

## TWENTY-FOUR HOURS IN BALLYCLERAHAN

Jill and I and my brother Mike and his wife Kay had planned to be in Doonbeg, County Clare, for a week starting May 18, 2013. I was able to re-arrange our schedule so that we could spend a day in the newly-discovered Slattery hometown of Ballyclerahan, County Tipperary.

First, a word on nomenclature.

The place "Ballyclerahan" that one sees on a map is actually the "Village of Ballyclerahan", which is partially surrounded by a larger geographical entity known as the "Townland of Ballyclerahan." The village has been variously referred to as "Ballyclerahantown", "Cleahan" and "Clerihan". The 19<sup>th</sup> century records usually say "Clerihan". This is the name I will use for the village.

There is also a "Civil Parish of Ballyclerahan", which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century incorporated the Village of Ballyclerahan, the Townland of Ballyclerahan and the Townland of Killock. In 1837, the Civil Parish of Ballyclerahan had 1038 acres and a population of 568. I will refer to the countryside outside the village as "Ballyclerahan".

Finally, there is the Roman Catholic Parish of "Clerihan", which in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was comprised of the Civil Parishes of Ballyclerahan, Newchapel and Colman. In 1837, Newchapel had 4737 acres and a Population of 1544, while Colman had 2663 acres and a population of 561. I will refer to this all-encompassing unit as "Clerihan Parish". "Slattery" was the most common surname in Clerihan Parish in 1850.

While they use the old names, the political divisions of County Tipperary in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries do not exactly correspond with those in use during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example, most of the old Civil Parish of Newchapel is today in Lisronagh.

I had made arrangements in advance to meet with the Clerihan Parish Priest, Father O'Bric, who had offered to give me access to the parish's extant Baptism and Marriage Registries.

In the mid-afternoon of Thursday, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the four of us arrived at the Farrenwick Country House in Curranstown, about three miles from the village of Clerihan, where we had booked two of its three rooms for the night. We were greeted by the innkeepers, Denis and Kay Fahey, who insisted that we have tea. Denis was retired from the military. He had patrolled the Clare coast and was very familiar with Doonbeg, which we had left that

morning. I told the Faheys that we planned to meet with Father O'Bric the next morning. They both said that he was "a wonderful man" and told us that we would enjoy meeting him.

After freshening up, we got back in our rented vehicle to explore Ballyclerahan and environs.

On the short drive from Curranstown to Clerihan we passed fields of a bright yellow flower that was unknown to us.



We later learned that the plant was rapeseed (from *rapa*, the Latin for turnip). Rapeseed, which has been grown since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is today used for animal feed, vegetable oil for human consumption and biodiesel fuel. The European Union is the largest producer. We also saw fields of rapeseed plants in Brittany and Normandy in France.

We came to a crossroad and paused. A man who had been going farm to farm handing out cards stopped to point us in the right direction. He gave us a card that identified him as a "hedge clipper". We were saddened to think that this was how he made his living. After passing mile after mile of magnificent hedges,

however, we reconsidered. There was an endless amount of work for a hedge clipper in Ballyclerahan. He will never starve.

The village of Clerihan is located on the road (R688) from Cashel to Clonmel. It is a small hamlet of less than a hundred fairly modern and well-kept small homes. There is what can best be described as a "general store". Although no one told us this, it appeared to be an upscale suburb for professionals and businesspeople who work in Clonmel.

At the center of Clerihan is St. Michael's Roman Catholic Church.



It is a well-kept masonry building that Father O'Bric later told us had been constructed between 1815 and 1820. Thus, it was the actual church building where our great, great grandparents, William and Mary Slattery, worshipped in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. And it was where our great grandfather, John Slattery, was baptized in about 1848. The church door was open so we went in.

The interior is as plain as the exterior. No neo-Gothic here. But there are several stained-glass windows.



ERECTED BY MRS DUNNE TO THE MEMORY OF HER BROTHER EDMOND SLATTERY  
CLERIKAN WHO DIED JANUARY 31<sup>ST</sup> 1908. IMMACULATE MOTHER OF GOD PRAY FOR HIM

One window shows the Virgin Mary stomping on a snake (a pictorial representation of the Immaculate Conception) with the following caption: "Erected by Mrs. Dunne to the memory of her brother Edmond Slattery [of] Clerihan who died January 31<sup>st</sup> 1908. Immaculate Mother of God Pray for him."

We know from the 1901 Irish Census that Edmond Slattery, brother of Ellen Dunne, was born about 1827. He was a teacher and farmer and was fluent in both Irish and English. He may have taught our great grandfather.

Ellen Slattery Dunne was born about 1836. In 1901, Ellen and Edmond lived together in Clerihan where Ellen ran a grocery store. She died sometime after April 1911.

A small graveyard lies adjacent to the church and contains a number of Slattery graves.



Most of the Slattery graves in the churchyard are of the Slattery family of Knockeevan. Knockeevan is a townland less than a mile from Clerihan along the main road to Clonmel. In 1850, virtually all of Knockeevan was owned in fee by Richard Pennefather, Baron of the Exchequer, Ireland, and one of the great lawyers and judges of British Ireland. Baron Pennefather had a landed estate in Knockeevan called Darlinghill. He leased 100+ acre farms to a William and a Denis Slattery. The descendants of this William and Denis eventually acquired ownership of most of Knockeevan, destroyed Darlinghill, and built Knockeevan House. The Slatterys of Knockeevan appear to be the wealthiest family in Clerihan Parish.

We decided to explore the area outside the village of Clerihan. I picked a road at random. Like many Irish roads it was extremely narrow. As was my wont, I pulled over to let an impatient native pass. This was a lad of about seventeen summers.

He stopped and asked whether we were alright. Kay said we were fine, but that we were looking for Slatterys. He paused for a moment and then answered that he was actually a Slattery through his mother. Kay asked whether there were any Slatterys in the vicinity. He said that his Uncle Denis Slattery lived up the road and that he would take us there. We followed him a short distance and stopped in front of a small white-washed cottage.

We rang the bell and knocked and knocked, but no Denis. Jill photographed the boy with Mike and me and then he wished us well and drove off.



No sooner had the lad left than Himself opened the door.

As the following photograph shows, Denis was very glad to meet the American Slatterys.



We continued to explore and eventually found our way to Clonmel. Clonmel is the largest town in County Tipperary with a population of slightly less than 20,000 and lies across the River Suir from County Waterford. The downtown looked depressed and there seemed to be little to recommend it. We had a leisurely dinner at a local hotel and headed back to the Farrenwick Country House.

Despite the fact that it was now 9:30 PM, the Faheys greeted us at the door. "The parish priest is waiting for you," exclaimed Denis. He meant now, this minute. Apparently, the Faheys had called Father O'Bric and told him that we had arrived. Father O'Bric told them that we would have to look at the records that day because he was off to a wedding in County Clare the next morning. So we headed back to Clerihan. Thank God it stays light until 10:30 PM that time of year in Ireland.

The priest's house is on the other side of the street just down from the church and graveyard. It is an ochre-colored two story building surrounded by an ochre-colored masonry fence with a gravel courtyard. It is impressive from the outside. On the



inside, it is clear that a bachelor *sans* housekeeper has been a long-time resident.

Father O'Bric greeted us at the door. He is greying, in his early sixties, with a friendly disposition. Barry Fitzgerald would play him in the movie. Somehow we neglected to take a photograph.

Father O'Bric told us that he was not from the Clerihan area. He said that he was born on the Dingle peninsula in western County Kerry and was a native Irish speaker. Kay asked whether he ever said Mass in Irish. He said, "rarely, because no one would understand it."

The Clerihan Parish Baptism and Marriage Registries had been assembled by Father O'Bric. The first page thereof stated that all of the records prior to April 17, 1852, had been inadvertently burned at around that date. Thus, there is no baptism record of John Slattery, our great grandfather, who was born about 1848, or of his brothers, Thomas, born about 1846, William, born about 1850, and Edmond, born about 1851.

The registries are in Latin. Attached are photographs of the entries for Patrick Slattery and Judith Slattery, respectively, children of William Slattery and Mary Hogan, and siblings of our great grandfather. Patrick was baptized on June 5, 1853 and Judith on August 7, 1856.

1853

Die 7<sup>a</sup> Aprilis, David et Danile Ryan & Margarita  
Tobin de New Chapel, Spon. Jernia Jinks Maria Linn

15<sup>a</sup> Maii, Maria et David Meany et Maria Murphy de  
Edeman - Spon. Philips Maher et Maria Guiney -

17<sup>a</sup> Fredericus et Carolus Malchaky et Catharina Lonigan  
de Grague - Spon. Jacobs Massey et Maria Massey -

27<sup>a</sup> Edm. undus et Gulielmus Bates et Catharina Casey  
de Bleihan - Spon. Edmundo Slattery et Maria Bates.

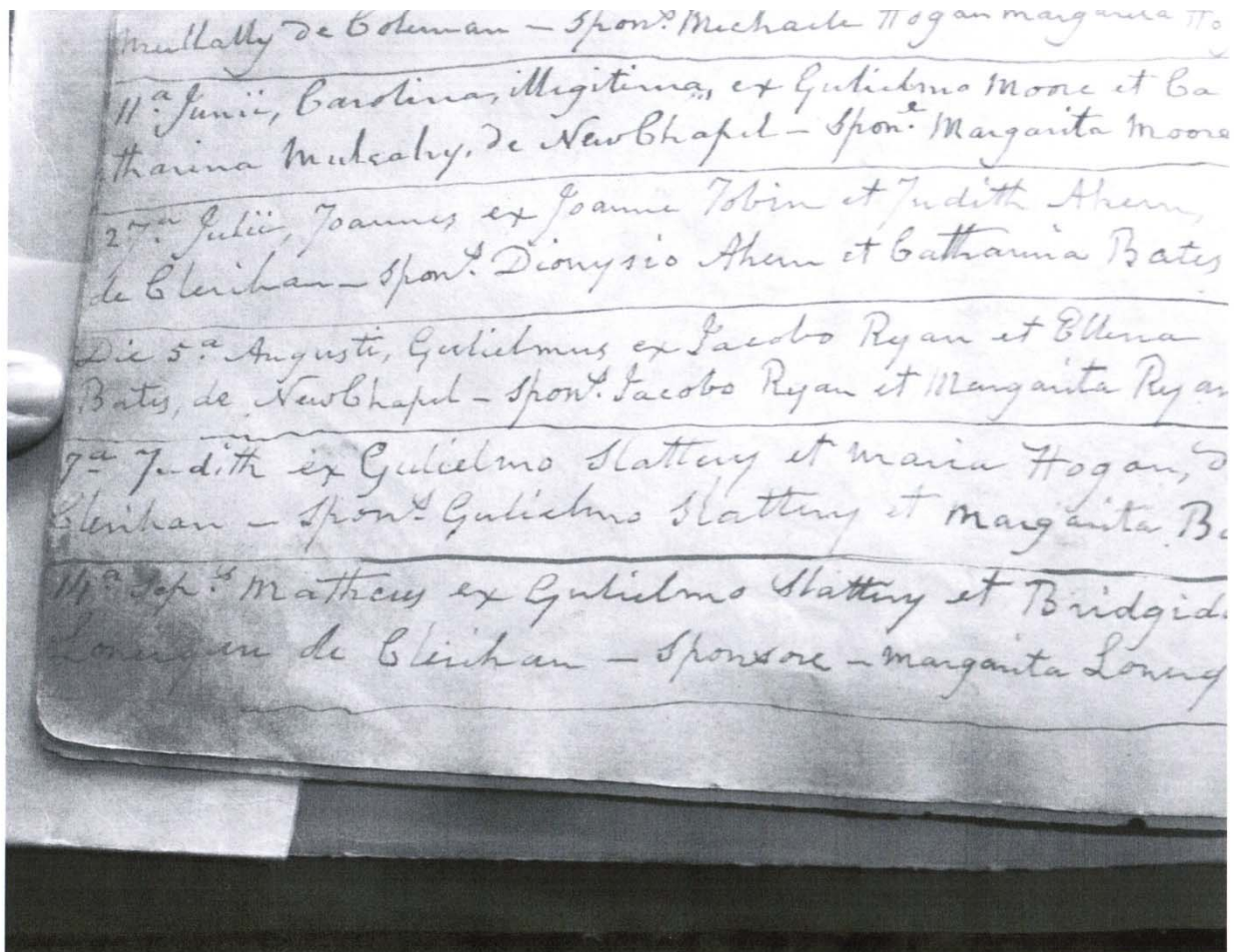
Die 2<sup>a</sup> Junii, Gulielmus et Joanne Tobin et Catharina Bates  
de Grague - Spon. Michael Sullivan et Judith Donnell -

5<sup>a</sup> Patricius et Gulielmus Slattery et Maria Hogan de  
Bleihan - Spon. Dionysio Bates et Margarita Slattery -

Die 10<sup>a</sup> Julii, Elena et Joanne Smith et Margarita Brennan  
de Edeman - Spon. Thomas Landy et Anna Anglum -

12<sup>a</sup> Margarita et Jacobus Moeler et Maria Lanigan  
de Edeman - Spon. Joanne Lanigan et Catharina Slattery

Die  
Bleih  
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6



We were also shown indices to the 1852-1882 registries, as well as to the registries from 1882 to 1900. These indices had been prepared by volunteers from the parish. The indices are arranged alphabetically by surname and chronologically within a surname. There is also an index for the Marriage Registries arranged by the surname of the bride. The indices show the place of residence of the participants if the original record does, as well as the witnesses to marriages and the sponsors with respect to baptisms.

Until the new Baptism Registry was begun in 1882, the registry and the corresponding index showed only the baptism date, not the birth date. The index after 1882 continues to show only the baptism date. After 1882, however, the Baptism Registry itself shows the birth date, as well as the baptism date. Usually, babies were baptized either on the day of birth or the next day.

The parishioners of St. Michael's Church have also transcribed the inscriptions from the readable headstones in the churchyard

and in the nearby Ballyclerahan and Newchapel Cemeteries. Father O'Bric gave us access to the books containing these transcriptions.

I asked Father O'Bric if there was a way to copy the indices with respect to the Slatterys. He said "yes" and produced an old copying machine which he placed on the floor. We then proceeded to make the copies. The machine chugged out about an inch of lines of type every 30 seconds. It took about 40 minutes to make the copies.

It was now 11:30 PM. Kay asked Father O'Bric whether we could come back in the morning to finish our research. After a little persuading, Father O'Bric agreed to let us finish without him so long as we would lock up the house when we were done.

We drove back to Curranstown and slept like babies.

The next morning, after a wonderful Irish breakfast, we bid "good-bye" to the Faheys and once again made our way to Clerihan and Father O'Bric's house. Father O'Bric stayed for a while to get us re-started. I tried to make a €100 gift to Father O'Bric, but he resisted. Finally, I asked him to say a Mass for William and Mary Slattery, late of Clerihan. Defeated, he admitted that he could not refuse that request. He stuck the two 50 Euro notes between some knick-knacks on his bookshelves.

After Father O'Bric left for the wedding in Clare, I investigated the house. All I could think of was Georges Bernanos's *The Diary of a Country Priest*.

Before he left, Father O'Bric gave us directions to the Ballyclerahan Cemetery. This is located less than a mile west of the village next to the old church, which was already a ruin at the time of the Ordnance Survey (1825-1846). After completing our research at Father O'Bric's house, and despite the inclement weather, we drove to this cemetery.

There are hundreds of graves, many going back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century or before. Many of the headstones contain faint inscriptions. Since Slattery was the most common surname in Clerihan Parish in 1850, it is likely that further information about the Slatterys would be discovered if these headstones could be deciphered. Photographs of Ballyclerahan Cemetery, including one showing Kay with the rapeseed fields in the background, follow.





There is also an old cemetery at Newchapel, which we did not visit.

Sometime after noon on Friday, May 24th, we left Ballyclerahan and headed for Kinsale so that the next day we could board the overnight ferry to Brittany, which we did.

There is much more investigating to be done in Ballyclerahan. I intend to return with more time available.

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