

A Cantwell Miscellany, Brian J Cantwell, October 1960

The two main branches of the Cantwell family in Leinster were in Kilkenny and Tipperary areas, and our particular branch appears to be descended from the latter. Unfortunately, owing to lack of documentary evidence, I have not been able to trace lineage back prior to the late 18th century.

The first Cantwell shown in the family tree which I have prepared is James. He lived in Rahan district near Tullamore, where the Parish register is incomplete and gives no information of interest. There are now no Cantwells in Rahan; part of their lands are incorporated in the estates of St Stanislaus' College. In the nearby Rahan cemetery there are a large number of tomb stones which show that this has been the burial place of the family for almost 200 years.

Edward Cantwell, 1750-1831, and his wife Catherine or Kate Flynn, 1760-1842, were the parents of a large family, one of whom, John, born 1792, later became Bishop of Meath. He was consecrated in 1830 and had the difficult task of reforming that large diocese after Catholic Emancipation. He died in December 1866 and was interred in Mullingar old Cathedral.¹ Descendants of his brothers and sisters now reside in the Ferbane and Tullamore neighbourhood. I have not included details of this branch in the family tree as I cannot complete the connection. The similarity of Christian names in the earlier generations of each branch is, however, significant. It is possible that Edward and James were brothers.

One of the first Cantwells to come to Ireland was Hugh, a Norman knight, who came with Strongbow in 1170. His name is included in a list of "men of account orderly as they came to the conquest of Ireland also called 'these conquerors'", published by Meredith Hammer, 1571 (Sir James Ware's edition, 1633). The spelling of the name Cantwell varied considerably during the twelfth to seventeenth centuries: de Kentewelle, de Kentwell, de Cantwelle, etc. In fact in Luke Wadding's Papers, 1614-38² there were no less than eleven variations in reference to Rev. Michael Cantwell, S.J. such as Michel Cantuel, Michel Cantwell, Milero Cantuell, Michaele Cantwello, & etc. In a letter dated May 29th 1631 from Madrid he signs his name 'Don Miguel de Cantevillas'. Variations in spelling such as these add to the difficulty in identifying particular members of the family and placing them in their correct order.

After Hugh (1170) came Gilbert (1190-1245) who had large holdings of land from Geoffrey de Turville, Bishop of Ossory, in the Kilfane (Kilkenny) district³. In the *Calendar of Documents*⁴ there is an interesting entry. It states that on November 20th 1244 King Henry III of England 'commanded' Bishop Geoffrey, Treasurer of Ireland, and Maurice Fitzgerald, Justiciary, to pay from the Irish treasury the sum of £50 for the Manor of Kentwell, Suffolk, sold to the King. (The Thirteenth-century pound is reckoned to be worth £40 to £50 present currency).

Kentwell Hall, near Long Melford, Suffolk, is a large red brick 'H' shaped Elizabethan manor. Although no Cantwell has resided in the district for over 700 years it is interesting to see the name being

¹ Cogan Rev A *The Diocese of Meath – Ancient and Modern* Vol. III, 1870

² Jennings Rev. Brendan O.F.M. *Wadding Papers, 1614-38*, Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1953 (The correspondence of Fr. Luke Wadding)

³ *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 1172-1603*, Vol. I, Irish Manuscripts Commission

⁴ *Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland, 1171-1307*, Vol. I p. 407 1881

perpetuated. A nearby range of sand hills are known as Kentwell Downs and not far from the house is a small wood called Norman's Grove⁵.

I am indebted to M. P. Stratham Esq., M.A., Country Archivist of the West Suffolk Record Office, for the following information:

“The manor was held by Gilbert de Kentwell in 1224. William de Kentwell is mentioned as holding land in Melford at his death in 1245. It then appears to have passed out of the hands of the family.

