

## Private v Parliamentary Morality – Peter McDonald MP (1836-1891)



Peter McDonald, son of Randal, was born in 1836 and received an ‘elementary education’ in Kilfinane, Co. Limerick. He married Catherine, eldest daughter of Michael Carmody, born in Co. Limerick, 1856. They had no known children.

He became a teacher in the French College, Blackrock sometime around or after 1860 when it was founded<sup>1</sup>. Within a few years he became a commercial traveller and then set up as a wine merchant and spirit rectifier in 12 Wellington Quay, Dublin. Subsequently he took in a partner, Thomas Francis Cantwell<sup>2</sup>; the firm was then called Cantwell & McDonald since he took more of a back seat role due to his political commitments.

He was first elected as a Commissioner for Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire), and afterwards represented the Mountjoy Ward in the Municipal Council and was elected senior Councillor to the position of Alderman.<sup>3</sup> In 1885 he was nominated for the North Sligo Constituency as a Nationalist Candidate for the Irish Parliamentary Party and won easily with 5,216 votes as against 776 for the Conservative candidate, Lt Col John ffollott. He was returned unopposed in the July 1886 election and served as High Sheriff of Dublin the same year.



During the 1890 Kitty O’Shea affair, he attended the parliamentary party meetings in London but did not make any contribution<sup>4</sup>. He chose to oppose Parnell and joined the ‘anti-Parnellites’. Later in the year he was being asked to deny rumours that he was due to retire from politics<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *The Times* 14/3/1891 & 27/11/1885. I have been unable to trace their marriage or her parentage. That she was born in Co. Limerick is from the 1901 census, see later

<sup>2</sup> Employed as an accountant in Limerick city from 1870

<sup>3</sup> *Freemans Journal* 13<sup>th</sup> March His political life is only dealt with briefly, he wasn’t publicly active

<sup>4</sup> The Parnellite split or The disruption of the Irish Parliamentary Party, *The Times*, London 1891 & The Story of the Parnell crisis, *Pall Mall Gazette*, London, 1891 The two illustrations come from the latter; he is probably third left in the bottom row, looking left and away from the speaker

<sup>5</sup> *Leicester Daily Mercury* 23/12/1890

He died suddenly on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1891: “He was apparently in the enjoyment of good health until about 10 o’clock when he was seized with an attack of apoplexy and although medical assistance was promptly obtained it was unavailing.”<sup>6</sup> The funeral was set for the 16<sup>th</sup> at Glasnevin.<sup>7</sup>

A sign of the political fervour of the times was an *Irish Time’s* comment that “The sudden and unexpected death of Alderman Peter McDonald makes a parliamentary vacancy in North Sligo and we should have been glad to make no reference to the possible succession in the representation until the remains of the deceased had been interred.”

Next day’s *Freeman’s Journal*<sup>8</sup> reported that: “The funeral was attended by a large concourse of mourners and the regret felt for the loss of one who had in his time done such useful services as a private citizen and in many public capacities, and whose genial disposition and high character were so widely known, were made manifest by the numbers, the respectability and the representative character of those who assembled to pay a last tribute to his memory. The Catholic Commercial Club had the blinds drawn and the flag half mast high as the cortege passed.”

Among the large concourse that attended in Glasnevin were Thomas Francis Cantwell and his son James who would have been eyewitnesses to an event told by his grandson Brian<sup>9</sup> to his own son, the author of this article. The story is that at the funeral both his Dublin wife and London wife turned up in Glasnevin, neither knowing of the other’s existence. This spread like wildfire and caused scandal and amusement due to his ‘anti-Parnellite’ stance. The existence of an official and unofficial wife is confirmed in his will:<sup>10</sup>

