

Vicissitudes of a Manuscript Collection: the papers of Maurice Lenihan in the Burns Library, Boston College

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An important collection of manuscripts and papers in Boston relating to the Limerick historian and newspaper editor is discussed. The origin and history of the documents are outlined and a summary of their contents provided. The bulk of the papers consist of correspondence to Lenihan, on political, social and journalistic activities, mainly for the period 1836-74. There are also drafts of outgoing letters from Lenihan and records of the committee which organised the erection of the O'Connell monument at the Crescent, of which Lenihan was joint secretary.

Let me confess right away, without prevarication or mental reservation, that I am a manuscript enthusiast. There are many other perfectly respectable branches of the library profession, each with its own set of challenges and rewards, but there is an important distinction between the manuscript librarian and the archivist.

The archivist deals with the organically-grown output of papers of an organisation. A considerable part of the demand on space in the Burns Library, for example, is made by the archives of Boston College itself. The development of retirement and culling policies for such records, not to mention their arrangement, description, cataloguing and housing, demand great care and skill, for administrative and legal reasons as well as historical. But in a way the archivist has it made - there is a right way to arrange archives, reflecting the organisation chart of the originating body.

Of course many of the technical aspects of the archivist's work are shared with the manuscript librarian - care and conservation of fragile and perishable documents, filing, boxing, listing of the contents of collections. But the true manuscript librarian is a free-booter, a buccaneer, an acrobat, for unlike the colleagues dealing with printed books or archives, the manuscript librarian has no correct and predictable way of dealing with the next consignment of material which lands on the desk or - perish the thought - arrives in a truck-load at the basement loading-bay.

A bundle of literary drafts will require him/her to be immersed for a while in the works of a great or a minor or even an obscure writer, seeking for clues as to the best ways to arrange them. Letters and papers of a politician - those are the ones which can arrive by the truck-load - will require consultation of existing histories, biographies, calendars and almanacs. Questions to which there is often no answer must be posed - is this all the surviving papers of this person? If these papers appear to be in some order, is it an original order or a spurious order imposed by some former owner? The papers of Maurice Lenihan in the Burns library, though they contain no political or literary bombshells, no drafts of secret treaties, no unpublished literary masterpieces, provide examples to illustrate the points I have been trying to make. They also, in their literary content, give us an entry into an important phase of the history of nineteenth-century Ireland.

Who was Maurice Lenihan, and what do the papers tell us of his life and times? Briefly, Maurice Lenihan was a journalist and historian who lived more or less through the nineteenth century (1811-1895). I have found no portrait but a contemporary tells us that he was a well-built handsome man, of gentle disposition and great charm of manner. (To speak plainly, 'well-built' may be no more than a euphemism for fat.) His journalism was practised in the interest of the moderate nationalist position in Irish politics (though he was friend to some who were of more extreme views) and practised too very much in the Catholic interest.

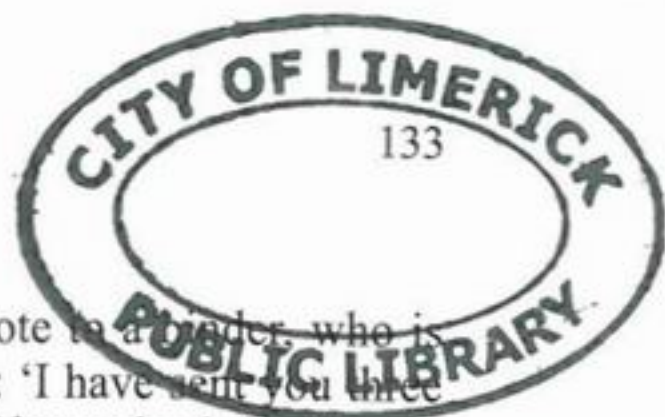
He is principally known to the modern generation as the author of the standard history of Limerick, where he spent most of his adult life. He was also the author of perhaps a score of papers in the learned press and of course of the steady output of a journalist, this including a series of articles, 'Reminiscences of a journalist,' on which his principal biographer, Fr. Francis Finegan, S.J., relied. Fr. Finegan, who published his five-part essay on Lenihan in the journal *Studies* in the 1940s, did not have the advantage of knowing of the existence of the Lenihan papers in the Burns Library and we are already, therefore, face to face with the problem of the physical history of the collection and its dispersal.

