

St. Molua's Parish,
Magheracluone

An account of the parish during the life time of

Patrick O'Byrne

The blind Harpist

A talk given at Feile Pádraig Beirne 2013
by Robert Kingston, Rector of St. Molua's

Ba mhaith liom an chaint seo a thosnú as Gaeilge mar is í an teanga a labhair Pádraig Beirne go dtí raibh sé seacht mbliana déag d'aois. Ní raibh mórán Béarla aige in aon chor. B'fhéidir, gur chuala Evelyn P. Shirley, an tiarna talún, go raibh ceoltóir iontach ina chónaí ar a eastát. Tá a fhios agam go raibh Béarla aige sula ndeachaigh sé go dtí an scoil ceoil i mBéal Feirste sa bhliain míle ocht gcéad agus a dó dhéag.

Tá mise chun caint faoin ábhar “Eaglais na hÉireann ag an am a raibh Beirne ina bheatha”. Céad bliain roimh an dáta sin dúirt Easpag Protastúnach Kilmore, Liam Bedell, nach n-úsáidfeadh sé aon sagart Protastúnach nach raibh Gaeilge aige, ach ní raibh go leoir ministrí ar fáil ag an am seo, nó in am ar bith ina dhiaidh sin, chun é sin a dhéanamh. Ach do bhí Gaeilge ag b'fhéidir beirt de na sagairt i gClochar a tháinig go dtí Machaire Cluana in am O'Beirne, se sin lke ra Molloy agus Cumming, ach mar sin bhí bearna mhór idir na daoine agus na ministrí Eaglais na hÉireann.

When I was asked to give a talk tonight it was suggested that something related to the time Patrick Byrne lived might be appropriate. The only subject connected with that time I know anything about is the Church of Ireland background and so I suggested I would read up about the

Magheraclaone/Carrickmacross area at that time. I am no expert on history and I may have missed a great deal but I was delighted to find a rich seam of interest in the historical data available. I hope I can make it sound interesting to you and I would love to help if anyone wants to dig deeper. It was not a happy time for Ireland and its people, for the churches or the clergy but there were strong movements developing which helped shape the best in modern Ireland and which sowed the seeds of our current problems. The time is a working model for discussion of the relationship that there should be between state and church (or indeed any kind of social organisation or movement). It also highlights basic questions about how local government should be organised.

Keith Sanger in an article which is freely available on the internet variously gives Patrick Byrnes date of birth either as 1794, 1795 or 1797. At that time there was no Episcopalian or Church of Ireland Rector in Magheraclaone. There was however a Vicar by the name of Robert Cuming. He became Vicar in 1767 and held the position until 1795 when he moved to be Rector of Muckno, or Castleblayney. As a 'Vicar' Cuming was totally dependant for his job on whoever held the Rectorial rights for Magheraclaone at the time. Before the Reformation these rights and the income which derived from them were held either by the monastery at Louth Abbey or the Hospital of St. John the Baptist in Ardee or perhaps at times by the Archbishops of Armagh. The late Medieval period in this area displays a tussle for power and income between these three with the poor Bishop of Clogher getting a look in from time to time when the major players temporarily exhausted themselves, a bit like a small bird nipping in to steal some scraps while bigger birds are too busy fighting each other off! I think I am right in saying that The Bishops of Clogher came into real spiritual possession of this part of Monaghan only when the

McMahons stamped their authority on the area in the late 1500's.

In Ireland, Tithes were introduced by the Synod of Cashel in 1171, and then were confined mainly to areas under Anglo-Norman control. In theory, the revenue from tithes divided into four parts — one for the upkeep of the clergyman, another for Poor Relief, a quarter for Church Maintenance and Education and the fourth for the Bishop.

With the dissolution of the monasteries during the Reformation the Rectorial rights, which included the receiving of the Tithes, were transferred either directly to influential clergy, to local clan leaders or to landlords. These people were given the title of “Impropriator”. In the case of Magheracluone the Rectorial rights were taken over by the Moores of Mellifont, the Earl of Drogheda's family. Back in 1622 they put one of their family, a William Moore, in as Vicar on a salary of £12 a year, which was roughly half the value of the tithes from the Rectory. In 1628 Magheracluone was joined with Magheross where the fascinating Robert Boyle was Vicar. I have considered the many unanswered questions about him in the Carrickmacross Parish History you will find on our website.

In 1837, during Patrick O'Byrne's lifetime, Samuel Lewis produced his “Topographical Dictionary of Ireland” which is highly reliable. In it he states that the living is a:

vicarage, in the Diocese of Clogher, and in the patronage of the Bishop; The rectory is impropriate in Col. Moore The tithes amount to £1116. 13s. 4d., of which £686. 13s. 4d., is payable to the impropriator, (that is to Col. Moore) and £430 to the vicar. The glebe-house, erected in 1816, cost £941. 10s. 9¼d., of which £323. 1s. 7d., was a gift, and £415 7s. 8½d., a loan,

from the late Board of First Fruits, the residue having been supplied by the incumbent; the glebe comprises 40 acres, valued at £60 per annum. The church is a neat modern structure, built in 1835, at an expense of £738. 9s. 2¾d., being a loan from the same Board.

