Niall Meehan is guilty, again, of using modern concepts and expecting racist “Empire building” – part of a “white Australia” policy;

## Burning of Ballyconree orphanage

* Sir, – We are members of the family of Albert Farrell mentioned in your article (“Names of boys burned out of care home released”, Home News, Michael Parsons, February 20th).

Like the other “Irish boys”, Albert lived happily in the Reid Home at Burnside, Parramatta (Sydney, New South Wales) when he arrived from Ireland in 1922. He subsequently worked in various capacities for the Reid family – at their residence and in their factory – until his retirement. He enlisted in the merchant navy during the second World War, returning to the employment of the Reid family after the war.

It is true that these “Irish boys” in Australia, formed a close bond. Two of the Morgan “boys” lived next door to the Farrells and many other “boys” visited our house regularly.

After lots of searching and a stroke of good luck, Albert was reunited with his sister when they were aged in their late 1970s. Unfortunately we have not been able to find any other living relatives.

After several years of research, we have established that our father’s parents were Charles Farrell and Mary (Hanlon) and grandparents Edward Farrell and Cecilia (Keogh – who was the niece of Judge WN Keogh who was Attorney General of Ireland in 1855). Albert had an older brother Richard James Farrell whom we were never able to locate.

We hope someone reading this may have a connection to us and make contact.

Our father was born in Dublin city and baptised as a baby in the Church of Ireland. He died in 1999 aged 86. – Yours, etc,

M WIDDERS (nee FARRELL)

S FARRELL,

Susan Lane,

Annandale, Australia. [5 March 2012]

ir, – By sheer chance, I decided to Google my father’s name, John Longmore, as I am tracing my family tree.  To my surprise after years of no success your story came up (“Names of boys burned out of care home released”, Home News, February 20th) and my father’s name was there.

We know 11 of the boys’ names listed and your story confirms for the first time from an Irish source what happened to these young boys.  I can inform you that the benefactor’s name was Andrew Reid who arranged for these boys to go to Burnside Homes at Parramatta, NSW, Australia.  Mr Reid sponsored these boys throughout their life at Burnside, with my father telling me that they often stayed on Mr Reid’s property at Yass, NSW, Australia.  The boys said they had a happy life at Burnside.  Miss White (a matron who you reported had accompanied the boys from England) was with them at Burnside also.  I remember meeting Miss White when I was a young child.  When she left Burnside she resided in Toongabbie (not far from Parramatta) and the boys as they grew older used to visit her.  She was like a mother to them.

Our family attended the Burnside Reunion on October 15th, 2011 where they had the homes open for inspection and they have been kept in excellent order.  The home Mr Reid had built for these boys was of a very high standard.

As the men married and had families they tried to trace their own parents – some were successful, some were not.  My father was one of the unsuccessful ones – there was always this brick wall we would come up against.   My sister even tried when she was in Ireland in 1990.

My father told us he remembered the boat being fired at as they sailed out of the harbour and he  always said his religion was the Church of Ireland before he came to Australia.  He was employed over the years as a gardener, waterside worker and transport driver. He enlisted in the Australian army during the second World War with Thomas Metcalf.  John Longmore died on June 6th, 1987 and is survived by his wife, Doreen, daughters Maureen and Kathleen, two grandchildren and three great grandchildren.

These men were like brothers to each other, always looking out for each other and they kept in contact with each other until they died.  Our families still keep in contact with most of them nowadays.

We will be sending copies of your article to their families:  Metcalf, Farrell and Shaw.

My family are very grateful for your article today and thank God for guiding my fingers to Google today. – Yours, etc,

MAUREEN HUGHES nee LONGMORE,

Burke Close,

Forster, New South Wales,

Australia. [25 February 2012]

* Sir, – Michael Parsons wrote that the burning of the Ballyconree Boys Orphanage on June 30th, 1922 by anti-Treaty forces during the Civil War was “for allegedly teaching the boys to be “pro-British”. (“Names of boys burned out of care home released”, Home News, February 20th). There was more to it than that unattributed assertion, as indicated previously (Letters January 13th 20th).

