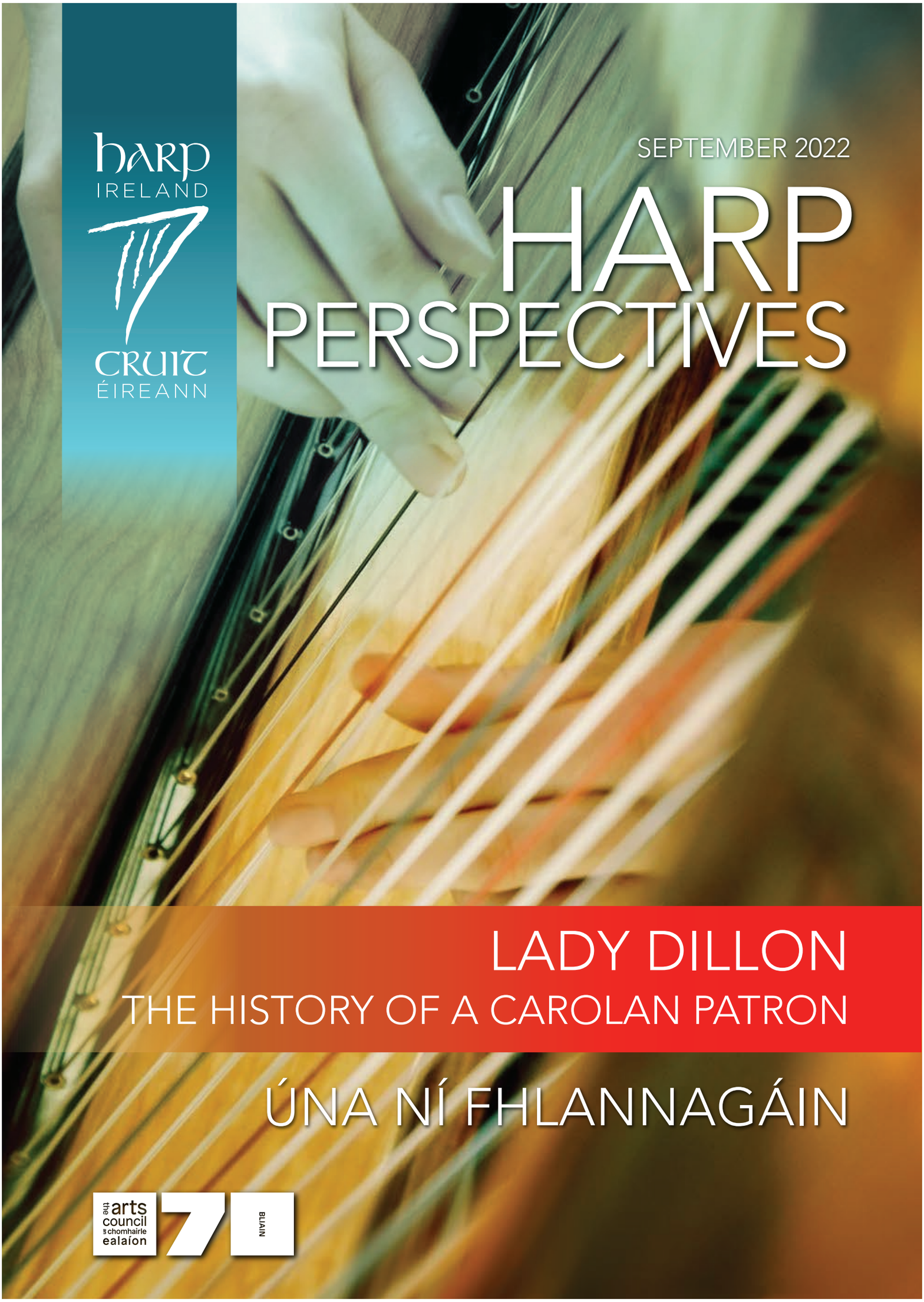

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HARP PERSPECTIVES

LADY DILLON

THE HISTORY OF A CAROLAN PATRON

ÚNA NÍ FHLANNAGÁIN

the arts council an chomhairle ealaíon

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Welcome to *Harp Perspectives*, Cruit Éireann, Harp Ireland's online journal.
One of our strategic aims is to establish thought leadership across the harp sector by building up a body of thinking about the harp and harping through a historical and contemporary lens.

Harp Perspectives is a conversation about harping and features key informants, harpers and non-harpers, sharing their authentic views and ideas. We believe that this combination of scholarly research and personal insights will highlight the harping legacy inherited from our tradition bearers and help forge a contemporary harping identity, secure in its understanding of its origin and how it wishes to evolve.

