


RANDOM HOUSE  BOOKS



I Never Knew That About the Irish

Christopher Winn

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About the Book

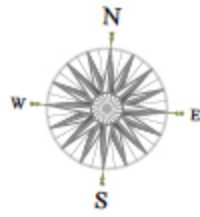
Bestselling author Christopher Winn takes us on a fascinating journey around Ireland, discovering the traditions, triumphs and disasters, foibles, quirks and customs that make up the Irish people. From their peccadilloes to their passions he uncovers entertaining stories and astonishing facts that will amuse and inform us in equal measure.

Travel from coast to coast across Ireland and learn how every county contributes to the distinct Irish personality in its own unique and different ways. From County Leitrim, the most sparsely populated county in the Republic of Ireland to County Louth, Ireland's smallest county, discover the site of the first play performed in the Irish language, sail the longest navigable inland waterway in Europe and watch the horse racing at Ireland's first all-weather racecourse. Listen to the memories and tales of ordinary folk from every walk of life and find out from them what it means to be Irish.

Beguilingly illustrated with pen and ink drawings throughout, this charming book is guaranteed to have you exclaiming: 'I never knew that!'

About the Author

Christopher Winn has been freelance writer and trivia collector for over twenty years. He has worked with Terry Wogan and Jonathan Ross, and sets quiz questions for television as well as for the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph*. He also produces for theatre and has toured with Hugh Massingberd's play, *Ancestral Voices*, about James Lees-Milne. He is the author of the bestselling *I Never Knew That About England*. Books covering Ireland, Scotland, Wales and London came next, followed by *I Never Knew That About the English*.



CHRISTOPHER WINN



*I Never Knew That
About*
THE IRISH



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
Mai Osawa



EBURY
PRESS

For Ros



PREFACE



THE IRISH ARE philosophical and proud, they are poetic and passionate, they are great musicians and writers, inventors and pioneers. They are hospitable, full of fun, and with a wicked and self-deprecating sense of humour that translates into the most wonderful literature and art. Irish singers and entertainers, actors and designers carry a picture of Ireland to the far corners, and while Ireland is still seen by many as predominantly rural, modern Ireland has grown rich and successful in industry with talented entrepreneurs and retailers and designers.

But who are the Irish? George Bernard Shaw, the Nobel Prize-winning playwright, described himself thus. 'I am a genuine typical Irishman of the Danish, Norman, Cromwellian and Scotch invasions.' He might have added Celtic – the Scotch, or Scotii, were a Celtic Irish tribe who crossed the sea from Ulster to Argyll and then returned. And all over Ireland there are the remnants of Neolithic civilisations that occupied Ireland even before the Celts arrived from Europe.

Hence the Irish character is a fusion of all these different peoples and cultures, forged and shaped over time into an Irish identity and personality that then spread out again from Ireland across the world – the Irish diaspora is vast and vibrant with some 80 million people worldwide claiming Irish descent, 40 million of them in the United States.

The Irish island may be small but the Irish influence is huge and this book tells the story, not just of those who created Ireland, but also of those Irish who helped create new worlds across the oceans, and imbued them with a subtle Irish flavour and a distinctive Irish philosophy.

THE PROVINCES AND COUNTIES OF IRELAND



THE IRISH ARE fond of their counties. As well as their own distinctive physical make up, each of Ireland's 32 counties has its own characters and personalities. The different landscapes of each county imbue those born and bred there with different characteristics, pose different challenges, evoke different moods and responses.

The placid lakes of Fermanagh or Westmeath give rise to a different kind of poetry or philosophy to the mountains of Wicklow or Kerry. The wild and lonely lands of Donegal inspire a different kind of music and literature to that which comes from the picturesque meadows of Dublin or Waterford. The quiet lacustrine countryside of Longford brings forth a different type of character from the windswept bastions of Antrim.

Hence any study of the Irish people must be sensitive to the Irish landscape and that landscape is most recognisably and comfortably divided into the counties.