Migrating to Australia is quite fashionable in Ireland today British archives contain a copy of an instruction from Lionel Curtis in the British colonial office to telegram the Irish government, and a report from the master of the orphanage, Chas. G Purkiss.

The telegram should have stated that the orphanage was, “burnt . . . as reprisal for inmates’ loyalty, no immediate danger to lives”. The last five words (from an Admiralty report) were struck out. Inclusion might have led to opposition to “evacuation” to Britain of 33 boys aged seven to 18 (not 16) and erosion of its propaganda value. The file contains no reference to the removal of girls from another orphanage three miles away. They left for England afterwards but were conjoined in propaganda on the burning.

Purkiss reported this conversation between his daughter and the IRA “C.O.” who, “stated that Ballyconree Orphanage had been destroyed because it had been used as a training school for boys to serve in the British Army, with whom they . . . were at war and through whom they . . . were fighting the Free State Provisional Government. Further, the C.O. alleged that the irregulars were in possession of evidence which proved that the Ballyconree Boy Scouts had been guilty of espionage, and that the establishment at Ballyconree had been used for the entertainment of British forces, all of which charges were more or less true.” Purkiss said the republicans searched for two “senior patrol leaders” and for someone “who had been heard to give military orders to the scouts”. Purkiss denied such orders were given or that the orphanage was a military “training school”, but asked, “if it were a crime for an English family, living under the British flag to train their boys to be loyal to King and Empire”.

The Irish Church Missions to Roman Catholics (ICM, a Church of Ireland body with a London HQ) ran a number of such institutions designed to “bring blessings to England” by changing the Christian denomination and the national identity of most of the Irish. It was a sectarian colonial endeavour, illustrated by the ICM later characterising the boys’ role as servants of the empire.

Michael Parsons’s report that Barnardo’s facilitated the subsequent removal of 21 boys to Australia is not surprising. Of approximately 130,000 children transported from Britain, Barnardo’s transported most (and the last in 1967). Many were not orphans at all. This effective kidnapping occurred for numerous reasons: economic – it was relatively cheap and the children became cheap labour; racist “Empire building” – part of a “white Australia” policy; arrogant – the identity of the children and wishes of parents were not considered (see Empty Cradles by Margaret Humphreys, my Church State and the Bethany Home, and “Protestants were left as Orphans . . .”).

It is good news that Barnardo’s released the names of 21 transported children but a pity that the names of 12 boys and all the girls’ names are unknown. Perhaps Barnardo’s might also reveal the names and fate of children sent to them from Dublin’s Bethany Home. – Yours, etc,

NIALL MEEHAN,

Offaly Road,

Dublin 7. (24 February 2012)

Thanks David. I'll look forward to listening to the session, if and when it turns up on the History Ireland site. Will probably put in a letter on the Regan article pointing out his own elisions/inaccuracy.

I wrote a letter yesterday (below) to the Irish Times on the Clifden orphanage. Hopefully it or a similar one will get in.

Jeff

Dear Editor,
In his letter (13 January) on the Burning of Ballyconree orphanage in Connemara in 1922, Niall Meehan condemns himself and the Republican cause out of his own mouth. Unionists are guilty of pogroms against Catholics in Belfast. This is a given but Edward Carson is condemned on his response to the outrage for his "accusations of generalised anti-Protestantism" which were mostly "as usual untrue."

And there we have it, the burning out of dozens of Protestant children in the new Free State is justified on a single assertion that a warden had acted "as an informer" and that the children behaved in a pro-British fashion, while a major politician unfavourable to the death threats and destruction is put down as a liar.

Being described pejoratively as an informer in a war, like treason, depends entirely on which side you support and who wins. Before independence, most southern Protestants were traitors, or in many cases informers, in that they supported the lawful British authorities. They paid a price then but that does not mean they can be treated now as expendable.

Without getting involving in the conversion controversy, it is worth noting that both parents of the poet Louis MacNeice worked at the Clifden orphanage schools while his father Frederick was later Bishop of Down, Connor and Dromore. His mother worked there for two decades and that is where they probably met, according to David Fitzpatrick's new biography of Bishop MacNeice.

