

TWO WINDOWS: THE TENANTS OF THE DE FREYNE RENT STRIKE 1901–1903

A dissertation submitted to the Caspersen School of Graduate Studies,
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ABSTRACT

Two Windows: The Tenants of the De Freyne Rent Strike 1901-1903

PhD Dissertation by

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The Caspersen School of Graduate Studies

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The De Freyne rent strike of 1901 in County Roscommon, Ireland, was of national significance when it happened, but it has not been remembered or commemorated in Ireland and is largely ignored in Irish historiography. While this research examines the events and ramifications of the strike, the primary intent is to resuscitate the contributions of the tenants, and to understand why their efforts have been forgotten. As a micro-study, it looks at the final days of the Irish Land War from the perspective of those who fought its battles on a single estate. In addition to reviving a forgotten episode in Irish history, this project focuses on two main inquiries: how the concerns of people in a small place intersected with larger political and social movements, and how the remembrance of one episode in the long history of land reform in Ireland was crafted and controlled by local circumstances and later events.

Late in 1901 near Frenchpark, the tenants on the rural estate of Arthur French, 4rd Baron De Freyne, stopped paying their rent. Far from remaining a local dispute, their action exploded into a national furor pitting nationalist political leaders fighting for issues like land reform and home rule against unionists in their final defense of landlordism. The tenants' act of rebellion was debated in parliament, and made headlines in Dublin, London, New York, and across the global Irish diaspora. When Lord De Freyne sued the leaders of the United Irish League in retaliation, the situation in Roscommon became a tipping point that led to a conciliatory

conference between landlord and tenant advocates in 1902. That conference paved the way for the Wyndham Land Act of 1903, which signaled the end of landlordism in Ireland.

Given the lack of personal documentation from the tenants, this research relies on government statistics, newspaper articles, and manuscripts from various archives to establish the tenants' motives and attitudes. The legacy of collective action on the estate, stretching back fifty years before the strike, is interrogated, as is the influence of political and religious leaders during that period, and at the time of the strike. The research examines the tenants' economic, social, and cultural lives, and considers the impact of Lord De Freyne's behavior and attitudes on their communal resistance.

*To my late husband and eternal buddy, Pete,
who still holds my hand.*

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To my children and grandchildren, Casey, Pat, Mary, Eamon, and Nell, and to all my family and friends, who have humored and supported me (“aren’t you done with that yet?”), I offer thanks and love.

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INTRODUCTION

The Irish gene code is mapped on to townlands and drumlins, alleys and terraces, boreens and main streets, housing estates and villages. Our thought processes work best at the Ordnance Survey scale of 1:5000—zone out too much and we lose our bearings. Our politics and our literature are steeped in locality like pickles in a jar.

Fintan O'Toole¹

My father's father came from a small place in County Roscommon called Barnacawley. He left his home in Ireland sometime around the turn of the twentieth century and emigrated to the United States; I never knew him because he died long before I was born. Later research revealed that his family were tenants of Arthur French, the 4th Baron De Freyne, and the 1901 census said their house was rated third-class because, for one reason, it had only two windows on the front. The same census said that the De Freyne mansion in Frenchpark had seventy windows on its facade. There are no family stories about my grandfather's relationship with this landlord, nor about what he left behind in Ireland. Only two pieces of paper remain to document his journey: a funeral card for his father, confirming where he came from, and his U.S. naturalization papers, to suggest he did not plan to go back. When I visited Roscommon seventy years after his death, all that was left of the De Freyne mansion was a broken stone wall covered in moss. In Barnacawley, there was no trace of my family either, and a local woman had only a vague idea that they had ever lived there. I wonder how many of the things that I could see that day might have been there when my grandfather left—wet grassland under a pale sky, a horse in a field, gnarled trees and hedgerows—and how much of it had stayed in his memory.

¹ Fintan O'Toole, "The Irish Christmas is a fiction of home," *Irish Times*, 20 December 2016.

I also wonder if my grandfather ever recalled that the people of Barnacawley, along with tenants from all the townlands nearby, started a rent strike in 1901 which caught the attention of people around the world. Far from being a local matter, the tenants' action had far-reaching consequences. It prompted fiery reactions from major political figures on all sides, and made headlines in Dublin, London, the United States, and throughout the Irish diaspora. One immediate cause of the strike was the purchase by the government's Congested Districts Board of the nearby Dillon estate, where tenants were given the opportunity to buy their farms at a lower rate than the De Freyne tenants were paying for rent. Anger over that disparity, coupled with bad weather and low agricultural prices, incited the rent strike. Yet what began as a dispute with one landlord exploded into a national furor that bolstered the cause of Irish nationalists, while at the same time exacerbating fissures in their party. Fearful of escalating agitation, some unionists reacted to the strike with a final desperate defense of landlordism, while others of their class were driven to the bargaining table. The tenants' action, along with Lord De Freyne's retaliatory law suit against twenty-nine nationalist leaders, became a tipping point that forced the Land Conference of 1902, which in turn paved the way for the watershed Wyndham Land Act the following year.

However, just as my grandfather's memories of home were concealed from his children, the De Freyne rent strike has been hidden in both historiography and local memory. The image of those windows mentioned in the census—in one house offering a limited, pinched view of the world, and in the other, a floor-to-ceiling vista of sky and manicured lawns—made me wonder about the tenants' access to information, and to what extent memory depends on knowledge. If what seems to have been a significant

event in the history of land tenure in Ireland could be erased from memory in the exact place where it happened, was it significant at all? Who were these tenants, and what mattered to them? How did they imagine their lives could change? Why did they stop paying their rent that year, what did they accomplish, and why does no one remember what they did? My project began with questions like these, and with the desire to recreate the events of the strike as seen from a two-windowed house.

There are two books about memory in Ireland that triggered the direction of this investigation. The first, *Remembering the Year of the French* by Guy Beiner, examines how alternative sources, like folklore and oral traditions, enhance our perception of the past. By accepting the inherent characteristics of the non-literary tradition—including bias, inaccuracy and forgetting—as givens not as limitations, Beiner is able to tease out perspectives and attitudes that are missed by conventional historiography.² The second, *Remembering Ahanagan, Storytelling in a Family's Past* by Richard White, delves into the memories of White's own family, and the ways that their stories collapsed time and rearranged events, defying every convention and rule that White upheld as an historian. He finds instead a different kind of history, in which a particular place is invested with meaning based on the stories that are told about it, and where his mother “knows what she remembers,” even if she was an infant at the time of the event she is recalling.³

Both of these books encourage the consideration of the memories of local residents in small places as a fruitful conduit to understanding, not only historical events, but also the lived experiences of the people who participated in them. The De Freyne rent

² Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French, Irish Folk History and Social Memory* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

³ Richard White, *Remembering Ahanagan, Storytelling in a Family's Past* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 30.

strike, however, did not offer any stories or oral traditions from which to draw, instead there was an absence of recollection and revision. Drawing on the unorthodox ways that Beiner and White embraced their sources, it became clear that the absence of memory about the strike could take the place of a local oral tradition, and that the communal act of forgetting could be invested with the same kind of meaning as an oft-repeated family tale. In a sense, then, this is a history of how things are forgotten in a small place.

Irish historians have generally neglected the strike as well, but when they do mention it, their references are always tangential to an analysis of some other event or personality. Hence, F.S.L. Lyons reports that De Freyne's lawsuit put great pressure on the finances of John Dillon, MP (Mayo East),⁴ and Sally Warwick-Haller cites the strike because William O'Brien, MP (Cork City) feared the no-rent action would prompt a government challenge to his United Irish League (UIL).⁵ Philip Bull dissects the effect of the agitation on the growing estrangement between Dillon and Irish Parliamentary Party chairman John Redmond, MP (Waterford City) on the one hand, and O'Brien on the other.⁶ Even though Andrew Gailey declares that Chief Secretary George Wyndham was helpless "as Irish politics came to focus on Lord De Freyne's Frenchpark estates and the brutal reality of class warfare," he has little else to say about it, except to recommend Joseph O'Brien's discussion of the strike, which is equally brief.⁷ In a far-afield reference, literary scholar Lionel Pilkington speculates that publicity about the strike may

⁴ F.S.L. Lyons, *John Dillon, A Biography*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 225.

⁵ Sally Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1990), 214.

⁶ Philip Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism, A Study of the Irish Land Question*, (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1996), 161–62.

⁷ Andrew Gailey, *Ireland and the Death of Kindness, The experience of constructive unionism 1890–1905*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1987), 182; Joseph V. O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 132.

have influenced the Abbey Theatre to reject Padraic Colum's play, *The Saxon Shillin'*, but provides no other context.⁸ Even in research directly focused on land issues, scholars shortchange the strike: when Fergus Campbell champions the grassroots efforts of the UIL in rural Ireland as integral to the development of the Wyndham Act, he never once mentions the De Freyne strike or the baron's lawsuit.⁹ The only detailed treatment of the strike, to my knowledge, is in L. Perry Curtis' discussion of the evictions that followed it in 1902–03.¹⁰

While the shortage of academic treatments is perplexing, even more mystifying is the lack of any local memory about the strike. Finding family stories or received history of the strike in present day Roscommon proved more frustrating than the search for historiographical commentary. I spoke at length with local history experts, like Jim Ganly, former president of the County Roscommon Historical and Archaeological Society; Mary Dwyer, a family historian from Frenchpark; Deirdre O'Gara, curator of the Douglas Hyde Center in Portaghard (which has a large display on the landlord's family), and the late Pádraig Vesey, a local historian, author and farmer. Liam Byrne, who collects Roscommon ephemera and material culture, shared what he had about the estate, and Mike Lennon of the Roscommon Association Dublin offered his suggestions for

⁸ Lionel Pilkington, *Theatre and the State in Twentieth-Century Ireland: cultivating the people* (London: Routledge, 2001), 38. The play, a realistic vignette, tells the story of an Irish family in the moments before they are to be evicted. While it does not mention Lord De Freyne specifically, it would have evoked images from eviction stories in the press about the estate. The play was eventually presented in 1903 by the Daughters of Erin (*Inghinidhe na hÉireann*), a group founded by Maud Gonne. Padraic Colum, "The Saxon Shillin'" in Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, eds. *Lost Plays of the Irish Renaissance* (Newark, DE: neyProscenium Press, 1970), 14-15, 65-71.

⁹ Campbell, "Irish Popular Politics and the Making of the Wyndham Land Act, 1901–1903," *The Historical Journal*, 45:4 (December 2002), 755–73.

¹⁰ L. Perry Curtis, Jr., *The Depiction of Eviction in Ireland 1845–1910* (Dublin: University College Press, 2011), 286–89.

research. I submitted an article to the *Roscommon Herald*¹¹ and posted notices on genealogy web sites, asking descendants of the rent strikers to search their attics and memories for any information their families had about the strike. I consulted the Roscommon County librarians, as well as *Irish Times* columnist Patsy McGarry and Irish writer John Waters, who both grew up in the area, but no could tell me anything about it. While everyone was generous with their time and knowledge, they all echoed Vesey, who told me outright: “I have lived all my life within four miles of Frenchpark and I have never heard anything about a rent strike.”¹²

Why? What was it about the story of this strike that was not worth remembering? Memory is always selective, and the process of choosing what to remember and what to forget does not always follow set patterns. For instance, Mary Dwyer knew a lot about her family, De Freyne tenants in Parkeel, but was astonished when I showed her evidence that her grandmother had been evicted two years before the strike began.¹³ She knew from family lore that her grandfather worked as a migrant laborer in England, as so many other people did then to earn extra money, so it was not surprising that the report of the eviction did not mention him. The story about his struggle to support his family was remembered, but the one in which her grandmother was put on the roadside with her small children was not. According to this pattern, the story of the rent strike should have survived in local memory since it would recall impoverished people taking a bold stand to better their lives. Instead, it vanished.

¹¹ *The Roscommon Herald*, 11 January 2011.

¹² Telephone conversation, 25 March 2011.

¹³ *Freeman's Journal*, 29 August 1899.

Ian McBride suggests “what we choose to remember is dictated by our contemporary concerns,”¹⁴ but what were those concerns when the strike was first forgotten? Did it vanish from memory as soon as tenants reluctantly began paying their rent in 1902–03? Or when De Freyne’s lawsuit was withdrawn in 1904; or when he agreed to settlement terms in 1905? Ensuing catastrophic events in Ireland could certainly have overshadowed the strike’s hold on people’s memory. While it would be twenty years before Ireland could claim its own government, the strike may also have been a victim of the “bouts of communal amnesia” that Declan Kiberd attributes to some in post-colonial societies. Like Salman Rushdie’s “midnight’s children” in India, maybe the survivors of the rent strike eventually “misaid their powers of retention...having forgotten everything to which they could compare anything that happened.”¹⁵ Perhaps it was ignored in historiography because it began in 1901, a period in Irish history described by Conor Cruise O’Brien as “a sort of crease in time, a featureless valley between the commanding chain of the Rising and the solitary enigmatic peak of Parnell...a time in which nothing happened: nothing except...a revolution in land ownership.”¹⁶

Significance

It is not surprising that a small, local dispute between a few landlords and their tenants in Roscommon might escape attention now, but at the time, the strike was

¹⁴ Ian McBride, “Memory and National Identity in Modern Ireland,” in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 6.

¹⁵ Quoted in Declan Kiberd, “The Elephant of Revolutionary Forgetfulness,” in *Revising the Rising*, eds. Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha and Theo Dorgan (Derry: Field Day, 1991), 10.

¹⁶ Conor Cruise O’Brien, ed., *The shaping of modern Ireland* (London: Routledge & Kegan Ltd., 1960), 13, quoted in Philip Bull, “The Significance of the Nationalist Response to the Irish Land Act of 1903,” *Irish Historical Studies*, 28:111 (May 1992), 284.

regularly conflated with big, national issues. It commanded bold headlines and was debated on the floor of parliament. John Dillon described its potential in millenarian terms:

The trouble, although for the moment confined to Roscommon, involves a principle of vital interest to Ireland. If the De Freyne tenants succeed, it will be impossible for the Government to resist any longer our claims for the compulsory settlement of the Irish land question. The very existence of the Irish nation, and the whole future of the Irish National movement are affected seriously by the struggle proceeding on the De Freyne and neighboring estates.”¹⁷

Stephen Gwynn, a Redmondite home ruler (and the grandson of Young Irelander William Smith O’Brien), was unequivocal in his belief in the importance of the strike, writing in 1912 that “...not one human being in Ireland believes that without the agitation—the lawless, violent agitation of 1902, centering round the De Freyne evictions—we should have got the Land Act of 1903.”¹⁸ Even Michael Davitt, who along with Dillon criticized that legislation, praised the tenants’ efforts: “No reference to this crucial period in the history of the Irish land war can overlook the part played by the tenants on one or two small estates in County Roscommon.”¹⁹

Opposition leaders were vocal about the strike as well, investing the tenants’ action with the laurels of national significance for their own reasons. Discussions of the strike in parliament were linked to debates on compulsory land purchase, a concept Col. Edward J. Saunderson, MP (Cavan), leader of the Unionist Party, considered “outside the horizon of practical politics.” He attacked the agitation as a reincarnation of the Plan of

¹⁷ *New York Times*, *New-York Tribune*, 23 February 1902.

¹⁸ Patrick Maume, “Gwynn, Stephen Lucius,” in eds. James McGuire and James Quinn, *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009), <https://dib.cambridge.org>; Stephen Gwynn, *The case for home rule* (Dublin: Maunsell & Company Ltd., 1912), 69, *CELT: The online resource for Irish history, literature, and politics*, www.celt.ucc.ie.

¹⁹ Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism in Ireland; or, The Story of the Land League Revolution* (London, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1904), 702.

Campaign and blasted its hidden agenda. The strike's real purpose he said, was not to "obtain fair play for the tenants, but to turn the British Government out of Ireland" and destroy the protections of private property. Saunderson vowed that "Lord De Freyne and other landlords who were to be 'campaigned' would not fight alone. Many Irishmen and Englishmen would stand by him in the interests of law and order and the prosperity of Ireland."²⁰

Between November 1901 and December 1903, the *Times* of London printed at least ninety articles about the De Freyne estate or his lawsuit, and the *Irish Times* published at least 150. Worldwide press coverage included regular stories in the *New York Times* and other papers in that city, as well as in Boston, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Australia, and elsewhere. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* ran a long, sympathetic story about the eviction of some of De Freyne's tenants, seventy-year-old Thomas King of Feigh, and his son, Bernard.²¹ The former mayor of San Francisco, James D. Phelan, sent Irish party chairman John Redmond £500 because he was afraid "the action brought by Lord De Freyne against the Irish National leaders is designed to crush your party and destroy the political life of the people."²² The tenants' local organization, dubbed the Associated Estates, published this in the *Freeman's Journal*: "To Irishmen and women the world over we appeal for funds to carry on this struggle, and to show that Irish-born men and women are capable of working out the salvation of their country by stern action and true and faithful brotherhood."²³

²⁰ "Commons sitting" January 23, 1902, *Hansard*, fourth series, vol. 101, cc. 723–725; *Irish Times*, 24 January 1902.

²¹ *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 December 1902.

²² *Irish Times*, 22 July 1902.

²³ *Freeman's Journal*, 28 February 1902.

Yet the strike is worthy of study not just because there were politicians and journalists, some eager to promote their own causes, who attached importance to it. Rather, its value also lies in the opportunity it offers to consider how ordinary Irish people negotiated their lives in the midst of—and sometimes, despite—contemporary political and cultural forces. In 1901 these forces were of course focused on imagining an Irish nation, but also on establishing an authentic Irish identity. The years before and after the strike saw the growth of the Gaelic League, devoted to the Irish language; the Gaelic Athletic Association, which lobbied for Irish sport, and the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, which promoted self-help for farmers. In literature and theatre, writers like W.B. Yeats and John Millington Synge explored different ideas about what it meant to be Irish, and in the cities, the Irish labor movement struggled to make itself heard under leaders like James Larkin. Scholarly attention has long focused on these seismic movements and actors, and their significance for Ireland at that time and in the future, but a study of the De Freyne rent strike does precisely the opposite. It is of value primarily because it explains what was happening in Ireland from the inside out, to unnamed people far away in the bogs of Roscommon, while another Ireland was busy explaining itself.

Scholarship

A lot of research on land issues in Ireland was produced between 1960 and the 1990s, and includes the work of Paul Bew, Samuel Clark, L. Perry Curtis, Jr., David Seth Jones, Barbara Solow, and W.E. Vaughan, among others.²⁴ While agrarian agitation has

²⁴ Representative works by these authors include: Paul Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation in Ireland, Parnellites and Radical Agrarians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); Samuel Clark, *Social Origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); David Seth Jones, *Graziers, Land Reform*

often been treated by Irish historians as a kind of proto-nationalism, more recent interpretations focus on its unique causes and characteristics. Still, a few of the older studies sought to approach the topic from the vantage of those who waged the battle, not focusing on the connections between unrest and political formations as much as on the agitators' motivations and habits of collectivism. Clark, in his *Social Origins of the Irish Land War*, which began as a study of Roscommon, examines the ways that rural collective movements changed over time, and how competing alliances arose within these movements. In *Irish Peasants: Violence & Political Unrest 1780–1914*, edited by Clark and James S. Donnelly, Jr., the various essays examine topics like the influence of modernization on agrarian agitation and the class structure of rural society. Both books situate collective actions in Ireland within larger theoretical frameworks concerning agitation throughout Europe, but Donnelly suggests that the most fruitful opportunities for ongoing research are those that concentrate on specific localities in Ireland:

Local studies focusing on the way in which class, religion, territorial divisions, and family structures shaped the character of collective action in particular places are wanted. A longitudinal analysis of how collective action in a certain locality was transformed over time as a result of changes in these social structures would constitute a major contribution to the study of Irish agrarian society.²⁵

In addition to this suggestion from Donnelly, similar ideas from two other historians, posed almost thirty years apart, support the focus of this inquiry into the rent strike and the culture of agrarian resistance that fostered it. In 1985, David Fitzpatrick proposed narrowing studies on tenant unrest to “the criminal history of a parish, county

and Political Conflict in Ireland (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 1983); Barbara Solow, *The Land Question and the Irish Economy, 1870–1903* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and Tenants in Mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).
²⁵ James S. Donnelly, Jr., “The Unreaped Harvest,” in Clark and Donnelly, *Irish Peasants, Violence and Political Unrest 1780–1914*, eds. Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, Jr. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 422.

or region over a long span...within a relatively homogenous economic context.” Rather than seeing outbreaks of agitation only in connection to larger national issues, he likens unrest to “the collision of two icebergs, an event preceded by a good deal of unreported grinding and crunching at a lower level.” Unrest is “an indicator of underlying relationships and processes,” Fitzpatrick says, and the “composition and leadership of ‘collectivities’ provide insight into alignments and hierarchies” in the affected community. He then suggests those underlying factors need to be mined all the way down to a familial level to fully understand the evolution of protest.²⁶

Fergus Campbell proposed a comparable idea in 2013, indicating that Fitzpatrick’s challenge may have gone unanswered. In the collection of essays, *Land Questions in Modern Ireland*, which he edited with Tony Varley, Campbell (along with Clark, Solow, Bull, and others) reconsiders his earlier work. He says he hopes to focus his future research on the concerns of Irish rural families as prime factors driving rural unrest, particularly on the issue of inheritance. “Our thinking about the struggle for land in rural Ireland needs to extend beyond the political or the economic,” he proposes, “to thinking about what the acquisition of land might mean to the emotional life of an individual and a community.” His words invite researchers to imagine what such a community was like, composed as it might be of land-holding sons, almost-inheriting sons, and non-inheriting sons—from the same or different families—all in competition for similar kinds of land and ultimately, the chance to marry. Campbell points to other psychological factors that could have contributed to disagreements over land, wondering if “child-rearing methods in rural Ireland may have created a population that tended

²⁶ David Fitzpatrick, “Unrest in Rural Ireland,” *Irish Economic and Social History* 12 (1995), 98–100.

towards insecurity and feeling easily slighted, and that therefore fell easily into conflicts with one another that were difficult to resolve.”²⁷

Recent publications focusing on local history in County Roscommon include Anne Coleman’s *Riotous Roscommon*, Diane Dunnigan’s *A south Roscommon emigrant*, Pat Watson’s *Roscommon Folk Tales*, and Michael Huggins’ *Social Conflict in Pre-Famine Ireland: The Case of County Roscommon*. There were twin treatments of the 1847 murder of Major Mahon in Strokestown by Peter Duffy and Pádraig Vesey. A predecessor to the De Freyne strike, the “Ballykilcline Rising” of the 1840s was examined by Robert J. Scally in 1995 in *The End of Hidden Ireland*, a book that provides a template for using limited sources to illuminate the lives and motivations of unknown people. Mary Lee Dunn revisited these events in her 2008 *Ballykilcline Rising*, which traced the paths of those forced to emigrate.²⁸ All of these studies help establish a context for the strike, but none has anything specific to say about the 1901 events in Frenchpark.

Sources

Without access to personal accounts from the tenants, the search for information about their lives and mental landscapes relies heavily on primary sources created by others about them. These include government documents like the census and the

²⁷ Fergus Campbell, “Land and Revolution revisited,” *Land Questions in Modern Ireland*, eds. Fergus Campbell and Tony Varley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 167–69.

²⁸ Anne Coleman, *Riotous Roscommon, Social Unrest in the 1840s* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 1999); Peter Duffy, *The Killing of Major Denis Mahon: a mystery of old Ireland* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007); Diane Dunnigan, *A south Roscommon emigrant, Emigration and return, 1890–1920* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007); Mary Lee Dunn, *Ballykilcline Rising: From Famine Ireland to Immigrant America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); Michael Huggins, *Social Conflict in Pre-Famine Ireland: The Case of County Roscommon* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007); Robert J. Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland: Rebellion, Famine and Emigration* (New York: New York University Press, 1995); Pádraig Vesey, *The Murder of Major Mahon, Roscommon 1847* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008); Pat Watson, *Roscommon Folk Tales* (Dublin: The History Press Ireland, 2013).

valuation reports, newspapers, and evidence in the De Freyne family papers. Any study of small places in Ireland is hampered by the loss of most individual census returns for the nineteenth century.²⁹ The records of the Irish Land Commission, which could provide valuable information on individual land transactions, especially for the period after the strike when tenants began purchasing their properties, are not available to the public, because they “are deemed to contain ‘private sensitive information.’”³⁰ The De Freyne family papers do not contain any consistent records of tenant occupancy over time, so other sources were used to map the extent of the estate, and to identify tenants. While seventy townlands were found in which Lord De Freyne was the primary land owner, in eight of them it is unclear who was collecting the rent, he or one of his relatives, so the research focuses on those townlands most likely to have been part of the rent strike.³¹ Despite inconsistencies between all these sources, taken together they provide a workable timeline of tenant occupancy from the end of the Famine until the strike in 1901. A brief

²⁹ One explanation is that the government routinely destroyed them after 1851 in the belief that copies had been saved elsewhere. This was long before the fire in 1922 in the Public Records’ Office in the Four Courts building in Dublin during the Irish Civil War which eradicated the 1821–51 individual returns. John Grenham, “Why is Griffith’s Important for Irish Genealogy,” *Ask About Ireland*, <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/history-heritage/irishgenealogy/what-is-griffiths-valuti/>; “Start your Research: Census Records,” The Irish Genealogical Society, <http://www.irishancestors.ie>. The 1901 and 1911 individual returns are available from The National Archives of Ireland (NAI), <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search>.

³⁰ Fiona Fitzsimons, “Records of the Irish Land Commission,” *History Ireland* 22:1 (January/February 2014), 49. Owners and purchasers of land have access to relevant archives, but there are no facilities for public research. Ciaran Moran, “No plans to make Land Commission records generally available to the public,” *FarmIreland*, 10 November 2018, www.independent.ie.

³¹ Those townlands not under close examination include Caher, Carrowbane, Cloonshanville, and Derry, which were all deeded over to Lord De Freyne’s mother, the Lady Dowager by 1901; Frenchpark Demesne, home to the Baron, his family, and household staff; Clashcarragh, occupied by another family member; Glebe East, whose sole tenant was Rev. Arthur Hyde (father of Douglas), and Dereenamanckaun, which consisted of a lake, an island and no tenants. The estate’s only town, Frenchpark, straddled two townlands, Cloonshanville and Corskeagh, and Lord De Freyne was the major landowner only in Corskeagh.

description of these sources follows, including an explanation of the labyrinthian (especially to a non-Irish observer) structure of civil administration divisions.

Valuation Records

The national valuation office in Dublin maintained records of every occupier of land in Ireland from the mid-nineteenth century on, with details on occupiers' names, acreage, land quality and property value.³² The first attempt at creating a standard for land values in Ireland is referred to as Griffith's Primary Valuation, after Richard Griffith, who headed the project.³³ Between 1857 and 1858, his researchers recorded the sizes of individual land holdings in County Roscommon and set values on each tenement by estimating the amount of profit each could reasonably realize in a year (not necessarily the resale value). The ways land was divided, and the manner in which occupancies were designated can reveal the layers of relationships within each community. In each townland, the boundaries of tenant holdings were identified by an index of numbers and letters for each occupier and subtenant, and the value on each holding set the local poor rates payable by each occupier. Those occupiers responsible for paying rent and poor rates on the plots were named next to their "Immediate Lessors," or the person to whom their rent was paid, which could be a middleman or the actual land owner.³⁴

³² Most of the De Freyne estate is found in the so-called "cancelled" Valuation Office books for Roscommon, Frenchpark Barony, in electoral districts Artagh North, Artagh South, Buckhill, Fairymount, and Frenchpark, held in the Valuation Office, Irish Life Centre, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin. Digitized versions are available on site, but the original copies proved easier to examine.

³³ Gillian M. Doherty, *The Irish Ordnance Survey, History, Culture and Memory*. (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), 15 and *passim*. A searchable database of Griffith's Valuation is available on the Irish government's website, *Ask About Ireland*, www.askaboutireland.ie.

³⁴ James R. Reilly, "Is there More to Griffith's than Just Names?", *The Irish at Home and Abroad*, 5:2 (1998), 58–68; John Grenham, "What is Griffith's Valuation?" *Ask About Ireland*. <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/reading-room/history-heritage/irish-genealogy/what-is-griffiths-valuation/>.

In townlands where De Freyne was the major land owner, middlemen were the exception rather than the rule. However, there were many instances on the estate where multiple people occupied the same holding as co-tenants, not designated as middlemen and subtenants, although those kinds of relationship might have existed anyway. The pervasiveness of these co-tenancies, and the number of properties held in common without dwellings, muddies the picture of exactly who held how much land. Group parcels, with or without buildings, were often not sub-divided by an individual's assigned acreage, so all group members appear to be liable for the rates in equal portions (properties valued under £4 were not charged for poor rates³⁵). In these land-holding combines, which could be holdovers from traditional communal group lettings, participants would need a way to determine each member's responsibility for rates, a process that might entail intra-group negotiations and arbitration, or a ruling by the estate agent.

Over time, the primary valuation was updated by the valuation office in Dublin. Revisions were made by crossing out old data and writing new names and figures in different colored inks, with each color linked to the changes made in a specific year (it is surprising how many ink colors were available). As years passed, these books were "cancelled," and new ones copied by hand from the outdated versions, so each townland's history of occupancy was recorded in different books with multiple handwritten revisions, far into the twentieth century. The many changes in plot numbering

³⁵ Landlords were liable for poor rates for these properties. William L. Feingold, *The Revolt of the Tenantry: The Transformation of Local Government in Ireland, 1872–1886*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984),16.

made over time were most likely made in Dublin for the valuation office's own administrative purposes, and not by landlords.³⁶

De Freyne Estate Papers

The De Freyne papers in the manuscript collection of the National Library of Ireland hold centuries of family and estate records, as well as much material pertinent to distress on the estate in the nineteenth century and during the rent strike. Letters between the baron and his agent, and with various government and church leaders offer insight into how the business of the estate was connected to the outside world. The only specific, dated, list of tenants is a survey and map of the estate made in 1894 by James Martin from a "Land Valuation and Survey Office" in Ballinasloe, but it is not clear if that was a private or a government entity.³⁷ Just like the valuation records, it shows each townland with its individual holdings, and provides a numbered list of tenants, but it uses a different numbering system to connect them to their holdings. Although not all the 1894 maps and lists are legible, many survive intact, giving a picture of landholding patterns seven years before the rent strike. Did De Freyne commission the survey, and why? It seems likely that he did, since the original remains in his papers. The 1890s were a period of particularly hostile relations between him and his tenants, so if he paid for this expensive and complicated project, he may have done so in reaction to that unrest, perhaps as a first step towards consolidating his small, problematic holdings into larger farms. Another possibility is that the prospect of an estate-wide survey could itself have

³⁶ Email from Brendan Robbins, Public Office/Archives, Valuation Office, Dublin, 5 December 2016.

³⁷ De Freyne estate survey and maps, III.iii. Two Land Valuation and Survey Books, 1894. MS 42,438/1-2, De Freyne Papers, National Library of Ireland (NLI).

been a catalyst to the unrest, as it would have raised the threat of re-organization and disruption on the estate.

During my initial research at the National Library from 2009–2011, the De Freyne estate papers were housed in unsorted packing crates. During my final visits there in 2015–17, the library had begun cataloging the collection, a process which has since been completed. However, I have not been able to reconcile in person the individual sources which I have used with the new catalog system. Therefore, manuscript and file numbers cited here are based on my estimation of how the sources should fit in the new system, an estimation I hope comes close to reality. In cases where the file descriptions are not clear, I have given the most general citation.³⁸

While the baron’s name sometimes appears in the primary sources as “de Freyne,” the more common spelling at the time was “De Freyne.” That is also the way it was spelled in *Burke’s Peerage*, and is the version preferred by the National Library of Ireland, and the 4th Baron himself in his correspondence.

Government Documents

The last major sources of evidence about Lord De Freyne’s tenants are parliamentary reports, general statistics from the Irish census from 1851–1901, and the online individual returns for 1901 and 1911, and to a lesser extent, the Tithe Applotment books from 1825–37. Although these sources have vast amounts of information, access to the most relevant data is sometimes hobbled because of the structure of civil divisions in Ireland. Because an estate was a non-governmental entity, the only way to assemble

³⁸ I was assured by Collette O’Flaherty, Keeper, Special Collections and Manuscripts, National Library of Ireland, in a conversation at the library on 2 August 2016, that generalized citations would be sufficient for those seeking further research.

information about it is to combine data from all the townlands it contained. Therefore, the most useful statistics are those found at the townland level, but a great deal of data on ages, education, emigration, occupations, and agricultural yields can be found only for bigger civil units like the poor law union, county, or province. These larger units often overlap other geographic and political spaces, and in some cases, their boundaries were shifted during the nineteenth century, making statistical comparisons between different civil divisions and decades complicated and imprecise.³⁹ Of course, the online censuses for 1901 and 1911 contain much information on individual people, so statistics on each townland was extrapolated from the personal returns.

The largest civil divisions were the province and county. Most of the De Freyne estate lay in County Roscommon which, along with Leitrim, Galway, Mayo, and Sligo, made up the province of Connacht. The estate also lay in the barony of Frenchpark. Baronies were large entities within a county, administrative holdovers from the Tudor period, although some were thought to reflect ancient Gaelic land divisions. After the 1891 census, the barony was no longer used for statistical purposes.⁴⁰

A more significant large land division, the Poor Law Union (PLU), was introduced with the passage of the Irish Poor Law in 1838, as part of the government's effort to modernize and control the administration of local services. Centered around market towns where workhouses were built, each PLU was governed by a group of local dignitaries called the Board of Poor Law Guardians. PLUs were divided into electoral districts (ED) for the purposes of levying poor rates and for census taking. The De Freyne

³⁹ W.E. Vaughan, A.J. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Historical Statistics: population, 1821–1971* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), xiii.

⁴⁰ S.J. Connolly, ed. *Oxford Companion to Irish History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 41.

property lay primarily in Castlerea PLU, and its townlands were scattered among the EDs of Artagh North, Artagh South, Buckhill, Fairymount and Frenchpark. Castlerea PLU also reached into Mayo and Galway. Within a poor law union, land was also divided into other units called civil parishes, which were generally coterminous with the parishes of the Church of Ireland, and which could cross county and barony lines (Roman Catholic parishes were not used as civil divisions).⁴¹ The De Freyne townlands in Roscommon lay primarily in the civil parish of Tibohine, although a few were in Castlemore and Kilmamanagh parishes.

Some statistics, particularly in the later census returns, are based on Registration Districts (or Superintendent Registrar's Districts) which were formed on the boundaries of the PLUs after 1864 legislation that required vital statistics to be collected at a local level. These districts were broken down into smaller Registrar's Districts, based on the Dispensary (medical) Districts of the PLUs, where births, deaths and marriages were actually recorded.⁴² The De Freyne property was in the Castlerea Registration District, with most of its townlands in the smaller Frenchpark and Balllagherreen Registrar's (Dispensary) Districts. These districts are not to be confused with the EDs, or electoral districts. As both of these registrar's districts contained townlands from other estates as well, these statistics are less valuable than those from individual townlands. After the conversion to local government in 1898, the Registration Districts and Poor Law Unions were often referred to in the census as County Districts.

Not only are townlands the most fruitful geographical division in terms of research, they were also the places created and named by the people who lived in them,

⁴¹ Reilly, "Is there More to Griffith's than Just Names?", 69.

⁴² "History of Registration in Ireland," <http://www.welfare.ie/en/downloads/GRO-History.pdf>.

having existed long before the introduction of valuation maps and statistical surveys. They usually consisted of a few houses and farms grouped in a small area, generally inhabited by people related to each other. Unlike English villages with their distinct commercial and social hubs surrounded by farms, Irish townlands were loosely amalgamated through custom and longtime familiarity to facilitate traditional communal farming systems. Their Irish names, which were anglicized on the maps and in surveys, often referred to local topography or folklore. Whenever possible, statistics about the estate here will be presented from those available at the townland level. Spellings of place names will correspond to the versions used today by Ordnance Survey Ireland.

Chapters

The first five chapters cover the documented history of tenant unrest on the estate, the strike itself, and the main non-tenant actors who participated in it. The first two, “Agitation I 1840-1879” and “Agitation II 1879-1901,” are chronological studies of tenant agitation on the estate from the Famine until just before the strike. Evidence of tenant-based resistance is presented in the context of larger events in Ireland’s history, especially the progress of land reform. The strike is treated in Chapter Three, with a description of the events and main participants. It examines the rhetoric that constitutes a good deal of the available information about the strike, dissecting the kinds of messages the tenants heard, and considering how those messages might have been received, understood, and internalized. Chapter Four looks at the political leaders and clergymen who tried to influence and assist the tenants. Of particular note here are Lord De Freyne’s lawsuit against the nationalists with its fallout, and the complications attached to a mortgage he held from a charity overseen by the Archdiocese of Dublin. The life,

attitudes, and behavior of Lord De Freyne are covered in Chapter Five, “Landlord and Land,” as well as his family’s history and details on his personal wealth. Included are descriptions of the topography and physical condition of the estate from various contemporary observers.

The next three chapters delve into the lives of the tenants themselves, using data on economics, culture, education and social structures to tease out reasons why they resorted to a strike, and why it was lost to memory. Chapter Six, “Maps and Numbers,” charts the population on the estate from the time of the Famine, especially in regard to migratory workers and emigration. It also compares conclusions drawn about the De Freyne tenants by outsiders to the demographic data on the size and value of their farms. As a way to understand social structures on the estate, it also presents a history of surnames in three townlands, and the land holding patterns associated with those surnames. In Chapter Seven, “People,” statistics and newspaper stories are mined for information on the education and cultural life of the De Freyne tenants. Of great significance here are the press accounts of evictions that followed the rent strike. They not only provide tenants’ names and descriptions of homes and farms, they are also the only accounts of actual tenant behavior separate from the political arena. The last chapter, “Afterwards / Memory,” discusses the decades following the strike when, under the shadow of important events and political movements beyond the estate, tenants began to purchase their holdings. The lack of local memory and commemoration is considered in the context of scholarship on memory in Ireland, and in light of the research presented in the previous chapters.

Reflection

While this investigation of the De Freyne rent strike does not claim to answer questions about the whole of Ireland, or even the whole of the estate, it also does not pretend that the events on the estate were isolated or unique. So, what happened in Frenchpark probably happened elsewhere to a greater or lesser degree, but only by focusing on the history of events in individual small places like this can there be any real consensus of what happened in a greater context. Describing the history of an entire nation is very different from unearthing the pasts of people living in a small place. Who owns the De Freyne rent strike, the people who decided to forget it, or those who want to know more about it today? The job of writing history from the bottom up, with the goal of understanding the interior motivations of those long dead, is a perilous task. Good intentions clash with a lack of evidence, and supposition intervenes. As described by Ranajit Guha in a study on the process of writing the history of peasant revolts in India, the reconstruction of what was never recorded can lead:

to the mediation of the insurgent's consciousness by the historian's—that is, of a past consciousness by one conditioned by the present... And since this discourse is... about properties of the mind—about attitudes, beliefs, ideas, etc. rather than about externalities which are easier to identify and describe, the task of representation is made even more complicated than usual.

Guha also warns against the urge to place every instance of insurgency along an “axis of a protracted campaign for freedom and socialism” since this, like “colonialist historiography...excludes the rebel as the conscious subject of his own history and incorporates the latter as only a contingent element in another history with another subject.”⁴³ The reasons why someone commits an act of insurrection can be more

⁴³ Ranajit Guha, “The Prose of Counter-Insurgency,” *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 77.

revelatory than any immediate political ramifications, perhaps more illuminating than even the act of insurrection itself, but the reasons why are much harder to find.

The territory around Frenchpark that was the De Freyne estate still lies in a broad plain of grassland just north of the geographic center of Ireland. There are beautiful lakes and rivers nearby, and rolling green hills and farmlands, but no high mountains or dramatic seascapes. It is not the Ireland of travel posters, nor does it project the “sublime” of Irish landscapes favored in paintings or poetry. The images it conjures are more work-a-day than heroic, and such a small place can easily be overlooked by tour buses as well as historians. All the more reason to uncover the forces that drove one of the last battles of the Land War between an unyielding landlord and his equally determined tenants, and to discover why no one remembers it today.



CHAPTER 1: AGITATION 1840–1879

“It’s losin’ your time ye are. I have gone through it all before.” So bragged a nattily-dressed De Freyne tenant to the bailiff and constable who threatened him with eviction and jail in this 1891 cartoon.¹ Indeed, he *had* gone through it all before. Protests, evictions, and prison sentences for agrarian agitators on the estate appeared in every decade from the time of the Famine in the 1840s to the strike in 1901, corroborating studies on the deep legacy of resistance in County Roscommon as a whole.² Although tenant agitation through those years was regularly conflated with political goals, there was no absolute relationship between unrest on the estate and opposition to British rule.

¹ John D. Reigh, supplement to *United Ireland*, 24 January 1891, *United Ireland* 1891 January 24 (A) Prints & Drawings, NLI.

² The county’s pre-Famine contributions to tenant unrest are discussed in detail in Coleman, *Riotous Roscommon*, and Huggins, *Social Conflict in Pre-Famine Ireland*.

While people always act in their own best interests, politicians with larger agendas will just as readily seek to harness their energy. However, collective resistance on the De Freyne estate simmered with or without the presence of elite management, and in spite of ongoing upheavals in local political engagement. Tenants perfected the performance art of agitation to trumpet their personal grievances to their landlord, the government, the world, and more often than not, to each other. The knack for collective resistance was something they owned—an attitude, a way to cope—passed down like an heirloom from parent to child.

The Anatomy of Unrest

It is tempting to conclude that the arc of tenant agitation on the estate showed a steady progression from inward-focused dissent in small cabals to a more collaborative, outward-reaching agenda in a widespread collective. Certainly, through the influence of various national political movements (beginning with Daniel O’Connell’s campaigns), tenant groups did adopt increasingly sophisticated organizational practices. They learned to hold regular meetings run by elected officers who answered to a central directory, to use membership cards, raise funds, and to publish official statements in addition to anonymous placards and threatening letters. However, the impulses that drove the strike in 1901 and the tactics that were employed were not that different from those of the conacre battles of the 1840s. It was not ideology that drove unrest, but rather issues rising from the prime loci of rural economics—rent costs, land quality, and agricultural prices. The particular circumstances around Frenchpark, mainly the preponderance of small, unproductive farms, exacerbated those issues. The United Irish League tried to modernize the fight in 1898–1901 by using the strategies of collective bargaining, and (like earlier

movements) it hoped to expand agrarian issues into a referendum on the fate of Ireland. Nevertheless, the De Freyne rent strike began for some timeworn reasons: there had been bad weather, and tenants did not have the money to pay the rent.

Certainly, the national political parties had an effect on local agitation, bringing together people with divergent needs and opinions for intermittent periods. However, the history of agitation on the estate shows how difficult it was for political leaders to maintain solidarity and control over the far-flung periphery. The inconsistencies and contradictions in some of the ground-level operations of unrest on the estate complicate ideas explored by scholars like Clark, Bew, and Campbell about how and why people collectivized. While they have examined tenant agitation primarily in its relationship to the progression of land reform and national politics, political scientist James C. Scott presents a model that focuses on the agitators themselves. Scott looks at “peasant” subversion in southeast Asia as quotidian behavior, not as an aberration uncorked only by the force of political movements. While the forms of resistance that appeared on the De Freyne estate could be more confrontational than what Scott describes, they fit his analysis of the gradations that separate indigenous resistance from organized political activity.

Scott describes how a single aggrieved tenant, who may have secret fantasies of revenge, will trade stories with other aggrieved tenants until “there arises the basis for a collective grievance, collective fantasy, and even collective acts,” creating a “repository of collective grievances of much of the community against that kind of landlord in general.”³ Despite the geopolitical discrepancies between the people he studied and Lord

³ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 43–44.

De Freyne's tenants, agitation on the estate can be approached as a component of daily life as well, and such a reading offers insight into the psychology of tenant life that is otherwise lacking in most historiography. Scott delineates two kinds of agrarian resistance: "everyday" and "open," further qualifying them as "offstage" and "onstage" behavior. Everyday resistance is accomplished subtly (something as simple as a joke told at the expense of an absent superior) and is rarely rewarded since offstage behavior is expected to fail, or at least to have no real impact. Open resistance and onstage behavior are concerned with large issues like the passage of laws, and the reform of an entire social system, so they require mass mobilization and thrive on the expectation of actual change.

Like Scott's description of everyday resistance, some of the collective actions on the De Freyne estate had "no formal organization, no formal leaders, no manifestoes, no dues, no name, and no banner."⁴ However, aggrieved tenants also put a public face to their anger, in handmade posters and official statements. Subversion on the De Freyne estate therefore fell somewhere between Scott's definition of everyday and open resistance, since it was locally and individually perpetrated, yet backed by a supportive wider community. Unlike some of the peasants Scott describes, these tenants were encouraged by the formal national organizations as well, providing justification for their backstage attitudes and actions. The actions that we know about, the behavior that was openly defiant, may stretch the limits of Scott's definition of everyday resistance. However, the behavior that is hidden from our view must have been quite robust and must have flourished inside the realm of families and neighborhoods. Without the daily

⁴ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 33–35.

habit of expressing frustration in home-grown ways, and without the underground acknowledgement of shared grievances, no outside organization could have rallied community support. Indeed, national organizations relied on being able to stoke the flames of everyday resistance. Many examples of tenant agitation were futile in the short term (thus placing them well within Scott's definition of everyday resistance), but tenants never seemed to be dissuaded by past ineffectuality. As evidenced by Scott's disgruntled field hands, no underling ever expects foot-dragging to topple an empire, but he does it anyway.

The De Freyne estate was owned by a direct line of French family members who, for the most part, resided there. The 4th Baron, Arthur, who was the landlord during much of the period examined here, was also a Catholic, and attended Mass with his family in a local church. Shared residence and religion might seem conducive to a congenial relationship between landlord and tenants, but during the twenty years leading up to the strike such was not the case. Many factors can be used to explain the persistence of everyday agitation on the estate, and the open agitation that periodically erupted from it, factors which affected other parts of Ireland as well. An overriding psychological factor was the frustration and despair of people whose only options beyond their small farms were migratory labor or emigration. This situation was exacerbated by an antiquated system of land tenure that did not reward tenants for their capital investments and improvements to the farms. Equally important factors include long-term poverty, and an inheritance pattern that favored one child, often dooming others in the family to emigration or to a barren life as bachelors or spinsters.⁵

⁵ Fergus Campbell describes non-inheriting sons who had to "live out their days as bachelor labourers and become impotent old 'boys', never able to become men." Campbell, "*Land and Revolution revisited*," 167.

Cultural influences were also in play, as tenants' strong familial, religious, and emotional ties to the land, and to each other, stoked the fires of resistance. Clark observed that these kinds of existing social relationships, and not just ideology, determined when, how, and with whom collective activity took place.⁶ In one cultural explanation for the persistence of rural protest, Irish tenant farmers were said to claim special rights to the land that went beyond English tenurial law, rights they believed were automatically granted by virtue of their occupancy, labor, and family ties. A study from the 1980s found that a traditional system of "social norms, beliefs and obligations which governed the relationship between land, kinship, and identity" led tenants in the nineteenth century to believe that the land they lived on 'belonged' to them and their kinship group and that a particular occupier at any point in time was only holding the land in trust for his descendants."⁷ Clark notes that the landlords' "general practice of leaving the same family in possession of a farm for generations almost inevitably led them [the tenants] to assume that undisturbed occupancy was a customary right rather than a privilege." This sense of preserving the land for future generations can explain the vehemence directed at anyone who tried to occupy an evicted tenant's property; land grabbers were boycotted and attacked with a greater fury than anything directed at the landlord or agent.⁸ When Charles Stewart Parnell told tenants in 1879 to "hold a firm grip of your homesteads and lands,"⁹ he was not telling his listeners anything new, but rather "acknowledging that an attitude which already existed could become a crucial component of Irish agrarian

⁶ Clark, *Social Origins*, 6 and *passim*.

⁷ John William Knott, "Land, Kinship and Identity: The Cultural Roots of Agrarian Agitation in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Ireland," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 12:1 (October 1984), 93, 99.

⁸ Clark, *Social Origins*, 180, 321–324.

⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 9 Jun 1879, quoted in Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 154.

agitation.”¹⁰ The Irish farmer’s sense of ownership has also been described as a “prehensile grip on the most menial individual property rights,” which usually concerned land, but could also be about jobs, promises of marriage and other non-landed property (and could just as easily concern a dispute between family members as between tenant and landlord).¹¹ An anthropological study in the 1930s observed that, even then, blood and land were inextricably tied, and that “A particular ancestral line is inseparable from a particular plot of earth.”¹²

Clark concluded that the Land War happened as a result of social changes set in motion by the Famine, when people from different social strata—urban vs. rural and large farmer vs. small farmer—found they had goals in common. This allowed them to break away from traditional communal bonds, he said, to embrace associational collectivities that bridged economic, geographic, and social differences.¹³ While the evidence on the De Freyne estate backs up Clark’s ideas about links between urban and rural classes, it further suggests that the goal of this new collectivity was largely self-preservation and self-advancement. (“Self” in this context does not necessarily refer to individual farmers only, since family groups often operated as one entity.) David Fitzpatrick pointed out the logistics of self-interest in Irish nationalist activity:

Readiness to participate depended not only upon the (immeasurable) intensity of one’s nationalist fervor but also upon one’s (partly measurable) social and economic circumstances and expectations. For most people, to serve their country is also to serve themselves, so that risks and costs they are prepared to incur...are circumscribed by their expectations of consequent benefits. Those who have

¹⁰ Heather Laird, *Subversive Law in Ireland, 1879–1920: From ‘Unwritten Law’ to the Dáil Courts* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 69–70.

¹¹ Joseph Lee, “Patterns of Rural Unrest in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: A Preliminary Survey,” *Ireland and France 17th–20th Centuries: Towards a Comparative Study of Rural History*, ed. by L.M. Cullen and F. Furet (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI, 1980), 229.

¹² Conrad M. Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman: An Anthropological Study* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), reprint by permission of the Macmillan Company, 82–83.

¹³ Clark, *Social Origins*, 246–304, and *passim*.

nothing to lose...may risk everything, but those who have nothing to gain will seldom risk anything.¹⁴

This does not mean that families did not help each other through hard times, but it explains why the communal energy that sustained agricultural agitation did not ultimately translate into a new social order that embraced a similar inclusivity. Organized agitation, with its demands for internal solidarity, required a membership with nothing to lose, but with expectations of gain. It was a tool to a specific end, but tenants, agitating within a collective movement that prioritized unity and fellowship, really wanted to own their own farms. After decades of collective action for land rights, what finally emerged was not an agricultural system that resembled the impulse and rhetoric of a collective, but rather an “individualist instinct for exclusive ownership” and “the entrenchment of a decidedly individualist system of farm ownership.”¹⁵

Self-preservation and community are not antithetical, of course, and often rely on each other. While collaborating with one’s neighbors was always part of the battle plan, it was never easy to sustain a communal bond even among social equals, much less across a social gap. The principles and importance of collaboration had to be vigorously inculcated and then vigilantly protected by forces within and without the townlands. In many cases, it appears that reinforcing and policing these bonds was the major responsibility of tenant organizers. This is shown by the language used in their speeches, and by the continuing need for intimidation and boycotting among the tenants. In the political rhetoric, farmers on the De Freyne estate could never just be individuals on £5

¹⁴ David Fitzpatrick, “The Geography of Irish Nationalism, 1910–1921,” *Past & Present* 78 (February 1978), 114.

¹⁵ Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, “Irish Land Questions in the State of the Union,” *Land Questions in Modern Ireland*, eds. Fergus Campbell and Tony Varley (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 17.

plots hoping to make it through the season—they were soldiers, visionaries, and above all, Irishmen, fighting together for their country’s freedom. They were told their plight united them with all their neighbors except, of course, with those who chose to pay their rent, or supply the Royal Irish Constabulary with potatoes, or the bailiff with transportation, or otherwise willfully separate themselves from the group. The divide between those with nothing to lose, and those with something to protect, runs long and deep through time, but all were focused on self-preservation. During periods of relative prosperity and peace, did any of these tenants feel as connected to their neighbors, or to their unseen, far-off countrymen, as they were depicted to be during times of scarcity and collective unrest?

This line of thought might seem to contradict the tradition of cooperative working relationships in rural communities—*comhar* in Irish—but thinking about self-preservation helps explain how this sharing economy actually functioned. Mutual help between farmers was vital throughout the agricultural year, especially for big jobs like mowing hay, and all blood-linked neighbors would assist each other in a large working party or *meitheal*.¹⁶ The Irish family was not a “clan, as anthropology uses the term. For there are no fast bounds and no rigidities; it is a system of potentialities.” Relatives were referred to as “friends,” and relationship was determined in ever-widening circles in the descent from a common ancestor. The practice of *comhar* was actually a form of mutual obligation, and anyone who failed to respond reciprocally could become estranged from the community. In English, the farmers said they had the “right” to help their friends, but

¹⁶ Discussed in Laird, *Subversive Law in Ireland*, 69–70, and in Jonathan Bell and Mervyn Watson, *Irish Farming, Implements and Techniques 1750–1900* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd., 1986), 131, 217.

in Irish they said, “Tá cóir orm,” which translates as “The right (or justice) is on me,” as in “I have an obligation” to help. Families with grown sons or sons-in-law would share their labor with their relations and would receive similar help in return. Families with no working-age men—such as childless couples or people considered “strangers” with no nearby relations—would not participate in *comhar*. They would have no obligation to help others, and no one would feel obliged to help them (although they might anyway). The extent of blood relationships was further defined by geography, since a relative living at a great distance could not take part, making the blood connection for all practical purposes useless. It was foolish to marry someone whose relatives lived too far away since the distance would make reciprocity untenable.¹⁷ The existence of such determinants in agricultural affairs would certainly carry over into other areas, such as the obligation to participate in communal agitation. Postcolonial scholar Heather Laird claims the Plan of Campaign succeeded in garnering tenant support, not just because of its leadership or vision or goals for Ireland, but “because the concept of co-operative resistance to threats to property and land was already deeply ingrained in Irish rural life.”¹⁸ At the bottom of it all was the acknowledgement that for every farmer’s self-preservation, communal assistance was required.

While the basic habits of local resistance were co-opted by political movements, that resistance was never just a corollary to those forces. From the 1840s onward, whenever a political movement surfaced that articulated their needs, angry tenants were ready to support it. It does not seem likely that their organizational prowess evaporated between peaks of political activity, only to erupt when a Parnell or an O’Brien snapped

¹⁷ Arensberg, *Irish Countryman*, 62–69.

¹⁸ Laird, *Subversive Law in Ireland*, 69–70.

their fingers. Rather, there was a homegrown, shared consciousness—reinforced by everyday resistance—that tenants had to behave in certain ways to make their voices heard. Communal action, whether anonymous or nationalized, was for most of the nineteenth century the only form of redress available to poor farmers beyond individual negotiations with their landlord.¹⁹ Beginning with the Encumbered Estates Acts of 1848 and 1849, there was a series of laws passed in parliament to deal with land tenure in Ireland, and some provided potentially beneficial measures, like the introduction of “judicial rents” (amounts set by a Land Commission, not the landlord).²⁰ The Encumbered Estates acts were designed to encourage the purchase of heavily indebted estates, with the long term purpose of bringing fresh capital and ideas into the Irish agricultural system. However, no record has been found that the De Freynes bought or sold any property under these acts.²¹ Each succeeding piece of land legislation from the 1840s on was focused on particular difficulties faced by landlords and their tenants, but whatever these laws did for larger farmers, they had a minimal effect on the lives of smallholders.²² By 1901, many De Freyne tenants were paying judicial rents, but even that was considered onerous in bad seasons; and the valuation records indicate that very few ever had the resources or inclination to take advantage of the opportunities to buy

¹⁹ In one example of an unsuccessful attempt to go above the landlord, a group of tenants on the De Freyne and Dillon estates wrote a resolution to Dublin Castle which “declared that great poverty and distress existed among the small farmers,” begging for government help to seed and drain their land. A local inspector sent by Dublin reported that “the statements in the resolution were an exaggeration of facts” and the request was dismissed. *Times*, 10 April 1883; *Freeman’s Journal*, 10 April 1883.

²⁰ Brief descriptions of the various acts appear in Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism*, 193-200.

²¹ Only a handful of Roscommon landlords appear in the records, with sales of £77,467 compared to £414,806 in Galway. *Incumbered Estates Commission (Ireland). Return of the proceedings of the Commissioners for the Sale of Incumbered Estates in Ireland, from their commencement up to the 1st day of January 1852.* (167). 23.

²² A detailed description of the various acts that dealt with rent and tenant purchase can be found in John P. Huttman, “Fenians and Farmers: The Merger of the Home-Rule and Owner-Occupancy Movements in Ireland, 1850–1915,” *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 3:4 (Winter, 1971) 183–91.

their farms. The ballot box did not offer much comfort either, despite the continuing expansion of the voting franchise for males over the years 1850–1900, and election of a nationalist ticket to parliament in 1880.²³

Tenant farmers were not the only residents in rural areas who were affected by inequities in land use, or by poverty, and bad weather, but they were the most likely to collaborate in protests. A separate rent-paying group, the herds, formed their own association in Roscommon in 1881–1882, “in a context of unrest among subaltern elements in the area,” but little activity was reported from that group. Herds had a difficult time deciding if they should join the national land movements, which opposed the grazing farms on which the herds’ livelihood depended.²⁴ Many herds are identified on the estate on Griffith’s in the 1850s and on the survey of the estate in 1894, but no accurate count is available (the 1881 census recorded 180 persons, male and female, with the occupation of shepherd in Castlerea PLU). On the 1901 census, twenty-five people identified themselves as “herds” in the five electoral divisions covering the estate. A much larger group, landless laborers (1,096, male and female, on the 1881 census in

²³ The Irish Franchise Act of 1850 gave the right to vote to any man with property worth £12, and successive acts expanded that to include most heads of households by 1884, including laborers. Connolly, *Oxford Companion to Irish History*, 215. However, lodgers, servants, and adult sons living their parents were not included. Representation did not necessarily ensure voters’ concerns would be heard in parliament, either. In the 1870s, both of the county’s representatives, the O’Conor Don and Charles French (eldest brother of Arthur, 4th Baron), opposed a land measure supported by farmers. The O’Conor Don explained that a “member of Parliament is not bound by the views of his constituents.” While both members were “eminently friendly to the tenant-farmers in theory...neither will frame a measure themselves, or support one framed by anybody else.” *Connaught Telegraph*, 30 September 1876. James J. O’Kelly and Andrew Cummins were elected as home rule nationalists in 1880 for Roscommon. Brian M. Walker, ed. *Parliamentary Elections Results in Ireland, 1802-1922* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy, 1978), 310.

²⁴ John Cunningham, “A Class Quite Distinct,” *The West of Ireland, New Perspectives on the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Carla King and Conor McNamara (Dublin: The History Press Ireland, 2011), 147.

Castlerea Union),²⁵ was also marginalized by the various land reform movements. J.J. Lee calls the agricultural laborer “the forgotten man of Irish history,” arguing that pre-Land League agitation was often shouldered by sub-tenants who were usually at odds with the tenant farmers to whom they paid rent, not with the land owner. Famine and changes in land use reduced the number of laborers, but there has also been “an act of collective amnesia” by historians and political leaders who overlooked the cottier class, designating the tenant farmer as the only true “victim” of land inequality.²⁶ Even though Land League rhetoric tried to include them, laborers did not stand to benefit in the same way from the changes in land laws as tenant farmers, and laborers were “historically reluctant to assert themselves in wider associational collectivities” such as those Clark describes. It is difficult to fix the number of non-land holding laborers living on the De Freyne estate in 1880, but the estate survey from 1894 shows there may have been some housing designed for them under the Labourers’ Act of 1883 in at least two townlands, the kind of “cottage scheme” that was often opposed by farmers.²⁷ By 1901, there were almost one thousand men on the estate who identified themselves as laborers to the census takers. Of course, many of them were farmers’ sons who may have worked their family farms as well as doing day labor elsewhere, but it is assumed that they did not hold land themselves. These outliers—herds and laborers—might not have been drawn to

²⁵ *Census of Ireland 1881: Area, Population and Number of Houses, Occupations, Religion and Education, Vol. IV, Province of Connaught C.3268*, 493. *Census of Ireland 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

²⁶ Joseph Lee, “The Ribbonmen,” *Secret Societies in Ireland*, ed. T. Desmond Williams (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1971), 35.

²⁷ Pádraig G. Lane, “Poor Crayturs,” *The West of Ireland, New Perspectives on the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Carla King and Conor McNamara (Dublin: The History Press Ireland, 2011), 46. The valuation records and estate survey map show nineteen holdings in Leitrim and eleven in Cloonfinglass consisting of a “house and bog garden” with no acreage that were valued at five shillings each in 1901. De Freyne estate survey and maps, III.iii. Two Land Valuation and Survey Books, 1894, MS 42,438/1–2, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

the Land League in the same way as tenant farmers, but they all lived in the same townlands, and went to the same markets, and churches, and dealt with each other day-to-day in various capacities. The participation (or reluctance to participate) by herds and laborers colors any appraisal of the extent of an associational mix breaching the boundaries of class and occupation on the estate during the Land War.

Conacre, Crime and Tenant Right: 1840–1860

Before starvation and disease effectively obscured other concerns, there were three forces in the 1840s that had the potential to inspire collective action on the De Freyne estate. The first two were national and aspirational: Daniel O’Connell’s Repeal crusade and the Young Ireland movement. The third was local, pragmatic, and focused on land: the struggle by tenants and landless laborers to obtain conacre, or small parcels of land rented for subsistence farming.²⁸ Roscommon’s newspapers were full of stories about Repeal and Young Ireland, so tenants would have been aware of the issues involved. However, there is scant evidence that either gained enough support on the estate to spark collective action. The *Messenger* and the *Journal* backed O’Connell, while the loyalist *Gazette* despised him, and all three were disdainful of the Young Irelanders and their challenge to O’Connell.²⁹ O’Connell held a “monster meeting” for Repeal in Roscommon town in 1843 that was said to attract 350,000 people, with local barristers, clergymen and gentry on the rostrum, including “Lord French,” who gave a testimonial to the movement.³⁰ This could have been Arthur French, who had become the 1st Baron in

²⁸ Labor was often exchanged in lieu of cash payments for rent of conacre. Connolly, ed., *Oxford Companion to Irish History*, 114.

²⁹ *Roscommon-Leitrim Gazette*, 4 December 1846.

³⁰ *Roscommon Journal*, 26 August 1843.

1839, and whose nephew would be the 4th Baron at the time of the strike. In 1801, Arthur's father had refused an earldom as he opposed the Union, so it would not be out of character for his son to support Repeal.³¹ Despite O'Connell's immense popularity, especially among the lower classes, his movement, like the romantic nationalism of Young Ireland, was mainly a mouthpiece for the concerns of the urban mid-to-upper classes, and had little of substance to offer the rural poor starved for land. One of the few nationalists seriously confronting land issues at the time was James Fintan Lalor. The Young Irelander envisioned the nationalization of property, but his ideas were rejected by nearly everyone (to resurface decades later through Michael Davitt and others). At the time, land issues were considered the domain of "secret agrarian rebels, whose terrorist methods appalled both the Irish Catholic middle class as well as the Protestant landed class."³² The organizational prowess of O'Connell's campaigns has been credited with giving all Irishmen a taste for collective action on a massive scale, and tenants near the estate had learned before the Famine how to raise large crowds to bargain for what they wanted.³³

Still, it was more common for those engaged in rural agitation in the 1840s to rely on communal ties and anonymity rather than on elite leadership or public display. Participants were overwhelmingly holders of small farms or landless laborers, who directed their wrath against those one or two steps up the social ladder, rather than at a landlord.³⁴ This kind of agrarian unrest was classified by the police as a crime, and the

³¹ Maurice French, *The Frenchs of Frenchpark* (Warminster, Wilts: Published by the author, 1999), 22.

³² Anne Kane, *Constructing Irish National Identity: Discourse and Ritual during the Irish Land War, 1879–1882* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 39–40.

³³ Reports from the 1830s show assemblies of 3,000 in Ballaghaderreen and 10–14,000 in Ballina, Co. Mayo, from which deputies were appointed to approach landlords with their grievances. Huggins, *Social Conflict in Pre-Famine Ireland*, 161.