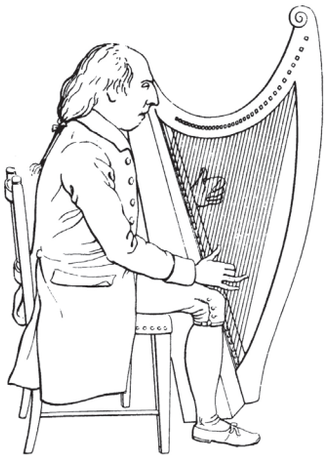
In our September edition, Úna Ní Fhlannagáin traces the lineage and history of the Dillon family and discovers the fate of 'Lady Dillon' for whom Carolan composed his tribute – a young Frances Dillon who was married to her first cousin Charles at the tender age of 14.

Our thanks to each of our contributors for their willingness to add their voices. Their contributions will no doubt enrich and inform our thinking.

Aibhlín McCrann and Eithne Benson
Editors
September 2022

LADY DILLON:
THE HISTORY OF A CAROLAN PATRON

Úna Ní Fhlannagáin



One of my favourite composers is our national harper-composer Turlough Carolan, who lived from 1670 - 1732. As a harp student, I learnt Carolan's composition 'Lady Dillon'. In recent years, I've attempted to piece together the cultural context of this piece. The composition of 'Lady Dillon' was a reaction to a complex series of events tracing back over centuries. It involved a very different culture, with very different norms. Here, I attempt to outline the political and cultural events that led to the composition of the piece.

Carolan wrote multiple pieces for the Dillon family, and to really understand the context in which they were written, we have to go as far back as 1185. In that year, Sir Henry Dillon came to Ireland as part of the Norman invasions of Ireland. His descendants became a Hiberno-Norman landlord family in a part of county Westmeath called 'Dillon's Country'.

Now, let's fast-forward 350 years. Sometime around 1530, a member of this family, Thomas Dillon and his wife Mary had a third baby... a little boy called Theobald.

We know that in 1559, Theobald 'commanded an independent troop, in the royal cause'... so we can infer that little Theobald Dillon would grow up to become a military commander, and that he supported Elizabeth I.

During Theobald's lifetime, the English monarchy wanted to assimilate the Gaelic leadership into the new Tudor kingdom of Ireland and their Anglican Church. The Irish clans were different to the political and constitutional system of England; they had more autonomy, and a power structure rooted in loyalty to their clan and kin.

So the English crown started a policy called 'surrender and regrant' where Gaelic chiefs and some autonomous Norman-Irish lords were actively encouraged to surrender

their lands to the king, and then have them regranted (returned), if they paid an annual sum to the monarch and swore loyalty to him. Those who surrendered were also expected to speak English, wear English-style dress, remain loyal to the Crown, follow English laws and customs, abjure the Roman Catholic Church, and convert to Henry's new Anglican Church. In return, these chiefs and lords would be protected from attack, and could organise local courts and enter the Parliament of Ireland.

In 1582, in a particular 'surrender and regrant' action known as 'the Composition of Connacht', Theobald Dillon was appointed collector-general of the composition money in Connacht and Thomond (a massive area covering North Munster – present-day County Clare and County Limerick, plus around Nenagh in County Tipperary).

One of the groups of Gaelic 'freeholders' under this jurisdiction was various Costello freeholders in eastern County Mayo. Dillon acted very unethically towards the Costello freeholders. He told them that in order to save expense and ensure the smooth legal transfer, they should surrender their lands in one land-title.[1]

The nefarious Dillon had this single, large land-title regranted *in his own name*, becoming the legal landowner in the process. He never returned this title to the lands to the Costellos. This large-scale fraud had repercussions for centuries; almost 200 years later, Dudley Costello would undertake rapparee action in an effort to regain his family's lands.

1 Interesting fact for GAA fans: in 1840 the county lines were redrawn between Mayo and Roscommon. You can view the pre-1840 map of the Barony of Costello here: https://sites.rootsweb.com/~irlkik/ihm/barony-map-ireland.htm. This includes a little section under Coolavin, which from 1840 became a part of Roscommon! https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1840/act/76/enacted/en/html

A few years later, Theobald would fight under the Earl of Essex in the 'Nine Years' War' (1593–1603), in support of Elizabeth I, and was knighted by the Earl of Essex on 24 July 1599[2]. King James I gave him the title 'Viscount Dillon of Costello-Gallen' on the 16th March 1622. "Costello-Gallen" refers to the baronies of Gallen and Costello in County Mayo – the land he had, in essence, stolen.

