

Miscellanea

AN UNHAPPY EXPERIENCE IN CRUISE'S HOTEL

Cruise's Hotel attracted quite a lot of favourable notices from nineteenth century travellers. William Makepiece Thackeray in 1843 referred to "the excellence of Mr Cruise's hotel which every traveller knows." This "large, neat and prosperous" establishment was, he asserted, "one of the best inns in Ireland." This excellence he put down to the care and attention of the owner: "Mr. Cruise is the only landlord of an inn I have had the honour to see in Ireland. I believe these gentlemen commonly (and very naturally) prefer riding with the hounds or many sports, to attendance on their guests; and the landladies, if they prefer to play the piano, or to have a game of cards, in the parlour, only show a taste at which no one can wonder; for who can expect a lady to be troubling herself with vulgar chance-customers, or looking after Molly in the bed-room or waiter-Tim in the cellar?"

Mrs West, a Quaker traveller in 1846, found on her arrival that the hotel was full. "However the very civil landlord seeing a lady, and as he said 'a very tired one too,' would not turn us away, but got two young barristers to vacate their rooms into which we were installed with all possible speed." Regrettably the peremptorily expelled barristers did not record their feelings for posterity. J.H. Ashworth was equally rhapsodic in 1853 "I found myself most delightfully located at Cruise" hotel, an establishment that is not excelled even in Dublin." Towards the end of the century favourable comments were still being made. S. Reynolds Hole in 1892 praised "Mr Cruise's very excellent and extensive hotel."

It is of interest then to find a very different view expressed in 1860. Julius Rodenberg, a distinguished German author and traveller, presents a picture so at variance with other accounts that it is difficult to believe he was describing the same hotel. Rodenberg, who was born in 1833, abandoned his initial career as a lawyer to travel and write. Having lived for a time in London, he settled in Berlin in 1859 where he achieved a distinguished literary reputation. On his death in 1914 such was his fame that a street in Berlin was named after him. Among the books he produced was an account of his travels in Ireland, *Island of the Saints*, published in 1861. This work is a fascinating, intelligent, sympathetic and insightful view of the country and its people. His comments on Cruise's hotel are therefore of particular interest:

I reached my inn and it was a perfect Colossus of a building, displaying on its broad forehead in golden letters the name, "Cruise's Royal Hotel." The royal glory sank considerably, however, so soon as I entered it and climbed up a labyrinth of steps. On gazing at the glistening gold letters and mighty front of my hotel, what expectations were aroused! But inside everything was as badly managed as possible, uncomfortable and disagreeable. The tall windows had not been cleaned for an eternity. Dust lay on the torn velvet of the furniture, the damask beds were disgustingly filthy, while silver teapots and cups with broken handles, knives with the points missing and bent forks formed the service. The perfect indifference and want of sympathy for everything that makes existence not only endurable but pleasant rose before the new arrival at every step and produced a depressing effect upon him. I did not feel so desolate in the most gloomy shebeen-houses of the farthest west. There it was my free choice to share whisky and oatmeal with the most unhappy and poorest portion of the poor people; and their stories and songs spiced the meal and made the scene

full of painfulness and poesy; but here, wedged in between pretension and insufficiency, between the white chokers of the waiters and the dirty chairs and tables, a great fear full upon me.

Cruise's coffee-room was arranged on the English model. The waiters were stiff and grand although the green island peeped out at times at their elbows or through some treacherous holes. Gas-lights were burning and striving to display their brilliancy through dusty globes as well as they could. Wearied travellers were seated at tables, like myself, and shouting for newspapers. Very few of which were to be seen. My dinner was in the mean while brought in under covers as in England; but the peculiar tricks the cook plays in this way, both with the hunger and imagination of the diner, were not so pleasantly terminated as is the case there. The fish was half raw and red; the joint – mutton, of course – was uneatable from the opposite fault. The mutton patriotism becomes, from this point westward, always more and more opposed to the demand a well regulated stomach must make for a reasonable variety. At last, you rise with mutton and go to bed with mutton and the whole world seems to exhale a smell of mutton. Wherever I looked and felt, the same discomfort; the porter bottles were badly corked, the cheese was utterly decayed and the butter was ornamented with breadcrumbs; the plates and dishes were strongly plated, on the other hand, and the waiters' cravats of the most aristocratic stiffness. Fortunately my appetite was not alarming and I was soon out again with a cigar between my lips.

