

# Western Family History Association

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## “Finding out about my grandfather that I never knew....and some more”

*by Sean Flanagan, Claregalway, Chairman WFHA.*

The main purpose of this report is to demonstrate, as a beginner to family history research, how I planned a system of searches in the national archives resulting in the discovery of new details on my ancestry, in particular my grandfather John Flanagan who died in 1933, years before I was born.

My home was in the townland of Ballybride, 2 miles from Roscommon town on the road to Creggs. Our father Jack told us that John came from the Creggs area, that he was a good stockman who traded at the local fairs including Roscommon, Creggs and Ballygar. My interest in him was stirred up by a number of talking points:

(1) When I was introduced to an elderly man, a native of Ballygar, at the Nursing Home in Loughrea around 1987, he commented- “you mean Flanagan from Ballynakill” (Ballynakill is situated between Creggs and Glenamaddy). This by-the-way comment proved, later on, to be a significant signal for the direction of my investigations.

(2) I was shown an old newspaper report recalling the agrarian troubles and evictions on the Pollock Estates in Creggs during the 1850s. Was John Flanagan caught up in these land disputes?

(3) More recently I was reminded that during John’s lifetime, there was another John Flanagan also resident nearby in Ballybride. To distinguish between the two, our John Flanagan was often referred to as ‘Pollok’ Flanagan.

I required documented evidence to confirm these assertions. My approach to finding the information was to trace the members of John Flanagan’s family in the land, civil and church registers commencing with John’s death in 1933 and working back in sequence through the generations. I continued to follow retrospectively the land and family records back to the time of Griffith’s Valuation and before. The results, as described in my report, show that this approach was generally successful.

No record of John’s DOB has been found. But various records of his age appear in a number of documents:

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Reference	Age Recorded	DOB Estimate
Marriage Record 1896	Not stated	-
Death Certificate 1933	84	1849
Roscommon Messenger 11.3.1933	90	1843
Census 1901	40	1861
Census 1911	56	1855
Headstone in St. Coman’s Cemetery	Not stated	-

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Hence, estimates of his DOB range from 1849 to 1861. In the 1901 Census his Birthplace is recorded as Co. Galway; in the 1911 Census it is recorded as Co. Roscommon.

**Registration of farm title:** My first search was conducted in order to determine his status as a farmer, i.e., tenant or land owner and his farm size. With the Folio No. for his land holding, I visited the Records Office at Bishop St., Dublin, and obtained a copy of the Registration of Title- John Flanagan of Ballybride, Roscommon was registered as owner in fee simple of the lands described- 47 acres, dated Nov. 11 1905. His ownership was subject to an annuity payable half-yearly to the Irish Land Commission (ILC).

I then asked when did he acquire his farm or who was there before him? The Land Records Office was unable to help because their records in Bishop St. only commence in 1905; he advised me to visit the Valuation Office in Lr. Abbey St.

The Valuation Office is the agency for property valuations in the Irish State. The Cancelled Land Books hold the valuation records of land and properties throughout Ireland. To locate the Cancelled Land Books holding the valuation records for John Flanagan, it was necessary for me to state the name of the county or barony, electoral division and parish. For a given parish, the valuation records are classified according to townland. The listed records in the Cancelled Land Books give the name of the occupier, the owner or lessor, description of property, the rateable valuation and the dates of any changes. These records extend back to the time of Griffith's Valuation in the 1850s. The valuation records are listed in manuscript format, hand written in ink onto printed forms.

In the Cancelled Land Book for the years 1894–1908 Townland of Ballybride, John is recorded as the Occupier of 47 acres in three lots Reference nos. 6, 7, 8, House, Offices & Land. The Immediate Lessor was Charles Raymond Pelly. In 1908 the Immediate Lessor's name was stroked out and replaced with a new entry- "In fee, LAP". This means that in 1908 John became owner of his farm through the Land Purchase Act. The Wyndham Land Purchase Act 1903 facilitated tenants to purchase their farm holdings. The UK Government advanced £70m for land purchase loans. Through the ILC, 75% of tenants bought out their landlords. The land was registered in the name of the purchaser subject to an annuity payable to the ILC. The debt was attached to the property and not to the owner who was free to sell the property subject to the annuity. These records gave me an understanding of how John acquired ownership of his farm. Although it was a one-farm unit, there are 3 Reference nos. for the Valuation Map for reasons that will become clear later.

