



# ACAI NEWSLETTER

No. 44 Apr./May. 2011

## ASSOCIATION OF CHURCH ARCHIVISTS IRELAND

### Contents

|  |               |
|--|---------------|
| <b>Gentle Readers:</b>                               | <b>1</b>      |
| <i>Dominique Horgan</i>                              |               |
| <br>   |               |
| <b>Columban Central<br/>Archive.</b>                 | <b>2 - 3</b>  |
| <i>Niamh Collins</i>                                 |               |
| <br>   |               |
| <b>Newry Poor Clares</b>                             |               |
| <i>Sr. Joan McAteer</i>                              | <b>4 - 6</b>  |
| <br>   |               |
| <b>Talk at Launch of<br/>Landed Estates Website.</b> |               |
| <i>Catriona Crowe.</i>                               | <b>7 - 8</b>  |
| <br>   |               |
| <b>World Famous Craft.</b>                           |               |
| <i>Teresa Byrne</i>                                  | <b>9 - 10</b> |
| <br>   |               |
| <b>Morpeth and Maynooth</b>                          |               |
| <i>David Kelly, osa</i>                              | <b>10</b>     |
| <br>   |               |
| <b>Items of Information</b>                          |               |
| <i>Niamh Collins</i>                                 | <b>11 -12</b> |

### Gentle Reader,

Greetings to you all from your committee. We had our first meeting in September with a number of newcomers joining the committee. We assigned various responsibilities to members and initiated a new one - Communications Officer, for which Niamh Collins kindly accepted responsibility. The AGM has been fixed for 21 April in All Hallows; some other events have been discussed - more anon.

On a dreary November day like today, I find myself wondering what can I write about that might spur us all into action! First of all I would like to let you know of the success of the Roman Tour of the **Catholic Archives Society**, which a few of our members joined. The Vatican archives and other archives of interest in Rome were on the agenda. On your behalf I congratulate all those involved in its organisation. Perhaps one of our representatives who was present would tell us about it later.

Browsing the internet I have come upon a few interesting items that you might, on another dreary day such as this one, find of interest. The Irish Newspaper Archives boasts the largest on-line database in the world of Irish Newspapers, dating from 1700's - just type in Irish Newspapers. Web Archiving Service (WAS) is another extremely interesting and challenging site. Fiddle around with the site and you will discover that you can attend a 'Webinair' and learn all about it! The introductory video with the site is excellent for information purposes. The Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) is also of interest and it reminds me that we have not made an archival visit to Belfast for some time. Unfortunately PRONI does not seem to open on a Saturday, which is the day most suitable for most of our members. However, we shall keep it in mind.

Another archives curiosity is APENet (Archives Portal Europe), a fairly recently launched online facility of descriptive lists etc (2011) from a number of European National Archives. The site 'Historical Research in Europe' also held my interest in that I could not find any specific entry on Catholic Church archives listed that I could recognise, though the Church of Ireland has many items listed. Perhaps I missed the entries in this massive site. All in all a satisfactory dreary November afternoon!

When you receive this Christmas and its festivities will be in our sights. I wish you all the many blessings and happiness at this wonderfully joyful time of the year.

Sincerely  
Dominique Horgan op  
Chair ACAI

## **The Columban Fathers Central Archive**

I began working as archivist in the Columban Fathers Central Archive in January of this year. The archive had previously been under the care of Pat Crowley in St. Columban's, Grange Rd, Donaghmede, Dublin, and is currently being supervised by Michael Molloy in the Missionary Society of St. Columban's Irish headquarters in St. Columban's, Dalgan Park, Navan, Co. Meath.

The Society of St. Columban is a missionary society with missions in Asia, the Americas, and the South Pacific. The archive forms a detailed and fascinating history of the lives and work of the Columbans, since their foundation in 1916. It consists of the records of Central Administration, as well as the records of the different Regions and Units including: the United States, Australia, China, Philippines, Korea, Burma, Japan, Peru, Chile, Fiji, Pakistan, Taiwan, Brazil, Jamaica, Belize and Britain. Also included in the archive are the papers of significant Columbans including the founders Edward Galvin and John Blowick, and the records of projects associated with the Columbans. The most important of these projects was the Columban Oral History Project, where Columbans were interviewed about their experiences as missionary priests. The transcripts and audio tapes of these interviews are held in the archive.

The records in the archive exist in a variety of formats including: correspondence, accounts, minute books, reports, statistics, diaries, maps, articles, deeds, constitutions, journals, newsletters, newspaper clippings, photographs, and audio-visual material. The archive also contains an extensive film collection which includes early 20<sup>th</sup> century film from China and other Missions Regions, educational films, and a particular treasure: unique footage of President John F. Kennedy's visit to Ireland in 1963.

