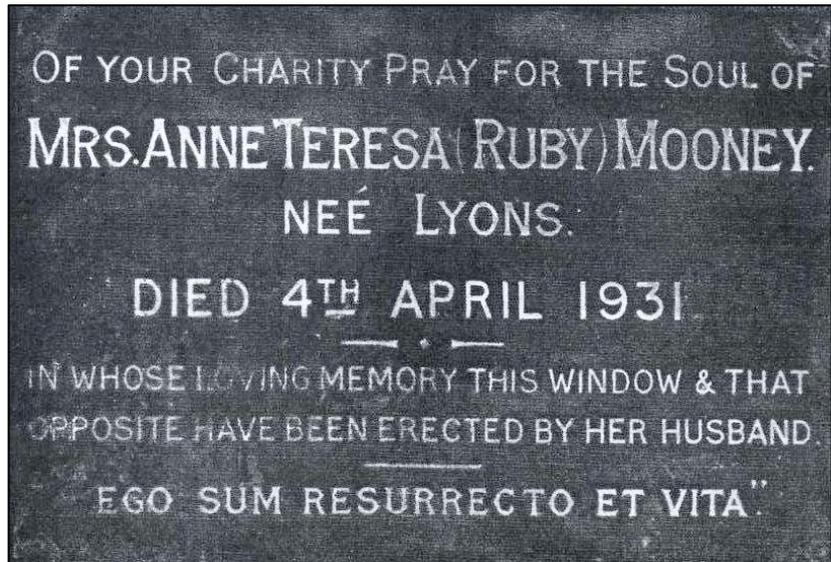


HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE  
COUNTY LONGFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY



### A GIFT OF LOVE

*The Story of the Harry Clarke Studio Windows in St Mel's Cathedral, Longford.*

*as told by Kitty Hughes who found the family behind the plaque and unearthed this fascinating story.*

The discovery of this badly charred yet still legible plaque in the rubble of the Cathedral, some months after the great fire, intrigued everyone. A photo of the plaque was placed in the *Parish Review* seeking help identify Ruby and the windows. The response to this photo led to a wonderful discovery. It was David Leahy who gave us the first lead when he located the Lyons family tombstone in Ballymacormack graveyard - it said *Ranchi, India* after the name 'Ruby' who died on the 4 April 1931.

Then Stella Fitzgerald said she knew Patricia Mooney, the daughter Ruby Lyons of Cloncoose, very well as a young girl and also Ruby's sister Molly. She said Patricia was a lovely young girl and they played tennis together. Patricia went to school in Mount Anville in Dublin. So now we know that Anne Teresa – Ruby was Ruby Lyons from Cloncoose, Longford, daughter of Patrick and Mary Elizabeth Lyons.

We discovered that Patrick a native of Co Westmeath had spent many years in Argentina where he made out well and on return purchased the farm and residence in Cloncoose just two miles from Longford town. He married and raised four children the two girls and sons Patrick and Joseph.

Ruby met and fell in love with Herbert Mooney of Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin. Herbert worked in India for the India Forestry Service. They were married in St Mel's Cathedral on the 6 September 1927. Afterwards they sailed to India. Stella recalled that they had two children, Patricia and Frank. She did not know where they were now but thought that Frank became a vet and possibly lived in Co Tipperary. Stella also recalled that Molly Lyons went on a visit to India and that she and Ruby and the two children were on a voyage home to visit Cloncoose in 1931 when Ruby became ill on board the ship. She was hospitalised in Marseilles, France, but sadly she died and was buried there. Molly took the two small children home to Cloncoose and she recalls that they had an Ayah, a children's nurse, with them, a very exotic figure in the

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Clooncoose and Longford of the 1930s. So now we knew the person named on the loving memorial plaque. One question remained! Which windows did it refer to? And also where are all the family now.

Among the maze of documents and data compiled and consulted following the great fire in St Mel's Cathedral was a log book from The Abbey Stained Glass Company. It contained a transcript of part of the original order books of former stained glass companies – the Clarke, Earley and Mayer Studios- that had supplied the Cathedral windows. Fr Tom Healy Adm. gave me this log book and turning the pages I discovered the following:

*Our studios have the records from the Harry Clarke Studios and the original purchase orders read as follows:*

*Order Book 2 page 86 - 8<sup>th</sup> September 1932.*

*Order No 1737*

*H. F. Mooney Esq. 33 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin.*

*St Mel's Cathedral, Longford – Transept gables*

*Design, supply and fit two stained glass windows as per estimate 7<sup>th</sup> September 1932.*

*Both for the sum of £500-0-0.*

The magnificent Harry Clarke Studio windows so treasured as part of not only our diocesan heritage but of the nation's heritage were a **gift** donated by Herbert F Mooney to perpetuate the memory of his beloved young wife, Ruby. These stained glass windows fifteen feet high by five feet wide are of the highest artistic quality and the two most important windows in the Cathedral. What an extraordinary gift - and the little brass plaque placed alongside (and somehow displaced over the years) did not even bear the name of their generous donor.

