

Land, politics and religion on the Clancarty estate, east Galway, 1851–1914

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SUMMARY

Studies of landed estates are important for understanding not just the life of the landlords, but also for assessing the social history of the community resident on estates. This thesis expands upon existing knowledge regarding landlordism in Ireland, with its focus being land, politics and religion upon the Clancarty estate between 1851 and 1914. The estate was situated in east Galway and comprised 23,000 acres and included the large town of Ballinasloe, which underwent a radical transformation in the nineteenth century under the watchful eye of the Clancarty family. They oversaw its development from a town of dirt roads and unsanitary conditions to a superbly designed estate town that was praised by contemporaries as an example for other landlords across the country to follow.

Both the urban and rural parts of the estate witnessed massive economic, political and social change, paralleled with the rest of the country. This thesis examines the common ground that existed between urban and rural tenants and traces the development of urban society and how this impacted upon the rural hinterland and vice versa. It examines the relationships that existed between townsmen, tenant-farmers and others on the estate, such as labourers. A study of this nature allows a closer examination of the reasons underpinning an estate's decline and break up. Particular attention is paid to urban tenants and the benefits they derived from the shifting power structures in Ballinasloe, as a new elite emerged following the collapse of the Clancarty estate and the departure of the family from the town they

constructed.

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ABBREVIATIONS

B. T. D. A.	Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association
C. T. D. A.	Central Tenant Defence Association
C. D. A.	Clonfert Diocesan Archives
<i>C. P.</i>	<i>Connaught People</i>
C. S. O., R. P.	Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary's Office
<i>C. T.</i>	<i>Connaught Telegraph</i>
<i>D. N.</i>	<i>Daily News</i>
<i>F. J.</i>	<i>Freeman's Journal</i>
<i>G. E.</i>	<i>Galway Express</i>
<i>G. P.</i>	<i>Galway Press</i>
<i>G. V.</i>	<i>Galway Vindicator</i>
<i>I. F. G.</i>	<i>Irish Farmers' Gazette</i>
<i>I. H. S.</i>	<i>Irish Historical Studies</i>
I. N. L.	Irish National League
<i>I. T.</i>	<i>Irish Times</i>
L. G. B.	Local Government Board
N. A. I.	National Archives of Ireland
N. L. I.	National Library of Ireland
<i>N. Y. D. T.</i>	<i>New York Daily Tribune</i>
<i>N. Y. T.</i>	<i>New York Times</i>
P. D. A.	Property Defence Association
P. P.	Parish Priest
R. M.	Resident Magistrate
S. R. M.	Special Resident Magistrate
T. C. D.	Trinity College Dublin
<i>T. N.</i>	<i>Tuam News</i>
<i>T. H.</i>	<i>Tuam Herald</i>

T. N. A.	The National Archives of the United Kingdom
U. C. G.	University College Galway
U. I. L.	United Irish League
V. F.	Vicar Fornae
W. N.	<i>Western News</i>
W. S.	<i>Western Star</i>

INTRODUCTION

I.) Aims and objectives

This thesis explores issues of land, politics and religion on the Clancarty estate between 1851 and 1914, with attention also being paid to religious and class tensions that existed on the estate. The estate was located in east Galway and south Roscommon, mostly within the vicinity of the town of Ballinasloe, though the family did possess some land near Loughrea. In 1876 it comprised almost 24,000 acres in Galway and over 1,600 acres in Roscommon, with a total valuation of nearly £20,000.¹ The family possessed land in eighty-nine townlands, spread over eleven parishes. According to the *General valuation of rateable property in Ireland*, there were 1,444 occupiers on the estate – and in the absence of estate rentals – this is the most important source for ascertaining the approximate size of holdings on the estate.² The estate expanded after the Famine because of purchases made by the third earl of Clancarty in the Encumbered Estates Court, thus signifying that the estate remained solvent after the numerous crises presented to many other Irish landlords during the Famine and this expansion is discussed in chapter one.

Landlords generally carried out evictions in response to the non-payment of rent or as a method of maintaining order on estates. Prior to the Land War, such evictions frequently failed to provoke a sympathetic response. J. E. Pomfret's *The*

¹ *Return of owners of land of one acres and upwards in the several counties, counties of cities and counties of towns in Ireland* (Dublin, 1876), pp 294, 314.

² See *The general valuation of rateable property in Ireland* [Griffith's Valuation] for Galway and Roscommon.

struggle for land in Ireland, 1800–1923 (1930) is an orthodox nationalist account of landlords acting as capricious evictors. He argued that landlords had no interest in improving their property, were predatory in their management and evicted tenants at a whim. This resulted in the concept of the dichotomy of the oppressor and the oppressed surviving in the popular imagination.³ However, the historiography of Irish landlordism since the 1970s has debunked such an idea and the works of J. S. Donnelly, Terence Dooley, Barbara Solow and W. E. Vaughan have exposed Pomfret's central argument as flawed, though one with a 'powerful teleological attraction, in that it explained the land war and the abolition of landlordism'.⁴

Landed estates were important centres of activity and the existence of an urban centre provided a focal point for trade: Ballinasloe was an important focal point for trade on the Clancarty estate. The countryside played a vital role in the local economy, which was important, considering the lack of industrial development in nineteenth-century Ireland. Rural tenants were suspicious of urban centres while town tenants were aggrieved that they were so dependent on their rural neighbours for survival. Because landlords were often the soul of the estate, mutual respect and affection between landlord and tenant existed on the Clancarty estate. Such loyalty fostered a sense of order, with class structures remaining rigid, though such structures became challenged as nationalists began to challenge this. This thesis is the first comprehensive assessment of the Clancarty estate and explores social relations from

³ J. E. Pomfret, *The struggle for land in Ireland, 1800-1923* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1930), pp 19-27.

⁴ J. S. Donnelly Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London, 1975); Terence Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860–1960* (Dublin, 2001); B. L. Solow, *The land question and the Irish economy, 1870–1903* (Harvard, 1971); W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994), p. vi

the immediate post-Famine period until its sale under the terms of the land acts of 1903 and 1909, with the focus on land, politics and religion. Landlords, landlord–tenant relations and the land question feature prominently in the historiography of late nineteenth-century Ireland. However, there have been relatively few case studies of landed estates. Such studies deepen our knowledge of the phenomenon of Irish landlordism and can unravel the intricate web of relationships that existed in rural Ireland.⁵

Despite being an important urban centre in east Galway, major studies on the town of Ballinasloe have been lacking, although there have been several works published on parishes, towns and landlords in the vicinity of Ballinasloe and the Clancarty estate.⁶ P. K. Egan’s *The Parish of Ballinasloe* – published in 1960 – was one of the first local history works of its kind and is a comprehensive examination of the Catholic parish of Ballinasloe from the early Christian period to the early twentieth century. Tadhg Mac Lochlainn’s *Ballinasloe, inniu agus inné* (1971) is a useful compendium for the history of the town over a 200 year period, but offers little in terms of in-depth analysis.⁷

⁵ For examples of such case studies, see R. B. MacCarthy, *The Trinity College estates 1800–1912: corporate management in an age of reform* (Dundalk, 1992); W. A. Maguire, *The Downshire estates in Ireland, 1801–1845* (Oxford, 1972) and Gerard Moran, *Sir Robert Gore-Booth and his landed estate in Co. Sligo, 1841–1876* (Dublin, 2006). For an example of the estate management of an individual landlord, see A. P. W. Malcomson, *Virtues of a Wicked Earl: the life and legend of William Sydney Clements, third earl of Leitrim* (Dublin, 2009).

⁶ See John Joe Conwell, *A Galway landlord during the Great Famine – Ulick John de Burgh, first marquis of Clanricarde* (Dublin, 2003); J. S. Flynn, *Ballymacward: the story of an east Galway parish* (Dublin, 1994); Joseph Forde, et al, *The district of Loughrea, volume 1: History, 1791–1981* (Galway, 2003); idem, *The district of Loughrea, volume II: Folklore, 1860–1960* (Galway, 2003); Bernadette Lally *Print culture in Loughrea, 1850–1900: reading, writing and printing in an Irish provincial town* (Dublin, 2008); Joe Molloy (ed.), *The parish of Clontuskert: glimpses into its past* (Ballinasloe, 2009); Tony O’Gorman, *History of Fohenagh* (Galway, 2000).

⁷ P. K. Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe* (Dublin, 1960); Tadhg Mac Lochlainn, *Ballinasloe, inniu agus inné: a story of a community over the past 200 years* (Galway, 1971).

There has been an outpouring of works on land, politics and society at a national and regional level, with Philip Bull, Fergus Campbell, Terence Dooley, Donald Jordan, Edward Kennedy, Donnacha Seán Lucey, Thomas Nelson and Walter Walsh all exploring various issues from differing perspectives.⁸ This thesis sets out to explore the complexities of social relations that existed on a provincial Irish estate between 1851 and 1914. Local studies, such as this, play an important role in understanding the wider historical context of the period. Internationally, there has been a move away from ‘national histories’, with greater attention being given to local and regional studies, which are still lacking within an Irish context, as research generally focuses upon the ‘high politics’ milieu. Gerard Moran and Raymond Gillespie argued that:

local historians in Ireland and indeed elsewhere, have been slow in appreciating the complexity of their subject, failing to recognise that local history is a specialised technique of historical study rather than the poor relation of the discipline ... the reality is that history written at national level provides only partial answers to the problems presented and other perspectives are badly needed to correct and deepen our understanding of the evolution of Irish society.⁹

Moran has further contended that the historiography regarding the Land League and

⁸ Philip Bull, *Land, politics and nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996); Fergus Campbell, *Land and revolution: nationalist politics in the west of Ireland, 1891–1921* (Oxford 2005); Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*; idem, ‘The land for the people’: *the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004); Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland: county Mayo from the plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge, 1994); Edward Kennedy, *The land movement in Tullaroan, County Kilkenny, 1879–1891* (Dublin, 2004); Donnacha Seán Lucey, ‘Land and popular politics in County Kerry’ (PhD thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2007); idem, *The Irish National League in Dingle, County Kerry, 1885–92* (Dublin, 2003); idem, *Land, popular politics and agrarian violence in Ireland: the case of county Kerry, 1872–86* (Dublin, 2011); Thomas Nelson, *The land war in County Kildare* (Maynooth, 1985); Walter Walsh, *Kilkenny: the struggle for the land, 1850–1882* (Kilkenny, 2008).

⁹ Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran ‘Land, politics and religion in Ireland since 1600’ in *Longford: Essays in county history* (Dublin, 1991), p. 5.

the Land War places too much emphasis on its central mission, with scant attention given to the initial radical ideology that played a crucial role in the genesis of the Land League and the initial stages of the Land War. ‘This neglect has resulted in marginalising many of the personalities within the regions’.¹⁰ The activity of ‘rank and file’ Land League members, as Fergus Campbell has termed them, has been neglected in the historiography of the land question.¹¹ This study will examine the role that local nationalists such as Thomas Byrne, Matt Harris and James Kilmartin amongst others, played in estate life as they attempted to formulate an agrarian policy for small tenant farmers that could link urban and rural tenants into a sense of communal identity. An important aspect of this thesis is an exploration of the disharmony amongst nationalists on the Clancarty estate and how they failed to mobilise tenants during the Land War. Considering the presence of Matt Harris – a man that Parnell called ‘the grandfather of the Land League’ – this was a source of embarrassment. This is not the place to explore Harris’s role in the Land League on the whole; rather the focus is on his activity within the vicinity of the Clancarty estate and his relationship with other local nationalists and the fourth earl of Clancarty. While the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association was not very successful in mobilising the Clancarty tenantry, it was still an important tenant-farmer movement that operated in the vicinity of the estate. It attempted to instil a sense of class identity amongst small tenant-farmers. It also gave them the confidence to speak up against

¹⁰ Gerard Moran, ‘James Daly and the rise and fall of the Land League in Ireland, 1879–92’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxix, no. 114 (1994).

¹¹ Fergus Campbell, ‘The hidden history of the Irish Land War, a guide to local sources’ in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, land and culture* (Dublin, 2000), pp 140–52.

perceived injustices and to participate in the subsequent agitation that led to the Land War. The association was the most forceful exponent of the idea of combination and agitation prior to the Land War:

It was more radical than most other such organisations: condemning bad landlords, graziers, and the failure of the 1870 land act to protect the tenants from landlord tyranny. Its contempt for the larger farmers – those occupying more than sixty acres of land – indicates its more extreme views, as most other tenants' defence associations were composed of this very class.¹²

II.) Sources

Terence Dooley has argued that: 'estate records reveal the reality of estate life as opposed to the myth which has often been handed down in oral history or, indeed, in biased history texts that perpetuated the stereotype of the rack renting, capricious and evicting landlords'.¹³ They are usually the most pertinent source when carrying out research on a landed estate and used in conjunction with other sources can foster a greater understanding of the phenomenon of Irish landlordism.

Unfortunately the papers of the Clancarty estate were destroyed in 1975 on the instructions of Greville, seventh earl of Clancarty.¹⁴ This significant lacuna in estate papers has been partially filled by consulting the estate papers of the Dillons of Clonbrock, the Bellews of Mount Bellew and the Mahons of Castlegar families which were all neighbouring estates in east Galway. The Clonbrock papers have been particularly useful in this regard, especially considering that there was correspondence from the fourth earl of Clancarty reflecting his opinions on the Land

¹² Moran, 'James Daly', p. 191.

¹³ Terence Dooley, *The Big Houses and landed estates of Ireland: a research guide* (Dublin, 2007), p. 66.

¹⁴ E-mail correspondence, with Nicholas Trench, ninth earl of Clancarty, 13 April 2007. Subsequent attempts to contact the ninth earl have proven to be fruitless.

War. The lack of estate papers disqualifies an economic analysis of the Clancarty estate, yet other sources present the opportunity to construct a coherent picture of social relations that existed on the estate. This thesis explores the challenges to the traditional authority enjoyed by the Clancarty family in the post-Famine period as a series of events threatened their control on the estate. Such resistance to the power of the Clancarty family occurred in tandem with events that were taking place throughout the country, especially from the late 1870s onwards, as the structures of both land ownership and power became realigned in the countryside.

According to Marie-Louise Legg: ‘the increased literacy and prosperity in the post-Famine period gave rise to an expanded readership so that by the late nineteenth century most counties had at least one newspaper’.¹⁵ A systematic examination of local newspapers is an essential aspect of this work. In *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork*, J. S. Donnelly has shown the benefits of making extensive use of local newspapers: ‘local newspapers can indicate what landlord–tenant relations were like in an area; they can provide information on the social and economic conditions of tenants which is often not available in estate papers’.¹⁶ The most important newspapers used in this study were the *Western News*, owned by John Callanan, a prominent local nationalist, the *Western Star*, whose political affiliation changed depending on the leanings of its owner and the *Galway Express*, which was the organ for the Protestant/Unionist community.¹⁷ These newspapers played an

¹⁵ Dooley, *The Big Houses and landed estates of Ireland*, p. 109.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp 66, 109.

¹⁷ For more on the provincial press, see Marie-Louise Legg, *Newspapers and nationalism: the Irish provincial press, 1850–1892* (Dublin, 1999).

important role in shaping local popular opinion for the group that they represented, with the underlying tensions that existed in the region frequently intensified as a result of polemics in the local press.

Barbara Solow showed how the utilisation of parliamentary papers could offer a new insight into the land question. She paid particular attention to royal commissions and the evidence they collected from a wide array of individuals. The commissions most pertinent to this study are the Devon commission and the Cowper commission. Testimony gathered from these commissions in relation to the Clancarty estate give a fascinating insight into estate management policies in the absence of estate papers. However, the evidence presented needs to be treated with circumspection, because the method of questioning frequently led to misleading answers being given. Despite this, the minutes of evidence can be used to probe how contemporaries interpreted what was happening and what their fears and aspirations were.¹⁸ The Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary's Office are potentially one of the richest sources available for the Land War of 1879–82, the Plan of Campaign of 1885–91 and the period from the foundation of the United Irish League and the Ranch War of 1906–9. While much of the material has seemingly been lost for a multiplicity of reasons (which frustrates researchers), what has survived has proven to be incredibly useful in constructing a coherent picture of social relations on the estate.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Solow, *The land question and the Irish economy, 1870–1903*; Dooley, *The Big Houses and landed estates of Ireland*, pp 85–7; *Report of the royal commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act 1881 and the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act 1885* [C4969] HC 1887, 1; *minutes of evidence and appendices*, [C496], HC 1887 xxvi, 25; *Index to evidence and appendices* [C4969], HC, xxvi, 1109.

¹⁹ Dooley, *The Big Houses and landed estates of Ireland*, p. 104. For a discussion on the Registered Papers of the Chief Secretary's Office, see the website of the National Archives of Ireland, http://www.nationalarchives.ie/topics/Chief_secretary/CS.htm (date accessed, 24 July 2010) and for a

III.) Overview of chapters

Chapter one explores the socio-economic condition of the estate with particular attention being paid to the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society and the estate management policies of the Clancarty family in the immediate post-Famine period, while also exploring the pace of life on the estate during the period under examination. The society was established by the third earl of Clancarty to encourage an improvement in the condition of small farmers in the region. While many similar organisations existed in name only, the Ballinasloe society made strident efforts to encourage good farm husbandry amongst the small tenant farmers on the Clancarty estate and the Ballinasloe Poor Law Union. An analysis of Griffith's valuation will allow for a clearer understanding of the structures of occupancy on the estate by determining the number of occupiers and size of holdings.

The third earl of Clancarty acquired a notorious reputation for sanctioning provocative proselytising on the estate. He was influenced by the 'Second Reformation', discussed by Irene Whelan in *The Bible War in Ireland, the 'Second Reformation' and the polarisation of Protestant Catholic relations, 1800–1840* (2005).²⁰ Both his father Richard, the second earl and his uncle, Power le Poer Trench, who was in turn, bishop of Waterford, Elphin and archbishop of Tuam, were staunch evangelicals. Whelan stated that many evangelicals in the early nineteenth century were of Huguenot extraction and Desmond Bowen argued that they were

discussion on the problems presented to researchers see Brian Griffin, *Sources for the study of crime in Ireland* (Dublin, 2005), p. 29.

²⁰ Irene Whelan, *The Bible war in Ireland: the 'Second Reformation' and the polarisation of Protestant Catholic relations, 1800–1840* (Dublin, 2005).

raised on stories of oppression and violence, because they were forced to flee religious persecution in France.²¹ Such a background was an important formative influence for William and when he became third earl, he tried to foster such activity on the estate. Chapter two is an assessment of the third earl's final efforts at attracting converts on the estate, as the activity that took place before and during the Famine failed to attract significant numbers of converts. It exposes Clancarty's failure to appreciate the attachment his tenants had to their faith and the inability of the Catholic Church to reach out to the poor adequately, which ensured that they were vulnerable to such activity. Clancarty believed that England was great because of the Reformation, which never took hold in Ireland because 'Freedom-giving principles were never imparted to the Irish people'.²²

Catholics within and outside the estate frequently criticised the Trench family during the Emancipation and Repeal eras and 'it was acceptable political practice to propagate scandalous tales' about the family.²³ Nevertheless, they commanded a loyal tenantry because of their benevolence during the Famine, but the continued attempts at proselytising threatened the harmony between landlord and tenant on the estate and chapter two explores the first serious challenge to Clancarty's authority in the post-Famine period. His consistent refusal to allow the Sisters of Mercy enter the workhouse to provide educational and spiritual guidance to those resident there was a source of antagonism in Ballinasloe. Clancarty viewed their presence as a real threat

²¹ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland: a study of Protestant-Catholic relations between the act of Union and Disestablishment* (Dublin, 1978), p. 139.

²² Earl of Clancarty, *Ireland: Its present condition and what it might be* (Dublin, 1864), p. 6.

²³ *ibid.*

to the proselytising mission he attempted to establish in the workhouse and he succeeded in preventing their entry into it for a decade, which was a reflection of the influence he had. The threat of the *ex-officio* guardians turning against him over this issue – due to public distaste over his stance – resulted in him becoming increasingly isolated. When Lord Dunlo, Clancarty's eldest son and heir, stood for election in 1859, in the middle of this controversy, it presented the Catholic Church with an opportunity to flex its political muscle and humiliate Clancarty.

Proselytising activities attracted the extreme opprobrium of the Catholic clergy and hierarchy in county Galway, with clergy outside the sphere of influence of the Clancarty family being especially vociferous in expressing their displeasure over such activities. Chapter three explores how this antagonism precipitated one of the most contentious by-election campaigns in nineteenth-century Ireland. It was another challenge to Clancarty's authority as a landlord and political figure and it came from agents outside his sphere of influence. The 1872 Galway by-election was called as a result of Sir William Gregory's resignation as M.P. for Galway in order to take up an appointment as governor to Ceylon. This contest took place between Clancarty's third son, Captain William Trench and Captain Phillip Nolan of Ballinderry, Tuam. It became a near epic clash between the two most powerful groups in the Irish countryside – landlords and the Catholic clergy. Divergent opinions amongst landlords emerged almost immediately. A propaganda war ensued, as the clergy attempted to destroy the reputation of the third earl in order to prevent his son from being elected.

The 1872 by-election also saw a Fenian element becoming involved in

electoral politics for the first time in county Galway, as some began flirting with constitutional politics, preceding the 'New Departure' of 1879 and following on from the election of O'Donovan Rossa in 1869. Their involvement was later purposefully illustrated by the election of a member of the Supreme Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, John O'Connor Power as M.P. for Mayo in 1874 where Matt Harris and Michael O'Sullivan acted as election agents. Such an experience and the over-zealousness of the clergy saw a burgeoning lay leadership representing the interests of tenant farmers emerge from Fenian ranks.²⁴ Chapter four is an assessment of the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association, a radical tenant farmer movement that concentrated its activity within the vicinity of the Clancarty estate. Under the guiding hand of Matt Harris, James Kilmartin and Michael Malachy O'Sullivan, it advocated a class-based struggle between small tenant farmers, graziers and landlords, because historical relations between each of these groups were always antagonistic, with the hope that the small farmers would eventually triumph. Particular odium was directed towards graziers, as east Galway saw a high concentration of this type of farming, which was seen to be detrimental to small tenant farmers and labourers.

Chapter five explores life on the Clancarty estate during the first phase of the Land War. There was very little anti-landlord activity on the estate during either phase of the Land War; instead activity focused upon the condition of the labouring classes and attempts at ameliorating their distress by both Lord Clancarty and class-conscious nationalists, like Matt Harris and Bishop Patrick Duggan of Clonfert. While these

²⁴ This is discussed in R. V. Comerford's *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848–82* (Dublin, 1994).

men may have come from disparate social and political backgrounds, they did reach some consensus when it came to the alleviation of distress of the most impoverished on the estate. Clancarty's efforts to alleviate distress ensured an acquiescent and grateful tenantry, to which he referred in correspondence with Lord Clonbrock. There were few challenges to the level of rents on the Clancarty estate in the land courts, with only a handful being judicially fixed. This indicated that tenants were content with the *status quo*. However, a new elite was beginning to emerge due to the 'revolt of the tenantry' sweeping the countryside, which began to challenge Clancarty's authority.

This grassroots militancy sprang up and had a greater impact amongst tenants on the estate by the mid-1880s. Chapter six assesses the challenges made to Clancarty's previously solid control over the estate and the elected boards in Ballinasloe. His hegemony and influence was now questioned repeatedly and fearlessly by nationalists as they began attempting to fill the potential political vacuum that was emerging due to the declining influence being exerted by landlords in the countryside. This was despite the fact that nationalists on the estate were divided amongst themselves. The uncertainty surrounding the future of the estate as a result of the land acts and the ill-health of Clancarty were two reasons for these attacks. While there was Plan of Campaign activity on neighbouring estates, such as the Clanricade estate, the Clancarty estate was an oasis of calm in a highly agitated region despite the challenges being presented to the fourth earl's traditional role as a landlord. The movement seemed to have lost direction from 1888 onwards, as important local nationalist figures George Gleeson Bowler, John Callanan, and Matt

Harris died.

Chapter seven examines the reasons underpinning the break up of this once great estate. While land legislation was the main factor in this decline, the fourth earl's disinheritance of his son was an added twist to the saga of the break up of the estate. Lord Dunlo had a cavalier attitude towards money, and a proclivity to debt, with his marriage to a dancehall singer a humiliation for his parents and an act of defiance against the gravely-ill fourth earl, which resulted in his determination to punish his wayward son accordingly. All these factors made a contribution to the ignominious end to the Clancarty family's presence in Ballinasloe, which had been their home for over 200 years. The result of this was the consolidation of the power of new local elites that emerged from the merchants and former nationalist leaders as they sought to fill the lacuna left by Clancarty's departure. The significance of their emergence as a new polity was their disinterest in ameliorating the condition of the poor, *vis a vis* the sense of duty the Clancarty family felt in assisting the most vulnerable on the estate. Clancarty's disconnect from his tenants because of distinct differences in class and political interests, further intensified the sense of isolation he felt, and the failure of nationalists now in positions of influence to assist those below them is reflective of the failure of the British government to adequately legislate for the departure of the aristocracy from positions of political power.

II.) The Trench/Clancarty family, 1630–1850

The origins of the Trench family can be traced to the Seigneurie of La Trance in the Protestant territory of Poitou in central western France. The family fled the religious

persecutions that took place there in the late sixteenth century and then settled in the north of England. A branch of the family came to Ireland during the confiscations of the seventeenth century and they initially settled in county Cavan. Frederic Trench, the great-grandfather of William, the first earl of Clancarty, came into possession of land at Garbally at the time of the Battle of Aughrim. Cathal Fenton has said:

It presented the Trench family with an invaluable opportunity to raise their profile. Frederic gave his house to King William's army, rendering the forces of that prince every assistance in his power. He, together with his brother, Rev. John Trench, afterwards Dean of Raphoe, served as guides to King William's troops on the day of action, and pointed out to them the pass by which they were enabled to fall upon the left flank of the enemy, and the fate of the day was thereby decided.²⁵

For their services to the Williamite forces, Frederic became a commissioner for county Galway and his brother, John, was made dean of Raphoe. The family rose from humble origins to become a family of great wealth within fifty years of arriving at Garbally through astute land deals and marriages. Frederic was succeeded by his namesake, who oversaw the creation of agricultural fairs, for which Ballinasloe is now so famous.²⁶

The stature and wealth of the family continued to grow significantly in the eighteenth century with the marriage of Richard, father of William, the first earl of Clancarty, to Frances Power of Coorheen, Loughrea. This was an especially fortuitous marriage for the Trench family as Frances Power was the only daughter and heir of David Power and the Power family's significant wealth increased that of the Trench

²⁵ Cathal Fenton, 'The Trench family and the development of Ballinasloe, 1800–1850' (M.A. thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2002), p. 5.

²⁶ Richard le Poer Trench, *Memoir of the le Poer Trench family* (Dublin, 1874), pp 6, 9.

family, resulting in them coming to possess all the Power lands in the baronies of Leitrim, Dunkellin and Loughrea in county Galway. Another development of this marriage was the addition of the name Power to the family surname and for a time, the family was known as Power Keating Trench, as the Keating lands were a part of the Power marriage settlement and the surname eventually evolved into its present form of le Poer Trench.²⁷ The importance of marrying into influential families is something that members of the aristocracy were acutely aware of, with one of the first earls of Clancarty's daughters marrying into the Gregory family, while another married into the La Touches, the Dublin Huguenot banking family. William's second son, Power, became the Anglican archbishop of Tuam, while his third son, Charles, became archdeacon of Ardagh. The family's support of ultra-Protestant causes and the Act of Union ensured that their profile rose significantly, which James Kelly discusses in his essay, 'The politics of Protestant ascendancy: Co. Galway 1650–1832'.²⁸

William Power Keating Trench continued the adroit work of his predecessors in fostering important contacts in influential circles. He married Anne Gardiner, sister of the first Lord Mountjoy in 1762 and sat as M.P. for Galway between 1768 and 1791. He was the first colonel-commandant of the Connaught provincial regiment between 1781 and 1782. After retiring from the House of Commons in 1797, he was elevated to the House of Lords and was made Lord Kilconnell, Baron Kilconnell of

²⁷ *ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁸ Whelan, *The Bible war in Ireland*, p. 238; James Kelly, 'The politics of Protestant ascendancy: Co. Galway 1650–1832' in Gerard Moran (ed.), *Galway history and society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county* (Dublin, 1996), pp 229-70.

