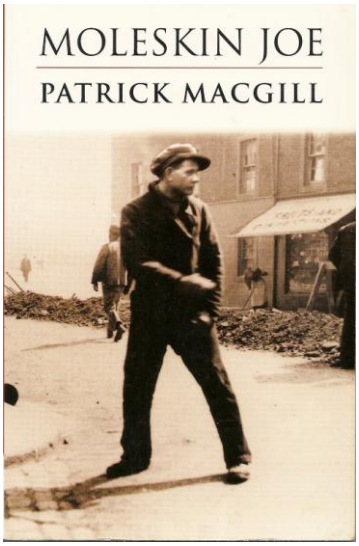
Edward Neafcy October 2011

A Visit from Moleskin Joe
The Irish in Scotland, England and on the Western Front

Who was that Man?



It was my Uncle Bill who told me about Moleskin Joe and the Children of the Dead End. We had talked about people only developing an interest in family history as they get older, and therefore letting chances pass by to ask questions of the older generation. When he was young, a man had called at his home in Lancashire to see his father, my grandfather, who was Ned Neafcy from the 'Old House' in Shanvaghera. He asked who the man was. Ned said, 'That was Moleskin Joe'. I don't know how long it was before Uncle Bill followed that up and read Patrick MacGill's books, because I didn't ask. Now, twenty years after Uncle Bill told me about it, I got round to reading 'Moleskin Joe' myself. 'Children of the Dead End' is available on-line.

From Shanvaghera to Liverpool to the USA

I had already been thinking about Gerald Swift. A grandson of Ellen Neafcy of the old house, born and raised in the USA, he wanted Irish citizenship by ancestry and so asked me to get a copy of his father's, Mike Swift's, birth certificate. From this I learned that Mike had been born in Athol Street, Liverpool. I already knew that my Dad's eldest brother had been born 'in Scotland Road', the main road nearby. Many years later, I put together the papers for Irish citizenship myself. The addresses on the marriage certificate of my grandfather and his bride Bridget McNally of Camlough, Co. Armagh, were both adjacent to Athol Street. They were married in St Alban's church, Athol Street. Both Ned and his sister Ellen therefore lived around Athol Street when they first left Ireland. So at least two of the seven children from the Old House passed through Liverpool. Ellen was already married to Bart Swift from Knock. The eldest of Ellen and Bart's children would have been baptised in St Albans church, as would be the eldest son of Ned and Bridget.

Keeping in Touch

Out of the blue, this spring, 2011, I got an email from Gerald's daughter Colleen in Virginia. She asked me for the names of our relatives who had lived in Brigantine, New Jersey. I told her and was also able say where her family had been before moving to America. I told her she would find 29, Boswell Street, Bootle, last home in England of Mike Swift, on Google Earth and also St Alban's church in Athol Street. However, I wondered why she had asked me about this. It then dawned on me that whilst I wasn't the oldest in the family, I was the oldest on Facebook. I don't use it, but I'm there and traceable and it's pleasant that younger family folks invite you to be a 'friend'. This magazine, Glór, is so important as well: the base in Mayo, the news, the continuing interest, relatives' visits, my Uncle Tom's concert. Colleen's enquiry got me to thinking I should put together the mementoes I have accumulated and see if I could join up the dots.

Pre-electric World

They say that what an author writes says as much about himself as about the subject he has written on. Anyway, I'll put in a bit about me. This is a sort of family history, but I'll start by saying that I am with the physicist and polymath James Lovelock when he said that the defining feature of our civilisation is electricity. I started school in 1948 and reached official retirement age in 2008. People of my generation have lived our lives surf-riding with a huge wave of electricity-driven technology chasing us. I'll mention this now and again as I go on.

The importance of electricity wasn't apparent to me in my infants' school in Lancashire. At home, we had gas lights – coal gas, and downstairs only. People would ask for a 'gas shilling' in their change when making a purchase so they would be sure of having a coin they could put in the meter to pay for a bit more gas. A lot of street lights were gas and at the railway stations. The school and some houses had electric lights. Some houses, off the beaten track, were still on paraffin lamps having neither gas nor electricity. One farm had its own electricity generator. There were telephone wires everywhere, though nobody we knew had a telephone. Some had corks on them so the racing pigeons could see them and not run into them. Our house had electricity, but all it seemed to be used for was to make the 'wireless' work – that being what we called a radio in those days.

Schoolday Memories

The school was a small building with two 'ends' When you first went to school you were in the 'Little End'. The teacher we had in the Little End could see what the future had in store for us and one day we arrived to find she had made something in cardboard the like of which we had never seen before and had never heard of. It was a television. She had made a square hole for the screen. Inside the cardboard box were two rolls with a scroll of paper on them on which she had drawn a story. One of the rolls would be wound round to bring a new bit of the story into view. We were in the post-war era of austerity when industrial output was directed to the exclusion of toys and playthings so we were used to a lot of improvising. Despite this, I must say there was no 'Wow factor' for this my first encounter with television. The reason I remember it is because it is my first memory of a co-operative effort – scrolling the story - and also one of the kids in the class said they had a television at home. She and the teacher spoke knowledgeably about something nobody else knew about. I remember the girl. She lived on a farm I passed on the way to school. Her name was Ellen Olverson. I never saw it written and in Lancashire at that time I suppose either or both of the names could have had an aitch in front of it. I have never encountered that surname again, but it is obviously English rather than Irish. Despite it being a Catholic school, in my class I was the only one who talked of Ireland and who went there on holidays. I don't recall that any of the kids had Irish surnames. Many years later I was given an explanation for that.

A Legacy of Henry VIII

It was in the early summer of 1975 I chanced on an explanation for Irish surnames being unusual in a backwoods Lancashire Catholic infants' school. The company I was working for in Leeds, Asda, owned a creamery in Settle near the North Yorkshire border with Lancashire. There was a proposal to widen the road to the west of the town. The creamery's water supply came from a source that would be lost under the widened road. The source would have to be tapped somewhere else. I had to go and see what was at issue. It meant a day with the manager of the creamery. It was a superb day to be in the Pennines looking for water. He told

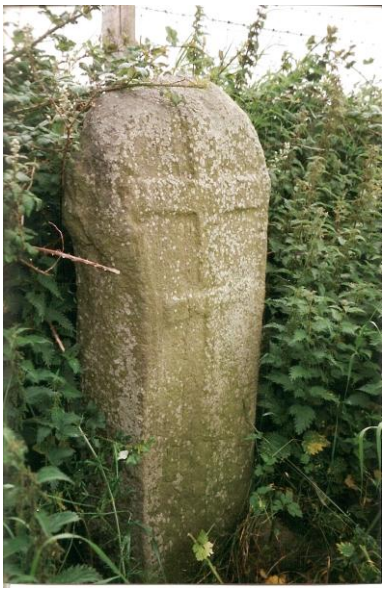
me why there were more English Catholics in Lancashire than in Yorkshire. Abbeys in Yorkshire had owned huge estates stretching from York to the Lake District. King Henry VIII confiscated them and gave the land to his supporters who were thereby encouraged to join him in his rejection of Rome. There wasn't much in the way of church land to confiscate in Lancashire, so there weren't the carrots to entice Lancashire people to abandon their old ways. It's obvious once you know.

