery. The first international match ever between America and England was fixed for 1895, and Conneff who had by that time hung up his shoes, was persuaded to make a come-back. Trainer Mike Murphy put him on a strict three month training regime on Travers Island. After coming off a night shift as a Pullman car conductor he astonished everyone and won the race in style, as America won all the events.<sup>19</sup> But, on this occasion, Conneff was carried off the field with exhaustion after competing and winning two races, signs perhaps that he was in decline.<sup>20</sup>

It was, said Caspar Whitney athletic authority for *Harper's Weekly*, the most remarkable performance ever seen on an American track. Conneff was carried off the field on the shoulders of his club mates, while the band played 'Yankee Doodle'.

In 1896 Conneff made the decision to turn professional. Although suffering from malaria he competed against F.E. Bacon in three high profile races watched by crowds of over 10,000 people including Theodore Roosevelt at Old Worchester Oval. Returning to full health Conneff challenged George Blennerhasset Tincler a law student at Trinity College, to a race. Tincler easily defeated a now failing Conneff in the race and in a subsequent rematch. It was the end of the road for Conneff and his athletic career.

### **Conneff's Military Career**

When the Spanish-American war broke out in 1898, Conneff enlisted in the U. S. Army and saw service in Cuba, Puerto Rico, St Michael's, Alaska and later in the Philippines. Amongst the battles he was engaged in was at El Caney and San Juan Hill. When the war was over he was stationed in the Philippines where he worked as a clerk to Troop E of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. It was here on 10 October 1912 he was found drowned in the Pasig River.

News of his death took some time to reach Ireland. The *Irish Independent* reported his death on 21 December 1912 and recalled his 'feats of wonder and admiration on the track'. According to the *Manila Daily Bulletin* Conneff's body had been found floating in the Pasig river. There were no marks of violence on his body and it was ascertained that he had been in the water for about twenty four hours. On his possession was a watch, some money and a pair of new sunglasses. He was described as a 'peaceful and sober man' whose death was 'an

accident'. However, the fact that he was a good swimmer raised questions. The paper asked whether he was 'rendered helpless by a blow?' It concluded by saying that 'he has no family except his old father in Ireland. His removal was well attended and there were many floral tributes'.<sup>21</sup>



**Grave of Thomas Conneff, Presidio National Cemetery, San Francisco**

## **Conclusion**

In August 1946 when Martin Egan of Shanaglish Athletic Club in Galway won the Irish four miles at Dundalk, he broke Conneff's fifty-nine year old world and Irish record set in 1887, probably the last of his records to fall.<sup>22</sup> Part of the reason for Conneff's absence from the sports history pages may have been because of a controversial decision taken in 1913 when John Paul Jones of Cornell University broke Conneff's 1895 record and the International Amateur Athletic Association decided to hold this as the first ever record and never adequately explained why Conneff's record was ignored.<sup>23</sup> Of interest also is the fact

that Conneff is even mentioned in *Ulysses* by James Joyce as one of Ireland's great heroes.

That Conneff never ran in the Olympic Games probably assigned him to the pantheon of forgotten stars. Today, Sergeant Thomas Patrick Conneff lies buried in the US Military cemetery in San Francisco, in the shadow of the magnificent Golden Gate Bridge. He remains a peripheral, if all but forgotten figure in Irish sports' history, and indeed all but forgotten in his native county Kildare.

### References:

<sup>1</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, 23 July 1887; Earnan P. de Blaghd, 'Cold War in the Dublin G.A.A. 1887', *Dublin Historical Record*, (Oct., 1968), pp. 252-62.

<sup>2</sup> Wayne M. O'Leary, 'Thomas Patrick Conneff and the birth of the modern mile racing in America' in *Canadian Sports History Journal* (1995), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *FJ*, 31 July 1886.

<sup>4</sup> *FJ*, 2 August 1886.

<sup>5</sup> *FJ*, 17 August 1886.

<sup>6</sup> *FJ*, 25 August 1886.

<sup>7</sup> *FJ*, 25 July 1887.

<sup>8</sup> *FJ*, 1 August 1887.

<sup>9</sup> O'Leary, 'Thomas Patrick Conneff', p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *FJ*, 20 August 1887.

<sup>11</sup> *Leinster Leader*, 14 October 1950.

<sup>12</sup> *FJ*, 8 September 1887.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *FJ*, 19 September 1887.

<sup>15</sup> *FJ*, 26 August 1887.

<sup>16</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 14 June 1888.

<sup>17</sup> E & E Cashmore, *Making sense of Sport* (New York, 2005), p. 512.

<sup>18</sup> *New York Times*, 27 January 1888 and *Harper's Weekly*, 30 May 1891.

<sup>19</sup> Edward S. Sears, *Running through the ages*, N. Carolina, 2001, pp 121-2.

