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British Connections

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- **21 Mar 2026** Aiofe O’Conner – Time and Place: Temporal and Geographical Boundaries of influence



Remember

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President's Message



Craig L. Foster, AG®

Remembrance Day and Remembering

Oh how do you do, young Willy McBride
Do you mind if I sit here down by your graveside
And rest for a while 'neath the warm summer sun
I've been walking all day, and I'm nearly done
I see by your gravestone you were only nineteen
When you joined the great fallen in 1916
I hope you died well
And I hope you died clean
Or young Willy McBride, was is it slow and obscene

Did they beat the drums slowly?
Did they play the fife lowly?
Did they sound the death march as they lowered you down?
Did the band play the Last Post and chorus?
Did the pipes play the Flowers of the Forest?

These are the first stanza and chorus of "The Green Fields of France." Written in 1976 by Scottish folk singer-songwriter Eric Bogle, this song is considered to be one of the most

powerful anti-war songs ever written. Bogle wrote this song after visiting military cemeteries in Belgium and France.

Decades ago, I lived for a couple of years in northern France. While there, I visited the Luxembourg American Cemetery and Memorial located a short distance out of Luxembourg City. The sight of row upon row of white crosses is sobering and humbling. I remember walking among the rows reading the names of young men who gave all for their country and for generations yet unborn.

These graves were from World War II and admittedly, that war had more of a personal impact on me than World War I. My father fought and was wounded in that war. Nevertheless, I, like most Americans, cannot comprehend the horror and brutal bloodiness of war as we have not personally lived in a war-torn landscape like our British cousins and those in continental Europe.

Only a few days ago, I looked at photos and read stories about Remembrance Day in Britain, which yearly outshines the United States' Veterans Day in terms of ceremony and the number of those who actually take the time to remember. I personally remember the number of people I met years ago while living in France who told what it was like to live through not one but two world wars as they witnessed fighting, suffering, and dying all around them. I also can't forget walking a portion of the Maginot Line looking at bombed-out installations and climbing into bomb-made craters slowly being reclaimed by forest. I can understand the level of poignancy and participation on Remembrance Day for those that bore the brunt of war.

This issue of *British Connections* discusses military records and has excellent suggestions for research. It will be extremely helpful for most of us, in one way or another, who have a connection to the military past. Our fathers, grandfathers, or great-grandfathers fought in these and other wars. Their stories and sacrifices are worth remembering.

"The Green Fields of France" ends with these haunting questions:

Now young Willy McBride I can't help but wonder why
Do those who lie here know why did they die?
Did they believe when they answered the cause?
Did they really believe that this war would end wars?
For the sorrow, the suffering, the glory, the shame
The killing and dying were all done in vain
For young Willy McBride it all happened again
And again, and again, and again, and again

Did they beat the drums slowly?

Did they play the fife lowly?

Did they sound the death march as they lowered you down?

Did the band play the Last Post and chorus?

Did the pipes play the Flowers of the Forest?

Did the pipes play the Flowers of the Forest?

Let's ensure their fighting and dying wasn't in vain by telling the stories and sacrifices of our ancestors who fought for their country and their loved ones. Let's do the genealogical and historical research and write their stories so our children and grandchildren, and their children, can always remember.

Craig

From the Education Director

Megan Heyl, M.Ed.

Five Brothers, Five Branches



Image from The Montreal Star, 2 February 1918, p. 2.

One day, while researching my paternal line, I received an email from a sender called "O:PM"—a name that was not familiar to me. A bit of searching revealed that the email was from Operation Picture Me, but the sender did not include their name. The email explained that O:PM had noticed that I had several CROLL family members on Find a Grave, and attached was a

newspaper clipping that I had never seen before. The email went on to explain that since my maiden name was CROLL, and I had made several CROLL memorials on Find a Grave, I could be related to the men in the article. The sender expressed their hope that this would help with my research.

Immediately, I dragged the image from the email to my desktop and enlarged it to the full size of my screen, and I stared with amazement at the military photos of my grandfather and four of his brothers! I'd hit the genealogy jackpot!

Arranged in the image from left to right and in order of birth:

- Pte. W.D. (Walter David) Croll US Army – 1890
- Gunner W. Croll (William) British Army – 1893
- Sgt. G.W. Croll (George Wood) Canadian Expeditionary Force – 1895
- Sapper S. Croll (Stanley) Royal Engineers, British Expeditionary Force – 1897
- Pte. H. Croll (Hector) Royal Highlanders Corps, Canadian Expeditionary Force – 1899

My grandfather is Walter David, but there is more to be learned in the words written under the photos!

- It listed Mrs. A. Parkes, and her address of 220 Bishop Street (Montreal). She was the first born in the family (Elspet is her name), and she was born in 1888.
- It told of Walter, my grandfather, being in the US Army.
- It told of William being in the 44th Battery, Indian Expeditionary Force, Mesopotamia.
- It told of George being in the C.E.F. (Canadian Expeditionary Force).
- It told of Stanley being in the Royal Engineers, British Expeditionary Force.
- It told of Hector being in the 73rd Battalion, R.H.C. (Royal Highlanders Corps), C.E.F.

Then I took another look at their photos and saw how much all these boys look alike. I noticed their ages in 1918: Walter 28, William 25, George 23, Stanley 21, and Hector 19. I asked myself, why was each boy in a different branch of the service?

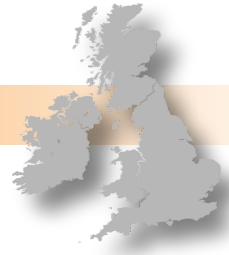
At this point, of course, I had a notepad of paper filled with questions that all required research to answer. Were any of these men killed in action? Did they return to Wales or stay in Canada? Or did they come to the USA? Did they have families? Careers?

Operation Picture Me is an organization that locates and shares photos of Canada's fallen heroes, so their names and faces will be remembered forever. Photos are uploaded and placed on the Canadian Virtual War Memorial. You can find Operation Picture Me and the Canadian Virtual War Memorial on Facebook. To date, Operation Picture Me has added 125,282 photos to Find a Grave and manages 39,640 memorials. Many organizations support the work of these volunteers, including the Veterans Affairs Canada (<https://www.veterans.gc.ca>). Be sure to check them out. Who knew? I sure didn't.

Take it from me: don't discard any "out of the ordinary" genealogy-related emails, messages, or any correspondence from people you don't know. I'm not saying don't use caution—you should always be careful—but a message from a genealogical volunteer angel like O:PM could feel heaven sent. Our ancestors don't want to be forgotten, and it is our duty to keep their memories alive for future generations.

Uncover your *English* roots

Paul Milner, FUGA, M.Div.



Thiepval Memorial to the Missing of the Somme is the largest of the memorials to the missing, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, which was built between 1928 and 1932. It currently lists 72,311 casualties, but that number has decreased as identifiable remains are still being found each year.

Lest We Forget: Remembering Britain's Great War Soldiers

NOBODY TOLD ME!

In the 1993 book by Sebastian Faulks, *Birdsong*—a novel of an illicit love affair and fighting during the Great War—there is a scene in which Elizabeth, the soldier's granddaughter, is driving through the French countryside to the town of Albert. This scene is in the book, but not in the movie with the same name. Elizabeth is like us, seeking information on her grandfather.

Elizabeth sees a peculiar, ugly arch sitting among the crops and woods. At first, she takes it to be a beet factory, then sees that it is too big; it is made of brick or stone and is monumental, as if the Arc de Triomphe had been dropped into a meadow.

Intrigued, she turns off the road and walks to the arch. In front of it is a lawn—lush, cropped, and formal in the English style, with a gravel path between its trimmed edges. She is impressed with the size of the arches because they are massive.

