

A Review of the thesis entitled “*Cabhair is Cairde is Grasta O Dhia Chugainn. A Study of the “Saoicht” of a Parish in Co. Clare.*” for which Mr. Flan Garvey, Chairman of the Governing Body at the Institute of Technology Tralee was awarded an M.A. at the Institute of Technology, Tralee in 2008

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Introduction

The dissertation presented by Mr Flan Garvey, at IT Tralee in 2008 for which he was awarded an M.A. degree by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council (Now QQI) has attracted in the recent past unprecedented media attention. Despite a great deal of comment about its shortcomings and the circumstances of its award (to a person who was the Chairman of the Governing Body of the Institute in which the award was made), and despite the fact that it sat for four years on the library shelves at IT Tralee for all to read, little or nothing about the content of the thesis itself has entered the public domain. From a scholarly perspective this is peculiar and hardly satisfactory when so much controversy abounds about the dissertation. Academic works are meant to be the subject of analysis and criticism by the scholarly community. It is a core principle of scholarship that academics have a duty to critically analyse each other’s work and publish their conclusions. In that way errors and deficiencies are uncovered, useful additions to lines of academic thought are identified and the process of learning advanced. It is in that context I now seek herein to redress the deficit of analysis with respect to this highly controversial dissertation.

What is the Dissertation about?

The thesis is entitled “*Cabhair is Cairde is Grasta O Dhia Chugainn. A Study of the “Saoicht” of a Parish in Co. Clare.*” The inclusion of the devout supplication in Irish coupled with the word “*Saoicht*” in the title would seem to suggest that the work is partly in Irish or that the Irish language has some specific relevance. This does not prove to be the case, however, as becomes apparent on reading the work through. Other than the inclusion here and there of a sprinkling of Irish words and phrases for no obvious purpose, most notably in the titles of some chapters, it emerges that the Irish language has no relevance to the thesis. The token use of Irish offers no informational value and seems to be, simply, an idiosyncratic, stylistic device of the author. From an analytical perspective the use of the term ‘Saoicht’ at the core of the title is, however, problematic in that nowhere is the term defined, nor is there any indication in the dissertation how its scope is delimited.

The Irish or Gaelic term “saoicht,” depending on context, appears to have subtly different meanings and may be taken to denote “learning,” “wisdom” or “accomplishments.” It may also be taken to mean something close to the concept of

“culture” in the broad sociological sense, as in the norms, values and created artefacts that are characteristic of a group or of a people. In the absence of any effort in the work to define or operationalize the concept of “Saoicht” as applied to a parish or the people past and present of the parish, it is not at all apparent that the writer had a clear picture of his own intent. The objective of the thesis seems, on the one hand, to be the writing of a general history and description of the culture of the Parish of Inagh and Kilnamona but, on the other hand, there is an avowed intention to show how the people of the parish triumphed over adversity down through the ages. In the Abstract it is stated that:

“It is the story of a ‘simple’ people steeped in religious faith and tradition, whom whenever tested, have shown resilience, facing adversity with courage and dignity. It is these societal attributes that need to be recorded and preserved for posterity” (p.5).

Throughout the body of the thesis there is little or no advertence to this theme of ‘adversity’ and triumphal response. At the end, in Chapter 8, “*Concluding Remarks*,” there are further indications of what the author believed he had been about. He states:

“The theme of my submission is: ‘Cabhair is cairde is grasta o Dhia chugainn’¹ and in putting together a selected social history and folklore of Inagh/Kilnamona in County Clare, I have endeavoured to show how ‘help’ and ‘friends’ and the ‘grace of God’ are intertwined in the lives of our people, a theme often present in manifestation (sic) of local culture” (p.281).

While the meaning of the above passage is far from clear, it is obvious that *the “social history and folklore”* of the parish is selectively addressed with presumably the purpose being to show how “help,” “friends” and “the Grace of God” were important to the people of the parish down the ages. Harking back to the theme of triumph over adversity, referred to in the introduction to the thesis, one assumes the intent is to show how those three phenomena enabled such a triumph in the parish. The research effort might then be understood as an attempt to show how cooperation and religion enabled the people of Inagh and Kilnamona to survive and thrive in the face of adversity. The problem this, seemingly reasonable, conclusion raises is that it is by no means clear that the contents of the thesis follow the same logic. The material selected for inclusion and that excluded seems to bear little relationship to this purpose and seems to be based on an entirely different, unstated and indiscernible set of criteria.

The lack of clarity as to what the term ‘Saoicht’ is intended to encompass raises a profound methodological question: within the context of what academic discipline or disciplines is the dissertation to be understood? To what branch or branches of learning does it purport to contribute and which academic specialism or specialisms is a writer of “Saoicht” expert in? It is not a branch of Irish or Gaelic scholarship given that it is written in English and has nothing at all to do with the Irish language. This is surprising given that one of the external examiners of the thesis was a retired Professor of Modern Irish and that Mr Garvey’s supervisor when writing the thesis at IT Tralee

¹ Roughly translates as ‘May we have help, friends and the grace of God’ but may be intended to mean “May we have the help, friendship and grace of God.”

was also an Irish scholar. Based on the content of the dissertation it would seem to be a peculiar amalgam of folklore, history, archaeology, geography, biology and sociology. It is extremely difficult to discern how those varied disciplines are meant to be wedded together in any coherent way under the single term ‘Saoicht’ or how any one scholar could hope to have genuine expertise in such a diverse set of academic fields. There is no attempt in the work to situate it in the context of an academic tradition or discipline to which the term “Saoicht” refers. There are no references to similar works in the past on which this thesis is intended to build or which have in any way influenced the form and style of this research effort. It is left entirely to the reader to infer from the content how works on “Saoicht” are situated within the totality of all scholarly endeavour.

It is to be noted that a synopsis of the thesis was subsequently published as a book by the author under the title *A History of the Parish of Inagh / Kilnamona* (Garvey, 2011). This would strongly suggest that the thesis was also intended to be a work of history. One can only speculate on the author’s reasons for using in its title the term “Saoicht” instead of “History”.

The thesis consists of a brief Preface, a brief Introduction followed by seven chapters, the contents of each of which will be described below.

The Chapter Contents

The Preface and Introduction

It might be expected that the Preface or Introduction would offer some clarity as to what exactly is the scope and intent of the dissertation. The first sentence of the Preface begins as follows:

“Putting together the history of a parish is an overwhelming task and the writer knows well that he can never do justice to the enormity of it.....”(p.17).

This seems to clearly indicate that the objective is to write a history of Inagh and Kilnamona. There follows some comment on the paucity of “*literature about local histories*” (p.17). Then, however, it is stated that the present research is “*located in academic terms in the interface of social history and folklore*” (p.17), at once both narrowing and extending the scope of exploration with the qualifier of “*history*” by “*social*” and the addition of “*folklore*”. There is no other effort in the Preface to describe the purpose of the dissertation with the remaining page briefly addressing the geography and some notable physical features of the parish.

The Introduction commences with the question: “*Why should I undertake this work?*” (p.20). This might be expected to result in some illumination of the author’s purpose. In summary, his answer reflects his conviction that someone like him who was “*born, bred and reared in the parish and who worked in the parish as a teacher for over thirty five of my thirty seven years of teaching should leave to posterity all I have discovered about our place and our people*” (p21). Again, the inclusive theme re-emerges in the phrase “*all I*

have discovered". This latter appears to be the most accurate description of what follows in the content of the seven chapters in that the sole criterion for inclusion of information or comment would seem to be the availability of the material.