My understanding is that by Boyle's time the Rectorial rights and income both of Magheross and Magheracloone were controlled by the Moore Estate but that the highly efficient Bishop Spottiswood, who by his actions in Lisnaskea showed he was not one to be intimidated by landlords, was well and truly in control of the parish and clergy. One hundred years on Mr Cuming was very much beholden to his Bishop rather than to the Col. Moore, though he would have had to keep in tune with him and with the local Landlord's the Shirley's, Brownlow's and Porter's as well. Being a Vicar was a bit of a balancing act, though in those days the most significant consideration of today was missing - the wishes of the ordinary parishioners were not much heeded and even less those of the Roman Catholic majority or Presbyterian minority. On June 16th 1770, three years into his ministry in the parish Vicar Cuming managed to get a grant of 20 acres of land from the landlord as Glebeland on which to build a Rectory. I am not sure if it was actually built then or later but at least he set up the process.

Robert Cuming had been born in Dublin in 1712, his father John described as being a Merchant. He was educated in the school run by a Master Francis Hutchinson before he entered Trinity College on the 27th June 1728 aged 16 and earned his BA in 1734 and an MA in 1735. Bishop John McDowell, who read over this paper for me, believes that "The Francis Hutchinson who educated Robert Cumings is, I am pretty certain, Francis Hutcheson originally from Co Down but who

was one of the outstanding philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment. He became Professor of Philosophy at Glasgow University and influenced both Adam Smith and David Hume.” There is a gap in the record before he was appointed Curate of Aughnamullen on 1742 where he stayed for twelve years. He then came to Magheraclone in 1767 where he worked until his move to Castleblayney in 1795. Remember this would have been when he was eighty three years old. He lasted there for seven years and he died aged ninety and still in post. The only other information I have on him is that his son John matriculated in Glasgow University in 1774.

In 1774, the fourteenth year of King George the Third, an Act was passed by the Irish Parliament: “to explain and amend an Act made in the third year of the reign of his late Majesty King George the second, entitled. An Act for the better keeping of churches in repair”. It recognised that the Tithe system was corrupt with the money being funnelled into the pockets of the holders of the Rectorial Rights (or impropiators as they were called) and never getting back to the parishes. It aimed to shift responsibility for the collecting and applying of the Tithes from the Impropiators over onto Select Vestries and their chairmen, in other words the Vicars. The Select Vestries were to collect the money and send on only the portion due to the Impropiators. It seems to have taken this act a long time to filter through to parish level. This exchanged one abuse for another as there is no doubt unscrupulous clergy then began to pocket a large proportion of the Tithes meant to be spent by them on local government.

The Rev Mr Cuming was followed into Magheraclone in early 1795 by James Molloy perhaps a year after Patrick Byrnes birth.. He is listed as having been collated, which

means he was appointed by the Bishop. He was appointed Rector and Vicar, but this did not mean the Bishop surrendered the Rectorial rights to Molloy because they still belonged to the Moore family, the Impropriators. But the title effectively granted him and the parish the rights and responsibilities endowed by the 1774 Act but also sowed the seeds of problems for future clergy. While the Rector now enjoyed some Rectorial privileges the downside was that he became almost totally responsible for the collecting of the tithes, in other words the taxes, which had always been unpopular but which were soon to become a rallying point for revolt. The Bishop and Col. Moore may have seen the writing on the wall and the transfer may have been an early recognition that the old system of administration was beginning to fall apart and really the Church of Ireland should never have allowed itself to be sucked into the ensuing mayhem. But it did and it has paid a high price.

Mr Molloy was probably originally from Hughestown, Tumna, Boyle in Co. Roscommon and his family, the O'Molloys were the official Standard Bearers to the King of England in Ireland. Molloy may well have been an Irish speaker and perhaps he might have had some contact with the Byrne family. Might he possibly be the one who pointed out the blind young harpist to the landlord?

So John Molloy was from an ancient Irish family from Connaught some of whom had conformed to the Established church after the Reformation. He had entered Trinity College Dublin on the 1st February 1766 where he gained a BA and became Curate of Donaghmoine in 1772. He married and settled down in the area and had a son, Francis Lucas who was educated initially by Mr Pinching in the Weymouth School in Carrickmacross.

