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Early Printing in the County Louth

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Early Printing in the County Louth.

UNDER the above heading, there appeared in last number of this Journal (pp. 52-3) a most interesting and recondite article from the pen of E. R. M'Clintock Dix, Esq. In the course of that article, we were told—"I have not come across any printing in either Drogheda or Dundalk in the seventeenth century, nor within the first half of the eighteenth. There were of course booksellers in Drogheda much earlier than this, but *there is no evidence* that they printed."

Since we read that article, we have had the pleasure of bringing under the notice of our esteemed friend, one evidence that there was printing done in Drogheda much earlier than the second half of the eighteenth century, that had escaped his notice. It is to be seen in Cardinal Moran's "Memoirs of Oliver Plunket," 1st edition page 245. Dr. Plunket had occasion to publish a decree embodying his decision concerning a certain controversy that had waged for some years between the Dominicans and Franciscans of his Province. This decree he had printed in Drogheda and promulgated there. It is dated from Dundalk, 11th of October, 1671. Dr. Moran's words are—"That decree was not published till the 11th of October following, when it was printed and promulgated at Drogheda." It is unnecessary to quote the decree, since it can be so easily seen. But that sentence is most interesting, for it proves to us that a printing press existed in Drogheda as early as 1671. In D'Alton's History of Drogheda, mention is made of a certain Patrick Maher, bookseller, who in the last decade of the seventeenth century was outlawed and attainted with a number of other citizens of that town. It is quite possible, perhaps we might say probable, that the press in which Dr. Oliver Plunket's decree was printed belonged to him. J. Power in his "Handy Book about Books" gives 1757 as the earliest year for Drogheda printing known to him, but Dr. Moran's passage carries us back eighty six years earlier.

Although the following notice does not seem quite within the scope of our Journal, still we hope that it will be found interesting enough for insertion. A copy of an old Cork paper came quite accidentally into our hands. It is the "Hibernian Chronicle," vol. III., No. 51, issued at Cork on Thursday, June 27th, 1671. Dr. Madden in his "Irish Periodical Literature" informs us that the Chronicle was a bi-weekly, printed at first as a quarto and afterwards enlarged to folio. The copy under notice is quarto. William Flyn, the printer's name, appears on the front page, above the well formed and neatly executed title, and on the last page we learn that it was printed "at the Sign of Shakespear, near the Exchange, where letters and essays and Articles of Intelligence for this Chronicle are received, *without any enquiry from the bearer*, and where printing work is executed with propriety and on the most reasonable terms." The italics are ours, but they emphasize for our notice a rather quaint inducement for "copy" that editors would scarcely undertake to hold out nowadays. The advertising columns contain two notices of Cork publications, that are of interest to bibliographers. William Flyn announced to his readers that he had on that day published "The Complete Country Dancer" and the "History of Sir William Harrington." E. R. M'Clintock Dix has compiled a surpri-

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singly extensive list of Cork publications, and from that compilation we learn that Trinity College possesses a large number of stray copies of the *Hibernian Chronicle* printed between 1777 and 1779. But we are assured by that gentleman, who is the first authority upon these matters, that ours is the earliest extant copy so far. It is quite possible that some such copies of Drogheda or Dundalk papers are suffered to remain in oblivion. A little research might bring them to light, and it is a pity that such interesting objects should remain hidden under bushels, when they can be used to reflect light upon our country's history, and honour upon our country's name. We should feel glad to learn of any such discovery.

And now that we are speaking of the light which old papers can cast upon the past life of our towns, perhaps some illustrations taken from some such rescued and frayed leaves may not be out of place.

