

# 3.11.2 The Life and Times of Richard Lewis O'Mealy

## *Part II*

Ken McLeod & Ronan Browne

This slide show and lecture was presented at the William Kennedy Piping Conference staged by Brian Vallely in November 2008 by Ken McLeod and Ronan Browne.

To keep the pdf file size small I removed the graveside video and all the O'Mealy recordings. The video and the MP3s are all available for download from the SRS website.

Ken McLeod & Ronan Browne

With much help from many others

# The Life and Times of Richard Lewis O'Mealy



Ken McLeod & Ronan Browne

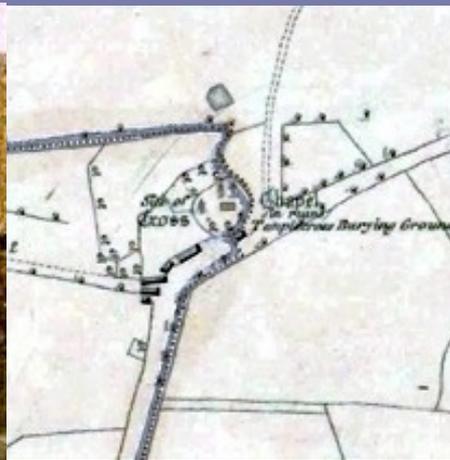
With much help from many others

## The Life and Times of Richard Lewis O'Mealy Part 2.

Last year I gave a talk on this subject which we now call part one. I took too long over it and had to chop some stuff. This time I will try to finish what I had. However I feel I must give a brief account of his life for those who missed part one.

I said that volume three of the Seán Reid Society Journal would be a special issue dedicated to RL, and would include all the data that had been gathered, including all the pictures and recordings. We have decided to give it away free of charge from a dedicated web-site. For those who would prefer the journals in book form NPU is coming to the rescue. The costs of publication in print were beyond the means of the initial small group of contributors. The sound tracks are all available presently on Ross Anderson's website. The BBC, who kindly made them available, recorded them in Belfast, in 1943.

# Templecross



## Templecross

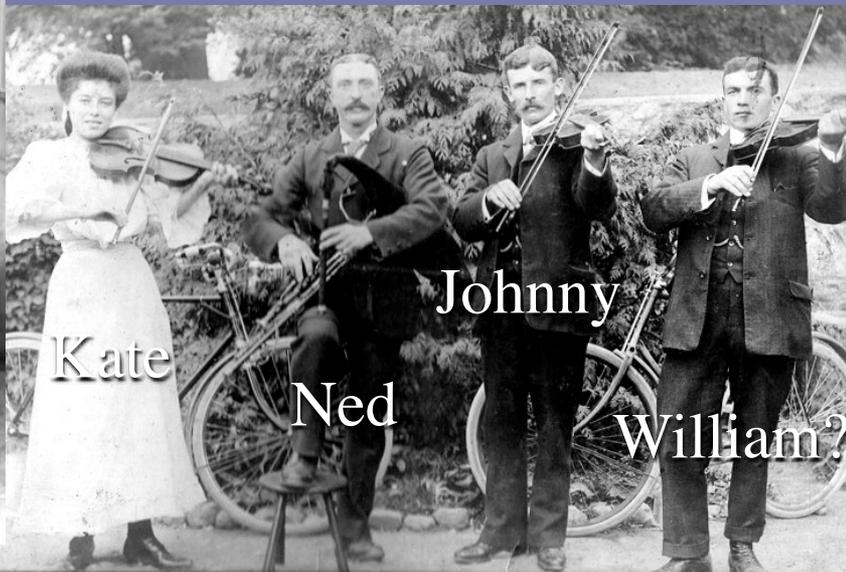
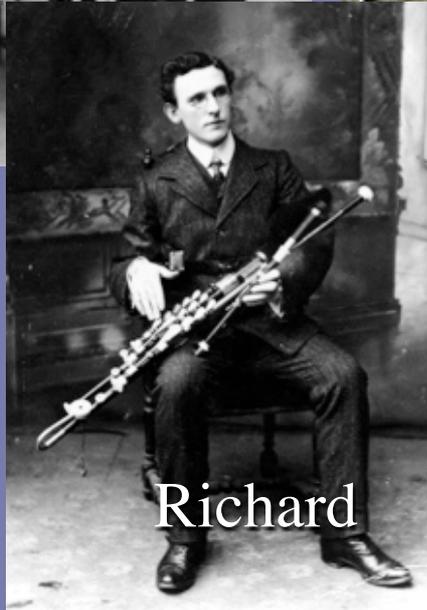
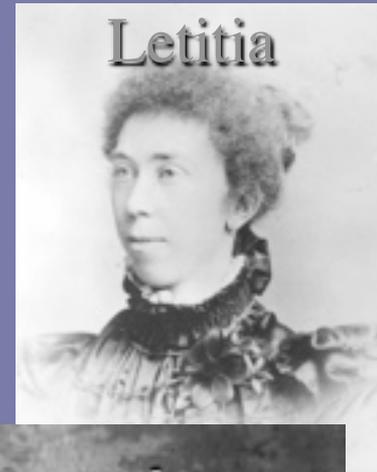
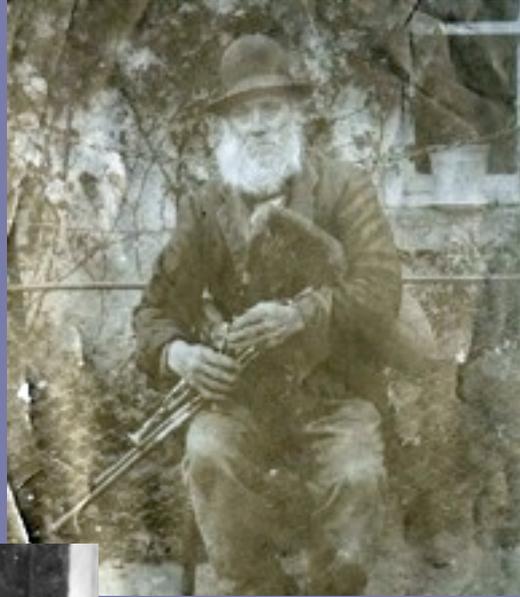
R.L.O'Mealy was born in 1873.