So now to find the family of Ruby and Herbert. Stella Fitzgerald had said she thought that their son Frank had become a vet and may have lived in Tipperary. My brother in law John is a vet in Limerick so he might know. He didn't. But he suggested I ask the Veterinary Council and he gave me the phone number. I outlined the story of the cathedral windows and the reason for my query and the secretary was very helpful. She did discover one name Francis Morgan Mooney but sadly he was deceased. I asked if she had an address and she read it out; 'Clooncoose'... I didn't hear anything else! I asked if this was the name of a house. Yes it would seem so. I couldn't believe it. He had called his home after his mother's townland in Longford. But there was no phone number.

Next step was the telephone directory enquiries but there was no phone number for that address in Co Tipperary. Back to John again and he suggested the regional Veterinary office in Co Tipperary where someone might remember Frank Mooney. And sure enough after telling my story again of the windows to a helpful secretary she said 'Oh, I know his wife - Kitty – she has moved to live in Tipperary town. She gave me her address but no phone number. However I was only one more phone call away – Telecom supplied the number and I dialled. The answering machine said to leave a message for Kitty. Not my strongest point these answering machines but I outlined my story of the windows and left my name and number.

About two hours later the phone rang and a lovely lilting voice said 'this is Kitty Mooney and I'm so excited about the news of the stained glass windows in St Mel's Cathedral'. Kitty knew well the story of the windows. She told me that her husband Frank Mooney son of Ruby and Herbert had died almost twenty six years ago. They had copies of the windows framed at home in 'Cloncoose'. She said too that Frank's sister Patricia had died in the USA a few years ago. She also told me that his father- Herbert- had married again and that he had a daughter Jill who lived

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in Dublin. I had several lovely conversations with Kitty and I sent copies of the *Parish Review* to her and to her own family of three sons and two daughters and she sent them on to Jill.

Some weeks later I received a lovely letter from Jill and I quote the following from it :  
*I have the diary written by my father, Herbert, between the years 1916 and 1932 from which I gleaned the following - Herbert and Ruby were married in Longford on 6 September 1927. They went to India where Herbert worked for the Indian Forest Service. Their first born, Patricia was born in Ireland on the 24 April 1929. Her brother Frank was born in India on 30 September 1930. On the 19 March 1931 Ruby and her sister Molly, (who had been visiting them in India) , with the two children then aged two years and six months, left India to return for a holiday in Ireland. Ruby became ill on the boat and was taken to hospital in Marseilles where she died on 4 April. She is buried in the cemetery of St Louis in Marseilles.*

The following is an extract from Herbert Mooney's Diary written on 18 August 1932:

*I have left instructions with Miss Purser and Henry Clarke's to prepare design for two stained glass windows for erection in Longford Cathedral to perpetuate the loving memory of my darling wife Ruby. The subjects (1) St Anne. (2) The Resurrection. The first is her patron saint. The belief and hope in the Resurrection was the thought that held me together during the dark days following her death. The text 'Ego sum resurrection et vita' will form an inscription. I wrote out this text in full as soon as I received the news that my darling was dead and read it many times to gain strength to endure life without her.*

Jill enclosed with the letter this photo of Ruby and Herbert on their wedding day. It was probably taken at the family home in Clooncoose. Jill told me that Herbert died on 20 August 1964 in Dublin.

The family is very pleased that these beautiful windows have been rescued and restored awaiting reinstallation in St Mel's Cathedral, together with the little plaque with its loving message sacred to the memory of Ruby and Herbert Mooney. And they hope to visit Longford with their families when St Mel's Cathedral reopens.

My thanks to Kitty Mooney and to Jill Meghen also Fr Tom Healy, David Leahy, Stella Fitzgerald, Fr Tom Murray and John Scollard who helped unfold this story from the ashes of St Mel's Cathedral.

*Kitty Hughes*

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Since this story unfolded sadly Mrs Kitty Mooney of 'Cloncoose', Tipperary Town passed away in June 2012. She was very delighted that I had made contact with her about the windows of St Mel's Cathedral. May her soul rest in peace. *K. H.*