This is the last will and testament of Mr Peter McDonald, Alderman and Member of Parliament, now of 11 Clarinda Park West, Kingstown, in the county of Dublin made this 7<sup>th</sup> day of February, 1890. I appoint Michael E Fitzgerald, 20 Westland Row Dublin<sup>11</sup> and Henry Bonass, solicitor of 1 Parliament street Dublin to be my executors and I direct all my just debts and funeral and testamentary expenses shall be paid as soon as possible after my decease. I bequeath unto my wife Catherine McDonald £2000 out of the capital and profits that shall be to my credit at my decease and at my place of business, 12 Wellington Quay, I

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<sup>6</sup> *The Times* 14/3/1891 *The Freeman’s Journal* adds that he was attended by Drs MacDermott and Newland and *Irish Times* have a very short note to say the Kingstown Town Hall flag flew at half mast. The death notice (16<sup>th</sup> March) says “after a short illness to the inexpressible grief of his sorrowing wife”

<sup>7</sup> *Freeman’s Journal* and *Irish Times*, 16<sup>th</sup> March, 1891

<sup>8</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> January See appendix for list of mourners

<sup>9</sup> The bare bones of the story came via Brian’s mother, Kathleen, as James died in 1925 when Brian was 11.

<sup>10</sup> Slightly abbreviated; National Archives, Principal Registry Will Book, 1891, H-M. Ff 257-8, The will and associated documents have not survived

<sup>11</sup> Fitzgerald & Co. Wine merchants and spirit rectifiers, Thom’s Directory, 1891

also bequeath to my wife my household furniture and all personal effects at my residence. I hereby bequeath to Henry Bonass £3000 in trust for the object named in the letter bearing the address to him, same to be paid out of my accumulated capital and profits

I bequeath out of said profit and capital to my niece Rose McDonald now of 136 Lower Gloucester Street, Dublin, £500, to the President for the time being of the French College, Blackrock, Dublin, £500 for masses for the repose of my soul, the present President being Rev Jules Botrel, and to my executor Henry Bonass £100 for acting as trustee for the above named sum of £3000. I desire that the residue together with any and all shares in public companies, cash in bank, and monies owing to me shall be divided into four equal shares and that one share shall be given to Charles McDonald now of 219 Court Avenue, Covington, Kentucky, USA, one share to my sister Hanora Joyce of Inverness, Magentic County, Quebec, and the remaining two shares shall be given in trust to my brother Charles for distribution as he may desire between the children of our late brothers, John, William and Arthur. Same to be done only after my executors have paid have paid all my liabilities and finally realised all of my assets. Herewith I enclose the key of my private safe drawer at 12 Wellington Quay in which will be found all information referring to such shares as I may hold at my decease

Signed and witnessed by Felix M Mullen, Kings Inns, Henrietta St., and William B Carlin, 91 Lower Baggot St.

Letter (codicil) written from Wellington Quay and Essex St., February 1890

My Dear Mr Bonass

Having full and implicit confidence in you and Mr Fitzgerald I have appointed you both my executors and further I have nominated yourself as trustee for carrying into effect my bequest of £3000 believing you will faithfully discharge that duty. If possible I wish you would carry same into effect without the knowledge even of your colleague & my other executor Mr Fitzgerald. I wish the money as according it may be got from my partner Thos Cantwell shall be forwarded to such solicitor or party that may be named for that purpose by Mary Madden otherwise known as Mrs Mary Donnell the legatee or her representatives. I desire that the acknowledgement of such money or monies shall be shown by you to Mr. Fitzgerald but without disclosing for whom they were intended. In order to identify said Mary Madden you will find in my private drawer of the safe a photograph of her and my child Mary and of her and my child William described in the accompanying certificates as Mary McDonald and William McDonald, as further proof of identity the legatee will produce the originals of these certificates. My desire and intention is that the £3000 should be

appropriated £1000 for each of the three parties named. £1000 to the mother Mary Madden and the other two thousand to be lodged in the joint names of all three till the children come of age. If my wife or any of my relatives should dispute the validity of my will and bring it to court I will that such person so disputing it shall forfeit the legacy named for her or him and that such forfeited amount shall go the President of the French College Blackrock to found burses for students for the foreign missions

Signed with same witnesses

If his intention was to keep his mistress secret, then it failed completely. However why she turned up is not clear, since it seems likelier that she knew of his official wife. Other more remote possibilities include that she believed she was actually married (but then why Mrs Donnell with two children with the McDonald surname) or that she travelled incognito and was recognised. Perhaps it was out of love and not thinking of the consequences.

