

## Ballinvreena Fair

The earliest reference to Ballinvreena Fair dates back to 1798. In April 1798 Staker Wallis was flogged at Ballinvreena Fair, having been captured in March of that year and eventually executed in Kilfinane in the following July.

The following account of the Staker Wallis story, written by an unnamed author, was published in the Cork Examiner on 1 February 1912

### THE CORK EXAMINER THURSDAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 1, 1912

An esteemed correspondent from Milwaukee, his thoughts of other days stimulated by the magnificent lecture on "Dr. McElligan and his Times" delivered by the Very Rev. Canon Murphy, P.P., D.D., Macroom, recounts in an interesting letter the story as he heard it when a boy on his native heath, of the fidelity and sufferings of Wm. Wallace, a '98 celebrity, known to his compatriots as "Wallace the Staker," who laid down his life for his country in these troubled days. Wallace was born at Teerovor, in Limerick, in 1738. He took a prominent part in the United Irish conspiracy in his parish, and was arrested and brought into Kilfinane. After being three times publicly whipped on a cart drawn through the town, he was executed by the orders of Captain Oliver without even the semblance of a trial. Ireland produced no nobler or truer son than he. Oliver offered him money and liberty if he would give the names of the company of which he was captain, but the old hero sternly refused. Even after his second public whipping, Oliver sent him a paper with the promise of freedom if he would write even one name on it, whereon the sturdy old man returned the paper with "William Wallace" written on it.

Oliver now conceived a most atrocious plan. He concluded to have Wallace brought to Ballinvreena, a few miles east of the town, and have him publicly whipped the third time, expecting very naturally that his friends would rush to the rescue. The following account of what happened is from a memoir of Wallace compiled by his great-granddaughter, a Mistress Eunice Graham Brandt, of Chicago: "On the 14th of April there was to be a cattle fair held at Ballinvreena, a town three miles east of Kilfinane. Oliver had Wallace brought to the fair grounds to be flogged for the third time. After Barkman had administered a few blows, and as Oliver was shouting 'Lay on the cat,' and that perhaps he would then tell, an officer named George Wheeler Bennett rode up and cried 'Sillime! for torturing an old man!' and when he saw the condition of Wallace's body he ordered Barkman to stop, and after a sharp conference with Oliver, there was no more flogging." Whereupon Wallace was conveyed back to Kilfinane, and hanged. His head was spiked on a stake over the market house, and his body was buried in a rude grave filled in with lime, in the open square. "When," our correspondent asks, "will the men of Limerick raise a monument to the memory of the Staker, on the spot where his body was buried?"

To read an online account of the story of Staker Wallis see [Memoirs of The Staker Wallace | Topics | Our Irish Heritage](#).

The late historian, Mainchin Seoighe, published his book *Staker Wallis His Life and Times and Death* in 1994. Copies of that book can be purchased at [Staker Wallis Book - His Life and Times and Death, by Mainchin Seoighe | Kilfinane Coshlea Historical Society, Topics | Our Irish Heritage](#).

The aonach (or fair) was very much a feature of ancient Ireland. Today many places associated with those fairs bear the evidence in their placenames, for example, Nenagh (Aonach Urmhumhan) and Mainistir (Mainistir an Aonaigh). From the thirteenth century onwards patents were granted to prominent landed gentry for the holding of fairs and markets in their area. Buyers, sellers, stallholders etc could then be charged custom fees to enter the Fairgreen- the designated space for the holding of the fair.