Surname Research

So, as a child, all you could do was listen. A favourite uncle was one who would tell stories. I learnt that our surname should have had a 'K' in front of it but somehow it had got lost. I would have been a student at the University of Liverpool when I first found Edward MacLysaght's 'Surnames of Ireland'. It was fascinating but as far as my name was concerned it only deepened the mystery: a Donegal name that had become Bonner and Crampsey? A pseudo-translation? A by-name for midwife? As students we had specialised pens and ink for doing maps and their legends for cartography, but basically all we did at university then was reading and writing by hand. It was the late 1960s before I was able to write something a précis of MacLysaght and get it typed up at work by giving a secretary £5. It was work then. Typos were laborious to correct. I've forgotten the vocabulary. Typing would be on a special sheet which would then put into a machine to make copies. I then passed the copies round to the family. As time went by I worked on other aspects of family history. For this piece I'll try to put things into chronological order rather than in the order in which I found them.

It was in the late 1980s in York City library I looked at the Oxford Dictionary of Surnames, at Bonner, being what was called the pseudo-translation of Ó Cnáimhsighe. It was obvious that the compliers of this work had had later and better sources than MacLysaght and Woulfe whom I had found many years before. The Dictionary of the Royal Irish Academy had been published in the mid '70s. Somebody at Dublin library kindly faxed me the page with the definition of 'cnaimseach' on it. (Pre-printing era, they used to put a dot over the 'm' rather than an aitch behind it.) Once on to dictionaries as a source, I found 'cnaimhseag' in a Scottish dictionary, meaning 'bearberry'. The habitat of the plant in Ireland – north western mountains, scree slopes, fitted well a Donegal surname. It was oxytocic, which I found meant something that accelerates labour in childbirth, so there was the midwife sorted out. That could have been the end, but the page from Dublin had the letters 'bcc' for the source of the word. I rang to ask was this Beatha Colaim Chille, Manus O' Donnell's 'Life of St Columba'? It was. I asked if York library could get a copy for me. They borrowed one from Manchester University. Its editors/translators were O'Kelleher and Schoepperle. It had to go straight back – no extension of time. And so I got to the origin and meaning of our surname. It has happened so often. You think you are at a dead end, but re-visit a subject and in the meantime someone has found something that moved you on. Today, O'Kelleher and Schoepperle's work is available on-line. Just scroll down to paragraph 146. Everything is becoming easier. Look no further for the pseudo-translation to Boner in its various spellings. In order to preserve the 'period' feel of O'Donnell's work, 'O'Kelleher and Schoepperle translated the sixteenth century Irish into Shakespearean English, which for me really works.

An Ancient Shrine in Co. Derry



Beatha Colaim Chille had the story of St Columba's resurrection of Connla the Smith to finish the holy casket he had started making before he died and described the location of the site of the event. Dr Ann Hamlin, Director of Built Heritage, Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland, directed me close enough to the historic site of Dun Cruithne to ask where to find it. We continued to exchange after her retirement. She told me the cross I had found – all that was still standing of the old shrine site - was 11th or 12th century and that though I was saying 'Cross of Lorraine', there was no French connection. It is not a common form in Ireland, but it is not unique to Duncrun.

A Discovery of Human Bones

I wrote up the story of the Pictish Fort (Dun Cruithne means fort of the Picts) in an edition of Glór many years ago. The legend says the Ó Cnáimhsighe clan are the descendants of Connla. I won't say more this time, but I will put in something I omitted then. I was the first of our party to find the cross and at its foot was a plastic supermarket bag. Its contents were heavy but I assumed it was old picnic trash and cast it aside. My brother Frank Kneafcy being 'a bit of a toot', looked into it. The contents made the story and confirmed what St Columba had found all those years earlier: you need a good joiner on the job! The bag contained human bones, some part of a skull or skulls. They were brown and obviously very old. The cross stands on what is or was in August 1997 the farm of Mrs Kathleen McDevitt. I spoke to Mrs McDevitt's daughter Mary on the day we made our visit and after we found the cross. It had been a temporarily hired tractor driver who had waved us on. Kathleen McDevitt was on holiday and Mary arrived whilst we were in the fields. I exchanged letters with Kathleen McDevitt subsequently. Her son had been ploughing using a modern plough which dug deeper than previously. I thought I should share this with Ann Hamlin. I delayed as I was afraid official investigations following the finding of human remains would disturb the routine of the farm and it was a field full of cabbages. When I did tell her a couple of months later, she told me I need not have worried about the authorities disrupting the work of the farm: it wasn't unusual for ancient bones in Ireland to be unearthed. Ancient burials were in shallow graves, and it was generally young farmers who disturbed them, as they worked their machinery more vigorously than their fathers. She said she could put an order on the land, restricting its use to pasture, so there would be no more disturbance. Though she said a grant would be payable to the farm so that they would not suffer financially, I said I would prefer to leave everything as I had found it and please would she not impose a control on the use of the land. It was bizarre for us all that as legendary descendants of a man resurrected from bones - doubtlessly from the same ancient burial ground - we should have showed up on a day when bones from there were again in evidence. A nephew of Mrs McDevitt who was a priest gave the bones a Christian burial. My uncles Joe and Tom were with Frank and me on that trip to Duncrun. We had taken a day out from the Flaedh Cheoil that year in Ballina. It turned out that Kathleen had had relatives at the Flaedh as well. We weren't the first Kneafseys to come to the old shrine. A couple from California had visited a few years earlier.

Mary knew from personal experience things I knew from O'Donnell and she knew which buildings standing today had used stonework 'recycled' from the former abbey.

Kathleen said that the Picts knew good land when they saw it. I recalled that O'Donnell had said more or less the same thing: that ‘the land called at this day Ard Meggiolagan ... inferior to no ecclesiastical territory in all Ireland at this day 1520’. It enabled the little Duncrun Abbey, site of the shrine which could attract pilgrims of ‘a great sort, 500 horses and more’, to become one of the wealthiest in Ulster. In my piece about the Pictish Fort, I had worked out that the resurrection at Dun Cruithne took place in 573 AD. I now find 584 as the date for the establishment of the commemorative abbey and that it appears on the 1931 Ordnance Survey map as ‘ruins of an abbey’.

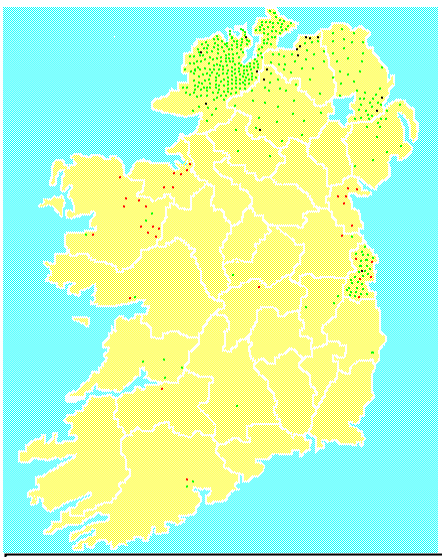
I made the point in the piece that Duncrun’s commanding views provided common ground to the two explanations I proposed for the origin of Cnáimhsighe. They took in the ancient burial ground - you may say the cnamhaibh aimsir foda, which I said inspired the pseudo-translation to Boner, and not far beyond that high cliffs and scree – favourite habitat of the cnaimhseag, accounting for the midwife element. Eibhlínn Ní Chnáimhsí of the Donegal Gaeltacht, whose family the Irish Government had persuaded to re-adopt the old name, told me that in Donegal the pseudo-translation is always pronounced ‘Boner’, however it is spelt.

