
The Ring of the Piper's Tune

Piper Caulfield and a forgotten East Mayo musical tradition

Michael Kelly

Once upon a time East Mayo resounded to the music of the pipes. However, after the Famine the combined effects of death, emigration and changing musical tastes seemed to signal the death knell for the Irish piper. But then, during the Gaelic Revival, efforts to preserve and revive the piping tradition were initiated, first by the Feis Ceoil committee from 1897, and then by the Pipers' Clubs of Cork (1899) and Dublin (1900). One of the unsung saviours of the tradition was Mayo piper Pat Nally (c. 1868-1911) from Balla, a first cousin of P.W. Nally. He was a key figure in the Dublin Piper's Club, along with a friend whom he had introduced to piping, his work colleague Ned Kent (Éamonn Ceannt, the 1916 leader). Later on, the dying embers of the piping tradition were fanned into flame by Comhaltas from 1951 and Na Píobairí Uilleann (the Uilleann Pipers) from 1968. Today uilleann piping is a thriving art form, with some 3,000 exponents around the world. Just as we were about to go to print came the announcement that uilleann piping had received an important global accolade in the form of official recognition by UNESCO.

Part 1 of this article identifies some faint echoes of the old 19th pipers in East Mayo, many of whom were blind, while Parts 2 and 3 explore the life, lore and legacy of one particular piper of that era who hailed from Aghamore parish - blind Piper Caulfield of Liscat.

PART 1:

The piping tradition of East Mayo

*'Twas the brightest of all the bright days of the year
And it came near the end of October
For the harvest was in and the winter was nigh
And the season for toiling was over
When over the path 'cross the hill of Kilbride
Like a bard of the kings with fine martial stride
And his pipes, decked in green, swinging loose by his side
Came Killeen the piper from Carra.*

Killeen the piper (by John Gibbons)¹

This is the opening verse of a ballad celebrating a famous Mayo piper of the 19th century. It hints at the mood of excitement generated by his arrival into a rural village on an autumn evening when the people are in a relaxed mood after the harvest has been saved. The piper in question was Thomas Killeen and while his surname might suggest an Aghamore connection, in fact he came from further south in the county – from the Ballyglass district in the barony of Carra, to be precise. Along with his brother Pat, a dancing master, he was well-known throughout East Mayo, and indeed farther afield. Like many pipers of his era, he was visually impaired. He famously made a pilgrimage to St Winefride's Well in Wales, reputed to be the oldest continually visited pilgrimage site in Britain, in the hope of regaining his sight and while he didn't find a cure on that trip, he did find a wife! Piper Killeen reputedly composed the well-known jig *The Lark in the Morning*. He died in December 1907 at the age of 79.²

The social history of Ireland in the 19th century is littered with tales of pipers like Killeen. The piper was then a respected individual in the community, being the main source of instrumental music for dancing on social occasions, such as weddings. As ethnomusicologist Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin has observed: 'Itinerant pipers enjoyed considerable status in western townlands. They were carriers of news as well as entertainment, and their arrival generally prompted a *ragairne* (house dance). They often followed established itineraries which were built around the work year of their patrons'.³

The music of the pipes was often considered to have otherworldly or magical connotations and the piper features prominently in folklore, and is even immortalised in local placenames, such as 'Sceach an Phiobaire'. A typical piece of folklore, recorded in Béacán parish in the 1930s, describes how one man acquired his piping skills after an encounter with the fairies. It concludes: '... he got his old bagpipes and the minute he touched them they began to play reels, jigs and hornpipes'.⁴ As the great music collector Francis O'Neill aptly put it, 'the favoured beneficiaries of fairy friendship seem to have been the pipers ...' Just as Piper Caulfield's era was drawing to a close, O'Neill was beginning his work of salvaging the music of immigrant Irish musicians in Chicago, including several from Mayo, and his compendium of Irish musicians contains much piper lore.⁵

A trio of East Mayo pipers - McGlynn, Garoghan and Groarke

While anecdotal evidence suggests that pipers once abounded here, a comprehensive census of Mayo pipers of the past has yet to be compiled. In the adjacent county of Galway, for example, at least 90 pipers have been documented; the Aran Islands alone boasted no fewer than seven pipers back in 1821!

East Mayo certainly had its fair share of home-grown pipers such as our own Piper Caulfield, though most are either forgotten or barely remembered today. Many of them emigrated long ago, such as another Aghamore native, Michael (Mick) McGlynn, who was blind from birth or early childhood. He was born around 1835 so it's not unreasonable to surmise that he was tutored on the pipes by his older neighbour, Piper Caulfield. In any event, McGlynn had emigrated to Coventry around the time of the Famine and later settled in Birmingham where he, in turn, served as a tutor to a young man named Thomas Garoghan. His pupil would go on to become a distinguished piper himself. 'Professor' Garoghan, as he was known, although born in Coventry had East Mayo roots too, his parents having lived in the parish of Began where some of his siblings were born before the family decided to emigrate. Garoghan is believed to have made the earliest commercial recording of the uilleann pipes in October 1898. There is reason to believe that he was related to the celebrated piper, James Groarke from Lisduff, Ballyhaunis, who was described as 'one of the best, if not the best, of the pipers in Ireland in his day'. Research is ongoing to establish the exact nature of the family connection.⁶

Piping pedigrees: the Carneys of East Mayo

Little is known about another Aghamore piper named Michael Carney, apart from the fact that he was a married man who died at Cúigiú in March 1866 at the age of 70. Perhaps he was related

to his more famous namesake, Piper Carney of Churchfield, Knock? The latter was a contemporary and friend of the aforementioned Piper Groarke and, according to local lore, the pair often spent entire days playing the pipes together at Carney's house near Churchfield crossroads near Knock.⁷ This was a well-known landmark for generations and the expression 'Piper Carney's' was used, for example, in public notices inviting tenders for local road maintenance in the 1890s. Piper Carney's first name was never mentioned but since he is stated to have been the grandfather of Knock fiddler, Frank Carney (1914-98), then we can identify him as John Carney (c. 1837-99) although his father Thomas (c. 1818-87) may have been a piper too.

