

# LISTOWEL AND ITS VICINITY

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*Published by*  
MERCIER PRESS  
CORK

powder (for export to the European Economic Community) was established beside the main factory. This plant also has a daily intake of 150,000 gallons of milk and employs another fifty people.

### The Presentation Convent

was founded on 6 May 1844 when, following an invitation from Father Jeremiah (Darby) Mahony, four Sisters came from Milltown to open a school at Listowel. The need for the school was underlined by the fact that on the day it opened 300 pupils attended and soon afterwards there were 500 girls from Listowel and the surrounding area on the rolls. Initially some adults, who were being prepared for Confirmation, also attended.

Scarcely had the Sisters begun to raise funds to build an adequate school and a chapel when they were faced with the catastrophe of 1846-7. The Sisters courageously tackled the problems posed by the famine. Utilising their own somewhat scanty resources, and donations received from benefactors, they succeeded in serving their pupils a substantial breakfast of bread, a mug of boiled rice and a little milk almost every morning during those dreadful years.

By 1848 the community was destitute and some of the Sisters, due to overwork and undernourishment, had become ill and died. However, from this time on the situation improved. In 1848 the authorities succeeded in effectively distributing money, subscribed in England for the relief of famine in Ireland, to local bodies and the Sisters received some of this in the form of a daily supply of rye bread, with which they continued to feed their pupils. Something of the faith and courage of the early members of the community can be imagined from the fact that they built their chapel in 1849 and only four years later they put up an infant school and a number of classrooms.

In 1853, probably prompted, at least in part, by the fact that their convent was dedicated to the Holy Cross, the Sisters erected a large cross on the outside of their school. Soon afterwards the Commissioners of National Education ordered it to be taken down in accordance with the rules of the National School Board. When this order was ignored, the Sisters received a series of letters from the Commissioners, urging them to comply with the order. And, when Father Michael J. McDonnell was appointed parish priest of

Listowel in 1856, he refused to become manager of the convent school until the offending cross was removed. However, in spite of these pressures, the Sisters did not take down the cross.

One is given an insight into their continuing service of the people of the area by the *Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland* of 1870. It seems that the desire of parents to have their children educated by the Sisters was so great that during the previous three years an average of eighty girls boarded in the town in order to be able to attend the convent school. The Sisters were also distributing food and clothing to their more-needy pupils at this time. Whereas the distribution of clothing took place at a few stated times during the year, some 100 out of the school's 500 pupils received a meal of bread and milk or bread and coffee (when milk was scarce) or bread and soup (in the winter time) each day.

The convent school has developed considerably down through the years. A large primary school was built in 1883, and the secondary school was opened in 1942, both being built out of the Sisters' own funds. A science laboratory and a gymnasium were built in 1967 and, with the advent of free secondary education, three further classrooms had to be added to the secondary school in 1969. In 1973 the community numbered twenty-eight, and in the school-year 1972-73 there were 384 pupils with ten teachers (of whom nine were Sisters) in the primary school and 400 pupils with twenty teachers (of whom nine were Sisters) in the secondary.

Besides educating most of the girls of Listowel and its vicinity for over a hundred years the Sisters have also made a significant contribution to Ireland's missionary effort abroad. When the Presentation Sisters of the Kerry diocese established two new convents in California, one at Uplands in 1955 and the other at Montclair in 1959, three Sisters from Listowel convent were among the foundresses. Also, many girls, who attended the convent schools and later joined religious orders, have served overseas.

In 1971-2 extensive repairs were carried out on the convent chapel, which is dedicated to Mary Immaculate.<sup>11</sup>

11. Much of the above information is taken from the convent diary, Presentation Convent, Listowel.

The Catholic church was begun in 1829.<sup>350</sup> It replaced a temporary structure which had been erected about 1815 and which was not any more impressive than the old 'Mass-house' which had done service in 'Tea (Tay) Lane'. Initially the new church consisted of the cruciform-shaped body of the present church. There were no seats in it and it had three galleries. Then between 1865 and 1867 the beautiful tower and spire were erected and finally in 1910 the present aisles were added.<sup>351</sup>

By the time the spire was erected on the Catholic church the worst features of the Protestant ascendancy had passed and in 1869, with the disestablishment by Gladstone of the Protestant State Church in Ireland, the legal fiction that all Irish people were Protestant or at least ought to be was ended for ever.

#### Proselytism

Earlier in the nineteenth century a determined and constructive effort was made to propagate the Protestant faith in Ireland. This effort, which began at a time when it had already become obvious that legal sanctions could no longer be effectively used to promote the spread of Protestantism, was largely inspired by John Wesley (he toured Ireland nineteen times). In any case, it was an integral part of the later Revivalist Movement, some of whose members regarded Ireland as a good area for missionary activity. The sincerity and dedication of these nineteenth-century proselytisers contrasted sharply with the various sporadic and half-hearted efforts made up to that time by Protestant churchmen to convert the Irish.

One of the most formidable barriers hampering the efforts of earlier proselytisers had been the Irish language and so 'The Irish Society for the promotion of the education of the Native Irish through the Medium of their own language' was founded in 1818. The purpose of the society was to teach 'the Native Irish' to read

350. I.F.C., School MS 406:54-5. It was one of the many churches erected during the episcopacy (1824-56) of Cornelius Egan who also founded eight convents and over two hundred schools. See D. A. Reidy, *The diocese of Kerry*, 40.

