

CHAPTER VI

End of nine-year war – Conquest of all Ireland – A land of forts – Flight of the Earls – Plantation – Uprising - Thomas Baintreadhachd - Keary of Fore – Saint Fechin’s Abbey – Thomas & Mary O’Ciardha – Orangemen – Transportations – Parish of Kilkeary – Limerick hold out - Act of Union.

It would appear from documented sources that at this time the name Thomas always retained for the first-born son of the head of the clan. "Thomas O’Ciardha of Offaley, Fore, a branch of the Cahill family of Connaught, derived from Cathal, [No. 102 of the Cahill of Connaught pedigree] also known as Thomas Baintreadhachd [Thomas the Widower] was the ancestor of Keary of Fore from Co. Meath. In Hart’s Irish Pedigrees of 1887, pp499, Keary/Carey [O’Ciardha] of Fore, Co Westmeath, were descended from Dermot O’Ciardha of Offaley. During the 1650s reverted to the Keary form of spelling because another member of the family, using the C, had become protestant.

Thomas O’Ciardha was killed by Cromwell’s Parliamentary troops in 1654 at the burning of Saint Fechin’s Abbey. The monastery was an important monastic centre founded in AD630 later to become a small-fortified town defended by two gates, a canal, a mound and a ditch. The monastery withstood several burnings and raids eventually becoming an Anglo-Norman Priory under the rule of the order of St Augustine. The last Prior, William Nugent, surrendered the house and possessions to Henry VIII. The town of Fore allied to the English - being close to the English ‘Pale’.

It was during the sacking of the Abbey of 1654, by the English Parliamentarians, that Thomas’s three sons: ²Thomas, who married Mary O’Brian of Naas, niece of Hugh O’Byrne, Patrick and James escaped and found refuge with Hugh O’Byrne of Dublin, one of the Confederate Catholics. In the early 1600s, the O’Byrne family owned vast estates round Clare, Naas in Kildare, and Wicklow.

In 1653-65 Leinster was one of four equal land provinces of Ireland made-up by areas such as Kilkenny, assigned by the English parliament as security for soldiers and adventurers, Carlow and Kildare, retained as a government reservation and Queens, an area included in the plantations of the Catholic James I. The throne of England was, after James II, occupied by Mary and William of Orange – hence Irish Protestants becoming ‘Orangemen’. This reign effectively destroyed the Catholic landowning classes

The aftermath of the Cromwellian plantation period found some Irish catholic citizens selling-up, others quite demented by worry, some running away and others executed. The transportations completed finally in July 1655. There were many arrests for failing to transplant, in fact so many that the goals were full... hangings made space available until an excuse was made to let some go. Those picked on were landowners not the landless. A few years later some of the new owners sold up to others who increased their grants by purchase to become the new ‘gentlemen’. It was generally a clearance of the old landowners and even in the Restoration; things were never the same again - the old ways in Kilkeary superseded. Some old freeholders went to Irish counties whilst others went aboard, mainly to Spain and Holland - away from English influence changing their names and making a fresh start. By this time, the clan was almost non-existent.

In the Civil Survey of 1654-1656, the Parish of Kilkeary, spelt Kylkerry, showed even at that late stage spellings were not regularised, it also suggests that the parish was considerably larger containing several townships and parcels of land. The parish began at the ford of Bellasuillsane, at the river of Geagh, bounded with the parish of Kynaneafe followed the river southward to Poellacholla, which adjoins Tampledony, Ballymacky, Grenanstowne and Lisbony. The parish was described in the survey as having good arable meadows and pastures, several springs and a number of plough-lands. The Hearth Money Rolls indicate that several members of the family living in Co

Tipperary started to use the English form of Ceary to retain their estates. They were better off under the Restoration settlement, for they received back three-fifths of their land. That was before the 1691 Jacobite War... by the end they had even less. Those of the family who retained their Gaelic native Irish name lived outside Clonmel's walls.

Many of the old gentry, including the O'Ciardha and the O'Kennedys, had been evicted from their estates. In exchange they had been given 'fractions' - huts to live in, where they had to stay without possessions. One of the clans, the O'Kennedys of Ormond, had their 'fraction' confiscated in the Williamite wars - because forty-eight of the clan families wished to maintain their Gaelic inheritance... this did not go down well with the Anglo-Irish who expected them to conform. Other families, related to the old gentry, hid under another name for fear of losing what little they had managed to retain.

The O'Ciardha and O'Kennedys were not the only clans to live by deception. It is clear that few of the old families realigned back to their former allegiances. They had not been happy under the previous relationships and wanted to make a change. Some, of the elderly stayed at home and worked for their new masters, tilling their own land... others, wishing to leave were allotted land in Connaught. In Ormond, the more adventurous gentry took refuge in the inaccessible valleys of Glenculloo between the Slieve Felim hills, from where their descendants still carried their dead to be buried in the churchyard at Kilkeary.

