

“The Turn of the Hand”

“The Turn of the Hand”:
A Memoir from the Irish Margins

By

Mary Warde

Transcribed and Edited by Michael Hayes

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

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by Mary Warde
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This book is dedicated to my father and mother with much love...

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FOREWORD

Edward Warde was born near Dunmore, County Galway on the 24th of August, 1915. Both of his parents came from a long line of tinsmiths. His father Patrick Warde was born in Tuam, County Galway on the 5th of March, 1880 and was serving in France in the First World War when my father was born - (in 1915). His mother Mary Stokes came from Roscommon. He learned tinsmithing at an early age from his father and his older brothers. They were a family of eight – including two sisters and six brothers. All are now deceased (RIP). Anne died young and Edward's eldest brother Martin died at fourteen years of age from blood-poisoning caused by a gash on his leg. The second Martin was born in 1925 and emigrated to England where he lived in Birmingham for the rest of his life. He is buried in Saint Mary's Sallyoak cemetery, Birmingham. Edward's brother Jim was in the Merchant Navy and sailed out of Sydney. He died in Sydney in 1988 and is buried in Galway, Ireland. His brother Pat died in Clondalkin, Dublin in August, 1980 and is buried in Esker Cemetery, Lucan in County Dublin. "Galway John" is buried in Galway city as are his parents, Pat and Mary Warde – and his sister Mary Ellen Warde (Caffrey). Edward died on the 29th of August, 2002 peacefully at his eldest son Martin's home in Parkmore, Tuam. Edward was a much-loved and respected man throughout the county. He spent most of his early life in Galway city. Then two-and-a-half years in care with his brother Jim and another two-and-a-half years in foster care near Ballina, County Mayo. He spent five years in London but returned to Ireland before World War II. Edward married Bridget Ward in 1941 in Tuam – they were married for 57 years before she died in 1998. Edward made many pieces of copper and brass for different organisations. Some pieces of his work are in a pub in New York and in various Irish Centres in England. Edward never bragged about his work – he was a modest man and always considered his brothers to be better tinsmiths than himself. He wanted the trade (tinkering) to be continued and the young people to be able to do tinsmithing. There was a living to be made from it, through the use of the imagination and by turning one's hand to different things that were saleable. Edward was a gentle man who had a deep faith, loved old customs and the Traveller way of life. Although Edward lived in a house for thirty-eight years he never forgot his roots. This is just a brief look at my father's life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I hope you appreciate this work as much love went into the making of it.

I would like to thank Michael Hayes for his help and support in putting this book together.

And to all my family and my daughter Aaron and daughter in law Ashling for their patience and support and all the many people who encouraged me.

God rest the souls that are mentioned in this book and are at peace now. Sacrifice of the Mass will be offered to those deceased members.

Any profits made from this book will go to Down Syndrome Ireland as it was my fathers most cherished charity.

MY FAMILY TREE

Mary 1943	Martin 1945	Ned 1947	Patrick (Died young – 1947)	Bridget 1949	John 1951	Winnie 1953
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Edward Warde1915			Bridget Warde1913		
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Pat Warde 1880		Mary Stokes 1884		Ellen Warde 1895	Patrick Ward 1884	
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Martin Warde 1853	Ellen Sweeney 1856		John Stokes 1851	Ann Quinn McDonagh 1854		Davie Warde 1851	Mary Gill 1852	Laurence Ward 1856	Margaret Ward 1858

Patrick Warde 1835	Mary Cuffe 1834	John Sweeney 1835	Margaret Warde 1833	Patrick Stokes 1820	Catherine Burke 1822	John Quinn Mc Donagh 1824	Bridget Reilly 1835	Patrick Warde 1835	Mary Cuffe 1834	John Gill 1826	Margaret Gill 1830	Patrick Ward 1841	Jane Ward 1839	Patrick Ward 1830	Mgt Ward 1831
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INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL HAYES

Autobiography is not something we simply read in a book; rather as a discourse of identity, delivered bit by bit, in the stories we tell about ourselves, day in and day out, autobiography structures our living.¹

