



'AS FULL OF SPIRIT AS THE MONTH OF MAY'

William Shakespeare

Dear Members

Another month has flown by. We have just had the super flower moon here which brightened our night on the 25th/26th, although elsewhere in the world, I believe, there was a lunar eclipse. Hearing about these events, literally a world away from each other, on the news the next morning, made me ponder about the availability of information in our world. We have become used to instant access to news and information, but spare a thought for our forebears, waiting for months for news of a beloved child or sibling who had emigrated. Letters home are a great source of family information. Sometimes they were so treasured that the recipient had them published in local newspapers. It's worth looking out for them when browsing newspaper archives.

In this edition of the Newsletter, look out for more new 'look-up' records, one man's round the world task to record disappearing headstone engravings, a broken down 'brick wall' and some accidental finds.

Back in the January Newsletter I had thought to create the 'Chronicles of 2020' and asked what you would want to record about this peculiar time. Well, someone replied, so we'll start off with thoughts of a year we might want to forget.

Evelyn

B2513

CHRONICLES OF 2020

Alfred Gracey
Associate Member, Kent

The most challenging aspects of the pandemic for me in 2020:

- Increased threat of early death (though not so tragic as death of my paternal grandfather in the 1918 Flu); establishing Enduring Powers of Attorney
- Restricted travel, few meetings with family and friends, no refreshing holidays, cancelled conferences re family history, deteriorating intellectual skills
- Postponement of house renovation project in our retirement scheme; and of family history research I'd planned for temporary accommodation
- Miserable pervasive news about Brexit, and the mess about Northern Ireland's treatment.

I have actively sought joy and found it in:

- Patience to tolerate defects of house, enjoy its good points; stoicism in my wife and adult children; keeping TV and radio switched off (except for rugby)
- Health, money and initiative to pursue and enjoy restricted-travel life with a thankful attitude and tolerably good health
- Garden and workshop projects; good internet and broadband for online meetings for family, church, and history; free eBooks from county Library etc.
- Art and craft projects by my wife that have given her long awaited fulfilment, and enriched our conversations
- Online shopping and deliveries, especially of groceries and DIY materials
- No Covid19 deaths among family and close friends
- Vaccine available February 2021, received and effective; excellent research system.
- *Competent national government re. NHS and COVID, and Treasury's support.

DOCUMENTING GOD'S ACRE - GRACEHILL

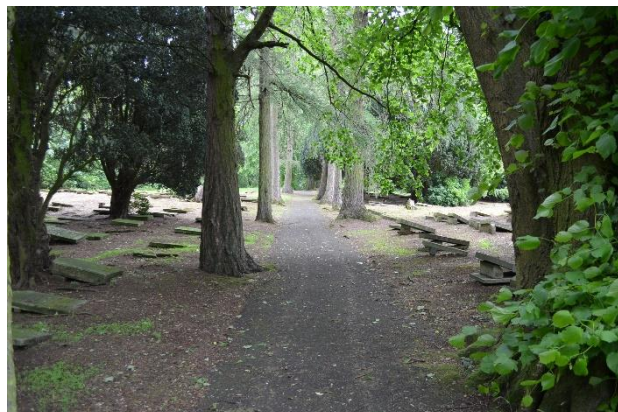
The Moravian Village of Gracehill near Ballymena was established in the 1760s, based on the teachings of John Huss a Czech theologian and philosopher (1372 - 1450) and John Comenius a theologian, pedagogue, and philosopher (1592 - 1670). The village was built around a central square with the church at its head and stands today much as it was 200 years ago. To the rear of the church lies God's Acre, a peaceful and beautiful place where a central pathway, through an avenue of trees, separates the final resting place of, residents of Gracehill.

God's Acre is accessible by the sisters' or brothers' walk, and the gravestones of women are found on the right of the pathway and those of the men to the left in order of their passing. Children are buried to the rear of the adults.

The Moravians kept meticulous records dating back to 1765, these include registers of births, deaths and marriages as well as daily diaries. Several years ago, the Gracehill Church Warden began the daunting task of transcribing the recorded burials and creating a plan which showed their location in the graveyard. This monumental task was completed in 2019 and there is now a complete plan of burial sites and several books listing those interred in alphabetical and burial order.

Our family were members of the Moravian Community from 1765 when Adam Christie was accepted as a brother until the death of his grandson James Christie in 1857. My first visit to Gracehill in 2012 revealed numerous stones in God's Acre that belonged to my family. Many however were almost undecipherable either

covered with moss or badly eroded due to centuries of wear by the weather.



God's Acre Central Pathway showing women's stones to the right and men's to the left.



Ashley Christie at the grave of his great, great, great grandfather James Christie 2012

It was obvious that as every year passed more and more stones were becoming almost impossible to decipher. I was concerned that the identity of those recorded on the stones could be lost forever unless something was done to record them. As a result, I decided to photograph each stone, record its inscription and map its location.

This was an enormous task and, living in Australia and visiting once a year, it has taken several years to complete. Using the new plan and books listing those in the registers I have been able to identify the names on many of the stones I photographed, despite them having only a few letters or numbers that were readable.

