

George Pilkington of Tynan

Clockmaker and enterprising business family

by Brian Gilmore

Several military conflicts brought much destruction to County Armagh during the Nine Years War (1593-1602) as the army of Hugh O'Neill fought to prevent English incursions into counties Armagh and Tyrone.¹ And yet as a case study of George Pilkington, a Tynan clockmaker from an enterprising business family, suggests, the area began to recover quite

quickly in spite of the scale of the devastation.

An artefact from the period, Bartlett's Map of South Ulster (1602-3) indicates the "long trench of the forde", where Marshall Henry Bagnell and 850 English soldiers were killed and another 400 injured.² They had been ambushed in 1598 at what became known as the Battle

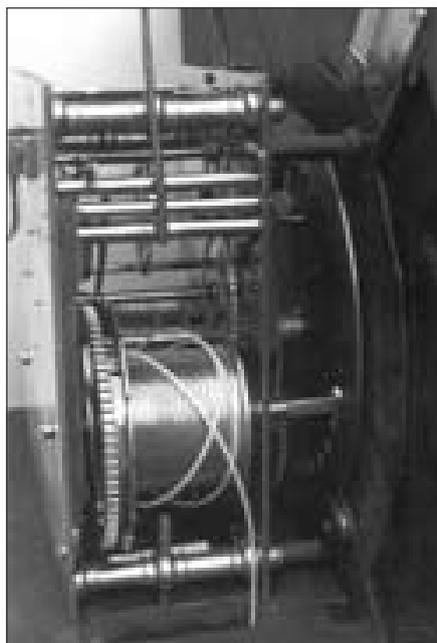
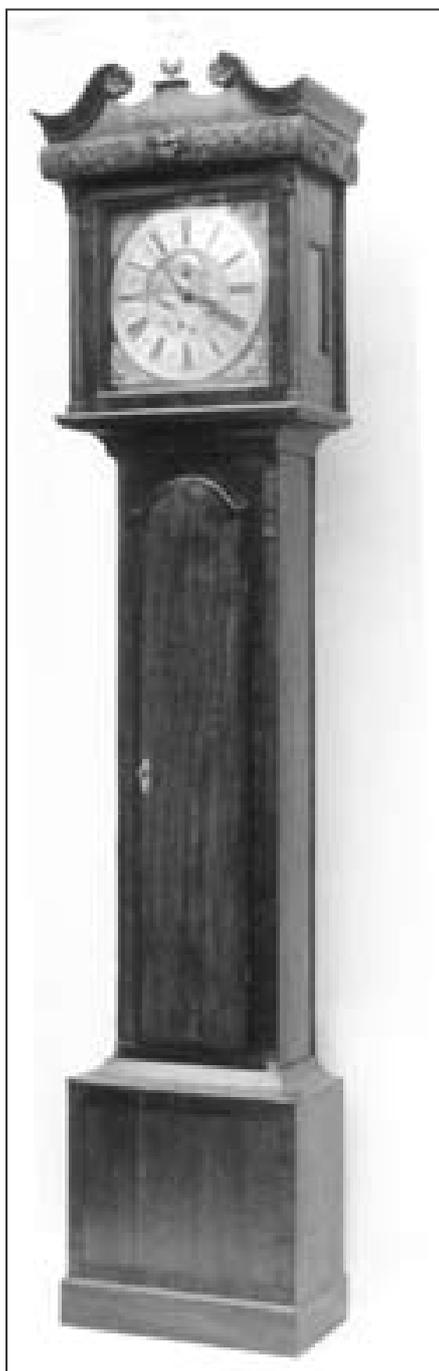
of the Yellow Ford.¹ The map also shows castles destroyed at Kinard³ and 'new castle' at Creevekeeran⁴ and hill forts at Lisglin⁵ and Lisdrumbruchas, all clearly sites of further conflicts. The 'teampall' (church) at Tynan is shown intact and significantly it is through this church that we find out a great deal about the Pilkington name, which is inextricably woven into the history of Tynan.

