

Fragments from Lost Census Returns: Entries Relating to the Kilfinane District

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The destruction of the Public Records Office when the Dublin Four Courts were shelled in the last days of June 1922 must ever remain a source of the greatest regret to historians, both professional and amateur. Among the priceless sources of information about our past that perished in the holocaust were the original census returns for the years 1821, 1831, 1841. Summaries are in existence, but the particulars relating to the individual families have gone.

In June 1921, Pádraig Ó Ruairc, a native of Ardpatrick, Co. Limerick, took extracts relating to certain families from the returns for the Kilfinane district. Sometimes the particulars copied by him are as they appeared in the returns; a few times he abbreviates them by omitting the names of the children and writing "family" instead. Here and there in the extracts he interpolates his own comments regarding certain families, or certain of the particulars supplied in the returns.

Pádraig Ó Ruairc had been employed as a Civil Servant in Dublin, and intended, when he retired, to write a history of Coshlea—*Cois tSléibhe*, his native barony. Because of various factors, including spells in hospital, he never got around to compiling his history. In December 1965 I received a long interesting letter from him, about a third of it in Irish and the balance in English. With the letter he enclosed copies of the extracts he had made from the census returns for 1821 and 1851. Pádraig died very shortly afterwards. *Solas na Soilse dó!*

The extracts do not cover all the families in the Kilfinane district, but since the information contained in them is unavailable elsewhere, it is important that it should be recorded permanently somewhere, preferably in this volume of the *Journal* honouring Dr. Edward MacLysaght, a scholar who has demonstrated the value of such records on many occasions. The following are the extracts.

* * * *

KILFINANE (Barony of Coshlea)

Copies from Census of 1821. Census Return. Vol. 7, part 1. Bay 6.1. Shelf 3. Sub-number 51.

Townland of Kilfinane in the parish of Kilfinane

In house No. 43 (3 stories) owned by Catherine Cleary, widow, I find William Bishop (55) lodger, victualler, and Allag Bishop (55).

In No. 42 (3 stories): Daniel McCarthy (27) nailer.

Margaret McCarthy (60) mother.

James Fetton (18) apprentice.

House No. 55 (2 stories) Joseph Wiggins (33) schoolmaster. No. of acres 8. Public teacher and parish clerk to the Established Church. Has two daughters: Allay (7), Mary (under 1).

House No. 64. Owned by Michael Walsh (50) carpenter. John Dwyer, lodger (60), schoolmaster. In "Observation" column we find "Master of a poor school supported by subscriptions. Consisting of 70 boys and 30 girls which is resident in the town."

- Mary Dwyer, lodger (52) schoolmistress.
Elizabeth Norket (28) lodger, assistant schoolmistress.
- House No. 81* (2 stories)
James Bible (34 or 54); farmer and Bridewell keeper. Obs.: "This No. is the Bridewell in this town . . . is confined only one prisoner."
- House No. 82*
Prudence Collins (56).
Rev. John Creed of Ballyorgan, curate, resided in this house.
- House No. 83*
Thomas Shore (42) med. doctor; son, Thomas (20) an A.B.
- House No. 86*
Charles Bennett, Esq. (40), coroner in this county. Mary Bennett (30) wife.
- House No. 97* Matthew Cranitch (55) publican.
- House No. 109* (2 stories)
Patrick McCarthy (41) nailer and farmer. Obs.: "Keeps a shop of General Goods."
Mary McCarthy (35) wife
Patrick McCarthy (8) son
Richard McCarthy (3) son
Henry McCarthy (1) son
Margaret McCarthy (13) daughter
Mary McCarthy (10) daughter
- House No. 9*
John McCarthy (35) (smyth), has 3 sons
Tim (10)
Owen (7)
Patrick (2) and 1 daughter Julian (1)
- House No. 109* (Contd.)
Mary Frazer (80) mother in-law
Ellen Fenton (55) house servant
Mary Casey (18) house servant
Denis Rea (32) house servant
No. of acres owned by Patrick McCarthy 8.
- House No. 116*
William Fizzle (20) wheelright
- House No. 126*
Cornelius Murphy (60) feathermonger. Obs.: "There is a school in this house. Consists of 18 girls and 2 boys."
- House No. 130*
Patrick Stack (10) parish child.
In the Square.
- House No. 7*
School House. Obs.: "There is a school on this square in this town. It consists of 101 boys and 50 girls. Joseph Wiggins, Master. Supported partly by subscription from Gascoign Oliver, Esq., and parish cess of £5 a year. Some scholars who can afford pay for their tuition."
- House No. 8*
Cornelius Shanahan (52) schoolmaster. Obs.: "A public school consists of 30 boys and 9 girls."