There have been other problems which have made it difficult to match my photographs with the warden's work. An early gardener found that maintaining the area was difficult with the stones spread out, so he moved both the early men's and women's stones into abutting lines along the central pathway, no consideration was given to the graves that were not marked by a stone.

Numerous stones were not placed where they should be according to the registers, others had no marker and some stones did not appear in the written records, many were broken.

Despite these difficulties I have now identified most of the stones and have printed two colour folios detailing those belonging to the men and those belonging to the women. Each volume contains a photo of the stone, its number, details recorded on it and if there is no stone then I have detailed what should be there according to the registers.



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A digital copy is also in the final stages of production, this will allow the researcher to look up a name in the index, click on it which will direct them to the site of the grave and then another click will take them to a photo if the stone exists.

Copies of these will be presented to the Church at Gracehill and a copy to the NIFHS who have made a financial contribution to the production of the records. Hopefully, we will be able to return to Ireland in the next twelve months and make a presentation of this work.

Rob Christie
Member A3710

LOOKUP UPDATE

We have transcribed some small sets of marriage records which were included with the Ballymena area churches. They are all pre-civil registration and are ready for 'lookup' requests.

1st Ballymena Presbyterian Church

Marriages 1 March 1814-20 Dec 1819 and 28 March 1840-24 March 1845.

There are 77 marriages recorded between 1814 and 1819. These early marriages were recorded scattered through a register of baptisms. Residence or congregation is recorded, Connor and Cullybackey congregations are mentioned, and most of the folk were from the Ballymena locality, except for Arthur MORELAND of Belfast who married Mary KILLEN of Ballymena on 31 Oct 1814.

Of the 169 marriages from 1840-1845 most of the recorded residences are Ballymena and surrounding townlands but these two stood out as being unusual.

Hamilton FERGUSON of Summerhill, Co. Meath married Mary ARCHER of Holywood, Co. Down on 23 Nov 1841.

Leonard DOBBIN of Belfast married Alethea Maria GRAHAM of Belfast on 10 Feb 1843.

1st Ahoghill Presbyterian Church

Marriages 1841-1845.

There are 121 marriages in these 5 years before civil registration. Father's names are recorded in some records, the congregation they belong to, and the place of marriage is often recorded. E.g. 'in the minister's kitchen,' or 'Marriage in John Green's, her brother in law's, Limnaharry.' And a groom who travelled a long way! Wm. John COOKE of the State of New York, America, married Eliza Margaret BURNETT on 25 June 1842.

Cullybackey Presbyterian Church (later known as Cuninghame Memorial)

Marriages 1818-1838 (296 marriages) and a list of Communicants 1820-1836 (297 entries).

In the marriages the congregation or parish to which they belong is recorded rather than the place of residence, and most are Cullybackey, but Randalstown, Finvoy, Portglenone, Ahoghill and others are also mentioned.

Sandra Ardis
Projects Co-ordinator

FAMILY RESEARCH - TAKING THE SCENIC ROUTE

I have been searching for my forebears most of my adult life, working with and then taking over from my mother. Her quest was to find out about her father, a Protestant gardener. He would not reveal his birthday and had no official papers. The only clue was a notice he put in the Irish Times at each of his daughters' marriages. My mother wondered if it was a cry for help to his relatives.

Years ensued searching original documents, documents on microfiche, gravestones in Kerry where the townlands of O'Brennan and Kilmoylee were situated. As more documentation came online, more searches were carried out, all to no avail. No-one of the name 'Thomas Giles Kerin' seemed to have existed. Speculation ensued - was he Catholic rather than Protestant, had he been married before and so on. Working forward from Revd. John Kerin mentioned in the newspaper cutting was relatively straight forward until the early 19th century but a connection to my grandfather could not be found - the missing link was his father.

CLARKE and KERIN—June 14, 1945, at St. Peter's Church, Antrim road, Belfast, by the Revd. J. R. B. McDonald, B.D.; Walter, only son of Mr. and Mrs. Clarke, 1 Rectory road, Hayes, Middlesex, to Ethel, youngest daughter of Thomas Giles, and Elizabeth Kerin, of Ashford, Co. Wicklow, and great-grand-daughter of the late Revd. John Kerin, formerly Rector of Obrennan and Killmoylee.

About fifteen years ago, two research incidents happened that changed its course. Watching a television programme about a Farmers' market in Cork, my mother said 'they speak like Daddy'. It seemed incredulous that she had not been aware that her father had a Cork accent but it turned out that neither did her sisters!

Soon afterwards, I took my mother to Ireland. She had not been back for almost five years since my father's death, her health was failing and she wanted to go 'home' for a visit. We went to Clara, Co. Offaly, my mother's birth place and looked at the lodge where she was born, her aunt's house, the houses of the Goodbodys, who were the dominant employers and where her parents and other members of the family had worked. I started to find more out about Clara which led to helpful exchanges with Michael Goodbody who has published extensively on his family. Also, I found the article by the eminent historian David Beers Quinn 'Clara: A Midland Industrial Town 1900-1923' published in 1998. It was here that I learnt that both Quinn's father and my grandfather were gardeners working in Goodbody houses around the same time and were very likely to have known each other. This discovery led me to a book of photographs, 'The Clara Pictorial Record' published in 1992 which has a photograph which includes my aunts and Quinn taken at the Protestant School in 1920.





