

CARRIGALLEN NEW ZEALAND CONNECTIONS

Gerry Mangan

EARLIER THIS year (March-April, 2015) while on a visit to our daughter, Sarah and her family, in Australia, I, with my wife Grace, took a few weeks off to visit New Zealand. While there we visited Christchurch, the capital of Canterbury. An earthquake devastated the centre of Christchurch on 22 February 2011, killing 181 people. A statue, which was toppled during the earthquake, had recently been restored to its place in front of Christchurch Cathedral. The statue is of John Robert Godley, who, we were delighted to discover, had strong connections with Carrigallen.

He was the eldest son of John junior Godley and Katherine Daly. John junior inherited Killegar estate, a few miles from Carrigallen, on his father's death around 1810. He built the house in Killegar (completed in 1813), the church, school and school teacher's house at Killegar, together with two gate lodges. All these remain to this day. John Robert's brother, the Rev James Godley, had been the first incumbent of Killegar Church and became rector of Carrigallen. James's daughter, Maud, lived



■ John Robert Godley 1814-1861

■ A maquette of John Robert Godley, a study for the original statue in Christchurch, has pride of place in the Saloon in Killegar House

PHOTO: TONY FAHY



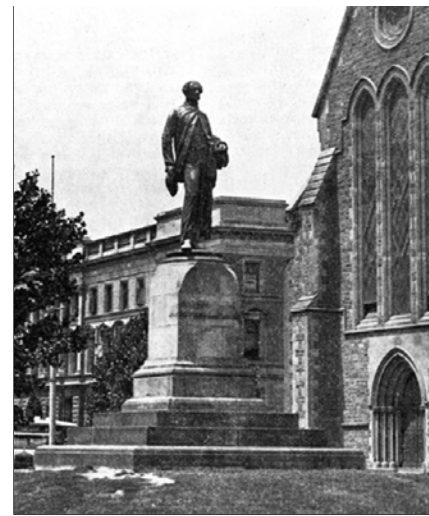
her life in the parish and ultimately in the village itself where she died and was buried. John Junior lived to age 88, dying in 1863, and was buried in his own churchyard at his gates.

John Robert was born on 29 May 1814. After being educated in Harrow and Christ Church College, Oxford he travelled extensively. It was from that experience he developed ideas on colonial administration many of which were published in *Letters from America* in 1844. Future Prime Minister Gladstone thought well of them. It was apparent that at age 28, Godley already had an appreciation of colonial problems well ahead of his time. For a time he turned his attention to Irish affairs and in 1843 at age 29 was appointed High Sheriff of Leitrim, and Deputy Lieutenant and Justice of the Peace the following year. Deeply moved by the appalling distress arising from the Great Famine he considered, based on his experience, that colonisation could be part of the solution and proposed settling a million Irish people in Canada. He stood for Parliament for County Leitrim as a Tory candidate with a view to

promoting this scheme, but failed to be elected. This was in part due to the opposition of Catholic priests to his proposed scheme. Soon afterwards he turned to journalism with an emphasis on colonial questions. His writings drew the attention of Edward Gibbon Wakefield whose ideas on colonial reform were similar to his. Wakefield persuaded Godley to lead a new colony in Canterbury, New Zealand, partly because of his political connections, which helped to secure funds for the colony. He went as chief agent for the Canterbury Association, formed in 1848, to found the colony. It was supported by a number of peers including the Archbishop of Canterbury. The capital city of the new colony was to be Christchurch, after the Oxford College Godley attended. On 13 December 1849 with his wife Charlotte (nee Wynne) and son, John Arthur, he sailed in the *Lady Nugent* to prepare the way for the arrival of the first body of emigrants. He was present at Lyttelton in December 1850 to welcome the four ships all carrying the emigrants and supplies for the planned colony. For the next two years he served as leader of the colony. He negotiated with the Canterbury Association for the introduction of pastoral farming, instead of small-scale agricultural holdings

favoured by the Association, and encouraged the introduction of stock and stockmen from Australia. This proved in time to be a sound policy. Godley believed that the Canterbury Association's purpose was "to found Canterbury and not rule it" and thought that the colony should be self-governing. It is acknowledged that it was Godley in effect who first outlined in New Zealand the full significance of the term "responsible government". In November 1852 a deputation asked him to allow himself to be nominated for the first election for Superintendent of the Canterbury Province. He declined as he had intended all along only to stay for 3 years. Difficulties with the Canterbury Association and an estrangement with Wakefield strengthened his decision to return to London. He left for England in December 1852 where he worked as a columnist and essayist for several newspapers. He wrote mainly about colonial reform, a subject clearly dear to his heart. He was also employed at the War Office where he continued his argument for the self-governing of the British colonies.

He had suffered for much of his life from indifferent



health. He died at the young age of 47 on 17 November 1861. In 1867 the people of Christchurch erected a bronze statue bearing his likeness in Cathedral Square. At the unveiling, tribute was paid to his rare qualities of mind and character. Designed by Thomas Woolner, it was the first commemorative statue in New Zealand unveiled to commemorate a single person and has been described as one of the few portrait statues in New Zealand with any claim to artistic merit. A replica was given to Killgar

■ John Robert Godley's statue, toppled and broken in the earthquake



House. Its restoration so soon after the earthquake indicates the esteem in which he continues to be held in Christchurch and Canterbury.

His only son, John Arthur went on to become private secretary to Gladstone, the prime Minister of the UK mainly responsible for the Land Acts and the introduction of the first Home Rule Bill. He thus became a Gladstonian Liberal and encouraged his tenants to buy their farms under the Land Acts, contrary to the position taken by many other landlords in Ireland at the time. The Liberal Prime Minister, Asquith, bestowed the hereditary title of Lord Kilbracken on John Arthur in 1909. Asquith also sought to introduce Home Rule for Ireland during his period as Prime Minister. John Kilbracken, the grand son of John Arthur was in Australia on his way to New Zealand to represent the Godley family at the centenary commemoration of the foundation of Canterbury/ Christchurch by John Robert, when news reached him of his father's death and his inheritance of Killegar and the title. After some hesitation, as the estate was heavily in debt and had been put up for sale by his father, he withdrew it from the market having decided that it was worth trying to retain possession, a decision that

changed his life. When he returned from the centenary celebrations it was as sole owner of Killegar House. It remains today in the possession of the Kilbracken family. There is a wonderful illustrated biographical article on Lord John Kilbracken, who died in 2007, in the 2008 edition of the *Leitrim Guardian*.

While we were in Australia the centenary commemoration of the Gallipoli landings in World War I took place on ANZACS day, 28 April 1915. The ANZACs, Australian and New Zealand Expeditionary forces, played a major part in that campaign and suffered heavy casualties. The controversial commander of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force was General Sir Alexander Godley, a nephew of John Robert.

A final note. Margaret Gaffney, well known to readers of the *Leitrim Guardian*, born in the parish of Carrigallen in 1813, was a contemporary of John Robert Godley, who was born a year later in 1814. After a remarkable life of service to the poor of New Orleans, a statue to commemorate Margaret was erected by the people of New Orleans. It was unveiled on July 10th 1884, the first monument in the US to be erected in honour of a woman. From origins in Carrigallen they both went on to



lead disparate lives of great service in far off countries. Recognition and profound gratitude persists today from the people they served, epitomised by their statues.

SOURCES

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