

CUMANN SEANDÁLAÍOCHTA
IS STAIRE CHIARRAÍ

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KERRY ARCHAEOLOGICAL
AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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The O'Connells and South Kerry

By Muiris Bric

In this, the 250th anniversary the birth of Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847), it is worth remembering that his life and times were dominated not just by his career as a national and international figure. He was also a local landlord, a local public figure and a member of a family which had deep roots in Iveragh and in particular, in Derrynane and in Cahersiveen and its environs. Just over 200 years ago what he often referred to as 'his' town (Cahersiveen) was 'stretching', as one contemporary writer put it. As recorded in the official census in 1821, there were 36 houses and 205 people. Ten years later, the corresponding figures were 189 houses and nearly 1,200 people while ten years later again, the relevant figures in 1841 were 215 houses and about 1,500 people. The trend was clear.¹ However, if one looked backwards rather than forwards, the place was not static. Indeed, for over the three hundred years between 1300 and 1650, it was among the most dynamic in southern Kerry and Cork. And there, presiding over it all, was Ballycarbery Castle, the symbol of that dynamism, the symbol of power and authority and the symbol of a place which was everything but part of a 'hidden' or 'underground' Ireland.

Ballycarbery was built after the MacCarthys - and a coalition of Gaelic chieftains - had halted the push of the Normans across Munster at the Battle of Callan (1261), near the present-day town of Kilgarvan. Taking a leaf from Norman culture, the McCarthys consolidated that victory by building a string of castles, including Ballycarbery, in which they then ensconced one of their principal political clients, the O'Connells. As the custodians or 'wardens' of Ballycarbery, the O'Connells were then charged to exercise authority in the name of MacCarthy Mór and to collect customs duties from the shipping in and out of Valentia Harbour and its environs. Over time, the O'Connells also developed and oversaw a strong import/export trade - particularly with Spain - which became so robust that in the words of a historian of the seventeenth century, Friar O'Sullivan of Muckross Abbey (Killarney), Ballycarbery became:

so familiar with trading with Spain that they thought nothing of making voyages there, and of the Kerry women borrowing one another's cloaks for a run across to Spain to sell eggs and dilisk

... [also] there was nothing then in vogue with the inhabitants ... but Spanish wine, Spanish clothes, Spanish leather, and Spanish swords ... and other commodities - iron, liquorish, fruit, &c.²

As Ballycarbery became increasingly busy, it was inevitable that the O'Connells would become a power in their own right so much so indeed, that Domhnall MacCarthy Mór (1428-69) agreed to a marriage between his daughter, Mary, and Aodh (Hugh) O'Connell of Ballycarbery (b.1436). The family were also marrying into the leading Gaelic families of Munster, including the O'Sullivans, the O'Briens, the O'Connors and the O'Donovans of Carbery. Furthermore, when Elizabeth O'Donovan Carbery married Morgan O'Connell (+1550) and brought Ballycarbery as part of her dowry, the O'Connells came to own Ballycarbery by right and it was as such that during the turbulent years of the sixteenth century, they had to deal with the aggressive monarchy of Elizabeth I.³

Elizabeth was the most effective of the Tudor monarchs who aimed to reduce Ireland under their control by 'Surrender and Regrant', an initiative which had been developed by her father, Henry VIII. Under it, Gaelic chieftains could surrender the titles and lands which they held under Gaelic law and custom and have them 're-granted' by the Crown according to English law. The policy brought advantages to both sides. For the Tudors, it brought Gaelic chieftains to at least a 'nominal' loyalty - and at no cost. For the Gael, it helped to secure the succession because in English law, land was passed directly from one generation to the next within the **immediate** family of the ruler (primogeniture) whereas in Gaelic law, such matters were decided by the wider family. In any event, such 'Tudorised' Gaelic chieftains did not believe that by adopting English laws of succession, they would not be able to live their lives as they had always done, including practicing their Catholic faith.⁴

Such views became even stronger after the succession of James I (1603-25), son of Mary, the Catholic Queen of Scots (1542-87), whom many believed would undo the Protestant Reformation or at the very least, allow greater toleration of Catholicism. The fortunes of Geoffrey O'Connell (c.1569-1639), the penultimate master of Ballycarbery Castle, made the point. Although Geoffrey continued to practice as a Catholic, he was appointed as High Sheriff of Co. Kerry in 1614.*^a

*^a The High Sheriff was appointed on a year-to-year basis and was the Crown's highest ranking judicial authority in the county. It was always seen as a mark of royal favour. Two of Geoffrey's ancestors also held the post under Elizabeth.

While the appointment irritated many, his opponents bided their time and in 1648, their particular champion, the parliamentary regime of Oliver Cromwell (1642-58), dethroned and executed James' son, Charles I (1625-48). The suppression of Catholic and Royalist sentiment in Ireland soon followed, culminating in the siege and fall of Limerick (November 1651) and Galway (May 1652).

Charles Fleetwood, Cromwell's son-in-law and *de facto* governor of Ireland followed these victories for his army by obliterating the surviving pockets of Royalist resistance, including Ballycarbery which was blasted by cannon and reduced to a ruin in February 1652. Given the support which the O'Connells had given to the Royalist cause, the then head of the family and eldest son of Geoffrey of Ballycarbery, Maurice FitzGeoffrey, was given the familiar choice of 'Hell or Connaught' (including Clare) and transplanted to the 'sour and bitter land' of Brentree (near Inagh, Co. Clare), a place which was reputedly so raw and desolate that according to folklore, 'it would not feed a snipe'.⁵ And so, to make the obvious point, the bombardment of Ballycarbery brought the political and economic power of the O'Connells to an end, at least for the time being. However, branches of the family continued in several parts of South Kerry, including Tarmons (Waterville), Ballinabloun (the Glen) and Canburrin, where they never forgot their humiliation in being ousted from Ballycarbery. But they were determined to recover.

Cromwell's victories introduced yet another group of planters to Ireland, the most prominent of whom was Sir William Petty (1623-87), manager of the so-called 'Down Survey' of the Cromwellian confiscations in Ireland. Although most of his family's 96,000 acres were in and around Kenmare, they included over 25,000 acres in Iveragh (Dromod, Foilmore, Ballinskelligs and 'Over the Water', Cahersiveen), some of which had been attained from the transplanted Maurice FitzGeoffrey O'Connell. In any event, what became known in 1784 as the Lansdowne estate^{*b} was the largest estate in South Kerry. For their part, the Mahonys also had land 'Over the Water'. However, although Kean Mahony (b.1700) and his successors built and re-built their Castlequin House as one of the finest residences in South Kerry, the surrounding estate was small. So was that of Dr. James Barry (+1873) of Villa Nova. However, he was a late arrival in the locality as were the Blennerhassetts of Kells House, each of whom purchased their estates from Lord Lansdowne during the early-1820s and

^{*b}In 1784, the then head of the family was created Marquess of Lansdowne and it was by this name that the estate was known thereafter.

in 1805, respectively. In all probability, these lands had also been part of the forfeited estate of Maurice FitzGeoffrey O'Connell.

The other major 'Over the Water' landed family, the Blands, owned most of the land to the west of Castlequin. Although their main estate was in and around Sneem, they were absentees in Iveragh. However, after they fell into debt during the 1850s, their land in Iveragh was sold to among others, James O'Connell (1786-1872), of Lakeview, Killarney, Daniel's younger brother, who regarded the purchase - and in particular, that of Ballycarbery Castle - as the recovery of his ancestral home from which his family had been ejected in 1652. Although another influential South Kerry family - the FitzGerald, Knights of Kerry - had also been financially squeezed by the Great Famine, Maurice, the 18th Knight (1781-1849) and his successor, Peter, the 19th Knight (1849-1880), survived to leave their mark on South Kerry, not least by making the case for the establishment of Valentia as the hub of both a transatlantic cable network and a more modern system of international trade.⁶ All that said, however, the fortunes of the O'Connells were also recovering from the loss of Ballycarbery.

Following the enforced transplantation of Maurice FitzGeoffrey O'Connell to Co. Clare, his remaining family was scattered over various parts of South Kerry, including Tarmons (Waterville), Aghort (Ballinskelligs) and Ballinabloun (The Glen). For his part, a grand-nephew, John (1675-1740), later settled in Derrynane, took out a lease from the earls of Cork and set about rebuilding his family's fortunes. However, the so-called 'Battle of the Two Kings' between James II and William of Orange again drew the O'Connells into politics. On this occasion, John enlisted in support of James II and fought at the Battles of The Boyne (1690) and Aughrim (1691). However, he was later pardoned under the terms of the Treaty of Limerick and on condition that he would live a quiet and apolitical life, he was permitted to return to Derrynane where he died in 1741.

In the meantime, his son and heir, Domhnall Mór O'Connell (*d.* 1770), was developing such a successful estate in Derrynane that by the middle of the eighteenth century, his family was better off than ever. Although this was due in no small measure to a flourishing smuggling trade with continental Europe, it enabled the O'Connells to get a second wind. Moreover, as a result of the marriages of the twenty-two children which Domhnall Mór had with the renowned Gaelic poet, Mary O'Donoghue (Máire ní Dhuibh), Derrynane became the centre of a powerful network

which reached into many parts of Kerry and Cork. Their son and heir, Maurice 'Hunting Cap' (1728-1825), would become even more successful while in 1773 or so, his younger brother, Morgan (1739-1809), settled on another O'Connell property at Carhan, about a mile east of Cahersiveen, which with Canburrin, he had inherited from his father, Domhnall Mór, upon the latter's death in 1770. The timing could not have been better for both the O'Connells and Trinity College Dublin (TCD).⁷

In 1597, Trinity had been granted some 8,800 acres in South Kerry under the extended Munster Plantation. However, it had been difficult to collect anything from a place which was so hard to access. It was also difficult to source Protestant middlemen to whom it could be sub-let and as such, satisfy the Penal Laws which prevented Catholics from renting and accumulating land. However, this changed in 1778 when the Penal Laws which had forbidden Catholics to lease land were repealed. As a result, Trinity could now look to the O'Connells, a family which was (thanks to smuggling) cash-rich but asset poor (thanks to the Penal Laws) while for their part, the O'Connells could use their money to increase the size of their estate, all the more so because the Trinity Estate bordered that of Carhan.⁸

Morgan also had other ambitions: to create a second Derrynane - a second commercial hub - on the banks of the River Fertha, just as 'Hunting Cap' had done in Derrynane. Indeed, Morgan was remembered in Iveragh as a 'Jack-of-all Trades' who sold:

many a cargo of French laces, wines, and silks ... at an immense profit in the south and west of Ireland ... [enabling] him rapidly to accumulate a large fortune ... Be it a bit of soap, a yard of tape, the noggin of whiskey, a metal button, a pound of iron for the spade or the horse shoe, or any other little article ... [Morgan] could accommodate all - and at all times.

However, at least for the moment, Morgan had no plans for Cahersiveen. In part, this was partly because he remained in poor health until he died in 1809, having been incapacitated by a stroke a few years earlier. This partly explains why Morgan's son, Daniel ('the Liberator'), spent a lot of time in Carhan as the dutiful son although it should be noted that he also did so because his childless uncle 'Hunting Cap' - who had adopted him as his heir - did not approve of his marriage in 1802 to his cousin, Mary O'Connell of Tralee because she brought no dowry to the

marriage. As a result, at least as 'Hunting Cap' saw it, she would do little to enhance either the social standing of the family or the reputation of his nephew.⁹

While in Carhan, Daniel also began to think about how he might develop his father's business interests. As a result, he decided to build a new town. It is hard to say why O'Connell wanted to do this. He may have been influenced by the fact that the government planned to establish a new post-town in South Kerry and that opportunities would follow. Or it may have been that by 1810, fairs were being held with increasing frequency in the area and that there was talk of building a quay on the Fertha to serve a growing trade begging the question why not do so in Carhan. Finally, he may have wanted to be like the Knight of Kerry who was building his own new town of Knightstown in the hope that it would become - not only a regional commercial hub - but one which would develop as the centre of a transatlantic business. Neither man was short on ambition or the commitment to drive it.¹⁰

For his part, O'Connell had a problem. Given that the construction of a new town would cost a lot of money and that it would be years before such an investment would yield a return, the project was best developed on his own lands at Carhan rather than on his leaseholds from Trinity in Cahersiveen. After all, he surmised, if the O'Connells were making the investment and taking the risks, it was they who should get the dividend. And so it was that O'Connell turned to plan his new town at Carhan. Although no original plans for the proposed Carhan Town survive, it is clear that some of them were realised, including the construction of a primary school and a substantial mill on Carhan River, both of which lasted into the early-twentieth century. Aside from a few other buildings, new roads were also either built or planned, including the so-called 'New Road' - the present N70 - as well as the Reenrusheen Road - which O'Connell intended as the Main Street of his new town. A presbytery was also built (off the Rocky Road) which continued to house the parish's Catholic clergy until 1876.¹¹

The construction of the presbytery also serves to remind that O'Connell intended to build a splendid church which would be at the centre of his new town in Carhan. Although the precise location of the proposed church is unclear, there is some evidence to suggest that it was to be built near the site of the present-day Mart. In any event, the plans were abandoned - as were those for proposed town at large - about 1830. However, they did leave a mark as the following memoir - written in 1918 - suggests:

It is said that this project [for a new church] was formed by the Liberator, and even that he erected the building at his own expense. The walls were fully completed to the top; but at that stage, the work appears to have been stopped, and the chapel was never roofed. So far as the present writer remembers, it was a lofty and commodious building ... It was still standing in the early "sixties" of the last century [that is, in the 1860s] but no trace of it now remains. So far as we know, the only use to which the building was ever applied was as a "Stand House" during race-meetings ... [when] a temporary wooden staircase was constructed from the inside, leading to the top of the building where boarding was laid and accommodated with seats, from which there was an excellent view of the racing!¹²

For all that, however, Carhan continued to hold a special place in the lives of the people of South Kerry, not least on their horse-racing calendar. The annual pattern day (15 September) saw to that. Even after O'Connell and Mary relocated to Derrynane in 1825, they retained an interest in racing. Indeed, they drained and donated a new track in Lower Carhan which the *Tralee Mercury* described as follows in 1838:

The course is represented as forming a circle, verging on the high road leading from Killarney and Tralee [the N70], and in front of a fine eminence where the populace can enjoy a full view of the races. Cahirciveen is within a few minutes walk of the ground, the situation of which, we imagine, must be magnificently picturesque.¹³

The races have been held annually in Carhan ever since.

With respect to the proposed Carhan Town, it is sometimes said that plans were abandoned because many of those who were living in Cahersiveen at the time were not willing 'to change their abodes'. If this was the case, it is likely that they had generous terms as lessees or sub-lessees of the Trinity Estate which they would lose if they relocated to Carhan. In any event, the famine of the early-1820s did not encourage them to move. Neither did O'Connell's growing political career, especially after the Catholic Association was established in 1823 to campaign for Catholic Emancipation. And so, after O'Connell inherited Derrynane in 1825, he decided that instead of using Carhan House as a

second home or developing a new town around it, he would refurbish Derrynane. Mary agreed, especially as the place needed extensive and costly renovations. As a result, Mary and Daniel decided that they could afford only one house in Kerry and Carhan was not to be it. Neither was there to be a Carhan Town of which Mary had never been a fan. Indeed, she told O'Connell in 1819 that she hoped that he had 'no intention of building at Carhan'. I really think it would be throwing your money away, at least for some years'. Although he did not fully disengage from his pet project until 1830 or so, she got her way and Carhan fell into ruin.¹⁴ Indeed, when Lady Georgina Chatterton (1806-76) visited in 1838, she described Carhan as 'an old ruined house ... [with a] lonely and sad air'. Two years later, Robert Allen also noted that Carhan was 'Now alas! a ruin - used only for the occasional shelter of cattle'.¹⁵

In any event, O'Connell's agent, John Primrose III (1795-1865), had been managing most of his affairs in and around Carhan. The Primroses were no strangers to the O'Connells. Originally from Scotland, they had leased a small farm in Carhan from Trinity College in 1775 and subsequently built Hillgrove House. Given that Hillgrove was only about fifty yards from Carhan House, it was inevitable that the Primroses and the O'Connells would develop a close relationship, especially after John III married Ricarda Connor (1796-1848), niece of Mary O'Connell, in 1830. In the 1830s, the Ordnance Survey described Hillgrove as 'a rectangular building with two wings, all two stories high and in good repair' which, Samuel Lewis added, were 'surrounded by a finely wooded demesne, a feature of rare occurrence in this wild district'. In August 1849, when part of Hillgrove was advertised for letting, the place was said to consist (in part) of 'One Large Sitting Room', four 'Excellent' bedrooms, a kitchen, a servant's hall, and a stable which could keep one or two horses'. Although nothing survives of it to-day, Hillgrove had been a large house which often hosted large parties, especially after political meetings in the locality.¹⁶

The hospitality of Hillgrove is a reminder that O'Connell's campaign for Catholic Emancipation (1823-29) had its advocates in South Kerry no more than it had in other parts of the county and country. Indeed, after O'Connell was first elected as MP for Co. Clare in July 1828, a celebratory dinner was held at 'The Cahersiveen Hotel' (Fitzgeralds, opposite the present O'Connell Memorial Church) in honour of 'the Member for Clare'. Lord Nugent and Fr. William L'Estrange (+1833), O'Connell's Carmelite chaplain, both of whom were visiting Derrynane

at the time, attended as did his eldest son, Maurice (later MP for Tralee), the Knight of Kerry, and about fifty other 'gentlemen', including the Primroses of Hillgrove, Kean Mahony of Castlequin and Dr. Barry of Villa Nova. The festivities were premature. While O'Connell had been duly elected, the government indicated that he could not take his seat in Parliament because the relevant legislation which would enable him to do so had not completed its passage through Parliament. This did not happen until April 1829. As a result, O'Connell had to organise and pay for a second campaign. In Cahersiveen, although £225 had been collected as Catholic Rent in the locality, a further £420 was raised at a meeting on 18 May 1829, despite the fact that the recently-completed Catholic church had left little money for anything else. In any event, O'Connell was again elected (unopposed) as MP for Co. Clare in July 1829 and the following February, he took his seat in the House of Commons, the first Irish Catholic to do so since the 1690s. On his return to South Kerry in September 1830, he was again fêted in Fitzgerald's Hotel and between May 1831 and December 1832, he would sit as one of the two MPs for his native county, something which gave him no end of personal satisfaction.¹⁷

For all his influence, however, O'Connell also had to contend with that of the Whiteboys. Although details of their early history in Iveragh are vague, they were not inactive. In 1816, for example, they pinned a public 'Whiteboy letter' to the door of the Penal-Era church in Cahersiveen and while its contents are unrecorded, if similar letters are anything to go by, it is probable that it mentioned the economic distress of the time and the need to redress it. Although by the 1820s and 1830s, the Whiteboys were often known as Rockites and Ribbonmen (and the three titles are used interchangeably), nobody doubted their importance or determination to improve the circumstances of the poor, especially during the famine year of 1822.¹⁸

In February 1822, James O'Connell informed his brother, Daniel, that 'Captain Rock' had 'made his appearance' in Iveragh the previous November and that since then, 'every peasant in the Barony of Iveragh is a white boy (*sic*), and as such is determined neither to pay rent, tithes nor taxes'. In December 1821, one of the tithe collectors of the Rev. Michael Dowling, the Church of Ireland in Cahersiveen, was beaten 'severely' in Gurranebawn when he tried to serve court summonses to collect overdue tithes while a number of 'Whiteboy oaths' were administered in Cahersiveen, Foilmore, Dromod, Waterville and Spunkane. For Myles

McSweeney, O'Connell's brother-in-law, there was a clear reason why this had happened: 'Dowling's exorbitant charges for tithes'.¹⁹ And so it was that when local landlords met in Carhan House in early January 1822, their first concern was 'to stop that vile traffic [in tithes] in Iveragh which has converted the most peaceable peasantry in Ireland into an armed banditti'. Although James O'Connell reported that 'the *mania of Whiteboyism*' was 'over in Iveragh' by the end of the same month, he believed that 'the landed proprietors' of the locality had learnt a lesson: if they wanted to neutralise the Rockites, they had to ensure that the people of the locality would not be driven 'to despair' and that 'by a firm and humane conduct' they would 'show them [that] it is only by a peaceable and proper demeanour for the future [that] they can expect any redress'. For O'Connell, the campaign for Catholic Emancipation would provide a platform to do this in that it could generate and organise what for him was an unassailable power: the moral and collective authority of the people.²⁰

O'Connell managed that campaign through the Catholic Association, one of the most important political organisations of nineteenth-century Ireland. It was also one of the most effective, rooted as it was in parish committees which were complemented by others at county, provincial, and finally, at national level. It also had its own treasury which was funded by a monthly 'Catholic Rent' to which supporters contributed from all over the country. Although this Rent varied from as little as one penny a month to a guinea or more for the better off, it had the effect of blending O'Connell's followers, rich and poor, urban and rural, into a popular combination which was driven - not by the militancy of the Whiteboys - but by the moral authority of the people. It also had the support of the Catholic Church. This was important not so much because O'Connell believed that Emancipation was a 'Catholic cause' but because the local priest could neutralise the influence of Whiteboyism among the public at large. As O'Connell saw it, not only could the Whiteboys challenge his leadership but they could undermine the effectiveness and conduct of his campaign. There was also another consideration. During his visit to South Kerry in 1840, Richard Allen was:

informed that O'Connell's tenants, by far the larger proportion of the inhabitants of this district, have a court of their own - a court of appeal personally to him, and to the settlement of their disputes - to an investigation into their wants, and an unremitting

endeavour to alleviate them, is he, during his stay at Derrynane, chiefly devoted.²¹

Thus, O'Connell saw himself not only as the Moses of Catholic Emancipation but as a type of traditional Gaelic chieftain who was no less important for living in the nineteenth century rather than his ancestors had in medieval Ireland.

If only because O'Connell saw himself in these terms, his interest in South Kerry never waned. But then, he could not afford to do otherwise, considering that his lease from Trinity was not due to expire until 1865. And so, it was on his watch that for all the plans he had considered for Carhan, the town continued to 'stretch' to include an hotel, a post office, a police station and bridewell, a market house, a courthouse, an 'agency' of the Bank of Ireland, a pound, and even a public reading room. It also had a quay, two stores for purchasing oats, and what was described as 'a considerable traffic in linen and yarn'. In 1840, the Presentation Sisters opened a new convent for which O'Connell waived the rent and contributed £1,000 to the building fund. There were also two ferry crossings across the Fertha while by 1843, a new bridge was also under construction.²² For all that, however, the management and development of Cahersiveen fell between two competences: those of the landowner (Trinity College) and its lease-holding middlemen (the O'Connells) and - as with any lease - the one could not ignore the other, especially if they wanted to improve the property. As a result, Richard Griffith, the Surveyor of the Ordnance Survey, noted that the houses and public amenities in Cahersiveen were erected as needs be, not according to any 'fixed plan'. In other words, the town lacked a systematic plan and accordingly, it had its critics.²³ Among them was Thomas Campbell Foster.

Campbell Foster arrived in Cahersiveen on 15 November 1845. He was one of a new type of investigative journalist who was changing the face of British journalism at the time and as such, at least in the opinion of *The Times*, an ideal man to report on O'Connell as a landlord. There were two parts to his reports. The first concerned Cahersiveen which Campbell Foster suggested was a 'wretched' place and the victim of O'Connell's neglect. O'Connell countered that he had expended considerable sums in developing the town towards the 'prosperous and thriving place' it was. Indeed, he added modestly, he had 'created the town'. Although *The Times* subsequently retracted what its reporter had said about Cahersiveen, Campbell Foster's other criticisms lingered. They were also at the core

of what he had to say about O'Connell as a landlord: that for all his public eloquence about reform, he treated his tenants harshly and demanded that his rents were paid in full. O'Connell's response was equally robust. It was also accompanied by the results of the investigations of a number of other newspapers as well as by extracts from all sorts of sources, including the rent books of the Derrynane Estate itself.²⁴

For all that, however, one could not doubt one's own eyes, especially in Derrynane Beg, which became the poster-case for the 'wretched' circumstances of those who lived there. However, the point was made that more often than not, these were not tenants at all but day-labourers - or *spailpíni* - who had been evicted from the neighbouring estates of absentees and who had come to Derrynane in search of work at the Big House. However, as such opportunities were limited, more and more people ended up 'squatting' in the place - to use a contemporary word - with a consequent challenge to O'Connell. However, O'Connell's reply was clear: he had never 'cleared out' anybody from his estate or, as he also put it, 'exterminated any family'. And so, as the *Cork Examiner* concluded:

there are many poor on Mr. O'Connell's estate ... But the *cause* of that poverty ... cannot be a reproach to that good as well as great man, but to the tyrants and oppressors who, by their exterminations, have rendered Mr. O'Connell's estate a refuge for destitution, a shelter for the oppressed, resting place for the houseless, homeless, landless wanderer.

And just in case anybody had any doubts about his views, Maurice O'Connell added that his father had 'always' denounced those who cleared their lands as 'wholesale murderers'. Moreover, he knew that he could not 'exterminate poverty by exterminating the poor' - even if this meant allowing people from the estates of the neighbouring absentees to drift into his own.²⁵

However, if all this was true, the question was why had Campbell Foster had come to South Kerry in the first place. One answer was that *The Times* hoped that it could blacken the reputation of a man who in addition to a campaign against the Union, was also commenting on land reform. As he told a 'monster meeting' in Mullingar on 14 May 1843, Repeal was not only about restoring an independent Parliament to Dublin. It would also provide an opportunity to reassess the landlord system. Indeed, for all that

Campbell Foster had to say, O'Connell was ahead of his time on his own estate. Thus, he wrote, 'for years before we knew 'tenant right' by name, the practice prevailed ... that when holdings came up for renewal, allowance was made for any improvements which had been made by outgoing tenants'. Moreover, as he saw it, tenants should be entitled to leases:

no lease or no rent, say I ... I would [also] give the tenant an opportunity of proving what a solvent tenant ought to give for his land in order to fix the amount of rent he would have to pay ... I would [also] allow [that] ... all the improvements that he makes on his holding, and if the landlord did not pay him the full value of these improvements, he could not turn him out, but would be obliged to give him a new holding.²⁶

And so, *The Times*, rather than focus on the message, focussed on the messenger - not that it mattered anyway because with the Great Famine looming, the people of South Kerry - and indeed, of Ireland at large - had other things on their mind.

About The Author

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When the Rattoo monks traversed the ‘White Horse Ridge’

By John Flaherty

Author's Note

This is an expanded version of a short paper *The Archaeology of ‘The Monk’s Road’, Rattoo to Dysert* written for a University College Cork Certificate in Introduction to Irish Archaeology, which was submitted in May 2006. This paper re-visits the work of a small number of individuals whose dedication and interest has preserved the history, folklore and archaeology of a bog trackway or togher that runs through Dysert Marshes near Lixnaw in north Kerry. It is dedicated to those individuals, many of whom have passed, and to all our local historians and archaeologists.



Plate 1: The Medieval Church at Rattoo with the eleventh century Round Tower in the background (Source: Author).

Introduction

The ecclesiastical site located at Rattoo is widely known in archaeological circles, noteworthy for its exceptional example of a complete round tower.¹ The tower was constructed of hard quartzose sandstone and stands at 29.56m in height. It is part of a complex of monuments and has been radiocarbon dated, using tiny quantities of charcoal found in the mortar, to the later eleventh century.² Within the tower itself, at the top left-hand corner of the interior frame of the north window, is found a *Sheela-na-gig* dated to the twelfth century.³ To the SW of the tower, located in a graveyard, stand the ruins of a rectangular church of composite date. The church is generally considered fifteenth century, but there are obvious earlier features, and a seventeenth century inscribed stone was used to repair the doorway in the western gable of the building.⁴ NE of the round tower are found the ruins of an Augustinian Friary, generally considered fifteenth century but originally founded two centuries earlier.⁵



Plate 2: Dysert Church ruins and burial ground with the embankments of the river Feale in close proximity (Source: Author).

There is also evidence of an earlier ecclesiastical enclosure at Rattoo, which can only be recognised by various crop marks from aerial photographs.⁶ No surface remains of the enclosure survive, the exact site is unknown, and in the absence of a proper excavation it is imprudent to draw any firm conclusions. However, tradition says that from the sixth century an earlier monastic settlement existed at Rattoo. According to

George Petrie, Rattoo ‘was the seat of an ancient bishopric, erected by Bishop Lughach, one of the earliest progenitors of Christianity in Kerry, but of whose history nothing more is preserved other than his name and festival day, the 6th of October... according to the tradition of the country there were anciently seven churches in the place’.⁷

To the east of Rattoo, exactly 3.5km as the crow flies, lies the Early Medieval site of Dysert. The ruins of Dysert Church stand in a small graveyard on the west bank of the river Feale, which flows NW before meeting the river Brick to form the River Cashen. As the church is almost completely ruined its date is unclear, possibly twelfth or thirteenth century. Both its name and location suggest that a hermitage predated the church. Local folklore suggests this structure was to the NW and in close proximity to the current site.⁸ *Díseart* comes from the Latin word *desertum* and means a desert, wilderness or isolated place.⁹ In an ecclesiastical sense it was used to denote a hermitage, such secluded spots as the Irish saints and holy men chose to live in isolation. It was afterwards applied to churches erected in these places.¹⁰ This particular site was known as *Díseart Ó dTriallaigh*, the hermitage of St. Triallaigh, whose life is recorded in the *Uí Fiachrach* genealogies, compiled by Duaid MacFírbis in the seventeenth century.¹¹ So what links these two ecclesiastical sites separated by the river Brick and a large expanse of raised bog at Dysert Marshes, known locally as Ballignare bog?

White Horse Ridge or The Monk’s Road

In 1841 John O’Donovan wrote that ‘An ancient road, now called White Horse Ridge, extends from the old church of Dysart, through the bog, as far as Rattoo’.¹² Local folklore suggests that Rattoo was the primary site and Dysert a satellite, perhaps one of many. For example, the Rattoo Heritage Society described this bog trackway, together or causeway (in Irish *tóchar*) as ‘A great clerical highway that ran from Rattoo and led to their retreat house or hermitage at Dysert’.¹³ The trackway is primarily known as White Horse Ridge in the Rattoo district; around Lixnaw and Dysert it was always known as the Monk’s Road.¹⁴ The trackway is clearly marked as *Bohergarraunbaun* on the first edition, 1841-42, Ordnance Survey (OS) map, running for c 1.85km. *Bohergarránban* translates as the road of the white horse.¹⁵ Why the name White Horse Ridge? The Rattoo Heritage Society claimed that the name came from the white clay used in its construction.¹⁶ Local folk tales place its origins in a ghostly white horse that was often seen galloping along the road during the hours of

darkness.¹⁷ However, Donal O'Connor who lives at Tarbertisland, on the banks of the river Shannon, suggested that as white waves of the river Shannon are often known as 'white horses', the white bog cotton growing on the trackway's ridge may have had similar connotations to the local people as it blew in the wind.¹⁸



Plate 3: The first edition Ordnance Survey map clearly depicts 'Bohergarraunbaun' running through Dysert Marshes, Rattoo to the W, Dysert to the E (Source: Tailte Éireann).

