

In Memoriam: Sir Dudley Colles

Richard Colles Johnson

ON THE 13th July, 1976, died in London Sir Dudley Colles, an occurrence which should not go unnoticed by those with an interest in Kilkenny history: for he was the last link in a family which had been connected with Kilkenny for nearly 300 years.

His earliest ancestor in Ireland was William Colles, a member of an old family of Leigh Court, Worcester, who came with the Earl of Essex in 1598 at the age of 13, and was granted lands in Doughill, near Athlone.* His son, William Colles of Skinner Row (now Christ Church Place), Dublin, who lived 1610—1690, was "a greate sufferer for his Majestie" in the rebellion of 1641, during which his wife and children, driven from their home in Dublin, perished from the cold.

By his second wife this second William had a son, again William (1648—1719), a celebrated surgeon, whose early desire to become "a ministere of Christe" was deterred by his "imperfect speeche." After spending the earlier part of his life in England, he returned to Ireland, buying extensive lands in Co. Kilkenny (including Kilcollen, Madleen, Lisnafunshin, Graiges, and Coolecullenduff). He had a portrait of himself painted every seven years to remind him of the passage of time, and wrote at least two partial autobiographical accounts, one of which (a diary now in the Ormonde Papers in the National Library) is an important account of the late seventeenth century troubles. (He himself was once abducted and held captive and tortured for three days in the Cave of Dunmore.)

William of Kilcollen's landed property passed to his eldest son, Barry, and thence to the Meredyth family; his second son, the fourth William (1702—1770), owned property in Dublin (one house later the Catholic University) and the famous black marble mills at Maddoxtown, outside Kilkenny. A man of some genius (some would

*Most of the following account is based on the author's unpublished conflation of earlier family histories, a copy of which is in the Newberry Library, Chicago. Also consulted were M. Fallon, "Abraham Colles" (1972), W. Ristow, ed., "Christopher Colles's Survey of Roads" (1961), and Mrs. J. C. J. Murphy, "The Kilkenny Marble Works," *Old Kilkenny Review*, 2 (1950), 14—19.

say eccentric genius), he made one of the earliest scientific communications to the newly-founded Royal Dublin Society, invented mechanical devices for the mills (one of which consisted of tethered dogs walking in a circle, driving machinery meant to bore the marble; it was not a success), wrote tragedies, and invented a musical instrument which would play itself while floating down the Nore. He was Alderman and sometime Lord Mayor of Kilkenny and built the Tholsel and St. John's Bridge. An elaborate monument* was erected to his memory at the now disused St. Mary's Church. (His talents may have inspired his nephew, Christopher Colles, whose guardian he was, who early in his career worked with his uncle on the Kilkenny-Inistioge Canal and served on the River Nore Navigation Board, which experience would prove useful to the ingenious and visionary man who planned the first water works for New York City and was the first to propose the Erie Canal.)

Near the mills William Colles built Abbeyvale, which proved vulnerable to flooding; his son, the fifth William (1745—1779), who was educated, with Burke, at Ballintore in 1770 built on higher ground Millmount, a small but original house which still stands. This last William's widow, who outlived him by 69 years and managed the mills during her sons' minorities, was buried, with other members of the family, in the cemetery at Maddoxtown.

Their first son, the sixth William, became a friend of Daniel O'Connell in the cause of Irish liberty; the second son, Abraham, became "the foremost surgeon in Ireland when Ireland was the leading medical centre of Europe"; and the third son, Richard (like his brothers educated at Kilkenny College), who in 1810 built Riverview House (now called Lavistown House) continued the marble mills. During his lifetime (1774—1849) they grew in prestige and profitableness, especially before the end of the Napoleonic wars (after this time there was severe competition from foreign marbles).

Richard Colles's son, Alexander Harper Colles (1815—1876), Mayor of Kilkenny in 1863, improved the business and erected the Kilkenny market gates. His son, another Richard, was born in 1844, was educated at Kilkenny College and at Trinity College, Dublin, and became both High Sheriff and Justice of the Peace of Kilkenny. His wife was his first cousin, Selina Jane, daughter of the Rev. John Mack Williams, Rector of Burnby, Co. York: and it was at Millmount on the 5th April, 1889, that

*See "The Colles Monument," *The Irish Builder*, 1 Sept. 1890, p.211.