Clearly piping was in the Carneys' DNA because near Irishtown there lived another Carney clan with a distinguished piping pedigree, the best-known of whom was Michael Carney (1872-1938), who was a popular figure – as performer, tutor and pipemaker - in Irish music circles in New York in the decades before World War II. His father, also named Michael, was a piper too, who had performed on stage at the first Irishtown land rally of April 1879, the one that famously spawned the Land League. His grandfather, James Carney, who died before 1882, was also a piper and both father and grandfather reputedly won piping contests throughout Ireland. His uncle, another James Carney, who also settled in Brooklyn, was another good piper, while a relative from an earlier generation, Thomas Carney, had reputedly been deported from Ireland for some youthful misdemeanour but was permitted to take his beloved pipes with him and actually played them aboard the convict ship¹⁸

An East Mayo piper in the House of Commons

The Dooastle district of East Mayo, adjacent to the musical heartland of South Sligo, has produced many fine musicians over the years, but none more colourful than the gentleman piper, Joseph Myles McDonnell (1796-1872), better known as Joe Mór. During his brief tenure as an MP, he once famously tried to smuggle his pipes into the House of Commons chamber! His pipes ended up in the National Museum and were used by Eamonn Ceannt and James Ennis, father of Séamus, to illustrate a lecture on piping in 1912.⁹



'Big' Joe McDonnell MP

A spendthrift, gambler, sportsman, politician and bankrupt, legend has it that when Joe Mór died in Dublin in 1872, there wasn't enough money to pay the Glasnevin gravediggers to bury him, so some returning Dooastle spalpeens kindly stepped in and did the job *gratis*.¹⁰

Piper Gorman in Aghamore

Music is sometimes characterised as a portable or mobile art; it is not constrained by geographical boundaries. Pipers from outside of East Mayo frequently dropped in to perform here. Some didn't have far to travel, such as Patrick Vizzard from Ballinlough and John Reilly (c. 1849-1927) and the Burkes of Cloonfad, who were just over the county boundary in Roscommon.¹¹

Probably the best known of all musical visitors was a visually-



Johnny Gorman, a line drawing from 1903.

impaired piper who died a century ago this year. He was Johnny Gorman (1861-1917), who hailed from Derrylahan townland near Carrowbehy, not far from the Mayo border. Tom Coen (1893-1991) of Bruff recalled that, as a very young boy, he once heard Gorman play at a house dance in the Mial Tráin home of Martin Lyons, who died the same year as Gorman. Jim Heneghan of Doogary had brought Gorman over from Gurteen and actually put him up for that entire winter.¹² The accompanying sketch of Gorman was drawn in 1903 when he performed at the Mayo Feis in Ballyhaunis, which was attended by Douglas Hyde and Padraig Pearse.

'The Prince of Pipers' in Ballyhaunis

A celebrity piper who visited East Mayo in the late 19th century was Clonakilty-born Dick Stephenson (c.1855-97), known as 'the

Prince of Pipers'. After returning from a successful American tour with Ludwig's company in 1886, he embarked on a series of engagements around Ireland in the company of a banjo player named John Dunne, to whom he was related by marriage.



Dick Stephenson John Dunne

Sadly their relationship came unstuck after a performance in Ballyhaunis. The story goes that Stephenson earned a bonus for playing *The Fox Chase* while his banjo-picking partner had to sit it

out, not being able to follow Stephenson's complicated variations on the pipes. This 'trifling incident' led to a bout of fisticuffs and the end of a long friendship between the pair!¹³

Traveller pipers

The notion of music as a nomadic art is perhaps best exemplified by the famous traveller pipers such as the Rainey and the interlinked Cash and Doran families, who visited East Mayo at intervals, usually for fairs and similar public gatherings. They were said to have even developed a distinctive 'Traveller style' of piping. One of the Rainey pipers, Michael Rainey, who was born at Roundfort during the Famine, eventually settled in Claremorris where he died in 1911. His father Stephen (c. 1821-87) was a piper too, as were his sons Michael and Stephen, the latter being admitted as a member of the Dublin Pipers' Club in November 1902.¹⁴ Because of the travellers' adverse living conditions, their instruments were often not up to scratch. Eamonn Ceannt once remarked that it was unfair to judge pipers generally 'by the poor, broken-down itinerant performer who generally played on a wheezy, leaking, indifferent instrument'

just as it was unfair 'to condemn the violin after hearing a fair day fiddler'.¹⁵

A few of the traveller pipers survived into the 20th century. Here is an eyewitness recollection of an unnamed piper who used to visit East Mayo in the 1930s:

'I can see him yet as he came across Thornton's garden towards our house, taking the short cut. As he came nearer he began to fill the pipes with air and the pipes let out a few screeches just like wild geese. Well there wasn't a hen in the place but took off flying when they heard him!' According to the same source, there was another travelling piper named Dominic Gallagher 'in the next village of Glan'.¹⁶



The Cleary homestead at Castlegar which Piper Doran used to visit; the lady feeding the hens is Johnny Cleary's mother (Courtesy of Colmán Ó Raghallaigh, Clár Chlainne Mhuiris).

Later, Johnny Doran (c. 1907-1950), generally acknowledged to be one of the all-time great pipers, was a regular visitor to Claremorris Fair. He would camp at Castlegar near the home of accordionist, Johnny Cleary (1915-87), and the pair often swapped tunes. Doran even danced *Dunphy's Hornpipe* at a session in Cleary's house.¹⁷

The ubiquitous blind piper

Why were so many of the 19th century pipers blind, like Caulfield, Killeen and McGlynn? There are two main reasons. Firstly, blindness was generally more common in those days, often as a result of smallpox, an acute viral disease that was particularly prevalent in famine times. Another cause was vitamin A deficiency, a side-effect of malnutrition in times of hunger. While free vaccination against smallpox was widely available in Ireland from 1851, it had only limited success. If vaccination had been strictly enforced, said one doctor in 1869, there would be 'less blind pipers and fiddlers in the country ...'.¹⁸ Secondly, piping was regarded as one of the few occupations that might provide a talented blind youngster with the means of eking out a living, just as tailoring and shoemaking were often deemed suitable trades for the lame.

