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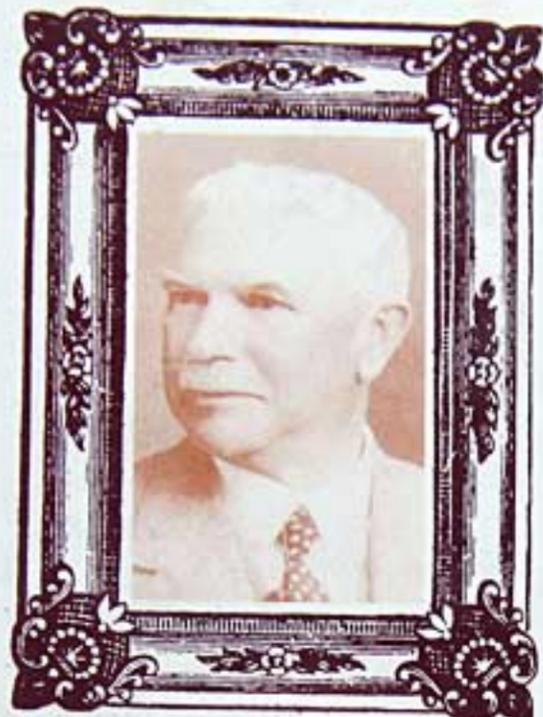
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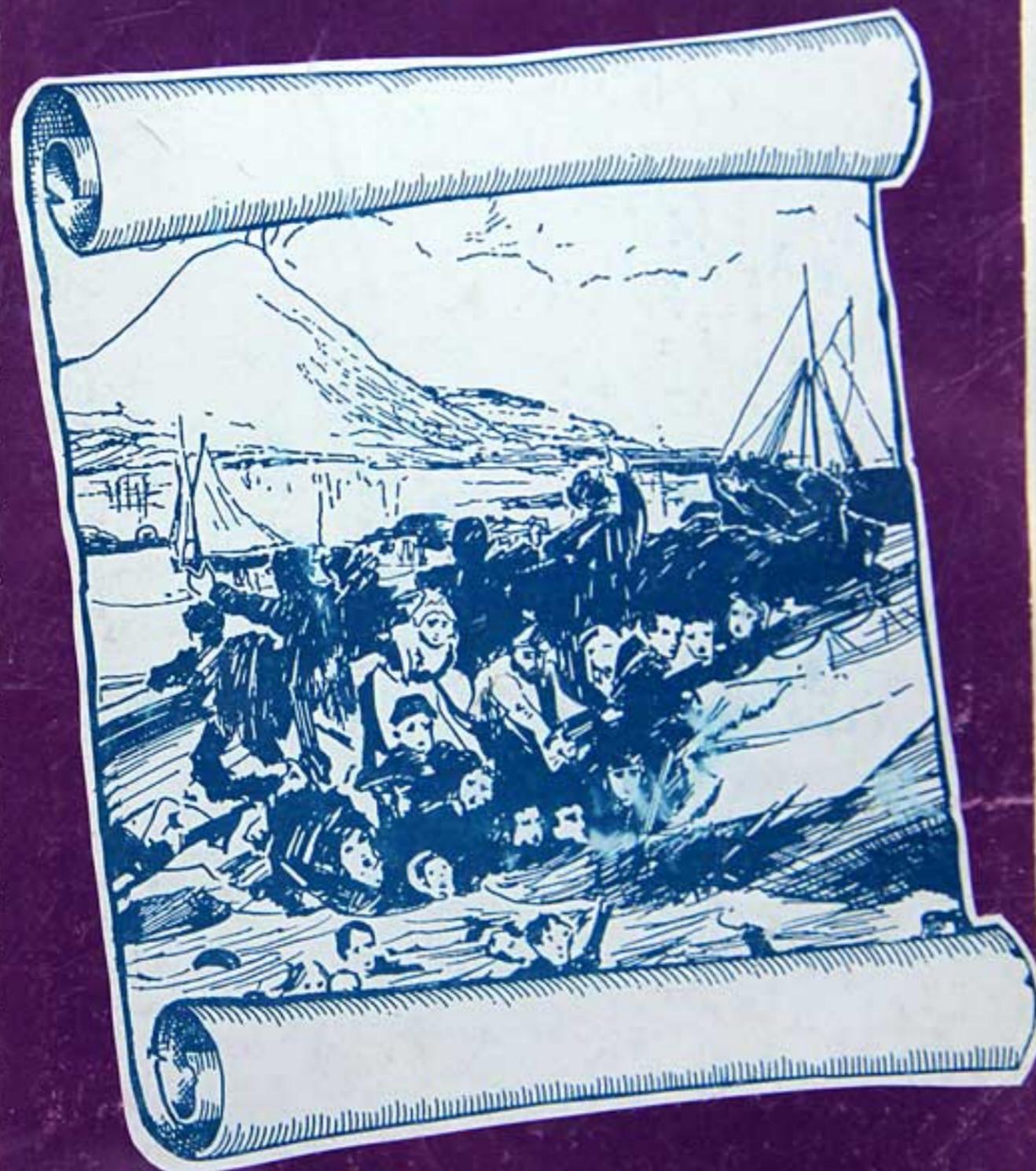
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*Front Cover:*  
*Healy's Hooker Capsized - (Mayo News, Saturday, 30 June 1894).*  
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## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Clew Bay Boating Disaster .....	5
KIERAN CLARKE	
Theobald Dillon, a Newcomer in Sixteenth-century Mayo.....	24
BERNADETTE CUNNINGHAM	
Kilmeena, Part II .....	33
JARLATH DUFFY	
Traitor or Patriot? The Case of Edmund Garvey of Rosmindle .....	63
TERENCE GARVEY	
Saint Marcan's Loch and Early Ecclesiastical Ruins at Rossclave .....	79
REV. P. J. GULLANE	
P. A. Heneghan – Alias Burton – The Dauntless Man from Dooncastle .....	83
JARLATH DUFFY	
Major John MacBride .....	89
OWEN HUGHES	
The Administration of the Poor Law in Mayo, 1838-1898 .....	98
CHRISTINE KINEALY	
Famine and the Land War: Relief and Distress in Mayo, 1879-81, Part II.....	111
GERARD P. MORAN	
The Parish of Oughaval (Westport) – A Brief Historical Sketch .....	128
GEORGE O'CONNELL AND PEADAR Ó FLANAGÁIN	

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## CLEW BAY BOATING DISASTER

by Kieran Clarke

Darby's Point, Achill Island, June 14, 1894. Early morning as nearly 400 people gathered on the shore waiting their turn to board the currachs that would ferry them from the pier to the four hookers at anchor in the channel. In turn the hookers would bring them to Westport and from there the islanders would make their way by steamer to Glasgow or Liverpool to work in the fields of Scotland or England.

To understand the reasons for this annual exodus of young islanders, one must appreciate the extreme poverty which existed in Achill in the last half of the nineteenth century. In 1894 the Westport correspondent of the *Irish Daily Independent* described the island as . . .

. . . a stretching patch of bog and barren soil, yielding only stones and stunted weeds and hemmed in by tall hills, presenting here and there rocky fronts to the Atlantic and making sunless valleys dark and rugged, with scarce a vestige of grass – all hard rock – refusing to yield to labour even the smallest return in fruit . . . The starved cattle prowl along the roadside in search of food, and get more in all probability than their owners. There are 6,000 people living in the most miserable hovels that ever sheltered man or woman, worse than many a man builds for his dog or fowl, getting not a penny, one might say with considerable truth, from the land for which they nevertheless pay rent . . . The villages of Achill swarm with people living under such conditions. The few fowl, the pig, the horses, the cow are only a wretched mimicry filling up the scene. They bring in next to nothing but the Irish peasant will try every means of turning a penny.<sup>1</sup>



*Darby's Point, Achill Sound (Photo by K. Clarke).*

This year the need to 'turn a penny' was greater than ever before. Two years earlier the islanders had been in a 'state of starvation so destitute that they ate all the potatoes they had for seed and were unable to crop their lands.'<sup>2</sup>

In 1892, Mr. Balfour, then Chief Secretary, and accompanied by his sister, had visited the island to 'see the extent of the poverty at first hand.' As a result the Seeds Act was framed, 'under which a Government loan was granted to the local Poor Law Guardians for the purchase of seed for the unfortunate islanders. Repayment of the loan was to be made in two years or at some future time as the Lord Lieutenant might decide. Upwards of £4,000 worth of seed was given in this way, but large quantities of seed failed' resulting in many local people being unable to meet the repayments. The Government persistently refused to have the time for repayments extended and as the money became due 'the unfortunate people were being harassed by seizure of crops, milch cows and other belongings.'<sup>3</sup> Consequently in 1894 they were compelled to seek work in Scotland and England in even larger numbers than usual.

At Darby's Point on that Thursday morning, the first hooker to be loaded was the *Victory*. Owned by Patrick Sweeney and John Healy, and crewed by John Healy and his brother Patrick, the *Victory* appears to have been the largest of the four hookers bound for Westport on that day. Indeed next to the 'monk's boat' the *Victory* at '16 Tons burden' was probably the largest hooker in Achill at that time.

Patrick Lavelle, who with John Patten crewed 'Patten's Hooker', watched as the Healy brothers helped the excited young islanders from the currachs that had ferried them from the shore. Lavelle was later to testify that 'he did not know how they got room in her'. He himself 'took a boat load after that. I said I would take no more but I did not refuse any'.<sup>4</sup>

The third boat to leave was owned and skippered by James Fadden and he 'left Achill the previous morning with about seventy passengers'.<sup>5</sup> Last to leave was 'Kilbane's hooker' and as it was weighing anchor at 9 a.m., the *Victory* was off Currane and moving towards Mulrany where it would turn south east for Westport Bay.

There had been several days of rain and strong winds but the morning of the 14th was 'fairly fine with a nice gale blowing'. By mid-day Healy had rounded the bar at Dorinish, where one witness described the sea as being 'dead calm'. It was certainly calm enough for Jack Healy and Edward Scanlon to squeeze between the passengers demanding their 6d. fare. Healy later claimed to have collected £1-15-0, and thought that about five people had avoided paying him. This was his method of estimating that the *Victory* was carrying only 75 passengers, but the police were later to prove that there had been 126 passengers on board.

The 6d. fare was little in comparison to the 5/- fare from Westport to Glasgow. Most of the islanders had to borrow this sum from the agent who had recruited them for the Scottish farmers, but yet as the hooker sailed up

Westport Bay the singing and laughter of the passengers rang across the water.

Soon John Healy could see the Laird Line steamer *Elm* ahead. It had run aground on 'the flats' off Annagh Head. Registered in Glasgow and calling at Westport on a regular basis, the *Elm* was unloading part of its cargo into a lighter. On board was Captain Carswell, his crew, pilot Thomas Gibbons and a number of men under stevedore Michael O'Malley.

It was now nearly 1.00 p.m. and as the *Victory* approached from the west, a rowing boat carrying teenagers Edward O'Malley and Thomas Burke was approaching from the opposite direction with a message for Captain Carswell. In 1957, Edward O'Malley, then 80 years of age, recalled . . .

. . . we had tied up our boat to the lighter and had boarded the steamer where we were watching the transfer of part of the cargo to the lighter [which was owned by Anthony Gill]. The sound of the singing attracted us and we casually watched the approach of the hooker. All of a sudden as it came nearer, it changed its course and we were struck almost lifeless as we saw it capsize.<sup>6</sup>

Edward Cannon, one of the passengers on board the *Victory* described what had happened.

[We] were coming along and had reached about half a mile from Westport Quay, where the Glasgow steamer was anchored. A lot of those on board were young things who had never seen a steamer before, and they stood up. Healy ordered them to sit down several times, but they all pushed to one side to see the steamer. There was a number of people down in the hold . . . He [John Healy] told them several times to sit down. They were all standing up. He told them to sit down that 'the boat was going to jibe.' The wind was coming ahead of her. The boom and the sail brought the boat over, and it went down in a sudden way, so that he did not know what happened after. The boom did not carry any of the people over but it caused the boat to go on it's side.<sup>7</sup>

On the *Elm*, Edward O'Malley saw what happened:

. . . at first glance, we were able to see that when the mast struck the water, the mainsail and jib had imprisoned under them several of the poor islanders. The water was a struggling screaming mass of human beings. Some were grabbing their companions in order to try and save themselves; but the inevitable result was they were dragging one another underneath. [Tom Burke] and I quickly recovered from our initial shock and within a minute or two we had jumped into our boat and pulled away from the steamer to help in the rescue operations. We kept hauling as many as we could out of the water and into our boat, while several others clung to the gunwhales. In a few moments, our boat was packed with water-sodden people - men and women - we must have had over two dozen of them. In the excitement we did not realise that we were near to providing a further tragedy, for with our super-cargo and those clinging on to the sides, the water was pouring over the gunwhales and the boat was nearly awash. Fortunately a stevedore on the steamer was quick to realise

our plight, and jumping into a boat he pulled over to us and took off some of those on our boat as well as those clinging to the side.<sup>8</sup>

The stevedore, Michael O'Malley, 'would have gone down too' as in the space of a few minutes his 'boat was in a very bad mess and she was filling'.<sup>9</sup> He in turn was saved by John Gibbons, Innishlyre, whose boat had been coming up the bay ¼ mile behind the hooker and who arrived at the scene with the crew of the steamer in four of their boats coming close behind him.

Edward O'Malley continues, . . .

. . . I saw some of the sailors try to release some of the unfortunate victims who were imprisoned beneath the sails, and though they were successful in extricating a few who were caught near the sail edges, they were powerless – as everybody else was – to release the others owing to the weight of the sodden sails and the pressure of water. I remember looking in that direction while we were rescuing others, and I could see the heads of the submerged ones being pressed up against the sails in their brief but vain struggle for survival. The bulge of each head in the sail reminded me then of a football.<sup>10</sup>

Edward O'Malley and Tom Burke rowed their load of survivors to Westport Quay. Both were later rewarded with the gold medal of the Royal Humane Society.

Michael O'Malley made for Rosmalley with his load, only to return again to help the sailors bring the remaining survivors to the *Elm*, where according to James Robertson, mate of the *Elm*, 'three of the passengers who were taken out of the water were believed to be dead, but by the efforts of the steward of the steamer [Mr. Taylor] and Captain Carswell, they were resuscitated.' He added 'the great bulk of the passengers on board the hooker were girls and the remainder, with one or two exceptions, were young men.'

By now, more boats had arrived from Westport Quay to assist the sailors. James Robertson continues . . .

. . . we next commenced to take out the dead. Eighteen were taken out of the hold. We did not get any out of the fore-castle. When we took off those who were clinging to the hull the hooker righted a little, and we were able to get at the dead bodies in the hold with the boat-hooks. When we came alongside first the sails were nearly below the water, and the belief is that none of the passengers who were hanging on to the hooker, or who were in the water free of the hooker were drowned.

News of the tragedy reached Westport. The first rumour was that a hooker had been overturned by the cable of a steamer at anchor in Westport Bay. Crowds hurried to the Quay anxious to obtain information of the disaster, only to find when they reached there, boat after boat, at intervals, bringing up the bodies which had been recovered. 'Language fails utterly to picture the almost indescribable horror of the scene. Tenderly and carefully the bodies were removed from the boats to the slip near the Demesne . . .'

Inside an hour and a half from the time of the occurrence – a little before twelve o'clock – 'eighteen bodies were recovered, a considerable number of

them being women – some young, and a few advanced in years.' The bodies were moved to 'one of the stores adjacent to the police barracks, but as others arrived it was found that it did not afford sufficient accommodation for all, and the store adjoining had to be forced open, where one half of the bodies were placed.'<sup>12</sup>

The hundreds of Achill people who had come in the other boats awaited the arrival of the corpses. 'As fond relatives were recognised the wailing rent the air and the scene was heartrending.'<sup>13</sup> These islanders who had survived remained walking the quay, watching intently the incoming boats, 'weeping and ringing [sic] their hands disconsolately.'<sup>14</sup>

Stories and rumours of heroism passed from group to group. One such story was that of the young man who had been pulled into a rescuing boat, but on seeing his sister in danger, plunged into the water, seized his sister's shawl with his teeth and sank with her, only for both of them to be subsequently rescued by another boat.

By evening twelve more bodies had been added to the eighteen previously found, making 'a total of thirty corpses now lying in the improvised dead-house at Westport Quay.' One of these had been found early in the evening by the constabulary boat. Six were found by the Rosminna coastguards and four by Clew Bay islanders who had hauled the scene of the wrecks with grappling hooks.

Of the twelve now recovered, eight were female, none of whom 'appears to have been more than eighteen years old, amongst them a child of not more than eight years who was on a visit from Scotland with some friends . . . Amongst the males is a poor old man whom dire necessity alone could have pulled from his home in Achill to earn wages in the harvest fields of Scotland.'<sup>15</sup>

A relief committee had been quickly formed under the chairmanship of Mr. P. J. Kelly, chairman of the Board of Guardians. He enlisted the help of A. M. O'Malley, J.P., Mr. Horne, the Resident Magistrate, P. J. Doris, assistant clerk of the Union, local clergy and many other prominent Westport people, including Myles Stauton who became the hon. sec. of the committee.

P. J. Doris was given the responsibility of getting survivors in need of medical assistance to Westport Hospital. A. M. O'Malley wired Mr. Tatlow, manager of the Midlands Great Western Railway Company, asking if it would be possible to have the bodies conveyed on the new and as yet unopened railway line from Westport to Achill Sound. Mr. Tatlow in his reply offered to put on a special train, but only as far as Newport, as the remainder of the line had not yet been handed over to his company. This problem was overcome when Mr. Horne dispatched a mounted policeman to Newport to persuade the engineers there to allow the train to travel on to Achill.

By now large numbers of Achill people were arriving in Westport on foot and in carts. Many remained walking about Westport all through Thursday night 'crying pitifully'.

The following morning saw a group of women 'in scarlet home spun

petticoats and coloured kerchiefs crowded around the entrance to a yardway on the quay at Westport. Without tears, without vehement gesticulation, they sobbed a mournful wirrasthrue.<sup>16</sup>

Later that day the *Elm* would set sail for Glasgow carrying 160 of the islanders but first Mr. P. J. Kelly, the Coroner opened the inquest on the bodies that had been recovered.

In a large yard owned by Mr. McBride and Mr. Gill, 31 of the bodies lay in plain deal coffins, the lid in each case being labelled with the name of the person whose remains it contained. The relatives of the victims were gathered about, some of them in silent grief, others wailing pitifully at the loss of their loved ones. The spectacle conveyed a very sad impression.

The jury having been sworn, the Coroner, [Mr. Kelly] went through the process of identification. Accompanied by the jury he passed from coffin to coffin. As each lid was removed friends or relatives of the deceased were called forward to identify them. Next they proceeded to an adjoining outhouse, where nine bodies still lay uncoffined, the coffins for them not having yet arrived. Here a similar system of identification was gone through. 'The process led to renewed scenes of grief.' The Coroner and jury then moved to 'Mrs. McBride's establishment' where the inquest was continued. A few witnesses having been examined, the police requested a postponement on the grounds that they expected to be in a position to produce further evidence on the following day. The Coroner adjourned the inquest for seven days.<sup>17</sup>



View in Clew Bay, Co. Mayo. (From a Lawrence Photograph).

Later that evening, all the bodies having been coffined they were moved to the railway station at Westport Quay, loaded in wagons and sent to the town station. Here it was announced that the train to Achill would leave at 10.18 a.m. the following morning, Saturday, and 'long before the hour for starting, the poor Achill people assembled at the Westport railway station, most of them showing signs of the great mental strain which they had suffered during the past few days.'<sup>18</sup>

By ten o'clock news arrived that two additional bodies had been found. An inquest the following Monday would identify them as **Joseph Cooney**, aged 18 of Bleanaskill, and **Patrick Cafferkey**, also aged 18, of Tonragee, but on board the train now were the bodies of:-

**Catherine Molloy**, aged 30, of Achill Sound, who left behind a husband and an aged mother and father.

**Nancy and Martin Cooney**, aged 20 and 15, sister and brother of Joseph Cooney.

Sisters **Mary** (24), **Margaret** (18) and **Annie** (15) **Malley**, the Valley, whose father Owen Malley was now childless.

75 year old **Patrick O'Donnell** and 20 year old **Margaret O'Donnell** of Derreens. Margaret was dumb, as was her sister who had remained at home. Brother and sister **John and Mary Patten**, aged 18 and 20, from Shraheens. Their crippled father was left to mourn them.

**Mary Patten**, 18, of Newillin, who was going to Scotland to provide for her mother and five other children.

10 year old **Mary McFarland** from Scotland. Mary had been living with relatives in Achill and was returning to her widowed mother in Glasgow. She was a cousin of Patrick Cafferkey of Tonragee.

**Mary Scanlon**, 28, of Shraheens, who left behind her stepmother - a very old and feeble woman.

14 year old **Mary Ann Lavelle**, Shraheens, the oldest of a family of seven children.

**Joseph and Bridget Weir**, aged 18 and 15 from The Valley who left an invalid father, their mother and six younger children.

**Bridget Lynchehan**, 20, Shraheens, who left her father and six young children.

**Thomas Caffrey**, aged 37, of Belfarsad. His wife and 8 children had remained in Achill.

Both parents and two sisters of **Bridget McLoughlin**, 24, of Derreens, were still alive.

**Catherine Gallagher** of Currane, aged 17, left a widowed mother and several younger children.

**Sibby Quinn** of Achill Sound was 15 years of age.

**Honor Patten** of Shraheens, was aged 20 and was the daughter of a farmer.

**Mary Doogan** of Dereens, was 40 and was the wife of a blind fiddler and mother of 2 children.

**Catherine Walsh** was also aged 40 and had been living in Bleanaskill with her married brother.

**Winnie McAneely**, aged 16, was also from Bleanaskill. Her mother had died only two weeks previously.

**Sibby McAneely** of Bleanaskill was aged 34. Sibby had been the sole support of her bedridden mother.

**Bridget Joyce**, aged 18, of Tonragee West, was the eldest of 5 children.

19 year old **Mary Cooney** was also from Tonragee. Her two brothers had also been on the *Victory* and were saved.

**Honor English**, aged 16, from Rosturk, was daughter of Martin English, and was going to Scotland with her cousin Catherine English from Achill Sound. Catherine was rescued.

**Patrick Cafferkey** of Belfarsad was 18, and was identified as a batchelor and labourer.

John Healy was at the station when the train moved out at 10.30. The *Irish Independent* records that . . .

. . . the police thought it prudent to prevent the Healys attending the funeral to Achill as it was feared, considering the excited state of the people, that they would not be safe in doing so. There was, however, little necessity for the precaution, as the relatives of the deceased who attended the inquest do not appear to attach any blame to John Healy or his brother. A rumour has been circulated that the former, who is half owner of the boat, the other owner being Patrick Sweeney senr., lies in a very serious condition at the residence of Mr. Myles Staunton, James St. and it is stated that he has been attended by a priest and a doctor.<sup>19</sup>

Healy's condition was not however as serious as reported. He 'was seized with a fainting fit, was promptly attended by Father Macken and after about three quarters of an hour had almost recovered.'<sup>20</sup>

As the train arrived in Newport, a large crowd gathered on the platform and expressed 'great sympathy with the afflicted relatives, most of whom are in a weak and dejected state.' 'Old man English, who was examined at the inquest and whose young daughter is amongst the dead had a severe fainting fit and was in a very weakly condition. Mr. Myles Staunton of the Relief Committee luckily had a flask of brandy of which the old man took a little.'

The train proceeded to Rosturk where the body of Honor English was removed from the train. 'Fathers Connolly and Fitzgerald got out of the train and gave the poor relatives all the consolation they could.'

The *Mayo News* describes how as the train got under way . . .

. . . large numbers of people were on the banks - kneeling with joined hands - evidently in prayer. Crowds followed the train, which moved slowly, inquiring for relatives and weeping bitterly. At Molranny a vast number of people had assembled and on the arrival of the train there was a loud cry of sympathy with the relatives . . .

On reaching Tonragee, six miles from Rossturk, the coffin of Mary Cooney was removed for internment in the cemetery of that neighbourhood. The sight from the train after the removal was most

touching. The coffin was placed on a bier in the centre of the road. The immediate relatives lay prostrate upon it weeping frantically while other knelt round weeping and praying. The people are wretchedly poor . . .

Through Pollranny townland where some of the victims resided, crowds followed the train weeping piteously.

At Achill Sound, which we reached at 2 o'clock, the whole country round was black with people. The cries which rent the air, and the scene generally was appalling. The train stopped amidst a large crowd who on every side surrounded it. Relieving Officer Lavelle had a large number of carts ready to convey the bodies to the cemetery. Each survivor on leaving the train was embraced by relatives. The relatives of the victims were frantic with grief and rent the air with their sad cries . . .

It would be quite impossible even for the most disinterested bystander to witness the scene unmoved. As each coffin was removed Mr. Grey, jun. announced the name on the lid, and this was followed by a cry of woe from the respective knots of relatives who composed the crowd.

Black flags marked the way across the Davitt Bridge and along the route to Kildownet Cemetery. All 28 coffins having arrived they were laid in the graves as the prayers for the dead were read.

A thick mist had begun to fall some time before. The brightness of the early part of the day had been succeeded by a gloomy foggy mistiness which tended to deepen the sadness of the scene . . . As the first shovelfuls of earth fell upon the coffins, the wild lamentations of the people burst out anew. Shortly afterwards the rain fell more heavily, and a fierce storm arose and the wind shrieking over the mountain sides and along the valleys of Achill seemed to wail in sympathy with the poor sorrow-laden islanders.<sup>21</sup>



*Kildownet Cemetery, Achill Sound. (Photo by K. Clarke).*

The bodies of Patrick Cafferkey and Joseph Cooney arrived by 'open carriage' on the following Tuesday – Cafferkey to be buried at Tonragee, while Cooney was laid to rest beside his brother and sister at Kildownet.

At Westport Quay the *Victory* had by now been refloated and was berthed close to the Idle Wall. 'Westport quay has now resumed its normally quiet aspect, and the only evidence of the late terrible disaster is the many little torn shawls, baskets, and numerous odds and ends, which are to be seen strewn along the pier.'<sup>22</sup>

The inquest on all 32 victims was resumed on Friday, 22 June. The verdict was that . . .

. . . we consider that the deceased were drowned abreast of Islandrue in the county of Mayo on the 14th June, 1894, by the capsizing of the hooker "Victory" and which said hooker was in charge of John Healy and we consider the capsizing took place by the passengers on board rushing to the side of the hooker nearest to the steamship "Elm". We consider that the hooker was not properly ballasted when she left Achill and we consider that the hooker was grossly overcrowded.'<sup>23</sup>

Of the 126 passengers on board, 94 had been rescued.

It was not long before the shocked inhabitants of Westport were to again assist in another sad inquest. On 1 November 1895 five children aged between 8 and 16, and the sons of Patrick Kelly and Joseph Kelly of Islandmore were drowned while fishing in Clew Bay.

## APPENDIX 1

### THE ACHILL DISASTER (Irish Weekly Independent, 23 June 1894)

The further investigation into the circumstances of the sorrowful Achill fatality has not led to the disclosure of any new facts, and although the Coroner's inquiry has not yet terminated, its result may be anticipated with some approach to accuracy. The boat that proved a death-trap to so many was evidently overladen, and at a critical moment there was some mismanagement, or error of judgment, on the part of those in charge. What is even more appalling than the tale of death is the revelation of life on Achill Island which the evidence discloses. The poor people who were migrating to Scotland to gather in Scotch harvests were driven to quit their own little crafts by what a benevolent Liberal Chief Secretary lovingly termed "the pinch of hunger". They should go to Scotland to earn the landlords' rent and the seed rate, and all the other rates that an ameliorative British government imposes upon the very poor Irish for the benefit of British officials and the welfare of the British Empire. Otherwise they would be evicted by due process of law, or the bailiffs would be upon them, and, in one way or another the mysterious

thing called "the law" – which is to the Irish peasant another name for his own undoing – would have them in its claws. Thus young and old cross the seas to earn by hard toil in the fields of Great Britain the wherewithal to satisfy the demands of those who levy toll upon the peasant, and perchance to save up as well a few extra shillings for the comfort of the old people who, being beyond their labour have made their last trip over the water and must stay at home. Boys of fifteen and one little girl of ten were amongst the victims of the disaster. We say advisedly that even if landlords must go without their rack-rents, and even if Governments be embarrassed by the consequences thereof, this white slavery must be brought to an end. It is a barbarous, demoralising, infamous traffic – and heavy is the responsibility that lies upon those who should have checked it but failed to do so. For the present, however, the survivors of the disaster and the families of those who have perished, and who have in many cases lost the rent-earners, claim the sympathy and help of the public. A fund has been started for the purpose of aiding those who have been reduced to distress, and we publish to-day a letter from the High Sheriff of Mayo inviting assistance. No words of ours are needed to commend this timely appeal to the support of the benevolent amongst us.

An inquest was held to-day on the bodies of the thirty unfortunate people who lost their lives through the accidental capsizing of Jack Healy's hooker in the harbour of Westport yesterday forenoon. Amongst those present were: Mr. J. J. Louden, Mr. Joseph McBride, Secretary Harbour Commissioners; Capt. Horne, R.M.; District Inspector Hume, Father Fitzgerald, C.C.; Father Nicholson, C.C. etc.

Edward Cannon, sworn and examined by the coroner, deposed that he knew Bridget Weir and had identified her body. She was about 15 years of age. He also identified the bodies of Joseph Weir, about 18 years of age; of Mary Malley, Anne Malley, and Margaret Malley, aged 24, 15, and 18 respectively. Witness was a passenger on board the hooker which left Achill about 8 o'clock on Thursday morning to come to Westport quay, and thence to proceed to Glasgow. The day was fine. There was a nice gale. Coming over the bar there was a dead calm. They were coming along, and had reached about half a mile from Westport Quay, where the Glasgow steamer was anchored. A lot of those on board were young things who had never seen a steamer before, and they stood up. Healy ordered them to sit down several times, but they all pushed to one side to see the steamer. There were a number of people down in the hold. John Healy was in charge of the hooker, and was steering her at the time. He told them several times to sit down. They were all standing up. He told them to sit down, that "the boat was going to gibe". The wind was coming ahead of her. The boom of the sail brought the boat over, and it went down in a sudden way, so that he did not know what happened after. The boom did not carry any of the people over, but it caused the boat to go on its side.

By a Juror – There were about 100 passengers aboard.

To the Coroner – The boat went on its side; then his feet were in the hold, and he made his escape by catching hold of the boom. He went on the side of the boat, and was picked up by the boats of the Glasgow steamer.

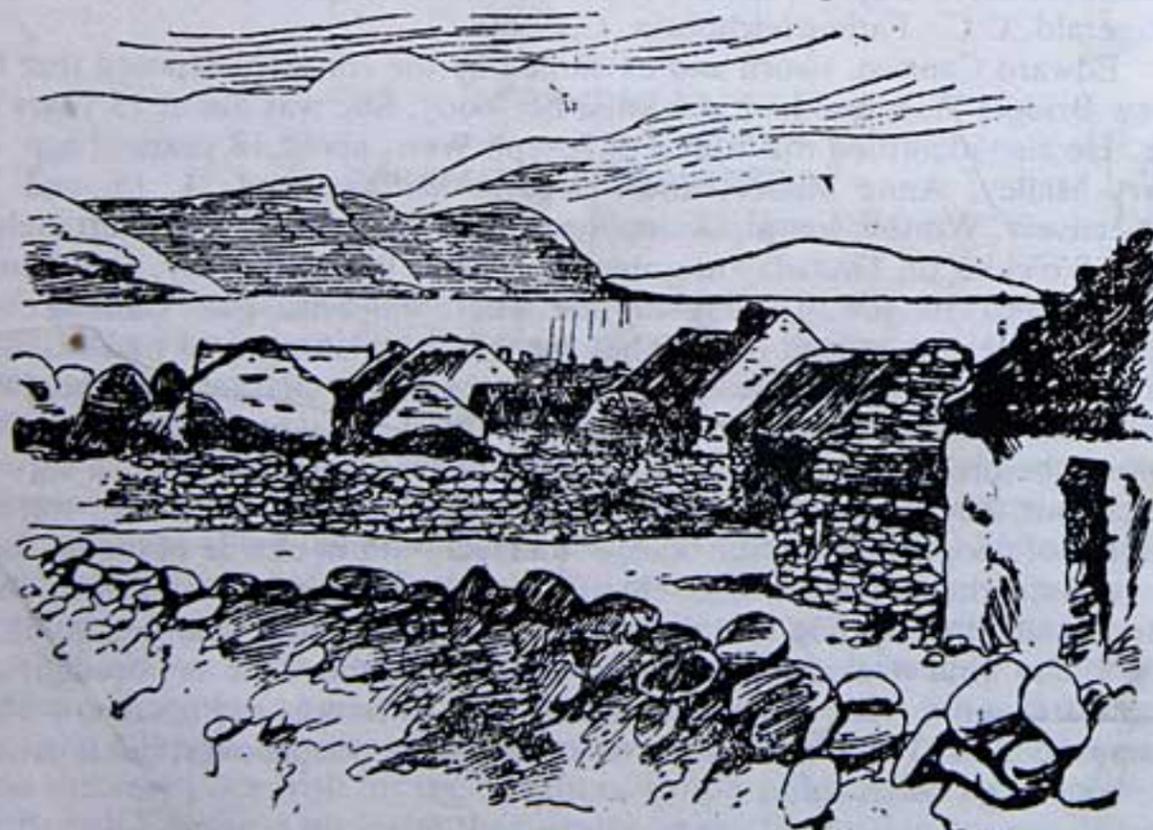
By a Juror – He did not think the boat was overlaoded when he was leaving. The boat left from Darby's Point. He did not know if Healy loosened the sheet when he was going to jibe. As far as he knew nobody remarked when they were starting that the boat was overcrowded.

To another Juror – He was not a connection of the Healys. He could not say if the boat would have jibed properly if it had been ballasted sufficiently.

John Gallagher, Currown, deposed that he knew Mary Patton whose body he identified. He believed she was less than twenty years of age. He also identified Patrick Cafferkey and Catherine Gallagher. Witness travelled by Jack Healy's hooker. The hooker, he believed, belonged to Patrick Sweeny, and was called the Victory. He did not know how many persons were on board the hooker. Witness was on board the hooker when it capsized. He believed he was rescued by some of the sailors of the Elm.

To a Juror – He paid Healy sixpence for his passage. The money was collected about half an hour before the boat capsized. Witness did not know who was steering the hooker while Healy was collecting the fares.

Patrick O'Donnell identified the bodies of several of the deceased, and said he travelled by the hooker on which the accident happened. He paid sixpence for his pasage to Healy less than half an hour before the boat



*Keel and Cliffs of Minaun, Achill. (From a Lawrence Photograph).*

capsized. After they passed the Glasgow steamer Healy turned the sail, and when he was turning the sail the boat turned over. People came up from the hold to look at the Glasgow boat, but he could not say that they went to one side of the boat.

By a Juror – They left at nine o'clock. He guessed that there was about a hundred in the boat. Healy should have had more ballast. If he had known Healy would have taken the number of passengers he did he would not have gone on the boat. The people would not have stirred the same as they did if it were not that Healy went to collect the money.

Healy did tell the people to sit down when he was going to jibe. He could not have run direct to the quay without jibing.

By another Juror – The Glasgow boat had nothing to do with the capsizing of the boat. Only for the assistance of the sailors of the Glasgow boat the entire lot would have been drowned. He heard Healy's brother make the remark that he was taking too many passengers.

To District-Inspector Hume – None of those who came on board the hooker left before it started.

Anthony M'Anely deposed that he came from Achill in the third hooker. Jack Healy's hooker was some distance before them. He did not see the hooker when she was capsized, as the steamer Elm lay between them. When the hooker on which he was got as far as the steamer he saw Healy's hooker capsized. It was shouted on board the hooker on which he was that they should all keep quiet or the same thing would happen them. They took the sails down and passed on in the direction of the quay. The sailors on the hooker said if they touched Healy's hooker they would knock off the people who were clinging to the side and drown them. They saw some of the women struggling in the water as they were passing.

To a Juror – The hooker on which he was travelling was smaller than Healy's. There were about three score passengers on it, but he thought there were more on Healy's.

Frank Mulloy identified several of the bodies.

Peter Cooney, Tonragee, identified the body of Mary Cooney, who was his sister. He identified Mary M'Farland, who belonged to Scotland. She came to Achill last year on a visit to her grandmother at Tonragee. There was a good deal of knocking about while the fares were being colected on board the hooker. When Healy was going to jibe he did not lower the sail. He hauled in the sheet. He (witness) was thrown into the water. He caught hold of a rope first, and then managed to catch hold of the keel; he was rescued by one of the boats of the steamer.

Anne Macaneilla deposed she travelled from Achill Sound in Healy's hooker. When the boat capsized she caught hold of the gunwale. A man who was overhead pulled her on to the side of the boat. She then jumped into John Gibbon's boat, and was brought to the quay.

Martin English, Rosturk Castle, identified the body of his daughter, Honor English, who was aged sixteen. She left his house on Wednesday for

the purpose of going to her uncle's house at the Sound in order that she might proceed to Scotland with a first cousin of hers. Witness heard in Achill about six o'clock last evening of the accident. He saw the body of his daughter this morning.

James Cafferkey identified the remains of his uncle, Tom Cafferkey. Witness travelled from Achill yesterday in Patton's hooker, which left after Healy's hooker. Witness was under the deck of the hooker, and on coming on deck he saw Healy's hooker capsized and a number of people struggling in the water and others clinging to the side. The people on Patton's hooker were afraid to come alongside the capsized hooker for fear they should drown the people who were clinging to it. Patton's hooker went into Westport Quay. He heard that the people on board the Elm shouted to those on board the hooker not to go near the capsized hooker.

A Juror - More of them would have been drowned only for the Glasgow steamer for all the help you gave them.

By the Coroner - There was a boat alongside going to help at the time the hooker in which witness was passed Jack Healy's hooker.

Owen Walshe identified the remains of his sister Catherine Walsh.

Thomas Joyce identified the body of his sister, Bridget Joyce, aged about 18 years.

Patrick Lavelle identified Sibby Quinn. Healy's hooker was so crowded that he did not know how they got room in her. He did not know how many people were in the boat. He heard some people saying the boat was overcrowded. He took a boat load after that. He said he would take no more, but he did not refuse any. If Healy had not collected the money and disturbed the people he would have got in safely.

John Patten deposed to the identification of Catherine Molloy who, he stated, was a married woman. He considered 100 passengers would be the largest number such a hooker as Healy's should carry. He considered there should be three tons of ballast on board. On such a fine evening as the previous evening was he would not lower the sail at all in the operation of jibbing.

James Fadden deposed that a boat belonging to him left Achill yesterday morning with about seventy passengers. He was passing the steamer Elm when he saw Healy's hooker capsize and a number of people struggling in the water, and several of them clinging on to the hull. Notwithstanding that he passed on with his boat, but lowered his sails. He did not try to render any assistance. He came on to the quay and discharged the passengers.