In the National Library in Dublin, there are sixteen stray issues of the *Drogheda Journal and Louth and Meath Advertiser*, of the years 1795, 1796, and 1797, still preserved, and in the Record Office a solitary copy, dated Saturday, December 13th, 1788, luxuriates, not in solitary grandeur, but with a few dozen other stray provincials, in a neat binding that is sure to preserve it well for many a long day. It is not quite certain as yet, at what date that paper was founded, for it is not certain whether it began as a weekly, or as a bi-weekly. It is likely enough however that it began as a bi-weekly, and if that be true, it first saw light in 1775. If, however, it began as a weekly and afterwards through successful management became a bi-weekly, the date of its foundation should be placed, as Mr. Dix observes, in 1762 or in 1763. The proprietor's name was Charles Evans, and his printing house was situate in Lawrence street. All the numbers are in excellent order and are very carefully preserved, but owing to age, and the damps of a century, the fresh whiteness of their early days has faded, and the years have browned them as beauty is browned by the warm summer sun. We perused with care, and with no small degree of pleasure, all of these ancient relics of Drogheda's past, and as we did so we felt as persons conversing with resurrected souls, with the *manes* of Drogheda's busy men of 100 golden years ago. The snatches of living history that those browned and faded pages contain were only snatches—grains of a mild opiate, that made us crave for more. But much of what we did see interested us, and we took some notes, and from them the following selections may speak for themselves:—

In the issue for July 28, 1795, occurs the following notice:—

“NOTICE.

To be sold by Public Auction,

At the Tholsel, Drogheda,

On Friday, 31st July, inst.

At the hour of one o'clock in the afternoon,

The stenes and materials of Sunday's Gate.* The purchaser to be allowed one month to carry off the materials.

* Sunday's Gate. We learn from MacCabe's Directory of Drogheda—published in 1830—that Sunday's Gate derived its name from the following circumstance:—

“Custom was exacted from persons coming into the town through this gate on week days for the support of the Brotherhood of St. Mary Magdalen, i.e., the Dominican Friars; but they were exempted from this tax on the Sabbath.”

This simple explanation seems to have escaped the notice of D'Alton and appears to us more reasonable than that given by Rev. Denis Murphy, S.J., in his admirable work “Cromwell in Ireland,” (p. 89), namely, that it was so called from the Dominicans of St. Sunday's friary near it, Sunday being “dies dominica.” The name is found in other towns as in Cork. The Drogheda gate, to the N.E. as shown on the map in D'Alton was also called the Cow Gate. It stood between two towers, the “Tooting,”—a strong round tower possibly Irish, not on the town wall but detached from it—and Boulsters, which, if its name is derived from the Anglican primate who may have lived near it, was probably re-named. See Murphy's “Cromwell in Ireland”—p. 101.

St Lawrence's Gate at Droghedah.

1748.

From Wright's Louthiana.

ST. LAWRENCE'S GATE, DROGHEDA.

1905.

To face page 26]

The money to be paid on the person being declared the purchaser. Drogheda, 25th July, 1795."

It would scarcely be just, without further evidence, which is not forthcoming, to indulge in a tirade of condemnation of the ancient Corporation of Drogheda for their vandalism. But if, as it would appear at first blush, that they threw down the old Gate and sold its materials as Esau sold his birthright, they would deserve all the opprobrium that their disgusted and indignant descendants could heap upon them. We cannot believe that they were wanton enough to perpetrate such a crime. What we believe is, that the old gate had become ruinously dilapidated, and through callous neglect was allowed to totter to its fall. But even in that hypothesis the old Corporation must bear their share of blame. It was quite competent for them to have kept the old Gate and the other old walls in repair, and by pointing and renewal they might have, with a small annual expenditure, been preserved. In justice to them, however, let it be said that they are deserving of grateful remembrance for having done their duty by at least one hoary monument that still stands to guard the old town. If the reader will take the trouble to look at Wright's view of St. Lawrence's Gate given in *Louthiana* at foot of the contents of Book II., and undescribed, he will observe that in that artist's time, this interesting monument was fast becoming a dangerous ruin. In that plate several portions of the Gate and particularly the battlements are represented as fissured and shattered and almost tottering to a fall. It would seem that, sometime during the last quarter of the eighteenth century perhaps, the Corporation undertook the work of restoration, that several feet were removed from the uppermost parts of the Gate and rebuilt after the original plan, and that the whole structure was subjected to a course of thorough repair. D'Alton has not mentioned this circumstance in his history, but there exist traces of a tradition in the town to that effect. And, indeed, if the building is closely observed on a bright day, the restored parts may be easily enough distinguished, for they wear a brighter and slightly fresher aspect than the original remains. While Drogheda men therefore must deplore the ravages made by time upon the ancient walls and gates and fortresses of their town, they may find consolation in the thought that at least one solitary sentinel was preserved by their forefathers, and still proudly stands to remind them of their town's historic past, and if need be, perhaps, to take up anew the duty of guardianship that it, many a time, faithfully fulfilled. It is a mercy, and not a small one, for which they should be grateful towards the old Corporators. Let us address them benevolently, then, with "peace to your shades."