Yours sincerely

Jeffrey Dudgeon

15 January 2012

**Burning of Ballyconree orphanage**

24 January 2012

Sir, – Niall Meehan (January 20th) seems to have a problem about there being any element of sectarianism here during War of Independence and after, and he quotes a Protestant Convention in May 1922 in Dublin.

However, I would rely on individual Church of Ireland ministers and bishops to know what was going on throughout the land, and indeed land was often the operative word. And we owe it to the burned out boys of Ballyconree that neither their religion nor the views of their warden were justification for what happened to them.

In June 1922, the Church of Ireland Gazette also made it clear that “in certain districts in Southern Ireland inoffensive Protestants of all classes are being driven from their homes, their shops and their farms in such numbers that many of our little communities are in danger of being entirely wiped out.” Mullingar, Athenry, Loughrea and Nenagh were mentioned. In Tipperary on August 5th, 1921, the Bishop of Cashel Dr Miller said: “Five of our members have been foully murdered without the slightest justification” and he appealed to Protestants in the area not to emigrate in the face of intimidation.

Local Rector Rev Sterling Berry wrote on June 10th, 1922 that in the area of Templederry, Silvermines and Ballinclough there was “scarcely a Protestant family which had escaped molestation, houses have been burned, Protestant families have been forced to leave the neighbourhood, altogether a state of terrorism exists”.

As my late father, who was involved, told me, there were many idealistic individuals involved in War of Independence, but this sectarian element was also present. Sadly many Protestants and their clergy remained silent about this and kept the heads down just to be left alone. Indeed on October 7th, 1921, the COI Gazette reported that even the migration of younger clergy had begun. – Yours, etc,

BRENDAN CAFFERTY,

Ballina,

Co Mayo.

**20 January 2012**

Sir, – I have recently spent some time researching Australian records and been impressed by both the range of information available and the extent to which it can readily be accessed online.This includes a significant proportion of military service records held by the National Archives of Australia (NAA); and Elaine White (January 18th) may be interested to know that her late father’s records are held in the archives in Canberra.He is recorded as Walter Miller, born in Clifton (sic), Ireland on December 23rd, 1912, service number 22479 and she may be able to request a copy from the NAA. – Yours, etc,

MICHAEL RICHARDSON,

Mollington,

Chester,

England.

Sir, – Did republicans act like unionists in reverse during the War of Independence? If we are to accept the view of southern Protestants at the time, it seems not. A Protestant Convention that met after the war, in Dublin’s Mansion House on May 11th, 1922, resolved, “We place on record that, until the recent tragedies in the County Cork, hostility to Protestants by reason of their religion has been almost, if not wholly, unknown in the Twenty-Six counties in which Protestants are in a minority.” The ‘recent tragedies’ was a reference to the killing of 10 Protestant civilians by persons unknown two weeks earlier.

Does this one west Cork exception illustrate a rule stating that there was not generalised anti-Protestantism during the period in question? Southern Protestants often rejected Ulster Unionist allegations that there was. There are too many examples to be ignored. Subsequently published memoirs reinforce this view. Support for the opposite point of view is, as Ian Cox points out (January 17th), in Peter Hart’s research published in 1998. The problem is that Hart excluded from his account evidence not supporting his opinion. For instance, Hart cited in relation to the west Cork killings a British intelligence account stating that Protestants generally did not inform. However, he omitted the next sentence, which stated that an “exception” was the “Bandon Valley” area, where the killings occurred.

Ian Cox mentioned the “Coolacrease killings” in Co Offaly. Two brothers named Pearson were killed by the IRA in June 1921. A year later, Fr Montgomery Hitchock, [Hitchcock – father of film director Rex Ingram and a celticist] a historian and Rector of nearby Kinnitty, stated that the area was “absolutely free from sectarian feeling, not to say bitterness”. He had “never known one case of religious intolerance. We can only live and let live down here”. How could a Church of Ireland clergyman square the killing of the Pearsons (who were not “pacifists”) with this statement? It can only be that during the course of the conflict, when a member of a minority religious community was attacked, it was generally perceived as being due to activity not identity.