Elizabeth walks up the stone steps leading into the archway. A man in a blue jacket is sweeping in the large space enclosed by the pillars. She comes into the archway and sees that they are written on; she goes closer, peering at the stone. The stone is covered with names. Every surface of every pillar has been carved with British names.

She says to the man,

“Who are these, these . . . ?” She gestured with her hand.

“These?” The man . . . sounded surprised. “The lost.”

“Men who died in this battle?”

“No. The lost, the ones they did not find. The others are in the cemeteries.”

“These are just the . . . the unfound?”

She looked at the vault above her head, and then around in panic at the endless writing, as though the surface of the sky had been papered in footnotes.

When she could speak again, she said, “From the whole war?”

The man shook his head. “Just these fields.” He gestured with his arm.

Elizabeth goes through the arch onto the steps on the other side of the monument. She is in a formal garden with some rows of white headstones, each with a tended plant or flower at its base. She runs her hands through her hair and says aloud to herself, “Nobody told me . . . My God, nobody told me.”

CORPORAL ROBERT FINNEGAN

One name carved on Pier 4 Face D of that monument is the name of Corporal Robert Finnegan [should be Finnigan, which is used in his brother John’s records], who served in the 11th Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. He died 1 July 1916, on the first Day of the Battle of the Somme. He is my mother’s uncle whom she never met.

The preparations started seven days earlier with a bombardment by over a thousand guns all along the approximately 15-mile-long front. The guns were trying to cut the barbed wire in front of the German trenches. They were trying to destroy the trenches themselves, and then trying to destroy the German guns that were firing back.

It was Saturday, 1 July 1916, at 7:15 a.m., when in broad daylight, the 9th Inniskilling Fusiliers crept out of the British trench under the protection of the ongoing barrage and moved forward to within 100 yards of the German trenches. At 7:30 a.m., the barrage moved on, and the soldiers were quickly on their feet; at least at this part of the front, they were quickly through the cut wire and into the German trenches. The men were on their way towards the Crucifix and the Schwaben Redoubt near the town of Thiepval.

At 8 a.m., the 11th Inniskilling Fusiliers came out of the British trenches. However, by then the Germans knew the attack was underway and they were ready. The attack to the right of the battalion had been stopped so the extra guns turned to cut down the battalion. Many died that sunny morning—in fact, over two-thirds of the battalion were listed as dead, wounded, or missing.

1 July 1916, the first day of the battle of the Somme, saw the loss of 57,270 men as casualties—dead, wounded, prisoners, and missing. (That is close to the size of the modern British Army.) Over 20,000 were dead.

Corporal Robert Finnegan was one of those who died that day.

Did he die in that initial rush while leading his men over the top? Did he die quickly cut down in his prime? Did he die slowly of wounds? Did he die later in the day in an assault on some German trench? I don’t know—and probably never will.

I do know that he is one of the unfound. Either then, or at the end of the war, there was no identifiable body to bury in one of the many military cemeteries.

His name is recorded on the Thiepval Monument, the largest of the Great War monuments to the missing. The Thiepval

Monument, designed by Edwin Lutyens, was completed in 1932. It is designed to be fractionally smaller than the Arc de Triomphe. It bears the names of 72,311 soldiers for whom no identifiable remains were located. Robert Finnegan is one of those names.

No wonder Elizabeth in my opening story was overwhelmed. “My God, nobody told me.” Nobody in the family told my mother. The events of the war were not talked about.

PRIVATE JOHN FINNIGAN

That same day, Private John Finnigan, Robert’s older brother, also of the 11th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, was wounded: seriously enough that he was shipped back to England. He was shipped out onboard *HMHS Asturias*, a former Royal Mail Steam Packet Company ocean liner built in Ireland in 1908 and converted in 1914 to a hospital ship. John died 10 July onboard ship, while returning home. He is buried in Elswick cemetery in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Northumberland.

The Western Front in France and Belgium was not the only battle front on which the British fought.

BERTIE WALTER CROWHURST – MESOPOTAMIA

Bertie Walter Crowhurst is the son of Walter and Sarah Ann Crowhurst of Rose Cottage, Upper Halling, Kent. He is my father’s great uncle, after whom my father James Bertie Walter Milner was named. He was a Private in the 2nd Battalion, Dorset Regiment.

Private Crowhurst was serving in Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq. Many would say that history has not taught us anything.

The British Army, led by General Charles Townshend, was retreating down the Tigris River, south of Baghdad, followed by the Turkish Army

of about 12,000 soldiers. On 3 December 1915, the British and Indian Army moved into Kut al Amara and the siege began. The British Army tried in vain to get up the flooding Tigris to relieve the town but met continued resistance from the Turkish Army strategically placed along the river. The siege ended with an unconditional surrender on 29 April 1916, primarily due to lack of food. The British garrison consisted of 13,309 soldiers, of which 3,248 were non-combatants. During the siege, 3,776 were killed or wounded; some died from their wounds, others from disease.

Private Bertie Walter Crowhurst was seriously wounded with a gunshot to the head on 10 January 1916, dying on 18 March 1916. He could not be evacuated because of the siege. He is buried in the Kut War Cemetery.

Of the 2,592 British rank and file taken prisoner at Kut, more than 1,700 (nearly 70 percent) died in captivity. Of the about 9,300 Indian rank and file (and followers), about 2,500 died after long-distance marches in captivity.

REMEMBERING THE WAR

At the end of World War I, Britain and her dominions had over 1 million dead. Armistice was called at 11 a.m. on 11 November 1918.

The futility of the war could be symbolized by the fact that the first British and Empire casualty of the war was Private John Henry Parr, a reconnaissance cyclist, killed on 21 August 1914—and the last, killed two minutes before the Armistice—George Lawrence Price, 28th Northwest Battalion, 2nd Canadian Brigade, were buried in the same cemetery near Mons on the Western Front (Hanson, 222).

By 1919, there was a desire and need to remember those who had given their lives in the Great War. This need led to the idea of what became the Cenotaph, meaning “empty tomb” in London. The Cenotaph was designed in minutes on the back of an advertisement by Edwin

Lutyens, who later designed the Thiepval Monument, and in 1919, it was constructed as a temporary structure. It was so flimsy that putting a step ladder against it to drape with flags was thought so dangerous that it might be knocked over. However, it was so popular that the permanent version of the Cenotaph, built to the same design, that we now see in London, was in place by November of 1920.

It was also during 1920 that the idea of a tomb for the Unknown Warrior was suggested by Rev. David Railton to the Dean of Westminster Cathedral, who then took the idea to the King, Prime Minister David Lloyd George and government officials.

So, on 7 November 1920, four field ambulances, each containing an officer and two other ranks equipped with shovels and sacks, arrived at cemeteries in the four main British battle areas on the Western Front—the Aisne, the Somme, Arras, and Ypres. In typical British army fashion, the significance of their days' work had not been explained to them.

They were to choose a grave marked as "Unknown British Soldier" and dig up the remains. They must examine the remains to make sure the soldier was British, but also to make sure that there was nothing that could possibly identify who the individual was. If there was anything that might help in identification, the body was to be buried again.

The body from each battlefield was taken to General HQ, twenty miles west of Arras. The delivery was coordinated so that the four ambulances would not see each other. Each body was covered with a Union Jack and laid out in the chapel. At midnight, Brigadier General Wyatt, the General Officer commanding British troops in France and Flanders, and director of the Army Graves Registration Service (now known as the Commonwealth War Grave

Commission), came into the chapel and selected a body at random.

