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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2009

Making moves: adults with special needs join up with Daghdha for annual dance festival >>P4



Accent all areas: we're still giving out, says Patricia Feehily, but not in our own accents >>P3



Healing energy: Reiki master Maggie Murphy in Ballingarry says to seek stillness and inner calm >>P4

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The present Knight of Glin Desmond Fitzgerald with his three daughters and grand-children at the castle

Over seven centuries the various Knights of Glin were - 'pugnacious, obsequious, rebellious, desperate, upstanding, debauched, broke, imperious, cruel, far-seeing, stupid and kind'...now their colourful history is revealed in a new book to be launched this week

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Days of the Knights come to life

Norma Prendiville

It is very much a local product, says Desmond FitzGerald, Knight of Glin of the book he has waited, and wanted, to write for most of his life.

Called "The Knights of Glin: Seven Centuries of Change", it is his, collective, attempt at capturing the essence of what his forebears stood for, good and bad, what they did and failed to do. It is a big, blocky broth of a book, caught between memoir and history, conflicted sometimes between scholarship and story. But it works.

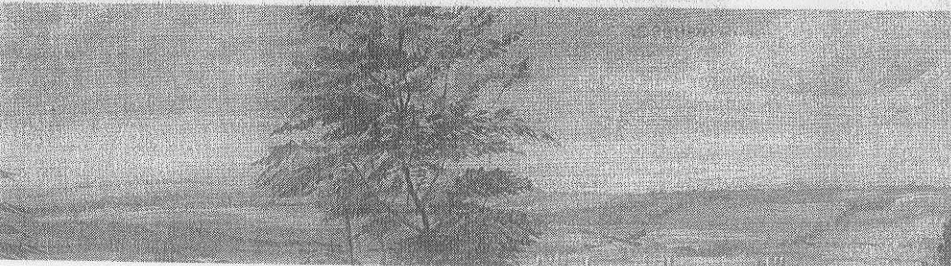
This is who we were, warts and all, the book seems to say. Live with it. It's your story too.

And that is perhaps the whole glory of it. While it traces the FitzGerald family history – (yes, yes, sometimes yawningly) – what is most vivid is the fact that that history is woven into the fabric of the history of Limerick, the history of West Limerick more particularly but always against the context of Irish and, even, world history.

"The idea of tracing the history of a country through the fortunes and vicissitudes and local history of one family is not new," says Roy Foster, the venerable Professor of History at the University of Oxford in the foreword to the book.

"Irish history," he goes on, "might look rather different if there were more books like this one and if there were more Irishmen like the 29th Knight of Glin."

Right on! That's our Desmond – No. 29 – the man who awkwardly but happily led the celebratory parade in his homeplace of Glin when they got a new playground this summer. It's the same man who can talk, and with authority, and who has talked, and with authority, to historians, archivists, artists, archaeologists, gardeners, builders



fice his son as cannon fodder. Another died from cholera caught while helping the destitute in a workhouse. There was a smuggling Knight and another who was notorious as Ridire na mBan, because of his numerous affairs.

The book chronicles all this – the wars and the intrigues, the arranged marriages and the love-marriages, the affairs and the elopements, the gambling and the rehabilitation, the profligates and the money-makers, the artists and the gardeners. Through seven centuries and 28 previous Knights, the book tells a story of adventure and opportunism, perfidy and loyalty, treason and rebellion, all shot through with human frailty.

These stories are not always told in the liveliest of fashion – but the fact remains that if the story were written in novel form, it would probably be a block-buster.

Desmond FitzGerald has a somewhat simpler take. "I think these stories have to be told, warts and all," he says quietly, simply.

It is also, as Tom Donovan, editor and midwife to the book, explains, a story of survival.

"No one person could have written this," declares Tom. In bringing it into being, the book has called up a meitheal of scholars, each illustrating different aspects of the story through seven centuries – and all neatly chaptered.

But none better than Tom's own chapters – particularly those where he tells the story of Glin's evolution as a village or the up-close-and-personal account of four Knights in a row.