The city of Armagh is shown to be in a dilapidated condition with all its churches roofless after several years of sacking by both English and Irish forces.² An indication of the commercial recovery of Armagh by 1622 was the earliest known record in Ireland for a "maker of horolges" - a clockmaker in connection with the City of Armagh - a Myles Stapylton.⁶

Pilkington,⁷ a very rare English surname, is prominent among clockmakers of the time.⁸ About 1630 a Henry Pilkington well armed with a sword and a musket was listed second among 155 men on 3000 acres of undertaker's lands on the estate of Anthony Cope in the barony of Orior in county Armagh.⁹ That is the earliest known record in County Armagh of the Pilkington name, which would later become synonymous with the finest long-case clocks manufactured by George Pilkington in Dublin circa 1710 and by George Pilkington in Tynan circa 1750 to 1770. It is frequently assumed that the two were related or possibly the same person.

George Pilkington was apprenticed in Dublin in 1695 to Robert Rigmaiden and a surviving mahogany clock signed "G Pilkington, Dublin" is now in the United States¹⁰ - Clock A.

Longcase clocks were found initially in the great houses of the gentry and the wealthy and it was only in later years that they became a household necessity



Clock A



Rep. Church Body

Clock B and Geo' Pilkington's signature from Tynan vestry minutes

for the middle classes.¹¹ It was to meet this demand that skilled craftsmen spread from the larger cities and towns to villages such as Tynan. One particular example is a mahogany clock still located in County Armagh with the brass dial signed on a ribbon "Geo Pilkington TYNAN" – Clock B.

Two other surviving examples of "George Pilkington Tynan" clocks are known, but these are in later longcases and only the dial and the works are original. One is in county Galway with the brass dial signed "George Pilkington TYNAN" – Clock C. The original square brass dial has been cut circular to fit into a later round dial case.

Another clock, in the Ulster Museum, has a coloured painting of Greencastle on the dial arch - Clock D.

It may be also that the name varied in its spelling since, in 1740, a 'Geo. Pilkinten' is listed as one of the Protestant Householders for the parish of Tynan.¹² We know that Saint Vindic's Church of Ireland church was the church attended by George Pilkington and his family.¹³ Vestry records list a single attendance of a Thomas Pilkington in the year 1733 and 'Geo Pilkington' is first recorded in April 1740.

This close involvement with the local church and community suggests that Thomas and George were established

residents in Tynan parish for several years before 1733 and 1740, but there is no evidence of the family living in the parish prior to 1720. The church¹⁴ and Tynan village are shown on Rocque's map (*Illu' p28 below*) of 1760¹⁵ - the mass garden referring to the altar of sods on the triangular point of ground formed by the junction of the now Chapel Hill Road with the now Coolkill Road.¹⁶ At this time it was the custom for the Tynan church bell to be rung at 9pm each evening for "the Curfew" and this ancient tradition continued for the next 150 years.

At the April 1747 Select Vestry called pursuant to the Act of Parliament for appointing overseers of the public roads, George Pilkington was appointed to serve as a temporary contingency in the room (sic) of Thomas Knox who was ill. Each overseer was responsible for a section of roads in the parish and local people without land had to work unpaid on the roads for a certain number of days each year. A Henry Pilkington, possibly George's brother, was a regular overseer of roads, an onerous task, for the Select Vestry for many years. The Vestry book was signed at every meeting by each member for their responsibilities.¹⁷

For several years George had the respon-



Clock C

sibility of providing the Elements for the Holy Communion and for washing the church linnen (sic). In April 1759 he was appointed Clerk of the Vestry in the room (sic) of a deceased clergyman. George is last recorded at the Vestry in September 1770 and thereafter a Mrs

whom thefts were to be reported. In 1771 a carefully worded advertisement for a farm servant by Mrs. Pilkington (presumably Ann, George's wife) is a good example of sound business acumen and the acceptance of the leading role of a woman in the Tynan area. It also

is not known if these facilities had been available to George during 1750-1770. It is also unclear whether the family business of clockmaking had been carried on after George's death by George, the son of Samuel Pilkington and grandson of George.

It is remarkable in these days when clocks and watches come with a one year guarantee, to think that the very beautiful clocks made by George Pilkington²¹ in Dublin and Tynan are still keeping time reasonably accurately after nearly 300 years.



