

# *Ballydavid House, Littleton*

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By Patrick Bracken

If ever a country house had an influence on a rural crossroads community Ballydavid House, Littleton, surely had. Situated five miles east of Thurles, in the Barony of Eliogarty and parish of Two-Mile-Borris, it stood in an elevated position with a southern aspect. The lands encompassing it totalled 95 acres, and the house was approached by a tree-lined avenue, alternating green and copper beech.<sup>1</sup>

Built early in the nineteenth century by the Russell family,<sup>2</sup> its principal occupant in 1828 was Mark C. Russell.<sup>3</sup> In 1850 John Russell held this position.<sup>4</sup> In the latter half of the century ownership changed hands, with the Power family taking possession. The house remained in their name until 1940.

The village of Littleton itself was an attempt at planter settlement at an arterial crossroads location, centred between the two Catholic parishes of Moycarkey and Two-Mile-Borris. Much of the village existence was due to the energies and moneys of the local Church of Ireland rector, Rev. Thomas O'Grady. Three noble buildings stand witness to this man – Castle View, Glebe House and St. Mary's Church.<sup>6</sup> They have withstood time, and in one instance fire.

Richard Power, who was a J.P. in the area, related well with the local community.<sup>7</sup> As well as providing much needed employment he was also called on to help at local events. At a sporting event in 1877 he was the principal official, holding the position of judge.<sup>8</sup> The Powers were a Catholic family, and Richard married Mary Weldon. Baptismal records show that they had nine children, born between 1861 and 1874.<sup>9</sup> The family also had business interests, tobacco-related, and land in Cashel.<sup>10</sup>

James Michael Power, who succeeded his father as head of the house, resided here with his wife Maria Houghton (of the Church of Ireland), and their two sons, James and Henry Richard.<sup>11</sup> Maria's father Henry, a doctor, was a regular visitor, and James's brother Richard also resided there.

Local people recount tales of life at this Big House. Memories of beautiful ballgowns and ladies alighting from carriages are still recalled. On All-Ireland Final Day the radio was prominently placed in a position which allowed the villagers to hear the broadcast of the game.

James Power first brought a motor-car to the area in 1906.<sup>12</sup> He died in 1912 at the age of 51. His youngest son Henry, an officer in the Royal Irish Rifles, attached to the Royal Flying Corps, was killed in action in World War I in 1917, aged 24. His other son James died aged 30 at Ballydavid in 1919.<sup>13</sup>

A sister of Mrs. James Power, Anne, now became a regular figure at Ballydavid. Mrs. Power farmed extensively and was a good employer. She died at her summer residence in Dunmore East in 1940, aged 73.<sup>14</sup> The house now passed into the care of her sister, Anne, a generous woman who worked for 55 years for the Stewart Institution in Cork. When she died in 1950 the decline of Ballydavid House began. Subsequently it was purchased and sold on a number of occasions over the next 13 years. Because of its unsafe condition it was pulled down in 1963, and much of the material was used as rubble-filling in the new wing of St. Patrick's College, Thurles, built between 1963 and 1965.<sup>15</sup>

The approximate position of Ballydavid House lay roughly where the local Catholic church



now is. Some of the beech trees from the avenue still stand, and the front lodge is incorporated into a shop, the back lodge having been demolished in 1985 in the course of road-widening.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. Tipperary Star 16.9.1950 (hereafter "T.S.").
2. Moycarkey-Borris Newsletter, Spring 1986, p. 60.
3. Tithe Applotment Book, 1828.
4. Griffith Valuation 1850, pp. 115-118.
5. Tipperary History and Society (ed. W. Nolan, Dublin, 1985), p. 362.
6. Records of Moycarkey and Two-Mile-Borris, E. O'Gorman (Galway, 1935), p. 18.
7. Co. Tipperary, A Guide and Directory, G. H. Bassett (1889), p. 398.
8. Moycarkey-Borris G.A.A. Story, T. K. Dwyer & J. Fogarty (Thurles, 1984), p. 11.
9. Baptismal records, Moycarkey-Borris.
10. O'Gorman, op. cit., p. 46.
11. Census of Ireland, 1901.
12. *Tipperary Historical Journal* 1994, p. 66.
13. Memorials and headstones, St. Mary's Church, Littleton.
14. T.S. 19.10.1940.
15. Thurles: The Cathedral Town ed. W. Corbett and W. Nolan (Dublin, 1989), p. 245.