Desmond FitzGerald is right when he says: "If you can do it on a local level, it can be more telling than the main storyline of major history. The fact it is so local is, I think, its interest."

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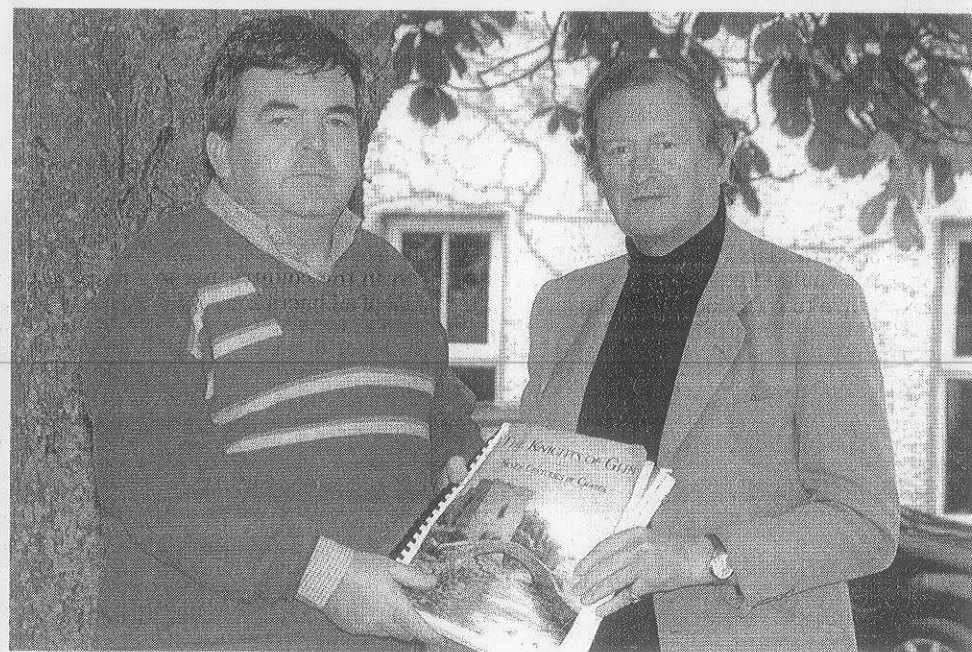
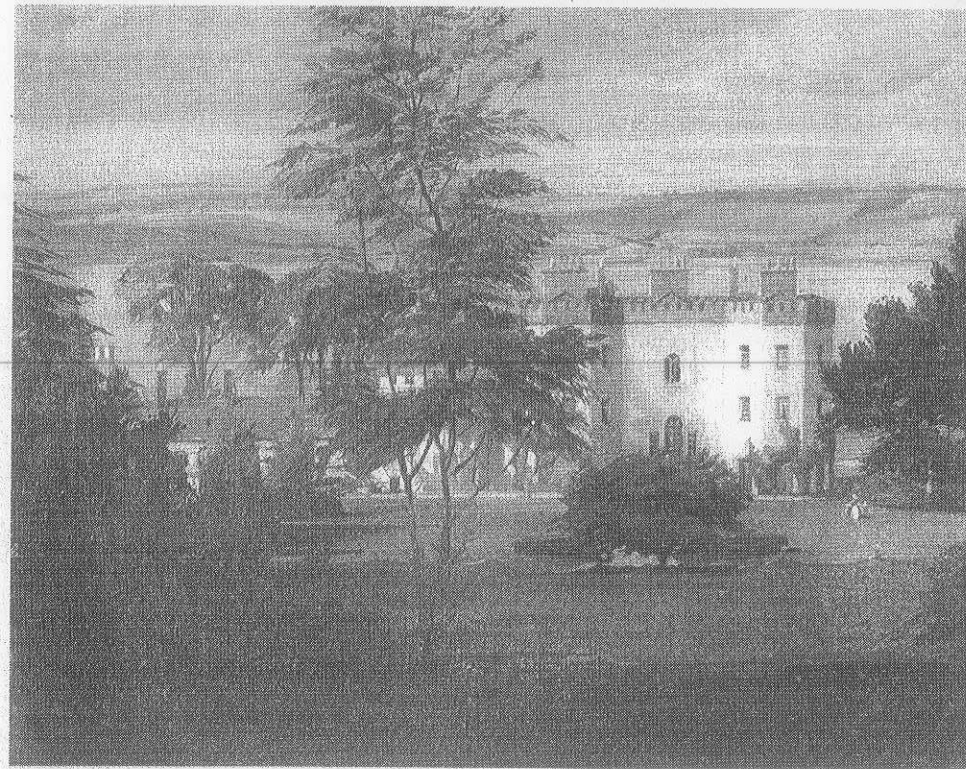
Right on! That's our Desmond - No. 29 - the man who awkwardly but happily led the celebratory parade in his homeplace of Glin when they got a new playground this summer. It's the same man who can talk, and with authority, and who has talked, and with authority, to historians, archivists, artists, archaeologists, gardeners, builders, experts of all kinds, about his world view. And his Glin view.