³⁴ Coleman, *Riotous Roscommon*, 18–29; Lee, "The Ribbonmen," 28.

most commonly reported incident in Roscommon in the 1840s was sending a threatening letter. Administering oaths, obtaining arms, assault to persons, and injury to property were also prevalent. Although the police called these incidents “crimes”, many were spurred by social concerns. “Land” or “conacre” appear in a list of the “Supposed cause of outrage” for at least half of 270 incidents reported in Roscommon in early 1846. The most common cause cited for a crime was “To compel him to let conacre,” followed by “to increase wages for laborers” or “to prevent strangers from getting land.” Clearly the people responsible were not revolutionaries concerned with national issues, nor were they common criminals, but rather local people attempting to enforce communal values. Likewise, among other causes of “outrage” are actions that reflect social rather than political concerns: “To prevent him marrying a widow for whom others had proposed;” “To drive him out of the country, he having seduced two girls in the neighbourhood;” or “To compel him to send goods to Dublin by carmen instead of canal boats.”³⁵

While scholars have depicted agrarian agitation at this point in the nineteenth century as a reaction to modernizing forces like global markets and mechanization, others have credited rural populations with a more purposeful radicalism. In the former group of historians is Charles Townshend, who writes that “Much of Irish violence and intimidation in the nineteenth century was directed not by ‘extremists’ in any useful sense of the term, but by representatives of communities whose object was to maintain, not destroy, social order.”³⁶ Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh does not see these rural secret societies “as

³⁵ *Assault, &c. (Ireland), Return to an Order of the Honourable The House of Commons* dated 28 May 1846, 369, 33–41.

³⁶ Charles Townshend, *Political Violence in Ireland: Government and Resistance since 1848* (Print publication date: 1984), 9. Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: October 2011. DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198200840.001.0001.

a mode of direct action popular politics” either, especially when “set against the scale of O’Connell inspired-and-directed mass politics.”³⁷ In this view, agitators were not calling for societal upheaval, but rather for the chance to maintain equilibrium in a changing world by clinging to what had worked in the past. Kevin Whelan argues this was the case in the eighteenth century when “the Whiteboys and Rightboys, sought a return to the days when the moral economy blunted the impact of the real one.”³⁸

Other scholars have argued that these early forms of collective resistance, generally without elite leadership, were more than spontaneous, localized eruptions of discontent that looked backwards instead of into the future.³⁹ According to Michael Huggins, agrarian agitation in Roscommon had its own intellectual contours, distinct from O’Connell’s or Young Ireland’s interpretations of nationalism. He cites ideological networking facilitated by the exodus of seasonal labor from Roscommon to urban centers in England where many forms of radicalism incubated. Ideas generated abroad, like the republicanism of the French and American revolutions, and later trades union and Chartist discourse, traveled home with the workers to percolate in the Irish countryside, Huggins says. In return, the migrant workers brought traditions of Irish collectivism to urban lower-class organizations in England. “While archaic forms persisted, new layers of meaning and new ways of articulating meaning (often borrowed) were heaped on top

³⁷ Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, “Gaelic Ireland, Popular Politics, and Daniel O’Connell,” *Journal of the Galway Archaeological & Historical Society* 34 (1974/75), 25.

³⁸ Kevin Whelan, “An underground gentry? Catholic Middlemen in eighteenth century Ireland,” *The Tree of Liberty, Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity 1760–1830* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1996), 26, quoted in Huggins, *Social Conflict*, 40

³⁹ Clark cites “sophisticated” behaviors in agrarian societies like the use of oaths and strategic avoidance of legal prosecution. *Social Origins*, 83–84. “Perhaps the most enduring single impression left by Ribbonism is its efficiency—its foresight, its calculation even its sophistication.” Lee, “The Ribbonmen,” 31.

of old traditions, not supplanting them but adding supplementary languages to the repertoires of agrarian rebels.”⁴⁰

The strategies developed in these early collectivities proved adaptable and long-lasting. The power of the secret movements was implied, rather than actual, and established a deeply rooted sense of self-surveillance and regulation in the community. Even though there were probably many more crimes in the 1840s than appear in official reports, the “absolute level of ‘crime’ was considerably less important than the psychological construction placed upon each outbreak.” A threat from a secret organization “had its effect because of a fairly high expectation of retribution if it were ignored: in other words, it worked very much like what is ordinarily described as law.”⁴¹ High levels of organization and planning can be seen in the activities of tenant collectivities in Roscommon. For instance, in 1845, 3,000 people gathered near Frenchpark to measure pasture land “for the purpose of dividing it for conacre among the poor,”⁴² a complex enterprise which required communications, planning, and logistical expertise. Unfortunately, no record is left of the ultimate outcome of this collective action.

Other strategies included anonymous letters, which functioned like sophisticated agitprop, hectoring recalcitrant farmers into action. One, sent in Roscommon from “your Countrys regenerator Molly Maguire,” denounced some farmers as “a poor weak, condemned set to allow yourselves and your families to be starved or at least half starved and see before your eyes all the fine lands of that parish—to see the produce sent off

⁴⁰ Huggins, *Social Conflict*, 161.

⁴¹ Townshend, *Political Violence*, 8.

⁴² Edward Lucas, Esq, Report to Constabulary Office, Dublin Castle and Chief Secretary’s Office, 22 March 1845, Outrage Reports, OR/1845 Roscommon, NAI.

every year without once getting a mouthful off these in any form or even a days work.”⁴³

In rare cases, the agitation is revealed to be inspired by individual initiative. Just a few miles from Frenchpark, a figure called “Captain Burke” marked out other people’s property for conacre, and sent letters directing local people to dig it up.⁴⁴ The police identified him as Michael John Burke, who also called himself “Captain Smart.” He lived between Ballintober and Castleplunket (an area straddling the Sandford and Murphy estates). Characterized as the “leader of the people who are engaged in turning up lands” when he was arrested by the Irish Constabulary, he was considered so popular that those constables were reinforced by an escort of dragoons.⁴⁵ Before being sentenced to seven years’ transportation, he issued an appeal for clemency that was striking for its complete lack of unctuousness, and its flagrant accusations of cruelty to the poor by landlords, agents, and middleman graziers. Burke also organized public meetings, attended by hundreds of local people. “His story should not be dismissed as insignificant,” says Huggins, “for there were undoubtedly many more Burkes leading local and regional struggles.”⁴⁶

Agitation of this sort was deeply alarming to Roscommon landlords like Lord DeFreyne (Arthur, the 1st Baron), and they begged Dublin Castle for military protection, resulting in the arrival of the 2nd Dragoon Guards in Castlerea in 1845. Because of the “alarming state of the neighborhood,” the landlords also asked for an additional magistrate in Elphin, an extra sub-inspector, and one hundred additional police. A placard

⁴³ Anon. letter, March 1845, Outrage Reports, OR/1845 Roscommon, NAI.

⁴⁴ Edward Lucas, Esq., 20 March 1845, Report to Constabulary Office, Dublin Castle and Chief Secretary’s Office, Outrage Reports, OR/1845 Roscommon, NAI.

⁴⁵ *Northern Standard*, 29 March 1845.

⁴⁶ Huggins, *Social Conflict*, 152–53.

bearing Lord De Freyne's signature at the top of a list of other landlords and officials was designed to be posted in the area and warned about the penalties for agrarian crime. It described local conditions in bursts of bold typography:

Parties of Armed Men have dared to assemble, and march in procession at midnight, to the purpose of exciting terror, and inducing the peaceable Inhabitants to engage in unlawful designs, and have further DARED to ASSEMBLE IN OPEN DAY, TO TURN UP LAND.... We do not expect that any admonition on our part will influence the IDLE and the DISSOLUTE, who having no Lands in their own possession, respect not its possession by others, and care not what amount of increased taxation, caused by their misconduct, is placed upon the County.⁴⁷

While there is no evidence of named individuals on the estate proper who were involved in agitation, the reaction of De Freyne and other landlords to the disturbances implied that the threat felt real, and that local people must have been involved. In addition to the stick of armed protection, the baron offered a carrot to potential Captain Burkes by providing food and employment for his tenants in the early Famine years, activities for which he and his family were praised in the Dublin and London press.⁴⁸ It is difficult to accurately parse the implications of this praise, which often sounds like a public relations campaign, but it seems likely that this Lord De Freyne did genuinely try to help his tenants. In Frenchpark, it was reported, "everything is going on satisfactorily, owing to the admirable arrangements made by Lord de Freyne (sic) and Mr. Fitzstephen French, MP."⁴⁹ De Freyne sponsored a "stirabout kitchen...at which 120 people are daily fed,"⁵⁰ and he employed "550 men daily in the further improvement of his beautiful and

⁴⁷ Warning Poster, April 1845, Report to Constabulary Office, Dublin Castle and Chief Secretary's Office, Outrage Reports, OR/1845 Roscommon, NAI.

⁴⁸ When George French, uncle of the 1st Baron, sent money to help his own tenants during the Famine, his agent asked to whom he should give the funds. "To those who cannot pay it back," George replied. *Roscommon Messenger*, 3 November 1860.

⁴⁹ *Dublin Evening Mail*, 11 November 1846; *Times*, 13 November 1846.

⁵⁰ *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette*, 7 February 1848.

extensive demesne of Frenchpark.” If other landlords followed his example, it was suggested, there would be “little of local suffering or agrarian outrages.” De Freyne’s only reward would be “the blessings of a grateful population.”⁵¹ In 1848, an anonymous correspondent in the *Roscommon Journal* said that Lord De Freyne employed “above eleven hundred persons daily in the improvement of waste lands,” and distributed four hundred blankets to the poor. If more landlords followed suit “the hitherto turbulent and riotous portion of them [the tenants] would venerate the law, and become a grateful and contented people.” Praise was also extended to special constables who “will not allow any stranger to remain within the district,” and to the government for excluding the district from coercion (more on this below) since “the people appear most grateful for it” and did not want to destroy the confidence placed in them.⁵²

Fitzstephen (MP for Roscommon from 1832 until his death in 1873) was the 1st Baron’s brother, and actively promoted the image of Frenchpark as a place where, “notwithstanding the great distress, tranquility prevailed.” He said of his brother, “Nothing on his part would be left undone to assist his tenants and neighbours.”⁵³ Fitzstephen told a government panel in 1846 that, armed with a list of the destitute in each townland, he himself had put two thousand people to work within a matter of days. His brother donated timber to build nine kilns for oats, distributed wheat flour and Indian meal to tenants twice a week (serving three thousand in one day), as well as ordering fifty tons of rice from Liverpool and machinery from Dublin to build a mill.⁵⁴ The “exertions of Mr. French in introducing supplies of Indian corn and oatmeal on his own account”

⁵¹ *Observer*, 5 April 1846.

⁵² *Roscommon Journal*, 1 January 1848.

⁵³ *Nation*, 26 September 1846.

⁵⁴ *Roscommon Journal*, 17 October 1846.

were praised in the *Times*, and his “laudable” behavior was “borne out by the concurrent testimony of journals of all shades of politics.” The *Times* also commented on the state of employment in Frenchpark: “Task work, which was at first refused, is now cheerfully undertaken by the people, who are contented with the wages they are enabled to earn under that system, and those who require it are employed.” This stands in contrast to a report on the same page from nearby Athlone that described a “furious mob” surrounding the meeting house of the local relief committee, demanding work-tickets “be given indiscriminately to every person who chose to apply for them.”⁵⁵

The newspaper portrayal of the estate as an oasis of peace and good management naturally implied that unrest reigned elsewhere, but just as obvious is the implication that other landlords should emulate Lord De Freyne’s actions to forestall anarchy. The newspapers assumed, in the early days of the blight, that tenant unrest could be offset by a landlord’s magnanimity, and De Freyne’s pro-active response to the emergency may have persuaded some of his tenants to view him as their protector. In 1847, two hundred of them were sworn in as special constables to protect the estate from the Captain Midnight-style attacks which were carried out, presumably, by their neighbors.⁵⁶ De Freyne’s relationship with his tenants in the 1840s is thus riddled with inconsistencies, from the patriarchal charity reported in the press to the draconian tone of the placard described above. Still, tenants may have retained a communal memory of the 1st Baron De Freyne’s benevolence even after the danger of the Famine receded, although the major concern of the poorest tenants, the inequality of land distribution, was ultimately

⁵⁵ *Times*, 13 November 1846.

⁵⁶ *Times*, 22 October 1847; *London Daily News*, 18 November 1847.

not addressed. However, to a large degree small holders and landless laborers held strong farmers responsible for the lack of conacre, and not their common landlord.

The wasteland drainage projects described above were most likely those funded by a £24,000 loan that Lord De Freyne applied for in 1846 under the Land Improvement (Ireland) Act (Act 8th and 9th Vict., cap. 56), the first landholder in Ireland to apply under the aegis of the Court of the Exchequer.⁵⁷ Fitzstephen had already championed the idea of drainage work to provide income for tenants as soon as the potato blight began, urging Roscommon landlords “to insure constant employment to the people...against the possibility of their suffering from famine.” Of course, reclaiming wetlands would be beneficial to the French family, since so much of their land was bog. Fitzstephen implies as much by suggesting that this work might be “fairly remunerative to the proprietor,” in contrast to the projects proposed by the Board of Works in which “the capital of the country had been wasted on unprofitable works.”⁵⁸ The drainage project had its critics in England. A Liberal British newspaper, the *Liverpool Mercury*, railed against it and questioned Lord De Freyne’s intentions:

So the English nation, with its usual liberality, just makes a free gift of £2,150 per annum to his Lordship and his heirs in perpetuity... A batch of labourers, to be sure, are found in 10*d* a day, and a shilling’s worth of work for a few months; but Lord de Freyne has £2000 a year permanently added to his income.⁵⁹

Then, in 1848 Sir Benjamin Hall complained that Lord De Freyne violated the law by paying his laborers in meal and rent receipts instead of cash, in effect getting the work done for free, and pocketing the government grant. De Freyne begged ignorance of these

⁵⁷ *Times*, 30 December 1846; *London Daily News*, 1 January 1847; *Dublin Morning Post*, 1 April 1847.

⁵⁸ *Times*, 25 December 1845.

⁵⁹ *Liverpool Mercury*, 8 January 1847. “*Liverpool Mercury*,” *The British Newspaper Archive*, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/titles/liverpool-mercury>.

transgressions and blamed his contractor, saying all future payments would be to the workers in cash. “There was not in Ireland one landlord more anxious than his noble relative to do everything in his power for the benefit of his tenants, nor was there a tenantry in Ireland more contented nor with better reason,” Fitzstephen said in his brother’s defense. He offered a tenant petition to the House of Commons signed by 1,097 residents in the “Artagh district,” which included over two dozen De Freyne townlands. Concerned about the Liberal Party complaint against “your Lordship,” the statement said the undersigned tenants “not only were grateful for the employment we have received in such a time of general destitution, but that we consider all his arrangements satisfactory.”⁶⁰ As an example of a tenant-initiated action, the document must be evaluated with caution, especially considering that in 1851, half of the male population in Roscommon was illiterate.⁶¹

Yet, even if Lord De Freyne or his agent wrote the memorial and handed it to the tenants to sign, tenants would have welcomed any employment in 1848. The Castlerea Poor Law Union, which supported the local workhouse and other official forms of relief, was nearly insolvent because local landholders did not pay the rates. It was over £9,000 in arrears in 1848, and half of that was judged uncollectible. De Freyne was on a list of defaulters submitted to the Poor Law Commission, along with most of the major landholders in the area, including Dillon, Murphy, Taafe and Balfe.⁶² The local relief

⁶⁰ *House of Commons Sitting of Friday, June 23, 1848*, “Alleged Abuses under the Land Improvement Act,” cc. 1074–1079. *Dublin Evening Mail*, 26 June 1848; *Roscommon and Leitrim Gazette*, 8 July 1848; *The Pilot*, 26 June 1848.

⁶¹ *Census (Ireland): The Census of Ireland for the Year 1851. Part IV. Report on Ages and Education 1855*, XXX. [i], xxxv. Even by 1901, the illiteracy rate for males over five years was between thirteen and twenty-two percent. Figures derived from a search from *Census of Ireland 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

⁶² *Papers relating to proceedings for relief of distress, and state of unions and workhouses in Ireland, Fifth Series - 1848* [919], 763, 769.

board blamed the central Commission and its regulations for the lack of support among landholders. The law had created long-term debt by the construction of a workhouse and substituted the time worn system of local charity with institutional care. Reacting to a parliamentary inquiry about the reaction of the poor to the workhouse, local landlord and politician the O'Connor Don said, "I am sure most of them would very much prefer the precarious Charity they now receive, rather than go into the Workhouse." He was further questioned whether that "precarious Charity," which often came from those only slightly better off, would tend to "demoralize the industrious Occupier." "The Poor," he answered, his hackles clearly raised, "are not immoral."⁶³

The concerns of the poor were immediate, and their first line of respite had always been their landlord. It was therefore not surprising that a huge procession of tenants marched to the gates of Frenchpark Demesne in October 1846, led by a man carrying a loaf of bread on a pole. The delegation presented a petition personally to Lord De Freyne, imploring "your immediate aid and strong representation to Government as to the state of absolute starvation." Asking for food and jobs, the tenants acknowledged "how much you have done and are inclined to do, to assist the poor and defend them against famine." De Freyne promised to help and asked them to "continue to conduct themselves as they had hitherto done, peaceably and quietly," urging them to rely on "their natural friends and proprietors—their landlords." This was reportedly greeted with loud cheering and waving of hats.⁶⁴ The traditional *quid pro quo* of landlord-tenant obligations was intact.

⁶³ *Report from The Select Committee of the House of Lords on the laws relating to the relief of the destitute poor, and into the medical charities in Ireland; together with the minutes of evidence taken before the said committee, 1846* [694], 269.

⁶⁴ *Morning Chronicle* (London), 9 October 1846; *Athlone Sentinel*, 9 October 1846.

By assembling together at the gates of the demesne these tenants acted on their own initiative to get what they wanted through a public show of strength, and not through the anonymous voice of a midnight raid. At the same time, the food march on the demesne acknowledged their collective deference to “their natural friends and proprietors.” Deference was a social habit that oiled the mechanism of landlord-tenant relations, and regulated behavior. When armed men broke into the home of Patrick Coen, one of Lord De Freyne’s gamekeepers, they demanded his firearms, but Coen gave them only one gun, saying he could not give them the other because it belonged to Lord De Freyne. The leader of the intruders was reported to have “pledged his word it should be returned after New Year’s Day, as they should regret doing anything to his lordship, whose residence in the country and the very extensive employment he gave to the people, they considered of the utmost importance.”⁶⁵

Deference could just as easily be withdrawn. In the same month, shots were fired at Lord De Freyne’s nephew, John French, Esq. of Cloonyquin, in front of his own gate, apparently because “he had spoken disrespectfully of the Molly Maguires.”⁶⁶ Later, a sub-agent of Lord De Freyne received a threatening letter, and a “gang of armed men” in the night stopped a public car in which he was expected to have been travelling, while he was actually “barricaded in his own house.”⁶⁷ Also on the estate, another “armed party of ‘Molly Maguires’ molested a superintendent of drainage works and a herd; forcing both to swear oaths, the former to leave the country, the latter to give up his charge of

⁶⁵ *Sligo Journal*, 13 December 1845.

⁶⁶ Report from Elphin District, 6 December 1845, Report to Constabulary Office, Dublin Castle and Chief Secretary’s Office, Outrage Reports, OR/1845 Roscommon, NAI. *Times*, 6 December 1845; *Nenagh Guardian*, 10 December 1845.

⁶⁷ *London Evening Standard*, 11 December 1847.

cattle.”⁶⁸ There are claims that Lord De Freyne was hung in effigy at the same demesne gates where the cheering had taken place.⁶⁹ The *Roscommon Herald* hinted that he was the direct target of violence when it expressed gratitude that “the above nobleman is quite recovered from the recent attack that caused so much uneasiness to his numerous Friends.” Fitzstephen was in control, taking care of his brother, and “engaged in carrying out the vast improvements” on his brother’s estate which gave “constant employment to his numerous Tenantry.”⁷⁰

A year later, in November 1847, Strokestown landlord Major Denis Mahon was murdered while driving in his carriage, shocking the community and nation.⁷¹ The government “proclaimed” much of Roscommon following this murder and two other attacks on local gentry, passing legislation that called for increased numbers of police and strict restrictions on the possession of firearms.⁷² Inexplicably, while much of Frenchpark Barony fell under these provisions, Tibohine and Castlemore parishes, where most of the De Freyne estate lay, escaped official coercion.⁷³ It was at this same time that Fitzstephen organized some two hundred De Freyne tenants into armed units to aid the constabulary, “and distributed them into watches, which patrol the estate by night and will do duty during the winter.” One of these patrols chased a “party of armed ruffians,” who had tried to force a De Freyne tenant in Carrowreagh who had taken the property of an evicted farmer to give it back to the previous tenant. The attackers escaped, but the tenants in

⁶⁸ *Worcestershire Chronicle* 24 November 1847; *London Daily News*, 18 November 1847.

⁶⁹ Scally, *Hidden Ireland*, p.46; French, *Frenchs of Frenchpark*, 1999, 26.

⁷⁰ *Roscommon Herald*, 28 November 1846.

⁷¹ See Duffy, *The Killing of Major Denis Mahon*, and Vesey, *The Murder of Major Mahon*.

⁷² *Crime and Outrage (Ireland.)* A bill for the better prevention of crime and outrage in Ireland, 1847, 11 Vict.

⁷³ *Return of Counties, Districts, or Baronies of Counties, in Ireland, Proclaimed under the provisions of Crime and Outrage Act, from the Period of the Passing of that Act in 1847 and the discontinuance in the Session of 1856...*195, 4.

Fitzstephen's patrol vowed "that any disorderly intruders will be received with the butts or muzzles of their muskets."⁷⁴ A *Globe* correspondent observed:

I cannot give you any idea of how pleased the people appear at Mr. French being out with them, and the confidence it gave them. If all the gentry would turn out, the people would support them and the Ribbon system would at once be put down. But Major Mahon's death appears to have frightened many of them.⁷⁵

Some of the De Freyne tenants must have felt their best options lay in siding with the law, or in appealing directly to their landlord for help. Evidence from the Strokestown estate shows that Major Mahon gave favored treatment to tenants who he believed were not involved in combinations.⁷⁶ Lord De Freyne may also have made life easier for his tenants if he thought they did not participate in secret societies, and he may have provided the night patrols with firearms as well. However, the refusal of a victim like gamekeeper Coen to identify his attackers in court shows that even those pledged to support the landlord would not betray the local combinations, either out of loyalty or fear.⁷⁷ Yet, while it is possible that the same people who joined Fitzstephen's special constables could also have been digging up grazing land on alternate nights, it is far more likely that there was a sharp cleavage between those who joined the constabulary patrols and those who favored the "Molly Maguires." Although the agricultural agitation in the 1840s was not driven by any articulated class struggle, class was a determining factor in participation.⁷⁸ The landlords' placard spelled out the class divisions quite clearly when it defined those who possessed no land at all as "idle and dissolute," and thus far beyond

⁷⁴ *London Daily News*, 11 November 1847; *Reading Mercury*, 20 November 1847.

⁷⁵ *Globe*, 17 November 1847.

⁷⁶ Vesey, *Murder*, 19.

⁷⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 7 November 1846.

⁷⁸ Clark argues that violence during the Land War was not fueled by class struggle either, but by the need to get stragglers to join and stay in the movement, *Social Origins*, 101.

the reach of law or reason. Even if the ranks of agitators were drawn only from the very bottom of the social and economic scale, this demographic pool was quite large on the estate, given the number of small farms with a low value.

When the economy began to recover in the decade after the Famine, levels of agrarian crime recorded by the government diminished, and as the numbers of rural laborers were decimated by hunger, disease and emigration, the desperate need for conacre diminished as well.⁷⁹ Agitation in the countryside continued, however, as seen in continuing references to it in the press, but few specific cases near the estate were reported. Attitudes towards it may have been softening, since at least one local newspaper made the surprising suggestion that agrarian agitation in Roscommon could be justified as a natural reaction to unjust living conditions. After condemning “those diabolical crimes, at which every well-ordered mind, every lover of mankind, every man in whose heart religion has found any place at all, must shudder,” the *Roscommon Messenger* wondered if those crimes “have been made to effect a more satisfactory adjustment of the relations between landlord and tenant in Ireland.” The newspaper observed that too much blood had been shed in Ireland because of the “arbitrary expulsion of tenants from their homes.” Agrarian agitation was not an organized activity, it concluded, but rather a “war...waged by individuals” with “no general concert—no common understanding or purpose.” Pointing to the link between agrarian crime and the system of land tenure, the paper saw agitation as an individual response, such as a single farmer’s anger when his

⁷⁹ *Return of Outrages reported to the Constabulary Office during the year 1869, with summaries for the preceding years and Return of Outrages reported by the Constabulary in Ireland for the months of January and February 1870, 1870.* [C.—60], 24–25. For statistics on the decline of laborers after the Famine, see David Fitzpatrick, “The Disappearance of the Irish Agricultural Labourer, 1841–1912,” *Irish Economic and Social History* 7 (1980), 66–92.

family faced eviction. It did not, or would not, accept that those “diabolical crimes” represented any kind of collaborative energy or premeditated strategy.⁸⁰

Tenants were not able to argue for themselves politically after the Famine, even when voting rights were extended to £12 holders in 1850, since landlords were likely to influence tenant votes.⁸¹ In some parts of Ireland, tenants began to seek other ways to redress the wrongs they encountered, forming local tenant groups that were then drawn into larger, national organizations. Like the north-south combination realized in the Ulster custom campaign of the Tenant League, these combinations united people and localities that had never had much to do with each other before.⁸² The tenant right movement was the most prevalent collectivity in Ireland during the 1850s, which supported the “3Fs” of fair rents, fixity of tenure, and the free sale of a tenant’s investment in a property. However, while tenant right gained strength elsewhere in Ireland, it never caught on in Connacht, although organizational meetings were held in Roscommon Town in 1850 and 1851, and some local leaders tried to rouse support.⁸³ The *Roscommon Journal*, at that point under the editorship of Charles Tully,⁸⁴ remarked that “In every part of Ireland, with the exception of Connaught, this all important subject has been discussed. But in Connaught not even the shade of a shadow of Tenant Right ever existed, and consequently the People know little or nothing of its manifold blessings.”⁸⁵

⁸⁰ *Roscommon Messenger*, 27 October 1855.

⁸¹ R.V. Comerford, “Ireland 1850–70: Post-Famine and Mid-Victorian,” *A New History of Ireland V, Ireland Under the Union I, 1801–1870*, ed. W.E. Vaughan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 382.

⁸² R.V. Comerford, “Churchmen, tenants, and independent opposition,” *A New History of Ireland V, Ireland Under the Union I, 1801–1870*, ed. W.E. Vaughan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 400.

⁸³ *Roscommon Messenger*, 8 and 15 June 1850; *Roscommon Journal*, 5 April 1851.

⁸⁴ Charles was grandfather of Jasper Tully, who figured in the strike in 1901. Marie-Louise Legg, “Tully, Jasper Joseph,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁸⁵ *Roscommon Journal*, 13 April 1850.

The *Roscommon Messenger*, the Liberal weekly owned by Alexander O'Connor Eccles,⁸⁶ assured readers that tenant right was not communism or socialism, and scolded that, “not from one corner of Connaught that we could hear, has that cry rising from the rest of Ireland...been responded to by one single demonstration of sympathy.”⁸⁷ The Dublin Tenant League conference in August 1850 attracted support from Ulster, Leinster and east Munster, but, according to the *Nation*, “Even sleep does not bear so close a resemblance to death as does the torpor that is upon Connaught”⁸⁸ regarding tenant right. Much later, in 1869, O'Connor Eccles would become the chairman of a Roscommon tenant-right committee, supported by “Mr. Fitzgibbon, Castlerea” (no doubt this was Henry, father of John, a future leader of the strike). The committee advocated “the removal of the many complicated evils arising out of the many present system of land laws.” Committee members were local gentry and professional men, and no names common to tenants on the De Freyne estate were listed.⁸⁹ Possibly the initial lack of interest in Connacht occurred because the “core weakness of the early tenant right movement...lay in the fact that it was essentially a top-down movement rather than a genuinely grassroots organization.” There were more small-holders in Connacht than elsewhere and, after years of grinding poverty, tenants like those on the De Freyne estate were “more concerned with mere survival than the co-ordination of a mass agitation.” The lack of interest throughout Roscommon for the tenant right movement also suggests that farmers did not have enough surplus capital to have made the improvements that

⁸⁶ Marie-Louise Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism, The Irish Provincial Press, 1850–1892* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), p. 212. O'Connor Eccles was succeeded as editor by nationalist and Home Ruler, Luke P. Hayden, MP, who spoke for the tenants during the rent strike in 1901. O'Connor Eccles, “a strong Home Ruler,” was the father of writer Charlotte O'Connor-Eccles. *Times*, 15 June 1911.

⁸⁷ *Roscommon Weekly Messenger*, 18 May, 13 April 1850.

⁸⁸ *Nation*, 2 March 1850, quoted in Clark, *Social Origins*, 213.

⁸⁹ *Roscommon Messenger*, 30 October 1869.

gave that movement impetus elsewhere. “Even the concept of ‘fair rent’ had little real meaning for impoverished smallholders living on the economic margins.”⁹⁰

The baron himself may have blunted local interest in tenant right, especially among occupiers of larger holdings. A Sligo tenant of Lord De Freyne wrote to the *Gazette* in 1854 full of praise for the baron’s generosity, for bearing the costs of improvements by tenants and paying for drainage work. His “schemes towards ameliorating their past grievances have fully satisfied their wants.”⁹¹ When Arthur died in 1856, there was a new Lord De Freyne, his brother the Rt. Rev. John French (2nd Baron from 1856–1863). The records do not show if drainage work on the estate continued during John’s tenure (Arthur had £7,900 in grants approved in 1852).⁹² However, even when applications for loans dropped during the later 1860s due to extreme weather conditions and other causes, the 3rd Baron, Charles, another brother of Arthur and John, was one of the “principal” landholders participating in improvement projects in Roscommon, itself the site of “the great bulk of the Land Improvement Works” in western Connacht.⁹³ Another possibility for the lackluster reception for tenant right may be that it was already operating on the estate in an acceptable form. An observer, walking from Ballaghaderreen through Frenchpark and on to Castlerea in 1850 remarked that tenant right existed there just as it had twenty years before, “subject to the same customs

⁹⁰ Andrew Shields, “Serving the Farmer, The Tenant Right Movement in the West, 1848–57,” *The West of Ireland, New Perspectives on the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Carla King and Conor McNamara (Dublin: The History Press Ireland, 2011), 52, 58, 61.

⁹¹ *Roscommon and Leitrim Gazette*, 4 March 1854.

⁹² *Public Works, Ireland. Twentieth Report from the Board of Public Works, Ireland, with appendices*, 1852, 30.

⁹³ Richard J.J. Irwin, “Counties of Roscommon, Sligo, Mayo and East Galway,” *Public Works (Ireland): Thirty-Fifth Report to the Lords of the Treasury from the Board of Public Works, Ireland, With Appendices of the Year 1866*, 48.

regarding revaluations and revisions.”⁹⁴ Forty years later tenants were still selling the rights to their property on the estate, for example, John Hardiman Jr. “purchased” Henry Sampy’s farm in Buckhill for £205 in 1893, a remarkable price, given that the annual rent was only £8.⁹⁵

The 1860s began with a failure of the potato crop and a scarcity of fuel in the locality, and once again, Lord De Freyne, along with other local gentry, responded, distributing coal and timber for fuel, and clothing to the populace. The losses were not easily reversed through charity; by 1863, the Castlerea PLU reported that hardly anyone on the De Freyne estate could afford to pay the poor rates.⁹⁶ Agitation appears to have continued, although the constabulary claimed by 1864 there was only one offence for every 2,132 people in Ireland, compared to one for 648 in England and Wales, with arrests very close to the average there. However, a newspaper correspondent styling himself a Roscommon magistrate, a “Justice Christian,” accused the police of failing to protect the public by refusing to arrest offenders. He cited forty-nine instances of outrage like threatening letters and fires for which there was only one detention and no arrests. These crimes, he said were “striking terror into the hearts of hundreds of families, who could not retire to rest at night without being liable to have flames for their winding sheets, nor walk out of their dwelling without the ever-present risk of being shot dead, or beaten to death by a band of assassins.” The Irish Constabulary inspector general’s office countered the justice’s accusation by saying that the number of offenses was inflated

⁹⁴ Letter signed by “A Connaught Ranger,” *Dublin Weekly Nation* 18 May 1850.

⁹⁵ *List of sales by Tenants of their interests in farms on Lord De Freyne’s estate showing vendor, vendee and am’t paid for Purchase Money*, II.v. Tenant agreements & assignments, 1883-1903. MS 50,329/2/18–19, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁹⁶ *Roscommon Journal*, 4 January 1862; 31 January 1863.

locally by those hoping to get compensation for injuries and property damage, and that the low arrest record “arises not from the inefficiency of the police, but from the disinclination of aggrieved or injured parties to prosecute.”⁹⁷ It is impossible to say if the crimes “Justice Christian” highlighted were perpetrated for social reasons, like those listed above from 1846. What is clear is that the populace preferred to be policed by itself, rather than by the Irish Constabulary.

Fenians: 1860–1878

If tenant right, which embraced legislative solutions to the problems facing Irish farmers, did not energize De Freyne tenants and their neighbors into collective action, the emergence of physical force nationalism in the 1860s left a more lasting impression. The Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), also called the Fenians, promoted Irish nationhood by any means necessary, including physical force. The movement did not attract huge numbers of rural recruits across Ireland at first, possibly because leaders tended to come from urban backgrounds, and because it foregrounded Irish independence before social and land reform.⁹⁸ Agrarian agitation in Ireland had a checkered relationship with Fenianism: while Fenians promised the end of landlordism that promise was always contingent on political separation. In the early days of the IRB in Roscommon, the idea that arms and soldiers would arrive from the United States to free Ireland was roundly denounced in a local headline as “The Hallucination of the Fenians.”⁹⁹

Yet, local support for the IRB appears to have grown quickly. In 1866 a shipment of gunpowder and shot was confiscated in Boyle on its way by rail to John Coleman of

⁹⁷ Constabulary Notes and clippings 1864, MS 7619, NLI.

⁹⁸ Clark, *Social Origins*, 201–2; Bew, *Land and the National Question, 1858–82*, p. 40.

⁹⁹ *Roscommon Messenger*, 30 September 1865.

Frenchpark.¹⁰⁰ The only John Coleman in Griffith's Valuation held forty-four acres from Lord De Freyne in Corracoggil South. Two others from Cloonshanville, Andrew Cruise and Martin Morrisroe, were arrested as suspected Fenians the same year. According to Griffith's, Cruise rented a house from Lord De Freyne's tenant Michael Reilly. The only Morrisroe in Cloonshanville was a Thomas, who rented a house from Lord De Freyne on a parcel which was part of the graveyard of the medieval Cloonshanville Abbey.¹⁰¹

Neither of the arrested men appears to have been a tenant farmer, but they could certainly have been sons of tenant farmers, agricultural laborers or artisans, groups that have been linked to Fenian membership.¹⁰² In a further indication of the popularity of the movement locally, Douglas Hyde recounted many conversations he overheard as a boy about local Fenians, in the cottages of tenants living near Frenchpark, well into the 1870s.¹⁰³

Another local Fenian, and a Dillon tenant, was Edward "Ned" Duffy, who was born in Ballagherreen and raised in Loughglynn.¹⁰⁴ He was reputed to be the main organizer for the movement in Connacht and achieved wide recognition as an IRB leader. A confidante of James Stephens, Duffy was arrested along with Stephens and others in 1865, and was accused of distributing Fenian propaganda in Castlerea, and of manufacturing ammunition. Sentenced to Millbank Prison in London, Duffy died there in 1868 from a combination of an existing case of tuberculosis and official neglect. After his arrest, his sisters, who were teachers in Loughglynn, were dismissed from their posts by

¹⁰⁰ *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 27 March 1861.

¹⁰¹ *Roscommon Messenger*, 3 March 1866.

¹⁰² Clark, *Social Origins*, 203; Bew, *Land and the National Question*, 38.

¹⁰³ Janet E. Dunleavy, Gareth W. Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde: A Maker of Modern Ireland* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press: 1991), 54–55, 57.

¹⁰⁴ Desmond McCabe, "Duffy, Edward," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*; Bew, *Land and The National Question*, 41, 45; Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, "The Fenian Movement," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 2 August 1885; *Western Daily Press*, 11 November 1865; *Freeman's Journal*, 15 November 1865; "Loughglynn History," *Discover Mayo*, <http://www.mayo-ireland.ie/en/towns-villages/loughglynn/loughglynn-history.html>.

Lord Dillon's agent, Charles Strickland, who also was an agent for Lord De Freyne at the time.¹⁰⁵ Buried in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin with his fellow Fenians, Duffy was also honored with a large stone memorial in Loughglynn erected in the 1960s near the place where his sisters taught school. Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, who was incarcerated with him at Millbank, wrote the thirteen-stanza "Lament for Edward Duffy" in his honor. The poem hints at strong support for the Fenian movement near the De Freyne estate:

I tried to get to speak to you before you passed away,
As you were dying near to me and far from Castlerea...
In the dead house you are lying and I'd wake you if I could;
But they'll 'wake' you in Loughglynn 'Ned, in the cottage by the wood.

Local tradition reveals a lasting regard for Duffy in the area and draws a direct line from Fenianism to the transfer of land ownership after the land act of 1903. A woman from Driney, Mary Kate Cafferkey, remembered hearing that Duffy would come home every weekend from his work with the Fenians. He would pray in the local chapel in Loughglynn and afterwards, roughhouse with local boys and, "perhaps he gave them a lesson on rebellion and revolution, which was now filling the air, as they walked beside that shady demesne." People participated in the Land War when it began in 1879, Cafferkey said, "because the youths who talked with Eddie Duffy were mature men now, with understanding, and they joined the League." After the landlord class was gone (presumably Cafferkey mean after the land acts of 1903 and 1909), Eddie's companions were "old and bent," but "they saw one victory achieved, they were the owners of the soil." Cafferkey's remembrances, housed in the National Folklore Collection, is repeated almost word-for-word and without citation in Loughglynn native Vera McDermott's

¹⁰⁵ Strickland was replaced in 1870 by Valentine Blake, the brother-in-law of Lord De Freyne. *Connaught Telegraph*, 6 April 1870; *Irish Times*, 12 April 1870.

memoir, *The Woodlands of Loughglynn*. These tales show how personal connections and local topography can be infused with political meaning. Cafferkey and McDermott both bemoan the later destruction of the “cottage by the wood” by the CDB in the 1890s, and then later in the mid-1900s, the destruction by the Electric Supply Board of trees “which O’Donovan Rossa mentioned, which once gazed down on the home of Eddie Duffy...leaving hardly a landmark to show where a patriot trod.”¹⁰⁶

There was a shift in public perception across Ireland after 1867, and historian Vincent Comerford has argued that “Once the Fenians had been shown to pose no serious threat of revolution they became objects of sympathy and a pretext for public demonstrations.”¹⁰⁷ The Amnesty Campaign, a national movement to free Fenian prisoners, gave radical separatists and more conservative nationalists the opportunity to join forces under the same banner. In 1869, two weeks before a national amnesty rally would be held in Dublin, twenty-five thousand people gathered in Roscommon town to demand the release of Fenian prisoners. A large contingent arrived from Castlerea by train, complete with a marching band. There is no proof that tenants from the De Freyne estate were in the crowd, but it is likely they were. The speakers were equivocal: they supported the Fenian prisoners, but not Fenianism. According to one priest, the people had gathered, “not by any means to express your approval of the Fenian organization,” but to call for amnesty for the prisoners. O’Conor Eccles told the assembly that, “no matter how mistaken might have been the means,” the prisoners had suffered nobly for

¹⁰⁶ “A Local Hero, Eddie Duffy, Fenian,” National Folklore Collection, The Schools’ Collection, Volume 0240, 415–424, www.duchas.ie; Vera McDermott, *The Woodlands of Loughglynn* (Little Longstone, Derbyshire, 1998), 25–28.

¹⁰⁷ R.V. Comerford, “Gladstone’s first Irish enterprise, 1864–70,” *A New History of Ireland, V, Ireland Under the Union I, 1801–70*, eds. F.X. Martin, P.J. Byrne, W.E. Vaughan, Art Cosgrove, J.R. Hill, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 439.

Ireland, and deserved to be set free.¹⁰⁸ Did the thousands of people who traveled there that day agree that the means had been mistaken? Or did speaker after speaker encourage them to support amnesty, and to simultaneously reject Fenianism, because they thought many in the crowd needed to be so convinced?

After their unsuccessful rising in 1867, Fenians infiltrated other political pastures, like Home Rule or land reform, without abandoning their earlier strong attitudes about political separation. According to Bew, the “ideology and practices of ‘agrarianism’ appeared to become more and more significant among Connacht Fenianism in the very early 1870s.” This prepared “an audience—or at least the possibility of a receptive hearing” for the inception of the Land League in 1879.¹⁰⁹ Donnacha Lucey describes how Fenianism re-emerged in County Kerry in the late 1870s in a kind of agrarian/separatist *mélange* that particularly appealed to “the large cohort of ‘young men’” with “social frustrations owing to an abrupt decline in marriage and inheritance opportunities,”¹¹⁰ a demographic also well-represented in Roscommon.¹¹¹ In the late 1870s, the IRB had much greater appeal in the western counties as “numbers of hard-pressed smallholders... were attracted to the brotherhood because it promised them the opportunity to mobilise (sic) in support of their perceived economic interests.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *Roscommon Messenger*, 2 October 1869.

¹⁰⁹ Bew, *Land and the National Question*, 41–45.

¹¹⁰ Donnacha Séan Lucey, *Land, Popular Politics and Agrarian Violence in Ireland, The Case of County Kerry, 1872–86* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2011), 56–58.

¹¹¹ The social backgrounds of Fenians is discussed in R.V. Comerford, “Patriotism as Pastime: The Appeal of Fenianism in the Mid-1860s,” *Irish Historical Studies*, 22:87 (March 1981), 239–250.

¹¹² R.V. Comerford, “The politics of distress, 1877–82,” *A New History of Ireland VI, Ireland Under the Union, II 1870–1921*, ed. W.E. Vaughan (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 29.

Beginning in 1878, Fenianism was more officially amalgamated with agrarian issues under the New Departure.¹¹³

The 1870s began with legislation that gave some legal support for tenant right, followed ten years later with an act which established a Land Commission to facilitate tenant purchases of their farms, and which began to set rent through the courts.¹¹⁴ Neither of these laws offered much comfort to small farmers. Outside factors, like a worldwide depression, the failure of the local potato crop, a drop in the need for migratory workers in Britain, bad weather, and low prices on the global market, forced tenants again to seek reductions in rent in the late 1870s. A Roscommon county inspector noted that the holders of land valued under £10, like many of the De Freyne tenants, were “really the greatest sufferers having perhaps one or two cows, but who are now denied credit, even a stone of meal... If these men are forced to part with their cow... they are utterly and hopelessly ruined.”¹¹⁵ In the area spiraling out from Castlerea, an outsider said that “the exceptional year of disastrous seasons has brought a crisis in the affairs of the farmers... their poor yield of potatoes was destroyed to the extent of one-half by disease... tenants being unable in the brief interval between the great rains and the premature snow and frost to dig up all the potatoes and save their peat too.”¹¹⁶ What is known as the Land War would begin in 1879.

¹¹³ Described in Bew, *Land and the National Question*, 46–73, and Comerford, “The politics of distress,” 28–34.

¹¹⁴ Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism*, 196.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Clark, p. 234 from testimony by Captain Straight to the Local Government Board, 27 February 1880.

¹¹⁶ *Chicago Times*, 8 February 1880.

CHAPTER 2: AGITATION 1879–1901

The Land League: 1879–1885

People in Frenchpark showed great enthusiasm when young Arthur French reached his “majority” and officially took over as the 4th Baron at the age of twenty-one in 1876. There was a lavish celebration on the demesne, and a procession through Frenchpark under triumphal arches to greet him as he returned from “his continental tour.” Newspaper coverage referred to the French family as having “an ancestry untarnished by a single act of oppression towards an ill-fated and down-trodden people.”¹ Fireworks, bonfires on the hillsides and a reception for three hundred under a “marquee” on the demesne grounds followed the procession. The iconography of the celebration bears reflection. Stretched out in front of Thomas McGarry’s public house in Frenchpark was “a beautiful banner of green artistically trimmed with rosettes” with “Welcome home Scion of a Noble family” on one side and “God Save Ireland” on the other. Another banner bore the De Freyne arms, and the words “Cead Mille Faltha” and “God Save Ireland” over a crownless harp. The decoration outside Michael Giblin’s public house said, “Welcome to our Noble Lord.” Five years later, Thomas McGarry was the president of the Frenchpark branch of the National Land League, and Michael Giblin was its treasurer.²

The Land League, established in 1879 in County Mayo, advised tenants to pay their landlords a rent equivalent to Griffith’s Valuation rate (set in the 1850s in Roscommon) and, if evictions occurred, to ensure that those farms remained vacant and

¹ *Connaught Telegraph*, 15 July 1876.

² *Roscommon Journal*, 22 January 1881; “The Irish Land League Returns (monthly),” 17.706 (3) Co. Roscommon, The Land League Collection, NLI.

out of the hands of new tenants and landgrabbers. Clark argues that the Land League was built on new alliances between merchants, educated townspeople, and farmers. It encouraged people to move away from their old attachments (such as the patriarchal/deferential relationship between landlord and tenant) to more “associational” allegiances, defined by common interests, that reached across the boundaries of family, parish, and social standing. Those who assumed leadership roles became the countryside’s new elites: priests, shopkeepers, publicans and large farmers. New social groups emerged, he argues, as small farmers began to find themselves in close contact with large farmers for the first time, and as the population of landless laborers melted away. “In the post-famine period, nearly all-important power struggles were waged by active collectivities tied together primarily by common interests and objectives rather than by communal bonds,” he observed.³

Land League branches were soon established on and near the estate, and those branches communicated regularly with the Dublin directory. As publicans and merchants with established operations in Frenchpark,⁴ McGarry and Giblin reinforce Clark’s conclusions about a new elite leadership that emerged after the Famine. However, their participation in Lord De Freyne’s celebration emphasizes how the social change driving the new collectivity never followed a straight path. It was a slow, indeterminate process in which people could just as easily embrace feudal festivities honoring a new baron as they could entertain a tenant organization dedicated to overthrowing the system that supported him. Of course, as merchants, these leaders had many conflicting interests, and

³ Clark, 305, 358, 356.

⁴ Slater’s *Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1881* (Manchester: Isaac Slater, 1881) p. 34; *Census of Ireland 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

they would naturally be inclined to encourage tenant farmers to pay their shop bills before paying rent to the landlord. They might also be inclined to ignore basic tenets of the League when it suited their purposes, as Patrick Rabbitt of Moyne, then president of the Fairymount branch, did when he took over the farm of an evicted tenant, Mary Rogers of Barnacawley in the 1890s. Rabbitt, who was “a respectable farmer and country shopkeeper,”⁵ allowed her to live in her own house at the salary of one penny a month as a caretaker, so she was basically a servant or employee, not a tenant. Their agreement could be terminated at a month’s notice by either side, or “by the misconduct of said Mary Rogers.”⁶ Rabbitt may have acted out of neighborly concern or he may have just wanted her land, but what he did was directly contrary to the League maxim “never to take land from which a tenant has been evicted.”⁷

Inconsistencies in behavior like this hint at the persistence of class distinctions and self-interest within the newly integrated collective, as sturdy townsmen appear reluctant to sever ties with a nearby benefactor and nobleman, and a well-off merchant and farmer manipulates the future of a poor widow. Clark admits that the new relationships he observed among large and small farmers and tradesmen were based on marketplace activities rather than personal interactions. Hagglng over the price of store cattle may not have made them friends (and obviously did not erase differences in their standards of living, economic power and material interests), but it did help create the

⁵ *Freeman’s Journal*, 9 March 1899.

⁶ Rabbitt-Rogers Caretaker agreement, II.v. Tenant agreements & assignments, 1883–1903, MS 50,329/2/18–19, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁷ As proclaimed by the Frenchpark League branch, *Irishman*, 7 August 1880. Three years later, Rabbitt was mysteriously crushed to death under his own cart, which had been full of sacks of flour and other provisions. His death was ruled an accident caused by darkness on a road “in an unprotected state.” *Freeman’s Journal*, 9 March 1899.

kinds of networks that facilitated large-scale collective action.⁸ Such a network emerged in Frenchpark, where the leadership of the League branch illustrated how Clark's "new elites" anchored the rural power structure. The branch was formed in 1880 at a meeting that reportedly attracted seven thousand people. Jordan Loughlin, a Frenchpark blacksmith and leather dealer, was named the first president.⁹ Loughlin went on to serve as treasurer of the branch until resigning in 1881 because of ill health, promising to do "all in his power to advocate the cause," as he saw no other way to save the Irish nation.¹⁰ (An old man by 1901, Loughlin helped frightened tenants pay their rent secretly to Lord De Freyne during the strike.) Besides McGarry and Giblin, who were grocers as well as publicans, the other leaders of the branch were also town residents who owned shops or had professions other than, or in addition to, tenant farming. They included vice president William Morris, a baker and shopkeeper, along with honorary secretaries Patrick J. Cullen, the owner of the De Freyne Arms, the hotel where they held meetings (and who supplied the Frenchpark Demesne kitchen with supplies, according to a shopping list in the De Freyne papers), and Joseph Finerty, a baker, grocer, and publican. Among the committee members were Bartly Higgins, a draper and grocer; Jasper Tully, owner of the *Herald*; James King, a tailor, and John Lavin, an egg merchant who became a leader in that industry (an IRB member, he was memorialized by Maud Gonne in 1901).¹¹ In Castlerea, the president of the local branch was Henry Fitzgibbon, a draper, and father of John Fitzgibbon, the future strike leader (Henry was already mentioned in connection

⁸ Samuel Clark, "Strange bedfellows? The Land League alliances," *Land Issues in Modern Ireland*, eds. Fergus Campbell and Tony Varley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 101.

⁹ *Nation*, 7 August 1880.

¹⁰ *Roscommon Journal*, 22 January 1881. Details on individual occupations from *Slater's Directory, 1881*, 33–34; *Slater's Royal National Commercial Directory of Ireland, 1894* (Manchester: Isaac Slater, 1894), 50.

¹¹ *United Ireland*, 20 November 1897.

with a tenant-right organization in the 1860s).¹² Many of these men continued in leadership positions after the movement was reconfigured as the Irish National League.

The influence of this new elite cadre is illustrated by the election of 1880, when Roscommon voters (those with property valued at £12 or more) rejected the decades-long occupancy of the county's two parliamentary seats by the noble French and O'Conor families, and elected Parnellite home rulers James J. O'Kelly and Andrew Cummins in their place. (Neither were local residents, but both were associated with the IRB and the Land League.)¹³ The election reveals a change in the allegiances of the merchant and strong farmer classes, but it does not tell us much about the disenfranchised tenants and laborers. Furthermore, the change that the parliamentary election represented did not extend to local government. When Parnell told the Irish people in 1881 to wrest control of the local boards of guardians from the landlord classes, many unions across Ireland complied,¹⁴ but Castlerea did not. The chairman of the local board in 1883 was landlord Thomas G. Wills Sandford, with the O'Conor Don and Charles French (brother of Arthur, 4th Baron) serving as vice chairmen. This represented little change from the 1860s, when Sandford held the same position and Lord De Freyne (Charles, 3rd Baron, father of Arthur and Charles) and the O'Conor Don were vice chairmen.¹⁵ In his study of the political makeup of the boards of poor law unions, William Feingold demonstrated that the Castlerea PLU (along with Boyle next door) maintained what he called the most

¹² *Roscommon Messenger*, 26 June 1880.

¹³ Walker, ed., *Parliamentary Election Results, 1802–1922*, p. 310. C.J. Woods, "Commins (sic), Andrew," and Owen McGee, "O'Kelly, James Joseph," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

¹⁴ Virginia Crossman, *Local Government in Nineteenth-century Ireland* (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast, 1994), 53.

¹⁵ *Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory of the United Kingdom for the year 1868*, 1218; *Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the year 1883*, 1152.

“conservative” structure for a board of guardians, that is, with three landowners and no elected tenant members, until at least 1886. Other unions, particularly in Munster and far western Connacht, were “radicalizing,” adding one to three tenant members in place of landowners on their boards during this period.¹⁶ By 1896, two years before the poor law system would be replaced by elected county councils, the Castlerea union’s chairman was the O’Conor Don and the vice chairman was Charles French.¹⁷ Feingold reads the move towards radicalism on the boards of guardians as a “separate, self-sustaining movement carried on by local politicians” distinct from the national movements. He says this radicalizing process happened because there was “a class of educated, attentive, and business-like administrators—successful farmers and shopkeepers who believed they had earned the right to exercise power but who were denied that right by the existing value system.” These changes on the boards were influenced greatly by local circumstances, which would include factors like the personalities of the landowners and their relationships with tenants.¹⁸ But even assuming that landholders like the French and O’Conor families had maintained continuing, friendly influence over the local tenantry, where were the educated farmers, shopkeepers, and administrators in the Castlerea PLU? They did become the backbone of the local Land League branches, and they did change the county’s representation in parliament, but they were not able, or were not inclined, to topple landlord power from the local board of guardians.

There are further indications that the new elite amalgamation of farmers and townsmen had difficulty establishing a consistent voice on the estate. In the early winter

¹⁶ Feingold, *The Revolt of the Tenantry*, 198–200.

¹⁷ *Thom’s Irish Almanac and Official Directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the year 1896*, 1156.

¹⁸ Feingold, *The Revolt of the Tenantry*, 240–41.

of 1879, only two months after the formation of the Land League in County Mayo, Parnell and Davitt appeared in Castlerea before a crowd of over five thousand to demand reduced rents and peasant proprietorship. Letters read from Roscommon MPs Charles French and the O’Conor Don were greeted with taunts and groans from the audience. French said he refused to attend because such a meeting would “make use of the distress which unfortunately exists to give certain agitators and adventurers an opportunity of speaking and thereby spreading dissension and revolution through the country.” To the approval and cheers of the audience, someone on the podium named “M. Lavin,” identified as secretary of the local branch, tore up French’s letter and tossed the pieces into the cheering crowd.¹⁹ That summer, the Fairymount branch of the Land League welcomed two hundred new members, who promptly approved rules adopted by the executive council in Dublin. They vowed to uphold those rules “at the sacrifice of our lives, or the confiscation of our property.” Secretary Michael Lavin, almost certainly the man on the podium who tore up Charles French’s letter, proposed an addendum to that resolution. While landlordism was to be condemned, he said, “there are some landlords whom I do not think it just to stigmatize,” especially Lord De Freyne, “whose Christianity and tender feelings for his tenants caused him to use every means to relieve his tenants that were in distress.” The Fairymount branch then officially thanked De Freyne for “his indulgence to his tenants that are in arrears” as part of the official Land League resolution.²⁰

Did this nod to the landlord mean that people were conflicted about their allegiance to the League, or that they were keeping all options on the table, or both? Lord

¹⁹ *Munster Express*, 13 December 1879.

²⁰ *Nation*, 31 July 1880.

De Freyne had borrowed £5,100 “during the distress in 1879” and added that to his own funds to provide drainage work for tenants. He said he remained on the property to help his tenants as long as possible, and only pressed for rent collections after a good harvest in 1880. The tenants refused to pay unless, as advised by the League, he granted an abatement, so unable to pay his own bills, he closed his estate and left Ireland for a short time (perhaps there was an element of fear in his decision). The baron said his tenants had always been well treated, were not charged extra for turf rights, and had not had a rent increase since he assumed the title except once by court order. They had always been allowed to sell their interest in the farms, he claimed, and there were no evictions within his memory. Tenants’ memories may have been longer, however, because De Freyne said that their attitudes had become “much worse.”²¹

Those worsening attitudes were manifested in bursts of aggressiveness throughout the 1880s and into the next decade. In January of 1881, additional police were posted to the baronies of Boyle, Castlerea and Frenchpark to curtail activities like the celebrations that took place in Frenchpark, Ballagherreen, and Loughglynn after a constable died from injuries sustained during a “riot” in County Mayo. Injuries were recorded at another “riot” at a League meeting to support tenants on the Murphy estates nearby, where ten leaders were arrested, and banners confiscated.²² In 1882, De Freyne’s agent, Henry MacDougall, said he would accept one year’s rent from farmers who were behind on

²¹ “Statement of Lord De Freyne,” to John O’Hagan, undated, Correspondence related to the Land War, 1883–1904, VII.i. MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI. Despite the catalog date, this and an accompanying letter from O’Hagan to Lord De Freyne were probably written in 1881 or early 1882 due to references to Irish Chief Secretary William Forster and De Freyne’s land agent, MacDougall, both of whom were serving during this time. Forster resigned in May 1882, Richard Hawkins, “Forster, William Edward,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. MacDougall was replaced in 1887, G.M. Gusty to Lord De Freyne, 31 October 1887, Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, VII.i. MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

²² *Worcester Journal*, 29 January 1881; *Edinburgh Evening News*, 8 April 1881, 10 October 1881.

payments, and even supplied them with the paperwork and instructions they needed to apply for the remaining funds under the 1882 Arrears Act. The tenants, described as being “of the very poorest class,” turned down his offer, demanding instead a rent reduction of six shillings, eight pence in the pound (the same amount they would demand in 1901 to match the “Dillon rent”).²³ They were also reported to have asked for Griffith’s as a base value, as suggested by the League. Shortly thereafter signs from “Captain Moonlight” began to appear, promising certain death to any tenant who paid before everyone on the estate was charged a rent based on Griffith’s.²⁴

In Frenchpark, a thousand tenants refused to pay Lord De Freyne’s rent, and it was reported that anyone walking through Castlereagh “will see at every corner the words ‘Pay No Rent’ written on walls &c. in large capital letters in chalk.”²⁵ Armed and disguised men beat a De Freyne tenant suspected of paying his rent and “cut off a large quantity of his wife’s hair, also beating her severely.”²⁶ Thomas Flanagan of Derrylahan, a De Freyne tenant with eleven children on twenty acres, went to court to get compensated for injuries he received when he was beaten by a huge crowd in Ballaghaderreen. Boycotted for paying his rent, Flanagan did not name his attackers, although the police suspected he knew them.²⁷ Early in 1882, more troops were sent to Frenchpark from the 1st Battalion North Staffordshire who were stationed in Athlone.²⁸

²³ *Nenagh Guardian*, 25 March 1882; “Statement of Lord De Freyne,” to John O’Hagan, undated, Correspondence related to the Land War, VII.i. MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI. The Arrears Act hit Lord De Freyne particularly hard, having “£16,500 extinguished in arrears on his Roscommon rental of which he recovered £5,900.” Terence Dooley, *The Decline of the Big House in Ireland: A Study of Irish Landed Families, 1860–1960* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 2001), 96.

²⁴ *Leinster Express*, 25 March 1882.

²⁵ *Nation*, 3 December 1881.

²⁶ *Roscommon and Leitrim Gazette*, 7 January 1882.

²⁷ *Westmeath Examiner*, 16 December 1882.

²⁸ *St. James Gazette*, 11 January 1882.

Shortly after this, the Land League, outlawed in October 1881, was refashioned as the Irish National League, with a broader nationalist agenda.²⁹ On the De Freyne estate, despite the shift in national goals, rent resistance continued as before. Panicked by the continued agitation, Lord De Freyne begged Irish Chief Secretary William Forster to petition the government to provide “any facilities for recovering my rents and defeating the combination against all law and order which at present exists on my estate.” He told Forster that tenants were threatening to shoot his agent if he proceeded against them legally. Claiming he was owed £36,583 in back rent, he pointedly told Forster he was still had to pay “income tax and quit rent... Tithe rent charges and poor rates” as well as his mortgage and family charges. De Freyne’s solicitor, John O’Hagan (no relation to the Young Irlander of the same name), advised his client against evictions or distraining property because new regulations made such actions “useless against holdings of a few acres on the thickly populated estates like yours.” Legal costs could be astronomical, and in some cases, landlords could not recover them.³⁰ Nevertheless, in March of 1882, hundreds of writs and ejectment processes were filed against tenants on the De Freyne estate.³¹

In September of 1883, there were reports of a settlement,³² and the following year William O’Brien told a crowd in nearby Gurteen that landlords would regret not offering abatements because “men like you did cripple their claws” in the past. In the customary

²⁹ The Ladies Land League assumed many of the functions of the Land League after it was proclaimed. Ladies’ branches met regularly in Frenchpark, Fairymount and Tibohine, and the officers all appear to have been single women. Besides collecting subscriptions, the ladies gathered food and clothing for evicted families. *Freeman’s Journal*, 5 January 1882; *The Nation*, 7 January, 7 August 1882.

³⁰ “Statement of Lord De Freyne,” to John O’Hagan, undated; John O’Hagan to Lord De Freyne, undated, Correspondence related to the Land War, VII.i. MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

³¹ *Nenagh Guardian*, 25 March 1882.

³² *United Ireland*, 22 September 1883.

rhetoric of the Land League, he told them to take care of their children first, then pay the shopkeeper and finally to “decide among yourselves how much you can pay the landlord.” He singled out Lord De Freyne’s tenants, whom he said, “erred on the side of moderation in their demand.”³³ Although De Freyne had said in private that he could consider a reduction of twenty to thirty percent, there was no settlement and agitation continued.³⁴ After the Fairymount and Tibohine branches urged tenants to come to Frenchpark to demand a reduction, five hundred of them confronted agent MacDougall and refused to pay any rent without a thirty percent reduction.³⁵ So strong was the League’s presence that in 1885, when Lord De Freyne had to go to court to evict a tenant named Peter Hevican, the venue for the proceeding was moved to Dublin because “the so-called National League was so powerful in Roscommon that a fair trial could not be obtained.”³⁶

Conflicts Within: 1880–1890

Straddling the transition from the National League to the inception of the Plan of Campaign, periods of internal bickering within the local branches continued to threaten tenant unity. Laurence Geary disputes Clark’s belief in widespread “communal solidarity” among tenants and suggests that the Land War as a whole “was a class struggle fought at two levels—between landlords and tenants and by tenants among themselves.”³⁷ Detecting rupture in the ranks, not unanimity, Geary presents unsettling

³³ *Dundalk Democrat*, 16 October 1884.

³⁴ Lord De Freyne to Archbishop William Walsh, 17 November 1884, Correspondence related to the Land War, VII.i. MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

³⁵ *Irish Times*, 7 October 1885.

³⁶ *Weekly Freeman’s Journal*, 26 December 1885.

³⁷ Laurence M. Geary, *The Plan of Campaign 1886–1891* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1986), 1–2.

stories about the pressures and violence that arose as tenants tried to maintain a solidified front against the landlords. In a retrospective look at *Social Origins*, Clark dismissed the assumption that “conflict within social movements is evidence of weakness, of a failure to unite in a common endeavor.” Disputes and discords within a movement are to be expected, he said, and prove that the movement had harnessed the power of multiple constituencies. “While factionalism can weaken a collective effort... factionalism itself is often the consequence of the strength of a movement and, to this extent, a measure of its power.”³⁸ If long running disputes in the branches in Frenchpark and Fairymount reinforced the resiliency of the League, they did so even though these animosities seem to pre-date the start of the organization. Conflicts within each branch, and between the Frenchpark and Fairymount branches in particular, strongly suggest a town/farmer split with overtones of class antagonism which do not seem to have been healed by participation in the organization.

Three members of the Frenchpark branch defected in 1887, hoping to join the Fairymount/Tiobhine branch, because Frenchpark had not held a meeting in five months. Those members, Martin O’Gara, Bernard Harte (who would be president of the Frenchpark UIL in 1901), and Michael Solan (who lived on Frenchpark Demesne), had additional reasons for their resignations:

We...were the three most humble and unpretending members of the Frenchpark committee, but though our tongues were not glib nor flippant, nor our apparel of the finest material, we were blessed with a fairly keen perception. We saw very little use in being nominal members of a nominal committee, and I give it this qualification without the slightest fear of contradiction... [Thomas Towey, secretary of the Frenchpark branch] would do well to learn that theory without practice is of very little use. High-sounding words and nonsensical assertions not followed by earnest practice has a pleasing effect on ‘fools’ and ‘crooks’ but we stoutly ignore relation to either. I unhesitatingly tell Mr. Towey and his committee

³⁸ Clark, “Strange bedfellows?”, 111.

that they are total strangers to patriotism and, moreover, that the faintest principles of honesty would prevent them from profaning the sacred name of Nationality by their words...their declarations are many, while their actions are nil.

Using a common racial epithet, O’Gara went on to say that Towey could no more prove him wrong than could a group of black people “dispute the principles of the Catholic Religion with the Bishops of Ireland.”³⁹ The references to glib tongues and fine apparel hint at social and economic differences, and they also show how personal quarrels could easily be couched in political language. It is hard to imagine why Towey, an original Land Leaguer in 1881,⁴⁰ could be disqualified as a patriot because of his lack of skill at running a meeting. He was very involved in local agitation, was the manager of the Frenchpark League band, and collected rents under the Plan (for which he was arrested the following year).⁴¹ O’Gara’s complaint of a do-nothing committee may have been justified, but his concern about “high-sounding words” implies he was offended by intellectual snobbery as much as by false promises of action.

