

CLARE CASTLE

BY HUGH DALY



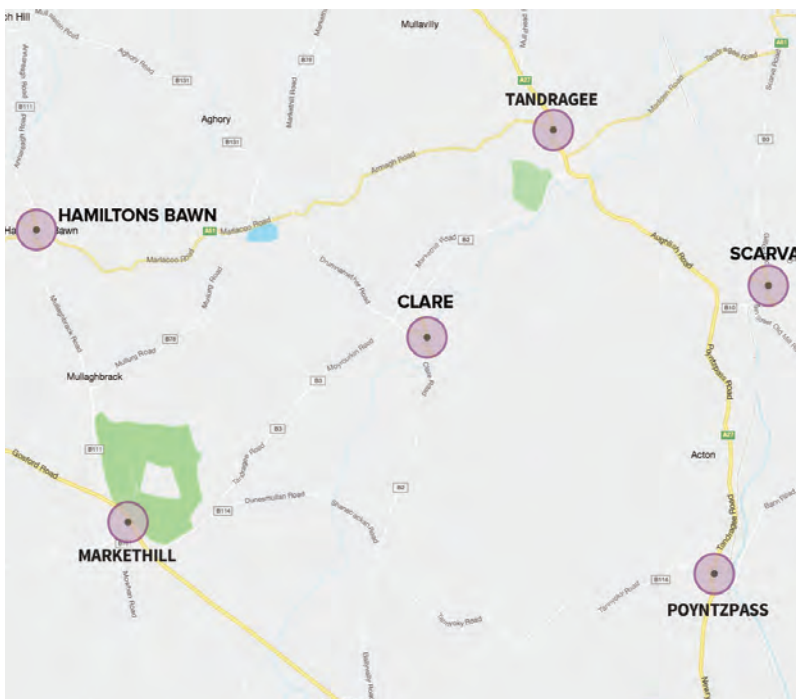
The tower of Clare Castle

The townland of Clare lies about two miles south-west of Tandragee on the border between the baronies of Lower Orior and Oneiland. The townland includes the village of Clare, as well Clare Glen and the ruins of what was once ‘Clare Castle’.

Although I had spent many teenage days working for my uncle in the locality, I had never heard of ‘Clare Castle’ until a few years ago when I came across a reference to it. Indeed when I asked some local people they confessed that they knew nothing about it. But my interest was aroused. The castle is in ruins today, and all that is left is a tower and a rectangular enclosure or ‘bawn’, which was converted into cowsheds in the 20th century.

O’Hanlons

In his article entitled *‘The Rise and Fall of the O’Hanlon Dynasty’* in the third edition of our journal, *‘Before I Forget ...’*, C.F. McGleenon in his *‘The O’Hanlons of Orior’* and Joe Canning in his *‘O’Hanlon’* give very thorough accounts of the O’Hanlon clan, who for centuries lorded over much of County Armagh, and in particular the Barony of Orior. Their stronghold was at Ballymore, today’s



Tandragee. For many years O’Hanlons seemed to be adept at ‘keeping-in’ with those in power, but in 1608, following the suppression of an ill-conceived rebellion led by Oghy O’Hanlon, their lands were confiscated and became part of what is known as ‘The Plantation of Ulster’.

Sir Francis Cooke

An early mention of Clare is in the 16th century state papers produced just before the Ulster Plantation.

In 1610, Francis Cooke, from Norwich, was granted 1,000 acres of land in the townlands of Clare, Druminure, Cloghoge, Ballyshiel More, Ballyshiel Beg, Mavemacullen and Tamnaghmore. Cooke was married twice, his second wife being the widow of Sir Edward Donnington who oversaw the building of the Walls of Derry. The grant was subject to the conditions of the Plantation of Ulster, chief of which was that the grantee must occupy the land and secure it. Cooke seemed to have no interest in his grant or perhaps was incapable or reluctant to secure it and eventually sold his portion to Sir John Bourchier.

Also as part of the Plantation, John Bourchier had been granted 1,000 acres in Tawnavaltiny, (also known as Tamnavelton) which is around Laurelvale north-west of Tandragee.

The Bourchier family

John Bourchier (d.1614) was the son of an Elizabethan soldier George Bourchier (1535-1605) who had made his name in Munster helping suppress the Desmond Rebellions of 1569 and 1579. George was married to Eleanor Manners and built a castle near Lough Gur, about 10 miles south of Limerick city. They had 5 sons. The first three boys died young, the fourth was John, and the fifth son was Henry.

