

Cavanagh the Dublin Gunmakers

Circa 1817-1923

by David Stroud

Well! I hear you cry, never seen Kavanagh spelled with a "C". Well, it is the early form and assists us, along with other indicators, in dating a very fine example of this gunmakers work.

The gun that literally "sparked off" this article was purchased by my good friend, Joe Scott, a retired Firearms Officer for North Yorkshire. One of the more educated of their variety! A man with a passion for the gunmakers art and possessing a long-standing affinity with the shooting world.

Cavanagh, William - first appeared in the Dublin Trade Directories in 1817 yet his name was spelled with the traditional "K". As with many other gunmakers trading in Dublin around this time they were operating within the trade prior to listing themselves, this being a relatively early form of advertising - and no doubt expensive?

Kavanagh's grew to be one of the most respected gunmakers in Ireland along with Rigby and Trulock & Harris. A list of Kavanagh's trading dates and addresses can be seen in Fig. 3 overleaf. As can be seen, this family business spanned over 100 years and the gun in this article would be one of the first guns made by the founder William Kavanagh while trading at 6 Anderson Court, Greek Street, Dublin.

Who Kavanagh was apprenticed to is unclear but he went on to expand his business by introducing his two son's James and William, officially in 1839.

Returning to the gun itself we have a 12 bore shotgun with an overall length of 49 inches. A barrel length of 33 inches



bored true cylinder (.729). Weight would be approximately eight pounds. I understand the frizzen was refaced following its recent purchase in order to enliven the ignition. In addition, Joe Scott was given good advice on loading by fellow MLAGB member Dave Marland. Joe now shoots the gun with a 2.5 drms charge of "Swiss No 2". With a pan of "OB" fine powder. This covered with 1oz of No. 6 Shot gives a nice even pattern at 30 yards.

The elegance and pleasing line of this gun is enhanced by the use of the "French Cock" which has the sweeping bottom tail that covers the top jaw screw thread as it passes through the cock. This feature was popular in Ireland circa 1815 and can be found on various types of weapons but is prominent on the duelling pistols of this period.

It should be remembered that Ireland was greatly influenced by the French. Not only in fashions of all descriptions but in its politics also. The French Revolution being almost the fuse for what would occur in Ireland in 1798.

The other interesting fact with this gun is that it is marked under the 1843 Registration Act. This clumsy piece of legislation was brought in by the British Government in an attempt to reduce and control all privately owned weapons within Ireland and commenced in August 1843, finally being repealed in November 1846. Therefore, we know this gun was in the county of Donegal between these two dates.

We can deduce this because The Act (Schedule B., 6&7. Vic., Cap. 74. Sec. 3) covered 34 Counties and 5 Boroughs of

Fig. 1. Cavanagh marked lock work. Showing Roller Frizzen spring, Rain Proof Pan and Classic French Cock.



Ireland and this shotgun was registered within the county of Donegal and marked accordingly with the county prefix (DL) and the owners licence number, 3526. The licence was issued by the Petty Sessions and the marking of the weapon implemented within the County Police Barracks. The Registration mark is just visible on the top of the brass butt plate (Fig. 2).

The other signs of quality on this weapon are the full rain proof pan, roller frizzen spring and superb walnut stock. A real Irish gem and not bad for a gun found in a corner of a damp basement in Scarborough.

William Kavanagh died in 1849 but his influence on the guntrade was immense, not only in Ireland but also on the mainland. The celebrated Stephen Grant having been apprenticed to Kavanagh prior to his time with Charles Lancaster and Thomas Boss & Co.

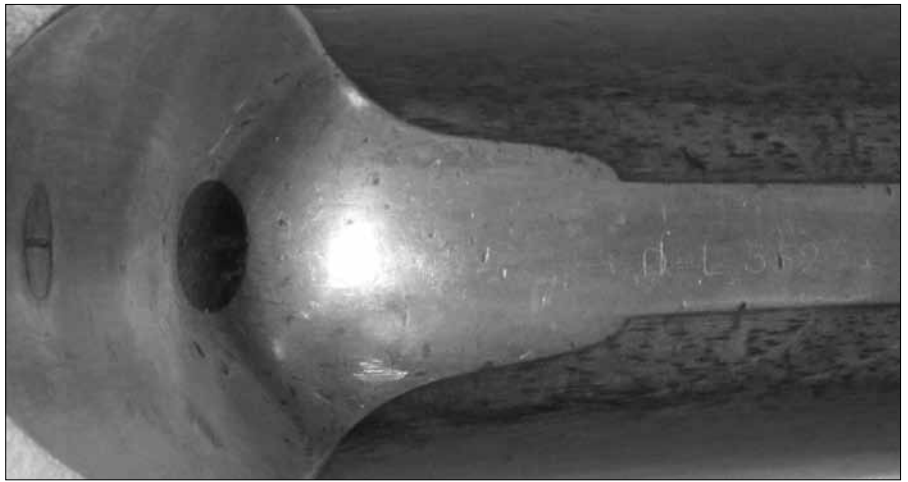


Fig 2. Brass Butt Plate showing Irish Registration Mark DL 3526. Co Donegal.

Kavanagh, William.	Dublin	1816-1821	6 Anderson Court.Greek St.	
Kavanagh, William.	Dublin	1822-1837	4 Upper Ormond Quay	
Kavanagh, William.	Dublin	1838	4 Upper Ormond Quay & 11 Dame Street	
Kavanagh, William & Sons	Dublin	1839	4 Upper Ormond Quay & 11 Dame Street	
Kavanagh, William.	Dublin	1840-1842	4 Upper Ormond Quay	
Kavanagh, William Jnr	Dublin	1840-1842	11 Dame Street	
Kavanagh, William & James	Dublin	1843-1849	4 Ormond Quay Lower	
Kavanagh, William Jnr	Dublin	1843-1849	11 Dame Street	William senior died 1849
Kavanagh, James	Dublin	1850-1852	4 Ormond Quay Lower	
Kavanagh, William Jnr	Dublin	1850-1852	12 Dame Street	
Kavanagh, James	Dublin	1853-1863	12 Dame Street	
Kavanagh, William Jnr	Dublin	1853-1863	12 Dame Street	
Kavanagh, William & James	Dublin	1864-1870	12 Dame Street	James died 1870
Kavanagh, William.	Dublin	1871-1882	12 Dame Street	
Kavanagh, William & Son	Dublin	1883-1923	12 Dame Street	

Fig 3. Kavanagh Trading Dates and Addresses

My thanks to Joe Scott (MLAGB No 5492) for his assistance and insistence that I write this article and trust it proves of interest to all the black finger brigade!

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