“Other references to the family occur in *Feudal Documents from the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds*, edited by D. C. Douglas (O.U.P. 1932). These are twelfth-century grants to the abbey etc. of lands at Hasketon in Suffolk and in London. It appears from these that Gilbert, son of Frodo, (the latter being brother of the Abbot and holder of the Manor in 1086) may have been the same Gilbert who appears in deeds of 1154 etc. as father of Richard of Kentwell, the donor of the lands to the Abbey,”

Could the name Kentwell be derived from Conteville in Normandy? Nearby is Tourville – Geoffrey de Turville?

In Ireland the Cantwells were followers of the Dukes of Ormond and prospered accordingly. There are some hundreds of references to the name in the Ormond Deeds⁶ and various State Papers during the period 1200 to 1650 from which it is evident that the family was widespread and closely knit. There were large holdings in Counties Kilkenny and Tipperary: Kells, Kilfane and Rathcoole (all in Co. Kilkenny), Moycarky, Dromineer and Nenagh (all in Co. Tipperary) held ‘Cantwell Castles’, the principal ones being at Rathcoole and Moycarky. There are some very interesting Cantwell tombs in Kilcooly Abbey, near Urlingford. They represent the burial places of Richard and his wife Graes (sic)⁷. The dates of their deaths are not recorded but the tomb was made in 1608. Other burials include William, again no date of death, and his wife Margaret (a Butler) who died 1528.⁸ This beautiful Abbey ruin is well worth a visit. In Kilfane Church-yard, south of Kilkenny, there is a stone effigy of a Cantwell, believed to be that of Sir Thomas, c.1259-c.1320. The following extract from the *Transactions of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society*⁹, refers to this effigy.

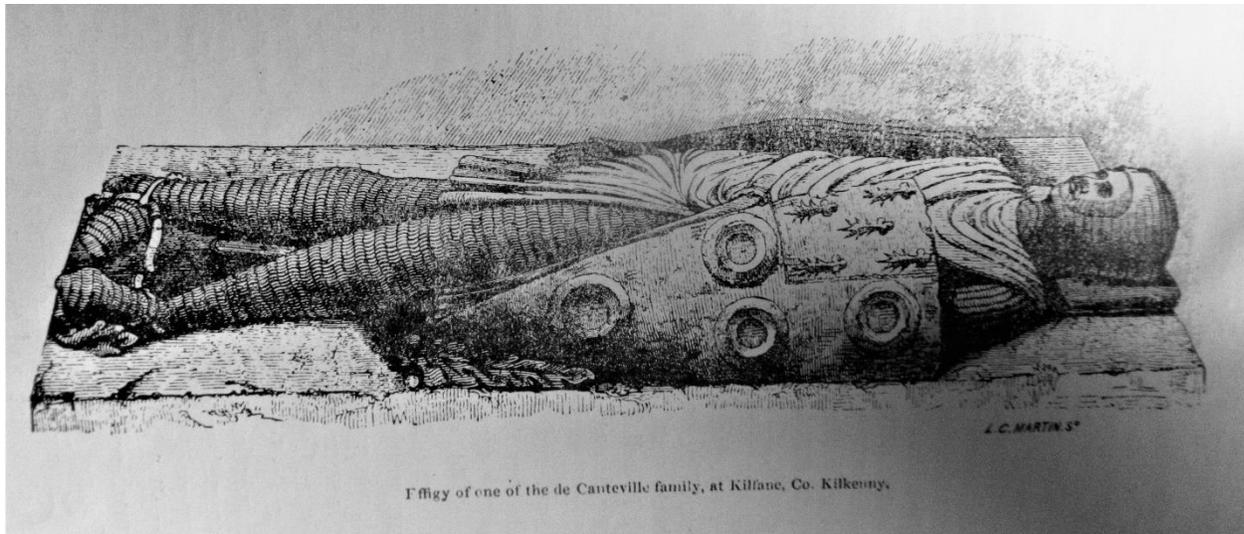
⁵ Ordnance Survey 6” map Suffolk sheets LXIII and LXII, 1884

⁶ Ormond Deeds, op. cit. Vols. I to VI

⁷ *Journal of the Association for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead in Ireland*, Vol. V 1888-1920

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ Vol. II 1852



Effigy of one of the de Canteville family, at Kilfane, Co. Kilkenny.