In September 1808 an announcement in The Limerick Chronicle indicated that a gentleman named Michael Keys had a patent for Ballinvreena New Fairs. The fair dates announced then were 19 November, 21 June and 31 August. Earlier and later evidence show that there was also an April date on the calendar of Ballinvreena Fairs. Mr Keys expressed his satisfaction with the two fairs already held in June and August of 1808 which according to him prospered 'beyond his most zealous Expectations.' Now he called on his 'numerous Friends and the Generous public' to support the

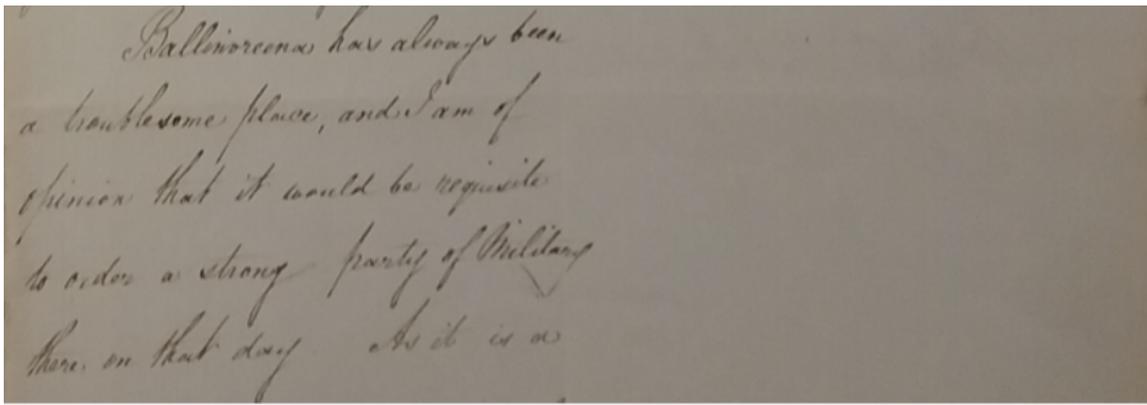
upcoming fair on 19 November. Confidently he claimed to be able to provide a range of market opportunities for various producers stating that 'as it is the season for *fat pigs* every good Buyer in that Line in Cork, Limerick and Waterford have also promised to attend' and 'a buyer from Dublin would purchase 100 Tons of Flax if brought there' and those who have 'Strong Horses or Mares will meet a Customer.' As well as that entertainment was also on offer because 'Mr Keys will give a Cup to be run for by Hunters, three Miles across the Country, to amuse his Friends free of any Charge.' At the same time he promised to 'use his utmost Endeavour to preserve Order'.

**NOTICE.**

**T**HE *NEW FAIR* of BALLINVREENA, in the centre of the Golden Vein of the County Limerick, CUSTOM FREE, which will fall on *SATURDAY* the 19th Day of *NOVEMBER* next, but agreeable to the Custom of the Country will be held on the *MONDAY* following. MICHAEL KEYS, finding the last New Fairs of Ballinvreena, held on the 21st Day of June, and 31st of August, and which in future will be held on said Days, prosper beyond his most zealous Expectations, is a third Time induced to solicit that Support he has already received from his numerous Friends, and the generous Public, to carry on the other Fair, which, according to Patent, will be held on the Day as above stated; he assures the Public, that every Victualler of Note in Cork and Limerick, have promised to attend, and as it is the Season for *Fat Pigs*, every good Buyer in that Line in Cork, Limerick, and Waterford, have also promised to attend. A Gentleman from Dublin will attend the Fair, who would purchase 100 Tons of *Flax* if brought there; such as have strong Horses or Mares will meet a Customer.—Mr. KEYS will use his utmost Endeavour to preserve Order, and in return for that very great and generous Support he has already received, he will give a *Cup to be run for by Hunters*, three Miles across the Country, to amuse his Friends, free of any Charge.

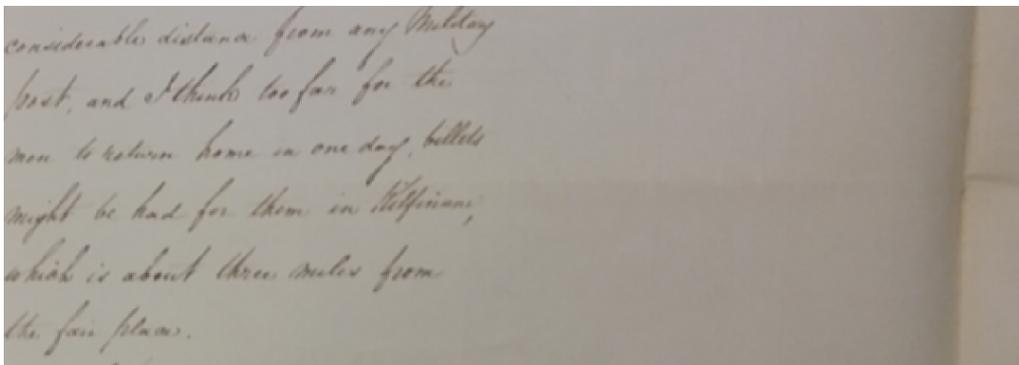
(a) September 27, 1808.

