

KERANS FAMILY HISTORY



DAVE TREANOR

Corran Kerans, Bill Birch, Dave Treanor, and Jan Wood at our house in Wimbledon in 2012 when we met to plan a book on the Kerans family



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Cover picture is a water colour of Deer Park Cottage where Sarah Kerans (née Clarke) last lived. The back cover has a photo of Sarah Clarke taken by her son Rev Thomas Kerns MD in 1858

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Acknowledgements

In the summer of 2012 Jan Wood, Bill Birch, Corran Kerans, and myself met up to discuss collaborating on a book on our Kerans family from Ireland.

I agreed to take the lead in writing it. Having recently retired I had both the time and the inclination, and some experience having written books on three other branches of my family.

Jan Wood is a professional archivist who sent me a very comprehensive report on the Kerans family in 2008 and probably did more research than anyone else. I could not have produced this book without her. Jan is from the family of Emily Ashworth who married Lyons Kerans, my great great grandfather.

Bill Birch is from an Australian branch of the family that we believe descends from one of the half-brothers of the earliest Lyons Kerans, my great great great grandfather. He was the first to research the early members of the Kerans family from around Durrow in Kings County, Ireland. Much of the material in the early chapters is based on his writings.

Corran Kerans and his uncle Lyons Herbert Delany Kerans are descended from a son of Lyons Kerans and Emily Ashworth who emigrated to Australia. They had been planning to produce a book since the 1990s. His uncle died

without completing what he had started, although he passed much of what he knew to Corran and Jan. Corran provided a wealth of archive material, and recounted many interesting stories.

I made contact with any members of the family we could trace, and the best photographs and the most interesting stories came from them. Some went to great lengths in gathering information and commenting on drafts.

I am particularly grateful to Deborah Powell and her sister Deidre Watson, Michelle Browne, Liz Biggart, Susan Cullen, Derek Tunnington, Marion Rae, Carol Jopp, David Penny and his mother Vi, Eleanor Wintour and her sons Patrick and Richard, Shawn Harwood, his mother Beth Boyd Blair and her sister Rosemary Miller, Victoria Wilson, Ginny Leonhart, Clare Fox, Ridley James, Melanie Baker, Susan Oakely, Jenny Benson, Karen Whittaker, Linda Godfrey, and Albert Snethlage, with apologies to any that I left out.

It has not been possible to identify who took most of the photos, or the origin of many other illustrations, but almost all were supplied by members of the family.

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Preface

The Kerans were a part of the Protestant establishment that ruled in Ireland until the formation of the Republic in 1922. Dr Thomas George Kerans described them as of 'yeoman stock': the earliest members of the family were tenant farmers some of whom had quite large holdings of land, and would have lived in 'gentleman's residences'. They were from the central belt of Ireland, whose strong links with Britain were proudly proclaimed in the names of Kings County and Queens County. Their sons were well educated, and those that did not go into farming joined the professions, or the army.

The opening chapters in Part 1 of the book explain our earliest known origins, and can be read sequentially like any other history book. But thereafter it is more like an encyclopaedia. Most of the remaining Parts each describe a branch of the family descending from Lyons Kerans and Sarah Clarke. This makes it easier for members of the family to examine their own ancestry, but I hope they will also stray into neighbouring chapters where they will find some truly amazing stories.

We trace the Kerans through two or three centuries of Irish history. I found it helpful to read *The Story of Ireland* by Emily Lawless (1890) so as to understand this from the perspective of protestants living in Ireland in the nineteenth century.

History and politics go hand in hand, and although we might agree on the facts these are always open to interpretation, and never more so than in Ireland.

Ireland is separated from the rest of Britain by the Irish Sea. In older times, far from being a barrier, this was a major trading route. Before the days of roads and railways most goods were carried by water, and most of Europe's major cities were on navigable rivers or the coast. The earliest peoples of Ireland were the Scots, speaking Gaelic. Like Scotland and the north of England, Ireland later came under the influence of the invading Vikings, who are reputed to have established Dublin. The Vikings in northern France became the Normans who were the next to invade Britain.

The industrial areas in the north had large Protestant working class populations. It was only a short hop across the Irish Sea from Belfast to Stranraer, and there were strong connections between Belfast and Glasgow.

I think it is fair to say that Ireland was often poorly governed, and too distant from the centres of power to exert its rightful influence. The divisions were emphasised following the Reformation, with most of the Irish retaining their allegiance to the Roman Catholic tradition.

There are parallels between the history

In some chapters I have coded the descendants so that, for example, WRA4.4.2 is the second child of the fourth child of William Robert and his wife Annie Kerans.

of Scotland and Ireland. Throughout their past it has been in the interest of certain sections of society in both countries to ally themselves with the English Crown, or the English Parliament, or the English Church whilst others formed alliances with the French as England's old enemy.

The anti-Catholic laws which also applied throughout Britain were particularly inappropriate in Ireland, as was the policy of displacing Irish landowners with settlers from England, Scotland and even Wales. Cromwell was responsible for the most gross of these invasions that left a lasting impression that Ireland was colonised by the British, rather than being an integral part of one country spread across the British Isles. The 1798 rebellion saw the most vicious imposition of British power, with thousands of Irishmen hanged for daring to rebel against British rule, and inviting an invasion by the French.

