

St. Clerans

THE TALE OF A MANOR HOUSE

By
William Henry

Foreword by
Merv Griffin

1999

By the same author:

THE SHIMMERING WASTE
THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ROBERT O'HARA BURKE
A ST. CLERANS HISTORICAL MINI SERIES

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Author: William Henry

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This book is the brain-child of Mr. Merv Griffin. Although an extremely busy man in the entertainment and business world, he still manages to make time for the cultural aspects of life. By restoring the historic manor house at St. Clerans, and having this book published on virtually every aspect of its history and folklore, Merv Griffin has made a very valuable contribution to the world of Irish history and folklore. Through this venture, he has shown that there is no need to destroy the past in order to progress with the future. The work carried out at St. Clerans, both physically and literally, should, and will be recognised as a step the right direction for future developments in archeological and historical sensitive areas. It is very reassuring to see men like Merv Griffin show such an interest in Ireland's heritage.

Thanks to the following people: The Viscountess Selby, Francis Chamberlain Esq., great great great nephew of Robert O'Hara Burke, and grandson of Mr. Neville Chamberlain, the former Prime Minister of Great Britain, Mary de Vere Chamberlain Taylor, Major John William Burke Cole J.P. D.L. All of these people contributed to this work by allowing me access to their personal family documents and photographs. To Mr. William Doran for supplying me with important information regarding the recent history of St. Clerans. Mr. James Casserly, for his advice and proof reading my work, and also making valuable suggestions. Mr. Derek McGlynn, Barna, artist. Mr. Marcus Doherty, artist. Mr. Francis O'Brien, Ms. Elizabeth O'Mahony, Ms. Clay Boden, Mr. Christy Burke, Mr. Tom Kelly, Mr. Peadar O'Dowd, Mrs. Monica Coughlan, Mr. Pat Rooney, Mr. Jim Higgins, Mr. Pat McGlynn, Mrs. Mary Jennings, Mrs. Linda Finnerty, Mrs. Marita Silke, Mr. Jarlath Slattery, Mr. Paul Gosling, Mr. Gerhard Steininger. Thanks also to: The staff of the James Hardiman Library, National University of Ireland, Galway. The National Library of Ireland, Dublin. Galway County Library, Island House. Library of the Galway Mayo Institute of Technology. Norman Morgan Library, Loughrea. The Royal Artillery Institution, Old Royal Military Academy, Woolwich, London. The Sandhurst Collection, The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. Laurence Pollinger Limited and the Estate of the late Alan Moorehead. National Geographic Society, USA. The Griffin Group.

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proof read all of the literature regarding St. Clerans, and made many valuable suggestions. *Táim an-bhuíoch duit as ucht do chabhair. Ní bheadh an leabhar críochnaithe fós murach thú* Jacqueline.

William Henry. 1999

Foreword

Some years ago, I was in Ireland to interview the remarkable John Huston for 'The Merv Griffin Show'. Both of us were Americans not many generations removed from the Emerald Isle. Both of us dreamed of a home in the rolling green hills of the west of Ireland. At that time, only one of us had achieved that dream.

During the eighteen years John Huston owned St. Clerans, the manor house rang with laughter from intimate dinners and hunt balls. Huston's daughter Anjelica - later to take her place among the Hollywood royalty with her own Oscar - remembers enchanted evenings with famous stage and screen stars mingling compatibly with local gentry.

When I discovered in 1997 that St. Clerans was in need of a new owner, I immediately knew (with the fabled 'second sight' of my pure Irish bloodline) that I would have my home in Ireland.

Restoring St. Clerans to its former splendor has been a joy and a personal mission. I have named each of the unique suites in the manor house for my maternal and paternal lineages (as well as the Hustons). I think they would approve.

I look forward to sharing my magical shamrock kingdom with you. I believe you, too, will fall under its infallible charm.

Merv Griffin. 1999

Introduction

This book contains the complete history of St. Clerans, Craughwell, County Galway. The evidence of habitation in this area, dates from the Irish Neolithic Period. These people were among the first to arrive in Ireland. Through this work, the mists, which obscured our vision of the past have been removed, and allows us to view the history of St. Clerans from the earliest times to the present day. The book informs us of the history and archaeology, and also the very important folklore attached to St. Clerans. Superstition has been associated with St. Clerans throughout its history. Ghosts, Headless Horsemen and of course the Banshee, which many people believed once inhabited this ancient land, all of these manifestations play a role in the following chapters.

The manor house at St. Clerans was designed by Sir Richard Morrison. The building which began in 1784, was completed in 1811, and faces east. This Neo-Classical style of architecture arrived in Ireland in the mid-eighteenth century. The popularity of this style was partly influenced by excavations of Greek temples, and the discovery of decorative frescoes at Herculaneum and Pompeii. Sir Richard Morrison was the son of John Morrison, the architect. By the time Richard was twelve years old, a new generation of architects, including his father had adopted the Neo-Classical designs. St. Clerans has been described as a villa-style house. This term was used during the eighteenth century to denote the secondary seat of a gentleman, however it was often his primary residence. A beautifully decorated fountain stands directly opposite the main doorway. The view from the front of St. Clerans is unimpeded, due to construction of the purpose built Ha-Ha. This structure is situated over 37 meters from the front of the house. It runs in a north south direction for just over 186 meters, and the portion directly in front of the house is arc shaped.

The history of a house should not be divorced from that of the people who built and lived within its wall. Thus the stories contained in the following pages, tells of the glory, hardship, mystery and romance which surrounds this great old house and its many occupants. Each chapter contains a tale of its own very unique era. Many of the people mentioned, have made their own special contribution to history, at home and also abroad. This book introduces the reader to: crusaders, soldiers, explorers, film directors and entrepreneurs. It contains something of interest for everyone: the serious historian, folklorist, movie enthusiast, practical joker and business minded. Family names associated with St. Clerans include: Burke, O'Hara, de Vere, Burke Cole, Huston, and now Griffin. There are many other family names included in the text. Some of the historical material contained in this book has never before been published, which adds to the importance of this work.

William Henry. 1999

CHAPTER I

Origins

According to Burke family tradition and records, the earliest evidence of habitation in the Isercleran area is a stone axe-head, which dates from the Irish Neolithic Period *circa* 4000 -2000 BC. It was also reported that a bronze harness was found at Isercleran, indicating activity in the area, *circa* 1000 BC. The Burke family manuscripts records the presence of a ringfort and chambers or a souterrain some distance east of the manor house. No surface trace of these monuments can now be found. This was the ancient Ringfort of Isercleran, it was a circular enclosure, surrounded by a bank of earth. On top of the earthen bank there would have been a palisade of rough cut timber, similar to a stockade. It was normally protected on the outside by a fosse and at least one bank or ditch. They were not forts in the military sense, but were the protected farmsteads of the early Irish farmers. The Ringfort of Isercleran was probably the habitation site of the local chieftain. The records indicate that the fort was surrounded by a *chevaux de frise*, a strong defensive feature, to impede any enemy who may attack the fort. Ringforts usually date from *circa* AD 400 to 1200. The dwellings in the ringfort were generally constructed of wattle and daub walls, with thatched roofs. The souterrain at Isercleran was constructed within the ringfort. This was an underground man made tunnel, they are usually lined on both sides with dry stone walls, and across the top with flat stone lentils. The entire structure was then covered with earth, thus making it almost impossible to detect. They were normally used for storing food, however they could act a place of refuge in times of danger. The presence of such monuments would indicate that very important people lived in this area from ancient times. There is a lot of folklore and superstition attached to ringforts, which are often referred to as fairyforts. The origin of this superstition dates from earliest times. According to legend, one of the great invasions of Ireland was by the Milesians, we now know these people as the Celts. The Celts successfully fought off every attack made on them by the Tuatha de Dannann, who were the rulers of Ireland at the time. Finally both sides made peace and divided Ireland between them, all the land below ground was given to the Tuatha de Dannann. According to some old folklore traditions, ringforts were the last refuge of the Tuatha de Dannann and that the souterrain was the entrance to their magical underworld. The Tuatha de Dannann then became the magical people we call the fairies or leprechauns.