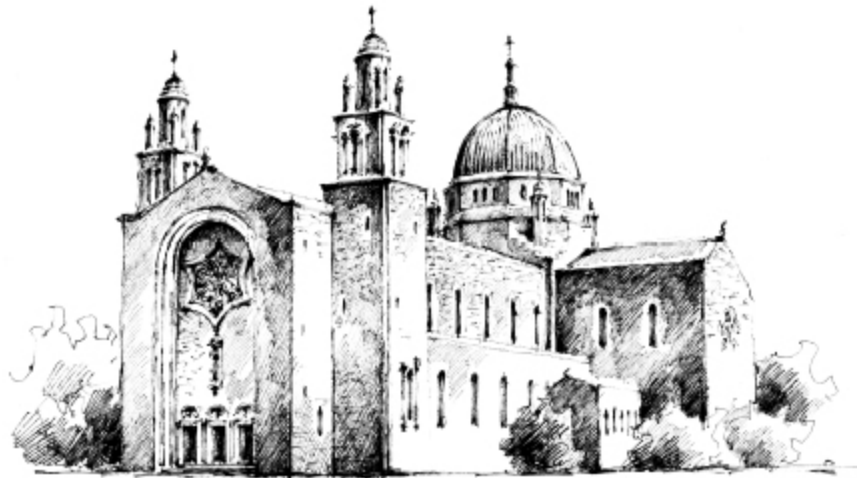
The counties I have grouped into the four ancient Irish provinces or kingdoms of Connacht, Leinster, Munster and Ulster, for these provinces, still much loved, define an older Ireland from which the modern land and its people developed and grew. To understand the Ireland and the Irish of today it is essential to know from where they came.

CONNACHT



County Galway

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND'S LARGEST LAKE + O'FLAHERTY'S
CASTLE + IRELAND'S THIRD LARGEST CITY + A POET AND HIS
DONKEY + AN ANCIENT FISHING VILLAGE + FRIENDSHIP RINGS +
IRELAND'S LONGEST RACING FESTIVAL + GALWAY OYSTERS +
NORA BARNACLE + THE CONNEMARA BUS



*Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Nicholas, a
prominent Galway landmark.*

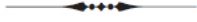
◀ GALWAY FOLK ▶

Richard Kirwan + Robert O'Hara Burke + Dan O'Hara +
John Ford + Margaret Dolan + William Joyce + John Huston +
Peter O'Toole + Francis Barrett

COUNTY GALWAY is Ireland's second largest county and
contains the 7,000 acres of Connemara National Park,

opened in 1980, as well as IRELAND'S LARGEST GAELTACHT, or Irish-speaking area.

Lough Corrib

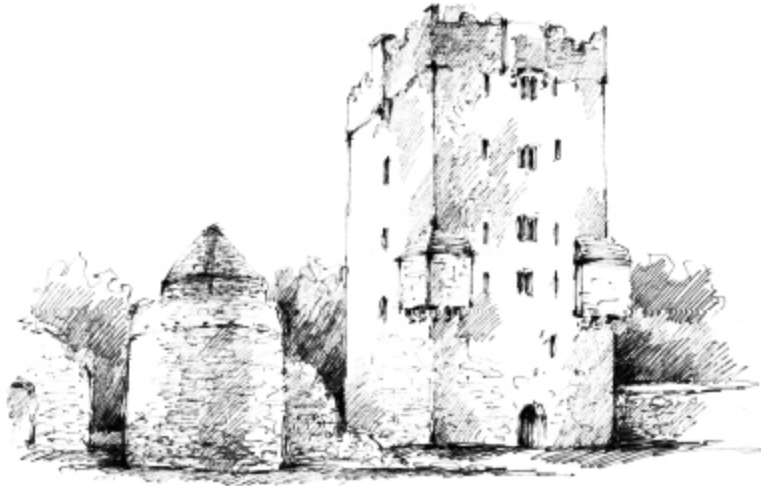


THE COUNTY IS split almost into two by LOUGH CORRIB, which covers an area of 68 square miles (176 sq km) and is THE LARGEST LAKE IN THE REPUBLIC AND SECOND LARGEST IN ALL IRELAND. Lough Corrib empties into Galway Bay by way of the RIVER CORRIB which, at just under 4 miles (6 km) in length is thought to be THE SHORTEST RIVER IN EUROPE. The river, which is popular today with whitewater rafters, flows far too powerfully to be navigable and, in the 12th century, IRELAND'S FIRST CANAL, THE FRIAR'S CUT, was constructed to allow boats to pass between Lough Corrib and the sea.