Chapter 1 (pp. 22-83): "Inagh and Kilmamona: An Overview from Prehistory, History and Legend"

This chapter commences with "*A view from prehistory and mythology*" (p.22), attempting to trace the movements of various legendary tribes such as the Firbolg, the Milesians and the Earnai in the region. Much of this latter material (mid page 28 – end page 35) is transcribed directly from a previously published article by Gaynor (1942). Virtually the entirety of Gaynor's article, a 566 line work (A4), is reproduced verbatim in the thesis. There then follows a detailed account of the location, physical characteristics and dimensions of three "wedge tombs" extant in the parish. This material (pp. 36-41) is also largely copied verbatim from another source, from DeValera and O'Nullain (1961, pp. 58-59 and 60-61) with the insertion here and there of a few extra points. No information is offered as to the origin, history or archaeological significance of the tombs.

The next section in the chapter describes the Inagh River and has no apparent connection at all to the chapter title, being largely a verbatim account from the report of a Central Fisheries Board scientific survey conducted of the river (Whelan and Roche, 1987). Thereafter, the theme reverts abruptly once more to the historical, addressing the history of the area from early Christian times to the 18th century. This is a turgid and relatively impenetrable section peppered with ancient names of places and peoples. It is replete with sentences like: "*Cineal Cormaic, ousted by Clan Culein from Magh Adhair, which they had held for four centuries, were obliged to settle in Kilmale-Breintir Cormacach*" (p.51). Its purpose or intent is far from clear. There are then two detailed accounts of clerical martyrdoms in the vicinity during the Cromwellian period, followed by further sections dealing with specific aspects of the ecclesiastical history of the parish and returning again with an additional section on one of the martyrdom cases described previously.

As with earlier sections in the chapter, the text of the material dealing with Christian times to the 18th century, the martyrdoms and with aspects of ecclesiastical history (mid p. 48 - end p.69) is transcribed from Gaynor (1942) apart from two or three sentences or phrases.

There is then another abrupt change of theme. Having addressed again in the previous section the Cromwellian era martyrdoms, a section is opened dealing with Mount Callan House, the importance or relevance of which to the history of the parish is left unsaid. This consists of a few seemingly random items of information about the house, built it is said in the 1870s by one Lieutenant Colonel George Synge, about whom no details are offered. We are told that the present owner Robert Tottenham "*has been the pioneer of private afforestation in this country*" (p.79), that the house had its own private electricity source and was not joined to the national grid until "*quite recently*" (p.80), that the present owner, Robert Tottenham, is "*preparing to get involved in wood chipping and wood pellets*" (p.81) as an energy source and that during the "*troubles in the 1920s, the*

owners of Mount Callan house had protection from the IRA” (p. 81), indicating the local esteem in which they were held. In the final sentence of the section it is stated that “a DVD on the life story of Robert Tottenham is attached to this dissertation” (p81). It is not indicated why the details of Mr Tottenham’s life are included in a DVD as opposed to being included in the body of the dissertation, nor what the relevance of this material is to the dissertation as a whole. The DVD is not included in the present review. The chapter ends with a three page Conclusion section summarising its contents.

In addition to being struck by the extent to which the contents of the chapter have previously appeared verbatim in the writing of other authors, one cannot escape a sense of mystification about the logic behind the inclusion and exclusion of material. A dissertation is meant to be a work of scholarly research. It has an avowed purpose. It sets out to investigate a well-defined issue. It seeks to arrive at a well-argued conclusion supported by the research and scholarship undertaken. Everything included in a thesis should be subordinate to that objective. It is impossible to discern any such thread in Chapter 1 of this thesis. Why does the history of the parish, such as it is, end during the Cromwellian settlement? Did nothing of any relevance occur in the parish during the whole of the 18th and 19th centuries until the building of Mount Callan House in the 1870s?

If there is intent to show how the people of Inagh and Kilnamona triumphed over adversity, surely the exigencies of the 18th and 19th centuries culminating in the catastrophic famine of the 1840s would provide a far more appropriate historical context in which to test this hypothesis than anything which came before. Even if the only intent is to trace the history of the parish, the omission of the whole of two of the three most recent centuries is inexplicable. The third of these centuries, the twentieth, is addressed after a fashion in Chapter 2.

The only reasonable conclusion one can draw about Chapter 1 is that it was written with no clear purpose in mind. Whatever material was more easily at hand was included and done so in the least effortful manner – by transcription where possible. No criteria for distinguishing matters of historical relevance were applied. Thus, there is the inclusion of material from a biological fisheries survey of a river system, along with ancient Irish origin mythologies, random information from the Cromwellian era and the account of Mount Callan House.

Chapter 2 (pp. 148-170): “The Social History of Inagh/Kilnamona in the 20th Century”

The first sentence reads: *“This chapter aims to deal with the various systems, organisations, trades occupations etc. that were part and parcel of everyday life in the parish of Inagh during the 20th century (p.84).”* To achieve this, a diverse array of 13 separate themes are addressed, including, inter alia, the Gardai, communications, education, agriculture, an Ghaeilge, tinkers and travelling shows, blacksmiths and

marriages and deaths. Again the lack of any clarity of purpose is obvious. The author states at the outset:

“This chapter will show how the various strands of living were intertwined and how people depend on themselves and others and how working together, rather than separately, benefited everyone” (p.84).

Keeping in mind the obvious point that people have no further choice but to depend on themselves or others, a reading of the various sections renders it far from obvious how they contribute to this stated objective. The section on the social history of the Gardai deals mainly with the state of the premises and physical resources available to the local Gardai including a list of the dimensions of each room in the Garda station. The subsection on crime, more relevant to a social history one would assume, consists of a single eleven line paragraph giving an unreferenced and unsubstantiated description of the type of crime dealt with in the first half of the twentieth century in the parish. The subsection which follows, on the sanitary services available to the Gardai, merits a ten line paragraph. Over half the chapter is devoted to the sections dealing with the Gardai and with Education. The section on education describes several primary schools which existed or still exist in the parish, mainly in terms of the buildings, names and biographical details about the teachers and managers and numbers on the rolls, interspersed with occasional anecdotes about disagreements or controversies which occurred at various times in the different schools. The author appears in one of the controversies where, as the Principal of a school in 1966, he found it necessary to have the school electricity bill established in his own name so as to have the school linked to the national grid.

A striking feature of the whole chapter is the paucity of referencing. Much of the writing follows the fashion of reminiscence or story-telling, seemingly based on the author's own experience and memory. The very brief section on 'Roads and Quarries' quoted in its entirety below serves as an example of the style involved:

“Up to the middle of the last century the roads were made from the stones from local quarries. There were quarries in Ballyea, Barry's and Paddy Longes, Fitzgibbons in Maurice Mills and in Been and Skeagh on the western side of the parish.

Up to the 1950s roads were let out for tender and whoever was supplied the contract supplied the stones and as a young boy the author remembers seeing the Curtin brothers sitting on a bag on a heap of stones and with their hammers broke(sic) the stones up small enough to be put on the roads to maintain them. The stonebreakers would tender for certain roads from crossroad to crossroad” (p. 135).

Sections on Marriage and Death and on Agriculture, subjects which would have been amenable to detailed statistical research from a variety of sources, are dealt with instead in terms of the author's generalised descriptions of matchmaking, wedding ceremonies, wakes, bull inspections, turf saving, hay making and such like. There is no research in evidence for most sections with descriptions of the author's understanding or views of past realities being assumed to suffice. The 25 line section devoted to “An Ghaeilge” evinces no research whatsoever on when and how widely Irish was spoken in

the parish, nor when or why it declined. It is asserted without analysis or discussion that the loss of the language “*can be attributed to two things, (a) colonisation and (b) emigration. Colonies (sic) banned the use of Irish and children in school were slapped when they spoke Irish, but it was really immigration that did most damage*” (p.134). There follows, without any attempt to explore the level or nature of emigration from the parish at various times, a brief unsupported description of how it led to a reliance on the English language and to the loss of Irish. The scant consideration given to the Irish language is evidence, if evidence were needed, of the tokenism inherent in the use of Irish in the title and the thin sprinkling of Irish included throughout the dissertation.