What has been happening to these papers since their creation up to one hundred and seventy years ago? Some, but not all, have a roughly stabbed hole near the centre which tells us they were filed, if that's the word, on a spike on Mr. Lenihan's desk as soon as they had been dealt with. Many of the letters deal with journalistic matters - people pay subscriptions, submit matter for publication. Their enclosures were removed, that is sent to the bank or the printer, before the letters were spiked, and the enclosures, therefore, unfortunately do not survive as part of the collection.

I have already referred to Lenihan's 'Reminiscences', Fr Finegan's source. Fortunately we can reconstruct a small part of the manuscript text of this work from materials in the Burns collection and learn therefrom something of the history of the papers. As Lenihan wrote the 'Reminiscences,' apparently when he came to a spot which he felt should be illustrated by the text of a letter, instead of copying out the text of the letter he went to his spike and extracted it physically. Clearly to do so properly with minimum damage he should have removed first from the spike all items added later than, that is above, the desired item. Unfortunately he did not always adhere to this. Being in a hurry, as journalists always are, he just fingered down through the pile until he came to the desired item, grasped and chucked it so that it came away with a rough tear from the spike to the edge. Then he attached the letter with glue in its place in his text before passing it to his printer. Some at least of the 'Reminiscences' were in a handsome small volume of which part survives in Burns. We know it was a handsome volume because no other would have all edges gilt. Lenihan's uncouth procedure made extremely difficult copy for his printer but that was nothing strange for Lenihan.

In 1865, during the course of publication of his work on the history of Limerick, Lenihan received letters from a harassed Dublin printer. 'And I take this opportunity,' poor Mr. Fowler the printer wrote, 'to assure you that your copy, as it has come to us in general, is about the most difficult to make out that I have ever met.' And a few days later Fowler wrote again: 'Sometimes it has not been easy to spell out your copy and sometimes your directions, perhaps from having been written in haste, did not seem clear to us; but of course as we become more used to your handwriting we will become better up to your way and wishes.'

Now, after the completion of his 'Reminiscences,' he apparently set about putting his literary affairs in order, in a way which should have brought a blush of shame to the



cheek of anyone with any historical bent at all. In 1874 he wrote to a binder, who is unnamed, which is good for the binder's posthumous reputation: 'I have sent you three packages of letters to be bound up with some of the others which I have also left with you for binding. I suppose the whole will not make more than three volumes.' The poor binder was left with the discretion as to the order in which the items in these various consignments were to be arranged and mounted in these volumes. And it gets worse: 'When they are thoroughly well pressed, as you know how to press them, the bulk will not be much.' Lenihan and his binder are treating the manuscripts as if they were (to use a modern analogy) wrecked car-bodies being compacted for the scrap-furnace: 'I want a strong binding for the letters, but not expensive, as I told you.' He got a strong glue anyway.

It gets even worse again. The letter I have quoted is a letter by Maurice Lenihan and therefore occurs with his papers only as a copy or draft of an outletter, which may or may not have been sent. If we can find about three volumes of Lenihan's letters to match his unclear directions to the binder, we will conclude that the letter probably was sent. And indeed we can find evidence of such volumes, one of them, probably the largest, in the Burns Library, one, dismantled, in the National Library of Ireland and one which was once alleged to be in the possession of the Limerick County Library.

I hasten to assure you that the dismantling and rearrangement of a Lenihan volume, which apparently took place in the National Library of Ireland, took place when I was a small boy in short trousers, walking into eternity, like James Joyce, across Sandymount strand and years before I joined the staff of that institution. The dismantling which took place in Burns was not quite so drastic and did preserve some evidence of earlier conditions; and it took place before any of today's staff could have been involved. At least we have managed to identify probably fragments of that bound volume and are preserving evidence, as a warning to future generations, of what was probably the horrible pressing which the binder, at the bidding of the owner, inflicted on the suffering papers.