We can trace the roots of our family through all of these phases in the history of Ireland. The Kerans line may well go back to Scots aristocracy forced out of Scotland for rebelling against the King and encouraged to settle in Ireland to extend British influence there in the early years of the seventeenth century. The Kerans married into families that can trace their origins to the Norman Conquest. We have stories handed down through the family of involvement in putting down the Rebellion of 1798.

Once the Republic of Ireland took over all but a few northern counties, most of our family spread out across the British Empire, to India, Australia, Canada, and also to the USA, as well as to all corners of the UK. There were some who stayed behind, and some who returned two or three generations later, so we have descendants living there to this day. One

branch of the family still occupies the farm on which Sarah Kerans (née Clarke) spent her final years.

The same names keep recurring, so it is very easy to get lost in our family tree. There are eleven William Kerans, seven ancestors named Lyons Kerans and six Laurence C Kerans five of whom were Laurence Clarke Kerans. Three people named Lyons Kerans married Sarahs, and two of the Sarahs were their cousins. To help guide you through this maze there are family trees in each chapter, and maps to locate where they lived.

With the help of many living descendants of the family we have found letters and other documents, portraits, and photographs from the earliest days of photography, together with articles in contemporary newspapers that tell us something about the lives of some of these people.

Inevitably I have my own personal favourites. I particularly like the Lawrence Clarke Kerans who at the tender age of 17 went off hunting elephants in Abyssinia with his older cousin, who found him a job delivering diplomatic mail to the British Consul, only to be kidnapped by the manic depressive tyrant who ruled that country along with the consul and other Europeans. He was an innocent abroad. I came across a leather bound volume published by the *Illustrated London News* describing the British expedition to rescue the captives. This book had been passed down through the family since the 1860's when these events took place, and is now one of my most prized possessions.

I admired his father, the first to be named Lawrence Clarke Kerans, who achieved a great deal by his own endeavours and founded a great Kerans dynasty. I stayed in his house at South Park in Ahascragh, Co Galway. As a child we ate

our meals using silver plated cutlery with a Kerans crest that originated there in his household.

He had a brother Thomas who was both a doctor and an Anglican priest, who wrote learned books seeking to reconcile the ancient scriptures with the new discoveries of science in the first half of the nineteenth century. He set up a medical mission in the Middle East. He was an early photographer and we have pictures he took in 1858 including ones of Sarah Clarke, and the cottage at Deerpark where she lived. One of his daughters emigrated to Trinidad and the other illustrated children's books before marrying into a family of Victorian artists and sculptors and moving to live in the United States.

There are plenty of other attractive figures, such as Charlie St Kilda who everyone seems to have loved, and who lived in the other great family house in Birr that remained in the family through two or three generations. This branch of the family mostly served in the military where many of them achieved high rank. Their most famous hero would be John Simon Kerans who rescued HMS Amethyst from the Chinese Communists just after the war, and was the last descendant of Lawrence Clarke Kerans of South Park to bear the name Kerans.

Perhaps the saddest story is the murder of Ronald Kerans by the UDA during 'The Troubles' in 1975 and the devastating effect it had on his family, some of whom have barely spoken to each other since.

There are a few scoundrels and less attractive characters too, such as a eugenicist who set out to prove that the African brain was inferior to that of Europeans, and my great great grandfather who blew a fortune on his extravagant lifestyle and went to debtors prison. He was another

Lyons Kerans who despite his faults founded the second great Kerans dynasty including almost all the remaining members of the family that carry the Kerans name.

I do believe there is a certain gentility to be found in most living descendants of the family who I have met. It has been a pleasure getting to know them, and our history.

Dave Treanor
November 2013

Part 1 Earliest Ancestors

Part 1 looks at the origins of the Kerans family. My great great great great grandfather William Kerans was born around 1718 and died at Ballybought in Co Offaly in about 1806. There is evidence that he descended from the Cairnes who can trace their roots back to a noble Scottish family. But some early members of the family believed we originated in the West Country with a soldier in Cromwell's army.

We will examine the provenance of the various stories told about our ancestry. Whether they are myths or the faint traces of real memories, the stories themselves are quite interesting.

We then look at the second generation of the Kerans family, the children of William Kerans. Records from this period are incomplete, so our knowledge is based on stories handed down through the family. But at least we can trace some of these people back to parish records.

We know about three of William's children: William and Thomas by his first wife, and Lyons by a second. My family and that of most of the Kerans who we are in contact with are descended from this Lyons Kerans. Bill Birch is from a branch of the family in Australia who may be descended from one of Lyons' half-brothers, William or Thomas. Bill was the first to research the early family in recent times. Much of Part 1 is based on his writings and he is quoted at length.

The first Lyons Kerans married Sarah Clarke. We Treanors have a family pedigree that is now falling apart because the paper is so old, which connects her to the Drury family that originally came to England with the Norman Conquest in 1066, and held powerful positions in government and substantial lands in Suffolk. The people who created that pedigree would have known Sarah so it has to have some credibility even if only to the extent that it was believed to be true at that time.

