

Miscellanea

CHIMNEY-SWEEPS IN ENNIS IN THE 1830s

Most people are familiar with the plight of young chimney-sweeps in the England of Charles Dickens. However, a few references in the *Clare Journal* of the 1830s show that they were no better off in Ennis at that time. The issue of 19 October 1835 contains a letter from a correspondent who signed himself "Rufus", in which he made the following comments:

Is it to be imagined, will it be credited, that there are several human beings in Ennis without food, without cloaths, without having ever been taught that there is a Saviour in Heaven—a Destroyer in Hell? Wretched beings who have been in their infancy purchased from their hard-hearted parents, and are detained in this awful bondage under the name of apprentices!! I allude to the younger sweeps. I say it is the duty of both Magistrates and Clergy instantly to institute an inquiry into their state, and to see that justice be done these unhappy orphans—and I beg to add, that should such not be the case, it will be my duty to call a public meeting to consider the subject; a call which I know will be equally responded to, from the sympathy which I have already heard expressed on the subject; but the necessity, for which I would gladly see removed, as it will inevitably cause exposure, by immediate improvement of the conditions of these children as to their food and clothing, and by their being permitted, during some part of the day or week, to attend the schools where they may learn something of their duty to their God and neighbours.

Two years earlier (4 July 1833) a news-item in the same paper had referred to "the miserable life of those poor children engaged in cleansing chimneys". However, it held out hope for change and the possibility that they would no longer be needed because of the arrival in Ennis of a machine for cleaning chimneys which had been used successfully elsewhere. Before very long there was a strong reaction from chimney-sweeps who felt that the new machine posed a threat to their livelihood. The *Clare Journal* of 11 July 1833 describes what happened:

A very disgraceful scene occurred in the streets of this town on Tuesday evening. We mentioned, a few posts back, that a machine for cleaning chimnies was in the possession of a man named Hughes, who would send it to the country. The sweeps, seeing that an injury was done their business, resolved on having satisfaction. Accordingly, on the above evening, they collected to the number of four or five, backed by twenty or thirty persons more, and placed themselves before the door of a house in which Hughes was cleaning chimnies, shouting and roaring. The man who carries the machine, when he came outside, was hooted and pelted at, and treated in a very ruffianly manner. Hughes, hearing what was their intention, remained inside until a party of Police arrived, who conveyed him home through the hootings of the mob. Yesterday evening, one of the sweeps, named Reilly, an habitual drunkard, and one whose very appearance would be enough to make one shudder, was brought to gaol by the Police for attacking Hughes.

It is clear that the other sweeps eventually succeeded in putting Hughes out of business because two years later "Rufus" ended his letter with the question: "Is there not somewhere in the town a machine for sweeping chimnies?"

IGNATIUS MURPHY

FACTION FIGHTING AT KILKEE

Faction fighting, in the words of Kevin Danaher, "was nothing more than a crude and dangerous form of sport" in which the number of people killed and injured was much less

than one might expect. The great faction fights usually took place on the occasion of fairs—in West Clare at Ballykett, Kilmurry and Kilmacduane,¹ where pitched battles were fought. No fairs were held in Kilkee until about 1860 and it is probably for this reason that we find no mention of faction fights there during the early nineteenth century when they were very common elsewhere. Then, for some reason which is not clear, the previous quiet was broken on the eve of the Famine, and for a short time Kilkee heard the shouts of the rival Kean and Collins factions.

The first gathering mentioned in the newspapers occurred on a Sunday in late August 1845. On this occasion the ringleaders were arrested and placed in the lock-up before they had got down to business—to the great relief of the visitors.² On the following Sunday about a hundred police were drafted into the town to preserve the peace. All recreation centres were closed and the sale of intoxicating drink was forbidden. As expected, the two factions assembled their forces from the surrounding countryside and again prepared to do battle. However, through the exertions of Fr. Comyn, the parish priest, and others, the crowds were eventually persuaded to disperse without a conflict.³

On the last Sunday of the old year a woman had her arm broken in a clash—and it was generally expected that this encounter would be continued on New Year's Day 1846. When Jonas Studdert, a local middleman and magistrate, realised what was about to happen he sent to Kilrush for reinforcements and very soon forty police arrived in Kilkee "all furnished with a full compliment [*sic*] of ball cartridges". Faced with such a display of force the prospective combatants had no option but to withdraw.⁴

During the winter several of the leaders were fined and imprisoned.⁵ Nevertheless, the following summer saw the factions meet again for what were to prove to be their last clashes. In early October 1846 "A Resident" wrote to the *Limerick Reporter*:⁶

During the past fortnight I have witnessed with much regret several recurrences of the old faction fight system, that has so often disturbed this peaceful locality during the past winter. Day after day, particularly on the occasion of any public amusement, the visitors sojourning at this watering place are startled by the shouts of country people parading the streets, eager to fight, and evincing a disposition that was every moment liable to be convulsed by the slightest opposition from the other party.

