



Thomas Bulfin RIC second from left.

THE BULFIN FAMILY

By Tom Bulfin (*Crean*)

The Bulfin and Clancy families of Grange are well known in the locality and beyond. For a number of generations, the families have been linked through marriage. My grandmother was Bridget Clancy from Grange, married to Thomas Bulfin from County Offaly.

The Clancy Connection

There are accounts to be found in this book of the Clancy family, including the murdered Mayor of Limerick, Seirse (George) Clancy – my granduncle. Therefore, I will avoid repetition, except where it is merited for the sake of the Bulfin story and clarity.

My great-grandfather, John Clancy, known as Johnny, was born in Doneraile, County Cork in 1848, and he died on December 31st, 1935. He moved to Grange with his father, George, in 1854. In Grange, he learned his trade as a carpenter from his father. He worked at the Croker Estate in Grange as a very young man. He married Bridget Farrell (1858-1898) from Monaleen at the church there. Johnny and Bridget had five sons and two daughters: Patrick, George, Jack, Joseph, Edward, Mary and Bridget. Bridget was to become my grandmother.

My great grandmother, Bridget Clancy (nee Farrell), had a significant role in running the Clancy post office and public house. As she died at forty years of age, my grandmother, Bridget Clancy, left school at twelve years of age to look after both. Subsequently, on 24th March 1919, she was appointed postmistress by Mr Gallagher, Postmaster at Kilmallock.

Telephones were very scarce at the time, and only a few knew how to operate them. Consequently, my grandmother, Bridget, assisted people wishing to make telephone calls from the post office. In those times, all phone calls to private subscribers were routed through the post office exchange. She operated effectively as both a journalist and adviser to many.

My grandaunt, Mary Clancy, never married, and she performed all the housework required. According to my father, Paddy Bulfin, Mary was as much a mother to him and his siblings as their natural mother, Bridget, was. My father often said

that Mary was a wonderful person and they affectionately called her ‘Nana’. When she died in 1959, Dad mourned her death as much as if she was his own mother.

The Bulfin Origins

The Bulfin family hailed from Co Offaly. My grandfather, Thomas Bulfin, came from Five Valley, near Birr, Co Offaly, born into a Church of Ireland family. That Bulfin family branch were originally Palatines – German Protestants – who escaped religious persecution in their own country, and settled in Kings County, as it was then known, during the plantation of Laois and Offaly in 1556. My grandfather, Thomas, came to Co Limerick when he was stationed in Grange (1912 – 1916) – a member of the RIC (Royal Irish Constabulary).

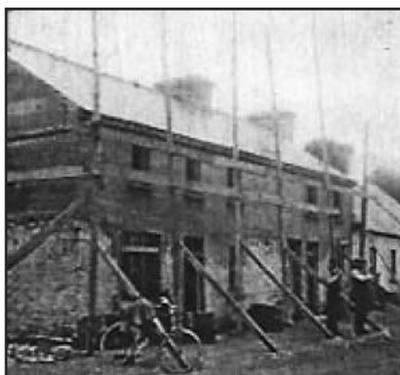
My great-great-great grandfather was Robert Bulfin, who was born in 1790 in Coologue (probably in Co Offaly as opposed to similar place names in Co Limerick and Co Kilkenny). His wife was Mary Ann (surname unknown); she was born in 1786 and died in 1868. They had nine children, one of whom was my great-great grandfather, William Bulfin, born in 1812.

William Bulfin was married to Ann Greene (1801-1866). They had nine children: Robert, John, William, Sarah Jane, George, Thomas (my great grandfather), Elizabeth, Margaret and Mary Ann.

My great grandfather, named Thomas (1847-1917), was married to Elizabeth Hamilton (1852-1912). They had eight children: William James Bulfin (1877-1957); Margaret Alice Bulfin (1880-?); Mary Anne Bulfin, twin (1881-1957); Sarah Jane Bulfin, twin (1881-?); John Hamilton Bulfin (1882-1951); Lucy Barbara Bulfin (1884-?); Frances Elizabeth Bulfin (1885-?); and Thomas Bulfin (1889-1967), who was my grandfather.

Grandfather Thomas Bulfin and Wife

The precise circumstances under which my grandfather, Thomas Bulfin, and my grandmother, Bridget Clancy, became acquainted are not clear. However, there is documentary evidence in existence to indicate the commencement and conduct of an intense love affair that led to their marriage in 1916. I am in the possession of many hand-written postcard messages between the two parties, mostly from Thomas to Bridget, which indicate a truly unique courtship. Owing to the circumstances of the time, that is to say Ireland’s fight for independence, and he being in the RIC, and there being considerable antagonism between Catholics and Protestants, it is understandable that the



Bulfin home at Lower Grange being extended – 1915/16

many postcards were written in code, some of which have been deciphered. The fact that Bridget lived in a house containing a post office meant that her privacy was much protected by the coded correspondence. Other members of the Bulfin family, as well, have a number of such postcards in their possession.