The blind piper features frequently in our poems, paintings, and folklore. A much-reproduced image of a blind piper is Haverty's famous painting from 1844 (below) which hangs in the National Gallery. The original was painted for Robert Gore-Booth of Lissadell, Co Sligo.¹⁹

A favourite poem from schooldays long ago recalled the heart-warming tale of a blind itinerant piper and his dog, 'poor Pinch and Caoch O'Leary'.²⁰ Composed by John Keegan before the Famine, it was popularised again in recent times by Benedict Kiely's distinctive rendition, often heard on RTÉ's Sunday morning radio programme *Mo Cheol Thú*. It includes the verse:

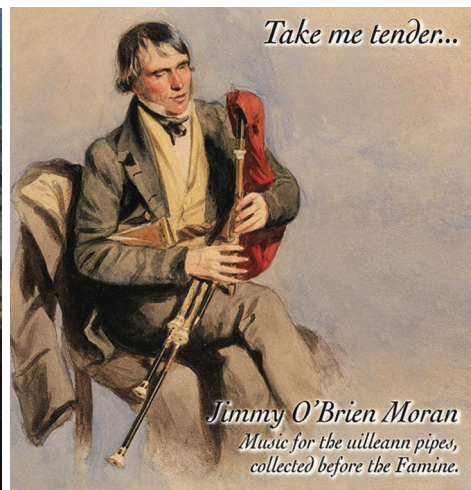
*Poor Caoch and Pinch slept well that night,
And in the morning early
He called me up to hear him play
'The Wind that shakes the Barley'*

Blind Piper Conneely

Being blind, however, didn't necessarily prevent a piper from leading a full life, as the stories of Killeen and Caulfield testify. Likewise, when music collector George Petrie met the famous blind piper from Connemara, Paddy Conneely, in 1839, he was surprised to discover that Conneely, despite his handicap, was farming 'a bit of ground' and was quite capable of acting as a local tour guide!²¹

Although he travelled as far as Dublin, we don't know if Piper Conneely, who died in 1851, ever performed in East Mayo. The reason we know more about him than we do about his contemporaries like Piper Caulfield is that he had a much higher profile, thanks to the support of Petrie and other patrons such as the Mayo-born historian, James Hardiman (who supplied him with a famous set of pipes) and the gentleman piper Lord Rossmore. Not only was Conneely's music transcribed by several eminent collectors but his portrait was painted by a leading artist and became quite well-known when an engraving of it was published in Petrie's widely-read *Irish Penny Journal* in 1840. Several of Conneely's tunes have been re-created by modern-day piper and lecturer, Dr Jimmy O'Brien Moran, on his 2013 CD entitled *Take me tender* which allows us to take 'a peep behind the veil of pre-Famine Irish music'.²² The CD sleeve features Piper Conneely's famous portrait.²³

The proliferation of pipers, blind or not, meant inevitably that



Above: Piper Conneely's famous portrait on the sleeve of Jimmy O'Brien Moran's CD.

Left: Joseph Patrick Haverty's The Blind Piper (Courtesy of National Gallery of Ireland)

some were of a mediocre standard, such as the unfortunate Thomas Stephens, a blind piper, who in 1855 ended up in Ballinasloe Workhouse along with his wife and family. He successfully applied to the Guardians of the Union for the 15 shillings needed to remove himself and his family to England. Asked why he couldn't make a living at home, he replied that he 'was a poor player and that the Irish public would not patronize him; but in England, where they did not know the difference, he could support himself comfortably'!²⁴

The foregoing selection of pen-pictures gives us a flavour of the rich piping tradition in and around East Mayo in bygone days, but much more research needs to be done to gain a full appreciation of its significance. In Part 2 and 3, we'll look at the life and legacy of a piper who features prominently in local folklore and musical heritage, Piper Caulfield of Liscat.

PART 2:

Piper Caulfield of Liscat: life and lore

*Now who the piper was and when
He plied his merry trade
Is lost in far antiquity
By memory mislaid.²⁵*

Although the name of Piper Caulfield loomed large in local lore and was associated with several local tunes, virtually nothing was recalled about the man himself, not even his first name. Surprisingly he is not mentioned by James Jennings of Eskermorilly, Knock, who was born some five years before the Famine, in recalling the local music-making of the past: 'The only instruments they had were the bagpipes, violins and flutes. There would be a man in the village that would be able to play on the bagpipes ... The most important of the pipers were Thomas Carney, Michael Reiny, and Thomas Groarke'.²⁶ The three pipers in question belonged to the piping clans already discussed above.

While Piper Caulfield remains an elusive figure, recent research has filled in some of the gaps in his story. In trying to establish some facts about his life, we began at the end. By locating his civil death record, we learned that he was born around the year 1814, that he was christened Patrick and that he was indeed classified as a piper. Incidentally, the instrument he played would have been known to him and his contemporaries as 'union pipes' or 'Irish pipes' rather than 'uilleann pipes', a term that only gained currency long after his death.²⁷ He married twice, and the record of his second marriage tells us that his father's name was Thomas. His mother's identity has not been ascertained. It is likely that he was blind from birth or infancy and that his disability was the reason he learned to play the pipes, although the Caulfields were musical anyway, as we shall see. He may have been slightly lame too, according to local lore.

The musical Caulfield clan of Tamhnach

The piper came from one of several related Caulfield families in a cluster of houses known as the village (or *baile*) of Tamhnach (or Tavnagh), situated in the townland of Liscat in the parish of Aghamore. Tamhnach means 'the clearing, green field or grassy upland'. However, only two Caulfields – Thomas and Thomas Snr – are listed among the tenant farmers of Liscat in Griffith's Valuation (c. 1856). The local landlords were the Tyrrell family, who had held the entire townland on lease from Viscount Dillon since 1798. Like many other landlords, they were in serious debt after the Famine and in 1857 were forced to sell Liscat through the Encumbered Estates Court.

While the piper's people are believed to have been landless labourers or cottiers (locally pronounced 'cotchers'), all the Tamhnach Caulfields were said to have descended from the same family. Most likely the cottiers would have had an informal arrangement with the 'official' tenants to build their cottages on small garden plots just big enough to plant a few potato ridges.



Liscat (Lissachat), c. 1814,

This is what Liscat looked like around the time Piper Caulfield was born, with the distinctive house clusters clearly in evidence. These clustered villages produced communities which, in the words of historian Dr Kevin Whelan, were 'socially cohesive, rich in kinship and mutual help and full of great talkers, singers and dancers'.²⁸ That description certainly applied to Tamhnach.

No doubt the social gatherings in and around Liscat were occasionally enlivened by a 'drop of the craythur', or as one 19th century writer neatly put it, 'by a steaming jorum of the "rale ould mountain dew", never spoiled by the blink of a gauger's eyes!²⁹ The gauger, of course, was the dreaded excise man who was always assiduous in pursuit of the poitin-makers. In April 1843, for example, when Piper Caulfield was still in his 20s, the excise men raided Liscat and made off with a sizeable haul of illicit brewing materials - one poitin still, 750 gallons of potale, 24 bushels of oat malt and 16 vessels of wash!³⁰ This was at a time when drink was seen as the curse of Irish society and Fr Mathew's Temperance movement was in full swing.