Ernest Dudley Gordon Colles, their third child, was born. (The second, Richard Bertram, R.N., and the youngest, Eleanor, died in 1904 and 1914 respectively and are buried on the north side of St. Canice's Cathedral; the eldest, Captain Alexander Conway Colles, R.N., died in 1974 at Richmond.)

Dudley Colles was educated at Arnold House, Llandullas, and at Eastman's School, Winchester, and in 1906 entered the Royal Navy. (He never again resided in Ireland. As a result of the difficult period 1916-1923 his father sold the Kilkenny property and retired, first to Dublin and then to Surrey. He was much interested in his ancestry and erected by the west door of St. Canice's Cathedral a tablet in memory of the Colles family's connexions with Kilkenny. He died at Kew Gardens in 1929.)

He was Secretary of the British Naval Section of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919-1920, and rose to the rank of Paymaster-Commander. He was Secretary to the third and second Sea Lords and to the Commander-in-Chief of the America and West Indies Station. Retiring from the Navy in 1932, he joined the Royal Household, becoming Secretary of the Privy Purse (1932-1952), Deputy Treasurer to King George VI (1941-1952), and Deputy Treasurer to the Queen and Assistant Keeper of the Privy Purse (1952-1958). He was an extra Equerry to the Queen since 1958.

He was awarded the O.B.E. in 1919 and the Royal Victorian Order in 1936 (of which he was Registrar 1932-1936 and was made Companion in 1943 and Knight Commander in 1949). In 1953 he was created Knight Commander of the Order of the Bath. His foreign honours included Knight Commander of the Order of Dannebrog (Denmark), Order of Christ (Portugal), Order of the North Star (Sweden), Order of Menelik (Ethiopia), Commander of the Legion of Honour and of the Order of the House of Orange (Netherlands), and Order of Merit (Italy).

During the difficult days of the Second World War, he was frequently at Windsor, where the Royal Family had removed, and occasionally attended luncheon parties at which the two young Princesses presided.

His wife, whom he married in 1920, was the former Jacqueline Norman, who pre-deceased him, as did his only child, Jane (Mrs. John Hyde-Thomson). He lived at St. James's Palace until 1948, when he moved to Wren House, Kensington Palace.

A tall, thin, aristocratic-looking man, he was gracious, witty, and above all kind. He was always proud of the Colles family and his Anglo-Irish heritage. With his death Kilkenny has lost a contact with its long-ago past.



K.A.S. SLIDE COLLECTION

A collection of coloured slides is currently being compiled at Rothe House by Mrs. E. B. Layton and Miss Rita Harte of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society and Mr. Brendan Kealy of the Old Carlow Society. It will be a cumulative one of buildings and objects of historical, architectural and artistic importance in the Country. A start has been made to provide a comprehensive classified index.

The collection has two main purposes:—

- (a) to provide a borrowing and reference service for lecturers, teachers, and anyone interested in the material remains of Ireland's architectural and artistic past.
 - (i) It is proposed to have a restricted borrowing service for local history societies and schools in Kilkenny and Carlow; and possibly a duplicating service open to all, if finances and staff permit. It is also proposed to have selected sets with notes to accompany them — a kind of commentary for local borrowers.
- (b) The second purpose of the collection is to form a permanent record of Irish architecture, sculpture, carving, stained glass, etc.

Contributions to this collection would be very welcome —

- (a) in the form of slides of good quality or duplicates of same;
- (b) in the form of money contributions towards the cost of materials;
- (c) in the form of direct involvement to assist with the work-load as the project develops;
- (d) in the form of suggestions as to what might be included. For example: In the field of Industrial Archaeology, there are possibly many buildings and objects known to a few persons but going unrecorded and unremarked including factories and warehouse architecture; watermills; kilns; forges; malt houses; anything of an industrial nature.