

The Lonesome Death of Reverend John Mulqueen

by Tom Donovan

In the era following the Napoleonic Wars Ireland and particularly Limerick became a hotbed of sedition and land agitation. The accompanying violence and outrages brought condemnation from many Roman Catholic clergymen who tried to pacify their flock. Many of the perpetrators were unhappy with this interference and some threatened the lives of the priests who tried to obstruct or hinder them.¹ While many were surprised by these threats few believed that the warnings would result in the murder of a priest.

However, on the evening of 8 November 1819 a line was crossed when a priest was brutally murdered on a dark country road by a gang of Whiteboys. Fr. Mulqueen², Parish Priest of Bulgaden and Ballinvana, was returning from a sick call to one of his parishioners. At the height of the road, leading from Fantstown to Kilbreedy churchyard, Fr. Mulqueen met two men, James and William Clifford. The men warned the priest that a party of five or six armed men had told them to 'clear the way'. Fr. Mulqueen enquired if they knew the men and when they replied "no" he said he would "go and find out who they were".³ It was known locally that he was in the habit of reprimanding and advising 'the idle and dissolute of his parish', to change their line of conduct. While the priest was engaged in this benevolent act one of the men, a thoughtless youth turned round and discharged the contents of his gun⁴ and deprived him of life and he died a martyr to the good of his country.⁵

An inquest was held at Fantstown the following day where County Coroners Charles and James Bennett, 'in view of the body of the deceased, enquired into when, where, why, how and by what means the priest came to his death'. They were assisted by a jury of twelve men.

In his deposition James Clifford confirmed he met with Fr. Mulqueen and 'a short time after he heard the shots fired he found Rev. John Mulqueen had received two gunshot wounds on the left side of his breast of which he died in about an hour'.

The deposition of Nancy Ryan stated that 'as she was getting her supper, a party of

men came to the door of her house and desired her to put out her light, or if she did not they would have her life; upon which, through fear, she did so; in a short time after she heard two shots fired, at a distance from her house'. Shortly afterwards she heard that 'Fr. Mulqueen was shot about 50 perches from her house'.

Several others were examined but nothing further was discovered about the event of that November night. The inquest concluded that: 'Rev. John Mulqueen was wilfully, and unlawfully murdered on the lands of Killbreedy, from gun-shot wounds, he received on the left-hand side of his breast, about the hour of nine o' clock in the afternoon of the eight of November, instant, from some person or persons as yet unknown.'

There was also comment on the remains which were 'truly shocking to the eye of the most hardened beholder'; the wound on his breast was very large, a musket ball having passed near his heart; and below that wound was 'another of less magnitude, inflicted by a slug, which originally was part of the handle of a spoon'.⁶

The circumstances of the murder of the young priest horrified the whole country and in particular the area of east Limerick where the crime was committed. The murder united all classes and an advertisement inserted in the local newspapers offered a reward for information that would lead to the conviction of the murderers. It contained an extensive list of contributors to a reward fund and continued to be published until January 1820.⁷

Murder & Reward, Eight Hundred Pounds.

Whereas the late Rev. John MULQUINY, P. of *Ballinvana*, in the county of Limerick, was murdered on the night of Monday, the 8th November, inst. near Kilbreedy, in said Parish, by a party consisting of five or six men armed, one of whom fired a shot at the said Rv. J. MULQUINY, of which he shortly expired.

Now, to bring the perpetrators of such a crime so outrageous and unprecedented in our County, to condign punishment, as well as publicly to express our horror at the same, we whose names are hereunto subscribed, do offer the several Sums respectively annexed, to any person who, within Twelve Calendar Months, will apprehend and lodge in any of His Majesty's Gaols in this Kingdom, the villains who committed the said murder, so that they may be prosecuted to conviction; or a Reward of FIFTY POUNDS for such Private Information as may lead to their apprehension and conviction. We do further offer a reward of TWENTY GUINEAS to any of the perpetrators of the said murder, except the villain who actually fired the shot, for turning approver, and every exertion shall be made to obtain for him his Majesty's pardon.

Nov. 16.