In 1611 a Survey was undertaken by Sir George Carew, to establish how the plantation was progressing. Carew found that in many cases very little progress had been made, but he did note that John Bourchier was at least gathering materials to build a castle. John was knighted in 1611 and, it seems that sometime between 1610 and 1613, he purchased the Manor of Clare from Francis Cooke. He served as Member of Parliament for Armagh 1613-1614. When he died in 1614, the two Manors passed to his younger brother Henry.

Henry Bourchier had been educated at Trinity College in Dublin, which his father George had helped establish in 1592. Apart for the lands in Co Armagh he inherited a total of around 18,000 acres. He was knighted in 1621 and became Earl of Bath.

In 1618-19 a further survey was carried out by Captain Nicholas Pynnar to see how things were progressing. His report on Henry Bourchier was as follows:

“Henry Bowcher Esq. hath 2,000 acres called Claire. Upon this proportion there is a bawn of Lyme and Stone, being 100 feet in length and 80 feet in breadth and 14 feet high with two Flankers. There is now in building a good stone house which is full two stories high and a number of workmen labouring for the speedy completion thereof.”

The bawn was intended to be a place of refuge in the event of trouble. However T.G.F Paterson in his notes on Clare states that in 1622 the house was three storeys high but still not fully finished and that the bawn was still not complete. He says that there were two flankers and two more “*under consideration*”.

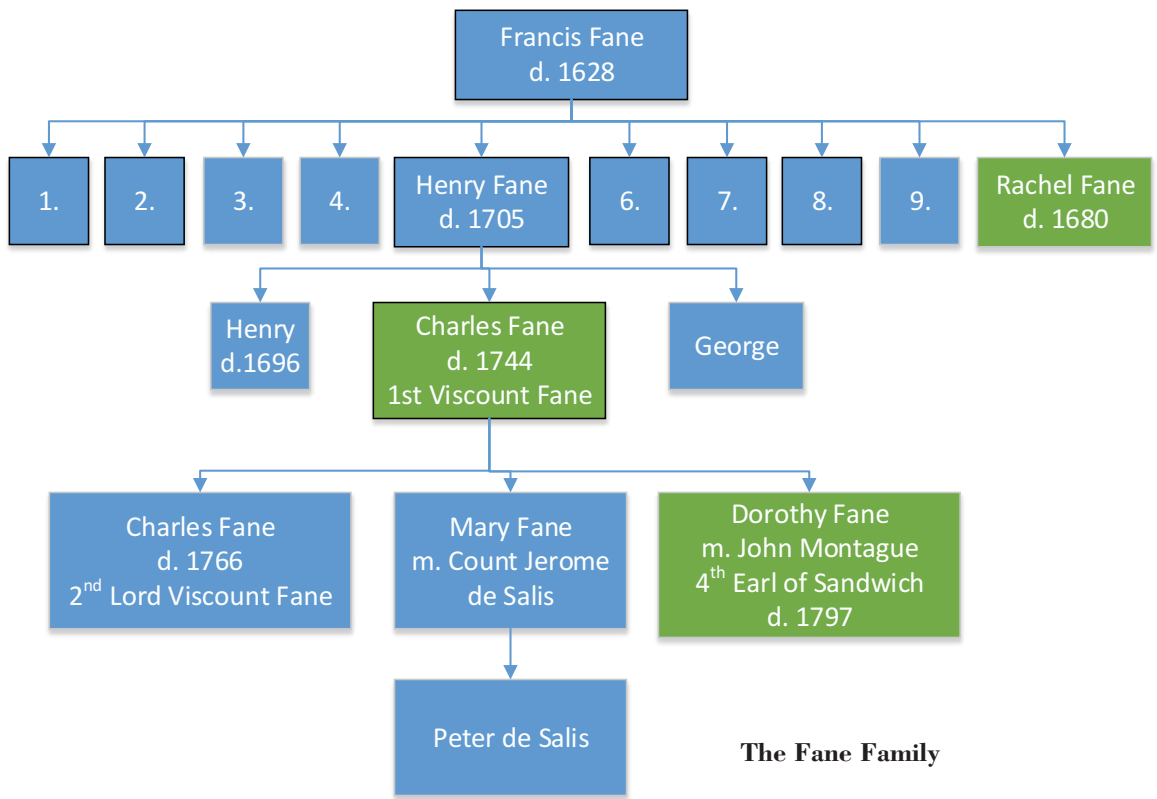
The settlers were obviously uneasy and there were attempts to prepare for a possible backlash from the dispossessed Irish. A ‘*Muster Roll*’ was taken in 1630 to establish how many men and what arms were available if trouble arose. The Muster Roll lists the following men with arms as being available to ‘*Sir H. ‘Booche*’ in the event of trouble: Richard Ball, Thomas Ball. William Greere, William Cariel, John Glendony, Oliver Kennitee, John Hollingwood, Henry Hunter, Henry Hunter (younger), and Robert Hunter (younger).

