

The Irish Language in Clare and North Tipperary, 1820: Bishop Mant's Enquiry

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Richard Mant was born in England in 1776, and after a distinguished career as an Anglican priest in that country came to Ireland in 1820 as bishop of the united dioceses of Killaloe and Kilfenora. Zealous and energetic, Mant immediately after his consecration set about informing himself on the state of his diocese, and as part of that process addressed to his clergy a business-like enquiry on the population, extent, and condition of their parishes, both as to purely ecclesiastical affairs—state of church buildings, particulars of divine service, etc.—and more general topics—the status of the Protestants, the number and kind of schools, and the language of the parishioners. The questions relating to this last topic were numbers 16 and 17 of nineteen questions and read as follows: *Is any part of your parishioners incapable of understanding religious instruction, whether public or private, delivered to them in the English language?* and *Are you or is any minister of the established church in your parish or union capable of giving instruction in the Irish language?*

Mant's abstract of the replies, dated 8th of September 1820, with a copy of his questionnaire, is now Ms. 352 in the National Library of Ireland, and we give below a full copy of those parts of the tabulated abstract under each denomination which relate to his questions 16 and 17. We have followed his style of designation of the parishes, etc., exactly, as, while we do not need to enter fully into the complex unions, rectorial and vicarial, we do not wish to inhibit readers who may wish to do so. The united diocese consisted mainly of almost the whole of the Co. Clare and a large tract in north Tipperary, and in the following transcript we have italicised those denominations not in Clare. We have expanded the names of clergymen from the initials which Mant normally used to indicate persons fully named elsewhere in his abstract. These expansions and a few other explanatory phrases added by us are in square brackets. We have standardised capitalisation and expanded his other contractions—for Protestant and Roman Catholic, for example—silently.

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BALLYNACLOUGH Vic.: No parishioners incapable of understanding religious instruction in English, minister incapable of teaching in Irish.

TERRYGLASS Vic.: No person incapable of understanding English. Curate does not understand Irish.

LETTERAGH Rec. and **INNISDADROM**: Both Protestants and Roman Catholics in general speak English. Mr. [S. J.] Otway [the minister] not capable of instructing in Irish.

BALLYMACKEY Vic., **TOOMEVARA** etc.: All the parishioners understand English. No minister of the establishment understands Irish.

KILNASOOLAGH Vic. etc.: All parishioners understand English. Incumbent does not understand Irish.

AGHLISHCLOUGHANE Vic. or **EGGLISH**: English understood by all. Mr. [Travers (J.), the curate] does not understand Irish, which, he says, is not used in his neighbourhood. He knows no clergyman

who does. This is observed by others in their answers.

LORRHA Rect. and Vic. etc.: English universally understood. The archdeacon [Rev. Ed. Price] does not understand Irish. He says, the Irish is exploded here *in toto*.

KILLALOE Rect. etc.: English understood by almost if not all the people. Ministers do not understand Irish.

TOMGRANY Preb. and Rect.: No part of parishioners incapable of understanding English. The rector [Rev. Wm. Read] understands Irish: and says that he has often explained passages in scripture to some of his Roman Catholic parishioners in that language.

LOCKEEN Preb. and R., **DOONASS** R. and V., etc.: English understood by all Protestants. Not many if any Roman Catholics who do not understand it: certainly none under 30 years of age. He [Rev. H. Richard Langrishe] does not understand Irish.

CLONDAGAD Preb. and Vic.: The greater part of parishioners incapable of understanding religious instruction in English. Mr. K[ennedy (Richard)] does not understand Irish.

DYSERT, Preb. and V., **KILNEBOY**, R., **KILKEEDY**, R.: He [Rev. F. Blood] says "the Popish children lose what little English they acquire at school when they arrive at an age fit for labour". He does not say whether he or his curate understands Irish, but he says "there are three itinerant Irish teachers in this country, who are Protestants in principle, and who are doing a great deal of good". Qu. By whom sent? What denomination of Protestant? What sort of good?

TULLOH Preb. and Vic.: Almost the entire population understand English, except a very few, very old people. Mr. W[hitty (John)] does not understand Irish.

INNISCALTHRIE, Preb. **KILRUSH** Vic., **KILFIERAGH**, etc.: Irish confined to old persons in retired places. English spreading very fast. Mr. W[hitty (Irvine)] knows no clergyman capable of instructing in Irish. He considers all attempts to revive the Irish detrimental to the Protestant religion, dangerous to the peace of Ireland, etc., and he notices the utter inefficacy of T. Conellan's efforts to make converts in that way.

