

The Heavy Metal Guv'nor – Giles D'Arcy (1821-1903) by Declan Barron

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Jail in Ennis was on O'Connell Street (then named Gaol Street). It stood on the site of the Town Hall Restaurant, The Old Ground Hotel. This Jail became overcrowded with an increase in custodial sentences and it was decided to build a new jail. The site chosen was on what is now called Station Road (the site later became the site of Braids factory). The new prison, completed around 1832, was a highly organised institution, where “a good school is established under a qualified master every prisoner is employed, and trades are taught to the younger criminals. Weaving, tailoring, shoe-making, carpentry, rope-making, and smith-work, are carried on continually, and a fair profit is made for the county, and one third paid to the prisoners as the law directs.”¹ It was into this world Giles D'Arcy was born.



The site of the old Ennis jail. Photo: NIAH

Giles was baptised on the 6th of May 1821, the second child and eldest son of John D'Arcy and Catherine, the daughter of Maurice O'Connor, of Jail Street.²

His father John D'Arcy was born 1790. In his late teens John joined the Clare Militia and a few years later transferred to the 88th Regiment of Foot (also known as the Connaught Rangers) as an Ensign. He served throughout the Peninsular War and was present at the battles of Talavera, Bussaco, Fuentes d'Onore, Ciudad Rodrigo, Badajoz, Salamanca, Vitoria, Nivelle, and Orthez for which he was awarded a medal with five clasps. He retired as a Lieutenant on half pay in 1815.³

During the Peninsular War several stories, mentioning John, were recorded, including this anecdote which occurred during the Battle of Salamanca

*"At the time the Colonel of the 22nd French Regiment stepped out of the ranks and shot Major Murphy dead at the head of his regiment, the 88th, a number of officers were beside Murphy. It is not easy at such a moment to be certain who is the person singled out. The two officers who carried the colours of the 88th regiment, and who were immediately in the rear of the mounted officers, thought that the shot was intended for either of them. Lieutenant Moriarty, carrying the regimental colour, called out, 'That fellow is aiming at me!' 'I am devilish glad to hear you say so,' replied Lieutenant D'Arcy, who carried the King's, with great coolness, - 'for I thought he had me covered.' He was not much mistaken: the ball that killed Murphy, after passing through him, struck the staff of the flag carried by D'Arcy, and carried away the button, and part of the strap of his epaulette."*⁴

On the 11th June 1818 Lieutenant John D'Arcy married Catherine O'Connor, of Jail Street.⁵ John's wife Catherine, gave birth to a daughter, Maria, in Jail Street, in March 1819, Giles in 1821, a son Maurice O'Connor D'Arcy in February 1823 and a daughter Catherine in November 1826.⁶

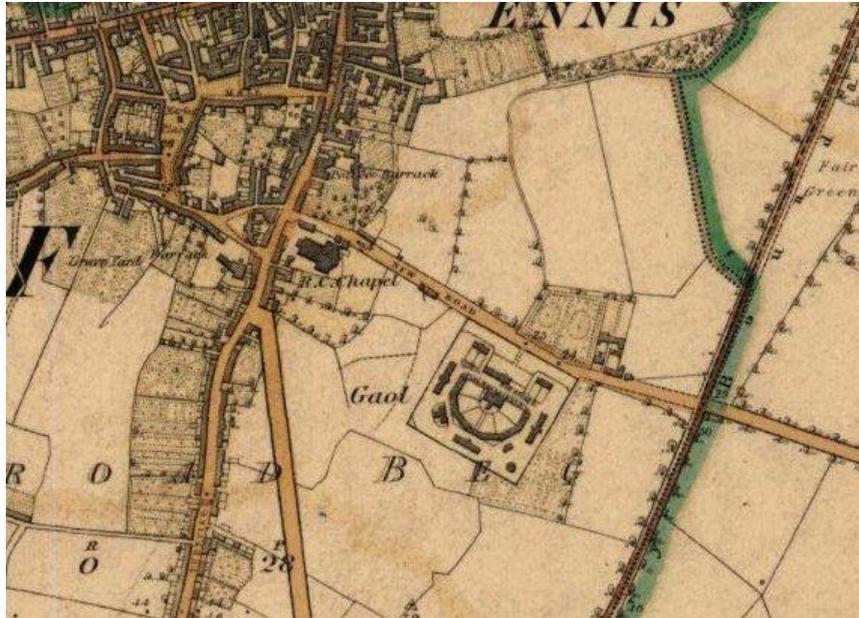
In the 1821 Freeholders List a John D'Arcy was leasing land in Lack from W. N. McNamara and the names of the lives on his lease were Giles Daxon and John Cahill (which was registered 19 July 1819). In 1829 an advertisement appears in the paper for leasing lands at Ballygriffy and applications were to be made to "Giles Daxon, Esq., Club House, Kildare St, Dublin, or to Lieut. John D'Arcy, Ennis". Both of these records along with John naming his first son Giles would suggest to me there was a close family relationship between the D'Arcys and Daxons.⁷