CAPTAIN'S LANE

- House No. 1*
Denis Treacy (60) taylor
John Treacy (26) son, piper
Roger Sheehy (50) lodger, schoolmaster
- House No. 4*
Schoolhouse. Obs.: "A public school that is kept in this house consists of 40 boys and 6 girls."
- House No. 7*
James Shea (40) labourer
Timothy Shea (12) son
Patrick Shea (9) son
James Shea (3) son

Observation in reference to Timothy and Patrick Shea: "These children go to a free school in this town supported by subscription from the Baptist Society in Dublin."

HIGH STREET

House No. 1

Timothy Horigan (42) victualler. Among his sons I find one Michael (1) who was perhaps the Mick Hourigan I knew as an old man.

House No. 2

Schoolhouse. Obs.: "A public school is kept in this street which consists of 40 boys and 20 girls."

House No. 23

John Fitzpatrick (30) smyth
Charles Fitzpatrick (1)

House No. 29

Matt Hinchy (56) shoemaker. Among sons Mathew Hinchy (19).

CHAPEL LANE

House No. 1

John Fitzgerald (28) shoemaker.

House No. 2

John Roach (24) musitioner. Obs.: "A public school kept in this house rented from occupier, which consists of 50 boys and 7 girls."

Obs.: "There is a new built chapel in this lane in this town at the extremity and on this townland, on which there is a belfrey."

House No. 17

Owen Callaghan (32) jobber. Obs.: "Hawks waistcoats."

MILL LANE

House No. 1

Daniel Ahern (60) cooper

OFAIRIS (?) (Feevis?) STREET

House No. 3

Peter Nailor (40) farmer.

House No. 11

Daniel Tolstone (33) labourer.

House No. 12 (4 stories)

Charles D. Oliver, Esq. (52) gentleman and farmer. Acres, 40.

Mrs. Sara Oliver (35) wife

Master John Oliver (under 1)

Miss Anne Oliver (15) daughter

Miss Elizabeth (13)

Miss Mary (10)

Miss Elitia (7)

Miss Sarah (4)

Mrs. Mary Binane (50) Governess (and a host of servants and retainers).

House No. 29 (3 stories)

Rev. James Ellard (47). Acres, 9. Obs.: "This man lives in Glebe House, the incumbent does not live in the parish." (P. Ó Ruairc's note: "This Ellard was married to one of the Bennetts.")

GENERAL OBSERVATION BY P. Ó RUAIRC: "It is noticed that Kilfinane has its fair amount of 'strolling beggars'. The remarks in the observations column were sometimes crude, e.g. 'this man is a natural born idiot'. Sometimes in reference to a child it is intimated that he goes to Parish School—the Protestant School, presumably; e.g. in reference to Anthony Bishop (5); William Marks (3) goes to a Public School. The number of schools in Kilfinane at this time appears extraordinary. Of course Kilfinane was then a more populous place than it is now, and was also, very

likely, much more prosperous. It had more industry, mills, butter market, important flax and spinning industries. From the Census Return the school population would appear to be:

	Boys	Girls	Total
School of John O Dwyer (house 64)	70	30	100
House No. 7 (School in Square)	101	50	151
House No. 8 (Shanahan's)	30	9	39
House No. 4, Captain's Lane	40	6	46
House No. 2, High Street	40	20	60
House No. 2, Chapel Lane	50	7	57

There is also a reference in entry re House No. 7 (James Shea) to a free school in the town 'supported by subscriptions from the Baptist Society in Dublin'. This may be the school in Captain's Lane."