With high ceremony and under guard, the body of the Unknown Warrior was transported across France, the English Channel, and southern England, so that in the morning on 11 November 1920, the body was moved from Victoria Station to the Cenotaph. As Big Ben struck 11 o'clock on the 11th day of the 11th month, "The Great Silence" began.

"The Great Silence" lasts two minutes—the first minute to commemorate those who fought and came home, and the second to remember those who did not. This was a tradition imported from South Africa, starting in the early days of 1918 (Hanson, 300).

On this occasion, everybody and every activity across England and most of the Commonwealth stopped. Everything stopped. For two minutes.

Following the silence, the body of the Unknown Warrior continued in ceremony to its final resting place in Westminster Abbey. A service was held in Westminster Abbey, and after the congregation left the Abbey, the grave was prepared. The doors were then opened again, allowing the mourners to file in two ranks.

The plan was that the Cenotaph and the tomb of the Unknown Warrior would be closed to the public almost immediately, allowing only three days for the mourners to visit the grave, but the response of the people in London and the rest of the country forced a change of heart.

Prime Minister David Lloyd George, six days later, wrote to Lutyens to say that "The Cenotaph . . . is a token of our mourning as a nation, the Grave of the Unknown Warrior is the token of our mourning as individuals" (Hanson, 305).

The very anonymity of the body buried in Westminster Abbey allowed every person, if only in the privacy of their own thoughts, to assume a personal link with the Unknown Warrior. Many

During and following the Great War, many former soldiers and their families expressed their beliefs in poetry and many other art forms. One of the most familiar is “The Soldier,” by Rupert Brooke, a soldier who died from illness during his service.

The Soldier

by Rupert Brooke

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England
given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

thousands of grieving people—perhaps even all of them—convinced themselves that their missing loved one could really be buried in the Abbey.

By Monday, 15 November, it is estimated that nearly a million and half pilgrims had filed past the Cenotaph and at least half a million paid their respects at the tomb of the Unknown Warrior.

The mourners were filing past the grave at 5-6,000 per hour whenever the abbey was open. Even after the coffin was placed into the grave and the grave sealed, they still came. They came because their husband, son, father, or friend was buried in that grave in the Abbey.

The Times reported on 12 November 1920:

The Unknown Warrior whose body was to be buried may have been born to high position or to low; he may have been a sailor, a soldier or an airman; an

Englishman, a Scotsman, a Welshman, an Irishman, a man of the Dominions, a Sikh, a Gurkha. No-one knows. But he was one who gave his life for the people of the British Empire.

At the Cenotaph, 100,000 wreaths were laid in the first three days; even 9 months after Armistice Day, 300–400 wreaths a week were being placed at the Cenotaph.

After the war, the people of Britain struggled to know what to do both about the survivors and to remember those who died.

For Armistice Day ceremonies in 1921, the now “familiar red poppy” was promoted as a way of employing disabled veterans and raising funds for their support. They were always provided, and still are, as a freewill offering. The silk poppy had first been promoted in France in 1919, and in America in 1920, before being promoted in Great Britain in 1921 (Clouting, 189–195).

In 1939, with the outbreak of World War II, the name of the ceremony changed from Armistice Day to Remembrance Day, recognizing all servicemen and women from the Commonwealth who served. Today's celebrations are still observed on Remembrance Sunday, the second Sunday in November. In places, 11 November is still recognized as Armistice Day.

TRACING THOSE WHO SERVED IN THE GREAT WAR

Most records for Great War servicemen and women are deposited at The National Archives at Kew. Search the research guides, at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk to learn how to seek your ancestors, and learn which of the records have been digitized and can be searched online, versus those which you will need to go to Kew to personally search.

Many records have been digitized and indexed and are available at www.cwgc.org; www.ancestry.com; www.fold3.com and www.findmypast.com. Survival of the records is an

issue, but you should be able to tell your ancestor's story.

Are you going to remember your ancestors who were warriors? Or are you going to be like Elizabeth in the opening story and say, "My God, nobody told me."

Don't forget what your warrior did for Country or for the Empire.

LEST WE FORGET

Served but did not survive

In sadness, for the Great War, it is much easier to research the servicemen and women who died, rather than those who served and survived. Personally, my family has no tradition of military service, yet every family would have had someone who served. In addition to the those mentioned earlier, these men on my family tree served, and are here remembered.

Lance Corporal Walter William Finnigan of the 8th Bn. West Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales Own). Died of wounds 26 July 1918. He is buried in St. Sever Cemetery Extension in Rouen, France, and is survived by his wife Annie and three children of 34 Buckingham St., Newcastle-on-Tyne—Brother of Robert; John; and Joseph Edward.

Private John Croudace of the 12/13th Northumberland Fusiliers, Missing and presumed dead 21 March 1918, commemorated on Pozieres Memorial, France—Son of John and Jane Croudace of 14 Bentinck St., Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Private Francis Donnelly of the 1st/7th Bn. Lancashire Fusiliers. Died 25 March 1918, commemorated on Arras Memorial—Son of Francis and Ellen Donnelly of 46 Maple St., Newcastle-on-Tyne.

Sergeant Herbert Lewis Hayes, of the Royal Garrison Artillery, 178th Siege Battery. Died 7 July 1917 and is buried at Lijssenthoek Military

Cemetery in Belgium—Son of Lewis and Alice Hayes, of Bar Cottage, Malpas, near Truro, Cornwall. On 14 Jun 1917 he was awarded the Military Medal for taking prisoners.

Private Albert William Alfred Milner of the 8th Bn. Queen's Own, the Royal West Kent Regiment, who died 26 September 1915, and is remembered on the Loos Memorial, Panel 95 to 97.

Gunner Herbert E. Milner, of "D" Battery. 250th Brigade, Royal Field Artillery, who died 22 August 1918 and is buried at Villers-Bretonneux Military Cemetery, France.

Private Robert Telford of the 1st Bn. Northumberland Fusiliers was killed in action on 4 March 1915 and is remembered on the Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial, panel 8, in Belgium.

Served and survived

Private Joseph Edward Finnigan of the Lancashire Fusiliers received a gunshot wound to the left foot, but survived and was discharged 26 February 1919, living at 13 Bell St., Newcastle-on-Tyne—brother of Robert, John, and Walter William

Lt. Col. Henry Samuel Mosley of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps. Awarded the Distinguished Service Order and issued the 1914 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal. Survived the War and continued to serve.

William Henry Milner of the Royal Garrison Artillery, 40th Company, who served 12 years in India, Aden, and England prior to the Great War, being discharged in 1904. In November 1915 he re-enlisted but was medically discharged in December 1916. He was awarded the Silver War Medal.

Harold Milner, who enlisted in the Royal Navy in December 1915 and served on a number of ships, being discharged in February 1920.

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There are literally thousands of books written about the Great War. These are the books in my personal library that provided context for this article and which I found helpful in understanding how servicemen and women have been and are remembered.

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Croix de Guerre



The Croix de Guerre medal (Creative Commons: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Croix_de_Guerre#/media/File:Croix-De-Guerre-Francis-Browne.jpg).

Practically every family has a genealogist somewhere amongst the ranks, a person who other members can rely on to know the “family story.” Of course, for those of us in that actual role, there can often be a mountain to climb in trying to get other relatives interested in our pursuit! From time to time, however, there can be one moment, or one discovery, that can elicit the interest of other members of the clan with their



The author's first cousin twice removed, John Brownlee MacFarlane (author's image).

own heritage. With my own father, it was the discovery of a military event that finally won him over, and which opened him up to talking about his family past.