From the mid nineteenth century it appears little attention was paid to the Monk's Road. It is not shown on the later edition OS map of the 1890s. Furthermore, although steeped in folklore, it is mentioned only once in the Schools' Folklore Collection which holds folklore collected by primary-school children in the neighbourhood during 1937-38. Even then, the child at Lixnaw Convent School merely reproduces O'Donovan's short entry from the *Ordnance Survey Letters*.¹⁹ However, according to Bertie O'Connor, those who cut turf in the bog were always familiar with the trackway and knew of its whereabouts as they routinely exposed sections of it whilst harvesting peat.²⁰ This was the situation throughout Ireland, where more bog trackways have been discovered than in the whole of the rest of Europe, the majority by turf-cutters since the harvesting of peat became popular in the seventeenth century. Irish archaeologists paid little attention to them, and only a few wooden trackways were investigated. However, the exploitation of raised bogs, in a more industrial approach, to provide fuel and generate electricity,

became a threat to their very existence. This resulted in large scale archaeological activity, especially in the midland Bord na Móna bogs. These excavations have recorded at least 3,500 sites, the majority of which were wooden trackways of various dimensions.²¹

A revival of interest in the Monk's Road began in the 1980s. Bertie O'Connor was one of those who formed the Rattoo Heritage Society in 1988 with plans to release a film history of the district. For this purpose, the Society resolved to excavate a section of the *trackway* to examine how it was constructed. This was carried out immediately during that turf cutting season.²² In addition to the work of the Rattoo Society, the greatest contributors to preserving the story of the trackway have been the late Tim Griffin from Ennismore, and the late Noel O'Connor from Ballyduff. Both published short papers on the trackway in local journals.²³

Rattoo Heritage Society Excavation, 1988

As previously noted, the Rattoo Heritage Society carried out an excavation of the Monk's Road during 1988. This was done in conjunction with turf cutting on a turf bank owned by Seán Barry, who was familiar with the trackway from previous turf harvests. The turf cutters had removed 'three sods' before encountering a layer of 'white gravel', ranging from 1cm to 4cm in diameter. Underneath this a layer of white mud was exposed, estimated to be 'five feet' (1.52m) in width; its depth from 0.25 m to 0.3m. However, the dig was to reveal something of even greater interest, what the Society regarded at the time as 'the main road construction'. Beneath the clay was another *c* 0.35m of 'solidly compacted' peat, underneath which the Society found a layer of 'straw or bog hay...in a perfectly preserved state'. The removal of this material exposed a layer of timbers laid down on cross beams; these timbers were again in a perfect state of preservation. Pegs removed from either side of the roadway were most likely used to keep the cross beams in place.

The timbers were estimated to have a diameter of between 10 and 20cm. As a cross branch was removed its perfectly cut edge suggested that a very sharp tool was used in its felling. With the bark still intact, it was identified as silver birch. Smaller branches, with their leaves similarly intact, were also removed in a perfectly preserved state. This material was most likely used to fill gaps between the larger timbers; the bog hay and straw then laid down to give an even finish to the structure. Much of this light finish was found at both sides of the trackway. The Society concluded that originally there were 'two-foot-deep trenches' dug at each

side of the trackway and that, over the years, the straw displaced from the roadway fell away and filled these trenches.²⁴ Evidence from later sources indicates that this was not unique to the site. These trenches allowed for drainage from the surface of the trackway promoting better underfoot conditions. However, according to A. T. Lucas, it was also important to retain a balanced saturation in the substrata of the trackway as an excessive drying out could result in shrinkage and the subsequent lowering of the trackway below the level of the surrounding bog.²⁵ Subsequently, three individuals, including Seán Barry on whose turf bank the excavation took place, individually informed the Society of an intriguing find they had each made whilst cutting turf. All had randomly found a quartz stone placed exactly in the middle of the clay and gravel trackway, the Society maintaining that these, when shining in the moonlight, guided the travellers on their journey. Had the Rattoo monks perhaps devised the 'cat's eye' fifteen centuries before Sir Percy Shaw?

According to Bertie O'Connor, apart from those given above, no further measurements were taken during the excavation, nor was the exact location of the excavation recorded. O'Connor believed it was about a 'third in' along the trackway from the Rattoo end. Although the excavation was undertaken in only one location, several turf-cutters claimed similar finds, including the timber trackway, in others. The findings underwent no subsequent expert investigation. The Society had hoped to get the timbers dated in Belfast, but the associated costs proved prohibitive.²⁶

The findings of Tim Griffin

Tim Griffin lived in Ennismore, a stone's throw from Dysert, on the far bank of the river Feale. He was a regular visitor to Dysert Marshes throughout his lifetime, familiar with its terrain, history and archaeology, particularly the presence of the trackway. Incidentally, Griffin may have been unaware of the Rattoo Society's investigation as he never mentioned or wrote about it.²⁷ This author visited Dysert Marshes on two occasions with Griffin, during both January and March 2006. On the first visit we were accompanied by Donal O'Connor of Tarbert. The trackway runs through an unwelcoming area of *c* 800 hectares of bog, where extreme care is needed at all times. The bog is liable to flooding and has numerous trenches and holes, some natural, others the result of turf cutting, both traditional and mechanical. The area can also be very disorientating as one can see nothing but a tawny coloured vegetation in all directions. Griffin was very aware of its dangers, outlining that he would never visit

without his mobile phone and compass. During the March visit, which followed a period of wet weather, he contemplated abandoning the trip on several occasions as even the access road was severely flooded.



Plate 4: The alignment of the Monk's Road is clearly visible on Google Maps (Source: Google Maps).

The alignment of the Monk's Road, running 300° NW 120° SE throughout, is clearly visible in aerial photographs; those who constructed it displayed remarkable skill in keeping this alignment constant through such a large and inhospitable area. The aerial shots also show that the banks of turf were allotted and marked out at right angles to the trackway, meaning that during each turf cutting season further damage was inevitably done. On the ground the trackway presents itself as a raised bank or ridge through the bog. This is a result of the trackway not allowing the settlement of the bog over its course, and most likely the origin of the 'Ridge' from White Horse Ridge, mentioned above. However, this ridge may not be discernible to the uninitiated, particularly because of its cover of never changing vegetation. This raised bank or ridge is visible, without any risk, where the trackway intersects the most northerly access bog road, that closest to the river Brick, seen as a sudden elevation on the roadway.²⁸

On returning to Dysert Marshes on a number of occasions during September and October 2025 this author believed this elevation on the road to be a good starting point.²⁹ Looking NW towards Rattoo, the round tower, as always, was a constant in the distance. However, it was

impossible to see any sign of the ridge in that direction, even when walking into the bog. There appeared to be more growth than in 2006, which is most likely the result of less turf cutting activity and a decline in the strategic burning of the bog in the Springtime. Nevertheless, the ridge was easily seen in the landscape running SE towards Dysert, particularly as the vegetation growing thereon, particularly furze, differed from that of the surrounding bog. It was noticeable that long extant sections of the trackway are now rare, mechanical diggers having flattened sections of the ridge as they traversed. However, turf cutting has infrequently produced a perfect cross-section of the composition of the trackway in the turf banks. Tim Griffin, because of his knowledge of the terrain and his observations of the turf-cutting strategies, knew the locations where these cross-sections could best be viewed, and found at least six in what he described as ‘an area of bog well over a half mile in length’.³⁰ On remembering Tim Griffin’s advice as to the dangers involved, and without any great knowledge of the terrain, I decided it was best to err on the side of caution as regards re-locating these cross-sections. Therefore, any measurements or cross-section images of the trackway are those recorded with Tim Griffin during the visits in 2006.



Plate 5: The author standing on the raised bank where the Monk’s Road intersects the most northerly access road to Ballignare bog (Source: Joe McAuliffe).



Plate 6: Joe McAuliffe highlights the outline of the Monk's Road ridge as it runs SE towards Dysert (Source: Author).

Tim Griffin had investigated the trackway in two ways, firstly by examining these cross-sections and, secondly, by taking core samples through the trackway. From the cross-section the most striking or obvious component of the trackway was the layer of clay, which Tim Griffin identified as marl, and recorded as having an average width of 2.10m, more than 0.5m wider than recorded by the Rattoo Society.³¹ The *North Kerry Archaeological Survey* claimed a 'consistent width' of 2.75m throughout, but did not specify where this measurement had originated.³²

From the centre, where it was *c* 0.2m deep, the depth gradually tapered off towards each verge. This clay was topped off with a slight layer of small gravel and stones, no more than a few centimetres deep; on occasion the stones were mixed with the clay. This gravel was sometimes found on the surface of the bog, arguably the remains of disintegrated turf sods from the trackway that were found to be too stony for burning and therefore discarded. Griffin found that the stone differed in various parts of the trackway. Whilst the majority were white or grey in colour one particular section had a coating of brown chips, which were either of sandstone or granite origin. He believed this stone likely came from the Rattoo area, but ‘someone with a flair for geology’ said it could also be found in an esker near Dysert.³³ Local folklore tells that the gravel and clay was drawn from the rivers or verge of the bog on the monks’ backs, in either baskets or linen bags, as a form of penance.³⁴ What was different from the Rattoo Society’s investigation was that Griffin found a foundation layer of brushwood beneath the clay. Lucas described that both trackways made wholly of timbers, and those of gravel and clay were often rafted with a layer of brushwood. If the terrain was particularly wet stones, gravel or clay were mixed with the brushwood. In all cases the brushwood foundation prevented the overlying materials from sinking through the yielding substratum of peat.³⁵



Plate 7: The marl and gravel layer of The Monks Road. This photo was taken after a spell of wet weather so this layer presents particularly well (Source: Tim Griffin, 2006).



Plate 8: Gravel from the trackway, left behind from a discarded turf sod that had rotted away
(Source: Tim Griffin, 2006).

In the years prior to 2006 Tim Griffin had taken many core samples through the virgin bog above the trackway and had also driven rods through the bog to determine the exact depth of the trackway in the bog and to see if any foundation materials were used. The clay layer was from 1m to 1.1m below the current surface of the bog. The bottom layer or foundation was immediately under the mud and was no more than 3 to 5cm in depth. It consisted of small sticks or branches of possibly birch, hazel, willow or alder, all of which grow along the low-lying perimeters of the bog. Core samples revealed that none had a diameter of more than 2cm. He described that a ‘tussock grass-like material’ appeared to have been mixed with the branches, as a binding agent, to give a more solid foundation for the upper layer. This material grows in abundance in the bog and would have been readily available. Griffin further suggested that this foundation layer was not needed throughout the entirety of the trackway’s length, used only in ‘quagmire’ conditions. He believed those who constructed the trackway, where possible, took advantage of an ‘island’ of firm ground. The core samples revealed nothing but raw bog beneath the brushwood. Griffin estimated that the depth of bog underneath the trackway ranged from 3m to 5m, lessening as one approached Dysert.³⁶



Plate 9: Sample of the small branches taken from a core sample by Tim Griffin in 2006
(Source: Tim Griffin, 2006).

Evidence suggests that the materials used to construct the Monk's Road were unusual, bog trackways constructed of anything other than timber were uncommon. Aidan O'Sullivan wrote that archaeological surveys have recognised 'thousands of wooden (and occasionally sand and gravel) trackways' in the midlands' raised bogs. Timber trackways ranged from simple structures made by placing small branches and brushwood on the bog's surface to those constructed with large oak planks such as at Corlea.³⁷ Lucas recorded a small number of non-timber trackways, including that discovered in Derryarogue bog, county Longford, in 1958, apparently consisting wholly of gravel.³⁸ This site was investigated by Etienne Rynne, who also reported on a trackway, very similar in nature to the Monk's Road, at Lullymore bog in county Kildare. Known as the 'Danes' Road', it consisted of a layer of gravel and marl, 0.20 - 0.25m deep, material that was readily available at the bog's margins. It traversed the bog in three separate sections. Interestingly, timber planks were found, laid transversely, under one of the sections. However, these did not appear to be from an older trackway but laid occasionally in places, as a raft, where the bog was unusually soft. The clay layer measured *c* 3m in two sections and *c* 4.5m in the third. Although much wider than that found at Dysert Marshes, the similarity is obvious, the depth of the marl and gravel layer almost identical to that of the Monk's Road.³⁹



Plate 10: Tim Griffin taking a core sample from the virgin bog that covers the Monk's Road
(Source: Author).

Rattoo Heritage Society v Tim Griffin

What conclusions can be drawn from the two casual investigations undertaken at Dysert Marshes? Apart from slight differences in measurements the trackway made of gravel and clay was similarly described by the Rattoo Society and Tim Griffin. The former found no trace of the underlying brushwood raft, but Griffin believed this layer was unnecessary in drier sections of the bog. This trackway, from its folklore and history, is now generally accepted as the Monk's Road, most likely dating from the Early Christian/Early Medieval Period (*c* AD 400 – 795). As no formal investigation or dating of the Monk's Road has been undertaken one can only hazard a guess as to its age. Both Noel O'Connor and Tim Griffin suggested that the trackway was at least 1500 years old, dating from *c* AD 500. Both had come to this conclusion from hearing the old people say that the growth of peat or turf was rated at about 1 foot (0.35m) or one turf sod per 500 years. If this were the case, and factoring in Griffin's measurement of *c* 1m of turf above the trackway, this date would be plausible.⁴⁰ In reality bogs grow at a very slow rate, on average somewhere between 0.1m and 1m every 1000 years. However, if the conditions are optimal, growth of raised bogs can be very rapid.⁴¹ One paper from the late nineteenth century claimed that 'in some cases bogs increase in thickness each year 5 or 6 inches, in some cases not at all'.⁴²

The discovery of many of the trackways recorded in Irish bogs predated the dating techniques of pollen analysis and radiocarbon.⁴³ However, those recently dated indicate an enormous span of time during which they were constructed and traversed, construction continuing over thousands of years. They range in date from the Neolithic (*c* 4000 - 2500 BC) to the Medieval, although there are particular concentrations in the Late Bronze Age and the Iron Age and something of a hiatus from the first century BC until the Early Medieval period. For example, a trackway at Corlona, county Leitrim, has been dated to *c* 1640 BC, which places it in the Early Bronze Age, whilst that at Clonstat, county Offaly, dates from *c* AD 780, placing it within the Early Christian Period.⁴⁴ Ireland's best-known trackway at Corlea, county Longford has been dated to 148 BC.⁴⁵ Assuming that the Monk's Road is of the Early Christian Period, what conclusions can be made about the underlying timber trackway?

An Iron Age Timber Trackway?

As the Rattoo Heritage Society found no brushwood raft under the trackway of mud and stone, one might assume that the timber structure

was constructed for this purpose. However, both were divided by *c* 0.35m of compacted peat suggesting a trackway of earlier origin. Taking the dating strategy of O'Connor and Griffin, this would place its date to the period of Christ's birth. However, the very weight of the upper trackway undoubtedly led to compression of the underlying peat, meaning that this peat layer was deeper prior to the construction of the Monk's Road. Therefore, it can be assumed the trackway is earlier, possibly dating from the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age, somewhere in the first millennium BC. Although the Rattoo Society had only investigated a very short section of trackway, from their communications with turf cutters, they believed that the timber trackway existed elsewhere under the Monk's Road. However, Tim Griffin claimed, that in rodding the bog, he only ever encountered underlying bog of great depth. There is no doubt that the later Monk's Road completely traversed Dysert Marshes. Bertie O'Connor believed that 'when they came to build the second road (Monks' Road) they knew where to build it', meaning the builders would have followed the course of the earlier timber structure.⁴⁶ Barry Raftery, from his experiences at Corlea, suggested that this was occasionally done, new trackway constructions taking the same line across the bog as earlier structures that might have been covered over for centuries.⁴⁷

Perhaps the timber trackway from the first millennium BC did traverse the entire bog, the builders of the Monk's Road intending to fully follow its path but deterred for some environmental reason, such as extreme flooding. In any case the trackway either took a different route or was never finished. The argument can also be made that it was a shorter structure built in the bog for some specific reason. In fact, the majority of timber trackways did not completely cross bogs but rather facilitated access to or movement within a bog. Raftery argued that short wooden trackways were built in wet sections of a bog and did not extend further across the drier sections, noting several examples of trackways crossing the wetter fringes of raised bogs in county Longford.⁴⁸ Other studies further argued that traversing the bog was not their primary function, but that they gave access to the wetlands where people gathered to perform tasks from 'the mundane to the ritual'. Peatland sites arguably played important recurring roles in peoples' economic, social and belief systems, perhaps even for the appreciation of the surroundings. This is demonstrated through the considerable resources that communities invested in their construction. Some excavated trackways led to platforms, or were themselves platforms, which could be used for ritual, maybe even

sacrifice, or from which offerings were cast into the bog. In a more practical way they facilitated hunting, allowed for the gathering of plants for medicinal purposes, building or crafts, or, although still unproven at any Irish site, to facilitate the collection of bog iron, an important source of the metal in ancient Ireland.

Excavations at Ederclon, county Longford, dated to the Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age, (the trackway at Dysert Marshes arguably of a similar date) suggested that the bog was not always seen as a barrier but as a place to be utilised and appreciated. In an excavation area of 170m long by 30m wide traces of twenty-six trackways, often built in a zig zag fashion, crossing or merging with each other to form crossroads or platforms. Fragments of bowls, spears and other wooden objects were buried throughout the site often at these convergences, suggesting a tradition of votive deposition. Dating revealed that various aspects of the site had been frequently rebuilt during the Bronze and Iron Ages, signifying its continued importance.⁴⁹ Can we make any conclusions about the use of the simple wooden trackway at Dysert Marshes?

The trackway may have been used for only a brief period as evidence suggests that many of its counterparts had a very short functional lifetime. For example, analysis of the timbers and the growth of the associated peat suggests that an Iron Age trackway at Corlea had been in use for no more than a decade.⁵⁰ Was the building of the trackway at Dysert Marshes a short-term symbol of wealth, status, or skill? The compiler of the *Annals of Connacht*, in extolling the merits and feats of the dead, cites the building of causeways amongst the most worthy of acts.⁵¹ Similarly, the *Uraicecht Becc*, a law-text on status, states that the ability to construct a trackway added two cows to the honour-price of a master wright.⁵² Perhaps it was quickly abandoned after serving its purpose of leading to a place of bonding or ritual in the bog. Local political factors or societal collapse may have led to its abandonment. Maybe a warmer, drier period made access to the wetlands possible without a timber roadway, or in turn, a deteriorating environment made access impossible. Brunning and McDermott argued that the analysis of wooden trackways in our bogs has helped to reveal the transient character of human activity where events could happen quickly resulting in the fruits of considerable effort disappearing in a short period of time.⁵³ At an rate, the trackway was eventually engulfed by the bog where a unique chemical structure preserved it until re-discovered by turf-cutters and subsequently investigated by the Rattoo Heritage Society.



Plate 11: The ruins of the quay in deep undergrowth at Rattoo (Source: Author).

Reaching the Monk's Road

The archaeological evidence outlined above leaves many unanswered questions. However, in combination with history and folklore, it suggests that a causeway made of clay and gravel, possibly dating from the late fifth or sixth centuries, connected two Early Christian sites, Rattoo and Dysert. Its name, 'The Monks Road', conjures up images of saintly men walking slowly and silently through the bog in prayer. Local folklore suggested that at particular times there was one constant line of people from one end to the other.⁵⁴ Were these people from both the ecclesiastical and secular communities? Did both communities combine to construct the trackway, and both subsequently use it? Its construction was a labour intensive and intricate process that required a substantial investment of time, expertise and resources. An estimated 2,200 metric tonnes of marl clay alone would have been needed to build that demonstrated on the first edition OS Map.⁵⁵ Therefore, it can be assumed that it was intended to make optimal use of a construction that had consumed so much time, materials and labour. Lucas suggested that trackways of less than 1m in width were no more than footpaths but that tracks of a width of 2m or more could be classed as roads. These would have been suitable for the passage of domestic animals, packhorses and such light vehicular traffic as might have existed.⁵⁶ However, Brunning and McDermott, drawing from studies throughout Europe, suggested that wheeled transport in the

medieval period was limited, the use of pack animals and boats of greater importance.⁵⁷ Therefore, in addition to its ecclesiastical functions, the Monk's road may have enabled local communities, neighbouring the bog, to communicate with one another for the purpose of trade and general social intercourse.



Plate 12: The point at the end of the tree-lined canal where the crossing of the river Brick was most likely made to access the Monk's Road (Source: Author).

Noel O'Connor estimated that the walking journey from Rattoo to Dysert would have taken approximately forty-five minutes.⁵⁸ This is probably a conservative estimate as the first hurdle on the journey was

crossing the river Brick, which today is *c* 50m wide enclosed by *c* 5m high embankments. This was not always the case. The first edition OS map described the strip of land at the far side of the river, between the river and the bog, as 'liable to flood'. Aerial photographs suggest that a further section of trackway extended from the Monk's Road, through this area right to the river's bank. Although today not clearly visible as a ridge in the landscape, there is certainly a contrast in vegetation between where the trackway ran and the surrounding field, a growth of thistles clearly evident along its path. To the east of this area, a small section of the bog, has been reclaimed and is now in pasture.⁵⁹ Although the Rattoo site itself is built on arable land sloping gently towards the river, reaching the same required traversing large tracts of 'marshes'. At Dysert the river Feale is similarly enclosed by high embankments, which, like those on the Brick near Rattoo, were erected in the 1950s as part of the Brick, Cashen, Feale and Galey drainage scheme. These initiatives were taken after major flooding events in the district during 1926, 1941 and 1946. Minimal drainage efforts had been initiated centuries early by the Fitzmaurices, Lords of Kerry and continued by Sir John Benn Walsh and the newly formed OPW in the mid nineteenth-century. It is estimated that, prior to the works, the area of land under constant threat of flooding was upwards of 3,500 hectares, causing major hardship, particularly for farmers.⁶⁰ In 1908 the *Kerry Evening Star* reported that some years previously several head of cattle had drowned at Dysert Marshes.⁶¹

Therefore, that first part of the journey from Rattoo to the trackway was arguably often difficult if not impossible. The first edition OS map shows a quay at Rattoo, with a canal running from there to the River Brick. Traces of the quay, a wall of large, square, moss covered stones, survives in deep undergrowth directly opposite the gates of Rattoo House, *c* 25m from the Lady's Walk road which runs along the bottom of the Rattoo site.⁶² Noel O'Connor questioned if the communities around Rattoo who intended to use the Monk's Road may have rowed down this canal, and on reaching the eastern bank of the Brick then continued on foot along the trackway. However, he concluded that the canal is likely of much later date so those undertaking the journey did so on foot before crossing either by bridge or by boat.⁶³ Regardless, where the canal reaches the river was the most likely crossing point. As there is no evidence or lore to suggest that the river was bridged at this point, a boat crossing is more likely. Archaeological evidence suggests that dug-out log boats were used extensively throughout north Kerry during this and earlier periods. Boats,

hollowed predominantly from the trunk of a single oak tree, were found at Ballinclemesig, Gortnaminsha, Ragoonagh, Derryco and Dysert.⁶⁴

The use of such a boat at Dysert goes back to the legend of St. O'Triallaigh, who was said to sail 'in a curach [sic] without a hide (i.e. which was not covered with a hide) round the west of Ireland...until he landed (by God's assistance) in the port aforesaid at *Disert Triallaigh*'.⁶⁵ In 1932, when the section of the river at Dysert was being cleared of any debris that hindered fishermen from fishing with a boat and net, a large amount of stones were found, only in one section of the river, by the bank. These findings suggest that perhaps there was once a quay at Dysert. Furthermore, during the same process the remains of several dugout canoes were found, which according to Tim Griffin, were examined by staff from the National Museum.⁶⁶ In 1841 John O'Donovan recorded a fisherman at Dysert ferrying people across the river in a flat-bottomed boat, apparently taking a short cut on the way to Listowel.⁶⁷

Part of a wider regional network

Tim Griffin recalled how the older people, who would have been conversant with the folklore of their grandparents and great-grandparents, told of the existence of another roadway that led from the eastern bank of the Feale at Dysert to Listowel. He remembered now lost traces of a raised passage running through two fields in Coolagown, directly opposite Dysert graveyard, which followed the same alignment as the Monk's Road. At least seven individuals, many of whom lived quite a distance apart from one another, spoke of *Bothair na Fuaigarach* or 'The Road of the Funerals'; Griffin claimed that the name was apt as it connected with three cemeteries along its route, funerals came west to Dysert and went east to Listowel. No traces of this route have survived.

Furthermore, local folklore tells that a structure called the 'Monks' Footbridge' crossed the river Feale from the vicinity of Dysert Church into Coolagown, on the river's eastern side. During dredging of the river, in 1953-54, morticed timber beams, c 0.2m square, and measuring 3m to 3.5m in length, were pulled from the river at this point suggesting remnants of such a structure.⁶⁸ Tom Dillon, who lives at the eastern side of the river from Dysert, is also familiar with the stories of a footbridge and *Bothair na Fuaigarach* and believes that a crossing of the Feale at Dysert places the Monk's Road in a bigger network of trackways. As previously noted, *Bothair na Fuaigarach* extended in an easterly direction towards Listowel. However, both Dillon and Tim Griffin recalled lore

regarding a roadway that went in a northerly direction from the Feale, possibly at Killocrim, through the townlands of Gortmaminch, Dromloughra, Killarida, Dromalught and Ballyegan, then continuing through Lisselton and Larha, before eventually reaching the Shannon Estuary at Letter Strand.⁶⁹



Plate 13: The river Feale at Dysert, at the crossing point that possibly placed the Monk's Road in a bigger network of trackways and pilgrim paths (Source: Author).

Parts of this route traversed bog, and another trackway was found in the townlands of Killarida and Dromalught. This site was investigated by the archaeologist Peter Danaher in 1964 following the discovery of timber planks during turf cutting. Further planks were discovered in 1971. Measuring from 3.25m to 4.5m long, *c* 0.4m wide and *c* 0.19m high, these planks were laid end to end, with some suggestions they were joined together with pegs. They were lying on turf about 1m over the bottom of the bog and *c* 0.37m under the present level of cut-away bog.⁷⁰ Despite the archaeological evidence of a trackway made of planks, turf-cutters in the area apparently met with a trackway with a similar composition as the Monk's Road, built of branches, mud and stone.⁷¹ Was this a similar situation to that at Dysert Marshes, with a wooden trackway buried

beneath that of stone and clay? The trackway investigated by Danaher extended in a SW-NE direction towards two disused burial grounds in the townland of Killarida. Tim Griffin believed it was an artery that connected a number of Early Christian sites in that immediate area, small churches or oratories at Kiltewan, Killarida and Gortacrossane, the latter taking its name from a hermit monk, St. Crissan. He further suggested that these were ‘sister’ churches under the auspices of a ‘mother’ church.⁷² Was the Monk’s Road part of a pilgrimage route that eventually led to the River Shannon, built for the convenience of the monks and visitors on pilgrimage? The word *tóchar* itself was connected to pilgrimage routes as with *Tóchar Phádraig*, in county Mayo, which led from Ballintubber Abbey to Croaghpatrick.⁷³

The demise of the Monk’s Road

Again, the Monk’s Road leaves very many unanswered questions. However, what is known with certainty is that its functional lifetime was limited. Noel O’Connor’s argued convincingly that it may have been abandoned in the early ninth century as it would have given marauding Vikings access to Rattoo from the river Feale, attackers alighting at Dysert before finding their way along the trackway.⁷⁴ However, he failed to factor in his own hypothesis that the trackway was enveloped by bog *c* 1500 years ago, almost three centuries earlier. Without proper dating it is impossible to draw any concrete conclusions and O’Connor may well be right. However, the Monk’s Road may have been abandoned for similar reasons as the wooden trackway that underlies at least part of it. Again, its functional lifetime, perhaps only decades, may have been abruptly ended because of environmental or political factors. It can also be argued that lower levels of human activity allowed the surrounding bog and vegetation to gradually engulf the trackway, a situation exasperated if there was any slackening in the high levels of required labour-intensive maintenance. Some form of projecting markers as well as local memory may have prolonged its functional life but eventually there came a time when the trackway was completely abandoned, swallowed up by the growing sphagnum.⁷⁵

Conclusion

The Monk’s Road or White Horse Ridge is an obscure, largely forgotten bog trackway or togher that evidently connects the monastic sites of Rattoo and Dysert through the Dysert Marshes, that occupy the terrain

between the rivers Brick and Feale in north Kerry. It pre-dates the surviving archaeological ruins at Rattoo, most likely dating from the beginning of the Early Christian period. Due to the landscape and environment its construction was a major feat of planning, engineering and toil, requiring the combined efforts of both secular and religious communities. Although possibly an artery of trade and communication, local folklore tells that it was largely used by the Rattoo monks to reach a hermitage quietly nestled on the far fringes of the intermediate bog. The trackway may have been part of a larger pilgrimage route that eventually led through north Kerry towards the River Shannon. Although never professionally excavated, Tim Griffin and the members of the Rattoo Heritage Society carried out separate casual investigations with most interesting results, particularly as the latter discovered an underlying timber trackway, possibly from the Iron age, predating the Monk's Road by several centuries. Although the efforts of its previous investigators were highly commendable, a major professional excavation and comprehensive study is required in order to better understand the origins, functions and subsequent demise of this ancient monument. For now, what remains of the Monk's Road survives beneath the peat in Ballignare bog, the only finite proof of a contemporaneous connection between the sites at Rattoo and Dysert.

About the Author

John Flaherty is a farmer and historian from Kilflynn in north Kerry. He has a particular interest in agricultural history, especially Irish agricultural publishing and farming societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He holds a PhD in history from Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, on the evolution of Irish veterinary practice. He edits the *Kilflynn Chronicle*, fifteen issues of which have been hitherto published. John is a Council Member of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society and a member of the British Agricultural History Society.

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⁴ Caroline Toal, *North Kerry Archaeological Survey* (Dingle, 1995), p. 244.

⁵ Bernadette Tarrant and Grainne O'Connell, *North Kerry landscape* (Dublin, 1990), p. 145.

⁶ V. Hurley, 'The early church in the south-west of Ireland: settlement and organisation', in S. M. Pearce (ed.) *The early Church in western Britain and Ireland. BAR British Series 102* (Oxford, 1982), p. 321.

⁷ George Petrie, *The ecclesiastical architecture of Ireland* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1845), pp 170, 400.

⁸ Folklore collected by Tim Griffin, Ennismore; Toal, *North Kerry*, pp 208, 244-5.

⁹ P. J. O'Connor, *Atlas of Irish place names* (Newcastle West, 2001), p. 65.

¹⁰ P. W. Joyce, *The origin and history of Irish names of places, Vol. 1* (Dublin, 1869), pp 324-5.

¹¹ Duaid MacFirbis, *Book of Genealogies*, p. 253. The version referred to in this paper is a transcript made by Eugene O'Curry in 1836. A microfilm copy is held in the National Library of Ireland. The manuscript was originally written c 1650-66. Other versions have also been transcribed and published including that of John O'Donovan, known for his work with the Ordnance Survey, in 1844; See also Oidhreacht Leac Snámha, *Lixnaw heritage trail* (Lixnaw, 1992), p. 43.

¹² John O'Donovan, *Ordnance Survey Letters, Kerry* (Dublin, 1841), p. 14.

¹³ Rattoo Heritage Society, *Ballyduff a place in the Kingdom of Ciar* (Ballyduff, 1989), VHS format. For continuity of purpose the word trackway will be used throughout this paper.

¹⁴ Interview with Bertie O'Connor, recorded at Ardoughter, Ballyduff, on 16 October 2025; Interview with Tom Dillon, Ennismore, recorded at Lixnaw on 19 September 2025.