We often describe pedigrees as family trees. But there is one big fault with this analogy. A tree is firmly rooted in the ground, and the flimsiest branches are at the top, whereas a pedigree gets more speculative and shaky the nearer you get to its base. So bear with us through these early chapters. The book would be incomplete if it did not examine what we know about our dim and distant past. And that means delving into some matters about which there is a great deal of uncertainty.

CHAPTER 1

Family Pedigrees

HJKD Pedigree

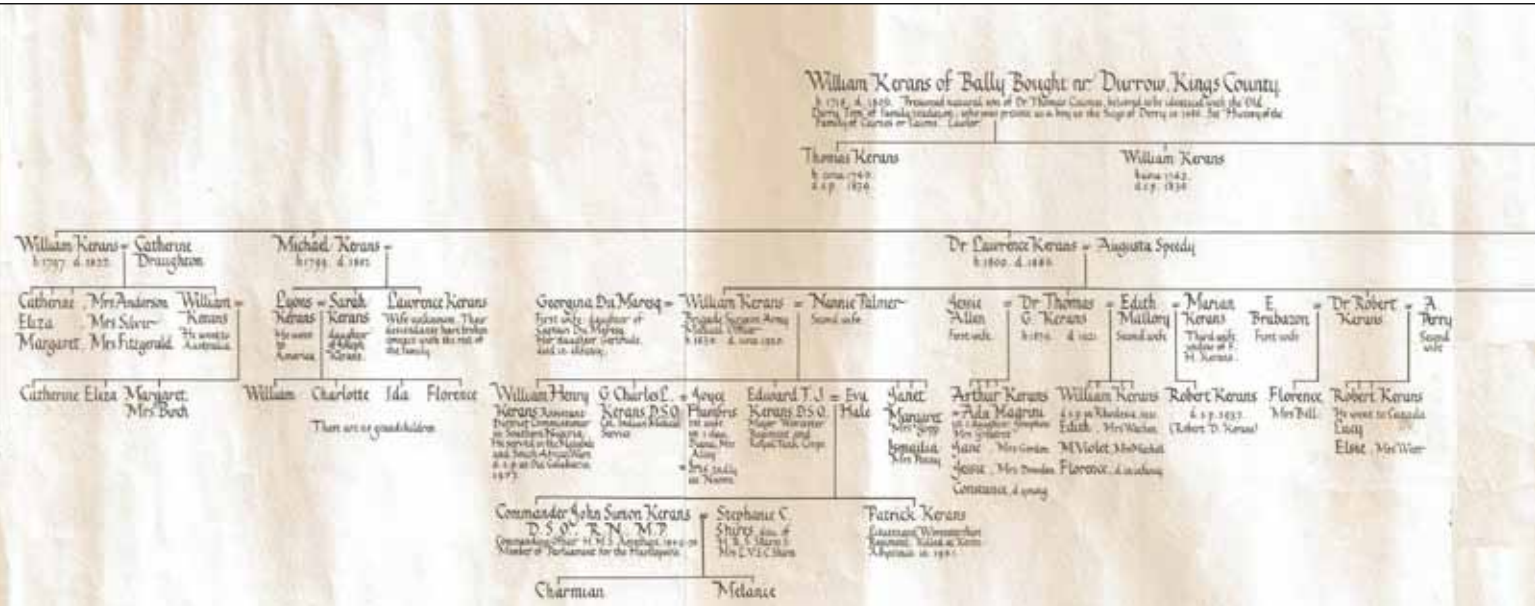
The earliest (pre-19th century) ancestry of the Kerans families of Durrow parish in Kings County is uncertain. There is a mix of family anecdotes, some hard evidence from church registries and vestry books, and unexplained gaps in the records. Fortunately, however, several attempts were made by the family in the early part of the 20th century at compiling pedigrees.

