

The Parish and Village of Tulla

600AD to 1900AD

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My great great grandfather, was born in the Parish of Tulla around 1800, he was a hotel keeper in the village between about 1830 and 1850 and like most family historians I wanted to know more about the place where he lived and worked and gain an insight into the history of the parish and town of Tulla.

This article is the result of many years of research and I have received considerable help from many other family historians in gathering information for the story, my thanks and appreciation to them all.

At the end of the sixth century, around the year 590AD, a son was born to a family living in the northern part of Ireland and his parents named him *Mochuille*.

Mochuille studied under *St. Albinus*, he became a committed Christian, and today would have been an ordained priest.

Like many of the holy men of the early centuries, *Mochuille* had a special relationship with animals and around 620, he was led southward by a deer, to a sparsely settled and marshy area of County Clare, then known as *Dremriasc*.

In the midst of these marshes was a small hill, overgrown with trees and scrub, *Mochuille* cleared the undergrowth with his own hands, levelled the top of the hill, created a raised terrace platform and lays the foundation for a church.

The "*Life of St Mochuille*", published in the Clare Champion in 1942, tells us that working at a feverish rate, *Mochuille* was "*too busy to cook the bit he ate*", but he owned a blessed bull which he trained to fetch and carry and he would often send the bull, with bags, to Ennis Abbey where the monks would put up provisions for him.

Travel on the roads was dangerous in the wilds of East Clare and when a group of robbers heard of the journeys made by the bull they decided to lay in wait and rob him. They hid on *Classagh Hill* and when they attacked the bull, beating him and taking the goods, the bull roared so loudly he was heard by *Mochuille*.

The holy man stopped working and prayed and cursed those hurting his bull and at that very moment the robbers were turned into limestone slabs where they stood and for many years it was possible to see limestone "*pillars*", ranging in height from four and a half feet to over six feet on *Classagh Hill* and it was believed that they were the petrified remains of the seven robbers

As the building of the church progressed and as *Mochuille* began to convert some of the nearby population, the local prince, *Forannan*, became concerned at the rise of another "*power*" and he convinced his brother in law, *Guareaus*, who was a northern king, to send soldiers to arrest *Mochuille*.

On the way to *Mochuille*, the soldiers killed the tame bull and were enraged when having killed and slaughtered it, the flesh would not cook, much angered they rushed to attack *Mochuille*, but as they approached their arms and limbs failed them and they fell helpless.

At the prayer of *Mochuille*, the soldiers, now repentant, were cured, and they immediately joined *Mochuille*'s band.

These soldiers were not well educated and little able to shine in religious tasks and devoted their strength to fortifying the monastery against any further attack

by their late chief. They made a "*caher*" with stone walls, deep trenches and outworks and at the end of a year a substantial, well fortified monastery had been established.

Gaureaus was enraged at the defection of his soldiers and set about raising an army to attack *Mochuille's* monastery, the army marched over the mountains of *Aughty* and upon reaching an area near the church, sent a small band forward to reconnoitre.

On their way, they met a holy woman who lived among the wild beasts in the middle of the wood and began to interrogate her about *Mochuille*, fearing their violence she set fire to the furze and heather and in a moment all the hill was sheet of flame and the men fell smothered by the smoke.

This was enough for *Guareaus*, he fell at *Mochuille's* feet declaring him "*a dear and acceptable friend of Christ*". *Mochuille* forgave him and prophesied the *Guareaus* would be famous for his liberality and from then on he was known as "*Guaire the Hospitable*".

Mochuille, who was beginning to be known as *Mochulla*, was later consecrated as a bishop and died at a great age in the second half of the seventh century.

The village of Tulla grew up around St. Mochulla's monastery and he became it's patron Saint. In 1086 the monastery was blockaded and almost captured by *Tadbg*, the son of the titular king of Ireland and in 1141, a monk, who may not have been a resident of the district, wrote the "*life*" of *St. Mochulla* from which much of the preceding has been taken.