There were bigoted nationalists. There still are. Per capita, however, there were more bigoted Ulster unionists who had some followers, a minority of the religious minority, down south. They were encouraged and enlisted by British forces. Many suffered because of this.

I am sorry if Ian Cox finds additional information with regard to the burning of the Ballyconree orphanage in June 1922 wearisome (January 13th). Publishing relevant evidence is not for the purpose of condemning or condoning historical events. It may prevent contemporary observers using them for tendentious purposes. Unfortunately, Peter Hart’s work was used in that manner, generating heat where there should be light. – Yours, etc,

NIALL MEEHAN,

Offaly Road,

Cabra,

Dublin 7.

**18 January 1922**

**Burning of Ballyconree orphanage**

 Sir, – I have been doing research on my father, Walter Horace Millar who was one of the Clifden orphans who were sent to Australia after the burning down of their orphanage, and I came across your article (Michael Parsons, An Irishman’s Diary, January 9th). On the question of “What kind of lives did they lead and did they find happiness – let alone make any fortunes”, I thought maybe you would be interested in the life of at least one of these children.

 Walter was sent to “Cramby”, a Sheep Station at Mungindi, Queensland, Australia, to live with a family called Murphy. He may have been about 13 years at the time. They were very kind and treated him as one of the family, and one of the sons became his best friend. He learnt how to shear sheep. When the war began, he enlisted in the Royal Australian Air Force in Canberra, Australian Capital Territory. He spent some years in the air force, and I was told that, while being on guard duty during all weathers, he contracted tuberculosis, so would have been discharged.

 He was given hope of a cure as there was a new treatment being used at that time, and as he had met my mother, Olive May Dillon (a nurse), who was visiting a friend in hospital, felt that they both had a future if they got married. I, (Elaine Patricia Millar) was born on September 22nd, 1947 and unfortunately, by this time, my father’s tuberculosis had worsened and he was spending much time in and out of the Greenslopes Repatriation Hospital, Brisbane. He passed away in 1952 when I was five years of age.

 Up till then, he had a happy life. At 19 years, I married Robert Frank White in 1967 in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. We have had six children and in the 1980s, went gold prospecting in Victoria, and Western Australia. (We had three children at the time). My husband found a 62oz gold nugget plus many others and we had many enjoyable years travelling around Australia. Even though we did not find a “fortune” as such, I thought it was interesting enough to mention it as part of my father’s ancestry.

 I am still looking for more information about my father, and your article was helpful because I learnt the ship’s name that he travelled to Australia on, and also the name of the orphanage (Burnside) that he would have been sent to. – Yours, etc,

 ELAINE WHITE,

 Gibson Street,

 Capalaba,

 Queensland,

 Australia.

**Burning of Ballyconree orphanage**

Sir, – It is with some weariness that I read yet another letter from Niall Meehan attempting to discredit a well-sourced account of an attack on Protestants during the period 1920-23 (January 13th). This has been a consistent theme in Mr Meehan’s polemics in various publications. To date he has challenged Peter Hart’s accounts of the Dunmanway murders and Alan Stanley’s account of the Coolacrease killings. The charge common to all his apologias is that the murdered Protestants were either informers or too friendly with the British forces.

Mr Meehan’s preposterous letter paints a picture of the boys of Ballyconree orphanage that would be perfectly at home in a James Bond novel. However, as more and more of these stories of crimes against Protestants between 1920-23 come out, Mr Meehan seems to be caught in a difficult place. Either a vast amount of ordinary Protestants (among them shopkeepers, ministers, farmers and even members of pacifist religious sects) were spies and informers, or the murders and crimes were driven by something else. As the only common factor is religion, it would seem sensible that this was the more likely motivation. — Yours, etc,

IAN COX,

Gusserane

New Ross, Co Wexford.

Sir, – To further correct “An Irishman’s Diary” of January 9th, the Free State was established in December 1922. For most of 1922 the Provisional Government of Southern Ireland was responsible for the 26 counties.

