

JOHN TWISS

John Twiss of Castleisland

*Farewell my dearest sister Jane, your
fond and last adieu,
At the early age of thirty-five I now must
part from you,
For the murder of James Donovan I am
now condemned to die
On the ninth of February ninety-five
upon the scaffold high.*

*John Twiss from Castleisland its true it
is my name
I never did commit a crime, why I
should deny that same
I own I was a sportsman, with spirit
light and gay,
But paid spies and informers, my life
they swore away.*

*On the twenty-fifth of April eighteen
ninety-four,
That was the night, dear sister Jane,
long years you may deplore
When I was taken prisoner, the police to
me did say
For the murder of James Donovan we
arrest you on this day.*

*It was at the Cork assizes my enemies all
swore
That I shot James Donovan and laid
him in his gore
The jury found me guilty, the judge to me
did say
On the ninth of February, ninety-five,
will be your dying day.*

*But when I heard my sentence passed to
the judge - I did say
The jury found me guilty without the
least delay.
I swear that James Donovan I never yet
did know
May the Lord forgive my enemies who
proved my overthrow.*

*My blessings on the Mayor of Cork, and
the people there also
In thousands they petitioned, to release
me they did go
But my enemies were determined I
should my life lay down
For paid spies and informers - "A
traitor to the crown".*

*My last hour is approaching, I hear the
death bell toll
The hangman he has pinioned me, I
must now give up my soul
You know that I am innocent is all I
have to say
May the Lord forgive my enemies, on all
their judgement day.*

(Source: Séamus Mac Mathúna (ed)
Traditional Songs and Singers, Comhaltas
Céoltóirí Éireann, Dublin, 1977, p.40)

The last of the agrarian crimes we are going to look at is the clubbing to death of James Donovan, an emergency man on a farm in the Glenlara district near Newmarket in Co. Cork by two men on an April night in 1894. John Twiss, whom we have already mentioned, of Cordal, near Castleisland, a convicted Moonlighter, noted poacher and a thorn in the side of the police, was tried, convicted and executed for the Glenlara murder. Twiss affirmed his innocence of the crime in a remarkable speech from the dock after he had been found guilty. The speech, though rambling and repetitive, was notable for its strange idioms, its striking images and its patent honesty. It elevated the poor, ignorant countryman to another level and gave credence to his claim that he was "of the blood of gentlemen."¹⁷

The Old Limerick Journal p.39

William Twiss

1

Robert

*m. Elizabeth Hely, Donoughmore, Co. Cork
a relative of the Hely Hutchinsens*

1

*John
1862c*

George

*82.2
Mary*

George Twiss + Jack "Cathy" Connel

16 MOD 77/77.2

FTWISS
JOHN

They Hanged John Twiss

- 82.1 Jan 342 John Twiss + Timothy Callaghan remanded on a charge of breaking into the house of William Hartnett Neenahill on Xmas Eve + taking £3-0-1. About 10-15 involved.
- 82.2 Jan 2444 Cork Winter Assizes.
Twiss' house (Ardmore) about 4 miles from the scene of the crime. Father Robert, Brother George, Sister Mary. Twiss found guilty. Put back for sentence. Jury disagreed re Callaghan + he was discharged.
- 82.2 Jan 27R5 Judge: John Twiss you are 20 years of age. Not implicated in stealing the money. The object was to frighten Ambrose Hartnett back to London. Sentenced to 18 months.
- 83.10 Apr 13R1 John Twiss + 2 Conors arrested at Candel on Monday night as they were leaving the house of a man named Prendiville where they had been, it is alleged, on a moonlight expedition.
- 83.10 Apr 20R6 Wed. Special hearing before H.F. Conidine RM Tralee. John Twiss, Hugh Conor carpenter + John Conor. Twiss just after 15 months in Mountjoy. Only a few days out. Twiss' health seems to be in a critical condition. Charged that on the 9th. of April they attacked the house of John Keefe Glanville N.T. and demanding arms. They had just left the house with a revolver and ammunition which Keefe had given them when John Conor was captured in his disguise (a lady's cloak with the hood drawn over his head). The other 2 were arrested at the same time quite close to the house about 11 o'clock. Remanded to 20th.
- 83.15 July 27R4 John Twiss 2 years. The Conors 12 months.
- 94.2 Apr. S2347 (Robt Twiss Scantaglin arrested re murder of caretaker Donovan Newmarket on Friday morning.
- 94.2 May W943 Remanded at NMarket police barracks. Not represented. Declared his innocence.
- 94.2 May W23R4-5
- 94.3 June W6R6 Prisoners remanded
- W20R3-4 " "
- 94.25 May W16R5
- 94.3 June S30R2 Twiss + Keefe remanded
- 94.3R July W11R6
- 94.4 July W25R5
- 94.4 Aug W1R4-5 More extraordinary evidence.