However, when the suggestion was made that “a section of the once famous branch of Frenchpark” should join the Fairymount/Tibohine branch, the merger was rejected in Fairymount after a “sturdy Nationalist” objected, declaring “he would never again have any connection with anything that would be called a Frenchpark branch.”⁴² The exact origin of a disagreement between the Frenchpark and Fairymount branches is unclear, but demographic data reveal some socio-economic differences between the two. As Clark suggested, these branches were formed on the boundaries of Catholic parishes,

³⁹ *Roscommon Herald*, 5 November 1887.

⁴⁰ *Roscommon Herald*, 22 January 1881.

⁴¹ *Freeman’s Journal*, 23 February 1887, 5 and 9 June 1888.

⁴² *Roscommon Herald*, 13 August 1887.

and the two membership lists coincide respectively with the townlands in the parishes of Frenchpark and Fairymount (historically called Tibohine, but not to be confused with the civil parish of Tibohine, which contained both of these religious parishes).⁴³

A contemporary assessment said the town of Frenchpark “presented a poor appearance, as the houses are nearly all thatched,” and that the “small market on Thursday” had “nearly fallen into disuse.” But with a population of 239 in 1881, it still had three fair days a year, and was the closest thing on the estate to an urban center. There were two churches, Catholic and Church of Ireland, a boys’ and a girls’ national school, a post office, a dispensary, numerous shops and grocers, an RIC barracks, a hotel, at least six public houses, a haberdashery, two tailors, a cabinet maker, and the ruins of a thirteenth-century Dominican friary, not to mention the elegantly wooded grounds of Frenchpark Demesne nearby.⁴⁴ The Catholic parish of Frenchpark covered another thirty-seven townlands in addition to Corskeagh and Cloonshanville, the townlands on which Frenchpark town was situated, but was geographically smaller than Fairymount Catholic parish.⁴⁵

In contrast, the townland of Fairymount (*Mullaghnashee* in Irish) which lay four miles away (pop. 200 in 1881), had only a Catholic church, a post office/shop, and a national school (at the time of De Freyne’s 1894 survey). The Catholic parish surrounding it from which the National League branch was formed included over thirty more townlands. A comparison of the Griffith’s maps gives the visual impression that

⁴³ “Fairymount [Tibohine],” and “Frenchpark [Kilcorkey and Frenchpark],” Leitrim-Roscommon Map Collection, Leitrim-Roscommon Genealogy Web Site, www.leitrim-roscommon.com.

⁴⁴ *Slater’s 1881*, 33–35; *Slater’s 1894*, 50.

⁴⁵ Brian Mitchell, *A New Genealogical Atlas of Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc: 2002), 142.

holdings in the Catholic parish of Frenchpark were larger than those in Fairymount parish. Less than half of the townlands in Frenchpark parish were owned by De Freyne, while nearly all the townlands in Fairymount parish belonged to him. These differences between the two parishes could explain divergent attitudes towards agitation in the League branches they supported, echoing Fitzpatrick's distinction mentioned earlier about those with nothing to lose versus those with nothing to gain. The Frenchpark branch members, who had larger farms, or businesses in town, and who might have been dealing with a land owner more amenable than Lord De Freyne, may have had different priorities than the Fairymount branch, with its smaller farms and stubborn landlord.

All three defecting members from Frenchpark were De Freyne tenants holding farmland (O'Gara may have had an interest in a public house). Towey, the president with "high-sounding words" lived in Mullen, a townland largely situated on the Murphy estate not far from Frenchpark town, but Towey does not appear to have had a business there. As detailed previously, the leaders of the Frenchpark branch were predominantly merchants and shopkeepers, but the leaders of the Fairymount branch seem to have been primarily tenant farmers, holding farms slightly larger than the average tenant. The president at one point was John Keenan,⁴⁶ who held fifty-five acres from Lord De Freyne in Kilgarve, according to Griffith's and later valuation office records. Another was branch secretary Michael Lavin, most likely from Lisduff where he held twenty-six acres from the De Freyne's.⁴⁷ He resigned from the League in 1886 "for some reason, but it was not accepted for the reason that services such as he can render are not easily

⁴⁶ *Roscommon Journal*, 18 January 1887.

⁴⁷ Lavin is an extremely common name in this part of Roscommon, but only one Michael appeared in the valuation records as a land holder, living in Lisduff in 1890–91. There was a Michael, a 45-year-old laborer living with his mother in Lisduff, on the 1901 census.

dispensed with.”⁴⁸ M.W. and then T. Hussey were both named as presidents of the branch, and they were probably Michael and Thomas Hussey of Clerragh,⁴⁹ who held a twenty-six-acre farm together from Lord De Freyne, both in Griffith’s and in the valuation books in 1890. James McDermott served as vice president, and Thomas Morrisroe was secretary.⁵⁰ Both surnames (and their cognates) were common on the estate, so exact identification is difficult, although of the three James McDermotts which appear in the records, none had individual holdings over twenty acres. While this survey of the Fairymount branch is inconclusive, it does suggest that its leadership consisted mostly of farmers with small to mid-sized holdings and were men whose livelihoods and interests did not generate much of an official paper trail.

The Plan of Campaign: 1886–1893

In 1886, the Plan of Campaign was launched on a handpicked list of estates in Ireland, including De Freyne’s.⁵¹ Speaking at large rallies near Ballaghaderreen and in Castlerea, John Dillon extolled the Plan, and local people celebrated with bonfires, bands, and banners, bearing slogans like “Low rent or no rent,” and “Ireland a Nation.”⁵² Under the Plan, tenants were instructed to offer their landlord a “fair” rent, and if that was refused, they lodged those funds with Plan officials, who would use them to take care of evicted families.⁵³ Tenants had been said to “join” the Land League—as individuals—in

⁴⁸ *Weekly Freeman’s Journal*, 18 September 1886.

⁴⁹ *United Ireland*, 29 December 1888.

⁵⁰ *Weekly Freeman’s Journal*, 10 October 1885. Morrisroe’s letters to John Dillon in the 1890s show he remained active as a tenant advocate. 5 April, 11 and 19 September, 21 December 1894; 3 March 1895, Ballaghaderreen (sic) Co. Mayo, Papers of John Dillon, MP, (1851–1927), leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, IE TCD MS 6806, Trinity College Library Dublin.

⁵¹ There was a later claim that the De Freyne estate was not in the original target list but was added under the influence of John Fitzgibbon. *Evening Independent*, 27 September 1892.

⁵² *Nation*, 11 December 1886.

⁵³ Geary, *The Plan of Campaign*, 26.

local branches which were usually based on geographic divisions like the Catholic parish, including many estates. Now, tenants on individual estates were being asked to “adopt” the Plan as a group, linking together those who paid rent to the same landlord (the same organizational template used in the strike in 1901). The need for associational solidarity between small farmers, laborers, and those with big farms was more important than ever since the Plan required near universal support on each named estate to work at all.

De Freyne was a perfect target. As Geary notes, the Plan’s “victims” were “carefully chosen and a landlord’s known financial vulnerability was the overriding criterion.”⁵⁴ In December 1886, some 230 De Freyne tenants deposited their rent with Plan trustees at a railway station in County Sligo. On a chilly, snowy day, groups of men, poorly clad in suits of “frieze and corduroy,” congregated on the platform waiting to hand cash to John Redmond’s brother, William, and some local priests. Tenants produced their “last half-year’s rent, and some a whole year’s rent, less the amount of reduction which had been refused by Lord De Freyne...in some cases they produced pocketsful of banknotes or gold, which were unhesitatingly handed over.” Despite their outward appearance of impoverishment, tenants were able to produce large amounts of hard cash.⁵⁵ These funds were deposited in bank accounts in their names, and their names were recorded in a book. Once they received a receipt or “ticket”, the tenants “went outside in groups to watch their neighbours arrive.” What did they talk about while they waited for their neighbors to appear (or not) and deposit their own rent funds? Redmond later spoke

⁵⁴ Geary, *Plan of Campaign*, 141.

⁵⁵ Hoarding cash was not uncommon across the country. An increase in Irish bank deposits from £16 million in 1859 to £33 million in 1877 “simply reflected a transfer of savings from the mattress to the bank safe.” Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society 1848–1918*, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2008), 11–12.

to the crowd, praising their efforts, but at the same time, suggesting that support was not ubiquitous. He warned that anyone “who went behind the backs of the majority should be treated as land-grabbers.”⁵⁶ His remarks reinforce the idea that communal solidarity, no matter how triumphantly celebrated, was always one step away from dissolution.

In early 1887, tenants gathered in Fairymount to demand fair rents under the aegis of the Plan, and to hear William O’Brien and James J. O’Kelly speak. O’Brien targeted Lord De Freyne and his agent once more, and told the tenants that adherence to the Plan would bring about freedom for Ireland.⁵⁷ De Freyne tenants assembled again in March 1887 in Frenchpark and Gurteen, and were told that the Plan would be victorious on the De Freyne estate if they “acted like men and fought the fight out.”⁵⁸ O’Brien’s language indicates that tenants may have been wavering.

You are bound to win if you only keep together... you must not allow yourselves to be tempted away from the National ranks by some miserable, personal advantage which may profit you for the moment but for which you and your children, perhaps, will pay heavily in the future—if you only try, each man of you, to be honest, and not merely expecting everybody else to be honest except yourselves, because let me say to you there is a great deal of backsliding, and there is not a little dishonesty among you farmers. You go behind each other’s back and for some little profit you play the game of the landlord or the agent (groans).⁵⁹

Organizers “hoaxed” the police into thinking that rents were being collected at this meeting, an activity that was actually taking place at two different sites. The business of distracting and flummoxing the police reappears often, up to and through the strike, and was reported with great glee in the nationalist press. The tactic undoubtedly provided a

⁵⁶ *Irish Times*, 3 December 1886; *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 December 1886.

⁵⁷ *Roscommon Journal*, 8 January 1887; *The Weekly Freeman*, 8 January 1887; *Nation*, 8 January 1887; *Westmeath Examiner*, 8 January 1887.

⁵⁸ *Freeman’s Journal*, 7 and 8 March 1887.

⁵⁹ *Freeman’s Journal*, 11 January 1887.

good deal of amusement and satisfaction for the participants, which must have helped diffuse the sting of being told by William O'Brien that they were "dishonest" if they looked out for themselves apart from the collectivity.

A *Freeman's Journal* article (part of a series on Plan estates) said De Freyne tenants spoke well of their landlord, but despised his agent, MacDougall, who displayed "callous indifference to the sufferings of the people," took pleasure in evictions, and burned down tenant's houses with his own hand. His manners were "hoity-toity" and "he rode here and there in the manner of a great Pasha." The new agent Robert E. Blakeney hired in 1887 was heralded as a savior—until he was accused of the same transgressions in the 1890s. The continued respectful relationship with the landlord, if indeed it existed, may have resulted from the fact that De Freyne and his family were a constant in the lives of generations of tenants, whereas his agents, who did the landlord's dirty work, would come and go. There is also an indication that the De Freynes had interactions with their tenants that operated outside normal lines of contact, and which skirted legal technicalities. The *Freeman's Journal* charged that, as happened elsewhere, many farms had been valued at a higher rate than they were worth to secure votes for the landlord's candidate. Tenants were told this change would bring no extra cost to them, although in many cases, they still had to pay the higher rate. Some tenants had also been in the habit of lodging funds with the previous baron in lieu of a bank account, but often were given no account of the funds. Furthermore, during the time of the Plan, De Freyne and his agent (and Lord Dillon as well) accepted the paper "tickets" representing deposits to the Plan administrators in lieu of cash rent payments, tacitly recognizing their validity. The *Freeman's Journal* believed that "surely this brings the landlords into direct complicity

with the Plan.”⁶⁰ Like his tenants, it appears that Lord De Freyne did whatever was necessary to keep afloat.

A settlement was reached in early 1888, which organizers called a victory for the Plan. It was guided by John Fitzgibbon of Castlerea and prompted by correspondence between Lord De Freyne and William Walsh, Archbishop of Dublin (who had volunteered to chair a conference between representatives of each side).⁶¹ But despite the settlement, many tenants still were not paying their rent, and eviction procedures continued. Early in 1889, William O’Brien accused Lord De Freyne of going back on the agreement by cutting the abatement for 1888 rents, but agent Blakeney said the settlement only covered abatements for 1886 and 1887. Referring to a recent letter from the Vatican that said withholding rent was sinful, O’Brien argued that the lowered abatement was a “calculation” by De Freyne that “the working of the Papal Rescript, the merciless police persecution of their local leaders and the service of a perfect shoal of ejectments would cripple the tenants’ power of resistance. Lord De Freyne has only his evil advisers to thank, for the result was...to band the tenants together more firmly than ever.”

O’Brien argued that the first payments under the agreement were made properly, but that circumstances surrounding the second round forced poor tenants “to plead for

⁶⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 June 1888. Lord De Freyne was asked by a landlords’ organization to write a *riposte* to this series, but there is no evidence he ever did. “Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union” to Lord De Freyne, 4 July 1888, VII. Land Question, 1879-1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI. Evidence of the practice of over-valuing properties to increase voting rolls on the estate appears in the valuation books for the Casserly farm in Mullaghnashee (Fairymount), c. 1860, and in the *Irish Independent*, 17 September 1892 for the Gara farm in Cloonfinglas, c. 1856.

⁶¹ De Freyne agreed to a reduction of six shillings in the pound for 1887 rents, and five shillings for 1886, with all evicted tenants reinstated. *Manchester Guardian*, 23 January 1888; *Freeman’s Journal*, 1 June, 9 June 1888. William Walsh to Lord De Freyne, 31 December 1887, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883-1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

time.” Blakeney said “some of the largest tenants on the estate have paid,” but that over three hundred did not pay any rent at all, and some only six months’ worth. “The tenants did not come in” to the rent office, he said, that is, they did not abandon the no-rent resistance, forcing ejectment procedures.⁶² By the end of January the next year, there were reports of another settlement granting an abatement of six shillings in the pound on non-judicial rents, and three on judicial rents, with Lord De Freyne covering any legal costs.⁶³ Agitation continued, however, since the Frenchpark, Fairymount/Tibohine, Errit, and Loughglynn branches of the National League were soon all reported to be “suppressed.”⁶⁴

Politics and Persecution: 1890–1898

Developments in national politics obfuscates our view of the tenants’ priorities in most sources at this point, as leaders, unabashedly, began to use the tenants’ predicament to settle their own scores. In 1890, after Parnell was named the correspondent in the O’Shea divorce case, the Irish party split, and the fissure intensified after his death in 1891. On one side were those who continued to support Parnell, which included many influential people in Roscommon, such as John Fitzgibbon and Luke Hayden. On the other side were those who already had political differences with Parnell, but who, guided by the teachings of the Catholic Church, were now scandalized by his personal behavior. Frenchpark and North Roscommon were a Parnellite stronghold, but the animosity of the “split” underscored political life. Riots in the streets of Frenchpark during the election of 1892 preceded the narrow (3,251–3,199) victory of the anti-Parnellite Matthias Bodkin

⁶² *Freeman’s Journal*, 4 and 5 January 1889.

⁶³ *Irish Times*, 31 January 1889; *Freeman’s Journal*, 5 February 1889.

⁶⁴ *Roscommon Herald*, 13 April, 13 and 20 July, 7 September 1889.

over incumbent James J. O’Kelly, a Parnellite.⁶⁵ Bodkin was quickly replaced in 1895 by O’Kelly, who held the office until his death in 1916.⁶⁶

When the Fairymount branch met to reorganize in 1891, Fitzgibbon deftly conflated politics with local land issues. He said the landlords, encouraged by the split in the nationalist ranks, “will insist on their last pound of flesh during the coming winter.” He suggested door-to-door recruitment for the reconfigured branch, and also asked his listeners to do something they might find unpleasant: to work with those “who so readily abuse Mr. Parnell...to help the tenants to obtain reductions in their rents.” He looked out over the crowd and saw the “same old familiar faces that were to be met with during the hot fire of ’68 and ’87 now here in the cause of Irish National Independence.” Of the De Freyne tenants at that meeting, those who can be positively identified represented the higher end of the land holding spectrum on the estate with farms of approximately twenty to forty acres. (There were exceptions, for instance Michael Cawley in Cloonfinglas held sixty-eight acres, and Owen Hart of Fairymount held only seven.)⁶⁷

For many possible reasons, the Plan of Campaign seems to have enraged Lord De Freyne, and his determination to continue evictions may have contributed to tenant resilience. “Lord De Freyne has to-day set fire to the tail of Ireland,” said Farrell

⁶⁵ Matthias McDonnell Bodkin, *Recollections of an Irish Judge: press, bar and Parliament* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1915), 185–188; N.C Fleming and Alan O’Day, *The Longman Handbook of Modern Irish History* (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education Ltd., 2005), 131, 166.

⁶⁶ Owen McGee, "O’Kelly, James Joseph," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁶⁷ Acreage is from the valuation books c. 1901. The other tenants were: Fairymount: James Corcoran, sixteen; John Corcoran twenty-four; John Higgins, eleven; Pat Lee, eleven. Leitrim: Roger Forde, twenty-nine; James Creaton, eighteen; Robert Connor, thirty-four; Frank Browne, nine; Bridget Carroll, thirty-one. Cloonfinglas: John Higgins, thirty-six; Tom and James Higgins (their acreage was taken over by M. Cawley); John and Peter Gara, forty; Thomas Carty, thirty-two. Grallagh: Robert Lylly, forty; James Gill (Martin) thirty-two acres; Luke Callaghan, seventeen, and part of thirty-three. Buckhill: Tom Finn, twenty-six (on Griffith’s), Martin Finn twenty-four, Stephen Finn, twenty-three.

McDonnell, a solicitor defending evicted tenants in 1895, “and it will burn to its head.”⁶⁸ One reason for his strong reaction must have been that the loss of revenue under the Plan made his precarious financial situation even worse. His previous agent had warned him, “You will not be able to manage as you say viz pay all the mortgagees yourself, unless you have come across a gold mine.”⁶⁹ Like Lord De Freyne, landlords in the western counties who held vast stretches of impoverished farms had a different perspective than those from the more prosperous east. They were said to be “in the grip of the moneylenders, and are with swords drawn insisting upon the last penny from their starving tenants... They are bound by their necessities or by their flintheartedness to fight; and their tenantry are bound by the first law of nature to resist...”⁷⁰

Another possibility for his strong reaction is, as Fitzgibbon suggested, that he sensed a weakening in the strength of the tenant combination because of the Parnell split, and so began a campaign of intimidation against his tenants in the hopes it would break up the organization. When Fitzgibbon pleaded with Dillon, now the leader of the anti-Parnellites, to provide money and political muscle for the evicted De Freyne tenants, he said De Freyne was closely monitoring the strength of the local branches, and that any sign of weakness would inspire him to give his tenants an “unmerciful crushing.” If De Freyne believed the party split worked in his favor, it is easy to see how he might have come to that conclusion. Parnellites and anti-Parnellites tussled publicly and spent as much time blaming each other as the landlord or the government for the tenants’ fate. The

⁶⁸ At the same trial, the judge criticized De Freyne for allowing so many years’ unpaid rent to accrue, raising the possibility that he had done so to allow tenants time to recoup their losses. *Irish Times*, 11 January 1895.

⁶⁹ Henry MacDougall to Lord De Freyne, 13 January 1888, Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, VII.i. MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁷⁰ *Leinster Leader*, 16 October 1886, a reprint from *United Ireland*.

Independent, which supported Parnell, said tenants at a string of evictions near Fairymount had lost the will to fight, and were “timid as sheep,” and “almost without friends.” It pointed out that Bodkin, then the new anti-Parnellite member for the area, did not come to the evictions to support the tenants, nor did John Dillon, who “appeared to be in no way concerned in their welfare.”

In contrast, the Parnellites, like Michael Cawley, the treasurer of the Fairymount League branch who helped pay a surety for branch members John and Peter Gara,⁷¹ were said to have rallied around the evicted families. While ostensibly urging Fairymount tenants to reorganize, Fitzgibbon deflected attacks from “Healyite” Jasper Tully⁷² and accused O’Brien and Dillon of joining “the men that deserted their leader.” It was these men, he insisted, and not the loyal Parnellites, who were “responsible for starting the Plan of Campaign on the De Freyne estate...and for breaking it down...and leaving the tenants at the mercy of Lord De Freyne and his agent.” John Redmond visited the area, declaring that “the men are divided into hostile camps,” for which he also blamed Dillon, implying that those who deserted Parnell were as guilty as the landlord.⁷³ Dillon, for his part, claimed that “the crowbar brigade was now visiting Balllagherreen and Frenchpark...due to the divisions amongst the people of those parts. Half of them were Parnellites and half of them were supporters of his...” If the people united, he said, “and put an end to factionism (sic)...soon [they] would they put an end to these evictions.”⁷⁴ Posters for a Parnellite rally in October 1893 were defaced with printed strips claiming

⁷¹ *Irish Independent*, 17 September 1892.

⁷² The anti-Parnellite faction itself became divided between followers of Dillon and those of T.M. Healy MP (North Louth). Frank Callanan, “Healy, Timothy Michael,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁷³ *Evening Herald*, 27 September 1892, 30 September 1893.

⁷⁴ *Irish Times*, 2 October 1893.

the meeting had been postponed, a maneuver that was “not the work of the landlord party,” according to rally speaker T.P. Harrington, MP (Dublin Harbour). “Youthful blackguards from the neighbouring village of Creevy” threw stones and tried to disrupt another meeting and the rebuilding of an evicted family’s house. Chased away, the miscreants were judged to be sons of tenants from the Murphy estate who supported Bodkin and “were hired in the interests of Lord De Freyne.” In turn, the *Freeman’s Journal* accused the “Redmondite party” of dropping its assault on Lord De Freyne for a “bitter” attack on Dillon and Davitt.⁷⁵

De Freyne’s retaliation began with twenty-two evictions in late December 1890. Those evicted included Annie Quinn in Eden, who said her husband was in America. In Cloonsheever, Michael Dare and his family of five were evicted, along with the seven-member family of Ned Dockery, who was himself working in England. At the scene of these evictions, the *Herald* said the “land gives little or no assistance to keep body and soul together in this locality. Here the impulsive crowds lost all control of themselves, and a wild scene was presented.” After charging the crowd, the police retreated; at the same time, “Lord De Freyne was in sight with visitors snipe shooting.”⁷⁶ In 1891, Patrick Hanly, a herd holding fifty acres in Fairymount, began acting as a liaison between the landlord and the non-rent paying tenants. Hanly’s name is not evident in available lists of National League members, but he appears to have been a target of Lord De Freyne’s surveillance during the strike in 1901. He corresponded frequently with Lord De Freyne and acted as an arbitrator along with the baron’s brother-in-law, Valentine Blake. After meeting with groups of tenants, Hanly urged the baron to show restraint: “I beg you will

⁷⁵ *Freeman’s Journal*, 8 November 1893.

⁷⁶ *Roscommon Herald*, 20 December 1890.

stay proceedings till I am able to place their news before you.”⁷⁷ There is no clue as to how local League leaders reacted to Hanly’s intercessions, but his work seemed to have earned the approval of the Archbishop of Elphin, Lawrence Gillhooly, who also urged De Freyne to allow Hanly and Blake to do their work unimpeded.⁷⁸ Something must have come of their diplomacy because by February Archbishop Walsh in Dublin told De Freyne he was glad to hear that “the unpleasantness is at an end.” Pointedly, the prelate mused, “It is too bad that some way cannot be hit upon to hinder the constant recurrence of so unsatisfactory a state of things.”⁷⁹

At the same time, Fitzgibbon’s entreaties for aid from the League during the winter of 1891 became progressively more desperate, as his faith in Dillon weakened. Explaining that a previous relief fund had already been depleted, he told Dillon,

Relying on your letter of 19th October I gave the tenants every encouragement and what I am now to do puzzles me. There is a regular war on the estate. Men have gone to jail for the fourth time and now if there be a crash the consequences will be most disastrous. I certainly thought that you might have been able to keep to what you promised Frenchpark men at Ballaghaderreen.

Dillon, in France at the time, was not forthcoming.⁸⁰

The ‘war’ Fitzgibbon was referring to resulted from what was called the “Star Chamber,” a form of tenant persecution by local magistrates, probably initiated at the direction of De Freyne. At the end of 1890, some De Freyne tenants began receiving

⁷⁷ Patrick Hanly to Lord De Freyne, 23, 25, 27 and 31 January 1891, Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, VII.i. MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers; Diary of the strike, undated, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁷⁸ Laurence Gilhooly to Lord De Freyne, 30 January 1891, Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, VII.i. MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁷⁹ William Walsh to Lord De Freyne, 9 February 1891, Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, VII.i. MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁸⁰ John Fitzgibbon to John Dillon, 26 January, 1, 16 and 23 February 1891, “John Dillon’s correspondence with other members of parliament, Fitz-G, Fitzgibbon, John 1891–1914,” Papers of John Dillon, MP, (1851–1927), leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, IE TCD MS 6754/462–483, Trinity College Library Dublin.

summonses to appear before an inquiry board, a procedure permissible under the coercion acts, to answer questions relating to “a criminal conspiracy punishable by Law... [that] exists...on the estate of the Right Honourable Lord De Freyne.”⁸¹ At the Star Chamber sessions, tenants were grilled about their relationship to the Plan of Campaign, and their knowledge of speakers who appeared at local meetings. A slew of De Freyne tenants, including many whose names were on local League rosters, were sentenced to jail terms for refusing to answer these questions. Some of those who did not appear after being summoned, including women and children, were arrested in the middle of the night, and then driven around for hours before being brought to a holding cell in Castlerea. If they refused to answer the questions when they were brought before the R.M. the next morning, some were taken by the mail train to Castlebar jail where they were held in a “cold, flagged cell till the following morning.” After a breakfast of black tea and bread with no butter, they were brought back to the inquisition, and the same routine would be repeated. Several De Freyne tenants (including William Pritchard, Owen Lavin, Michael Duffy, Martin Byrne, James Creighton, John Corcoran and Thomas Sampey) went through this process at least seven times before being given prison sentences.⁸²

In parliament, Irish members peppered Chief Secretary Arthur Balfour with questions about women and children being brought before the Star Chamber, and demanded an end to nighttime arrests, but Balfour said it was all necessary because of a conspiracy of tenants to “abscond.”⁸³ Luke Hayden pressed him to implicate the landlord,

⁸¹ *Western People*, 3 January 1891.

⁸² *Nation*, 14 February 1891.

⁸³ *Freeman's Journal*, 14 February 1891.

“I wish to ask the Chief Secretary if Lord De Freyne, on whose estate the arrest was made, is a brother-in-law of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland.”⁸⁴ De Freyne’s connection to the Star Chamber was verified by a report that his offer of an abatement of six shillings in the pound would include a promise to end the Star Chamber inquiries.⁸⁵ The *Nation* took the opportunity to compare the proceedings in Castlerea to the “tyrannies” of “Czardom,” an “outrage...in the sacred cause of recovering the rackrents of the brother-in-law of the representative of her Majesty the Queen.” After these extra-judicial sessions were denounced by Irish members in parliament, “The midnight visits to the De Freyne estate by the police were stopped,” and all the prisoners were released. Bonfires and celebrations for them were reported near Fairymount.⁸⁶

Despite the appearance of a victory for the combination, there was continued division among the tenants. Not everyone wanted to cooperate with the Plan, and not everyone was willing to sacrifice their freedom to preserve it. According to Fitzgibbon, three separate deputations, “unauthorized by the body of the tenants,” had approached Lord De Freyne to negotiate a private settlement. He feared these defections could crush the local branches, an outcome that would not only be “ruinous to the men of the estate, but would have a most disastrous effect on the tenant farmers of Ireland.” Fitzgibbon said he was “sorry to see men, however few, going to the Star Chamber and returning home without going to jail.”⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Irish Times*, 14 February 1891. The 4th Baron’s first wife, Laura Octavia Dundas, was the sister of Laurence Dundas, 1st Marquis of Zetland, who served as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland from 1889–1892. Laura died in 1881, and the baron remarried in 1882. *French Family Association*, www.frenchfamilyassoc.com; Fleming and O’Day, *The Longman Handbook*, 288.

⁸⁵ *Western People*, 10 January 1891

⁸⁶ *Nation*, 21 February 1891.

⁸⁷ *Freeman’s Journal*, 7 January 1891.

Tenant loyalties were thus being pulled in different directions when a catastrophic event allowed the Parnellite leaders to solidify their influence. In September 1893, during an eviction, the house of Thomas Barrett in Corracoggil North (Lisacul) was set aflame while his young daughter, Anne, was still inside. She was not injured badly, although accounts differed widely, but the incident precipitated public outrage.⁸⁸ On the estate, conditions had continued to worsen, with many houses of evicted tenants being burned or dismantled by emergency men, and with police patrolling the eviction sites instead of paid bailiffs.⁸⁹ Public and political disgust at the destruction of houses, especially for those set on fire, was vehement, and nationalists from both sides of the split denounced it.⁹⁰ They also denounced the actions of the constabulary at the evictions, and accused the government, through the RIC, of helping to ransack people's homes.⁹¹

Many justifications followed from agent Blakeney and Dublin Castle, explaining that the destruction of the houses was necessary to prevent illegal re-entry, and that the police were always stationed out of sight during a house-leveling, and remained just close enough to be summoned if trouble arose.⁹² Nationalists from the Parnellite camp then began rebuilding the houses, constructing stone dwellings at a remarkable speed with the help of local artisans and volunteers. Many of these "builders" were arrested and charged with trespassing and other crimes, including Patrick O'Brien, a former MP (Monaghan North) and confidante of John Redmond, John Fitzgibbon, John Lavin, Dominick

⁸⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 23 November 1893; *United Ireland*, 17 November 1893. In one account a neighbor rescued Anne, but not before her hair and scalp were burned. In another, her flannel petticoat saved her from being burned alive. *Freeman's Journal*, 7 and 23 November 1893. A previous report said the family member remaining in the house was male and an "idiot." *Freeman's Journal*, 23 September 1893.

⁸⁹ *Evening Herald*, 16 and 30 October, 3 November 1893.

⁹⁰ *Evening Herald*, 30 September, 16 October, 3, 6, and 8 November, 23 December 1893; *Freeman's Journal*, 8 November 1893.

⁹¹ *Irish Times*, 7 November 1893.

⁹² *Evening Herald*, 13 November 1893.

Mulligan, William Field MP (Dublin St. Patrick's), Patrick Conroy of Castlerea, Owen Mahon and Martin Roddy of Cloonmaul, and James Creighton and Edward King of Feigh.⁹³

According to T.W. Russell MP (Tyrone South), who visited the area, the "Royal Irish Constabulary was doing the work of emergency men and are protecting the ruined homesteads of Lord De Freyne, lest they should be rebuilt by the ex-tenants and their friends." He said about twelve houses belonging to the Barrett's neighbors were also destroyed. All of them had been made official caretakers of their property at some point after an earlier eviction but, still owing two- to six-years' rent, they were evicted again in September 1893 and their houses were knocked down. Similarly, the Barrett farm of twenty-nine acres (held jointly by Thomas and Bridget Barrett, his sister-in-law) was granted a reprieve in 1881 on £76 in arrears. Rents were paid until 1885, but then a decree was made against the farm in 1888, and Barrett was installed as caretaker. Lord De Freyne took possession in 1892 and nailed up the doors. The Barretts went back the same night and continued to live there. It was not until 20 September 1893 that "the agent and ten men cleared the family out and knocked down the house."⁹⁴ The following day they returned and set it on fire. Barrett later testified that on the 20th he had

fitted up a place in the ruins for himself, his wife, and children; that they pulled a few sticks out and put them across to make a temporary shelter, and he put some of the old thatch upon the top, that he did not know how long he might have to stop in it; that some of the family stopped under the shelter and some in holes the best way they could...that the child Anne Barrett was in the so-called house when

⁹³ *Evening Herald*, 16 October, 3 November 1893.

⁹⁴ *Times*, 15 December 1893. The twelve whose houses were levelled were: included Patrick Mahon and Peter Hunt of Dromod, Ellen Nolan of Carrowbehy, Mary Moran of Curragher, Thomas Cahellin of Cloonbunny, Peter Cunningham of Ballinphuill, Michael Dare of Cloonsheever, Patrick Egan of Cloonfad, Charles McDermott of Cloonard, Mary Noone of Cloonarragh, Michael Rogers of Sheepwalk, and Patrick Moran of Curragher.

Mr. Blakeney set fire to it; and that he saw the child brought out by the mother when the house was, as he said, blazing.⁹⁵

The incident provoked multiple lawsuits, including a charge against Blakeney by Barrett for malicious burning and a motion by De Freyne against the Parnellites to force them to tear down the house they had rebuilt for Barrett.⁹⁶ The government's case of trespassing against the re-builders was withdrawn just before Queen Victoria was set to announce her support for the proposed evicted tenants bill, and the grand jury dismissed the charges Barrett brought against the agent.⁹⁷ The re-builders, however, were barred from any further trespassing on De Freyne's land.⁹⁸ Despite the lack of an actual legal victory, the Parnellites found powerful ammunition in the damning image of a land agent almost burning a child alive, as well as in their efforts to rebuild the houses, both of which allowed them to position themselves as the tenants' real protectors. Shortly after the evictions, Fitzgibbon and Patrick O'Brien visited the area, and "had to traverse a wide tract of country" where,

[at] the scene of one of the burnings, they found Mrs Barrett, aged about 70, and her son and daughter, aged about 20 and 16 respectively, huddled together in a space about two square yards and too low to stand erect in, under shelter of the only bit of the fallen roof that escaped the flames. Here the poor creatures have existed squatted round a little fire every night since their eviction...but since Sunday's meeting hope and courage have been given to them, and the visit of Messrs Fitzgibbon and O'Brien...afforded them much encouragement.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *Evening Herald*, 22 January 1894.

⁹⁶ *Evening Herald*, 9 November 1893; 22 January, 23 February 1894; *United Ireland*, 17 November 1893; *Freeman's Journal*, 17 January 1894. Another account said a neighbor rescued Annie, but not before her hair and scalp were burned. In another, her flannel petticoat saved her from being burned alive. *Freeman's Journal*, 7 and 23 November 1893. A previous account claimed the family member remaining in the house was male and an "idiot." *Freeman's Journal*, 23 September 1893.

⁹⁷ *Evening Herald*, 3 October, 3 December 1893; 8 March 1894.

⁹⁸ *Evening Herald*, 24 February 1894.

⁹⁹ *Evening Herald*, 18 October 1893.

These evictions spurred new rounds of agitation, in particular an effort to stop De Freyne and his agents' from participating in the local hunt club, an action that seems to have arisen more from locally felt outrage than from a League directive.¹⁰⁰ Yet the party fissure remained the main lens through which resistance was described in the press, and the hubris of political leaders obscures whatever tenant contributions existed. When a vast crowd assembled on the slopes of Fairymount hill it was described as "ample and convincing evidence of the extent to which the country folk appreciate the value of services performed in Ireland's cause by the party of Independence" (Parnellites). T.P. Harrington told a crowd in Fairymount "within the past twelve years...we had so lifted up the peasantry to freedom, so taught them to value independence and combination" that evictions and house burnings should not have taken place. When they did, it was because "we allowed the strong combination...to be broken down (cheers), and the old enemies of the people have taken heart again."¹⁰¹

While Fitzgibbon and his cohorts were being prosecuted for rebuilding tenant houses, some Irish National Federation party members (anti-Parnellites) suggested that the evicted tenants were a "minor" issue (because all questions were "subsidiary to that of National self-government"). Other Federationists attacked the Parnellites and said, "the men who are putting themselves forward now as [the tenants'] champions are not sincere...and are merely doing so for objects of their own, for purposes of faction, and to bring discredit on the Home Rule Government." The anti-Parnellites, it must be noted,

¹⁰⁰ The "arch-exterminators," De Freyne and his agents, should not be allowed to enjoy themselves, protesters said. They massed on the racecourse, throwing stones and attacking the stag, tactics that dissuaded the baron and his agents from taking part. Unlike earlier hunt protests, this one primarily targeted individual members and not the hunt itself, which was a very popular pastime in the area. *Irish Independent*, 17 November 1893; *Connaught Telegraph* 6 January 1894; *Evening Herald*, 16 and 30 October 1893. Laird provides a discussion of hunt protests in general in *Subversive Law in Ireland*, 60–102.

¹⁰¹ *Evening Herald*, 16 October 1893.

were actively raising funds for evicted tenants and working to pass an Evicted Tenants Bill,¹⁰² but it was what happened on the estate itself that may have made the strongest impression on local people. Touring the newly constructed houses, a Parnellite cohort found “the cabins of the Barretts, the Hunts, and the Mahons are exceedingly comfortable little structures, and contrast favourably with the residences of the tenants’ neighbours. The new coatings of golden thatch lend them a picturesque prettiness which will be enhanced when the white washing of the exteriors has been completed.” Where “fierce hostility was displayed toward the Parnellites at the last election... a reception of a more gratifying character... was accorded the promoters of the housing project... people on the streets doffed their hats respectfully, and cheers were raised here and there.”¹⁰³

How did tenants feel about having their misery repurposed as political fodder? One of them, Michael Rogers of Sheepwalk, offers an example of how tenants could manipulate that process, by turning the Irish Party’s problems to his own advantage. Rogers’ situation was particularly dire. One of those evicted in the autumn of 1893, his house was demolished, but as “a supporter of ... [the] McCarthyite party,” had refused to allow the “Redmondite party” to rebuild his house, living instead with neighbors. He returned to his farm and planted a crop of oats and potatoes without any interference from the landlord. Then, in July 1894, Lord De Freyne’s steward arrived with forty head of cattle and, protected by a ring of police, allowed the bullocks to trample the crops for three days and demolish them. Appealing to Dillon through an intermediary (Michael Lavin, possibly the secretary of the Fairymount branch), he begged for monetary relief. “I was one of your truest followers,” he told Dillon, “I should be guarded along the road by

¹⁰² *Freeman’s Journal*, 23 and 13 November 1893.

¹⁰³ *Westmeath Examiner*, 2 December 1893.

my own priests from Frenchpark at the time of the election (sic). Now I am in real poverty.” (Rogers may have been illiterate as the letter carries his “mark.”) Party preference was not supposed to be considered in dispensing funds, but Rogers’ loyalty may have helped get him a grant of £1 every two months. However, his incessant requests seemed to have ultimately irritated party officials and it was suggested that he be cut off in early 1896.¹⁰⁴

Thomas Morrisroe, another officer from the Fairymount branch, also applied to Dillon for help for the evicted De Freyne tenants and used the political turmoil as leverage. Recounting how De Freyne had tallied evicted tenants’ remaining assets, which showed “there was very little or none left to meet the next years rent,” Morrisroe suggested Dillon use that information as evidence during the debate on the upcoming evicted tenants’ bill. “The Parnellite league and John Fitzgibbon is quite dead here and about Castlerea,” Morrisroe explained, “now is the time.” As the 1895 election approached, he offered Dillon this advice, “I am of the opinion it would be greatly in Mr. Bodkin’s favour...if he took some steps and do all he possibly could for those tenants and not to leave all the play to Fitzgibbon and Co.”¹⁰⁵

The Evicted Tenants’ Bill was rejected by the House of Lords, and it was not until 1907 that a new one was passed.¹⁰⁶ In the 1895 election, Parnellite James J. O’Kelly won Bodkin’s former seat from challenger T.J. Condon (3,411–2,935),¹⁰⁷ while life for the

¹⁰⁴ Michael Lavin and Michael Rogers to John Dillon, 14 July 1894, “Evicted Tenants,” #17, Ballaghaderin Co. Mayo, with Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon, Papers of John Dillon, MP, (1851–1927), leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, IE TCD MS 6806, Trinity College Library Dublin. *Irish Independent*, 20 August 1894; *United Ireland*, 1 September 1894.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Morrisroe to John Dillon, 5 April and 19 September 1894, 3 March 1895. “Evicted Tenants,” #17, Ballaghaderin Co. Mayo, with Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon, Papers of John Dillon, MP, (1851–1927), leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, IE TCD MS 6806, Trinity College Library Dublin.

¹⁰⁶ *Irish Examiner*, 30 August 1894; Fleming and O’Day, *The Longman Handbook*, 761.

¹⁰⁷ Walker, ed., *Parliamentary Election Results, 1802–1922*, p. 371.

evicted De Freyne tenants went on as usual. To prevent the bailiffs taking the hay crop of an evicted Tiobhine widow, Anne Deignan, whose farm was valued at £7, local supporters mowed it all in one night (and used her League allotment to buy “refreshments” for the mowers).¹⁰⁸ The Widow Finan from Barnacawley was sheltered in a hut in Fairymount, and Thomas Loftus of Cloontowart and his family of thirteen, the oldest under fourteen years, lived in a stable. Those residing in rebuilt houses included the Dares in Cloonsheever, the Mahons and Hunts of Dromod, and the Widow Callahan of Cloonbunny. Others who forcibly retook possession of their evicted homes were the McDermotts of Kilroddan, the Nolans of Erritt, and the Garas in Dromod.

The Barretts of Lisacul, whose burned home had caused so much furor, had been evicted from the house that had been rebuilt by the nationalists, and as of January 1895, it was occupied by emergency men. John Fitzgibbon cautioned Dillon against sending money to any tenants who had paid their rent as they were “not the fittest subjects for relief,” but continued to petition anti-Parnellite Dillon for monetary grants for other De Freyne tenants. However, he suddenly changed his tune with regard to the Barretts. Reports that either Bridget or her brother-in-law Tom had attempted to grab sole tenancy of their joint holding (from which they had both been evicted) prompted Fitzgibbon to tell Dillon that maybe, contrary to prior suggestions, the families should not be encouraged by another League handout. He added, perhaps to show his impartiality, “I never enquired into their politics but believe they are all Parnellites.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Thomas Morrisroe to John Dillon, 11 September 1894, “Evicted Tenants,” #17, Ballaghaderin Co. Mayo with Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon, Papers of John Dillon, MP, (1851–1927), leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, IE TCD MS 6806, Trinity College Library Dublin.

¹⁰⁹ “List of Tenants,” and John Fitzgibbon to John Dillon, 3, 8, 17 and 25 January 1895, “Evicted Tenants,” #212, 1–20, De Freyne and Murphy Tenants, Castlerea/Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon, Papers of

Like other tenants, the Barretts had fought with the landlord and the agent, the courts, the politicians, and with each other. Survival, politics, misery, and personal ambition were intertwined so tightly at the ground level of agitation in the 1890s that it is nearly impossible to see which strand leads where. This was the landscape, riven with political and personal cataclysm, to which William O'Brien brought his United Irish League in the late 1890s, offering a new kind of agitation.

The Influence of the United Irish League: 1898–1901

William O'Brien founded the United Irish League in 1898 with the dual goals of fighting for land redistribution and reuniting the fractured Irish party.¹¹⁰ It asked members to use the tools of collective bargaining to persuade graziers and large landholders to divide their property and make it available to small farmers.¹¹¹ The UIL told members to make personal visits to graziers, to refuse to work for “undesirable employers,” and to demonstrate at “court proceedings against League members and outside the homes and farms of graziers and grabbers.” They were also instructed to make shopkeepers “aware of their obligations towards the agitation.”¹¹² The one thing they were not advised to do was to start a rent strike.

In the years leading up to 1901, the League had been slow in recruiting members in the area near Frenchpark where animosity towards anti-Parnellites like O'Brien ran

John Dillon, MP (1851–1927), leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, IE TCD MS 6812, Trinity College Library Dublin.

¹¹⁰ Texts on the United Irish League include: Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*; Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War*; O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics*, and Bull, “The Formation of the United Irish League, 1898–1900: The Dynamics of Irish Agrarian Agitation,” *Irish Historical Studies*, 33:132 (November 2003), 404-423.

¹¹¹ O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics*, 172.

¹¹² Bull, “Formation of the United Irish League,” p. 410. Bew describes how “A group of sturdy young members would form a ‘deputation’ which would visit prominent local graziers with the suggestion that they might give up their land.” Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 43.

high, even though police reports predicted that poor tenants in the “thickly populated poor district which embraces the De Freyne, Murphy & other estates...are easily compelled to agitation and if their local leaders, such as Mr. John Fitzgibbon of Castlerea and Mr. JP Hayden MP should warmly espouse the UI League and agitate for the partition of these grazing tracts a good deal of trouble might be expected in these parts.”¹¹³

Fitzgibbon, a Parnellite who would emerge as the major spokesman for the rent strike, was largely responsible for the support the League achieved in Roscommon. Recognizing its growing influence elsewhere, and its potential to unite nationalists through grassroots mobilization, Fitzgibbon became a member in 1898 despite John Redmond’s disapproval. Fitzgibbon’s support, and that of his Roscommon compatriot, Hayden (who would also be active in the strike), was crucial to the continued vitality of the League beyond its Mayo roots, according to Michael Davitt¹¹⁴ (the only major Land League figure who supported O’Brien¹¹⁵). The people of Roscommon, however, took their time warming up to O’Brien’s organization.

The first county council election in 1899 illustrates the League’s uneven reception in Roscommon, where the national power struggle between O’Brien and Parnellite Redmond was mirrored in disagreements at the local level.¹¹⁶ Hoping for compromise and wider support for the League, Fitzgibbon promoted Redmond’s “toleration” policy in the local election. Introduced at the Parnellite convention in October 1898, this policy

¹¹³ “Confidential Report, United Irish League and Land Agitation,” 7 October 1901, CBS/25435S, NAI. The report said, “Hitherto the unpopularity of Mr. Wm. O’Brien with the Co. Roscommon Nationalists who were mostly Parnellites has checked any activity in agitation in that County such as was started under the auspices of the U. I. League.”

¹¹⁴ Bull, “Formation of the United Irish League,” 417–418.

¹¹⁵ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 39.

¹¹⁶ *Freeman’s Journal*, 13 January 1899.

suggested that certain landlords and unionists (Redmond stipulated “there were only a few” who qualified) should be included in the new local governments.¹¹⁷ O’Brien was strongly opposed to this, demanding that “the County Councils must be made nationalist fortresses,”¹¹⁸ and railed against the candidacy of Lord De Freyne’s neighbor, the O’Conor Don (Charles Owen O’Conor), for the county council. The intensity of his attack on O’Conor, one of Redmond’s “acceptable” landlords, implied O’Brien had reason to fear that the toleration policy was gaining ground in Roscommon. Edmund Haviland-Burke MP (Tullamore) agreed with O’Brien about the O’Conor Don:

On all hands they were hearing the same cry... He’s such a jolly good fellow, he opposes Home Rule, but he’s such a good landlord, a good employer, a good neighbor, a likely man to look to for odd jobs and favours (sic) to come. So let us show him toleration, and slip him into the County Council.”¹¹⁹

O’Brien and Haviland-Burke’s warnings went unheeded, and the O’Conor Don was easily elected to the first Roscommon County Council. Fitzgibbon became vice chairman of the council, and he worked to ensure that O’Conor was not named chairman, mollifying him with a committee chairmanship.¹²⁰ The politics of the matter were clear: Redmond’s strategy of inclusion was intended to broaden support for Home Rule among all classes, while O’Brien was trying to entrench a nationalist base that shut out elites like O’Conor. However, there was more than national politics at stake for voters, which Fitzgibbon rightly sensed. O’Conor had been in public office most of his life, was well-known throughout the county, and had recently distinguished himself on a parliamentary

¹¹⁷ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 50–51.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 55.

¹¹⁹ *Freeman’s Journal*, 21 March 1899.

¹²⁰ *Evening Herald*, 22 April 1899; *Manchester Guardian*, 24 April 1899. Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 53.

committee charged with returning tax overages back to Ireland.¹²¹ It is possible that Haviland-Burke's pejorative description of him was accurate, and that local voters were more comfortable with a landlord they knew well, even one who never fully supported Home Rule, than they were with O'Brien and his untested vision for the country.¹²²

Government bureaucracies like the CDB were notoriously unreliable and slow, and tenants knew the UIL's vision for land redistribution would require years to bring about substantive change. Whose land would be taken, the tenants may have wondered, which would then be re-distributed to—whom? There was “a profound evasiveness amongst even sympathetic nationalist cadres concerning the ideal of land redistribution” as well as “widespread uncertainty about its methods of operation.” Priests were less enthusiastic about the UIL than they had been about the Land League because the graziers, who were the focus of the agitation, were also fellow parishioners and tenants, not landlords, and there was a profound question about who would be “the legitimate targets of popular disapproval.”¹²³

With the help of Fitzgibbon and Hayden, recruitment for the UIL in the area was brisk, with much of its rhetoric focused on problems on the De Freyne estate, and with loyalty to the UIL presented as the main solution to those problems. In March of 1900 at a meeting in Fairymount to establish a new branch, a resolution was adopted condemning De Freyne for burdening his tenants with court costs. In September that year the

¹²¹ O'Connor served in parliament from 1860–80 as a liberal member for Roscommon, was a member of the Irish privy council, and served on various government committees from 1880 until his death in 1906. He was lord lieutenant of Roscommon from 1888–1906. Bridget Hourican, “Charles Owen O'Connor,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

¹²² O'Connor's election reflects the makeup of the previous form of local government, the Board of Guardians. The Castlerea and Boyle boards had remained steadfastly conservative (with no tenant representatives) at least until 1886, while surrounding Poor Law unions were radicalizing. Feingold, *Revolt of the Tenantry*, 193–201.

¹²³ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 39, 41.

Tiobhine/Fairymount branch—at the heart of the estate—decided to gather names of those who had not yet joined the League to be published in the local papers.¹²⁴ (O’Brien believed “the naming of names... would give the agitation some bite.”¹²⁵) At the end of 1900, after another bad harvest, the same branch told tenants to ask for a substantial abatement and denounced evictions on the estate.¹²⁶ By 1901, rent reduction became a key issue for the local branches eclipsing home rule, compulsory purchase, and emigration, raising the question of how much the branches were guided by local opinion and how much by directives from the organizational hierarchy. At the onset of the strike, the Loughlynn branch, from inside the Dillon property, passed a resolution to support the De Freyne tenants in their battle for reasonable rents, and voted to withhold their own reduced payments to the CDB until all branches could discuss “the best course to take going forward.”¹²⁷ In October, the Tibohine/Fairymount branch voted to co-ordinate with other branches to “appoint a day to make a demand” to all local landlords for lower rents, given “the very low prices of stock, and the incessant downpour of rain, which has rendered the crops almost useless,” and the Roscommon town branch followed suit shortly thereafter, asking for rent reductions across the county due to environmental and market conditions.¹²⁸

Mostly, the language used by the League branches avoided a direct declaration of a rent strike. Usually employed to address local matters, rent strikes had gradually begun to serve larger political purposes during the second half of the nineteenth century. While

¹²⁴ *Roscommon Herald*, 3 March, 22 September 1900.

¹²⁵ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, p. 43.

¹²⁶ *Roscommon Herald*, 10 November, 8 December 1900.

¹²⁷ *Irish People*, 19 October 1901.

¹²⁸ *Roscommon Journal*, 5 October, 2 November 1901.

the Ballykilcline “rising” in Roscommon (1834–1847) was termed a rent strike, its influence did not go far beyond the townland’s borders.¹²⁹ Following sporadic strikes encouraged by the Land League in the late 1870s, Parnell issued the “no rent manifesto” from Kilmainham Gaol in 1881, and the lowly rent strike morphed into a symbol of national unity. The Plan of Campaign was a rent strike on a grand scale, but other recorded strikes were localized. For instance, there was one in 1890 where some laborers refused to pay rent on the houses built for them through the local rates,¹³⁰ and another on the O’Callaghan estate in Bodyke, County Clare in 1892-93, the scene of a much-publicized eviction resistance in 1887.¹³¹

But by 1901 strategies were changing, and O’Brien wanted the UIL to use new tactics inspired by the labor movement, and not the old gambit of withholding rent. He said landlords should be “brought to a sense of the urgency of this question, not upon the old ‘no-rent’ lines, but by being treated just as the worst landgrabber was treated...made miserable and shunned and picketed...as public enemies.”¹³² He claimed the De Freyne strike was the first instance in the history of the League in which “there had been the slightest question of non-payment of rent, and that under very peculiar local circumstances.” Furthermore, he accused Chief Secretary George Wyndham of focusing on the strike to “divert attention from the real trades (sic) union lines on which this movement had been uniformly conducted, upon which they never had and never could be beaten.”¹³³ Try as they might to distance themselves from the no-rent part of the agitation

¹²⁹ Scally, *Hidden Ireland*, p. 73.

¹³⁰ *Kerry Evening Post*, 5 May 1890.

¹³¹ *Irish Times*, 11 January 1893; *Daily Express*, Nov. 15, 1893.

¹³² *Irish Independent*, 7 July 1902

¹³³ *Irish Independent*, 7 July 1902.

(some tried harder than others), other UIL leaders recognized that the rent strike provided the entire organization with a focus.

Scholars who have examined the growth of the UIL tend to treat the De Freyne strike as an aberration, and to skirt its significance in augmenting UIL membership and in affecting its strategies. This is because the focus has been on the organization and O'Brien's vision, rather than on the ambiguities that lay below. According to Bew, the UIL differed sharply from one predecessor on the question of rent:

The Land League in its offensive phase had been characterized by highly expensive rather legalistic forms of resistance to the payment of full rents... The initial target of the United Irish League was the grazing system and therefore resistance to rent payment—however operated—played an inessential role.”¹³⁴

Fergus Campbell does not mention the strike at all, claiming that membership in UIL branches in the western counties grew at the time because “the Irish Parliamentary Party MPs, UIL organizers and the nationalist press worked together to increase the amount of boycotting in Ireland.”¹³⁵ In contrast, Carla King claims the UIL at that time shifted its emphasis from attacks on graziers to “renewed opposition to landlordism” by staging rent strikes, yet she dismisses the “bitter dispute” in Frenchpark as just a local row.¹³⁶

Similarly, Sally Warwick-Haller argues that when the UIL and the parliamentary party joined together in 1901 it was a “revival of the traditional form of the Land War, with the focus on the withholding of rents on a number of estates. A central feature was the clash between landlord and tenants on the De Freyne lands in Roscommon.”¹³⁷ Neither credits the tenants as the source of “a renewed opposition to landlordism” or a “revival” of the

¹³⁴ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 42.

¹³⁵ Fergus Campbell, “Irish Popular Politics,” 761–2.

¹³⁶ Carla King, *Michael Davitt after the Land League* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2016), 454–55.

¹³⁷ Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War*, 213.

Land War. It is more likely that it was “the clash” in Roscommon that forced the return to Land League-era tactics, rather than the other way around.

Nationalist leaders, suddenly saddled with an unwanted rent strike, found themselves vigorously backpedaling. While O’Brien was fearful of the UIL resorting to illegal activities, others in the organization quickly adapted their strategies to accommodate the tenants’ action. The shift is well illustrated by a prevaricating statement in O’Brien’s paper, *The Irish People*: “The struggle is not a strike against Rent—although we all wish from our soul it was possible to resist the payment of a farthing to the Cromwellian marauders.”¹³⁸ For the tenants, however, it *was* a struggle against rent, something that certain UIL leaders appreciated when the larger organization did not. Membership growth in the area around the estate reflected that the local leadership understood the importance of the issues raised by the strike, even if a strike did not adhere to League philosophy. To the tenants, the act of asking for an abatement, and then refusing to pay rent until it was granted, seemed likely to produce quicker results than the amorphous and untested idea of land redistribution.

Although the League had a foothold in the county, with branches all over the De Freyne and nearby estates, the unity that its leaders yearned for was still being tested. As in the rivalry between the Fairymount and Frenchpark branches during the Land League years, local animosities surfaced. One particularly public dispute in 1901 was between the branches in Loughglynn and Ballaghaderreen over an attack voiced by Loughglynn’s branch president, publican Patrick Webb. He viciously criticized Ballaghaderreen’s fair committee for scheduling a new pig market on the same day that the village of

¹³⁸ *Irish People*, 4 January 1902.

Loughglynn held its annual fair. The press printed personal insults (Webb was called an “arch-spider” who entertained police late at night in his pub¹³⁹) along with accusations of elitism (Webb said one leader in Ballaghaderreen was “reared on the crumbs from Lord De Freyne’s table”¹⁴⁰). What might have been an unremarkable, if nonetheless colorful, confrontation over a local issue was presented in the branch meetings and in the press as an integral component of the rent strike. The Ballaghaderreen people were forced to deny that they were “a clique and backers of De Freyne and Murphy” or had deliberately tried to undermine the tenants’ struggle.¹⁴¹ The quarrel was soon quashed when a resolution was signed to “bury the hatchet,” calling it “a misunderstanding” which could damage the “success of the fight...against landlords of the district.” All the “words used in the heat of passion” were quickly dismissed, perhaps on orders from higher levels of the UIL.¹⁴² The Dillon estate covered a lot of the area around both Loughglynn and Ballaghaderreen, so it is possible these warring parties were former tenants whose land had already been bought by the CDB (Webb was a Dillon tenant). What is irrefutable is the skill and audacity with which an argument about a pig fair was woven into the struggle for lower rents, and the destiny of Irish nationalism.

Reflection

The endurance of many different forms of agitation on the De Freyne estate across long stretches of time is startling. However, one constancy spanned the activities of generations of agitators from the Famine until the Dillon settlement made “peasant

¹³⁹ *Western People*, 28 December 1901.

¹⁴⁰ *Western People*, 14 December 1901.

¹⁴¹ *Western People*, 7 December 1901.

¹⁴² *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 January 1901.

proprietorship” tantalizingly within reach. Before 1901, every time tenants came together to agitate for a common purpose, they did so under the rules of landlordism. Before, they were tenants, without the rights and privileges of property, used to bargaining or demanding what they needed. After the strike and the repercussions that followed, they were more easily characterized as potential land owners with new battles to fight and new rules to observe. In the past, tactics varied from cattle maiming, boycotting, lighting bonfires, cheering speakers, or barricading a house against eviction. As soon as an eviction was halted, or the rent finally reduced, tenants could get on with the business of feeding their families until the next crisis arose. The legislative climate and the available cast of national leaders changed frequently, but tenants did what they needed to do, scrambling for what they saw as their due, fighting with each other and relying on each other, and responding to strong leadership with varying degrees of enthusiasm. They displayed a propensity and talent for occasional, intense bouts of resistance, and could easily summon a lockdown mentality when necessary—elbows linked, and jaws set against whatever came down the road. In a scenario that is easy to imagine but so far impossible to document, agitation could also have been felt as an energizing force, providing excitement, purpose, and context for lives that may have lacked all three. The question that begs to be asked is largely unanswerable: What happens to people for whom it is necessary to repeat such behavior over and over again, with so few results?

CHAPTER 3: THE STRIKE

Who started the De Freyne rent strike? In answer to this question in 1901, everyone connected to it—tenants, landowners, priests, politicians, and journalists—responded differently. Today, those answers are not as important as the question itself. This is not to say that it does not matter who started the strike—the tenants did initially. What the question acknowledges is how crucial it was for everyone involved at that time to find someone else to blame. Evidence from newspapers, letters, police documents, and parliamentary papers shows so much energy was devoted to naming, attacking, prosecuting, or suing those responsible for the strike (or to deflecting culpability), that the tenants’ original concerns were sidelined. It would be impossible to calculate how some local issues about the weather, cattle prices, or a difficult landlord became “the fight of Ireland”¹ were it not for the spectacle of political leaders either assigning or denying blame. The key to the tenants’ point of view lies in an unchronicled space between the events that are documented and the rhetoric they inspired. To understand what they were thinking, it is necessary to pay attention not only to what the tenants did, but to what other people said they were thinking. Who was blaming whom is a good place to start.

The newspapers said the tenants blamed both Lord De Freyne, because he would not reduce their rent, and the Congested Districts Board,² for flaunting the Dillon

¹ Quoted from a speech by Patrick Webb in Lord De Freyne’s Affidavit, MS 15/24/6, Redmond Papers, NLI.

² Congested districts, mostly in the west, were defined by dividing acreage by population, and the board was set up in the 1890s to address problems specific to those areas. This was reflective of the “great Victorian wave of social reform. In Britain, this had a mainly urban focus, but it acquired an (sic) uniquely rural emphasis in Ireland, with the west being treated as a rural slum.” Kevin Whelan, “The modern landscape: from plantation to present,” in F.H.A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan, Matthew Stout, eds. *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, 2nd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 103. See also Ciara Breathnach, *The Congested Districts Board of Ireland, 1891–1923, Poverty and Development in the West of Ireland* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005).

purchase before them. The government, the landlords, and most church leaders were vociferous in laying responsibility for the strike on the strong influence of the United Irish League over idle migratory workers, back home for the winter. They said the tenants were not thinking for themselves at all, but only following the dictates of the nationalist organizers: they were being used. Assigning blame was important to the government because it offered a sense of control over a potentially combustible situation; if the instigators were guilty of crimes, they could be arrested, the strike would be deflated, and the League eviscerated. Just as loudly, nationalist politicians and their newspapers in support of the tenants' alliance, insisted that the strike was entirely the initiative of the local farmers. While enthusiastically ceding agency to the tenants for starting the strike, the nationalists also seized the opportunity to bolster the UIL agenda by harnessing it to the momentum aroused by the Frenchpark conflict. They insisted the strike was part of their larger vision for Ireland that included home rule and compulsory land purchase, even though leaders like William O'Brien and John Redmond did not approve of the strike at all, and others, like John Dillon, accepted it only with reluctance. It was "a peculiar dispute," according to an *Irish Times* correspondent, one whose "issues, indeed, have been confused by cross and counter-currents, and the tangled skein of the demands and desires of the tenants and the Nationalists is very hard to unravel."³

Without first-hand accounts from the rent-strikers themselves, that unraveling process remains fraught with difficulty, although it is helpful sometimes not to take the available documentation at face value. For instance, rather than accept the binary suggested above, that the tenants were either independent agents or pawns of political

³ *Irish Times*, 22 February 1902.

interests, another question to ask would be: why stage a rent strike at all in 1901? There was nothing intrinsic in any of the two catalysts mentioned above—the CDB purchase or the League—which should automatically have triggered a rent strike. If anything, the Dillon purchase had the potential to placate farmers by suggesting that more of them might be able to buy their farms at some point in the future. Furthermore, the UIL, as the primary driver of agricultural and nationalist agitation at the time, was officially not interested in rent-strikes as a strategy, preferring agitation less susceptible to legal consequences, like boycotting. The Dillon purchase would not have been perceived in political terms by tenants in these small townlands, but rather as an immediate, personal affront that favored some people, but not themselves. This suggests that tenants based their decision to stop paying rent on influences other than politics, such as their own feelings and experiences, their pocketbooks, or the weather.

Significantly, seventy-two hours of heavy rain had destroyed the harvest of 1901 in that section of Roscommon, leaving hay cocks floating on submerged fields.⁴ Given falling prices for stock and rising prices for fodder due to the lost harvest, the tenants had a strong expectation, based on past experience, that a rent abatement would be granted in November. However, De Freyne refused to grant one, a decision based, it would seem, on his need for the income and his disdain for outside interference. The tenants then acted in what they saw as their immediate self-interest, using the established strategy of withholding rent. That their local agenda was then adapted by the League to fit its national goals is not surprising, nor is the tenants' easy acquiescence to that process, but that does not mean they never had an agenda to start with. Even if their highest

⁴ Torrential rain fell continuously day and night from 5 to 7 September 1901. *Roscommon Journal*, 28 September, 12 October 1901.

expectations ended at the borders of their own holdings, they found comfort in belonging to a national organization with its sense of solidarity, identity, and long-range purpose. If any of this leads to the conclusion that the tenants made the decision to withhold rent based on their own acumen, only to find the whole thing lifted out of their hands and turned into something else entirely, it also illustrates how readily the government and the League recognized the potential of the tenants' revolt to enhance other purposes. A tangled skein, indeed.

Background

Given the long history of bad relations between the landlord and tenants on the De Freyne estate, it would be oversimplifying things to suggest that mere jealousy over the Dillon purchase or bad weather started the rent strike. Still, both played a large part. Nationalist rhetoric recognized the influence of jealousy and inequality, but generally ignored the weather, while the government saw the entire affair as part of a conspiracy to eventually overthrow British rule and ignored both the tenants' feelings and their sodden fields. Yet in the public mind, if the press reports are at all accurate, it was clearly the envy aroused by the Dillon purchase that ignited the revolt. How could the De Freyne tenants not be jealous when they read in the newspaper about a gathering of Dillon tenants where "the women of the families were there in all their glory as new peasant proprietresses"?⁵ Unlike Lord De Freyne, Viscount Henry Arthur Dillon was an absentee landlord who had given control of his Irish estate to his agents long before he agreed to sell it to the CDB in 1899. At £290,000 for 90,000 acres, it was the most extensive land purchase the board had overseen to date. Dillon's 4,200 tenants were given a discount in

⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 29 October 1901.

their rent of six shillings, eight pence in the pound, pending the final settlement of the purchase agreement.⁶ In addition, the settlement was reported to include help for drainage work and soil reclamation, loans to improve housing, and the re-distribution of grazing land to the farmers.⁷ To tenants on neighboring estates, this amounted to obscenely preferential treatment for the Dillon occupiers by a government agency. The CDB must never have anticipated such a reaction, operating within its ten-year-old mandate to improve life in the rural western counties. Earlier plans to start local industries and improve drainage—all meant to quell the extremes of the nationalist spirit—were being replaced with a new land purchase scheme, reflecting both a lack of progress in quelling that spirit, and mounting political pressure from the United Irish League.⁸

The relationship between the CDB and the estate was complicated. Even De Freyne's agent, Stephen Woulfe Flanagan, bemoaned that too much money had been “lavishly expended on the Dillon Estate” and observed that “the people feel intensely the neglect with which they have been treated.” He complained to Lord De Freyne, “The action of the Congested Districts Board is undoubtedly calculated to produce discontent!”⁹ Lord De Freyne refused to consider the CDB purchase terms because he said they were “ruinous,” and would leave him with investment returns equal to half what he should have been receiving in rent. Still, even he was jealous of what was being

⁶ Rev. Claude Blair ffoulkes (sic), “Dillon, Harold Arthur Lee, seventeenth Viscount Dillon (1844–1932),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), Online Edition, ed. David Cannadine, 2004, www.oxforddnd.com; Breathnach, p. 145; *Freeman's Journal*, 19 November 1901.