The details of the burning are less important than the effect that such events had on Ireland’s future. The main financial hope for the South in 1922 was that the former landed gentry would stay at home and spend their income from their compensations for selling land under the Land Acts. The amounts came to over €50 billion in modern values. The annuities that supported the capital were still being paid and were a drain on rural incomes. Under the Treaty, the South also had to pay its share of the British public debt, an overhang that had not even been quantified.

To facilitate this, a large number of the senators nominated to the Free State Senate were Protestants, either former landowners or professionals that they admired, such as Lord Glenavy and Henry Guinness. It was said that this reflected WT Cosgrave’s liberalism towards Protestants, but the covert reason was to keep them involved in the new state, living and spending their money here. This was made known to my great-grandfather Walter Guinness when he was appointed secretary to the treasury in 1924.

Unfortunately the ongoing civil war and events such as Ballyconree and the burnings of hundreds of country houses alienated most of the wealthier former gentry and they left Ireland. Arguably the results of the weaker financial position included emigration and the hastily conceived Boundary Commission deal in 1925. – Yours, etc,

PATRICK GUINNESS,

Furness,

Naas, Co Kildare.

17 January 2012

**An Irishman's Diary**

**Irish Times 9 January 2012**

**MICHAEL PARSONS**

PROTESTANT orphans – some as young as five years old – were burnt out of their care home in Connemara by “Republicans” and then dramatically rescued by a British gunboat 90 years ago this year. They are among the many forgotten victims of the Civil War. Could any still be alive? In Britain’s House of Lords on July 26th, 1922, Hansard reported an emotional debate during which Lord Carson deplored “everyday life in Ireland, where outrages, slaughter, and every kind of criminality proceed apace”.
He drew fellow-peers’ attention to news that “two orphanages in the County of Galway” had “recently been looted and burnt to the ground by Sinn Féiners” and revealed that “the Admiralty sent ships which brought away to this country the staff and thirty-three boys and twenty-five girls”.
Lord Carson wondered “what has become of these children, and how they are to be provided for in the future?” Carson said that anti-Treaty IRA “Irregulars” had called to the orphanage, threatened to shoot one of the boys, ordered those who were out working in the fields to be rounded up, imprisoned them in the church and then set fire to the residential building.
He said that the children’s lives were only saved because of the matron’s intervention. Carson claimed that when she asked the “fully armed barbarians” to explain their actions she was told that “the boys were being taught loyalty to England” and that the orphanage had, during the first World War, sent many boys to join the British army.
The Earl of Crawford, a government spokesman in the upper house, responded to Lord Carson and said “I can only amplify the facts”. He then stated that: “These orphanages are known as the Connemara Orphans’ Nurseries.
They consisted of two houses at Clifden in County Galway, at which were accommodated 33 boys and 25 girls, together with the staff, all of them Protestants. At the beginning of July the boys’ orphanage was attacked by the Irish Republican Army, and burned to the ground. It is not yet known whether the house in which the girls were accommodated was similarly destroyed. The boys were brought from Clifden to Queenstown [now Cobh, Co Cork] by destroyer, and thence to London by the ordinary route. They are now accommodated in a hostel in West London, and they are being looked after by their own staff. On July 6 two of His Majesty’s ships were sent to Clifden by Admiralty instructions to secure the removal of the girl orphans and the staff, and to bring them to Devonport”.
Given the convulsions gripping the newly-established Irish Free State, and government-imposed press censorship, the matter received relatively little attention here. However, The Irish Times reported, from London, on questions asked in the House of Commons about what one MP described as a “dastardly outrage”.
In August 1922, an appeal to assist the orphan boys was published in the Times of London. On November 8th, The Irish Times reported that “As a result of that appeal, an offer was made to house and educate the children at a well-known Australian institution, founded and supported by private munificence, the Burnside Homes, Parramatta, near Sydney.”
And so, the following day, less than five months after their evacuation from Ireland, the unfortunate boys took to the high seas again.
Arranged by the Migration and Settlement Office at London’s Australia House, 23 Irish children accompanied by a matron sailed away aboard the steam-ship *Euripides* .
The “lucky” orphans arrived in Sydney just in time for Christmas. On Saturday, December 23rd, 1922, The *Sydney Morning Herald* , reported that the boys “ranged in ages from 5 years to sixteen” and were of “a splendid type of sturdy, well-mannered, and well-behaved Irish boyhood”.
The paper reported that the boys would live in the care home although the older ones would be “placed with suitable guardians on the land” as “most of the boys intend to become farmers, having received farm training at the orphanage in Ireland”.
The boys were greeted by a welcoming committee at the wharf in Sydney Harbour and heard a speech by the deputy-chairman of Burnside Homes, a Mr GA Murdoch. He said: “Although you have found a home in this sunny land we do not want you to forget the land of your birth. There is bright sunshine on the horizon in Ireland, and we hope that before long she will be happy and contented once more – a great part of the great British Empire”.
He informed the new immigrants that the children of Sydney’s Murrumburra Sunday School had, on hearing of their plight, taken up a collection. Mr Murdoch then presented each of the Irish boys with a shilling and declared: “We hope that you will be able to go and make your fortunes, founding them upon these lucky shillings”.
What kind of lives did they lead and did they find happiness – let alone make fortunes? It is now just over 89 years since the Connemara Protestant orphans arrived in Australia. Any still living would be aged at least 94.
There is some confusion about the precise number of boys who sailed on the *Euripides* – with contemporary newspaper reports varying the number between 22 and 25.
The fate of the remaining boys, who presumably stayed in London, – and the girls who had been evacuated to Devonport – is not known.