The surest, safest, and durablest moment monument that men can leave of their doings in this world, to consecrate their names to immortalite. For there is neither picture, nor image of marble, nor arch of triumph, nor pillar, nor sumptuous sepulchre, that can match the durableness of an eloquent history, furnished with the elements which it ought to have.²

Every theory is the fragment of an autobiography
—Paul Valéry

This narrative *is* us, our identities.³

History as a form of remembering and the arts of biography have always been closely allied. The genre that is the “memoir” is itself a form of remembering, a curious double-bind where the past and the future are inextricably linked and where memory spills through to form a new discourse. What is left is a permanent record or testimony – a “memorial” to the people and the events which have shaped our history and culture, our “passing through”. The autobiography and the memoir were once the preserve of the elder statesman or the “grand old dame”, those members of the establishment who often employed the genre to eulogise the manner whereby their public careers paralleled historical events.

The turn of the century has witnessed a radical change in this regard, however. Publishers have expanded their lists at unprecedented levels as

¹ Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative (Paperback) by Paul John Eakin (Author) – (2008, 4)

² From: Les Vies des Hommes Illustres, 111v – (Cited in France, P and St. Clair, W. (2002) Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography (2002, 69)

³ Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative (Paperback) by Paul John Eakin (Author) – (2008, 4)

more and more books are marketed as memoirs and “life histories”. Today autobiography and memoir explore the lives of both young and old. More than ever, they are emblematic of the “cultural turn”; more often than not, they symbolise the exigencies of the particular cultural moment. In historical terms, autobiography and memoir was frequently viewed as indicative of the Western mode of self-representation, a partial consequence of the Enlightenment and a vehicle for the rational “I” who was its dominant narrator. This approach has altered significantly to make a range for a wide range of diverse and multi-voiced texts and autobiographical practices, different traditions and histories and even a “confessional” culture of testimony which Spivak has identified as “the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression, to a less oppressed other”⁴



⁴ *Living Autobiographically: How We Create Identity in Narrative* (Paperback) by Paul John Eakin (Author) - (2008,4).

IN THE BEGINNING...



Front Row: Edward Warde, Nan Joyce, Frank Moriarty, Gay Byrne, Mary (Warde) Moriarty, Mary Sherlock, Anne-Marie Carr and Pat Sherlock.

Back Row: Brigid Sherlock and Kate Carr.

In the Ireland of today, the people are always talking about the “changing times”. And what is often forgotten is that the times are always changing. There was a time when the Christian churches in Ireland weren’t as organised as they once were in the twentieth century. This was that time known as the “hidden church” when the structures of the Catholic Church were not so organised or built up. This was the day when the Catholic Church had to go underground because of persecution from the British. It was the time when the Catholic people had to get married themselves and get married later with the priest in the secret place where nobody could hurt or kill them. The same with the old and the new. Babies baptised on hillsides at dawn. People buried before the rising of the lark or before the late curlew cried at dawn. And all because of the foreign power that

wished to dominate and suppress. That foreign yoke that wished to trample the people beneath its feet.

I'm tracing back now, drawing my way back through the well of the years to where the only history is what is passed down – from father to son. This is oral history now because it's all that we Irish were left with for the many centuries. All that we had. And a Ward family member, a Traveller Ward – he fought at the Battle of Vinegar Hill. He fought in 1798, spilled blood in the place where the blood flowed like rain. And from death and destruction came rebirth – He met a girl named Brigid Keefe.

She was a settled girl one of the many women who were involved in the rebellion and often-forgotten. This girl named Brigid Keefe – with her brother and her father – went up to Vinegar Hill in Wexford to try and drive away the tyrants. And after the fighting the Irish had their secret meetings, their feasting and drinking and their tending to wounds. And Brigid Keefe met and married Patrick Ward who fought at Vinegar Hill. They married in the place which they then called the “hidden Church”.

