

loads of personal items – some of which make up our archives today – had to be shipped home to Ireland and they had all the other tasks that go with closing down a house. Upon drawing a breath our mother said ‘and your father was very good’.

She went on to say ‘it was a very difficult time, it was bitterly cold, we had three small children, the flat in Dublin and most of our furniture moved to Skryne. We were both trying to



Robin, Peter, Netta, Elizabeth, Caroline and Eoin from Sunday newspaper, 1953

hold down jobs and we had very little money – I suppose now-a-days they would call it trauma!’.

There is much more to the tape recording which we have used to help us in compiling other chapters.

The move to Skryne Castle was completed in the spring of 1948. They started off with a full house, because as well as the family, Granny (our father’s mother) came along with her furniture together with Aunt Sylvia, our father’s spinster sister. Aunt Bryda, our mother’s young sister stayed for the first six months and there were two maids. Our mother said on the tape recording, referring to our grandmother moving in ‘it was very noble of her – but also very foolish!’.

They settled well into Skryne Castle, Netta was born shortly afterwards and Caroline in 1951. Later baby Rosemary was born but died an infant. By now our mother had given up work in Dublin and had become involved in local history. In the early 1950s she studied archaeology in UCD, took part in the excavations at Tara under professor Sean O’Riordan and wrote ‘The Legend of Tara’ (1952), the opening lines of which are ‘This book is not written for scholars, if you are a scholar, shut it up at once. It is written to tell the ordinary person something of Tara and the people who lived there. It’s not all true, it’s not all myth’.

The following is our mother’s ‘History of Skryne Castle’ which she handed out to enquiring visitors:

Henry II, King of England and ruler of the Angevin empire came to Ireland in October 1171 to order and arrange affairs in Ireland where the Normans were bent on conquest. Before he left in April 1172 he made extensive grants of land to his followers. He granted Meath to Hugh de Lacy.

Hugh de Lacy in feudal fashion, proceeded to build castles to fortify his territory and to divide Meath into baronies. The barony of Skryne was granted to his knight Adam de Phepoe, who in turn subdivided Skryne into manors which he granted to his followers.

At Skryne a castle was built at some time between 1172 and 1175. The de Phepoe family held the barony until the close of the fourteenth century when an heiress carried the title to the Marward family who were barons of Skryne for some two hundred years. The last of the Marwards was Jenet Marward who married William Nugent. Jenet died in 1629 having sold the Skryne estate.

After this the castle seems to have fallen into disrepair. It was restored early in the nineteenth century and occupied by the Wilkinson family. The present house is built round the old keep.

When the Normans first took possession of their new lands they erected temporary castles on the top of earthworks. Such an earthwork, or Motte, as it is called can be seen south of the castle. It is now planted with trees, but in the twelfth century when it was the site of Adam de Phepoe's castle it would have been surmounted with wooden towers and dwelling houses and surrounded with a strong palisade. Below it would have been a bailey where the soldiers would have been quartered. The motte would have dominated a wide area of countryside and have been used as a defensive habitation and



Sunday newspaper photograph of our mother at Skryne Castle, 1952

administrative centre whilst the baron of Skryne was consolidating his position and organising labour to build the stronger stone castle.

Now in her mid thirties, we discover from our archive, correspondence that she struck up with her various relations in an effort to gain information on her family and on the Hickeys.

Perhaps this is a good time to explain where we five siblings take our names from.

Robin was Christened Robert Hamish. Our grandfather was Robert Sydney Hickey. Hamish was our mother's brother and the youngest who, as we have said, was shot down and killed during WWII in 1941.

The second name given to Peter was deCarteret. This comes from our mother's father, Edward Cecil Malet-Warden, his blood father as we have referred to earlier, was Charles Malet deCarteret, the Seigneur of St. Ouen, Jersey.

Eoin Clement Barron – our maternal grandmother was Miss. Isabel Barron and our mother's great grandmother was Mrs. Emily Clements.

Isabel Barron's grandfather was John Netterville Barron so hence Elizabeth Netterville, or Netta.

Caroline Patricia was born in 1953 at a time when Tara was very much in vogue and our mother very



Mrs. Lillian Finlay and our mother on the lawn at Skryne Castle, c.1990. Mrs. Finlay (Lillian Roberts Finlay), mother of ten, including Fergus of Bernardos, author of autobiographical novel *Always On My Mind*, 1998 and a sequel *Forever In The Past*, 1993. Below: Family group with Aimee and Granny at Skryne at Skryne Castle, 1949.

much involved. We think Patricia must have been inspired by St. Patrick, the national patron saint. More about all these families in other chapters.

The clause in the lease for Skryne Castle to allow paying guests was to prove useful. By the early fifties there were five children, our mother had given up her work and being the nineteen fifties work was scarce for our father.

Having a castle as our guesthouse also turned out to be very useful in that it helped to attract, what could be described as a better type



of guest. There were entire American families who came to stay. A British Tour operator Erna Low, sent special interest groups for several years. Our mother arranged and conducted historical tours of Co. Meath. She made contact with several agencies that sent students and school children to Ireland. Hundreds of them came to Skryne over the years to learn English, mostly for six to eight week stays. In particular we remember two little Spanish sisters, under twelve. There were three Patricks, Big Patrick, Middle Patrick and Little

Patrick, all French and all returned for at least three years running. There were the Greek boys, George and Peter, this was when the Generals were in power in Greece, and they were very aristocratic type of boys. We remember that they hand painted Greek scenes on to the big white wardrobe which stood on the top landing and which Eoin still has because we couldn't bare to throw it out when closing down Skryne Castle.

