



# THE NOLAN

The Newsletter of the O'Nolan Clan Family Association

*Happy St. Patrick's Day to All,  
Beannachtai na Feile Padraig*

March 2010

Issue 20

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*Slan agus beannacht,  
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Editorial views and opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Clan association.

## **In Brief ...**

### **Next Clan Gathering**

On page 14 you will find details on the forthcoming Nolan Clan Gathering to be held on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September at the Lord Bagenal Inn in county Carlow.

For those who may have forgotten to renew their membership a copy of the membership renewal form is included on page 16 (last page).

Members are reminded that the clan dues are due at the beginning of each calendar year and it is the responsibility of individual members to ensure that their membership is up-to-date. The clan does not send out payment notices.

### **Articles in this Issue**

In this issue of the newsletter you will find two major articles.

The first article focuses on the period in Irish history just prior to and immediately after the “Invasion” of Ireland by the Normans and explores , what role the Crusades and more specifically the Templar knights may have played in the lives of our Nolan ancestors. Several possible links to modern-day Nolan families are identified but, one in particular stands out, that of the Nollent family of Normandy which, based upon all information uncovered so far, appears to have a family link to the O’Nolans of Forth O’Nolan dating back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

In the second article we focus on the mid to late 1800s and give a short biography of John Amnesty Nolan, a famous Carlow Nolan who played a major role in the fight for Ireland’s freedom.

### **A Carrot, an Egg & a Cup of Coffee!**

This is a short story where a mother attempts to pass on to her grown-up daughter a piece of acquired wisdom about how one should approach adversity. Given the recent near-collapse of the world banking system and the many challenges now facing us, I thought that we could all use a bit of advice in this department!

### **St. Patrick’s Day Celebrations**

This year marks the 15<sup>th</sup> year since the founding of the modern-day Nolan Clan family association. For my part I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who, in the past, have contributed to making the Nolan Clan a vibrant entity wherein we can all celebrate our Irishness and our individual families’ survival despite hardships and adversity.

On St. Patrick’s day give a tip of the hat to the many generations who came before us and who now celebrate in heaven. Also give thanks for the many friends you have. Have a pint! Celebrate life! Celebrate your freedom!

Cheers!

### **Happy Birthday Anita**

Before lapsing into the main text of the newsletter I could not pass up the opportunity to pass along a belated happy birthday wish to my Aunt Anita who recently celebrated her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday. May you have many more!

*By Roger Nowlan*

*Newsletter Editor  
(<http://nolanfamilies.org>)*

# The Knights Templar & the O’Nolans

## Introduction

This article focuses on the history of the Knights Templar and explores possible early links between it, the O’Nolans of Ireland and the De Nollent family of France with known origins in Normandy. In the process possible links to families bearing variants of the Nolan family name are also identified.

## Early Years of the Templars

After the first Crusade, Jerusalem having been secured, in 1118/1119, Hughes de Payens and eight other knights, took vows of obedience to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, resolving to “live in holy poverty and chastity, and to devote themselves to the care and protection of Christian pilgrims”. Initially the number of Templar knights was small but, by 1129, largely due to the efforts of the Cistercian monk Bernard de Clairvaux, this devoted group of knights had grown in number and obtained from the Pope its own rule as a religious order.

The order was soon showered with gifts of land, money and privileges to help them in their cause. Perhaps the most significant of privileges was the freedom from tithes, many taxes and tolls. This enabled them to establish, in a relatively short time, unrivalled travel and shipping networks and thereby augment their wealth. Having to administer many land holdings and large sums of money the order also developed a competency in accounting and, together with the Jews, pioneered banking in Europe.

Clad with a white robe sporting a bright red cross, the Templars projected the image of gentlemen, well-respected and fully implicated in worldly affairs.



In 1145, Pope Eugene III called the Second Crusade in response to the fall of an occupied territory in Palestine. This was also the first crusade to be led by European kings and history tells us that Scottish crusaders were involved most notably winning a battle against the Moors in Lisbon. Given that, in Europe at the time, the Irish were still being referred to as “Scots” we may assume that Irish crusaders were also involved.

In 1147, the prominent Cistercian monk Bernard de Clairvaux was called upon to promote the Second Crusade. By then, the Cistercians had already established an abbey in Ireland at Mellifont (1142; Meath) and, during the Second Crusade (1147-1149), with the full support of the local Irish kings, including Dermot MacMurrough, King of Leinster and Turlough O’Brien, King of Thomond (Limerick area), four more abbeys would be founded at Bective (Meath), Baltinglass (Kildare), Monasterenanagh (Limerick) and Boyle (Roscommon).

