

GLENLO ABBEY (formerly known as Kentfield)

Sincere thanks to Zara Brady who kindly provided this article

The Ffrench Family 1740-1855

Glenlo Abbey was built in 1740 by a well-known Galway banker and member of Ffrench family - one of the fourteen tribes of Galway. The Ffrench family were descendants of a knight who accompanied William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings in the Norman conquest of England. The family held a position of authority in Galway city and county with some members elected city Mayor. Others acquired estates throughout the county.

The Ffrench family resided at Glenlo Abbey for 115 years. During their time on the estate, the land was used to producing wheat, barley, potatoes, flax.

The stone chapel was built for the private use of the lady of the house in 1790 - but the chapel was never consecrated as the lady of the house died during its construction. The chapel was finally completed during the restoration of Glenlo 190 years after Lady Ffrench's death.

The Blake Family 1855-1897

Another "Tribe of Galway", the Blake family, were also very well-known and held state positions in Galway and Connaught over the centuries.

The family, of British extraction, were said to be descendants of Sir Aplake, a Knight of King Arthur's round table.

They first arrived in Ireland during the reign of Henry II accompanying the infamous Strongbow who headed up the first Anglo-Norman migration in 1169/70. They went on to own estates throughout Connaught including Menlo Castle, a mansion now in ruin on the banks of the river Corrib.

Thomas Blake purchased Glenlo and the estate in 1855. Glenlo had been leased before Blake's arrival. In 1846, Glenlo had been advertised in a newspaper - The Galway Vindicator - described as a "most desirable residence". The advert described "accommodation a family of distinction can desire, in which are included, three Reception rooms, and nine sleeping rooms". It also described: "Dairy, Turf and Coal Lock-up Houses, with very appropriate and well-built offices, Stewart's Apartments Garden, Farm Yard".

The Ffrench and Blake family tombs can be seen today in the grounds of Bushy Park church (St. James' Church). The large and prominent tombs indicate the wealth and position the families held.

The Palmer Family 1897 – 1984

The Palmer family purchased Glenlo in 1897 - they were wealthy land owners operating flour and maize mills in Galway city.

Milling in Galway city was a major industry with up to 30 mills operating by the mid-19th century - providing employment to hundreds of people. Water powerfully flowed through Galway city as it does to this day. Its energy was generated by itself

as it flowed from the Lough Corrib - one of Ireland's largest lakes - to the river Corrib which is just two miles long. The power of the river was harnessed and a milling industry developed in the 19th Century.

The Palmers also ran a brewery called "The Nuns' Island Brewery", named after its location next to the Poor Clare Convent. - And they branded their "T Palmer's Superior Porter" as "equal to Dublin".

The mills of Galway suffered greatly with the arrival of the railway - which brought free trade and cheaper products from the US. The small factories could not compete with progress - and the mills were empty and quiet by the turn of the 20th century. The Palmer family had sold much of their land to support their milling business and lost their fortune. The family then focused their attention on farming the estate at Glenlo.

Jeffrey Palmer, the second generation of Palmers to live at Glenlo, fought in the First World War. After returning from the battle field, he married one of Ireland's first commercial models, Evelyn McNamara from Limerick. Evelyn was famed for her beauty and was the main model for Palmolive shampoo.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Jeffrey and Evelyn Palmer opened their home to paying guests and were able to maintain the estate. Many distinguished guests stayed at Glenlo during this time including judges from Dublin working at the Galway courthouse.

Trevor Wardell, grandson of Jeffrey Palmer, was the last of the family to live at Glenlo, had a dairy and organic farm. However, the costs of running the estate and maintaining the old house were escalating and this attributed to them deciding to sell Glenlo Abbey, which they did in 1984.

The Bourke Family

The Bourke family purchased Glenlo Abbey in 1984.

The Bourke's began a major restoration project as the main house was in need of repair and the abbey was in ruin. They brought the buildings back to their former grandeur - with new and interconnecting buildings which went on to form the five star hotel.

The farmland became a nine-hole parkland golf course and driving range with walking and jogging routes where guests enjoy the exceptional beauty and peacefulness of the Glenlo estate. Glenlo Abbey opened as a five star hotel in 1992 and soon established a national and international reputation as a luxury country retreat within Galway city and a desirable wedding and function venue.

The Lally Family

In 2013, the Lally Family took over Glenlo Abbey Hotel and Golf Course.