Mr Molloy died on the 4th June 1805 while he was still serving in Magheraclaone probably in his early fifties. He was followed by the Rev. St. George Caulfield who the Bishop appointed on the 26th July. Although he served for twelve years in Magheraclaone I have not been able to find out much about him. His Trinity College entrance papers says that his father was a 'Clericus' that is a clergy person, and that he had been to a school run by a Dr. Stokes before he entered Trinity on the 4th January 1779 aged sixteen, gaining his BA in 1783 and becoming Curate of Rossorry in 1799. Caulfield left Magheraclaone in 1817 to step down to being the Perpetual Curate of Ardkeen in Co. Down. It seems likely that Mr Caulfield did not enjoy good health.

Things become much more problematic with the arrival of the Rev Patrick Cumming on the 7th May 1817. He had been the Perpetual Curate of Ardkeen for three years so he essentially exchanged parishes with Mr Caulfield. According to his Trinity College Dublin entry he was another farmer's son from the West of Ireland, Co. Clare to be a little more precise, where he was educated by a Mr O'Brien before came to Dublin University in 1807 aged 19. The Latter Day Saints IGI has him born at Ball, Co. Down in 1779. In 1810 he became a Trinity Scholar, which was quite an honour and shows he worked hard at college. He got his BA in 1811 and MA in 1819. I have not found any connection between the Rev Patrick Cumming and the Rev Robert Cumming, his predecessor despite the similarity in name. Cumming is probably a corruption of the name Commins or Comyn which occur frequently in East Galway. His descendants called themselves Cummins.

There is a stone plaque on the Tower of St. Molua's over the front door inscribed: Built AD 1824, Revd P.M. Cumming

A.M. Vicar. According to Canon Leslie St. Molua's was reconstructed in 1622 after it had fallen into disrepair and so was a much older building. He notes that £343 was spent on the building between 1834 and 1864 in ongoing repairs. Remember Lewis' Survey says it was built in 1835 but I think what he is referring to is these repairs. The church was reconsecrated in 1891 after enlargement, presumably with the Chancel and Vestry room which are later constructions. I think the main building is earlier than Mr Cumming's time and the plaque refers to the building of the Tower and perhaps other repairs. I would like to get more information on all this.

On the 31st May 1826, the seventh year of George the Fourth, the united Parliament of England and Ireland had another go at trying to sort out the deepening mess surrounding the Tithes or "Cess" tax. A new act consolidating and amending all previous tithe Acts was enacted. Protestant Dissenters and Roman Catholics were no longer to be forced to be members of Select Vestries, Incumbents (whether Rectors or Vicars) were to be required to live in their parishes, whether they had any parishioners or not, Select Vestries were to deal only with Tithes and no other business, notices of Select Vestry meetings are to be posted on the doors of Parish Churches, Dissenting Meeting houses and RC churches and Incumbents and Church Wardens were to be personally liable for any shortfall in the collection of the tithes. The whole thing was totally unrealistic and unworkable.

These changes spelt trouble for Mr Cumming and the people of the area. As well as this, controversy dogged Mr Cumming during his time in Magheraclone. As well as the major problems with the tithes, he also had trouble with his Bishop, with his daughter's health, with his wife's dressmaker, with parishioners, with the Shirley family and given the string of

court cases and litigation he was involved in, in trouble with just about everyone else as well.

From 1831 to 1836, on the back of yet another Tithe Act, there developed a 'Tithe War' (really an anti-tithe civil disobedience movement) in Ireland with ordinary people refusing to pay the tithes and evictions and violence resulting. In Magheracloone this led to an incident on the 9th November 1832 when a body of dragoons had to protect the tithe proctors who were trying to make the collection. Notice that this was thirteen years before the incident known as the 'Battle of Magheracloone' which resulted in the death of a local man, Peter Agnew of Lisnaguiveragh, over the same issue. Going by the Parish Registers Mr Cumming seems to have been on one of his frequent visits to England at the time of this incident but his general attitude was probably a factor in the matter. We might note that in areas of Ireland where Presbyterians were in a majority they got themselves elected on the Select Vestries, (which at that time were still open to anyone to seek election) and then blocked every attempt to spend the tithes on anything to do with the Church of Ireland or its clergy. In Roman Catholic majority areas the approach taken was more direct. We might add that in areas where the Church of Ireland was strong its members, even members of judiciary and nobility, promised to pay, but only when everybody else did. An Episcopalian solution to an Irish problem!

The background to this is complex but includes the situation where the population of the island had risen to over eight million. The demand for rental land was insatiable and valuations climbed out of control - what we would call an economic bubble.

A new Tithe Act in 1833 changed the situation so that

outstanding Tithes were no longer due to the clergy but to the government. This meant that when the clergy were unable to collect the money they were personally accounted as being in debt. In 1833 Mr Cumming was named as a co-defendant in a Chancery suit versus a Joseph Pasley, the plaintiff for debts owed. Mr Cumming and the Parish were sequestered on the 3rd November 1835, that is two years later, for £600 due by them. The sequestration was removed two years later on the 14th December 1837 after the debt had been paid.