Will you explain to the jury why you did not render some assistance? Because I had enough on board my own boat, and could not have given any assistance. I was going about four and a half knots an hour, and I could not stop or turn back to give assistance. Even if I had been able to stop it would not have been safe for the passengers on my boat for me to have attempted to have given assistance. When I got to the quay I went back in a small boat. It was necessary for Healy to gibe at the place he did. The way in which Healy

gibed on the occasion was not the proper way, to allow the boom to swing round.

John Gibbons, boat owner, farmer, and pilot, deposed that he resided at Innislyre. Yesterday evening he was coming to Westport in a small boat when the accident occurred. He was about a quarter of a mile distant when the hooker capsized. He considered that the mainsail should have been lowered at the time of the gibing. As soon as he saw the hooker capsized he steered for it. A boat from the steamer Elm arrived before him. Witness rescued about 22 of the passengers in his boat. He considered that a hooker like Healy's should carry between 70 and 80 passengers.

To a Juror - With full ballast, he considered 100 passengers too many. With less ballast it would be still more dangerous. It would not have been safe, in his opinion, for Fadden's hooker to have gone to the assistance of the capsized hooker. The captain of the Elm did everything requisite to save life, and were it not for the steamer being there at the time, a great many more lives would have been lost.

John Healy, the skipper of the hooker Victory, deposed that he left Achill yesterday morning. He considered he had seventy to seventy-five passengers on board. The fare he charged was sixpence a head, and the amount collected was £1 15s. There were about five who did not pay. The fares were collected when they were about four miles from Westport quay. The most of the passengers were in the hold at this time. When coming abreast of the steamer Elm a grey man who was on deck spoke to the passengers. Witness did not hear what he said. The passengers at this time were rushing up from the hold of the hooker, and they went to the side of the hooker next the steamer. He cautioned the people several times not to rush to the side. It was the rushing of the people to the side that caused the boat to capsize. The sail went to the side at the same time the hooker capsized. Witness called to his brother to lower the peak, but he was not able to do so. He had about 4 or 5 tons of stone ballast on board at the time, and about half a ton of chains and other ballast.

To the Jury - There was no great rush of passengers. When witness was taking in the passengers in the morning his brothers told him that they would not take any more, and after his brother said that he did not take any more on board. If there were over a hundred passengers on board witness did not get the money for them. The position of the steamer Elm did not interfere with the sailing of the hooker, but if the steamer had not been there the people would not have rushed to the side, and the hooker would not have been capsized. There was no check as to the number of passengers the hooker should take. It was not at all over-crowded at the time, and he could have carried more. He took one hundred and twenty passengers last year.

Patrick Healy, brother to the last witness, deposed that he sailed the boat along with John. They had about five tons of ballast and cargo. He could not form an idea of the number of passengers on board. He had not cautioned his brother against taking any more passengers on board. He told him that the

tide was going out, and that they would do with what they had at present. After he told his brother that he did not take another passenger on board. His brother collected the fares inside the bar. Witness was steering at the time. There was not a stir on board the boat while he was collecting. When they came within a hundred yards of the Glasgow steamer the people were crowding up to see the boat which they were going to go past. The young girls were shouting and singing. All that could went on the side of the boat near the steamer. It was the rush of the people to the side which caused the movement of the sail. It was not his brother's intention to jibe. In consequence of the number of people who were in the boat witness was unable to lower the peak as his brother requested. He was rescued by one of the steamer's boats.

By a Juror - He had more people many times before on the boat. She could carry more than they had on board at the time of the disaster.

The Coroner said the the police were not able to produce any further witnesses before them that day, and, as the inquiry was an important one, he thought every light that could be thrown on the affair should be brought to bear. Unfortunately, the parties who witnessed the circumstance from the Glasgow steamer sailed in their vessel shortly before the inquiry was opened. He thought it would not be prudent, considering the importance of the inquiry, and the number of lives that had been lost, that they should close it without having all the witnesses the police could produce. If they considered that the persons on board the Glasgow boat could throw any light on the matter he would suggest to them that they should adjourn the inquiry for another day. No inconvenience could be suffered by the adoption of that course.



*The Fishery, Duagh Village, Achill Island. (From a Lawrence Photograph).*

The foreman said he thought they had got quite sufficient, and that they had enough of evidence to decide the case.

The Coroner thought the inquiry ought not to be shortened when it was possible that further light could be thrown upon the matter.

Another Juror said he would emphatically protest against an adjournment.

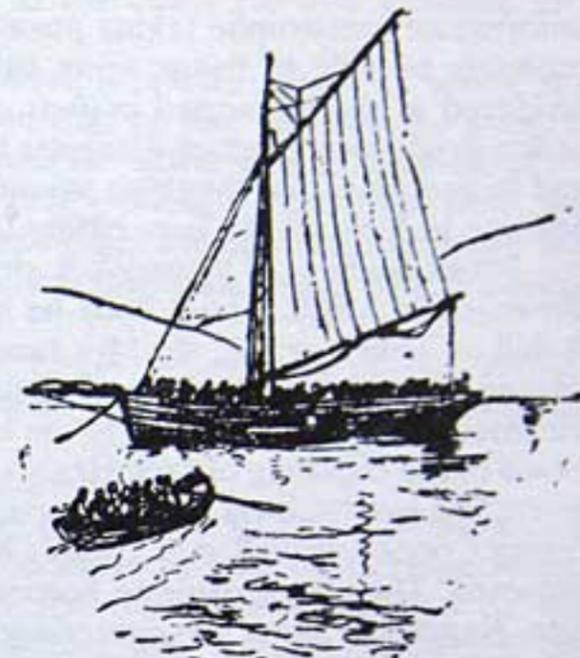
The Coroner said the police might be in a position by the next day to procure further evidence which would throw additional light on the matter.

Another Juror said there had been thirty victims of the affair, and he for one would not agree to have the matter closed.

The Coroner - Quite right.

Another Juror said he thought they ought to pay some recognition to the action of Mrs. McBride and Mr. Hopkins, who had on the previous night behaved with such disinterested nobility. They should also thank Mr. Gibbons who had rescued 23 people in his own boat.

It was decided to adjourn the further investigation till 10 o'clock on Friday, the 29th June.



*Loading the fated Hooker (From a Lawrence Photograph).*

### ANOTHER INQUEST

Westport, Monday Evening.

Mr. P. J. Kelly, Coroner, held an inquest today at Westport touching the death of Joseph Cooney and Patrick Cafferk (Patk), two more victims of the terrible disaster in Westport Harbour on Thursday last. Amongst those present were - Messers J. J. Loudon, B.L.; A. M. O'Malley, J.P.; P. J. Kelly, Chairman of the Board of Guardians; Joseph McBride, Secretary of the Harbour Commissioners; Myles Staunton. The jury who heard the evidence at the inquest on Friday last was again sworn, Mr. John Lavelle being foreman.

The Coroner, addressing them, said that it would be unnecessary for him to refer to the depositions that were taken on the last occasion, as the Jurors were already in possession of the evidence. What he now proposed to do was to take formal evidence of the identification of the two bodies found. Since it was impossible for the police to-day to offer them any further evidence on the matter, it would be necessary to have the evidence of some officials who were on board the Glasgow steamer on the occasion, and who witnessed the

unfortunate catastrophe taking place. They would be examined, and would probably be able to throw some light on the occurrence. They would be produced at the adjourned inquest on next Friday week as arranged. The police would now produce witnesses to identify the two bodies lying outside, and he proposed that they also adjourn this inquiry so that they might be in a position to have all the facts before them when it would be resumed.

Frank Mulloy, of Breanaskill, deposed that he knew Joseph Cooney, of Breanaskill, Achill, whose body he had viewed and identified. Witness left Achill on Thursday last, the 14th June, instant, at about ten o'clock a.m. and walked round the road to Westport quay, which is a distance of 29 Irish miles. He intended to go to England to the harvest. When he arrived at Newport he heard of the capsizing of Jack Healy's hooker, and he then came to Westport quay. The two brothers Joseph Cooney and Martin Cooney, and their sister, Nancy Cooney, travelled in Healy's hooker to Westport Quay, and were all drowned. They were going to Scotland with the object of earning the seed rate. Nancy was about 20 years of age, Joseph about 19, and Martin 15 or 16 years. Nancy and Joseph had been to England before, but the youngest was going over for the first time.

Mr. Lavelle - Am I not right in stating that some of these people were so wretchedly poor that some of the English farmers actually sent over passages to them? Did you hear that?

Witness - I did sir.

Mr Lavelle - Very well; that didn't come out in evidence on Friday last.

Another Juror - The shopkeepers of Westport also gave them money for their passages.

Witness, in reply to a Juror, said Joseph Cooney was his brother-in-law.

Patrick Cafferkey deposed that he knew the deceased Pat Cafferkey, of Tonragee, Achill. He was 18 years of age. He left his (witness's) house on Thursday last about eight o'clock in the morning for the purpose of taking a passage in Jack Healy's hooker to Westport quay, and thence to Glasgow to earn some money. Witness did not accompany the deceased on the hooker. There was a niece of his (witness's), who came home on a visit to him from Scotland about two years ago, also in Jack Healy's hooker. She was on her way home to her mother, who lives in Glasgow, and she also was drowned. She was only ten years of age, and was going to Scotland to try to get something to work at.

The Coroner said the police were not able to offer any further evidence. The officials of the Glasgow steamer would be able to throw some further light on the matter, and he thought the inquiry should be adjourned in order that the whole matter might be properly investigated.

Mr. Lavelle thought, as foreman of the jury, Mr. Moran being absent, that it was his duty to thank the Coroner for the impartial manner in which he had conducted the inquiry to its present stage. Great credit was also due to Sergeant Moliseed, for all those who witnessed his conduct and that of the constables under him could not but testify to the kind and humane manner in

which they performed the last duties to the dead. He also included Mr. Hume, D.I., in his observations.

The Coroner acknowledged the complimentary terms in which the foreman had referred to him. He added that he had received the greatest assistance both from Mr. Hume and from the active and efficient Sergeant Moliseed, who was indefatigable in his exertions from the time the catastrophe took place up to the present time. He also acknowledged the services of Mr. Hume, and said they were greatly indebted to Mrs. McBride for leaving her room at their disposal.

Mr. Lavelle said they should not forget the services of Mr. A. M. O'Malley, J. P. and those of the men of the Glasgow steamboat on the occasion.

The Coroner then adjourned the inquiry.

At about twelve o'clock noon the remains of Patrick Cafferkey and Joseph Cooney were conveyed on cars to Ballycroy and Achill, respectively, where the interment will take place. The funeral was attended by the members of the Distress Fund Committee, and a large number of the respectable inhabitants of Westport.

#### NOTES

1. *Irish Daily Independent*, 29 June 1894.
2. *Irish Daily Independent*, 16 June 1894.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Connaught Telegraph*, 28 June 1894.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Christmas Number *Cork Weekly Examiner and Holly Bough*, 1957, p.33.
7. *Irish Weekly Independent*, 23 June 1984, p.5.
8. Christmas Number *Cork Weekly Examiner and Holly Bough*, 1957, p.33.
9. Supplement *Mayo News*, 30 June 1894.
10. Christmas Number *Cork Weekly Examiner and Holly Bough*, 1957, p.33.
11. *Mayo News*, 23 June 1894.
12. *Connaught Telegraph*, 16 June 1894.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Irish Daily Independent*, 15 June, 1894.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Irish Daily Independent*, 16 June 1894.
17. *Connaught Telegraph*, 28 June 1894.
18. *Mayo News*, 23 June 1894.
19. *Irish Daily Independent*, 18 June 1894.
20. *Mayo News*, 23 June 1894.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Irish Daily Independent*, 18 June 1894.
23. Supplement *Mayo News*, 30 June 1894.

KIERAN CLARKE: Electronics engineer and member of Westport Historical Society. Lieutenant of Order of Malta Ambulance Corps and founder member of Mayo Mountain Rescue Service. Photographer and sea angler.

**THEOBALD DILLON,  
A NEWCOMER IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY MAYO**  
by Bernadette Cunningham

In the late sixteenth century, the Gaelic and Gaelicised inhabitants of the recently formed county of Mayo had to come to terms with an increased number of newcomers to their territory. By and large, prior to the establishment of the Connacht presidency in 1569, Mayo had been beyond the range of interest of the English in Ireland. However, by the 1580s, newcomers to the county were present in increasing numbers. Some of these men held office as sheriffs, justices of the peace, or even as collectors of Composition rent. The newcomers to Mayo were a diverse group. Some were from Old English families in the Pale, usually younger sons; others were New Englishmen, often former soldiers in the service of the Crown of Ireland.

There were two contrasting elements in the motives which brought these men to Mayo. One reason for establishing links with Mayo was the promotion of the interests and objectives of the Crown through the provincial and county administrative structures. The second reason was the pursuit of private gain. The newcomers cannot, however, be divided into two distinct groups along these lines, for in fact the two sometimes contradictory motives were often subsumed in the same person. When the interests of the Crown coincided with their own interests, the newcomers to Connacht played the role of loyal subjects of Queen Elizabeth; when those interests conflicted, the distance from London, in an age of extremely poor means of communication, could prove very convenient indeed.

English officials who came to sixteenth-century Connacht were not arriving to set up government in a vacuum, rather they were attempting to super-impose a new form of government on a society which had previously operated under its own rather different system. In practice, even where English Crown proposals for the government of the western part of Ireland had been worked out in any detail, the means of implementing these proposals had to be worked out at local level, by local officials reaching what accommodations they could with the native population. There was both conflict and collusion between native and newcomer. The attempt to fuse two different political, economic, legal, social and cultural systems was not easy, but it is around this attempted fusion that the history of sixteenth century Ireland revolves.

**I**

One approach to the analysis of the interaction between the different communities is to examine the activities of the brokers between those communities at local level. One man who played the role of broker between native and newcomer in Mayo was Theobald Dillon, a younger son of a well-connected Old English family in the Pale. A man with a legal education, but few prospects, Dillon came to Mayo about 1580 apparently for want of

something better to do. He worked on behalf of the provincial presidency as collector of Composition rent for many years, but it is clear that he also worked on his own behalf since by the 1620s he had title to a large quantity of land in Mayo, and had acquired the title of Viscount Dillon.<sup>1</sup> Much of that land had been the territory of the MacCostellos in the sixteenth century. In a manner which few contemporaries understood clearly, the MacCostellos became Dillon's tenants on their own lands in the transitional period, when legal title to the land was being established under the English system of land tenure. Previously, under the native system, the land in the lordship had been the property of, and shared among, the MacCostello kin group.

In his role as Connacht President, Sir Richard Bingham was rightly suspicious of the activities of Dillon in the barony of Costello. In 1588 Bingham reported that:

If Dillon had his right and no more than he ought to have, he should not have any one foot of land in all ClanCostello, for what he hath there he hath gotten by practising, and by very indirect ways, from the inhabitants there in the time of the collectorship, when he did what he list.<sup>2</sup>

As late as 1596, Bingham expressed ignorance of how exactly Dillon had acquired possession of such a large territory.<sup>3</sup>

A second curiosity is that when an agreement was reached with the native lords and freeholders of most Connacht lordships in 1585, to pay Composition rent to the Crown in place of previous ad hoc exactions and in return for protection, the barony of Costello was omitted. Again few officials at the time could understand what had happened, but they complained that Dillon had by 'excellent cunning purchased the whole barony of Clancostello . . . [and] by his means the whole country at the time of the Composition was omitted out of our survey'.<sup>4</sup>

The question arises over these two issues, as to whether Dillon was engaged in underhand dealing towards the MacCostellos, or subsequently towards the Composition commissioners appointed by the Crown, or both. Or was there another explanation of this rather curious situation?

Fundamentally what was at issue was the question of landownership. The system of ownership, occupation and inheritance of land was central to the way any pre-industrial society worked, and a transformation of that system, such as was under way in late sixteenth-century Connacht was bound to have far reaching implications. During the period of transition which extended over several generations, the occupiers of the land had to come to terms with a new set of legal and economic realities. Thus, as the right to own or occupy land gradually came to be seen to depend on adherence to the regulations of the English legal system, then a man who wished to sustain himself or his family group had to learn to use that system, or depend on a broker to act on his behalf.

The MacCostellos had traditionally occupied a territory on the eastern periphery of the lordship of MacWilliam Iochtar, the barony of Costello being the easternmost barony of the county of Mayo, bordering on Roscommon. The Composition Commissioners in 1585 described the territory in terms of 'the hard passage of travel thither, by means of the great bogs, woods, moors and mountains, and other evil ways in and to the said barony'. It was 'barren amongst the most barren . . . standing in so discommodious a place . . . [that it] can hardly be brought about to be peopled with civil inhabitants'.<sup>5</sup> Clearly the territory that so interested Theobald Dillon was not every newcomer's idea of utopia.

The connection between Dillon and Mayo begins in the early 1580s, when there are curious reports among the records of the central administration, to the effect that the inhabitants of the territory of MacCostello have given Theobald Dillon a great portion of land there, along with the castle of Castlemore. The then president of Connacht, Sir Nicholas Malby supplied one of these reports saying:

The possessor of a large but poor territory, MacCostello, by surname Nangle, claims to be allied to the Dillons and had called out of the English Pale, Tibbot Dillon . . . and given him with the consent of all his kinsmen, as a free gift, a great portion of his land with a fair ancient castle called Castlemore, which stands in a place the Scots must have passed when they came from the north into MacWilliam's country.<sup>6</sup>

Malby went on to explain that Theobald Dillon, somewhat to his cost, had accepted the offer of land in order to promote civil government in Mayo, rather than be idle at home. The president considered Dillon to be 'honest and valiant' and considered his enterprise 'most commendable and necessary an inducement to others to do likewise'. It was clearly advantageous from the point of view of the provincial administration, to have men like Dillon who could be office holders in the localities, to help promote peace and stability among the native community who had little experience of the working of English law. Consequently Malby had no reservations about recommending Dillon for the office of sheriff. But it was clear from the beginning that Dillon, like most of his fellow newcomers, had come to Connacht to promote his own interests as well as those of the Crown. He expressed a wish to establish an enterprise in Mayo which would allow his posterity a stake there, a wish which was realised rather more successfully than he himself could have envisaged on arrival.<sup>7</sup>

## II

Dillon's post as collector of the Composition rent in Connacht would have brought him into contact with the local elite throughout the province, and this coupled with his Old English background and legal education, would have ensured that he had a thorough knowledge of both the workings of the various Connacht lordships and the New English administration in Ireland.

To the gentlemen and freeholders of Mayo he would have been clearly identifiable as a middleman between them and the provincial president. This did not necessarily make life any easier for him, however. In 1583 he related that having collected rents in Tyrawley he proceeded . . .

. . . towards the place where MacWilliam was, who met me and his wife Grainne Ni Mhaille with all their force, and did swear they would have my life for coming so far into their country, and specially his wife would fight with me before she was half a mile near me.

He left apparently without collecting any rent on that occasion.<sup>8</sup>

From glimpses such as these one can appreciate the dilemma of newcomers to Mayo in the late sixteenth century. For these men who were not only acting as agents of the Crown in Mayo, but also intended creating a livelihood there for themselves and their families, antagonising the native population was no way to ensure personal advancement, or even to stay alive. John Browne of the Neale died at the hands of the Mayo Burkes in 1589, and another newcomer, John Newton, who described himself as one of the first Englishmen in Connacht, had his property burned and spoiled by the native population, even though he claimed that the land on which he settled had previously been waste land. In times of crisis, the newcomers could be in a vulnerable position, and indeed at the end of the century Theobald Dillon's property was the object of attack from various factions of the Mayo Burkes during the course of the nine years' war.<sup>9</sup> In this context, when, for instance one Thomas Roe Burke was slain in 1586 by a sub-sheriff in Mayo acting on the instructions of Sir Richard Bingham, the Connacht president, and a rebellion threatened, it was not just the Mayo Burkes who were disturbed. It appears that such an intervention by the president into local affairs in Mayo was a matter of serious concern to Theobald Dillon, and to Francis Barkley, the Provost Marshall of Connacht. Sir Richard Bingham, though apparently a biased observer, offered some perceptive comments on the episode:

This man thus slain was nothing missed, nor much lamented – no not even by his own kindred – only it misliked most Francis Barkley, provost marshall of this province, and Theobald Dillon, collector of her Majesty's composition rents, for those men had gotten in those parts horses and hackneys and great store of land of many the lewd and ill-disposed persons there, upon conditions to maintain them in all their causes, which . . . they were daily in hope to augment and increase.<sup>10</sup>

Bingham went on to explain that after some of the Burkes had gone into rebellion, Barkley and Dillon, 'the better to win credit with the ill-qualified and to bring their purposes to pass', promised 'that they would repair to Dublin and procure their pardons, which as they said would be easily obtained'. The newcomers were offering their services as brokers between the rebels and the government. The most acceptable explanation for this, and certainly for the reported actions of Dillon and Barkley in the aftermath of this event, is that these two newcomers had set themselves up in the role of protectors of the natives of south east Mayo. They then set out to prove to the

local population that they were worthy of their self appointed role. As it turned out, the lord deputy, Sir John Perrott, did not grant pardons to the Burkes on the basis of Dillon's and Barkley's interventions, but the fact that they believed he might was itself significant.<sup>11</sup>

A further aspect of Dillon's role as broker can be discerned from a document purporting to be a 'True Discourse' of the rebellion of the Burkes in 1586. Written from the standpoint of the Mayo Burkes, but apparently masterminded by Dillon and Barkley, the 'rebels' case is presented in a comprehensive seven page document in English. Interestingly, none of the signatories, who included the man being chosen as MacWilliam, Edmund Burke Mac Richard an Iarann, were able to sign their names to the document. They were all illiterate. Clearly they needed an intermediary to represent them in their dealings with the English administration, which placed an emphasis on written documents which would not have been usual in Gaelic Ireland.<sup>12</sup>

In the case of the 1586 rebellion in Mayo, as in many other episodes, Theobald Dillon was operating at two levels. The other element of this episode was the antagonism between Dillon and Sir Richard Bingham. Bingham was convinced that Dillon and Barkley would be successful in their application to the lord deputy, 'for that the lord deputy loved not me and would do anything to cross and disgrace me'.<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, in Dublin, Henry Wallop, clearly an opponent of the Perrott faction, considered that the lord deputy, Perrott, paid too much heed to Barkley and Dillon, at Bingham's expense, and added 'I think rather it is for the evil will he beareth to Sir Richard'.<sup>14</sup> There was little any one could do to control the activities of men like Barkley and Dillon, as they played one faction off against another. Their activities were viewed differently by different observers. In 1581 Lord Deputy Grey reported that Theobald Dillon was content to inhabit that 'barbarous corner only to do good among the savage people'.<sup>15</sup> Shortly afterwards however, it was reported that Dillon was one of several newcomers operating in Mayo in collusion with 'many . . . ill-disposed persons there to maintain them in all their causes'.<sup>16</sup> Later criticism was even more severe with Sir Richard Bingham reporting that . . .

. . . he is as dangerous a man and as great a dissembler as any can be, a great extortioner, a favourer of rebels and malefactors, and one that hath been driven to his pardon for matters of treason'.<sup>17</sup>

This description of a newcomer was offered by a man who had earlier advocated the establishment of Englishmen on land in Mayo, arguing that 'the better the country is so established, the more quiet and civil it shall be'.<sup>18</sup> When the case brought by Dillon against Sir Richard Bingham was heard, Bingham was acquitted, and it was deemed that he had opposed Bingham 'for vexation and dislike he hath to his government there, than for any probable just cause or matter'.<sup>19</sup> The antagonism between Dillon and Bingham only subsided after the departure of Perrott from the office of Lord Deputy in May 1585.

### III

For the MacCostello clan, however, Theobald Dillon was the most conveniently available broker to act on their behalf, and his negotiations with the Composition commissioners when they belatedly dealt with Costello barony in 1587, shows how shrewdly he could deal with the provincial administration and the Crown. Conveniently perhaps for Dillon, Sir Richard Bingham was temporarily absent from the province when he negotiated a deal with the Composition commissioners, which conceded that the inhabitants were only to be charged Composition rent on 83 of the 275 quarters of land surveyed. Sir Richard Bingham happened to have stopped over in Chester on his way to London when he discovered, to his great anger, that Theobald Dillon was also in town and was on his way to court. Dillon was on his way to seek acceptance of the revised survey of the barony, which reduced the amount to be paid to the Crown in Composition rent by £100 per annum, and which left much of the land which he held free of Composition rent.<sup>20</sup> Dillon clearly spared no effort in time or travel in implementing his plans for the territory he claimed in Costello barony. The advantage to be gained was that land left free of Composition rent was most attractive to potential tenants. In this way Dillon had secured favourable conditions not so much for those of the MacCostellos who inhabited those lands, but rather for himself as their lord, since it would have allowed him to attract new tenants to his underpopulated territory. Tenants were a vital economic asset for the estate he was developing in Mayo.<sup>21</sup>

But in the light of this, can it be assumed that the native population had really given away their land to him 'as a free gift' in 1580 as Malby had reported? And if so, what had they hoped to achieve by so doing? The Annals of Loch Cé offer a brief glimpse of the native interpretation of this unusual transaction. It is recorded there for the year 1586 that . . .

. . . Castlemore of the MacCostellos and half the lordship of the country were given to Tibbot Dillon by MacCostello . . .<sup>22</sup>

The word used in the original Irish text was 'Tiarnas' which would imply lordship or dominion, or an area of jurisdiction. Under the native system a lord exercised jurisdiction over followers rather than over a given extent of land. Thus it would appear that it was not land but rather lordship over people that was offered to Dillon by the MacCostellos. They had allied themselves to Dillon so that he would act as their protector. He had also been given the castle of Castlemore. Having acquired possession of MacCostello property in his capacity of protector of the native population, Dillon had to be seen to be able to fulfil that role. Hence his anxiety that he be seen to act following incidents like the incursion of Bingham's sub-sheriff in Mayo. Whether or not he undermined the provincial administration in the process was of secondary concern; his primary objective was his personal advancement in Mayo.

There is a discrepancy of six years between the date when Dillon's acquisition of property in the MacCostello territory as a 'free gift', is noted in the records of the central administration and its recording in the Annals of Loch Cé. It seems plausible that the nature of the deal which had been entered into was not fully considered by the native population until a crisis arose. At any rate there is no record on the native side of Dillon's activities until 1586. In that year a controversy arose which illustrated that the MacCostellos had misunderstood the implications of the deal. Theobald Dillon lodged a petition that his lands at Castlemore and Binnfada which he held 'by lawful and just title taking the profit thereof without disturbance', had been unlawfully taken over by five of the MacCostellos from Tolghay who had dispossessed Dillon's tenants and proceeded to occupy the land themselves.<sup>23</sup> It seems plausible that this was land which they had previously occupied, and that they were returning there after a period of years on other clan lands. However, they now found that their right to occupy land they had traditionally held, though without title in English law, was being challenged in the English courts.

In seeking redress against the MacCostellos, Dillon was reluctant to have the case heard before a court in Connacht pointing out that . . .

. . . the defendants are greatly allied and countenanced by the best and chiefest in the said shire and province of Connacht, and withal the place being so far distant from her Majesty's ordinary courts of common law here at Dublin as hardly can your suppliant have jurors from thence for trial of his case in any usual action for recovery of his said land'.<sup>24</sup>

Despite having legal title under English law, Dillon was not at all confident that a Connacht based court or jury would uphold his right to the lands of Costello in the face of a counter claim from the MacCostello clan. The outcome of the case is not documented in the decrees register, which suggests that the case had been settled prior to a final hearing. The early seventeenth-century evidence shows, however, that Dillon retained title to the land, though the identity of the tenants on that land cannot be precisely ascertained.<sup>25</sup>

#### IV

In the long run, what was underway was a process of informal colonisation, unplanned by the central administration in Dublin or London, but not less effective for that. By a variety of means, and partly for economic reasons, the pace of that colonisation process had increased by the early seventeenth century, and by then Dillon was one of the most successful of many Palesmen, New Englishmen, and merchants from Galway who gained possession of large quantities of land in Mayo. It was a development which clearly illustrated that fortunes could be made by a few enterprising individuals in a period of transition, where the native community got into economic difficulties which prevented them adapting, or were the consequences of them not adapting, to changing circumstances.

Though a newcomer, Dillon's role among the MacCostellos is closely paralleled by that of some of the native elite in Connacht who likewise built up English style estates for themselves in the province. Thus the earl of Clanricarde fulfilled a similar role as broker for his followers or tenants in the lordship of Clanricarde, though apparently with rather more concern for the welfare of his tenants. The Earl of Thomond did likewise in Thomond, and in Mayo, Sir Theobald Burke, Tibbott na Long, achieved the same objective on behalf of a portion of the Mayo Burkes. In many cases, in these lordships also, the lesser families were reduced to the status of tenants, the difference being that it was the native lord rather than a newcomer, who had adopted the role of landlord on the English model.<sup>26</sup> Where the native overlords were not in a position to adapt sufficiently to changing circumstances, as was frequently the case in Mayo, the lack of a powerful native overlord who could act on behalf of the lesser kin groups in their dealings with the New English administration, meant that the lesser family groups were open to manipulation by other speculators in the province. Before the trend became widespread in Mayo, Theobald Dillon had led the way showing that one man with political connections coupled with a little legal knowledge, and a lot of ambition, could exert a great deal of influence on the native population and create a handsome estate for himself and his heirs.

#### Notes

1. For an overview of sixteenth century Mayo see Bernadette Cunningham, 'Natives and newcomers in Mayo 1560-1603', in Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (ed.), *A various country: essays in Mayo history, 1500-1900* (Westport, 1986, forthcoming); for the seventeenth century see Raymond Gillespie 'Lords and Commons in seventeenth century Mayo' in Gillespie and Moran, *A various country*. On the role of brokers see also the introduction to *A various country*. On Dillon see for instance P.R.O., S.P. 63/64/134/30; S.P. 63/87/37; R.C. Simington (ed.) *Books of Survey and Distribution, ii, Co. Mayo*, (Dublin, 1956), pp 80-93; John Lodge, *A Peerage of Ireland*, ed. Mervyn Archdale, (Dublin, 1789), under Dillon.
2. P.R.O., S.P. 63/87/35.
3. P.R.O., S.P. 63/195/22.
4. P.R.O., S.P. 63/139/73.
5. On landholding and society in this period see Mary O'Dowd, 'Gaelic economy and society', in Ciaran Brady and Raymond Gillespie (ed.) *Natives and Newcomers: the making of Irish colonial society, 1534-1641*, (Dublin, 1986), pp 120-47; James Morrin (ed.), *Calendar of Patent and Close rolls of Chancery in Ireland, ii, [1576-1603]*, (Dublin, 1862), pp 141-3.
6. P.R.O., S.P. 63/73/85.
7. P.R.O., S.P. 63/73/51.
8. P.R.O., S.P. 63/99/37.

9. P.R.O., S.P. 63/128/97; S.P. 63/130/26; S.P. 63/145/75; S.P. 63/209/152; for further detail see Bernadette Cunningham, 'Political and social change in the lordships of Clanricarde and Thomond, 1569-1641' (M.A. thesis, U.C.G., 1979) pp 178-81, 189-91.
10. P.R.O., S.P. 63/126/53.i.
11. P.R.O., S.P. 63/125/53; S.P. 63/126/53.i.
12. P.R.O., S.P. 63/126/83.
13. P.R.O., S.P. 63/126/83.
14. P.R.O., S.P. 63/124/53.
15. P.R.O., S.P. 63/87/37.
16. P.R.O., S.P. 63/126/53.i.
17. *Calendar of State Papers Ireland, 1586-88*, p.482.
18. P.R.O., S.P. 63/125/57.i.
19. *Calendar of State Papers Ireland, 1586-88*, p.267.
20. *Calendar of State Papers Ireland, 1586-88*, pp 482, 486-7, 500-01; There is also evidence that Dillon had earlier managed to achieve similar concessions on other lands in which he had an interest in counties Westmeath and Longford, P.R.O., S.P. 63/87/28; S.P. 63/74/14.
21. Bernadette Cunningham, 'The Composition of Connacht in the lordships of Clanricarde and Thomond, 1577-1641', in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxiv, (1984), pp1-14.
22. William Hennessy, ed. *The Annals of Loch Cé, ii*, (London, 1871), p.477.
23. P.R.O.I., Chancery Bills, B.97, [1586].
24. P.R.O.I., Chancery Bills, B.97, [1586].
25. In 1587 the Composition Commissioners report indicated that Theobald Dillon and his tenants were in possession of most of the lands of the barony; Morrin, *Calendar of Patent and Close Rolls, ii*, pp 142-3. P.R.O.I., RC/4/15, Mayo, James I, No. 4, [14 July, 1607]; R.C. Simington, *Books of Survey and Distribution, ii, Co. Mayo*, pp 80-93.
26. For the parallels with Clanricarde and Thomond see Bernadette Cunningham 'Political and social change', chapter 5 and *passim*.

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## KILMEENA – PART 2

by Jarlath Duffy

In addition to the Cushalogurt find mentioned in *Cathair na Mart* Vol. 5, No. 1, there are four other finds which show that the area between Newport and Westport was inhabited for thousands of years before the Celts came to Ireland. Mr. John Duffy of Kilmeena while digging a potato field in 1932, uncovered a gold bracelet which belongs to the Late Bronze Age.<sup>1</sup> In 1950 Mrs. Sheridan from Westport reported on the finding of an inhumation in a long cist grave found in a sandpit at Knockinisky, which could date as far back as 1600 B.C.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. R. Quinn forwarded to the National Museum in 1968 a polished stone axe-head, which was found while digging a track beside a field bank twenty yards from a ring fort at Rostuohy.<sup>3</sup> More recently Mr. Liam Ryder on his lands at Banagher, has come across some beads which experts feel are over 3,000 years old.

There is very little to be found in the written records concerning the church and school from St. Brendan's time until the ending of the Penal Laws. Pádraig Ó Móráin in *The History of Kilmeena Parish*, presumes that the various religious establishments at Kilmeena, Moyna, Inisdaff, Clynish and Kilmaclasser, must have had an uneasy time of it during the period of the Viking raids.<sup>4</sup> The historian today does not go along readily with the idea of the foreign invader plundering all before him. Indeed many may have landed to replenish their stores of food and water and left peacefully again.

The organisation of the Church changed with the Anglo-Norman conquest. Knox tells that:

Umhall had three prebends, the Archdeacon's and Killabegs and Faldown. The Archdeacon and the Prebendary of Killabegs shared tithes in Aghagower, Oughaval, and Kilgeever. The Prebendaries of Killabegs and Faldown shared others in Burrishoole, Kilmeena, and Kilmaclasser. The arrangement in Kilmeena was peculiar. The Prebendaries had a fixed charge on certain townlands payable by the incumbent who took surplus and made good deficiency, and a proportion of other tithes. Faldown probably was in Kilmeena where that Prebendary had so much the larger interest, £31 to £8, in the specified townlands. Those townlands included Kilmeena itself and Innisdaff, in which there is an old church. An old church is reported to have been on Clynish. Faldown should be Kilmeena or Innisdaff.<sup>5</sup>

The same writer listing the emoluments of the Chapter of Tuam for the year 1243, quotes:

*Prebendary of Faldown:* Parts of rectories of Burrishoole, Kilmaclasser, Kilmeena. No cure.

*Prebendary of Killabegs:* Parts of rectories of Aghagower, Oughaval, Kilgeever, Kilmeena, Kilmaclasser, Burrishoole, Ballyovey, Crossboyne, Kilmainebeg, Cong, Ballinchalla. No cure.<sup>6</sup>

As the ancient monastic system of Ireland came to an end at the beginning of the 13th century, the Archbishop of Tuam seems to have claimed more than his due. To his claim to the church of Kilmeena among others, he was granted episcopal rights only.

In Sweetman's *Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland* a list is given of the taxation of the Diocese of Tuam:

Kilmayn (Kilmeena)	£2.66
Kilmalasser (Kilmaclasser)	.66 <sup>7</sup>

Bodkin's *Visitation*, which lists parishes at the close of 1558 or early 1559, has the following entry:

Vicarage of Kyllmyna. . . usurped by Wyllyam Keighe. . . John O'Donayll Vicar of Kyllm'ciacer studies at Oxford and Ranald M'Conoyll usurps the profits of the vicarage. . .

John son of Jonatus Prebendary of Kyllmyna who studies at Dublin about to go to Oxford. And Edmund de Burgo brother of the Earl of Clanricard usurps the profits of the prebend contrary to the Archbishop's collation and the royal letters.

Lodovicus O'Grada Vicar of Kyllmyna.<sup>8</sup>

The taxation of Benefices for the First Fruits made in 1584 show:

Vicarage of Kilmyne 10s. Od. Kilmeena.<sup>9</sup>

The lists of Benefices and Incumbents in 1591 for the Diocese of Tuam has the following reference:

Rectory of Kilmyne Incumbent: The Queen  
 Rectory of Kilviclassir Incumbent Thomas O'Hubain  
 Prebendary of Kilmyne Incumbent Richard Pwer  
 Vicarage of Kylvina Incumbent Donatus O'Hubain  
 Vicarage of Kylviclassy Incumbent Thateus O'Hubain<sup>10</sup>

Although very little is known of the effects of the Protestant Reformation on the inhabitants, it probably had very little at the early stages.

In Knox's list of See Lands for 1617, the Archbishop appears as holding the following lands:

Crosse cartron (Cross)  
 Moygowerbeg (Mayour)  
 Inishdaff  
 Kilmaclassy (Kilmaclasser)<sup>11</sup>

In the Schedules to the first Report of the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Revenue and Patronage 1833, we read, among others, for See Lands:

Lands	Acres	Notes
Mayour		Mayour in Kilmeena Parish
Mayourbeg	1,664	
Leganillaga		Raigh in Burrishoole, a little S.E. of St. Brendan's Well and B.G. [Burial Ground]
Roigh		

Lands	Acres	Notes
Drenard		Drumard and Cross
Cross Shralieve		adjoin Kilmeena <sup>12</sup>

In *The History of Kilmeena Parish*, Pádraig Ó Móráin writes:

The rising of 1641 must have been well supported in the two parishes. Of the landholders of 1641, all of Norman descent as we have seen and Catholics to a man, not one appears in possession after the re-distribution. They had to make way for their co-religionists who had been banished to 'hell or to Connacht' and the best of their lands here and there was marked as 'Protestant land'.

The registration lists of 1704 contain some interesting information. In the not too dark days of Charles II, it was not so easy for a candidate for Holy Orders to get a bishop to ordain him.

In 1704, Eneas MacDonnell was parish priest of Kilmaclasser Parish and Elaneden (now corrupted to Islandeady) half parish.

He was born in 1651 and was ordained at Athleague by Dr. Dominick Burke, 'titular bishop of Elphin' in 1678. His sureties, bound in £50 – a sum about equal to £1,000 at present – were Valentine Browne of Kinturk and Myles MacDonnell of Moyower (Eneas MacDonnell lived at Derryribbin).