This is the house where they lived and where RL and his siblings were born, in various states over 100 or so years.

Centre left is the house around the 1890's with his father Larry, on the right, his mother Letitia left.

The Mealy family history has mainly been preserved by the Farrar family of Ballynacarigy, County Westmeath, which is the nearest town to where the house was in the townland of Templecross and it ended up in the hands of the Farrar's.

# Larry Mealy & Letitia Lewis



## The Mealy Family

This picture of Larry was taken around 1900. He died in 1903 aged 80 years old.

There were eight children and as you can see many of them played instruments.

Larry had a 20 acre farm there but he also worked on a local estate where he was the steward. He played a set made in the eighteenth century by James Kenna.

# The Kenna Pipes



Larry Mealy



Ned Mealy



Sam Farrar



Jonathan Farrar

## The Kenna Pipes

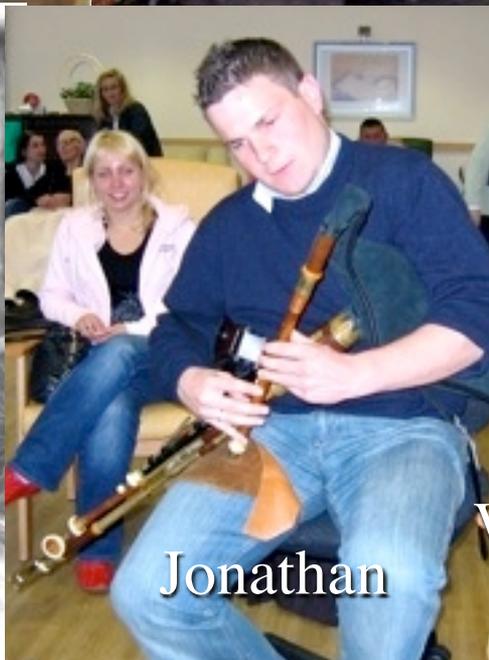
The Kennas, James and son Timothy, worked in Ballynacarrigy from 1770 to 1812 which may be more than a coincidence. I often wonder if the O'Mealys knew these great pipe-makers. It was Ned, centre picture, who inherited Larry's pipes and they went from him to Kate and from her to Sam Farrar. Sam gave them to his grandson Jonathan, who plays them today.

## The Farrar Connection:

Richard's sister Letitia married George Frederick Farrar creating the connection between the families, but Letitia died young and George remarried therefore there is no direct connection with the Mealys.

In this picture from left to right, we have Larry Mealy, his son Ned Mealy, Sam Farrar and his grandson Jonathan.

# The Farrars



## The Farrars

The picture at bottom right was taken in July 2007 when Wilbert Garvin, Ronan and I went to visit Sam in hospital. He got home again shortly after that but unfortunately died on April 3 of this year. He was a lovely old man and became very emotional when we talked about Richard and pipes in general. He had made several chanters himself, some of which can be seen on the table at the bottom of the picture.

## Now, back briefly, to our story:

When RL first left home he went to the town of Ballymahon to serve his time as a draper. He then moved to Dublin in the same position. He was in Boyle, Co Roscommon in 1897 and competed in the Feis Choil in Dublin in that same year.

# Belfast Houses



5 Edinburgh St.



17 Edinburgh St.



45 Rugby Avenue

## Belfast Houses

It appears that Richard came to Belfast in or around 1900 where he lived at number 5, and later number 17 Edinburgh Street, off the Lisburn Road. He moved once also on Rugby Avenue, not shown, but 45 is where he spent the most of the remainder of his life and where Brendan Breathnach, Andy Conroy, Sean Reid and countless others went to meet with him. He had moved there in 1931.

# O'Mealy Memo



Memo. from ~~1860~~  
R. L. O'MEALY.

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## Press Notices.

"Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the famous Irish Piper . . . His playing was warmly applauded, and he had to bow to an air that would break no denial . . . at last retired amidst a great outburst of applause. . . . Mr. O'Mealy achieved a distinct success."—*The Belfast Irish News*.

### PAN CELTIC CONGRESS.

"Mr. O'Mealy contributed some exquisite melodies on the Irish Pipes. The naive instrument, under his masterly manipulation, seemed to bubble over with reflecting consciousness."—*The Irish Times, Dublin*.

"This gentleman's playing of the Irish bagpipes is one of those unique artistic achievements along traditional lines that music-lovers of culture will thoroughly appreciate. Mr. O'Mealy's pipes stand in the same relationship to the ordinary instrument of the ignorant piper that a Handel-Caric clarinet of to-day does with the clarinet of Handel's time.

I think that future Irish composers will find an unfailing source of inspiration, and more hints towards a legitimate technique, with due appreciation of idiom and manner, spirit and tempo, in Mr. O'Mealy's playing than elsewhere.

There is the right ring about this playing; it goes straight to the heart; the whole art of the thing is healthy and sound."—*Belfast Evening Telegraph, 20th November, 1900.*

### CONCERT ON NEW YEAR'S NIGHT.

Popularly known in the City by his past appearances . . . gave a number of selections . . . was in every way impressively accorded. The music that he took out of his pipes was indeed beautiful, and

the expression perfect. To hear him alone was worth a visit to St. Columba's Hall on New Year's night."—*Daily Journal*.

