

National Heritage Week 2013: “The Descent of Olive, Lady Ardilaun”

(A Presentation in Macroom, Tuesday August 20th, 2013, by Kevin Corcoran and Teddy Cook)



As participants discovered, Olive Ardilaun was no Aristocratic Upstart.

On bequeathing in Trust, in perpetuity, her Walled Demesne to the Townspeople of Macroom in 1925, Olive was conveying intact her ancestral Castlegrounds – the Seat of the O’ Flynn, Lord of Muskerry and subsequently the Seat of the “McCarthy Láidir” – the Cadet Line of the Cashel Kings – Olive’s lineage.

But as we have equally learned – through her Great Great Grandmother Helena Herbert of Muckross, Olive was in direct descent through both her mother Jane, Countess of Bantry, and her father, William Bantry White, nephew of Robert Hedges Eyre of Macroom Castle (himself the only son of Helena Herbert) to the McCarthy Title. We acknowledge the forensic research of this lineage by its’ author – the late Peter O’ Leary of Derryvane, Inchigeelagh who kindly volunteered his own Primary Research through the Ardilaun Papers (Oxford University) during 1990-92. Peter himself was descended from the same Cadet Family, through his ancestor Cormac McCarthy (Láidir) Viscount Muskerry who died in 1640.

Cormac Láidir’s two daughters Maria and Julia each married Viscount Kenmare (a widower) and his son the young Viscount. Kenmare was a Browne – Catholics of Norman Irish stock who had kept their lands and title throughout the Elizabethan, Cromwellian and Williamite confiscations of 80% of the 20,000,000 Acre Island. Maria McCarthy-Browne was the Great Great Grandmother of Helena Herbert who married back into the McCarthy Seat on her betrothal to Richard Hedges Eyre of Macroom (1719-1780). Helena’s Great Granddaughter Jane Herbert for the second time married back into the McCarthy Demesne, 130 years later, on her marriage to William, 3rd Earl of Bantry (1801-1884) – making them second cousins.

In her letter to the Secretary of the Trustees dated January 23rd, 1925, Olive stated – “from the time of Cormac McCarthy, surnamed Láidir, born in 1411, (my castle) has always remained in the position of families allied by blood, except during periods of confiscation after which it always came back to its’ original owners. My father is the direct descendant of Cormac McCarthy Láidir” (Maria’s father was the direct descendant of the earlier Láidir of 1411).

Like no other, Olive knew her roots back five centuries. And on her marriage in 1869 to Baron Ardilaun (Arthur Guinness), Olive became the wealthiest woman in both Britain and Ireland. Only the British Monarch was wealthier.

Readers are urged to source Katherine Everett's "Bricks and Flowers" (Published 1949) – as Olive's first cousin through her mother Jane Herbert, here we have sound biographical details of the "Tans" and later the "Irregulars" occupying her Macroom Castle and 16th Century Gardens. Included by Katherine are graphic descriptions of the burning of Macroom Castle – reminiscent of Bowen's "The Last September".

The presentation, on Tuesday, 20th August, included eye-witness accounts of Olive's generosity to the Dublin Poor. Olive is attributed with the presentation to the Dublin Citizenry of St. Stephen's Green – landscaped and planted with many Holm Oaks by her Husband Arthur. Additionally, Olive bequeathed her Ashford Castle (inherited on Arthur's death 1917) to the State.

Attached is the lineal Descent of Olive Ardilaun – compiled by Peter O' Leary (R.I.P. – August 9th, 2013).

Organisers wish to thank John O' Sullivan, Macroom, for the loan of an original photograph of Olive as a young woman – not seen before in a public space. John is directly descended from Olive Ardilaun's Housekeeper Mrs. McNally who lived in Macroom Castle until the day of the "burning". According to John, historic references to the Castle Housekeeper as Mrs. McCarthy are erroneous.



Our Heritage Event concluded with a commemorative planting of a Common Yew on the banks of the Sullane River – together with a re-enactment of Olive’s descent with the co-operation of the wonderfully attentive participants.



All are in agreement that the erection by our County Council of a Commemorative Plaque to Olive’s memory, in the Curtilage of her Castle, would serve to remind a new generation of Townspeople and Visitors of a Noble Woman named Olive (1850-1925).

We thank “Castle Café”, Macroom for providing venue.

The above was written by Teddy Cook.