¹⁵ A garron or garran, borrowed from Irish gearrán and the Scottish Gaelic, gearran, describes a small sturdy castrated workhorse, a gelding.

¹⁶ Rattoo Heritage Society, *Ballyduff a place in the Kingdom of Ciar*.

¹⁷ Interview with Tom Dillon.

¹⁸ Information collected from Donal O'Connor, Tarbertisland, January 2006.

¹⁹ Schools' Folklore Collection, Vol. 410, p. 271, Clochar na Toirbhirte, Lic Snámha.

²⁰ Interview with Bertie O'Connor.

²¹ Aidan O'Sullivan, 'Exploring past people's interactions with wetland environments in Ireland' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 107C (2007), pp 150-4; A. T. Lucas, 'Bog wood: A study in rural economy' in *Bealoideas*, no. 23 (1954), p. 73.

²² The Rattoo Heritage Society's film history was released in 1989 on VHS format titled *Ballyduff a place in the Kingdom of Ciar*. Tralee Library previously held a copy that appears lost. This author would like to thank Bertie O'Connor for access to his copy.

²³ Noel O'Connor, 'Was the 'Monk's Road' covered over in the early 9th century to protect Rattoo' in *Ballyduff Recorder* (2003), pp 45-7; Tim Griffin, 'A pictorial journey on the Monk's Road from Rattoo to Dysert' in *Ballyguiltenane Rural Journal*, vol. 34 (2011/2012), pp 75-80.

²⁴ Rattoo Heritage Society, *Ballyduff a place in the Kingdom of Ciar*.

²⁵ A. T. Lucas, 'Trackways or causeways: Some evidence from archaeological, literary, historical and place-name sources' in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. 85C, no. 2 (1985), p. 59.

²⁶ Interview with Bertie O'Connor.

²⁷ According to Bertie O'Connor the video was released locally and then taken to London in November 1989, where it was well received by the diaspora.

²⁸ The Google Maps coordinates at this point are 52.4397155, -9.6279170.

²⁹ This author visited Dysert Marshes on 19 September 2025 accompanied by historian Tom Dillon, who is familiar with the history and folklore of the district. Our main purpose was to view the raised ridge where the trackway crosses the access roadway. Although we managed this, any further investigations were curtailed due to extensive flooding. Conditions had greatly improved on returning to the bog on 17 October, accompanied by Joe McAuliffe, a local historian whose family have cut turf here for generations. The drier conditions allowed access into the turf banks to view the ridge, especially as it ran SE towards Dysert.

³⁰ Griffin, 'A pictorial journey', p. 77.

³¹ Marl is a white, lime rich mud, that can often be seen at the very bottom of a bog when it has been cut away or closer to the surface on the bog's perimeter. It is a dense, heavy, waterproof material, so transporting it over distance to the site of the trackway was no mean feat.

³² Toal, *North Kerry*, p. 67.

³³ Griffin, 'A pictorial journey', p. 78.

³⁴ Interview with Tom Dillon; The unrecorded folklore of the Gilbert family collected by Tim Griffin.

³⁵ Lucas, 'Trackways or causeways', p. 39.

³⁶ Griffin, 'A pictorial journey', p. 78.

³⁷ O'Sullivan, 'Exploring past people's interactions', p. 169.

³⁸ Lucas, 'Trackways or causeways', pp 41-3.

- ³⁹ Etienne Rynne, 'A trackway and a bog road in Lullymore bog' in *Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society*, vol. 14, no. 1 (1964), pp 38-9.
- ⁴⁰ Noel O'Connor, 'Monk's Road', p. 45; Griffin, 'A pictorial journey', p. 80.
- ⁴¹ John Feehan and Grace O'Donovan, *The bogs of Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), p. 196.
- ⁴² T. Johnson, 'The Irish peat question' in *Economic Proceedings of the Royal Dublin Society*, no. 1 (1899-1909), p. 17.
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- ⁴⁵ OPW, *Heritage Guide No. 50: Corlea Trackway, Iron Age Roads in the County Longford Peatlands* (Dublin, 2010), p. 3.
- ⁴⁶ Interview with Bertie O'Connor.
- ⁴⁷ Barry Raftery, *Trackways through time: archaeological investigations on Irish bog roads, 1985-89* (Rush, 1990), p. 4.
- ⁴⁸ Barry Raftery (ed.), *Trackway excavations at Moundillon bogs, Co. Longford, 1985-1991* (Dublin, 1996), pp 197-9.
- ⁴⁹ Conor McDermott, Cairtriona Moore, Cara Murray, Gill Plunkett and Michael Stanley, 'A colossus of roads: The Iron Age archaeology of Ireland's peatlands' in Gabriel Cooney (ed.), *Relics of old decency: archaeological studies in later prehistory: festschrift for Barry Raftery* (Bray, 2009), pp 54-60; Brunning and McDermott, 'Trackways and roads', pp 364-7, 375; OPW, 'Corlea Trackway', p. 5.
- ⁵⁰ W. A. Casparie, 'Corlea 1: palaeo-environmental aspects of the trackway' in Barry Raftery (ed.), *Trackway excavations at Moundillon bogs, Co. Longford, 1985-1991* (Dublin, 1996), p. 374.
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- ⁵³ Brunning and McDermott, 'Trackways and roads', p. 376.
- ⁵⁴ The unrecorded folklore of Mick Purtill collected by Tim Griffin.
- ⁵⁵ This author came to this approximate figure by multiplying the average width of the trackway from the figures given in this paper (2.12m) with an average depth (0.25m) and the estimated length of the roadway as shown on the 1st edition OS Map (1850m), to reach a figure of 980.5m³. <https://www.aqua-calc.com/calculate/volume-to-weight-estimates> that 1m³ of wet excavated marl weighs 2.24 metric tonnes. A figure of 2200 metric tonnes is roughly the equivalent of that legally carried by 90 three axle ridged tipper trucks.

⁵⁶ Lucas, 'Trackways or causeways', p. 44.

⁵⁷ Brunning and McDermott, 'Trackways and roads', p. 364.

⁵⁸ Noel O'Connor, 'Monk's Road', p. 47.

⁵⁹ This author explored the area by walking along the OPW constructed eastern embankment of the River Brick, from which the journey towards the bog can easily be visualised.

⁶⁰ Tim Griffin, 'A ramble along the river' in *Ballygultinane Rural Journal*, no. 28 (2005), p. 85; Idem, *A ramble along the river* (Unpublished Booklet), pp x-xi.

⁶¹ *Kerry Evening Star*, 31 December 1908.

⁶² This author was told of the existence of the quay remains by Gary Taylor, who works with the OPW.

⁶³ Noel O'Connor, 'Monks Road', p. 47. Although there is no obvious literary evidence as to the origin of the canal, it probably dates to the 18th century, possibly built by Thomas Fitzmaurice, 21st Lord of Kerry, Baron of Lixnaw. According to Bertie O'Connor they were later upgraded under a Famine Relief Scheme. For an overview of improvements made by Fitzmaurice see Oidhreacht Leac Snámha, *The Fitzmaurices: Lords of Kerry and Barons of Lixnaw* (Lixnaw, n.d.), pp 49-50.

⁶⁴ See D. B. O'Connell, *First minute book and record of the of the County Kerry Field Club, 1939-1951*; Eamon P. Kelly, 'A log boat from Derryco' in *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*, no. 14 (1981), pp 10-13; P. Healy, 'A dugout wooden boat in the estuary of the Cashen' in *Journal of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society*, no. 14 (1981), pp 155-6.

⁶⁵ MacFirbis, *Book of Genealogies*, p. 253.

⁶⁶ Tim Griffin, *A brief survey of the rural historic sites in the locality where I live* (Unpublished essay, submitted as part of the UCC Certificate in Local and Regional Studies, Listowel 1998-99), p. 14.

⁶⁷ O'Donovan, *Ordnance Survey Letters*, p. 34.

⁶⁸ Griffin, *A brief survey*, p. 19.

⁶⁹ Tim Griffin, 'In and around Drommurrin locality' in *Ballydonoghue Parish Magazine*, no. 18 (2002), p. 42; Interview with Tom Dillon.

⁷⁰ Toal, *North Kerry*, p. 67.

⁷¹ Interview with Tom Dillon.

⁷² Griffin, 'In and around Drommurrin locality', pp 41-2; For discussion of these sites see Toal, *North Kerry*, pp 218-9.

⁷³ See Peter Harbison, *Pilgrimage in Ireland: the monuments and the people* (London, 1991), pp 139-40; Ballintubber Teamwork, *Tóchar Phádraig, Patrick's causeway from Ballintubber to Croagh Patrick: a pilgrim's progress* (Ballintubber, 1989).

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Killarney and the Railway (Part 1)

by Oliver Doyle

Introduction

When the Down survey was completed about 1656, Killarney did not exist. However, when Thomas, 4th Lord Kenmare, came of age in 1747, the town consisted of only his Lordship's residence, a few slated houses and 100 thatched cabins – the population not exceeding 500. A writer in 1756 wrote 'A new street with a large commodious inn are designed to be built here; for the curiosities of the neighbouring lake have of late drawn great numbers of curious travellers to visit it'.



Plate 1: Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of Killarney 1838 with Court House and Kenmare House.

(Source: English National Archives, Kew).

An English tourist, Samuel Carter, in 1858 updated his book *A Week at Killarney* first published in 1843 and described his journey having taken the Great Western Railway to Milford Haven (opened 15 April 1856) and then by steamer to Waterford. This service was run in conjunction with the GWR and South Wales Railway. From Waterford, Carter travelled by train to Limerick Junction, where he stayed at the Station Hotel, now the Irish Rail Divisional Engineer's offices, describing it as 'an excellent

hotel'. The following day he proceeded to Mallow and changed trains for Killarney noting that it was a 'new route' from Mallow having 'recently opened' (opened 15 July 1853 nearly five years earlier).

Killarney, in the pre-railway days, had considerable mining activity but this had ceased when the railway reached the town. Goods traffic here was confined to the locality as there were stations around in every direction. Throughout the 123 years of goods trains there was just general traffic with nothing unusual or specialised. In modern times the major industry locally, Liebherr Cranes, has not really benefited the railway, the cranes going by road to Fenit for export. Undoubtedly Killarney's greatest asset are its mountainous and lake-land scenery, including Ireland's highest peak - Carrantuohill 3,414ft, and the Kenmare and Muckcross estates.



Plate 2: The Quagmire Viaduct in a scenic setting between Headford Junction and Killarney on 19 July 1985 with the 18:25 Freight train from Tralee to Mallow (Source: Barry Carse).

Killarney Junction Railway

Before the GS&WR opened their railway to Mallow on 19 March 1849, plans were in progress to extend the railway to Killarney by the Killarney Junction Railway (KJR) authorised by Act of 1846 and amended in 1851. On 6 April 1853 the railway opened as far as Millstreet 'whence Mr Dargan and the Directors proceeded, by omnibus, to the Lake Hotel, Killarney... where a very sumptuous entertainment was set up'. There was one intermediate station, Kanturk which was renamed Banteer on 1 April

1889 when the Newmarket Branch opened with a station close to that town.

On 20-21 May 1853, Captain Wynne, Royal Engineer, inspected the line to Freemount and was quick to point out 'The permanent way is laid single track, and the earth works and bridges are only constructed for a single line' and he was surprised there was no provision for making the route double track in the future. He found the track properly laid and in good order, and the other works of sufficient strength and 'he was not aware of anything which would render the opening of the line to Freemount dangerous to the public using the line'. The line subsequently opened on 25 May 1853.

The interval between Freemount and Headford (3 miles 70 chains - 80 chains in a mile), was still incomplete and with regards the section between Headford and Killarney, (7 miles 50 chains), he found the company was 'unprovided with locomotive engines or any other rolling stock applicable for the conveyance of the public'. He was therefore unable to inspect the line and had to therefore state that in his opinion the line could not be opened. He had received a letter from the Chairman of the GS&WR, which he agreed with, stating that 'only one engine would be permitted between Killarney Junction and Freemount and this would be limited to 20mph – a precaution very necessary as the engine will have to travel tender foremost in the 'up' (toward Mallow) direction as there is no turntable at Freemount'.

On 11 June 1853, Lieutenant Tyler inspected the railway between Headford and Killarney which had fourteen bridges - six over and eight under the railway. One over and one under bridge was of masonry construction while the remainder all had masonry abutments and timber girders. There was also a viaduct on trussed timber girders 30 foot long. A level crossing at 36 miles 27 chains, Minish, had a gatekeeper with flags. Lt Tyler 'considered it absolutely necessary that a signal post with lamps be provided' as approaching from Mallow it was on a falling gradient of 1:108 and on a 60-chain curve. He delayed sending his report until 17 July until he received a certificate from the company that his requirements had been completed.

The railway opened on 22 June 1853 with a road connection between Freemount and Headford. This was the year of the Great Exhibition in Dublin attracting considerable numbers of foreigners to the city and many of these wished to view the Lakes of Killarney which was now more accessible given that the railway was open (apart for four miles). A *Cork*

Examiner reporter eloquently wrote in the *Freemans Journal* ‘from Mallow the stranger is conveyed by railway to Freemount station where he enters the omnibus, which conveys him four or five miles through a singularly wild and picturesque mountain road to Headford where he again enters the train and is conveyed to the terminus at Killarney’. As many as 250 passengers a day were travelling to Killarney requiring at least eight, and frequently ten, omnibuses to connect with trains at Freemount. Hotels at Killarney, the Castletlough, Victoria and Muckcross had difficulty accommodating the numbers booking.

Lt Tyler arranged to inspect Freemount-Headford on 9 July and he arrived in Dublin the previous evening. On the morning of the Chairman and Engineer of the KJR informed him that part of a cutting had fallen in on the rails and the line would not be ready for inspection before 12 July. Lt Tyler postponed his inspection till that day and noted the track was of bridge rail 80 lb to the yard with sleepers every 2 ft 6 in – similar to the rest of the Mallow-Killarney line ‘but is in bad order’. Freemount Level Crossing was intended to be a bridge in the Parliamentary plan, but he would not use this as a reason for not opening the line, provided a signal was provided. It was not a busy crossing and the engineer agreed to provide a signal and crossing keeper immediately.

The Inspecting Officer had considerable concern about a 62-chain long cutting near Freemount, stating it would be necessary to remove a large quantity of rock in addition to what had already been taken away. Its deepest section was 54 feet and the slope on inspection was about $\frac{1}{4}$ to 1. It would therefore take some time to remove the rock and to ensure the safety of the public while the work was in progress, safety measures were put in place. Every train would be ordered to stop on arriving at either side of the cutting and not to proceed until a white hand signal was displayed by a responsible person who was satisfied the cutting is safe throughout before letting the train pass. Lt Tyler also considered the maximum speed should be 4 mph.

This spoil removal was complete by November. Lt Tyler concluded his report noting that both Freemount and Headford stations would be closed upon the opening of the line and there would be no station between Millstreet and Killarney. Within a year a station was proposed at Shinnagh and opened on 1 December 1854. It was renamed Rathmore on 1 January 1864. A new station, Headford Junction, a quarter of a mile nearer Killarney, opened on 1 January 1859 in readiness for the opening of the Kenmare branch on 4 September 1893.

In October 1853 exceptional rainfall caused flooding not seen since 1789. In twenty-three days, 6.9 inches fell. The flooding peaked on 2 November severely damaging sixteen bridges in County Cork. On the Killarney branch the Chairman, Mr Pennefather, examined the branch in detail and returned to Dublin on 7 November after a minute inspection, reporting only two cattle passes damaged and about 70 foot of embankment damaged caused by the collapse of the Rathcoole mail-coach road bridge. Rathcoole railway bridge was undamaged though part of the Ballydaly overbridge had fallen but the rubble had been removed from the track within an hour. The total flood damage to the line did not exceed £300. Passengers were still being conveyed by rail with the exception of fifty yards where they had to travel on foot but this damage was expected to be repaired by Monday 14 November 1853.

The new railway now offered new communications advantages for County Kerry. There was considerable delay to the mail traffic which was still being conveyed by road, and the Post Office was strongly criticised for not having responded to the railway's offer of a rate for conveying the mail. The English & Irish Telegraph Co entered into an arrangement with the KJR to erect telegraph wires between Killarney and Mallow in connection with the Great Southern & Western Railway. In March 1853, Mr Elworthy CE made arrangements for the erection of the poles as the telegraph had to be in working order for the opening of the line.

At the half-yearly meeting of shareholders held at King's-bridge [sic] station on 31 July 1854, those present were told, with the exception of one small station at Lombardstown (opened 1 March 1855), the railway was complete and had been handed over to the GS&WR. It was added that the hotel at Killarney, with accommodation for 125 guests, was almost complete and would open within a month.

Tralee and Killarney Railway

When the Tralee & Killarney Railway was first proposed, there was opposition to the scheme with Lord Kenmare being one of the main opponents despite he having been a major supporter of the KJR. A very practical long letter, signed *Kerryman*, in the *Kerry Evening Post* on 19 January 1853 and the persistence of the promoters seemed to have reversed attitudes including Lord Kenmare, through whose estate the railway was passing for eleven miles. Lord Kenmare gave the land to the Company free of charge. The promoters were quick to point out the advantage of a railway across the agricultural lands through which the

line would pass conveying cattle, corn, butter and other produce. They cited that Tralee would be within three hours of Cork, four hours of Limerick, seven hours of Dublin and nineteen hours of Liverpool with its large industrial area. The first sod of the new line from Killarney to Tralee was cut on Wednesday 19 September 1855 by the Lord Lieutenant the Earl of Carlisle. A Directors' meeting in Tralee early in December 1858, was told that laying the track would commence 'next week' at the Killarney end and progress at a mile a week with the line planned to open on 1 May 1859.

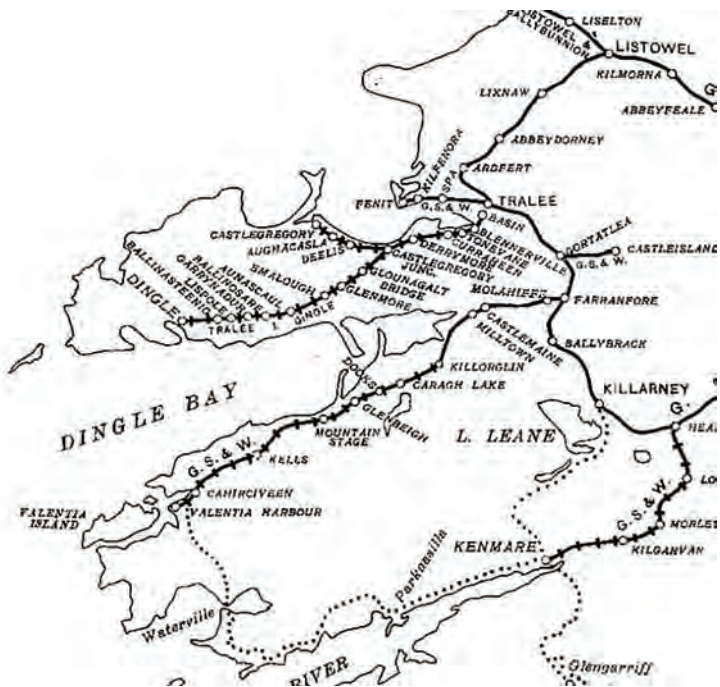


Plate 3: Map of Kerry railways 1906 (Source: Viceregal Commission)

Colonel George Ross RE inspected the railway for the Board of Trade on 14 July 1859. He noted that the railway was 21 miles 68 chains, single track throughout but sufficient land had been purchased for double line. Bridges were constructed for double-track. The railway was built by an independent company, but the GS&WR were 'charged with the entire management of it'. Key points from his inspection were as follows: 'The

junction with the GS&WR is by means of a siding [sic] at Killarney. Tralee has been completed with a passenger platform, siding, turntable, signalling and a temporary ticket office. The GS&WR were proposing passenger traffic alone. Preparation for goods traffic will be a work of time [sic]. There was one intermediate station, Farranfore, 10 miles 77 chains from Killarney, about halfway to Tralee. It had a siding, a loop all protected by signals. The GS&WR did not propose to use it as a passing place initially – Killarney to be the passing place for trains between Tralee and Mallow, a distance of sixty-two miles. The forty-one miles from Mallow to Killarney 41 was to be one working section and Killarney-Tralee the other’.



Plate 4: For the construction of the railway from Killarney to Tralee, the railway opened a large ballast pit on the North side of the railway from the back of Fair Hill, Killarney, to the Tralee Road overbridge. Overhead bins were erected on large wooden frames and wagons were shunted underneath and quickly filled. Large quantities of stone and gravel were extracted until the 1930s. The sidings were then retained for storing trains on busy GAA days. In 1957, old carriages that had been used in Cork for Summer Sunday excursions to seaside stations in West Cork were parked there and left to decay as seen on 10 June 1958. (Source: Roy Denison).

Telegraph was laid from Mallow to Killarney but not on the new line to Tralee. Col. Ross stated it was desirable that the telegraph be extended there and Farranfore may occasionally be used as a passing place. He also noted ‘the works on the line are not of an important character with the exception of some very heavy [sic] rock and clay cuttings. There are numerous cattle creeps under the railway and farm roads passing over the

track on masonry arches or plate girders. A considerable number of under-bridges and viaducts are spans not exceeding 35 foot. The latter are constructed of masonry or masonry lined with brick work and some of them with lattice girders. Works seem very good and the girders sufficiently strong. Embankments have been standing for a considerable period and seemed good. The ballast was good quality, 18 inches deep under the sleepers. The formation, 18 feet wide, including in clay cuttings reducing to 15 feet in rock cuttings. Bridge rails averaging 27 feet long and weighing 80 lb per yard were used throughout. It was laid on traverse sleepers 2 feet apart at the joints and 3 feet apart at the intermediate sleepers and affixed by wood screws 6 inches long and to the joint sleepers by a fishplate chair 2ft 10in long weighing 42lb and with the flange of the rail joint spiked to the joint sleepers’.



Plate 5: A piece of bridge-rail as used in the laying of the Mallow-Tralee railway line
(Source: Courtesy Bodmin Town Museum, Cornwall).

The track was good, but Colonel Ross thought it would be better if fang bolts were substituted for fixing the rail and chair to the sleepers at the joints and requested that the Engineer of the GS&WR bring the subject to the notice of his directors to replace the spikes by fang bolts. Of seventeen authorised level crossings on the line, the Inspector found one had been replaced by an over-bridge, two by a deviation of the road and another is likely to be closed by arrangement with the county. In conclusion approval was given to open the line subject to there being only one engine or two coupled together at any time between Killarney and Tralee.

The line opened for passengers and parcels on 18 July 1859 with two trains in each direction weekdays and one on Sundays. Goods and cattle trains started on Wednesday 24 August. Mr Edward McDonnell, GS&WR Chairman, visited Tralee two days later and noted 13 wagons there loaded with goods for Killarney. He purchased £159 worth of furniture from Walsh & Co, Square, Tralee, for the Railway Hotel at Killarney which was sent at once by train. Two further intermediate stations opened later Ballybrack on 1 November 1892 and Gortatlea on 1 August 1871.



Plate 6: Great Southern Hotel, Killarney, about 1950, approached by the tree-lined Railway Avenue. It was one of the first railway owned hotels in the world, opening in 1853, the year the railway reached Killarney. A large extension was built to the left in 1957. (Source: Ashe Studios, Dublin, courtesy CIE).

	Dublin	Cork
First Class	38s 2d	15s 2d
Second Class	28s 8d	11s 5d
Third Class	17s 3d	6s 9d

Table 1: Tralee Fares, Opening day 18 July 1859 (Source: Kerry Evening Post)

Killarney Junction-Millstreet	6 April 1853
Millstreet-Freemount	25 May 1853
Headford-Killarney	22 June 1853
Freemount-Headford	15 July 1853
Killarney-Tralee (passenger traffic)	18 July 1859
Killarney-Tralee (goods traffic)	24 August 1859

Table 2: Rail line opening dates (Source: Newspaper Archives)

Accidents on the Line

At the time the railway was being planned, there was no development east of the town and Killarney station was constructed in what is today the town centre. This has been of great benefit to the large numbers of passengers who have arrived at Killarney by train since 1853. However, when the Tralee & Killarney Railway desired to continue the railway westward to Tralee, the track layout required trains going to Tralee to reverse into a 'siding' parallel with the route from Mallow and then go forward up a steep gradient of 1:100 towards Tralee. This procedure was questioned three times, the first following an accident on 27 August 1869.

On this occasion a train from Tralee went at speed into the 'reversing siding' and struck the buffer stop. This caused injury to twenty-one passengers who received cuts and bruises, with one lady's nose being broken. The accident was investigated by Lieutenant Colonel F H Rich, Railways Inspecting Officer.

On the day in question, a cattle show was taking place in Tralee where a special train arrived from Cork at 10:30. It left at 17:40 and on its return and consisted of an engine and tender, eleven carriages and three horse boxes. Two of the carriages had a brake compartment each with a guard. The driver, on arriving at Farranfore, stopped his train before his engine had reached half-way up the platform. He told the signalman he had forgotten the train staff and requested the station master allow him to put the train in the siding and return with the locomotive to Tralee, to obtain the train staff. The station master properly told him he could not return to Tralee, that there were three more trains to follow, and that he should have brought a train ticket and not the train staff. He directed the driver to bring his train forward, to bring the carriages to the platform and allow the passengers get out. The driver moved the train forward but did not stop until he had gone so far that the last carriage of the train was 80 yards beyond the platform. He was then called back, and this time he stopped

his train at the platform and the Farranfore passengers alighted. The Station Master had some doubts about the sobriety of the driver and, as he was not personally acquainted with the man, he sought the opinion of the guard and was assured the driver was 'all right'. The station master then gave the driver a train ticket authorising him to proceed to Killarney and left Farranfore at 18.20 for Killarney 10¾ miles distant.

At about two miles out from Killarney station, the railway falls towards the station on a gradient of 1:100, changing to 1:120 approaching the ticket platform (locally known as the check platform) and then rises for about 200 yards at 1:720 till it reached a buffer stop and earth bank behind. The train was scheduled to stop at the ticket platform and when the passengers' tickets had been checked the train was to reverse into Killarney station. On the day in question, the train appears to have been travelling at considerable speed when it reached the top of the incline two miles from Killarney. One of the Second Guards stated that owing to the speed of the train he applied his brake as he passed an over-bridge, about 1,630 yards from the ticket platform, and the Head Guard, travelling in the rear van, applied his brake when passing an over-bridge, about 700 yards from the ticket platform. The signal was clear for the train to approach the ticket platform and, according to the evidence of a person who witnessed it from Killarney station platform, the train was doing a speed three times faster than usual.

As the driver passed the signal, he put the engine into reverse in an attempt to stop at the platform but overran and struck and broke the buffer stop and mounted the earth bank at a speed that Colonel Rich estimated to be 12-15mph. The engine came to a halt against the abutment of an over-bridge, about 20 feet beyond the buffer stop. The front wheels of the tender were derailed as were two wheels of each of the first two carriages. There was minor damage to the engine, tender and leading two carriages. The driver remained on his engine and was not 'much hurt' but the fireman jumped clear and, initially, did not appear to have been injured but more than two weeks later, when visited by Colonel Rich, he was in bed and appeared seriously ill. The Second Guard jumped before impact and was uninjured, but the Head Guard was knocked down and bruised. Mr. George Ilberry, General Manager of the GS&WR, saw the train arrive, ran to the point of collision and spoke to the driver. He thought he had a problem and sent a policeman to examine him, but the latter thought he was sober but 'flurried and hurt' by the accident.

The crew of the train were interviewed about the incident and stated

that upon arrival at Tralee in the morning, they put the engine in a siding and about 11:00 they went into the town for breakfast. The fireman stated that he returned to the station about 12:00 and the driver about 30 minutes later. The latter, on the contrary, stated that he went into a chapel and did not return until after 16:00. Both men were on their engine well before departure time and no one appeared to have noticed anything amiss with them before departure. About one and a half miles after departing from Tralee, the driver told the fireman he had left without the train token or a ticket and, while they should have protected the train and the driver gone back for authority, they both agreed to go on to Farranfore. When questioned by the Inspecting Officer, both denied they had stopped short and then over-run Farranfore platform. Several days after the accident, the driver found the train ticket for the journey in the breast pocket of his coat having forgotten he had been given it!

Colonel Rich concluded that he had no doubt that the driver and fireman were not in a fit state to do their duty, and that accident was the result of the driver's misconduct. He had been twenty years a GS&WR driver and had been suspended since the accident. In the final paragraph of the report Colonel Rich concluded 'I recommend that the blind siding and stop buffers, where the accident happened, be dispensed with, and that the branch line to Tralee be carried for some distance alongside the line from Killarney to Mallow, and be joined to that line'. While it is normal practice to carry out the recommendations of a Railways Inspecting Officer, this one was ignored by the company.

Royal Train

Killarney was very popular with tourists May to September and received a huge boost with the visit of Queen Victoria in 1861.

The Royal train left King's Bridge [sic] at precisely 12.50 on 26 August 1861 formed of the Royal Carriage (built specially by the GS&WR for the visit), five First Class carriages and luggage vans. At the stations along the line, great crowds assembled who greeted the royal party with loud cheers as the train passed. Thurles station was crowded to suffocation by the peasantry of the surrounding districts and was tastefully decorated in evergreens as were the reserve engines. The train arrived at Limerick Junction at 16:12 and stopped for ten minutes and a guard of honour of Constabulary was drawn up on the platform. The station was adorned in evergreens. The train also stopped at Kilmallock and Mallow, arriving at Killarney at 18.30. This has been the most prestigious train ever to arrive

in Killarney. The Queen was accompanied by Prince Albert and her children Prince Alfred, Princesses Alice and Helena. The Royal party were then escorted from the train to Kenmare House passing three roadside platforms specially erected, each with 800 people seated. The Queen's days were spent touring the local sights and included a visit to what is known since as Lady's View - Her Majesty declaring that such was its beauty it should only be gazed upon by ladies.

At noon on Thursday 29 August the party left Muckcross House for Killarney station and joined the Royal Train which departed at 12:54 for Dublin, slowing at Millstreet to pick up the token and arrived at Mallow at 13.54 stopping for water. It departed at 14.03 arriving at Kingsbridge at 17.59 taking a little over five hours - an average point to point speed of 35mph. Mr George Miller, Chief Engineer of the GS&WR is reported as having driven the Royal Train in both directions though this was perhaps symbolic as he must have been accompanied by a competent driver with route knowledge and familiar with the locomotive. As the Royal party joined horse drawn carriages at King's Bridge for Westland Row station the 87th Royal Irish played *God save the Queen*. After crossing the city, the Royal party travelled to Kingstown Pier, joined the Royal Yacht *Victoria and Albert*. They did not sail for Holyhead until Friday morning and that evening left Holyhead by special train for Aboyne station some 32¼ miles West of Aberdeen, the nearest station to Balmoral Castle.

The extensive publicity of the Queen's visit, in such prestigious publications as *the Illustrated London News*, launched Killarney as a premier tourist destination. Tourist have flocked to the town and its surrounds ever since except during the 1914-1924 period (World War 1, the War of Independence and the Civil War) and during World War 2 until 1948.