### BRITISH ASSOCIATION IN BELFAST. Lord Shaftesbury's Garden Party.

"Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the well-known Irish Piper, was also present, clad in his picturesque costume, and the visitors from England and Scotland were especially interested in this clever musician, and in the instrument which he knows how to use with such effect."—*The Belfast News-Letter, 17th Sept., 1901.*

"Two impressive moments showed the influence of his music upon the audience."—*The Irish News, Belfast*.

"Mr. O'Mealy was a delightful change. He has great powers of execution, and is very expressive. In the old Irish airs he played with all the feeling that could be imparted to them, and in the old pibrochs, reels, and jigs, he rattled them off in a pleasing style. Mr. O'Mealy is a refined performer . . . no doubt that at the Cork Exhibition the Irish Pipes will be recognised as the corner-stone of all instruments."—*Belfast Evening Telegraph, 17th April, 1902.*

"The programme was all that could be desired, possessing features at once novel and engaging. Chief among these were the selections on the Irish Pipes. . . .

The music was soft and sweet . . . perfect harmony produced by a master hand, with such subtlety, such grace and power of inflection, that the audience were spellbound."—*Coleraine Constitution, 9th March, 1901.*

## PRESS NOTICES.—Continued.

"Such a success at last year's concert, again enchanted all with the music of his Irish Pipes."—*The Glasgow Examiner*.

"A feature of the evening were the selections on the Irish Pipes by Mr. R. L. O'Mealy." . . . —*Belfast Northern Whig, Sept. 17, 1901.*

"A brilliant exponent on the Irish Pipes. His selections were cleverly rendered, and were an object lesson of the music that can be produced on the national instrument of Ireland. . . . There can be no doubt that for a mixed audience at a concert the Irish Pipes carry off the palm for music, especially when manipulated by such a past master of the art as Mr. O'Mealy." . . . —*Newspaper, 14th April, 1901.*

"A very attractive feature of the proceedings was selections of Irish airs played by the popular Irish Piper, Mr. O'Mealy, which deservedly secured the heartiest applause."—*Londonderry Standard*.

"Gave a very fine selection on the pipes . . . an air that would break no denial . . . very heartily applauded."—*Belfast Irish News, 13th Dec., 1901.*

"Mr. O'Mealy, the famous Irish Piper, created quite a storm of applause. His marvellous manipulation of the historic pipes, and the exquisite musical results thereof, being the theme of general remark during the subsequent part of the night."—*The Newry Express, 12th April, 1901.*

"The sweet-toned Irish Pipes, in the hands of such an accomplished musician."—*Londonderry Standard*.

### IRISH PLAY IN BELFAST.

"Mr. R. L. O'Mealy gave a masterly performance on the pipes, which was received with the utmost enthusiasm."—*Belfast News-Letter, 17th Sept., 1901.*

"Gave two welcome selections on the union pipes . . . imitable dance-rhythms came tripping off his keys . . . There is no laughter like the laughter of the pipes in Mr. O'Mealy's hands; the jig is a compelling thing, and the reel tipples off in that deliciously naive fashion that knows no peer." . . . —*Belfast Evening Telegraph, 17th Feb., 1904.*

"The chief attraction on the programme was the playing of Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the famous Irish piper . . . He is a marvel, a genius . . . His playing is a masterpiece of refinement." . . . —*Coleraine Constitution, 1903.*

