

HISTORIC SITES: HEDGE SCHOOL (cont'd.)

over which one passes on entering the town from the east. The arch is the one nearest the village.

DISTINGUISHED PERSONALITIES; Sir William & Oscar Wilde:

Sir William Wilde spent his youth & a great deal of his life on the south-eastern shore of Loch Corrib, where, in 1865, he built Moytura House. Amongst his many celebrated works, his "Loch Corrib" is outstanding as a monumental, but often historically inaccurate, guide to this part of the West. The house is a plain though handsome residence, hardly distinctive in style. He chose the name to commemorate the great pre-Christian Moytura Battle, which he firmly believed to have taken place within view almost of the site selected for his dwelling. "This house", as he himself says, "commands a magnificent prospect to the West, south & east, & can be seen from most parts of the middle lake." It is approached by a long avenue, now much neglected, leading from the right side of the Cong-Cross road, about 2 mls from Cong. Sir William's intertwined initials, & the date, 1865, are carved in a small circular plaque over the front of the house. Here, too, Oscar Wilde, & undoubtedly, his mother, "Speranza" lived for a time. Oscar accompanied his father on many of his archaeological expeditions in the distr., as Sir William mentions in his book.

The house is now owned by Mr. Thunder, who permits visitors to see it, without charge. A stand for flowers, or plants, at the front of the house, is said to have been made in remembrance of a daughter of Sir William's.

In a field at the back of the house is a peculiar tower of rough stones - windmill shaped. This is probably the tower which Wilde said he had built on an ancient fort called Caher Gearoid.

Captain Boycott: This notorious gentleman lived at Loch Mask House now occupied by Mr. Patrick Daly. The house, a sizeable square-fronted bldg., stands beside Loch Mask Castle, on the S.E. shore of the lake & about 3 1/2 mls. N. of Cong. It is a solid stone bldg without any pretensions to architectural beauty or interest, & is approached by a long avenue. It was erected early in the 19th centy by the Elwoods of Strandhill area.

Boycott was agent for the Earls of Erne & Kilmaine, & the harshness with which he treated the poor tenants & others under his charge soon earned for him the hatred of all with whom he came in contact in the course of his duties.

In the summer of 1880, Parnell propounded his policy for the complete isolation of rack-renters, brutish landlords, land-grabbers & others of that class who were persecuting the peasantry of the country. In the following October, the plan was put into effect against Boycott & the staunch tenants simultaneously took up a determined stand against the petty tyrants, ignoring his ejection processes & threats. Then his groom, Martin Brannigan, left his employment without notice, to be followed immediately by Dick Higgins the herd, his cock, maids, workmen & all others who tended the house & lands or were in any way engaged in helping to run the huge property. Immediately too, he found it impossible to get a local farrier to shoe his horses & he could procure no goods, food, or other requirements, from shop or store. With amazing spirit & cohesion the people withstood his pleas as they had his bullying threats & soon he was stranded in a state of complete & thorough ostracization.

The rigid attitude of the people was now a subject of discussion all over the country & newspaper headlines drew public attention in other countries also to the situation & developments. Lord Erne sent 40 "Orange" workers from the north of Ireland to aid Boycott in his duties & it was

**DISTINGUISHED PERSONS: Captain Boycott (cont'd.)**

thought necessary too to send a troop of Hussars & two pieces of artillery to protect the unhappy agent & his new staff from the wrath of the local people who were now more determined than ever to see their campaign through to success. The soldiers, however, had no enviable task & they considered their assignment as a demeaning as well as an uncomfortable one, camped as they were in tents in a field near the house.

But the atmosphere was becoming daily more untenable for Boycott & suddenly, one night at dark, he went off to Claremorris - it is said that he went concealed in a sack on an ass cart, though other versions say that he was removed in a Red Cross wagon with an escort. Military & imported workmen relinquished their unpleasant tasks on the very next day & left immediately.

**Redpath:** It is related that an American journalist named Redpath was, amongst others, in the district at the time for the purpose of having first-hand knowledge of the situation. When dining with the Rev. Fr. O'Malley, P.P., The Neale, he asked the priest if he could suggest a new word to describe Parnell's sensational policy, whereupon Fr. O'Malley promptly supplies the noun-verb "Boycott". The word was included in Redpath's report & was speedily established in the English vocabulary.

