

THE O'KEEFFE FAMILY OF GRANGE

By David (Dai) O'Keeffe

I have been requested to write a piece for this book about my family, the O'Keeffes of Rahin, Grange, who came to the area from the Seat of the O'Keeffe Clan on the Cork/Kerry border in the late 1700s. I am not sure if there is anything of exceptional interest about the O'Keeffes of Rahin. However, here goes for what it's worth.

Late 1700s

As far as I can establish the Rahin/Grange branch of the O'Keeffe family came as some kind of land agents to the Guillamore Estate towards the end of the 1700s.

1820s

The earliest evidence of the existence of the family in this area is contained on an O'Keeffe headstone in Glenogra Graveyard with the earliest burial of a Mrs O'Keeffe in 1820. This headstone has fallen and now lies face down, not far from the church ruins. The last burial of a member of the family in this grave was of John O'Keeffe (my uncle), who was buried in the early 1970s.

The O'Keeffes acted as land agents to the Guillamore Estate and were supplied with a house, most likely similar to the house now occupied by Declan and Alice Hehir and their family at Boherageela, Meanus.

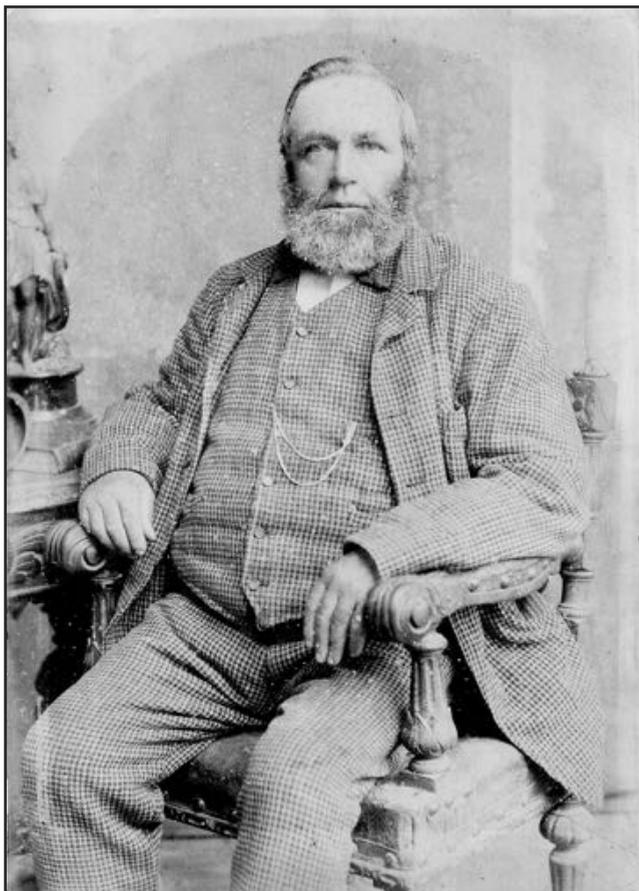
1830s

Sometime around 1830, the O'Keeffes leased a farm of over 70 statute acres at Rahin from Count De Salis, which remained in the family until the late 1960s. Leasing land in those times was virtually the only way to become involved in farming. Later in the century, the family purchased the farm after the Land Acts were introduced by the British Government towards the end of the nineteenth century.

1890s

In 1893, my great grandfather, John O'Keeffe, was chosen by the tenant farmers to read an 'Illuminated Address' of welcome to the Seventh Count De Salis on his return with his new Belgian bride (*Princess*) after their marriage in Brussels. As was

customary at the time, all the tenant farmers and Estate workers turned out to welcome the couple. Their carriage would have been drawn by some of the Estate workers while others would have provided a guard of honour carrying lighted sods of turf on pitchforks. Cruise's Hotel Limerick provided the catering for the banquet that followed at which the representative tenant farmers attended in Lough Gur House. My grand-uncle, Canon David O'Driscoll DD, originally from Mountfox, said grace. He was my grandmother's



John O'Keeffe, great grandfather of David (Dai) O'Keeffe.

brother and a curate in Bruff at the time. He later served as parish priest of St Munchin's Parish in Limerick and built St Munchin's Church across the road from the Treaty Stone. He was buried in the church grounds, and his grave is marked by a large white marble cross. On the night that the Mayor of Limerick, Grange man George Clancy, was murdered by the Black-and-Tans on his own doorstep, Canon David O'Driscoll administered the last rites and later attended to the dead former mayor, O'Callaghan.