### CONCERT OF IRISH MUSIC.

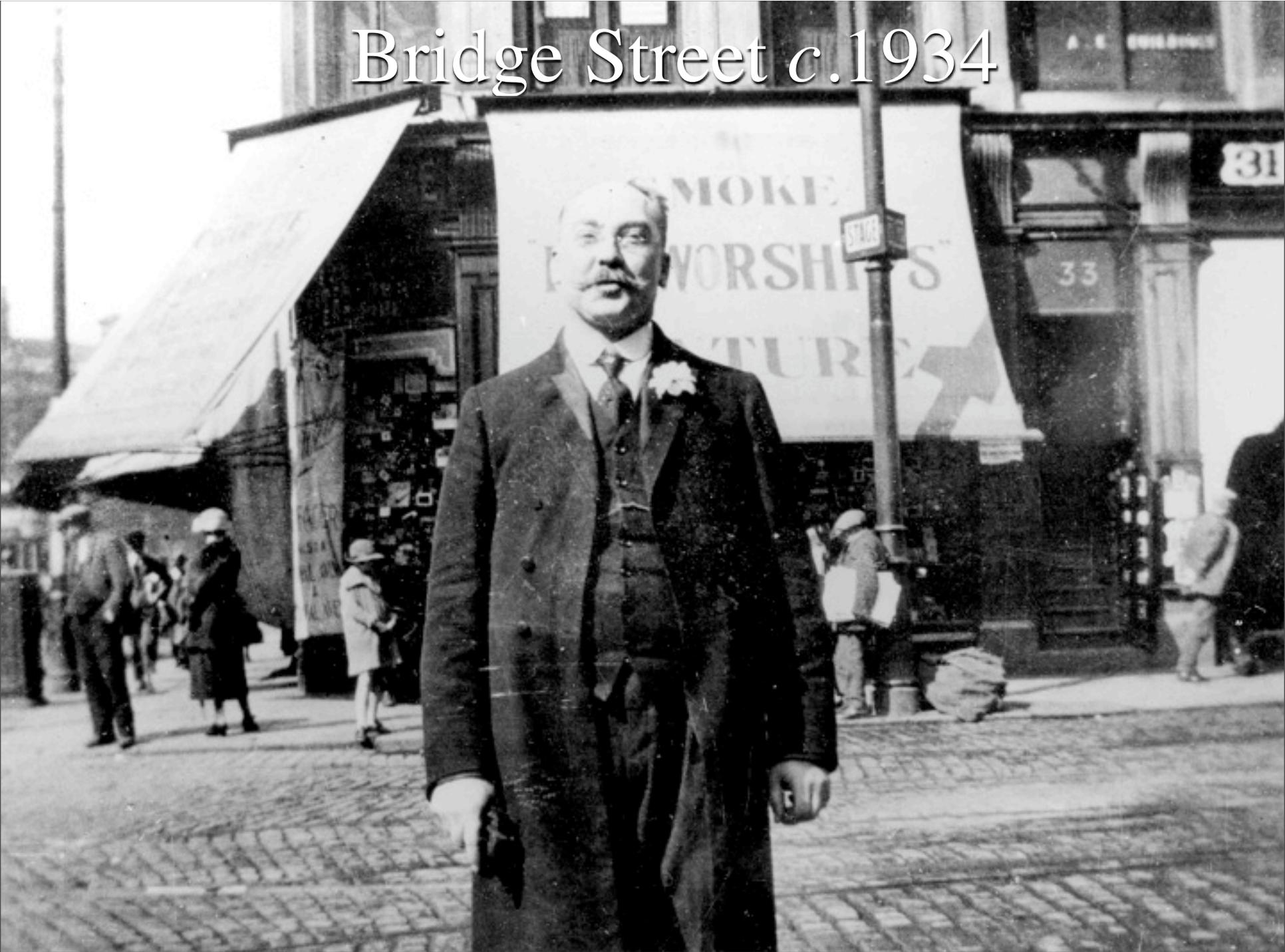
"Mr. O'Mealy . . . played some of his Irish slow and dance airs, the latter with imitable humour; as a contrast to this, the slow air was most beautifully sung in the character. An encore was responded to. It is interesting to mark the effect of the pipes on an audience; nothing else has quite the same exhilarating effect." . . . —*Belfast Evening Telegraph, 11th Jan., 1905.*

## The O'Mealy Memo

He was so popular that by 1905 he had his own printed stationery with dozens of news clippings about himself in the double centre pages. This was found recently by a nephew of Jim McIntosh and proves that he played in Scotland on at least two occasions.

Richard began making pipes sometime before 1900 and apart from his busy time playing and making pipes he was a 'floor-walker' in a major department store in Belfast.

# Bridge Street c.1934



## **Bridge St. Belfast c.1934**

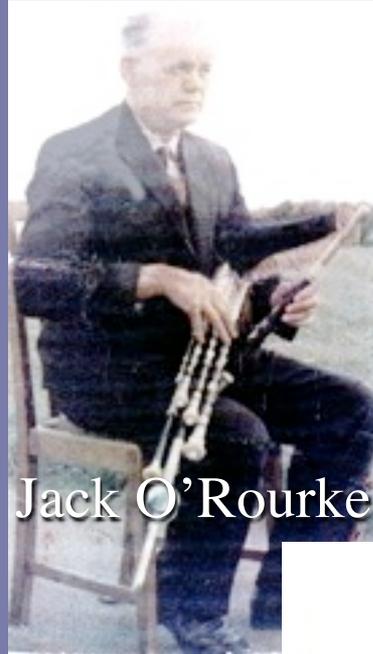
His first wife, Nellie died in 1920 and it was said that he did not play at all for some time. He reappears in the Street Directory in 1926 but just last week Seán Donnelly found and pointed out to us a piece he found in the Irish Times advertising a programme on BBC Radio Belfast on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 1924 in which RL played solo on several occasions during the evening sharing the time with other local singers and musicians on three separate programmes.

He taught many to play mostly at home but some by post and there is quite a lot of music hand written by RL together with pieces of advice on learning to play in collections and private hands. It would seem that the majority of his pupils were first Highland pipers who later took up the Union pipes.

