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about Foynes doing his shopping. He spoke Irish to anybody who knew the language. When his remains were being brought from Foynes Island, a cortège of seven local boats accompanied the boat carrying the coffin.

Beyond Mount Trenchard the road veers very slightly inland to reach the village of Loughill (*Leamhchoill*, Elm Wood). A small river called the Owvaun (*Abha Bhán*), or White River, flows into the Shannon at Loughill. It is an excellent trout stream. David James O Connor, of Finnoo, Ballyhahill, sang the praises of the Owvaun almost a hundred years ago:

> By Ballyhahill gliding, Lisready green and fair,
> It seems to be as loath to leave the spots of beauty there;
> By Curraghmore and Woodcliff, past glen and cliff and lawn,
> Unrivalled is thy beauty, my sparkling bright Owvaun.

In the townland of Finnoo there was a place with the wonderful name of Whiskey Hall. David James O Connor wrote a song about that too:

> I dream of Curragh's valleys and Loughill's drowsy shore,
> I dream of youth's companions I never shall see more;
> I dream of eyes that fondly beamed from neath an old plaid shawl,
> When I took youthful rambles near moonlit Whiskey Hall.

The course of the river from Loughill south to Ballyhahill, a distance of about 1½ miles is very beautiful. The road runs inland, close to the river, and ascends gradually, offering a succession of delightful prospects. At Ballyhahill the oldest road in West Limerick crossed the river by a ford. It came up from the old castle of Glin by way of Knockbrack, *Cnoc Breac*, the Speckled Hill – so called from the white boulders dotting the brown heather – and continued on to Shanid Castle. It was close to the Owvaun, in the townland of Woodcliff, that Sean Finn, commandant of West Limerick Brigade, IRA, was killed during the War of Independence.

From Loughill to Glin is about 4 miles. It is a nice drive, especially the last mile or so where the road runs by the shore of the Shannon estuary. Across the water is County Clare, and ahead County Kerry beckons tall, welcoming fingers in the shape of the chimney stacks of Tarbert's electricity-generating station.

The old name of Glin was *Gleann Corbraí*, the Glen of the

Corbraí, the Corbraí being another Celtic people who were settled by the estuary shore. Entering Glin from the Foynes-Loughill direction one sees on the left, on the banks of the small Glencorbry river, the remains of the castle that had once been the stronghold of the Knights of Glin and that fell to Carew in 1600. The Knights of Glin – family name, Fitzgerald – were a branch of the Munster Geraldines, and they have held their lands in Glin in unbroken succession for over seven hundred years.

The village of Glin is laid out in the shape of a large square which slopes down to the Shannon. Drift-net fishing once gave considerable employment there. There were numerous weirs on the Shannon, some owned by the Knight, others by various ordinary local people. Three or four men went out in each fishing-boat, and up to fairly recent times the blue jerseys and peaked caps of fishermen were a common sight in the village.

The place had a thriving fish market, where salmon taken locally, and in Tarbert and Ballylongford, were bought and then sent directly from there to Billingsgate. Ice was needed to pack the fish in to keep them fresh, and this demand was met by the construction in the Glin area of a number of ice-houses, large circular structures, partly underground, in which the ice was stored. Local people sometimes constructed special ponds on their land, and during spells of frosty weather they would collect ice from the ponds and sell it to the ice-houses. But the bulk of the ice was imported from Norway, in square-rigged, four-masted ships that tied up at Glin pier. Only one of the ice-houses survives; it has, however, been altered and adapted to other uses.

The Fitzgeralds were established in Glin by the mid fourteenth century, and the unusual title 'Knight of Glin' (in the early period sometimes called 'Knight of the Valley') was in existence by the early fifteenth century. Nobody is sure how the title originated. One story says that three Geraldines, fighting for King Edward III in his Scottish wars, displayed such exceptional valour that they were knighted on the battlefield by the King. They were dubbed according to the colour of their armour, one becoming the White Knight, another the Green Knight and the third the Black Knight. The Green Knight subsequently became known as the Knight of Kerry, and the Black Knight as the Knight of Glin. But J. Anthony Gaughan, in his book *The Knights of Glin* (p. 19), thinks that "Perhaps the best explanation for these anomalous but romantic appellations is that they

are an example of the Gaelicizing of the Anglo-Normans of Desmond, the titles being similar to Gaelic chieftainships."

The Knight of Glin was closely involved in the uprising of the Munster Geraldines in the sixteenth century, and he and his son were captured and sentenced to death. The Knight escaped by a legal technicality, but his son, Thomas, was hanged and quartered in Limerick in 1567. A living tradition, recorded in the Glin district in the 1920s, told how the victim's mother, who was present at the execution, seized her son's severed head and drank his blood (as Eibhlín Dubh did with the blood of her slain husband, Art Ó Laoire, more than two centuries later*). The custom obviously had some ancient mystical significance. She then collected the parts of the dismembered body and put them in a linen sheet before the funeral procession set off on the long road home.[7]

The immense concourse that followed the gory remains included one hundred keening women. These keening women were professional mourners, the word 'keening' coming from the Irish word *'caoin'*, 'to lament'. The 'keen' or lament would usually take the form of extempore verse, in praise of the dead person, half spoken, half chanted by the leading lamenter; then would come a wild and piteous refrain taken up by the other lamenters. The frenzied lamentation of those hundred women keening their young lord on the road to Glin that day long ago, must indeed have been a sound terrible to hear.

Undeterred by the fate of young Thomas Fitzgerald, the Knights of Glin continued to ally themselves with those who, at different times, revolted against English supremacy in Ireland. It was because of his support of O Neill and O Donnell in the last long-sustained war (1594–1603) fought by Gaelic Ireland that the Knight of Glin found his castle besieged by an English army under Sir George Carew in 1600.

