

CLONAKILTY GLEANINGS FROM THE SCHOOLS' FOLKLORE COLLECTION 1937–38

Áine Ní Chonaill



This paper gives a background to the Schools' Folklore Collection of 1937–38 with a focus on West Cork and features two items of particular interest from the Clonakilty contribution to the collection. The first describes, in Irish, the hanging of three United Irishmen in Clonakilty. The second is a first-hand account, in English, from Dan O'Connor of Gortnascarty detailing his imprisonment for resistance to eviction in 1889.

Introduction

The Irish Folklore Commission was established in 1935, with the aim of collecting and preserving the rich corpus of Irish folklore. It was established as an institute attached to University College Dublin (UCD) and in 1971 was subsumed into the Department of Folklore, UCD, where the collection is now archived.¹

Professional folklore collectors were employed to collect material from the more renowned *seanchaithe* (storytellers) but it is a more amateur, but nonetheless very valuable, contribution which is the subject of this article. In 1937 the Commission initiated a remarkable scheme known as the Schools' Folklore Collection. With the cooperation of national school principals, the

fifth- and sixth-class pupils were invited to become folklore collectors in their own areas. They were encouraged to speak to their parents, grandparents or older neighbours and record what they learned from them. Some guidelines were given as to possible topics: local history and monuments, folktales and legends, songs, proverbs, customs, traditional work practices, etc.² The result was almost half a million pages of written material,³ and as well as being archived in UCD the collection is now available to view for free online.⁴

West Cork Contribution

Since the scheme was voluntary, it is not surprising that the quantity and quality of material varied from school to school. Kilcolman school, near Enniskeane, for example, provided a mere five pages of material,⁵ while Kilmacabea school, in Leap, contributed over 100.⁶ The *modus operandi* varied also. Not all schools used the senior pupils as had been envisaged. Master John McCarthy, Ardagh boys' school, Rosscarbery, used no pupils or local people. Instead, he provided information he had on the area such as the meaning of placenames, the poem 'The Battle of Rosscarbery' by Seán Ó Coiléain (author of the famous poem on Timoleague Abbey), the story of Teampaillín Fachtna and a few other items.⁷

Liam O'Rourke, principal in Knockskeagh school, north of Clonakilty, and brother of Clonakilty's Conchubhar Ó Ruairc,⁸ used the pupils but added eight pieces he collected himself (six of them in Irish) from Randal Ó Muirthille (Randal Hurley), Shannonvale.⁹ In Ardfield, the principal of the boys' school, Patrick O'Donovan, recruited his son, Denis, then in his early twenties to gather material from the local speakers of Irish.¹⁰ Ardfield had maintained the language longer than other areas around, and the entire collection from that school is in Irish and amounts to c. 130 pages.¹¹

Clonakilty Contribution

In the Convent of Mercy school in Clonakilty, although some fifth- and sixth-class pupils contributed material, by far the majority of pieces was contributed by '*an rang idirmbeánach*', the intermediate class. These were students from what was known as the 'Secondary Top' which the sisters operated from 1908 until they opened the secondary school proper in 1941.¹² These students

would be the equivalent of seventh- and eighth-class and were taught the secondary school course. About a third of the material is in Irish.¹³ It was not the principal, Sr Teresa, who oversaw the collection, but Sr Mary Columba Myott (*An tSr Colm le Muire*) who was to become the first principal of the secondary school and who was probably engaged at this period with the 'Secondary Top' students.



Fig. 1: Sr Mary Columba Myott, Convent of Mercy, Clonakilty
(Source: *Sacred Heart Secondary School 1941-1991: Golden Jubilee Yearbook*, p. 90).

In Clonakilty boys' school only a very small number of people supplied material, notably Pat Galwey, from the townland of Carhoo (seven pieces) and Pat Hayes, from the townland of Donoure (five pieces).¹⁴ To these James Sheehy, the principal, added ten pieces, all in Irish, which he appears to have collected himself from Mr John Keohane, from the townland of Bealad East. Rather peculiarly, he also included some long articles from the *Southern Star* and other newspapers on significant local events and figures from the War of Independence such as the fall of Rosscarbery barracks and John *Flyer* Nyhan.



