

SOME CLARE HISTORY

Strongbow marched into Munster in 1174 but was defeated by Donal Mor O'Brien at Thurles and 1700 of his men killed. Shortly after this, Thomond and Connaught were at war and in 1178 in a war with the McCarthys of Cork much of the country from Limerick to Cork was desolated. In 1188, the Normans under John DeCoursey made an attempt to subdue the whole west but were defeated at the Curlew Mountains by the Dalcassians and Connaughtmen, who had united against the common danger. In 1210, Donogh and Mortogh O'Brien both claimed the kingship of Thomond and Donagh in order to get the help of the English, acknowledged King John and allowed the English to build two castles, one at Killaloe and one at Roscrea. Donogh changed his residence from Killaloe to Clonroad.

In 1318, the English, who had built a castle at Bunratty were defeated at Dysart O'Dea and driven from Clare and the Dalcassians, almost constantly at war with the English, with other Irish clans and with each other maintained their independence until 1540 when O'Brien, McNamara, O'Grady and O'Shaughnessy took English titles.

Under the old Irish system the land belonged to the clan and the clan elected their chief, who was not necessarily the son of the last chief. Under English law, the land belonged to the Lord and the eldest son succeeded to the title.

Some of the O'Briens, probably seeing that England was going to win eventually, turned Protestant and threw their

lot in with the English. Practically all the others and many O'Briens also lost their lands in Cromwells conquest. After the Williamite war, the lands of those who backed James were confiscated. Most of the chiefs and many thousands of the young men of the Dalcassians joined foreign armies. Five hundred McMehons were killed in one battle fighting for France. The remainder of the proud Dalcassians were reduced to a life of semi-slavery under the new landlords who despised their language, culture and religion and had them completely in their power. Many of the new landlords did not even live in the country and their only interest was to extract the maximum possible rent. The descendants of the DalCas were as Yeats said "beaten into the clay" but they never accepted that the landlords were the rightful owners of the land.

The Dalcassians were a tough war-like people, but they had no national feelings and were as likely to fight for the English as against them. They fought only for their own clan. Indeed, it could be argued that the rise to power of the O'Briens and DalCas was a misfortune for Ireland as otherwise the O'Neills would probably have succeeded in uniting the island under a permanent High Kingship. A census of Clare taken in 1659 by Sir William Petty gives the population as 16,474 Irish Catholics and 440 English Protestants. With the coming of peace, even though it was a harsh peace, and the introduction of the potato, the population increased rapidly and was 280,000 in the 1841 census.

The 1225 Tythe book of the parish of Tuamgraney contains the earliest written reference to Gurtaderra that I have been able to find, but some neighbouring townlands have been mentioned much earlier. In the "Book of Forfeitures and Distributions", the Townlands of Aughrim, Cappacannaun, Cloonusker and Coolagory belonged to the Earl of Cork in 1641. Correkyle belonged to the Earl of Thomond. In 1659, tenants in Aughrim were Pierce Butler, Edmund and John Roche, in Cappacannaun, Andrew Barrett, Teige O'Crowley and Matthew O'Cullane. An inquisition (a kind of court) held at Ennis on 7th August 1650 found that Cloonusker belonged in fee simple to Sir Donagh O'Grady and that he had assigned Cloonusker, Fossamore and other lands to Hugh Brady, Bishop of Meath. Coolagory, Cooracloon and Leadhort are mentioned in a McNamara rent roll of the fourteenth century.

It is thought that the foothills of the Slieve Aughtys were covered by an oakwood up to three or four hundred years ago but pockets of the area were inhabited much earlier.

THE LIFE OF THE PEOPLE

The ancient Irish lived to a great extent on milk products and meat. While oats, barley and wheat were grown from very early times, the general belief is that it was mainly a pastoral country. I happened to be in North Mayo a few years ago while a prehistoric farm which had been buried under four or five feet of turf was being excavated. When the turf was cut away, the ridges in which oats were grown could be plainly seen and indeed differed little from the ridges used by our great grandfathers for the same purpose. Milk products, butter, cheese and "bonnyclaber" boiled sour milk, seem to have been an important part of the diet. Cattle were moved to the hills and mountains in the Spring and brought back in the Autumn when the wheat and oats had been cut. The surplus cattle were killed at Samhain (November) and the remainder survived as best they could on the grass which had not been grazed during the summer. It is doubtful if much hay was saved until about four hundred years ago. During times of war or invasion, which was a lot of the time, the people would move into the woods and mountains with their cattle and live on milk products supplemented by blood drawn from their animals and meat from an odd slaughtered animal.