“The Cantwell or de Canteville family was amongst the early Norman settlers in the Counties of Kilkenny and Tipperary. Thomas de Kentewell is one of the witnesses to a charter granted by Theobald Walter, first chief butler of Ireland, to his town of Gowran, in the reign of Henry II. The Cantwells early possessed large property in the county of Kilkenny, on which stood the castles of Cantwell’s Court near Kilkenny, and of Stroan and Cloghsreg in the immediate neighbourhood of Kilfane. That this monument represents a Cantwell is proved by the evidence of heraldry. The shield is charged with a bearing, which, without the tinctures, may be described as – four annulets, a canton ermine – the bearing seen on the seal of John Cantwell, attached to a deed of Walter Fitz Peter de Cantwell, and Peter Fitz Peter de Cantwell, dated 46th Edw III, and on the seal of another John Cantwell, affixed to a deed dated 15th Henry VII. Probably this effigy was sculptured in memory of Thomas de Cantwell, who, by a writ dated at Thomastown, in the county of Kilkenny, in the year 1319, was exempted from attending at assizes, on the plea of being worn out with age (Rot. Pat. 13 Edw II no 33). Tombs, it is well known, were occasionally erected by persons before their decease; perhaps such was the case in this instance. A suit of mail, without any portion of plate, defends the body, and the head and throat are protected by a chaperon of mail which falls over the hauberk; the chaperon is flattened at top, presenting the appearance of a slightly elevated cone. A long triangular shield, very much curved, and charged in relief with the arms before described, is supported on the left side by a shield-strap, passing over the right shoulder, and some acorns with oak leaves are carved in the stone as a support for its point. A surcoat is worn over the hauberk, confined by the sword belt at the waist, and the sword lies under the body, the end appearing between the legs; the right arm (the hand being bare, and the mailed gauntlet hanging by) is extended by the side; and the right leg crossed over the left. The feet are supported by well-carved clusters of oak leaves with acorns, and the spurs are broadly rowelled. The effigy is well sculpture, apparently in Kilkenny marble; the contour of the head and neck is fine, the legs and feet are well formed, and the folds of the surcoat are disposed with considerable elegance; but the shoulders are narrow, the chest flat, and the right arm badly designed. The entire absence of plate armour prevents us from assigning this effigy to the successor of Thomas de Cantwell, as the latter was not dead in 1319; but he was an old man at that period, the broad rowelled spur forbids us to assign it to his predecessor, who must have died early in the thirteenth century, and the character of the oak leaf foliage would also point to about 1319, it being carved with the marked vigour and truth to nature, characteristic of the Decorated style of architecture which then came into vogue. It seems also probable, from the style of the building that this Thomas de Cantwell was the founder, or at least rebuilder, of the ancient church of Kilfane.”

The estate now known as Cantwells Court is situated near Rathcoole a few miles north of Kilkenny City and about ½ a mile north of the original castle, the remains of which still stand; it is a typical square Norman tower with traces of earthwork defences. Cantwells Court was confiscated in 1653 and John, the then owner, was “transplanted with mother and dependents to Connaught”¹⁰. Corrigan¹¹ states that he

“joined the services of exiled Charles II, became Captain in Col. Dempsey’s Regiment which served under Prince of Conde, Signed petition to be restored to estates but got no redress, No record remains of his ultimate fate”.