Given Bernard de Clairvaux's earlier promotion of the Templar order, it is highly likely that in 1147-1148 some, if not the majority, of the Irish recruits to these new Cistercian abbeys would have been diverted to the Knights Templar Order. This scenario thus raises the possibility that, in this time period, one or more Nolan tribesmen would have joined the Templar order if for no other reason than to develop their fighting skills.

## Early Travel to Normandy

Around 1150, trade between the Irish port of Wexford and the Norman ports at the mouth of the Seine, the major gateway to the European market, would have been commonplace. Individual travel to and from the Continent would also have been relatively unrestricted.

Furthermore, given that, in 1167, two years prior to the main Norman invasion of Ireland, Dermot MacMurrough, the defeated king of Leinster, went to Normandy and brought back a small force of Norman knights to help him win back his kingdom, we can safely assume that, at the time, some sort of working relationship existed between the noble houses of Leinster and Normandy.

In such a context of free travel and exchange, the O'Nolan, Chief of Forth O'Nolan (Carlow area) and holder of the hereditary office of Marshall to the kings of Leinster, would certainly have considered sending one or more of his sons to Normandy to learn the skills of stewardship and service to royalty.

At the time, the best place in Normandy to learn such skills would have been at the household of Guillaume de Tancarville, Chamberlain of Normandy. Around 1154, even John FitzGilbert, Marshall of England, sent there his youngest son there for training.

The Tancarvilles were related by marriage to several other influential and esteemed families

of Normandy including the Crespin (Crispin) and Harcourt families. In particular, in 1147, Robert de Harcourt, a relative, had built a chapel (St. Étienne-de-Renneville) in Eure and donated it and its surrounding lands to the Knights Templar. Lying in the middle of a fertile agricultural plain, this Templar site soon became one of the wealthiest in Europe and also served as a commandery.

## A Nolan Knight in Normandy

In 1170, in Normandy, a knight by the name of Guillaume de Nollent wrote his last will and testament, leaving behind a wife, Isabel de Tancarville, and a son named Roger.

His wife, Isabel, was the daughter of Guillaume de Tancarville. From land records, it is also possible to establish that Guillaume de Nollent's land lay close to the wealthy Templar site of St. Étienne-de-Renneville founded in 1147 by the Tancarville relative, Robert de Harcourt.

Modern genealogies further add that Guillaume had a grandson named Isambart, a somewhat unusual first name of Gaelic origin meaning "bard of Jesus", suggesting a celtic origin for the family.

In present-day Co. Carlow we find the small community of Tankardstown located next to Tullow, the ancient seat of the O'Nolans of Forth O'Nolan. Could its early settlers have been members of the Norman Tancarville family? If so, this would be further evidence of a link between the Nollent family of Normandy and the O'Nolans of Forth O'Nolan.

In France the commune of Theil-Nolent in the canton of Thiberville still thrives today as it did in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, and over the course of the intervening centuries some descendants are known to have used the "Nolan" spelling for their family name.

## A Templar Patron in Ireland

The son of the English Marshall sent to the Tancarville household for training was none other than the future “William the Marshall” and, given the timeframe when he was there (c1154-c1172), he would no doubt have known and perhaps even sparred with the knight Guillaume de Nollent (b. circa 1130) married to his host’s daughter Isabel. He may even have attended the funeral for Guillaume whose life ended abruptly in 1170, seemingly as a result of involvement in the Norman invasion of Ireland.

William was knighted by his host, the senior Tancarville knight, in 1172 and remained in France for a few more years making a living by competing in various jousting tournaments.



His fame rising with each victory, William was soon summoned back to England to serve in the royal household where he became embroiled in the king’s battles against his own sons. In one such battle, he spared the life of the future king, Richard the Lionheart and, upon becoming king, Richard was quick to seek William’s favour, honouring a promise made by his father, Henry II, that William would be given the hand of Isabel de Clare in marriage.

Styled at court as the “Countess of Ireland”, Isabel was the only surviving child of Richard FitzGilbert de Clare, Earl of Pembroke (better known as “Strongbow”, leader of the Norman invasion of Ireland) and Aoife (daughter of the

former king of Leinster, Dermot MacMurrough) and, as such held rights to vast lands in Ireland (Leinster) and Wales (Pembroke).