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Samuel Adams, Esq.	2 5 6
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Chidley Coote, Esq. Mt. Coote,	11 7 6
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Mr. John O'Donnell, Kilbrady,	5 13 9
Rev. Mr. Murnane, P. P. Kilmallock,	5 13 9
Rev. James Moore, Glanroe,	5 13 9
Rev. A. Hannan, R.C.C. Bruff,	5 13 9
Rev. J. M'Carthy, P. P. Elfin,	5 13 9
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Rev. J. O'Herlehy, R. C. C. Kilfinnan,	2 5 6
Rev. D. Bulkley, do. Bruff,	2 5 6
Rev. J. Madigan, do. Ballinvana,	2 5 6
Mr. Michael Landers, Ardpatrick,	11 7 6
Mr. Patrick Cahill, Fantstown,	2 5 6
Mr. John Blackburn,	5 13 9
Mr. M'Halpin, Ballinvana,	2 5 6
Mr. Thomas Grady, Martinstown,	2 5 6
Mr. Henry Grady, Ballinvana,	2 5 6
Mr. J. Cleary, Gibbenstown,	3 8 3
Mr. John O'Donnell, sen. Clareen,	1 2 9
Mr. Thomas Halpin, Ballinvana,	1 2 9

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Mr. Richard Ready, Kilfinan,	1 2 9	Mr. Thomas Fitzgerald,	1 2 9	Dan. Hunt, Esq. Kilfinane,	1 2 9
Mr. Michael Sheedy, Gibbstown,	1 2 9	Mr. Peter Meade,	1 2 9	B. Mara, Esq.	1 2 9
Mr. James Molony, Kilfinan,	1 2 9	Mr. Thomas Meade,	1 2 9	Wm. Gleeson, Esq.	1 2 9
Mr. Thomas O'Donnell, Ballinamana,	1 0 0	Mr. Patrick Cleary,	2 5 6	Mr. Patrick Molony,	2 5 6
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Mr. John Clanchy, Bulgiden,	1 2 9	Mr. John Cleary,	1 2 9	Mr. Laurence Cussen,	2 5 6
Mr. Cornelius Clanchy, Clareen,	1 2 9	Mr. Samuel Lynch,	1 2 9	Mr. John Bailey,	2 5 6
Mr. John Riordan, Glanroe,	1 2 9	Mr. Patrick Quinlan,	1 2 9	Mr. J. Madden, Glenbrohane,	1 2 9
Mr. Wm. Egan, Fermoy,	2 5 6	Mr. Henry Blake,	3 8 3	Benjamin Friend, Esq.	5 13 9
Mr. Patrick Waters, Fermoy,	2 5 6	Mr. Brien O'Donnell,	3 8 3	Mr. Pat. Sherin, jun.	2 5 6
James Godsell, Esq. Sunville,	2 5 6	Mr. Thomas Riggs,	1 2 9	Jos. Gubbins, Esq.	5 13 9
Mr. Patrick Ryan, Bulgedin,	2 5 6	Mr. David Heelan,	1 0 0	Thos. D. O'Grady, Esq.	2 5 6
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Mr. Denis Carroll, Kilfinan,	2 5 6	Mr. John Madden,	5 13 9	Mr. Matthew Madden,	1 2 9
Mr. Henry Dulmage, ditto,	1 2 9	Mr. Ml. Madden,	3 8 3	Mr. Edmond Sinan	1 2 9
Mr. Gerard Fitz-Gerald, ditto,	1 2 9	James Gubbins, Esq. Knocklong,	5 13 9	Mr. W. Grady, Elton,	1 2 9
Mr. Simon Riordan, Bottomstown,	3 8 3	Joseph Gubbins, Esq. do.	3 8 3	Mr. John Grady,	1 2 9
Mr. James Keys, Mitchelstowndown,	3 8 3	Mr. James M'Carthy,	1 2 9	Mr. Edm. Woods,	1 2 9
Mr. James Riordan, Bottomstown,	3 8 3	Mr. Denis M'Eniry,	3 8 3	Rev. W. Keane,	1 2 9
Mr. Wm. Cleary, Ballycullane,	3 8 3	John P. Bennett, Limerick,	2 5 6	Mr. John Barry,	2 0 0
Mr. Patrick M'Namara, Knockany,	3 8 3	Mr. John Collins, Bruff,	1 2 9	Mr. Mich. Lynch,	2 0 0
Terence O'Donnell, Esq. Kilbreedy,	5 13 9	Mr. J. M'Grath, do,	1 2 9	Rev. P. O'Neil, Knockany,	1 2 9
