

Frank Roche – fiddler, dancer, and music collector: a musical life in turn-of-the-twentieth-century rural Ireland

Colette Moloney

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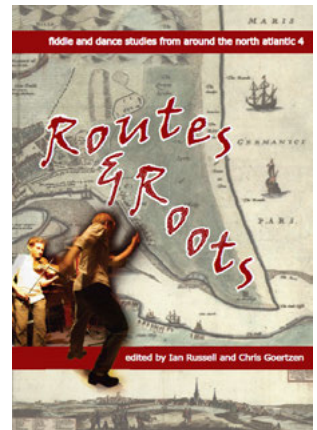
Routes and Roots

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About the author:

Colette Moloney is Assistant Head of the Department of Applied Arts at the Waterford Institute of Technology. A graduate of University College Cork and the Cork School of Music, she holds a PhD from the University of Limerick.

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Frank Roche – fiddler, dancer, and music collector: a musical life in turn-of-the-twentieth-century rural Ireland

COLETTE MOLONEY

Frank Roche (1866–1961) was a musician, dancer, and music collector who resided for most of his life in the village of Elton, near Knocklong, County Limerick. He is best known for his publications *The Roche Collection of Traditional Irish Music*, 2 vols (1912); *The Roche Collection of Traditional Irish Music* (1927);¹ and *Airs and Fantasias* (1932).² His multifarious activities cast a fascinating light on the music, dance, and social contexts of these indispensable entertainments in rural Ireland of the turn of the twentieth century.

When I was growing up, older musicians in the area often spoke of Frank Roche and indeed one fiddle player, Eugene McGrath, described the attic full of music, both printed and manuscript, which had been in Frank's home. In the mid-1990s, I decided to try to locate the Roche music manuscripts, if indeed they were still extant. Armed with a knowledge of the area and a number of local contacts, I did manage to unearth Roche manuscripts but not those for which I had hoped: what were found were short stories and folklore in Irish, which had been noted by Roche c.1930–1939. These manuscripts had been given on loan to a local historian, Mainchín Seoighe, about 1950, and had then remained amongst the latter's personal collection of local-interest material. The stories were subsequently edited by Dáithí Ó hÓgáin and published under the title *Binsín Luachra* in 2001. In addition, the Roche family held a notebook which contained comments by Frank Roche on the piano arrangements made by Dr Annie Patterson of items in the Roche publications, a small number of John and Frank Roche compositions, a number of song texts translated by Frank, a draft of what appeared to be an adjudicator's appraisal of a dancing competition in Frank's handwriting, and a copy of the scarce 1932 Roche publication. Furthermore, I made the acquaintance of Frank Roche's nephews and nieces who were able to provide biographical detail about their uncles, father, and grandfather which hitherto had not been recorded.³

Francis Roche, or Frank as he was better known, was born on 13 August 1866⁴ in the townland of Knocktoran in the parish of Knocklong, County Limerick, which is situated on the outskirts of the village of Elton. Frank was the fourth of nine children born to John Roche and Margaret Walsh Roche. John Roche was both a dancer and a musician, and, according to his descendents, supported his family by teaching. John taught traditional and modern dancing, and classical, traditional, and modern music on piano and violin, in addition to deportment. His services were valued by both his well-off and not so well-off students, as these accomplishments helped some to climb the social ladder and were deemed normal for those who did not need to climb. He was well paid for his classes, which ensured that the Roche family lived in comfort even in difficult times. Two of John's brothers were also musicians, but both died on the passage to America.

In the 1901 Census of Ireland John Roche gives his occupation as a farmer.⁵ At that stage, though, he also indicated that he was 78 years of age and may have ceased teaching, and, as was common at the time, the family may have kept some livestock and poultry, mainly for household use, on their small holding. John's grandchildren commented that the Roches always maintained a good garden in the home place and that the house itself was tastefully furnished. John's wife, Margaret Roche, had died in the summer of 1878, shortly after giving birth to a baby daughter. The baby also died; indeed only six of the Roche children lived to adulthood: Ann (known as Alice), James (Jim), Mary, Francis (Frank), Nora (known as Nonie), and John. The young Frank's own health was not good in childhood as he apparently suffered from asthma.

The three Roche boys – James, Frank, and John – all shared their father's interest in music. They presumably received their early music education from their father, but the three boys were subsequently dispatched to Cork city every Saturday on the train (a round journey of 100 miles) to learn classical music from a German teacher who taught there. The lessons and the train trip must have been expensive and this underlines the financial security which the family enjoyed.

