

So, Where are the Bodies Buried???

by Eamon Horan.

This story of graveyard searching. All started with a letter I received, posted from of all places, Albuquerque, New Mexico. And yes, it's along long, long way from here to there - but the subject matter of the letter was intriguing and the challenge it offered was just what was needed in a March morning of 2014. All the training which I had taken over the previous two years with Ireland Reaching Out www.irelandxo.com could now be put to good use. Here was a challenge worth the chase!

The letter writer, Mary Leonard (retired nurse) was coming to Ireland in April with the hope of reuniting with her long lost Irish family – specifically her Great Grandmother whose family – named Dwane (misspelled on entry to the U.S. as Duane) – had lived and worked in the Roscrea region, but like millions of others had emigrated to the U.S. in 1846 fleeing, as they were, from the beginning of the worst tragedy in Irish history – the Great Hunger (An Gorta Mór).

Mary had gathered a lot of information from earlier family stories and writings and was able to lay a good foundation to a potential search and of great help was information that her brother had recorded of his findings on a trip to Roscrea in 1950. He had found two headstones of the family in the Catholic cemetery of Roscrea with the correct family names and dates.

So, my search seemed on the face of it, to be very simple – find those two headstones in the local cemetery and bingo! another satisfied customer.

Wrong! There is nothing simple about searching for families in the Roscrea group of parishes. Roscrea is divided between two provinces – Munster and Leinster, three counties – Tipperary, Offaly (King's County) and Laois (Queen's County) and numerous rural Parishes surrounding the town for many, many miles – all with their own graveyards. Many, many graveyards!

However, the notations on the headstones were recorded in 1950 as follows:

Erected in memory of Hugh Dwane, born 1826, died 1869 by Mr & Mrs Henry Trench and their son Henry Bloomfield Trench, in gratefully remembrances of faithful services from boyhood until death.

And beside it the other stone reading – erected by Hugh Dwane in memory of his beloved father William Dwane 1848 age 57.

Roscrea, the town, boasts of more than 1000 years of history and its cemetery reflects that longevity, but I was satisfied by the fact that our local undertaker who has a database of local graves and was the first point of contact, would soon help me locate the graves. He assured me that he was not familiar with the name Dwane and to his knowledge there were no Dwanes buried in his domain. I had a little root around myself– but in vain.

But as I am Roscrea born and of an advancing age, I remembered the name Trench (headstone) was from a bygone era of Landlords and who occupied three large houses at Sopwell (Ballingarry, North Tipp), Cangort (Shinrone) and Redwood (Lorrha) with large tracts of lands attached.



<http://www.grantonline.com/grant-family-individuals/places/trench-houses.htm>

Further research of the headstone with reference to 'Bloomfield' confirmed that the mostly likely big House where Hugh Dwane worked through his lifetime was "Cangort" in the historic village of Shinrone, Offaly. So, my first graveyard search then, took me and my brother (search helper) to the old Church of Ireland in which the Barak Obama ancestors are to be found. But again, no luck. So the next step was to call on the local historian – Noel McMahon – . . who lives in the village and has two books published on Shinrone. Noel and his wife Margaret are avid gardeners and I was delighted to get a tour of their quite outstanding garden – a haven of tranquillity. He pointed out that there were pictures of a Dwane Priest and Sister in his books who were most likely related to my search family and he

suggested that the ancestors were most likely buried in the ancient Kilcomin Church grounds two miles from the village. (<http://www.grantonline.com/grant-family-genealogy/Tipperary/Shinrone/shinrone-history.htm>) a place set apart, home to St. Cuimin who founded his Abbey here in 630 AD.

So, a search of the graves followed with great expectations of a find but, alas, no luck.

Next day I met Mary Leonard in her Roscrea B&B (<http://www.slidala.com/>) owned and operated by another Shinrone person, Marie Warren, who was keenly interested in a successful outcome to her guest's search. We could not have this guest coming all the way from New Mexico and going back home without finding her beloved ancestors.

I should add that Mary, on arrival, immediately set to search the archives of St. Cronan's Church, Roscrea and the surrounding graveyard herself, but here again to no avail.

Next day, Mary & I drove to the next most likely Graveyard - the Church of Ireland one-in the village of Ballingarry, North Tipperary, burial place of the 'Trench' families. Here we diligently searched and searched but here again, no Dwanese! And so, back into the car and off to see the 'big house' of Sopwell, home to one of Ireland's largest Landlord families up until the 1960's. On our way I passed a bungalow and noticed two people working on their very beautiful front garden. I stopped, reversed, and sought advice as to the whereabouts of our elusive Dwane family. What a delightful surprise - it could only happen in beautiful Ireland - Yes, he (John Ryan), was familiar with that surname and seeing as the day was nice and sunny, they dropped the gardening, put on the wellies and joined us in our search.

John and his very jovial partner joined us in my car and directed us to a very hidden graveyard - Uskane, near Borriskane. But, alas, no further joy. No Dwanese.

I was beginning to despair but Mary was loving the whole Irishness of our tour!

But John had an ace card to play - and he led us to the house of Michael Delahunt (Sopwell) whom I now know to be the foremost authority on names of families, burial places and graveyard recordings in N. Tipp. Without his wonderful help which was given friendly & freely, I am afraid our day would have been a failure. Michael evidently has spent his life's work in researching and recording the graveyards of North Tipp and this all long before the invention of the modern computer! His 'front room' is his library of all that has been forgotten in N. Tipp.

Michael actually knew the recent family of Dwanese and had a detailed knowledge in his memory of where the ancestors were buried. He then went on to sketch out on

the ground with his walking stick the last known house of the Dwane family in the district - just a mile or so from his front gate (now bulldozed).

Things were looking up – Mary was getting excited.

But wonder of all wonders, Michael referred back to his countless journals of grave recordings in his front room and was able to come up with the exact location of the two elusive Headstones of the older Dwane burials.

Surprise, surprise he said, with conviction that we would find those stones where?? . - back inside the front entrance to ROSCREA's cemetery, 100 yards to the right from the Franciscan Archway!

It was getting late when we arrived back in Roscrea and the search was now in a delicate state of anxiety – would we find the elusive headstones or not?. Would Mary go back to Albuquerque, New Mexico empty-handed with stories of half-crazy Irish people leading Tourists on make believe headstone tours??????

Well the finale to any good story is, of course, the one with the happy ending and so it was for this search.

There within feet of where Michael Delahunt said they would be were the headstones – much to Mary Leonard's delight – and to my great relief.



Mary Leonard standing by her ancestors' gravestones in Roscrea Cemetery

And so we adjourned to the local Alehouse to celebrate our good fortune of reuniting Mary with her long lost family.

Mary flew home to New Mexico a very happy Lady with stories to tell.

But the story didn't finish there – a few days after her departure – a fellow Ireland Reaching Out enthusiast, Ann DeRoe, who lives in Shinrone, called to say that she had discovered the modern burial place of the family in Shinrone Roman Catholic graveyard and has a connection to living relatives who possibly live in Portumna.

Mary Leonard's brother & family are now planning on visiting Ireland and hope to make the connection with living relations after 150 years of separation.

And the lesson to be learned from this story is that Ireland Reaching Out is a really worthwhile concept connecting the Diaspora (all 60+ million) back to their roots and hopefully Tourism Ireland will be a major winner in the process. All this in keeping with my earlier career working then in Canada for Air Canada but my heart was always "home in old Ireland" land of wanderers, dreamers of exiles, but 'not forgotten people'!