Judging by details in police reports Ballinvreena Fair, like many other fairs in the region, became notorious for what today would be described as violent anti-social behaviour. Faction fights were inter-familial feuds, each side being supported by hundreds of supporters-male and female. The best known warring factions in County Limerick were the Three Year Olds and Four Year Olds. In 1836 Sub-Inspector Smith wrote to police headquarters stating that it was necessary to draft in extra police and military to keep the peace at the Fair of Ballinvreena on 31 August. Ballinvreena, he stated, was always a 'troublesome place' and he asked that a 'strong party of Military' should be present on the day.



Ballinoreena has always been  
a troublesome place, and I am of  
opinion that it would be requisite  
to order a strong party of Militia  
there on that day as it is a

Chief Constable O'Connell of Kilfinane planned to have 15 men there on the day but this, according to Sub-Inspector Smith and CC O'Connell, would not be sufficient and the request was sent for as many extra men as could be spared. The extra personnel would have to be placed in billets in Kilfinane.....



considerable distance from any Military  
post, and I think too far for the  
men to return home in one day, billets  
might be had for them in Kilfinane,  
which is about three miles from  
the fair place.

It was noted that the local Magistrate, Mr George W. Bennett would also attend if required.

But other events were also taking place on that day and it was decided that the 35 Infantry troops which were to come from Charleville should be sufficient for policing the fair of Ballinoreena. This was along with the force of 15 policemen from Kilfinane promised by Chief Constable O'Connell of Kilfinane.

It appears that the fair of  
Ballinreena will be held on the 31<sup>st</sup>  
instant, on which day the Races  
at Newcastle near Limerick will  
be going on, and Mr. Vohes will  
be obliged to attend there, in con-  
sequence of which I waited on Colonel  
Mansel in Limerick to make ar-  
rangements for the attendance of  
the Troops. It appears that only  
35 Infantry can be got from  
Charleville which Mr. Vohes said

Police Report

W. Hillier

29<sup>th</sup> Aug - 36

V. M.  
Aug. 29.

On the day of the fair 19 November 1836 there were actually 20 policemen and 35 infantry troops on duty in Ballinreena but they had very little to do. Possibly the reports of heavy policing combined with the atrocious weather of the day kept customers (and possibly traders) away because 'by three o'clock in the afternoon the tents were struck and the crowd dispersed'.

County of Limerick

I attended on yesterday at the  
fair of Ballinreena with 20 Policemen  
and 35 of the 61<sup>st</sup> Regiment, under  
the Command of Captain Jones, from  
Charleville. In consequence of the extreme  
wetness of the day there was a very  
small assemblage of people, and at  
5 o'clock in the Evening all the tents

