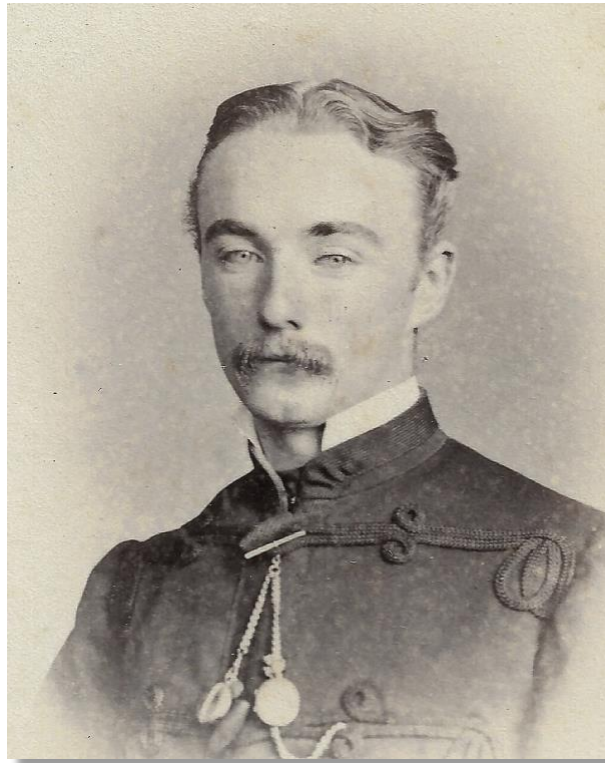


Captain Martin Oranmore Kirwan 1847-1904

83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot - Dublin County Light Infantry
Royal Dublin Fusiliers - Dublin Castle Scandal 1884



Lieutenant M O Kirwan 83rd Regiment of Foot Poona India circa 1870

Martin Oranmore Kirwan was born 26th April 1847 at Dublin, Ireland, the son of Captain Richard Andrew Hyacinth Kirwan 1813-1886 of Baunmore County, Galway, and Agnes Jane Kirwan (nee Thompson) 1815-1884. Richard Kirwan had been a Captain in the Galway Militia, Lieutenant 5th and 7th Fusiliers, Justice of the Peace, High Sheriff, and Deputy Lieutenant of Galway County.

Martin Kirwan was one of five children born to Richard and Agnes Kirwan between 1840 and 1852. Martin's siblings were Helen Louisa Elizabeth 1840-1905, Agnes Jane Johanna 1841-1891, Henrietta Frances 1843-1921, and Major John Denis Kirwan, Royal Horse Artillery, 1852-1891.

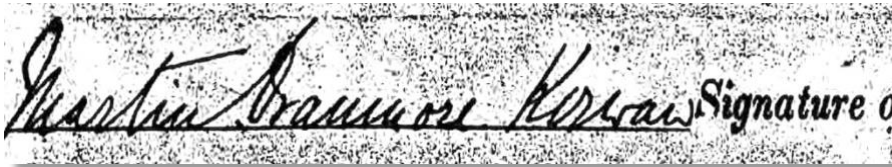
Following his formal education, Martin Kirwan purchased a commission as Ensign with 20th (East Devonshire) Regiment of Foot in May 1867, aged 20. Within weeks, however, he exchanged into the 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot 8th June 1867, most likely preferring to be in an Irish regiment.

At this time, it was customary practice for officers to exchange with officers from different regiments, if a desirable opportunity arose. This allowed officers to transfer between regiments, most often with the mutual agreement of both parties and usually approved by higher command. The reasons for exchange could be strategic, social, financial, or personal

The 83rd (County of Dublin) Regiment of Foot had been established in 1793 during the French Revolutionary Wars. Raised to serve as part of Britain's efforts against Revolutionary France, initially operated in the West Indies and Ireland. The regiment was involved in several key engagements, including the French campaigns in Egypt and the Peninsula War 1808-1814.

After spending some time with the regiment's depot companies in Colchester, England, Martin travelled to join his new regiment garrisoned at Gibraltar in December 1867.