Fig. 2: James Sheehy, Principal of Clonakilty Boys' School
(Photo: courtesy of Frances Connolly, daughter of James Sheehy).

Two items from the boys' school are of particular interest. The first is an Irish-language piece collected from the above-mentioned John Keohane.¹⁵ It is an intriguing narrative as it provides some very specific details which give it a claim to be based on historical fact, but also has elements which could be deemed folkloric embellishments. It describes the hanging of three United Irishmen in Clonakilty; they are named as Patrick Horrigan/Horgan? (*Pádraig Ó Árgan*), Tim Hurley (*Tadbg Ó Muirlitbe*) and Daniel O'Donovan (*Dombnial Ó Donnabháin*). It states their ages and the number of children they had. It gives the dimensions of the scaffold and records the alleged utterances of the watching crowd (one might be sceptical of such detail after almost 150 years). It also names the officer 'Nacs' (Knox) who was in charge of the body of soldiers who came to oversee the executions. The account is as follows:¹⁶

Bás gan Sagart gan Bhráthair

Níl aon bbás a bhaineann preab chomb huafásach as croí an Éireannaigh agus an bás san. B'sbin é an bás ámb a bhí i ndán don triúr a daoradh chun a gcrochta i gClanna Caoilte (1798).¹⁷ Is amblaidh cuireadh i leith go raibh baint acu leis na b-Éireannaigh Aontuithe. Pádraig Ó Árgan an fear ba shíne orthu, fear timpeall le daichead bliain a bhí ann, atbair clainne é, mórsheisear¹⁸ acu. An tarna fear, Tadbg Ó Muirlitbe ab ainm dó. Bhí beirt mar chlan air. Dombnial Ó Donnabháin ab ainm don tríú fear. Ní raibh sé ach ina bhuaicbaill fós. Bhí tigh mór sa phríomb-sbráid cois na b-Abhann agus is ann a bhí na cimí ag na Sasanaigh. Ar agbaidh an tí amach a bhí an chroch. Dhá chuaille naoi dtroithe ar airde sáite sa talamb, ocht dtroithe óna chéile agus bata trasna ó chuaille go chéile. Bhí slua mór bailitbe ón gceantar timpeall, mná, leanaí agus seandaoine a bhí formbór dóibh, cé go raibh fo-fhear óg orthu. Eagla agus uafás ar gach éinne a bhí láithreach. Ag seanchas agus ag cogarnail dá chéile 'Go gcabbraí Dia linn.' 'Bás gan sagart gan bhráthair.' 'Níl peaca ar anam Dbombnail.' 'Marú coirp agus anama le chéile.' 'Níor dhún Dia bearna riamb gan ceann eile d'oscailt.' 'Ba mbór an sólás sagart.' 'Fuadar ar Nacs.' 'Bhí na saighdiúirí dearga ag doras an tí mbóir ag magadh agus ag gáire. 'Seo chugainn Nacs', arsa duine den slua. D'fheachadar go léir suas an tsráid. Anuas an tsráid tháinig gasra marcach. Fear meánaosta a bhí mar thaoiseach orthu. Fear rambar agus beathuithe a bhí ann, agbaidh bhuí agus súile dubha agus croiméal liath air. Ní raibh focal

*as duine den slua. Thug na saighdiúirí fé ndeara an tost obann, d'fbéachadar uatbu agus nuair a bhí sé soiléir dóibh go raibh an slua ag teacht i ngar dóibh, d'éiríodar as an magadh.*¹⁹