Early Excursions & Fares

As soon as the railway opened to Mallow excursion fares were offered to Killarney which included omnibuses to Killarney. For the 10:00 train from Dublin to Killarney on Wednesday 25 May 1853, opening day of the railway to Freemount, from where, according to the advertisement in the *Freemans Journal*, passengers would 'be conveyed by the Company's omnibuses to Killarney'. A First Class ticket valid for return within 27 days was 46s 6d, Second class 34s 6d. The omnibus operators declared their journey was through remote scenic countryside and it was not long before the number of tourists arriving in Killarney exceeded the available accommodation.

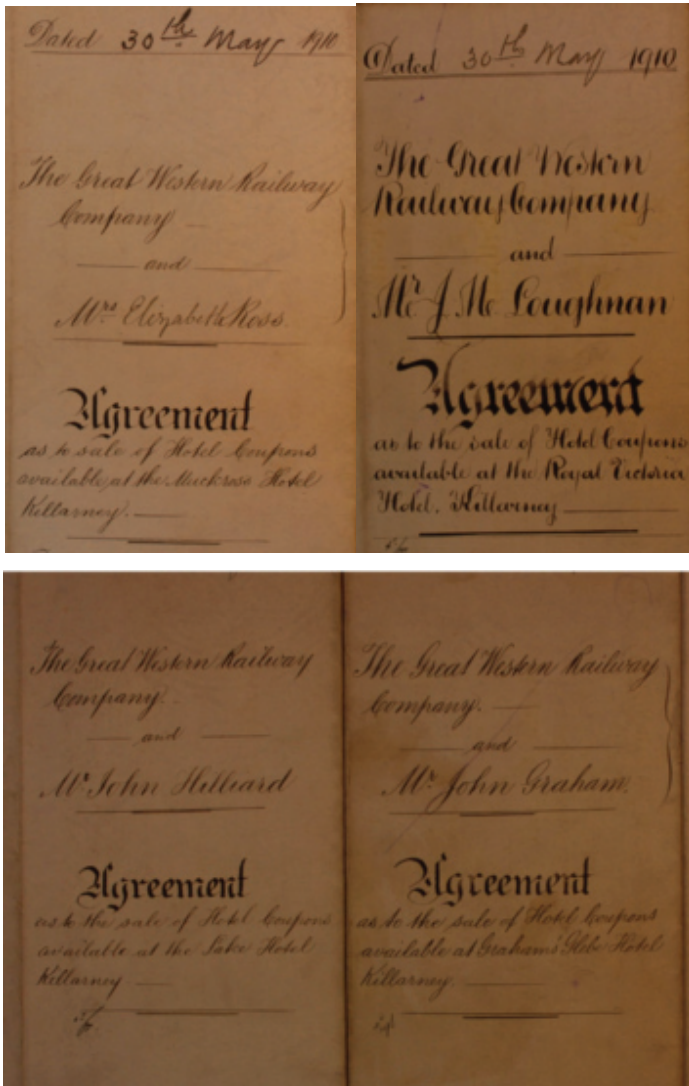


Plate 7: Agreements between the Great Western Railway and Killarney hotels signed on 30 May 1910. (Top l-r) Mrs Elizabeth Ross, Muckross Hotel. Mr J Mc Loughnan, Royal Victoria Hotel. (Lower l-r) Mr John Hilliard, Lake Hotel. Mr John Graham, Graham's Glebe Hotel (Source: Oliver Doyle – Courtesy Archivist, Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre, Chippenham, GWR Collection).

For the Killarney Race meet on 16-18 August 1855, the railway provided a special train from Cork each morning at 09:30 calling at all stations from Mallow, returning at 20:30. In the Summer of 1864, Family Excursion tickets were offer between 1 May and 31 October by any direct train to Killarney at a fare for two passengers costing First Class £4.10.0d, Second Class £3.12.6d. Return was valid by any direct train within a month. On Monday 24 September and Friday 19 October 1866, a special excursion train departed Kingsbridge at 11:00 with both a Killarney and Cork portion with the same fares to both destinations – First Class £1, Second Class 15s.

As track improved and locomotives became more powerful, journey times decreased. An excursion from Dublin to Killarney at 16:00 on Saturday 4 August 1888 had an overall journey time of 6 hours. Two hundred availed of the service, returning from Killarney on Monday at 16:30. Next day, Sunday, a special train from Cork at 08:00, conveyed staff on the Cork 'branch' free of charge to Killarney. According to the *Kerry Sentinel* of the 8 August 'married men were allowed bring their wives and families and unmarried men their lady friends'. The train arrived at Killarney at 11:00 with 500 passengers. Many availed of boat trips from Ross Castle where the Young Men's Society band played. The train returned from Killarney at 19:30.

On the Queen's Irish visit in 1900, there was hope she would return to Killarney but not so. It was expected her visit would increase the number of British tourists, but one newspaper reporter wrote 'the badness and expensiveness of the hotels was a deterrent' as well as the 'badness of the train service'.

The opening of the Fishguard-Rosslare route to Ireland in 1906 made Killarney more accessible with 'day' excursions from London (Paddington) overnight one night, returning overnight the following night. The first such excursion left Paddington on Monday evening 16 September 1907 bound for Killarney, 478 miles distant, and the return fare was less than a sovereign. The train of five coaches, including a restaurant car, weighted 170 tons and was hauled by a recently built 'Star' Class 4-6-0 locomotive. *The Times* reported that the train was to run non-stop Paddington-Fishguard Harbour, 262 miles, in five hours (Unlikely as water would have been required). The sea passage of 62 miles from Fishguard to Rosslare was scheduled to be $2\frac{3}{4}$ hours using one of the new turbine steamers. The pace slackened for the 154-mile train journey from Rosslare Harbour to Killarney, taking five hours. Eight hours was allowed

in Killarney, and the return train was due in London at 08.30 on Wednesday. *The Times* described it as an example of railway enterprise - a visit to Killarney being for the first time within the list of day excursions from London.

As the traffic developed additional hotels were built in Killarney and the GWR signed contracts with hotels in the town for the supply of meals and accommodation so they could sell 'inclusive packages' to Killarney. Thomas Cook, the well-known travel agent also promoted Killarney with packages. Local bandits in the Gap of Dunloe caused an adverse report in the *Times* on 15 May 1907 after firing five shots at a car in the Gap sent to meet Cook's tourists who had proceeded up the Lakes and was to bring them back through the Gap. The tourists had fortunately privately hired ponies and were following the car some distance behind. The car, with two policemen who were escorting it, raced back up the Gap again. The tourists, escorted by a large number of pony-men, were allowed to proceed down the Gap.

After partition the GWR was anxious to further develop Irish tourist traffic. At 02:00 on 1 July 1925 members of its Board including the Right Honourable Viscount Churchill GCVO JP, the Earl of Edgecumbe and the Earl of Dunraven as well as Sir Felix Pole, General Manager, and the Company's Chief Officers, left Fishguard Harbour on board the *SS Saint Andrew* for Sneem, Co Kerry where it anchored off-shore. The party then stayed at Parknasilla and on Monday 4 July they entertained the Directors and Chief Officers of the Great Southern Railway at Killarney as well as 'gentlemen of the district interested in tourist development' [sic]. On their return journey to Fishguard the steamer called at Cove[sic] so the party could visit Cork and the *Saint Andrew* then went up to Waterford City and anchored mid-river. As the vessel only had a passenger certificate for short passages, the GSR officials travelled by train to Cove and Waterford for the meetings there. To this day tourists are a high percentage of passengers to Killarney station.

War Memorial

From the extensive lands it acquired at Killarney, the railway gave a site for the memorial to the officers and men of the Royal Munster Fusiliers who fell in Burma and South Africa (1881-1902) - a 24ft high Celtic cross of carved Kilkenny limestone costing over £1,000 with bronze tablets depicting commemorative groups. The monument was unveiled at 12:00 on Wednesday 26 September 1906 by Colonel the Right Honourable Earl

Kenmare, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, HML in the presence of Lord Dunraven, Lieutenant-General Sir C Knox, Lady M Douglas, the Right Hon Dorothy Brown and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Nottingham, Right Rev Dr Robert Brindle DSO. After the unveiling a band and buglers drawn from the 4th Battalion played *The Dead March in Saul* following which Dr Brindle consecrated the memorial and a bugler sounded the *Last Post*. Lord Dunraven then spoke, and the proceedings ended with *God Save the King*.

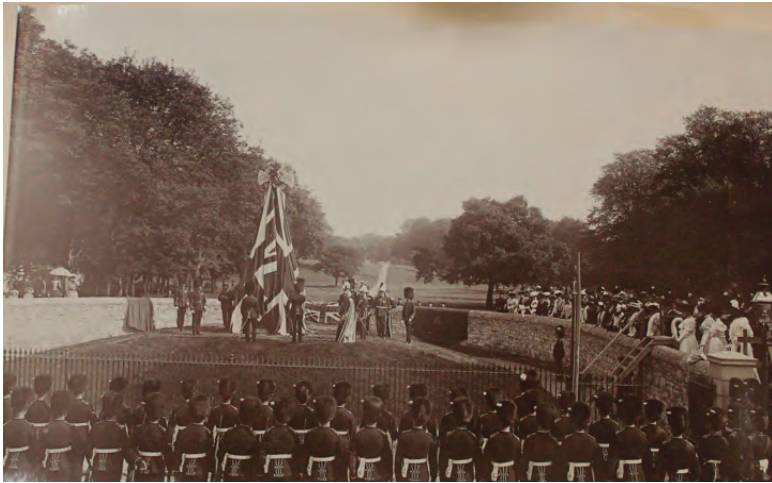


Plate 8: Unveiling of Memorial to the Munster Fusiliers between Railway Avenue and Countess Road in Killarney. At 12:00 on 26 September 1906, Colonel the Right Honourable Earl Kenmare removed the Union Flag to unveil the Memorial. Dr Robert Brindle DSO, Catholic Archbishop of Nottingham, former Chaplain to the Forces, consecrated the Cross. A detachment of the 4th Battalion with band and buglers, stationed in Tralee, is drawn up in front. Source: William McCarthy, Tralee, Courtesy National Army Museum Archives, Chelsea, London.

Troubled Times

During the War of Independence, the Great Southern Hotel became a military barracks with large numbers of the Royal Fusiliers encamped there. As a result, no significant attacks occurred at Killarney railway station but at both adjacent stations, Headford Junction and Ballybrack, there were serious incidents.

On Monday 21 March 1921, one officer and 29 other ranks of the 1st Royal Fusiliers were proceeding by train from Kenmare to Killarney when the train was ambushed about 15:00 at Headford Junction. Before the

arrival of this train, thirty to fifty undisguised men gave the station master and his wife three minutes to get out of their house. His wife suggested locking the door but was told not to. Three open wagons and a covered one were moved as they were obstructing the rebels' view of where the Kenmare train would stop. In total about 100 rebels encamped in the station house and on the 12 foot high embankment on the Up side (towards Mallow). They opened heavy fire on the troops as the train stopped, immediately causing considerable casualties with the officer-in-charge, a sergeant and six other ranks killed while twelve were injured, two of whom died later. Some of the passengers were armed with revolvers and after leaving the train joined the rebels. A few military survivors fought stubbornly for fifty minutes and particular credit was given to the coolness and bravery of a Vickers machine gunner who held the rebels a bay until a train from Mallow arrived with an officer and fourteen other ranks onboard returning off escort. The Officer commanding the troops heard the firing in the station and instructed the driver to stop about 600 yards short. The troops detrained and went across the fields to dislodge the rebels and drove them into the open. After a search for rebels, they collected the bodies of their dead comrades and those of two rebels. They took all by train to the Great Southern Hotel barracks at Killarney.

When news of the ambush reached Killarney, the military commandeered the 16:40 train to Mallow, cleared it of civilians, and sent a large force of 1st Royal Fusiliers to Headford Junction but fighting had already ceased. The military reported that there were four dead rebels seen, two of whom were recovered – one the rebel leader. The rebel fire killed a civilian Killarney cattle dealer, Mr John Breen, and injured two other passengers one of whom, Mr J. Cagney, also a cattle dealer, died on 23 March and his remain were conveyed by 13:22 train to Mallow near his home village of Liscarroll. Also, that evening at 16:00, a large crowd assembled at the Great Southern Hotel to receive the remains of the two recovered rebels for their funeral. Some rebels' arms and ammunition were captured but the army lost nothing. When the train was returning to Killarney it was fired on about halfway and a woman driving cows was shot in the foot.

At Ballybrack on Tuesday 9 November 1920, two Auxiliary Police Constables were travelling back from leave to Farranfore when six or seven men jumped from the train and opened fire on their carriage injuring both. They were then dragged as they were dying from the train onto the

platform and had further bullets shot into them. Constable Turner was killed, and Constable Woods was seriously injured. Two men then boarded the Guard's van while six others got on the locomotive and ordered the driver to proceed and, after some distance, they ordered him to stop where all eight disembarked and disappeared into the countryside. A special train took both constables to Military HQ in Killarney. A telegram was sent to Cork for a medical specialist to travel by the next available train to operate on Constable Woods who was seriously injured. On Thursday 11 November the remains of Constable Turner, a former member of the Welsh Regiment, was despatched by train to his native Kent after which a military inquiry was held at Military HQ where evidence was given by Ballybrack station staff. None of the assailants could be identified. Constable Woods, a former Grenadier Guardsman, later died and his remains left Killarney by the 19:27 Mail train on 16 November for burial his native Glasgow. In June 1921, Constable Turner's mother was awarded £1,000 compensation at Tralee Quarter Sessions. At the time the RIC had great difficulty recruiting constables and some British soldiers left the army and joined the RIC. The Ballybrack signalman, Denis Donovan, who lived 200 yards from the station, was arrested after his house was searched and seven rounds of revolver ammunition found within. A District Court Marshall acquitted him as there was no evidence given that he owned the house.

Travel by rail continued to carry a risk. On Wednesday 8 June 1921, a Tralee-bound passenger train left Ballybrack about 18:30 in daylight and within 60 yards fierce fire opened on both sides of the line. As woman and children screamed and passengers lay on the floors, the military replied as the train rushed on. One soldier was killed, and three attackers were seen to fall. When the train reached Tralee about 19:00 the body of the deceased soldier, Private Harry Minion, North Lancashire Regiment, was removed to Tralee Military Barracks.

In the weeks leading up to the Civil War life in Killarney was difficult, the railway and roads were continuously being damaged, and goods supplies were low. The monthly fairs were in vain as cattle dealers could not travel to the town and livestock could not be moved. The first fifteen years of the 1900s had been prosperous years for the town thanks to the railway bringing in increasing numbers of tourists. The majority of the population knew how good life had been and sought to have it restored.

On Saturday 22 April 1922, Michael Collins, Major-General Sean McKeon, Mr Finian Lynch TD and Mr Kevin O'Higgins TD travelled on

the down 07:35 Mail train from Kingsbridge changing at Mallow enroute to address the people of Killarney. The journey was uneventful until the train approached Headford Junction Station Gates which were closed against the railway, chained and padlocked, and the keys taken away. The problem was quickly overcome when Major-General McKeon borrowed a track key hammer from a permanent way man and smashed the lock. A similar problem was encountered a few miles from Killarney and similarly overcome. The train arrived at Killarney over an hour late.



Plate 9: Killarney station on 15 September 1960 with a gas wagon on the right with two horizontal cylinders of gas for the Radion Train dining cars. Behind is a long train of cattle wagons as nationally cattle fairs were large in September and October with farmers downsizing their herds to conserve winter feed. (Source: Roy Denison)

The delegation made their way towards the meeting platform in the town but were stopped on their way. The New Hotel in Killarney was occupied by the Irregulars and the garrison leader stood on the roadway with revolver drawn. He told Mr Collins that the meeting could not be held until an explanation was forthcoming for an incident alleged to have happened near Listowel the night before. Mr Collins had a short exchange of words about the incident, smiled and proceeded on his way while Major-General McKeon remarked that he was an Irish soldier who could walk where he liked in Ireland and continued walking. The garrison from the hotel were called out and responded immediately. Some were uniformed and all were armed with rifles, revolvers, bayonets, and

Thompson machine guns. These were trained menacingly on Mr Collins, Major-General McKeon, Mr Finian Lynch TD (served as a TD until 1944 and was an eminent barrister and judge), Mr Kevin O'Higgins TD (was MP for Queens County 1918-21 and a TD 1921-27) and the unprotected members of the party. Two Franciscan priests from the nearby friary and the Administrator from the Catholic Cathedral intervened. After an eventful and tense couple of hours during which the platform for the party to speak from in the Market Square was burned, the meeting took place outside the Friary, chaired by Fr. P.T. Fitzgerald, Administrator, Killarney. There was much cheering for Michael Collins and Major-General McKeon with Mr Finian Lynch TD receiving the greatest applause. The party return to Dublin by road.

The transport situation in Kerry during 1922 was very difficult and there were food shortages. The railway from Tralee to Mallow was impassable and the nearest open railway station to Tralee was Newcastle West while Mallow was the nearest one to Killarney – both 40 miles by roads which were torn up making travel difficult. Goods being transported were frequently subject to seizure. In one day alone fourteen cars of flour for the people of Killarney were seized. The situation was made more difficult on Monday 14 August 1922 when nine of the ten masonry arches of the great viaduct over the River Blackwater, South of Mallow station, were demolished by the Irregulars with the assistance of two German engineers from Krupps of Essen. Michael Collins viewed the damage the following Sunday, 20 August, and announced he would be back in a couple of days with engineers to clear the rubble and a replacement bridge of steel construction would be provided as a quick replacement. He did not live to get back as he was shot dead at Béal na Bláth the following Tuesday. The two centre arches of Monard viaduct nearer Cork were also blown as was a bridge over a river near Banteer. Reconstruction of the Blackwater viaduct took just over two years, and President W T Cosgrave ceremonially drove the first train across it on 16 October 1924.

The New Great Southern Hotel at Killarney, open just six years, was maliciously burned on 16 August 1922. In September 1922, Ballybrack signal cabin was burned. At this time the people of Killarney were in a bad way for food. Supplies were being brought from Tralee in cartloads in convoy at great risk. Frequently, as soon as damage to structures was repaired, further damage was incurred. Curran's Bridge, two miles the Killarney side of Farranfore, was repaired after malicious damage and reopened on 8 January 1923 only to be badly damaged again two days later.



Plates 10-14: Road over bridges between Mallow and Killarney are all single track masonry arch spans while some original bridges for agricultural access are simple iron spans (lower left) supported by masonry abutments. Many of these have been renewed with concrete spans and concrete block walls (Lower right)
(Source: Oliver Doyle, Facilitated by Irish Rail).

About the Author

A third-generation railway man, Oliver Doyle grew up at railway stations where his father was Stationmaster: Bantry, Killarney (1956-59), Claremorris & Rosslare harbour. He joined CIE as a booking clerk at Rosslare Harbour in June 1962 and moved to Dublin in 1966. He was promoted to management in 1980 becoming Operating Manager in 1990 responsible for timetabling and the Central Control. Deeply interested in mechanical signalling from an early age, tutored by the signalman at Bantry. Before retiring after almost 48 years' service, Oliver spent five years co-managing the modernisation of track layouts at stations on much of the railway network with the new layouts controlled by computerised electric signalling. This included providing increased track capacity to facilitate more frequent services if required in the future. A life-long researcher and author on railways and tramways, both historic and modern, Oliver has had some 70 papers published in journals and magazines. He also had five books published co-authored with Stephen Hirsch.

References

I accumulated information for this paper over the last 70 years. During 1956-59 I had long conversations with Jerry Cahill, Signalman and Dave Cronin, Parcels Porter, Killarney. Both gave me information dating back to the War of Independence. Land plans for the building of the railway I consulted at the House of Lords courtesy of the Keeper of the Record. Historic maps I studied at the British Library, St Pancras, London. At the British National Archives, Kew, Surrey I found considerable information in the vast collection of pre-1921 railway files there. For Military matters involving the railway, the information is at the National Army Archives, Chelsea, London. The Killarney hotels contracts with the Great Western Railway I photographed at the Wiltshire & Swindon Historic Centre, Chippenham. Records of the mechanical signalling are available in the Railway Signalling Company, Fazakerly, files at the Liverpool Record Office. Both the Irish Newspaper Archive and the British Newspaper online collection at the British Library, yielded a large volume of interesting facts. Much of the railway excursion information is from the GS&WR/GSR/CIE/Irish Rail Weekly Circulars - an internal railway booklet issued weekly since 1888.

Labour and Sinn Féin, War and Revolution in Kerry, 1914-1916

by Kieran McNulty



Plate 1: The Mall, Tralee, 1905 (Source: National Library of Ireland)

Introduction

Francis Devine has asserted that ‘socialist politics had deep roots in Kerry’. Karl Marx with his daughter Eleanor and Friedrich Engels visited Killarney on a tour of southern Ireland in 1868 leading to extensive writings on the Irish question and the observation that Ireland is England’s ‘weakest point. Ireland lost, the British Empire is gone’ which would in turn lead to an upsurge in class struggle in England.¹ In contrast to most other research of this period, this article aims to demonstrate, using County Kerry as a microcosm of national and international events, the nature of the upsurge in revolutionary activity, particularly amongst the working-class that occurred in Ireland from early 1914 to the Easter Rising of 1916. It will analyse the relationship of the working-class to the labour and republican movements during these years, a period when a mass working-class

movement began to emerge, mobilised in support of economic and democratic demands.

According to Conor Kostick, the failure of traditional histories to include the experience of the working class when discussing the Irish revolution, ‘weakens their narrative’,² while Dominic Haugh claims ‘... the historiography of this period views the working class as playing little more than a subservient...role to nationalism.’³ It should be stressed however, that the political situation in regard to the development of the labour movement in Kerry during the First World War was rather different from that of the rest of the country, as Crean, explains:

In striking contrast, the urban labour movement in Kerry, particularly in Tralee, experienced the high point of its political if not its organisational activity during the war in late 1915 to early 1916 rather than 1917-1918. The dynamic for this earlier development was provided by the intervention of the ITGWU and the close relationship between the local labour leaders in Tralee and the Irish Volunteers who were especially strong in Kerry.⁴

This point shall be discussed later, in the context of the Easter Rising, but it should be stressed here that the politics of the national labour movement and in particular labour’s adherence to syndicalism lent itself to this close and at times subservient relationship with nationalism.⁵

The Emergence of the Labour Movement in Kerry

Despite the lack of emphasises on developing a strong political party, workers in Kerry were to fight some very bitter industrial disputes in the 1914-16 period. Even before the ITGWU launched itself in the county, trade unions in Tralee, by far the county’s largest town with a population of 10,300,⁶ had fought a number of strikes against the town’s employers.⁷ This rise in union militancy led to attempts being made in Tralee at the end of the nineteenth century to establish a trades’ council to help unify and coordinate the struggles of the different unions in the town. These efforts failed, due to what Paul Dillon has argued were ‘divisions between skilled and unskilled workers.’⁸ Finally, in early 1914, Tralee Trades’ and Labour Council (TTL) were successfully revived with a membership of over 500 workers.⁹ Several unions were represented on the Trades Council including the Workers’ Union, the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR),

Irish Drapers Assistants' Association (IDAA), Carpenters' Union, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), Bakers' Union, Tailors' Union, Brick and Stone Layers' Union and the Grocer's Assistants' Union.¹⁰ T. O'Gorman (IDAA) was elected President of TTLC, Michael J. O'Connor, Vice President and Michael O'Connell, Secretary (the latter two were both shop stewards in Tralee Workers' Union).¹¹ *The Kerryman* reported at the time, this leadership was often cautious in its attitude preaching 'harmonisation' between workers and employers and 'peaceful' resolution to disputes. It was the rank and file that often took a leading role in strike action and put pressure on the leadership to be more actively supportive of industrial action.¹² Crean has again noted that although:

... the most striking aspect of the Trades Council's activity in its first year of existence was its willingness to take to the streets in protest at perceived injustice ... while its public profile represented a radical departure for the Tralee labour movement, this should not lead one to conclude that the philosophy animating from its leading activists was particularly revolutionary.¹³

The prospects for most working-class young people in Kerry at this time were extremely limited, and Billy Mullin's experience of work is typical of many young men in the county during this period. Mullins, after leaving school at the age of sixteen, started full-time work in 1912 with Donovan's Ltd. (building suppliers), located in The Square in Tralee town centre. He was expected to work a twelve hour day often for a full six day week with the only rest day being Sunday.¹⁴ In early 1916, at a meeting of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) in Listowel, J.E. Tackaberry gave examples of workers receiving what he described as 'starvation wages...where labourers were working for as little as 10s per week. One of these had to support a wife and ten children. Another worker who was being paid 14s 6d per week, including Sundays, could not afford to change jobs as his house was rented from his employer'. O'Connor of TTLC explained how '... war had seen an increase in the cost of living - 56% increase on necessities like food. Therefore, workers should now be on double their wages of 1914... workers were not out for strikes but wanted to prevent strikes and reduce friction between employer and employee'.¹⁵

It was these conditions plus the inspiring example of the Dublin workers during the 1913 Lock-out that saw a significant rise in union militancy in Kerry during the early war years. Mike Quill, who was later to become president of the Transport Workers' Union of America, recalled, with reference to the Lock-out, how this 'long struggle of ragged hungry men who had faith in their own beliefs deeply affected farmers in distant Kerry'.¹⁶ Numerous short strikes occurred involving small groups of workers in the county during this period, including the strike by eight members of the NUR employed on the Tralee to Dingle railway, workers who according to the *Worker's Republic*, 'gained a substantial increase in pay' in November 1915.¹⁷

Perhaps the best example of union militancy during this period was the dispute at the Munster Warehouse Company. The company, whose managing director was Daniel J. Murphy, was one of the few large commercial concerns in Tralee and witnessed the most protracted industrial dispute in the town's history. Eighteen male and female shop assistants employed by the firm went on strike for almost three years between 1915 and 1918, in protest at the company's breaking of a local agreement with the IDAA concerning the 'living-in system'. This system meant that the firm's employees, male and female, children and adults were forced to share accommodation on the company's premises. The strike was successful in ending the 'living-in system' and marked a significant victory for both the labour movement in Kerry and nationally.¹⁸

The Transport & General Workers Union

Undoubtedly, the real stimulus to the growth of the labour movement in Kerry during these years was the official launching of the Tralee branch of the ITGWU by the union's general secretary, James Connolly, in October 1915. TTLC organized a rally in the Town Square, and according to the *Kerryman* over 3,000 people attended, representing a majority of the town's workforce.¹⁹ The rally was addressed by a number of officials from the Trades Council and finally by Connolly, who spoke on the need for all workers, including farm labourers, the most disorganised section of the workforce, to join the union, and concluded his speech by condemning Ireland's involvement in the war in Europe,

I know that we in Ireland had never suffered one particular iota from any European power, but one...this war was not for Ireland, it was not for them no matter who wanted it. They stood

for that section of the community who had fought the battles of the world and who had remained at the bottom no matter who was at the top (hear, hear). They would no longer accept the position of inferiority (hear, hear). They say not only are they part of the nation, but they are the most useful part of it (hear, hear). No matter who sold Ireland in the past, the Irish working class never sold it, they always fought for it (hear, hear).²⁰



Plate 2: James Connolly with Tralee Trades and Labour Council, October 1915. Standing (L-R): P. Casey (DA); J. Lenihan (NUR); M. Horgan, J. Counihan (Brick and Stone Layers); P. Casey, T. O'Regan (Bakers); P. Barry, D. Moynihan (ASLE&F); T. Costello, M. Conroy (Tailors). Sitting (L-R): T. Howard (Local Branch Secretary, IDAA), T. O'Gorman, (IDAA), M.J. O'Lehane (General secretary, IDAA); J. Connolly (ITGWU); R. O'Carroll, T.L. (B.&S.L.); M. O'Connell, (Secretary, Tralee Trades and Labour Council) M.J. O'Connor, V.P. (Tralee Workers' Union). In front (L-R): D. Curren, P. O'Connor (Grocer's Assistants); M. Dowling (Carpenters). (Source: UCC Multitext Project in Irish History (<http://www.multitext.ucc.ie/>); Names: Liberty June 1981. T&GWU member's newsletter).