Garbally. His work in parliament, but more ostensibly, his support of the Pitt administration facilitated the awarding of this title, though Michael Davitt argued that he received it as a reward for services to Lord Camden, who was lord lieutenant during the 1798 rebellion. William was elevated to the earldom of Clancarty because of his son's support for the Act of Union in the House of Commons and this was the second installation of the Clancarty name into the peerage, because Frances Power's mother was a descendant of the sister of Donough, the first earl of Clancarty of county Cork.²⁹

The eldest son of the earl of Clancarty received the title Lord Dunlo, Dún Leodha being an ancient name for the town of Ballinasloe and Richard le Poer Trench, who later became second earl, was called Lord Dunlo by courtesy. While M.P. for Galway, he wanted to present a loyal Protestant address to the government in order to express his loyalty both to the Established Church and the government, but his fellow Galway M.P., Richard Martin did this before he had the opportunity to do so and Martin ensured that a resolution supporting Emancipation was also added. Dunlo pursued a constructive if somewhat sycophantic line with the government when he was an M.P. and reaped dividends once he succeeded to the earldom in 1805. He began to move in diplomatic circles after this; thereby ending his family's century-long involvement in politics in Galway. His accession to the earldom occurred in tandem with the beginning of the declining Protestant involvement in county Galway

²⁹ Michael Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland or the story of the Land League revolution* (London, 1904), p. 32; Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 180.

politics.³⁰

The second earl of Clancarty's diplomatic career began when he was appointed a commissioner for affairs to India in 1805 and he remained in this role until 1806. The changing administration saw him moving to the British Privy Council and he served as ambassador to The Hague between 1813 and 1823. Because of his deft political acumen, Trench was awarded a viscountcy in the United Kingdom in 1818 and became marquis of Heusden in the Netherlands in 1824. He retired from the diplomatic corps in 1824 and set about remodelling the family home at Garbally Park in order to reflect the elevated status the family achieved as a result of his activities in Europe. Mark Bence-Jones described it as a 'large and somewhat austere two-storey house', built to replace an earlier house that had been burned in 1798.³¹ The family's reputation as good and progressive landlords had long been established by the time of his death in 1837. He initially rejected the introduction of anti-Catholic measures by the government in 1827, but had become opposed to emancipation by 1829.³²

Richard's eldest son, William Thomas, was more interested in local matters, resulting in him establishing the Ballinasloe Horticultural Society in 1837 and by 1841 it had evolved into the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society. He later set about landscaping Garbally Park and remodelling the mansion in 1839, because of the large scale destruction of the demesne as a result of the 'Night of the Big Wind'. There were apparently 15,000 trees destroyed on the Clancarty estate on this night, including all the trees on the demesne, which was over 1,000 acres. He was the

³⁰ Kelly, 'The politics of Protestant ascendancy: Co. Galway 1650–1832', pp 257–8.

³¹ Mark Bence-Jones, *A guide to Irish country houses* (London, 1978), p. 130.

³² Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, pp 180, 234.

resident landlord during the Famine and acquired a reputation of trying to assist his tenants through this crisis. He did not permit sub-division nor was he amenable to the presence of cottiers on his estate. He maintained an estate of small holdings, even though many landlords across the country were largely unsympathetic to the plight of the tenantry and used the Famine as a pretext to clear uneconomic holdings.³³ His commendable work was not forgotten by his tenants, who erected a statue in his honour in 1874, two years after his death.

William Thomas was, like his contemporary, the third earl of Leitrim, more at ease dealing with agricultural matters on his estate than the political world relished by his father; but like Lord Leitrim, he was willing to speak in the House of Lords in relation to matters that he was passionate about, such as the Poor Law. Some peers were resistant to its implementation and in 1838, the anti-Poor Law Irish Peers and M.P.s met under the chairmanship of Lord Clanricarde. Clancarty and Clanricarde clashed over this and they never reconciled their differences, which had long term implications with regard to landlord participation in electoral politics in county Galway and this is discussed in chapter four. These peers agreed that relief should be provided to the aged and infirm, but they were not willing to agree to any further amendments. Clancarty was a sincere believer in the Poor Law and was desirous that it would succeed. He was considered to be a ‘respected young peer’ and he supported a comprehensive poor law, but agreed that good government was needed if this was to

³³ Samuel Lewis, *Topographical dictionary of Ireland* (1837); p. 137, Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 286; Lisa Shields and Denis Fitzgerald, ‘The Night of the Big Wind in Ireland, 6–7 January 1839’ in *Irish Geography*, 22 (January 1989), pp 31–43; J. S. Flynn, *Ballymacward, the story of an east Galway parish* (Dublin, 1994), pp 136–7; J. S. Donnelly, Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth century Cork: the rural economy and the Irish land question* (London and Boston, 1975), p. 113 and idem, *The great Irish Potato Famine* (Gloucestershire, 2001).

work. Viscount Eliot called him one of the most sensible men in the country. Peter Gray argued: ‘if unfortunate in some of his appointments, [Clancarty] could not be blamed in the circumstances for appointing those favourable to the government of the day’.³⁴

Despite such progressive thinking in regard to the Poor Law, Clancarty was of the opinion that Catholic chaplains were given preferential treatment and had salaries that were double those of their Protestant counterparts. This implied to him that the Poor Law Commissioners were biased in favour of Roman Catholic chaplains, even though they were supposed to remain objective. He questioned:

the soundness of the principle on which the poor law commissioners had carried out the appointments of chaplains under the new act, whether they were of a religious character, or whether, as appeared to him (the earl of Clancarty), they were directly inconsistent with Protestant religion in Ireland.³⁵

Such a statement makes the reasoning behind his resistance to the admittance of the Sisters of Mercy to the Ballinasloe workhouse easier to comprehend. This is explored in greater detail in chapter two.

The family played an important role in the development of Ballinasloe and the second earl did engage in town planning with *Pigot’s Directory* noting Ballinasloe was a well-built and thriving town by 1824.³⁶ Even though the infrastructural

³⁴ For more on the third earl of Leitrim, see Malcomson, *Virtues of a wicked earl*; for more on the first marquis of Clanricarde see Conwell, *A Galway landlord during the Great Famine*; Peter Gray, *The making of the Irish Poor Law, 1815–43* (Manchester, 2009), pp 289, 321.

³⁵ *Hansard*, lx, col. 626–7.

³⁶ *Pigot’s directory* (Dublin, 1824), p. 132; Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, pp 180, 234; le Poer Trench, *Memoir of the le Poer Trench family*, p. 28. See entry on Richard le Poer Trench in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* and his biographical entry in Oxford National Biography, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27703?docPos=4>, date accessed 12 July 2010; see also Jane Conroy, ‘Ballinasloe, Catholic Emancipation, political tourism and the French liberal agenda’ in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 54 (2002), pp 103–128; Aideen Ireland,

advances made by the family in the first half of the nineteenth century brought great benefit to their tenants, (discussed in chapter one), the second and third earls did not escape controversy. The family's evangelical zeal engendered hostility towards them that became part of the folklore locally. One such example was a story collected from Mrs Scanlon of Creagh, Ballinasloe in 1935. She stated that when the Sisters of Mercy convent was built in the 1850s, Lady Clancarty ordered that trees be planted around it, because she found the edifice to be an eyesore, but the trees 'grew thin and lanky and failed to fulfil their purpose'. Such a story or one similar to it was repeated on five occasions to the Folklore Commission schools collection. In fact, the stories collected do not criticise the earls of Clancarty; rather odium is directed towards the third earl's wife. Another story claimed that Clancarty allowed some nuns to use his carriage to return to the convent after alighting the train at Ballinasloe, but once his wife heard this, she ordered that the carriage be disinfected before she would use it. While such stories need to be treated with circumspection, they are indicative of the power of popular memory regarding attitudes towards landlords and are significant in this exploration of attitudes towards the Clancarty family between 1851 and 1914.³⁷ This thesis will explore the complex set of relationships that existed on the estate and by doing so; it will foster a greater coherency to the picture of life on the Clancarty estate between 1851 and 1914.

'Clancarthy [sic] Correspondence 1785–1861' in *J.G.A.H.S.*, 46 (1994), pp 197–202.

³⁷ *National Folklore Collection, schools manuscript collection* (microfilm consulted at Galway County Library, Nun's Island), reel 8, pp 183–193.

CHAPTER ONE:
ESTATE MANAGEMENT POLICIES ON THE CLANCARTY
ESTATE, 1851-1914

I.) Introduction

Ballinasloe is located on the river Suck, the largest tributary of the river Shannon. The river divides the town into two unequal parts, with the larger section being located in county Galway.¹ It is located within the baronies of Clonmacnowen in Galway and Moycarn in Roscommon. While the population of the country was decimated by the Famine, the district of Ballinasloe did not see as severe a decline as others parts of Connaught and the perspicacity of the third earl of Clancarty played an important role in this regard. The 1841 census reported that there were 14,715 and 2,888 persons living on the Clonmacnowen and Moycarn estates respectively. There was only a slight decline by the time of the 1851 census, with 13,614 persons accounted for in Clonmacnowen and 2,205 in Moycarn. However, there was a serious collapse in the population of the Clonmacnowen barony between 1851 and 1861, with the number of people residing there falling to 9,744 and by 1881 it stood at 7,856 persons, with slight falls in population recorded thereafter.²

K. T. Hoppen has contended that landlords who survived the Famine were able to present a stronger front because weaker landowners had been removed: ‘what the

¹ Samuel Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland* (London, 1837), pp 110–11.

² Census of Ireland, 1841–1861

Famine did for the overall position of Irish landowners was to act as a Darwinian agent weeding out the weak and reinforcing the strong' and landlords that were unable to extract rents from their tenants disappeared after the Famine: 'the most striking aspects of landlordism during the two decades which followed the Great Famine of 1845–9 were strength, prosperity and optimism'.³

The management policies initiated on the Clancarty estate prior to the Famine helped to ensure that the estate emerged relatively unscathed in its aftermath. This chapter pays particular attention to the socio-economic condition and management policies implemented on the Clancarty estate after the Famine. These policies were frequently disseminated through the auspices of the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society, which was established by the third earl of Clancarty. The society's operation was discussed at length in evidence given to the Devon Commission and in the pages of the local press and *Irish Farmers' Gazette*. While the Devon Commission sat prior to the period being examined in this thesis, the evidence gathered at it gives an indication of the socio-economic condition of the estate, improvements and the management policies of the Clancarty family and it creates a picture in the absence of estate records.

³ K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland, 1832–1887* (London, 1984); p. 106; idem 'Landownership and power in the nineteenth-century Ireland: the decline of an elite' in Ralph Gibson and Martin Blinkhorn (eds), *Landownership and power in modern Europe* (London, 1991), pp 164, 168.

II.) Socio-economic condition of the Clancarty estate and estate management.

According to the *General Valuation of Rateable Property in Ireland*, there were 1,444 occupiers on the estate. It consisted of 978 holdings less than five acres, 338 between five and twenty acres, 164 between twenty and fifty acres, forty-two between fifty and 100 acres and twenty-one that were over 100 acres. This meant that just over sixty-three per cent of holdings on the estate were less than five acres, but 413 of these were located in the townspark of Ballinasloe. 1,320 holdings had a rateable valuation. 660 were valued at £4 or less, 277 at £10 or less, 353 at £50 or less, twenty-one at £100 or less and nine were valued at more than £100. Despite such a plethora of small holdings, the estate appeared to remain solvent throughout most of the period being examined, even though tenant-right and the sale of goodwill were only permitted in rare circumstances.⁴ The Clancarty family did not allow their tenants to sub-let, there were very few cottier tenants on the estate and the extensive subdivision that took place prior to the Famine was not acceptable in its aftermath. P. K. Egan noted: ‘up to 1834, consolidation of holdings and evictions for the purpose [of consolidation] had not taken place in Ballinasloe parish, nor is there evidence of such in the remaining years of the decade’.⁵ Clancarty did not embrace the shift to grazing that was occurring on many estates after the Famine because he thought it was detrimental to small farmers and this was appreciated in the district. He also argued that an estate of large farms needed to be avoided unless there was significant capital

⁴ *Report from her majesty's commissioners of inquiry into the state of law and practice in respect of the occupation of land in Ireland minutes of evidence pt. ii* [616], HC 1845, 498 – 500.

⁵ P. K. Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, (Dublin, 1960), pp 153–5.

available to invest in them.⁶

As discussed in the introduction, the Clancarty estate emerged relatively unscathed from the ravages of the Famine, with the third earl expanding it through the auspices of the Encumbered Estates Court. In 1850 he purchased an estate in Kellysgrove for £11,000. This particular estate was heavily encumbered and he cleared the tenants from it and paid for their passage to America. He bought an estate in Fairfield, outside Eyrecourt, but attempted to have this sale reversed after he discovered that many of the tenants there were tied into perpetual leases, which was a reflection of his policy of having an estate of tenants-at-will, with the exception of urban tenancies, which is discussed below.⁷

It is difficult to ascertain levels of evictions on the estate in the absence of estate rentals. However, as has been discussed in the introduction, landlords often carried out evictions to restore order on the estate. One such example was reported in the *Western Star* on 25 January 1851. The third earl of Clancarty carried out twenty clearances on his estate in January 1851: ‘there was a want of merciful consideration, of Christian forbearance, in forcibly breaking the houses over their heads, in the most inclement, the severest week we have had since the winter season commenced, but they should have submitted’.⁸ These evictions were carried out in response to tenants who resisted paying the rents demanded of them. Clancarty was eager to portray himself as a fair and reasonable landlord, but the actions of these tenants challenged his paternalistic authority and he responded accordingly.

⁶ Patrick Melvin, ‘The landed gentry of Galway, 1820–1880’ (PhD, Trinity College Dublin, 1991), p. 163.

⁷ Melvin, ‘The landed gentry of Galway’, p. 163.

⁸ *Western Star*, 25 Jan. 1851.

Clancarty did not allow tenants to fall into arrears, but he was willing to come to an arrangement with those who were struggling to pay rent in order to allow them to repay it over a set period of time. Middlemen were not allowed on the estate because Clancarty believed that both he and tenants had a greater chance of prospering without them and most tenants were tenants-at-will, because he thought that they would be more likely to carry out improvements than those tied into a lease. In 1864 he argued that: 'tenants who hold by the longest and most advantageous leases, are commonly far behind those who hold from year to year, and pay the landlord the full value of the land; but in either case there will be little permanent improvement effected or benefit derived if the tenant is uneducated'.⁹ However, an exception to this was in relation to leases in townsparks, which were held in perpetuity on the estate. This had the advantage of encouraging the construction of good quality tenements in the town.¹⁰

L. M. Cullen argued that the construction of towns and villages in Ireland were not a process of urbanisation; rather they were a scheme of landlord improvement, thus becoming focal points for trade. Susan Hood has examined the impact of such a policy in Strokestown, county Roscommon. She argued that the policy of giving long leases in urban areas gave the leaseholders considerable freedom, but landlords saw a diminution in their authority as tenants began to obtain a certain degree of autonomy. Nevertheless, landlords benefited from such arrangements, as the physical and infrastructural condition of the estate town improved, with markets benefiting the

⁹ Earl of Clancarty, *Ireland: Her present condition and what it might be* (Dublin, 1864), p. 27.

¹⁰ *Report from her majesty's commissioners of inquiry into the state of law and practice in respect of the occupation of land in Ireland minutes of evidence pt. ii* [616], HC 1845, 498 – 500.

tenants through trade and the landlords through the tolls collected.¹¹ She further elucidated that:

The social hierarchy and mutual interests which existed between the various elements of society ... provides a useful framework into which the relationship between landowners and their urban tenantry can be placed. By creating such physical improvement to the landscape as the establishment of infrastructural improvement of an urban settlement on their estates, landlords not only insured their own economic, political and social interests, but brought benefits to others too. For example, when a landowner secured a market in his town, he not only secured his own economic interest, determining his right to a share in the profits raised by local exchange, but, also contributed to the economic progress of others, the merchants and manufacturers, whom he had encouraged to settle in his town, and who shared a vested interest with him in economic objectives. By means of tenurial policy, landowners could control overall improvements, whilst delegating the responsibility of building individual holdings to other parties ... By means of their leasing policy; however they were enabled to delegate responsibility for individual holdings to their tenants, in what was intended to be a mutually advantageous bargain. By means of favourable leases many landowners, attracted reliable tenants such as merchants or skilled workers to participate in the improvement of existing or recently established towns and villages. Tenants were offered leases for urban holdings for low ground rents and on long terms of years or lives, which attracted them to settle, in return agreeing to bear most, if not all of the cost of constructing the properties ... By charging low ground rents and bestowing long leasing terms, landlords facilitated modernisation, delegating the actual responsibility and cost of constructing individual properties, often according to their own formalised plan.¹²

In the 1870s the fourth earl of Clancarty acknowledged that there were numerous uneconomic holdings in the country but did not think a reduction in rent was the appropriate solution. Neither he nor his agent, Edward Fowler objected to farmers' engaging in tillage because the quality of land in the district was so poor due to a lack of drainage.¹³ The issue of the drainage of the river Suck was a long running affair

¹¹ Susan Hood, 'The landlord-planned nexus at Strokestown, county Roscommon: a case study of an Irish estate town, c. 1660–c. 1925' (PhD thesis, University of Ulster, 1994), pp 3–23.

¹² *ibid.*, pp 23–4.

¹³ *Irish Farmers' Gazette*, 24 May 1879, p. 165; 4 Oct. 1879, p. 332.

that appears to have never been adequately resolved. The third earl of Clancarty wrote to Lord Abercorn, the lord lieutenant of Ireland, in 1867 expressing his desire that the rivers Suck and Shannon be drained under the one programme and asked that the Suck be included as part of an arterial drainage scheme for the Shannon region. However this was to no avail.¹⁴

Much of the infrastructural improvements on the estate took place in the 1810s and 1820s and they were the initiatives of the second earl's agent and brother, Charles le Poer Trench. As well as being agent to his brother, Trench was also Archdeacon of Ardagh and an active proselytiser: 'he neglected his ordinary duty to his Protestant flock to become, after the Evangelical enthusiasm had taken hold of him, a scourge to the poor tenantry and workers on the estate of his brother, the earl, and fomentor of much religious bitterness about Ballinasloe'. He was succeeded as agent by his brother, Rear-Admiral William Le Poer Trench.¹⁵ Archdeacon Trench frequently threatened to call in the 'hanging gale' against tenants in order to force them to send their children to bible schools that began to emerge on the estate from 1818. While he was firm in his estate management policies, he 'succeeded in clearing up the dung hills (in the town), paving the footpaths and ensuring that the ale houses closed at a reasonable hour' and it is likely that such management policies led to perpetual leases becoming the norm in townsparks and an imposing monument was erected in his memory, overlooking the Fair Green at Dunlo Hill.¹⁶

¹⁴ Lord Clancarty to Lord Abercorn (National Library of Ireland, Mayo papers, MS 43, 839/1).

¹⁵ Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 182.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp 182, 222.



Fig. 1.1, Trench Monument. Photograph courtesy of Noel Mulryan.

Egan argued that the general condition of the poor in the Ballinasloe district remained stable and did not deteriorate between 1815 and the eve of the Famine: ‘there are no details of the condition of the poorer classes in the town [of Ballinasloe], who must have formed a majority, but it can be taken that their condition was somewhat less precarious than that of a large part of the rural population’, which serves as a useful explanation as to why there was a large migration from the rural to the urban part of the estate.¹⁷ He further stated that the urban population of the Clancarty estate doubled between 1821 and 1831, as a result of the proliferation of small industries in the town at this time.¹⁸

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp 143-153, 230-1.

¹⁸ *Pigot's directory* (Dublin, 1824), pp 197–8.

Table 1: List of business in Ballinasloe as listed in *Pigot's Directory*, 1824

Auctioneers	Architects	Attorneys
2	2	2
Bakers	Boot and shoemakers	Grocers
4	4	12
Hotels	Iron mongers	Leather sellers
2	3	3
Linen drapers	Linen and woolen drapers	Pawnbrokers
6	4	2
Publicans	Surgeons	Tailors
13	2	3
Tallow Chandlers	Tobacconists	Miscellaneous
4	2	12

‘In 1831 [the estate] comprised 632 houses, nearly all slated, of which 265 were built during the ten years preceding’.¹⁹ The third and fourth earls of Clancarty had a keen interest in improving inadequate housing. An undated pre-Famine poster in the Bellew papers illustrates such interest demonstrated by the Clancarty family in encouraging their tenants to keep their houses in good order.

¹⁹ Lewis, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland*, pp 110–11

Table 2: Prizes offered for the neatest habitation in the four different classes of houses

Neatest habitation			
<i>Class</i>	<i>Prize</i>		
	£	s	d
1	4	11	0
2	3	3	3
3	2	2	6
4	1	1	9

The qualifications to enter for any of the above classes of premiums are: an (sic) house with a chimney regularly built and drawing well. A paved or gravelled space before the door. Six feet by eight feet the house whitewashed inside and outside once (at least) with the year. The dunghill to the rear of the house, and six feet from the wall there of. A window to each room to open with a hinge or sash. An outhouse for pigs or cows if either in possession of claimant.²⁰

The evidence presented above indicates that the most substantial estate management policies took place prior to the Famine, which paralleled improvements that were taking place on other estate towns, such as Strokestown. Despite such conscientious endeavours to improve housing on the estate, the third earl expressed his dismay with the condition of cabins in Ballinasloe in 1852 and the failure of tenants to maintain them properly, which left him exasperated:

after repeated remonstrations to some of my poorer neighbours at the condition of their dwellings, and promises on their part that all should be clean on the next occasion, I have found that the dirt continued as bad as ever, in fact whether as a habit or as a substance, it (dirt) sticks to the person.²¹

²⁰ Undated poster (probably pre-Famine) (N. L. I., Bellew of Mountbellew papers MS 31, 761)

²¹ *I. F. G.*, 16 Oct. 1852, pp 499, 501.

In 1866 Lord Dunlo had designs drawn up for improved labourers cottages in Deerpark, resulting in him being awarded a gold medal from the Royal Agricultural Society. The cost of constructing these four cottages came to £278 17s. 8d.²²

Rural prosperity improved in the post-Famine period and this had the added affect of seeing increased consumption of luxury items, such as tea and tobacco.

Susan Hood highlighted that ‘the growing number of retail shops in towns was indicative of the increased spending power of rural society’.²³ She further demurred:

against this background of the improving agrarian economy, towns became more distinctive entities in the rural landscape. The central importance of agriculture to the economy was facilitated by the presence of existing urban settlements, which, in serving the transformation of agricultural processes, developed distinctive administrative, commercial and social functions, features that set them apart from their surrounding rural hinterlands.²⁴

III.) The Ballinasloe Agricultural Society.

Agricultural societies began to emerge in Ireland from 1731 with the establishment of the Dublin Society, which subsequently became the Royal Dublin Society. Other societies were later established in Antrim, Kildare and Louth and these local societies grew in tandem with national organisations. The Farming Society of Ireland was established in Ballinasloe in 1800 and became incorporated in 1815. It received an annual grant of £5,000, but it is unclear where this money came from, possibly the Royal Dublin Society. The Farming Society of Ireland received this award on an annual basis until it became defunct in 1828.²⁵

²² *Irish Builder*, 15 Sept. 1866, p. 262. This edition also has plans for the cottages included, *I. F. G.*, 5 Oct. 1867, p. 377.

²³ Hood, ‘The landlord-planned nexus at Strokestown, county Roscommon’, pp 212–13.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁵ Jonathan Bell and Mervyn Watson, *Irish farming implements and techniques, 1750–1900* (Edinburgh,

Agricultural societies had the potential to play an important role in alleviating the condition of the poorest in the country through advanced agricultural practices, though many were not as proactive as the Ballinasloe organisation. On the eve of the Famine, Reverend William Hickey, an agricultural writer based in Wexford, argued that these societies were vital for the improvement of farm husbandry, but Thomas Baldwin was sceptical about the level of support they attracted. He contended that they failed in their efforts to ‘reach the numerous class of small farmers to whom this system (prize giving) is addressed’. While there was a hope that agricultural advancement would be fostered, some societies were ridiculed because of their incompetence and failure to deal adequately with the numerous crises presented during the Famine.²⁶

The third earl of Clancarty was as enthusiastic about good estate management as his father and uncle – Archdeacon Trench – which is evidenced when he established the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society in 1841.²⁷ It was the product of Clancarty’s ‘earnest desire to improve the farming of the small occupiers around, by providing rewards to stimulate industry’.²⁸ He made a conspicuous effort to use the society as a tool to improve the condition of farmers within the vicinity of his estate. A local farmer, Laurence Egan testified to the Devon Commission in 1843 that he was grateful to the society for the assistance it provided him, because prior to its existence

1986), pp 3–5.

²⁶ Thomas Baldwin, *Public opinion on the application of the prize system to the improvement of the agricultural practices of the small farmers of Ireland with the introductory remarks* (Dublin, 1879), p. ix. For more on William Hickey see *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, vol. 4, pp 674–5.

²⁷ *I. F. G.*, 6 Sept. 1851, p. 343; 27 Nov. 1852, p. 578.

²⁸ *I. F. G.*, 16 Oct. 1852, pp 499, 501.

he was a farmer in name only.²⁹ The Ballinasloe board of guardians and ratepayers of the union were eager to see it coming into operation, in the hope that by offering pecuniary incentives, it would encourage farmers to adopt more advanced agricultural techniques and in turn, reduce the level of rates in the district. Its primary objective was to improve the condition of the more vulnerable farmers in the region: ‘under the society’s regulations, all rewards of money premiums have been confined exclusively to the humbler classes of the rural population ... The special regard shown to the interests of the poorer classes has rendered the institution eminently popular amongst those for whom it was most required’.³⁰

Clancarty was eager to expand the society’s sphere of influence beyond the Ballinasloe poor law union in the hope that it would foster greater social harmony and prosperity in the countryside.³¹ In an attempt to extend its orbit, Clancarty suggested that farmers from the Clifden, Galway, Oughterard, Loughrea and Tuam Unions should be allowed to enter competitions sponsored by the society in 1851.³² At the 1852 dinner, he said that its success was down to ‘every class and every individual, from the highest to the lowest within the district, [being] interested in its success; and were similar societies instituted in every district of Ireland and supported ... the country would speedily realise a state of prosperity’.³³

Clancarty believed that education was the key determinant in achieving change to agricultural practices in the country, with numerous works pertaining to Irish

²⁹ *Report from Her Majesty’s Commissioners of Inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland*, [605] [606] HC 1845 Appendix 8, pp 30–1.

³⁰ *I. F. G.*, 6 Sept. 1851, p. 434.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*, 16 Oct. 1852, pp 499, 501.

agriculture and the education of farmers published from 1750 onwards. The success of these works was hindered by their failure to disseminate information in a way farmers could understand. The ability of farmers to instigate change for their own benefit was debatable, especially as the Ulster Custom was frequently not recognised outside of the province and tenant-right and the sale of goodwill was acknowledged on the Clancarty estate only in exceptional circumstances. Their authors failed to appreciate the obstacles that Irish farmers faced: ‘the farming methods which were available to these men were often neither within the resource of the mass of Irish farmers, nor were they always the most suitable for their situation’.³⁴

Clancarty was convinced that landlords had a moral obligation to their tenants in ensuring that they maximised the potential of their holdings and anything less than the total improvement of the condition of the land was unacceptable. He thought Irish farmers were unable to maximise the potential of their holdings because of the archaic agricultural practices they were using: ‘why do farmers in general, exhibit such waste, such ill-fenced, ill-squared and dirty fields, such as a total absence of skill and economy, so much land lying unproductive, and that which is cultivated not producing half as much as it should’.³⁵

Like the third earl of Leitrim, Clancarty wanted Irish farmers to adopt scientific methods of farming similar to those used by farmers in England and Scotland in the hope this would improve social harmony and offered pecuniary

³⁴ Bell and Watson, *Irish farming, implements and techniques*, pp 2–5.

³⁵ *I. F. G.*, 16 Oct. 1852, pp 499, 501.

incentives for this purpose.³⁶ His foresightedness led him to establish a model farm in the townland of Deerpark and prior to the Famine and he hired a Scottish agriculturalist, James Clapperton to visit both landlords and tenants to instruct them on the benefits of good farming practices and it appears that these agriculturalists were retained after the Famine. In his testimony to the Devon Commission, Clapperton said he ‘found ... friendly social intercourse between landlord and tenant. [This] is eminently calculated to stimulate and arouse the latent energy of the small farmer’, even though this rarely happened.³⁷ He encouraged a system of farming called four or five shift rotation on the estate in an effort to improve yields and explained its operation to the Devon Commission.

It is according to the ground. If I see it suited to the four courses, we begin with manure. The first year it is put under potatoes or turnips, or mangel wurzel; then the second year it is wheat, oats or barley – clover or grass being sown along with the crop. The third year it is clover and grass; and the fourth year it is broken up and put under oats – and the same course recommences after it is manured. The fifth course rotation is by letting it remain two years in grass.³⁸

Thomas Baldwin was an optimistic critic of Irish farming methods and he believed that it was essential for small farmers to adopt improved agricultural techniques, such as deep tillage and early harvesting.³⁹ The vast majority of farmers failed to do this, which resulted in them being ‘in a wretched condition ... Two or three bad years brings [farmers] to the verge of starvation and creates a feeling of discontent, [this] is

³⁶ *I. F. G.*, 16 Oct. 1852, p. 499; 10 Oct. 1857, p. 865–6; 24 May 1879, p. 165; 4 Oct. 1879, p. 332; Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, pp 153–5. A. P. W. Malcomson, *Virtues of a wicked earl: the life and legend of William Sydney Clements, third earl of Leitrim 1806–78* (Dublin, 2009), pp 212, 221.