St Columba’s Trail from Donegal to Scotland

Ann Hamlin told me about Brian Lacey, who was working on St Columba. He later produced a new translation of O’Donnell’s ‘Life’. I see he is now a prime mover in the establishment of a pilgrim ‘Trail of St Columba’, Slighe Chaluim Chille, Slí Cholmcille, identifying 72 stops across Ireland and Scotland, to take in some of the most beautiful spots in the two countries. Whether Duncrun will be in the 72 remains to be seen. Owners’ rights and attitudes and rights of way issues have no doubt featured in the identification of this Trail. Duncrun Farm is at post-code BT49 0JE and the old abbey site is uphill and behind it. The Google Earth photo is from too high an altitude to be much use.

Mapping the Kneafseys

When I first wondered about these things, doing work myself would have been away beyond the capability of an individual person. Years went by and technology moved on. I could use the computer to map the distribution of the name. I was lucky. It was the early 1990s. I used the telephone directories of Ireland as the data source. The Republic and the North had different systems, but optical character recognition could be used on both. Britain would not have been possible the way things were done then. The map is in colour and makes a distinction between the three derivatives of Ó Cnáimhsighe. As it happens, it doesn’t matter if it is in black and white. The dense cluster in Donegal is almost all Bonner, whilst the cluster in Mayo is almost all Kneafsey. It may be surmised from the map that the families who left Donegal for Mayo left before the pseudo-translation of the name to Bonner. Why they left one place for the other we can guess. We don’t need to guess why some of their descendants left Ireland altogether. How they left Ireland and how they got to their destinations is perhaps a different story.



Distribution of Ó Cnáimhsighe families 1992

From Donegal to Shanvaghera

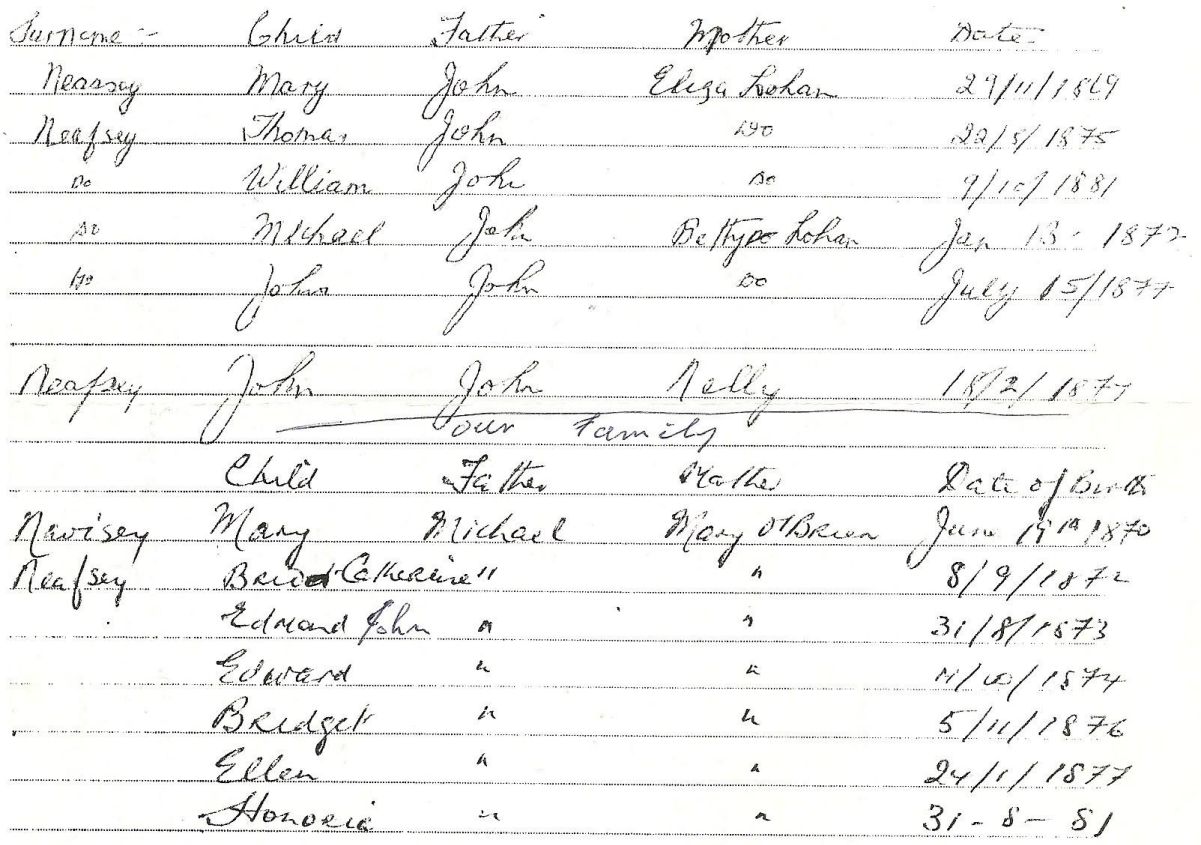
So we move from the shrine at the Pictish Fort through the leaving of Donegal to the shrine at Knock and 'The Old House' in Shanvaghera. Between June 19th 1870 and 31st August 1881, Mary O'Brien and her husband Michael whose surname was retrospectively spelt 'Kneafsey', had seven children – five daughters and two sons. They were baptised in St John's church, Knock. This was a momentous time in Mayo, with 1879 seeing the Apparition in Knock and the foundation of the Irish Land League in Irishtown, and the boycotting of Captain Boycott. All of the seven married, six of them to local people. Six of them had children. From the family trees I have been given I would say there were 36 children altogether. It was a time of emigration. Most of the children left to live in England or the USA. There were 32 houses in 1851 in Shanvaghera and 27 in 1911, a decline of 16%. The Griffith Valuation has one reference to our surname for Shanvaghera, a John Knavessey.

Of the 36 grandchildren of 'The Old House', I of course knew seven that were the children of my grandfather. I also knew five of the six by his sister Ellen – the Swifts. I met two of the seven of his sister Mary and one of his brother John. That is 15 – fewer than half of them, but enough to have picked up some information that others perhaps don't have. This is a photograph of the derelict old house taken in August 1971. Alo Kneafsey cleared it much later and I don't know if there are any other photos of it. It's a pity I'm standing in front of it, but we were frugal with photographs in those days before digital cameras. It was Agnes Carney who took us to see it. 'Many's the time I've slept in that house', she said. I have a picture too of Agnes outside her house in Ballyhaunis. She is standing between my mother, Ivy, and her cousin and my mother's second husband, Mike Swift. My wife, Jean, would have taken the picture.