Denis Ginnane, of Killmina, was P.P. of Killmina Parish and Elaneden half Parish. He was born in 1662, and was ordained in 1686 at Gallway by Dr. James Lynch, 'then Titular Bishop of Tuam, Archbishop'. His securities were George Browne of Liskillin, and Myles MacDonnell of Moyower.

Myles MacDonnell, of Moyower, held extensive leases of lands in the parish and elsewhere. He lived in the house now occupied by Mr. Eugene Campbell. He had a large family, one of whom, Bonaventure MacDonnell, O.S.F., was Bishop of Killala Diocese from 1749 to 1760.

According to a return made for the Government in Dublin, by Dr. Dillon, Archbishop of Tuam in 1801, Kilmeena and Kilmaclasser had each a parish priest without a curate, and the income of each was estimated at £65.<sup>13</sup>

Mayour is a most interesting place and deserves an article all to itself at some further date.

Father Cullen, later to be Archbishop of Dublin, busied himself in Rome in the early part of the nineteenth century with the re-organisation of parishes in the Irish Church.

Pádraig Ó Móráin is of the opinion that Kilmeena and Kilmaclasser were united in 1817 when Father Thomas O'Keane became P.P. Under Fr. O'Keane the churches at Myna and Fahy were built, and had a life-span of 130 years.<sup>14</sup>

Tradition places the site of the earlier church in Myna in the field opposite the present church, but perhaps only an excavation can verify this.

At the end of this article is given in the appendices a list of parish priests and curates insofar as it is known for the past 200 years or so.

Fr. Sheridan's report on the parish in the 1830s makes interesting reading. The following is a brief summary:

There were no deserted children in the parish who would have perished through neglect within the last three years;

The number of illegitimate children who were not supported either by their reputed father or by their mother was nil. The mother generally supported her offspring by begging;

Widows or orphans who had neither relatives nor means to support them, had no alternative but begging;

While precise numbers could not be ascertained, from observation and comparison it was thought that there were more than 100 persons who, from old age and infirmity, were incapable of work; they were usually supported by their relatives or neighbours, no other provision was made for them. 'The poor here are tender of and dutiful to aged parents';

Emigration – Very few left their dwellings in the parish, and those who did went to England;

Of those who emigrated, some were married men, who went in hopes to earn the landlord's rent; their wives and children in their absence lived on the produce of their holdings or by begging;

Regarding the number of householders who let lodgings for strolling beggars and the price of a night's lodging, the number of beggars at this season of the year is comparatively few; but after the consumption of their provisions, their number is remarkably increased in summer. Alms usually given in provisions;

No person died from destitution in the parish within the past few years. Strolling beggars are always lodged gratis here.<sup>15</sup>



*Fahy Church prior to 1950s.*

Meanwhile on the other side of the religious divide, the Church of Ireland was enjoying its strongest period in the history of Kilmeena, because of the advent of families whose fathers were employed in the Coastguard stations at Pigeon Point and later at Rosmoney, and the arrival of the Rev. Giles Eyre.

The Rev. Charles Hargrove was Giles Eyre's predecessor. He was a universal favourite in Turlough before his appointment to Kilmeena in 1832(?).<sup>16</sup> As there was no glebe house in the parish, he resided in Westport and thus became dissociated in some measure from his appointed sphere of duty. However in 1835 Charles Hargrove tendered his resignation, which was brought about over doctrinal rather than any personal difficulty. Rev. Giles Eyre was appointed his successor. Giles Eyre had already served in Hollymount and Athenry and brought with him a certain reputation. Bishop Power's letter of appointment was blunt:

My dear Eyre,

The living of Kilmeena. . . is now vacant. The succeeding incumbent must be bonafide resident if he would be obliged to reside in a *cabin*, and better, I fear, he will not be able to procure. . . I offer this to you thus.

Subsequently, Mr. Eyre fitted up a cabin for himself in the principal village in the parish – Carrowholly.<sup>17</sup>

In the early part of the 1830s, the following is the state of rectories and vicarages for Kilmeena:



*Church of Ireland, Buckfield.*

No church. Two school-houses in different parts of the parish and appropriated to divine service (a church is in progress of building). Divine Service was held every Sunday during summer and alternate Sundays during winter. The attendance at Service was about 35 persons at each centre and this was described as on the increase. The one rector is residing at Westport.

At the same time there is one Roman Catholic chapel with services on Sundays and holidays, with 1,500 to 2,000 usually attending, served by two priests who officiate also at Fahy chapel in the parish of Kilmaclasser.<sup>18</sup>

Giles Eyre, whose family were Mayors of Galway, seems to have been a man of substance with property in Athenry and in Kilmeena – Calf Island (Wilks family, Michael Moore, R. Gibbons), Carraholly (Thomas Browne).

Annual tithes after deduction for prebend of Faldown and Killibegs amounted to more than £250 p.a.<sup>19</sup> When he came to make his will in 1871, he had much to leave:

'I will devise and bequeath to my dearly beloved wife Dora Eyre all my goods and chattels of every kind soever and all my cattle and farming stock and implements of every kind and all my household furniture plate and plated ware china glass and delph services of every description and all my carriages and horses as also all my railway shares in the Irish North Western Railway and in the Great Northern and Western of Ireland Railway Companies if not previously sold and disposed of and all and every the several Policies of Assurance which I have effected on my life with the Royal Exchange Assurance Company of London Accounting to Eight hundred and fifty pounds £850 and all benefit and advantages to be derived therefrom and all monies I may leave at my decease and all monies which may be due and owing to me absolutely as and for her own sole use and benefit I also leave and bequeath to my said wife Dora (alias Dorinda) Eyre the use for her natural life of my house offices farm and lands of Rusheen commonly called Carraholly and my farm and lands of Moyna with their appurtenances. . . as may hereafter be named in this my last Will and as Richard Ormsby now deceased served me faithfully and honestly as my Parish Clerk Schoolmaster and Steward now moreover in recompense for such his services and in token and regard thereof I leave bequeath and devise to his widow Mary Ormsby the house yard offices and garden on the aforesaid farm and lands of Rusheen which she now occupies and enjoys with the four fields containing about four acres be the same more or less that is to say for description Killeen tillage field and the field opposite it on the North side of the public high road Bidy Scarrys field and the field opposite it also on the north side of the High Road. . .

and later in a codicil:

I will and bequeath to my dear friend George John Marquis of Sligo his heirs and assignees all that and those the house which I have built on the land in Rusheen leased by him to me and which is now used as a schoolhouse and is licensed as a house for divine service together with the enclosure belonging thereto in trust nevertheless for the use of the

Protestant Parishioners of Kilmina Parish to be used by them for the same purpose only and I pray and trust that my dear friend will of his goodness confirm the same unto the Parishioners forever.<sup>20</sup>

Local tradition gives the date of his church at Rusheen, Carrowholly as 1850. Writing in 1938, Martin Mannion reports that 'the seats are still in the church, the bell on the spire. . . (but) no Service now. . .' The school's measurements he gives as 30' x 15' x 12' with 2 doors and 12 windows built of cut stone'.<sup>21</sup> The converted school is now the residence of Raphaele McCabe.

The nineteenth century saw an awakening in education in the Irish countryside. The Commission of Public Instruction gives the following list of schools for Kilmeena and Kilmaclasser:

Description of each school	Sources of Support	No. of children on the books at the time of Inspection	Average daily attendance	Whether the average daily attendance has been increasing, stationary, or diminishing, for the last 5 years	Kind of Instruction
<b>KILMINA</b>					
1. Free school at Sprighill, kept by Patrick Feeney.	£15 p.a. from the rector	No list produced	From 40 to 50	Increasing	Reading, writing, arithmetic, and scripture reading.
2. Free school at Carrohowley, kept by Henry Browne, in connexion with the Tuam Diocesan Education Society	£10 p.a. from the Society, a free house and garden	Do.	About 45	Do.	Do.
3. School at Drungagh, kept by John Geraghty	Payments by the children of 1s. to 3s. 4d. per quarter	Males Females Total	37 11 48	30 to 40 Diminishing	Reading, writing and arithmetic; Roman Catholic catechism in English and Irish

Description of each school	Sources of Support	No. of children on the books at the time of Inspection	Average daily attendance	Whether the average daily attendance has been increasing, stationary, or diminishing, for the last 5 years	Kind of Instruction
4. School at Clooneen, kept by John Flynn	Payments by the children of 1s. to 3s. per quarter	Males Females Total	25 10 35	... .	Increasing Do.
5. School at Rassaw, kept by William Walsh	Do.	Males Females Total	35 15 50	40	Open 9 months Do.
6. School at Ardkeene, kept by Thomas Gallagher	Payments by the children of 1s. to 3s. per quarter, producing about £8 per annum	Males Females Total	40 10 50	40	Established 2 years. Increasing Do.
7. School at Knockbuy, kept by John Hiland	Payments by the children of 1s. to 3s. per quarter	No list produced	From 40 to 50	Open 3 months	Do.
8. School at Lisluane, kept by Austin Mealy	Do.	Do.	Do.	...	Do.
9. School at Crowhill, kept by Patrick Joyce	House from Sir Samuel O'Malley; payments by the children of 1s. to 2s. 6d. per quarter, amounting to about £3/£4 p.a.	Males Females Total	57 35 92	From 50 to 60	Diminishing Do.
10. School at Drumgariff, kept by Michael Mulreen	Payments by the children of 1s. to 2s. 6d. per quarter	No list produced	40	Diminishing	Reading, writing and arithmetic; Roman Catholic catechism in English and Irish

Description of each school	Sources of Support	No. of children on the books at the time of Inspection	Average daily attendance	Whether the average daily attendance has been increasing, stationary, or diminishing, for the last 5 years	Kind of Instruction
11. Hedge school at Innislyre Island, kept by Peter Mealy	Do	Do.	30	Stationary	Do.
12. Hedge school at Castleaffey, kept by Andrew Kane	Payments by the children of 1s to 2s per quarter amounting to about £4/£5 p.a.	Males Females Total	40 20 60	50	Open 8 months Do.
13. Hedge school at Coolborreen, kept by James Fox	Payments by the children of 1s to 2s. 6d. per quarter	No list produced	35	Diminishing	Do.
			<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
No. of children on the books of the Daily Schools			234	101	335
<b>KILLMACLASSER</b>					
1. Slingen school, in connexion with the Tuam diocesan and Kildare St. Societies; John Kirkpatrick, master	£15 p.a. from the former Society, and local subscription and books from the latter Society; a free house and garden	Males Females Total	81 48 120	50	Increasing Reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, and scripture reading

Description of each school	Sources of Support	No. of children on the books at the time of Inspection	Average daily attendance	Whether the average daily attendance has been increasing, stationary, or diminishing, for the last 5 years	Kind of Instruction	
2. Slingen female free school, in connexion with the Tuam, Diocesan Education Society; Harriet Ferriss, mistress	Salary to the mistress paid by the Society	Males Females Total	.... 39 39	39	Established 1 month	Reading, writing, arithmetic, needlework and scripture reading
3. School at Fahey, kept by Peter Carey	Payments by the children, from 1s. 3d. to 5s. per quarter, producing about £16 p.a.	Males Females Total	51 20 71	40 to 50	Increasing	Reading, writing, arithmetic, and the R.C. catechism

22

They also report schools at Roy and Derrinaff, Brocagh, Gortnaclassough, Buckfield, and Knocknabola.<sup>23</sup>

The following is some of the history of three schools in the parish – Rosduane, Myna and Carrowholly.

The earliest reference to Rosduane National School is for the year 1840 when the building of the school was proposed. The Trustees were A. & G. Clendining. The lease was for 3 lives viz. Queen Victoria, Prince Consort and their son – later King Edward.<sup>24</sup> This ruse was used by the Irish to ensure that the lease would have as long a life as possible. It was a good bet that the members of royalty would outlive any of their offspring. (A similar procedure was followed for Carrowholly National School in the year 1844). It was noted that there were 80 males and 60 females coming to the school. Because of tidal problems it was necessary to exercise great caution when choosing the school site. The school was under Sir R. A. O'Donel, a fact which seems to rankle with clergymen later in the school's history. The school opened on 20 July 1844. In 1847 £9 salary was granted to Mary Reilly as work mistress.<sup>25</sup> Repairs were carried out in 1855 and the average attendance, it was noted, had fallen to 26. Teacher Thomas Gallagher is mentioned in 1856, Maura Cusack (1857) Michael McKay, John Joyce (1859), Peter McKay (1859), Joseph McNamara and Anthony Jordan (1861). The same year Stephen Fox, teacher, is sent to prison for fighting with his landlord and loses his position.

Further teachers were Pat McNally (1864), Thomas Cuinn (1869), Eliza McNamara (1869), Mark Cusack (1870), Stephen Fox (1875), Teresa Kenefick (1875-81). Pat Caine (1881-90) gives his address as Ballytighe, Glenhest, and states his father taught in Derradda in 1841 and he himself in Skirdagh 1856.<sup>26</sup> Kate Price and Norah Keane are mentioned in 1884.<sup>27</sup> The Rev. B. McDermott, Kilmeena, complains about the school in 1887, and mentions inter alia, the poor condition of the forms and the broken down fences leaving the yard open to a mad bull, but this is refuted by Mr. O'Donnell who says all the allegations are false.<sup>28</sup> Anne O'Malley joins the staff in 1893, Martin H. O'Donnell (1899-1941) and Mary Moran (1913).

New privies were built in 1895, and a fuel store in 1905 at the cost of £20.<sup>29</sup> School Inspector Fenton reports in 1910 that the average attendance was 43, the average on rolls 62.<sup>30</sup> Rev. Fr. O'Toole writing to the Commissioners in 1912 states that he would wish to see a central school to replace Myna and Rosduane. He is looking for suitable plots for agriculture. Completing the roll of the teachers are Mrs. Alice Quinn, Mr. Tony Gibbons and Mrs. Feehan for the years 1941-1969. It must be remembered that the above list is not exhaustive. Some of those named taught only for a month, others for years. On many occasions schools were closed – poor condition of building, pupils at the harvest or teacher ill. The Principal was held responsible for everything relating to the school – cleanliness, outer fencing, pupils not returning after midday break. Inspectors were exacting and it must be recorded that the educational system enjoyed today at primary and secondary level, is largely due to the pioneers who started teaching in the hedge schools and for most of their lives taught in poor surroundings a people who were very poor.



Site of first Myna N.S.

The story of Myna school follows similar lines. The first teacher mentioned is Thomas Ryder (1826).<sup>31</sup> Frs. McManus and H. O'Connell seek to establish Myna school in 1836.<sup>32</sup> The building is described as made of stone and mortar and thatched. There are no desks, no seats. The school has a five-day week, 10-4, 34 males and 27 females attending; 3 rooms in good repair measuring 40' x 17½' x 9'. Thomas Gallagher is the teacher mentioned.<sup>33</sup> Supporting names for the school include the following surnames Joyce, O'Grady, Madden, Gibbons, Walsh, Cannon, Gavin and Moran. Teacher Pat Feeney is granted a salary of £10 in 1839.

In 1847 the inscription over the door is noted 'Built by Most Rev. Dr. McHale 1841'. The school is now crowded to excess because food is distributed there. It is likened more to a soup kitchen than a school by Inspector Hamill. 1850 Bridget Joyce (18 years) is mentioned. Rev. Luke Ryan reports that the school adjoins the Church, is now 51' x 15' x 9', has 3 tables, 9 forms and a teacher's desk. No males (surprising) are attending, but there are 64 females. J. Warde and P. Joyce are the teachers.<sup>34</sup>

1858 Anne O'Malley is retained as a teacher with Miss McNamara. The school now has 101 males and 83 females. Mary Geraghty joins the teaching staff in 1868. Pat Joyce is dismissed 2 years later for having a copy of the Fenian oath in his possession and also arms with no licence. John Warde left the school the same year. In 1870 Thomas McKay taught in Myna but later emigrated. John Moran and Teresa Kenefick are now mentioned in the records with Pat Joyce as Principal! There are now 87 males and 73 females on rolls.

1872 sees Mary Fleming and Bridget Higgins already recognised with the attendance given as 37 males, 36 females. 1875 T. Kenefick left and £8 salary was granted to M. Geraghty. 1883 Patrick Jordan was assistant with Mr. Moran, Principal and Mr. O'Donnell, Monitor.<sup>35</sup> In 1884 a report lamented that the state of the school was very poor and that agriculture was not taught nor was there little cramming before examinations. Kate Pryce is work mistress. 1889 Michael Duffy is teacher until 1898; 1890 Michael Roddy and Michael Walshe are assistant teachers with average attendance now shown as 67 males and 65 females.<sup>36</sup> Bridget Moran and Mary Geraghty are also teaching in the school. In 1894 salary was withdrawn from Mrs. Mary Geraghty because of insufficient numbers. Mr. M. O'Donnell was appointed to the school in 1898 and 2 years later Michael Walshe left, one wonders was it for Carrowholly.

1906 saw the Manager writing that he wishes to build a new school. School Inspector Fenton reported in 1910 65 pupils on average. P. H. Moran joined the staff in 1902 and became Principal in 1912.<sup>37</sup> The school moved to a new site in 1925 and the last 3 Principals have been Mr. R. Quinn (1949), Mrs. A. Quinn (1970) and Mr. W. Cox (1982).

The story for Carrowholly is somewhat more complicated because at times there were two schools in Carrowholly and it is difficult to decipher which school is referred to in the early records.

Tradition tells that the first school in Carrowholly was built in 1834 for the children of labourers and tenants of the Demesne, and the people employed in the Coastguard Stations at Pigeon Point.<sup>38</sup> In 1844 there are 2 references to Carrowholly school which must have been the school built by Giles Eyre. George Clendining and G. Hildebrand are the trustees. The school is a cabin, 1 room, 13' x 10' x 6' with 2 teachers, hours 11-4 in winter, 10-5 summer, and there is no religious education for Roman Catholics (a point which was disputed greatly in subsequent years).<sup>39</sup> The site is in Rusheen; the lease from the Marquess of Sligo was granted as at Rosduane for 3 lives, viz. Queen Victoria, Prince Consort and son.<sup>40</sup> There are 100 pupils in the school, and it is recorded that there is much opposition to it from the Roman Catholic clergy. The teachers are Michael Cain, Principal and Mgt. McGreal (20 years of age) 'for plain work, knitting and some fancy work.' In October of that year Henry Browne (Protestant) is recorded as the teacher and is accused of giving Protestant catechism to Roman Catholic children. Inspector Hamill reports:

In the *Mayo Telegraph* of 11 April 1849 Thomas Hardiman, Pastor of Kilmeena wrote a letter against Rev. Giles Eyre who was then seeking financial support for his school. Hardiman told that 'his [Eyre's] flock did not number a dozen till the starvation began. . . ' and he continued 'I wish to point out that the present teacher is apostate, that his predecessor Kane was apostate, and his predecessor again old Harry Browne an apostate, and was dismissed by the Board for teaching Protestant Catechism to the Catholic pupils. . . ' and he concluded 'Regarding the state of the parish. . . suffice to say death from starvation is now as. . . familiar to us here as was ever death from any epidemic that has ever scourged this land. . . '<sup>41</sup>



Myna N.S. 1925-1983.



*National School, Carrowholly to 1945. Now the home of the Mullees.*

1848: The attendance is given as 64 males, 64 females. 1849: John McDermott (from Galway) is appointed. Some scholars rowed over each day from the Quay to his school. Mary Buckley and Rachel Matthews are also mentioned.

For early 1850s the following are reported as teachers there, M. Keane, Timothy Tuohy, Topsy Flynn, Patrick Dermody (Principal) and Michael Sheridan.<sup>42</sup> In 1852 Rev. Giles Eyre loses a court case which he brought against Patrick Dermody.<sup>43</sup> John Mangan was a monitor in 1856. Bridget Dermody (23 years) joined the teaching staff in 1859 for sewing, making frocks, knitting and cutting out. There was a 5-day week with 5 hours per day. The school room measured 36' x 18' and the attendance was 36 males, 28 females. She arrived at the school with a testimonial from Mrs. McDonnell of Mayour.

1860 sees J. Warde as substitute. P. Joyce is teacher. Four years later repairs are carried out in the school.

1877 P. Dermody is given permission to cultivate the school plot for his own use.<sup>44</sup>

1881 Wm. Reilly is Principal with 60 pupils.

1884 P. Dermody is pensioned and 2 years later John Greely is appointed. Mary Joyce is monitor in the school in 1887, and 3 years later Bridget Dermody retired. John Greely who married a niece of McDermott became principal, with Mary Greely as assistant later in 1898. Michael Walsh from Kilmeena joined the teaching staff and he enjoyed a reputation of producing 'great scholars'. The turn of the century saw new privies provided.

Inspector Keith reported – 'flooring broken, desks and bookpress perforated by vermin. . . books injured by their [vermin] ravages. . . pupils in playground for physical exercises. . . [but] pupils [were] more orderly than on former occasions. . .'<sup>45</sup>

1903 saw the building of out-houses, while in 1906 Inspector MacWilliam reported on 'the good condition of the building. . . the desks are new. . .'

In 1909 average attendance is given as 55, and 2 years later the Office of Public Works recommends improvements. A side reference to the school at Rusheen says that the school had an average attendance of 15 and was under Rev. Hannay.

In 1912 Rev. J. O'Toole writes to the Commissioners stating that a new school is required, but noting that the lease is near the end of its term advises 'wait sale of property as school is not in a central place at present'.

In 1913 King Edward has died, the lease is up. Inspector Fenton surrenders lease. Fr. Conroy, P.P. writes to the Commissioners.<sup>46</sup>

Local tradition tells that the roof was blown off the school by a great storm in 1927. Mrs. Greally retired in 1928, Mr. Walsh in 1930. Mr. Egan (from Castlebar), Mrs. Staunton, Eileen Daly and Nuala Moran, complete the list of Principals who have served, and indeed are serving, the children of Carrowholly well to the present time.

The first reference to Fahy is dated 1826 when Philip Doyle became teacher there.<sup>47</sup> In 1855 Norah Keane (20), James Cusack (Principal) and Michael O'Donnell, Manager, are reported as teaching a roll of 154 in a room 40' x 14'.

Inspector Fenton reports an average of 107 in 1910.<sup>48</sup> One of the most famous past pupils of this school was Fr. Pat Cusack who died in 1944 P.P. of Keelogue.

Other references to local schools include Ardkeen and Claggan, that were refused sanction in April 1840 because leases could not be effected;<sup>49</sup> Inislyre where Mary Fleming (20 years of age) was appointed in 1881; Cullenmore where Inspector Fenton reported 11 average attendance with 18 on rolls in 1910; Broca established in 1831 with 46 males, 20 females, backed with signatures which included Fr. McManus, Fr. O'Connell, Cusack, O'Donel and Gannon, to which Thomas Joyce was appointed in 1839 in a room 24' x 12'; Slingan, where in 1826 Patrick Judge (Protestant) was appointed;<sup>50</sup> Gorteen and Gortnaclashagh Schools reported under Kildare Schools in 1836; and others at Coolbareen, Buckfield and Knacknabola.

The earliest reference for a school at Rosehill is to Thomas Joyce 1826<sup>51</sup> (a hedge school). Sir Samuel O'Malley built the first school in July 1836.<sup>52</sup> It is described as made of stone and mortar and slated, 22' x 16' x 12'. There were neither desks nor seats. The school operated a five day week 10-4. There were 60 males and 40 females on the rolls and Patrick Joyce was teacher. All scholars made payments. Rev. P. MacManus of Westport was manager, and the supporting signatures for the school included Fr. H. O'Connell, Gibbons,



Mr. Keane and Mrs. Greally, Carrowholly N.S. c.1924.



National School, Carrowholly today.

Gannon, Garavan, Murray and Burke – all Roman Catholic.<sup>53</sup> Owen Maley was appointed teacher there in 1839 at the salary of £8 per annum.

Sir Samuel O'Malley's estate for the year 1846 is set out in Appendix 3. Local tradition looks upon him as a descendant of Gráinne, and suggests he was born on Clare Island and that his father was a tax gatherer for Lord Sligo. He was an M.P. for Mayo in Grattan's Parliament. Tradition holds that he changed his religion and voted for the Union, and received title and financial reward. From some of this money he bought Rose Hill Court. His aim was to view Clew Bay and Clare Island every day of his life. But a great storm arose on his first night in his new castle, and the roof was blown away. Although repaired the same fate once more befell the castle. Sir Samuel moved to Doonamoon, Belcarra.<sup>54</sup>

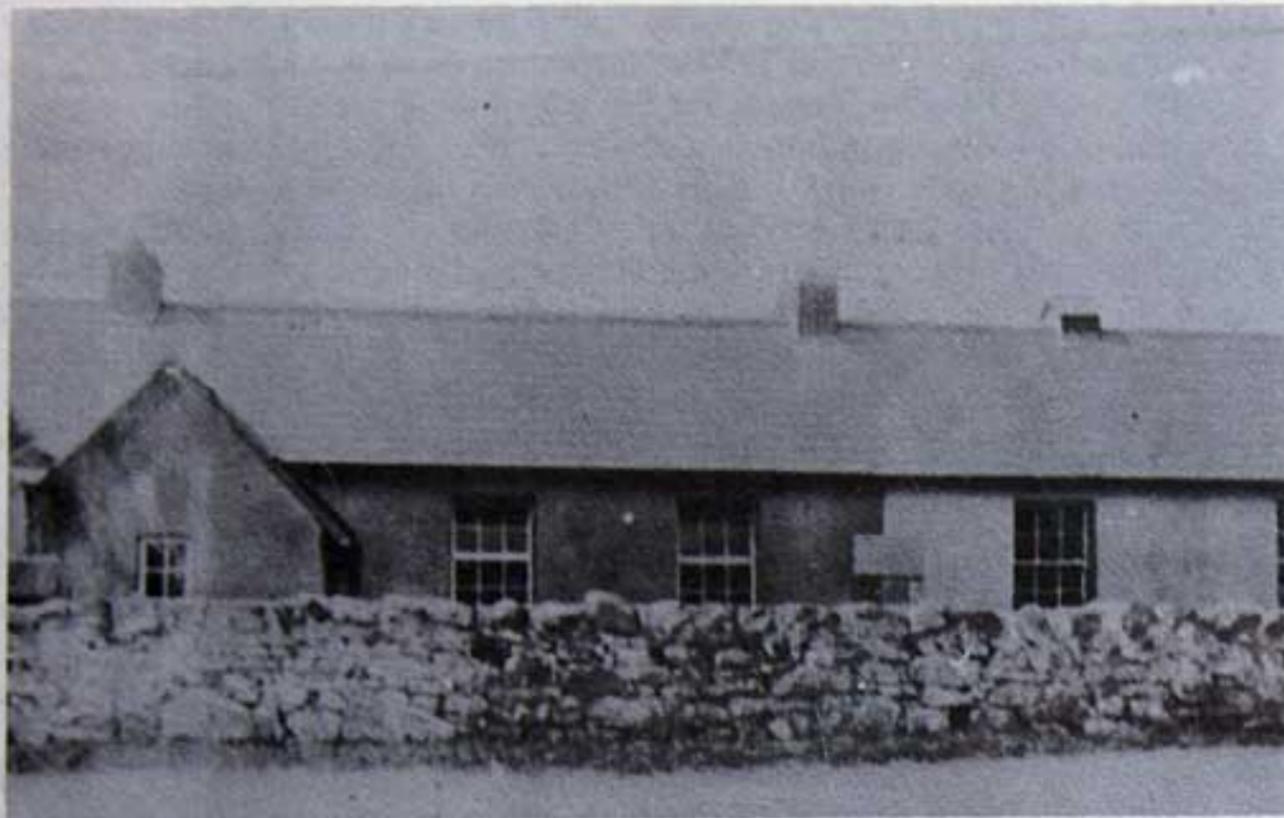
Martin O'Donnell gives a slightly different version of Sir Samuel O'Malley.<sup>55</sup> He attempted the building of the castle but it was never completed. The family was most important. Sir Samuel who was son of Owen who died about 1774, shot his mother and his son Owen shot his brother. Ruin overtook them. One of Sir Samuel's sons became a lawyer and was known as Counsellor O'Malley and is remembered by the people.

Again there's a reference in *Síle Ni Chinnéide*, 'A Frenchman's Tour of Connacht in 1791' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 1976. Coquebert De Monbret visited the Westport area in 1791 and describes the O'Malley family gossip:

the last of them died some time ago and public opinion charged his wife, who behaved very badly, with having poisoned him. She was acquitted by the jury, but a few days before I arrived here she was shot by her son, ten or twelve years of age [Sir Samuel?]. While dying she had time to declare that the shooting was an accident.

During 1830 and 1831, Sir Samuel was employed by Dublin Castle in his capacity as one of the chief officers of the South Mayo Militia to give reports to them about the state of the countryside. These reports are quite general and the only mention of Kilmeena is the case of the tenant assembly of January 1831. This is that report:

[previous day quiet, so on morning of 14th]. . . I went out again with Mr. Fitzgerald Higgins who brought out the staff of the South Mayo [militia] by Lord Sligo's orders to the Bridge of Buckfield, where a large party was expected to assemble and at which place no people were. Mr. Higgins halted his party there and I went on to warn the Burrishoole yeomanry to be ready to parade at a moment's notice. . . [met a man]. . . and he asked him who swore him and he said people who broke into his house at night and who he did not know, he said his name was Moran and he resided in Mr. Lewis O'Donnell's land. I desired him to go home and he went. . . I afterwards met several parties who all said they were sworn and going to fulfil their oaths, and they all returned towards their homes at my desire but said they fear their houses would be burned. . . [then at Buckfield Bridge] they appeared on the summits of the hills and two parties formed



*N.S. Fahy.*



*Sir Samuel's Folly, Rosehill.*

on the road to Newport, and another on a new road on the right flank of the South Mayo, but which came into the road to Westport in the rear. These two parties were separated by a river. I went on the road to Newport and cleared it without bringing on the men, but the other party continuing and the party reforming on the right of the road. I sent Mr. Charles O'Malley a lieutenant of the Burrishoole Corps to Lord Sligo, to say I would wish to parade the Corps at once to march them into Westport in the evening to receive their arms and ammunition. And in the meantime a further force should be sent to [ ] the staff of the South Mayo. Mr. Fitzgerald Higgins then read the riot act to the party who had formed on the road on the right flank of the staff, but they did not disperse. He then read the riot act for the party formed on the Newport Road but they would not disperse either, and on his returning to the staff of the South Mayo accompanied by [ ], the Revd. Mr. Hughes the P.P. of Newport and Burrishoole addressing the people formed on the Newport Road, after he had spoken to them for some time he came up to us, and after he saluted us, I said I regretted to see such a thing; he said the distress was very great. I told him there was no such great distress and that the people should disperse; he said the distress was very great and that he could disperse them in an instant but he wished to let it come to that, and seemed to wish to let it come to that, and seemed to wish for some kind of parley with the people. I said it was open rebellion; he said it was not, and I walked away. After Mr. Fitzgerald Higgins having reasoned with him for some time, he went up to the crowd on the Newport Road and spoke to them. Mr. Charles O'Malley having just then returned with Lord Sligo's approval of my suggestion, I called on Mr. Fitzgerald Higgins to order the staff to clear the Newport road, and as I went in front of the staff I heard one person say they would obey their priest but no other person. Mr. Charles O'Malley also heard him. The party on the Newport Road then began to disperse and also the party on the new road on the right flank of the staff. I sent Mr. Charles O'Malley on to parade the Burrishoole Corps - Lord Sligo came up in a few minutes and the people dispersed. Mr. Charles O'Malley paraded 96 of the corps in ten minutes. I have had them marched in here and I have kept them in Westport tonight, and I shall keep their arms and ammunition here under my own care. My second [?son] Mr. William O'Malley who had come to give any aid he can, heard one of the party on the Newport Road [saying] they would disperse quietly until the next time. . .<sup>56</sup>

On 9 January Sylvanus Jones, C.C. of Police and Magistrate, wrote to Government saying:

Some hundreds of the peasantry assembled last night near the chapel of Kilmina on the road leading to Newport for the purpose of swearing not to pay either rent, tithes or taxes. This mob visited several villages in the direction of this town for the same purpose and did not disperse before day light, it appears they had no arms with them.

*(To be continued).*

**APPENDIX 1**  
**PRIESTS OF KILMEENA**

**Parish Priests**

1704	Eaneas MacDonnell, P.P. Kilmaclasser & Islandeady
1817-1832	Fr. Thomas O'Keane
1825	Fr. James Joyce
1830	Fr. Charles Kelly
1832-1836	Fr. Myles Sheridan
1837-1841	Fr. Patrick MacManus (Adm.)
1841-1850	Fr. Thomas Hardiman
1851-1861	Fr. Luke Ryan
1861-1897	Fr. Michael O'Donnell
1897-1915	Fr. J. O'Toole
1915-1928	Fr. Conroy
1929-1937	Fr. P. Brett
	Fr. Eaton
	Fr. James Walsh
1970	Fr. Michael Tiernan
1970-1980	Fr. Thomas Mulloy
1980	Fr. Éamonn O'Malley

**CURATES OF KILMEENA**

1884	B. McDermott
1889	Wm. H. Kelly
-1894	James Heaney
	Fr. Burke
1894-1896	Richard Biggins
1896-1897	Thomas Healy, Adm.
1898?	Michael Hughes
1900	Ed. Walsh
1902	H. Kelly
1912-1917	B. Canavan
1914	J. Gibbons
1919	Michael Walsh
	William Walsh
Later	Michael Burke
1946	Fr. Philibin
1947	Fr. Murphy
	Fr. Tiernan
	Fr. Gullane
	Fr. Greaney
	Fr. Shaughnessy

**APPENDIX 2**

**Will of Bonaventure McDonnell, Bp. of Killala, made 6/9/1760.**  
*Archivium Hibernicum*, Vol. 2 (1913) p.240

[Dr. McDonnell, a Franciscan, was appointed 7/5/1749 and died first half of September, 1760. (Powicke & Fryde say 16/9/1760)].  
In the name of God, Amen. I, Boney McDonnell of Castlebar, in the county of Mayo, gentlen., being of sound and perfect memory. . . I leave and bequeath unto my sister Mary Garvey otherwise McDonnell the sum of £15 sterling; to my sister Oner McDonnell £15 sterling; to Mr. Duffy, Parish Priest of Castlebarr £12 sterling, giving such share of that as he thinks proper to his coadjutor; to the poorest widows of the parish of Kilmina and the parish of Castlebarr £8 sterling; to the secular clergy and Regulars of the Diocese of Killala and Abby of Moyn £50 sterling; which sune (is) to be distributed to the above Regulars and seculars by Mr. Patrick Duffy, Parish Priest of Castlebarr, John Finan, Parish Priest of Ballina, and Hugh Kelly, Parish Priest of Backs – all the above Legacies to be paid out of the Funds or sune of money due to me now on my brother Charles McDonnell and my Nephew Frank McDonnell both of Moyover in the county of Mayo. And the remainder of what money is due to me on my brother Charles & my nephew Frank and others I bequeath to my nephew Frank McDonnell he paying the foregoing legacies. To my nephew Jozeph McDonnell the residue of (or) rest of my wordly substance, he paying all my debts and funeral expenses. I doe hereby constitute and appoint my nephew Jozeph McDonnell and my nephew Frank McDonnell and Andw. Mahon of Castlebarr to be executors of this my last will and testament.

In witness whereof I have hereunto put my hand and seal this sixth day of September in the year of our Lord God one thousand and seven hundred and sixty.

Signed, sealed and declared and published in the presence of us as his last will;

Thady McNamara.  
Hugh Hopkins

(Will not proved).

APPENDIX 3

THE ESTATES OF SIR SAMUEL O'MALLEY  
IN THE COUNTY OF MAYO

The Castleaffy Estate

Townland	Sub-Denomination	Tenants' Names
Claggan	Claggan North	Walter McNally Patrick Caine Sen. Michael Burke Charles Malley
	Claggan South	John Caine, Jun. Michael Reilly William Berry Darby Keane
Rosmindle		Martin Casey Pat McHale Pat Nolan Austin McHale
Roscahill	Roscahill East	Thomas Grady Edward McHale John & P. Gibbons James Kirby
	Roscahill West	John Malley Thady Malley
	Roscahill East 2	Peter McDonagh John Nolan Pat Burke, Jun. Widow Michael Burke
	Middle Roscahill West	Anthony McNulty Pat Malley, Jun. Peter Malley
	East Roscahill West	Pat Staunton Edwd. & Jack McHale Thomas Browne

Townland	Sub-Denomination	Tenants' Names
	Roscahill East 3	Mrs. McDonagh Peter McDonagh James Moran
Inishnakillew	Inishnakillew West	Thomas Mogan Patrick Quin Austin Quin, Jun. James Jordan
	Inishnakillew East	Michael Malley Patrick Cowell Thomas Jordan Bryan Malley
	Purtaghnacloy	Denis Keane
Drumgarve	Drumgarriff West	Martin Burke James Joyce Edwd. Malley Jun. James Malley
	Drumgarriff Middle	Austin Moran William Brown John Sullivan
	Drumgarriff East	John Staunton Charles McNally John Malley Michael McDonagh
Castleaffy	Castleaffy West	James Malley Myles Staunton Richard Joyce
	Castleaffy East	John Gibbons Mrs. Dever William Gibbons Thomas Gibbons
	Castleaffy Middle	Patrick Gibbons Dominick Gibbons Patrick Joyce John Joyce

Townland	Sub-Denomination	Tenants' Names
Innishcottle		John Quinn
Innishgowla	Innishgowla	Pat Malley Walter Malley Michael Malley
Collan More & Collan Beg	West Collan North	William Casey Pat [?] Thomas Malley Martin Malley
	Middle Collan North	Pat[?] & Martin Casey Pat Leonard
	Collan Beg North	Michael Wat Purcell James & Pat McHale
	East Collan North	Pat & Michael Gibbons Michael McHale, Sen. Michael McHale, Jun.
	Collan Middle North	Michael Leonard James Casey Michael Burke Patrick Burke
	Collan South	John Casey, Jun. James Casey John Malley Edmd. & Wat Malley James Malley
Innishgort	Innishgort	Patrick Jeffers John Scahill Myles Burke
Knockicahalaun	Knockicahalaun	William Gill
Innishcottle		
Ilanaconney	Ilanaconney	
Moneybeg	Moneybeg	
Corrigrevagh	Corrigreevagh[?]	
Rabbit Island		

The Castleaffy Estate is situate about 3 miles north of Westport, some of it consisting of islands in Westport Harbour. The tenantry are numerous and apparently very poor. The soil varies in value from 12/- to 18/- per acre. There is lime on the Estate which is made but little use of, and the lands are badly cultivated. The tenants who occupy the islands appear to be in better circumstances than those on the mainland, which may be accounted for by the advantages they have in collecting seaweed for manure. The eastern sides of the islands are of very good quality, but the Western sides are too much exposed to admit of tillage cultivation. The inhabitants of the islands devote about half of their time to fishing and the other half to farming. The Oyster Beds may be made productive of profit, but it seems they have hitherto been neglected.