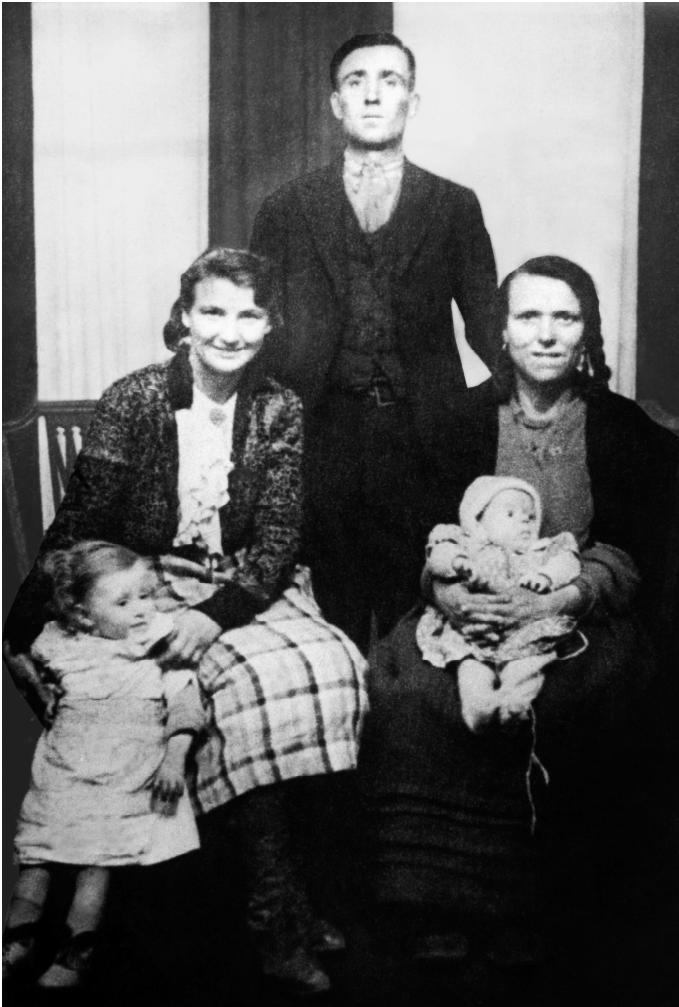
This underground church where they got married at dawn was outside Ross somewhere and the curlew was only making his way home in the early-morning when they were pronounced man and wife. The Catholics had to be careful about who they were then. They had to keep their religion to themselves and so too did the priests. Because the priests in those days were hunted from place to place by the occupier. The British were afraid of priest and teachers alike, and their power over the Irish people. How they might make the people rise up against them. And after they were married the newly-wed Wards continued on the road and came down around the west of Ireland where they had children. Sons and grandsons married then back into the other Travellers the other Wardes (Irish: Mac an Bháird – Son of the Bard) that were always travelling the roads then. And that's the way it went down until it came to my own generation.

There's the history of our country – Ireland – and the history of the Irish people and the history of those Irish people who were Travellers and half of it is still hidden from us. More than half – probably the most of the loaf. All the myths that the English had about the Irish and the Irish had about each other – the settled people about Travellers and the other way around. And we're only beginning to see through the fog of memory now, to brush past the misty rain to see where the sunlight is breaking through. To find our own true history. And like every history it's a mix of legend and fact, one story added to another like the layering brick of a house and

all we can do is build our own house and construct our history once more in the way that we see fit and true. In our own way.



Brigid Warde (née Brigid Ward) and Edward Warde (RIP).



**Mary-Ellen, Edward and Brigid Warde.
The two children in the photo are Edward and Brigid's – daughter
Mary-Ellen and their son Martin.**

TRAVELLERS AND SETTLED PEOPLE

We have lived beside each other for centuries on the small island that is called Ireland. They've lived within a stone's throw of one another – within spitting distance – and yet, there's never been as much misunderstanding and lack of communication. The same was true in the past and it's true to a certain extent even today. Because myth forms people's perceptions of one another. It's all they have, the only mirror where they can see the other who might be a stranger to them. We've heard all of the myths going back through the years. - *The Travellers marry only their cousins. The Travellers are all robbers. They love fighting. They have plenty of money hidden away – buried in a box out the back. They are all secretive people – “as thick as thieves”. They don't want to live in the same way as the rest of us – they have their own strange ways. They don't go into the hospital for the baby and they crowd in when somebody is dead so that the fighting can start. They are all “drop-outs” from the Famine fields. They're not Irish at all but came here once from another country”.*