Knock Baptismal Records

My Dad, Peter Neafcy, had died young and his Dad had died when he was only 10, so there wasn't much in the way of family folklore. However, my Uncle Bill, an elder brother of my Dad's, had a keen interest in family. He gave me an extract from the Knock Baptismal Book which featured two families. He had marked one as ours. The eldest child in both families was called Mary: one was 'Neassy' and the other, ours, was 'Navisey'. I think of these spellings as 'Demotic': the writer was just trying to represent what he heard with the alphabet he knew. I think of Ó

Cnáimhsighe as ‘Classical’ but few would have been literate in Irish then, even if they were fluent speakers. The spelling ‘Kneafsey’, as the families in Ireland for the most part became, I think of as ‘Modern’, as once you have seen the Irish, this is obviously the best transliteration. I see that modern Irish has now simplified this to Ó Cnáimhsí. The Baptismal Book record from about 1872 standardised to ‘Neafsey’ for both families - still demotic. I now know from various certificates of my grandfather that there were other changes, as there were for Patrick Neafsy of the Second Irish Guards of 1915. Taking one example, my grandfather’s sister Bridget appears in the Knock records as Neafsey at her baptism in 1872 and as Kneafsey when she married in 1901. This is what Uncle Bill gave me:

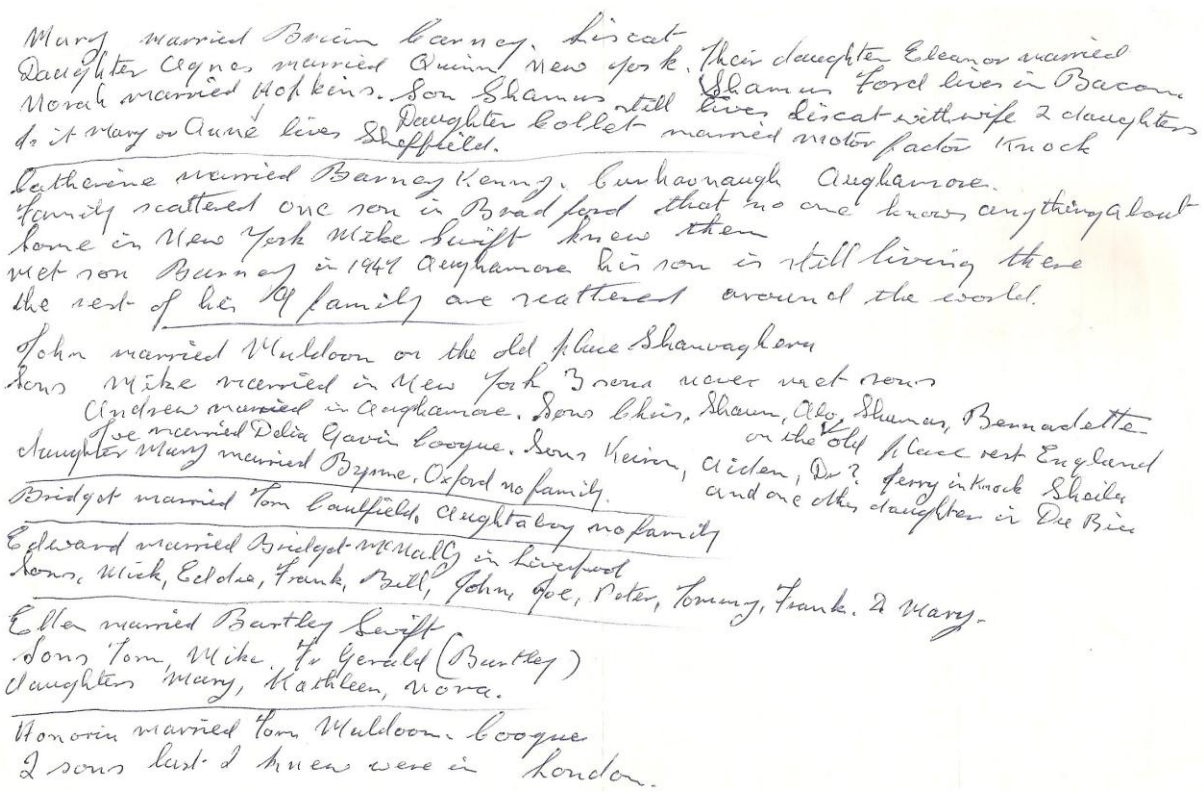


Surname	Christ	Father	Mother	Date
Neassy	Mary	John	Eliza Lohan	29/11/1869
Neafsey	Thomas	John	Do	22/5/1875
Do	William	John	Do	7/10/1881
Do	Michael	John	Bridget Lohan	Jan 13 1872
Do	John	John	Do	July 15/1877
Neafsey	John	John	Nelly	18/2/1877