The accused, were then remanded in custody until Saturday, 13th inst.

Head-Constable Cusack prosecuted, and

The steamer G. M. Booth had her engines stopped and no signals set. The Campana passed within 100 yards of her and signalled,

"In conclusion I would strongly urge on the Sanitary Authority the great necessity which exists for enforcing the provisions of

Slater's Directory of Ireland published in 1894 contains the names of public officials, schools, private residents and commercial people in Dingle and also the names of a number of farmers in the peninsula.²⁹⁶

In the report of the Congested Districts Board for the year ended 31st March, 1895, it was reported that the Blasket Island Pier and breakwater and the Sleah Head road had been completed—the pier and breakwater at a cost of £384 and the road at an expenditure of £285 as against an estimate of £365.

So far as one could judge from the local papers, there was no public protest in Dingle in connection with the judicial murder by hanging of John Twiss of Cordal, Castleisland, in Cork jail on the 9th February, 1895, on a charge of killing a caretaker named James Donovan, who had resided at Glanhara, near Newmarket, on the 21st April, 1894.

At the Inquest, where a verdict was returned amounting to wilful murder against the British Government, of which "honest" John Morley, as Chief Secretary, was the responsible minister in Ireland, it was proved that Twiss had protested his innocence before he stepped on to the scaffold, and had stated that he had been approached in his cell before his conviction, by a police officer named Irwin who offered him his life and liberty if he swore that the men responsible for the murder were Messrs. Maurice Moynihan, Tralee, and Michael Power, Cork, who were suspected of being connected with the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

The Chief Secretary, who had refused to reprieve the doomed man, declined to risk prosecuting newspapers which had described the execution as a cold-blooded murder.

A vigorous leading article in the "Kerry Sentinel," written by Mr. Edward Harrington, entitled "Done to Death," began with the sentence:—"John Twiss was done to death by due process of law in Cork jail on Saturday morning for a crime, of which on the very verge of eternity, he solemnly and vehemently protested his innocence."

177.2 (5)

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In July, Sir Thomas Esmonde, who had been returned unopposed as the Parliamentary representative of West Kerry, visited Dingle, and was presented with an address signed by Father Scollard, C.C., and Messrs Gerald Maguire, J.P., Chemist; Daniel Griffin, Thomas Burke, Timothy Gallavin, Timothy O'Connor, Stephen Hickson, Maurice E. Fitzgerald, Ventry, and Timothy O'Flaherty, Kilfountain.

The loss on the working of the Tralee and Dingle Railway for the half year amounted to £3,208 19s. 2d.

In August a paragraph in the "Kerry Sentinel" dealing with the "patron" held in Castlegregory stated:—

"In former days the 'patron,' which is now held in Castlegregory, was held on the Brandon side of Loughill in that beautiful level warren where the first chapel in that parish dedicated to the honour and glory of the Blessed Virgin was erected. This 'patron,' in the Irish language is entitled 'La le Muirah na Deehe.'"

In administering the Sacrament of Confirmation in Ballyferriter on the 29th of this month, the Catholic Bishop (Dr. Coffey) expressed regret that the children had not been prepared in the Irish language as on his previous visitations he found that the children so prepared had shown a much more intelligent knowledge of the Christian Doctrine than those prepared in the English Catechism.

During the year the Brandon Creek landing place and approach road were completed by the Congested Districts Board (which came into existence on the 5th August, 1891) at a cost of £921 for the landing place and £144 for the Approach Road. A protection wall at a cost of £381 was also built and rocks removed for an expenditure of £97.

In the Dingle peninsula the following included the areas registered as Congested—Dingle, Dunquin, Kinard, Kilmalkedar, Kilquane, Marhin, Ventry and Dunurlin.

Minard was not included.

There was a deficit of £1,684 in the working of the Tralee and Dingle Railway Company for the half-year ended December, 1895.