<sup>20</sup> J Sprechman and W Shannon, *This day in New York Sports*, New York, 1998, p. 265.

<sup>21</sup> *Manila Daily Bulletin*, 11 October 1912.

<sup>22</sup> *Connaught Tribune*, 22 July 1994.

<sup>23</sup> *Irish Independent*, 28 July 1984.

## CLANE'S PARNELL COTTAGES<sup>1</sup>

*by Pat Given.*

As the citizens of Clane know so well, the pleasant environs of our town provide numerous opportunities for valuable exploration and effortless learning about our heritage. Locally, one can stop and absorb the pleasing visual impact of the motte and bailey structures which guard some of the primary approaches to our town, the impressive Clongowes college, the well kept Blackhall stud, the defensive remnants of the medieval Pale and the many other aspects of landscape archaeology whose presence have for centuries, and sometimes even longer, reminded Clane locals and travellers of past events. Unless sensitively tuned to their historic relevance, it is very easy to miss other more understated features of our country-side such as the numerous well-kept and comfortable cottages which dot our roadsides. These cottages are much less ostentatious than the many other, architect-designed and impressive stone-built, former landlord residences which share their environs but these smaller, picturesque cottages also possess a precious, but less-frequently chronicled history. The story of these 'Parnell cottages', when explored, reveals the long struggle undertaken to address the enormously difficult living conditions experienced by the Irish labourer in the years immediately after the Famine.

This struggle for equality extended from the legacy of the misery bequeathed by the famine, through the anguished period of the 'Parnell split', when that leader's formidable power in the British House of Commons was so tragically weakened, and it continued into the early years of the twentieth century and the final days before the dawning of Irish independence. The story of the campaign for agricultural labourers' rights complements the struggle for tenants' rights during the days of the Land League and together they took a roughly parallel course over the

same time period. One of the labourers primary demands was for the provision of acceptable standards of habitation and many of today's 'Parnell cottages', as their name suggests, find their origins in those circumstances. This review seeks to recall briefly the main events along the path to the eventual victory which left us with these numerous pleasant cottages on the Clane landscape.

The problem of poor housing for Ireland's agricultural labourers did not commence with the famine. As early as 1836 the Poor Law Commissioners recommended that a comprehensive solution to the problem was required. The solution then suggested consisted of the provision of allotments of land with 'rent, tenure and conditions fixed by a body to be established under the title of the Board of Improvement'.<sup>2</sup> In the absence of such action and in the wake of the 1840's potato failure, the destructive impact of the subsequent famine on the population of agricultural labourers may be measured by the extent of the decline in their numbers from 1,300,000 in 1841 to 329,000 in 1881. This population decrease was occasioned through the effects of famine combined with the subsequent increase in emigration and the overall change from tillage to pasture farming which was occurring at the time. A subsequent parliamentary paper, written in January 1870, reported that in some parts of the Trim Poor Law Union agricultural wages had increased by seventy-five per cent in the previous twenty years, i.e. from 1850. In Kildare and Meath an increase of thirty per cent was recorded in the same period while in both Tullamore and Mullingar Unions the increase was shown as being in the order of fifty per cent. In spite of this sizable increase the average rate of wages was still only 1s. 4d. per day or 7s. 1d. per week. Unsurprisingly, in eight out of the twelve Poor Law Unions surveyed the labourers were stated to be 'not contented'. The report attributes this discontent *'to [their] uncertainty of*



**Interior of mud cabin at Kildare**  
*Illustrated London News*  
9<sup>th</sup> April 1870<sup>3</sup>



**A labourer's cottage with  
a pigsty and acre of land**



**John Noonan's Parnell cottage on Millicent Road**



*employment...to improvident habits, to the wretched dwellings they inhabit and to the influence of evil agitators.*<sup>4</sup>

From the 1870s forward a slightly more favourable political climate saw the enactment of a series of laws to ease the transfer of land ownership from landlords to tenants. At the same time, the tenants' employees, i.e. the rural labourers, continued to be overlooked. The 1881 census highlighted the squalor in which so many of the rural labourers existed by showing that a total of 431,119 families were living in either third or fourth class accommodation. Fourth class accommodation was defined as a one roomed cabin made of mud or perishable material while third class accommodation was similar but had one to four rooms with windows. Living conditions such as these, forced the legislators to act and, in 1883 the local Poor Law Guardians were empowered to provide labourers' cottages with half-acre allotments attached. The timing of this shift in legislative policy towards the agricultural labourer is interesting since it had been only two years earlier, in 1881, that the rights of their employers, the tenant farmers, was recognised in law, giving them a more permanent interest in their holdings. This initial Labourer's Act proved unpopular mainly because the cost of the new housing came from finances raised from the rates. Thus, farmers objected to;

*the splendid houses built for them [the labourers] while they [the farmers] who have to pay the rates for building the houses have to live in miserable cottages.*<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand the local Poor Law guardians, who were responsible for implementing the building of labourers' cottages, were usually large rate-payers themselves and were consequently reluctant to agree to expenditure on projects which served to increase the rates. A final problem concerning these early laws was associated with the fact that the legislation in

force did not provide for the repair of neglected or condemned cottages.