⁷ *Supplement to the Wicklow People*, 12 April 1902.

⁸ Whelan, “Modern Landscape,” 101–102. Fergus Campbell argues the Dillon purchase was a direct government response to UIL agitation in *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland 1891–1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: September 2007, 21–25. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199273249.001.0001.

⁹ Stephen Woulfe Flanagan (SWF) to Lord De Freyne, 23 September 1902, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

accomplished with government funds, “Look at the money the Congested Districts Board are spending on the estates, draining, cutting down timber, building new houses and so on. Why they are actually paying the tenants for working on their own holdings...they can afford to do so.”¹⁰ The De Freyne tenants already took a dim view of the board’s projects, complaining that it had done nothing for them in its ten years of operation, but everything for the Dillon tenants.¹¹ When Flanagan lobbied for CDB funding to start lace-making and other small projects (to no avail), he admitted that tenants would probably not have supported the projects anyway:

There are people here – not many – who if they suspected that the lace or any other industry was established to purchase their silence would consider themselves called upon in political honour – if there be such a thing – to do their utmost to defeat it. There are some even who...though it would considerably add to their reserves, would oppose it to the last. It would be hard all the same because...the rest of the people would suffer.”¹²

The CDB purchase may have been part of numerous conversations in local public houses, but Bernard Harte, a De Freyne tenant in Portaghard and a UIL organizer, said that the main reason tenants had been talking about asking for a rent reduction was because it had been a “bad year.”¹³ The government and Lord De Freyne did not recognize the importance of the tenants’ grumbling, and pinned the inception of the strike on a speech in October by nationalist John Dillon (no relation to the estate owner) in which he demanded equity with the Dillon tenants: “Why should not the tenants on all the neighbouring (sic) estates get the same reduction? ...I don’t want to rob anyone of their property, but if the people of Connaught band together under the United Irish

¹⁰ *Supplement to the Wicklow People*, 12 April 1902.

¹¹ *Irish Times*, 13 December 1901

¹² SWF to Lord De Freyne, 25 September 1902, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

¹³ *Irish Times*, 11 January 1902; *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 January, 11 January 1902.

League, we can force the gov't to reinstate evicted tenants and to take people off the bogs and mountains and give them "decent farms of good land." (cheers)"¹⁴ The Dillon purchase became the *de facto* cause of the strike because of its geographical proximity and because the size of the purchase gave it notoriety. It raised the profile of what might have otherwise been an uninteresting local dispute to national scrutiny. "Give us the Dillon rent!" was an easily articulated message that functioned as a cover-all for a varied list of grievances of lesser national interest.

Many tenants on the estate paid judicial rents, which were set by the courts and not the landlord. A review of Lord De Freyne's rent rolls in 1902 showed most holdings were let for under £5 a year, but that many were rented for much less. "Fourteen shillings, twelve shillings, ten...one man...on the list rented at one shilling a year, and two years in arrears, at that."¹⁵ Despite this evidence, De Freyne tenants, like many Irish farmers, were often behind with their rent by necessity, not choice. Bad harvests, heavy rain, low prices for stock or grain – anything could cause a farmer to be in arrears, often for years at a time, and many owed court costs from earlier troubles as well. In July 1902, John Coleman of Corracoggill South owned Lord De Freyne two years rent and £30 in costs and John Sharkey of Lissacurkia owed four years rent plus £39 in costs.¹⁶ In 1898, the newly appointed Flanagan said he feared "an eviction campaign...is inevitable as I have a legacy of 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11 years rents due,"¹⁷ and over one hundred tenants owed at least one year's rent in 1899.¹⁸ Because paying rent often tipped farmers into

¹⁴ *Roscommon Herald*, 12 October 1901.

¹⁵ *Supplement to the Wicklow People*, 12 April 1902.

¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 8 July, 23 July 1902.

¹⁷ SWF to John Woulfe Flanagan (JWF), 18 June 1898, 1189/11/2, John Woulfe Flanagan Papers, NAI.

¹⁸ "Lord De Freyne's Estate, Report on Rentals and Accounts for one year ending 1st May 1899," III.i. Estate rentals, 1842–1899, MS 50,329/3/1, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

insolvency, most of the organized agricultural agitations in the nineteenth century privileged rent reduction as the best “path to income maintenance” (bypassing other remedies current then elsewhere in Europe such as “improved technical education, drainage, marketing and credit arrangements.”)¹⁹ Rent was the linchpin on which Irish landlordism functioned, and agitators argued that it chained Irish farmers to a hand-to-mouth economy of migratory labor and subsistence farming. When tenants came together by choice and did not pay their rent, the symbolic impact of their refusal reverberated beyond immediate losses of revenue for the landlords since it mocked the entire system of private property, and by extension, colonial power itself.

The Events

The strike unfolded rapidly, inspired several months’ worth of headlines, and then disappeared without fanfare. It began when tenants on the De Freyne and surrounding smaller estates collectively stopped paying their rent in November, and ended gradually when, as individuals, they either began paying it again, or reached a settlement with their landlord. It is not obvious how many initially stopped paying rent out of conviction, nor how many did so under pressure from their neighbors, or because they could not afford to pay under any circumstances. What is clear is that most of them stayed away from the rent offices from November 1901 until late in 1902, or possibly far beyond that, given the recurrence of evictions. While it is also unclear when and how the tenants on the De Freyne, Murphy, Sanford, O’Grady and other smaller estates began calling themselves the “Associated Estates,” they all began withholding their rent at the same time in

¹⁹ Barbara Solow, “The Irish Land Question After 1870,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 27:4, The Tasks of Economic History (December 1967), 620.

November, 1901. The title, which first appeared in the newspapers in mid-December, implied they shared common grievances and goals.²⁰ Who created that title, and who decided that it was necessary? The United Irish League is the most obvious choice, since it may have suited its purposes to siphon off the rent strikers into their own category as the “Associated Estates” to distinguish them from existing UIL branches.²¹ In his research on the Land League, Samuel Clark did not find a single “branch or sub-branch that claimed to represent tenants living on a specific estate,” even though the central committee had encouraged it, “since tenants on the same estate did often join together to request abatements or to resist evictions.” Instead he found that Land League branches were formed by the Catholic parish or townland, and that the estate was “a less important communal structure.”²² Yet, like the Plan of Campaign, the 1901 agitation was recognized as estate-based, and was most often referred to under the name “De Freyne,” coupled with words like “struggle,” “fight,” or “agitation,” even though tenants from other estates were also involved. De Freyne’s was the largest estate of the group, and his tenants had over many years built a reputation for rebellion. As a resident landlord he was more visible to his tenants than other property owners in the area, who were generally absentees. These facts, along with Lord De Freyne’s very public obstinacy, seem to be the reasons why the strike was so often referred to by his name alone.

²⁰ The title “Associated Estates” appears again in Roscommon during the Ranch War of 1906–10, as a generic designation for anti-grazier groups, and then again in 1911–12 as an official committee formed to protest the limitations of the 1909 land act, and to voice local disillusionment with both the UIL and the progress of the redistribution of untenanted land. Strike leaders, including Hayden and Fitzgibbon, were linked to that 1911 committee. David Seth Jones, *Graziers*, 187, 199.

²¹ *Supplement to the Wicklow People*, 12 April 1902.

²² Clark, *Social Origins*, 294.

The Associated Estates standing committee pledged “to meet every week, or oftener if necessary, until the fight is over.”²³ How did this “fight” play out in the tenants’ daily lives, and what did membership in the collectivity require them to do? Mostly it required them *not* to do something, like not paying rent or not patronizing a boycotted shopkeeper. In this light, the behaviors required by the strike can appear as more passive than active. This does not diminish the significance or persuasiveness of the agitation, but it does show how deeply the poor understood their place in the world and the limitations of their power. They knew their best hope lay not in direct confrontation, but rather in carefully crafted reactions to the damages perpetuated by outside power. For example, evictions were set in motion by the sheriff’s order to vacate, delivered by a bailiff under the orders of a landlord, often with police protection. People knew their ejections were inevitable, but eviction resistance was common and was often a public and emotional protest, existing just outside the law. People barricaded their houses with tree trunks, threw rocks at the estate agent or bailiffs, re-entered their homes illegally, and gathered their children inside shelters built by their neighbors on De Freyne’s property without his permission. None of these tactics was successful in immediately restoring them to their homes, but they did garner public sympathy, a powerful weapon in itself.

The tenants’ sense of the limits of their agency extended to activities within the League. Public gatherings occurred only when outside speakers were present, or on the orders of the organization; there does not appear to have been any impromptu mass gatherings without them. The most common strike-related activity (other than, presumably, complaining to your neighbor) was to show up for these meetings and

²³ *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 January 1902.

dutifully cheer or groan the speakers. Some of these speakers were sent to jail, and tenants cheered them again at the railway station when they returned.²⁴ All these activities required adherence to timetables set by a power outside the townlands such as the League, the courts, or the railroad. Contributing their rent money to the defense fund could be considered a proactive choice by the tenants if it were not so obviously tied to a future calamity, such as eviction, brought on by the decisions and actions of powerful others. Not that they had much choice in the matter, but the thrust of the tenants' agitation was reactive.

There were traditional ways of expressing outrage or jubilation which were self-initiated, like setting bonfires, playing in marching bands, or blowing horns and banging drums after dark, and these were common during the strike. The clearest example of strike activities that required individual creativity or personal acts of will on the part of the tenants, was internal policing like boycotting and intimidation. These were ground level, self-directed activities, that required no specific orders from above since tenants had grown up in a community where these tactics had long been useful for reasons political and personal. When the local organizations decided someone was "obnoxious" for paying their rent or cooperating with authorities, it was up to the people who lived nearby to decide what to do about that. Someone had to compose the threatening letters sent to those who dared to pay their rent, and someone had to devise and carry out retribution against landgrabbers. Even here, tenant power was limited, since these activities were usually directed at people within their own community, who were not in a position to change much of anything. The closest Lord De Freyne came to being the

²⁴ A good example is the return of Owen McGarry from jail in Sligo where he was carried through the town on people's shoulders, *Freeman's Journal*, 13 February 1902.

victim of any acts of intimidation were threats and attacks on his agent. Self-policing was also ultimately self-defeating since it required tenants to create an elaborate system of boundaries among themselves. However, creating an unpleasant atmosphere for those who stood in the way of progress was one of the few weapons available over which they could exert a measure of control.

The tenants' lack of direct agency does not imply that they were swept into the rent strike by outside forces. Quite the contrary, since the sources suggest that the idea of getting a decrease in their rent was developed over time and with deliberation. The myth that "peasant rebellions" are "purely spontaneous and unpremeditated affairs" often persists because of the dearth of information about the consciousness of these rebels in sources. In examining the historiography of peasant rebellions in India, Guha says the risk of "turning the world upside down" was far too great for impromptu rebellions. Instead, insurgency was the result of "protracted consultation" among peasants and their leaders, and was "preceded by petitions, deputations, or other forms of supplication." which reveal "a motivated and conscious undertaking on the part of the rural masses."²⁵ In much the same way, before and during the De Freyne rent strike there were several peaceful, albeit unsuccessful, tenant deputations to Lord De Freyne. The first was on 24 October 1901 (the others in November and December) when a group of tenants approached the gates of Frenchpark Demesne asking for a rent abatement to match the Dillon tenants' discount. Such an effort to open negotiations was necessary since the

²⁵ Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," 45–46.

CDB did not have the power to force De Freyne to reduce rents or to make him sell to the tenants.²⁶ John Dillon later reported to the UIL convention:

The tenants were met with insults by the agent and by Lord De Freyne himself; the gates of the demesne were slapped in their faces, and they were not allowed to approach this august landlord to discuss this situation with him...that was the answer given to a moderate and reasonable demand on the part of a body of oppressed and half-starving people.

Another description of the event was offered by T.W. Russell MP (South Tyrone), a unionist who championed land reform in a speech in parliament:

On one side, they had the tenants of the Dillon estate paying 12s, where they had paid £1, while those belonging to the De Freyne estate continued to pay £1, and had been refused the 12s. The tenants waited, he was told, the other day on the landlord to ask a reduction of rent...but ...those tenants were not allowed inside the demesne gates, nor was the reduction they sought granted.²⁷

In De Freyne's version of this meeting, hundreds of tenants came to his house while he was recovering from influenza. Physically unable to come to the gate to see them, he sent his gardener to ask for their request in writing. Later, after "finding no grounds whatever" in it, he directed Flanagan "to refuse any abatement." The Baron heard later that only a few local men were directly involved in planning the deputation, and that most of the people "who attended were simply told to come here and given no information as to why they were to come."²⁸ Unless contingency plans were already in place, the strike had to be organized very quickly since gale day, when rent was collected, was 1 November.

²⁶ *Times*, 24 January 1902. In 1909 legislation finally granted the power of "compulsory purchase," and part of the rationale for its passage was "to ease friction caused between CDB tenants and tenants on neighboring non-congested estates" like those of Dillon and De Freyne. Breathnach, *Congested*, 155.

²⁷ *Irish Times*, 9 November 1901, 9 January 1902, 1 November 1901.

²⁸ Affidavit of Lord De Freyne, Moore, Keily & Lloyd, 1 July 1902, MS 15/24/6, Redmond Papers, NLI.

On October 27, at a meeting in nearby Ballaghaderreen, where the luckier Dillon tenants were celebrating the finalization of the CDB purchase of their farms, John Dillon praised them for agitating to bring about the purchase and questioned the self-reliance of their neighbors, demanding that

the De Freyne tenants should fight for their rights (cheers). I was talking the matter over with some agents of the League in that district and they told me there was a great deal of apathy on that estate and the League in the districts was not what it ought to be. Well, the De Freyne tenants, if they are men, will take a lesson from the men on the Dillon estate and show that they must fight for their rights (applause). Let them fight, let them meet, let them come in, as in the old days, with the League card in their hats, and they will make an impression... That can only be done by forming fighting branches of the League.²⁹

Dillon was clearly recruiting members for the League, not advocating a rent strike per se. Whatever effect his attempt to shame the De Freyne tenants into joining up may have had on their egos, they began withholding rent soon after. Between November and January 1902 only 38 tenants paid Lord De Freyne's rent in Frenchpark, while 489 had paid in that period in 1900–01. In the rent office in Mullaghroe, Boyle, two tenants paid rent in December compared with 46 the year before and 101 in 1897. Few came to pay in Castlerea in November and no one came at all on the Loughglynn collection days.³⁰

Soon, the countryside was aflame with meetings and speeches as chronicled in a running log to which De Freyne had access, possibly gleaned from police notes.³¹ It tracked the activities of prominent UIL leaders like Fitzgibbon, Johnston, Webb, John O'Donnell MP, Conor Kelly MP, Jasper Tully MP, and Thomas Lavin. It also followed

²⁹ *Freeman's Journal*, 29 October 1901.

³⁰ Affidavit of Stephen Woulfe Flanagan, 1 July 1902, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

³¹ The diary of the strike events in the family papers seems to be written in De Freyne's hand. Diary of the strike, undated, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI. There is also a mention of a diary he was promised that was furnished by RIC District Inspector Vincent J. Hetreed in a letter from Lord De Freyne to his solicitor, H.L. Moore, 25 May 1902, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50.329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

the movements of significant local leaders like De Freyne tenants Harte, John Lavin (whose house in Frenchpark was the site of a meeting on 22 December), Pat Lavin of Turlagharee, and Michael Egan of Cloonfad, as well as Murphy tenants like Owen McGarry of Raheela, and Pat Hanly of Rathkeery (most likely the herd who acted as a liaison between landlord and tenants in the 1890s). Outdoor rallies attracted hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people who came to hear local and national speakers on 10 November at Lisacul, 17 November at Cloonfad and Frenchpark, 21 November at Fairymount, and 28 November at Corraccoggil.³² These meetings, with bonfires ablaze and bands playing, must have been exciting and energizing, a kind of interactive street theatre. At Fairymount, it was reported that 4,000 people gathered after dark from League branches twelve miles around. Before Fitzgibbon and others spoke,

horns were blown and drums beat, waking up the entire country. The place of meeting was known only to the secretaries and committees of the League. Men from all the districts were ordered to assemble at stated quarters...and led by the officers the vast contingents wended their way to the place of meeting.³³

At a secret location after the Lisacul meeting, Fitzgibbon told the crowd of 500 they had a right to a reduction of six shillings, eight pence, and another speaker urged them to offer their landlord nothing more than the “Dillon rent.”³⁴ Other meetings were held on 1 December in Gurteen (County Sligo) and Frenchpark, 2 December at Portaghard and Callow, and 3 December at Raheela, 5 December in Sracocka (Callow). Smaller conferences between local leaders in private dwellings and in “O’Gara’s public house” took place weekly, and there were larger meetings until the end of the year in Carrowreagh, Tibohine and Loughglynn. In January of 1902, an assembly took place at

³² Diary of the strike, undated, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

³³ *Western People* 30 November 1901.

³⁴ *Freeman’s Journal*, 14 November 1901.

Gortaganny, and more were recorded through February, March, and April,³⁵ with over 1,000 in attendance on 26 January 1902 in Lisacul.³⁶ Sergeant Frizelle, the director of the RIC station at Frenchpark said the countryside was “peaceable” up to November 17, when John Dillon spoke in Frenchpark. Comparing what he heard in Frenchpark to the “Orange drums” of his youth in Ulster, Frizelle said,

about two days after the meeting, the country appeared to me to be disturbed, and in the dark hours of the night I could hear horns sounding, drums beating, and cheering...that extended for a period of four miles, from Sheepwalk to Fairymount... I have come to the conclusion that the people have been intimidated by this band playing and horn sounding at night...into not paying their rent to Lord De Freyne and adjoining landlords.³⁷

The government responded by drafting “hundreds of policemen” into the district.³⁸ Meetings were held “from the early morning until night in the teeth of the Castle hirelings on the De Freyne and Murphy estates.”³⁹ Attending these meetings (often more than one a day⁴⁰) could require farmers to tramp about the countryside, following speakers as they tried to evade the police on bicycles (still an uncommon sight in the countryside) or in horse-drawn carts. Secret signals directed tenants where to go, with the police arriving at a suspected meeting site, only to find it was transferred to another location.⁴¹ One constable tracked the elusive path of UIL organizer Denis Johnston from Boyle to Edmonstown, to Gurteen, and to Frenchpark in one day, about 37 miles. “We searched for signs of a meeting,” the constable reported, “and found a determined looking

³⁵ Diary of the strike, undated, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

³⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 30 January 1902.

³⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 10 January 1902; *Irish Times*, 10 January 1902.

³⁸ *Irish People*, 4 January 1902. In Frenchpark, where the RIC normally had six constables, there were eighteen by early January. *Freeman's Journal*, 11 January 1902.

³⁹ *Irish People*, 2 December 1901.

⁴⁰ *Connaught Telegram*, 4 January 1902.

⁴¹ *Western People*, 30 November 1901, 4 January 1902; *Irish People*, 6, 14 and 21 December 1901; *Times*, 16 December 1901; *Freeman's Journal* 13 February 1902.

crowd of about 500 men.” He said the people had been standing in tight rows for some time waiting for Johnston to appear, “as they would in drill position apparently obeying some word of command and very silent...almost everyone in the crowd carried a stick.” UIL organizer James Casey of Ballaghaderreen walked up and down in front of the crowd exhorting them, “Here’s the car, let ye all be ready boys.” When they discovered that Johnston was not in that car, the people seemed to be disappointed and broke ranks. One man was overheard complaining about Johnston’s evasion of his RIC trackers, “If he was a man, he wouldn’t be afraid of any bloody...” but the constable did not record the rest.⁴²

Although the local UIL branches were formed months earlier, Bernard Harte, president of the Frenchpark branch, said they did not begin collecting a tenants’ defense fund until the time of Dillon’s speech 17 November, asking five shillings per pound of each holding’s valuation, which was then handed over to Fitzgibbon, Casey, and Webb for safekeeping.⁴³ (Webb also encouraged tenants on the Dillon estate to contribute at least one shilling per pound to the fund for their neighbors.⁴⁴) Harte said he supposed the funds were for expenses “if Lord De Freyne was running them into law.” Harte said the fund had no connection to rent payments as had been the practice during the Plan of Campaign, and receipts were given to every tenant who paid. He gave this testimony as a witness in the trial of other UIL leaders accused of instigating the tenants to strike, testimony that he refused to repeat a month later.⁴⁵ Asked if the tenants had all agreed not

⁴² “Ballaghaderreen, Dec. 6, 1901, Report of Denis Johnston’s movements.” CSORP/1901/Box 24944, NAI.

⁴³ *Freeman’s Journal*, 11 January 1902. The De Freyne affidavit suggests that the fund had been set up at least a week prior to Dillon’s speech, MS 15/24/6, Redmond Papers, NLI.

⁴⁴ *Roscommon Journal*, 4 January 1902; *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 January 1902.

⁴⁵ *Freeman’s Journal*, 11 January, 28 February 1902.

to pay their rent, he replied that they asked for a reduction because of the poor harvest, and then had “agreed not to pay until they got an abatement.” In his assessment, the rent strike was not a deliberate action, but rather the result of De Freyne’s refusal. Harte is one of the few De Freyne tenants whose words were recorded, but his testimony must be considered in light of his position as a League organizer speaking under oath to defend other League members. As such, he did declare that the UIL had “nothing whatever to do” with the tenants’ initial decision.⁴⁶

In late November, a second deputation representing the tenants approached agent Woulfe Flanagan to ask for lower rents, and it included Fitzgibbon, Webb, Thomas Lavin, secretary of the North Roscommon UIL, and Canon W. White, the parish priest of Loughglynn. The agent refused to see them at all because they were not De Freyne tenants themselves.⁴⁷ Woulfe Flanagan argued that the potato crop that year had been good, but Webb rebutted, “all the potatoes on the estate did not pay half Lord De Freyne’s rent.” On 7 December a third group, consisting of Webb, Canon White, and William Elwood, a tenant from Carrowbehy, approached Lord De Freyne. They withdrew the original request for the “Dillon rent” reduction of six shillings, eight pence in the pound, and asked instead for three shillings in the pound. When that was refused, they offered two shillings, with the guarantee of a settlement with all rents paid. However, De Freyne “would accept nothing but the full rent.” Webb said De Freyne refused the offer because acceptance would be seen as a “victory for the League,” but even after Webb offered to write a statement calling it a “concession by the landlord,” he still refused.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Freeman’s Journal*, 3 January 1902.

⁴⁷ *Tuam Herald*, 30 November 1901.

⁴⁸ *Freeman’s Journal*, 28 February 1902

The police thought the delegation represented the views of most tenants, who were willing to accept the smaller abatement, but that top UIL leaders in the area opposed any reduction in their demands. Suggesting a breach between what the tenants wanted and what the League leaders advised, the police report also questioned Webb's presence at this second conference, as well as Fitzgibbon's absence. Webb was in a "predicament," the report said, having created "bad feeling" between himself and the League, "but he does not know how to withdraw without losing the confidence of the people."⁴⁹ The influence of the League was apparently still not as strong as the tenants' desire to get an abatement, but Lord De Freyne's refusal to meet them halfway gave the UIL the advantage it needed.

Not long after the last deputation, De Freyne distributed a circular to his tenants, which he later said was written to prevent "demoralization of the district, but I am sorry to say it had little effect."⁵⁰ It read:

We have had, from time to time, our differences, which are inseparable from the taking of legal proceedings to fix fair rents and other causes, but I have always had the satisfaction of feeling that you recognized and appreciated the interest in your welfare which I have invariably preserved. With some confidence then, I desire to point out to you that we are on the eve of what may turn out to be a grave crisis both for you and for me. You have declined to pay the rent now due on the ground that you are entitled to a reduction, but I must remind you that your rents are judicial rents and were fixed by the Land Commission. I feel you have been badly advised in the attitude you have now taken up. I desire to avoid putting on you the costs of law. I, therefore, confidently hope that you will reconsider your position and pay your rents on or before December 11th, after which day I shall no longer be able to postpone the taking of legal proceedings. I am faithfully yours, De Freyne.

⁴⁹ "Deputation to Lord De Freyne concerning a reduction of rent," 25849/S, Chief Secretary's Office, Crime Special Branch, NAI.

⁵⁰ De Freyne Affidavit, MS 15/241/6, Redmond Papers, NLI.

In the tenants' rebuttal, reprinted in the same newspaper as De Freyne's circular, they said their poverty was worse than that of the Dillon tenants, and they had never gotten any benefits from the CDB. "Our desire is that your lordship should sell to the Congested Districts Board on the same terms as Lord Dillon," and "although we think the price is high, we are willing to repay it." Pending that sale, they further requested the original rent abatement, noting, "we have entirely lost confidence in the Land Commission Courts, and cannot agree that because our rents are Judicial they are therefore, fair rents."⁵¹ In short, the tenants resolved to move beyond the request for lower rents and fight for the sale of the property. By refusing their request again, De Freyne had helped the League win the loyalty of his tenants.

Arrests and prosecutions of speakers began soon after the meetings started.⁵² For the meeting at Gurteen, Jasper Tully, John O'Donnell, Denis Johnston, and others were accused of unlawful assembly and conspiracy to incite Lord De Freyne's tenants not to pay their rent. All three were sent to jail.⁵³ The speakers at the meeting in Gortaganny were also arrested, including Fitzgibbon and Webb. They each were sentenced to four months in prison.⁵⁴ O'Donnell, Johnston and Owen McGarry, were prosecuted for speaking at Raheely on 3 December for conspiracy. The meeting was at the house of a man who had been served a writ for ejectment (it may have been McGarry's house). "There was a band outside, and about 150 people following it. The people, who were shouting and yelling, went round to the back door, and there the defendants delivered speeches... The people groaned and hooted when there was any reference to the

⁵¹ *Irish Times*, 13 December 1901.

⁵² *Irish Times*, 24 January, 1 March 1902.

⁵³ *Irish Times*, 28 January 1902.

⁵⁴ *Freeman's Journal*, 1 March 1902.

landlords of the estates.” For his part in the conspiracy, O’Donnell was accused of telling the tenants to “meet, whether night or day, on the hillsides of Roscommon and let not traitor or grabber pass.”

Identifying those “traitors,” and compelling them to join the combination was a vital element in the tenants’ activism. An observer noted that tenants who refused from the start to have anything to do with the combination were generally exempt from any opprobrium from their neighbors. But a “waverer,” someone who joined the no-rent campaign and then secretly paid their rent, would be singled out for “unpleasantness.” Strikers expressed their disapproval of such conduct by “disobliging’ them so far as they can without vindictiveness.” A waverer “is not considered by the others as having any claims on a former friendship in the amenities of everyday life; and no one will go out of his way to do him a good turn.”⁵⁵

Evidence of intimidation must be evaluated by its origins. Then as now, newspapers tended to focus on sensation and dysfunction, and ignore other angles to a story. Also, much of the information on intimidation comes from spy networks and paid surveillance, which had long been staple tools of the British government against insurgencies in Ireland, and was a system also employed by the insurgents themselves. Lord De Freyne’s solicitors encouraged him to hire a local process server, Patrick McNiff, to infiltrate the tenants’ ranks, and he returned information on the tenant activities. De Freyne himself, and his agent Flanagan, kept notes on individuals on the estate who participated in boycotting and intimidation. The Irish Party had its own “observers” on the Associated Estates, paid operatives who reported on events and helped

⁵⁵ *Irish Times*, 9 January, 19 January, 26 January 1902.

manage the agitators. Reporting to John Redmond in Dublin were William Duffy MP (South Galway) and John Cullinan MP (Tipperary South), who were both named in the De Freyne suit.⁵⁶ Their presence shows how closely the national political elite was watching events in Roscommon. Duffy and Cullinan made speeches, took the pulse of the community, and kept in close contact with Redmond. While ostensibly on the side of the tenants, their real purpose in Roscommon was to protect the Irish Party.

Newspapers tended to cover instances of intimidation attributable to organizations, rather than individuals, giving these activities an official gloss. The Ballaghaderreen UIL branch warned “drivers and owners not to supply the Castle agents with cars...so as to enable them to carry out evictions.” Shopkeepers in Frenchpark were called upon by the League branch there to make “Callaghan, the bailiff...realize the effects of his present conduct” in processing evictions. In Cloonfad, a meeting was called “to bring the searchlight of public opinion to bear on all obnoxious individuals.”⁵⁷ Roscommon County Council, under the leadership of John Fitzgibbon, cancelled public works that were “largely for the accommodation of the landlords...or where contractors were not evicted tenants.”⁵⁸ One doctor was refused a salary increase from the Castlerea Board of Guardians because he “was the man who certified for Woulfe Flanagan...that a man was fit to be evicted who died a few days afterwards.”⁵⁹ A tenant committee told another doctor, who was accused of paying his rent, that they “declared his dispensary appointments vacant,” and would advertise for another medical man. William Elwood, a

⁵⁶ Their letters are in MS 15,186, MS15,241, Redmond Papers, NLI.

⁵⁷ *Irish People*, 7 December, 14 December, 9 November 1901.

⁵⁸ *Times*, 29 September 1901.

⁵⁹ “Public Health and Poor-Law Medical Services,” *The British Medical Journal* 1(2207: April 18, 1903), 945.

De Freyne tenant and local postmaster who was in the deputation that petitioned for an abatement, asked the same committee for permission to pay his rent, because if evicted he would lose £1,500. He was told his case was not exceptional enough to warrant clemency and that “he should accept the consequences of paying rent.”⁶⁰ Those consequences, presumably, included social ostracism.

Many reports of intimidation committed by individuals come from Lord De Freyne and his agent, who used them as ammunition against the League. In a letter to Chief Secretary George Wyndham, De Freyne wrote that the only way to help the tenants was to take the power from “the hands of the village ruffians and the inhabitants of many humble homes will bless you in their hearts though they may shout loudly against you in public.”⁶¹ He fingered Webb as advising tenants to “unite yourselves and become detectives in your villages, watch your neighbors...the man who does not join us watch him when he goes to the Fair or the Market with his pigs and I guarantee we will get no buyers for him.” De Freyne wrote notes in his papers about some tenants. Next to the name of Martin Flanagan of Errit is penciled “Intimidates,” and next to that of John Dillon of Tully, “the worst of the lot, encourages and threatens.” (According to the 1901 census, Flanagan and his wife lived in a third-class dwelling; Dillon had seven children in a second-class house). The tenants were “completely terrorized,” De Freyne wrote, and some had asked him to prosecute them for non-payment even if they had already paid

⁶⁰ *Irish Times*, 19 February 1902.

⁶¹ Lord De Freyne to George Wyndham, 5 May 1902, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI. Wyndham had his own plan for dealing with Dillon, O’Donnell and their allies. He had a “List #2” of “notorious agitators,” whose presence near “certain ‘disturbed’ areas” on his “List #1” would automatically trigger a police response. He estimated that “nine-tenths of the people are hanging back from the agitation,” and boasted, “I am keeping the lawless parts wedged off from the rest of Ireland.” “Confidential” letter, George Wyndham to Rt. Hon. A.J. Balfour, 2 November 1901, *Life and Letters of George Wyndham*, J.W. Mackail and Guy Wyndham, eds., v.2 (London: Hutchinson & Co., undated), 428–29.

their rent.⁶² One tenant approached the baron while he was “shooting” to say he had been accosted by strangers who searched him for a rent receipt after leaving the bank in Castlerea at the same time as Flanagan. Another told De Freyne that paying court costs was preferable to a “broken head.”⁶³ An unidentified tenant expressed his complex anxieties in garbled syntax and spelling:

To Hon. Lord Defraine

Dear Sir a poor suffer wishes to tell you the state of things in the townland of Rooskey and Aughalustia. There is a pack of men hear with strong help who has poor suffers under control and afraid of there lives and of there little means with them and as afraid to pay you your rent which is Pat Doherty, Domnick Naughton, John Jordan, James (unintelligible) of Aughalustia Pat Doherty brings fear for the people goes round and even sends them out to pelt your agent at Crunaun Bridge and then goes and gives all the news to the police officer he cesses the people with Pat Web to his back his brother in Law he has this neighbourhood in a terrible way and Tom Jordan your balif if he knew a poor suffer like me would pay my rent (unintelligible) for a pint of porter for God sake take pittty on the weak he and Naughton is out gathering more defence money now and I beleve both has their rent Payed.

A poor Sufferer⁶⁴

In Lord De Freyne’s notes he lists the names of some local tenants who paid their rent, or tried to, and what happened to them as a result. After Patrick Kenny of Cloontowart paid his rent he was told, according to De Freyne, that his four children should “stop away from school” for their own protection.⁶⁵ Martin Sharkey of Tulagharee could not get anyone to plough his land after he paid his rent, so Lord De Freyne sent him some horses. But Sharkey “was so intimidated that he had to go to Ballaghaderreen the

⁶² De Freyne Affidavit, MS 15/24/6, Redmond Papers, NLI.

⁶³ Undated document, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI

⁶⁴ A poor Sufferer to Hon. Lord Defraine, undated, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁶⁵ He may have been the same Patrick Kenny who gave evidence to De Freyne’s solicitors for the lawsuit against Fitzgibbon, et. al, and who the solicitors later suspected of lying to them. H.L. Moore to LDF, 26 and 30 May 1902, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

next day to apologize to the agitators.” De Freyne claimed that after a man named Callaghan from Lissacurkia appeared at the rent office in December to ask for more time to pay, his cart donkey was injured.⁶⁶ Jordan Loughlin, 75, of Frenchpark, the first president of the Land League there,⁶⁷ “sent away rent by cheque for a whole lot of tenants who were afraid to send it themselves.” Loughlin was described as a District Councillor and “a sort of independent old fellow and although a Nationalist does not belong to the U. I. League.”⁶⁸

Woulfe Flanagan took note of a tenant named Doherty who “was always anxious to pay, but was prevented by his children because of their fear of being boycotted,” and of others who were afraid that “the house should be burnt over their heads” because they had paid their rent. Tenants paid early in the morning, he said, or late at night, coming across the fields in a circuitous route to avoid observation. He thought they were genuinely afraid of violence and a system he calls “picketing” which kept them from his office, describing a “state of terrorism.” Sometimes the rent was sent through the post accompanied by a self-addressed return envelope for the receipt because the agent’s handwriting would have been recognized. Woulfe Flanagan himself was subject to actual violence on 20 January 1902, as he was returning from Ballymote with “a large number of Decrees against tenants for non-payment of rent.” About seventy men met him on the road, jeered and threatened him, and he “received a heavy blow from a stone or other missile.”⁶⁹ Organizers bandied Woulfe Flanagan’s name about in strike speeches, but

⁶⁶ Undated document, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers NLI.

⁶⁷ *Roscommon Journal*, 22 January 1881.

⁶⁸ H.L. Moore to LDF, 12 June 1902, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁶⁹ Affidavit of Stephen Woulfe Flanagan, 1 July 1902, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

none was as forceful as Webb, who said if De Freyne did not give an abatement, “all the Police in the world would not save Mr. Woulfe Flanagan from the wrath of the people.”⁷⁰

The reaction by the government and the landlords was swift and draconian. Legal procedures like evictions, sheriff’s sales of tenants’ rights, and the distraining of stock and other property followed swiftly after the first few months of agitation. Cattle were impounded, unless tenants could hide them in time, and in January, over three hundred decrees against tenants who did not pay their rent on the De Freyne and Murphy estates were obtained at the Roscommon Quarter Sessions. Although hundreds of policemen had already been seen at meetings in the area, reinforcements were sent to the RIC stations nearby after the Crimes Act was reinstated in March of 1902 by Wyndham.⁷¹ Fitzgibbon and Webb represented the tenants at one sheriff’s sale where they and De Freyne’s agent were the only bidders. Woulfe Flanagan’s bids won by one pound in nearly every case. Did Fitzgibbon and Webb lose the bids because of the one pound, or was the entire process pre-arranged, and their participation only a gesture of defiance? Fitzgibbon said at the sale that Lord De Freyne was not “exactly” to blame for the agitation, but rather it was the “emancipation” of the Dillon tenantry,” he said, who became “new people,” leaving the rest as “slaves.” With sale of their rights in the property, the tenants were effectively no longer tenants at all, and were subject to immediate eviction. Were they disappointed that their interests were so easily sold, or had they expected that all along? The last line in the *Herald* article captured what may have been a telling moment after the bidding was over: “The tenants and their sympathizers quietly separated after the sale.”⁷²

⁷⁰ De Freyne Affidavit, MS 15/241/6, Redmond Papers, NLI.

⁷¹ *Times*, 16 December 1901; *Irish Times*, 14 March 1902.

⁷² *Roscommon Herald*, 29 February 1902.

Soon whatever solidarity the tenants had achieved appeared to be unraveling. In early February 1902, it was reported that the O'Grady estate would be sold to the CDB, and in the spring, Denis O'Connor, son of the Don, settled with his tenants for a reduction of three shillings in the pound, and a promise to sell to the CDB.⁷³ Other signs that the collective action was beginning to fracture were noted by Redmond's agent Duffy, reporting from the Commercial Hotel in Ballaghaderreen. He said initially most "tenants are firm and solid in the combination, standing loyally by each other and prepared to take the consequences." However, he soon noted that the police were circulating among them and "sowing fear." A cartoon on the front page of the *Herald* (1 January 1902) showed two RIC inspectors, identified by name, shoving a gag into a man's mouth with the caption "How Martial Law Works in Frenchpark." Duffy told Redmond "fortunately I was on the scene just in the nick of time" to stem the influence of the police, but he also said he had to struggle against the disapproval of the agitation by most of the local priests. Forcing an upbeat tone, he said tenants in Frenchpark and Gurteen who paid their rent, were "well-to-do...people whose absence from the combination adds strength rather than weakness." But Duffy's confidence was rattled by his estimate of two hundred ejectment notices "ripe for execution," and the lack of adequate provisions for people facing eviction. Sensing danger, he insisted he should remain in the area because he feared Tibohine, Frenchpark or Loughglynn could break away from the combination if not "zealously looked after."⁷⁴

⁷³ *Irish People*, 1 February 1902; *Roscommon Herald*, 22 March 1902; *Freeman's Journal*, 20 April 1902.

⁷⁴ Letters from William Duffy, 25 January, 22 March, 24 April, MS 15,186, Redmond Papers, NLI.

A letter from “An old ’67 man” (another term for Fenian) in anti-Parnellite Jasper Tully’s *Herald* inspired more “talk of settling.”⁷⁵ The writer called himself “an old believer in the physical force doctrine, whose ideas have never been warped by the shoutings and blowings of the so-called constitutionalist agitators and Talking Shop men.” In the letter, he attacked Denis Johnston for telling a crowd that their cheering and shouting alone would be enough to:

knock the rifles from the policemen’s hands and the rents from the landlord’s pockets... Constitutional agitation is all very fine until you reach the point when you meet the man with the bayonet and the gun... without physical force at their back, a No-Rent movement is simple lunacy. There is no physical force at the back of Johnston and O’Donnell.

He accused Johnston of handing the League’s secrets over to the government, and leaving the defense fund vulnerable, because “after the recent Trades Union decisions it is open to the landlords to follow the Treasurers personally for loss and damage.” The writer also raised these questions, which may have been of more timely concern to tenants:

What is the state of things on the De Freyne and Murphy estates? The markets of Ballaghadorreen (sic) and the surrounding towns have been severely injured since this thing began, and where is it all to end? Are the people prepared to have their houses burned over their heads, and have their leading local men, like honest Owen McGarry, sent to prison to sleep on the plank bed, and to be put to the most degrading work like Michael Davitt and others, cleaning out prison closets?

As if to completely nullify the League’s competence and authority, the “Physical Force Man from Castlerea” said the only hope for the tenants was to lay their case in the hands of sympathetic priests and bishops, “the only friends on whom they can rely,” to press for a settlement.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Duffy called the letter “an unfriendly and cruel attack.” William Duffy to John Redmond, 22 March, Redmond Papers, NLI, MS 15,186.

⁷⁶ *Roscommon Herald*, 16 January 1902.

The fallout from the letter reveals how shaky the political ties between the national directory and the periphery could be, but also how the legacies of past struggles weighed on the present. The Associated Estates and the League leadership recoiled at aspersions in the letter about the handling of the defense fund by trustees Fitzgibbon, Webb and Casey, but completely avoided mentioning that it had raised the specter of armed violence. Suspecting that Tully was the letter writer himself, the *Freeman's Journal* lashed out at him, and a meeting of the Associated Estates quickly condemned the letter. The *Journal* reported that tenants were insisting that no "Physical Force Man from Castlerea" ever wrote such a letter, and that the *Herald* (and Tully) were "endeavouring to split up our combination by putting its columns at the disposal of every landlord, agent, emergency man, and bailiff."⁷⁷ In response, Tully filed a libel suit against the *Freeman's Journal*,⁷⁸ and printed a lighthearted column mocking the fuss over the letter (featuring a talkative bartender in the style of the Finley Peter Dunne's running feature in the *Chicago Post*):

To Friend Hennessey: Writing about that old '67 man kicking up a cloud of dust near Castlerea. Old '67 man has everyone talking—what will he do—set off a bomb in Parliament?...He seems to have a whole lot of '67 relations and friends. With everything being split into opposing camps, a good place for us is the ditch between the two sides, we could jump either way...Signed, "Mr. Dooley the Second."⁷⁹

While the controversy over the letter casts light on Tully's relationship with the League's Dublin leadership and the problems that leadership faced to control its forces in the field, it also adds another layer to the complex array of messages the tenants received. Perhaps there were others who felt the same way as the "old '67 man," but were reluctant

⁷⁷ *Freeman's Journal* 29 January 1902.

⁷⁸ *Irish Times*, 8 February 1902.

⁷⁹ *Roscommon Herald*, 2 February 1902.

to step forward. The *Herald* dutifully printed reactions in the following weeks condemning the letter from the “old ’67 man,” but there were at least two letters from anonymous authors who agreed with it.⁸⁰ In 1901, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (the legacy organization of the Fenian movement from 1867) had forty-two “circles” in Roscommon, with over twelve hundred members on the books (190 were considered “in good standing”). Meanwhile, the Gaelic Athletic Association, with seven branches in the county, had 188 members “under fenian control” but only thirty-six “under clerical control.”⁸¹ Duffy described some “’67 men” in Castlerea, who had connected with the tenants’ fight. They were denouncing John Fitzgibbon, he told Redmond, “that best and noblest of men. I would treat them with contempt if I didn’t know they could do us a lot of harm.”⁸²

Another local incident further suggests strong local support for the IRB. Just before the strike began, Maud Gonne appeared in Castlerea to dedicate a memorial to local IRB member and Land Leaguer John Lavin. The police paid close attention as she told the cheering crowd that Lavin “did not believe in Parliamentary methods. He preached a nobler and truer doctrine, the doctrine of John Mitchel and Wolfe Tone. He knew that no nation ever would win its freedom by talk... freedom would never be won without sacrifice and bloodshed.” Her words were clumsily countered by the Irish Party’s John P. Hayden, who urged all Irishmen to tolerate other nationalists’ methods, even if they disagreed with them, receiving cheers only when he mentioned Lavin’s name.⁸³

⁸⁰ *Roscommon Herald*, 25 January 1902.

⁸¹ “Annual statistical return of Nationalist associations in Ireland,” 20 Feb 1901, CBS/26268, NAI.

⁸² William Duffy to John Redmond, 22 March 1902, MS 15/241/4, Redmond Papers, NLI.

⁸³ *Irish Independent*, 9 September 1901.

A final note on the tenants' combination. One segment of the population on the De Freyne estate—landless laborers and those with small conacre plots who did not pay rent—played a particularly silent role in the agitation. As was the case with the Land League, laborers' interests were subordinate to that of tenant farmers in the UIL rhetoric, even though O'Brien tried to gain their support by calling laborers "the backbone of every fight for Ireland."⁸⁴ At the UIL convention in Dublin in January 1902, a speaker was booed from the stage when he asked, "What would be the consequence to the labourers of land purchase? The owners would be multiplied and probably...treat the labourers worse than the landlords themselves. (Cries of 'Put him out!') ...you would have the same thing over again and multiplied."⁸⁵ Laborers did throw their weight in with the UIL, but long-time tensions between occupiers and laborers never went away. While laborers may have recognized that their best options lay in combining with the farmers, "they did so without any noticeable passion or particular enthusiasm."⁸⁶ A letter writer to *The Irish People* (23 March 1901) suggested that all the laborers would get for their "services so ungrudgingly rendered" was "coldness and contempt."⁸⁷

Although continuing evictions sparked protests, the main agitation appears to have diminished during the spring and summer of 1902, coincidental with the jail terms of many UIL leaders. By June 1902, the strike was reported to be have been settled through the intercession of the Bishop of Elphin, John J. Clancy, but it is not clear if the

⁸⁴ Clark, *Social Origins*, 298–99; *Weekly Freeman*, 14 April 1900; quoted in Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 76.

⁸⁵ *Irish Times*, 9 January 1902. The speaker, identified as Mr. Quinlan, was most likely Patrick Quinlan, who worked alongside James Connolly in the International Workers of the World in New Jersey in 1905–06, and was a founding member, with Connolly and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, of the Irish Socialist Federation in New York in 1907. Donal Nevin, *James Connolly, "A Full Life,"* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), 267–278.

⁸⁶ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 77.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 76.

tenants received any abatement at all.⁸⁸ They may have grown tired of the fight, but it is also likely that seasonal migration took many of them to England at that time. Lord De Freyne was convinced the trouble on the estate was

made by or stirred up among the very small holders out on the bog, who are not Irish farmers at all, but English labourers. They go over to England for three-quarters of the year, and merely come home to spend the winter here... It is the easiest thing in the world to get up an agitation amongst them, as they have very little to do while they are here, but go around to markets and meetings.⁸⁹

A correspondent for the *Irish Times* came to the same conclusion. He was told by a “local gentleman” that the young men who return from England each year were idle with “constant opportunities of making mischief.” At UIL meetings they “hear the frothy speeches delivered by the tenants’ advisers, and easily influenced by what is said, keep up the agitation, and in many ways intensify its malignity.”⁹⁰ Another factor in the diminishing agitation may have been De Freyne’s lawsuit against the UIL directory and the *Freeman’s Journal* which dragged on in the courts, distracting the nationalist organizers until it was finally settled in July 1904.⁹¹ In February 1905, more than three years after the first deputation to Frenchpark Demesne, John Fitzgibbon announced at a “mass meeting of the tenantry, that ... Lord De Freyne agreed to the tenants’ terms, and signed the agreement for the sale of his property to the Congested Districts Board.” Bonfires were lit on Fairymount hill and in the surrounding area, and “The wildest enthusiasm prevailed.”⁹² In July 1906, De Freyne vested 36,000 acres with the Congested Districts Board.⁹³

⁸⁸ *Irish Times*, 2 June 1902.

⁸⁹ *Supplement to the Wicklow People*, 12 April 1902

⁹⁰ *Irish Times*, 26 February 1902.

⁹¹ *Irish Times*, 2 July 1904.

⁹² *Irish Times*, 28 February 1905; *Manchester Guardian*, 28 February 1905.

⁹³ “Frenchpark,” Connacht and Munster Landed Estates Database, www.landedestates.nuigalway.ie.

The Rhetoric

While the strike happened for economic, psychological and social reasons, those imperatives were always subsumed by the language of national politics. Speeches at strike meetings were full of sinew and calls for solidarity, attaching the strike to events and movements far away from Frenchpark. Thomas Mahon of Ballaghaderreen reassured the tenants at Fairymount: “You have Ireland at home, Ireland in America, Ireland in Scotland and the world at your back, beat de Freyne and then we win.” At Loughglynn, the landlord’s name became a generic noun, when tenants were urged to fight against “all the De Freynes in Ireland.” Patrick Webb at Gortaganny told tenants that at a meeting in Dublin “men of all creeds and denominations, men from all parts of the world, they having only one voice, and the only sentiment they had was the De Freyne fight was the fight of Ireland,” and then reminded tenants not to fall behind on their payments to the defense fund.⁹⁴ While the tenants did not leave a record of their thoughts about the strike, the ideas they heard can be found in newspapers and police reports. What was heard or read may have been internalized, or may have been dismissed, but much can be interpolated by considering what the strike leaders thought the tenants needed to hear and what they wanted them to think.

Because the League (and by extension the Irish Parliamentary Party) was uncomfortable having a rent strike on its hands, the initial message the people heard reflected that ambivalence. Despite O’Brien’s mandate to keep the UIL away from any illegality,⁹⁵ the League was now forced to adapt its agenda to include the strike and, for

⁹⁴ These speeches were all quoted in Lord De Freyne’s Affidavit, MS 15/24/6, Redmond Papers, NLI.

⁹⁵ Bull, *Land, Politics, and Nationalism*, 161.

the most part, national leaders tried to separate themselves from it. Speaking in parliament about the De Freyne tenants, Redmond equivocated:

What I desire to say—and I wish my words could reach every man on that estate—is that I believe they have right and justice and honesty on their side. I wish them every success. They have gone into this on their own initiative... I say to these people that I know two things about the future of the combination—if they persevere in it some of them will suffer and will have to face the sacrifices. I know another thing, that if they persevere they are bound to succeed.⁹⁶

He later blamed the tenants' revolt on the Dillon purchase, and the government's refusal to support compulsory sale, which "has given rise to the widespread discontent and agitation in Ireland." If the CDB had the power to force landlords to sell, he estimated the trouble on the De Freyne estate could be settled in twenty-four hours.⁹⁷

Michael Davitt, who publicly debated the Bishop of Elphin, John J. Clancy, on the morality of paying rent during the strike, insisted the tenants received no advice from the League and had started the combination on their own. The League thought the strike was a "right demand put forward in a wrong way," Davitt said, and tenants were "left in their contest to the guidance of local sympathizers" like Fitzgibbon.⁹⁸ John Dillon declared in Westminster that "though neither he nor the Irish Party had anything to do with the struggle, he was prepared to go at once to the district and advise these tenants to abandon their combination and pay their rents."⁹⁹ Yet at Fairymount he was reported to have told tenants to "make it hot" for the landlords, and "so long as they deny you justice you will deny them rent."¹⁰⁰ William O'Brien, who had told "the men of Callow and

⁹⁶ *Irish People*, 1 February 1902.

⁹⁷ *Irish Times*, 24 February 1902.

⁹⁸ Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 702–703.

⁹⁹ *Westmeath Examiner*, 1 February 1902.

¹⁰⁰ *Irish Times*, 31 January 1902, 9. This speech inspired a unionist response that the strike was "simply a case such as that boasted of by Mr John Dillon when he offered to produce men who 'can't pay and won't pay because I tell them not to pay.'" *The Northern Whig*, 3 July 1902, also quoted in Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 89.

Breedogue and Frenchpark” two years earlier that “it is all up with landlordism and grazierism in Connaught,” and that they should “leave these ranches without horn or hoof or auctioneer or buyer,”¹⁰¹ vehemently recoiled at the idea of a rent strike of any kind. “I never for one moment contemplated a no-rent movement,” he said, “words cannot tell you what a blow it is to me.”¹⁰² He wrote to *Irish People* editor Tim McCarthy, “The attempt to saddle me with responsibility for this wretched business is worse than the worst... [and] really fills me with despair of ever making myself understood.”¹⁰³ Yet, in March 1902 he declared, “Lord De Freyne has no more moral or economic right to what he calls his rents than he has to knock his tenants down on their return from the English harvest and rifle their pockets of their earnings.”¹⁰⁴ Even local stalwart Fitzgibbon participated in this rhetorical sidestepping, testifying in court that he had tried “to prevent a general refusal to pay rent,” and claiming he had “exhausted all other means before I took part in these radical measures.”¹⁰⁵ Yet he supported the tenants so enthusiastically he landed in jail anyway.

If the speakers who encouraged the strikers (while maintaining they never told them to strike) found that job complicated, what was the reaction of their listeners who, if they spotted these incongruities, were forced to remain silent on the subject? Perhaps the sheer barrage of meeting after meeting, and the appearance of so many speakers, helped the League cement support despite the inconsistencies in their message. The rhetoric at these meetings urged, above all else, that the tenants become united and fight together,

¹⁰¹ *Freeman's Journal*, 11 July 1899.

¹⁰² Quoted in O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics*, p.132.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War*, p. 213.

¹⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, 3 March 1902.

¹⁰⁵ Quoted in Hugh Sutherland, *Ireland Yesterday and Today* (Philadelphia: The North American, 1909), 87.

that is, join the League. Any more precise definition of what it meant to be “united” was left up to the listeners, who had to negotiate that maze in their daily lives. The term “nationalist” is used in most speeches, with many references to how much better Ireland would be without the landlords and graziers, as if their absence alone would allow nationhood to flourish. While speakers pounded home the more recently articulated goals of compulsory purchase, an end to landlordism, and land redistribution, their rhetoric would have sounded familiar to anyone who had lived through the Land League or the Plan of Campaign.

The past and the present were regularly collapsed into one in UIL rhetoric, linking former struggles to the strike. Not only were the tenants fighting for their land in 1901, but they were fighting for it in the past as well, in the centuries-old struggle for the land of their ancestors, which they had lost through confiscation, settlement and clearances. Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh argues that receptivity to a “myth of ‘historical dispossession’” was crucial to encouraging collective action during all phases of the nineteenth century land agitation, especially among those whose grievances were based, as most were, in local or familial circumstances. No matter how immediate or dire those circumstances might be, “effective mobilization invariably required the lubrication of ‘historical memory’—however selective, imperfect or manipulated—of old, unexpiated wrongs.”¹⁰⁶ At a rainy and windy meeting in 1899 about four miles from Frenchpark, a crowd heard UIL speakers declare that the land Cromwell confiscated in the 1600s should be returned without charge to the original owners, and that landlords should not get “one shilling” until evicted tenants from the Famine were returned to their former holdings. William

¹⁰⁶ Ó Tuathaigh, “Irish Land Questions in the State of the Union,” 6.

O'Brien declared that same day that any tenant who mowed a landlord's hay might as well "reap a crop of your father's graves, aye, or root up your father's bones and make bone manure of them."¹⁰⁷ Speeches also referred to more recent history. Recalling the Land League days, John Dillon reminded an audience in Frenchpark of

the dark, black days of '79, when I myself have seen, hundreds of times, a long string of starving men and starving women standing at the doors of the pawnshops in Ballaghaderreen and pawning the beds from under them in order to get a little Indian meal to keep body and soul together...then I swore and the men who were with me...that so long as God gave us health and strength to fight the battle of the people we would declare war, implacable and unrelenting upon landlordism...we have very nearly finished the job.¹⁰⁸

Dillon also rekindled memories of the sins of De Freyne's former agents to condemn the current one:

You remember the years 1885, 1886 and 1887...you remember MacDougall, the burner (groans), and Whitby Lynch (groans), and Blakeney that came after... I remember very well when a De Freyne tenant was almost afraid to come over to a meeting if he saw Mr. MacDougall and three policemen with bayonets fixed. That was the way he used to collect the rents with a petroleum can in one hand and box of matches in another setting fire with his own hand to the houses of the people. Well, we cleared out McDougall and Whitby Lynch, and Blakeney is gone, and I promise you Flanagan will follow them (cheers).¹⁰⁹

War was a common motif, as speakers urged the virtues of "manliness" and conjured battlefield calls for solidarity. In February 1902, Patrick Webb told a meeting of tenants, many of whom faced eviction, that "They were fighting a brave battle and victory was already on their banners." A tenant on the Murphy estate who had received a notice of ejection, echoed that language, pledging to "fight the battle against

¹⁰⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 11 July 1899. O'Brien had a reputation as a dynamic speaker. An English woman once said, "When I hear William O'Brien make a speech, I feel that if I were an Irishwoman, I should like to go and break windows." Quoted in Lady [Augusta] Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre, a Chapter of Autobiography* (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), 16.

¹⁰⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 19 November 1901.

¹⁰⁹ *Roscommon Herald*, 23 November 1901.

landlordism...to the bitter end, and that our war cry is ‘no surrender.’”¹¹⁰ References to the Boers’ fight against the British in South Africa were numerous, and it was the only recurring motif, other than some references to the current UIL agenda, that would have been unfamiliar to the tenants’ grandparents.¹¹¹ A *Herald* cartoon compared Lord De Freyne’s confiscation of tenants’ livestock to Field Marshal Lord Horatio H. Kitchener’s unsuccessful “drives” against Boer General Christiaan de Wet. In the cartoon, all De Freyne got for his “drive” was “one jackass.”¹¹² Fitzgibbon remarked that with the number of police near Frenchpark “one would imagine they were living in the Boer country, so great was the display of R.I.C. armed to the teeth.”¹¹³ Organizer Denis Johnston was popularly called “De Wet,” comparing his ability to get through police lines to hold meetings “evening after evening,” with the guerilla warfare practiced by the Boer general.¹¹⁴ Referring to the recent British innovation in detaining prisoners in South Africa, one article dared the government to do its worst (with the implication that the Associated Estates’ tenants would fight back like the Boers): “Mr. Wyndham may send every man of the three thousand tenants to jail...He may cage their wives and their sons and daughters in ‘Concentration Camps.’”¹¹⁵ The Boers were widely supported in Ireland for their stand against the British Empire, so using references to that conflict bestowed a kind of international legitimacy on the strike.

¹¹⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 18 February 1902.

¹¹¹ Motifs and terminology of the Boer conflict were very familiar to the tenants. When a policeman appeared at a meeting in Fairymount in a “white hat and clerical mackintosh” (resembling clothing worn in South Africa), the crowd spontaneously shouted, “Spion Kop!” the location of a recent victory by the Boers. *Irish People*, 30 November 1901.

¹¹² *Roscommon Herald*, 24 May 1902.

¹¹³ *Irish People*, 21 December 1901.

¹¹⁴ *Western People*, 4 January 1902.

¹¹⁵ *Irish People*, 4 January 1902.

Reflection

The events of the De Freyne rent strike illustrate how local concerns intersected with national interests at the end of the Land War, and how the national leadership was often stymied by the complexity of maintaining a consistent message while, at the same time, encouraging local support. The De Freyne tenants unintentionally challenged the UIL by acting on their own behalf, forcing it to revamp its agenda to include them. Their subversion set events in motion that helped bring about the Land Conference of 1902, which then inspired the Land Act of 1903, a far cry from what they, or many members of the UIL leadership, had originally hoped to achieve. When the UIL asked the tenants to fight to end landlordism and to create an Irish nation, all the smaller battles—grazing vs. tillage, small holder vs. strong farmer, and man vs. bog—were assumed to be part of that bigger fight. The League leadership helped the tenants to come together despite their many differences, but that unity also diminished their individual miseries, and buried their immediate concerns. The League rhetoric called for unity, strength, manliness and national pride, so it is certain that their opposites—jealousy, fear, mistrust and uncertainty—were rampant, exacerbated by intense boycotting and intimidation within the community.¹¹⁶ It would be fifteen years and more before most of the De Freyne tenants were able to assume ownership of their farms, and the complications attached to land distribution during the next decades mocked the simplicity of the League rhetoric. After it was over, the question of who had started the De Freyne rent strike was no longer relevant, but so too was any question of who had won.

¹¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 25 February 1902.

CHAPTER 4: POLITICIANS AND PRIESTS

Many non-tenants tried to speak for the striking farmers on the Associated Estates and to steer the direction of their collective action. Among them were notable Irish politicians and members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, as well as lesser League officials and parish priests. Their opinions were broadcast to the tenants in newspaper articles, at open air meetings, and at Sunday Mass. Since most of what is known about the strike comes from the words and deeds of these leaders, and not from those of the tenants, it is crucial to understand who these men were,¹ and how their interests intersected with the strike. They sent messages to their constituents and parishioners that were full of zeal and sympathy but, under the apparent belief that the tenants did not know what they were doing, also full of advice and remonstrance. Much of this political and spiritual guidance reflected issues far removed from immediate concerns about soggy fields and the cost of rent. While speaking for and about the strikers, many of these luminaries, particularly the most prominent, were actually working through worries of their own which had been exacerbated by the strike. With the exception of the local organizers and parish priests, these men did not live anywhere near the estate and, not surprisingly, the more pronounced their notoriety, the less they interacted directly with the tenants. In an attempt to differentiate their well-recorded voices from the tenant voices that have been lost to history, this chapter will look at the politicians and priests who had the most to say.

¹ The only non-resident woman who openly supported the strikers was Maud Gonne, the political and social activist, actress, and muse of William Butler Yeats. Local tenant women had prominent roles in eviction resistance and in boycotting, but otherwise did not assume public leadership roles in the rent strike as they had done with the Ladies' Land League in the 1880s.

1902. No. 583.

In the High Court of Justice in Ireland.
CHANCERY DIVISION.

VICE-CHANCELLOR.

BETWEEN

THE RIGHT HONORABLE ARTHUR FRENCH
BARON DE FREYNE Plaintiff;

AND

JOHN FITZGIBBON, PATRICK WEBB, DENIS
JOHNSTON, BERNARD HARTE, OWEN M'GARRY, JOHN
CULLINAN, M.P.; CONOR O'KELLY, WILLIAM DUFFY,
M.P.; THE "FREEMAN'S JOURNAL," LIMITED; JOHN
E. REDMOND, M.P.; JOHN O'DONNELL, M.P.; DAVID
SHEEHY, LAURENCE GINNELL, ALFRED WEBB,
ANDREW J. KETTLE, PATRICK WHITE, WILLIAM
O'BRIEN, MICHAEL DAVITT, JOHN DILLON, M.P.;
EDMUND HAVILAND BURKE, M.P.; JOHN
MACINERNEY, THOMAS HARRINGTON, JOHN ROCHE,
M.P.; J. P. FARRELL, M.P.; PATRICK MULCAHY,
L.R.C.S.I.; JOHN GORDON SWIFT M'NEILL, M.P.;
ALDERMAN J. J. FARRELL, JOSEPH DELAHUNT,
JOHN MULDOON, AND RICHARD M'GHEE.

Defendants.

DEFENCE

Of the *Freeman's Journal*, Limited, delivered on the day of April,
1903, by John L. Scallan & Co., Solicitors, of 25 Suffolk Street,
Dublin.

(1) The Defendant Company denies that the Plaintiff is the owner of large estates in the Counties of Sligo, Roscommon, and Galway, or that he is the owner of any estates or land in those or any other Counties in Ireland. The Defendant Company denies that the Plaintiff has 1,692 tenants or any tenants in the said or any other Counties, and the Defendant Company denies that the Plaintiff has any estates which are let annually by the season for grazing purposes.

(2) The Defendant Company denies that in 1901, or at any other time, the Defendants, with intent to injure the Plaintiff, or at all conspired together to compel the Plaintiff to grant to his tenants a permanent abatement of 6s. 8d. in the £ sterling upon the rents which

"Lord de Freyne v John Fitzgibbon and others, Writ of Summons," *In the High Court of Justice in Ireland, Chancery Division, Vice Chancellor*, 1902, No. 583, Redmond Papers, MS 15,241/6, NLI.

Politicians

Lord De Freyne decided which political leaders were most complicit in the strike when he sued twenty-nine members of the Irish Party and the United Irish League,² as well as the *Freeman's Journal*, for £20,000 in June 1902. The suit claimed they had persuaded his tenants not to pay rent in order to force him to sell his estate to the Congested Districts Board. Only two tenants were on his list, and both were League officials. In the strong belief that the national political powers fueled the strike, De Freyne and the landlords who backed him hoped the suit would eviscerate the national party's pocketbook and its ability to function, and thus stop the strike as well. De Freyne's move rattled his nationalist adversaries, and their reactions to the suit reveal the political and financial fragility of the Party and the League.

While most of the defendants named in De Freyne's suit were not personally active in the agitation as speakers or organizers, once they were accused of conspiring to force him "to sell his property at a price below its value," they became the purported authors of the rent strike.³ The nationalist core leadership had a profound uneasiness with that perception, as their battles for Home Rule, land redistribution, and compulsory purchase were being undercut by this rather inconvenient rent strike. The potential political ramifications of the lawsuit were enormous, coming at a time when the Irish Party was struggling to maintain the unity which it had attained by electing Redmond as chairman in 1900. The party was also faced with a reduced workforce because, after the reinstatement of the Crimes Act in early 1902, "eleven sitting members of the party and

² The complete list, with names, addresses, and occupations, appears at the end of this section.