The village continued to grow slowly over the centuries and became the trading centre for the surrounding area and as in many villages the church was the "*heart*" of the village.

In 1302 the village is known as *Tulach* and the church is listed as one of those in the Diocese of Killaloe. The Church and its lands were seized in 1611 as the Reformation spread through Ireland and in 1693 it was described as being in "*ruinous condition*".

The Protestant Church, whose ruins can today be seen in the Tulla cemetery, was built in 1702 and abandoned in 1812.

Around 1680, a Father William Connellan was appointed parish priest in Tulla and he arrived during the "*Penal Law*" times, when priests had to keep a very low profile to avoid arrest and imprisonment. In 1704 all Catholic priests were required to register and provide two securities of fifty pounds each to be of good behaviour and Father Connellan was one of 45 priests to register at Ennis in July 1704.

The local situation deteriorated in 1712 when there was a outbreak of agrarian violence and as a result the Penal Laws were more rigidly enforced and Father Connellan was arrested for saying Mass illegally.

A Government report of 1731 stated the following about Tulla Parish "*In this parish there are two Mass Houses, one a very old one, and another a new one. There are two Popish priests, William and Andrew Connellan, there are, likewise, two Popish schoolmasters*".

We now enter the period when my great great grandfather and his family would have been participants in events and we can imagine how they might have been involved.

Daniel O'Connell won the Clare election in 1828 and he often spoke to huge gatherings in the area and I wonder whether my distant relative was one of the thousands who listened to the "*Great Liberator*".

The whole family would have attended the opening of the new Catholic Church in 1829. My great great grandparents were married in that Church in March of 1829 and they may have been one of the first marriages in the new church, the old Catholic Church was located on the hill where *St. Mochulla's* original monastery stood, close to where the cemetery is today. The Church which opened in 1829 is still in use.

In 1832, a new Court House was opened and this must also have been a big event in the village, the Court House is still in use and is a landmark in the village, my ancestors pub, which also still stands, although no longer used as a pub, was a single room "*pub*" with a tap room and with accommodation for the family at the rear and upstairs.

In 1837, *Samuel Lewis* published his *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* and he tells us about Tulla:

Tulla is a market and post town, and a parish, in the barony of Tulla containing 7114 inhabitants, of which 874 are in the town (including my ancient Irish family). the principal trade is derived from its position on a public thoroughfare, and is chiefly confined to the supply of the surrounding neighbourhood. The market is on Thursdays; fairs, chiefly for the sale of cattle, are held on May 13 and September 29.

A chief constabulary police force is stationed in the town; road sessions for the Barony are held here, as are petty sessions on alternate Thursdays, and a manorial court every month; there is a small brideswell for the district.

The parish comprises 15,304 statute acres; the system of agriculture is rapidly improving. On the plough land at Milltown is a lead mine which was formerly worked but is at present discontinued.

There are five private schools, in which are about 340 children and a dispensary.

The village continued to grow and **Slater's National and Commercial Directory of 1846** listed the following people in the parish and town of Tulla:

Gentry and Clergy

Brew, Rev. Richard, *Glebe*

Molony, John Patrick, *Craig*

Browne, Capt. Thomas, *Newgrove Cottage*

O'Callaghan, George Esq., *Maryfort*

Browne, Thomas Burke, *Newgrove Cottage*

O'Grady, Miss Catherine, *Tulla*

Ellerd, John Esq., *Tulla*

O'Grady, Miss Eliza, *Tulla*

Gore, Francis, *Tereda Castle*

O'Grady, Patrick, *Tulla*

Hastings, Rev. John, *Tulla*

O'Sheedy, Rev. Patrick, *Tulla*

MacNamara, James D., *Ayle*

MacRee, William Esq., *Bonavaree*

Molony, James, *Kiltanon*

Professional Persons

Church Education School, Edward Bury, Master
Fraser, James, Physician and Surgeon
National School, Peter Cunningham, Master
Nihill, John, Apothecary
Silver, John, Physician and Surgeon

