

From Croagh Patrick to Table Mountain: A Mayo Uilleann Piper at the Cape of Good Hope (1845) - Seán Donnelly

Between 1848 and 1853 the English artist, (John) Thomas Baines (1820–75), took part in several expeditions into the interior of Africa from the Cape of Good Hope. In July 1849 he met a Scottish settler in the Baviaans River Valley, Eastern Cape, who played a number of musical instruments, including the Irish union (later uilleann) pipes:

The evening was spent in listening to several of the sweet old Scottish melodies played with much taste and feeling by Mr. Ainslie upon the Irish bagpipes, which, as being less likely to get out of order, he prefers to those of his own country, and beside which, he also handled with considerable skill the accordion and some other instruments.¹

By the time Baines met Ainslie, at least one Irish piper was already pursuing a professional career at the Cape of Good Hope. He also had a Scottish link through his employer, Hamilton Ross (1774–1853), who was born to Scottish parents in Co. Galway. Ross had come out to the Cape in 1796, an officer in the Scots Brigade during the first British occupation, 1796–1803.² He fell in love with Catherine Elizabeth van den Berg (1781–1843), the daughter of a rich Dutch merchant. Her father opposed the match, wishing his daughter to enter an arranged marriage, so she eloped with Ross when his regiment left for India in September 1798. Having married in Madras in January 1799, the couple returned in 1801 to the Cape, where Ross retired on half-pay in 1803. He set up in business as a merchant, and built up the first trading fleet based at the Cape, importing goods from India and provisioning the islands of Mauritius, Reunion and St Helena. He rose to be a leader of the local mercantile elite, a founder of the Cape of Good Hope Bank, and a member of the Cape Legislative Assembly. Having acquired a town residence,

¹ *Journal of a residence in Africa, 1848–53*, ed. by R.F. Kennedy (2 vols, Cape Town, 1961–4), I, p. 124.

² J.L. McCracken, 'Irishmen in government in South Africa', in idem., (ed.), *The Irish in South Africa, 1795–1910*. South African–Irish Studies II (1992), p. 25. The author states that Ross joined the Aberdeenshire Rifles at the age of sixteen, and other sources say that he served in the Scots Greys, Scots Guards, etc., but the regiment was the 81st Aberdeenshire (Highland) Regiment: 'The Descendants of Jacobus Johannes van den Berg' @<http://www.vandenberg.co.za/jacobusjohannes.htm> Accessed 18 May 2012.

Mount Nelson on Government Avenue, he then bought a country estate, Sans Souci, six miles away at Newlands, in the foothills of Table Mountain. At both he laid out beautiful gardens and grounds, growing numerous exotic trees, shrubs and fruits at San Souci, both outdoors and in hothouses. Ross's wife Catherine Elizabeth died in May 1843; the couple had four daughters.³

Two years later, in 1845, Ross was corresponding with a friend or agent, apparently in England, about engaging an Irish piper for his household. Extracts from his letters were published in 1984:

O'ROURKE, *1829 in County Mayo, Ireland, Bagpiper

According to family records in the possession of Major Kenneth Robert Thomas, O'Rourke was brought out from Ireland in approximately 1845 to be employed as a member of the staff at "Sans Souci", the residence of the Honourable Hamilton-Ross of Mount Nelson in Newlands. In a letter dated 14 July 1845, he writes: "As there is a possibility of my returning to England, we had better let the piper affair rest, unless you can get a *good one without encumbrances*. I would not think of taking a man to such a distance from his family nor want to take a man with a large family, but if you could get a *good Piper*, without *encumbrances*, whether I return or not I would be glad to take him on the following terms: I would pay for his passage to the Cape and when there he would live in my house with the Steward, the Butler and upper servants, I would pay him besides at the rate of £30 a year, and if he prefers living out of the House I would give him more; he would have to play in the evenings for us when we had company or when we wanted him, but on other evenings he might go out to other families, and if *a real good player*, he would not doubt get plenty of calls and plenty of money; I would engage him for one year certain, and if he did not like me, or I did not like him, he would be at liberty to return, and I would find him a *free passage at my expense*, or he might stay at the Cape if he preferred it; to prevent any disappointment or misunderstanding, I have been as particular as possible. £30 a year with board and lodging may not be thought much, but in addition to this it would cost me full £20 to