As with the previous chapter, the choice of themes and the manner of their treatment shows no coherence or commonality of purpose. Throughout, there appears to be no attempt to draw on the material included so as to support the author’s assertion at the beginning that:

“This chapter will show how the various strands of living were intertwined and how people depend on themselves and others and how working together, rather than separately, benefited everyone” (p84).

It is notable also that the dissertation’s treatment of history in the 20th century passes by without any consideration of the effects of the War of Independence, the Civil War, the foundation of the Irish Free State and the birth and development of our political parties and system of local and national governance. It is as if none of those events had any relevance to the parish or people of Inagh and Kilmamona, just as, seemingly, the Great Famine, The Land War, The Land Acts, and the origins of militaristic Republicanism had no relevance in the previous century.

Chapter 3 (pp. 148-170): “Meon Na nDaoine: Traditions and Customs”

The third chapter continues in the story-telling style of chapter 2. In brief sections devoted to each, a total of 11 themes are addressed. A few quotations will suffice to illustrate the nature of the whole. In the section on “Killing the pig: a communal feast,” one reads:

“The pig was killed usually in the lead up to Christmas. Pork steak was cut away from the main fletches of meat and ‘the puddings and pork steak’ were divided with the neighbours, a lovely custom and it lasted until recent times” (p.152).

Peculiarly, this section, by way presumably of a mental association with food, goes on to list a variety of beliefs and superstitions beginning with “*Men always took off their hats or caps when eating...*” (p.152), but progressing on to address others such as spitting when sparks came out of the fire and throwing salt over one’s shoulder in the event of breaking a mirror.

In the section on “Winter rituals” a typical paragraph reads as follows:

“The 8th of December was a big country day in the town of Ennis and many went there to shop, but, the main event before Christmas would be for the farmer and his wife to go to Ennistymon on the pony and car or horse to buy “the Christmas.” They would go to their

usual shops to bring the half sack of flour, a chest of tea, a big bag of sugar, presents for Santa Claus, big candles for the windows for Christmas and some few bottles of alcohol – whiskey, sherry and porter for Christmas visitors and some biscuits (p.164)”

The two passages quoted above are illustrative of the content of Chapter 3 which reads as the quotidian reminiscences of an old person. It is the author’s story of times past and may or may not on any point reflect discussion or interviews with other parties or consultation of written sources. On page 154 the point that thatched roofs were common in rural Ireland up to the 1950s is referenced to a book by Danaher (1964). This book was actually published in 1962. Another 1994 (originally published in 1972) book by the same author is cited on page 158 with reference to the demise of a custom whereby on the first Sunday of lent chalk marks were put on the coats of eligible men who had not married. The only other reference to a written source is to that of O’Suilleabhain’s, *Twenty Year’s a Growing*, which on page 157 is cited, rather unexpectedly, to support the statement that *“Lent began with Ash Wednesday, a day of fast and abstinence.”* The only other source references of any kind in the chapter are two footnotes on page 150, one cited as *“source- personal memoir”* and the other *“Paddy Enright R.I.P.”*

Chapter 4 (pp.171-231): “Religion – Anam Pobail”

The author commences with the claim that *“In this chapter I hope to show how religion was important to our ancestors and as to (sic) how even in adversity, they adhered to a strong belief system”* (p171). A reading of the chapter, however, makes it very far from clear that this theme is adhered to except in the most tangential sense that, because evidence of religious activity and practice at various times in the parish is shown, it might be inferred that the local people adhered to some form of religious belief. As with previous chapters, it consists of separate accounts of seemingly randomly chosen topics. There are accounts of the financing, building and fitting out of a number of churches in the parish, followed by a detailed account of various priests who served in the parish back to the early 1700s.

Initially the section on the priests is discursive, concerning historical evidence as to the uncertain identity and circumstances of the parochial clergy in the eighteenth century. From 1820 there is a sudden change in style with the discursive giving way to a chronological list of the names of priests who served in the parish, including, for some, a few perfunctory details about them. From 1966, the level of detail increases again and a pen picture of each priest in turn is offered. For example, of Fr. O’Dea who died in 1982 we read:

“Fr. O’Dea lived very frugally and had a great fear of colds, flue (sic), storms etc. He always had a Volkswagen Beetle and always bought a second hand car. He was an unusual character, had a great turn of phrase, didn’t believe in spending money in the parish and certainly raised no debts. He had a very sweet singing voice.

His housekeeper was very loyal to him, always kept hens, which provided them both with fresh eggs.

He dispensed with ceremony very skilfully and had a great interest in stocks and shares” (p. 199).

A large proportion of the text on both the churches and the priests (most of mid p. 175 - mid p. 194) is already to be found in a 1965 book called 'History of the Parish of Inagh and Kilnamona' by Seamus Mac Mathuna or in Gaynor (1942) already mentioned above. The sudden shift of style in addressing the priests of the parish from 1820 corresponds to where the material identical to Gaynor (1942) ends on page 194.

Another striking oddity in this chapter is the fact that from the beginning of the second paragraph on p. 190 to the end of the first paragraph on p. 194, apart from a few words, it is a repeat of text already included in Chapter 1 at pp. 66-69, text which, as indicated above, had already appeared in Gaynor (1942).

Following the section on the priests there is the story of a local girl who is alleged to have been miraculously cured in 1913 from a tubercular knee on a visit to Lourdes. Much of the piece is given over to the quotation of statements from medical doctors and from the girl herself and from her father. It is not indicated, however, whether the authorities at Lourdes investigated this case and, if so, whether it was deemed a miraculous recovery.

There follows sections on blessed wells in the parish, the stations (masses held in parishioners homes), Marian shrines and local burial grounds. The style in these sections is again that of the story teller narrating his memories. For example under the heading *St Flannan's Well* there is the following paragraph:

"There were two crutches left there by a man who was cured there, about the year 1882. There is great faith locally in the healing powers of the water from the Holy Well, especially for any eye ailment. A story tells of a priest, from America, Fr. Barry, having a request granted after visiting the well. He told a local man that he had travelled to Lourdes, Rome, Knock and other renowned places, but had his request granted after visiting Drimanure" (p. 214).

The entire section on Marian shrines consists of the following:

"1954 was dedicated a Marian year by the then pope, Pope Pius XII and there was renewed dedication to Our Lady in various ways. Inagh Church is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception and the people of the time thought it fitting to erect a Marian Shrine. A committee was formed to do same and money was collected and a lovely shrine built.

A local committee also got together in Kilnamona with PP. Fr. J. Cosgrove, as treasurer. As there was a surplus of funds a processional cross and a ladder, for doing out (sic) odd jobs around the church, were purchased. Both shrines remain in excellent condition. In 1955 Mr. Miko Reidy, Ennis and formerly of Inagh and a blacksmith by trade made and presented a lovely gate to the shrine in Inagh (Parish records)" (p. 219-220).

A section is dedicated to Rev. Father Garrett Shannon from Inagh "*who ministered in Australia for many years and left a mark in this parish*" (p. 221). The piece deals solely with his funeral in Australia and with his last will. There are indications that at least some of the text must have been written at the time of his death with the inclusion of the sentence "*Universal regret is expressed at his death by all who knew him* (p. 222)" without it being part of a quotation and with the opening of a quotation on p. 222 for the

panegyric given by Rev. Dr. Barry, a quotation which is not subsequently closed. On pp. 226 -228 it seems as if another panegyric by Rev. Father Slattery is quoted in full, though in this case there are no quotation marks. No references are included to indicate the sources of information used. There is no indication of the year in which his death and funeral occurred. On the basis of the information provided the only “mark” he left in Inagh was the £600 he bequeathed to his brother Michael.