It would appear that Frank was sixteen years of age before he finally left the National School in Bottomstown, near Hospital, County Limerick. This was possibly due to his ill-health; alternatively he may also have missed school if he accompanied his father on his travels as a teacher, perhaps accompanying his dancing classes. Indeed, Frank spent five years in fifth class with an attendance pattern of 136, 77, 54, 114 and 42 days:⁶ the average school year at the time would have been *c.*200 days. Once Frank left school he worked with his father as a teacher and accompanist for dancing. Frank was noted as a dancer himself, for which he won the Munster Belt.⁷ He apparently always had an interest in new tunes, or tunes which he had not heard before, and he was noting examples which he came across from a young age.

In 1892, John senior and his three sons decided to move to Limerick to teach music and dance full-time in the city. They established an Academy of Music and Dance in Charles Street. In the late nineteenth century, there was a decline in interest in Irish dancing coupled with a declining rural population. The demand

for the travelling teacher also diminished or was oversupplied, as John Roche now had three sons in the profession. The move to Limerick therefore may have been an effort to secure employment for all the family in a large centre of population. The father primarily taught dancing and his sons music, but they also provided the music for his dance classes. Their sister Mary had by this stage joined a convent to become a nun; Nora moved to Limerick to keep house for her father and brothers, initially at number 3 the Crescent and then at 20 Roches Street; while the eldest sibling, Alice, remained in the home place in Knocktoran. The Roches apparently never fully settled in Limerick and regularly came to Knocktoran for the weekends on a pony and trap, a journey of three or four hours. John Roche senior was born in 1822/23;⁸ therefore he would have been *c.* 70 years of age when the Academy was set up in Limerick. When the Census was taken on 31 March 1901 all the Roche family, apart from James and Mary, were at the family home in Knocktoran. This is perhaps not surprising as the Census was taken on a Sunday night and they may have been in Elton for the weekend. As mentioned earlier though John describes himself as a farmer rather than a 'teacher of music' or a 'teacher of music and dance', which is how his sons are described. He may therefore have retired from teaching by this stage and perhaps have returned to live permanently, or at least intermittently, in Knocktoran. John's grandchildren though believe that he continued to work until his death in 1911, remaining seated while he taught the steps in the later years. Alice and Nora are also both described as a 'teacher of music' in the Census return for 1901: their descendants, however, hold that neither of the women ever taught music.

The Roches regularly played for concerts: Frank preferred the violin, though he also played the piano; John junior usually played the piano in the family group, though he was also a violinist and was active as a composer; James played the violin when performing with his brothers, but he was employed as a church organist at the Redemptorist Church in Limerick during the Academy years. The Academy in Limerick was very successful and was attended by many of the best families in the city, including Lord and Lady Nash. When John senior died, however, it began to decline. It may be that it could not function satisfactorily without him, but it is also possible that the three brothers needed his controlling influence. They were generally regarded as being high-spirited and quick-tempered, so much so that, when they performed on stage together, agreement on even the choice of tune was difficult.

Conradh na Gaeilge or the Gaelic League was an organisation founded in Dublin in 1893 by Douglas Hyde, who was later to become the first President of Ireland. It aimed to revive and promote the Irish language, but eventually also turned its attention to Irish music, song and dance.⁹ This organization, above any other, was to have a major cultural influence on Frank Roche. The Roches were particularly conscious of the decline in interest in Irish culture as it affected their livelihood and the way in which their livelihood was earned.

An initiative by the London branch of the Gaelic League in 1897 was to have a profound effect on Irish music and dance for many decades to follow. The Irish

language classes at the London branch were flourishing but it was felt that it needed to encourage more social interaction, particularly as they had experienced the Scottish *Céilithe* in London. The first Irish *ceili* was held by the London branch on 30 October 1897. The actual participation of the dancers at this was problematic as most of the Gaelic League members were at least middle class professionals whose knowledge of Irish dance was very limited. The dancing therefore comprised only of a very simple double jig, danced in couples, and the quadrille and waltz.¹⁰

One of the Gaelic League's lasting interventions was in promoting a form of social dancing it considered uniquely Irish. The League's dancing commission denounced as 'foreign' the most popular social dances of the day – quadrille sets – in favour of what they described as 'ancient' figure-dances, newly choreographed for the urban ballroom. These later became known as *ceili* dances, referring to their performance at Gaelic League social nights or *ceili*.¹¹ It seems ironic that the sets of quadrilles, which were danced throughout rural Ireland, were considered more foreign than the new hybrids of dances promoted by the Gaelic League, which often owed much to Scottish dancing and even ballet movements. Hornpipes and reels, which had been introduced into Ireland from England and Scotland respectively, in the 1700s, were as 'foreign' as the quadrille, but escaped the Gaelic League's purges. In many rural areas, however, people continued to dance 'the sets'.¹²