Descendants of John O'Keeffe

John O'Keeffe, my great grandfather, had three sons and three daughters. My grandfather, David, who was known as "The Boss Keeffe", was never seen without a collar and tie, even in the meadow on a very warm day. On his deathbed, his last request to my mother, who nursed him, was to be laid out in his collar and tie, which was never done at the time as a brown habit was then used.

One son (my granduncle) dropped dead at Clancy's Pub (*former post office, Grange*), and another served as an usher in the House of Commons in London before immigrating to Australia. Contact was lost, but word came back through a

Grange man, Father Tracey, who served as a priest in Australia, that my grand-uncle died a happy death. My grandfather had three sisters: Nan (Nancy) who married a teacher named Callanan from Lisdoonvarna, and they opened the "Bellevue Hotel" in the spa town. Another sister died suddenly while dining in Finn's restaurant (*currently Bean an Tí Bakery*) in Little Catherine Street, Limerick in the 1920s. A third sister, Catherine, married a man called Bresnihan, who farmed at Ballycullane on the farm now owned by the Fitzgerald family. Catherine had no children and was buried in Grange in 1936.

My grandfather, David ("The Boss"), married Margaret O'Driscoll, a farmer's daughter from Mountfox, and they had four in family.

My aunt, Sr Angela, served most of her life as Matron in St Patrick's Hospital in Fermoy with the Little Company of Mary nuns, and she is buried in the grounds



Colonel Liam Fraher and Johanna O'Keeffe (aunt of Dai O'Keeffe) on their wedding day.

at Milford House in Limerick, to which she retired. My other aunt, Johanna, married Colonel Liam Fraher of Ballynanty House, Bruff, and they had two daughters named Mairéad and Eileen and one son, John, who farmed at Ballynanty and worked with Teagasc as an agricultural instructor.

My father, David, served in the Irish Army during World War II and married my mother, Annie Kelly, at the end of the war. They lived at Roxtown House, my mother's farm then, now occupied by Frank Hanley and family. They had two children, Pat, who died young and me. My grandfather's youngest son, John, inherited the farm at Rahin and married Maureen Murphy from Meelin, Co Cork, late in life, and they had no children. John was killed in a car accident near Grange Cross, and he

had arranged to be buried in the old cemetery at Glenogra. A new family grave was taken at Grange in the 1930s, and, apart from John, all family members have been buried there since.

Music, Song and the O'Keeffes

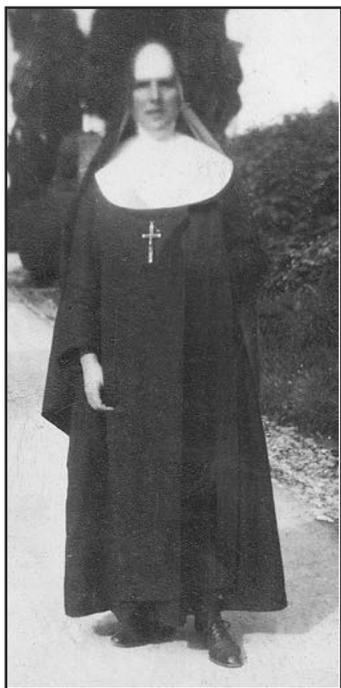
My two aunts, Sr Angela and Jo Fraher, were both competent on the piano which they learned on an upright piano in Rahin. My father, David, and my uncle, John,

also learned to play the piano and the violin. I distinctly recall my aunt, Jo Fraher, playing the grand piano at Ballynanty House when I was very young, with dinner guests including my own mother taking part in the sing-song.

Neighbours and Friends of the O'Keeffes

The O'Keeffes were very friendly with the three families of the O'Dwyers who lived around the entrance gate to the Rahin farm and with the O'Donnells, who came to live nearby in the 1930s. Major JG O'Dwyer, who was born in the passage-way near Donie O'Dwyer's house, – now owned by the Nealon family – lived near Annacotty and visited my grandfather on Christmas Eve during his later years, always bringing a bottle of Paddy Whiskey.