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to a section entitled “*Memories of the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes 1958.*” The description of the event is written in the first person indicating that it is drawn from the memory of the author. A sentence included in the account, however, suggests otherwise:

“Bologne (sic) was for me a place of school day memories. I wandered around to recall them, but all had gone, and a new port and city had arisen from the debris of World War II” (p.229).

“Bologne” here almost certainly refers to Boulogne-Sur-Mer a harbour town in northern France, near Calais, which was very heavily bombed by the allies in the summer of 1944. It is clear that the actual writer of the piece had, as a schoolboy, visited France, almost certainly prior to the invasion of France in 1940 and definitely before summer 1944. The original writer of the piece had then to be someone quite a bit older than the dissertation author. Though no reference is given in the text to suggest what that source might be, there is a clear indication in the list of 12 primary written sources at the end of the thesis. The last entry in the list reads:

“Rodgers, Dr. Joe. Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes (1958), Cited in Fr. Gaynor’s Parish Records” (p.286).

It would seem likely that Dr Rogers’ is the voice we encounter in the text describing his experiences on the pilgrimage in 1958.

As to the author’s claim at the beginning of the chapter “*to show how religion was important to our ancestors and as to (sic) how even in adversity, they adhered to a strong belief system (p171),*” he does not again advert to this idea and makes no argument based on the information provided to support this contention. The information furnished in the chapter seems bound together only in so far as it refers in some way to the theme of religion and has at least some connection with the parish of Inagh and Kilnamona.

What is omitted is even more surprising than what is included. It is astonishing that, in a country which witnessed for around a century the extraordinarily dominant influence of the Catholic Church on all aspects of life followed then by a rapid secularisation and decline in the status of the Church, no consideration of this whole process would appear in a chapter on religion. Even allowing for the author’s lack of clarity about his purpose in writing the dissertation, it is clear that religion in some sense was considered a central theme by him in his endeavour and, as such, it remains inexplicable how the rise and decline of Catholicism could have been entirely ignored.

Chapter 5 (pp. 232-245): “Laochra Paroiste”

Uniquely this title is written in Irish only. “Laochra Paroiste” may be taken to mean heroes of the parish. What follows, however, proves to be a quixotically selective list of characters using what is, in any event, a highly subjective criterion. In the first sentence we read: *“This chapter deals entirely with the history of some members of the Barry family.....(p. 232).”* This selectivity is justified by the unsubstantiated claim that Barry is the most common name in the parish. The author does not, however, stick to his word in that having written about Garret Barry, a blind piper born in 1847, Mother Mary Gerald Barry O.P. 1881-1961, a prominent nun in the United States, Fr. Joe Barry, who served in seven parishes in the Diocese of Killaloe and died in 1990, Very Rev. J. Barry, P.P. of Sixmilebridge, who was ordained in 1915, Jim Barry, an Australian wine producer, whose grandfather originated in Kilnamona, he runs out of Barrys and, inexplicably, resorts to writing about O’Connells instead – Maurice O’Connell, who gave his name to the place now known as Maurice’s Mills, and some others of that name.

The chapter conclusion reads in its entirety as follows:

“This family of the Barry name epitomizes the ups and downs of the (sic.) life, some extremely successful, some not quite so good but yet important in life and death. The Barrys cover all aspects of rural Inagh, religious, farming, soldiers, workers, musicians, wine makers (and drinkers!) and the same is still very common in our parish” (p. 245).

This does little to explain the inclusion of the section on the O’Connells and the piece on Jim Barry, wine maker, whose only connection with Inagh and Kilnamona is that his grandfather originated there. It is very difficult to avoid the conclusion that, like so much else in the dissertation, the actual criterion for inclusion is the ready availability of information, with the failure of specific items to fit even the most elastic justification being treated as no reason to avoid their inclusion. In some cases even the absence of available information seems not to be a deterrent. The following is the totality of information included on one of the Barrys, Fr. Joe Barry:

“Fr. Joe Barry, Laurag, Inagh was the last of that family in religion. He served in seven parishes in the Diocese of Killaloe, the last one being Flaggmount, from which he retired home and worked the home farm. He died on June 10th, 1990 and is buried in Inagh Church Grounds” (p. 240).

It is difficult to discern what was heroic about the life of Fr. Joe Barry, unless his relatively peripatetic pastoral career somehow acts as a qualification.

Nowhere in the chapter is there any attempt to explain how exactly the individuals chosen are deemed to be especially heroic or meritorious. On the one hand, limiting inclusion to one family name, even if that qualification is belatedly ignored, seems to unnecessarily restrict the field, while on the other, including individuals three generations removed from the parish would seem to be excessively inclusive.

Nowhere in the chapter either is it explained how the individuals chosen can or should be deemed to be representative of life in Inagh. Such an effort might in any event be

unproductive in that heroes can hardly be expected to be representative and their lives are surely the last that one should use to epitomise the ups and downs of life for the majority.

Chapter 6 (pp. 246 -259): “Ar Scath a Cheile a Mhaireann na Daoine” (The Communal Spirit and Mentality of the People)”

This chapter sets out to “*demonstrate how working together benefits everybody*” (p. 246) by reference to two community ventures: the Inagh Cooperative Development Society and the Kilmaley/Inagh Group Water Scheme. The broad statement that “*working together benefits everybody*” would seem no more than a platitude and hardly an appropriate hypothesis for academic research without a careful consideration of circumstances, objectives and alternative strategies. In the chapter, as written, the unspoken logic followed seems to be that, as a number of individuals working together resulted in two worthwhile community development projects being brought to fruition, working together, therefore, benefits everybody. Both projects are described in terms of the process undertaken, what the perceived need was, how the opportunity arose, who got involved, the costs involved, some obstacles encountered and overcome and what ultimately was achieved. It is of interest that the author is described as an early advocate of the Inagh Cooperative initiative (see p. 247) and is listed as the Assistant Secretary of the committee involved (p.248). Another individual with close ties to this dissertation (one of its External Examiners), Fr. Harry Bohan, is credited with being “*One shining light in all this... (p.249),*” when the project was in difficulty, through his commitment of the Rural Housing Organisation to make a substantial investment.

It is not clear that the author had a direct personal involvement in the group water scheme but it is clear that the two projects were intertwined. In the introduction to the chapter we read the following:

“It so happened that at the time neighbours in Kilmaley Parish were trying to organise a group water scheme and appeared to have trouble getting it organised. As we needed water for our housing development in Inagh it was decided to approach the Kilmaley group to work together” (p. 246).

The “*Kilmaley group*” refers to the originators of the group water scheme project and “*our housing development*” refers to what became the Inagh Cooperative Development Society. The author would, therefore, seem to have had ample opportunity to know all about the group water scheme project from personal experience. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that once again the overriding criterion governing the inclusion of topics in the dissertation is the easy availability of information.

It might reasonably be argued that the two projects follow the ‘resilience of the people’ theme adverted to in the Abstract, the penultimate sentence of which reads

“It [referring to the dissertation] is the story of a “simple” people steeped in religious faith and tradition, whom whenever tested, have shown resilience, facing adversity with courage and dignity” (p.5).

Surely, however, if it had been the author's intention to illustrate how the people of his parish coped with adversity, far better case studies could have been advanced – how, for example, they coped with the Great Famine, with the War of Independence and the ensuing Civil War or how, down through the generations, the people responded to the perennial ravages of emigration? Set against the themes so blithely ignored, the adversity overcome by two, albeit very worthy, modern development projects pales rather into insignificance.

