

Initial Identification Report on The “Vermount Ledger”

1808 LABOUR ACCOUNT BOOK

This is a “Farm Labour Account Book” from the Mount Bellew estate. I have seen several other examples which have survived, mainly dating from the 1820s and a few from the 1840s. The largest collection is among the Bellew Papers at the National Library of Ireland (MSS 27,475). A smaller holding of five ledgers was purchased at auction in the 1990s and donated to Mountbellew Parish by late Monsignor Michael Tobin P.P. This “Vermount Ledger” is of special interest because it dates from an earlier decade than the others known to have survived.

Each Labour Account Book covers a six-month period. The “Summer half-year” began at the first of May and ran to the 30th of October. The Winter half-year ran from “gale day” on the first of November to the 30th of April. The Vermont Ledger contains the 26 weeks from 2 November 1807 to 29 April 1808. There are a few ‘bonus’ weeks from May 1808 which, it is remarked, are transferred to a “New Book”. Usually, this home-bound volume would have a plain cardboard cover, which is unsurprisingly missing, given the manner in which it was ‘preserved’.

The format is the same for all these labour ledgers. There is a week to each opening: on the left-hand page is a daily summary report of work done and total wages paid; on the right-hand page is the roll-call of labourers recording the days on which each man, or members of his family, was hired. Normally, there are a few extra pages where additional relevant entries are made.

The names listed are tenants of the estate, who were bound by a clause in their lease agreement to work for the landlord on any days that he required. While this might be an inconvenience for the labourer, the value of any work he did was used to offset part of his rent: in the 1840s, payment in cash was given – although some men paid for famine relief meal “*by work*”.

Certainly in later years, there was a higher wage in Summer than in Winter: but I notice that the normal labourer rate is 7d per day, both in the Winter half-year and the ‘bonus’ weeks from May 1808 which are accidentally included. But there are changes to the ‘extra’ man’s wage, rising from 5d to 6d in the Summer period; Overseers have gone up from 1s to 1s 3d; Boys from 3d to 5d; Mason from 1s 9d to 2s 2d. Mowers, Car horses would also be different.

I have checked some of my notes from visits to NLI, but even without doing so I was certain that these are Mount Bellew estate tenants. They occur in other labour ledgers, lease proposals, rent books, agreements and some in general estate correspondence. As a general rule, the tenants are listed in village groups – some were in ‘Co-partnership’ agreements.

At random, I opened the roll-call on page 20: ID numbers change on other pages where the list varies. Top of the page are tenants who held land in Cloonoran, Castle Bellew and Gatestown. Laurence Bellew, Patt Donalan, John Noon and Patt Rourke were a partnership in Cloonoran. Thady Costalow (10) had land in Lower Cloonoran: he would marry the daughter of Roderick Halvey, the steward to CD Bellew.

The next readily identifiable groupings are in the Clooncalliga-Marless area. Peter Geraghty, John Nestor, Lacky Loughnane (18), James Devane John Geraghty and Patk Rowan (usually 'Royan', alias Ryan) Daniel Geraghty are all Marless. Edmond Kelly (14) lived in Clooncalliga and was a "driver" – presumably, a cattle drover who went to fairs for the Bellews.

Some names were resident in the town of Moylough but held land (for a cow, potatoes) in Marless, Moylough itself and Patch townlands...Michael Finaughty, Thomas Monahan are examples. Thomas Dowd (32) had land in Timree/Marless, a place called 'Lenamore'.

McGuire (36), Devane 38 Gahogan 39 and Carrick 40 were in Doon Wood. Augustin Gahogan's name is spelled variously as Gahagan, Geoghagan and Hogan. A descendant of his (Tony Emerson, living near London) has been in correspondence with me for a few years and has been to visit the field where the Gahogan house stood.

Patt White (7) was in Timree

On 'page 15' the extra workers listed on Monday 16th January 1808 Laffey, Tyrrels, etc are in Creggannagruagh near Caltra – this land came into the Bellew estate from CD Bellew's mother, Jane Dillon, daughter of Henry Dillon Kinclare.

Based on the "roll-call" alone, you can say with certainty that this document originates from the Mount Bellew Estate.

On "Page 12", the Lime account, settled on 15 June 1808 is signed by Roderick Halvey who took up the post as Steward when Christopher Dillon Bellew succeeded as proprietor of Mount Bellew in 1797.

Page 12, again: Thomas Hayden was a blacksmith in the Bellew forge: he lived in the town of Mount Bellew Bridge – and was known to be too fond of his grog...

As you know already, there are tons of stuff to tease out in the ledger...and for the moment this is enough for me to be certain that you have a Mount Bellew document on your hands. The date, as I explained already, is of special interest. The roll-call changes when tenants move on or die...one curious 'absentee village' is that of Newtown (part of Bovinion) which was a settlement beside the landlord's demesne – they were tenants in 1808, and appear in all the later ledgers.

Thanks so much for getting in touch and sharing this valuable discovery with me. I have been so convinced that there must be lots of 'stray' Bellew material that has either not been found, identified – or perhaps held secretly. This item proves the point in spades!

Congrats to the finders, and minders...and enjoy it!

Joe Clarke.

26 March 2022.