The following notice however reflects on a different class of the inhabitants. There will be vandals everywhere till the end:—

"NOTICE.

"Any person detected in pulling down or carrying away the stones of the old town wall (without being authorised so to do) after this date will be prosecuted according to law. *July 15th, 1796.* GEORGE EVANS (Mayor)."

When there existed a necessity for the Mayor to publish in the local paper a threatening notice of that kind, it will be very easy to understand how it is that so few traces of the walls and fortresses of Drogheda have survived.

"October 3, Saturday, 1795.

"Tuesday last, George Evans was sworn into the office of Mayor of this town, and Henry Brabazon jun. and George Tandy Sheriffs for the ensuing year.

"In the evening His Worship entertained the High Sheriffs, the members of the Corporation and several gentlemen of respectability, in a sumptuous manner,

"at the Mansion House. The dinner was confessedly the best that could be produced, and the wines of the first quality. Lieut.-Col. Maxwell, and the Officers of the Donegal Militia, Hamilton Georges, Esq., Major Alexander and Norman Steele, Esq., were amongst the visitors who partook of the entertainment. At nine o'clock, Mr. Mayor, accompanied by our late worthy chief magistrate (Ralph Smyth, Esq.), visited the High Sheriffs and their company and remained with them half-an-hour, during which time Hamilton Georges, Esq. filled the Mayor's chair. Good humour reigned during the night round the festive board. The company did not retire until after 12 o'clock; and are highly pleased with the politeness and attention of Mr. Mayor."

The above notice which occurred in the news columns on the above date gives an interesting insight into the social customs of the Corporators of 100 years ago. The Mansion House referred to was, of course, the present Mayoralty Rooms, situate on the north quay.

In the same number survives the only reference that we could find to the occurrences in the Assembly Room of the Corporation in the Tholsel. The papers we may state here were taken up chiefly with governmental and viceregal and royal proclamations, and with lengthy cuttings from Dublin and English papers which treated of the doings of foreign countries. France was about that period in a state of turmoil, and indeed Europe generally, and the people of Drogheda must have sought for with avidity all the news concerning the French upheaval and its consequences that they could lay hands on. The newspaper proprietor catered therefore for their tastes, and the local news, the report of corporation meetings, &c., did not find much space allotted to them. Hence the scantiness and brevity of these notices that do refer to them. Only once in all the sixteen issues of the paper are we introduced to the meeting room of the Corporation, and that in the following excerpt which betrays the stormy side of Corporate life:—

"CORPORATION OF DROGHEDA.

"At a Special General Assembly, held the 23rd September, 1795, for the purpose of taking into consideration the most violent attack made by a member of the Corporation on the Chief Magistrate in the execution of his office, on Wednesday, the 16th inst. Alderman Holmes having appeared in his place, presented the following apology:—

"To the Mayor, Sheriffs, Burgesses, and Commons of the County of the Town of Drogheda:

"GENTLEMEN,

"I am sensible my conduct to the Mayor on Wednesday the 16th was improper and reprehensible, and beg leave to assure the assembly that the words I used on that occasion were the result of sudden passion, and proceeded from the warmth of my temper, and that I had no deliberate intention of giving offence. Therefore, I beg leave to acknowledge my error and request the Mayor to accept this apology, which I would have made before to him, but I wished my apology to be as public as the offence. 23rd September, 1795. JOSEPH HOLMES."