Theobald had 19 children, and lived to a great age (a quote from 1878 says that he lived to be "so advanced an age, that at one time he had the satisfaction of seeing above an hundred of his descendants in his house of Killenfaghny").[3] Of that hundred descendants, two are of interest to me: his sons Christopher and Lucas.

Theobald gave Christopher and Lucas the land that he had stolen from the Costellos. Christopher was given land in Ballylaghan, Co. Mayo, and inherited the title 'Viscount Dillon of Costello-Gallen'. Lucas was given an estate in Loughglynn, Co. Roscommon. Due to Christopher and his heirs dying prematurely, in 1682 the title passed to the descendants of Lucas.

It wasn't just the title of 'viscount' that travelled to Roscommon; around the same time, a blacksmith and his family moved here from Meath. Their young son, Turlough, would go on to radically innovate the musical language of our national instrument – the harp. And the Dillon family would form a significant part of that cultural development.

Lucas Dillon, who 'lived in splendour, and universal esteem'[4] in Loughglynn, married Jane Moore; together they had Robert Dillon. Their son Robert inherited Loughglynn and married Rose Dillon[5], from Streamstown, Co. Mayo; they gave birth to Theobald Dillon around 1650.

Theobald married Mary, mainly lived at Kilmore, County Roscommon, and had 8 children. There was a title in the family, but he probably didn't expect to inherit it, because not one but two of his cousins, were before him in the line of succession.

2 To put this into perspective, it should be said that at this point, Theobald was already in his sixties and that Essex knighted a great many people; in fact, it was said "[Essex] never drew sword but to make knights".

3 Webb, Alfred (1878). "Dillon, Theobald, Viscount". *Compendium of Irish Biography*. Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son. p. 149. OCLC 122693688.

4 This is the description of Lucas from Nichols' *Biographical Peerage of Ireland*. I am not sure if this fulsome quote was inserted to boost book sales, or if it was a genuine indication of Lucas's good standing in the community!

5 Rose Dillon died in 1681. This is relevant when trying to decipher who 'Lady Dillon' was.

However, both of them died prematurely and with no children, so in 1682 Theobald, suddenly and surprisingly, became the 7th Viscount Dillon of Costello-Gallin.

These were interesting times. Three years later, the Catholic King James II came to power in England. But in 1688 he was deposed from the English throne by the Protestant William of Orange. James II fled to France from where – with French help – he landed in Ireland seeking to regain the crown.

James II

Theobald, who was a Catholic, supported James II and raised two regiments to fight for him. One was commanded by his eldest son, Henry – who had just had his first baby, called Richard – and the other by a younger son, Arthur, aged 19. All three of them fought in the conflict of James II versus William of Orange as it played out on Irish soil.

That all sounds very fabulous and glorious – but what did it really look like?

The Jacobite army of James II numbered 23,500. His Irish infantry were mainly untrained peasants who had been pressed into military service. They were poorly equipped, some with obsolete matchlock muskets and others with scythes and other farm implements. Only the Irish cavalry were of a high calibre. James's army needed reinforcements.

William III

On May 17th 1689, William of Orange declared war on France. Louis XIV, the king of France, knew that it was in his interest to assist King James II of England in his struggle against William in Ireland. But he was also in dire need of men in his own war against William on the continent. The solution was a swap: Louis agreed to send 6,000 of his well-trained French regulars to James in Ireland, in return for slightly over 5,000 raw Irish recruits.

The regiment of Theobald's second son, Arthur Dillon, was chosen as one of five Irish regiments to go France as Ireland's part of the agreement. And so, on the 1st of May 1690, the 19-year-old Arthur and his men landed Brest. These regiments formed the first 'Irish Brigade' in France and went on to fight on behalf of the French for the remainder of the Nine Years' War (1689–97).

Back on the ground in Ireland, the viscount and his eldest son Henry, were facing an international Williamite army of around 36,000 men. These were professional soldiers equipped with the latest flintlock muskets - and crucially, William's army had eight times as much artillery as James'.

Henry had his own regiment. Theobald, aged around 41 at this point, was fighting in the foot regiment of another Connachtman, a young man called John Burke, who was one of the Earls of Clanricarde. John and Theobald were distantly related, so I'm sure John and Theobald knew people in common, and maybe even had met each other before the war. During the odd respite from fighting, I imagine they reminisced about old times, or dreamt of a brighter future. Knowing Ireland, they probably talked about the weather a lot. Maybe Theobald mentioned his sons, or his new baby grandson; John might have alluded to his young family.