³⁷ *I. F. G.*, 30 Sept. 1854, p. 478; Melvin, ‘The landed gentry of Galway, 1820–1880’, pp 127–8.

³⁸ *Report from Her Majesty’s Commissioners of Inquiry into the state of the law and practice in respect to the occupation of land in Ireland minutes of evidence pt. ii* [616], HC 1845, 516–17

³⁹ W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994), p. 84.

injurious to the general prosperity of the country'.⁴⁰ Baldwin suggested that it would be more remunerative for small farmers to plough their farms using spades instead of horses, especially when the farm was less than ten acres. He argued that if farmers managed their farms in a more productive fashion, such as the adoption of deep ploughing, weeding and proper crop rotation, it could add £5.5 million to the value of tillage in the country.⁴¹

Farms in the Ballinasloe district were badly managed and covered in weeds, partially because labourers were not being effectively employed to work on them.⁴² Digging competitions for farmers and labourers were organised by the society in the hope that it would increase tillage production. Landlords participated in the 1850 digging competition 'and the large amount of work done in 1850 was chiefly owing to the competition that year among landlords, who have not since competed and may be partly attributable to the desire on their part to relieve the pressure at this time on the workhouse'.⁴³

Digging was generally concentrated where land had been exhausted from over cropping, 'but [is] sufficiently deep to admit of being sub-soiled or where there is a hard substratum that does not allow the water to sink through it, deep digging is unquestionably beneficial'. In 1851 surplus prize money from the show was used to hire extra labourers to dig exhausted soil over the winter months, thereby giving much needed employment. In 1852 labourers dug the soil to a depth of between twelve and

⁴⁰ Baldwin, *Public opinion on the application of the prize system to the improvement of the agricultural practices of the small farmers of Ireland*, pp v–vi, ix.

⁴¹ Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland*, pp 83–4

⁴² *I. F. G.*, 16 Oct. 1852, pp 499, 501.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 578.

seventeen inches and Clancarty commended them for digging it to such a depth. Poor weather resulted in ploughs being used in 1853 because the soil was too heavy for spades to be used and this resulted in fewer labourers being employed during this winter. Alderman John Reynolds proposed a toast of gratitude to Clancarty at the 1857 society dinner because of his concern for the welfare of the poor in the district. This was despite the animosity between the two men over the Sisters of Mercy débâcle that was ongoing at this time, which is discussed in further detail in chapter two. Digging competitions ceased in 1874 because it was never fully appreciated in the district. In 1876 W. E. Duffy suggested that they needed to be revived and the fourth earl of Clancarty concurred, promising to pledge the necessary resources to ensure that it would succeed.⁴⁴

Despite the efforts of the earls of Clancarty to assist farmers on the estate, many were not interested in improving the condition of their farms and contemporaries argued that leases were too short to tempt tenants to carry out improvements. According to Bell and Watson: ‘leasing arrangements on farms have ... been accepted as having important influences on farming methods ... [but] there is some disagreement as to their real effects’.⁴⁵ Small tenant farmers were suspicious of the efforts made by the well-to-do landowners in carrying out improvements, because they feared there would be an increase in rents if they did.⁴⁶ Vaughan has contented that: ‘tenants were harangued at agricultural shows, invited to

⁴⁴ *I. F. G.*, 6 Sept. 1851, p. 434; 27 Sept. 1851, p. 473; 16 Oct. 1852, pp 499–501; 27 Nov. 1852, p. 578; 3 Dec. 1853, p. 607; 1 Oct. 1853, p. 485; 10 Oct. 1857, pp 865–6; 19 Mar. 1859, p. 133; 31 Dec. 1859, p. 647; 5 Oct. 1878, p. 358; *Tuam Herald*, 9 Sept. 1876.

⁴⁵ Bell and Watson, *Irish farming, implements and techniques*, pp 3–10.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

compete for prizes for good cultivation, and urged to keep farms better by precept and example'.⁴⁷

In 1857 Lord Dunlo was keen to change the perception that the show, rather than the alleviation of distress was the *raison d'être* for the society. Clancarty wanted landlords and larger farmers to set a good example to the smaller farmers in the district and he was reported to have said: 'good farming on the part of noble lords or wealthy proprietors is never looked on as an example for the smaller occupiers who obtain their subsistence by manual labour in the field'.⁴⁸ While the quality of the stock at the 1862 show was poor, Clancarty stated that he would improve the schedule of prizes if it would encourage potential competitors to enter and he wanted to remove the discrepancies which had crept into the competitions that saw smaller farmers compete against larger farmers.⁴⁹ However, he did not think that the stock of smaller farmers was inferior to larger farmers; though by 1869, he agreed that farmers in the fourth class should not have to pay a subscription in order to compete. By the 1860s, shopkeeper-graziers began to enter these competitions, which caused some animosity as farmers thought these competitions should be their exclusive preserve:

some dissatisfaction was expressed by tenant farmers that the prizes offered them for competition were often taken by persons who had other means of living, beside the profits of their farms, it is recommended that for future, the prizes offered for competition in the second and third classes be strictly confined to farmers whose sole, or principle means of living are derived from the profit of their farms.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland*, pp 121–2.

⁴⁸ *I. F. G.*, 28 Feb. 1857

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 4 Oct. 1862, p. 332.

⁵⁰ *W. S.*, 14 Jan. 1865; *I. F. G.*, 17 April 1869, p. 136.

Dunlo's marriage to Lady Adeliza Hervey, daughter of the second Marquis of Bristol triggered a massive celebration on the estate as tenants lined the streets to show their affection for the newly married couple, with horses being yoked from their carriage as it was pulled through the streets by the tenantry of the estate through the principal streets of the town. This gave Dunlo an opportunity to view 'the ornamentation in each house for him and his wife'.⁵¹ Eugene Hynes argued that such 'exaggerated displays of deference towards landlords masked tenants sense of powerlessness', though K. T. Hoppen claimed: 'certain estates built up distinct feelings of social and political *esprit de corps* which cut across most other barriers and distinctions'.⁵² Lady Adeliza's brother, the third Marquis, donated a cup for the best bull in 1869 to mark this occasion. Once Dunlo became Lord Clancarty in 1872, he oversaw the introduction of premium bulls across the region and allowed his tenants to use his own bull in order to improve the quality of their livestock. However, only a small number of tenants utilised this offer, because they believed that any improvements they made would result in an increase in rent. No awards were granted when there was a lack of competition, which was frequent in the immediate aftermath of the Famine and landlords often only returned the best farms for inspection, thus giving a false impression as to the condition of their estates.⁵³

Despite nationalist aloofness towards the society, James Kilmartin, a local nationalist of significant stature, became a judge at the 1878 show. He criticised the

⁵¹ *Tuam Herald*, 22 Dec. 1866.

⁵² Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland*, p. 134; Eugene Hynes, *Knock, the Virgin's apparition in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cork, 2009), p. 142.

⁵³ *I. F. G.*, 3 Oct. 1874, pp 361–2.

conditions of some holdings in the district and he held tenants partially responsible for this. Nevertheless, he had 'seen ample evidence of prosperity in the condition of the people on some estates, while on a few others there was equal evidence of sloth and indigence',⁵⁴ and he did not think that landlords were providing adequate assistance to their tenants.⁵⁵ There was some grievance directed towards tradesmen, because as J. Ward claimed, they had not suffered to the same extent as farmers did from the various downturns that had affected the country since 1878. While nationalists interpreted the society as a landlord stronghold, landlords and strong farmers thought it was an egalitarian organisation.⁵⁶

There was a booming linen industry in Mayo and Sligo in the eighteenth century and while it was the principal source of wealth by 1790, it had collapsed in 1837 due to saturation in the linen market. Its collapse and the exposure felt by small farmers led to the emergence of graziers as members of the new capitalist elite in the countryside. There was resurgence in its production in the 1850s and 1860s. The Clancarty family appreciated that tenants needed to supplement their incomes and the third earl and his wife encouraged their tenants to engage in weaving, needlework and butter production during the 1850s. Clancarty sowed five statute acres and he hoped that his tenants would follow his example and use it for manufacturing purposes, because it had the potential of being financially remunerative for farmers. However, his hopes were dashed by the poor quality exhibits at the 1864 show, which supports Barbara Solow's argument that it was futile for farmers to turn to flax outside of

⁵⁴ *I. F. G.*, 5 Oct. 1878, p. 358.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *W. N.*, 9 Oct. 1886.

Ulster as a financial supplement.⁵⁷

The expansion of the butter market to the British Empire and beyond in the nineteenth century presented farmers with another opportunity to supplement their income. The increased consumption in dairy products between 1850 and 1873 in Britain made its production especially lucrative, with Clancarty believing that it could be a useful pursuit for farmers. He failed to appreciate that the quality of the grass was quite poor in the region due to a lack of adequate drainage, which meant that it was quite difficult for farmers to produce a decent standard of butter.⁵⁸ The fourth earl had invested £4,500 in arterial drainage works by the mid-1880s. Edward Fowler told the Cowper Commission that the land was now of similar quality to the ‘butter land’ of Blarney, county Cork, but no evidence has been uncovered as to whether any renewed efforts to engage in butter production took place in the district after the completion of this arterial drainage work.⁵⁹

Women were encouraged to supplement family income by engaging in needlework: ‘while the men labour abroad, it is a gratifying thing to find the females at home employed in industry, in producing clothing for their families’. There was no produce on display at the 1851 show despite the girls that attended the estate schools being taught needlepoint at the behest of Lady Clancarty.⁶⁰ A local curate in

⁵⁷ *I. F. G.*, 6 Sept. 1851, p. 473; 1 Oct. 1853, p. 486; 19 Mar. 1859, p. 492; *W.S.*, 14 Jan. 1865; Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland: county Mayo from the Plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge, 1994), pp 60–1; Solow, *The land question and the Irish economy, 1870–1903*, p. 31.

⁵⁸ *I. F. G.*, 6 Sept. 1851, p. 473; 1 Oct. 1853, p. 486; 19 Mar. 1859, p. 492; *W.S.*, 14 Jan. 1865; J. S. Donnelly Jr, ‘Cork market: its role in the nineteenth century butter trade’, in *Studia Hibernica* no. 11 (1971), p. 132.

⁵⁹ *Report of the royal commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act 1881 and the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act 1885* [C4969] HC 1887, 1; *minutes of evidence and appendices*, [C496], HC 1887 xxvi, qs 21,617, 21, 666–8.

⁶⁰ *I. F. G.*, 6 Sept. 1851, p. 473; 1 Oct. 1853, p. 486.

Ballinasloe, Fr Malachy Green took particular umbrage at Lady Clancarty's initiative and ensured that the Sisters of Mercy taught lace-craft when they established their school in Ballinasloe in an attempt to counteract any potential proselytising activity that would have taken place.⁶¹

Very often farmers did not carry out improvements because of the initial capital that was required and also because fencing and drainage needed the co-operation of landlords. W. E. Vaughan stated that farmers did not interpret infrastructural changes as improvements, but rather increased prosperity.⁶² The *Western Star* said that 'landlords were unwilling to lend their assent to real improvements that would have secured an increase in rents'.⁶³ Many rarely looked beyond their immediate circumstances and significant obstacles presented themselves in attempting to change such a mindset, with William Bence-Jones arguing that 'it is a mere delusion that farmers in Ireland are burning to carry out useful improvements and are kept back by landlords. It is earnestly to be wished the fact was so, for the remedy would then be easy'.⁶⁴ Many landlords were eager to blame tenants for the lack of improvements taking place, but they did not encourage their tenants to carry out such improvements and the 'Ulster Custom' did not exist on many estates outside the province.

⁶¹ Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 255

⁶² Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland*, p. 85.

⁶³ *W. S.*, 14 Nov. 1868.

⁶⁴ Solow, *The land question and the Irish economy, 1870–1903*, p. 39.

IV.) The October fair

Fairs were one of the most important forms of exchange in provincial Ireland and they often had a geographical influence beyond the immediate hinterland of where they were held.⁶⁵ The prices of the Ballinasloe October fair are amongst the most substantial returns of prices of the nineteenth century and they are a good indication of the strength of Irish agriculture in this period. The returns were published in *Thom's Directory*, local newspapers and cited in Parliamentary inquiries.⁶⁶ No evidence of a patent of the Ballinasloe fair appeared until 1758 when 'Richard Trench Esq., of Garbally, got one for holding a fair at Dunlo, on [17] May and [13] July. The great fair for fat cattle in October, it is probable, was established before this period'.⁶⁷ Fairs were held in Ballinasloe in January, May, July and October, which was the most significant of these and is the subject of discussion in this section. Ballinasloe was called a 'somewhat unpretentious town that achieved worldwide celebrity'⁶⁸ because of the October fair. 'The fair commences on Tuesday morning according to custom, but also according to custom, the fair commences on Sunday. This is a contradictory statement but true nevertheless'.⁶⁹ Ewes, wethers and some rams were sold on Monday, with the remaining stock then sold on Tuesday. Some horses were displayed on Tuesday evening and sold on Wednesday. Bullocks were sold on Thursday and Friday.⁷⁰ Country Fair Day, also known as 'Poor man's market', was and is still held

⁶⁵ Hood, 'The landlord-planned nexus at Strokestown', pp 218-19.

⁶⁶ Liam Kennedy and Peter M. Solar, *Irish agriculture: a price history from the mid eighteenth century to the eve of the First World War* (Dublin, 2007), p. 11.

⁶⁷ *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, xxiii (1893), pp 88-9.

⁶⁸ *W. N.*, 6 Oct. 1900.

⁶⁹ *I. F. G.*, 6 Oct. 1900, p. 776.

⁷⁰ *Western News*, 6 Oct. 1900.

on the last Saturday of the fair and any remaining stock was sold on this day.⁷¹

There was a large attendance at the 1852 fair, with ‘the supply of sheep ... then expected to be short, and no doubt was entertained that prices would range high. The demand for horned stock was also to be expected to be without parallel’. Despite the presence of foot and mouth, most of the stock changed hands: ‘in fact, there never was before on the Green of Ballinasloe a finer display of cattle ... The great demand for horned cattle and sheep for the purpose of stock land heretofore devoted to tillage, gives the most convincing proof that tillage farming is no longer remunerative’ and there was little proof of any prosperity for farmers. While the quality of the stock at the 1853 fair was poor due to the inclement weather, there was still a good number of horses sold.⁷²

A series of fortuitous circumstances ensured the success of the 1854 fair. A late rainfall improved the quality of the pasture and the Crimean War led to an increased demand for stock: ‘the joyous vociferations of the Irish herdsmen in charge of the stock loudly uttered in all the richness of the deepest brogue, echoed throughout the woodlands of Garbally’. There was a similar degree of excitement at the 1855 fair: ‘the immense breadth of “whitened fleeces” which contrasted deeply with the foliage of the Garbally woodlands, formed a scene of rustic splendour only to be witnessed at a Ballinasloe fair’. Buyers were left disappointed after the 1857 fair, because the supply of sheep could not match demand. There was a significant drop in the sale of sheep in 1859, which was attributed to the severe drought in 1859. The wet weather

⁷¹ *I. F. G.*, 8 Oct. 1853.

⁷² *ibid.*, 9 Oct. 1852; p. 489, 16 Oct. 1852, p. 499; 8 Oct. 1853, p. 226.

which followed this scorching summer affected sales at the 1860 fair.⁷³

There was a significant agricultural depression between 1859 and 1864, with rivers bursting their banks in June 1860 and fields in Loughrea became totally flooded. The consequence of this was that the land could not be worked. Even though the winter of 1861–2 was mild, the promise of renewed prosperity quickly faded. Pasture land became infested with weeds or was bare, though there was an increased risk of disease which created difficulties selling animals. The weather was unfavourable to the fattening of stock and ‘livestock production was seriously injured not only indirectly through crop deficiencies but also directly by adverse weather conditions ... This appalling catalogue of meteorological adversities imposed huge losses on the agricultural economy’. The cycle of droughts and excessive rainfall resulted in crops being badly stunted and the price of hay doubled between 1858 and 1860. The vegetation that appeared in the spring of 1863 was not sufficient for the nourishment of stock.⁷⁴ While the number of cattle sold had a consistent fluctuation; the same could not be said for the numbers unsold, which varied greatly. A high level of unsold stock indicated its poor quality for that year and foot and mouth distemper, poor quality pasture and bad weather all played roles in this.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 6 Oct. 1855, p. 541; 10 Oct. 1857, pp 865–6, 877; 13 Oct. 1860, pp 505, 513.

⁷⁴ J. S. Donnelly, Jr., ‘The Irish agricultural depression of 1859–64’ in *Irish Economic and Social History*, iii (1976), pp 34–8.

Table 3: Number of cattle sold at the Ballinasloe October fair, 1851–1862

Year	Sold	Unsold	Total
1851	11277	9228	20505
1852	12090	645	12735
1853	12249	2538	14787
1854	15570	2139	17709
1855	16237	3803	20040
1856	16540	5928	22468
1857	16411	949	17360
1858	15353	7160	22513
1859	14714	3398	18112
1860	15745	1729	17474
1861	15343	1626	16969
1862	13941	1590	15531

Source: *Irish Farmers' Gazette*, 18 October 1862, p. 352

The poor supply of cattle in 1860 led to high prices being demanded despite the disappointing quality on display: ‘while the breeders on the west side of the Shannon ... have to return home with heavy purses and light hearts’. Inadequate hay supplies meant that the eastern graziers were unable to fatten cattle sufficiently to produce good quality meat and they were hit hardest by this agricultural crisis and ‘in the spring of 1864 the extremely high prices of store sheep and especially store cattle greatly dismayed the struggling graziers’. J. S. Donnelly described the crisis as a ‘fodder famine’ because ‘the crop deficiencies curtailed production in the far more important livestock sector’ and there was an increase in the costs of harvesting crops.

Even with the gravity of this crisis, there was no noteworthy outbreak of discontent in the Irish countryside because shopkeepers extended credit, which eased the burden on farmers. It presented the Irish Republican Brotherhood – a secret, oath-bound, seditious organisation, founded in 1858 – with an excellent opportunity to mobilize the countryside, but they failed to do so, because they had not formulated a coherent agricultural policy at this time as they were focused on revolutionary insurrection.⁷⁵

The arrival of foot and mouth disease and sheep rot in the winter of 1862–3 resulted in up to sixty per cent of sheep being declared unsound by March 1863 and this led to widespread panic amongst buyers. Poor quality store cattle and the return of foot and mouth at the 1869 fair resulted in trade being very sluggish. While favourable weather ensured that the 1871 fair was a success, the numbers sold decline from 60,921 in 1870 to 56,900 in 1871. Breeders were conspicuous by their absence and there were very few sheep from Roscommon and none from Mayo, as new fairs at Banagher and Tuam threatened the Ballinasloe fair. Sellers were accused of exploiting its *facile princeps* by demanding extortionate prices for stock. It was maintained that ‘this arbitrary power is more imaginary than real, that is to say, bowed down to rather on account of the prestige of the institution than of the power which it actually possesses’. The *Irish Farmers’ Gazette* argued that these changing circumstances provided a welcome respite for farmers, saying ‘the doings of the buyer and seller at Ballinasloe in October of each year regulate the price of a stale

⁷⁵ Donnelly, ‘The Irish agricultural depression of 1859–64’, pp 34–8. For more on the I. R. B., see R. V. Comerford, *The fenians in context, Irish politics and society, 1848–82* (Dublin, 1978 and 1994); M. J. Kelly, *The fenian ideal and Irish nationalism, 1882–1916*; Owen McGee, *The I. R. B., The Irish Republican Brotherhood: from the Land League to Sinn Fein* (Dublin, 2007).

article of food, and change the value of almost everything that is consumed in the domestic economy'.⁷⁶ Foot and mouth distemper affected sales at numerous fairs in the same period and by 1873, more vigorous veterinary inspections of stock took place when trains arrived at Ballinasloe in an attempt to minimise the threat of disease spreading.

To the Irish graziers, amongst whom an exchange of stock at the great fair of Ballinasloe, varying from 50–80,000 sheep and 10–15,000 cattle on each occasion, takes place, it is of no small importance of a gratifying nature to learn, on the authority of Professor Ferguson, at the head of her Majesty's Veterinary Department in Ireland, that in the week ending 27 September there were only four farms or places in all the province of Connaught under restriction and in all Ireland only eighty-three.⁷⁷

Farmers sold their stock on their farms in 1875, rather than bring them to the fairs, because of the return of foot and mouth and the consequent risk of spreading disease.⁷⁸ In 1883 more stringent precautions were introduced that superseded those in a place a decade earlier.

the results of the Ballinasloe fair have this year been anxiously looked for by all in the cattle trade of Ireland. Although the district in which this important agricultural gathering takes place is fortunately, free from disease, the prevalence of foot-and-mouth distemper in Leinster and the restrictions on the movement of stock imposed both in this country and in England and Scotland necessarily had a very marked effect on business.⁷⁹

The 1876 fair was slow to take off and Garbally demesne, – where livestock was allowed to graze prior to the beginning of the markets in the town – was reported not to have been as lively as it had been ten years previously, with 'neither buyers or

⁷⁶ *I. F. G.*, p. 37; 16 Oct. 1869, p. 399; 15 Oct. 1870, p. 240; 1871, p. 386; 9 Oct. 1875, p. 359.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 4 Oct. 1873, p. 343.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 9 Oct. 1875, p. 359.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 6 Oct. 1883, p. 587.

sellers [able to make] up their minds as to what the prices should be' and the supply of sheep reported to be one of the lowest in years. In 1877, buyers and sellers were reticent about closing a deal until they managed to figure out the pulse of the fair. There was a shift in the reasons for purchasing in 1877: 'the fairs of the future will chiefly consist of young animals for exportation or agricultural purposes'. The 1879 fair was not as bad as had been initially feared. Prices at the 1880 fair were at 1878 levels, which reflected the impact of a few months good pasturage. There was uncertainty in the cattle trade in 1883 and by 1884 it was felt that the sheep fair existed in name only. Such was the decline in numbers that it was moved from Garbally to the fair green and by 1906, the numbers of sheep for sale collapsed by between 10,000 and 12,000 from the peak of the fair.⁸⁰ Since the third earl of Clancarty was the driving force behind the fair, it was inevitable that it would decline after his death and by 1878: 'the fame of the Ballinasloe fair seems to be gradually departing. All the life, bustle and excitement for which the great western gathering was so eminently distinguished has gone dead out of it'. The paucity of transactions in 1881 led some to fear that: 'it has had its day, and while it may not for a very long time pass into history, as some maintain it soon will, it has undoubtedly reached its declining years'.⁸¹ The intensity of the agitation saw a declining participation throughout the 1880s, though there was a hope that this would change when there were signs of an economic recovery in 1888: 'we feel ourselves again afloat on the tide of prosperity, after years of retrogression, in which the hopes and spirits of many

⁸⁰ *T. H.*, 7 Oct. 1876; *I. F. G.*, 6 Oct. 1877, p. 363; 11 Oct. 1879, p. 349; 16 Oct. 1880, pp 393–4; 6 Oct. 1883, p. 587; 11 Oct. 1884, p. 621.

⁸¹ *T. H.*, 7 Oct. 1876; *I. F. G.*, 12 Oct. 1878, p. 363; 8 Oct. 1881, p. 395.

of our farming friends were some several degrees below zero'.⁸² The *Irish Farmers' Gazette* stated that the 1882 show challenged assumptions held in the countryside that farmers did not want to be seen to be convivial with landlords.⁸³ While this fair was reported to have been a success, the *Irish Farmers' Gazette* commented that the stock and crowds had declined from previous years. This echoed the fear 'that the future course of the Ballinasloe autumn gatherings must be downward'. Despite such gloomy outlooks regarding its future, the fair was still seen to be the great fair of the country at the *fin-de-siècle*.⁸⁴

V.) The declining influence of the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society

Subscriptions from local landlords was the main source of income for the society and the Irish Peasantry Society – which advised on the employment of tenant farmers in Ireland – also made significant financial contributions: 'as the object of that society is the improvement of the condition of the Irish peasantry, there is, in this respect, a perfect agreement between it and the Ballinasloe District Agricultural Society'.

Clancarty wanted landlords to increase their subscriptions in order to cover the costs of agriculturalists employed by the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society. He recommended that an amendment to the subscription rates was the best way forward for this and he requested that the rules be changed accordingly: 'it was therefore ruled that the number of his tenants admissible to compete without paying fees of entrances should

⁸² *I. F. G.*, 6 Oct. 1888, p. 443.

⁸³ *ibid.*, 30 Sept. 1882, p. 572.

⁸⁴ *W. N.*, 6 Oct. 1900; *T. H.*, 5 Oct. 1901.

thenceforth be regulated by the amount of his subscription'.⁸⁵

However, as landlords in the locality were heavily encumbered after the Famine, it meant that they could not contribute to the extent that Clancarty had hoped for. This amendment failed to bring about an increase in subscriptions, with members eager to have the changes rescinded.

The spirit of agricultural improvement still pervades the district, though the number of competitors for the society's prizes entered in the present year is rather less than we have been called on to visit at previous inspections. This may be in some measure attributable to the new rule of the society, limiting the number of entries from each estate in proportion to the amount of the proprietor's subscription.⁸⁶

An incompetent committee and poor location were blamed for the sparse attendances in 1868 and 1871. Richard, Lord Dunlo, the eldest son of Lord Clancarty, chaired a sub-committee to investigate what direction it needed to take in the future. The gentry was frequently criticised for their poor support of the society and in September 1876, Major Seymour said that the society was receiving more support from tenant farmers than the gentry.⁸⁷ In January 1871 Hon. Charles Trench suggested that they cease granting awards for livestock and divert the funds into the creation of more prizes for tillage. The quality of stock at the 1874 show improved with 'some of the horned stock would have done credit to a metropolitan show'.⁸⁸ Despite this ray of hope, the show declined again by 1876. Members were disappointed with it and some suggested that it needed to be discontinued and also suggested that judges from

⁸⁵*I. F. G.*, 5 Feb. 1852, p. 69.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 5 Oct. 1861, p. 524.

⁸⁷ *W. S.*, 3 Oct. 1868; 31 Oct. 1868; 14 Nov. 1868; *T. H.*, 7 Jan. 1871; 4 Oct. 1873; *ibid.*, 9 Sept. 1876.

⁸⁸ *T. H.*, 7 Jan. 1871, *I. F. G.*, 3 Oct. 1874, pp 361–2.

outside the district be appointed and changed on a regular basis in order to maintain the impartiality and integrity of the show. The *Irish Farmers' Gazette* said the stock displayed was not representative of what was really in the district.⁸⁹ After the disastrous 1868 show, the committee was the only remaining coterie in the district that had any faith in their abilities to continue organising it. Lord Dunlo suggested that large graziers like Allan Pollock of Lismanny needed to be coaxed into sending good quality stock to shows in the hope that such an example would encourage other farmers to do the same.⁹⁰ The *Tuam Herald* was satisfied with the large number of gentry present in 1873, but was embarrassed at their treatment in 1876: 'it was painful to see the number of respectable people, male and female, who were refused admission while the judges were making their awards for no apparent reason other than the caprice of the person who was in charge of the gate leading to the show yard'.⁹¹ The ability of the committee was again called into question in 1886 and ordinary members wanted to end sinecure appointments, instead only having persons with proven ability sit on the committee. Townspeople were blamed for the apathy dissipating throughout the district regarding the show by 1886; though the *Western News* argued the disinterest in it was widespread amongst all classes. Increased farmer apathy towards the society reflected the extent of nationalist influence in the countryside and nationalists would have exerted pressure on farmers in the district not to participate in the society's activities.⁹²

⁸⁹ *I. F. G.*, 9 Sept. 1876, pp 351–2; *W.N.*, 15 February 1890.

⁹⁰ *W. S.*, 14 Nov. 1868; for more on the Pollock Family see Joe Molloy (ed.), *The parish of Clontuskert: glimpses into its past* (Ballinasloe, 2009), pp 205–38.

⁹¹ *W. S.*, 4 Oct. 1873; 9 Sept. 1876.

⁹² *W. N.*, 9 Oct. 1886.

By 1889 there was a discussion about what direction the show needed to take in order for it to survive. The *Irish Farmer's Gazette* stated that: 'if the gentlemen of Roscommon and Galway want to work properly together, they would be able to make Ballinasloe famous for horses'.⁹³ The presence of the Queen's premium stallions – high quality horses – at the 1889 show implied there was renewed interest despite the insipid competition in the first class horse section. Lord Clancarty was the principal exhibitor and this appeared to have always been the case: 'the earl of Clancarty, Lord Ashtown, Mr. H. B. St. George, Mr. J. Martin and other local gentlemen ... worked hard both days to make the meeting a success, and their efforts were well rewarded'. Such was the decline in sheep being exhibited that the primary focus of the fair shifted to horses from 1895 and this is still the case today.⁹⁴

Clancarty's agent, Edward Fowler, was forced to reflect on the prize sheet in 1888 because of the collapse in subscriptions, the poor quality of stock on display and nationalist boycotting of the show. He asked members to make an additional contribution to prevent the society from going into debt, but there was a poor response to this request. Nationalist members attempted to pressurise Fowler into granting all awards because they thought it would be harmful to agriculture in the district if this did not happen. In an effort to reach a compromise, Robert Ronaldson and John Ward suggested that the prize fund be reduced by half and the judges be asked to work *pro bono*. The finances of the society improved by 1889 and in its annual report, R. J. Gill stated 'the tide has at last set in favour of the society, in spite

⁹³ *I. F. G.*, 5 Oct. 1889.