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Clara became a dangerous place for Protestants during the Civil War. My grandfather was taken late one night in 1921 and, although returned unscathed, the family were frightened and left for the comparative safety of a 'big house' in rural Co. Westmeath after my mother's birth in early 1922. Quinn's family returned to his father's native Ulster the following year.

The connections of place in Cork and Clara have led not only to bridging the gap between my clergy forebears in Kerry and my grandfather, but have shown me how a sense of place can enrich understanding of relatives. Looking more broadly at tracing my family history, these unplanned incidents, have enabled me to break down a 'brick wall' in the research. The only mystery surrounding my grandfather was his attempt to hide poverty and maternal illiteracy and sadly, it would seem that he did cry for help but the call was not answered in his lifetime.

Sylvia Turner February 2021
Member A4917

UNEXPECTED TREASURES?

I mentioned some accidental finds above and here they are.

The first refers to some of my family who were killed on the night of the 1941 Easter Tuesday 'Blitz' on Belfast during World War II. I knew that cousins of one of my grandmothers had been killed in their house at Whitewell Road, Greencastle. They were John and Rose Fisher and their daughters, Martha and Mary, and Mary's husband, David Andrews. My grandmother, now long departed, had told me the story herself. I knew no more until I chanced upon a little booklet entitled 'Cockletown' whilst clearing out our NIFHS Newtownabbey Branch cupboard. In this little volume, produced by the Greencastle Community Empowerment Partnership, there is a first-hand account, written by Air raid Warden Alfred Ambrose, of the events of that fateful night in Greencastle and particularly the destruction of the Fishers' house. He also told of the miraculous survival of the two children of Mary and David, who had also been in the family home. One, a little boy, was found wandering down the road and the other, a baby girl, had been buried by debris and survived, undiscovered for twelve hours, still in her pram, the hood of which had saved her. Sadly I don't know what happened to them - a task for another day. It didn't make pleasant reading, I have to admit, but it's rare to find an eyewitness account of such an event.

The second is nearly as gloomy. Someone lent me a copy of 'Not Forgotten; Lurgan and the Great War' by Richard Edgar and Clive Higginson. Normally publications, commemorating soldiers killed during war, provide some details of the soldier, perhaps his next of kin. However, this book provides an amazing amount of information about the families of the soldiers. Within the first fifteen minutes of casually flicking through the pages, I found the confirmation I needed to link three families of Uprichards. I had been looking for this connection for some time. Further reading has solved the problem of a disappearing son of Matthew and Anne Bunting and I found that my 2 x great aunt's husband, Andrew Waring McCleary, whom I had met on several occasions as a child, had survived service in the Great War. As had his brothers. I also know which war memorials to visit to find the names of other family members, not so fortunate.

The book provides some background to political issues of the day and continues with the recruitment and training of those who 'took the King's Shilling'. There is information about the regiments and some of the battles they were engaged in. There are many photographs, some of named individuals and some of groups.

Although the sub title is Lurgan in the Great War, geographically an area stretching from Lurgan to Aghalee is covered, including Dollingstown, Waringstown, Maralin, Donacloney, Moira, and surrounding townlands. If you have family in this area, I'm sure you'll find something of interest.



PROFILE FORMS - A SUPPLEMENT

Member A2600 is researching the following families:

Lightbody of Co. Down, pre 1800

Gavin of Ireland, pre 1900

and has also submitted the following query:

Thomas Gavin Any information on Thomas Gavin; Scottish census states that he was born 1851 in Ireland.

Member A4550 is researching the following families:

Steed of Lisburn, Co. Antrim, pre 1850

Dalton of Lurganure, Co. Antrim, pre 1864

Wright of Co. Antrim, pre 1864

and has also submitted the following query:

Robert Steed Searching for any information about Robert's family. He was born 1784 in or near Lisburn town; enlisted in the British Army in 1808; occupation at the time "weaver"; retired in 1821; died 25 November 1852 likely in Co. Antrim.

AND FINALLY...

NORTHERN IRELAND IS OPEN FOR RESEARCH (SORT OF)

Keep your eyes and ears open for the latest tranche of research venues that are opening up to public access. From 24th May PRONI, GRONI, the Linenhall Library and LibrariesNI premises are opening their doors to the public, albeit with restrictions, mostly booking appointments to view their resources.

As the re-opening processes are very fluid at present I suggest you check each organisation's website before you venture forth. You don't want any wasted journeys. Some of the above are also offering alternatives to physical visits. Again worth checking out. If you do get a research session booked somewhere and it's not all you hoped it might be, please be pleasant to staff. Whatever the shortcomings you might feel exist, frontline staff will be doing their best to provide a service under very challenging conditions.

AND FINALLY, FINALLY ...

Don't be shy! Send in your stories, tips and requests. The members make the Society and we want to hear from you. Contact address as always - Newsletter@nifhs.org.

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