

The Wynne Family of Hazelwood House

The Wynne family established themselves in Sligo in the later 17th century. They went on to become one of the dominant forces in political and economic life for the next two centuries.



Lt. General Owen Wynne II (c.1664-1736/7)



Lieut-General Owen Wynne of Hazlewood, the third son of Owen Wynne I of Lurganboy, was born in 1664 or 1665. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin, and studied for the Bar.

In 1689 he was captain in the Earl of Roscommon's Regiment of Foot and in the following year fought with the Williamite forces at the Boyne. He served at the Battles of the Boyne, Aughrim and Eniskillen, and through the whole of Queen Anne's wars in Flanders; his regiment of foot ("Wynne's Foot") raised in the year 1701, was "broke" as a Whig regiment in 1713, but on the accession of George I he raised the 9th Regiment of Dragoons.

With his military pay and appointments, and perhaps for other reasons unknown] he succeeded in becoming a rich man. He was able in 1720 to buy land in Co. Cavan for $\text{€}15,000$ from the Duke of Wharton. Two years later, in 1722, Owen Wynne bought the family's estates in Co. Sligo [comprising in total c.14,500 acres] for $\text{£}20,000$. The conveyance included parts of the town of Sligo, together with the town's fairs, markets, tolls and customs.

These, although profitable, were to cause much trouble and controversy in later years. At Hazelwood he built his house, to the designs of the German architect, Richard Cassels

Owen Wynne II died in 1737. He left his estate to his nephew, Owen Wynne III. Writing at the beginning of the following century, the Rev. Richard Wynne, brother of Owen Wynne V, stated that General Wynne was offered a peerage but refused it; he [the General] said he would

rather be the first of the commoners than the last of the peers. Even if he had accepted a peerage, the title would have become extinct on his death



Colonel Owen Wynne III (c.1686-755)



When Owen Wynne III succeeded his uncle in 1737 he was the first of the Wynnes to combine in one ownership the family lands in Counties Leitrim, Cavan and Sligo. As soon as he was able, he served the Crown, aged 19 or 20, by joining the army, buying a company two years later and served several years in Flanders.

He married his first cousin Catherine, daughter of Colonel John Ffolliott of Donegal and his wife Lucy daughter of Owen Wynne I. Owen III and Catherine had three sons, James, Owen (later Owen IV) and John, and two daughters, Lucy and Hannah. Hannah in 1743 married William Ormsby, MP, of Willowbrook (three miles from Sligo, on the road to Glencar). She thus became an ancestress of the Ormsby-Gore family. Owen III was High Sheriff of Co. Sligo in 1723 and 1745, he filled the same office in Co. Leitrim in 1724. He died aged 79 in 1755.

His wife, Catherine, died in 1778. Owen III's eldest son, James, died in 1748, eight years before his father's death. He was MP for Co. Sligo from 1737 to his death. He married Susanna, eldest daughter and co-heiress of Sir Arthur Shaen, 2nd and last baronet of Kilmore, Co. Roscommon, but they had no children. This marriage was hardly a success, as there was a lawsuit of 1745 where the plaintiff was Susanna Wynne and the defendant her husband, James Wynne.

Owen Wynne III was a colonel in the army, as probably was his second son, Owen IV, and certainly his third son, John. Colonel John Wynne, was MP for Sligo from 1751 to 1760 and again from 1769 to 1778 and for Co. Leitrim from 1761 to 1778. He died unmarried. Owen III died in 1755 and was succeeded by his second son, Owen IV.



The Right Honourable Owen Wynne IV

In 1754, before he inherited the family estates, Owen Wynne married Anne Maxwell whose brother, John, the M.P. for County Cavan, was created Baron Famham in the Irish peerage 1756. The Maxwell family had reached Ireland from Scotland in the reign of Elizabeth.

