



*Dolly Monroe*

# Dolly Monroe

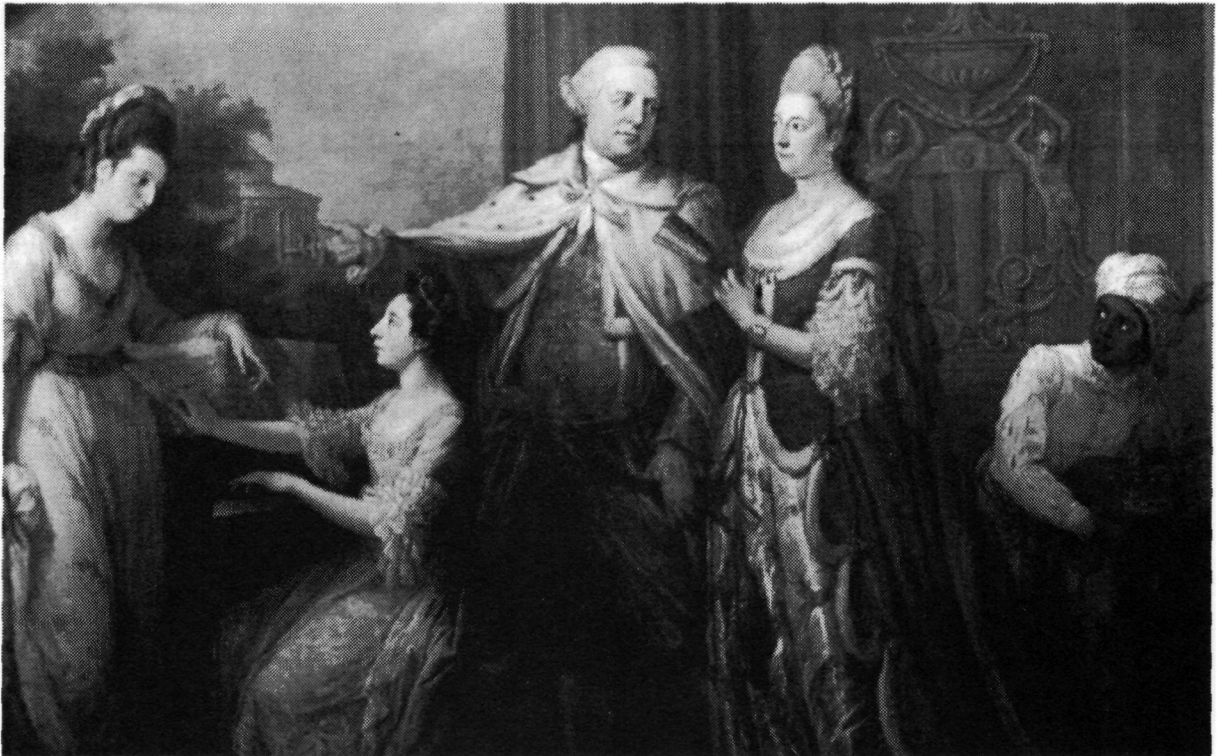
## The Famous Irish Beauty

By Eric McElroy

*"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a fortune, must be in want of a wife"*  
(Jane Austin - 'Pride and Prejudice')

Halfway between Gilford and Banbridge in the parish of Tullylish, and on a pleasant situation overlooking the Bann valley, stands Roes Hall, the ancestral home of the Monroes of Tullylish. In the mid-18th century the proprietor of Roes Hall was Henry Monroe and, by all accounts, life for him was placid and enjoyable. The troubles of the 17th century, in which the Monroes had played such a central role, were far behind and the troubles of '98, in which a family member was to be a charismatic leader of the United Irishmen, were as yet unforeseen.

