



Cumann Oidhreachta Eanách Dhúin

Annaghdown Heritage Society

www.annaghdownheritage.ie

info@annaghdownheritage.ie

Muachtlitir Lámh. 14

FREE

Samhradh 2024

FÁILTE

Welcome to our Summer 2024 newsletter. Recent events have included talks by Midie Corcoran - From Tiny Pieces of Paper do Large Family Trees Grow, and Noel Carolan - 'The Starving West': Food Supply Challenges and the New Irish State in 1922 and 1925.

The Society was deeply saddened by the death of our member and friend Peter Newell of Barranny on 14 December last. Peter was an unwavering supporter of our Society's activities over many years and his loss is keenly felt by all. His erudite contributions to our meetings and his encyclopaedic knowledge of Annaghdown history and genealogy will be greatly missed. He was an unfailingly kind and courteous man, always keen to assist those seeking information or guidance. May he rest in peace.



Membership of the Society is open to all and costs €10 per annum, which can be paid via PayPal using the 'Join Us' button on our website, or at any of our events. You can follow our activities on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, and by visiting our website.

INTERVIEW WITH KATHLEEN O'SHEA (NÉE O'NEILL), MULLAGHADRUM

Evelyn Stevens

Continued from our previous edition

Some of Kathleen's Ancestors

The Earls had left Ireland in 1607 and by 1609 the planters began to arrive. Patrick O'Neill's forebears lost their lands in Co Tyrone and had to flee to the Glens of Antrim. The planters were mainly Presbyterian who didn't agree with the Church of England. They were deemed to be troublemakers in England and Scotland and this was a great way to get rid of them! Kathleen's ancestor, Patrick O'Neill came south in 1798 and it is said that he was fighting in Castlebar and that he 'crossed to Killala's broad bay to meet General Humbert'. He then came further south, thinking that he had some kind of connection in Galway who might be able to take him back home to the North, and finally arrived in Addergoole. There was no bridge over the Cregg river in 1798, but somebody told him that Frank Leonard had a boat. He went to Leonard's who took pity on him and they told him to stay, so he didn't go any further on his travels and married Frank Leonard's daughter. They had six sons, Francis (who got married and lived in Gortroe), Brian, Michael, John, Pat and

James. There was also a daughter Mary who married a Burke man in Gortroe. Their daughter married Francis's son (they had to get a dispensation as they were first cousins). They had two sons, Billy and Martin. Martin lived in a tenant farmer's house in Gortroe, this meant the house had 4 windows and that he had security of tenure. Billy O'Neill built a house at the junction and ran a pub there.

Kathleen's great-grandfather Brian O'Neill also had a plot in Gortroe, he was possibly the grandson of the O'Neill who came from the north. There's a garden/field in Gortroe to this day called O'Neill's garden. It is now a housing estate in Corrandulla/Gortroe. Kathleen got some of her family history from the Inventory Book in the records of the local church in Corrandulla. Fr Fitzgerald, the curate in Annaghdown carried out the inventory in 1931. The inventory detailed all the people in the parish and their means.

Maria Grealley, Kathleen's great-grandaunt, married Micil Scully. She had a small shop, and every morning she'd take her canvas bag and walk into Galway for goods for her shop. If only she had a bicycle! Kathleen is sure that she never saw one, this would have been in the 1850s or 60s. Maria's grand-niece, Mom Hynes, who lived to be nearly 104, said there were weeks where she'd walk twice in one day to Galway.

The first bicycle, a penny farthing, that came to the area belonged to Joe Blake of Annaghdown who was visiting his cousins in Cregg Castle. This bicycle was the cause of a pub in Corrandulla being closed down by the RIC. This was because the men standing outside the pub drinking after hours chased the 'apparition' of the penny farthing down the road thus drawing attention to their illegal activity.

