



# Cumann Oidhreachta Eanách Dhúin Annaghdown Heritage Society

**FREE**

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Nuachtlitríimh. 4

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## FÁILTE

Welcome to the fourth edition of our newsletter - much has happened in the six months since our last edition.

In January, we officially re-opened our Heritage Room in the Old Girls' School, following an extensive refurbishment. The room is now a functional meeting space, and provides an appropriate environment for displaying artifacts relevant to the history of the area. It really was a case of all hands on deck to create this lovely space and we are most grateful to everyone who helped out. Particular thanks are due to John Harkin and the FÁS scheme workers for their assistance on this project, and to Michael Wooldridge, Australia, for his substantial donation in memory of Donna Staunton (a member of the Annaghdown diaspora), without which this renovation would not be possible. We were delighted to welcome Donna's son Jack and daughter Madeleine to the re-opening, together with Michael Wooldridge who spoke at the event.

This year we ran another hugely successful programme of Spring Lectures which were very well attended and received. We kicked off with a genealogy event on February 27th, hosted by Society Chairperson Paul Greaney, entitled 'Tracing Annaghdown Ancestors'. This was followed by a fascinating talk by Johnny Burke on the Tuam Sugar Factory on April 24th. John Cunningham's talk on May 29th 'Annaghdown Immigrants to New Zealand, as represented in the writings of Dan Davin' gave an intriguing insight into the lives of those who left the shores of Lough Corrib to start a new life on the other side of the world. We were delighted to welcome visitors Krista Heatley and Steve Luttrell from Portland Maine on May 26th, with Krista giving a talk on the 19th century Portland Irish and the railroad industry. We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all of our speakers, and to those who attended the events.

Our events are open to both members and non-members and we hope to run similar events again next year.

One of the key areas we have identified for development is the gathering of oral histories. Oral history is the collection and study of historical information using recordings of interviews with people having personal knowledge of past events. The society is a member of the Oral History Network of Ireland and we take advice from the network on best practice in recording oral histories. We have already started recording members of the Annaghdown community. Evelyn Stevens has interviewed John Murphy, Mary Potter and Tom Concannon and these interviews are available to view on the Annaghdown Heritage Society YouTube channel. We are investing in more sophisticated equipment to record interviews in the coming months and are very interested in finding more people who would be happy to be interviewed for this project. We are particularly interested in the following topics: Gaeilge in the parish, the Corrib Drainage Scheme, Lough Afoor, landed estates, public houses, thatching, and folklore, but would also welcome any other topics which may be of interest.

This year we also initiated a project to document the townlands in the parish so that all of the information on any given townland is available on one easy to navigate page. We ran two workshops to provide anyone interested in taking on a townland the skills that they need to put the information together and were delighted to find volunteers, both in the parish and as far afield as Australia, willing to help out. At present, the townlands of Muckrush, Coteenty, Shankill, Annaghdown, Woodpark, Bunatober, Cloonboo, Cahermorris and Kilgill are complete and available on our website. There are 63 townlands in the parish of Annaghdown and we would welcome any other volunteers who feel they might like to help out on this very worthwhile project.

## INFORMATION



**Events** are announced on our website and in local newspapers/church newsletters. All are welcome. Membership of the society is open to all; we request an annual subscription of €5 to help with costs, including insurance, website and printing of newsletters.

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## THE 1918-19 FLU EPIDEMIC IN ANNAGHDOWN

*Paul Greaney*

It is just over one hundred years since the influenza pandemic, commonly known as the *Spanish Flu*, swept through Ireland and infected one fifth of the population. The death registers for Turloughmore and Headford registration districts indicate that there were at least 25 deaths due to in-

fluenza in the Annaghdown area, between September 1918 and May 1919. The first victim recorded is Martin Nally (57) of Tonamace, who died on 22 September 1918. The disease is known to have affected younger individuals more severely, and this is to be seen in the fatalities in Annaghdown, with 17 of those who died aged under 40 years.

Another of those to succumb was James Kilgarraiff of Ardgaineen, who died on 9 December 1918. In a letter to a cousin in 1982, Sr Clarenca (Julia) Kavanagh of Ardgaineen and Texas wrote: "I vividly recall, also, that one of the Kilgarraiff boys, who used to travel "abroad", was the first to succumb to the World War 1 influenza in our locality". In fact, James was the third influenza victim in Ardgaineen - his neighbours, siblings Mary (22) and Thomas Concar (23), had died on 17 October and 19 November, respectively. The death of another neighbour, John Skerritt of Kilgill, was to follow on 11 December. The Connacht Tribune of 14 December reported, under the headline *Another Influenza Victim*, that he had died at his sister's residence in Bunatover (Cunningham's), after a few day's illness. It was also stated that his funeral was *the largest seen in the district for a number of years*, leading one to wonder how much the contagion might have been further spread at such large gatherings.