After his marriage to Aoife in 1189, William, as the new Earl of Pembroke and Leinster soon set about making improvements to his wife’s holdings in Wales.

In 1199, William inherited his father’s position of royal Marshall and quickly became known throughout Europe as “William the Marshall” or simply “the Marshall”.

In the early 1200s he began making improvements in Ireland building a Cistercian abbey at Graiguenamanagh (Carlow) on the river Barrow (1204-1207) and, a bit further upriver, a castle in the town of Carlow (1207-1213). It was also during this time that two Templar commanderies were built in Co. Carlow, one at Killerig (between the towns of Carlow and Rathvilly) and one at Dunleckney (near Bagenalstown).

After a short illness, in May 1219, William passed away but not before having donned Templar robes and professing his vows as a Templar knight, fulfilling a lifelong wish.

By the time of his death, William had served four kings - Henry II, Richard the Lionheart, John (of Magna Carta fame) and Henry III - and risen from obscurity to become for the last four years of his life the regent of England. Known for his fairness and chivalry, he was thought by many to have been the "greatest knight that ever lived".

In the succeeding years, each of William's sons became Earl of Pembroke and Marshal of England, and each died without issue. William's vast holdings were then divided among the husbands of his five daughters (family names: Bigod, Clare, Briouze, etc.).

## **Dissolution of the Templar Order**

In 1291, the fall of Acre in Palestine put an end to Christian rule in the Holy Land and the need for the protection of pilgrims traveling there. Initially there were talks of merging the two military orders of the Templars and the Hospitallers, however such talks were soon overtaken by events in France.

By the early 1300s, many lords and sovereigns owed exorbitant amounts to the Templars and were eager to find a way out. Such an avenue presented itself in 1307.

King Philip IV of France, heavily indebted to the Templars, mounted a campaign to discredit the Templar Order. On Friday October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1307, on charges of immoral behaviour and heresy, thousands of French Templars were swiftly rounded up, imprisoned and often tortured. Multiple trials followed culminating in hundreds of Templars being burnt at the stake.

By 1312 all trials had ended and the Pope had agreed to dissolve the Order. The Pope, however, no longer believed that the accused had been heretics. Although they may have committed grave sins, they were not heretics and were absolved of this charge. The damage, however, had been done and the Order's temporal holdings were reassigned to the Knights Hospitallers.

In England, motivated by similar interests to those in France, Edward II of England publicly ordained in 1307 that all Templars in his dominions be seized and that the Order be suppressed. In Ireland, however, perhaps because of recent military assistance provided by the Knights Templar or a not so flagrant conduct, action against them was delayed. Arrests only began in earnest in 1309 after a reminder had been received from the king.

In 1312 a trial for those arrested was held in Dublin. With great solemnity and before an assembly of high-placed church and state officials, feebly-supported accusations were brought forward and, as if pre-ordained, the final verdict was that the Order of the Knights Templar should be totally abolished in Ireland. With the death knoll having been struck, Irish Templars still at large in Ireland were left to fend for themselves, finding refuge wherever they could.

## **Fate of the Templar Knights**

Those Templar knights with an established reputation and skills in financial affairs (banking, land transactions, etc.) or trade (shipping, import/export, etc.) probably continued doing business as usual but in some secular capacity.

Those favouring a religious life likely found refuge with the Franciscans or Dominicans, as happened in Italy or they may have chosen to go to Portugal where King Dinis had founded a new Order of religious knights, the Order of Christ, and given it the Templar's former holdings.

As regards those Templars with highly developed fighting skills, in 1312 two major avenues would have been open to them, either a change of allegiance to the Order of Knights Hospitallers to whom their holdings had been re-assigned or a flight to Scotland where they could help Robert the Bruce win freedom for his country. Aided by the O'Donnell rulers of Tyrconnell, many are known to have chosen the latter option, first rallying at the Templar site near Ballymote, Co. Sligo (Templehouse lake), and then fleeing to Scotland via the ports of Sligo and Tyrconnell and, indeed, eventually playing a pivotal role in the Scots epic victory over the English at Bannockburn in 1315.