The quadrilles were prohibited at Gaelic League *Céilithe* as 'foreign dances'. Also excluded were dances such as the highland fling, schottische, and the barn dance, which were part of the repertoire of traditional musicians and dancers in rural Ireland at the time. Hostility towards 'foreign dance' persisted into more modern times and there are accounts of dancers being asked to leave the floor for attempting to dance a set, highland fling, or schottische at a *ceili*, even as late as the 1950s.¹³ The *ceili* dances – 'The Walls of Limerick', 'The Siege of Ennis', and so on – still survive and are regularly danced at dances organised by the Gaelic League *Céili* Clubs and taught at Irish-language summer schools in the *Gaeltacht* areas.

Frank Roche was just as interested in the Irish language as in music, and collected folklore and stories. The Elton area of county Limerick was originally Irish speaking but by Frank's lifetime English would have been the spoken language. In the 1901 Census of Ireland return for the Roches, only the father John and Frank are listed as being able to speak English and Irish – the remainder of the family are given as English speakers only. This would suggest that Irish was the spoken language in the area in the father's youth, born c.1822/23, but that by the time of the Roche siblings, Irish was not the spoken language – Frank's fluency in the language appears to have been as a result of his own specific interest in the subject. The Census statistics for 1851 indicate that by that year 53.3% of the population of Knocktoran spoke Irish, but by 1891 only 14.3% were Irish speakers.¹⁴

Even as early as 1900, when he was living in Limerick, Frank was actively involved in organising and adjudicating at *feiseanna* for the Gaelic League. In an effort to link Irish music with Irish texts, Frank translated English songs, which were common in the locality, into Irish. In order to collect music and to improve his own

Irish, he travelled to county Kerry several times in the late 1920s. In addition, a close friendship developed between himself and Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin, a native Irish speaker who was working for farmers in the Elton area. When there was land being distributed by the Land Commission near Elton, Frank arranged for Ó Súilleabháin to be given an allocation, in an effort to encourage the Irish language in the area by having a native speaker resident.

John Roche senior purchased the house and land in Elton, which he had previously leased, from the landlord Charles Coote Webb for the sum of £60 in 1907, under the auspices of the Irish Land Commission.¹⁵ The agreement indicates that the Roche family had previously leased the property from about 1878,¹⁶ though the Roche descendants were not aware that John Roche and family had lived anywhere other than the Knocktoran address. John Roche senior died on 3 March 1911. In his will, dated 14 December 1908, John senior bequeathed the house, its contents, and land in Elton, in addition to ‘any money that may remain after the payment of [his] just debts and funeral expenses’, to his eldest daughter Alice and his youngest son John. His other sons do not receive a mention in his will, apart from a provision in the eventuality that they did not pay his expenses:

I direct that all my just debts & funeral expenses be paid and satisfied by my Executor as soon as possible after my decease. If my sons don't discharge these obligations I direct that the said expenses be paid from the proceeds of my Insurance Policy.¹⁷

It is not known when exactly the Roches returned to live permanently in Elton, but, in the 1911 Census of Ireland, James, Frank (who by this stage had started to use the Irish form of his name Proinnsias de Roiste), Nora, and John junior were still resident at 20 Roches Street in Limerick.

As in many parts of rural Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century the social life of the Elton area was largely dependent on house dances. These dances, which frequently included refreshments and card playing, were usually all-night affairs, concluding around 6:00 am to allow for the commencement of farm duties. There was a strong social and musical bond between the musicians and dancers at these events in the small domestic setting. The musicians were not paid for their services, and generally alternated between playing and dancing. We do not know if the Roches were involved in playing for house dances, but we do know that they regularly played for hall dances in the neighbouring towns. This is perhaps understandable as the Roches were professional musicians who needed to make their living from music and would perhaps have been more inclined to play at the hall dances for payment.

While living in Limerick, the surroundings and clientele demanded a high standard of living, and the Roches maintained this ‘comfortable’ style when they returned to Elton. The Roche house was noted for music, but not for holding house dances, as other houses in the locality at the time were known. Musical entertainment

in the Roche household usually occurred on a Sunday, when the brothers returned from Mass in Knocklong. They then regularly played music to entertain the numerous visitors who came from far and near to listen until the dinner was ready at 3.30 pm. Often car loads of people descended, including the famous Countess Markievicz, and all then had dinner with the household.