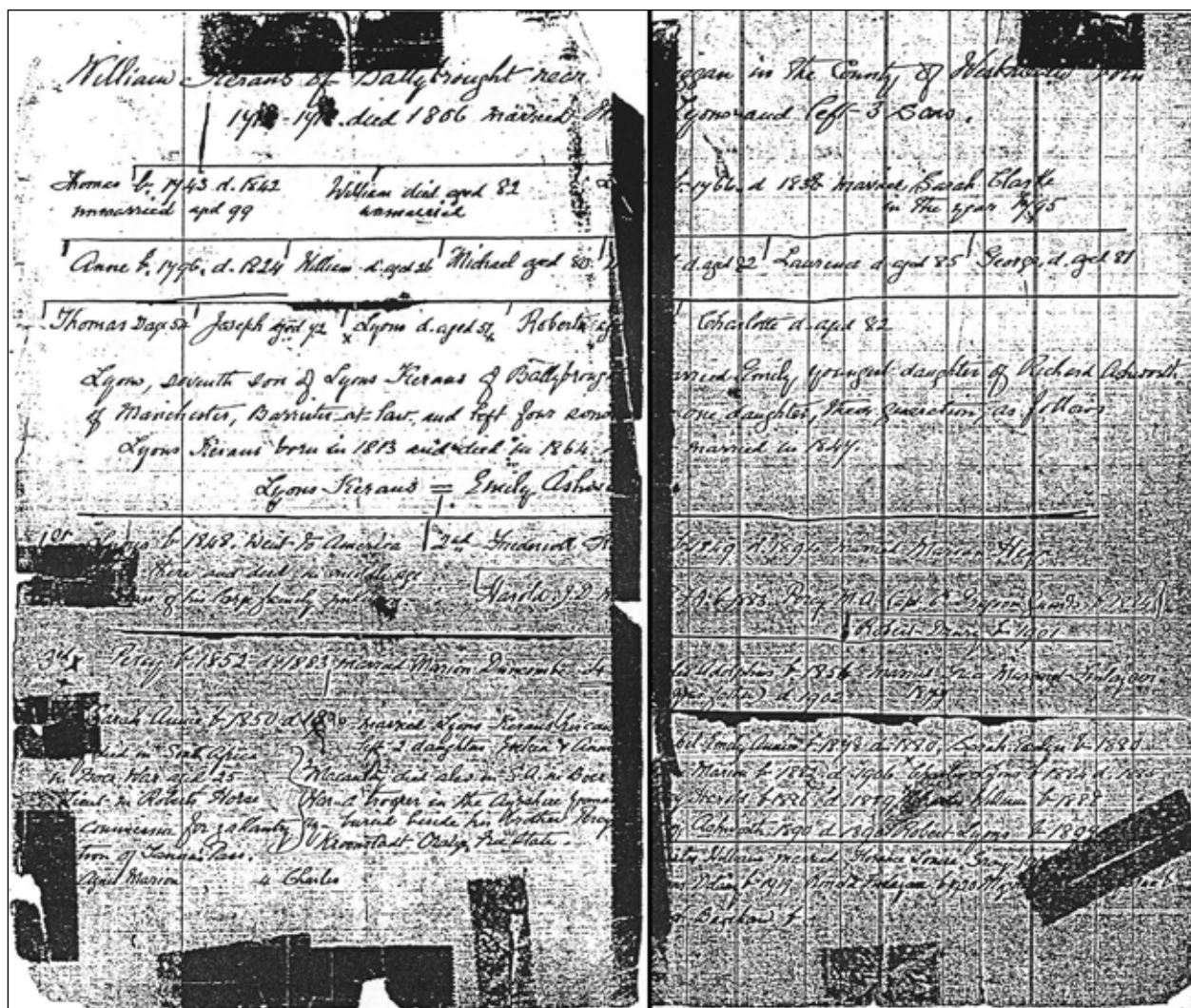
The best known was by Major Harold Kerans. He tells us *‘I made out this pedigree from memory in Ireland in August 1946’*. Although the earlier version from 1946 contained some inaccuracies, as he

subsequently pointed out, it appears to have been largely incorporated into the one prepared for Commander John Kerans in 1960 by Clare G M Evans under Harold’s direction, which was widely distributed around the family.

The 1960 version of the Kerans pedigree is almost complete in listing descendants with the Kerans surname. It is reasonably accurate, at least for the details of those post 18th century family members it includes. One exception is the link to Bill Birch’s Kerans family line, shown through William Kerans (1797–1822), the eldest son of Lyons Kerans. Bill Birch points out that

Major Harold Kerans’
1960 pedigree





CWK pedigree sent by Thomas George Kerans to his nephew in Australia, Charles William Kerans²⁵

the ancient origins of Sarah Clarke's family. It provides additional information on her father's origins, and traces links between her mother Anne Drury and the noble Drury family going all the way back to the Norman Conquest in 1066. It was handed down through the Treanors, who are descended from Dr Thomas' younger brother Lyons Kerans (1849-1922).

It also provides more detail than the HJDK pedigree on some of the descendants of Lyons Kerans and Sarah Clarke, including many more birth and death dates. It has clearly been added to in different handwriting since its original creation,

presumably by the Treanor family.

Both of Dr Thomas' pedigrees claim that the Kerans are descended from the West Country Kerne family, via John Kerne who came to Ireland as part of Cromwell's army and received the farm at Ballybought for his services.

All three of these pedigrees agree that the Kerans family begins with William Kerans. He does not appear in any parish records and was born before births, marriages and deaths were registered. So we have to rely on information passed down through the family for most of what we know about him.

CHAPTER 2

Kerans Origins

William Kerans 1718-1806

According to the Harold Kerans pedigree, William Kerans was born around 1718 and died around 1806. He appears to have married twice. We cannot be sure of the names of either of his wives, although Harold suggests that the first might be Margaret Cairnes, and the second Margaret Lyons. He had two sons by his first wife (Thomas and William) and one by his second (Lyons). There may well be other children that we do not know about.

The most extensive research on these early origins of the Kerans family has been done by Bill Birch who writes:

While the earliest known or recorded ancestor is William Kerans (1718–1806), his ancestors have been the subject of family discussion. Notes accompanying the Major Harold Kerans' 1960 pedigree include the assumption that William Kerans was the 'natural son' of Dr Thomas Cairnes, or 'old Derry Tom', who was present as a boy at the siege of Derry in 1688. Where this story came from is unsure, but it is likely to be based on H. C. Lawlor's 1906 account of the 'History of the family of Cairnes'. One of the 'boys' who helped to secure the gates of the city against the army of James II, a Catholic convert, was a William Cairnes, who was born around 1664, so would have

been about 24 at the time of the siege. He later became a captain in King William's army and fought in the Battle of the Boyne. Through the death of all his brothers, without issue, he succeeded to the whole of his father's property. After his military career he became known as 'The Old Captain' in his native country of Killyfaddy. He was kindly, dignified and proud of his ancient name. He married, and although he had no legitimate children, he had at least one daughter, Margaret, out of wedlock. She received £300 from her father's estate after his death in 1740.