All of these things are myths; it's the way in which people are seen, the way that they are perceived. And it could be said the same for both sides. The rumours and stereotypes go on and on. Stranger than strange. Rumour and hearsay, whatever piece somebody adds to the tale – and then another. A story unfolding...like a length of string. And there are two ways of looking at stereotypes and false information. You can ignore it and hope that it goes away – that it fades off and is carried away in the wind. Or you can do something to waylay the talk – to cut it down as you would a bush. If you are brave, you can undermine it and pull the legs out from under it.

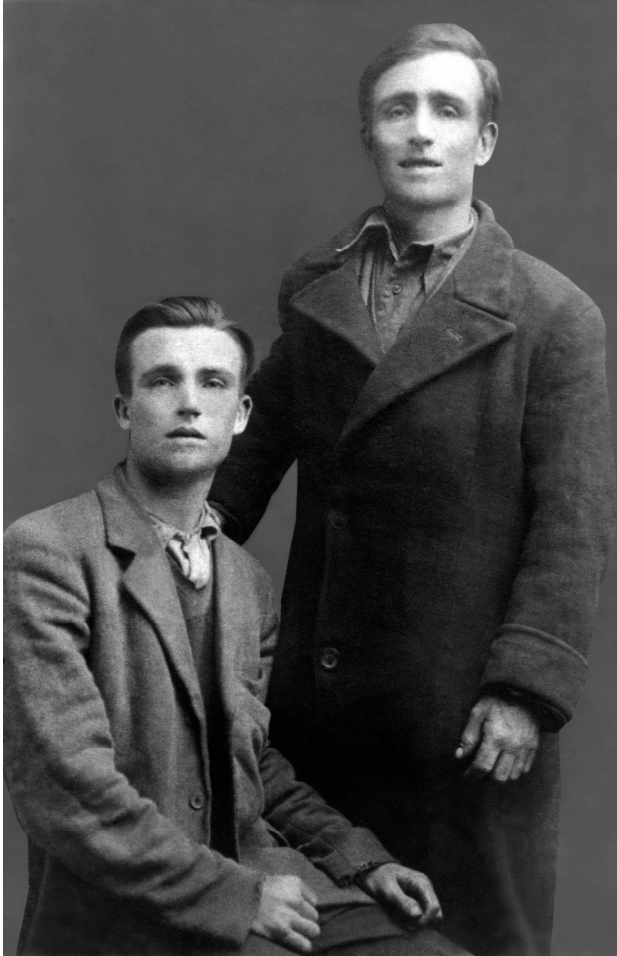
A part of this story is about this process. It is to give some snippets from the story of one Traveller family – so that all may be not be judged the same and painted as the one. To give an example - There were a lot of myths in the old days about Travellers getting married by an older person in the extended family – one of their family heads say – a Traveller leader. But you ask me – a woman in her mid-sixties who grew up in the heart of the Traveller community. Was there any truth to this notion Mary? And I'll say no. If it happened I never heard tell of it. And I would tell you if I had because you deserve the truth.

A settled woman told me once that her father was going to a fair one morning. He was a farming man and he was up very early in the morning to make his way to the fair in the time before cars and speed and the roar of the modern world. He was up with the lark, at five bells in the morning and she (this woman) accompanied him part of the way – down to the main road with their few cattle – to set him on his way. And she swore that she had seen a Traveller woman putting her newborn baby into the river and washing it – the baby stitch-less and raw as the day it was born. And when the woman finished her story I started laughing and I couldn't help myself... *Where did you hear that old scéal?*, I said to her? *Where could you have heard that?* And through the course of the talk this old woman admitted that she wasn't sure about exactly what she had seen that morning – that she was still only young at the time.