The subsequent slow implementation of the provisions of the 1883 act was investigated by a parliamentary select committee in 1884/5 and in addition to the impediments listed above the committee suggested a number of other areas which required remedial action. Their investigation showed that while the cottages could be built for £70 each, legal fees of £35 brought the total cost to £105. Financial studies showed that, at the weekly rent of 1s. per week, the cottages were being provided at a loss of £2 5s. per annum and that the loss was driven mainly by the high legal costs. The committee recommended that these issues be addressed and in addition they also introduced a proposal to provide each cottage, even those already constructed, with a half acre allotment and again called for the compulsory demolition of cottages considered unfit for human habitation.

The remedial legislation to address the conditions of the agricultural labourer was slow to emerge and eventually public and political considerations forced the establishment of a Royal Commission on Labour in 1893. The resulting major report is important, not alone because of its recommendations but also, because of the amount of informative evidence it contains.<sup>6</sup>

In Part IV of the report, the Kildare area and other Irish areas are examined and reported upon by Assistant Commissioner W. P. O'Brien C. B. An important recommendation made by him concerned the method of administration of the scheme for the provision of labourers' cottages. Up to then, the labourer was required to initiate the proceedings to obtain suitable accommodation. O'Brien remarked that 'the noisy and importunate labourer alone, is often provided with accommodation' and he added that 'labourers in many cases say

nothing lest they should irritate employers'. O'Brien's opinion and the evidence which he quotes are shocking. He said that:

*in few if any of the countries with which we are familiar has the condition of the class of agricultural labourers in regard of their house accommodation ever been known to sink to a lower level of wretchedness than that very largely reached in Ireland...in modern times.*

A witness stated that:

*their [labourers] houses are seldom fit to keep out the rain, the floors are damp, the windows do not deserve the name, mere holes frequently stopped with rags, they have very rarely built chimney braces...nothing can be more miserable.*

The conditions reported from the Naas Poor Law Union, which included the Clane area, in the 1893/4 report, echo these comments. With regard to the supply of cottages the report blandly states 'more are wanted.' The condition of the cottages in this area is described as:

*some are in wretched condition and appear to have been provided by the occupiers themselves, who are bog labourers.*

The construction of the non-Union cottages are described as:

*frequently made of bog sod and thatched. In some cases sodded on top instead of thatched.*

For the Union-provided units, the cottages had four rooms, described as kitchen, two bedrooms and a scullery or occasional bedroom. These also had two outhouses, described as a pighouse and a small house for sanitary purposes and the latter was said to be 'rarely, if ever used.'

Although a comment on the quality of ventilation was requested by the commissioners none was given in the Naas report. On drainage, the Naas report showed that there was no planned drainage provided to the cottages in its area and again it stated that closets were provided but rarely used. Finally in the Naas area, no practical steps had been taken ‘to meet the urgent demand that exists for a better supply of pure water’.

The Guardians of Mountmelick Poor Law Union remarked on the cost of the cottages since they thought that they ‘cost too much money for the accommodation in them’. They also highlighted the change occasioned when the occupants of the ‘miserable hovels’ moved into ‘these comparatively comfortable houses’.

*They dress much better, keep their houses far more neatly, and I have many come to me to ask for flower roots to plant in their gardens, and in flower pots in their windows.*

O’Brien also commented that, although the allotment of land accompanying the new cottages had been increased to one acre since 1892, ‘it was still not an accomplished fact’. Some of the new cottages had been given just a few perches and rarely did the gardens exceed a quarter of an acre while many did not have any garden. With standards such as these it was to be expected that, as the century ended and the historic 1899 elections loomed, the issue of labourers’ cottages would become an election issue. In Clane, John Delamere Whyte, who had been a long-time Poor Law Guardian for the area, ran as a candidate for election as a District Councillor, Clane Division. In a letter addressed to the electors of the county electoral division of Naas, and published in the *Kildare Observer* dated 11 March, he presented his ‘platform’ [sic] as:

*Restoration of the evicted tenants (being one myself), compulsory land purchase, release of the unfortunate political prisoners, bona fide home rule, and no half measures, Catholic university question, the building of cottages for the labourers- which I have always advocated at the Board as P L G.*