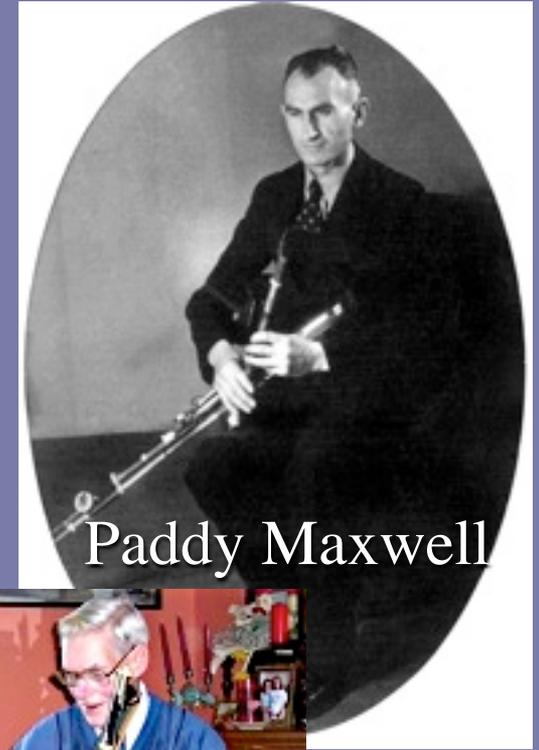
# Pipers Taught by O'Mealy



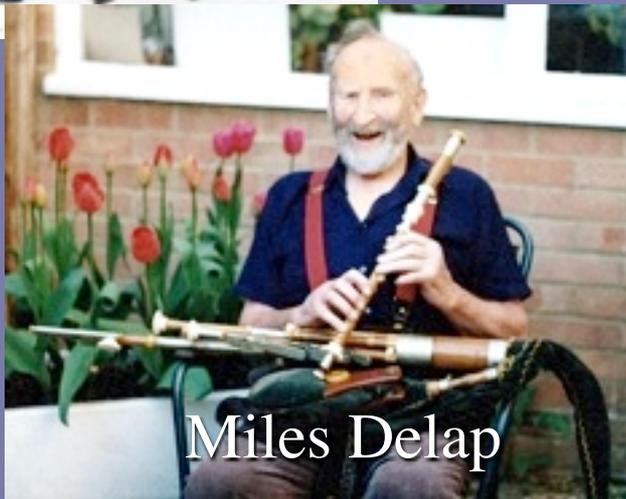
William Hope



Jack O'Rourke



Paddy Maxwell



Miles Delap



Jim McIntosh

## Pipers Taught by O'Mealy

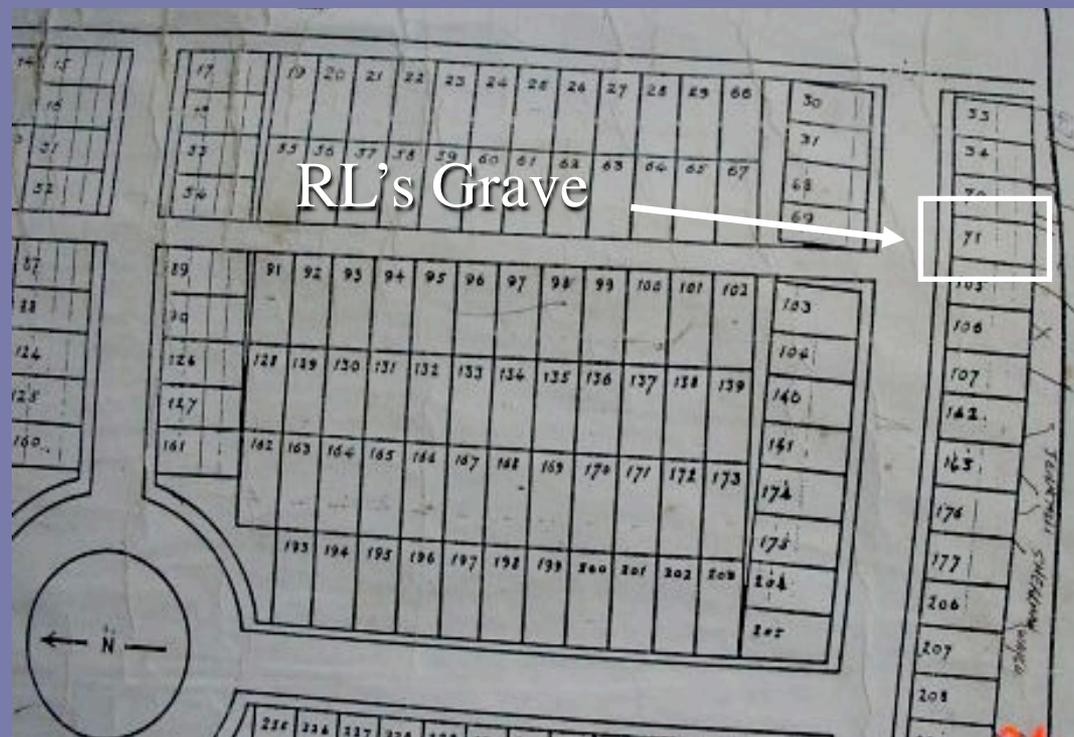
This is some of them.

Clockwise from top left are William Hope, Jack O'Rourke, Paddy Maxwell, Jim McIntosh and Miles Delap.

