

2.10 Lord Rossmore, a gentleman piper. James O'Brien Moran

This article draws on two published accounts of a particular incident, both of which were submitted by Seán Donnelly to different issues of *An Píobaire* several years ago. The material is reworked and interpreted here in relation to the findings of my own research. I am grateful to Seán for his helpful suggestions during the preparation of this article and indeed, for many other matters.

One often hears of gentlemen pipers and, no doubt, these were the original patrons of the earliest pipe makers. What were their playing standards and their repertoire? How far removed were they from the folk tradition? Did the gentlemen ever mix socially with folk musicians? For whom did they play their music? These are some of the questions that are considered in this brief article about one such gentleman piper – Lord Rossmore.

Lord Rossmore met the Galway piper Paddy Conneely, presumably for the first time, when Rossmore was a guest at a dinner party held by Patrick Brophy the state dentist, who resided at Dawson Street, Dublin. Conneely was engaged to play his pipes during the meal. Among the other guests was Frank Thorpe Porter who recounted the occasion in his memoirs *Twenty Years Recollections of an Irish Police Magistrate* (1880).

The late Lord Rossmore was very intimate with Brophy, who was certainly not singular in admiring the many amiable and agreeable qualities invariably evinced by his noble friend. On one occasion Pat had engaged a first-rate player on the Irish pipes named Conolly or Coneely, to enliven upwards of a dozen guests by his very delectable music. He was totally blind, and was placed on a chair in a corner of the parlour, where he played whilst we were dining, but he had been previously supplied with a plentiful repast. In the course of the evening, Brophy had a small table placed before the piper, and said that he had afforded us great pleasure, but he should take a little rest, unyoke the pipes, and have a tumbler of punch, which was made by Brophy and put just at his hand. Almost immediately, after this arrangement had been effected, Captain Toosey Williams urged Lord Rossmore to take the pipes and favor [sic] us with a tune or two. We all joined in the request to “his Lordship” and he acceded to our wishes, and played several pieces of exquisitely sweet music, interspersed with the most extraordinary imitations. In one, which was named “The hare in the Corn”, he produced sounds very much resembling the cry of the harriers, and other tones like the notes of a hunting horn, terminating with two or three simulated squeaks, supposed to indicate the capture of the hare. He then proceeded to play the beautiful Scotch air “Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doun”, to which we were listening with great delight, when the blind piper rose from his seat, and exclaimed with furious indignation – “I did not expect such treatment from any people calling themselves gentlemen. It was a most scandalous shame to bring me, a poor dark man, here to be humbugged as you are trying to do, calling on ‘My Lord’ to yoke

on my pipes and play for ye. He is as much ‘a lord’ as I am myself; the d__l a lord ever played as he does, he’s nothing but a rale piper. It is not honest or decent to try and deceive me, but you can't do it.” Brophy succeeded in pacifying the enraged musician by admitting that the performer was a real piper, and we had two or three tunes more. Conolly's indignation produced very great merriment amongst us, and no one enjoyed it more than the noble object of his censure.

It is an interesting story, which says much about both Conneely and Rossmore. In the first instance it is surprising that Conneely travelled as far as Dublin for performances. Nor was he afraid to stand up and admonish his patrons. It is curious too that he allowed his pipes to be used by another. However, the most remarkable information contained in this anecdote is the fact that Paddy Conneely felt that Rossmore was equal to the standard of a good professional piper, possibly a rival to Conneely himself who was highly regarded by all who heard him. The ‘noble object’ of Conneely's censure was Henry Robert Westenra (1792-1860), otherwise 3rd Baron Rossmore, who, although a gentleman, was an excellent piper.

The Rossmore family had an interest in the Irish pipes for at least two generations. The 2nd Baron, Warner William Westenra (1765-1842) was a noted performer as was his brother Lieutenant Colonel Henry Westenra (b. 1770), while the second generation was well represented by the subject of this sketch, 3rd Baron Rossmore – Henry Robert Westenra.