Britain had taken control of Gibraltar in 1713 and thereafter had retained a military presence on the rock. During the Napoleonic Wars, Gibraltar had become an important base for the Royal Navy and was designated as one of four British fortresses (together with Halifax, Nova Scotia, Bermuda, and Malta). During the 19th century, the peacetime military garrison at Gibraltar fluctuated between 1,100 and 5,000 troops at any one time.

A handwritten signature in dark ink on a light background. The signature reads "Martin Brammore Kerrow" in a cursive script. To the right of the signature, the word "Signature" is printed in a serif font.

During their time garrisoned at Gibraltar, officers of the 83rd Regiment would have engaged in a variety of

activities. Officers would socialise with one another and with the local civilian population, attending formal dinners, balls, receptions, and occasional outings to scenic spots at Gibraltar and in Spain.

While the border between Gibraltar and Spain was sometimes subject to tension, particularly during times of political unrest or diplomatic disagreements, officers would have been able to travel to Spain for leisure or exploration, especially during periods when relations were more stable. This travel would have been both an opportunity for relaxation and a way to experience a different culture during their time away from the garrison.

Sports were also a common pastime, and the officers would have played games like cricket, tennis, or racquet sports, as well as participated in riding or hunting. Maintaining military readiness was another priority, so officers spent time leading drills and training exercises with their men, ensuring they were prepared for any potential conflict.

During his time at Gibraltar, Martin joined the Freemasons, an institution involved in various aspects of society, including politics, social reform, and community development.

While stationed at Gibraltar, Martin was a member of an amateur dramatics group that organised performances to entertain his fellow officers and troops. Below are two photographs of Martin dressed in character costumes, the photograph on the left is annotated on the reverse "Jessy in "As Cool as a Cucumber" and signed and dated by Martin December 27th, 1867. "Cool as a cucumber - a farce in one act," was a play written by W Blanchard Jerrold in 1857.



Martin was promoted to Lieutenant without purchase 11th January 1869, vice Lieutenant F C Wright promoted to Captain.

Having served their time at Gibraltar, the 83rd Regiment commanded by Colonel A. B. Hankey, embarked the troopship "Tamar" 11th March 1870, and proceeded to Alexandria on the Mediterranean coast of Egypt. From Alexandria they travelled by train to Suez on the Red Sea coast and on 25th March embarked the troopship "Euphrates" for onward transport to India. Arriving at Bombay 8th April 1870, the regiment then proceeded to Poona where it was quartered in Wanourie Barracks.

Poona, located 120 miles southeast of Bombay in the western state of Maharashtra, was one of the most important military and administrative centres for the British in India in the 19th century. Established in the early 19th century, the Poona Cantonment (permanent military station) became a key base for British forces operating in the Bombay Presidency and the surrounding regions. The cantonment was strategically important because of its proximity to the Deccan Plateau and its distance from the coastal areas, making it a safer, less vulnerable location to potential attacks from coastal insurgents. The temperate climate of the region also made Poona an attractive location for British officers and troops, especially during the sweltering summer months in other parts of India.



Martin O Kirwan Gibraltar circa 1868

The Poona Cantonment housed various regiments, including the British Indian Army's artillery and infantry units. This led to the development of infrastructure such as bungalows for officers, barracks, hospitals, roads, and a Bazaar. Over time, Poona became a major centre for British military operations in the western part of India, as well as a hub for the distribution of supplies and reinforcements

In June 1871, Martin Kirwan resigned his commission, after only four years with the 83rd Regiment and return to Ireland.

Back in Ireland, Martin joined the Dublin County Light Infantry, a part-time militia force, as a Supernumerary Lieutenant, and in April 1880 was promoted to Captain.

In 1881, the Dublin County Light Infantry were amalgamated with the Royal Bombay Fusiliers and Royal Madras Fusiliers, two army regiments stationed in India, and another militia unit from County Kildare as part of the Childers Reforms, to form the Royal Dublin Fusiliers.

In addition to his military duties, Martin was involved with charitable works with the poor and infirm, and a parishioner's church warden at St Stephen's Church, Dublin. Martin was elected as a member of the Royal Horticulture Society during a council meeting in January 1879. The meeting was chaired by Gustavus C. Cornwall, who five years later would appear in court with Martin Kirwan as a co-conspirator in a trial that shocked the establishment.