One of the most striking aspects of Connolly's speech was its clear anti-imperialist sentiment and his forceful message that it was in the interests of the Irish working-class to stand firmly opposed to Britain's war effort. This is significant because it placed TTLC, who had organised the rally, in direct opposition to the pro-war line being advocated by John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP). This was despite the fact that a number of the unions affiliated to Tralee Trades Council were British based unions including the NUR and ASLEF.²¹

Although the rally was successful, resulting in over 160 workers joining the ITGWU, many leading Tralee trade unionists, including O'Connor, vice president of the Trades Council, were sacked from their jobs because of their involvement in the rally.²² Workers faced a double form of victimisation, first for their trade union activity and secondly for their support for the

struggle for a sovereign state. The local labour movement took a strong stand against intimidation of union activists by their employers as was noted by RIC intelligence who reported that on 31 October,

‘...a protest meeting was held in Tralee against the dismissal of M.J. O’Connor a prominent trade unionist and Sinn Féiners (sic) by employer for an anti-recruitment speech he made the previous Sunday. W.P. Partridge was brought down especially from Dublin to speak at the meeting, and he made a very violent anti-recruiting speech...’²³

The Union argued that the workers were being victimised solely because of their union membership.²⁴ In December 1915 the RIC County Inspector in his monthly report for Kerry observed ‘at Tralee ... labour trouble is at present being stirred up and organised by a leader of the Transport Workers’ Union from Dublin’²⁵ – a reference to William P. Partridge.²⁶

In November another large meeting was also organised by TTLC, this time in Denny Street at the monument to the 1798 rebellion, with the main speaker again being Partridge. While one of the objectives of the meeting was to encourage workers to join unions it was also billed as a ‘protest meeting’ against the ‘victimisation’ of workers who had attended the rally addressed by Connolly in October and as O’Connor, who was also a speaker at the meeting put it, ‘for upholding the principles of trade unionism’.²⁷ Amongst the other prominent speakers was Mr J. Good, Secretary of Cork Trades Council.²⁸ Later in the month at another rally in Tralee, this time held at the Rink, the president of the Tralee Branch of the Transport Union, Mr P. O’Riordan, and a number of other trade union officials spoke. The *Worker’s Republic* stated that the meeting was to ‘strengthen’ the Transport Union in the town, resulting ‘in some 40-50 new recruits’ to the union, and was ‘remarkable for the presence of a big force of police’. It was also reported by the newspaper and by the RIC that further ‘recruitment meetings’ were held leading to the launching of new branches of the ITGWU in Kerry including the port of Fenit in December where Partridge was once again the main speaker and where almost a hundred workers were recruited to the union.²⁹ On 26 January 1916 a branch of the ITGWU was established in Killarney, the county’s second largest town, followed by the organising of the fifth branch of the union in Kerry in Listowel on 28 March 1916 at a meeting held in the Urban Council Chamber, in Carnegie Hall.³⁰

The united front which was being established between the Transport Workers and the Volunteers in Kerry was clearly observed during the annual Manchester Martyrs Anniversary commemorations in Tralee in late November 1915. The *Workers' Republic* reported that a rally of a thousand Volunteers was held in Tralee to commemorate the Manchester Martyrs. Both the Tralee branch of the ITGWU and Tralee Trades' Council took part in the event along with the Trades Council's Strand Street Band.³¹ According to the newspaper J.M. Slattery and Sons, a bacon factory in Tralee, 'invented a silly pretext', citing, 'slackness of work' and being 'inefficient' to dismiss several employees of the firm, all members of the ITGWU who had taken part in the commemoration. The ITGWU maintained this claim was 'ridiculous' as evidenced by the length of service of many of the workers dismissed. One of the workers who was sacked was an employee by the name of Hannifin who had worked for Slattery's for thirteen years.³² Other workers dismissed included Jeremiah 'Jerh' Quirke and Patrick Herbert, who had been employed by the firm for nine years and eight years respectively. The Union argued that the workers were being victimised solely because of their union membership.³³ Female employees of the firm were also dismissed if it was discovered that they were the daughters of men who had taken part in anti-conscription protests.³⁴

On 3 December another rally was held again 'at the '98 Memorial' to oppose Tralee UDC's decision against the 'co-option' of a labour representative to replace the previous labour representative, the late Mr J.J. O'Riordan. The speakers included Michael O'Connell and Michael J. O'Connor representing TTLIC and Partridge who pledged that in the next election 'the working class of the town would vote for the working class representative and no other'.³⁵ In February 1916 the RIC County Inspector reported another visit by Partridge to Kerry where he 'addressed meetings in Tralee, Listowel, Killarney and Dingle', all towns along with Fenit where the Transport Union was establishing branches. The report went on to state that Partridge's 'speeches have been mostly disloyal – and his work amongst the labourers, have caused a considerable amount of unrest'. This included leading the Fenit branch of the ITGWU to organise the 'blacking of a ship' which docked in the port on 28 February and thereby securing a pay increase of 1s per day. On the back of this success Partridge 'sent notices to Tralee employers demanding 5s per week pay rises'.³⁶ By the end of 1915, O'Connell claimed that 'there were 700 organised workers in Tralee'.³⁷

Anti-war Sentiment

This level of political consciousness amongst workers in Kerry is further reflected in the context of recruitment to the British Army. Desperate measures were adopted by the British to encourage local men on the Cork/Kerry border to join the army. Mike Quill, who later became the leader of the Transit Workers' Union in New York, remembers retired army officers being sent to local fairs, where a 'recruiting booth would be set up each market day, and the farm lads would be approached'.³⁸ Despite such initiatives, Tom Crean has shown that the early support for the British war effort evident throughout most of Ireland did not manifest itself in an upsurge of recruits to the British Army in Kerry, the county registering the lowest enlistment figure for the entire country for Catholic males employed outside agriculture, only 3.3%. This figure compares unfavourably to the national average of 6.8%. Thomas F. Martin attributes this low figure for Kerry men joining the British Army to 'the ambivalence Kerry felt towards the war' even from the earliest days of the conflict, and also reveals that the county had the lowest known men killed while serving in Irish regiments in the British Army during the war, 443, or 1.06% of the total.³⁹ Indeed as early as the summer of 1915, TTLC passed a resolution opposing conscription reflecting a growing opposition to the war amongst the working-class in Tralee.⁴⁰ According to Crean, in Kerry, farmers' sons were the most reluctant to join the army while only amongst the small section of urban unskilled labour was there any willingness to consider the army as a viable source of alternative employment.⁴¹

Keith Jeffery argues that a similar urban/rural and class divide was mirrored throughout Ireland and indeed in Britain.⁴² Terence Denman underlines this argument by showing that traditionally Irish recruits to the British Army 'had been effectively recruited by hunger and unemployment ... and came from urban and agricultural labourers'.⁴³ Kieran Allen maintains that this trend in recruitment continued with the outbreak of war in 1914 and that 'those who joined came predominately from the urban poor, driven into the army to escape poverty'.⁴⁴ Thomas Dillon has also emphasised that, separation money payable to the soldier's next of kin,

was a valuable recruiting tool and by May 1916 ... 1,200 men from the town of Tralee had joined up, a figure which amounts to almost half the documented number of the whole county of Kerry.⁴⁵

There was too the expectation that the war would be over within a year at most, and that their sacrifice would result in the granting of Home Rule for Ireland.

In November 1913, Eoin MacNeill formed the Irish National Volunteers to defend Home Rule, and in the same month the first branch of the new organisation in Kerry was formed in Tralee. When war broke out in Europe during the summer of 1914, Redmond urged his supporters in the Volunteers to join with the Ulster Volunteers and sign up for the British Army to fight against the Germans. In this sense Redmond's call to enlist initially proved effective in terms of early recruitment, and is a sentiment reflected in the August report of the Kerry County Inspector of the RIC who observed 'an extremely strong anti-German feeling in the county which is partly religious'.⁴⁶ There was strong sympathy for the rights of small countries, particularly Catholic Belgium, whose neutrality had been violated by the Germans. Even the local provincial newspaper, *The Kerryman*, a strong opponent of Redmond, took a pro-Allied stance against the Germans and referred to them as the "Saucer-Kraut".⁴⁷ Allen suggests that there were multiple reasons why young Irish men initially appeared enthusiastic to join the British Army, including a sense of adventure and being seduced by British War Office propaganda into 'defending little Catholic Belgium'. Allen also argues, that as the war dragged on, 'the futility of Redmond's politics became clearer', causing a split in the Volunteers.⁴⁸ Even as early as November 1914, RIC intelligence had reported that this split in the national movement was becoming increasingly apparent in Kerry. It further noted that of the 4,334 members in Redmond's Irish National Volunteers in the county, over 1,041 had already declared themselves members of Sinn Féin, and as such continued to align themselves to Eoin McNeill's Irish Volunteers, whose local leader was Austin Stack.⁴⁹ Nationally McNeill's organisation had approximately 11,000 members compared to an approximate membership of 165,000 in Redmond's volunteers.⁵⁰ But the continued loss of credibility by Redmond and the IPP during the War meant, as Crean has again suggested, that the ground between republicanism and labour was narrowing as is shown by their united opposition to recruitment to the British Army.⁵¹

However, the motives of the two movements for opposing the war were very different. Leading local members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), the radical faction at the core of the Irish Volunteers including Stack and Mullins were less motivated by opposition to the First World War in general than they were by opposition to the British. The pledge on joining

the Fianna was typical of republican thinking. Young men promised ‘to work for the independence of Ireland, never to join England’s armed forces, and to obey [their] superior officers’.⁵² The revolutionary socialist stance adopted by the labour movement under Connolly’s leadership and influence in regard to opposition to the First World War was in stark contrast to the position held by the leadership of the IRB. Connolly saw the war in general terms, as an imperialist adventure by the capitalist nations and argued that the European working-class, regardless of nationality, should stand united in opposing the war, and fight instead for international socialism, ‘and the final dethronement of the vulture classes that rule and rob the world’.⁵³ Connolly further developed his argument against the war when, in an article in *International Socialist Review*, published in spring 1915, he argued that the only way to bring the war to an end was through revolution and ‘...that the signal of war ought also to have been the signal for rebellion, that when the bugles sounded the first note for actual war, there notes should have been taken as the tocsin for social revolution’.⁵⁴ Allen has argued that Connolly took up the classic international socialist position that war was the result of capitalism and was consequently a form of competition by other means.⁵⁵ But Connolly’s stance was only shared by a minority in the Second International who were committed to resisting the war including the leaders of the Bolsheviks in Russia, and the Scottish republican socialist, John McClean.

Cumann na mBan

For some time, a small number of women had been involved in the republican movement in Kerry, but it was not until the split in the Volunteers that they finally became organised, as part of the republican women’s organisation, Cumann na mBan (CnB). On foot of instructions from the Executive Committee of the Tralee Volunteers, Austin Stack and Paddy Cahill were appointed to a sub-committee to establish ‘a ladies corps and ambulance class’. At a meeting on 26 March 1915 at the Rink, the Tralee branch of CnB was established with a membership of sixty and with Kate Breen appointed president and Liz Ann O’Brien appointed commanding officer.⁵⁶ The organisation also included Maggie Clifford in its ranks. Both the latter two women were from Tralee and Clifford later went on to become Stack’s secretary.⁵⁷ Aideen Sheehan has suggested that while CnB had given women ‘their initiation into politico-military struggle for the first time’ and ‘while it offered women new opportunities to participate in society’ it narrowed the scope of its aims to the purely

nationalist. This combined with its organisational links with the IRA 'limited the organisation's revolutionary potential'. While individual feminists and socialists may have been attracted to CnB, the organisation tended to steer clear of social struggles with most of its activists being involved in the cultural aspects of republicanism.⁵⁸ There is no evidence that at an organisational and strategic level it gave any significant support to the labour movement. The republican movement, in general, appears to have had no clear worked out theory of equality. For many women attempting to become active in political and social struggles, this was to become more apparent after the Easter Rising as Lisa Weihman has commented:

With their best advocates within the nationalist and labour organisations dead and the Rising a military failure, women found their participation downgraded from comrade-in-arms to second-class help mates.⁵⁹

Because of these weaknesses, Weihman also notes that though 'Irish women after the Rising did gain both an independent nation and the vote, [they gained] few other rights'.⁶⁰

Labour and Nationalism in Kerry

In Kerry, the RIC County Inspector observed in November 1915 how 'this labour movement appears to be mixed up to some extent with the Sinn Féin volunteer movement'.⁶¹ This suggestion that in the various organisations, especially the ITGWU and the Volunteers, you had essentially the same core of activists is a rather contentious one. At rank-and-file level in Kerry there was undoubtedly a strong element of truth to this statement; at a leadership level however, it is rather more problematic. We have already noted how the leadership of both organisations differed in how they viewed Ireland's participation in the war in Europe, but also perhaps more importantly the leaders of the IRB, including Austin Stack and Billy Mullins, were not members of trade unions. On the other hand, as was typical of labour's relations with republicans in Kerry throughout this period, the republican leadership's arm's length relationship with labour did not stop leading trade unionists from becoming involved at senior level in the volunteer movement. For example, William Partridge, a regular visitor to Kerry, was a member of the IRB along with local leading Tralee union activist, Michael O'Connor.⁶² Before the end of the War, Maurice Neligan, secretary of the Listowel branch of the ITGWU

would also become a member of the IRB.⁶³ This leads us onto another point of controversy; was the development of the ITGWU in Kerry part of joint preparations between the respective leaderships of the union and the IRB for the Easter Rising? Although Connolly viewed labour's alliance with the nationalists in purely tactical terms as a temporary arrangement, for others, including Partridge, nationalism had always been an integral part of their overall political philosophy.⁶⁴ According to Micheál Mac Donncha, Partridge had originally been elected as a Sinn Féin councillor and worked for the Southern & Western Railway but was eventually sacked due to his trade union and political activity.⁶⁵ Only a week before the Rising took place in Dublin, Connolly cautioned his followers; '[I]n the event of victory, hold onto your rifles, as those with whom we are fighting may stop before our goal is reached. We are out for economic as well as political victory'.⁶⁶ According to Samuel Levinson this principled political position by Connolly is proof that he 'had not betrayed international socialism by taking up the fight for Irish national freedom'.⁶⁷ Contrast this with Partridge's speech at the founding meeting of the ITGWU branch in Dingle, in January 1916, where he stresses the nationalist credentials of the union referring to it as 'a purely Irish organisation' and actually went as far as endorsing Sinn Féin's economic policy which he argued 'in practice meant Irishmen supporting Irish industry, helping Irish men, and helping Ireland'.⁶⁸ This idea, that the native Irish capitalist was somehow preferable to the foreign one, was a notion that Connolly would never have swallowed. Unlike Partridge, Connolly remembered that William Martin Murphy, a native capitalist and nationalist, had refused to recognise the ITGWU and this had in turn led to the Dublin Lockout of 1913. The Lockout, which lasted six months, cost the lives of five workers, killed by the Dublin Metropolitan Police. This is not to say that Connolly did not give ground to nationalism. He did not, for instance, support the organising of sections of the Irish Citizen's Army in counties outside of Dublin including Kerry. Indeed, at the end of 1915 Connolly wrote to Stack, by then the Commanding Officer of the Irish Volunteers in Tralee, reassuring him:

It is not our purpose to disrupt but rather to increase and strengthen the true national movement, and in a town the size of Tralee there is no necessity for any other military body than the Volunteer Corps which has stood out so splendidly by the true Irish ideal...⁶⁹

Significant details on Partridge's activities in Fenit have also been revealed since the public was officially granted access to the Bureau of Military History (BMH), in 2003. In 1916, Mark Kenna was a Lieutenant in the Churchill-Spa Company of the Irish Volunteers, located in an area of Kerry between Tralee and Fenit. In 1955 Kenna gave a witness statement to the BMH which referred to Partridge's activities in Fenit. He claimed the union official's 'mission there was to organise a branch of the dock workers. While in the port Partridge also 'addressed an anti-recruiting meeting' and remained in the area until news broke of Roger Casement's arrest. Casement had been assigned responsibility for landing a boatload of German arms at Fenit. Partridge was next heard of being held prisoner in Dublin after the Easter Rising. Kenna further states, 'It is my opinion that Partridge was sent down by James Connolly not only to organise the Transport Workers' Union, but to ensure that the discharge of the arms from the *SS Aud*, the ship transporting the weapons [from Germany to Kerry], would be carried out efficiently and without a hitch'.⁷⁰

The founding meeting of the Transport Union in Killarney, a meeting described by the *Kerryman* as 'an overflow gathering' differed significantly from the union's inaugural meeting in Tralee, a few weeks earlier. Unlike in Tralee, Connolly did not attend the meeting in Killarney, but which was instead addressed by officials from Tralee and included Michel O'Connell. Although the officials emphasised the need for workers' 'unity and organisation' in the face of 'huge employers' federations', no reference was made to the war in Europe or to imperialism in general.⁷¹ This attitude, even at this early stage, shows the contrast between the clear anti-imperialist and revolutionary stand of Connolly on the war, with that of the more cautious attitude of a growing number of officials within the union bureaucracy.

The Easter Rising in Kerry

The arms shipment on board the *SS Aud*, a 1,000-ton steamer, included 20,000 rifles, a million rounds of ammunition and ten machine guns.⁷² According to Greaves, 'the plan would be facilitated' by workers in aiding 'to transport the arms speedily throughout the south and west of Ireland by the ITGWU branch network in North Kerry'.⁷³ Devine adds weight to this argument by observing that the Transport Union's organisation in Kerry at this time represented 'a remarkable presence...given that the union then had only eight other branches' in the rest of the country.⁷⁴ According to the leading republican, Florence O'Donoghue '[T]o ensure

co-operation of the railway personnel, Partridge was sent to Tralee from Dublin'.⁷⁵ J. Anthony Gaughan asserts in his biography of Austin Stack that, '[P]robably with the collusion of Stack ... Partridge, a confidant of James Connolly, had been sent from Dublin to Tralee to ensure the cooperation of the railway personnel'.⁷⁶ Gaughan also perceptively notes:

... that Stack had invited a number of engine drivers and firemen to a meeting in Tralee on Easter Sunday morning. Almost certainly it was then that he intended to inform these men of the arms landing and to ask them for their help in transporting the arms from Fenit to Cork and Limerick for distribution at these centres.⁷⁷

Crean has argued that whatever the facts behind Greaves' argument, '[I]t can at least be said that a workforce imbued with "Sinn Fenianism" would clearly be an invaluable asset to any putative insurrection in the Southwest. Hence the possibility that trade union organisations in Kerry were connected to the plans for the Rising cannot be excluded'.⁷⁸

While there is little doubt that Partridge and possibly O'Connor were aware of plans for a Rising, their hard work is not sufficient evidence to explain the dynamic which drove the growth of the ITGWU in Kerry at this time. One can also argue that economic and social factors were in reality the main driving forces behind the popularity of unions. The high war-time prices resulted in demands for higher wages. According to the *Kerryman* between July 1914 and July 1916 there had been a 48% increase in the cost of a week's food for a family of five, rising from £1 5s to £1 17s.⁷⁹ In this regard a key stimulus to union organisation was the government-imposed system of compulsory arbitration and conciliation in which unions were automatically assigned the role of representing workers including farm labourers. William Mulligan has observed that, '[A]s the German submarine blockade forced British and Irish agriculture to move from pasture to more labour-intensive tillage production, the National Wages Board for Ireland fixed the minimum labourer's wage... and the ITGWU began to represent agricultural labourers'.⁸⁰ Theresa Moriarty has further explained how this new process, by forcing employers to accept arbitration, 'encouraged trade unionism [as] it established consistently successful representation by unions, which attracted members'.⁸¹ The victimisation of trade union activists also led to many workers joining unions as an act of solidarity.

The fact remains however, that trade unions were growing and

becoming more organised in Kerry. If Casement's arms shipment had been landed, the vast majority of union rank and file members, while no doubt taken by complete surprise, would have proved willing supporters of the republicans, given their public record so far. It can therefore be argued with some confidence, that if arms had been landed in Kerry the role of union members, including dock workers for unloading the arms and railway workers for transporting them around the country, would have proved crucial. In the event given the overwhelming odds facing the republicans, it is hardly surprising that the Rising was crushed within a week, with most of the leadership executed. The O'Rahilly, an IRB member from Ballylongford, in North Kerry, was amongst those killed in action in Dublin during Easter Week. In Kerry, not alone was there a failure to land any arms but the local republican leadership and leading labour activists were arrested along with Casement. The only confrontation with the Crown forces in the county, took place the following Saturday, 29 April, in Firies, when having managed to successfully escape arrest, local Volunteer, Jim O'Riordan shot and wounded two RIC men, one of whom later died.⁸² The IRB however did, manage to alert Clan Na nGael (CNG) in the United States about the Rising by transmitting a message from the trans-Atlantic cable station on Valentia Island to North America. On Easter Monday John Devoy of CNG delivered news of the Rising to a hastily convened press conference in New York.⁸³ In Europe, V.I. Lenin, leader of the Russian Bolsheviks, was one of the few socialists who defended the Rising as essentially a revolt against British imperialism and as such a blow to capitalism, arguing that, '[W]henever expects to see a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it', adding that the '... misfortune of the Irish was that they have risen prematurely when the European revolt has not yet matured'.⁸⁴

Republican socialist Peadar O'Donnell, in reference to his native county of Donegal, argued that the post-rebellion executions only impacted on the county's population because 'the threat of conscription came on its heels and that it was the threat of conscription that forced the people onto their feet'.⁸⁵ While this is undoubtedly true of most parts of Ireland, the situation again in Kerry is rather more complicated. Crean has emphasised that while the general reaction in Kerry to the rebellion was initially hostile, the execution of the leaders, especially that of Casement, along with the mass arrests that took place in the county which included leading members of the ITGWU; Michael J. O'Conner and William Farmer, 'soon began to produce a decisive political shift away from the already

weakened IPP ...'.⁸⁶ There was considerable sympathy in Kerry for Casement and his trial and execution received extensive coverage in the local press, particularly from the partisan *Kerryman*.⁸⁷ In an effort to undermine Casement's defence, his homosexuality was used against him as a form of character assignation. Leading prominent figures including the Irish socialist George Bernard Shaw led campaigns in his defence but to no avail. At 9.00 am on 3 August 1916, Roger Casement was hanged in Brixton Prison, London.⁸⁸ When eventually those arrested were released over the following months, bonfires were lit and huge crowds gathered to welcome the freed prisoners home to Kerry and as Diarmaid Ferriter asserts, this represented '... a dramatic illustration of changed attitudes'.⁸⁹

Conclusion

In Kerry, in common with the rest of nationalist Ireland from the period after the end of the First World War until the end of the Civil War in the spring of 1923, republican theory continued to be dominated by the politics of the gun. It can be best summed up in a single sentence as Billy Mullins remembers being told by an old republican, '[T]here is only one cure for it boy, and that's the gun, boy, the gun'.⁹⁰ This approach was doomed because it viewed the struggle for independence only in terms of an elite group of volunteers fighting a war on behalf of nationalist Ireland, with few having any notion of building a mass movement with labour in a fight for a workers' republic.

Despite this, socialism did provide an alternative theory of resistance, and it is quite revealing the extent to which workers did effect class relations in Kerry during the 1914-16 period. Unfortunately for the workers of the county, the full potential of the labour movement to achieve the ambition of a workers' republic was not realised. Perhaps most damaging to the future prospects of the labour movement in Ireland was the failure of its leadership to make any serious attempt, after the 1916 Easter Rising, to challenge Sinn Féin and thereby attempt shape a movement aimed at achieving state power with a much stronger working-class character. The labour movements' traditional adherence to syndicalism also hindered it from successfully organising a rival political party to Sinn Féin. This would not have been the case had Connolly and Larkin left as their legacy a Labour Party as strong as the ITGWU and committed to a workers' republic. The loss of these leaders also meant there was little prospect of an alternative revolutionary socialist leadership for the union members to identify and bond with. Consequently, only the militancy of the union rank and file represented the

clearest expression of working-class radicalism during these years and where the demand for a workers' republic was something more than mere rhetoric. A good example of this sort of action is the IDAA strike at the Munster Warehouse Company. After the Easter Rising, the local leadership of Tralee Trades and Labour Council, Michael J. O'Connor, T O'Gorman and Michael O'Connell, remained and was of the same political disposition as their counterparts in the new national leadership of the ILPTUC, William O'Brien and Tom Johnson. Allen has observed of this leadership that:

Those who claimed Connolly's ideas after his death were primarily trade union bureaucrats who used left rhetoric to cover their own cowardice ... A more unlikely pair of revolutionaries could not be found. They owed their prominence solely to the fact that there existed no alternative sizeable left-wing party.⁹¹

About the Author

Kieran McNulty originally from Birmingham, England graduated with a BA (Hons) in history from the University of Portsmouth, and with an MA in history from NUI Maynooth. He has had several articles published on the working-class history of Kerry, 1913-23. A resident of Tralee, Kieran is active in social movements in his local community.

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Denis Shine Lawlor (1808 – 1887): Landlord, Repealer and Poet

by Brendan McCarthy

'A profound scholar, a refined gentleman, a patriot loving his country wisely and well, a good landlord and the best and truest friend' - Rev Bat O'Connor PP Milltown

Introduction

Denis Shine Lawlor ranked amongst the leading Catholic gentry of Kerry and Cork during the nineteenth century but has since slipped from historical view. A Renaissance man, a poet and a writer, he was an avid supporter of Catholic emancipation and a staunch ally of Daniel O'Connell in the campaign for the Repeal of the Union. This article aims to bring back to light the life and times of this interesting individual and traces his life using the many references to him in the newspapers of his day.

Family and Upbringing

Denis Shine Lawlor was born on 30 March 1808 at Castlelough, Killarney. He was the eldest son of Denis Shine (1770-1816) and Ellen Lawlor (1780-1857) and was born into comfortable circumstances. According to Burke, his father Denis Shine esquire of Killarney was the son of Denis Shine Esq. of Mount Infant, Knocknagree, Co. Cork.² His great-grandfather Thadee Shine (1718-1776) had married in 1763 Ellen Duggan, daughter of Henry Duggan (1718-1803) of Mount Infant. The Shine family were originally from Shinnagh, Rathmore and in *Fr Ferris's Parish Histories* it is said that the Shine family built Shinnagh House in the 1700s.³ Denis's mother Ellen Lawlor was the daughter of Martin Lawlor (1753-1839), apothecary of Killarney and his wife Mary Anne McCarthy (1753-1846).

At some point around the turn of the nineteenth century, Martin Lawlor acquired Castlelough which was a country house erected in the early 1700s near to the ruins of Caisleán na Locha, one of McCarthy Mór's most impregnable castles built on a rocky outcrop jutting out into Lough Leane. After Denis Shine senior's marriage to Ellen Lawlor in 1807, this idyllically situated property between Killarney and Muckcross became

their family home. With the birth of Martin Shine Lawlor in 1813, young Denis gained a brother and a sister Mary Ann Shine Lawlor followed in 1815. The family were devoutly Catholic, and his sister Mary Ann later became a nun. Unfortunately, tragedy struck the family in 1816 when Denis's father died at the young age of 46.



Plate 1: Castelough as depicted in a panoramic map of the Lakes of Killarney drawn by Cornelius K. Farrelly in 1836 and engraved by W. Endicott & Co in New York in 1842. The map legend records No. 20 as 'Castle Lough, Mrs Lawlor's, East View'. (Source: Library of Congress).

Student and Poet

Little is known of Denis's early education, but his upbringing was privileged. In an article for *The Dublin and London Magazine* in 1828 he spoke of having had a nursemaid and of the servants addressing him as 'master' as a boy.⁴

In 1825 Denis (aged 17) and his younger brother Martin (aged 12) were sent to complete their secondary education at the prestigious St Mary's College, New Oscott, Birmingham (often referred to as Oscott College). The College had been founded in 1794 for the training of priests and the education of lay pupils and was a popular choice at the time for wealthy

Irish Catholic families. Denis enjoyed his three years at Oscott and kept up close links with his alma mater during his lifetime. He studied literature and wrote poetry and, while at college, he edited and wrote verses for the College's literary gazette called '*The Oscotian*' which has been continuously published since 1826. He left the College in 1828.

He also wrote poetry and articles for *The Catholic Miscellany*, a periodical published in London by Joseph Robins & Co between 1822 and 1830 and for *The Dublin and London Magazine*, another Catholic nationalist periodical, also published by Joseph Robins & Co between 1825 and 1828. He published these contributions under his initials 'D.S.L.' and at the time he styled himself as 'Denys-Shyne Lawlor'.

According to one article, as well as writing poetry, he devoted his leisure hours to 'the collection of Irish legends and of Irish historical facts'.⁵ At age 21 he published '*The Harp of Innisfail [A Poem]*' and his poetry was lyrical and romantic in style with themes often nationalistic, lamenting Irish suffering and English misrule. He therefore had a significant output of work published before he reached the age of twenty-one.

A Kerry Gentleman

Upon reaching his majority in 1829, he was back in Kerry and succeeded to his father's estate. The Shine estate comprised as follows: the townland of Nohavaldaly, Co Cork in their native parish; five townlands in the parish of Kilmeen (Knockavoreen, Knockeenacurrig East and West, Knockeenadallane and Meentyflugh) in the vicinity of Kiskeam, Co. Cork; four townlands in the parish of Kilbonane (Lissavane East and West, Lisheenashingane and Laharan) near Milltown, Co. Kerry; two townlands in the parish of Aghadoe (Gortacollopa and Killalee) and two townlands in the parish of Knockane (Cooleanig and Gearha) in the vicinity of Beaufort, Co Kerry. In terms of size, we know from the Local Government Board's '*Return of Owners of Land in Ireland*' that in 1876 Denis Shine Lawlor's estate comprised 1,374 acres of land in County Kerry with a valuation of £607 10s and 940 acres of land in County Cork with a valuation of £265 15s.

His return to Kerry coincided with the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act 1829 which finally gave Catholics the right to vote in elections, hold government offices and sit in Parliament as MPs. It was the culmination of years of campaigning by Daniel O'Connell and his Catholic Association. The legal disabilities imposed on Catholics by the

Penal Laws (albeit only sporadically enforced during the eighteenth century) were regarded by Catholics as a gross injustice and an affront to their religion (particularly wealthy Catholics who viewed themselves as loyal subjects of the Crown).

The coming into force of the Emancipation Act was celebrated throughout Ireland and by way of thanks to Daniel O'Connell, a National Tribute was raised throughout the country. The twenty-one year old Denis Shine Lawlor makes his first appearance in the Kerry papers in April 1829 when he attended a meeting of the friends of Daniel O'Connell at the County Courthouse Tralee to raise this subscription.⁶ He himself contributed £10 (a considerable sum in 1829) and became a member of the Killarney District Committee to raise funds for the National Tribute.⁷ With the National Tribute, O'Connell was able to pay off his debts, leave the practice of law and devote himself entirely to politics. O'Connell's next campaign was for the repeal of the Act of Union 1800, another cause that Denis Shine Lawlor was to embrace.

In May 1830, Denis Shine Lawlor departed for an extended tour of the Continent. He first visited his old College in Oscott and found that the Rector, Dr Henry Weedall, who he had been particularly fond of while a student, was in a state of exhaustion and had been advised to go to the Continent for his health. He was reluctant to go but finally agreed when Denis offered to be his travelling companion. We know that they rendezvoused at Koblenz on the Rhine in June 1830 and from there their tour took them to Strasbourg, Schaffhausen, Oberland, the Simplon Pass, Turin, Milan, Genoa and Florence before eventually arriving in Rome in October 1830 where they stayed for some considerable time.⁸ It seems Denis continued his travels alone thereafter.

He was back in Kerry by 1833 and appears as a member of the Grand Jury of the County of Kerry for the Killarney Quarter Sessions in April 1834.⁹ The Grand Jury was the local government system in operation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and members were selected by the High Sheriff of each county from the wealthy and influential landowners of that county. The Grand Jury sanctioned expenditure on public works (roads, road maintenance, bridges, infirmaries and other infrastructure) to be paid for by means of a county cess or rate. Proposals for expenditure on public works were considered twice a year at Presentment Sessions held prior to the Spring and Summer Assizes. Denis Shine Lawlor was to serve on the Kerry Grand Jury for over 30 years. He was still on the panel at the end of the 1860s.

His rise as a county gentleman continued as the 1830s progressed. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1835, High Sheriff of Kerry for 1840 and was elected to the Board of Guardians for the Union of Killarney in November 1840. The Board of Guardians administered the system of poor relief introduced in Ireland by the Poor Law Act of 1838. This comprised indoor relief provided within workhouses and was funded by a compulsory levy on local ratepayers.



Plate 2: Sawston Hall, Cambridgeshire. (Source: Author).

Marriage and Family

The year of 1840 would prove to be a busy year for the 32-year-old Denis because, in addition to his many duties as High Sheriff, he got married.

On 4 June 1840, he married Isabella Huddleston, eldest daughter of Edward Huddleston of Sawston Hall, Cambridgeshire. The marriage took place in London. The Huddlestons were a prominent English Catholic family and Sawston Hall, a Grade 1 Tudor manor house, had been in their family since 1517. It seems Denis was introduced to Isabella by her eldest brother Edward Huddleston who was a clerical student at Oscott College at the same time as Denis. The couple made their home at Castlough and Denis's new wife would have taken over as mistress of Castlough from Denis's widowed mother, as was customary at the time.

Having completed his duties as High Sheriff of Kerry during 1840, the couple went on an extended trip to England and the Continent in 1841

returning to Kerry in June 1842. The Cork Examiner reported in June 1842:

‘After a long absence from his native county, while sojourning on the Continent, this highly estimable and respected gentleman has with his amiable lady returned to his splendid seat Castlough, near Killarney’.¹⁰

Having left as a couple, they returned as a family, a daughter, Isabella Ellen, having been born on 23 February 1842 while they were in England. Also, while in Brussels on his way back from the Continent, Denis Shine Lawlor remitted £50 (a very considerable sum at the time) towards the building of the new Catholic Cathedral in Killarney which was just commencing in 1842.¹¹

Shortly after his return, he spoke at a temperance soirée held at the Temperance Hall in Tralee in honour of the visit of Fr Theobald Mathew, the temperance advocate. In his speech, he ‘bore testimony to the high esteem in which Fr Mathew is held on the Continent from which he (Mr. Lawlor) was but a very short time returned’.¹²

Denis and his wife were only briefly back in Kerry, as the Cork Examiner reports their departure for the Continent once again on 29 August 1842 and their return to Kerry on 7 June 1843.¹³ Isabella gave birth to their only son Denis Alexander Shine Lawlor at Castlough on 8 July 1843. At the close of 1843, the Kerry Evening Post printed another example of Shine Lawlor’s benevolence when it reported that ‘Denis Shine Lawlor, that excellent country gentleman’ and another local landlord, John Hurly, made abatements to their tenants’ rents in Milltown ‘to meet the pressure of the times’.¹⁴

The Repeal Campaign

1843 had been declared ‘Repeal Year’ by Daniel O’Connell and a number of large rallies had been held around the country. The campaign was to culminate in a monster meeting at Clontarf in October 1843, but the government banned the meeting and O’Connell called it off. He and a number of others were charged with sedition in November 1843. Jury selection was blatantly unfair with Catholics on the jury list struck off and the jury packed with twelve men opposed to O’Connell. The so-called ‘State Trials’ went ahead in January and February 1844 with O’Connell and others convicted and sentenced to a year in prison in May 1844,

though their convictions were later quashed on appeal.