## Repercussions in Ireland

Besides bringing about the ultimate demise of the order of Knights Templar, the end of the Crusades marked the end of an era of détente throughout Europe when wars between nations and dreams of conquest had been largely kept in check by a common purpose, that of the liberation of Palestine. A notable exception, crucial to our story, had been the conquest of Normandy by the French in 1204.

At the time, this conquest had no doubt created turmoil in the various Norman families of Ireland, having to choose between an allegiance to England and one to France. The same would have been true for monks and knights whose Order had close ties with France, most notably the Cistercians and the Templars. However, while the Crusades lasted their allegiance went largely untested.

After the Crusades, true allegiances would become more evident. For example, the De Lacy family, best known for having built many of the early Norman castles in Ireland sided with the Irish against the English.

The same was also likely true for many of the descendants of the Templar patron William the Marshall. This is reflected in a famous altercation in 1297 between king Edward I and Roger Bigod, Lord of Carlow, who refused to serve against the king of France in Gascony. Although commanded and threatened with hanging,

Roger's final words were "[By God], O king, I will neither go nor hang."



By 1301, the Irish were anxious to gain their freedom and certain English settlers were no longer tolerant of the “incursions of the Irish” into their towns, of their ways and customs.

In early 1307, Edward I of England died and was soon succeeded by his son Edward II. The scene was now set. Complaints from Ireland now falling on fresh ears and dreams of conquest resurfacing, the new king was quick to follow the example of King Philip of France, ordering the arrest of all Templars in his dominions and the Order suppressed.

In 1301, with the assistance of monks from the Cistercian (Duiske) abbey at Graiguenamagh, the Templar Order had built a new castle at Ballymoon, upriver from Graiguenamanagh. However, in 1308, soon after receiving the king's order in Ireland, this Templar site was “suppressed”. Looking at the present-day delapidated ruins of Ballymoon castle, next to Ballywilliamroe, the “townland of Bloody William”, there can be no doubt that the Templar knights resisted the takeover of their castle.



As we have seen, after the dissolution of the Templar order in 1312, many knights fled to Scotland, eventually playing a pivotal in securing freedom for Scotland in 1315 under the command of Robert the Bruce.

Scottish Independence having been won, many knights are likely to have returned to Ireland in January 1317 as part of the army of Edward the Bruce, brother of Robert, who was intent on “free[ing] Ireland from the English yoke”.

The O’Nolans, O’Mores, O’Tooles, MacMurroughs and other Irish chiefs soon joined in the fray and, on January 26, 1317, the combined army won a major battle against the English at the “mote of Ardscurr”, near Athy (Kildare). That day the English forces incurred heavy losses and the army, commanded by Edward the Bruce, spread throughout the country winning battle after battle but, in the end, overtaken by famine and reduced in number, it had to retreat to Ulster.

By May of the following year, the English had regrouped and, having collected a large force, defeated the combined Irish and Scottish forces in a decisive battle at Faughart, near Dundalk, on May 28, 1318.

In the succeeding decades, at every opportune moment, the Leinster chiefs would make further attempts. In one such attempt, in 1329, Richard O’Nolan, son of Philip (O’Nolan chief killed in 1327?), and a few trusted knights made a daring attempt to rescue the king of Leinster, Donald Art MacMurrough (Kavanagh), who was being kept by the English. The king having been moved, the attempt failed but Richard took along a few high-ranking hostages and retreated to the security of Forth O’Nolan.

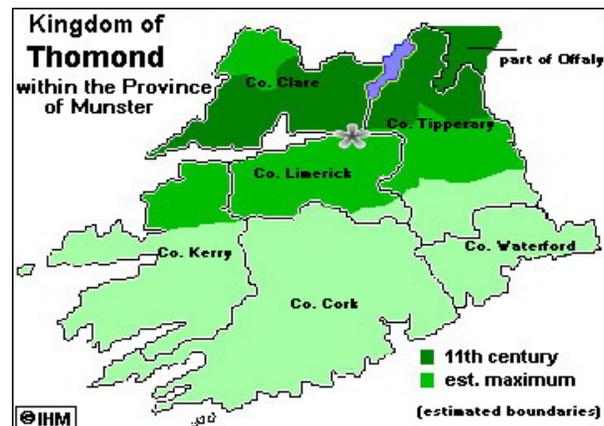
In an attempt to disconcert the O’Nolans, the English now raided Nolan territory intent on burning and laying to waste whatever they could not carry off. However, encountering stiff resistance and incurring heavy losses, they retreated to Gowran (Kilkenny) to regroup and refit. In the meantime, Richard with his hostages, by a circuitous route, withdrew to the Cistercian Abbey at Graiguenamanagh where the O’Nolans had “loyal friends” who, in light of events leading up to this point, we suspect that that these were former Templar knights from Ballymoon castle (“suppressed” in 1308) taking refuge in the Cistercian Abbey.

