

THE GRANGE – CROKERS

By Michael (Minie) O'Brien

The ruin of the former 'Great House', "The Grange", popularly known locally as "Crokera", as viewed across the Camogue River from the village of Lower Grange, known as Sixmilebridge in olden times, is both eye-catching and impressive, and it seems to demand your attention. The ruin stands on an elevated site, which slopes gently towards the river, and it may seem that the two, each of which in their own right had glorious days in times gone by, are intent on mutual protection of an old friend.

The former great house, despite massive decay over the years, remains architecturally striking in outline, especially from a distance, and in its former glory, it must have been awesomely handsome. The attractive river continues to flow towards the Maigue, ever doing its critical duty of draining the land, but, alas, it no longer has high numbers of fish breaking the surface of its waters and setting



View of Crokera Great House from Knockfennel.

the fly fisherman's heart fluttering. Nor does it provide a salmon or trout for a family dish as it did in abundance in years well past. Thus, the house and the river have much in common as each laments the demise of a former glory.

From Glory to Dereliction

The house was three stories over a basement, six bays at the front and three bays on the side. At the rear of the house, there was an extensive and elaborate set of stables and farm buildings. According to Tony Browne's article (*Lough Gur & District Society Journal – No 11, 2000*), the house was built by "Hannan of Carnurry", who also built the County Court House. (*Information provided by Mrs Greene Barry*).

The **1911 Census** (*House No 3 – Skool – Ballybricken*) recorded the occupants of "The Grange" as Caroline Croker, aged 72 (single). The house was staffed by Annie Duff, aged 58 (single), a domestic servant; Mary Kirby, aged 39 (single), cook; Ellen Murphy, aged 40 (single), housemaid; Margaret Feston, aged 68 (single), laundress; Bridget Higgins, aged 32 (single), kitchen maid; Thomas Gabin, aged 42 (widower), coachman and Patrick Cronin, aged 19 (single), domestic servant.

By 1928, the owner, Caroline Croker had died (1926) and the estate, acquired by the land commission, was divided among local farmers. In the early 1940s, the house was dismantled: fireplaces, interior doors, painted ceilings and anything of use was removed. The house was stripped of its roof and left to fall into ruin. It appears that the house may have been inhabited for some years following the death of Caroline Croker and possibly up to the late 1930s.

"The Grange" was described as in excellent repair even though it had not been occupied for some years preceding the *Irish Tourist Association Survey* of 1942. So, it must have been around that time that the house was dismantled.

The great house and the estate to which it belonged, in varying ownership through the years, provided important employment for local people, and indeed for people of the wider locality. References are found elsewhere in this book to a number of people who were in Croker employment.

Some History of "The Grange"

Standish O'Grady bought around 100 acres of the land on which the house stands in about 1790 and the house was built by Standish's son, Thomas, in the early 1800s. (*Nobody Home – Forgotten Buildings of Ireland*)

The O'Grady family claimed to be one of the oldest in Ireland, and they traced their family tree back as far as the Ancient Kings of Munster (*Nobody Home...*) The O'Gradys of "The Grange", parish of Fedamore, County Limerick, were a branch of the O'Gradys of Kilballyowen. They intermarried with the Morony and Croker families. One of the Kilballyowen O'Grady family was Thomas (Sr) whose son Nicholas married Helen Morony. Their son, Standish, was the father of Thomas

O’Grady. Margaret, the sister of Thomas, married the Reverend Robert Croker in 1874, and it was their children that assumed the name, O’Grady. ([Moore Institute, NUIG](#))

Henry O’Grady held an estate in the parishes of Fedamore and Knockainey, barony of Small County, at the time of Griffith’s Valuation. He died in 1853 and was succeeded by his brother Thomas. ([Moore Institute, NUIG](#)).

It appears that “The Grange”, the subject of this article was the second house given that name. Tony Browne in his article published in *The Lough Gur & District Historical Society Journal* stated that Robert Cussen, in his notes to Caleb Powell’s Grand Jury records, tells how the second house came to be built.

“Thomas O’Grady, the Grand Juror was the son of Standish O’Grady of Grange and Widow Shepherd. Standish at first lived in an unpretentious farm house, and he coveted a lovely old Ingoldsby mansion house with a fine deer park, called ‘The Grange’ [*the first house*], which adjoined his lands. But Ingoldsby Massy, the owner, would only sell him (1780) a life use of the place. On Standish’s death, his son Thomas succeeded. ‘The Grange’ [*the first house*] passed to the Count de Salis, and Thomas had to give up possession and build himself a new house, which he perversely named ‘The Grange’. Thomas was quite undistinguished. He did not marry, and on his death in 1861, his property descended to the Crokers, children of his sister Margaret, who assumed the name of O’Grady, and on the death of the survivor of them, it passed out of the family.”

“Standish O’Grady’s brother, Nicholas, had been called to the Irish bar. However, he found this did not suit his aspiration. He moved to London where he became a successful gambler and amassed a considerable fortune. He ended up in Paris where he committed suicide, leaving his estate to his nephew, Thomas.” ([Abandoned Mansions of Ireland II](#)).

“Thomas O’Grady, on inheriting his uncle’s wealth, decided to build himself a fine new mansion which he named ‘The Grange’, named after the house rented by his father. “The [*new*] Grange” faced sloping down to the river; it was superbly planned, and the Estate included a deer park.” ([Abandoned Mansions of Ireland II](#)).

“The Grange” was inherited by the Crokers in 1861. Edward Croker, son of the Reverend Robert Croker of the Ballynagarde family and his wife Margaret O’Grady of The Grange, inherited this County Limerick estate following the death of his uncle Thomas O’Grady in 1861, which amounted to 2,121 acres in the 1870s. ([Moore Institute – NUIG](#)). In 1894, it was noted by Slater as the seat of Captain Edward Croker. Edward Croker died unmarried in 1896 and was succeeded by his sisters Helen Lady Dyer and Miss Caroline Croker. ([Moore Institute – NUIG](#)).

Following the death of Caroline Croker in 1926, who was unmarried, furniture and other chattels, of “The Grange”, were catalogued for sale. ([Archival Sources at Limerick City Museum](#)).



All that remains of Crokers Great House.

“I Doubt it Says Croker”

There is a retort *“I doubt it says Croker”* that is used to this day, and has been for many years, throughout County Limerick and indeed further afield, when there is intention to convey doubt about belief in something that has been said by somebody. It would appear that these famous words arise from an exchange between Old John Croker, as he lay dying of a terminal illness at Ballinagarde House, and his son, Robert, a clergyman. Apparently, Robert told his father that he was going to a better place – “there is a land that is fairer and better than this you’ll regard” said Robert to his dying father. Old Croker surveyed his fine demesne and replied, “I doubt it” and then fell dead. The house became known locally as “I Doubt it Hall”.

References and Notes:

- (1) <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=2261>
- (2) <http://www.nobodyhome.ie/58tg/thegrange.html>
- (3) NUI Galway – Moore Institute. Reference Source: Slater, Isaac. “Royal National Directory of Ireland: List of Principal Seats”. (Manchester: 1894). Reference #32605: xxviii, 146 (the Grange).
- (4) Archival Sources at Limerick City Museum – Reference #21092: Catalogue of furniture etc., for sale at The Grange, following the death of Caroline Croker, 1926: LM1994.0008.
- (5) <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=2253>
- (6) www.AbandonedIreland.com – Ballinagarde House, Co Limerick.