The will does not specify Mary's address. Presumably the certificates are birth certificates but as they've not survived it's not known whether they were registered in England or Ireland nor are the two children's ages known. If it is assumed that they started their relationship when he became MP, and was in London frequently for long spells, then they have to be less than six years old, but there is no evidence either way. Their subsequent fate is unknown.

It appears that Catherine was humiliated by the affair and withdrew from public life. She left Clarinda Park within a year and, in 1901, was living at 8 Royal Marine Road with a servant and likely relation Ellen Carmody. She gave her age as 48 which does not fit with *The Times* statement that she married in 1856. Carmody was also born in Co Limerick and gave her age as 34<sup>12</sup>.

She died 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan 1908 at her residence, no death notice was published; an indication that her funeral was a very private occasion<sup>13</sup>. She died intestate; administration of £763 was granted to Ellen Carmody, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1908<sup>14</sup>. In 1911 Carmody (now aged 40) was a lady of private means with 'income from houses' with a Dublin-born servant maid, 18-year old Essie Toomey.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that Peter McDonald's will was proved within six months shows that it was uncontested. No doubt there were legal consultations on his widow's behalf, but there would have been no guarantee

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<sup>12</sup> National Archives 1901 Census Royal Marine Road

<sup>13</sup> It may be that her death was not registered as the only Catherine McDonald registered in 1908 is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter rather than the first. She is not buried in any of the Glasnevin Trust Cemeteries

<sup>14</sup> National Archives Calendar of Wills and Administrations, 1908, estate value c. £7,000

<sup>15</sup> National Archives 1901 Census 1911 Census Royal Marine Road, the National Archives gives Essie's surname as Trowy

of success as it would become a dual issue, the validity of the codicil and the forfeit clause. The fees expended for an uncertain amount of money with the possible result of total loss was not an attractive proposition.<sup>16</sup>

His share of Cantwell and McDonald was sold outright to Thomas Cantwell; he paid by instalments to Henry Bonass up to the late 1890s.<sup>17</sup>

## Appendix

Description of removal, list (men only) of mourners<sup>18</sup> and cemetery plot note

Yesterday, the remains of the late Alderman McDonald, MP, were conveyed from Clarinda Park, West, Kingstown, for internment to Glasnevin Cemetery. The funeral was attended by an exceedingly large concourse of mourners, and the regret felt for the loss of one who had in his time done such useful services as a private citizen and in many public capacities, and whose genial disposition and high character were so widely known, were made manifest by the numbers, the respectability, and the representative character of those who assembled to pay a last tribute to his memory. The funeral left Kingstown at about 10 o'clock, and reached the Cemetery about noon. The Catholic Commercial Club<sup>19</sup> had the blinds drawn and the flag half mast high as the cortege passed. The chief mourner was Alexander McDonnell (nephew).

A very large number of wreaths, including one from the Catholic Commercial Club, and floral crosses were placed upon the coffin. The Rev Father Coffey, chaplain of the cemetery, said the last prayers over the remains in the mortuary chapel.

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<sup>16</sup> It would seem that the letter was composed without consultation with Henry Bonass who probably would have advised him that such a letter would be treated as a codicil and thus published under probate law. There is the issue of client confidentiality which was superseded, maybe because the client was deceased. Properly advised he could have set up the trust fund before he died and make a bequest in the will, in which case his solicitor would be under no obligation to reveal the duties of the trust. If he had funded the trust beforehand then nobody would have known such a trust existed though it would have needed realisation of assets which may not have been desirable or possible.