In November 1329, the English finally caught up with Richard who, at length, despite valiant efforts by his small band of knights, was compelled to surrender, offering up his son as a hostage. Subsequent to this incident, the Abbot was charged with harbouring felons and, as for Richard, without any apparent provocation, in January 1330, he was attacked by an unknown party and killed.

## Other Possible Nolan Links

### Nolans of Galway

In early Christian times, the Ua hUallachain (Holohans, Nolans, ...) lived in northern Offaly and, by the 11<sup>th</sup> century, their territory extended into the kingdom of Thomond centred around the city of Limerick.



By the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, strong bonds of kinship had also been forged with the newly arrived Normans, the daughter of the King of Thomond, having married William Fitzadelm de Burgo, progenitor of the Burkes in Ireland.

Appointed Governor of Limerick in 1185 and succeeding Strongbow as Chief Governor of Ireland, William soon set about conquering all of Connaught, eventually overcoming the O’Connors.

His son Richard married an O'Connor and is said to have founded Galway city, building there a fine house for himself and a Franciscan friary. Around the same time, his older brother, Walter De Burgh, Earl of Ulster, supposedly built a friary (Franciscan /Augustian) at nearby Logboy (Claremorris, Co. Mayo) and this is where we pick the first traces of Nolans in Connaught. Proof of this is found on a monument erected in the Galway city Franciscan friary in 1394 and dedicated to the memory of the "Nolans of Loughboy".

Recognizing that the early Nolans of Connaught were associated with the De Burgh family both in Logboy and in Galway city we conclude that the two families must have been somehow closely associated.

Such a close association could have first developed very early on in the Limerick area where Nolans and the Gaelic-friendly De Burghs (Burkes) lived in close proximity. If we are indeed correct in this assumption then the only question remaining would be "When did they go to Connaught?".

Two major possibilities present themselves: circa 1200, when the Nolans would have accompanied the De Burgh family in their

## **Summary/Conclusion**

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Our study of early Templar history has uncovered several interesting possible early Nolan family linkages, most notably the one between the O'Nolans of Forth O'Nolan and the Nollent family of Normandy. As regards the latter, the migration of O'Nolans to France would have occurred sometime during or after the Second Crusade (1147-1149) and in a broader context of friendly relations and regular visits between the noble families of Leinster and those of Normandy.

conquest of Connaught, or; circa 1312, when they would have been part of the flight of Templars from the Limerick area, possibly entering Connaught via the ports of Galway or Sligo and then taking refuge at the Logboy friary (circa 1312).

## **Newlands of Scotland**

Having seen how Irish Templar knights helped the Scots gain their freedom, it is quite likely that some present-day Scottish families are descendants of Templar knights who remained in Scotland. The Newlands may be one such family, their ancestor choosing Newland as the new family name in a new homeland.

## **Nolins of La Rochelle**

Aided in their flight by the O'Donnell of Tyrconnell, better known as the "Fisher-King", some Templar knights may have fled to the port of La Rochelle where fish was traded for wine. In La Rochelle, the Templar knights would likely have found work in the shipping industry or in port defense/safety and, over time, adopted the family name Nolin.

In this context of détente, the Invasion of Ireland by the Normans in 1169, at least initially, could even be seen as the result of a vow of friendship and assistance made between fellow knights as they huddled around the fire under the bright night sky of Palestine.

The Nolan family crest with its red cross, four swords and the motto "Cor unum, via una", one heart, one way, may even find its roots in this early period of our history.

*By Roger Nowlan*



**Map relating to De Nollent family of France**



**Map relating to earliest Nolan Family of Galway**

# *John Amnesty Nolan –soldier of Irish Liberty*

## Introduction

John Amnesty Nolan, a Carlow Nolan, is best known for his success in obtaining the release of members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) who had been arrested during the Fenian troubles of the 1860s. This article takes a cursory look at his life and times, and his contribution to the cause of Irish freedom.

