



**Cumann Staire Chontae Thiobraid Árann**

Co. Tipperary Historical Society, The Source Library, Cathedral Street, Thurles, Co. Tipperary, Ireland  
353 (0) 52 616 6123 [society@tipperarycoco.ie](mailto:society@tipperarycoco.ie) [www.tipperarystudies.ie/thc](http://www.tipperarystudies.ie/thc)

**Tipperary Historical Journal  
2002**

**© County Tipperary Historical Society**

<https://tipperarystudies.ie/tipperaryhistoricaljournal/>  
[society@tipperarycoco.ie](mailto:society@tipperarycoco.ie)

**ISSN 0791-0655**

# Marcus Bourke – a biographical sketch

---

By William Nolan

When the Norman invaders advanced across what are now the counties of Waterford, Tipperary and Limerick in 1185, a branch of the de Burgos occupied the scenic Glen of Aherlow. The ancestors of the Bourke family to which the retired editor of this Journal belonged settled in the townland of Ballyglass, south of Tipperary town, where Ballyglass House Hotel is located. For half a millennium, with their allies the Gaelic O'Dwyer clan of Kilnamanagh, the Bourkes of Ballyglass controlled this area, together taking part in the sack of Cashel in December 1641, for which three Ballyglass Bourkes were publicly executed.

After the Williamite confiscations of the 1690s these Bourkes migrated to Solohead, where within living memory they farmed in the townland of Moanmore near Monard. In the 1850s Marcus Bourke's great-grandfather migrated to Tipperary town, where his grandfather J.J. Bourke was born in 1863. An athletics specialist, he became known as 'Bourke the Handicapper' and in 1885 was a co-founder of Arravale Rovers GFC. During the controversial agrarian episode of New Tipperary (1889-1895), Bourke was secretary of the Evicted Tenants League, when Lord Barrymore's tenants set up the settlement of New Tipperary on the town's outskirts.

J.J. Bourke was coach to three successful Tipperary football teams which won All-Ireland titles (1889,1895,1900) and was a member of the GAA Athletics Council. He died in 1918 aged only 55. A journalist by profession, he had been the local correspondent of the Tipperary, Cork and Dublin newspapers for over two decades.

J.J. Bourke's eldest son Patrick was born in 1893 and obtained a scholarship from the CBS in the 'old Monastery' to UCC, where he got a BA in Journalism before World War I. During that war he was a secondary teacher in the CBS school in Kells, Co. Meath. One of his classmates in Tipperary CBS was Sean Treacy, so it was not too surprising that when Bourke moved to Meath he became active in the IRB, Sinn Fein and the Gaelic League. He played both hurling and football for Meath and served three years as chairman of the Meath GAA Board. When he moved to Dublin in 1919 he vacated his post as O/C, North Meath Brigade, IRA and joined the editorial department of the *Irish Independent*, from which he retired 40 years later as Chief Leader Writer and Books Editor. Called to the Bar in 1931, he became an SC in 1950 and later a Bencher of the King's Inns, dying in 1975 aged 82. For many years he had been a prominent figure at GAA Annual Congress.

Patrick Bourke's eldest son Marcus (editor of this Journal for 14 years, 1987-2001) was born in 1927 and educated first at the model national school attached to St.Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra. From an early age he spent the Summer months with relatives in Tipperary Town. His father, whose Irish had been picked up in childhood from Irish-speaking cousins in Aherlow, encouraged his children to speak the language at home. Marcus's secondary education was obtained from the Jesuits at Belvedere College, alma mater of James Joyce. With a classmate named Cleary (later Prof. Conn Ó Cleirigh, UCD), who also had a GAA background, Bourke attempted to establish a hurling team in Belvedere, and when this failed both boys joined outside clubs – Bourke going to Crokes HC, then operating in Drumcondra, and Cleary to his Nenagh father's club, Faughs HC.