Four collections relating to the foundation and early years of the Society have been listed so far. These collections are:

- The Central Administration Foundation Collection
- The Galvin Collection
- The China Collection
- The Korea Collection

These collections consist of administrative papers showing the inner workings and day to day running of the Society. In addition to this, the large volume of correspondence and personal accounts provide an insight into the thoughts, impressions and experiences of different members of the Society. In the Foundation Collection a researcher can follow the correspondence from the first kernel of an idea to establish an Irish Missionary Society, through the mounting excitement as this idea gains approval from the Irish Bishops and Rome, to the formal Canonical Erection of the Society and the putting in place of structures, many of which remain today.

In the China and Korea Collections the researcher is given an insight into the administration of a Mission Region as well as the priests' impressions of the mission territories and their work. These impressions of the people, customs, landscape, politics and culture of China and Korea in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century make for fascinating reading. In addition to this, much of the correspondence is intimately concerned with local and international wars and crises such as the occupation of China and Korea by the Japanese, the outbreak of World War

II, the Korean War, the Communist takeover in China, and the expulsion of foreign missionaries. The letters and accounts of Columban priests caught up in these events provide a unique personal viewpoint on the impact and devastation of war on the local population, and the personal toll for the Columbans, with some of their number captured and killed.

In the Galvin Collection, however, despite these dangers and hardships it is interesting that the letters of Edward Galvin, written to his family from China in the 1930s-1950s, rarely mention the upheavals in the country. Instead he is primarily interested in the minute details of family and local news from his home parish in Cork. In a letter to his nephew Donal O'Mahony, dated 23 January 1948, Galvin dedicates only one sentence to describe the dangerous situation in China: 'The reds are still moving around the diocese and most of the priests are either on the run or on the alert', while the rest of the letter is taken up with discussing family news.

The archive holds extensive photographic collections including photographs from all the Mission Regions. One of the more interesting collections is an album of photographs of John M. Fraser. Fraser was a Canadian Missionary priest working in China, who spoke in Maynooth in 1911 and proved a major influence in the foundation of the Society of St. Columban. He later founded the Scarboro Foreign Mission Society. The album contains photographs of scenes from Taichowfu, China, in 1914-1915. These include a stunning landscape, images of Fraser's church and congregation, and scenes from the boys' and girls' schools including Fraser instructing children on the bible and a first communion class. The photographs provide a unique view of a Catholic community in early 20<sup>th</sup> century China.

The rich and varied material held in the Columban Fathers Central Archive should prove of interest not just to those researching Church history, but to researchers in the areas of 20<sup>th</sup> century history, international relations, politics, sociology and family history. The collections are available for consultation in the archives' reading room in Dalgan Park. Access is by appointment only and researchers should contact me using the details below:

**Niamh Collins**  
**Archivist**  
**Columban Fathers Central Archive**  
**Dalgan Park, Navan, Co. Meath**  
**Tel: 046 9098204**  
[niamhcollins@columban.com](mailto:niamhcollins@columban.com)

### **Ursuline Archive**

It was good to read in a recent Irish Catholic newspaper that the Ursuline Sisters have launched a new archive which contains books, documents and artefacts which chart the history of the sisters in Ireland from their acceptance of the invitation from Nano Nagle to join her in her mission of education of the poor in Cork city in 1771 to the present day. Snippets of life from the archive formed the basis of a talk by Margaret Lantry, the professional archivist who was employed to catalogue the contents of the archive. Virginia Teehan of U.C.C spoke on Mary Ryan, the first female professor in Ireland, and her Ursuline education and Dr John Logan of Limerick University reflected on the importance of the archive to historians of today.

The archive will offer insights into life in Cork since 1771 and will be open by appointment. See [www.ursulines.ie](http://www.ursulines.ie)