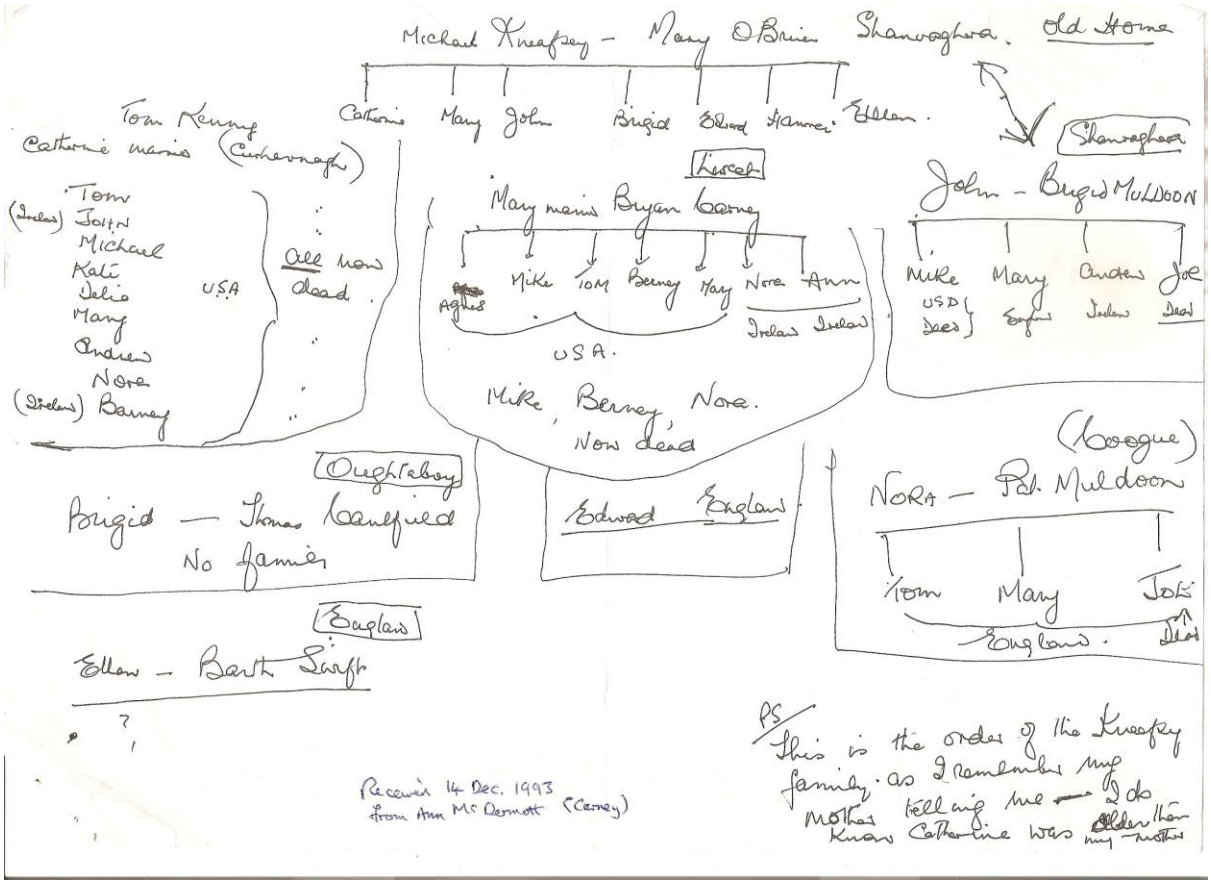
Our Family

Child	Father	Mother	Date of Birth
Mary	Michael	Mary O'Brien	June 19th 1870
Bridget Catherine	"	"	8/9/1872
Edward John	"	"	31/8/1873
Edward	"	"	11/10/1874
Bridget	"	"	5/11/1876
Ellen	"	"	24/1/1877
Honoria	"	"	31-8-81

Uncle Bill had written in freehand on the back of this Baptismal Book data what he knew of what had become of the children. He gave me this in 1991. I know this because he also had a signed and dated copy of the data for our family alone from John Carty and it had all been one job. This is what he wrote:


Mary married Barrin Barney. Liscat
Daughter Agnes married Quinn New York. Their daughter Eleanor married
Norah married Hopkins. Son Shamus Shamus Ford lives in Bacon.
Is it Mary or Anne lives Sheffield. Daughter Collet married motor factor Knock
Catherine married Barney Kenny. Curhavnagh Anghamore.
Family scattered one son in Bradford that no one knows anything about
home in New York Mike Swift knew them
met son Barney in 1947 Anghamore his son is still living there
the rest of his family are scattered around the world.
John married Muldoon on the old place Shanvaghera
Sons Mike married in New York 3 sons never met sons
Andrew married in Anghamore. Sons Chris, Shaun, Alo, Shamus, Bernadette-
on the old place rest England
Joe married Delia Gavin Coogue. Sons Kevin, Aiden, Dr? Jerry in Knock Sheila
Daughter Mary married Byrne. Oxford no family. and one other daughter in Dublin
Bridget married Tom Caulfield, daughter no family
Edward married Bridget McNally in Liverpool
Sons, Mick, Eddie, Frank, Bill, John, Joe, Peter, Tommy, Frank. 2 Mary.
Ellen married Bartley Swift
Sons Tom, Mike, Fr Gerald (Bartley)
Daughters Mary, Kathleen, Nora.
Honoria married Tom Muldoon. Coogue
2 sons last I knew were in London.

Uncle Bill had written under ‘Mary’, ‘is it Mary or Anne lives in Sheffield’. I had met Ann McDermott in Sheffield when I lived there briefly. She retired from nursing back to Knock and I was reacquainted with her there. We exchanged letters in 1993 and she sent me this freehand family tree. Ann did not have the advantage of the Baptismal Book data and so unsurprisingly there are some differences in the ages of her aunts and uncles as she remembered them. As far as my grandfather was concerned, her family tree just said ‘Edward, England’: there was no need for further detail for me. The same went for his sister Ellen – she just put ‘Barth Swift’. I knew the Swifts well, of course. It is interesting to have the perceptions of two cousins on the family and to see how well informed both were.

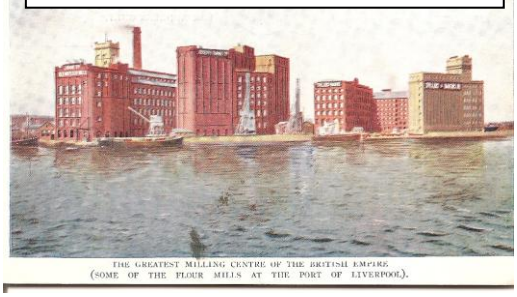


From Shanvaghera to Liverpool

From the old house, my grandfather and his sister Ellen, and maybe others, spent some time in Liverpool with their respective families. I am a graduate of the University of Liverpool and for some years after graduating in 1964 I worked in town planning in the city. I worked on the area in which they had lived, but I did not know that at the time. Apart from being told that my father's eldest brother had been born in Scotland Road there was nothing in the family folklore about Liverpool itself. We were in the Wigan area and the Swifts had been in Bootle, just north of Liverpool. This was perhaps strange given the importance of Liverpool to Irish emigrants of my grandfather's generation. So, along with Moleskin Joe, I thought I should belatedly check up on Athol Street, Liverpool.

It turns out that a book was published in 1987, 'The Liverpool Docklands: Life and Work in Athol Street', by Pat Ayers. There was an area called 'Over the Bridge'. This was the Athol Street bridge over the Leeds-Liverpool canal, on the docks side. I must say in eight years working in Liverpool I never heard the expression, 'Over the Bridge', but then, I didn't know anyone who lived there.

The Greatest Milling Centre of the British Empire
(Some of the Flour Mills at the Port of Liverpool)



THE GREATEST MILLING CENTRE OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE
(SOME OF THE FLOUR MILLS AT THE PORT OF LIVERPOOL).

'By 1900, the north end of Liverpool was one of the most important districts in the country. Numerous industries associated with shipping and the processing of imported raw materials were located there. These included ship repair, animal foodstuffs, sugar refining, tobacco, timber,

molasses, flourmills, margarine manufacture and a whole host of others. The area was also one of the poorest, most squalid and disease ridden places in Britain.

In response to a rapidly expanding population's demand for gas, Athol Street Gas Works opened in 1834. It was ideally located on the banks of the Leeds-Liverpool canal which provided a direct link with the Wigan coalfield. By 1881, the area had taken on the shape it was to retain until the Second World War. ... Welsh builders ... erected the houses between 1830 and 1870 ... usually these houses remained in Welsh hands ... mainly two and three bedroomed terraces with cellars, small back yards and outside taps and toilets ... desperate demand for housing brought a rapid deterioration of conditions.

In the years between the Wars, approximately six thousand people lived Over the Bridge. Of these, there were no more than twenty families who were non-catholic. St Albans church was the focal point of the local community ...'

The existing Catholic churches could not cope with the influx of Irish immigrants and it was as early as 1849 that St Albans church was built close to the docks. Ned Neafcy and Bridget McNally were married there in 1908. Mike Swift was born in Athol Street in 1906. Most of the residential property has gone now and the redundant church is premises for a climbing centre.