Our third probable volume is a scrap-book of family and other documents stated in 1946 by Fr. Finegan to be in the possession of Limerick County Library. That library claims it never did own such a thing, that Fr. Finegan's assertion has caused the enquiry to be made over and over again since 1946. They show there the only original letter they possess to Lenihan - and it bears the tell-tale torn edge of paper adhering which shows that this letter, like so many in Burns, was prised with greater or lesser degree of force from a bound volume. And it is a letter from a correspondent of whom other letters figure in the Burns set.

Two further volumes of Lenihan papers which survive in the National Library of Ireland, by the way, are most probably not part of those condemned to death by pressing. One is a commonplace book, printed and bound to be sold as such. Another intact volume contains some vellum leaves bearing material on the Lenihan family as well as more miscellaneous matter, but it is bound in red leather, with gilt tooling and therefore does not qualify as inexpensive, as required by Lenihan's instructions to his binder.

We are left then with one dismantled volume in Burns and a probable bit in the National Library of Ireland and a possible in Limerick and we can now consider two pieces of evidence which appear to lead to the conclusion that the papers were more or less randomly dispersed in these volumes, perhaps by that unfortunate binder. First evidence is clustering by date - that is to say, the Burns collection has heavy representation of documents of certain years, the early to middle 1840s, for example, but poor representation of others, while the National Library of Ireland material is rich in periods in which Boston is are the poorer.

The other piece of evidence, the case of the unfortunate Mr. Kempston, is more specific. John Kempston, a strong Tory, was editor and proprietor of the *Clonmel Advertiser* newspaper and in 1838 he published an attack on Maurice Lenihan, then working for the *Waterford Chronicle*. There is in the Burns collection a letter to Lenihan, at the *Chronicle* office, from D. O'Leary, of Clonmel, in 1838, strongly advising Lenihan against taking a libel action against a coyly-named K. just the initial. 'I am an enemy to libel prosecutions on principle (not on feeling alone) and most emphatically do I think those connected with the press should eschew such a resource ... it is not a popular nor a defensible attitude no matter how opposed the parties in politics may be, for an editor to drag into court in a libel case, another ...' Despite this caution, Lenihan pressed his case and won. He accepted less in damages than those awarded and Fr. Finegan tells us that the intermediary in securing this reduction for Kempston was no less a person than Fr. Mathew, the Apostle of Temperance, with whom Lenihan was acquainted and whose temperance cause Lenihan warmly supported. Fr. Finegan knows this because a letter of Fr. Mathew to Lenihan on the point survives (more correctly a portion of a letter which Fr. Finegan identified as Fr. Mathew's from the handwriting). This letter is not in Burns, it is in the National Library of Ireland. But we turn again to Burns for we do have there the final pay-off of the affair, the grovelling letter elicited by Lenihan apparently in lieu of damages or as a condition for the reduction of damages. It is hard to withhold sympathy from poor Kempston, even if he was, as appears, a bigoted Tory:

Nenagh, March 20th., 1841.

Maurice Lenihan, Esquire.

Sir,

In the spring of 1838 being the then proprietor of the *Clonmel Advertiser* newspaper and at the time labouring under considerable excitement of mind and irritation of temper owing to a verdict for a heavy amount of damages against me, I did publish in that journal a libel upon you of a very unjust and gross nature but which I am happy to say has not injured you in any way either in reputation character or public estimation.

That I regretted the publication is evinced by my not defending your action but suffering judgement to go by default and that I do still and ever shall regret the circumstances I give you my solemn assurance.

You have now Sir with the magnanimity of the man and the forbearance of the Christian waived your claim on my sureties who became liable to the payment of a large sum namely £300 and have nobly expressed to the Revd. Mr. Mathew your willingness to accept of costs only. For this Sir you have my thanks and eternal gratitude as also those of the innocent family who should otherwise have suffered for my error.

I am Sir

Your very obliged and grateful servant

John Kempston.

