

The Mathews of Bonnetstown, County Kilkenny.

Roy Hobson

When Colonel Peter Stubber's Regiment of Foot in the Commonwealth Army was disbanded in August 1655, Captain John Mathews received lands near Kilkenny and in Upper Ossory in lieu of his arrears of pay for his service in Ireland since 1649, the date of the arrival of the Cromwellian army and as a "49 Officer" for previous service in England or with the garrisons of Dublin or Derry. The likelihood is that he and his brother Thomas were in the Dublin garrison as early as 1646.

The lands that he received were 228 acres at Bonnetstown, 77 acres at Cappagh (the sheep plot) both on the outskirts of Kilkenny, and 945 acres around Ballykealy on the borders of Counties Kilkenny and Leix.

In 1655 John executed a deed settling the lands on his brother in law Colonel Ralph Fenwick and his wife's brothers Major Robert, Captain Arthur and Lieutenant George Ormsby on trusts which seem to have been that after his death they should be held for the benefit of his wife Ann and their son Samuel.

Ann was one of the daughters of Edward Ormsby of Tobervaddy Co. Roscommon; she and John had two other children Elisabeth and Grace.

In the Census of 1659 John is shown as the owner of Bonnetstown and was probably living in the old fortified keep for protection against roving bands of outlawed former owners, then known as Tories or Rapparees. Even Kilkenny Castle was broken into and the Duke of Ormonde's silver taken in 1685. The Mathews continued to live in the keep until 1737 when with the arrival of more settled times John's great grandson built an imposing Georgian house in front of the old keep.

John died in 1660 and Sir Arthur Betham's abstract of his will has on it a sketch of a coat of arms of a Mathews family long established in South Wales.

The same year saw the restoration of the Monarchy and

the application by many of the dispossessed owners for the restitution of their lands including the Mathews properties. A Court was set up to adjudicate on these claims but it was some years before the Mathews received formal grants confirming their titles; even then one grant was subject to a saving in favour of the former owner if comparable land could first be found for the Mathews instead.

Sometime in the late 1670s Samuel Mathews married Ann the daughter of Captain Joseph Cuffe of Castle Inch and according to Lodge they had six sons and two daughters.

In 1683 Samuel and Ann sold property in Upper Ossory they had bought from the original grantee a fellow officer of his father and both affixed their seals to the documents showing similar seals to that drawn by Betham on the abstract of John's will.

James II succeeded to the throne in 1685 and began an active pro-Catholic policy, replacing Protestants with Catholics in the army and preparing to modify the Restoration land settlement. This caused concern among the Protestant settlers and the birth of a son to the King in June 1688 and the prospect of a continuing line of Catholic Monarchs heightened their fears.

The Mathews at this stage did not seem greatly concerned as two of their sons aged 8 and 9 entered Kilkenny School on May 4th 1688.

Concern increased through the autumn, with a respite when the King fled to France in December, but then rumours of his return with a French army caused a panic and a widespread exodus in March; a fund was started in London to relieve the more pressing wants of the refugees. Samuel's family, his mother in law Martha Cuffe of Castle Inch, and the Headmaster of Kilkenny School all left.

James arrived at Kinsale in March 1689 in a French fleet and landed with arms, ammunition and French military advisors; passing through Kilkenny on the way to Dublin, a French observer noted the desolation, the untilled land and no stock was visible.

On arrival in Dublin James summoned a Parliament which repealed the Act of Settlement under which much of the Protestant lands had been held for the previous thirty

years and passed an Act of Attainder whereby some two thousand of those that had fled were directed to surrender themselves to justice by a certain date or forfeit their lands and be hanged, drawn and quartered without trial. Captain Samuel Mathews was included in the list as having gone to join the Prince of Orange.

William landed in Ulster in June 1690 defeated James at the Boyne; Colonel Churchill, later the Duke of Marlborough, captured Cork in September and resistance ceased by October 1691 with the capture of Limerick.

Lodge writing in the 18th century said that two of Samuel's sons "died in the troubles of 1688". This seems to tie in with the provisions of Samuel's Will made in May 1689. Betham's abstract mentions only two sons and two daughters. There is no mention of his wife either; it is possible that she too had died by that time. The abstract mentions his mother, two brothers in law and a cousin, and it is possible that they were the trustees and guardians of his infant children.

Samuel's two sons Joseph aged 12 and George aged 10 re-entered Kilkenny School in January 1692.

In July 1692 Samuel's will was proved in Dublin.

Probate was granted to his wife's will in 1693 or 1695 (there is some discrepancy between different copies of the Index) at the Kilkenny District Registry.

The actual dates and circumstances of their deaths are not known.

Both daughters married in 1709, Martha to the Earl of Blessington, and Anne to Francis Duggan an attorney whose family owned land next to the Mathew's property at Ballikealy. Martha, the elder daughter, died in 1767 aged 84 and her sister Anne was buried in the Campanile Church at Durrow.

Extracts from the burial Register have survived and suggest a family tragedy:

December 1733 ... Mr. Charles Dougan son of Doctor Dougan shot by accident died 13th instant interred 25th Dec.

January 1734 ... John Duggan son of Francis
Ann Duggan wife of Francis