In the Tithe Applotment Books for Drumcliff Parish in 1825 Lieut. John D'Arcy is listed in Clonroadmore.

John's father, Thomas, was Governor of Ennis Jail, on Jail Street, between 1811 and 1824.⁸ John took over the job after his father. At this time Ennis Jail was in transition from the old building on Jail Street to the new building on Station Road.⁹ When completed John and his family lived in the "commodious arched section in the front."¹⁰

Giles and his younger brother Maurice both attended the Erasmus Smith College (now Coláiste Muire) from 1832 to 1837.¹¹ After leaving school Giles began mixing with the gentry of the locality and while participating in a hunt, with Mr. Finucane's hounds, his

horsemanship was humorously reported — “Mr. Giles Darcy getting off an ugly fence, was equally fond of his mare slashing Moll, and embraced her with his knees above her head, and then came quietly to earth on his nose.”¹²



The new jail on New Road, later Station Road

While living in the Jail complex John had some alterations made to the buildings including putting a balcony on the roof of his quarters “for the purpose of facilitating general supervision”.¹³ In October 1844 the Jail was inspected by the Director General of Prisons, Dr. White. He left a note in the visitors’ book which read “ Inspected the prison, and was much pleased with it altogether; nothing could exceed its cleanliness and order in every particular” and “found great regularity and order prevailing all thro' the prison.”¹⁴

It is unclear when Giles began working, with his father, at the Jail. When the Jail was inspected in 1845 the report stated that the excellent clerk “who has been selected as a person to recommend for the appointment of governor of a gaol should an opportunity offer”¹⁵ and the following year the report states “the clerk acts in a great measure as Deputy Governor, the duties of which office he fills in a very satisfactory manner.”¹⁶ In January 1848 we find that Giles was the Clerk. The Jail inspector's report stated that John was in bed sick and Giles, the Clerk, “acted as his deputy and appeared quite conversant with every rule connected with the discipline and efficiency of the establishment” and the whole place was considered in good order with credit due to the staff. John's annual salary was listed as £300

and for Giles was £50.¹⁷ John's illness prevented him from continuing in his job and he was granted a retiring salary of £175 per year, “a compliment well deserved by the recipient, as it was cheerfully bestowed by the donors, on part of the entire County. Mr. D'Arcy was a zealous and efficient officer, and Ennis Jail, under his care was a model for other jails of the kingdom.”¹⁸ A few months later we see Giles has been installed as the new Governor.¹⁹

By 1851 Giles was on top of his job. The Chaplain wrote, in a report on the jail, that he was “a gentleman whose intelligence and efficiency cannot be too highly prized, provided for the convicts remunerative employment at which they are now engaged. The officers of the depot who, before they came to it, were at the gaol, where they had the benefit of his superintendence, carried out successfully Mr. D'Arcy's views.” The following year the Jail's Board of Supervisors thanked Giles “for the admirably efficient manner in which that establishment is conducted.”²⁰

In 1853 a very amusing story was related in the local paper where six men, who were on the run in the Scariff area and decided they were better off to go across the Shannon at Killaloe and cause trouble in Ballina, and be committed to Nenagh Jail because “they heard that the hard labour there (Nenagh Jail) was only pastime compared with the heavy metal used by Mr. Darcy, in Ennis, of which it appears they did not approve.”²¹