I have found the original documents in the National Archives (online) where the Lord Lieutenants Office empowers Dublin solicitors, Le Maitre and Marron, acting in behalf of the Impropritor (O'Moores) through their “Rectorial rights lesee” J.B. Kiernan, whose wife Maria Kiernan represents him, to collect £630 sterling owed to them from the £1300 the Rector and Church Wardens have failed to collect. If you think we are legally manacled today it compares favourably with what was going on then as does the number of fingers taking their pickings from this unsavoury pie. The tenants at the base of this pyramid, soon to be engulfed in the tragedy of the Famine are a stark reminder of our responsibilities in our current situation.

Basically what seems to have happened is that when the dispute arose between the parish tithe collectors or proctors (one of whom by the way was a Roman Catholic) and the local people who refused to pay their tithes, the parish fell short in the amounts they were expected to collect. Under the terms of the 1833 Tithe Act this led to legal proceedings against the Rector by the civil administration to recoup the shortfall. The Church Wardens and Rector (and Parish) had their personal assets frozen as a consequence. As I said the tithes, always unpopular, were now become a matter of major discontent and

civil disobedience, (compare Property Tax, Waste charges, Water charges etc. today) and the common view was that they were for the upkeep of the Protestant clergy and their church buildings. In fact the Rector and Church Wardens and Select Vestries were the nearest things at the time to a local council as it would be today (but maybe for not much longer!). They were responsible for providing care for founding children and burying those who had no one to bury them. As well as paying the clergy the tithes also were also used to pay for the cutting of roadside hedges, clearing of drainage ditches and the resurfacing of the lanes and so on. You can find all these things discussed in Select Vestry minutes of two hundred years ago. So if the vestry was not collecting the tithes they could not do the work they were supposed to do and were sanctioned by central Government usually at the behest of the local landlords. The Established Church of Ireland was effectively becoming more and more a pawn in the hand of the civil administration with all the responsibilities attaching to it but, by Mr Cumming's time, with diminishing power and certainly no popular mandate of any sort.

The whole system was obviously dysfunctional: part of it (money collection by tithing) a throwback to former times; part of it (the Select Vestries) unable to cope with the growing demands of a more organised civil society and the whole arrangement no longer in tune with the growing demands for greater freedoms, for access to ownership of the land and with the desire for greater democracy. The upshot of all this was major strife before the Tithe Act of 1838 transferred the collection of Tithe to the Landlords, who then tried, unsuccessfully, to attach it to increased rents. The disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1870 and the setting up of local health boards and councils finally relieved the Church of Ireland of these responsibilities. But that lay

forty years in the future and Mr Cumming, and others like him, were caught in the unhappy vice grip of an angry populace on the one side and an unrelenting administration on the other trying to work a system which was never designed to do the work being asked of it. The civil administration of the time was not in fact “designed”, it had evolved from the structures of the past and was not fit for purpose in the 1830's.

In the PRONI Index of the Shirley Papers we read:

There is one box of papers (mainly printed matter), 1826-1902, relating to parliamentary, Poor Law and local government elections in Co. Monaghan and to local patronage (including Church of Ireland patronage) matters.

The section includes: a detailed breakdown of the voting behaviour of the Shirley tenantry at the 1826 general election in Co. Monaghan; printed copies of the British and Irish Reform Bills, 1831; a bundle of Co. Monaghan Poor Law election papers, 1846; a number of anti-Emancipationist and electioneering handbills, posters, etc, c.1830 onwards; correspondence of E.P. Shirley about the Rev. Patrick Cummings's neglect of the parish of Magheraclone [in which Lough Fea is situated],

Given that Mr Cumming and clergy before him were collated by the Bishop and now had Rectorial status, though the inpropriators rights remained with the Moores, it is interesting that the Shirley Papers regard the parish as being in their patronage. Mr Cumming may have been Rector but the Landlord would have still seen him as working for him. As time went by there was obviously a huge falling out between Shirley and Cummings, which was not a “good thing” for the Reverend gentleman.

Looking at the complaints made by E.P. Shirley to the Bishop of Clogher they come down to matters such as on three Tuesday mornings Mr Cumming did not turn up for the Morning Prayer (which was read daily at 10am), and on other occasions was late starting. He complains that there were only 15 people in church on a Sunday morning and that Mr Cummin's son, Charles was acting as Clerk, that is he was saying the responses. Charles, by the way is the son who emigrated to Australia and is the forbear of the family line who have recently visited the area.

One might treat Mr Shirley's complaints about the neglect of the Parish with some scepticism except that the London Gazette's reporting of the Chancery suit lends some credence.