³ "Lord de Freyne v John Fitzgibbon and others," MS 15,241/6, Redmond Papers, NLI; *Irish Times*, 14 June 1902, 3.

two former members were imprisoned” for various activities around the country. The financial threat from the suit was equally onerous, especially because, during the years of the Parnell split, the party’s coffers had been reduced due to “the refusal of a thoroughly disillusioned public to subscribe to their funds.”⁴ Even if they prevailed in court, party leaders feared that the De Freyne lawsuit might saddle the Irish Party with suffocating costs, as had happened recently to a labor union in England when it was sued by the Taff Vale corporation for interfering with railway workers.⁵ The party’s reaction was a countersuit against the landlords’ collective, claiming it had “maliciously stirred up Lord De Freyne” to prosecute them,⁶ a reversal of the accusation of conspiracy that Lord De Freyne had made against the nationalists.

Almost without exception, the defendants in De Freyne’s suit lived vastly different lives than those of the rent strikers. For the most part, they were gentlemen or professionals, members of parliament, or political operatives who traveled around the country speaking to crowds on similarly troubled estates. Of the three identified as farmers, only two were local men, and the third, A.J. Kettle, was a prosperous landholder in County Dublin.⁷ Lower-rung organizers such as Denis Johnston from Leitrim, John P. O’Donnell, MP (Mayo South), Conor O’Kelly, MP (Mayo North), William Duffy, MP (Galway South), and John Cullinan, MP (Tipperary South) did the hard work of recruiting, regularly appearing in the area, giving speeches and working directly with local branches. They were sent by the Dublin directory to encourage the people on the

⁴ F.S.L. Lyons, *The Irish Parliamentary Party 1890–1910* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951, p. 238, 67-89, p. 99; F.S.L. Lyons, “The Aftermath of Parnell, 1891-1903,” *A New History of Ireland VI, Ireland under the Union II*, 93.

⁵ *Irish Times*, 21 June 1902; *Irish World*, 9 July 1904; “Taff Vale case” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, www.britannica.com/even/Taff-Vale-case.

⁶ *Evening Herald*, 26 July 1902; *IT*, 27 July, 2 August 1902.

⁷ Desmond McCabe, “Kettle, Andrew Joseph,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

Associated Estates to join the League and follow its agenda. The three youngest—O'Donnell, Johnston, and O'Kelly—were probably valued as much for their personal appeal as for their strong loyalty to O'Brien.⁸ Four of them, excluding Johnston, were elected to parliament for the first time in 1900.⁹ These men repeatedly put themselves in legal danger on the Associated Estates through their speeches, facing criminal charges and prison time alongside local organizers like John Fitzgibbon and Patrick Webb. Fitzgibbon and Webb were familiar to people on the estate through their positions on the Roscommon County Council, and in earlier agitations like the Plan of Campaign and the eviction resistance of the 1890s. Both were commercial men who lived in towns, as were James Casey of Ballaghaderreen and Patrick Conry of Castlerea, two other local organizers who were not named in the lawsuit. The only tenants on the Associated Estates named in the suit were farmers Owen McGarry and Bernard Harte, who were the president and vice president of the Frenchpark branch of the League. Like the leaders of the Associated Estates identified in newspapers and De Freyne's surveillance, they had the biggest stakes in the struggle, but their opinions were largely unrecorded.

The De Freyne lawsuit dragged on in the courts for two years before it ultimately collapsed from the weight of its own complications.¹⁰ Before that happened, however, it forced the nationalist leadership to redirect its energies away from the bogs of Roscommon. Of all the national leaders, John Dillon was most directly associated with

⁸ O'Kelly, who became the first chairman of the Mayo County Council in his mid-twenties through O'Brien's intercession, was eulogized as a "brilliant, singularly gifted, and eloquent young politician" whose "youthful appearance helped quite as largely as his gifts to explain the magnetic hold he took on the people." *Western People*, 16 October 1915.

⁹ Cullinan and Duffy ran unopposed, but O'Donnell defeated Boer War hero John MacBride (future husband of Maud Gonne) and O'Kelly edged out businessman William Martin Murphy (who engineered the Dublin Lockout of 1913). Walker, ed. *Parliamentary Election Results, 1802–1922*, 160–162.

¹⁰ A court ruled that "the plaintiff abandon all claim for damages" after it was determined that "a penalty against the defendants might have serious effects in other actions." *Times*, 30 June 1904.

disturbances on the estate, but his side-stepping began before the lawsuit was even filed. In a speech in November 1901 in Frenchpark, he unintentionally assumed responsibility for the strike when he advised tenants to refuse to pay rent until they got “justice.”¹¹ Dillon had wanted his message to be the same one he had delivered many times before, which was a call to use whatever means necessary—within the law—to dissolve landlordism forever. According to Dillon’s wife, Elizabeth (who had been a close friend of De Freyne’s second wife, Marie Lamb), he told the local leaders he would not be part of any combination formed by the tenants, but his plan had always been to use the tenants’ agitation as leverage in the battle for compulsory purchase. However, his biographer F.S.L. Lyons notes that “the tenants of Roscommon took him very much at his word.”¹² Lyons seems to agree with the contemporary notion that, while the tenants might have gone too far, it was Dillon who first ignited their fervor.

Yet when he reiterated his support for the tenants at the UIL convention in January 1902, Dillon pointedly left it to them to decide to what lengths they would go in their struggle. Trying to separate himself from the agitation, he also insisted before parliament that neither he nor the party had instigated the fight over rent and that, while he supported compulsory sale, he would encourage the tenants to cease their agitation and pay their just debts.¹³ Nevertheless, his appearance at Frenchpark would “have unexpected and serious consequences.”¹⁴ A unionist newspaper called the strike, “simply a case such as that boasted of by Mr John Dillon when he offered to produce men who

¹¹ *Irish Times*, 31 January 1902.

¹² Lyons, *John Dillon*, 225.

¹³ *Westmeath Examiner*, 1 February 1902.

¹⁴ Lyons, *John Dillon*, 225.

‘can’t pay and won’t pay because I tell them not to pay.’”¹⁵ De Freyne fingered Dillon as the inventor of the disturbance beginning with an earlier speech at Boyle,¹⁶ and according to agent Woulfe Flanagan, tenants had said the strike was “created and fostered for their own purposes by John Dillon” and others.¹⁷ A police reporter and a local League organizer both testified that Dillon’s speech had been a catalyst for local activity.¹⁸ Despite his efforts to abjure this position, Dillon was lauded in the area as a benefactor, no doubt because he had spoken so often over the years in defense of these tenants. Another reason may be that during the 1890s, he managed the purse strings of the League’s fund for evicted tenants. Some of those who suffered eviction, like Mary Doherty of Cloonmaul, wrote directly to him begging for money. She promised if she got enough funds to put down a crop, “I will not trouble anyone next year.”¹⁹ Near Fairymount, the story was that when Mrs. Gallagher went back to her house after being evicted, “John Dillon supplied her with a bed.” She was jailed multiple times for returning to her house, and each time she did John Dillon would give her “a bed.” When her house was finally burned down by the bailiffs, “John Dillon supported her in the town.”²⁰

¹⁵ *Northern Whig*, 3 July 1902, quoted in Paul Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation in Ireland, Parnellites and Radical Agrarians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 89.

¹⁶ Affidavit of Lord De Freyne,” MS 1189/19/2, Redmond Papers, NLI.

¹⁷ Affidavit of Stephen Woulfe Flanagan, 1 July 1902, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

¹⁸ *Times*, 10 and 11 January 1902.

¹⁹ Mary Doherty to John Dillon, 7 April 1897, *Evicted Tenants*, MS 6812, 212, Papers of John Dillon MP, 1851–1927, TCA.

²⁰ “Mrs. Gallagher,” Mullach na Sidhe (C.), *The Schools Collection*, Volume 0239, Roll 15426, 233, www.duchas.ie. A letter about a Mrs. Gallagher also appears in Dillon’s correspondence in November 1895 along with pleas for and from other tenants. *Evicted Tenants*, MS 6806 Ballaghaderin Co. Mayo, 17, Papers of John Dillon MP, 1851–1927, TCA.

Like Dillon, other prominent leaders tried to keep themselves removed from the no-rent agitation. Michael Davitt was silent on the strike until provoked by Bishop John J. Clancy into a debate on the morality of rent (see the discussion on their conflict later in this chapter). O'Brien, was abroad for his health in the winter of 1901 when he learned he too was being blamed for the events on the Associated Estates, and vehemently denied any responsibility for the rent strike.²¹ However "the view that he was the mainspring of agrarian agitation still prevailed, especially in Government Circles."²² As far back as 1887, he had declared in Fairymount, "We are the real peacemakers this winter, and the Lord De Freynes...are the lawbreakers and the criminals."²³ This perception was reinforced in 1901 when O'Brien advocated a renewal of boycotting and agitation to "throw half the country into a blaze" in support of the anti-grazing effort.²⁴ Redmond, for his part, kept a sharp eye on events in Frenchpark through his operatives like Duffy and Cullinan, who reported to him by post.

Davitt had already cautioned Redmond about the "increasing demands of the local branches of the League upon the Central Fund for law costs in connection with coercion trials," but when the lawsuit was filed he warned that "In view of the De Freyne trial a great sum of money must be found."²⁵ O'Brien detested the direction the agitation had taken because of the rent strike and the lawsuit, and designed his new national campaign of "widespread boycotting, mass meetings and flagrant clashes with authorities" to "arouse interest in America" and raise funds there. He wrote to Davitt, "a desperate

²¹ O'Brien, *William O'Brien and the Course of Irish Politics*, 132.

²² Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War*, 213.

²³ *Weekly Freeman's Journal*, 8 January 1887.

²⁴ *Irish People*, 7 September 1901, quoted in Campbell, "Irish Popular Politics", 760.

²⁵ Michael Davitt to John Redmond, 9 May and 18 June 1902, MS 15,179, Redmond Papers, NLI.

attempt is being made by the landlords to make our whole movement turn on the fate of the De Freyne fight... [We must] give the landlords something else to think about and make the issue in the De Freyne case less important.” Otherwise, they risked “playing the landlords’ game, with the certainty of having our funds utterly swallowed up.” To secure money for the fight against De Freyne and the other landlords, a trip to the United States was arranged for Redmond, Dillon and Davitt.²⁶ Redmond vowed to fight De Freyne’s suit “in the most vigorous way we can at every turn.”²⁷ His determination may have wavered by the spring of 1903 when one of De Freyne’s solicitors suspected there was a “bona fide effort on the part of Mr. Redmond to settle, but I believe he could not get the money.”²⁸ Two defendants, Dillon and John O’Donnell, were sued as individuals as well,²⁹ putting their personal well-being in jeopardy. Dillon feared that imprisonment for him or O’Brien might tear the whole home rule movement into pieces.³⁰ When the suit dissolved in 1904, Dillon breathed a sigh of relief, “It is in fact a complete victory for us and leaves us a handsome surplus in the defence fund after all expenses are paid.”³¹

The nationalists’ countersuit against the landlords was dismissed in the press as “The Irish Party’s Legal Joke,”³² yet it may have had an unintended effect on events to follow. In his initial call for a land conference in 1902 between landlords and tenant representatives, John Shawe-Taylor invited the Duke of Abercorn to participate, alongside Redmond and others.³³ Abercorn, the titular defendant in the nationalists’ suit,

²⁶ Warwick-Haller, *William O’Brien and the Irish Land War*, 217.

²⁷ John Redmond to William O’Brien, 19 June 1902, Redmond Papers, MS 15,212/8, NLI.

²⁸ Robert Schoenfield to Lord De Freyne, 25 May 1903, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, NLI.

²⁹ “Lord de Freyne v John Fitzgibbon and others,” MS 15,241/6, Redmond Papers, NLI, 4.

³⁰ Lyons, *Dillon*, 225, 183.

³¹ John Dillon to John Redmond, 30 June 1904, MS 15,182/6, Redmond Papers, NLI.

³² *Irish Times*, 7 August 1902.

³³ *Irish Times*, 3 September 1902.

refused the invitation, as did the other landlords approached by Shawe-Taylor. Redmond and O'Brien, however, agreed to attend. New landlord representatives were then invited, and they were led by the more moderate Lord Dunraven (whom O'Brien supported for chair).³⁴ Abercorn said his refusal to participate rested on Shawe-Taylor's unknown reputation and the absence of support for the conference among both landlords and tenants. However, he may also have cringed at the prospect of sitting down at a table opposite his legal adversaries in the De Freyne matter, and thus unintentionally allowed the voices of more moderate landlords to prevail at the conference.³⁵

There were other prominent outsiders who supported the tenants but were not members of the League, and therefore not named in De Freyne's lawsuit. Maud Gonne had been advocating for tenants on the estate since the late 1880s,³⁶ and was a visitor there during the evictions of the 1890s.³⁷ No friend of the UIL, in September 1901 she lambasted the failures of parliamentary politics at a memorial to John Lavin, a local IRB and Land League veteran in Castlerea.³⁸ Recalling a boy she met there who lived in a "hovel," and who said he wanted to grow up to fight the British, she roundly criticized local officials ("UI Leaguers most of them") for the quality of housing for laborers.³⁹ Her comments could not have pleased those officials, nor the tenant farmers who often opposed special concessions for the landless. In the summer of 1902, she refused to extend the initial run of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* at the Abbey Theatre when striking tenants

³⁴ Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War*, 224–25.

³⁵ *Irish Times*, 22 and 23 September 1902.

³⁶ Samuel Levenson, *Maud Gonne* (New York: Readers' Digest Press, 1976), 196

³⁷ *Newry Reporter*, 23 November 1893.

³⁸ *Irish Independent*, 9 September 1901; "Official Report: Unveiling of Lavin Memorial at Castlerea 8 Sept 1901, Chief Secretary's Office, Crime Special Branch, CBS 25302/S, NAI.

³⁹ *United Ireland*, 21 September 1901, quoted in Karen Steele, ed. *Maud Gonne's Irish Nationalist Writings, 1894–1946* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 133.

on the estate asked her to help them negotiate a settlement. She ultimately decided not to go to Frenchpark because she was reluctant to confront the UIL forces there, especially after the *Irish People* criticized her for disparaging the League during an American tour (where she made “a few bad friends instead of gaining recruits”).⁴⁰

Thomas W. Russell, who accepted Shawe-Taylor’s invitation to participate in the Land Conference, was also on the estate in the 1890s and again in 1902. The grandson of an evicted Scottish crofter, and a unionist devoted to agrarian reform,⁴¹ his 1893 article in the *Times* describing conditions on the estate was quoted at length by both Dillon and Redmond during the strike.⁴² Russell, an outlier among unionists because he fought for compulsory purchase, did not blame Lord De Freyne for these conditions, since he had “succeeded to the inheritance...and even the richest, the ablest, and the strongest man might well recoil from the task of righting the wrongs of circumstances and accumulated years.” He questioned the efficacy of government land initiatives whose complexities raised so many obstacles that tenants were unable to take advantage of them. He also wondered about

the happy-go-lucky character of the western peasant. He trusts largely to luck. A good year comes, and he gets along fairly well. It is followed by a cycle of three or four bad seasons, and, of course, he gets into difficulties. But, as this is his normal condition, he goes gaily along until things come to a full stop, and then it is “abroad,” as he calls it, or something worse at home.”⁴³

His patronizing tone about farmers’ habits notwithstanding, Russell believed these “peasants” would make good landowners. He came back to the estate during the strike,

⁴⁰ Levenson, *Gonne*, 1976), p. 196; John G. Kelly and Ronald Schuchard, eds. *The Collected Letters of William Butler Yeats, Volume III: 1901–1904* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1994), 168; Mary O’Flaherty to John Redmond, 22 February 1901, MS 15,236/20, 1898-1909, Redmond Papers, NLI.

⁴¹ James Loughlin, “Russell, Sir Thomas Wallace,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁴² *Freeman’s Journal*, 19 November 1901; *Irish People*, 1 February 1902.

⁴³ *Times*, 15 December 1893.

bringing three British politicians with him—Alfred Emmott MP (Oldham), Charles Douglas MP (Northeast Lanarkshire), and W.P. Byles, MP (Bradford)—to conduct a tour and “investigation.” His observations indicate he talked with local residents and spent time in their company. When workers in the fields first saw his caravan approaching they rushed their cattle into hiding, thinking the bailiff had come to confiscate their stock. On discovering who the visitors really were, hundreds of people followed their procession, and gave them an “overwhelming” reception. Russell “discovered beyond all doubt that the rents come from America and from labour in England... The Land Commission in fixing the rents at the beginning, blundered to the most lamentable extent... rents are at least 33 percent too high as fixed by the Court.” Like members of the Irish Party, Russell protested that the strike had not been conceived in Dublin but was “a matter of the Associated Estates tenants themselves. They have formed their own committees; they have taxed themselves... What the United Irish League has done is to provide a man on the spot to give advice to the people where necessary to prevent things from going into illegal courses.”⁴⁴

Two of those men “on the spot”—John O’Donnell and Denis Johnston—were young, charismatic, and willing to do whatever was required of them. O’Donnell, thirty-three at the time of the strike, was a newspaperman and an O’Brien acolyte who later became League secretary. The son of a small farmer in Westport, County Mayo, he “endeared himself to his audience” in the early days of the UIL because of his command of local issues, and his talent for giving fiery speeches. O’Brien bemoaned, “Only for O’Donnell I don’t know what I should do. He is the only one who can be relied upon to

⁴⁴ *Irish Daily Independent and Nation*, 24 May 1902.

be sober as well as brave.”⁴⁵ Near Frenchpark Demesne in early December 1901, O’Donnell thundered that “every representative man in the country” would come to fight for a rent reduction “by day or by night, by sunshine or storm, on the hillsides or the bogs and townlands, until your cause is won. I say deliberately that you might as well expect fair play from the devil if you held a court in hell as from the present Constitution.” Along with Johnston, O’Donnell was sentenced to prison for unlawful assembly after uttering remarks like these.⁴⁶

Johnston was also an O’Brien retainer, and rose through the ranks to become the League’s chief organizer and assistant national secretary under O’Donnell.⁴⁷ A shopkeeper from Dromahair, County Leitrim,⁴⁸ Johnston was, according to Lord De Freyne, “an uncertified Bankrupt” who decamped to Ballaghderreen in the winter as a “paid Organizer of the United Irish League.”⁴⁹ Described by others as a man of “genial disposition and kindly nature,”⁵⁰ he also had a literary bent, having published a book of verse in 1897 called *Idle Idylls*, described as “celebrating the beauty of County Sligo, Bundoran, Fairies, and on the joy of Cycling.”⁵¹ He proposed a resolution at the League’s national convention in 1900 “to promote the circulation of purely Irish reading matter and the publication of cheap monthly booklets under the auspices of the United Irish

⁴⁵ *Irish Times*, 13 August 1920; Warwick-Haller, *William O’Brien and the Irish Land War*, 177-8; Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation, Irish Nationalist Life 1891–1918* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 238.

⁴⁶ *Irish Times*, 9, 13, and 29 January 1902.

⁴⁷ Denis Johnston to John Redmond, MS 15/198/1–2, Redmond Papers, NLI.

⁴⁸ He and his business partner, Francis Timoney, declared bankruptcy in late 1899, and Johnston reopened the store again in early 1900. Newspaper readers were encouraged to shop at the new store because of Johnston’s impeccable nationalist credentials. *Sligo Champion*, 9 September and 30 December 1899.

⁴⁹ “Affidavit of Lord De Freyne,” MS15/24/6, Redmond Papers, NLI.

⁵⁰ *Irish Examiner*, 10 March 1911.

⁵¹ One poem, “Fairy Revels,” contains a reference to W.B. Yeats. *Dé Burca Rare Books*, Catalogue 126 (Blackrock: Christmas 2016), 59. www.deburcararebooks.com.

League.”⁵² After a conviction for holding illegal assemblies on the De Freyne estate, Johnston said he used his time in Sligo Gaol to learn Irish.⁵³ Johnston was the League’s chief organizer for Ulster until a few months before the strike began, when his speaking schedule shifted to townlands on the Associated Estates.⁵⁴

His job there was to revivify the local League branches, and his theatrical behavior may have been as effective a tool as his oratory in attracting new members. Capable of evocative language (“the depopulation of the beautiful plains of their fertile country was one of the saddest pages in the record of Ireland’s wrongs”⁵⁵), he achieved a kind of folk hero status with local people, as well as the ire of Lord De Freyne and Chief Secretary Wyndham.⁵⁶ Barely thirty in late 1901,⁵⁷ Johnston quickly gained a reputation for daredevil escapades. In the early days of the strike, he was reported to have eluded the police by bicycle, horse-drawn carriage and train, often switching his direction or conveyance mid-journey to hold secret meetings in tenants’ homes or fields.⁵⁸ In one story he scaled a ladder to avoid the police at Patrick Webb’s pub in Loughlynn, then traveled by boat across the lake. It was also said he had avoided arrest once by hiding in a “bacon box” with a young boy sitting on top as they were pulled away on a cart. Near Fairymount, a horse was commandeered by the RIC to follow Johnston, but it refused to

⁵² His resolution was supported by Bishop John J. Clancy, a major figure in the strike. Clancy railed against the importation of English books since “no worse influence was exercised by England than by her filthy literature.” *Freeman’s Journal*, 13 December 1900.

⁵³ *Sligo Champion*, 28 June 1902.

⁵⁴ In early November 1901 he spoke in Boyle, Lisacul and Frenchpark. *Irish Independent*, 18 September and 6 November 1901.

⁵⁵ *Roscommon Journal*, 24 August 1901.

⁵⁶ William E. McCarthy to Lord De Freyne, 11 July 1902, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁵⁷ *Census of Ireland, 1901 and 1911*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

⁵⁸ Chief Secretary’s Office Crime Special Branch, CSORP/1901/box 24944, NAI.

budge, despite a severe whipping. The “horse was never called anything after that only land leaguer,” recalled a local man.⁵⁹

The other non-resident defendants who regularly worked on the estate—Duffy and Cullinan—were more closely linked to Redmond than to O’Brien. They reported back to him in Dublin on the progress of events in Roscommon, keeping a close eye on branch activities, and stepping in for local leaders who were imprisoned.⁶⁰ All of these men traveled at the pleasure of the leadership in Dublin, living in places like the Commercial Hotel in Ballaghderreen. Their talents for rousing people up, and for carefully monitoring their activities once roused, sustained the connection between the strikers and the Dublin hierarchy. It is unclear how well they coordinated with local leaders, and whose vision or directives held the most sway, but Duffy and Cullinan’s letters to Redmond show that they were closely in touch with the more prominent local men, like Fitzgibbon and Webb.

As merchants, Fitzgibbon and Webb filled an integral role in the rural community, occupying, as Clark describes, the center hub in “a sociogram of human relationships.” Farmers relied on merchants for goods and credit and the shopkeepers, in turn, relied on the farmers, gladly extending credit to keep their business. Merchants’ horizons could include a “wider circle of friends” and tended to be “more cosmopolitan” than farmers, reaching outside the immediate community through the normal course of business, as well as through marriage.⁶¹ The potential for exploitation in this symbiotic

⁵⁹ “Tales about the Land League,” Mullach na Síthe (C.), *The Schools Collection*, Volume 0239, Roll 15426, 217–19.

⁶⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 25 March 1902.

⁶¹ Clarke, *Social Origins*, 131–132; Liam Kennedy, “Retail Markets in Rural Ireland at the end of the Nineteenth Century,” *Irish Economic and Social History* 5 (1978), 54–55.

relationship between shopkeepers and farmers was well recognized at the time.⁶² Writer John Millington Synge feared that “the very people who were orchestrating the anti-grazier campaigns of the United Irish League” were swindling farmers and laborers because they were in a “position of unrivalled economic dominance.” Horace Plunkett founded the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, a co-operative movement for Irish farmers, in reaction to the “paralysing stranglehold over the peasantry” enjoyed by the publican-shopkeepers.⁶³ These were elite reactions, of course, the reality being more nuanced. Shop keeping was an unstable business, with a fluctuating income, yet shops were able to provide “gathering places for people of all classes,” and they often “kept families from starvation.”⁶⁴ Merchants dominated local politics in Roscommon,⁶⁵ and as was the case in the 1880s, it was shopkeepers and publicans who controlled local organizing during the strike.

Like his father Henry, who was the first president of the Castlerea branch of the Irish National Land League in 1880, John Fitzgibbon ably combined politics and business. He ran the family’s soft goods business on Main Street in Castlerea, a large establishment with thirty employees, while also maintaining a high profile in local and national politics.⁶⁶ A former IRB man,⁶⁷ he had been a local champion of tenants’ rights

⁶² Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, 38.

⁶³ Quoted in P.J. Mathews, *Revival, The Abbey Theatre, Sinn Féin, the Gaelic League and the Co-operative Movement*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press in association with Field Day, 2003), p. 129.

⁶⁴ Caitriona Clear, *Social change and everyday life in Ireland, 1850–1922* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), 31.

⁶⁵ Michael Wheatley, *Nationalism and the Irish Party: Provincial Ireland 1910–1916* (Published to Oxford Scholarship Online, 2010; Print publication, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32–37.
DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199273577.001.0001

⁶⁶ John Bligh, “Fitzgibbon, John,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*; John Bligh, “John Fitzgibbon of Castlerea: ‘A Most Mischievous and Dangerous Agitator’,” Brian Casey, ed. *Defying the Law of the Land, Agrarian Radicals in Irish History* (History Press Ireland, 2013), 217–236; *Census of Ireland, 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

⁶⁷ Maume, *Long Gestation*, 228.

for years and had been prosecuted and sent to prison repeatedly, so it is not surprising that he would be named first in De Freyne's lawsuit. The American journalist, Hugh Sutherland, who visited Fitzgibbon in 1902 described him as "a man of the people...a speaker of natural force, a devout Christian, a total abstainer...and one of the finest Irishmen I have ever met."⁶⁸ A more recent evaluation called him "far and away the most influential nationalist politician" in Roscommon. A loyal Parnellite, he supported Redmond faithfully. In the years after the strike as the Irish Party slowly lost its power, he would be accused of various transgressions and acts of self-interest related to his positions as chairman of the county council and a member of the CDB.⁶⁹ However, in 1901, he was the local politician most closely related to the tenants and their struggles and was a trusted leader.

Webb, a publican in Loughglynn whose business supported a shop assistant, an apprentice and a servant, lived in "the best building" in that small town. He was also a pig and cattle dealer.⁷⁰ President of the Loughglynn branch of the UIL and a member of the Roscommon County Council,⁷¹ Webb had been active in local politics for years, and was alternately praised for his combativeness and energy, or rebuked for fomenting discord in the local organizations.⁷² More volatile than Fitzgibbon, Webb was arrested on at least three occasions for common assault, and also for animal cruelty.⁷³ He and the local hierarchy were dismissively described by Lord De Freyne in a letter to Chief

⁶⁸ Sutherland, *Ireland Yesterday and Today*, 55.

⁶⁹ Wheatley, *Nationalism*, 35, 96.

⁷⁰ Sutherland, *Ireland Yesterday and Today*, p. 64; *Evening Herald*, 13 August 1902.

⁷¹ *Irish People*, 7 December 1901.

⁷² He fell out with Fitzgibbon in 1908 and continued to buck the party line until his death in 1915. Wheatley, *Nationalism*, 102–104.

⁷³ *Petty Sessions Court Registers, Order Books*, County of Roscommon, CSPS 1/2336, 26 April 1890; CSPS 1/2346, 23 July 1904; CSPS 1/2347, 1 April and 22 July 1905.

Secretary Wyndham: “If a tenant pays, the local committee will fine him and I suppose spend the fine in Mr. Webb’s public house.” Wyndham had another view of Webb’s involvement: “Patrick Webb is a changed man since he went to prison,” he wrote to De Freyne, claiming Webb wanted to return funds he had collected and “be out of the whole trouble.” Agent Woulfe Flanagan said of Webb: “the crow has come home to roost... The hypocrisy of the scoundrel is astounding,” adding that Webb wrote letters from jail instructing someone to make sure his servants made their Easter duty. Woulfe Flanagan continued, “When the people begin to recount his misdeeds his days are numbered.”⁷⁴

A large part of the League rhetoric focused on boycotting graziers, but many of its leaders, including those who became “the principal leaders of the ranch war in 1906–10, were either graziers themselves or became graziers or were intimately related to graziers.” A primary leader of the ranch war was John Fitzgibbon,⁷⁵ who held pasture land which he maintained he was keeping in an unofficial trust to sell back to smallholders.⁷⁶ Roscommon historian Pádraig Vesey said many local leaders, like Fitzgibbon and Webb, were wealthy men (Webb being a leading exporter of cattle) and were unlikely exemplars of the UIL doctrine of equity in land distribution.⁷⁷ Since grazing was one of the few options for moving up the social and economic ladder, Bew’s comment that “ranching was more despised in rhetoric than in practice” bears consideration.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Lord De Freyne to George Wyndham, 15 May 1902; George Wyndham to Lord De Freyne, 21 May 1902; Stephen Woulfe Flanagan to Lord De Freyne, 12 December 1902. VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁷⁵ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 206–07.

⁷⁶ Maume, *Long Gestation*, 228.

⁷⁷ Telephone conversation, 24 March 2011. Webb is remembered locally, Vesey claims, and is reputed to have died penniless.

⁷⁸ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 208.

Lord De Freyne vs. John Fitzgibbon and others
Writ of Summons (Excerpts)

Edward the Seventh by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and of the British Dominions beyond the seas, King, defender of the Faith and so forth. To

John Fitzgibbon, of Castlerea, County Roscommon, Shopkeeper
 Patrick Webb, of Loughglynn, County Roscommon, Publican
 Bernard Harte, of Portahard, County Roscommon, Farmer
 Denis Johnston, of Ballaghadareen, County Mayo, Gentleman
 Owen McGarry of Raheela, County Roscommon, Farmer
 John Cullinan of Bansha, County Tipperary, Member of Parliament
 Conor O’Kelly, of Claremorris, County Mayo, Member of Parliament
 William Duffy, of Loughrea, County Galway, Member of Parliament
 “The Freeman’s Journal,” Limited, 4 to 8 Princes-street, Dublin
 John E. Redmond of 8 Leeson-park, Dublin, Member of Parliament
 John O’Donnell, of 38 Sackville-street, Upper, Dublin, Member of Parliament
 David Sheehy, of 2 Belvedere-place, Dublin, Esquire
 Laurence Ginnell, of 38 Sackville-street, Upper, Dublin, Barrister-at-Law
 Alfred Webb, of Shelmaliere, Orwell Park Road, Rathgar, Gentleman
 A.J. Kettle, of Artane, County Dublin, Farmer
 Patrick White, of Clonalvey, Balbriggan, County Dublin, Member of Parliament
 William O’Brien, of Mallow Cottage, Westport, County Mayo, Member of Parliament
 Michael Davitt, of Combre House, 4 Mount Salus, Dalke, Esquire
 John Dillon of 2 North Great George’s-street, Dublin, Member of Parliament
 Edmund Haviland Burke, of 70 Waterloo-road, Dublin, Member of Parliament
 John McInerney, of Cratloemoyle, Cratloe, County Clare, Gentleman
 Thomas Harrington, of Johnstown, near Urlingford, County Kilkenny, Agent
 John Roche, of The Mills, Woodford, County Galway, Member of Parliament
 J.P. Farrell, of Market-square, Longford, Member of Parliament
 Patrick Mulcahy, of Ballinamore, County Leitrim, Licentiate Royal College of Surgeons, Ireland
 John Gordon Swift McNeill, of 17 Pembroke-road, Dublin, Member of Parliament
 John J. Farrell, 45 St. Clare’s-terrace, Clonliffe-road, Dublin, Alderman
 Joseph Delahunt, 42 Camden-street, Dublin, Gentleman
 John Muldoon, of 7 Herbert-place, Dublin, Barrister-at-Law
 Richard McGhee, of Clankilvoragh, Lurgan, County Armagh, Gentleman

Witness, THE RIGHT HONORABLE EDWARD BARON ASHBOURNE, Lord High Chancellor of Ireland, the 13th day of June, In the Year of Our Lord, One Thousand Nine Hundred and Two.

Priests

Politicians were not the only sources of contradictory ideas about the strike to which tenants were exposed. Overwhelmingly Roman Catholic,⁷⁹ the people on the estate also heard the strong opinions of their clergymen and observed their involvement with the strike (or lack thereof). As a Catholic peer, Lord De Freyne himself sought and received advice from high-ranking churchmen, who were well aware of his support in the House of Lords for issues like Catholic education.⁸⁰ As League demonstrations were often held on Sundays, directly after Mass, tenants could easily encounter two separate messages about their moral obligations and patriotic duties on the same day. Most people would have been reluctant to blatantly ignore the advice of the bishop or the priests,⁸¹ so an additional layer of misgiving was added to the anxiety strikers faced already as they navigated between the often-competing demands of their families' immediate needs, and those of the strike effort.

The most prominent Church leader connected to these events was the Primate of Ireland and Dublin Archbishop, William Walsh, a longtime confidante of Lord De Freyne, whose stewardship of a controversial mortgage on the estate imperiled his ability to intervene in the conflict. Another was John J. Clancy, the Bishop of Elphin, who privately urged De Freyne to grant a rent abatement, while publicly denouncing the strike tactics and battling with Michael Davitt over the morality of paying rent. Clancy's advice

⁷⁹ There were 178,000 people in the Diocese of Elphin, where most of the estate lay, and 170,000 of them were Catholic, according to *Sadlier's Catholic Directory Almanac and Ordo for the Year of Our Lord 1891*, Part III. Ireland England, and Scotland (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1891), 45. See also *Census of Ireland, 1901*, Part I Area, Houses and Population, also the Ages, Civil or Conjugal Condition, Occupations, Birthplaces, Religion, and Education of the People, vol IV, Province of Connaught. No. 4 County of Roscommon. {Cd. 1059–III}, 119–122.

⁸⁰ *Royal Commission on University Education in Ireland*. Appendix to the first report. Minutes of evidence taken at the first nine sittings in Dublin, 1902. Cd. 826, XXXI.29, 295.

⁸¹ A point emphasized by Pádraig Vesey in a conversation with the author, 4 July 2010.

to his flock was not always well received, although he is credited with brokering a settlement to the strike. A few parish priests openly supported the tenants' request for lower rents (without specifically approving the strike) and also participated in League activities, and some did not, while others worked quietly on the sidelines. If the rent strikers on the estate had any doubts about what they were doing, they found small comfort in the divergent range of guidance they received from the Church.

Archbishop Walsh, a supporter of the Land League,⁸² participated openly in negotiations between Lord De Freyne and his tenants during the 1880s and 1890s. He designed the parameters of a conference between the landlord and his tenants in 1887, and even agreed to serve as chairman. Walsh's interest in these events was not strictly parochial, as he told De Freyne he hoped that a "settlement, if we are so fortunate as to come to one, in this case, has a fair chance of being taken as the basis for a settlement all over Ireland." At least twice, in 1887 and 1891, he suggested approaching John Dillon to act as an intermediary on the estate, because the nationalist was "reachable" and able to persuade "local men of influence."⁸³ Walsh's impact was felt so strongly that there were rumors that some tenants in the 1880s did not pay their rent because they believed that De Freyne would never evict them without the Archbishop's blessing.⁸⁴ However, Walsh's power as a negotiator began waning in the 1890s when nationalists drew attention to his position as the main trustee for a £44,000 mortgage granted to Lord De Freyne by Paul Cullen, Walsh's predecessor as Archbishop, and Ireland's first cardinal.

⁸² Thomas J. Morrissey, "Walsh, William Joseph," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁸³ William J. Walsh to Lord De Freyne, 9 November and 31 December 1887; 26 January 1891. Lord De Freyne to William J. Walsh, 28 October, 14 and 18 November 1887, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁸⁴ Valentine Blake to Lord De Freyne, 31 December 1887, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

The money lent to De Freyne in 1877 came from £80,000 bequeathed to the Dublin Archdiocese by wool and drapery heiress Bridget O'Brien to open a school for poor children. There is no hint indicating specifically why De Freyne needed the money, how the loan was negotiated, or why he chose to get it from Cullen. The only direct links between the cardinal and De Freyne were their religion and their solicitor, John O'Hagan of Harcourt Street, Dublin, who would have certainly have had the ear of the twenty-two-year old fledgling baron. When the young peer made his "debut" at a meeting of the Catholic Union of Ireland a year earlier, he seconded Cullen's resolution for a "system of university education, of which Catholics can avail themselves without prejudice to their religious convictions."⁸⁵ Did O'Hagan broker a deal between the two, promising De Freyne's support for education in exchange for the mortgage? While many other Catholic peers supported the education initiative, perhaps De Freyne needed extra persuasion. The De Freyne family had been Protestants until the time of his birth and the baron, who was called "a Catholic by accident,"⁸⁶ would raise eyebrows when he battled with the Bishop of Elphin, Lawrence Gillooly, over control of schools on the estate in the 1880s. While other explanations for Cullen's decision are still possible, questions remain. Certainly, De Freyne needed cash to cover the massive charges and debts which he had inherited as the new baron in 1876. The cardinal may also have hoped to receive a good return on his loan to help support the school, which was named the O'Brien Institute (OBI) and was situated on the Charlemont Estate in Marino outside Dublin. Yet it remains a mystery why Cullen would mortgage more than half of the school's seed money to a young heir

⁸⁵ *Belfast News-Letter*, 17 November 1876; *Dublin Weekly Nation*, 25 November 1876.

⁸⁶ *Irish People*, 4 January 1902.

on an indebted estate.⁸⁷ When Cullen died, Walsh took over the management of the loan, only to find that De Freyne was not always able to meet the £1906 annual interest. When agitation during the Plan of Campaign brought a drop in rental revenue, and the threat of evictions, Walsh was caught between humanitarian concerns for the tenants and his obligation to the OBI. He pressured De Freyne to compromise and grant an abatement, even offering a reduction of De Freyne's debt during times when rents were not paid, presumably to protect the tenants as well as to preserve the estate as a source of income for the institute.⁸⁸

It is unclear when the mortgage first became public knowledge, but in 1894, James J. O'Kelly (the former and future MP for North Roscommon) announced he had legal proof of its existence and claimed he had uncovered another mortgage of £30,000 granted to De Freyne by Gillooly (no evidence of this second mortgage has been found). O'Kelly urged Walsh to foreclose on the O'Brien mortgage as a way to force De Freyne to stop his evictions. Barring that, O'Kelly demanded that Walsh explain why "the trustees of the Catholic charities of Dublin were silly enough, or reckless enough to hand over to the De Freyne family £44,000 of Catholic charitable funds... [to be] placed at the service of the evictors and exterminators of the people."⁸⁹ Walsh received personal letters from tenants on the estate asking the same questions, and he responded to them privately before making a public statement in the *Freeman's Journal*, in which he defended

⁸⁷ Jim Cantwell, "An Irishman's Diary," *Irish Times*, 15 December 2008. Additional information on the mortgage and the O'Brien Institute was taken from Cantwell's notes for a book on the OBI (unpublished, as of 2018), which he generously shared with the author. The correspondence between O'Hagan, the Archbishop and Lord De Freyne was lost when O'Hagan's firm moved from Harcourt Street in Dublin in 2007, according to Cantwell's research (an inquiry at the firm in 2010 proved unsuccessful).

⁸⁸ William J. Walsh to Lord De Freyne, 26 October 1889, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁸⁹ *Evening Herald*, 28 August 1894.

himself. He wrote that he wanted to “open the eyes of the tenants to the shameless fraud which is being practiced upon them” by nationalists like O’Kelly, who “hold me up to public odium as a well-known unrelenting enemy of the persecuted tenantry of Ireland.” He could not foreclose, he wrote, because the mortgage payments were “the mainstay of the support of the O’Brien school,” where “large numbers of destitute children are fed and maintained,” a characterization now open to question.⁹⁰ *United Ireland* issued a quick rebuttal (27 October 1894), claiming Walsh could have found the funds elsewhere to support the charity without De Freyne’s interest payments, and calling his attack on the nationalists, “baseless.” Responding to accusations of a conflict of interest, O’Hagan’s firm, which still represented the archdiocese as well as De Freyne, insisted that he was acting solely on behalf of the baron, and not for the Walsh, when he instigated ejectment proceedings against the tenants.⁹¹ Although the United Irish League did not make Walsh’s complicity the main focus of its public strategy, the issue of the archbishop and the mortgage would not disappear. When the strike began seven years later, Walsh’s connection to it was still being used as a way to force De Freyne’s hand. In May of 1902, John Redmond wrote privately to the archbishop about the rent strike, stating “I feel quite certain that if your grace could see your way to give notice to call in the mortgage it would practically end the matter.”⁹² The *Irish People* also demanded that “the trustees” intervene in the tenants’ struggle or be seen as “partners, either actively or passively, in

⁹⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 23 October 1894. Cantwell cites research (Mary Raftery and Eoin O’Sullivan, *Suffer the Little Children, The Inside Story of Ireland’s Industrial Schools*, Dublin, 1999, 26) which says that a school like the OBI was a second-tier charity, for “better-off boys, those from the upper middle classes,” and not for the poorest orphans. One famous pupil was W.T. Cosgrave, the first leader of the Irish Free State.

⁹¹ A. O’Hagan to the *Irish Independent*, 23 October 1894, original in De Freyne Papers, NLI. Jim Cantwell, in an email to the author, 11 March 2009, found John O’Hagan’s position in these transactions “curious.”

⁹² John Redmond to William Walsh, 6 May 1902, MS 15,230/3, Redmond Papers, NLI.

an infamous outrage.”⁹³ Walsh would continue to express his opinions on related issues, like the recommendations of the Land Conference of 1902,⁹⁴ but his intimate correspondence with Lord De Freyne appears to have stopped. The mortgage was presumably dissolved five years’ later when De Freyne sold his property to the Congested District’s Board.⁹⁵

Another private correspondent of Lord De Freyne was Gillooly’s successor as Bishop of Elphin, John J. Clancy, who openly supported the Irish Party.⁹⁶ He urged the baron to compromise during the strike, while at the same time denouncing the tenants’ actions from the pulpit. Professing, with exaggerated modesty that “I am only the Parish Priest,” he wrote De Freyne in December 1901,

I have no doubt...the agitation is being fanned by outsiders, and there may be an alternate political object in view. It is also possible that many people are prevented from paying their rent by fear lest they should earn the displeasure of the League... I should be very glad to see some arrangement come to for the sake of peace.

He urged De Freyne to offer a reduction of 3s, less than half of what the tenants demanded, because “it would take the wind out of the sails of the mischief makers... No doubt it is inconvenient to become the victim of the agitation...but I fear there is no help for it... But there is no use in speaking of honour to the starving.”⁹⁷

A public speaker known for his eloquence,⁹⁸ Clancy delivered a Lenten address to the people of Roscommon in February 1902 in which he urged them to obey the law and

⁹³ *Irish People*, 4 January 1902.

⁹⁴ *Irish Times*, 21 and 28 February 1903. F.S.L. Lyons claims Redmond lumped the Archbishop together with Davitt as equal enemies of the 1903 land bill. Lyons, *Irish Parliamentary Party*, 239.

⁹⁵ Cantwell says no further reference to it appears in either the De Freyne or Walsh papers. In 1921, the OBI trust was worth £66,500. *Irish Times*, 15 December 2008.

⁹⁶ *Freeman’s Journal*, 13 December 1900.

⁹⁷ John J. Clancy to Lord De Freyne, 17 and 20 December 1901, Correspondence relating the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁹⁸ Anne Dolan, “Clancy, John,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

pay their rents. He alluded to the “Papal Rescript,” the 1888 letter from the Prefect of the Holy Roman Inquisition, Raffaele Cardinal Monaco La Valetta, which said withholding rent was a sin, and also condemned anyone who intimidated others “prepared to pay the rent agreed on with their landlord.” When five days later Fitzgibbon and Webb were arrested for unlawful assembly, an anti-clerical observer suggested the government acted in response to Clancy’s sermon.⁹⁹ In a chapel in Loughglynn, when the bishop repeated his Lenten sermon, members of the congregation got up and walked out.¹⁰⁰ Yet, in his correspondence with De Freyne, Clancy still urged the baron to settle with his tenants and stop the evictions.

Heartfelt sympathy for your poor tenantry and solicitude for your family compels me to write to you once more and to submit, with all possible deference, that you must hesitate before converting your property to a wilderness and driving the people to extreme measures of revenge.

He also mentions the “obstinate determination of the people’s advisors and the penalty to which the people themselves are prepared to submit.”¹⁰¹

When De Freyne refused to grant the abatement, Clancy devoted his energies to convincing the tenants to pay their rents for the moral reasons set out in the papal rescript, emphasizing that judicial rents were set by law and were “binding in conscience.” In a more practical vein, he cautioned them that the pursuit of their demands was not worth the horror of eviction.¹⁰² During Clancy’s “Confirmation tour” of the districts in and around the Associated Estates that June, at the suggestions of local pastors, he met with tenants who were refusing to pay their rents. After this meeting,

⁹⁹ Michael J. F. McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1903), 168–69.

¹⁰⁰ *Irish Times*, 26 February 1902.

¹⁰¹ Letter from Bishop John J. Clancy, 20 February 1902, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

¹⁰² *Irish Times*, 30 August 1902.

Clancy consulted privately with De Freyne's agent, Woulfe Flanagan, and then reported to the tenants that there would be no compromise. "Lord De Freyne was determined upon getting his rents, and that he would take no settlement that would not entail full payments of the rent." If there was "unconditional surrender," he might consider wiping out the court costs, Clancy told them. The tenants were said to have been offended by Clancy's suggestion that they were being "forced into the struggle" by outsiders, and his claim that "the crisis which has now arisen was of their own making."¹⁰³ At the same time this meeting was taking place, a press report appeared claiming that Clancy's intercession had resolved the strike.¹⁰⁴ Everyone had their own version of "resolved," of course, and since evictions continued for years (presumably because of unpaid rent) this report seems premature. John Fitzgibbon did not declare the conflict officially over until 1905 when Lord De Freyne indicated he would sell to the CBD.¹⁰⁵ In 1903, agent Woulfe Flanagan insisted the strike was ended without any compromise on Lord De Freyne's part, and that "tenants have settled by paying their rent and costs in full." A reference to Clancy's intercession seemed to have come from the same press report.¹⁰⁶

Clancy was further embroiled in the strike through a debate he had with League leader and radical nationalist Michael Davitt. Davitt claimed he never had uttered a word about the De Freyne fight until Clancy attacked the UIL as "strangers in Roscommon" and "designing men" who could not be trusted, and who used the people's money for big hotel bills. Davitt and the Bishop of Elphin spent the summer of 1902 battling out their

¹⁰³ *Westmeath Examiner*, 7 June 1902.

¹⁰⁴ *Irish Times*, 2 June 1902.

¹⁰⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 February 1905.

¹⁰⁶ SWF to Lord De Freyne, 29 January 1903, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne papers, NLI.

differences in a series of letters and opinion pieces in the press. When Clancy claimed that it was immoral to withhold rents, Davitt countered that the immorality lay in expecting tenants to pay thirty per cent more than their neighbors for the same kind of land. When Davitt accused the bishop of attacking the UIL, Clancy replied that he had encouraged his priests to join local chapters from the start of the League in 1898. When Clancy referred to him as an “anti-clerical juggernaut,” Davitt retorted that Clancy should not be allowed to “take shelter as a politician behind the sacred functions of a Bishop, or to turn a place of divine worship into an annex of a landlord’s rent office.”¹⁰⁷ In hindsight, Davitt said the De Freyne fight was “unsuccessful” because the landlords got the “moral support of the local bishop and beat the combination.” Local Catholic dignitaries were willing to overlook De Freyne’s “sins,” he speculated, something that would never do for a Protestant landlord.¹⁰⁸ In an off-hand remark to his employer, agent Woulfe-Flanagan gave his opinion on the course of the debate: “Of course, you saw the Billingsgate slaying the bishop got from Davitt, rebel against every law human and divine.”¹⁰⁹

Some parish priests were visible and vocal in their support for the striking tenants, although their priorities differed. In Castlerea, Monsignor Patrick Hanly had long worked quietly to bring about settlements for tenants without ever taking part openly in politics. He encouraged people to ask the government for an “allotment of land on fair and reasonable terms” as well as for education for their children. He envisioned his parishioners becoming a “commercial people,” who could “out of their abundance,

¹⁰⁷ *Irish Times* 22, 23 and 30 August 1902.

¹⁰⁸ Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 703.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Woulfe-Flanagan to Lord De Freyne, 29 January 1903, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

supply products that will be sought for and valued in foreign markets.”¹¹⁰ In contrast, Canon William White, the parish priest of Loughglynn, allied himself more prominently with political forces, being named chair of the meeting that kicked off the new branch of the UIL there in 1901. At that meeting he vowed to do “the little in my power to lift the peasantry of the West of Ireland out of the enforced poverty, squalor and misery in which a great majority of them habitually live.” Like Msgr. Hanly, he also wanted the tenants to become self-sufficient, so they did not have to rely on working abroad, but White was more concerned with morality than global markets.

Seasonal laborers, he said, “have to associate with the English working-man, than whom, from a religious point of view, a lower specimen of the human race scarcely exists.” By noting that “evil communications corrupt good morals,” White seems to have been expressing a fear that the harvestmen were being influenced by unacceptable ideas, perhaps the radical labor and socialist ideologies rampant among the English working classes. He thought the foreign influence on the migrants was so great that “When they return for the winter months, they have no liking for the work at home.” Join together today, White told the crowd of potential Leaguers, to “secure for yourself as much land and at such a rent or annual charge as will enable you to live at home...without being subject to the humiliation and the danger to body and soul of going to England.” The English are “essentially selfish,” he said, taking much and giving back little.

They need to be constantly worried, annoyed, and kept in hot water if you are to get your rights from them. Experience, too, teaches you that you never got anything from them except through agitation...move heaven and earth by a vigorous, unceasing agitation till you get what you are entitled to before God and man... Let every small tenant in Ireland join in the agitation... Be practical, be moderate, be just, keep your mind on the main issue; don't be turned aside by local or petty jealousies amongst yourselves... Remember you are Christians

¹¹⁰ *Roscommon Journal*, 26 October 1901; *Roscommon Messenger*, 5 January 1907.

before everything. Our blessing, our sympathy, our assistance cannot be with you if you do anything unchristian. These meetings, too, would naturally lead to drinking. If a man wants a drink badly let him take it, but on no account delay in the public house or take a second. If those, too, who are opposed to you see you going home drunk or tipsy they will not fear you, as you are not able to care for yourselves.¹¹¹

Canon White was called “patriotic,” and “a wise and moderate priest” for another speech in Lisacul, where he again presided over the meeting. He “warmly urged” the people to “combine for their own protection.” His popularity with the tenants seemed confirmed when Patrick Webb told a crowd in December that he had seen Lord De Freyne talking to Canon White, and the priest’s name was greeted with loud cheers.¹¹²

What the tenants did not know, and White did not wish to reveal, was that, like Bishop Clancy, he was corresponding privately with Lord De Freyne (“this letter is strictly confidential” he noted in one). He approached the baron deferentially in November 1901 and admitted that he had refused the tenants’ invitation to accompany them on the first deputation to Frenchpark Demesne to ask for the Dillon rent (he participated at another in December). He thought the issue “was a question of justice between man and man” and “I did not feel justified giving an opinion on it.” Also, he did not want to “make it more unpleasant” for Lord De Freyne “in case you could not see your way to give a reduction.” In the same letter he does urge a reduction of 3s (like Clancy’s suggestion, it was half of the Dillon abatement), “if not from justice at least from expediency” since it would “not violate...Conservative Convictions.” Besides, he reasoned, De Freyne’s situation was not like that of other landlords because so many of his tenants lived next to land already purchased by the CDB, and “of course it is only

¹¹¹ *Freeman’s Journal*, 21 September 1901; *Roscommon Journal*, 28 September 1901.

¹¹² *Irish People*, 16 November, 14 December 1901.

human that they should be [influenced] by the contrast in the rents.” Four months later, he wrote again, regretting “there is no hope of peace.” He said church collections were being boycotted on Sundays because the people “see I am not in their confidence.” The previous November, he had told tenants in Tibohine it was in their own interests to pay their rent, but the evictions were making his position more difficult. In a cryptic remark to De Freyne, he said, “You may lay waste the Parish, but they know the flame was not worth the candle.” Was he predicting that De Freyne’s stubbornness would cause his own defeat, or create further hard times ahead for the tenants? White sounded confused and exhausted when he concluded, “This letter calls for no reply as [I have] no [hope for] peace.”¹¹³

White was not merely a parish priest laboring in isolation; there’s a good chance he possessed a personality and streak of ambition that fueled his outspokenness as much as his convictions did. He made at least two trips to America, with one lasting fifteen months in the period just after the main agitation of the strike, and one year later when he boasted of improved conditions in Ireland. On the first, he was purportedly raising funds for a new church in Loughglynn, an effort for which he was welcomed warmly on his return.¹¹⁴ At the cornerstone laying ceremony in 1905, the new church was described as sited “in the heart of a miserable, uninviting country,” and the old church as “standing in humble contrast with the new.” A sermon that day linked the church building process to the bravery of an ancestor of Lord Dillon who fought alongside the “men of Loughglynn” at Aughrim in 1691 against King William.¹¹⁵ Other nearby church building

¹¹³ Canon William White to Lord De Freyne, 9 November 1901, 24 March 1902, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

¹¹⁴ *Roscommon Messenger*, 2 January 1904; *Detroit Free Press*, 25 October 1908.

¹¹⁵ *Roscommon Messenger*, 3 June 1905.

projects were completed in Tibohine in 1860 and Fairymount in 1880.¹¹⁶ Irish barrister Michael McCarthy, a unionist with anti-clerical views, questioned the construction of such churches in poor neighborhoods. Not only were funds used for church building that might have been directed elsewhere, he said, but the projects diverted pastors' attention from their parishioners. Noting that "The priests did not co-operate with the De Freyne tenants in their efforts to get a reduction from the landlord," he observed that in "Castlerea, the priests' buildings—churches, presbyteries, and convents—are rearing their cut-stone fronts aloft, as they are at Roscommon, forming such a contrast to the surrounding habitations of the laity and the general squalor of the country, as to challenge criticism."¹¹⁷

Yet White's trips abroad and his church building project seemed to have only increased his popularity at home. His trip in 1901 provided a human face for Irish Americans to accompany the news reports about the striking tenants. In Boston, a song (to the air, "Father O'Flynn") was "dedicated to the ladies of St. Cecelia's Parish and of the Gaelic School, who took such practical interest" in Father White's "labor of love and charity for the persecuted people... on the De Freyne estates back in Roscommon."

(excerpt):

Dear Sogarth Aroon we are thankful you came to us,
 Let us use you while here, so you'll give a good name to us,
 Then Cead Millia Faulthia lath Sogarth Aroon!
 We have read the sad news from Roscommon Lough Glynn,
 Where women and children and feeble old men,
 Are roughly evicted
 And sorely afflicted
 By Landlord De Freyne that cold Anglicized coon.

¹¹⁶ "St. Baoithin's Roman Catholic Church, Tibohine, County Roscommon," "Church of the Sacred Heart, Fairymount, County Roscommon," National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie>.

¹¹⁷ McCarthy, *Priests and People*, 167.

By signs of the times, this same Landlord De Freyne,
 May find his evictions, was labor in vain,
 He'll be so restricted
 That those he evicted
 Will get back their homes near you, Sogarth Aroon. (sic)¹¹⁸

Also on a fund-raising tour America in 1904 was the Loughglynn-born firebrand Rev. Michael O'Flanagan. In a pamphlet published in New York to support Bishop Clancy's plan to create an industrial school in the vacated Dillon mansion house, O'Flanagan attacked Lord De Freyne as "a local tyrant" whose evictions brought back "the horrid scenes of twenty years ago...which shocked the civilized world." *In absentia*, O'Flanagan's was the strongest clerical voice anywhere publicly denouncing the baron.¹¹⁹ Other local clerics, other than White and Hanly, kept a low profile during the strike, possibly tempered by directives from Clancy (with whom Flanagan had battled). Redmond's man-on-the-ground William Duffy gave a jaundiced portrait of their involvement, claiming that parish priests' "hostility" to the League affected the solidarity of the people, and that "all the priests, practically, are against the strike." Duffy quoted one priest who urged his flock to pay their rent by telling them "If the landlord found nothing but hay on a farm to pay him, he would be justified, if he couldn't carry it away, to set it on fire."¹²⁰ In April of 1902, Dillon wrote to Redmond that, "The priests on the estate are all stating that the tenants have paid and bragging that they have broken up the

¹¹⁸ Edward Fitzwilliam, ed. *Songs and Poems, American and Irish National and International Patriotic, Political Economic and Miscellaneous* (Boston: J.K. Waters Co, 1906), p. 123. This unattributed "song" bears little resemblance to the poem by John Banim, "Sogarth Aroon," written in 1831.

¹¹⁹ Rev. Michael O'Flanagan, "Loughglynn and the Irish Industrial Revival," 1904, a pamphlet in the possession of Liam Byrne, a collector of Roscommon ephemera, who shared a digital copy with the author; Desmond Greaves, "Father Michael O'Flanagan, Republican Priest, the story of his life with extracts from his speeches" (The Connolly Association, 1954), reprinted in 2015 for a centenary celebration of O'Flanagan's leadership in a dispute over turf rights in Cliffoney, County Sligo. Also, see Patrick Maume, "O'Flanagan, Michael," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

¹²⁰ William Duffy to John Redmond, 1 January 1902, MS 15,241/2, Redmond Papers NLI.

combination.”¹²¹ Clerical names that had been linked to land agitation in the area during the 1880s, like Canon Peter O’Donoghue, Rev. M. Henry, or Rev. P. Filan, who collected funds for the Plan of Campaign and spoke at demonstrations (“the priesthood of Ireland gave their hearty endorsement to every single action and act of the Irish Parliamentary Party” declared Rev. Filan in 1887),¹²² are not found in reports on the strike. White is the only local cleric who appears with any frequency in the accounts of tenant activities in 1901–03.

Reflection

While it is impossible to know how tenants actually reacted to what their political and religious leaders had to say about the rent strike, it is clear that those messages were complicated by distant events and circumstances. Nationalists were preoccupied by De Freyne’s lawsuit, and clerics were constrained by church teaching, and the complications of De Freyne’s Catholicism. The lower level organizers, who were dedicated to fighting for issues that deeply concerned the tenants, were also distracted by their obligations to the League, and their own ambitions. Some of the issues the politicians and priests flagged—freedom from English rule, civic virtue, party loyalty, personal morality—had little to do with the tenants’ reasons for starting a rent strike. There is no way to measure how long the strike remained a deliberate act of volition by the tenants, but it seems quite possible that the cacophony of elite voices commenting on their actions and offering advice may have been instrumental in dismantling whatever solidarity and sense of purpose they had mustered at the start.

¹²¹ John Dillon to John Redmond, 10 April 1902, MS 15,182/3/B, Redmond Papers, NLI.

¹²² *Irish Times*, 3 December 1886; *Freeman’s Journal*, 8 March 1887



Frenchpark House, c. 1910¹

CHAPTER 5: LAND AND LANDLORD

As a resident landlord, Arthur French, 4th Baron De Freyne of Coolavin (1855–1913), was a familiar figure to his tenants, and he was known to engage with them personally through letters or face-to-face encounters. For those tenants, the battle in 1901 was not against the concept of “landlordism” as much as it was a conflict with the man in a trilby hat and a Van Dyke-style beard who lived behind the gates of Frenchpark demesne, and who probably knew them, and their fathers, by name. The tenor of the baron’s relationships with his tenants at the time of the strike is discernable mainly through his responses to their demands, his treatment of estate agent Stephen Woulfe Flanagan, and through the comments of other observers. Despite protestations of his concern for them, his stubbornness and refusal to seek a compromise was as important a

¹ [French Park Album] [graphic], Created 1910–1913, Digital Photograph Collection, NLI.

factor in the development of the events of 1901–03 as the tenants’ involvement with the United Irish League.²

De Freyne seemed genuinely bewildered by his tenants’ actions. Lacking the vision to imagine any other scenario, he was determined to keep possession of his property and the way of life he loved at any cost. Months after the strike began he confessed,

I have not...the slightest desire to be hard on my tenants... I deeply regret the present state of things, not only on my account, but because I know what it means to the poor people themselves. They are doing no work now, but wasting their time going from meeting to meeting... I admit that their conditions of life are very wretched. Nobody deplores that more than I do. But there it is. You cannot alter the whole face of the country.³

A Catholic and a staunch unionist,⁴ he abhorred the presence of the United Irish League on his estate and accused its leaders of turning his poorest tenants against him. He saw himself as business-like and fair with his tenants, especially those who met his standards for hard work and loyalty. Obstinate refusing to reduce rents or sell to the Congested Districts Board, he was equally stiff-backed in his attempt to crush the nationalist agenda with a lawsuit designed to demolish the coffers of the United Irish League. Without his intractable response to the tenants’ request there would have been no rent strike in 1901, and possibly no frightened landlords scurrying to a land conference with nationalists in

² Biographical information on Lord De Freyne and details on his family and estate are available in a variety of sources. “Arthur French, 4th Baron de Freyne of Coolavin,” *The Peerage*, <http://thepeerage.com/p7614.htm#i76134>; *Burke’s genealogical and heraldic history of the peerage, baronetage, and knightage*. (London: Burke’s Peerage Limited, 1967), 706–707; Maurice French, *The Frenchs of Frenchpark* (Warminster, Wilts: Published by the author, 1999, a family history written by the baron’s grandson, and *Frenchs of French Park*, a photo album prepared for a 2007 French family reunion, Torn Corner Ltd., www.torncorner.co.uk. The latter two are held in the Roscommon County Library, Roscommon.

³ Supplement to *Wicklow People*, 12 April 1902.

⁴ *Irish Times*, 18 March, 13 September 1893.

1902, or even a Wyndham Land Act, at least not in the form in which it was finally approved in 1903.

Given his family history and finances, some resistance to the tenants' demands was predictable, even understandable. It was the intensity of his myopia that gave nationalists the opportunity to isolate him as particularly unfeeling, and to crown him "the last of the evictors" and a "noble rackrenter."⁵ While some members of his own class supported him in the lawsuit against twenty-nine members of the United Irish League and the Irish Party, other property owners found his position untenable, and they welcomed an opportunity to negotiate with tenant representatives at the conference. Many factors fed De Freyne's inflexibility, including his family's entrenched history as resident gentry, his uncertain finances, and the mixed character of the land he owned. His personality and behavior must be considered as well. The contentious relationship he had with land agent Stephen Woulfe-Flanagan, the man who should have been his strongest ally during the strike, suggests that the baron was not averse to shooting himself in the foot.

The Land

When he came of age in 1876, De Freyne inherited the third-largest estate in Roscommon, which ranked just behind the King-Harman and Pakenham-Mahon properties in size.⁶ The area affected by the strike, encompassing what became known as the Associated Estates (including properties belonging to other local landlords), formed a rough triangle from Castlerea to Ballaghaderreen to Frenchpark.⁷ There, living conditions were directly affected by the clash of interests perpetrated by geography and

⁵ *Westmeath Examiner*, 10 October 1902; *Southern Star*, 19 July 1902.

⁶ *Landowners in Ireland, Return of Owners of One Acre and Up...1876*. C:1492, LXXX.61, 295, 315, 320.

⁷ *Irish Times*, 26 February 1902.

land use. Vast open stretches of rich grasslands, sitting on beds of limestone and shale, had historically supported sheep farms and the business of cattle breeding. Immediately contiguous were sections of raised bog and long fingers of wasteland that reached into the good pasture land, the kind of marginal land where many of the poorest tenants lived.⁸ At the time of the strike, over half of the county's 629,633 acres were devoted to grazing. Less than a quarter of that total produced vegetable crops (mostly potatoes and oats), and the rest of the county consisted of water, marshes, barren land and bog.⁹ Grazing cattle was the most productive use of the land, and as the Irish beef market flourished in the early nineteenth century, it encouraged the expansion of pasture land and the elimination of small tillage plots. Kevin Whelan describes the conversion to grazing as a process that removed "small farmers from the pasture lands, forcing them onto the hungry hills and sour bogs, while bullocks lorded it knee-deep in grass on the best land."¹⁰ Fergus Campbell paraphrases a contemporary observer, "the essence of the western problem was the juxtaposition of vast tracts of untenanted grazing land, occupied by landlords and graziers, next to the plots of impoverished small farmers, with insufficient land to provide them with a reasonable standard of living."¹¹

The local market towns like Ballaghaderreen, Castlerea, and Frenchpark supported the cattle trade, and were in turn supported by it. Cattle dealers took advantage

⁸ "Geohive," *Ordnance Survey Ireland*, www.osi.ie; Kevin Whelan, "The Modern Landscape: From Plantation to Present," and John Feehan, "Components of the Irish Landscape: Bogs," in F.H.A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan, Matthew Stout, *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*, second edition, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 79, 169 (map).

⁹ [Cd. 1059–III] *Census of Ireland, 1901*, Part 1... Vol IV Province of Connaught, No. 4, County of Roscommon, 1.