In 1854 *The Clare Freeman* reported that Giles was fined, at Ennis Petty Sessions, for “exposing his stallion on the public streets”. *The Clare Journal* reported the same incident and said he, and a James Hynes, were fined for “having their entire horses in the streets”.²²

In 1857 Giles married Nannie H., the eldest daughter of James Mahon of the Old Ground.²³

In March 1863 we learn a lot about Giles when he is in Court charged with assault. Under oath he testified that while out walking he came across two men fighting and he asked the Plaintiff, Michael Enright, “what are you doing, you blackguard, let go the man'. He declined to desist from assaulting Hayes, and I gave him two blows of the stick on the shoulders; he then turned round and said 'you long ruffian, I'll pull out your guts'; a victualler named Considine then laid hold of him, but he became so outrageous that I suggested that he be tied with a rope to prevent him from injuring himself and others.” When cross-examined he states, “The stick was not rough; I often weighed myself; I am over fifteen stone weight; I am six feet seven inches high; I do not believe that I am as big as two men of Enright's dimensions; I

never boasted of being a strong and powerful man; I did not give him such a blow as a man of six feet seven inches would be likely to give him.” This case was heard in Limerick because in Clare “D'Arcy was so much acquainted with the jurors” that Enright felt he would not receive a fair trial there. The Jury returned a verdict for Enright and awarded £5 damages and costs.²⁴

Meanwhile Maria, Giles' eldest sister, became one of the early Sisters of Mercy in Ennis. In her book on that subject Sr. Pius O'Brien tells us that Maria was engaged to a Dr. Austin Fitzgerald of Miltown Malbay. At this time she began meeting the sisters as they visited the prisoners and, influenced by their work, she got herself released from her promise to Mr. Fitzgerald, converted to Catholicism and took her vows in 1858 (aged 39) as Sr. Vincent. Not long afterwards Fitzgerald died (of a broken heart?) and left £1000 to the Sisters.²⁵ Maria died in Sept 1894 aged 75.²⁶

After finishing his schooling in Ennis, Maurice went to Glasgow where, in 1846, he qualified as a doctor and joined the British Army. He retired from the army as a Surgeon in 1866 and died in Northampton in 1886.²⁷

When Griffith's Valuation of Co. Clare was drawn up, circa 1855, Giles was leasing over 300 acres. He was leasing Cranagher House and 200 acres there from William Blood and close to 150 acres at Cappahard from Thomas Persse and Matilda Tottenham. He was also leasing offices and yards right next to the Jail.²⁸ Farming while he was in the position of Governor of the Jail brought objections. Shortly after objections were made in 1862 Giles finished working in the Jail. In a court case in 1866 over land he leased in Drumbiggle, Giles stated while Governor “obstacles were being thrown in the way of his farming by the Board of Superintendence of Ennis Jail” so he “had the name of the caretaker (Clune) down in the poor rate books as the owner.” He also states that “he had never denied that the land belonged to him, nor did he admit the fact; he must not tell a lie for the farm in such a case.”²⁹ In April 1863 The Board of Superintendence advertised looking for a new Governor and the following month this adopted resolution of the board was published - “that the unanimous and marked thanks of the Board, be given to Mr. D'Arcy, for his very efficient management of this Jail, during the time it had been under his Governorship. - (Signed) - Inchiquin, Chairman.”³⁰

In June 1863 Giles moved to Athy, Co. Kildare. While living here he became very involved with horses and competing at the county agricultural shows. Here his horses competed in

what was the early form of showjumping. At the Kildare Agricultural Show in 1869 his horse won 1st Prize for the “highest jump over hurdle”. He won again at the same show in 1875.³¹

Giles father, John, lived for another 20 years after retiring, and although, by then, residing in Jail Street he died in the Jail on 19th July 1868.³² (The house they lived in on Jail Street is now Pat McCarthy Shoes, No.53 O'Connell St.³³). John was buried in Killone cemetery.³⁴ The contents of the house, including pots and pans were sold by auction and the lease on the house put up for lease the following October.³⁵

As yet no record has been found showing what happened to Giles younger sister Catherine. (She is not the wife of William Ribald that is listed in the Ennis R.C. Records as having children in the 1840s).