When Bridget Clancy and Thomas Bulfin wished to marry, Thomas approached Bridget's brothers with a view to obtaining their approval. Permission was granted on the basis that he would change his religion and politics – which he did – a development that was frowned upon by his family in Co Offaly. The marriage took place in Grange Church in 1916. Down through the ages, it has been the case that obstacles in matters of the heart were invariably overcome through the primacy of true love. So it proved for Bridget and Thomas. They went on to have a family of nine, seven sons and two daughters: William, Maureen, George, Tommy, Breda, John (Johnnie), Joe, Patrick (Paddy) and Robert (died very young).

At the time of their marriage, Bridget was the postmistress in Grange, and a public house, run by the Clancy family, was attached to the house. After their marriage, they extended their cottage to become a two-storey dwelling. It appears that my great-grandfather, on the Bulfin side, had unmarried sisters in America, who sent him the money to meet the extension costs and also to purchase land. Thomas and Bridget owned the land known as 'Mont an Ard', which is directly across from the house on the far side of the main road, which was apparently assigned by the Land Commission. They also owned a parcel of land known as 'Banogue' farther down the road towards Limerick. That is the land in the corner bound on two sides by the Bruff-Limerick main road and the minor road from the main road that goes off in the direction of Fedamore. Like many farmers in the area, Thomas also acquired land in what is known as the Corcass, which was used mainly as meadow land for hay.

My father often spoke fondly of my grandfather's gardening prowess – he was an excellent tillage man and very proud of his garden, where he grew vegetables sufficient for his family's needs. He also kept cows; so milk was plentiful. Pigs were reared; thus providing ample supply of bacon. As regards food, the family was nearly self-sufficient. A boar was kept, and he was available to neighbours and many others when his services were required for sow impregnation. My grandfather had a horse and trap, which he used to deliver telegrams to the surrounding areas.

During "troubled times" in the early 1920s, the Bulfin home in Lower Grange was attacked by the infamous "Black-and-Tan" Crown forces. Apparently, my grandfather was taken away but one of the policemen present identified him as an ex RIC member and intervened to have him released. The bullet marks from the attack are still evident at the house.

Grandfather's First Cousin – William Bulfin

My grandfather's first cousin, William Bulfin (1864-1910), born in Co Offaly immigrated to Argentina, where he became a rancher on the Pampas. Later, he

became both the proprietor and editor of *The Southern Cross*, a Buenos Aires newspaper. He returned to Ireland in 1902 and rode around the country on a bicycle made in Wexford. He wrote a book about his travels, titled *Rambles in Eirinn* – this book, a travelogue, published in 1907, remained an important social history of Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century.

Rambles in Eirinn is a description of the people and places of Ireland. William's travelogue provides a vivid picture of Irish town and country life. It features chance encounters with rogues who populated rural areas, descriptions of the land and various agricultural activities, historical sites, and the legends and folklore of the peasants. At the turn of the twentieth century, Ireland had just experienced the end of the Land War and agrarian reforms that saw the demise of the Anglo-Protestant landlord system. Most of the land was then owned by a rising Irish Catholic middle class, and this demographic would be responsible for the revolutionary activity, between 1916-1923, that resulted in Irish independence and bitter civil war.

His descriptions, in which he voices his bias against the colonial order, provide a fascinating insight into a society that was on a knife edge. William was a nationalist and friend of Griffith, but he would not live to see the goals of Irish nationalism realised. He showed his contempt for the gentry and satires the British administration of the country that he believed did not look after its interests. He had an intimate knowledge of the Irish landscape and the historical importance of places such as Tara, the Skryne Valley, Vinegar Hill and other sites. For him, these places were sacred grounds as evidence of Irish civilisation that existed prior to British rule and of the long Irish struggle for freedom and independence.

William's son, Eamon, studied in St Enda's School with Patrick Pearse. He was one of the youngest of the Volunteers involved at the GPO, Dublin, in 1916, where James Connolly bestowed on him the honour of hoisting two 'tricolours', one on either side of the roof. For his part in the 'Rising', Eamon received the death sentence but this was commuted on the plea of Argentina's Ambassador to London. Along with others, he was sent to Stafford prison in England and Frongoch internment camp in Wales. His daughter, Catalina Bulfin, married Amnesty International founder and Nobel Prize winner, Sean McBride, son of Maud Gonne and Major John McBride, who was executed for his part in the 1916 rebellion.

