

‘To a little girl for keeping the poultry last year’: Food and Fellowship in a Franciscan Community in Georgian Ireland

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In April 1791 the Franciscan friars of Courtown friary recorded that they paid three shillings, nine and a half pence to the little girl who features in the title of this paper. Other than through these accounts it is unlikely that any record of this little girl, undoubtedly Catholic and from a rural class largely unnoticeable, would be preserved for posterity. Instead, this unnamed keeper of poultry is one of the many local people that the friars meticulously record as playing a role in the functioning of a specific micro-economy in rural Ireland at the turn of the eighteenth century.

A manuscript set of accounts kept from December 1788 through to June 1801, UCD-OFM Mss C75 is one of several account books in the curatorial care of University College Dublin, under the terms of a unique relationship between the Irish Franciscan Order O.F.M., and the university. The transfer of the archives from the Franciscan Library in Killiney, County Dublin was initiated in 2000 when the Mícheál Ó Cléirigh Institute for the Study of Irish History and Civilization was established as part of the UCD-OFM partnership. A short guide to the Killiney-based library was published in 1955.¹ The archives include a major series of medieval and early modern manuscripts, four series of which have now been wholly or partially transferred and are available to view online.² While more quotidian, the importance of the account books within the O.F.M. archive was recognised by the Irish Manuscripts Commission with the publication of the account books relating to the Franciscan convent at Broad Lane, Cork.³

The friars’ early presence in Ireland is recorded in *The Annals of Ulster* and other Anglo-Irish annals with what Colmán Ó Clabaigh describes as the somewhat laconic statement that in 1224 ‘The preachers entered Ireland’.⁴ Unlike monks, who see their religious purpose fulfilled through retiring from the world and embracing solitude, friars are to be found living in the wider, usually urban, community, fulfilling their religious mission by preaching and adopting a lifestyle of poverty, evangelism and ministry to the poor. The four mendicant orders, Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans and Franciscans, were all established in Ireland by the third quarter of the thirteenth century. Friars of the Sack, known as Blue Friars, forbidden to receive fresh members by the Council of Lyons in 1274, are also recorded as being present in this period.⁵ This paper is concerned with a particular record relating to one of these orders, a set of accounts kept by a small community of five Franciscan friars in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

Tracing their origin back to St Francis of Assisi, Franciscans are established in three orders. The cloistered

nuns of the Order of Saint Clare, the Poor Clares, are the second order, and the third order secular and regular are respectively members who live in the community without vows, and those who live in community under vow.⁶ It is the first order that is relevant here, and it encompasses the Order of Friars Minor (O.F.M., *Ordo Fratrum Minorum*), the Friars Minor Conventual (O.F.M. Conv.), and the Friars Minor Capuchin (O.F.M. Cap.). The friars of the Irish Franciscan Province are members of the Order of Friars Minor. Organisationally ‘the Irish province belonged to the Recollect branch of the Stricter Observance reform of the order’.⁷ Within the pages of the ledger book under consideration in this paper these religious differentiations fade into the background.

By the end of the seventeenth century the Franciscan order in Ireland numbered almost 600, having been transformed from a small fragmented organisation by virtue of what is described as a vision of themselves ‘as distinctively Irish and distinctively Franciscan’.⁸ The success of this vision both lay in, and may be measured by, the close link that the order fostered with their lay supporters.⁹ Joseph Mac Mahon contrasts the distinctive voice and strategy of the friars in the seventeenth century with the more modest achievements of the friars in what he terms ‘the silent century’, from 1698 to 1829,¹⁰ noting that this silence also refers to the fact that there are fewer documentary remains for this period. By the nineteenth century the friars were facing difficulties on several fronts, both in Ireland and on the Continent.¹¹ The accounts of the friars in Courtown open a small window for researchers within this timeframe. Given the paucity of archival material relating to both the period and the community in its widest sense, the importance of the detail recorded through the pages of the ledger comes to the fore.

