

Tom McDonald, Bannow, Co. Wexford



PADDY CAHILL

The Bannow Boatman

The *Wexford Independent* reported, on the 12th of January 1848, that Paddy Cahill had died on the 7th of January on Bannow Island, aged 85 years. The celebrated “Bannow Boatman” in Anna Maria Hall’s Sketches was based on him. Paddy Cahill and his people had rented the Island for two centuries from the Colclough family. John C Tuomy, the Taghmon school master, wrote in the obituary:--

“Cahill, in early life, to the business of a farmer, added that of a mariner and traded in his own sloop to different ports along the Irish coast, and beyond the channel. It was in ‘the sear and yellow leaf’ of life, and when his family had grown up, that ‘Paddy’ betook himself to the occupation of ferryman. In February 1836, when for the first time, I visited Bannow and full of Mrs Hall’s glowing descriptions of Irish scenes, in company with a lamented friend, now no more, I went to pay my respects to the ‘Boatman’. True to Mrs Hall’s sketch, we found him on the bank, his boat upturned on the beach and in the immediate vicinity of a wretched thatched cottage. He was a man of herculean frame and after a first salutation ‘to go across!’ we answered not and said we only came to see him—Aye, aye, said he, this is some of Mrs Hall’s doings. Order me out half-a-pint (pointing to the cabin) and you shall know all. *The native* was quickly forthcoming and Paddy having quaffed a glass to our good health, entered into very interesting anecdotes of Miss Fielding’s early life, how often he had since passed her and her husband across the ferry’ and related how many strangers, induced by her sketch, had come to see him. The cabin was not the boatman’s house; it was that of a poor woman, who generally kept ‘a drop to warm the people’ passing and re-passing the ferry. ‘Paddy’ true to his vocation, plied his boat to the last and to his credit, be it told, he never charged persons in his own rank of life, more than ‘a glass of grog at the little house.’ From ‘gentle folk’ he thankfully received whatever piece of money

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

they chose to bestow. The boatman's remains were on Sunday the 9th, interred, within the mouldering walls of the old church of Bannow, a ruin well known to the distinguished Authoress, who first brought poor Cahill, into public notice, as 'The Bannow Boatman.'"

The above proves that John C. Tuomy first came to Bannow in February 1836 but where did he come from to teach in Taghmon and if so how did he get to Bannow (which he wrote incessantly about) so regularly? He was a superb writer, without peer; but grossly unrecognised by historians of the Co. Wexford.