Eamon was a noted sportsman and a prominent member of the UCD Fitzgibbon Cup (hurling) and Sigerson Cup (football) teams. He led UCD to victory in the 1915 Fitzgibbon Cup Final. In the book *The Cups That Cheered*, written by Dónal McAnallen and published in 2012, it is recorded that Eamon Bulfin scored three of UCD's six goals against UCG in the opening Fitzgibbon Cup game on Friday 26 April 1912. The deciding game between UCD and UCC was "one of the best and fastest hurling matches that could be witnessed." (*The Freeman's Journal*).



Thomas Bulfin Sr, Lower Grange.

Eamon scored the only goal of the game that UCD won by a point.

Family of my Grandparents

As stated, my grandparents, Thomas and Bridget, had eight children, six sons and two daughters. The following is a brief account of each commencing with the oldest William and concluding with the youngest, Paddy, my late father.

WILLIAM Bulfin was born on 12th August 1917 and died tragically on 23rd October 1919, aged just over two years. He was buried in Grange Cemetery. The tragic accident happened when he toppled into a barrel containing just a couple of

inches of water while playing in the backyard of the house. Unfortunately, the couple of inches of water were sufficient for him to be drowned. My father told me that my grandmother never really came to terms with William's death and she often recalled that sad period in her life.

MAUREEN Bulfin was born on 16th September 1919 and died on 12th July 1990. Maureen was married to William English from Knockainey, where she moved after her marriage. Her husband died a young man in 1947. The couple had no children. Maureen returned to reside in Lower Grange for some time, during which Breda stayed in Knockainey with Maureen's mother-in-law, Mrs Annie English.

After a few years, Maureen returned to Knockainey to continue the running of the farm until it was sold in the 1960s. Maureen and her mother-in-law then moved to Lower Grange and took up residence in the small house attached to the family home.

During those years in the 1950s, my grandfather and Uncle Tommy helped out with the running of the Knockainey farm for Maureen, especially the cutting, saving and harvesting of hay. Maureen, while in Knockainey, faithfully visited home in Lower Grange every Wednesday and Saturday. She assisted Breda with the weekly post office accounts preparation each Saturday evening.

GEORGE Bulfin was born on 10th November 1920 and died on 12th January 1994. George, popularly known as Georgie, never married. He was a well-known character in Grange, renowned for his frequent presence at the Camogue River Bridge, where he saluted all and sundry as they passed by. I recall a story about George when, one day, he was the goalkeeper in a hurling game. A hare appeared nearby in the field, attracting George's attention. George vacated his goalkeeping

duties in favour of chasing after the hare!

TOMMY Bulfin was born on 29th December 1921 and died on 8th December 1980 after a short illness. Tommy, who never married, lived in Lower Grange through his lifetime. He was well known and greatly liked in the area



Paddy Bulfin with his wife Philomena and son Tom (Crean) in the middle

and had a long association with the GAA, particularly with underage hurling. He was, apparently, an excellent hurler during his playing days. He had a sweet melodious voice, and he was known to sing a song or two in a public house setting. Tommy was a very hard-working farmer.

BREDA Bulfin was born on 22nd February 1923 and died on 18th October 2003. She was well known as the postmistress in Grange for many years, having taken over the role from her mother. She was greatly respected and liked and was a friend to many. She had an excellent rapport with the postmen who were attached to Grange Post Office – John Joe Hourigan, Mick Madden and Pake Harty, to name a few. She never married and always regretted the fact that she had no children of her own. However, she had a wonderful heart for children of all ages and willingly shared all she had with any child who crossed the threshold. She had a special relationship with Sister Anne Marie – Peggy O’Mahoney – during Peggy’s growing-up years. She gave her love willingly to all her nephews and nieces and nurtured them as they grew up. She never forgot a birthday, a Christmas, a wedding, a First Communion or a Confirmation. Breda was a good camogie player and played on a Fedamore team that had a high reputation. A lovely tribute was paid to Breda in the *Fedamore News* 2003 following her death.

JOHN (JOHNNIE) Bulfin was born on 14th February 1924 and died on 23rd February 2007. He married Margaret (Adge) O’Brien from Camass and lived there, where they reared four sons. Johnnie commenced working in Dunworth’s Public House and Grocery at Bruff in 1945, where he remained until his retirement. Johnnie was renowned for his involvement in GAA matters. He was an able hurler himself and an enthusiastic coach in later years. As a mentor and supporter at hurling and football matches, Johnnie would be heard instructing and encouraging local team members. His four sons, Thomas, John, Seoirse and William were excellent hurlers on Bruff teams over the years.