My father was a huge fan of the Hollywood actor James Stewart, something I inherited from him, with my own family still watching *It's a Wonderful Life* every Christmas as regular as clockwork. But it was to be another aspect of his life that my



Brigadier John Brownlee MacFarlane (author's image).

father, a naval submariner, found particularly interesting, and that was the fact that James Stewart had been awarded the French Croix de Guerre with Palm in 1944 for his work as a bomber pilot during the Second World War. The Croix de Guerre was first created in France in 1915, and is commonly awarded to allies of the French who had performed particularly heroic deeds. What my father did not know was that his own father's first cousin had received the very same award for his own actions in the Second World War.

John Brownlie MacFarlane, known colloquially as "Jock," was born in Inverness on 18 April 1908, to Catherine Stewart and Charles Mackintosh MacFarlane, a colour sergeant with the Second Battalion of the Cameron

Highlanders, later to become a captain of the Seaforth Highlanders in the First World War. After being educated at Merkinch Primary School in the city, and then at Inverness Royal Academy, where he became the dux medallist, John went to the University of Aberdeen to study medicine, eventually graduating from the university's Marischal College on 1 April 1931.

On 26 January 1932, John joined the Royal Army Medical Corps as a lieutenant, his university qualification permitting him to bypass the lower ranks to join as an officer. He initially served for a short period with the British Army on India's northwestern frontier, and by 1 May 1934 had been promoted to the rank of Captain, equalling his father's final rank in service. On Saturday, 18 December 1937, John married 25-year-old Margaret Macrae Gillies, daughter of medical practitioner Dr. Kenneth Gillies (deceased) and Johanna Ross Fraser, with the ceremony taking place at King's College Chapel, Aberdeen. There was a bit more to the wedding, however, as noted in the *Glasgow Herald* of 20 December 1937, which recorded that there had in fact been a double wedding at the college chapel on that day, with Margaret's sister Ara marrying a Dr. Maurice Barrett Griffith of Darlington.

Just prior to the Second World War, John was promoted to the rank of major. When war broke out, he soon saw service on the Western Front in France, Belgium, and Germany, but it was to be his actions in the immediate aftermath of D-Day that led to his recognition by the French. D-Day was the opening phase of the huge Allied operation to invade Europe, known as Operation Overlord, with the initial amphibious landings taking place on 6 June 1944. Despite heavy casualties on the beaches of Normandy, the Allies were soon able to drive the German army into a retreat that would see the end of the war within the following year.



Infantry of the 7th Seaforth Highlanders, 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division, waiting at their start line on 26 June 1944 for the signal to advance (Imperial War Museum, B6010, collection 4700-29, public domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Epsom26_June.jpg).

As part of the campaign, John was attached, with a temporary promotion to Lieutenant Colonel, to 194th Field Ambulance, one of three medical field units assigned to accompany the 15th (Scottish) Infantry Division, the additional units being the 193rd and 153rd Field Ambulances. The 15th was a Territorial Army unit that had yet to see any action in the war, and alongside the 31st Tank Brigade, it was assigned to cut off the city of Caen, and to then capture bridges to allow the 11th Armoured Division to cross the River Odon, finally powering through to Brettville-sur-Laize. On 26 June, the operation commenced, only to face huge obstacles, including German-laid minefields and barbed wire, and heavy fighting, including heavy opposition from the tanks of the elite German SS Panzer Corps. Over the next five days, the battle for the River Odon was brutal, with almost 2000 killed or wounded in action on the British side alone, and almost 800 missing. Whilst the objective of securing the river was not

completed, enough territory was captured, and enough German forces tied up, to make an impact, which just two weeks later led to the capture of Caen in a follow-up action called Operation Charnwood.

As a consequence of his actions during Epsom, John was awarded the Croix de Guerre with Palm. The citation reads:

Lieut. Col. J. B. MacFarlane has given outstanding service since landing in Normandy in command of 194 Field Ambulance. At the battle of the River Odon, the advance through France and the crossing of the River Seine, his coolness and determination under battle conditions were an example to all ranks under his command and largely contributed to the successful evacuation of casualties in the many battles in which his ambulance took part. His own ADS [Advanced Dressing Station] was under fire on more than one occasion and his courage and personal example in



A Universal Carrier of the 49th (West Riding) Infantry Division during Operation Epsom being used to evacuate wounded (Imperial War Museum, B6048, collection 4700-19, public domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Epsom27June.jpg>).

visiting his CCPs [*Casualty Collecting Points*] at all times and often under fire were inspiring to his men.

After the war, John's temporary promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel was made permanent on 9 June 1947. He received subsequent promotions on 21 February 1956 to the rank of Colonel, and on 3 May 1961 to Brigadier, and during this post-war period, he took charge of several military hospitals in Germany and then Singapore. His final act in service was a stint at Scottish Command in Edinburgh, before finally retiring from the British Army on 29 August 1966, with his retirement announced in the *London Gazette* on 30 August.

John eventually passed away on Wednesday, 6 December 1972 at the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh, his usual residence being at Dalanloch, Glenurquhart, with the cause being acute myocardial infarction, a ruptured oesophagus, mediastinitis, and plurisy. In an obituary in the *Inverness Courier and General Advertiser* on Friday, 8 December, it was noted that

After retiral, Brigadier MacFarlane served in a professional capacity on the Pensions Board for the Army in Edinburgh, and left the home that he and Mrs MacFarlane (née Miss Margaret Gillies, a daughter of the late Dr. Gillies, a well known medical practitioner in Inverness) had at Dalanloch, Glen Urquhart, at the start of each week, returning at the week-end. He became suddenly ill in Edinburgh on Monday of last week, and died two days later. His death was a shock to many old friends in Inverness and Glen Urquhart, and to those who had served with him in the Army in Edinburgh and elsewhere.

John was finally laid to rest at Kilmore Cemetery at Drumnadrochit. His wife, Margaret, eventually passed away on Friday, 30 November 1984, at her house in Plockton, known in Gaelic as Tigh an Fhaing (The Fank House). A few years later,

Based in the Ayrshire town of Stewarton, Northern Irish-born Chris Paton runs the Scotland's Greatest Story research service (<http://scotlandsgreateststory.wordpress.com/>)

and the daily Scottish GENES genealogy news blog (<http://scottishgenes.blogspot.com>). Amongst his many publications are *Tracing Your Scottish Family History* on the Internet, *Tracing Your Scottish Ancestry Through Church and State Records*, and *Sharing Your Family History Online from Pen and Sword*, as well as *Down and Out in Scotland: Researching Ancestral Crisis from Unlock the Past*. Chris also tutors short courses through *Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd*, including *Scottish Research Online* and *Scotland 1750–1850: Beyond the Old Parish Registers*.



the property would become a regular location in the hit BBC television series, *Hamish MacBeth*.

December 6, 2025, 11 a.m. EST
“Medieval Inquisition Post
Mortem” with Rhiannon Lloyd



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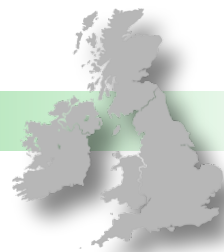
Medieval Inquisition Post Mortem

Many believe that research into Medieval women can be an impossible task. Through the use of Inquisitions Post Mortem, this presentation hopes to show that it can not only be possible, but rewarding at the same time! Through learning more about Agnes Burnell, more can be learnt about many more women like her.

Rhiannon Lloyd's Bio

Rhiannon is a genealogist and family historian based in Somerset, England. She specialises in research for the South West counties of Somerset, Dorset and Devon.

Her passion is in medieval genealogy, and her MSc Dissertation with the University of Strathclyde focused on how Inquisitions Post Mortem can aid research into Somerset Medieval women (1475 - 1500). Palaeography is also a passion and there is nothing more that Rhiannon likes to do than puzzle out the text of old documents. Members can view the recording on the members-only Winter Webinars page.