¹⁰ Whelan, "Modern Landscape," 79.

¹¹ Louis-Paul Dubois, *Contemporary Ireland* (Dublin, 1908), 309, summarized in Fergus Campbell, *Land and Revolution: Nationalist Politics in the West of Ireland*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: September 2007, 10.

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of the Midland Great Western Railroad, which provided connections to the Royal Canal and eastern markets, linking the area to the rest of the country and the world.¹² By the time of the strike, both large landowners and small occupiers participated in the grazing economy. Small farmers sold their one- to two-year old calves to graziers, who kept them for another few years before passing them on to cattle “fatteners” in the counties of Leinster, who then sold them on the international market. In order for these smallholders to raise themselves economically, they needed capital to increase their herds, and good quality grazing land, which were both beyond their reach.¹³ Expansion of grasslands was a commercial decision which proved very beneficial to some, but the consequences to the poor who could not participate in this market reverberated socially and politically through the decades.¹⁴

In Roscommon in particular, landowners had long been intent on “the expansion of grazing and the removal of excess tenants to make way for more viable holding sizes.”¹⁵ A poor law inspector in 1848 noted that in Castlerea Union “a great portion of the good land was appropriated for grazing purposes and in the hands of a few larger occupiers; the poor being generally squatters on the brink of bogs...on the poor and unprofitable lands.”¹⁶ In 1902, John Fitzgibbon led American journalist Hugh Sutherland

¹² *Vice-Regal Commission on Irish Railways, Including Light Railways, Appendix to the First Report*. Minutes of evidence (taken in Dublin and in London, 12th October 1906 to 1st March 1907, inclusive) and documents relating thereto, 509 (map).

¹³ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, 13–14.

¹⁴ Whelan, “The Modern Landscape,” 79.

¹⁵ Mary Kelly, “The Famine in County Roscommon,” *Atlas of the Great Irish Famine*, eds. John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 308.

¹⁶ “Papers relating to proceedings for relief of distress, and state of unions and workhouses in Ireland,” eighth series, HC 1849 (1042), p. 56, quoted in Kelly, “Famine in County Roscommon,” 316. Lord De Freyne’s agent, Dominick Corr, Esq., described the extreme poverty of the people who lived on marginal land. He told the Devon Commission in 1844 that government loans were necessary for reclamation projects on bog land, to make it profitable and to provide income for the poor. *Evidence taken before Her Majesty’s Commissioners of Inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland. Part II*. 1845 [616], 373–377.

through the grazing districts on and near De Freyne's estate. Sutherland described the "low rolling hills, and long meadows" of the pastures where the only buildings were the isolated cottages of herders. Fitzgibbon told Sutherland it was "the best land in Roscommon, fit to support thousands. And on land where ten families might live in decent comfort the only occupants are a man and a dog." He then drove his visitor "in the opposite direction from where lay the rich grazing ranches," towards the townland of Feigh on the De Freyne estate. Sutherland was appalled:

The green fields disappeared, and as the road wound along a slight ridge there lay miles of unkind-looking land...with wide stretches of brown bog. And here, where everything conspired to cheat husbandry and make life hard, I found the people. Their cabins were on every side; where stones were sown thick in the soil...The houses were pitifully mean, the tilled patches pitifully small. The poverty was glaring... I had seen more misery than I can ever describe.

Fitzgibbon explained that in the decades of clearances that began before the Famine people who were dispossessed elsewhere had gravitated to the poor land near Frenchpark and Loughlynn. He told Sutherland that

the estates of Lord Dillon and Lord de Freyne became a refuge for evicted tenants. They took hundreds of holdings, only the worst land being obtainable by them, and there they began again the struggle for existence... It is almost incredible the amount of labour that has been expended in trying to reclaim these worthless lands.¹⁷

Sutherland was sympathetic to the UIL, and his 1909 book recounting his visits to Ireland featured a foreword by party leader, John Redmond. Nonetheless, descriptions of the De Freyne property by less overtly partisan observers confirm his characterizations. A travel book in 1904 described "hundreds of acres of rich grassland with scarcely a house upon them" on the De Freyne estate, which lay cheek-by-jowl with "hundreds of acres of bog-land, with the little cabins crowding upon one another as far as the eye can see...

¹⁷ Sutherland, *Ireland Yesterday and Today*, 1909), 69, 57, 60, 66.

[rents] cannot be paid out of the land.”¹⁸ T.W. Russell, the liberal unionist who supported the tenants’ cause in the belief that contented farmers would strengthen the union,¹⁹ called areas of the De Freyne estate “about the most wretched place that ever anybody set foot upon,” where tenants were living on land “not worth rent at all.”²⁰ Cathcart Wason, MP, a Scot, visited the estate and called it “the black spot in the Empire,” where “the tenant labourer had done everything, and had created something out of absolutely nothing... He had to build his own cabin, reclaimed his land, and he did that in the blackest and dreariest months of the year, because in summer he was away in England or Scotland, leaving his wife and children to struggle on as best they could.”

William McCartney MP, a unionist from South Antrim, who condemned agrarian agitation and supported Lord De Freyne, saw things a little differently, yet he nonetheless acknowledged the inferior quality of the land where most poor tenants lived. He called it a “mistake...to suppose that because land was termed ‘bog land’ nothing could be grown upon it.” When he visited the estate, McCartney said he had seen “good crops of oats and potatoes” on bog land, and small farmers with enough stock to support their families. The difference between them and their less prosperous neighbors was “evidence of labour or any trouble being taken on the holding.” The real problem as he saw it was that “for months in the year the men did nothing. They put in the crop and went to England in May; they returned in November, and then from November to May they did nothing but

¹⁸ Milburg Francisco Mansfield and Blanche McManus, *Romantic Ireland*, vol. 1 (Boston: L.C. Page & Company, 1904), 61–62.

¹⁹ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 89.

²⁰ *Irish Times*, 11 November 1902.

wander about the country after the agitators, wasting their money and making the fortune of the whisky-shop keepers.”²¹

Shifting responsibility for their poverty onto the poor themselves was an approach also taken in an 1892 report of the Congested District Board on the counties of Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, and Sligo.²² According to the CDB inspector, Henry Doran, “Anyone knowing these districts cannot fail to be struck with the primitive and slovenly manner in which the cultivation of the land is attempted, and the thriftless appearance of the people, the live stock (sic), and the houses and their surroundings.” Doran concluded that the “most formidable difficulties...arise from the peculiarities of the people.” They spent so much time abroad as migratory workers, he said, that they were unlikely to improve their own farms when they came home. Furthermore, he argued, they refused to change their traditional ways and adopt more advanced farming methods. Since his report is of a practical nature, he acknowledged that many families were unable to support any livestock, which would require capital, and therefore “one of the most frequent primary causes of their poverty is want of sufficient manure to grow good crops.” Like McCartney’s, Doran’s criticism also confirmed that the Castlerea district lay in an area of “hundreds of square miles of poor land,” which was also “the most thickly populated in Ireland.”²³

²¹ “Commons Sitting of Wednesday, 23rd July 1902,” *20th Century House of Commons Hansard Sessional Papers*, 4th Series vol. 111, 1103–1105, 1049–1050.

²² As defined by Arthur Balfour, the chief secretary who inaugurated the CDB, the people and land in these districts were “not congested in the sense of being crowded but congested by not being able to draw from their holdings a safe and sufficient livelihood for themselves and their children.” Quoted in James Morrissey, ed. *On the Verge of Want, a unique insight into living conditions along Ireland’s Western seaboard in the late 19th century* (Dublin: Crannóg Books, 2001), p. viii.

²³ *Congested Districts Board for Ireland, Counties of Mayo, Galway, Roscommon and Sligo, General Report of Mr. Doran, Inspector on The Undermentioned Districts*, reproduced in Morrissey, *On the Verge of Want*, 117–119.

The Landlord: Family and Finances

Lord De Freyne's verdant estate at Frenchpark lay in the heart of this "congested" area. The entrance to the demesne was imposing, with high iron gates and a wall opening onto a "handsome winding avenue" that led to a large brick house on the demesne's 1,400 undulating green acres which were "pleasingly ornamented."²⁴ Estate maps show a deer park, numerous out buildings and four formal gardens with intricately designed pathways and plantings.²⁵ De Freyne's thirteen children were raised on the estate, and they appear in turn-of-the-century photographs enjoying games and sports on the grounds.²⁶ Three of his brothers, a sister, uncles, aunts, and his mother lived close by. As a resident landlord, he had deeper connections to the property than did absentees like Lord Dillon, who unsentimentally divested himself of his lands to the CDB. In addition to serving as his family's home, the estate was also De Freyne's only source of income. Yet the paramount reason why Lord De Freyne would neither countenance a rent reduction in 1901 nor consider selling to his tenants was not sentiment, it was because the value of the estate was entangled—without hope of resolution—in payments to family members and in long-term debt. He asked his solicitors to include in his affidavit for the lawsuit against the UIL a statement about "anxiety, annoyance, and worry caused to me by the agitation and to the fact that owing to it I was unable to pay the mortgages—family charges on the dates they were due."²⁷ Comparing CDB initiatives in drainage, reclamation, and house

²⁴ Isaac Weld, *Statistical Survey of County Roscommon*, (Dublin: R. Graisberry, printer to the Royal Dublin Society, 1832), 289–90. The gates were constructed in the estate forge in 1704, *Weekly Irish Times*, 23 October 1938.

²⁵ Estate maps in the De Freyne papers, not listed in current catalog, NLI.

²⁶ Family photographs in *[French Park Album] [graphic]*, Created 1910–1913, Digital Photograph Collection, NLI, and "Frenchs of French Park," 2007.

²⁷ Lord De Freyne to H.L. Moore, 25 May 1902, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

building on the former Dillon estate to what he as a single landlord could do for his tenants, De Freyne declared in exasperation, “They [the Board] have no big place to keep up, no mortgagees to pay, no heirs to provide for so they can do all these things. But there is no landlord in Ireland, or in England either, who could afford it.”²⁸ This complaint was unintentionally prescient—what better argument could the baron make for the demolition of his own way of life, and the arcane apparatus of privilege that supported it, than to admit that it was all economically unsound?

Arthur became the 4th Baron De Freyne by a quirk of fate. At the age of thirteen he assumed the title on the death of his father, Charles, even though there were three older sons in the family. Under hereditary law, none of Arthur’s older brothers could claim the title because their parents’ marriage, conducted by a Catholic priest in 1851, was not considered valid. Three years after that wedding, it became clear that Charles would become the next baron because the 2nd Baron, his brother John, was about to die without an heir. So, Charles and his wife hurriedly re-married in the Church of Ireland. Arthur was their fourth son, but the first born after the second marriage, and so the only legal heir. William, the third brother, lost the title and the prospect of inheriting the estate when he entered the world just a bit too soon in a railway station in Mullingar while his parents were on their way to their second wedding.²⁹

²⁸ Supplement to *Wicklow People*, 12 April 1902.

²⁹ “Arthur French, 4th Baron de Freyne of Coolavin,” *The Peerage*, <http://thepeerage.com/p7614.htm#i76134>; *Burke's peerage*, p. 706; French, *Frenchs of Frenchpark*, 1999, 29–30. Although William and his brothers were denied the title, there does not seem to have been any overt family animosity. William casually referred to his early life as that of a “younger son,” but he never regretted leaving Ireland in the 1880s to become a rancher in New Mexico (and a future employer of Butch Cassidy). William French, *Some Recollections of a Western Ranchman* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co, 1928), 1.

Arthur's mother, Catherine Flanagan, was the daughter of a local Catholic farmer, and she brought the French family back into that faith for the first time since the 1600s. According to family lore, Charles fell in love with her when she delivered eggs to his house. She was twenty-three and Charles was sixty when they married in 1851, and she bore him seven children, but the family biographer is eager to point out that the marriage was a love match and not a case of *droit de seigneur*.³⁰ She lived close by Frenchpark demesne in Caher (also Cahir) House in Errit, where she and Charles had raised their family, from Charles' death in 1868 until her death in 1900 as Lady Dowager De Freyne.³¹ As a young man, Arthur attended Catholic schools, one in Kildare (likely the Jesuit-run Clongowes Wood³²), followed by Beaumont (also run by the Jesuits) and Downside, both in England. When he was twenty-two, he married Lady Laura Dundas (sister of the first Marquess of Zetland, Lawrence Dundas, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland from 1889–1892). She died in childbirth in 1881, leaving him with a son, and a daughter

³⁰ Some sources identify her as Catherine (nee) Maree, daughter of Luke Maree. However, the baron's grandson claims her maiden name was really Flanagan, and that Maree was a deliberate inaccuracy perpetrated by the family (for an undisclosed reason). Perhaps the change was designed to distance her from her family roots, which may have been humble. The only Luke Flanagan in the valuation reports held a three-acre farm in Cloonarragh, a short distance from Frenchpark, and paid rent to the De Freynes. The only Maree in the Roscommon valuations was a Thomas, who lived on a similarly small farm in Loughglynn Demesne on the estate of Viscount Dillon. *Burke's peerage*, 706; French, *Frenchs of French Park*, 1999, p. 29; "Griffith's Valuation," www.askaboutireland.ie.

³¹ *Irish Times*, 20 October 1900.

³² James Joyce's sojourn at Clongowes Wood twenty years later was depicted in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). John Redmond may have attended Clongowes at the same time as Arthur French. Michael Laffan, "Redmond, John Edward," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

who died at the age of fifteen.³³ He then married Marie Georgina Lamb, the daughter of an English government official, with whom he had eleven children.³⁴

The young baron inherited not only a title but also all the debts of his ancestors, to which he soon added his own. One of his first steps after he came of age and officially assumed the title in 1876 was to obtain the controversial mortgage of £45,000 on the property from the charitable fund overseen by the Roman Catholic diocese of Dublin (payable at £1906 a year, principal and interest).³⁵ Three years later he borrowed £6,000 from the government to pay for drainage work during a period of agricultural distress and exercised his right to raise a £5,000 mortgage under his first marriage settlement. Adding to his fiscal worries, under the 1882 Arrears Act he was able to recover less than a third of £16,500 owed him in unpaid rents.³⁶

The estate's support of extended family members included annual payments of £350 to his sister, Mary, £1,000 to his brother, Charles, and £200 each to his four other brothers, and an indenture of £4,664 a year for his mother. There were contractual obligations to non-family members as well,³⁷ and additional charges of £3,207 a year for

³³ The son, Arthur Reginald (known as Reggie), became the 5th Baron when his father died in 1913. He had a strained relationship with his father, who disapproved of his heir's marriage to a London barmaid. The young man disappeared shortly after his wedding and enlisted in the U.S. Army as a private, serving for some time during with U.S. forces in the Philippines. His letters to his father from that period (X.viii. Correspondence of Arthur Reginald 5th Baron De Freyne, 1902–1911, MS 50,329/10/10, De Freyne Papers, NLI) suggest a reconciliation. On his father's death in 1913, Reggie became 5th Baron and his wife was Baroness. In addition to French, *Frenchs of Frenchpark*, 1999, 41–41, see also the *New York Times*, 18 and 19 February 1905, 19 October 1913, and the *Roscommon Messenger*, 18 December 1915.

³⁴ "Arthur French, 4th Baron de Freyne of Coolavin," *The Peerage*, <http://thepeerage.com/p7614.htm#i76134>; *Burke's peerage*, 706.

³⁵ As noted earlier in the "Politicians and Priests" chapter, this loan would become political fodder for nationalist supporters of the rent strike, as it had been for the tenants' advocates during the evictions of the 1890s. Jim Cantwell, "An Irishman's Diary," *Irish Times*, 15 December 2008.

³⁶ Dooley, *Decline of the Big House in Ireland*, 96.

³⁷ Mortgage document, 20 May 1878, and "Resettlement of French Estate," 7 August 1901, VIII.iii. Material relating to the settlement of the estate under Arthur, 4th Baron De Freyne 1876–1916, MS 50,329/8/7–10, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

taxes, insurance, and other costs.³⁸ Since the baron had no other source of funds beyond his estate (such as investments in mines or factories abroad), he relied on rents from tenants and profits from land he farmed himself to cover these expenses and the maintenance of the demesne. In 1898, the rental income on his properties in Counties Roscommon, Galway and Sligo was £11,552 (the bulk from the area near Frenchpark). Roughly, the yearly fixed charges against the estate were at least £8,025, a figure which does not account for fluctuating costs for maintenance and improvements. There was additional income of about £12,000 from untenanted land De Freyne held in his own name, but his solicitor, John O'Hagan, said "the upkeep of the house, out offices and demesne" swallowed any profits from that source.³⁹

De Freyne's situation was not unique among Irish landlords, who often were responsible for family charges set by legal settlements, and who amassed debts over time through improvident spending, poor estate management, and diminished rental returns.⁴⁰ Absentees were notoriously guilty of lavish spending, gambling, and depleting funds needed to drain wetlands, build roads, modernize farming methods, or make other necessary improvements.⁴¹ When some properties became profit-making for the first time in the 1850s and 1860s, the vision of future windfalls prompted landlords to borrow

³⁸ "Lord De Freyne, Statement, showing present position of his Lordships Estates," undated. There is a reference in the document to the "passing of the Local Government Act" which would set the date after 1898. The document appears to be part of another report, "Lord De Freyne's Estates, Report on Rentals and Account for one year ending 1st May 1899," IX.vii. Three accounts of the total value of the De Freyne Estate, MS 50,329/9/9, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

³⁹ "Lord De Freyne's Estates, Report on Rentals and Account for one year ending 1st May 1899," III.i. Estate rentals, 1842–1933, MS 50,329/3/1, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁴⁰ A landlord from County Laois (then Queen's County), Col. William Hutcheson-Poe, who would be part of the Land Conference in 1902, observed, "It is an admitted and regrettable fact that by far the larger number of Irish properties are so loaded with family charges, mortgages and other incumbrances, that, after payment of those and other necessary outgoings, the margin of income left for the owner is so small that any further diminution of it would leave him absolutely penniless." *Leinster Leader*, 9 August 1902.

⁴¹ See L. Perry Curtis, Jr. "Incumbered Wealth: Landed Indebtedness in Post-Famine Ireland," *The American Historical Review* 85:2 (April 1980), 332–367.

funds to remodel and upgrade their estates. Loans secured under the expectations of another boom cycle were used to pay for European art and furniture, foxhunting, horse racing, and shooting, memberships in London clubs, and the social “seasons” there and in Dublin. When an agricultural depression hit in 1877, some lenders got nervous and demanded immediate repayment.⁴² Luckily for De Freyne, the charitable fund in Dublin did not demand immediate repayment so he continued to make annual payments until the sale of the estate to the CDB, when the mortgage disappears from the records.⁴³ The baron may have originally borrowed money to pay for the profligacy of his predecessors, but his own spending habits (such as his London home on Upper Belgravia Street and club memberships of White’s and the Carlton Club, and the purchase of a Lorraine-Dietrich racing car), were not particularly frugal either.⁴⁴

Maintenance of Frenchpark House and demesne also drained his accounts, but De Freyne and his family continued to live there despite his claims of financial distress. The three-story “Palladian-style house” was built in the 1600s with bricks imported from Holland. It was enlarged in the eighteenth century with a pair of two-story wings on either side joined to the house by curved galleries, which may have been designed by Richard Castle, the architect for Leinster House in Dublin. Inside, there was a drawing room with Georgian doors, a decorative molded ceiling, four soaring windows, and a fireplace with intricate colored inlay on white marble attributed to the Italian artist, Pietro Bossi.⁴⁵ There were “several spacious and almost palatial apartments; the great hall, with

⁴² Dooley, *Decline of the Big House*, 30–43, 78, 110.

⁴³ Cantwell, “An Irishman’s Diary,” *Irish Times*, 15 December 2008. Additional information on the mortgage and the O’Brien Institute was taken from Cantwell’s notes for a book on the OBI (unpublished, as of 2018), which he generously shared with the author.

⁴⁴ French, *Frenchs of Frenchpark*, 1999, 32–33.

⁴⁵ French, *Frenchs of French Park*, 1999, 7. Frenchpark House was similar in style to Strokestown House, the home of the Mahon/Packenham families, and the site today of the National Famine Museum.

its remarkably handsome Adam-decorated staircase, and its beautiful stained-glass window, being a striking feature of the interior.”⁴⁶ When the house was dismantled in the 1950s, the ceiling of one room sold for £50,000.⁴⁷ The auction catalogue at that time mentions eight bedrooms, a smoking room, a drawing room, a dining room, a study, and a gunroom.⁴⁸



Frenchpark House interior⁴⁹

Hunting on foot and on horseback was a favorite leisure time activity on the estate. There was “excellent shooting” for grouse and men and boys could make ten shillings a day driving the birds before the shooters by beating the grass with sticks, and

⁴⁶ *Weekly Irish Time*, 23 October 1938.

⁴⁷ Michael McLoughlin, “The Big House,” *Roscommon Association Yearbook*, (Dublin: 1992), 58.

⁴⁸ “Sale at Frenchpark,” *Catalogue of Fine Antique Furniture*, (Dublin: Hamilton and Hamilton, Auctioneers, 1953).

⁴⁹ *Frenchs of French Park*, photo album, 2007.

there was “no shortage of beaters.”⁵⁰ De Freyne raised foxhounds and his stable was well regarded. So important was the hunting culture in the area that a primary form of tenant protest in the 1890s was an anti-hunt campaign to deny Lord De Freyne and his agent their most conspicuous pastime.⁵¹ Entertaining hunting parties, and maintaining stables, horses, and dogs added to the estate’s overall expenditures.



Shooting party at Frenchpark, 1909 ⁵²

The civic engagement expected of the gentry had further defined the family’s ties to the community. Besides sitting as a peer in the House of Lords, De Freyne also served as an honorary colonel in the 5th Battalion, Connacht Rangers, as justice of the peace, and as deputy lieutenant for Roscommon,⁵³ just as his ancestors had been magistrates, poor law guardians, and members of parliament and the militia. The first French to acquire land in Roscommon was Patrick fitz Stephen (buried in the family plot at Cloonshanville Abbey in Frenchpark in 1669), who was the descendant of salt merchants and city officials in Galway. Patrick’s son, Dominick, married the daughter of a Protestant bishop

⁵⁰ *Frenchs of French Park*, photo album, 2007.

⁵¹ *Irish Times*, 16 October 1893. 14 September 1901, 11 December 1903.

⁵² *[French Park Album] [graphic]*, Created 1910–1913, Digital Photograph Collection, NLI.

⁵³ *Times*, 11 September 1913.

and conformed to the established church. Dominick's son, John, (remembered as *An Tiarna Mór*, the Great Lord), fought with King William II at the Battle of Aughrim, but was said to have held land in trust for his Catholic neighbors, the O'Conors of Bellangare, during the time of the penal codes. His son refused a peerage, and his grandson, a strong critic of English policy in Ireland, turned down an earldom in 1801 rather than support the union of Ireland and Great Britain. However, John's great-grandson, Arthur, became the first Baron De Freyne of Artagh in 1839 and was granted a permanent, family title, Baron De Freyne of Coolavin, County Sligo, in 1851 (after Daniel O'Connell wrote a letter on his behalf to the O'Conor Don). The first title expired upon his death in 1856, but the second was extended to his brother, John, and then to another brother, Charles, the father of Arthur, the 4th Baron.⁵⁴

Although he and his children were Catholics and attended a church in Frenchpark among the local people, the baron's religion did not always soften his relationships with the Roman Catholic tenants living on his estate. His allegiance to the Church of Rome was strong, as he aligned with other Catholic peers in parliament to promote certain Catholic interests, yet he never veered from his unionist beliefs. He supported higher education for Catholics in Ireland and demanded unsuccessfully that a clause on Protestant succession be stricken from King Edward VII's oath in 1901. He was part of a delegation of "English Roman Catholics" who attended the papal jubilee in Rome in

⁵⁴ *Burke's genealogical and heraldic history*, p. 705. French, *Frenchs of Frenchpark*, 13–26. O'Connell asked the O'Conor Don to approach Lord John Russell about granting a permanent peerage for the family. He credited their long history in government and their support of Liberal and Whig agendas. He also mentioned the family's support for Catholic Emancipation (this was before the Frenchs returned to Catholicism). Daniel O'Connell to O'Conor Don, 1 August 1846, reprinted in French, *Frenchs of Frenchpark*, 1999, 56, with Clonalis Papers, Vol. 111, 6 listed as the source.

1903.⁵⁵ However, he was also one of eighteen Catholics in the House of Lords who voted against the home rule bill proposed by Prime Minister William E. Gladstone in 1893 (only four Catholic peers voted in its favor).⁵⁶ His promotion of Catholic interests, which were reported in the press, never directly affected the people who paid him rent and therefore did little to protect him from criticism. An anonymous poet mocked his public stance as a “good ‘Cawtholic’” after De Freyne reportedly referred to tenants as “shiftless” during a period of evictions and house burnings in the 1890s.

“They’re a helpless shiftless lot”–
 The houseless mother and wean,
 The bashful maid and the father staid–
 That pestered the good De Freyne!
 Crow-bar, pick-axe and sledge,
 And grappling irons ply
 Till there stands not a cot of that “shiftless lot”
 Beneath Bethlehem’s Star in the sky.⁵⁷

Was De Freyne’s relationship with his tenantry more than typically acrimonious for a landlord on a troubled estate? Evidence as to his personal dealing with the tenants is generally unreliable, given the commentators’ often biased allegiances. One visitor to the area said, “it would be impossible to see a resident landlord more utterly out of touch with his tenantry,” adding that people knew he was at home only by the “occasional pop of his rifle when he shoots an unwary rabbit” behind the walls of the estate.⁵⁸ Family testimony, on the other hand, suggests that the Frenchs interacted amicably with local

⁵⁵ *Irish Times*, 17 November 1876; *University Education (Ireland) Copy of a Declaration of the Catholic Laity of Ireland, on the Subject of University Education in that Country, lately laid before the Prime Minister. (The O’Conor Don)* 108, 20 March 1879; *Belfast Newsletter*, 30 June 1887; *New York Times*, 6 August 1901; *Times*, 11 March 1903.

⁵⁶ *Irish Times*, 18 March, 13 September 1893.

⁵⁷ *Westmeath Examiner*, 2 December 1893.

⁵⁸ Michael J. F. McCarthy, *Priests and People in Ireland* (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1903), 167, 170. The vehemently anti-clerical McCarthy, the son of a Land Leaguer, had “moved from a tepid nationalism to a frank unionism.” Bridget Hourican, “McCarthy, Michael John Fitzgerald,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

residents. One son, Fulke, was a “great hero to the village lads at Frenchpark and asked his father to give them a field for their football to which Arthur readily agreed.” The baron also constructed a “Hand Ball tower for the village children.” When Fulke and three of his brothers were killed in World War I, plaques in their honor were placed by the family in the village church in Corskeagh, along with tributes to their mother and father, where they remain today.⁵⁹ When the manor house was shut down in the 1950s, people were sad to see it go because the estate had been a source of employment. But a local resident reflected the community’s ambivalence in observing that “Frenchpark would be better off if the ‘Big House’ was retained, but no one shouted ‘Stop.’”⁶⁰

The Landlord and the Agent

One way to assess the quality of De Freyne’s interactions with his tenants is by looking at his prickly relationship with his agent, Stephen Woulfe Flanagan. Not only did the agent come to believe that De Freyne disliked him, he would learn too that his loyal service was not appreciated. John Fitzgibbon once observed that the baron was “unfortunate in his agents,”⁶¹ but it may also have been that his agents had been dealing with a particularly difficult employer. Like his predecessors, Henry MacDougall and Robert Blakeney (who replaced MacDougall in 1887), Woulfe Flanagan was despised by the tenants because of his strict policies and became the target of violence. He seems to have been a man of some sensitivity, who turned to the career of estate agency out of

⁵⁹ Edward Fulke French, 32, died of influenza and pneumonia in Germany in 1918 as a prisoner of war, two days after the Armistice was signed, having fought in the Gallipoli campaign. His brother, George Philip, 25, died in battle in 1915 on the same day as the oldest brother and 5th Baron, Arthur Reginald, 35. Ernest Aloysius, 22, died from wounds received in battle in 1917. *Irish Times*, 14 December 1918; *Munster Express*, 10 December 1918; *Irish Times*, 25 August 1917; *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, www.cwgc.org.

⁶⁰ McLoughlin, “The Big House,” 58.

⁶¹ *Irish Times*, 28 February 1902.

desperation rather than by choice, and who, as the son of a judge and landowner, felt diminished by his position in life.⁶² He did not always seem to approve of the work he was required to do, calling one eviction campaign “an unpleasant ordeal” that he hoped would be the last on the estate, given all the “signs of the abolition of landlordism.”⁶³ In letters to his brother John, a lawyer and writer for the *Times* in London,⁶⁴ Woulfe Flanagan portrayed himself as a faithful worker, and accused Lord De Freyne of harboring “an unfavorable attitude towards me in spite of my appeal to his better feelings.” He said De Freyne treated him “with the utmost callousness,” and that he had “long thought of getting out of this abominable estate.” It was clear the baron reposed little confidence in his agent. Even though Woulfe Flanagan kept the estate books, when a group of English politicians arrived on a fact-finding mission while De Freyne was abroad, the baron would not trust his agent to share information with them.⁶⁵

Hunting for a new job as the strike drew to a close, Woulfe Flanagan found he could not shake his association with the estate. At first, he hoped to serve as a “negotiator” for the sale of the De Freyne property in the wake of the 1903 Land Act, but the baron told him he was “too much disliked by the tenants and that they would not agree to negotiate” with the agent. However, “if the tenants don’t come to terms,” he told his brother, “he expects me to ‘process’ it, as of old, and incur more dislike.” Woulfe Flanagan knew De Freyne would “never give me a free hand” and that “the late evictions

⁶² Stephen was the son of Stephen Woulfe Flanagan, PC (Ire.), a judge in the landed estates court who owned over three thousand acres in Sligo and Roscommon. C. J. Woods, "Flanagan, John Woulfe," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

⁶³ SWF to JWF, 11 October 1903, MS 1189/17, 2, John Woulfe Flanagan Papers, NAI.

⁶⁴ John Woulfe Flanagan “was a protagonist in the newspaper’s campaign against Charles Stewart Parnell,” and wrote the 1887 *Times*’ series, “Parnellism and Crime.” Woods, "Flanagan, John Woulfe," According to his obituary, John “had nothing to do with accepting and publishing the so-called Parnell Letters.” *The Times*, 18 November 1929.

⁶⁵ “Commons Sitting of Wednesday, 23 July 1902,” *Hansard*, 1052.

have sealed my fate.” He suspected De Freyne was plotting to arrange the sale through someone else and was not “acting square.”

Trying to secure a position on the Land Commission for Stephen, John wrote to prime minister Arthur Balfour describing how his brother had “managed this most difficult estate...in a crisis of exceptional difficulty.” But a Dublin barrister, Henry C. Lynch, told Stephen the commission would never choose to hire “the agent of the notorious De Freyne estate.” His part in the evictions would be seen as “inhuman conduct in flinging out on the side of the road to perish from exposure poor women without a penny to buy food not to speak of paying rent.” As it became more apparent that the estate would be sold to the tenants and he would be out of a job, Stephen was fearful for himself and his family. Wyndham should compensate him, he told John, for “the annoyance which I incurred in consequence (*direct consequence*) of the sale of the Dillon patch and general land policy of the Gov’t, resulting (as it must result) in loss of my employment and income.”⁶⁶

Woulfe Flanagan did not harbor any great opinion of the tenants, either, although he did seem to put the greater responsibility for the disturbances on local organizers. He told De Freyne that the organizers—“the whole villainous crowd”—held meetings only to “keep the people from asking for the money they gave them last year... These fellows know that as long as they keep up a semblance of agitation the people will fear having recourse to the law.” He believed the vast majority of tenants hoped for an amicable

⁶⁶ SWF to JWF, 12 April 1905; 18, 19 November 1903; JWF to Arthur Balfour, 12 April 1903; H.C.L. Henry C. Lynch) to SWF, 18 October 1903; SWF to JWF, 30 October 1903, MS 1189/17, 2, John Woulfe Flanagan Papers, NAI.

settlement but beyond that, “a very large number of them have no further idea of the subject in their minds—everything else is a mystery to them.”⁶⁷

The Landlord and Politics

De Freyne’s decision to sue twenty-nine nationalist leaders and the *Freeman’s Journal* reflected his own contempt for the tenant’s collaboration as well as his growing desperation. His intense correspondence back and forth with his Dublin solicitors, Moore, Keily & Lloyd, from 1902 through 1904 reveal a frantic, concerted effort to incriminate strike leaders, as if their presence alone was the major stumbling block to reconciliation. The solicitors’ plan was to catch the UIL leaders in any action or speech that could be construed as criminal and to secure witnesses among the people who were willing to be informers. H.L. Moore sent De Freyne instructions on how to proceed: “Could you find out what Meetings are planned (without letting it be recognized as coming from you) and who are the probable speakers? If they are important enough for a reporter just telegraph the names and places to me.” Moore asked De Freyne to have secret copies made of witnesses’ depositions “without telling anyone,” and warned him not to ask the local magistrates for any copies because they would be “compelled to refuse and would tip our hand too soon.” De Freyne sent Moore a diary he had received from a local policeman, chronicling the agitation, and suggested they sue other newspapers as well as the *Freeman’s Journal*. The baron thought the owner of the *Westmeath Examiner* would be “a good mark for damages” and that they should go after William O’Brien’s newspaper, *The Irish People*, as well (only the *Freeman’s Journal Ltd.*, appeared on the final writ).

⁶⁷ SWF to Lord De Freyne, 25 August, 25 October 1902, 19 November 1903, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1-30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

Moore forwarded telegrams with coded messages and directed that copies of witness depositions be sent multiple times by different routes, presumably to avoid interception. One messenger, for his own protection, asked not to be required to read the material he carried.⁶⁸

De Freyne may have been chosen by the UIL as a hapless figure prone to attracting bad publicity, or “as a landlord who would be likely to succumb to pressure.” Instead, he displayed the opposite response, digging in his heels to the point that “the leaders of the League are said to be both surprised and disappointed by the firm way in which he has fought the combination,” according to one critic of the League. The support of others in his class was crucial to his resilience and frustrated his opponents (nationalists were said to have dubbed the property owners’ group “Extermination Ltd.”).⁶⁹ Although other landlords ostensibly backed De Freyne’s lawsuit, only his name appeared on the writ, and much of their rhetoric centered on self-protection. The writ was useful, however, as a way to focus attention on the plight of property owners as a class, and inspired collaboration within the group. Col. Edward J. Saunderson, MP (Armagh), leader of the Unionist Party, praised De Freyne’s “highly important action” which showed that “organized attack” must be met by “organized action.” He said the landlords had funds to support De Freyne’s fight and that “an isolated landlord, heretofore too poor and weak to fight the League, would henceforth not be crushed, but be backed up to the last by his own class.”⁷⁰ Lord De Freyne himself was among a group of almost two hundred landowners who subscribed to the new Irish Land Trust (reconfigured from the

⁶⁸ H.L. Moore to Lord De Freyne, 22 May, 25 May, 12 June, 9 June 1902, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁶⁹ *Scotsman*, 20 August 1902.

⁷⁰ *Irish Times*, 4 June 1902.

Property Defence Association in 1902), as a way for “the classes whose interests are at stake to combine to protect themselves.”⁷¹ Still, the landowners were nervous about the ripple effects of the strike. A member of the Irish Landowner’s Convention approached the O’Conor Don to make sure De Freyne and other local landlords targeted by the strike did not submit to pressure and lower their rents or sell their properties below value. While a united front seemed desirable, not all landlords were convinced it was achievable. De Freyne’s neighbor in Strokestown, Henry Pakenham-Mahon, told him there were no funds available in Roscommon to start a landlord’s trust (adding that in his case “my mother and charges take all the money”⁷²). A local government official thought such hesitation was illustrative of the fear many landowners had of “anything in the nature of a personal liability for their neighbors.”⁷³

As Redmond, Dillon and the other members of the United Irish League sued by De Freyne countered with their own suit against the Land Trust,⁷⁴ Moore, Keily & Lloyd were busy trying to avoid a jury trial in De Freyne’s action, and the baron became increasingly frustrated with the delays and legal reversals that they encountered. When a jury trial was finally ordered, he appealed to the House of Lords, but Moore informed him in October 1903 there was no hope of his appeal being heard that year.⁷⁵ In June of

⁷¹ G. de L. Willis to the O’Conor Don, 5 February 1902; “The Irish Land Trust, 1902,” VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁷² H. Pakenham Mahon to Lord De Freyne, 4 February 1902, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁷³ T. J. Stafford to Lord De Freyne, 13 February 1902, VII. Land Question, 1879–1906, MS 50,329/7/1–30, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

⁷⁴ *Evening Herald*, 26 July 1902; *Irish Times*, 27 July, 2 August 1902.

⁷⁵ H.L. Moore to Lord De Freyne, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904, MS 50,329/7/1–11, De Freyne Papers, NLI; *Evening Telegraph*, 30 December 1903.

1904, the baron abandoned all charges against the nationalists in a settlement in which the parties agreed to pay their own legal costs.⁷⁶

While De Freyne, with or without the support of other landlords, was pushing his vendetta against the UIL, other landlords pursued the option suggested by Galway landlord Capt. John Shawe-Taylor and Kerry landlord Lindsay Talbot Crosbie for a conference between landlord and tenant representatives.⁷⁷ While there had been earlier calls for reconciliation, none had received widespread approval.⁷⁸ The landlords' decision to engage with tenants in 1902 was directly tied to a spike in local disturbances across the country, similar to the De Freyne strike. Historian Fergus Campbell notes Shawe-Taylor's personal experiences with violence and argues that "the 'moderate' landlords who attended the Land Conference were similarly influenced by the high level of agitation generated by the United Irish League in 1901–2."⁷⁹ At least one landlord was willing to admit publicly that tenant agitation had been effective. Colonel William Hutcheson-Poe, who was one of the landlord representatives at the conference, stopped short of approving UIL methods, but said,

let us be honest enough to admit that the cause for which they, in the first instance, took up the quarrel with Lord De Freyne was after all, a perfectly legitimate one...to obtain...the same advantages for his tenants as had recently been gained by their neighbours on the Dillon Estate... [That the UIL favored] more violent measures, is scarce matter for surprise, seeing that past experience has, unhappily, taught them that from constitutional agitation they have little or nothing to expect, and that every concession which they or their party have wrung

⁷⁶ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 June 1904; *Irish Times*, 2 July 1904.

⁷⁷ For details on the genesis of the Land Conference, see Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, 77–79; F.S.L. Lyons, *The Irish Parliamentary Party 1890–1910* (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), 99–100; Patrick Maume, *The Long Gestation, Irish Nationalist Life 1891–1918* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 41, 65–66; and Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism*, Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War*, 221–233.

⁷⁸ Warwick-Haller, *William O'Brien and the Irish Land War*, 221–222.

⁷⁹ Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, p. 79. Bew finds that "These landlords were unrepresentative in their moderation, a fact which was in the medium term to tell against the conciliation process." Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, p. 97.

from England in the past has been won—metaphorically, if not literally—at the point of the bayonet.⁸⁰

With the blessing of Wyndham, the Land Conference met in December of 1902 and quickly issued a report calling for changes in the government’s land purchase schemes. While O’Brien and Redmond served as tenant representatives at the conference, not all nationalists approved of conciliation with landlords. Michael Davitt strongly opposed it and blamed De Freyne’s lawsuit “against the most prominent members of the League directory” as the reason “some of the leading League leaders took fright, and went into a land conference with certain members of the landlord party.”⁸¹ Wyndham’s second Land Act, which passed into law in 1903, took direct inspiration from the conference’s report. While deeply flawed, the new legislation did more to hasten the implosion of landlordism than any previous act. An unfortunate legacy of the act was the division it exacerbated within the Irish Parliamentary Party, with Davitt and John Dillon pitted against William O’Brien and Redmond. O’Brien was criticized so sharply over his support of the land act that he soon resigned from the party.⁸²

Davitt was not alone in seeing a direct connection between the fight in Roscommon and the events that led to the new land act’s passage. According to Campbell, the United Irish League “certainly believed that the ‘Wyndham’ Land Act was the result of their agitation in Roscommon, Mayo and other parts of Ireland.”⁸³ John Fitzgibbon, who gave his support to the Land Conference, was even more specific in

⁸⁰ *Leinster Leader*, 9 August 1902.

⁸¹ Davitt, *Fall of Feudalism*, 705.

⁸² Discussions on the Land Act of 1903 and its effects on the Irish Parliamentary Party appear in, among others, Campbell, *Land and Revolution*, 80–85; Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism*, 152–175; F.S.L. Lyons, *Irish Parliamentary Party*, 99–109; Warwick-Haller, *William O’Brien and the Irish Land War*, 233–251, 274; Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 97–121, and Maume, *Long Gestation*, 65–71.

⁸³ Fergus Campbell, “Irish Popular Politics and the Making of the Wyndham Land Act, 1901–1903,” *The Historical Journal* 45:4 (December 2002), 772.

connecting the fight in Roscommon to the conciliation that occurred in the fall of 1902. He told his followers that, “without fear of contradiction” the fight on the De Freyne estate “brought on the Land Conference and the Land Act of 1903.”⁸⁴ As late as 1907, Fitzgibbon was repeating that assertion when, as Chairman of the County Council, he asked a CDB board (which included Horace Plunkett) to get evicted tenants on the De Freyne estate re-established on their properties, “as it was largely due to their self-sacrificing action that the Land Act of 1903 was passed.”⁸⁵ In hindsight, the *Freeman’s Journal*, which had been a target of the lawsuit, believed that the struggle on the De Freyne estate and his subsequent reaction “to a large extent directed public attention to the need of land purchase on a large scale, and brought about the state of affairs in which the Land Act of 1903 was passed.”⁸⁶

Reflection

Although he sat in the House of Lords for almost thirty years, Arthur French, 4th Baron De Freyne, did not care for politics. When he died, the *Irish Times* assessed his influence: “he was never prominently identified with political warfare, and the only time his name came into prominence was during the fierce land war on his estate.”⁸⁷

Depending on the source and time period, he was seen as either a benign and friendly landlord, or a fiend. Certainly, he was stubborn and single-minded, and it is a singular irony that his intractability was instrumental in bringing about what he feared the most, the sale of his property to his tenants. Yet, while he was not able to hold on to most of his

⁸⁴ *Leader*, 21 December 1907, quoted in Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 165.

⁸⁵ *The Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1907.

⁸⁶ *Freeman’s Journal* 23 September 1913.

⁸⁷ *Irish Times*, 26 September 1913.

estate, he was able to take advantage of the sale provisions of the Land Act of 1903, which were more generous to landlords than earlier land purchase schemes had been, even with the new concessions to tenants. Instead of receiving payment in stock for their estates, landlords were now to be paid in cash, with an additional twelve percent bonus of the total purchase price paid out of a government fund.⁸⁸ The Land Act was slow to function, but so was Lord De Freyne, so it was not until 1906 that he vested some 36,000 acres in the Congested Districts Board.⁸⁹ He remained on his demesne where he retained his sporting rights, and was said to have “continued to take a friendly interest in his former tenants, and the relations between them were most harmonious.”⁹⁰ He died in 1913 at the age of 58, after a short illness.⁹¹ His funeral in Frenchpark was attended by gentry from surrounding counties and dozens of clergymen, as well as “hundreds of people, including his tenantry.” It was described as “a marked demonstration of the people’s regard for the deceased nobleman.”⁹² Probate of his will revealed a personal estate estimated to be between £100,000 to £150,000, which was mainly divided between his widow and eldest son.⁹³ After relinquishing his property, he had acquired stocks in various British companies, presumably with the funds he received from the CDB. Certificates dated 1906–07 reveal investments in firms like Automobile Co-Op, Eadie Manufacturing, Cleveland and Durham Electrical Power, Le Roi Mining, United Electric Car Co., and Metropolitan Amalgamated Railway. Although there may have been scant

⁸⁸ Bull, *Land, Politics and Nationalism*, 153–154.

⁸⁹ “Family: French (Frenchpark) (Baron De Freyne),” Connacht and Munster Landed Estates Database, www.landedestates.ie.

⁹⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 23 September 1913.

⁹¹ *Irish Times*, 23 September 1913. De Freyne was unfortunate enough to read his own obituary. A lengthy notice of his demise was published in London eleven days before his actual death, and a short retraction was issued the next day. *Times*, 11 and 12 September 1913.

⁹² *Irish Times*, 26 September 1913.

⁹³ *Evening Herald*, 3 January 1914; *Irish Times*, 10 January 1914.

opportunity in Ireland for similar investments, it is notable that the funds that Lord De Freyne received from the sale of the bog land of Roscommon were used to advance the technology, transportation, and industrial modernization of Great Britain.

CHAPTER 6: MAPS AND NUMBERS

While information on politicians, religious leaders, and the landlord reveal a good deal about the world the De Freyne tenants lived in, that insight is always skewed towards the experiences and expectations of others. Who were the people in the two-windowed cottages who refused to pay Lord De Freyne's rent? When investigating a small, under-documented place like the De Freyne estate, it makes sense to ask simple questions first: How many people lived there, and how did all that change over time?¹ The comings and goings of people on the Frenchpark estate can be tracked through maps and governmental statistics in three areas: population data, surname distribution, and documentation on housing quality and farm size. Of course, these sources provide only a surface sketch of the people who lived through the strike. But when the demographic inquiries trigger additional lines of deliberation, as they often do when confronted by other forms of evidence, an image of the real people involved begins to emerge.

Sometimes, the maps and statistics confront each other. For example, the census says the population on the estate fell precipitously right after the Famine, but on maps from Griffith's Primary Valuation in the 1850s, which were drawn to establish tax rates, the De Freyne estate looks like a very busy place.² It is cut like a jigsaw puzzle into tiny

¹ As suggested by Raymond Gillespie, "An historian and the locality," *Doing Irish Local History: Pursuit and Practice*, eds. Raymond Gillespie and Myrtle Hill (Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast, 1998), 17.

² The Griffith's Valuation maps can be seen on www.askaboutireland.ie. Current and historical maps are available on the Ordnance Survey website, www.map.geohive.ie. On the modern maps from the OS, which serve backpackers as well the government, property lines are not drawn in, yet, on the satellite images they seem to emerge, ghost-like, as stone walls and hedgerows. The visual difference between the old and new maps startles: at one time cartographers depicted the topography around Frenchpark as circumscribed and complex, but now they display a landscape that in comparison looks open and empty. Also, see printed maps from the Ordnance Survey Discovery Series #32, "Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo," and #33, "Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon, Sligo."

warrens of infields and outfields, each numbered and assigned to named occupiers, and the landscape is dotted with dwelling houses and outbuildings. The proximity of the plots and buildings hint at a constant flurry of interaction between property holders, yet was life in these townlands as bustling as these maps imply? By 1901, most likely it was not. The rural landscape, historically allocated in communal agreements by imprecise divisions like “the measure of a cow’s grass,” had been re-imagined in acres, roods, and perches, beginning in the pre-Famine period, to suit the purposes of British bureaucracy. The older system, which “involved communal rights and responsibilities” on comparatively undefined holdings had been replaced by the kinds of precise partitioning visible on the Griffith’s Valuation maps. If anything, the change provoked isolation rather than interaction, as clustered “villages” filled with tenants, co-tenants, and subtenants were officially supplanted with single occupiers on individual plots. This caused disruption to traditional relationships, sometimes forcing evictions of sub-tenants by their own families or friends.³ In the section below on estate surnames, there are many examples of reconfigurations of the landscape that could have disrupted long established communal agreements. The busy appearance of the cartographic image really reflected the requirements of an official mindset which had to name and number everything, and not the view from a two-windowed cottage.

The population numbers themselves force other lines of questioning. While they show how the community shrank, decimated by famine and poverty-driven emigration, the data do not tell us how the people who remained on the estate adapted their daily lives

³ For a description of the shift from the traditional system to more modern land divisions as it unfolded in county Donegal, see Breandán Mac Suibhne, *The End of Outrage: Post-Famine Adjustment in Rural Ireland* (Oxford Scholarship Online: August 2017, Print publication 2017), 85–106.
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198738619.001.0001

to accommodate the shrinkage. With many young people leaving in droves, accepted hierarchies and habits had to morph into something not quite new, but not quite the same.⁴ Economic historian Cormac Ó Gráda has said that the young men and women who left Ireland after the Famine were probably more naturally talented and equipped for upward mobility than those who stayed behind. “Is it not fair to assume that the emigrants were less risk-averse than those who stayed,” he asks, “less shy or inhibited, and more determined and ambitious?”⁵ Ó Gráda admits that there is no way to quantify this observation, but he may also be underestimating the obstacles faced by those who remained in Ireland. Did they not face their own challenges and hard choices, and did they not take their own leaps into the unknown, even if they remained in a familiar place? Did everything in Ireland really stay the same, or is that a judgment from the diaspora? Emigrant stories are constructed out of dramatic events—the pain of leave-taking and the shock of assimilation—while the stories of those who stayed behind remain static, weighted down and obscured by wider considerations of agricultural unrest, political formations, or economic development. This happens, of course, because documentation at a personal level is scarce, and official records, gathered to serve the purposes of the government and the landlord class, refuse to capture the nuances of local experience.

In one more example of how the statistics complicate other evidence, the demographic data confront stories about the estate and its tenants that are found in the press and political rhetoric. Sometimes, the maps and numbers support those stories, and

⁴ For a discussion on family configurations and the place of young people in the home around the time of the strike, see Timothy Guinnane, “Coming of age in rural Ireland at the turn of the twentieth century,” *Continuity and Change* 5:3 (1990), 443–472.

⁵ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History*, (Oxford Scholarship Online: 2011, Print publication: 1995), 230. DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198205982.003.0009.

sometimes they contradict them. One thing on which politicians, journalists and government officials could all agree was that De Freyne's tenants were extremely poor, an observation which seems to be confirmed consistently in the valuation records. The total valuation of each separate townland on the estate (this may be true for other estates as well) changed very little from the 1850s to 1900, and the census shows only slightly greater variability. There were changes made to the rates of individual properties over the years indicating that inspectors must have visited the estate occasionally. Still, interpreting the valuations as indicators of the potential earning power of the properties seems to suggest economic stagnation over time, or at least the perception of such by the valuers.

The idea that the people on the estate were impoverished is well justified by statistics on the size of holdings and the quality of housing. Most of baron's tenants occupied holdings of less than twenty acres in 1901, and almost three-quarters of them lived in what were classified as third-and fourth-class dwellings.⁶ Samuel Clark proposes that the lowest threshold for a viable farmer (with some important caveats) was twenty acres, which puts most of De Freyne's 1901 tenants into his category of "rural poor."⁷ While the perception that many De Freyne tenants occupied small holdings on poor land appears to be correct, their full economic health remains uncertain. As will be shown later in this chapter, extended family cohorts frequently controlled portions of several farms of

⁶ Figures derived from *Census of Ireland, 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>, and the Valuation Office cancellation books for Co. Roscommon, Frenchpark Barony, Electoral Districts of Artagh North, Artagh South, Buckhill, Fairymount and Frenchpark.

⁷ Samuel Clark, "The importance of agrarian classes: agrarian class structure and collective action in 19th-century Ireland" in *British Journal of Sociology*, 29:1 (March 1978), 27. Noting that Emmet Larkin preferred a threshold of thirty acres, Clark adds, "I do not mean to imply that we would call every farmer with more than twenty acres a 'large farmer.' Any acreage cut-off point is, of course, suspect, since it makes a distinction dichotomous that is actually continuous and because all acres are not equally productive." 38, n. 12. Also, Clark, *Social Origins*, 40.

varying sizes, sometimes in multiple townlands. The potential for support and co-operation within these families complicates any quick or easy conclusions about the tenants' financial vitality. While they may have been very poor individually, tenant families could benefit materially and psychologically from close kinship networks.

The demographic data also add context to the language used in United Irish League rhetoric about land grabbers and graziers, which implied that they were “upholders and beneficiaries of the ascendancy and the old landlord system,” who had “gained land and prospered at the expense of the ordinary peasantry” after the Famine and the clearances and evictions that followed.⁸ On the De Freyne estate, there were very few properties big enough to be considered grazing ranches, and land that was used as pasture had been so designated for generations. Furthermore, both big and small properties tended to remain within the same families over time. This kind of continuity was not stressed in UIL rhetoric. William O’Brien condemned a man who took a farm from another tenant in south Mayo just before the CDB could buy it: “The people’s hopes were dashed to the ground,” he declared, “by this stranger, this big grazier who comes from a place forty or fifty miles away...and takes the bread out of the mouths of the people.”⁹ Patrick Webb urged a group of tenants in 1899 “not to in any way assist the small ring of graziers and grabbers who stand between the people and the land of their fathers.”¹⁰ In many townlands on the estate, that “small ring” would have had to include members of the same local families, whose land belonged to common fathers and

⁸ David Jones, “The issue of land distribution: revisiting *Graziers, Land Reform and Political Conflict in Ireland*,” Fergus Campell, Tony Varley eds. *Land Questions in Modern Ireland* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), 139.

⁹ *Connaught Telegraph*, 21 September 1901.

¹⁰ *Freeman’s Journal*, 21 March 1899.

grandfathers. There were no large-scale confiscations of properties by people with unfamiliar surnames from the 1850s to 1901, nor were there many plots over two hundred acres, a minimum acreage for grazing farms proposed by Paul Bew.¹¹ In fact, the lasting presence of a particular surname within a townland appears to have been a more important factor in the evolution of landholding patterns than was the influence of outsiders' cash. This does not mean that conversions from tillage to pasture or land-grabbing did not take place, but it does imply that both large-scale grazing and the influence of newcomers were negligible in those processes. As much as family networks helped tenants to survive, the reverse must also be considered. Relatives or longtime neighbors, operating in their own best interests, could well have been the ones taking over evicted farms or acquiring tillage properties to use as grasslands.

Two sets of maps made before the strike are relevant: the Griffith's Valuation series from the 1850s, and the private estate survey maps from 1894 found in the De Freyne papers.¹² Government data on the estate include parliamentary reports; the Tithe Applotment books from 1825–37; general statistics from the Irish census (1841–1901); the online individual census returns for 1901 and 1911, and details on tenants' names and holdings listed in Valuation Office documents. There are also various artifacts from the family papers, including rent rolls, lists of tenants in arrears, and caretaker certificates, that comment on population and landholding issues.

¹¹ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, p. 8. David Seth Jones suggests a “rough guide” defining a grazier as someone who held 150–200 acres valued at £50 or above in *Gaziers*, 1.

¹² De Freyne estate survey and maps 1894, III.iii. Two Land Valuation and Survey Books, 1894. MS 42,438/1–2, De Freyne Papers, NLI. Maps on the Leitrim-Roscommon Genealogy website are also helpful, www.leitrim-roscommon.com.

Population

As in the rest of Ireland, the population on the estate plummeted directly after the Famine, and declined steadily thereafter, except for a brief period in the 1850–60s. In 1841, there were 10,984 people living in the estate townlands in Roscommon. By 1901, that figure dropped to 6,576, and would wither to 5,819 by 1911.¹³ Lord De Freyne's property stretched into counties Sligo and Mayo as well, but the largest portion lay in Roscommon where the bulk of the strike activity took place, and where this research is focused.¹⁴ By one calculation, he was the largest landowner in Roscommon, with greater acreage than either of the owners of the King-Harman and Pakenham-Mahon estates.¹⁵ He owned two-thirds of Tiobhine Parish, and was the principal landowner in a few townlands in Castlemore and Kilnamanagh Parishes as well. As mentioned earlier, he claimed at one point to have 1,720 tenants, with annual rents of £14,583.¹⁶

The Great Famine of 1845–52 was particularly brutal in the province of Connacht, which suffered the highest percentage of population decreases in Ireland, with an average loss there per county of 28.5 percent. Roscommon led the province, and the nation, with a thirty-one percent decline. While actual population losses were highest in the province of Munster, the only county there that came close to Roscommon in its

¹³ See Appendix A for population statistics per townland. The population figures for the estate as a whole have been tabulated by combining the totals for each townland in Roscommon where De Freyne was the principal landowner. As such, they are approximate. 1874 [C.1106] *Census of Ireland, 1871. Part I. Area, houses, and population... Vol. IV. Province of Connaught. County of Roscommon*, 459–463. 1912 [Cd. 6052] *Census of Ireland, 1911. Area, houses, and population: Also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Province of Connaught. County of Roscommon*, 35–37.

¹⁴ In 1876, he owned 25,436 acres in Roscommon, 4,052 acres in Sligo and 328 acres in Galway, and ranked third in total acreage at that time. *Landowners in Ireland, Return of Owners of Land of One Acre and upwards in Counties, Cities and Towns in Ireland*. 1876 [C.1492] LXXX.61, 295, 314–320.

¹⁵ Fleming and O'Day, *The Longman Handbook*, p. 616, quoted from Kevin Cahill, *Who Owns Britain* (London, 2001), 318–54.

¹⁶ *Statement of Lord de Freyne to John O'Hagan*, undated, VII.i. Correspondence relating to the Land War, 1883–1904. MS 50,329/7/1–11 De Freyne Papers, NLI.

proportional decrease was Cork at twenty-eight percent.¹⁷ Most of the De Freyne townlands had endured significant population losses, with the pre-Famine population reduced from 10,984 to 7,996 by 1851. Seven townlands lost half or more of their inhabitants in those ten years, and in another nine townlands, the decreases ranged from thirty to fifty percent. A handful remained stable or had a slight increase in population. The number of intact families also plummeted, as reflected in the numbers of inhabited houses. The rural portion of Tibohine Parish (minus Frenchpark and Loughglynn towns) had 3,071 inhabited houses in 1841 (including 2,018 families in 4th class houses) but by 1851, people were living in only 2,310 homes of all classes. In the townland of Portaghard the number of inhabited houses dropped from forty-five in 1841 to thirty-four in 1851, and in Derrinea, where there had been six houses with people living in them in 1841, a decade later there were only two. In Castlemore Parish, there was a sharp loss of inhabited houses in Aghalustia, which went from seventy-two homes in 1841 to forty-nine in 1851.¹⁸

In an anomalous reversal, between 1851 and 1871, the general population and numbers of inhabited houses inexplicably increased on the estate, while continuing to fall in the rest of Castlerea PLU and the county.¹⁹ In the parish of Tibohine, where the bulk of the De Freyne estate lay, the population rose from the 1851 total of 13,718 to 14,481 by 1871, and while not huge, the increase must be considered next to the continuing

¹⁷ *Abstracts of the census of Ireland. Taken in the years 1841 and 1851.* 1851 (673) [1400] L.327, 331, 332–3.

¹⁸ 1852–53. *Census of Ireland for the year 1851. Part 1. Area, population, and number of houses, by Townlands and Electoral Divisions. County of Roscommon.* XCII.515, 202–205.

¹⁹ [C.1106] *Census of Ireland, 1871. County of Roscommon.*, p. 429, p. 424; 1871 [C.375] *Census of Ireland for the year 1871. Abstract of the enumerators' returns, showing by provinces, counties, cities, and certain corporate towns,* LIX. 801, 4, 10.

decreases that were taking place elsewhere. A third of the townlands in Tibohine (with a third of the total parish acreage) were owned by other landlords, but the population in most of those places dropped in the same period. In the estate townlands, the 1851 estate total of 7,996 rose to 8,995 in 1861, and then to 9,098 in 1871, with most townlands experiencing their biggest increases during the 1860s. Forty-three De Freyne townlands saw an increase in population by 1871, and seventeen of those exceeded their 1841 totals.²⁰ Only Ballinphuill (153–127) and Portaghard (324–308) recorded significant losses in that period.²¹

The number of inhabited houses also reflected this increase. In 1871, there were 21,585 fewer inhabited homes in all of Connacht than there were in 1851, and in Roscommon, the corresponding decrease was 5,325.²² Yet, in Tibohine Parish the number of inhabited homes rose from 2,529 in 1851 to 2,704 in 1871 (still far below the 1841 total of 3,071). Some De Freyne townlands saw significant increases in family dwellings, as in Buckhill (39–55), Cloonbunny (34–50), Cloonfad (30–43), Cloonmaul (20–34), and Drummad (30–50), although most changes in inhabited dwellings, up or down, were of less than ten. Tibohine was the largest parish in Roscommon, both in area (44,092 acres) and residents (14,481 in 1871),²³ but its size alone cannot account for these anomalies. Whether the explanation rests on the local economy, a policy or set of circumstances on the estate, or pure happenstance, it had a limited effect since the uptick abruptly reversed itself.

²⁰ See Appendix A.

²¹ [C. 1106] *Census of Ireland, 1871. County of Roscommon*, 459–463.

²² [C.375] *Census of Ireland for the year 1871. Abstract of the enumerators' returns*, p. 11.

²³ [C. 1106] *Census of Ireland, 1871. County of Roscommon*, 461–463.

Beginning in 1871, the total population on the estate fell by thirty-eight percent to 6,576 at the time of the strike. Townlands that dropped sharply during those years include Portaghard (308–164), Leitrim (427–305), Tibohine (186–117), Slieveroe (131–64), Kilgarve (166–72) and Cloggarnagh (289–172).²⁴ Family data were recorded only at the provincial and county level, and in Roscommon there were 6.8 percent fewer families in 1901 than there were in 1891, still a small number compared to the decrease in the number of families in the county from 1841–1901, a staggering fifty-four percent.²⁵ The tabulation of inhabited houses on the estate reveals some stability during the years 1881–1901, although small losses are recorded everywhere. Census notes on townlands with abandoned houses supply the stock explanation that the houses were empty because of “emigration and removals.”²⁶

Emigration data is similarly confined to the county and province, and the information gathered at ports, railway stations, and at the travelers’ final destinations did not track the outflow for smaller areas like the parish or townland. Emigration patterns within the estate itself are were not recorded in the family papers, nor is there any evidence that the De Freynes supported any assisted emigration schemes. For the county, emigration peaked immediately following the Famine, and then continued at a consistent level through the following decades. At least two thousand people left the county every year in twenty separate years between 1851–1901, and in that entire fifty-year span the total number of emigrants dipped below an annual level of one thousand only briefly in

²⁴ 1901 [Cd. 1059] *Census of Ireland, 1901*. Part I. Area, houses, and population: Also the ages, civil or conjugal condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion, and education of the people. Vol. IV. Province of Connacht. County of Roscommon, p. 28, 37–38.

²⁵ 1901 [Cd. 613] *Census of Ireland for the year 1901*, XC.175, p 16.

²⁶ 1901 [Cd. 1059] *Census of Ireland, 1901*, County of Roscommon, 28, 37.

the late 1870s.²⁷ In 1901, just before the rent strike, 2,358 Roscommon residents left their homes for other countries, of whom 1,670 were single people between the ages of twenty to thirty.²⁸ Although the Roscommon emigration figures were high compared to the rest of Ireland, they were far less than those for the rest of Connacht. However, in the 1890s (coinciding with evictions and agitation on the De Freyne estate) Roscommon reported the only increase in emigration for the province.

Emigration from Connacht²⁹

County	1881–1891	1891–1901 (to Mar. 31)
Galway	51,121	36,820
Leitrim	21,008	9,830
Mayo	41,368	40,703
Roscommon	16,332	23,128
Sligo	23,594	14,065

Despite the suffering it caused, emigration played a vital part in community survival, as funds sent home from America and England often paid the rent for the small farmers on the estate. Likewise, seasonal migration, in which rural people left for short periods of time to work in England, Scotland or other parts of Ireland, had kept families afloat for centuries. In 1903, a parliamentary report made a special reference to the long, continuing history of migratory labor in Ireland, quoting Bishop George Berkeley's *Querist* from 1735: "Whether it would not be much better for us if, instead of sending our men abroad, we could draw men from the neighboring countries to cultivate our own? (Q.

²⁷ 1901 [Cd. 1059] *Census of Ireland, 1901*. County of Roscommon, 136.

²⁸ 1901 [Cd. 531] *Emigration Statistics of Ireland for the year 1900*, 9.

²⁹ 1901 [Cd. 1059] *Census of Ireland, 1901*. County of Galway, 253. County of Leitrim, 93. County of Mayo, 253, County of Roscommon, 136, County of Sligo, 98.

529.)”³⁰ Of course his suggestion went unheeded, and 168 years later, seasonal laborers were still streaming out of Ireland. One of the biggest sources of those workers was County Roscommon, particularly the Castlerea PLU/ County District.

