





## Happy Families

We were never without visitors at Newcourt . . . When they came it was anything from a fortnight to a month. For summer the house was always crammed, the jolliest house party.

Isabel Chavasse, *née* Fleming

In February 1819 a cart could be seen making its way from Newcourt House near Skibbereen in Co Cork westward along a rutted track. There were no roads capable of taking a carriage, and although the journey was little more than thirty miles, it represented something of an odyssey. The young couple who sat in the jolting vehicle on a mattress which had been placed over straw felt the humiliation of travelling in a 'common butt cart'. They were not peasants, but members of the tight knot of Protestant families who had dominated this area for generations.

Eliza (Dizie) Townsend, the daughter of the agriculturist Horace Townsend, of Derry House near Ross Carbery, had married Lionel Fleming, who lived twenty miles away at Newcourt, a substantial house outside Skibbereen to which he was heir. To solve the problem of keeping him occupied until he inherited the main property, his father, Becher Fleming, had dispatched him to a piece of family property on the coast at the farthest end of West Cork. Dizie was very much aware that apart from the local clergyman and a drunkard who lived ten miles away, there were no gentlefolk in the neighbourhood.

The rocky landscape was scattered with hovels that Thackeray would compare to kraals. In comparison Ballydevlin, the simple two-storeyed house overlooking the Fastnet, where Lionel took his bride, was palatial, but she felt the lack of the comforts she had enjoyed at Derry. Rooms were lit by smoky candles made of mutton fat. 'Sometimes the wicks were the pith of rushes and sometimes cotton twine. They had a nasty smell and gave poor light.' Few vegetables were grown, and to a large extent the couple, and in due course their children, relied on supplies sent by their parents. Since no root crops were grown to keep animals alive, in winter, when seaweed was used as a substitute for cabbage, their diet of mutton, ling, salted pork and bacon (including pigs' heads and feet) was only occasionally enlivened by Lionel's gun with rabbit, hare and wild duck.

The nearest post town, Skibbereen, was thirty miles away, and the Flemings followed the practice at remote houses of relying on their own

private barefoot post. They used regular messengers who were sent almost daily, bag on back, covering the thirty miles between Ballydevlin and Newcourt and the twenty miles beyond that to Ross Carbery for the exchange of letters between Dizie and her father. One woman called Peggy Jourdan, who made the journey in a day, was heard to say, 'O there's many a lifting up leg and putting down leg and bending the knee between here and Derry.'

Lionel became a magistrate, a position which was another symbol of the landlord's power over people. There was no other authority in the area and magistrates held the power of life and death. In 1813, when a certain Catherine Donovan was condemned and hanged for the murder of Ellen Carty, the servants of William Hull, the magistrate who had delivered the sentence, were attacked at a fair by her friends. Hull, who lived at Leamcon, ten miles from Ballydevlin, complained to the authorities: 'I live in a remote and lawless part of the country . . . without the least military or civil aid or solitary policeman.'

In addition to his duties on the Bench, Lionel oversaw an unproductive copper mine belonging to the family, built a courthouse and acted as unofficial customs officer. He took it upon himself to impound wreckage in the face of scavengers. His son recalled how 'when the glass fell he used to rouse the people near and take them down to the shore to pull up their boats and save them'. He was punctilious in his duties, if not officious. A gentleman who disapproved of one of his judicial decisions made him fight a duel.



Dizie ran a school and did good works, but she suffered from loneliness. For years there was no doctor in the area. Sunday church meant a journey overland and then taking a boat across the inlet to the small port of Crookhaven, where the congregation were sailors, customs men and a few small farmers. For genteel company they had the clergyman, Mr O'Grady, father of the writer Standish O'Grady, with whom they joined in musical evenings, Lionel on the violin or cello, Mr O'Grady with the flute and Dizie at the piano. 'We ventured on Handel and Mozart very often, and so we had our music and enjoyed it, and it promoted serenity in this remote place.'

