

A little bit of history. **Thomas Swords – Father and Son, 19th century Maynooth Entrepreneurs**

While doing research for another Maynooth History project a number of years ago I came across some of the names of the major players who could be described as entrepreneurs of their day and who were involved in business dealings in the town of Maynooth. Two such men were father and son Thomas Swords senior (1749-1826) and Thomas junior (1775-1851) who lived at Crewhill which is situated on the Moyglare Road.

It was sometime later that I discovered that Thomas senior was buried at Ladychapel Cemetery. I recently paid another visit to take down the wording of the very substantial monument that stands in his memory. It is a testament to his goodness in life – based on principles of loyalty, honesty, love of family and philanthropic deeds. The grandeur of the monument also speaks to the wealth and importance of the family. It is interesting that his standing among bankers is given priority.

Beneath this Monument

*Repost the mortal remains of
Thomas Swords of Maynooth Esq
Who departed this life on the 18th August 1826
In the 77th year of his Age*

In Manners kind and conciliatory

In Disposition humane and generous

In Friendship steady and disinterested

Characterised not less

By the Purity of Principle than by Integrity of Life

He enjoyed the respect and Regard

Of all Banks,

And died deeply regretted by his sorrowing Family

By an extensive Circle of Friends and by the Poor

Who lost in him a bounteous Benefactor

To perpetuate the Memory

Of a revered and lamented Parent

To record the filial Piety

Of his affectionate and afflicted Children

This memorial of his many Virtues

Is inscribed

To the tenderest and best of Fathers

Requiescat in pace

There is a further plain and modest stone slab attached to the wall of the church which refers to an earlier Swords member and it marks the ownership of this plot in the cemetery.

This Monument was Erected by James Swords for him and his posterity 1762.

At the age of 26 Thomas Swords Senior is recorded in the College Account books from the beginning of the establishment of what was then called the Royal College of St. Patrick. He sold a horse, carriage and harness to the College for £14.0.1, he charged £7.10.4 for carriage and storage of freight of coal to Hazelhatch. He provided potatoes and oats to the college for £57.3.5. He rented a house to the college for student accommodation for several years at £36 per year. By 1800 he was selling sheep and cattle to the college which realized substantial sums, £100.13.11 and later for “sundry cattle” he was paid £350.11.3.

Thomas Swords senior was a successful Brewer who lived at Crewhill, Maynooth and was associated with the Catholic Committee that petitioned for Catholic Relief Acts in the early 1790s. (Seamus Cullen). The 1791 Act granted Catholics freedom of worship, to own their own schools, to hold junior public offices and to live in London. The 1793 Act allowed Catholics parliamentary and municipal franchise and allowed for entry to University.

Slater’s Directory of 1846 notes the family, listed under the heading of gentry, as living at Crewhill. By this time Thomas Swords senior had died (1826) and his son Thomas took over the business. He was chairman of the Board of Health in 1832. Maynooth had a temporary cholera hospital and permanent dispensary. The Duke of Leinster was its principal voluntary contributor donating £10.0.0. towards whitewashing and cleaning the habitations of the poor in the town. Thomas Swords and other members of the Board of Health sent an application to the Board of Guardians requesting an advance of £100, they received £80.0.0.

The Brewery was still part of the family business as the Freeman’s Journal of 4 July 1835 notes.

To be Let

The BREWERY and MALT-HOUSE, with suitable Offices, lately occupied by Mr. James Casey, in the town of Maynooth.

The advantages which this Concern possesses would render it an eligible site for either a Brewery or Distillery, have a stream of water running through it, which now turns a mill-wheel of considerable diameter, but could be made applicable to a much greater power of machinery, and have the Royal Canal passing within a few perches of its gate.

Proposals will be received by.... or by Thomas Swords, Esq. Crew Hill, Maynooth

N.B. Two dwelling-houses also to be let in the same town with good lock-up yards, contiguous to said Brewery. (Which was Kavanagh’s Mill and where Manor Mills now stands).

In 1836 he was one of the signatories to a letter to the High Sherriff Co. Kildare requesting a meeting to discuss the “odious imposition of Tithes”. In 1844 he contributed to the fund for the payment of the building of the New Roman Catholic Church at Maynooth. He is reported in June 26, 1846 to have contributed to the widow and orphans of a deceased clergyman in Co. Meath. He also contributed to All Hallows College, Dublin.

Thomas junior was one of the main property holders in Maynooth in 1851 and had a valuation of £55.10.1 for holdings in the Town with the Duke of Leinster at the top of the list with a valuation of £583.10.0. Swords was 7th in the list. We know that Thomas Swords died in 1851. It does not appear that he was married or had children and the subsequent swift auction of his property may also point to this.

Freeman’s Journal 8 April 1851. March 30, at the advanced age of 76, Thomas Swords, ESQ. Universally respected by all who knew him and endeared to his immediate friends by the urbanity of his manner, the benevolence of his disposition, and the strict sense of honour which distinguished all the transactions of his long and blameless life, his memory will be long held in grateful remembrance by the poor of his native parish as well as the surrounding parishes for whose use he bequeathed a large sum of money together with a considerable yearly property in perpetuity.

The Freeman’s Journal of April 12, 1851 reports on an auction to be held on 16 April by order of the Executors of the late Thomas Swords Esq at Crewhill. Consisting of Horn Cattle, Horses, Crops, Farming implements, Manure, Household Furniture, Plate and Plated Ware, Covered and Outside Car and Harness etc. (Further details are given in the advertisement)

The Freeman’s Journal April 24, 1851

Sale of the Estate of the Late Thomas Swords, Esq. The Estate of Harristown will be auctioned on Wednesday, 30th April 1851, at the hour of two o’clock. The Sale will take place on the Lands, that the Purchaser may thereby have an opportunity of forming a correct opinion of the many advantages this well-circumstanced property affords.

Harristown contains 135 Irish acres of prime land, is

situate in a peaceful, healthful, and Sporting Country, within two miles of Maynooth and Kilcock, both market and post towns; it adjoins the splendid Demesne of the Duke of Leinster, and possesses numerous local advantages.

As a discretionary power is vested in the executors to dispose of this Property by Public Auction or Private Sale, Proposals (pre-paid) addressed to Doctor O’Kelly, Maynooth, or to Mr. John Casey, Bagnalstown, County Carlow, the Trustees and Executors in this case; or to Mr. Thomas Ardhill, Solicitor 72 Aungier Street Dublin, will be duly attended to ; and should an adequate offer be made the purchase will be declared, if not disposed of previously. John Cogan, Auctioneer, Leixlip.

Recently a map of the property of Harristown was purchased by Maynooth University Library. The estate map was drawn up by Sherrard, Brassington and Green in 1820. It shows the townland of Harristown, Kilcloon, Co. Meath as belonging the Thomas Swords (Senior). Sherrard, Brassington and Green were the leading firm of surveyors in the early 19th century who also drew up a volume of the maps of the “Manor or Maynooth” (including Carton Park) in 1821. The sentiments expressed on the monument in Ladychapel cemetery and the death notice of Thomas junior reflect their shared entrepreneurial skills, political interests and philanthropic endeavours. Sources: Irish Newspaper Archive; Susan Durack: Maynooth: Towards a Community profile, 1795-1911. MA Thesis 2001.

For more about the history of Ladychapel graveyard see http://seamuscullen.net/ladychapel_graveyard.html

Susan Durack



**Thomas Swords monument
at Ladychapel Cemetery**