Listed from 1854 (many years later perhaps when the whole matter had been tidied up)

Debtors court

10th August 1837 (a month or two before the debt was cleared)

The Reverend Patric Matthias Cumming (sued as Patrick Mathias Cumming), formerly of Bath, Somerset, afterwards of Southampton, then of Somerset-street, Portman square, afterwards of Upper Baker-street, then in Thayer street, Manchester-square, afterwards of Manchester-street, Manchester-square, then residing at Hastings, Sussex, afterwards of Boulogne-sur-Mer, then living in Northumberland-street, New-road, afterwards of Melcombe-place, Dorset-square, then of Wyndham-place, Bryanstone-square, both in Middlesex, then occasionally of Duttin, afterwards of Magheracloone Glebe, county of Monaghan, near King's-court, Ireland and on arrival in London, lately remaining at the Blue Boar Hotel, High

Holborn, Middlesex, Clerk

There is also correspondence available between Mr Cumming and the Bishop in which he is asking for further leave of absence so he can take his daughter to the continent for the good of her health. When the Bishop delays his reply Mr Cumming writes to say that he regards the Bishop as endangering his daughter's life and hints at appropriate (as he sees it) action. In response to one of Mr Shirley's letters of complaint the Bishop meekly pleads that he does not have as much power as people think he has and refers to Mr Cummings litigious tendencies!

While he was supposed to be in Magheracloone according to the court listing of his addresses and his correspondence with his Bishop, Mr Cumming seems to have spent quite a lot of time in London and other parts of England and the continent. We have no indication of how long these visits were and to be fair to him while he had employed curates in Magheracloone at his own expense, the Rev Ben Gray, the Rev M. McKenna, the Rev William Hewson are mentioned in the Registers, Mr Cummings name appears in the Baptismal Register against virtually every baptism, and at the time they were quite numerous. However it is notable that he presided at very few of the funerals, leaving those to his curates. One of Mr Shirley's complaints was that at least one person had been buried without a minister officiating as none could be found. Perhaps we should note that while Baptisms are arranged with some notice given there is not quite the same flexibility with funerals.

Against this it has been suggested to me that defending himself in the sequestration case perhaps involved travelling to London where the proceedings were being heard and most of the

addresses listed are within reach of the courts. However this does not explain what he was doing in Hastings, Sussex, and Boulogne-sur-Mer though these may have been completely innocent personal visits added in by those suing him to create a certain effect. Certainly there were people who were out to make life difficult for him and making a list which made him sound like someone on the run might have helped their cause.

Another incident occurred in the very fashionable (and expensive) city of Bath where he seems to have had a house more or less continuously for two or three years (in the court report it is said to be for the good of his own health). While he was there a pamphlet was published by a local paper, 'The Bath Herald' alleging that when he went to pay a bill for his wife's dresses he had behaved inappropriately towards the highly respectable seamstress. He took the paper to court for libel. The transcript of the court proceedings has frequent references to "laughter in court" and the case seems to have achieved some notoriety. He won the case but was only awarded a farthing, plus his expenses, an outcome which he believed vindicated him but which the newspapers owners were no doubt very pleased with given the publicity it attracted to their publications.

No sooner was the sequestration case sorted out than Mr Cumming was involved in a complicated case in the Monaghan Assizes where he lost his case but then appealed the decision on the basis that the Jury summons had not issued more than six days before the Assizes began meaning the assembling of a jury was illegally rushed. This issue was still not settled when he raised an objection in court to his having to pay expenses on the basis that neither the court decision, or the appeal had been dealt with. Reading the court report it is obvious that he had the learned gentlemen of the law tied up in legal knots.

Mr Cumming blundered from one crisis to another and while some of this seems to have been of his own making there were others who were out to make life even more difficult for him.

Mr Cumming seems to have married into money. His wife Harriett Slator, whom he married in 1814, was the third daughter of the Vicar of Naas, James Slator, and the granddaughter of Sir Edward Lovett Pearce who was a distinguished architect and the foremost exponent of the Palladian style of architecture. Among other major buildings he designed the Irish Parliament building, now the Bank of Ireland, and Castletown House. So Mr Cumming was well connected. They had eight children. Noting their exploits reads like a quick sketch of those who built the British Empire. Henrietta, the sickly one, married a William Heberden, of the English Civil Service in India and died within two years of going to India. Helena also married an English official in India and, with two of her children was one of the last English to leave Cawnpore before it was besieged in the Indian Uprising of 1857. Their first son who became Lieut. James Slator Cumming died on the 6th April 1842, his 23rd birthday in a skirmish as he led the 9th Regiment of the Imperial Army through the Kyber Pass. William and Robert seems to have made little impact on the world having flunked out of university. Charles Francis Cumming, whose descendants have visited us moved to Australia where he became a Magistrate but also ended up in controversy. According to the "Brisbane Courier Newspaper" he died aged 60 of debility and exhaustion but full of peace and hope (Home papers please copy).