#### THE ROSEHILL ESTATE

Townlands	Sub-Denomination	Tenants' Names
Conrea	Conrea	Pat Staunton, Sen. Pat Staunton, Jun. Thomas Powell
Money	Knockinisky	Thomas Caine Thady Caine, Jun. Martin Caine Owen Regan Mrs. Edward Gibbons John Joyce Pat McEvilly
	Coolaghbaun	Michael Joyce James McDonagh Patrick Malley John Joyce
	Rosehill Middle	Edmond Staunton Patrick Browne James Sullivan Peter Joyce
	Rosehill East	Philip Kerrigan John Malley Edward Malley

Townland	Sub-Denomination	Tenants' Names
	Old Walls	David Murray Patrick Woods Patrick Casey Andrew McHale Richard McHale Myles Burke
Mucklagh	East Muchlagh	Edward Joyce Thomas Joyce, Jun. Austin Joyce Thomas Joyce, Sen. Peter Joyce
	Mucklagh West & Knockasproha	Charles Cannon Sen. Thomas McNally Peter Gibbons John Malley Charles Cannon Jun. Thomas Reilly Martin Moore Anthony Moore
	Mucklagh East	Pat Joyce Pat Moran Thomas & James McNally

This Estate which is situate about 4 miles from Westport is very much exposed to the sea. A good house was built on the highest point some years since, by Sir Samuel O'Malley, but it was found too bleak for a residence, and it is now in ruins. The greater part of the land which is worth from 12/- to 15/- per acre, is in tillage, and there is an abundance of lime.

#### SUMMARY OF THE CASTLEAFFY ESTATE

	Yearly Rent		
	£	s.	d.
Claggan	65.	15.	2½
Rosmindle	59.	18.	0
Innishnakillew	170.	15.	2½
Drumgarve	109.	16.	4
Castleaffy	89.	15.	8
Innishcuttle & Inishgowla	28.	3.	6
Collan More & Collan Beg	176.	1.	1
Innishgort	19.	18.	3
Knockicahalaun	35.	9.	2½
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	842.	0.	8½

#### SUMMARY OF THE ROSEHILL ESTATE

	£	s.	d.
Money	215.	14.	0
Mucklagh	88.	13.	1
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	304.	7.	1

#### GENERAL SUMMARY OF ESTATES

Clare Island	617.	17.	3
Castleaffy Estate	842.	0.	8½
Rosehill Estate	304.	7.	1
Carrowmore & Cahir Estate	356.	0.	2
Estate near C'bar	314.	8.	9
Kilowcarra Estate	63.	19.	2
Kilboyne Estate	342.	5.	0½
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	£2,840.	18.	2

By the foregoing particulars it will be seen that the Estates of Sir Samuel O'Malley Bart. contain according to the return made by his Agent 9046 acres, but that the more accurate information afforded by the Ordnance Survey makes the aggregate quantity 9995 Statute Acres. This discrepancy might in some measure be accounted for by the Agent's account extending only to the Arable pasture and Bog lands, and the Ordnance Survey including the Lakes and Water belonging to the Estates.

The Leases of some of the Towns are expired and on the eve of expiring, when advances of the Rent might fairly be expected and realized, particularly on Clare Island, which is Tithe Rent charge free, by which the Rental will be increased to a net annual sum of £2,800 after deducting 6d. in the pound for the Tithe Rent Charges on the Lands subject thereto, and 3d. in the pound for the Landlord's moiety of the Poor Rates – see the observations on Clare Island f. 5.

There are on the Lands comprising the whole property 333 Tenants and it appears that the Rents are paid with punctuality.

It may not be safe to calculate that a forced Sale would produce a clear sum exceeding £60,000 but the Estate is certainly worth more than that sum, probably taking Clare Island to fetch the amount of Lord Sligo's offer of £20,000[?], the whole property is certainly worth £70,000.

Messrs. Cromie who are applying on the behalf of Sir Samuel O'Malley for the loan of £40,000 at 4¼% are very respectable and responsible persons as well as effective and energetic Agents, and as it is understood that they are to give their undertaking for the regular and punctual payment of the interest, the security for such a Loan in Ireland may be considered as improved thereby:

Estimated clear annual value and Rental	£2,800
Interest of £40,000 at 4¼%	1,700

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Surplus annual income	£1,100
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The surplus estimated minimum value is £20,000.

The various Townlands composing this property, are set forth in the 12 accompanying Maps, being the published Sheets of the Ordnance Survey, which is probably the most accurate, useful and interesting work ever performed by this Government, or by the Government of any other country.

The foregoing is respectfully submitted

**Chas. Bailey**  
**5 Stratford Place**  
 10th January 1845

1. National Museum, Reg. No. 1932: 7R.I.A.
2. National Museum.
3. National Museum, Reg. No. 1968:81.
4. *History of Kilmeena Parish 441 A.D. to 1958 A.D.* – Pádraigh Ó Móráin, M.A. (Mayo News, Westport), page 4.
5. *The Dioceses of Tuam, Killala & Achonry*, – Hubert T. Knox (Hodges Figgis Dublin, 1904) pages 85, 86.
6. Ibid. p.89.
7. Ibid. pp 193, 198.
8. Ibid. pp 207, 209.
9. Ibid. pp 221.
10. Ibid. pp 224, 226.
11. Ibid. p.181.
12. Ibid. p.189.
13. *History of Kilmeena Parish*, p.6.
14. Ibid. p.7.
15. *Enquiry into the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland*, 1831, p.21.
16. *A Memoir of Power le Poer Trench Archbishop of Tuam*, Rev. J. D'Arcy Sirr, D.D. (Dublin 1845), p.217.
17. Ibid. p.224.
18. Public Record Office: Diocese of Tuam: Class I Rectories & Villages p.43d.
19. Account Book of Rev. Giles Eyre dated 1836: pp 54, 65, 70, 71, 75, 76, 79.
20. Will of Rev. Giles Eyre, probated 26 May 1875.
21. Irish Folklore Dept. U.C.D. MS No. 90 (p.390).
22. Commission of Public Instruction pp 52d, 66d. Public Record Office Dublin.
23. *Report of commission on education in Ireland*, 1826.
24. Public Record Office ED1/102 – No. 9.
25. Ibid. ED1/61.
26. Ibid. ED9/6138.
27. Ibid. ED1/65-349, 350.
28. Ibid. ED2/109-50, ED2/33, ED9/4394.
29. Ibid. ED9/16790.
30. Ibid. ED9/25274; *Cill Mhiodhna*, M.A. Ó Domhnaill, p. 47.
31. Dingfelder and McAuliffe, *Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses in the Province of Connacht 1826-27*, 1256.
32. Public Record Office ED2/102.
33. Ibid. ED1/99.
34. Ibid. ED1/62 No. 68; ED1/142 & 157; ED/109.
35. Ibid. ED1/65-30; ED1/65-321.
36. Ibid. ED9/5644.
37. Ibid. ED9/23213.
38. Irish Folklore Dept. U.C.D. MS. No. 88 p.319.
39. P.R.O. ED1/83 & 91.
40. Ibid. ED1/102.
41. *Mayo News*, 27 May 1893.
42. P.R.O. ED2/109.
43. Ibid. ED1/102 No. 205.

44. Ibid. ED9/113.
45. Ibid. ED9/14756, 14723, 14760.
46. Ibid. ED9/22971-23000.
47. *Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses*.
48. P.R.O. ED9/25274.
49. Ibid. ED1/142.
50. *Schoolmasters and Schoolmistresses*, 1256.
51. Ibid.
52. P.R.O. ED2/101.
53. Ibid. ED1/98.
54. Irish Rolklore Dept. U.C.D. MS no. 68, p.390.
55. *Cill Mhiodhna*, p.55.
56. Sir Samuel O'Malley, Dublin Castle, 14 January 1831, SPO 1831:W3.

JARLATH DUFFY: Native of Aughagower, living in Carrowholly, graduate U.C.D. Principal Vocational School, Westport for past ten years. Founder member and Chairperson, Westport Historical Society. Editor *Cathair na Mart* 1981-4, Co-Editor *Fair Fingal*, 1975.

**TRAITOR OR PATRIOT?  
THE CASE OF EDMUND GARVEY OF ROSMINDLE**  
by Terence Garvey

Edmund Francis Garvey was on 14 September 1798 arrested on a charge of High Treason, for which he was tried seven weeks later by Court Martial sitting at Castlebar and condemned and sentenced to transportation for life; and before November was out he had been despatched to Cork for onward shipment to Botany Bay. His arrest had been carried out at the behest of Lord Altamont's brother, the Right Honourable Denis Browne, a member of the Irish Privy Council and of the Irish Parliament, and a magistrate, who then and throughout the ensuing eight years conducted against Edmund a campaign of sustained hostility and malice. Edmund was arrested on the strength of a letter stated to have been found in the pocket of a French uniform on the battlefield of Ballinamuck in Co. Leitrim. The battle of Ballinamuck, fought on 8 September 1798 (six days before Edmund Garvey's arrest) had seen the defeat and surrender of the Franco-Irish forces under the French General Jean-Joseph-Amable Humbert, and had been followed by the summary execution of many of the Irish participants in the war. The letter, declared by Denis Browne to be in the handwriting of Edmund Garvey, and signed simply with the initials 'E.G.', purported to have been addressed to Fr. Michael Gannon, an Irish priest who had joined the French. It contained political and practical advice for transmission to 'the French General'.

So far the narrative is fairly plain sailing, but from this point on contradictions multiply. Edmund hotly denies that he is guilty of treason and, in particular, that he wrote the letter. Denis Browne no less hotly asserts the contrary. At the time, Edmund had the better of the argument, eventually succeeding in turning the law on his persecutor. And in his later years, having retired across Clew Bay to Falduff on the south shore, he seems to have established himself there with all the appearances of a solid and respectable citizen.

But in modern times, historians of Ireland's national independence movement have been very ready to co-opt Edmund Garvey into what they conceive to have been a network of local insurgent leaders engaged in patriotic activities throughout Connacht and the midlands. That such a group existed is not disputed; but that Edmund was a member, let alone an important member, is largely unsubstantiated.

In the hope of resolving these contradictions, the present paper re-examines the contemporary material preserved in the State Paper Office in Dublin Castle. This exercise, while enabling us to dismiss some propositions which have hitherto passed as historical fact, does not – alas – add correspondingly to our positive knowledge of Edmund Garvey's case.

The array of powers taken by the government of Ireland for dealing with the rebellion is analysed in Appendix 1 – an impressive enough collection to all appearances, but not one affording complete protection. Its shortcomings became apparent on 20 December 1798 when Edmund's counsel managed at one stroke to overturn the proceedings of the Castlebar court martial and to frustrate Edmund's removal from Cork to the antipodes. The instrument which worked this destruction was a writ of habeas corpus obtained by the defence from the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Kilwarden, in the Court of King's Bench in Dublin. The point of law underlying this move was the inadequacy of the Royal Prerogative to sustain the application of martial law save in conditions of actual emergency (given that martial law by statute – whether by way of the Rebellion Act or of the Habeas Corpus suspension Act – did not come in until the spring of 1799).

Even with this leak plugged there were still occasional lapses, when expiring legislation did not get renewed in time or when officialdom played a wrong card and missed a trick. On such occasions Edmund found himself briefly at liberty and no doubt felt that such cat-and-mouse treatment was unworthy. In truth, however, it was illusory to suppose that Edmund had a hand to play. Once officialdom had grasped the full potentialities of the 'Secretary's warrant', the game was up, his options being reduced to languishing in jails between Galway and Kilmainham or accepting the meagre bounty of 'pardon' under the Banishment Act. In the event, there was little choice. It must have become clear to him in the spring of 1801 that he would be left to stew in his own juice in Galway; and 'after being repeatedly solicited' by his friends, Edmund consented to enter into sureties to quit the country. An undated order (SOC 3447/1) made by the Lord Lieutenant and council in June, authorised the court of King's Bench to accept bails from eight named inmates of Kilmainham (including Edmund) on condition that they shall quit the Kingdom under the Banishment Act.

Of his banishment we know merely that it took him to Portugal, which was virtually the only country of continental Europe not actually under Napoleon's occupation. By March 1806, with Pitt dead and Charles James Fox in power, parliament began to let the emergency powers taken during the rebellion run out without replacement. Edmund in Lisbon evidently got the message and was soon back, first in London, then in Dublin, testing the strength of the ice.

The readings he took were evidently encouraging. Only the egregious Denis Browne had the gall to have Edmund arrested on arrival and thrown into Castlebar jail. Now, however, there were no more emergency powers. A writ of habeas corpus meant what it said.

Born in the second half of the 18th century, Edmund was the eldest surviving son of the senior (Lehinch) branch of the Garvey family. Mythology apart, the first Garvey in Mayo was Christopher (later Sir Christopher), son of the Kilkenny man who became successively Dean of Christ Church,

Dublin, Bishop of Kilmore and Archbishop of Armagh. Christopher came to Mayo around 1580 in the wake of John Browne of The Neale, progenitor of the Brownes of Westport. Both men played parts in the transformation of Connacht from a Gaelic-Irish tribal society into a settled part of Queen Elizabeth's dominions. Sir Christopher's son John divided up the extensive lands acquired by the family in Elizabeth's and James I's reigns between his three elder sons, by far the best portion falling to Francis, the eldest, who obtained the estate centred on Lehinch in the Robe valley in Kilmaine and adjoining baronies. Though the Garveys of Lehinch lost almost every acre they possessed during the Cromwellian transplantsations in the 1650s, Edmund's forbears continued, for reasons which remain obscure, to use for two generations more the style 'of Lehinch'; Edmund's father, another Francis, being (according to the Genealogical Office pedigree) the first to use the style 'of Rosmindle'. The same source tells us that Edmund moved from Rosmindle, and we find his son, Francis, a third of the same name, residing in the 1840s and 1850s at Falduff, on the south shore of Clew Bay, adjoining Kilgeever.

Although Garveys had come to Mayo as Protestants in Reformation times, it looks as though at least the Lehinch line had, through marriage or otherwise, returned to the old religion. The Francis who was Edmund's grandfather married a Moore of Brees. His grandson James married a Jordan, and Edmund's father Francis married another; while Edmund himself married a Catholic, Anastatia, daughter of Ingatius Kelly of Castlegar. Penal Laws or no penal laws, this was not actually a very unusual state of affairs. Edmund Garvey's cousin, Bonadventure Garvey of Murrisk, married a Roman Catholic lady, Margaret Merrick of Tuam, in the early 1790s which gave rise to interminable litigation. Even the Brownes who had also of course been Jacobites were Catholics as late as 1729, and sundry collaterals went on a good deal longer. Moreover, Catholic Relief Acts had, from the 1780s onward, repealed many of the more distressing and humiliating provisions of earlier enactments.

While Edmund describes himself (in Prisoners' Petitions 1800/46) as 'a person of but very moderate property', one notes that he readily put up a recognizance of £500 for himself, and two friends – 'esteemed and known to be men of fortune and high character' – put up further sureties of £250 apiece. These were considerable sums at the time – both absolutely, and more so still in a cash-starved economy, where land, the main receptacle of value, could not, because of the entailing of estates, readily be converted into cash. All the same it is clear that Edmund's tribulations constituted a substantial economic disaster.<sup>1</sup> In the petition already quoted he tells the Lord Lieutenant that, before misfortunes befell him, he had established himself, at his residence 'on the seacoast of the west of Ireland', in the salt-making business. It was not, it seems, his only iron in the fire, for he says merely that it was upon it that he 'chiefly relied' (not exclusively depended). All the same, the salt business, being 'totally dependent on his skill and attention' had been 'from the

moment of his first arrest, totally unproductive'. For a while it had been possible for Edmund's mother (Anastatia Garvey, nee Jordan) to superintend the salt business while Edmund was under arrest; but the distress occasioned by her son's imprisonment, combined with the 'dissipation of his property and the final ruin of his prospects' had brought down the old lady's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave. There is however still a faint whiff of mystery about Edmund's economics. He comes back to the subject in an 'address' (SOC 3687/11) directed in February 1807 to an unnamed functionary at the Castle – probably Joseph Trail, the under-Secretary, or possibly Thomas Kemmis, the Crown Solicitor. 'My great crime' Edmund writes 'is to have a little independent property, and mercantile connexions in England by whose means it is probable I will be able to improve that property'. But, not perhaps surprisingly, given that Edmund has just spent five years abroad, there have been encroachments – 'a part of that property has been for some time in the hands of others, without even a pretended claim', and 'another part is now wanted'. Much that looks interesting eludes us here. What were the English mercantile connexions? Who were the trespassers on Edmund's property? What was the thing about salt-making? It must either have been very lucrative (Edmund had a shot at starting it up in Galway during an interlude of freedom in 1800 but Denis Browne and his henchmen soon put a stop to that) or – perish the thought – could it have been a cover for some other, more obviously remunerative activity, like smuggling?

In the way of personal details we learn surprisingly little from so much paper. Two points only are worth retention. A letter from Galway dated 16 July 1800 to a correspondent in Dublin Castle (filed with Prisoners' Petitions 1800/417) records that his recent arrest (the fifth) fell when he was 'on the eve of being married', thus inflicting on him a loss 'which is now worse than death'. Unfortunately we do not know whether the lady in question was the one whom he eventually did marry – Julia, the daughter of Ignatius Kelly of Castlegar – nor, if so, whether he managed to get her to the altar in time to take her to Portugal with him when he went there the following year. The second crumb of evidence relates to Edmund's health and physique. He says, in his petition to Lord Cornwallis in 1800, that he was never a soldier nor a sailor but that, when the French came in 1798, he volunteered for service against them, only to be rejected by the CO of the Newport corps of yeomanry on the ground of the shortness of his sight. This, he was told, made him 'totally unfit for military duty'. Likewise, when Edmund, after his fifth arrest, was being moved from Galway to Dublin, we find Brigadier-General Thomas Meyrick (who otherwise emerges as a fairly clockwork brand of senior officer) asking Dublin Castle whether he may advance the cost of hiring a horse, since Edmund 'does not seem very capable of undertaking so long a march'.

The Right Honourable Denis Browne, M.P., the author of Edmund Garvey's troubles, achieved notoriety by the zeal and brutality with which he pursued the Mayo rebels of 1798. In his day he was *Donnchadh an Rópa*

Denis the Rope, and local legend remembers him as 'Soap-the-Rope Browne' (from his technological contribution to the increased productivity of the hanging industry). As chairman of the Mayo bench of magistrates, he was well placed to order arrests and to get his victims prosecuted; but it was death sentences he was after, and his correspondence attests alike the trouble he would go to to be present on the grisly occasion and the perverted pleasure which he derived from seeing the deed done. In his *Westport House and the Brownes*, Denis Browne's namesake, the tenth marquess of Sligo, who generally manages to find a good word to say for most of his forbears, attempts no apologia. The Right Honourable Denis, he says:

... was an able man, but never felt that his abilities were stretched. It was said that he was jealous of his elder brother, and even more jealous of his nephew when he became the second Marquess. Perhaps it was over-compensation, a wish to show his power, so typical of petty dictators, that made him react so harshly when Humbert's invasion collapsed. He hung [sic] arbitrarily, and without proper trial, some [sic] of the Irish who had joined the rebellion. . . [he] abused his privileged position with a callous disregard for the aspirations of others. (WH and the B, p. 32).

True, the rebels, on the morrow of the battle of Castlebar (i.e. 28 August) had seized Westport and occupied both Westport House and Denis Browne's own residence at Mount Browne. However well or badly these uninvited guests may have behaved – there is conflicting evidence on this – both brothers took to their heels and, though they were back before many days had passed, the experience cannot have endeared the rebels to either of them.

The main obstacle to the fulfilment of Denis Browne's hang 'em-all policy was the political views of Lord Cornwallis, the 'Lord Lieutenant General and General Governor of Ireland', to give him his full title. Cornwallis was a soldier-statesman whose experience encompassed the American War of Independence (it had fallen to him to surrender the British forces to General Washington at Yorktown in 1781), the Governor-Generalship of India and the defeat of the Franco-Irish forces under General Humbert. Later, he was to negotiate the Peace of Amiens with the French, in 1802, and thereafter to return to India for a second spell as Viceroy. If one were to divide Ireland's British rulers into the proponents of conciliation and those of coercion, Cornwallis would be found unquestionably among the conciliators, as indeed would be his Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, who resigned in 1801 when he failed to carry Catholic Emancipation. So also would other members of the team, the young Castlereagh as Chief Secretary (into whose soul the iron – very conspicuous in later life – had not yet entered), Elliott as under-secretary, and – in the judiciary – Lord Kilwarden as Lord Chief Justice. Cornwallis let it be known to the presiding officers of courts martial, and to the civil courts, that he wished to see the death penalty reserved to extreme cases of treachery and brutality: if it were thought necessary to put offenders out of harm's way, the primary remedy lay in transportation overseas.

Denis Browne regarded Cornwallis and his policy – to borrow a term from a later age – as ‘wet’ through and through, and could never forgive him. Here is Browne sounding off on the subject in a letter to Alexander Marsden in Dublin Castle on 18 May 1800 (Rebellion Papers 620/57/16):

I had him [Edmund Garvey] taken, and prosecuted him before a court martial for the fact. He was convicted to the satisfaction of every person. But the mercy of the court, *chiming with the feelings of Lord Cornwallis*, sentences Mr. Garvey to transportation for life, instead of Death which his crime well merited. [Underlining added].

Seven years and two lords lieutenant later (for Cornwallis had resigned with Pitt in 1801 and died in India in 1805), we find him at it again in a letter to Marsden’s successor Joseph Trail on 26 February 1807 (SOC 3687/18):

Edmund Garvey. . . was convicted of high treason by a court martial and, *in pursuance of the mild maxims of Lord Cornwallis*, was transported for life, instead of being hanged as he well deserved. [Underlining added].

and, referring in the same letter to Edmund’s release by Lord Kilwarden, Denis Browne goes on:

In those strange times it was not uncommon to see the Publick Safety sacrificed to Vanity and to a wish for Popularity, which took in more than one object.

For him, repression was more than a mere reaction to the rebellion. Psychologists no doubt have a name for his obsessive preoccupation with capital punishment. But there is ideology here as well. Richard Hayes, in *The Last Invasion of Ireland*, quotes at page 16 a report which Browne submitted to the Castle as early as 1794 – the doctrines of liberty and equality had ‘permeated the lower classes’ in his constituency; the works of Thomas Paine<sup>2</sup> were widely read and, if a landing of French troops took place, they would be joined by the main body of the people. Here we have an early glimpse of Denis Browne the ideologue, who ran an intelligence network financed by Secret Service funds, and established himself as Dublin Castle’s *homme de confiance* and principal informant in Mayo.

Browne had a hand in most of the prosecutions that followed the rebellion in Mayo; but for Edmund Garvey he seems to have had a special rod in pickle:

Previous to the invasion of the French of Mayo, I had information that Mr. Garvey was a seditious person and as such had him watched; but by the system of watchfulness of the traitors of that time, and by the cleverness of Mr. Garvey, he evaded my enquiry and pursued his mischief unmolested (6205/57/16).

Seven years on (Browne to Trail, 12 February 1807, 3687/10) Edmund’s devilish cunning is still uppermost in his tormentors mind:

Mr. Garvey is an educated man of very superior ability. He engaged early in the conspiracy of the United Irishmen and carried on his practices in such a way that I could not come at him. But he did infinite mischief with great ability. He endeavoured to disorganise everything, to prevent the

credit of the National Bank paper – then the only circulating medium, to prevent conviction by juries and to unite all in detestation of the Government and the English connexion.

But, in the end, persistence had its reward:

In 1798 I had the good fortune to catch him. I got hold of a letter of his to the French General, through the medium of a rebel with him<sup>3</sup> advising with as much ability as wickedness the mode and means of conquering this island and connecting it with France. I caused him to be arrested and convicted him to the satisfaction of the court and the whole country of High Treason. He was condemned to transportation beyond seas for life; and it was a sentence of great lenity.

The authenticity of the letter, which Browne describes as being ‘of the greatest atrocity’, written by ‘a most dangerous person’, is examined in detail below. Here we are concerned rather with the motivation of Browne’s vendetta against Edmund. ‘I have’, he concludes (Rebellion Papers 620/57/16) ‘done more than my duty respecting this person. My conduct has more the appearance of persecution than precaution, yet I am unwilling to say all that I think and feel on this business’. Since reticence in relation to the offences of ‘traitors’ was wholly alien to Denis Browne’s style of behaviour during these years, his remark last quoted raises an enquiring eyebrow. Oddly enough we find Denis Browne’s elder brother, Lord Altamont, writing, apparently out of the blue, to Cornwallis (State Prisoners 21, May 1799) enquiring whether Edmund could not be allowed to transport himself voluntarily to America. (We see Lord Altamont’s letter being sent on from Phoenix Park to the Castle – private secretary to private secretary – with request for advice: but no more is revealed). What on earth can be going on here? Could there in fact have been some personal reason? – a woman? a debt? a piece of land? rivalry in business? childhood or boyhood hatred? – which fuelled and intensified Browne’s itch to do Edmund down, and moved his brother to try and get Edmund out of the country. Such an hypothesis can be neither confirmed or denied on evidence currently available.

In one of the final salvos fired by Denis Browne in 1807 we find the following piece of shrapnel:

In Connaught the return of such a man as Mr. Garvey is particularly dangerous in its example, when the resident farmers are mostly of the class description and religion of Mr. Garvey, where there are few resident gentry to control or interfere with the influence of these middle men over the Peasantry. The attention of the Crown lawyers should be pointed to the case. . . In my mind he is an incurable rebel and cannot on any principles of policy or safety be allowed to remain in Ireland.

So far as religion is concerned, Brownes and Garveys alike had come to Mayo as protestants. Edmund’s branch – Garveys of Lehinch – had been dispossessed by the Cromwellians and sided with King James, as indeed had the Brownes, who had operated a cannon-foundry for the Jacobite forces. ‘Westport House’, Lord Sligo writes, ‘has been Protestant since the eighteenth century’. In other words, as the Convert Rolls<sup>4</sup> attest, the Brownes, who had

slipped back in the 17th and the first half of the 18th centuries into the faith of their ancestors, thereafter began one by one to 'conform' to the beliefs of the Church of Ireland by law established. As for 'class description', the ancestors of both men – John Browne of the Neale and Christopher Garvey of Lehinch – there was not much to choose between them. They had come to Mayo together. They were both, for better or worse, gentry, though the Brownes had played for higher stakes, got (and eventually managed to hold on to) more land, become richer and got ennobled, while Edmund's holding of land in Rosmindle was minuscule in comparison. Still, Browne's attempt to dress up his prejudices in the language of sociology is not persuasive; nor is it entirely easy to reconcile the 'middle man' farmer with the earlier characterisation of Edmund as 'an educated man, of very superior ability'. We may conclude that Denis Browne was merely trying to be nasty and, as often, his personal qualities were ensuring success.

This said, an attempt must now be made to assess whether Edmund Garvey was guilty or innocent of the charge of high treason. The lapse of nearly two centuries lends a certain perspective, but makes the discovery of further evidence unlikely.

Of the proceedings of the Court Martial at Castlebar, no record has been found save the sentence, of which a copy is preserved at SOC 3687/3. It is undated.

Sentence passed on Edmund Garvey, tried by Court Martial at Castlebar.

The Court having considered the Evidence for the prosecution as well as that offered by the prisoner in his defence, do find him guilty of the Crime laid to his charge and do therefore sentence him to be transported for life.

G. JACKSON  
Colonel and President.<sup>5</sup>

This tells us little that we do not already know, though it disposes of Hayes's statement (*The Last Invasion of Ireland*, p.309) that Edmund 'received a sentence of death which was commuted by Lord Cornwallis to penal servitude for life'. For an account of what actually passed at the trial we are thus driven back to the statements by Denis Browne already quoted above, and to the meandering but reasonably concrete and coherent story related by Edmund in his petition to Cornwallis of July 29 (or 31) 1800 (Prisoners' Petitions 1800/416).

Though Denis Browne's writings are full of assertions, as we have seen, of Edmund's wickedness and disloyalty, and the danger which he represented to society, it appears that the prosecution chose to rest their case solely upon the evidence of the letter (here reproduced at Appendix 2), and on the testimony of two witnesses who swore that the handwriting was Edmund's,<sup>6</sup> no evidence being offered impugning his loyalty and good character. Accordingly, Edmund explains, the defence was content to demolish the allegation that he was the writer. The two prosecution witnesses admitted under cross-examination that they had not seen Edmund write anything for

upwards of two years 'and then but once'; and one of them acknowledged having been 'for a long time at law and on bad terms' with him. By contrast, the defence called 'five gentlemen of respectability and known loyalty', who swore, each of them, to an accurate knowledge of Edmund's handwriting, that the letter in question bore no similitude thereto, and that positively it was not in Edmund's handwriting. Having thus shot the prosecution's case down in flames, Edmund's counsel decided not to importune the court with character evidence. It was not, of course, the sort of court that they were used to, nor perhaps would it have done any good if they had. At a later stage, as Edmund mentions at the end of his petition, 'many more witnesses' came forward 'to disprove the said letter'. They included in particular a Mr. Dominick Blake, who would not merely testify that the handwriting is not Edmund's, but 'will also prove that it is the handwriting of one Miles Jordan, who was shot at Ballinamuck'. Both Blakes and Jordans were good families of Mayo gentry at the time. Edmund's mother had been a Jordan. It seems likely that all of them, including Edmund, were Catholics. On present information, there is no identification of a Miles or a Dominick.

But if the need for evidence of good character had been discounted at the Court Martial, it became, with Edmund in and out of jail and petitioning for a fresh trial, a commodity of the first importance. He was, he said, not short of it; only the opportunity to bring it to bear was lacking. He offered to produce gentlemen who during the rebellion had resided in the same barony with him and had been eyewitnesses of his 'correct and loyal conduct':

If allowed the benefit of a trial by due course of law or if Your Excellency pleases by a court martial, your petitioner could fully establish his innocence or, if discharged on his former recognizances could, if deemed necessary, obtain certificates of his loyalty and general good conduct from the entire barony in which he resided, and from *the most respectable gentleman in the whole country*. [Underlining added].

Who, we may wonder, was this unnamed paragon? The Brownes might reasonably have claimed that the cap fitted them, but for them Edmund has different language: as he notes in the same petition 'his arrest was occasioned by the enmity and hatred of some persons of rank and property in the county where your Petitioner formerly resided'.

Now, to the letter. It is undated. No place of origin is given, and it is addressed 'To Citizen Gannon, commissary to the French at Castlebar'. If it is genuine, it must have been written in the interval between the Franco-Irish victory at Castlebar on 27 August, and the defeat at Ballinamuck on 8 September 1798, but most probably before Humbert left Castlebar bound for Sligo and Leitrim on 3 September. 'Citizen Gannon' was none other than the Reverend Father Michael Gannon, an energetic, francophone Irish priest from Louisburgh, whose temporal qualities of organisation and drive had gained him the position of Commissary, or procurement officer, to the French forces. Richard Hayes describes him (*Last Invasion* p. 194) as having studied with distinction in France where he became the Chaplain to the Duc de

Crillon. His master went into exile after the revolution and Gannon returned to Mayo, where in 1798 he joined Humbert. On the run, and with a price on his head, he was captured in November 1799, sentenced to transportation, but escaped and after some years as a priest in France, died in Lille as a chaplain to the French army.<sup>7</sup>

The message of the letter can be distilled into five propositions:

- 'suspected persons' (i.e. loyalists, adherents of the old regime in Connacht) must be put where they will be safe from personal violence, but will be unable either to pass intelligence or to spread alarm and despondency. There can be no question of keeping any of them in public positions.
- in granting Commissions, take good care that no one group is favoured over others, or you will have grave trouble over jealousies.
- native Irish troops should be tried out in small operations before they are allowed to get into major engagements: they will be more reliable on foot than on horseback.
- British soldiers should receive a warm invitation to come over to the rebel side, but should be 'trusted with caution' if they come.
- but yeomen (i.e. local Irish) who join the rebel cause have their heart in the right place; and a sure way to it is the offer of land when the victory is won.

In substance this is not bad advice to offer provided that the recipient is assumed to be quite unfamiliar with the political situation in Mayo. But the language in which it is expressed cannot fail to strike the reader as odd. In the other examples of his style which we have, Edmund writes a reasonably clear and distinct brand of prose. Here the writer, as though made nervous by the solemnity of the occasion, waffles on dreadfully, like Polonius, his text studded with maxims ('the natives, I conceive, should be tried in Skirmishes or marches to different places. . .') and generalisations ('habit produces courage. . .', 'the courage of one often communicates itself to others. . .', 'Fear is epidemical'). And then there are the gallicisms - 'He is arrived at the moment the most favourable' (? *il est arrivé au moment le plus propice*); the former governing class appear as 'the suspect persons', which means nothing much in English but becomes clear enough when we go into French. *Les suspects* were the target of the notorious *Loi des suspects* passed by the *Convention* on 17 September 1793, on the basis of which almost anyone could be classified as an enemy of the revolution. All in all, the letter is a peculiar missive for anyone to address to Father Michael Gannon, whom Edmund (supposing he wrote it) must, as a Catholic, have known pretty well and who had, it appears, spent the best part of the preceding seven years in and around his native Louisburgh, engaged in assessing the prospects for mass rebellion.

Though much of the advice it tenders is sensible and indeed sensitive, the letter is perfectly plainly treasonable from the viewpoint not merely of 'ultras' like Denis Browne, but from that of anyone seeking to govern Ireland and defend it against the French. Who wrote it? Denis Browne insisted that

Edmund did, arguing that 'E.G.' was obviously Edmund Garvey and seeking to prove without much success, that the handwriting was his. It does not seem to have occurred to anyone that 'E.G.' might as easily have been Edmund Gibbons, elder son of John Gibbons of Westport, a landowner and agent to Lord Altamont. This Edmund was captured, court-martialled and ordered to be hanged; but his sentence was commuted and he escaped from a ship bound for Botany Bay, joined the Irish Legion in France and died in Boulogne. And, as already noted, Dominick Blake was prepared to swear that the handwriting was that of Miles Jordan. Finally noone, not even Denis Browne, seems to have been prepared, once the original court-martial finding had been overturned, to bring the question of authorship of the letter to an issue in the courts of common law.

In his book *The Last Invasion of Ireland* Richard Hayes (at p. 308) classified Edmund Garvey as one of the 'local insurgent leaders', interesting mainly because of the fact that he 'belonged to the landed gentry', added that Edmund 'joined the French forces on their arrival'. Hayes offers no crumb of collateral for this last statement which, were it a matter of fact, would with reasonable certainty have been picked up and used without mercy by Denis Browne in his prosecution. Nor again do any of the Crown lawyers who time and again sifted the case against Edmund come up with any suggestion that he 'joined the French forces'. And, for what it is worth, we have Edmund's statement that he was as blind as a bat and was found totally unfit for military service when he offered his services *to the British*. In fact this seems to be a third careless error committed by Hayes in his treatment of Edmund, who is, as an actor of less than the first rank, swept up in an appendix the labelling of which has gone wrong.

An ironical consequence of this state of affairs is that the modest but honourable place that Hayes - and other students of 1798 - have accorded to Edmund Garvey in the Pantheon of Irish revolutionary patriots appears definitely less than secure. He may indeed - and such views were by no means unknown in the class to which he belonged - have felt an affinity with the largely Catholic, or 'closet' Catholic, landowners around Clew Bay, and he had ample grounds for hating and fearing the Brownes. He may too have had his emotions stirred by the French revolution and have read Tom Paine, but there is no suggestion that he was a United Irishman (had there been, the charge would have been a bull point in the indictment against him) nor, the letter apart, is there any vestige of evidence of collaboration with the French.

If indeed Edmund was the great rebel that Denis Browne paints him, or the distinguished patriot the historians like to see in him, his conduct must be rated as supine and craven in the highest degree. Instead of proclaiming his devotion to Ireland's cause, he spent seven years protesting his loyalty to the established government. No shred of evidence is adduced that he gave assistance in men, money, arms or food to the Irish patriots or their French allies. When the game was up after Ballinamuck, did he, like the real heroes

(Gibbonses, MacDonnells, Prendergasts, Sweeneys and the like) live rough among the rocks of Connemara and try to escape to France? Not a bit of it. He continued to sit in Rosmindle making salt until Denis Browne came to get him. Surely had Edmund really been a 'traytor', he would have been delighted that the court martial had been fools enough to let him off with transportation for life, and would have accepted his fate in the expectation that, like many others, he would slip away to France and fight again? His behaviour, be it said in all seriousness, will not sustain the burden of glory which historians have tried to thrust upon it, much as they have sought to magnify and romanticise that other unheroic figure 'President' John Moore. To their credit, the judiciary throughout jibbed at convicting him, and his persecutor, Denis Browne, took good care not to let Edmund's case come before a court of common law. Let us then apply the rules of evidence, acquit him of treason and let him retire quietly from the hall of fame.

## APPENDIX 1

### Emergency Powers

The response of authority to the rebellion of the United Irishmen unfolded by several stages as the needs of the moment changed and developed.

Initially, the firm hand was all-important: the outbreak in Leinster on 23 May 1798 was answered on the following day by the *proclamation of martial law*. In proclaiming it the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Camden, relied, as he was entitled to do, upon the Royal Prerogative as his warrant – in the face of manifest armed insurrection – for ousting the normal jurisdiction of the Courts. Lord Camden's martial law was still in force when the French landed on 22 August, and was made ample use of in the reprisals taken against their Irish allies after General Humbert's surrender on 8 September.

But once the initial blood-letting was over, the Government's prime need was for getting off its hands the numerous rebels, many of them in truth of relatively minor importance, who had been rounded up and confessed their guilt. To execute these people in cold blood would contribute nothing to the pacification of the country: besides, Lord Camden had been succeeded as Lord Lieutenant by Lord Cornwallis, whose experience as a statesman and a man of the world strongly predisposed him against avoidable killing. The solution adopted was the enactment on 6 October 1798 of the statute (38 Geo III 78) generally referred to as *The Banishment Act*. It provided for the 'pardon' of named rebels on condition that they got out, and stayed out, of British territory, but did not go to countries at war with Britain. Sureties could be required for the performance of these conditions, the penalty for breach of which was death or transportation for life. Some 90 prisoners are listed by name, and there is provision both in the Act itself and in the

supplementary Act passed on 7 May 1799 (39 Geo III c.36) for others, including persons not yet sentenced, but who qualified for 'pardon', to be disposed of by the same process.

As noted above, Martial Law 'by Prerogative' was considered to be wholly appropriate in emergency conditions of open insurrection. But once the French had surrendered, and the Courts of Common Law had resumed functioning, courts martial could not be retained without legislative sanction ('martial law by statute') granted (and renewable) only for short periods of time. With several well-known 'traitors' still at large and on the run, the government could not afford to let this power go by default; and the *Suppression of Rebellion Act* (the *Rebellion Act* for short) – 39 Geo III c 1 – became law on 25 March 1799, empowering the Lord Lieutenant to authorise trial by court martial for all offences committed in furtherance of the rebellion. No proceedings under martial law were to be challenged in the courts of common law; and the Crown's certificate that they were taken in accordance with the Rebellion Act was to be conclusive, and a sufficient return to a writ of habeas corpus.