The Rossmores were probably fairly typical of their class. The 2nd Baron had married into the title, and the family seat was Rossmore Park. Adjacent to the town of Monaghan, it was a large 19th century castle to which several additions in different styles had been carried out by the mid-19th century. In the earlier part of the 20th century the 5th and 6th Barons spent much of their time living in England and this magnificent castle was closed up for long periods. This may have contributed to the spread of dry rot which caused the building to be abandoned in the 1940s and it was subsequently demolished. The grounds were sold to the Irish State in the 1960s. The family mausoleum, which was built specifically to house the remains of Henry Robert, and the graveyard have fallen into decay and, more recently, have been subjected to vandalism.

An adjoining estate, Camla Vale, was the home of Lieutenant Colonel Henry Westenra who left it to his nephew, the 3rd Baron. It was to Camla Vale that the family seat was moved when Rossmore Park became uninhabitable. It is said that spores of the dry rot fungus were brought to Camla Vale when the wine cellar was transferred. Apparently it too became infested with dry rot. It was sold in the 1960s and was demolished towards the end of that decade. A residence was retained in the grounds of Rossmore Park as an Irish base for the family and it was there that some of the family paintings and much of the contents of the Rossmore library were stored. It was there too that a set of pipes and a manuscript collection of music, which had belonged to the piping Westensras, were kept, all of which were destroyed in an arson attack on May 4th, 1981, (allegedly by a fringe element of the I.R.A.) to mark the death of Bobby Sands, when the house was burnt down.

Fortunately much of the family furniture had been acquired by, or loaned to, The National Trust before the arson attack, and is housed in their various properties around Northern Ireland.

Equally fortunate also is the fact that much of the Rossmore Papers had been on loan to the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI) for conservation and photocopying at the time. These papers comprise some 5,200 documents and 55 volumes which span the period from 1610 to 1959. It is to be regretted that four tea-chests full of papers awaiting delivery from the house to the local Monaghan Museum were also lost in the blaze.

Much of the material held at PRONI includes personal and political papers which provide a fascinating insight to ascendancy life both at local and national level. The Rossmore Papers have been catalogued by Peter Collins in a recent publication 'County Monaghan Sources in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland' (1998).

The instrument played by the earlier generation – Warner William and Lieutenant Colonel Henry, was more than likely a less developed version of that which comprises a full set today, since they probably had already begun to play by 1785 or 1790. On the other hand, at least two sets made for Henry Robert survive, each with three regulators. One splendid set in the possession of the right honorable Garech a Brún, which featured on the front cover of the album 'The Drones and the Chanters' (c.1971), is attributed to Thomas Kenna, possibly incorrectly¹ and was fashioned in ebony, ivory and silver. This may have been the set exhibited in Belfast in 1856. The other is an elaborate set made by Coyne of 151 Thomas Street, Dublin, another of the great makers of the period. Seán Donnelly gives the years 1841-45 for Maurice Coyne at this address.² The set, although not currently in working order, is described as being "decorated with inlaid wood" and "inlaid with a shell". The description probably refers to the bellows which often had a shell pattern in marquetry on the front board. This set is now in the hands of the present Lord, William Warner Westenra, who signs himself "Paddy" Rossmore. It is his wish that his son might play them.

A number of tunes sourced from "Lord Rosmore" appear in the music collection of George Petrie. A certain amount of confusion seems to have arisen as to which Lord Rossmore was the contributor of the tunes to Petrie. This may have been perpetrated by Captain Francis O'Neill who, in his *'Irish Minstrels and Musicians'* (1913), implies that it was the 2nd Baron Rossmore.

This aristocratic performer on the Irish or Union pipes.....was born in 1765, ennobled in 1796, and died in 1843. His son, the third baron, was also an accomplished piper. ...An examination of the *Complete Petrie Collection* shows that six tunes were obtained from Lord Rossmore, who personally noted down some of them from the playing of 'Paddy' Conneely, the famous Galway piper.