By 1884, a political war existed in Ireland between the Home Rule movement and the British administration. When an Irish Nationalist MP Tim Healy accused two high level British officials with being homosexual, it exposed Dublin's clandestine male homosexual community. What began as accusations in the press concerning two government officials, led to a number of high-profile court

cases and the prosecution of several prominent individuals. Collectively, these cases became known as 'The Dublin Castle Scandals 1884'.

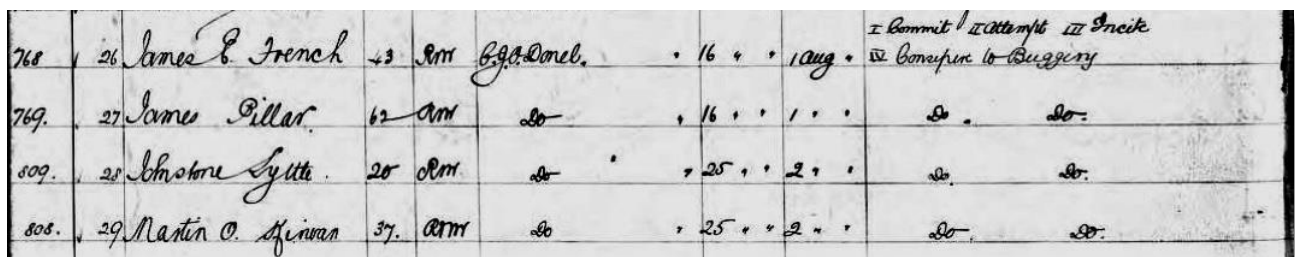
Perhaps aware of his pending arrest, Martin resigned his commission with 5th Battalion Royal Dublin Fusiliers 13th June 1884.

The Belfast Evening Telegraph reported 25th July 1884:

"Yesterday evening, between six and seven o'clock, Captain Martin Oranmore Kirwan, of the Galway Militia, was arrested at his lodging in Mount Street by Detective-Inspector Morrow and conveyed to College Street Police Station. The charge differs from those on which the former arrests have been made and is that of "procuring persons for the commission of immoral crime." Captain Kirwan made no statement and offered no resistance, and on arrest displayed perfect coolness."

The error stating that Martin Kirwan was a member "of the Galway Militia" was quickly refuted by a Major Gardner Adjutant of 4th Battalion Connaught Rangers, who wrote, *"Captain Oranmore Kirwan, who was arrested last week in connection with the Dublin scandals, does not belong to the Galway Militia, nor did he ever hold a commission in the regiment."*

Held in custody, the Kilmainham Prison Court Registry of Prisoners for Trial by Commission, records that four men were held for trial on a charge of *"committing, attempting, inciting, conspiring Buggery."* Those men were James French a detective inspector 43, James Pillar wine merchant 62, and Johnston Lyttle distillers' clerk 20, and Martin O Kirwan Army Officer 37.



No.	Name	Age	Prof.	Charge	Date	Commit	Attempt	Incite
768	James F. French	43	Det. Insp.	Buggery	16 Aug			
769	James Pillar	62	Wine Merchant	Buggery	16 Aug			
809	Johnstone Lyttle	20	Distillers' Clerk	Buggery	25 Aug			
808	Martin O. Kirwan	37	Army Officer	Buggery	25 Aug			

Entries from the Kilmainham Prison Court Registry of Prisoners for Trial by Commission

Despite the entry in the prison register suggesting a charge of a more serious crime, in late August, Martin Kirwan and another man Gustavus Charles Cornwall, Secretary of the General Post Office, were tried for conspiring together to procure persons to commit immoral offences.