Aughnanure Castle - Home of the O'Flahertys



NEAR THE SOUTH shore of Lough Corrib is AUGHNANURE CASTLE, a six-storey tower house located just outside the village of Oughterard, 'Gateway to Connemara'. It was built in the 16th century by the O'Flahertys, who controlled much of the land around Lough Corrib from a series of castles, of which Aughnature was the most powerful. In the main hall one of the flagstones was hinged as a trapdoor so that unwelcome guests could be tipped into a watery dungeon below.



The O'Flahertys were amongst the most feared of the Galway chieftains, so much so that a sign was hung over the west gate of the Norman town of Galway that read, 'From the ferocious O'Flahertys may God protect us.' In 1545 Donal O'Flaherty married the celebrated pirate queen Grace O'Malley, and today the O'Flahertys are still an influential presence in County Galway, having contributed an impressive number of mayors to the city.

Galway City

GALWAY CITY, IRELAND'S third largest city, lies on the banks of the River Corrib where it flows into Galway Bay. The town was once renowned for its fleet of distinctive boats called Galway Hookers (from the Dutch word *holker*, meaning a small, manoeuvrable vessel), designed to cope with the heavy seas of Galway Bay and used for fishing and trading with Holland and Spain. Galway Hookers are no longer in service, but examples still turn up to annual sailing events and races.

Galway boasts two fine churches, THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS (CHURCH OF IRELAND), THE LARGEST MEDIEVAL

PARISH CHURCH IN IRELAND, and the imposing Roman Catholic Cathedral of St Nicholas.

In keeping with the Irish-speaking tradition of the region, Galway is home to An Taibhdhearc, a theatre founded in 1928 that puts on plays exclusively in Irish. In 1935 a statue of Padraic O Conaire, one of Galway's most cherished Irish writers, was unveiled by Eamon de Valera in Eyre Square, which is now a memorial garden to the American president John F. Kennedy, who visited the city shortly before his assassination in 1963. O Conaire's statue has since been moved to the Galway City Museum, beside the Spanish Arch.

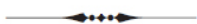
Padraic O Conaire *1882-1992*



PADRAIC O CONAIRE was born in Galway and grew to love the Irish language when he was at school in Rosmuc, a village in the heart of the Connemara Gaeltacht. After spending some time in London working as a civil servant he returned to Galway to teach and write Irish as part of the Gaelic Revival of the early 20th century. He was one of the first to

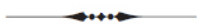
use Gaelic for journalism and he also helped run events for the Gaelic League, an organisation dedicated to the preservation of the language. He would travel around Galway and Connemara with his donkey and cart, stopping at pubs and villages to tell stories, and perhaps his most popular work is his short story about how he came to meet his little black donkey, and the fun and games they had together.

Claddagh



WHEN THE TOWN of Galway was founded in the 12th century as an Anglo-Norman stronghold, it was put down alongside one of Ireland's oldest fishing villages, CLADDAGH, which dates from the 5th century and took its name from the Irish word 'cladach', meaning stony shore. The native Gaelic community of Claddagh and the Anglo-Norman merchants of the town pretty much kept themselves apart, and from medieval times right into the 20th century, Claddagh was governed by its own mayor or 'king', and kept to its own laws and customs. The village became renowned as a classic example of an authentic Irish community, attracting numerous writers and artists, before its pretty jumble of thatched cottages was demolished in the 1930s and replaced with modern housing, and the village was subsumed into the city of Galway.

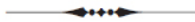
Claddagh Rings





COME DOWN FROM the days of old Claddagh is the traditional Claddagh friendship or wedding ring, fashioned as two hands clasping a heart, surmounted by a crown. Legend tells that the ring was originally designed by a Galway man, Richard Joyce, who was captured by an Algerian corsair while sailing to the West Indies in the 17th century and sold into the service of a goldsmith in Algiers. Joyce became so adept as a goldsmith himself, that when William III came to the throne and demanded that the Moors release all their British prisoners, his goldsmith master offered half his own fortune and his daughter's hand in marriage if Joyce would stay on as a partner. The Galway man was already betrothed to a Galway lass, however, and he returned to Claddagh and gave his love the ring he had designed and made especially for her during his long exile. Today, Claddagh rings have become a cultural symbol worn by those of Irish descent all over the world.