The piper's tree

To make ends meet, the 'cottier' Caulfields had to travel to England each year to work as spalpeens (*spailpíní* or migratory workers): 'Every year on the Friday after St Patrick's Day they'd be off and wouldn't return again until the towards the end of November after working for farmers beyond'. These are the words of Patrick ('P') Murphy (1887-1961) of Liscat, whose mother Mary Caulfield was born in the last inhabited house in Tamhnach village and was a relative, possibly a niece, of the Piper.³¹ His father, Michael Murphy (c. 1841-1915) of Cloonlee, who 'married in' to Caulfields in 1875, remembered the piper well. Michael's memories were passed on to his son, Patrick Murphy (known as 'P'), who in turn related them to his cousin, Michael Waldron of Cloontariff (grandson of Thomas Caulfield of Tamhnach).

Although the Caulfields are long gone, one of their cottages is still intact and Michael Waldron can point out the sites of the others, including one which was located 'close to the bush still called the piper's bush or tree'.³² According to Michael: '*P' Murphy had the story that on a fine day, or on a Sunday after dinner time, the piper would be sitting on a branch or the bough of a tree playing the pipes and I don't know how many young ones listening to him and some doing steps of dance.*'

Acquiring and passing on the piping skills

We can only speculate as to where Piper Caulfield may have acquired his pipes or indeed his piping skills. Perhaps these were inherited from previous generations, as in the case of the Carneys of Irishtown, the Burkes of Cloonfad and other piping dynasties? Who made his pipes? An expert tradesman such as a blacksmith or a carpenter might have tried his hand at pipe manufacturing. For example, Michael Carney's training as a millwright probably helped him to become a pipe-maker in America. Similarly, Patrick Hennelly (1896-1978) from Crossboyne, who became a renowned pipe-maker in Chicago, said that he picked up the necessary skills while serving his time with master coachbuilder, Joe Dwyer in Castlebar, where he 'learned to read music, studied wind instruments, wood-working tools, crafting and turning'.³³

Perhaps Piper Caulfield was tutored by his neighbour, the little-known piper Carney of Cúigiú, who was 18 years his senior. Perhaps the landlord, Tyrrell, had a hand in encouraging Caulfield to take up piping? Some benevolent landlords – and they included an occasional 'gentleman piper' such as John Reilly's patron, Andrew Kirwan of Cloonfad - were known to come to the assistance of blind children amongst their tenants by sponsoring piping lessons or purchasing pipes. In East Mayo there was at least one 'gentleman piper' - Donagh O'Grady of Tavrane. Tyrrell himself, who was a fiddler and piano-player, was known as a music patron, who tutored two other blind musicians in the locality, fiddlers Máire Connally and Mary ('Maney') Boyle.³⁴

Piper Caulfield himself definitely did some tutoring, according to Michael Waldron, and one of his pupils was Piper Carney of Churchfield:

'There was no mention of what became of his pipes but John Joe Fleming said that Piper Carney in Churchfield, Knock may have got them as Carney was a bit younger than Caulfield, it seems, and it was said that Caulfield taught him to play. It's interesting that we always said 'Piper Caulfield' and 'Piper Carney'. There never was any first name mentioned that I heard of. I suppose there were no other pipers in the area so there was no need to call them by their first name because everyone knew them and, besides, the surnames Carney and Caulfield were common around these parts so the word 'Piper' helped to distinguish them from others of the same name.' Clearly, by this time, the fact that there had already been a Piper Carney in Cúigiú was completely erased from local memory.

Music mad

According to 'P' Murphy, once the Caulfields of Tamhnach returned from their annual stint in England, they had plenty of free time for music-making during the winter months: *'All they*

were doing was sleeping, eating and playing music. They'd be playing the music and sharing tunes from once they got up in the morning ... and, of course, that mightn't be too early ... until they went to bed at night. They were music mad!'

Haste to the wedding

Piper Caulfield would have been obliged to do some travelling in order to eke out a livelihood but he appears to have been based at Liscat throughout his lifetime. We don't know when or where his first marriage took place but his first wife, Catherine, whose maiden name is not known, was about six years younger than him. She may have hailed from the Ballindine district. She died at Liscat, aged 50, on 3 November 1869 and is described as a 'piper's wife' on her civil death record. Her passing was notified by John Caulfield of Cullentrath – an adjacent townland but in Began parish - who presumably was a close relative.

The piper took the plunge again two year later. Being blind was obviously no impediment to a piper in finding a marriage partner! Dinny Delaney, the famous blind piper from Ballinasloe, was another who married twice. Caulfield's second wife was Mary Finn, daughter of the late Larry Finn of Began. The marriage took place in Began church on 7 December 1871, the witnesses being Thomas Waldron and Mary Finn. The piper's own father, Thomas Caulfield, was dead by this time.

While it has not been possible to trace any written record of children from either of Piper Caulfield's marriages, local lore suggests that he may have had at least five children, including a son who was reputedly killed in a mining disaster in England in 1908 along with other local young men and two daughters, who were also pipers and emigrated to America.³⁵ While nothing more is known about the two emigrant daughters, the 1908 mining incident - the Maypole Colliery Disaster - still looms large in local folklore because of the local casualties.



Bringing up the pit ponies after the 1908 Maypole colliery explosion

Maypole Colliery Disaster, 1908

Just after 5pm on Tuesday 18 August 1908, an underground explosion ripped through the Maypole Colliery in the village of Abram near Wigan, killing 76 miners, several of whom were from East Mayo. ('Big Pat' Fleming of Bruff (c. 1875-1953), who is the subject of a separate article by Joe Coen in this issue of *Glór*, was another local who worked as a coalminer at Wigan). The explosion started a fire which raged on for four more weeks, causing further explosions. It was not until November of the following year that the bodies of most of the victims were

brought to the surface and the last body was not recovered until 1917, nine years after the blast.