Battle on the Farmstead

Every so often when carrying out family history research, we may come across a story that connects to a much bigger national story. When I started to research my wife's Irish family from County Kilkenny, I had no idea that we would soon be plunged into the very heart of the Irish Civil War.

During the Irish War of Independence, which raged from 1919–1921, Ireland was on its last legs as a constituent part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, having been brought into a forced union with its neighbour and colonial overlord in the aftermath of the failed 1798 United Irishmen Rebellion. In 1916, whilst Britain was distracted with the First World War on the continent of Europe, Irish revolutionaries attempted to declare independence from Britain during the Easter Rising of 1916, declaring that Ireland would be a constitutional republic. The rising initially failed, and its leaders were executed shortly after by the British. This soon turned into a grave tactical error for the British, with the revulsion against their actions, alongside opposition to the proposal to introduce military conscription in Ireland, providing wind in the sails of a relatively minor party at that point called Sinn Féin, meaning “ourselves.” In the post-war general election, Sinn Féin won the majority of seats in Ireland, but instead of taking these up at Westminster, constituted their own independent government, called the Dáil. The republican military forces that had previously fought in 1916 coalesced under a new banner—the Irish Republican Army—and launched a guerilla campaign against the Crown's forces in Ireland, forcing the British Government to a stalemate.



The Prendergast boys of Killonerry, all members of the Third Tipperary Brigade of the Old IRA. (Pic courtesy Ann Prendergast).

During the War of Independence, the Westminster had partitioned the island into two self-governing territories, called Northern Ireland, catering for the Protestant majority in six of Ulster's nine counties, and Southern Ireland, to look after the remaining twenty-six counties. The end of the war was agreed through the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 21 December 1921, with Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom, and the rest of the country to be reconstituted as the Free State of Ireland (Saorstát Éireann). This would no longer be a part of the United Kingdom, but still part of the British Empire, with its elected members required to swear an oath of allegiance to the British monarch. The new arrangement was to kick in from 6 December 1922, but the Treaty proved to be too bitter a pill for many of the republican forces to swallow, causing a split amongst both the political ranks in Ireland and the Irish Republican Army. Many saw the agreement as a betrayal of the republican ideal

declared in 1916, and could not stomach the continued partition of the island.

The faction of the IRA that believed Michael Collins' words that the treaty could “provide the freedom to achieve freedom” was soon reconstituted into a new body, the National Army, and was heavily armed by the British. Those opposed to the arrangement continued to exist as the IRA, and were termed the “Irregulars” by the new state. In June 1922, both sides fell into a bitter conflict with each other, as the Irish Civil War commenced.

Whilst this was all happening, many across the length and breadth of Ireland were caught up in how the story played out at a local level, with families and communities split on ideological lines. In County Kilkenny, Thomas Prendergast, the paternal grandfather of my mother-in-law,

was a farmer running a business at Killonerry townland, just five miles from the nearest market town of Carrick-on-Suir in County Tipperary. In 1903 Thomas' mother Bridget had died, with the original Killonerry farm then divided into two farmsteads between himself and his older brother Patrick, who held onto the original farmhouse, requiring Thomas to build a new house next door to the older property. With his wife Mary Shea, Thomas raised a family of nine children at the new farmhouse at Killonerry, including my wife's grandfather Paul (born in 1895), whilst Patrick had five children of his own with his wife Annie Hogan in the original farmhouse. The cousins grew up together, playing around the two farms' fields and running in and out of each other's houses as they grew up, as one extended family.



The two farms on the Killonerry, formerly owned by the Prendergast family. The original farmhouse is the larger building to the left (author's image).



Another view of the two farms, with the original farmhouse to the right (author's image).

In October 2005 I was contacted by an American-based woman called Ann, the daughter of Michael Prendergast, one of Patrick's sons. Ann informed me that her father had joined the Third Tipperary Brigade of the Irish Republican Army, and had fought against British forces in the War of Independence from 1919–1921. Michael continued to fight with the Irregulars in the ensuing Irish Civil War (1922–1923) against his former Old IRA colleagues. Following defeat, he was forced to go on the run from Ireland, travelling first to Canada, and then to the United States, where he married. He eventually returned to Ireland in 1978, and passed away in his sleep some nine years later.

This was an amazing discovery, but I was soon to discover that Michael was not the only member of the Prendergast family to have participated. A search of the Military Archives (www.militaryarchives.ie) website's "Military Services (1916-1923) Pension Collection" revealed that not only was Michael involved, but so were all of his male Prendergast cousins from Killonerry townland, including my mother-in-law's father, Paul Prendergast, as well as from collateral family lines from other parts of the

townland. File number MA/MSPC/RO/152 showed that all were members of "K Coy. (Killonerry)" of the 8th Battalion of the IRA's 3rd Tipperary Brigade.

The file revealed no details of any actions that they may have been involved with, but I soon came across a further astonishing discovery, this time from the press. Through the Irish Newspaper Archives (www.irishnewsarchive.com) I located an obituary for Thomas Prendergast in the *Munster Express* of 29 May 1936, which stated that "His home was a centre of much activity during the Anglo-Irish War in which himself and his sons and daughters took an active part." An even more remarkable article from the *Munster Express* of 20 July 1934 noted a compensation claim by one of Thomas' nephews, his brother Patrick's son, also called Thomas, to the Irish Government for damage caused to the original Killonerry farmhouse by the Free State Army in August 1922. Young Thomas admitted to being an active sympathiser of the pre-Partition IRA, and later for the Irregulars, for whom he had worked as a driver.

The biggest surprise was yet to come. The reason for the compensation claim was that the

two adjacent farmhouses at Killonerry had been at the very centre of a full blown battle between the National Forces of the soon-to-be constituted Free State and the Irregulars of the Old IRA. Through a book called *Carrick-on-Suir: Town and District 1800-2000* by Patrick C. Power, I sought some much needed context, learning that in a bid to rid the area of Irregular forces, the National Army had taken control of Killonerry after a battle with the 8th Battalion of the IRA's 3rd Tipperary Brigade. Two eighteen-pounder cannons were brought to Killonerry, and from there the Free State forces bombarded republican positions across the River Lingaun, as well as machine gunning and mortaring their opponents, until they retreated. In another book, Eoin Smithin Walsh's *Kilkenny In Times of Revolution 1900–1923*, there were further details. The attack on Wednesday 2 August 1922 had started at Killonerry, and was focussed on a neighbouring property called Tinvane House (also connected to my wife's family). The

account noted how the anti-Treaty IRA had tried to outflank the National Army troops at Killonerry, coming so close that their cries of “Up Tipp” could be heard, but they had subsequently been driven back. Following the battle, the National Army then continued its advance towards Carrick-on-Suir, driving the Irregulars back further.

In the *Evening Standard* newspaper of 5 August 1922, it was further claimed that two wounded republicans had been brought to the old Killonerry farmhouse just a few days prior to the battle, having been injured in an earlier engagement with the National Army in Waterford. Both died in the house from their wounds.

The article from 1934 detailing young Thomas' compensation claim stated that as part of their occupation of the area, the National Forces had taken possession of the original Killonerry farmhouse for two days, causing significant



The damaged original Killonerry farmhouse, pictured here prior to its restoration (photo courtesy Susan O' Mahoney).

Damage to Property Act

SOUTH KILKENNY CLAIMS HEARD AT KILKENNY CIRCUIT COURT.

Most of Judge Sealy's time at Kilkenny Circuit Court last week was occupied hearing claims under the Damage to Property Act, 1923.

Dr. M. J. Crotty, State Solicitor, represented the State in all cases.