A Close-knit Catholic Community

Pat Ayers makes the point about how close knit and loyal to their community its inhabitants were and how it was a fun place for kids. From my own experience I can add a little to what she says. After I joined the planning office, my first trip out was to the North Docks with an area plan on which to mark what Standard Industrial Classification the various businesses belonged to. There were redevelopment and development ideas for the area, and there was information from elsewhere on the likelihood of businesses surviving disturbance by category. As regards the proportion of Catholics in the population, I worked on birth statistics for the area, for the acreage that would be needed for schools: there were Catholic schools and state schools. The area was overwhelmingly Catholic from the docks as far east as Great Homer Street, at least. The area I was looking at was much bigger than Over the Bridge, but an anomaly has stayed with me to this day. I found that the number of Catholic baptisms in the area exceeded the total number of births. I could only assume that young parents on the overspill estates were coming 'home' to baptise their babies. Certainly, the volume of bus connections between for example outlying Kirkby and intown Everton was greater than would be predicted by journey to work or leisure venues. Also, when a population was disturbed through slum clearance and redevelopment, it would produce more households than the number disturbed. This was because sharing with in-laws, convenient in the original place, would not be convenient in the new place as someone would find himself too far from work. They would no doubt still want to get together frequently. In the Great War, US troops were stationed at what would become the Kirkby overspill estate. Mike Swift told me that. He watched them go by.

It may be that I got population work to do because I could use a slide-rule for calculations. Looking back it's surprising how many people in an office could get through their day without doing calculations. I would say pocket calculators came in in 1974. Everybody got one – electricity again – people who had hardly ever done a calculation since they left school. I was at Asda then, a supermarket company. In our department, only the boss, a director with

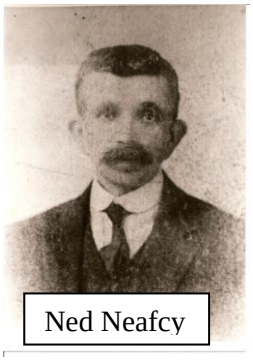
a Jaguar as his company car, and I, had a slide rule. The transparent cursor had broken off his but he used it anyway with no difficulty. He had probably had it since he was a naval officer in World War II. I never asked.

Irish Speakers in Lancashire

I would add to what Pat Ayers has to say something about the Irish language. The Rev Patrick Woulfe produced his Irish Names and Surnames in 1921, which included the origin and meaning of over 3500 Irish surnames. It had been a long time in the preparation and the Great War slowed things down anyway. I recall that he had done his research in the 1890s, talking to emigrant Irish speakers from the West conveniently collected in communities in south Lancashire. The book doesn't say where, but it must have been places like Over the Bridge or the equivalent in Manchester.

The Leaving of Liverpool

But life for the emigrant Irish wasn't all introspective and loyal and fixed to one area. Many Irish stayed in Liverpool, but many moved on. There were labour intensive activities everywhere: opportunities that led to the leaving of Liverpool. Moleskin Joe was a navvy who worked all over the country on big civil engineering projects. He and many of the men he worked with had no women or had escaped from family life: fiction, but no doubt a true 'mise en scène'. Ned Neafcy moved first to Glasgow, then Liverpool. Neither the Neafcys nor the Swifts stayed long Over the Bridge. Ned moved inland to the coalfield. His wife had been a servant in a merchant's house. He got a job in a mine paying wages. He was also a ganger and my English grandfather was one of the men who worked for him. I see from Moleskin Joe that a man could get a job with a fixed amount of money to be made and it was up to him how many men he employed: the fewer, the more they would each get. From the Mining Museum in Yorkshire I learned that women and children working down the mines, before the practice was banned, had not been employed directly by the mine owners but had been brought in by their husbands and fathers to achieve a quicker output.



Ned Neafcy

Ellen and Bart Swift

Though subject to the casual hiring system of the docks, Bart Swift was never short of work. He took his family to Boswell Street in Bootle – still relying on the docks, but you could say moving downstream as increasingly bigger ships moved the centre of the port's gravity downstream. Mike Swift never mentioned Athol Street before I did, so he must have been too young to remember it. The census return of 1911 is there so it could be checked for the residents at that date. I haven't done it, but I have a date anyway. A childhood memory of Mike's was the King coming past the end of their street, which on the computer is easy to check: it was July 11th, 1913. Bart took his wife and family to America, but came back, which didn't please Ellen.

The 'Spanish' flu of 1918/19 caused havoc. Ellen Neafcy-Swift died and was buried in Ford cemetery north of Liverpool. One and maybe two of the Neafcy kids died. Ned Neafcy said he would never play

the whistle again. Or was it flute, I don't remember. Bart Swift remarried and left again for America, taking his eldest son with him. The second son, Mike, was sent back to Ireland following the death of his mother. He was two or three years in school in Coogue. The third son came to live with the Neafcys at 128, Billinge Road, North Ashton, near Wigan. The three girls were put in an orphanage in Crosby. As money came in for their fares, the Swift kids all went to America. This was probably not an unusual way of doing it.

The Story of an Emigrant Ship

My Dad died when I was 21. His Dad, Ned, died when my Dad was 10. So what I learned of Co Mayo was from talk by uncles and their cousins. What meant something to them meant something to me. In 1986 I produced a drawing of a ship for an 80th birthday present for Mike Swift, who as a widower had married my widowed mother, Ivy. Mike had mentioned to me that the name of the ship on which he had sailed from Liverpool to the USA was the 'Haverford'. I then got the date and the price of the ticket from him and the address he left behind. So I surprised him with this drawing and history of the ship with a line in it about Mike himself. I kept a copy myself.

People from Ireland and all over Europe would make their way to Liverpool to catch an ocean-going ship to America. Many must have done so from Mayo and so this story for Mike might have a more general interest. It turned out that the history of the 'Haverford' covered almost the entire 1893 – 1924 period in which the ports of Liverpool and Philadelphia played important roles in large scale emigration from Europe to the USA. The period began when the American Line began to build steamships without 1st class and with little 2nd class accommodation. It ended when the bigger ships of the Southampton - New York service could cope unaided with sharply reduced emigrant flows. The first of these effectively one-class ships, the 8,607 ton twin screw 'Southwark', left Liverpool for Philadelphia in December 1893. Records show that her planned 1st class accommodation had been eliminated at the design stage. Other shipping lines followed suit. The Haverford was the third American Line ship of this design. Twin screw 5,000 IHP engines drove the 11,635 ton ship at 14 knots. She was 511 feet in length, 59ft 2 inches in width and 27 feet 2 inches in depth. She carried 150 2nd class and 1,700 steerage passengers. She was built at Clydebank, Scotland, by John Brown and Co. Ltd, for the International Navigation Co. Ltd of Liverpool, a subsidiary of the International Navigation Co of New Jersey. The Liverpool company remained her nominal owner throughout her life. Five months in construction, launched on May 4th 1901, she was three months in fitting out. Built for the American Line, her maiden voyage on September 4th 1901 was for an affiliated company, Red Star, which sailed the Southampton – New York run. She did four round trips for Red Star before being detailed to Liverpool. In April 1902, in American Line colours, she made her first trip to Philadelphia. Her sister ship, the Merion, plied the Liverpool - Boston run for the Dominion and American Lines. In 1902 the International Navigation Co of New Jersey changed its name to International Mercantile Marine Co and bought the share capital of White Star and a number of other lines. White Star became the company's showpiece with bigger ships than the American Line.

Following the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 the Haverford was taken into British Government service. Ships had had Government subsidies in their construction so that they could be called upon in the event of war. She served 1915 and the early part of 1916 as a transport for the British Expeditionary Force. She then returned to the North Atlantic run. She escaped a U-boat attack off the coast of Ireland on June 17th 1917, but was hit off Scotland 12 days later with the loss of eight lives. She was towed to Lough Swilly, beached and repaired. Soon after resuming service, she again escaped a torpedo attack on April 17th, 1918. Her sister ship was sunk on military service in 1915.

