

O'CALLAGHAN WESTROPP PAPERS

Some time ago the East Clare Heritage Group acquired a collection of miscellaneous papers and documents relating to the O'Callaghan-Westropp estate, Lismehane (Maryfort), Tulla, Co. Clare. The papers range in date from about the 1770's to the 1960's, but deal mainly with the period from 1880 to the turn of the century. They were purchased from a private collector, Mr Coughlan, in Limerick.

Under Cromwell, the O'Callaghans had forfeited their lands in Co Cork and had, like many other Irish landowners, been transplanted west of the Shannon to Co. Clare. They succeeded in retaining possession of their Clare lands and conformed to the established Church. O'Callaghan's Mills takes its name from the family. In the 1880's the O'Callaghan heir, as a condition of inheriting the nearby estate of his Westropp uncle at Fortanne, took the name Westropp, and was known henceforth as O'Callaghan-Westropp.

The Land League movement, from its inception in 1879, was taken up strongly in Clare and particularly around Bodyke, on the O'Callaghan-Westropp estates. Colonel John O'Callaghan offered determined resistance to the efforts of his tenants, and in 1881 some proposed evictions there led to the collision known locally as the "Battle of Bodyke". Further trouble erupted with the onset of the Plan of Campaign and the ensuing evictions of 1887. Again, in 1893-4, another round of evictions gave rise to renewed disturbances. These events are recounted in Mr John S Kelly's book, "The Bodyke Evictions", published in 1987.

The estates were finally bought out in 1909, after which the O'Callaghan-Westropp continued to farm what remained of their property. Col John O'Callaghan (1829-1912) commanded the Clare Royal Garrison Artillery (Millitia). His son, Col. George O'Callaghan-Westropp (1864-1944) exercised the same command, was a member of the Royal Commission on Militia and Volunteers 1903-4, was an aide-de-camp to three successive British monarchs, member of the Irish Free State senate 1921-22, president of the Clare Farmers' Association in the early 1920's, and President of the Irish Farmers' Union 1926. His son, Conor J O'Callaghan-Westropp, was active as a Council member of the National Farmers' Association (predecessor of the IFA) in the 1950's.

The estate papers acquired include various legal documents - leases, marriage settlements etc - relating to lands and property which at different times, by inheritance or marriage, passed through the hands of the family between about 1770 and 1870. It is interesting to observe the complicated arrangements which were

deemed necessary in order to make financial provision for widows and heirs of the landed gentry mortgaging of lands and houses, appointment of trustees, taking out of insurance policies, safeguards against failure to keep up insurance premiums etc - all expressed in the infinite repetitions and circumlocutions of legal jargon. Frequently the effect of a massive page of vellum can be boiled down, in layman's language, to a couple of short sentences. Also included in the deeds are a number of brief leases to individual tenants, in standard form, mostly dating from the 1830's, and usually for a term of 21 years of the lives of three named persons.

Papers which cast light on the running of the estate include farm accounts (1860-77), records of the numerous grades of domestic servants employed and the wages paid to each (1891-1940), cash book (1895-1906), weekly wages of farm workers (1911-1915), and a visitors' book (various periods between 1896 and 1942); a written book of recipes, 1852, and notes on the rearing of poultry, 1930.

Miscellaneous receipts deal with income tax, head rents, quit rents, tithes, rates (including tenants' receipts), insurance premiums etc. Accounts are furnished by solicitors, and by estate agents for rents collected and transmitted. Notes from time to time record lists of tenants, rents, arrears, evictions, outrages (poisoning of cattle in the 1890's).

Reflecting the stormy history of the estate, there are considerable numbers of legal forms about summonses for non-payment of rent, eviction notices, and details of last-minute clearances of arrears.

There are occasional letters from tenants seeking a reduction of rent, because of bad weather or poor prices at fairs, or appeals for more time to discharge arrears.

A couple of documents, from the 1830's and 1850's, relate to proposals by English entrepreneurs to raise minerals on the estate; one company was entitled the Milltown Silver Lead Mining Company. Such ventures were not uncommon at this period; later in the century Parnell made similar efforts to promote mining in Wicklow.

A couple of hundred letters of miscellaneous correspondence are included in the collection, some of them routine social items, invitations, acknowledgements, thanks, congratulations, condolences ("mourning" stationery and envelopes were much in evidence). Other letters deal with wills, legacies and various financial arrangements. Col. J. O'Callaghan writes to his agent, R. Stacpoole, 11 Sep 1879: "Dear DickPS I give you the straight tip on the Coolreagh side because of Mr. P. Hogan he is a second

Parnell in this quarter if not a still greater Jesuitical firebrand !!!! Burn this. J. O'C".