In 1900, four-fifths of all migratory workers from Ireland came from Connacht (15,878). Although county Mayo had by far the highest ratio of seasonal workers in the country at 47.2 per one thousand residents, Roscommon was next at 17.7 (in all of Ireland, the ratio was only four per one thousand residents). The largest concentration of Roscommon migratory workers came from Castlerea District, on and around the De Freyne estate. In 1891, Castlerea ranked fifth of all Districts/PLUs in the nation supplying migrant labor, with a ratio of 46.8 workers per thousand residents, and in 1900, it accounted for 1,752 of the 2,060 seasonal workers from Roscommon.³¹ It was the largest district in the county at 163,662 acres,³² with a population of 33,576 out of a county total of 101,791 in 1901, so its large number of migratory workers is not surprising. What is significant is the high percentage of these workers to the population. In the 1880s, Castlerea ranked sixth of all PLUs in Ireland in the percentage of workers it sent abroad. In the six counties in 1881 where the ratio of seasonal workers exceeded three percent of adult males over the age of twenty, Mayo was first with 17.3 percent, and Roscommon was second at 4.5 percent. In 1900 in Castlerea District, thirty-seven out of every thousand residents went abroad to find work, compared with the next highest in the county, 7.5 workers in Boyle District.³³

³⁰ [Cd. 1842] *Agricultural statistics, Ireland, 1903*, 6.

³¹ [Cd. 341] *Report and Tables relating to Migratory Agricultural Labourers in Ireland, 1900*, vol. CI 483, 16–17, 47.

³² 1901 [Cd. 1059] *Census of Ireland, 1901*. County of Roscommon, 3–5.

³³ [Cd. 1842] *Agricultural Statistics, Ireland, 1903*, 22.

Most migratory workers in Ireland were landless by 1900, but Connacht led the nation in the number of migrants who did occupy farms and pay rent. In Castlerea District/PLU, out of 1,752 migratory workers, 339 held land under twenty-five acres, with 240 of those occupying farms of five-fifteen acres. These numbers meant only one thing: Castlerea's economy could not support its population; land holders needed income from abroad to pay their rent and expenses just as much as the landless did. A parliamentary report on the west of Ireland concluded that "the phrase 'mobility of labour' is but a euphemism for the activity aroused by prospective starvation."³⁴

Surnames

Despite population fluctuations, some surnames in the estate townlands never budged.³⁵ There are many family names recorded in the Tithe Applotment books in 1825–37 that reappear in Griffith's Valuation in the 1850s, in other valuation records throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, in the estate survey from 1894, and in the 1901 household census returns. While many people left for new lives in England, America and Australia, certain core family units remained in their townlands. The core unit might include grandparents, adult children and their families, nieces and nephews, in-laws and grandchildren, all linked by a common cognomen.³⁶ A rural economy can encourage families to remain in one place for a long time, and it is common for surnames to appear or disappear in these communities because of marriages, or the arrival and departure of temporary workers. Landless agricultural laborers were possibly more

³⁴ [Cd. 341] *Agricultural Statistics, Ireland, 1900*, 17–18, 46, 12.

³⁵ Raymond Gillespie suggests tracking surnames in small, under-documented places as a way to determine if they are "open" or "enclosed." Gillespie, "An historian and the locality," p. 17.

³⁶ Guinnane, "Coming of Age," 443–44, 448.

mobile than land holders, moving on and off the estate to follow work opportunities, but landholding begat permanence.

In examining surname resilience alongside land holding arrangements, patterns emerge that suggest reasons why some family names were most likely to remain in one place, and why others disappeared. Each surname is considered in the aggregate within three different townlands, with grandparents, parents, siblings, cousins, aunts, and uncles all together as one entity, as long as they share the same last name and regardless of whether they lived in the same house, or on the same property. This methodology is inherently imprecise since having the same surname does not necessarily imply other commonalities. However, lacking individual documentation on any of these people, the survival of a family name, linked with a history of farm sizes, provides one set of clues about the social structure in which they lived. In the three townlands investigated here there were hardly any new surnames that appeared in the fifty years before the strike, and only a handful which vanished completely, but each townland displays an idiosyncratic pattern that connects surnames to landholding. Scrutinized first is Barnacawley, where my grandfather was born in 1871, a small place with many occupiers of tiny plots. Leitrim was a bigger townland with a mixture of large and small tenements held under many surnames, and the third, Cloonfad, was characterized by big farms held cooperatively under a small number of family names.

Barnacawley, at only 336 acres, illustrates the ferocity of tenants' grip on little bits of land in a place where larger plots were not available. From a high of 241 in 1841, its population dropped to 181 ten years later, rising slightly during the 1860s, only to plummet down again to 133 at the time of the strike. While holdings shared between two

or more surnames disappeared there by 1894, multiple tenancies under the same surname were still common in 1901. Nine surnames remained in the townland from before the Famine, forming a core tenancy that continuously occupied a large portion of the townland acreage in multiple small plots. In 1825, when the land was assessed to determine tithes payable to the Church of Ireland, people with these surnames held plots deemed of average quality, but they were small. Out of the twenty-five holdings recorded on the tithe documents, just three were over ten acres.³⁷

The nine family names of Hardiman (Hardman), McDermott, Moffat, Molloney (Mullowney), Finan (Finane), Dyer, Kerrane (Cerrane), Walder and Woods remained in Barnacawley from the 1820s through the time of the strike. Each of their individual holdings continued to be small, and none of them became obviously prosperous, as the majority were still living in second- and third-class houses with thatched roofs in 1901. We do not know if all surviving surnames had more established family networks to begin with than those which did not flourish, but it is clear that the survivors nearly always had greater amounts of land under that surname. The more parcels held by a particular surname in 1857 when the primary valuation was completed, the more likely it was that those people would still be holding land in 1901.

³⁷ In the tithe books, these holdings were all given a land quality ranking of “three,” in a system with up to “six classifications with corresponding valuations.” R.C. Simington, “The Tithe Composition Applotment Books,” *Analecta Hibernica* 10 (July 1941), 296.

Barnacawley Surnames³⁸

Surname	1825	1850s	1894	1901
Callaly			X	
Cawley/McCawley		X		
Caranne/Kerrane	X	X	X	X
Connely	X			
Connor	X			
Dalton			X	X
Dyer	X	X	X	X
Finan	X	X	X	X
Foley		X	X	
Frain/Frayne	X	X	X	X
Gallagher	X	X		X
Giblin			X	X
Hardiman	X	X	X	X
Henery				X
Lavan			X	X
Mahon				X
McDermott	X	X	X	X
McGarry	X			
McGreevy	X			
Moffet	X	X	X	X
Mullowney	X	X	X	X
Rogers		X	X	X
Shryane/Shreehane		X	X	X
Walder		X	X	X
Woods	X	X	X	X

Highlighted names appear in records consistently from 1825–1901

As for new surnames, the four that appeared on the 1894 survey were all linked to small, single holdings. John Giblin had ten acres; Edward Dalton, eight; Thady Lavan, fourteen, and Hubert Callaly, ten. On the 1901 census three of these names remained but

³⁸ The dates in this chart refer to: 1825, the *Tithe Applotment Books*, <http://www.nationalarchives.ie>; 1857, Griffith's Valuation, www.askaboutireland.ie; 1894, De Freyne estate survey and maps, III.iii. Two Land Valuation and Survey Books, 1894. MS 42,438/1–2, De Freyne Papers, NLI, and 1901, *The Census of Ireland 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

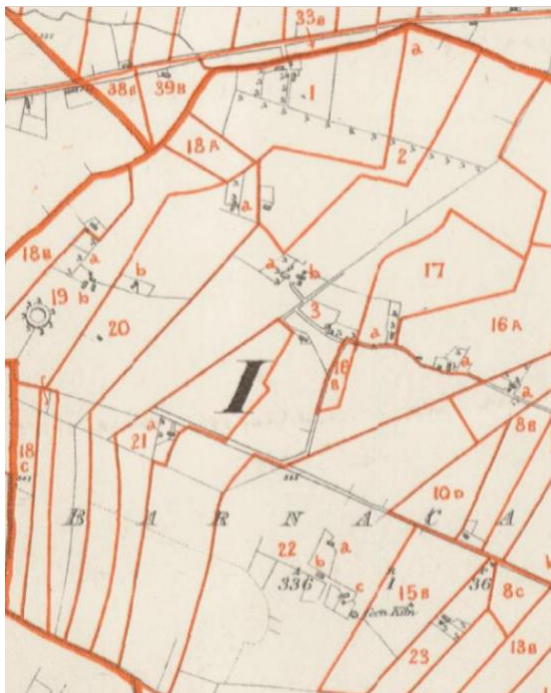
represented just one household each (Callaly reappears in the 1911 census). The other twenty-nine households on the 1901 census were divided among sixteen different surnames, and only two of those were new since 1894: Mahon and Henery (sic).³⁹ This means that between the 1850s and 1901, only six new surnames appeared in the townland, and each represented just a single household. Any one of those six might have intermarried with an existing family, but the new residents did not seem to bring any extended family of their own with them to form new households.

From 1850–1901, the family names that disappeared were also linked to very small, single pieces of property or a small plot shared with others. The Cawleys/McCawleys, Foleys, Gallaghers and Fraynes were occupiers in the 1850s, but do not appear on the census in 1901. In the 1850s, William McCawley’s heirs held ten acres; Patrick Cawley had seven, plus a share in another parcel; James Foley’s heirs occupied three acres; and John Gallagher and Thomas Frayne held plots of four acres each. The Foleys and Fraynes still held property in 1894, indicating they left Barnacawley in the seven-year period before the strike. Most of the tenants in Barnacawley did not finalize the purchase of their holdings until at least 1915, and only then with the assistance of the Land Commission.⁴⁰ At that point the biggest land owners were the Hardyman (sic) and the Finans. Of the thirty-one parcels that passed into tenant ownership, thirteen were under ten acres each. Only two new surnames appeared in the 1911 census, both connected to existing families.⁴¹

³⁹ Catherine Mahon was a married woman living with her sister (her husband may have been working in England), and Pat Henery was a 60-year-old farmer. Both lived in third-class houses. *Census of Ireland, 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

⁴⁰ Listed in the Valuation Office cancellation books as “In Fee (LAP),” which refers to properties sold under the Land Purchase Acts.

⁴¹ “Tinan” is most likely a misspelling of Finan, and “Whyte” belongs to the daughter and son-in-law of a Dyer.



Portion of Barnacawley, Griffith's Valuation, 1857



Portion of Barnacawley, Estate Survey, 1894

Another pattern emerges when comparing maps from different decades. Between the Primary Valuation in the 1850s, the 1894 estate survey, and later valuation records, there were many changes in the maps and numbering systems. But no matter what the system, surviving surnames often held the exact same pieces of land. For example, as illustrated in the two maps above, in the 1850s a forty-five-acre holding designated as #3 had three houses labeled a, b and c and was held in common by three Finans: Bridget, Roger, and Thomas. In 1894, some other Finans had ten holdings, but with different numbers: #6 and 6A were held by Patrick, #8 and 8 A-B by Mary, #11 and 11A-D by James, and #12 by and 12A by John, for a total of forty-one acres.⁴² A comparison of the maps reveals that these properties were carved out of the exact same acreage. Similar

⁴² All these examples are from "Barnacawley," Griffith's Valuation, www.askaboutireland.ie; Estate Survey 1894, III.iii. Two Land Valuation and Survey Books, 1894. MS 42,438/1-2, De Freyne Papers, NLI.

shifts occurred for other surnames. Some McDermotts owned parcels #18A, 18B and 18C in the 1850s, yet on the 1894 map, McDermott property was designated as #1, 1A and 1B. Comparing the maps, both assign the same eleven acres to the McDermotts, give or take a rood or perch.⁴³ In another case, Thomas and James Malloney owned fourteen acres in parcel #20 in the 1850s, but Dominick and Edward Molloney (sic) owned eight and six acres a piece in parcels #3 and #4 in 1894. Again, a visual check shows it is the exact same fourteen acres, just re-numbered and split in half. However, this pattern did not hold in every case. Parcel #5 (not pictured here) on the Griffith's map appears as nine acres held jointly under eight names (four Hardimans, three Dyers and a Walder). In 1894 those nine acres were subdivided into twelve smaller parcels with Dyer linked to at least six, Walder to three, and Dalton and Lavan to one parcel each.⁴⁴ What happened to the Hardimans? While the Hardiman name was still attached to other pieces of property on the 1894 map, it is impossible to know who got the best deal in the re-configuration of parcel #5.

Lord De Freyne may have commissioned the 1894 survey and realignment of occupancies to streamline estate management and eliminate joint tenancies. He may also have made concessions to the tenants by allowing families to continue holding the land they already occupied, even if only one family member was designated as "occupier." This may explain why the 1894 map is so much more intricately sub-divided than the Primary Valuation map, with over one hundred numbered plots in Barnacawley alone, perhaps referring back to the earlier un-mapped portions held in common by various

⁴³ In old Irish measurement, a perch was equal to 30.35 square yards, 40 perches equaled a rood, and 4 roods were equivalent to one acre. *Ordnance Survey Ireland*. <http://www.osi.ie/education/schools-and-third-level/secondary-schools/secondary-schools-teacher-resources/>.

⁴⁴ The 1894 tenant lists are incomplete, and the map comparisons are approximated visually.

people. The 1894 printed survey lists are easy to decipher, showing each occupier next to their assigned holding numbers, but the visual translation of that information onto the map reveals a balkanization of what were already very small plots on the 1850s map into even smaller pieces. However, with only twenty-eight named rate payers in Barnacawley in 1894 versus many more in the group tenancies of the 1850s, rent collection would have been much easier for the landlord and agent, even if the individual occupiers were holding numerous small parcels scattered across the townland.

For all we know, these changes may have been acceptable to the tenants, especially to those families who remained in control over approximately the same acreage, but the documents mask the reactions of those who felt they had received less land, or a lower quality of land, than they thought they deserved. Whatever the reasons for the changes, the shifting about of such small parcels suggests a fragile economy in which there was competition for the tiniest bits of land. These shifts might have required negotiations between the tenants, trips to the agent's office, signing of paperwork, and possibly future recriminations for perceived bad deals. The maps show a sharply divided landscape in which property lines were so ubiquitous you would inevitably trip over someone else's tiny patch on the way to your own. This was not unlike the older communal systems in which families held small, often non-contiguous portions of a holding. But by 1894, every family portion had a single named occupier, an assigned number in the book, and possibly sub-division numbers too, as well as a defined property line. In the De Freyne family papers, there are many examples of agreements between tenants concerning rights to cross someone else's property. In the older system, communal occupiers may have been able to work these things out on their own, but by

the late 1800s many required the force of a document signed by the agent to regulate their interactions. These revisions to occupancy designations were not just paper changes, they were actual disruptions to daily life that forced tenants to abandon long accepted protocols and realign their expectations.

Leitrim was over four times as big as Barnacawley at 1,491 acres (including an uninhabited 651-acre bog owned by De Freyne), and its pre-Famine population of 408 was reduced to 305 by 1901. Out of fifty-three surnames found in all the Leitrim sources, only eight were recorded continuously from before the Famine until the time of the strike, while an additional fifteen appear without a break from the 1850s until 1901. Unlike the pattern in Barnacawley, the dominant surnames in Leitrim were mostly connected over time to large single-occupancy holdings, and not to a scattering of little holdings, or shares in multiple tenancies. By 1901, all Leitrim's tenancies were listed under the names of single occupants, and the largest properties (ranging from twenty-two to sixty acres each) were occupied by members of the Higgins, O'Brien, Connor, Forde, Carroll, Bristlan (or Breslin), Madden, McGarry, Heneghan, and McDermott families. All of these names were present in the valuation records in the 1850s, when the largest single occupancy properties were held under names of Higgins, O'Brien, Connor, Forde, Carroll and Creighton. The Maddens, McGarrys, Heneghans and McDermotts held smaller properties at that time or were part of the thirteen inter-surname lettings. Between 1916 and 1923, when many of the townlands in Leitrim were finally purchased by the tenants, the largest land owners were recorded under the surnames of Higgins, O'Brien, Connor, Forde, Carroll, Creaton (sic), Madden, McDermott, Peyton, and Breslan. It is not surprising, then, that on the tithing records compiled before the Famine, there was a

Higgins with forty-four acres, a Connor with thirty-five, an O'Brien with nineteen, along with three Fordes, a Scally, and a Peyton. Only one surname confounds this pattern.

There were Killeens in Leitrim from before the Famine, but they consistently held very small pieces of property from landowners other than Lord De Freyne. The only Killeen in the 1901 Leitrim census was 80-year-old Bridget, and her surname was not recorded there in 1911.

Leitrim attracted many more new surnames in the period leading up to the 1890s than either Barnacawley or Cloonfad. While it was bigger in area, there may have been other reasons for the difference. New surnames on the estate survey included Bristlan ("Breslin," in the 1901 census), Armstrong, Owens, Staunton, Gara, Moffat, Hughes, Beirne, Kerrane, Webb, Donnellen and Lee. Bristlan held twenty-five acres designated "herd's land" in the 1890s and remained in the townland past 1901. Armstrong, Owens, and Staunton, not common surnames anywhere on the estate, had first appeared in valuation records in the 1890s when they held properties under twenty acres each. Staunton is not on the 1911 census, and of the other two, only Owens ended up with more than a twenty-acre farm after 1923 (forty-six acres).

Eight of the new families in Leitrim may have arrived because of housing legislation for the landless. These eight belonged to a group of nineteen (the others had common Leitrim township surnames) who held a "house and bog garden" valued at five shillings each on the valuation records in the 1890s. These houses were located on what appears on the map to be open and undeveloped land, possible part of the bog land held by Lord De Freyne. (Next door in Cloonfinglas, where two parcels of bog totaling 350 acres adjoins Leitrim's, eleven other tenants were also listed as possessing a "house and

bog garden” valued at five shillings with no acreage.) These homes may have been erected for landless workers (new or already resident), and the younger sons of local farmers who did not inherit their family farms, under legislation that authorized local authorities to build houses with half-acre gardens for laborers.⁴⁵ Were these new residents attracted to Leitrim by the promise of cheap housing, or had they already been living there as squatters or in the homes of relatives? Their surnames were all common to Roscommon, if not to Leitrim, so they might have come from nearby townlands. Remarkably, all but one of the nineteen families in the bog cottages remained in Leitrim through the 1901 valuation and census, so they may have benefited from the housing scheme. At least three of them eventually became land owners, but not until after the Land Act of 1923, at which point the Moffats, owned twenty-three acres, the Garas, ten, and the Webbs, sixteen. These were not large farms by any means, but a definite improvement over what they had in the 1890s or earlier. Upward mobility like this is not so easily demonstrated elsewhere on the estate.

Eleven other surnames in Leitrim listed on Griffith’s disappeared from the valuation records by the 1890s, and do not re-appear on the 1901 census. Seven of these had been renting only a house and a garden from other land holders who were themselves tenants of Lord De Freyne in the 1850s and could have been laborers. The surnames of the middlemen—Forde, Foley, Mullaney, Keeher, Carroll and Callaghan—reappear in the 1890s and on the 1901 census, but their subtenants’ names do not. Another two of the eleven which disappeared after Griffiths, Dillon and Darcy, were more prosperous, and held forty acres listed as “herd’s house and land,” and had their own subtenants. The last

⁴⁵ 1874. *Agricultural labourers dwelling’s (Ireland). A bill to encourage the erection and improvement of dwellings for agricultural labourers in Ireland.*

two surnames to disappear were Walsh and Norton. Both held single tenancies under ten acres, while Norton was a partner in two other group holdings, none amounting to more than twenty acres per share.

Like Barnacawley, Leitrim maintained a core of families who continued to hold larger amounts of property than did the new ones who appeared in the 1890s or those which disappeared completely. Unlike in Barnacawley, there were some surnames which lasted in Leitrim for fifty years with holdings smaller than what the other surviving surnames had, but no family groups increased their holdings substantially. Dominant families remained dominant at the same levels during the turbulent years after the Famine and before the strike and those who started out with smaller holdings tended to stay at that level. Families who survived may have been better farmers than those who did not, or they may have succeeded just because there were more of them from the start.

The latter explanation is illustrated by Cloonfad, whose 637 acres appear to have housed a very stable community. Its population rose and fell over the years, from 197 in 1841, to a high of 242 in 1871, settling down to 179 by the time of the strike. The same names that appear in the tithe documents in 1825—Egan, Kelly, Connor, Sharkey and Corcoran—are repeated in the early valuation books, which reveal they held a few large parcels in groups. In the 1850s, four Sharkeys held a 219-acre plot along with three Dyers, a Lavin and a Bruin. By the 1890s, Lavin and Bruin were replaced by Roark and Sampey, but the only residents with those surnames on the 1901 census were elderly people. Another 197 acres was held in the 1850s by Corcorans, Mahons, Callaghans, McLoughlins and Sharkeys. In addition, Corcoran (later Johnson) and Mahon held sixty-three acres; two Egans and a Molloy held thirty-six, and more Egans held another eighty-

six acres in separate pieces. All those names reappear on the valuations from the 1890s with similar-sized holdings, and in the 1901 census as well.

There are only three new surnames in Cloonfad in the 1901 census that had not been recorded before, and two of them belonged to widows. Yet there were still nine Sharkeys, seven Egans, four Corcorans, two Callaghans, and two Dyers, along with other recurring surnames. The large communal parcels were broken up by 1901–02, as the nineteen tenements listed in the 1890s became thirty “in fee” parcels by 1916. At that point, most of the sections over twenty acres were owned as single plots by families named Sharkey, Corcoran, Dyer, Callaghan, Mahon and Egan. There is only one new surname, Regan, in one household, on the 1911 census. When Lord De Freyne finally sold his property in Cloonfad to the CDB, the descendants of people who had held large communal tracts in the 1850s became its major land owners.

The surname histories in these three townlands have much in common. Strong family units survived in each townland for those families that already held a good quantity of land by the 1850s. Certainly, some individuals within those family groups fared better or worse than others, but the relative longevity of certain names in each townland would suggest that continuously holding the same land, or a larger portion of land, was a critical factor in surname retention, along with the strength that proximity to a strong kinship network would offer.

However, these townlands differed in the way geography affected the kinds of holdings available, which then influenced patterns of surname dominance. On Griffith’s, all three had holdings that included bog land, but it was distributed differently in each. In Barnacawley, five parcels owned by core families included bog, but most others did not.

Leitrim had very large stretches of bog, the largest of which was held by Lord De Freyne with very little value attached. The other holdings in Leitrim are clustered around more productive land, except for a forty-three-acre section of bog held by some of the core families. Bog land is listed as part of almost every holding in Cloonfad, but because tenants held large tracts there in group lettings, they may have had the man-power and communal resources required to do reclamation work and make these parcels productive.

Sizes and configurations of holdings also differ in the three townlands, as does the rigidity of surname dominance. In Barnacawley, core families held many small units, which were often disconnected, and irregularly shaped. A handful of new families appeared there over the years, usually with small, single holdings, and those who disappeared were also attached to the fewest and smallest holdings. In Leitrim, huge stretches of bog land surrounded smaller pieces of farmland, with fewer examples of long, stripped properties than in Barnacawley. Leitrim was also the only one of the three townlands to show a substantial influx of newcomers and new dwellings (i.e. laborers' cottages). Cloonfad had the smallest, and most enduring, set of surnames, with almost no newcomers taking farms for fifty years. Cloonfad's dominant families held more and larger pieces of land in common for a considerable period of time than did those in either of the other two townlands.

Although it seems to make sense that the largest families with the most property would also be most likely to maintain the strongest ties to the land, the differences in these townlands show that this was accomplished in various ways. The differences were related to topography, population density, and traditions that may have been specific to a location or to a family, but they all played a part in who remained on the estate and who

did not. But were the core family units who remained able to thrive, or did they merely hang on? A deeper examination of the kinds of houses they lived in and the sizes of their holdings shows that survival itself may have been the highest form of success.

Housing and Farm Size

Housing quality standards in the Irish census were rigid, arbitrary, and wildly imprecise, all at the same time. For example, a house with only two windows in front was marked as third-class, but there is no way to measure how sturdy it was, or what kind of furniture it had inside, or how well the family maintained their garden. Still, Clark recommends using these standards as one of the few reliable ways to define levels of poverty. He describes the dwelling house rankings as they ran from fourth-class (“miserable one-room mud cabins with no more than one front window”), to third-class (“small one- or two-room cabins with no more than a couple of front windows”), to second-class, and then first-class houses, which, at the very least, had to have non-perishable roofs with lots of rooms and windows. Even with a post-Famine decline in their numbers across Ireland, third- and fourth-class houses made up sixty-eight percent of all homes in Connacht in 1881.⁴⁶ Twenty years later, on the De Freyne estate, they still accounted for seventy-one percent of the available housing. Out of 1,279 houses ranked on the estate in 1901, 896 were third-class, and 347 were second-class. Only twenty-two could be designated first-class, and just seventeen were rated as fourth-class.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Clark, *Social Origins*, 141. There is also a good description of the differences between the housing classes in pre-famine Ireland in Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland*, 29–31.

⁴⁷ Data on the class of houses is culled from *The Census of Ireland, 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

Third-class houses held sway in most townlands, but in eight (Clerragh, Cloonard, Eden, Figh, Grallagh, Kilgarve, Mullaghnashee, and Parkeel) second-class houses predominated. Curiously, these all lay in the Fairymount ED, except Feigh, which was in Artagh North. Townlands where third-class houses vastly outnumbered second-class included Tully (thirty-two to three), Urrasaun (ten to zero), Meelick (twenty-two to zero), Errit (thirty-five to seven), Cloggarnagh (thirty to ten), Cloonbunny (thirty-four to four), Cloonmaul (twenty-seven to two), and Drummad (thirty-six to seven). Again, a geopolitical pattern emerges: all but Cloggarnagh (Buckhill ED) were in the Artagh South ED. These patterns in housing levels are not easily accounted for, but there are some possible explanations. Since all townlands were geographically contiguous within each ED, they possibly had similar kinds of land quality, affecting residents' level of prosperity. Also, the townlands in Fairymount ED were near Frenchpark and Castlereagh, towns with links to the rest of the country, while Artagh South and North were closer to the poverty-stricken areas of Mayo like Swineford, which may also have had some bearing on the prosperity of the inhabitants, and on the availability of building supplies.

The twenty-one first-class houses on the estate, in addition to the De Freyne mansion, included homes of three clergymen: two Roman Catholic priests, and the Rev. Arthur Hyde of the Church of Ireland. Hyde's son, Douglas, the future president of Ireland, also had a first-class house in Ratra. Two other first-class dwellings housed Royal Irish Constabulary units; three were public houses or hotels; one belonged to a national school teacher, and one to Bridget Flanagan, who may have been a housekeeper in Caher for the lady dowager, Lord De Freyne's mother. The remaining first-class homes belonged to what must have constituted the upper crust of the "strong farmer"

class on the estate. Some might also be classified as graziers, since they occupied long-established herding properties, and include Patrick and Cormack Gordon in Aghalustia; Joseph Kelly in Corracoggill North; Mary Gordon in Sheepwalk; James Gordon in Grallagh, and Pat Keenan, John Cox and Peter Fallon in Portaghard (Fallon was a more recent name in the townland). Others include Mary Ellen Gordon in Curreentorpan, who held ninety-five acres in 1901, and William Elwood, a sixty-eight-year-old farmer and shopkeeper in Carrowbehy. He lived in a first-class house, employed his four daughters and a young man as shop assistants, and could afford a servant and a carman. (He was also one of the tenants who first approached Lord De Freyne in 1901 about reducing their rent.)

Farm size is another way to determine economic vitality. Eighty percent of De Freyne's tenants occupied farms under twenty acres in 1901, a high ratio even by local standards. Castlerea Union *in toto* had seventy-five percent of its farms under twenty acres, but other unions in Roscommon ranged from fifty-five to seventy percent. Heavily congested areas in nearby county Mayo tallied at seventy-nine percent in Swineford, and sixty-four percent in Westport. By contrast, for the whole of Ireland, fifty-five percent of agricultural holdings were under twenty acres in 1901.⁴⁸ Just four townlands on the estate could boast more than ten farms above twenty acres, while in another six, not a single holding exceeded twenty acres.⁴⁹ Large numbers of tenants could barely manage to hold ten acres, and holdings under five were quite common. In the townland of Cloonarragh, twelve out of twenty-nine holdings were under ten acres, and in Leitrim townland, a third

⁴⁸ [Cd. 1190] *Census of Ireland, 1901. Part II. General report with illustrative maps and diagrams, tables, and appendix*. 1902, Vol. XXIX.1, 353–359.

⁴⁹ See Appendix C.

of its seventy-six plots were ten acres or less. In the townland of Tibohine, with twenty-nine holdings, only eight were over ten acres. As stark as these figures seem given what they imply, they are ultimately under-calculated. Some of these properties were held communally and could therefore represent even smaller acreage per capita. While most small farms would not support a family, the larger farms were not all that big either, and there were not many of them.

Less than half of the rent-paying townlands had farms over fifty acres in 1901, and there were only thirteen holdings over a hundred acres across the estate. Mid-sized farms, those between fifty and one hundred acres, were just as scarce as large ones on the estate. In 1901, there were only twenty-one, and of these mid-sized farms, fifteen were linked to surnames appearing in Griffith's or in the 1894 survey, with two others possibly connected through marriage.⁵⁰ The rest included two examples of herd's land transferred to someone with a non-recurring surname, in Fairymount (Mullaghnashee) and Roosky, and two instances where people who were not farmers—a shoemaker in Cloonfad and a stone mason in Ballyglass West—retained a share in a property with a farmer.

The data show that the biggest properties did not change hands often, and that those designated as “herd's land” in 1901 had been used as pasture land for decades, even if their occupiers shifted. The largest single holding in 1901 was 232 acres in Cloonagh, held by thirty-four-year-old James Melvin. There were no Melvins listed in Cloonagh in the tithe books, or in the 1850s when the largest land holders were named Kenny, Scally,

⁵⁰ In Corracombeen, Michael Scally, whose surname was not in Griffith's, held fifty-nine acres in 1901. His father-in-law on the census was Michael Grady, and a tenant of that name held the same acreage in Griffith's. In Errit, Dominick Rush, an apparent newcomer, held fifty-nine acres in partnership with Pat Hopkins, an older surname in the townland. Rush, 66-years-old on the census, was born in Co. Mayo, as was Hopkins wife, who was forty-six. Most estate residents were born in Roscommon, so she was likely Rush's daughter.

Mulrennan and McEnnelly (the latter two shared 126 acres, the largest parcel at the time). While Melvin may have been a recent interloper, buying out neighboring farms, he may also have acquired the land through family ties—the 1901 census shows his wife was a Kenny.

The largest joint holding on the estate was the 257 acres of bog held by James Kilkenny and Pat Dillon in 1901 in Lecarrow. There is a Pat Dillon in Griffith's holding 262 acres of bog there with Thomas Lowry and Andrew Ryan, but not with a Kilkenny, and the reason for James' appearance in 1901 is undocumented. He may have been an outsider, but his acquisition of a shared bog does not seem to have profited him very much. A married woman named Maria Kilkenny was there for the census in 1901 with six children. If her husband was the same James identified in the valuation books, he was not at home when the census takers came in early spring and could have been working abroad that day. Other large parcels include the 219 acres in Cloonfad held by four different families, and another 196-acre farm there held by five families. As mentioned earlier, these parcels stayed primarily within the same families even after they were split up into smaller single holdings. Another large farm belonged to Mary Gordon, who managed a corn mill on her 186 acres in Sheepwalk and sublet ninety-seven acres to John Gordon. While no Gordons appear there in Griffith's, there was an "out of repair" corn mill on 186 acres occupied by James McGann in the 1850s. McGann disappears from the record, indicating that the Gordons bought his land, or possibly inherited it if Mary was herself a McGann. In any case, she was prosperous, with a twelve-room house and two servants. Her apparent wealth (unusual for the area) may have been recently acquired, but just as easily may have been inherited.

In Kilgarve, two successive Gordons, first Thomas, then Cormac, held 162 acres in the 1901 valuations. In the 1850s, Thomas Gordon held 164 acres, of which seventy-five was bog land. There were three Gordon households in Kilgarve in the 1901 census and in one, twenty-eight-year-old Cormac was head of a family of three grown sisters and a twenty-year-old brother, all of whom were unmarried and living with him in a second-class house with a slate roof (a step up from their neighbors'). Another large property in Kilgarve was held first by James Beirne (214 acres) and then by John Gunning. This was designated as herd's land, but there is no herd's land listed on that spot in Griffith's and no property of that size at all, raising the possibility that the 214 acres was a consolidation of smaller plots. Beirne was not a recurring Kilgarve surname, nor was Gunning, and neither name appears on the 1901 census, so they may not have lived in the townland at all. Either could have been one of the outside land-grabbers or graziers decried by politicians.

Derrinea and Tawnyrover, both small and sparsely populated, were the only two townlands in which every tenant occupied large farms. Derrinea, the site of much-publicized evictions in 1902,⁵¹ was occupied by one family, the Hevicans, who had lived there since at least the time of Griffith's. Tawnyrover had a single tenant in 1901, Maria Meldon, a fifty-two-year-old widow who sublet her 113-acre property to five others, including two other widows and a widower. Those tenants' surnames matched those of the people who sublet from Michael Meldon in the 1850s, who may have been Maria's husband or father-in-law, and whose 108 acres was designated as herd's land.

⁵¹ *Irish Times*, 15 August 1902.

Herding land always existed on the estate and was often among the largest parcels in Griffith's. These properties were not the only ones used for grazing, however, and *commanage* (shared property used for grazing small amounts of stock) was still noted on the maps in 1894. Yet herd's land deserves investigation as a subset of the larger properties on the estate. These parcels changed hands through the years, and were not always held by the same families, but there seems to be a continuity to their use as pastureland, complicating any claims by politicians of abrupt conversions of tillage land to grassland. In 1851, Castlereaugh Union had 31,407 acres under crops (including meadow and clover) and 68,492 under grass for cattle or sheep herding.⁵² By 1891, the acres under crops rose to 34,737, and grassland increased to 84,420, indicating stability in tillage property while the area used for ranch land ballooned.⁵³ Unfortunately, these statistics are not available at the townland level, so they are only suggestive of conditions on the estate.

Herding occupied a special status among occupations in rural Ireland. Herds often functioned as independent contractors not drawn from the local labor supply, so the appearance of a new surname as a herd would not be unusual. They were more skilled than ordinary laborers, had higher social standing, and could earn as much as three times the income of a farm laborer.⁵⁴ Parcels designated as herd's land with a house and offices were found in close to twenty townlands on the estate in the 1850s, but were not always designated as such in later valuation reports or on the 1894 survey of the estate. In at least

⁵² 1852–53. *Census of Ireland for the Year 1851. Part II. Returns of Agricultural Produce in 1851*, p. 145.

⁵³ [C.—6894.—xxi.] *Royal Commission on Labour. The Agricultural Labourer. Vol. IV. Ireland. Part IV*, 51.

⁵⁴ John Cunningham, "A Class Quite Distinct,' The Western Herds and their Defense of their Working Conditions," *The West of Ireland, New Perspectives on the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Carla King and Conor McNamara (Dublin: The History Press, 2011), 138–141.

half of them, the family name connected to the herds' land remained in the townland through 1901, if not always on the original property. In other cases, the herd's surname was an outlier to the area.

One clear transfer of these herd's tracts within one surname is the 158 acres already mentioned in Aghalustia held by Patrick Gordon in Griffith's and then by Cormack Gordon in 1901. In other places, the transfer to different tenants is easily traced, like the twenty-seven acres held by John McGarry in Leitrim in the 1850s which was later occupied by John Bristlan, also as herd's land. In another case in Corracoggil North, James Gordon and Patrick Kelly held herd's land of 126 acres in 1901, which was occupied in the 1850s by James McGann (perhaps the same McGann who owned the corn mill in Sheepwalk). Gordon and Kelly were not recent arrivals, however, having been there at least since 1894, when they held 196 acres.

Less straightforward is the case of Carrowreagh, where thirty-four-year old John Cullen held the biggest parcels (fifty-nine and forty-five acres) in 1901 in a 205-acre townland divided into ten parcels. In the 1850s, the two biggest parcels were both held as herd's land by Hugh Kelly (seventy-eight acres) and the partnership of John Cullinane and John Darcy (fifty-nine acres). The name Cullen does not appear in Griffith's, and none of the other three surnames are on the valuation or census records in 1901. Is Cullen a misspelling of Cullinane, or was he a newcomer who took over longtime residents' properties? Whether or not the young Cullen was a herd himself, he did have some kind of economic advantage over his neighbors. The house he shared with his mother, unmarried sister and cousins in 1901 had a slate roof and eight rooms, a sharp contrast to poorer houses nearby. The thirteen properties over one hundred acres discussed here can

thus be divided into eight which were handed down through some family connection, and five which had no apparent family link to the property holders in Griffith's. Two of the second group were herd's land that was transferred as such to new occupiers, and the other three cannot be directly traced, and could therefore have been taken by newcomers.

While there is not much evidence of massive conversions from tillage property to pasture by outsiders on Lord De Freyne's estate during the last half of the nineteenth century, he himself owned numerous large tracts of untenanted land which could have been used for grazing, either for his own stock or by tenants on the "eleven-month system." This system became popular in the late nineteenth century because it allowed landlords to set rents and agreements outside of the regulations of the land acts.⁵⁵ As already noted, large scale grazing and the practice of short-term rentals were vehemently denounced by the UIL, which promoted the break-up of these grasslands for re-distribution to smallholders. Unfortunately, we do not know for sure how De Freyne's untenanted land was used, or if it was let for short term rentals,⁵⁶ although it would have made economic sense for him to do so. He did lease the land of some evicted tenants near Errit to his brother-in-law, Valentine Blake, who rented it to eleven-month tenants.⁵⁷

Other evidence must be considered before drawing conclusions about his use of short-term rentals to graziers. Many of his untenanted properties identified in a 1906 parliamentary report appear to have been in his possession as empty land since the 1850s, long before the land acts made eleven-month agreements tempting. In sixteen townlands

⁵⁵ The many economic advantages of the system to landowners and short-term renters are described in Jones, *Graziers*, 112–135.

⁵⁶ In an email on April 10, 2017, Brendan Robbins from the Public Office/Archives, Valuation Office, Dublin, was not able to say definitively if short-term renters were listed as tenants in the cancellation books.

⁵⁷ "Statement by Witness Commissioner Kevin R. O'Sheil, B.L.," *Bureau of Military History*, 1913–21, W.S. 1770, File No. S. 909, 1,052–53, www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie.

he held the same amount of untenanted acreage in 1906 as he had in 1857, and in three others the difference varied by less than thirty acres. If these properties were useful for pasture, it would have made sense for him to have been renting to graziers all along, and not leave them empty, or to have used them for his own stock. However, almost all the empty properties he held in the 1850s were designated as bog or lakes, and the valuations of these parcels were so low that it is questionable how suitable they were for pasture. In 1906, the untenanted land in six of the townlands listed had no ratable value at all. In only seven were they rated at £10 or more, with the highest assigned to Frenchpark Demesne itself (£846). Otherwise, the highest valuation of his untenanted land in any townland was £16,⁵⁸ far below the £50 suggested by Jones as a minimum for grazing property.⁵⁹

While the amount of untenanted acreage in some parts of Ireland increased exponentially in the latter part of the nineteenth century,⁶⁰ the total amount of empty land on the De Freyne estate increased only slightly from 5,782 acres in the 1850s to 6,417 acres in 1906. Although large increases were recorded in Carrowbehy (from ninety-five acres in 1857 to 402 in 1906), Cloonbunny (0 to 167), Cloonfad (0 to 107), and Leitrim (651 to 707), none of these untenanted properties were valued at more than £5. If the empty land on the De Freyne estate was mostly bog and wetlands, his tenants (who should have known the quality of the land) would not have been likely to covet it without prior reclamation. Nonetheless, the De Freyne tenants' situation was conflated in the

⁵⁸ Figures from 1906 are taken from *Return of untenanted land in rural districts...*, H.C. 1906 (250), c, 177, 379–383.

⁵⁹ Jones, *Graziers*, 1.

⁶⁰ In the nearby Athlone Union in Roscommon, untenanted land increased by thirty-two percent between the 1850s and 1906. Jones, *Graziers*, 115–116.

popular imagination with tenants on other estates where large, lucrative, grasslands lay beside uneconomic small holdings. Without diminishing the very real conflicts between poor small holders and large graziers, on the De Freyne estate there may not have been that much empty land suitable for tenants' use. Yet the perception of plenty (and profit) laying side-by-side with misery helped fuel antagonism.

Reflection

When the 1901 census was recorded in early spring, it was still several months before the tenants would refuse to pay their rent, and before the midnight meetings, bonfires and impassioned speeches would begin. Many lived in houses that were primitive and cramped, which lay on farms too small to support a family. These circumstances encouraged the steady drip of emigrating sons and daughters, and the need for the wages of migratory workers because, even at the turn of the twentieth century, there was still no other way to earn money. At the time of the census, there were fewer people on the estate than there had ever been, with fewer families, and fewer inhabited homes. The Dillon settlement allowed those remaining to imagine becoming land owners themselves, as there were many fewer hands into which the estate could be sold than there had been ten or twenty years earlier. Some tenants survived long enough to assume land ownership, while their relatives and friends did not. The vast de-population of the estate recorded in the census and other statistics begs consideration of what surviving families did with the knowledge that they were the ones still on the land as the long-held dream of ownership actually started to become real.

In the three townlands investigated, the surnames that survived generally represented those families that already held a good quantity of land in the 1850s, and who

had large kinship networks. I do not know if they survived because they held the most land or the best land, and it is possible that those who survived were more skilled at farming than those who did not. Individuals within those family groups may have fared better or worse than others, but there is no evidence in these sources that any of the surviving surnames increased their holdings dramatically over time. While having a large amount of property under a certain family name from the start was an important factor in surname retention, as was the proximity of a strong kinship network, the accumulation of wealth was not as crucial. In other words, the larger the holdings and the greater the number of holdings associated with a single surname, the more likely that surname was to survive, whether or not those families actually thrived on that land.

While the landholding figures question claims that large amounts of property were taken over by outsiders or converted to grassland, they also highlight how few large farms there were, and how the great majority of tenants struggled on miniscule farms of one to twenty acres. It gives a sense of the hopelessness, even impotence, that must have colored the tenants' aggregate mindset as they eventually turned to the collective action of a rent strike. The maps and numbers present a strong image of people caught in a recurring cycle of generational poverty who, faced with the Dillon settlement, found themselves hurtling into the future without a realistic strategy or ground plan to guide them.

Two significant conclusions emerge from this accumulation of data. First, in narrowing the inquiry down to the townland level, it is clear that there were many deviations in the way land was held. These differences, while often miniscule, force the realization that there were factors beyond economics, politics, or the Irish tenurial system

that decided which families held the biggest or smallest farms, how long they remained on them, and how frequently new families appeared. These factors could include the townland's geography, the personalities of dominant family members, a history of co-operation or of disputes between families, or just a strong sense of "this is how we do things" in a particular place. I think the persistence of idiosyncratic differences in the statistics helps lift these people out of the standardized obscurity to which they have been relegated.

The second point is that the primary goal of the people who remained in Ireland was not just to survive, it was to survive in a specific place. Families may have made a deliberate choice to stay where they were based on sound economic reasoning, or they may have remained because they had little choice, but they did make a choice of some kind. Any willful change short of emigration—for instance, moving into a town, developing a trade, or finding farmland to rent on another estate or in another county—was not a viable option for everyone. Many factors conspired to keep these families poor and struggling, including weather, markets, legislation, and the tenurial system itself. While there were provisions for tenants to buy their farms in some of the land acts passed before the Wyndham Land Act in 1903, capital was in short supply and no one in these townlands took that option, as those who were paying rent in 1857 were still doing so in 1901. So, were they stuck in place? Was Ó Gráda correct to imply that the people who remained were afflicted with paralysis of both opportunity and spirit? That might be true if economic benefit was the only goal. Those who remained behind continued to work their farms without prosperity, and family members abroad kept on contributing to the upkeep of those farms without recompense, as indeed many never saw their family's

home again. All of this implies that the preservation of the family farm was an emotional investment above all, with the understood goal of keeping the family name on the land. It was not a goal that would placate an economist, but it tells us something about how these people got up each day to work, and why they did not leave.

AN EXCITING SCENE ON THE MURPHY AND DE FREYNE ESTATES.



Roscommon Herald, 14 December 1901

CHAPTER 7: PEOPLE

Despite their abbreviated height and primitive weapons, these women in their caps and aprons seem to be winning the battle against a phalanx of oversized constables with rifles. What is the source of their power? The answer lies in the center of the drawing. In defense of their homes there would be no surrender, no compromise, and no fear even if—or especially if—“the men were at market.” The caption tells us that the women “collected rapidly,” indicating an efficient communication system, and “drove them off,” implying that their tactics (shillelaghs in hand) were effective. Little has been recorded about individual tenants in the De Freyne strike, and even less about the role of women, but this cartoon places women on the front line of the fight, as in fact they often were. They are not making speeches about the future of Ireland, they are not negotiating

purchase terms; their resistance is visceral and emotive. Many non-political factors would have contributed to their attitudes, world view and behavior choices. Some understanding of these factors emerges from census data on education and literacy, and scholarship on the intellectual lives of ordinary Irish people that considers print and visual culture, libraries, and reading habits.¹ Newspaper coverage about individuals associated with the strike, especially tenants faced with eviction, describes their material lives as well as their behavior under stress.

Education, Culture, and Language

By 1901, there were still a number of people in the electoral districts within the De Freyne estate who could not read and write. Illiteracy rates for those over five years ranged between 12.7 to 22.1 percent (compared to 35.1 percent for all of Tibohine Parish in 1881).² On the estate proper, a quarter of the men and women who were heads of households (432 out of 1,532) said they could not read, but there was always someone in those homes, especially children, who was able to read the newspaper or write a letter to family members abroad.³ While these figures show that at least three-quarters of the people on the estate may have been literate, they do not tell us how well they could read

¹ To my knowledge, there is no broad study of the interior lives of the Irish poor to compare to Jonathan Rose's work, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001). One study, Perry B. Ellis' *A History of the Irish Working Class* (London and Chicago: Pluto Press, 1996, first published 1985), favors political rather than social interpretations. Despite the intriguing conceit proposed by the title of *A History of Irish Working-Class Writing*, Michael Pierse, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), this collection of essays skews towards urban working-class life and elite representations of the Irish poor, offering few examples of literary work produced by the lower classes.

² The districts are Artagh North, Artagh South, Buckhill, Fairymount, and Frenchpark. [Cd. 1059] *Census of Ireland, 1901*. Part I. Area, houses and population...Vol. IV. Province of Connaught, No. 4. County of Roscommon, 119. Since the 1881 figures are derived from the parish as a whole, and not the five electoral districts which nevertheless made up most of Tibohine, they can be compared generally, but not precisely. [C. 3268] *Census of Ireland, 1881*. Part I. Area, houses and population...Vol. IV. Province of Connaught, No. 4. County of Roscommon, 520.

³ Figures derived from a search in *Census of Ireland 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

or how often they used these skills, but they do suggest that children had more schooling than their parents.

How important was schooling in the lives of rural families which, like many on the De Freyne estate, relied on their children's labor?⁴ Twenty-five primary schools for both boys and girls (only four were coeducational) served these five districts in 1901 as part of the national school system, with 1,079 pupils between six and eighteen in attendance that May. This is less than half of the total population for that age group in the five districts. The agricultural calendar affected school attendance, and many of these students may have been in class at other times of the year, rendering their education piecemeal, at best.⁵ In Fairymount DED (total population, 1,668), there was one school and 421 children aged six to eighteen, but only fifty-four were attending in May 1901. In Artagh North, only 272 children of school age were attending out of 783 in the district (total population 2,664).⁶ The national school system, launched in 1831, was a response to social turbulence and brought together the unlikely duo of a non-Catholic establishment "confronted with political and social unrest and a Catholic hierarchy concerned about the effectiveness of Protestant evangelicalism." The main goal of the national schools was to teach students to read, an outcome that was not necessarily seen as the doorway to a better life but rather as "a mere acquisition of a set of skills to be used

⁴ Despite a disagreement over the management of a school in Roosky in 1882, Lord De Freyne did support local schools, contributing £100 to a school in Tibohine in 1877. Bishop Laurence Gillooley to Lord De Freyne, 21 June 1882, VI.v. Correspondence regarding the building of schools at Aughalusta, Lisacul, Clooneyquinn and Carrowcoghill, Co. Roscommon, 1883–1885, MS 50,329/6/5–7, De Freyne papers, NLI; *Roscommon Messenger*, 22 December 1877.

⁵ These numbers are in line with school attendance across rural Ireland, in other European countries, and in the United States. Tony Fahey, "State, Family and Compulsory Schooling in Ireland," *The Economic and Social Review*, 23:4 (July 1992), 373–376.

⁶ *Census of Ireland, 1901*, County of Roscommon, 131–32, 102, 28.

by the pupils for their own purposes.”⁷ For students in Roscommon, those purposes were primarily being prepared for work abroad where they would have to speak English well and, it was always suspected, they would face threats to their Catholic faith.

Emigration was a primary impetus for education, forcing schools to respond to the “real necessity of having [students] properly instructed in early youth before they are scattered over a dangerous and corrupting world.” Education at a young age was necessary, according to the *Messenger*, because ninety percent of boys over fifteen were bound to leave home to work in England, and forty percent of the girls would emigrate for jobs in the United States.⁸ These girls embraced schooling to impress the families who would employ them as domestics, not to improve their lives in Ireland. According to David Fitzpatrick, they “valued education only when they expected to leave the country and its schoolrooms behind them.” Schoolbooks were then blamed for making emigration too enticing, and Fitzpatrick notes that “readers and geography texts, with the concentration upon any race or nation rather than the Irish, were thought to generate unpatriotic wanderlust.”⁹ A common belief was that education for the poor was misguided and dangerous because it encouraged them to step outside their social class.¹⁰ “Too high an education will make the poor often times discontented and will unsuit them for following the plough,” declared Paul Cardinal Cullen, Archbishop of Armagh and

⁷ John Logan, “Sufficient to their needs: Literacy and Elementary Schooling in the Nineteenth Century,” in Mary Daly and David Dickson, eds., *The Origins of Popular Literacy in Ireland: Language Change and Educational Development 1700–1920* (Dublin: Department of Modern History Trinity College Dublin and Department of Modern History University College Dublin, 1990), 132, 128–29.

⁸ *Roscommon Messenger*, 22 December 1877.

⁹ David Fitzpatrick, “‘A Share of the Honeycomb’: Education, Emigration and Irishwomen,” in Daly and Dickson, eds., *Origins of Popular Literacy in Ireland*, 179, 176.

¹⁰ Linde Lunney, “Knowledge and Enlightenment: Attitudes to Education in Early Nineteenth-Century East Ulster,” in Daly and Dickson, eds. *Origins of Popular Literacy*, 101–2.

Dublin.¹¹ Schooling for the poorest children was typically considered optional in Roscommon, as elsewhere, and it was not until 1899 that a compulsory education bill was debated by the county council.¹² Jasper Tully, the anti-Parnellite editor of the *Herald*, voiced his opposition:

Well-off farmers can afford to send their children to school, the poor cannot afford to lose their labor... I have gone myself to the National School. I know in the poorest district there are times when some of the children go out to school hungry, and come back with no certainty of a meal before them... And now, we are asked by this proposal to send the policemen to the doors of these wretched people to tear out their wretched children?

Tully advocated spending money on technical education for farmers, laborers' cottages, or dividing grazing land among small farmers, rather than on "a few more monitors in the schools and that the poor wretched children may be crammed into a machine to grind them...under the horrible Results system."¹³

Other inadequacies of the national schools have been dissected by scholars like Niall Ó Coisáin and John Logan, who question the legitimacy of a progressive march toward literacy suggested by generational improvements in reading abilities on the census. Ó Coisáin points to the likelihood of subjective "misrepresentation" inherent in census reports and other self-evaluations.¹⁴ Logan looks at teachers' experiences and pupils' memories to conclude that in Irish national schools there was "a great cultural and cognitive gap that many pupils crossed only with difficulty."¹⁵ There can be no certainty

¹¹ Quoted in John Logan, "Book learning: the experience of reading in the national school 1831–1900," in Bernadette Cunningham and Máire Kennedy, eds., *The Experience of Reading: Irish Historical Perspectives*, (Dublin: Rare Books Group of the Library Association of Ireland and Economic and Social History of Ireland, 1999), p. 173.

¹² Compulsory attendance in Ireland was introduced in 1892 but was treated more as an ideal than as an enforceable statute. Fahey "State, Family and Compulsory Schooling," 374–76.

¹³ *Roscommon Herald*, 29 July 1899.

¹⁴ Niall Ó Coisáin, *Print and Popular Culture in Ireland* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Macmillan Press Ltd. and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 32.

¹⁵ John Logan, "Sufficient to their needs," in Daly and Dickson, eds., *Origins of Popular Literacy*, 191.

how many of these shortcomings were prevalent in the schools on the De Freyne estate, but it is clear that school attendance was low, or at least erratic, and that migratory labor and emigration exercised a greater influence on the lives and expectations of young people than a desire for intellectual growth.

There is a body of research which addresses the intellectual lives of ordinary Irish people during the nineteenth century by asking what people read.¹⁶ These studies struggle with a lack of documentation, particularly about the reading habits of the poor, and with “an obvious disjunction between what has been produced and packaged as the canon of ‘Irish’ literature, and what has been popularly read.”¹⁷ Some historical records assumed that the rural Irish did not read much at all besides newspapers. An 1841 pamphlet claimed that there were only 220,000 books in all the libraries of Ireland,¹⁸ and in 1849, a parliamentary committee on libraries declared with a touch of horror that there were seventy-three towns in Ireland without a single bookseller.¹⁹ (By the 1890s, there were still no booksellers or news agents listed in directories for the towns that ringed the De Freyne estate: Ballaghaderreen, Frenchpark, and Castlerea.)²⁰ Historic anecdotes and literary references led one modern observer to conclude “that the Irish were never much given to books as such,” and not inclined towards the “long thought” mental processes

¹⁶ In addition to other works cited, see: Rolf Loeber and Magda Loeber with Anne Mullin Burnham, *A Guide to Irish Fiction, 1650–1900* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), and Robert Welch and Brian Walker, eds., *The Oxford History of the Irish Book* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁷ Clare Hutton, foreword to Jacqueline Genet, Sylvie Mikowski and Fabienne Garcier, eds. *The Book in Ireland* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006), xix.

¹⁸ Referenced in Felicity Devlin, *Brightening the Countryside—The Library Service in Rural Ireland, 1902–35*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Department of Modern History, St. Patrick’s College, National University of Ireland Maynooth, 1990, p. 18. Available at <http://eprints.maynoothuniversity.ie/5320/>.

¹⁹ K.A. Manley, “Engines of literature: libraries in an era of expansion and transition,” in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, 1st ed. Vol. 2., Giles Mandelbrote and K. A. Manley, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 510. *Cambridge Histories Online*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521792745>

²⁰ *Slater’s Royal National Directory of Ireland (1894)*, 22–23, 37–38, 50.

found in them (as opposed to the shorter, more easily digested messages in newspapers and periodicals). Other factors, like the Catholic Church's fear of "promiscuous and unsupervised reading," the Irish propensity for sociability (including oral traditions and storytelling), and living conditions that limited privacy, may also have discouraged reading as a solitary pursuit.²¹

There is other evidence, however, to refute the perception that the Irish did not read. Ó Coisáin shows that the poor had access to all sorts of books from the beginning of the nineteenth century, mainly chivalric romances, criminal biography, histories, and religious texts in cheap reproductions or chapbooks. These books served many purposes besides entertainment, and he sees a link between rollicking crime tales and the agrarian protests like those common on the De Freyne estate. At a time when most forms of popular protest were classified as crimes, Ó Coisáin thinks these tales of former nobles who became highwaymen and thieves may have helped readers "move away from the notion that the individual personality is the source of the crime and towards an explanation which locates it in social conditions, and specifically in dispossession."²² This suggests that people's ideas about land ownership and other issues may have been formed from sources other than politics or religion. John Moulden also finds a variety of books on many topics was available to rural communities early in the nineteenth century, implying a well-developed distribution network and a cultural framework that could appreciate various perspectives. The preponderance of songs in the volumes he examines suggest that elements of the Irish oral culture lingered in nineteenth century reading

²¹ Tony Farnar, "'We are not, I think, a book-reading people'—Book-reading and Publishing in Ireland 1890–1960," in Genet, Mikowski, and Garcier, eds. *The Book in Ireland*, 128–29.

²² Ó Coisáin, *Print and Popular Culture*, 91.

habits.²³ Printed ballads, sometimes used to decorate the walls of cabins, along with popular printed volumes in prose, “constituted the form of literature most likely to have provided the first reading experience of the poorest in society, in both educational and material terms.”²⁴ Ó Coisáin implies a similar link to oral traditions in his description of the practice of “horizontal reading,” in which books or journals were read aloud to a group, with “many interruptions, explanations, comments, and criticisms, constituting a kind of communal determination of the meaning of a text.”²⁵ Two studies on booksellers in County Galway and County Mayo (both near congested areas prone to agricultural agitation like the De Freyne estate) show there was a brisk market for printed goods, books, newspapers and magazines at the end of the nineteenth century, but there is no evidence how many of these were available to the poorer classes.²⁶ Books for sale at Thomas Kelly’s news agency in Loughrea included titles on Irish culture and history, housekeeping, and religion but, at one to six shillings each, most were out of reach for an agricultural laborer.²⁷

There is a long tradition of private reading rooms and book groups in Ireland sponsored by labor, political, and religious groups, but many were restricted to specific social groups who could afford the price of a membership, and were usually town-based.²⁸ In the 1850s, a lending library in Roscommon town charged a penny a day for

²³ John Moulden, “‘James Cleland his Book’: The Library of a Small Farming Family in Nineteenth-Century County Down,” in Andrew Carpenter and Marc Caball, eds., *Oral and Print Cultures in Ireland, 1600–1900*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 102–118.

²⁴ John Moulden, “Sub-Literatures? Folk Song, Memory and Ireland’s Working Poor,” in Pierse, ed., *History of Irish Working-Class Writing*, 104.

²⁵ Ó Coisáin, *Print and Popular Culture*, 199.

²⁶ Bernadette Lally, *Print Culture in Loughrea, 1850–1900, Reading, Writing, and Printing in an Irish Provincial Town* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008); Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism*, 149–156.

²⁷ Lally, *Print Culture*, 51.

²⁸ Political sponsors included Daniel O’Connell’s Repeal organization, the Young Irelanders, and the Land League. Devlin, *Brightening the Countryside*, 24–26.

“Religious and Moral Books, Popular, Amusing and Cottage Libraries.”²⁹ Elsewhere in the county, there were reading rooms and lending libraries in Keadew and in Mount Talbot, both supported by subscribers and wealthy patrons, although the Mount Talbot facility was ostensibly established for those who “earned their bread by the sweat of the brows.”³⁰ At the end of the nineteenth century, a scheme for “village libraries” was promoted by the agricultural co-operative movement begun by Horace Plunkett, with the first one opening in Tissara, County Roscommon, in 1899.³¹ At the time of the strike, the movement offered a top prize of £25 to the local co-operative society which excelled at making “their parish a place where no Irishman would like to emigrate from.” Among the types of “social amelioration” to discourage emigration that the local groups could submit was the organization of a local library.³²

The numerous public library laws passed in parliament beginning in 1850 were essentially dysfunctional in Ireland. Funding for Ireland was based on the British model in which money for libraries was designated for cities and towns since, in Britain, these were the areas with the densest populations. In Ireland the opposite demographic conditions prevailed, but the same strategy was applied although “the bulk of the population lived in rural areas,” thus insuring that the people in the countryside “were most starved of reading matter.” It was not until after the turn of the twentieth century that private funding and local initiative coalesced to allow public libraries to develop in

²⁹ *Roscommon Messenger*, 9 January 1858.

³⁰ *Roscommon Herald*, 21 March 1863, 9 April 1864; *Roscommon Journal*, 2 July 1864.

³¹ Tissara may now be known as Dysart, in the south of the county. Devlin, *Brightening the Countryside*, 47–51.

³² Others included Irish language classes, the revival of national sports, music and dance, the formation of choirs, and a “crusade against badly kept and dirty homesteads.” *The Irish Homestead*, 9 November 1901, 744.

rural areas.³³ There was a proposal for a library in Boyle in 1896 supported by public subscriptions,³⁴ but the first free public library in County Roscommon did not appear until 1930, and even at that point, there was controversy over public funding. The new library, housed in the county courthouse, was started with seed money from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, which required the county council to pay for continuing support through new taxes. One Roscommon council member saw the library as a great benefit for the poorer residents, which would provide an antidote to complaints about the “dullness of life” which led to emigration. Another councilor, who vowed to oppose the new rate, argued, “We have bog roads and none of you ever stood up and suggested striking a rate to repair them and now we must charge the ratepayers 3d in the £ for a library.”³⁵

Print was not the only form of communication media available to people in provincial Ireland in 1901, as various forms of modern visual culture had already infiltrated the countryside. Photography had flourished in Ireland since the mid-nineteenth century (although usually as an elite pursuit),³⁶ and even the screening of motion pictures had begun in Dublin by the end of the 1890s.³⁷ While the consumption of visual media was limited, people in rural communities had been exposed to the modernizing effects of still and moving image reproduction by 1901. Magic lantern slide shows had become so common outside of Dublin that even the inmates of the

³³ Devlin, *Brightening the Countryside*, 24–26, 36, 46; See also Catherine Moran and Pearl Quinn, “The Irish Library Scene,” in *The Cambridge History of Libraries*, 253–54.

³⁴ *Roscommon Herald*, 1 February 1896.

³⁵ *Roscommon Messenger*, 10 August 1929, 26 July 1930.

³⁶ See Edward Chandler, *Photography in Ireland: the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: Edmund Burke, 2001).

³⁷ Kevin Rockett & Emer Rockett, *Magic Lantern, Panorama and Moving Picture Shows in Ireland, 1786–1900* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011), 216–257.

Roscommon workhouse were treated to a show by a group of priests in 1901,³⁸ which makes it seem likely that the non-institutionalized lower classes may already have had access to them. Public lectures in rural areas on topics from travel to religion were often accompanied by this kind of visual presentation. According to Niamh McCole, provincial audiences preferred “local content and quality narration,” over foreign imagery, and the “spectacular” quality of the visual entertainment was never as important as the oral narrative.³⁹ These events may have been designed as passive activities for “individual satisfaction,” but Irish audiences treated them more like a social gathering or a public meeting. Audiences did not always observe the proprieties, such as keeping silent during the slide show, and despite instructions from the presenter, “bawdy wordplay and spontaneous interjection” were common. McCole concludes that the audience “valued sociability over private contemplation in their reception of visual entertainments.”⁴⁰

Rural communities themselves became the subject of the camera’s eye. Imagery of rural poverty was employed as agitprop, and the De Freyne estate was part of that visual ammunition. In 1897, in a protest against the jubilee celebrations for Queen Victoria, Maud Gonne and others projected slides of eviction scenes on the wall of a building in the heart of Dublin. Art historian Fintan Cullen believes the slides were produced by the Dublin photographic firm of William Lawrence, which marketed slides of evictions from Counties Clare and Galway. This disputes Gonne’s claim that the slides were taken by her longtime friend, Pat O’Brien, MP (Kilkenny),⁴¹ who had accumulated

³⁸ *Roscommon Journal*, 1 January 1998.

³⁹ Niamh McCole, “The Magic Lantern in Provincial Ireland, 1896–1906,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 5:3 (November 2007), 252–54.

⁴⁰ Niamh McCole, “Seeing Sense, The Visual Culture of Provincial Ireland 1896–1906,” PhD. Dissertation, Dublin City University, July 2005, 201.

⁴¹ See Fintan Cullen, “Marketing Sentiment: Lantern Slides of Evictions in Late Nineteenth-Century Ireland,” *History Workshop Journal* 54:1 (October 2002), 177, n.6. Maud Gonne, *The Autobiography of*

his own library of eviction photos, many of which were taken on the De Freyne estate. O'Brien was well known for carrying a small camera in his pocket to snap images of political opponents, policemen, and others he wanted to intimidate.⁴² Closely associated with protests on the De Freyne estate in the 1890s (especially during the controversial burning of the Barrett cottage in 1893), his "kodak" was a familiar sight around Frenchpark. During one eviction O'Brien ran with his camera in hand, chasing an emergency man who was pulling a hat down over his face to avoid recognition. When neighbors gathered in protest on the property of an evicted tenant, O'Brien took several shots of the "grabber in his angriest moments to the infinite amusement of the people."⁴³ Even though photographs did not appear in the local press, people recognized their power. According to Gonne, O'Brien had already used his photographs of evictions in a public exhibition long before the jubilee protest, projecting slides from a barge in the River Thames onto the parliament buildings.⁴⁴ His images of the Barrett's burned-out cottage in 1893 (labeled "instantaneous photographs" long before the advent of the Polaroid) were credited with forcing the retreat of the RIC from the estate.⁴⁵ Most of the Lawrence eviction slides were taken during the 1880s, so while Gonne may have used them during the jubilee protest, it is also more than likely that she also chose to project her friend Pat's photos from 1893 of the De Freyne estate in the 1897 protests in Parnell Square.

Maud Gonne, A Servant of the Queen, eds. A. Norman Jeffares and Anna MacBride White (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 215.

⁴² "The terrors of Mr. Patrick O'Brien's Kodak" were mentioned in the *Nation*, 4 October 1890. His use of it in court, "snapping his Kodak in the face of authority," was noted in the *Freeman's Journal* 11 May 1890.