It has not proved possible to find any other source to confirm this story. The *Hibernian Chronicle* does not report it for 1797, 1798 or 1799.²⁰ Rickard Deasy (1766–1852), of the Clonakilty brewing family,²¹ in old age, compiled a record of the 1798 period for his son Rickard (1812–83).²² He makes no mention of these hangings. He was not, however, in the area for the entire period as his parents prevailed on him to leave for England for his own safety early in 1799.²³

The second piece of interest to this paper was collected by Pat Galwey of Carhoo. It is a first-hand account from Dan O'Connor (1862–1943), Gortnascarty, about his resistance to eviction and subsequent imprisonment in 1889 at age twenty-seven.²⁴ Dan's mother, Mary, a widow, was the tenant.²⁵ Before proceeding to his account, it is useful to look at the background to the eviction as given by the *Skibbereen Eagle*.

The farm comprises about 20 acres, the valuation was £16.10s, the rent (judicial) fixed two years ago, £18, and the former rent £24. Four years' rent are due, two judicial and two non-judicial. She has also two other small holdings, one of six acres from Sir George Wycherley, and one of five acres from another.²⁶

The paper goes on to say that Mrs O'Connor had gone to Lord Bandon's office a few months earlier to get a clear receipt up to May on payment of £36. This had been agreed but she had not been able to get the amount together, partly because of high law costs which she had had to pay on account of litigation with Sir George Wycherley. On the day of the eviction Lord Bandon's representative, Mr Jones Snr, repeated this offer but Mrs O'Connor seemed to be in straitened circumstances and asked for time until she would fell the harvest when she would then pay a year's rent. This was refused and the eviction proceeded.²⁷ The account of the eviction by Dan O'Connor as told by Pat Galwey in the Schools' Folklore Collection is as follows:

Eviction Incident in Clonakilty District

I recently heard the following story from Mr. Dan O'Connor of Gortnascorthy. On August 13th 1889 almost 50 years ago the bailiffs visited my home in Gortnascorthy to evict me. I hid up in the loft. The police Inspector named Purcell and his men broke in the door to search the premises and to arrest us all. One man, Constable Ryan, who was stationed at Milltown refused to obey. This man, Constable Ryan, when he resigned was presented with £60 by the people for having refused to break my house.

They found me up in the loft, Mr. O'Connor told me. They asked me to surrender or they would shoot. I threw an empty bottle at them on the minute I saw them and hit one of them on the head.

The boards of the loft were not nailed to the rafters. The sergeant removed some of them but when he put up his head I let him have the contents of a bucket of lime which was my only ammunition. I put the run on him anyway. My supplies at length ran out. Then one of the police overpowered me at last and gave me a crack of his baton on the head and almost knocked me out. They did not evict me anyway.²⁸

They brought me with them to Ardfield where they evicted an old lady Mrs. Coghlan.²⁹ They then proceeded to Clonakilty. Many people cheered me as I passed handcuffed between the police through Lamb St. and up to the police Barracks.

The coat was whitewashed with the lime I threw on it and the Inspector ordered its owner to turn it inside out to prevent him from being laughed at.³⁰ I was detained in Clonakilty barracks until six o'clock and I got nothing to eat from them.

I was then taken to Bandon in a side cart. Three policemen watched me with loaded guns ready for action. I was very cold so I asked them to put a rug over my shoulders but owing to the jolting of the car the rug fell off. The sergeant would not put it on anymore because he said that I tried to kill him that day.

I was tried that evening in Bandon before the Magistrate Mr. Cronin. The Court Clerk said that I had an honest face. I was ordered to be

taken to Cork jail next morning. I was kept that night in Bandon. I was kept ten days in Cork jail. The sergeant was medically examined to see if his eyes were damaged by the lime. I was released for a while and went home.