In 1896, it appears, a certain Ernest Brown, of Ballinacurra House, Limerick was the victim of an attack, and received a couple of letters of congratulation on his escape. One letter said - "Congratulations on providential escape from the murderous intention of the Wretches who attacked you and which I was so very sorry to read of in today's Irish Times. I fear that owing to ?.... you were not able to inflict any injury to them.... I am truly glad to believe that you did not receive any yourself". The other ran "My dear Brown, More power to you yer Sowl. Shoot hell out of the bastards. Danm glad they missed you PS. I am sorry you were not loaded with buckshot".

In 1909 a correspondent, evidently a military man, writes to congratulate Col. George O'Callaghan-Westropp on the smart turn-out of (presumably) the East-Clare Regiment on some military occasion at Clonmel ...". It is a thousand pities that such fine material is not to be used to the full... I most thoroughly agree with you that the only hope for the existence of the Empire is compulsory service...".

Well-known names crop up occasionally, Joseph Devlin MP("Wee Joe"), James Craig (the future Lord Craigavon), George Wyndham MP, of the Wyndham Land Act. The latter writes to the Colonel in 1912"... Thanks largely to your letter.... I hope that I do realise the new problem, and danger, in the large area - one-third of Ireland - Over which the new Congested Districts Board presides.....Our position - which I define in a chapter I have written for Carson's book - is clear and will be maintained. The Unionist Party stands by the policy of the Land Act of 1903. If we take office we will carry out the objects of that policy and scrap the follies of Birrell's Act of 1909. That Act was dictated by Dillon. It practically repealed the Act of 1903. I say this unreservedly on the authority of all Unionist Leaders after consultation with our financial expert on "Ways and Means". It can be done and we mean to do it".

In the 1902's, there are some papers dealing with agricultural matters, including great numbers of signatures to a petition by Clare farmers to Dail Eireann in 1927, representing that "the inhabitants aforesaid were and are grievously impoverished by the disturbed state of the County and of its environs between the years 1919 and 1923, by interference with fairs, markets and means of communication, and by industrial unrest elsewhere, by high National and Local Taxation and by the great Agricultural Depression of 1921 onwards. That, owing to the prolonged rain fall in the years 1923 and 1924, vast numbers of cattle and sheep died from Liver Fluke, Tuberculosis and other obscure diseases, and their owners were often too poor to replace them, and in consequence are becoming unable to meet their obligations, to the great peril of this County and of its Services. Your petitioners pray that an official census of the numbers and value of the Live Stock which died between 1st October, 1923, and 30th April, 1925, be forthwith taken".

Further papers from the 1950's relate to Mr Conor O'Callaghan-Westropp's involvement with agricultural organisations at that time.



Thomas Johnson Westropp was the son of John Westropp of Attelia, Co. Limerick, by his second wife Charlotte Louisa Whitehead of Uplands Hall Lancashire whom he married in 1856. Thomas was born on the 16th August 1860 at Tulla, Co. Clare. He was reared at the family home in Attyflin and was educated at Trinity College Dublin where he obtained an M.A. in 1885. He was a noted antiquarian and visited many archaeological sites throughout Ireland. He prepared notes and sketches on Tombs, Forts, Churches and a wide variety of other monuments and historical sites. Most of his published material is available here, and is a prime source for local historians. He died unmarried in 1922.

In August 1969 Mr O'Callaghan-Westropp and his wife inserted a notice in the Irish Times that, in view of the conduct of Protestants in Northern Ireland, they no longer wished to be regarded as Protestants. This brought forth a mass of correspondence, especially from Northern Protestants, some more in sorrow than in anger, others abusive, some signed, others anonymous, accusing him of ignorance of the facts of the situation, and forwarding pamphlets and statements to enlighten him.

The interest of Mr Thomas J Westropp, at the turn of the century and later, in antiquities, explains the presence among the papers of numbers of issues of learned journal and articles therefrom, notably a wideranging study by Mr Westropp of the ring-forts of Clare and Limerick.

Numbers of the estate papers appear to have suffered slight fire damage but are nevertheless generally legible.

Some of the most interesting material in the papers has no direct connection with the O'Callaghan-Westropp estate: it is entitled "Newspaper scraps relating to the Scariff Union, County of Clare, from 1842 to 1851, compiled by Theobalds XIV Lord Dunboyne" (who was presumably some family connection). While many of the cuttings, from the "Limerick Chronicle", consist of advertisements and notices (invitations to tender for the

supply of food, clothing etc; advertising of staff vacancies; striking of rates), they do give indications of the truly appalling conditions which seem to have prevailed in the area during the Famine. An index of the region covered by the Union is given by an advertisement of 4 November 1848 for the supply of Indian Meal, per ton, to the outdoor relief depots of Scariff, Clonrush, Feakle, Killaloe, Kilnoe, Killuran, Mountshannon, O'Gonnelloe, Tulla and Woodford.