It was during this period that Frank met Patrick Joseph Joyce from Glensheen, a nephew of the Irish music collector Patrick Weston Joyce. Frank himself tells us that he spent a week on business in Dublin in 1907 and he may indeed have met P. W. Joyce on this or another occasion.¹⁸ At any rate Patrick Joseph Joyce lent Frank manuscript copies of ballads and tunes which P. W. Joyce had collected. Frank was helped by his brother John in compiling volumes 1 and 2 of the Roche collection which was published in 1912. The foreword to the edition was written by the well-known music scholar, Cathal Ó Braonáin, a friend of Frank's, who at that time was resident in Millstreet, County Cork. It is not clear why volumes 1 and 2 were published together as one book. Volume 1 perhaps predated volume 2 and Frank may originally have intended to publish it earlier, but for some reason its publication was delayed. In the preface to volume 1, Frank gives the reasoning behind his publication; basically that it was requested by friends, pupils, other teachers, and members of the Gaelic League:

The present collection was begun about 20 years ago, and its production has been undertaken at the request of numerous friends and pupils of mine, as well as many teachers, and members of various branches of the Gaelic League, who wish to possess, something, so far, not obtainable, a handy, and at the same time comprehensive volume of reliable Irish music at a moderate price.¹⁹

It seems that his reasoning for selecting material for inclusion was to avoid duplicating material already published:

Being anxious to first avoid cases of duplication, I thought to give only what, as far as I knew, had not hitherto been published, and to exclude pieces of doubtful national origin, but in order to produce the book required, I had perforce to alter my intention. Where however, such cases occur, it will be seen that the settings in this volume, as a rule, either differ from what have appeared in previous publications, or are better variants of them, and therefore, I hope that their inclusion will be excused.²⁰

It would also appear from the preface that he obtained much of his material from manuscripts given or lent to him:

In preparing this Collection for publication, I have to acknowledge my indebtedness in the first place to Father Brennan for his admirable essay, and to the following ladies and gentlemen for MSS. either lent or bestowed. Father Malachy O'Callaghan, Gormanstown; Surgeon Major Bourke, U. S.

Army; Mrs. Jas. Hickey, Killonan; Messrs. Path. Joyce, Glenisheen [sic]; John Martin, Kilfanane [sic]; Dan O'Leary, Knockaney; Ml. Mulvihill, Newcastle West; Path. Barry N. T. Drumkeen; Joseph Hurley, Glenbrohane; P. C. Dwane, Pallasgreen; James Noonan, N. T. Garrydoolis, and Wm. Merrick, Tower Hill; and of County Limerick. Messrs. T. Bernard, Peter McMahon, Joseph Halpin, E. B. Duggan, James McMahon, and Martin Clancy – all of Limerick city. Miss F. Donovan, Seafield, Tralee; Messrs. Michael Disette, Ventry, and P. Kirby Rathea, County Kerry [sic], An Paorach, Nenagh, County Tipperary, Miss Hannah Coughlan, Cork; Messrs. Jas. Sheehan, and Ml. Spillane, Castletown Bere, County Cork, Mr. Ml. Dwane, Four Mile Water, County Waterford; Messrs. M. Flanagan, Kilmainham, and P. J. Griffith, Rathmines, Dublin, and Dr. Annie Patterson, and Messrs. Boosey and County, for permission to include the original Irish air by Dr. Patterson.²¹

Most of the manuscripts obtained appear to be from Limerick city or county, though he did obtain others from further afield. Frank does not generally give the source of individual tunes in his publications, apart from those composed by family members or some items by Thomas Moore. It would appear that he utilized items supplied to him by Patrick Joseph Joyce, as Joyce is included in the list of contributors. It is not clear, however, if these Patrick Joseph Joyce items were items obtained from Patrick Weston Joyce or not.

Roche also appears to have noted tunes from musicians in the locality and included the compositions by his brother John and others:

For tunes taken down from the playing of Messrs. Wm. Guerin, Knocktoran, Edmund Quinlan, Glenlara and from the singing of John Walsh, Elton, County Limerick; For airs and pipe marches recently composed by my brother John, and Gillabridghe O Cathain, St. Munchin's College, and to my father for airs and dance tunes.²²

The first part (titled volume 1) of his 1912 publication contains 79 airs, 52 jigs, and 68 reels. The second section (titled volume 2) contains additional tunes thus: 39 hornpipes, 13 single jigs, 18 hop jigs, 14 set dances, 6 flings; 9 country dances (long dances and sets of quadrilles), 16 old set tunes, and 40 marches (including a version of 'The Fox Chase', a piece imitating a fox hunt, which is generally associated with pipers).