William Cairnes had a younger brother Thomas, who was in his teens at the siege of Derry. Thomas became a physician, but appears to have been a man of disreputable character. While he had married, it appears he treated his wife badly, and they had no legitimate children. However, he had at least one illegitimate son, William, who was also a beneficiary of his Uncle William's Will, receiving £20. The use of the term 'natural son' in the Kerans pedigree is a polite way of saying that William was the illegitimate son of Thomas Cairnes, so it's possible to imagine a scenario in which such a son might sever links with his disreputable father by changing the spelling of his original surname. William Kerans is

shown as being born in 1716, when Thomas Cairnes would have been in his 40s and quite capable of fathering children. Sons named William and Thomas appear in the two generations after William Kerans, suggesting these names featured in earlier families. Taking all these points into consideration, there is therefore a vague possibility of a connection with the Cairnes family involved in the siege of Derry, although it would seem impossible to verify it through surviving records.

However, in the preamble to his 1917–1918 pedigree, Dr Thomas George Kerans had put forward a markedly different origin. His father, Dr Lawrence Clarke Kerans (1800–1886), had told him that, according to his mother Sarah, the Kerans family was descended from an English soldier, named Kerne (or similar), who was a soldier in one of Oliver Cromwell's regiments. Following his subjugation of Ireland in 1652, Cromwell arranged grants of land for his supporters ('adventurers') and

soldiers by displacing many of the existing owners, and this 'Kerne' was a beneficiary. These transfers of land holdings were later recorded in detail in the Books of Survey and Distribution, of which there are several sets.

A search of these volumes held in the National Archives in Dublin, for the Parish of Durrow and Kilbride, in Ballycowen Barony, Kings County, revealed a tantalising entry. Someone with a surname spelled 'Keane' had received land in the townlands of 'Cornedarragh' and 'Ballynesragh', some two miles southeast of Ballybought. If this 'Keane' was a misspelling for 'Kerne', then the official records would confirm the family belief in an English origin for the Kerans family.¹ Just to add more uncertainty, however, the word 'kerne' or 'kern' is an anglicised version of a Middle Irish word meaning a lowly soldier, so it's possible that the name Kerans came from this general term, rather than from a particular person.

Another twist is provided by the name Lyons, which is presumed to be the maiden name of the second wife of the earliest William Kerans. The Lyons family is said to have been descended from one of Cromwell's adventurers who received land on the outskirts of Tullamore. Maybe, then, it is the Lyons family, rather than an early Kerans man, which provided the basis for the family anecdote.

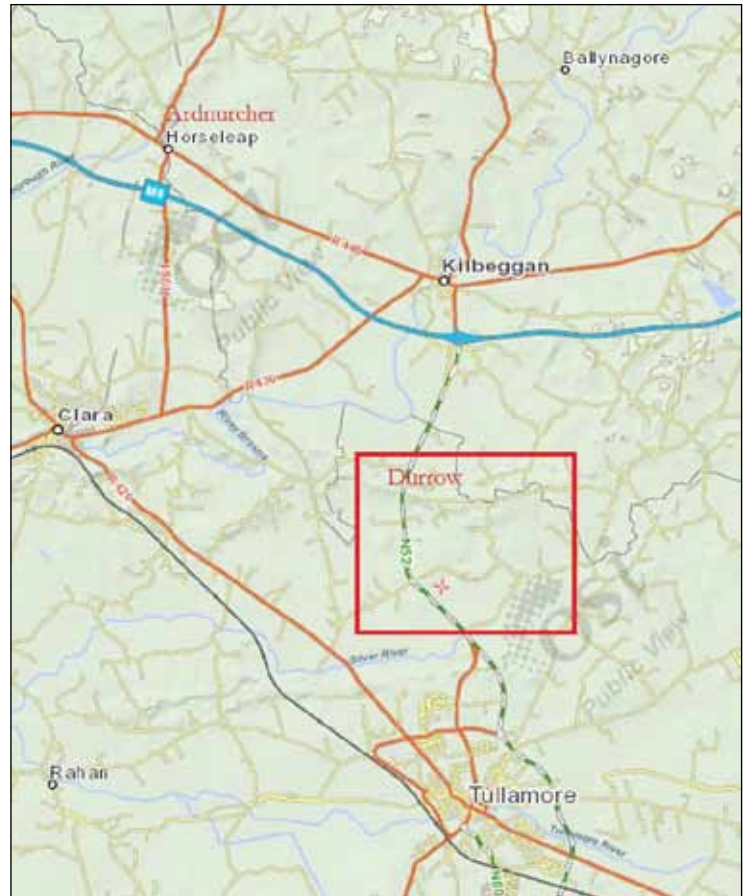
A website search for Ardnurcher found an article 'The old churches of Rahan and Lynally', by Fr Gerard Rice, 1979, which refers to a Charles Lyons being an adventurer family (of Oliver Cromwell) who had the lands of Mucklagh. Lyons' daughter married the son of one Thomas Moore, who had bought up land in Tullamore and elsewhere and was MP for Phillipstown. This lineage led to the Charleville estate near Tullamore.