Between 1900 and 1914 there are frequent references in official reports regarding the progress made on the provision of cottages to Kildare labourers. The twenty-eighth annual report of the Irish Local Government Board showed that between 1891 and 1900, the construction of 16,303 houses was authorised while 14,385 were constructed and 14,281 were already occupied. In the Naas area a total of one hundred and eighty-one cottages were authorised while one hundred and seventy-eight were constructed and let in that same period.<sup>7</sup>

The thirty-sixth annual report of the Local Government Board for Ireland, published in 1908, is a valuable source of information on the specification to which the cottages were now being constructed. The report provides a model specification for the cottages, which it suggests could be built for a cost of £170 each. It places great emphasis on the need for a dry, well drained site for the cottages which should be well ventilated and heated.<sup>8</sup>

By 1914, the forty-second annual report of the Local Government Board of Ireland reported that, while 52,277 cottages had been authorised under the scheme, a total of 43,702 cottages had been constructed. In the Naas Poor Law Union out of four hundred and fifty-one cottages authorised, four hundred and twenty cottages had been constructed and ten were in course of construction.<sup>9</sup>

The looming world war and the subsequent war of independence in Ireland brought a temporary slow-down to the progress of this very worth-while initiative. In 1919, the forty-sixth report of the

Local Government stated that since 1883 some 47,868 cottages had been built. Unfortunately, a further 3,390 applications for additional cottages, each having the required one acre plots attached, were on hold due to ‘curtailed capital expenditure.’ The report further stated that 708 cottages also required an additional half-acre to bring them up to the legal specification of one acre but these applications were required to await the availability of funds. The existence of these ‘Parnell cottages’ in the Clane area provides a great example of the history to be found behind so many everyday built artefacts in our local environment.<sup>10</sup>

### References:

<sup>1</sup> This essay focuses on the development of rural housing in county Kildare. There are a number of very valuable publications which cover the history of urban housing in Kildare: James Durney, *In the shadow of kings: Social housing in Naas 1898-1984* (Naas, 2007); James Durney, *A bridge, a town, a people: Social housing in Newbridge 1900-1996* (Naas, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Enda McKay, ‘The Housing of the working classes 1883-1916’ *Saothar*, xvii (1991), p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Kildare County Council, *Directory of archaeological sources relating to County Kildare* (Naas, 2008), p. 68, where it was published courtesy of Kildare county council’s Local Studies Library, Newbridge.

<sup>4</sup> *Report from the Poor Law inspectors on the wages of agricultural labourers in Ireland*, p.15, H.C. 1870 [C.35], xiv, 1.

<sup>5</sup> A Tyrone farmer as quoted in MacKay, ‘The Housing of the working classes 1883-1916’, p. 28.

<sup>6</sup> *Royal Commission on Labour 1893/4*, H.C. 1893/4 [C.6894-xix], xxxvii Pt 1.131.

<sup>7</sup> *Annual report of the Local Government Board for Ireland, for the year ended March 1900*, pp 485-7, H.C. 1900 [Cd. 338], xxxv, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Annual report of the Local Government Board for Ireland, for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 1908*, pp 268-71, H.C. 1908 [Cd. 4243], xxxi, 1.

<sup>9</sup> *Ann.report of the Local Government Board for Ireland, for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> Mar 1914*, pp 156-68, H.C. 1914 [Cd. 7561], xxxix, 595.

<sup>10</sup> *Annual report of the Local Government Board for Ireland, for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> Mar 1918*, p. lx, H.C. 1919 [Cmd. 65], xxv, 1.

## **FR JOHN DOYLE - A CLANE PARISH PRIEST AND THE BUILDING OF COOLERAGH CHURCH**

*by Michael Clifford*

Fr. John Doyle was appointed Parish Priest of Clane, Rathcoffey and Staplestown in 1948. The *Leinster Leader* of the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 1948 reported that:

*His Lordship, Most Rev. Dr. Keogh, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin has appointed Rev. John Doyle, C.C. Rath, Portarlinton, to be Parish Priest of Clane in succession to the late Very Rev. Laurence Keogh, P.P.*

Fr. Doyle was born about 1890 in Crann, Clonegal, Co. Carlow. He belonged to a family of five; he had two sisters and two brothers. Coming from a farming background, he always had a great interest in farming and as a priest later on, he maintained this interest and became very involved with the farming community in each parish where he served.

Following his studies in Knockbeg College, Carlow and St. Patrick's College Maynooth, he was ordained on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July 1915 in St. Patrick's College, Carlow. He served as a curate in Suncroft. Prior to his appointment as Parish Priest of Clane he was attached to Rath parish where he had served for many years. While he was in Rath, he took a keen interest in all the affairs of his parishioners. He was an ardent sports follower and was a member of the Emo Sports Committee. He was also a member of the Laois County Committee of Agriculture and had been vice-chairman for a number of years. He had just been re-elected to this position at the previous July meeting. His parishioners regretted his departure; nevertheless, they wished him the very best on his new appointment as Parish Priest of Clane.

