

CHARTER I

John Keary - Union between Britain and Ireland – Struggle for Catholic emancipation - Thomas Kearey leaves Ireland for St Giles in London – The Irish ghetto - The canals - Railways – Booming economy – Buildings galore - Factory Acts – Dickensian Life.

John Keary was born in the middle of the eighteenth century. He had five children the fourth of whom was called N Thomas... all first born sons in the family were called Thomas – it was a tradition. Thomas saw the light of day in 1791... that he would later spell his name with an ‘ey’ was propitious if he were to shrug off his Catholic religion - to make his way in London. Using the old Gaelic-Irish spelling of Ciardha would not be helpful!

□ Thomas - to be my great, great-grandfather, made his way by ferry from Dublin to Liverpool; seeking a better way of life... He hoped that prosperity lay ahead, for there was nothing in Ireland but trouble and strife. Little did he know that for the rest of the clan and all his fellow countrymen there was worse to follow...

Ireland was in rebellion and Britain at war. Britain was in a period of economic growth stimulated by war with France. Now was the time to exploit the need for skilled workers for the new industrialized society.

When he marched down the gangplank in Liverpool Thomas was excited by the challenges which lay ahead. He sought passage to London by coach; relying on his skills as a worker in metal to find work – perhaps start a business... for Dublin’s silversmiths and goldsmiths were recognised as highly skilled craftsmen. These skills, working with precious metals, carried over to working with tin and lead – metals more closely allied to the home – servicing water-tanks, pipes, buckets, cauldrons washing and cooking pots and all other metal containers. Not only was he skilful shaping metal but had a knowledge of joinery and the manufacture of carts.

He was quite prepared to seek work of a more mundane kind - to start afresh... hopefully, with better prospects for long-term employment... especially after taking the plunge to leave home. His family, having gone through years of persecution, exploitation and finally eviction was having to split up and find their own way away from the country they loved.

When the Irish immigrant travelled to London, he made for Westminster...it was here that he felt most at home. The Irish populated Soho and the surrounding street and alleyways. There are many written accounts about St Giles-in-the-Fields, in the early 1800s, appearing as a maze of cellars and tenements based on the boundaries of St Giles High Street, Bainbridge Street and Dyott Street. This was about the time that gas lighting first started to be installed in London, initially in Pall Mall.

Within the area about St Giles, New Oxford Street was developed...to lay waste to the slums of Church Lane, Maynard Street, Carrier Street, Ivy Lane and Church Street, which was a mass of courts, alley ways and hiding places. These countless tenements were described as ‘Rookeries’ or perhaps as ‘Little Dublin’ or ‘The Holy Land’ – whatever, as an area populated by the Irish.

It was there, shortly after taking lodgings, in 1818, that he met and courted Hester Pepler, eventually marrying her on the 17th October 1819, at St Anne’s Church, Soho... fathering two boys and five girls.

Hester was born and christened in 1794 in Great Stanmore; a small village on the outskirts of North London, just off the Great North Road, and died, March 1872 in Westminster at the age of 79. She was buried at the same church she was married in sixty years before. Hester’s mother before marriage was named Mary Collins. It would be interesting if she were any relation to the Collins of Chard, my mother’s family.]

In 1816 the building of the Grand Junction branch canal was being dug out on the Paddington Estate. At the same time houses were being built along its banks to furnish the builders with homes.

In 1801 there were only 324 houses in Paddington, this was a time of expansion in keeping with the canals and the development of steam engines. Connaught Place in 1807 was the start to the development of Tyburnia between Edware Road and the Uxbridge Road. A couple of years later the degradation mounted causing concern... not before time. By then Paddington had 879 inhabited houses to give shelter to 4,609 persons. It wasn't long before Paddington acquired a terrible reputation. The area on the north side of the Paddington and Marylebone Estates was as far as the more reasonable living conditions stretched... for the time being! Beyond that lay mean streets, alleyways, huts, reservoirs, wharves and warehouses. This division was reinforced by the building of the Great Western Railway in the 1830s with its terminus and goods station. Land between the railway and canal intersected by Harrow Road deteriorated into slums. A large percentage of those living there were displaced Irishmen.

This whole area began to be redeveloped. The people was gradually pushed out, whole estates raised to the ground and the builders moved in. It became a period of massive building projects that made the way for the prosperous suburbs of Bayswater, Paddington and Kensington, when rich tradespeople, developers, merchants and professional men followed the gentry into taking over the new houses giving a further boost to the area with their lavish life styles. Westbourne became the place to be, reaching to the southern most end of Westbourne Green. By 1860 the feverish pitch of building started to come to an end. Thirty years of rapid development

□ Thomas and Hester's eldest son, born 1820 in St. Giles, Middlesex, was also named 'Thomas - as was the custom. He was my great-grandfather and trained, after leaving school, as a whitesmith and tinsmith taking over much of the trade from his father. He married Hanna Raybould when she was twenty-one [her father Henry was also a whitesmith] in 1841...at St Andrew by the Wardrobe, Holborn. It was thought, at that time, there were 1,000 Irish paupers entering London each week, congregating around this area, all seeking work.