³ W.J. De Cock (ed.) Dictionary of South African biography (5 vols, Cape Town, 1968 – c.1987), ii, p. 606; 'The Descendants of Jacobus Johannes van den Berg' @<http://www.vandenberg.co.za/jacobusjohannes.htm> Accessed 18 May 2012.

bring him out and, if he did not like the place, I would have to send him back, and by our laws, no contract made here could oblige him to remain with me more than one year. — I am taking out a Butler *who is an Irish man* on the same terms; if the Piper be a Catholic, we have Chapels and a Bishop, with Priests at the Cape” (italics by the author of the letter). The quest was successful and in a letter dated 12 August 1845, he writes as follows: “I forgot to mention that I have got a beautiful Piper; all the way from the County of Mayo; I have never heard a better: his having neither *wife* nor *child*, and being only 26 years old, makes him quite a treasure to an old fellow in the dumps. His name is O’Rourke, or O’Rourke, a descendant from the Kings of Ireland, so that my piper has better blood in him than half the lords in your land.”⁴

The year of birth in the heading to the entry should obviously read 1819. Only a month elapsed between Ross’s two letters, and if they were to the same man (as they seem to be), then it was hardly he who arranged to send O’Rourke to Cape Town. Moreover, Ross would hardly have needed to identify the piper if his correspondent had been responsible for dispatching him from England or Ireland. O’Rourke, then, reached the Cape independently, perhaps on a ship bound for Australia. Though Ross thought that £30 a year plus keep was not a high wage, it was what he proposed to pay his butler and he did promise to raise it if the piper chose not to live in. Ross did add, too, that the novelty of the instrument would ensure that the player was in demand elsewhere.

Fifty years later Dr William Henry Ross, a grandson of Hamilton’s born in 1835, recalled O’Rourke at San Souci.⁵ The doctor was the third son of Hamilton’s daughter, Maria Johanna (1802–87), who married her first cousin, John Ross (1807–81), born in Dublin, the son of a Robert Ross.⁶ The couple succeeded to Mount Nelson, keeping up the tradition of hospitality there – at least on a formal level – and presumably to San Souci:⁷

⁴ Jacques P. Malan (ed.), *South African music encyclopedia* (4 vols, Cape Town, 1979–86), III, p. 371.

⁵ C. Pama, *Wagon Road to Wynberg* (Tafelberg [SA], 1979), p. 56.

⁶ 'South African Settlers', p. 656 @<http://www.southafricansettlers.com> Accessed 18 May 2012.

⁷ Richard William Murray, *South African Reminiscences: a series of sketches of prominent public events since 1854 ...* (Cape Town, 1894), p. 187.

Dr W.H. Ross, writing in about 1905, describes the way of life of the gentry of the suburbs on the southern slopes of Table Mountain: “On New Year’s Day and other festive seasons it was more delightful to dance out of doors than within. Impromptu garden parties were soon turned into ‘Hops’ and the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren joined in to the fiddling of an old Johnny – the Irish bag pipes (another novelty to many) for he could also make his pipes do more than reels and could speak *Polly put the kettle on*, could play many jigs and country dances and even sing a comical Irish song.” — In all probability this was still the same O’Rourke, then an old man.
...⁸