The old church at Durrow in 2012



The townland of Ballybought is most closely associated with the early Kerans family in Durrow parish, in particular with Lyons Kerans (1766–1838) and his wife Sarah. However, when they took up their land in Ballybought is uncertain. Durrow parish records show that they were living there when their first daughter Anne was born in 1796. Lyons' older half-brother, Thomas, was in Ballybought in 1791, when he became a vestry member of the Durrow parish church. This is the earliest Kerans entry in the parish records, which commenced in 1709, so it's possible that Ballybought became the family centre around 1790. On the other hand, in a letter written in 1893 by Lyons Delany (then in Rhode Island, USA) to his cousin Thomas George Kerans, he provided an account of the bloody 1798 Kilbeggan rebellion of 'united Irishmen' against the loyalists, and of their grandfather Lyons' experience of it. Kilbeggan is the nearest town to Ballybought, just across the border in County Westmeath, and Lyons and his wife Sarah and firstborn son William, still a baby in his cradle, were said to be living in a house in the town². According to this letter, William's delicate health was attributed by his mother to the trauma of the rebellion, resulting in his death in 1821 and burial in Ardnurcher church graveyard. Other members of the Kerans family are said to be buried in Ardnurcher, the last being Sarah. Lyons and Sarah raised at least eleven children, from whom virtually the entire Kerans lineage descended.

If the presumption in the 1946 and 1960 pedigrees, that William and Thomas Kerans were half-brothers of Lyons, is correct, then who was their mother? One intriguing possibility is that she was their father's cousin, Margaret Cairnes. In the Lawlor account of the Cairnes family, Margaret Cairnes, even



though she too was illegitimate, was the only other descendent of the Cairnes brothers. By combining their inheritance from her father's Will, Margaret and her cousin William could buy land elsewhere and leave their shameful origins behind them. It's unlikely that this connection could ever be verified through surviving records, but it remains a tantalising possibility.

William and Thomas Kerans were active members of the Durrow parish church, serving as vestry members, with occasional stints as church warden, from 1791 until 1833. An entry in the Durrow vestry book reports Thomas's death occurring between the vestry meetings of April 1832 and April 1833. William's death is unrecorded. Both men are assumed to have died unmarried in their 80s, but it's possible that either or both of

This modern map shows Durrow about 4 miles south of Kilbeggan and a similar distance north of Tullamore. Ardnurcher where several members of the Kerans family are reputed to be buried is in the top left corner about 6 miles west of Kilbeggan, and over the Offaly county border in Westmeath. Why the family were buried there rather than at Durrow remains a mystery. It may indicate an ancestral connection with Ardnurcher.⁴

them married and fathered children.

Around this time, another Kerans family was living in nearby Ballynamona townland, about a mile southeast of Ballybought. Simon Kerans and his wife Susan were raising five children, including Samuel and another William. How this family links in with the earliest Kerans generations is unknown but they almost certainly are directly related. They had a close involvement with the Durrow parish, as Simon was the parish clerk in 1850 on the occasion of his daughter Eliza's wedding. Sons Samuel and William were later to resume the role played by Thomas and William Kerans, as they served as vestry members and wardens for the Durrow parish church from 1871, when they had moved to nearby Acantha townland, until 1879. Samuel died in 1882, but William continued his duties until 1903, after which his sons, William, James and Stephen took over until at least 1921. By then, as the last members of the Kerans family lineage left

in the parish, they were living in Gormagh townland, in a cottage on the road from Tullamore to Kilbeggan.

The original Ballybought lands were put up for public auction in 1913, although it's not known whether any members of the Kerans family were connected with them at the time of sale. From examination of the pedigree, it seems most unlikely.³