INNISCALTHRA, Vic., **MOYNOE**, V., **CLONRUSH**, V.: None incapable of receiving instruction in English, which has been greatly extended of late among the Roman Catholics and was always in general use with Protestants. Irish not known to Mr. M[artin (James)].

OGONILLOE, Vic.: English spoken by all except a very few old persons who inhabit the mountains. Mr. M[artin (Richard)] does not know Irish.

DROMCLIFFE, Vic., with four others: No Protestant parishioners incapable of understanding religious instruction in English. Many of the Roman Catholics incapable. Mr. F[itgerald (Michael)] not capable of instructing in Irish.

CLARE ABBEY, Perp. Cur.: English not an obstacle to the reception of religious instruction in any part of the parish. Mr. Y[oung (William)] does not know Irish.

KILLADYSERT, Vic. and **KILCHRIST**, Vic.: All the Protestants understand English: very few others. Mr. H[adlock (W. H.)] does not know Irish.

KILSEILY, Vic., **KILFINAGHTY**, Vic., and eight others: English spoken by all the Protestants but no remark as to Papists. Mr. M[iller (William)] does not know Irish: nor, as he says, any clergyman in the county.

CLONLEA, Vic.: None incapable of understanding English. Mr. W[elsh (Richard)] does not understand Irish.

KILMURRY, Vic. and four others: All Mr. B[utler (John)]'s parishioners understand English. So he says: but whether he includes the Roman Catholics does not appear. He does not understand Irish.

QUIN, Vic., **CLONIE**, V., **DOWRIE**, V.: No parishioners incapable of understanding English. Irish stated to be not necessary in a minister.

STRADBALLY or **CASTLECONNEL**, V., **KILNEGARRIFF**, V.: Mr. C[rampton (Josiah)] says, Every Protestant in Ireland understands English and very few Irish. In his parish no Roman Catholic under 50 or 60 years who does not perfectly understand English. He knows no clergyman capable of instructing in Irish.

KILFARBOY, Vic., **KILMIHILL**, Vic.: [No return]

AGHANCON, R. and V.: [No return]

BIRR, R. and V., **LOCKEEN**, Vic.: Not an individual in the union who does not perfectly understand English. Scarcely any, Irish.

CASTLETOWN, R. and V., **YOUGHAL**, **BURGESS**: No parishioners incapable of understanding English. Neither Dr. P[arker] nor Mr. P[arker (S. G.)] knows Irish.

FINNOE, R. and V., **CLOUGHPRIOR**, R. and V., **KILBARRON**, V.: English the only language spoken in the union.

BOURNEY, Vic., **BURRISNAFARNEY**, R. and V.: All the Protestant parishioners know English: nothing said of the collective population. The curate [Rev. Patrick Murray] capable of giving instruction in Irish.

SHINRONE, R. and V. **KILMURRY ELY**, R. and V., **KILCOMEN**, R.: Not a single inhabitant

capable of understanding Irish.

DUNKERRIN, R. and V. *CASTLETOWN ELY*, etc.: None incapable of understanding English. The dean says, the Irish language is scarcely spoken in his union or neighbourhood.

TEMPLEHARRY, R. and V., *CULLENWAYNE*, R. and V.: All the parishioners conversant in the English language. The Irish quite obsolete in the neighbourhood.

KILRUANE, R. and V.: [No return]

BURRISOKEANE, R. and V.: English universally understood.

MODREENY, R. and V., *ARDCRONEY*, V.: None of the parishioners incapable of understanding English. Irish not known to Mr. P[almer (Edwin)] or his curate [Rev. W. B. Fry].

BALLINGARRY, Vic., *USKEANE*, Vic.: All parishioners understand English. Mr. C[onolly (John)] does not understand Irish.

KILMORE, Vic., *LISBUNNY*, R. and V., *KILNANEAVE*, do.: No part of Protestant parishioners incapable of understanding English. Roman Catholics not noticed. Incumbent [Very Rev. Gibney Holmes] does not know Irish.

TEMPLEDERRY, R. and V.: No parishioners incapable of understanding English. Incumbent [Rev. Edmund Jordan] and curate [Rev. William Jordan] ignorant of Irish.

MONSEA, Vic.: English universally spoken. Curate [Rev. Richard Studdert] never heard Irish spoken in the parish. Is totally ignorant of it.