**George MacNamara:** Some few yards W. of the cloisters of Cong Abbey is the former home of George MacNamara, famous 18th century figure in these parts. This fine house was described by Bishop Pococke in 1770 as the most delightfully situated residence he had seen in the course of his travels. It stands among the trees near the abbey & with a pretty stream at one side. A Mr. Lambert acquired the property some time after MacNamara's death & to him is due the newer front in the house & the cut-stone mullioned windows. Sir Benj. Guinness bought Lambert's interests in 1855 & the house fell into ruin from disuse.

MacNamara was born in 1690 in Co. Clare (Cratloe?), and, about the year 1740, he secured for himself Cong Abbey & lands. As a Catholic, & thereby prevented by the Penal Laws from owning property of any value, he had to have the property bought for him in trust by his brother-in-law, Stephen Creagh Butler, a Protestant. A talented man, of superb physique & handsome mien, MacNamara's name descends to us in legend & tradition as that of a great & gallant man, a Robin-Hood of the Irish who risked his life & his all on many occasions to ease the burden of the oppressed peasantry. He was an exceptionally good shot & was reputed to be one of the finest horsemen in the country. In a very practical way he set about his self-appointed task of aiding his poor & downtrodden countrymen & whenever an account came of eviction or other ill-treatment, he was off immediately to raid & rob the wrongdoer or some other more convenient malefactor - distributing the spoil equitably amongst the deserving.

That he really existed, & was so chivalrous & redoubtable a character as present day belief upholds, is strongly supported by sound tradition. A book was written about him by a Patrick Higgins. Mr. Peter Foy of Cong has a small broken anvil which, he earnestly insists, was used by MacNamara who shod his own horses & on which he is said to have made master keys & other implements to be used in his escapades. He was a friend of the people & they aided him when possible & helped to cloak his activities from those who would apprehend him. His closest friend & confident was Donal Roe O'Nolan, a close co-operator in many of his exploits. His horse, Venus, is likened to the better-known "Black Bess" of Turpin & was reserved always for her owner's clever operations! When he rode to

**DISTINGUISHED PERSONS: George MacNamara (cont'd.)**

the hunt, as he seems to have done regularly, he used other horses. Donal was the agent through whom he quietly distributed money & necessities to those most requiring them. At home, he produced his own beer, fruit, bread & wines & he raised beef & operated his own fishery - all of which were meted out to the poor with open-handed generosity..

MacNamara is buried in the church of the ruined Abbey of Cong.

**HOUSES: Lord Abbot Prendergast:**

At Abbotstown, on Mr. Gardiner's lands, within a few hundred yds of Moytura House, is a long, shallow, vaulted stone bldg which was resided in by the Abbots of Cong during times of persecution. This is now a cattle shed. Nearby is a ruined small house, once the abode of the last Lord Abbot Prendergast who died in 1829 & was buried in the old abbey. Born in 1741 & educated at the great Jesuit establishment, St. Omer's, he lived through the reign of four Kings George. He appears in popular legends as a dignified kindly man of culture.

General George Blake: General George Blake, a member of the Garracloone (Cross) family, rode with 24 men to aid the French General, Humbert, when the latter arrived with his invading army at Killala in 1798. Participating in the successes of the insurgents & invaders, Blake took part in the disastrous Battle of Ballinamuck, only to disappear mysteriously, never to be seen or heard of again. He had commanded his personal servant, John Nevin, to remain in charge of both their horses until he himself should return from some desperate affray or sally. Nevin waited all day & long through the night, but his master & leader did not return, & so he rode home alone. The mystery of Blake's disappearance was never solved.

Killeen's: At the teacher's residence, beside the school-house at Cong, many of the most famous personalities of the 1916 Rising were accustomed to gather in the early days of the national resurgence. Killeen, the teacher, & his family were all ardent enthusiasts & trusted friends of the leaders. Pearse, Griffith & Rooney, the "Poet of the Revolution", were amongst those who were welcomed here. Indeed, the village of Cong seems to have been a stronghold of Sinn Fein ideals & many of the villagers can relate personal contact with the patriot leaders: Mr. Peter Foy has in his possession some historic letters written by Rooney to Robert Foy.