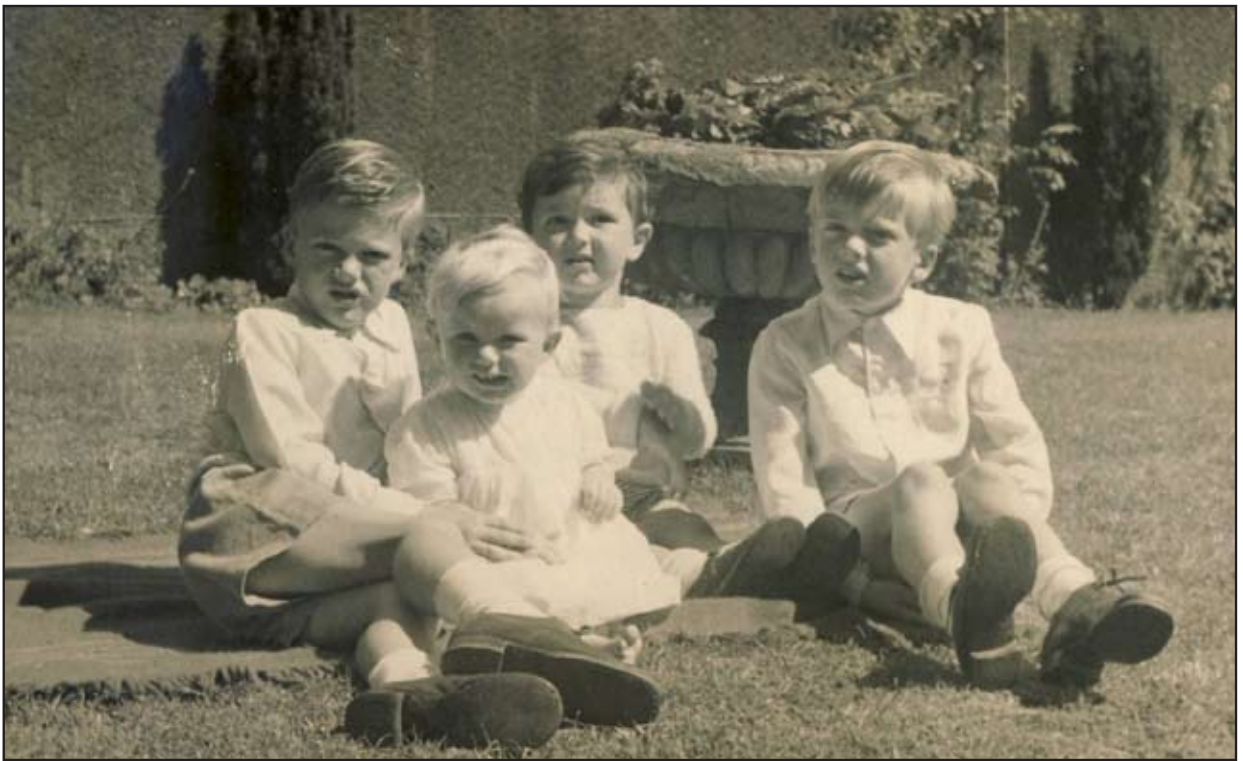
As we grew up we became great friends with many of the visitors. Several came back as adults. Many corresponded with our mother. Big Patrick's children came to stay with Eoin and Nora and their children in turn went for holidays to Patrick's family in Paris. Just this year Eoin and Nora received a wedding invitation from Patrick's youngest son, now living in America.

During the early years of the guest house, our mother went to an auction of the contents of a local big house. In a moment of weakness she bid ten pounds and became the proud owner of a side car. It was a magnificent piece of carriage work, known as an outside car or a jaunting car, like the ones in Killarney. It was highly varnished and decorated, with leather seats and a well in the centre. The seats were along both sides and the driver or jarvey sat in the middle up front. We had no horse, but this was overcome by 'borrowing' the cart horse from the adjoining farmyard. She bought a full set of harness, complete



Clockwise from main: Netta and Caroline helping at a wedding reception at Skryne in 1958 with Bridie Farnan, Mrs Fleming, Mrs Kelly and Mrs Nixon; our father and mother with the three boys and motorcar at Skryne Castle, 1949; Our mother holding Netta, our father, Granny, Aimee, Bryda, with Eoin, Robin, and Peter in front.





Clockwise from main: Robin, Netta, Eoin and Peter in the garden, Skryne Castle, 1949; Skryne Castle with the twins, pre' garden creation, c.1948, note the wind charger; Dixie the cart horse with side car, Peter, Caroline, Robin and Miriam Oakes at Skryne Castle, c.1957



with brass buckles and all. We children drove groups around the avenue, up to the top of the hill and even across to Tara.

One March in the mid fifties she decided to enter, with the side car in the Kitchen and Cellar Week Parade. A big undertaking by any standards. The horse in Skryne was too fat and the side car had to be transported to Dublin. These problems were overcome with haste. A good neighbour from nearby Dunshaughlin was called upon. Mr. Eric Craigie and his family owned Merville Dairies in Finglas, later to become Premier Dairies. They had a huge depot with hundreds of horses, still delivering milk at that time. He very kindly arranged for a horse and jarvey complete with black coat and bowler hat. We, as many as could be fitted on, were dressed up with white báinín sweaters and báinín hats with bobbles, equipped with a Skryne Castle sign and off we went, starting in the Phoenix Park and finishing up in the city centre.

We children moved away in the 1960s and came home for holidays with our boyfriends and girlfriends. It was a big house; there was plenty of room, probably jobs to do, and always something, not just interesting, but often intriguing going on.

During the sixties, wedding breakfasts eased off, some students still came in summer but our mother decided to pursue another career. She took up teaching but still managed to keep her castle going.

It was while going through a folder file of our mother's that was full of recipes, mostly newspaper cuttings from the 1930s to the 1970s, that we were reminded of lovely stories from the 1950s. As well as newspaper recipes there are recipes written on scraps of paper, the back of postcards - one such recipe in her own handwriting records how to make coal blocks using slack cement and flower pots for moulds, this was on the back of a note dated 1943. So grandchildren, that's how one kept warm during the war.

Another recipe, also 1943, would have made for a good wartime party.

Take a good sized lemon, cut the rind off as thin as possible which put in a breakfast cup; half fill it with boiling water and cover and let it stand until cold - pour this liquid into a jug, add the juice of half the lemon and from 20 - 24 lumps of sugar, a tumbler and a half of sherry, 6 tablespoons brandy, 3 tablespoons rum, 3 tablespoons of any liqueur. This will fill a wine bottle.

There are recipes for Christmas Cakes, Homemade Chutneys, Onion Soup - A Noble Dish With No Pedigree, Oat Cakes, Your First Batch Of Marmalades, Black Forest Cake, Herring; The Silver Of The Sea, Apple Jelly, Marrow Jam, Lemon Curd and there is a letter from Ranks Flower of Limerick dated 1963 enclosing the recipe for Hot Souffle.

Lucy Franks, our mother's good friend and mentor has handwritten out and signed in 1957 a recipe for Vegetable Marrow Jam.

There are loads of newspaper recipes from Monica Nevin cut out from the Irish Times up to 1953 and thereafter many by Monica Sheridan, presumably the same person. With the advent of Telefis Eireann (RTE) in 1961, Monica Sheridan went on to be the celebrity chef of her day nicknamed 'Finger-licking Monica' for she gained notoriety for tasting by licking her fingers - it wouldn't do now!