The little group of musicians playing while fierce winds rattled the windows of the house makes a charming image. But Dizie was continually unhappy. After nine years had passed, during which she had four children, one of whom died, and the road had improved enough to take a chaise and two horses, she wrote to her father asking him to urge her father-in-law to remove from Newcourt. But old Mr Fleming had no intention of giving his house to his son during his lifetime.

Horace Townsend tried to console his daughter: 'There are weighty considerations for remaining longer at Ballydevlin. You are doing much good there, and I think it was a happy day for that country when you and Lionel went there. This is an important consideration. . . . Then it is a cheap place, and with a rising family that is not a matter to be overlooked. You are

no expense to me for I have now a very productive Demesne that supplies everything for housekeeping at a very easy rate. . . .'

The letter may have been some comfort to Dizie, as were the frequent visits to her father's lavish and crowded house at Derry. From time to time the chaise would be brought out, and the family would return for a period of civilised living. Her son wrote: 'Well do I remember my joy when we were told that the horses' tails were being clipped and other arrangements made for the journey.' Old Mr Fleming lived on at Newcourt, and Lionel and his wife had to remain at their outpost for seventeen years.

In 1837 Becher Fleming died at last, and his heir was able to return to Newcourt. A fragmentary diary of Dizie Fleming's has survived for the stormy winter of 1828 with flu prevalent and the fear of cholera – but full of the bustle of return. 'Monday 5th March . . . Arrangements of all kinds, unpacking on all sides. . . . Friday 9th March 'Poor Mrs F's last day here – packing up all her things but not composed. . . . Old Mrs Fleming departed with her unmarried daughter.'

Some of the furniture from Ballydevlin, 'our late sweet abode', was sent down the coast by ship; the rest, including the piano, came by car. Above all, the family was back in a part of the world which it considered civilised and pleasant – among friends and relatives.

After their years in exile Lionel and his family found there was activity unknown at Ballydevlin. Summer passed in a round of picnics and visits to the islands in Roaring Water Bay; a man sat in the bow of the boat amusing the ladies by playing the cornet. 'Dances were the chief winter entertainment. The waltz was a new dance, also the polka. . . . No matter if the house was small, it had a dance, even if supper had to be in the bedrooms, and one hardworked piano supplied the music.'

Both Lionel and Dizie came from large families; Lionel had nine siblings, Dizie twelve. They were related by blood, like almost everyone else in West Cork; geography and the size of families saw to that. Somervilles, Townsends, Meades, Pooles, Hungerfords, Bechers and others who lived west of Bandon were linked to each other by cousinship and marriage over and over again. The likenesses of many members of these families are preserved in the silhouettes of August Edouart, a Frenchman who toured the south of Ireland with his scissors in 1833, or the pink-checked miniatures by the prolific Cork-based miniaturist Frederick Buck.

In West Cork gentlemen remained comparatively poor. Landlords had less good land and therefore collected less in the way of rents. At Newcourt there was no question of sending the boys away to English schools; the Reverend Browne in Bandon and the Diocesan school in Ross Carbery were adequate. The problem of how to dispose of the children of these large families was constant in Irish provincial society. Lionel Fleming's banishment to the farthest end of West Cork was one solution. Younger sons could join the army and go abroad; those who stayed behind had a limited choice of professions considered suitable: they could become clergymen, enter the law,

## Masonic Lodge Concert

**GRAND MASONIC CONCERT,**  
(Conducted by  
**BROTHER W. P. O'DONOGHUE**)  
To be given in Aid of the FAILING FUNDS of  
the  
**MASONIC FEMALE ORPHAN ASYLUM**  
**CORK,**  
**ON THURSDAY EVENING,**  
**9TH OF APRIL, 1863, AT THE**  
**NEW LECTURE HALL,**  
**MARDYKE, SKIBBEREEN.**

