

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE KENIFECKS OF BALLINDEASIG HOUSE.

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The Kenifecks were one of that group of Catholic merchant families in Cork who prospered during the long boom of the American and French wars and whose constant intermarryings formed a web of social and economic contacts. Their origin was Cambro-Norman and they no doubt had been considerable landowners in East Cork at one time but by the eighteenth century they were mainly tenant-farmers, particularly in the Barony of Imokilly where their occupation was marked by placenames such as Garranekeneafeake. When or how the progenitor of the particular family of which we write came to the city to set up as a merchant is unknown but the Lucas Directory of 1787 confirms that an Edmond Kenifeck, merchant of North Abbey, was there at that time, and the evidence suggests that they had been there much earlier.

The term merchant at the time covered a very wide range of occupations but there is no doubt that Ed Sen[ior] was a draper since his death notice describes him as such in 1793 .

THE FAMILY OF EDMOND KENIFECK.

Edmond Kenifeck had two sons, Richard and Edmond, who were later to be partners in a drapery business with Edmond as the senior partner . Circa 1750 would seem to be the most likely time of their birth but the maiden name of their mother is unknown. In 1780 Edmund married Mary Creagh, daughter of William Creagh, another draper and apparently a prosperous one too since Mary brought a fortune of £2000 with her, a very large sum at the time . By 1782 Edmond had set up in business at 4 Gaulnaspur, near Shandon, as a woollen draper, haberdasher and dealer in claret. In April 1785 he had moved to Shandon Rd. and a notice in the Hibernian Chronicle tells us that he had taken his brother Richard in to partnership in his drapery. Finally, in 1789, he moved to No. 2 in the fashionable Patrick St. where he advertises that he is well supplied with woollen drapery and fancy waistcoats in newest fashion.

The further history of the shop in Patrick St. can be shortly told. In 1805 Edmond Kenifeck & Sons were woollen drapers there. In 1815, after the death of his father Edmond, Richard his eldest son, leased it to his brother Patrick, also a draper. Patrick was certainly there in 1820 but he moved to Ghent in Belgium at some time after that. The name does not appear in Pigot's Directory of 1824. In January 1799 Mrs Mary (Creagh) Kenifeck had died at the house over the shop in Patrick St.

HOW WEALTHY WERE THE KENIFECKS ?

Judging by the number of times the words "wealthy woollen draper" appears in obituaries of this period, it was obviously a lucrative trade, but was it so lucrative that a shop in Patrick St. could set the owner up as a country gentleman complete with mansion and 700 acre estate ? Possibly, after all Bryan Sheehy, another Catholic merchant of Batchelor's Quay, had recently taken advantage of the relaxation of the Penal Laws to take out a 999 year lease from William Worth Newenham for Corbally House and estate near Glanmire. But a search through the Registry of Deeds shows that the Kenifecks had more than a draper's shop to rely on.. Here are a few examples of what can best be described as property speculation :

365-95-243718

Indented Deed dated 17 September 1784. Edmond Kenifeck of the City of Corke merchant and Edmond Roche of Kildinan in Co. Cork Esq. parties. Kenifeck to yield up to Roche messuage house or tenement in the city for the remainder of 999 year lease.

Witnesses Thomas Chatterton, John Bastable

378-147-752405

Deed of assignment dated 20 March 1786 Edmond Kenifeck merchant to Jane Creagh, widow of William Creagh woolen draper garden and turret in Sundays Well.

Witnesses Richard Farrell, Jonas Landers.

(She resold this property in 1791 to William Lane for £455).

The Edmond Kenifeck in these deeds is probably Edmond Sen. who died in 1793.

505-280-326000

Deed of assignment dated 8 June 1796 Edmond Kenifeck woolen draper to Hugh Baker merchant preoperty in city.

Witnesses William Mannix Thomas Mannix

506-143-328336

Assignment dated 16 October 1796 Edmond Kenifeck merchant to George Smith Gent. property in city. Witnesses Thomas Mannix Henry Wilward Gents.

507-480-329329

Indenture of Release dated 17 March 1796 Edmond Kenifeck and Joseph Fannin linen draper ,parties

house in South Main St. Cork.

Witnesses Denis O'Sullivan Thomas Mannix Public Notary

517-273-339744

Lease dated 20 February 1799 Edmond Kenifeck to Owen McCarthy merchant 7 acres in Knockfree.

Witnesses Odell Spread Thomas Mannix.

624-526-430620. Assignment dated 20 August 1810 Edmond Kenifeck to Jonathan Davis of land with old houses in City. Witnesses George Fitton Thomas Mannix.