Stories

A Canon Lynch in Lackagh in the 1930s needed to have the old church reroofed and he wanted 30 pounds per house, it was said by a doctor who came to the area that 'there was only very rich people in Lackagh and very poor people'. There was this particular man who worked for the county council or something, but he had lost his job, his daughter was going to England nursing and she wanted a reference from a religious minister. On the Sunday after mass this man approached the Canon and when he went in of course the Canon thought he was coming with the money, but the poor man wouldn't see that much in the whole year. He told the Canon what he wanted and that he didn't have the money. The Canon had a walking stick at the back of the door and he reached for the stick. The poor man ran and the Canon ran after him. It seems he had been in the Connaught Rangers at an earlier time of his life and the man said to the men outside 'let ye have a good look men, tisn't every day you see a Connaught Ranger running from a soldier of Christ!'

Anyway he went home very disappointed and he began to

think what was he going to do, he had everything but the letter. And he thought to himself, 'isn't there a Protestant minister this side of Athenry, I'm going to tell him my story to see what he can do'. He went to Athenry anyway. The Protestant minister met him and he told him his story, how he didn't have the money for his own priest, and he came to him to get a reference for his girl. The minister began to question him: 'Are you not working? What did you do before?' He told him he was in the Connaught Rangers. 'Oh my good man are you not getting a pension, you're entitled to a pension. As it happens my bishop is on his holidays in Lough Mask house with the Commander-in-Chief of the Connaught Rangers, if you go down to him I'll give you a letter for the bishop, I'd say he'll do something for you.' I don't know how he went to Killala House, did he walk? He gave the letter from the minister to the bishop, the bishop told the Commander-in-Chief and it was all settled, he got his pension and back money, and the letter he needed for his daughter. I don't think he went to the Canon with the 30 pounds!

There's another funnier story somewhere on the other side of the road in Claregalway. There were these people having the stations - you know now the ordeal for people when they had the stations. They were afraid of the priests. In those days you had to set up the table in the kitchen. You had to raise up the table with a chair at both ends so that the priest wouldn't be leaning down to say the mass. The table would have had candlesticks and the other items needed for the altar. I don't know if they went around the village collecting the things needed for the altar. They had everything set, and then they decided to go to the parlour (the room behind the fire) to prepare the breakfast table for the morning. That's where they were when a sow pushed in the back door. The sow came in and the first thing it went for was the white tablecloth, when she pulled it off it pulled everything off the table, smashing some of the items. They probably had to go around to collect the things once again from neighbours. It was during the war and the Canon, who was the parish priest, was coming to say the mass. He came on a bike, he was always in a hurry, he didn't pull the brakes in time and he pushed against the door. The wife thought it was the sow again: 'brostaigh a Shéamuis tá an cráin ar ais' (the sow is back), and the Canon heard it when he came in. Imagine, they couldn't explain to him, they were afraid to tell him, they were afraid to open their mouths, he came in and said 'the reception I got, I was called a sow' (it would have been all in Irish). He said the mass anyway and the whole sermon that day was about the reception he got at this house and no one dared open their mouth to explain to him what happened the evening before.

There was a man from the Corrandulla area who had a bad pain and it wasn't going. His wife decided she would walk over to Maureen Cullen, who lived on the Lackagh Road. Maureen Cullen was in the same vein as Bidy Early, and when you'd go to her with a problem, she'd know as soon as you came in what was wrong. The woman told Maureen that her husband had a bad pain. She said 'I'll make up a bottle for him now'. But you'd never know, she'd go outside to make up the bottle, you wouldn't see what she was doing. When she came in she gave her the bottle, I don't think there was any money involved. When Maureen Cullen was giving her the bottle, she

said 'be careful on the way back that you don't fall asleep'. It was a real frosty morning, and a local farmer was out looking at his ewes, it was lambing season or coming up to it. Lo and behold the woman was found sleeping on the top of a stile on the farmer's land on the way back. The farmer saw the woman asleep so he brought her home to his house. They sent for the priest in Lackagh. And of course the priest had forbade anyone to have anything to do with this Maureen Cullen. He prayed over her anyways and she came to. And it was discovered by the time she left Maureen Cullen's and fell asleep on top of the wall, that's when her husband recovered at home, the pain went. The priest had condemned her from the pulpit, and nobody was to have anything to do with her. Then one day he was over near the graveyard, and the horse fell and injured his fetlock. He tried everything, got a vet and everything but nobody could do anything for the horse. In the end he had to bow down and go to Maureen Cullen, and she cured his horse. So there was no more condemning of Maureen Cullen after that.