From the following notice we may learn approximately the date at which the present markets were built in Fair street, and the foul uses to which the site upon which it is built was put before that spacious quadrangle was erected:—

"NOTICE.

"The Committee appointed by the Corporation for erecting the new Cornmarket on the waste grounds in Fair street, give notice to the different proprietors of manure heaps, to remove same before the 17th March next. Feb. 20, 1796."

From several interesting notices which it is unnecessary to quote we learn that there existed an old custom in the town of farming out the revenues received at the Gates. Everyone entering the town with market produce, &c., was obliged to pay his toll and these Gate Customs were sold monthly by the Corporation of Drogheda to the highest bidder. "The purchase money to be paid down immediately after the sale, in cash or bank-notes."

The following piece of news is too interesting to be omitted; it is given in the number for June 25, 1796:—

"Thursday night last the Post boy conveying His Majesty's mail of letters from the General Post Office, Dublin, was stopped near the turnpike in Black Horse Lane, near Dublin, by four men who robbed him of the entire mail, containing 19 bags.

"Last night information was given to Mr. Mayor by a shopkeeper in West Street that two suspicious looking men offered him a bank-note, payable to order, but not endorsed, in payment of a suit of clothes, which he refused. Mr. Mayor went in search of the villains and took them into custody. One of them has since made a full discovery of the robbery of the above mail and the parties concerned before the Mayor and William Gibbens, Esq., who had his answers taken down. Some bank-notes of Beresford & Co. and a bill drawn in favour of Messrs. Byrne & MacDonald for £97 were found on their persons. The person who has turned approver has made (and promises to make more) useful discoveries to Mr. Mayor of various robberies lately committed in and about Dublin. This morning we understand two men have been apprehended charged with endeavouring to get cash for a bank-note of £50 part of the above booty.

"Mr. Mayor underwent a great deal of fatigue last night in search of a third person who was concerned in this robbery and we are sorry to find his exertions were fruitless. Mr. Mayor is certainly entitled to public thanks for bringing this business to light."

In the same paper a reward of thirty guineas was offered to the person who would apprehend the villain for whom the Mayor's fruitless search was made. His name was Bynge alias Mortimer, and the following interesting description was published as a clue with a view to his capture:—

"Said Bynge alias Mortimer is about 5ft. 6in. in height, sandy hair, fair complexion, light made, had on a brown surtout coat, blue body coat, red waistcoat, corduroy breeches and white stockings. He passes himself for a smuggler."

We have not been able to ascertain whether he was arrested or not. People must have been greatly afraid of the highway men, for their hands were very strong, and the comrades of a captured bandit were sure to take revenge upon the man that was imprudent enough to give information that led to his capture or conviction. It is surprising the number of robberies that are recorded in these papers; neither life nor property was safe. One marvels at the adventures of Collier, and half doubts their truth, but when one reads the records of the town of Drogheda and its district of one hundred years ago, he can no longer withhold credence from that breezy tale.

In what we have given we have exhausted almost all the references to the Mayor and the Corporation contained in the papers. However, the interesting does not cease here, for there are many other items that enlighten us upon the lives that Drogheda men led one hundred years ago. For instance, we become aware of the existence of a "Theatre Royal" in that old town under the patronage of the Mayor, in the following advertisement:—

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“THEATRE ROYAL, CROW STREET.

By permission of the Rt. Worshipful the Mayor of Drogheda,

On Monday evening, the 17th of August, (1796),

Will be presented the celebrated new Comedy, called

“THE RAGE, OR FRAILTIES OF FASHION.”

To which will be added the celebrated popular Entertainment, called

“THE CHILDREN OF THE WOOD.”

[Being positively the last time of performing it].

To begin precisely at half after 7 of the clock ;

Boxes and Lattices, 3s. 3d. ; Pit, 2s. 2d. ; Gallery, 1s. 1d.

Tickets to be had of Mr. Chenny at Mr. Reilly's, No. 1 Shop Street—and places to be taken at the Theatre from 11 to 1 each day.”