Fr. Doyle was a very saintly and prayerful man. He was regarded as an ascetic man, one who lived an austere life. As a pastor he was very progressive. 'For a man of his years, Fr. Doyle had a most unusual flexibility and freshness of approach with regard to the changes in the Liturgy recommended by Vatican II' (*Leinster Leader* March 10th 1973.) At the same time he was also very humorous. The story is told that on one occasion, one of the curates at the time was visiting him one evening when a representative of a local organisation arrived with a colour television, which Fr. Doyle had won in a local raffle. Fr. Doyle had a black and white television which he ever hardly turned on, something which was well known to the curates in the parish. The visiting curate was delighted for him and said so, while at the same time secretly thinking that he would be told to take the colour television away to his own house. To his utter consternation and dismay, Fr. Doyle told the curate to take the colour television out of its box and set it up. He also told the visiting curate that he could take away the old black and white set for himself.

He was very committed to the people in the parish and was at all times very concerned for their temporal as well as their spiritual needs. He got involved in all the activities of the parish and could be regularly seen driving the young people to the various activities such as carnivals and other sporting events. He was very interested in education and was supportive of all efforts to improve the educational facilities in the parish. He gave great support and encouragement to the Presentation Sisters in their efforts to set up second level education for students in the locality. In dealing with his work in the parish, one can readily say that he left his mark in practically every aspect of its life. He will be best remembered for the building of the Christ the King church in Cooleragh, a monument to his hard work and his commitment to his parishioners. The requirement for the new church arose because of the building of the adjacent village of



Coill Dubh in the 1950s. This new village was necessary to serve the needs of the people who migrated to the area to work on turf harvesting and consisted of permanent family homes to replace the previous camps or billets.

### **The Church of Christ the King, Cooleragh**

Numerous meetings were held as to where the new church would be built and many local families offered a free site for the building of the church. At a very early stage the Crosby and McCormack families both offered a free site. Later on the Ward family offered a free site. This site was provisionally accepted. Initially, many of the committee were in favour of building the church within the village of Coill Dubh itself. In all of this work, Fr. Doyle played a very prominent part. Eventually, it was decided to build the new church on some land that was donated by Robin and Maureen Cusack. Robin had been very active in the Muintir na Tire organisation from the beginning. Robin died on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2000.

Once the site had been decided upon plans were prepared and these were put out to tender. The architectural firm of Lardner and Partners of 61 Lower Baggot Street and later of Usher House, Dundrum was awarded the contract of designing the new church. Over the years, this company has been involved in many major construction projects including the Irish Life Building, Bank of Ireland in Coolock, Cavan Post Office and Telephone Exchange and the Waterford Regional Hospital. The chief architect for the Church was Mr. André Zakrzewski, who was born in Poland. After his family fled from Poland at the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, the family settled in Scotland where he received his early education. Later, the family moved to Ireland. He trained as an architect in UCD. Andre took a great interest in the work of the building of this church. After his death, such was his affinity to that part of the parish that it was his wish that he would be buried in Staplestown. The

engineering consultants were Ove Arup, a Swedish company. Mr. Noel Dooley was the quantity surveyor. The Cementation Company were involved in the laying of the foundations and the main supporting concrete beams which are very much a feature of the church. The main building contractor was Mr. James Geraghty from Ardclough with a tender for £26,335. At the time when the contract was signed, the parish had collected £24,500.

Monday the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1961 was a very special day in the parish. Shortly after noon Very Rev. Fr. J. Doyle assisted Right Rev. Monsignor Miller, P.P. V.F. Newbridge who blessed the site of the Church and performed the ceremony of cutting the sod. Both curates Fr. Keogh and Fr. Cullen were present. Mr. Jim Geraghty handed the shovel which was used to turn the sod to the Monsignor. The church was designed to hold 520 worshippers. Monsignor Miller, speaking after the ceremony said that:

*The building of a church is an honour to a parish, I congratulate all concerned. God's blessing is now on the site, and may the work prosper.*

### **Foundation stone of Cooleragh church**

On Sunday the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April, 1961, the foundation stone of the church was laid after the eleven o'clock Mass by Most Rev. Dr. Keogh, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. This was to be the fourth church in the fast expanding parish of Clane and Rathcoffey.

Very few, if any, of the locals or those who were involved in the construction of the church will forget what happened shortly after the work on the church commenced. The incident is very much part of local folklore and a witness recently described it as follows:

*Most of the main beams which supported the sides and the roof had just been put in place and maybe one or other was not secured or supported sufficiently. Be that as it may; however, on one fine evening in 1961 a beam fell over and if it did, it lay against another beam, which it dislodged and in no time, they were all levelled to the ground.*

Undeterred, the people got on with the work even though the collapse added to the expense of building the church.