In support of O’Connell, Denis Shine Lawlor spoke at length at a meeting convened in Killarney ‘to request Her Majesty to remove the Law Officers in Ireland in consequence of the insult they offered to the Roman Catholics of Ireland by the part they acted in striking the Jury pending the State Trials.’¹⁵

At the beginning of June 1844, Fr Mathew was a house guest of Denis Shine Lawlor at Castlelough and Denis accompanied him to Killarney the following day where Mass was celebrated and the pledge administered to a great many people.¹⁶ Later in June The Nation newspaper reported on ‘the largest and most influential meeting that perhaps was ever held in Killarney’ to protest at the sentencing of Daniel O’Connell and Denis Shine Lawlor took the chair of that meeting.¹⁷

Retribution followed swiftly. A few days later, the Lord Chancellor dismissed Shine Lawlor from his position as a Justice of the Peace for Kerry. Denis’s response to his dismissal was published in The Cork Examiner in which he stated that the State Trials and the sentencing of Daniel O’Connell had been a turning point for him, saying:

‘I should consider myself forever unworthy of my character and principles as an emancipated Irishman if I longer refused to unite in the grand and peaceful struggle for Nationality or hesitated to give expression to my strong opinion on those proceedings.’¹⁸

His dismissal as a J.P. meant that he also forfeited his position as a Guardian of the Killarney Union though on a happier note, a second daughter Mary Jane Sara was born on 8 August 1844.¹⁹

Daniel O’Connell and his fellow prisoners were released on 6 September 1844 and there were celebrations all over the country. The Kerry Examiner reported that ‘*Castle Lough, the seat of Denis Shine Lawlor Esq, sent forth a brilliant light while, like the High Sheriff, its worthy proprietor threw open his cellars, hospitable at all times to his servants and workmen and to all comers a cead mille falthe*’[sic].²⁰ In January 1845, Daniel O’Connell was in Killarney where a soirée was given in his honour at Cronin’s Hotel. Denis Shine Lawlor who was Vice Chair, spoke warmly about O’Connell and proposed the toast ‘Health, long life and success to Daniel O’Connell, the Liberator of Ireland’, his words being met by rapturous applause.²¹ In April 1845, a new Board of Guardians was elected for the Killarney Union and Denis was amongst

those elected, no doubt influenced by his public support of O'Connell.

Denis was in Cork in June 1845 along with a number of gentlemen from Killarney to accompany Daniel O'Connell on a procession through the city.²² He was also on the platform with Daniel O'Connell at a 'Great Repeal Meeting' in Killarney on 6 October 1845. An honorary banquet was held for The Liberator that evening in a large pavilion erected on New Street and Denis was in the Chair for the occasion.²³

The year would end on a happy note when Denis's wife gave birth to their third daughter Frances Mary at Castlelough on 10 November 1845.²⁴

Famine and Politics

Denis would continue to play an active part in poor relief and local politics as the years of Great Famine approached.

In March 1846, a Poor Relief Committee was formed in Killarney with the Earl of Kenmare as Chair and Denis Shine Lawlor as one of the Committee members.²⁵ In September 1846, the so-called 'Repeal Magistrates', Denis Shine Lawlor, Morgan John O'Connell M.P. and John Primrose Esq were reinstated as Justices of the Peace for Kerry. In a sign of the approaching famine, the papers record Denis Shine Lawlor contributing £5 to the Kilcummin and Nohoval Relief and £5 to the Kilbonane and Kilcolman Relief Fund.²⁶

As hunger and distress mounted, Denis Shine Lawlor at the conclusion of the Spring Assizes of 1847 proposed that the Kerry Grand Jury pass a resolution condemning the decision to dismiss individuals with ten acres of land from public works relief. Given the prevailing conditions of the country, Shine Lawlor said that that decision 'was tantamount to signing the death warrant of those persons struck off'.²⁷ The situation rapidly deteriorated and a report from Killarney received by the Chief Secretary's Office in Dublin in April 1847 stated that:

'People were literally dropping in the streets and perishing in their miserable cabins. The local workhouse was full, as was the fever hospital, which was the only one in an area of 144 square miles. The hospital had been built to accommodate fifty-four patients but now contained 130 and its funds were almost exhausted'.²⁸

The unexpected death of Daniel O'Connell in Genoa in June 1847 plunged the country into mourning and Denis Shine Lawlor chaired a

meeting in Killarney on 10 June 1847 to express sorrow and condolences on the death of The Liberator. Denis spoke movingly at the meeting of ‘his deep anguish and sorrow’ at hearing the news.²⁹

On 17 April 1848, The Cork Examiner published a letter from ‘A Kerry Elector’ blaming Denis Shine Lawlor ‘for the greatest error committed by your county i.e. electing Morgan John O’Connell as M.P. as he (Shine Lawlor) had proposed O’Connell at the hustings’. Morgan John O’Connell had voted for the infamous Gregory clause of the Poor Law Amendment Act 1847 (which disqualified from relief any person occupying more than a quarter of an acre of land) and in doing so had “thereby pronounced sentence of death by starvation on those thousands of human beings excluded from relief”.³⁰ Three days later at a large Repeal Meeting in Killarney, Denis Shine Lawlor made a long and fiery speech in which he broke with his old friend from Oscott College, Morgan John O’Connell M.P. He said that ‘we have written and sung and toiled together but now we are on different sides’.³¹ At a ‘Great Repeal Demonstration’ on Easter Sunday, Denis Shine Lawlor and two others were proposed as representatives from Kerry to attend the Council of Three Hundred in Dublin. This was a Council of ‘three hundred good men and true to take into consideration the final resolve of Ireland for freedom’.³² As a consequence of his Repeal activism, Denis Shine Lawlor was once again dismissed by the Lord Chancellor from the Kerry magistracy.³³

Away from the arena of local politics, 1849 saw the publication of Hercules Ellis’s popular compendium ‘The Songs of Ireland’ which included three of Denis Shine Lawlor’s poems. They were entitled ‘Tomorrow’, ‘Banshee’s Keen’ and ‘Fitzgerald’s Wife’.³⁴ We also have an interesting description of Denis Shine Lawlor from the pen of the Scots-born historian and social critic Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) who made a tour of Ireland during the summer of 1849 in the company of his friend Charles Gavan Duffy (1816-1903). The travelling pair were unlikely friends. Gavan Duffy was a journalist and Young Irelander while Carlyle was an imperialist who was dismissive of the idea that Ireland could govern itself. The landowning elite in Ireland he considered ineffectual and only interested in their rents while the peasantry he believed were indolent and dependent. The diary he kept of his trip was published after his death. He and Gavan Duffy visited Killarney on 18 and 19 July 1849 and stayed at Roche’s Hotel in Cloghereen. Because of his friendship with Gavan Duffy, Denis Shine Lawlor took the visitors on a tour of the Gap of Dunloe returning by boat through the Lakes and hosted them to dinner at Castletlough that evening.

On first meeting him at Roche's Hotel, Carlyle described Shine Lawlor as 'polite, quick, well-bred-looking, intelligent little fellow, with Irish-English air, with little bead-eyes and features and 'repale' feelings, Irish altogether.' Of their conversation on the tour, Carlyle describes 'Swift pleasant-enough colloquy, sensible, shifty man, has done his best in famine time, with wretched tenants, still above water, thanks to 'lying in' money he had.' On their tour, they encountered 'beggars waiting at solitary corners, start with us, run sometimes miles, – get nothing, Lawlor doesn't mind them in the least'. As to politics, Carlyle wrote: 'Ex – 'repale' Shine does agree with me that a Parliament, – any Parliament in these times is a mere talking-machine: that a 'Parliament in College-green', even if it could be had, is moonshine'. Dinner at Castlough that evening he described as 'noisy-Irish, not unpleasant, not anywhere unpolite; nor was intelligence or candour amid the roughish but genial mirth a quite missing element'.³⁵ Attending dinner that night was Denis's wife, his brother Martin (then a medical student in Edinburgh) and Rev Dr Moore, Principal of Oscott College, amongst others.

If he ever did read Carlyle's 'Reminiscences' in later years, Shine Lawlor would no doubt have had something to say as regards the accuracy of the descriptions, not to mention the condescending tone!

In late January 1850, Denis Shine Lawlor spoke at a dinner for Fr Bat O'Connor PP of Milltown at Fitzgerald's Hotel, Milltown to mark his departure to America on a fundraising tour for Killarney Cathedral. In his speech Fr O'Connor said Shine Lawlor had been the prime mover in his going to America to collect funds.³⁶

A New Home

In May 1850, the Kerry Evening Post reported that 'the proprietor of the Kenmare Arms, Killarney, has taken Castlough, the late residence of Denis Shine Lawlor Esq, for an hotel. Mr. Lawlor's interest in Castlough has not as stated expired but that gentleman has gone to reside at Grena which has been surrendered to him.'³⁷

The new purchaser of Castlough was Mr. Thomas Cotter. He enlarged the house and converted it into a thirty-three-bedroom hotel. It remains a hotel to this day (The Lake Hotel) albeit much altered and expanded. The Shine Lawlors' new home was Grena (or Grenagh) House in Beaufort at the other end of Lough Leane. This had been the home of John O'Connell, brother of The Liberator, but his expensive lifestyle compelled him to give up Grenagh and move to France. The circumstances of how the house came to be surrendered to Denis Shine Lawlor in 1850 are not known.



Plate 3: Grenagh House (No.17) as shown on the 1842 panoramic map of the Lakes of Killarney. The map legend records 'Granna, John O'Connell's, South View, who keeps famous pack of Buck Hounds for hunting the Stag on the Lakes & Mountains'. (Source: Library of Congress).

Tralee Borough Election of 1853

The death of Maurice O'Connell, M.P. for Tralee, another brother of The Liberator, in June 1853 caused a borough election and Denis Shine Lawlor decided to stand.

At the nomination of candidates at the County Courthouse in Tralee on 4 July 1853, Denis was nominated by T.B. Hurly Esq solicitor and P. O'L. Byrne, proprietor of The Kerry Examiner. Also standing was Daniel O'Connell, former M.P. for Waterford City, youngest son of The Liberator and nephew of the late M.P. When Denis stood up at the hustings, he was shouted down by O'Connell supporters in the audience and prevented

from speaking. Furious, Denis published his election statement in *The Tralee Chronicle* the following day in which, referring to his opponent, he stated:

‘The organisation of a mob to deter me by violence from pursuing a canvass or attending a meeting was a matter of public notoriety. It could not have been kept from his ears or eyes if he had walked the pavement at all and being thus, he was bound under all the circumstances to have prevented this discreditable conspiracy and, not having done so, he cannot be acquitted of the responsibility’.³⁸

Daniel O’Connell took offence at the allegation and sent his representative, Morgan John McSweeney, to call upon Denis Shine Lawlor to demand a retraction. Denis did not retract but did state that ‘I never intended to charge Mr. D. O’Connell with the guilt of being a party to the organization of a mob to interrupt my canvass’.³⁹ This seems to have defused the matter, and, in the event, Daniel O’Connell comfortably won the election.

In March 1854, Denis Shine Lawlor was restored to the magistracy for Kerry for the second time.⁴⁰ In September 1854, he sent his son Denis Alexander aged 11 years to Oscott College which he attended for six years.

On 22 August 1855 in a solemn ceremony the new Catholic Cathedral in Killarney, designed by Augustus Pugin and dedicated to St Mary, was consecrated for worship. Denis Shine Lawlor is not mentioned by name in the newspaper reports of the opening of the Cathedral, but he would certainly have been present. He was one of the trustees of the Cathedral and had been heavily involved in the fundraising efforts.

Another Election

In the General Election of 1857, the 49-year-old Denis Shine Lawlor was persuaded to stand for the constituency of Cork County which returned two members of parliament. He received a glowing endorsement from *The Cork Examiner*:

‘As a man of cultivation and attainment Mr. Lawlor is scarcely second to any man in Ireland; and to his political opinions, which are those of the Independent Opposition school, he is as true as

steel. The adoption of even one man like Shine Lawlor would be a triumph to the greatest county in Ireland'.⁴¹

Having accepted the nomination for Cork County on behalf of the Independent Opposition Party, Shine Lawlor suddenly resigned as a candidate. The reasons are not entirely clear but a report in *The Nation* of 4 April 1857 stated that Shine Lawlor had received a private letter from Mr. Alexander McCarthy, the former Repeal Association M.P. for Cork City 'in the light of which I could not continue as a candidate.'⁴² The issue seems to have been a matter of honour for Shine Lawlor and it seems Alexander McCarthy may have asserted or invoked a previous agreement by Shine Lawlor not to seek the nomination for Cork County. In any event, Shine Lawlor stood aside, and McCarthy was elected as Independent Opposition Party M.P. for Cork County.

Family and Life, 1857 onwards

In October 1857, Denis Shine Lawlor's mother Ellen passed away aged 77.⁴³ In his role as landlord, *The Nation* of 3 April 1858 carried a story of one of Shine Lawlor's tenants at Lissavane, Listry called Daniel Falvey whose house had burned down. Upon hearing the news, they reported that Shine Lawlor rode to the spot, gave Falvey £15 and had his house rebuilt at his own expense, *The Nation* referring to him as 'the model landlord of Kerry'.⁴⁴

At the Spring Assizes of Tralee in April 1859, a schoolteacher called Daniel O'Sullivan from Droumanassig, Kenmare was charged with being a member of the illegal Phoenix Society (an oath-bound Fenian movement originating in the Skibbereen area) and received a sentence of 10 years transportation. This was the first of the so-called Phoenix Trials and was characterised by blatant jury packing by the law officers of the Crown. Eleven Roman Catholics were called for the jury panel, but all were disqualified and the jury selected consisted of ultra-conservative Protestants. Denis Shine Lawlor was one of ten Kerry magistrates who called a meeting 'of the friends of Civil and Religious Liberty' in Tralee to protest at the conduct of the trial and he spoke at length at the meeting.⁴⁵

Later in 1859, we know that Denis Shine Lawlor was on the Continent once again. In December 1859, there was a public meeting of the Catholics of Killarney which, according to the report in *The Nation*, attracted a crowd of between 8,000 and 10,000 people. The purpose was to show sympathy with Pope Pius IX 'in his present trying circumstances',

these being insurrections in several of the Papal States. Read out at the meeting was a letter of support for the Pope written by Shine Lawlor from the Hotel Windsor, Rue de Rivoli, Paris dated 1 December 1859.⁴⁶

In September 1860, Shine Lawlor hosted William Smith O'Brien as a guest at Grenagh.⁴⁷ William Smith O'Brien was a leader of the Young Ireland movement who had been convicted of sedition for his part in the Young Irelander 'Famine Rebellion' of 1848 and sentenced to deportation to Van Diemen's Land. He was later pardoned and returned to Ireland in 1856 but thereafter withdrew from politics.

In April 1861, Denis Shine Lawlor's eldest daughter Isabella married Daniel O'Connell of Derrynane Abbey, eldest grandson of The Liberator at Fossa Church. The marriage was celebrated by the bride's uncle Rev Canon Huddleston.⁴⁸

In August 1861, *The Kerry Star* carried a letter to the Editor from one John L Fahey of Killarney criticising landlords for not giving their tenants security of tenure arguing that this was the reason there was little investment by tenants in improving their holdings. However, his letter excepted by name eight Kerry landlords including Denis Shine Lawlor under whom, according to Mr Fahey, 'the tenantry find security, contentment and happy homes'.⁴⁹ That same month, Queen Victoria made her celebrated visit to Killarney and Denis Shine Lawlor was among the Kerry magistrates at Killarney Railway Station welcoming the monarch, 'many of whose wives and daughters also graced the platform'.⁵⁰

In June 1863, *The Cork Examiner* reported on the marriage of Daniel O'Connell B.L., second son of Mr James O'Connell of Lakeview House, to Frances Mary Lawlor, third daughter of Denis Shine Lawlor. The marriage took place at Fossa Church, and the chief celebrant was the Bishop of Kerry.⁵¹

In December the following year, Denis Shine Lawlor was one of the many signatories to a request to the Lord Mayor of Dublin to convene a meeting to form an Association with three objects (1) reform of landlord and tenant law to afford full compensation to the tenant for valuable improvements, (2) abolition of the Irish Church Establishment and (3) perfect freedom of education in all its branches.⁵²

Tragedy struck for Denis on 25 September 1867 when his wife Isabella died at Grenagh aged just 58 years. He was deeply affected by her death. In an effort to come to terms with it, he travelled to the Continent in 1868 and made a pilgrimage to Lourdes amongst several other places. On his return he wrote 'Pilgrimages in the Pyrenees and Landes' which was

published by Longmans & Co in London in 1870. It recounts the history of apparitions and miracles connected to the Virgin Mary in the southwest of France. Colm Keane and Una O'Hagan credit Shine Lawlor as the first Irishman to bring back an account of Lourdes which had been rapidly developing as a shrine since the apparitions reported there by Bernadette Soubirous in 1858.⁵³

The Kerry Evening Post, never a friend to Denis Shine Lawlor, reproduced a distinctly unflattering review of the book from The Saturday Review. Shine Lawlor had included a poem at the end of each chapter of the book and the reviewer wrote, *inter alia*, that 'the book would have been the better for being compressed to about half its present size, and the author would certainly have done wisely to omit the metrical effusions which form the close of every chapter, and which never rise above the dead level of average hymnology, while some of them sink into the merest doggerel'.⁵⁴

From around the early 1870s, Shine Lawlor seems to have spent more and more time abroad. His brother Martin Shine Lawlor, who was the resident physician at the Killarney District Lunatic Asylum, died aged 57 in December 1870.⁵⁵ In 1874, he published in London an historical novel entitled 'Centulle: A Tale of Pau' (Longman & Co., London, 1874). He wrote it in the early 1870s, and the foreword is dated June 1872 at Ticino in southern Switzerland. The book was reviewed in The Spectator, and the reviewer described it as 'a pleasant, refined and ingenious book. It personally conducts the reader through the Pyrenees and the Basque provinces, in company with an imaginary pair of friends, who meet with some interesting people and undergo some curious adventures'.⁵⁶

Denis's second daughter Mary Jane married Capt. C. W. Fondall of Ryde, Isle of Wight, on 26 February 1876. In late 1877, he was in Rome from where he remitted £5 to the fund for the erection of a memorial to the late Bishop of Kerry.⁵⁷ While still in Rome in May 1878, he had the honour of meeting the Pope [Leo XIII] as a member of a deputation of leading Irishmen headed by the Archbishop of Dublin.⁵⁸

On 26 August 1878, having been a widower for 11 years, the 70-year-old married for the second time. His new wife was Alice Mary Riley of Bayswater, London, daughter of Charles Riley, and the marriage took place at the Church of St Mary of the Angels in Bayswater.⁵⁹ It is not known how they met.

He was back in Killarney in late 1879. He attended a meeting of the Killarney Board of Guardians in January 1880.⁶⁰

The Land War

On 2 April 1881, The Cork Examiner reported that through his agent, John C. O’Riordan (Killarney solicitor and fellow magistrate), Denis Shine Lawlor had given his tenants in Kiskeam a reduction of 20% on their year’s rent and ‘those that were unable to pay got a further indulgence’. The Kiskeam Land League returned their thanks to Shine Lawlor for the abatement.⁶¹

The Kerry Independent in February 1882 carried an interesting report about the visit of Miss E. M. Reynolds of the Dublin Ladies Land League to Rathmore ‘to offer relief to the tenants of the Earl of Kenmare’ in February 1882. Whilst having dinner alone at The Railway Hotel where she was staying, she was approached by Maurice Leonard, Sam Hussey’s head clerk. Sam Hussey was land agent for the Kenmare Estate which was at this time suffering financial difficulties due to burgeoning rent arrears. Maurice Leonard made certain derogatory remarks to Miss Reynolds about the Land League and the Ladies Land League. Denis Shine Lawlor, whom the newspaper described as ‘one of the most popular gentlemen of Kerry’, happened to be at the hotel at the time, overheard the comments and immediately remonstrated with Mr Leonard.⁶²

A revealing insight into Shine Lawlor’s approach to his tenants comes from a report in The Cork Examiner in November 1883 on sittings of the Kerry Land Commission adjudicating on rent in certain Killarney land cases. One case involved the Estate of Richard Henry Quill covering ‘fairly good farms situated beyond Beaufort. They formerly belonged to Mr Denis Shine Lawlor who seems not to have raised the rents. In 1861 Mr Lawlor’s interest ceased and the new proprietors considerably increased the rents.’⁶³

Death

Later in the 1880s Denis Shine Lawlor spent more time in England and on 17 October 1887 he died aged 79 at Chester Hill, Woodchester, Gloucestershire, the cause of death being given as senile decrepitude. He was brought home to Ireland for burial and was interred in the Shine family vault at Nohaval Cemetery, Co Cork.

The graveyard at Nohaval is an ancient cemetery located in the townland of Nohaval Lower and marks the site of a monastery founded by St Finian Fionn in 556 AD. According to long established tradition, the Shine family tomb was located at the site of the altar of the ancient church and was a place of reverence for local people who paid rounds at

the cemetery on the last three days of each week. The main pattern was on Good Friday each year when up to two hundred people would pay rounds and say prayers finishing at the Shine family tomb.⁶⁴

The Kerry Evening Post carried a gracious obituary to Shine Lawlor. Amongst other things, it touched on the famine years and his career as a landlord.

‘Those who remember how heavily the horrors of the famine years pressed on Killarney and its neighbourhood will remember well his noble and fearless efforts to bring relief to the famine-stricken sufferers. Day after day and at all hours he was there to be met with in the lanes and slums of the town soothing the sufferings and ministering to the wants of the poor. At an early age he inherited an extensive property. A cordial and friendly relationship was at once established between him and his tenants and this the recent land crisis failed to shake or even to weaken.’⁶⁵



Below: Novohal Graveyard, Novohaldaly Parish, Barony of Duhallow, looking southward towards Caherbarnagh and the Paps. The high altar of St. Finian's Church (founded A.D.556) was situated about where the vine-covered Shine-Lawlor tomb is seen in the foreground. The ruins of the old monastery, church and round tower are no longer seen.

Plate 4: Novohal Graveyard. (Source: Vol VI of O’Kief, Coshe Mang, Slieve Lougher etc. Casey Ed, Birmingham, Alabama 1952-71).

Denis Alexander Shine Lawlor

On his death his only son Denis Alexander Shine Lawlor inherited the Shine Lawlor estate in counties Kerry and Cork.

After attending Oscott College, Denis Alexander had gone to Trinity College Dublin and subsequently made his career in the British Army, joining the 13th Regiment of Light Infantry as an ensign and later becoming an officer.

In 1890, three years after his father's death, Denis Alexander also inherited Sawston Hall and the Huddleston estate in Cambridgeshire on the death without issue of his uncle Ferdinand Huddleston. On succeeding his uncle, Denis Alexander added 'Huddleston' to his name becoming thereafter Denis Alexander Shine Lawlor Huddleston (often abbreviated to Denis L. Huddleston or just D. L. Huddleston).

In 1893 Denis Alexander auctioned off his father's library which, according to the advertisement in the Freeman's Journal, included:

‘The fine arts, voyages and travels, history poetry and drama, the history, antiquities and literature of Ireland and a unique collection of pamphlets on Irish affairs in 155 volumes.’⁶⁶

Thereafter Denis Alexander lived at Sawston Hall, leading the life of a country squire and running his Irish estate from there. He was a magistrate for the county of Cambridgeshire and at the age of 54, he married Alexandrina Keith of Halifax, Nova Scotia but the couple had no issue.

The End of the Line

On 5 June 1921, at the age of 77, Denis Alexander Shine Lawlor Huddleston was killed in a motor accident at Tottenham in London and is buried beneath a Celtic Cross at the Churchyard of St Mary's Church, Sawston, Cambridgeshire. His estate passed to a nephew but by then most of the Shine Lawlor estate in Cork and Kerry had been purchased by the tenants. Under the Land Purchase (Ireland) Act 1903 (known as Wyndham's Act) tenants got an advance from the Government to purchase their holdings repayable through annuities and this facilitated widescale purchase by tenants throughout Ireland and heralded the end of the landlord system in Ireland.

On Denis Alexander's passing without any heir, the Shine Lawlor name, well known for so long in Kerry and Cork, passed into history.

About the Author

Brendan McCarthy, a native of Tralee, Co. Kerry has recently edited and published *Fr Ferris's History of the Parishes of Rathmore, Gneeveguilla and Knocknagree* which may be obtained at www.rathmorehistory.com.

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Brian Ó Ceallaigh (Bryan Kelly) - Part 2

by Jeremias Cronin

Editors Note:

This is second half of a two-part article on the life of Brian Ó Ceallaigh (Bryan Kelly), Killarney native and Irish language enthusiast. Following on from Kelly's early life from 1899 to 1915 and his internment in Germany during WWI, this article, covers his life after this period and his work and relationship with many of the authors from the Blasket Islands.

Part 2

Bryan Kelly returned to Killarney in 1915 and gradually parked his interest in German, having failed to convince the people with whom he had dealings there allow him continue his studies in Germany. The curriculum he had studied consisted in the greater part of languages and literature and at this point Irish replaced German in his heart. However he did return to Germany a decade later.

His Mother arranged private lessons for him with An Seabhac, a native speaker from the Kerry Gaeltacht. An Seabhac wrote (cf. Tomás An Bhlascaoid lch.205), “Chuireas aithne ar Bhrian tuairim na bliana 1916 i gCill Airne.mar gur theastaigh uaidh Gaeilge d’fhoghlaim dáiríre. Bhí oideachas forleiththeadóil ilghnéitheach air, leathdosaen teanga ar a thoil aige, eolas mór ar an Eoraip agus suim i litríocht agus ins na healaíona eile. Bhi rud amháin maidir le foghlaim go raibh fuath aige dhó, agus eagla aige roimis; uimhríocht”.

I came across a similar student in my role as Leaving Certificate Oral Irish examiner. I examined an Englishman, a mature student, and was so impressed by the standard of his Irish that I asked him how long he had been learning Irish, purely out of curiosity on my part. His reply in English; ‘Oh crumbs! Numbers!’. An Seabhac advised Kelly to go to the Gaeltacht and live there. “Ba ar mholadh Phádraig Uí Shiocró (An Seabhac) a dhírigh sé ar an mBlascaod, áit ar casadh Tomás air” (cf. Tomás An Bhlascaoid lch.229). This was Tomás Ó Criomhthain. I have often wondered why An Seabhac sent him to the Blaskets. Bryan Kelly's close relative and next door neighbour Jane Cronin of Ballycasheen House was sent to Baile An Scelig to learn ‘the Irish’ as the phrase then was. While Baile An Scelig was as far from Killarney as the Blaskets, at least

it was on terra firma. Perhaps An Seabhac's nom de plume was apt. Was he keeping an eye on the mainland Gaeltacht for his own literary purposes? I hasten to add An Seabhac's "Jimín Mháire Thaidhg" was a source of great enjoyment to me when I was taught it at Lissivigeen National School.

Much has been made of the fact that the Blaskets were cut off from the outside world. This fact of course does not preclude genius. The German philosopher Immanuel Kant never left the city of Königsburg. For Bryan Kelly moving from a comfortable home and the relatively benign climate of Killarney to the poverty and wild climate of the Atlantic could not have been easy. Tomás Ó Criomhthain called Inis Mhicileáin "an chloch", Bryan Kelly could easily have used the same term to describe the Great Blasket. The fact that he had only recently secured his freedom from detention in Germany and was nevertheless prepared to spend long periods of time on a remote island shows his keenness as a scholar of Irish. The German word "wissbegierig" sums up this condition best I feel, referring to an 'inquisitive nature'. The fact remains the mainland Kerry Gaeltacht would have served Bryan Kelly's purposes equally well. Tomás Ó Criomhthain himself confirms this view. "Ní bheadh leabhar ná dhá leabhar im dhiaidhse mura mbeadh an fear maith a chuir ag obair mé. Is mó rud do dhéanfadh na daoine in áit iargúlta dá mbeadh fear maith ann do thabharfadh an t-eolas dóibh mar chuir Brian O Ceallaigh ag obair mise" (cf. Tomás An Bhlascaoid I ch, 235). As a UCC student in the late nineteen sixties, fifty years after Bryan Kelly's stint on the Blaskets, I remember the feeling of being totally cut off from the outside world in locations such as An Charraig, Clochán Dubh and Muiríoch, all on the mainland. There was no radio, no television, no newspapers. When I called on Maura Devitt from Dublin who was holidaying in Na Gorta Dubha in the late nineteen seventies she was delighted to meet someone from the outside world!

Professor Séan Ó Coiléain of UCC, perhaps the greatest living expert on Tomás Ó Criomhthain's magnum opus 'An tOileánach', quotes Ó Criomhthain; "Aibréan 1917 is ea do tháinig Brian O Ceallaigh go dtí an Blascaod Mór. Do ghlac sé do láimh me agus do chaitheamar téarma fada lena chéile, nach mór bliain" (cf. Tomás an Bhlascaoid I ch 235). Half a century ago in his paper 'The role of the artist in a primitive rural community' Séan O Connor SJ wrote:

‘A bunch of us were holidaying in Carraroe, Connemara. One night in the kitchen with a group of local people, somebody asked Máire Áine Ní Dhonncha to sing. They pulled out a stool in the middle of the concrete floor. She sat down. She sang *Úna Bhán*. The song came to a close. Nobody clapped. Máire Áine Ní Dhonncha never raised her head. She broke into the next song. Song after song. It was long after dawn when she herself broke the spell. ‘Haven’t you enough of my singing now?’ she said in Gaelic.”

His conclusion: ‘for people who lived in harsh, almost brutal conditions of poverty and destitution they show an astonishing refinement. This process has been operative in Gaelic speaking rural Ireland for hundreds of years. It is of course an oral process. It ranges from storytelling, local history, how to make potato drills or to cut turf’.

Tomás Ó Criomhthain embodied this process perfectly. He came from an oral tradition of folktales and folksongs. Tomás sang “An Chuilt” at Christmas. Eighteen stanzas of it were all he sang as by then the day was dawning. This is further proof of his prodigious memory (cf. An tOileánach 2002 lch.167). He sang an Bhean Dubh ón Sliabh at his own wedding; “Ní cheapfá go raibh aon teanga ar aon duine insa tigh, beag nó mór, go raibh sé críochnaithe” (cf. an tOileánach 2002 lch 190 et seq). His audience was just as spell bound as Máire Áine Ní Dhonnacha’s. He was also a farmer and a fisherman. He was the main Irish Language contact person on the island for its visitors.