Henry Monroe, however, had a problem. A similar problem was set out very clearly by Miss Jane Austin in *Pride and Prejudice*. Like Mr. Bennett in that novel, Henry had five daughters for whom he had to make provision and secure as favourable marriages as possible. The girls were named Dorothea, Frances, Mary Ann, Isabella and Louise. Dorothea, more commonly known as Dolly, had from her earliest days been noted for her sweetness of nature and her beauty. Little is known about the girls' early years but, in a letter to a friend, Dolly described a shopping expedition when a maid brought

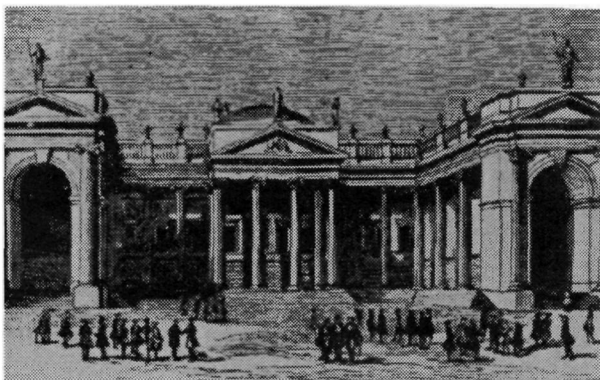


*Earl of Ely, his wife, Dolly Monroe and Angelica Kauffman*

them with her to Banbridge. The girls were not to be exposed to the heady excitement of 18th century Banbridge and were left at the little graveyard in Seapatrick to stay among the grassy mounds while the maid went on to the shops. So it would appear that Dolly's early years were spent in quiet innocence in the pastoral surroundings of the, as yet un-industrialised, Bann valley. An exciting day out was likely to be a visit to friends or relations in the neighbourhood. Such surroundings were very different from the raffish, hectic Georgian Dublin to which she was soon to move.

The benefits of a successful marriage had been realised by Dolly's aunt, Frances Monroe, a sister of her father, who had married Henry, Viscount Loftus of Ely in 1745. Lord Loftus was a rich and influential man with a home in Rathfarnham Castle near Dublin and a town house in Hume Street in Dublin City. (The family name is still preserved in Ely Lodge in County Fermanagh, the home of the Loftus family until the 1940s). Frances was to find that, despite her new husband's important position, he was a weak and vain man and soon she came to be the dominant partner.

An extremely socially ambitious woman she had Rathfarnham Castle extensively modernised to the highest standards of the day and threw herself wholeheartedly into Dublin society.



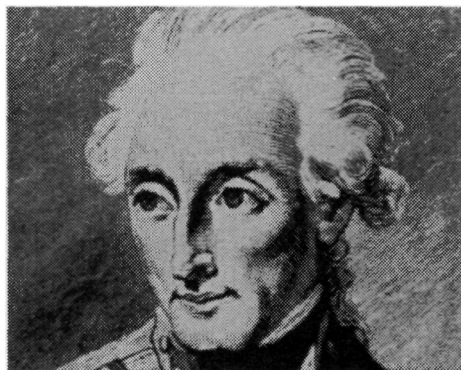
*Bank of Ireland*

Lord Loftus was a member of the Irish Parliament. This was a somewhat unruly body, the management of which had been entrusted by the London government to a group called 'The

Undertakers'. This nickname arose because they had undertaken to get the King's business through the Irish House of Commons. These 'undertakers' had become so powerful that, instead of being agents of the King's Lord Lieutenant (or Viceroy), they were able to dictate to him. They had arrived at the position where they wanted all Irish affairs to be under the direction of the Irish Parliament. The King's ministers in London (Lord North and Lord Bute) decided that the time had come to crush them and so they sent Lord Townshend, a friend of theirs, to be the new Viceroy and 'bring back the administration to the Castle'.

The Irish Parliament was opposite the gates of Trinity College in a building now occupied by the Bank of Ireland. Its composition was similar to the Westminster Parliament with a House of Lords and a House of Commons. It became notorious for corruption and place hunting. Of one member (John Hely-Hutchinson) it was said 'If you gave him Great Britain and Ireland for a demesne, he would ask for the Isle of Man as a potato garden'. Lord Townshend determined to exploit this corruptibility and to win over a number of peers to his side. He particularly cultivated a group known as the 'patriot peers' and among these was Dolly Monroe's uncle, Lord Loftus. It seemed to Townshend, that given the nature of the man, he would be susceptible to being worked on.