But then, on 12th of July, 1691, the conflict climaxed in the Battle of Aughrim. Despite a brave and tenacious defence by the inexperienced Irish infantry, the Battle of Aughrim saw many senior Jacobite officers captured or killed, the Jacobite army shattered – and, in his 40s, Theobald's death.

The remains of the decimated Irish army took refuge within the walls of Limerick, where the supporters of James II - who by then had deserted them - underwent a siege. The second bomb thrown into the besieged city killed Theobald's widow, Mary.

The Williamite war formally ended just one month after that, with the Treaty of Limerick. Around 25,000 people had died in the war, and 20,000 of James II's supporters were exiled. Theobald and Mary Dillon had been killed within two months of each other. And just before his death, Theobald was 'attainted', which meant his title and his lands were forfeit.

So what happened to Theobald and Mary's two sons, Arthur and Henry?

Arthur Dillon stayed in France. He and his regiment were sent to Roussillon and Catalonia, where they fought the Spanish as part of the 'Nine Year's War'. The war ended in 1967, and Arthur found the time to marry. At the time, King James II lived in France and was married to Queen Mary of Modena. Louis the XIV had given them a home to live in. Arthur met Christina Sheldon, who worked there as a 'lady-in-waiting' to the queen. Arthur and Christina got married, and had 10 children, of whom the eldest son was Charles. There was never any doubt about what Charles was going to do for a living; Arthur put Charles' name down for the Dillon Regiment when he was just 4 years old.

Arthur would go on to have 13 years of active military service on behalf of France, all over the North of Italy, then France, and finally in Germany.[6] In 1730, Arthur handed leadership of Dillon's regiment over to Charles, his eldest son. His regiment would remain at least nominally under the command of a Dillon for its entire 100 years of service, and thus retain that name for a full century.

And what of Henry, Arthur's brother? Many of the Jacobites went into exile with the Flight of the Wild Geese. However, 'Henry the Eighth', as I fondly call him, stayed in Ireland and in 1694 managed to obtain a reversal of the attainder and succeed to the title and lands of his parents. He survived into in his 70s, and was succeeded in 1713 by his son, Richard, aged 25. And this is where Turlough Carolan comes into the picture.

We don't know much about Richard's life. But we do know that in 1715, just settling into being the 9th viscount, he refused to take the Oath of Allegiance in 1715 and withdrew from the Irish House of Lords. So he must have been a bit of a rebel. His royalist forebears were probably turning in their graves.

Earlier when I mentioned that Richard's grandad, Theobald, had fought in the foot regiment of John Burke, I posited that they may have been chatting about their families over the campfire when in battle. The relationship between the two families had undoubtedly continued, because Richard subsequently went on to marry that same John Burke's second daughter, Bridget Burke, in 1720.

6 Presumably he was a good soldier, as he was promoted twice.

Bridget's family had a similar experience to the Dillons in the Williamite war. Her father, John Burke, now the 9th Earl of Clanricarde from Galway, had survived the war, but he had been imprisoned for months afterwards. Her brother Ulick, just 22, had been killed at the battle of Aughrim; two of her other brothers were forced into exile as foreign soldiers, and died in France and Spain. Her father had been attainted - remember that word? It means that his title and his lands were forfeit. John must have been a good negotiator, because he in 1703 he obtained a reversal in return for a fine of twenty-five thousand pounds and the commitment that his two eldest sons would be raised as Protestants. The family paid mere lip-service to this requirement. Though the oldest son, Michael, became a Protestant and was educated at Eton and Oxford, all the younger Burkes remained Catholic.

Since 1695, the penal laws had been in full swing in Ireland: a series of oppressive laws imposed in an attempt to force Irish Catholics and Protestant dissenters to accept Anglicanism and English authority. It was forbidden for Catholics to buy land, or to lease land for more than 31 years. If a Catholic leased land, you had to pay 2/3rds of the annual value of it in rent every year. If a Catholic died, they were forbidden from leaving their land to one son; they had to split it between all their children, thus radically and quickly reducing land-ownership. In the words of Edmund Burke, an Irish statesman, of the time:

> "[The Penal Laws] are a machine of wise and elaborate contrivance, and as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment, and degradation of a people, and the debasement, in them, of human nature itself – as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man.

And so it was in this challenging time that Richard and Bridget, two Catholics from battle-scarred families, got married.

And yet, there was joy and cultural resistance, around these times too. Turlough Carolan would come to the house of Richard Dillon and Bridget Burke on regular occasions to perform and compose in their honour. We know that he composed three pieces for this family, in his trademark style of Gaelic harp music, influenced by dances and Italian flourishes. And wonderfully, Richard and Bridget had a baby – Frances.