"The most munificent act we have yet to record is, the donation of 200, on Christmas-eve, by Thomas Wentworth Beaumont Esq, of Britton-hall, Yorkshire, to Philip Reade Esq of Woodparks, in aid of a private fund established by this gentleman, for the relief of the very distressed neighbourhood in which he resides; and it is gratifying to record, that not a single case of outrage or robbery has occurred within his parish of InnisCealtra, though many are suffering extreme privation. Mr Reade, independent of his annual New Year's dinner, has, since October, given a daily dinner to his numerous workpeople, and to this circumstance, combined with his constant efforts to relieve the worst cases of destitution around him, may be attributed the singular fact, that turnips and several pits of potatoes, have remained safely in the fields, uninjured and unprotected. Not a shilling has, as yet, been subscribed by any of the proprietors, to assist in relieving the misery on their own estates in this district of Galway. At Derrygoolen, on the estate of the Marquess of Clanricarde, a man of the name of Burke, with 4 children, was lying in fever, in a wretched hovel - 5 wretches came to the house, and notwithstanding the entreaties of the wife, robbed the family of all they possessed, taking away the blankets off the people in fever, and even the vinegar, and a small portion of meat!! The revolting case was brought before the bench of magistrates at Woodford, and such is the fearful state of misery, that the miserable wife declined to identify even the property". (06-01-1847) "The letter of Ralph P Sheppard, Scariff, is replete with libellous matter - therefore inadmissible - one fact however is stated - that within 13 weeks upwards of 200 died in the Workhouse and some days no less than a dozen deaths". (06-01-1847). - "The number of deaths in the Scariff workhouse, arising from fever, amounts to a frightful extent..." (09-01-1847) - "In Mountshannon-daly, and its vicinity, the distress is represented as very great, aggravated by contagion, introduced from the Scariff workhouse, by persons returning, and bringing with them their children, only partially recovered from the malady raging there. In this district the famishing population amount to 4,000, 400 of whom are Protestants of the Established Church! (16-01-1847). - "... the extremely difficult case of Scariff, Co. Clare, almost the very worst in Ireland..." (10-05-1848) - "Scariff Union continues in a deplorable condition. Disease is yet raging among the paupers.

Dr Smyth, who was lately sent down from Dublin by the Board of Health, has fallen a victim to fever. He died on Thursday night, and the Master of the Workhouse, who maintained his post in the midst of all the devastation wrought by disease, has vacated his situation." (24-05-1848) - "On Friday a pauper of weak

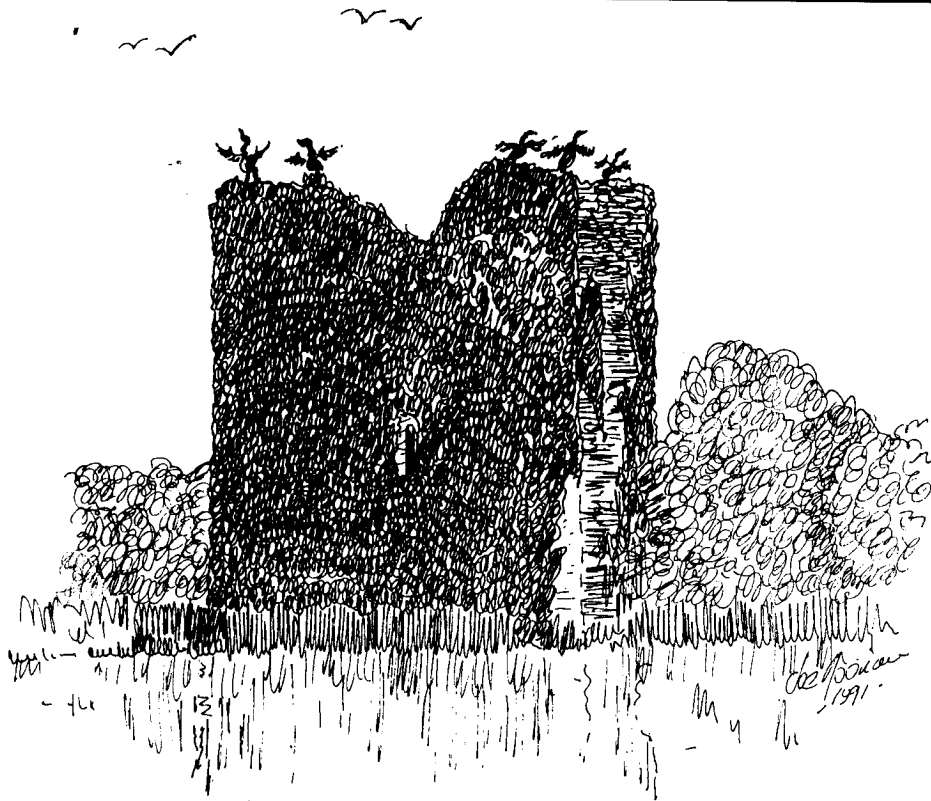
intellect named James Sheehan, was discharged from Scariff workhouse, where he had been in hospital - he asked for admittance into one house, and was refused, being considered in fever. He was found next morning at the side of a stream, quite dead! The coroner having been sent for, declined attending, and as there was no magistrate in the neighbourhood at home, the Police constable at Mountshannon held an inquiry, and the above facts were proved. It appeared the man had got a shilling on leaving the workhouse, but his intellect was so weak that he did not know the value of coins" (03-06-1848).