During Elizabethan times, a policy adopted by the English of burning the corn and slaughtering the cattle caused widespread famine in Munster. The use of the potato, said to have been introduced by Sir Walter Raleigh, about

the year 1800, had become general by the time of the Williamite war in 1690. The potato crop could not be easily destroyed by an enemy and the Williamite war did not cause the widespread famine associated with earlier wars. Tommy McGrath told me that the Conways had a tradition that the first Conway in Gurtaderra was a Jacobite soldier who stayed on after the defeat of the Irish.

The population of Clare had been seriously reduced during the Elizabethan and Cromwellian wars and was less than 17,000 according to Petty's census of 1659. With the coming of peace after the final conquest by William and with the help of the potato which enabled a family to live on a small farm of rather poor land, the population increased rapidly despite alien rule and high rents and tithes. Without its natural leaders and deprived of education by the Penal laws, Ireland did not develop like other European countries. The land was the only source of a living and the farms got smaller and the standard of living lower as the population got greater and rents higher until the final disaster of the famine.

In the 1825 Tithe book, there were thirty-two names, presumably heads of families and landholders, in Gurtaderra. In the 1841 census, there were sixty houses and three hundred and twenty-one people. The standard of living must have been extremely low. Until the recent introduction of artificial manure, there was very little upland hay in

Gurtaderra and it is doubtful if enough hay could have been grown to feed sixty cows, i.e. one per family in 1841. Indeed, many families must not have had even one cow. It is doubtful if there was any horse in Gurtaderra in the years before the famine, all the tillage was done with the spade and shovel, the potatoes were sown in ridges about three feet wide, and oats in wider ridges. My father told me that his grandfather, Tom Moloney, was the first to have a plough in Gurtaderra. It is not easy to see how they made money to pay rent and tithes in those times. Most of the time, cattle were very cheap and it was the custom to kill bull calves soon after birth. The pig and butter must have been the main source of income. The present fences were built mainly from 1750 to the famine years. Before that, the only fence was one around a couple of acres about the house in which the tillage was done. In the first Ordinance Survey Map of 1839 what appears to be the infield fence about Horans is shown. They would appear to have been the last to change over from the old infield-outfield system. During the latter half of the last century, the use of the horse and plough became general. In my young days, there was at least one horse on each farm. The man with one horse joined with a neighbour for ploughing and mowing. It was called "cooring". Every farm grew potatoes, oats and cabbage and most grew mangolds and turnips as well. Mangolds and turnips were not grown in Gurtaderra before the famine. In addition to the tillage done by horses, each house had a haggard in which early potatoes and cabbage were sown with the spade. The haggard

was tilled year after year. This continued right up to and for a few years after World war II. The first mowing machine was used in Gurtaderra in the last years of the last century and by 1920 practically every farm had a horse drawn machine, At present 1978 there are only a few horses in Gurtaderra.

In pre-famine times, the cow and the pig often lived in the house with the family and in some houses this continued much later. JohnHoran (Nevelles) remembered a cow in McMahons (the Burners) kitchen. The custom of keeping hens in the kitchen on a roost over the door did not fully die out until a hundred years ago, and a sow with young bonhams was brought into the kitchen for the first week or fortnight, especially in winter up to about fifty years ago.

An orphan lamb or a Bonham that had no teat (a murt) was often reared in the kitchen. In my young days, there were hens, geese, ducks, turkeys, pigs, goats, a donkey and a horse in addition to cows and cattle on practically all farms. Many farms kept a few sheep also.

The keeping of hens, geese, turkeys, goats, donkeys and later pigs began to die out after World War II and today 1978, cows, cattle and perhaps a few sheep are the only animals kept. During World War II and up to about 1968, Tom Nugent, Tommy Horan, Tom Noonan, Bill McGrath and James Bugler sent milk to the Creamery. At present 1978, farms in Gurtaderra consist almost entirely of keeping cattle, with sheep on a few farms.

Artificial manure and lime are now used and many more cattle can be kept than in the past.

The Gurtaderra farmer has escaped from his traditional role

producing cheap food for England and is now, thanks to the E.E.C., well paid for what he produces. Most farms still grow some potatoes and a little cabbage but otherwise there is little tillage. Many traditional skills have died out. The young men of today are not skilled in horsemanship or in the use of the spade and scythe. The arts of thatching and basket weaving have died out and churning and butter-making which were very important up to a few years before World War II are now things of the past. While practically everyone can drive a car or tractor, the standard of mechanical knowledge is not very high and in general machinery is not well looked after. Except that more manure is used and, therefore, there is more grass and hay, the system of cattle raising used differs little from that of our grandfathers time. Unlike most of Europe, the car and tractor came to Gurtaderra before the bathroom and many houses are still without running water. It is to be hoped that this situation will be remedied in the next few years.