Frances, Lady Loftus, had no children of her own. On a visit to Roes Hall she was captivated by Dolly's sweet nature and good looks and decided to bring her back to Dublin to live with



*Henry Grattan*



*Henry Flood*

her in Rathfarnham Castle. So it was that Dolly was plucked from her rural idyll in Tullylish and plunged right into the heart of Dublin society. Dublin at that time was the second city in the British Isles and socially it was brighter than it had ever been before or since. The Irish aristocracy still lived in Ireland (rather than being absentees in England) and maintained town houses in Dublin. They ate, drank, gambled, and attended theatres and clubs, spending lavishly the rents garnered from overworked tenants. In the poorer quarters drunkenness and prostitution were rife. Yet this aristocratic class did encourage the arts so that literature, the theatre and musical life flourished. An example of this was that the first performance of Handel's great oratorio 'Messiah' was given at the 'New Musick-Hall' in Fishamble Street, Dublin on 13th April 1742.

It is probable that Lady Loftus had in mind that she might bring about a good society marriage for Dolly but she could scarcely have guessed the quality of suitors that she would attract. Many of the glittering members of the Dublin society of the time are still familiar names. The Irish Parliament had Henry Grattan and Henry Flood, Oliver Goldsmith was a rising literary figure and the stage had R.B. Sheridan. The nature of the time is probably best exemplified by Francis Andrews, the provost of Trinity College and MP for Londonderry, and his lady friend Peg Woffington. Andrews was very much a man of his time, intellectually brilliant but morally decadent. He was responsible for

the reconstruction of much of Trinity College including the facade with which we are still familiar. He was a distinguished scholar and collector of books, paintings and fine wines. He also had an eye for a good-looking woman and among his lady friends was the notorious actress Peg Woffington. Peg had a beauty to match Dolly but her character was very different. As a young girl, the orphaned daughter of a bricklayer, she had sold watercress outside Trinity College and her looks had attracted many students. Taken up by a Madame Volante, a high rope walker, who used her as one of the two children she carried in a basket, she was apprenticed in the famous 'Smock Alley Theatre' where she eventually played Ophelia in Hamlet before going to London. She took the capital by storm. She played opposite David Garrick, and became his partner for a number of years, before breaking off the relationship and returning to Dublin and Smock Alley. When Thomas Sheridan, father of R.B. Sheridan established



*Peg Woffington*

the exclusive 'Beefsteak Club' she became its president. As she was the only female this caused a considerable stir! Peg was not a woman to be trifled with and on one occasion she chased a rival actress off the stage and stabbed her behind the curtain.

When Dolly arrived in Dublin aged eighteen; her youthful beauty made an immediate and electrifying sensation. It is difficult to explain the extent of this except by recognising that Dublin was a jaded society eager for novelty, be it a new opera, a new play, a new dance or a new beauty. The ascendancy gentry were easily bored - Dolly was a new face. Every man wanted to meet her, and soon she was the toast of every male dining-club in the city. Crowds surrounded the house in Hume Street and she had to take her morning walk at 6.00 am to avoid them! The newspapers reported her every movement and printed poems and articles, which named her admirers (some of whom they lampooned). Many painters tried to capture her beauty. The most successful of these was the famous Austrian portraitist Angelica Kauffman. Two portraits of Dolly by this distinguished painter are in the possession of the Irish National Gallery but unfortunately these are not currently on display.

Suitors began to make their way to Rathfarnham and those who made definite proposals of marriage were, the now aged Francis Andrews, the parliamentarian Henry Grattan and Sir Hercules Langrish. Even Oliver Goldsmith fell under her spell and in 'The Haunch of Venison' wrote: -

Of the neck and breast I had still to dispose  
'Twas a neck and breast that would rival  
Monroe's.

Andrews was a particularly persistent suitor. To discourage his rivals he went so far as to have a flier published in the newspapers stating: -

"The Rt. Hon.F. Andrews, Provost of T.C.D. is about to lead to the hymeneal altar the beautiful Miss Monroe".