BURNING AT BRENOR.

Edward J. Power, Brenor, Piltown, claimed £250 for the burning of a hay barn and farm implements in March, 1923.

Dr. M. J. Crotty, S.S., for the State, and Mr. Budd, B.L. (instructed by Mr. J. F. Power, solr., Carrick-on-Suir) for applicant.

Mr. Budd said applicant was an extensive farmer and his house was near that of the Earl of Bessborough. At this particular period of a number of these big houses were being burned by those in opposition to the Government. It was common knowledge in the neighbourhood that applicant's sons were members of the I.R.A. and they were continuously told by the Free State troops and others that if Bessborough House went up their house would go up on the following night. Bessborough House went up on March 14, 1923, and applicant's hay barn went up on the following night.

Applicant said on the night in question he came out and found the whole barn ablaze. He discovered an empty petrol can in a stream adjoining on the following morning. A lean-to beside the barn was also burned, a reaper and binder, value £65, a cow worth 35 gns., 25 tons of first-crop hay and other farm accessories. He discovered the fire about 1 a.m. He had sons in the I.R.A. at the time. There were rumours going around that if Bessborough House was burned there would be reprisals. After the fire at his own place his daughter was arrested and accused of burning Bessborough.

Dr. Crotty—Can you suggest any reason why your barn was burned?

Applicant—I can, of course—the Free State troops were dead against me and my daughter.

You don't suggest that it was the Free State Army did it?—I know they would not

FIGHT AT KILONERY RECALLED.

Thomas Prendergast, Kilonery House, near Carrick-on-Suir, was applicant in a claim for £107 17s. 3d. for damage done to his house and property during a big engagement between the Free State troops and the forces against them in July or August, 1922.

Mr. Budd, B.L. (instructed by Mr. Power, solr., Carrick-on-Suir), for the applicant.

Dr. Crotty said he understood the case was not being heard until the following day. He had an official of the Board of Works coming from Waterford to give evidence and he was not prepared to close his case that day.

Mr. Budd submitted a map of the scene of the occurrence and said the Free State troops came out from Waterford and were operating on the slopes at the back of Carrick-on-Suir.

Applicant said he was an active sympathiser with the I.R.A. and then his sympathies went to those who opposed the Free State forces after the Treaty. He was actually out driving for them. He was advised by his solicitors not to apply for compensation under the 1923 Act. He was not at home in July or August. He was there some time previous to July and the damage for which he now claimed compensation was not then done. The Irregular troops were encamped at a wood by a tributary of the Suir near his house. Col. Prout and the Free State troops came up from Waterford and there was a three days' battle during which the Free State troops occupied the house. Applicant was arrested on the day they arrived and kept in an outhouse. He found all this damage when he came back. He was claiming for repairs to the floor, joists, windows, skirting, plastering, etc. Applicant had got an estimate for repairs from a Carrick-on-Suir firm. He had deducted 60 per cent from the estimate for joinery because he admitted the woodwork in the house was old at the time. In the case of the plastering he had deducted 50 per cent. There were also certain articles taken away by the troops—an overcoat, suits of clothes and pairs of boots. He had paid £10 for the two suits of clothes and regarded them being worth half-price at the time they were taken. He was also claiming half price in

DAMAGE BY BLACK AND TANS.

Martin O'Shea, Kilmoganny, was applicant in a claim for £19 15s. for damage to his house by the Black and Tans in 1921.

Mr. Walsn, B.L., for the applicant.

Applicant said on May 12, 1921, the Black and Tans broke the door and windows of his house. The repairs to the house cost £25, but he was only claiming £19 15s. He was not present at the time the house was broken into. His brother paid the £52 for the repairs to the house.

Judge—You were friendly with the I.R.A. and they attacked you?

Applicant—Yes.

James Gorman said he was passing by applicant's house some day in May, 1922, and he saw eight Black and Tans in applicant's yard. Two of them were bursting in the door. Witness told them that there was no one inside, and he got orders to clear away. He passed back about half an hour later and saw that the door had been burst in.

Philip Moore, carpenter, said he carried out repairs to applicant's house three or four years ago. It had been left derelict since 1921. The house was a wreck. He received £12 from applicant's brother for repairing the house.

Dr. Crotty—If it had been repaired at once it might not have cost so much?

Witness—It might not.

It was a commons since 1921. Anyone could go in or out?—Yes.

His Lordship gave a decree for £12 and allowed £2 10s. expenses.

RIFLE AND MACHINE GUN FIRE.

Edward Walsh, Killeasy, Hugginstown, was applicant in a claim for damage to his house and property as a result of rifle and machine gun fire by the Free State troops.

Mr. Connolly, B.L., appeared for the applicant.

Mr. Connolly said that Dr. Crotty and himself had agreed on a figure of £30.

The applicant stated that on Nov. 27, 1922, the Irregulars were in his house and the Free State soldiers surrounded the house. The Irregulars opened fire on the soldiers and the soldiers returned the fire with rifles and machine guns. The plaster, slates and some furniture in the house were damaged.

Compensation claim by Thomas Prendergast, son of Patrick Prendergast, in 1934, as recorded in the Munster Express on 20 July (Irish Newspaper Archive).

damage by ripping up the floor boards for fuel and tearing down the curtains. Thomas noted that on the day of the battle, he had been arrested by the National forces and locked into an outhouse. When subsequently released, he discovered extensive damage to his home, which he had recently inherited following his father Patrick's death. The compensation claim was for damage to the floor, joists, windows, skirting, and plastering, for the destruction of a mahogany table, four mahogany chairs, mattresses, covers, quilts, all the delph and china, as well as for the loss of mechanic's tools,

two razors, and three pairs of lace curtains, which it was claimed had been torn down by the soldiers to form stockings, causing laughter in the courtroom when read aloud. At the end of the hearing, the judge agreed that young Thomas should receive £102 in compensation.

Young Thomas was not the only witness. His uncle, my mother-in-law's grandfather Thomas, was also called to testify. In his deposition, he noted that he had witnessed the army taking his brother's property, recalling how the soldiers had also slaughtered all of the cattle on his own adjacent farm in the process, an action which

had left him “a teetotal wreck.” He had previously received compensation for this.

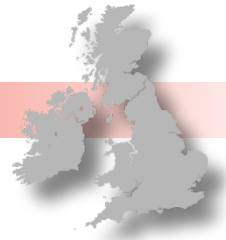
I then discovered that a further article from the *Kilkenny People* newspaper on 13 December 1924 provided details on this earlier claim, although the paper mistakenly identified him as “Michael Prendergast” rather than Thomas. He noted that during the conflict, a bullock had been wounded, whilst his wheat and oats had been trampled, with action taking place around the hay ricks on his land. He further described how a mare had been injured, and that another horse had died from its injuries. He was duly awarded £113 in compensation. An interesting follow-up to this is that an article from the *Munster Express* of 31 January 1941 noted how a horse on Killonerry farm had to be destroyed; it was subsequently dissected, and a rifle bullet from the conflict was found to have been embedded in the knuckle joint of the horse's hind hip.

An interesting coda to this story happened very recently whilst I was at a conference in New Zealand, when I received an email from a lady in Ireland who had been the god-daughter of the last member of the Prendergast family to have been based at Killonerry—someone who had recently passed away. The lady in question had found out about my interest in the family's history and forwarded copies of photographs that she had been allowed to take from her godfather's home, one of which showed the dilapidated condition of the old Killonerry farm property after the civil war. The property was renovated in 2019 and now once again stands majestically over the Lingaun valley, with no trace of the terror that had once enveloped it, and the drama that had enveloped the Prendergast family once resident there.