## Newry Poor Clares

Sr. Joan McAteer

On 9 February 2010 the Abbess of the convent in High Street, Newry closed the gate and departed for the new convent at Ashgrove. This brought to an end 180 years of life for the Sisters of St. Clare in High Street. The convent can trace its origin back 800 years to Assisi where Francis and Clare founded the Franciscan and Poor Clare orders. The Poor Clare order spread quickly over Europe with many foundations. However in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, because of persecutions, any young woman in England or Ireland aspiring to become a nun had to go to the continent, and most went to Flanders. The first recorded profession of an Irish Poor Clare since the dissolution of the monasteries and convents in Ireland in Tudor times, took place in Gravelines in N. France, then the Low Countries in 1629. It was that of a young Wexford lady called Marianne Cheevers. She and some companions later returned to Ireland to establish a Poor Clare monastery for their own nation. It seemed that it was relatively safe and they settled in Ship St. or some would say Cook St. Dublin, close to Merchants Quay. In a short time, however, they were hounded from place to place and lived in various cities including Athlone, Galway, Waterford, Limerick, Wexford and Drogheda. But in spite of wars, expulsions, raids, burnings, persecutions, Cromwellian times and Penal laws, the order was not suppressed and today the Poor Clares is the longest established order of women in Ireland. In Dublin they lived in various areas including Dorset St., North King St., North William St., and we have in our archives handwritten documents from that time, as well as a painting executed by one of the Sisters called Mrs Moloney. It came to Newry with Mother M. Tracey, the foundress and is the only one of its kind to have survived in Poor Clare hands. In 1806 the Dublin sisters were unable to pay their rent and a Mr Denis O'Brien came to their aid and paid the rent for one year. They were nearly forced to disband. However, they were invited by a Miss Maria O'Brien to take over the management of an orphanage and in due course moved to Harold's Cross, Dublin, and that is now the oldest foundation of religious women still in existence in the Archdiocese of Dublin.

**Newry:** In 1829 the Bishop of Dromore, Dr Kelly, in an attempt to alleviate widespread poverty and a great need for catholic education, invited the sisters from Dublin to found a house in Newry. There had been no nuns in the province of Ulster for about 300 years. Mother Michael Tracey and five other sisters travelled to Newry, accompanied by Fr. John Fitzpatrick ADM on Pentecost Sunday 31 May 1830 and they arrived on 2 June – two days on the stagecoach then, a journey of 1½ hours now! Rev. John Gilmour of Rostrevor had been an army chaplain to the British at the Battle of Waterloo and he left £500 to Dr Kelly for charitable purposes. Fr. Gilmour had to reside in France in order to secure this bequest to religion. Just two days after making his will he died and was buried in Bordeaux. Bishop Kelly added £35 from his own scant finances to the bequest and a house was purchased for the nuns. The convent was situated on High St. between the Orange Lodge and the Unitarian Meeting House and grave yard. The area at the back of the house was a barren area with little spots of verdure but the sisters carried buckets of soil and transformed it into beautiful grounds. The townspeople helped as soon as they got to know the work of the sisters.

John Mitchell's father was the Minister in the Unitarian Chapel beside the convent and was most friendly to the sisters. Occasionally, Orange mobs tried to storm the convent gate, and on one occasion after a court case, windows were smashed in the convent and the repairs cost £7. However, in time the sisters were accepted and theirs was the first convent successfully established north of the Boyne since 1690. The population of Newry at the time would have been about 14,000. A temporary chapel was prepared and a committee of catholic citizens was formed to raise funds. Both laity and clergy gave generously from their not over-plentiful resources. The Marquis of Downshire gave £25; and the Earl of Kilmorley gave £10. Mr Thomas Duff, the renowned architect of Newry Cathedral, planned the chapel, cells and schools with speed and economy! The foundation stone of the chapel and schools was laid on 11 August 1830 and on 2 May 1831 there were 400 children attending the day school.

The first postulant who entered on 4 October 1831 was Margaret Rice aged 18, daughter of Henry Rice from Market St. Her reception ceremony was a public one, and being the first in Ulster for

centuries it attracted widespread attention from Catholics and Protestants alike. Accommodation was very limited so tickets were issued. Sadly, over twenty years later in 1853 a malignant typhus fever attacked several of the sisters and Sr. Patrick Rice who was nursing other sisters succumbed to the disease herself and died at the early age of 41 years. In 1832 two Corley sisters entered and their reception was held in the unfinished chapel. Other sisters arrived as time went on and in 1832 the first two orphans – Eliza and Catherine Shields arrived. By 1835 the number of pupils in the school was 500. The sisters had been formerly engaged in the care and instruction of youth, especially of female orphans. It soon became apparent that their apostolate would be in education rather than caring for orphans. A glowing tribute was paid to the sisters in the Newry Telegraph in 1832 *“for their instruction of poor female children in the ways of virtue and for rescuing orphans.”* In 1839 Daniel O’Connell and his son Maurice visited the convent and schools and left a notation in the report book remarking on *“the neatness and cleanliness of the children and superior style of their language and perfect understanding of what they read.”*

