

The Fitzgeralds of Mountmellick



St. Joseph's Church, Mountmellick

As I stated earlier Michael Snr. declares in the census returns that he was born in Queens county (Laois) and was born around 1828/1829 according to his recorded age in the census. So I examined the on-line records for Michael (Snr.)'s birth and discovered that there is a record of a Michael Fitzgerald born to a James Fitzgerald in Mountmellick on 1/Jan/1829. If this is the correct record, he was the third of six children born to James Fitzgerald and Eliza Westmond. His parents James and Eliza were married in the same church in Mountmellick on 1/11/1823. NB Note that all the entries in the records from this church in this period are all dated the first of the month. I think this means that the actual date is not recorded so the first of the month is given to all records.

This town developed as a Quaker settlement when the group arrived in 1657. under the leadership of William Edmundson. It features the first Quaker School in Ireland. The town grew under the industrious influence of the Quakers and turned into a thriving market town with 27 industries including breweries, a distillery, woollen mills and a sugar beet factory, which gave the town the name of "The Manchester of Ireland".



Photo by]

THE SQUARE, MOUNTMELICK.

[W. Lawrence.

From a Catholic point of view Mountmellick was formed into a distinct Parish in 1770 and includes portions of Rosenallis, Castlebrack and Coolbanagher. The original church, St. Peter's, served the community in Mountmellick until the present Church of St. Joseph was built in Mountmellick Town in 1878. St. Peter's then, housed a boys school until 1910. The foundations of the chapel are still visible today. Birth records this far back get very sparse due to the penal laws and after the repeal of the penal laws after 1771 there were initially very few parishes.

Unfortunately in the marriage record of James and Eliza no address is given for either spouse so we must investigate the possibilities available on-line.

There are two possibilities in the 1850 Griffith survey for James Fitzgeralds that seem feasible. One in the centre of Mountmellick town 11 Main Street and one to the east in Kilmanman about 7km away. The other possibilities, and there are some, are too far away in the county.

One piece of evidence I found recently online gives more details of the birth of the youngest, Elizabeth. She was born 20th August 1838. The sponsors names are given as Garrett Keating and Cath Conroy. I looked for a Garrett Keating and found only one. He was a farmer in a place called Sronagh just to the south of the town where there is now a housing estate. The other sponsor was one Ellen Conroy and there are Conroys living in 33 Main Street just down from James Fitzgerald.



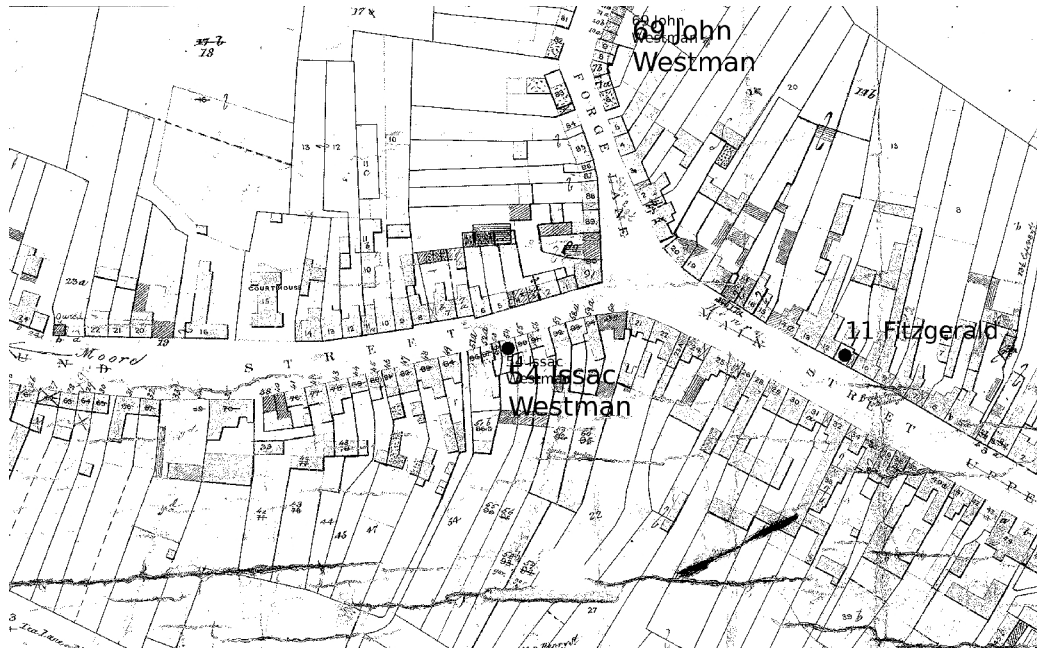
Main St. Mountmellick No 4 is W. Chambers so No 11 is down the street

Slater's directories of the country detailed who lived in towns all over Ireland in the 19th century. His guide of Mountmellick in 1846 lists James Fitzgerald as running a Linen Drapers & Haberdashers shop with woollen goods as an addition in the Market Square. There is also a listing for him as "Clerk of petty sessions" whatever that might be. So if his first born son is Michael then he should appear in the later editions of *Slater's Directory* as the new owner of the business when he succeeded his father. There are directories in 1870 and 1881 and 1894. But in the 1870 directory, although the address is different there is a James Fitzgerald. He is a *Grocer and Dealer in Sundries* in Bridge St. In 1881 and 1894 there are no records for Fitzgeralds in any similar position. So I therefore suggest that this is our James Fitzgerald in 1846 and that as Michael had joined the RIC he passed on the business to his second son James. It's a little of a long shot but would explain why the first born did not inherit.

However, James Fitzgerald is not shown living in Mountmellick in any of the tithe applotment (~1823) records I could find. I was never likely to find one as the Tithes only applied to those on the land. James as a town dweller would never appear. So we get no more clues as to his origins. The parish records for Mountmellick are very good and extend well back into the 18th century so I would have expected James's birth to have figured in the baptismal records. However he does not. Perhaps he was from outside the county. One possibility is that he was from the nearby county of Kings Co., now County Offaly. The Tithe applotments gives us a possible James Fitzgerald in Ballynakill in 1826. But I think this is unlikely. We shall never know for definite unless some other record comes to light.

The Westmonds too have possibilities in Mountmellick and Kilmanman. The Griffith Survey gives

either Issac or John Westman living in Pound Street or Forge lane respectively. The tithe applotments date from around 1823 and these suggest that Eliza's father might have been William who is shown in Mountmellick in 1823 but this William Westman would have been a farmer. Perhaps Issac is the correct father after all.



Centre of Mountmellick 1854

Therefore the top of our tree looks like this:

