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Michael Doheny — the Cork connection

By Michael Fitzgerald

James Doheny was born in the parish of Ballingarry, South Tipperary, in 1786, almost certainly in the townland of Shangarry. He was, according to the family tradition, an uncle of Michael Doheny, the Young Irishman and Fenian. Since Michael Doheny was born at Brookhill, near Fethard, this suggests that his father may also have come from Ballingarry; but absolute proof of this is lacking.

James was educated at St. Kieran's College, Kilkenny, and later at the Irish College in Paris, where he found himself in some trouble. He became involved in a family dispute with some neighbours; in fact, the tradition is that he had taken part in faction fighting. As a result Archbishop Bray refused to accept him for his home diocese, but he was accepted for Cork Diocese by Dr. Moylan.

At this period there were several Tipperary-born priests in Cork Diocese. They included two from his home parish, Fr. Prout of Watergrasshill and a Fr. Ryan who became P.P. of Drimoleague. It appears that there was a shortage of priests in Cork at this time, while Cashel had a surplus. In 1814 Fr. Doheny was appointed curate of St. Mary's, Shandon, in Cork City. Four years later he was appointed P.P. of Dunmanway.

In 1818 Dunmanway was a poor and remote area, without a church. So in his first years Fr. Doheny used the castle of Ballynacarriga, three miles from Dunmanway, as a church. This well-preserved tower house, built on a high rock by the O'Hurley family, involved a steep climb for the congregation, and the actual room used was on the top floor. As soon as possible the new P.P. built a church here, and others at Togher and in Dunmanway itself.

The landlord of the area was a Sir John Cox, who had been born in the West Indies (where his father owned a plantation) who is said to have had the morals and manners of a slave owner. But even a Simon Legree was no match for a Tipperary faction-fighter! In a blistering sermon Fr. Doheny condemned Cox's behaviour from the pulpit.

The next morning, while the priest was at breakfast, Cox arrived on horseback waving a drawn sword, and demanded that the housekeeper send out Doheny to him. Fr. Doheny told his housekeeper to tell "the gentleman" to wait until he had finished his meal. Then he strolled out to meet the furious Sir John, bringing with him a broomstick he had picked up on the way. This he immediately (and vigorously) laid across the unfortunate animal's haunches.

Terrified, the horse bolted, with Cox clinging desperately to its neck, leaving Fr. Doheny the clear victor. From then onwards he was treated with respect, and in the course of time became quite friendly with the Cox family, who eventually became generous and humane landlords, even providing a site for a church. One member of the Cox family became a noted classical scholar.

The landlord was not, however, Fr. Doheny's sole problem. An annual fair held at *Gearran Bán* in his parish had become notorious as the rendezvous of thieves, pickpockets and petty criminals from all over Munster. The police were powerless, so Fr. Doheny dealt with the problem in his own way. He organised the Dunmanway faction-fighters to clean up the fair, and they did it so effectively with their blackthorns that the trouble never recurred!

Not far from Dunmanway, at Kilcaskan, a small estate was owned by William O'Neill Daunt, who was a convert to the Catholic faith, a patriot and man of letters, at one time an M.P., a



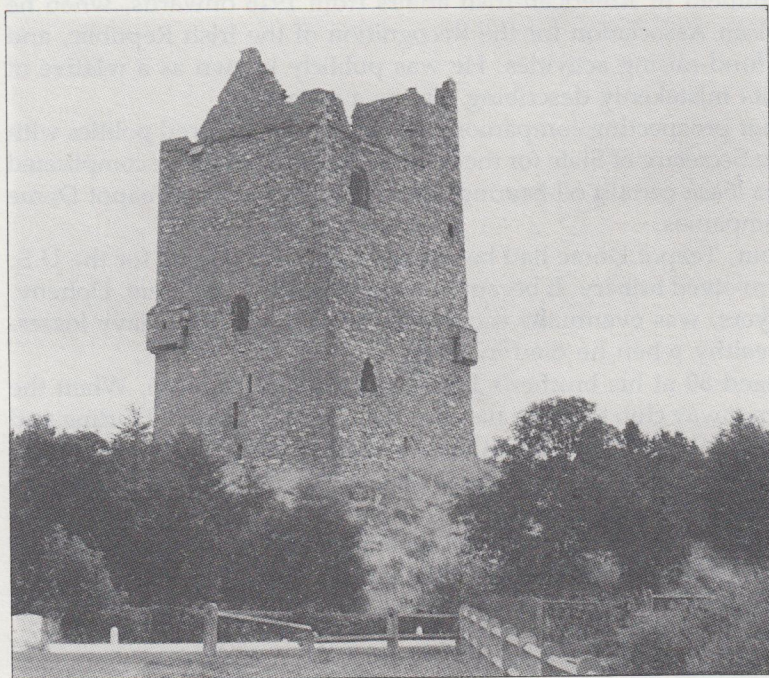
friend, supporter and later biographer of Daniel O'Connell. He and Fr. Doheny became close friends, and Fr. Doheny also became friendly with O'Connell, who sometimes came through Dunmanway on his way from Derrynane to Cork.

O'Neill Daunt's diary, *A Life Spent for Ireland*, published by his daughter after his death, contains many references to Fr. Doheny. He mentions the harrowing stories he heard from the priest of the ravages of famine in the parish, and of an earlier Cox who was a noted priest-hunter, but later relented and provided a site for a church.

All West Cork was badly hit by famine from 1845 onwards. The sufferings of the people of Clonakilty and Skibbereen are well known; but Dunmanway was badly affected as well. The famine also brought great personal trouble to the priest. Before the famine he had borrowed a sum of money, which he was unable to repay. Two versions exist; one gives the amount as £550, and the other as £1,200.

It appears this was borrowed from the Board of Works for church buildings or improvements. He could not proceed with the work due to the famine, and loaned the money to a local man on the security of a farm which, unknown to Fr. Doheny, was already mortgaged.

The borrower became bankrupt, and only the help of two local friends saved Fr. Doheny from jail. The bishop then asked him to retire, and provided him with a pension. He accepted this and, not without difficulty, restrained his parishioners from rebelling against the bishop's decision.



Ballynacarriga Castle near Dunmanway, which Fr. Doheny used as a church.

In the 1830s Fr. Doheny obtained a lease of a farm at Lakelands near Dunmanway for his brother, Thomas Doheny, who then moved from Ballingarry with his family. It was to his house that Fr. Doheny went on retiring. Here too in the autumn of 1848 came a hunted felon, their nephew Michael Doheny, then was "on the run" after the rising.

In his famous book *The Felon's Track* Doheny told the story very discreetly, never mentioning names or the relationship. He probably wished to avoid any risk to his relatives, since the book was first published in New York in 1849 after his escape.

In 1845 Thomas Doheny's daughter, Bridget, was married in Dunmanway to John Meagher of Shangarry, Ballingarry, her old home. During the hectic days before the '48 Rising, Michael Doheny had stayed at her house, despite the earnest advice of the police sergeant at nearby Ballydonnell, who told the Meagher family to get rid of him!

Another daughter, Ellen, married a Tim O'Donovan of Nedineh, who was a cousin of Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. Many years later their son Jeremiah called on Rossa when the latter visited Newcastle-on-Tyne, and reminded him that he had known him as a child when Rossa visited his father's house in Dunmanway.

Although Thomas Doheny had several sons and grandsons, most of them must have emigrated, since their names are not recorded in the West Cork death registers. There are no people of the name in the area now, although there are descendants of Thomas Doheny's daughters.

During the 1920s a wealthy American visited Shangarry to trace his roots, and the evidence suggests that he was a grandson of Thomas Doheny. Edward L. Doheny was born at Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. At 16 he had run away from home and became a gold prospector, but with little success. Later he acquired a reputation as a gunman in the American west.

In 1892 he moved to California, where by a remarkable stroke of luck he struck oil. Within months he was a millionaire. By 1925 he was worth an estimated \$100,000,000.

Edward L. Doheny was prominent in American-Irish affairs from 1916 onwards, when he became president of the American Association for the Recognition of the Irish Republic, and also took a prominent part in fund-raising activities. He was publicly known as a relative of Michael Doheny, some accounts mistakenly describing him as a grandson.

In 1920 one of Doheny's former prospecting companions, Albert B. Fall, entered politics with considerable success and became Secretary of State for the Interior. Doheny, by some complicated dealings, had persuaded Fall to lease certain oil-bearing lands at a place called Teapot Dome in Wyoming to some of his companies.

The whole story soon came out. Teapot Dome had been reserved to provide oil for the U.S. Navy; the deal was illegal and involved bribery. It became a major scandal at the time. Doheny, who could afford the best lawyers, was eventually acquitted, but still suffered heavy losses. He was still, however, very wealthy when he died in 1933.

Father James Doheny died aged 80 at his brother's house at Lakelands in 1866. When the G.A.A. was founded, the Dunmanway club took the name of the Michael Doheny Hurling and Football Club, and it is from this club that the Dunmanway people acquired the name which they still proudly use — "the Dohenys". Indeed, the name is often used for West Cork in general, where the term "a dawney fellow" is a compliment.

The most famous member of this club was a young player named Sam Maguire, who emigrated to Britain and after whom the All Ireland football trophy is named.

Acknowledgements

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