Neighbours of the O'Keeffe family included the families of Shinnors, O'Connell of Grange Hill, Hogan, Hartigan, Conway and Casey. My grandfather, David, played cards several times a week at the neighbouring Guare family home which was at the time located near the present residence of Helen and Pat O'Dwyer in Upper Grange. He was a very superstitious man as were many of the population at the time. One night when returning home, some "prime" boys held back his sheepdog who always travelled with him and tied two tin cans to his tail. They released the dog when David was half way home resulting in my grandfather running terrified for home, with his dog just catching up as he reached the house door.



Sister Angela O'Keeffe (aunt of Dai O'Keeffe).

O'Keeffe Burial Grounds

The earliest O'Keeffe grave is in Glenogra cemetery. The earliest inscription is of a female family member in 1820. The headstone has now fallen and lies face down. The last person to be buried in the grave was John O'Keeffe, who was killed in a car accident near Grange Cross in 1971. The O'Keeffe family acquired a new grave in the graveyard attached to Grange Church in the 1930s, and Catherine Bresnihan (nee O'Keeffe) was the first to be buried there in 1936. The following have been buried there since then.

- Margaret O'Keeffe (nee O'Driscoll), Mountfox, died 31/12/1940
- Patrick O'Keeffe died young on 21/02/1949
- David O'Keeffe died on 13/03/1956

- David M O'Keeffe died on 13/06/1966
- Annie O'Keeffe (nee Kelly), Roxtown, Ballyricken, died 31/08/1998
- Margaret O'Keeffe (nee Curtin), Templeglantine, died 31/01/2011

The O'Keeffes and Education

The O'Keeffes attended hedge schools until 1867 when Grange Primary School was built. Apparently, one of these hedge schools was located in Rahin, some distance behind O'Donnells house. After the FCJ Sisters had come to Bruff, the girls boarded in Bruff Convent, and the boys attended the De La Salle School in Bruff. My father, David, attended St Munchin's College in Limerick as a day student and stayed with his uncle, Canon David O'Driscoll, who was Parish Priest of St Munchin's Parish until his death on 8th December 1923. I was educated by the Jesuits at Crescent College, Limerick in the late 1950s.

The O'Keeffes as Employers

The O'Keeffes usually employed two servant boys, and a housemaid who also helped out with farm work. Harry Wade, a granduncle to former County Councillor, Eddie Wade, worked with my grandparents in Rahin. My grandmother, Margaret, who held the purse strings, refused Harry a sub to allow him to attend the IRA dance in Caherguillamore House on St Stephen's Night, 1920 and pleaded with him not to attend as word was out that British forces were going to raid the event. However, my grandfather gave him money, and he went to the dance and was shot dead that night. My grandmother's sister, Johanna O'Driscoll, came to live in Rahin after her sister married my grandfather, David, and stayed there all her life. She brought a 'Singer' foot sewing machine with her and sewed for the whole family for years. I still have the sewing machine that is in perfect working order.

Politics and the O'Keeffes

The O'Keeffes were supporters of Daniel O'Connell, Charles Stewart Parnell, John Redmond and Michael Collins. They supported Cumann Na nGaedheal, and later the Fine Gael Party since its foundation until the present time.

In the early 1930s, when De Valera came to power, farmers were almost bankrupt due to the economic war being waged against Britain. My father and mother, who were both single at the time, joined the 'Blue Shirt' movement, as did thousands of farmers and their family members. They held meetings and social events at the O'Connell family house at Grange Hill, now owned by Con O'Sullivan and family. They attended rallies all over County Limerick, long before the ICMSA or the IFA were formed. Their uniform was a blue shirt with a tie embossed with the cross of St Patrick (red) on a light blue crest, and they also wore a navy beret.

As extreme Republicans and Fianna Fail supporters attacked these meetings and rallies with rocks and bottles, 'Blue Shirts' carried wattles for their own protection. I still have one which my mother used.

The O'Keeffe Family Connections

My father's cousin, Sean Moylan, who was born in Kilmallock in 1888, was one of the leaders in the War of Independence as O/C (*Officer in Command*) of Cork No 2 Brigade of the Old IRA.

Moylan served as a Senator, TD and Government Minister from the early 1930s until 1957, for North Cork. I recall clearly his visit to our home during the East Limerick By-Election of 1952 when he was Minister for Education.

He visited Grange School while I was a seven-year-old pupil in first class, to meet my teacher, Mrs Rita O'Donnell. He called me up to the top of the class to shake his hand, which I refused to do as he was a Fianna Fáil member. I clearly remember holding my two arms behind my back – no doubt to the great embarrassment of Mrs O'Donnell.