The Sunday bells awoke me next morning. It was a rainy day, cold and uncomfortable. I shivered all over in the dark, gloomy bedroom allotted to me. I had put on my over-coat and yet I shivered. My window offered a prospect of the Arthur quay and the Shannon. In spite of the piercing cold of the autumn morning the river was crowded with men and horses bathing together and that took place in front of the most fashionable and lively streets in Limerick and on the quay stones the men performed their toilet while the horses coolly shook off the water drops.

And, yes, it *did* rain continuously during his time here.

Liam Irwin

MONTPELIER OR PORTCRUSHA UPPER?

The *Annals of the Four Masters*, under the year 1506, records the building of O'Brien's bridge at "Port-Croisi" (Bank of the Cross), the modern Portcrusha. Its purpose was to link O'Brien lands on either side of the Shannon in Counties Clare and Limerick but the Crown saw it as a threat to the stability of the region. The reign of King Henry VIII, therefore, saw three expeditions to destroy the bridge, in 1510, 1536 and 1538 (Hodkinson).

The date of the present bridge is not entirely clear. It was the subject of discussion in this Journal in the early years of the last century (NMAJ). According to Ernest Brown (pp 208-09), the six arches on the Clare side were built by John Brown of Clonboy after the 1691 Siege of Limerick. The other half was to have been built by Donal O'Brien who failed to do so, and so a temporary structure existed until the bridge was later completed by the County, approximately one hundred years later. Brown then changes his story (p.377) and credits the building to William Brown who settled at Bridgetown in 1719. The story is confused somewhat by the fact that Burke's *Landed Gentry of Ireland*, has William Brown settled at Clonboy in 1691 and receiving a confirmation of his grant in 1717. The Inchiquin Manuscripts (No. 252, p. 83), however, hint that O'Brien may have been doing some work

there in 1705, because in a letter dated 26 May that year, a Francis Burton wrote to Donat, "I am glad o Briens Bridge goes on to your satisfaction." A date at the start of the eighteenth century seems most probable.

The original query, which prompted the discussion outlined above, stated that there was no bridge there in 1651 when Cromwellian forces crossed the river by boat. This, however, seems unlikely because a drawing from c.1680 shows what appears to be a trestle bridge, possibly with wooden decking on stone piers (Dineley, p. 200). It seems likely that this is the old sixteenth century bridge, known to have been of both wood and stone (Hodkinson), which survived in dilapidated form to be replaced in the eighteenth century.

The Co. Limerick end of the present-day bridge stands in Montpelier, the townland immediately north of Portcrusha. As a place name Montpelier is derived from the French and is of no great antiquity. Art O Maolfabhail (p. 222) in his treatise on Co. Limerick placenames gives the earliest usage of Montpelier as 1768 and can suggest no Irish name for the townland. An examination of the Portcrusha name as listed in O Maolfabhail (*op. cit.*) shows there to have been two Portcrushas. The Civil Survey of County Limerick, 1655, mentions "both Porttcuissies" (Simington, p. 59) while the Census of 1659 records eighteen people in Upper and twenty two in Lower "Port Crussy" (Pender, p. 275). Upper and Lower "Porterusse" appear in a list of the lands of Lord Inchiquin dating from 1667(Abstracts, p. 98).

Bridging points seldom, if ever, move any distance, because of the road infrastructure connecting them to their hinterlands. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that the original name of Montpelier was Portcrusha and, if the distinction between the two Portcrushas is based on their relationship to the Shannon, then Montpelier is Upper Portcrusha.

B.J. Hodkinson

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EVIDENCE FOR THE SINGING VOICE OF CATHERINE HAYES

Catherine Hayes was born in Limerick City in 1825 and local folklore tells us that her talent was first recognised by Edward Knox, the Church of Ireland Bishop of Limerick. He heard her singing the traditional Irish art song *Jimín Mo Mhíle Stór* from a garden next door to the Bishop's Palace in Henry Street. She was about 16 years of age at the time and we are told she sang in a simple sweet childlike soprano voice. Her singing voice was of such quality as to impress the famous composer Franz Liszt when Catherine met him in 1843.



Plate 1 Catherine Hayes ©1850 (Photo: National Portrait Gallery, London)

As her career developed her repertoire included opera and oratorio as well as Victorian, Scots and Irish ballads. In the many reviews of her concert and operatic performances, complimentary titles such as the 'Irish Nightingale', the 'Irish Siren' and the 'Swan of Erin' were applied to her. The *Sydney*

Morning Herald newspaper in its edition of 4 Oct 1854, was particularly flattering in its comments on her musical skill and the quality of her voice: "Catherine Hayes has surpassed all expectations - so unlike all we had ever seen or heard in the colony - people were unprepared for the superiority of talent she possesses - such faultlessness, purity and delicacy of execution." Another commentator said: "Audiences were impressed by her bravura operatic arias, but were more affected by her singing of such ballads as 'Home Sweet Home.'"