**[See also recent biography of Bishop Frederick MacNeice by David Fitzpatrick 'Solitary and Wild' - both of Louis MacNeice's parents, Frederick and Lily, were teachers at the Ballyconree orphanage school in Connemara.**

**13 January 2012 letter from Niall Meehan]**

**Burning of Ballyconree orphanage**

Sir, – The Ballyconree boys’ orphanage in Galway was burned in June 1922 by anti-Treaty forces. The girls’ orphanage was untouched. (An Irishman’s Diary, January 9th). Edward Carson raised the matter in the British parliament with accusations of generalised anti-Protestantism. This had been Ulster unionist strategy since pogroms against Catholics began in July 1920. Most of what Carson alleged was, as usual, untrue.
The Ballyconree boys were required to salute the Union Jack each morning and were marched to church behind it each week. While this can’t have created a favourable local impression, particularly as hostilities centred on the legitimacy of that emblem, that would not appear to be the cause of burning the boys’ orphanage. The warden declared to his royal navy rescuers that he had been acting as an informer under cover of his responsibilities.
The orphanages were among a number run by the Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics. The ICM was a Church of Ireland body headquartered in London. It was, as its name implies, designed to convert Roman Catholics to a form of evangelical Protestantism. It was also one of a number of such institutions that effected social controls on childbirth out of wedlock within the Protestant community.
It caused much friction within the Church of Ireland and gradually became a marginal presence within that religious community. I became aware of it when researching the related Bethany Home in Dublin, many of whose residents were treated appallingly. Over 200 are buried in unmarked graves while others still alive are denied restitution by the Irish State.
The 1922 orphans were relocated first to London. The boys were then transported permanently to Australia, like almost 130,000 British (plus Northern Irish) children transported to former colonies up to 1967. It was done largely without parental knowledge or consent and often accompanied by lying and deceit. The ICM’s Banner of Truth magazine summed up the orphanage’s work afterwards: “hundreds of [Ballyconree] boys . . . are now worthy sons of the British Empire in different parts of the world”. The scandal of child “migration” was exposed in Margaret Humphreys’ book, Empty Cradles. The recent film, Oranges and Sunshine, with Emily Watson, dealt with it also. Humphreys now runs the Child Migrants Trust that traces separated siblings and their parents.
Michael Parsons’s *Irishman’s Diary* is one way of looking at what happened.
Another is to suggest that the children were kidnapped and transported abroad, where, like thousands of others, they disappeared. – Yours, etc,

NIALL MEEHAN,

Offaly Road,
Cabra,
Dublin 7.