<sup>17</sup> National Archives Cantwell Papers 1182/7/1

<sup>18</sup> Freeman's Journal 17<sup>th</sup> March 1891 The first part of the list has been edited by removal of duplicate names (where found) and regrouping representatives from Blackrock College and Cantwell & McDonald. The second part has not been edited; some names are duplicated in both parts. It should not be assumed that the mourner's names are spelled accurately.

<sup>19</sup> 42 Upper Sackville St. Founded by Dublin merchant supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party, 1882. At this time the newspaper was undecided whether or not to support Parnell (Felix M Larkin, 'A great Daily Organ': the Freeman's Journal, 1763–1924, *History Ireland*, Vol.14 2006) but, either way, the emphasis on the club members was useful PR for their many commercial advertisers regardless of politics

Amongst those who attended the funeral were: Right Hon the Lord Mayor & High Sherriff Dr J K Kenny MP, Wm Murphy MP, T Sexton MP, Thos Condon MP, John Redmond MP, T Harrington MP, Alderman Meagher, Alderman Perry, Alderman Robt Foxton, Alderman Gill, Alderman O'Reilly, Alderman O'Toole, Jas Waters, Councillor O'Meara, Councillor Lenehan, Thos Sherlock TC, John Kennedy TC, J O'Dwyer TC, J Kennedy Junior, John McQuaide JP TC, J M Bolger TC, J Hutchinson TC, Henry Bonass TC, J Sheehan TC, E McMaster JP TC, Thomas F Cantwell, James Cantwell, Nicholas Lynch, Alderman Sir Henry Cochrane DI, J J O'Kelly TC, Dr Wade TC, Dr R Kenny, Very Rev J Botrell President Blackrock College, Very Rev Fr Ebenrecht do., Rev M Hyland do., Rev H O'Toole do., John Beveridge Town Clerk, James Henry Assistant Town Clerk, John S Carroll City Marshall, John Burke City Sword Bearer, Mervyn Crofton, J J Bulger, Daniel Maguire, Bernard H O'Reilly, Chas Coyle, Edwd J Clifford, Frank Weldrick, Peter Sheridan, Prof H Fagan, Laurence O'Rourke, Anthony Carroll, John Shuley, Thos C Graham, Peter Leech, TC, John Burke, J Cleary, Thos McAuley TC, John Behan, Jas Kavanagh, Michael Nugent, Philip Gilligan PLG, Joseph Behan, John Donnelly Town Clerk, Kingstown, J Begg TC Kingstown, Thos O'Reilly, Very Rev Fr Cantwell, Very Rev Canon Harold PP, Rev Dr Butler CC Berkeley Road, Francis Robt Nowlan, Richard Ward; James J Byrne, Maurice Butterly JP, Frank Butterly, J J Carrigg, Capt Cunniam, Philip Hynes TC Kingstown, J Furlong Kingstown, James Martin Drumcondra, Rev Fr Clancy Maynooth, Rev Fr Judge Maynooth, P W Joyce LLD, J J Mulvey, D Casey, Alex McDonnell, Capt Gill, Alderman V B Dillon, Thomas Brown TC, J J Robinson TC, C O'Reilly, M Nugent, Frederick Hamilton, Francis Gibney, Nicholas Lynch ex-MP, John Myles CTC, J A Farrell, T O'Dwyer TC, J F Henderson, Terence PLG, M H Lemon Chairman Licensed Grocers and Vintners' Association, Robert B Livingstone, G M Ross CE, James McBlaine, W Elliott, G Byrne solicitor, W Fitzgerald Barry, P J Lennox Sec LGVA, P Dolan, N Proud, Patrick MacDonnell, Patrick J Molloy, Bernard O'Connor, F Egan, T Eager, Thomas Higgins, George T Monson, John Cassidy, J P Butler, R D O'Callaghan, solicitor, Dr Casey, J J Mulvey, Dr Edward Flinn FRCS, Robert P Livinston, M E Fitzgerald, P McArdle, Col Bidwill, Richard Callen, Dr W H Byrne, John Lawlor, Joseph Berry, Dr Scott, TC, James McMane, Gerald Byrne, W Elliott, Capt D Dunn, John L Robinson TC CE, P J Bermingham, P Marlow, Michael O'Brien, Jas Begg TC, P Hynes TC, J Furlong, J Furlong TC, Major E Wayte, J E Ryan, M Morris, E Ennis, P C Ryan, J McCoall, Dr Newland, Dr Donovan, W J Jefferson, W Burke, Rev Mr Cullen, Canon Walsh PP, Rev Mr Eaton, Canon Harold PP, Rev Mr Brennan, D Bulger, Deputy Inspector-General W Connolly RN, D Meagher, J Bloom, Bernard O'Connor, M J Bloom junior, O'Sullivan, John Walsh, P J Campbell, P P Lee, Rev J Buller, J McPadden, Samuel F Bole, Laurence Malone, J A Reardon, F Cherry, J J Nagle, J J Goulding, F Hamilton, The Right Hon the Lord Mayor J A Mannion, Rev P Lee CC, P McArdle, - Sheehan, Bernard Goulding, James Cleary, James McDonnell TC