While the two projects described were undoubtedly worthy, there is no overt attempt to use them to illustrate how resilience or any other community characteristics highlighted in the Preface and Introduction such as “help,” “friends” and the “grace of God” were called upon in any particular way to bring them to fruition. The stories of the projects are recounted as if for their intrinsic interest value and not to make any scholarly point.

Chapter 7 (pp. 261-280): “*Decline of a Rural Parish in Co Clare*”

The first two sentences of this chapter deserve quotation:

“When one looks back at our history and studies the various periods when it looked as if we would succumb to Tuatha de Danaan, Fomorians, Milesians, local tribes or Kings, Danes, Normans or English, it is an amazingly rich history of resilience and pride. Invaders failed to suppress us, the Great Famine, the Black Plague, wave after wave of disease, Including T.B., cancer, polio all proved one thing and that is that a struggling people always have an ambition in life (p. 261)”

It is as if the author is for some reason pursuing a comedic parody of academia. The racial exclusivity claimed in the first sentence for the people of Inagh and Kilnamona is without precedent. In what sense can it be claimed that the “we” referred to did not “succumb” to any of that list of prehistoric and historic settlers of Ireland? From what pure genealogical strain of ancient blood do the inhabitants of Inagh and Kilnamona supposedly derive? While amusing at one level, there is also a disturbing racist implication evident in this distorted logic. Any reasonable analysis of Irish history confirms a process of integration not racial exclusivity. Conflict there was aplenty in Irish history and there were unquestionably genocidal episodes but the outcome has always ultimately been a merging or integration of races in Ireland. The Irish in consequence are a mixture of various prehistoric tribes together with Vikings, Normans, Anglo-Saxons and a variety of other immigrants to our island down the ages. It is difficult to understand a sense of Irish history which leads to the suggestion that the people of this parish are exclusive of the groups listed.

The second sentence in the above quotation deserves attention for a different, though no less perplexing, reason. Having failed to address any of those themes of profound adversity, how can they now be adverted to as if they had been at the core of the dissertation all along? It is clear that the theme of the ordinary people's triumph, whatever that might be, was of singular importance in the author's thoughts while writing the dissertation. It is clear also that he identified the “*Great Famine, the Black Plague, T.B., cancer and polio*” as prime examples of adversity. Despite that, he elected

to ignore them entirely in writing his work with perhaps the sole exception of the account in Chapter 4 of the alleged miraculous recovery of a victim of tubercular knee.

Reading further into the contents of Chapter 7, it becomes quickly apparent that the theme of decline is only carried three pages into the total of twenty one. The only reference to decline even within those three pages is to the fall in the population of the parish between 1841 and 1971, when the trend began to reverse. No demographic or sociological analysis of the long population decline is attempted. The chapter would far more appropriately have been entitled “A Personal Commentary on the Wealth and Progress of a Rural Parish” in that it largely consists of the author’s views on how much advancement there has been. A sense of the contents can best be captured in a series of quotations:

“Now we all have cars, the exception being a few old people” (p.264).

“Very few people now emigrate – there are plenty of jobs for our young people....” (p.264).

“When the young build houses now they build them big – huge in some cases.....” (p.264).

“Young women now are all working and when they marry and have children, they still continue to go out to work....” (p.264).

“These same type of what I call “the modern families” usually go on a family holiday once a year and that’s a good thing surely” (p.265).

“We also have a large number of carpenters, roofers, plumbers, electricians, plasters (sic), blocklayers, tilers, fitted kitchen makers, etc. – all making huge money and more luck to them” (pp.265-266).

“The parish is also awash with agricultural contractors – very high numbers compared to other rural areas” (p. 266).

“Most farmers now stock dry-cattle only” (p. 266).

“Speaking of slurry – it can become a serious problem at times if the underground tank spills over during winter” (p.267).

None of the claims and statements is in any way supported by evidence or references. The reader is expected to take the facts on trust. After such commentary on transport, jobs, wealth, family structure and farming, and after a brief listing of the schools, churches, postal facilities, shops, petrol stations and pubs extant in the parish, there are more detailed accounts of two somewhat unusual businesses. One is a micro-brewery set up by the author together with his brother and the other a goats’ cheese production facility owned by the author’s daughter. There are then a few brief comments on the improved state of the roads in the parish and an account of some local angling and lake-shore amenities. Reflecting on “Clonmaccon (sic) Lake” (probably, Cloonmackan Lake), the author is unable to resist waxing lyrical in its praise with the words:

“What a wonderful restful thought provoking place to visit in “vacant or in pensive mood” (p.271).

Wordsworth is not mentioned but perhaps it is unnecessary given the fame of the verse from which the words are quoted. The commentary on modern Inagh concludes on a more prosaic note, with an account of the controversial development of a major landfill site in the parish.

The remainder of the chapter is given over to the author's prognostications for Inagh and Kilnamona. His tone, sadly misplaced in 2008 on the threshold of the economic cataclysm about to befall the nation, is evident from the outset. After the heading "*What lies ahead?*" we read:

"Never was the future so bright for the people of Inagh / Kilnamona parish" (p.272).

Forced emigration is seen as a thing of the past. More and more young people are predicted to build houses in the parish. The existence of planning permissions for two schemes of 14 and 34 houses are instanced, together with planning permission being sought for 100 houses, a crèche and shopping units. "*The site for the latter has made €2m! The whole parish could have been bought for that kind of money up to 30 years ago (p. 273),*" is the bemused comment included. A development obstacle in the guise of an inadequate water supply is noted but the authors ebullient mood continues with the following conclusion:

"It is just another new challenge and I'm confident that we will rise to the occasion" (p. 273).

Success is predicted for the local hurling clubs and the active engagement of parents with their children's pursuits outside the home is welcomed. The parochial hall facilities are described as is a local childcare facility with government funding of €1m being secured to develop a new "*state of the art facility*" (p.275).

The number of churches, serving priests and the number and times of weekly masses are recounted in the context of dwindling mass attendances, particularly in one Church, where a recovery is predicted as the population of the parish grows.

A special section is devoted to the future of farming. The demise of self sufficiency on modern specialised farms is lamented. With reference to farm families it is stated that:

Very few have any garden, no pig, no turf from the bog, no hens for the eggs – they buy everything like their neighbours in the towns" (p.277).

Despite its heading, "*The Future for Farming*", it transpires that the section does not address this theme at all and, having briefly included comment on what has been lost through modernisation, moves on, by way of a *non sequitor*, to the renaissance of traditional house funerals and wakes and then to the plight of the elderly and those who live alone and those who may be unable to socialise with their friends in the pub due to "*the stringent drink/driving laws*" (p. 278). In this context the Minister of the day (for Rural Affairs), Eamon O Cuiv, is commended for his sensitivity to those issues and for his plans for rural transport. Nevertheless, the need for better facilities for the retired and elderly is recognised as a pressing concern, as is the need for facilities related to "*pastimes (sic) and activities*" (p.278) for young people.

Leaving aside the chapter's misleading title, the profoundly peculiar introductory sentences and the misleading title for the section on farming, it is important to consider what the contents of the chapter actually achieve or, even, are intended to achieve. The latter is rendered difficult to establish given the lack of clarity as to what the dissertation as a whole is actually about. If we take the thesis to be an attempt at a general local history of the parish, then we might regard the chapter as an effort to summarise the present outcome of that history and to predict what the future of the area will be. Based on headings 7.3, 7.4 and 7.5, entitled respectively "*Where are we now?*", "*What lies ahead?*" and "*The Future for Farming*", which together account for all but 4 pages of the chapter, it is safe to assume that this is what it was intended to do. Should it and does it do so?