The first stone building recorded at Isercleran was a small church, which was probably first built during the 8th or 9th century. Similar to most Early Christian Churches in Ireland, it was small, 17ft by 9ft, lit by one small window on the east gable, just over the altar. The west doorway was 2.5ft in width, and was no more than 6ft in height. It was built entirely of stone with a high pitched roof. The external length of the church was 21ft, and it was 15ft at its highest point. The church was called Kilkisheen, meaning the little Church of the Ford of the Hurdles. It stood on the north side of the Dunkellin River. The records also tell us that the church of Isercleran may have been destroyed by Vikings. Indeed the Vikings did attack the Galway area on a number of occasions. In AD 807, they attacked the monastery at Roscam, close to Galway City. Another attack in AD 927, must have struck great fear into the local population, it was probably during one of these attacks that the monks at Isercleran suffered. The remains of the little church can be found approximately 30 metres north of the manor house. There is also a hermitage associated with the estate and indeed one interpretation of the name Isercleran, is the Hermitage of the Ford. In some religions, particularly Christianity a number of hermit monks would join together, forming a hermitage. Some monasteries actually developed from such modest beginnings. The remains of the hermitage may be located about 60 metres, north of the manor house, just as one enters the wood. Also hidden away in the woods are the remains of a Holy Well. This natural spring well was in use up to this century. Although 'Wells' or 'Holy Wells' appear to be Christian monuments, much of the ritual and folklore attached to some of them, displays strong pre-Christian elements.

The Manor House of St. Clerans, was originally the home of a branch of the Burke family. To look at the history of St. Clerans, or Isercleran, as it was formerly known, one must also look at the history of the Burkes, a family who will forever be associated with St. Clerans. The Burke family can trace their origins back to an age of courage and chivalry. Over the centuries, the Burkes of St. Clerans have displayed this rich inheritance. From Godfrey, one of the leaders of the first military Crusade in AD 1097, to Lieutenant Colonel John James Burke Cole, O.B.E. who, during World War I, was awarded the Croix de Guerre and Military Cross.

All variations of the De Burgo, De Burgh, Burke and Bourke families can trace their descent from Pepin le Vieux, Duke of Anstrasia, *maire du palais*, who lived in AD 622 in the region we now call France. However, Charlemagne is the great symbolic figure who stands supreme above all other ancestors. Charlemagne or Charles the Great, as Head of the Holy Roman Empire, united the Franks. It was Charlemagne's great-grandson, Godfrey of Bouillon, who gave the family their Coat of Arms, a yellow shield with a red cross and a lion rampant on the Dexter quarter. Similar to most



1. Medieval Knight. Conjectural drawing of a de Burgo Knight.
(Drawing by Marcus Doherty. The Authors Collection)

early Coats of Arms it was simple and in heraldic terms, yellow represents the colour of the sun; symbolising leadership, intelligence and generosity. Most of the Burke families use the chained cat-a-mountain as their crest, which signifies liberty, vigilance and courage.

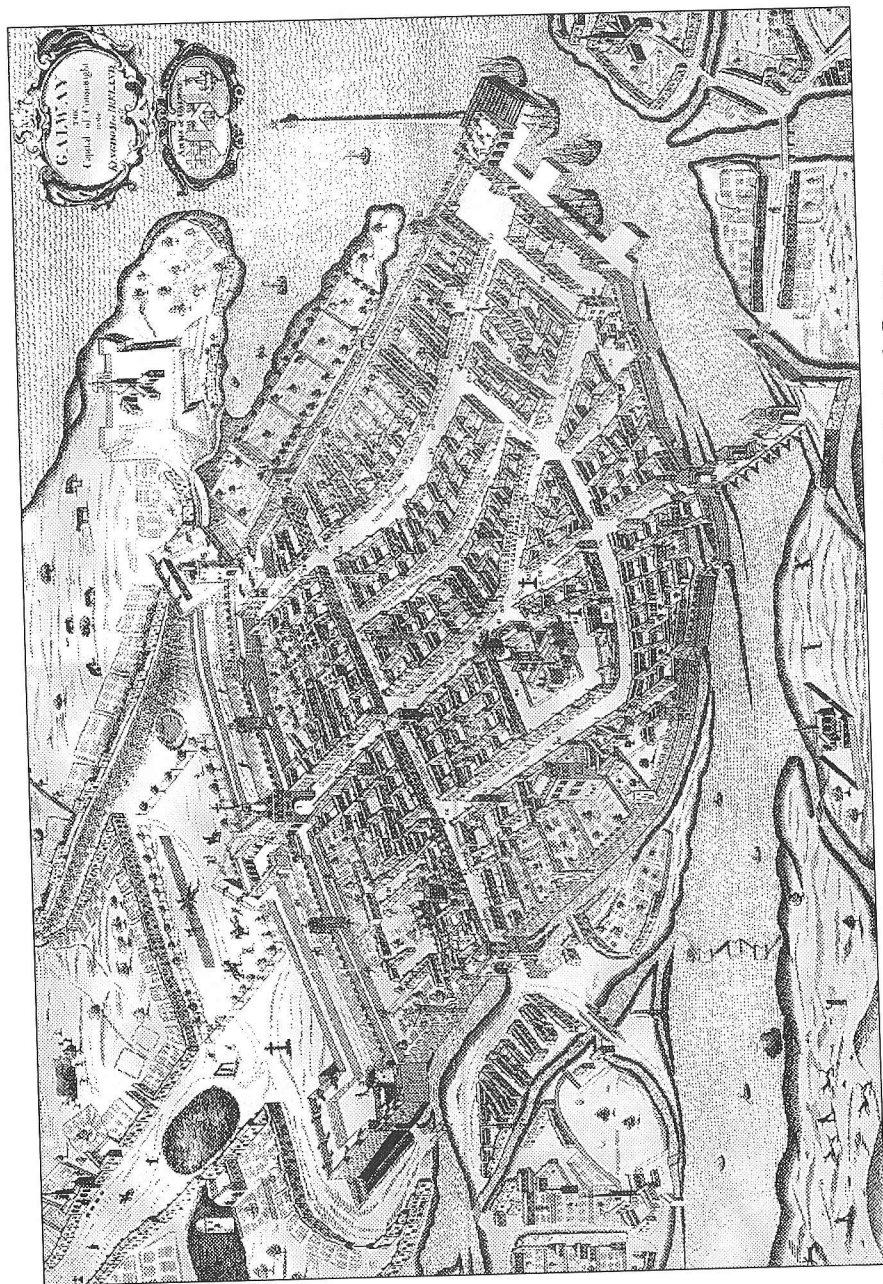
Godfrey's exploits in the crusade of 1097, demonstrates from an early date, a spirit of adventure and a desire to conquer new territories. There is an oral tradition in the Burke family that Godfrey carried a yellow shield during the crusade, and that the red cross was given to the de Burghs by the English King Richard I, the Lionhearted, after Godfrey had killed a Saracen chief in battle. King Richard dipped his fingers in the blood of the dead chief and drew a cross on Godfrey's shield saying:- '...These be thine arms forever'. . The name Richard has thus been perpetuated among the de Burgh families. However, there is some confusion surrounding legend, as King Richard I was not born until September 8th 1157, and he was one of the leaders of the third crusade in 1189. The most ancient armorial bearings of the corporate town of Galway, which were used from *circa* 1370 to *circa* 1485, incorporated the Arms of de Burgo. The family name is derived from Tourbourg, in France, where Godfrey's great-grandson, John was a general in the King's Army and was in charge of the King's towns. Tour means tower or castle and bourg meaning village or town. The successful conquest of England by William the Conqueror after the Battle of Hastings in AD 1066, was achieved with the help of Robert de Burgh. Both men are depicted on the Bayeaux Tapestry.