At present we are quite unable to say where exactly in the town Crow Street was, and what was the site of this famed Theatre Royal. We know, however, that during the 18th century it was quite the practice of the players in the Smock Alley Theatre of Dublin to make prolonged stays in Drogheda during the slack season in Dublin, and to perform there for the amusement and delight of the elite of Drogheda. In 1738 the Smock Alley Company performed thrice weekly in Drogheda on a temporary stage, erected in the Crown and Thistle Inn. Their first performance took place upon September the 11th, and after a six weeks sojourn they closed their series and returned to Dublin ; and they must have profited well in that prolonged stay, for they returned to the old town again in the following years. Of the history of this play-house in Crow Street we know very little ; but a writer in the *Evening Herald* informs us, that the first regular play-house ever seen in Drogheda was built in 1772-3, by an ex-clergyman of the Protestant Church who came over from England and turned actor. Later on ambition inspired him to become a Theatre Manager, and he built in Drogheda a neat little Theatre, which, when packed, was capable of returning £40 at a performance. But Milmoth's—that was an alias he assumed—venture failed after a three months' trial, he therefore abandoned his theatre and left the town. That in all likelihood is the “Theatre Royal” referred to in the advertisement.

Another most interesting advertisement announces the opening of a New Catholic School in West Street, Drogheda, under the patronage of Primate Richard O'Reilly, and under the management of the Rev. James Keelan—“for the instruction of young gentlemen in the various branches of literature which are necessary to fit them for college. The reading of English shall be particularly attended to, and the greatest care exercised to inculcate on every occasion the principles of Morality.”

“N.B.—No Boarders to be received until further notice. Terms one guinea per quarter. Do. on entrance. *Drogheda, August 11th, 1795.*”

The following exceedingly quaint announcement, given just as it appeared, will interest the antiquarian :—

“CUSTOM HOUSE, DROGHEDA.

“Sale by inch of candle at said Custom House the Goods under named, at Eleven o'clock in Forenoon, on Monday, the 8th inst :—Four Feather Beds.

Signed by Order,

“*March 1st, 1796.*

“T. Collins, Reg of Seizures.”

“DROGHEDA POST COACHES.

“Seats and orders for the above coaches from and after this day to be taken
“at Mr. John M'Cann's, Chandler, next door but one on the west side of Mr. Richard
“Gougerty's. *Drogheda, June 4th, 1795.*”

In the issue for August 6th, 1796, there is given a brief account of the Dundalk Assizes, from which the following has been culled :—

“BEFORE JUDGE DOWNES.

“Bridget Thornton, Matthew M'Cann and Bryan Fegan were found guilty of
“perjury in open court—to be thrice pilloried and transported for seven years. The
“two latter persons were pilloried during the sitting of the Court. Michael Duggan,
“acquitted of murder but found guilty of manslaughter—ordered to be burned
“on the hand and discharged.”

I shall conclude my already too lengthened notice with the following rather piquant (for our enlightened age !) advertisement :—

“MATTHEW QUINN

“Respectfully informs the Nobility and Gentry of Ireland that he effectually
“cures every species of annoyances arising from smoaking chimnies however desperate
“and incurable it may appear—and in order to convince them that he holds no
“fraudulent scheme, as many pretenders do who frequently undertake what they
“are inadequate to accomplish, he shall execute every branch of his business
“on the candid terms of—*No Cure No Pay, and give one month's full trial.* He
“further assures them that he erects machines for cookery on a most improved plan,
“hitherto unattempted by any other, which combines the advantages of elegance,
“durability, utility, and economy, requiring not more than one half of the fuel,
“labour, and time usually expended on the occasion. Finally, from his knowledge
“of the doctrine of Fluids and Aerostatic powers he can erect Baker's ovens, heated
“by stone coal, requiring no more than half the fuel, labour, and time, usually
“expended on the occasion.

“N.B.—A line addressed to him (post paid) at Kingscourt, near Kells, will be
“respectfully attended to. *Kingscourt, 27th September, 1798.*”

And now, having introduced you to honest Matthew Quinn, we have done.

Sinn Féin.