Legislatively the period opened with what is referred to as the Banishment Act of 1697 (9 Will. C. 1). This provided for the banishment of all catholic clergy exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction, along with all regular clergy.¹² The term secular clergy refers to deacons and priests who promise obedience to a bishop as their immediate superior. Also referred to as diocesan priests, they are not monastics or members of a religious institute. Regular clergy are clerics such as friars who follow a rule, from the Latin *regula*, and who are members of religious institutes. The Act of 1697 was one of the Irish Penal Laws enacted during the successive reigns of William and Mary, William III, Anne, George I and George II, the Penal System itself predating this period. The Act of 1697, which came into force in 1698, was the first of several directed

specifically at the problem of popish clergy. The Irish Franciscan authorities advised compliance and that each house should draw up an inventory of goods, ensuring their safe keeping with suitable benefactors.¹³ This official advice notwithstanding, it appears that between one hundred and two hundred friars continued to live in Ireland subsequent to the enforcement of the Bill and there is evidence that by 1700 friars were returning to the country. By 1704 many of the regulars had registered as parish priests, but regardless of this the effect on the communities of friars was profound. Dispersed and with the need to be constantly vigilant, it took a decade before they began to return cautiously to their traditional locations.¹⁴ From the beginning of the reign of George I (1714–1727), communities were being quietly formed. In 1715 the County Galway Grand Jury represented to the lords justices ‘that great numbers of popish priests and friars, and other ecclesiasticks of the Romish persuasion had come into the kingdom within the last four years’, identifying specific locations where the friars had settled.¹⁵ The friars rented houses from Catholic landowners in Galway, and from those who had conformed under pressure of the penal laws to the Established Church but remained on friendly terms with their former co-religionists.¹⁶ The small community in Courtown, County Meath followed a similar pattern of settlement.

The wider political and religious background was no less troubling for the friars in this period. In 1751 Propaganda Fide, a special congregation in the Roman Curia, issued a decree that forbade religious superiors from receiving novices in Ireland.¹⁷ Recruiting suitable clerics was a complex problem in eighteenth-century Ireland, not least because Catholic Ireland was deprived of a primary and secondary school system.¹⁸ Illegal schoolmasters and hedge schools were not highly regarded by many ecclesiastics. Men who aspired to be priests received their priestly ordination in Ireland and then went abroad to study, some lacking ‘the advantage of a proper formal classical education’.¹⁹ Alongside this, Ireland was considered by Rome to suffer from an over-supply of priests, putting an undue burden on the laity. This was addressed in 1741 by limiting each Irish bishop to twelve ordinations during his lifetime and reinforced in 1750 with a decree forbidding regular clergy from receiving novices in Ireland. Described as ‘over-kill’,²⁰ ‘the decree not only depressed the numbers, but the friars themselves’.²¹ These decrees were not unrelated to the fact that Irish Catholicism was deeply riven from within by factional rivalries, which included recurrent clashes between seculars and regulars.²² The Master General of the Dominicans was assured by Laurence Richardson O.P., Bishop of Kilmore ‘that there were ecclesiastics in Ireland who were trying to destroy the regular clergy with greater fury than did Queen Elizabeth’.²³ A further assault on the friars’ spirits came from within the wider European political arena. In the latter part of the reign of Emperor Joseph II, subsequent to the death of Empress Maria Theresa, decrees affecting the

order saw the curtailing of activities in the college in Leuven in 1782, and while the college there was spared in 1786, the college in Prague was closed that year by order of the Emperor.²⁴ The French Revolution added to the order’s troubles with the suppression and confiscation of colleges across French-occupied Europe.²⁵ At home, agrarian disturbance, the emergence of the United Irishmen and the Rebellion of 1798 must have been cause for considerable anxiety, yet are unrecorded in the log of daily transactions in the account book. It is against this background of upheaval, both physical and psychological, that the details recorded in Courtown friary of a life of ministry in the Franciscan tradition, lived quietly and methodically, appear all the more startling.

