

# A Policeman's Lot

## *The Dwyers of Cappanahanagh*

*@ Family History Day  
Dublin City Library & Archive, 23 March 2013*

### **Background**

The Dwyers are my father's side of the family and I have traced them back to Cappanahanagh in East Limerick, where I figure Ellen Humphreys (who married John Dwyer my great great grandfather) was born around 1789. The family were tenant farmers who subsequently bought out the land, and, while the site of the original homestead is still in family ownership, the building itself and the farming aspect are now gone. The present owner is John Meehan who is my second cousin once removed.

My own branch of the family left the land in 1881, when my paternal grandfather, **Michael Dwyer**, joined the RIC. He spent his career in Co. Mayo, and lived mainly in Ballyhaunis, both as an RIC constable and after his retirement. That is where my father was born in 1903 and where I thought my country roots were. But, being in the RIC, my grandfather was not allowed serve in his own county of origin. Nor was he supposed to serve in his wife's county, but for some reason, having married a girl from Kiltimagh, he succeeded in staying in Mayo up to his retirement and beyond to his death in 1941.

My paternal grandfather's brother, **William Dwyer**, also joined the RIC from Limerick in 1882. He had an undistinguished career which only lasted five years and in the course of which he was fined twice. His given reason for leaving the force was to emigrate, but the records suggest he did not. He got married shortly after leaving and eventually ended up as a publican in Crowle, Co. Tipperary.

I have another RIC connection going further back through my paternal grandmother, whose father, **Luke Reilly**, joined the force from Co. Sligo in 1853. Stationed in Kiltimagh in 1879 he was close to some momentous events in Irish history: the land war, including Michael Davitt's monster meeting in Irishtown; and the reported apparition of the Blessed Virgin in Knock. It would have been part of his duties to report on both these events.

That's the RIC angle on which I have based the title.

### **My general approach.**

The way I have approached the presentation is to pick a few themes which figure in the family and which I hope will resonate with others. Each of these themes has a family member with a story, and at the end of each theme I hope to remark on what I learned from that theme about following up my family history.

### **A Diversion**

Before launching into the family stories proper. I describe a problem I had accessing the local Cappahanagh (Murroe & Boher) parish register on film in the National Library of Ireland (NLI). On his installation in 1992, Bishop Clifford claimed copyright on the film and forbade the NLI to show it to anyone without his permission which he never gave. This forced researchers to use the Heritage Centre in the Diocese at €80 a throw.

This particular clerical moneyspinner was severely dented when the NLI took their courage in their hands and defied the Bishop's ban. As a direct result of eventually accessing the film of the register I was able to claim a vital relative who had been misdigitised to another family in the Diocesan data

base.

### **The Stories and Themes**

Apart from the RIC above, I am dealing with the following themes.

***John P Dwyer:*** my uncle's death on the Somme in WWI, was hastened by the High Command's insistence on introducing tanks into the assault on High Wood against the advice of the local Commander. High Wood was taken but the tanks were an unmitigated disaster and actually increased the scale of the casualties. The local Commander was (unjustly) blamed and relieved of his post. This was done in secret as the High Command were claiming in public that the tanks had been wonderful. More than 20 years were to pass before the Commander was vindicated, by which time he was long dead.

***Paddy Dwyer:*** whose skinny dip and death sparked a bitter sectarian row in Ballinasloe at the beginning of the Civil War. The Protestant boatman was rebuked for putting the modesty of two women before the life of a drowning Catholic boy.

***Jane Dwyer:*** who my cousin told me didn't exist but who nevertheless went to America in the biggest ship then afloat (no not that one) in 1908, and raised five lads in the Bronx during the Great Depression. Her grand-daughter discovered me through the internet and filled me in on the American scene.

***Nora Dwyer:*** who married Tom Kelly. The family said Kelly's Bar in the Olympia Theatre had been named after him. On further investigation and interrogation this turned out not to be true but the real story was even better.

***Luke Dwyer:*** my father the clerk, his pursuit of, and marriage to, my mother, a clerk turned shopkeeper, and the death of an artist in a sweetshop.

***Margaret Reilly:*** my paternal grandmother who delivered a strong message from beyond the grave.

I had to omit some of my father's other siblings and also cut out some details on the above in order to stay within the time limit for the presentation. You can catch up on further background and excitement on the page dedicated to this talk <http://photopol.com/dca5/> or on the general family history page [http://photopol.com/fam\\_hist\\_mat.htm](http://photopol.com/fam_hist_mat.htm) on my website.

Pól Ó Duibhir

<http://photopol.com>

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