Shopkeepers and Traders

Brazil, Daniel, *Blacksmith*
Callaghan, Edmund, *Baker*
Chadwick, Thomas, *Shopkeeper*
Connell, Michael, *linen draper*
Culliny, John, *Publican*
Daly, Carroll, *Cooper and Shopkeeper*
Daly, Michael, *Baker*
Doherty, James, *Baker*
Doherty, John, *Druggist*
Edwards, Joseph, *Hardware*
Egan, Patrick, *Carpenter*
Grady, Martin, *Carpenter*
Hahir, John, *Wheelwright*
Hahir, Michael, *Shopkeeper*
Halvey, Michael, *Publican*
Hogan, Thomas, *Carpenter*
Hynes, John, *Leather Seller*
Hynes, John, *Plasterer*
King, John, *Wheelwright*
Leo, John, *Shoemaker*
Lynch, Michael, *Publican*
McInerney, Jeremiah, *Tailor*
McInerney, Patrick, *Stonemason*
McMahon, Patrick, *Shopkeeper*
Murphy, Michael, *Grocer*
Murphy, William, *Linen Draper*
O'Brien, Michael, *Grocer & Spirit Dealer*
O'Connell, Timothy, *Publican*
O'Regan, William, *Druggist*
Pennyfather, Richard, *Nail Maker*
Pepper, Thomas, *Linen Draper*
Powell, Thomas, *Publican*
Quigney, Hannah, *Shopkeeper*
Ready, Patrick, *Hardware*
Reddan, Daniel, *Carpenter*
Reddan, John, *Carpenter*
Ryan, Roger, *Boot Maker*
Sullivan, Owen, *Cooper*
Sullivan, Roger, *Tailor*
Sweeney, James, *Boot Maker*
Tuohy, Patrick, *Dyer*
Watson, William, *Grocer*
White, Thomas, *Publican*

The years between 1845 and 1850 were horrible years for Tulla, the potato famine struck the district with devastating consequences, in 1845 the population

of Tulla parish was estimated at 9,000 and rising, by 1851 it had fallen to 6,700 and this despite the fact that children continued to be born.

It's difficult for us to understand the significance of a single food crop, but potato featured in almost every meal, it has been estimated that adults consumed thirteen pounds of potato each day, imagine what would happen to us, if thirteen pounds of our daily food was suddenly unavailable, with nothing to replace it.

My Tulla ancestors seem to have survived the famine better than many, there were six children in the family in 1840 and during the next ten years, two of those died and another four were born, but many other Tulla parish families fared far worse, the population of the townland of Kilmore falling from 204 to 76. Things improved as the potato crop returned to normal and the 1860's and 70's were generally better times.

The 1880's saw the formation of the Land League and much agitation for land tenure and tenants rights. The President of the Land League was Charles Stewart Parnell and East Clare was a stronghold of the movement.

The Munster News of 8 June 1881 reported on a meeting held in Tulla; Miss Anna Parnell (sister of the leader) attended at Tulla, County Clare on Sunday. The meeting was very large. There were about one hundred police and about one hundred soldiers drafted into the town, the police being about in the open streets and the militia stationed in the court house. In the course of her speech, Miss Parnell said it was evidently the intention of the Government to induce the people of Ireland to resist the law and she asked them to avoid falling into the trap laid by the enemy.

Hitherto the police had been in the habit of ingratiating themselves into the favour and confidence of the people ...henceforth they should treat the constabulary with distrust.

Tulla passed into the new century in relative peace, but with the coming of modern transportation markets and saleyards began to be centred on the larger towns and rail centres and Tulla's role as a trading centre diminished and today it is a small, busy town which is still the commercial centre for the surrounding district.

The town still supports a number of pubs and all the stores and services needed by the local community, doubtless it will continue to develop and will remain the "*ancient homeland*" for countless descendants of the many Tulla people who have scattered all over the globe.

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