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James Ellard, Clk. Kilfinane,	2 5 6	John Bouchier, Baggotstown,	22 15 0	Mr. John Wallis, jun.	1 2 9
Edward Bennett, Esq.	2 5 6	James John Mulquiny, Newtown,	10 0 0	Mr. J. Collins,	1 2 9
Mr. John Wallis, Bosnetstown,	1 2 9	Rev. David Fitzgerald, Abbyeale,	2 5 6	Pat. Russell, Esq. Mount Russell,	11 7 6
Benjamin Hughes, Esq.	2 5 6	Cousellor Lefroy,	20 0 0	Rob. Maxwell, Esq. Charleville,	11 7 6
George W. Bennett, Esq.	2 5 6	Mr. Bryan O'Donnell, Milmount, [i]	5 13 9	Rev. B. Gibbins, Charleville,	11 7 6
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Mr. Patrick M'Carthy, Kilfinan,	2 5 6	Richard Burke,	5 3 9	Laurence Mara,	1 2 9
Hugh Toutchtone, esq.	2 5 6	R. Wilson,	1 2 0	Mr. Tim. Quillinan,	1 2 9
Mr. M. Hays, Bosnetstown,	1 2 9	Rev. Thomas Grady,	10 0 0	Mr. E. Wallis, jun. Glanroe,	1 2 9
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Mr. James Keane, Earlsfort,	2 5 6	John Green,	5 0 0	Mr. Owen Molony, Fantstown,	3 8 3
Mr. Thomas Keane, ditto,	2 5 6	James T. Mulqueen,	3 8 3	Mr. John Molony, do.	3 8 3
Mr. James Keane, jun.	2 5 6	Michael T. Mulqueen,	3 8 3	Mr. Thos. Lynch, do.	1 2 9
Andrew M'Cullough, Clk.	2 5 6	William Davis,	3 8 3	Mr. John Lynch, do.	1 2 9
John Blennerhassett, Esq.	5 13 9	Earl Talbot, Lord Lieut. of Ireland,	100 0 0	R. Ryan, Ballinvreena,	1 2 9
Mr. Michael Carroll, Ballinahinch,	1 2 9	John Bouchier, Baggotstown,	22 15 0	Michael Ryan, do.	1 2 9
Mr. Wm. Money, Elton,	1 2 9	D. Courcy O'Grady, Esq.	11 7 6	Mr. J. Dwane, Coolfree,	1 2 9
Rev. John Sheedy, P. P. Kilfinan,	2 5 6	Thads. R. Ryan, esq.	2 5 6	Mr. E. Bermingham, do.	1 2 9
Mr. Patrick Quinn, Charleville,	2 5 6	Mr. R. Shaughnessy,	2 5 6	Mr. T. Weldon, Raheen,	1 2 9
Rev. Mort. Collins,	5 13 9	Mr. D. Cudmore,	2 5 6	Mr. D. Dwane, Coolfree,	1 2 9
Mr. Patrick Hussey,	2 5 9	Parker Bennett, Esq.	2 5 6	Mr. John Hayes, Ballinvreena,	1 2 9
Mr. Cornelius Cleary,	5 13 9	Mr. M. O'Donnell, Laurence Town,	2 5 6	Mr. Nicholas Condon, do.	1 2 9
Rev. Patrick M'Namara,	5 13 9	Mr. M. O'Donnell, Mill Mount,	2 5 6	Mr. J. Walsh, Cork, Butter buyer,	2 5 6
Rev. P. H. Sheahan,	5 13 9	Mr. John Madden, Garryspillane,	3 8 3	Mr. David Carver, Thomas-Town,	1 2 9
Mr. Mat. Molony, Bruff,	1 2 9	John Crips, jun. Esq.	1 2 9	Mr. Myles Ryan, Newtown Ellard,	3 8 3
Mr. James Cleary,	5 13 9	Mr. John Ryan,	1 2 9	Mr. Denis Ryan, do.	3 8 3
Rev. David O'Brien,	5 13 9	Mr. ——— Ryan,	1 2 9	Mr. John Ryan, do.	3 8 3
Rev. Charles M'Carthy,	2 5 6	Mr. Jeremiah Shine, Ballymacreece,	1 2 9	Mr. Pat. Ryan, do.	3 8 3
Rev. Michael Cullane,	2 5 6	Thos. Bennett, Esq.	1 2 9	Mr. John Coomey,	1 2 9
Mr. John Barry,	2 5 6	Jos. Gabbett, Esq. Mount Minnett,	2 5 6	Mich. Burke White, Esq. Ballinvirrick,	5 13 9
Mr. Timothy Ryan	2 5 6	Mr. J. Cleary, Knocklong,	2 5 6	Rev. John Preston, Galbally,	3 8 3
Mr. John Madden,	2 5 6	Edw. Bennett, jun. Esq.	2 5 6		