Unfortunately she reached the peak of her singing career in the 1850s, long before 1877, when Thomas Edison invented the most primitive type of gramophone recording equipment. We are therefore dependent on these written accounts in trying to gain an impression of what her singing sounded like. In the case of most modern world famous singers, even those who sang as long ago as the 1890s, it is possible by means of sound recordings, even if often very poor in quality, to get at least some impression of how these performers sounded. These include such famous artists as Enrico Caruso, John MacCormack and Margaret Burke Sheridan. The continued releasing of CD versions of old recordings helps to immortalise the voices of these singers, long after their deaths.

Catherine Hayes died on 12 August 1861 and a lengthy obituary notice was published in the *London Times* a few days later. The writer's comments are not entirely complimentary. In the course of the notice he states that her skill in singing Irish ballads particularly Moore's Melodies was unsurpassed, but that her abilities did not somehow match up with the challenges of Italian opera. In the absence of any recordings no judgement can be made on this issue today.

She merits two columns in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Her voice was summed up there as being 'of the sweetest quality, and of good compass, ascending with ease to D in alt. The upper notes were limpid, and like a well tuned silver bell up to A. Her lower tones were the most beautiful ever heard in a real soprano, and her trill was remarkably good'. Interest in her life and work has been revived by the publication of a new biography, *Catherine Hayes, The Hibernian Prima Donna*, (Dublin, 2000) by Basil Walsh, a Dublin man now resident in Florida.

Cian O'Carroll

A NINETEENTH CENTURY DESCRIPTION OF KILPEACON CHURCH

The earliest reference to a church at Kilpeacon appears to be in the 1201 inquisition into the ecclesiastical property of the Diocese of Limerick where it is given as Ballichorchiam. A document in the Black Book of Limerick shows that this was another name for Kilpeacon.¹ It is listed in the Taxation of the Diocese of Limerick in 1302 under its old form of Kylebecan.² In the 1306 Taxation it is termed Kilbegan and is valued at £2.0.0.³ The proxy tax of 1418 mentions 'ecclesia Kilbekayn alias Ballymconcour'.⁴ It occurs in the form Kilbebain in 1505 when part of its revenues were

¹ John Begley, *The Diocese of Limerick: Ancient and Medieval*, Dublin 1906, p. 124. Begley is not consistent in spelling as it is given as Ballichorcram on p. 120.

² *Ibid.*, p. 190.

³ Art Ó Maolfabhail (eag.), *Logainmneacha na hÉireann Imleabhar: 1 Contae Luimnigh*, B.Á.C. 1990, p. 106.

⁴ Begley, *op. cit.*, p. 250

assigned to Emly.⁵ The first use of the modern spelling is in the Civil Survey of 1654.⁶ Nothing reliable is known about its early history or St. Becan to whom the church was dedicated⁷. The medieval church had long been abandoned when Sir William King obtained it as part of a grant of lands in the area from Charles II in 1667.⁸ He built a private chapel near the ruins on the site in the late seventeenth century.⁹ This building was destroyed and rebuilt in the 1760s before being incorporated formally into the Church of Ireland organisational structure in the early nineteenth century and further enlarged.¹⁰ A new chancel was added in 1867, which was the last substantial modification and it still functions as a parish church.

Kilpeacon was the church where the Westropp family of Attflynn near Patrickwell, Co. Limerick usually worshipped and where their burial vault was located. Thomas Johnson Westropp [1860-1922], the noted antiquarian, regularly attended Sunday services there as a young man. He was not always spiritually enhanced as an entry from his diary in March 1878 shows:

On Sunday 18th being the day after St. Patrick's day Mr Gubbins gave us a forty minutes long sermon on St. Patrick, King Coroticus, Odin, Palladius, the decree of Hadrian, Burning of Rome, Caesar's commentaries, the shamrock, the Arians and Aryan races, the Coliseum, the Hill of Tara, Baal, Belial, Goldsmith's history etc proving that St. Patrick was – not a gentleman – but a protestant.

This diary is a very valuable source for Westropp's early life in County Limerick and shows that his interest in history and archaeology began at a young age.¹¹ Among the items of local interest is the account he provides of Kilpeacon church. In addition to the short historical introduction, he gives a valuable description of how the interior of the church was arranged in the mid-nineteenth century. His slightly sardonic comments on those who participated in the typical Sunday service there are also of interest.