The convent cemetery later called “The Vaults” was dedicated in 1838 and the first sister to be interred there was Sr. Bonaventure Harte who had come from Dublin on the foundation. She had been a widow and had an only son, a priest. Teaching continued in High St. until a larger school was built in 1866. The sisters purchased fields and gardens as sites for new buildings, and old tenements were demolished. Some of the land had been owned by Orangemen and to quote Dean Swift *“We got our feet on the path paved unwittingly by our enemies.”* The original school was converted to a convent and in the 1840’s a breakfast kitchen and workroom were opened. Children were clothed and fed and medicines were distributed to the poor. About 70 young women were trained in art, lace-making, embroidery and knitting, thus providing them with a means of livelihood for themselves. Some of the work was exhibited at the International Industrial Exhibition in London in 1851 and it won many accolades and testimonials. Later the lace industry was transferred to the Sisters of Mercy and the Poor Clare Sisters devoted undivided attention to the poor schools. Catholic devotions had been denied to the people for many years and so in 1858 when the sisters acquired a new crib owing to the generosity of Mrs Carvill, mother of one of the sisters, hundreds of people came on pilgrimage from as far as thirty miles away to admire and pray at the crib.

1894 was a significant year as ground was purchased for a new Infant Boys’ School which parents had been requesting for a long time. A site was purchased for £175 and a two storey building was erected. The little boys were prepared for the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation and so remained in school till aged nine years. Later they left at seven and in 1954 they transferred completely to the Abbey. In 1894 the name of the school was changed to St. Clare’s National School and in that year there was a severe ‘flu epidemic when the schools were closed for a month and the sisters were all vaccinated. May devotions were always given pride of place. By 1857 hundreds of children and their parents paraded in thanksgiving for favours received. A small chapel – Portiuncula in commemoration of the original in Assisi, was built and for many past pupils and local families these processions bring back happy memories of school days.

After the death of John Mitchell’s father, a Mr Alexander Henry became minister. He had been a barrister in London, a Protestant, but after the death of his wife he converted to Catholicism and he attributed his conversion to the prayers of our sisters. Afterwards he studied for the priesthood and was transferred by Cardinal Wiseman from Westminster diocese and was ordained by Bishop Leahy for the Dromore diocese. He was disinherited by his family but had a small allowance from his brother. Mitchell Henry who built Kylemore Abbey in Co. Galway, was a near relative of his. Fr. Henry was responsible for bringing the relics of St. Leontia, who was martyred in Rome during the reign of Diocletian, from the Roman catacombs to High St., Newry. The relics arrived in a glass case and reposed under the high altar in High St. They are now in the chapel porch of our new convent in Ashgrove. That explains why many Newry girls are called Leontia.

**Foundations: Cavan:** In 1861 the first foundation from Newry was made when Dr Browne, Bishop of Kilmore obtained permission for a Poor Clare convent in Cavan town. Three sisters are still involved in various ministries there.

**Kenmare** 1861: Co. Kerry was recovering from, the famine and there was great poverty. Bishop Moriarty was homilist at the month's mind mass of Dr Blake of Newry in 1860, and having visited the Newry convent he requested a foundation for Kenmare. His request was granted and the then Abbess Mother Michael O'Hagan and six others left Newry for Kenmare. Before Mother O'Hagan went to Kenmare she set up a lending library in Newry and set in place a scheme for the publication of devotional and historical books of a popular nature, throughout Ireland. Mother O'Hagan was the daughter of a wealthy Belfast merchant and sister of Lord O'Hagan, who was an attorney and M.P. and the first catholic Lord Chancellor of Ireland. Among her companions on this foundation was Sr. Margaret Anna Cusack, (Sr. Mary Francis Clare) better known as the Nun of Kenmare and the subject of many books and biographies.

**Keady** 1871: Marianne McGlone from Middleton, Co. Armagh, having attended a profession ceremony in Newry decided to enter the convent herself and in July 1861 she sadly said Goodbye to her rather elderly parents and travelled to Newry. As she travelled her sadness increased at the thought that she would never see the area again. However she felt that a voice spoke to her and said "*Do not be sad for one day you will travel along this route and have companions.*" Ten years later she was chosen to go on the Keady foundation. Eight sisters still minister there.

**Australia:** In 1883 there was a request to the Keady convent for a foundation in Waverly, Australia. Keady requested help from Newry and willingness to go on mission being a characteristic of our order six sisters set out for Australia. They departed the North Wall on 4 October 1883 and as there was cholera in Egypt they had to go by the Cape of Good Hope and arrived in Australia on 23 November and shortly after their arrival they established a school.