GARRINLACE

No. 3

Denis Mara (60) farmer, Acres 21.
Ellen Mara (55) (Obs.: "Almost dead of a consumption").
Children:

Cornelius (23)
Michael (20)
Denis (4)
Catherine (17)
Johanna (14)
Ellen (6)

BALLYRIGAN

No. 1

John Thornhill (45) labourer and farmer. Acres 32. Obs.: "Constantly employed, and a right of mountain."
Anne Thornhill (45) wife.
John Thornhill (18) son (labourer, constantly employed)
Catherine Thornhill (13) daughter, flax spinner
Ellen Thornhill (9) "
Anne Thornhill (6) "
Anne Creanbury (78) mother-in-law. Obs.: "Past her labour".

No. 3

Jacop Barkman (42) labourer and farmer
Ariot Barkman (36) wife

No. 7 John Fizzell (68) farmer

Anne (59) wife
Jacop Fizzle (19) son

No. 8 John Fizzle, Junr. (24) farmer, 3 acres

Mary (20) wife
William (1) son
Samie (under 1) son

BALLYORGAN

"I notice that there were several flax spinners in this townland—Dalys, Minchens, Hourehans, Bests; also many Palatine names—Bests, Dulmages, Stroughts"—*P. Ó Ruairc's note.*

Joyce: Garrett Joyce (27) shoemaker, occasionally employed.

Betty Joyce (27) wife
Michael Joyce (3) son
John Joyce (1) son

Chapman—Eliza (6), daughter of James (40) farmer.

BALLYSHONAKIN

In *House No. 39* of Matthew Denne (75) are
Catherine Denne (70?)
Ellen Rourk, maiden (73)

JAMESTOWN

In *House No. 12* of Davie Roche (38) farmer
Mary Roche (38) and family we find
Denis Rourke (23) brother-in-law, labourer, constantly employed.
Catherine Rourke (26) sister-in-law, house servant.

BAUNATLEA

House No. 1 William Shepperd (35) labourer, and family.

House No. 2

Denis Rourke (56) farmer. Acres 35. Obs.: "Denis Rourke held 167 acres in Townland of Sunville in this Parish".
Honora Rourke (52) wife
John Rourke (20) son. Labourer. Constantly employed by his father.
Denis Rourke (15) son. Pupil
Garrett Rourke (13) son. Pupil
Hanora Rourke (20) daughter. Flax spinner
Margaret Rourke (18) daughter. Flax spinner
Catherine Rourke (16) daughter. Flax spinner

BALLYVODANE

House No. 8

Denis Hayes (30) farmer
Denis (6) son
Edward (1) son

House No. 4

Patrick Mortal (40). 20 acres, farmer
Martin (11) son
Patrick (4) son
John (1) son
Ellen (12) daughter
Catherine (9) daughter
Bridget (7) daughter
Mary (3) daughter

House No. 3

John Mortall (40) farmer. 20 acres
Catherine (30) wife
Martin (9) son
James (6) son
John (3) son

MORTALSTOWN

House No. 31

John Rourke (52) farmer. Acres 52
Margaret Rourke (51) wife. Flax spinner
Garrett Rourke (26) labourer. Obs.: "Constantly employed by his father."
Denis Rourke (23) son. Labourer, employed by father
Thomas Rourke (18) son " " "
Patrick Rourke (11) son. Pupil
Mary Rourke (14) daughter. Pupil
Honora Rourke (8) daughter. Pupil

Phil Rourke (21) house servant
Bridget Lillis, house servant.