The 'railway age' started in 1825 when Thomas was five. By the start of the First World War, almost every part of the country was covered. It was very unusual for anyone to work in a factory that employed more than ten people for this was the average staff content of most stately homes and people were just not used to controlling more. It seems strange that businesses had this almost mental limit for group practices. The railways broke this barrier. The rapid decline in agricultural work. The operation of the Corn Laws, which blocked the import of foreign produce, ensured that farmers received a better rate of pay for their harvests. Only about a third of the population lived in large towns or cities but this was soon to change as industrialization took hold. The government restrictions on the employment of women and children although resisted by the working class were passed. Factory Acts ensured a fixed working week and day, even though a fourteen-hour day was not unusual dropped to ten later in the century. Schooling for all ages was a matter for individual parents to decide what was best. There was no co-ordination between competing educational establishments. Only about fifty per-cents of adults could sign their names.

'Thomas's brother William, 1837-1902, sixth child of F Thomas and Hester, was born the same year Queen Victoria came to the throne. He became a much-respected Westminster City Councillor for fourteen years - about the same time the London County Council was established. He was a coal merchant, baker and boot merchant [his wife's father was a Leather Dealer]. During his two marriages, he had fifteen children - four of the births are recorded in St Anne's Church, Soho, [*St Anne's Church was the same church □ Thomas was married in eighteen years before*] nine of William's children had connections with the Borough of Brompton where they were all born. There is a plaque erected in Westminster City Hall in his honour for his, 'loyal and faithful work to the people of Westminster particularly the poor'.

William's father C Thomas, immigrated to England from Ireland in about 1812 by that time Kilkeary Parish was recorded as being situated in Upper Ormond, four miles south-west of Nenagh

of 2,524 acres, containing 662 inhabitants. It lay twenty-seven miles from Limerick, in County Tipperary in the diocese of Killalo. Kilkeary and Ballynaclough formed a benefice linked to 'the deanery'. The deanery was endowed with sufficient capital to provide the enlarged parish with a private school capable of providing education for 70 local children. The farmed land alone brought in tithes amounting to £120, which went towards the rector's stipend. The growing strength of the British economy had an effect not only on Irish manufacturing but also in siphoning off capital from Ireland's farming community. □ Thomas's' move away was precipitant for when his son William was eight years old the people of Kilkeary were locked in famine conditions. Gradually the eldest boys of poor families in Ireland moved into the cities... thereafter making their way to Dublin and onwards to England and London. It was a desperate situation alleviated by the new industrial society - its quest for power and need for swifter transportation... accomplished by construction of better roads the birth of canal navigation and the manufacture of bricks and steel. The invention of steam locomotion and the construction of the railway network added to the demand for even more coal. Once this movement was afoot – the gravitation from a rural existence to town and city life coupled with the invention of machines to mass produce everyday products there was no stopping the need to continue the process. Fortunately, there was sufficient labour available...

The 1841 census of London registered nearly two million citizens. Three years later parts of Soho were described as 'a sort of petty France'. French immigrants predominately owned most shop; there were schools, wine shops and restaurants mostly catering to 'the French'. The proximity of 'The Rookeries', in St Giles and elsewhere, gave 'foreignness' to this whole neighbourhood of London. None of this mattered to the new citizens. They were only interested in earning money to pay for food and board. Other niceties could come along later. As agricultural workers were laid off, a rapid change was noticed in the countryside. Only just over twenty per-cent of the population worked on the land the difference was felt by the industrial towns and cities as people began to flood in. Construction – the making of things not just building, took half of Britain's labour force. Free Trade was now the call in all but agriculture. In 1842, the budget introduced income tax. Although declared a temporary measure never removes taking the place of tariffs.

There was scarcely any drainage or sewerage, where the gullies were open a foot or more of offal, garbage, dung and sand overlapped the sides, buckets of human waste was still thrown out of upstairs windows adding to the indescribable mess and stench. The corpses of the poorest were just thrown into open marshland around St Bride's Church. On Wednesdays, the ground was opened up again to receive more bodies. Low-lying districts often flooded resulting in the Great Stink of 1858. Many Irish immigrants were engaged in the construction of the new sewer system. Labourers were paid in 1859 18s a week, skilled workers double that and engineers, the latest skill to be picked-up and developed - by associated tradesmen, 35-37 shillings.