To my mind – that story was a good example of how exaggerations about certain people who might be seen as different (i.e. Travellers) can assume the status of “fact”. If that woman did see that child near the river that day – you can be sure that the small child was probably half-dressed and that its mother was only throwing a sup of water into its face to give it a wash and to wake it from the night's sleep. And while the baby might have been small, it couldn't have been new-born either - because nobody would be so foolish as to expose a newborn baby to the elements in this way. Whether Traveller or settled - a small baby would be wrapped up and kept warm. Stories or no stories. It makes no matter. These types of myths assume were always there and probably always will be. It's human nature to see the difference in the “stranger”, the “outsider”, the people who keep to their own station. There were always these myths and stories. That Travellers would head off for the day begging and leave their small children tied up in the caravan, say. Absolute rubbish!! – and that's the truth of it.

Years ago, when I was a small girl and the same for whoever was there before me. Whichever of us young ones were there in the *molly* (camp), it was our responsibility. We were in charge of all of the children who were in the camp at the time. Whoever was there – God forbid we wouldn't take care of them! And I remember minding droves of children. Making sure they stayed away from the road and the horse, the big wheels of the turning cart, heavy and dangerous. This one time my poor little sister fell into an old drain and she was crying like her life depended on it! I couldn't have been more than 12 years of age myself and the adults were out hawking and working. The women hawking artificial flowers, laces, holy pictures and the gallon cans made of tin - whatever would make money and put the food in our bellies. The men running the metal in the grooves

of the side of the road, cutting and shaping and fixing the metal pot and the twist of the farmer’s machinery – drawing on the knowledge of all that came before them –the artists, engravers and the metal –men of old.



Martin and Edward Warde (my father and my uncle).

At first I thought my sister was only being funny - that she was like an actress in the Oscars – standing there and giving a performance. But then I realised how wrong I was - I found that that she had fallen on a sharp piece of a broken car. And, as often happens to people, I felt guilty then. The broken metal she had fallen onto had sawed her leg – sawed right through to her thigh. My poor little sister who couldn't have been more than three years of age! And it was all I could do to take her out and calm her. I warmed some water as my father used to do and I put the Dettol into it and washed the cut clean. The thought went through me then - like the shock of broken skin – there might be some rust in it. And so I scrubbed the wound clean, wiped it and cleansed it and applied the TCP with its own stinging brightness. I dabbed the wound around its edges with the bit of clean cloth, tied the cloth to the wound. And when the adults came home, the decision was made. "She has to be stitched they said." And we brought her to the doctor and he stitched her straight away. But unfortunately for my small sister, didn't those stitches burst afterwards so that she always has a suffering there to this day. Afterwards she always had a kind of a problem with that leg, a juddering pain that would bring a person low.



Edward and Bridget Warde visiting Knock Shrine in County Mayo with their grand-children, John, Edward, Michael and Shirley.

THE TURN OF THE TALK – CANT – OUR OWN LANGUAGE

Cant was spoken widely in the Traveller Community when I was a child. We knew that it was our own language and that we were a different group from other communities because of that fact – i.e. that we had our own culture and our own language. Cant was mainly used when settled people were present. We were told at that time not to tell anybody about it. The Older Traveller's said that if we were to give it out to the country people, they would learn it and they would know as much of it as us. You have to remember too that they didn't teach us Irish back then. In the same way that some country people who spoke English normally would turn to Irish if they wanted to speak privately or in front of people that they preferred not to understand them. We needed our own private code as well.

I remember asking my grandmother once, how she learnt the Cant. And her answer was simple and straight forward. She said "I learnt it the same way as you did, from listening to others and being told what to do and what not to do in the language".

My grandmother had her theories about where the language came from, where it first originated from. Her thinking about it was that it was handed down from generation to generation. This also explained the reason why can had different languages and words in it from different periods. People talk about immigration to Ireland today as if its a new thing but they forget that we've always had different people and languages coming into Ireland. There are some Latin words in Cant and some older words from the Irish language too.

My grandmother believed that this was because the old priests and monks travelled with the Traveller's years ago in times of colonisation and oppression. Cant was a protection language for them at that time. It was a way of disguising who-was-related-to-who and who did what occupation when the tyrant was trying to persecute and jail people.