Tynan on Rocque's map of Co. Armagh 1760

Ann Pilkington, possibly his wife, undertook the responsibility for providing the Elements for the Holy Communion and washing the church linen for £3-10-00 each year.

Of particular interest is that the signatures of "Geo Pilkington" from the Vestry minutes during the 30 years from 1740 and 1770 are identical to those on the brass dial "Geo Pilkington" on clock B. As the dial of Clock C is differently signed "George Pilkington", it is unclear if this simply was an early design from a different engraver or if this clock may have been made by another member of the family.

Belfast evidence

Advertisements in the Belfast Newsletter^{18 19} relating to Pilkingtons of Tynan provide other valuable leads about the family. George was Post Master of Tynan from at least 1760 to 1770 and had connections with silver watchmakers from as early as 1760. He was also a land agent and a respected member of society to

illustrates the near absolute power that the business people at the time had over servant employees.

An advertisement by John Begg of Belfast claimed that he supplied country watchmakers with ready made work and all the materials for clock and watch making. As the case of clock B is of the Dublin style, this may indicate that George Pilkington of Tynan had some connections with Dublin.

The question then arises over whether country clockmakers, such as Pilkington, simply purchased fully complete ready made work in their own name and simply acted as a retailer to their customers - or whether all materials including the dial, the engraving, the movement and the case were sourced and assembled in a satisfactory manner locally. Regarding this issue, Robb has commented that the case was rarely if ever made by a clockmaker and usually the dial was the work of an engraver, with the clockmaker being only responsible for the movement.²⁰

By 1800 cabinet making was also part of the Pilkington business in Tynan, but it



NAT. MUSEUMS & GALLERIES OF NORTHERN IRELAND

Clock D

Endnotes

1 *Irish Battles – A military history of Ireland*. GA Hayes-McCoy. 1969. The long trench used in the ambush was located near Tullygoonigan and Annahagh, 3 miles north of Armagh

2 *Ulster and other Irish Maps c 1600* GA Hayes-McCoy. 1964. For Armagh see pages 5 and 6.

3 Now Caledon. Kinard – from the Irish Cionn Aird for 'head/top of the hill' - nearby

O'Neill crannóg (island dwelling) of Dromorrie - no longer extant. Henry Oge McHenry O'Neill of Portnelligan, a former rebel, was appointed Sheriff of Ardmagh in 1605.

4 Ruins of Creevekeeran castle visible from Drumhillery Road - nearby O'Neill crannóg of Portnelligan in Doogary Lough.

5 Unusual "square" hillfort visible behind Linwood's on Monaghan Road. From the Irish *Lios an Ghlinn* for 'fort of the glen'.

6 *Return of Artificers within the Realm of Ireland*, dated 1622. Quoted by TGF Paterson in *Armachiana* (Armagh County Museum) with articles on other Armagh watch-clock makers.

7 Originating from the place called Pilkington in the parish of Preswick, Lancashire

8 *Surnames of Ireland* by R E Matheson . Only 8 births in 1890 for surname Pilkington in Ireland.

9 *An unpublished early 17th century census of men and arms on the estates of English and Scotch settlers in Co. Armagh*, TGF Paterson. *Seanchas Ardmhacha* 1970, 5, 401-417.

10 NAWCC Bulletin July 2003 "*Dublin Clocks - Part 1*" by Killian Robinson. <http://nawcc.org/pub/bulletins/bulaug03.htm> . The author is contactable via kcbpr@aol.com

11 For history of longcase clocks refer to: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Longcase_clock and http://www.bbc.co.uk/antiques/collectors_guides/clocks_longcase.shtml

12 <http://www.proni.gov.uk/> Protestant Householders of the Parish of Tynan, 1740, T808/15258. No family connection can be established with the earlier Henry in 1630. No 1664-5 record *County Armagh Householders*. TGF Paterson. *Seanchas Ardmhacha* 1958, 3, 96-142 No land or house records for Pilkington in county Armagh 1827 and 1864 (Householders Index). No known gravestones for Pilkington <http://www.historyfromheadstones.com/index.php?home>

