A LUCKY ESCAPE

"...he lay across the rough wall at the side of the church, he was drenched in a cold sweat"

Patricia O Reilly

JOHN KELLY lived with his three brothers and parents in their mud cottage in Annaduff Glebe, Drumsna. It was an early March evening in 1857 after a tough days work digging ridges with loys for the years potato crop. The men sat around the open fire eating a supper of oatmeal porridge. The father, James Kelly announced that arrangements had been made for his eldest son John to marry Miss Jane Keary, a neighbouring girl who lived with her widowed mother on a small holding of a cottage and six acres of land. The plan was that John would move in with his new bride and her mother and work the land.

The Kelly boys made no comment and neither did their mother. A few weeks later John accompanied his father and mother to the home of Jane Keary and her mother, so that the young couple could formally meet. John felt awkward as he shook hands first with Mrs Keary and then with her daughter Jane. He sat down on the wooden form by the wall as bid by his father. Jane Keary was sitting on a chair across the kitchen. James Kelly and Mrs Keary discussed the plans and arrangements, while Mrs Kelly sat without interrupting.

John took a few sneaking looks at his bride to be and he surveyed the kitchen that was soon to be his home.

In the weeks that followed, John experienced the luxury of having a new suit of clothes made for him. Finally it was the morning of the wedding and the Kelly family arrived at Drumsna church on foot, having crossed the fields well in advance of the 8oc ceremony. It was a lovely June morning and the sun had already come up. As the priest opened the church, Jane Keary, her mother and other bridal party arrived driven by Mrs Keary's brother, in a horse and trap borrowed from Acheson's mill where he worked.

John's brother Martin was to be groomsman, and both were kneeling in the front seat on the left hand side in Drumsna church.

As the bride and bridesmaid came up the aisle, John took a side look at his future wife. She was dressed in a bright blue suit and her face was covered with a lace veil.

The ceremony started and John felt himself break out in a cold sweat. After what seemed like ages he turned to his brother Martin, 'I think I am going to pass out', he whispered. He then began to retch and he could feel the bile rising in his throat. He got up from the seat and he ran down the aisle and out the door. By the time he lay across the rough wall at the side of the church, he was drenched in a cold sweat. His head was throbbing with pain, and all the green bile had come up from his fasting stomach..

There was a strange atmosphere in the church as the priest waited in silence for the groom to return. 'Maybe you would be good enough to get your brother', he said to the groomsman.

Martin Kelly placed his hand on his brothers shoulder as he lay across the wall. John straightened up and looked into his blue eyes, 'I can't go through with it', he gasped, 'I'm going to leg it to Corlara and get the train to Dublin, don't go in for a few minutes to give me a head start'.

Martin nodded and said nothing. John was gone several yards down the road when Martin called after him: 'Wait John, take this', handing him a small brown parcel. 'This is the money Mrs Keary gave to the ould fella for Jane's fortune, I hope it brings you luck'.

Martin watched as his brother's long body disappeared across Drumsna bridge. He returned to the church and whispered to the priest, 'He's not going through with it, he ran away'.

Martin stood in the sunshine outside the church while the talk and kabal was going on between the two families. He smiled as he heard the sound of the train making tracks through the fields on its way to Dromod.

Some years later he joined his brother in Sydney, Australia, where they both became very wealthy businessmen.

This Summer, one hundred and fifty years later, another John Kelly stood outside Drumsna church. He spoke about his great grandfather from Annaduff, Glebe, and he told the story of the day in June all those years ago when he had the courage to listen to his gut.