Galway Races

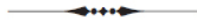


THEY HAVE BEEN racing horses in County Galway since the 13th century, but the first racing festival held at BALLYBRIT, home of the present GALWAY RACES, was in August 1869, when over 40,000 people attended the two-day event. Today, the summer festival is held in the last week of July and lasts for seven days, THE ONLY WEEK-LONG RACING FESTIVAL IN IRELAND OR BRITAIN. The main race, the Galway Plate, is

run on the Wednesday, while Thursday is Ladies Day and includes a 'best-dressed lady' competition.

Galway Races form the premier festival in the Irish racing calendar, and are as much a social event as a festival of horse racing, with champagne and oyster bars, jazz bands, trade stands and competitions. The original grandstand, built in the 1950s and replaced in 1999, boasted THE LONGEST BAR IN THE WORLD (now thought to be found in Düsseldorf).

Galway Oyster Festival



FOUNDED IN 1954 by Brian Collins, manager of the Great Southern Hotel, as a means of extending the tourist season, the GALWAY OYSTER FESTIVAL has become one of the world's premier oyster festivals. It is held in Claddagh over four days and nights in September, the first month of the oyster season, and attracts visitors from all over the world to sample the oysters, along with plenty of Guinness, vintage car displays, street entertainments, music and the Oyster Pearl beauty contest. The main highlight is the hotly contested World Oyster Opening Championship. Film director John Huston is said to have consumed over 3,000 oysters when he attended the festival in 1960.

Nora Barnacle *1884-1951*



NORA BARNACLE WAS born in Connemara, the daughter of a baker. She had just turned 13 when her mother threw Nora's father out for drinking too much, and mother and daughter went to live in Nora's uncle's house on Bowling Green in Galway City, now a museum in her memory.

Almost immediately Nora met her first love, a 16-year-old schoolteacher called Michael Feeney, who tragically died that year of pneumonia.

Three years later, another of Nora's sweethearts, Michael Bodkin, also died of pneumonia, having stood outside Nora's window in the heavy rain, serenading her.

In 1903, after her uncle learned of an affair she was conducting with a local Protestant boy, Nora was sent away to Dublin, and it was while working as a chambermaid at Finn's Hotel that she met her future husband, the writer James Joyce. Their first romantic encounter took place on 16 June 1904, and Joyce later chose this date as the setting for his masterpiece, the novel *Ulysses*, about an ordinary day in Dublin seen mainly through the eyes of Leopold Bloom, a Jewish advertisement canvasser.

The Connemara Bus



THE CONNEMARA BUS, driven by Hugh Ryan, is a 1949 Bedford bus that takes tourists for a four-hour drive around Connemara from Galway City, and IS THE OLDEST OPERATING BUS IN IRELAND.

Bloomsday

Since 1954, June 16th, or 'BLOOMSDAY', has been observed as a holiday in Ireland, during which Joyce's life is celebrated with readings, dramatisations and street parties. While the biggest celebrations are in Dublin, where aficionados retrace Bloom's footsteps around the city, Bloomsday is also celebrated in various places around the world that share a connection to Joyce or the novel, such as Philadelphia in the USA, where the original handwritten

manuscript of *Ulysses* is kept at the Rosenbach Museum, or Hungary's oldest town, Szombathely, birthplace of Bloom's father Virag, a Jewish émigré.

The original Connemara Bus, a wooden vehicle built on to the chassis of a 1932 Bedford truck, was driven by Hugh Ryan's grandfather and used to ferry the women of Connemara and their produce to market in Galway.

Connemara is famous for its green marble, and is IRELAND'S ONLY SOURCE OF TRUE MARBLE.



Richard Kirwan

— 1733–1812 —

RICHARD KIRWAN, scientist and eccentric, was born in CLOUGHBALLYMORE, near Kinvara. In 1787 he published his most famous work, 'Essay on Phlogiston', which held that phlogiston was the substance given off by combustion – a theory that was later disproved when it was discovered that combustion involved burning oxygen from the atmosphere. He was also a colourful figure in the fields of chemistry, geology and meteorology and is credited with introducing the study of mineralogy to Ireland in his 'Elements of Mineralogy' – the first essay on the subject in English. In 1799 he became President of the Royal Irish Academy.