In furtherance of the above reward and from a conviction of the loyalty, honour and correct conduct, manifested by Mr. Mulqueen, during his life, Mr. Evans has offered the following pecuniary considerations:—

To the conviction of the five ruffians who murdered this unfortunate gentleman £30 0 0

For the Prosecution of each to conviction £10 0 0

For such intelligence as will enable Mr. Evans to prosecute any one of the party to conviction £10 0 0

Ash-Hill, Nov. 9, 1819

Despite the outcry after the horrific murder and the large rewards offered there were no convictions. Four men were arrested and taken to Kilfinnane bridewell two weeks after the murder², but there were no further reports of their fate. Three names were published in the *Hue and Cry*. Two were supposed to be labourers, the eldest being twenty-eight years, and one being a farmer. They fled into the mountains where some of them perished, but all escaped the hangman. The following year the *Limerick Chronicle* of March 15 1820 stated that a man answering the description of Henry O'Brien was charged with the murder, but there were no further reports of a trial.

The remains of Father John Mulqueen were buried on Old Kildimo churchyard, near his native place. The multitudes that attended the funeral and the outbursts of sorrow and grief that were manifest on that day lived long in the memory. His heartbroken mother placed a suitable memorial stone over his grave with this inscription:

This monument was Erect^d
by Anne Mulqueen in mem^y
of her son Rev^d Jn^o
Mulqueen Parish Priest of
Bulgidan & Ballinvania
who dep^d this life Nov^r 9th
1819 aged 31 years.

May the Lord have mercy on his soul ¹⁰



Headstone on the grave of Rev. Mulqueen in Old Kildimo Graveyard

The inscription on the stone does not refer to the tragic circumstances surrounding the parish priest's death at the early age of 31. The memorial stone is facing those of his friends, neighbours and relations, in the time honoured tradition of a priest facing his flock in death as he did in life.

(Endnotes)

1. Gerard Curtin, *West Limerick: Crime, Popular Protest, and Society, 1820-1845* (Limerick 2008). While many of the threats cited are subsequent to the murder of Rev Mulqueen there is little doubt that, from the evidence given by Clifford at the inquest he feared for the priest's life on that fateful night.
2. The name Mulqueen, Mulqueeny and Mulquiny were interchangeable in contemporary newspaper reports, so for consistency Mulqueen is used, apart from extracts, throughout this article.
3. *General Advertiser or Limerick Gazette* Friday 12 November 1819.
4. *Limerick Chronicle* 10 November 1819 reported that the murderer discharged three shots.
5. Rev. John Begley, *The diocese of Limerick from 1691 to the present time* (Dublin, 1938). pp 464-65.
6. *General Advertiser or Limerick Gazette* Friday 12 November 1819.
7. *General Advertiser or Limerick Gazette* Friday 17 December 1819. The reward note continued to be published until 14 January 1820.
8. A previous edition of the same paper corrected the amount to £5 0 0 for Mr Bryan O'Donnell, Milmount and added Councillor Lefroy to the list with a contribution of £20, on November 19.
9. *General Advertiser or Limerick Gazette* Tuesday 23 November 1819
10. Rev. John Begley, *The diocese of Limerick from 1691 to the present time* (Dublin, 1938). p.p 464-65. The extract of the inscription on the headstone does not include 'alias Lyons' after the name Anne Mulqueen, but appears to have been added to enlighten the reader of Mrs Mulqueen's maiden name. The inscription quoted here is as it appears on the headstone.

Tom Donovan is editor of this journal, *Ballybrown Parish Journal* and the *Glencorbry Chronicle*. He a native of Glin, County Limerick and now lives in Clarina. He is chairman of Glin Historical Society and he has edited some books published by that society including *The Knights of Glin: Seven Centuries of Change* and *Home Thoughts from Abroad*.