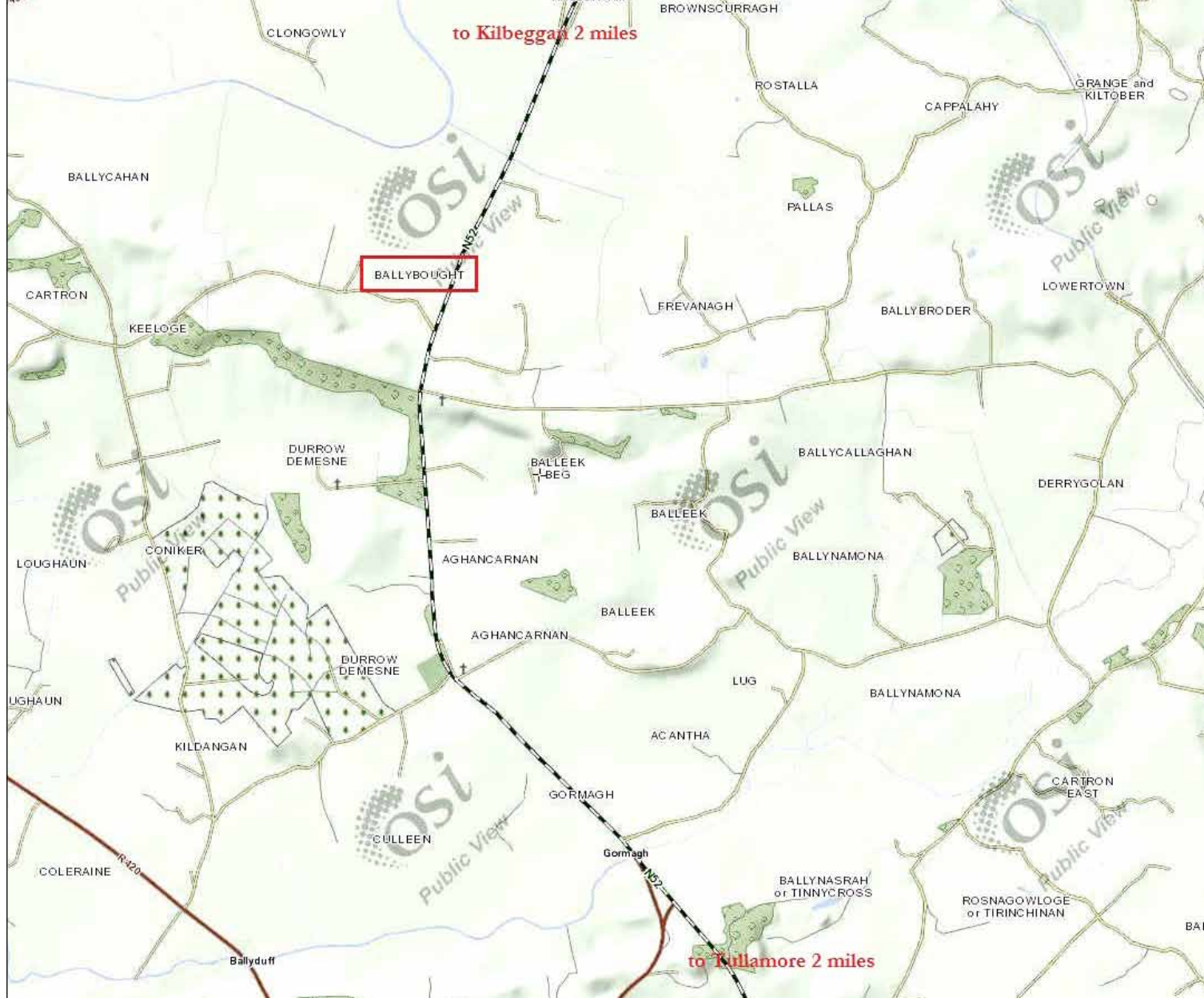
Ballybought and Durrow

In about 1855 the Griffiths Valuation listed ownership of all properties in Ireland for taxation purposes. The entries for the township of Ballybought in Durrow are shown below.

In 1913 a property at Ballybought was sold by William Molloy. There were two properties owned or leased by members of the Molloy family at the time of Griffiths, amongst several others in Ballybought. It was probably the one owned by John Molloy that was occupied by the Kerans family, and sold by his son William in 1913.

Ballybought in the parish of Durrow in Griffiths Valuation, surveyed in the 1850's to provide a basis for taxes based on property holdings

PARISH OF DURROW.							
No. and Letters of Houses to Map.	Names.		Description of Tenement.	Area.	Rateable Annual Valuation.		Total Annual Valuation of Rateable Property.
	Townlands and Occupiers.	Immediate Lessors.			Land.	Buildings.	
	BALLYBOUGHT. (Ord. S. 8 & 9.)		Total . . .	110 1 0	50 5 0	2 5 0	52 10 0
1	John Ward.	Countess of Norbury.	House, offices, and land.	54 2 14	52 5 0	1 0 0	53 5 0
2	Cornelius Hennessy.	Same.	House, office, and land.	5 3 30	3 10 0	1 0 0	4 10 0
3	John Spelman.	Same.	House and land.	6 0 20	3 15 0	0 15 0	4 10 0
4	Owen Cunningham.	Same.	House, office, and land.	6 2 7	3 10 0	1 0 0	4 10 0
5	James Menton.	Same.	House, office, and land.	11 2 5	7 0 0	1 0 0	8 0 0
6	Keydo Molloy.	Same.	House, offices, and land.	95 3 8	52 0 0	2 10 0	54 10 0
- a	Michael Coblen.	Keydo Molloy.	House & small garden.	-	-	0 15 0	0 15 0
- b	Christopher Poynes.	Countess of Norbury.	House and land.	-	2 5 0	0 10 0	2 15 0
7	Patrick Daly.	Same.	House and land.	5 2 30	1 5 0	0 10 0	1 15 0
- a	Matthew Geraghty.	Same.	House, offices, & land.	-	20 0 0	1 0 0	21 0 0
8	Daniel Geraghty.	Same.	House, office, & land.	75 2 6	20 0 0	1 0 0	21 0 0
- b	John Dalton.	Same.	House, offices, and land.	70 1 5	37 0 0	2 0 0	39 0 0
9	Thomas Daly.	John Dalton.	House.	-	-	0 15 0	0 15 0
- a	Thomas Nolan.	Countess of Norbury.	House, office, and land.	33 3 19	20 10 0	1 5 0	23 15 0
- b	William Kilmurry.	Same.	Land.	3 3 21	2 0 0	-	2 0 0
11	Richard Kilmurry.	Same.	House, office, and land.	19 1 22	7 5 0	1 5 0	8 10 0
12	Thomas Nolan.	Same.	House, offices, and land.	38 2 36	23 10 0	1 5 0	24 15 0
- a	Richard Kilmurry.	Same.	Land.	30 2 21	5 15 0	-	5 15 0
- b	Nicholas Berry.	Same.	House, offices, and land.	27 3 33	2 15 0	-	2 15 0
14	Mary Coudern.	Same.	Land.	27 3 22	11 0 0	-	11 0 0
15	Anne Langan.	Same.	Land.	10 2 16	9 5 0	-	9 5 0
16	John Butler.	Same.	Land.	9 1 56	3 0 0	-	3 0 0
17	Patrick Carroll.	Henry Kemmis.	Land.	6 1 4	2 0 0	-	2 0 0
18	John Molloy.	Same.	House, offices, and land.	52 0 32	27 15 0	1 5 0	29 0 0
- A	Thomas Minnock.	Same.	Land.	11 2 19	3 0 0	-	3 0 0
- B	John Molloy.	Same.	House, offices, and land.	39 1 35	18 0 0	1 15 0	20 15 0
- C	Thomas Minnock.	Same.	Land.	4 0 14	1 5 0	-	1 5 0
20	Thomas Minnock.	Same.	Land.	13 0 7	3 5 0	-	3 5 0
- B	Thomas Minnock.	Same.	Land.	20 2 16	10 0 0	-	10 0 0