JOE Bulfin was born on 23rd April 1925 and died on 7th April 1996. He married Angela Mason, and they had five children – Geraldine, Kevin, Brian, William-Patrick and Brendan. Joe moved to England in 1949, where he lived out his life. He was employed by British Airways. He had a remarkably good tenor voice. He won a BBC radio competition in 1952, and he performed in public concerts. Joe wrote an article titled “*Grange Man in London*”, circa 1985, about his life and experiences overseas. It is worth reproducing some of what Joe wrote as his account provides a fascinating insight into life for the immigrant in those times.

“Apart from the sadness of leaving one’s home, I also must confess, I felt the leaving of the Bruff hurling club as a player left a deep abyss in my sporting life.

My thoughts all through my journey to London were full of nostalgia, but now I wondered what was in store for me.

My first experience of London was a foggy dismal morning as I wound my way to now known Euston Road, where I met a London Transport bus inspector who guided me to Kilburn, where I was to meet two great friends of mine.

Life was difficult here at that time, and the only consolation that one got was through the Catholic Church and above all, our faith. One’s faith and trust came into prominence when one was questioned about one’s nationality when looking for accommodation or work.

I became involved in the Limerick Association in London – it was a great success, so much so that it is still a great Association today. It had in it, from its formation to the present day, some of the nicest and greatest Limerick men and women to be found anywhere in the world.

Whenever one meets an Irish man or woman over here, the usual question is: What part of Ireland do you come from? Have you been home recently? Very few Irish people deny their country of faith, despite the ‘troubles’ of recent years. We have a natural feeling of our own and are very soft and sentimental. We will do anything for each other, and one can always sense their longing to be part of things Irish. To travel by train and boat and to witness the joy of emigrants’ faces as they near the Irish coast is something to behold.

Very few Irish lose their faith, in fact, their faith increases because they know that it is so easy to lose it unless you strengthen your resolve to love God and the country of your faith.”

PATRICK (PADDY) Bulfin was born on 10th June 1926 and died on 25th April 2008. He was, of course, my beloved father. He married Philomena Monaghan from Clonlara, County Clare, and they had six children together – Therese, Thomas, Mary, Bríd, Mairéad and Colm. He worked in Dunworth’s Public House and Grocery at Bruff from 1943 until he moved to St Joseph’s Hospital in Mulgrave Street, Limerick

in 1948, where he trained and became a psychiatric nurse – a profession that he worked in full-time until his retirement in 1987, after forty years of public service. He and his family lived close to the said hospital.

My father wrote an account of his fond memories of Grange, where he recalled childhood times that were very happy ones and a contented and united family. He recalled that children were all “hurling mad”. They played on a small patch of ground beside Madden’s Forge, which was known to them as “The Grove”. He recalled school and hurling friends, including those from the Feely, O’Brien, Burke, Harty, Clancy, Corrigan and O’Donnell families, amongst others. He recalled his first day at school in Grange, when the principal, Mr T Lynch, told him not to return the next day unless he brought a bottle of stout for him. At the time, the family had a public-house in Lower Grange. The next morning, he pestered his mother so much that she eventually gave in and gave him a bottle of stout for the headmaster. He recalled his happy days at school and the teachers and fellow pupils. Recalling his time in Dunworth’s Public House in Bruff, this was one of the happiest periods of his life. Maurice and his wife Nora were always good and kind to him.

My father told me that when he was a young boy, it was his job to deliver telegrams. At that time, John and Gertrude Hunt, antique dealers and advisers to collectors worldwide, lived in Lough Gur. Following World War II, they built up one of Ireland’s greatest private collections of art and antiques, which dated from the Neolithic period to the twentieth century. The collection is now held in trust for the State at The Hunt Museum, Limerick. My father delivered telegrams to the Hunt residence, which included invitations to buy or bid on items from all over Europe. This was the most efficient communication medium available to close a sale at the time.

The *Census* taken in 1911 recorded that five male members of the Clancy family were carpenters by trade; alas, that family tradition has not survived in the parish to present times. However, some current members of the Bulfin family, descended from Bridget Clancy, have taken up the mantle and have ensured the survival of the art for another while, at least. Being one of these, it gives me pleasure and pride to follow in the steps of those who have gone before.

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References and Notes:

- (1) *Bruff publication – The Dawn.*
- (2) *The Southern Cross, a Buenos Aires newspaper.*
- (3) *Rambles in Eirinn – travelogue, published in 1907 by Gill publishing – written by William Bulfin 1902.*
- (4) <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/digital-book-collection/digital-books-by-subject/geography-of-ireland/bulfin-rambles-in-eirinn/>
- (5) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Bulfin
- (6) *The Cups That Cheered – A History of the Sigerson, Fitzgibbon and Higher Education Gaelic Games, written by Dónal McAnallen and published by Collins Press in 2012.*
- (7) *The Freeman’s Journal.*
- (8) *Sincere thanks to the Offaly and Limerick Bulfins, who assisted with the research.*