From UCD Bourke in 1948 got a BA in law and economics, and later an MA in economics under Prof. Paddy Lynch. In 1949 he was called to the Bar from the King's Inns, and practised from the Law Library in Dublin and Kildare for 11 years. In 1948, following a family tradition, he became a sports reporter with the *Irish Press*, moving in 1949 to the *Irish Independent* as a news sub-editor. By a happy coincidence his period in the *Irish Press* coincided with the resurgence of football in Meath and that county's first All-Ireland senior football title in 1949. From childhood Marcus had been a keen follower of football in South Tipperary and when in the *Irish Press*, he reported on the rise of Tipperary in football based on the army teams in Clonmel and Templemore. He has also been a lifelong fan of Tipperary hurling and was fortunate to meet some of the leading figures of the 1950s and 1960s when his father was chairman of the Tipperary Association in Dublin, specially formed to look after Tipp teams on their visits to Dublin. In 1960 he became a parliamentary draftsman in the Attorney General's office, retiring at 60 in 1987 as chief parliamentary draftsman.

The complexity and responsibility attached to the post of parliamentary draftsman are probably not widely appreciated. The draftsman is ultimately the author of every Act of the Oireachtas, which normally starts life as a proposal by a government department submitted to the Cabinet. After rigorous examination both at departmental and government levels the proposal, now developed into a full-blown Scheme of a Bill approved for constitutionality by the Attorney-General, the decision for new legislation is taken by the Cabinet, and soon the scheme for a Bill arrives on the draftsman's table. It becomes his (or her-there are now women drafters) duty to put the scheme into legal language, viz. to fit it into existing law (if any) and to ensure that when it becomes an Act it is both workable by civil servants and is not found unconstitutional by any member of the nine-person Supreme Court. As a Bill proceeds through the various stages of both Dáil and Seanad, complying with the Standing Orders or rules of each House, it is the draftsman's responsibility to ensure its safe passage through each stage. An ability to work in co-operation with both the promoting department and the responsible minister becomes vital. Bourke still has a vivid memory of a national electricity stoppage in the early 1960s when the Dáil had to be recalled to pass emergency legislation, and he found himself confronted in Leinster House by the then Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, who had very definite views on how the industrial dispute could or should be resolved! Since his retirement Marcus has served terms as a legislative consultant to the Government of Zambia, where his 30 odd years' experience as a parliamentary draftsman served him well in a new African state where democratic practice was still only in its infancy.

Bourke's first two major books were coincidentally published in 1967 – a short biography of the Kerry 1916 patriot, The O'Rahilly, and another on the leading Tipperary Fenian leader, John O'Leary. The O'Rahilly book came at the tail-end of the 1966 Golden Jubilee celebrations of the 1916 Rising. The biographer was given partial access to family papers by O'Rahilly's eldest son, a barrister and leading figure in Clann na Poblachta. The O'Leary life came about when Bourke discovered that no biography of O'Leary, dead since 1907, existed. O'Leary was a living link between the Young Irelanders of the 1840s through to the Fenian organisation and on up to the Sinn Féin movement founded by Arthur Griffith before O'Leary's death. *John O'Leary: A Study in Irish Separatism* sold 3,000 copies, of which 1,000 comprised a U.S. edition from the University Press of Georgia. At the book's formal launch in December 1967 by the Taoiseach Jack Lynch, several Tipperary personalities (among them Dan Breen and Dick Mulcahy) attended.

Early in the 1970s Bourke was invited to undertake a history of the GAA by the History Committee at Croke Park. No such work had been undertaken since a short work in 1916, when the GAA was only 30 years in existence. Research for this new history took almost eight years,

and the book was launched at GAA headquarters in December 1980. No less than 10,000 copies of this first edition – now in its third, 1999, edition – were printed and an abridged version in Irish in 1981 prepared by Tomás Tóibín was published by An Clóchomhar.