At first sight, Ross’s use of the term ‘fiddling’ simply meant that O’Rourke played the fiddle for the dancing, but he could possibly have used it to mean just playing music. Then, again, if O’Rourke was getting on in age, the fiddle would have been less physically demanding than the pipes when playing for long bouts of dancing. Ross’s memory of O’Rourke as an old man could have meant that he was recalling his parents’ era at San Souci, rather than his grandfather’s. However, since he was ten years old when O’Rourke arrived, he is bound to have been one of ‘the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren’ present on New Year’s Day during Hamilton Ross’s time. In all probability, he knew O’Rourke for decades, and remembered him as playing the pipes, and possibly the fiddle in later years. Since Ross hardly intended ‘an old Johnny’ to be pejorative, as in ‘an old codger’ or the like, ‘Johnny’ was probably O’Rourke’s forename, and Ross may have intended inserting the surname later but failed to recall it. There are obviously words missing after this, a lacuna that may have been in the original manuscript, as an excerptor could hardly have left the syntax so faulty.

Coincidentally, Ross’s brief description of the *al fresco* New Year celebrations at San Souci is confirmed in striking detail by a longer, fictionalised, account published in 1858. The anonymous author, apparently a member of the landed gentry in either Great Britain or Ireland, calls himself ‘a newly arrived T.G.’, an abbreviation whose meaning is not now obvious. When bad weather drove his ship into Port Elizabeth, 478 miles east of Cape Town, in December 1853, he decided to

⁸ Malan, *South African music encyclopedia*, III, p. 371.

accept an invitation extended years previously by a college friend to spend Christmas at the Cape of Good Hope. Two days and two nights of bouncing around in a primitive mail-cart on equally primitive roads saw him reach Cape Town on Christmas Eve, exhausted, bruised and filthy. After a week of lavish hospitality in brilliant sunshine, weather which induced a certain nostalgia for the dark, cold and rain of a northern Christmas, 'we availed ourselves of an invitation to "assist" at a colonial merrymaking, and usher in 1854 with all the honours due to it.' The destination, six miles from Cape Town, was 'Lismore Hall, seat of the oldest family in the colony ...'. (The Dutch did not count, of course, having settled at the Cape only in 1652.) The name 'Lismore Hall' was clearly modelled on those of other Irish-owned estates around Cape Town called Donnybrook, Killarney, etc.⁹ Indeed, Roscommon was the name Hamilton Ross gave to the little settlement on his own estate housing outdoor workers,¹⁰ and Athlone is still the name of an area in nearby Claremont. That 'Lismore Hall' was San Souci is also implied by the distance travelled from Cape Town, six miles, and the names of the places the party passed through, Plumstead and Rondebosch, for instance.

The author gives a charming picture of his host greeting his guests with his family and staff on the steps of the hall:

All the inmates of the hall—with their entertainer at their head, a hale, erect, white-haired patriarch of seventy—were assembled at the terrace to exchange congratulations, and distribute largesses of half-crowns among the junior members of the family, collected for one day, at least, under the same roof, when we drove up. The usual compliments of the season were exchanged, and minute inquiries made of all the lads under sixteen, as to the number of their pockets, so as to have a coin placed in each for luck. ...

The gathering comprised thirty-eight members of the one family, the author being the only non-relative present, which implies that his hosts in Cape Town were also members of the Ross family. After an enormous breakfast, the guests spent the

⁹ For the general picture, see Donal P. MacCracken, 'Irish settlement and identity in South Africa before 1910', *Irish Historical Studies* xxviii (Nov. 1992), pp 134–49.

¹⁰ MacCracken, 'Irishmen in government in South Africa', p. 25.

morning rambling through the magnificent grounds of the estate, plucking and eating the various exotic fruits growing outdoors and in hothouses. They joined the youngsters on a visit to Newlands Spring nearby, still a local attraction, where jets of paralytically cold water bubbled up through quicksand from a great depth. Returning to the big house, the party sat down to a magnificent dinner, after which the piper put in his appearance:

At about three p.m. a fat old butler in the most snowy of gloves and unexceptionable evening costume, announced dinner to be served; and the master of the feast, with a grinning young native at his back, waving a bunch of ostrich feathers, took his place at the head of his hospitable table, and glanced with pardonable pride at the goodly array of viands and plate set out before his numerous progeny and their olive branches. Excluding the writer, we mustered eight-and-thirty beings belonging to the same stock. What boots it to tell of the curries and ragouts, the joints and entries, the poultry, pastry, and game, of the first course; of the pies and custards, puddings, tarts, and curious confectionary of the second; or of the endless display of grapes and strawberries, figs, peaches, and pineapples, raisins, walnuts, and water-melons, at the desert Suffice it to say, that it was nearly five o'clock ere all the proper toasts were honoured, and the gentlemen joined the ladies. Then there was a general cry for "Jemmy the piper," and an adjournment to the lawn. Speedily Master James Blake, with his Irish bagpipes, made his appearance, and with a touch of his forelock and a back fling of his right leg, requested to know what tune would be most acceptable. The fellow, with his laughing eyes and thoroughly Celtic face, was evidently a "character," and decidedly popular; for after getting permission to play what he liked, he immediately struck up "Polly put the kettle on, and make me quick some tea!" By some means he managed to make these very words issue from the body of his instrument in such a comical manner, that the company fairly screamed with delight, and gave instant orders for the desired beverage. Gigs, melodies, and polkas followed in quick succession; the young folks, as usual, sent urgent despatches to the neighbours to come and join them, and then dashed with the utmost zeal into the circling waltz and fatiguing gallopade: the servants—male and female—pressed forward to see the fun, and being descried, were ordered by their masters to dance for their amusement; while the old people placidly looked on, and enjoyed their coffee a la Turque. The new

arrivals brought with them fresh musicians and vigorous limbs: and so master and valet, maiden and maid, footman and groom, and pages of high and low degree, in inextricable confusion, went footing it and capering it over the smoothly-mown lawn, until even the grass broke out into a violent perspiration, and the falling dews drove the company within doors. A ball-room was soon improvised by moving all the furniture out of the great hall, and submitting its highly-polished oak floor to the indignity of being trampled and jumped upon by stalwart cavaliers in heavy boots, and having its lustre stamped out of it by the ponderous Balmoral of more than one buxom wench. Albeit it suffered but slightly in comparison with the red tiles of the capacious kitchen, where the above-mentioned attendants plunged and curvetted—pranced and leaped, shrieked, laughed, slapped their hands and thighs, and indulged in such eccentric gymnastic feats amongst themselves, that it seemed as if Bedlam had broken loose, and no keepers were to be found for love or money.¹¹

The one discrepancy between this account and the known facts is the date, 1 January 1854, whereas Hamilton Ross had died on 3 February 1853. It would be reasonable to assume, however, that the narrator postdated the event, a deliberate alteration, just as he changed the name of the estate and the piper. Of the former, it was already noted that the altered name reflected those of Irish-owned estates around Cape Town. The change in piper's name was also minimal: 'Jemmy' is close in sound to 'Johnny'; 'Blake' is a fairly common Connacht surname, strongly associated with Co. Galway, and O'Rourke was from neighbouring Co. Mayo.

But the party piece, 'Polly Put the Kettle On', would seem to clinch the identification. This trick was bound to intrigue listeners unfamiliar with an instrument such as the uilleann pipes, and was probably one of a number of ploys professional players used to catch the attention of general audiences. The trick was an aural illusion, of course. The nursery rhyme, 'Polly/Molly put the kettle on' (x 3), 'And make us all some tea', is so universally known that all a piper had to do was to play particular notes suggesting the sound of the words sung to them, and the

¹¹ 'December in the South', *The London University Magazine*, iii (Jan. 1858), pp 14–17. A 'Balmoral' was a heavy laced walking shoe. A slightly shortened version of the article appeared as 'Christmas at the Cape of Good Hope' in *The Morning Chronicle* (London), 25 December 1858.