Although the friars are recorded in Trim from 1282, the friary itself dates from 1318. Situated on the junction of Castle Street and Market Street, the site is now occupied by the courthouse. Expelled in 1542, the community was re-established by 1629. Sometime around 1720, after the years of upheaval occasioned by the Banishment Act, the returning friars settled north of the town where they built a residence in the townland of Courtown, ‘near the old church of Clonmaduff, where for upwards of a century they laboured in the service of God and of the people’.²⁶ As a house of refuge for the Trim community, the friary was referred to as ‘Trim’ in official documents.²⁷ Cogan sketches a brief description of the friary’s early years, of its receiving jurisdiction from Dr Luke Fagan, Bishop of Meath, ‘over the parishes of Bective, Rataine, Churchtown, Clonmaduff, Moymet, Tullaghenoige, and Kilcooley’.²⁸ The account book fleshes out the comment in Cogan that ‘a Protestant gentleman generously set them a farm at a moderate rent, and here they built a house...’²⁹ The accounts record that the friars leased land from William Henry Worthington, who had an estate at Simonstown in the parish of Donaghmore, in the lower barony of Navan. The friars did not deal directly with Worthington; payments were made to his agent, Mr. Williamson until April 1798 when Robert Barnwell, ‘a strong patron of the Franciscans became acting agent’.³⁰ The leasehold was for thirty-four acres at £31.9.0. per annum, normally paid in instalments. As can be gleaned from the title of Joseph Mac Mahon’s paper, delivered in 2015 at the Donatus Mooney Day in University College Dublin, there was a constant struggle to balance the accounts. These were entered by the guardian or *praeses* each month and signed off by discreet, members of the friary council, usually two, but only one by the end of the period. The local community afforded extremely generous credit to the friars, in terms of the time extended for payment of bills. In some periods of difficulty Robert Barnwell paid the rent on the leasehold and was reimbursed later by the friars. The friars also leased smaller pieces of land and had acquired a portion of the local bog, which was drained, and they made contributions towards the road that serviced it.³¹

In the period covered by the accounts the pastor and parish priest was Michael Tipper, and the guardian was

John Waldron, although there was movement in these roles between the two. John Molloy assumed the role of guardian at the end of the accounts on Michael Tipper's demise in 1801. The death took place during the accounting period of three other friars, Michael Fleming, James Flinn and John Clarke. Thomas Grehan was appointed to the parish of Carnaross in July 1799, remaining there until his death in 1826. Patrick Ryan was reputedly the last friar at Courtown, where he died in August 1826 and is buried in the friars' plot at the Black Church in Meadstown.³² Against the stresses described above, the Courtown account book reveals a structure of community living that adds greater nuance to the history of the friars than is more generally provided in commentary that concentrates on wider social and political concerns. In his book on the popular mind in eighteenth-century Ireland, Vincent Morley remarks on the neglect of collective mentalities by Irish historians and argues that this is accounted for by a disproportionate emphasis on high politics and elite and official records, resulting in a disregard for popular culture. Morley's thesis is that the 'collective assumptions, aspirations, fears, resentments and prejudices of the Irish-speaking populace' has been misread and neglected through a lack of understanding — both literally and in the wider intellectual sense — of the vernacular song and verse of the period.³³ The argument may be extended with some merit to an appreciation of sources such as the account books, read not with the eye of an economic historian, but rather as a source of social history and most particularly valuable for a food historian. What emerges from the accounts is a picture of community interdependency and shared networking that gives a more balanced perspective on the wider political frameworks, about which the book is entirely silent. The accounts are mute on the growth and activity of the United Irishmen, agrarian disturbances and the French Revolution. Some ten miles distance from the friary, the Battle of Tara was fought between British forces and Irish rebels on May 16 1798, resulting in four hundred deaths. In that month the account book records that twenty-two men were paid for 'setting' the potatoes and Mary Connolly was paid for five days for 'laying' them. The friars sold a dry cow for £6 and two young bullocks were sold 'at Bective', a small hamlet nearby. Mrs Fay settled her account with the friars for 'a hide and fat' that they had sold to her seventeen months previously. Most astonishingly, income is recorded 'for a stork' of £4. 4s. 9d. The white stork (*ciconia ciconia*) is a rare visitor to Ireland with five county records 'involving' seven birds recorded on the Bird Watch Cork website for the years from 1846 to 2014.³⁴ It is unlikely but not impossible that the bird was sold for consumption; storks had not featured on the tables of the nobility since medieval times,³⁵ although it was not to the taste of the Irish chieftains who dined with King Henry II on Christmas Day in 1171.³⁶ While it is possible that the friars mistook a heron or crane for a stork, it is also a possibility that the friars shot a bird that had some value for