SUNVILLE

House No. 71

Thomas Hayes (35) labourer
Bridget Hayes (30) wife
Patrick (11) son
Peter (3) son
Johanna (9) daughter
Catherine (7) daughter
Mary (4) daughter
Ellen (under 1) daughter
Catherine McDonnell (60) mother-in-law

House No. 60

John Rourke (60) labourer
Margaret Rourke (12) daughter

House No. 62

Miss Sophia Godsell (50) widow. A lady. Obs.: "Living on her money."
James Godsell, Esq. (28). Half-pay officer in South Cork Militia. Obs.: "He has inheritance of the demesne or estate on which estate the Boulting Mill is situated in this Townland, and is a Sportsman."
Miss Sophia Godsell (20) a Lady, and seven other Godsell among the servants and retainers.
(*P. O Ruairc's note*: "There was a mill in Sunville producing 1500 bags of flour per year".)

House No. 15

Allick McDonnell (68) farmer
John Rourke (17) house servant

—FROM 1851 CENSUS—

SUNVILLE LOWER. PARISH OF PARTICLES

John Rourke (50) married 1824
Mary Rourke (45) wife
Denis Rourke (25) son
Patrick Rourke (23) son
Hannah Rourke (17) daughter
Mary Rourke (13) daughter
John Rourke (11) son.

None of the children yet married. The two last are going to Mr. Hayes's school. All are able to read and write. Return of those whose home is in this house but who were absent on the night of Sunday 30th March 1851:

Garrett Rourke (21) son, clerk at drapery, then residing in America.

Michael Rourke (21) son, " " " " also " " "

SUNVILLE UPPER

Charles O'Rourke (50) married 1824. Ploughing. Can't read. Speaks Irish and English.
Bridgett O'Rourke (60) wife. Can't read. Speaks Irish and English
Patrick O'Rourke (15) son. At Mr. Jones's School. Read and write.

Also in this house:

James Kearney (2) grandson
Mary Dinan (60) visitor, married in 1842. Begging. Can't read. Speaks Irish and English. Born in Co. Cork.
Patrick Dinan (7) visitor. Begging.

MORTALSTOWN

Margaret Rourke (40) not married. Labouring woman. Cannot read. Speaks Irish and English.

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Pádraig Ó Ruairc was of the opinion that the John Roach, "musician", recorded in the 1821 census as living at No. 2 Chapel Lane, Kilfinane, was an ancestor of John and Frank Roche of Elton, compilers of the famous Roche Collection of Irish Music. House No. 109 in Kilfinane (at east end of town, on right hand side) was the house in which the recently-deceased John MacCarthy, a prominent member of the East Limerick Brigade I.R.A. Flying Column, was born.

The John Thornhill (45), labourer and farmer, of Ballyriggin (House No. 1), was Pádraig Ó Ruairc's great-great-grandfather. John Thornhill's son, also John, as well as being Pádraig Ó Ruairc's great-grandfather, was also great-grandfather of the well-known novelist, Kate O'Brien.

The Ballyriggin Thornhills were descended from a Cromwellian Planter. In her book *Presentation Parlour* (Heinemann, London 1963, p. 13), Kate O'Brien states that this Cromwellian Thornhill must have become a Catholic, or if he himself did not, that his children certainly must have. Pádraig Ó Ruairc says that Kate O'Brien is incorrect in stating this. John Thornhill, Pádraig Ó Ruairc's (and Kate O'Brien) great-grandfather, was a Protestant until his marriage to Ellen O'Mara, daughter of a neighbouring farmer. He became a Catholic on his marriage.