If one contemporary found Lenihan gentle, of great charm of manner, his contemporaries in the newspaper profession clearly did not, even those who, unlike Kempston, were on his side in politics. John Francis Maguire, for example, who was editor of the *Cork Examiner*. Lenihan had worked for this paper, under this editor, in 1843, but less than ten years later Maguire felt constrained to write loftily, and not for the first time, to his erstwhile junior.

My dear sir,

I cannot in courtesy refuse a reply to your letter. It is true the *Examiner* has been stopped, principally because of the statement made by Mr Jackson of the manner in which you treated him with respect to a copy of your paper, which you first gave him, and then let him 'fight for' with a third party. Then I have been constantly informed, by the gentlemen in the office ... that various petty acts of what they state to be unfairness have been constantly committed against the *Examiner* in the *Vindicator*; some of which have been brought specially under my notice, exhibiting to say the least, an evident unfriendliness of spirit, and a desire to inflict small annoyances ... I almost think it would be more satisfactory to stop all future communication, than to be perpetuating a constant cause of annoyance or misunderstanding. However, if you have the least necessity for the *Examiner*, I shall give orders for its being continued, and in the meantime I send that of today.

While Lenihan had worked as a journalist in Cork and Waterford, most of his career was spent in Limerick and Tipperary. In 1843, at the urging of Daniel O'Connell and the bishop of Killaloe, Dr. Power, he founded the *Tipperary Vindicator* and later bought and incorporated with it the *Limerick Reporter* and for the rest of his life was editor and proprietor of the *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*. This was his bread and butter and he had to remain a breadwinner all his life to support a family until his death on Christmas Day 1895. But he did not live cheap. His daughters were sent to boarding school in Dublin and he paid for the publication of some if not all of his books – the bills for both are in the Burns collection.

He remained closely allied with the Catholic church and therefore on the conservative side of the nationalist movement. His newspapers had been strongly anti-tithe, that is against the system which laid a tax on all in a Protestant parish, even Catholics, for the support of the established or state Protestant church. He had met O'Connell as a young man, as noted, and supported him against the more revolutionary Young Ireland movement of the 1840s. For all his conservatism, when Lenihan was mayor of Limerick in the 1880s he admitted as a freeman Michael Davitt, leader of the land agitation which shifted ownership of the land from the great landlords to the peasant occupiers, perhaps the most revolutionary event in modern Irish history.

At least two leaders of the brief Young Ireland uprising of 1848 were among Lenihan's friends, Michael Doheny and Thomas Francis Meagher. Lenihan was the only one aware of Doheny's escape to France while the British were still hunting him in Ireland. The fragment of Lenihan's 'Reminiscences' which we seem to have identified covers this episode and includes a glued-in letter of Doheny's sister. Doheny and Meagher both finally reached the United States safely and Doheny's *The Felon's Track* recounts his adventures and includes a letter from Meagher to Lenihan. Meagher was the flamboyant character, educated at Jesuit colleges in Ireland and England, dubbed 'Meagher of the sword' for his fiery speeches. He it was who designed the tricolour flag of modern Ireland, joining the green and orange traditions with white for peace between them. Perhaps because of the dramatic nature of their activities, the Young Irelanders became a model for later revolutionary movements, much more than O'Connell, despite his political success and their military failure.

Fr. Finegan goes so far as to say that Lenihan's paper was an unofficial organ for dissemination of news of the local Catholic diocese. There is certainly an unpleasantly bossy tone about letters to Lenihan from Dr. Butler, bishop of Limerick, who wrote:

My dear Mr Lenihan,

Have the goodness to publish the accompanying 'collection for the Pope' in your issue of today, and pray direct that particular attention be paid to the accurate printing of the figures.

Perhaps you would direct attention to the list by an editorial line.

The collection for the Pope was the Peter's pence collection, normally taken up on Palm Sunday. It was a medieval institution, dropped perforce with the division of Christendom at the Reformation and re-introduced in the late-nineteenth century to make good the losses to the Papal States in the political upheavals of that time. There is also in the Lenihan papers a copy of the circular issued optimistically seeking the recruitment in Ireland of an army of 50,000 men - one hundred from each parish - to defend the Pope. Lenihan may have kow-towed too much to bishops but there is a nicer side to his work for the church. In 1872 a Mr Powell of the Camden Street Works wrote to him, asking for an appointment so that he, Powell, might thank Lenihan for the help he had given Mr Powell's firm. Few readers of this simple letter will respond to it as personally as do I, but it represents a much larger dimension, than the merely personal, of nineteenth-century Irish life.