⁹⁴ *W.N.*, 17 Sept. 1887; *I. F. G.*, 5 Oct. 1889; 11 Oct. 1890 p. 482; 5 Oct. 1895, pp 545–6.

of the prophecies of its enemies' and there was an increase in its credit balance from £29 10s. 9d. to £40 13s. 0d.⁹⁵

The dinner of the society afforded an opportunity for the gentry and large graziers to engage in praise of Lord Clancarty:

We were much gratified in perceiving the harmony and kind feeling manifested by all present. Were such scenes more common throughout the country, we would hear less of landlord tyranny, or want of confidence in the higher classes. Such considerate condescension on the part of the earl of Clancarty is, to say the least of it creditable to his lordship and a worthy example of others.⁹⁶

Speeches were important facets of these dinners, as the material condition of the district, various agricultural developments and awards were announced during the proceedings. Toasts were usually proposed in honour of the queen, the lord lieutenant, the army and navy, the judges of the show and the incumbent Lord Clancarty, with the slogan 'speed the plough' on display over his table, which was a call for increased tillage.⁹⁷ Clancarty's wide ranging interests were praised in sycophantic tones. For example, in 1860, the *Galway Press* said: 'the versatility of his Lordship's genius enables him to range over a wide field of display from the production of prize turnips to that of biblical phenomena', which was reflective of a time of deference for landlords.⁹⁸

The allure of the dinner receded after the death of the third earl in 1872 and there were only forty present at the 1874 dinner. This was held in Hayden's Hotel and

⁹⁵ *W. N.*, 9 Oct. 1886; 6 Aug. 1887; 17 Sep. 1887; 16 Jun 1888; 10 Sep. 1888; 15 Feb. 1890.

⁹⁶ *I. F. G.*, 5 Feb. 1852, p. 69.

⁹⁷ *W.S.*, 14 Oct. 1865.

⁹⁸ *Galway Press*, 28 Nov. 1860

not the Agricultural Hall as had previously been the custom. The fourth earl did not attend it in 1876 and Major D'Arcy of Castlepark chaired proceedings. By 1880, the tensions that were being felt in the district because of the actions of the Land League and the rise of nationalist politics were replicated at the dinner when nationalists remained seated when the toast to the lord lieutenant was proposed. The toast was drunk 'with dumb show, there was no applause whatever', which was a clear show of disapproval on the part of nationalists to this toast being proposed.⁹⁹

The boardroom of the workhouse hosted the meetings of the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society from the time of the society's establishment.¹⁰⁰ In 1880 nationalist guardians wanted to establish an alternative agricultural society with no landlord involvement and asked the Local Government Board for £100 to: 'give prizes annually to the farmers of the Union whose Poor Law Valuation does not exceed £40 for the improvement of stock and crops, thereby contributing to the permanent wealth of the district and diminishing pauperism by promoting the permanent wealth of the community'.¹⁰¹ The *ex-officio* guardians were taken aback by the pettiness of this action. Major Thornhill said: 'I don't belong to it, but when they met here for so many years; they have a kind of prescriptive right'.¹⁰² Reddy wanted these privileges revoked, arguing that it was Lord Clancarty's society and was detrimental to the welfare of tenant farmers. Such hostilities were common across board rooms at this time and in the context of this thesis, such tensions are explored in

⁹⁹ *I. F. G.*, 3 Oct. 1874; p. 361, 9 Sep. 1876, p. 351; *W.N.*, 9 Oct. 1886.

¹⁰⁰ *W.N.*, 17 Sep. 1880.

¹⁰¹ C.S.O., R.P., 1888 14700 in the National Archives of Ireland.

¹⁰² *W.N.*, 1 Oct. 1888.

chapters five and six.¹⁰³

Edward Fowler resented such a request and asked the Local Government

Board not to sanction it:

We have held out meetings for the past forty-five years in the boardroom of the union workhouse, but last year, the National League members of the board of guardians expelled us from it, because we drink to the queen's and lord lieutenant's health at our annual dinners ... There is an existing agricultural society forty seven years old under the presidency of the earl Clancarty. [The society's] income is from £130 to £150 a year and whose sphere of influence extends and covers over and embraces the four unions of Ballinasloe, Tuam, Mountbellew and Portumna, but practically has been confined to the union of Ballinasloe ... Now under the circumstances, we humbly request that the grant of £100 a year be given to the existing Ballinasloe Agricultural Society and not to the board of guardians, in the one case of giving it to our society it will increase its usefulness, especially among the respectable and large farmers who chiefly support it and will enable us to give more valuable prizes to small farmers and be a stimulus to good agriculture and loyalty ... If given to the board of guardians (a large number of whom are shopkeepers and publicans in the town of Ballinasloe and others who know nothing of agriculture and care less) to administer it will be employed in boycotting our local society and the money will be misappropriated and used as a whip to punish loyalties.¹⁰⁴

Fowler was taken aback by the hostility engendered by nationalists: 'some of the guardians have queer views of [the society] and said they were an Orange society and another said it was a landlord society in which the tenants had nothing to do whatever'. Fowler thought that it was a quasi-egalitarian organisation which came to the assistance of small tenant farmers. Despite such a belief, it was Lord Clancarty who had the final say over the sanctioning of the prize sheet, which exposes the idea

¹⁰³ For more on the antagonistic relations between elected and *ex-officio* guardians see Virginia Crossman, *Politics pauperism and power in late nineteenth-century Ireland* (Manchester, 2006) and W. L. Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry: the transformation of local government in Ireland, 1872–1886* (Boston, 1984).

¹⁰⁴ C.S.O., R.P., 1888 14700, in N.A.I.

of egalitarianism as a myth.¹⁰⁵ Nationalist were accused of intimidating John Gairdner and Major Seymour into resigning their membership. Both men denied this, stating that other commitments caused their resignation and W. E. Duffy suggested they had not paid their affiliation fees: ‘neither Orangeism, nor nationalism has anything to do with their resignation’.¹⁰⁶ James Barr said no distinctions were made between members, because the society was ‘not for one section of the kingdom’.¹⁰⁷ Nationalist attempts at establishing a parallel society never succeeded in going any further than this and despite such failure, it was indicative of both their desire and confidence in wanting to challenge the *status quo*. While it did not succeed, it brought attention to their cause and this is discussed in further detail in chapters five and six.

VI.) Conclusion

The second, third and fourth earls of Clancarty shared their passion for agricultural advancement and estate improvement with the likes of the third earl of Leitrim; though they had a different management style to William Sydney Clements, who could be quite acerbic, authoritarian and confrontational. Nevertheless, they all were of the opinion that good farming could lead to social harmony. The death of the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society’s driving force, the third earl of Clancarty, in 1872, was a significant factor in its stagnation and subsequent decline. He was a well-regarded landlord and through the auspices of the society, he attempted to alleviate the distress of farmers and labourers in the district. It attempted to carve out an

¹⁰⁵ *W.N.*, 10 Sep. 1888.

¹⁰⁶ *W.N.*, 1 Oct. 1888.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

important role in the district by trying to formulate substantive agricultural policies in order to improve the condition of poorer farmers. Despite some glaring misadventures in agricultural experimentation, such as flax cultivation and butter production, the third earl of Clancarty was sincerely altruistic towards small tenant farmers, even though they did not embrace the society with his fervour. They resented the proselytising efforts made towards them during the Famine and his son continued with such paternalistic endeavours, which are discussed in chapters five and six.

The third earl's attempts to involve other landowners in the society were fraught with numerous difficulties and he did not always succeed in getting their support. A combination of landlord insouciance and tenant farmer apathy prevented it from becoming a resolute success. The organisation faced difficulties in getting farmers to carry out improvement because of communal resistance farmers presented. Eugene Hynes argued that 'whether they realised it or not, the innovations these people championed threatened the very foundation of the claimed communal solidarity' of tenant farmers.¹⁰⁸

The Ballinasloe Agricultural Society could be interpreted as a vanity exercise for the Clancarty family, because it presented them as progressive and respected landlords, with the society dinner magnifying this perception. However it is arguable that the three earls examined in this thesis did have a genuine interest in the welfare of their tenants. The third earl's interests extended beyond the confines of his estate and this ensured an acquiescent tenantry during his lifetime. Later chapters will explore the disintegration of this loyalty, which appears to have been nurtured by a

¹⁰⁸ Hynes, *Knock: the Virgin's apparition in nineteenth-century Ireland*, p. 16.

discontented section of the urban tenancy. While the family succeeded in fostering a spirit of affection amongst the tenantry, the débâcle surrounding the admittance of the Sisters of Mercy to the Ballinasloe workhouse, a continuation of the Famine proselytising mission, drew attention to the obvious abuse of power by Lord Clancarty. This saw the harmony on the estate begin to unravel, which is the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: THE THIRD EARL OF CLANCARTY, PROSELYTISM AND EVANGELICALISM IN BALLINASLOE IN THE 1850s AND 1860s

I.) Introduction

Many landlords across the country were unsympathetic to the plight of the tenantry during the Famine and used it as an excuse to clear uneconomic holdings. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, the third earl of Clancarty attempted to alleviate the condition of the poor on his estate through advanced agricultural practices and private relief works during the Famine, which were in addition to government works.¹

Clancarty proved to be adept at effective estate management and he succeeded in augmenting the solvency of the estate in the post-Famine period while other landlords were going bankrupt. The previous chapter also discussed how Clancarty's paternalism resulted in him having a loyal tenantry. However, his consistent proselytising efforts – in conjunction with his relief works – was something that was frowned upon, especially by the clergy and Catholic press, such as the *Galway Vindicator* and *Western Star*. Despite his benevolence and attempts at improving the condition of his tenants, Clancarty's refusal to allow the Sisters of Mercy to enter the Ballinasloe workhouse saw a risk of a breakdown of order on the estate, which heretofore had been in place. Such tensions were as a result of Catholics and

¹ J. S. Flynn, *Ballymacward: the story of an east Galway parish* (Galway, 1994), pp 136–7; J. S. Donnelly, Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork: the rural economy and the land question* (London and Boston, 1975), p. 113 and idem, *The great Irish potato famine* (Stroud, 2001).

Protestants being convinced ‘that their religion – and only theirs – was the one true faith’.² Moffitt further argued that: ‘From the viewpoint of a mid-nineteenth century evangelical, popery or Romanism was not based on the scriptures but was grounded on a collection of orders, rites and traditions, while evangelicalism was firmly based on the word of God’.³ The repeated attempts to have them admitted symbolised open defiance against Clancarty and was the first serious threat to the total domination the Trench family had in local affairs in the post-Famine period. Conditions in the west of Ireland, especially in Connemara and Achill, saw proselytising activity become quite systemic during this period. Such activity was carried out by the Irish Church Missions under the direction of the English evangelical, Alexander Dallas. Moffitt has argued that: ‘From the Catholic viewpoint, English Protestants were seen to be exploiting the Famine by offering food and relief to the starving on the condition that they reject their Catholic beliefs’.⁴ Rome was concerned with Archbishop MacHale’s intransigence regarding the threat being posed to the poor in the west. His failure to respond and increasingly Gallican view regarding the church, resulted in Rome sending Paul Cullen to Ireland, with the power of Apostolic Delegate in order to ensure that the Irish Catholic Church became more disciplined and ultra-Montanist in its outlook. Cullen’s distrust towards Protestants was further fuelled by evangelical activity in the west of Ireland, resulting in him becoming almost paranoid about

² Miriam Moffitt, *Soupers and Jumpers, the Protestant mission in Connemara, 1848–1937*, p. 7.

³ eadem, *The society for Irish Church Missions to the Roman Catholics, 1849-1950*, (Manchester, 2010), p. 20.

⁴ *ibid.*

them.⁵

Contemporary opinion in the local press, and that of P. K. Egan, in *The parish of Ballinasloe* accused the third earl of Clancarty of manipulating his power by attempting to carry out a proselytising mission in the workhouse and refusing to allow the Sisters of Mercy admission at the same time. Egan further stated that the Clancarty family had engaged in an onslaught on the Catholicism of the people of Ballinasloe and that the evangelicalism of the Clancarty family was the cause of antagonism in Ballinasloe as they family began ‘using all the influence of their position ... to win proselytes from Catholicism’. This statement by Egan reflected his own bias as a Catholic priest and was an attempt to portray such activity as a heroic struggle of Catholics in their efforts to hold steadfastly to their faith in the face of the activities of an evangelical bigot. However, Egan’s assessment places a rather complicated issue into a very simplistic confessional paradigm that needs to be treated with caution.⁶

This chapter deals with four key events in Ballinasloe between 1851 and 1863 relating to Clancarty’s proselytising activities, namely: provocative proselytism on the estate, souperism, educational provisions and the consequences of the arrival of the Sisters of Mercy to Ballinasloe. Clancarty’s obstinacy regarding their admittance to assist the Catholic chaplain in tending to the spiritual needs of the Catholic paupers resident there and to counteract his proselytising mission had repercussions for the

⁵ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800–1870: A study of Protestant–Catholic relations between the Act of Union and disestablishment* (Dublin, 1978), p. 259; Moffitt, *The society for Irish Church Missions* (Manchester, 2010), p. 266.

⁶ P. K. Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, pp 177–8

family, such as Lord Dunlo's bid to be elected as an M.P. in 1859. How these four events soured attitudes towards the Clancarty family in the 1850s and 1860s will be examined, with the local press, such as the *Galway Vindicator* and *Western Star* taking a stance against Clancarty's activity and the *Galway Express*, the only Protestant newspaper in Galway, supporting Clancarty.

II.) Provocative proselytism on the Clancarty estate and within the Ballinasloe workhouse.

Two million people were nearing destitution in Ireland by the end of the eighteenth century. The subsistence crisis that took place between 1782 and 1784 was prevented from degenerating into a famine thanks to private relief initiatives granted by charities and benevolent landlords, though 'not all were prepared to combat distress actively'.⁷ Such crises continued into the nineteenth century and in 1804 a *select committee of the House of Commons respecting the poor in Ireland* was established, with the objective of exploring the possibility of creating some form of poor relief in Ireland. It came to the conclusion that a poor law system similar to Britain would be injurious to Ireland. Further select committees in 1819, 1823 and 1830 also came to no real consensus as to how to tackle the ever growing and serious problem of poverty in the country. 1836 saw the government establish relief works in order to develop resources and provide employment to the destitute masses. There were few incentives for politicians to tackle the issues of Irish poverty while they had not addressed the issues

⁷ James Kelly, 'Scarcity and poor relief in eighteenth-century Ireland: the subsistence crisis of 1782-4' in *Irish Historical Studies* vol. 28 (May, 1992), pp 38-62.

pertaining to the English Poor Law, and ‘establishing a royal commission to investigate the condition of the poorer classes in Ireland, chaired by the Protestant archbishop of Dublin, Richard Whatley, allowed the Whig government to postpone the issue of Irish poverty until the shape of the English system had been determined.’⁸

Poor law was only one aspect of a whole structure of relief and there was a myriad of difficulties surrounding its implementation. Some peers were resistant to its implementation and in 1838, the anti-poor law Irish peers and M.P.s met under the leadership of a neighbouring landlord of Clancarty’s in east Galway, Lord Clanricarde to discuss its implementation. While the peers agreed that relief should be provided to the aged and infirm, these were the only reforms they would support. On the other hand, the third earl of Clancarty supported the development of a comprehensive poor law system, resulting in an ideological clash between himself and Lord Clanricarde. Clanricarde was of the opinion that the implementation of the Poor Law as proposed by the government would impose excessive rates on already overstretched landlords, and he was of the opinion that it would aggravate, rather than alleviate poverty.⁹ These differences were never reconciled and resulted in significant implications for Lord Clancarty, and his son Captain Trench, when he ran for election in the Galway by-election in 1872 and this is discussed in the next chapter.¹⁰

Constructing workhouses to relieve distress in Ireland was initially frowned upon, but by 1836 the government acknowledged that they were going to be

⁸ Virginia Crossman, *The poor law in Ireland* (Dundalk, 2006), pp 6–10.

⁹ John Joseph Conwell, *A Galway landlord during the Great Famine: Ulick John de Burgh, first Marquis of Clanricarde* (Dublin, 2003), p. 14.

¹⁰ Peter Gray, *The making of the Irish Poor Law, 1815–43* (Manchester, 2009), pp 208–9, 321.

necessary. 1838 saw the passing of the Irish poor law act and workhouses were erected across the country, mostly in market towns and the Ballinasloe workhouse received its first admissions on 1 January 1842.¹¹ Workhouses were managed by a board of guardians and were bound by strict guidelines set down by the poor law commissioners. Paupers were admitted on the written order of the board of guardians, relieving officer, the master or matron of the workhouse, or in the case of any sudden or urgent necessity on the receipt of a written recommendation of a local warden, which was known as a red ticket.¹²

Desmond Bowen has argued that: ‘the poor people of Ireland in the post-Famine years were to find themselves fought over by fanatical men – men who taked of concern for the soul, but showed great interest in body counts’.¹³ In her essay, ‘Battle plans and battlegrounds: Protestant mission activity in the Dublin slums, 1840s–1880s’, Jacinta Prunty quotes a contemporary witness to this activity: ‘two hundred thousand Catholics! What a mass of souls wandering on in ignorance of their danger rushing onto destruction and no cry to warn them of their danger, no hand outstretched to save. Something must be done!’¹⁴ This activity was led by Alexander Dallas, founder of the Irish Church Missions, who was very confrontational in his approach. Members of the Irish society – discussed in further detail below – were concerned with the activity of Dallas, and they saw ‘how naive ... his assumption was that English middle-class morality and evangelical religious practice would have

¹¹ Virginia Crossman, *The poor law in Ireland* (Dundalk, 2006), pp 6–10.

¹² John O’Connor, *The workhouses of Ireland: the fate of Ireland’s poor* (Dublin, 1995), pp 94–5.

¹³ Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 207.

¹⁴ Jacinta Prunty, ‘Battleplans and battle grounds: Protestant mission activity in the Dublin slums, 1840s–1880s’ in Crawford Gribben and A. R. Holmes (eds), *Protestant millennialism, evangelicalism and Irish society* (New York, 2006), pp 124–5.

universal appeal among the lower classes in Ireland'.¹⁵ Clancarty's efforts were symptomatic of the evangelical zeal that he was inculcated in, and was quite different to what was adopted by Dallas. His endeavours at improvement were reflective of overt displays of Protestant philanthropy, which began in Dublin in the eighteenth century; with Irene Whelan arguing that when evangelicalism took root in the Church of Ireland, it grafted itself onto a tradition of philanthropy already in existence: 'Good works were to be done ... for the live of God, the redemption of the individual soul, and the general improvement of society would follow'.¹⁶

Alexander Dallas was the architect behind the missionary activity in Dublin and Connemara. His hubris isolated him from both Irish Catholics and evangelicals. The Irish Church Mission was almost forceful in their efforts to attract converts to evangelical Protestantism, and 'if the people could not be converted to evangelical Protestantism, the Irish Church Mission had no interest in providing an education for them'.¹⁷ The aggression of the Irish Church Mission deepened inter-faith tensions, especially in Connemara, where they concentrated their activity.¹⁸ Cullen's convening of the Synod of Thurles in 1850 resulted in the Irish Catholic Church becoming increasingly ultra-Montanist in its outlook, with ecclesiastical power becoming increasingly centralised and dogmatic and suspicion being cast upon traditional forms of worship. His zealousness in asserting his authority over his heretofore wayward

¹⁵ Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 227; for more on the Irish Church Missions see Moffitt, *The society for Irish Church Missions*.

¹⁶ Irene Whelan, *The bible war in Ireland*, pp 12-13.

¹⁷ Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, p. 227.

¹⁸ Moffitt, *The society for Irish Church Missions*, p. 267.

flock presented evangelical Protestants with new obstacles.¹⁹

Horrendous conditions endured by the vast majority of the poor at the time would have tempted many to convert in order to improve their situation and the Catholic clergy's response to this level of poverty was frequently inadequate. M. C. Ní Ghiobúin defined 'souperism' as 'a system of gaining adherents or camp followers to Protestantism by bribery or other means', such as food or monetary awards. 'Jumpers' converted from Catholics to Protestantism in the hope that their material well-being would improve.²⁰ There was a great deal of ill-feeling engendered towards 'souters', because they were seen to be of deficient character and they were equated with the devil by Catholic clergy due to their provocative proselytising methods. It was rumoured that Lord Clancarty was involved in 'souperism'. He denied this, stating it was an attempt to tarnish him as a bigot and Desmond Bowen maintained such allegations reflected public opinion. However, there were two apparent cases of souperism in Ballinasloe discussed below and while there is no definitive evidence to suggest that Clancarty was involved in either the Kenny or Gyles investigations, Desmond Bowen contended that contemporaries believed that he had some implicit influence.²¹

In January 1851 the Roman Catholic chaplain of the workhouse accused the Protestant school mistress of interfering in the religion of the Catholic children

¹⁹ Emmet Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75' in *American Historical Review*, vol. 77, No. 3 (Jun. 1972), pp 625–52.

²⁰ M. C. Ní Ghiobúin, 'Societal change in Achill Island in the nineteenth century' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2006), p. 137; for more on 'Souperism', see Desmond Bowen, *Souperism, myth or reality: a study in souperism* (Cork, 1970) and Miriam Moffitt, *Souters and Jumpers: the Protestant missions in Connemara, 1848–1937* (Dublin, 2008).

²¹ *Galway Vindicator*, 21 Jan. 1854; Bowen: *Souperism*, p. 136.

resident there, because they were discovered to be in possession of Protestant religious books. He was curious to know how this occurred, especially considering that no Catholic books were made available for them. He believed that the board of guardians was neglecting the religious instruction of the Catholic children and this was a threat to their faith. Protestant children were seen to be getting preferential treatment in the workhouse, which posed a risk to Catholic children being exposed to unwarranted and unwelcome Protestant influence. The chaplain requested that these books be locked into a desk where the children could not access them, but the majority of guardians would not entertain this, arguing that the workhouse was a place of tolerance and such a request was an unacceptable affront to Protestantism. While the board of guardians was not especially interested in entertaining the Catholic chaplain's complaints, it sought an assurance from the school mistress that it would not occur in future.²²

In May 1852 Patrick Nestor was charged with assaulting Stephen Johnstone, who had been employed by Reverend John Cotton Walker to stand outside Nestor's bakery with a banner stating the benefits converting to Protestantism would bring. Johnstone refused to desist from this action when requested to do so, resulting in Nestor forcibly removing him from the outside of his premises. Walker returned the following day with Johnstone to demand an explanation from Nestor as to why he was heavy handed with the boy. They were asked to leave the premises and Nestor forcibly removed them when they did not. John Larkin testified that Johnstone's placard was deliberately provocative and offensive to the opinions of Catholics,

²² *Western Star*, 11 Jan. 1851; 25 Jan. 1851.

resulting in Nestor's actions. Counter-charges of assault against Johnston and Walker were dismissed by the magistrates 'Messrs. Fitzgerald, R.M., French, Bell and Gascoyne', were all Protestants and consequently became demonised as 'Orange magistrates'.²³ The *Galway Packet* stated that the decision of the court reflected the obstacles faced by Catholics in Ballinasloe: 'the means by which the proselytising missionaries attempt to achieve their ends, are so grossly unchristian, so mean, petty and virulent, as to excite the disgust and animadversion of all beholders, save the most besotted fanatics'.²⁴

March 1854 saw an investigation regarding the religion of the Kenny children take place after they had been left into the workhouse by their mother, who had previously been employed by Lord Clancarty. John Cotton Walker, who was rector of Ballinasloe between 1845 and 1876, received a letter from Kenny in which she stated that she wanted her children to be raised as Protestants. The Catholic chaplain refused to accept this version of events, because Kenny could not be contacted to verify Walker's assertion.²⁵ John Curley²⁶ testified that Kenny lodged with him for four years and she always brought her children to Catholic mass, because she thought it was 'her duty'. Curley argued that she used Walker to ensure the material well-being of her children and would not leave them in the care of Protestants on a long-term basis, even for 'hundreds of pounds'.²⁷ Reverend Francis Hassard testified that when Kenny left Clancarty's employment, she asked him to take care of her children, telling

²³ *Galway Packet*, 26 May 1852.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *W. S.*, 4 Mar. 1854.

²⁶ From Griffith's Valuation, it appears that this John Curley lived at Reeves Lane in Townspark, Ballinasloe. His house was valued at £2 5s 0d.

²⁷ *W. S.*, 4 Mar. 1854.

him that she wanted them to be raised as Protestants. This delighted Clancarty because he thought Protestantism was a truer religion than Catholicism.²⁸

Curley suspected that Kenny received four shillings from Reverend Walker after the children entered the workhouse, thus indicating that Walker was engaging in ‘souper’ type activity. She met Fr Dillon at the train station and informed him that she wished her children to be raised as Protestants. Another witness, John Abbot met with Kenny and she also informed him that she wanted her children to be raised as Protestants. Reynolds dismissed Abbot’s testimony as flawed and said that he (Abbot) was not certain of Mrs. Kenny’s or her children’s religion. Walker denied granting her assistance on the condition that she would raise her children as Protestants, insisting the charity undertaken by members of the Established Church was extended to all children, irrespective of their religion and no pressure was exerted upon them to convert.²⁹ In ‘*A town tormented by the sea*’, *Galway, 1790—1914* (2004), John Cunningham argued that charity was seen to be a ‘Christian, rather than denominational duty’, which adds credence to Walker’s argument.³⁰

When the children attended school at Creagh, Kenny did not object to them being enrolled as Protestants. While they received no financial inducements for attending this estate school, they were alleged to have received a shilling a week for attending another estate school in Ballinasloe town, with Alderman John Reynolds claiming that they did this for financial gain.³¹ The children were alleged to have been

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ *W. S.*, 4 Mar. 1854.

³⁰ John Cunningham, ‘*A town tormented by the sea*’, *Galway, 1790—1914* (Dublin, 2004), p. 201.

³¹ *W. S.*, 4 Mar. 1854.

heard reciting Protestant prayers but would not say them in front of their mother. Other witnesses saw them attend Catholic services on a regular basis and reciting Catholic prayers which their mother taught them.³²

Reynolds accused Walker of being an unfit clergyman when he allowed Kenny into his house after she approached him for assistance: ‘the reverend gentleman is involved in a peculiar dilemma by the mother of these children deserting them’.³³ Kenny’s eldest daughter testified that while she never attended Protestant services with her mother, she believed that she was now one. The board of guardians concurred and the children’s ages entered into the registry to reflect this.³⁴ It is likely that Kenny came under the influence of ‘souters’, who sought to exploit the precarious and vulnerable position she found herself in. By agreeing to having her children raised in the Protestant faith, Kenny thought that she was guaranteeing their material welfare, though whether she really did want them to convert is unclear.

Walker thought the investigation was an attempt to destroy his reputation and its original purpose had been relegated to a secondary role. He sent a letter to the Guardians, outlining his grievances and his displeasure was especially directed towards Reynolds. He said that the investigation was indicative of intolerant attitudes in Ballinasloe and requested that his letter defending his character be entered into the minutes of the board of guardians. An unnamed guardian agreed with Walker’s assertion that he had been treated unfairly: ‘as one of the guardians present on the last day, and who did not approve of the course taken ... in conducting the enquiry, I move

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*, 11 Mar. 1854.

³⁴ *ibid.*

that Mr. Walker's letter and correspondence be interested on the minutes'.³⁵ The willingness of the board to allow this letter enter the minutes of the meeting reflected their own bias against Catholicism and the influence Clancarty could exert over decisions made.

Another investigation to determine the religion of a child that was under the care of the board of guardians was established soon after the Kenny investigation. Mrs Gyles left her daughter Ellen into the workhouse in January 1854 and wrote to Walker asking that she be raised as a Protestant, but she was entered into the registry as a Catholic. Her sister (who was twenty-two) stated that her parents were always Protestants and asked that her sister's religion be changed to indicate as such. Andrew Banfield proposed that Ellen be registered as a Protestant, as was customary in law and this proposal was accepted.³⁶

III.) Education on the Clancarty estate in the 1850s and 1860s.

Desmond Bowen stated that mass conversions to Protestantism apparently took place between 1850 and 1853 and it is likely that Clancarty wanted such conversions to occur in Ballinasloe.³⁷ John Derry was bishop of Clonfert between 1847 and 1870 and it was during his episcopacy that significant evangelical activity took place on the Clancarty estate.³⁸ While there were few that took the rhetoric of evangelical preachers seriously, Derry condemned the provocative methods employed by

³⁵ W. S., 11 Mar. 1854.

³⁶ W. S., 11 Mar. 1854.

³⁷ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland, 1800–1870: A study of Protestant–Catholic relations between the act of Union and disestablishment* (Dublin, 1978), p 313.