This dismantling of the habeas corpus safeguard was made more explicit and extensive in an Act passed three weeks later ('. . .to empower the Lord Lieutenant. . .to apprehend and detain such persons as he. . .shall suspect for conspiring against His Majesty's person and government' – 40 Geo III c 18 of 10 April 1800, generally referred to as the *Habeas Corpus Suspension Act*. It instituted a super-warrant (the 'secretary's warrant' signed personally by the Chief Secretary, or the Lord Lieutenant himself, or six members of the Privy Council) under which anyone detained for 'high treason, suspicion of high treason or treasonable practices' was to be kept in custody, without bail or civil trial, any law or statute to the contrary notwithstanding. The Act ran until 25 March 1801 and was renewable.

The Rebellion Act and the Habeas Corpus Suspension Act were both renewed by the Irish Parliament in 1800, and subsequently prolonged at Westminster as statutes of the United Kingdom. Following Robert Emmet's rising in Dublin on 29 July 1803, a new Rebellion Act (43 Geo III c 116) and a new Habeas Corpus Suspension Act (43 Geo III c 117) were renewed at intervals, finally running out on 8 March 1806.

## APPENDIX 2

### EDMUND GARVEY:

#### THE LETTER FOUND ON THE FIELD OF BALLINAMUCK

Following is full text of the copy of the letter preserved in the State Paper Office under ref. SOC 3687/14. I have punctuated and paragraphed it in the interests of comprehensibility, but have made no other addition; and I have included two passages which Richard Hayes omits from his transcription appearing at page 309 of *The Last Invasion of Ireland*.

To CITIZEN GANNON,  
COMMISSARY TO THE FRENCH AT CASTLEBAR.

[no date]

[no place of origin]

My dear Friend,

Amidst the hurry of business in which from your present situation you are involved, and which I have no doubt you will discharge with fidelity and honour, I trust you will forgive my taking up your time by communicating my Ideas to you, and through you to the French General, at this Important Period.

He is arrived at the moment the most favourable when the Government, as if excited by some supernatural Impulse, accelerate their own destruction. After exciting animosity amongst the people, armed a part to massacre the rest and proclaimed a religious war, this Religious Prejudice – policy requires – should be fed and encouraged: but humanity requires it should not be permitted to go to the length of taking away life in every Town.

The General should, in my mind, place the Suspected persons in a state as to be perfectly secure from Personal Violence, and yet not have it in their power to injure the common cause either by communicating Intelligence to the enemy, or fabricating reports to damp or chill the Public Spirit; but above all that they should not be permitted to hold any kind of Employment at this Crisis – the Effect it would have on the Multitude is inconceivable.

The General will not, I trust, be led to make any particular distribution of Commissions to any particular set of Men so as to Excite Jealousy amongst the rest: though only weak Minds could feel any in so great a cause, yet even this has ruined Ireland in a former period.

The Natives, I conceive, should be tried in Skirmishes or Marches to different places before they engage in a General Action. Habit produces courage, or insensibility of danger which produces the same effect. Suppose an attack on Sligo, if the General thinks the Army could be divided with safety there – they would be recruited by Thousands of Enthusiasts, and the habit and pride of Conquest would recruit their courage, and the main army might easily prevent their being attacked from Athlone.

The example of the yeomanry shews, and the conduct of the Cavalry in the engagement at Castlebar proves, how dangerous it is to trust on Horseback any but Experienced Soldiers. Many, seized by an impulse sometimes Irresistible, run on horseback, who would fight well on foot. The courage of one often communicates itself to others. But fear is Epidemical; the flight of one often brings that of a whole Regiment.

The Soldiers should be invited to come over with warmth, but trusted with Caution.

Of the Yeomen who join, their fidelity is Unquestionable. They all like the Cause.

But above all, my friend, the Men should be roused, Encouraged, animated. They should be told they fight for their God, their country and themselves. The principle of the Partition of Lands amongst them should be Inculcated, as I think by the French General. This would be Speaking at once to their feelings and Understandings. This Doctrine, once Inculcated, would shake the old Government to its centre. It will communicate thro' the Kingdom like an Electric Spark. It will spread dismay and distrust thro' the Ranks of our Enemies, may cause such Desertion among the Military, particularly the Militia, that the Government may fall without a Struggle and die without a blow.

The Expectation of our friends, the fears of our Enemies, are Realized by the Victory at Castlebar. The courage of French Soldiers, the Talents of their Commanders is established by the suspected persons – I mean those favoured by the old Government and those against whom the Public Indignation is Excited.

I remain your attached friend

E.G.

### Notes

1. We do not know how much land Edmund owned, nor indeed whether he actually *owned* Rosmindle. The fact that Rosmindle townland amounted to a mere 86 acres, suggests that Edmund may have held it in conjunction with neighbouring townlands backing on the tidal basin of Castleaffy Strand which, taken as a unit, may have had some relevance to the salt-making business. By the same token, the Ordnance survey Namebooks (cited by J. Duffy in *Cathair na Mart* Vol. 5 No. 1) show it as held in 1838, along with six contiguous townlands, by Sir Samuel O'Malley, Bart. The nature of Sir Samuel's tenure requires closer definition. For purposes of comparison, the Falduff property to which Edmund moved when he left Rosmindle, amounted in 1855 to 515 acres.
2. Paine (1737-1809), an Englishman, had taken a minor part in both the American and French revolutions. His writing, including *The Rights of Man* (1791/2) and *The Age of Reason* (1793) became the bible of contemporary radicalism. But one may wonder how many readers it found in the Mayo countryside.
3. The meaning of this passage, though not instantly clear, is that the letter was addressed to General Humbert through the intermediary of the 'rebel with him'; not that Browne got hold of it through the 'rebel'. We know from RP 620/57/16 that Browne received the 'parcel of letters from different traitors of Mayo' from the Sheriff of Co. Leitrim, who had received them from Ballinamuck. The letters are stated in the same passage to have been addressed to 'La Roche, the French interpreter'. (Actually, according to Hayes, *Last Invasion* p.299, La Roche, who came from France as Humbert's ADC, was an Irishman called Byrne from a family in the linen trade in Lisburn and Dundalk). Edmund's purported letter, however, is to Father Michael Gannon, not La Roche, and *pace* Hayes (p. 308) there was only one letter (not 'letters') purporting to be from Edmund.
4. Ed. by Eileen O'Byrne, published 1981 by the Irish MSS Commission.
5. There may well have been more than one Colonel Jackson around, but one such, a colonel of yeomanry from Tireragh, came from a Cromwellian family and, where 'rebels' were concerned, had the name of being quick with the rope. If this be he, it says something that he let Edmund go alive (cf. Hayes, pp 24, 262, 274, 284).
6. As already noted, the letter was unsigned and concluded merely with the initials 'E.G.'
7. He is almost certainly the same Father Michael Gannon who married Bonaventure Garvey and Margaret Merrick at Murrisk Abbey in 1793 or early 1794, whereby hangs another tale.

SIR TERENCE GARVEY: M.A. (Oxford). Born Dublin 1915 of the Murrisk Abbey family which was related to Edmund Garvey, and now lives in Thallabaun, Louisburgh. Sometime British ambassador in Peking, Belgrade and Moscow. Author of *Bones of Contention, and enquiry into east-west relations* (London, 1978).

### SAINT MARCAN'S LOCH AND EARLY ECCLESIASTICAL RUINS AT ROSSCLAVE<sup>1</sup>

by Rev. P. J. Gullane, Newport.

The Loch is now the head of the Rossclave Inlet, but it was once a fresh water lake, cut off from the sea by a ridge which connected with the south shore even in historical times.

Beginning from the west, we first find the ruins of Saint Marcan's<sup>2</sup> Church, of which only a fragment of the west wall now remains. This church was 15 feet long by 10 feet wide, and lay N.W. by S.E. The south gable abutted on the shore and was awash at high tide. The projection from the north gable no longer exists.

The church was called Teampall Marcain, and the adjoining plot of ground was called Garrdha an Teampaill.

About 50 yards S.E. of this church is the Children's Burial Ground in which there still seems to be evidence of a small church that was built around an ancient dolmen, as at Holywell, Ballyhaunis. This site at Rossclave was probably used for pagan worship and burials in prehistoric times. It is now called 'The Green'. At least one ancient relic still remains intact. It is a large, flat, white stone, measuring 5' x 4' x 2½' (called An Altóir). It may have been the capstone of a dolmen, *Altóir Íodhail* (idols). It is still venerated as a Mass Rock of the Penal Times.

Where the tide now runs into Loch Marcain there once stood a heap of large stones, around which pilgrims walked and prayed as they performed the usual stations on Saint Marcan's Day, 1st August. This Leacht of stones is marked C on the Ordnance Survey Map.

About 20 yards to N.N.E. of An Altóir is Saint Marcan's Well, on the shore at high water mark. It is dry at low tide. Water from this well had a great reputation as a cattle cure. Stations were performed around the Altóir and the Well every year on the Eighth Day of June, which was the great Fair Day of Newport.

It was usual also to swim sick cattle and horses across the lake, and invoke the intercession of Saint Marcan for their cure.

About 100 yards east of the well, another Leacht of stones marks the site of an ancient crannóg – now called Caiseal Marcain. It is possible that Saint Marcan once dwelt on this crannóg, too. The stones marking the site are visible only at very low tide.

On the ridge to the north of this point is an ancient earthwork. It is a prehistoric Ring Fort, about 37 feet in diameter, which gives further proof that men settled here *permanently* very long ago.

The ruins of a small church, dedicated to Saint Brigid, still stand in Kilbride graveyard beside the main Westport to Newport road. Perhaps Saint Brigid of Kildare was the original foundress, and the subsequent abbess adopted her name. Local legend carries a story of some misunderstanding between a Saint Brigid of Kilbride and our Saint Marcan, but similar stories

are told of other saints too. They are simply embellishments invented by local story tellers.

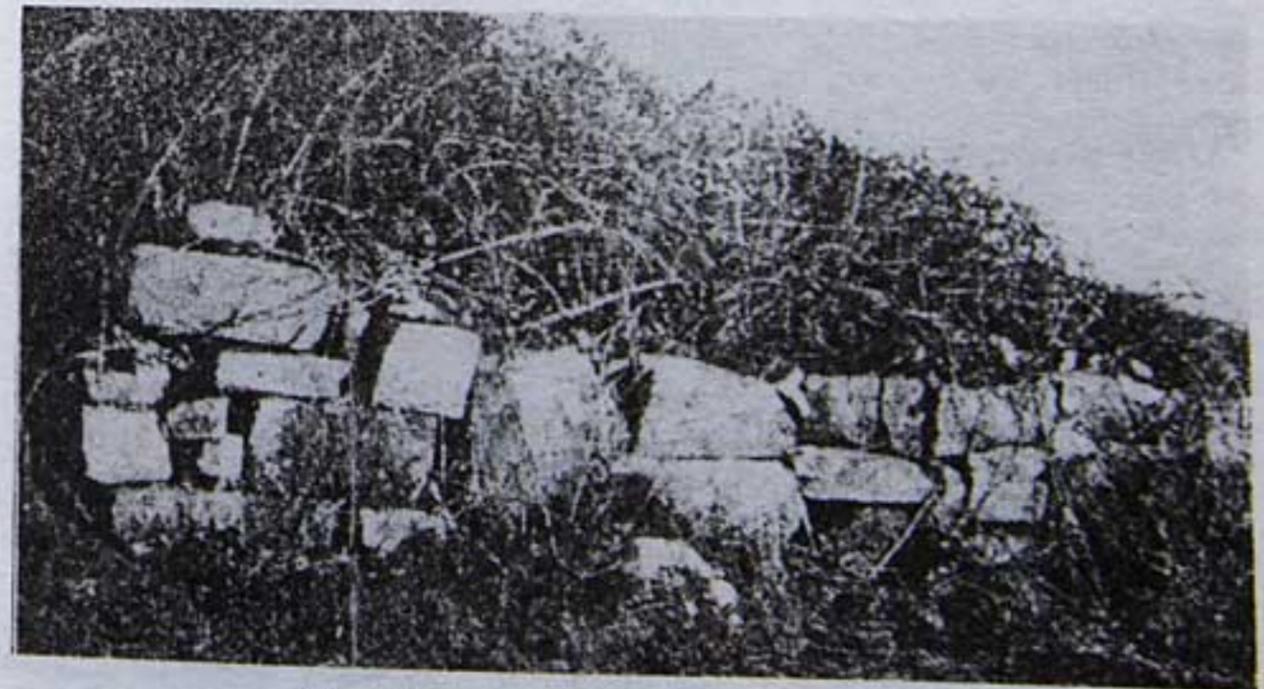
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The traditional 'stations' as performed at Rossclave, Newport, on the First Day of August, the Feast of Saint Marcan.<sup>3</sup>

1. First go barefoot to the 'Monument' (the Leacht of stones).  
Kneel facing the east, and say seven Paters, Aves and Glorias.  
Next walk 'deiseal' (sunwise) around the 'Monument' seven times, and repeat the seven Paters, Aves and Glorias en route.  
Then return to the starting point. Kneel and offer seven more Paters, Aves and Glorias. Finish with the Apostles' Creed.
2. After this proceed to 'The Green' and kneel at the 'Altóir' to repeat the seven Paters, Aves and Glorias, while facing east.  
Then walk 'deiseal' around the mound on which the 'Altóir' is resting, seven times, repeating the seven Paters, Aves, and Glorias en route, as before.  
Kneel again at the 'Altar Stone' facing east, and repeat the seven Paters, Aves, and Glorias as before. Finish with Creed.
3. Finally, it is also the custom to perform a similar station at Saint Marcan's Well. Kneel, pray, and walk around as before. Here, too, according to one's personal devotion, it is usual to include some suitable prayers for the souls in Purgatory. Finish this station also by reciting the Apostles' Creed.
4. The above traditional stations are often performed on other days in the year; most particularly on the Eighth of June, which is the Great Fair Day of Newport.  
On this day people pray for a successful live-stock market.
5. A simple method of keeping tally of one's 'rounds' is to pick up the exact number of pebbles needed and drop one at the end of each 'round'. This can be repeated for each 'station'. Obviously this method of tally is of very ancient origin.



*Fragment of wall of Saint Marcan's Church  
On Rossclave Inlet, near Newport, Co. Mayo.*



*Altar Stone at Children's Burial Ground  
Close to Saint Marcan's Church, near Newport, Co. Mayo.*

## NOTES

1. These notes are based on a paper by Hubert T. Knox, which was read to the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland on 30 April 1918 and printed in their Journal for the year 1919.
2. St. Marcan lived 500-550 A.D. He was the first missionary to live permanently here as the Apostle of Burrishoole. His name derives from *Marcach*, horseman (modern, Ryder).
3. Sincere thanks are due to Mrs. Nora Lavelle, an old resident of Rossclave, who very kindly supplied a written account of the local, traditional 'stations'. To quote her own words, 'The way to do the Stations at Loch Marcan: this is how I heard it from the old people some fifty years ago'. This account was written in 1984, and is based on the tradition of the local inhabitants for over a hundred years. The typed version given below is based on that given by Mrs. Nora Lavelle. Through her good offices it is now on record as a contribution to local history.
4. Illustrations from *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. 49 (1919).

### ST. MARCAN'S LOUGH AND RUINS, CO. MAYO.



REV. P. J. GULLANE: Has served as curate in Westport and Kilmeena, also in Glasgow, Co. Galway and other areas in Co. Mayo. In 1974 he became Parish Priest of Moore, Co. Roscommon, and now lives in retirement in Newport.

## P. A. HENEGHAN - ALIAS BURTON THE DAUNTLESS MAN FROM DOONCASTLE

by Jarlath Duffy

In this article an account will be given of one Pat A. Heneghan from Dooncastle, three miles south of Westport, born a short time after the Famine, who became a brave and dauntless hero in the cause of Irish freedom. Around 1870 he left for the U.S.A. where he worked at the trade of coachbuilder. On Christmas Day 1884 he arrived in London from America. If little is known of Pat Heneghan's life up to 2 February 1885, the same is not true from that date forth.

In his own words he tells us:

I was only a few months in London when one evening a few detectives called to my rooms. They examined all my property, and shook the dust out of one of my boxes and took charge of it. They questioned me as to how I came from America; what business brought me. They had no warrant for my arrest, but they asked me to go with them to Scotland Yard and repeat my statements. This I did; and from that day I was a prisoner. They produced the dust before the Inspector, and after an examination he threw it into the dust-bin. It was *not* dynamite! I was kept there for three days, and each day I was brought into the yard and paraded before a number of people to see if any of them would identify me as being connected with the explosions. This they were unable to do. I was then brought up in Bow Street Police Court and was remanded day after day for eleven or twelve weeks. Finally a True Bill was found against me and I was sent forward for trial at the Old Bailey the following May, before Judge Hawkins - the mild and merciful(?). In all it was four months from the day I was first arrested until I stood in the dock in the Old Bailey. While being detained in Clerkenwell prison previous to the trial, the prison authorities came and asked me to allow them to have my photograph taken, for purposes of identification later on, I believe. I refused. They then said they would have it in spite of me. I said they would not and they did not. The following day, I was brought into the yard and the photographer was there. Two of the warders caught hold of my arms, two more caught me by the legs, and the Deputy-Governor caught me by the neck, but I resisted, and with so much effect that the photograph was not taken. This was repeated but without success. The Deputy-Governor was so enraged at his failure, that he pressed his thumb on the ball of my throat until he stopped my breathing. My throat was sore for a week. It was only a 'mockery of a trial' - a farce. The indictment read out by the gentle Judge Hawkins charged me with 'making war against Her Majesty's subjects'. There were over a hundred witnesses produced for the Crown, and not one of them was able to point to a single fact that would incriminate me. One of them swore that he saw me in London at the time I was in New York. Another witness for the Crown proved that he was a perjurer, that I was not in London at that time. In summing up for the defence, my counsel said there was nothing whatever proved against me for which they could send me to prison. The Attorney-

General, in addressing the jury, said: 'Gentlemen we don't know but this man belongs to a secret organisation in London; that he is at the head of an organisation for making war against the Crown of England'. Judge Hawkins in charging the jury said: 'Gentlemen, you must have no doubt on your mind that this is the man'. The jury then retired and after a few minutes returned with a verdict of 'Guilty'. There was no need for them to retire at all. Judge Hawkins was in high delight at the verdict, and with much smirking and smacking of the lips he said, with grim emphasis, 'I will give you penal servitude for life'. I was three days in Newgate and then brought to Chatham.<sup>1</sup>

Between the years 1881 and 1885 many were convicted of various offences in connection with the manufacture, possession and use of dynamite. James McKeivitt and James McGrath were convicted at the Liverpool Assizes in July 1881, for causing a dynamite explosion with intent to blow up the Town Hall.

Thomas Gallagher, Albert George Whitehead, Henry Hammond-Wilson and John Curtin, were convicted at the Central Criminal Court in May 1883 on charges in connection with dynamite explosions in Liverpool. Timothy Featherstone, Patrick Flanagan and Henry Dalton, were convicted at the Liverpool Assizes in July 1883 for manufacturing dynamite in Cork and bringing it to Liverpool. James McCulloch, Thomas Devanney, Peter Callaghan, Henry McCann and Terence McDermott, were convicted in Edinburgh in December 1883 in connection with explosions at Glasgow. John Daly (later Mayor Limerick City) and James Francis Egan were convicted at the Warwick Assizes in July 1884, for conspiracy and possession of dynamite and bombs about the time of the explosion at Victoria Station. Thomas Callan and Michael Hawkins were convicted at the Central Criminal Court in January 1888, for the possession of dynamite in London in the autumn of 1887 with the supposed intention of causing an explosion at the House of Commons. John Duff was charged with the alleged murder of a political associate. All of these were Pat A. Heneghan's fellow prisoners at Chatham.

Tradition would add one more to that list – the name of Thomas Clarke, the oldest signatory of the 1916 Proclamation. In 1880 Tom Clarke reached London where he was soon arrested. He had been followed from New York by Henri Le Caron a British spy. On 14 June 1883 at the Old Bailey he was, with three others, sentenced to penal servitude for life.<sup>2</sup>

At the Old Bailey Pat A. Heneghan and James E. Gilbert were charged with being connected with explosions at the Victoria Station, Scotland Yard, the Junior Charlton Club, the Metropolitan Railway and the Tower of London. They both received life sentences.

During the next fifteen years in the prisons of Chatham and Portland, Pat A. Heneghan and comrades endured without flinching an incessant attempt to deprive them of their lives and reasons. In his prime, Pat Heneghan is described as a man of fine physique, full of strength and activity, and equal to any amount of work. In Chatham Prison for six years he found the treatment

very harsh, the food insufficient and the imposed work extremely hard. He worked at carpentry in prison and enfeebled in health by the confinement, the want of nourishing food, and long hours of labour, his constitution was much weakened and he suffered much from varicose veins and weak lungs. He was removed to Portland in 1891 where the treatment was a shade less severe. Two of his comrades were unable to withstand the regime and were released in 1896 hopelessly insane.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Clarke was released in 1896, but Pat A. Heneghan remained on in despair with little hope of survival.

In order to protect his relatives back home Pat A. Heneghan had used 'Henry Burton' as an alias from the time of his arrest, and it is as Henry Burton enquiries were made to the local police in Westport in May 1898. The authorities felt he was from the neighbourhood of Westport and that he had a brother a baker. They felt Burton was not his true name and wondered did he assume his mother's name.

Thomas Clarke, Sergeant, set to work but could not supply any answer to the prison authorities. A breakthrough occurred in January 1899, when a Matthew Heneghan of Westport sought an order to visit Henry Burton. From the Home Office came urgent enquiries as to whom this Matthew Heneghan might be. The Sergeant on this occasion was able to make the connection: 'There was no Matthew Heneghan living in Westport', he reported, 'but there is Anthony Heneghan living in Bridge Street, Westport, who is a baker and has a public-house'. The secret was out. Anthony's brother was Matthias Heneghan 'who holds a small farm at a place called Dooncastle. Henry Burton is his brother and his correct name is Pat Heneghan. About 25 years ago he went to America and for the past 15 years they had not heard from him'. The Sergeant explains that friends in America had told Matthias Heneghan about Henry Burton in jail. He filled in other family details and continues 'Anthony the baker is married and has 12 children, and is only in struggling circumstances. He told me if his brother was released that he would come to live with them and perhaps sometime go to America. There is nothing known to the discredit of the other members of the family', he concluded.<sup>4</sup>

The *Weekly Independent* of February 1899 reported as follows: 'Henry Burton, the only remaining Irish political prisoner in Portland was visited last week by his brother. . . It was the first time since he was sentenced that poor Burton had been visited. . . Though weak in body his mind is still clear. . .'

Buton's case was now taken up by the Amnesty Association in Great Britain. Later that month the Home Office announced that Pat A. Heneghan would be released. A month later Burton was thrust out amongst cold callous strangers without any indication as to where a helping hand might be available, but he succeeded in making his way to Dublin where he was welcomed by, among others, members of the Amnesty Association who accorded him an enthusiastic reception. The police reported back to London that the reception was 'rather cool' and that one week later Pat A. Heneghan was on his way to Westport. Pat Heneghan complained bitterly about all his



*P. Heneghan nephew of  
P. A. Heneghan (Burton).*

things having been sold, and the £1.80 offer that he was made on release for his watch, tools, trinkets etc. Although it was increased to £5, he would not be silenced. The *Freeman's Journal* commented that 'no fair-minded Englishman could be without feeling ashamed of the latest instance of the meanness and vindictiveness with which the British Government is wont to treat Irish political prisoners'.<sup>5</sup>

Pat A. Heneghan spoke from the top window of his brother's public-house in Bridge Street to cheering crowds. Later a large and important meeting was held at Aughagower to give him a céad míle fáilte home.

The most whole-hearted enthusiasm prevailed, and as Mr. Heneghan drove up the scene of enthusiasm was almost indescribable. Present were: Messrs John O'Donnell, Hon. Sec. Provincial Directory, U.I.L.; M. Grimes, D.C.; Thomas Duffy, D.C.; Hugh Malley, D.C.; Bryan Malley, D.C.; Thomas Gibbons, D.C.; John Tunney, D.C.; Thomas Grimes, D.C.; Michael Sheridan, D.C.; Anthony Heneghan, Westport; Matthias Heneghan, Dooncastle (brothers); Anthony Waters; Manus Mulloy, T.C.; Joseph Gilboy, T.C.; and a large contingent from Westport.

The chair was taken by Mr. Michael Grimes, D.C., who in the course of an eloquent speech described the treatment Mr. Heneghan received in prison, as well as the causes which led up to his incarceration.

Mr. Waters, Hon. Sec. Aughagower Branch, U.I.L. read an address of welcome to Mr. Heneghan. Mr. Heneghan, on coming forward to speak in reply to the address, was loudly cheered again and again. He said that words failed him to give expression to his feelings of thankfulness for the kind welcome given to him by his old schoolboys and parishioners, with whom he was associated nearly thirty years ago. Many changes had come over the country since then, but he was glad to say the greater number of them were for the betterment of the condition of the people. There was no chance of their grievances being redressed unless they kept up a good strong agitation, and it was not necessary for him to tell them that agitation would be useless unless unity prevailed amongst the people (cheers). Their only hope was united action, and with that weapon the Irish people would be able by constitutional means to wring from England their long lost rights. The only thing that would keep back the cause, for which so many sacrifices were made in the past, would be quarrelling amongst themselves, but he was proud to observe that the differences of the past were healed up in Connaught, and that they were working harmoniously together (cheers). He was in entire sympathy with their new movement, and would use his best efforts in the good work of getting the land for the people (cheers). He again thanked them for the kind reception given to him, and retired amidst a hurricane of cheers.

Mr Joseph Conroy, Hon. Sec. Turlough Branch United Irish League, next spoke, and advised all present to support the principles of the new organisation – the United Irish League.

After further speeches the meeting then dispersed cheering loudly for Mr. Heneghan'.<sup>6</sup>

Little is known of Burton after this. He returned to America, and died there it is thought in the 1930s and is buried in Connecticut. Many of his relatives live and work in the Westport area. His nephew Paddy later joined him in America, and served in the American Army in the First World War where he saw action in France. Back in Doon he launched the dance-hall under the slogan 'Do your Dancing at Doon' where the famous Albert operated his shows after the Second World War. A grand-nephew of Pat Burton Heneghan is Séamus Hawkshaw, Carrowholly, whose mother Delia (R.I.P.) was one of the 12 children referred to by the thorough Sergeant of the local police. Anthony Heneghan's pub became a frequented place of the Black and Tans some twenty years after the release of Pat. A. Heneghan, but secretly much information was passed on to the men on the run regarding the plans of the enemy, which was gathered from soldiers or police who said too much when the drink was in. A great-grandniece of Pat A. Heneghan is the wife of Neil Armstrong who placed the Tricolour with the Stars and Stripes on the moon.

In 1899 Pat A. Heneghan, talking about being free, said "getting my liberty is like getting out of hell and into Heaven". He had come a long way from Dooncastle. He, too, made a step for mankind.

#### Notes

1. *Mayo News*, 11 March, 8 April, 6 May 1899.
2. Micheál Ó Súilleabháin, *Where Mountainy Men Have Sown* (1965), pp 181-2.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Public Record Office, CBS 18971/S.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Mayo News*, 11 March, 8 April, 6 May 1899.

*Heneghan's Public House – now the Shoe Shop*



#### MAJOR JOHN MacBRIDE

by Owen Hughes

One of the first effects of the 1916 Rising was the creation of a political revolution which, under the Sinn Féin organisation, gave an overwhelming majority to nationalist Ireland in the General Election of 1918 for self-determination, which led to withdrawal from the British House of Commons and the setting up of the First Dáil. The British had promised Home Rule since the eighties of the last century, and did, in fact, pass an Act granting us Home Rule in 1914, but 'hung it up' for the duration of World War I, which began that year, while they launched a recruiting campaign to cajole the youth of Ireland to go out and fight for 'The Freedom of Small Nations'. Yet, in 1919, when the country had spoken in the 1918 Election, they sent the Black and Tans, and so began the War of Independence.

There is no doubt but the man who most inspired the West Mayo Flying Column was Major John MacBride. Born at Westport Quay in 1868, he was son of Captain Patrick MacBride, a native of Co. Antrim, the owner of a merchant ship trading into Westport, where he married Honoria Gill and settled down as a merchant. They had five sons: Joseph, elected the first Sinn Féin T.D. for West Mayo in 1918; Patrick, who inherited the family business; Anthony, County Surgeon until the middle thirties; Francis, emigrated to Australia and John, the youngest. John was born in the year that followed the Fenian Rising of 1867 and in the shadow of the Auxilary Workhouse, which, but twenty years earlier, housed thousands of victims of the Famine, which so ravaged the Westport area and of which sad and bitter memories were still fresh in the minds of his family and neighbours. Twenty five years before his birth, the Constitutional Movement under O'Connell for the repeal of the Act of Union had failed, but before the chagrin of the failure and the clouds of the Famine had risen from a mortally wounded nation, the flame of hope and freedom burst forth anew in the Young Irelanders' Rising of 1848 – reasserting afresh the separatist idea of '98 and Ireland's right to nationhood. In his early 'teens in the late seventies and early eighties, he witnessed the struggle of the National Land League to break the power of landlordism with its concomitant evils of eviction and famine. He heard of 'The New Departure' negotiated by Davitt and Parnell, as a result of which the Fenians threw in their weight behind the social and economic struggle for the land.

In his middle 'teens he was apprenticed as a draper's assistant in the drapery store of John Fitzgibbon in Castlerea, Co. Roscommon. During his apprenticeship years he was very active organising the Brotherhood. After the death of Parnell (1891) he went to work in Dublin, where he became an active member of the Young Ireland League and the Celtic Literary Society in 1892, 1893 and 1894. Those societies, consisting as they did, of youth who sided with Parnell, helped to keep the separatist idea alive by organising visits to the graves of Wolfe Tone in Bodenstown and Owen Roe O'Neill in Cavan, and by visiting scenes of the '98 Rebellion in Wexford, New Ross and Vinegar

Hill. They supported the revival of the Irish language by pressing for the appointment of Irish professors in the Training Colleges, and pressed Local Authorities to establish libraries throughout the country. The most zealous workers in the Young Ireland League were Arthur Griffith, Henry Dixon, Liam Ó Rúnáin and John MacBride. Indeed, it may well be said that it was at these meetings of the Young Ireland League, half secret, half open, held in the early nineties after the death of Parnell, in the stuffy backrooms of Dublin, that ideas of future rebellion and revolution were nurtured.

County of Mayo & Dublin District of \_\_\_\_\_

NAME, John Mc. Bride  
 OCCUPATION, Clerk in Hugh Moore & Co. Yarrall St. Dublin  
 RESIDENCE, 13 O'Connell Avenue

PHOTOGRAPH.



DATE OF DESCRIPTION, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 95  
 HEIGHT, Abt 5 Ft. 6 In.  
 AGE, About 30 Years  
 WEIGHT,  
 Make, Medium  
 Hair, Reddish  
 Eyes, Grey  
 Eyebrows, Fair  
 Nose, Long  
 Mouth, Regular  
 Complexion, Fair  
 Visage, Thin  
 Whiskers, None  
 Moustache, Reddish  
 Beard, None  
 Native Place, Westport Quay Mayo

REMARKS:—(Here insert particulars of eccentric habits, peculiarities of gait, manner, &c., and marks on person)

No. of File

OBSERVATIONS.

311 3  
4485

Said to be an active Secret Society man  
 & intimate with Fred. J. Allen

In 1895 MacBride emigrated to South Africa. Two years later he was joined by Arthur Griffith who received a warm welcome from him.

In 1898, the commemoration ceremonies in Ireland, in London, and in the U.S.A. of the 1798 Rising, which resulted in the healing of the Parnellite Split by the formation of the United Irish League, gave Griffith and MacBride an opportunity of uniting the Irish in South Africa. The hatred between the British and the Boers had now reached fever point. They set to work energetically to organise a commemoration ceremony in Johannesburg. They gave lectures on the '98 Rebellion, spoke at meeting and organised publicity through two papers owned by a Boer friend.

A huge parade took place through the principal streets of Johannesburg carrying the Irish flag and singing national songs, so that for the first time the great international gathering of onlookers realised that the Irish were not British and had a distinct national philosophy.

The celebrations ended with a function presided over by the Burgomaster at which a community of friendship was formed between the Boers and the Irish and at which, before the breakup, *Die Volkslied* and *God Save Ireland* were sung.

Griffith returned to Ireland in October 1898 to take up the editorship of a newly founded national paper, *The United Irishman*, and a year later, his friend, John MacBride, was elected a leader of the Irish Transvaal Brigade and commissioned a major in the Boer Army.

Nationalist sympathy in Ireland at the time of the Boer War lay on the side of the Boers and the formation of the Transvaal Brigade was greeted with much enthusiasm. As proof of this the Transvaal Committee was formed in Dublin with Maude Gonne as its first president, and including Arthur Griffith, James Connolly and the old Fenian, John O'Leary. It held anti-recruiting meetings, published anti-recruiting posters, and had its meetings broken up by the police and many of its members arrested including James Connolly.

Arthur Griffith was later to write of the Irish Brigade in the *United Irishman*:— 'They have chosen the side of the weak, the side of right and liberty in the present war, but primarily they have gone out to battle for Ireland, to strike at and weaken her oppressor'. That was how leading nationalist opinion saw it — a war which might weaken the ties of Empire and so help towards Irish freedom.

The Transvaal Irish Brigade rendered a good account of themselves by their bravery. They took part in about twenty battles altogether including Colenso, Spion Kop and Ladysmith.

Back in Paris after the end of the Boer War, he was visited by Arthur Griffith and Maude Gonne. Griffith warned him that he must not return to Ireland and urged him to go on a lecture tour of the U.S.A. to collect funds for Griffith's paper — *The United Irishman* — which he did, accompanied by Maude Gonne, a lady who was to become his wife in 1903.

Maude Gonne, the daughter of an English officer of Irish descent and an English mother, was brought up in Dublin, and educated in France. She travelled widely with her father who held various diplomatic appointments until his death. A woman of remarkable beauty, popular in many European capitals, she used her influence on behalf of many of the Irish treason – felony prisoners and was instrumental in securing their release. She was noted for her work in the Land League days as a founder of women's organisations, particularly in north-west Mayo and in Co. Donegal. She became a prominent Irish revolutionary and was active in all phases of the national struggle.

Her son, Seán MacBride, has shed further lustre on the MacBride name. As Secretary General of the International Commission of Jurists, as Chairman of Amnesty International, he has won the Nobel Peace Prize and the Lenin Peace Prize and has been honoured with Doctorates from the Universities of the Old World, the New World and the Third World.

A constitutional lawyer of worldwide renown, he was elected by the General Assembly of the United Nations to the post of Commissioner for Namibia in South West Africa with the rank of Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Major MacBride returned to Dublin in 1904 after the General Amnesty in 1903. His friends secured him a small post under Dublin Corporation. During the following twelve years to 1916, he spent his spare time organising the Irish Republican Brotherhood, addressing anti-recruiting meetings, and lecturing on the United Irishmen's movement and the Manchester Martyrs. It is worthy of note that at an historic meeting held on 9 September 1914, in the library of the Gaelic League Headquarters at 25 Parnell Square, to which Éamonn Ceannt invited Arthur Griffith and James Connolly, that the other members present were P. H. Pearse, Thomas MacDonagh, Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh, Joseph Plunkett, Major John MacBride, Éamonn Ceannt and William O'Brien (Labour).

That meeting made two important decisions:-

1. That there would be a Rising
  - (a) If the Germans invaded Ireland.
  - (b) If Conscription was pressed.
  - (c) If the end of the war was in sight without a Rising
2. That Ireland would seek to be represented at the Post-War Peace Conference.

It was further decided to use all open national movements to forward and strengthen the propaganda for freedom, and to further strengthen the secret military movement of the I.R.B. Among the long list of suspects listed by Sir Mathew Nathan shortly after his arrival in Ireland as Under Secretary in late 1914, were:- Thomas J. Clarke, whose shop at 75 Parnell St. was receiving daily attention from the police, Major John MacBride, Thomas Ashe, James Larkin, James Connolly, Bulmer Hobson, Arthur Griffith, John T. Kelly, Francis Sheefy-Skeffington, P. H. Pearse and others. These were what

Nathan described as 'the small knot of violent men'.

In his address on the Manchester Martyrs in November, 1914, Major MacBride gives us the Fenian Credo of separation when he said:

No man can claim authority to barter away the immutable rights of Nationhood; for Irishmen have fought, suffered, and died in defence of those rights. And, thank God, Irishmen will always be found to snatch up the torch from the slumbering fire, to hold it aloft as a guiding light, and to hand it on, blazing afresh, to the succeeding generation.

He was at 41 Parnell Square on Easter Sunday morning when the shock of MacNeill's countermand of the mobilisation ordered for that day by Pearse occurred. It is known that Seán MacDermott wrote 'a most urgent message' to MacBride on Easter Monday morning. An account quotes the late John MacDonagh as having asked his brother, Thomas, 'who is the man in the blue suit?' when MacBride appeared at the head of Jacob's Garrison as they marched from their mobilisation point in Stephen's Green to the Factory. 'That's Major MacBride', Commandant MacDonagh is reported to have replied. 'He walked out to me and said, "here I am if I'm any use to you." Of course, I'm delighted to have him.'

After fortifying the factory, outposts were placed by MacBride, who also supervised the placing of snipers on roofs. With these aids on the side of the Rebels, the enemy found it safer to move under cover of darkness in the streets near the factory. Volunteer Pádraig Ó Ceallaigh, a member of the garrison in Jacob's Factory, describing the fighting there during Easter Week said in an account published in the *Capuchin Annual* of 1966:- 'Commandant MacDonagh sent small batches of Volunteers on frequent forays to reconnoitre or establish an outpost in case the enemy should attempt to creep up on us secretly – Major John MacBride personally led some of these expeditions'. In the 1916 number of the Irish weekly, *Inniu*, Earnán de Blaghad, describing his acquaintance with the 1916 reader states:-

I once met a soldier who was not one of the signatories of the Proclamation, Major John MacBride. He came to Belfast to give a lecture to the small club we had there – an event of which we were proud. He was particularly brave, his ideas and example had a great influence on the young generation, and I think he should be named with the seven who changed Ireland.

Father Aloysius, O.F.M. Cap. has told that when he and Father Augustine came to Jacob's with Pearse's surrender order, 'Major MacBride said that if any attempt were made to counsel surrender he would oppose it with all the strength he could command.' A fearless and courageous fighter to the last ditch and the last man. After the surrender MacBride was taken to Richmond Barracks where he was tried by Court Martial on 4 May 1916.