351. Kerry Diocesan Archives, Killarney, Diaries of Drs Moriarty and Mangan. See also I.F.C., School MS 406:54-5. For more on St Mary's Catholic church, see pp. 502-3.

the Bible in their own language and thereby wean them away from 'the errors of Popery'. Because some members of the society in their zeal for converts made adherence to Protestantism a precondition for receiving food, in effect, soup, before and, especially, during the famine period, the converts of the society became known as 'Soupers'.

Despite the fact that the Protestant proselytisers were active throughout Kerry between 1820 and about 1860 their only significant successes in the county occurred in the areas around Dingle, Brosna and Kilgarvan. They do not appear to have been particularly successful in the Listowel area, although there is evidence that they were active in Ballybunion and Moyvane.

One of the most enthusiastic promoters of this work was a Thomas Dowling, a convert and inspector of schools for 'The Irish Society'. Probably a native of Ardfert, he travelled throughout the county in the course of his work for the society. He spent a good deal of his time in the Dingle area and also in the vicinity of Brosna. Later he was active in Moyvane. In 1845 he was at Farrenpiere near Ballybunion, where he intended to build a house. However, this occasioned serious opposition. A number of local people even destroyed his building materials on June 17. According to a report in the *Kerry Evening Post* of June 21, this incident was sparked off by a denunciation of Dowling which had been made by a priest in Ballybunion some time previously. The destruction of Dowling's building materials was carried out, seemingly, in the mistaken belief that he was setting up a schoolhouse to further his work in the area. In any case, the reaction of the local people underlies the steadfastness with which they withstood the efforts of the proselytisers and the bitterness occasioned by the latter's activities.

Like the penal laws, the work of the proselytisers seems only to have strengthened the Catholic faith of most of the people. Unlike the penal laws, however, it did a grave disservice to the Irish language which in many places suffered irreparably by being associated with proselytism in the minds of the people.<sup>352</sup>

352. For most of the above, see P. de Brún, 'An tAthair Brasbie', *K.A.H.S.J.* 2 (1969) 38-58; and *Filíocht Sheáin Uí Bhraonáin* (Baile Átha Cliath 1972) 18-24.

## APPENDIX 1

## ORIGINS OF SOME NORTH KERRY FAMILIES

It would take a specialist to unravel exhaustively the origins of all the families making up the present population of north Kerry in general and Listowel in particular. However, the general origins of many of the surnames which were and are common to the district are well known and some can be associated with historical events.

The Broder or Broderick, Kennelly, O'Connor and Scanlan families are probably the oldest in the district.<sup>1</sup> Close behind these are the McCarthy, Moriarty, O'Connell, O'Donoghue, O'Mahony, O'Shea and O'Sullivan families. The bearers of these surnames moved into the district from south Kerry. Apparently the Tarrants or Trants are of Norse extraction. The ancestors of the area's Bolands, Corridans, Keanes, MacMahons,<sup>2</sup> Mulvihills, O'Briens and many of the O'Carrolls (very often Carroll) originated in County Clare. The Brownes, Cantillons, Fitzgeralds, Fitzmaurices,<sup>3</sup> McElligotts, Marshalls, Pierces<sup>4</sup> and Stacks are of Norman descent. The Elizabethan settlement brought in Blennerhassetts (some eventually became Hassetts), Chutes, Crosbies, Dennys, Hollys, Raymonds, Stoughtons and Wilmots.

The transplantation of some of the O'Moore septs from Laois to Kerry by Sir Arthur Chichester in 1608 was responsible for the

1. The O'Connor family was the most important of these. Many of those so named were descended from the O'Connor of Kerry and later of Carrigafoyle, the great Gaelic princely family of the area. For more on the O'Connors, see J. F. MacMahon, 'The rise and fall of Carrigafoyle', *Shannonside Annual* 1958, 39-53; *ibid.* 1959, 44-50; *ibid.* 1960, 44-5, 83-8. See also T. Pierce, 'The O'Connors', *Shannonside Annual* 1956, 63-6; and 'Tarbert and its lords', *Shannonside Annual* 1958, 77-87.

2. The late J. F. (Jack) MacMahon suggested that some of the MacMahons of north Kerry were descended from a Mahon O'Connor and thus were really a branch of the O'Connors (see J. F. MacMahon, *Shannonside Annual* 1958, 53).

3. The Fitzmaurices and the Fitzgeralds, to a lesser extent, were the most influential families in this area for quite a long time (see Chapters 3 and 7).

4. For an excellent account of the Pierces, see J. H. Pierce, 'The origin of the Pierce family of Co. Kerry', *K.A.H.S.J.* 5 (1972) 14-32.

district's strong representation of Dees, Dorans, Dowlings, Kellys, Lawlors and Moores. Seemingly the McEvoy's, another one of the transplanted septs, did not flourish in their new environment (see M. G. Dowling, 'The Crosbie agreement of 1607', *Journal of the Co. Kildare Archaeological Society* 13 (1946-7) 143). The Cromwellian settlement introduced the Amory, Bateman, Boyle, Carrigue (Carrig), Collis, Cooper, Day, Godfrey, Gun, Hickson, Owens, Ponsonby, Sandes, Stoute and Sweetman families to the area. After the Williamite victory of 1691 the Gentleman, Hewson, Hilliard, Julian and Leslie families arrived. Finally, the surnames Binner (Benner), Bovenizer, Fizell (Fitzell), Glazier (Gleasure), Hoffman, Latchford, Millar (Miller) and Switzer, which were formerly more common in the area, owe their origin, for the most part, to sixteen 'Palatine' families who were settled on the Blennerhassett estate near Tralee between 1746 and 1776.