The estates which John Cantwell held in Co. Kilkenny included Kilfane (1637 acres), and Cantwells Court (1376 acres)¹², also Dromineer (1200 acres), Co Tipperary¹³. Lord Ranelagh was granted most of the Cantwells Court lands and shortly afterwards the property was renamed Sandfords Court¹⁴. Lord Ranelagh, originally Sir Roger Jones, took his title from Ranelagh, near Glenmalure, when he was granted that district in 1628¹⁵. The house now known as Sandfords Court was built on the site of Lord Ranelagh’s house, the house now called Cantwells Court has no association with the original family. From a study of the 6” O.S. maps¹⁶ covering the area it is interesting to see that not only have the principal names survived but so also have those of the townlands as set out in the Down Survey of 1655-1659¹⁷.

Mr Liam Price, in his *Place-Names of County Wicklow, the Barony of Arklow*, 1941, mentioned Ballecantowlo and Ballenecantowloe as occurring in Deeds of 1594 and 1620 respectively. The origin of these names, which are now obsolete, is given as *baile* Cantwell.

Among the Cantwells mentioned in early documents appear the names of John, Archbishop of Cashel, 1450-1484;¹⁸ Oliver, Bishop of Ossory, 1487-1527, who built the “great bridge” at Kilkenny¹⁹; Thomas, Dean of St. Canice’s Cathedral, Kilkenny, 1479-c.1491²⁰; and Peter, last Abbot of the Dominican Convent, Kilkenny²¹; he surrendered the convent to the Crown in 1539. In addition there are numerous references to Cantwell landowners, witnesses, soldiers and rogues. The latter include Nicholas²² who stole cattle in 1551 and Richard, brother of the Abbot of Holy Cross who was shot by Lord Mountgarret in 1621 for “plundering” the English settlers in Kilkenny²³.

¹⁰ Carrigan, Rev. William, C.C. *History and Antiquaries of the Diocese of Ossory*, Vol. III 1905

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Civil Survey, 1654-56, Co. Tipperary*, Vol. II, Stationary Office, Dublin, 1934

¹⁴ Graves, Rev. James, and Prim, J.G.A., *History, Architecture, and Antiquaries of Cathedral Church of St Canice, Kilkenny*, 1857

¹⁵ Price Liam, *The Place-Names of Co. Wicklow, Barony of Ballinacor North*, Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, 1945

¹⁶ Ordnance Survey 6” map, Co. Kilkenny, sheets XIV, XV, XIX, and XX

¹⁷ Goblet Y M A *Topographical Index of the Parishes and Townlands of Ireland in Sir Petty’s MSS Barony Maps, c. 1655-59*, Stationery Office, Dublin, 1932