Eighteenth and nineteenth century collectors of Irish music, such as Edward Bunting, George Petrie, Henry Hudson, and even Patrick Weston Joyce were selective in the material that they collected, at the very least restricting their collections to what they saw as truly Irish items. It is therefore noteworthy, particularly given Roche's strong involvement with the Gaelic League, that he included items from Moore, flings, and sets of quadrilles in his 1912 publication. The inclusion though was a conscious one which he seeks to justify in the introduction to the volume by stressing that the tunes had become Irish by association:

It may be objected to by some that the work contains matter foreign to a collection of Irish music, such as Quadrilles, or 'Sets' as they are popularly called, and other dance tunes also. That objection may be admitted as regards their origin, but they have become Irish by association, and so long as the people dance Sets, etc., it is better they should do so to the old tunes in which their parents delighted, rather than be left depending on those books from across the water containing the most hackneyed of Moore's Melodies mixed up with music hall trash, and, perhaps a few faked jigs and reels thrown in by way of padding.²³

Roche, therefore, would seem less puritanical in his outlook than his Gaelic League colleagues and displayed an understanding of Irish music as a practitioner. Like his contemporary, Captain Francis O'Neill, he notated the repertory of traditional musicians at the time, be its origins Irish or not.

In 1915, John Roche, the only member of the Roche family to marry, married Brid O'Flynn, a school teacher. The couple lived in different parishes where Brid taught until they finally settled in Emily, County Limerick. John transferred full ownership of the Roche homestead to his sister Alice on 5 February 1916. He continued his occupation as a music teacher and, as his family grew, John regularly took his children by horse and trap to the Knocktoran house, where the brothers played music together.

James Roche spent some time as an organist in Tipperary town and also in Drogheda, County Louth. He lost the latter post during the War of Independence c.1922, when he apparently played the 'Death March' in the middle of a church service, while the funeral of an IRA volunteer was passing the church.²⁴ From that point on James, Frank, and their sisters, Alice and Nora, all lived together in the old house in Knocktoran. James taught music, primarily piano but also violin on occasion, travelling from house to house in the local area on a bicycle. Frank did most of his teaching further afield, spending days in colleges such as Roscrea, County Tipperary, and Drishane, County Cork. He also taught dancing and music in primary schools in Herbertstown, County Limerick, and Kanturk, County Cork. The Roches purchased a car in the 1920s, one of the first in the area, but none of the four family members ever learned to drive. Their niece Margaret remembered the family being driven to Ballyorgan, a nearby village, on one of the few occasions that the car was ever used. The Roche brothers travelled mainly by bicycle or horse and trap, and then by bus or train, while the car languished in the garage.

After his 1912 publication Frank became well known as a music scholar and known to collectors of music such as Rev. Richard Henebry, Carl Hardebeck, and Séamus Clandillon. Roche and Hardebeck had a particular respect for one another and in 1921, while Hardebeck was teaching music at University College Cork, Frank published a piece titled *Fantasia* for violin with piano accompaniment by Hardebeck:

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A Fantasia for Violin and Piano on Irish airs by F. Roche, accompaniment by Carl G. Hardebeck, will be welcomed by Irish musicians. It can be had from Messrs. Piggott and County, Dublin, Cork and Limerick at 2/6 net. The harmony and the excellence of the new composition will be greatly appreciated.²⁵

Roche's second collection of music was published in 1927. According to Roche in the preface to this volume:

The first Edition (4,000) which appeared early in January, 1912, was so well received as to render a reprint of the work necessary after a few months, the entire issue having been sold out. Two further reprints have since been called for.²⁶

The 1927 publication contained volumes 1 and 2 of the 1912 publication with an additional volume 3 added, which contained 70 airs, 18 reels, 18 double jigs, 9 single jigs, 21 hop jigs, 7 long dances, 25 old dances (most non-Irish in origin – mainly waltzes, barn dances, mazurkas, and schottisches), 19 hornpipes, 9 set dances, 4 sets of quadrilles, and 20 marches. According to Roche:

The Collection has been completely revised and enlarged by more than 200 Airs and various pieces taken down and collected during the past few years, amongst them some fine settings of Airs from an old MS. of my father's which was not available when the first edition was being prepared.²⁷

He also acknowledges the loan of manuscripts or contribution of tunes from a Mr O'Donoghue of Ballyneety; Patrick Joseph Joyce, Glensheen; Tim Crowe of Dundrum, County Tipperary; and his own brother John:

I have gratefully to acknowledge my thanks for the loan of an old MS book belonging to the late Mr. P. O'Donoghue, Ballyneety, Limerick, and in particular to Mr. P. J. Joyce (now deceased), Glensheen [sic], Kilmallock, for many beautiful Airs and Dance Tunes, and for the loan of his fine MS. Collection of Irish Music; to my brother John, and to Mr. Tim Crowe, Dundrum, County Tipperary, for some airs and dance tunes and to any whose names have been inadvertently omitted.²⁸

Roche again feels the need to justify the inclusion of the more popular tunes in his collection:

In Compliance with the wishes of many, and in accordance with my own, I have included a selection of old ballroom dance favourites in this volume. In these simple and melodious items, together with the various sets of quadrilles, or lancers, a substitute may be found to some extent for the vulgar, inane, and noisy stuff called dance music in vogue at present. Let us hope that they may

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also help in some measure to enkindle a desire for a revival of the rational and artistic style of dancing which obtained before the war.²⁹

An old friend of his, Dr Annie Patterson, arranged items in the Roche collection for piano. This edition, as far as we know, was never published, but what does survive are Frank's notes and comments on the arrangements. In the preface to the 1927 edition Roche states:

Encouraged by that success [the sales of his first edition], and in response to numerous requests, the enterprising publishers had decided some years ago on bringing out another edition of the whole Collection, arranged for the Pianoforte by Dr. Annie Patterson – of whose eminence as a Musician, and enthusiasm in the cause of Irish Music, it is unnecessary to speak – but its publication has been unavoidably delayed by circumstances arising out of the great war.³⁰

Roche hoped that Ireland would develop a native art music style, as other countries had, and that a national Irish composer would emerge as Chopin, Grieg, Weber, and so on had in other countries. He saw his collection as providing the basic material from which an emerging composer could draw. He saw the proposed arrangement of the Roche collection for piano as a demonstration that Irish music was as adaptable to full harmonization as the music of other countries and as a stepping stone to having the tunes arranged for other instrumental and orchestral combinations:

In harmonizing these Airs, it has been the aim of Dr. Patterson to make them – in her own words – 'as Musically as possible' (keeping in view, doubtless, subsequent Instrumental and Orchestra arrangements), and to endeavour to demonstrate their adaptability to as full a harmonization as the Folk Music of other Nations.³¹

He further adds that the publication was a fulfilment of a childhood dream to hear pieces such as 'The Fox Chase' played by full orchestra:

The compilation involved considerable labour, but it is a labour of love lightened always by the consciousness of its national import and necessity. Looking at it now fully harmonized, I cannot help reflecting how, in boyhood, when listening with delight to many of these fine old Air and pieces – notably 'The Fox Chase' – I used at the same time, feel sad to think that they could never, as it then seemed, be noted down, but would pass away with the old patriots who played them. I little thought at the time that the day was not so far off, when not alone would they be noted down, but harmonized, and that the performance of the famous old "Fox Chase" by full orchestra would also be made possible.³²

In November 1927, when the preface to the 1927 publication was written, the publication of Patterson arrangements, with a separate violin part 'for those who play only the Violin, Flute or Pipes, or for any who may object to Pianoforte arrangements on traditional grounds', seemed eminent. Indeed, Roche devoted a considerable amount of space in the 1927 preface to discussion of the upcoming publication. An ominous note however is added in a footnote which reads thus: 'The publication of the Pianoforte arrangement seemed assured at the time the foregoing was written'. The proposed edition does not appear to have been published, or, at least, there are no extant copies of the publication and no references to its release survive. Patterson does appear to have completed the work. Although the music manuscript does not survive, Roche's comments on the individual arrangements do and would seem to suggest that he was looking at manuscript drafts of the arrangements as he wrote. If, as seems likely, it was not published, the reason is not clear: the work on the arrangements appears to have been completed. It may perhaps have proved too expensive to publish the proposed volume or, alternatively, the publication may have been delayed and then World War II intervened.

Roche also provides a valuable note on Irish dancing in the preface to the 1927 publication. In this, he details the dances that were in vogue at the time and the nature of their execution. He also laments the banning of dances such as the set of quadrilles by the Gaelic League (though he does not specifically mention the organization by name) and the inadequacy of their replacements:

The spectacular and difficult dances for the few were cultivated to the neglect of the simple ones for many leaving the social side untouched, except to criticise, or condemn. The ballroom dances in vogue at the time were all banned and nothing put in their place but a couple of long dances.

An exception should have been made, one would imagine, in favour of the popular old Sets (they had become Irishised), if only on account of the fine old tunes with which they were usually associated; but they were decried amongst the rest.