Soon after I was again tried and was sent to Cork jail. I then had a very hard time in jail. I met Rev. Fr. McCarthy the curate of Bealad, in the Parish of Kilmeen, in jail. He was in jail for preaching against English rule.³¹

I was released after a month and you may be sure I was glad.³² When I went home I was glad to hear that my farm was safe. I have the same house and farm since.³³

This farm in Gortnascarty remained in the possession of the O'Connor family and is farmed today by James O'Connor, Dan's grandson.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the National Folklore Collection (www.duchas.ie) and the Irish Newspaper Archives (www.irisharchives.com) for permission to reproduce material. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of the editor, Clíodhna O'Leary and also Dan O'Leary, Michael O'Mahony, Siobhán Keohane and James O'Connor, Gortnascarty, in the preparation of this paper.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Daly, E. 2005. *Leap and Glandore: Fact and Folklore*. Leap, p. vii.
- 2 'Schools' folklore scheme (1937-38)', <http://www.ucd.ie/irishfolklore/en/schoolsfolklorescheme1937-38> [accessed 4 Apr. 2017].
- 3 Daly, *Leap and Glandore*, p. vii.
- 4 <http://www.duchas.ie>.
- 5 *National Folklore Collection, Schools' Collection* (hereafter *NFCSC*), vol. 0315, pp. 1-11.
- 6 *NFCSC*, vol. 0309, pp. 162-274.
- 7 *NFCSC*, vol. 0308, pp. 161-210.
- 8 Conchubhar Ó Ruairc (1913-92) was an Irish language author, local historian and principal of Clonakilty boys' school from 1951 to 1979.
- 9 *NFCSC*, vol. 0311, pp. 415-31, 453-61, 494-6, 545-7.
- 10 Ó Coileáin, S. and Ó Donnabháin, D. 2002-03. 'Our proud heritage: Part ii'. *Ardfield/Ratbarr Journal* 4, pp. 24-9, at pp. 24-5.

- 11 *NFCSC*, vol. 0316, pp. 124-254.
- 12 *Sacred Heart Secondary School 1941-1991: Golden Jubilee Yearbook*. 1992. Clonakilty, p. 13.
- 13 For the entire collection from the Convent of Mercy, Clonakilty, see *NFCSC*, vol. 0311, pp. 266-330.
- 14 *NFCSC*, vol. 0311, pp. 98-265. Paddy Hayes (1926-2001) was a Cork County footballer and GAA stalwart (John Hayes, Donoure, and Mrs Josephine Hayes, Cork, pers. comm.). See O'Donovan, J. R. 2002-03. 'Paddy Battery' Hayes'. *Ardfield/Ratbarr Journal* 4, p. 70.
- 15 It appears that the only John Keohane living in Bealad in the 1930s was the son of Denis Keohane and Margaret Dempsey, born 18 February 1917 (date of birth supplied by Fr John Collins and Siobhán Keohane). He was uncle of the late Paddy Keohane of Keohane Readymix and Kilmeen Drama Group. He would have been twenty-one at most at the time of the folklore scheme and one would be surprised at someone so young being the informant. Family relatives, however, say he was 'known to be scholarly' and that the Keohanes had a good standard of Irish (Siobhán Keohane, pers. comm.). It is possible that this scholarly bent had led him to gather folklore independently and that James Sheehy knew of this and approached him for material.
- 16 Spellings have been modernised and emended.
- 17 It is not certain if this date was interpolated by James Sheehy or given by the informant. In either case it could be an assumption. Executions took place in the county in 1797, '98 and '99. See Prendergast, J. 2015 (last edited). 'Cork 1797 - 1799: Notices & reports from the 'Hibernian Chronicle,' with notes', <http://corkgen.org/publicgenealogy/cork/potpourri/corkancestors.com/1797-1799CorkUnitedIrishmen.htm> [accessed 8 May 2017].
- 18 *Mórsbeisear*: seven
- 19 *NFCSC*, vol. 0311, pp. 176-8.
- 20 *Hibernian Chronicle*, 1769-1800, Cork, available to view in National Library of Ireland (hereafter NLI).
- 21 Tuipéar, T. 1988. *Historical Walk of Clonakilty and its Water-Front*. Clonakilty, p. 25; see also Sutton, this volume.
- 22 Letters of Rickard Deasy to his son, Rickard, 1845-6. Cork City and County Archives (hereafter CCCA), U42.
- 23 CCCA. U42/10.
- 24 Baptismal record 15 May 1862, Rosscarbery parish, Diocese of Cork and Ross, Co. Cork, microfilm 04773 / 03, p. 268, Catholic Parish Registers, NLI, available to view at <http://registersnli.ie>. Death certificate registered 10 Dec. 1943, Register's District Clonakilty, available to view at <https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie>.
- 25 Mary O'Connor, née White, was from a nationalist and activist background as her obituary in the *Southern Star*, 22 Oct. 1910, makes clear. Her maternal grandfather, James Cullinane (*Shemus A' Gorwa*), forged pikes for the United Irishmen in his