"Scariff Union has now the unenviable distinction of being the most wretched and destitute in the south of Ireland. The present Inspecting Officer of Skibbereen, who had been administering the poor law provisions in Scariff, considers his removal a release, as however great the destitution in Skibbereen, it was almost nothing compared to the lamentable conditions in the union of Scariff."(09-05-1849) - The Evening Packet publishes the following from a correspondent:- "Scariff, June 4, 1849. As I never see in any of the papers one word about the Scariff Union, I will now give you a slight description of it. By the census taken in 1841, the population of this union was 53,563, and the value of it 55,806. We have now 18,887 on outdoor relief, and 1,506 in the workhouses. You must know we have in addition to the house, originally built (which contains 800 persons), eight auxillary ones, all in good order. We have about 400 either sick or aged, who literally came in to die.Really the misery here is awful, no one can comprehend it except those who witness it. There have been several instances of persons of both sexes being brought into the fever hospital, quite naked, and when recovered they have not clothes to go out, so must be clad by the union. All sorts of tricks are practiced to try and get out door relief, such as pretending to be widows, and borrowing children to swell the number of their families. Much of the ground is waste. Many tenants, after sowing corn and planting potatoes, surrender their farms to entitle them to outdoor relief. Half the gentry are smashed; in fact, if something is not done, and that speedily, the country is gone. Four poor persons went to lodge in the electoral division of Feakle lately, they died of cholera, and the fellow in whose house they lodged procured coffins from the relieving officers in which he put them and laid them on the road side; there they remained for four days before being interred. A horrible murder took place near this the other day: an old woman had a bit of land which she sold for one pound, in order to entitle her to out-door relief. On the next day she was to surrender the possession, but that night she was murdered. Her son and his wife lived with her; they are both now in gaol, and there is no doubt of the murder having been committed by them, to get the pound and prevent the surrender of the ground! All ties between parents and children are totally snapped asunder. From morning 'till night I am taken up either in the workhouse or holding boards in out-stations; in fact I would rather be one of your devils than a vice-guardian in such a place as this. I know a gentleman who was lately worth 1,500, now living on India meal - Little does England know of

the state of the union of Scariff." (09-06-1849) - "The workhouse, already overcrowded, is continually beset by those unhappy objects endeavouring to gain admission, many of whom remain whole nights of this most inclement weather under the surrounding walls, without other shelter. From this has resulted fever and various infectious diseases, as there is no change of clothes even for those admitted; and their rags, steaming with wet, have spread malaria in the probationary wards, 23 persons being seized with fever on one night last week; and by the report of Doctor Williams there has been frequently neither bread, milk, nor even light for the sick in hospital, nor a change of clothing, and some of the sick are even without shirts at this moment. The In-door Relief - The inmates, amounting to 2,474 are all, except the sick before referred to and the children, totally without milk, and their sole food is dry bread or stirabout for the last six weeks; their clothing is utterly deficient, and that which was provided for them has been seized and sold by the sheriff, and carried off on Friday last to pay the debts of one of the contractors;

and a number of the sheriff's officers still remain in the possession of the workhouse and all its auxiliaries a heavy expense to the union, and this board cannot know the moment that every article may be disposed of, and the entire body of paupers left without a bed to lie on. The contractors for meal too refuse further supplies without payment, which we cannot give;.....We refrain from going into further and harrowing details. It is sufficient to state that deaths are daily occurring from starvation, and that in whatever view we consider the duties which the law imposes on us, we feel the utter inability of our discharging them under present circumstances...." (23-02-1850) - "We understand that no death has occurred in the Scariff workhouse or its auxiliaries from the 10th December to the 24th, a period of fourteen days. This fact is highly creditable to those in immediate attendance on the poor of the institution, and must be gratifying to the feelings of the chairman and Board of Guardians of that union".

Tom Gorman



CORMORANTS DRYING THEIR WINGS ON THE PARAPET OF SIMON'S CASTLE IN SCARIFF BAY.

A local character, Fintan Ducey, has left many a gullible tourist bewildered with his explanation of this well known spectacle.

Fintan informs the curious that cormorants have only one gut. They feed almost exclusively on small fish and in particular slippery eels. After having their lunch, they retire to Simon' Castle and pose in this unusual fashion in an effort to hold on to their hard earned meal.