

A great Gaelic scholar from Castleconnell

ALL last week the residents of scenic Shannon-side Castleconnell were holding their annual festival. Among the events was an exhibition of rare old Castleconnell photographs.

The surviving, or ruined 18th-century Castleconnell mansions are reminders of many interesting personalities associated with these old mansions.

Ruins

Prospect House, now in ruins, is near one of the most romantic stretches of the famous Falls of Doonass. Nearby, the Shannon creeps over The Leap of Doonass. Directly opposite this old mansion is The Tail of The Falls of Doonass.

The salmon pools here have descriptive names. They include Poulaherra (The Ferry Hole), Poulahoo, Salahogue, Upper and Lower File Beg and Feemor—all from Gaelic originals. So have all the other pools up to Worrals Inn.

When Standish Hayes O'Grady—who was born at Prospect House in 1822—was growing up in Castleconnell, most of the older local salmon fishermen were fluent native Gaelic speakers.

Perhaps it was listening and talking to these old fishermen and hearing their rich Gaelic lore that inspired a love of the Gaelic language that later made Standish Hayes O'Grady Ireland's leading Celtic scholar.

Standish Hayes O'Grady was a son of Admiral O'Grady and a nephew of the first Viscount Guillemore of Caherguillamore House, near Lough Gur. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin.

Despite his Anglo-Irish lineage and background, Standish Hayes O'Grady had a love of the Gaelic language and its culture from a very early age. He spent his youth wandering through County Limerick collecting old Gaelic tales and customs.

He was a friend of the contemporary great Gaelic scholars and antiquarians, Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan (who collected

Gaelic lore and manuscripts for the Irish Ordnance Survey) and Micheal O Longain, whose poet-father had been Steward to the Knight of Glin. O Longain, fought with the 1798 Wexford insurgents & composed the song "Maidin Luain Cincise"—an appeal to the Munstermen to rise and aid their Wexford compatriots against the British Army.

In his travels through County Limerick, O'Grady saw the last Gaelic scribes at work. These scribes transcribed the Old Gaelic hero tales, romances and poems in manuscript form. At night—especially when a farmer's family and their neighbours gathered in to help with wool-carding, or at wakes—one of the group would recite old tales or poems from their manuscripts.

In fact, O'Grady often heard people recite these old hero tales in full at a rural fireside gathering, without any manuscript.

Tales

His greatest achievement was editing and translating into English collection of old Gaelic tales known as "Silva Gadelica" Manuscripts (annotated) by O'Grady.

These are now in the National Library of Ireland. The National Library of Wales (Aberswyth), Cambridge University Library, and the British Museum, London.

His first work, written when O'Grady was 21, was an edited volume of Gaelic poems of Donnchadh Rua Mac Con Mara, of Cratloe—which included Mac Con Mara's nostalgic "Ben Chnoic Eireann Oighe" and "Eachtraí Ghiolla an Amrain," about the Cratloe poet's escapades in Newfoundland.

Despite his Anglo-Irish lineage—which included his father, who was a British agent—O'Grady was no West Briton. In fact, he was savantly pro-Irish and detested those traitorous Irish writers—like the 16th century Dublin-born historian, Richard Stanyhurst, who vilified their fellow-countryman for the English authorities.



At the FCA stand at Limerick Show (from left): Sgt-Major Larry Tuohy, Comdt Tony Daly, OC, 14th Inf Bn, and Capt John Donnelly, 14th Bn.

O'Grady spent thirty of his young years as a civil engineer in California. He published "Silva Gadelica" in 1892. Co-incidentally, Dubhghlas de hÍde (later the first President of Ireland) founded Conradh na Gaeilge, the movement to revive the Gaelic language and culture.

Brilliant

Dubhghlas de hÍde described O'Grady as a brilliant and correct speaker of Irish, as witty in it as in English. Eleanor Hull (another outstanding Gaelic scholar) regarded O'Grady as the last of the grand old scholars of Ireland.

Access to ruined Prospect House is by the road that turns off the main Richill-Castleconnell Village road to the Clareville Waterworks. Or by the riverside walk through the former Lord Massey mansion site, down river from Castleconnell Village.

Although the Shannon is not as majestic now, as in O'Grady's time, as you stand near ruined Prospect House, its gentle voice over the Tail of The Falls of

Doonass will prompt an appreciation of the great Gaelic scholar, and Irish patriot, Standish Hayes O'Grady and the old Castleconnell Gaelic speaking sal-

mon fishermen who inspired his great love of our ancient language and its romantic hero tales and poetry.

—SEAMUS O CINNEIDÉ

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