Isercleran

Richard FitzGilbert, more commonly known to the Irish as Strongbow, led the Norman invasion of Ireland in AD 1169-71. He was accompanied by William Fitz-Andelm de Burgo, a descendant of Robert, who had fought at Hastings. With the arrival of Strongbow and de Burgo, the Norman conquest of Ireland took on a new meaning. Their initial objective was to secure the province of Leinster, where they had first landed, but ultimately their ambitions encompassed the entire Island. In AD 1179, King Henry II of England granted the entire province of Connacht to William de Burgo and his heirs. Following this grant, there were a number of unsuccessful attempts by the Normans to conquer the area. However, it was not until *circa* 1235 AD, that the Irish fort at Galway was finally captured by William's son, Richard de Burgo. It was then that the foundations of the medieval city of Galway were laid down. Over the following centuries Galway prospered, mainly due to trade with mainland Europe.

The Burke family can trace their ancestry at St. Clerans, from 1308, when a castle was built there by Sir Ulick de Burgh. It was then known as Isercleran Castle. In 1316, the Battle of Athenry was fought just a few miles from St. Clerans. The de Burgos allied with another great Norman family in Connacht, the de Berminghams, severely defeated the Irish armies. The Irish were under the command of Feidhlim O' Connor, King of Connacht, and Tadhg O Ceallaigh, King of Ui Mhaine. After the battle, the two Irish Kings were decapitated. A fourteenth century Common Seal of the Town of Athenry, depicts the severed heads of the two defeated Irish Kings. It is believed that Irish casualties were so high, that the town walls of Athenry, were financed by the armour captured from them.

In AD 1333, the Brown Earl of Ulster, William de Burgh, was murdered. His baby daughter, Elizabeth, was taken to England. Later Elizabeth married Lionel, Duke of Clarence, the third son of King Edward III. Lionel and Elizabeth's great grandsons became Kings of England, Edward IV and Richard III, and it was the latter who granted Galway a royal charter, thus giving it city status in 1484. Eventually in Ireland many of the de Burgos became immersed in the native Irish traditions and customs, and a branch of the family changed their name to Burke and '...became more Irish than the Irish themselves.' Some sources suggest that one of the reasons for this, was the marriage of Elizabeth to Lionel. The Burkes became leaders of the native Irish armies just as they had led Norman armies in the earlier centuries. The



2. The Pictorial Map of Galway City 1651. The city founded by the de Burgos.



3. Burke Tower House
(The Authors Collection)

Battle of Knockdoe, fought a few miles from Galway City in August 1504, is an example of this. The battle was fought between the Earl of Kildare, Gerald FitzGerald, serving the King, and his opponent was Ulick Burke, who commanded the Gaelic Clansmen. To some historians the defeat of Ulick Burke and the Irish at Knockdoe signaled the death of Gaelic Ireland.

The old Tower House at Isercleran which may be seen today was completed by the end of the 16th century, and it was surrounded by a bawn wall. Several out-houses and mills were also constructed. There were other buildings situated on both sides of the Dunkellin River, these consisted of houses for both servants and local inhabitants. They were possibly built by Henry Burke. One source states that Henry Burke wore a shirt dyed with saffron, and a short jacket with wide sleeves. Over all he wore a cloak of fur and carried a short broad sword. However, the *Queen's Register of Castles* at that time, records the owner as Myler McHenry Burke. The Burkes of Isercleran had by this time integrated with their native Irish neighbours. They spoke the Gaelic language and were indistinguishable from the Irish clansmen in their manner and dress. The family played the harp, and on occasions a travelling harper or piper would visit Isercleran, not just to play for his illustrious host, but also to provide the family with news of events from other parts of the country.

In AD 1602, Jonick McHubert Burke of Isercleran, was killed in a rebellion. A year later, another member of the Burke family, Walter Oge, was hanged for participating in the same rebellion. In 1606, the Crown granted Isercleran to John Kinge of Dublin. However in March 1619, the lands were restored to Moyler McMoyler Burke by King James I. During the Cromwellian Confiscation's in the 1650s, many Irish were driven from their homes in Leinster, Ulster and Munster. They were forced into Connaught, at sword point, thus creating the term, 'Hell or Connaught'. It was a period when many great Irish families lost their land and homes to the Cromwellians. Isercleran suffered the same fate. According to family tradition, the Cromwellian officer who was ordered to take possession of the castle, had his head forcibly removed by the Burkes. Subsequently, a headless trooper on horse-back was seen galloping away from the old bridge along the Crush Warragha road, which unfortunately was later destroyed. It is said that even today the ghostly phantom can be seen at midnight, galloping past the old house. Perhaps in search of his missing head, or indeed the man who removed it? Ironically, a suit of Cromwellian armour was excavated from an area near the front gate of St. Clerans during the last century.

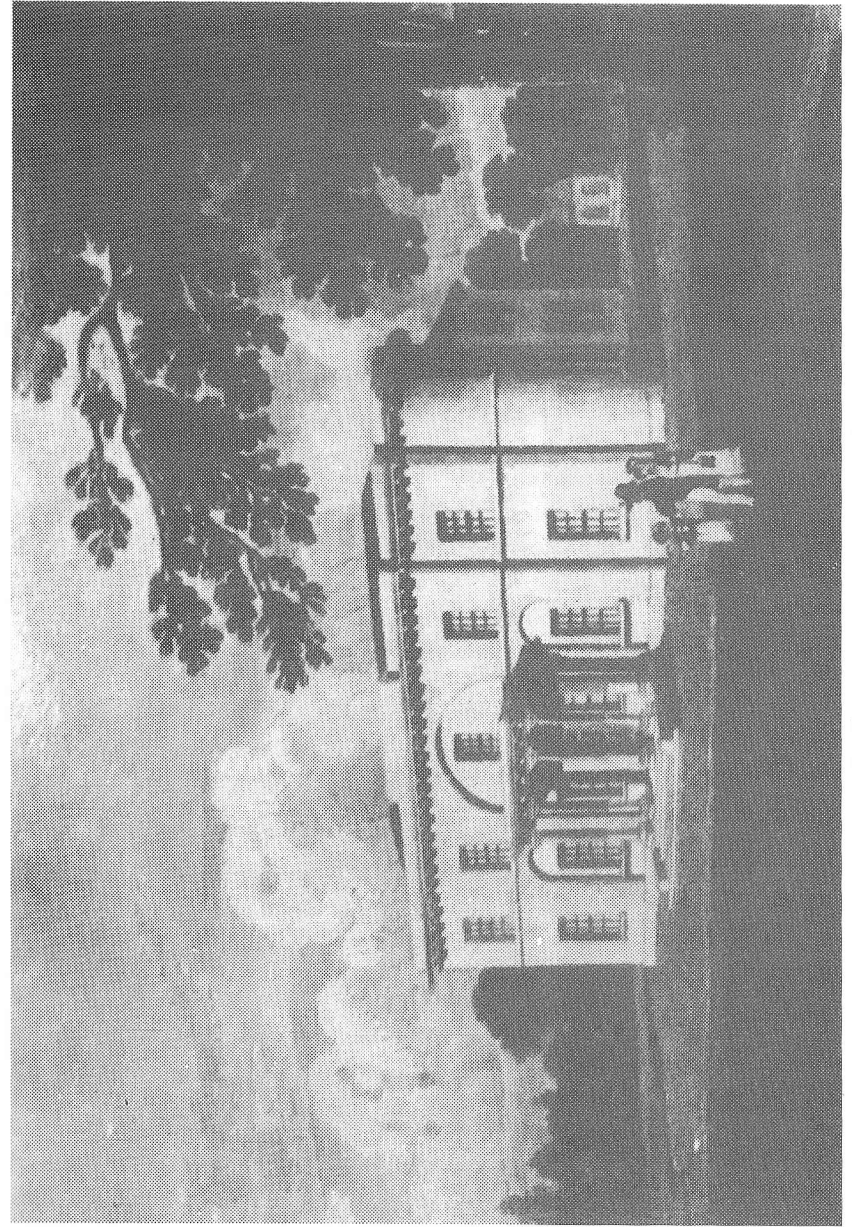
St. Clerans

The end of the Jacobite / Williamite War, which terminated with the Battle of Aughrim, County Galway in 1691, heralded at least one hundred of the blackest years in Ireland's history. The old bridge situated upstream from the manor house at St. Clerans is known as Sarsfield's Bridge, because Patrick Sarsfield the Jacobite Commander, is reputed to have crossed it during his retreat from Aughrim. In 1695, Acts were introduced restricting the rights of Catholics in education, arms-bearing, religion and ownership of property, these Acts were known as the Penal Laws. By 1704, Isercleran was again under Burke ownership. However, the Burkes of Isercleran suffered greatly under these laws. The family was reduced to poverty, such as they had never known. One of the frightening aspects of the Penal Laws, was the right of a son to dispossess his own father having changed his religious persuasion. James Burke and his son John, of Isercleran, were known to attend Mass in secret places such as the Seefin souterrain. This souterrain still exists and is situated about two miles south of St. Clerans.