Cregg Castle - home of Richard Kirwan

Richard Kirwan's family were one of the 14 'Tribes of Galway', powerful merchant families made wealthy from trade with the Continent, who dominated Galway politics from the 12th century until the late 18th century. Unlike most of the tribes, who were of Anglo-Norman origin, the Kirwans had Irish roots.

In 1754 Richard Kirwan inherited CREGG CASTLE, near the village of Corandulla north of Galway City, when his older brother was killed in a duel. Cregg Castle was built by the Kirwans in 1648 on the site of a 13th-century castle and was one of the last fortified houses to be constructed in Ireland. Richard put up a laboratory in the grounds, the remains of which can still be seen. Cregg Castle is now a hotel.

ROBERT O'HARA BURKE (1821-61) THE FIRST MAN TO CROSS AUSTRALIA FROM SOUTH TO NORTH, was born near Craughwell. Burke became an army officer and then a policeman, and emigrated to Australia in 1853. He was chosen to lead an expedition, which became known as the Burke and Wills expedition (along with English surveyor William Wills), whose aim was to travel from Melbourne to the Gulf of Carpentaria, on Australia's northern coast. They succeeded

in reaching the Gulf, but both Burke and Wills died on the return journey at a place called Cooper's Creek, from where their bodies were eventually recovered and laid to rest in Melbourne.

*Sure it's poor I am today,
For God gave and took away,
And left without a home poor Dan O'Hara
With these matches in my hand,
In the frost and snow I stand
So it's here I am today your broken hearted ...*

Dan O'Hara's Song



DAN O'HARA was a tenant farmer who lived with his wife and seven children in a small stone cottage in the shadow of the Twelve Bens in Connemara. Theirs was a simple but happy life, typical of rural 19th-century Ireland, full of storytelling and singing round the turf fire of an evening. Unfortunately, most of Dan's land was given over to potatoes, and in 1845, at the start of the Great Famine, the crop failed, leaving Dan with no income and unable to pay the rent. He and his family were evicted and had no choice but to emigrate to America. Dan's wife, and three of their children, died on the voyage, and the survivors arrived in New York destitute. The children were taken into care and

Dan was reduced to selling matches on the streets. His story has been made famous in song.

Film director JOHN FORD (1894–1973) was born John Martin Feeney (sometimes Sean Aloysius O'Feeny) in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, to Irish parents from County Galway. Remembered especially for his classic western *Stagecoach* (1939) which began his cinematic partnership with John Wayne, Ford is THE ONLY DIRECTOR EVER TO HAVE WON FOUR BEST DIRECTOR OSCARS, for *The Informer* in 1935, *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1940, *How Green Was My Valley* in 1941 and *The Quiet Man*, which was filmed entirely in Ireland, in 1952. He had a five-year affair with Katharine Hepburn who, with four wins, has won more Best Actress Oscars than anyone. In later life Ford was famous for wearing a trademark black eye-patch.



MARGARET DOLAN (1893–2004), THE OLDEST WOMAN IN IRELAND when she died aged 111, was born in TUAM.

Buried in Bohermore Cemetery in Galway City is WILLIAM JOYCE (1906–46), founder of the National Socialist League and broadcaster of Nazi propaganda in the Second World War. Joyce had an Irish father and, although born in New

York, he grew up in Galway. Fanatically anti-Jewish and anti-Communist, Joyce was unwilling to fight against Hitler and at the start of the war he fled to Germany, where he got work as an English language broadcaster. Accused by the *Daily Express* of using 'English of the haw-haw, "dammit-get-out-of-my-way" variety', Joyce became known as Lord Haw-Haw. He was executed for high treason at Wandsworth prison in London in 1946, and his remains were reinterred at Bohermore in 1976.

John Huston

— 1906–87 —



The American-born actor and film director JOHN HUSTON (*The Maltese Falcon*, *The African Queen*) was of Scots-Irish descent. In the 1950s he became an Irish citizen and bought and restored a Georgian house called St Clerans in Craughwell, a small village about 10 miles (16 km) east of Galway. His daughter, the actress Anjelica Huston, went to school for a while at Kylemore Abbey in Connemara. In 1948 Huston won two Oscars for *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* (for Best Director and Best Screenplay), and in 1985, at the age of 79, he became THE OLDEST PERSON EVER TO BE NOMINATED FOR THE BEST DIRECTOR OSCAR, for *Prizzi's Honor*. Huston was also an artist and in 1982 was asked to

design that year's label for Château Mouton Rothschild. Huston owned St Clerans from 1954 to 1971.