Giles can be found, with his wife, in the 1901 census living on Northumberland Avenue, Kingstown. Two years later, in July 1903, Giles died.³⁶

Notes:

1. Kelly, Tim, 'Ennis County Jail' in *The North Munster Antiquarian Journal* Vol.XVI (1973-4) (hereafter Kelly, Ennis Jail); *Report of the Inspectors-General of the General State of The Prisons of Ireland 1845* (Dublin, 1846).
2. Drumcliffe Church of Ireland Parish Records (hereafter D.CoI.); *Clare Journal* (hereafter C.J.) 20 July 1868; *Ennis Chronicle* (hereafter E.Ch.) 13 June 1818.
3. D.CoI.; C.J. 20 July 1868; E.Ch. 30 Dec 1809.
4. *Adventures with the Connaught Rangers 1809-1814* by William Grattan (Undated modern reprint by The Naval & Military Press Ltd. Anecdote pg.258. More D'Arcy references on pages xiii, 136-9, 222, 228, 325-8. Pg. 328 mentions him returning to Ennis by the Mail Coach in 1814.
5. E.Ch. 13 June 1818.
6. Drumcliffe Church of Ireland Parish Records.
7. E.Ch. 27 May 1829
8. C.J. 20 July 1868; C.J. 12 Sept 1811; National Archives of Ireland Ref. CSO/RP/SC/1821/1723 ; Pigot's Directory 1824.
9. Kelly, Ennis Jail, p. 66

10. O'Murchadha, Ciaran, *Sable Wings over the Land*, p. 21.
11. *C.J.* 31 Dec 1832; *C.J.* 23 Dec 1833; *C.J.* 29 Dec 1834; *C.J.* 23 Dec 1835; *C.J.* 5 Jan 1837.
12. *C.J.* 28 Feb 1839.
13. *Limerick Chronicle* (hereafter *L.Ch.*) 20 Sept 1837
14. *C.J.* 21 Oct 1844.
15. *Report of the Inspectors-General of the General State of the Prisons of Ireland 1845* (Dublin, 1846)
16. *Report of the Inspectors-General of the General State of the Prisons of Ireland 1846* (Dublin, 1847)
17. *Reports from Commissioners: Fourteen Volumes* 1848 p. 81.
18. *C.J.* 18 May 1848.
19. *C.J.* 31 July 1848.
20. *Parliamentary Papers House of Commons* 1851; *Limerick Reporter* 24 Feb 1852.
21. *C.J.* 27 June 1853 in *Dunboyne Newspaper Clippings* p.131.
22. *Clare Freeman* (hereafter *C.F.*) 6 May 1854; *C.J.* 8 May 1854.
23. *C.F.* 7 Nov 1857.
24. *C.F.* 21 Mar 1863; *C.J.* 13 Nov 1862.
25. O'Brien, Sr. Pius, *The Sisters of Mercy of Ennis* (Ennis, 1992) pgs. 23 and 171.
26. *Freeman's Journal* 28 Sept 1894. Her obituary says she was Mother Superior for 20 years. There is some confusion here as there were 2 Sr. Vincents.
27. *Commissioned Officers in the Medical Services of the British Army, 1660-1960* Part 1 pg.337.
28. Griffith's *Valuation of Ireland*.
29. *L.Ch.* 8 Mar 1866
30. *C.J.* 6 Apr 1863; *C.J.* 14 May 1863.
31. *L.Ch.* 8 Mar 1866; *Dublin Evening Mail* 1 Oct 1869; *Freeman's Journal* 14 Oct 1875.
32. Official Death Registry Ennis No.491 1868

33. Cancellation Books. Giles wife's sister m. John Purdon. *C.J.* 28 July 1862; Brennan, Larry *O'Connell Street* (Ennis, 2012 pg.94)
34. *C.J.* 20 July 1868
35. *C.J.* 27 July 1868; *C.J.* 22 Oct 1868.
36. *Saturday Record* 11 July 1903.