Edmond died in November 1811 so this is the last transaction he registered. His brother and partner Richard, who had never married, died in January 1814 at his house Corbally in Blackrock, then as now a fashionable suburb.

After his death , his nephew Richard, now the owner of nos. 1 and 2 Patrick St. made two further transactions.

674-120-464177

Lease dated 28 April 1814 Richard Kenifeck woolen draper to Thomas Shinkwin cabinet maker house in Patrick St. at a rent of £40p.a.

Witnesses John Mahony Thomas Mannix

696-510-478067

Lease dated 8 April 1815 Richard Kenifick of Cork to Patrick Kenifeck draper house in Patrick St.

Witnesses Wm. P. Mahony of Woodlawn John Dorbinhead

No doubt Richard had been running the business for Uncle Richard after the death of Edmond but now he was determined to stop living over the shop since the estate at Ballindeasig was available. We come now to evidence that the Kenifecks were also middlemen on considerable areas of land in Co. Cork. The evidence is indirect in that the wills of both Edmond and Richard were destroyed but they can be reconstructed to a degree as they were recited in future deeds as evidence. An assignment dated 19 May 1831 shows that Edmond either owned or held on lease the townland of Reagrove and in fact it was there that he died. Another assignment dated 31 August 1819 recites that Richard Kenifeck, late of Corbally, in his last will lands of Tubberneig, lands of Coolkilly, Rathcormac etc. Coolkilly was a townland of about 1000 acres, but 686 acres are described as "mountain waste".

However it was in 1808 that Edmond had made his final land acquisition. He bought Ballindeasig House, a typical Georgian Box design, built most probably within the previous thirty years, together with 650 acres IPM.

603-63-410811

Deed of Conveyance dated 14 July 1808. Parties Patrick Lambert, Dublin, clothier, Edmond Kenifeck of Cork, draper, John Lambert, and Josiah Dunn, Dublin. House and lands of Ballindeasig 650 acres IPM.

Sum of £3999 to Patrick Lambert.

Before we move into Ballindeasig, let us deal with the other children of Edmond and Mary Creagh.

Jane Kenifeck, the only daughter married Pierce Mahony on 10 January 1815 with a fortune of £2000.

Patrick the next brother was also a draper. He took over the shop in Patrick St. in 1815 but is in King St. in 1820 according to a directory. He moved to Ghent in Belgium at some unknown time.

He must have married because the issue of The Constitution of 5 October 1843 carried a marriage notice of his youngest daughter Margaret at Ghent to John de Cock Esq. of Barnard. In The Cork Constitution of 1857 he is referred to as "the late Patrick Kenifeck".

The youngest brother William was Secretary of the Hibernian Gaslight Company in Dublin in 1825 and seems to have held that position for some years. According to the Will Calendar, William Kenifeck died 19 March 1860 at Bristol, but gives his home address as Marlborough St. Cork. He never married.

DECLINE AND FALL AT BALLINDEASIG HOUSE.

For some reason, the Kenifecks seem to have been in no hurry to move into Ballindeasig House. Edmond had a map of his new estate as well as the bordering farm of Reagroove drawn in 1810 but he was still at Reagroove when he died in 1811. Richard Roche Kenifeck's address is given as Reagroove when he married Alicia Moylan in February 1815. Alicia was a first cousin of Bishop Francis Moylan. For some reason, there were two marriage settlements drawn up, one just before the marriage which dealt with the fortune of £1500 which Alicia was to bring to the marriage and the second in July which dealt with Alicia's jointure.

685-81-471025

Marriage settlement dated 3 February 1815. Parties 1. Richard Kenifeck 2. Alicia Moylan 3. Denis Moylan and Stephen Roche 4. Charles Spread of Sandestown Lodge, Co. Kerry and Denis Richard Moylan, merchant 5. Edmond Roche of Kildinan and Denis Creagh Moylan, marriage portion to be £1500

Witnesses Richard Foott James Foott.

684-506-470899

Marriage settlement dated 23 July 1815 Parties 1. Richard Kenifeck 2. John Drew Atkins Gent. and Stephen Roche on the marriage of said Richard Kenifeck and Alicia Moylan, youngest daughter of the late Richard Moylan, lands of Ballindeasig to be assigned to John Drew Atkins and Stephen Roche.

Witnesses James Scott Richard Scott.

The Stephen Roche mentioned was a partner with his brother James in a private bank. Both brothers had married Moylan sisters, who were second cousins of Alicia.

Richard and Alicia had six children whom it may be convenient to list here since they played a part in the events which followed.