John Burke married Jane Burke of Cloghanover. Their eldest son James, married Penelope Hardiman, *circa* 1755, she was the daughter of Robert Hardiman of Loughrea. By 1758, James had changed his religion and became a Protestant. The marriage produced two children, a son and daughter. Their son, John, married Elizabeth Armstrong in 1785. When James Burke died *circa* 1790, his son John became master of Isercleran. John Burke was then wealthier than his family had been for generations. John and Elizabeth had five children, James being the eldest, followed by Robert, John, Penelope and Elizabeth. It was John who changed the name of the family estate to St. Clerans. The building of the present house at St. Clerans began in 1784. During its construction, most of the early castle (from 1308) was demolished and some of the stones from it were reincorporated in the building of the stables and out-houses. When his grandfather, Robert Hardiman died, *circa* 1795, John Burke inherited quite a large fortune in property which included a sugar plantation in Jamaica. Under the terms of the will, he had to take the name Hardiman, hence the name Hardiman Burke. Unfortunately John had a very extravagant lifestyle and despite his wealth, his love of gambling led him to mortgage his property in Jamaica in 1803. When he died in 1808, he left debts of £22,000. John left all of his property, except St. Clerans, to his second son Robert. His eldest son James Hardiman Burke inherited St.



4. Anne O'Hara Burke
(circa 1820, Courtesy, the Viscountess Selby)



5. St. Clerans Manor House circa 1817
(The Viscountess Selby)

Clerans. Because of his inheritance, Robert Burke may have been a much wealthier man than his brother James. However he also inherited his fathers extravagance and love of gambling.

During his military career, James Hardiman Burke served with the 7th Royal Fusiliers and was involved in the capture of the islands of Martinique in 1809 and Guadeloupe in 1810, during the Napoleonic War. Although he was not a wealthy man, due to the extravagance of his father and brother, James still managed to finance major renovations at St. Clerans. He had the old mills and houses demolished, in their place he planted trees. He was High Sheriff of County Galway in 1811. In the same year, James completed the work on the manor house at St. Clerans, which was designed by Sir Richard Morrison. In 1817, James married Anne Louisa O'Hara, she was the daughter of Robert and Frances O'Hara, of Raheen, County Galway. Anne was the third daughter of twelve children. On the occasion of their wedding, Anne's dowry was £4,000. They were presented with two Connemara marble tables by Sir Richard Martin, a close friend of the Burkes of St. Clerans. He is better known as 'Humanity Martin', a name given to him by King George IV, because of his kindness to animals. It became popularized as 'Humanity Dick'. He initiated the introduction of laws for the protection of animals. He was also known as 'Trigger Martin', because of his reputation with a duelling pistol.

James and Anne Burke had seven children: John Hardiman, Robert O'Hara, James Thomas, Fanny Maria, Elizabeth, Hester Albinia and Anne Celestine Burke. Hester seems to be the sister to whom Robert the explorer, was closest. He wrote many of his Australian letters to her, addressing them by his pet name for her, Hessie. By all accounts Anne O Hara Burke was a very beautiful woman, full of tenderness and sympathy. It was probably for this reason, that a condemned prisoner, named Anthony Daly, had requested to see her. It seems that Daly was the leader of a band of men, whom, depending on ones point of view, could be called outlaws or patriots. There are a number of variations to the story, as to why Daly faced the hangman, one of which was that Daly had shot at one of the Burkes of St. Clerans. In 1820, he was captured, and brought to trial, he was sentenced to death by hanging. Daly maintained his innocence to the end, insisting that he, being a keen marksman, would not have missed his target. Anne's husband James had been involved in the man's conviction and Daly told Anne that he bore no rancour against her husband, that he could not have acted otherwise. He then asked her to look after his little daughter, Mymie. The little girl was afterwards cared for by the Burke family. The ladies of St. Clerans are reputed to have secretly watched the execution, from two bedroom windows on the south side of the house. It took place on a small hill called Seefin, about two miles from the house. After the execution, the south bedroom

windows were blocked up.

James Hardiman Burke was elected Mayor of Galway in 1820 and served until 1822. During the 1820s, James owned a town house and property at Dominick Street in Galway City. By the 1820s, Galway City was suffering severely from the effects of high unemployment and poverty. There had been food shortages in 1816-17, but in 1822 the potato crop failed and caused a minor famine. Hordes of people flocked into Galway City in search of food, but Galway already had a problem feeding its own population. During the summer of that year fever was widespread in the City. Grants were made available to combat the epidemic and by November it seems to have passed. In the 1826 elections, the resident population was without a strong candidate to contest the constituency. They invited James, who was then deputy mayor, to stand, but he declined. He was elected Mayor of Galway again in 1829 when Catholic Emancipation was granted in Ireland.

Anne Burke must have been a woman of great kindness and courage, who was well aware of the sufferings of the ordinary people. During a fever or plague epidemic in the Claddagh Village, Galway, Anne went among the unfortunate people and nursed the sick. Her kindness was rewarded by these people, as afterwards she was always made welcome in their homes. Anne travelled about the county in a phaeton drawn by a pair of grey-coloured Connemara ponies. Anne died in Dublin, in 1844, a year before the outbreak of the Great Famine, she was the last Mrs. Burke of St. Clerans. Her brother-law, Robert Burke, died in 1848, and after his death, almost everything he owned was sold to pay his debts.

The Great Famine which devastated Ireland between the years 1845-1850 was one of the most tragic events in Irish history. In its aftermath, it left perhaps a million and a half dead; the true figure will never be known. At least another million people had fled to other countries. One need only look at the drop in population between 1841 and 1871 to see the results of the devastation.

Population of Ireland	
1841	8,175,000
1871	4,412,000

The famine began in June 1845, when frightening reports began to come from Europe that a new blight was noticed in Belgium. It was not known for certain where the blight had come from, but it probably originated in America and was perhaps carried to Europe in fertilizer. There had been reports of blight in America in 1843, and by 1845 it had spread into Europe. In countries like France, the Netherlands, Germany and Switzerland thousands of people died as a result of widespread crop failures. However,

people living on mainland Europe were not as dependent on the potato as much as their neighbours in Ireland. Also in 1846 a severe drought on the continent helped destroy the blight, thus avoiding the catastrophe which struck Ireland. During the devastation of the Great Famine, James Hardiman Burke tried to ease the sufferings of the unfortunate people. In order to create some employment he had the river, which ran through his land at St. Clerans, straightened and added the little waterfalls and ponds, which can still be seen today. His daughter Fanny set up a soup kitchen in the old castle, to try and feed the starving masses.