a taxidermist. There are several entries for purchase of 'powder and shot', with the detail added in August 1789 that it was 'to shoot the crows'.

The names of tradesmen and tradeswomen who had business with the friars populate the accounts, with names of certain families occurring regularly. Denis Fitzsimons sold turf to the friars, 96 kishes in December 1788, and received payment for '29 perches of drain' and 'three days work'.³⁷ In June 1789 the friars paid him 11s. 4½d. for 'cutting our turf on account'. He is also recorded on the income side, with the receipt of income from the sale of 'meal' to him by the friars. Peter Fitzsimons sold butter regularly to the friars, and also worked for them on a casual basis. In June 1793 an indication that this is a family of Fitzsimons is given by a payment to 'Peter Fitzsimons junior' for eleven and a half pounds of butter, with yet another Fitzsimons, Phelim, being paid in May 1795 'for cleaning quicks'.³⁸

Another name that appears with some regularity is Mulligan. Payments to a Denis Mulligan are recorded from the beginning of the accounts through to 1796. The friars paid him almost monthly for beef, legs of mutton, 'a quarter of lamb', pork, tongue and tripe. 'Denis Mulligan for the meat of this month as by bill' alternates with more detailed entries such as 'Denis Mulligan for a quarter of lamb'³⁹ and 'Denis Mulligan for a surline [sic] of beef' in December 1793. Like Denis Fitzsimons, Denis Mulligan also appears on the left side of the ledger where income is recorded. In June 1791 the friars record income 'for a wether'⁴⁰ sold Denis Mulligan' with an added entry of 'item charged Mulligan more for the wether' of two shillings on the original figure of £1. 8s. 6d. In December of the same year they sold a cow to him for £7. In January 1792 he bought a bullock from the friars for £11. 15s. On the corresponding expenditure side of the book payment detail of one shilling is recorded 'to Denis Mulligan for luckpenny', one of several references to this custom of returning a small amount of money by the seller to the buyer for good luck in a transaction. On 27 December 1788 a payment was made to 'Mr Gaughran's Miller his xmas [sic] box' of one shilling and three pence. In January 1789 Mr Gaughran's distiller is paid one shilling and one penny 'for his xmas box', repeated the following January as 'to the brewers man'. In July 1791 a related entry for the same amount reads 'To Mrs Fay's brewer for last xmas box'. Denis Mulligan's transactions with the friars were various. He is also recorded as receiving payment of 1s. 7½d. 'for a cod he bought for us' in May 1792. In June 1794 the friars record receiving 4s. 4d. from Patt Mulligan 'for a slink calf', one of several entries on the income side for what were unborn calves retrieved at an abattoir or slaughterhouse. In March 1798 it is recorded as income for 'a slink calf skin'; the skin was used in the manufacture of fine gloves. Cocks and salt were purchased from an Arthur Mulligan, and from Mrs Fay, along with saltpetre, the regularity of such purchases indicating that preserved meat was important in the friary. In December 1791 James

Lynch was paid for killing a cow 'and salting her', 'Dignam' supplied salt along with a reaping hook, bread and starch and in December 1794 the detail of who supplied salt is simply recorded as 'to different persons for nine stones of salt had last harvest'. In 1800 Biddy Mulligan was paid 3s. 3d. 'for breakfast', this specific payment recurring two more times. The friars record several other payments for 'breakfast', most usually at 'Dunderry Bridge'. From other entries this appears to be an establishment called Hazelwoods. It is unclear if this establishment was owned or run by the Mulligan family. Several entries are made recording transactions with Matthew, John and Mary Magee for baskets, 'the work of his mare', and 'eight chickens' respectively. Matthew Magee was several times in receipt of money for casual labour.

