

## **THE SHOOTING OF ROGER NORTH** **(on Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1850)**

*As researched by the late Fr John Moorhead SMA, a native of  
Rossbeg, Rahugh, Kilbeggan*

Roger North lived at Kilduff House, Croghan, Tullamore. Kilduff House was built by another Roger North, son of Joseph North, Bracklyn House, Ballycommon, Tullamore, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. To quote from Mr Byrne's book 'Kilclonfort' "as to when North acquired Kilduff has not been established, but in 1710 he enlarged his holding by taking a lease on 646 acres (Irish) on Clooncom, Cloonagh and Mullagharush. The lease did not expire until 1892 when the last one of the three lives named in the lease – William North – died in Australia."

The builder of Kilduff House, Roger North, apparently impressed Sir Charles Coote, the author of the Royal Dublin Society's "Survey of Co Offaly(?) Agriculture" in 1801. Coote wrote "Mr North has made some choice improvements here in drainage and burning the moors, which often produced an abundant crop of rape, and gave excellent pasture for store-cattle three to four months of the year. The gentlemen has also built an excellent mansion house, which with the infant plantations in the adjoining grounds, have greatly ornamented this part of the county, which must have had before a miserable and bleak appearance".

Roger North died in 1830 and was succeeded by his son of the same name. As to when the Norths first came to Kilduff, I don't know. Roger (senior) was the son of Joseph North of Bracklyn, Ballycommon.

Roger North (junior) succeeded to Kilduff in the 1830's. He seemed to have been an unpopular man, even with his fellow Landlords. He is supposed to have a Land Steward by the name of Mr Gill, who hailed from the Birr area. He intended to create an estate at Garryduff, Rahugh - a townland he possessed – for Mr Gill..

The first pre-requisite was to evict the local farmers by raising rents, etc. The first to fall foul of this plan was the Daly family, who farmed about 60 acres of land at Garryduff. Some time previously, Fr. Pierce P.P. of Kilbeggan, had bought hay from some farmers in Garryduff. Having paid for same, the P.P. was in the area arranging for the transport of the hay to Kilbeggan, when who arrives but Mr North : not only did he forbid the removal of the said hay, but he insisted on being paid again for it! Fr Pierce never forgot Roger North's interference with this transaction.

The Daly family, having been evicted, went to live in a hut in Mountrath bog. Young Darby Daly let his feelings be known around Rahugh. The only solution was to get rid of Roger North and he was aided and abetted by Mr Judge of Judgville, who loaned him a muzzle-loader gun.

Knowing how anxious Mr North was about cattle, word was sent up to Kilduff that some of his cattle were missing from Daly's land in Garryduff. As was expected Roger North himself came down from Kilduff hotfoot – he always walked down the road with a little white dog as his sole companion. After passing over from King's County to Westmeath at Cishefinne, he came to a boreen. A sharp whistle rang out from the entrance to the boreen. He turned around : a shot rang out. Down fell Roger North and his little dog licked is face. Inside the boreen Darby Daly let the gun, which had been resting in the fork of a blackthorn bush, fall out of his hands and he fell beside it in a faint from the impact of the 'kick' of the gun.

John and Tom Moorhead, who had been working nearby, rushed down to see how everthing went. Roger North was lying on the roadway, while Darby Daly was in a swoon. They shook him and he came to. On realising what he did, he caught hold of the gun and started off across the fields for his hut in Mountrath bog, leaving his coat behind him. The Moorheads returned to their work, nor answering any questions from Reynolds, a boy from Connaught who was helping them with the harvest. He had been hired only that morning. On the way home for tea in the evening they would have to pass the body, so Ned Moorhead made some excuse and took young Reynolds out to another field to show him cattle he he had bought, and from there they took another route to the house.

Some time later a beggarwomen was passing by. She saw Roger North's body on the roadway, After hurrying on her way she informed Mr Hussey-Walsh in Kilduff. He in turn informed the police in Croghan.

Thinking it may have been a heart attach, Mr Hussey-Walsh arranged for a dray to go and take the body home. When they arrived at the spot, his men set about lifting the body on to the dray. Seeing the blood, he ordered the body to be left there until the police from Croghan got there. On arrival, the police, knowing it was outside their jurisdiction, sent word to Kilbeggan to inform the police there. As it was too late to come so far, the Croghan police mounted a watch of local farmers to stand over the body throughout the night.