On the matter of should, it seems reasonable to summarise the present state of affairs in the parish in light of its history. Attempting predictions of the future is a less obviously purposeful endeavour and, unless it is to be nothing more than subjective speculation, needs to be constrained within a worked out predictive model. As regards what the chapter does in fact achieve, it consists of nothing more than the entirely subjective commentary of the author as indicated above. Moreover, albeit that this is entirely in keeping with the manner in which the history of the parish has been explored in previous chapters, it is further marred by the lack of any discernible criteria for the choice of topics addressed. There is no overt attempt to reflect in the present and future, historical themes used to structure the past. Such an effort would have, in any event, been doomed to failure given the serendipitous inclusion of historical material. What we are left with is a chapter which has little or nothing to do with its title and instead provides a forum for the author's own quixotic pronouncements on the present and future state of his own parish.

Chapter 8 (pp. 281-285): "Concluding Remarks"

This too proves to be a misleading title in that the brief chapter of little over 4 pages consists almost entirely of synopses of the 6 prior chapters. One might have expected at some point to encounter a summary of what the dissertation is deemed to have achieved as a work of scholarship and an overview of how its objectives have been met. The nearest one comes anywhere to that are the two opening paragraphs of this final chapter. They are as follows:

"The theme of my submission is "Cabhair is cairde is grasta o Dhia chugainn" and in putting together a selected social history and folklore of Inagh/Kilnamona in County Clare, I have endeavoured to show how "help" and "friends" and the "grace of God" are intertwined in the lives of our people, a theme often present in manifestation (sic) of local culture. Our present is built on our past and our future is based on the firm bedrock of both."

From the earliest extant reference to County Clare in the Book of invasions – Leabor Gabhala Erenn, I have focused on tracing the origins of our parish up to the present day; how it developed; how our people lived; what culture, heritage and lore they have handed onto us and what now lies in the foreseeable future" (p. 281).

This is presumably a statement of what the author saw himself at the beginning as setting out to do. It is far from a simple matter to interpret in any precise way from this what his intent was. In the first instance, there is the intent of writing a history of the parish with a specific focus on the social as opposed to the political and military, it would seem, given the points mentioned above. One assumes in this context that tracing the origins of a parish is intended to refer to more than the drawing of ecclesiastical lines on a map and is meant to refer to the evolution of a sense of community, belonging and identification with place among the people of the parish. There is then the intent to show how the themes of “help”, “friends” and the “grace of God” have played an important role in the lives of the people. This begs the question of why? Why those themes? Surely there are innumerable themes which feature prominently in the lives of any community of humans: love, enemies, thrift, competition, materialism and communication, to name a random few? To select three such strands from the fabric of life and to render them central in a scholarly analysis of a community requires careful justification. There is no evidence at all of either an *a priori* or a *post hoc* justification of that kind anywhere in the thesis. Moreover, there is no structured attempt to draw on the material recounted or discussed throughout the various chapters to illustrate how those themes had any unique relevance in the lives of the people of Inagh and Kilnamona. In every chapter, topic after topic is addressed without any reference to those concepts.

Phrased as they are, it is difficult to imagine how evidence might be adduced for a special impact on the lives of the people of Inagh and Kilnamona of “help,” “friends” and “the grace of God.” While “help” and “friends”, two related concepts, might be operationalized for research purposes as ‘cooperation,’ thus potentially allowing for the identification of relevant evidence, the concept of the “grace of God” is far more problematic as the subject of scholarly study. What would constitute evidence of its existence in any circumstance? How might one detect its impact? The closest one could imagine coming to any operationalization of the concept is in terms of religiosity or evidence of religious beliefs and devotion among a community, enabling an attempt to trace its effects on behaviour.

There is no obvious explanation why an intangible theological concept, “grace of God” is used in place of the much more concrete and objective concept of ‘religion’ or ‘religiosity.’ Even if we assume that “cooperation” and “religiosity” were the intended focus, the commonplace nature of the two begs the question of their special relevance to this parish and its occupants. Would not any illustration of their relevance in a single parish be akin to showing the impact of food, water and air – inevitably true to some indeterminate extent? At very least, a comparative analysis of communities, varying on those characteristics, would have to be conducted before anything of use could be shown. Of course, this is all moot since the dissertation as written, pretences aside, shows no evidence of an attempt to trace the impact of those putative characteristics of the people under study.

What does the dissertation achieve?

Absence of Context and Purpose

The work has not been located in any recognised discipline or scholarly tradition. There is no literature review to illuminate the scholarship foundations, if any, on which it is built or the context in which it seeks to advance learning. Such brief statements of purpose as are included are opaque and contradictory. It seems that the author was unable to give any clear expression to what exactly he was about. In light of the work as a whole, his most accurate and honest expression of intent is “*to leave to posterity all I have discovered about our place and our people*” (p.21). This, depending on what exactly has been discovered, might bode well for a locally published book or booklet on parish history but is hardly the basis for a scholarly dissertation. Herein lies one of two fundamental problems about this work. This is the absence of any clear purpose. The other problem, the lack of scholarly method, is addressed subsequently below.

Absence of purpose is profoundly problematic in a scholarly dissertation. It is clarity of purpose which imposes discipline on the scholar to select what is relevant from what is not and to address what is relevant in a structured and coherent way. Each element of a dissertation is a building block which makes a contribution to the whole, to the overall purpose of the endeavour. In this dissertation, there is no delimited purpose and, therefore, no structure around which the content is unified. Any and every piece of information or opinion about Inagh and Kilnamona, in the past present or future, becomes admissible, the corollary of which is that anything can be left out. The Great Famine is ignored but an account of Mount Callan House is included. Emigration and its impact on the demographic and social reality in the parish are ignored but the author’s description of “Killing the pig” is admitted. The late 19th century land war and the ensuing grant of the land to tenant farmers receive no mention. Nevertheless, it is possible in a history chapter to find room for an account of a fisheries survey of the Inagh river. Lacking any unifying purposeful structure other than as an account of all the author knows about his place and his people, all that can then be asked of the dissertation is the extent to which it has advanced knowledge and insight into the serendipitous topics included. Here we encounter the second fundamental problem manifest in the dissertation: a profound lack of scholarly method.

The Scholarly Method

For perfectly rational and practical reasons, scholars are expected to adhere to various norms of scholarship. Their works are meant to advance learning and insight and to do so they must make it clear for other scholars how they have arrived at the conclusions reached. Those evidential foundations will vary in nature depending on the discipline. In history, they will be sources or recorded information drawn on and the logic employed in their interpretation in light of previous published work. In Mathematics they will be premises adopted and the logical working through of mathematical implications and consequences. In Sociology, they will be data collected in a systematic and traceable way and its interpretation in light of existing scholarship following logical argument. In all cases, it should be possible to distinguish the author’s contribution from the sources

and foundations on which it is built and it should be possible to verify the accuracy and soundness of those foundations and trace the logic by which the author has arrived at his or her own conclusions. Only in this way is it possible to appraise the real value of an academic work. Otherwise, it would be possible for a work to be nothing more than a rehashing or even repetition of the works of others or to be constructed from false or misleading information. In simple terms, the reader needs to be able to locate and check the sources of information drawn upon and be given the wherewithal to judge the soundness of the conclusions drawn by the writer.