Kylemore Abbey

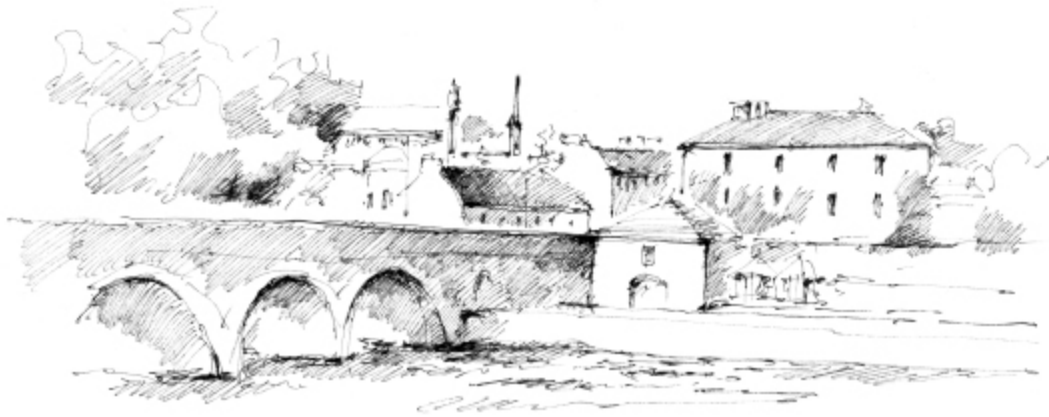
Film actor PETER O'TOOLE is thought to have been born in Connemara in 1932, although he also has a birth certificate from a hospital in Leeds, Yorkshire. He is best known for his role as T.E. Lawrence in the 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia* and is also THE MOST NOMINATED ACTOR NEVER TO ACTUALLY WIN AN OSCAR - with a grand total of eight nominations. In 2003 he accepted an Academy Honorary Award for his lifetime contribution to film. In honour of his Irish ancestry he always wears one item of green clothing, usually a sock.

FRANCIS BARRETT was born in 1977 into a family of Galway Travellers, and at age 19 he was chosen to represent Ireland at boxing in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, becoming the FIRST TRAVELLER TO REPRESENT IRELAND IN ANY SPORT AT OLYMPIC LEVEL and THE FIRST TRAVELLER TO CARRY THE NATIONAL FLAG AT THE OPENING CEREMONY.



County Leitrim

CRUISING CAPITAL OF THE SHANNON + FATHER OF INDUSTRIAL
GERMANY + HARPISTS AND PRESIDENTS + A BENEVOLENT DESPOT
+ A FINE MODERN WRITER



Carrick-on-Shannon, 'the cruising capital of the Shannon'.

LEITRIM FOLK

Bishop Patrick O'Healy + Robert Strawbridge + Revd
Joseph Digges

COUNTY LEITRIM is the most sparsely populated county in the Republic of Ireland. Much of the county is covered in water and it is often remarked that land in Co. Leitrim is sold not by the acre but by the gallon.

Carrick-on-Shannon

The county town, CARRICK-ON-SHANNON, is described as 'the cruising capital of the Shannon'. It is a popular base for boats using the Shannon Erne Waterway, which links Ireland's two greatest rivers and forms part of THE LONGEST NAVIGABLE INLAND WATERWAY IN EUROPE, stretching for 250 miles (400 km) from Lough Erne in Co. Fermanagh to the mouth of the River Shannon at Limerick.

Irish Father of Industrial Germany

The Shannon Erne Waterway, opened in 1994, is actually the restored Ballinamore and Ballyconnell Navigation, which was constructed in 1860 as part of the Ulster Canal, meant to link Limerick with Belfast. The Navigation was designed and executed by the Dublin-born engineer WILLIAM THOMAS MULVANY (1806-85), who also established numerous other building and irrigation projects to help as job creation schemes during the Great Famine.



On a trip to London, Mulvany met Michael Corr, an Irish businessman born in Slane in Co. Meath, and brought up in Brussels where his family had fled after the uprising led by