Tomás Ó Criomhthain and Bryan Kelly read *Séadna* by An tAthair Peadar Ó Laoire together. The leitmotiv of *Séadna* is that of “Der Bauer und Der Teufel”, one of Grimms’ fairy tales. They began by collecting folk songs and later fairy tales in Hessen. Before Bryan Kelly’s arrival Tomás Ó Criomhthain had also written down folk songs and folk tales. There is an Ancient Greek word “parrhesia” which can be translated as free speech. Hermut Lappin writes (Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung 20/03/2020) on Athens in the fifth century B.C. saying ‘the great importance of the folk meeting was the summary argument, a type of group intelligence-from the sum of the many opinions will result that which is correct. Therefore it was important that everybody spoke’. In the case of the seanchaí his audience corrected any mistakes he made. This is echoed in the discussions Tomás Ó Criomhthain recorded in *Allagar na hInise*, e.g. “Ar bharr Thráigh Ghearraí a bhí an t-allagar seo ag formhór

an bhaile lena chéile” (1977, lch.155) and ‘Bhíomar ar stad ag an gcrosaire atá in aice na dtithe – Diarmaid Na Féasóige, an Poncán, Sean-Eoghan, Seán an Ghrinn, agus mórchuid eile again ag cur an tsaoil trí chéile’ (ibid, lch. 186). ‘Ní raibh aon duine óg ná aosta insa Oilean so ná go raibh fhios age Tomás Maol cad ab aois do, agus insa paróistí lasmuigh chomh maith; an lá, an bhliain agus an uair an chloig. Deireadh na daoine ná raibh a leithéid de shíofróir insa cheantar agus gan A na B aige in aon teagain” (An tOileánach 2002 lch.28). I have been lucky enough to get to know Señor Antonio in Porreres, a rural village in the Balearic Islands, who has this very gift. Señor Antonio Adrover Blanch had to leave school while still a child when his father was killed in the Spanish Civil War. He closes his eyes in the manner of a sean-nós singer and comes up with days and dates with amazing accuracy.

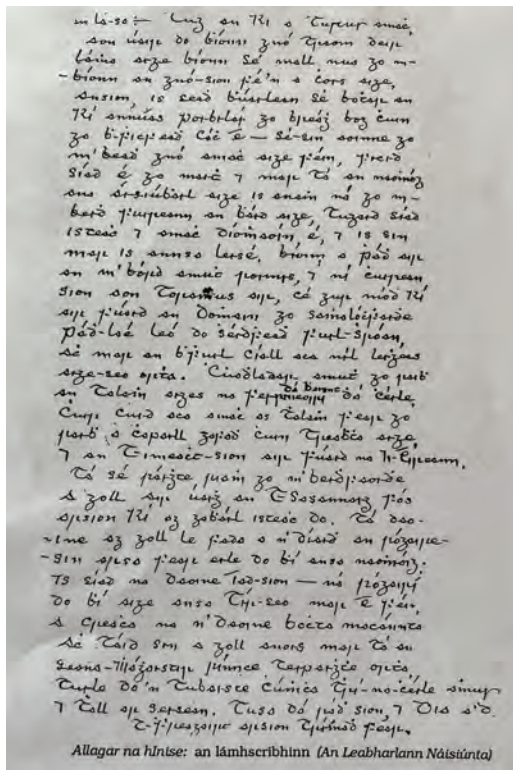


Plate 1: Example of Tomás Ó Criomhain's excellent handwriting (Source: NLI).

Earnán de Blaghd expressed amazement that Tomás succeeded in writing a book; “Gan dabht is mór an t-iontas gur éirigh le fear mar Thomás Ó Criomhthain leabhar do cheapadh” (Irish Independent 28/03/1933). Bryan Kelly insisted to Tomás Ó Criomhthain that he ‘write about what you see at this moment’ (Tomás An Bhlascaoid lch.230). Gaius Julius Caesar used the Historic Present to hold the reader’s attention in *De Bello Gallico* and *De Bello Civili*. Like Caesar, Tomás Ó Criomhthain considered himself a purist in the use of language. The following is from a letter Tomás wrote to Kelly, ‘Is iontach más gá dhom aon chasadh do dhéanamh ar an méid do bheadh breac agam...’ (NLI Mss. 15,785). In *Allagar na hInise* he uses the Aimsir Láithreach and in particular the Gnáthláithreach to great effect. Regarding the Covid 19 Pandemic, Antonio Muñoz Molina, the Spanish writer wrote ‘the tense which best expresses what we are experiencing at this moment is the Present Indicative which names the occurrences in the very moment in which they happen or some hours later at the latest when neither memory nor forgetfulness have begun their constant task (EL Pais 3/04/2020).

Bryan Kelly pointed out to Tomás Ó Criomhthain the significance of his life on the island. ‘I tried therefore to make him realise what interest every day incidents which were occurring around us would possess for people who are accustomed to a more comfortable and complicated existence. Write about what is happening here every day to yourself and to otherswhat he cared to write about was good enough for me (Tomás An Bhlascaoid lch.231). Before Bryan Kelly’s arrival Tomás Ó Criomhthain had been receiving money from various sources including the Gaelic League – one of a number of organisations which had been founded in the hope of preserving the Irish Language. Recently I came across the following in an MA thesis: ‘The Society for the Prevention of the Irish Language!’ founded in 1867. This is clearly the missing link which would have made all the difference!

On the first of June 1918 Bryan Kelly became a Junior Inspector in the Department of Education. He was twenty-nine years of age. Up to this point he had had no gainful employment. His older brother Laurence was a priest and his two younger brothers Thomas and Denis, a surgeon and barrister respectively. His two remaining siblings, two girls, married well. His father known as “Spider” was a hard-headed businessman but during this time his businesses were not going well. Bryan Kelly’s first cousin Ellen Kelly, who had a great head for arithmetic and was the only person Spider trusted to look after his accounts, lived by now at Ballycasheen

House, Killarney. A guest house for tourists with a clear view of Mangerton Mountain was built there. No tourist ever stayed in it and in fact it was used as a stable and grain loft. The world war had impacted not only on Bryan Kelly but also on tourism in the town. The Kelly family moved house from Main Street to the Hall, Ballycasheen, still in Killarney Urban District. Bryan Kelly's father was well connected politically and was a JP for Killarney along with Lord Kenmare and Major MacGillycuddy of Flesk Castle (Coltsman's Castle). It seems he used his influence to secure Bryan his position. Bryan was of course not lacking in qualifications as he was a BA, LLB, had studied in France and Germany, spoke French and German, had organised French lessons at Limburg and had spent time improving his Irish. He is listed as Brian Albert Kelly in 'Ireland's School Inspectorate' by John Coolahan. However, as we have seen previously, he was not a career man and lasted only a year in the position.

Professor Séan Ó Coileáin has shown that Bryan Kelly was the pupil and Tomás Ó Criomhthain the master. As we have seen this was Kelly's own position. There is no doubt however that he was Tomás Ó Criomhthain's Maecenas. Dan Cronin of Ballycasheen House, next door neighbour, close relative and contemporary of Bryan Kelly maintained that whiskey and tobacco were the ingredients which inspired the Muse in Tomás. In fact, as well as whiskey and tobacco, Kelly kept Ó Criomhthain supplied with paper, pen and ink. He provided the lamp (cf. An tOileánach 2002 lch.202) by which Tomás wrote and indeed cash. On one occasion Tomás wrote; "Féach Litir Mhór Kelly". They were parcels not letters and were regularly opened before they reached Tomás. It seems the contents did not always reach him intact. He wrote to Kelly, 'n'fheadar ar chuiris inti iad no nár chuiris' (August 1923). Consequently Fr. Laurence Kelly, Bryan's older brother, by then a priest in the Dublin Archdiocese took Bryan's gifts to Tomás, some of them at any rate. In a letter to Bryan Tomás writes, 'Conas atá t'athair? Conas atá sibh ar fad is gach áit? Ta leabhar an tsagairt fós agam'. Fr Laurence had taken a book from Bryan to Tomás. In Allagar na hInise (1977 lch.210) "Tráthnóna bím fein agus an sagart thiar ar na lantáin ghlasa ata laistiar den churadóireacht". Tomás points out to Bryan precisely where he was with the priest. Likewise "Is iad bóithre Bhriain a bhíonn agam féin agus an sagart a thabhairt isteach gach tráthnóna" (ibid, lch.211).

Tomás Ó Criomhthain's literary efforts could never be classified as *ars gratia artis* (art for arts sake). His writing had always earned him some

money and this is perfectly understandable in the context of the hand to mouth existence he lived. Knut Hamsun's 'Growth of the Soil' which Bryan Kelly brought to his attention may have been the key in particular to his writing of "An tOileánach". Knut Hamsun won the Nobel Prize in Literature for this book in 1920, in which year it had been translated from Norwegian into English. This meant big money and Hamsun was fifty seven when this work was published. Ó Criomhthain was about sixty when his first work was published and the similarities between 'Growth of the Soil' book 1 and 'An tOileánach' are remarkable. Obviously Tomás is the hero of An tOileánach, Isak the fictional hero in Growth of the Soil. Both are farmers, fishermen, tillers of the soil, builders. The struggle with nature is a constant one. They both have a simple faith - all was in the hand of God. The State owns the land - Isak has to deal with the Landsman; Tomás with the Congested Districts Board. There is mention of valuations, of boundaries, of taxes to the State. They both fenced in their cultivated ground. Tomás was surrounded by water; Isak by virgin forest. Mail came by boat and was awaited expectantly. Schooling was often out of reach in both cases. The other world was never far away.'... and then came a song from the tarn...it was the tiny fishes song' (Growth of the Soil, Worster 2008 ed.p.92). 'Chualamar an tamhrán dá rá go fada bog binn.....nach róinte iad san' (An t-Oileánach, 2002 lch.239). Bryan Kelly wrote to Tomás on the 27/01/1922, "A Thomáis I send you four ounces and four sheets. Also, some newspaper cuttings. One cutting is about a man on an island like a black man in Norway. The 'black man in Norway' is Kelly's way of referencing the Evil One who appeared to Isak in Growth of the Soil. In Séadna which Kelly and Ó Criomhthain read together the Evil One appears as An Fear Dubh.

Tomás Ó Criomhthain sent Allagar na hInise, Allagar 11 (both in the form of a diary) and An tOileánach in regular instalments by post to Kelly over a five-year period from October 1918 to June 1924. Professor Seán O Coileáin has proved Bryan Kelly did not understand Tomás Ó Criomhthain's Irish. Bryan Kelly had studied Irish and was a member of the Gaelic Society at Trinity. His father from Sliabh Luachra would have been familiar with Irish words and phrases extant in the area. A hundred years after his father grew up in Tuarnánach I myself remember hearing 'Tuarnánach atá go brónach' in Killarney. Jane Cronin of Ballycasheen recalled 'Tuar na nóinseach!' An Seabhac who had given Bryan Kelly lessons in Irish claimed 'b'ionadh liom a éascaí a fuair se greim ar bhunús na Gaeilge uaim-se'. 'Bhí bun-eolas maith ag Brian ar an nGaeilge uaim-

se-go bhféadfadh sé é féin a chur i dtuiscint’ (cf. Tomás an Bhlascaoid, lch. 234). His next teacher was Tomás Ó Criomhthain himself, another native speaker of Irish of course; according to Tomás, ‘he went away with quite good Irish, although he had little of it when he came’ (Flower Papers UCD).

Bryan Kelly’s problem was like Isak in *Growth of the Soil* - Tomás Ó Criomhthain retained his dialect. Tomás boasted of the purity of his Irish. In “An Béal Bocht”, his parody of An tOileánach, Myles na gCopaleen provided the *reductio ad absurdum* of this view:

‘Bhí duine uasal as Baile Átha Cliath ag taisteal na dúiche...
 ..Bhí gléas leis ar a dtugtaí gramafón agus an té a dhéanfadh
 scéalaíocht nó seanchas i láthair an ghléis seo chuirfeadh an
 gléas ar chuala sé de ghlanmheabhair....An oíche seo bhí an
 duine uasal teach Mhacsamailliúin Uí Phíonasa, é go
 suaimhneach sa dorchadas thiar agus an meaisín éisteachta láimh
 leis.....isteach le seandúine fliuch báite é ólta go lán a chraicinn
 agus ag lapadánacht in ionad siúil le tréan meisce.....pé áit ar an
 urlár a raibh se ina luí bhog croí an duine uasail nuair a
 mhothaigh se go raibh sruth mór cainte ag teacht as an áit sin ...
 .. léim se aníos agus shocraigh sé an meaisín éisteachta láimh
 leis an té a bhí ag stealladh amach na Gaeilge....Thuig se go
 mbíonn an dea-Ghaeilge deacair agus an Ghaeilge is fearr
 beagnach dothuigthe.....is róchinnte gurb í an mhuc sheacráin
 a bhí againne a dóirt pé focail a bhí ráite an oíche sin’ (cf. *An Béal
 Bocht* eag. 2018, lch. 38 et seq).

This image was inspired in turn by Punch cartoons of the pig in the parlour in Irish dwellings. In fairness to Tomás Ó Criomhthain no Standard Irish had existed since the Flight of the Earls after the Battle of Kinsale 1601 and the demise of the Bardic Schools. Although An Gúm had provided spelling Guidelines (Treoracha d’Aistritheoirí 7/10/1926), the first attempt at standardisation of Modern Irish did not come until 1958 i.e. Gramadach agus Litriú Na Gaeilge, An Caighdeán Oifigiúil.

An t-Athair Peadar O Laoire in particular championed the adoption of ‘caint na ndaoine’ in written works. ‘Caint an duine’ would have been a more accurate term as each writer wrote as he spoke. An t-Athair Pádraig O Duinnín wrote in the preface to his dictionary in 1927, ‘Local words of approved genuineness have been freely inserted..... It is not desirable,

however, to encourage the use of words only recently borrowed and for which there are good Irish equivalents, even if these latter have gone largely out of use'. It is one thing for a language like German which for a time rivalled English in the United States of America to adopt terms from other languages e.g. 'Wir koennen uns scheinbar alles jederzeit ergoogeln' (cf. fluter.de); Irish extant only on dwindling icebergs midst an Anglo-American ocean cannot afford to do this. Tomás Ó Criomhthain himself was guilty of this 'sin', e.g. 'opinióin' (Allagar 11, lch.138) and (An t-Oileánach 2002, lch. 114)?...cuid dá gcorp le feiscint nár sheighneáil an ghrian riamh roimis sin air?.

Admittedly this pales to insignificance in comparison with what I heard in Connemara circa 1970; 'chycleáil mé siar an ród go dtí na cottaigí! Of course, there can be no doubting the pre-eminence of native speakers in any language. Dr. Esti Blanco-Elorietta of NYU notes that 'the brain does not develop native dexterity in a second language after the age of six' (cf. El Pais 29/01/20). Midway through the twentieth century Marshall McLuhan (The Global Vision, 1962) examined mass media. At the time there were three TV Channels in the USA which he termed saturation. The feeling was that English (American) was on its way to becoming the sole world language and that in a generation dialects would disappear. The opposite happened. Texans on TV exaggerated their dialect to show their Texan identity. Thirty years later the linguistic differences between Texan and New York English were greater than when McLuhan wrote. I believe this phenomenon influenced writers of the Irish Restoration period such as Tomás Ó Criomhthain.

Tomás Ó Criomhthain was not the only writer on the Blaskets supported by Bryan Kelly. Mícheál Ó Gaoithín, son of Peig Sayers and who transcribed her story, sent his own diary to Kelly covering all of 1923 until May 1924. It was written on pages of a large day to page diary which Kelly had sent to him. Some believe that Mícheál Ó Gaoithín not Peig herself was the true author. 'Thugas iarracht ar an scéal so do scríobh mar do scríos leabhar Pheig cheana. Bhíos ag iascach uirthi i gan fhios di nó go raibh an stór a bhí i bhfolach ina ceann leis na blianta fada scríofa síos agam'. (Beatha Pheig Sayers FNT 1970 Réamhrá, lch.1). Bryan Kelly sent whiskey and tobacco to him also.

Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin, sister of Muiris Ó Súilleabháin who wrote 'Fiche Bliain Ag Fás', got a book to read from Tomás, a book which he himself had received from Kelly. Kelly had written to her giving her permission to get 'Iceland Fisherman' by Pierre Loti (This English

translation of *Pecheur d'Islande* was published in 1896) from Tomás. Tomás had scarcely finished *Allagar na h-Inise* when she began to write her diary and 'Cín Lae Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin' was published in 2000. These diaries were also written for Bryan Kelly from the first of May to the twenty ninth of November 1923. 'Is é is dóichí gurb é Brian Ó Ceallaigh a chuir ag scríobh an chéad lá í agus a thug peann agus pár di b'fhéidir' (*Cín Lae Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabhain*, Coiscéim 2014 Réamhrá).

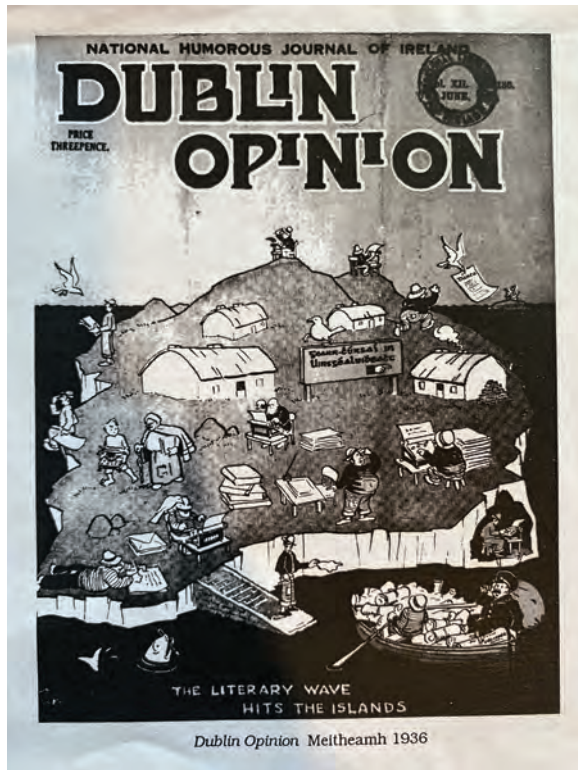


Plate 2: 'Cottage Industry' in *Dublin Opinion*, June 1936 (Source: Author)

In his preface to 'Twenty Years A-Growing' (OUP 1951.p.x) George Thomson wrote on Muiris O Súilleabháin: 'He was subject to only one literary influence. When he was a boy, a copy of Gorky's 'My Childhood' found its way into the island. He read it and it made a deep impression on him'. This text found its way through Bryan Kelly's supply chain. In an

interview with Proinsias mac Aonghusa in 1976 (cf. Bliainiris 2000 Carbad lch.109) George Thomson said, ‘Bhí Leabhar Thomáis Uí Chriomhthain an tOileánach tar éis teacht amach san am. Dúras leis an leabhar sin a thógaint mar mhúnla’. Clearly Kelly had provided the seed capital for this cottage industry on the Blaskets (cf. Dublin Opinion cartoon, the literary wave hits the islands, meitheamh 1936).

A. T. WILLIAMS,
Military Canteen Manager (late Royal Fusiliers).

"I have taken Phosferine since first leaving England in August, 1915. I went to West Mudros and Gallipoli, Smyra Bay, and Cape Hellas fronts, until the evacuation. I was transferred to the Egyptian Frontier, leaving there in November, 1916, for England. I got my discharge from the Army September, 1917, being over age after 3 years 29 days. I had Malaria, loss of appetite, and sleeplessness. I went to my Doctor, and after 4 weeks' treatment I got worse, and could not work, so I started taking Phosferine again, and it has made a man of me. All my canteen staff take Phosferine."

This military Canteen Manager declares that in all his varied war experience, Phosferine is the one thing which never failed him at the times of greatest strain—Phosferine enabled his nerve organisms to provide the vital force to overcome all the stress and climatic rigours which undermined the systems of those not fortified and protected by Phosferine.

When you require the Best Tonic Medicine, see you get
PHOSFERINE

A PROVEN REMEDY FOR

Nervous Debility	Schwannitis	Stomach Indigestion	Retention	Chlorosis
Indigestion	Hypertension	Loss of Appetite	Strain-Pain	Headache
Headaches	Neuritis	Parasitism	Parasitism	Parasitism
Stomach	Prostration	Parasitism	Parasitism	Parasitism

Phosferine has a world-wide reputation for curing diseases of the nervous system more completely and speedily, and at less cost than any other preparation.

SPECIAL SERVICE NOTE Phosferine is made by Messrs. J. & J. Williams, Ltd., London, and is sold by all chemists, druggists, and grocers. It is the best tonic for Phosferine—strong, and reliable. Sold by all Chemists, Druggists, etc. The 1/2 size contains nearly four times the 1/4 size.

Plate 3: Advertisement for Phosferine (Source: Irish Weekly Independent, May 25, 1918)

In a letter to Bryan in May 1923, Mícheál O Gaoithín thanked him for the two bottles of Phosferine Kelly had sent him. He had pointed out to Kelly that he was melancholic because his girlfriend had died. Phosferine was an early twentieth century tonic that was advertised to be a cure for a variety of ailments including depression, rheumatism, sciatica and other conditions. In an advertisement for Phosferine (cf. Irish Weekly

Independent. May 25, 1918): ‘A.T. Williams (late Royal Fusiliers) declares in all his varied war experience Phosferine is the one thing which never failed him at the times of greatest strain’. Bryan Kelly had been detained just after war broke out, had been in a prisoner of war camp where he discovered his brother had been wounded in the war and where the din of battle could be heard. No doubt he was on Phosferine himself. He had contracted TB while detained and his mental and physical problems meant he had difficulty in holding down a job.

In the same letter of May 1923 Mícheál O Gaoithín expresses his disappointment that said parcel did not contain tobacco as he was addicted to it. He ended his 1923 diary with the following: ‘Sea, a Bhriain, is dócha gur é an scríbhinn déanach agam é, ó tá an gátar ró-bhuailte linn. Chuireas leitir go dtí Seán Ó Súilleabháin T.D. ag lorg cabhartha ach sin a raibh dá maith dúinn ann. Is baolach gur é an mála an chéad áis eile a bheidh againne chun cabhartha agus nach í an peann...’ (cf. NLI Ms.G 1021). The Blasket Islanders tended to emigrate to Springfield Massachusetts - another link to “Growth of the Soil” as the Norwegians also emigrated to America in lean years.

By now Tomás Ó Cíomhthain was also expressing his disappointment with Kelly. In August 1923 he wrote to him in the form of verse:

‘Do cheapas a stóir gur millionóir thu agus cárta cúil,
Is go ndéanfá dhom treoir chuinn an ghnó mhór thabháchtach úd;
Mo bheathasa ar fáil is taisc lánmhór, dar ndóigh,
Is gan faic ar an gclár do chuirfeadh rás chum féin chuinn siúil.
‘Sea mar’ mhaireamar riamh mairfeam choíche,
O thúis an chluiche go deireadh na scríbe’.

and in prose; ‘Bhíos ag faire amuigh ar na páipéir, ach ba dheacair dóibh teacht agus nár chuiris chun siúil iad’. Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin was more subtle in her diary which she sent to Kelly: ‘Bhíos ag taibhreamh ar maidin gur tháinig naomhóg ón dtír isteach agus cóigear fear inti agus í lán d’ualach rudaí acu. Dar liom féin gur ghlaoigh fear acu orm féin agus gur thug se bosca maith mór dom agus m’ainm as Gaelainn air....Tríd an bpost a tháinig se....Cad a bheadh ann na feidhre do bhróga ísle agus casóigín chnóitálta.....Bhíos ag cuimhneamh ar feadh tamaill, tar éis mé a dhúiseacht, ar mo thaibhreamh agus arsa mise liom féin, b’fhéidir go dtiocfadh sé chun cinn....’ (Cin Lae Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin lgh. 18-19 Coiscéim 2014).

Her dreams tended to bear fruit! ‘Nuair a chonac gach éinne ag bailiú timpeall ar fhear an phoist do ritheas féin chomh maith le cách eile.... bhí mála aige ina dhorn.... D’oscail se an mála mór agus thóg se aníos bosca, agus é déanta suas le cordaí bána....agus ghlaoi sé ar m’ainmse....níor fhanas leis na cordaí a scaoileadh ach an scian a thabhairt orthu, agus ‘sé an chéad rud a bhuail liom ná an gúna glas céanna do bhí ins an taibhreamh agam.’ (cf. Scéilíní on mBlascaod Coiscéim 20004 eag. Nollaig Mac Congail lch.96).

However, there is no doubting Bryan Kelly’s generosity. On his arrival at the Blaskets he had given footballs to the boys and sweets to the girls. Unlike Valentia Island my research has not shown that the footballs helped any Blasket Islanders make the Kerry team! We saw already how he supplied prisoners of war with cigarettes at Limburg. His next-door neighbour and close relative, Jane Cronin of Ballycasheen, remembered him visiting her in Colaiste Íde, Ventry. She thought him lovely. She was enrolled in the Preparatory School for Teachers there from 1934 to 1938. On graduation her Leaving Cert class were taken on a boat trip to the Great Blasket where they were photographed with Peig Sayers. Bryan Kelly who had experienced boarding school life himself brought her a box of Fry’s chocolate bars on one occasion. Unfortunately, the nuns confiscated the entire box, giving Sinéad Ní Chróinin just one bar for herself and her friends. One factor did limit his ability to give. His mother Bridget Kelly passed away on the thirtieth of March 1922. She encouraged him in his interests which had enabled him to keep the supply chain to the Blaskets open. His father would not have been keen that the one person in the family not gainfully employed was in fact dispensing money on An Blascaod Mór. After his wife’s death John Kelly set up a Trust which on his own death granted £1000 to each of his two daughters. When Bryan Kelly died in 1936 his share was valued at £150. John Kelly held shares jointly with Bryan and this meant that Bryan could not dispose of shares without his father’s consent and signature. By this method Spider limited Bryan’s capacity for giving. Tomás Ó Criomhthain may have been aware of this; ‘Thug sé cúnámh chuinn maireachtaint dom, agus féin mar ‘thug go dtuga Dia an cúnámh céanna dhó féin’ (cf. Seanchas ón Oileán Tiar, lch.xvi).

Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s disenchantment with Kelly increased with time. He had been sending his diary (Allagar na h-Inise, Allagar 11) and apologia pro vita sua (An t-Oileánach) to him for half a decade. He had been praising Kelly in songs and in fact he felt all prose could only be

improved by verse: ‘nar ghránna liom féin riamh an leabhar go mbeadh leathdosaen d’amhránaibh bhreátha ann’ (cf. Tomás An Bhlascaoid lch.247). This is reminiscent of the Roman poet Ovid: ‘Sponte sua carmen numeros veniebat adaptos, et quod temptabam dicere versus erat’ (Tristia).

It was fashionable for writers to use a nom de plume at the time Bryan Kelly brought the aforementioned authors to the attention of Tomás. All three used a nom de plume as indeed did An Seabhac. Tomás was having none of this, he wanted to see his name and work in print. In a letter to Kelly Tomás was crystal clear: ‘Cuirfidh mo bheathasa leathadh ar do shúile ma théann chuin cinn. Beidh Éire mheata mar ainm ar Éire an lá ‘bheidh leabhar Thomáis Dhomhnaill Mhic Criomhthain insa tsiopa gan díol’ (cf. Tomás An Bhlascaoid lch.243). ‘Bhíos féin sa Bhlascaed an lá a tháinig na chéad chóipeanna tríd an bpost go dtí an Criomhthanach, agus is cuimhin liom an gliondar agus an mórtas beag a tháinig ina shúile nuair a d’oscaíl sé amach an chéad cheann acu’ (cf. An tOileánach 1980 eag. Pádraig O Maoileain lch.7). Pádraig Ó Maoileain was Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s grandson. In an interview with Radio na Gaeltachta (1981) Pádraig Ó Maoileoin recalled being on the island when Tomás first held his printed work in his hands. He claimed Tomás was so delighted that it added ten years to his life.

Bryan Kelly approached Shakespeare and Company in Paris, the Irish Texts Society in London and Eoin McNeill, the Minister of Education in Dublin with the manuscripts but without success. W.T. Cosgrave, President of the Executive Council of the Free State, was a regular visitor to Kelly’s home The Hall, Killarney. He attended John Kelly’s funeral in Killarney in 1940. Neither this political connection nor the fact that Eoin Mc Neill and Bryan Kelly had both been at Blackrock Castle enabled Kelly to get the manuscripts published. He does not appear to have been under any pressure from Micheál Ó Gaoithín or Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin to have their diaries published. Like the Roman poet Horace (exegi monumentum aere perennius) Tomás Ó Criomhthain felt his writing would live when he was dead.

Bryan Kelly handed over the manuscripts of Allagar na h-Inise and An t-Oileánach which he possessed to An Seabhac late in 1925. Unlike Kelly An Seabhac did succeed in having both works published: Allagar na h-Inise in 1928 and An t-Oileánach the following year. The publication of the books ended the association between Tomás Ó Criomhthain and Bryan Kelly. An Seabhac replaced Kelly in Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s esteem. This is perfectly understandable. By the end of May 1928 Tomás had already

received money for his writing: ‘Do chuir An Seabhac bile deas chóm cheana as agus tá sé agam £20’ (cf. Tomás An Bhlascaoid lch.258) On 16 October 1929, Tomás wrote: ‘Do chuireas an leabhar go ‘Cill Airne’ fadó. Níor chuir Eibhlín aon tuairisc chóm ‘na thaobh; ní lú chuir ná i dtaobh an Allagair....’(cf. Tomás An Bhlascaoid lch. 257). The Eibhlín in question was Bryan Kelly’s sister Eily who married Liam Trant McCarthy. 1929 was the year of the Wall Street Crash. This event affected Killarney. ‘Many young men of twenty’ were unable to emigrate. Football matches between townlands within Killarney were attended by hundreds. The Killarney Legion football club was founded for political reasons, but nevertheless it did show that the numbers existed for a second football club in the town. Now Moyeightragh Legion could compete with Moyeightragh Crokes. John Kelly’s business enterprises were not immune to the worldwide down turn. In 1929 he advertised his house, shop and premises at the corner of Main St, Henn St for sale or lease. The family fortunes were in decline. Already on the sixteenth of March 1926 a Deed of Settlement concerning family property was heard in the Irish courts. Bryan Kelly must have regretted his largesse to the Islanders. The family was aware of the success of the two books and they felt An Seabhac had taken all the credit. A dispute arose between Fr. Laurence Kelly, Bryan’s brother, and An Seabhac. By now he was serving as curate in St. Mary’s, Rathfarnham, Dublin. Legal advice was sought. The Solomonesque judgement was as follows: Bryan Kelly (and his family after his death) owned the paper of the manuscripts because he had supplied it. An Seabhac, the publishers owned what was written on the paper. While this dispute was in train Fr. Kelly got possession of the manuscripts.