The friars' relationship with the Stanley family is also recorded through the accounts. William Stanley was a cottier or tenant of the friars, 'our cottier', who was remunerated by them for casual labour, as indicated by an entry in May 1792 stating that he was paid 'for 272 days work until the 1st inst. at 6d. per day'. The friars paid him for a spade, advanced 4s. 4d. to him 'to buy shoes for his wife', rented 'a ridge of flax ground to him', and bought meal, potatoes, and chickens from him. Judy Stanley, whether a wife, sister or daughter to William is unclear, was paid for butter and in July 1800, 5s. 5d. was paid 'to Stanley's little girls' for eleven days at turf.

It should be noted that there is an important caveat concerning the entries in the account books. Namely, that they record the date of the money transactions. As noted above, long credit terms were extended to the friars by the people they traded with, as did the friars in return. In terms of working out consumption levels the account books are lacking both in this respect and in respect to the fact that there is no indication from the figures how many sat down to table at any given time. A single entry in August 1789 records a payment to George Byrne for 'eleven days work at 6d. and six days at 9d. n.b. without meat or drink', which would imply that this lack of provision of food was the exception. In July 1790 three quarts of whiskey was purchased for 3s. 3d. 'for the turf drawers'.

The friars were prodigious purchasers of chickens. In June 1789 they paid for a total of twenty-eight chickens over a four-day period, with the price per bird varying from four pence to three and a half pence. The same month the friars made two separate purchases of ducks, fifteen in total. They bought turkeys, buying between nine and fourteen at a time. The expenditure on the turkeys was recorded in the months of June through to October, while income from the sale of them to James Leynagh was recorded twice, in January 1792 of £1. 4s. 0d for 'a dozen', and in April 1793 13s. 6½d. for eight. Pigs were raised, sometimes bought at Athboy and Crossakeel fair, or in the case of 'two fat pigs', at Navan in April 1795. 'Slip pigs', pigs between two and three months of age, and 'store pigs', pigs not weaned, are occasional terms used. Mick Stanley

and Denis Mulligan also sold pigs to the household, although it is unclear if in these instances the pigs were for immediate slaughter. In March 1795 the accounts record under income the receipt of two small pigs, valued at thirteen shillings. In the same month there is a record on the expenditure side to 'Peggy our second maid' and 'our boy John' of a pig each, each valued at 6s. 6d., totalling thirteen shillings. Whether this was a gift to Peggy and John or payment in kind is unrecorded.

