

Tel: 096 31809

www.northmayogenealogy.com

Email: nmhmanager@gmail.com

Email: northmayo@gmail.com

You Tube



**Are you interested in
professional help to
Research Your
Family History?**

**All research can
be done remotely.**

Tel: 096 31809

Email: northmayo@gmail.com

or visit

www.northmayogenealogy.com



“The No Christmas Box Brigade”

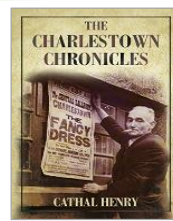


*“You robbed us of our Fairs and Markets
Now you want to rob us of our trade,
And ye are all a lot of cowards
In the No Christmas Box Brigade”*

*Find out who they were and how the
power of the poet made them infamous.*



Cover: The Square, Charlestown 1930s and the Bridge, Charlestown (images from Charlestown.ie)



The No Christmas Box Brigade

In the run up to Christmas in 1915 and 1916, the Great War was on everyone's mind. Research over the last 25 years has brought to light that many of our ancestors fought in that war, experiencing all the horrors of the trenches. Many more Irishmen were already working abroad when the conflict broke out and joined regiments in their adopted homeland, which can make their records more difficult to trace. Here in Ireland, the effects of the War on the economies of small towns and villages, and the fear and dread of conscription being introduced were added pressures for those families who silently dreaded the letter informing them that their son would never come home.

In the middle of all this, was the fact that Ireland had almost achieved Home Rule (devolution in our modern political language) in 1914, before the outbreak of War stymied its introduction. The tide of nationalism, the emotions and effects of the 1916 Rising, and the execution of its leaders, added to a stormy mix of feelings and opinions about what was going on in Europe and Ireland's place in it.

But wars are fought by humans, and no matter what the reason for their presence abroad, we think of our loved ones all the more at Christmas time. A tradition arose in these years to send what we might now think of as 'care packages' to soldiers at the front, to provide some little solace for Christmas Day. These 'Christmas Boxes' contained things like tobacco, chocolate and maybe some items of clothing like socks or gloves.

Some people felt that any attempt to aid the War effort, even at the level of a Christmas Box, was unpatriotic. One such row broke out in Charlestown during the First World War. A number of the towns' traders were approached to supply something for Christmas Boxes. A campaign was mounted to refuse to go along with the Christmas Box idea. It seems feelings ran high over this. It moved one local man, Thomas Colleran, to express his disgust at the stand taken by the traders.

He used one of the oldest Irish forms of reprisal against one's enemies; the satirical poem. In ancient Ireland, the gift of poetry was seen as a special talent one was born with. And if you possessed it, you were on no account to be messed with. A poor wandering poet, showing up at someone's door and seeking a meal and shelter, could, if refused, compose a few witty and sharp lines outlining their lack of charity. The parsimonious householder's neighbours would gleefully memorise these lines for all time. The poem could travel down the generations long after the person who closed the door in the poet's face was dead.

Thomas Colleran lived at Rannarann, near Bushfield, Charlestown. His poem 'The No Christmas Box Brigade' leaves no doubt about what he thought about some of the business people in the town. The poem came to life again in 1978, when it was reprinted in the Western People.

I originally came across the poem 'The No Christmas Box Brigade' in Cathal Henry's book, 'The Charlestown Chronicles'. Cathal has always been a great help to us in the Heritage Centre over the years when it comes to questions about Charlestown, or Swinford! Thank you Cathal from all at the North Mayo Heritage Centre.

*You people all both great and small
Come listen to my song,
A verse or two I'll sing to you
I'll not detain you long.*

*Concerning the Charlestown shopkeepers
I hear that it is said
They have organised a regiment,
Called the No Christmas Box Brigade.*

*There is Morrisroe and Campbell
Two foremost Generals in the field
PA Mulligan and Gavigan
That never yet did yield.*

*There is Moffit and Mark Henry
That never was afraid
They are the seven leading Generals
In the No Christmas Box Brigade.*

*These seven leading Generals
I tell you it's no yarn
They have sent to the Red Cross Hospital
Seven thousand jugs of jam
Their customers would not buy them
But the nurses at Belgrade
Can thank the Charlestown Officers
Of the No Christmas Box Brigade.*

*There is Eggler Duffy, Harrison and Hayden
too
Yankie Murray and Whisker Carroll
I'll plainly tell to you
John Doherty from Wigan
Tommy Honan in from Clare
They are all wearing the Khaki jackets
In the No Christmas Box Brigade.*

*There is John Casey, the Yankie Butcher
He has made a noble stand
He has organised the butchers all
To march at his command
He drills them all around the town
And these are the words he said
I will pass them all, both big and small
In the No Christmas Box Brigade.*

*There is Mrs Harrington from Chapel Street
And Mrs Weaver too,
And likewise Mrs Honan and Baker
O'Donoghue
Tom McDermott and Willie Mulligan
They are taking a noble stand
Of the Chapel St section of the
No Christmas Box Brigade.*

*There is Tom Hopkins from Ballagh St,
As you may understand
His name will pass down in history
As a thorough gentleman,
He would not join the regiment
He said I am so afraid
They won't be able to beat the Germans
In the No Christmas Box Brigade.
They then marched over to Ballagh
It was getting very late
But the Collerans and their allies
Soon made them to retreat,
You robbed us of our Fairs and Markets
Now you want to rob us of our trade,
And ye are all a lot of cowards
In the No Christmas Box Brigade*

*Now to conclude and finish
I hope I soon get a chance,
To fight a bloody battle
In the sunny lands of France,
When the Germans will see them coming
They will sorely get afraid
Of that regiment from Charlestown
Called the No Christmas Box Brigade*

Church Street, Charlestown
(image from Charlestown.ie)