Two months after the end of the war, in January 1919, the Haverford was again sailing from Liverpool to Philadelphia, and was soon the only ship on this run. On April 1st 1921 White Star took over the service from the American Line and the Haverford became known as a White Star liner. In 1921 the US government introduced emergency restrictions and a quota system which severely restricted immigration from southern and eastern Europe. There was an immediate slump in transatlantic passenger flows. Early in 1922 the Haverford made three American Line voyages from Hamburg to New York, then resumed the Liverpool - Philadelphia run. Amongst emigrants embarking on April 13th 1922 and travelling on an $89 steerage ticket for the 13 day trip, was young Michael Swift from 29, Boswell Street, Bootle, Lancashire, England. $89 seems a lot, but in those days the exchange rate was $4 or $5 to £1 sterling.

In May 1922 the run began to take in Boston en route to Philadelphia. On June 6th 1922 the Haverford was joined by the 16,322 ton Pittsburgh, ordered seven years earlier for the American Line but delayed by the war. The Pittsburgh also sailed as White Star. Taken off the run in October 1922 the Haverford carried 1500 British troops to Turkey which was then at war with Greece. Years later, in Yorkshire at an antiques fair, I saw a painting of the Haverford off Smyrna, the city ablaze as the Turks took it from the Greeks. It was huge painting, evidently not meant for a domestic setting.

From 1923 onwards a twice monthly call was made at Boston by bigger ships en route to New York. In 1924 the National Origins Act was adopted, limiting numbers of immigrants. The same year saw the withdrawal of the Liverpool - Boston - Philadelphia service, and also that of the Mediterranean – New York service. With an evident shortage of either civilian or military work, the Haverford was sold in December 1924 to the SA Ansaldo of Italy for £29,000 and was broken up in February 1925.

When he saw the drawing, Mike described the ship as a ‘one-stacker’. I suppose the Haverford was about a fifth of the size of the Titanic which boasted four stacks, one of which was a dummy. Despite the impressions you get from the film, the Titanic had three classes and the category of passengers who took the greatest percentage loss of life were, surprise, surprise, the second class men. Mike also recalled that as the ship pulled out of Liverpool, someone was playing ‘Maggie’ (the Creek and the Creaky Old Mill).

By 1986 I had been self employed for about four years. I knew I could do what I wanted to do to produce the birthday present, but it was quite laborious. I had a BBC computer into which I had put an extra chip so that it would do word processing. I had a fax machine, which was state of the art then. I knew the best place to get the story of the Haverford was the Liverpool Maritime Museum at the Albert Dock. I bought some books there. There was a photograph of the Haverford but it wasn’t good enough. I found one of its sister ship, and that

is what the drawing, by an architect contact of mine, is based on. I found the White Star colours and we used them for the drawing. It would be a lot less laborious now. We have broadband now and much more information is available on-line. There are pictures of the Haverford - postcards were made of all these ships and people have uploaded them. It has been a feature of family history as I have encountered it.

Applying for Irish Citizenship

Of the grandchildren of the 'Old House', four of us have acquired Irish citizenship by ancestry. There are two anecdotes for this. For me, the surname spelling issue came back. When I did my surnames book, I chose the spelling 'Neafsey' as that was what was in the baptismal book for my grandfather. So I thought I should stick with that for the Irish citizenship. For a witness you have to stick as well with the accepted professions of doctor, magistrate etc of the original drafting – nobody with a new fangled job, however exalted. There was no problem with that, second attempt. However, when I came to apply for the Irish passport, they wanted two applications for this surname that I had used. I thought I couldn't use this spelling, as there was only the book. Then I remembered my marriage certificate of 1967. In the boxes, my surname appears twice, in beautiful black ink, neither signature written by me. One has the spelling 'Neafcy' and the other 'Neafsey'. I had noticed the error at the time, but what do you do? Anyway, that was good enough for Ireland and they let me be 'Neafsey' on my passport.

The other story was by Gerald Swift, who was working in US Government service. He asked if it was OK for someone with such a job to have a foreign passport. He got a good natured assent. Kentucky has an unusual award which it bestows on citizens who have been of particular worth to the state. Though it has nothing to do with the US army, it grants them the honorary title of 'colonel'. His boss said he would look on Gerald's acquisition of Irish citizenship as being the same as him becoming a Kentucky colonel. The Irish citizenship isn't retrospective, so we can't pass it on to children we had before we got it.

Patrick MacGill

Whilst writing this, I have been reading 'Moleskin Joe'. The copy I got has an introduction by an eminent Scottish librarian, Brian D. Osborne, dated January 2000. Osborne tells us that MacGill was born into poverty on a subsistence farm in Glenties, Co Donegal, around March 1890. (The famous MacGill Summer School held annually in Glenties is so-called in his honour). He published his first book, on his early life and hardships, in 1914: 'Children of the Dead End'. It is set around 1909. He acknowledges it is mainly autobiographical. He is already a friend of the character he calls Moleskin Joe. In 1915, which makes him a volunteer, MacGill was a stretcher bearer with the London Irish. He was at Loos. I had seen the battle referred to as 'The Big Push'. MacGill wrote a book about it entitled 'The Great Push', of which chapters are available to be read on-line. Hill 70 is there and so too are all the other awful place-names my brother David referred to in what he wrote about Patrick Neafsy. MacGill was an eye witness from a distance to the advance of the Guards Division and he saw the artillery reception they ran into. He was wounded himself in October 1915, which makes it a few days after Patrick Neafsy and John Kipling were killed. He had respiratory difficulties from breathing gas (which if it were at Loos would have been blow-back from British gas), and to find a better climate was one of the reasons he emigrated to America later

on. Obviously, given what David and I have read and written about Loos, these details grabbed my attention immediately.

Horrors of the Great War

'Moleskin Joe' was published in 1923. It is not about the war, though many of the navvies Joe worked with were veterans. So was Joe himself: he had become a sergeant. I was looking out for a line Uncle Bill had mentioned. It was a man who never went back. Uncle Bill thought it might refer to his father. I didn't find it – it must be in another of MacGill's books. I was struck by a character in the book, Father Nolan. He was a veteran of the Great War. He and Joe knew each other from the war, which must mean Loos though there is no reference to Loos or any other specific location. Father Nolan had killed a wounded soldier with a bayonet, as he was beyond the help of prayer. Father Nolan was a priest to the wandering navvies and was respected, though this was well known about him. Before Moleskin Joe, I have never heard of a priest putting a wounded soldier out of his misery. Is it plausible? Heartrending as it is, MacGill's verse about Loos is less heartrending than his prose about it, so I'll quote that:

> *The dead men lay on the shell-scarred plain,*
> *Where death and the autumn held their reign*
> *Like banded ghosts in the heavens grey*
> *The smoke of the conflict died away.*
> *The boys whom I knew and loved were dead,*
> *Where war's grim annals were writ in red,*
> *In the town of Loos in the morning.*

It seems plausible to me. And who was better placed to see it than a stretcher-bearer? Who was more likely to call a priest to a hopeless case than a stretcher-bearer? Such a story could only come out in a fictional work, and not in a memoir such as 'The Great Push'. The fictitious Father Nolan in 'Moleskin Joe' would have had to use a bayonet: a gun-shot would have attracted attention to what was going on. In real life, there would have been a well meaning conspiracy of silence and deception to ease the pain of the dead soldier's relatives back home. That said, there is no need in 'Moleskin Joe' for us readers of this fictional work to be given this information about Father Nolan. The priest could have played his part without us knowing it. It can only mean that MacGill wanted this story in his writings somewhere because he wanted to share it.