Nothing was wasted; in April 1795 the accounts record the friars as being in receipt of 2s. 8d. for eight pounds of 'hogs lard'. In April 1799 the difference in the quality of salt for table consumption and for preserving or 'corning' meat is recorded with the entry of 'salt' for 1s. 6d. and 'salt for pig', costing 3s. They also bought salt for salting their cow. Entries for fish are numerous and varied. The household made regular purchase of cod, sometimes one, frequently two and recorded purchasing three in May 1795 for 7s. ½d. In February 1801 they paid 'Lynagh' 4s. 4d. for bringing a cod 'from Dublin'. The same month they paid 3s. 9½d. for a cod from Navan. The payments for cod all occur around or just after the Lenten period. In the medieval period cod fishing grounds were heavily exploited, largely because of the demand for salted and dried cod for Lent.⁴¹ There is no indication as to whether the friars enjoyed their cod fresh or salted. The household bought whiting, eel (a dozen costing 1s. 11d. in September 1794), and ling. In February 1790 they bought twenty-five pounds of ling at 3d. per pound, 7s. 3d.; in March 1792 they paid a premium price, 9s. 6d., for a 'quarter cent. of best Rush ling', twenty-eight pounds. According to D'Alton's *History of the County of Dublin*, Rush was 'enumerated by Hollinshed as one of the chief haven towns of Ireland, and once celebrated for the curing of ling',⁴² the tithes of corn and hay 'from Rush and Whitestown were leased at the annual rent of £7. 9s. 3d., and two dozen of dry ling, thus affording some evidence of the ancient celebrity of Rush ling'.⁴³ Herrings were bought in bulk. In February 1789, there is an entry of 1s. 1d. for 'herrings at the bridge'; breakfasts 'at the bridge' have been noted above. *The Parliamentary Gazetteer* of 1845 narrates that the parish of Clonmaduff, where the friary was located, is traversed northwards by the road from Trim to Kells, and westward by that from Dunderry-Bridge to Athboy.⁴⁴ In October 1789 payment is made for 'five gentlemen's breakfasts at Dunderry bridge' and the friars regularly record offerings received from there. In March 1789, 10s. 10d. was paid for 'two hundred of herring' and 19s. 2½d. for 'ling, red herring and cheese as per bill'. Red herring are 'whole ungutted herring, heavily salted and cold smoked until hard'.⁴⁵ With a purchase of two hundred, it would seem that the friars were preserving herring, either by kippering them (split down the back, lightly brined and cold smoked) or preserving them as red herring, although as they are recorded as paying for red herring it is more likely that they kippered their own. Red-herring houses had been in

existence in Wexford and Waterford since the seventeenth century despite Charles O'Hara's letter to the Royal Dublin Society in 1775 in which he describes smoking herring 'in a new way'. O'Hara was however successful in persuading the Society to provide grants for the erection of red herring smoke houses on the northwest coast.⁴⁶

Both seeds and plants were purchased annually and seasonally. Cabbage, onions, turnips and carrots are all specified, the friars purchasing with some regularity 400, 500 and 700 cabbage plants in the months of spring. When not shooting the crows, the friars fended off the birds by using cabbage nets, the purchase of which is recorded frequently in the accounts. In July 1792 Mr Morgan of Trim was paid for cauliflower plants (2s. 2d.) and salad seed (2d.), 'lettuce seeds' in July 1799, in March 1801 'small seeds' were obtained from Mrs Morgan. Only once, in March 1794, do the friars specify purchasing flower seeds. Entries in August 1790 indicate that the household turned their hand to making blackcurrant wine with the purchase of two stones of the fruit for 3s. 3d. and four dozen corks for 6d. There are no other records of fruit other than the purchase of lemons, the first entry for which appears in April 1789 when it is recorded with Jamaica sugar. The purchase coincided with the annual visit by the Provincial, recorded with some honesty twelve months later as 'for lemons during the Provincial's time'. The sum expended was the not inconsiderable amount of 2s. 5d.; a 'dozen of lemons' are recorded as costing 1s. 1d. in February 1792. The absence of record for fruit such as apples or pears indicates perhaps that the friars either had their own orchard or were gifted such fruit. The account books relating to the friary in Thurles, an urban environment, for the period from 1838 through to 1895 have regular entries for the purchase of apples.⁴⁷

The house that the friars had built was sturdy and well maintained. Ned MacManus and 'Martin the thatcher' are names given at different times to those thatching the roof, and were employed for anything between three and eleven days at a time, the daily rate working out at 1s. 1d. In October 1792 they bought timber from Joe Fihely 'to cover the dairy', the chimney in their 'parlour' required tending by 'Nixon' in December 1788, and the window there was glazed or re-glazed in February 1790. They paid a sweep regularly to sweep their six chimneys.⁴⁸ They planted flax and Margaret Geelan was employed for spinning the tow. Ash balls were bought 'to bleach the yarn' and Tom Roe 'the weaver' was paid for twenty-eight yards of coarse linen 'woven by him'. In October 'Gearty' wove fifty-five yards of sheeting. In October 1794 the household bought a spinning wheel.