Drawing on their expertise in the hotel and hospitality industry and their passion for excellence, the family has invested greatly in Glenlo Abbey.

Facilities have been upgraded, including the golf course and driving range and the hotel has been refurbished to create the opulent environment reminiscent of the

great country house Glenlo Abbey once was.

Miscellaneous Notes:

Freeman's Journal

J. Killery is mentioned in Freeman's Journal as being a Tenant of Kentville.

O'Donovan's Field Name Books

lists Kentfield, in Ragoon Parish. Proprietor Lady French, Kentfield House, otherwise, Glenlo. This townland is held by Proprietor with a neat two story high house with offices and garden. Known by the name of Glenlo House, and adjoining said House is a Chapel for the accommodation of the family. The Demesne is well planted. Soil good arable pasture and meadow producing wheat, barley, potatoes, flax. Nothing more remarkable on it. 144 acres.

Situation: N.E of the parish. Bounded on the North by the parish of Oranmore in the Liberties, on E. by Bushy Park, on South by Balagh, and on west by Gortatleava and Killeen.

Proprietor: Lady French of Kentfield House, otherwise Glenlo House.

NUI Galway : Landed Estates

(House) [Glenlo](#) - A house called Kentville was occupied by the Martin family in the late 18th century though Wilson mentions a Mr. Irwin living there in 1786. By 1824 Thomas Redington was occupying Glenlo, which became the home of Thomas Blake in the mid 19th century and of the Palmers in the late 19th century. Now functions as a hotel.

(Estate) [Blake \(Glenlo\)](#) - Martin J. Blake writes that Henry Blake of Glenlo Abbey, a medical doctor, was a grandson of Patrick Blake of Kiltullagh and a brother of James Blake of Cregg Castle. Henry Blake died in 1830. In the 1870s this branch of the Blake family owned over 1,000 acres in county Galway. The estate was advertised for sale in the Landed Estates' Court in July 1883 and was comprised of Glenlo Abbey, Annaghmore West in the barony of Tiaquin and Ballynamordoon and Gortdrishagh in the barony of Leitrim.

(Estate) [Mahon \(Belleville\)](#) –

The Mahons bought the Belleville estate in the parish of Monivea, barony of Clare, county Galway, from the Brownes of Coolarne in the early 1780s. They intermarried with the Lamberts, Blakes of Glenlo Abbey and the Seymours. According to the Ordnance Survey Field Name Books, Major Mahon owned townlands in the parish of Athenry in the 1830s. In the 1870s Henry Blake Mahon owned 1,786 acres in the county. His son General Sir Bryan Mahon had a distinguished military career in the late 19th century.

In the early 20th century the General sold part of his estate to Colonel Dudley Thomas Persse and his wife Mary Creagh. It was later sold to the Daly family of Corofin. About 1,300 acres of Bryan T. Mahon's estate was vested in the Congested Districts' Board in March 1912.

Article from Oughterard Heritage

“Iris Harben” by Mary Kyne *(This lady’s mother was Eileen Palmer of Glenlo – they were an interesting family! Z)*

Iris Harben, Clonriff House, Oughterard has many memories when she looks back over 90 memorable years spent between Ireland and England. Iris was born in April 1920. Her parents George de Stacpoole, Mount Hazel, Woodlawn and Eileen Palmer of Glenlo Abbey were both Galwegians. George inherited land in Meath and the family of three boys and two girls were born there. Their father fought in World War 1 in Sionica and returned to farming after the war. The children were educated in Ireland and in England.

Benedictine school

At the tender age of eight Iris was taken on an old mail boat to Hollyhead en route to Rugby. Her father took her by the hand off the train and handed her over to a Benedictine nun who ran the Benedictine school – Prince Horpe. He got back on the Hollyhead train and returned home. Despite being left with the nuns in this small convent Iris enjoyed the carefree and caring atmosphere of the beautiful setting of her new boarding school in the Warwickshire countryside.

Roehampton

Later she transferred to a convent senior school in Roehampton near London. The decision to move to this school was greatly influenced by her aunt who had attended the school. Iris had a very “naughty Scottish uncle” who gave her a present of field glasses. She used them wisely – not for discovering the wonders of nature but for fun – to watch the exciting game of polo at Hurling Polo Grounds near the school. From her sunny bedroom window, four floors up, she had a splendid view of her surroundings!! Her best friend at school was Jerry Redington whose family owned the house where Sweeney’s Hotel is to day. Iris played tennis and hockey in school.