The Liscat victims were believed to have included a pair of Kearns brothers and a pair of Murphy brothers but the list of 77 victims on the Maypole monument in Abram churchyard includes only three names that might identify Liscat emigrants: Peter Caulfield (aged 25), Thomas Kearns (25) and Thomas Murphy (25). Kearns and Murphy were undoubtedly from Liscat but I have failed to identify any Peter Caulfield born in Liscat in the relevant period. In any event, the Maypole disaster was a huge blow to the Liscat community, says Michael Waldron, 'and, of course, it was the end of the music'.

Piper's Caulfield's musical performances

Returning to the story of Piper Caulfield himself, we catch a few fleeting glimpses of the blind musician in action, thanks to folklore recorded from Tom Coen, himself a whistle-player with links to the Knock Flute and Drum Band of the early 1900s.

The wild *spraoi* at Waldrons

The first of Tom Coen's tales recalls the mischief-making that went on at country-house dances in Piper Caulfield's time. Liscat and Cúigiú were always noted areas for music and amusement, said Tom. Here he describes the antics at a *spraoi* which was held in Pat Waldron's house at Liscat, probably in the 1860s or '70s, on a night when music was provided by Piper Caulfield:

The dance had been going on well into the night and the old people had drifted home and the Old Waldron man ... Pat, I think, was his name³⁶ ... had gone up in the room to bed ... and only the young ones were left, but the piper kept playing for them. It was Piper Caulfield and he was above on the table, sitting on a chair, playing away like hell for the young dancers and they stepping it out and cheering him on.

As the night wore on, the craic intensified and then the horse-play started:

It seems at some point they started to get very loud and a bit rowdy. At that time there would be potatoes brought in to the house for different reasons - for safe-keeping and storage and to help them bud, if it was springtime. They'd be usually kept up in the loft room at the end of the main kitchen, or up over the fire somewhere, to keep them dry. Anyway, when the ruaille buaille started a few of the wilder young bucks began to grab some of the stored praties and started to pelt them at each other.

The old man heard the rúpaí rápaí below and because he was a very tall man he had to stoop and put his head out under the door jamb beside the fire to investigate what was happening. I suppose it was inevitable that he'd take a hit ... and sure enough he got an awful wallop of a pratie down on top of the head and before he could pull back another landed and nearly took the ear off him!

Old Waldron, kept awake by the racket, soon lost patience and took action:

He didn't pretend or shout, or anything, but away out with him and, when he landed back in, what had he in his hand but the hayfork or, better still, a graip with four prongs on it! Anyway,

without a word of warning he started into flaking and ripping and rúpaling before and behind him, stabbing and pucking ... All the gang were trying to make their escape and in a short while there was no one left but the piper ... and he was still above on the table playing away like mad. He was blind, of course, and maybe had a sup taken and anyway he wasn't sure what was happening and he asked what was going on.

Old Waldron spoke for the first time and told him the story of the clearance and warned him: 'I have a good mind to stab you and your pipes as well and that'll put an end to the spraois ... and it'd be just good enough for those that don't know how to behave themselves'.

Even though they were about the same age, Waldron obviously didn't absolve the blind piper from blame! However, Tom Coen insisted that Pat Waldron, despite abruptly halting that particular *spraoi*, was actually a great music lover. The Waldron family, he said, were all very musical and their house was a great music venue. The musical talent passed down the generations too. Pat Waldron's grandson, Tom 'Toll-Oil' Waldron NT, was a good fiddler and taught music in school in the 1930s and 1940s at a time 'when very few teachers were doing that sort of thing'. Moving on down the generations, the musical DNA continues to find expression, for example in Tom's own grandson, organist Noel Henry, who composed the special music for the Ballyhaunis Millennium Spire Project.

The mysterious visitors to Piper Caulfield

Tom Coen also recounted the tale of three mysterious strangers who arrived unannounced one day looking for Piper Caulfield, when he happened to be away attending the local fair. At that time, one of the best-known, long-established fairs in the West of Ireland was held quarterly at Ballinacostello (often referred to simply as 'Ballina') in Aghamore parish. On his way to the fair, Piper Caulfield had stopped by the house of his sister, Mrs Jim Jeffers, at Shanvaghera and deposited his pipes there for safe-keeping. Why, one wonders, did he not bring the pipes to the fair to try to earn a few shillings, as did so many pipers of his time? On the other hand, perhaps he had a reputation as a good judge of animals, just like his fellow blind pipers Paddy Conneely and Dinny Delaney! In any event, it was at Jeffers house that, in his absence, the strange trio showed up looking for him. Tom Coen takes up the story:

Before heading for the fair, the piper had left his pipes carefully on the kitchen table with strict warning to his sister to let no one near them in his absence. He had struck off to Ballina and soon after that she started to milk the cows. In most places the cows were kept within in the dwellinghouse in those days.

She wasn't long milking when she noticed a shadow at the door. That time every door was left open all day ... and she looked up to see these three men filling the doorway. One of them was nearly halfway in and he began to look around and, of course, spotted the pipes on the table.

"Oh, I see there's an instrument of music here", says he.

"There is", she said, "It's my brother's."

With that he moved in and took a hold of the pipes and started

shaping to put them on. She got right upset.

"He'll be very vexed now if you interfere with them."

"Don't worry I'll do them no harm", he said. "But it's a great pity he's not here himself... but he'll see the difference in those pipes when he comes back."

And he kept fitting them on and started playing and she couldn't get over it. She thought there were a hundred pipers round the house with the music there was ... and she there milking the cows.

"It's a pity the piper isn't here", he repeated again, "but he'll see the difference in the instrument when he comes back."

And the three men went out suddenly and a minute or so later she was up from under the cows and went out after them and looked up and down the road but they weren't to be seen. They had disappeared.

The piper came home from the fair in Ballinacostello later on and of course she had to explain the case to him and tell him what happened.

"Ó, s'anam an Diabhail, they have my pipes ruined I'm sure", says he.

He put them on and humoured them a little but the first thing he noticed was that that they didn't need much humouring at all, and with that he started to play and he sure did notice the difference. They had improved a hundred per cent."

Piper Caulfield performing during the Land War, 1880/81

There are a couple of faint glimpses of Piper Caulfield in action during the Land War, just a few years before his death. Following an eviction at nearby Mannin in September 1880 a huge *meitheal* of locals, accompanied by three musicians, descended on the evicted farm where they harvested and carried away the potato crop for the benefit of the evicted tenant. A letter from the local branch of the Land League explains what happened next: 'A few of them took one of the musicians and placed him on a tree, which was cushioned with coats, from which he played some national and soul-stirring tunes, to enliven the scene ...'.³⁷ We can be virtually certain that this musician was indeed Piper Caulfield, who lived literally within earshot of the place and whose favourite spot for his Sunday afternoon performances was the bough of a tree, as already mentioned in 'P' Murphy's anecdote. The other two, in all probability, were the blind female fiddlers already mentioned, Máire Connally and 'Maney' Boyle.