The late President of Ireland, Seán T. Ó Ceallaigh, in his autobiography – *Seán T.* – describes how he saw him being marched across the Barracks Square on the day of his trial:

We had great respect for him but remembering his 'history' we had little hope of his being reprieved. He had fought bravely against the English in the Bóer War and that was something we felt would not be forgotten. The enemy would be glad to even the score.

We stayed watching out on the Barrack Square until MacBride and his companions returned and where should they be marched to but right under our window. I raised the lower half of the window and I spoke to them, especially to John MacBride and I enquired if he were tried yet. He confirmed that he had been. I then asked if they were told the result. He replied 'No, but we are to be told later to-night. But in my own case I know very well what the judgement will be.' Then, speaking very seriously, he pointed his index finger in the direction of his heart and said: 'I will get it here in the morning.'

'Oh! don't say that John', I said. 'God is strong, You don't know yet what could happen to save you'

'Nothing will save me, Seán T.' he replied. 'This is the end. Remember that this is the second time that I have sinned against them'.

After a few more words an officer came along, pointed a revolver at me and ordered me to shut the window, which I did.

As they were marched off, MacBride locked his hands and raised them up as if he were bidding us a final farewell.'

Very soon after he bade farewell to Seán T., MacBride was taken to Kilmainham Jail. He was attended there by Father Augustine, O.F.M. Cap. who wrote:

Friday morning, May 5, 1916. After two o'clock this morning a loud knocking was heard at the Bowe St. gate of the Friary. I went down and a soldier told me that I had been asked for by one of the prisoners at Kilmainham. I went at once.

On reaching the prison I was immediately shown to a cell and on it being opened, I gripped the hand of Major MacBride. He was quiet and natural as ever. His very first words expressed sorrow for the surrender, and then he went on quickly to say that on his asking for water to have a wash, a soldier had brought him a cupful. 'I suppose', he added with a smile 'they think I could wash myself with that much.' He then emptied his pockets of whatever silver and coppers he had and asked me to give it to the poor.

Finally, placing his Rosary tenderly in my hand, he uttered a little sentence that thrilled me: 'And give that to my mother.' Then, he began his Confession with the simplicity and humility of a child. After a few minutes I gave him Holy Communion and we spent some while together in prayer.

I told him I would be with him to the last and that I would anoint him when he fell.

When the time was up a soldier knocked on the door and we went down together to the passage where final preparations were made. He asked quietly not to have his hands bound and promised to remain perfectly still.

## Cuimneacán do Seán Mac Giolla Bridge.

Major John MacBride Memorial.

PATRONS  
HIS GRACE, MOST REV. DR. WALSH,  
ARCHBISHOP OF TUAM  
AN TADIRIACHAIR, EAMON DE VALERA,  
WILLIAM T. COSGRAVE, T.C.



1863

1916

JOHN MacBRIDE  
Major in the Army of the South African Republic; Vice-Commandant in the Army of the Irish Republic. Executed in Dublin, 5th May, 1916.

EDWARD MCANIC, CHAIRMAN  
PATRICK J. O'DONNELL, VICE-CHAIRMAN  
THOMAS STICK, TREASURER  
EILEEN DUNNEEN } HON. SECS.  
MICHAEL FITZGERALD }  
THE OCTAGON WESTPORT.

July 23<sup>rd</sup> 1945

*A. B. Hara,*  
You are appointed to collect Westport Town in aid of a bone Memorial on Monday July 30<sup>th</sup> 1945.  
All collectors will meet in the Committee Rooms on that date at 9.30 A.M. for final instructions.  
M. FitzGerald } Hon.  
E. Dunneen } Secs.

Major John MacBride Memorial Appeal Letter, 1945.

'Sorry Sir,' the soldier answered, 'but these are orders.' Then he requested not to be blindfolded and a similar answer was given.

Turning slightly aside, he said to me, quite naturally in a soft voice: 'You know, Father Augustine, I've often looked down their guns before.'

Later, a piece of white paper is pinned above his heart, and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, I whisper into his ear: 'We are all sinners. Offer up your life for any faults or sins of the past.'

And this brave man, fearless of death, responds like a child, yet firmly: 'I'm glad you told me that, Father. I will.' The two soldiers and myself now move along the corridor, turn to the left and enter the yard where the firing squad of twelve is already waiting with loaded rifles.

Six now kneel on one knee and behind them six stand. He faces them about fifty feet from the guns, two or three feet from the wall.

The two soldiers withdraw to the left, near the Governor and Doctor, and I, oblivious of all but him, stand close at his right in prayer.

The officer approaches, takes me gently by the arm and leads me to a position below himself on the right.

He speaks a word. The prisoner stiffens and expands his chest.

Then quickly, a silent signal, a loud volley, and the body collapses in a heap.

I moved forward quickly and anointed him.

Major Blackadder, who presided at the Court Martial had this to say: 'All the men behaved well, but the one who stands out as the most soldierly was John MacBride. He, on entering, stood to attention facing us and in his eyes I could read: "You are soldiers. I am one. You have won. I have lost. Do your worst."'

Finally, he is named with three of the signatories to the Proclamation in the immortal poem – *Easter 1916* – by W. B. Yeats.

We know their dreams, enough  
To know they dreamed and are dead;  
And what if excess of love  
Bewildered them till they died?  
I write it out in verse –  
MacDonagh and MacBride,  
And Connolly and Pearse,  
Now and in time to be,  
Wherever green is worn,  
Are changed, changed utterly,  
A terrible beauty is born.

## MAJOR JOHN MacBRIDE

### A BALLAD

Hurrah for Major John MacBride,  
For him we give three cheers,  
For Ireland's grand old cause he died,  
With the Dublin Volunteers.  
He fought the English ten to one,  
And tamed their Saxon pride,  
But now our gallant chief is gone,  
Brave Major MacBride.

With Kruger and the fearless Boers,  
He fought for liberty,  
And when he sought the Irish shores,  
He came to set us free.  
For this he laboured day and night,  
For this he fought and died,  
A martyr for our country's right,  
Brave Major MacBride.

Poor crimeless Éirinn droops her head,  
And mourns with blood and tears,  
Her faithful sons in battle dead,  
Brave Irish volunteers.  
When will the red stream cease to flow?  
When will her tears be dried?  
And who will raise the flag laid low,  
With Major John MacBride?

(Air – "Who fear to speak of '98").

OWEN HUGHES: B.A. Principal Knockrooskey National School, 1931-74. Served on Mayo Co. Council 1950-79. Member of Agriculture and Vocational Education Committees. Has written and lectured on Major John MacBride.

## THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE POOR LAW IN MAYO, 1838-1898

by Christine Kinealy

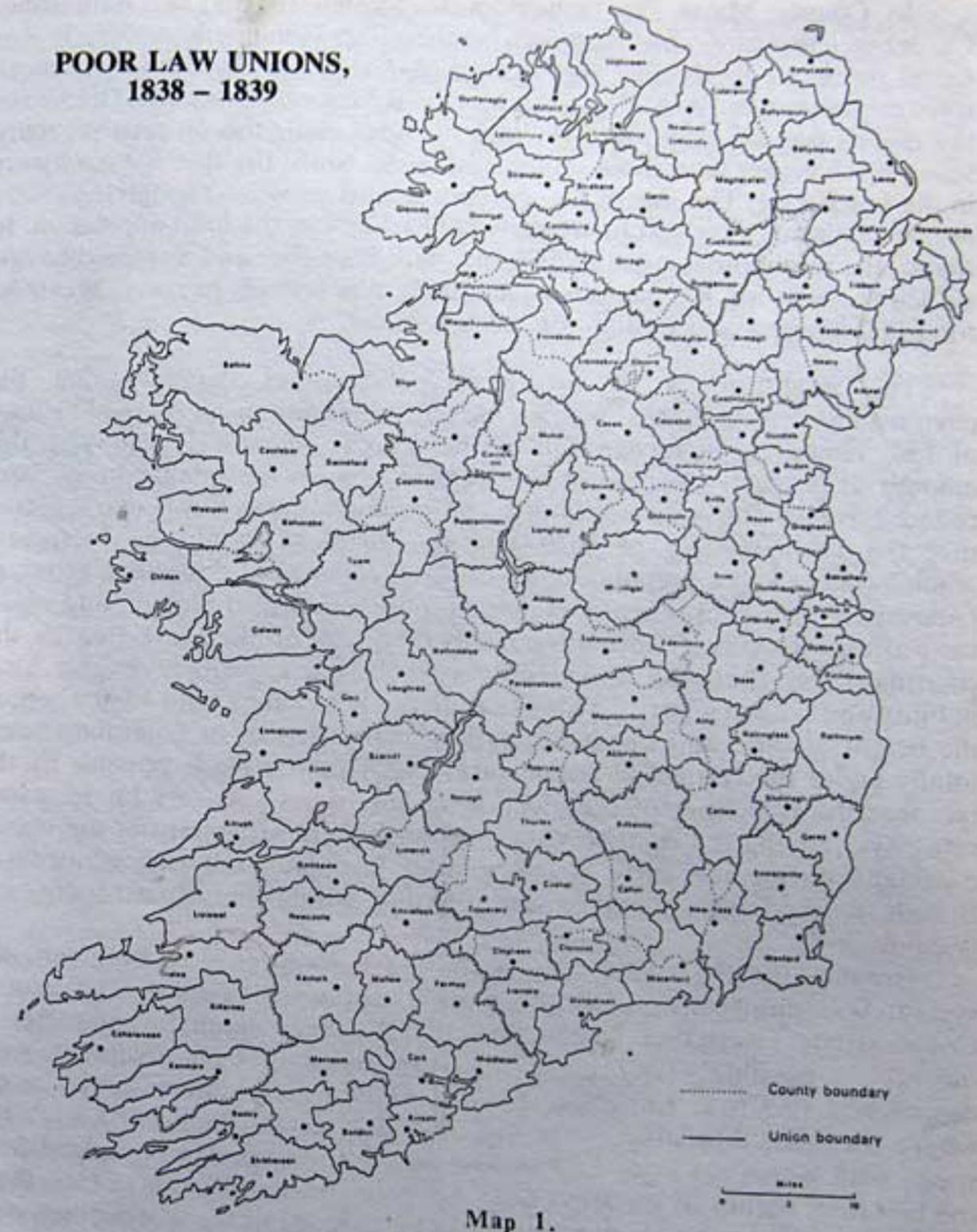
State intervention in social welfare was unknown in Ireland until 1838. The 1838 Poor Law, therefore, which introduced the workhouse system into the country, marked a radical departure in Irish social history. Its aim, however, was not so much to reduce Irish poverty at large but rather to relieve the most destitute elements of it. Although some studies have been made of the administration of the Irish Poor Law, they have tended to be one-sided, and its operation has been seen through the eyes of its central administrators rather than its local ones. However, many of the forces which shaped the Poor Law emerged as a result of local factors, and this meant that the workhouse system was subject to wide regional diversities. Because of this, the standardised system of poor relief which the central administrators desired, was far removed from what actually evolved in the unions.<sup>1</sup>

This paper on the Poor Law in Mayo, examines the relationship between the local Guardians and the central administrators, and looks at how this affected the provision of relief within the county. Although the Poor Law was operative in Ireland until 1923 – in the Six Counties until 1948 – I have chosen 1898 as the finishing point of this paper, because this year marks the introduction of urban and rural district councils which took over many of the duties of the Boards of Guardians.

The Irish Poor Law was to a large extent modelled on the 'new' English Poor Law of 1834, although the former was intended to be more stringent than its English counterpart. In both England and Ireland, however, poverty and destitution were commonly regarded as the fault of the individual who, it was believed, could change his or her situation through exertion and self-help. The type of Poor Law introduced in 1838 reflected this, and was also shaped by the fear that even a limited system of outdoor relief in Ireland would eventually bankrupt the country. The Irish Poor Law, therefore, was based on a strict adherence to the 'workhouse test', which meant that the only form of relief allowed was that which was given within the confines of the workhouse. At the same time, destitution rather than poverty, was made the only criterion necessary to qualify for relief.

To facilitate the introduction of the Poor Law, the country was divided into 130 new administrative units known as unions. These unions consisted of a number of electoral divisions which were, in turn, made up of townlands. Each union was to have its own workhouse which was to be governed by an elected Board of Guardians, who were also responsible for the levying of rates to pay for the maintenance of the local poor. The task of dividing the country up in this way and of establishing the administrative machinery of the Poor Law, fell almost exclusively on the eight Assistant Poor Law Commissioners who were to provide the vital link between the central Commissioners in Dublin and the local Boards.<sup>2</sup>

### POOR LAW UNIONS, 1838 – 1839



Reproduced from Paul Ferguson, 'Administration and Geographical Divisions of Ireland in the nineteenth century', M.A. thesis, U.C.D.

In County Mayo, five unions were formed in Ballina, Ballinrobe, Castlebar, Swinford and Westport. During the Famine, however, it was found necessary to increase this to nine and so, in 1849, additional unions were established in Belmullet, Claremorris, Killala and Newport. The size of the unions was far from uniform, with the ones along the western seaboard being much bigger than those on the east coast, whilst the smallest ones were in the north-east. The size of the workhouse also varied, although they were usually made large enough to accommodate 1-1½% of the local population. In Mayo, the workhouses were fairly large, with Castlebar and Swinford having sufficient room for 700 paupers each, Ballinrobe for 800 paupers, Westport for 1,000 paupers and Ballina for 1,200 paupers.

The qualifications of the elected Guardians depended on the circumstances of each area, with an average minimum property qualification of £30. However, in recognition of the scarcity of people occupying this amount of property in some of the western unions, the qualifications were reduced to £10. The Assistant Poor Law Commissioner in Connemara, feared that the consequences of such low qualifications would be inefficient administration and a preponderance of shopkeepers and tradesman acting as Guardians. These apprehensions proved to be unfounded though, and whilst the professional classes were numerically dominant on the Mayo Boards, the chairman, vice-chairman and deputy vice-chairman, were invariably local nobility and landed gentry.<sup>3</sup> This situation did not change until 1880 when, at the height of the Land League agitation, many Boards of Guardians came totally under the control of tenant farmers.<sup>4</sup> This was made possible by the fact that the franchise for the election of Guardians was very broad, every rate-payer having the right to vote. Although some irregularities did occur, especially during the early elections after this date, the vast majority of Boards worked well together and fighting within the Board-room was uncommon.<sup>5</sup>

Because the Poor Law only permitted indoor relief to be given, the system was inoperative until the workhouses were opened. The central Commissioners were therefore anxious that this stage should be completed as quickly as possible. To achieve this, the Assistant Commissioners were despatched to Cork, Limerick, Belfast, Dublin and Londonderry – areas where the least difficulties were anticipated in establishing the Law.<sup>6</sup> The speed with which the Poor Law system was introduced, can be judged from the fact that, within six months of the Act being passed, Boards of Guardians had been elected in eighteen unions, and by 1842, 81 of the workhouses were admitting paupers. By the beginning of 1845, 118 workhouses were open for relief.<sup>7</sup> In general, the workhouses in Connemara were the last ones to be ready to admit paupers.

When the Assistant Commissioners had decided upon the parameters of a union, a public meeting was convened at which they made their suggestions and explained the basic tenets of the Poor Law to the local population. These

meetings were generally well attended and the proposed system of poor relief met with little opposition.<sup>8</sup> Mayo was no exception to this; the local Assistant Commissioner describing the public meeting in Castlebar as, 'one of the most numerous and respectable which I have yet attended' – the Earl of Lucan, Sir William Brabazon and Sir Samuel O'Malley being amongst the local gentry present at it.<sup>9</sup>

The function of the workhouses was both to test and relieve destitution, and as such, they were the foundation of the Irish Poor Law. Relief could only be administered within the confines of the workhouse and to whole family units. An effective workhouse was considered to be one which deterred people from applying for relief, whilst ensuring that those who did, did not remain inside for any protracted period. Physically, the workhouses were to embody this 'deterrent' principle, and the architect was directed to make them uniform and cheap, durable and unattractive. Conditions within the workhouse were to be based on the principle of 'less eligibility', that is, conditions inside were to be less preferable to life outside. Because of the great poverty in some parts of Ireland though, the Commissioners realised that in areas such as Mayo it would be impossible to make the workhouse diet inferior to that of independent labourers; therefore, life within the workhouse was to be based upon the principles of order, classification and discipline. This strict regimentation, together with the loss of liberty, were to constitute the basis of the Irish workhouse 'test'.<sup>10</sup>

The cost of building each workhouse was to be a charge on the local rates, although it was initially paid for by a loan from the Treasury. The cost of repaying these loans was unpopular with many Boards of Guardians, including the Mayo ones, who were vociferous on the issue, and in 1844 the Government reluctantly reduced the amount to be repaid.<sup>11</sup> Despite this, even as early as 1842, unions throughout the country were experiencing financial problems. This was primarily because, although poor rates had been struck in most unions, they were actually being collected in very few. This problem was most acute in Mayo where many of the poorest unions were situated. In the Ballina, Swinford and Castlebar unions, by 1843, no rates were being paid and the Guardians were without funds. The local Assistant Commissioner feared that these workhouses might be forced to close down. The Ballinrobe Guardians actually discharged 40 paupers from their workhouse, again because of their inability to collect rates. The Guardians attributed this inability to the fact that the rate-payers, especially the small occupiers, had no surplus money.<sup>12</sup> Despite this, the Commissioners were unsympathetic, and they continually urged the Guardians to enforce the rate collection even more vigorously with all the legal means available to them to do so. The Mayo Guardians in particular, doubted their ability to collect any rates and resented the Commissioners' interference and lack of compassion.<sup>13</sup>

Despite threats of legal action on the part of the central administrators, the opposition became even more widespread. In the Ballina union, for example, three of the rate collectors were assaulted and severely beaten. The Guardians felt that unless a Stipendiary Magistrate and military reinforcements were sent to the areas, no money would be collected and the workhouse would have to close. A similar fear was expressed by the Ballinrobe and Westport Guardians.<sup>14</sup> As a result of this continuing resistance, in 1844 the Poor Relief Act was modified and recognition was now given to the inability of certain groups to pay rates, by exempting all occupiers valued under £4 from them. Instead, this charge was now transferred to the landlords.<sup>15</sup> The effect of this Act in Mayo was to simultaneously disenfranchise over half of the rate-payers. Also, as most of the land in much of the country was subdivided or of poor quality, it greatly increased the burden on the landowners. The full impact of this became obvious during the latter part of the Famine when the pressure of poor rates bankrupted some landlords, whilst at the same time their failure to pay the rates often made them objects of public censure.<sup>16</sup>

Following the introduction of this Act most of the opposition to the payment of rates in Mayo came to an end, resistance continuing only in the Ballinrobe union. The Commissioners dealt with this by sending a Stipendiary Magistrate and military to the area. But continuing financial problems in the Castlerea union resulted in the Guardians refusing to open their workhouse, and in fact, only did so reluctantly, when the Commissioners issued a mandamus against them.<sup>17</sup> As a result of this, by 1844 only a very small part of the rate remained uncollected, which meant that, despite this trouble, the poor rates in Ireland were being better paid than in England.<sup>18</sup>

In the years following the introduction of the Poor Law of Ireland, the weather was particularly harsh and wet. June, July and August were traditionally the 'hunger' months, but in every year between 1838 and 1845 extraordinary distress was reported in some parts of the country. This distress was most intense in the summers of 1839 and 1842, and it was especially severe in parts of the south and west including Mayo.<sup>19</sup> However, initially, the government regarded these reports of scarcity with reservation. Because no workhouses were open, and no relief could be administered outside of them, the question was whether the Poor Law should be extended or whether it should be by-passed in favour of other forms of relief. The Government decided though, to keep this additional relief totally separate from the Poor Law which meant that, in distressed areas such as Mayo, alternative relief operations were established. Government aid was to be given in these areas only if it was met by equal donations from private quarters, with only a few exceptions being made. The Government feared that if this plan was not adhered to, self-reliance within Mayo would be undermined.<sup>20</sup>

In 1842 there was again extraordinary distress throughout Mayo. The government adopted the same policy that it had in 1839 and again refused to

let the Poor Law be extended, despite appeals from the Guardians to do so.<sup>21</sup> The rigid refusal of the Poor Law Commissioners, even during times of exceptional distress, to deviate from the principles of the 1838 Poor Law Act, arose from their fear that, if outdoor relief was provided, even on a temporary basis, it would afterwards be impossible to return to the usual system of relief, and this, in turn, would ultimately break down the whole system of Poor Relief in Ireland.<sup>22</sup>

The potato blight which first appeared in Ireland in 1845, was to put a great strain on the Poor Law, especially after 1847, when it became the main vehicle for the provision of relief. Initially, however, the Government decided to by-pass it in favour of other forms of relief as they had done in 1839 and 1842. This was because in the early stages, this distress was regarded as only a temporary failure. This meant that the country was poorly prepared for the crisis which it was to undergo. In many unions the Boards of Guardians had to stretch their limited resources in order to supplement the inadequate relief measures. The re-appearance of the blight in 1846, meant that the distress could no longer be regarded as short-term and all the relief measure had to be reviewed. The dramatic increase in distress resulted in a more permanent system of relief being introduced in 1847, one which recognised the Poor Law as being the main provider of relief.<sup>23</sup>

One of the main limitations of the Poor Law was its inability to provide sufficiently relief during a period of acute distress or famine. The amount of relief provided by the Poor Law was governed by the fact that the workhouses nationally could provide accommodation for only 100,000 paupers, whilst in Mayo, the workhouses had only sufficient accommodation for 4,400 inmates. Attempts to meet additional distress through the provision of outdoor relief was not possible under the terms of the 1838 Act.

In 1845, therefore, as in previous years, the government decided to meet the distress by organising relief committees, which would receive grants of aid equal to local subscriptions. Public works and supply depots were also to be established. The role of the Poor Law, however, was not to be extended in any way. The first effect of the potato blight on the Mayo workhouses occurred in March 1846, when the price of potatoes rose to such a degree that an alternative had to be found for them as the basic food in the workhouse diet.<sup>24</sup> A few months later, when blight appeared for the second time, the impact was more obvious. In October 1846, the paupers in the Westport workhouse had to wear their own clothes instead of the regulation workhouse ones, because no funds were available for this purpose. Two weeks later, the Guardians resolved to admit no more paupers to the workhouse because their funds were exhausted.<sup>25</sup>

Other Mayo unions were facing similar problems. In the same month, the Ballina Guardians had to reject 200 applicants for relief because their workhouse was full.<sup>26</sup> Financially also, the unions were in trouble. The Ballinrobe and Castlebar Guardians owed £3,000 and £1,000 respectively the weekly expenses of the Castlebar union being paid for by the Earl of Lucan.<sup>27</sup>

By the beginning of 1847, the Westport Guardians were also totally without funds and the workhouse was being kept open by private donations from the Marquis of Sligo.<sup>28</sup> In these and other similar cases the Commissioners were generally unsympathetic to the situation of the Guardians, merely exhorting them to use all of their legal powers to collect as high a rate as possible.<sup>29</sup> However, after two years of extensive blight in Mayo, this was almost impossible. The Swinford Guardians pointed out that the small occupiers in their unions were unable to pay high rates because the cost of food was so high. The Westport Guardians, whilst agreeing to strike a rate of ten shillings in the pound, simultaneously disclaimed responsibility for their anticipated inability to collect it. In a similar way, the Ballinrobe Guardians stated that they wished to absolve themselves from any liability for the rate-collection and instead put it on to the Government.<sup>30</sup>

Not surprisingly, conditions within the Mayo unions were deteriorating. Repeatedly, the pauper inmates of the Swinford, Westport and Ballina workhouses were faced with eviction, and although some Government grants were given to the unions, frequently they kept open due to the personal generosity of the Guardians.<sup>31</sup> Although the Guardians received little public sympathy from the Poor Law Commissioners, privately both the Commissioners and the Government agreed that there existed a crisis in parts of Ireland which was beyond the power of the local authorities to meet.<sup>32</sup>

Early in 1847, the British Government decided that new relief measures were necessary to meet the prolonged distress. This was because they feared that sustained interference by them in the relief operations would demoralise the Irish people and reduce them to 'helpless dependence'. Instead, the Government decided to give more emphasis to the local union structures, arguing that, as the potato failure was essentially local, its cure should come from local sources. This meant that the cost of funding the relief was now to be recognised as a local rather than an Imperial charge.<sup>33</sup> To achieve this, all relief was to be provided through the machinery of the Poor Law and the responsibility for financing it was to be borne by the local union rates. For the first time, outdoor relief was to be permitted, although it was to be subject to tight central control. Inevitably, as a result of these extra burdens, many of the local Poor Law unions fell into severe financial difficulties. Within a few months, twenty-two of them had been officially designated 'distressed' and had to be given aid from the Government. All of the Mayo unions fell into this category. The country's continuing economic problems therefore, forced the Government to play a much wider role than it had envisaged for itself in the provision of relief.

The change over to Poor Law relief in August 1847 came at a time when over three million people were in receipt of aid. Inevitably in Mayo, this new legislation stretched the resources of the unions to their limit. An example of this occurred in the Ballina union where the Guardians gave 260 paupers whom they were unable to admit to the workhouse, a week's supply of

provisions each, even though outdoor relief had not been authorised in their union. A few weeks later, on one day alone, 2,000 paupers applied for relief. Although the workhouse was full and they were unable to be admitted, the Guardians provided each of them with a meal.<sup>34</sup> At the same time the Ballina Guardians were in dire financial straits. They complained that the poor rates were now so high that they were absorbing the whole produce of the land and ruining many occupiers. They therefore asked that more Government funds be given to the union.<sup>35</sup> In the Ballinrobe union, the Sheriff of Mayo actually seized the property of the workhouse and put it up for auction, because the union was in so much debt. Because of the disease-ridden state of the workhouse, however, no offers were made to buy the goods.<sup>36</sup>

The Commissioners used the financial difficulties of the Mayo Guardians as an excuse to dismiss them and appoint paid officers in their place whom they hoped, would be able to reduce the administrative costs of the Poor Law. The substitute, or 'Vice' Guardians soon found themselves in a similar predicament to the elected Guardians. When, for example, the Castlebar Vice-Guardians took up duty, they found themselves without the resources to relieve what they described as, 'the wretched mass of human misery' which confronted them. The Vice-Guardians in the Ballinrobe union attributed the slowness of the rates coming in to a genuine inability to pay them rather than any dishonesty by the rate-payers.<sup>37</sup> As a result of these financial problems, the Government was again forced to intervene in the provision of relief.

The impact which the successive years of potato blight had on the country was uneven. Following the 1848 harvest, the worst of the Famine was over in Ulster, whilst a year later, the demarcation between recovery and deterioration became even more marked. In Mayo, in common with the rest of the western seaboard, the demand for relief after 1849, showed no signs of abating. The local rates were now at their highest level ever, and the Vice-Guardians experienced the same problems as their predecessors in trying to collect the rates.<sup>38</sup> The situation in the local unions had been made worse by the introduction of the Quarter Acre Clause in 1847, which had decreed that any person in possession of more than a quarter of an acre of land was not eligible to receive relief.<sup>39</sup> Within the Mayo unions, this Act caused many problems for the local administrators. The Inspector in Castlebar reported that people with more than a quarter of an acre of land were trying everything to make their claim for relief valid. Some, people for example were handing over their land to their relatives or even voluntarily surrendering to their landlords for this reason. On Clare Island, the local bailiff was found guilty of fraud for pretending that some people had surrendered their land whilst, in fact, they were continuing to occupy it. In the Ballinrobe union also, there were incidences of many small occupiers being allowed to reoccupy their surrendered land as caretakers or lodgers.<sup>40</sup> There is no doubt that this Act was a harsh piece of legislation, and although it was subsequently amended to permit the families of people occupying more

than a quarter of an acre of land to receive relief, it continued to be a much hated law.<sup>41</sup>

At the beginning of 1849, the Chief Poor Law Commissioner reported that, whilst the situation generally had improved in Ireland, in Mayo, Galway, Clare and parts of Kerry, distress was greater than it had been in any previous year.<sup>42</sup> The Commissioners insisted that every effort be made to collect the poor-rates in these areas. Inevitably, this proved to be difficult and external financial assistance continued to be necessary.<sup>43</sup> The Government, in a further attempt to reduce its role, introduced a national rate known as the Rate-in Aid which, it was hoped, would shift the financial burden from the local rates to a national one. This Law was introduced with the intention of forcing the wealthier unions to subsidise the poorer ones, thus reducing the amount contributed by the Imperial Treasury.

By 1850, some signs of recovery were visible in Mayo. In both 1849 and 1850 a large potato crop was sown and in the following year this was only partially affected by the blight. The pressure on the Mayo workhouses was also eased by four new ones being opened in Belmullet, Killala, Claremorris and Newport. Mayo's recovery from the Famine was faster than even the Poor Law Commissioners hoped for. Unions which had previously been dependent on external funds quickly became self-supporting, even though their rates continued to be high. Within the space of two years, the decrease in the number receiving relief in the Belmullet and Westport unions was as high as 80%. This resulted from an increased demand for labour, partly caused by the drain of emigration. But although the worst of the Famine was over in Mayo, its legacy was obvious. The example of the Belmullet union is fairly typical. Since 1845, 29% of the population had disappeared and much of the land lay waste. Also, the amount of disease, mortality and emigration was still considerable throughout the whole of the county. Despite the various changes, however, the structure of landholding and the dependence on potatoes by the local population did not change as much as it did in other parts of the country.<sup>44</sup> Although the poor-rates in Mayo continued to be high for many years, the Poor Law as a whole had survived this period of unprecedented distress and entered the second half of the nineteenth century in an even stronger position than before.

The demographic changes which resulted from the Famine, meant that in post-Famine years relief to the able-bodied ceased to be significant and instead, relief to the old, the infirm, and the young became more important. Because of this, the workhouses were increasingly used as centres for medical relief rather than poor relief. Poor relief also became more closely amalgamated with public health and the local Guardians were made responsible for the Nuisance Removal Acts of 1848 and 1849, the Medical Charities Act of 1852, the Burial Grounds Act of 1856 and the Vaccination Acts of 1858 and 1863.<sup>45</sup> Following the introduction of the Local Government Act in 1872, the duties of the Guardians were further extended, whilst the

Artisan Dwelling Acts and the Seeds Provisions Acts were also put under the jurisdiction of the Guardians.<sup>46</sup>

By 1859, the number of people receiving poor relief in Ireland was at its lowest level since before the Famine and, with the exception of a few years, continued to fall. However, although the standard of living in Ireland as a whole may have risen in the latter part of the nineteenth century, for a large part of the Mayo population, these were years of subsistence. Although a sustained famine such as existed between 1845 and 1852 did not recur, a bad harvest meant that large portions of the Mayo population became immediately dependent on poor relief. This occurred during the years 1859-62 and 1879-80, when large scale distress clearly exposed the vulnerability of the local people.

The distress in both 1859 and 1879 was caused by the reappearance of the potato blight in Ireland. Along the western seaboard this had disastrous consequences, as a large portion of the population still depended on the potato as their staple food and this did not change until the end of the century.<sup>47</sup> The Great Famine had had less impact on land ownership in the west than in the rest of the country. And so in Mayo the majority of the people continued to live on very small holdings, that is, land valued under £4 per year. Between 1879 and 1880 Land League agitation was at its height and, as recent studies have shown, some of the distress in these years resulted not only from the potato blight but also from landlord activities and its accompanying evictions.<sup>48</sup>

During both of these periods of distress the Poor Law Commissioners used its powers to make outdoor relief more widely available, although on both occasions it was made very clear that this form of relief should only be given with extreme caution. Despite this some of the Mayo unions got into financial trouble, the Belmullet one, for example, in 1880 was £3,000 in debt, some of the defaulters being Guardians.<sup>49</sup> In the same year, the Guardians of the Belmullet, Swinford and Newport unions were dissolved and replaced by Vice-Guardians, because the Commissioners believed they were not making enough effort to collect the rates.<sup>50</sup> The impact of the distress varied greatly within Mayo, the unions which had the greatest number of small-holders being the most affected by any crop failure.<sup>51</sup> Repeatedly, during these periods of distress, the Poor Law found itself in financial difficulties. This was largely attributable to the way in which the Poor Law was financed. The system of supporting the poor of each electoral division out of the local rates placed a great burden on the land holders, especially in unions such as Belmullet where 87% of the population were valued under £4.<sup>52</sup> In times of distress, therefore, the Poor Law foundered because it tried to force land which was not producing any surplus to finance the support of its local poor. Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century there were many isolated cases of distress in Mayo, usually occurring as a result of a partial failure of the potato crop. Because of the general poverty of the area, seasonal migration became an important supplement to many people's

income. In the poorer unions, such as the Belmullet and Newport ones, Emigration Committees under the auspices of the Guardians were established.<sup>53</sup> The Government also gave financial aid to poor families in the area who wanted to emigrate.<sup>54</sup>

Financially the situation of the Mayo unions remained precarious and in 1886 the Newport Union, which had a very low valuation, was re-amalgamated with the Westport one in order to extend its area of taxation.<sup>55</sup> The periodic inability of the Mayo Guardians to collect rates, however, brought them into conflict with the Commissioners, and in 1880, 1885 and 1898 – all periods of high distress – various Mayo Boards were dissolved.<sup>56</sup> In all of these years the distress was caused by potato blight, which occurred on a sufficiently large scale for the Government to intervene and introduce relief work to the area.<sup>57</sup> However, by the end of the century, the central authorities were confident that despite these periods of distress, the areas affected were getting smaller. This they attributed to a reduced dependence on the potato by the local population.<sup>58</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century it was obvious that distress in Ireland was decreasing. In 1891 the Government had had to provide relief works to 23 unions, in 1895 to 14 unions, in 1898 to 11 unions and in 1905 only 5 unions needed external assistance. However, of these 5 unions, 2 of them were in Mayo, that is, Belmullet and Westport. To a large extent, this coincided with the districts where land was still sub-divided and potatoes widely used.<sup>59</sup> This continuing dependence on external help though, showed that as Mayo entered the twentieth century, for many of her population, the line between subsistence and distress was still a narrow one.

#### Notes

1. See C. Kinealy, 'The Administration of the Irish Poor Law, 1838-1862' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, T.C.D. 1984).
2. *Ibid.*
3. Commissioners (Coms.) to Assistant Poor Law Commissioners (A.P.L.C.), Letter Books (L.B.) of A.P.L.C., Public Record Office of Ireland (P.R.O.I.), 7 Oct. 1838; *ibid.*, A.P.L.C. to Coms. 22 Dec. 1843; evidence of Edward Senior, 'First to Sixth Reports of Select Committee of the House of Lords appointed to enquire into the operation of the Irish Poor Law, and the expediency of making any amendment in its enactments' pp 146-8, H.L. 1849 (192) xvi, 1.
4. W. L. Feingold, 'The tenants' movement to capture the Irish Poor Law Boards, 1877-86', in *Albion*, vii, No. 3 (1975).
5. C. Kinealy, 'The Irish Poor Law' *passim*.
6. Coms. to A.P.L.C., P.R.O., L.B., 11 Sept. 1838.
7. Appendix to Eighth Annual Report of P.L.C., 1842; Appendix to Eleventh Annual Report of P.L.C., 1845.
8. A.P.L.C. to Coms. L.B., P.R.O.I., 11 Sept. 1838.
9. *Ibid.*, 18 Oct. 1839, 23 Oct. 1839.

10. G. Nicholls, *The Irish Poor Law* (London 1856); Sixth Annual Report of Poor Law Coms. 1840.
11. Coms. to A.P.L.C., L.B., P.R.O.I., 24 Nov. 1842, 9 Dec. 1842, 13 Dec. 1842; Memorial of Castlebar Guardians, State Paper Office (S.P.O.), Chief Secretary's Office, Registered Papers (C.S.O.R.P.), 1843 O.5958, 24 April 1843; 'Report of Select Committee appointed to consider the report of the Commission for Enquiry into the execution of the contracts for certain union workhouses in Ireland, and to whom two petitions were referred', H.C. 1844 (441) xiv. . .495.
12. A.P.L.C. to Coms. L.B., P.R.O.I., 21 Nov. 1842, 11 Feb. 1843, 11 March 1843, 29 June 1843.
13. *Ibid.*, Coms. to A.P.L.C., 20 Nov. 1842, 2 Dec. 1843.
14. Resolution of Ballinrobe Guardians, S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1844 22.5519, 28 March 1844; *ibid.*, Coms. to Chief Secretary (C.S.), 1844 A. 14154, 7 Oct. 1844, 10 Oct. 1844.
15. 6 & 7 Vic. c.92.
16. 'Returns of Parliamentary electors; also of tenements valued for the relief of the poor'. H.C. (533) 1844 xliii, 323; Report on the rating of immediate lessors, from 'Select Commission of the House of Lords appointed to enquire into the operation of the Irish Poor Law Acts relative to the rating of immediate lessors and to report thereon to the House' H.L. 1847-8, pp3-11.
17. Eleventh and twelfth Annual Reports of P.L.C., 1845-6.
18. G. Nicholls, *The Irish Poor Law*, p.300; Evidence of Edward Senior, 'Select Committee on the Irish Poor Law' 1849 p.147.
19. Fifth and Twelfth Annual Reports of P.L.C., 1839/1846 *passim*.
20. Sixth Annual Report of P.L.C., 1840 *passim*.
21. Eighth Annual Report of P.L.C., 1842 *passim*; Castlebar Guardians to Lord Lieutenant, S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1842 Z 7430, 9 June 1842.
22. *Ibid.*, Coms. To C.S., 1842 O 8864, 2 July 1842.
23. 10 vic. c.31; 10 & 11 vic. 84; 10 & 11 vic. c.90.
24. Minute Books (M.B.) of Ballina Guardians, National Library of Ireland (N.L.I.) Ms. 12001, 30 March 1846, 20 April 1846.
25. *Ibid.*, M.B. of Westport Guardians, Ms. 12607, 21 Oct. 1846, 4 Nov. 1846.
26. Report on Ballina Union, S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1846 018344, 17 Oct. 1846.
27. Chairman of Ballinrobe Union to C.S., S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1846 A. 14212; *ibid.*, extract of minutes of Castlebar Guardians, 1846 O 19716, 24 Oct. 1846.
28. Minute Books of Westport Union, N.L.I., ms. 12607, 20 Jan. 1847.
29. Coms. to Marquess of Sligo, Westport Union, S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1846 O. 20106, 7 Nov. 1846; *ibid.*, Coms. to Castlebar Guardians, 1846 O. 19716, 24 Oct. 1846.
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31. Report of A.P.L.C. (Westport), S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1847 O 794 20 Jan. 1847; *ibid.*, A.P.L.C. (Ballina) O 718 18 Jan. 1847; *ibid.*, British Home Secretary to C.S., O 580 14 Jan. 1847.
32. Extract of Westport Minutes, S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1847 O 863, 22 Jan. 1847; *ibid.*, Ballina Guardians to C.S., 1847 O 806, 20 Jan. 1847; Report of A.P.L.C. (Swinford) S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., O 718, 14 Jan. 1847.
33. Charles Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis* (1847), *passim*.

