

# LIMERICK CHRONICLE

Celebrating  
250 years -  
1768 - 2018

INSIDE THIS WEEK



Memory of poet  
is still 'Strong'

THEN & NOW: PAGE 40

DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST TITLE

## From ruins to thriving village

### How Castleconnell got its name and went from fiefdom to freedom

Continued from last week

If one is to judge by the number of human skeletons unearthed at this place in the thirties during excavations for gravel, it would appear that the casualties were quite considerable.

It is most intriguing to reflect on the old tradition that has long been kept alive in the district of Boher and Abington that the little hull where the gravel pit was opened was the site of the main battle on that fateful day and that it has always been claimed locally - long before the human remains were discovered - that this was a place of great slaughter after the Burke's horses were stolen by a "crowd from Kerry".

It was poor consolation for Bill Burke to be raised to the Peerage with the title: "Lord Baron Burke of Castleconnell."

He was left to languish in his cold grey fortress to mourn the violent deaths of his two fine sons - and all over a pair of plough horses!

He survived the Killanure disaster for an anguished four years and was succeeded by his grandson, John, who was a minor at the time.

After a few years, the young Lord figured in another tragedy.

While in London in 1592, he fell foul of a certain Capt. Arnold Cosby, an Elizabethan buck who had been lately granted a considerable slice of Co. Limerick.

A difference of opinion arose between the two, possibly over something less important than a pair of plough horses, and a duel was arranged.

It was first agreed that the engagement should take place on horseback but Cosby, at the last minute, called for the contest to take place on foot.

While Burke, who, apparently agreed to the change, was stopping to remove his spurs, Cosby treacherously ran him through.

The captain was convicted of murder and was hanged over the spot where Lord Castleconnell died.

John was succeeded by his younger brother, Richard, who, after a short but tempestuous career, also met a violent death - this time much nearer to home.

The death occurred on the banks of the Camogie river at Grange where the old Kilmallock road crosses the river.

He had been engaged in a fight with the O'Connors - a conflict that also accounted for Richard's younger brother, Thomas.



'Castle of Connell', from which the name of the village derives, was destroyed in a siege by the army of General Ginkel, fighting in support of the Army of William of Orange at the end of the 17th century

The title fell to the last brother, Theobald, who set about carrying on the bloody heritage of Castleconnell and at the same time, increasing the size of his already ample estate by appropriating the property of his cousin, Sir John Burke of Brittas, whom he helped to betray to the authorities as one who was practicing the Catholic faith in defiance of law.

The Burkes took the Confederate side after the rebellion of 1641 and lost their estates at Castleconnell and Brittas during the Cromwellian occupation.

After years of great privation and

poverty, they were given back part of their old estates after the restoration.

Lord Castleconnell's "beg up" to Charles 11 is indicative of the sorry plight of the wealthy classes were reduced to the ranks under Cromwell.

"For five or six years trailing a pike in the Duke of York's regiment, he understood no mystery, but now he has run in debt for food and raiment and is at the end of his credit, in imminent danger of imprisonment for his debts and unable further to subsist if your majesty relieve him not.

"Burke must have had a four-leaved shamrock as we have so few

instances of this worthless monarch's interference with the Cromwellian order."

Castleconnell enjoyed a relatively peaceful episode during the thirty years after the restoration but the fateful year of 1690 saw the Burkes once more ousted from their stronghold and their properties taken over by the Williamites.

The castle was partly destroyed in 1690 but was reoccupied by the Burkes towards the winter of that year after the raising of the siege of Limerick and the withdrawal of William's army to winter quarters.

It was a short respite; the Williamites were back the following year and thoroughly demolished the castle after the garrison, numbering 250 were driven out; some of whom were even killed.

At the same time, the title "Lord Castleconnell," became extinct.

The Burkes, without title or standing, gradually infiltrated the ranks of the common people and a new ascendancy took over Castleconnell.

This article first appeared in The Leader on August 20, 1996.