The outcome of the court case held 22nd – 23rd August 1884 was reported in the Weekly Mail: *"The pleadings in the case of Mr. Cornwall and Captain Kirwan were ended at Dublin on Saturday and Baron Dowse, in charging the jury, directed them that if they believed the evidence, both the prisoners were undoubtedly guilty, while the guilt of Kirwan was proved by a number of letters which he had written. The jury retired shortly before one. They returned into court at half-past two, when the foreman intimated there was no chance of their agreeing to a verdict. They were, however, sent back by the judge. At a quarter-past three the jury again returned into court and stated that there was no chance of their agreeing to a verdict. The Judge having explained the questions submitted to them, directed the jury again to retire. The Foreman said the question on which they were divided was as to the credibility of the witnesses. At half-past three the jury were sent for, and as it appeared there was no chance of their agreeing they were discharged, and the prisoners were put back. After the jury had been discharged, on the application of the prisoners' counsel, the accused were admitted to bail until the next Commission, themselves in 1,000 each, and two sureties in 500. A number of the friends of the prisoners shook hands warmly with them. It is stated that the jury were unanimously in favour of acquitting Cornwall, but were unable to do so, owing to the dictum of the judge, that they must either acquit or convict both together. It is further stated that eight of the jurors*

were disposed to acquit Kirwan. – Mr. James Pillar, 60, a grocer, who had pleaded guilty to the charge of inhuman practices, was sentenced to twenty years' penal servitude.” (Weekly Mail, Cardiff).

Unsatisfied with the result of the original case, the Crown arranged for a new trial, held 28th October 1884, at the Commission Court, Green Street, Dublin, before Mr Justice Harrison. Both men were charged with “*conspiracy to procure the commission of felonious offences*”. On the second day of the new trial, the jury retired at 4 o'clock, and within 20 minutes had returned with a verdict of not guilty, due to lack of sufficient evidence. The verdict was received with “*hisses and applause*” in the court room. The two men were released from custody.

The scandal subjected Martin to public scrutiny and social isolation. His involvement in the scandal, even without a conviction, led to a tarnished reputation. The media coverage and public discourse surrounding the trial only reinforced negative stereotypes about homosexuality, associating it with moral corruption and criminality.

Throughout the trials, it appears that Martin did not lose the support from his family, his father Richard Kirwan, Deputy Lieutenant of Galway, his brother Major John Kirwan RA, his cousin Lord Oranmore and Brown, all attended Martin's original trial.

Upon the death of his father Richard Kirwan in 1886, Martin Kirwan succeeded to his father's estate. It was here perhaps in Galway, that Martin Kirwan escaped the wider public scrutiny and began to regain some of his standing within his community. In addition to overseeing his estate, Martin Kirwan served as a governor of the County Infirmary, was an active committee member of the County of Galway Horticultural and Home Industrial Society and regularly contributed to local taxes as a cesspayer.



Martin Oranmore Kirwan 83rd (County of Dublin)
Regiment of Foot Gibraltar circa 1868



Gustavus Charles Cornwall

In 1902, answering a letter published in the Galway Observer, Martin Kirwan replied to a letter from a John Tarpey asking for assistance for the tenants of Liscananaun and Cloghane. Responding, he wrote, “*my answer to this is – there were never 100 families there or any number approaching it.*”

The town land of Liscananaun contains close on 300 acres and there are 24 tenants holding the same. In addition to this they all have extra land I gave them since I succeeded to the estates in 1886, and 3s in the pound off their judicial rents. In addition to this, all the spare hands that can be spared from their work at home I employ here all the year round."

In 1908, Hugh Rees Ltd published a book of the "Memoirs and Services of the Eighty-Third Regiment County of Dublin from 1793-1907". It is perhaps not surprising, given the moralistic views and conservative attitudes of the day, that Martin Kirwan's name was not included with all the other officers that had served in the 83rd Regiment.

Martin Kirwan lived at Baunmore House, County Galway, and never married. He died on Tuesday 17th May 1904 aged 57. The Tuam Herald 28th May 1904 wrote of Martin Kirwan '*...he was a considerate landlord, and highly esteemed by his tenantry, and his loss is mourned by all who knew his many virtues both in the city and county of Galway. The remains arrived in Galway from Baunmore on Saturday, en route for Dublin.*'

Martin was laid to rest at the Mount Jerome Cemetery, Harold's Cross, County Dublin, Ireland, on Saturday 21st May 1904.

Researched and written by Gary Hynard 2025