Music while you work ... the house that was built in a day

A year later, music featured again at another local Land War incident which occurred in Liscat itself ... and it would be

surprising if Piper Caulfield was not involved. This time 'Maney' Boyle was the centre of attention. According to Tom Coen, she was a widow whose first husband came from 'Fideán ... a small cluster of houses ... near the mearing of Kilgarrif and Larganboy'. Following his early death it seems she had no claim on the house in Cúigiú and she and her daughter had been evicted in late February 1881. Even though she married another partially-sighted musician, James Lyons from Churchpark, in March 1881, the family must have remained homeless.

Tom Coen again: 'Eventually the friends of the Fenians got to hear of her plight and decided they'd build a house for her in the Liscat bog on a kind of commons. They picked a right spot on a nice little hillock near enough Eden and Aughtaboy. They picked a certain day ... and they set to work ... and there was as many men there as would build ten houses, hundreds of men arrived and everyone carrying a few stones or something on his shoulder'. Coen's folklore is corroborated by a contemporary newspaper report: 'About 1,000 men assembled at Liscat on Wednesday, 21st inst., for the purpose of building a house for a poor widow and family who were evicted on the 28th February last. At ten o'clock contingents poured in from the surrounding districts with banners, carts, spades, lime, straw, and sods, etc. When all were assembled there must have been 1,500 present'.³⁸ Despite an attempt by the police to intervene, within a few hours the workmen 'had a neat two-roomed house built, roofed and thatched, which the evicted woman and family occupied the same night!'.³⁹ The whole enterprise was accompanied by musicians 'playing national airs'. Piper Caulfield is not mentioned in despatches but he would scarcely have missed such a major event in his own townland.

End of an era

Pat Caulfield, the blind piper of Liscat, died at home on 27 February 1884 at the age of 70. He had been ailing with bronchitis for a year. His death was notified by Catherine Nally of Liscat. Possibly she was the former Catherine Caulfield (c. 1828-c. 1905) who married Peter Nally (c. 1827-1898) and who may, in fact, have been the piper's sister. His burial place is not known.

The piper's younger neighbour, blind fiddler 'Maney' Boyle-

Superintendent Registrar's District.		Claremorris		Registrar's District		Ballyhaunis				
18 84 DEATHS Registered in the District of Ballyhaunis in the Union of Claremorris in the County of Mayo										
No. (1.)	Date and Place of Death. (2.)	Name and Surname. (3.)	Sex. (4.)	Condition. (5.)	Age last Birthdays. (6.)	Rank, Profession, or Occupation. (7.)	Certified Cause of Death, and Duration of Illness. (8.)	Signature, Qualification, and Residence of Informant. (9.)	When Registered. (10.)	Signature of Registrar. (11.)
115	18 84 Twenty Seventh February Liscat	Pat Caulfield	Male	Widower	70 years	Piper	Bronchitis one year uncertified no medical attendant	Catherine Nally Marry Nally Present at Death Liscat	Thurketh May 1884	C. S. Crean Registrar.

Lyons, only survived him by seven years. She died from TB at Liscat in July 1891 at the age of 40. Her musician husband, James Lyons, who remarried in 1893, died a decade later in February 1903 aged 49. The passing of this trio of 'professional' musicians, coupled with the emigration of other talented players like the Murphys, must have seemed like the end of a musical era in Liscat but, as we shall see, it was not the end of the musical tradition.

PART 3:

Piper Caulfield's musical legacy

*I heard the piper playing,
The piper old and blind,
And knew its secret saying -
The voice of the summer wind*

The Irish Pipes (Katharine Tynan)⁴⁰

Passing it on

While the art of piping art may have practically died out in the locality, nevertheless the music of piper Pat Caulfield and the extended Caulfield clan of Liscat has had repercussions in succeeding generations as their musical legacy filtered down by various means, carried on especially by the single-row accordion players.

Three of the Murphy brothers, sons of Mary Caulfield (who died in 1937), were musicians: Tom (1883-1908), who was killed in the Maypole Colliery disaster, played the accordion, as did Martin ('Murt') (b. 1884), while 'P' played the fiddle. 'A lot of the right old unusual tunes that Martin Murphy had on the box came from the older generations of the Caulfields and from the piper, no doubt', says Michael Waldron of Cloontarriff.

Tom Caulfield of Liscat, although not known as a musician himself, was a good ballad singer according to his grandson, Michael Waldron: 'I remember him singing songs when the neighbours gathered in and he'd be always asked to sing. His opening song was nearly always *John Mitchel*'.

There was another Mary Caulfield from Liscat who became the mother of Tony Moran (born 1899) of Aughtaboy (or Octaboy), an accomplished fiddler and accordionist. Tony emigrated to New York where he had his own band for several years. *Tony Moran's Reel* became part of the repertoire of accordionist Mrs Nora Rooney, née Toolan from Kilchun, Knock (1898-2000), who spent over 50 years in New York where she played with the likes of Paddy O'Brien, Paddy Reynolds, Andy McGann and other great musicians of that era. In her youth she was a regular visitor to house *spraois* in Aughtaboy while visiting her relations where she picked up this old reel from Tony Moran. It is probably part of Piper Caulfield's legacy, as is a tune known as *Nell Halligan's Jig* from the playing of accordionist Nellie Halligan (Lios Míogáin), who married fiddler Jimmy Killeen in Carrownedan. Her mother was Mary Moran from Aughtaboy. *Nell Halligan's Jig* was popularised by P.J. Hennon after he heard Nellie playing it one night at a session in Halpins of Ballyhaunis. Incidentally, the townland Aughtaboy was particularly noted for music and musical connections. Ed Reavy, the Irish-American fiddler and composer, named one of his compositions 'Aughtaboy' in honour of his wife, Brigid Morley, who hailed from the townland, as did the grandfather of Seamus Egan uileann piper and multi instrumentalist, the Philadelphia-based musician of the band *Solas*.⁴¹

New York piper Jerry O'Sullivan, who has roots in East Mayo, is convinced that the music of the 19th century pipers, fiddlers and fluters of East Mayo has been transmitted down to us via the old-style melodeon repertoires which have been preserved by some of today's single-row box-players such as Alan Morrisroe and Paddy Joe Tighe. They have the same style – 'it is pipe-friendly, very bright, bouncy, hearty, incredibly joyous music',

says Jerry, 'and their playing is definitely a window into the music of 100 to 120 years ago.'⁴²

Home-made fiddles and flutes

Keeping the music alive in Liscat and its neighbourhood was often a challenge since money for instruments was never easy to come by. Occasionally, musicians had to make do with home-made instruments, as Michael Waldron recalls:

'Murphys and Caulfields were related to Mick Reddington in Eden and he also had the music in him.'⁴³ He was supposed to be a good flute player. I heard him playing the wooden flute when he was an old man and I think it was a flute that he had made himself, or at least he did play first on a flute he made himself.