On arrival the next morning, the Kilbeggan police wanted to take the body to Moorheads for an autopsy, but Miss Elizabeth Moorhead (great aunt of Fr Moorhead), would not allow them in, so they took it on to Handibode's and put it in a shed.

In the meantime Ned Moorhead continued working in the harvest field with young Reynolds. The previous week the boy had been working with Charlie Flanagan, a local man. During the course of the day Charlie Flanagan passed on his way to the forge at Mullagharush, carrying some part of a machine for welding. On seeing him young Reynolds said to one of the Moorheads "Look at Charlie Flanagan with a gun!

Later, John and Tom went to the boreen again and took Darby's coat and hid it under Cishafinne Bridge. After dark they went over to their aunt, Mrs Smyth and told her about the shooting of Roger North and where they had hidden Darby's coat. She is alledged to have said to them "When the police arrive, they are sure to search everywhere, especially under the bridge. Finding the coat they will surely get Daly as every tailor will recognise his own clothes. She sent them back to remove Darby's coat and bring it to her. The coat was wet so she could not burn it, so she got a bucket, put the coat inside, took a spade and off she went and buried Daly's coat in Monasette bog.

The autopsy took place in Handibode's barn, conducted by Surgeon Berry of Tyrrellspass and the Coroner was Mr Marcus Kelly. There was great police activity around the area. Roger North was shot through the heart, his assailant meant to kill him, as the gun was loaded with nails, etc. Mr North had wounds from the shoulder to the groin. The evidence from the local community was nil. Although many had been working in the fields, nobody saw anything unusual - except for the beggarwoman, who passed that way and saw the body on the road. She also saw a man, without a coat, running in the direction of Mountrath bog, with something in his hand - it could have been a fork or a gun.

In due course, Charlie Flanagan, along with John and Tom Moorhead were arrested and jailed in Mullingar. The crown witness in each of these cases was Reynolds, the young 'spalpeen' from Connaught, who swore he saw Charlie Flanagan with a gun on that Monday, and that John and Tom Moorhead left the field before the shot was heard, therefore implicating all three of them.

Charlie Flanagan was blamed in the wrong. It was a case of mistaken identity. He wasn't anywhere near the place at the time of the shooting. Because he was a suspect, the rent was raised and he was evicted from his house and farm.

Darby Daly, in the meantime, was told he would have to leave the country. He sold the few sheep he had and set out for America. He got the train at Portarlinton for Queenstown (Cobh) and from there sailed to America.

In the meantime the Moorheads and Charlie Flanagan had been convicted of the murder of Roger North on the evidence of Reynolds despite their protests of innocence. The date for the execution was put back until the next Assises.

Meanwhile Darby Daly got a permanent job in Pennsylvania working on the construction of the railway. On the job were other Irish lads who went there to escape the rigours of the law at home. When word of the convictions filtered out, Darby wrote to his sister in Rahugh. Having received his letter, she informed Fr. Pierce P.P. Kilbeggan. Fr Pierce contacted Mr Henry Pilkington of Tore Lodge, Tyrrellspass. It was decided to send two police officers to America to interview Darby.

Having located Darby they proceeded to question him. He answered everything to their satisfaction and advised them to leave America as quickly as possible as their lives would be in danger if his co-workers knew their business there. He was very anxious that they arrive back safely as he was aware that if they failed to return Charlie Flanagan and the two Moorheads would be hanged.

On the safe return of the police officers from America, Charlie Flanagan, John and Tom Moorhead were released from Mullingar Jail. With little hope of settling down in Ireland the Moorheads decided to go to America. John first married Ann Ryan of Pallasboy, Rahugh (their first child, Michael, was baptised in Kilbeggan in 1854). In 1855 John, Ann and the baby set off with Tom for the U.S.A.. John settled around Pittsburg in Pennsylvania. Tom joined the US Army during the Civil War and after the war returned to Ireland - to Keelbeg, Castletowngeoghegan. He married a Miss Young from Moranstown, Mullingar. They had one child, a daughter - Mary.