¹⁸ Harris, *Works of Sir James Ware concerning Ireland, 1739*, p.481

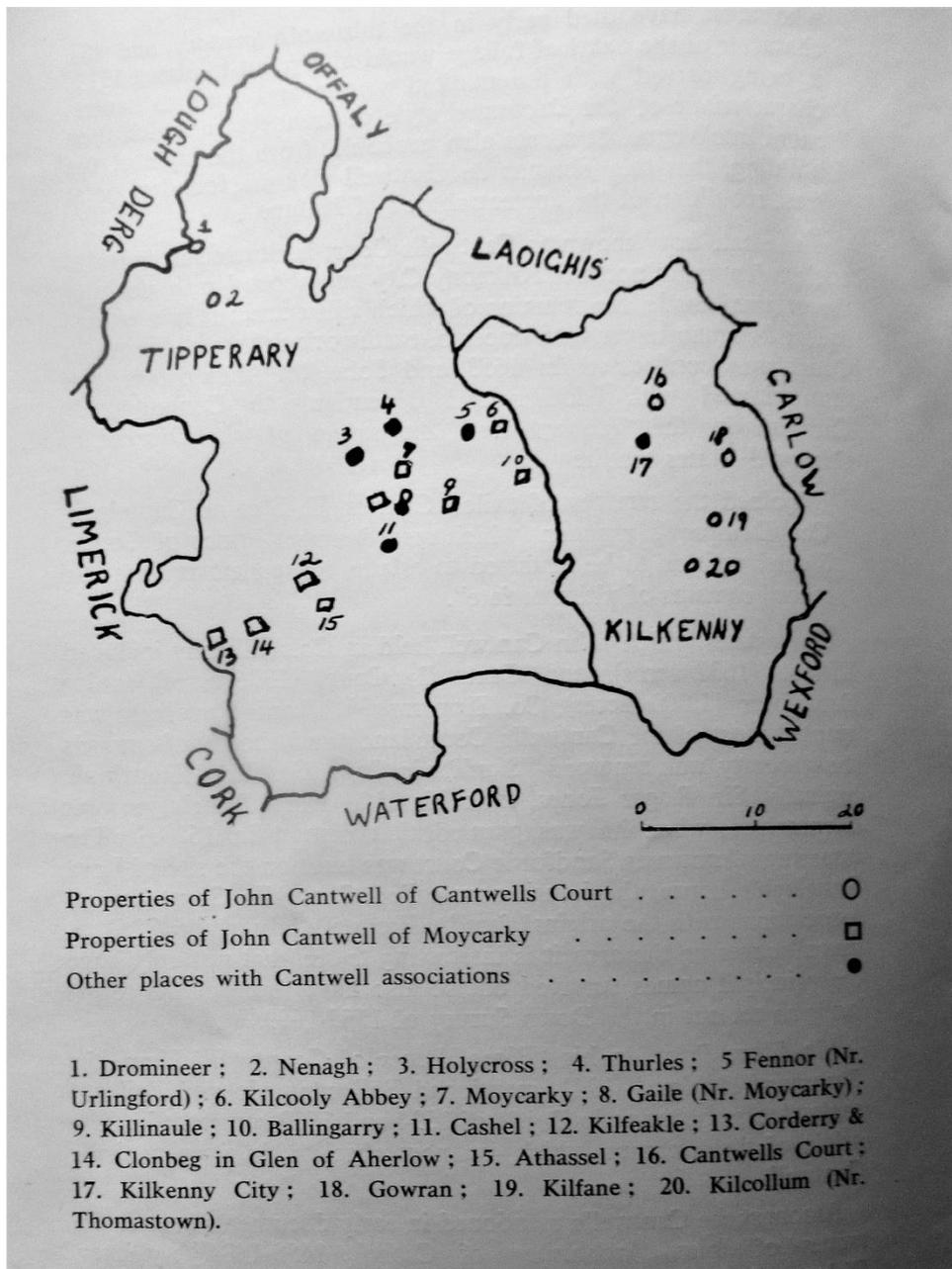
¹⁹ Leslie Rev. J.B. *Ossory Clergy and Parishes*, 1933

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ History, etc. of St. Canice’s, *op. cit.*

²² Ormond Deeds, *op. cit.* Vol. V

²³ Healy Rev. W. P.P., *History and Antiquities of Kilkenny County and City*, 1893



There is now little trace of Moycarky Castle. The Civil Survey (1654-56)²⁴ lists the townlands, stated to contain 1648 acres, held by the Castle, again, most of these can be identified by their present names. Evidently the Moycarky branch of the family was also dispersed in the mid seventeenth-century. I have not been able to trace subsequent movements, but the reoccurrence of the Christian names of Thomas, John and James points to a connection between Moycarky and, approx., 60 miles to the north, Rahan.