The Concars were not the only family to lose multiple members. Husband and wife Martin (48) and Bridget Lardner (38) of Tonagarraun died on 13 and 15 April 1919, respectively. Nor was the loss confined to the farming or labouring classes; one of the early victims was Kate Hosty, housekeeper and sister of the parish priest, who died on 15 October aged 52. In general, though, it was the more impoverished classes who suffered most, due to poorer diet and lack of access to medical care.

Perhaps the most strikingly tragic story from this area is the death of Mary (84), Julia (39), and Sarah Mulryan (3), of Addergoole, all of whom died on 18 March 1919. Their deaths were registered by Patrick Mulryan (known locally as Pat Chormaic), who had lost his step-mother, wife, and daughter. Julia had given birth to a son, Patrick, five days earlier, and he later died 29 March. The tragedy is recounted by John Murphy of Cregduff, in his book *By Corrib, Clare and Cregg*: 'One family lost three members. The three corpses were brought to Annaghdown Church by horse cart with keening women sitting on their coffins, as was the fashion then. They were members of the Mulryan family (*Charles* or *Cormac*) . . . it was a very, very sad event in the locality.'

Many older victims had their cause of death registered as 'old age and debility', which makes it difficult to identify the full impact of the pandemic. This is the case of Mary Mulryan above, whose cause of death is not recorded as influenza, although she almost certainly died of it. It has been observed throughout the country, as reported by Ida Milne in her recent book on the subject, *Stacking the Coffins*, that survivors were reluctant to speak of the influenza later in life; this too seems to have been the case in Annaghdown, where it seems to have largely faded from memory despite its devastating impact.

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## THE COEN FAMILY

*Mary Margaret Burke*

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July 2018 marked the coming together of the Coen family of Anbally for the first time in many years, when the descendants of John Coen and Sarah Spelman gathered at Cloonacauneen Castle.

John Coen was born in Anbally in March 1838 to Edward Coen and Mary Glynn. In 1876, he married Sarah Spelman of Cahernahoon, who was born in 1850 to John Spelman and Catherine Fahy (Twomileditch). Their family were as follows.

1. HONOR (1877-1929), married Patrick Duggan in Pittsburgh in 1903. They had two daughters, Mary and Sarah.
2. KATE (1878-1904) went to America in 1895, and died aged 26 years.
3. MARY (1880-1914) went to America but later returned and married John Coen of Anbally. They had one son, Patrick. Mary died in childbirth in 1914.
4. EDMUND (1882-1933) married Teresa Lydon in Pittsburgh in 1912. They had four children: John, William, Mary, and Teresa.
5. SARAH (1884-1923) married William Guering in Pittsburgh in 1918. They had two children, Joseph and Florence.
6. JOHN (1887-1935) married Mary A Monroe c. 1918. They had seven children: John, Dolores, James, Martin, Mary Patricia, William, and Kathleen.
7. TIMOTHY (1889-1969) married Catherine Keane from Cloonfad, Co. Mayo, in America. They returned to Ireland in the mid-1960s and purchased a house in Dublin, returning to the US after two years. They remained in constant touch with my dad (Patrick) and uncle Murt.
8. MARTIN or MURT (1889-1971) married Mary Nolan of Kilgill. They had five children: John P., Charlie, Martin, Sarah (Burke), and Joseph (born and died in 1926).
9. PATRICK (1892-1975), my father, stayed on the farm in Anbally, but also worked for a time in the coalmines in England. He was married first to Julia Canavan in 1922. She died in 1948, and Patrick married Celia Laffey, my mother, in 1950.
10. MARGARET (1895-1969) married Robert Wenzel in 1965.
11. MICHAEL (born 1899) - died aged 8 years.

Margaret came to visit in 1956 and again in 1962 for 6 weeks. After returning from the 1962 trip she married Bob Wenzel. It was after her death in 1969 that we lost

touch with America, as Tim and Catherine also passed away shortly after. In later years I started to research the family online and eventually found John Coen's attestation paper in 2010. When the 1940 census became available, I discovered that he had seven children. Then, in January 2015, I discovered an online obituary for John's daughter, Mary P. Reuss, who had died the previous June. I decided to leave a message on the obituary guest book. Months later, her son Glen McHale checked the obituary as his mother's anniversary approached and replied by email. He explained that he had travelled to Ireland with his mother in 2002, but hadn't found any Coen relatives. Amazingly, his brother Bill had also visited and travelled the N17 to Knock, never knowing he was so close to Charlie Coen's home and shop in Corrandrum. In August 2017, myself, Anne-Marie Byrne (daughter of Charlie Coen), and her daughters Hannah and Jodie joined a gathering of 137 Coens in Pittsburgh. Some of these had never met before, despite living within a 10 mile radius. Many of these in turn travelled here for the Coen gathering last year.