Monica however was a real lady. She knew our mother probably through the ICA (Irish Countrywoman's Association). She called to Skryne Castle one winter's evening, we remember it well. Our mother brought her directly into the large kitchen, the only warm room in the house, and sat her down at the round table

JUST CABBAGE

THIS is not intended as a piece for the gourmet societies. It is all about cabbage, and is directed at the housewife who has three or four football-playing sons in the family. I suppose there can be nothing worse than a mess of white cabbage that has been boiled to a pulp and then served up to a disgruntled family.

If you want to cook cabbage that anybody can eat (and that includes Mr. Gourmet), then get a large white cabbage, cut it down the middle and remove the hard stalk. Now slice the cabbage down in five or six segments and put it in a large pan of boiling water and blanch it for about five minutes. (This takes away the cabbagey smell and the acrid taste.) Then run the cabbage under the cold tap and shred it. (Never mind all the nonsense about vitamins going down the sink; they'll end up there anyway, if you boil the cabbage in the ordinary way).

Put a lump of butter into the saucepan, and when it has melted put in the shredded cabbage. Stir the cabbage round in the melted butter and cook the whole thing gently until you feel the cabbage is pretty well tossed about. You must keep stirring all the time, but it only takes about five minutes. At this stage add salt and pepper and a dash of grated nutmeg, and about a heaped dessert-spoon of flour which you shake in. Give another good stir to mix up the flour.

If you are of an extravagant turn of mind you should now add about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cream. Stir again and let it boil. Put a tight lid on it and leave it to simmer for about half-an-hour. Supposing your family doesn't like cream in cooking, then a cup of unsweetened condensed milk is a fair substitute.

This cabbage is delicious to eat. It also smells remarkably well when it is cooking in the kitchen, which is more than can be said for the ordinary variety. It has the great advantage that it doesn't shrink in the cooking and that it retains a certain bite under your teeth.

* * *

There's another thing you can do with cabbage which is also very nice, but for this you need lots of cabbage because it shrinks like the devil. The little pointed cabbage or the crimped savoy are best for this job. Again you slice the cabbage down the middle to remove the hard stalk. If the cabbages are small leave them in halves. If they are a bit on the big side, then quarter them. Melt some butter in a saucepan, add a cut-up carrot, a sliced onion, a squashed clove of garlic, the cabbage (in sections) salt and pepper, a teaspoon of sugar and no more than $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water. Put a very tight-fitting lid on the saucepan and leave the whole thing to cook for about an hour (maybe more) on a very slow heat. It's even simpler if you put the saucepan into a moderate oven.

When you come to serve it, you just lift out the cabbage and serve it with its own juice, which you can always reduce by fast boiling if there is too much of it.

If you ever use cabbage in soup, then you should always blanch it first in boiling water. You can't imagine the difference it makes.

* * *

I wonder does anybody ever really make any of the things I write about. Now that tomatoes are cheap you should think about spaghetti with a rich tomato sauce and plenty of grated cheese. Or crabs, which are so inexpensive and so very nice. Soon again there will be mussels. The good soups, like onion; the cheese soufflé; the grouse... But I have done them all before. What is there left to write about? What have you up my sleeve?

DO YOU KNOW?

1. Who was the "man of mean estate, who died, as firm as Sparta's King, because his soul was great"?
2. What is the (i) native (ii) European population of Kenya?
3. What activity was carried on in the Tech Miduarta?
4. Where are the following: Qatar, Tadjikistan, Gozo, Antananarivo?
5. What is a gauss?

(Answers in column 8.)

The Three R's

The sum of seventeen shillings and fivepence is to be shared by Roddy, Rowley and Ritchie in proportion with their ages. Rowley's age being two-thirds of Roddy's, and Ritchie's two-thirds of Rowley's. How much will Rowley receive?

(Solution on Monday.)

Monica Sheridan's onion soup, Irish Times, c.1954

in the window alcove and offered tea. They talked and talked over tea and Monica noticed some freshly baked loaves of brown bread upon the windowsill – ‘Oh she said, Elizabeth I would love a slice of your brown bread, it looks wonderful’. Our mother duly sliced some bread and placed it on a plate and – disaster! She had no butter, we never had butter in the winter months when there were no guests. ‘I am dreadfully sorry’ she explained ‘but I’m out of butter, I just have some Stork margarine’. Monica, national star of TV cooking immediately and very kindly replied ‘that’s quite alright, I eat it at home all the time’. That’s what you call politeness.

THE IRISH TIMES, SATURDAY, MAY 22, 1954

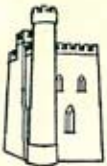
Magazine Page

GOOD COOKING

by Monica Sheridan

THIS is not just another column of recipes. It is far more concerned with the right attitude to good food. Monica Sheridan is a housewife who believes that, if a thing's worth cooking, it's worth cooking well. She starts this week by saying—

Top right: Monica Sheridan recipe, Irish Times, c.1954.
Right: Sunday lunch menu at Skryne Castle, early 1950s



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1/-	[<p>Apricot Peach Meringue Cream</p> <p style="text-align: center;">or</p> <p>Orange Glacé</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Paul Nelson</i></p>	
1/-	[<p>Tea or Coffee</p> <p>Chere & Biscuits</p>	

The Teaching Years

In the early 1960s circumstances changed for our mother. The family were starting to leave home and she decided that teaching may be a better way to earn an income. In 1961 she went to teach in Breconshire in Wales, only returning to Skryne during the school holidays. She taught in a school that looked after disruptive girls who had not done well in mainstream schools. Here they learnt a core curriculum as well as hairdressing, catering and other vocational subjects.

As with everything our mother did she became very involved with these students instilling in them an interest in nature, history and the outdoors. Indeed she even brought some of them to stay in Skryne during their holidays. There are still souvenirs, in our possession, of this period in Wales in the form of pottery dishes and a couple of heavy Welsh hand woven woollen bedspreads.

In 1963 she took a job teaching Maths and English at the Londonderry High School for Girls. She lived with a family on the outskirts of Derry only travelling back to Skryne every second weekend. While at the school she became heavily involved in drama productions which included musicals; her primary role was that of costumier. It was during this period of her career that she went on a school trip - a cruise to Italy, Greece and Turkey. This and later trips were educational cruises organised by the British India Line using ex-British troop ships which had found a new role bringing school pupils on such explorations. With this expertise under her belt in 1969 she organised a group of friends, acquaintances and all of her family to undertake a Baltic cruise taking in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Leningrad. This family spin-off was much enjoyed and proved a great success.