34. Minute Book of Ballina Union, Ms. 12,202 11 Oct. 1847.
35. Ibid., Ms. 12203, 24 Nov. 1847, 10 Dec. 1847.
36. Sheriff of Mayo to Coms., S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1847 O 10579, 9 Sept. 1847.
37. Vice-Guardians, Castlebar to Coms. S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1847 O 11034, 26 Oct. 1847; *ibid.*, Vice-Guardians, Ballinrobe to Coms. 1848 O 5139 31 Jan. 1848.
38. P.L.I., Castlebar to Coms. S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1848 O 638 26 Dec. 1847; *ibid.*, Vice-Guardians, Ballinrobe to Coms. 1848 O 2328, 31 Jan. 1848.
39. 10 & 11 Vic. c.31.
40. Circular from Coms. 'Copies of Correspondence upon which the Coms. of the Poor Law in Ireland took legal advice on the construction of the tenth section of the Act 10 Vic. c.31; and of the case submitted to them by counsel; and of the circular letter of the Coms. issued thereon' p.4. H.C. (442) 1847-8, liii, 519, 23 May 1848.
41. *Ibid.*
42. Evidence of Edward Twistleton (chief P.L.C.) 'Inquiry on Irish Poor Law Lords' p.654 1849 xvi; rate-collector, Ballinrobe to Coms., S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 1849 0750, 13 Jan. 1849.
43. *Ibid.* P.L.I. Castlebar to Coms. 1847 O 1763 20 Feb. 1849.
44. P.L.I. Ballina to Coms., S.P.O., C.S.O.R.P., 03576. 28 April 1849; *ibid.* memorial of rate-payers of Belmullet Union to Lord Lieutenant, 1851 05775 3 Aug. 1851; Sixth annual Report of P.L.C. 1853.
45. 11 & 12 Vic. c.123; 11 & 12 Vic. c.111; 14 & 15 Vic. c.68; 19 & 20 Vic. c.98; 21 & 22 Vic. c.64; 26 & 27 Vic.c.52.
46. Eighth Annual report of Local Government Board, 1880.
47. *Ibid.*
48. G. Moran, 'Famine and the Land War; relief and distress in Mayo 1879-1881', *Cathair na Mart*, No. 5 1985.
49. Eighth Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1880, *passim*.
50. Twenty-second to Twenty-sixth Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1879 to 1882, *passim*.
51. G. Moran, 'Famine and Land War' *passim*.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Eleventh Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1853.
54. Eighteenth Annual Report Local Government Board, 1890.
55. Fourteenth Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1886.
56. Eighth, Sixteenth and Twentieth Annual Reports of Local Government Board, 1888, 1888, and 1898.
57. Nineteenth Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1896.
58. Twenty-sixth Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1898.
59. Thirty-third Annual Report of Local Government Board, 1905.

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**FAMINE AND THE LAND WAR:  
RELIEF AND DISTRESS IN MAYO, 1879-81,  
PART II  
by Gerard P. Moran**

**III**

Initially the cries of famine from Ireland were brushed aside by the British press as merely an attempt by the Land League to generate support for its cause. English opinion, at this stage, was prejudiced against Irish distress because of the aggressive tone of the speakers at meetings, coupled with the general acceleration of crime levels which co-incided with the agitation.<sup>1</sup> The severity of the problem only gained tacit recognition when English correspondents, such as J. H. Tuke, verified that conditions in Ireland were indeed serious, and were approaching the magnitude of 1847, especially along the western seaboard. The government's approach to the distress reflected the sentiments of the population; characterised by general caution about the extent of the distress. It was aware of the situation in the country in July when it became obvious that the potato crop was badly diseased. The officials in London and Dublin had been informed of the extent of the problem through the resolutions passed by the local elected bodies in the country. At the same time the Lord Lieutenant was exhorted by the delegations from all over the country to sanction remunerative employment in the more distressed areas of the country. Nevertheless, the governments's line was one of caution.

There was a general reluctance to admit the gravity of the problem until an official survey was carried out. As it was, the government was slow in carrying out this report. The local government board's inspectors were only ordered to compile information on the harvest prospects in each county, with particular reference to the potato crop, on 5 September 1879. By this stage a growing number of the general public, as well as individuals with a vested interest, waited anxiously for the authorities to announce some remedial measures to combat the problem. Thus, six crucial weeks were lost at a time when some basic form of relief measures could have had a most beneficial effect on those areas most in need.

By the time the government received its report, at the end of October, the diseased potato crop has been almost entirely consumed, and an increasing number of people were turning in desperation to the Land League and the Poor Law Guardians for help. The government was informed that the crop would be deficient in quantity, inferior in quality and would not be more than half the average crop. While this was contradictory to the general opinions of the local elected representatives, the report did state that no extraordinary legislation would be required as normal relief measures should overcome the distress.<sup>2</sup> The underlying implication was that some form of help would have to be given, especially in the west of Ireland, and as a result some additional relief measures were planned. If they had been implemented

earlier, they would probably have cushioned the people against the full effect of the distress when it reached its height in the spring of 1880. The government was refusing to recognise the imminence of the famine, although it had been informed that the staple diet of the people in the west of Ireland had been practically annihilated. It was overlooking the fact that other economic factors had exacerbated the problem. The government's negative approach to the existence of a famine was very much resented by leaders of the nationalist movement. By the time the government did involve itself in measures to counteract the famine, it would prove to be too little too late.

It was to be the Poor Law unions who would be at the forefront in attempts to combat the distress, but few additional powers were to be granted and no extra finance given. The Guardians were being asked to combat the problem with the limited resources they possessed, although these had proved to be seriously ineffective even during the relative prosperous years. With the potato crop diseased and remittances from seasonal migration at an all-time low, it was imperative that some practical legislation be enacted to ward off distress.

A supplementary measure was eventually passed; the Seed Supply Act came into being on 1 March 1880 funded by the money of the disestablished church. This provided the Guardians with interest free loans for the purchase of seed potatoes for distribution amongst those tenants who did not have the means to acquire them. It was an important measure in that the government recognised the serious position in the west of Ireland, where the tenants had been forced to eat their seed potatoes because of a shortage of alternative foods. In this the government was following the lead set by the private relief committees, notably the Land League and the Duchess of Marlborough Relief Committee, in distributing seed potatoes. The Guardians only distributed the seed potatoes to those farmers with valuations under £10, and those with valuations under £4 were given enough seed potatoes to plant one quarter of their holdings. However the private charities placed no restrictions on recipients, acknowledging the fact that all groups were experiencing great difficulties. The tenants were required to repay the Guardians their loans in two instalments to the local government board by August 1882.

The government was attempting to avert a recurrence of the famine in the following autumn, as the tenants were at this stage without seed potatoes for planting. Claremorris was the first Mayo union to avail of the proposals applying for £8,000 for seed potatoes.<sup>3</sup> The new legislation appeared to be a genuine attempt to ensure the tenants would not have to face famine the following autumn. However, there were many defects in the remedial measures, the principle one being that of finance. The first instalment of the loan had to be repaid by the tenants by November 1880, but nobody took into consideration that the distress might possibly continue beyond this period. The government's measure had lacked insight in recognising that many of those destitute tenants were already in debt to the shopkeepers and the landlord, and would consequently be unable to meet these commitments, not

to mention those of the Guardians. This resulted in many unions failing to repay the first instalment of the seed loan to the local government board.

The problem was exacerbated by the fact that many tenants had also to pay increased Poor Law rates as a result of the distress. Many of these unions were on the verge of bankruptcy as it became increasingly clear that the tenants were unable to meet their dues. Many unions, such as Castlebar, petitioned the local government board to rescind the first instalment of the loan. The only electoral divisions of the Castlebar unions that were eventually exempted from repaying the first instalment were Addergoole and Ballingoraher, for they had been given inferior seed potatoes.<sup>4</sup>

The Guardians planned to supply the tenants with Champion seed potatoes, for it was generally agreed that this potato variety was the most resistant to blight. However, success would depend on a steady supply. As a result, all groups attempted to distribute these seed potatoes, and consequently the Champion became the most important variety sown in the county. In 1880, 91.9 per cent of the land of Mayo planted with Champions remained blight free, this being a much higher proportion than the traditional varieties. Even areas such as Newport, Belmullet and Ballaghaderreen, localities which had repeatedly succumbed to the ravages of blight, reported that in the main the Champion potato was undiseased.<sup>5</sup> The tenants themselves wanted to change their potatoes, and there were reports from Mayo of people waiting at the railway station for the Champion seed potatoes to be distributed.<sup>6</sup> In some cases the demand exceeded supply and when the Guardians were unable to procure an adequate supply of Champion seed potatoes, they were forced to distribute varieties which were very much prone to blight. In some cases such as Addergoole,<sup>7</sup> this only exacerbated the famine problem when the crop eventually succumbed to disease. It was reported from Lahardane in September 1880, that the people were in fact worse off than they had been the previous year, because of the failure of the potato crop.

The introduction of the Champion potato did have a major long term effect on a major potato consuming and producing region like Mayo. There was a remarkable shift in emphasis in the variety grown with 64 per cent of the potato acreage planted with Champions in 1882 compared to 19 per cent in 1880. In 1886 the figure stood at 89 per cent.<sup>8</sup> This transition in favour of a new variety of potato also occurred in the poorer regions of the county. By 1882, 55 per cent of the potato acreage of Belmullet was under the Champion. Nevertheless, while the Champion proved remarkably resilient to blight, and was regarded by most farmers as their saviour, it did eventually succumb to the disease, resulting in a new outbreak of distress in the 1880s and 1890s.

It was clear a new approach was imperative, and so the government decided on a new departure to mobilise the landlords in their relief undertaking. Initially most landlords declared that the reports of distress in their areas were exaggerated. As a result of this placid attitude, the

landowners did not play any major role in the relief operations up to the end of 1879. Eventually, they could not fail to be aware of the widespread nature of the potato failure and many of them did become actively involved through force of circumstance in relief operations. Their attendance at relief meetings in this period was looked upon with suspicion by certain sections. Indeed it provoked outspoken criticism from the Land League representatives, who maintained that the destitution was a direct consequence of the landlords' own agrarian policies. Such an occurrence took place at Castlebar and it resulted in the landlord representatives withdrawing from the relief meeting. It became difficult for the landlord to participate benevolently in the public relief operations, when an accusing finger was being pointed at them by their fellow members of the relief committees. Some landlords did avail of the opportunity to punish those tenants who were involved in the Land League by refusing them relief. Therefore while Lord Lucan and the Earl of Arran did provide relief works on their estates, only those who had stayed outside of the land agitation were employed. One tenant informed the Bessborough Commission that his landlord, Sir Roger Palmer, had withheld relief from him because he had attended a Land League meeting in 1879.<sup>9</sup> There was little doubt that some landlords hoped to curtail the agrarian activities of their tenants by imposing such penalties, utilising the present distress of the tenants to forestall these very tenants in any future unrest.

Many landlords did aid their tenants by granting them rent abatements of up to 30 per cent. By doing this they were acknowledging the existence of distress, but such philanthropy had little bearing on the tenants' individual situation, as it was the total financial structures that needed to be reformed. A rent abatement of 30 per cent meant only a 3 per cent real saving for the tenants. Therefore, while the reduction was a welcome help, it made little impact in combating the distress. Most landlords who held small estates, were unable to provide reductions as they themselves were experiencing difficulties, and any cut back in their income would have exacerbated their problems. Both landlord and tenant were finding themselves unwitting victims of an archaic economic system in the process of collapse.

There were also those landowners, particularly those who were non-resident in Ireland, who contributed little to the relief of distress on their estates. J. H. Tuke pointed out that distress was greatest on those estates where the landlord was an absentee.<sup>10</sup> While the evils of absenteeism were always apparent,<sup>11</sup> they became more overt during periods of distress and the links between distress and absenteeism were marked. The annual rental siphoned from Mayo by absentee landlords was £100,000, an amount equal to that spent on the relief of distress in the county from 1879-81. It was pointed out that landlords who were resident on their estates, as in Ballina, combined effectively to keep down destitution, compared to those who were absentees as in the Swinford-Claremorris regions.

The situation deteriorated badly as 1879 progressed. In November the government introduced measures to help ward off the distress, but they were

limited in their extent, terminating on 31 January 1880, and costing a paltry £31,892. The government was putting the onus on the landlords to provide relief by giving employment to their distressed tenants. The government was offering the landlords a loan, the first instalment of which had to be paid after two years, and the repayments had to be made within twenty-four and thirty-seven years, the interest rate being one per cent.<sup>12</sup> Major government assistance was required at this stage, as the shopkeepers were no longer able to extend credit to the tenants. However the government's involvement was limited to land improvements and the landlords opted out, as they considered the repayments to be too high. The government was still not prepared to concede that anything like a serious famine was in evidence, as was seen from this short term measure. It was clear the authorities were not in possession of the full facts, since no provisions were being made for relief works when the potato crop would be consumed. It was only when the Registrar General issued his findings on the harvest prospects, warning that the potato crop would be scarce in most areas after Christmas, that the authorities admitted the widespread nature of the distress in the country.<sup>13</sup>

It was evident at this point that the government's faith in the landlords' ability to help ward off the distress had been misplaced. Nevertheless, it remained their intention to utilise the Guardians and the landowners as the primary means of channelling the relief. At the beginning of January the Treasury sanctioned £5 millions for the landlords and sanitary authorities to combat the distress. When one considers that up to one million people were in need of help it meant that only 10/- per person was being made available for a period of thirty weeks. The new potato crop was not due for harvesting till August. One of the more promising aspects of the measure was that the provisions were modified and the interest rate lowered, a point which the landowners seized upon, as £914,991 was approved to Irish landowners, £106,417 of this to those in county Mayo.<sup>14</sup>

However the signs were not encouraging from those areas of greatest distress, such as Mayo, Donegal and Connemara. The primary benefactors from this legislation were the smaller landowners, for the larger proprietors were mainly absentees and they did not avail of the loans to any great extent. The majority of destitute tenants were on these estates. The five principal landlords in Mayo, Sligo, Dillon, Lucan, Palmer and Arran, all absentees, applied for £6,700 between them. Colonel King Harman, who had a small estate in Shrule barony, applied for £29,500 for estate improvement.

The government's intervention in 1880 occurred when distress was at an advanced stage but its involvement was too little too late. It had been amply warned about the impending distress. Its reliance on the landlords and the Guardians as the focal point of the relief was not effective in those areas where aid was most needed, the remote regions of the west of Ireland. There remained the problem of the smaller landlords who were unable to partake in the schemes at all, as they would never be able to make the repayments. The

only other measures the government carried out were a limited number of relief works.

The government was aware that the landlords were not involving themselves wholeheartedly in the relief operations. Despite the fact that it was generally agreed that this limited approach was a total failure, the authorities refused to give the Guardians any major additional powers, although they comprised the only body which had the expertise and the know-how to implement changes. The only additional measure that was implemented, was the opening of baronial works in January 1880, with the object of stimulating employment amongst the poorer classes, in particular for the labourers. It had been envisaged that this would lead to a decline in pauperism and also in the Poor Law expenditure, as this group would no longer be chargeable on the rates. Despite this, there were only a few people paying the rates and they were also the people who would have to pay the loans for the baronial works.

Special baronial presentment sessions were to take place to determine the amount of relief work which would be allocated to each area, and these applications would then be submitted to the local government board for consideration. If authorised, the first of fifteen annual instalments of the loan would have to be repaid after two years, and the interest rate was set at one per cent.<sup>15</sup> All of the Mayo baronies quickly applied to the sessions for loans: ranging from £52,000 in Costello to £25,000 in Carra. However, those groups that were to be relieved, such as the labourers, were dissatisfied with the proposed remuneration, as the weekly wage in Claremorris was set at 9/-, a 25 per cent reduction on the normal rate.<sup>16</sup> In general there was little opposition to the wages to be paid, for the people were only too happy to be employed. On some of the private schemes, such as the Earl of Arran's, the wages were set at a lower level than normal.

There were aspects regarding the relief works which greatly curtailed their effectiveness. The works contracts were given out to private individuals, often related to members of the grand juries, and they were more concerned with the quick profit that could be obtained than with the primary objective, the relief of distress. In consequence the numbers employed on the works never reached the targets which the government had envisaged. Then the landlords were not entirely happy with the prospect of an additional financial handicap being placed on them, as they would have to repay the loans for the works. As happened with the Poor Law repayments, the financial burden would fall on them and not on the general public. Therefore they were determined to keep the loans down to a minimum. Their attitude was typified by the remarks made by the chairman of the County sessions:

To pass for that amount [£23,000] was wholly out of the question, unless they wanted to plunge their heads under water altogether, with no hope of ever rising again.

As a result of the landlord's actions, the effectiveness of the proposed plans was very much curtailed. A resident landowner in Turlough, P. Daly, opposed all the works, despite the fact that 300 families were destitute in the area.<sup>17</sup> Eventually only £3,122 was approved of by the Carra presentment sessions. Similar occurrences were repeated all over the county with many landlords opposing the measures.

There were other factors which militated against the government works, in particular the attitude of the local government board inspectors. Although the baronial sessions had reduced the amounts considerably, the officials only approved of loans which they felt would be of benefit to the regions. This occurred despite the fact that the officials in many instances were unacquainted with the districts and the extent of the distress. The entire sum sought by the Ballinrobe sessions was rejected, and only £250 of the £867 applied for by the Newport works was issued. In Claremorris £2,409 was sought for works but only £920 was issued.<sup>18</sup> The *Freeman's Journal* criticised the ineptness of the works and called for a real system of public works to tide the people over the crisis.<sup>19</sup>

There is little doubt but that the people regarded the works as one of the few avenues of safety from the distress. It was reported that women and children accompanied the men to the works in an attempt to obtain money. In many instances the people regarded these operations as substitutes for the private charities which by the spring of 1880 were experiencing difficulties in coping with the distress, as the numbers requesting help had continued to increase. There was also the problem, as had occurred with the public works during the great famine, of paying the labourers. Some of the private contractors refused, or were unable to pay the workers, as often the money was held up in Dublin. There was also the problem that in some cases the works commenced without official sanction and in consequence were left without funds.

The works were scheduled to finish at the end of autumn 1880, as it was felt the people would be adequately fed by the new potato crop. However such was not to be the case in forty-five baronies, and it would be a fair statement to say that the distress lasted nearly two years in those areas. This was a result of the prolonged failure of the potato, and the government had little option but to keep the works open.<sup>20</sup> When one considers that 171,000 people in Mayo were in need of relief and 131,000 in Galway, it is easy to see the ineffectiveness and inadequacies of the baronial works. It must be remembered, however, that had it not been for the efforts of the clergy and the private relief organisations, the extent of the problem would have been even greater.

In times of crisis, and especially during periods of famine, the people had always turned to the clergy for leadership and help. However, the priests at this stage did fear a diminution of their control over the people because of the rise of the Land League, guided as it was by fenians and other prominent local people, some of whom were totally alien to the church. On the other hand

there is little doubt that locally the priests were still regarded as the leaders within the community, looking after the temporal, as well as the spiritual well-being of their flock. It was the clergy who were primarily responsible for organising relief meetings, and in many instances these ultimately resulted in the formation of local relief committees. In January 1880 the parish priest of the Neale, Fr. John O'Malley, convened a meeting to establish a relief committee and to distribute any relief that was forthcoming for the regions. From those attending the meeting a deputation was formed to wait on the Ballinrobe Guardians to seek remedial works for the parish.<sup>21</sup> Very often these meetings organised by the clergy formed the basis for the establishment of Land League branches in the area. A demonstration, convened in Castlebar in January 1880 by the local clergy, was used by James Daly to call for the formation of a tenants defence association in the town.<sup>22</sup> It resulted in the establishment of a Land League branch in the town at the end of January, about the same time as a local relief committee was formed. Both these organisations had the parish priest, Canon Magee, at the helm. Similar situations were witnessed throughout the country with the clergy to the fore in both the relief activities and the Land League. In all, over 1,400 priests were involved nationally in the 840 relief committees,<sup>23</sup> and over 1,200 of these participated directly with the Mansion House Relief Committee.

The Catholic clergy were not alone in their relief activities. As had occurred with the distress of 1860-62, Catholic priests did co-operate with clergy of other denominations in fighting the distress. In many areas the formation of the relief committees was the direct consequence of a joint approach in initiating relief committees. In January 1880 the Catholic bishop of Killala, the Rector and the Presbyterian minister were responsible for convening a meeting of influential and wealthy people in Ballina, with the expressed object of relieving the growing distress in the town.<sup>24</sup> At the same time there were instances, such as in Connemara, where there was no apparent attempt to have any concerted effort to alleviate the problem by the local religious leaders. This was evidently the legacy of the proselytising campaigns of the 1850s in the region.

The role of the priests during this great crisis, was primarily to supervise the distribution of food and fuel from the private relief organisations and whatever was supplied by the Guardians. In addition, they monitored the extent of the problem, being in many cases the only group who gave objective assessments of the distress. They were also openly critical of the private and public measures, and they were especially vocal regarding the inadequacies of the relief. In Claremorris they considered the two stone of meal distributed by the Guardians as insufficient to meet the people's requirements. They were overwhelmed with requests for food but they were unable to help. When the people had depleted their own resources, they invariably turned to their priest as their last hope of obtaining assistance. One priest informed the Mansion House Relief Committee that hundreds of destitute people daily visited him in search of food but he was powerless to help them.<sup>25</sup> They were

turning to the priests as the only sympathetic person whom they had access to, for after the landlord, the cleric was the only person in the community who had the power to seek aid. Throughout this period the amount of aid being received was minimal compared to the distress; in many cases only one stone of Indian meal per family being provided. At Kilbeaty, near Charlestown, a large crowd assembled at the chapel in search of food, yet over two hundred starving families had to return home empty-handed, although they were as destitute and deserving as those relieved.<sup>26</sup>

While the clergy did participate in the distribution of meal, they viewed this measure as being merely of a temporary nature. It should only be implemented as a backup to the outdoor relief granted, since it clearly reduced a proud people to the demoralising role of beggars. Nevertheless while such relief was required, the priests were prepared to co-operate in its distribution. Their role was important because they were one of the few groups whose reputation remained untarnished. In contrast, the accusing finger of misappropriating funds was often cast at the local Land League branches. As the local relief committees contained local clergymen, who controlled the destination of the relief funds, such charges were never made against them. Consequently they were an important component in the administration of relief.

As for the Land League, it had never wanted to become actively involved in the relief of distress. Circumstances, rather than its own deep convictions, forced it to become involved in measures to help ward off famine. In the initial stages, the central executive of the Land League went out of its way to inform the branches that it was not an agency for the relief of distress. However, its attitude changed quickly, as it was given little option but to engage itself in the relief process, due to continuous appeals from its own strongholds, such as Mayo. It was when Parnell and John Dillon went to America in January 1880, that large amounts of money were collected for the relief of distress. Initially this tour was to be used to collect funds for the land agitation, for the League leaders felt it was the government's duty to provide aid. However, when it became known that the level of distress was more acute than had first been thought, it was decided to make a collection for the relief of distress. Such a collection had the advantage of tapping the sympathy of the Irish-American population, as thousands of them had been forced to leave Ireland under similar circumstances during the distress of 1845-50 and 1860-62. Parnell informed his audiences throughout his tour, of the imminent distress in Ireland, and this resulted in £50,000 being contributed by Americans to the Land League for the relief of distress.<sup>27</sup> Compared to the funds of the other private relief organisations, such was a small sum, less than 10 per cent of the total relief expenditure, and only 20 per cent of the League's total funds. However, although the sum was not as great as that at the disposition of the other organisations, it was important, for the tenants in the west of Ireland looked to the League as the organisation to ward off the

famine. After their initial reluctance, the League conscientiously involved itself in the process of helping people fight the famine.

At the beginning of 1880 the League pulled off a major propaganda coup when it decided to use its funds to distribute seed potatoes to the tenants for planting in the spring. This action was important because the experiences of the great famine had shown that when the potato was blight free no planting had been undertaken, for the people were involved on the public works and the seed potatoes had been consumed. It was an undertaking which displayed great foresight by the League and was followed by the other relief organisations, both private and public. It was one of the few organisations which could successfully undertake such a venture, because of its vast network of branches (500) throughout the country. Eventually £10,000 was spent on the distribution of seed potatoes. Such action did provide the Land League with a good image amongst the people of the west, for it was involving itself in issues other than those of a political and agrarian nature. However, a problem persisted in that many tenants still regarded it primarily as an agency for obtaining relief. Those individuals who sought relief were refused by the central executive, as it only dealt with local relief committees. It was probably as a result of this method of relief that it came in for such criticism. Tenants tended to seek aid from the Land League rather than the other relief organisations, which consisted of large numbers of landlords.

The Land League continued to come under a barrage of criticism because of its relief distribution. At times it did give the impression that it was indifferent in this role. It was stated that a beggar and his family were refused relief because a subscription to the Land League had not been paid.<sup>28</sup> There were reasons for this attitude. Some of the Land League executive did not want to compromise their prime objectives, and genuinely feared that their role of distributing relief was responsible for a decline in their principal aim - that of political agitation for peasant proprietorship. The League's administration also began to wind down as a result of the increasing amount of time being devoted to the distribution of relief. This occurred at a period when Davitt was attempting to keep the League's administration costs to a minimum. One of the principal criticisms levied against it was that it did not give out adequate funds. Many of the local organisations, especially those in the poorer regions of the west, where the League was viewed primarily as a relief organisation, were very critical of this fact. It was reported from Connemara that the people were disillusioned with the League because of the inadequacies of the relief sent from Dublin.<sup>29</sup>

The problem in the urban areas was that the Land League branches were mainly composed of traders and merchants. It was alleged from areas like Crossmolina, that relief was only given to those tenants who traded with these merchants. In addition there were the constant but unsuccessful appeals of the Castlebar branch, for funds to combat the distress in Auglish, Ballyhean and Breaghwy.<sup>30</sup> They were also unsuccessful in their appeals to the other relief organisations. The problem was that so many areas were seeking money

at the same time, at a period when all regions in the west sought aid as the potato supply diminished. All of the Dublin relief organisations were experiencing difficulties by May 1880, as the numbers looking for relief increased, putting further pressure on their meagre resources.

While the local relief organisations did possess the infrastructure to come to grips with the distress, they did not have the funds. The problem was exacerbated by the bitterness that existed amongst the Dublin relief organisations, in particular the jealousy between the Land League and the Mansion House Relief Committee. Instead of uniting in an attempt to combat the famine, the Land League attacked the Mansion House organisation for allowing landlords make up its executive. When Davitt went to Paris to collect funds, he became embroiled in this bitterness with P. J. Smyth, M.P., who was there on the same mission for the Mansion House Relief Committee.

In the long term, the distribution of relief, despite its adverse effects, did prove beneficial for the Land League. As has recently been shown, the relief efforts allowed the League gain a foothold in a number of areas, and it helped bring in money from America for its political campaign.<sup>31</sup> Otherwise there is little doubt that it would not have been able to sustain the agitation. Nevertheless the Land League did not consider itself as primarily a relief organisation, unlike the other major relief organisations.

The Mansion House Relief Committee and the Duchess of Marlborough Relief Committee were the two main private relief agencies, and they distributed over £267,000 in aid, chiefly by organising the purchase of food and overseeing its distribution amongst the needy. This was an area in which the government did not participate, and the work of these organisations was very much appreciated by the local people. Bishop MacCormack of Achonry informed the representative of the Mansion House Committee, J. A. Fox, that were it not for the exertions of the private organisations, many people would have died.<sup>32</sup> While both organisations had similar objectives, they differed radically in their approach.

The Mansion House Committee was the largest relief organisation to involve itself in remedial measures during the famine of 1879-81. It was formed on 2 January 1880 by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Dwyer Grey, the proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal*. He used his paper, which had the largest circulation in the country, to appeal for money and show the extent of its operations. The committee's central executive comprised politicians and churchmen of all persuasions. It also included a number of landlords, which brought it into conflict with the Land League. As it was, the leaders of the two organisations, Grey and Parnell, were not on speaking terms because of differing ideologies, and this created further tension between the two movements. However the Mansion House organisation was more effective in obtaining funds for the relief of distress. Within two months of its initiation, it had collected over £84,000 from all over the world, especially from those countries with high immigrant populations. It was providing £8,000 a week in

relief to 106 local relief committees throughout the country.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the Duchess of Marlborough's committee, it worked with the local committees in each area, and this had the advantage of quickly channelling its relief to the distress areas. While these local committees primarily obtained aid from the Mansion House committee, they were by no means exclusively tied to that body. When the distress was at its height in 1880 and it became increasingly difficult to obtain relief, these local bodies sought aid from wherever possible, indicating that their first loyalty was to the local people. It was reported from Dugort, Achill, that families burdened by the yoke of distress, were tramping about through the rain and storm from one committee man's house to the next begging for food.<sup>34</sup> At the same time the Castlebar relief committee attempted unsuccessfully to obtain funds from all the central relief committees. When it eventually procured £250 from the Duchess of Marlborough Relief Committee, it had the problem of attempting to relieve 3,300 people. Breaghwy, one of the poorest districts in the union, received an allocation of only £4/8/-, or 5d per distressed family. Eventually it was decided to help the twenty five more destitute families.<sup>35</sup>

The Mansion House Committee had come into existence at an appropriate time, since the numbers in need of relief were burgeoning with increasing rapidity, especially after January 1880 when the total potato crop had been consumed in most parts of the west of Ireland. By March there were 350,000 people receiving relief in 690 relief areas, and the total cost up to this point was £56,000.<sup>36</sup> Mayo and Galway were at the centre of its activities, and over one-third of its total relief expenditure was being spent in these two counties. 171,000, or 70 per cent of the population in Mayo, were being relieved through 64 local relief committees who worked with the Mansion House Committee. In Galway, 133,000 people were being relieved.<sup>37</sup> There were variations within Mayo itself, however. Here, nearly all of the people were being relieved, but only 40 per cent of Killala's population were actually suffering distress.<sup>38</sup>

While the operations of the Mansion House Relief Committee eventually catered for 800 districts, the Duchess of Marlborough Relief Committee tended to concentrate its efforts on smaller areas where it could give more help. This relief organisation was established by the wife of the Irish Chief Secretary. It appointed the local board of Guardians' chairman to lead its relief committee and very often he was unsure about the extent of the distress in those remote areas. At times there was confusion in ascertaining whether the people were being relieved by public or private relief. The Duchess of Marlborough Relief Committee concentrated its efforts on a few areas which were badly off, rather than diversifying its efforts over a larger area. On occasions it did co-operate with the Mansion House Committee to combat the distress. In the summer of 1880 they forced the government to acknowledge the advanced state of distress along the west coast of Ireland, and the authorities did provide them with four ships to distribute food amongst the 36,841 destitute people. Without this help there is little doubt but that many

of these people would have perished in these inaccessible regions. 7,051 of these were off the Mayo coast.<sup>39</sup> Besides co-operating in this venture, the private relief organisations were only too willing to act together in distributing any aid which came their way. The plight of the Irish brought a quick response from the Canadian government and people, and £23,000 (\$100,000) was sent for the practical alleviation of distress. The two relief organisations undertook this task, and a committee was formed which decided to utilise the money to buttress the fragile subsistence-like economy of the west of Ireland. Fishing was aided by the building of new piers in remote areas and the provision of fishing equipment for the poorer tenants.<sup>40</sup> It was due to this aid that piers were built at Enniscrone, Mulrany, Lecanvey, Lacken and Roonagh thus giving employment to over 100 Mayomen. The major drawback about this was that the aid was confined to the coastal areas with no consideration for the poverty which was as acute in the inland areas. What is important is that it displays a spirit of co-operation amongst the two major relief organisations and an awareness outside Ireland of the distress in the country.

Although the Duchess of Marlborough Relief Committee was more confined in its operation than the other private charities, it did provide support on a large scale for those severely distressed areas, such as Westport, Newport and north Donegal. Its activities were hindered by insufficient funds which resulted in a further contraction in its pursuits. Between April and October 1880, the relief organisations received only £23,000 in subscriptions<sup>41</sup> at a time when there was a steady increase in the numbers seeking aid. When it was rumoured in Westport that the relief to the area was to be slimmed down, it resulted in panic amongst the relief recipients.

Altogether the Duchess of Marlborough Relief Committee spent £135,245 on the relief of distress, and although it was not as extensive in its undertakings as the Mansion House Committee, its aid in many ways was more practical. It was aware that vast sums were being expended on Indian meal and little on providing the people with hope for the future. As a result it decided to devote part of its resources to helping those tenants who had consumed their seed potatoes. While £119,000 was spent altogether in the purchase and distribution of food, £30,000 of this was utilised in providing the tenants with seed potatoes and oats. Without this help there is little doubt but that the famine would have extended itself into 1881, as the people would not have had the seeds to plant.

The relief committees mainly distributed Indian meal, just as their counterparts had done during the great famine. Very often those people in distress were prepared to travel long distances in the hope of obtaining food, but very often they had to return home empty-handed. As the spring went into the summer the number in need of relief continued to increase considerably, so that two out of every five people along the western seaboard were being given relief. At this stage, funds were nearly exhausted and the committees had to cut down their expenditure, resulting in an alarm about

what would happen in the autumn, especially if the distress continued. It was repeatedly attempted, but unsuccessfully, to impress upon the government the gravity of the situation if this occurred. Fortunately for all concerned, the potato crop was good and thus the relief organisations were no longer required.

#### IV

It is clear that the acute level of the distress of 1879-81 was to rank among the worst experiences in Ireland during the course of the nineteenth century. There is little doubt but that county Mayo ravaged as it was by the disaster, was severely hit by its effects. In comparison with the other periods of distress, in the 1840s and 1860s, the level of its severity becomes very clear. Its intensity was greater than that of the great famine, because all of the principal crops were reduced in quantity and other economic factors seriously complicated the question. In contrast the great famine was entirely the consequence of the failure of the subsistence crop, the potato. Fortunately the calamity of the earlier period was somewhat minimised in 1879 by the major decline in population. Even the distress of the early 1860s was not as devastating as that of the following decade, as no one year was characterised by the destitution that was to be found in 1879.

It was the heroic exploits of the private relief organisations which had helped minimise the dastardly effects of the 1879 distress. There is little doubt that without their intervention the spectre of 1847 would have once more made an appearance. These organisations were not in existence to ward off the destitution of the 1840s and 1860s, and it was their exertions which saved lives in 1880. In this their task was helped by the local and national newspaper network which had sprung up in the 1860s and 1870s, which informed the public, both inside and outside Ireland, of the magnitude and seriousness of the distress. This resulted in subscriptions being sent to Ireland from all over the world, especially from those Irish who had emigrated and were only too well aware of the evils of famine. They were fortunate in that they could tap a literate public, who were only too willing to help.

The distress of 1879 had the effect, unlike the other cases, of precipitating a political agitation for agrarian reform. Such was not the case in the 1840s, for the political era was on the wane because of O'Connell's demise, or in the 1860s because political activity was on the decline after the fiasco of the independent opposition movement in parliament. However in the 1870s there were politicians prepared to utilise the agrarian situation to agitate for reforms.

Mayo had been very severely affected. There were many who realised that the whole social and economic infrastructure needed overhauling, as it was responsible for perpetuating the continuous poverty of the people. However there was no radical remedy which could transform their position. While the age old cry of land reclamation was once more aired, it was generally believed that this would bring no practical benefits. The more enlightened thinkers, like James H. Tuke, realised that a more radical

settlement was required, one which was not however accepted by the political leaders in the country. These were the assisted emigration schemes of 1883 and 1884, which were condemned by Parnell and Davitt. Nevertheless this was the only realistic alternative to the perpetual destitution on those uneconomic holdings.

The shortcomings of the workhouse system had been exposed once again, attention being focused on its inability to cope with the rigours of a large scale famine. This was especially the case in the poorer unions, where large numbers of paupers pushed the unions almost to the brink of bankruptcy. The old principle that proximity to a workhouse was the all-important factor in combating distress was negated once and for all. Officials now realised that the overriding aspect had to be financial stability and a small number of rate payers could not be expected to support a large number of dependents on the Poor Law. The union which stood out most in this respect was Newport and eventually it had to amalgamate with its relatively better off neighbour, Westport, in 1885.

Many Mayo tenant farmers availed of the provisions of the 1881 Land Act to have their rents judicially fixed. However the results which they anticipated, i.e. a cushion against the potato failure, failed to materialise. Although the rent reductions averaged 20 per cent, they were still expected to pay their rent during times of distress such as 1883, 1885 and 1898. This demonstrated the irony which had developed during the Land League days, when people believed peasant proprietorship was the panacea to all their problems. Landlord policies and spiralling rents were but minimal causal factors in bringing about the desperate situation which prevailed in Ireland during the 1870s. The real problem was a blistering symptom of a collapsing social and economic structure, a festering problem which eventually had to rupture.

#### Notes

1. *Correspondence relating to the relief of distress in Ireland, 1879-80, 1879-80*, H.C. 1880, (c 2483), lxii, p.3; *Nation*, 15 Nov. 1879.
2. *Annual report of the local government board for Ireland, being the ninth report under the local government board, (Ireland) act*, H.C. 1880, (c 2603), xxiii, pp.45-6.
3. *Connaught Telegraph*, 21 Feb. 1880.
4. *Ibid.* 23 Oct. 1880.
5. *The agricultural statistics of Ireland for the year 1880*, H.C. 1881, (C 2931), xciii, pp 78-84.
6. Tuke, *Visit to Donegal and Connaught in spring of 1880*, p.53.
7. *Connaught Telegraph*, 1 May, 1880.