The Camden Street Works was the Dublin headquarters of the firm of Hardman, Earley and Powell, specialists in church art, and presumably Lenihan had assisted them with favourable publicity in his paper. Hardman's was a Birmingham firm and its link with an Irish subsidiary was called for by the amount of church work being carried out in Ireland in the late-nineteenth century, following political and demographic changes. A gradual liberalisation had been forced on British politics, both by internal pressures and agitation, represented most dramatically by the Catholic Emancipation won by O'Connell. There was too the massive decline in population during the famine years of the 1840s and the following decades, which reduced the population of Ireland but laid the basis for an ultimately prosperous community of Irish heritage across the sea. *Si monumentum requiris circumspice*: the beautiful campus of Boston College is a monument to this community,

A strong Catholic middle-class was emerging in Ireland, larger farmers, town business people, professionals and a middle-class intelligentsia whose role in the development of modern Ireland has been too little explored. Lenihan himself was elected a member of the prestigious Royal Irish Academy in 1874 and was given a grant of arms for himself and his descendants by the Office of Ulster King of Arms, an office whose principal business had been the recording of the arms and pedigrees of the titled and landed classes. Even the head of that office was now a Catholic, Sir John Bernard Burke, whose name is known to us as the origin of the title of a standard work of reference, *Burke's Peerage*.

The Catholic church in the post-famine era was relieved of the pressure of tending the unruly, over-crowded and ever expanding population of early nineteenth-century Ireland and could depend on this new class in its efforts, for example, to build churches and schools. The infra-structure for such undertaking was lacking so the Hardman firm, which had worked for the English Gothic-revival architect Pugin, came in and allied itself with the existing small firm of Earley and Powell. (The collegiate Gothic of which the Burns Library is such a fine example is part of the architectural heritage bequeathed to us by Pugin). The Hardmans eventually withdrew, continuing business in Birmingham, but the Dublin firm survived and I have met members of both the Earley and Powell families. Hardmans and their work for Pugin had done something of even more immediate interest to me; they had brought to Ireland from Birmingham two of my great

grandparents, a McGloughlin, a decorative iron-worker and Pearse, a sculptor. Family tradition states that the journeymen Pearse and McGloughlin shared quarters in that Camden Street Works, sleeping like traditional apprentices under the counter in the shop. Be that as it may, their families became allied through the marriage of a Pearse daughter to a McGloughlin son and but for that union someone else would be the proud first occupant of the visiting chair in Irish studies in the Burns Library of Boston College.

Before proceeding to a consideration of certain other parts of the Lenihan collection, let us end our discussion of Lenihan himself with the remark that whatever about the quality of his work as a journalist and historian, whatever about his piety and his patriotism, his cavalier attitude to his papers shows that he would never have made an archivist, and certainly not a manuscript librarian. And let us end this part of our presentation with a last quotation from a contemporary of Lenihan's who wrote in 1912: 'a member of his family informed me recently that at the time of his death a collection of valuable historical papers mysteriously disappeared.' Perhaps they have just as mysteriously re-appeared in the Burns Library.

So far we have touched on the history of Lenihan's papers and said something of their content. It remains to be added that as well as accumulating his own papers Lenihan collected some others. He sold some of those he had collected, principally, it seems, those relating to his historical work, late in life - we have already mentioned his relative poverty - but some of the items he collected remained with the papers as they reached the Burns Library, by whatever means.

We know of Lenihan's devotion to O'Connell and it will be no surprise that he was an active member of the Testimonial Committee set up in Limerick to commemorate the great Liberator in 1854, a few years after his death. The records of that committee survive as part of the Lenihan papers in Boston and were originally gathered not by Lenihan but by his co-joint-secretary, Fr Roger O'Higgins, a Franciscan. The papers are mainly procedural - accounts, lists of subscribers, minutes of meetings and so forth - but they do contain a letter of John Hogan, sculptor of the larger-than-life statue of O'Connell which the Committee erected at the Crescent.