## His family & Early Influences

John's parents lived in the Ballon area of county Carlow and were both Nolans, a not so surprising occurrence given that even today every second household in the area has some sort of Nolan family connection. John's mother, Alicia, was a descendant of the Shangarry Nolans and the limited information available points to his father Maurice having been a descendant of the Chief O'Nolan family of Co. Carlow, the Ballykealey Nolans. Local tradition also holds that the family was somehow related to two prominent clergymen, Bishop Nolan and Cardinal Cullen.

Based upon an account by Fr. Peadar MacSuibhne, John and his siblings would have been born at the old Kearney farm which lies on the northern approach to Killane townland, coming down from the main Kilknock crossroad. Today the farm is easily distinguishable by its front gate made out of hinged wagonwheels.

John born in 1841 had an older brother, Patrick Francis (P.F.) who became a priest and is best known for having built the church at Rathoe (part of Ballon-Rathoe parish). He also had a brother named Michael who did not marry and a sister named Mary who married a Patrick Lalor.

While growing up, John and his siblings would likely have been influenced by the political views of their uncle, the Rev. Patrick Celestine (P.C.) Nolan, Parish Priest of Rathvilly (1855-1895), a peace-loving man of great culture who, in the early 1840s, put his heart and soul into Daniel O'Connell's campaign to repeal the Act of Union (1800) between Great Britain and Ireland, denouncing it as unjust political, economic, and cultural domination in Irish affairs.

## 1860s Political Environment

In the 1840's, through non-violent means, Daniel O'Connell's Repeal movement had tried unsuccessfully to obtain the Repeal of the Act of Union (1800) with Great Britain. By the mid-1840's, impatient with the progress of the Repeal movement, a splinter group, the Young Ireland movement, was formed and, ostensibly opposed to O'Connell's strict policy of non-violence, they soon had organised a Rebellion which took place in Tipperary in 1848. The Young Irelander movement having failed in its attempt at rebellion, its leaders became somewhat conciliatory and sensitive to the impact the famine (1845-1849) was having on the country, the movement was put on hold ten years later in 1858 as part of the newly founded Irish Republican Brotherhood, the IRB, whose primary aim was to achieve independence for Ireland. In America, the Brotherhood, calling itself the Fenian Brotherhood, collected funds and enlisted members for an Irish invasion.

Still recuperating from the effects of the Great Famine (1845-1849) in 1858 very few Irish initially took interest in the Brotherhood but, by 1863, the tide had turned. It had its own newspaper, "The Irish People" and interest was growing, especially in urban centres. However, ever vigilant, the Government kept a watchful eye on the Brotherhood and had spies and informers who reported on its every move.

By 1865, Dublin Castle had become concerned with the spread of Fenianism, which had infiltrated the British Army, the Irish communities in Britain. The movement was growing stronger with each passing day, especially in Dublin, Cork and Tipperary, and, in an effort to stymie its growth, the Government began arresting leaders. Next, in September 1865, it seized the Brotherhood's paper, "The Irish People" and imprisoned its staff.

On the morning of March 6th, 1867, a long-awaited and often deferred Rising finally came off at Tallaght, near Dublin. Snow had fallen heavily the previous night, and on the Dublin mountains it was several feet deep. Nevertheless a large body of men came out from the city, and made a stand against a Government force sent out to oppose them.

Lacking leaders and seemingly without a concerted plan, the Rising eventually fizzled out. Attempts at insurrection were made at other places and other times throughout the country, but they too failed. Several people were arrested and sent to trial resulting in death sentences, long prison sentences or penal servitude.

As one could be imprisoned without trial in Ireland at that time, the surviving revolutionaries under the command of Col. Thomas Kelly retreated to England, hoping to revive the organisation from there.

In September 1867, after a convention in Manchester, Col. Kelly and his aide Captain Deasy were arrested and imprisoned but, in no time, the local Fenians had organized a rescue which succeeded. In the process, however, a policeman serjeant was accidentally shot. In December 1867, another jailbreak took place in Clerkenwell, London, and here too things went badly, several working class people being blown up in the process.

Such unprecedented violence led to widespread panic in England, fuelling anti-Irish sentiments which made it near impossible to hold a fair trial for any Irish prisoner. In the Manchester incident, five suspects were arrested and tried for the police shooting and, although no clear evidence was ever presented, three of the accused were convicted of murder. None of them had fired the fatal shot and yet they were hanged as accessories to murder. Under normal circumstances, they would at most have been convicted of manslaughter.