listeners' minds did the rest.¹² This trick was known to earlier pipers, including the famous O'Farrell, a man who made a career for himself in England and Scotland, frequently playing on the London stage between 1800s and the 1830s. Said to have been from Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, O'Farrell performed, taught, and seemingly made pipes, besides being the author of *O'Farrell's collection of national Irish music for the union pipes ...* (London, 1804), and *O'Farrell's pocket companion for the Irish or union pipes ...* (4 vols., London, 1809). In April 1830 he played in a dramatic piece called *Barney Brallaghan*, based on the song/tune of that name by Jonathan Blewitt (1782–1853), in the Surrey Theatre, London. His performance of 'Polly Put the Kettle On' charmed the reviewers every bit as much as O'Rourke's was to do at San Souci:

Mr. Farrell, the Irish piper, played two airs on the union pipes in the fair- scene. His execution of the air "Molly, put the kettle on," was most extraordinary. He actually "handled his pipes" in such a way that the words marked above were as distinctly breathed from the pipes as they would be when articulated by the human voice.¹³

In the scene of Donnybrook Fair, O'FARRELL, the Irish Piper, performed upon the Union pipes in a most extraordinary manner, introducing imitations of the noises peculiar to a farm-yard. The most astonishing part, however, of his performance was the manner in which he played the old tune, "*Polly, put the kettle on.*" We have often heard it said that the Irish make the pipes speak: in this instance he completely verified the assertion: the words, "*Polly, put the kettle on,*" were almost as distinctly articulated as they could be by the organs of speech. His performance was loudly applauded.¹⁴

The coincidence of O'Rourke's being from Co. Mayo and playing 'Polly Put the Kettle On' raises the possibility that he had a link to a piper born the year he reached Cape Town. This was Thomas Garoghan, born in 1845 to Mayo parents in Coventry, Warwickshire. A full-time professional player, he came to general public attention quite late in his career as 'Lynch the Piper', a character in the two-act

¹² Making an uilleann-pipe chanter apparently speak intelligible words was a trick still known to old pipers in the twentieth century. The Dublin piper Dan O'Dowd (1903–89) used to do it, as did the Roscommon piper Andy Conroy (1911–89), who spent most of his life in Dublin and New York.

¹³ *London Standard*, 20 April 1830. I am very grateful to Nicholas Carolan, Director of the Irish Traditional Music Archive, for this reference and the next.

¹⁴ *Morning Post* (London), 20 April 1830.

comic opera, *Shamus O'Brien*. With music by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford and libretto by George H. Jessop from the poem by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, this work toured England and Ireland and during 1895–6. When the opera played Belfast in November 1896, the enterprising Garoghan advertised private recitals before and after the performances, obviously seeking to capitalize on the comparative rarity in ‘respectable’ circles of the union pipes, an instrument then in what appeared an irreversible decline.¹⁵ Coincidentally, in Belfast the previous year, ‘a rare old set of Irish bagpipes’ that had cost an antiques collector £50 was offered for sale at £5 in the posthumous sale of the collection.¹⁶

When Garoghan played at the 1912 Oireachtas in The Rotunda, Dublin, ‘his music was much admired, and by uttering intelligibly on the chanter, “Polly put the kettle on,” the unique trick roused the audience to enthusiasm.’¹⁷ The reaction suggests that the trick had ceased to be a common one. Garoghan’s possible connection with the Cape Town piper would have been through one of his two teachers. He told a newspaper reporter in 1897 that he was the last of forty Irish pipers who had once played around the English Midlands. Besides having Mayo parents, he had learned piping during the 1860s from an uncle of his, James O’Rourke of Birmingham, and from ‘Michael M’Glynn’, a native of ‘Aughamore’, possibly one of the places called Aghamore in Co. Mayo.¹⁸ Like most trades, professional piping tended to run in families, and though coincidence cannot be ruled out, the odds are that two professional pipers surnamed O’Rourke from Co. Mayo, contemporaries or near-contemporaries, were related.