Whilst working in Derry our mother procured a boxer dog called Niell. This came about when Ina Coyle, who owned a pub in Curraha, not too far from Skryne, had borrowed some of our mother's very rare dishes for a catering event. (Ina's son Raymond owns and runs Tayto and Hunky Dory crisps today.) On returning the dishes Ina informed our mother that one of them was broken. Not knowing how to compensate for this Ina nervously asked would she like a pure bred boxer pup as a sort of compensation. The pup duly changed hands and this proved to be a great deal as Niell became a loyal companion for many years. As fellow travellers they journeyed to and from Derry together and Neill was even taught how to spell his name. She would put down ten cards in a line on the floor with the five centre cards having the letters NIELL written on them. On command, with his scuttly tail going at a great pace and a good deal of snorting, he would go straight for the letter N, which would be pushed out of line. On command each subsequent letter of his name duly followed.

Her time in Derry was very rewarding but it was a long way from home. She missed her house and garden which were now beginning to be neglected.

Consequently, in 1968 our mother took a teaching post near her home. This was at Dunshaughlin Community College in Co Meath. It was here that she met Kay, who was also teaching there. It was through this association that Kay met Robin and they eventually married. At the school our mother developed in the children an interest in local history and bird watching.

It was quite a rural school at the time. A number of her students were later to become life-long friends. Many of them came on trips to Derrygooney, Co. Monaghan (more about Derrygooney later). One such was Eugene Connaughton and over time these trips went on to include Eugene's mother and his sister Una, who remains a continuous visitor to Derrygooney up to the present day.

In 1979, at the age of sixty two, she decided to take early retirement. She was of the opinion that there was too much left to do in life. Time was needed to undertake the many projects she had in mind, which included her historical research and writing. Also high on her agenda was the Meath Archaeological and Historical Society, travelling, looking after her dogs and keeping up the house and garden.

Tape recordings made mostly in the 1960s

What might seem now to be a very old fashioned tape recording machine was, in the 1960s, quite an up to date piece of equipment. Our mother's recorder was about the size of a modern desktop photocopier. It took two 25 mm reels, one rolling tape on to the other as it recorded. The reel could be turned around so as to use the tape on both sides. It was important to note carefully what was recorded and where it was on the tape otherwise one could spend ages searching.

The tape recorder was plugged into the mains electricity and the microphone was at the end of a long lead attached to the machine. It was quite an ordeal to set up but very efficient when used properly.

Our mother went to a great deal of trouble with her recordings. Generally she spoke to older people about their experiences in their youth, which for most would have been the late 19th or early 20th century. We have managed to transfer most of this work on to CD. Some of the sound quality is poor but always the content is well worth listening to.

One recording is of Peter McKenna and his niece, Siobhán (cousins of the great Irish actress Siobhán McKenna), at Derrygooney, Co. Monaghan. Siobhán sings ballads and Peter relates tales, folklore and local Monaghan history.

There is a recording of Mr. Oakes, a neighbour at Skryne and the son of a 'Strong Farmer'. He talks about his childhood memories, including: an excursion on the Navan/Drogheda canal; going with a whole football team to matches on a dray drawn by two horses; and Christmas excursions to Dublin by train. He discusses the small farming classes, intermarriage between farmers and how workmen came from the West of Ireland to Co. Meath at harvest time.

Our mother recorded another neighbour, Jock Wilkinson, then an old man with a long white beard. Another 'strong farmer' or perhaps more of a 'gentleman farmer' (Jock's father used to own Skryne Castle), Jock talks about his young days in Co. Meath, farming during the war and he tells us about driving his fast pony to Dublin, some twenty miles in less than an hour – the bus takes that long today.

Recorded also was The Groom Callaghan from the Five Cross Roads at Skryne. The Groom was one of three elderly brothers, living alone. He talks about his father recalling the famine. He remembers the horse fairs at Skryne on top of the hill, and Swan's house which was the bank before the turn of the century. He recounts how there was no money in circulation. No coins or notes, just barter, for all classes.

Another recording is with Mrs. Maureen Smith, who lived at the top of the hill at Skryne. Maureen relates her memories of working, as a young girl, at Dunsany Castle and how she went each winter with Lord and Lady Dunsany and the family to their home London. One of Maureen's jobs was to go, by boat, in advance of the family, with the silver so that the table and bedroom settings would be in place when the Lord and Lady arrived.

On yet another tape Mrs. Kelly from George's Cross, Skryne but brought up at Tara speaks about her childhood and working 'downstairs' at Dowdstown House at the turn of the century. Dowdstown House is today Dalgan Park, the home of the Columban Fathers. She gives a detailed description of a servants life, without complaint, and how later she moved with the family to Derry and subsequently to England where she didn't stay and came home because she couldn't get to Mass on Sundays.

Our mother recorded Mr. Ted Dunne from Clownestown, Tara. Ted gives a short but very interesting account as life as a young work boy at Corbalton Hall, Skryne, an estate of some 500 acres, the home of the Corbally Stourton family. One of Ted's memories is, as a young lad, preparing with his father, the game-keeper, for the several annual pheasant shoots.

One excellent tape recording our mother made was with her mother's first cousin, Esther O'Grady, then an old lady living in Co. Carlow. Esther talks at length about their extended family and trips to visit her grandparents in Brighton in the late nineteenth century. A fuller detail of this tape is given in the chapter on

Esther O'Grady.

In turn it came to Christina and Eoin to record Elizabeth Hickey. It was in 1998, a few weeks before she died. She knew they were coming and was prepared, she made herself comfortable, propped up in bed and spoke for more than an hour. She spoke as we have said earlier, about early life in Dublin, the search for a house in the 'home counties'. Discovering and moving to Skryne Castle and of the tragic death of her mother.

These are just a taste of some of her recorded stories which are now safely in our archives.

Derrygooney

Derrygooney was a part of our mother's life for thirty years. In 1968 she was teaching in Londonderry High School and travelled from Derry to Skryne every second weekend in her green Mini car. She was in the habit of picking up people who were looking for lifts on the roads. This was in order to make the long journey more interesting. She gave a lift to a Peter McKenna from Derrygooney and thus forged a long friendship and an introduction to the house she was to use for the next thirty years.

She mentioned to him that she would like to be able to stay in a house somewhere near one of the many lakes in Monaghan. Within days Peter was on the phone and had connected her with Willie Gray who owned the house in Derrygooney. It originally belonged to Willie's grandparents and had been rather a grand house in its day. Willie describes his grandparents as having a pony and trap and a very well kept yard. His mother had been raised in the house and always made sure to visit our mother when she was staying there. Old Mrs. Gray would get very upset if our mother referred to the house as a cottage.

