



**Castle Cooke** --the house seen above-- and the Castle Cooke estate were the property of Lt. Colonel William Cooke-Collis, my great grandfather (and my mother's grandfather). It was always his home and he lived there until 1921 when the house was burnt down by an armed gang of IRA terrorists. Remaining walls of the burnt out house were later demolished.

The house was situated 3 miles NE of Kilworth village and 6 miles NE of Fermoy town by road. Fermoy was the site of a large British Army barracks when Ireland was under British rule before 1922. Colonel William Cooke-Collis was a senior Army officer who had been based at Fermoy for several years before the destruction of his house. Fermoy barracks was the scene of the first attack for arms by the IRA against British troops during what is now called Ireland's War of Independence.

The remains of an old ruined castle still stand high above the river Araglin about 330 yards SE of the site of Castle Cooke house. This was a Condon castle of rectangular shape with rounded corners built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Originally called Dun Gallane, it passed to the Cooke family in the 17<sup>th</sup> century becoming the property of Thomas Cooke (who was buried at St Andrew Undershaft, in the City of London, in 1706). These Cookes, who

apparently came over to Ireland with Oliver Cromwell, subsequently called the place Castle Cooke. At some later date a marriage between one of the



Lt.-Colonel William Cooke-Collis, C.M.G., A.D.C., D.L.,  
(etc.). Born 1847, died 1933. (regimental portrait)

Cooke family and a Collis led to adoption of the name Cooke-Collis.

Colonel Cooke-Collis's country house was described as a "late seventeenth-century or early eighteenth-century" house, with "an irregular structure consisting of several gable-ended ranges, with 19<sup>th</sup> century eaved roofs; and a 2 storey projecting gabled porch". This is the house that we see in the photograph above which is thought to have been taken in about 1908.

One feature that can be seen in the photograph --which might seem rather puzzling -- is a tall rectangular building behind, which towered over the house itself. If one didn't know otherwise one might think this was the ruined castle keep, also known as Castle Cooke, which actually stands 330 yards away from the house. In fact, this was Colonel Cooke-Collis's new wing to the house which was completed in 1908. It was built with dressed limestone from his own quarry in the (Araglin) glen and contained, besides other rooms, a large dining room panelled with oak grown on the estate. The last Colours carried by the North Cork Militia hung in a frame, under glass, on the walls. As a senior military officer and an important local figure, the Colonel sometimes gave large dinner parties and entertained at Castle Cooke. The new wing presumably contained additional rooms for visiting officers and other guests who visited the house. This large wing was presumably joined to the older house and it may not have been quite completed when the photograph was taken.

On June 7<sup>th</sup> 1921 when an IRA gang arrived to burn the house there was a dinner party in progress hosted by my elderly great grandfather. The armed men said they had orders to burn down the house but, evidently, they had not been instructed to kill anyone. This was despite the fact that two British officers who had been visiting the house a few weeks earlier had been ambushed and murdered on the drive.

The IRA men, respectfully calling him 'Sir', took William Cooke-Collis outside and tied him to a tree. They told the guests and other members of the family present to collect whatever they could take out from the house and they would set it alight in twenty minutes. They poured drums of petrol throughout the ground floor and, when everyone was outside, they set the house ablaze before departing into the night. Some of the paintings and a few other objects that were saved included much of the Castle Cooke dinner service. I still possess some of the attractive red patterned plates and soup plates which survived that night. The only thing to be grateful for was that none of the Cooke-Collis family or their guests were murdered. My mother

and her parents, British Army officer William James Norman Cooke-Collis and his wife Cléonice, were, thankfully, not at Castle Cooke at the time.