By co-incidence Anne's grandfather had been Bishop of Kilmore in 1643. That bishopric was abolished during the Commonwealth. Following the Restoration he was bishop of the combined sees of Kilmore and Ardagh. These are the two sees in which Owen Wynne I in 1658 had, during the Commonwealth, obtained his profitable bishops' leases.

Owen IV was elected in 1749 M.P. for Co. Sligo in the Irish Parliament. He became an Irish Privy Councillor in 1756; allowing him the title of Right Honourable. His house in Dublin was in Henrietta Street. This broad street, rising up to what would be the King's Inns, was built on a grand scale. Cassels, (architect of Hazelwood), was responsible for the design of some of the houses. While in Dublin Owen received a regular stream of letters from Edward Martin, his agent in Sligo. These letters, which extend in time from 1758 to 1766, throw much light on the life which revolved around Hazelwood.

They refer to estate management, elections and the candidates in them, rents, the recovery and payment of debts, the employment of servants, the cutting of turf, etc. Mrs. Martin was in charge of brewing; pickling salmon in kegs of spice, wine and vinegar, while on one occasion 600 oysters were pickled. As required, kegs were sent to the Wynne household in Dublin. An ice house was constructed, work which required digging to a depth of twenty feet. In 1764 a domestic crisis blew up when a housemaid named Molly Fleming was found to be pregnant, the father being

mother servant named Johnston. Molly was discharged and Johnston forgiven. Of Molly, Martin wrote: "I am really sorry for her and I believe her otherwise to be a good servant". As to Johnston, Martin naively commented: "He promises fair he never will be guilty of the like again". The episode is an example of the widely-held view that it is always the woman's fault.

Some pages of Martin's ledger relating to disbursements survive. The entries cover the years from 1758-1761 and contain dozens of headings relating to the functioning of an agricultural estate. More personal entries relate to the purchase of brandy and wine. In the three year period there is only one entry relating to port; on that occasion eight dozen bottles were bought. Apart from claret, wines such as hock were bought at a rate of a dozen bottles at a time. During the period three hogsheads (46 gallons each) of claret were bought from a wine merchant in Derry.

When Owen was High Sheriff of Co. Sligo in 1758 he paid for such items as the entertainment of the judges, the provision of trumpeters and halberdiers and the transport of felons to Dublin. As is shown in a receipted bill of 1785 he paid a total of £23 to a Dublin boat builder for a 20 foot boat, together with its masts, sails, rigging and oars. This boat was transported by road to Lough Gill.

Systematic forestation was carried out on the Wynne estate and in other lands taken on long leases for the purpose. By an Act of the Irish Parliament of 1783/84 a financial advantage was offered for the planting of trees, and for this purpose the landowner had to make annually a sworn return stating the varieties and numbers of trees planted during the previous twelve months. The record of these returns extends in time from 1785 to 1835 and thus relate to Owen IV and Owen V. During this fifty years period the number of trees planted is just short of 200,000. Twenty-three different varieties were included, the largest number being Scots fir, alder and ash, with oak and beech not far behind.

Owen IV died in 1789 leaving six sons and three daughters. His eldest son, Owen, succeeded to the family estates. The next son, John, died unmarried while the other sons, Henry, Robert, Richard and William founded families of their own, thus accounting for the extended family of Wynne who survive and thrive to the present day. There were in addition three daughters, Elizabeth, Judith and Catherine.



Owen Wynne V (1755-1841)

Owen Wynne V was born in 1755 and died aged 86 in 1841. He was twice High Sheriff of Co. Sligo during his father's lifetime. A year after succeeding to the family estates he married Lady Sarah Elizabeth Cole, eldest daughter of the 1st Earl of Enniskillen. The family of Cole had originated in Ireland with Sir William Cole, an undertaker in the plantation of Ulster in the reign of James I.

