

# Clonroche Historical Society

Secretary: Mr Patrick O'Neill

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## History: Analysis of Patrick Kennedy

In 1852 the campaign by young Bob Carew, the first son and heir to the 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Robert Shapland Carew of Castleboro, to get elected to Westminster—the lower house of the British Parliament—foundered as the unpleasant Tenant Right movement with a lethal compound of some truth, gross and malicious exaggeration and plain lies plus a lacing of toxic wit relentlessly attacked both the Carews and the Whig Party to which the Carews were intractably connected. Patrick Kennedy, long since domiciled in Dublin wrote to the Wexford Independent in June of 1852 in favour of the challenged candidature of young Carew; the opposition to the Carews within the Catholic community was effectively unprecedented as the Carews of Castleboro Co. Wexford and Woodstown Co. Waterford were over generations advocates of Catholic Emancipation and had traditionally represented the Catholic denomination in Parliament. The bewilderment in Kennedy's letter is, therefore, explicable; his letter is, also, inadvertently, graphic, emotional and biographical:

"I once formed a unit in Mr

O'Neill's school, where swelling the procession from Clonroche to Castleboro on Lord (then Mr) Carew's triumphal return from the Wexford hustings; and the heartfelt joy felt by the dense, and shouting and exulting crowd, all along the shady road and roused to its highest pitch when on arriving at the castle he presented his eldest son to the affectionate and enthusiastic multitude of his humble friends; this heartfelt joy and evident attachment made on my mind and heart an ineffaceable impression. Many such demonstrations may have been made, where the under-current of feeling might not at all correspond but here all was in harmony. How could we be but enthusiastic when every one knew and felt the constant goodness and forbearance of himself and his honoured father to all the dwellers on the estate, and their unceasing efforts in Parliament and out of it for the attainment of Catholic Emancipation. Individually I had every motive for gratitude and attachment.

In the Cloughbawn school established by Lord Carew I got the best education any country school at the time could afford:

afterwards by his favour I was sent to the Education Society in Dublin, was promoted to another school on his estate and when I afterwards removed to this city was presented with a considerable sum beyond what I was entitled to. I have, also, since my settlement here, found that I was not forgotten. Now my case was not a solitary one. I suppose it was only one in some hundreds of goodness shown by the family. I am sorry that my absence from the county and ignorance of its present condition and politics unfit me from being of much use to a cause which I have so much at heart. But surely if there has not occurred an awful change in the family character, which I am almost certain there has not, where can our people look with more prospect of success, for a fitting representative, that in the bosom of so old, so long resident and so kind a family."



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Pat Kennedy in this letter is describing the scenes around the Clonroche/Castleboro locality after Bob Carew returned from his triumph with Colclough in the celebrated 1818 election. The Mr O'Neill referred to is the legendary schoolmaster Hugh O'Neill.

The character of the Carew family of Castleboro had not changed and it is probably a rhetorical trick for Kennedy to put that query: the proper location of change was within Irish society, itself: the Catholic peasantry or tenantry, unnerved, perhaps, by the Famine, had become less deferential to the great landed proprietors and were effectively seeking reform—albeit comparatively modest reform—of the land system at this time. Kennedy's postured ignorance of these agrarian controversies is undoubtedly disingenuous and a fine example of his craft in deflecting attention from the unwelcome realities of life.

The literary skills, the novelist's touches, the beautiful diction, his storyteller's timing and strategy plus his marvellous evocation of the enchanting topography of the area enable Pat Kennedy to seduce the reader into a wonder world. His writings are flecked with motifs of frugal plenitude such as harvest festivities, wedding breakfasts, etc; and occasional (if well supervised) dances, hurling matches and snatches of rhymes and old ballads. The scraps of social detail are enthralling. It is a society at ease with itself under the kindly sway of the Whig/Liberal landed proprietors. His most famous book "The Banks of the Boro" is a paean to the House of Carew of Castleboro and an implicit thesis that their estate was a paradigm of perfect economic and social order.

Kennedy compared his works to that of Anna Maria Hall who spent her formative years at Bannow on the estate of the iconic Tom

Boyse—the first cousin of the first Lord Bob Carew. The paranormal and the crudely superstitious intrude too much into Mrs Hall's writings and the level of spin is excessive to the point of reader incredibility. Pat Kennedy was an early exponent of what in modern parlance is called spin doctoring but he indulges in it with a subtle restraint. Mrs Hall's wonder world is that of life on the estate of Tom Boyse but she was severely critical of many other landlords and wary of an impending calamity in Ireland if the young people did not desist from entering impetuously into very early marriages. There is no intimation of eventual calamity—such as the Great Famine of 1845-48—in Kennedy's work. Both Mrs Hall and Pat Kennedy wrote in a twilight space between factual and objective description and fiction: in Kennedy's single details are often a hybrid of fact and imagination. He spins at a bewildering speed and imperceptibly.

I will in the weeks ahead deal in detail with the writing and life of Patrick Kennedy; it is a subject that I could go and on about.

There are many things about the history of our parish and locality that people do not seem to know of; everybody should know the history of their own parish, blah, blah, etc et al (that is a bit of Latin, for ye!). In his maiden speech (first speech in Parliament and nothing to do with amorous proposition) the future 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Bob Carew on May 1, 1813 spoke "in defence of Catholic relief" and on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1814 spoke "denying allegations of unrest in Wexford." Bob Carew always played down the issues of crime, unrest and political disturbance and as County Lieutenant he followed a policy of leniency and, if possible, relative appeasement.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1801 the

Yeomen burned the little Catholic Chapel at Courtnacuddy but it is important to point out that the Dublin Castle administration usually provided compensation to rebuild these chapels. In 1827 the Board of First Fruits loaned or gave £900 to build the modern Church of Ireland (then Established Church) building at Colaught/Castleboro. (Killegney Church).

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 1957 Canon Michael Murphy the manager of Clonroche National School wrote abruptly to the Department of Education:

"The sewage system and the water closet in my school in Clonroche went completely out of order during the past year. I had to get out and pay for getting the whole system put in order again. And if I bulked the whole cost into one item and sent it to you that way I don't think I did anything wrong and I venture to say that you with all your great system behind you wouldn't do the work under twice the amount. I had a qualifying engineer overseeing and carrying out the work free of charge. You wouldn't do that."

People should know these things.