Our mother saw charm in the house and lake and an arrangement was made with Willie Gray to rent it for ten shillings a year. She moved in with basic furniture, an old electric cooker, a couple of tables, some iron beds and not a lot else. She purchased a small fibreglass boat which features strongly in all our memories of Derrygooney. There was a large open fireplace with a crane and bellows. Everyone who went there will remember the exclusive toilet facilities in the small room at the end of the row of sheds in front of the house. The toilet then became an indoor facility when there was a dry toilet installed in the large front room that held the boat. Here she put a red and green - stop and go - sign to show when the toilet was engaged.

One cannot write about Derrygooney without saying a little about Peter McKenna, a bachelor. Peter lived close by and really enjoyed when anyone was visiting the house. He would walk in, uninvited, with a big smile. He had a huge knowledge of local history and folklore, all in his head, and loved to take our mother to show off all the old mills, forts and houses that he knew in the area. He was delighted to have an audience. He enjoyed storytelling and had to be told to go home at the end of the night. He lived with his mother until her death and Peter sadly died in 1979.

When she went to Derrygooney first, Peter Boylan had a working forge at the entrance to the lane. There was a huge bellows at the back of the forge with an anvil where he shaped out both horse and donkey shoes. He was a small man with a dirty black face and always wore a cap. Peter died tragically by falling into a pit and drowning. The house by the forge is now occupied by the McGuckins who come from Northern Ireland and stay at weekends. The McGuckins are related to the original owner Peter and they knew our mother well. They loved it if we stopped to talk as we passed down the lane.

Our mother kept very descriptive diaries of her years traveling to Derrygooney, it would be impossible to tell the full story. There were many stories told to her by the local people which she wrote down. There is a record of the birdlife and wildflowers and the history of local families. There is much about the Weir's who lived on the lane. Maggie and her two brothers, Jack and Jimmy. They told her about how a woodcock would bury its head in the ground and turn over and over. This was in order to draw you away from the nest. They also told her how to make a canoe. Get the trunk of a fir tree beside the lake. Test a small piece and see if it floats. Black oak is no good as it sinks. - then you chisel it out. This family have all since passed on but we all have memories of visiting their house, being met by Maggie with her beautiful, toothless smile and being brought in for home-made bread and jam. The yard was filled with flower beds and there were contented hens and cattle around the place. There were other people with whom our mother kept in contact with, Jimmy Rayburn who was related to Sam Rayburn, former Speaker of the House of Representatives in the US. Jimmy lived nearby and gave her an old rustic 'Monaghan' chair which sat beside the fire for many years. (Terry and Netta later brought the chair to the Ulster Folk Park in Omagh).

There was Jimmy Chambers who lived over the fields and local farmers Willie Weir and his family who our mother visited by taking the boat down the lake and walking across the field.

The diaries start with visits from Eoin, Nora, Christina and Brutus the dog, Robin, Kay and Fiona, and later Rodhan and Aillinn, came. There are photographs of Geraldine with Cathal, Siobhán and Áine as a tiny baby along with our cousin Nicola, her husband Gilbert and their baby Camille. There is a photograph of Brian, aged about five, which she took of him crying. He had refused to eat the sausages she had cooked. It was only afterwards that she realised that the sausages were rancid – but she still took the photograph. Caroline has some written entries in the diaries.

There are so many people who went to visit Derrygooney and they are all well recorded most of them having written in the diary themselves at the end of their stay. There are names that are unknown to us but who all enjoyed the place and left glowing reports. Uncle James Woodruff along with Bryda and our cousin George were there. Bryda went quite a few times. The Kats family from America were there. John Conlon and Eugene Connaughton had been pupils of our mothers in Dunshaughlin Community School and came with her several times to birdwatch and enjoy the lake. Eugene's sister, Una, then came and thereafter became a regular visitor with her husband and two sons Brian and Sean. Una Connaughton, Netta, Claire and Geraldine have a tradition of going up there in May when the bluebells are out and walking around the lake.

In the early days our mother was still taking foreign students during the summer; they were brought to Derrygooney and seemed to have had a great time. They helped Willie Gray with the threshing and picked wild berries for pudding. They walked around and swam in the lake. They took the boat down the river and over a course our mother had planned out for them. She would meet them later in the car and bring them home. They took the boat across the lake in order to go to Mass and also to go to the sweet shop. Kathleen Hart, a long-time friend of the family, now living in Greece, went to Derrygooney with these students and helped with the English teaching and generally looking after them. Cathal and his friend Norman Sturdy went in later years. Ronnie McCabe and Peter occasionally took time off from work at Finnstown and went up to fix the roof. Cathal and Ronnie also went to fix the gutters.

In the 1980s she went there many times with Anne Swatman - who was a neighbour from Dunsany and a good companion to our mother. In the 1990s Anne's mother Eileen made many visits with her and wrote often in the diary.

There are lists, in these diaries, of things to bring on her next visit. They mostly consist of things like: sand, long lead, jar for sugar, screwdriver, weed killer and rat poison. She describes a visit to the house where she found the rats appeared to have had a "Christmas Party" which ended in a fight as she saw blood on the door to her bedroom. The dogs found a dead one in the pile of wood beside the fire. She always brought one or two of her dogs with her and they nearly always disappeared causing huge anxiety. They loved to go hunting for hours but they always came back – eventually.

There are many anecdotes recorded in the diary but a favourite one is of the Monaghan bachelor who was taken in to Monaghan Hospital. He was so dirty that the nurses had to strip him and wash him. On the third go at washing him they discovered that he was wearing a vest.

There are records kept of how long it took her to swim across the lake. The last written one in 1984 says "swam the lake in 14 minutes". If she was alone she would tow the boat across with her as she swam and then row back. On 21st September 1998 Claire has written the following entry:

There are records kept of how long it took her to swim across the lake. The last written one in 1984 says "swam the lake in 14 minutes". If she was alone she would tow the boat across with her as she swam and then row back. On 21st September 1998 Claire has written the following entry:



Threshing at Derrygooney 1972 Willie Gray was in hospital and neighbours came in to do the threshing;

Granny Elizabeth, Mrs. Swatman, Netta, Rascal, Poppy and myself visited today on this glorious Monday afternoon. After a picnic type lunch, we all headed with the boat down to the lake. Myself and Mammy took turns in the boat and Granny also took a trip around the lake.

Mrs. Swatman and Granny Elizabeth stayed on the shore and saw a heron, cormorant and a pair of divers. The bold Rascal caught a rabbit, which he was forced to share with Poppy. After our boat trip, Mammy and I felt a little more daring and plunged into the cold lake, which remained freezing throughout the swim. We returned to the house for a well earned cup of tea.