In light of the need to trace sources, it is hardly surprising that standard conventions for referencing exist and are understood and employed by all legitimate scholars. There are several but all have in common the capacity to enable the reader to trace to their origins the sources drawn upon at any point in a scholarly work. Such conventions also enable the reader to distinguish what is the writing of the current author from that of other previous authors who may be quoted. It is perfectly legitimate and normal for all writers to include verbatim transcriptions of passages where to synopsis them would lose something valuable in the translation, so to speak. I have in this review included many sentences and passages from the work reviewed because I believe that the original words are necessary for a proper understanding of the points being made. By the simple expedients of quotation marks, italics and indented passages with the page number from the original work included in each case, the reader is left in no doubt who actually wrote those sentences and, if in any doubt, can trace them to their original source. Of course, any scholar worthy of the title is judicious in the inclusion of verbatim quotations. They must be included for a good reason and not as a lazy substitute for the writer's own work.

Inclusion of Other Author's Writings

As indicated in the review of the various individual chapters above, this dissertation author shows a remarkable tendency to substitute the writings of others for his own and to fail to facilitate the reader in tracing sources used. Virtually the entire text, of a 566 line (A4 page size) article by Gaynor (1942) is transcribed verbatim. Nineteen pages of the thesis text is identical to material found in Mac Mathuna (1965). Further extensive passages are reproduced from DeValera and O'Nullain (1961) and from Whelan and Roche (1987). In addition, there are clear signs that the account of the 1958 diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes in chapter 4 is transcribed from the contemporaneous first-hand account of Dr. Joe Rogers found in the Inagh parish records and that in the same chapter much of the account of the funeral of Rev. Father Garrett Shannon was, likewise, transcribed from contemporaneous sources.

The manner of writing throughout the dissertation renders all of the extensive sections written previously by others indistinguishable from the author's own writing. This inevitably produces jarring shifts of style and literacy. Far more problematic from a scholarship perspective is that the reader is led to believe that he or she is reading the writings of the author not the words of other scholars. Apart from the manner in which the reader is deceived, there is the ineluctable fact that the extensive sections involved owe nothing to the scholarship of the author. It would be quite possible to reproduce

such material without even understanding what it contains. In any fair appraisal of the merit of the dissertation, those sections would have to be eliminated and the remainder judged in their absence.

Failure of Attribution

There is throughout a widespread failure of attribution. Unique in a thesis which has been awarded an M.A., in so far as I am aware, no accepted convention of referencing is employed. There are various footnotes on pages throughout the thesis which contain apparent attribution but they are scarce, inconsistent and often uninformative. A total of 17 footnotes in 12 different pages of Chapter 1 mention Gaynor whose 1942 paper is reproduced virtually in its entirety in the dissertation. Those footnotes take on various wordings as follows:

“Molua” – written by Fr. Gaynor, P.P. Inagh/Kilnamona. Killaloe Diocesan Publication in 1941 and 1942” (pp. 22, 23, 25, 33, 52).

“Writings by Fr. Gaynor and the Journal of the R.S.A.I for 1916“ (p. 25).

“Fr Gaynor, PP. Inagh/Kilnamona” (pp.27, 30).

“Fr Gaynor’s Parish Records” (p. 48).

“Fr. Brendan Jennings O.F.M (R.I.P) The Abbey Galway, supplied a copy of the manuscript to Very Rev. Fr. Gaynor, P.P. (R.I.P) Inagh/Kilnamaona (p. 55).

“Fr. Gaynor’s P.P. Inagh/Kilnmaona, Parish Records” (p. 58, 59).

None of the footnotes can be regarded as a proper reference following a standard accepted format and which would easily allow the document or documents concerned to be traced. It is not possible to infer whether the references are all to the same source or to different documents written by Fr. Gaynor. In the list of secondary sources at the end of the thesis there is only one reference to Gaynor:

“Gaynor, Very Rev. P (1941/42), Molua Killaloe Diocesan Publication.” (p. 288).

This suggests a single source referenced in various ways in different footnotes.

Many of the above footnotes are appended at points in the text where the text in its entirety is a copy of Gaynor (1942). The whole of section 1.3, entitled *“Further evidence from mythology”* which runs from p. 28-35 is a copy of text found in Gaynor (1942). There is, as explained above, nothing to indicate that this is so. Nevertheless, on p.30 the number 23 in superscript is inserted into the text in the middle of a sentence after the word *“Dindseanchus.”* This refers to footnote 23 which reads: *“Fr. Gaynor, P.P. Inagh/Kilnamona,”* creating the impression that this specific point is being attributed to this, albeit vague, source. The same applies to footnote 26 on p. 32 and footnote 27 on p. 33. Other such footnotes seeming to refer to specific points in the text are to be found in sections 1.6 - 1.12 on pages 48-69, virtually all of which is a direct copy of Gaynor (1942).

Throughout the passages copied from Gaynor (1942) there are other footnotes inserted which were not in the original or represent altered versions thereof. For example, the penultimate footnote in the list above, to do with Fr. Brendan Jennings O.F.M., occurs at a point very close in the dissertation text to that where the following footnote in Gaynor (1942) is inserted:

“I am indebted to Father Brendan Jennings O.F.M, one of the leading authorities on Franciscan literature for this copy of the passage which is found in the MS. at St. Isidore’s.” (Gaynor, 1942, p. 34)

In the second paragraph on page 53 of the dissertation after the sentence *“The MS was written by an unknown friar who – unlike Broudinus – had precise information concerning the martyrdom of Fr. Carrighy,”* footnote 39 is inserted. This reads as follows:

“(a) Life and Letters of Lore(sic) Query, Governor of Munster 1743 (b) Query’s State Letters Volume ii, p110, Dublin 1940”

The same sentence in Gaynor (1942) does not have any footnote attached.

In Gaynor (1942) the following sentence appears in in quotation marks, *“Maccreecius of Kilmacreehy, a disciple of St Alba of Emly, died 540, having lived to an advanced age, founding Kilmacreehy, Kilmanaheen, and Inagh churches about 530”* (p.31). The sentence has an attached footnote which reads:

“Westropp, “Churches of Clare,” Proc. R.I.A. 1900, Vol VI, No 1, pp. 109,142” (Gaynor 1942, p. 31).

When the same sentence appears at p. 49 of the dissertation, in a section transcribed from Gaynor (1942), the year is changed to 520 and the attached footnote reads:

“St Maccreehy died 540 AD. See Westropp (1916) on the “Churches of Clare – Proceedings of the R.I.A.” (p. 49)

It is very difficult to understand what the author intended by the insertion of changed or additional footnotes into passages which are, in any event, direct quotations from another source. Whatever his intention, this practice bears no relationship to accepted norms of referencing.

In addition to the idiosyncratic use of footnotes associated with passages reproduced from other sources and the failure to reference or adequately reference those sources, it is striking how few references there are for other parts of the thesis, In Chapter 2, *“The Social History of Inagh/Kilnamona in the 20th Century”*, it is stated in the introductory paragraph that *“all known material already available relating to our parish i.e. school roll books, parish records etc.”* (p.84), were reviewed. That and the footnotes listed below constitute the totality of sources for the chapter. Throughout the two sections of the chapter dealing with the Gardai and with Education, pp. 84-115, the following sources are cited in footnotes:

“Garda H.Q. Archives, Pheonix Park, Dublin”(p. 85,86, 87, 91).

“Garda H.Q. Archives, Pheonix Park, Dublin (1924)” (p.85).

“Muintir Na Tire – Its role in Irish Society – The Clare Champion – Fr Henry Bohan 26.10.1968 & 02.11.1968 p.13” (p. 88).

“Leas Comisineirs letter to the Secretary, Office of Public Works. (08.08.1928)” (p. 89).

“Letter dated 25.05.1928. Leas Comisineir to Office of Public Works” (p. 90).

“Fr, Gaynor’s parish records which are available through Fr. K. Horgan, Inagh” (p.92).

“National Archives ED8/17965” (p. 101)

The remaining 10 sections of the chapter (pp. 116-147) mention only the following three sources and those references are on two very specific points:

“Clare Champion, May 23rd 2008. “Saturday Record” August 8th 1927.” (p. 138).