Garoghan’s uncle, James O’Rourke, may have been the Irish piper in Birmingham whom the author George Moore (1852–1933) heard as a schoolboy in 1863 or 1864. With his brother Maurice (1854–1939), George was returning to the Jesuit school at St Mary’s College, Oscott, Birmingham – where he was utterly miserable and continually ill – from the family home, Moore Hall, Carnacon, Co. Mayo. The brothers travelled in the care of a Mayo priest who was going on holidays to a

¹⁵ The Belfast News-Letter, 3 November 1896.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 18 December 1895.

¹⁷ Francis O’Neill, *Irish minstrels and musicians* (Chicago, 1913), p. 284.

¹⁸ ‘London Letter’, *The Weekly Irish Times*, 25 September 1897: O’Neill, *Irish minstrels*, pp 284–5.

cousin in Birmingham, a provisions merchant, with whom they stayed overnight. Reminiscing about that night fifty years later, George and Maurice found that one recalled aspects the other had forgotten. The miserable bedding in a room with uncurtained windows had stuck in both their memories. The overpowering smell of cheese in the shop had induced a lifelong dislike of it in Maurice, and while George remembered the bad food at dinner, Maurice did not:

I don't remember the dinner, but what I remember very well, is that a number of people came in after dinner, and that a piper was sent for, and we were asked to say if he was as good as our Connaught pipers. They all turned towards us, waiting for us to speak, and I can remember my own embarrassment, and my effort to get at a fair decision, and wishing to say that Moran was the better piper.¹⁹

The casual way the piper was sent for is a hint at how common they were in Irish communities in major English urban centres during this period.²⁰ The piper Maurice thought superior to the Birmingham one was Martin Moran, also from Co. Mayo. As a six-year-old child in 1848, James Berry (1842–1914) saw Moran on St Patrick's Day at a 'Cake' – a social gathering held as needed to raise funds for a struggling family – in his native village of Bunowen, Louisburgh.

When I came on the scene, all the people were gathered in a vast crowd, and the piper, a young man, sat on a chair in the open air playing 'Haste to the Wedding.' He was six feet four inches in height and admirably well-shaped, and was surely the most distinguished man I have ever seen, although he was blind.

This was Martin Moran, the son of a well-to-do farmer in the locality, considered to be the best piper in Connacht in his day. It was a wonderful and glorious sight to see him seated and playing, sometimes sweeping the keys of his pipes with great, long fingers.

In after years when I had grown up, this masterful sweeping of his pipes filled my mind with visions of Carolan and the great and grand old harpers of ancient Erin.

Martin became a great favourite with John McHale, the lion of Tuam, who presented

¹⁹ George Moore, *Hail and Farewell: Ave, Salve, Vale* (3 vols, London, 1911–14), ii, p. 82.

²⁰ There is a wealth of information on Irish pipers in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Nicholas Carolan, 'Courtney's "Union Pipes" and the terminology of Irish bellows-blown bagpipes' @<http://www.itma.ie/digitalibrary/pdfdownloads/>

him with a set of pipes which cost thirty-five pounds, and presenting them the Archbishop christened him the last of the minstrels.²¹

Coincidentally, another piper associated with the Moores of Moore Hall was also remembered in tradition as being exceptionally tall. All-but-blind, 'Big' Thomas Killeen (1828–1906) stood well over six feet and was, like Moran, the son of a prosperous farmer: 'a warm farmer' was the local term around Ballyglass. His brother Patrick (1835–*post* 1911), whose sight was marginally better, had trained as a dancing master and the two travelled around together, teaching music and dancing. It was long remembered around Ballyglass that the Killeens enjoyed the patronage and support of George Henry Moore (1810–70), father of Maurice and George, MP for Co. Mayo a number of times. It was a tradition among their relatives that the brothers had been arrested a number of times under the Prevention of Crimes (Ireland) Act of 1881 – the Coercion Act – as they travelled around at night teaching dancing and playing music, and that Moore, as MP for Mayo, had arranged for them to be exempted from the act.²² Moore, of course, had died eleven years before the Coercion Act became law, and it was John O'Connor Power (1846–1919), MP for Mayo, 1874–85, to whom the Killeens appealed. He raised their plight with the Chief Secretary for Ireland in the House of Commons on 30 November and again on 1 December 1882.²³