Whatever the truth about his problems in 1842 Mr Cumming was effectively banished from Magheracloone to a small parish at Drumod and Prior near Kenmare in Southern Kerry where he

served until his death in 1855. Lewis describes

DROMOD, a parish, in the barony of IVERAGH, county of KERRY, and province of MUNSTER, 7 miles (S. by E.) from Cahirciveen, on the river Inny, near its influx into Ballinaskelligs bay; containing 4600 inhabitants. It comprises about 270 "reduced acres," as apportioned under the tithe act, consisting chiefly of mountain pasture, waste, and bog, with patches of arable land intermixed, and is principally the property of the Marquess of Lansdowne and the Provost and Fellows of Trinity College, Dublin."

Mr Cummings case demonstrates the complexities of life at the time and shows that if you were not on good terms with the Landlords life could become rather uncomfortable in the mid 1800's making it wise, perhaps, for Patrick Byrne to keep well in with his patron. In the midst of all the turmoil connected with the Tithes and then the Famine Patrick Byrne placidly strums his harp for the enjoyment of the great and the good. Unfortunately unlike David of old with the mad King Saul, Byrne's strumming did not soothe the savage brows of the authorities of his day. It was easier to be the Landlords harper than it was to be his pastor.

The last Rector to serve in Magheracluone during Patrick Byrne's lifetime was the Rev. George Hickson who was collated by the then Bishop, The Rt. Rev Lord Robert Ponsonby Tottenham Loftus, on the 12th November 1842. Mr Hickson came originally from Dingle in Co. Kerry where he had been educated by the Rev. Robert Craig. His father was a lawyer and the High Sherriff for Co. Kerry. After picking up a BA and MA in Trinity he began his ministry in Cloyne Diocese in 1824. Mr Hickson married a Miss Hewson who may have been daughter of the Curate of that name who had served under

Mr Cumming. He had three children all of whom married and settled down locally in the Dundalk, Armagh and Cavan areas.

If Patrick Byrne had been a member of the Church of Ireland residing within the parish of Magheracloone Mr Hickson is the cleric who should have presided at his re-interment but there is no mention of it that I have found to date. I suspect that there were no Church of Ireland clergy involved. The Curate in Carrickmacross at the time was the well thought of Dr William Thompson, the Rector, Dr Romney Robinson being the absentee Director of the Observatory in Armagh. There is no mention of his being involved that I have found.

In his article in the Clogher Record of 2010 Michael McDermott states that the Revd Marcus Rainsford (1820-1897) who he names as Vicar of Dundalk attended Patrick O'Byrne on his deathbed in Dundalk Hospital and buried him in St. Nicholas's Graveyard in Dundalk in the evening of the day after his passing. Mr McDermott suggests this may have been common practice at the time because of the ongoing fears of contagion left over from the Famine. Rainsford was born in Ireland and graduated from Trinity College, Dublin, in 1843. He was an extremely fervent evangelical preacher and it is said that huge crowds thronged to hear his pulpit ministry in Dundalk and later when he moved to be Rector of St. John's Church in Belgrade Square in London. It is said that everyone from the Crown Prince, and Prime Minister down to the lowliest street sweepers were attracted by his preaching. He worked closely with the American evangelist Dwight L. Moody in the famous "Gospel Dialogues" held in connection with evangelistic campaigns in London in 1875 and 1883 to 1884. Rainsford was a notable author and one of his books, on the Lord's Prayer, is still in print and highly regarded.

Mr Hickson served in Magheraclone during a particularly difficult period, one in which the young man was shot during a Tithe related incident, for example, but somehow or other seems to have avoided involvement.

Although it took place after Mr Byrne's life time the Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1870 while Mr Hickson was still in Magheraclone. Its assets in money and land were taken over by the government and redistributed to various government institutions as well as to Maynooth College for the training of RC priests and Assemblies College in Belfast for the training of Presbyterians. Each Church of Ireland parish was left with 35 acres and its Rectory and churches while the clergy were paid a lump sum and were discharged. Some clergy took their lump sum and retired while the majority remained in the Rectories and put the lump sum into a fund which was invested to form a capital asset, the interest from which might be used to pay them into the future. The RCB, or Representative Church Body was set up as Trustees of this fund and quickly developed into an efficient 'civil service' type administration for the Church of Ireland.

Unfortunately we have to say that in 1872 when the lump sums were finally paid out the Rev George Hickson kept his money, resigned the Parish and retired to Dun Laoighre. His lump sum was £340.9s.8d. Admittedly he was 75 years old at the time and he died four years later in 1876, aged 79 but many others of his age group put their money into the future of their church and gave it a foundation on which to build its very different new future.