The following reference to Moycarky and its owners occurs in the Calendars of State Papers²⁵:

²⁴ Civil Survey, Co. Tipperary, *op. cit.*

²⁵ *Calendars of State Papers relating to Ireland, 1509-1670*, Public Records Office, Dublin, Vol. XVI, p. 454

“The King (James I) to the Lord Deputy, Captain John Butler having complained to him that his wife, being sole daughter of Edmond Cantwell, and so lawful heir to the castle of Muckarke and divers other lands in that kingdom. He and his wife were absent at the death of her grandfather who survived her father and died seized of the said Castle and lands. A third brother of Edmond Cantwell taking advantage of their absence did unjustly enter into possession of that Castle, &c., and still holds the same. For recovery whereof Captain Butler has prayed their (the king’s) assistance. Required them to give such remedy as may stand with the law, whereof we require to have a special care, the rather because Captain Butler has brought earnest letters of recommendation from the King of Poland (Sigismond III) for expediting his cause and returning him to Poland within six months: Given under the Privy Signet at Westminster, 9th January, 1623”

The Captain Butler referred to above was John, son of Edmund, 2nd Viscount Mountgarret. I have not been able to trace the result of the King’s representations.

The acreage figures quoted above are all Plantation acres: 1,000 = 1620 Stature Acres. Gleeson²⁶ states that the Plantation figures should be increased by 20% to allow for “some uniform and inscrutable errors in all measurements”.

The destruction of the Public Records Office, in which was stored almost all parochial registers, county records and other important papers, in Dublin in 1922 makes it almost impossible to bridge the gap between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Further examination of Rent Rolls, Wills, etc. also tomb stones in Tipperary and Offaly will be necessary before a more complete Family Tree can be attempted. I have included in the tree a much abbreviated pedigree of the Halpin and Coyle families to show the Dublin connection.

Addendum

Background

This pamphlet was privately published as part of historical and genealogical research on the Cantwell family, originally from Rahan, Co. Offaly, in the early 1800s, by my late father in the 1950s. For a short biography see my website – originally published as part of the introduction to his *Memorials of the Dead* on CD, www.iancantwell.com. The family tree is a separate sheet not included here except for the main section – see below. All his original end-notes of sources are now footnotes.