The family seat, Florence Court completed in the 1760s, lies seven miles from Enniskillen. From c.1730, the Wynne and Cole families had been associated, certainly in the making of the Enniskillen-Sligo road and, in the case of the Coles, possibly in the employing of Richard Cassels. Owen V first entered the Irish Parliament in 1778 as member for Co. Sligo, while at the same time his father was member for the borough. Owen junior's opponent in the election was his father's brother-in-law, William Ormsby of Willowbrook.

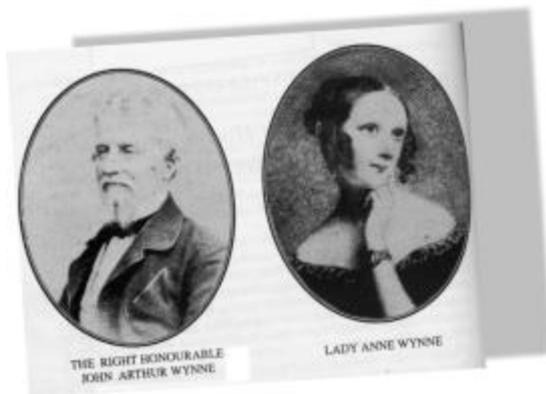
The contest was fought with a great deal of corruption and disorder on both sides, with the result that Owen's election was followed by a petition to unseat him. At the petition hearing petition by a committee of the Irish House of Commons, proceedings which lasted for 2yrs, leading counsel for Wynne was John Philpot Curran, this being the first major case in which the great advocate took part.

The committee heard evidence of bribery and evidence that the poll book was stolen and the electoral lists thrown in the river. It is surprising to learn that instead of ordering a fresh election the committee upheld the Wynne election.

The hearing costs were so great that, according to O'Rorke, the effects were felt by both families after a lapse of over one hundred years. In subsequent elections, all of them expensive, Owen held one of the county seats until, on the death of his father, he returned himself for the borough seat which had been his father's.

He retired from Parliament in 1806 by being appointed Escheator of Munster, purely a nominal post but as an office of profit under the Crown, it disqualified its holder from membership of the Commons.

It was a device by which a Member of Parliament could resign in between elections. Its modern equivalent in the UK is the office of Steward of the Chiltern Hundreds. He then "sold" his borough seat to George Canning for an annuity which continued until 1820 when the seat was resumed by Owen. ... [While still a member of the Irish Parliament], he voted against the ... [the Union], as also did the two county members, Joshua Edward Cooper and Charles O'Hara. ... [When] a meeting of Protestants was held in the court house of Sligo on 12 August 1812, it passed four resolutions [hostile to Catholic Emancipation], each proposed by Owen Wynne.



The Rt Hon. John Arthur Wynne (1801-1865)

In 1843 John Wynne was appointed a member of the Devon Commission which under the chairmanship of the Earl of Devon, was set up by Peel to examine how far the Irish land system was responsible for the prevailing discontent and disturbance and how far Parliament should interfere.

Of the five commissioners four were Irish landlords and the chairman an Englishman who owned property in Ireland. This prompted O'Connell's comment that it would be as reasonable to consult butchers about the lenten fast as to consult landlords about the rights of tenants. After sitting for two years the commission failed to recommend the reforms later called the 'three Fs', fair rent, fixity of tenure and freedom for the tenant to sell his interest in the holding. It did propose a limited right to compensation for improvement, but a bill to this effect was defeated in the House of Lords and the report of the commission was no mere whitewash.