Based in the Ayrshire town of Stewarton, Northern Irish-born Chris Paton runs the Scotland's Greatest Story research service

(<https://scotlandsgreateststory.wordpress.com/>) and the daily Scottish GENES genealogy news blog (<http://scottishgenes.blogspot.com>). Amongst his many publications are Researching Ancestral Crisis in Ireland, Tracing Your Irish Family History on the Internet (2nd edition), Tracing Your Irish Ancestors Through Land Records, and Tracing Your Belfast Ancestors from Pen and Sword, as well as Sharing Your Family History Online. Chris also tutors short courses through Pharos Teaching and Tutoring Ltd, including two Irish-themed courses, Progressing Your Irish Research Online and Researching Irish Land Records.





A carriage stands ready to collect the judge from Lampeter Assizes, late nineteenth century. People's Collection Wales, <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/sites/default/files/images/2016/June/dmj00001.jpg?itok=Do6Gw8RE>.

Wales: Land of the White Gloves?

On a cold winter's day, a judge wearily descends from his carriage, making his way to the courthouse. Even though he was used to travelling miles from court to court, it had been a rough journey across pitted roads and through a heavy snowstorm. He always hoped there would be at least one crime to consider at the Quarter Sessions, and that this time his journey across the frozen Welsh roads had been worth the effort. But if he saw the clerk approach him with

a pair of white gloves, he would know his journey had been in vain.

This fictional, yet typical, scenario is based on historical reality, for judges would, at all times of the year, occasionally turn up in time for a court session, only to be faced with a courthouse empty of accused criminals. By the mid-nineteenth century, Wales had earned the moniker, "the Land of the White Gloves." The gloves were a symbol that there were no cases

to try—that the district had, apparently, been free of any meaningful crime during the previous weeks and months. This fact was widely celebrated by some commentators of the period as evidence that the religious revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had had a beneficial effect on the morals of the Welsh people. However, was this actual evidence of a relatively crimeless, peaceful society, or were other factors at play that hid the real nature, scope, and incidence of offences in the country? Were our Welsh ancestors simply “lucky to get away with it”?

BACKGROUND TO THE WELSH COURT SYSTEM AND RECORDS

Prior to 1830, serious criminal cases in Wales were tried in the Welsh Courts of Great Sessions. They were similar to the Assize Courts in England, but they were also able to try all manner of cases alongside the Quarter Sessions where most of the lesser crimes were tried. The Great Sessions were made up of four circuits: Carmarthen (comprising Carmarthenshire, Cardiganshire, and Pembrokeshire); Brecon (Breconshire, Glamorganshire, and Radnorshire); North Wales (Anglesey, Caernarvonshire, and Merionethshire); and Chester (despite being located just across the border in England, it was where Flintshire, Denbighshire, and Montgomeryshire’s major crimes were tried). Crimes committed in Monmouthshire went before the courts of the Oxford Assizes.

The Court of Great Sessions system was abolished in 1830, and the whole of Wales then adopted the same Assize Court arrangement as existed in England.

The Court of Great Sessions’ records have survived very well, and can be viewed at the National Library of Wales (NLW). They contain very useful gaol files that include the indictments themselves as well as examinations and jury

lists. Most of the cases that were tried between 1730 and 1830—around 21,000—appear in the NLW’s searchable online Crime and Punishment database: <https://crimeandpunishment.library.wales/>. In addition to the nature of the crime itself, the database also lists the names and (normally) occupations of both the accused and the victim along with the parish in which they lived, the verdict and, where relevant, the punishment. Reference numbers are also included so that the original files themselves can be consulted at the library. When no verdicts are recorded it is sometimes possible to establish if individuals were found guilty or innocent by cross-referencing these files with other criminal registers, some held at The National Archives (TNA), and with any relevant articles relating to the cases in question that appeared in newspapers.

On the other hand, if you wish to search the Quarter Sessions’ records then, where they have survived, both from before and after 1830, you will find them at the relevant local county archives.

EXAMPLES OF CASES FROM THE COURT OF GREAT SESSIONS FILES (1730-1830)

A cursory glance at cases that went before the courts during the 1820s alone suggest that Wales (the majority of its communities being rural at that time) was not exactly the crime-free, peaceful idyll portrayed in some later accounts. Public order offences (which included riots and assaults), along with sheep, cattle, and horse theft, clothing theft, and the passing of counterfeit money appear to have been the most common crimes during that decade, although manslaughter and murder cases also make the occasional appearance.

In March 1828, William Jones, a labourer from the town of Cardigan, was found guilty of stealing a horse and riding gear from a John Bartlett Bevan and John Gwyther. It was a



Carmarthen courthouse and guildhall (image dated 1853), one of the courthouses that hosted the Great Sessions of south-west Wales (Carmarthenshire, Pembrokeshire and Cardiganshire) and local Quarter Sessions. It later served as one of the country's Assize courts. In 1843 it was the venue for one of Wales's most noteworthy trials – that of two of the leaders of the Rebecca Riots, John Jones (Shoni Sguborfawr) and David Davies (Dai'r Cantwr) who were found guilty and transported to Australia. Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Town_Hall,_Carmarthen_\(1133998\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Town_Hall,_Carmarthen_(1133998).jpg) / NLW Welsh Landscapes Collection.

capital crime and he received the death sentence.

In January 1820, Eleanor Lloyd, a servant from Corwen, Merionethshire, received a partial guilty verdict after she stole wearing apparel from her aunt, Mary Owen, “with whom she boarded and lodged.” Her punishment was two years imprisonment with hard labour.

In September 1826, death was the punishment handed out to Andrew Williams, a labourer of Llanllwchaearn, Montgomeryshire, who was found guilty of stealing a cow, the property of a Robert Thomas of Llanuwchllyn, Merionethshire.

In July 1826, David Lloyd, a farmer of Llanegryn, Merionethshire, came before the court charged with the manslaughter of an innkeeper—Richard Owen of the Ship Inn Dolgellau—after a scuffle on fair night when Richard died of “inflammation of the bowels.” The accused and the deceased had apparently also come to blows six weeks

earlier when the innkeeper had suffered broken ribs. However in this case, the court decided not to prosecute “for want of evidence.”

When punishments were recorded in the files, then we can see that the penalties varied—from various periods of imprisonment with hard labour through to transportation (to Australia) and death. However, when compared with cases that went before the English Assize Courts of the same period, it seems that far fewer cases went before the Court of Great Sessions in Wales. For example, between 1750 and 1830 only around 168 individuals were on average tried annually across the Welsh courts (minus Monmouthshire and Chester circuits). Even in Glamorganshire, the county that saw the most cases, only around 27 people on average were tried every year. This compared with Lancashire during the same period, where around 67 people were on average tried annually in the Assizes, and in Kent where 136 people on average went before the courts.¹ This can only be partly explained by differences in population numbers in some counties, for the pattern suggests that, in general, Welsh people were more reticent to report crimes to the authorities. One of the reasons why this was the case was that the trial proceedings were conducted in English, a language that many barely understood, for at that time much of the population spoke only Welsh (the vast majority in many parts of the country). This may also have been one of the reasons why the parties in question and their communities preferred to settle matters out of court rather than turn to the authorities for justice.

