

THE PURCELL FAMILY OF GRANGE

By Miriam Gallagher

In Grange Churchyard, at the side that is adjacent to the recent graveyard extension, is to be found the Purcell family burial vault. It is the only accessible burial vault in the graveyard, and as such, the structure has attracted curiosity over many years. It is an elaborate construction in comparison with the many burial plots throughout the graveyard. Clearly, it was erected by a family of some considerable means and community standing at the time. It now suffers in appearance from the passage of time and neglect. As far as I can tell, an interment in the vault has not taken place in recent decades. The vault, set below ground level, is accessed through a large steel door. However, to arrive at the door, it is necessary to open a large and heavy two-sided horizontal iron grill on the surface and to walk down steps. On the surface, the inscription on a tablet to the rear of the burial chamber reads: "THE BURIAL PLACE OF JOHN PURCELL'S FAMILY".

In August 2014, I happened to meet Dianne and Michael McGuinness, on a visit to Ireland from Melville, New York, USA. Michael's grandmother was Delia Purcell, daughter of Patrick Purcell (1826-1893), formerly of The Square, Bruff. They were conducting research at Grange on the ancestral Purcell family.

Dianne and Michael had heard about the upcoming *Grange Book* and the possibility that an article on the family of John Purcell of Grange would be included. With great enthusiasm, they agreed to forward copies of documents in their possession as well as photographs relating to the Purcell family and to provide any further documentation or analysis arising from their continuing research. Subsequently, a copious amount of documentation was received. Dianne and Michael acknowledge the tremendous assistance received from many people in the Grange and surrounding localities as they sought to identify Michael's Irish roots. Subsequently, Sally Purcell from London added to the research material as she traced her ancestry back to 'Dublin' John Purcell.

In what follows, I have attempted to briefly trace the Purcell family of Grange and connections. The Purcell family are descended from David Purcell of Ballycalhane, executed as a rebel in 1581 (*Ref: The Farm by Lough Gur*). I hasten to add that this article does not purport to represent an exhaustive genealogical account

of the Purcell family of Grange. Rather, it traces the McGuinness connection as well as focusing on a number of the Purcell and Spillane family who were well known prominent personages and important achievers in their time. It also traces the Purcell ancestry of Sally Purcell, London.

In Tullybrackey Cemetery, there is a tombstone inscription that includes: Erected by Patrick Purcell [1783-1868] in memory of his father, William Purcell [1747-1795], who died August 1, 1795, aged 48 years...Renewed by P Purcell [1826-1893] of Bruff in memory of his sister Mary Barthly, who died 1851 and his father of Grange P Purcell died July 14th, 1868.



Patrick Purcell (cooper), The Square, Bruff



The Civil Death Record for Patrick Purcell (30-07-1868) indicates his address as Grange Hill and his occupation as a farmer. His father was William Purcell, and his mother was Ellen Clanchy (Clancy). His son, Patrick also, was a cooper, with an address in Bruff – his daughter, Delia (Bridget) Purcell provided the Purcell ancestry line for Michael McGuinness.

It would appear that in 1850, roadside lands that extend approximately from near the top of the hill on the Old Road as far as the Weekes passageway were occupied by the Purcell family. Apparently, outbuildings from the Purcell era remain standing on the Fitzgerald farm and according to Dianne and Michael McGuinness, Sheila Fitzgerald paints the buildings white every spring.

Patrick Purcell (Cooper)

Patrick was born in 1826 and died on 11th July 1893 of pneumonitis. The following death notice appeared in the *Limerick Chronicle* – “Mr Patrick Purcell, a very popular and esteemed townsman, passed away to his Heavenly reward at his residence in Bruff on the 11th instant. His numerous friends will regret to learn of his demise, owing to the many noble qualities that he possessed. He was a good father, a pious and zealous Catholic, and he passed away fortified with the rites of his Holy Church. His remains were interred in the family vault at Tullybrackey. The funeral was as large a one as left Bruff for many years.” John Purcell, son of Patrick, was also a master cooper.

Mary Barthly, daughter of Patrick Purcell (Grange farmer) and sister of Patrick Purcell (Bruff cooper), was married to John Barthly of Caherconlish, Co Limerick. They had four children: Bridget born in 1845, James born in 1846, John born in 1848 and Hanora born in 1851, the same year of Mary's death.