Henry Bourchier had four houses or castles, Clare Castle in County Armagh, Bourchier Castle in County Limerick, a townhouse in London and the family home at Tawstock, North Devon. In 1638 Henry aged 50, who had inherited the title ‘*5th Earl of Bath*,’ married Rachel Fane, a lady exactly half his age. As described by the Earl of Clarendon, Henry did not seem an attractive proposition. Clarendon described him as ‘*a man of sour temper and unsocial behaviour*’ who ‘*had no excellent or graceful pronunciation... who had not or ever meant to do the king the least service*’. Rachel, apparently, disagreed and the marriage took place at the Church of St Bartholomew the Great, Smithfield, London on December 13th, 1638.

When the anticipated ‘backlash’ came in 1641, despite their anxiety, the settlers were extremely poorly prepared. The precise details of the rebellion and scale of atrocities round Clare are difficult to assess as there are claims and counter-claims but that many atrocities were committed is beyond doubt. One report states that rebels burned the Earl of Bath’s castle and imprisoned settlers in his mill.



Rachel Fane, Countess of Bath, which is displayed in St Peter’s Church in Devon.



The Fane Family

Sir Henry himself was not in Ireland at the time. The following year 1642, when the English Civil War broke out, he sided with the Royalists and left his London townhouse and went to live at Tawstock in Devon. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London for a while but later released. Henry didn't live to see the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 as he died in August 1654, at which point the estate passed to his widow Rachel, Countess of Bath.

Rachel overcame her grief relatively quickly and seven months after Henry's sad demise, she married Lionel Cranfield, 3rd Earl of Middlesex.

Downe Map

The Down Survey was taken by soldiers commissioned by the Commonwealth between 1655 – 1658. While the survey mentioned Bouchier's Mill, and included maps, this survey was carried out after Henry Bouchier's death and while Rachel Fane was owner of Clare Castle. It is our earliest drawing of Clare Castle. It is certain that Rachel never visited Clare and it is likely that none of the later members of her family ever stayed there.

When Rachel died on 11th November 1680 the two manors were left to her brother Lord Henry Fane of Basildon. When Henry died in 1705, both manors passed to his nephew Charles.

Charles married Mary Stanhope in 12 December 1707 and had three children Charles, Mary and Dorothy. Mary married Jerome, Count de Salis whose family came from Chiavenna in northern Italy. Dorothy married John Montague 4th Earl of Sandwich – (creator of the popular lunch-box essential which bears his name).

When Charles Fane died in 1744, the estate passed to his son Charles, but when he died without issue the land was left to his two sisters Mary and Dorothy.

Mary, Countess de Salis inherited the land at Tamnaghvelton (Laurelvale) and Dorothy Countess of Sandwich inherited Clare. Dorothy Dowager Sandwich died in 1797, after which Clare Castle was sold.



1st Viscount Fane



Dorothy Fane Countess Sandwich

Dawsons

During the time that the Castle was owned by the Fanes, there appears to have been a number of tenants in the castle. One of these were the Dawson family. Walter Dawson became a tenant of the castle from 1739.