It was the same with one of the older fiddles that was here in Cloontarriff. I used to hear my mother saying that it was her brother, Tom Caulfield, that made that fiddle and do you know what he made parts of it from? Pieces of plywood from an old tea chest and pieces of harder wood of some sort for the fingerboard... She reckoned that there was a good enough sound out of it and that it lasted quite a long time all through the years and nearly all of them learned to knock a tune out of it ... and it lasted so long anyway for years until such time as my father married in here and started going to England seasonally to work.

The first time he came home from England he bought a fiddle inside in Pat O'Brien's in Main Street in Ballyhaunis. Instruments and money were scarce and 'P' Murphy, my mother's first cousin from Tamhnach, was mad for music and he was delighted and it was a great story that this 'new' fiddle had landed in our house and he'd be playing away on it every time he called. That same fiddle is still here but I'm afraid no tune was played on it for 40 or 50 years'.

A 'cobbled together' musical instrument could serve its purpose surprisingly well in the hands of a good musician. Traveller musician 'Big Rainey', for example, could produce wonderful sounds on the fiddle even though his instrument 'had barely a square inch of varnish on it' and had a hole in its belly, while his bow was strung not with horse-hair 'but what looked like carpet-thread, fastened to the heel though a cotton-reel nailed onto it'!⁴⁴

Michael Waldron (Cluain Tairbh) with a fiddle bought by his brother in 1947 (Courtesy of Joe Byrne)



The piper's dance tunes

I will end this rambling piper trail with four local dance tunes that are associated with Piper Caulfield and the Liscat hinterland. They are *The Cúigiú Lassies*, *Nell Killeen's Jig*, *Tony Moran's Reel* and *Denny Mulkeen's Highland*. The music of Piper Caulfield and his fellow musicians was primarily dance music – both for individual step-dancing and for sets – and a strong dance tradition survived in Liscat and surrounding townlands into the 1930s.

John Kelly (1916-2012), who learned step-dancing from the famous dancing master, John Tuohy of Kiltimagh, back in 1926, recalled seeing 13 men lined up one night in Rattigan's Hall in Cúigiú to do a reel. That was in the 1930s in the townland adjacent to Liscat. 'Wasn't it a great thing to be able to muster such a number of dancers, all within a small area of Achadh Mór, Knock and Began?', said Kelly. 'Among those men you had dancers like the two Burkes in Tobar, Peter and Mickey Lyons of Mial Tráin [the townland where a young Tom Coen saw Piper Gorman playing in another Lyons house], Johnny Halligan of Cor Thamhnach a relation of Piper Caulfield and sister of Nelly Halligan Killeen, Martin Kearns, Ned Campbell from Sean Mhachaire, Hubert Carney from Mial Tráin, Mick Burke and Denny Mulkeen from Cúigiú'.⁴⁵

John Kelly also documented a half-set from his own townland of Lios an Uisce which was typical of the country-house dances popular in Piper Caulfield's era and locality. The basic format of this East Mayo set-dance – Part 1: Jig, Part 2: Jig, Part 3: Reel, and Part 4: Polka (or Schottische or Waltz) – fits neatly with the four tune sequence mentioned above.

The four tunes have been notated by Castlebar-born multi-instrumentalist, Emer Mayock, herself a distinguished piper, and her musician husband, Dónal Siggins.

The Cúigiú Lassies was recorded by Joe Byrne in Cúigiú School from whistle-player Tom Coen of Bruff and Cuigiú, Achadh Mór in October 1972 and also from single-row box-players, Mick and Joe Burke from Cúigiú Achadh Mór, at Mick's home in October 1974.

Nell Killeen's Jig was recorded by Joe Byrne from Mick and Joe Burke of Cúigiú in Mick's home in 1972 and also from accordion-player, Mrs Kate Neachtain Tighe, originally of Ballinacostello, Achadh Mór, in her home in Ard Doire, Achadh Mór in April 1994. The tune was popularised by P.J. Hennon after he heard Nell Halligan herself playing it at a session in Ballyhaunis.

Tony Moran's Reel, a version of *The Green Groves of Erin*, was recorded by Joe Byrne from accordion-player Mrs Nóra Rooney (née Toolan), originally of Kilchun, Knock, at her home in Ballyfarna in April 1994. The recording is included on *Boscaí Singil: accordionists from East Mayo*

The Cúigiú Lassies



Nell Killeen's Jig



Tony Moran's Reel



Denny Mulkeen's Highland



(Dreoilín Productions, 1994).

Denny Mulkeen's Highland, which is a very unusual tune for Co. Mayo or even Connacht, was recorded by Joe Byrne from Denny Mulkeen, single-row accordion-player, singer and step-dancer, at his home in Cúigiú, Achadh Mór in October 1972.

These four tunes, as recorded from the single-row box players, have an unmistakable 'old ring' to them and, as Jerry O'Sullivan has observed about such tunes, are definitely 'pipey' especially *Nell Killeen's Jig*. The melodeon has preserved the staccato, stuttery, jerky rhythm of the 'tight' piping style. *Tony Moran's Reel* is another fine example of the 'straight' hard-driving reel, ideal for dancing. Mrs Rooney's dynamic version of it on *Boscaí Singil*, even though she over 90 years old at the time, fully does it justice. *Denny Mulkeen's Highland* is a perfect, pithy pipe tune, which also has lot of Scottish resonance as one would expect from a Schottische or Highland.

Although more than 130 years have elapsed since the death of Piper Caulfield, he is not quite forgotten. His influence can still be traced in snippets of local folklore, in features of the landscape and especially in the rich local heritage of country house dance-music. The stories of Piper Caulfield and his fellow pipers of East Mayo are an important part of our heritage and are well worth recovering and preserving.