Carlisle Arms Hotel: Pearse stayed often at the Carlisle Arms Hotel, during the first few years of this century & his name, written in Irish with a firm hand, appears under different dates, 1904 etc., with those of other famous men & notabilities. Michael Davitt & his son, Michael, An tAthair T. MacRuadhraí, Ardmhaca (now Cardinal?), Stephen Gwynn, Erskine Childers & his wife, Robert C. Barton, Count Plunkett, The MacGlinchey of the Reeks, & a long list of other personalities of Ireland, U.S.A., Canada, England, France, Germany, New Zealand & other countries, provides interesting study in the old visitors' book preserved by Mr. Corcoran, who operated this hotel (now closed).

C.D.D. MacLagan: Mr. MacLagan has many claims for inclusion under this head - not that he is aware that he is the subject of a paragraph in this report, since he is a retiring person. Cyril David Dalrymple MacLagan, now 86 years of age, is the son of a former Archbishop of York, the dignitary who placed the crown on the head of Queen Mary, & was born in Scotland.

In early life he co-operated with his father in hymn-writing &, at an early age, he engaged in farming in Canada. He also lived in America for some time before returning to England. Forty years ago he started visiting Ireland and

DISTINGUISHED PERSONALITIES: C.D.D. MacLagan (cont'd.)

used to spend six months in the country, fishing & shooting, mostly, if not altogether, in Connemara. At the end of fifteen years, of which one half was spent in Ireland & the other in England, he took up permanent residence in the West. His guest house, which he had established in Connemara, was abandoned during the troubled times in this country & for the past 25 years he has resided permanently with the Ryan family, who now operate Ryan's Hotel, Cong.

Mr. MacLagan, even though 86 years, fishes every day during the season on Loch Corrib, spending 8 long hours in the boat, wet weather & fine. He has a log book recording his catches for every day in all those years - the entries in that log would be the envy of the proudest angler, including, as they do, trout over 15 lbs in weight & monster salmon & pike. He did some shooting even last year & is determined to take out the gun again next autumn. Mr. MacLagan has been a well-known popular figure in Cong & Connemara for nearly half-a-century &, even to those who know him long, is yet a subject for wonder as he marches firmly to & from his boat each day dressed in the most outlandish & unmodish fishing garb.

**MANSIONS:** Ashford Castle. Ashford House, now Ashford Castle, formerly family residence of the Earl of Oranmore & Browne, then purchased & extended by the Guinness family - of porter fame - was acquired by Mr. Noel Huggard in 1938 & now ranks as one of the finest provincial hotels in the country. By virtue of its situation alone this must surely be considered one of the most delightfully-placed hotels imaginable. It stands in its own lovely heavily-timbered grounds of about 350 acres, amidst smooth lawns & parkland watered by fast-running streams, overlooking the great islet-studded Loch Corrib which spreads a long extended arm westwards under the long range of tall colourful mountains of the Joyce Country.

The name Ashford is only a modern English name that is none too original & that certainly is not too appropriate, despite the profusion of fine ash trees in the vicinity, in a locality where the ancient Irish had already familiarised many soft, musical & invariably apt place-names. The old name for Ashford is Ceapach Corcog, the "Market Garden of the Beehives"; possibly the monks of Cong Abbey were responsible for this name which is still preserved in the name of the townland, Cappacorcoge.

The Oranmore & Browne family chose this delectable spot on which to erect a shooting lodge, at the middle of the 18th century. The lodge was built after the style of a French chateau & when, a hundred years later, Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness bought the lodge & property in the Encumbered Estates Court, he commenced a series of extensions & improvements to both house & grounds which was pursued on a much larger scale by his son & heir, Lord Ardilaun. Ardilaun, who took his title from a small wooded island at Lough Corrib that stands close to the shore at the W. side of the castle, never won the hearts of his tenants & poorer neighbours, & would appear to have been a selfish & proud man. He built a monument of dressed limestone & granite & well ordered lawns & avenues & vast waving plantations, in which his might & wealth would be reflected. His father's name is still held in high regard by the older people, but there are few who had contact with his methods in these parts who sincerely utter a word of affectionate remembrance of Lord Ardilaun himself. Nevertheless, he worked wonders in rapidly developing the property which he had inherited & he set about linking up the demesnes of Ashford, Strandhill, Ross Hill & Ballykine, all of which his father had previously acquired, by means of splendid drives, avenues & tunnels, so that he could traverse the entire huge estate without even crossing a public road. Where a public road or a river ran through his lands, he constructed a bridge or tunnel that would give him uninterrupted access