⁴³ *Westmeath Examiner*, 4 November 1893; *Irish Daily Independent*, 3 November 1893; *Evening Herald*, 13 November 1893.

⁴⁴ Gonne, *Autobiography*, 157.

⁴⁵ *Irish Weekly Independent*, 9 December 1893.

The power of the press was well appreciated by rural citizens, and periodicals of many kinds had been available to people in the area for decades. Not long after the first issue of *The Nation* appeared in 1842, one of its Young Ireland founders, John Blake Dillon (father of the 1901 strike leader), returned to his County Roscommon home which lay, as he described it,

in the most distressed district of Ireland and wrote back excitedly to his partners: 'I am astonished at the success of *The Nation* in this poor place'—twenty-three subscriptions in hungry Ballaghaderreen. The bottom of the Irish social pyramid, 'to whom reading was not a necessity,' felt the force of the journal each week 'like electric shocks.'⁴⁶

As literacy and the availability of newspapers expanded, readers from the lower classes increased and the influence of the nationalist press grew. Marie-Louise Legg believes there is a "justification for the belief, both before and after the rebellion of 1848, that there was a link between learning to read and an involvement" in nationalist politics.⁴⁷ While temperance societies and religious groups promoted reading as a moralizing force, Legg finds examples in contemporary fiction and customs that show politics had a stronger influence on getting people to read. She also uses evidence of various examples of elite disapproval and press censorship to indicate how powerful the threat of a literate, newspaper-reading public was perceived to be. During the Land War, critics who feared the power of the nationalist press advocated for government control and censorship. Irish readers were only getting one side of the story, they argued, and Irish newspapers "persistently stirred up bad feeling between the owners and occupiers of the Soil."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Quoted in Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature, from Thomas Davis to W.B. Yeats* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 67.

⁴⁷ Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism*, 65.

⁴⁸ Lord Claud John Hamilton, MP (King's Lynn), quoted in Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism*, 115.

In 1901, Roscommon readers had ample access to local and national papers that encouraged radical changes in land ownership, particularly the *Roscommon Herald* (from 1859), *Roscommon Journal* (from 1828), and the *Roscommon Weekly Messenger* (from 1895). During the Land War, government intelligence cited the *Herald* with a handful of other provincial papers for the strength of its influence on readers. Nationwide papers with a nationalist or liberal agenda included the *Freeman's Journal* and the United Irish League's *Irish People*, and were also available in the area, but it was the local papers that were "read mainly by those on lower incomes: small farmers, artisans and shopkeepers." Legg's research shows that the lower gentry and professional class, the clergy, and the army read the *Freeman's Journal*, and the landlords and nobility read the *Irish Times* or the London press.⁴⁹

The Roscommon papers were important to the community because they ran weekly stories on local organizations, including the Associated Estates, citing names of members, quoting local leaders, and praising them for their work. They also reprinted stories from the national papers, so people knew what was happening across the country and in parliament. By trumpeting the activities of nearby athletic clubs and language groups, the local papers also encouraged cultural nationalism. When the Castlerea Dramatic Club, which was attached to a branch of the Gaelic League, presented a play called "The Wearin' of the Green" by Michael Waldron of Ballyhaunis, the local reviewer apologized for its imperfections as a drama by praising what he saw as its real value. It was "thoroughly Irish in tone and conception and so much in keeping with what the real portrayal of the Irish character should be," he wrote. Comparing its characters to those of

⁴⁹ Legg, *Newspapers and Nationalism*, 211–12, 155–156, 151.

renowned playwright Dion Boucicault, he said, “Waldron exalts his countrymen, not debases them.” In a letter to the *Herald*, the secretary of the Frenchpark football club praised his squad (called the “De Wets” after the leader of the Boer rebellion—a hero to many nationalist Irish) as the only local team “upholding Gaelic Rules.” They bought only Irish goods, he said, getting their jerseys made in Ireland and embroidered with harps and shamrocks at the Convent of Mercy in Roscommon. “It was gratifying,” he wrote, “that they were not made in Germany.”⁵⁰ At the Tir Na N’og Bazaar in Roscommon town, in the summer before the strike began, all the tickets and drawings of prizes were printed in Irish, which the *Journal* took as a sign of changes taking place in Ireland, “and that in a county like Roscommon, which is anything but an Irish-speaking county, is deserving of notice.”⁵¹

Roscommon might not have had as many Irish speakers as Counties Galway or Mayo, but strong pockets of bilingualism appear in the Castlerea PLU where most of the De Freyne estate lay. It is significant that Douglas Hyde learned Irish from tenants on the De Freyne estate, where his father was an Anglican rector and a distant relation of the French family. (Douglas’ first Irish teacher was De Freyne’s gamekeeper, Seamus Hart.)⁵² Nearly all (forty-nine out of fifty-five) of Roscommon’s Irish-only speakers in 1901 were from the Castlerea district, as was the largest cohort of Irish/English speakers, 10,209 compared to Boyle Union with the next largest at 1,664.⁵³ Even though the Castlerea Union had the highest total population in the county, these numbers seem unbalanced, and they appear even more so inside the townlands on the estate. Nearly

⁵⁰ *Roscommon Herald*, 11 January, 2 February 1902.

⁵¹ *Roscommon Journal*, 17 August 1901.

⁵² Dunleavy and Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde*, 37.

⁵³ *Census of Ireland, 1901*. Vol. IV...County of Roscommon, Table XXXVII, 130.

thirty percent of the estate townland's population (1,959 people out of 6,573) claimed to speak Irish in 1901 (this includes Irish-only and bilingual speakers), compared to fifteen percent for all of Roscommon, and closer to thirteen percent in Ireland as a whole.⁵⁴ It is tempting to draw the conclusion from these figures that the tenant community on the De Freyne estate was more insular than those in the rest of the county because so many of them still spoke Irish in 1901.

Research by Nicholas Wolf undercuts such facile interpretations. He says the Irish language was widely used within the framework of modern social, ecclesiastical, economic, and legal structures long past the dates previously appointed for its demise. He argues that facility in Irish did not impede participation in the transactions of a modern society, nor did it foster a segregated community “locked in struggle with its English-speaking counterpart” as some histories imagine.⁵⁵ Yet it did provide a mortar with which to construct a common identity and may have encouraged certain people to associate in group actions like the rent strike. When John Dillon told a story about a police reporter taking notes at a strike meeting in Frenchpark who dropped his pencil “as if he were shot” when a “fine Irish speaker” began to talk, he automatically linked the Irish language to the strike community.⁵⁶ While local leaders like Bernard Harte, Patrick Webb and John Fitzgibbon did not profess knowledge of Irish on the census, more than a third of the members of the Associated Estates named in the *Freeman's Journal* did. (These figures are difficult to interpret because so many people left the language question blank

⁵⁴ *Census of Ireland, 1901*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>. [Cd. 1190] *Census of Ireland, 1901. Part II*, Table 1, p. 109, Table 37, 153.

⁵⁵ Nicholas M. Wolf, *An Irish-Speaking Island, State, Religion, Community, and the Linguistic Landscape in Ireland, 1770–1870* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 14, and *passim*.

⁵⁶ *Irish People*, 23 December 1901.

on the census.) Also, in a sample of tenants who were evicted by Lord De Freyne after the strike began, there was at least one Irish speaker in seventy-five percent of their homes.

Names and Stories

What can we know about the people who refused to pay their rent in 1901, and of their hopes for the future? To begin, we can learn some of their names, how much land did they held, and what kind of houses they lived in. No lists of defaulting tenants survive in the estate papers to elaborate on the agent's claim that his rent office was empty that November. Some strike supporters can be identified through a membership list of the Associated Estates published in the press,⁵⁷ and others were named in De Freyne's private surveillance, but these amount to just a few dozen names. The only other sources that link individual tenants to the rent strike are newspaper accounts of the evictions that followed in 1902–03. Not only do they name tenants by townland, but they also provide rich and evocative stories about individual lives and behavior. Eviction is not absolute proof that these tenants supported the strike, especially since most of them had not paid rent for a very long time, and therefore carried many years' worth of accumulated court costs as well. However, the general assumption seems to have been that anyone faced with eviction for non-payment of rent was necessarily part of the agitation, no matter when they had first stopped paying. Little distinction was made by the press, the landlord, the government, politicians, or the clergy between those who did not pay because they

⁵⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 3 January 1902.

could not (or had not been able to for years), and those who did not pay in 1901 because they *would not*.⁵⁸

Not all of the active association members and strike leaders can be traced through the census and valuation documents, but of the thirty-one names remaining, a wide range of ages, education, family circumstances, and size of holdings emerge.⁵⁹ That range diminishes for tenants appointed to the “standing committee” charged with meeting weekly “until the fight is over,” as they tended to be those with larger holdings and nicer homes. Along with representatives from the Murphy, O’Grady and O’Connor estates, those from the De Freyne estate on that committee were Patrick Gordon of Aghalustia (135 acres), Cormac Gordon of Kilgarve (162), Bernard Harte of Portaghard (13), William Elwood of Carrowbehy, who was also a shopkeeper and postmaster (46), Michael Egan of Cloonfad (26), and Michael Neafsy of Feigh (24). The only non-landholder on the committee was Michael Hunt of Ballyglass West (identified in the newspaper as living in the next-door townland of Kilroddan), a laborer who lived with his mother on a holding of less than twenty acres. Everyone on this committee from the estate was literate, and all except Hunt were farmers. On the full association roster, most members from the estate were farmers or farmer’s sons (three more besides Hunt called themselves “laborers”), and all but two (both in their fifties) could read and write. Their ages ranged from twenty-one to seventy-five, with an average of forty-two.

⁵⁸ Police reports argued that the no-rent action was willful, that tenants on the De Freyne estate were “generally comfortable,” and that even though the “majority are poor...it is believed they could pay their rents.” “Movement against payment of rent,” County Roscommon, Ballaghaderreen, 28 November 1901, CSORP/ 1901/ 24462, NAI.

⁵⁹ Information about individuals was obtained from *Census of Ireland 1901/1911*, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie>.

The homes these strike supporters lived in were largely third-class dwellings, per census standards, with only thirteen second-class, and two first-class dwellings. Many of those homes were crowded. The James Waldrons in Breanamore had ten people in two rooms, the Patt Ryans in Gortaganny had ten in three, the Owen Lavins in Lissacurrkia had eleven in two, and the John Dillons in Tully had eleven in three rooms. Most of the holdings were below twenty acres, so it is very likely that a good number of the Associated Estates members were migratory workers for part of the year. The majority had families to care for (just eight were unmarried).

In the sample of forty-four families identified through eviction stories in 1902–03, only one name, Michael Johnston of Roosky, also appears on the membership roster for the Associated Estates. This does not mean that other evicted tenants were not part of the organization, or that the association members were not targets of eviction at other times. What it does suggest is that the agent proceeded first against tenants with long records of non-payment, rather than targeting strike supporters just to punish them for their membership, especially if their payment histories did not lend themselves as easily to prosecution. The sample does not represent the actual number of evictions over the course of the strike, which would have been much higher, since Lord De Freyne filed hundreds of ejectment writs.⁶⁰ He does not appear to have followed through on all those notices, perhaps relying on the old landlord's trick of controlling tenants by merely threatening eviction.⁶¹

⁶⁰ In January and April 1902, Lord De Freyne filed over four hundred writs of ejectment, *Irish Times*, 9 October 1902; in October 1902 he filed 300, *New York Times*, 9 October 1902.

⁶¹ This was not as common after the Land Act of 1870, which allowed tenants to buck such a threat with counter claims for improvements they made on their holdings. In Clark, *Social Origins*, 179.

The evicted families were from the electoral districts of Artagh North, Artagh South, Buckhill, and Frenchpark, which all lay within a few miles of each other.⁶² Fathers and mothers were farmers, farm laborers, or farmers' wives, although some women claimed an occupation as housekeeper, washwoman, or dressmaker. Younger children were often identified as "scholar." As noted earlier, while English was universal in every home (except that of Winifred Connor of Aghalustia, a monoglot Irish speaker who lived alone), there was someone in most of these homes with a knowledge of Irish. Household size could be quite large: the Johnstons in Roosky had eleven; in Aghalustia, the Cartys had nine in their household, and the Giblins and the Caseys had eight each. There were ten Sharkeys in Lissacurkia, eight Maddens in Coracoggil South, and eight Scallys in Cloonagh. While large families were common, so were the deaths of children: Bridget Corrigan in Roosky lost eight of fourteen, and her neighbors, the Naughtons, lost two of eleven. Patrick and Ellen Lavin of Lissacurkia lost three of ten; Michael and Maria Carty of Aghalustia lost seven of twelve children, and the Gribbins down the road lost three of five. These family patterns were not unusual, even for the gentry, as Lord De Freyne himself had thirteen children from two marriages and lost his oldest daughter when she was fourteen.⁶³

Holdings ranged from just a few acres up to fifty-eight, but only nine of the forty-four processed for eviction were over twenty, and valuations, except for the largest properties, were £10 or less. None of these tenants had more than three out-buildings, except Thomas King in Figh who had six. All their roofs were made of combustible stuff

⁶² *Discovery Series 32*, Ordnance Survey Ireland.

⁶³ "Arthur French, 4th Baron de Freyne of Coolavin," *The Peerage*, <http://thepeerage.com/p7614.htm#i76134>.

like wood or thatch. Thomas Kenny's house in Clooncah was the only fourth-class house, but there were twenty-four families living in third-class dwellings, and eighteen others in second-class houses. Most families lived in only two rooms, although about a dozen had three rooms, and Mary Lavin's in Turlagharee had four. House ratings can be misleading because an extra window on an otherwise indistinguishable facade could change the classification. So, while these tenants seem to occupy the same economic stratum, a wide divergence in building structure and maintenance, land quality, stock holdings, or household goods can hide behind the census rating.

For instance, Norah Freeman's house in Cloonbunny was "exceedingly neat and pretty," even though "she had not a half-penny in the house" to avoid eviction.⁶⁴ William Reid's house in Feigh was a "well-kept substantial building," with out-buildings in good repair. He was able to achieve a settlement with agent Woulfe Flanagan, even though his land could not yield a profit. He relied on his sons—six in America, one in London and one in Dublin—to support him. In contrast, the three houses owned by the Regan brothers at Corracoggil South were described as "wretched hovels." Down the road, Bridget Madden lived in a "miserable cottage" with "floor space of perhaps twenty by twelve" on land that was partially "wet and marshy." She was evicted in "the pitiless rain" because she had no money and no assets after the death of some pigs and a bullock (her husband, Owen, was working in England at the time). Nearby, John Coleman and Martin Doherty held twenty acres together, a third of which flooded during the summer and more in the winter. They had "poor unsubstantial structures" but which were kept in better order than those of their neighbors.⁶⁵ John Sharkey in Lissacurskia, "a decrepit old man," said he

⁶⁴ *Southern Star*, 30 August 1902.

⁶⁵ *Irish Times*, 5, 8 and 9 July 1902; *The Morning Leader*, reprinted in *The Southern Star*, 19 July 1902.

had paid his rent regularly for over thirty years with the support of two brothers in America. His farmhouse was “a substantial building, in good repair” but his land was “of bad quality, and the greater portion...flooded in the winter.” The house was a quarter mile from the public road and his only animals were two goats and two pigs, but no poultry.⁶⁶ Winfred Morrisroe’s house in Cartron Beg had windows without glass, stuffed with “straw and rags” and no doors. Possessing only a goat, she relied on three daughters in America and a son in England for her rent.⁶⁷

Another set of evictions late in 1903 included that of Thomas Scally of Cloonagh, where five families lived on fourteen acres. The route to his house was “through roads almost impassable from flooding.” His dwelling was “a miserable cabin the greater portion of which is given up to the accommodation of the few four-footed animals in the tenant’s possession.” The Scallys’ neighbors, the O’Grealys (or O’Grady in the census), lived on “the worst repaired road in the country.” Thomas Kenny’s house nearby was a “mere cabin,” whose entrance was “perilously close to an unsavoury looking cesspool.” All three of the husbands in these families were working in England when the evictions took place.⁶⁸ In Cloonmaul, John Doherty’s holding of five acres had only two that were arable. Mary Barrett’s home in Curraghard was described as “a wretched-looking cabin with two acres of land” and no livestock. It was a “long, weary march through breen and across bog land” to where Catherine Coffey shared her holding with her daughter-in-law, whose husband had been in America for nine years and provided little support.

The house is a mere hovel, composed of one apartment, with the light peeping in through the smoke-begrimed rafters. With the exception of a rickety table and a decrepit dresser, on which there were several cracked cups and bowls, the house

⁶⁶ *Irish Times*, 23 July 1902.

⁶⁷ *Evening Herald*, 14 August 1902; *Irish Times*, 14 August 1902.

⁶⁸ *Irish Times*, 6 October 1903.

was devoid of furniture. A rough ledge in the corner, on which there was some loose straw, did duty as a bed... As it was impossible to induce even an emergency man to go into possession of the hovel, the one window it possessed was nailed up and the agent having procured staples, padlocked the door himself.⁶⁹

Tenants, no matter what the condition of their properties, had varied reactions to the arrival of these evicting parties. Some removed their furniture and belongings before the sheriff arrived with a kind of resigned determination, but others resisted with vehemence. Cohorts of emergency men hired from distant counties (often in Ulster) were backed by police for these evictions. In August 1902, a “large body of constabulary were sent over from Roscommon and other stations, and when to those were added the local men about a hundred police of all grades, including about a dozen on bicycles” were assembled in Frenchpark for eviction duty on the De Freyne estate.⁷⁰ The people who resisted eviction were drawing on a tradition in Ireland of battling the bailiff that went back at least to the days of the Land League.⁷¹ In Cloonmagunnaun, John McDermottroe, his wife Bridget, and three of their nine daughters (three were in England, and three in America) joined in the fight to save their home, “cursing and abusing the agent and his men.” District RIC Inspector Hetreed “was almost knocked off his feet by a girl who pushed him violently from behind,” as another woman threw mud in the agent’s face. McDermottroe offered to pay the four years’ rent he owed, but his offer was rejected when he would not cover £38 in court costs as well. When they were finally forced out of the house, Bridget was

almost out of her mind with grief and seeing that all her attempts to recover possessions were futile, she knelt down at the door steps, and surrounded by about

⁶⁹ *Irish Times*, 7 October 1903.

⁷⁰ *Evening Herald*, 14 August 1902.

⁷¹ See Curtis, *The Depiction of Eviction in Ireland*, 194–223.

40 young girls, set up a *caoine* for the loss of her home... while it lasted the hands of the authorities seemed to be instinctively stayed.⁷²

Bernard King of Feigh barricaded his house against eviction with “a wall of stones” and boiling liquids, barring the doors and windows. When he tried to attack the bailiffs, the police carried him off.⁷³ King said money his grandmother earned in London secured the “fine” to rent the farm in the first place, and his wife had worked in America for years to pay for improvements. After the eviction, King and his family moved to a neighbor’s stable.⁷⁴ At Catherine Coffey’s in Curragherd, the 66-year-old woman and her daughter-in-law, Eliza, struggled with the bailiffs over pieces of furniture, forcing the police to step in, just as a young girl hit the agent in the face with a piece of turf.⁷⁵ A woman in Clooncah would not accept an offer made by Woulfe Flanagan, declaring that “sooner than do so she would take her children and walk into the lake.” Later, as her front door was being nailed shut, she handed her baby to a neighbor and threw herself at the bailiff, who needed the police to rescue him. Her children, coming home from school, found their mother being held by the police, and jumped into the fray to try to release her. Again, Woulfe Flanagan got a face full of dirt from an onlooker. Retreating, he also dodged a stone thrown at his head. One the way back to the main road the assembled crowd “treated him to a fusillade of cabbage and sods.”⁷⁶

Barring Bernard King and John McDermottroe’s efforts, it was women and girls who usually commandeered the front lines of resistance at evictions on the Associated

⁷² *Evening Herald*, 14 August 1902.

⁷³ *Irish Times*, 23 July 1902; *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 December 1902.

⁷⁴ Sutherland, *Ireland Yesterday and Today*, 1909), p. 62; *Evening Herald*, 23 August 1902; *Western People*, 22 November 1902.

⁷⁵ *Irish Times*, 7 October 1903.

⁷⁶ *Irish Times*, 6 October 1903.

Estates, as they had at evictions in Ireland since the 1880s. Wives and daughters were often the only ones at home when the sheriff arrived if the men were working abroad, but there was another more strategic reason for the women's behavior. Men remained silent, or on the sidelines, because they expected to receive harsher treatment from the police.⁷⁷ It was common that "the young girls and women of riper years were sometimes very disorderly and behaved offensively towards the bailiff and Mr. Flanagan." Although this kind of gendered resistance did not fall directly under the organizing influence of the United Irish League, it was nevertheless effective. Long before Bridget McDermottroe knelt at her front door to *caoine* for the loss of her home, the evicting party had arrived at her house to find that

The kitchen was filled with old women and young girls, their respective ages ranging from about 10 to 60...the bailiff...was received with a storm of groans, and language of very abusive character was used towards Mr. Flanagan. Aided by several constables, the bailiff made an effort to clear the house. This was not a pleasant task, and it did not look an easy one, for when the women were dislodged from one corner, they ran to another, some weeping, some hurling foul names at both the agent and the bailiff, and others making noises which were wholly indescribable.

Later, as the evicting party was leaving, "the women kept up a continual wail" and two younger women, probably McDermottroe's daughters, knelt on the grass "and prayed that something which is never associated with blessing might overtake Mr. Flanagan before he reached his home." Sometimes, the descriptions of these interactions with the authorities suggested a kind of vexatious flirtation, as in a confrontation where young women "varied their performances at short intervals by chaffing the police in a good-humored way"⁷⁸ or in another, when "the robust, barefooted, peasant girls made

⁷⁷ Janet TeBrake, "Irish Peasant Women in Revolt: The Land League Years," *Irish Historical Studies*, 28:109 (1992), 76–77.

⁷⁸ *Irish Times*, 14 August 1902.

merry at the expense of the police, and their laughing countenances contrasted with the faces of the victims.”⁷⁹ While the women’s proactive role in eviction resistance cannot be interpreted as evidence of parity with men, it is illustrative of collective action that flourished outside of the formal structure of political organization.

Despite these incidents, an *Irish Times* correspondent at one of the early evictions wondered if the resistance was losing its mettle. He noted, with what may have been wishful thinking, that the De Freyne tenants were “in no way pugnacious,” and that to “any person acquainted with the turbulent scenes which characterized the evictions of fifteen or twenty years ago, the scenes of yesterday seemed tame and trivial.”⁸⁰ It was true that many of these evictions led to settlements, or ended in tenants offering to pay and then having their offers refused when they could not cover the extra costs. Paying rent, early in the strike effort, was considered traitorous behavior, but by the time the evictions began in the summer of 1902 attitudes may have softened. That fall, a companion travelling with the sympathetic Ulster politician T.W. Russell said that paying rent was still “not the popular procedure” among tenants on the estate, but those who did pay were not “molested, or shunned in any way. They come into Castlerea and shop like others, there being no attempt at boycotting.”⁸¹ Even a UIL leader like John Fitzgibbon seems to have averted his eyes when McDermottroe tried to pay his rent (UIL leaders were often in attendance at evictions).⁸² Since the UIL was reluctant to condone a rent strike from the start, perhaps it overlooked payments during the eviction campaign as a

⁷⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 9 July 1902.

⁸⁰ *Irish Times*, 8 July 1902.

⁸¹ *Western People*, 22 November 1902.

⁸² *Evening Herald*, 14 August 1902.

way to eliminate the illegality of the strike while not compromising the collective effort against landlordism and grazing.

Eviction resistance shows how tenant-driven protest could intersect with the agenda of the UIL. Another indigenous form of protest available to strikers was local brass and marching bands like the one from Frenchpark which appeared frequently during the strike.⁸³ These were local voluntary organizations that existed for many years before and after the strike, but which regularly appeared in tandem with large meetings and rallies in 1901, often leading huge contingents of tenants walking to the meeting locations. The band from Castlerea had been around in one form or another since the time of Daniel O’Connell, and a newer iteration of it boasted, perhaps in self-defense, that the members were “the sons of all the respectable stock of tradesmen of Castlerea, and have always been remarkable for good conduct.”⁸⁴ *An Druma Mór* (The Big Drum), an Irish language novel set in Donegal, places the start of a local musical tradition there to the time of O’Connell as well, and emphasizes how integral a marching band culture was to a remote rural area.⁸⁵ In Roscommon, while the bands were town-based (in addition to Frenchpark and Castlerea, Boyle also had a contingent that appeared at strike meetings), there may have been the same loyalty and enthusiasm among rural residents as existed in Donegal.

These bands had a long history of aligning with nationalist causes, like the Castlerea group which boasted it had greeted “the mighty Tribune O’Connell,” and was

⁸³ The Frenchpark band appeared at the 17 November rally at which John Dillon was later accused of igniting the strike. *Freemans Journal*, 19 November 1901.

⁸⁴ *Mayo Examiner*, 13 September 1869.

⁸⁵ Seosamh Mac Grianna, *The Big Drum*, Art Hughes, tr. (Belfast: Ben Madigan Press, 2009), 10. Written in the 1930s, the novel is set between 1912–17.

“second to none in Connaught.”⁸⁶ A band from Boyle, returning from a Land League meeting in Elphin in 1880, stopped twice—first at the home of “an unpopular landowner in the locality” and then at the home of a man who was being guarded by twenty policemen (probably because he was deemed a land grabber)—to play the funeral march by Hayden from his “Saul” oratorio. The performances drew “hooting and groaning” from people nearby.⁸⁷ Spontaneous drum and horn playing was reported in the early days of the strike, but the participation of the more established, and accomplished, musical groups in the agitation reveals that creativity, emotion, and playfulness were as much a part of the agitation as politics or dogged determinism. It is left to the imagination to conjure the atmosphere of a strike meeting attended by thousands where Irish melodies or martial airs played by brass bands resounded through the night air.

Reflection

Investigating the mental landscapes of people long dead, who have left few clues behind them, is in many ways an exercise in frustration. While the documentation says that people on the De Freyne estate were able to read and write, we do not know what they thought about themselves or their place in the world, apart from what might be expected given their religion and political orientation. Still, while tenant families regularly faced pressing problems of a practical nature, it would be shortsighted to assume that they were without imagination or insight. The lack of written evidence about the strike in the form of diaries, letters, memoirs, or literature of any kind suggests people feared reprisal for recording their thoughts or did not have enough confidence in

⁸⁶ *Mayo Examiner*, 13 September 1869.

⁸⁷ The use of a classical piece which resonated with local people suggests a shared musical literacy. *The Nation*, 7 March 1880.

themselves or their own literary acumen to put their ideas in print. Perhaps they were able to express their doubts and dreams sufficiently through the medium of conversation, or perhaps issues surrounding the strike were too complicated to quantify. People certainly read newspapers and had access to other forms of literature. They would have enjoyed traditional forms of entertainment like music and dance, and could have been exposed to plays, magic lantern slides, the cultural enterprises of the Gaelic League, and other activities. However, the dearth of libraries, book shops, and other sources of textual intellectual stimulation was troubling to observers at the time, who realized that not only were there no jobs for young people to keep them in the countryside, neither was there anything to engage their minds. People must have felt this deficiency, even if some dismissed it as a less than pressing issue.

One of the character traits that fueled the strike was a deep belief in the power of communal solidarity. While the violent resistance to evictions was not unique to the estate or the time, the prevalence of community-sourced forms of protest—often gendered—suggests that the processes that produce attitudes, ideas, and aspirations were also communally wired. A similar form of intellectual engagement is evident in the ways people read books and newspapers as a group activity, and in how they preferred to encounter visual entertainment as an ensemble rather than as solitary viewers. Looking at what we can know about the De Freyne tenants, it seems possible that they considered the development of an interior life in the same way they dealt with farming and politics: as something rooted in individual need that was best accomplished as a group. Perhaps that explains why a crowd of women could assemble so quickly to battle the RIC to save their homes, but no one seems to have written a poem about it.

CHAPTER 8: AFTERWARDS / MEMORY

Landgrabbers, so hateful, so cruel, so vile,
Were the curse and the scourge of the Emerald Isle;
But the days of these grabbers, so cunning and clever,
Are gone with a vengeance, aye, gone and for ever. (sic)¹

Someone, probably from Mayo where the *Connaught Telegraph* was published, wrote this poem about landgrabbers in 1902. While the anonymous author invoked triumph over injustice, he or she was guilty of wishful thinking. Even after the “ranch war” of 1906–10 subsided,² landgrabbers and graziers continued to be objects of rural opprobrium, well into the time of the Irish Free State, and cattle-driving, in which the stock of a grazier would be scattered off his land, was among many forms of protest against large land holders and owners. This continuing animosity occurred for the simple reason that a great number of people in the congested districts, even those who now owned their farms, still did not have enough good land to support their families. They pointed the blame for their plight on those who had managed to acquire more land, whether or not the small holders had a legal claim to it. This was certainly true on the De Freyne estate, and the disparity stemming from the distribution of land is one likely reason why the accomplishments of the rent strikers were wiped from memory. The claimants were convinced that the spoils of the Land War had not been distributed evenly. In one litigation against cattle drivers in Roscommon, “all the defendants admitted that they drove the stock, but they were suffering under a grievance, real or

¹ *Connaught Telegraph*, 9 August 1902.

² A description of the conflict can be found in Jones, *Graziers*, 184–203.

imaginary. Most of them occupied small holdings of land, and they felt that while there were large tracts of land at their doors, they were entitled to a share of it.”³

On March 18, 1919, a group of people walked onto the De Freyne demesne near Errit and began digging up the pasture land. They represented thirty-six nearby families who professed claims to the land, including some who had been evicted from it in the 1880s when it was first let for grazing on the eleven-month system. They already had sent the local priest to Lord De Freyne (then Francis French, 6th Baron) to ask him to sell it to them or to the CDB so they could increase their small properties. De Freyne promised to sell to the highest bidder, but surreptitiously gave twenty-one-year leases to his grazing tenants instead. In protest, the claimants took possession of the property and began digging, but after being confronted by the police, they soon walked away peacefully. Later, De Freyne cancelled a lawsuit against them, even though they had “entered his land and ploughed it up for division amongst the tenants.” They had ceased their agitation and “he did not desire to cast a stigma on the people of the locality.”⁴

For the half dozen graziers who held that land, however, the consequences of occupying it were far more serious. The following New Years’ Eve their homes were attacked with rocks, their gates and doors were demolished, and their turf supplies were destroyed. One of them, Thomas Casey of Carrowbehy, said he had long been “boycotted for having land in Lord De Freyne’s estate.” He was constantly taunted when he went out in public and “could not pass the road without being hooted and shouted.” Another, Thomas Morris of Gortaganny, was accused by a neighbor’s young daughter of hitting

³ *Irish Times*, 4 May 1920. Incidents of cattle-driving and agrarian protest were reported across County Roscommon. *Irish Times*, 10 May, 22 May 1920; *Freeman’s Journal*, 29 April, 5 May 1920.

⁴ *Westmeath Independent*, 19 April, 31 May 1919; *Freeman’s Journal*, 27 May 1919.

her on the head with a stick because she had called him a “grabber.” The charge against him was later dismissed by a judge who did not believe the girl’s story. He declared it was “the most disgraceful thing on God’s earth—parents...training a child, to commit perjury to have revenge on a man with whom they had a quarrel.”⁵ Nearly two decades after the strike began, rural agitation on the estate continued, but in 1919–20 it was neighbors, not the landlord, who were the primary targets of protest.

Simmering during the war years, the discontent over the lack of adequate land sparked a resurgence of rural unrest across the western counties when the Armistice came in 1918. As in the past, agrarian agitation could be politically useful, as Sinn Féin (in North Roscommon under the leadership of Father Michael O’Flanagan) supported the demands of the land hungry when expedient but cooled its enthusiasm when necessary (as when land distribution was likened to a Bolshevik “reign of terror”). The question of how to distribute grazing land was problematic everywhere, because so many prominent people held pasture land themselves.⁶ The CDB was criticized for its class bias because it allowed landlords, like Lord De Freyne, to retain control over demesne land, which would have been prime locations for redistribution. Tony Varley argues that this “practice, and that of re-selling untenanted land back to the seller, was taken as evidence that the state was more concerned with safeguarding the interest of a still powerful landlord/grazier class than in performing its statutory duties.”⁷

⁵ *Westmeath Independent*, 19 April, 31 May 1919; *Offaly Independent*, 14 February 1920.

⁶ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 214–17.

⁷ Tony Varley, “A Region of Sturdy Smallholders? Western Nationalists and Agrarian Politics during the First World War,” *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 55 (2003), 133.

While it dovetailed with revolutionary activities during the War of Independence in 1919–21, agrarian agitation retained its singular power to ignite passions.⁸ Dooley argues that during the treaty debate in 1921 for “the majority of people living in rural Ireland, access to land continued to be a possibly more desirable commodity than independence.”⁹ So alarmed were the leaders of the new Dáil Éireann by the unrest in the countryside that they established a system of land courts directly under its control. The new court officers reported that County Roscommon was particularly rife with agitation, even more so than “the traditionally turbulent counties” of Mayo and Galway. A memorandum to the Dáil labeled “Regarding Cattle Drivers, Marauders, Terrorists, and Hooligans” (written by Graham Sennett, an auctioneer in Roscommon and a Protestant Sinn Féiner) begged the new government to put a halt to “driving first and bargaining afterwards.” Kevin O’Shiel, a land court judge appointed by the Dáil, took a long view of the situation. While the “agrarian trouble in Co. Roscommon was...exceptionally bad... The roots of that last of the Western Land Wars lay, of course, far back in history.” But O’Shiel also believed the Great War had added to the land hunger which sparked the violence. From 1914–19, the purchase programs of the CDB and Land Commission had been suspended, and migratory labor and other forms of emigration had been halted, “thereby enormously increasing the number of young men in the country with no other outlet to look to but primitive husbandry.” Without jobs or the possibility of going abroad

⁸ On the De Freyne estate, an example of revolutionary activity was an attempt to destroy the police barracks in Frenchpark. Although the plans were thwarted, uniformed squads nevertheless burned houses and businesses in reprisal in Frenchpark and nearby villages searching out those responsible. *Irish Independent*, 4 October 1920, *Offaly Independent*, 9 October 1920. The barracks were attacked again the following June. *Irish Times*, 29 June 1921.

⁹ Terence Dooley, “Land and politics in independent Ireland, 1923–48: the case for reappraisal,” *Irish Historical Studies*, 34:134 (November 2004), 175.

to find work, people needed land, a goal which became even more out of reach when wartime inflation forced land prices to rise.¹⁰

Although the ripple effects of halting land purchase for five years would have been felt everywhere, the suspension did not impede the initial sale of the De Freyne property. The purchase of De Freyne's 36,250 acres was confirmed by the CDB in 1906.¹¹ (Only those estates where the offer to purchase was "unaccepted, but still pending" were affected during the wartime break.¹²) The terms of the 1906 settlement with the CDB promised tenants mortgages from fourteen to twenty-one years, at five to seven shillings per pound less than they had paid in rent. All of his tenanted land would be sold, but the baron would retain the Frenchpark and Errit demesne lands and all sporting rights. Evicted tenants were to be installed as caretakers by the CDB until they were offered their own annuity terms.¹³ Despite the progress these terms offered, the actual divestiture of the property among the tenants would take years to complete. In 1907, when the CDB prepared to distribute seven thousand acres near Castlerea into twenty- and thirty-acre plots, two hundred applicants already stood in line.¹⁴ Yet by 1909, just before the Birrell Land Act would make the CDB a corporate board with greater powers, only thirteen properties on the De Freyne estate had been sold to former

¹⁰ Kevin O'Shiel, "On the edge of anarchy," *Irish Times*, 12 November 1966, one article in a six-part memoir, reprinted in Fergus Campbell and Kevin O'Shiel, "The Last Land War? Kevin O'Shiel's Memoir of the Irish Revolution," *Archivivium Hibernicum* 25 (2003), 155–200. The original series was published in the *Irish Times* on 11, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, and 20 November 1966. The dispute on the Errit demesne lands was heard in O'Shiel's court, and the judgment required a court-appointed valuer to determine "the persons most worthy of retaining all these holdings" among either the tenants or the claimants, but the final outcome is not recorded. "Statement by Witness Commissioner Kevin R. O'Sheil, B.L.," *Bureau of Military History*, 1913–21, W.S. 1770, File No. S. 909, 1,052–57, www.bureauofmilitaryhistory.ie.

¹¹ *Seventeenth Report of The Congested Districts Board for Ireland* [Cd. 4340] 1908, 113.

¹² *Twenty-Seventh Report of The Congested Districts Board for Ireland*, [Cmd.759] 1920, 20.

¹³ *Freeman's Journal*, 18 October 1904; *Roscommon Messenger*, 22 October 1904; *Irish Independent*, 29 March 1905.

¹⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1907.

tenants.¹⁵ In the valuation records, most properties are not recorded as being “in fee” until 1914–16, and many others were not officially in tenants’ hands until after the establishment of the Free State Land Commission in 1923.

These delays were caused by many factors, one being that initially the CDB was charged with improving deficient properties before they could be sold to occupiers. The De Freyne estate must have been considered particularly inadequate because the board spent £34,741 on improving roads, bridges, fences, housing and drainage there from 1903–08, far more than it spent on all but one of the ninety or so properties it handled at that time.¹⁶ Another important factor in the delay was that the mechanism by which tenants with small farms would become owners of bigger properties was still untested and evolving. Even the property in the fabled Dillon settlement was bedeviled by the cumbersome process of deciding who would get what land. The CDB was clear that its mandate was “not to add to the number of landholders by providing new holdings for men who are not already landholders, but to enlarge the small holdings of existing occupiers.”¹⁷

This was of little comfort to landless laborers, but the methods used to enlarge holdings would be problematic for occupiers as well. The board had originally hoped to increase the size of farms by combining the properties of any tenants who might be persuaded to emigrate (after the purchase of their tenant-right) and distributing that land among those who stayed behind. It soon became apparent that “Hardly any small tenant in the west of Ireland who has land would give it up in order to emigrate.” The board

¹⁵ *Eighteenth Report of The Congested Districts Board for Ireland* [Cd. 4927] 1909, 139.

¹⁶ *Seventeenth Report of The Congested Districts Board for Ireland* [Cd. 4340] 1908, 140–41.

¹⁷ *Seventeenth Report of The Congested Districts Board for Ireland* [Cd. 4340] 1908, 12.

tried another tactic: purchasing untenanted land nearby and “migrating” nearby tenants onto it. Initially, the idea was that the most prosperous tenants would be chosen to migrate, leaving behind their more desirable farms to be divided among former neighbors with smaller, less profitable holdings. Choosing the criteria to determine who would migrate and who would not was a difficult process from the start. In 1907 the Roscommon County Council was asked for its views “as to the class of tenants to be migrated and the desirability of locating an agricultural instructor in the midst of them to teach them better methods of agriculture.”¹⁸ Unfortunately, in many townlands there were not any prosperous farms to vacate. In those cases, migrants would have to be drawn from the class of poorer farmers, and “the holdings of those who remained could be little increased by the addition of the vacated small holdings.” The entire process was deemed “a tedious and expensive way of relieving congestion.”¹⁹

Apparently the CDB was not concerned with how much rancor its redistribution plans might cause in a locality where some people were removed to “better” land and others were given bits and pieces of their former neighbors’ property to add to their own. The board expressed frustration, not sympathy, with tenants who did not easily acquiesce to its initiatives on property realignment and the assignment of turbary rights, so the inevitable ensuing debates added to the delays affecting land distribution. As early as 1901, the CDB had complained about problems in redistributing property on the Dillon estate, citing many “contradictory claims and petty conflicting interests” among tenants. In some cases, the board said that “a single individual, by refusing to accept a new ‘striped’ holding in lieu of a dozen patches of land distributed among his neighbours’

¹⁸ *Manchester Guardian*, 3 April 1907.

¹⁹ *Twenty-Seventh Report of The Congested Districts Board for Ireland*, [Cmd.759] 1920, 18–19.

(sic) possessions, blocks the improvement of a whole townland, to his own no less than others' detriment." The Dillon tenants also refused to cede control over sporting and mineral rights to the CDB, and further frustrated the board when they balked at its suggestions on how to manage those rights themselves.²⁰ On the De Freyne lands that were dug up in Errit, even though the majority of the graziers were sympathetic to the claimants and would have relinquished their land, two of the eleven-month tenants refused to go along and thus prevented a speedy settlement.²¹

At least sixty-two families across the De Freyne estate were "migrated" to other properties, including some who had been evicted during and after the strike. The CDB paid the migrants for their tenant-right when they vacated the land, except in the case of evicted tenants, who do not seem to have been paid at all.²² It is impossible to track migrated families precisely, or to determine if they increased their holdings as part of the migration process. However, the majority of families evicted during the strike seem to have survived in place. Of forty-four households described in newspaper eviction stories in 1902–03, forty were still residing in the same townlands in 1911. The missing four were elderly and may have died in the interim. Most original heads of household were still in residence in 1911, and if they were not, their adult children or widows remained (two families were headed by "married" women in the census, indicating that their husbands were still alive but elsewhere, possibly working abroad). Housing ratings remained nearly the same from 1901–11; there were slight improvements in the ratings for only eleven of these evicted families.

²⁰ *Tenth Report of The Congested Districts Board for Ireland* [Cd. 681], 18–21.

²¹ O'Shiel, *Bureau of Military History*, 1913–21, W.S. 1770, File No. S. 909, 1,054.

²² *Seventeenth Report of The Congested Districts Board for Ireland* [Cd. 4340] 1908, 120–21.

Also remaining in place were those tenants that De Freyne had identified in his papers as strike leaders. Martin Flanagan of Errit, Thomas Raftery of Gortaganny, Pat Hevican of Carrowbehy, Bernard Harte of Portaghard, and John Dillon of Tully were all living in the same townlands in 1911, and in the same kind of houses (Harte and Hevican were survived by widows). Of twenty-seven other De Freyne tenants marked as members of the Associated Estates in 1902,²³ all but four were still living in the same places in 1911 (or were survived by widows or immediate family.) Even the families who Lord De Freyne said had paid their rent during the strike also remained in place, all living in similar homes (Jordan Loughlin, who was elderly in 1901, was survived by his daughters).

It is not possible to determine when or if these people's circumstances improved after the strike, but it seems likely that for most people things stayed pretty much the same. Nonetheless, after 1906 many of the strikers, strikebreakers and victims of eviction were on their way to becoming landowners. Owning land did not solve all their problems, of course, and in some cases may have only reinforced existing deficiencies in land quality and the equity of distribution. One thing is certain, for at least ten years after the strike, virtually none of these families went away. While this continuity suggests that a strong local memory of the rent strike should have persisted, the events of 1901–02 were instead swallowed into a generally vague set of tales about land issues and agitation. In a community where poverty and protest had been commonplace over generations, the settlement of the rent strike did not rank as a victory worth talking about, though in comparison with other kinds of unrest the tenants had lived through—the Land League,

²³ *Freeman's Journal*, 3 January 1902.

the Plan of Campaign, or the evictions and house burnings of the 1890s—it actually ended in a kind of triumph.

Guy Beiner has argued that “the memory of historical events does not begin after the event in question, or even during the event, but perhaps before the event...we tend to base our memories on templates provided by recollections of earlier experiences.” In other words, we remember things in the same way we have remembered similar things in the past. In nationalist Ireland, he says historic events have often been recalled through what he calls “the triumph of defeat.” Fed by a “deep memory” of trauma and its pantheon of martyrs, the tradition celebrates, not the defeat itself, but rather the continuing quest for the job undone, which is accepted to be the creation of an Irish nation.²⁴ The De Freyne rent strike did not offer an easy accommodation to that template; what it possessed in trauma, it lacked in martyrs and a sense of what the path going forward would be. There was one moment of celebration—when John Fitzgibbon announced the settlement in 1905 and bonfires were lit on the hills around Fairymount—but it did not last long.²⁵ The tenants would live through years of delays and bureaucratic haggling, a war in Europe, conscription, cattle-driving, revolution at home, the Black and Tans, a treaty battle, contentious elections and the defeat of Fitzgibbon’s party, a civil war, and a new Irish government before some of them could actually call themselves landowners. The triumph of 1905 was quickly buried.

Unlike Richard White’s study on his family’s stories in *Remembering Ahanagan*, most research on memory and commemoration in Ireland has focused on the ways that

²⁴ Guy Beiner, “Between Trauma and Triumphalism: The Easter Rising, the Somme, and the Crux of Deep Memory in Modern Ireland,” *Journal of British Studies*, 46:2 (April 2007), 370, 377–79.

²⁵ *Manchester Guardian*, 28 February 1905.

political events like the rebellions of 1798 and 1916 are remembered. Since the possession and cultivation of land was integral to the lives of most Irish people, Campbell argues that focusing on those kinds of events ignores “the remembering and forgetting of episodes of agrarian conflict” which he says deserve equal attention as “an important aspect of rural Irish thought.” The De Freyne strike was often perceived at the time in political terms, but it began and ended as a quest for better land. While there is no institutional or communal memory of the strike, there is also no way to know if it was forgotten with intent, or merely through neglect or fatigue. In formal oral histories taken in rural places, Campbell says respondents often tend to repress “difficult aspects of the past” like feuding or violence and promote “stories that reflect the unity of the parish, the malevolence of the British state and the Irish landlords, and the contribution of local people to the nationalist movement.” As White describes that process in his family, the story of the death of a local man at the hands of the Black and Tans cinched the storyteller’s status: “To claim a part of Eddie Carmody, even a small part, is to have authority in the world. When you speak, others, no matter how grudgingly, have to listen.”²⁶ Based on his own experience gathering local stories in county Galway, Campbell says local knowledge of the past is often not evenly distributed or accessible. Sometimes, he says, “most members of the parish know little about what happened and yet a small number of people know a great deal but tend to keep their stories to themselves.”²⁷

However, in the case of the De Freyne strike, there is not even a glossed-over version of the events. Finding people in the area around Frenchpark who would talk

²⁶ White, *Remembering Ahanagan*, 32.

²⁷ Campbell, “Land and Revolution Revisited,” xxxvii–viii, 169–70.

about any type of agitation in the early twentieth century proved nearly impossible. Jim Ganley, a Roscommon historian who does not live near Frenchpark himself, speculated that “there is a strong folk memory about this rent strike, but people are reluctant to talk about it. Nearly all the families involved still live in the area. There would be bitterness about some of the double dealing that went on at the time.” One older man, who had heard stories from his mother about tenants digging up grassland at night circa 1920 (probably referring to the agitation at Errit), agreed to talk to Ganley about it only when assured that his words and name would not be published in Frenchpark.²⁸ Any communal memory of specific events during the strike was replaced over time by a vague sense that whatever had happened in 1901–02 still mattered in some way and should not be talked about.

In *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, Ian McBride said that in order for memory to function “the past has to be reconstructed over and over again” to meet the needs of the present, and that “remembering and forgetting are social activities...reliant upon particular vocabularies, values, ideas, and representations shared with other members of the present group.”²⁹ Applying this to the De Freyne strike, it is hard to imagine how memories of the rent strike could have served the present needs of survivors at any point in the following decades. On the contrary, recalling who paid their rent to Lord De Freyne and who did not, who was boycotted and who threw rocks through a window, or who was evicted and who ended up with a bigger farm, would have only fostered anguish and conflict. This does not mean that no one had any memories of the

²⁸ Email from Jim Ganley, 3 April 2011.

²⁹ Ian McBride, “Memory and national identity in modern Ireland,” in *History and Memory in Modern Ireland*, ed. Ian McBride (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,) 12.

strike, or that recollections were not mulled over in private. However, combined with the long-term effects of the delays and the conflicts over land distribution, it seems clear that no one was anxious to broadcast the story of how it all began.

It is hard to imagine what kind of communally acceptable story about the strike could have survived through those years; the only possible versions might have focused either on the heroism of local leaders or on the villainy of the landlord, but neither rendition seems to have emerged. Ultimately, the United Irish League lost its influence, while general affection for the remaining De Freyne family diluted any bitterness towards the actions of their ancestors.³⁰ The main local leader of the strike, John Fitzgibbon, despite his longtime advocacy for tenants, was not lionized as a local strike hero. He was, after all, a successful merchant and not a farmer, and was criticized for his own land holding practices. During the war, along with Redmond, he supported conscription in Ireland, a policy which ran counter to growing republican sentiment. After years on the Roscommon County Council and in parliament, he was defeated by a Sinn Féin opponent in Mayo South in 1918 and died the next year.³¹ The Frenchpark area's strong nationalist and Parnellite core, which he had represented, had already been transformed in 1916 by the death of James J. O'Kelly, an Irish party stalwart who had represented Roscommon in parliament continuously, except for a three-year period, since 1885. O'Kelly was replaced by Count George N. Plunkett, a radical Sinn Féiner, who was then returned unopposed in the elections of 1918 and 1922 (he ran on the anti-treaty ticket in 1922).³²

³⁰ Bew describes a "rapid change in political temperature" as the "Irish Party for so long the undisputed embodiment of nationalist aspirations was soon to be replaced by Sinn Féin." Electoral defeats were particularly crucial in North Roscommon and South Longford. Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 212–13.

³¹ Bew, *Conflict and Conciliation*, 208–210; John Bligh, "Fitzgibbon, John," *Dictionary of Irish Biography; Manchester Guardian*, 9 September 1919.

³² Walker, ed., *Parliamentary Election Results, 1802–1922*, 236–37, 371–72, 396; Brian Walker, ed., *Parliamentary Election Results in Ireland, 1918–92* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy; Belfast: The Institute

Fitzgibbon's link to an older parliamentary political outlook eliminated any chance he might be remembered in 1920 as the hero of a tenants' revolt from 1901.

Each aspect of the strike's history offers reasons why it would not, could not, be openly remembered or commemorated by local people. From the start, it was neither a local event, nor a national event, but it required those involved to behave at times as if it was both, and at other times as if it was one or the other. Loyalty to the strike effort was automatically conflated with support of the nationalist agenda, even though that agenda was not dependent on the success of this local project. The rhetoric from the United Irish League urged unity and aggressiveness, indicating that there may have been division and inertia among the people. There was little indication that anyone in the UIL really wanted to single out the rent strikers for the nationalist pantheon, as they were characterized in speeches as mere foot soldiers in the quest for independence. Rather than feeling free to pat themselves collectively on the back, the strikers had to sort out—or bury—memories of boycotting and intimidation, either as protagonists or victims, and to untangle the confusing messages they had received from their politicians and priests.

I did not know my grandfather, but I did know my father. Even though I have been told my grandfather did not talk very much, I believe my father still absorbed a good deal from him about his life in Ireland and the reasons why he left the De Freyne estate around the time of the strike. In the 1920s, their family lived over a carriage house on a large estate in South Orange, NJ, where my grandfather was the gardener and groom, and my grandmother was the cook. In the summer, when “the family” was away on vacation, my father was allowed to enter what he called the “big house” to read in

of Irish Studies, The Queen's University, Belfast, 1992), 9; Owen McGee, “O’Kelly, James Joseph,” and D.R. O’Connor Lysaght, “Plunkett, County George Noble,” *Dictionary of Irish Biography*.

their library, a privilege that both thrilled and rankled him. He knew by instinct, or by his parents' example, that he did not belong in that room. My grandfather had been a groom in Ireland too, taking care of someone else's stable, but my father dreamed of joining the ranks of those who owned the horses. Although people in his immediate family had always lived in rented homes and apartments in New Jersey, my father bought a house as soon as he married my mother and never paid rent to a landlord.

When I was born, he did not name me for a saint or Irish heroine but picked Daphne instead because it sounded as if I was someone who "rode to hounds." This was an allusion to the red-coated hunting parties in New Jersey's "horse country" that he would never join, and very like those who had galloped across the De Freyne estate in my grandfather's youth. Once a year on St. Patrick's Day, my father became Irish. He would cry watching the yearly broadcast of the film, *The Informer*, but not in sympathy with the IRA hero and his trench-coated rebels. He wept instead for the drunken lout, Gypo Nolan, who never stood a chance, tragically pinioned between poverty and aspiration, and not destined for glory of any kind. Whatever my grandfather had conveyed to his son about Ireland, it was not the nuances of Irish nationalism. My father's real inheritance was confusion: an immense reverence for the trappings of class combined with a gut-deep hatred of privilege.

Confusion is an apt way to describe the mental landscapes of tenants on the De Freyne estate during and after the strike. A bewildering array of economic, religious, social, and political imperatives competed for their attention as they struggled to keep their homes and support their families. During the strike, they may have felt the urge to respond to the call of solidarity with their neighbors or to rally under the appeal of

nationalism. At the same time, they may have harbored a vestigial fondness for their landlord and the kind of relationship they used to have with him, or secretly wanted to better their own circumstances without worrying too much about anybody else.

Afterwards, feelings of hurt, shame, disappointment, and suspicion must have lingered to infect future dealings with the landlord, other tenants, shopkeepers, priests, or political organizations. Then, after waiting years and years to own their properties, many found they still could not make a living, while some former tenants seemed to be thriving. The strike was forgotten because it solved nothing for those who had participated, despite its significance as an example of a local agrarian initiative driving the national political agenda. Memories and stories must serve the people who keep them. So, the survivors of the De Freyne rent strike have come to resemble guests at a large family gathering where there were so many clashes and such bad behavior on all sides that everyone agreed—in the greater light of day and in the interests of the common good—never to speak of it in public again.

There is one other possible explanation why the rent strike has not been remembered. In December 2018, in nearby Strokestown, three siblings were evicted from a farm house by a bank over an unpaid debt of more than €300,000, a dispute that had lingered in the courts for almost ten years. After the eviction, private security guards were dispatched to protect the house and keep the former inhabitants out. One night the guards were attacked with sticks by a gang of masked men, and eight people were injured, vehicles were burned, and a security dog was killed. Roscommon TD Michael Fitzmaurice “criticized the heavy-handed nature of the eviction” but also said that “violence was not the answer and the only solution was negotiation with the banks.” As

of January 2019, the family had returned to their home, and was suing the bank and the agencies that provided the security personnel who carried out the eviction. The suit charged that the eviction violated “constitutional and European convention rights.” One man was arrested in the attack on the guards, but his court appearance was not advertised because the Gardaí were fearful of violent protests.³³ Aside from the fact that the initial dispute was with a bank, not a landlord, and that family members recorded the eviction on cell phones, the other details—a long-term dispute over debt, a forceful eviction and possession by paid guards, violent reprisals by anonymous attackers, attempts by a politician to appeal to both sides, and a lawsuit—eerily resemble the elements that surrounded the De Freyne rent strike. Perhaps some things are not remembered because they never stop happening.

³³ “Investigation into attack at repossessed farm in Roscommon,” 16 December 2018, *RTE*, rte.ie; Conor Lally, “Roscommon eviction: man quietly charged over attack,” *Irish Times*, 11 January 2019; Tim Healy, “Farm owner of Roscommon eviction house to bring case against KBC Bank,” *FarmIreland*, 27 February 2019.

APPENDIX A – POPULATION

Sources: [1106] *Census of Ireland, 1871*, [1059] *Census of Ireland, 1901*, [6052] *Census of Ireland, 1911*

All townlands are in Tibohine Parish except Aghalustia and Roosky in Kilnamanagh Parish, and Carrowreagh, Cloonmagunnaun, and Slieveroe in Castlemore Parish.

Townland	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Aghalustia	320	261	310	255	226	233	222	169
Ballinphuill	170	109	153	127	121	123	121	109
Ballyglass West	180	124	150	162	139	108	109	112
Barnacawley	241	181	188	192	180	147	133	112
Breanamore	174	147	186	160	153	146	142	92
Buckhill	320	232	246	279	295	276	229	225
Caher	19	6	19	14	13	8	3	5
Carrowbane	7	11	5	3	5	11	11	3
Carrowbehy	140	113	123	126	131	144	122	96
Carrowreagh	139	140	155	145	130	105	96	78
Cartron Beg	57	50	48	42	41	39	36	39
Clashcarragh	17	5	4	10	9	0	0	12
Clerragh	113	82	89	85	77	59	58	56
Cloggarnagh	298	228	268	289	258	201	172	146
Cloonagh	91	66	73	88	103	87	93	70
Cloonard	192	111	84	109	86	86	60	60
Cloonarragh	328	211	212	143	150	147	129	91
Cloonbunny	196	177	210	242	248	217	170	146
Clooncah	38	37	26	25	29	26	34	34
Cloondart	22	11	14	27	31	28	17	13
Cloonfad	197	173	220	242	229	206	179	157
Cloonfinglas	255	117	150	220	197	162	104	83
Cloonmagunnaun	163	124	129	141	165	104	71	62
Cloonmaul	114	120	144	159	178	149	124	90
Cloonshanville	89	69	64	120	134	101	94	91
Cloonsheever	196	173	183	160	137	106	99	85
Cloontowart	216	205	235	222	237	217	203	196
Corracoggil North	231	188	218	224	218	180	144	172
Corracoggil South	104	69	91	99	106	95	81	84
Corracommen	75	49	60	75	72	61	57	60
Corskeagh	181	116	162	111	105	72	63	43
Cureentorpan	229	157	170	156	147	144	105	84
Curraghard	143	119	113	146	154	142	111	93
Dereenamanckaun	22	12	13	9	11	11	0	5

Townland	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Derrinea	35	15	16	12	13	12	13	13
Derry	58	51	64	60	53	48	41	35
Derrylahan	73	70	95	101	82	58	58	42
Drummad	165	204	230	239	228	173	162	141
Dungar	45	31	28	20	10	9	7	10
Eden	155	139	141	153	151	119	116	93
Errit	222	143	219	247	258	247	215	171
Feigh	229	183	193	227	229	189	166	135
Frenchpark Demesne	53	86	72	56	60	68	63	39
Glebe East	6	4	3	7	6	4	2	4
Gortaganny	145	124	140	142	162	133	114	112
Grallagh	282	164	170	163	190	148	117	135
Kilgarve	189	136	180	166	117	100	72	87
Kilroddan	119	100	112	113	99	86	85	88
Kilrooan	111	84	66	71	70	70	55	39
Lecarrow	39	30	32	25	34	39	40	33
Leitrim	408	314	393	427	402	358	305	214
Lisduff	74	72	79	79	85	80	73	70
Lissacurkia	336	155	169	169	162	159	140	124
Lissananny	109	75	76	67	56	54	39	35
Meelick	100	104	123	135	123	102	96	80
Mullaghnashee	283	159	224	198	200	159	125	130
Parkeel	145	137	142	139	164	124	105	80
Portaghard	739	324	390	308	207	150	164	148
Ratra	159	141	136	130	116	112	96	73
Roosky	169	149	166	172	163	142	127	124
Sheepwalk	389	169	134	120	112	100	74	85
Sheevannan	20	12	33	69	70	42	25	38
Slieveroe	161	128	96	131	119	96	64	64
Stonepark	34	16	26	28	19	17	15	17
Tawnyrover	31	14	16	25	16	14	13	10
Tibohine	267	172	183	186	171	133	117	101
Tully	212	182	173	174	208	184	189	190
Turlagharee	73	59	72	57	41	27	26	29
Turlaghamaddy	45	25	11	16	10	14	17	9
Urrasaun	2	32	37	59	62	47	48	48
Totals	10,959	7,996	8,955	9,098	8,783	7,558	6,576	5,819

APPENDIX B – DE FREYNE ESTATE VALUATIONS

Sources: Valuation Records

Townland	Acres	1901 Value	1858 Value
Aghalustia	1183	364	364
Ballinphuill	478	158	160
Ballyglass West	282	89	85
Barnacawley	336	153	155
Breanamore	580	136	135
Buckhill	826	243	238
Caher	215	56	55
Carrowbane	93	64	65
Carrowbehy	488	77	85
Carrowreagh	376	205	203
Cartron Beg	117	73	70
Clashcarragh	97	85	88
Clerragh	260	97	99
Cloggarnagh	405	187	187
Cloonagh	488	78	65
Cloonard	356	139	138
Cloonarragh	497	161	163
Cloonbunny	635	150	142
Clooncah	270	54	54
Cloondart	199	16	15
Cloonfad	637	158	155
Cloonfinglas	810	160	165
Cloonmagunnaun	587	101	101
Cloonmaul	453	81	73
Cloonshanville	931	335	318
Cloonsheever	880	109	112
Cloontowart	539	200	203
Corracoggil North	522	266	262
Corracoggil South	354	185	171
Corracommeen	366	58	53
Corskeagh	314	474	474
Curraghard	323	159	154
Curreentorpan	347	184	185
Derreenamanckaun	250	60	60
Derrinea	282	18	17

Townland	Acres	1901 Value	1858 Value
Derry	170	49	52
Derrylahan	224	49	49
Drummad	578	134	125
Dungar	62	37	27
Eden	421	188	187
Errit	1197	203	192
Feigh	732	314	315
Frenchpark Demesne	1127	930	938
Glebe East	34	47	44
Gortaganny	441	101	98
Grallagh	392	190	185
Kilgarve	714	174	180
Kilroddan	200	65	65
Kilrooan	143	69	70
Lecarrow	338	39	38
Leitrim	1487	329	325
Lisduff	298	87	87
Lissacurkia	382	195	198
Lissananny	545	104	108
Meelick	204	51	51
Mullaghnashee	422	252	223
Parkeel	271	127	129
Portaghard	524	396	438
Ratra	325	235	209
Roosky	487	197	197
Sheepwalk	714	605	604
Sheevannan	368	127	113
Slieveroe	224	107	104
Stonepark	106	51	51
Tawnyrover	112	42	44
Tibohine	303	200	196
Tully	918	142	142
Turlagharee	116	87	92
Turlaghnamaddy	78	36	40
Urassaun	232	29	24
Totals	30,665	11,121	11,009

APPENDIX C – NUMBER OF LARGER FARMS BY ACRES

Source: Valuation Books, c. 1901, ND=No data available.

Townland	Total # Holdings	20-30	30-40	40-50	50+	100+	Total over 20 acres
Aghalustia	55	4	0	0	2	2	8
Ballinphuill	23	2	0	0	0	0	2
Ballyglass W.	ND	0	1	1	1	0	3
Barnacawley	36	3	2	1	0	0	6
Breanamore	ND	2	1	0	0	0	3
Buckhill	56	6	0	2	0	0	8
Carrowbehy	25	1		2	1	0	4
Carrowreagh	10	2	1	1	1	0	5
Cartron Beg	6	1	1	0	0	0	2
Clashcarragh	97	0	0	0	0	0	0
Clerragh	14	3	1	0	1	0	5
Cloggarnagh	31	5	1	1	0	0	7
Cloonagh	11	0	0	0	4	1	5
Cloonard	19	3	2	0	0	0	5
Cloonarragh	29	5	0	1	0	0	6
Cloonbunny	31	3	1	0	0	0	4
Clooncah	7	1	0	0	1	0	2
Cloondart	4	0	0	0	0	0	7
Cloonfad	30	2	2	0	1	2	7
Cloonfinglas	29	2	3	1	1		7
Cloonmagunnaun	16	0	0	0	0	0	3
Cloonmaul	26	2	1	0	0	0	3
Cloonsheever	34	5	2	0	0	0	8
Cloontowart	21	1	1	0	0	0	2
Corracogil N.	29	1	0	0	0	1	2
Corracogil S.	14	1	1	0	0	0	2
Corracommeen	10	1	1	0	2	0	4
Curragherd	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND	ND
Curreentorpan	33	0	1	0	1	0	2
Derrinea	3	0	0	2	0	1	3
Derrylahan	8	1	1	0	0	0	2
Drummad	27	3	0	0	0	0	3
Dungar	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
Eden	23	3	1	1	1	0	6
Errit	37	4	6	1	1	0	12
Feigh	29	5	4	0	2	0	11

Townland	Total # Holdings	20-30	30-40	40-50	50+	100+	Total over 20 acres
Grallagh	35	2	1	1	0	0	4
Kilgarve	23	4	0	0	1	2	7
Kilroddan	16	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kilrooan	144	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lecarrow	9	0	1	0	0	1	2
Leitrim	76	6	5	0	0	0	11
Lisduff	27	7	0	0	0	0	7
Lissacurkia	27	3	0	0	1	0	4
Lissananny	11	5	0	0	2	0	7
Meelick	20	1	0	0	0	0	1
Mullaghnashee	35	3	0	0	1	0	4
Parkeel	22	1	0	0	0	0	1
Portaghard	ND	3	2	0	1	0	6
Ratra	16	2	0	0	0	0	2
Roosky	ND	0	2	1	2	0	5
Sheepwalk	19	1	0	0	0	1	2
Sheevannan	ND	0	0	0	0	0	0
Slieveroe	10	2	0	0	0	0	2
Stonepark	5	1	0	1	0	0	2
Tawnyrover	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Tibohine	29	2	0	0	0	0	2
Tully	41	4	2	2	2	0	10
Turlagharee	5	1	0	0	0	0	1
Urrassaun	10	1	0	0	0	0	1

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