³⁸ For more on Derry see Bernard Canning *Bishops of Ireland, 1870–1987* (Paisley, 1987), pp 330–1.

proselytisers, calling them ‘mercenary missionaries of heresy’. He described Lord Clancarty as ‘a landlord notorious for his hereditary hatred of Catholicity’ that played an important role in the revitalised evangelical movement, which had concentrated most of its activity in Connemara and Dublin after the Famine. Clancarty was accused of ‘attacking the [Catholic] faith’ and terrorising his tenants into sending their children to estate schools. Derry was disappointed with Catholics that converted to Protestantism in order that their children would receive an education, accusing them of treating their religion with contempt and realised that there was no alternative but scripture schools on the estate and he later remarked:

It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that the faith is not attacked here with those and the other kindred agencies usually employed against it ... Schools under the Church Education Society are multiplied in a diocese in which none can be expected to attend them but the children of Catholic parents. Industrial education is perverted into a trap for religion. A landlord ... upholds in one neighbourhood as many as four proselytising schools; and at different other parts of his extensive property.³⁹

Catholic education in Connaught stalled because of Archbishop John MacHale’s resistance to the provision of non-denominational education. His stance on this important issue influenced his suffragen bishops and left large numbers of Catholics with no alternative but to turn to Protestant educational influences. The intransigence of Catholics and Protestants in relation to the provision of educational facilities to the poor resulted in the delayed development of adequate facilities in the west of Ireland. Archbishop MacHale’s exclusion of national schools from his archdiocese would have had an impact across Connaught and this behaviour provided fertile ground for

³⁹ W. S., 22 Oct. 1854.

proselytisers, especially as they began re-orientate their proselytising activities towards children.⁴⁰ P. K. Egan argued that Ballinasloe became a focal point between the Catholic clergy and evangelicals for the ‘minds of the youth’.⁴¹

The Irish Society was established in 1818 with the aim of ‘[making] the truth of God’s blessed word known to the Irish people’ by preaching scripture to them in the vernacular. The society also taught poor Irish speakers how to read, using the bible as a text book.⁴² Clancarty attended an Irish Society meeting that was held in Ballinasloe in April 1854, which was the first such meeting held in the town and numerous notices were erected across the town publicising the event. At it, Clancarty praised the ‘positive impact’ that the society was having upon the evangelical movement in Ireland and for spreading knowledge of the bible, which reflected the enjoyment of Protestant liberty by those that converted:

he argued that the Irish Society was the epitome of truth, charity and true and Christian virtues. From the testimony here borne by the Roman Catholics it was manifest that the object of the society was supply to spread the knowledge of the Scripture in the tongue cherished by the people.⁴³

Clancarty said that intolerance and persecution were traits inherent in Catholicism, referring to a resolution issued to Roman Catholics attending Irish Society schools in 1825, which stated:

The Roman Catholic Church of which we are members, hath never, by her councils nor the spiritual head denied the scripture to those who read them with reverence and sincerity; that on the contrary, we find on the best authority

⁴⁰ Maeve Mulryan-Moloney, *Nineteenth-century elementary education in the archdiocese of Tuam* (Dublin, 2001); Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 155; Moffitt, *Soupers and jumpers*, p. 62.

⁴¹ P. K. Egan, *The Parish of Ballinasloe: its history from the earliest time to the present century* (Dublin, 1960), p. 139.

⁴² Moffitt, *Soupers and jumpers*, p. 10.

⁴³ *W. S.*, 22 Apr., 1854; 22 Oct., 1854.

that several of our popes went even further than the Bible Society to induce the reading of God's word, not only by recommending it, but by holding out inducements for doing it. That when such pious practices were so highly recommended by the spiritual heads of our church, as acceptable to our creator, they cannot now be displeasing to him, and that finally, we consider that the reading of the holy scripture, is our right as men, our duty as christians, and our privilege as Roman Catholics.⁴⁴

Clancarty said: 'it was a pity of the poor Roman Catholics of the same flesh and blood as themselves ... they could continue in serfdom while they had the means of obtaining liberty', which was through conversion.⁴⁵ He argued that the Catholic Church was aghast at the ethos of the Irish Society and he believed the British government was being pressurised to provide public monies to 'support the Romish Church'.⁴⁶ He asserted the original Reformation was a failure because Elizabeth I did not utilise the vernacular effectively. This speech reflected the beliefs of Alexander Dallas – an English evangelical Protestant and founder of the Irish Church Missions – who wanted to evangelise to the entire country in order to 'accomplish the unfinished business of the Reformation in Ireland'.⁴⁷ Clancarty said that Catholicism did not give sufficient spiritual guidance to its members and was a false doctrine, which reflected the opinion of other evangelicals such as Dallas and Edward Nangle, the founder of the Achill Mission. The Irish Society believed that there was something lacking in the faith of Catholics because they did not read scripture and Irish Society missions attempted to counteract this while teaching the Irish peasantry how to read by using

⁴⁴W. S. 22 Oct. 1854.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷Prunty, 'Battleplans and battle grounds: Protestant mission activity in the Dublin slums, 1840s–1880s' pp 119–22.

the bible as a text.⁴⁸ Mr Seymour of Somerset House, Clontuskert – and a neighbouring landlord of Clancarty – called ‘Romanism’ a ‘soul destroying system’, arguing that it was subversive to Christian morality and it was essential that it was pushed out of its strongholds. He praised the ‘principles of Protestant truth, as opposed to popish error ... Popery ... should be destroyed in the height of her power by the brightness of the coming of Jesus’.⁴⁹

The Irish Missionary College was established in 1846 in Portnick, Ballinasloe for the purposes of instructing Church of Ireland clergy in the Irish language with the intention of proselytising to the Irish masses that could not speak English. ‘It had been founded by Rev. James Lancaster, secretary of the Connaught Auxiliary of the Irish Society to train clergymen in the Irish language’.⁵⁰ The first principal of the school was Reverend R. H. Orr and there were seventeen pupils in it by 1850.

Clancarty wanted to ‘save the country from the deceit and superstition supplanted with Romanism’.⁵¹ He was a major benefactor to its establishment and contributed a sizeable portion of the £3,000 expended on its construction, saying that it had a national objective: ‘edifices [in the town] are only of local interest, not so the Irish Missionary College’.⁵² It had closed well before the end of the nineteenth century, with it serving as the Clonfert Diocesan School between 1902 and the diocese’s

⁴⁸W. S., 22 Oct. 1854. Desmond Bowen discusses this controversy in *The Protestant Crusade in Ireland, 1800–70.*, pp 178–9; Theresa McDonald, *Achill Island* (Tullamore, 1997), p. 166; See *Dictionary of Irish Biography* for entries on Dallas vol 3, pp 6–7 and Nangle, vol. 6, pp 854–6.

⁴⁹G. E., 5 May 1855; for more on the Seymour family see Joe Molloy (ed.), *The parish of Clontuskert: glimpses into its past* (Galway, 2009), pp 127–56; and the entry on the family on the Landed Estates Database, the Moore Institute, NUI Galway, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=966> (date accessed, 31 July 2010).

⁵⁰Moffitt, *Soupers and Jumpers*, p. 10.

⁵¹G. V., 22 Oct. 1854.

⁵²ibid.

purchase of Garbally House in 1922.⁵³ It declined, partially because of the arrogance of Alexander Dallas, whose Irish Church Mission came to dominate evangelical and bible related teaching in Ireland, with Irish Society being almost helpless to resist because of its poorly organised state.⁵⁴ Clancarty claimed the Catholic Church failed to provide for the education of its adherents, which resulted in Protestant evangelical associations, such as the Kildare Place Society establishing schools:

The national schools, supported from the coffers of the state; on the other side the Irish Society, the Church Education Society, and other associations, without any capital, but the contributions made to them. It was cheering to observe that Protestantism, with all this difficulty, was effectually gaining ground. The clergy of Ireland (Protestant) was a credit to the church, and he (Lord Clancarty) was glad to see them uniting with other individuals, known as Dissenters, but who held the great essentials of the Christian faith, and all going forward in this great struggle.⁵⁵

Clancarty and Walker repeatedly asserted that the Sisters of Mercy were under-qualified to tend to the paupers in the workhouse. However, in *The parish of Ballinasloe*, P. K. Egan stated that they came to Ballinasloe in order to provide denominational education in the town. He also said that there were Catholic schools on the estate, but tenants were forbidden to send their children to them for a period and once they were allowed to do so, a financial penalty of six pence was imposed on each family that sent their children to these schools.⁵⁶ Such activity reflected local power struggles between clergy and Protestant evangelicals as they engaged in a battle for the souls of paupers in order to guarantee ‘safe passage through the pearly

⁵³ See *The Seventh Annual Report of the Irish Missionary School, Ballinasloe for the year ending 31 December 1853* (Dublin, 1854); *G.E.*, 5 May 1855; Moffitt, Souters and Jumpers, p. 10.

⁵⁴ Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland*, pp 226–7.

⁵⁵ *G. V.*, 22 Oct. 1854.

⁵⁶ *G. V.*, 21 Jan. 1854; 24 Oct 1857; Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 256.

gates'.⁵⁷ T. P. O'Neill argued that the failure of the proselytising mission to take hold in Ireland was a factor in the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1869.⁵⁸

IV.) The Sisters of Mercy and the Ballinasloe workhouse

The badly organised state of the Irish Catholic Church prior to Cardinal Cullen's arrival opened up numerous possibilities for Protestant proselytisers.⁵⁹ However, Cardinal Cullen's zealotry in reorganising the Catholic Church in Ireland hindered any chance they may have had. For example, his episcopacy saw a substantial growth in the number of nuns in Ireland and they played a significant role in counter-acting Protestant proselytisers. In 1800, there were only 122 nuns in Ireland – but this had increased thirteen fold in fifty years – resulting in 1,500 nuns in the country by 1850.⁶⁰ Archbishop Murray of Dublin granted leave to Catherine McAuley: 'to call her little family "of our Blessed Lady of Mercy"' to tend to the sick in hospitals across Dublin in 1828.⁶¹ McAuley established the Sisters of Mercy with the intention of bringing comfort to the sick and the dying. She believed that poverty was the chief danger in nineteenth-century society, but the impartment of Christian knowledge to the poor could empower them, which was a similar opinion to Protestant evangelicals. McCauley was adamant that those who joined the Sisters of Mercy would have 'commitment to outgoing merciful service, to the poor, sick, homeless, dying and

⁵⁷Moffit, *Soupers and jumpers*, p. 7; see also Daire Keogh and Albert McDonnell (eds), *Cardinal Paul Cullen and his word* (Dublin, 2011).

⁵⁸ T. P. O'Neill, 'Sidelights on souperism' in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, lxxi, (Jan.–Jun. 1949), fifth series, p. 64.

⁵⁹Moffit, *Soupers and jumpers*, p. 20

⁶⁰ Emmet Larkin, 'The Devotional Revolution in Ireland, 1850–75', p. 626.

⁶¹K. M. Barry, *Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy: a sketch* (Dublin, 1894), pp v, 1, 33; Catherine Clear, *Nuns in nineteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 1987), p. 37.

uneducated'.⁶² The work that she and her cohorts carried out was praised by the Catholic Church. Rev. T. A. Finlay S. J. said: 'it was a rare providence ... that God chooses for the great enterprises of his services, individuals whose natural gifts are wholly out of proportion with the task appointed them'.⁶³ W. H. Lecky commented: 'in the Sisters of Mercy, the religious orders of Catholicism have produced one of the most perfect types of all womanhood'.⁶⁴

Bishop Derry invited the Sisters of Mercy to Ballinasloe in 1853 to establish a convent, tend to the poor of the workhouse and provide Catholic educational facilities in Ballinasloe. Their arrival was also an attempt to bolster a Catholic counter-charge against proselytisers that were still trying to attract converts, especially as child-centred proselytism was seen to be a more effective method and the establishment of Catholic schools lowered the risks of conversions.⁶⁵ Ballinasloe was the main urban centre in east Galway and like other urban centres, such as Dublin, it attracted large proselytising missions and the Catholic counter-charge, with Derry's actions paralleling what Cullen was attempting in Dublin. Derry hoped that the Sisters of Mercy would succeed in counteracting the proselytising mission that Clancarty and Walker were attempting to establish in the workhouse. Both Derry and Alderman Reynolds were to the forefront of the campaign to have the sisters attend to the poor in the Ballinasloe workhouse. Neither man envisaged the numerous efforts by Clancarty to block the admission of the Sisters of Mercy, as what was hoped to be a

⁶² Barry, *Catherine McAuley and the Sisters of Mercy*, p. 3.

⁶³ *ibid.*, p. v. See *Dictionary of Irish Biography* for entry on T. A. Finlay, vol. 3, pp 789–91.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Moffit, *Soupers and jumpers*, p. 78.

mere formality became the most controversial incidents to take place in Ballinasloe between 1853 and 1863.⁶⁶ By only allowing the Catholic chaplain permission to tend to the religious needs of the paupers that were resident in the workhouse Clancarty was able to consolidate Protestant dominance of the board of guardians.

The Sisters of Mercy had been welcomed in other towns such as Ennis, having arrived there in 1853. They attended the workhouse every Saturday and Sunday to console the sick and dying, whilst providing religious instructions to the Catholic paupers that were resident there. On 20 July 1855 they were allowed to attend the Kilrush workhouse every Sunday for the same purpose, with two Protestant members of the board of guardians, Francis Coffey and Randal Borough proposing and seconding the motion for their admittance, believing that the paupers would benefit greatly from this. The staff of the workhouse at Kilrush admired the work they carried out there; with the medical officer, Dr Elliot saying:

No doubt there is something wonderful in your religion ... it astonished me to see ladies of high social position and refined education ... so devoted to the sick ... witness the calm resignation of the poor ... with which they leave the world. I can see nothing like it in Protestantism.⁶⁷

Clancarty stated that the Sisters of Mercy's admittance to other workhouses was irrelevant to the situation in Ballinasloe, but he did not elucidate as to how this was

⁶⁶ G. V., 23 Jul 1853; Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 143; Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, pp 259, 317. Captain Gascoyne was a land agent for Lord Clancarty who lived in Mackney Lodge. For more see <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=1011> (date accessed 12 July 2010). It has not been possible to identify for certain who Captain Bell was. Captain Lancaster was a landowner in Ardcar, Ballinasloe, Co. Roscommon; for more information on Lancaster, see <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=1234> (date accessed 12 July 2010).

⁶⁷ Pius O'Brien, *The Sisters of Mercy of Ennis* (Ennis, 1992), pp 11, 69; eadem, *The Sisters of Mercy of Kilrush and Kilkee* (Dublin, 1997), pp 45, 48.

the case.⁶⁸ His agent, Captain Gascoyne, brother, Robert le Poer Trench and local landowners such as Captain Lancaster of Ardcarne, sat as *ex-officio* guardians. As he was the most influential board member, Clancarty's opinion would help sway other members. There were 900 Protestants in Ballinasloe out of a population of 7,700 and they had the influence, status and social level of an oligarchy, with Clancarty being able to dominate and control affairs in the community with their assistance.⁶⁹ He saw the Sisters of Mercy as a real threat to his control over his Catholic tenants and this débâcle saw the control that he exerted over the running of the workhouse come under the microscope of public opinion. The local press commented on the controversy and Clancarty's ability to control who could enter the workhouse. His refusal to allow the Sisters of Mercy to enter the workhouse to tend to the poor ensured that he maintained control over policies governing its operation and it also accentuated the degree of influence he exerted when it came to formulating such policies.⁷⁰

On 29 June 1853 the *Warden of Galway* published an article entitled 'Ballinasloe union: more papal aggression', which had the explicit intention of inflaming distrust in the Protestant community towards the Sisters of Mercy by calling the Catholic Church a 'sect'.⁷¹ It contended that Fr Dillon was engaging in a sinister plot to proselytise to Protestant paupers in the workhouse. Dillon counter-argued that the purpose of having them admitted was to tend to the educational and spiritual needs of the Catholic paupers, because the high number of paupers resident

⁶⁸ *G. V.*, 21 Jan. 1854.

⁶⁹ Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 317; Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 143.

⁷⁰ Prunty, 'Battle plans and battlegrounds: Protestant mission activity in the Dublin slums, 1840s–1880s' p 119.

⁷¹ *Warden of Galway*, 29 Jun 1853.

in the workhouse made it very difficult for the staff that were there to tend to them efficiently.⁷²

Egan stated that there were 238 Catholics and sixteen Protestants in the workhouse when this controversy began, which implies that 6.8 per cent of the population in the workhouse were Protestant.⁷³ John Cotton Walker dismissed Dillon's assertions that Catholic paupers were being neglected in the workhouse, arguing that Clancarty had provided sufficiently for the educational needs of his tenants and residents in the workhouse. Robert le Poer Trench expressed his annoyance at Fr Dillon's attempts to introduce this motion without giving the requisite two weeks notice, believing that he was overstepping the influence he could exert at Board of Guardians meetings. The *Warden of Galway* accused Dillon of trying to exert undue influence upon the Catholic members of the board of guardians, stating that he attended in order to ensure that they would support the sisters' admission. Walker asked the Board of Guardians not to admit the Sisters of Mercy, because it would be an official sanctioning of proselytism. This was a rather hypocritical demand, as both he and Clancarty saw their admission as a threat to the nascent evangelical movement they were attempting to establish in the workhouse.⁷⁴

Clancarty and Walker were apprehensive that the nuns would pressurise Protestant paupers to convert to Catholicism: 'we shall let the nuns in, provided the bible is allowed to have free course'.⁷⁵ In July 1853 an attempt to allow scripture

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 258.

⁷⁴ *Warden of Galway*, 29 Jun. 1853.

⁷⁵ *W. S.*, 9 Jul. 1853.

readers enter the workhouse under the same terms and conditions as the Sisters of Mercy took place. Bridget O’Flaherty and Lucinda Blake asked to be admitted to the workhouse in order to proselytise to Catholic paupers. They were part of Clancarty’s attempts to admit proselytisers to the workhouse, because they believed the Catholic Church was in decline. However, they were not admitted, due to overwhelming resistance from Catholic board members.⁷⁶

Local newspapers, in particular, the *Galway Vindicator* played an important role in reporting on the activities pertaining to the Sisters of Mercy, and appeared to have played a role in shaping public opinion towards Lord Clancarty. The *Galway Vindicator* was contemptuous of Clancarty’s excessive influence in ensuring the defeat of these motions, arguing that ‘the creed of Christendom is charity’. It was bewildered as to why Lord Clancarty and the board of guardians would not sanction their admittance: ‘we have not patience ... [with] one of these dried specimens of an effete Protestantism’.⁷⁷ Clancarty feared the sisters had infiltrators in its ranks that would attempt to proselytise to the paupers and he wanted them to liaise with the Catholic chaplain to prevent this. Both he and Lord Clonbrock demanded that a list of all the sisters be compiled to reduce the risk of impersonation, with Clonbrock further arguing that they would be a disruptive influence. Alderman Reynolds dismissed Clonbrock’s fears, saying:

The Sisters of Mercy carried hope and rejoicing to the desolate hearth, and poured oil on the wounds of the afflicted. The Scripture readers excited rancorous feelings and angry dissensions. The Sisters of Mercy brought with them the glad tidings of heavenly hope and conciliation (sic); the Scripture

⁷⁶ *G. V.*, 9 Jul. 1853.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*; Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 255

readers brought exasperation mockery, and insult in their trail (sic). The Sisters of Mercy were the harbingers of peace and serenity; the Scripture readers were the missionaries of discord and uncharitableness.⁷⁸

Reynolds was disappointed that no permanent member of the board proposed a motion allowing the sisters to enter the workhouse, resulting in him having to travel from Boyle to propose them.⁷⁹ The following is an example of the divisiveness which caused Reynolds's frustration:

The question was then put to the chair. Chairman: The "nos" have it. Your resolution has been rejected. Alderman Reynolds: The "Ayes" have, there appears to be a division. Chairman: Then let the strangers withdraw. Alderman Reynolds: I protest against the exclusion of the press. If the reporters are excluded, I will ask to have the names. Chairman observed that the names will be called out and again directed strangers to withdraw. [The strangers present and the reporters retired accordingly] In the interval, we understand that Alderman Reynolds protested energetically against the exclusion of the press during such an important division, and after some delay, they were called in.⁸⁰

After the defeat of this motion, the *Galway Vindicator* again expressed its disappointment at Clancarty's interference: 'the petty czar of Garbally has again been despotic against the nuns ... the great ingredient in the religion of Lord Clancarty is a hatred of papists'. Calling Clancarty the 'petty czar' implied that he was overreaching his position as chairman of the board of guardians by acting in a demagogic fashion.⁸¹ Clancarty was accused of not being able to separate charity from religion as comfort, not religion was the vocation of the nuns. J. O'Donohue, a Catholic member of the Board voted against their admittance, but the *Galway Vindicator* believed the only reason he did this was because he was an employee of Lord Clancarty. It further

⁷⁸ *G. V.*, 21 Jan. 1854.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 23 Jul. 1853; *W.S.*, 21 Jan. 1854.

⁸⁰ *W. S.*, 21 Jan. 1854.

⁸¹ *G. V.*, 23 Jul. 1853

argued that the Protestant board members were bigoted towards the Sisters of Mercy and wanted to remove ‘female Jesuits’ from the workhouse because they would be harbingers of victory for the Catholic Church if they were admitted. Clancarty and his fellow Protestant board members were accused of being completely disgusted at the whole ethos of the Sisters of Mercy and claimed it was alien to their ideals: ‘the Clancartyism of the Ballinasloe guardians has denied to the Catholic inmates the benefits of the visits of the Sisters of Mercy’.⁸² Clancarty believed that there was an attempt to tarnish him as a bigot and he was determined to bring this controversy to a conclusion.⁸³

Reynolds was angry with Clancarty’s attempts to equate the Sisters of Mercy with scripture readers, whose *raison d’être* was to convert. By contrast, he argued, the Sisters of Mercy’s mission was to assist the paupers, because they were ‘ladies by birth’ and they could bring meaning and discipline to residents in the workhouse. He drew upon the example of Goldenbridge, Co. Dublin where they had the inmates gardening and providing laundry services and also claimed the paupers of the Athlone workhouse benefited from their presence. The extensive pauperism in Ballinasloe led to an increased immorality in the town. Reynolds and Fr Dillon wanted the Sisters of Mercy to restore morality, though Dunlo claimed that they had failed to do this.⁸⁴

This débâcle had been ongoing for a decade by the time it came to an end in 1863 as Lords Ashtown and Clonbrock turned against Lord Clancarty and agreed that the level of public support felt by the Sisters of Mercy meant that it was no longer

⁸²G. V., 23 Jul. 1853; *Galway Press*, 28 Nov. 1860.

⁸³G. E., 26 May 1853; G.V., 21 Jan. 1854.

⁸⁴G. V., 21 Jan. 1854; 24 Oct 1857.

feasible to reject their entry.⁸⁵ Lord Clancarty abused his authority on the board of guardians by being overzealous in his attempts to convert the residents to Protestantism, which alienated his family from the Catholic tenantry on the estate. He made unreasonable demands to allow scripture readers into the workhouse under the same conditions as the nuns. Clancarty had a great desire to attract converts to Protestantism, failing to appreciate the attachment the Catholic masses had towards their faith and many converts recanted their conversion once their situation improved.⁸⁶

There were members of the Established Church that were uncomfortable with the overzealous activities of some missionary preachers and the evangelical movement. By 1864, many reputable churchmen found that the activities of the likes of Lord Clancarty and John Cotton Walker were having a negative effect on their religion and that there was no concrete evidence to support the alleged successes of ‘souperism’ or ‘jumperism’. William Higgin, the bishop of Limerick, Ardfert and Adgadoo said: ‘the Church (Established Church) should stand forth as the honest and peaceful dispenser of God’s word ... she should not assume a position of domination and authority over the conscience of those that do not belong to her communion’.⁸⁷

Lord Clancarty saw the workhouse as a place of great potential to attract converts to Protestantism. Like the Dublin slums, it soon became a battleground to seek converts. Neither side realised that the masses had very little interest in what being preached to them, with W. A. Green arguing that people must eat and be

⁸⁵ Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 257.

⁸⁶ Ní Ghiobúin, *Dugort, 1831–1861, A study of the rise and fall of a missionary community*, pp 100, 102.

⁸⁷ Bowen, *Souperism*, p. 146.

sheltered before they can contemplate God. Bishop Derry appreciated the failure of the Roman Catholic Church to fully attend to the spiritual needs of their members, saying: ‘while the enemy press on with all this activity, past and present, we must admit to our lasting shame and disgrace that is on the Catholic side, there has been enormous supinity, much of which is still with us’.⁸⁸

V.) County election of 1859

Clancarty’s zealousness was overbearing to Catholics and it is likely that he was taken aback at the level of defiance to his authority in Ballinasloe. Catholic priests were a resurgent political bloc by the time of the 1857 election and this must have played a role in Dunlo’s comprehensive defeat at the 1859 election.⁸⁹ The holding of this election during the midst of the Sisters of Mercy controversy gave the clergy an opportunity to flex their political muscle and challenge the legitimacy of Clancarty’s authority.

Clancarty supported Sir William Gregory’s candidature in the 1857 election because Gregory supported denominational education. This was despite Clancarty’s belief that a Protestant landlord had little prospect of being elected in Galway. While he approached Lords Dunsandle and Clonbrock to support Gregory, Dunsandle was not prepared to do so. Nevertheless, Gregory and Sir Thomas John Burke were returned. K. T. Hoppen has stated that between 1852 and 1868 only thirty-eight

⁸⁸ Prunty, ‘Battle plans and battlegrounds: Protestant mission activity in the Dublin slums, 1840s–1880s’, p. 119; W. A. Green, *History, historians and the dynamic of change* (Westport, Connecticut, 1993), p. 85; Bowen, *Souperism*, pp 143–4.

⁸⁹ J. H. Whyte, ‘The influence of the Catholic clergy on elections in nineteenth century Ireland’ in *English Historical Review* No. 75, (1960), pp 239-59.

percent of county elections were contested, so it was natural that Dunlo's candidature raised a few eyebrows:⁹⁰ 'Lord Dunlo, it appears, is determined to proceed with an ill-advised and fruitless contest ... Lord Dunlo must go to the wall or Garbally and there nurse his newly acquired ardour under the orange flag'.⁹¹ In his election manifesto, Dunlo stated that he wanted 'perfect religious liberty' and a denominational education system established that supported the distinct ethos of the various religions in the country.⁹²

The parliamentary ability of Gregory was praised by the *Galway Vindicator* because he supported the rights of Catholics and because Dunlo was seen to be attempting to oust Gregory from his seat. Dunlo was called an anti-Catholic, ultra-Protestant: 'he might have quietly glided on his non-political career, hugged his darling dogmas of no-popery in his own bosom'.⁹³ The *Galway Vindicator* argued that Dunlo had to reject the strongly held beliefs of his ancestors if he wanted to have a chance of being elected: 'as long as Lord Dunlo flaunts the orange flag from the towers of Garbally, so long will he be fighting under the enemies colours'.⁹⁴ Therefore, because of his politico-religious leanings, it was thought that he could never be truly representative of the entire county:

He must have the moral courage to renounce the wisdom of his ancestors which spring from the penal laws, Catholic persecution and Protestant

⁹⁰ Brian Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: a biography* (Gerrards Cross, 1986), p. 129; for a more in depth discussion on this particular election see; K. T. Hoppen, 'Landlords, society and electoral politics in mid-nineteenth century Ireland' in C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 291; B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 90.

⁹¹ *G. V.*, 11 May 1859.

⁹² *ibid.*, 27 Apr 1859.

⁹³ *ibid.*, 7 May 1859.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 14 May 1859.

ascendancy ... My Lord Dunlo, you must “reform it altogether” be Irish, liberal and reforming – or be “no officer of mine”; your chance of representing Galway or any other locality will be of the slenderest description ... the influence of Garbally house, and the politics of Ballinasloe, are, and will be totally inefficacious in this county, as long as they shall continue of a stamp un-Irish, bigoted, sectarian and Tory.⁹⁵

Dunlo was outwardly gracious in defeat and congratulated his opponents, while the *Galway Vindicator* of 14 May 1859 celebrated the rejection of an ‘anti-Catholic candidate’.⁹⁶ It advised Dunlo that his standing on the issue of religion would hinder any chance he had of being elected in a subsequent election: ‘it would be preposterous to suppose that a Tory and a bigot in religion should represent this great Catholic constituency’. The evangelical zeal of his father made Dunlo anathema to the largely Catholic electorate. Brian Jenkins argued that: ‘Clancarty’s efforts to capitalise on the Tories popularity to recapture one of the Galway seats for his immediate family and his party did perturb Gregory’,⁹⁷ though such a concern proved to be groundless. Not getting the support of their neighbour and fellow Tory, Lord Clonbrock, also hindered any hopes of Dunlo being elected.

VI.) Conclusion

Despite contrasting religious views to those of his tenants, Clancarty still retained the deference and respect of the community on the estate. Clancarty was a sincere evangelical because he would not or could not coerce his tenants into converting to

⁹⁵ *G. V.*, 14 May 1859.