In 1659, Kilkeary, in the barony of Upper Ormond, held 769 households with a population of about four thousand persons. Kilkeary was a direct grantee land made over to a new sitting owner James Dalton. Some years later, during the Restoration period, some of the transferred settlement land given, perhaps shared, in some cases bought back, by the old landowners. These old landowners included the O'Meara, O'Connor's' and, Charles and Antony O'Carroll. Catholics held twenty percent of land in Kilkeary, Toomevara and Nenagh. This percentage became reduced during the 1700s. In Petty's Census of 1659, the O'Ciardha made up the largest percentage living in the Baronies of Scrine, Co Meath and Ballybritt, south Offaly. The McCareys of Moycashel Barony, Westmeath were also in abundance.

Ireland was still massively a Catholic population ruled and given their laws by an Anglo-Irish hierarchy. The country's link to Rome gave it its cultural base allied to the Continent through the Irish Colleges in France; the Italian military academies and those businesses engaged in overseas. To the English the Irish appeared a threat even though Ireland was a poorer cousin.

The Irish population in 1690 was now nearly two million and growing. Limerick was a prosperous seaport and used as bastion against British influence... it was the last to hold out. The Jacobites used the town and its river to retreat to... Limerick's city walls held... but only just! William confiscated all the land belonging to those Catholics who later escaped to France. The result of the defeat was The Treaty of Limerick in 1691 - it was the third great defeat. Thomas and Bridget Carey of Legbourne in 1692 saw the defeat of the Catholic cause. A number of families allowed retaining their property if considered docile enough - accepting English law; however, all Catholics were subject to Penal Laws.

This eldest son of Thomas Baintreadhachd, Thomas O'Ciardha, had three sons: ²Thomas the Elder, died in Spain nine years later, Patrick who escaped from Limerick at the same time entered Spanish service in the military and Hugh who married Margaret O'Brian daughter of Dermot O'Brian of Naas. Their son John O'Brian married Mary daughter of Owen M'Kewen of Clontarf and Swords. Their second child was a daughter born in 1749 who married in 1780 Hugh O'Moore of Longford, Castlepollard, in the County of Westmeath. The whole family were Catholics - held Gaelic allegiances to language and habit.

At that time, there were a number of landholding and public office Acts that restricted the rights of Catholics - prevented them assuming state office and property. If an individual wished to

‘get on’- ‘improve his lot’, he had to go where there was money to be made, skills passed on and property to be bought. That goal could only be accomplished by appearing to adopt the Protestant religion, using a name translated into English or adopting a more recognisable English name.

[This was the start of the O’Ciardha spelling being given up and the more English ‘C’ or ‘K’ used - to form and spell Kearey]. By adopting these changes, a move then made either to live in a settlement area or to find a new life abroad.

In the diocese of Killaloe, which included Kilkeary, there were only a few beneficed clergymen. Less who actually resided in the area? There were about three Catholic priests to one clergyman. Churches were not maintained allowing rotting roofs and broken walls to let in the damp and rain. This state - the paucity of the clergymen, also affected other church property, including glebe houses. Idleness was also recorded when it came to tithe collecting and ministering to their parishioners.

There was an exodus from the countryside as there were few opportunities for the ambitious and capable. The landowners patronised the tenant farmers who at onetime had been self supporting - now relied upon handouts and loans because of the potato blight. The problems were so acute that stealing crops was carried out, to survive and prevent children starving. Not long before generations of families had lived in harmony together, populating land not belonging to them with the knowledge that they would not be evicted... this was not the only time the English Parliament had taken their land away from them...

The O’Ciardha family had lost much in the confiscations, but some poor land kept as insurance... for harder times ahead. Irish politicians blamed the depressed state of the economy to English restrictions on Irish trade. The poverty of the rural economy was blamed on those who maintained pasturage instead of promoting the growing of seed and potatoes. This put down to the shortness of tenures – farmers were not allowed to think long-term, for it was a hand to mouth existence. The local opinion as opposed to that of Dubliners was under the threat of the quaterage tax. This tax was about people who wished to pursue a profession or trade but for whatever reason, usually because they upheld the old Gaelic traditions, thereby, excluded from membership of the relevant guild.

The annual pilgrimage to Lough Derg still went on although forbidden by law... the Church too, also frowned upon these acts of piety much to the chagrin of the local population who benefited from the additional circulating-cash.

Economic fluctuations prompted by taxation, which upset the normal domestic industry, particularly the cost of seed, potatoes and livestock, created unrest. Rebellion was in the air and tensions increased in rural areas releasing sectarian antipathies – there was a general collapse of Protestant morale for looking towards the Catholic majority... they were outnumbered. There were several threats both real and imaginary of invasion, rebellion and insurrection coming from France and Spain.

Tenant farmers, working from small farms in the diocese of Killaloe, mainly produced vegetables and corn, larger farms grazed cattle. Leases could last for up to forty years. Farmers made their own repairs and improvements, draining the land and rotating their crops. The landowners made sure their land was occupied so that land did not lie to waste and become overgrown. When a farm became vacant, the new lease ran according to periods of prosperity or want – in times of plenty they were short term. The result being, tenants not taking a long-term view of their future by planning ahead, keeping back some of their produce to use as next years seed... nor did they have a planned rotation of crops or devise ways to improve the drainage by digging ditches and drains. If you cannot foresee a future, you might just as well live for the present...