Lady Frances, however, had other and bigger fish to fry. The Viceroy, Lord Townshend, in his efforts to win over Lord Loftus visited the family at Rathfarnham. He was entranced by the young Dolly and soon made his feelings

plain, giving her to understand that he intended marriage. His ornate coach with its six running footmen was seen to be calling at the Hume Street residence three times a week.

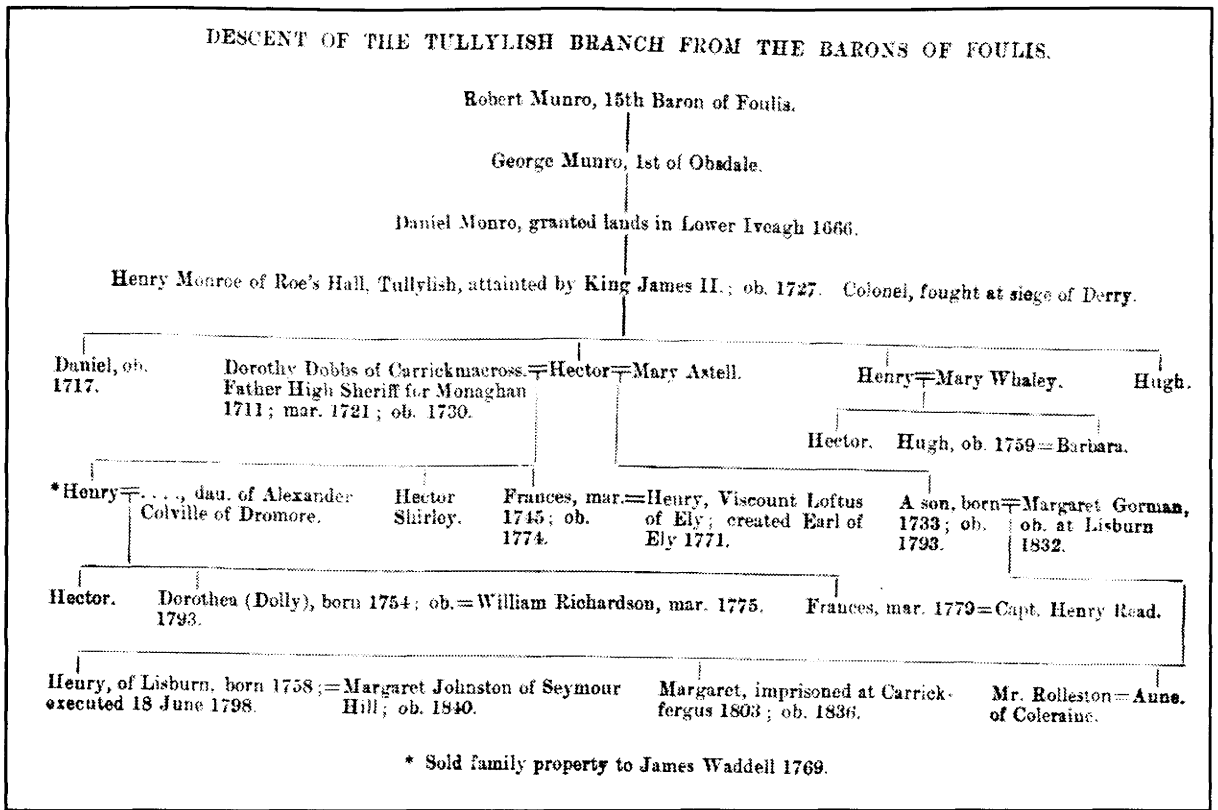
The prospects of such a match were breathtaking as the wife of the Lord Lieutenant would be the 'Vicerene' - she would stand in for the Queen of Ireland! The other suitors were ruthlessly dispatched, much to their annoyance, and either Gratten or Sir Hercules Langrish wrote a thinly disguised satire called 'Baratariania'. This was a parody of 'Don Quixote' which told of Sancho Panza being made governor of an island west of England. Three of his courtiers were Count and Countess Lofthouse and Donna Dorothea Monrosa. The story told how the countess was planning to marry off Dorothea, who is described,