Duelling

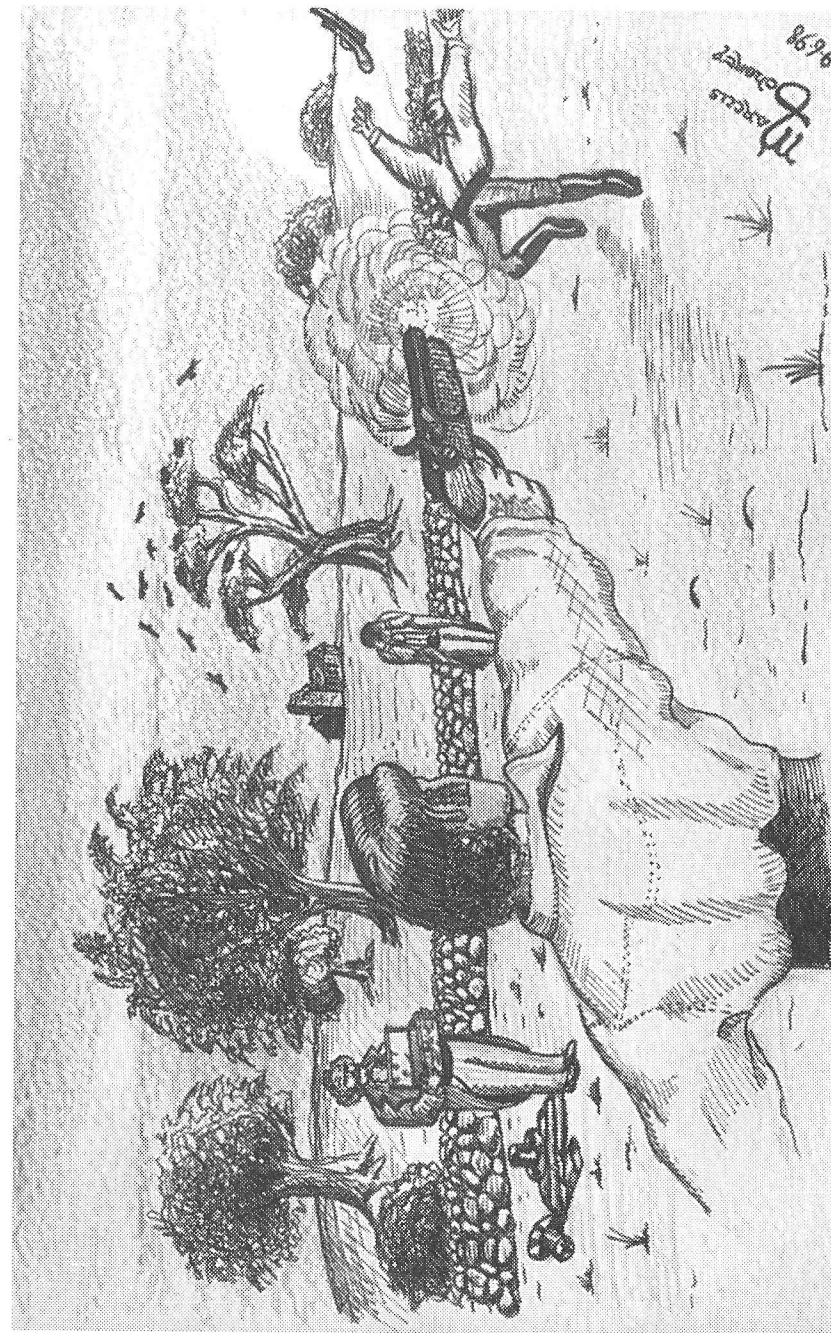
In Ireland, from the late 17th century to about the mid 19th century duelling was a highly respected art, Galway and Tipperary being two major counties where gentlemen became supreme exponents. It was a period in our history when many disputes between the landed gentry were settled by single combat. The Burkes of St. Clerans were not shy when it came to an affair of honour (duelling). Sir Jonah Barrington a High Court Judge of the Admiralty in Ireland, recording information on duelling in 1827, states that:- 'No young fellow could finish his education till he had exchanged shots with some of his acquaintances'. He also maintained that the first two questions asked regarding a young man's respectability and qualifications, when he presented himself as a suitor to a young lady, were:- 'What family is he of' and 'Did he ever blaze' meaning had he ever fought a duel. In the 1890s, Sir William Gregory, of Coole recalled his childhood sojourns with his grandfather, also William Gregory, the Under Secretary for Ireland. While they were living at the official residence in the Phoenix Park, Dublin, during the 1820s, he witnessed his grandfather intervene, and stop a duel between two Galway gentlemen just outside the gates. Young William vividly recalled the morning whilst his grandfather was in the process of shaving, the first shots were exchanged. Upon hearing the gunfire, his grandfather ran down the stairs, rushed out the front door and jumped onto one of the orderly's horses. He galloped the horse to the gatehouse and just as he arrived another shot rang out, however he was in time to stop any bloodshed. William later revealed that the duel was fought between Sir Valentine Blake and Robert Burke of St. Clerans, both Galway men.

Family tradition also mentions that, during the late 18th century, two relatives of the Burkes of St. Clerans, also had reputations for facing danger. They were Edmund Burke and Ulick Burke. Edmund Burke once came face to face with the notorious George Robert Fitzgerald, better known as 'Fighting Fitzgerald', a nickname he had earned through his malevolence. The two men met on a roadway, and it seems that Fitzgerald was in the habit of keeping his carriage in the centre of the road. Any traveller he encountered would have to give way. Burke would not surrender the road to him, instead he lashed out with his whip, and drove his horses wildly forward at Fitzgerald. Knowing that Burke would not be intimidated, Fitzgerald's courage failed him, and he pulled to one side, allowing Burke to pass. Ulick Burke of Strongfort, near Craughwell, a duellist of note, was a

rough man whose attire endorsed his temperament. Once while on a visit to Dublin, he was accompanied by a servant, they both stayed at one of the fashionable hotels in the city. There were also a number of young English officers staying at the same hotel. During an evening meal one of the officers, obviously not impressed by Burke's attire, instructed the waiter to take his watch over to Burke, and ask him to read the time of day. Ulick took the watch and fixed it upon the point of his sword and said to his servant:- 'Take this watch around and ask which of the gentlemen owns the watch.' No one dared to claim it, so Ulick told his servant to keep the watch. Nonetheless when it comes to combat, one needs to have continued luck in order to survive, where as, the enemy has only to be lucky once. Ulick's luck ran out on Christmas Day 1822. He had been in a dispute over a hunting incident with a Mr. Blake. The combatants met just outside Loughrea, County Galway, but the authorities foiled the encounter at this venue. They then proceeded towards Portumna, while en-route, shots were exchanged between the two men, with the result that Ulick Burke was mortally wounded.

Sir Ulick Burke of Glinsk, County Galway, fought a duel on horseback. This was not unusual, as most of the earliest pistol duels were fought in this manner. A lawyer named Amby Bodkin was counsel for the plaintiff in a case against Burke. Sir Ulick and his attorney, challenged Bodkin and his attorney to a duel. The challenges were accepted. All four men arrived on horseback, and almost in battle formation they blazed away. Large crowds turned out to watch the rather bloodthirsty spectacle. Even Sir Ulick's six year old son was brought along to watch his father fight. Amby Bodkin was wounded in the fracas.

Sir Richard Martin, a good friend of the Burkes of St. Clerans, was one of the most famous duelists of the period and was an expert with both pistol and sword. He was reputed to have fought over one hundred duels during his life-time. One famous duel which Richard Martin fought, involved a continental duelist. This particular gentleman often wore a suit of light but strong chain mail beneath his clothes for protection, which was totally against the rules of honour. On the morning of the conflict, he fitted his body armour and set out to face Martin. However, one of Richard Martin's servants discovered this before the fight, rushing to Martin's side he said to him, in Gaelic so that the Continental would not understand what he was saying:- '*Buial e mar mharbhuigheann fear Conaqmara an mhuc*', meaning, 'Hit him where the Connemara man kills the Pig.' Martin took his servants' advice, and shot his opponent in the head killing him instantly. A similar story is attributed to Richard (Dick) Fitz-Gerald in *The Knights of Glin*. However, in this version of the story the opponents were using swords. Both men were notable duelists and shared the same Christian names. Did



6. Duelling an Affair of Honour
(Drawing by Marcus Doherty. The Authors Collection)

someone later confuse the two names? Or is it possible that both stories are true? Richard Martin's reputation with the dueling pistol defused many difficult situations. On one such occasion at a dinner party in his home an argument broke out. He turned to a servant who was standing beside him and said, 'Melt the Lead John.' His remark had the desired effect and cooled the situation. Sir Jonah Barrington, said in praise of Richard Martin, that he possessed:- 'urbanity towards women, benevolence towards men and humanity towards brute creation.'