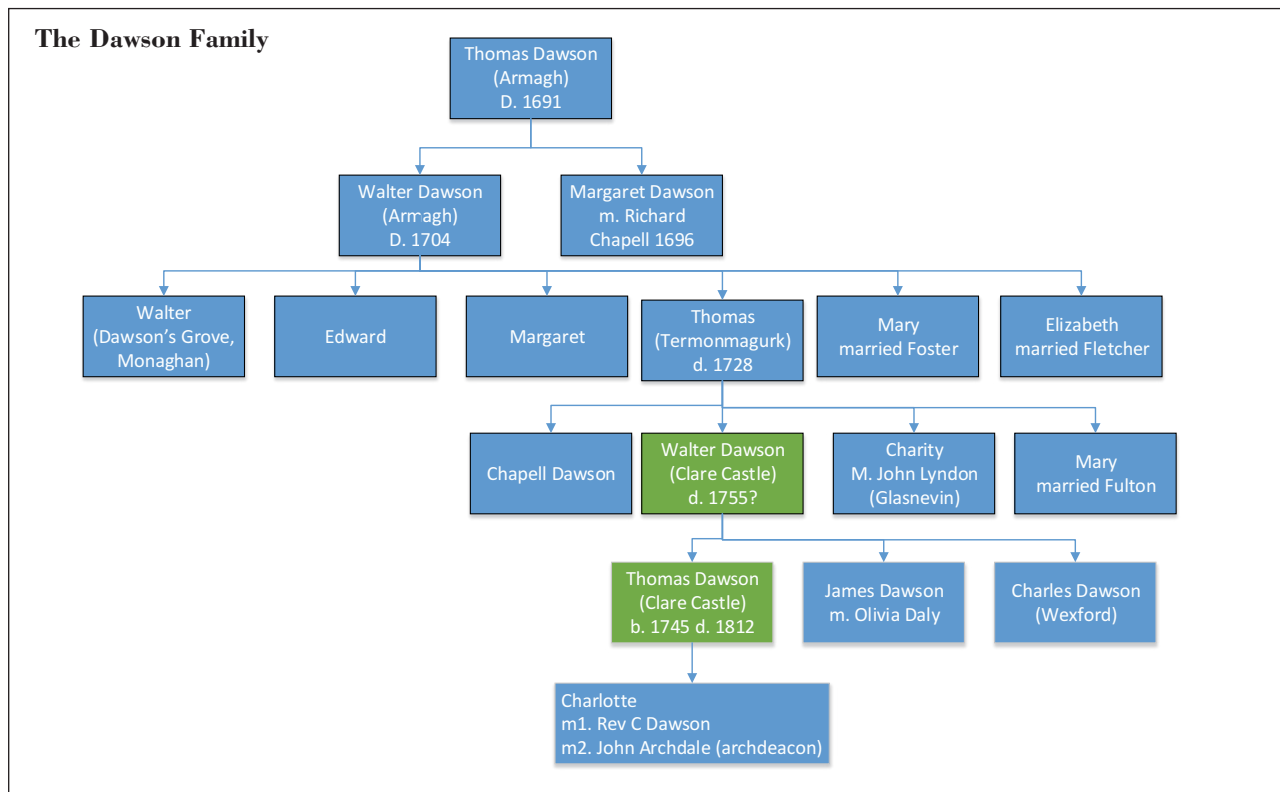
The Dawsons were a prominent Armagh family, as evidenced by Dawson Street in the cathedral city. Walter's great grandfather was the Burgess of Armagh and appointed by King James I. Clare Castle was the Dawson home until 1780.

Two of Walter Dawson's sons were active in the Volunteer movement in the 1770's and 1780's. Thomas Dawson was captain of the Clare Volunteers and later became Lieutenant-Colonel of the Volunteers South Battalion. As Captain, Dawson would have had his Clare Volunteers training and on military manoeuvres around the grounds of Clare Castle.

Another son, James lived for a while in Union Lodge, outside Poyntzpass before moving to Clare Castle. James was very active in the Volunteers, being Captain of Second Orior Volunteers. He was secretary of the great Ulster Volunteer Convention held in Dungannon in 1782.

However because of financial difficulties, Thomas Dawson was forced into leasing Clare Castle to a man called Thomas Leigh in 1783. On Monday night of 28th October 1785, Clare Castle was occupied by a Mr Thomas Leigh [the newspaper article refers to him as 'Lee'] and Thomas Dawson. During the night, the house caught fire as described in the paper:

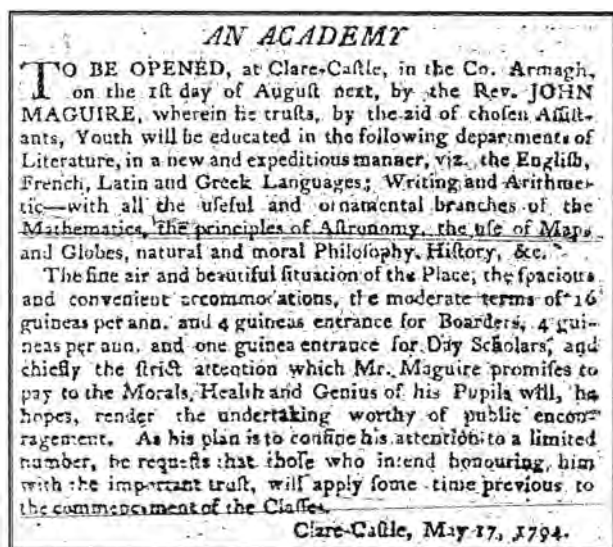
“On Monday night or Tuesday morning, the fine house of Clare Castle, near Tandragee, was totally destroyed by fire, every article of furniture, plate, jewels etc was also burnt, the family escaping barely with their lives. The house had long been noted as an eminent and venerable family seat; was lately in the possession of Mr T. Dawson, but now occupied by Mr Lee with whom Mr Dawson lodged. The fire was first providentially discovered by