Soon after this, the faction fighting ceased. This was probably due not to any efforts of the police but to the general paralysis which overcame the people with the progressive spread of famine and disease.⁷

IGNATIUS MURPHY

¹William Shaw Mason, *A Statistical Account of Parochial Survey of Ireland*, 3 vols., Dublin 1814-9, II, p. 455.

²*Limerick Chronicle*, 27 August 1845.

³*Ibid.*, 3 September 1845.

⁴*Tipperary Vindicator*, 10 January 1846.

⁵*Limerick Chronicle*, 4 February, 22 April 1846.

⁶*Limerick Reporter*, 6 October 1846.

⁷For a good general account of faction fighting see P. O'Donnell, *The Irish Faction Fighting of the 19th Century*, Dublin 1975.

“DEATH OF RYAN—THE CLARE INFORMER”

This was the heading the *Clare Journal* of 100 years ago used to tell its readers of the death in Montreal of Police Officer Michael Ryan, a native of Cahercalla, near Ennis. Ryan was only thirty-eight years old when he passed away.

Ryan informed against the men who went out in the Fenian rising in 1867. The first informer was a man by the name of Simon Neavin. Himself and Ryan were produced at the Fenian trials at Ennis Assizes. Ryan was then a young man about twenty-six years of age, six feet five inches high, formerly of the Pope's Brigade, next of the Clare Militia, next a Fenian and then a traitor. He was remarkable for his low brow, and was, except in stature, a very low type of humanity.

On his arrival in Montreal Ryan was immediately taken on the City Police Force. He at one time became a member of one of the benevolent societies in the city but when it was learned that he was a Fenian informer he was immediately expelled.

His colleague, Neavin, met with a horrible death a few years before this at Ballarat, Australia. His body was riddled with bullets and cut into quarters.

—From *The Clare Champion*, 10/3/1978

A COIN-HOARD FROM FOUNTAIN HILL, ENNIS

In March 1976 Seán Ó Murchada informed me of a substantial hoard of coins found in Donegh, Fountain, Ennis. The coins were found in December 1975, by a local farmer digging on his land. They were close to a tree and were wrapped in a cloth which disintegrated on handling. The coins were examined by a Jeremiah B. Casey of Lisdoonvarna.

There were sixty-six coins in all, with a face value of four pounds two shillings and a penny-halfpenny. Mr. Casey listed nineteen coins as being florins, but as sixteen of these are obviously halfcrowns due to the dates given for the pieces in question, and as there is a noticeable difference in size between the two denominations, I have assumed that all of the nineteen coins are in fact halfcrowns.

The coins are as follows:

Crown: George IV, 1821 (1).

Halfcrowns: George III, 1817 (3); 1818 (2); 1820 (2); no date given (1).

George IV, 1820 (3); 1821 (2); 18-- (1).

William IV, 1836 (1).

Victoria, 1845 (1); no date given (3).

Shillings: George III, 1816 (2); 1817 (2).

Victoria, 1839 (3); 1840 (1); 1844 (2); 1845 (1); 1853 (2).

11 other shillings present in the hoard. No details given except that the dates on the coins were not visible.

Sixpences: Victoria, 1853 (1).

8 other sixpences were present—no details given.

Fourpence (Britannia Groat): Victoria, 1839 (1).

Pennies: George ?? It is not specified whether this belongs to the reign of

George III or IV; no date is given.

Victoria, 1853 (2). These are mentioned as being in good condition.

Four other copper pennies are mentioned but no details are given.

Halfpennies: George ?? No details given.

Victoria, 1853 (1). This is specified as being in good condition.

No date given (1).

Two other halfpennies are recorded without any details being given.

As there was often a delay in shipping coin from the Royal Mint in London to Ireland a suggested date for the concealment of the hoard would be 1855. The hoard was certainly concealed before 1860 when the copper pennies and halfpennies were replaced by a bronze coinage.

The hoard was obviously hidden with the intention of recovery at a later date. The owner, quite probably, used the spot as a safe hiding place for his savings and died before he could recover or reveal to his family their precise location.

If anyone knows of the present whereabouts of the coins I would be very grateful if they would contact me so that a full inventory of the hoard can be made.

PAUL DUFFY

A 'LOST' COIN-HOARD FROM CLARECASTLE

In the summer of 1975, I was approached to value a small parcel of coins from the reigns of Edward VII and George V. The coins had obviously, originally been in some form of metal container as all were rust-stained, some quite severely so. There were seventeen coins in all, with a face value of twenty-two shillings and five pence, and were as follows:

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Ruler</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Halfcrown	Edward VII	1906	S.3211
Halfcrown	George V	1915	S.3241
Halfcrown	George V	1917	S.3241
Florin	Edward VII	190-	S.3212
Florin	George V	1911	S.3240
Florin	George V	1914	S.3240
Florin	George V	1915	S.3240
Shilling	George V	1911	S.3243
Shilling	George V	1916	S.3243
Sixpence	George V	1915	S.3244
Penny	Edward VII	1904	S.3221
Penny	George V	1914	S.3279
Penny	George V	1916	S.3279
Penny	George V	1917	S.3279
Penny	George V	1918	S.3279

There was one specimen of each coin in the hoard, except for the Edward VII florins of which there were three specimens, the last digit of the date of each was worn off—a not unusual feature of the silver coins of this period that have had considerable circulation. The reference S.—refers to the catalogue number in *Seaby's Standard Catalogue of British Coins*, Parts 1 and 2: "Coins of England and the United Kingdom", 13th Edition, London 1974.