“Sean O’ Suilleabhain, “Nosanna agus Piseoga naGael” (“Irish Customs and Beliefs”) Mercier Press, 1927.” (p.140).

“Kevin Danaher, “In Ireland Long Ago” (p.140)

For chapter 3, “Meon Na nDaoine: Traditions and Customs,” the citation of sources grows even more scant. The only sources indicated in the footnotes for this chapter are:

“*source – personal memoir*” (p.150).

“*Paddy Enright R.I.P*” (p.150).

“*“In Ireland Long Ago” by Kevin Danaher (1964)*” (p.154).

“*Twenty years a growing – M. OSuilleabhain*” (p.157).

“*The Year in Ireland*” by Kevin Dannaher, Mercier Press (1994)” (p.158).

The further one reads through the dissertation, the fewer sources appear. In the final chapter, “*Concluding Remarks*”, there are no sources cited and in the penultimate chapter, chapter 7, “*An Rod Seo Romhainn*”, *Decline of a Rural Parish in Co Clare*, only one source – “*Figures based on planning applications to Clare County Council 2006/2007*” (p.260) – is listed.

In summary, the manner and paucity of referencing renders it impossible to distinguish the author’s writings from those of others and to identify the evidential basis for information offered and assertions made. Much of the material, not directly transcribed from other sources, reads as if it is nothing more than the author’s beliefs and opinions. To what extent those beliefs and opinions are in any way objectively justified is impossible to appraise given the scant information given on source material. There is little or no sign of an analytical perspective being adopted. Even where sources are apparent, there is nothing to suggest a scholarly scepticism involving evidence being weighed and judiciously considered before conclusions are drawn. It is more of a case of information, whatever its value or source, being thrown at the page and left there to

rest. In consequence, the genuine information value of the dissertation, even in terms of the seemingly random collection of topics addressed, is doubtful.

Failure of Editing and Proofreading

There is another striking feature of this dissertation which sets it in sharp contrast to normal expectations of scholarly works which are advanced into the public domain. It has not been proofread in any effective way. Grammatical, typographical and spelling errors abound. On the front page the word “Education” is misspelt in the phrase “Submitted to the Higher Edcuation (sic) and Training Awards Council, October 2008.” The oversight of this typographical mistake alone represents a peculiar level of carelessness. The frequency with which “sic” has had to be inserted into the quotations from the dissertation in this review, quotations chosen for entirely different reasons, further illustrates the lack of care evident in the writing and proofreading of the thesis.

In the “PREFACE,” consisting of just over two pages, in the penultimate paragraph on page 18, “from” is misspelt as “form.” Also on page 18 the last full sentence does not follow a grammatical structure and contains an apparent typographical error:

“As if originals designed by the Maker, three wedge tombs stored (sic) in three strategic positions on the borders, Knocklassa being on the extreme south-west, Drimamure is to the extreme north and Lickaun stands in the south-east, as if all three served as lookout posts to guard against the marauding enemy.”

In the first page of the Introduction (p. 20) the following errors are apparent. In the first paragraph there is a sentence which reads:

“For this reason, the operalisation (sic) of the GAA founded in 1884, was founded on the parish as a unit or the history culture and traditions (sic).”

In the second paragraph the following sentence appears:

“The failure to record information of the past has resulted in the loss of local culture and, therefore, it is incumbent on me, as it was on O’Criomthainn to put in print what I know of our people and our past in order how (sic) to relate the resilience of the local people and culture.”

In the third and final paragraph on the page a sentence reads:

“There were church records before that and world (sic) handed them down through the clergy and told to me by Fr. Kevin Horgan in Inagh.”

This pattern of carelessness continues throughout the thesis with, at times inevitably, humorous consequences. In a footnote on p. 69, the “Yellow Dragoons” are mistyped as the “Yellow Dragons”

In the section on “The Social History of the Gardai,” there is a passage which reads:

“During those 50s, 60s and 70s winter classes for farmers and housewives were very popular. Booking(sic), baking and craftworks were the main ones for the ladies and talks on stock rearing, drainage, fertilisers, etc. were the main topics for the men” (p.88).

A few pages later on p. 91, the exact same passage with the same mistype of “Cooking” appears at the end of the section on “*The telephone in Maurice’s Mills.*”

As explained above in the description of individual chapters, there is another much more significant repetition of text within the thesis. In chapter 4, in the section entitled “*Priests of the Parish*” all of the text from the beginning of the second paragraph on p. 190 to the end of the first paragraph on p 194, with a few minor variations of wording, is a repeat of text already included in Chapter 1 at pp. 66-69 in two successive sections, one on “*Father Donough O’Quealy, P.P. (Circa 1690-1725)*” and the other on “*The Union of Inagh with Kilnamona (Circa 1730)*”.

A full account of all the errors and failures of proofreading in the dissertation would go on for pages but the examples listed above offer sufficient evidence of the haste and carelessness with which the work was completed. It is quite exceptional to find a Masters Dissertation presented for award in this unfinished state and certainly one for which an award was made without any changes to rectify the inadequacies.

The Review in Summary

It is apparent that the writer of this dissertation had no clarity of purpose in undertaking the whole endeavour other than to set down in writing all he knew about his parish. In consequence, decisions on the topics to be addressed and the material included and excluded are governed by no unifying scholarly objective. Availability of information appears to be the sole criterion employed. In so far as the dissertation purports to be a history in some sense of the parish of Inagh and Kilnamona, there are astonishing lacunae. The 18th and 19th centuries are entirely absent and the 20th century is addressed in a most quixotic and selective way omitting the impact on the parish of virtually every major event and trend of the century. The theme of religion and its impact on the people of the parish is clearly emphasised by the author. Despite this, there is no analysis at all included of the rise and decline in influence of the Catholic Church over the last century and a half and how that played out in this particular parish.

It is not even apparent to which discipline or tradition of academic scholarship the dissertation purports to contribute. There is no attempt to situate it in the context of an existing corpus of research or theory.

In drawing on sources and deploying information obtained, there is no adherence to the norms of scholarship. Extensive tracts are copied verbatim from several previously published sources and inserted into the text without any indication that they are not the writer’s own work. A number of chapters are, therefore, in effect co-written by a number of different individuals, the putative author and the original authors of a variety of other texts which are reproduced in part. Much, if not most of the material remains unreferenced and it is impossible to distinguish the author’s own subjective beliefs and opinions from what may rest on firmer foundations. There is a great deal of entirely personal and even self-referenced comment and opinion, showing a marked absence of

scholarly detachment and objectivity. Throughout the text there is no adherence to a standard convention of referencing. In its place is the sparse use of footnotes, many of which appear in passages copied directly from other sources, footnotes which may or may not have appeared in those sources. Footnotes referring, apparently, to the same source appear in several different forms and wordings in different places.

The chapter titles are frequently contradicted by their contents. Statements of intent at the outset of chapters and sections are subsequently ignored or contradicted. Section headings offer no certain guide to what may follow. Conclusions are drawn without any prior discussion or analysis of the evidence. It is as if a certain degree of amnesia is attendant on the writing with a loss of awareness as the writing progressed of what had been written before.

Before the dissertation was bound and presented for assessment, it was clearly not properly proofread. Mistypes, misspellings, malapropisms and blatant deficiencies of grammatical expression abound throughout. Even on the title page the word 'Education' is misspelt.

It is impossible for me to avoid the conclusion that Mr Garvey's dissertation is redolent of extreme haste, carelessness and disregard or ignorance of the most basic standards of scholarship. It has no unifying theme or purpose and is not, in any accepted understanding of the concept, a scholarly work.

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