cries of a child, by which the whole family was alarmed. Mr Dawson, by venturing back into his room in order to save some valuable papers, had very nearly been suffocated, as was also Mr Lee. The accident, it is thought, was occasioned by some sparks from a chimney falling on the roof, which was covered with shingles.”

Local tradition has it that there were no children in the house the night the fire broke out and that the ghostly warning cry, that alerted the household in 1785, was that of a child who had died during the rebellion of 1641.

In the 1790's, the Right Hon. John, Earl of Sandwich was still collecting rents for the townland of Clare. In the year 1795, John Newton surveyed the Clare Estate on behalf of the Earl of Sandwich who intended to sell it.



Advertisement publicising the opening of an 'Academy' by Rev. John Maguire

The sale took quite a number of years to organise because it included the separation of Clare and Laurelvale and the land in County Limerick. There followed one of the most unlikely periods in the history of Clare Castle.

Clare Castle Academy

The Reverend John Maguire was the Catholic Parish Priest of Ballymore Parish (covering Tandragee, Poyntzpass and Mullabrack) from 1788 to circa 1798. This was a turbulent period in county Armagh, coinciding with the relaxation of some of the Penal laws. Rev Maguire was a distinguished academic with a passionate desire to recruit and train young clergy for his church. So in 1794, he leased Clare Castle with the intention of opening up a junior seminary which would prepare young men for the Maynooth training college. The following advertisement appeared in The Northern Star newspaper on 17th April 1794.

Throughout the 1780's, sectarian tension had been building in County Armagh. Many drunken brawls between rival gangs had by 1786 become openly sectarian. These gangs eventually became the Protestant Peep o' Day Boys and the Catholic Defenders. During the next decade County Armagh was the scene of fierce sectarian conflict which spread into neighbouring counties and in 1795, about 10-12 miles away, the Battle of the Diamond took place, a key event in the formation of the Orange Order.

The establishment of a catholic-priest training-college in Clare Castle does not appear to have created any division or unrest in the area. It seems that the locals simply got on with things as before.

There was one quite famous past pupil of the academy: Michael Montague (1773-1845) from County Tyrone attended Clare College and went on to become President of Maynooth College in 1834.

Exactly when the Academy was closed is unclear but it appears to have been around 1800.

Robert Harden

In February 16th 1807, after a long and protracted negotiation with Peter De Salis about the combined estate of Clare, Laurelvale and Limerick, the Earl of Sandwich sold the Clare Estate. It was bought by Robert Harden who lived in the nearby Harrybrook House which also overlooks Clare Glen. According to *Samuel Lewis's Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, 1837, Robert had intended to rebuild Clare Castle "in the ancient style". I believe that he meant to dismantle the remains of the original castle and use its stones to repair parts of the bawn. The tower that we see today was the start of the 'ancient castle' which was never finished. It may be a case that Robert ran out of funds, or alternatively decided to invest in Harrybrook House instead. The outcome is that we're left with an ornate corner tower complete with fake arrow loops designed to resemble the narrow windows of 12th century castles from which the occupants would shoot arrows.

Later in the 20th century, when the castle grounds were owned by Major Harden, his workmen were ploughing the field between the castle and Clare Glen and discovered a hole in the ground. It is said that a shovel was found in the hole and when they tried to lift it the shovel disintegrated into dust. The Major instructed the workmen to fill the hole in, but they speculated that this could have been an underground cellar or a tunnel from the castle down into Clare Glen!



Mrs Harden beside the tower

Finale

And so that concludes our brief history of Clare Castle and its connections to the Ulster Plantation, the Walls of Derry, the 1641 Rebellion, the English Civil War, 'sandwiches', the Volunteers, a clerical Training College, ghostly cries and secret tunnels.

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