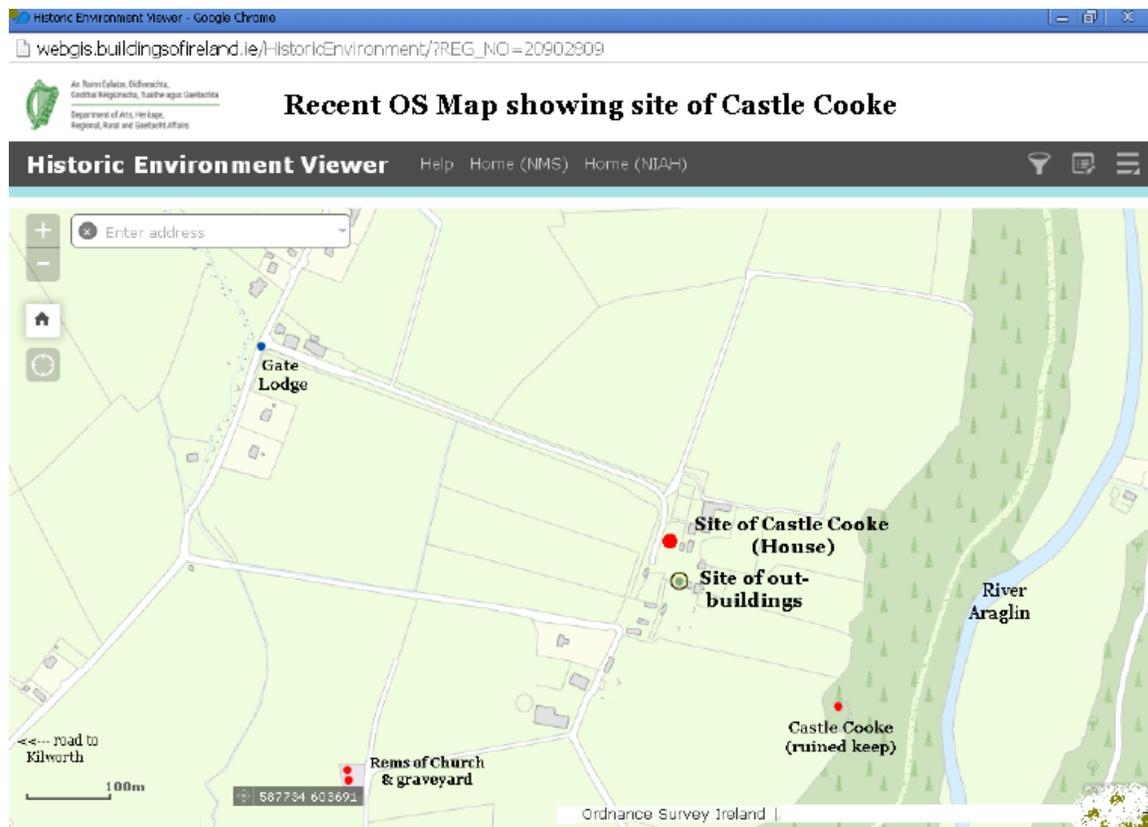


Portrait of Lt. Col. William Cooke-Collis by William Logsdail. (It was painted in 1924, three years after Castle Cooke had been burnt.)

My grandfather William James Norman Cooke-Collis was born at Castle Cooke in 1876. Another source on the internet (Geni) says he was actually born in Bombay (now Mumbai), India, where his father William had been posted, with his wife, by the Army at that time. He was the eldest of five Cooke-Collis children by William's first wife Catherine Oliphant who died in 1891. In 1894 William Cooke-Collis remarried and subsequently had a further five children by his second wife Elizabeth Cunliffe.

The IRA's destruction of Castle Cooke had taken place in 1921 when the Colonel was 73, and not long after that he went to live in England at The Hall, Islip, Oxon. When he died there in April, 1933, son and heir William James Norman Cooke-Collis inherited the Castle Cooke estate --or what was left of it. Not surprisingly he never returned there to establish ownership.

He, too, had a distinguished military career which culminated in him being appointed General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland District in 1935.





General Sir James Cooke-Collis, K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.

Agent: Aug, 1938 - April, 1941.

The military career of Major-General Sir (William) James Norman Cooke-Collis, KBE, CB, and DSO, always known as James, is summarized below:-

*Cooke-Collis was born on 7 May 1876 at Castle Cooke, Kilworth, Co. Cork [other sources say at Bombay, India] to Lt.-Col. William Cooke-*

*Collis and Catherine Maria Cooke-Collis (née Oliphant). He was educated at Cheltenham College. He was commissioned into the King's Royal Rifle Corps transferring to the Royal Ulster Rifles in 1900. He served in the Second Boer War as well as World War I.*

*After the WWI he was appointed Military Governor at Batoum in Transcaucasia. He became Commander of 11th Infantry Brigade in 1927 and Commander of 55th (West Lancashire) Infantry Division in 1934. He was appointed General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland District in 1935. He was responsible for ensuring that the Royal Ulster Rifles had its depot in Ballymena, its own recruiting ground, rather than in Belfast. He was invested as a Knight Commander, Order of the British Empire in 1937. He retired in 1938 and died at Dunmurry near Belfast on 14 April 1941, aged 64.*

On 30<sup>th</sup> January 1906 he had married Cléonice Gamble, daughter of Major George Francis Gamble at Harold's Cross Parish Church in Dublin. Their only child Catherine Patricia Cooke-Collis (born 10<sup>th</sup> March 1907, in Dublin) was my mother. She eventually became the sole heir of her father, Sir James Cooke-Collis, and de facto inheritor of the extinguished Castle Cooke estate. Actual title deeds were said to have been left in the custody of the family's solicitor in Fermoy but it is not known what became of those.

In any case, Land Registry records in Dublin showed that the Cooke-Collis family still held title to the lands at Castle Cooke –approx. 900 acres according to my mother—well after Ireland's independence as the Irish Free State in 1922. In about 1961 the Irish Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs (or some such government department) wrote to my mother requesting that she sold them a small parcel of land, maybe less than an acre, on which they wanted to erect utility poles or maybe a radio tower of some kind. They offered her a derisory sum like £4.

She wrote back accepting that but I don't know if they ever paid her. I did suggest several times in the 1960s that she at least investigated the registered ownership of the remaining land but she would have none of it. She wanted nothing more to do with Ireland and its rebels --as she used to refer to them. Since that time several houses and/or farm buildings have been built on the site of Castle Cooke house and

other parts of the old estate. The family which came to live there during the 40 years that followed burning of the house would most likely have claimed they had squatters rights if their ownership of the land had ever been challenged.

*“The doctrine of adverse possession allows third parties to claim a **right** over land (to which they had no **legal** title to) which they have occupied continuously for over 12 years with the intention of excluding all others including the true owner (also commonly known as “**Squatters Rights**”)”* ---Cahir & Co. Solicitors, Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland.

It is an extinguished estate, or interest, that a squatter may apply to acquire and this is no doubt what became of it. More buildings have been erected over the years and most of the land is now farmed. The ruined keep of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Castle Cooke still stands high above the Araglin river (see photo below) but --apart from some old walls-- little of the great house that bore the same name is visible any more.



--George Wingfield