**THIS CONCERT** will take place under the  
following **PATRONAGE** :—  
George Chatterton, Esq., D.P.G.M. of Munster.  
Thomas Somerville, Esq., J.P., D.L., High Sheriff  
of the County.  
The O'Donovan, J.P., Montpelier, Cork.  
Richard Henry Hedges Becher, Esq., J.P., Lake-  
lands.  
Lionel John Fleming, Esq., J.P., Newcourt.  
William H. Hull, Esq., J.P., Lemcon Manor.  
Richard Becher Hungerford, Esq., J.P., Bally-  
rizard.  
Thomas Somerville, Esq., J.P., The Prairie.  
Horace Townsend, Esq., J.P., Derry.  
John Richard Hedges Becher, Esq., J.P., Lough  
Ine.  
Samuel Richard Townsend, Esq., J.P., White  
Hall.  
John Limrick, Esq., J.P., Union Hall.  
Sir John Arnott, M.P., Cork.  
Francis Bennett, Esq., J.P., Clonakilty.  
James L. Holmes, Esq., J.P., Carrigmore.  
George Robinson, Esq., J.P., Coronea.  
Richard Notter, Esq., J.P., Skull.  
Major Herbert, Gandon.  
Thomas Attridge, Esq., Castletownsend.  
Philip J. Attridge, Esq., do.  
Major Gillman, Clonakilty.  
William Warren, Esq., Clontarf.  
Colonel Somerville, Ma maison, Castletownsend.  
Henry Hungerford, Esq., P.M., Skibbereen.  
James E. Somerville, Esq., M.D., Union Hall.  
Edward Powell, Esq., Banlahan.  
William L. Perrier, Esq., Jun., Cork.  
Thomas Jarmyn, Esq., Cork.  
James Swanton, Esq., Loriga.  
William B. Baldwin, Esq., J.P., Rock Cottage.  
Doctor Hobart, Cork.  
Doctor Limrick, Union Hall.

### Extract from Samuel Lewis' Topographical Dictionary 1837

**KILMOE**, a parish, in the Western division of the barony of WEST CARBERY, Co Cork and province of MUNSTER; containing, with the villages of Rock Island and Crookhaven (both of which are described under their respective heads), 6889 inhabitants. It forms a peninsula on the southern coast, bounded by Dunmanus bay and Crookhaven; and comprises 10,738 statute acres, as applotted under the tithe act. About one-third of the land is under tillage, chiefly by spade-husbandry, and the remainder is bog and mountain land, but the base of the mountains affords good pasturage; the highest mountain is Cahir, near Mizen Head. The scenery is very bold and interesting: the mountains are of schistose formation, based on argillaceous grit, with veins of quartz intermingled; deposits of copper are found in various places and masses of it are found in the mountain streams, but no mines have been opened: there are several small lakes.

On its western and southern boundaries are three remarkable headlands, namely, Three Castle Head, Mizen Head, called by Ptolemy *Notium*, or the South Promontory, it being the most south-western land in Ireland, in lat. 51° 26' 16", and lon. 9° 50'; and Brow Head, also said to be the *Notium* of Ptolemy. Dunmanus bay, which bounds the parish on the north-west, has deep water and good anchorage almost as far up as Mannin island, but is greatly exposed to

westerly winds, and is little frequented except by small vessels, which can ride in Dunmanus creek or above Mannin island. Besides this island there are in the bay Owen, Horse, Colt, Lamb, Bird, Furze, and Carbery islands, of which only the last is inhabited. Within the limits of the parish are numerous bays and creeks, the principal of which are Ballydevlin bay, Crookhaven, and Barley cove, in each of which there is good anchorage. Petty sessions are held at Tourmore on alternate Wednesdays, and there is a constabulary police station at Goleen.

The principal seats are Rockview, the residence of Florence. McCarty, Esq.; Seaview, of D. Coghlan, Esq.; Rock Island House, of J. Notter, Esq.; Ballydevlin, of **L. J. Fleming, Esq.;** **Crookhaven House**, of R. Doe, Esq.; Ballynaule, of J. Baker, Esq.; Goleen House, of J. McCarthy, Esq.; and Tourmore, of R. Bailie, Esq.