13 <http://www.proni.gov.uk/> MIC/1/12, MIC/1/13, MIC/1/18. Author is grateful to the Representative Church Body of the Church of Ireland, Dublin and Rev. Barry Paine, Rector of Tynan for permission to publish. *Dúiche Néill*, 2006, 15, 99-132, Tynan Burials and Baptisms 1683-1723 Rev JM Batchelor; www.oneillcountryhistoricalsociety.com

14 Vindic, the saint associated with the ecclesiastical foundation of Tynan lived in the early 9th century, according to Bishop William Reeves, Rector of Tynan 1861-86 (*Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, 6, 1900, 105-111). The church was rebuilt in 1784 and enlarged in 1822. Earlier history of the registers from 1688 to circa 1900 is discussed (20 pages) in *Parish Registers - Historical Treasures in Manuscript* by FX McCorry, 2004. £13 softback / £18 hardback post free from 10 Parkview Street, Lurgan BT66 8QL.

15 Rocque's map of Armagh is on display in the Irish and Local Studies Library, Abbey Street, Armagh

16 *History of the Tynan Parish in the County of Armagh*, JJ Marshall, 1932 Dungannon. Mass garden in use until Catholic church built circa 1813.

17 Microfilms can be inspected in PRONI, 66 Balmoral Avenue, Belfast BT9 6NY for those with an interest in the signatures of their forbearers. Local clergy are NOT to be contacted.

18 <http://www.ucs.louisiana.edu/cgi-bin/belfst/QueryForm1.cgi> Database 1738 to 1800 giving information and dates on which articles concerning selected keywords e.g. Pilkington were published. Printouts from microfilms of the Belfast Newsletter in Irish and Local Studies Library, 39C Abbey Street, Armagh BT61 7EB <http://www.ni-libraries.net/libraries/selb/irish-local-studies-library/>

19 Belfast Newsletter 7/10/1760, 23/12/1766, 2/1/1767, 11/11/1768, 24/5/1771, 12/7/1771 servant, 25/5/1784, 24/9/1784, 5/11/1784, 15/9/1789 Begg, 4/12/1789, 1/2/1796, 27/2/1797, 27/3/1797, 3/1/1800

20 *Ulster Clocks and Clockmakers* by John J Marshall et al. (Belfast Public Libraries) with articles on other Armagh watch/clock makers. *Ulster's First Watchmakers*, CJ Robb extract from Belfast Telegraph 6/2/1941.

21 Information and images of other George Pilkington clocks would be welcome to:- BrianJGilmore@aol.com, kcbpr@aol.com and Declan.Maher@gmit.ie

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St. Vindic's Church Tynan

A Servant wanted immediately, capable (with the Assistance of a Host Boy or Lad) of completely managing, and who will undertake doing all the Labour on a small Farm of twenty Acres, about eight or nine in Tillage, the rest in Pasture, Meadow, and Turf Beds; two or three Horses and three Cows to keep, the Duties have been required this Year; the necessary Assistance will be given in loading the Harvest, making the Hay, and cutting the Turf. He must be perfectly sober, honest, free from Idling and loose Company, and of such Fidelity and Attention to his Master's Interest and Business as will insure that every Thing is conducted with the utmost Frugality and Economy: He must be handy with his Hands and Limbs, and contrivance ingenious if as to any the Experience of small Hills or his Millery: His Character must be certified (by some Gentleman if he has lived with him upwards of five Years, if not by ten or more) to correspond with these Qualifications, if not in all which about Gentlemen are wanting, making at the same Time their Knowledge of the Deficiencies. These Gentlemen the Diligent and Enquiring must be known in their Country to be of such Honour as not to entertain a Servant whose Character they are doubtful of, one of what is called a Master or Gentleman, &c. He must be a single Man, who tells his Wife a thorough honest and of good Character, if he has a Son fit to work with him at home he will be able to do. Any applying for this Service must direct to Mrs. Pilkington at Tynan, near a Servant, with their Terms by the Year, and the Gentlemen's Names who will recommend them, to avoid all Pretence.

Advert by Mrs Pilkington's for servant from Belfast Newsletter 12 July 1771