Marcus continued his interest in the GAA, compiling the history of Faughs hurling club, which had a big Tipperary component, in 1985. This book won the national GAA award for the best club history of 1985. In the last two years, 1999-2001, he has been involved in a project sponsored by the Dublin County Board to write (in partnership with Jimmy Wren and David Gorry) the history of the GAA in Dublin City and County, which it is hoped will be published in 2002. One of the principal originators of this venture was Con Ryan, a native of Golden and for many years a dedicated chairman of the Dublin Junior Board.

The *Nenagh Guardian* on 22 August 1987 carried a report of the first meeting of the County Tipperary Historical Society at St. Patrick's College in Thurles. It read:

Last Saturday saw the gathering of a small group of 16 people from backgrounds as varied as geographers, barristers, teachers, scientists, politicians, archaeologists and local and academic historians. The one factor that linked this group is their concern and enthusiasm for all aspects of the county's heritage. The purpose of the gathering was to discuss the possibility of publishing a historical journal for the whole county incorporating the various disciplines connected with Tipperary's past. A society was inaugurated there and then to realise the venture.

Thus began the County Tipperary Historical Society on 15 August 1987. Eddie Dalton of Golden was elected chairman and Marcus was asked to draw up the Society's constitution. An editorial board consisting of Dr. Tom McGrath, Dr. Tony Candon and Dr. Tom Power was to oversee the collection of articles and the publication of the Society's journal. For a variety of reasons, including the emigration of Tom Power to Canada and of Tony Candon to Omagh, the editorial board did not function and the Society turned to Marcus for help. It was willingly given and the Society's first journal was published in 1988 and launched in Holycross. It is not my purpose to assess the contribution of the Journal to the cultural life of the county; but suffice it to say that since that initial meeting in Thurles, 14 issues of the journal have been published incorporating the scholarly research of some 300 authors. Marcus has been in the editorial chair throughout, "chasing people" and constantly identifying potential contributors. For the first time in its long history, Tipperary has a forum which draws from all of its regions.

The journal has gained a reputation for reliability – always appearing in the calendar year on its cover – and the quality of its contents is regularly commented on. It has a permanent home, through the courtesy of Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee; dedicated officers such as its late valued patron Archbishop Thomas Morris and sympathetic County Council administrators such as the then County Manager for Tipperary North Riding, John McGlinchy. Looking back Marcus identifies the publication of Michael Moroney's article on George Plant in the 1988 issue as instrumental in getting public awareness for the infant journal. All 1,000 copies were sold within four months and the Society subsequently issued the article in offprint format.

The journal has built up a vast store of knowledge pertinent to Tipperary which otherwise would have remained hidden. Marcus believes that the range of articles on the War of Independence and Civil War which incorporates personal memoirs of activists, hitherto unpublished, is a solid achievement. He is also pleased that the archaeology section has continued to attract good local contributors and realises the great debt the society owes to dedicated consistent authors such as Des Marnane, Michael O'Donnell and Maria Luddy. The

society was also to benefit from the network of goodwill constructed over many years by such people as Willie Corbett, Liam Ó Duibhir, Nancy and Donal Murphy and George Cunningham. The books review section has profited from Marcus's awareness of the writers and topics of Tipperary interest and he has carefully matched book with reviewer. He also had an appreciation of the importance of commemorating major historical events as the journals published in 1997 and 1998 can testify.

The 1997 journal marked the 150th anniversary of the Great Hunger. In 1998, apart from continuing with outstanding articles on the famine years, he commemorated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of what has become known as the Young Ireland rebellion of 1848 with a special issue, which was appropriately launched in Ballingarry. Marcus always encouraged researchers working outside of Ireland to publish in the journal and he has blended in the work of scholars such as Richard Davis from Hobart, Tasmania, Bob Reece of Freemantle, Australia, John Mannion of St John's Newfoundland and Richard Reid of Canberra, Australia. The academic rigour imposed and maintained throughout his editorial years has by no means deterred readers and the journal has also been successful in a commercial sense, always managing to pay its way. He has, to appropriate a term much loved by sports commentators, rendered sterling service to his ancestral county and to the wider nation of Tipperary worldwide.