

Wilbert Magill



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A brief synopsis of my Ulster Scots background

In endeavouring to trace my Ulster-Scots background, I have been able to go back (at least with some authority) to the period just after the 1798 Rebellion.

My forebearers were primarily involved in the farming and the agricultural industry, indeed my great grandparents and those before them were tenant farmers. They were lowland Scots who came and settled during the Plantation of Ulster in the County of Down. It is however to my grandfather and grandmother MaGill and also to my parents that I am deeply indebted for much of the information that I have been able to put together.

My great grandparents came and settled in the little townland of Craigboy, which lies between Donaghadee and Millisle in the County Down.

The generation that was born in the mid 1800's was reduced considerably during the years of the Potato Famine, which was perhaps one of, if not the worst time in the history of Ireland. It wasn't long after the Famine that my paternal grandparents were born. Both my grandfather and grandmother lost uncles and aunts (some dying in infancy) during this terrible calamity and many years later would have made mention of what they called 'the Famine'. Grandmother, who was older than my grandfather, was born in Craigboy in 1860 and grandfather in Moneyreagh (also in County Down) in 1866.

My grandfather's name was William John MaGill and my grandmother, before marriage, was Martha M'Auley. Grandfather came from Moneyreagh and was a master carpenter by trade. It was because of his expertise in this field that he was given the job to carry out repairs to the Ballycopeland windmill. The mill had been severely damaged in a ferocious gale in the winter of 1888, so much so that new blades and baffles had to be made and fitted and it was during this time he first met Martha, a farmers daughter who later became his wife and my grandmother.

They were married in the little Kirk in Ballycopeland, which in those days was under the banner of the 'United Free Church of Scotland'. In the late thirties the Church and its members joined together with the Presbyterian Church in Millisle, which is still much to the fore. The little Kirk is no longer in existence but the Church yard is still used to-day. Grandmother, the eldest of her family worked on the farm with her younger brother William. There were two dwelling houses on the farm, one occupied by William, grandmother's brother and the other by her Aunt Jane who passed away just before my Grandparents were married. It was in this dwelling that my grandparents set up home and it was here that they brought up their 4 sons and 3 daughters. My dad, Ernest was the youngest of the sons.



All of them were very much conversant with the ways of farming, including my grandfather. And whilst he was a competent craftsman with wood, he if needed, could turn his hand to the scythe, help with the flailing, and could handle the plough and two horses.

The windmill which grandfather fixed in 1888, continued to work until 1924 and the last person to work the mill was my father Ernest (Ernie). The owners at that time were Robert and Samuel Magilton. The National Trust took it over just before the Second World War in 1938.

With the Great War of 1914-18 over and with the windmill ceasing to grind corn and wheat, my uncles found there was not enough work on the farm so they would have assisted their father (my grandfather) working in the joiners shop or at a nearby flax mill at what was termed scutching. However every year from 1924 up to 1935, my father along with many young men from the surrounding district would head off to what they called 'hame'. They would board the boat at Donaghadee harbour bound for Portpatrick arriving in places like Ayrshire, Wigtownshire, and Galloway for the harvesting.

In conclusion might I just say as Ulster-Scots, Scotland is in our blood, it is where we are from.

When we take a weekend away where do we head for? Yes you've guessed it, Scotland.

You may have noticed that I haven't said anything in relation to my maternal grandparents, who were also Ulster-Scots and settled in a nearby townland of Ballyfrenis, just between Millisle and Carrowdore. Many of this side of my family still live in Lanarkshire in Scotland in places such as

Bellshill, Rutherglen and Motherwell. Indeed my uncle's name is inscribed on the War Memorial in Bellshill in memory to those who gave their lives in the Great War of 1914-1918. His name was Charlie Burrows, my mother's brother who was killed in action at the Battle of the Somme. One final point of interest, my uncle David was a Presbyterian Minister. Isn't it rather strange that the first religious Cleric appointed by Viscount Montgomery in 1607 when settlers arrived in County Down was a Cleric called Rev. David MaGill who was given land just on the outskirts of Newtownards. It was a little townland called Gregstown. That little townland is where I now live. You never know perhaps I'm related in some way.

Wulyam Raburt MaGill (Wilbert)



Tha Somme

It wus tha craim o' Ulster, that set aff fae thees shoars,
They wunt aff tae fecht in Flanders, agin tha Kaisers hordes.
They foucht in mony battels, laek Ypres an Passendael,
They excelled at tha Messines, an agin tha Turks at Dardenelles.
It'll aw be iver by Christmas, that's whut tha heed yins saed,
But they didnae sae whut Christmas, it wus wi' donkeys oor men wur led.
Yer King an Kintrae needs ye, Laird Kitchener wus tae sae,
An whun sum signed tha dotted lien, they signed ther leevs away.
Noo tha bloodiest battle it tuk place, ai' tha wors, wus still tae cum,
Whun iver tha craim o' Ulster, foucht tha Germins at tha Somme.
It stertit oan July tha first, in tha yeer, nineteen sixteen,
Whun they faced tha Huns bombardment, an sum jist bits o' weans.
Shair tha boms wunt oan dae efter dae, an aw throo oot tha nichts,
An tha gallent sinn's o' Ulster, foucht wi' aw ther micht.
It's scriven doon in histrie, it's ther fer aw tae see,
Fer they cum fae ivery knuck an kranny, an foucht wi' braverie.

Noo tha drummer boy is silent, an tha pipes hae ceased tae play,
Tha Last Poast haes lang be sooned, an tha buglers caw obeyed.
But in ivery hoose in Ulster, ther wus sum Mithers sinn',
That tuk up tha caw o' duty, an wunt aff tae fecht tha Hun.
Thoosans o' lives wur takkin, an tha mair it's in tha past,
We wull aye hae mien o' them, as lang as life wull laust.
Then lift yer glesses hiech wi' me, an saluet them that faced tha boms,
An toast wi' me tae tha memorie, tae tha brave men o' tha Somme.

Tha Killhoose dances

Shair Kerdur is a quaet wee place,
Oan weekdaes apert fae yin.
But oan Seterdae nicht it cums tae life,
Whun tha velye jist begins.
In a place that's cawed tha Killhoose,
That's whor they houl tha dance.
An fae eicht o'clock tae midnight,
They aw jump aboot an prance.
Tha fowk aw cum fae far an wied,
An roon aboot a deklaer.
An them that canny git inside,
Jist dance in tha apenair.
Tha lassies they'll aw staun aroon,
Oan yin sied o' tha flair.
Luken straicht acroas tha hoose,
At tha men fowk hoo er ther.
But lisen an A'll tell ye,
Aboot tha tither nicht.
Fer A niver noo saw sic a sicht,
An A lauched wi' aw ma micht.
Big Bertha, shes fae Hoarnies Knuck,
An bigged laek Despert Dan.
She ayewaes hiss' tae sit an luk,
Fer she canny git a man.

She weers aff tha shuther dresses,
Wi' twau pleets up each sied.
An wi' her hab nael bits oan,
Baets tha flair an keaps in tiem.
But this nicht noo it wus differr't,
Fer wee Tamas John wus ther.
He leeves ahint tha Lower Ludge,
An haes a wuddin leg fer shair.
Tha M.C. he goet oarder,
As oan tha platform he wud staun.
Tha nixt dance is tha ladies choice,
Mak shair ye git yer man.
Fer weer dancin tha Gay Goardens,
An whun A gie tae ye tha sign.
Rin quick an git yer pertners,
An then form twau straicht lines.
He shouted oot noo, yin, twau, three,
An they aw tuk aff real fast.
An they aw goet ther pertners,
But Big Bertha, she wus last.
She then loked doon at Tamas John,
an saed, jist cum wi' me.
She wus tha proodest wumin in tha
place, an her een lit up wi' glee.

Then tha fiddlers they goet sterted,
Tha Goardens fer tae play.
An as they danced aroon tha flair,
Bertha haud this tae sae.
Tamas wull ye pit yer erms aroon me,
An haud oan noo real ticht.
I'll sinn' be tiem fer birlin,
Haud oan wi' aw yer micht.
Noo wi' tha hoochin an tha clappin,
An tha stampin oan tha flair.
The yins that cudnae git insied,
Cum tae tha wundaes fer tae stare.
Then tha yins insied stapt dancin,
As Big Bertha tuk tha leed.
An liften Tamas by tha peg,
Houled him up abin her heed.
She sterted fer tae birl him,
But it wus tha rang wae roon.
Whun Tamas's wuddin leg spun aff,
An they fell doon tae tha groon.
Noo, tha moral tae tha wummin fowk,
Fae Big Bertha's this ye see.
Whun ye gaun oot dancin,
Dae not en up laek me.

Fer A goet sae exsichted,
An wus sae fu o' glee.
An didnae ken that a wus coortin,
Haulf a man an haulf a tree.

Inviet tae a waddin

A letter cum tha tither dae,
Fer ma wife an me;
Axkin us tae a waddin,
An it wus merked, RSVP.
We roet bak, aye, weer cumin,
An gien it nay mare thocht;
Tae tha dae o' tha waddin,
An whut tuk place wus iver ocht.
Boys noo ther wus sum problims,
An she goet intae a state;
Fer she his a wardib foo o' claes,
An naethin shair wud mate.
A loked at her an axked whuts rang?
An A goet a sherp reply;
A hae naethin tha'll fit saes she,
An let oot a graet big sye.
But she's iver a dizen dresses,
An haunbags o' aw kiens;
She his fitweer an whut gauns wi' them,
But, naethin cud she fien.
She pued an hauled an turned aboot,
Ach, shair they wudnae fit;
At yin stage she wus oot o' breath,
an went an broak tha zip.

She haud hersel intae sum shapes,
As she wud twust an turn;
An tryin tae pue her belly in,
Wud screw up her face an gurn.
Then she loked at me in a quare wae,
As if it wus my fault;
But A wusnae wi' her oan tha dae,
Whun aw tha claes wur boucht.
Weel sinn' hae tae be oan oor wae,
Saes I, er laet weel be;
Fer tha tiem noo it is twau o'clock,
An tha waddin sterts at three.
Ye wud think whun she gauns shappin,
Fer claes an aw tha bits;
Fer ye ken she's neerly foartie,
Wudin't ye think she'd ken whut fits.
Tha clock it kept oan tickin,
An A wus waulkin up an doon;
Whun a heert her cawing oot tae me,
Fae tha dressin rim.
Wull ye git me a bit o' binder twine,
Tae lace up this oul stae;
Fer a hae sumthin tha'll woark?
Wus whut A heert her sae.

Noo she laced it up throo aw tha ee's,
An tied it oan baith sieds;
Her belly sinn' haud bin transferred,
Tae her cheest that she cudnae hied.
Em ready noo fer gaun she saed,
This oul shawl wull woark jist fien;
Fer A'll keep it roon ma shuthers,
It'll hied tha binder twine.
A wheen o' minits noo wunt bye,
An she wus ready fer tha aff;
An noo whut she wus weerin,
Wull shairly mak ye lauch.
She haud fun an oul tiem corset,
A think tha richt naem noo is staes;
A hape noo she's larn'd her lessin,
Tae buy tha richt size o' claes.