**Ballyjamesduff:** 1872: Cavan and Newry convents supplied sisters for a Poor Clare convent in Ballyjamesduff, The sisters were involved in education there for many years and the old convent there is now the county Heritage Centre.

Mayobridge 1924: Five sisters departed Newry convent in 1924 and soon were teaching in the school there and looking after the sacrists. For 86 years the convent continued there and close bonds existed between the sisters and the local community. A statue for the convent was donated by Mrs Agnes Boyd at a cost of £13. It is said that the statue was smuggled across the border dressed in a nun's habit! The local people helped in many ways, but times change and last year five of us bade Goodbye to Mayobridge and transferred to Ashgrove with the sisters from High Street.

**Porthcawl** – South Wales: The first successful foundation across the Irish Sea was made in 1938 just one year before the outbreak of World War II. Mother Agnes O'Brien and another sister went in search of a suitable house. They were about to give up when a workman directed them to two large farmhouses that were for sale. Mr Rodgers, the owner received them kindly and when they informed him that they wished to set up a school for catholic children, he offered to let them buy the house and pay the loan without interest. Such generosity from a Welsh protestant! Soon a boarding and day school were opened and children from all denominations and none were taught from infant, junior and senior level in what has become an ecumenical centre of learning. During the war evacuees were harboured including nuns from another order. I spent 23 happy years there.

**America:** The first foundation was to California in 1960 and in a short time other convents were established. Six years later a foundation was made in Florida and others followed. In keeping with our option for the poor Sr. Anselm left Newry for El Salvador in 1972. She was joined by other sister later and they lived through the Civil War, earthquakes and the murder of Archbishop Romero. The sisters have done much to relieve distress and poverty and provide education in Gotera, Honduras and Guatemala. Our schools and parishes in Newry and other areas have contributed much for these missions. Teachers from our schools have gone to build houses for the poor. Many young ladies have become Sisters and are in various stages of formation. Some have come to spend time in community here. Our numbers at home are few enough now, but we have many vocations in El Salvador, so we hope that we continue to serve God into the future in our new convent in Ashgrove.

## Launch of Landed Estates website at NUI Galway

*First, congratulations to Brigid Clesham, Marie Boran and their team on this wonderful new online resource. It is easy to use, flexible, and packed with fantastic information for researchers.*

Last year, I gave a paper to the Irish Conference of Historians titled 'Archivists and Historians, Friends or Foes?' and I'll repeat the first few paragraphs today as they seem apposite for our session this morning. "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus. Archivists are from Saturn, Historians are from Jupiter." In medieval cosmology, Jupiter was associated with good luck, expansion, ideals, philosophical and spiritual teachings, abundance, higher knowledge, prosperity, enthusiasm, good fortune, bigheartedness and success. Its positive qualities included: zest for life and new experiences, wealth, generosity, honesty and good luck. Its negative qualities included: laziness, boastfulness, extravagance, and blind and misdirected optimism. Saturn's characteristics were restraint, hard work, responsibility, belief in structures, tendencies towards suffering and hardship, self-control and maturity. Saturn's positive qualities included self-discipline, patience, trustworthiness, integrity, a sense of responsibility, and the fortitude to overcome obstacles and hardships. Its negatives were reckless ambition, selfishness, pessimism, inflexibility, closed-mindedness and cruelty. While some stereotypes can be recognised in these designations, it is probably the case that mixtures of these qualities bless and afflict members of both professions. Unfortunately given human nature, prejudice, misconceived ideas of status, and sometimes, plain bloody-mindedness, mutual suspicion and mistrust can flourish between historians and archivists. Defence of professional territory, rigid hierarchical views of relative roles, narcissistic demands for attention, and petty power-play can be displayed by members of both professions. It can happen that archivists will deny historians access to much-needed material, pleading conservation, lack of catalogues or staff, or data protection. It can also happen that historians demand material which cannot be made available for a variety of good reasons, and display impatience in the face of what they perceive to be bureaucratic intransigence. Sometimes, perish the thought, historians even behave disrespectfully towards the precious items they are using. In my far too long experience, I have witnessed a historian eating lunch while reading 19<sup>th</sup> century police reports, a very important 20<sup>th</sup> century file finding its way to another historian's home so he could read it overnight, and shocking abuse of an innocent card index. These are rare outrages, and most historians behave impeccably in the presence of primary sources.