Ballybought (originally Baile Bocht, meaning poor town)⁴

John had married Elizabeth Kerans, one of the daughters of Simon Kerans (see Page 54).

Down to the beginning of the 18th century, Durrow was never anything more than a small village. It developed into a town between 1720 and 1760. In 1800 it numbered '218 houses, some let in perpetuity, many ruinous but [there was] neither trade nor industry, nor encouragement to them'.⁵ By 1841 the population was 1,318, but by 1901 this had declined to 559. Durrow is now dominated by the large

Catholic church of St Colmcille which stands prominently on the brow of a hill on the road from Kilbeggan to Tullamore.

The old Protestant church is at Durrow Demesne, on the site of Durrow Abbey, to the West of the Tullamore to Kilbeggan road, half a mile further south. Its churchyard is now well maintained, although no survey appears to have been carried out of the inscriptions on the graves. I spent about an hour there in November 2012 in the hope of finding a Kerans grave, without success.

Bill Birch is descended from William Kerans and Catherine Draughton who were baptising children in Durrow between 1816 and 1836. He has written a brief history of Durrow:

Durrow (Dair Magh or Dermaig) means 'plain of the oak trees'. The civil parish itself measures about 4 miles by 4 miles and its boundaries are the Brosna and Silver rivers. Between these streams the countryside is flat, a little boggy in places, and crossed by meandering low wooded ridges. These are geological features known as eskers, and consist of sand and gravel marking the beds of streams flowing beneath ice-sheets that blanketed the landscape until about 12,000 years ago. It was probably the religious significance of the oak groves that attracted the attention of Colum Cille, who was establishing a network of monasteries throughout Ireland in the 6th century. In about 550, having received a grant of land from a local king, Colum selected a site on a low green knoll above marshy ground and set up what was soon to become one of the wealthiest and most influential of his monastic communities. It was especially famous for the production of manuscript copies of the gospels, most notably the Book of Durrow, which somehow survived from the late 7th century and is now preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. The

Durrow Demesne as shown on the 25 inch OS map used for the Griffiths Valuation ⁴



Griffiths Valuation

In the absence of census records, the Griffiths Valuation provides a vital record of who owned and tenanted each property in Ireland in the 1850s. It was conducted by Richard Griffiths who was appointed Commissioner of Valuation in 1827. In March 1925 the surveying corps of the Royal Sappers and Miners commenced work on a 6" to the mile Ordnance Survey map⁶ which was used as the basis for the valuation, and which mapped the boundaries of every township. James Penny (see pPage 148) was in charge of one of the survey teams that began work in Belfast.

The survey records we see today come from the second survey which commenced in Carlow in 1853, and was completed in Armagh in 1865. Queens County was surveyed in 1853, Kings County in 1855, and Galway and Mayo in 1857.

The records give the acreage and value of all land and the value of buildings, identifying the freeholder and tenant.

The valuation was used to determine liability to pay the Poor Rate (for the support of the poor and destitute within each Poor Law Union). So it was for taxation purposes.

wealth and influence of the Durrow monastery attracted its share of pillagers and burners over the next four or five centuries as the torrid history of Ireland unfolded. In 1186, Sir Hugh de Lacy, granted the kingdom of Meath by the English king Henry II, was supervising the building of a castle on the site of the ruined monastery, by that time regarded as a monument to St Columb. A local labourer, indignant at the impending desecration of a sacred place, removed