The friars had all been educated on the continent.⁴⁹ Fr Tipper in Prague, where he had lectured and served as guardian: Frs Molloy, Waldron, Clarke, Grehan and Ryan were products of Rome, Fr Fleming of Leuven and Fr Flinn had completed his novitiate in Boulay, Lorraine. Their 'parlour' was no-doubt as comfortable as was consistent

with both their mission and their status as educated men. They had the means to employ servants, two males and two females, who appear to have lodged with the friars. Propaganda Fide issued a papal indult in July 1701 allowing dispensations from the Rule to the Irish Franciscans, owing to the persecutions they were subjected to in the period.⁵⁰ These relaxed rules for the friars on fasting, wearing the habit, riding on horseback and receiving money. The friars in Courtown travelled on horseback as it was the only safe way of ministering to their parishes and the accounts record transactions around the purchase, breeding, sale and stabling of their mares. Their kitchen appears to have been well, if not luxuriously, provisioned. In May 1789 Catty Meyler was paid £3. 13s. 8d., her wages in full, for the previous year. Mary McDonnell was paid £2. 3s. 4d. the same month, also 'her wages in full', indicating either an under-servant or different boarding arrangements. Catty Meyler appears to have remained with the friars until 1797; in May 1792 her wages had been increased to £4. 0s. 0d. a year. Peggy, 'our second servant' was paid £1. 14s. 1½d. in May 1790. 'Paddy our boy' and 'Johny, our second boy'⁵¹ were also in receipt of annual wages, along with an extensive role call of workmen whose tasks are unspecified.

The friars' table was furnished with dishes and plates of delftware, purchased at different times; they purchased soup plates and a small tureen in May 1791 for 3s. 9½d. and their stock of delftware was replenished regularly. In August 1789 'a small pot for the kitchen' cost 2s. 8½d. and the same month they paid 'a tinker' 1s. 7½d. for tinning two saucepans and mending pots. Along with turf baskets, in February 1790 the household bought 'potatoes baskets', *sciobs*, used for draining potatoes. The English watercolourist F. W. Tompnam's *Irish Peasants in a Cottage*, a watercolour dated 1844, illustrates the practice of eating from the basket; in the cottage the basket is propped on a three-legged pot. In the centre of the basket there is a noggin, a wooden vessel for food and drink⁵² and the friars record purchasing these with some frequency, expending 4s. 4½d. in February 1799 'for mending a sieve and noggins and a riddle'. The friars paid for weaving a tablecloth in July 1791, so if they used the *sciob* themselves, it was no doubt placed on the table. In September 1795 they paid 16s. 3d. to Mrs O'Neill for a breakfast table. In September 1793 the friars invested in an amount of kitchen ware which included 'wooden ware' bought at Navan fair, 'a kitchen jack and all its utensils' (£1. 6s. 6d.), two copper candlesticks (7s. 7d.), two kettles and a dripping pan (5s.) and paid 5s. 5d. to 'Totteral for hanging the jack'. A cover for the jack was bought the following month. In May 1801, the jack cord was replaced. The use of a jack and a dripping pan in the last months of the accounts indicates that by that time, if not before, the friars were spit roasting their meat, and possibly their fish. From the early eighteenth century, smoke, spring and bottle jacks replaced weight jacks, none of which required winding up.⁵³

Purchases of currants and raisins were paid for in the opening months of the accounts (January 1789), perhaps indicating that the household enjoyed a Christmas cake that year, although that particular expense was not repeated. However, the accounts do allow a glimpse 'of continuity in the Franciscan tradition'.⁵⁴ As Joseph MacMahon has observed, 'the visits of the Minister Provincial were an occasion for fraternal celebration',⁵⁵ registered in the accounts in July 1789 with the purchase of two dozen bottles of claret 'for the Provincial's visit and the feast of St Francis'. In October 1791 claret is again purchased to celebrate the feast of St Francis, in addition to 'half a pound of tea procured for St Francis' feast'. Offerings from the parishes are also recorded on the income side of the book with respect to the feast day. Provisioning of the house ebbed and flowed. Under the guardianship of Francis Tipper a more liberal hand is at play, while the accounts are more regularly balanced when John Molloy was guardian and under his hand they close in June 1801 with the friars in credit.