Hogan, after a career in Rome, had not long before returned to Ireland and the O'Connell statue, finally erected in 1857, must have been one of his last works, as he died in 1858. He was in 1856 at the head of his profession and felt entitled to adopt a fairly blunt tone with his clients. 'Very Revd. and dear Sir,' (he wrote to Fr. O'Higgins on 20 September 1856) 'Up to this moment I received no draft or cheque for the second instalment either from Cork or Limerick - So there is another of the steamers off to the south this morning without the Liberator's statue on board. The next boat/paddle box steamer/ will be on Wednesday though not one of Mr Allen's. And if the money be not advanced immediately, I will not be able to avail myself of even that opportunity ...' For his work Hogan was paid £1,000, a very large sum. This would be the equivalent of about \$100,000 today (using the retail price index).

The statue of course still stands in the Crescent though its attractive railings and lamps have long since been removed and the classical statue now stands marooned in an inappropriate 'water feature'. We should consider the site for a moment; the Crescent is a gracious broadening of Limerick's main thoroughfare at its southern or upper end and that site had been earmarked for a memorial to the son of a local peer, Lord Clare, family name Fitzgibbon. Lord Clare's son had been killed in the Crimean War and the loyalist, unionist and patriotically British part of the population wished to commemorate him. The O'Connell Committee succeeded in having the corporation of the city change its mind

and dedicate this prime location to O'Connell. The debate about the site is signalled by a cutting which occurs in the Lenihan papers and I draw attention to a strange question mark which punctuates that newspaper account.

The *Tipperary Leader* of 19 May, 1855, headed its 'Limerick gossip' column 'The Fitzgibbon memorial,' and in the midst of a long and bombastic attack on the loyalist proposal there occurs the following: 'Where are the monuments to Curran, Grattan, Cloncurry, O'Connell, and Davis - where? In the Town Hall reading-room there stands a picture of O'Connell. In an artisan's garret there hangs a bust of Davis ... Can Limerick boast of anything else to perpetuate their greatness, and yet, oh! unutterable shame, £1,040 to immortalise a lord's son (?)'

I apologise for the coarseness of the tale I have to tell but feel bound to relate accurately what was told to me in strict confidence in a public house in Limerick after a football match. The erection of the Fitzgibbon memorial proceeded at another location, on one of the bridges over the Shannon, and when it was unveiled the occasion was greeted by a local poetaster who was sometimes admitted to the pages of Lenihan's paper, though not, I hope, with the following verse which he dedicated to the new Fitzgibbon memorial.

There he stands in the open air
The bastard son of the earl of Clare.
They called him Fitzgibbon but his name was Moore
His father was cuckold, his mother a whore.

The crude verse does not even represent accurately the folk-belief, which was as follows - that the young officer was not son to Lord Clare at all, that Lord Clare in his youth had accompanied the libertine Lord Byron on the Grand Tour to the middle east and had joined with him in an escapade which involved penetrating the seclusion of a Turkish noble's harem. Lord Clare was caught and was punished for his indiscretion by emasculation. He returned home and went through a form of marriage with a young woman who found the arrangement unsatisfactory. She entered into a liaison with a Mr Moore who thus became the father of the Crimean hero. And a sly editorialist has buried all that nasty lore in a point of interrogation in parentheses!

I promised no earth-shaking historical or literary discoveries, but I hope I have shown how the papers of even a relatively minor figure on the national stage may give us glimpses of the great movements of history - the evolution of the catholic church and the nationalist revival, Fr Mathew and the Temperance Movement, Pugin and the Gothic revival, the militancy of Young Ireland and the emergence of a new middle class, all contributing to a moving picture of the complex thing which we are in Ireland today, a moving picture of the crash of the end of the past against the beginning of the future. Libraries, especially libraries like the Burns Library with a mandate and endowment to acquire old and beautiful things, help us to preserve that past, and inspire that future.