

## Reminiscences of Ireland

These notes are prepared by Mary Clements, daughter of Kathleen Clements (Carrucan) from the Peter Carrucan Line.

My sisters Margaret, Kathleen and I decided to go overseas in 1965 and, on our travels, to visit Ireland. My mother, Kathleen Clements (Carrucan) remembered that her grandmother Hannah Carrucan (Woods) had told her that if she went back to Ireland she could claim Fanarooske (?) castle. My mother had a brilliant memory and, although she was the youngest of the six children of Margaret and Michael Carrucan, she had vivid memories of her grandmother Hannah and her aunts in Eltham. One incident she mentioned was a Christmas when they had gone to Eltham. Hannah had Parkinson's Disease and, nothing deterred, was able to tie her Christmas puddings by holding string in her teeth. When they arrived at the farm, Hannah was sitting under a tree saying her rosary. When she saw Madge (Marguerite Carrucan, child number 5) and my mother, she wanted to sprinkle them with holy water. Madge had a new dress on that she didn't want marked so she ran down the hill with Hannah trying to chase her and shouting "the devil is after you". Such was the strength of Irish Catholicism at that time.

When we arrived in Ireland, we went to the Records Office in Dublin where, by looking through files, we finally found a name of only one castle which had any similarity to 'Fanarooske' so we decided to follow this possibility. The castle, called Faunarooska Castle, was located in Lisdoonvarna, a village north-east of Galway on the west coast. This was the correct location as we met Jim Carrucan and his wife Nancy there and the connections gradually fell into place. Jim was a distant second cousin to the Carrucans in Australia. The 'castle' itself turned out to be a crumbling Norman keep, constructed as a defence against the Vikings as, at that time, it provided an opportunity for the Irish inhabitants to enclose themselves, their families and animals, against the marauders. Interestingly, the house of John Woods, father of Hannah Carrucan (Woods) was still standing and it was built firmly in contrast to the poor hamlets of the Irish. Apparently John Woods collected rents for the English landlords which could explain his stronger position in the village, but this is only hearsay.

Jim and his wife were very hospitable and introduced us to many inhabitants of Lisdoonvarna. They had six children and were very proud of having recently installed a bath in their home. Many of the men reminded us of our grandfather Michael Carrucan, as they were of similar build and height. We spent time in an Irish pub talking to many of them and drinking Irish whiskey (?). When 12 noon struck, they all put down their drinks to say the Angelus.

Typical of the villages on the west coast, Lisdoonvarna had very poor soil for agriculture and farming. The topsoil had generally been eroded by the strong winds across the Atlantic and left poor low subsistence farmlets. There were many little stone fences separating these poor farmlets. (It makes sense that the English, when they defeated Ireland in the 13<sup>th</sup> century under King John, naturally settled on the fertile east coast.). Generally the 'owner' of the farm owned it till his death and it was only then that the eldest son inherited the land. Often the new landlord would be late middle-aged and would finally marry - generally a young girl - maybe eighteen years - who would be considered very fortunate that she had a substantial position in life. Most families consisted of 6 to 8 children - some of these would probably go into religion life (often I imagine incorrectly which would have caused inner frustration) while others would fly from Shannon

Airport to the USA - either Boston or New York. The flight only took four hours and we noticed that these immigrants would always come back to Ireland on annual leave. Irish families always have possessed a great sense of togetherness.

The Irish are great raconteurs and we were told many tales of the Irish famine in the 1940/50s when four million people left Ireland. During that terrible time men would stand in the icy Atlantic waters up to their waist trying to catch fish. Often they caught consumption from this exercise. Mounds of mussel shells built up in the tiny back yards.

The Irish were very strongly Catholic and there were many stories of the 'souters' who offered food to the Irish who would change their religion to Anglicanism. The hatred of the English was very deep and sustained by the tales of former times.

Everyone went to Church on Sundays but we noticed that only a minority went to Holy Communion (whether they considered themselves too sinful or perhaps were afraid of what the neighbours would think - hard to know!) The general offering on the plate was 6d.

Mary Clements