Sadly this was our mother's last visit to her beloved Derrygooney. She knew she was ill and asked to be brought down to the lake in the boat to see the water lilies.

At her request Peter, Netta and Andrew went there in November and cleared out anything she wanted to take from the house. She did say to leave the kettle and cups etc so that Willie Gray or any one working at the farm could come in and make tea. Willie refused to take the key from us when we went to return it.

Your great Granny Elizabeth journeyed to Derrygooney on 4th September 1999 for the final time when the family assembled to spread her ashes on the lake she had loved and shared with so many.

Robin, Peter, Eoin, Netta and Caroline

Robin and Peter - the twins

Robin and Peter's lives moved along quite in parallel. Having completed the last two years of their national schooling, up and down every day, to the High School in Dublin's Harcourt Street, they moved on to secondary school, at The King's Hospital (K.H.), then in Blackhall Place as borders. We other children missed them during term time but they seemed to have enjoyed themselves and competed fairly seriously in the school sports, even cricket!

It was while at K.H. that Peter came down with polio, there was a countrywide epidemic that year with restrictions on travel. The school was quarantined and pupils were not allowed home for the Easter holidays. Peter spent several months in Cherry Orchard Hospital and later at the Lady Goulding Rehabilitation Clinic, then in Clontarf. He seems to have made a remarkable recovery, because many didn't and were left permanently lame or even crippled.

They both left K.H. after Intermediate Certificate and started off careers in the two best hotels in Dublin at that time.

Their introduction to the two top hotels came about through our goat at Skryne 'Siobhán'. Siobhán was a British Saanan, a pedigree goat of course, and consequently each year was brought to visit a pedigree puck at Castleknock. Mrs. Besson and her family lived and had a farm where the Georgian Village is now, just beside the Phoenix Park. She kept a Jersey cow herd and British Saanan goats; she fed the goats' milk to the Jersey calves. Our mother came to know her quite well and it turned out that Mrs. Besson's husband Ken owned The Hotel Russell and The Royal Hibernian, both five star hotels in the centre of Dublin, both sadly now long gone.

Our mother spoke to Mrs. Besson, Mrs. Besson spoke to her husband and the boys were 'in', Robin as a commis waiter in the Royal Hibernian and Peter as a commis chef in the Russell.

Conveniently they were both able to live in the Harding Boys Home, a hostel in Lord Edward Street for young Protestant working boys from the country. This was a magnificent place, Victorian in style and manner, warm, good food, plenty of hot water and charges that were subsidised, realistically related to the boys' income.



Robin and Kay with our mother on their engagement day, 1970

In about their second year of training, the hotel worker's trade union ran a competition for all the hotel commis in Dublin. Both Robin and Peter were among the ten winners. Their prize was a week-long trip to Rome, where they even had an audience with the Pope. Thirty years later Eoin had lunch with Mickey Mullen, the trade union leader who had organised the competition. At first he didn't remember the twins, but when Eoin jogged his memory, he remembered them well. 'Yeah, the twins, yeah, they were Republican, yeah, feckin Protestant Republicans – I remember them well'.

They both fully finished their formal training and went, for a while, different ways. Robin set off to Paris and later to Trusthouse Forte in London. Peter was 'poached' to Newry in 1964 where the Scallon family, Dana's husband's family, had opened up the new Ardmore Hotel – one of the most exclusive hotels in Ireland.

It was shortly after arriving at the Ardmore Hotel that Peter met Geraldine Philips one morning in the staff room. He asked her to go for a walk and the rest is history. Some people have suggested that it was a 'smoke' he asked her to go for, but Geraldine insists 'no', it was the healthier option.

Robin came back to Dublin and joined Jury's Hotel, then in Dame Street, management team. Robin married Kay O'Connor in 1971. Kay, a TCD graduate, taught with our mother in Dunshaughlin and hence the introduction. They set up home in Portmarnock where Kay still lives. Robin, after Jury's, more or less spent all of his time, managing tourist hostels, and was chairman of the Irish Holiday Hostels Association. With Kay he enjoyed several trips in this role to far side of the world representing Ireland at international hostel conferences.

On one such occasion in South America, Robin sat beside Richard McCloud. It turned out that Richard was married to Suli, Teddy Malet Warden's (our mother's half brother) daughter. Richard runs the Nomads Backpackers chain in Australia.

Robin and Kay have three children, Fiona, Rodhan and Ailainn and four grandchildren. In January 2008 Robin and Kay took off on an around the world trip on the QE2 cruise ship. When they returned in April, Robin wasn't feeling well and he turned out to be quite ill. He died in August of that year.

Peter and Geraldine, having come back from their walk, continued to work at the Ardmore and to go out together. The Philips family, Geraldine tells us, came from South Wales in the late nineteenth century and took up residence in South Co. Down. The family later settled in Jonesborough at the foot of Slieve Gullion, under the rolling hills of South Armagh, where Geraldine was born.

Peter and Geraldine were married in 1972 and moved to Durrrow and later settled in Leixlip where they raised their family, one boy and three girls, Cathal, Siobhán, Áine and Deirdre. There are at present, five grandchildren.

Peter worked for many years, both full and part time with Eoin in Celbridge, Leixlip and at Finntown House Hotel.

Tragically, just three months after Robin's death, Peter died suddenly at home in November 2008. Almost exactly one year later, Peter and Geraldine's youngest daughter Deirdre gave birth to a baby boy and his name is – Peter.

Eoin and Netta – yours truly

Netta stayed on as a boarder at the Quaker, Drogheda Grammar School until her Intermediate Certificate and then went to live for a year in Paris as an au-pair. While there she attended the Alliance Francais to study French. At the same time Robin was working at the Restaurant Drouant in Paris. On returning from Paris, Netta completed a secretarial course at Miss. Galwey's College in Dublin before taking up a position with Porter and Irvine a stock broking firm on Dame St.

At age nineteen, Netta took off to Connecticut to work for eighteen months



Netta, 1957

with the Kats family. Here she looked after four boys - Nicolas, Greg, Ian and Tuckerman. She spent eighteen very enjoyable months with them and has remained friends ever since. The family owns a house in Errislannan near Clifden, Co. Galway and over the years the Kats family has stayed in Skryne and visited Derrygooney. Netta and our mother also stayed in Errislannan on a few occasions. Sadly Tuckerman has passed away, as have both his parents. Earlier this year, Nicholas, now a Naturopathic Doctor in Galway and living permanently in Errislannan, came to a BBQ and tree planting ceremony at Lucan in memory of Robin and Peter.

