

Rathkell School's Renowned Gaelic Scholar - 1853

Míchéal O'Tiomanaidhe

Margaret Geraghty, Carrarea, Hollymount



Míchéal is a famous Gaelic scholar, Irish writer and folklore collector. He was born in Cartoon on 20th September 1853 and baptized two days later in St Patrick's Church, Lahardane. His father was John, and his mother was Lynn from Ballinabaun, Crossmolina Parish. The Timoneys lived on a better than average holding, with good land. Míchéal has many literary works to his name including; Amhrán Gaedhilde an Larthair, Scéalta Gearra, Lampa Draoidheachta and Leabhra Filidheachta.

Tradition has it that Míchéal attended Rathkell National School. He would have started school about 1860. There is no register entry for him; the Boys Register only goes back to 1868. Míchéal became a monitor; the course generally taken when a youngster wanted to become a teacher, only the very clever ones were picked. He had other ideas and did not become a school teacher, on leaving school he became an apprentice in O'Beirnes Merchants of Ballina. He then went to England and from there, following in his father's footsteps to Australia. For twenty-two years he lived and worked in the gold fields and on the sheep farms, shearing and hauling wool.

Míchéal returned home, some say in 1894 and others say 1903. He became a close friend of Douglas Hyde and Pádraig Pearse, from whom he received a Gaelic League Certificate, attesting that he had attended Tuar Mhic Eadaigh College. He became a "Timire Gaeilge", an itinerant teacher of Irish. It is said that he taught Janney Flanagan, De Valera's wife. Míchéal was a member of the Folklore Commission, which gathered and published old stories and Irish folklore in 1935.

The importance of Míchéal's writings are best shown by this extract from a letter from Seamus DeLargy of Roinn Bhealoideas Eireann, Department of Irish Folklore, An Colaiste Ollscoile, written in 1930s.

"There were 31 tales in all and Mr. Michael O'Tiomanaidhe, of Lahardane, near Crossmolina, Co. Mayo, submitted them. These tales were written down by Mr. Timoney, during the years 1905/1906 in the county of Mayo, in Achill and Crossmolina Districts. As this collection is one of the most important ever made in this country. I feel it necessary to make a brief statement regarding the collector, his informants, how the collection was made, and its importance from a national and international standpoint. I made the acquaintance of Mr. Michael O'Tiomnaidhe for the first time on Sunday December 4th 1927 when, on learning that he was in lodgings in Rathfarnham, I visited him at Washington House near Loretta Abbey, Rathfarnham."

The Delargy Centre for Irish Folklore at University College Dublin is named after Seamus DeLargy. The same letter from Seamus DeLargy mentions another little known local story teller, Billy Fleming from Aughalonteen.

"In 1903 he obtained from Liam Pleimionn (a neighbour in Lahardaun) about eighty stories. This fine storyteller died about 1919/1920 aged about 80 years. He is buried in Addergoole about 1 ½ miles from Lahardaun, and a tomb stone is erected there to his memory by an old



neighbour and friend Sean Mac an Niallaigh, Dervin, Crossmolina. Mr. Tiomnaidhe tells me that Pheimionn was one of the last of the traditional seanchais. At one time a small farmer he was later evicted and forced to beg his bread travelling as a beggar-man through the country. He was a welcome guest in the farmer's houses where he told his tales to the assembled households. He never tired of urging the young people, wherever he went, of clinging to the Irish language and the old ways. He was a clever musician and a fair poet."



By 1906 Míchéal had collected, translated from the Irish and published Brian Carabine's Prophecy "The Prophecy of Red Brian Carabine". The story in Chapter 1 about how Brian came to have the gift of prophecy is as follows.

"Red Brian Carabine was born and reared in a place called Bailena h-Inneona near Inver in Erris. His dwelling house was in Fail Rua close to the beach. He was a decent man had very little money, as was usual in those times and he had no foreknowledge at the start of his life but as much as everyone else who lived in the half-barony of Erris until the year 1648.

There was no road to Erris at that time and it took him three days from once he left his own house, travelling by the coastline, until he reached Newtowngore in Tirawley. It was there he paid the rent to Lord Arran.

One day when Brian came to pay his rent to Lord Arran, a poor widow who had a weak family was there before him in the office and she had nothing to give them but the milk of the only cow she had, because food was scarce that year but no matter how bad the year was the landlord had to get his rent.