CREGG CASTLE

Michael Stewart

There are no flowers growing now in the garden at Cregg, or any of the ornamental shrubs and fruit trees which were once there in abundance, and that, more than anything else, tells in a forceful way, of the change that has taken place at this once proud centre of Irish landlordism. For the garden was once the showpiece of Cregg Demesne, and it was a pleasure to enter at any time of the year. But now it is just an ordinary field, with little to remind one of the treasures it once contained, except for the towering walls which enclose it. And the ruins of one of the garden sheds, where the head gardener would often sit, and gaze with contentment at a row of sweet pea which bloomed opposite the door, and keep a watchful eye lest anyone would be tempted to smuggle a juicy apple or a bunch of luscious fruit out of the garden.

Cregg Castle has a dignified history. It was once the residence of Irish kings and chieftains, the birthplace of a world-renowned philosopher and scientist, and has the distinction of reputedly changing hands at the turn of a card. According to historians, it was once known as Cragymulgreny Castle and is said to have been one of the oldest castles in Ireland to be continuously inhabited. Several kings and chieftains are reputed to have lived there at different periods, among them Brian Boru and Tairdelbach Ua Conchobuir. According to local folklore, it was once the property of Shane Ruagh, a famous chieftain, and during its reconstruction in the seventeenth century, prehistoric underground dwellings were discovered indicating that Cregg was a place of abode long before the most primitive settlements were established elsewhere.

This medieval fortress was rebuilt and remodelled in 1648 by the Kirwans, and for 300 years was the residence of the most prominent and influential landlords in the countryside, the Kirwans and the Blakes. Situated in a secluded part of a large estate, and surrounded by dense woods with a river nearby, it was one of the last of those castellated structures to be built in Ireland at the time for the purpose of defence. The building incorporated a library, also an oratory as the Kirwans and the Blakes were Catholic. The original entrance to the castle was on the east side through the 'grand' gate as it

was known, but this was later abandoned in favour of the one now presently used. A boat trench was constructed, linking the castle with the river, and according to local historians, the hand-cut stone used in the renovating of the castle was transported by boat via the river and lake from the stone quarries at Menlo near Galway.

They also say that at the time the castle was being renovated, the Kirwans occupied a vast area of land – upwards of 10,000 acres – to the north towards Tuam, and to the east towards Knockdoe. It seems that even though the Kirwans were Catholic, they gave protection to Protestant settlers who were fleeing the North at the time of the rebellion of 1641, and as a result, when the British later reasserted their authority, they were given possession of all of this land. It was said at the time, a horse let loose from the farmyard at Cregg would often make its way across country to another Kirwan home-stead 10 miles away at Castlehackett, without even leaving the Kirwan estate. More than 200 years later, the Parochial House and Franciscan Monastery at Carrowbeg were built on land which was then occupied by the Blakes of Cregg.

Cregg Castle was noted as the birthplace and home of the distinguished philosopher and President of the Royal Irish Academy, Richard Kirwan, who was born there in 1734. He was widely acclaimed for his work as a scientist, and it was written of him that his achievements and discoveries were on par with those of Einstein of later years. He was also Inspector General of Mines in Ireland, and he inherited the Cregg property when his brother Patrick was killed in a duel. By all accounts, Kirwan was a man of eccentric behaviour. He spent some time at a Jesuit novitiate but later converted to Protestantism. He married into the Blake family in 1757 and it is said that he was arrested very shortly after being wed for a large debt incurred by his bride of a few days' standing. Although he was called to the Bar in 1766, he spent most of his middle age in scientific pursuits in London and Europe. A collection of his writings which were on a ship which was captured by pirates while travelling to Ireland from the Continent are now in a library in the city of Salem. Local historians say that Kirwan turned to gambling in later years, and one night he gambled the castle and estate in a card game, and there are stories told of mirrors having been placed in strategic points around the card room so as to influence the course of the game. He was the last of that family to have ownership of the castle and passed away at his house in Cavendish Row in Dublin in 1814.