Her favourite subject was history but she always regretted not having studied Irish History.

Glenlo Abbey

Iris spent some of her holidays with her grandmother **Maud Palmer in Glenlo Abbey** but she dreaded the long journey home via Hollyhead on the unstable old mail boat. She enjoyed driving during the summer in her grandmother's chauffeur driven old Austen car to tea-parties at Hodgsons, Prevites, Miss Brooke Leggett and Redingtons houses in Oughterard. They travelled along a rough, dusty, sandy road from Galway to Oughterard.

Moycullen and Ross woods

Iris has clear memories of the street fairs, people weighing their produce and life stock on the huge weighing scales, sadly no longer there, in the square, visiting Annie Egan's butcher shop and Patrick Geoghegan's, fondly known as "Jingles", sweetshop situated next to the Angler's Hotel. The chauffeur loved shooting game so he invariably stopped on his way to Oughterard at Woodstock woods, Moycullen and Ross woods. Leaving his passengers sitting in the car, he would take out his gun and go into the woods in search of pheasant, woodcock or snipe. Sometime later he would return and nonchalantly continue on his journey. *"My grandmother would never make any comment on his return."*

Roundstone

Iris' mother Eileen leased Errisbeg House in Roundstone about 1929 and eventually Richard de Stacpoole, Iris' nephew bought the house and converted the stables into a picture gallery. During the Summer the family travelled from Meath with their cook and nanny to Roundstone, transporting with them food, bed linen and all the "paraphinnalia" required by a family for the summer sojourn by the sea. Grandmother Palmer would wave to them from the steps of Glenlo Abbey as they passed by on the Galway/Clifden train. Arriving in Ballinahinch Iris and those who could cycle cycled from Ballinahinch to Roundstone.

Padraic Faherty

While holidaying with her mother in Roundstone in 1969 Iris received an invitation to breakfast from the late General Darcy's daughter in law at Clonriff. She kindly accepted and discovered during her visit that the house was for sale. Iris decided there and then to buy Clonriff. Padraic Faherty, a local building contractor, built the house for General Darcy in 1961. The late, P. Joe O Malley was Padraic's first apprentice. As Padraic said, "*I had a bike when I started the building. I had a car when I finished it*".

Hurricane Debbie

In 1961 Hurricane Debbie blew down five mature beech trees along the boundary wall at Clonriff – trees that were planted in the 17th century by the O'Flaherties. There is now a beautiful view of the hills from this magnificent setting. Iris has spent her life at Clonriff creating her beautiful garden from scratch. It has been a labour of love.

An Irish woman in Czarist Russia

Geoffrey Palmer, Iris' uncle and his wife Evelyn sold Glenlo Abbey and moved to the Pier Road Oughterard. Geoffrey was a very keen fisherman. Iris used to fish with him. Iris' godmother is Kathleen French of Monivea Castle, daughter of Robert Percy French, a former British ambassador to Moscow and a Russian Countess. Recently Kathleen's extraordinary life story, "*An Irish woman in Czarist Russia*" by Jean Lombard has been published. "*Kathleen was a very close friend to de Stacpoole grandparents. They referred to her as "cousin" an endearment term for someone whose friendship was valued*". They were in fact distantly related.

Russian Revolution

Kathleen's parents separated when she was young and Kathleen spent her youth with her mother and Russian grandmother in Simbirsk where they owned several estates east of Moscow. She kept in contact with her father Robert. She was an accomplished farm manager but like many aristocrats of the time they were "asset rich and cash poor". The farms improved under her management. Unfortunately during the Bolshevik Russian Revolution her vast estates were confiscated, her

houses burned down, she was imprisoned in Simbirsk and later in Moscow. It is thought that Nadezhda, wife of Vladimir Lenin, leader of the revolution who was born in Simbirsk took her jewelry. Kathleen endured many hardships but survived and returned to Monivea in 1920 for a very short time but wasn't welcomed in Monivea and she took a cargo boat to China ending up in Manchuria. She died 1938 and is buried with her father Robert in the French mausoleum in Monivea.

Owenriff River

Iris' parents did ever thing in their power to secure Kathleen's release from prison. Iris possesses the stamina and resilience of her famous godmother Kathleen French. She has a vivid memory, is a good neighbour and has a keen interest in her idyllic surroundings by the Owenriff River. When asked what she liked about Oughterard she didn't hesitate. "*I feel I belong*", she said. No greater compliment could anyone pay to this fantastic place – Oughterard.