Edmond b. 1816

Ellen Roche Kenifeck b. 1817

Richard Kenifeck b. July 1820

Mary Creagh Kenifeck b. May 1823

Catherine Kenifeck b. June 1823

Alicia Kenifeck b. July 1824

It should be noted that Ellen is the first to appear in the Tracton baptismal register, which suggests that the family did not move into Ballindeasig House until then. There is a curious oral tradition that another Kenifeck family had been in occupation after it had been bought by Edmond in 1808 but had been "thrown out" and assigned to a farm at the Nohoval end of the estate. The T.A.B. certainly do show a Widow Kenifeck as a tenant with a good farm of 100 acres IPM in that area but I have never been able to find any confirmation of the story.

So Richard settled down to the life of a country gentleman and raising a family, but already by 1825 there were ominous signs of financial trouble. We turn again to that great store of knowledge, the Registry of Deeds.

802-149-541285

Mortgage dated 27 April 1825 Richard Kenifeck of Ballindeasig and Lucinda Hawkes lands of Ballindeasig, lands of Tubberneig, lands of Coolnakilly

(Denis Richard Moylan had married Mary Hawkes in 1817. They were a wealthy merchant family).

802-525-541660

Assignment dated 2 May 1825 Richard Kenifeck theretofore of Ballindeasig then of the City of Bath Esq. to Wm. Carroll of London, lands as stated in previous deed

824-96-554431

Reassignment dated 23 September 1826 by William Carroll of London to Wm. Kenifeck then of Dublin,

Richard Kenifeck of Cork

Witnesses John Drew Atkins Denis R. Moylan.

It looks as if Richard had managed to pay off the debt to Carroll, probably with the help of his relations, and regained Ballindeasig.

In 1837 Richard was borrowing again.

1838-3-59

Deed of annuity dated 20 November 1837. Parties Richard Kenifeck, Edmond Kenifeck his eldest son by Alicia Moylan, James Balfour of London, Pierce Mahony of Kingstown, Co. Dublin. £396-8-6 to be paid annually to James Balfour for 90 years.

1838-3-160

Mortgage dated 20 November 1837 Richard and Edmond Kenifeck, lands of Ballindeasig etc. to Luke Joseph Shea of Gortigrenane.

The Sheas were neighbours of the Kenifecks. In March 1842 Richard Kenifeck died, leaving his estate to Edmond the eldest son. That it was in a precarious financial state may be assumed from the sale in the Court of Chancery of Reagrove in that same year to the Hodders of Hoddersfield, who were the immediate lessors in Griffith's Valuation.

Edmond had entered the Kings Inns in 1834 and presumably qualified although there is no record that he ever practised. Many country gentlemen held law degrees as a useful aid to estate management.

Edmond and Richard carried on together in managing the estate. Here is a typical lease :

19844-6-246

Lease dated 18 March 1844. Parties Edmond Kenifeck of Ballindeasig and Richard Kenifeck. Said Edmond demised to David Kidney and Thomas Carroll the glebe at present held by Denis and Michael and Thomas Duff, 44 acres bounded by the high road from Robert's Cove to Kinsale, part of Farrenbrien East in the occupation of John Buckley and Dan Flynn, on east by boreen running east past Daniel Kidney's house.

The Famine was the final blow to the tottering edifice. Alicia Kenifeck died on 3 April 1847 and on the 15 November 1849 Edmond Kenifeck assigned all the lands of Ballindeasig and Tubberneague to his brother Richard and disappeared. There is no record of his death in Ireland. Perhaps he emigrated to Australia.

Neither Edmond nor Richard ever married, but their sisters had to be provided for. An assignment to William Morgan, a well-known local money lender, on 9 February 1850 produced £923. The parties thereto are Ellen, Mary and Alicia Kenifeck and Richard Kenifeck and of course Willoiam Morgan. This suggests that Edmond was no longer there and that Catherine must have died young. The problem was now to find brides for well brought young ladies with small or no fortunes.

Griffith's Valuation finds Richard still the immediate lessor of 689 acres in the parishes of Ballyfoyle and Nohoval and 286 acres in Tubberneague near Rathcormac. Coolkilly and Reagrove are now in other hands.

Richard has some 200 acres in fee at Ballindeasig, so we can presume he was farming them himself.

The first of the daughters to wed was Mary Creagh Kenifeck who was married to John Chrysotom Hennessy of Knockaniffe House near Ballyfeard on the 27 June 1850. Griffith's valuation shows him as the owner of 50 acres and a house valued at £14 (Ballindeasig was valued at £18) but he seems to have had cash and Kenifeck was deeply in debt to William Morgan through a mortgage of £1800 on his lands taken out in 1844. Hennessy paid off this mortgage in 1851 with a payment to Morgan of £3074. Kenifeck was obviously further in debt to Hennessy because in the same year in the Queen's Bench Division, Plaintiff John C. Hennessy, Defendant Richard Kenifeck, judgement was given against Richard Kenifeck for £7894.