To the Irish - the three men hung - Allen, Larkin and O'Brien - became known as the Manchester Martyrs and their last words "God save Ireland!" a rallying cry for the Irish cause.

## The Amnesty Association

Prior to the 1867 Fenian Rising, John Nolan had been an organiser in the Myshall-Ballon area in Co. Carlow. However, after the failed Rebellion he seems to have gone to Dublin, perhaps in response to a need for the organisation to regroup and concentrate its efforts.

At the time the organisation was having very little success in the rural areas and the Catholic Church was vehemently opposed to the Fenian movement, most notably in the person of Cardinal Cullen who supposedly went as far as excommunicating Fenians.

Such action would have been particularly devastating for John who, as far as we know, was related to the Cardinal.

The Rising had resulted in many arrests and the Fenians given long prison sentences. Lingering in prisons they were subjected to much harsher treatment than that typically given to inmates.

Those Fenians still on the outside agitated constantly for the release of their comrades and there was strong public sympathy for the prisoners.

Around this time, John met Isaac Butt, a barrister who had represented many of the Fenian prisoners at their trials and may in fact have represented John himself. Together they founded the Amnesty Association with Isaac as the president and John as principal secretary and one of its most forceful and tireless organisers.

## A Ruse to Raise Funds

John was a splendid organiser but found it difficult to get funds. In 1869, when he heard that Lord Spencer, the new Lord Lieutenant, would be visiting Dublin, he hit upon a plan.

They would organise a grand fete in the Exhibition Building, Earlsfort Terrace, under the patronage of the new Lord Lieutenant. They would get a military band and induce fashionable Dublin to meet the vice royal party. The main object would be to raise funds. To carry off their they would use as a front a benevolent organisation of English origin but under Nolan's control. Using the organisation's notepaper John wrote to Earl Spencer asking for his patronage of a benefit concert to be held in honour of his visit and that of his wife Lady Spencer. The Earl readily consented and plans for the fete were made. Demand for admission to the fete was overwhelming and thousands had to be turned away.

On the day of the visit, at four in the afternoon, the vice-royal party arrived at the Exhibition Building and were received by John Nolan, Patrick Egan and local Fenian leaders, all the while the band playing "God save the Queen".

Everything passed off without a hitch and Earl Spencer expressed to Mr. Nolan his delight at the warm reception he and Lady Spencer had received. In the final tally, the proceeds of the benefit concert amounted to 500 pounds which were promptly added to the Association's funds.

## John Makes His Mark

To rouse public opinion in Ireland for the release of the political prisoners, held in English jails John organised a great amnesty meeting to be held at Cabra, Phibsborough, Dublin. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 1869, two hundred thousand people congregated all demanding the release of the Fenian prisoners.

On January 5, 1871, the British, in a general amnesty, released 30 Fenian prisoners. Most of these had been either swept up by the British in 1865 when the Fenian paper had been suppressed, or arrested for having taken part in the March 1867 Rising, or rounded up after the rescue of the Fenian leaders Kelly and Deasy in Manchester in September 1867.

One condition for the release of the Fenian prisoners was that they exile themselves to the country of their choice and not return until their sentences had expired. Many chose to go to Australia, some to America.

Recognized for his major contribution in securing amnesty for the Fenian prisoners John became henceforth known as John “Amnesty” Nolan.

## A Journey to America

In 1872 “Amnesty” Nolan left Dublin for New York where he was connected in business with McSwiney, Delany and Co., a large drapery establishment.

While in New York he remained politically active mobilising American public opinion for the release of Irish political prisoners held in English and Irish jails. In this he was successful and, during this time, many prisoners were given early releases including a Michael Davitt, who later became a co-founder with Charles Stewart Parnell of the National Land League.

After Davitt's release in 1877, John, suffering from a lung ailment, withdrew from all political activities and went to work in Philadelphia for the firm of Sharpless Brothers (one of the largest dry goods firms in America at the time) where he worked until shortly before his death.

Sometime in April 1887, “stricken by his last attack of the lungs”, he died at St. Vincent's Hospital, New York, and was buried in that city.

## Final Hommage

On a November day in 1887, in Dublin's Glasnevin cemetery, twelve thousand persons assembled in Dublin in honour of the Manchester Martyrs who had been unjustly hung 20 years previous. That day several hundred people also assembled to witness the unveiling of a fine monument erected to the memory of John Amnesty Nolan who had died in April of that year. Many of them came to pay homage to a man who had remembered them when they were in prison. One of them, Michael Davitt, the founder of the Irish Land League (1879), was particularly grateful and speaking to those assembled, described John Amnesty as a generous, kindly man, as true a soldier of Irish Liberty as any that had fought in the present generation.