The tenants had all paid their rent until he came to the widow. She came from the same village as Brian and when the landlord called out her name she asked for a little space of time, until she could meet her dues and said she had no means at all to rear her children except for the milk of her only cow. "Have you anyone at all to go security on you", said the landlord. "Nobody but God" she replied. The poor woman had an idea that nobody would go security on her. "I'll give you God as my security that I'll pay you by a certain day", she said. "I'd like someone else as well as God" said the landlord.

Brian Rua was present and he had a great sympathy for the woman. When he saw the poor widow crying, with no one to go security on her, he put his hand in his pocket, paid the rent for her and said he would accept God's security. The landlord then felt repentant and said that he

himself would accept God's security, when Brian had paid him the rent, but Brian said there was no need for that now, as he had paid it.

On her knees from her very heart, the poor widow gave her seven thousand blessings to Brian Rua Carabine and went home. Lord Arran's wife was a noblewoman from London and she cordially thanked Brian for his kind-heartedness because he helped the widow in her hour of need.

Brian bowed to the noblewoman, and said "The all powerful Father will put twice as much in my way because I took him as my security, after your husbands refusal and there's not a single tear that poor widow shed with her broken heart, that didn't fall at the feet of the King of Glory in his royal seat in the Glory of Heaven and either she or I will receive our reward from every tear".

The tenants were scattering then, each going his own way and Brian did likewise, taking a short cut across the great mountain terrain. When he was about half-way to his own house a deep sleep came over him and he took off his coat, put it under his head and fell asleep. The palm of his hand was beneath his cheek and he could not say what length of time he was asleep, but he had a vision and in the vision he was told to put away carefully the article he'd find in the right hand sleeve of his coat and not let woman, child or anybody else catch sight of it except himself.

All the affairs of Ireland-all that was to be from that day to the end of the world- totally understandable to him, were printed on the sparkling jewel that he found in the sleeve of his overcoat when he awoke. Every single time he looked at it he got knowledge of the good and evil that was to come upon the world and the brightest lights he ever saw was coming from it."

In the 1930's Míchéal erected the bell at St Patrick's Church Lahardane. The bell's inscription reads:



"St Michael's Bell, erected by Michael O'Timony in the greater glory of God and in honor of St Patrick "

In 1937 he erected the cross in Lahardane to the memory of Father Andrew/James Conroy, the parish priest hung by the English in Castlebar for his association with General Humbert's forces and local volunteers, during the "Year of the French" in 1798. The following report appeared in the daily newspaper in August 1937.



“An imposing 18ft. high limestone Celtic Cross, commemorating the memory of Father Andrew Conroy, P.P., Addergoole, the Mayo patriot priest, who was hanged by the English Yeomanry in Castlebar in 1798, was unveiled at Lahardane today by Rev. J. Harte, C.C., Lahardane, in the presence of Mr. P.J. Rutledge, T.D., Minister for Justice and a gathering representative of the public bodies and principal towns of the country. An oration in Irish was given by Thomas Ban Ua Coinheanainn, Galway.

The Monument was the gift of Michael Timoney, now 82 years old, the author of many classical works in Irish. He was unable to be present owing to his great age, and was represented by his nephew, Mr. Timothy Jordan, M.C.C., with whom he resides at Enniscoie, Crossmolina, about three miles from the site of the monument.

Fr. Conroy was charged with assisting the ‘invaders’ after the French landing in Killala, and was later hanged from a tree in the Mall, Castlebar. The monument stands on the roadside in the shadow of the Nephin mountain. Mr. William Barrett, Lahardane, presided at the ceremony. Fr. Harte apologised for the unavoidable absence of His Lordship, the Bishop of Killala. For 139 years, he said, the remains of Fr. Conroy lay buried under the Abbey at Addergoole, with no stone to mark his last resting place or no cross to record his sacrifice. Through the generosity of Michael Timoney, a patriotic Irishman, they were able to erect a monument that would serve as a symbol of love that would forever unite the beloved parish priest to his people. The history of Ireland was one, not merely of an heroic fight for freedom, it was a history of Ireland of the Cross and of the Crown, and in that history the priesthood would ever hold an honoured place. “



Míchéal O’Tiomnaidhe died in March 1940, aged 86 years and is buried in Killmurray Cemetery.