So the question is: What exactly was the connection between Patrick Byrne and the Church of Ireland or the Established church? Some authors refer to him as the blind harper who became a Protestant but this needs some careful analysis. In his article in the Clogher Record of 2010 Michael McDermott states that: At an early juncture in his career Byrne embraced the Church of Ireland faith to which he adhered for the rest of his life.” He adds ”We also find that on 13th June 1845 the Masonic Celtic Lodge of Edinburgh and Leith has enrolled Brother Patrick Byrne”. For accuracy sake I would point out that there is no Church of Ireland faith, there is the Christian faith as understood and practised by the Church of Ireland. His Will and its Codicil state where he wants to be buried but those statements are contradictory and confusing. It is said he was buried a Protestant but actually he was not as far as I can see.

He was born and brought up a Roman Catholic. I have mentioned the fact that we are told that until he was seventeen he spoke only Irish while it is clear that most Reformed clergy of the time spoke nothing but English, so it is unlikely he had many contact with the Church of Ireland during his early life even though it is possible that at least one of the Magheraclone clergy of the time, the Rev John Molloy, was an Irish speaker. As well as that Patrick Byrne is believed to be a direct descendant of the O'Beirne who was an Irish chieftain and a captain in the Irish army which took part in the rising of 1641. It seems that the O'Beirnes lost their ancestral land subsequent to this which hardly endeared them or their descendants to the new settlers. Patrick Byrne's father farmed part of his families ancestral land as a mere tenant. Although there seems to be no detailed information available about his early life it seems likely that his skill as a musician while totally blind came to the notice of the landlords, the Shirley's, who encouraged him to develop his talents.

After he had been sent to the Harp School in Belfast his career obviously took off in England and Scotland as well as Ireland so between the time he was seventeen and twenty seven he must have moved in more upper-class circles and gained fluency in English and for the rest of his life moved in mainly English speaking social circles.

Further, while there is written evidence of him becoming a Free Mason there is no written evidence that I am aware of that shows him being welcomed into the Episcopal church. This is not surprising because on the one hand Episcopalians have always accepted Roman Catholic baptism as fully valid and complete and would not have re-baptised him, and unless he had wanted to make a bigger issue of it he would have conformed by simply joining in the household worship on the Shirley Estate or whatever big house he was performing in. We are told that until his later years Patrick Byrne never performed at public concerts but always in big houses. These usually had their own private chapels or estate churches and were not much involved in the worship at ordinary parish churches, though the landlords did involve themselves in the running of the dioceses and parishes and in monitoring the behaviour of the clergy for reasons which will emerge.

According to Michael McDermott's research Patrick Byrne left a Will and a Codicil and two later Wills which refer in different terms to where he wishes to be buried. The first also expresses a desire to be buried according to the rights and customs of the Church of England. It looks to me as if the hand of Evelyn Shirley or his lawyer is all over these documents. For example, officially at that time between 1800 and 1870 in so far as the Irish Church was concerned there was no such thing as the Church of England. After the 1800 Act of Union in Ireland

there was the “United Church of England and Ireland” and legal documents, such as an Irish will, would have had to be accurate on this. The will reflects a very English viewpoint and perhaps is more about the way Shirley saw things than the way Byrne did.

The first will reads (according to a transcription by Keith Sanger, in his comprehensive article on Patrick Byrne available on the internet, and from which I have drawn these documents):

Should I die in this neighbourhood, I wish to be buried at Ashfield commonly called Breaky, if not, to be buried in the nearest Protestant burying ground, my funeral to be conducted in plain manner according to the rights and customs of the Church of England, and I appoint Evelyn P. Shirley, Esq. sole executor of this my last will and testament, In witness whereof I hereunto set my hand and seal. This second day of November, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and forty six.

The second document is entitled: Codicil to my last will and testament signed and sealed by me at Lough Fea in 2nd day of November 1846.

Should I die at or near my native place I should prefer being buried in the new Protestant burying ground beside Carrickmacross, to that of Breaky, mentioned in my will.

McDermott states that a codicil was also made at St. Boswell's Green, Roxburghshire, Scotland in July 1856 and a final Will was made at Ettington in May 1859.

Byrne died in Dundalk Hospital after contracting a cold which developed into pneumonia and was immediately buried in the

hospital graveyard by the Revd Marcus Rainford, Vicar of Dundalk. Keith Sanger states that:

Since this was contrary to the harpers own wishes as recorded in his will, his family, through the offices of Evelyn Shirley Esq. of Lough Fea, arranged for a proper oak coffin and he was exhumed and re-interred as he had requested in the Protestant cemetery at Cloughvalley, by Carrickmacross, with an alter tomb inscribed;— *Here lieth the Body of Patrick Byrne, Harper to H.R.H. The Late Prince Consort Who Departed This Life At Dvndalk April 8. 1863 In The 69th Year Of His Age. May He Rest In Peace Amen*’.