⁹⁶ The result of the election was: Sir Thomas John Burke, 2,536, William Henry Gregory 2,435 and Viscount Dunlo, 1,496. See B.M. Jenkins, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 96. Walker mistakenly states Lord Dunlo’s name was William Thomas le Poer Trench. In fact, it was Richard Somerset le Poer Trench that was Lord Dunlo in 1859. William Thomas was the third earl of Clancarty.

⁹⁷ Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole*, p. 137.

Protestantism, believing that this was the wrong approach as ‘he had placed the truth within their reach through the medium of scripture schools’, thus reflecting the sincerity of his activity and this was the antithesis to Dallas’s approach.⁹⁸ However, P. K. Egan believed that Lord Clancarty’s opposition was because of his family’s bigotry towards Roman Catholicism. The eventual admission of the Sisters of Mercy to the Ballinasloe workhouse was a significant development on the Clancarty estate and represented the first significant challenge to the legitimacy of Lord Clancarty’s authority over the management of institutions on his estate. This undermined his political power as a landlord and was also an example of the success of Cullen’s ultramontane mission. The *Galway Vindicator* called Ballinasloe ‘not the green, but the Orange spot of Ireland’⁹⁹, with a letter writer to the *Nation* newspaper stating on 30 June 1863 that Ballinasloe had been the ‘metropolis of proselytism in this part of Connaught’, yet there is no evidence to suggest that significant levels of conversions took place.¹⁰⁰ This dispute had a polarising effect on relationships between the Protestant oligarchy and the Catholic tenants in the town of Ballinasloe, with underlying sectarian animosity lingering.¹⁰¹

It was reserved for Lord Clancarty and his satellites to become peremptory and Protestant, to show the world that piety and Christian kindness were utterly divorced from the workhouse over which they ruled and that there should be no merciful ministering in that dreary abode of cheerless charity and stinted

⁹⁸ W. S., 22 Oct 1854.

⁹⁹ G. V. 11 May 1859.

¹⁰⁰ *Nation*, 20 June 1863; Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, p. 259.

¹⁰¹ T. J. Kelly, “Come Lord Jesus, quickly come”: the writings and thoughts of Edward Nangle, 1826–1862’ in Crawford Gribben and A. R. Holmes (eds), *Protestant millennialism and Irish society, 1790–2005*, p. 100.

stirabout unless the Chair wants it and the Board awards it.¹⁰²

John Cotton Walker was the main protagonist in the evangelical movement in Ballinasloe and appeared to have been a nefarious influence upon Clancarty. His letters and speeches were inflammatory and anti-Catholic and added greatly to the emergence of episodic sectarian tensions emerging during this period. His activities were more reflective of the methodology adopted by the Irish Church Mission, which was crude and forceful. While such activity naturally created tensions between the Protestant Clancarty and his overwhelmingly Catholic tenantry, the distinct lack of violence or lingering animosity towards the Clancarty family reflected the fact that the third earl of Clancarty retained the respect and deference of his tenants. He was a responsible and shrewd manager of his estate and his benevolence during the Famine, in particular, was deeply appreciated by his tenantry. While Egan has asserted that it was the Catholic priests that succeeded in countermanding Clancarty's evangelical influence, he failed to appreciate that Clancarty was a sincere evangelical, and was not engaged in forceful activity, such as in Connemara or Dublin, which were under the influence of the Irish Church Mission. Despite being acknowledged as a good landlord, Clancarty's unwillingness to compromise on the admission of the Sisters of Mercy to the workhouse created a great deal of bitterness towards the family for decades to come, with sectarian rhetoric towards the third earl surfacing in a most forceful way during the 1872 by-election and this is discussed in the next chapter.

The *Galway Vindicator* believed that the proselytisers should have only sought

¹⁰² *G. V.*, 24 Oct 1857.

willing converts to Protestantism, which Clancarty did try and do, though newspapers characterised him as a sectarian bigot, but there is no definitive evidence to support such an assertion. Nevertheless, such a statement is reflective of the power and influence the press could hold over public opinion, as Clancarty was held up to public odium because of his beliefs, and as will be seen in the next chapter, the Catholic reaction to his activity was frequently against perceived, rather than actual injustices. While Clancarty was not explicitly involved in some of the proselytising activities on the estate, his influential thoughts on Protestantism did play an important role.¹⁰³

The religion of Christ, in its purity, will give us a country free from beggars, free from union workhouses, and totally devoid of any necessity for female almsgivers, in convent livery, held in bondage to a priesthood as unnaturally enslaved as they. Many thanks to Lord Clancarty.¹⁰⁴

Clancarty had a sincere belief that he was doing the right thing by attempting to attract converts from his tenantry, believing that this was both the path to salvation and improvement in their material well-being. He failed to appreciate the attachment Catholics had to their faith and such acts were seen to be a gross imposition. The tenants resisted accordingly, thus signalling the declining influence of the family.

¹⁰³ G. V., 2 Feb 1856; Jacinta Prunty, 'Battle plans and battlegrounds' in Crawford Gribben, et al., *Protestant millennialism, evangelicalism and Irish society* pp 125, 127, 138–9; for an example of Clancarty's evangelicalism see Earl of Clancarty, *Ireland: her present condition and what it might be* (Dublin, 1864).

¹⁰⁴ E. J. Quigley, 'Grace abounding' in *Irish Ecclesiastical Review*, xvi (1923), p. 516.

CHAPTER THREE:
NOLAN VERSUS TRENCH: THE 1872 GALWAY BY-ELECTION
AND ITS IMPACT ON THE CLANCARTY FAMILY

I. Introduction

Cardinal Cullen's attempts at restricting clerical involvement in electoral politics after his return from Rome were not as successful as he had hoped. His influence and power was derived from his appointment as Apostolic Delegate after being installed as archbishop of Armagh and subsequently cardinal archbishop of Dublin and the Synod of Thurles of 1850. However, the presence of John MacHale, archbishop of Tuam in the west of Ireland for over six decades, meant that the region was quite impervious to the reforms that Cullen attempted to introduce. In *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland, 1870–1874* (1990), Emmet Larkin alludes to correspondence between Bishop John MacEvilly of Galway and Cardinal Cullen concerning the 1872 by-election in Galway between Captain John Philip Nolan of Ballinderry, Tuam and Captain William le Poer Trench, son of the third earl of Clancarty, which became one of the most contentious by-election campaigns in late nineteenth-century Ireland. MacEvilly argued that the problems during the election campaign that led to the petition would not have occurred if the priests had adhered to the directions set out during the Synod of Thurles, directions which MacHale appeared to have ignored, with Cullen remarking after the petition that MacHale had

total disregard for the Synod.¹

Priests had been involved in electioneering from the early nineteenth century, especially during the campaign for Catholic Emancipation in the 1820s and at the 1852 election, because of the deeply contentious Ecclesiastical Titles Act of 1851.² While the clergy could be divided amongst themselves when it came to supporting a specific candidate, as had occurred during the 1857 election in Galway, they were united in their support for Nolan in 1872.³ Their participation attracted contempt from those not enamoured with this level of clerical interference because it was seen to be a form of manipulation and there was a fear that they could exert undue temporal influence.⁴

Captain John Philip Nolan's candidature in 1872 came after his failed attempt to seek election at the 1871 by-election. The Portacarron award, discussed in further detail in the next section, made him a more acceptable candidate the following year. As it was a *de facto* recognition of tenant-right, it made Nolan immediately more acceptable as a candidate to the clergy. This alarmed landlords and it resulted in them forming a pragmatic, yet fractured alliance behind Captain William le Poer Trench – third son of the third earl of Clancarty – in order to prevent Nolan from being elected. Trench's candidature resulted in extensive vituperation being directed towards the third earl of Clancarty during the campaign as a result of substantial proselytising

¹ P. J. Corish, 'Irish College Rome: Kirby papers' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xxx (1972), p. 67; Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland, 1870–1874* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina), p. 131

² J. H. Whyte, 'The influence of the Catholic clergy on elections in nineteenth-century Ireland' in *English Historical Review*, 75 (1960), pp 239–41

³ Brian Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole* (Gerrards' Cross, 1986), p. 129.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 242.

activities on the estate. This was despite the demise of such activity as a result of the admission of the Sisters of Mercy to the Ballinasloe workhouse a decade previously in 1863, which has been discussed in the previous chapter. In an article, entitled ‘The priesthood in Irish politics’, published in the *Dublin Review* in July 1872, the anonymous author said:

When Irish social phenomena are mentioned in any other connection than in reference to this Galway election the Englishman is fond of setting forth, how mutually opposed are the political views of landlord and tenant, and how readily Irish Catholics of the lower class accept every political doctrine set before them by their priests.⁵

This by-election was the second significant challenge to the hitherto unquestioned authority of the third earl of Clancarty in the post-Famine period. It showed how bitter contested elections could become, with William Steuart Trench (no relation), the infamous land agent commenting that they generally fostered great ill-will.⁶ This chapter explores the challenges that Trench faced during the campaign as a result of his father’s antecedents and the animus directed towards the Clancarty family as Catholic clergy attempted to portray them as capricious evictors and bigoted evangelicals. Attention will also be paid to Captain Nolan’s Portacarron award, the landlord convention that selected Captain Trench as their candidate, the canvassing and intimidation which took place during the campaign, the petition and the impact

⁵ ‘The priesthood in Irish politics’ in *Dublin Review* (July, 1872), p. 257,

⁶ J. H. Whyte, ‘Landlord influence at elections in Ireland’ in *English Historical Review* 80 (1965), p. 752; for more on William Steuart Trench see Gerard Lyne, *The Lansdowne estate in Kerry under W. S. Trench 1849–72* (Dublin, 2001).

that this by-election had upon the Clancarty family.

II.) The Portacarron award and landlord convention

An examination of the Portacarron award is essential in understanding why landlords were so resistant to Nolan's candidature. Nolan had an estate in Portacarron, near Oughterard and evicted fourteen tenants from it in 1864 and 1867 because of his objection to extensive sub-division that had been taking place. These evictions resulted in a grazier with 4,000 acres, called Murphy taking possession of the cleared holdings and it was because of these evictions that Nolan's candidature in the 1871 by-election, which came about after the resignation of Lord Dunkellin – the son of the first Marquis of Clanricarde – was a non-runner and Mitchell Henry of Kylemore was returned unopposed.⁷ By the end of 1871, it became clear that Sir William Gregory of Coole was going to resign his seat and Nolan was determined to win clerical support and do what was necessary to achieve this. Nolan established an arbitration committee in May 1871 in order to ascertain what level of compensation the evicted tenants were entitled to and he asked Fr Patrick Lavelle, A. M. Sullivan and Sir John Gray – men with well documented nationalist sympathies – to form this arbitration committee and he willingly accepted their decision, which was the awarding of compensation to evicted tenants. The award antagonised landlords in Galway for two reasons; the first being the nationalistic make-up of the committee and secondly, the

⁷ *The Times*, 2 June 1871; *Freeman's Journal* 27 Jan. 1872; R. V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848–82* (Dublin, 1994), p. 192.

dangerous precedent it set because it was a *de facto* recognition of tenant-right.⁸

Landlords dismissed the award as an empty gesture by Nolan in an attempt to make himself more electable in the eyes of the clergy, with the *Express* stating: ‘Captain Nolan did not ... agree to the arbitration until the tenants had gone to America’.⁹ While no legal obligation had been imposed upon Nolan to provide compensation to the evicted tenants, he said that he felt morally obliged to do so and this reeked of political expediency and many in the constituency doubted his repentance.¹⁰ Trench called the award a sham, arguing that despite the hyperbole surrounding it; many tenants were forced to emigrate after being evicted and no one had been restored to their holdings. Furthermore, Nolan had no legal right to evict Murphy, which challenged the validity of his boastings.¹¹ Despite such flaws, Fr Lavelle called Nolan: ‘one of the greatest benefactors to the tenant farmer class which the country has produced within the present century’.¹² While this is a gross exaggeration, it reflects the groundswell of support Nolan received in the aftermath of the award.

The *Freeman’s Journal* called the arbitration and the award a remarkable event: ‘as Captain Nolan matured in judgment as well as years, he recognised that he had done these men a grievous wrong in thus removing them from their holdings’.¹³ It further stated that it was ‘a great event for the tenantry of Ireland, and it shows how

⁸ *Tuam Herald*, 27 Jan. 1872.

⁹ *Express*, 16 Dec. 1871.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ *Galway Express*, 13 Jan. 1872; *T. H.*, 16 Dec. 1871; 27 Jan. 1872.

¹² Gerard Moran, *A radical priest in Mayo: Fr Patrick Lavelle: the rise and fall of an Irish nationalist, 1825–86* (Dublin, 1994), pp 136–7.

¹³ *F. J.*, 1 June 1871; *T. H.*, 27 Jan. 1872.

irresistible public opinion is ... Captain Nolan by this act has covered himself with honour, and has earned from the Irish tenantry, gratitude that will never fade'.¹⁴

Despite receiving endorsements from the nationalist press, the *Tuam Herald* was not enamoured with Nolan's actions, arguing that they reeked of political expediency.

'Industrious tenants had been cleared off a portion of his property, which was handed over to the large farmer. He discovered that this was a misdeed and repented; but his discovery and repentance only took place when he desired to become a member and found it an obstacle'.¹⁵

While Nolan attracted great enmity from the landlords, he was the recipient of gleeful praise from nationalists because: 'his noble conduct in atoning by large pecuniary sacrifices for some act of landlord severity inflicted in his youth, which might be traced, as often happens to the cupidity of evil counsellors rather than his own'.¹⁶ The precedent set by this arbitration was relished by the nationalist press: 'to recognise a principle so dangerous to autocratic landlordism as equitable arbitration between landlord and tenant, to adopt a course which plainly assumes and by precedent settles the principle that unjust evictions is a wrong, for which atonement should be made'.¹⁷ His willingness to accept the decision of the arbitration committee was the antithesis of what landlords viewed as acceptable behaviour for a landowner and David Thornley argued that the Portacarron award made Nolan as much a symbol of tenant-right as Home Rule.¹⁸

¹⁴*F. J.*, 7 June 1871 quoting the *Mayo Examiner*.

¹⁵*T. H.*, 8 June 1872.

¹⁶*F. J.* 28 July 1871.

¹⁷*ibid.*, 23 Sept. 1871.

¹⁸David Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule* (Dublin, 1964), p. 130

Bishop MacEvilly said that MacHale had given Nolan his unqualified support without any reference to or consultation with his suffragen bishops. This placed MacEvilly in an awkward position, because he had no option but to support Nolan for fear of a son of Lord Clancarty being returned as an M.P., which would also damage any influence the bishops could exert. He predicted that there would be an acrimonious battle during the election campaign. Bishop Laurence Gillooly of Elphin – who did not play a significant role in the campaign – thought that if Hyacinth D’Arcy of Kiltullagh contested the election, it would split the liberal vote and increase the chances of Trench winning.¹⁹ The *Freeman’s Journal* said:

Never for generations was an Irish county the theatre of a struggle more significant and momentous for the tenant-farmers of Ireland. The entire landlordism of the west have leagued in an unholy alliance to make an example of the courageous and noble hearted gentleman who, as they are pleased to express it, committed treason against the whole order and class by his submission to the arbitration of the Portacarron evictions.²⁰

Landlord influence in electoral politics was in steady decline throughout the nineteenth century and no M.P. had been returned from Garbally since Richard le Poer Trench (later the second earl) in 1802. His son, William le Poer Trench – the third earl of Clancarty – failed to have his heir elected in 1859 and acknowledged the declining influence of the aristocracy in Galway politics at that point.²¹ K. T. Hoppen

¹⁹ Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland*, pp 110–12; for more on Hyacinth D’Arcy, see the Landed estates database at NUI Galway, <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie:8080/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=766> [date accessed, 4 May 2011].

²⁰ *F. J.*, 23 Sept. 1871.

²¹ B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 7; see also, James Kelly, ‘The politics of Protestant ascendancy: Co. Galway 1650–1832’ in Gerard Moran (ed.), *Galway*

argued that ‘landlords generally groomed sons for election to the House of Commons, because it was seen to be suitable training ground for estate management’.²²

Nevertheless he must have played a significant role in putting his son William forward as the landlord candidate in 1872. While this by-election supports Hoppen’s argument that ‘Irish politics ... [was] often localist in content and style’,²³ it evolved into something that had wider implications and it was noted that: ‘for Galway county today there is no middle course between patriotism and recreancy’.²⁴ Such statements resulted in the campaign developing a distinctly sectarian and bitter flavour.

Despite such extensive involvement in electoral politics, K. T. Hoppen maintained that the clergy in the west of Ireland played a much more diminished role than in the eastern part of the country: ‘as western society (west of Ireland) proved more impervious to reform in religion, so it is also likely to have proved more resistant to the new politics of national movements and social reform’.²⁵

Some members of the Catholic clergy were circumspect about supporting the Home Government Association because of the sizeable Protestant presence in it, though R.V. Comerford has stated that Protestant conservative support of Home Rule was somewhat exaggerated.²⁶ However, the Meath by-election of 1871 showed how co-operation between Catholics and Protestants could become a vital cog in the

History and Society: interdisciplinary essays on the history of an Irish county (Dublin, 1996), pp 229–70; Jenkins, *Sir William Gregory of Coole: a biography* p. 129.

²² K. T. Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland, 1832–1885* (Oxford, 1984), p. 117.

²³ Hoppen, *Elections, politics and society in Ireland, 1832–1885*, p. viii; see also idem ‘Landlords, society and electoral politics in mid-nineteenth century Ireland’ in C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), pp 284–320; Gerard Moran, ‘Politics and electioneering in County Longford’ in Raymond Gillespie and Gerard Moran (eds), *Longford: essays in county Longford* (Dublin, 1991), pp 173–196.

²⁴ Moran, *Fr Patrick Lavelle: the rise and fall of an Irish nationalist*, pp 132, 136.

²⁵ K. T. Hoppen, ‘Landlords and electoral politics in mid nineteenth-century Ireland’, pp 288–9.

²⁶ Comerford, *The Fenians in context*, p. 188.

campaign for legislative autonomy if it was correctly utilised. This by-election saw the return of John Martin, a Presbyterian and Young Irelander and the Home Rule movement was buoyed by this initial success. However, the Galway by-election became an antagonistic battle between the two groups in the Galway countryside that exerted the greatest influence over tenant-farmers: landlords and the Catholic clergy, with the clergy engaging in sectarian hyperbola against the third earl of Clancarty. This reflected the lingering bitterness felt towards him over the evangelical mission he had attempted to establish on his estate decades previously.²⁷ The proselytising antecedents of Trench's family were repeatedly brought forward by the clergy at election meetings, in churches and through the pages of the local press in order to make the family and Captain Trench reprehensible to Catholic voters, with priests allegedly making speeches against Trench from the altar despite this being prohibited by a hierarchical edict in 1834.²⁸ The *Galway Express* contended: 'the sacred precincts of houses of worship were desecrated by being made places where the merits of the rival candidates were compared'.²⁹

Despite differing political ideologies amongst Galway landlords, the threat presented by Nolan resulted in them having to put aside such differences in an effort to defeat him and a landlord convention was organised on 18 December 1871 in order to select a suitable candidate. Clanricarde's presence at this convention was indicative of the threat posed by Nolan and the clergy at the by-election and the landlords looked to him for leadership. The *Freeman's Journal* commented: 'the Whiggish Clanricarde

²⁷ *T. H.*, 10 Feb. 1872; Moran, *A radical priest in Mayo.*, pp 132, 136.

²⁸ Whyte, 'The influence of the Catholic clergy on elections in nineteenth-century Ireland', p. 243.

²⁹ *G. E.*, 10 Feb. 1872.

and the ultra-Tory Clancarty were willing to put aside ancient feuds in order to have Trench returned'.³⁰ Up to this point, gentry politics in Galway had been divided between Tories and those with Whiggish tendencies, even though the party had been abolished in 1868. Hoppen contended that such dividing lines became blurred when external threats demanded a closing of ranks, with the Whig landlords standing behind Lord Clanricarde and the Tories behind Clancarty.³¹

In their common hatred of Captain Nolan the lion and the lamb of Connaught politics lay down together. The head of the great Whig house of Clanricarde and the head of the great Tory house of Clancarty forgot their differences, buried the hatchet of war and sent into the field as a candidate a scion of the latter family in the person of Captain Trench.³²

This alliance was indicative of the threat posed by Nolan's candidature and the formidable nature of the clerical electoral machine: 'by implication, [the landlords] pledged themselves to oppose Captain Nolan, the man of the popular choice'.³³ The *Galway Express* – the landlord organ in Galway – was concerned with the implications of having a clerically approved candidate returned to the House of Commons, fearful of the influence they could exert over an M.P., while also acknowledging that the landlord alliance was driven by pragmatism, rather than ideology: 'Captain Trench [was] the representative of the intelligence, toleration and independence of the county'³⁴, while Nolan's supporters were portrayed as being

³⁰ *F. J.*, 23 Sept. 1871.

³¹ Hoppen, *Election, politics and society in Ireland, 1832–1885*, pp 123, 126; Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland*, p. 110

³² *T. H.*, 16 Dec. 1871. *F. J.*, 23 Sept. 1871.

³³ *F. J.*, 14 Dec. 1871.

³⁴ *G. E.*, 27 Jan. 1872.

vulgar and ignorant.

Landlords did not think that priests should be involved in electoral politics and ‘their purpose [at the landlord convention] was to prevent Captain Nolan and humbug from coming into the county, and the meeting decided, almost unanimously that the best way of doing do was to bring in Captain Trench’.³⁵ The overwhelming majority of landlords backed Trench’s candidature because he would maintain the *status quo* if elected, with landlords further arguing at the meeting that they would be better representatives in parliament as they had not been corrupted by ecclesiasticism.³⁶ The *Express* claimed on 16 December 1871 that:

there is more than one reason for rejecting Captain Nolan. He comes forward, partly because he is the favourite of the cardinal, or whoever does his work in Galway, and partly because as a landlord who first drove out his tenants, and after some years joined an arbitration which was to decide what he should do to recompense them.³⁷

The clergy were displeased that landlords held this convention, arguing that they had no right to use their prerogative to field a candidate, despite doing something similar themselves.

If the landlords have united, it has been done in self-defence so that they may prevent the representation of the county being handed over to persons who are incapable of any large or generous sympathies, and who cannot look beyond the interests of the party to which they belong’.³⁸

The *Freeman’s Journal* did not think Clanricarde wanted to be seen to be overtly

³⁵ *G. E.*, 27 Jan. 1872.

³⁶ *Express*, 16 Dec. 1871; *G. E.*, 27 Jan. 1872; Liffey, ‘The 1872 by-election’, p. 332

³⁷ *Express*, 16 Dec. 1871.

³⁸ *T. H.*, 13 Apr. 1872.

supporting Trench due to the ideological differences between him and Clancarty: 'surely not at the bidding of his consistent opponents will the marquis of Clanricarde sacrifice his name and merge it with that of Clancarty'³⁹ and it expressed great contempt towards Trench:

We need scarcely say anything of Captain Trench's politics; as far as he has any they coincide with those of his family ... who opposed the granting of Catholic emancipation, and every other measure which has ameliorated the condition of Ireland, the lords of Clancarty were to be found.⁴⁰

The Times was reticent about the idea of farmers and labourers becoming invigorated with greater confidence after the election because they were subjected to undue influences from priests: 'If a certain notion takes firm possession of the small farmers or labourers who make up the mass of the faithful, it will, unless decidedly anti-clerical, receive the patronage or the tacit assent of the clergy'.⁴¹ Trench derided Nolan's supporters as not being from the intelligence of the county, rather, they were outsiders and from its rougher elements.⁴² The elitist attitude of landlords that became so apparent at the Loughrea meeting consolidated clerical support for Nolan and MacEivilly told Cullen that landlords had acted in a rabid manner not only at the convention, but throughout the subsequent campaign.⁴³

The united front presented by landlords began to crack once they began to question the level of support Trench actually had and the Nolan camp sneered at them, arguing they presented this façade of unity in an attempt to secure victory for

³⁹ *F. J.*, 18 Dec. 1871.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 14 Dec. 1871.

⁴¹ *G. E.*, 3 Feb. 1872, *T. H.*, 13 Apr. 1872; *The Times*, 31 May 1872.

⁴² *G. E.*, 27 Jan. 1872; *The Times*, 31 May 1872.

⁴³ Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland*, p. 127.

Trench, despite being divided about his chances.⁴⁴ Lord Clonbrock doubted the sincerity of Sir Thomas Burke's support of Trench because he was a Whig, with the *Tuam Herald* noting: 'Burke was all his life a determined political opponent of Lord Dunlo, Captain Trench's brother, and would be as soon out off his right hand as see him give member for Galway'.⁴⁵ Charles J. Blake refused to accept that it was a general meeting of the gentry: 'to give to that meeting the appearance of being general, while, in fact, it was little better than a collection of the Protestant gentlemen of the county, the staunch supporters of the house of Clancarty'.⁴⁶

III. Canvassing and intimidation

Trench felt that it was appropriate to begin his canvass among Catholic landowners because Galway was an overwhelmingly Catholic county, with the 1871 census showing that out of a total population of 228,615 there were 221,316 Catholics, leaving 7,299 Protestants living in the county, implying a little over three percent of the population was Protestant.⁴⁷ He claimed to have received some positive noises on his canvass, with thirty-three Catholic voters pledging to support him, though thirteen refused to do so. Trench also remarked that he experienced no antagonism while canvassing. 'I never received an unkind word from peer or peasant, except mobs'.⁴⁸

In spite of this, Trench faced resistance from fellow landlords while

⁴⁴ Liffey, 'The 1872 by-election', p. 332.

⁴⁵ *T. H.*, 27 Apr. 1872.

⁴⁶ *F. J.*, 18 Dec. 1871.

⁴⁷ *Census of Ireland, part one. area, houses and population: also the ages, civil condition, occupations, birthplaces, religion and education of the people. viv. Province of Connaught*, Table xxxi, Religious professions and sexes of the inhabitants and number of families, in each Parish in the county of Galway, p. 168,.

⁴⁸ *T. H.*, 27 Apr. 1872; *Copy of the minutes of evidence taken at the trial of the Galway county election petition, with an appendix*, Report 1872 p. 896, minute, 15,609.

canvassing. Charles Blake refused to grant permission to Trench to use his house as a base for canvassing because he feared that he would fall victim to intimidation and added further that he was going to abstain from voting: 'I took no part in the election on either side to make me obnoxious. My answer to all was that I was a man of business and would not make myself obnoxious by voting for either party'.⁴⁹ Lord Dunsandle's agent, William Daly testified that both he and Dunsandle canvassed the estate on behalf of Trench but only six tenants would pledge their support for him as some were afraid of voting against the wishes of their priests, while 'others said they would not go against their creed or their country'.⁵⁰ Captain John A. Daly canvassed forty voters on his estate, with twenty pledging their votes for Trench, but fifteen or sixteen would not vote for him because their lives had apparently been threatened.⁵¹

Trench tried to emphasise his own liberalism in order to present himself as a more acceptable candidate for Catholic voters because he understood that his father's evangelicalism was a hindrance to his candidature.⁵² Some voters, it seems, wanted to vote for Trench because he was seen to be the political antithesis of his father and the evidence does suggest that he was a moderate liberal.⁵³ Some Roman Catholic voters did not think there was a religious element to the election because their landlords, who were Catholics themselves, supported Trench.⁵⁴ He 'got some personal promises and conditional promises, provided the Clanricarde interest worked with me' when he canvassed Loughrea. However, his hope for Clanricarde's *imprimatur* was dashed

⁴⁹ *T. H.*, 16 Mar. 1872.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 13 Apr. 1872.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*, 16 Dec. 1871.

⁵³ *ibid.*, 1 May 1872.

⁵⁴ Whyte, 'Landlord influence at elections in Ireland', p. 753.

after they met at Portumna: ‘shortly before going to England at Christmas I called on Lord Clanricarde at Portumna and thanked him; he accepted my thanks, but gave me to understand I was not the candidate of his choice’.⁵⁵ Clanricarde tenants were not pressurised into voting for Trench and his agent, John Blake, stated that many tenants were afraid to vote for him, which was substantiated at the election petition by Michael Rushe.⁵⁶ Despite getting some Whig support in the county, failing to get the support of the most influential landowner in Galway presented Trench with insurmountable difficulties and the Nolan campaign was eager to exploit these.⁵⁷ The

Tuam Herald reported:

The house of Clanricarde, and the present marquis in particular formed the great centre of lights to the liberal party of this country. They are chiefly Roman Catholic gentlemen (members of the Liberal Party); and the cause of the Liberal Party here having been for a long series of years Roman Catholic and Liberal, Lord Clanricarde and his family received the support of the clergy of the county ... Captain Trench became a candidate for the suffrages of the county; but, although he afforded Lord Clanricarde an opportunity of offering him his support, the noble lord with that caution he afterwards forgot, prudently held aloof.⁵⁸

Nolan appreciated that he attracted hostility from the gentry and wanted to channel it in such a way as to encourage voters to defy their landlords: ‘I ask you to dare every form of coercion, and by returning me as your member to give the only fitting reply to the insults levelled by the “general” meeting at Loughrea’.⁵⁹ He argued that if the electors voted for him, they could show landlords that they could vote for whoever

⁵⁵ *T. H.*, 20 Apr. 1872, 27 Apr. 1872.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Galway county election petition*, 1872, p. 896 (15,609), *T. H.*, 27 Apr. 1872.