Visibility is an issue which nuances these interdependent relationships. Almost everyone knows what a historian is, hardly anyone knows what an archivist is. I was once asked by a customs officer in Heathrow what my job was, and he thought I said "alchemist". If only! And when alchemists, who ceased operating well over 300 years ago, are better known than archivists, it shows you how far we have to go. Our TV channels are full of glamorous historians, striding around in fabulous shirts, or sitting in beautifully furnished, softly-lit rooms, explaining everything from the state of Henry VIII's ulcerated leg to the history of money to the American Civil War to the sex life of the Irish landed gentry. If archivists, with very few exceptions, appear at all, they are the shadowy figures in the background showing something rare to the person in the fabulous shirt, and usually wearing unattractive white gloves.

we the archivists may be fascinated by the difference between rag and woodpulp. In fairness, while based paper, the huge advantages of mobile shelving, the niceties of digitised indexing, and the horrors of modern electronic records, it's hard to raise a flicker of interest from the general public, and I don't blame the general public. Any specialised profession develops jargon and niche interests, and there is a lot of the nerd about most archivists. I mean that in a good way! It is right that historians, who now get into their profession with an expectation of media exposure, should share their research and insights with the rest of us, and most of them do it extremely well. Those of us who believe that history is the discipline which teaches fundamental skills for living and working, like judgment, evaluation of evidence, good prose, and that marvellous understanding that the past was different to the present, can only applaud the growth of TV history and hope that it continues to be as popular as it is. Also, we need more students to take history at Leaving Cert level, where numbers are dropping, and media exposure can only help with this.

Both Archivists and Historians should be interested in exploring ways in which we can fruitfully co-operate, so that archivists can supply historians with what they need, that is, easily accessible and navigable primary sources for their research, and historians can assist archivists to attain that purpose, with advice, enlightened interventions, and sometimes, lobbying."

One of the new ways in which archivists can assist historians and the wider public is through digitisation. You will all be aware of the 1901 – 1911 census website, which has so far received over 540 million hits and over 11 million individual visits. Most of this is genealogical, but historians, statisticians, geographers and literature specialists are all making use of the site for a multiplicity of scholarly purposes, and it is being used extensively for the Leaving Certificate history curriculum, which now requires use of primary sources by students.

There are many other wonderful digital initiatives being created by archives and libraries, some of which you will hear about this morning from our two contributors. But there is one collection highly germane to the topic of this conference about which I must say a few words. The records of the Irish Land Commission remain closed to the public thirty years after the passage of the National Archives Act. They are now in a warehouse in Portlaoise where no access is given to researchers. It is crucial that this last great collection of state records which, among other things, records the transfer of 75% of the land of Ireland from landlord to tenant, be processed and released to researchers. The deeds collection alone, which contains documents going back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, has huge riches to offer a project like the Landed Estates database. An index already exists, so it should not be rocket science to get them out there. A combined initiative of archivists and historians is needed to make the Dept. of Agriculture face up to its responsibilities and get moving on this.

**Catriona Crowe**  
**Head of Special Projects - National Archives of Ireland**

(This article was the preamble to a session of talks delivered at the launch of the Landed Estates Website in the Moore Institute, NUI, Galway on Fri/Sat 20/21 May 2011. I am sincerely grateful to Catriona Crowe for permission to print above article in our Newsletter. It certainly gives us all food for thought, and we hope many will explore the website of the Landed Estates. Ed.)



## World Famous Craft – Saved by the Nuns

Teresa Byrne, G.S.S.

In a published account by Hall Lenihan written in 1841, where he spoke of his travels in Ireland, we find the following: *“The prolific manufacture of lace in Limerick that has reached a high degree of perfection was introduced in 1829 by an Englishman, Mr Walker. The industry modestly commenced, has succeeded in an astonishing way. They now employ 1, 700 women, girls and little girls between the ages of 8 and 30; the average wage is three shillings and sixpence a week but there are those who earn seven shillings a week. The foundation for the lace is made by machine.”*

Walker selected Limerick as a suitable place for his work and intended to open a factory there for the making of lace and exporting it to England. Later the English Lace factory was transferred to Ireland. Teachers were brought from England to train young girls in the making of lace. Other factories sprang up as the industry prospered and possibly because of this there was a slump in the market. Mr Walker died in penury in 1842 and with his death the industry declined. The Good Shepherd Sisters arrived in Ireland in 1848. They found the industry almost extinct but with the help of some remaining crafts-women they set up their own workshop.

In 1850 the Sisters brought a Belgian woman – Mlle. Van Nuwenhoven, a professional in the making of the famous lace to teach this delicate art. She later joined the noviciate and spent her whole life here until her death in 1913. When word reached Belgium of the lace making in Limerick, a Government Minister sent two officials to Limerick to interview this young woman who was alienating the special Belgian art. When they realised that she was a religious sister they departed never to return. It is interesting to note that the beginnings of the lace making in Good Shepherd convent, by a strange coincidence occupied the position that was originally the site of Walker’s Lace factory in Clare Street.