O'Neill seems slightly at variance with the information in *'Burke's Peerage and Baronetage'*. He says that the 2nd Baron died in 1843 when in fact he died in 1842. He also implies that it was the 2nd Baron who contributed the tunes to Petrie. This is repeated in an unpublished doctoral thesis edition of Petrie's manuscripts by Marion Deasy. It is unlikely that the 2nd Baron, Warner William Westenra, was the direct contributor of any of the tunes. While not all of the tunes carry dates, only one is dated 1841 (and that tune is not attributed to Conneely) which was the year before his death, and there is no implication that there was more than one Rossmore source. In

¹ See 'A century of pipemaking 1770-1870; New light on the Kennas and Coynes' by Seán Donnelly in this journal.

² Per Seán Donnelly in 'A century of pipemaking.....'

all, ten tunes are credited to “Rosmore” [sic], five of which are attributed to Paddy Conneely. Another three tunes come from “Col. Westenra”.

The Rossmore/Conneely encounter is retold in the autobiography of the second son of Rossmore's second marriage (his first wife died without issue). The 5th Baron – Derrick (his brother – the 4th Baron, died in a riding accident) has been described as “a left-over rake”, who lived a life of cockfights and gambling more suited to earlier times (Somerville-Large, 1995). He wrote his memoirs, *Things I Can Tell* (1912), in which he gives snippets of information about his father who apparently had a very bad stammer and, unlike “Derry”, had little interest in riding or racing.

My father's favourite amusements were yachting, shooting and fishing, and – oddly enough – playing the bagpipes, at which difficult art he excelled.... There is a story that one night he was dining with Brophy, the well-known Dublin dentist, who had engaged a blind Irish piper to amuse his guests. My father said he would give the company a taste of his own playing, so the piper, with a pitying smile, handed him over the bagpipes. But the old man's smile soon faded away, and was replaced with an expression of intense anger as the strains filled the room. At last he could no longer contain himself, and he went for Brophy hammer and tongs and demanded fiercely to know how he dared introduce a rival at the entertainment, since he was absolutely certain that no one but a real professional piper could ever play like that.

It is an interesting confirmation of the Thorpe Porter story. One might ignore the description of the piper being an “old man” as ‘Derry’ was born at least thirteen years after the incident and would not have known the piper's age. The fact that this meeting took place in the 1830s suggests that Rossmore might have been the first person, among surviving sources, to collect music from Paddy Conneely.

Two portraits survive of Henry Robert Westenra. The earliest, which was painted by John Fernley in 1810, shows a young man with a hunting gun, posing with his dogs. The other depicts him in later life dressed in military uniform. He is described as “Lieutenant and custos rostrorum, co. Monaghan, and sometime M.P. for that co.” in *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*.

Since Lord Rossmore played the same instrument as Paddy Conneely this adds a certain credibility to Rossmore's Conneely tunes which he probably intended for his own repertoire. No autographed music manuscript seems to have survived. Whether Rossmore gave Petrie the tunes in manuscript form, or whether Petrie transcribed the music from Rossmore's playing is difficult to ascertain, although the former is more likely. The Rossmore tunes are certainly in Petrie's hand throughout that collection.

The Rossmore tunes that are mentioned in the Thorpe Porter story, and the thirteen which appear in the Petrie collection, afford us a glimpse at a portion of the family repertoire. The programme music of “The hare in the corn” is suggestive of the other great descriptive piece “The fox chase”, and Rossmore obviously played this well. The other tune mentioned in the story is “Ye

Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doun.” Perhaps it is not too surprising that both of these tunes appear in O’Farrell’s “*Pocket Companion for the Irish or Union Pipes.*” Gentlemen pipers were obviously among the intended market for O’Farrell’s publications. George Petrie’s biographer (Stokes, 1868 ; 350) quotes a letter (dated June 1st, 1863) to collector Rev. James Goodman, in which Petrie mentions the fact that “the old Coulin” was

the favourite of the late Lord Rossmore, who had a strong love and a fine taste for Irish music. I have heard him descant upon its expression of sentiment, with an admirable appreciation of its beauty, for a quarter of an hour at a time.

To my knowledge the tunes of Lord Rossmore and Colonel Henry Westenra only survive in Petrie’s collection. The following is a list as they appear in Stanford’s edition (1903-1905) of that collection.