It has been claimed that Robert O'Hara Burke, the great Australian explorer, also fought a duel. This took place during 1840s, while he was an officer in the Imperial Austrian Army. The duel was fought with swords, and Burke seems to have overcome his opponent, but received a sabre-cut across his face. A hostess in one of the Melbourne clubs wrote of him:-

When we first knew Mr. Burke we called him Brian Boru; and there was such a daring, reckless look about him, which was enhanced by a great scar across his face, caused by a sabre-cut in a duel when he was in the Austrian Service. (Moorhead, A. 1963, p.30).

Because of this description, it would seem that the story of the duel was true, although there is no sign of a scar in a later daguerreotype taken of him, but by this time he had grown a beard.

Ghost Story

James Hardiman Burke died in the White Room at St. Clerans, in January 1854. Although his reputation was slightly tarnished following the Anthony Daly affair, he still commanded great respect from those who had known him. After his death, a local newspaper carried the following tribute to him:-

DEATH OF JAMES HARDIMAN BURKE, ESQ., OF SAINT CLERANS, J.P., D.L.

With feelings of poignant regret, we undertake, in this day's obituary, the sorrowful duty of recording the death of this lamented gentleman, after a long and protracted illness, during which he was attended by the Surgeon General, Sir Philip Crampton, Bart., and Francis Lynch, M.D., Loughrea. Allied with the most aristocratic families of this county, whom his death has placed in mourning, his character added a new lustre to the *prestige* of his high social position, and conferred a moral dignity more priceless and enduring than the mere glitter of rank and lineage can bestow. "The worthless," says the Roman historian - "are obscured by their ancestral honours, but the good illustrate them." The lamented deceased exemplified the truth of this golden sentence, and his virtues were worthy of the distinguished race from which he sprung.

Holding the commission of the peace for half a century, he was the model of what a magistrate should be, even in the most critical times - sagacious and discriminating, yet considerate and humane - firm in upholding the law, of which he was the sworn conservator, yet mitigating its rigour, when possible, by a lenient and merciful construction, he showed that the magistrate could be just without severity, and humane without favouritism. In these times in which we live, when the rancorous spirit of sectarianism has again been set loose amongst us, exciting feelings that are continually interrupting the course of justice, the loss of such a magistrate must be regarded as a public calamity.

Mr. James Hardiman Burke, for many years in succession, discharged the duties of Mayor of Galway, under the old Corporate *regime*, and thus, the last link between the modern municipal annals of our town, and its ancient historic associations has been severed by his death. As a Grand Juror, the talents of Mr. Burke were particularly distinguished; for, in this capacity, he exhibited a tact and aptitude for business, a perseverance in details, and an acumen in the investigation of facts that were very remarkable, and elicited the highest encomiums from those who had the best opportunities of appreciating his abilities in this respect. As to his merits as a landlord, when we say that his tenantry deplore their bereavement, as a numerous family, the death of an affectionate parent, whose solicitude was

unceasingly exercised to provide for their comforts, and anticipate all their requirements - we believe it is the highest and truest eulogium we can bestow.

But it was in the inner scenes of domestic life - that charmed circle, where man moved without that mask which, too often, veils the lineaments from public scrutiny, and appears to be just what he is, that the lamented deceased was more particularly deserving of esteem and admiration. In that sphere, he was ever found the generous friend, whose heart was ever ready to sympathize with, and whose hand was prompt, to alleviate distress. That fine old genial Irish hospitality, too, now fast disappearing from our land, but which still sheds its parting radiance round the hearths of the descendants of our old Irish Chiftains *ásicā*, was ever exercised with generous profusion beneath his roof-tree, and the unprotected and destitute experienced from his charity, liberal assistance and succour in their privations. In panning this brief record of the merits of this deeply-lamented gentleman, we are necessarily omitting many admirable *traits* in his character - but it is not within the narrow limits of an obituary, but in the hearts and memories of his surviving friends, that his merits will be best delineated, and his many virtues best and most indelibly recorded. (*Galway Vindicator*, 11th January 1854, p.2).

According to the family folklore, something very strange happened on the night James Burke died. A number of people at St. Clerans, including his daughter, Anne Celestine, are said to have heard the Banshee crying. The strange crying seemed to come from the direction of the river. The Banshee is one of Ireland's best known supernatural manifestations, who haunts the ancient Irish families. She heralds the approach of death, usually that of an important person, and an eerie wailing cry can be heard, instilling great fear and foreboding. The Banshee usually appears during the night hours, close to the ancestral home of the person she has come to cry for. There are two descriptions of her, one is of a beautiful young lady, dressed in medieval costume, the other is of a very old woman, bent and decrepit. Both types of Banshee have long hair that blows in the wind, and their eyes are fiery red. Shortly before he died, James Hardiman Burke and one of his stewards, had a terrifying experience while they were walking along an old road, close to St. Clerans. They both claimed that they saw the Banshee, but she moved quickly away from them. James drew his gun and fired a shot at her, immediately she turned towards them, and they beheld a chilling spectacle without a face, which riveted them to the spot. It was later thought that this incident was an omen, preceding the death of Burke.

Some people said that James Hardiman Burke's great love for St. Clerans, called him even from beyond the grave. It was whispered that after his death, he could still be seen walking the grounds. One story tells of three men poaching in the grounds of St. Clerans. After trapping a number of rabbits, they proceeded to climb the wall near the little woods. They were confronted by a man in a dress suit, who stared silently at them. The three poachers recognised him immediately and realising the identity of the