There are three problems with this. First of all, as far as I am aware, Bully's Acre, where he was buried, was not the Protestant graveyard. I stand to be corrected on this but St. Finbarr's Burial Book, for its time, is fairly comprehensive and talks of parishioners being buried in Magheross, the old church graveyard, or beside St. Finbarr's Church or at Carrickmaclim. But, Bully's Acre (Cloughvalley, Ashfield, Breakey, or the new Protestant Graveyard? (God's Acre was not opened until the 1890's)) are not mentioned in St. Finbarr's Burial book. It is possible some Protestant inmates of the Workhouse were buried in Bully's Acre but that was some years after Byrnes death. Bully's Acre had been consecrated by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Clogher on the 30th May 1843.

Secondly, St. Finbarr's Burial book does not mention Patrick Byrnes funeral or interment as it should have done if he was buried Church of Ireland within the parish. I have checked the Magheraclone Burial Book as well in case the clergy there were involved but can find no mention. Michael McDermott in the Clogher Record paper records that the Vicar (in fact he was Rector) of Dundalk, the Revd Marcus Rainsford attended him

during his final moments and that on the following evening, the 9th April 1863 Patrick Byrne was interred in St. Nicholas' churchyard in Dundalk. Three weeks later he was re-interred in Bully's Acre. The fact that E.P. Shirley makes no reference to this despite supplying compendious detail about other aspects of his dealing with Byrne is interesting. We might also note that as Byrne's executor he charged the costs of this re-interment not against Byrne's estate but against Byrne's sisters account.

Thirdly, the final words of the inscription on his tomb are something of a give away. In those more evangelical days of the Church of Ireland any hint of prayers for the dead were a complete no-no, seen as a denial of our need for faith in our total dependence on the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross for our eternal salvation. The Latin phrase "Requiescat in Pace" May he rest in peace" was seen as a prayer for the dead, and though there are instances of it on Protestant graves they are unusual. The phrase cut in stone on Patrick Byrnes tomb seems convincing proof that to his family, who with Shirley's assistance arranged his burial here, Patrick was and probably always really had been a Roman Catholic and while the Shirley's may have seen it differently it remains, to me, an open question as to how Patrick Byrne saw his situation church membership-wise.

The fact that Patrick Byrne had twice joined Masonic Lodges is neither here nor there in this regard. The Pope banned Roman Catholic's from joining Masonic Lodges as early as 1737 but the fact that this ban had to be reiterated in 1751, 1821, 1826, 1829, 1832, 1846, 1849, 1864, 1865, 1869, 1873, and 1917 seems to suggest at least some Roman Catholic men were ignoring it. The fact that many Protestant Churches also condemned Masonry (and still do) and were largely ignored by men from a certain social strata underlines that not too much

can be read into this. In fact his joining twice, once in the Celtic Lodge and then in the Grand Lodge might suggest he was not really all that aware of what was involved and was doing it to please someone else. Patrick Byrne was a trusting soul, remember how he was taken advantage and robbed of his savings on a train in Scotland, and I have my doubts about what some others say of him.

The Celtic Lodge was conceived in 1821 in the house of Alexander Stewart, 188 Cowgate, Edinburgh. The petitioners for a charter “being actuated by a strong desire, which they trusted was a powerful motive in the breast of every Scotsman”, “to promote the manufacture of the tartan of their native land and encourage the wearing of the ancient costume of their country.”

For this reason one of the Bye-laws of the Lodge was to be that – “all members should be clothed at their own expense in the Royal Tartan in honour of their Celtic forefathers, who wore their tartan at Church and on the battlefield.” The expense so caused was no trifle, as the fine display, so often noted in the minutes, appears to have been obtained at an individual cost of £40 or £50. For many years the kilted Lodge, escorted by its pipers, and headed usually by some of its military members, was a prominent object in every public Masonic ceremonial, and the enthusiasm of its members for everything national was unbounded. The godmothers of the Celtic Lodge were Lodge Canongate Kilwinning No 2 and Lodge Canongate and Leith No 5, both of whom, notwithstanding the opposition of some other Lodges, recommended the petition, hence the use of Edinburgh and Leith in the title of the Lodge.

The first regular meeting took place in the Old Freemason’s Hall, which still exists in the Cowgate. At that meeting, the

first to be entered, passed and raised, in the Lodge, was “Alexander Stewart, Spirit Merchant”, a respectable highlander of the Stewart Clan, who at refreshment “liberally treated his brothers with a plentiful supply of sandwiches, Glenlivet Whiskey, and some bottles of wine.”

On that note perhaps I will end in the hopes that maybe someone here will take the hint as to the latter as I see the former (sandwiches) lined up on the table beside us. These are very rough notes and I hope I have broken no copyright in producing them. I will put them on the parish web site but will be happy to modify them and give proper attribution of sources if requested.