

# *Le Chêile*

*Community Magazine*



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## EDITORIAL

**Note:: We repeat the Editorial from last April. This is because April 2020 marks the end of the first month of the Covid 19 strike and the Shut-Down which followed from it. See last paragraph below. Also, the Pandemic has brought a welcome upsurge in volunteerism and interest in the environment. See pages 6-7.**

Man is the only creature who despoils and pollutes his environment. The trees of the forest shed their leaves in Autumn, making their mineral content available to provide another year's growth. This is not pollution. Likewise for all the plants and animals of creation.

Man, all other creatures aside, is fully conscious and aware of what he is doing and he alone has free will in the matter. He is furthermore multi-talented and potentially creative. Yet it costs society millions annually to counteract littering and illegal dumping. The environmental and economic consequences, the adverse effects on tourism and the deterrent to in-coming industries and jobs are very serious matters.

Tidiness is recognized as a virtue. It is a desirable practice from which we all benefit, both the individual directly concerned and society as a whole. There are health implications as well: typhoid and cholera, for example, are diseases associated with polluted water and unhygienic environmental practices.

There are rural as well as urban consequences. Our country roads are more and more becoming the targets of dumping and litter dropped from the windows of passing cars. Those involved in the annual Spring clean will be aware that in the course of one year the frequency of coffee cartons,

bottles and cans builds up to about one per yard along the average road.

We cannot take the selfish approach, guided only by what is handy and convenient to ourselves as individuals; we are members of a larger community and the actions of each individual affect us all. Everything we do must reflect this responsibility. If it is shared by each and every individual it falls lightly on the shoulders of all. This message must go to every child and every generation.

April is (normally) Spring Clean Month. The Department of the Environment, through An Taisce and the County Councils make available free bags, gloves and equipment, as well as removal of the refuse collected, to local organizations which get involved. In this area the organizations with an established record are Tír na Móna and Clane Community Council (Tidy Towns Subcommittee).

As things stand, with the 'shut-down' in public gatherings and assemblies, it looks as though the National Spring Clean will be a non-runner (unless it is postponed to a later date when, hopefully, the corona virus might be under control).

### **EDITOR'S DEADLINE**

The deadline for receipt of material for the April issue of Le Chéile is

**Monday 19th April**

To 142 Loughbollard please.

E-mail: [mcevoyclane@gmail.com](mailto:mcevoyclane@gmail.com)

Get Le Chéile on [www.clanecommunity.ie](http://www.clanecommunity.ie)

# The unfortunate death of Jack Lattin, 1731

## Seamus Cullen

Jack Lattin was a gentleman musician from Morrinstown Lattin near Newbridge who gave his name to a well-known tune and dance that was popular from the early 1700's. His initial call to fame was the circumstances surrounding his untimely death in 1731 and this gave rise to the dance which has a very important connection to Castlebrown now known as Clongowes Wood.

### The Lattin Family

The Lattin family were extensive landowners in the area between Naas and Newbridge, having first acquired their lands shortly after the Norman invasion. In the late medieval period the family were noted as one of the leading families of the Pale. Following the reformation in the 16th century they belonged to a significant number of leading landed families in Kildare which included the Wogan's of Rathcoffey that remained Catholic and managed to retain their lands.

It was extremely difficult for Catholic families to retain their estates during the penal period when discriminatory laws were enforced against Catholics. Many lived for long periods on the continent where they avoided having to adhere to the unpalatable Penal Laws and also the ward of court system enforced in Ireland where an orphan Catholic heir could be brought up in the Established Church.

The Lattins were one such family who occasionally lived on the continent for long periods but retaining a close connection to Morrinstown Latin the family seat. Other Catholic families such as the Wogans and Brownes residing close to Clane also had connections with the con-

continent as senior members served in Irish regiments attached to the various Catholic powers in Europe.

Jack Lattin was raised in Paris with his father and regularly returned home to visit his relatives in Kildare and socialize in Dublin where the family had a town house in Lattin Court now known as Greek St. While written accounts of his activity as a musician are scant, one reference gives details of a lively party in a Dublin tavern called The Conniving House where Jack Lattin was referred to as 'matchless on the fiddle'. By all accounts this public house situated in Sandymount was one of the in places for young revellers in the early 18th century.