Kilpeacon church has never so far as I know had its legends recorded & so I think I am conferring an inestimable benefit on posterity to describe its former appearance though the legends I have to give are not very ancient. As is well known it takes its name from St. Becan whose church was still standing in the 16th century. The present building was only founded after 1690 by Sir Wm King whose tomb still exists in it. It was then used as a private chapel. After the destruction [of] Knocknegaul Church by the rebels it was finally adopted as the Parish church. In its present form it consists of a nave with 3 pointed windows on each side & two at the end on either side of the Belfry, built by Edward Villiers (Cripps) of Kilpeacon - who also added the old chancel 1759 - beneath which is the porch; at the East is a neat chancel with a gothic window of cut stone memorial to my father John Westropp of Attyflin

⁵ 'Obligationes pro annatis diocesis Limiricensis, 1421-1515' *Archiv. Hib.*, x 1943 pp 104-62.

⁶ R.C. Simington (ed.), *The Civil Survey A.D. 1654-1656 County of Limerick*, Dublin 1938 pp 108, 378

⁷ T.J. Westropp, 'A Survey of the ancient Churches in the County of Limerick' *P.R.I.A.* xxv, C, 1905 p. 372 gives his feast day as 26 May, Seán Spellissy gives 689 as his date of death and reproduces some doubtful genealogy, see Seán Spellissy and John O'Brien, *Limerick: The Rich Land*, Ennis 1989 p. 247.

⁸ Westropp, *op. cit.*

⁹ Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; its History and Antiquities*, Limerick 1866, p 306

¹⁰ P. Fitzgerald and J.J. McGregor, *The History Topography and Antiquities of the County and city of Limerick*, Dublin 1826, vol i, p. 300; S. Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, London 1837, ii p. 198; Spellissy, *op. cit.*

¹¹ I am grateful to George Stacpoole of Ballynacourty, Askeaton for his kindness in making the diary available to me.

(in 1867), it also has two shallow transepts. Adjoining the North is the Vestry; & the South, the old vestry, now a coal room. There are three monuments in the church the only remarkable one of which is the black marble slab with white marble pillars & trophies of arms erected to Sir Wm King the founder of the Church who died 1706. In the graveyard the principal vault is the Westropp of Attyflins. Two others of the Fosberrys & Herberts are to the East of the church & that of the now extinct Cripps of Kilpeacon, a fine old family in their day, is under the S. Transept. The existing registry begins 1804. There is a small house for the caretakers & a long stable for the horses of the congregation. The Church is surrounded by Lime trees & a little stream flows not far from the east of it.

I shall first describe it as it used to be about the middle of the present century as it was then unchanged from what it had been in the 18th, only for the transepts, so to speak of them, which had been erected by John Westropp & Mr. Green, about 50 years before. In the middle of the East window & attached to its woodwork by iron bars was a thing like an umbrella made of wood. This was the sounding board, below it was the high pulpit shaped like an egg cup [drawing of the pulpit appears here] When the clergyman was in it he suggested the notion that the top might plop down any minute & enclose him. Lower again were three desks one for the clerk two for the clergyman & lower again in a circular enclosure communicating by a small door with the desks stood the rough wooden communion table. The Attyflin & Greenmount pews filled up the North Transept, the Cripps' was in the South; the Roxborough near Sir Wm King's tomb. All the pews were great high square pews. At the end next to the door a very narrow high staircase communicated with the gallery which held two huge pews & "the" barrel organ which said organ had three barrels each of 12 tunes & it was given by Mr. Westropp & Mr. Green. Sir Wm King's monument then reached to the ceiling with cherabim & seraphim escutheons & foliage & all kinds of graven imagery.

Now my brothers Ralph & Hugh Westropp used to go to this church in preference to the then more comfortable & fasionable Adare because the whole service & above all the sermon was shorter. The congregation generally consisted of Messrs. Ned & Frank Green of Greenmount, an old woman who took charge of the church & perhaps one or two others. Mr. Hosford used for sheer charity walk out from Limerick on Sundays & act as Clerk. When the Hymn was announced he wd. descend from the desk & while Mr. Stenson the curate wd. read through the whole [hymn]. H[osford] wd. stump down the aisle, up the stairs & announce by a slap on the side of the organ & a loud clearing of his throat that all was ready. Then, Stenson having given it out again, the music wd begin. Hosford in the demi-semiquavers & multifarious varied variation & Old Mr. Green in a nose-trumpet voice forming the sole choir.¹²

Liam Irwin

¹² *Westropp Diary*, pp 124-6.