William Purcell and Ellen Clanchy had other children as well as Patrick (Grange farmer): daughters, Johanna ("Mammy Jug") and Hanora and sons, John (born on 11th March, 1785), Thomas (born on 24th May, 1789) and Richard (born on 8th October, 1791). Richard went on to become a victualler in Limerick.

Johanna married Michael O'Brien of Lough Gur (*Ref: [The Farm by Lough Gur](#)*). In the book, it is stated that Johanna's mother, Ellen Clancy, was a Raleigh, descended from Sir Walter Raleigh. According to Dianne and Michael McGuinness, it is believed that the Raleigh connection was through a brother of Sir Walter. Hanora married James O'Brien in 1797, and she is buried in Lough Gur Cemetery.

According to the Bruff Parish marriage records, John Purcell (1785-1872) of Grange, Limerick – son of William and Ellen – married Jane Ann Synane (variations of this spelling are to be found) of Ballyculhane on 17th August 1806. John and Jane Ann had the following children:

ELIZABETH, born 27th September 1808;
JOHANNA, born 4th March 1810;
ELIZABETH, born 16th May 1813;
CATHERINE, born 20th October 1815, died in 1893, aged 78 years;
WILLIAM, born 7th June 1818;
MARY, born 21st January 1821, died 12th June 1852, aged 31 years;
WILLIAM, born 17th July 1823, died 20th September 1838, aged 15 years;
JOHN, born 19th January 1830, died in 1841, aged 11 years;
ELLEN, born 1832.

There were two by the name of William and two by the name Elizabeth in the family. Apparently, it was a practice in the times to rename living children. All of the children died young except for Catherine Purcell, who married John Spillane (1800-1852), a tobacco importer from Limerick, in 1836. John Spillane died at the age of 51 years. Catherine died in 1893. Their son, William Spillane, became Mayor of Limerick and apparently had sixteen children.

The centre tablet over the burial vault in Grange includes the following words: *Consecrated to the memory of her fond husband John Spillane of Limerick by his devoted widow Catherine Spillane...who departed this life January 2nd, 1852 aged 51 years....*

The left-side tablet includes the following words: *The tribute of a mother's [Jane Ann] love to the memory of William Purcell died September 20th, 1838(6) aged 15 years....*

The right-side tablet includes the following words: *Token of affection by John Purcell to the memory of his daughter Mary who died June 12th, 1852...and his son John, aged 11 years [1830 - 1841].*

To the right of the burial vault, there is a headstone that reads: *A Token of Appreciation by John Purcell to the memory of his daughter Mary who died June 12th, 1852. Here rest in peace thou lovely maid and tho thou mould with the dust thou but fairer than the rose.*

'Uncle' John and Aunt Jane Purcell

The following passage, taken from *The Farm by Lough Gur*, provides insight into the lives of John and Jane Ann Purcell – it is beautifully written by the author, Mary Carberry, based on the story of Mary Fogarty (Sissy O'Brien).

“We always had dinner at one o'clock on Sundays instead of at four as on weekdays. In fine weather, relations sometimes came to spend the day. There were the aunts, mother's sisters, and their children from round about Knockainey, and cousin Julia, who was good-tempered except when heated from walking, cousin Tom Raleigh and cousin James Barry and father's Uncle John and Aunt Jane Purcell from Grange, a spruce and jaunty couple who were so old that they walked and stood arm in arm to prop one another up. In spite of totters they were gay and kind and were never tired of telling us stories of old times, when Uncle John was the little brother of “Mammy Jug”, his grown-up sister [*Johanna*].

“Tell us how you ran away to be married!” we begged, although we knew by heart that Aunt Jane was a squire's daughter and Uncle John, a farmer, and if it hadn't been for the help of the parish priest, young John would never have waited behind the ricks in Mr Synane's rick-yard one stormy daybreak until young Jane, creeping through the laurels, joined him for their elopement. They went by the fields so that no early labourers should see them, not knowing that all night the River Maigue had been over-running its banks and that the path was covered by swirling water. Still the turf walls and the Holy Thorn were standing out, and the nervous cows had not yet begun to swim. ‘Is it the will of God that I take you home to your father?’ asked John. ‘It is not the will of God, John,’ answered Jane, ‘until the water is higher than my heart!’ So John took her up pick-a-back, and they splashed over the drowned fields until they came to dry land. Two wetter people never knocked on a priest's door! ‘Well, well,’ said the priest, ‘tis a true saying that *Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it!*’ Within an hour he had married them, young John in his reverence's best suit which he kept to wear before the bishop, and young Jane in the fine clothes which the priest's housekeeper had set aside for her own burial! ‘Please, Aunt Jane, what did the squire say then?’ ‘Words, my dears, which I should blush to repeat! But later on, when he knew that John was