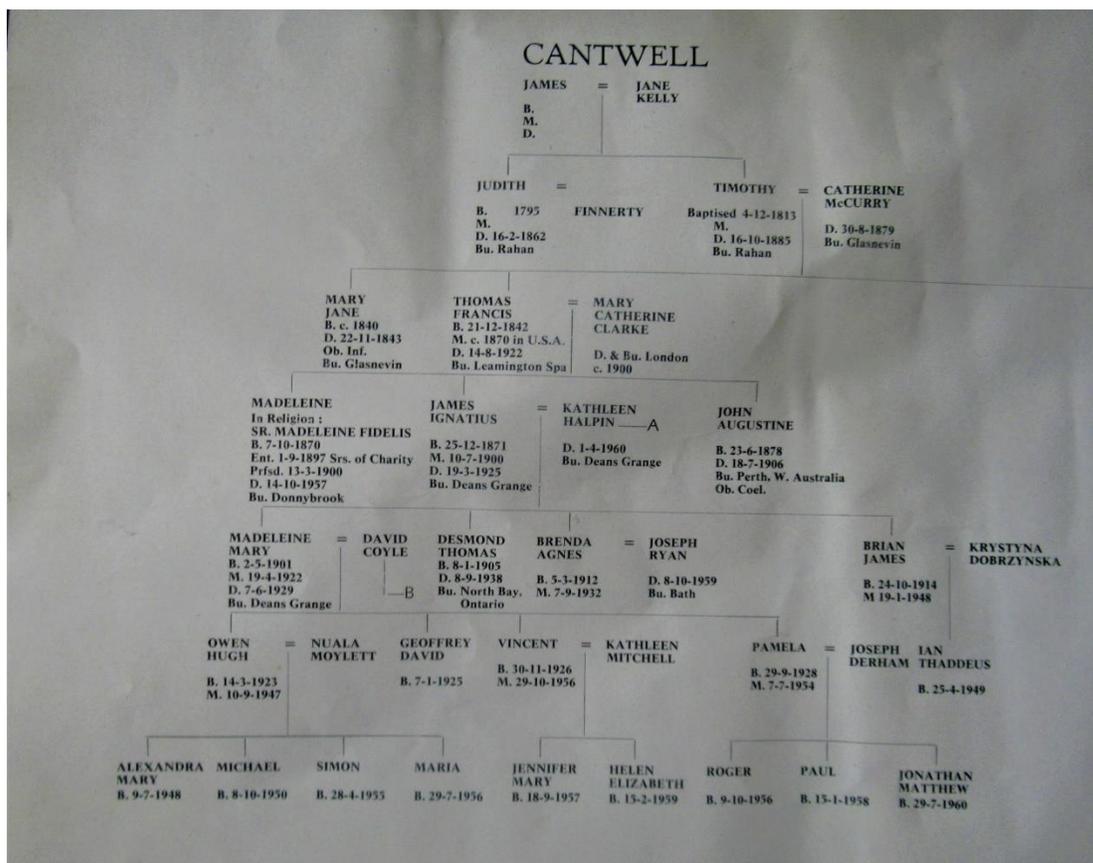
Family Research

This was written before the county indexes of surnames from Griffiths Valuation were published by the National Library, Ireland. It is possible that had they been available and the spread of the surname in Laois and Offaly was known this opinion might have been modified to argue for a northward spread from Kilkenny and Tipperary of the surname from, at least, the 17th century. Also, the Christian names listed are common among all Catholic families and do not sustain his hypothesis.

Not all Cantwells of Rahan are necessarily descended from the first Cantwell(s) to settle in the parish, whenever that was – Rahan cemetery indicates 18th century, but likely to be earlier. The surname is quite common in the parish in the early 1800s, according to tithe records, indicating that the surname was established for several generations at least.

²⁶ Gleeson Dermot F., *The Last Lords of Ormond*, 1938

Later research by me identified small gaps in his research and I picked up another son of what appeared to have been a large family. I was, however, unable to identify the townland in Rahan through parish registers, tithe applotment books, or estate records in the Land Commission and National Library – though one possible source to be checked is an ‘unsorted collection’ of O’Brien estate records in the National Library. It is likely that James (the first known member of the family) died before the Tithe book was recorded, 1823, and an elder son inherited the lease but, as the parish registers don’t go back far enough, it is unknown who that might have been.²⁷



I have been unable to identify where Timothy (son of James) married, anything about the origins of his wife, or birth place of the first two children but not apparently in Dublin as I’ve researched all the city and county parish registers. Interestingly the tailor’s shop was originally a children’s hospital so, according to date imprecisions in the Valuation Office revisions, it is unclear whether their first known child and daughter, Mary Jane, died in the hospital or at home in 1843.

My father related that he was at first unable to trace Timothy’s origins before Dublin, due to his mother destroying his deceased father’s papers, until he found, hidden in a crack of an old wardrobe, a photo of the Rahan head stone.

I also found the divorce papers of Thomas (son of Timothy) and Mary Catherine Clark of the 1890s that had a copy of their St Joseph’s New York 1869 marriage (there was no license). These records have since been destroyed and as the couple came to Ireland in 1869, they miss the USA 1870 census; her surname is so common as to be impossible to trace anything further on her. The combination of her desertion of the

²⁷ This chart, part of a larger chart that includes other related lineages, was printed with the pamphlet

family to go to London and the 'scandal' of her life and death there caused the family to clam up completely and persistent inquiries by my father were unavailing.

In fact the only clue of her death that he had was that when the *Freeman's Journal* reported it, as wife 'of a prominent Dublin merchant', the newspaper was banned forever from the household. Calculating the 25-year range my father spent five years in the National Library checking back issues until he found the report of her death, much to the disgust of surviving relatives, and then identified where she was buried. I also read the report and saw the word 'divorce' that led me to finding that record in the UK National Archives in the late 1980s. The family also had the unfounded belief, contradicted by the inquest's accident verdict, that she committed suicide.