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### LAND AGITATION IN GALWAY 1920-23

*Johnny Burke*

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In the early 1920s, with the battle for an independent Irish Republic at full pace, when IRA Volunteers were taking the fight to the Black and Tans and Auxiliaries, the land question was still a major issue in County Galway. Despite various Land Acts, particularly 1903 and 1909, in which loans were provided to tenants to purchase land, there were still many families who remained landless. Although the Acts allowed for land purchase, they did not allow for the distribution of land. Poverty-stricken families looked longingly at large ranches in Galway which supported only livestock and dreamed of having their own plot of land. The "land question" as it had been labelled for many decades, was still not solved for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the poorer families remained unable to purchase, so the situation arose where more prominent individuals bought up land that came on the market. The result of this meant that there were still many disgruntled landless farmers who felt they had no option but to resort to the tried and trusted methods of land agitation to highlight their plight. Additionally, there was now a national rebellion underway, with Irish freedom within touching distance and people dreamt of a bright future in an Ireland free from English tyranny. The Provisional Government of Sinn Féin however was fearful of a land war, in case such an upheaval would jeopardise the national struggle. This was further supported by their belief that in a future independent Ireland, the large farmers would have to be the backbone of the economy. The War of Independence however, had forced many RIC men to resign or emigrate and the Black and Tans were brought in to support them and lawlessness flourished. The protection afforded to landlords and ranchers was disappearing. A large landholder named Frank Shawe-Taylor, who had previously told locals that they would never see a perch of his land, was mur-

dered at Cashla as he drove from his house at Moorepark to the Galway Fair in March 1920. Bishop O'Dea of Galway, while sympathetic to the necessity of providing land to young farmers, said in his Lenten pastoral it was 'immoral and unjust to use unjust means in forcing a man to give up his land'. This pronouncement did not prevent the shooting of J.D. Blake in June 1920 on his way to mass in Kilconly. He had recently refused to give up his land to tenants. A month later, a North Galway grazier as well as three herdsmen, who had worked for other graziers were all murdered. A cattle drive was arguably the most common form of agitation. It involved driving the cattle off the land of a big farmer, or a farmer who had recently bought or rented disputed land in a particular area. These drives were usually undertaken by disgruntled landless farmers who felt that large farms used for grazing should be divided and allocated to themselves and/or their neighbours. In April 1920, the Connacht Tribune reported that 'extensive cattle drives' took place in various parts of North Galway, including Dunmore, Creggs and Castleblakeney, where 11,800 men raided all the grass lands'. Police were unable to deal with this level of agitation. That same month, cattle were driven from the land of Mrs. Kilgarriff of Tuam and replaced with tenants' stock and a demand made that she surrender some land. In May, land agitation in Connemara was reported as 'violent in this district for the past few months'. The Catholic clergy were not immune from agrarian violence. A Franciscan brother from the Agricultural College in Kilkerrin was savagely beaten as he attempted to round up cattle that had been driven off Franciscan land there. In June 1921, at Tuam Quarter Sessions (court) Patrick Conroy of Kilroe, Headford claimed £175 for injury caused to stock driven off his land. Despite the passing of the Treaty in Dáil Éireann on 7 January 1922, there was still much lawlessness in the absence of police, and agrarian agitation continued. A headline in the Freeman's Journal of 18 May 1922 reads: 'Cattle-Drives On a Big Scale; Deeds of Violence' and includes the following: Stocks were driven off Mr. F.G. Blake's land at Annaghdown and other stocks put in. A large force of armed I.R.A. went to the place and made about forty arrests, including several women who were more defiant and aggressive than the men. The prisoners were being taken to Tuam Barracks but they 'were persuaded' by the O.C. to take their stock home and have their grievances referred to the courts'. This report suggests that the passion for land showed no sign of subsiding post-Treaty, despite a military proclamation warning that such activity would not be tolerated. It could be argued that the possession of land was not only a means to make a living, but also a sign of upward mobility. Historian Úna Newell states: 'Agitation during the Civil War (1922-3) varied from the usual unauthorised knocking down of walls and non-payment of rents, to cattle driving, forcible occupation of land, illegal ploughing, threats of violence and shootings'. With the RIC now disbanded, law and order was at a low point and agrarian violence continued. In January 1923, Walter Joyce the landlord at Corgary Estate Mountbellew, was murdered on his way to mass. In April, a tenant on the