Mlle. Van Nuwenhoven specialised in the making of lace known as Brussels and Valencian lace. About 1890 the sisters discontinued the making of Valencian lace in favour of Limerick lace. We find an allusion to this in ‘The History of Limerick by Fr. J. O’Dowd.’ He writes, *“Limerick lace is successfully cultivated by the sisters of the Good Shepherd convent, whose display at the late Art Exhibition in Limerick contained many beautiful specimens remarkable for their richness of design and carefulness of execution.”*

Training in the making of the lace takes years to acquire proficiency in the delicate needle work which was deemed the finest lace in the world. Limerick lace can never be mass-produced for no machine can achieve the fineness for which it is justly famous. Because of the delicacy of the work it can never really be a lucrative business. Small output makes for big costs and those wishing to buy must pay a substantial sum for their purchase.

There are three types of Limerick lace – tambour, needlerun and appliqué – and all three are made in frames. The needlerun is the most beautiful, costly and durable of the three. Each design is printed with indian ink on yellow glazed calico and placed under the Brussels or nylon net which is used as a foundation for the lace. The design is then outlined with very fine thread and filled in by hand with Various stitches, such as the “diamond” stitch, bird’s eye, chapel stitch etc. When necessary a coat of arms may be incorporated into any design to suit various occasions. One example of this in 1954 was the magnificent celtic design chosen

for the alb which was to be presented to His Holiness. Pope Pius XII by the late Dr O'Neill, Bishop of Limerick. The Papal tiara, the crossed keys of Peter and the dove of peace, bearing the olive branch, were inserted into the design.

In 1979 Alderman Kennedy, President of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce at the time, commissioned a Limerick lace corporal from the Good Shepherd convent which was used by the late Pope John Paul II during the papal mass at Greenpark. In 1963 the Mayor of Limerick, Mrs Condell presented Mrs Jackie Kennedy with a Limerick lace christening robe during the Presidential visit to Ireland. But perhaps the finest specimens of Limerick lace were to be seen in the magnificent range of albs, rochettes, surplices and altar-falls which have been supplied to churches and members of the Hierarchy from all parts of the globe.

In 2001 Limerick lace ceased to exist. When one considers that it takes two weeks of work to produce a small table centre or a lace hankie, one realises it is no longer viable in today's world.



### **Morpeth and Maynooth: ACAI visit to Russell Library**

**David Kelly osa**

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, a number of ACAI members had the pleasure of a visit to the Russell Library in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. The specific purpose of our visit was to see the Morpeth Testimonial Roll, currently in the possession of the library and being prepared for digitisation. Librarian, Penny Woods warmly welcomed us and Dr. Patrick Cosgrove, history department, Maynooth, spoke to us about the testimonial, its provenance and content. Some of us present did not have the opportunity of attending the AGM in May and so this was an opportunity of catching up on something we had missed.

For anyone who wasn't able to be at either the AGM or in Maynooth on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Morpeth Testimonial Roll is a unique pre-Famine document containing an estimated 270,000 or more signatures from all over Ireland, which was presented to Lord Morpeth alias George Howard marking the end of his tenure as Chief Secretary in Ireland. The presentation took place in 1841. The manuscript is about 412 metres in length and if rolled out fully, would, it is estimated, be the equivalent of three times the length of Croke Park! The gathering and presentation of the signatures was intended as an expression of appreciation to Lord Morpeth. Morpeth or George Howard was the 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Carlisle and lived at Castle Howard in Yorkshire prior to his coming to Ireland. He received the testimonial roll from the Duke of Leinster who was living at Carton House, near Maynooth, at the time.

Paul Hoary, conservator, spoke to us about the current condition of the manuscript which had been retrieved from a dusty cellar in Castle Howard. From the section of the manuscript rolled out for us to view, we could see a variety of signatures from people of various backgrounds and places. Many of the signatures are those of peers, merchants, professionals, clergymen and landed gentry. Daniel O'Connell and Thomas Davis are among the more notable signatures. Paul showed us the large wooden spindle (with its box) on which the sizeable manuscript was kept rolled up. Some parts of the document have suffered damage but for the most part it is in reasonably good condition for its 170 years of existence. Paul is currently preparing the manuscript for digitisation by Ancestry.com. This will ensure the future preservation and accessibility of the manuscript for research. The manuscript is currently on loan to the Russell Library pending the completion of the digitisation project. The unusual nature of the document and its content effectively makes it a form of census of Irish people just before the Famine and as such will be a valuable source of information to historians and other scholars of that period.