The next question was to determine when John commenced farming on this holding and who was there before him? Hence, I examined the records in the Cancelled Land Book for 1883–1894. Revisions in 1894 showed that John took over the tenancy from a Patrick Flanagan of whom I had no previous knowledge. This transfer appeared to be a normal father to son succession and, later on, I found evidence to verify this assumption.

**The Cancelled Land Books** are unique because they relate people to a particular tenancy or property over the generations. The valuations were revised every 18 months to 5 years to ensure that everyone paid the correct amount of local taxation. Arising from the revisions, the changes are entered in the Cancelled Land Books, colour coded in ink and the year of the change is recorded in the right-hand margin of the manuscript.

Continuing back through the decades to Griffith's Valuation for Roscommon published in 1858, the records show that each of the 3 farm Lots, Reference nos. 6, 7, 8 was farmed at that time by a different Occupier, namely, John Mannion, Patrick Donoughan and Patrick Flanagan (25 acres), respectively. Thus, it is evident that in the later decades extending to the 1880s, Patrick acquired the tenements 6 & 7 as they became vacant. As a result of these acquisitions he increased his farm size to 47 acres.

**Perambulation Books:** Next question: when did Patrick commence farming in Ballybride? I had learned at earlier meetings of the Western Family History Association about the existence of Field Books and House Books, also known as Perambulation Books, compiled by surveyors in the years before Griffith's Valuation. The valuation documents compiled by the surveyors in the field after the perambulation of a district were published by the Board of Guardians and the Grand Jury to set their tax rates.

I asked at the Valuation Office whether they had a Perambulation Book for the Townland of Ballybride. It was located in the archives and the records show that a Patrick Nolan was the Occupier of Tenement 8 and that he was replaced by Patrick Flanagan in 1854. The Perambulation Book provided the first documented evidence for determining the year in which Patrick acquired his Tenement and commenced farming at Ballybride.

This result led to the next question: was Patrick Flanagan farming elsewhere before he replaced Patrick Nolan in 1854 and, if so, where?" In considering which direction my research should turn next, Tom Norton's reference to 'Flanagan of Ballynakill', as mentioned earlier, offered the best signpost. I inspected the land records in Griffith's Valuation for the Civil Parish of Ballynakill, Barony of Ballymoe, Co. Galway, published in 1856. The records show that a Patrick Flanagan was a tenant occupier in the Townlands of Keeloges East and Rosdaul, Map Reference nos. 2d and 1, respectively.

**Griffith's Valuation Map Reference Nos.** At this point it is appropriate to explain the Map Reference nos. that are entered in Griffith's Valuation lists. The location of a property within a given townland can be found marked on the valuation map for that townland. The valuation map is based on the Ordnance Survey map for the townland in which the property is located. OS maps were first published in 1837. Each farm holding or property listed in the valuations in the Cancelled Land Books was given a reference number and this number was marked on the valuation map. Hence, the location of a given farm holding in a townland can be identified by finding the Reference no. on the map.

It has already been shown that in 1854 a Patrick Flanagan was farming at Ballybride. In order to support the proposition that the two Patrick Flanagans were one and the same, the Cancelled Land Books for Ballynakill were examined again for Revisions. The revised records show that at Keeloges E. and Rosdaul in 1856, Patrick Flanagan was replaced by other tenants. It was concluded that Patrick Flanagan ceased farming at Ballynakill in 1856. **Revisions in the Cancelled Land Books** confirm the value of these Books in tracking the movements of tenants and identifying the changes of occupiers and lessors and the dates of such changes.

Arising from these findings, the next phase of my research was to collect evidence that the Patrick Flanagan who ceased farming at Ballynakill was the same man that commenced farming at Ballybride in 1854. To address this proposition, I adopted a new approach. I arranged for searches of the civil and church registers of the Flanagan family that resided at Ballynakill. These searches were conducted by the Heritage and Genealogy Centre in Strokestown. New and significant information was discovered.