Lattin became famous due to participating in a marathon dance in 1731 and there are two different contrasting accounts of this episode in the records. One has him dancing all the way from Dublin to Morrinstown but this seems to be unlikely, given the distance of twenty-five miles between the two locations. The second, and most likely account which comes from Lattin's own relatives, refers to a continuous dance from Castlebrown to Morrinstown Lattin.

Castlebrown at this period was owned by Stephen Browne. He built the residence thirteen years previously as a family seat and in the construction, included portions of the earlier Clongowes Wood castle once held by the Eustace family. Browne's wife Judith whom he married in 1710, was the daughter of John Wogan of nearby Rathcoffey Castle who had served as a colonel in King James's army during the Williamite War, 1689-91.

### The Hooley at Castlebrown

Castlebrown was obviously the location of a social event which included a dance attended by relatives, friends and associates of the Browne family. It was held in the first week of July 1731. It is unknown

for what purpose the dance was held but it may well have been to celebrate some event or even a going away party. During this period of the early 18th century younger sons of leading Catholic gentlemen while debarred from obtaining commissions in the British army obtained commissions in one of the many Irish Wild Geese regiments on the continent. A hooley on the occasion of the departure of one of these gentlemen may well have been the purpose of the party. Browne's eldest son and heir John was of a similar age to Jack Lattin while two of his younger sons Michael and Anthony later served as officers in armies on the continent. It is likely that all three would be present in Castlebrowne at the time.

There are many local families who could also have attended. Nicholas Wogan, brother-in-law of Stephen Browne and also Robert Aylmer and his wife Catherine Wogan from Painstown who were all members of the local Catholic gentry from estates surrounding Castlebrowne.

### **The Wager**

Social gatherings in the 18th century in addition to music playing, dancing and consumption of alcohol, sometimes also featured an interesting wager. It was an amusement practiced by the wealthy with men staking their guineas lavishly on any opportunity that might arise. Men risked their wager and gained honour and status from a successful bet. It would appear that Jack Lattin may have been the life of the party at Castlebrowne, and this led to a challenge which dared him to dance all the way from Castlebrowne to his home in Morristown Lattin dressed in party clothes. The wager was eagerly taken on by Lattin. The distance between the two locations is eight miles along narrow and winding country roads. While the sum involved is unknown it would have been substantial. Some accounts suggest there were heavy wagers on both sides. Other accounts suggesting that he danced and played the music himself at the same time would not seem to be practical. It is known

that he was accompanied on the journey by friends and musicians and that he even changed his step at every furlong on the route. While jogging an eight-mile journey does not appear to be an excessive exercise, however, dancing the distance certainly uses up more energy. It may be the equivalent of jogging more than three times the distance. The energy used would be similar to competing in a twenty-six-mile marathon. It is known that Lattin danced the entire journey and won the bet.

### **The Route**

The route that Lattin took from Clane to Morristown is easy to pinpoint from the excellent detail on Nobel and Keenan's Map surveyed in 1751. This was only twenty years after Lattin's death. Although, roads have changed direction and were considerably improved with new roads constructed, the direct route from Clane to Morristown Lattin is one of the few ancient roads to have survived intact virtually extending on the same course as it did in the 1730s. There was no Moss's Rd at the time, which is the road leading from Clane to Allenwood, built in the early 1750's. The Grand Canal also postdates this period with the section on the route at Digby Bridge built in 1794, and a railway line was also erected across the road close to Caragh in 1844.

Leaving Clane, Lattin danced along the Millicent road, passing the entrance to Longtown Estate which was later owned by Gerry Sweetman a Minster for Finance in the 1950's, who was married to Rosalind Mansfield a close relative of Jack Lattin. Continuing past what is now Digby Bridge, Lattin proceeded to Caragh where he took a right turn and continuing to the Thomastown junction close to the River Liffey where at present there is a spectacular vernacular thatched residence. Morristown Lattin is on the opposite side of the river at this point, a distance of approximately 200

meters.

## The Death and burial

The end result had a tragic end as Jack died shortly after he completed his dancing marathon. The cause of death was given as exhaustion. This has similarities with the first marathon race in 490 BC when Pheidippides, a Greek messenger, ran 26 miles from Marathon to Athens to bring news of the Athenian victory over the invading Persians. After communicating the message, he suddenly died from exhaustion.

Lattin was buried in the family burial plot in St David's Churchyard in Naas. His memorial survives to this day and reads as follows: Here lyeth the body of John Lattin [Lattin], eldest son of the above Patrick Latton, who departed this life the seventh day of July 1731 in the 21st year of his age.