The Last Remaining O'Keeffe Descendants with Direct O'Keeffe Bloodline

- Myself, David O'Keeffe, and my two daughters, Grainne and Rachel
- Coleman Fraher, Ballynanty, Bruff, and his two children
- Liam Fraher, Dubai, and his child
- Deirdre Fraher, Fermoy, and her three children
- Eileen Diggins (nee Fraher), Dublin, and her two children
- Johanna and Elaine Grey, Newry, Co Down, daughters of the late Mairead Grey (nee Fraher)

The Family Connection with Munster Rugby going back to the 1890s

My mother's uncle, Mick Kelly, won five successive Munster Senior Cup medals with Garryowen FC, captaining the team in 1894. He was born in Roxtown House



L-R, Margaret, Grainne, Dai and Rachel O'Keeffe at Grainne's graduation.

across the road from Scanlon's Shop, where my mother and I were born. The house is now owned by Frank Hanly and family. He worked as a senior staff officer with Limerick County Council until his retirement in 1947. He married Celia Canty



David (Dai) O'Keeffe as a young boy.

from Garryspillane, and they lived at 7 Swanson Terrace, O'Connell Avenue, Limerick. His daughter, Cecily, married former rugby international, Paddy Reid, who lined out with the famous Ireland Team that won the Grand Slam in 1948. Another daughter is married to former rugby international, Pat Whelan, and their daughter, Lisa (*Whelan*), is married to Jim Wallace, who was born in Grange where his uncle, Paddy, now lives.

I have the original photograph of the 1894 team in my hallway. I recall as a child when Paddy Reid borrowed the photograph in 1958 to make a copy for the new Garryowen Rugby Pavilion.

Holycross Rugby Club

A rugby club once existed for a number of years at Holycross in Bruff Parish in the 1930s. The Team wore the colours blue and white and played their games in O'Loughlin's field (*pump field*), and they used a shed which was situated on the road to Lough Gur, about 100 yards from Reardon's Public House, for the purpose of changing their clothes. The gable end of this shed is still standing and can be seen clearly from the roadside. Some of those who played with the club are mentioned below.

The local veterinary surgeon, George Shinnors, father of Austin and grandfather of Timo Shinnors, who helped Bruff Rugby Football Club (RFC) to attain senior status back in 2004; Jimmy O'Loughlin Holycross, father of Francis O'Loughlin, who was one of the founding players of Bruff RFC in 1970; Neil McCarthy of Glenogra – Neil is the grandfather to the present Bruff RFC full back, Brendan Deady.

Willie Boohan, Glenogra, whose son, Dan, and grandson later went on to play for Bruff RFC and Paddy Harty of the Old Road, Grange, were also team members. A number of local bank officials from both the Bank of Ireland and the Munster and Leinster Bank (*AIB*) in Bruff also played with the team. Joe Ryan, whose family own the well-known locksmith business at Upper William Street, Limerick, also played with the Holycross team.

The most famous player that Holycross fielded was Jim Barry of Adelaide House, Bruff, who played for Munster. Jim secured a 'final Irish trial' which was until recent years considered as good as an Irish cap. He was, unfortunately, unable

to attend, however, as he was in “negotiations” with the authorities; he was a particularly political man and was a staunch member of Fine Gael and the Blue Shirt organisation.

Jim once asked the late Limerick TD and Senator and six times Mayor of Limerick, Ted Russell, to guest play for the Holycross team. Both Ted and he were travelling back to Limerick by train after playing an inter-pro match for Munster in Dublin, when he asked Ted to play for Holycross the following day (Sunday). Ted willingly obliged.

This account was related to me by Ted Russell at a luncheon in Reardon’s Restaurant after my mother’s funeral. I brought him out after the meal to see the field where the matches were played and the dilapidated old shed which was used for dressing rooms.

Like many newly formed rugby clubs at that time in Ireland, Holycross RFC unfortunately lapsed and finally phased out, mainly due to the GAA ban on persons at the time playing “foreign games” or attending dances or other social events organised by rugby, soccer or cricket clubs.

The photo with this account was kindly given for use in this publication by Eleanor Bennett, Milltown House, Bruff, daughter of the above mentioned Jim Barry.

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Holycross rugby team including team captain Jim Barry (*first player from left in back row*).