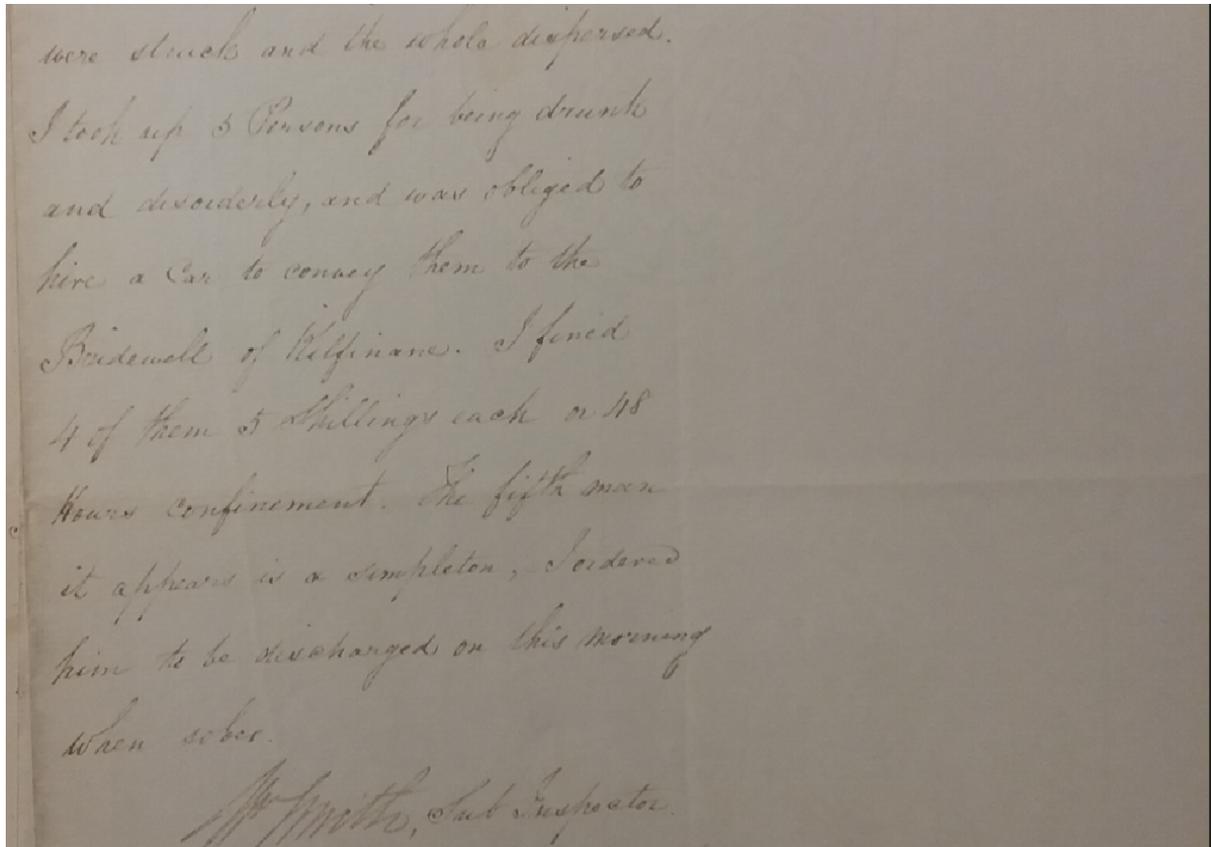
Police Report

W. Hillier

2<sup>o</sup> Sept. 1836

V.  
A. M.  
Sep. 2.

Sub Inspector Smith's report, written 2 days later, struck a slightly despondent note as he stated that his only duty on the day was to take up '5 persons for being drunk and disorderly' and that he 'was obliged to hire a car to take them to the Bridewell in Kilfinane'. He fined '4 of them 4 shillings each or 48 hours confinement'. Sub Inspector Smith went on to say that 'the fifth man it appears is a simpleton. I ordered him to be discharged in the morning when sober.'



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I took up 5 Persons for being drunk  
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4 of them 4 Shillings each or 48  
Hours confinement. The fifth man  
it appears is a simpleton, I ordered  
him to be discharged on this morning  
when sober.

*Smith, Sub Inspector*

The Limerick Chronicle's report on Ballinvreena Fair appeared on the following day 3 September 1836 and it concurred exactly with the police report, having more than likely been supplied by the military or police.

**The Company of the 61st Regiment, stationed at Charleville, were called out on Wednesday, to assist the Civil force in the preservation of the peace at the fair of Ballinvreena, in this County, under the command of Captain Jones, whence they escorted five prisoners into Kilfinane, where they were billeted that night, and returned to their quarters at Charleville next day.**

3 September 1836