His research, with my additions, can be found in his family tree note book and other records, lodged in the National Archives, Dublin: Private Accessions no. 1182

The Cantwell Fada

The Cantwell Fada is 95.5" (243cm) high, the tallest effigy of this type in the UK and Ireland. Other than the face, the body is completely covered in a suit of chain mail, which was popular until replaced by plate armour c1400. It is thought to originally have been a sarcophagus slab that was later set upright against the church's inner wall. However, more modern research places it earlier than c.1320. There are numerous images of the effigy and church online; the above is the original drawing from the 1852 *Kilkenny Archaeological Journal*.

For recent scholarship see

Roger Stalley, A misunderstood Gothic masterpiece: the Cantwell effigy at Kilfane, Co. Kilkenny, *Figures from the past: studies on figurative art in Christian Ireland in honour of Helen Roe*, ed. E. Rynne Dun Laoghaire, Glendale Press for the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1987, pp. 209-222,

Oliver Harris, Antiquarian Attitudes: Crossed Legs, Crusaders and the Evolution of an Idea, *The Antiquaries Journal*, September 2010, pp. 401-440

There is a tradition²⁸ that Thomas de Cantwell, having been on a Crusade, married Beatrice Donati in Italy (he became infatuated with her beauty), but after returning back to Ireland, they separated. She became friendly with Alice Kyteler, the only woman in Ireland to be tried for witchcraft, and was herself arrested, escaped, recaptured by her husband (who killed her accomplice Oliver de la Freine), whom she then killed with a gold hairpin, thrown back into a dungeon where she died, allegedly by suicide.

Kilfane Church was likely to have been the site of an earlier pre-Norman foundation dedicated to St Pháin or Chill Pháin from which the name Kilfane derives.

Depending on who you read, a local tradition was that misbehaving children at a nearby Protestant school, or in the church (temporarily converted to a school), were sometimes punished by having to kiss the statue.

Clerical

Many of the above mentioned medieval clerics studied at Oxford University and appear in their student registers; at least one of them was illegitimate, but it seems to have been common that such male children were church educated and often rose to senior positions in the Church hierarchy.

²⁸ <http://kilkennyarchaeologicalsociety.ie/cantwell-fada/>

John Cantwell (1792-1866), born in Rahan who became Bishop of Meath in 1830, published *Statuta Dioecesis in dioecesi Midensi observanda: et a RRmo. D.D. Joanne Cantwell, Episcopo Midensi in sua Synodo dioecesis edita et promulgata, hebdomada quarta mensis aprilis*, 1835. Publisher: Ex typ. Societatis pro Diffusione Catholicorum Librorum

Legal

Another source not available to my father was the *King's Inns Admission Papers* (Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1982) which shows two: Edmund Cantwell of Moykerke, Tipperary, Esq. 10 May 1610 and Thomas Cantwell, Cantwells Court, Kilkenny, attorney, Jan. 1608

A well-known Dublin Cantwell legal family of the later 18th and early 19th centuries had connections with Cantwells Court; (see separate article for family's biography). From the *King's Inns Admission Papers*:

Peter Cantwell, only son of John, Dublin City Esq., Middle Temple 31st Jan 1776, Hilary term 1778

John Cantwell, only son of Peter, Dublin, barrister, deceased, and Esther Dodd, over 17, educated Dublin, affidavit by his mother, Hilary term 1800, Bond Easter, 1805

John McNamara Cantwell, only son of John, Dublin, attorney, deceased, and Susan Gilmore, over 16, educated by private tutor, affidavit by John Houston, Easter 1832 died 14th January 1878 at 24 Lower Dominick St, Henrietta, sole executor under £7000

In the mid-19th century John McNamara Cantwell bought Sandford Court and renamed it Cantwells Court, apparently for nostalgic reasons; their tradition associated the family with the Moycarky branch. It was still owned by the family in the mid-1890s but was probably sold when the last of the direct line, Harriette Cantwell, died in 1896.