Meanwhile Eoin had left Preston school in Navan. He spent two seasons at Killeen Castle Stud Farm, training to be a 'stud farm manager'. Killeen was then managed by the former owner of the castle, Lord Fingall. Two Derby winners stood there – Hard Ridden, 1958, and St. Paddy, 1961. Killeen this year is opening up as a top class golf resort and hotel. Eoin then spent a few months with Wilkinson and Falkiner, Stockbrokers in Dame Street, introduced here by Miss. Lucy Franks, our mother's good friend. At this time Eoin stayed in the Harding Boys Home along with the twins.

In the autumn of 1962 came the call to Eoin, to go home to Skryne urgently and meet with a special guest – Mr. Amby McInerney of McInerney Builders, later PLC. Mr. McInerney had bought a five hundred acre farm at Skryne and was staying for a few days at the castle.

Our mother introduced them and the following week Eoin headed to Limerick to start work as a site clerk with McInerney's on a large housing site at Shannon Airport. It was while in Limerick that he met Nora Byrnes, then working in the Bunratty Shannon Shamrock Hotel. He moved with McInerney's to Dublin, then Waterford, by now as a quantity surveyor, then Cork and eventually in 1970, back to Dublin.

Nora, in the mean time had gone to work in the very luxurious Montreaux Palace Hotel, Switzerland and later to care for David Niven's children in Chateaux de'Oex, a fashionable Ski resort. Here she met with such distinguished house guests as Jacqueline Kennedy and Princess Grace of Monaco and her then, very young children.

Nora comes from Bruree, Co. Limerick, and before secondary school in Charleville went to the local National School in the village where Eamon De Valera started his education. Nora's grandfather was the G.P. in Bruree and his mother was a Cleary, a sister of Dr. John Cleary from Hospital on the Tipperary/Limerick border. It was this branch of the Cleary family that went to France with the Wild Geese at the end of the seventeenth century and became merchants in Marseille.

Désirée Clary, the name had changed a little, then a young lady, together with her family were close friends of the young Napoleon Bonaparte and his family. On August 17th 1798, Désirée married Napoleon's young fellow officer Jean Baptiste Jules Bernadotte, whose career rose with that of Napoleon and in 1818 Bernadotte became King of Sweden and his wife Désirée Clary became Queen. Their direct descendents, the Bernadottes are still on the throne today.

So, Eoin and Nora's grandchildren, as well as your great ~ grandmother having been the Queen of Sweden, you're cousin ~ is the present King of Sweden.

On her return from the U.S. Netta went to work as receptionist in The Club House Hotel in Navan (now the Newgrange Hotel). It was here that she met the journalist Willie Kealy who was then working for the Meath Chronicle. They married in September 1973 and went on to have three children, Brian, Andrew and Claire. Netta and Willie separated in 1989.

Netta went on to work as secretary for a civil engineer in Celbridge and then spent thirteen years working with Intel in Leixlip.

In retirement now she divides her time between travelling with her partner Terry, helping with her grandchildren, twins Andrew and Laura, serving on the committee on the Local ICA and searching through her ancestors' papers in Mrs Clements' box.

Eoin and Nora married in 1971 and have lived in Lucan since 1974, where they raised their four children, Christina, Aiden, Niall and Shane, and they now have seven grandchildren. Eoin stayed with the house building industry, developing estates at Ryevale Lawns Leixlip and Crodaun Forest Park, Celbridge before taking on Finnstown Country House Hotel, opening in 1987. Eoin and Nora sold the hotel in 2007 and now live in busy retirement.

Caroline Hickey

Caroline is the youngest of our family, born at home in Skryne Castle on April 2nd 1951. As children we remember the occasion well. The cot was made up and ready on the landing outside The Tower Room, our mother's lying in room. For several days, Dr. Murnane came and went with his black leather bag and we youngsters were told to stay very quiet as Mummy was resting and waiting for the new baby to arrive. So we decided to play 'April Fool' on April 1st, rushing into the bedroom, calling out: 'Surprise! Surprise! Guess what... ? The baby has arrived; we've seen her in her cot.'

Caroline, like the rest of us, walked across the fields to Skryne National School sometimes in bare feet on summer days. As a child she played her part in running the castle, standing on a chair while doing the washing up after the departure of bus tour groups who came for afternoon tea and in gathering sticks for the winter fires.

Caroline would have greeted some of the very early P.G.s at Skryne. P.G.s were paying guests and in the early years there were some very interesting visitors. The Wannings, an American Family with lots of young children came to stay over one Christmas. Mrs. Alice Atchison and her travelling companion arrived in 1952 by chauffeur driven American limousine. Alice was the wife of Dean Atchison, Secretary of State to President Harry Truman, who was on an official visit to Dublin. Mrs. Atchison wanted to stay in the countryside and meet some real Irish people. They were given The Pink Room and shared the bathroom with the rest of us – quite a good scoop for a fledgling guesthouse!

Caroline can still recall 'Rosie, Rosie, Rosie Darling', the shrill call of Mrs. Griffin to her granddaughter. This memorable duo stayed for about a year. Rosie and her grandmother who was bedridden and their yappy terrier Bobby were given the room off the drawing room which faced full south. She called for attention by banging her walking stick on the floor. Rosie, a couple of years older than Caroline, adapted very quickly to our family ways. She came to school with us, played hobby horse and as with everybody, gathered sticks for the winter fuel. Rosie spent her early years in Askeaton, Co. Limerick with her uncle Jack Griffin, an interpreter with the United Nations who travelled in and out to Switzerland. We lost touch with Rosie until many years later, probably the early seventies when we read about her in the newspapers and watched her on TV. Rosie had sailed around the world single-handed. And she later went round again with her husband Colin Swale who, with one hand on the tiller, delivered their baby somewhere on the high seas. All of this received much publicity and Rosie later told the tale of her travels in her book, best-seller, 'Rosie Darling'.

In recent years Rosie ran around the world to raise funds for various charities and to highlight the importance of cancer awareness and early diagnosis. Rosie has documented much of this on her website rosiearoundtheworld.co.uk.

Caroline is a prolific letter writer and stays in touch with all her old school pals and later friends. Like Eoin, she received her secondary education at Preston School in Navan. Preston was a bleak Victorian house, long since demolished and now a shopping centre car park, in the town centre. There were twenty six pupils which included boys and girls, borders and day pupils from first to sixth year and a prep school. There were three teachers including the headmaster and between them, they taught five languages English, Irish, French, Latin and Greek. Preston and its inhabitants of the fifties and sixties are well described in Homan Potterton's book 'Rathcormack – A Childhood Recalled'.