Cant also has some words that only very highly-educated and literary people developed and used. This shows too that there was many different types of traveller's and occupational classes amongst our community in the past. Poets, monks, bards, tinkers, stonemasons, travelling healers and horse dealers. Entertainers, musicians, acrobats and fairground people also. The travelling community is a reflection of the diversity that was

Irish society at one time and this is our country today. My grandmother got her oral history from our grandmother. This was back in a time when oral tradition was the main carrier of culture in Ireland.

In every family there were people who didn't have so much of the Traveller stories or lore for the very simple reason that they hadn't been born with Travellers. They were settled people who married in and became part of the community in their own time.

My grandmother had a very long life for a person of the Traveller Community. She died in 1977 at the age of 80. Thankfully, her memory was perfect right up to the day of her death.

In a way, we didn't always appreciate all of those old people when they were with us, as much as we should have. It is often the case nowadays that people are so busy rushing around – to where – God knows! - that we don't really appreciate old people and their experiences and memories... until they are gone.

Now today we talk about Travellers being an ethnic group. There is no group in Ireland today more ethnic than the Irish Traveller. This goes back thousands of years. We have kept our language, our culture and our way of life. We will always still be seen as different from the “mainstream” society.



Edward Warde with Patrick Warde, Tirboy Road, Tuam, County Galway.

THE TURN OF THE MIND: WORDS AND THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

Over the years many people in the Traveller community would have spoken about incidents and occasions when the language saved them or got them out of difficulty in some way. My mother told us a story that happened during the 1950's, a story that was as tragic as it was comic.

One day she went into a house and somebody from the house had gone for the guards. The reason this person had gone to find a guard was because someone else in the house had gone mad. This poor person was mentally ill.

At that time if you described somebody as gone mad the assumption would have been that the guards would take that person to the hospital in Ballinasloe. In those days there was a stigma attached to mental illness in Ireland as in many other countries. People didn't have the medical education at the time to realise that it was just another unfortunate illness, the same as having a physical illness. When people were mentally ill it was a particularly traumatic and difficult issue for the family in question to deal with.

My mother went into the house and asked the woman if she was interested in buying a tin can. She knew by the agitated state the woman was in that something was seriously wrong. The woman didn't answer her but turned back from the door and picked something up off the hall table. My mother noticed that she was fiddling with a big huge knife. My mother spoke to her again and then realised that the woman was sick "mad" as my mother would have called it.

My brother was with her and she said; "Misli out subleen – a reelye beor in the cenia (*Go on out boy, there's a mad woman in the house*). The woman obviously understood what my mother was saying because she made after her with the big knife. My mother took helter-skelter out the door where she met the woman's husband and he grabbed hold of his wife. She was in a right fury because it took her husband and son to hold her back.

She must have meet up with some Travellers at one time or another to know the Cant.

The truth of it was that the poor woman was due to go into the hospital in Ballinasloe that day. My mother didn't go back there again in a hurry. I'm telling you.

When I think back now on our own language some people used to say that some of it might have come from Cromwell's time and more of it from further back. At that time Traveller's would have travelled right throughout the country. Many different types of Traveller's and occupational groups and we know from our history that Cromwell killed many Traveller's and nomadic people in Ireland. Men, woman and children, it made no difference to him. When Cromwell's henchmen and soldiers were trying to force the Irish people into slavery, when they were murdering them and oppressing them in their thousands, it made sense for people to have a private code language that only they knew. There were other people who mixed in with the Traveller's to seek protection because they were being particularly targeted by the colonisation and plantation projects. The poets, clergymen and the other leaders of the people. People who had to go into hiding or who were in danger if they stayed in the "mainstream society". When you examine the history books you find references throughout the centuries to a small minority of people leaving the settled community and disguising themselves as part of a marginalised or "outsider" group such as the Traveller's. This went on in every century of the history of Ireland and the reality is that it went on in Ireland until very recent years.



Edward with great-grandchild at a Christening.