It seems strange that such a policy should have been decided upon and pursued considering that no substitutes were provided beyond those mentioned. A few years later, however, the *Bridge of Athlone*, *Siege of Ennis*, and an incomplete form of *Haste to the Wedding* were introduced, but, as might have been expected, these simple contre dances proved inadequate as substitutes for all those that had been prohibited. The showy and intricate four and eight-hand jigs and reels of the Revival, although interesting to the spectator, were generally looked on as designed only for competition or display on account of their difficulty, and, consequently, had no appeal as social dances.³³

In 1932, Roche published one final collection of music, *Airs and Fantasias*, which was a mixture of ballads, operatic selections, and traditional items for solo violin. Roche would also seem to have been in contact with Captain Francis O'Neill in America, as the latter sent him a copy of his 1913 publication *Irish Minstrels and*

Musicians with the following inscription: 'To Proinnsias De Roiste, a distinguished Knight of the Bow, with cordial regards of the author, Francis O'Neill, Christmas 1933'.

Frank Roche taught only a very limited amount of fiddle (or violin as he liked to call it) in his native area for much of his life, but, when his days as a travelling teacher were at an end, he regularly held classes locally. He would appear to have tutored students individually or in small groups, and the repertoire imparted seems to have been a mixture of Irish, light classical and popular music. Technique wise he taught the use of the different left hand positions on the violin with most students not graduating past fourth position. Given his own classical training, Frank laid particular emphasis on intonation, bow use, and tone (or as he termed it 'touch').³⁴ There are no extant recordings of Frank Roche performing, though he did record for radio.

Whether it was Roche's style that had a long term influence on the fiddle playing of the area, or simply that he was passing on a style of fiddle playing which already existed in the area, there were a number of common characteristics which linked the few older fiddle players, who remained in the Elton area in the 1970s and early 1980s. Not all of these fiddle players were direct students of Roche, but all had a clear tone, a tendency for longer bow use than the norm in surrounding areas, generally careful tuning, and a predominance of single and double grace notes and slides for ornamentation. Fiddle players who travelled outside of the area to music competitions sometimes used 'rolls', but not the fiddlers who were house musicians or who played only in the locality. There was also a strong tradition of air playing in the area. As the Roches were professional teachers, it is understandable that they would have had a substantial influence on the music of the locality. This has not survived to the present day, as music in the area reached a low ebb in the 1970s with only a few older fiddle players remaining. The current resurgence of interest amongst the youth is often serviced by teachers from other areas.

Frank Roche continued to teach and adjudicate at *Feiseanna* until the 1950s. James, Mary, Nora, and finally Alice died, which left Frank on his own in the house in Knocktoran. Prior to her death, Alice had transferred the family home and land to Frank on 20 January 1951. John and his wife moved to Dublin in 1956. Frank met the aforementioned Limerick scholar and historian Mainchín Seoighe at the county *Feis* in Bruree on 25 June 1950.³⁵ According to Mainchín, Roche was a low-sized, lively man, who looked twenty years younger than his age, and who spoke fluent Irish. Frank subsequently supplied Mainchín with material for his column *Teoraí Luimní* in the *Limerick Leader* newspaper, including his translation of 'The Galbally Farmer', which was published in the *Limerick Leader* on 16 December 1950. The final time that Seoighe and Roche met was at a commemoration for the Staker Wallace in Martinstown, County Limerick, on 19 June 1955,³⁶ at which Frank introduced the speakers.

Indeed, most people who remembered Frank were surprised that he was 95 years old when he died. He was small of stature and of light build, and his quick agility of step and movement stayed with him until the end. For many years before

his death Frank met nightly with his friends for a chat in the local pub, O'Sullivan's in Elton. His habit then was to call into the Daverin family on his way home, from where the man of the house, Ned Daverin, would accompany him the rest of the way.

In later years Frank lost most of his vision and hearing, and in September 1960, when his health deteriorated, he was admitted to St Camilius' Home in Limerick. He died there on 11 July 1961. The following obituary appeared in a newspaper at the time and a more detailed appreciation, 'A Tribute to Frank Roche', by Mainchín Seoighe, followed in the *Limerick Leader* of 29 July 1961:

Mr Frank Roche, Elton, Knocklong, County Limerick, who has died, was a native Irish speaker and a well-known adjudicator at Feiseanna. Aged, 95 he was said to be the last native speaker in County Limerick. A musician and teacher, he compiled and published the Roche collection of Irish airs. He was unmarried and is survived by his brother John.³⁷