Caroline moved on from Preston to St. Martha's College, Johnstown, Navan, a domestic science school run by the nuns and having excelled in the one year residential course, was invited to stay for a second year as a senior/assistant, which she very willingly did.

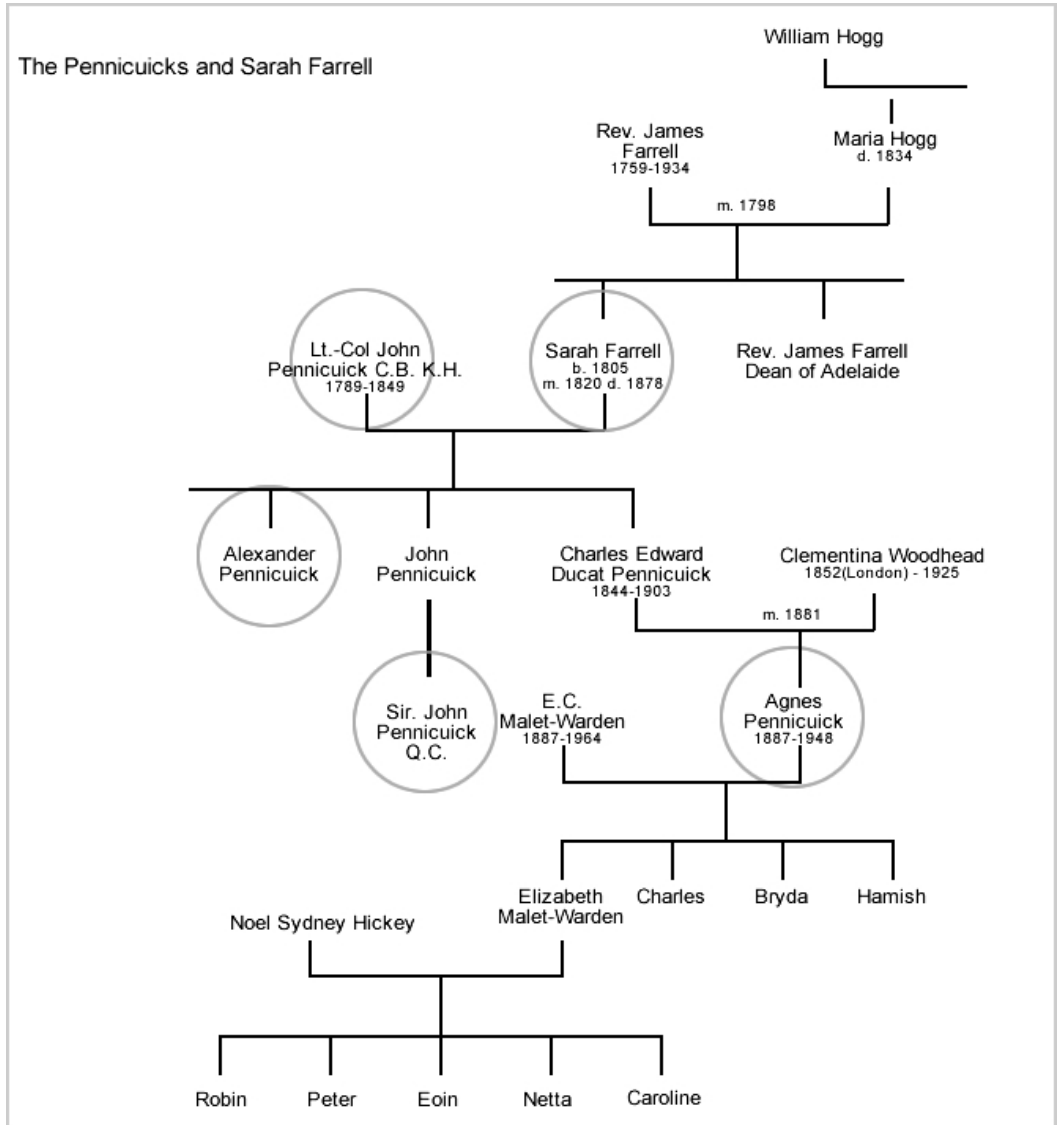
Caroline's first venture into employment was caring for Lord Moyne's pedigree hens at Castleknock. After this, she gave many years service to St. Vincent's Hospital Nursing Home on Leeson St. and later at Linden Nursing Home in Blackrock. Finally Caroline worked for ten years in The United Servicemen's Club on St. Stephen's Green before retiring. While at Linden Caroline organised for one of the distinguished residents, the former President of Ireland Eamon deValera, to give the Christmas pudding a stir. Caroline has a wonderful picture showing the nun, the girls, the Christmas pudding, the bottles of stout, the Fruitfield fruit, the empty pudding bowls in waiting and the former President giving the final stir.

Valerie was born to Caroline on Valentine's Day 1976 and after adoption went to live in Australia. They correspond with each other and met up in Dublin in the mid nineties. Caroline lives in happy retirement with her companion Kathleen in Leixlip.

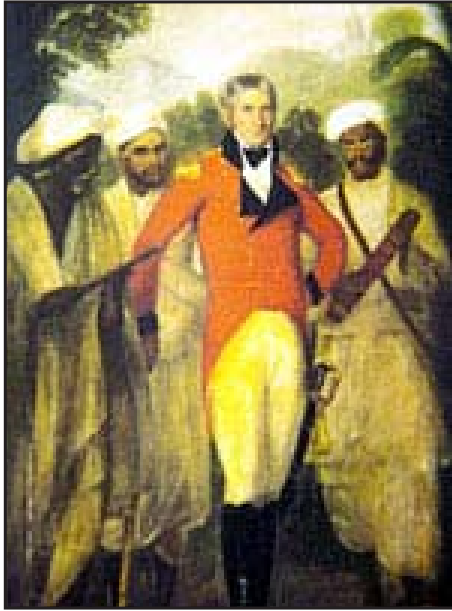


Netta and Caroline, school photograph and right Caroline, at St Martha's College, 1968, with Christmas cake.

The Pennycuicks and Sarah Farrell



A portrait of Sarah Farrell, left, and, right, our grandmother, Agnes Pennicuick, in 1911



(clockwise from main): Indian bibi Jemaneh, 1787. Captain Peter Rainier; 'Two Children' by Thomas Hickey signed and dated 1769, courtesy of the National Gallery of Ireland. Robert Emmett 1796; Col. Colin Mackenzie (1754-1821) (All by Thomas Hickey)