# RL O'Mealy's Grave



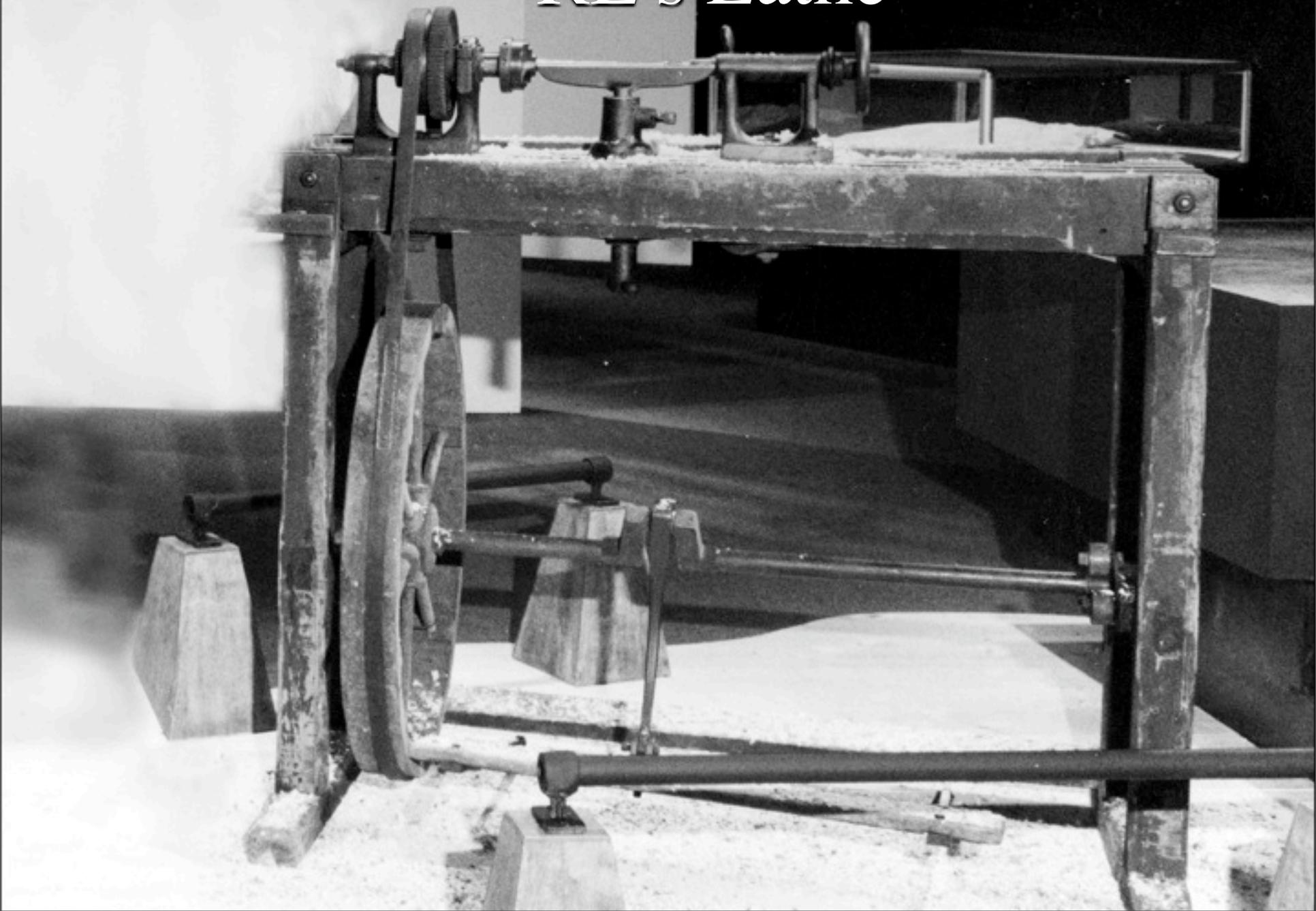
NO OF GRAVE	NAME OF DECEASED	ADDRESS	DATE OF BURIAL	AGE	By Whom	CEREMONIES PERFORMED	TIME
13 71	Richard L. O'Mealy	45 Rungby Ave	17. 3. 47	78			2:30 p.m.



## Grave Pics

RL died on March 14, 1947 and was buried in the graveyard at Knockbreda parish church, Belfast on St Patrick's Day. At his funeral there were only two pipers, Jack O'Rourke and Jim McIntosh plus his nephew George Farrar, and a few neighbours.

# RL's Lathe



## **O'Mealy's Lathe**

Jim McIntosh bought his lathe and some tools and got the collection of measurements and letters from customers which eventually found their way to Séan Reid in County Clare.

A good amount of that stuff has ended up at NPU in Henrietta Street, Dublin.

His lathe is in the O'Mealy room.

# BBC Tune Requests

## THE BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Head Office : Broadcasting House, London, W.1

Broadcasting House, Ormeau Avenue, Belfast

TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAMS : BELFAST 27411

8th January, 1949.

Mr. James McIntosh,  
114, Battenberg Street,  
Belfast.

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your programme form for Tuesday, 1st February.

We would like you to play the following items :-

"A":  
Jig: The Cook in the Kitchen Trad.arr.O'Mealy. (Ms.)  
Hornpipe: McElligott's Fancy ditto. (Ms.)

"B":  
Jig: Donnybrook ditto. (Ms.)  
Hornpipe: The Honeysuckle ditto. (Ms.)

## THE BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Head Office : Broadcasting House, London, W.1

Broadcasting House, Ormeau Avenue, Belfast

TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAMS : BELFAST 27411

16th December, 1949.

Dear Mr. McIntosh,

Thank you for your programme form for Tuesday, 10th January.

We would like you to play the following items :-

"A":  
March, "An Old Clan" Trad.arr.O'Mealy

"B":  
Jig, "The Boys of the West" Trad.  
Hornpipe "The Friendly Visit" Trad.

"C":  
Hornpipe, "The Wexford Hornpipe" Trad.  
Reel, "The Flogging Reel" Trad.

## BBC Tune Requests

Jim McIntosh was asked to play for the BBC after Richard passed away and it is interesting to see that they would write to tell him what tunes he had to play and always to the arrangement of RL.



### **Graveside Oration**

*(At this point we showed the video of the service- the video can be downloaded from the associated files folder of this article)*

Last year we restored RL's grave and with the help of Gary Hastings, had Arch Deacon Patterson say a few words in a small and short service of which we have a few clips.

*(Hand over to Ronan)*

# Contributors:

Ross Anderson, Piper  
BBC Archive, London  
Harry Bradshaw of RTE  
Ronan Browne, Piper  
Tom Clarke, Piper  
Lucy Delap, Piper  
Sean Donnelly, Piper & researcher  
Mick Dooley, Piper & pipemaker  
Leslie Drew, Great-grand-niece  
Clement Farrar, Great-grand-nephew  
Sam Farrar, Nephew  
John Farrar, Nephew  
Jonathan Farrar, Great-grand-nephew & piper  
Wilbert Garvin, Piper  
Robbie Hannan, Piper & broadcaster

Gary Hastings Arch Deacon, Mayo  
Dave Hegerty, Piper  
William Hope, Piper  
Robbie Hughes, Piper & pipe-maker  
Nollaig Mac Charthaigh, Piper  
Jim McIntosh, Piper  
Ken McLeod, Piper & Historian  
Michael Maxwell  
Paddy Maxwell, Piper  
Violet Medforth, Grand-niece  
Terry Moylan, Piper & archivist at NPU  
Jack O'Rourke, Piper  
P.F. Patterson Arch Deacon, Knockbreda  
RTE, For The Long Note programme 1984  
Trevor Stewart, Piper

This slide was left on the screen as Ken handed over to me and as I introduced my section of the presentation.