descended from the famous David Purcell of Ballycalhane, who, being in rebellion, was executed in Limerick in 1581, he grew more friendly and at last he came to like his son-in-law for himself, for being... 'Uncle John,' we said, while Aunt Jane bowed to us, as she always did, feeling a compliment was intended.'

Uncle John died on 15th May 1872, aged 86. His civil death record indicates that he was a widower and a farmer at the time. Jane Ann died, some time prior to her husband's death, in August 1871, aged 85. Apparently, after John's death, Patrick J Spillane took over his land holdings.

William Spillane

William Spillane (son of Catherine Purcell, married to John Spillane), grandson of John Purcell and his wife, Jane Ann, had a prestigious career in both his public and private life. He died at his residence at George St, Limerick, after a very short illness. He underwent surgery on the day of his death.

He was elected to a seat in the Corporation, and in 1870 he was unanimously elected mayor. Some years later, he occupied the position of high sheriff of the city. In 1875, he was appointed manager of the Gas Works. As a testimony to his great talent as a financier, he occupied a position as one of the auditors of the National Bank.

For many years, he occupied a seat on the Board of Governors of the Lunatic Asylum, as well as being an ex-officio poor law guardian of the Limerick Union. He was also a member of the Chamber of Commerce, Market Trustees, and Honorary Treasurer for the Governors of St John's Hospital, Public Free Library, Technical Education Committee and also for the then recently formed Jubilee Nursing Association. For many years, he was a magistrate for the city and county. He was appointed a deputy lieutenant during the Lord Lieutenancy of the County of Mr Thomas Enraght O'Brien. For a time, he was president of the charitable body, the Society of St Vincent de Paul.

The Other John Purcell (1811-1871)

There is a tombstone in Grange Graveyard that reads: *Mrs Catherine Purcell to the memory of her beloved husband John Purcell, who departed life on 21st September 1871, aged 59 years. Also her affectionate son, William Purcell, who died 19th December 1875 aged 21 years, Catherine Purcell died on 13th January, 1900, aged 83.*

Catherine Slattery Purcell (1817-1900), married John Purcell (1811-1871), of Grange on 19th February 1846 (*height of the famine*). Their daughter married Cornelius O'Dwyer of Herbertstown in 1883. Martin O'Dwyer, their only surviving child, was born in 1886 and died in 1974. (See pp 347 — *Martin O'Dwyer's Recollections*).

This John Purcell was the son of Patrick Purcell (1783-1868), Grange farmer. He was a nephew of John Purcell of Grange (1785-1872). He was the grandson of

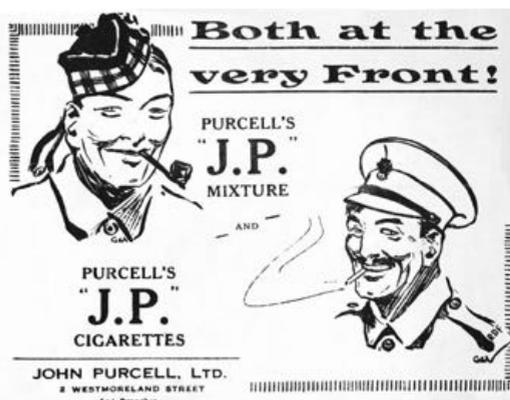
William Purcell of Grange (1747-1795).

'Dublin' John Purcell (1860-1916)
There were so many Purcell family members named "John" that confusion is inevitable at times. For ease of identification, Dianne and Mike McGuinness have dubbed this John as 'Dublin' John, which is very helpful. 'Dublin' John was a son of John Purcell (1811-1871) and Catherine Slattery Purcell (1817-1900). He was, therefore, a grandson of Patrick Purcell (1783-1868) of Grange and great grandson of William Purcell (1747-1795) of Grange. He was a nephew of Patrick Purcell, Bruff cooper, whose daughter, Delia, was the Purcell relative of Mike McGuinness.