KILLODIERNAN, R. and V.: All capable of receiving instruction in English. Clergy of the parish do not know Irish.

NENAGH, R. and V., *KNIGH*, R. and V.: All the parishioners understand English. The clergy of the parish do not know Irish.

KINNITTY, half R. and V., *LITTERLUNA*, do., *ROSCOMROE*, V.: Not many, if any, in the union who understand the Irish language. Incumbent [Rev. J. C. Maude] does not.

ROSCREA, R. and V., *KYLE*, R. and V., *KILCOLEMAN*, V., *ETTAGH*, R. and V.: No parishioners incapable of understanding English.

KILFENORA, R. and V.: None incapable of understanding English. So Mr. B[rew (Richard)], the curate] says. But does he include the Roman Catholics in his answer?

NOUGHAVALL, R. and V., *CARRUNE*, V.: [No return. Mr. Brew, curate of Kilfenora above was also curate of this union and perhaps his above reply was intended to cover this union as well.]

KILKORNEY, R. and V., *KILHENNY*, do., *OUGHMANNA* [*sic*]: [No return. Mr. Brew was curate of this union too and the foregoing remark applies.]

RATHBOURNEY, R. and V., with three others: Irish is the language of the country with few exceptions. Mr. W[estropp (John)] neither speaks nor understands it.

KILMANAHEEN, R. and V. with four others: Greater part of parishioners capable of understanding instruction in English language: but nothing will make an impression them, unless sanctioned and directed by their priests. The archdeacon [Dr. Kenny] is not capable of instructing in Irish.

KILTORAGHT, Vic., *CLOUNEY*, Vic.: The Protestants understand English. No remark on the bulk of the population. Mr. D[avoren (William)] does not understand Irish.

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The bishop appended to his summary of the replies a tabular abstract of the statements of population given for each denomination. We give below that part of this tabulation which relates to denominations in Clare with the figures he gives for total population, Protestant and Catholic populations, and their ratio.

	<i>Population</i>	<i>Protestant</i>	<i>Catholic</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
Kilnasoolagh	800	48	752	1/16
Killaloe	4000	175	3825	1/21½
Tomgraney	4000	60	3940	1/66
Doonass	6000	207	5793	1/28
Clondagad	1850	13	1837	1/140
Dysert, Kilneboy, etc.	4235	35	4200	1/120
Tulloh	4500	100	4400	1/44

Kilrush etc.	13000	850	12150	1/14
Inniscalthra etc.	4400	475	3925	1/8
Ogonilloe	1600	60	1540	1/25½
Dromcliffe (Ennis)	12500	300	11950	1/40
Clare Abbey	3094	50	3044	1/60
Kildysert etc.	2500	26	2474	1/95
Kilchrist	1500	71	1429	1/20
Kilseily	6000	260	5740	1/22
Clonlea	1730	125	1605	1/15½
Kilmurry etc.	12135	100	12035	1/120
Quin etc.	4000	45	3955	1/88
Kilfarboy etc.		[no return]		

Although the bishop made the last entry above, one of the areas for which he had no return, he unaccountably omitted the following for which figures were given in the body of his compilation:

Kilmanaheen	7591	50	7541	1/152
Kiltoraght	1300	4	1296	1/324

The following are the other denominations which he named but for which no return was available to him: Kilfenora, Noughaval, Kilkorney, and Rathbourney.

[Grand Total:	94735	3055	91680	1/30]
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Before proceeding to develop a tenuous argument *ex silentio*—notoriously the most difficult—from the foregoing, we must make certain common-sense and factual observations.

Mant's purpose in making his enquiry concerning language was practical and pastoral: did he need to provide an Irish-speaking clergy to reach his flock? As a bishop of the established church he regarded all residents in the area under his jurisdiction, including the Catholics, as members of that flock, and the remarks added to some of the replies above indicate that he was to some extent displeased that some of his clergy were not as clear as he was himself on that point.

Protestant ministers in an overwhelmingly Catholic area must have felt some understandable resentment at the bureaucratic demands for information from this Englishman sent from head office, as it were, to put some ginger into them. Their replies must be read in this light and it would be less than human to expect the curate in a remote parish to reply baldly, "I haven't a word of Irish and can have absolutely no communication with the vast bulk of my parishioners", even if this were the case. On the other hand, a minister might be replying with perfect truth when he says he never heard a word of Irish spoken, even in a community with a high proportion of bilinguals or monoglot Irish speakers: it all depends on who the people were with whom he might have spoken.