Describing the taking of the castle, Thomas F. Culhane says: "The Giltenans, Tadhg Dore and his brother, and Donal Culhane and two of his sons, were slain in the final defence. Some of the garrison tried to escape by jumping into the water surrounding the castle, but only three men succeeded in getting away. These were Mahon Dillane, Lewy O Connor and Donal Beag Culhane (whose father was slain in the defence of the

* See the famous poem *'Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoire'* or its translation, 'The Lament for Art O Leary.'

castle)." This traditional account of the capture of the castle was handed down orally through eight or nine generations.[8] All the surnames mentioned in the account are still numerous in the Glin district.

In 1730, when penal laws operated against Irish Catholics in many ways, including their right to own or lease land, John, the then Knight of Glin, abandoned the Catholic faith of his ancestors and conformed to Protestantism. From now on the Knights began to marry into Protestant families of English extraction. We are told that: "As the Geraldine blood of the Knights of Glin became diluted through marriages with Planter stock, they invariably tended to become progressively more and more loyal (to the English crown) and to abandon the ways of their fathers."[9]

However, Gerald Fitzgerald, brother of John Bateman Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin, was the most prominent member of the United Irishmen in West Limerick at the time of the Rebellion of 1798. The Knight did not share his views, but when he heard of the death of the insurgent leader, Lord Edward Fitzgerald (of the Kildare family), in May 1798, he called a meeting of all his tenants and preached war and revolution to them, until the parish priest, Father Mac Donnell, intervened and told the people to go home. One Glin man, Tom Langan (known as Captain Steel), a member of the United Irishmen, was transported to Botany Bay for his nationalist activities in 1798 and did not see Glin again until 1817.[10]

John Fraunceis Fitzgerald, son of the already-mentioned John Bateman Fitzgerald, was born in 1791. He was fostered by a local family named Costello, this being perhaps the very last instance of the centuries-old Gaelic custom of fosterage. In ancient Ireland the ties of fosterage were as strong as, if not stronger than, the ties of kindred. The Costello home was an Irish-speaking one, and so John Fraunceis grew up a fluent Irish speaker. After attending a classical school in Glin, he went to Cambridge, where he graduated with honours. In due course he became Knight of Glin.

Because of his weakness for the fair sex, John Fraunceis was known to all in the Glin district as *'Ridire na mBan'*, 'the Knight of the Women'. His amorous activities brought a number of denunciations from the parish priest, Father Daniel O Sullivan, who was noted for his ability to compose extempore verse in Irish. At other times, however, the priest and the Knight would be on good terms. Once John Fraunceis built a small lodge near

the Catholic church for his latest lady love, who was known to the people as 'the *Caillichín*'* ('the little hag').

On the following Sunday, the Knight was parading the *Caillichín* up and down the road in front of the lodge, and within full view of the people who were waiting for Father O Sullivan to come along and open the church door. When Father O Sullivan arrived, he said nothing at first. He had a habit of throwing out an extempore line of verse to a person and waiting for him to add a line to complete the couplet. On this occasion he turned to Tim Costello and, pointing to the lodge, said: "*Sin é an tigh a thóg Seáinín*" ("That is the house that Jack built"). Tim replied: "*Mar áras geal don chaillichín*" ("As a bright residence for the *Caillichín*"). Father O Sullivan tossed him some further lines, but all the replies were equally innocuous. Ancient custom dictated his mild replies; Tim was a foster-brother of the Knight.[11]

The present Knight, Desmond John Villiers Fitzgerald, twenty-ninth Knight of Glin, worked for a time as Deputy Keeper in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and is at present Christie's representative in Ireland. He is co-author with Anne Crookshank of *Paintings of Ireland* and co-author with Maurice Craig of *Ireland Observed*, a useful handbook to the country's buildings and antiquities. His home, Glin Castle, a "lime-white mansion", is a plain but striking many-windowed building, erected in the 1780s, with battlements and Gothic details added some thirty years later. It commands a splendid view of the Shannon Estuary. The estate is surrounded by a number of Gothic-style 'folly' lodges; one of these, on the Tarbert road, has been adapted as a restaurant and souvenir shop.[12]

That Tim Costello who rhymed the couplets about the *Caillichín* for Father O Sullivan, died on 4th June 1873, aged eighty-five years, and is buried in Kilfergus churchyard, half a mile east of Glin, on the road to Ballyhahill. The epitaph, which he composed for himself, is cut on his headstone:

This is the grave of Tim Costello,
Who lived and died a right good fellow;
From his boyhood to his life's end,
He was the poor man's faithful friend.
He fawned before no purse-proud clod,
He feared none but the living God;
And never did he do to others,
But what was right to do to brothers.

* Pronounced 'Koll-aheen'.

He loved green Ireland's mountains bold,
Her verdant plains and abbeys old;
He loved her music, song and story,
He wept for her departed glory.
And often did I hear him pray
That God would end her spoiler's sway;
To men like him may peace be given,
In this world and in heaven.

Amen.

One of the things that distinguishes that part of County Limerick that borders on the Shannon Estuary – especially from Askeaton to Glin – from the rest of the county, is that its people are wise in the ways of boats and tides and currents. They are a maritime people. The people in the other parts of the county are an inland people.

Beyond Glin, County Limerick extends westward only about two miles. The road runs by the edge of Tarbert Bay to the Limerick/Kerry border, and almost immediately beyond the border is Tarbert, from where a busy ferry service operates to Killimer, in County Clare. But today we go to neither Kerry nor Clare. Instead, we turn southward at Glin and follow the road to Athea, eight miles distant.