Previously, George Henry Moore had a nasty political encounter with another physically imposing player, this time 'a gentleman piper', Joseph Myles McDonnell (c.1796–1872) of Doo Castle, Ballaghaderreen, Co. Mayo. Popularly called 'Joe Mór' ('Big Joe') from his prodigious size – possibly a throwback to his galloglass ancestors – McDonnell played the pipes, as had his father, also Joseph Myles (c.1765–c.1845). Moore had clashed with McDonnell on a personal level in 1839, after buying a racehorse from him for £100 cash and a promissory note for £400.

²¹ James Berry, *Tales from the west of Ireland*, ed. by Gertrude M. Horgan (Dublin, 1966; pbk. ed., London, 1988), p. 23; O'Neill, *Irish minstrels*, p. 342.

²² Ruairí Somers, 'The Killeens of Ballyglass', *An Piobaire*, ii, uimh. 37 (Samhain 1987), 5. The dates of birth were calculated from the censuses of 1901 and 1911. Patrick is absent from the former but in the latter was living with his nephew, Thomas, a son of the piper's.

²³ 'Prevention of Crime (Ireland) Act—Thomas and Patrick Killeen.' HC Deb 30 November 1882 vol 275 cc376-7 @http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1882/nov/30/prevention-of-crime-ireland-act-thomas#S3V0275PO_18821130_HOC_82 Accessed 18 May 2012

Shortly afterwards McDonnell, perennially short of money, offered to take £200 for the promissory note, an offer Moore accepted. Subsequently, finding himself broke again, McDonnell went back on his word, demanding the full value of the note and accusing Moore of cheating him. After numerous blusters and threats, McDonnell challenged Moore to a duel, but Moore called his bluff, leaving him to emerge with little credit from the affair.²⁴

The political clash came about in 1846, when Moore stood for election as MP for Mayo, seeking to take the seat lately vacated by his brother-in-law Martin Blake. When he refused to take a pre-election pledge committing him to support the Repeal of the Union, Daniel O’Connell and Archbishop MacHale put McDonnell up against him. After a very bitter, quasi-sectarian contest, McDonnell won, but a year later, Moore comfortably defeated him in a snap general election, having this time taken the Repeal pledge. During his year as MP, McDonnell once attempted to play the pipes in the House of Commons, but was stopped in time. In the early 1900s, a magnificent set of pipes he owned – made by the famous Timothy Kenna on Essex Quay, Dublin – was donated to the National Museum of Ireland by his granddaughter, Louisa Darcy, through her relative Sir Anthony Patrick McDonnell, Under Secretary of State for Ireland, 1902–6, and afterwards Lord McDonnell of Swinford.²⁵

As to O’Rourke in Cape Town, Dr Ross’s recollection of him as an old man suggests that he continued on at Sans Souci after Hamilton Ross died, and possibly that John Ross kept up the custom of entertaining the extended family on New Year’s Day. The Ross family sold Mount Nelson in 1894 and the hotel built on the site, the first in Cape Town with hot and cold running water, soon became an international icon, patronized by the rich and famous, which it still is. The strong Scottish presence in South Africa has almost certainly ensured that the Highland pipes have been heard within its precincts at New Year. It is doubtful, however, if any Irish piper welcomed in the New Year there, or at San Souci, after the death or departure of Johnny O’Rourke from Co. Mayo.

²⁴ Maurice George Moore, *An Irish gentleman, George Henry Moore: his travels, his racing, his politics*. With a preface by George Moore. (London, 1913), pp. 74–80, 135–8, 150.

²⁵ Seán Donnelly, ‘A Piping MP: Joseph Myles McDonnell (1796–1872), Doo Castle, Ballaghaderreen, County Mayo’, *The Seán Reid Society Journal*, i (March 1999), 7:1–6. @<http://seanreidsociety.org/>