But it was not only the inmates of the castle who would behave in an odd way. There are also curious accounts of the eccentricities of the wildlife on the estate. They say that as one of the early owners of the castle lay dying in his room one night, the foxes came out of the woods and gathered on the lawn in front of his window, and howled in anguish throughout the night. While in more recent times, towards the end of the Blake period at the castle, following a falling-out with local priest Fr Hosty, who was barred from fowling in the woods, it was unknown for a hare to be seen anywhere on the estate, and it would turn away from the demesne wall, even when pursued by hounds.

In the mid-19th century during the years of the Famine, the castle was noted as a centre of refuge to the many people who came seeking food and shelter. Bowls of soup and oatmeal porridge were distributed in the large kitchen to those who

were taken in famished and hungry, and some collapsed and died on the avenue as they tried to reach the castle in search of food. And during this period of unparalleled austerity, a man would sometimes be given a turnip for a day's work on the estate, and if it was a very large one it might be weighed, and a portion sliced off lest he be overpaid, such were the times.

But life was not always dull at Cregg. At one time there were parties to which many of the tenants would be invited, and there is an account of a big party being given to mark the coming of the Archbishop to the castle to perform the marriage ceremony at the wedding of one of the Blakes. Then there was foxhunting, and there was nothing in the countryside to match the glamour and excitement of a meet of the hounds on the lawn at Cregg. At that time foxhunting was the jealously guarded preserve of the ascendancy and its followers, and they would assemble at the castle many times throughout the hunting season. But it was more than just a meeting of the hunt; it was a gathering of an elite, a boisterous celebration of wealth and privilege. There were lords of the realm and ladies, personages of pedigree, high rank, and high office, but there was no one there who was not of account or substance in the country. And they would exchange greetings in front of the hall door, and trays of refreshments would be taken out from the 'Grand' Hall and down the steps to be distributed amongst them. And it was all so grand and colourful, awe-inspiring and invigorating, and the castle in the background in its old-world elegance made it all so complete. And many would come and watch, and there was a chance that one might be asked to hold an impatient hunter, or help its rider to mount, for it would be an experience to be cherished and would make a man's day. When the gentry were refreshed, they would set off down the avenue in pursuit of a fox, and as they thundered by, it was once remarked that Victoria might have been in their midst, so confident were they, and assured, in a world of their own, and entirely unconcerned with anything that went on outside.

The castle features prominently in a local account of the financial collapse of a bank in Galway, at one time, which was owned by the Blakes. It seems that when this happened, a hoard of gold was transferred from the bank to the castle and the conveyance was hotly pursued by the Galway police all the way to Cregg, but they would not venture beyond the entrance to the demesne. Some of the better off tenants had their savings lodged in the Bank at that time in lieu of rent and they were dismayed to find that their deposit receipts were worthless and they had no money to pay the rent for that year.

In 1948, the last of the Blake family departed from Cregg Castle, leaving in the dead of night as had been foretold. Some years later most of the arable land of the demesne was redistributed, and the estate is much reduced now, like the empire that once created and sustained it. The old bell in the castle yard is still in its stone tower high above the hayloft, but is silent now, having long ceased to call out the hour to the men and women toiling in the fields, and the head gardener no longer blows his whistle to summon his workers, but Cregg is a place where the past is close, as its ancient edifice stands in its melancholy splendour, timeless and ageless, a monument to the glory of an empire, and a symbol of the lifestyle of a bygone age. *Originally written in 1980, revised January 2020.*