**Cooleragh Church**

Many local tradesmen secured work on the building of the church. Many still survive to the present day while quite a number have passed on to their eternal reward. The following are some of those workers who were involved in the building. Simon Maguire was the general foreman. Dan Newton and Nicky Farrelly were two of the bricklayers. Because of the huge discrepancy in their height, rumour has it that the scaffolding always had to be laid at a slope to make sure that Nicky was able to work at the same level as Dan. Tom Johnson, (RIP) was another bricklayer. Others who worked on the building included

Billy Lawlor, carpenter, Michael Fields, Andy Dunne, Jim Neill (RIP), labourer and Matty Kerrigan, (RIP).

Sunday the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 1963 was a dreadful day weather-wise. It was also a great day of celebration for the people of the parish and especially for the parishioners in the Coill Dubh part of the parish. In torrential rain, Most Rev. Dr. Keogh, blessed, dedicated and opened the doors of the new church in Cooleragh to the faithful, their new church dedicated to Christ the King. He was assisted by Rev. W. Hughes, C.C. Nurney and Rev. J. O'Leary C. C., both former curates in the parish. The High Mass was celebrated by Very Rev. John Doyle, the parish priest. He was assisted by the curates of the parish, Rev. J. O'Leary and Rev. P. Keogh. The Gregorian Chant was sung by the Clane Parish Choir which was conducted by Rev. Mother Perpetua. The organist was Mr. J. Dunny. There was a very large attendance of clergy from many parts of the diocese as well as representatives from St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Right Rev. Mgr Brenan, P.P., V.F., Edenderry preached the sermon at the blessing of the new church.

At the reception, held afterwards in the Bord na Móna works, Fr. Doyle said that this was the end of eight years of labour and the beginning of a new church for the people, and that both events marked important chapters in the history of the parish. He thanked his Lordship the Bishop, Monsignor Miller, Monsignor Brenan and the clergy for their support. He thanked the parishioners and all those who had done so much to help with all the collections which had gone on over the years and made it so much easier to get on with the building of the church. He also thanked the architectural firm and the building contractors who had been involved for the first time in the building of a church. Dr. Keogh thanked Fr. Doyle for all his work. He also congratulated the parishioners for all their work and financial support for their new church.

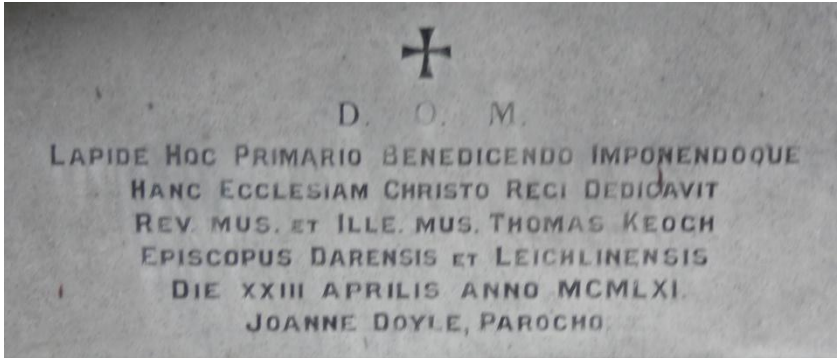


**At the Blessing of the Church of Christ the King Cooleragh  
From Left to Right: Rt. Rev. Mgr. Miller P.P.V.F. Newbridge; Rt. Rev. Mgr. Mitchell, President St. Patrick's College, Maynooth; Mr A Lardner, Lardner & Partners Architects; His Lordship Most Rev. Dr Keogh, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin; Mr J Geraghty, contractor; Very Rev. John Doyle P.P. Clane. (Leinster Leader 12<sup>th</sup> October 1963)**

Many on the day commented on the unique Stations of the Cross in the new church. Fr. Doyle was mainly responsible for these stations. Messrs Murphy, Devitt, Dublin, were the designers and manufacturers of the church windows. On one occasion when Fr. Doyle was visiting the company, he suggested that the Stations of the Cross be made from all the broken glass pieces in the workshop. The company acceded to his wishes. An outspoken man, he was the essence of kindness. He was well liked by the parishioners who appreciated very much all that he had worked for and achieved on their behalf. He was a pious man, a man who was noted for the time he spent in prayer in the parish church.

Fr. Doyle retired due to ill health towards the end of 1971. In doing so he was possibly the first parish priest in the diocese, if

not in the country to retire. On his retirement he was given accommodation in the convent. Before his retirement and after he had retired to the convent, the Presentation Sisters took great care of him.