8. *The agricultural statistics of Ireland for the year 1880*, H.C. 1881, (c 1932), vxii, p.71; *The agricultural statistics . . . for the year 1882*, H.C. 1883, (c 4067), lxx, p.66; *The agricultural statistics . . . for the year 1886*, H.C. 1887, (c 5477), lxxxix, p.66.
9. *Report of her Majesty's commissioners of inquiry into the working of the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland) Act, 1870, and the acts amending same, (Bessborough Commission), vol. ii, digest of evidence, pt. 1*, H.C. 1881, (c 2779 I), xvii, p.426, q16183.
10. Tuke, *Visit to Donegal and Connaught in spring of 1880*, pp 18, 58, 62.
11. For an account of the effects of landlord absenteeism, see Moran, G.P. 'Absentee landlords in Mayo in the 1870s' in *Cathair na Mart*, vol. 2, (1983) pp 30-34.
12. *Correspondence relating to the relief of distress in Ireland, 1879-80*, p.8; *State paper office; Chief Secretary Office, Registered Papers, 1891/17944/17*.
13. *British Cabinet papers to Her Majesty*, B63/11/14/9, 1 Jan. 1880.
14. *Return showing the amount allowed for relief work in Ireland, and the amount authorized to be expended and the amount expended up to the date*, H.C. 1881 (c 274) lxxvii, pp 39-40.
16. *Connaught Telegraph*, 21 Feb. 1880.
17. *Ibid.*, 24 Apr. 1880.
18. Fox, *Report on the condition of peasantry of Mayo in 1880*, p. 17.
19. *Freeman's Journal*, 24 May, 1880.
20. S.P.O., C.S.O., R.P., 1891/17944/47.
21. *Ballinrobe Chronicle*, 17 Jun. 1880.
22. *Connaught Telegraph*, 17 Jan. 1880.
23. O'Shea, J., *Priests, politics and society in post-famine Ireland: A study of county Tipperary, 1850-1891*, (Dublin and New Jersey, 198), p.121.
24. *Freeman's Journal*, 2 Jan. 1880. The same situation existed in the area round Newport. See Tuke, *A visit to Donegal and Connaught in the spring of 1880*, p.5.
25. *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Feb. 1880.
26. *Ibid.*, 31 Dec. 1879.
27. Palmer, N.D., *The Irish Land league Crisis*, (New Haven and London 1940), pp 98-9.
28. *Freeman's Journal*, 29 May, 1880. It was also known that the Land League would not provide aid to those areas where the other relief committees were providing relief. See Bew, *Land and national question*, p.95.
29. Tuke, *Visit to Donegal and Connaught in the spring of 1880*, p.78.
30. *Connaught Telegraph*, 1 May 1880. Some of the local Land League branches, like Balla, were accused of refusing to aid the people, Clarke, *Social origins of Irish land war*, p.318.
32. *Freeman's Journal*, 23 Jul. 1880; Fox, *Report on condition of peasantry in Mayo in 1880*, p.10.
33. *Mansion House Committee; Proceedings of the committee for the relief of distress in Ireland*, pp v-vii.
34. *Freeman's Journal*, 12 Feb. 1880.
35. *Ibid.* 26 Feb. (1880); *Connaught Telegraph*, 28 Feb. 1880.
36. *Mansion House Committee; Proceedings of the committee for the relief of distress in Ireland*, pp vii-x.
37. Fox, *Report on the condition of Mayo peasantry in 1880*, pp 43-4.

38. Tuke, *Visit to Donegal and Connaught in the spring of 1880*, p.65
39. *Report on the relief of distress on the west coast of Ireland, 1879-80*, H.C. 1881 (c 2671), lxii, pp 2-4.
40. *Report of the joint committee, selected from the committees of the Duchess of Marlborough Relief Fund and the Dublin Mansion House for relief of distress in Ireland, to administer the sum of 100,000 dollars, voted by the parliament of the dominion of Canada, towards the relief of distress in Ireland*, H.C. 1881, (326) lxxv, pp 3-25.
41. Palmer, *Irish Land League Crisis*, pp 93-7.

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## THE PARISH OF OUGHAVAL (WESTPORT)

### A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH

by Peadar Ó Flanagan and George O'Connell

#### Introduction

The present article is based on research carried out in 1983 as part of a social survey of the parish, at the request of Rev. A. King, administrator. It has subsequently been expanded and brought up to date by the authors. It deals in brief with the history of the present Catholic parish from the Patrician period to the present day.

#### Oughaval

Oughaval or Aughaval comes from the Irish *An Nuachabháil*, 'the new foundation'. The English name first appears in the Ecclesiastical Taxation of the Dioceses of Tuam, Killala and Achonry (1302) as *Uchongal*, and in the Visitations of the Dioceses of Clonfert, Tuam and Kilmacduagh as *Ucauyll* (1565). In the *Books of Survey and Distribution*, it appears as *Aghavale* (1636) and in Griffith's *Valuation* as *Oughaval* (1855).

#### Patrician Roots

Situated along the southern shore of Clew Bay and including Ireland's Holy Mountain, Croagh Patrick, and the mid-eighteenth century town of Westport, the parish of Oughaval traces its origins to the fifth century visitation by St. Patrick, who traditionally founded a church at Oughaval near the seat of the ruling family of the district at Belclare.

The Patrician foundation, of which nothing now remains, though not as important as Aughagower, was claimed by the see of Armagh as successors to St. Patrick, together with Teampall Patrick on Croagh Patrick and Glospatrick at Murrisk, until the 13th century, when the Papacy upheld the claim of Tuam as having maintained these early Patrician churches.

In the seventh century an abbey of Columban monks was also established at Oughaval under the patronage of St. Columcille, whose holy well is at that place. Some remains of this abbey can be seen in the parish burial ground at Oughaval today. This may account for the name *An Nuachabháil*, 'the new foundation'. According to O'Donovan 'there was a flag, or Leac Columcille, at this church, which the people were in the habit of turning against each other for bad luck. It was broken by order of the parish priest'.

#### The Medieval Period

The old Irish Annals make two direct references to the parish in the first half of the twelfth century. It is recorded that a thunderstorm resulted in the death of thirty pilgrims to Croagh Patrick on St. Patrick's Eve in 1113 A.D. Ó Máille was murdered in the stone church of Oughaval in 1131 A.D. by the son of Donal O'Dowda, but the murderer was himself killed by his own spear within three months 'through the miracle of Columcille'.



*Old Church at Oughaval cemetery.*

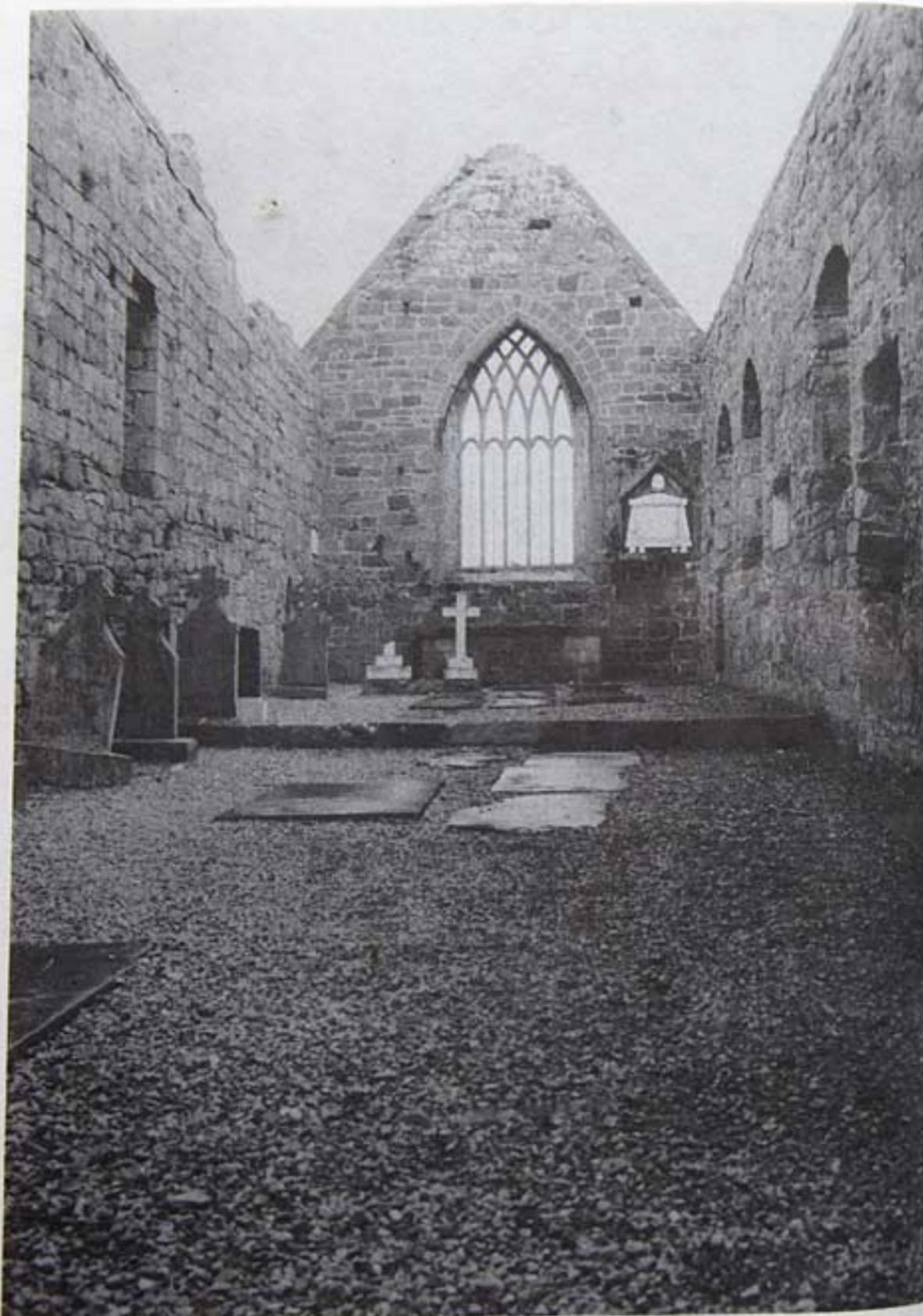
The reform of the Celtic monastic Church in the first half of the twelfth century resulted in the decay of Celtic monasticism, which was replaced by the diocesan system familiar to us today.

There is no record of the founding of any new monastic sites in the parish until Murrisk Friary in the fifteenth century, and it can be assumed that the Columban foundation at Oughaval was converted to secular use as a parish church under a rector and vicar, under the patronage of the O'Malleys, who were chieftains of the district and whose chief residence was at Belclare.

#### Murrisk Friary

It was a chief of the O'Malleys, Thady O'Malley, who donated land in 1457 for a friary and church for the Augustinian friars at Murrisk, under Hugh O'Malley of Banada, Co. Sligo. The papal letter of Pope Callistus III, suggests that at this time the secular clergy were not performing their duty of instruction of the faithful, as in many cases the church lands were in the hands of lay-people and the churches in decay.

The sixteenth century saw the reformation and dissolution of the monasteries, but in the case of Oughaval this was a slow process. In 1574 a report to the Lord Deputy mentions Owlemale (Oughval) and Moyrishe (Murrisk) stating that they were 'possessed either by friars or rebels, so as Her Majesty hath no commodity in the same'. In 1577 the lands of Murrisk



*Murrisk Friary or 'Abbey'.*

Friary were leased to James Garvey for 21 years, and in 1591 Owllyvally and Knockvale were held by Christopher Garvey. The name of the vicar of the parish in that year was Richard Ballach.

#### **The Seventeenth Century**

The siege of Kinsale 1601 ended what was left of the old Irish order and the Queen's writ extended to such remote parts as Oughaval. The Garveys were confirmed in their possession of Murrisk and the church lands of Oughaval and Glospatrick devolved on the Protestant archbishop of Tuam. Except for a brief while at the time of the Confederation of Kilkenny, the Catholic religion was not allowed in public, and church and abbey buildings fell into decay. The friars, however, remained in the locality ministering to the people under the patronage of the local Catholic gentry. A chalice was donated to Murrisk by Theobald, First Viscount Mayo, the son of Gráinne Uaile in 1635, another by Friar John De Burgo in 1648, and a third by Peter Browne of Westport in 1724.

Theobald or Tiobóid na Long was buried at Ballintubber Abbey. Friar John De Burgo died of the plague at Murrisk, and a curious memorial to Peter Browne exists at the ring fort of Carrownalurgan, which states 'Orate pro anima Petri Browne qui me fieri fecit 1723'. (Pray for the soul of Peter Browne who caused me to be made 1723). Carrownalurgan was traditionally regarded as the place of worship in the penal days and Peter Browne was the local patron. He was the son and successor of Colonel John Browne of Westport, an officer and lawyer in King James's army which was defeated at Limerick in 1691.

#### **The Penal Laws**

The aftermath of Limerick was a century of penal laws against the Catholic religion, the public practice of which was outlawed. The bishops had to flee and were replaced by vicar generals. The priests lived among the people to whom they grew closer than they had ever been before. Bounty or 'Priest Hunters' were common, none more infamous than Seán Na Sagart who reports in 1715:

that Patrick Duffy (a registered Popish Priest and reputed Vicar General) is now living in Westport in the County of Mayo, and that he saw Patrick Duffy on the 13th March in Westport (old Cathair-na-Mart) in the street, and saw great numbers of people gathering about the house of Thomas Joyce, and Patrick Duffy came out of the house about an hour after the multitude of people that had been there dispersed, which gave him reason to suppose they had attended Mass there on that day.

In April 1715 it was reported to the Lords Justices of Ireland by the Mayo Grand Jury that Teige Reilly of Oughavale Parish was dead and that Peter Gibbolane officiates in his stead.

The penal laws remained on the statute books for most of the eighteenth century, but various ways were found to circumvent them, particularly in the matter of property ownership. Those who did not wish to lose their lands

'conformed' to the Established Church, as did John Browne in 1729, having been brought up by Protestant guardians and educated in Oxford after his father's death in 1724.

#### The Brownes of Westport

John Browne built the present Westport House in 1732 and the Church of Ireland (Westport Demesne) in 1736. In the latter half of the eighteenth century he demolished old Cathair-na-Mart (Westport) and built the present town of Westport, work that was continued by his son Peter and grandson John. The Brownes were mindful of their Catholic antecedents and promoted Catholic relief measures in the Irish Parliament. These Relief Acts removed the most undesirable statutes of the penal laws which resulted in the growth of a Catholic middle-class in the town. Westport in the 1780s had three Catholic families of importance – the Gibbonses, the MacDonnells and the Higginses.

The parish priest of this period was Dr. Charles Lynagh (described as Parish Priest of the Union of Oughaval and Aghagower), and in 1787 he was given a lease by Lord Altamont for a Catholic chapel and parochial house at Riverside. It is evident that some temporary structure was erected here on or before this time, as the Chapel was not commenced until a quarter century later, probably due to lack of funds.

#### The Rebellion of 1798

During the 1798 rebellion the West remained quiet until the landing of the French at Killala. Westport was taken over by the insurgents and Westport House and Mount Browne occupied for a short period.

The Gibbons family was highly involved in the rebellion and left the country except for John Gibbons Jr., who with Friar Myles Prendergast of Murrisk friary held out in Connemara. Gibbons was captured and hanged in Westport and Fr. Prendergast died a natural death in 1834.

#### The Union

The direct result of 1798 was the Act of Union in 1801, a measure which had the support of many of the Irish bishops who saw it as the only way of gaining Catholic Emancipation. It was also actively supported locally by Lord Altamont who became the Marquess of Sligo when the measure was passed.

In a report of Dr. Dillon, archbishop of Tuam, to the English administration in that year, we find the parish of Westport (Oughaval) listed first after Tuam in importance, having a parish priest and two curates, with an income of £140. It is likely that the clergy of the parish at this period were regulars of the Augustinian Order. There was also an Augustinian at Murrisk friary. One of these priests was the Rev. William Cusack who died in 1812, aged 52 years, and to whom a later inscription is to be found near the altar in Murrisk friary – 'Revdus Gulielmus Cusack de Aoghavale Rector Obiit A.D. 1812 Aetatis 52'.



*Memorial to Fr. Cusack in Murrisk Abbey.*

The previous parish priest, Dr. Charles Lynagh became bishop of Achonry in 1808, and the next parish priest was to become archbishop of Tuam, Dr. Oliver Kelly.

#### Dr. Oliver Kelly

On the death of Dr. Dillon in 1809, Dr. Oliver Kelly the first President of St. Jarlath's College, who was then parish priest of Kilmeena, was elected Vicar Capitular of the diocese. Due to the captivity of the Pope by Napoleon, his appointment as archbishop was not confirmed until 1814.

In the meantime, he was transferred to the parish of Westport and commenced the vast task of providing the parish with a suitable church. The foundation stone was laid in 1813 on the site acquired by Dr. Lynagh in 1787, and this was one of the first post-penal churches to be built in the archdiocese. (In 1825 there were only 15-18 slated churches in the archdiocese). In this task Dr. Kelly received support from all sections of the community, Protestant and Catholic alike. The building of cut stone was in the gothic revival style, and fronted onto the Malls which were under construction at this time by Lord Sligo. The cost of the church was estimated at £6,000.



Stone in front porch of St. Mary's.

An interesting tablet was erected over the front porch of the church with the biblical inscription from Genesis, Ch. XXVIII:

This is an awful place. The House of God Erected by subscription and the strenuous exertions of the Most Revd. Oliver Kelly aided by the Parishioners A.D. 1813.

The 'offending' words were subsequently hacked off by another generation and the tablet has recently been re-erected in the front porch of the present parish church.

#### Fr. Bernard Burke

On his appointment to the see of Tuam, Dr. Kelly retained his position as P.P. of Westport which then had an income of £300 per annum. As he says himself before a select committee of the Lords and Commons (1825) 'I did apprehend that perhaps if I did send another priest to the place he would not be very kindly received by certain individuals there, and I thought that an unpleasant difference would be avoided by taking the parish in charge myself'. He refers to the poverty of the people at that time and requested the priests not to be too exacting in collecting the usual dues. In fact, he himself received less than  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the revenue of the parish.

In the year 1821, he appointed Fr. Bernard Burke to administer the parish on his behalf. Dr. Burke, a colleague and lifelong friend of Dr. Kelly, entered into the task with zeal. He completed the church and its interior and built outlying churches at Drummin and Lecanvey. In 1824 he built the Parochial Schoolhouse at Castlebar St., (Now Hughes's Wholesale Warehouse). The schoolhouse had a chequered history. In the 1830s it was a National School, and was subsequently taken over by the Sisters of Mercy in the 1840s, to be followed by the Franciscan Brothers in the 1850s, and later by the Christian Brothers in 1865. The Christian Brothers remained there for over a century.

#### Catholic Emancipation

As a result of the efforts of Daniel O'Connell, Catholic Emancipation was granted to Ireland in 1829. The occasion was marked in the parish by the lighting of bonfires on the hills and the erection of Emancipation Crosses. One such cross remains at Thornhill, Lecanvey, on the shores of Clew Bay erected on the lands of the MacDonnell family.

#### Population

The Commission for Public Instruction gives the following information about the parish of Oughaval in 1831:

- 633 Members of the Established Church.
- 13,913 Roman Catholics.
- 17 Presbyterians.
- 78 Other Protestant Dissenters.

In the Roman Catholic Chapel in Westport 3,000-4,000 attended Mass. There were 2 Masses on Sundays, one every weekday, one Mass on Sundays and Holydays in Lecanvey and Drummin.

#### Dean Burke Parish Priest

Fr. Bernard Burke was elected Dean of the Chapter of Tuam, a position which he held until his death. Shortly before his death on a visit to Italy, the archbishop took the unusual step of appointing Dean Burke as parish priest of Westport. The brief of appointment from Pope Gregory XVI was found amongst Dr. Kelly's effects after his death.

Dean Burke was first on the list for appointment to the vacant see of Tuam. but the bishops of the province decided on the appointment of Dr. John McHale, Bishop of Killala.

On his first visitation of the parish in 1835, he was welcomed by Dean Burke, whom he had recently transferred to Kilmeena, only to be presented with the papal brief of his appointment as P.P. of Westport by the Dean. This led to appeals to Rome by the archbishop without any success. Dean Burke was the last parish priest of Westport who was not an archbishop.

#### Sisters of Mercy

In 1841, the Dean applied to Mother McAuley, foundress of the Sisters of Mercy, to found a house in Westport, and in the following year three sisters were sent from Carlow under Sr. Mary Paul Cullen (a sister of Cardinal Cullen). The sisters resided at first in the Dean's house (Gallagher's, The Mall), while the convent was under construction on a site at Altamont Street given by Lord Sligo. Dean Burke contributed £200 himself and set about the task of fund-raising the balance (£3,000) throughout Ireland and England. The convent was first occupied in 1843, the schools constructed in 1845.

#### Famine Years

The community of sisters received new members and undertook the care of the parochial school, and in the first year of the famine provided meals daily for 500 children by means of a grant from the British Association, following a visit to Westport by their agent Count Strzelecki. They ministered

to all who were struck down with the fever and also worked in the newly opened workhouse at Cahernamart.

The parochial clergy during the famine years worked hand in hand with the clergy of the Established Church, and both Dean Burke and Rev. Patrick Pouden, Rector, were members of the Westport Relief Committee. A priest, a nun and the rector were all to die from the famine fever in these years.

#### Post Famine

The post-famine years were dominated by political questions. Archbishop John McHale and the Dean took different sides in the important election in 1857. The archbishop's man was George Henry Moore of Moore Hall, a Catholic landlord, who was elected but was unseated by petition by the dean's man, Colonel Ouseley Higgins of Westport, a life long friend of Dean Burke's.

Dean Burke died on 20 July 1861 on a visit to Rhyll in Wales. His remains were brought back to Westport by his nephew, Fr. James Davis, at the expense of Charles McDonnell a local merchant. He was interred under the high altar of the church. The remains were disinterred during the reconstruction of the church in 1959, and are now buried near the original high altar near the entrance to the present church. There is also a memorial to the Dean, who ministered for 40 years in Westport, in the sacristy of the present church, erected by his friend Colonel Ouseley Higgins.

#### Archbishop John McHale

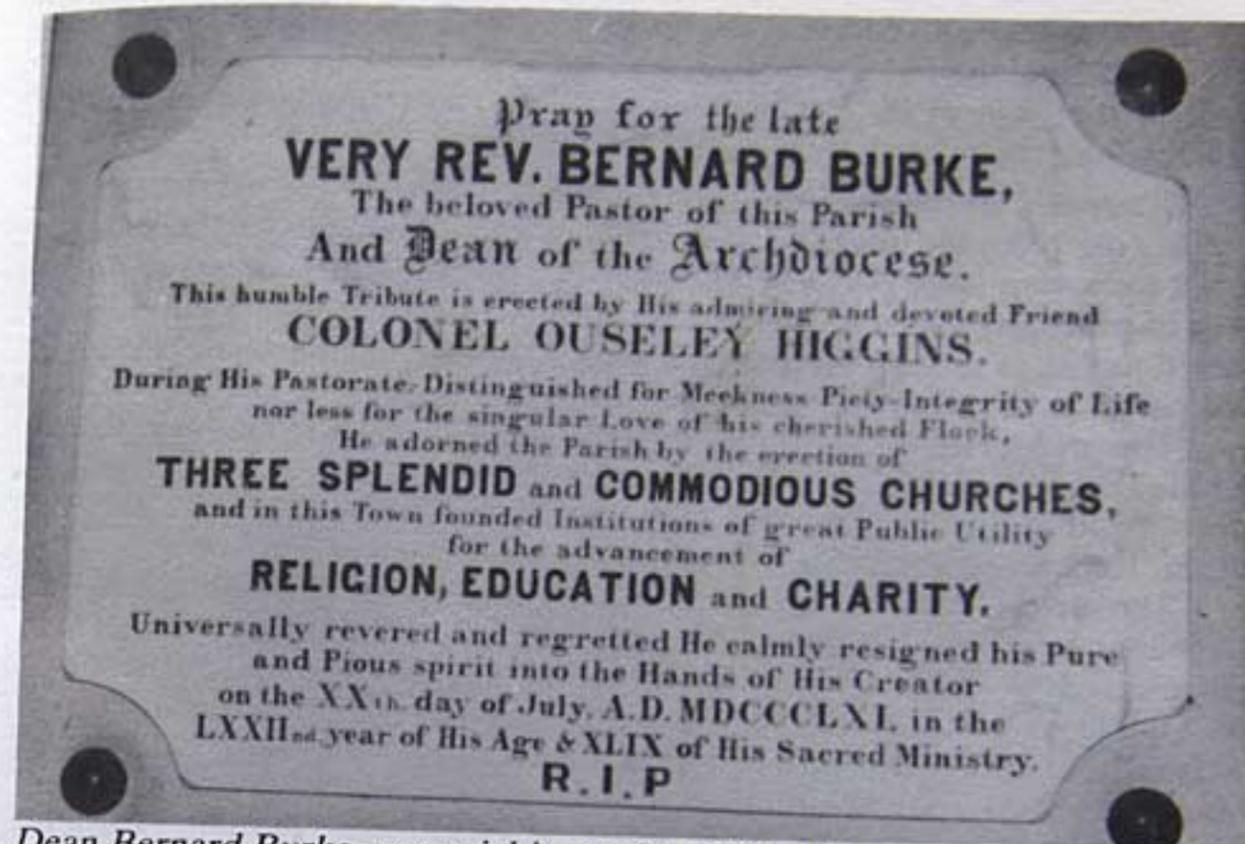
On the death of Dean Burke in 1861, Westport reverted to a mensal parish with John McHale as parish priest, a situation which has remained to the present time.

Dr. McHale introduced the Franciscan Brothers to run the school at Castlebar St., but they did not remain for long in the parish and the school again became a national school in 1851. Dean Burke left a bequest of £300 in his will towards establishing the Christian Brothers in the parish, and also provided a fund to be used towards providing prizes for the students.

#### The Christian Brothers

Father Cavanagh came as curate to Westport in 1847 and founded a Magdalen Home at Altamont St., to be run by the Sisters of Mercy. He invited the Christian Brothers to Westport, and they were offered the old schoolhouse on Castlebar St., the Dean's residence on the Mall as a monastery, and an annual stipend of £60 in addition to the proceeds of an annual collection in the parish. The Brothers arrived in April 1865 with Brother Joseph White as superior, and the school opened on 8 May with 200 pupils. One of the brothers was to die shortly of the fever.

Father Cavanagh was transferred as parish priest to Knock in 1867 and was elected Archdeacon of the Chapter of Tuam. It was during this period that the Apparitions took place at Knock.



*Dean Bernard Burke memorial in sacristy of St. Mary's.*

#### Land League

Archbishop McHale during a visit to the parish in 1879 heard of a meeting which was to take place on Sunday 6 June, in connection with the land agitation and which would be attended by Michael Davitt and Charles Stuart Parnell, M.P. Dr. McHale immediately wrote a public letter in the national papers condemning the meeting and on that Sunday preached at all Masses in St. Mary's Church.

The meeting, however, took place and many thousands attended, and the speeches were reported in all the papers. This meeting was to lead to the formation of the Land League later in the same year, and following three years of agitation the first Land Act was passed in 1881, the same year which was to see the death of Dr. John McHale.

#### Dr. McEvelly, Archbishop of Tuam 1881-1901

Dr. McEvelly, his coadjutor, succeeded him. He was a native of Louisburgh and lived until 1901. He was succeeded by Dr. Healy, bishop of Clonfert.

#### Dr. Healy, Archbishop of Tuam

Dr. Healy was very interested in history and antiquities and took a particular interest in the Patrician period. He was determined to revive the ancient pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick, and he built the oratory on the summit of the mountain in 1906 and instituted the modern National Pilgrimage as we know it.

He also gave an address at the opening of the Town Hall which had been purchased by Canon McDonnell, Adm., for £500, and a community hall was built at the back of it. The building was once the town house of Charles McDonnell.

#### **Dr. Gilmartin, Archbishop of Tuam 1918-1939**

By the 1920s the original gothic building with its galleries had become too small for such a large parish, and Father Patterson, Adm., embarked on the task of providing a new St. Mary's. He travelled to the United States to raise funds, and as in the past, the merchants of the town and the small farmers of the parish gave generously.

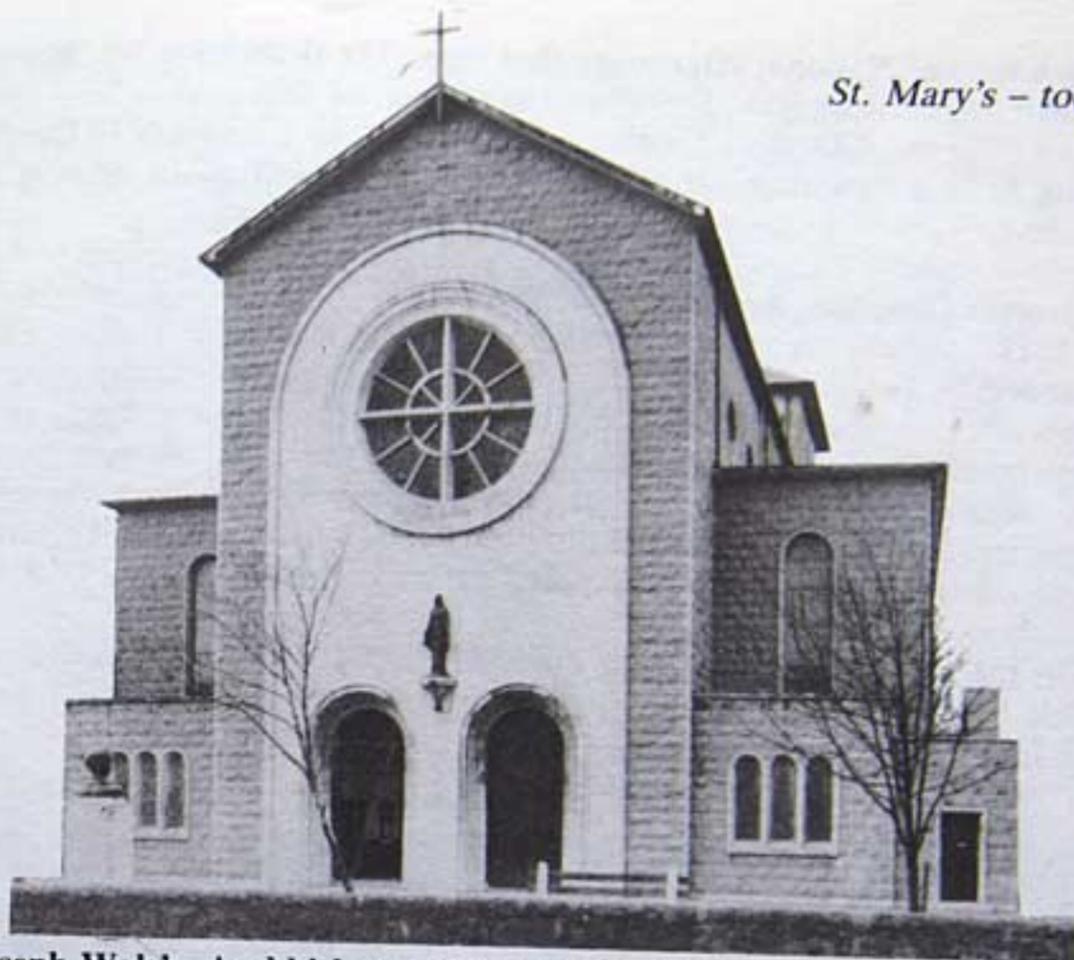
The project was a major one, costing over £30,000 and took four years to build. Land was acquired at the Shambles and the new church incorporated the old gothic facade on the Mall. The dedication took place in 1932, the year of the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin.

The dedication of the new St. Mary's church was performed by His Excellency the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Pascal Robinson, together with His Grace Most Rev. Dr. Gilmartin, Archbishop of Tuam and Parish Priest of Oughaval, and His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Morrisroe, Bishop of Achonry, who preached the sermon on that historic occasion. The new St. Mary's was the largest church in the province, and had a peal of eight bells, to which a ninth was added from the old St. Mary's in 1961. A commemorative booklet was issued in 1933. Fr. Michael J. Daly succeeded as administrator in the same year.



*South Mall and St. Mary's Church (Wynne Photograph - circa 1874).*

*St. Mary's - today.*



#### **Dr. Joseph Walsh, Archbishop of Tuam 1939-1969**

Dr. Walsh, a native of Newport, succeeded to the see of St. Jarlath in 1939, and received a very warm welcome in the parish.

In July 1940 Dr. Walsh and Dr. Michael Browne, Bishop of Galway and a native son of the parish, led the National Pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick. The two distinguished prelates gave a major boost to the pilgrimage in the first year of the Second World War.

In 1943 Fr. Daly was succeeded as administrator by James Canon Fergus, a native of Louisburgh, who was transferred to Ballinrobe as P.P., and subsequently appointed to the see of Achonry. He was followed by Fr. John Burke who ministered for eleven years as administrator.

In 1955 Fr. Burke was succeeded by Fr. Thomas Cummins, who undertook the onerous task of completing the new St. Mary's. The old gothic structure had fallen into disrepair, and it was decided to finish the task undertaken thirty years earlier by Canon Patterson. The work started in 1957 with the demolition of the old church, during which the remains of Dean Burke were discovered under the High Altar and re-interred in the new construction. By 1961, the Patrician year, the work was completed. During that year a number of major ceremonies took place, attended by Most Rev. Michael Browne, Bishop of Galway, Most Rev. James Fergus, Bishop of Achonry, His Grace the Archbishop of Tuam, Most Rev. Dr. Walsh and His Eminence Cardinal D'Alton (a native of Claremorris), who visited Croagh

Patrick for the National Pilgrimage that year. The dedication was performed by His Grace, Most Rev. Dr. Walsh in August of that year.

In 1965 the Christian Brothers celebrated their centenary in the parish, having built a new monastery, with primary and secondary schools in the demense.

**Dr. Joseph Cunnane, Archbishop of Tuam 1969**

1971 saw the departure of 'Canon Tom' from the parish. He was succeeded by Fr. Éamon O'Malley, who commenced the refurbishing of St. Mary's after Vatican II, with a new lay-out of the Sanctuary and High Altar under the dome of the church. He also proposed the refurbishing of the Town Hall, which had fallen into disrepair, as a community and sports complex for the parish. This work was carried out under the chairmanship of Fr. King and a local committee, and the new complex was opened in May 1973 by the archbishop.

In the same year His Grace made an important change in the Croagh Patrick National Pilgrimage, changing it from a night to an early morning climb in order to stamp out abuses.



*Fr. Michael Walshe, His Grace the Archbishop of Tuam, Most Rev. Dr. Walsh, Rev. P. J. Gullane, at St. Mary's, 1961.*



*Superintendent Moore; His Eminence Cardinal D'Alton; Mr. Barrett, Director Order of Malta Ambulance Corps; Dr. Desmond Moran, Medical Officer in charge, Westport Order of Malta Ambulance Corps; His Grace the Archbishop of Tuam, Most Rev. Dr. Walsh, at Croagh Patrick, Patrician Year 1961.*

In 1980 Fr. O'Malley was appointed as P.P. of Kilmeena and Fr. Anthony King succeeded as administrator. He carried out the conversion of the old stable-block at the rear of the presbytery, into a modern parish centre with lecture and meeting rooms. The Centre was opened by Dr. Cunnane in December 1983.

Westport Social Services Committee, which had operated for many years in the Town Hall, undertook the major project of providing a new centre for their operations and, with the co-operation of the Sisters of Mercy, a new Social Services Centre was opened and blessed by the archbishop on a site in the convent grounds in May 1986.

#### APPENDIX 1 PARISH PRIESTS OF OUGHAVAL

c. 1780-1803	Dr. Charles Lynagh (became bishop of Achonry).
1803-1812	Fr. Wm. Cusack (buried Murrisk Friary).
1812-1834	Dr. Oliver Kelly (became archbishop of Tuam).
1834-1861	Dean Bernard Burke (buried St. Mary's Church).
1861-1881	Dr. John Mchale, archbishop of Tuam.
1881-1901	Dr. John McEvilly, archbishop of Tuam.
1901-1918	Dr. Healy, archbishop of Tuam.
1918-1939	Dr. Gilmartin, archbishop of Tuam.
1939-1969	Dr. Joseph Walsh, archbishop of Tuam.
1969-	Dr. Joseph Cunnane, archbishop of Tuam.

#### APPENDIX 2 ADMINISTRATORS OF OUGHAVAL

1821-1834	Dean Bernard Burke.
1861-1875	Fr. James Ronayne.
1875-1884	Fr. Patrick Caulfield.
1884-1890	Fr. John J. Begley.
1890-1893	Dr. John P. Canning.
1893-1894	Fr. Peter McGirr.
1879-1900	Fr. Thomas Healy.
1900-1910	Fr. Michael McDonald (became P.P. Burrishoole).
1910-1920	Fr. Richard Canavan (became P.P. Carnacon).
1920-1933	Fr. Patrick Patterson.
1933-1943	Fr. Michael J. Daly.
1943-1944	James Canon Fergus (became bishop of Achonry).
1944-1955	Fr. John Burke (became P.P. Kilgeever).
1955-1971	Fr. Thomas Cummins (Canon 1968, P.P. Lackagh 1971).
1971-1980	Fr. Éamon O'Malley (became P.P. Kilmeena).
1980-	Fr. Anthony King.

#### APPENDIX 3 CURATES OF OUGHAVAL

1826	Fr. P. Tuffy, Fr. Walsh.
1831	Fr. T. Keaveney, Fr. T. McCaffrey.
1837	Fr. Wm. Feeney.
1845	Fr. P. Jennings, Fr. J. Waldron.
1846	Fr. T. Gibbons.
1847	Fr. Bartholomew Aloysious Cavanagh (became P.P. Knock 1867).
1861	Fr. Patrick Moore.
1865	Fr. Patrick Caulfield (became administrator 1875).
1866	Fr. Thomas Carr (became a bishop in Australia).
1867	Fr. Francis J. McCormack (became a bishop in Australia).
1869	Fr. James A. Ward.
1872	Fr. Patrick Lynskey.
1875	Fr. John J. Begley (became administrator 1884).
1883	Fr. John Loftus.
1884	Fr. P. Canning (became administrator 1890).
1888	Fr. Michael Diskin.
1889	Fr. Michael Higgins.
1900	Fr. Michael McDonald (became administrator 1900). Fr. John McCarthy
1904	Fr. Richard Canavan (became administrator 1910).
1905	Fr. James Burke
1908	Fr. Thomas A. Owens.
1910	Fr. Patrick Patterson (became administrator 1920).
1919	Fr. Laurence Lyons (Lecanvey) Fr. John A. Burke
1920	Fr. John Gibbons
1923	Fr. John Godfrey (Lecanvey)
1927	Fr. Michael F. Hanrahan
1933	Fr. Michael J. Daly (became administrator 1933). Fr. Timothy Gunnigan
1934	Fr. John Keaveney (Lecanvey).
1939	Fr. Patrick Ruane.
1940	Fr. Patrick O'Grady. Fr. James S. Diskin (Lecanvey)
1941	Fr. John Jennings.
1943	Fr. John Burke (became administrator 1944).
1944	Fr. Thomas Cummins (became administrator 1955).
1950	Fr. Jarlath Canney Fr. Thomas G. Cruise (Lecanvey).
1954	Fr. Patrick J. Gullane.
1955	Fr. Thomas C. Lynch
1958	Fr. Joseph Scott (Lecanvey)

- 1962 Fr. Dominic Grealy (became administrator Tuam, P.P. Knock).  
1964 Fr. Éamonn O'Malley (became administrator 1971).  
1968 Fr. Christopher Kilkelly.  
1969 Fr. Tadhg Ó Móráin (Lecanvey).  
1970 Fr. Anthony King (became administrator 1980).  
Fr. James Walsh (Lecanvey).  
1971 Fr. Peter J. Gilroy, S.M.A. (temporary).  
Fr. John Cosgrove,  
1974 Fr. John Loftus.  
1976 Fr. John V. McHale.  
1980 Fr. Tomás Treacy.  
1984 Fr. Francis McMyler.  
Fr. Patrick Costello (Lecanvey).  
1986 Fr. Noel Forde.

PEADAR O FLANAGÁIN: B.A., B.Comm. Officer in charge, Westport Order of Malta Ambulance Corps. Local historian and lecturer. Founder member and Vice-Chairperson of Westport Historical Society.

GEORGE O'CONNELL: Well-known and popular Westport electrician. Member of Westport Horse Show Society. Founder member and First President of Westport Historical Society. He has lectured extensively on local history.