The searches commenced with the marriage record of John Flanagan to try and identify the name of John's mother. No record of the mother's name was located on the Marriage Register. The next step was to search for marriage records of the siblings of John Flanagan to see if there was a mother's name listed or if the mother's name could be traced. Two marriage records were located: a Malachy Flanagan and a Martin Flanagan. But again neither marriage register for them included a record of the mother's name. So, the search for the mother's name was continued.

The next search was in the death records for the Ballybride area for any members of the Flanagan family. Two deaths were located, namely, the parents of John Flanagan- Patrick Flanagan died in Ballybride Roscommon, April 16 1892, age 65 yrs. Honor Flanagan died in Ballybride Roscommon, November 25 1893, age 70 yrs.

No other record of a Flanagan was located in the Townland of Ballybride. Next, the Roscommon records were searched for births and baptisms of the children of Patrick Flanagan and a woman called Honor. Because I believed that the family possibly originated in the Creggs area, the records for the Parish of Creggs were included in this search.

One birth record for a child of a Patrick Flanagan and an Honor Owens was located in the Roscommon Civil Birth records for 1864. This led to a search for other baptism records of children of this couple and six such records were identified. Significantly, the baptism records of the 3 eldest children were recorded in the Parish of Ballintubber and the 3 youngest children in the Parish of Roscommon. I am advised that the earlier records of

Ballintubber and Creggs overlap, as churches that now form part of the Parish of Creggs may have been in the Parish of Ballintubber in the 1840s. These records indicate that the family moved from Ballynakill to Ballybride sometime between 1849 and 1856. As reported already, the Land Records show that the family moved in 1854.

The final search was for the marriage record of Patrick Flanagan and Honor Owens. This was located in the parish of Creggs and shows that Patrick Flanagan married Honor Owens on October 4 1844.

As a newly married couple, they had their expectations for a successful future. But only a year later, the Great Famine commenced and continued until 1849, followed by its aftermath of destitution into the 1850s. I have no evidence of the challenges they faced but in common with the survivors of the Famine, they succeeded triumphantly for us. We should be proud of them.

**New discovery of family ancestors:** This refers to one of John's siblings, Malachy Flanagan, married Catherine Hoare in 1884, a widow in the nearby Townland of Moyliss. In addition to 2 children from her first marriage, the Civil Birth records and those in Athleague RC Baptisms show that Catherine gave birth to 12 children in her marriage to Malachy.

This new discovery motivated me to search the Cancelled Land Books for the valuations in the Townland of Moyliss. The records show that in 1885 Malachy Flanagan replaced the late Thomas Hoare as Occupier of an 80-acre tenement consisting of House, Offices and Land. The site of the tenement was located by examining the O.S. Map for Moyliss. Revisions recorded in 1897 show that in that year Malachy Flanagan was replaced by another tenant. The sudden departure of such a large family including young children ranging from 6 months to 14 years of age stirred my curiosity intensely.

I requested the Heritage and Genealogy Centre in Strokestown to investigate what became of this family. Catherine and her children were discovered amongst the list of passengers recorded on board the ship ss Lucania that sailed from Queenstown to New York on December 12 1897. Later, I located her husband Malachy on board the ss Servia which sailed from Queenstown for New York in the previous August. No information is available on what became of the family afterwards; no letters or photos have been found. The family is recorded in the 1900 U.S. Census, resident in Manhattan and the children all attending school. Their lifetime careers, working occupations, etc. in the New World have yet to be revealed. As consequence, my family history research continues to be a work in progress.

### **Summary:**

**Why research family history?** For me, it was driven by curiosity and a special interest in identifying the origins of my ancestors.

**Who were they?** Uncovering the details of my ancestors for the first time was a stirring experience which threw light on my distant past. Their origins, their family details as tenant farmers could have remained in oblivion or unknown to me and my siblings.

**Family history records are substantial.** Finding my way to a new universe of knowledge resulted in a strong sense of fulfillment. Patrick and Honor married in 1844 with hopes for a successful future. Only one year later the Great Famine commenced, followed by its aftermath of destitution into the 1850s. Their first four children were born in those years. I have no evidence on the challenges they faced. In common with all survivors of the Famine, their struggles ended triumphantly for us. We should be proud of them.

**Information gaps remain.** Some questions remain unresolved, e.g. what became of Malachy, Kate and their young children who departed from their 80-acre farm in Roscommon to New York in 1897? In the search for answers, my family history research continues to be a work in progress.