**The foundation Stone of Church of Christ the King, Cooleragh**

Fr. Doyle died on the 12 February 1973 and is buried in the grounds of the parish church in Clane. He is the uncle of Fr. James Doyle, C.C. who served in the combined parishes of Naas, Sallins and Two-Mile House. He was succeeded as Parish Priest by Fr. William Hughes, who had been a curate in Clane in the 1950s.

**References:**

*County Kildare Online Electronic History.*

*Kildare Observer* 1926

Family interviews and recollections

*Leinster Leader*

## MISCELLANY

Census records are an invaluable source of information for those researching family history. They provide a snapshot in time showing whole families together in a household. Information is given regarding ages, occupation, counties of birth etc. Unfortunately only the census returns for 1901 and 1911 are available for Ireland. Later censuses are unavailable for reasons of confidentiality. It is particularly regrettable that unlike England and Wales where records for each decade back to 1841 survive in the form of enumerators extracts all of the Irish records were destroyed by British Government order. Apparently the authorities were unaware that it was not the practice to make enumerator's extracts in Ireland.

Genealogists attempt to overcome this deficiency by referring to census substitutes the best known of which is Griffiths Valuation of Tenements dating from circa 1850. This however deals mainly with land and buildings and only records the name of the head of each household.

We are fortunate in Clane in that a census of the parishioners of the Catholic parish Clane was undertaken in 1880. The original document, which is held at Clane Parish Centre, is an exercise book containing a hand-written list of the parishioners of the Catholic parish of Clane.

The original entries dating from 1880 are in ink. Later additions were made in pencil up to circa 1885. These added new families, deaths and information on individuals who left the parish. Many of the entries are difficult to read due to challenging handwriting, fading or overwriting with other material. Clane

Local History Group has transcribed the material in the exercise book and a copy is held in the Parish office.

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### **A letter from America**

The columns of the *Kildare Observer* on 4 August 1906 carried the following letter from a Clane emigrant, Joseph Whyte, whose family was well-known in the area. His father, J.D. Whyte, was, for many years, a Poor Law Guardian for Clane district. He was also a starter for the Turf Club and was described as ‘one of the most brilliant amateur horsemen Ireland ever produced.’<sup>1</sup> As a jockey J.D.’s claim to fame was that he had ridden the winner of every important steeplechase in the country. Joseph’s mother, mentioned in the letter, was a well known figure with the Kildare Hounds and Harriers and prior to her marriage she was Hannah Eggshaw of Hybla, Monasterevin.<sup>2</sup>

There is much of value to note about the letter itself. For instance, its contents reveal the lasting links which bound our Irish emigrants to their homeland in this era of very difficult communications. The vital role played by our Irish mothers in maintaining that contact is also very evident. The writer’s clear pride in our games and flag which were then such obvious symbols of Ireland’s emerging nationhood is worth noting. This pride was later harnessed to provide successfully the energy which fuelled the struggle for Irish freedom.

*(To the editor of the ‘Kildare Observer.’)*

*Dear Sir, - As I receive your valuable paper each week from my mother (Mrs Whyte, Viewmount, Clane), and find it very interesting to me, as I was a constant reader of it before I left the Green Isle over nine years ago, I enclose you a clipping*



*taken from the 'Bridgeport Morning Telegram' of July 5<sup>th</sup>. I should like you to publish it, as the members of the Kildare team were all born in the Short Grass county, and their fathers or mothers, brothers or sisters would be glad to see that our national pastime is flourishing in the land of the free. Our grounds were decorated with the green flag of old Ireland on one side, whilst on the other waved Old Glory the Stars and Stripes. The Riley mentioned is Willy Riley of the Crom-a-boos, and Ed Ennis of the Clane team of about 1899; Jack Cruise is also a Clane man; Fitzgerald (captain) is an old Monasterevan man, while the rest were from Kilcock, Kildare, Kilcullen, Athy; some of the others I did not know when in Ireland. I am president of the club here, and I arranged the game, and the Kildare club is a credit to Ireland. Although born in Clane, I attended the Christian Brothers' schools in Naas for many years, and am an old classmate of Willy Rankin, president Co. Committee. Joe Rafferty was also going to the Brothers' school at that time. To all the young men around 30 years old in Naas remember me, and if you wish to publish any or all of this letter you may do so, and I know my old schoolmates will be glad to hear I am doing well. –Yours very sincerely,*

*Jos. E. Whyte*

*190 Park St., Bridgeport,  
Conn., U.S.A., July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1906.*

#### References

<sup>1</sup> *Kildare Observer*, 28 Oct. 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

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### **Forgotten Clane Saints**

In the post-Vatican II era, the Catholic Church has removed some notable names from their traditional calendar of saints. It appears also that the celebration of the special place formerly held by a number of Irish saints may have been de-emphasised,

or worse they may even have silently suffered the same fate as St. Philomena, St. Christopher and others. The qualifications necessary for the bestowal of the beatific title on many of the traditional Irish saints were vague, and sometimes even of questionable authenticity. Nevertheless the continuous survival of the special status given by our forefathers to these personages for over a millennium and a half suggests that we should continue that recognition in some form, or at a minimum, pass on some knowledge concerning their former revered status to future generations. In order to assist in this role, copies of authorised calendars of traditionally revered Irish saints exist<sup>1</sup>. A quick perusal of one of these sources demonstrates that Clane is associated with three saints, two of whom appear to have been somewhat overlooked in our contemporary historical records.