The Kipling Connection

Why was Moleskin Joe at my granddad's house? Uncle Bill had mentioned that Ned had been in Scotland: they may have met there. All we know for sure is what Uncle Bill knew: that Moleskin Joe dropped by. We can never know why or what he and Ned talked about. And yet. And yet ... We now know that Patrick Neafsy of Aghamore was one of 32 of the 2nd Irish Guards, including John Kipling, son of Rudyard, killed amongst all the others in the fields below Hill 70. Patrick was buried on the battlefield by Father Knapp, chaplain to his regiment, who reported his death. Father Knapp was himself killed in action two years later. Kipling made immense efforts to find out what had happened to his son. He must have been told that amongst all these Irish soldiers was a new and successful young author called MacGill. Kipling's efforts must have attracted attention to the Irish Guards who died with his son. Ours is a rare name. MacGill might therefore have heard the name Neafsy, which he recognised from jobs in Scotland, so he knew what happened to Patrick. So the story might

have got to Moleskin Joe. Neither Moleskin Joe nor Ned need have known Patrick personally, but same surname, same village as Patrick, someone not too close, Ned was perhaps somebody to talk to about it. The story brings out that someone not too close can be important. When my Dad was dying of leukaemia aged 45, his brother nearest in age, my Uncle Joe, made sure one time that he saw him alone. He told me that a dying man will sometimes say something to his brother that he wouldn't want to say to his wife and family. You have to be grateful for the wisdom of these old soldiers. My granddad's spelling on his death certificate was Neafsy, like Patrick's. The witness was his cousin Tom Caulfield, who I expect spelled it out for the doctor.

How did Moleskin Joe find our family's house? Like he does in the book, he would ask until he found the neighbourhood and then ask there. Bart Swift did the same when he returned to England aged 82 to look everybody up. I did wonder in Moleskin Joe why none of the navvies used a push-bike. It occurs to me that whilst MacGill sets Moleskin Joe the novel in the 1920s, his own experience of the hard life of a navvy was before he became an author – before the Great War. He was perhaps out of touch.

Discoveries on the Research Journey

There are supposed to be skeletons in the cupboard when you do family histories. I never expected to find human bones and a story of a Dark Ages resurrection. I never thought I would be reading about Linnaeus and the classification of plants. I know more about childbirth than I ever thought I would. I know more about the Battle of Loos. Lines from Kipling are on Great War memorials the world over: I did not expect to find that he himself quoted from another poet for the memorial to his son. I found there is more to Patrick MacGill than a reference somewhere to a man who never went back. You find something and the story takes over and starts to write itself. I'll add to this that there is more than one Loos, so for anyone with a sat-nav, you want Loos-en-Gohelle. As an aide-memoire to pronunciation, I have seen an old spelling, in Picardian French I suppose - Loches. Pronounce this as French but say 's' instead of 'sh'.

I made a couple of chance findings on the internet which pleased me. I have long known that there is a townland called Ballycramsie in Inishowen. I found a song, Crúscín Lán - (The Full Jug), sung by Clannad. It has the line, 'Is deas an baile Cnáimhsí'. (The town of Cnáimhsí is nice). The other is a booklet, 'A Ghàidhig air Aghaidh na Tire'. It's about the North Western Highlands of Scotland. It is in English and Gaelic with illustrations. There is a mountain with our name on it - Beinn nan Cnaimhseag.

Photographs

I'll make a final comment about photographs. Often early photographs are set in a photographer's studio or are of a formal outdoor occasion like a parade or a wedding. The cover photo of the book, 'Moleskin Joe', is neither. It is of a man of the period in workaday clothes in a street scene. There are roadworks behind him. It might be that electricity cables are being laid. I know that is what happened. I asked an auntie years ago when electricity first came to the village. She couldn't remember a date of course, but she remembered there were roadworks all along the way she walked to school. I would say that that was more than a mile and the time was late 1920s, possibly early 1930s. The works behind Joe would have been a little earlier, in that urban setting. Men like Joe were installing the infrastructure that would change the world beyond anything they could recognise: the world we are trying to cope with

now. I wonder if some of the people of that generation avoided being photographed. There is only the one photo of my grandfather. His cousin Tom Caulfield was ubiquitous but never photographed. There is only one of his eldest son, Mick. Mick had had rheumatic fever so missed being called up for World War II and was a bachelor. He should have been at several family weddings but he is not in the photograph albums. He must have made himself scarce. Now we have digital cameras and can record anything we like. It is hard to keep abreast of the technology available to us, and to cope with all the information we retrieve.

Conclusion

When I first went self employed, a surveyor already doing it said that of everyone you had met and everything you had learnt, it had cost somebody something: that was the investment in you. That was what you were worth and how you should value yourself and your time. It would have been my parents' taxes that paid the wages of the young teacher who made the cardboard television. It was a good idea. Not all work is directly productive. You pitch for jobs you don't get. Sometimes something you do is counter-productive. My parents would never have seen a television, cardboard or otherwise. It is true that there are things you should have asked when young. We are pleased when someone achieves a good and healthy long life, but some have to go long before the things they could have said have all been said. My Dad went before his time and so did my brother Frank. So did Gerald Swift, a fine story teller. So did Eibhlínn Ní Chnáimhsí. So did Ann McDermott – we were going to talk more about the family tree. So did Ann Hamlin – I would have gone to one of her talks in England. Turn around and they're gone. Many people have made investments in each one of us and if we can we should give them a return. So for them and for others to follow who may be interested, that is the dots of our family joined up. At least, the ones I have been able to see - at this day 2011. (As Manus O'Donnell would have put it).

Addendum

I wrote the above for the magazine 'Glór Achadh Mór 2011 edition. As ever, new facts emerge after a write-up:

MacGill explained Moleskin Joe's nickname as down to his wearing moleskin (cotton) trousers. I found that real moleskin was used to protect the hands when working with hot metal. That's worth a mention!

MacGill and Joe both worked before the Great War on the hydro-electric plant at Kinlochleven in Scotland. So I could have used this for the reference to electricity in the penultimate paragraph above. My grandfather may well have been with them.

I read others of MacGill's books. He tells us that the soldiers of the London Irish Rifles promised each other before first going into battle, that whatever happened to them, their families were to be told that they didn't suffer. I assume this must have been true of the Kitchener volunteers whatever battalion they were in. This would have reinforced Joe's motivation to pay a visit to my grandfather. He would have known what MacGill knew of Loos, whether or not he had been there himself. The London Irish Rifles were occupying Loos itself after its capture by the Black Watch, when the Black Watch losses meant they couldn't hold it themselves. From there, the London Irish would have seen the Guards Division advance, including the 2nd Irish Guards. MacGill was gassed at Loos, which confirms it was blow-back of British gas. He survived of course.