Again, some comment must be made on the respondents' estimates of population. 95,000 seems a gross underestimate of the population of the roughly three-quarters of the Co. Clare for which enumeration is provided; the remainder is covered by the areas for which Dr. Mant had no return, or otherwise does not appear to have accounted for and the few parishes in the county which were not under his jurisdiction. We know, after all, that the 1821 census returned a population for the county of

about 200,000. A responding minister was more likely to be wrong in his enumeration of Catholics to be counted in thousands than of Protestants, his own congregation, to be counted in dozens or a few hundreds at most. And a percentage error will be the greater in absolute terms the greater the quantity surveyed.

Despite all these reservations, we believe it is possible to draw certain valid conclusions from the bishop's factual summary. In the first place, there is a clear difference in style between the answers relating to Co. Tipperary and those relating to Co. Clare. A survey of the Tipperary entries shows that there is virtually no evidence for the existence in that area of any significant number of Irish speakers, bilingual or monoglot. The reporters are prepared to be quite categorical. "The Irish is exploded here *in toto*." No Catholic under fifty or sixty, who does not perfectly understand English. Not an individual here who does not perfectly understand English, scarcely any, Irish. English the only language spoken in the union. Not a single inhabitant capable of understanding Irish. The Irish quite obsolete, scarcely spoken. Never heard Irish spoken in the parish. Not many, if any, who understand the Irish language.

There is a variety of expression here coupled with an evenness of tenor in the responses which is convincing.

When we consider the Clare responses together quite a different picture emerges. Here the general tenor is defensive in tone—English not an obstacle to the reception of religious instruction. English spoken by all Protestants. None incapable of understanding English. Irish not necessary in a minister. And then there are the replies which quite frankly acknowledge the existence of a significant proportion of monoglot Irish speakers. These relate to an area west of a line north and south through Ennis. (The accompanying map indicates broadly the districts in Co. Clare covered by the various denominations used by Dr. Mant.) In the Ennis district itself, the administrative centre, many of the Roman Catholics are incapable of understanding religious instruction in English; in Clondagad, south-west of Ennis, the greater part of the parishioners are so incapable; in Kildysert, very few Catholics understand English. In Dysert, north of Ennis, the children lose what little English they have when they leave school. In Rathbourney, the northern tip of the county, where only a single Protestant is reported, Irish is the language of the country with few exceptions. The bishop clearly appreciated a certain anomaly indicated in some of the replies by the foregoing distribution, and added his queries to his summary. Under Kilmurry, for example, he adds to the report that all the parishioners understand English the acid remark: *So he says: but whether he includes the Roman Catholics does not appear. He does not understand Irish.*

Mr. Whitty of Kilrush (where, as in Ennis, the relatively high proportion of Protestants is due to the presence of police, revenue officers and soldiers) is the only one to express an active hostility to Irish. He obviously did not want to hear it, but even so his observation that Irish is confined to old persons in retired places must be read as meaning monoglot Irish. Tantalisingly, the large area around Kilfarboy or Miltown-Malbay is one of those for which we have no return.

The most interesting reply is probably that from Tomgraney. Here the Irish-speaking minister, while testifying like so many of his colleagues to the ability of the people to understand English, reports that he nevertheless speaks Irish to them.

A reasonable conclusion would appear to be that more than a decade before the introduction of the national system of education, commonly held to be one of the most formative influences in determining language use, east Clare was fairly heavily penetrated by bilingualism, while central and west Clare had a population of monoglot Irish speakers perhaps approaching six figures. In north-western Tipperary, any

surviving monoglot Irish-speakers were elderly, with a presumed dependency of bilingual connexions.

Students of the Irish immigration to North America sometimes speculate about the knowledge of English which may have been enjoyed by the massive numbers of Irish emigrants, largely from western counties. Dr. Mant's survey may prove of little help to them. Succeeding decades up to the Great Famine saw a continuing rise in the Irish-speaking, as in the general population, but this may have been offset by the educational innovation.

Dr. Mant stayed in Killaloe only three years before being translated to Down and Connor, and according to his biographer* during these three years set about improving himself by taking up the study of a new language: not Irish, but Hebrew.



Fig. 1. Map of Co. Clare indicating approximately the districts listed by Bishop Mant.

*Ven. W. B. Mant: *Memoirs of . . . Richard Mant . . . Bishop and Down and Connor, and of Dromore . . .* Dublin 1857.