same estate named John Creaven was murdered and six other tenants suffered heavy beatings. A court report from February stated that Thomas Glynn of Cloon, Claregalway ‘suffered shot-gun wounds in the head and neck’ as he left a neighbour’s house. Glynn, who survived the attack, had recently rented 75 acres, which the paper reported was the subject of agitation. The Government responded by setting up columns of the Free State Army to police agrarian activities. However, the Government were fearful that they would be accused of being no better than the British, when some of their activities included supporting evictions. One such eviction took place in Corrandulla on 21 March 1923 under the supervision of the No. 1 Company Special Infantry Corps, stationed at Renmore Barracks. Indeed the auctioning of seized goods after an eviction was similar to the actions of the authorities in the land wars of the late nineteenth century. The Government were making a clear statement that the rights of legitimate landowners would not be infringed, even if it meant the further impoverishment of landless families. Agitation began to wane with the passing of the Land Act in August 1923. The Government took charge of all land purchase and the Land Commission took over the functions of its predecessor the Land Settlement Commission. The process of land division was slow and in many cases seemed unfair. There were many local disputes about who was more deserving of land and the amount they received. The Minister for Agriculture was Patrick Hogan from Loughrea, whose enemies labelled him “the Minister for Grass” while others claimed he “preferred bullocks to people”. This was because Hogan, despite efforts to be fair to the smallholder, also preferred to keep a number of large ranches in the best farmland in the country to raise large numbers of cattle for the national economy. In the west however, the amount of land required far exceeded the amount available and this led ultimately to small holdings in the Galway remaining small, and in most cases uneconomic.

Sources and further reading:

1. Úna Newell, *The West Must Wait: County Galway and the Irish Free State 1922-32* (Manchester, 2013).
2. *The Connacht Tribune*: 10 April 1920, 11 June 1921, 17 February 1923.
3. *The Freeman’s Journal*: 18 May 1922.

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*FROM THE ARCHIVES:*  
**VISIT TO OLD IRISH HOME**  
**Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Cavanagh**  
**Will Go Back to Galway**  
*The Omaha Daily Bee, August 4, 1908*

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More than fifty-eight years after they left their old home in Ireland, Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Cavanagh, 5056 North Twenty-fourth street, will visit it again.

They will leave about August 31 on the long journey to the scenes of their childhood.

“I don’t expect we’ll see a soul we know,” said Mr. Cavanagh. “All of them are gone by this time, though it’s quite possible I’ll run across some of the boys I used to

play with about the quay and wharfs of old Galway, for the people over there are not great to leave their homes and where they are born they generally stay like a tree rooted in the ground.

“Of course, the city will be changed. There’ll be tram cars and electric lights and all kinds of modern improvements that we knew naught about when my wife and I left there in the ‘50s. And there’ll be steam cars running all over the dear old isle and steamships spouting smoke in the harbor where I knew naught but sailing vessels.

“I know the house where I was born is standing, and not changed in these sixty years, except that they’ve put a new roof on it lately. It is a stone house, and my father and grandfather and great grand-father were all born in it.”

“Mr. and Mrs. Cavanagh live in one of the prettiest places in Omaha. Their commodious cottage painted green as a shamrock, sits in the midst of a big yard at the corner of twenty-fourth and Brown streets. The lawn is beautifully kept; there is a grove of peach and cherry trees and a big grape arbor. Flowers are everywhere. The place has a 165 foot front on Twenty-fourth street and extends back 605 feet, giving room for a pasture for three cows and a big garden. A hired man and woman do the work.

Mr. and Mrs. Cavanagh were married July 9, 1846, and have lived together, therefore, sixty-two years. They have five living children and may grandchildren. They both came from families of the good old size. Mrs. Cavanagh was the daughter of Captain William Burke, for thirty-two years an officer in the British army. She was one of ten children, while Mr. Cavanagh was one of thirteen. Coming to America as a young couple, they farmed in Iowa in the early ‘50s. They then moved back to Cincinnati and later lived in Minneapolis before coming to Omaha thirty years ago. Both are still in excellent health, though near the fourscore mark. Mr. Cavanagh is head of the firm of P. Cavanagh & Son, representing the American Beet Sugar company.



The former Cavanagh home and farmyard in Gortroe, later occupied by the Cahill family.

*Editor’s Note:* Patrick Cavanagh was a son of John Cavanagh & Catherine Browne of Gortroe, and a brother of Archdeacon Bartholomew Cavanagh of Knock. We are grateful to Patrick & Suzette’s great-great-grandson Charles Cavanagh of Philadelphia, his daughter Kate (Bygrave) and son Chip, who brought this article to our attention.

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