The O'Rourke family to which Pádraig Ó Ruairc belonged lived in House No. 2 (1821 census), Baunatlea. The Denis O'Rourke mentioned here as head of the house was Pádraig's great-great-grandfather. The landlord for that area was named Lowe—perhaps the George Bond Lowe of *Glendnaar* and the Doneraile Conspiracy?—and Denis O'Rourke's son John was on good terms with him. He held his land from Lowe for a lease of lives. When John's son, also John (father of the late Denis O'Rourke of O'Rourke's Cross, Bruree) was getting married his father asked Lowe to put his son's name on the lease. Lowe gave him to understand that he would. Shortly afterwards Lowe became mentally incapable, and no lease was drawn up before the death of John O'Rourke, senior. Lady Lowe, aided and abetted by her agent Townshend, evicted the O'Rourke family. John O'Rourke's widow, ill and old, was taken out of the house on a stretcher, and spent her remaining years with relations named Kenny, in the Newtown Shandrum district.

Pádraig Ó Ruairc remembered hearing his grandmother (née Thornhill), who died in 1919, aged about ninety-six, tell of a red-haired woman of the roads who used call for alms at Ballyriggin, and whose husband had been killed at the Battle of Vinegar Hill in 1798.

Pádraig Ó Ruairc's grandmother spoke Irish. Pádraig says it was Decies Irish she had. She pronounced *im* (butter) as "ime", *coill* (a wood) as "kyle", etc. All south-east Limerick would, in fact, have spoken Decies Irish, some of this area being within the ancient territory of *Déise Bheag*. Incidentally, the few extracts from the 1851 census that Pádraig gives us show how widely spoken Irish must have been, even at that time, in Coshlea. In fact, 53.3 per cent of the population of the barony of Coshlea were Irish speakers in 1851.

The hospitality offered to travelling people, or itinerants as we would now call them, is indicated in the return in respect of Charles O'Rourke and family, in Sunville Upper.

The Charles D. Oliver, aged fifty-two, residing in House No. 12 in Mill Lane, in

1821, was, most likely, the Captain Charles Oliver who was responsible for the hanging of Staker Wallis in Kilfinane in 1798. When two men named Sheedy, who had been concerned in the capture of the much-respected Wallis, were attacked and killed on the night of 27th March 1800, Oliver began virgorously to hunt down suspects. A news item in the *Limerick Chronicle* of 5th July 1800, tells how on the previous evening a detachment of the Suffolk Fencible Regiment had committed twelve men—including nine named Wallis—to the County Gaol, charged with the murder of the Sheedys. The report went on to state that the prisoners had been apprehended by Charles Oliver, whom it described as “that most respectable vigilant and determined magistrate . . . to whose exertions for the preservation of the peace, and the bringing to justice a number of offenders, this county is particularly indebted”.

None of the twelve prisoners committed to Limerick County Gaol by Captain Oliver on 4th July appears to have been found guilty, but on 17th November 1800—according to the *Limerick Chronicle* of 19th November 1800—John O'Donnell and Timothy MacMahon were hanged in Kilfinane, for the killing of the Sheedys, and their bodies were interred in front of the jail. The jail still stands, as does the Kilfinane market house, upon which the head of Staker Wallis was set on a stake.

One other entry deserves mention. It is that of the Joyce family of Ballyorgan. The Garrett Joyce mentioned here was Gearóid an Scoláire—Garrett the Scholar—father of P. W. Joyce, historian, authority on place-names, and collector of Irish music, and of Robert Dwyer Joyce, the song writer. The family later moved to nearby Glenosheen. (For an account of these two brothers the reader is referred to the present writer's “Na Deartháireacha Seoighe ó Cho. Luimnigh—a Saothar ar son na hÉireann”, in *North Munster Studies*, E. Rynne (ed.), Limerick 1967, pp. 426-33.)

The extracts from the census returns reproduced here give us an idea of the magnitude of the loss that was incurred when the records of the centuries went up in smoke at the beginning of the tragic Civil War in 1922. *Bearnach ár stair ina n-éagmais!*