By 1940 Sinéad Ní Chróinín was a newly qualified National Teacher teaching in Dublin. She was expected to visit her mother’s first cousin Fr. Kelly in Rathfarnham every Sunday evening for tea. According to her daughter Eileen Devitt this was the last thing she wanted to do. She had been a boarder in Baile An Sceilg, Colaiste Íde and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. For the first time in her life she was free to enjoy life in the big city. She recalled Fr. Laurence’s house - Bryan Kelly had previously lived there for some time - it was difficult to climb the stairs as each step was impeded by books and documents. She maintained that Fr. Laurence passed on the manuscripts sent to Bryan Kelly to Professor Brian O Cuív and that he deposited them in the National Library of Ireland (NLI). Unfortunately NLI were unable to inform me when they received the manuscripts. By now she was a fluent Irish speaker and was expected

to help Fr. Laurence with his Irish. She had to read poetry and prose aloud to him ‘as Gaeilge’. Fr. Laurence who was an MA and had been Professor at the College of St. Paul Minnesota also visited An Blascaod Mór. In a letter to An Seabhac when Bryan had departed the scene Tomás Ó Criomhthain wrote: “Thug an Ath. Ó Ceallaigh seachtain anso ‘ár measc.....Ni dóigh liom go raibh se ró-aibidh insa teangain ar aon chor... .. Professor Seán Ó Coileáin wrote to me, ‘I have come across a letter written sometime in the mid-1930s from Seán Ó Criomhthain - son of Tomás - describing a visit by the priest to the Basket giving the impression that he had been snooping around but had received little information or cooperation’. I myself met Seán Ó Criomhthain in Muiríoch in my student days and he left me in no doubt that I was in the presence of greatness.

There has been some speculation as to whether Bryan Kelly ever saw *Allagar na h-Inise* or *An t-Oileánach* in print. He was so well aware of the horrors of war that I think he would have been far more interested in a different book published in the same year as *An t-Oileánach* i.e. “*Nichts Neues im Westen*”. After all, in spite of his failure to interpret Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s dialect, he was familiar with the content of both works. “*Im Westen nichts Neues*” is a novel written by Erich Maria Remarque which describes the terror of World War I through the eyes of a young soldier. Unlike *An t-Oileánach* Kelly would have had no difficulty reading this anti-war book written in Hochdeutsch.

It is not for me to judge the importance or otherwise of Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s work. I have read *Allagar na h-Inise* and *Allagar II*. I have taught the original edition of *An t-Oileánach* and read the definitive version edited by Professor Seán Ó Coileáin. I felt they contained too much repetition for my liking. However, at a seminar on Ancient Greek in 2003 at Delphi-the one in Phocis not in Mayo-GM Sifakis Professor of Classical Greek, University of Thessaloniki and NYU, pointed out that computer technology showed that stock epithets in *The Iliad* (e.g. *oinopa ponton*) vary in a very subtle manner. Like the *Iliad* an *t-Oileánach* is an end product of folklore.

A note of caution; “the island’s peak population of about 176 was reached in 1916” (cf. *The Basket Islandman* by Gerald Hayes p.21). While I take Franz Beckenbauer’s point if it were all about numbers China would win the World Cup every time, a Korean poet, Ko Un, claimed to be a much better poet than Seamus Heaney when the latter won the Nobel Prize for Literature. If I am correct in thinking that Hamsun’s *Growth of*

the Soil which won the Nobel Prize was the spark which ignited An t-Oileánach, then the circle was completed by Heinrich Boell another Nobel Prize winner with his translation of Robin Flower's *The Islandman* ("Die Boote fahren nicht mehr aus" – von Annemarie und Heinrich Boell 1992). This is my favourite version of Tomás Ó Criomhthain's magnum opus but then again Boell is nothing if not readable. It has to be pointed out as well that Knut Hamsun's *Growth of the Soil* was burned in Norway after the end of World War II. 'Peig; suffered the same fate. It was burned in Dublin by pupils who had completed their Leaving Certificate, among them the then Minister for Education's daughter!

An Seabhadh was not correct when he wrote that Kelly had to leave Ireland never to return when he handed over the Manuscripts to him in 1925. We know that Kelly was in Ventry shortly before he died. The introduction to the 1928 edition of *Allagar na h-Inise* "Ag tagairt don Leabhar" which Professor Seán O Coileáin believes was written by An Seabhadh was signed Brian Ó Ceallaigh, Cill Airne, Márta 1928. Bryan Kelly was a sponsor of his niece Nuala Trant McCarthy when she was baptised by his brother Fr Laurence in Killarney on the first of October 1929.

In the late nineteen twenties/early thirties Bryan Kelly revisited mainland Europe. His family had been keen travellers - unsurprising for people in the tourist business – and always in search of new business models. At that time Croatia was a popular tourist destination. It was also believed that its Mediterranean climate could mitigate if not cure illnesses such as consumption which he had contracted. He died on or about the 28 December 1936 in Split and was buried the following day. He shares a grave with Petar son of Petar Atrić from Split. People from more than one family were commonly buried in the same grave there. It is fitting that Bryan Kelly's last resting place is Split, site of the palace of the Roman Emperor Diocletian and of the Croatian Literary Renaissance. Up to 1918 Dalmatia was part of the Austrian Empire which meant German was widely spoken there. On 31 December 1936 his brother Fr. Laurence celebrated his Requiem Mass in Rathfarham. Among those in attendance were his aunt Miss L. Cronin, his sisters Mrs Trant McCarthy and Mrs. Daniel, Mr. McEntee, Minister for Finance and Mr W.T. Cosgrave TD. Bryan Kelly died a bachelor and intestate. On 20 April 1943 Letters of Administration of his personal estate, his lawful father John Kelly having died in June 1940, were granted by the High Court to Denis B Kelly BL of the Hall, Killarney, his youngest brother. Bryan Kelly's estate amounted

to £150. The value of his personal belongings was estimated at £5. In the Letters of Administration Bryan Kelly is described as a teacher with an address at the Esplanade Hotel, Bray. In Allagar 11 we find ‘Seo sciolpa den dtobac comónta dhuit aníos Ó Chill Mhantáin’ (1 July 1922). I have been unable to discover where he taught so perhaps he was a private tutor. At any rate, to use a very modern term, he was an influencer in the lives of Tomás Ó Criomhthain, Mícheál O Gaoithín, Muiris and Eibhlín Ní Shúilleabháin.

As we have seen, Tomás felt songs were an embellishment to prose; “Bionn rann chomh deas le h-aon rud eile I leabhar nó i bpáipéar” (cf. An t-Oileánach 2002 lch.171). He describes how the poet Seán O Duinnshléibhe prevented him from cutting a foot of turf on a splendid day for the job when he insisted Tomas write down one of his poems lest it be lost. I experienced a similar incident in County Clare, the home of traditional music, forty years ago. It was a wet summer when a couple of fine days came. We were tramping hay for a neighbour and rain had been forecast for the evening. We were working as hard as we could to save the field of hay when we noticed the hay’s owner had disappeared. When he returned to the field to be greeted by strong language he explained; ‘a tune came into my head. I had to go up to the house to play it’ – ‘Otherwise I would never remember it!’. The ‘Amhráin’ of Tomás Ó Criomhthain cannot be considered the Bible, nevertheless they throw some light on Bryan Kelly. I have come across nine songs written by Tomás, all of them containing praise of Kelly. Professor Seán Ó Coileáin has shown that Kelly stopped Tomas sending him songs: ‘Dábúr mise mo mháistir féin do chuirfínn leathdosaon d’amhránaibh breátha thall agus abhus insa sgríbhínn seo ach ní mé. Guth ó fharaire uasal atá ‘na chónaí I dtír Éireann atá agam agus ó ghlacas an ghuth táim toilteanach déanamh dá réir’ (cf. Tomás an Bhlascaoid, lch. 247). Kelly had studied Ancient Greek, Latin and German where “Genauigkeit” is paramount, and there is no room for ‘maybe’.

While Tomás Ó Criomhthain’s songs of praise for Bryan Kelly may be granted poetic licence, his letters to Kelly paint a different picture. At the beginning of the process Kelly wrote to Tomás in his usual humble fashion; “Scríobh cuntas cinn lae chugam, do mbé do thoil é. Brian O Ceallaigh”. The letters from Tomás to Bryan began with phrases such as: ‘A chara ardchéimeach, A chara na féile, A chara na n-árann, A fharaire léigheanta’. He wrote ‘Tá an chathaoir-cloiche úd, i nGort na Mara bhí agat Dé Domhnaigh..... Cathaoir Bhriain a h-aoinn anois. Táim á cur-so-

chugat le mór-urraim duit'. On notepaper embossed with a sprig of shamrock and the word 'Killarney' in green he wrote to Bryan: 'Ceal tobac amháin gan fáil ar ór ná airgead. Conas atá tathair sibh ar fad is gach áit. Ta leabhar an tsagairt fós agam. Is dócha go bhfuil Gleann Bheithe fáctha agaibh anois'. The priest was Bryan Kelly's older brother Fr. Laurence. John Kelly, Bryan's father, owned holiday homes in Glenbeigh and Bryan's first cousin Ellen Cronin of Ballycasheen stayed in one of them isolating herself and her newborn baby from the 'Spanish' flu when both were not well. Bryan Kelly made it clear that the foolscap he sent to Tomás was 'sent for a purely literary and personal purpose' (3 April 1921). Tomás wanted more than pens and paper. 'Is dócha ná fuil aon spéaclaí le fáil i nÉirinn age diabhail Chogaigh. Do mhór-mheas duit Tomás Ó Criomhthain'. Mo shóil in airde le fiacha an tobac. 'Níor shroich aon bhile beag ó Meán Fomhair, is é sin an ceann déanach'. He was looking for the price of tobacco. He wanted money notes not notepaper. In Allagar na h-Inise he overdoes the "plámás", 'sin pluga tobac agat o cheartlár Chill Airne faoi t'fhiacail agat, arsa mise.....Is dócha ná faca mo shóile féin aon fhear uasal riamh ach e féin' (cf.lch.17). Again, from Allagar na h-Inise; 'ba bhreá liom lá breá suite ar chathaoir Bhriain tar éis leaba chnap a bheith bainte agam, píp i mo bhéal blúire de thobac Bhéal Feirste inti.' (cf.lch217). Gallaher of Belfast produced tobacco for smoking and chewing. One of their brand names was 'Killarney Tobacco'. This flattery reaches a climax: 'Nil aon tortóg ná lantán a rabhas féin agus an duine uasal a bhí i mo theannta ceithre bliana ó shin nár bhuaileas mo láimh trí h-uaire air, agus mura mó de ghruaim a fuairas as sin ná de ghreann ní lú (cf. Allagar na h-Inise, lch 312). Here Tomás has raised Kelly to a position of sainthood. He placed his hand three times on every hummock where Bryan had been. Most disturbing of all: 'an t-óg uasal ó phríomhchathair Chiarraí, Cill Airne' (cf Allagar na h-Inise, lch.20). Tomás declares Killarney, Kelly's hometown, the capital of Kerry (This needs to be censored before anyone from Tralee lays eyes on it!), whereas in An tOileánach (2002, lch 184) we find 'baile mór Thrá Lí, príomhbhaile mór Chiarraí'.

When speaking among themselves, Brian was referred to as Kelly by the Islanders. In Allagar na h-Inise Tomás speaks with Cáit an Líthigh and he asks her to distribute letters among girls; 'An dtabharfá leat suas iad agus a cheann fein a thabhairt do gach duine acu?..... ar sise, 'Caithfead dul i ngach tigh leo, is dócha'. Ní gá duit é ach seasamh ag ceann do thí féin agus cuir glao bhreá láidir asat agus abair go raibh Kelly

sa naomhóg, agus geallaimse duit go mbeidh chugat gan rómhoill” (cf. lch 16). Tomás was not the only islander who saw Kelly as a soft touch. In his pen picture of Bryan Kelly Tomás wrote: ‘Ni raibh na h-Oileánaigh míbhaoch do ach go lánbhaoch’ (cf. An t-Oileánach 2002 lch. 319).

During World War I Tomas tells us a ship went down off the Blaskets: ‘Dóirt an captaein do bhí uirthi go raibh cuid do gach earra do bhain le beatha an duine inti, ach deoch amháin. . . . Do sábháladh luach na gcéadta don raic, agus do dhein na h-Oileánaigh mórán airgid di. . . . Ní raibh agamsa ach a bheith ag féachaint orthu dar ndóigh, mar nach i mbád ná i mbarc do chuas, ná puinn ag glaoch orm’ (cf. An t-Oileánach 2002, lch 319). This was the SS Quebra and Tony Allen wrote: ‘She was carrying a cargo of meat, cotton, watches, flour, brass sheeting, rods, bars and artillery shells’ (cf. wrecksite. Eu 26 June 2007). When on a voyage from New York to Liverpool the vessel struck on submerged rocks near the Great Basket. . . . shortly after one o’clock in the morning of August 23 she had experienced rough weather and the course was more than once changed. . . . The crew left the Quebra in two lifeboats and the jolly-boat, and the master had to make terms with a fisherman by promising him the jolly-boat if he would show him there to land. It was hoped such conduct towards ship-wrecked men would be explained away. . . . The fishermen would not take them ashore unless they were bribed. The captain then offered them a boat’ (cf. Liverpool Daily Post 12 October 1916). It was never easy to land on Oileán Tiar! The Quebra ran aground (wrecked) on the 23 August 1916. The captain was Evan Francis Thomas. Bryan Kelly was the Quebra for Tomas: ‘Mara raibh aon stanlainn leis an Quabra féin agam, féach mar sheol Dia an duine uasal chúm. . . .’ (cf. An t-Oileánach 2002 lch. 319).

Beneath the headline ‘Pioneer of The Blaskets Inspiring an Author’, Bryan Kelly was eulogised in the Irish Independent (31 December 1936). ‘It was a flash of insight on Mr. Kelly’s part that made him realise that Tomás had a story of his own to tell and that the story would be a permanent monument of the Gaeltacht. Mr Kelly often loved to picture Tomás setting to work at the table in his remote kitchen in the Blaskets. With something of the solemnity of a priest performing a solemn rite at the altar’. While Tomás was quite serious about his writing he did have a sense of humour which undoubtedly was a sine qua non for survival on the island: ‘Chuireas tine ar mo phíp. Chuireas an peann don bhuidéal agus chromas ag breacadh mo pháipéir ghoirm, agus faobhar orm. Bhi cat óg sa chúinne in aice na tine agus tá an-dhealramh go raibh sé do mo

thabhairt faoi ndeara, agus gur tuigeadh dó gur rud a bhí ina bheathaidh an buidéal agus gurb amhlaidh a bhíos-sa d'iarraidh é a chur uaim leis an bpeann. Thug se aon léim amháin ón gcóinne, bhuaíl a lapa faoin mbuidéal, bhuaíl a bhéal faoi cruinn díreach ar an leathanach gorm, agus chuaigh gan mhoill mar a raibh sé arís....Cheap sé gur luch an buidéal gan amhras' (cf. Allagar na h-Inise lch.4). No doubt this cat fíorghaelach was a direct descendent of Pangur Bán! The piece in the Independent continued, 'When Kelly took the accumulated manuscripts to Professor McNeill...Mr. McNeill after reading them exclaimed; here is the work I had been hoping for years would be done and now you have done it. But above all he won the love of his old friends on the Blaskets....and his heart would ever turn back there'. It is highly likely that this was written by his brother Fr Laurence who had celebrated his Requiem Mass. When Dan Devitt, Jane Cronin's husband, commented to Denis Kelly, Bryan's youngest brother who was by then a law lecturer at Trinity, that he thought the obituary on Fr. Laurence himself Shakespearean, Denis replied, 'he probably wrote it himself!'

In the Irish Independent (1 January 1937) Professor Eoin McNeill was full of praise of Bryan Kelly: 'Because Irish was the language of peasants and of rural life, it was looked down upon by those who thought themselves or wanted others to think them superior to that sort of thing... ..It was not so in Brian Kelly's case. He had an instinct for the values of language and he had a true literary taste....to give us the well itself to drink from, to enable those who had the power to send it out to all the rest'. He referred to Allagar na h-Inise and An t-Oileánach: 'life is in them and while we read them we are there in the middle of that life. This work he undertook and performed without any pretentiousness, without any advertisement, without any thought for himself in obedience to a generous and noble inspiration.

'An t-Oileánach' drew the interest of many toward the Blaskets, particularly those who previously knew little about these islands, only recognising them as small dots in the Atlantic off the Kerry coast (see Obituary of Tomás Ó Criomhthain in the Irish Times, 10 March 1937). Two decades after Bryan Kelly's passing (see the Irish Press, 21 December 1956), Seán Sheámais praised An t-Oileánach extensively in his column Dála An Scéil: 'The book possesses the traits of the epic; strength, movement, depth, and the music of humanity. It is also a superior storytelling'. In the same publication, An Seabhac wrote about Tomás Ó Criomhthain and Bryan Kelly in An Cló Gaelach. Numerous adjectives

have been used by various authors to characterise Kelly. An Seabhac aptly summarised him in his final remarks: ‘Brian lách O Ceallaigh’. Additionally, An Seabhac outlines Kelly’s travels across mainland Europe - Paris, Berlin, Croatia - evoking Hillaire Belloc’s ‘The Path to Rome’. While it is unclear if Bryan ever reached Rome, his younger brother Thomas certainly did. A surgeon with the RAF, Tommy Kelly was in Italy in 1944 and had a private audience with Pope Pius XII, who provided him with a tour of the Vatican. Between the wars, he furthered his medical qualifications. He served three terms in the RAMC during World War I, including at Ypres, and was injured during all three, the last time in October 1918 just before the war ended. On 1 January he became CBE, was awarded the Mons Star and was decorated by the Russians in 1918. He was attached to the RAF almost from the beginning. He was granted the Legion of Merit twice once in 1918 and secondly in WW2 by the USA (nothing to do with Killarney Legion !). He was a member of the House of Windsor’s medical team. He holidayed after the war in the family home, The Hall, in Killarney. On that occasion, his wife presented Abina Cronin of Ballycasheen House with two silver spoons to celebrate Abina’s birth in 1948.

As An Seabhac noted, Bryan Kelly possessed extensive knowledge of Europe and was also known to travel extensively within Ireland. He resided at various locations including Main St. Killarney, the Hall in Ballycasheen Killarney, Glenbeigh Co. Kerry, Rathfarnham Dublin, and Bray Co. Wicklow. In the year 2000 a plaque to the memory of Bryan Kelly in his former home the Killarney Heights Hotel was jointly unveiled by Fr. Laurence Kelly PP Kilgarvan, Jane Cronin Devitt (relatives of Bryan) and Niamh Ní Chríomhthain (granddaughter of Tomás). Pádraig Ó Siochrú (nephew of An Seabhac) was in attendance. The copyright to the 2002 edition (Cló Talbóid) of An t-Oileánach is held by Niamh Ní Chríomhthain. At least the dispute ended better than that between Saints Columba and Finian. Columba had copied manuscripts in Latin borrowed from Finian. Finian demanded he hand over the copy he made. The matter reached Diarmuid, Ard-Rí na h-Éireann. Diarmuid’s judgement: to every cow its calf: to every book its copy. The result of this dispute; untold slaughter.

Perhaps we should leave the last word to Myles na gCopaleen (Irish Times 3/1/1957); ‘I regarded the book in question with awe..... Its sheer gauntness is a lesson for all. It is the symbol of a Gaelic order gone under for good. But it is an extremely noble salute from them about to go away.....In one week I wrote a parody of it called An Béal Bocht’.

Appendix

Stanzas written by Tomás Ó Criomhtain in praise of Bryan Kelly.

ALLAGAR11 lch.1 11/2/1921

Tagann machnamh in aigne Thomáis
Mar bhíodh Brian liom go rábach sa tslí
Is n'fheadar an fada uainn an dáit'
Go gcroithfidimid lámha ann arís.

Ibidem lch.9 19/2/1921

Ta do dheartháir i bhfad uait a chím
Agus sin mar a bhíonn ag an áil
An uair a thagann siad suas insa tír seo
Bíd ag striocadh gan mhoill as gach lá
Is ait liom an áit seo go mbím ann
Nuair a chloisim an tír ina rírá
Ach sé mo dhóchas go bhfeicfead aríst thú
Ag tabhairt do bhrollaigh don dtóinn is tú ar snámh.

Ibidem lch.13 19/2/1921

Ta smúit ar dhúntaibh Éireann
Táim féinig ar bheagán brí
Mar táim rómhór trí chéile
Ag an té seo ata ag scaradh liom
Iarraim cabhair an Aonmhic
Chun an méid seo a ghlanadh dhíom
Is go bhfeicfinn Brian lá éigin
Ag téarnamh ag teacht im líon

Ibidem lch.21 3/4/1921

Táim féin go dubhach i ndiaidh mo scrúirse d'fhear ghrámhar
D'fhág bánta an Bhlascaeid Mhóir
Tá faoin bhfarraige siar go dian trí lá anois
O bhánta an Bhlascaeid Mhóir
Bhíos go maith go bhfaca i mo dháil é
Ach ar imeacht thar n-ais tá meath im shláinte
Ba chosúil le Brian ina bhéal miongháire
Is iad ar Bhánta an Bhlascaeid Mhóir.

Is minic a seolach air ar gcósta
 Ní deirim libh briag,
 Órnáidí móra ó phórtaibh
 Ná facamair riamh.
 Ní raibh ionnta, dar ndóighthir ach seodaibh
 Gan maitheas, mo chiach!
 Seochas Lampa Umha an Óir
 Do sheol an faraire Brian.

Is creideamhnach an gnó da shórt,
 Sé an faraire fial.
 An tabharthas lán-mhór a chur ar bórd
 Chun an fhir ata thiar.
 Tabharfaidh cabhair dom, dar ndóighthir,
 Chun gnótha na teangan do riar.
 Se Lampa Umha an Óir
 Do sheol an faraire Brian.

Is mo ceangaltán néata do thréinig
 Anso chugainn le bliadhain
 O Mheirice féinig mar a ngléastar
 Na nidhthe fé riar
 Nil ionnta, dar ndóighthir, ach seodaibh
 Gan maitheas thar bliadhain,
 Seochas Lampa umha an Óir
 Do sheol an faraire Brian.

Ta an t-óg uasal gan pósadh i bhFódla
 Ní deirim libh briag.
 Is na bruinneallaibh óga atá i dtreo leis
 Ach duine bheidh siar
 Fear an Lampa Óir seo a chur i dtreo chugham
 Mo bheannacht 'na dhiaidh
 A's molaim an óig- bhean a bheidh I dtreo
 Leis an bhfaraire Brian.

Tomas an Bhlascaoid lch.259 28/5/1928

Is ceart dom dar ndóigh an fear fóna a bheartaigh dom,
 ' Ainm a lua mar is mór mo ghradam do,
 Do choimeád sé do shíor go cruinn i bhfearas mé,
 Is é Brian O Ceallaigh é o bhruach Loch Léin.

Ibidem lch.26 24/4/1921

Is aít liom nuair a fheicim an lá
Is ná dearcaim aon bhád chugham ná nao'
Agus Brian inti i ndeireadh nó i lár
Ag tabhairt turais ar ár mbanta le gréin

Ibidem lch.33 18/5/1921

Bheadh mo shúil le Brian fá éigin
Ach an t-éirleach so ar Cháit Ni Dhuibhir.

Ibidem lch.46 12/7/1921

Thabharfainn cúrsa an tsléibhe isteach
Agus sé turais gach uair sa lá
Dá gcloisfinn Brian a bheith taobh liom
Go ndéanfainn leis croitheadh lámh.

NLI Ls.G1022 12/7/1921

Tá an oíche ag dul i bhfaid 's i ngearra laethe,
Ar bhánta an Bhlascaoid Mhóir,
Is dá bhficfinn Brian sa mbliain seo féinig
Ar bhánta an Bhlascaoid Mhóir;
Is fíor 's follas gur corraithe an saol é,
Gach lá chuinn aitis ó scaramair le chéile,
Ach beimid fós I dtreo lá éigin,
Ar bhánta an Bhlascaoid Mhóir.

ALLAGAR11 lch.119 1/7/1922

Is fada é ár ngradam araon
I gceangal le chéile de shíor
Is mór é an breacadh 's an léamh
Sa chuntas on dtaobh so lánfhíor
Fair a mhairfeadh beidh gradam mo chléibh
Don bhfaraire éachtach a bhí
Lántamall in aice lem thaobh
Chuirfeadh faid ar mo laetha sin fíor.

An Sguab Mí na Márta 1924

An Lampa Óir

' Sé an t-iongantais is mó a chonnac fós
I gcaitheamh na mbliadhán,
Ná amharc na seoide do seolach
Go dtí an t-Oileán Mór thiar
Tháinig sé i dtreo tré Fódla
Gan bascadh gan rian
' Sé Lampa umha an Óir
Do sheol an faraire Brian.

About the Author

Jeremias Cronin is from Ballycasheen House, Killarney. He was educated at Lissivigeen N.S., St. Brendan's College, Killarney, University College Cork, and the University of Limerick. He completed a master's degree on the Irish translation of The Book of Common Prayer, the third book printed in Irish. He has taught Ancient Greek, Latin, Irish and German at Secondary School and University levels.

References

Letters Tomás Ó Criomhthain to Bryan Kelly: NLI LS G 1020 1022; LS 15, 785

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PROCEEDINGS 2025

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday, 21 January
Tralee Library and via Zoom, 7:00 p.m.

Ross Castle and Life in Ireland during the 15th Century

Tuesday, 4 February
Dan Rael, Tralee Library, 7:00 p.m.

Echoes of War: Legacies of the Civil War in North Kerry

Thursday, 20 February
Dr Richard McElligott, Historian, Via Zoom, 7:00 p.m.

An Turas Fada go Trá Banna: Ruairí Mac Easmuinn ar an bóthar ó Aontraim go Ciarraí

Tuesday, 4 March
Pádraig Ó Conchubhair, KAHS, Tralee Library, 7:00 p.m.

Outing: Daniel O'Connell's Derrynane: Creating an International Stage for a Statesman

Sunday, 23 March
Victoria McCarthy, Conservation Officer, KCC,
Meet at Derrynane House Carpark at 2:00 p.m.

Pilgrimage in Medieval Kerry

Thursday, 27 March
Dr Louise Nugent, Archaeologist, Tralee Library, 7:00 p.m.

Outing: Coomsaharn Area

Sunday, 6 April
Aoibheann Lambe
Meet Glenbeigh NS, 2:30 p.m.

Knocknacuibg Excavations

Thursday, 10 April
Dr Michael Connelly, County Archaeologist, Tralee, 7:00 p.m.

Outing: Kilmalkedar Area

Sunday, 27 April
Isabel Bennett, Archaeologist, Kilmalkedar, 2:30 p.m.

Outing: Curator's Choice, Kerry Museum

Thursday, 8 May
Helen O'Carroll, Curator, Kerry Museum, 11:30 a.m.

Civil Army War Chaplain:**Fr William Ferris's Service with Kerry Command 1922-24**

Thursday, 8 May
Brendan McCarthy, Via Zoom, 7:00 p.m.

St Brendan's Mass

Friday, 16 May
St Brendan's Church, Tralee, 9:30 a.m.

**Outing: Ballyheigue Castle, St James's Graveyard,
and Our Lady's Well**

Sunday, 15 June
Bryan MacMahon, Historian, Ballyheigue Castle, 2:00 p.m.

Outing: Cahirsiveen

Sunday, 13 July
Prof Maurice Bric, Historian, Fair Field, Cahirsiveen, 2:30 p.m.

Outing: Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty's Killarney Links

Monday, 4 August
Mons. H. O'Flaherty Killarney Committee, Cathedral, 2:30 p.m.

Outing: Kilflynn (Heritage Week)

Saturday, 16 August
John Flaherty, Historian & Dr Richard McElligott, Historian
Meet at St Columba's Centre, Kilflynn V92 X272, 2:30 p.m.

Roundtable Discussion on Local History Publications

Thursday, 11 September
John Flaherty, Chair, with Joe Harrington, Lyreacrompane Journal;
Jim Finnerty, Ballydonoghue Parish Magazine; Dónal Hickey,
Sliabh Luachra Journal and John Downing, Sneem Parish News
Via Zoom, 7:00 p.m.

Award Ceremony: Kerry Young Historian 2025

Wednesday, 24 September
Kerry County Museum, Tralee, 7:00 p.m.

Architecture Kerry 2025
Friday 26-Sunday 28 September

The Massacre at Dún an Óir: History, literature, archaeology, béaloideas
Saturday, 27 September
Dr Conor Brosnan & Prof. Jane Grogan, An Díseart, Dingle, 9.30am

‘...the Tans appeared to have gone mad’.
The Crown forces and violence in County Kerry, 1920-21
Thursday, 16 October
T.E. Fitzgerald, Killarney Library, 7:00 p.m.

Altóir na Gréine
Thursday, 6 November
Dr. Billy Mag Fhloinn, SHU Campus, Dingle, 7:00 p.m.

Journal & Magazine Launch
Thursday, 20 November
Tralee Library, 7:00 p.m.

**The Great Famine and the national school system in Ireland, 1845–1852 /
An Gorta Mór agus córas na scoileanna náisiúnta in Éirinn, 1845–1852**
Tuesday, 25 November
Pádraig Ó Donnabháin, Tralee Library, 7:00 p.m.

Annual Social & Heritage Award Presentation
Sunday, 30 November
Rose Hotel, Tralee, 1:00 p.m.

The salmon fishing industry in the Rivers Feale & Cashen 1844-1964
Thursday, 4 December
Tom Dillon, Tralee Library, 7:00 p.m.

Daniel O’Connell 250 years on
Thursday, 11 December
Prof. Maurice Bric, historian, Killarney House, 7:00 p.m.

Institutional Members 2025

- Allen County Library, Genealogy Periodicals, PO Box 2270 Fort Wayne, IN46801-2270, USA
- The Blasket Centre, Baile an Ghleanna, Dún Chaoin, Co. Chiarrai.
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- Cornell Universities Libraries, Serials Dept., 110-B, Olin Library, Ithaca, NY 14853-5301, USA.
- Dublin City Library and Archives, 138-144 Pearse Street, Dublin 2.
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- The Education Centre, Dromtacker, Tralee, Co. Kerry.
- Glin Historical Society, C/O Thomas Donovan Corcamore, Clarina, Limerick.
- Harvard College Library, Serial Services, HCL Technical Services, 625 Mass Avenue, Mass. USA.
- Kerry County Library, Moyderwell, Tralee, Co. Kerry.
- Kerry County Museum, Ashe Memorial Hall, Denny Street, Tralee, Co. Kerry.
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- Mary Immaculata College, The Library, University of Limerick, South Circular Road, Limerick City.
- Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.
- Muckross House (Killarney), Trustees of Muckcross House, Muckcross, Killarney, Co. Kerry.
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- The National Library of Ireland, Kildare Street, Dublin 2.
- The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK.
- The National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, Wales, UK.
- Princeton University Library, Acquisitions Service Periodicals, 693 Alexander Road, Princeton New Jersey, USA.
- Retired Teachers Association (Kerry Branch) Lisadell, The Kerries, Tralee, Co. Kerry.
- Royal Irish Academy Library, 19 Dawson Street, Dublin 2.
- School of Celtic Studies, The Library, 10 Burlington Road, Dublin 4.
- Society of Antiquaries of London, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London W1JOB6 U.K.
- Trinity College Dublin, College Street, Dublin 2.

- Queen's University Belfast, University Road, Belfast.
- University College Cork, The Boole Library, Western Road, Cork.
- University College Dublin, James Joyce Library, Belfield, Dublin 4.
- University of Galway, James Hardiman Library, Newcastle Rd, Galway.
- University of Limerick, Glucksman Library, Plassey Tech. Park, Limerick.
- University of Notre Dame, Serial Acquisitions, 122 Hesburg Library, Notre Dame, IN46556-5629, USA.

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