NOTES

¹ *Mayo News*, 27 Oct. 1928

² Obituary in the *Western People*, 11 Jan. 1908.

³ Gearóid Ó hAllmhuráin, *A pocket history of Irish traditional music* (Dublin, 1998), p. 67.

⁴ Pat Kelly of Lios an Uisce, a pupil of Cill Bheacáin NS, writing for the Schools Folklore Collection, 1938 - www.dúchas.ie; Pat was an uncle of dance-teacher, Gráinne Kelly-Freene.

⁵ Francis O'Neill, *Irish minstrels and musicians: the story of Irish music* (Chicago, 1913), p. 432.

⁶ My thanks to Paul Waldron of Ballyhaunis, whose many years of research regarding pipers Groarke and Garoghan will hopefully come to fruition soon.

⁷ John Joe Fleming, Cluain Tairbh, Knock in an interview with Joe Byrne in 1995. John Joe's lore came from his uncle Mick 'Sky' Carney, a fiddle and box player and a neighbour of Caulfields of Liscat.

⁸ Michael Kelly, 'A Mayo piper in Brooklyn: the musical world of Michael Carney (1872-1938)' (forthcoming).

⁹ *Irish Times*, 31 Jan. 1912; NLI, MS 13,069/33/9, Ceannt and O'Brennan Papers, 1851-1953.

¹⁰ Seán Donnelly, 'A Piping MP: Joseph Myles McDonnell (1796-1872), Doo Castle, Ballaghaderreen, County Mayo', *The Sean Reid Society Journal*, i (1999), 1-6.

¹¹ Michael Kelly, 'The Cloonfad Piper' in *An Píobaire*, vol. 13, nos 1 & 2 (January & April, 2017).

¹² Tom Coen in an interview with Joe Byrne.

¹³ Francis O'Neill, *Irish minstrels and musicians: the story of Irish music* (Chicago, 1913), pp 271-3.

¹⁴ *An Píobaire*, no. 4 (March, 1970), p. 4.

¹⁵ *Irish Times*, 31 Jan. 1912.

¹⁶ Kevin McHugh, Rinn Eanaigh, Foxford, quoted in *Fidiléirí: Mayo fiddlers* (double cassette and book, Dreoilín 005/006), p. 5.

¹⁷ *An Píobaire*, vol. 2, no. 39 (May, 1988), p. 2.

¹⁸ *Longford Journal*, 16 Jan. 1869.

¹⁹ Frank Whelan, 'Legacy of "The Limerick Piper" Remembered' in *Treoir*, vol. 48, no. 3 (October 2017), pp 25-6.

²⁰ The poem is frequently mentioned, for example, in the Schools Folklore Collection of the 1930s – see www.dúchas.ie.

²¹ 'Paddy Conneely' in *The Irish Penny Journal*, 3 Oct. 1840.

²² Siobhán Long, *Irish Times*, 14 Feb. 2014.

²³ Watercolour portrait of blind piper Paddy Conneely (c. 1800-1851) by Frederic William Burton (1816-1900), who had been introduced to Conneely by his friend, George Petrie; Burton's most famous painting, *The Meeting on the Turret Stairs*, was voted Ireland's favourite painting in 2012.

²⁴ *Downpatrick Recorder*, 4 Aug. 1855.

²⁵ Bryan McMahon, 'The Brow of Piper's hill'.

²⁶ James Jennings, Eskermorilly (aged 97) recorded for Knock NS 1938 Schools Folklore Collection: <http://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4427890/4354782> .

²⁷ Nicholas Carolan, 'Courtney's "union pipes" and the terminology of Irish bellows-blown bagpipes', Version 1.0 as at 14 May 20, at www.itma.ie.

²⁸ Kevin Whelan, 'Pre- and Post-Famine Landscape Change' in Cathal Póirtéir (ed.), *The Great Famine* (Cork, 1995), pp 23-31.

²⁹ From 'Halloween' by Thomas Ryan ('A Drangan Boy'), whose works were transcribed by a pupil of Clochar na Trócaire NS, Drangan for the Schools Folklore Collection, 1938.

³⁰ *Southern Reporter and Cork Commercial Courier*, 20 April 1843.

³¹ John Joe Fleming, Cluain Tairbh, Knock, quoted in *Fidiléirí: Mayo fiddlers* (double cassette and book, Dreoilín 005/006), p. 8.

³² Michael Waldron, in an interview with Joe Byrne in 2017.

³³ Lawrence E. McCullough, biographical entry on Patrick Hennelly in Fintan Vallely (ed.), *The companion to Irish traditional music* (Cork, 1999), p. 186.

³⁴ Alo Waldron's poem 'The Cott' published in *Glór 2016* (p. 118) tells the story of the return to Liscat of 'Maney' Boyle-Lyons' grandson, Jim Lyons, in search of his roots.

³⁵ John Joe Fleming, Cluain Tairbh, Knock, quoted in *Fidiléirí: Mayo fiddlers* (double cassette and book, Dreoilín 005/006), p. 8.

³⁶ Pat Waldron (c. 1819-94), Liscat.

³⁷ *Connaught Telegraph*, 2 Oct. Sept. 1880.

³⁸ *The Nation*, 31 December 1881.

³⁹ Letter from Patrick McTighe, Knock, published in the *Connaught Telegraph*, 31 Dec. 1881.

⁴⁰ Although she lived in Claremorris during the First World War, Katherine Tynan (Mrs Hinkson) (1861-1931) had composed this poem in 1906, so we can't claim that it was inspired by an East Mayo piper.

⁴¹ Joe Byrne (ed.), *Boscaí Singil: accordionists from East Mayo* (Dreoilín Productions, 1994), p. 19.

⁴² Jerry O'Sullivan in conversation with Joe Byrne on the radio programme *Ceoil agus Éalaíon* broadcast on Mid-West Radio on 6 Sept. 2017.

⁴³ Mick Reddington (born 1892) was a son of Mary Caulfield of Liscat, who married James Reddington of Eden in 1886.

⁴⁴ Professor Tony Knowland in the liner notes for the CD *The Rainey's* (Pavee Point Travellers Centre, 2006).

⁴⁵ Joe Byrne (ed.), *Boscaí Singil: accordionists from East Mayo* (Dreoilín Productions, 1994), p. 8.