In 1843, as famine became more severe, John Wynne reduced his rents thereby lowering his annual income by £1,280. Rent arrears inevitably increased, under pressure of the Irish situation, and after much agitation by the Anti-Corn Law League in England, Sir Robert Peel in 1846 repealed the Corn Laws. This step split the Conservative party, the representative of the landed interest, and gave the Whigs a nearly unbroken twenty years of office. A brief Conservative ministry under Lord Derby and Disraeli held office in 1852 ..., [and in the Irish branch of this administration Wynne was offered, and accepted, the office of Under-Secretary in Dublin Castle, at the same time being made a Privy Councillor. In 1856 John Wynne re-entered politics and was elected for the borough by a majority of 31 votes in a total poll of 265; the poll shows the restricted nature of the franchise even after the Reform Act. His opponent was John Patrick Somers, who had defeated John Martin in 1837. He appears to have been a much more colourful personality than Wynne. In 1857, when Wynne and Somers contested the seat again, Wynne petitioned to unseat his opponent. The committee [appointed to try the merits of the election] decided that Somers should be unseated and Wynne declared elected after three Somers votes were transferred to Wynne and a further three votes of voters who were rejected by the poll clerk were awarded to Wynne.

Wynne was re-elected in 1859, but advancing ill-health caused him to resign a year later. He had served his community well. He was chairman of the Board of Guardians, the body responsible for poverty relief between 1847 and 1852. He helped to found the Sligo mental

hospital. He continued his father's work in agriculture and forestation . He died in 1865 at the age of 64. Bribery and violence reached their peak in the Sligo election of 1868 Parliament had had enough. In 1870 the borough constituency was abolished by a disfranchisement act.



Owen Wynne VI (1843-1910). JP & DL, High Sheriff (1875 & Co. Sligo/Leitrim) 1880, late Lieut 61st Foot

Owen Wynne VI succeeded to the family estates in 1865 at the age of twenty-three. In his youth he had served as a lieutenant in the 61st Foot Regiment and, as one would expect, he was High Sheriff of Co. Sligo in 1875 and of Co. Leitrim in 1881. At the age of 27 he married Stella Fanny, the younger daughter of Sir Robert Gore-Booth of Lissadell, the 4th baronet.

The second half of the 19th century saw the development of what is recognisably modern Ireland. ... In the face of falling prices and crop failures, Michael Davitt founded the Land League which organised mass meetings of tenants throughout Ireland. On 22 August 1880 such a meeting was held at Manorhamilton at which 7,000 people and six bands were present. The Land League was followed by the National League, after the former had been outlawed.

The National League in 1886 set in motion the Plan of Campaign which in Co. Leitrim was first put into action in December 1886 on Owen Wynne's estate, for the agent, George Hewson, refused a proposed reduction of 25%. It has been suggested that "The decision of the League to choose the Wynne estate for the Plan may have been influenced by the fact that the landlord was not considered harsh in his dealing with tenants and, therefore, the achievement of a favourable settlement within a short time was a real possibility..." Starting in the late 1880s, Owen Wynne sold his estates, other than the Hazelwood demesne, to the Land Commission for the price of £79,000. This represents about four million pounds at the present day.

On Sunday 27 February 1887, Mrs Wynne suffered a serious carriage accident which caused her death. Owen Wynne VI died in 1910 aged 67. One cannot escape the feeling that he was a saddened man. His wife had been tragically killed twenty-three years earlier. The great estates of 15,000 acres of Leitrim and 14,000 acres in Sligo had for the most part been sold. Since he had no male heir, with his death the line of the Wynnes of Hazelwood came to an end.'

The house and surprisingly large remaining estate were sold by the last Wynne descendant to own it in 1937. Having looked reasonably sound, and its future reasonably secure, as recently as the early 1980s, it is now in a state of advanced decrepitude, with a huge video tape factory glaring at its garden front at a distance of only 100 yards. The entrance front, in spite of its sorry physical state, still retains something of the austere grandeur of Richard Cassels, economical alike in scale, plan and avoidance of fussy ornamentation, but lavish in the quality of its stonework. Ironically, long before the arrival of the video tape factory, the Wynnes themselves had been out of sympathy with Cassels's at once practical and pleasing Palladianism.

Instead of adapting his links and pavilions to domestic use, they had added to the main block piecemeal and in inappropriate places and had destroyed the symmetry of the house by throwing out a crude two-storey wing to the left of the garden front.