Roche's musical legacy is undoubtedly his teaching and music collecting. He published almost 600 airs and dance tunes, many of which are not found in other sources, or at least in the same settings. He is the only source for many airs which would otherwise have been lost, such as 'The Lament for the Death of the Staker Wallace'. He provides information on ornamentation used at the time and developed signs to indicate the 'glide' and 'inflection', which he explains in the preface to the 1912 edition:

There is a peculiar feature of that style [the 'traditional style'] which I have endeavoured to introduce here, and to which I wish to direct attention. It is a curious 'interval' or inflection, that was much used by the old fiddlers with striking and often with charming effect (I now refer to the men *who Could play*). In the absence of a suitable musical symbol with which to indicate it, as neither the appoggiatura, nor the acciaccatura would do (one finger only being employed), I have used an asterisk for the upward, and an arrow for the downward glide [...]. The length of the glide, however, varies, but the ear of the experienced player enables him to regulate that quite easily. In quick passages, where the glide is not possible, the * indicates a quarter tone.³⁸

Single and double grace notes, triplets, and bowed trebles are also indicated in the printed tunes. The bowing patterns indicated are particularly interesting in dance tunes, where they often suggest an off-beat slurring pattern. Roche includes a very substantial amount of airs and, despite his support of the Gaelic League, does not confine himself to reproducing the dance tunes which the League would have considered truly Irish, but instead includes any dance-tune types which were in vogue at the time. His collections therefore give a snapshot of the repertoire of a fiddler in rural Ireland, particularly County Limerick, in the early twentieth century.

Notes

- ¹ Frank Roche, *The Roche Collection of Traditional Irish Music*, 2 vols (Dublin: Pigot, 1912; 2nd edn in 3 vols, 1927; repr. Cork: Ossian, 1993).
- ² Frank Roche, *Airs and Fantasias* (Dublin: Pigot, 1932).
- ³ The biographical detail on the Roche family in the article, unless otherwise indicated, has been obtained from interviews with John Roche and Margaret (Roche) Earlie.
- ⁴ Birth Certificate for Francis (Frank) Roche.
- ⁵ Return for house No. 3 in Knocktoran (Emlygrennan, Limerick) in the Census of Ireland 1901.
- ⁶ School Register for Bottomstown National School.
- ⁷ The Munster Belt was a Munster championship competition in Irish dancing.
- ⁸ John Roche's age is given as 78 on the return for the Census of Ireland 1901.
- ⁹ Helen Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance* (Kerry: Brandon, 1999), p. 29.
- ¹⁰ Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, p. 30.
- ¹¹ Brennan, *The Story of Irish Dance*, pp. 32–33.
- ¹² Liz Doherty, 'Hornpipe' and 'Reel', in *The Companion to Irish Traditional Music*, ed. by Fintan Vallely (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), pp. 190 and 308.
- ¹³ Larry Lynch, *Set Dances of Ireland: Tradition and Evolution* (Miltown Malbay: Séadna Books, 1989), p. 18.
- ¹⁴ Census of Ireland for the years 1851 and 1891.
- ¹⁵ Land Registry of Ireland, Schedule S973, Folio 6820: Agreement between Vendor [Charles Coote Webb] and Tenant [John Roche] for Sale of a Holding, dated 1 November 1907.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁷ Will of John Roche, Knocktoran, Elton, County Limerick, dated 14 December 1908.
- ¹⁸ Proinsias de Róiste, *Binsín Luachra*, ed. by Dáithí Ó hÓgáin (Baile Átha Cliath: An Clóchomhar Tta, 2001), p. 11.
- ¹⁹ Roche, *Collection of Traditional Irish Music*, p. v.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ Róiste, *Binsín Luachra*, p. 12.
- ²⁵ *Irish Independent*, 17 January 1921.
- ²⁶ Roche, *Collection of Traditional Irish Music*, p. iii.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² *Ibid.*
- ³³ Roche, *Collection of Traditional Irish Music*, p. v.
- ³⁴ Detail on teaching taken from an interview between Frank Roche and two other unidentified men [probably members of the O'Sullivan family] in O'Sullivan's Pub, Elton, County Limerick, probably in the 1950s.
- ³⁵ *Limerick Leader*, 1 July 1950.
- ³⁶ *Limerick Leader*, 29 July 1961. Staker Wallace was an Irish patriot who was beheaded by the authorities in 1798.
- ³⁷ The Roche family have a newspaper cutting of this obituary for Frank Roche, which appeared in an unidentified newspaper.
- ³⁸ Roche, *Collection of Traditional Irish Music*, p. v.