However, even when cases did go to court, there is statistical evidence to show that Welsh juries were far more likely to acquit the accused or to find them guilty of less serious charges than for which they were originally arrested. According to Walliss (2022),² this state of affairs was “without doubt endemic within the Welsh courts,” and can



Llangibby murder scene. Although Wales had the reputation of being a country with low levels of violent offences, there were nevertheless cases of some very bloody crimes, including the Llangibby murders of 1878 when a Spanish sailor, Joseph Garcia, was convicted of murdering a whole family when they were asleep in their beds – William and Elizabeth Watkins of Castle Cottage, Llangibby, Monmouthshire and their three young children. Source: People's Collection Wales, <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/1576306#?xywh=-600%2C-1%2C4799%2C2314>.

potentially be explained by a comment from 1795 that opined

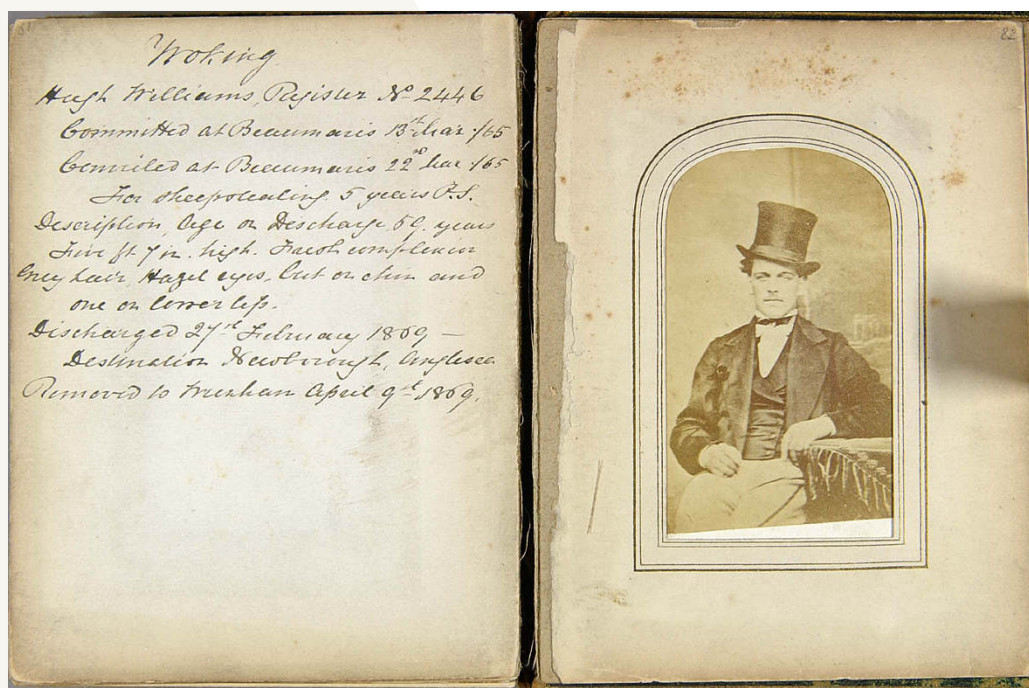
... it was very difficult to have justice done in Wales by a jury of Welshmen, for they are all related to one another, and therefore would rather acquit a criminal than have the scandal that one of their name or relations should be hanged . . .³

Or it can be explained that Welsh juries' acquaintance of the reputed offenders meant they may have felt more compassion towards them, and they therefore had a broader understanding of their plight.

This attitude appears to have continued for many years after the abolition of the Court of Great Sessions in 1830, when the new Assize court

system began to try the more serious crimes in Wales, and when lesser crimes went before local petty, magistrates, and police courts.

The lower numbers of officially recorded crimes and lower conviction and death penalty rates in Wales may therefore suggest that the country experienced fewer crimes, but the reality is likely to be a little different. The country may well appear to have been the "Land of White Gloves" in terms of the court proceedings themselves, but this certainly does not fully reflect reality, although the perception that Wales was generally a law-abiding country did shape some aspects of Welsh life and culture during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and



Pages from Denbighshire Constabulary's Criminal Register. Source: People's Collection Wales, see links below (this page).

certainly bolstered the cause of nonconformist chapels.

What should family historians therefore learn from this? Don't presume that your ancestors (or the communities in which they lived) were whiter-than-white, or that they were not perpetrators or even victims of crime – it is always worth taking a look at the various sources relating to crime and punishment in Wales, just in case!

CRIMINAL RECORDS SPECIFIC TO WALES— AN OVERVIEW OF ONLINE SOURCES

The Court of Great Sessions database (discussed above) is an index of cases that allows you to establish the correct files and to consult them at the NLW.

Some police constabulary registers are available, but have only survived for a couple of Wales's constabularies:

Cardiganshire's surviving register, dated 1897–1933, includes many images and physical descriptions of the felons along with details of their crimes. It has been digitised and can be viewed online on the NLW's website: <https://>

www.library.wales/discover-learn/digital-exhibitions/manuscripts/modern-period/criminals/.

Denbighshire Constabulary's prison register (dating up to 1899) is similar in content to Cardiganshire's and includes lists of previous crimes and places of incarceration as well as prisoners' destinations after their release from police custody. Part of this register's content is made up of information taken from the *Police Gazette*, which often reveals that many of the criminals were wanted by other constabularies across the UK. Much of this register has been digitised and can be viewed on the People's Collection Wales website. Volume 1 can be viewed here: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/7483/>, and you can access Volume 2 (folio 1) here: <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/items/7484/>.

Index to Cardiff's Police Constabulary Registers, 1904–1920 is available to search on the Ancestry website: <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61854/>. The original registers are housed in the Glamorgan Archives, Cardiff.

Carmarthenshire Gaol Felons Register database (1844–1871) can be searched online via the Welsh Legal History Society website. It includes transcriptions of almost 1,500 entries along with, where available, “mug shots” of the criminals. The original register is held by Carmarthenshire Archives. <http://welshlegalhistory.org/felons-register-search.php>.

Glamorgan Calendar of Prisoners (1850–1920), held by Glamorgan Archives, can be searched via the Ancestry website. It lists prisoners who were incarcerated in Cardiff and Swansea but who were awaiting trial: <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/62299/>.

The Swansea and Surrounding Area Gaol Records (1877–1922) is a collection held by the West Glamorgan Archive Service (Swansea and Neath area), but can also be searched on Ancestry. It also contains the Nominal Gaol Registers for Swansea, Brecon and Carmarthen prisons: <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/61231/>.

The National Archives (TNA) also has prison and criminal collections relating to Wales, such as the Criminal Registers (1791–1892) collection which appears on the Ancestry website: <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/1590/>. Several other relevant TNA series relating to crime and punishment have been digitised and appear on the www.findmypast.co.uk website, including the Habitual Criminals’ Registers and Calendars of Prisoners.

The Police Gazette, which included notices of wanted criminals and missing persons supplied by police forces across the UK, is also worth a consideration if you’re researching an ancestor’s criminal past – various years of this publication can be searched via Ancestry: https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/60861/?srltid=AfmBOor8R9pWfNwcOeEIL3wiSat97Hj9Lz3h3SgA_Jpej_ezldTCJWms.

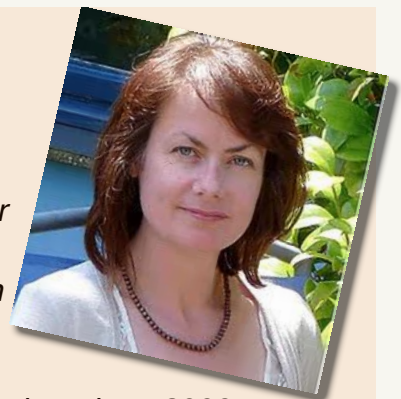
Endnotes

¹ “The administration of justice in Wales during the long eighteenth century,” John Walliss, *History Compass* (29 November 2022), <https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hic3.12756>

² Ibid.

³ Modern reports, or select cases adjudged in the courts of King’s Bench, chancery, common pleas and exchequer, volume the eighth, T. Leach (1795), cited in Walliss (2022), Ibid.

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