Catherine Purcell nee Slattery.

'Dublin' John, a Justice of the Peace, was a well-known Dublin businessman and married Bridget Grennan in 1880. They had thirteen children. In 1880, he opened John Purcell Tobacco Company Limited in Dublin, and at one time, he owned a controlling stake in the Brown Thomas Department Store on Grafton Street. The Lafayette Building on the corner of D'Olier Street and Westmoreland Street is a real Dublin landmark. The building, which looks straight down O'Connell Street is visually



'Dublin' John Purcell Tobacconist advertisement.

pleasing. It takes its contemporary name from the famous Lafayette photographers. As *Christian Casey* has noted in her architectural study of Dublin, it was built for the Liverpool and Lancashire Insurance Company in the 1890s. Casey has described the building as a "Portland stone baronial exercise with Gothic and Ruskinian leanings". JJ O'Callaghan was the architect.

The stonework of the Lafayette Building gives some indication of its former life. Above the Westmoreland Street entrance to the building, the London and Lancashire Insurance Company logo can be seen. The building was originally constructed for use by this company. In the front of the building, John Purcell's tobacco importers and cigarette suppliers logo is to be found. The Dublin City Public Library collection contains a fantastic image of one of John Purcell's shops in a former life, facing onto D'Olier Street. The photograph is reproduced here.

'Dublin' John Purcell died suddenly on 13th January 1916. *The Freeman's Journal* published his obituary "Prominent Citizen's Death – Mr John Purcell, JP" The following are extracts:

"The deceased gentleman, who had been apparently in the best of health until a few days ago, died yesterday afternoon at his residence, Conyngham Road, Phoenix Park. Mr Purcell, who had held a prominent place in business life of the city, was for several years a director of *The Freeman's Journal*, and as late as last week attended the company's Board meetings.

"As a life-long Nationalist he gave earnest and painstaking attention to the interests and welfare of the company [*Freeman's Journal*], bringing to bear on its affairs his great commercial knowledge and business capacity....

"His death removes a citizen whose loss will be generally and genuinely deplored. The extensive business which, as a tobacconist and cigarette manufacturer, he has built up in the city is a striking evidence of his enterprise and commercial capacity. His stake in the city's welfare was large, but his interests and activities were directed by civic and National considerations, rather than personal concerns.

"He was connected with the Irish Industrial Printing and Publishing Company, was a director of Brown Thomas and Company as well as a director of *The Freeman's Journal*...

"His interest in civil affairs brought him into the Citizens' Association movement, of which he was one of the original members, and his active association with it continued up to his death.

"Mr Purcell's son, Lieutenant Purcell, of the RAMC, is at present at the front."

The *Irish Times* published 'Dublin' John's will on 14th March 1916. He left a personal estate valued at £48,305. Inter alia, he provided £50 to the parish priest of Bruff for the celebration of Masses.



One of 'Dublin' John Purcell's tobacco shops facing onto D'Olier Street in Dublin.

In early 2015, Dianne and Michael McGuinness established contact with Sally Purcell, great granddaughter of 'Dublin' John. Her father, Edward Purcell, is the son of Patrick Purcell (1906-1958), one of 'Dublin' John's youngest children. As a result, the journey of research into the Purcell family of Grange continued.

Michael McGuinness (born 1945)

Michael (Mike) McGuinness of New York can trace his ancestors to the Purcell family of Grange, right back to William Purcell (1747-1795), descendant of David Purcell, a rebel who was executed in 1581. Mike's grandmother was Delia (Bridget) Purcell, daughter of Bruff cooper, Patrick Purcell (1826-1893), whose father was the Grange farmer, also named Patrick Purcell (1783-1868), whose father was the aforementioned William Purcell. So, commencing with David Purcell, the ancestral Purcell line is William, Patrick, Patrick and Delia.



James Naughton and wife Delia nee Purcell.

Delia married James Naughton of Crean in 1904, and the couple left Ireland to build a life in the USA. They had ten children, one of whom, Mary Naughton, born in 1908, was Mike's mother. Delia died in Queens, New York on October 6th, 1947. Her husband, James, drove a trolley car in New York City. Raising ten children in Hell's Kitchen, New York, during WWI and during the Great Depression was quite a feat.