From Lord Rossmore

- No. 541. The Wearied Lad. (Double jig)
- No. 742. John the son Darby. (2:4 time)
- No. 826. I was born for sport. (Double jig)
- No. 827. Mammie, will you let me to the fair. (2:4)
- No. 829. Cheer up, old hag. (Double jig)
- No. 870. Dancing measure to which Prince Charles Edward and Lady Wemyss danced in the gallery of the palace of Holyrood House in the year 1745. (Double jig time)
- No. 951. The Galway jig. (Slip jig time)
- No. 1115. *Bean an fhir rua.* (Double jig)
- No. 1118. *Briste Breidin.* (Slip jig time)
- No. 1119. The King’s Cave. (Double jig time)

From Col. Westenra

- No. 884. Kiss the maid behind the barrels. (or The Bruisus) (Reel)
- No. 934. The Munsterman’s jig. (Double jig)
- No. 968. Jig. (Double jig)

Although it is not representative of the repertoire, it is surprising to see eight double jigs, two slip jigs and only one reel. Many of these tunes are worth reviving. *Briste Bréidín* (No.1118) appeared in one of the early issues of *An Píobaire* and subsequently in *Ceol an Phíobaire*. The settings are ‘pipe-friendly’ as one might expect, although two tunes are written with two flats in the key signature, while another has three flats. A few tell-tales of piping technique appear, such as F naturals and the odd triplet. A turn symbol indicates that something like a roll was used in the jig *Bean an fhir rua* but its placement above a C suggests that these gentlemen knew their piping technique well. Stanford’s edition of the Petrie collection was recently republished by Llanerch (1995), so the material is available once more.

To address the questions put at the outset of this article, the above listing gives some indication of the repertoire of these gentlemen pipers. At least five of the tunes were learned from Paddy

Conneely, which suggests that some were in contact with folk musicians. We already have Paddy Conneely's assessment of Lord Rossmore's playing standard – "the d__l a lord ever played as he does, he's nothing but a rale piper" suggesting that at least Lord Rossmore had more than a sound grasp of the folk tradition and played better than any amateur Conneely had ever heard. There was probably little in the way of socialising. Although Conneely's company seems to have been sought after, it rarely transcended the relationship of patron and piper. Lord Rossmore's skill as a piper was obviously well known for him to have been asked to perform after the dinner at Brophy's house, so that his performance for his friends was probably not unusual.

The Rossmore family also had an important collection of Irish language manuscripts (sixteen volumes) probably assembled in Henry Robert's time, most of which is housed in St. MacCartan's Seminary in Monaghan. Other references testify to his strong sense of Irishness. Sir William Stokes, in his biography of Petrie, mentions that the reliquary known as Domhnach Airgid was purchased by

Mr. Westenra, afterwards Lord Rossmore, for three hundred pounds, with the view of preserving it to the country. On this occasion, Lord Rossmore wrote to Petrie (Stokes, 1868 ; 81) requesting him to communicate to the Academy and the University that he would be at all times ready to surrender it, at the price paid, to either of these national institutions, or to the Dublin Society, as a proper depository for its preservation.

A letter from Henry Robert survives among the papers of Sir John Gilbert in the manuscripts reading room of the National Library of Ireland. The present Lord Rossmore lives in London.

Bibliography

Bence-Jones, Mark. *A Guide to Irish Country Houses*. London, 1996.

Burke's Peerage. London, 1928.

Collins, Peter. *County Monaghan Sources in the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland*. Belfast, 1998.

O'Farrell, P. *Pocket Companion for the Irish or Union Pipes*, Vol. 1. London, c.1805.

O'Neill, Francis. *Irish Minstrels and Musicians*. Chicago, 1913.

Somerville-Large, Peter. *The Irish Country House*. London, 1996.

Stanford, C.V.(ed). *The Complete Collection of Irish Music as noted by George Petrie*. London, 1902-1905.

Stokes, William. *The Life and Labours in Art and Archaeology of George Petrie, LL.D.* London, 1868.

Thorpe-Porter, Frank. *Twenty Years Recollections of a Dublin Police Magistrate*. Dublin, 1880.

Westenra, Derrick Warner William. *Things I can tell*. London, 1910.