7. The Banshee
(Drawing by Derek McGlynn. The Authors Collection)

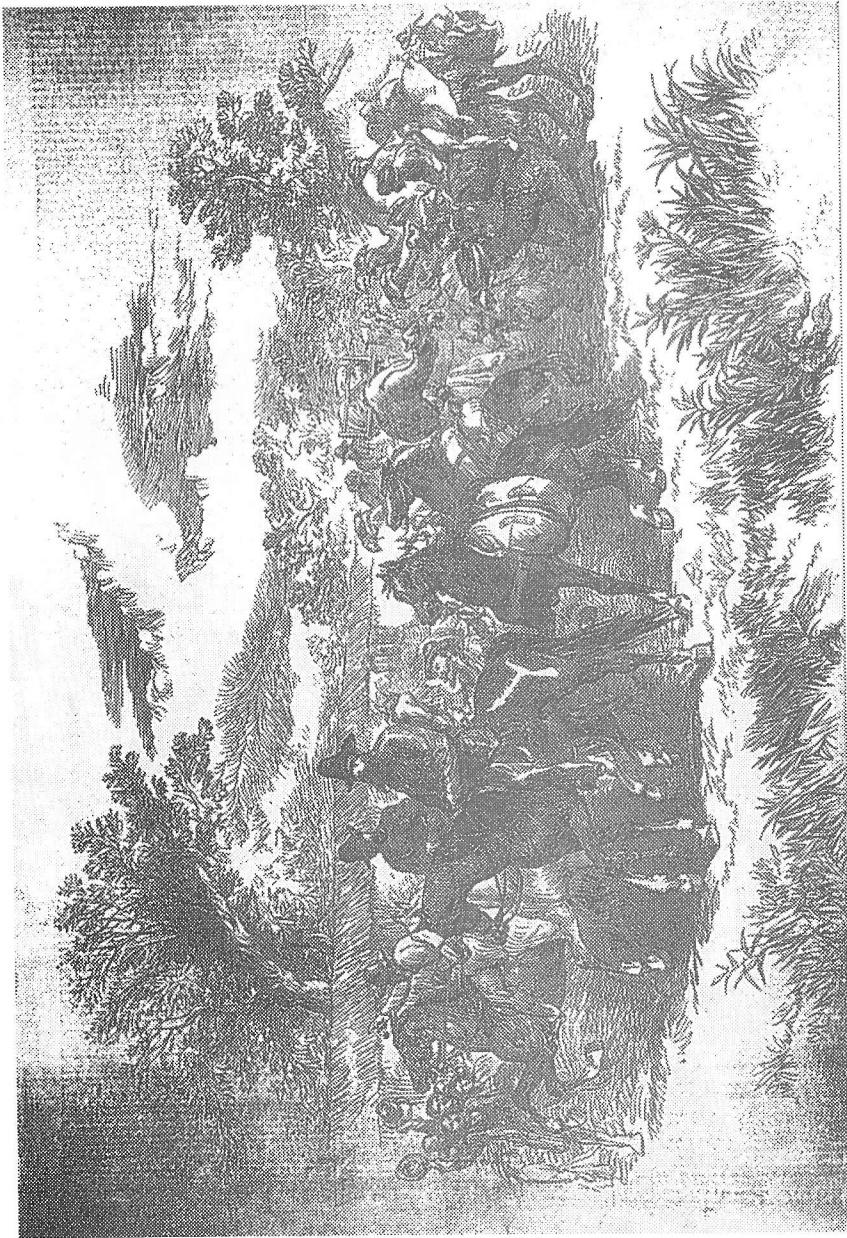
apparition, and knowing him to be long since deceased, they became very frightened and ran away. Apparently they could not escape his deathly gaze, it seems to have had the desired effect, as they never poached in the grounds of St. Clerans again. A similar story was told by some men who had gone to steal hay from the estate. Old Mr. Burke again made his appearance and frightened them away. Many years later, Ann Celestine was again to hear the crying of the Banshee, while she lived at St. Clerans with her children. The sound of the crying was so vivid that she instinctively checked on her children, only to find that they were all sleeping peacefully. She was quite puzzled by this strange incident. The next day she received a telegram to say that her uncle, John Burke, had died in Dublin.

The Great Explorer

James and Anne Burke's second son, Robert, was born in February 1821. Robert was baptised in St. Nicholas' Collegiate Church, Galway City, on the 30th July 1822. He entered the Woolwich Military Academy in 1835. His military record at Woolwich reads:- 'Robert O Burke, appointed 12 May 1835 aged 14 years 3 months. Discharged 9th December 1836.' In 1840, he joined the Imperial Austrian Army. He was promoted to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant in Prince Regent's 7th Hussar Regiment on August 1st 1842. The 7th Hussars were deployed in northern Italy, where Burke spent most of his service. As a soldier he was described as a good officer, popular and well liked within the regiment. He paid meticulous attention to the maintenance of his weapons and equipment and was excellent in his drill. The dressage of the men under his command was second to none. It was said he was of a good-natured but careless disposition; and that he had many natural talents. He was fluent in a number of languages, German, French, Italian and Hungarian. Burke had no engineering or scientific skills. He was not fond of alcohol, but tended to gamble, and probably because of this he was a habitual debtor.

In April 1847 he was promoted to the rank of 1st Lieutenant. In the same year he ran into health problems and was sent to the Recoaro spa in northern Italy, known for its treatment of respiratory illnesses. Burke was again granted leave to go to the famous spa of Grafenberg, now in the Czech Republic. He left Grafenberg and travelled to Aachen, a renowned German spa, without permission. Some suggest that Burke left to escape his creditors. In due course preliminary court proceedings against him were opened. The accusations were:- 'Extended leave without permission and Debts.' In January 1848, the Regiment's command investigated the accusations. Burke admitted his debts, and the inquiry took into account the great expenses he had amassed while trying to restore his health. In a letter written in December 1847, he had promised to pay back his debts when he obtained his assets. The court was confident that Burke would settle his debts when he promised to do so. Because he had contracted his debts in a light-minded manner, rather than deceitfully, it was decided to abolish proceedings. The charge concerning extended leave without permission was also dropped when Burke's outstanding behavior as a soldier was taken into account. With regard to his illness, one source indicates constipation.

After the proceedings finished, Burke resigned and returned to Ireland in



8. Robert O'Hara Burke Leads the Victorian Exploring Expedition August 21st 1860
(Courtesy, the Illustrated London News)

1848 amidst the devastation of the famine. On November 6th of that same year Robert joined the Irish Constabulary as a cadet, where he served for just over three years. This was a highly organized, disciplined police force and served as a model for colonial police forces throughout the British empire. On completion of his cadet training at the Phoenix Park Depot, Dublin, Burke was promoted to the rank of 3rd Class Sub-Inspector. He was allocated to County Kildare where he remained for a period of ten months. He was then transferred to the Reserve at the Phoenix Park Depot where he spent two years and two months. Burke was a very active man, who always seemed to be looking for a challenge and life in the Phoenix Park must have seemed very dull to him. He was not prepared to spend the rest of his life in the Constabulary, and resigned on 20th November 1852. Later that month, Burke read in a newspaper about the discovery of gold in Australia, the following year he emigrated to Australia. According to family tradition, Burke taught his sister, Anne Celestine, to dance an Irish Jig in the hall at St. Clerans, before leaving for Australia. In order to secure a position on his arrival there, Robert enlisted the support and influence of some very important people here in Ireland.

Robert O'Hara Burke secured a post in the Victoria police force, as an inspector, and was stationed at Carlsruhe, Victoria. After reading a letter from home containing the sad news of the death of his brother James in the Crimean War, he was discovered in tears. He said that he had just learned the particulars of his brother's fate, and it was not his dying that moved him in this manner, but the glory of his death. Determined not to let the opportunity pass, to prove himself a professional soldier, he applied for leave of absence to return to Europe and fight in the war, but by the time he obtained his request and had sailed into Liverpool in June 1856, the war was over. Robert sailed almost immediately back to Australia, this time never to return. When Burke arrived in Victoria he resumed his career in the police force at Beechworth. His military background obviously helped him in his career. In 1857, Burke proved himself a most successful officer when disturbances broke out during the gold rush on the Buckland River. In this incident he was in command of a small detachment of police. After marching fifty miles non-stop, he placed himself at the head of his men, took control of the situation and order was restored. Burke worked hard to advance his position within the police, and by 1858, he was appointed superintendent of police for the Castlemaine District. His success as a superintendent is apparent as he was held in high esteem by the men under his command and by the people he served. As a citizen of Beechworth he was universally liked and respected. A petition was signed by the residents of Beechworth to try and stop his transfer to Castlemaine, Victoria.

The Constitution Newspaper reported on the 19th of November 1858, that

the Government officials of the Ovens District, presented Mr. Burke, with a brace of revolvers, as a mark of their esteem and regard. These were based on the principal of Grants Double Trigger, and were handsomely finished weapons, calibrated to prove extremely serviceable should their owner unfortunately need to use them. One was a holster pistol, and the other was intended for wearing on the person. Both bore suitable inscriptions on silver plates covering the butt ends. It must have been very pleasing for Burke when leaving for Castlemaine, to carry with him such a testimonial from the gentlemen with whom he has been closely associated. The inscription on the pistol read:- 'Presented to Captain Burke by the Residents of Beechworth, Victoria.'