A close friend of the deceased, a John Francis Xavier O'Brien also stated that he “should be remembered in Ireland's long list of martyrs. Had he taken the course of simply minding his business he would have been one of the most prosperous merchants in Dublin (‘hear hear’ from the assembled crowd). But he chose the service of Ireland and gave up his health and his prospects in her service.”

## Conclusion

At a key moment in Ireland's struggle for freedom, John Nolan of Killane, later known as John “Amnesty” Nolan, succeeded in moderating tensions between Ireland and Great Britain, looking for a win-win solution for both sides.

Reviewing his life story, it would also appear that he espoused the non-violent approach to achieving one's goals. His ruse to raise funds for the Amnesty Association certainly stands out as a non-violent means but the organisation of a mass rally to demand the release of Fenian prisoners being subjected to inhumane treatment certainly set an example for others to follow.

According to a Fr. William Maher (believed to have been a relative), John was “the originator, the life and soul, the moving spirit of the Amnesty movement.” “Tall, handsome and eloquent, ... had he lived, [he] would, in all probability, be not unworthy to rank among such imperishable names as Grattan, Flood, Fox and Curran.”

*By Roger Nowlan*



## **A Carrot, an Egg & a Cup of Coffee – A great lesson!**

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A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up; she was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as one problem was solved, a new one arose.

Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to boil. In the first she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil; without saying a word.

In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to her daughter, she asked, 'Tell me what you see.'

'Carrots, eggs, and coffee,' she replied.

Her mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. The mother then asked the daughter to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard boiled egg.

Finally, the mother asked the daughter to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma. The daughter then asked, *'What does it mean, mother?'*

Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity: boiling water. Each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak.

The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened. The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water.

'Which are you?' she asked her daughter. 'When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean?'

Think of this: Which am I? Am I the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity do I wilt and become soft and lose my strength?

Am I the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Did I have a fluid spirit, but after a death, a breakup, a financial hardship or some other trial, have I become hardened and stiff? Does my shell look the same, but on the inside am I bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and hardened heart?

Or am I like the coffee bean? The bean actually changes the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavor. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you get better and change the situation around you. When the hour is the darkest and trials are their greatest do you elevate yourself to another level? How do you handle adversity? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean?

May you have enough happiness to make you sweet, enough trials to make you strong, enough sorrow to keep you human and enough hope to make you happy.

# O'Nolan Clan Ò Nuallàin

## Membership Application / Renewal Form



I wish to join/renew my membership in the O'Nolan Clan, a voluntary, non-profit organisation, relying upon its members for fund-raising, organizing clan activities and recruiting new members.

I understand that membership is open to anyone who supports the goals and aspirations of the clan:

- To organize a Clan Gathering every second year
- To publish a Clan Newsletter at least once a year
- To create and maintain, for current and future generations, an archive of historical and anecdotal information of interest to Nolans everywhere.

I further understand that membership dues are to be paid upon joining and, thereafter at the beginning of each calendar year, prior to March 17th. To save on postage and service charges, I may choose to pay for more than one year at a time. I will also advise the Clan of any change of address.

*NOTE: Currently, the membership fee per household is set at 10 Euros, \$13 USD, \$15 CAD or \$17 AUD depending upon whichever happens to be your local currency. If your currency is not one of the ones mentioned then the equivalent of 10 Euros in your currency must be calculated*

Enclosed is a **personal cheque in my local currency made out to "Sean Nolan - Nolan Clan"** in the amount of \_\_\_\_\_ as payment for \_\_\_\_\_ year(s) membership in the clan.

For clan records and to help with administration, my particulars (*or revisions thereto*) are:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Co./State/Prov. \_\_\_\_\_ Country/Postal/ZIPCode \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone No. \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Other family members \_\_\_\_\_

<p>Indicate whether this is a new membership _____ or this is a renewal _____</p>	<p><b>Post To:</b></p>	<p>Sean Nolan, Nolan Clan Treasurer Rathnarrin, Ardattin, Tullow, Co. Carlow, Republic of Ireland Tel: +353 5991 55666</p>
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