The Piping Style  
of  
*R. L. O'Mealy*

10 Tunes Recorded by the BBC  
28 August 1943

**The Piping Style of R. L. O'Mealy**

The rest of the talk consisted of Ronan playing the 10 O'Mealy tracks with notes on each piece visible on a slide as the music played. This part of the presentation was built from elements from Ronan's longer article (SRS 3.03) on the music of Richard O'Mealy.

# O'Mealy's Hornpipe

(O'Mealy's Jig)

– *Introductory Flourish*

- Tight fingering & steady Regulators
- Reg. Transitions between parts
- Repeat 2<sup>nd</sup> part - 7 x A notes on the regulator
- Repeat 1st part - legato run

– *Re-statement of 1st Part*

– *Signature Regulator Flourish to end*

Each piece of music was preceded with a copy of the relevant slide leaving enough time for the audience to read the notes before the track started. As the tracks are mostly of the order of a minute, listening and reading the notes at the same time would have meant that the tune would have ended before the audience got their bearings. Showing the slide first meant that people knew what to look out for as soon as the track started to play.

# The Cork Hornpipe

(The Harvest Home)

– *Introductory Flourish*

- Precise & fast-paced yet relaxed
- “Breaths” ending each part
- 2<sup>nd</sup> part - A rolls emphasised by regulator A
- Towards end - Interesting runs of notes
  - *No 1st part Repeat*
  - *Emphasised run up to High B to end*

# The Wheels of The World

## (The Rambling Pitchfork)

### Jig

– *Introductory Flourish*

- Stilted - On The Beat
- 2nd part flows better
- 2nd part - Long octave unison regulators

– *Extra 1st part but no regulator flourish to end*

# The Blackbird

## Set Dance

– *Introductory Flourish*

- Short slow air at beginning ends with unison regulator run
- Nice mix of open & tight playing with “Breath” stops throughout
- Long D articulated by 3 regulator Ds throughout
- 2nd part - no regs just before High A and then big low A reg

– *Extra 1st part but no regulator flourish to end*

# The Mountains of Pomeroy

## Air

### – *Introductory Flourish*

- Unison regulators & much use of Low E reg
- Quintuplets of A & of B reg notes
- Between 1st & 2nd time - rall to emphasise junction
- End 1st part - 3 G notes accompanied by <sup>BB</sup>G on reg
  - *No 1st part repeat*
  - *Signature regulator flourish to end*

# The Maid at Mourneshore

## Air

- *Introductory Flourish*

- Strong sense of sadness not evident in other pieces
- Nice vibrato on C and D
- 1st part - nice interplay between melody and regulator intervals
- 2nd part - notes are long & flowing with regulators clipped
  - *No 1st part repeat*
  - *No regulator flourish to end*

# The Drops of Brandy

## Slip Jig

– *Introductory Flourish*

- Stilted - On The Beat
- Nevertheless it is inventive & enjoyable playing
- Beginning 1st part - reg motif repeated each time
- Ending - RL holds long A and tumbles through to reg flourish
  - *Full extra 1st part*
  - *Signature regulator flourish to end*

# The Sligo Lasses

## Reel

- *Introductory Flourish*
- VERY fast for a 70 year old man!
- “Breath” stops throughout add to sense of urgency
- 1st part ends each time with unusual  $B_F G$
- 2nd part - regs pre-empt the melody (sense of urgency again)
  - *The tune is played 4 times through*
  - *Extra 1st part slowing down to*
  - *regulator flourish which slows down also*