The Catholic Commercial Club was represented by Messrs Thos W Leckey, Frank O'Neill, John McPadden, Joseph F Martin PLG, Joseph Charlton, P D Kavanagh, B H O'Reilly, Wm Butler, J Kennedy junior, J J Kennedy TC, Dr Bloom, J M Clinch TC, Joseph Flynn, B Gorevan, A Devereux, solicitor, John Boardman, P Boardman, F A Walker, Gerald Shalvey, Dr Delahoyde, J Condon LLD BL, James Keogh, Peter White, J Downes TC, W E White, John O'Connell, Thomas P Quaid, J N Muldoon, D Hisbon, Wm Walsh, Chr Coghlan, J J Cavanagh, Peter O'Reilly, John Doyle TC, John McQuaid, J P Shuley, N Lynch, H Bonass TC, P J O'Reilly, Alderman O'Reilly, John Lemass TC, John Gerrard, Thos Sherlock TC, Jas Keogh, H P Kearney, P J Molloy, Adam Begg, Prof Teegan, J McDermott, J A Berdem, J J Cartlan, John M Fay

He is the sole burial in plot ZG 57. There is no headstone and no memorial foundation fee paid.<sup>20</sup>

#### Dublin Wine Trade note

There was also McDonald and Brothers, Wine and Tea merchants, at 66-67 Upper Dorset Street, established in the early 1860s, run by James and three brothers<sup>21</sup>. The small world of the Dublin wine trade shows other connections. Michael E Fitzpatrick's brother, Martin, was also in the business; he later became proprietor of the *Freeman's Journal* and apparently had a small part to play as mediator to the conferences that led up to the Anglo Irish Treaty; he was appointed Senator by the subsequent Government. They are also related to McDonnells or MacDonnells in some way; there is an awful amount of potential confusion to be had in trying to work out how they are all related especially since McDonald and McDonnell are sometimes interchangeable. And also, Peter's father's name, Randal is more associated with McDonnell and not usually found in Limerick.

#### Declaration of Interest

The two wives at the funeral is part of Cantwell family lore; I always considered it too good a story to try and prove or disprove. But recently I felt the need to find out more about Peter McDonald and, armed with his date of death from my father's records, followed the trail via his obituaries, with a side glance at his political career and a futile search for some basic genealogical data (except for Catherine later) to his Last Will and Testament.

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<sup>20</sup> Glasnevin Cemetery Records, where he is indexed under Alderman McDonald rather than Peter McDonald

<sup>21</sup> *Strattens' Dublin, Cork and South of Ireland*, London, 1892 The Fitzgeralds also get a write-up