Clane, and in particular its early monastery, is already very well associated with St Ailbe, a bishop of Emly in County Tipperary.<sup>2</sup> Less well known are Clane's other saints, St Ithernaisc and St Bran Beg who are recorded in Hanlon's calendar of Irish saints which is also the source of the following information.

**St Ithernaisc** was an abbot and confessor in Scotland but he is recorded as being of Clane, County Kildare. Tradition states that he was a nephew of St Columba on the father's side and it is suggested that he lived in the sixth or seventh century. St Columba, who was also known as Columcille, died in 597 at Iona. Columcille is said to have studied at Clonard and to have founded the monastery at Kells county Meath. The close links between Iona, Clonard and Kells combined with Clane's location in north Kildare makes Ithernaisc's association with the locality a plausible possibility. It is known that in 1243, at the Scottish town of Lathrisc in Fife, a church was dedicated to St John the Evangelist and to Blessed Ethernasc. The saint is unusual in Hanlon's records since the Canon refers to

Ithernaisc's day of commemoration in Ireland, 24 January, as a 'reputed festival.' This requires clarification on two counts. Firstly the use of the word 'festival' is unusual since most other saints are recorded as having 'feasts.' The hierarchical relationship between 'feast' and 'festival' is not defined. Secondly, Hanlon uses the word 'reputed' to signify a question-mark about the date. Two of Canon Hanlon's Irish colleagues agree on the date 24 January but in Scotland the saint is remembered on 22 December which is said to be the saint's correct festival day.

**St Bran Beg** of Clane is recorded in numerous calendars of Irish saints, including the ancient Irish manuscript *Martyrology of Tallagh* where the name is given as 'Branbice of Chlaonadh'. Strangely this is another saint of the sixth or seventh century who is also reputed to be connected to St Columcille. He is said to be a son of Columcille's sister, Cumenia or Cuimne. The *Martyrology of Donegal* mentions that a festival was celebrated on 18 May in honour of the saint which was also the official feast day of the saint recorded in Hanlon's calendar. This is not surprising since Bran Beg's father was said to be Degill who had connections with Tyrconnell. Canon Hanlon further suggests that St Bran Beg *may be regarded as the founder and patron of Clane* since he believed, without citing any evidence, that Bran Beg probably founded a monastery in the locality. Bran Beg is said to be buried in the city of Derry and it should be noted that Canon Hanlon also stated that at the date of his writing (1875) the saint was annually venerated on 18 May at the church in Clane.

#### References:

<sup>1</sup> See for instance: John O'Hanlon, *Lives of Irish Saints* (9 Vols, Dublin, 1875-1906).

<sup>2</sup> Tony McEvoy, 'St. Ailbe and Clane Monastery' Seamus Cullen (editor), *A History of Christianity in Clane and Rathcoffey*, Clane, 2011, pp. 16-21.

## **GROUP EVENTS APRIL 2012 TO MARCH 2013**

### **Wednesday 18 April 2012**

Launch of Coiseanna – Clane Local History Group's new journal followed by a short talk by Pat Given on a Clane link to the Titanic.

### **Wednesday 16 May 2012**

Carita O'Leary, 'The Church of St. Michael and All Angels'.

### **Saturday 18 August 2012**

To celebrate Heritage Week, 18-25 August 2012 the group has been invited by the owners to visit their historic Courtown House, Kilcock.

### **18-25 August - Heritage Week.**

'Main Street Clane: its houses and its people', An illustrated talk by John Noonan in Clane Library. 8pm Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August

### **Wednesday 19 September 2012**

Pat Given, 'From Calico to Whiskey'.

### **Wednesday 31 October 2012**

John Noonan, 'A Seanacháí at Halloween'.

### **Wednesday 21 November 2012**

Dr Ciaran Reilly, 'Tommy Conneff – a Clane Legend'.

### **Wednesday 16 January 2013**

James Durney, 'The Death of Lieutenant John Wogan-Browne'.

### **Wednesday 20 February 2013**

Seamus Cullen, 'Sinead de Valera and WT Cosgrave, their Kildare Connections'.

### **Wednesday 20 March 2013**

Michael Clifford, 'The Clane, Killarney GAA Connection'.

*All the above are at 8pm in the GAA Centre, Prosperous Road, Clane, unless otherwise stated.*