⁵⁸ *T. H.*, 27 Apr. 1872.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

they wanted without being intimidated.⁶⁰ However, Sir Thomas Burke, a Whig, Catholic landlord, warned his tenants to ‘recollect when the election is over, you have no one to expect any favours from, except your landlord or agent’.⁶¹

Neither of the candidates’ manifestos became subjected to forensic treatment by the press, despite containing some overlapping aspects. They both believed that the drainage of the river Suck was an overdue and critical piece of infrastructural development because it could lead to improved industry, farming and landlord-tenant relations. Trench also suggested that the government needed to take control of the railways in order to make the remote parts of the country more accessible and the potential increase in freight and passengers would be of enormous benefit to the country at large.⁶² Furthermore he was eager that local resources would be utilised in order that real improvements in the condition of the people would take place.⁶³

Trench was obviously influenced by his father’s estate management policies – discussed in greater detail in chapter one – when he said that he wanted tenants to be treated fairly and not ejected from their holdings once they met their obligations, that is paid their rent and did not challenge the authority of the landlord. Like his father, he preferred tillage farming to pasture or grazing in order to sustain as many on the land as possible, thereby affirming the management policies of his father.⁶⁴ Even though he advocated such progressive measures, Trench was ‘entirely opposed to any measures which, however, speciously described have, in reality separation from England for

⁶⁰ *T. H.*, 27 Apr. 1872.

⁶¹ Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland*, p. 146.

⁶² *T. H.*, 13 Jan. 1872, 10 Feb. 1872.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 13 Jan. 1872, 20 Jan. 1872.

their object', fearing such an outcome would 'end in internal warfare and anarchy'.⁶⁵

Though opposed to Home Rule, Trench was amenable to some form of local government, especially when local knowledge would be of more benefit to decision making instead of instructions coming from central government. However, like other members of the aristocracy, he was opposed to the secret ballot bill, claiming open voting reflected the manliness of the Irish people.⁶⁶ Nolan supported Home Rule because he thought that this was the only way that the resources of the country could be developed adequately, but 'in other respects [he] was a liberal candidate of the well-established type'.⁶⁷

Trench was an advocate for denominational education, arguing that it would provide moral guidance for students.⁶⁸ While MacHale was initially unaware that he favoured denominational education, he later argued that Trench was not honest in his definition of it because: 'it would be ridiculous to have a Trench expounding Roman Catholic feelings on the subject of education. The Catholics did not seek to infringe on the rights of their fellow Protestants, but demanded for themselves the same privileges they enjoyed'.⁶⁹ Gillooly accused Trench of being delusional in abandoning the conservative principles of his family in order to make himself more electable: 'the liberals of the county with a few exceptions regard you not as a liberal ... but as a representative of the class typified in your father which hitherto has invariably upheld

⁶⁵ *T. H.*, 27 Jan. 1872

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ R. V. Comerford, 'Isaac Butt and the Home Rule Party, 1870–77' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vi: *Ireland under the Union, 1870–1921* (Oxford, 2005), p. 9.

⁶⁸ *T. H.*, 13 Jan. 1872.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 10 Feb. 1872.

Protestant and landlord domination over our Catholic people'.⁷⁰

Gillooly was suspicious of Trench's opinions pertaining to education because Catholic tenants on the Clancarty estate had been frequently pressurised into sending their children to bible schools, especially during the pre-Famine period. Trench was courteous in his replies to Gillooly's letters and agreed to accede to requests regarding the construction of Catholic churches and schools, though what actual influence he could have exerted over his father's estate policy is subject to conjecture. The repeated attacks on his family by Gillooly and the distracting nature of the correspondence resulted in Trench discontinuing it in order to resume campaigning.⁷¹

MacHale sought assurances from Trench that he would not evict tenants if they did not send their children to bible schools, allow Catholic tenants to build their own schools, convents and churches if they wanted to, reduce emigration and ensure that there would be no landlord intimidation of voters that did not cast their vote in his favour.⁷² The *Tuam Herald* commented:

Landlord intimidation in all its most frightening forms was again and again brought to bear upon the poverty, the helplessness, and the timidity of the tenants ... it was a misfortune of Captain Trench that he came from a house that can never hope to represent the electors of the county Galway; and it was, if possible, his greater misfortune still that recreant liberals and renegade Catholics presumed insolently to foist and force him into the representation of our country, not only with passive acquiescence, but even against the expressed objections of its people, priests and prelates.⁷³

MacHale was intrigued by Trench's selection because of the apparent alliance

⁷⁰ *T. H.*, 20 Jan. 1872.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 13 Jan. 1872; 20 Jan. 1872.

⁷² *ibid.*, 13 Jan. 1872.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 10 Feb. 1872.

between Clancarty and Clanricarde for this by-election campaign. Nolan's barrister, MacDonagh, questioned MacHale during the petition regarding his letters attacking the Clancarty family: 'you refer to the antecedents of the Clancarty family in one of your letters. Did you think a scion of that noble house was a fitting representative for this county?' MacHale responded: 'on the contrary, I thought him one of the most unfit men; nothing could surprise me more than that he should have been elected by this Catholic county'.⁷⁴

MacHale was accused of dictating to his suffragen bishops in order to ensure that Trench was not returned⁷⁵ and he alleged that Trench's candidature was a contributory factor in increased antagonism in the Galway countryside: 'I (MacHale) know ... that he had not the slightest chance of success without coercion and by coercion disturbing the peace of the country'. Such was his contempt for Trench that he published their correspondence in the *Freeman's Journal*; addressing him 'in language which ... not even a kindly hearted master would write to his own butler ... The idea of employing a public newspaper as a means for replying to a private letter was singular indeed'.⁷⁶ While the See at Clonfert was vacant at the time of the election, Bishop Patrick Duggan had been installed by the time of the petition and he also demurred that Trench was unelectable because 'the great majority of members would not poll for a member of the Clancarty family if left to themselves'.⁷⁷

MacEvelly attacked Trench in his correspondence to Cullen: 'moreover, the

⁷⁴ *T. H.*, 1 May 1872.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 16 Mar. 1872; for more on the Trench family and their involvement in the Battle of Aughrim, see P. K. Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe and Richard le Poer Trench, Memoir of the le Poer Trench family* (1874).

⁷⁶ *T. H.* 16 Mar. 1872.

⁷⁷ *Tuam News*, 25 May 1872.

Clancarty family as such detestable bigots and persecutors of everything Catholic, that the return of one of them, however personally liberal (and that is yet to be seen) would be a great humiliation'.⁷⁸ He further pronounced that 'any attempt on the part of any priest to sustain Captain Trench would have the effect of alienating from the priest, the affections and feelings of the people' and refused to accept that Trench had differing political opinions to his father.⁷⁹

The Nolan camp consistently portrayed Trench in a negative light and the clergy accused Trench of engaging in similar tactics. On 10 February 1872, the *Tuam Herald* said: 'there will never be divorce between the priests and people of Ireland' and Catholics that voted for Trench were branded as socially and politically inferior.⁸⁰ Nolan's supporters made reference to the activities of Trench's ancestors in order to portray him as a wholly unsuitable candidate for the constituency:

Captain Trench had the ... unpardonable misfortune of being a heretic. His family had been accused of assassinating St Ruth at the Battle of Aughrim, made their Catholic employees work on holy days and assisted Garibaldi against the pope. Down with Trench and infamy! Rise for Nolan and Irish freedom! ... Down with Cromwellian Trench! Down with the Saxon tyrant'.⁸¹

A number of Clancarty tenants organised a meeting in Ballinasloe in January 1872, endorsing Trench's candidacy and there was an acceptance among Nolan supporters that it would be unwise to canvas tenants on the Clancarty estate. However, a later election meeting at Ballinasloe saw Trench being heckled while making a speech, resulting in him being barely audible to those in attendance. There was a real threat of

⁷⁸ Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland*, p. 112.

⁷⁹ *T. H.*, 1 May 1872.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 10 Feb. 1872.

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 16 Mar. 1872.

violence breaking out and the sub-inspector of the Royal Irish Constabulary drew his sword in an effort to restore order.⁸² Priests said at a subsequent meeting in Ballinasloe that Protestantism was no religion at all and witnesses testified that the clergy threatened people with excommunication if they did not vote for Trench.⁸³

At a later meeting, Manning said: ‘let me not meet again a renegade Catholic who will speak against freedom of election, let me see a united people join hand in hand with their clergy in returning to parliament, the man of our choice, and that man is Captain Nolan’.⁸⁴ He attempted to diffuse any potential sectarian mutterings because of the level of antagonism that emerged during the campaign: ‘let no one say that that there is a Protestant we despise. Any person that thinks so I tell him now that he is mistaken’.⁸⁵ Despite making such a statement, Manning was heard attacking Trench because he was a Protestant.⁸⁶ Nolan’s supporters made false accusations that the Clancarty family had evicted thousands because they refused to convert to Protestantism.⁸⁷ ‘The antecedents of his predecessors have even been opposed to the free emancipation and free liberty of the Catholic people of Ireland’.⁸⁸ According to sub-constable Patrick Donnell, Molony had warned his parishioners in Gort that it was inappropriate to vote for Trench and accused Clancarty of being unkind to his tenants, calling him: ‘an old serpent who had left the bones of many in America ... Trench was the son of Lord Clancarty, one of the greatest bigots Ireland

⁸² *T. H.*, 27 Jan. 1872; 13 Apr. 1872; 10 Feb. 1872.

⁸³ *ibid.*, 18 May 1872.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 20 Jan. 1872.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 20 Jan. 1872; 6 Apr. 1872; 18 May 1872.

⁸⁷ *G. E.*, 27 Jan. 1872.

⁸⁸ *T. H.*, 27 Jan. 1872.

ever produced'.⁸⁹ At Ballinasloe, James Donelan – speaking in support of Nolan – said the peers and landlords had no right to interfere with the choice of the electors and they were behaving inappropriately.

the conduct of the peers is both illegal and unprecedented ... be not deterred by landlord threats ... fearlessly do your duty towards your God and your country ... this is a fierce encounter between the people and their would be taskmasters; it is an abominable attempt ... to trample on the rights and liberties of the people. Who is Captain Trench that the landlords are so anxious to return? He must be a stranger in this county, for he addresses you as the free and independent electors of Galway ... why add insult to injury, free and independent under landlord coercion ... the brave personally Captain Trench is amiable and an accomplished gentleman, but politically he can do no better than his brother, Lord Dunlo, who would consider it a grievous sin to contribute towards the repairs of a Catholic chapel. The name of his father, the earl of Clancarty, is familiar to all of you on account of it being invariably mixed up with acts of bigotry and intolerance.⁹⁰

This meeting focused upon the 'anti-Catholic traditions of the family of Clancarty, their opposition to Catholic education, their bigotry in refusing sites or accommodation for Catholic churches and schools and in opposing the nuns'⁹¹ and was an anti-Clancarty tirade, with Fr Coen arguing that Trench would only get elected if his father influenced voters or threatened evictions.⁹² Trench denied that his father carried out wholesale evictions on the Urachree estate, rather one tenant was evicted from it in 1848 for non-payment of rent and he was a Protestant.⁹³ At the election petition, Trench's barrister, Serjeant Armstrong, argued that they possessed undue influence and were out of control: 'As priestly influence is so great, we must regard

⁸⁹ *T. H.*, 6 Apr. 1872.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 27 Jan. 1872.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 20 Jan. 1872

⁹² *ibid.*, 20 Jan. 1872; 6 Apr. 1872.

⁹³ *ibid.*, 21 Dec. 1850; 19 Apr. 1851; *G. E. G. E.*, 27 Jan. 1872; *T. H.*, 20 Jan. 1872; 13 Apr. 1872; Patrick Melvin, *The landed gentry of Galway, 1820–1880* (Ph.D thesis, TCD, 1991), pp 43–4.

its existence with extreme jealousy, and seek by the utmost vigilance to keep it within due and proper bounds'.⁹⁴

D. W. Cruise did not think Catholics wanted to be accused of being renegades to their religion if they voted for Trench and he resented this level of clerical interference: 'Nolan was a nonentity, as much disqualified as if he were not in existence in the election'.⁹⁵ Such was the level of antagonism inculcated against the Clancarty family that Lord Dunlo was assaulted by a mob at Ballinasloe on 19 February.⁹⁶ The tensions of the campaign reached a crescendo by polling day with violence breaking out at various polling stations. 'Every possible method of vilifying Captain Trench was adopted by his opponents' with drunken mobs threatening Trench supporters, especially at Loughrea, Oughterard and Tuam. After voting for Trench in Loughrea, Mr Bellew Nolan was viciously beaten by a mob outside the courthouse.⁹⁷ The *Tuam Herald* said: 'Captain Trench's father was a great enemy of the Catholic Church and that if he could he would not allow the roof of the chapel in which they stood to be over them'⁹⁸ and Pat Egan testified that several men told him their lives would be in danger if they voted for him:

Captain Trench was a member of the house of Clancarty, whose traditions were conservative and intolerant. Everything opposed, religiously and politically to the feelings of this great body of people. His father had been the

⁹⁴ *T. H.*, 6 Apr. 1872.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1872; 27 Apr. 1872.

⁹⁷ *G. E.*, 10 Feb. 1872; *T. H.*, 20 Apr. 1872,

⁹⁸ *T.H.*, 16 Mar. 1872. This is in reference to the delay in building St Michael's Church in Ballinasloe, which was delayed because of the onset of the famine. However, it was eventually built in 1858 and is symbolic of the Gothic revival that was gripping church building, because of the influence of Augustine Welby Pugin. For more on Pugin see entry in *Oxford National Biography*, 45, pp 520–4.

stern consistent opponent of all the political aspirations of the county.⁹⁹

Fr O'Brien, the parish priest of Glenamaddy, said the by-election had presented voters with an opportunity to select a candidate that reflected their own consciences:

we are here to record our claims to franchise freedom ... we the tenant electors of Galway ... ask that we be left in the undisturbed exercise of a privilege, which the constitution has secured as fully to the humblest electors among you as to the most arrogant elector over there (pointing to the Trench supporters in the courthouse) ... the iron of Protestant ascendancy has burned deeply and I fear ... indelibly into your servile souls.¹⁰⁰

Thomas Mullery from Joyce Country did not vote for Nolan because he wanted to consult with his landlord, who instructed him to vote for Trench. However, he abstained because his parish priest had exerted undue moral influence upon him to change his mind. Many other voters that promised to support Trench voted for Nolan, asserting that it was against their religion to vote for him, which could imply that they were being pressurised by their priests.¹⁰¹ Captain Blakeney's tenants told him that they would not vote for Trench if it went against their conscience. Although he accepted this, he requested that those who would not vote for Trench abstain, which many did. While canvassing Patrick Barrett, Trench was asked 'are you the Captain Trench that is standing for the county ... I am sorry for it for I have to go against you'.¹⁰² Even an employee of Trench's, Laurence Walsh feared there would be unsavoury consequences if he voted for him.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ *T. H.*, 18 May 1872.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, 10 Feb. 1872.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 13 Apr. 1872, 20 Apr. 1872.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, 27 Apr. 1872.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1872, 27 Apr. 1872.

Fr Eugene White of Caltra was a dissenting voice among the clergy when he stated that he had no objection to Trench seeking election if electors thought he was the best candidate to represent them and he did not impinge upon their consciences. Some Catholic landowners such as J. J. O'Shaughnessy and John Forde did not think the election had a religious element to it because of the support Trench received from Catholic landowners like Sir Thomas Burke.¹⁰⁴ An article entitled 'The priesthood in Irish politics' published in the *Dublin Review* in July 1872, was critical of the role the recently deceased third earl of Clancarty played in various anti-Catholic movements during his lifetime, with the anonymous author saying:

We are far from intending any implication personally disrespectful to the late Lord Clancarty, of whom we know absolutely nothing. But it was universally believed that he was in act a thorough going anti Catholic; that he refused ground for a Catholic chapel and opposed the admission of nuns into a workhouse. It was also universally believed that in acting so, he did but conform to the hereditary habits of his family. Is it probable that his son was an acceptable candidate to Catholics who thus believed?¹⁰⁵

MacEvelly was also equally forthright in his assessment of Clancarty in a letter to Cullen: 'I need not say I and Dr Duggan entered the contest exclusively to keep out the son of the greatest bigot in Europe, the greatest enemy of Catholicity'.¹⁰⁶

This opinion of Trench and his family was so ingrained that it proved impossible to effectively challenge, with Trench being called an 'Orange tyrant' in a

¹⁰⁴ *T. H.*, 20 Jan. 1872; 11 May 1872; 13 Apr. 1872; *G. E.*, 3 Feb. 1872.

¹⁰⁵ 'The priesthood in Irish politics' in *Dublin Review* (July 1872), p. 286; for more on the antecedents of the Clancarty family regarding their anti-Catholic opinions see Jane Conroy, 'Ballinasloe, 1826: Catholic emancipation, political tourism and the French liberal agenda' in *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 54 (2002), pp 103–20.

¹⁰⁶ Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland*, p. 124.

threatening letter.¹⁰⁷ He found it incredibly difficult to counter accusations that he was a bigot, despite no evidence being uncovered to substantiate such an assertion: ‘he has ran (sic) off to Garbally for protection and there coiling his venomous tail around the Orange tree, he still remains in concert with the [most] bigoted scorpion who has ever preyed on the liberties and privileges of the people’.¹⁰⁸ While most of the insidious rhetorical flourishes during this campaign were confined to the pages of the local newspapers or on election platforms, there were some threatening letters sent to landlords from Nolan supporters. One threatening letter discovered near Portumna called Nolan a true patriot and defiled Trench as a ‘bigoted Orange Cromwellian’.¹⁰⁹ Lady Ann Daly of Marble Hill received a threatening letter because she canvassed Catholic tenants to vote for Trench and ‘she had acted in a lady like manner ... [in order] to purchase the conscience of a downtrodden peasantry’. The author of this letter also sneered at the ‘genteel meeting’ called to endorse Trench’s candidature.¹¹⁰

Fenians had been playing a significant role in elections since O’Donovan Rossa’s return in Tipperary in 1868. This resulted in Fenians, such as Dr Mark Ryan, getting a taste for electioneering, which he used at this by-election.¹¹¹ In his memoirs, *Fenian Memories* (1945), Ryan recalled this air of violence: ‘I set to work and ... got sixteen or seventeen outside cars, filled with Fenians and a fife and drum band to leave Tuam early on the morning of the meeting. We were armed with sticks, as a

¹⁰⁷ C.S.O., R.P., 1871/22275 and 1871/22250 in the National Archives of Ireland (N.A.I.).

¹⁰⁸ *T. H.*, 20 Jan. 1872.

¹⁰⁹ C.S.O., R.P., 1872/212; C.S.O., R.P., 1872/5879.

¹¹⁰ C.S.O., R.P., 1872/5879.

¹¹¹ Comerford, *The Fenians in context*, p. 179.

precaution against attack by the supporters of Trench'.¹¹² However, R. V. Comerford implied that something more sinister may have taken place: 'Mark Ryan, then a young local adherent of the advanced party and subsequently a noted I.R.B. man, recalled in his later years he had marshalled carloads of cudgel-bearing supporters of Captain Nolan'.¹¹³

Nolan lost control of his election campaign and the *Galway Express* said that he would be required to adhere to the wishes of the Roman Catholic Church in order to ensure their support.¹¹⁴ He denied that his supporters were responsible for any disorder that took place during the campaign, testifying to the petition that: 'it commences exclusively with the gentlemen now in the grand jury box'.¹¹⁵

IV. The election petition and its aftermath

Trench received 658 votes to Nolan's 2,823; a comprehensive defeat: 'Captain Trench should not feel that any disgrace attaches to his defeat. On the contrary, he should be proud that in the face of powers so formidable he was able to bring as many to the poll as he did'.¹¹⁶ The only hope that he had in getting the seat was through a petition and the clerical scaremongering that took place during the campaign provided a solid basis for one to take place. Election petitions was the procedure by which the results of a Parliamentary election were challenged. Trench demanded that the result be nullified and that he should be returned as M.P. for Galway in place of Nolan. The

¹¹² Mark Ryan (edited by T. F. O'Sullivan), *Fenian memories* (1945), p. 42.

¹¹³ Comerford, 'Isaac Butt and the Home Rule Party, 1870-77', p. 9.

¹¹⁴ *G. E.*, 27 Jan. 1872.

¹¹⁵ *T. H.*, 10 Feb. 1872.

¹¹⁶ *G. E.*, 10 Feb. 1872; Ryan, *Fenian memories*, p. 42; Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), pp 283-4.

date for the petition was set for 1 April 1872 and Judge William Keogh presided over it.¹¹⁷

Keogh practiced in the Connaught circuit after being called to the bar in 1840 and he stood for election in the rotten borough of Athlone in 1847. He had to face the hostility of the clergy to his candidacy because of his pro-establishment opinions that he expressed in a pamphlet in 1844. Desmond McCabe said that judicious bribery ensured his election by six votes, which resulted in him being the only Catholic Tory in the House of Commons.

In August 1850 he was one of two Irish M.P.s that attended the inaugural Tenant League meeting in Dublin. He helped establish the Catholic Tenant Defence Association in Dublin in 1851, which aimed to restore the Roman Catholic Church to good standing within the United Kingdom but Cardinal Cullen ousted him as secretary of the association in December 1851. Prior to the formation of the Aberdeen administration in 1852, Keogh and Richard Sadlier both lobbied for appointments to government. Keogh's appointment as Irish solicitor-general created consternation amongst Irish nationalists, though Cullen was very pleased to see Catholics in high office. This petition saw him come to public prominence once again and his antipathy towards the Roman Catholic Church and its priests may have reflected some bitterness over the treatment he had received over twenty years previously.¹¹⁸

Trench was of the opinion that he was promised approximately 60 percent of the vote, having been told: 'we like you very much; we will go with our

¹¹⁷ *T. H.*, 17 Feb. 1872; 24 Feb. 1872.

¹¹⁸ Desmond McCabe, William Nicholas Keogh in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* 5 (Cambridge, 2009), pp 149–51.

landlords ... and if they go for you, we will go likewise'. But despite such pledges, he only polled twelve percent of the vote and alleged that phantom and duplicate votes had been cast. His legal team contended that he 'should not ... be called upon to go to the expense of another contest' and be awarded the seat, arguing undue influence had been exerted at the election and 'the acts done in transgression of the statute were notorious'.¹¹⁹ Nolan was accused of corruptly influencing the vote in the Tuam area by providing alcohol and food to voters, with the clergy alleged to have exerted undue moral and physical pressure upon parishioners to vote for Nolan.¹²⁰ While Keogh agreed that the clergy could use their influence to have candidates elected: 'he may not appeal to the fears, or terrors, or superstitions of those he addresses'. He said that they had acted hypocritically in their advocacy of Nolan, especially after forcing his withdrawal from the previous election campaign and he found their near rabid support for him especially galling.¹²¹ He was quite acerbic in his dealings with the Catholic clergy and 'many observers felt his court management was disgracefully one sided'.¹²²

Nolan's brother and election agent, Sebastian Nolan testified that the clergy were essential for getting people to the polls Keogh found the level of interference to be repugnant, arguing that the clergy overstepped the influence they should have, stating that 'the constitution requires that every voter should come to the poll free and

¹¹⁹ *T. H.*, 6 Apr. 1872; 20 Apr. 1872; 27 Apr. 1872; *T. N.*, 25 May 1872.

¹²⁰ *Copy of the minutes of evidence taken at the trial of the Galway county election petition, with an appendix*, Report 1872 (241) (241-I), p. x.

¹²¹ *T. H.*, 18 May 1872.

¹²² *ibid.* Desmond McCabe, William Nicholas Keogh in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* 5 (Cambridge, 2009), pp 149–51.

independent'.¹²³ Cullen was scandalised by the reports of what priests had done during the campaign and it appeared to both him and MacEvilly that MacHale had little control over some of his priests. MacEvilly further stated to Cullen that he believed Nolan would be unseated, but that Trench would not be awarded the seat.¹²⁴ At the petition, Trench argued that many who had promised to vote for him were coerced into voting for Nolan. Michael Killeen assured Clanricarde that he would 'to vote for his friend; I did so for the last forty years, and mean to do so as long as I live; I voted for Captain Trench; coming out from mass we were hooted by the neighbours as Trenchites after the election'.¹²⁵

Keogh invalidated the election result, awarded the seat to Trench and ordered that Nolan bear all costs associated with the petition, which amounted to £14,000 and a national appeal eventually met these costs.¹²⁶ He accused Duggan and MacHale of being 'guilty of an organised attempt to defeat the free franchise'.¹²⁷ Public opinion suggested that there was a desire in Britain for the government to prosecute members of the clergy in order to reaffirm that there was no class above the law.¹²⁸

According to E. R. Norman: 'it was the manner of Keogh's judgment, which gave to the whole affair the qualities of sensationalism. If the evidence outraged English opinion, it cut the Irish Catholics deeply'.¹²⁹ There was widespread revulsion in the United Kingdom over the political clout exerted by the Catholic clergy at this

¹²³ *Galway county election petition*, 1872, p. 896 (15,609); *T. H.*, 27 Apr. 1872; 18 May 1872; *G. E.*, 13 Jan. 1872.

¹²⁴ Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland*, pp 123–4.

¹²⁵ *T. H.*, 13 Apr. 1872.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, 27 Apr. 1872; 16 Mar. 1872; Ryan, *Fenian memories*, p. 44.

¹²⁷ E. R. Norman, *The Catholic Church and Ireland in the age of rebellion* (London, 1965), p. 423.

¹²⁸ *Daily News*, 24 July 1872; *Express*, 24 July 1872.

¹²⁹ Norman, *The Catholic Church and Ireland in the age of rebellion* p. 423.

election and the *Express* was pleased with the government response: ‘it was not expected that they (the government) would display such a degree of moral courage, but at the same time, much of the value of their decision depends on the manner in which the prosecutions are conducted’.¹³⁰

Keogh believed that there were priests and bishops in breach of the *Corrupt Practices Prevention Act, 1854*, which stated ‘every person ... who shall make use of or threaten any force, or violence ... against any persons on order to induce or compel such person to vote or to refrain from voting ... shall be deemed to have committed the offence of undue influence’.¹³¹ His ‘report had put the government in a difficult position, as Gladstone had no desire for lengthy prosecutions against members of the clergy, which would obviously be hugely unpopular in Ireland’.¹³² Bishop Duggan and nineteen other priests were returned to stand trial because of their participation in the campaign and this sparked nationwide indignation and protests against the judge, though this falls outside the remit of this thesis. While John Carter claimed to have heard Duggan pledging to hurl anathema at anyone that would vote for Trench, no other witnesses were discovered to be able to substantiate this claim, resulting in Duggan being acquitted at his trial. Carter held a grudge against the priests in Ballinasloe because he voted for Trench, probably because he was employed by Lord Clancarty and after doing this, he was no longer asked to sing in choir and his children were removed from the local convent school.¹³³

¹³⁰ *T. H.*, 18 May 1872; *Express*, 24 July 1872; *Galway election petition*, p. 33.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, 1 June 1872; 17 and 18 Vic., c. 102 sec 5.

¹³² Liffey, ‘The 1872 by-election’, p. 343.

¹³³ *T. H.*, 18 May 1872; Moran, *A radical priest in Mayo*, pp 141–3; for more on Bishop Duggan, see the useful, if hagiographical, Thomas Brett, *Life of the most Reverend Dr Patrick Duggan, Bishop of*

After the petition, Gladstone decreed that Trench should be returned as the member for Galway, though Sir Colman O’Loughlin, M.P. for county Clare was concerned that the sovereign will of the people was not respected and a dangerous precedent was being set. David Thornley argued that ‘the Keogh controversy aroused old religious animosities to a higher pitch of excitement than at any time since the disestablishment campaign’.¹³⁴ The behaviour of the clergy did worry the government, because it threatened to undermine its authority in Ireland, therefore the prosecutions were an attempt by the government to reassert their authority.

It was inevitable that Keogh was going to attract condemnation after his judgement especially considering its polemical nature. He stated that the behaviour of the clergy was the worst case of ecclesiastical despotism that he had ever witnessed and that those who had voted for Nolan were brainless cowards who were instruments in the hands of ecclesiastical despots.¹³⁵ While it was never sympathetic towards Nolan, the *Tuam Herald* was displeased with Keogh’s vituperation of the clergy; especially after he called them ‘rabble rousers’ and condemned the judgement as intemperate, disagreeing with his argument that the clergy were ‘ecclesiastical despots’.¹³⁶ The implications of the judgement were foreseen by *The Times*, which predicted that there would be great political and social unrest as a result:

Judge Keogh’s decision on the Galway election is a tremendous blow at the abuse of political power by the Irish priests, and it was indeed, high time that something should be done to put a stop to what, in many Irish counties, has

Clonfert (Dublin, 1921).