But there is another great thunk to this book. After Desmond, 29th Knight of Glin, the title dies. It can only continue through the male line and there is no son or nephew to take on the title. The family line lives on - quite vigorously in fact - through Desmond's three daughters and their children, but the title is doomed.

For that reason, if for no other, the book is important.

"I had the idea of doing a book like this since I was quite young," Desmond says. Early in his life, he became acquainted with fellow Glin man, Thomas A Culhane who had a wealth of historical knowledge about the Knights of Glin but who emigrated to Australia in 1927.

"I used to correspond with him when I was a student," says Desmond. From there, he continued to probe, to investi-



Clockwise from main picture: Desmond FitzGerald, 29th Knight of Glin, and his wife Oida both contributed to the book which is launched this week. The Knight and Tom Donovan, who edited the book, hold the manuscript. A painting in the book of Glin Castle by artist Niccola Carraciola

gate, to try to piece it all together - not just in time, but in terms of ideas, influences and people. He made friends with a pharmacist in Limerick who put him on the right road - and he delved into dusty, fusty copies of the Limerick

Chronicle "heaped up" on the top floor of the Limerick Leader building in the city.

Desmond was hungry for knowledge. But in the beginning, it seemed there was little to go on. Much, if not all, of the family papers had gone up in

flames in some previous generation. A lot more of the family inheritance had been sold off to satisfy the demands of dunning sheriffs. He was left with small farings. But nonetheless, he kept digging, searching, delving.

My ancestors, he is quoted, somewhere, as concluding were an "improvident, wild and woolly lot who spent a lot of money".

A lesser man might have given up - or at least gone to ground - on the strength of

that conclusion. But Desmond FitzGerald has no problem being honest.

The Knights of Glin, if the book is to be believed, were a random lot. They were, at different times over seven centuries, pugnacious, obse-

quious, rebellious, desperate, upstanding, debauched, broke, imperious, cruel, far-seeing, stupid and kind.

Mostly, they reflected their times. Sometimes, they were ahead of their times. One Knight was prepared to sacri-

- the wars and the intrigues, the arranged marriages and the love-marriages, the affairs and the elopements, the gambling and the rehabilitation, the profligates and the money-makers, the artists and the gardeners. Through seven centuries and 28 previous Knights, the book tells a story of adventure and opportunism, perfidy and loyalty, treason and rebellion, all shot through with human frailty.

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But the stories in this book, if we have ears to hear, eyes to read and mind to understand, tell us that history is not as simple as we may have thought.

The different sections of the book were written, in the main, by local academics and historians along with contributions from the Knight himself and his wife, Oida.

It was edited by Glin man and local historian, Tom Donovan, laid-out by Fitzsimons of Shanagolden and printed in North Kerry and it will be launched in the County Council's Lissanalta House in Dooradoyle this Thursday evening.

The Dublin launch with broadcaster Vincent Browne takes place in the Royal Irish Academy this Wednesday - and there will be a Glin launch in Glin Castle on Saturday night.

A beautifully produced, elegant book, sumptuously illustrated, it is, most definitely, one for the bookcase - and for posterity.