After a refreshing cuppa, Penny took us on a tour of a recent library exhibition of books and manuscripts under the heading 'Celts and the Word'. Many of these items are of 16<sup>th</sup> century provenance, some older. All in all, we had an enjoyable and most interesting visit to the Russell Library and the Morpeth Testimonial, thanks to Penny Woods, Pat Cosgrove and Paul Hoary.

## Items of Information

At the last committee meeting of the ACAI it was decided to establish a new role of Communications Officer which I have taken on. What the role will involve exactly depends on feedback from ACAI members. At the moment I envisage the main aims to be to keep members informed and up to date about events, developments and topical issues in the world of Church archives and Irish archives in general.

I only began working as archivist for the Columban Fathers in January 2011 and the world of Church archives in Ireland is relatively new to me. Therefore, I would appreciate it if members would let me know what they are interested in hearing about and if they have any news themselves to contribute. This news can include information on any events, talks, exhibitions, training, and new or interesting collections etc.

In this first Bulletin I am including a short list of the archive organisations and resources that I find most useful and informative, as well as some news of events and happenings in archives in Ireland. Apologies in advance if readers find nothing new here, but with feedback I will be able to tailor the bulletin to meet readers' interests.

### Useful Organisations and Resources

Archives and Records Association, Ireland (ARA): a professional body for archivists, archive conservators and records managers which aims to support its membership through training, professional development, employment news, and help and advice. Details of ARA events and activities are posted on their webpage [www.archives.org.uk/community/regions/ireland.html](http://www.archives.org.uk/community/regions/ireland.html)

Learn About Archives: a website hosted by ARA which provides online information for the general public (but more especially educators and their students) on archival material and archive services in Ireland: [www.learnaboutarchives.ie](http://www.learnaboutarchives.ie)

Irish Archives Resource (IAR): a website which contains information about archival collections open for public research in Ireland. Its purpose is to aid researchers in finding collections relevant to their studies. The IAR invites repositories to upload descriptive entries for their collections which can then be searched on the website: [www.iar.ie](http://www.iar.ie)

Catholic Archives Society: a U.K. based Society founded to promote the care and preservation of records of dioceses, religious foundations, institutions and societies of the Catholic Church in the U.K. and Ireland by providing information, technical advice and training opportunities, and publishing relevant literature including a set of very useful advice leaflets for Church Archivists which are available on their website at: <http://www.catholic-history.org.uk/catharch/index.htm>

### Archive News and Events:

The Archives and Records Association, Ireland (ARA) have organised a training day (limited to ARA members only) facilitated by DHR Communications on *Strategic Communications*,

taking place on the 4 November 2011 at the Irish Architectural Archive, 45 Merrion Square, Dublin. This will be followed by the ARA Ireland winter business meeting.

The historic records of Derry Corporation which date from 1673 have been digitised and are now available online on the Public Record Office Northern Ireland website:

[http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/search\\_the\\_archives/derrycorporationarchive-3.htm](http://www.proni.gov.uk/index/search_the_archives/derrycorporationarchive-3.htm)

Kilkenny Archives Ltd. Is a group established to collect historic documents and records with potential to be used by researchers, tourists, and academics. The collected papers have recently been given a home in St. Kieran's College, a third level outreach facility with NUI Maynooth and are now accessible by appointment with consultant archivist John Kirwan, telephone 085 7484291

### **Feedback and Contact Details**

To notify me of any archive related news, events and issues, as well as to provide feedback on what you want from this bulletin, readers can contact me at the details below.

**Niamh Collins**

**Archivist**

**Columban Fathers Central Archive**

**Dalgan Park, Navan, Co. Meath**

**Tel: 046 9098204**

**[niamhcollins@columban.com](mailto:niamhcollins@columban.com)**

### **Dates For Your Diary**

Our AGM will be held in All Hallows College, Dublin on Saturday 21 April and we hope to see as many as possible there.

The Conference of Women Religious will be held this year in the School of Education, University College, Dublin , 21 – 22 June 2012. This conference explores the history and archives of women religious of Britain and Ireland. For information contact

Dr Deirdre Raftery - [deidreraftery@ucd.ie](mailto:deidreraftery@ucd.ie) or

Dr Louise O'Reilly, National University of Ireland, Maynooth -[louiseoreilly@nuim.ie](mailto:louiseoreilly@nuim.ie)

We have also received an invitation to visit Carlow where there is an abundance of archival material and many other items of interest.