Michael and his wife, Dianne, have a son named Michael, born in 1972. They have a daughter named Keira, who is married to a policeman. She has two young sons, a full-time career and a home to manage. She obtained a Bachelor's Degree from George Mason University. Keira is a musically gifted woman. On foot of impressive research by

Mike and Dianne, their five grandchildren now have unambiguous ancestral links to William Purcell of Grange (born 1747), spanning a total of eight generations.

Like his father before him, Michael has made a career in the NYPD. Immediately after college, in 1993, Michael Jnr was sworn into the New York City Police Department. He worked on patrol in the Midtown North Precinct and did plainclothes assignments in the Grand Larceny Task Force (pickpocket unit) and Queens Narcotics. In 1999, he was promoted to sergeant and worked on patrol in the Ninth Precinct, training new police officers. In January 2001, he was assigned to the Emergency Service Unit, where he worked patrol in Upper and Lower Manhattan until May

2011. He was then promoted to the rank of lieutenant, remaining in the Emergency Service Unit, where he is assigned as the special projects coordinator. He is also a rescue team manager on NYTF-1, an urban search-and-rescue team made up of NYPD Emergency Service Unit members and NYC firefighters. In 2008, he received a Master's Degree in Public Administration from Marist College. In 2009, he received a Certificate of Acknowledgement from Mayor Bloomberg for actions taken along with his squad following the crash of Flight 1549 in the Hudson River. In 2010, the Urban Search and Rescue Team, NYTF-1, responded to Haiti following the devastating earthquake that occurred there. The team spent fourteen days there and rescued six people who were entrapped in collapsed structures. Clearly, the Purcell reputation is in good hands.

At Bruff Garda Station is a photograph (*below*) of Michael McGuinness Jr and a plaque. The photo is of Michael holding a flag pole. The wording on the plaque reads as follows:

Sgt Mike McGuinness NYPD
(*Holding Flag Pole*).
Ground Zero 9/11.
Direct Descendant of Purcells,
Bruff Square

Sally Anne Purcell (born 1970)
Reference was made earlier to contact made by Dianne and Michael McGuinness with Sally Purcell (*London*) in their quest for more Purcell family history. Sally has established that 'Dublin' John was her great grandfather. She can, therefore, in similar fashion to Michael McGuinness, trace her Purcell ancestry back to William Purcell of Grange (1747-1795) and consequently is a relative of the rebel, David Purcell, executed in 1581.



Sally, married to Oliver Reed in 2012, is the daughter of Edward Purcell (born 1939) and French national, Dominique Jarrosson (1947-1994). Edward as well as Sally's brother, Charles Edouard (born 1967) are now both resident in Belgium.



Patrick and Francis Purcell with baby Michael.

Sally's father, Edward, was one of three sons of Patrick James Purcell (1906-1958) and Audrey Symes (1912-2002). Edward's brothers are Michael (born 1936) and Nicholas (born 1955). Sally's grandfather, Patrick James Purcell, was a son of 'Dublin' John Purcell.

So, commencing with Grange man William Purcell, Sally Purcell's ancestry is as follows, involving seven generations: William Purcell (1747-1795), Patrick Purcell (1783-1868), John Purcell (1811-1871), 'Dublin' John Purcell (1860-1916), Patrick James Purcell (1906-1958), Edward Purcell (born 1939) and Sally Anne – herself – (born 1970).

Conclusion

I am acutely aware that this article has not comprehensively charted the geneology from William Purcell (born 1747) and his wife, Ellen Clancy, up to the present time. In fact, the Clancy side of the family has not been researched at all. Earlier, I explained the context for this article which is almost totally based upon



'Dublin' John Purcell with his wife Bridget Grennan and some of their children.

the enormous research undertaken by Michael and Dianne McGuinness (USA) and by Sally Purcell of London. I realise that there are Purcell descendants in County Limerick and elsewhere whose lineage is not detailed within this account. This is a matter of regret, but time constraints for the production of this book curtailed the extent to which research was possible.

Perhaps this article may incentivise or encourage other descendants of William and Ellen to build upon the research results achieved by Dianne, Michael and Sally and to collaborate in the development of a much more comprehensive and inclusive genealogical analysis. Good luck with that! Maybe a future *Grange Book* will update the Purcell/Clancy story.