There is no limestone in Gurtaderra and the advantage of liming the land seems to have been recognised fairly early. I remember lime being burned by my father, by Tom Noonan and Bill McGrath. There is an old limekiln or the ruins of a limekiln on most farms. I doubt, however if lime was burned before the famine or if the horses and carts would be available to draw the limestone from Bodyke or Coolreagh. Guano, the dried droppings of seabirds imported from South America and slag, a phosphatic by-product of the iron foundries began to be used about the beginning of this century.

The use of ground limestone which was subsidised by Marshall aid became general after World War II but more lime could be profitably used, as Gortaderra has a mainly acid soil. The hay was cut by scythes up to the early years of this century. The Burner, Michael McMahon, is said to have been able to cut an Irish acre of hay in a day. He was said to "have the edge", i.e., he was skillful at putting a good edge on the scythe. Oats were cut with the reaping hook up to the beginning of this century. John Horan (Nevilles) remembered seeing querns used. I remember a quern stone lying in Paid McMahon's yard and in Bill McGrath's yard. Corn was threshed with the flail up to World War I, or scutched, i.e., beat the sheaf on a stone if the straw was required for thatching. The horse powered threshing machines were replaced by a stationery engine mounted on a cart in the 1920s. The first cement floors were put in in the 1880s. I remember do bwee floors in some houses. The first slate roofs were put on in the 1880s. The last thatched roof, John Horans (Nevilles) was replaced in 1960.

I remember seeing Matt Moroney's wife and Johnny Haron's wife carding and spinning wool at Johnny Harons about sixty years ago.

THE FAMINE

There are no traditions of actual deaths from hunger in Gurtaderra during the famine, but as there were sixty houses and 321 people in 1841 and only forty six houses and 235 people in 1851, it must have had a considerable effect, even though it was not as great as in Currakyle and Turkenagh..

Currakyle had 73 houses and 383 people in 1841 and only 28 houses and 153 people in 1851.

Turkenagh had 30 houses and 142 people in 1841 and 6 houses and 25 people in 1851.

Cappacannaun had 22 houses and 131 people in 1841 and 5 houses and 34 people in 1851.

Very little about the famine has survived in the folklore of the people and indeed, it would appear that the survivors did not wish to talk about it and passed on very little to their descendants.

I did, however, hear the following about a happening in a neighbouring town's land. Food was running short with this family of father, mother and one child. They realized that there was no hope they could all survive as they the only food they had was a drop the drop of milk their one old cow gave. They decided to let the child die, reasoning that the child would die anyway, if they died, and that perhaps God would give them other children. Food running shorter still the father died and only the mother survived .

She was more or less ostracized by the neighbours who held that should have died first rather than let the child die.

Tommy McGrath told me that his uncle Martin Taid McMahan told him that people were buried in haggards in Curragh as the survivors could not bring them to the graveyard.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE

It is doubtful if any English was spoken in Gurtaderra before the Famine but it became the spoken language of the people very quickly after that and in forty or fifty years only a few old people could speak Irish. I remember Ann Mungavin (No. 3 in the 1901 census) telling a story about a Missioner who could speak only English calling at Biddy Harons (No. 4 in the 1901 Census) and the problem hearing her father-in-law's confession caused, as he had no English. Quite a few of the fields still have Irish names. Among those which I remember are Garringlock, Roscrea and Portac Beg in Tom Nugent's place, The Drummins, The Ard, The Thanee, The Cloher, Aillanior Uisce and Garrylucra in Joe Mungavin's place, Culraheen in Tommy Haron's place, Poulinawanas in Lil Noonan's place, the Glenn Uacter in Guilfoyle's place and the 'Muing', a bog in Raywilla near the Asnas where the Guilfoyles, McGraths, Mungavins, Riordans and McManons cut turf up to about 40 years ago.

A number of Irish words passed into the English of the people, especially words that had no convenient one word translation in English, e.g. gawaul - the amount of hay that a man could carry in his two arms; barth - the amount of hay tied up with a rope that a man could carry on his back; an oxtar of hay - the amount of hay that a man could carry in one arm; a liar - the amount of corn that could be carried in the two cupped hands; grugawn - five or six .

sods of turf stood on end with two or three on top;
poulmarav - the hole left in a bog when turf was cut, a
cutaway bog; ciarawn - a part of a broken sod of turf;
gawlog - a forked stick.

"Do be" and "does be" were used in an attempt to convey
the sense of the Irish present habitual tense.

I remember Patsy O'Brien from Coolagoree, Paid Tuohy
from the "back of the hill" and the Soldier Cooney from
Turkenagh talking in Irish outside Cloonusker chapel
after Mass.