He was appointed leader of the Victorian Exploring Expedition of 1860. It was the first expedition to cross the Australian continent from south to north, leaving Melbourne on 20th August 1860. By November 1860, the expedition had reached Cooper's Creek, Central Australia. Before setting out on his epic crossing of the continent, Burke set up a base camp at Cooper's Creek. He left a number of men and supplies at the camp, which was known as camp LXV, under the command of William Brahe. They were instructed to wait three months or as long as supplies lasted. Burke and three companions, William Wills, John King and Charles Gray, set out for the Gulf of Carpentaria on December 16th 1860. They arrived there on February 11th 1861, but the journey had taken longer than expected. Meanwhile back at the base camp, after waiting nearly four months, Brahe became very concerned about Burke's absence, he feared that Burke had perished in the wilderness. Brahe decided they could wait no longer, and that he and his party would leave the depot on Sunday morning April 21st, and return to Melbourne. At about 10.30 a.m. on that fateful day, Brahe led his little party out of camp LXV. Not taking any chances and still hoping that Burke's party would return to Cooper's Creek, Brahe arranged for some provisions to be left behind, e.g. meat, oatmeal, flour, sugar, rice, and a note in a bottle explaining their position. Placing the provisions and bottle in a cache, they then buried the cache in the earth close to a coolibah tree. He marked the spot by carving on the tree what became the most famous notation in the history of exploration in Australia:-

D I G
3 FT. N.W.
APR. 21 1861

Just over nine hours later, at about 7.30 that evening, after an extremely hazardous journey, on which Gray had died. Burke, Wills and King staggered into the camp after force marching the last 30 miles that day. It was a staggering achievement for men in such weakened condition. Their

supreme effort was in vain, they were greeted only by the silence of the camp. One cannot imagine the sheer disappointment and the utter despair that the three men must have felt, upon reaching the deserted camp, only to find the blackened embers of the extinguished fires and the almost fresh camel dung strewn about the ground. At first they thought that Brahe may have been forced to move camp because they had been constantly plagued by rats. They may have encountered some hostility from the natives, but after reading the notation on the tree, this ray of hope was dashed. Wills and King dug up the cache, King smashed the bottle and handed the note to Burke, which he read aloud by the light of the moon:-

Depot, Cooper's Creek, 21 April 1861,

The depot party of the V.E.E. leaves this camp today to return to the Darling. I intend to go S.E. from Camp LX, to get into our old track near Bulloo. Two of my companions and myself are quite well; the third-Patton-has been unable to walk for the last eighteen days, as his leg has been severely hurt when thrown by one of the horses. No person has been up here from the Darling.

We have six camels and twelve horses in good working condition.

William Brahe. (V.E.E. MS13071)

The note must have been the most devastating blow of all, after experiencing the hardships of such a gruelling journey, they had missed their salvation by just nine hours. Brahe's note was also misleading, saying that his companions were quite well and that the animals were all in good working condition. This was one of the main reasons that Burke decided not to try and follow Brahe's party, but instead follow shorter route. However he did ask the others if they wished to pursue Brahe's party that night, but they were utterly exhausted and it was physically impossible for them to do so. If they had decided to keep going the outcome may well have been different, because Brahe had camped just fourteen miles away. However the next day Brahe's party moved southeast towards Bulloo at a steady pace. The debate that night must have left a lot of unanswered questions. Over two months of bitter hardship still lay ahead of the gallant explorers, before death finally overtook Burke and Wills. King managed to survive with the help of Aborigines. On September 15th 1861, a rescue expedition led by Alfred Howitt, reached Cooper's Creek, and brought King back to Melbourne.

Robert O'Hara Burke of St. Clerans is now honoured among the great men of the nineteenth century and his name is forever engraved in Australian history. Shortly after his death, a Galway newspaper referred to him as the greatest of all the Australian explorers, they were quoting a claim made during the course of a lecture on Queensland, Australia, given in October 1862 by Mr. Henry Jordan, representative of the Queensland government:-

These accounts, given us by Stuart, of the central portions of Australia, are fully

confirmed by the late much lamented Robert O'Hara Burke, the greatest of Australian explorers. To this man belongs the praise of having first actually crossed the great Island Continent. No one can read the narrative of the toils and achievements, the suffering and death, of this brave man, without being deeply affected by it, and without a feeling of something like indignation at the series of miserable bungles which cost him his life. Still there was something grand and glorious in his end. (Galway Vindicator 4th October 1862).

What memories St. Clerans must hold of Robert O'Hara Burke? To look out from the doorway of the old manor house now, is to have an overwhelming sense of the long road he took from Galway to his lonely death at Cooper's Creek. News of Robert O'Hara Burke's death reached Galway, in January 1862, and was reported in the local newspaper:-

The Australian mails have brought us intelligence of the death of Mr. O'Hara Burke under circumstances of melancholy interest. Deeply as we regret his demise, we must glory in his great and daring adventure. He was just the man to succeed in such an enterprise. One of the noblest specimens of humanity, capable of enduring fatigue to any amount, he was gentle, generous, and kind-hearted as a child. In this city he was well known; he spent his early youth in Dominick Street. The child, it is said, is father to the man, many a time, when looking at O'Hara Burke in his boyish days, we predicted he would one day write his name in the history of his country. Well, if he has not literally accomplished our prediction, he has at least added his name to the long roll of distinguished Irishmen. He has opened up a vast continent, almost as large as Europe, to the enterprise and industry of the human race. He has added his name to the great discoverers of the unknown parts of our globe; and in a thousand years hence, the name of O'Hara Burke will be as familiar with the people of Australia as that of Columbus is with the inhabitants of America at the present day. (Galway Vindicator, 18th January 1862).

The bodies of Burke and Wills were brought back to Melbourne for burial. While the remains of the two explorers were lying in state, from the 5th to 20th January 1863, over 100,000 thousand people came to pay their respects. Over 40,000 people lined the streets of Melbourne to see the funeral cortege, which took place on the 21st of January 1863. Dignitaries from all over Australia attended. It could well be compared to a state funeral. The Governor, the Houses of Parliament, the Mayors, and Councillors of provincial towns, the army, navy and the police, all were well represented. Consular representatives of nine nations also attended. The coffins were placed on a huge carriage, fifteen feet long and twenty-two feet high with an open canopy on top, it was drawn by six black horses with full honours. The



9. Monument to Burke and Wills
(Melbourne, the Authors Collection)

carriage was a replica of the one which, eleven years earlier, bore the remains of Dublin-born Sir Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, the famous British soldier and Statesman, to St. Paul's Cathedral, London. The procession was led by the Castlemaine Light Dragoons, followed by an army band playing the 'Dead March in Saul'. The streets were lined with soldiers, their firearms held in reverse order. Business premises along the route were draped in mourning colours and flags hung at half-mast from every Public Building. Among the pallbearers was John King. Many people wept openly as the funeral cortege moved slowly towards Melbourne General Cemetery, the explorer's final resting place.

Although Robert O'Hara Burke was laid to rest thousands of miles from his native home at St. Clerans, he is indeed greatly revered in his adopted country. A vast region of land between Cooper's Creek and the Gulf of Carpentaria was named 'Burke's Land'. Among the many monuments erected to him throughout Australia is the huge bronze statue of Burke and Wills which stands on a granite pedestal, situated on the Collins Street side of City Square, Melbourne. In 1864, the Melbourne artist, Charles Summers, was commissioned to design and execute this memorial. It was the first and largest bronze casting ever undertaken in Australia. Summers belonged to the neo-classical school, and modeled Burke on Michaelangelo's Moses. Robert O'Hara Burke was posthumously awarded its Founder's Medal by the Royal Geographical Society. Over the years many articles and books have been written about this epic event, which is also celebrated in film and documentaries. The 1985 film *Burke and Wills*, premiered in London before the Prince and Princess of Wales, Charles and the late Lady Diana Spencer. It was the first Royal Primer of an Australian film. By a curious coincidence Emily Lawless the distinguished Irish writer was a great friend of Lady Sarah Spencer. They shared the same house, Hazelhatch, in Surrey, England. Lady Sarah Spencer was a sister of the 5th Earl Spencer, who was twice Viceroy of Ireland. She was also the great great grandaunt of Lady Diana Spencer. Emily Lawless was a first cousin once removed of Robert O'Hara Burke. They shared a common ancestor, Penelope Hardiman Burke, of St. Clerans. Robert O'Hara Burke has gained a treasured place in the history of Australia and achieved world fame because of the events which occurred at Cooper's Creek.