

A Tale of Old Clare Hill



Gravestone No. 99 – Calladine – Old Clare Hill Cemetery

In its ongoing activity of recording gravestone inscriptions in County Clare, Clare Roots Society undertook this work in Old Clare Hill Cemetery, Clarecastle in the summer of 2009. Based on the experiences of the Society in undertaking similar work in Killone & Clare Abbey, an agreed template for recording the inscriptions was decided upon and work commenced. A map showing the approximate location of each grave was drawn up showing that there were over 170 graves to be recorded and photographed. There is no evidence that a church or monastery ever existed at Clare Hill but in the 1940s a holy-water fount was discovered buried in the ground there. The gravestones date from the 1740s.

Clare Hill cemetery is very well maintained and many fine examples of stone-cutting were found particularly on the recumbent tombstones, with ornate decoration and lettering. Most of the stones were of local limestone and over the years, this stone has been attacked by white lichen. This made some of the letters difficult to decipher. Some unusual surnames were discovered. About a dozen grave-stone were found of English soldiers or their families who had died while stationed at the barracks in Clarecastle in the mid-1800s. A number of inscriptions appear to refer to seamen who died as their ships were in the Port of Clare and who found a last resting place in Clare Hill. During the cholera outbreak in June and July 1832, about

100 people died and are buried in the lower part of the cemetery in unmarked graves. There are a number of named gravestones of further victims of that cholera epidemic, primarily that of Fr. O'Brien and of Surgeon James Read of the 68th Regiment Light Infantry. This older part of the burial-grounds at Clare Hill records the history of the village over the past

250 years and it is interesting to research the records and stories behind the aging tombstones. We are fortunate to have one such record in the diary of Colour-Sergeant George Calladine, 19th Foot, 1793-1837. George Calladine was born in Wymeswold, Leicester, the son of a gardener. He joined the Derbyshire Militia in 1810 and progressed to the 19th Foot. His regiment was posted to Ceylon in 1814 where they assisted in the suppression of a revolt. Returning to England, the regiment was posted to Ireland in 1821. Calladine brought his wife and children with him and he was stationed in barracks in the south of the country. Calladine's diary records his arrival in Clarecastle:

We arrived at Clare Castle on the 4th November, 1828 and relieved the 15th Depôt, sending detachments out to Kilrush, Scattery Island, and other small detachments down about a point of land called Loop Head, at the extreme west of the country. The village of Clare is a poor, miserable dirty place situated on the river Fergus, about one mile from Ennis. The barracks are on the opposite side of the river from Clare, and about the worst barracks and the worst situated of any that I have been stationed at in Ireland. The barracks, such as they are, are surrounded by an old wall which at one time enclosed a castle of the noted Brien Borhœ, the last King of Munster. At this time there were no remains of the castle left except a round tower at the entrance gate, and which was occupied by the barrack-serjeant, Joseph Modgeley, a curious character, who once belonged to the Blind Half Hundred (50th Regiment). The castle and property round belongs to the O'Brien family, who, I suppose, are descendants of the great Brien Borhœ.

The hospital was about as good a building as there was in the barracks, and we were very comfortably situated therein, and very happy with my family at Christmas and New Year's holydays, having my two little children, Billy and Ann; but the measles soon made their appearance among the children of the depôt, and it pleased God to deprive us of both our children, Billy dying on the 13th January and Ann on the 15th. We buried them in one grave and on one day, the 16th January, and erected a small tomb over them with the following verse on it, which was the only tribute of love we could pay to them. But it is a great consolation to think they are now two little angels in heaven. Billy was two years and four months old and Ann only eight months.

As part of the exercise of recording the inscriptions on the gravestones, the Calladine stone was identified and photographed. The lettering is badly affected by the lichen but with an effort, the inscription can be read.

In Memory of Will^m & Anne

Children of George Calladine Ser^g 19th

Reg^t & Anne his wife

W^m died 13th Jan 1829

aged 2 yrs 4 months

Anne died 15th Jan 1829

Aged 8 months

*Grave of Innocence, surely here
The sweetest bloom of beauty is,
Oh ! may I sleep in couch as fair,
And with a hope as bright as this.*

[The quotation is taken from a religious poem entitled "Grave of a Christian" by James Edmeston.]

The diary goes on to say:

During our stay at Clare Castle the duty was very severe on the depôt, as the men seldom got above two nights in bed, and perhaps on picquet one of them, and having to find the jail guard for Ennis. As the guard mounted after dinner, it was generally dark before the old guard arrived at the barracks. We were all confined to quarters after retreat beating, so taking all things into consideration it was the worst place the depôt ever lay at.

We lost fourteen or fifteen children during our stay at Clare, having found when too late that the disease had been left in the bedding by the 15th Depôt, and they also had lost a number of children. After the loss of ours my wife took much to fretting, and I was obliged to get her out walking through the country when the days got longer and the weather fine. During our excursions we visited several gentlemen's seats, at least they should have been such, but they were mostly unoccupied, Buncraig and Barntic being among the number.

Calladine states that an outbreak of measles was the cause of death of his children and that a total of fourteen or fifteen children died in that outbreak in January 1829. Children of the previous regiment had also died from the measles. No record of other graves relating to the event was found.

Calladine and his regiment were moved from Clarecastle on 17 March 1829 to Nenagh. He and his wife had two further children while stationed in Nenagh but neither infant survived longer than eight months. Of the 13 children born to the couple, eleven died in infancy. George Calladine died in 1876 aged 83. His wife had predeceased him by thirty years.

Calladine's diary gives an insight in to the life of a soldier in Ireland in the early years of the nineteenth century. In particular, it gives a personal and realistic perspective on life in Clare Castle barracks. His view may be influenced by the tragic death of his children from the unhygienic conditions in the barracks but is probably an accurate description of the conditions that prevailed at the time in the Barracks and in the village of Clare.