The person who showed me the coins was not the finder and would not give the finder's name, although, when pressed, he provided the circumstances of the find.

In 1974, Clare County Council demolished some houses in Clarecastle to improve the bad bend on the Ennis side of the bridge. During the demolition operations, a workman found a hole in one of the house-walls. Suspecting that there might be something inside, he reached in and found a small metal box, which he described as being "rotten with rust". The box contained the coins mentioned above.

It was some considerable time before I could pursue this find further, and when I was in a position to do so, I found that the silver coins had been sold for their precious metal content and that the pennies had been lost.

The later coins, and in particular the 1917 George V halfcrown, showed very little signs of having been in circulation, so it is plausible to suggest a deposition date of 1919/20, that is, during the War of Independence. Hoards from this period are not uncommon, though very few have been published. The hoard was quite possibly concealed at a time when Crown forces were raiding in the area. The box was quite probably placed on a ledge in the hole and dropped to the bottom. As the hole was about three feet deep, recovery except by vertical extraction was impossible.

At the time of seeing the coins, I, fortunately, made notes on the find with a view to having it published in our *Journal*. Sadly now, this note has to have the words "A Lost Hoard" in its title.

PAUL DUFFY

MONSELL PAPERS

The Public Record Office of Ireland, Four Courts, Dublin 7, has recently acquired a collection of papers of Limerick interest relating to the Monsell family of Tervoe, Clarina. They relate to William Thomas (1754-1836), whose will, detailing family and property, is also in the Public Record Office, William (1778-1822), William, 1st Baron Emly (1812-94), and Thomas William Gaston, 2nd Baron Emly (1858-1932). The range of the Monsell documents is from 1795 to 1901, but most of the correspondence is to William, the 1st Baron. He was educated at Winchester College and at Oriel College, Oxford, where he matriculated in 1831 but took no degree. A convert to Catholicism, he was a Moderate Liberal M.P. and represented Limerick County from 1847 until 1871. He was a dedicated agricultural reformer and supported a national university for Ireland but opposed the Land League and Home Rule. His many political appointments saw his creation as Baron Emly in 1874.

Correspondents to the Monsell family include Ambrose Lisle March-Phillipps de-Lisle, who wrote between 1845 and 1877, mostly on Catholic matters; Stephen de Vere, who wrote on local, Irish and British matters from 1878 to 1894; Charles Graves, Bishop of Limerick, who wrote on diverse matters, including St. Patrick, between 1858 and 1893; J. Pope Hennessy, who commented on his governorship of Labuan and Nassau from 1866 to 1873; Freiherr von Hügel, who dealt with Catholic topics between 1884 and 1893; Charles, Comte de Montalembert, French politician, Celtic scholar, and also a prolific

writer on Catholic matters and on Celtic studies, whose correspondence here dates from 1850 until 1874; the Dowager Duchess and Duke of Norfolk, who wrote on social and Catholic matters between 1863 and 1901; Charles Owen, the O'Connor Don, wrote concerning Irish political developments from 1872 to 1880; Sir George, Marquess of Rippon, who covered Catholic relations with Rome in 1878, and Sir John, the Earl Spencer, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, who wrote on Irish affairs between 1871 and 1884.

Limerick matters are covered by Stephen de Vere, writing on developments around Adare; Henry Thomas, 2nd Earl of Ilchester, on family scandal; John Jebb, Bishop of Limerick, concerning his land dealings; the Hon. Lord John, 1st Earl Russell, on Lord Dunraven's elevation to the Peerage; Desmond Fitzgerald, the Knight of Glin, on family matters; John D'Alton on his proposed history of Limerick, and George Butler, Bishop of Limerick, on the Limerick Industrial School.

There is also a selection of non-Monsell material which includes 18th century Plunkett and Limerick correspondence, some letters from Rev. John Healy, parish priest of Cahirciveen, and from Rev. David Moriarty, Bishop of Kerry. There is correspondence in copy form from Charles Gavan Duffy writing from Australia and France, which dates from the 1855-80s. In all, there are over two hundred and fifty items of correspondence and personal papers which cover the period 1713-1901 and complement the Monsell Collection held by the National Library.

The Monsell papers are now available to the public. Opening hours of the Public Record Office are from Monday to Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The accession number of the collection is 1A.51.21.

AIDEEN IRELAND