forge at Coorleigh and was himself wounded at the Battle of the Big Cross in 1798. He subsequently fled to France and served in Napoleon's army. Mary was a prominent member of the Ladies' Land League (founded 31 Jan. 1881, dissolved 10 Aug. 1882) and also a prominent member of the National Federation and the United Irish League.

- 26 *Skibbereen Eagle*, 17 Aug. 1889.
- 27 Land agitation at this period was making it very difficult for landlords to collect rents. On the Earl of Bandon's estates arrears of £16,000 – almost one year's income – had accumulated by March 1889 and 'not as much as one penny' was being paid according to their agents, Doherty and Jones. See Donnelly, J. S. Jr. 1975. *The Land and the People of Nineteenth-century Cork*. London and Boston, p. 348.
- 28 The *Skibbereen Eagle*, 17 Aug. 1889, reported that the furniture and possessions were removed and that the O'Connors were not made caretakers. Obviously, they later repossessed the property.
- 29 According to the *Skibbereen Eagle*, 17 Aug. 1889, Mrs Coghlan, a widow, and two others shared the farm. None of them was resident on the farm. There was disagreement between the three as to whether or not to pay rent. Lord Bandon would rent the land to whoever would pay.
- 30 This was acting Sergeant McManus who, the *Skibbereen Eagle*, 17 Aug. 1889, reported, 'looked as if he were enveloped in a sheet or had been taken out of a bed of snow'.
- 31 Fr McCarthy's imprisonment was for matters connected with land agitation. He was charged with using intimidating language towards a man to prevent him taking a farm from which a tenant had been evicted. He was sentenced to four months which he served from 25 June to 25 October 1889. See O'Leary, D. 2006. *Father Timothy McCarthy Parish Priest and Patriot of Kilmeen & Castleventry Parish Co. Cork*. Rossmore, Clonakilty.
- 32 The sentence had been three months with hard labour, see *Skibbereen Eagle*, 14 Sep. 1889.
- 33 *NFCSC*, vol. 0311, pp. 211-14.

TWO MARINER FAMILIES AND A YACHT

John A. Sutton



This paper looks at specific aspects of the history of two families with Clonakilty origins: the Suttons and the Deasys. While no pedigree connection between the two families has been established, their involvement in seafaring activities and the American Civil War draws some interesting parallels between the two.

The Suttons

A number of Sutton families resided in Ring, just southeast of Clonakilty, during the early nineteenth century¹ and were associated with maritime trade.² Their use of particular Christian names and name sequencing practices³ suggest a relationship to other Sutton families in West Cork at that time,⁴ though a direct link has yet to be confirmed. Robert Sutton (1761–1841) of Ring was married to Catherine Murphy (1772–1819),⁵ and they had at least seven sons five of whom were Clonakilty-born master mariners: Nathaniel (b. 1794),⁶ Thomas (b. *circa* 1798),⁷ George (b. 1804),⁸ Abraham (b. 1813)⁹ and William (b. 1814).¹⁰ These five brothers and their uncle, Captain John Sutton (b. *circa* 1780),¹¹ as well as their descendants provided Cork with twenty-two master mariners in the nineteenth century as family members migrated first to Kinsale and then on to Cork City.¹²