The accounts are an exceptional record of life as it was lived by a small group of men and their servants in a small parish in Ireland as the eighteenth century turned. They reveal life lived on many different levels. The friars administered a parish, but their activity and influence extended far beyond this through their adherence to the practice of the quest,⁵⁶ whereby offerings, in cash or kind, were gifted to the friars. Issues surrounding this practice are for a different forum.⁵⁷ What is unique about these accounts is that they provide a detailed financial record of a relatively small religious household, and indicate how a community functioned around this. Apart from the adults that the friars traded with, the record of children employed by the household is exceptional. Besides the little girl in the title who kept the poultry, the friars paid fifty-seven children 9s. 6d. in July 1792 to gather the stones in the meadow, an unspecified number of children 13s. 1d. in April 1794, a further twenty-two were paid 3s. 8d. the following April, and the last entry respecting these juvenile workers is in May 1797 when two children were paid 4s. for twelve days 'gathering stones'. There are many prisms to look through when studying these accounts. The motivation here is to determine how this particular household functioned within the singular circumstances that it faced both as a religious community and as a small household, a household that is unique in leaving a written record for posterity. No complete records like this exist for an equivalent religious, or non-religious, household in Ireland.⁵⁸ No better description of the problems facing historians of Ireland by the partial survival of its archives has been articulated than that provided by Marie-Louise Legge when she described this as being comparable to 'peering through a keyhole at the ballroom and watching a group of dancers. Occasionally a couple moved into focus. But for all one knew, just out of sight, there could be a group of naked men and women, dancing the Lancers'.⁵⁹

The friars were carriers of information and news from community to community, in line with their tradition of being chroniclers and repositories of history. As Joseph MacMahon points out, it is likely that they were instrumental in calming passions and allaying fears in the upheavals of the period.⁶⁰ They provided for the poor in financial terms as is testified to by the many entries relating to this in the accounts. They abided by the law, paid their hearth money, window taxes, public cess, and tithes to the established church. The accounts that they kept allow us to look through the keyhole. Nobody is dancing, but they provide testimony that for 'the unconsidered'⁶¹ regardless of the politics of the period, life went on.

About the author

Dr Dorothy Cashman's doctoral dissertation investigated the history of Irish culinary manuscripts, with particular reference to the gentry of County Kilkenny (1714–1830). A founding member of the committee of the Dublin Gastronomy Symposium, she presents frequently at conferences on the subject of Irish food history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. She has contributed to the documentary series 'History on a Plate' on Lyric FM, The History Show on RTE Radio, and has delivered talks at the National Library of Ireland, the Irish Georgian Society and at the IEHCA and SOFIR conferences in Tour and Dijon. Dorothy has contributed essays to a variety of academic publications. Her chapter on sugar bakers and confectioners in Georgian Ireland features in the forthcoming special edition, 'Irish Food', of the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies/Revue canadienne d'études irlandaises* (CJIS/RCÉI). Dorothy loves manuscript and printed cookbooks, diaries and commonplace books, inventories and accounts. Her current research is on the account books of the Irish Franciscan order held in UCD Archives.

Notes

The author is indebted to Fr Joseph MacMahon O.F.M. and wishes to record her appreciation of the kindness and assistance afforded to her by Fr MacMahon. This included providing her with the full transcript of his lecture, "The house is in debt": The Account Book 1788–1801 of the Franciscan House Courtown, Co. Meath', as cited in this paper, delivered at the Donatus Mooney Day, University College Dublin 22 May 2015.

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