The living is a rectory and vicarage, in the diocese of Cork, and in the alternate patronage of the Crown and the Bishop: the tithes amount to £500. There is no glebe-house; the glebe comprises 7a. 0r. 4p. Here are some extensive tracts of mountain land belonging to the see of Cork, but now in the hands of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. The church is at Crookhaven. In the R. C. divisions the parish forms part of the union or district of West Skull, and has a chapel at Goleen, which was built in 1806. There are five public schools, in which about 400 children are educated, and about 200 are taught in five private schools; there are also three Sunday schools, but most of them are closed during the winter. The three castles which give name to a lofty promontory are detached buildings, within a gun-shot of each other: they are on the cliff and near a spacious and very clear lake, and are stated to have been built by the Mahonys in the 15th century. At Ballydevlin is a castle, called Desmond castle, which was built in 1495 by the Mahonys. Some remains of ancient castles also exist at Lisgriffin and on the shore of the lake of Dunkelly; and near the head of Barley cove are the ruins of the old parochial church.

**AUGHADOWN**, or AGHADOWN, a parish, in the East Division of the barony of WEST CARBERY, county of CORK, and province of MUNSTER, 3¼ miles (W. S. W.) from Skibbereen; containing, with several inhabited islands, 5419 inhabitants.

This parish is situated on the north bank of the river Ilen, and comprises 7063 statute acres, as apportioned under the tithe act, and valued at £5400 per annum. Its surface is very uneven; in some parts, especially towards the north, it is rocky and unproductive; but near its southern boundary, towards the Ilen, the land is good and produces excellent crops. About two-thirds of it are under cultivation; the remainder is rocky ground and bog, of which latter there is a considerable extent near Newcourt. The state of agriculture is not much improved; the old heavy wooden plough is still used, and some of the land is cultivated by spade labour; the fences are everywhere much neglected. Several good roads intersect the parish, one of which is a new line from Skibbereen to Crookhaven, likely to be of considerable advantage. The Ilen is navigable for vessels of 200 tons' burden nearly to its eastern extremity: a quay and storehouses have been constructed at Newcourt, but are entirely neglected, and the harbour is only frequented by a few sand boats, which discharge their cargoes there for the convenience of the farmers.

The principal seats are Aughadow House, that of H. Becher, Esq., occupying an elevated site in the midst of flourishing plantations, and commanding a fine view of the western coast; Lake Marsh, of Hugh Lawton, Esq.; Whitehall, of S. Townsend, Esq.; **Newcourt**, of Becher Fleming, Esq.; the Glebe-house, the residence of the Rev. T. D. Moore; and Holly Hill, of the Rev. J. Coppinger, P.P.

Fairs for the sale of cattle, sheep, pigs, &c., are held on May 6th and Oct. 2nd. A manor court is held monthly by a seneschal appointed by Lord Carbery, for the recovery of debts under 40shillings; and here is a constabulary police station.

The living is a vicarage, in the diocese of Ross, and in the patronage of the Bishop; the rectory is partly impropriate in Lord Audley and partly forms the corps of the archdeaconry of Ross.

The tithes amount to £600, of which £300 is payable to the impropriator and appropriator, and £300 to the vicar. The church, situated on the margin of the river, is a small neat edifice with a square tower, and was built by aid of a loan of £500, in 1812, from the late Board of First Fruits. The glebe-house is handsome and commodious, and is situated on a glebe of 45½ acres.

In the R. C. division this parish is the head of a union or district, which comprises also the parish of Kilcoe and part of Abbeystowry, and contains two chapels, situated at Aughadown and Kilcoe, the former of which is a large and handsome edifice, occupying an elevated site near Currabeg.

In addition to the parochial schools, there are schools at Whitehall and near Newcourt, also a pay school. In the demesne of Whitehall are the ruins of Kincoe or Kincolisky castle, built by the O'Driscolls in 1495; and on the grounds of Lake View are some picturesque remains of an ecclesiastical edifice, called by the people of the neighbourhood the Abbey of Our Lady.