"Lovely Dorothea, her stature was majestic, but her air and demeanour was nature itself. The peculiar splendour of her carriage was softened and subdued by the most affable condescension, and as sensibility gave a lustre to her eye so discretion gave a security to her heart, and indeed while her charms inspired universal rapture the authority of her innocence regulated and restrained it. The softest roses that ever youth and modesty poured out on beauty glowed on the lip of Dorothea. Her cheeks were the bloom of Hebe, and the purity of Diana was in her breast. Never did beauty appear so amiable nor virtue so adorned as in this incomparable virgin. But let us not be supposed to glance a thought against your purity lovely Dorothea! Whatever be your fortune and whatever way you go, you will retain yourself. If in public splendour and exalted station you will carry with you humility and modesty. If inauspicious destiny sink you to the rank of humble condition your beauties will adorn and your virtues dignify your retreat"

Andrews, perhaps due to his age, was less irritated and his will included the clause-

'I entreat Miss Dolly Monroe to accept my coloured prints - a fitter ornament for her dressing room than my library - as a mark of my greatest respect for her many amiable qualities' Lord Loftus, flattered by the attention paid to his niece crossed the floor and became a supporter of the Castle administration. As a reward he

DESCENT OF THE TULLYLISH BRANCH FROM THE BARONS OF FOULIS.



The Family Tree

was created Marquis of Ely. But Townshend's charm and blandishments did not win over everyone. His administration had lowered the tone of political life. Becoming more and more unpopular, he was eventually recalled to England. He was almost mobbed by a hostile crowd as he embarked from Dalkey, on 26 December 1771. His effigy was burned before his eyes and his last sight of Ireland was the light from the bonfires burning along the coast in celebration of his departure.

He did not bring Dolly with him, nor did he send for her when he got to England. Indeed his treatment of her was despicable. Before leaving Dublin he sent a poem to Andrews, which was widely circulated and which more or less said, "You are welcome to her!" While he had been taken by her looks and character in the long run she had been a pawn in the game of high politics and ambition played between Townshend and her aunt. The disappointment must have been intense and soon Dolly withdrew from Dublin and returned to Roes Hall and the quiet life.

However she was too attractive to be left unadmired and in 1775 married Mr. William Richardson of Richill. This more humble but happy marriage lasted for eighteen years, during which the couple travelled widely and had a villa in Italy, which they visited from time to time. Her reputation as a beauty lasted and people came out to the roads to see her carriage passing. She was not to be blessed with children and died in 1793 at the early age of thirty-nine. Her burial place was in the graveyard at Richill and surprisingly is not marked by a gravestone. This may, in some part, be due to the fact that her husband remarried in 1794. His new wife was Louisa Magennis from Waringstown, a connection of the Mc Innis family of Drumantine near Poyntzpass.

Dolly's marriage had all the marks of a happy one. However, from time to time she must have mused on the contrast between peaceful domesticity, and being wooed by a vice-regal lover who appeared to be offering her the chance to become the wife of the King's



representative in Ireland and so the highest in the land. Be that as it may she is still remembered as "The Famous Irish Beauty" while Townshend's name is only remembered for corruption and veniality.

**LINES IN PRAISE OF THE BEAUTY OF  
DOLLY MONROE**

From an Epistle to George Howard, Esq., by George Faulkner.

*Fond swain, I hear your wish is such  
Some painter should on canvas touch  
The beauties of Monroe;  
But where's the adventurer will dare  
The happy mixture to prepare  
Her peerless charms to shew?*

*First let the cheek with blushes glow  
Just as when damask roses blow,  
Glistening with morning dew,  
Contrasted with the virgin white  
With which the lily glads the sight  
Blend them in lovely hue.*

*And truly then that cheek to grace  
Upon her flowing tresses place  
The chestnut's auburn down.  
Her lips you may in sort depaint  
By cherries ripe, yet oh! 'twere faint  
Should them with hers be shewn.*