However, by 1735, Frances was still an only child, and being female, would not have been allowed to inherit the family estate[7]. Richard Dillon held the title and the estate, and once he died, Frances, her mother, and all who depended on them would have nowhere to live, and no way to earn an income.

The next in line to the title was her first cousin, Charles. The only way to protect Frances from economic ruin was to arrange her marriage to somebody who was economically self-sufficient. Furthermore, if Frances were to marry Charles, then Frances, her mother and all her dependents could remain living in their home.

So, on January 16th 1735, Frances Dillon married her first cousin, Charles. Frances was probably only around 14 years old at the time; I imagine she had never been outside of Mayo. Charles was 34, had been officially an army captain since age 17, and had fought all over mainland Europe. The piece of music 'Lady Dillon' was probably composed by Turlough Carolan in honour of their wedding. Frances gave birth to a baby boy when she was approximately 17 years old. Sadly, he died very young, and Frances died at approximately age 18, on January 17th 1739, in London. Charles died 2 years later, aged 40, also in London.

There are so many things I would love to know about Frances and Charles; how long had the marriage been arranged? Did Frances know from a young age that she was betrothed to Charles, or was it a sudden decision? How did Frances feel about it? Where did they get married? Did they ever meet before their wedding? Did they have a common language? If so, was it Gaeilge, English, or French, German, Latin or Greek? Did they get on? Why did they move to London? Unfortunately, their story remains lost in time.

The piece 'Lady Dillon' is in a major key, and decidedly joyful. From learning it, I had always imagined that Carolan had a personal relationship to Frances, and to her family, and that there was great affection between them. It was a shock to find out that 'Lady Dillon' was written during such a turbulent era, and for an event that blatantly contravenes our current model of women's rights.

As a young Irish woman in 2022, my immediate reaction was horror at Frances' wedding; by modern-day standards she was a child bride; it seemed to me she was

7 Incidentally, this is still the case in 2022; a daughter of a peerage created in England can only ever inherit if she has no brothers or nephews.

sold in exchange for the maintenance of the status quo, and her larger family's material wealth and status. I found the genesis of this composition problematic.

However, I am undoubtedly viewing the event through an unfair modern lens. According to norms of the day, it was typical for girls to marry young (although from what I can understand, Frances may still have been slightly younger than average), and it was acceptable to marry a relative. What I view as an extreme decision was not unusual for the time. The family's decision that Frances would marry Charles was a reaction to a harsh reality that I, with my access to food abundance and central heating can't even truly comprehend – that Frances would potentially starve to death without marriage, and her family would be homeless if she were not to marry her cousin. Perhaps Frances saw marrying her cousin as an honour, a chance to save the people she loved. When interpreted in this way, her marriage was a revolt, in its own tiny way, against the political oppression of her family and culture. This is now the narrative I choose, in order to bring a sense of joy to the piece as I perform it.

Carolan's composition in honour of Frances Dillon is a shining beacon in this difficult history. In my opinion, it's one of his finest works – ranging in emotion from tenderness to strength, and finishing with a joyful dance tune. 'Lady Dillon' has 2 sections; an Italianate piece in the style of 'Carolan's Concerto', and a subsequent lighthearted gigue. The foreign influence of Vivaldi, Corelli and Geminiani is very much to be observed in the structure and flourishes of the first section, reflecting Carolan's cultural influence from mainland Europe, a side-effect of the continential political wranglings happening during his lifetime. The gigue is a beautiful fusion of Irish melodic sensibility with the 'giga' of western art music.

I imagine Carolan being invited to 'the big house' to mark the occasion, and to celebrate the family's Gaelic culture in the face of stark oppression and uncertainty. When playing this music, I imagine family and guests feeling trepidation about the future, but attempting to seize a moment of joy, while they can. This is the philosophy I take from the turbulent history of the Dillon clan, and the sense I strive to bring with me as I perform the piece in our present day.

Úna Ní Fhlannagáin

Úna Ní Fhlannagáin is a harper and singer based in Galway, Ireland. Rooted in the jigs and reels of North Clare and the sean-nós singing of Connemara, she is also influenced by American post-minimalists and free jazz. Playing music since age 3, she has since performed all over Europe, and in North America, the Middle East, and Asia. Artistic collaborations include Celtic music icon Alan Stivell, Grammy-winner Bobby McFerrin, and free jazz legend, Anthony Braxton. Passionate about music education, she is the first, and so far only, Irish harpist to qualify as a Suzuki harp teacher. A soulful performer, she strives to create emotional connection with her audience; to bring solace and joy.