## The Jack Lattin dance and rhymes

In the years following his death Jack Lattin obtained a greater notoriety than when he was alive. It was through music that his name in particular survived. As early as June 1733 less than two years after his death a dance tune known as 'Jack Lattin' was played at events. This tune became very popular and well-known throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The composer of the tune is unknown. An account from 1807 claiming that Jack was the composer and actually danced it on his marathon may not be accurate. The Jack Lattin tune also became an air of songs many of them of Scottish origin.

Non-musical rhymes also survive and one in particular was passed on by the Lattin family. The estate of the family passed to the Mansfield family when Paulina Lattin married Alexander Mansfield in 1817. Their granddaughter Maude recounted a family rhyme about Jack Lattin as follows:

Jack Lattin dressed in satin

Broke his heart of dancing  
He danced from Castle Browne  
To Morristown.

## James Joyce

Jack Lattin also gets a mention in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), which is considered one of the most important works in modern literature. Ironically, both Joyce and Lattin shared a connection with Castlebrown as Joyce was a boarder in Clongowes Wood College from 1888-91. Joyce was noted for his experimental use of language particularly in *Ulysses*. In the play he used the term 'I'll make it hot for you. I'll make you dance Jack Lattin.' The wording was intended as a form of punishment or chastisement. In Kildare use of the term was intended as a threat and obviously, Joyce had knowledge of this and possibly also the circumstances connected to Lattin's unfortunate demise.

## A resurgence of interest

By the late 20th century Jack Lattin was largely forgotten, then in 1999, the *Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society* published Sean Donnolly's article 'Ecstasy in Eighteenth - Century Kildare; the strange story of John Lattin of Morristown Lattin (1731)'. It gave a detailed account of Lattin's epic and an excellent history of the dance-tune. The article generated a renewed interest in the exploits and story of this epic.

In November 2020, Edwina Guckian a noted choreographer and dancing teacher recreated Jack Lattin's long-distance dance as a project which was initiated by the Irish Traditional Music Archive with funding from several bodies including The Arts Council of Ireland and Arts Council of Northern Ireland. She danced at eight locations to the Jack Lattin tune on a route leading from Clongowes Wood to Morristown Lattin accompanied by Cathal Ó Curráin a fiddler who provided the music. The first location was close to the entrance to Clongowes Wood Castle. This section of the building has not changed since 1731. The second location was on a surviving portion of the

Pale earthworks in the grounds of Clongowes. The third location on the route was the Franciscan Friary burial ground in Clane where some gravestones date to the time of the dancing marathon. Ironically, the site chosen by Edwina to dance was within ten meters from the family burial plot of Fr Andrew Ennis, Parish Priest of Clane who died in 1738 and who may in fact have witnessed the dancing marathon as it passed through the village. The final location and where the marathon dance ended was at the front entrance gate to Morrinstown Lattin.

Jack Lattin's epic marathon gives some account of the amusements enjoyed by the gentry and in particular the Catholic nobility in the period of the early 18th century. While members of leading Catholic families were forced to travel to the continent to obtain army commissions, all forms of higher education including clerical education, the story of Jack Lattin shows that it was not all doom and gloom for this branch of society during the period.

of twelve months the number of items thrown from cars along roadsides, ranging from coffee cartons, to drink cans and bottles builds up to one item per yard on average. Then there is the matter of bags of rubbish dropped in gateways and into ditches and streams.

The map on page 7 shows the range of roads covered in the Clane area. While it would be nice to give a list of the names of those involved in the clean-ups those who gave their many hours and days of service did not do so to have their names listed and it would be impossible to do so anyway without missing someone.

A BIG THANKS TO ALL WHO ARE INVOLVED ON BEHALF OF LE CHÉILE AND THE GENERAL COMMUNITY.

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## **ENERGETIC CLEAN-UP OF THE COUNTRYSIDE!**

Usually at this time of the year, a National Spring Clean is organized with the support of the County Councils and An Taisce. Equipment and transport is available to support volunteers and local groups. Because of the pandemic, which is now extending into its second year, a fully organized undertaking was not possible this year. Local volunteers, many of whom would have been involved in previous years, were not slow to come out and tackle their own areas. Many saw it as a productive way to gain their necessary daily exercise while keeping on top of a polluted environment and at the same time fully observing the requirements of social distancing, face covering, etc. Adults and younger family members were widely involved. The County Council provided transport to take the bagged litter and waste to the dump. It is a statistical fact that in the course