The judgement states that Kenifeck owned lands at Ballindeasig and Tubbernaneague, Rathcormac.

The inevitable result was the following conveyance :

1853-5-169

Conveyance dated 19 February 1853 Richard Kenifeck then of Ballindeasig conveys lands to John C. Hennessy of Ballindeasig.

And so Hennessy became the cuckoo in the nest and settled down with his wife Mary in their new home. What Mary thought of it we don't know, but there seems to have been an understandable coolness between Richard and his Hennessy in-laws. He died in the Mercy Hospital on 12 December 1873 and was buried in the family vault at Nohoval. An entry in the Calendar of Wills shows that his assets were valued at under £2000 and that his executors were William Charles Connell of Cloverhill, Blackrock and Bryan Galwey, South Mall.

Meanwhile, with their world collapsing around them, the eldest daughter Ellen Roche Kenifeck was married on 12 December 1850 to Jerome Scully, a second cousin (his mother was a Catherine Moylan). The Scullys were a Tipperary family with many connections with Cork merchant families such as Moylan, Creagh, Sheehy and now Kenifeck. Jerome had been brought up and educated in Versailles, where his father James Darby Scully had made a strategic retreat from his creditors (one of his neighbours there was Denis Richard Moylan, Ellen's grand-uncle, who had gone bankrupt about 1825). It is said that Jerome spoke all his life with a marked French accent. He was heir to an estate in Tipperary called Silverfort, which his father had bought from his cousin Darby Scully in the Incumbered Estates Court. The estate was about the same size as Ballindeasig with the same kind of comfortable middleman's residence, so although they were not rich Ellen must have enjoyed a comfortable life until she died in 1897 and was buried on the Rock of Cashel. The third daughter Alicia presumably remained with the Hennessy family in Ballindeasig in the role of maiden aunt until she entered the Mercy Order at St. Mary of the Isles Convent at the mature age of 45

THE HENNESSYS OF BALLINDEASIG.

The story of the Hennessy occupation may be briefly told. John C. Hennessy died in Ballindeasig in 1891 leaving the estate to his eldest son Michael. It was in his reign, so to speak, that the family made it into Burke's Landed Gentry of Ireland (1912 edition), the Last Hurrah of the Landed Gentry before so many of them were swept away by war abroad and revolution at home. It is a short article starting with the marriage of John to Mary Creagh Kenifeck and contains only one generation. Michael died intestate in 1913 and the estate passed to his sister Kathleen Mary Hennessy, who had married Herbert Baldwin O'Sullivan Beara.

He died about 1930 and she died in 1934, the last of the family to live in the house. It then became the property of the youngest sister Mary Josephine Hennessy who lived in Cork City, so the house remained unoccupied for several years. Mary Josephine had never married. By the time she died in 1937 almost all the estate had been sold to tenants under the various Land Acts and the house was in poor repair.

Mary Josephine left the house and about fifty acres of land that remained to Bishop Cohalan of Cork with the ambitious objective of setting up a Trust for the education of priests. Faced with the prospect of running a farm of 50 acres, the Bishop applied to the Charity Commissioners to vary the terms of the will and when he obtained permission he sold Ballindeasig on to the Mercy

Order for £250. The nuns were delighted to be given what they thought might make a good holiday home near the sea, such as many Orders had, and sent two sisters on a scouting party. They were appalled to discover an overgrown avenue leading to a derelict house, but obtained entry through a window. They retreated when they feared the floors might collapse.

Today, renamed Tabor Lodge, it is a rehabilitation centre run by the Mercy Order and if you drive up the long tree-lined avenue you may see Ballindeasig House, little changed, before you.

SOURCES.

There is, alas, no cache of family papers, letters, diaries etc. to put flesh upon the bones of the people mentioned in the article. It relies upon such well-known sources as the Registry of Deeds, the National Archives, O'Kief Coshe Mang and the National library. I am also indebted to Sister Margaret Kiely for access to the Ballindeasig archives, though these deal with the Hennessy family rather than the Kenifecks, to Frank Thompson of New York whose work on the registers of the Five Parishes around Carrigaline is a model of what can be done with local records, and to Mike Scanlan of Yorkshire who supplied me with oral history derived from his Kenifeck grandmother who was born on the Ballindeasig estate in 1889.

A note on spelling : As is well known, townland names were spelt in all sorts of different ways. I have left them as they were in original documents.