# Smash the Windows

## Single Jig

– *Introductory Flourish*

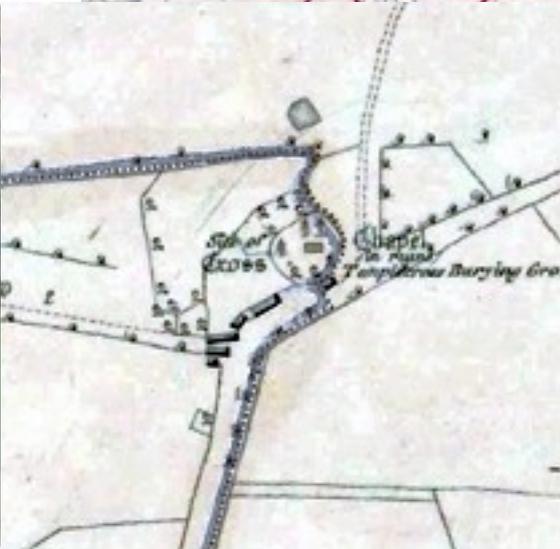
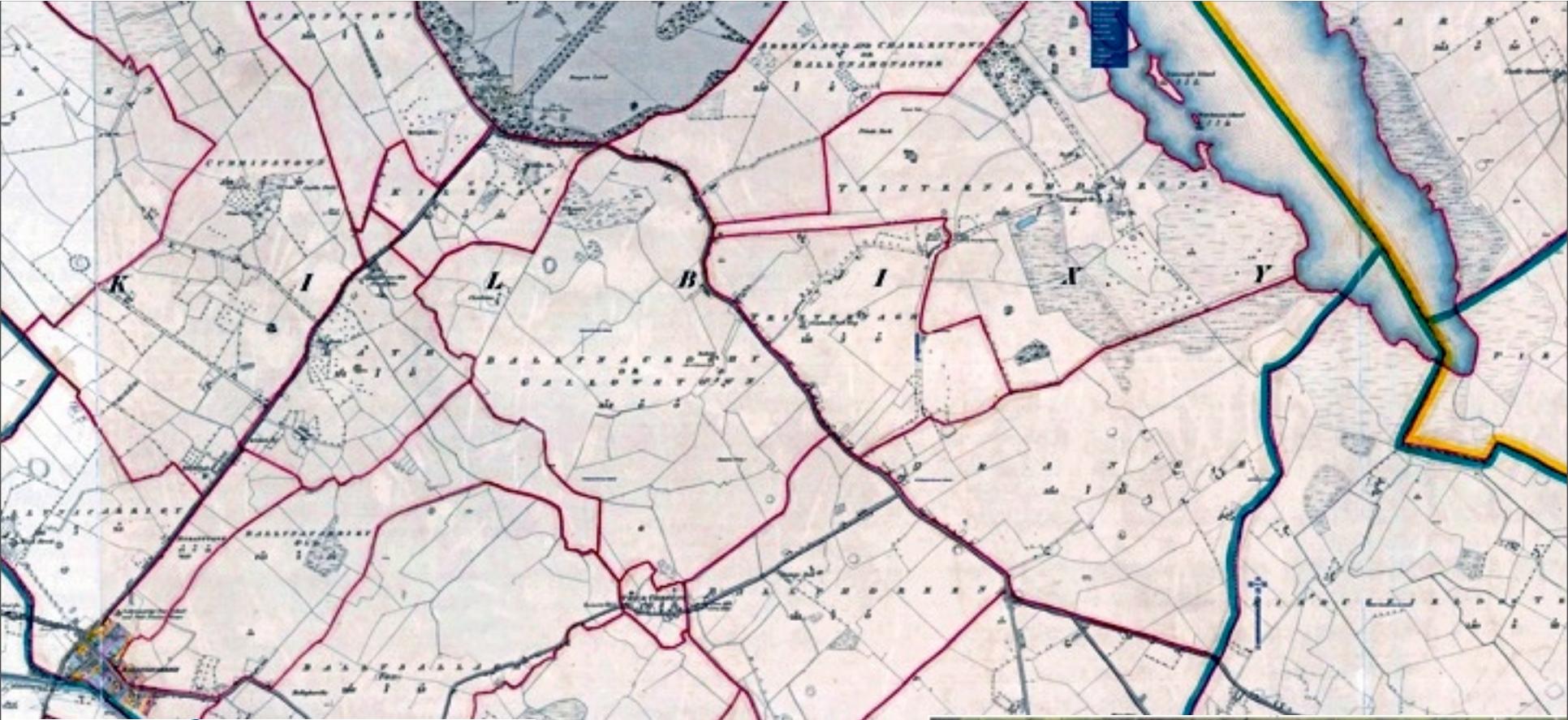
- Lovely bouncy rhythm
- Long Low E on chanter & low regulator
- 2nd part - answering triplets - sense of fun
  - *Extra 1st part but no regulator flourish to end*

# The Donegal Reel

## Jig

### – *Introductory Flourish*

- Nice changes from D to E to G (& down again) on regulators
- Link note on regs between parts
- 2nd part - regs follow rising melody but not stressed High A x 3
- G# reg note causes speed wobble on chanter
  - *Extra 1st part with long held-over E and down to D*
  - *no regulator flourish to end*



To finish, we showed a few maps and arial photographs of the area around Templecross where Richard was born and where he grew up.



Monday, 27th February, 1905,

AT 8 O'CLOCK.

Lecture Hall,

Mr. R. L. O'MEALY,

The famous Irish Piper will appear in Ancient Bardic Costume at the Elocutionary Competitions on MONDAY, 27th FEBRUARY, 1905.

**PRESS OPINIONS.**

PAN CELTIC CONGRESS.

Mr. O'Mealy contributed some exquisite melodies on the Irish Fu-ee. The native instrument, under his masterly manipulation, seemed to bubble over with rickling tunefulness.—*The Irish Times, Dublin*

—This gentleman's playing of the Irish bagpipes is one of those unique artistic achievements along traditional lines that musicians of culture will thoroughly appreciate. Mr. O'Mealy's pipes stand in the same relationship to the ordinary instrument of the itinerant piper that a Rodal-Carte clarinet of to-day does with the clarinet of Handel's time.

—There is the right ring about this playing; it goes straight to the heart; the whole aim of the thing is beauty and sound.—*Belfast Evening Telegraph*.

BRITISH ASSOCIATION IN BELFAST.

—Mr. R. L. O'Mealy, the well known Irish Piper, was also present, clad in his picturesque costume, and the visitors from England and Scotland were especially interested in this clever musician, and in the instrument which he knows how to use with such effect.—*The Belfast News-Letter*.

—The music was soft and sweet . . . perfect harmony produced by a master hand, with such subtlety, such grace and power of inflection, that the audience were spellbound.—*Cherwell Constitution*.

—Mr. O'Mealy, the famous Irish Piper, created quite a furore of applause; his marvellous manipulation of the historic pipes, and the exquisite musical results thereof, being the theme of general remark during the subsequent part of the night.—*The Newry Reporter*.

—Mr. O'Mealy assisted by Mr. Manning on the violin. This combination of pipes and violin is Mr. O'Mealy's own idea and produces a really beautiful effect.—*Irish Times*.

This last slide showing Richard in his characteristic celtic revival costume was left showing as we had a lively questions and answers session for the last 15 minutes.