¹³⁴ *Hansard*, ccxi 13 June 1872 211, Col 1679 and 1680; *Morning Post*, 29 May 1872; *Daily News*, 30 May 1872; *The Times*, 30 May 1872; Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule*, pp 188–9.

¹³⁵ Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland*, pp 129–31.

¹³⁶ *T. H.*, 18 May 1872.

been for years a crying scandal ... The storm of recrimination will rage for weeks, perhaps for months.¹³⁷

Keogh's Catholicism exacerbated the anger that was felt towards him after the judgement, especially as he brought clerical influence under scrutiny that it never had been subjected to previously. The *Express* asserted that such was the extensive undue influence of the clergy that it was enough to invalidate a dozen elections. Keogh became anathema not only in Galway, but throughout the country, with effigies of him being burnt and the Dublin clergy signed a petition condemning him for what he had done.¹³⁸ The English press was apprehensive that priests would act in a more provocative manner in order to solidify their influence amongst the people, such as using the confessional as a place to canvass voters to choose the preferred clerical candidates. *The Times* argued the petition highlighted that Ireland would be controlled by priests if Home Rule was granted.¹³⁹

The clergy was determined that no one from Garbally would be returned and Trench was correct in his belief that they were determined to sabotage his chances at being returned. MacHale thought the election was a contest 'which [Trench] could not hope to win but by the unconstitutional coercion of the Catholic constituents, who form the great mass of the Galway electors'.¹⁴⁰ Priests had access to the people Trench could never hope to have because they lived among them. 'The Roman Catholic clergy were not non-entities. They were with the people from the cradle to

¹³⁷ *The Times*, 31 May 1872.

¹³⁸ *Express*, 28 May 1872; 30 May 1872; *The Times*, 24 May 1872; 24 July 1872.

¹³⁹ *Morning Post*, 29 May 1872; *The Times*, 30 May 1872; *Daily News*, 30 May 1872.

¹⁴⁰ *F. J.*, 28 July 1871.

the grave ... the candidature of Captain Trench was rooted in illegality'.¹⁴¹

V.) Conclusion

The 1872 by-election was the tipping point in the decline of landlord influence in local politics in Galway and this was coupled with an increase in support for Home Rule. Gerard Moran argued that while 'the electoral successes in Meath in 1871 and Galway in 1872 may be attributed to the local bishops' contempt for the alternative candidates available, they represented a tacit acceptance of the cause'.¹⁴² The excessive clerical influence during the campaign resulted in Nolan losing control of the direction that it eventually took:

It was not Captain Nolan's battle; it was the battle of the priests against their disassociation from the people. A disassociation which they thought would lead to infidelity. It was their battle. They were glad to avail themselves of him as a candidate. He did not presume to call them his agents. They honoured him by their preference, and they assisted him in the struggle for what they believed to be right and just ... his sentiments so expressed were in perfect unison with the views of the people, who were perfectly competent to elect him to the House of Commons.¹⁴³

The *Express* refuted nationalist press allegations that Clancarty was reviled in the county, saying he did get support from Catholics in the county: 'though he is a Protestant, he has won the respect and confidence of the Roman Catholic gentry and farmers of Galway', even if this was in actuality, a relatively small section of the

¹⁴¹ *T. H.*, 27 Apr. 1872.

¹⁴² Moran, *A radical priest in mayo: Fr Patrick Lavelle*, pp 132, 136.

¹⁴³ *T. H.*, 27 Apr. 1872.

county.¹⁴⁴

The third earl's illness and death presented Nolan supporters with a cynical opportunity to attack his character as a landlord. 1872 was also an *annus horribilis* for the Clancarty family, following death of the third earl. As a result of the anti-Clancarty propaganda during the campaign, the family's role in electoral politics became greatly diminished.

The by-election coincided with declining deference towards the fourth earl of Clancarty from his tenants. However, there was still a degree of affection felt towards his father and this was exemplified by the erection of a large statue in his honour at Cleaghmore only two years after his death and along with the election meeting supporting Trench by his tenancy and the reticence of the Nolan campaign to canvass Clancarty tenants. It was clergy from outside the vicinity of the Clancarty estate that were the main protagonists in this by-election. The consequence of their interference was an increased resistance towards clerical involvement in electoral politics, resulting in Galway Fenians beginning to take a more active role in local political matters as they attempted to present themselves as an alternative leadership to the clergy. Fenians in the county, such as Matt Harris, were angry with the clergy because of their exuberance during the campaign. Mark Ryan stated that there was Fenian involvement in the election campaign and Matt Harris got 'Fenians to support the popular candidate as Nolan was facing 'the whole horde of the landed class and garrison [who were] arranged on the side of Trench'.¹⁴⁵ Eugene Hynes has recently

¹⁴⁴ *Express*, 16 Dec. 1871.

¹⁴⁵ Ryan, *Fenian memories* (1945), p. 42.

stated that ‘Fenianism and the Land War provide abundant evidence that the priests could lead the people only in the direction in which they wished to go’.¹⁴⁶

While MacEvilly had hoped that the people would be at one with their priests after the by-election, the emergence of Fenian led movements, such as the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association, challenged both clerical and landlord influence. Despite the fear that the clergy would wield uncontrolled authority over the electorate after the assent of the secret ballot act, this did not happen, with E. R. Norman arguing:

The ballot act had its most significant results in Ireland. But the fear that the priests would simply strengthen their influence by the assumption to themselves of that, which the landlords could no longer wield, was not to prove so dire. In the mid-seventies the influence of the clergy at elections declined, partly because of episcopal alarm at the excesses of the Galway case, but more because of the rise of an Irish political party which had a Dublin caucus organising the selection of candidates.¹⁴⁷

The post-Famine period saw tenants becoming increasingly politicised and Fenians began to play an important role in this politicisation from the late 1860s as they began to appreciate the importance of the land question and Fenianism was no longer a ‘bogeyman’ for farmers; they played an important role establishing tenant-farmer movements that began to challenge the authority of landlords in a much more organised and coherent fashion.

¹⁴⁶ Eugene Hynes, *Knock: the Virgin’s apparition in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cork, 2009), p. 100.

¹⁴⁷ Norman, *The Catholic Church and Ireland in the age of rebellion*, p. 429.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE BALLINASLOE TENANT DEFENCE ASSOCIATION, 1876–9

I.) Introduction

The 1860s and 1870s saw a plethora of farmers clubs and tenant associations emerge in Ireland, something which Samuel Clark discussed in *The social origins of the Irish Land War* (1979).¹ Such organisations reflected the emergence of the ‘challenging collectivity’, which consisted of: ‘combinations formed by and claiming to represent the interests of tenant farmers [that] became the predominant type of agrarian collective action in the post-Famine period’.² They aimed to challenge the basis of power in the rural countryside in an attempt to affect change for the benefit of that particular collectivity. These movements were influenced by the Tenant League of the 1850s, which was a short-lived organisation that represented the interests of larger farmers and was established as a response to the economic crisis of the 1850s.³

The autumn of 1869 saw the British prime minister, W. E. Gladstone, initiate the process of granting legal recognition to the Ulster Custom ‘and an attempt was made to initiate and support analogous practices elsewhere’.⁴ This culminated in the 1870 Land Act and while it was largely rejected as being inadequate by both landlords and tenants, it paved the way forward for much more comprehensive legislation that helped to expedite the decline of landlordism in Ireland.

Fenian interest in an anti-landlord movement became conditioned by the

¹ Samuel Clark, *The social origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1979), p. 220

² *ibid.*, p. 211.

³ For more on the Tenant League, see J. H. Whyte, *The Tenant League and Irish politics in the 1850s* (Dundalk, 1963).

⁴ R. V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848–82* (Dublin, 1985), p. 179; for more on the Ulster Custom, see M. W. Dowling, *Tenant-right and agrarian society in Ulster, 1600–1870* (Dublin and Portland OR, 1999).

economic depression of 1859–63, though no policy was formulated as a direct consequence of this depression. Once this was coupled with increased involvement in popular politics, Fenians began formulating an agrarian policy in the 1860s. Paul Bew has contended that prior to this; Fenianism was an abstract nationalist concept which neglected the land question as they believed that peasant proprietorship could only be achieved after independence had been granted.⁵ The consequences of the deaths of twelve innocent civilians outside Clerkenwell prison in December 1867 was a realisation for many Fenians that the conditions for a successful rebellion were not in place.⁶ The establishment of the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association saw Fenian agrarian policy in the west of Ireland beginning to develop a greater coherency.⁷

The 1860s and 1870s saw Fenians in the west of Ireland attempting to expand their support base and during this period, they insisted that any agitation had to be non-parliamentary. They still prioritised military action and were explicit in their objectives as they ‘were not prepared to join in any struggles of the peasantry which had as their object anything less than the goal of national independence’ which was an attempt to overcome the localism of Ribbonism.⁸ The election of Supreme Council member, John O’Connor Power as M.P. for Mayo in 1874, forced a reappraisal of this ideology and Donald Jordan argued: ‘the precedent set for constitutional agitation set by John O’Connor Power was not lost on orthodox Fenians, such as Dr Mark Ryan, who saw behind the new departure,

⁵ Paul Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland, 1858–82* (London, 1980), pp 38–9; for more on the agricultural depression of 1859–63, see J. S. Donnelly, Jr., ‘The Irish agricultural depression of 1859–64’ in *Irish Economic and Social History*, iii (1976), pp 33–54.

⁶ Comerford, *The Fenians in context*, p. 170; Donald Jordan, ‘John O’Connor Power, Charles Stewart Parnell and the centralisation of popular politics in Ireland’ in *Irish Historical Studies* xxv, No. 96 (May 1986), p. 48.

⁷ Comerford, *The Fenians in context*, p. 170.

⁸ For more on ribbonism see Tom Garvin, ‘Defenders, ribbonmen and others: underground political networks in pre-famine Ireland’ in C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), pp 219–44; Jennifer Kelly, ‘The downfall of Hagan’, *Sligo ribbonism in 1842* (Dublin, 2008); J. J. Lee, ‘The ribbonmen’ in T. D. Williams (ed.) *Secret societies in Ireland* (Dublin, 1973), pp 26–35.

the nefarious influence of the member for Mayo'.⁹

There were attempts at courting popular support for such policies through local newspapers and increased literacy levels in post-Famine Ireland meant that such radical ideas reached a wider audience than previously. According to Paul Bew: 'the Fenian press constantly emphasised the I.R.B.'s special links with urban artisans and mechanics, rural smaller peasantry and agricultural labourers'¹⁰, thus attempting to encompass the lower classes in provincial Ireland. While Clancarty was not the focus of any specific criticism, the B. T. D. A. still signified a degree of defiance towards the fourth earl's authority, as he struggled to foster the same level of deference his father enjoyed, resulting in increased communal resistance to his authority. This will be discussed in subsequent chapters; it is the aim of this chapter to explore the Fenian influence surrounding the establishment of the B. T. D. A. as it attempted to organise farmers and foster a sense of class consciousness in order to challenge both the authority of landlords and the threat posed by graziers to small farmers, even though it was composed of all sections of the non-propertied classes in the district.

II. The origins, aims and objectives of the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association

Tenant Defence Associations, such as those established in Farney, Kerry, Kilkenny and on the Leinster estate were established as a mechanism by which farmers could articulate their disappointment with the 1870 Land Act, including its failure to provide for leaseholders. For example, the Farney Tenant Defence Association was established on 21 May 1874 and its members pledged to oppose any candidate that did not support tenant-right in parliament.¹¹ The Central Tenant Defence Association, which was dominated by

⁹ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 38, 40.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 1.

¹¹ Micheál McDermott, *Gypsum mining and the Shirley estate in south Monaghan, 1800–1936* (Dublin, 2009), p. 36.

large cattle farmers, was the most prominent of these associations. Many large farmers had suffered significant losses as a result of foreign trade and its creation suggested that there was a basis for agrarian agitation.¹²

The Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association was the first such association established in Connacht to advocate the rights of small tenant-farmers. It asserted that grazing was detrimental to the material well-being of smaller and more vulnerable farmers, thus: 'indicating a break with the differing orientation of the Central Tenants' Defence Association, [which had] little support in Connaught'.¹³ Many graziers were shopkeepers that sought to acquire land as a status symbol, thus reflecting the importance of land in achieving status and respectability in provincial Ireland and there was a fear in Ballinasloe that such a thirst for land threatened to squeeze small farmers out and ruin their livelihoods. Donald Jordan argued: 'the significant role of merchants and strong farmers in leading a movement that drew large numbers of small farmers into its ranks would appear to lend support ... that the post-famine structural changes in Irish society had produced a substantial degree of solidarity within the farming and trading community'.¹⁴

Despite being the most significant proportion of the population in the Irish countryside, farmers' political energies prior to the 1870s were either dormant or fragmented, resulting in the Catholic clergy being the main political organisers. Previous attempts at establishing movements, such as the Tenant League, were generally short-lived, as they were reactions to economic downturns. Nevertheless, farmers' clubs and Tenant Defence Association became a medium by which farmers could focus their discontent in an organised fashion, and this resulted in them becoming a very powerful

¹² Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, p. 54; Donald Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland: county Mayo from the plantation to the Land War* (Cambridge, 1994), pp 209–25.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, p. 192.

and influential political entity. Fenians, along with town tenants, played an important role in these organisations,¹⁵ resulting in ‘collective action by and for tenant farmers [that] was slowly, but unmistakably expanding’.¹⁶

Western neo-Fenians, such as Matt Harris, Michael Malachy O’Sullivan and John O’Connor Power appreciated that it was the land question and not Home Rule that farmers were truly interested in. For example, in Mayo, the expansion of a livestock-orientated economy in the 1850s and 1860s created the ideal conditions for radical political activity to grow because of the threat livestock farmers posed to the livelihoods of small farmers and western-based Fenians, especially in Galway and Mayo, who ‘took the lead in bringing their radical traditions and organisational experience to the inchoate agrarian movement and there was fertile breeding ground for growth amongst the lower classes’.¹⁷

The B. T. D. A. was established in Corbett’s Hotel, Bridge Street on 10 May 1876 and it immediately attracted the attention and support of James Daly and Alfred O’Hea of the *Connaught Telegraph*, who both wanted to see a similar movement established in Mayo.¹⁸ O’Hea eventually sat on the executive of the association. While the local priests, J. Kirwan, J. R. Moloney and T. Keighrey, were present at its inaugural meeting, none of them were returned as president, which indicated a move away from clerical control and the emergence of an effective lay leadership in the operation of popular movements.

Other notable local nationalists, W. E. Duffy, Matt Harris, James Kilmartin, Garrett

¹⁵ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 232–3; R. V. Comerford, ‘Isaac Butt and the Home Rule party’ in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the Union, II, 1870–1921* (Dublin, 1995), pp 15–16.

¹⁶ Clarke, *The social origins of the Irish Land War*, p. 219.

¹⁷ Jordan, ‘John O’Connor Power, Charles Stewart Parnell and the centralisation of popular politics in Ireland’, pp 49–50.

¹⁸ For more on James Daly and the *Connaught Telegraph*, see Gerard Moran, ‘James Daly and the rise and fall of the Land League in Ireland, 1879–92’ in *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. 29, no. 114 (1994), pp 189–207; J. J. Lee called Daly ‘the most forgotten man in Irish history’, J. J. Lee, *The modernization of Irish society, 1848-1918* (Dublin, 1973), p. 69. Lee has also argued the *Connaught Telegraph* became the most effective propaganda machine in Connaught, even though Daly was naturally conservative and did not want to see widespread agitation take place, he succeeded in bringing the plight of small western farmers to greater national attention.

Larkin, J. J. Madden (who later achieved notoriety among local nationalists, discussed in chapter six), Patrick Madden, Michael Malachy O'Sullivan and John Ward were all on the platform, at which Duffy was returned as the inaugural president and in his maiden address, he said:

there can be no society ... without admitting some principle of justice. Man in his lowest stage will not build a hut or tame a wild animal if he were not allowed the right to keep them; but, on the other hand, if he uses his hut or his animal to the injury of the rest of the community they have a right to take them from him.¹⁹

J. S. Donnelly Jr., contended that western Fenians radicalised their ambitions in order to appeal to small tenant farmers and the B. T. D. A. was an example of how this worked.²⁰

While Paul Bew asserted that: 'many Fenians agreed with Matt Harris, who saw the land agitation as part of a revolution that would bring about full national independence without recourse to parliament and without the aid of parliamentarians'.²¹ Fenianism and ribbonism had merged in places, especially after an outbreak of violence in Westmeath between 1870 and 1871. Bew further argued: 'what the developments of 1870–1 did mean was that when the agricultural situation soured towards the end of the decade, there was a pre-existing tradition in certain areas of Fenian involvement in agrarianism'.²²

There were approximately twenty mass meetings of the B. T. D. A. recorded in the *Connaught Telegraph* between 13 May 1876 and 8 November 1878 and it became an important movement to 'beget the Land League'.²³ A circular in the Sweetman papers – held in the National Library of Ireland – indicates that the founders of the association wanted as many people as possible to join, with annual membership fees starting at a shilling.²⁴ Harris drew up this circular for subscriptions to the association in April 1878 in

¹⁹ *Connaught Telegraph*, 2 Sept. 1876.

²⁰ J. S. Donnelly, Jr., 'The Land question in nationalist politics' in T. E. Hachey and L. J. McCaffrey, *Perspectives on Irish nationalism* (Kentucky, 1989), pp 79–98

²¹ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, p. 54

²² *ibid.*, p. 45.

²³ T. P. O'Connor, *The Parnell movement* (1887), p. 170.

²⁴ Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association circular in Sweetman papers, (National Library of Ireland, MS

order to encourage increased involvement from farmers. ‘At the present time public opinion is felt to be a great power, but a power which requires ... concentration, guidance and direction. Since its establishment, the Ballinasloe Tenants’ Defence Association has incessantly striven to supply these necessary requirements, but has had its operations greatly limited through not getting that practical support without which no public body can exist’.²⁵

Local Fenians and agrarian radicals, Matt Harris and Michael Malachy O’Sullivan, played prominent roles in the establishment of the Land League in 1879. While the meeting at Irishtown county Mayo on 20 April 1879 was seen to be the genesis of the Land League and the agitation that soon spread throughout the countryside, it was in Ballinasloe that the first shoots of organisation which reflected the desires of small tenant farmers appeared. Despite such ideals, there was difficulty motivating farmers to participate in the movement during a time of economic prosperity because farmers would only agitate when their immediate economic conditions were threatened and prior to 1876, there was a booming economy in much of Ireland.²⁶

Farmers were essential to the economy of local communities as merchants had their interests intertwined with the countryside. Bew contended that: ‘it is often argued that the poor peasantry and the agricultural proletariat (as opposed to the more independent middle peasantry) rarely initiate militant action, partly because these classes are often enmeshed in relations of dependence with the dominant classes, the landlords and their allies’.²⁷ This also highlights a seamless juxtaposition between the urban and rural elements of provincial Ireland because urban centres were hugely underdeveloped

47,573/3).

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, p. 55; Comerford, ‘Isaac Butt and the Home Rule party’, p. 16; Moran, ‘James Daly and the rise and fall of the Land League in Ireland, 1879–92’, p. 190; David Thornley, *Isaac Butt and Home Rule* (Dublin, 1964), p. 250.

²⁷ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 87, 90.

and maintained strong links with the countryside as a result.²⁸ This lack of trade and commerce in Ireland created a disproportionate dependence upon land. Connacht consisted mostly of graziers and small holders and there was a relative absence of medium-sized farms in the province and Harris argued that when there was a preponderance of grazing in a district, small towns fell into decay. Ballinasloe did not appear to suffer such a fate, owing to its importance as the ‘agricultural centre of Connacht’, the sizeable urban population and the astute estate management policies of the Clancarty family.²⁹

The *Connaught Telegraph* stated that people from commercial and industrial backgrounds in Ballinasloe were encouraged ‘to come forward and join the association’, because ‘as our sole dependence is agriculture, the ruin of our towns will follow that of the country’ and unity between town and country was essential to fight off any future crises.³⁰ Ballinasloe shopkeepers appeared to have been dependent upon the trade of small farmers, as graziers were believed to have taken their trade elsewhere in the county, because, according to J. Ward in 1879, it was not fashionable for them to be seen to be transacting their business in Ballinasloe. When the economic situation began to deteriorate in the late 1870s, shopkeepers’ interests had become more strongly intertwined with the rustics, as Clark concluded: ‘the shopkeeper who lives by the custom of the farmer cannot meet their engagements if their accounts are not paid’³¹ and William O’Brien called this relationship between shopkeepers and small farmers desperate.³² Their involvement in an agrarian movement could also have been in the hope

²⁸ Kevin Whelan, ‘Town and village in Ireland: a socio-cultural perspective’ in *The Irish Review* 5 (1988), pp 34–43.

²⁹ *Report from the Select Committee on the Irish Land Act, 1870; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence and Appendix*, HC 1878 (249), xv, I pp 270–1, q 4983; Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 87, 90.

³⁰ *C. T.*, 24 June 1876.

³¹ Clark, *The social origins of the Irish Land War*, p. 232.

³² *C. T.*, 12 Jan. 1878; Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 56–9; Samuel Clark, ‘The social composition of the Land League’ in *I. H. S.*, xvii, no. 68 (1971), p. 447.

of attracting business from small farmers as they became increasingly dependent upon them for business.³³ A major difficulty with Irish towns and villages, Kevin Whelan has argued, was that they ‘pulsated the rhythm of the agricultural season’³⁴, which serves as a further explanation for urban involvement in these movements and the necessity for farmers to have successful harvests in order that merchants could also survive.

The establishment of such an organisation during a time of economic prosperity was a challenge to the authority of landlords in Ballinasloe and east Galway, but it did not appear to be a cause of great concern for them. It also reflected the growing political ambitions of the post-Famine political elite, as they turned to politics to further their economic importance. The lack of a strong national political movement in the 1860s and 1870s resulted in them focusing their attention on local politics and such power was very attractive to the new, emerging elite, which W. L. Feingold discussed in *The revolt of the tenantry: the transformation of local government in Ireland*, (1984).³⁵ Donald Jordan maintained that ‘the wave of national feeling during the 1870s undermined the horizons of many local political activists, but did not nullify their fidelity to local initiative and local responsibility’.³⁶ The end of the 1860s saw Fenian ‘influence among the small farmers, shopkeepers and artisans of [Mayo become] such that they were in a position to employ their organisational experience and political consciousness in support of an agrarian movement’.³⁷ While there were Fenians present in its ranks, no evidence has been uncovered to suggest that the authorities thought that the B. T. D. A. was a seditious organisation, with the exception of the police raiding the houses of Harris and O’Sullivan, under the pretence of searching for arms, though it was more likely to do

³³ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, p. 39.

³⁴ Kevin Whelan, ‘Town and village in Ireland’, p. 36.

³⁵ Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, pp 179–80; see also W. L. Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry: the transformation of local government in Ireland, 1872–1886* (Chicago, 1984).

³⁶ *idem*, ‘John O’Connor Power, Charles Stewart Parnell and the centralisation of popular politics in Ireland’, p. 47.

³⁷ *idem*, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, pp 183.

with their radical rhetoric and Fenian backgrounds.³⁸

James Kilmartin was the self-appointed ideologue behind the association:

I have the satisfaction of being the originator and organiser of this association in Ballinasloe ... I watched the political horizon for some bright light to show the tenant farmers the path to prosperity and independence ... I have endeavoured to inspire the people with a hope in parliamentary agitation, and I am confident that by a united and persistent agitation we will achieve our ends, for no government of the day can afford to disregard the voice of the people.³⁹

Despite Kilmartin's attempts at self-aggrandisement, the presence of two well known Fenians gave the association a certain appeal it may not have achieved otherwise.

James Daly's attendance at a meeting on 13 August 1876 was an indication that the organisation was attracting interest beyond the immediate hinterland of Ballinasloe:

[Its] indefatigable perseverance ... cannot fail to be crowned with success ... We believe the day will come when a separate body will be established in each county, and all these organisations linked together under the direction of a central council ... there have been many signs of late that the west is rapidly awakening from her prolonged lethargy, and ... she will soon take a foremost place in the struggle for Irish freedom; not the least encouraging signs of these symptoms at the Ballinasloe Association.⁴⁰

Despite the growth of radical ideas in the province of Connacht, Ballinasloe and the Clancarty estate never became a centre for systematic agitation at any stage during the period under study in this thesis due to an acquiescent tenantry. Two years prior to the establishment of the B. T. D. A., they expressed their fidelity and appreciation towards the third earl of Clancarty, through the erection of a substantial statue in tribute to his empathetic estate management, especially during the Famine. However, there was a degree of radicalism inculcated in certain residents on the estate that had wider implications at a local, provincial and to an extent at a national level. Like the later Land

³⁸ *C. T.*, 9 Nov. 1878.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 13 May 1876; Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, p. 209.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 1 July 1876.

League, the social composition of many of the leaders of this association did not come from the tenant-farmer class, but rather from town tenants, such as Harris and O’Sullivan, though Harris had grown up on a small farm near Athlone, which he inherited, but passed on to his sister.⁴¹

The *Western News* – the newspaper based in Ballinasloe – did not cover the meetings held by the B. T. D. A. in any significant detail, despite being owned by a nationalist, John Callanan. Instead, the *Connaught Telegraph* of Castlebar, carried extensive reports on its activities and along with Harris, Kilmartin and O’Sullivan, Daly was eager to promote an agitation amongst the tenant farmers of Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. Home Rule was the dominant issue of the day and the B. T. D. A. wanted to shift emphasis to the land question because farmers were more interested in it, thus emphasising its provincial spirit. They were also keenly conscious that tenant-right did not interest landless radicals and it was important to involve them in this movement, as some had interfered in tenant-right meetings earlier in the decade and Isaac Butt called on anti-tenant-right radicals not to cause disruptions during a public meeting held at the Rotunda on 14 December 1869.⁴²

James Kilmartin stressed the importance of collective activity, asserting that it was more important than rhetorical musings in newspapers. The clergy were not active participants in meetings, which: ‘set the people whispering [that] the priests are not with the people in their national demands’.⁴³ The reasons for this are twofold: firstly, the mutual suspicion between Fenians and the clergy and secondly, the dominance of the laity in the executive of the committee. While there were priests on the central committee, none was elected to the central executive positions – president, vice-president, treasurer or secretary – during the existence of the association. Despite such

⁴¹ *Report from the Select Committee on the Irish Land Act, 1870*, HC 1878 (249), xv, I, p. 270, qs 4987-8

⁴² Comerford, *The Fenians in context*, p. 177.

⁴³ *C. T.*, 13 May 1876

clerical reticence towards the association, the parish priest of Shannonbridge, Fr O'Reilly, gave it his unequivocal backing because it 'had done much good in keeping alive and fostering a health public opinion' and had the potential to be a powerful weapon to instigate change. It also attracted the support of Archbishop MacHale and his suffragan, Bishop Duggan of Clonfert, with both men being invited to become members in October 1877.⁴⁴ They were men that possessed well-known nationalist sympathies and frequently acted independently from the rest of the Irish hierarchy. This support of the association saw a rapprochement between the two men, considering that MacHale refused to officiate at Duggan's episcopal ordination in 1872.⁴⁵ Duggan subsequently condemned the behaviour of landlords on moral terms: 'though he may not break the law in evicting the tenant from his farm, I venture to say he broke the spirit of the law of God'.⁴⁶ He further argued that tenants had little legal protection – a criticism of the inadequacies of the 1870 Land Act – which reflected the radical opinion he held throughout his episcopate in Clonfert.⁴⁷

The first public meeting of the B. T. D. A. was held at Shannonbridge on 25 May 1876. The location of this meeting was especially symbolic, owing to the fact that Shannonbridge straddled two counties: King's County in Leinster and Roscommon in Connaught, with Ballinasloe, in Galway, seven miles away from where the meeting was held. The 'sentiments characterised an increasing number of such meetings in the later 1870s and underlay the foundation of a number of similar organisations, thus preparing the ground – especially in the west – for the Land League'.⁴⁸ The three Fs, fair rent, fixity of tenure and freedom of sale were demanded. Fair rent was defined as 'payment to the landlord of a just and proportion of all profits which could possible be made on the farm

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 20 Oct. 1877.

⁴⁵ P. J. Corish, 'Irish College, Rome: Kirby papers' in *Archivium Hibernicum* (vol. 30), 1972, p. 66.

⁴⁶ *C. T.*, 23 December 1876.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Philip Bull, *Land, politics and nationalism; a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), p. 70.

by an industrious tenant'.⁴⁹ Rent needed to be fixed arbitrarily at stated intervals, with the ability of altering it if there was a dramatic change in economic conditions.⁵⁰ The B. T. D. A. preferred the idea of having rents fixed by arbitration instead of the development of some form of universal rent. The *Connaught Telegraph* proclaimed: 'we shall never cease this agitation until every tenant farmer in Ireland, as long as he pays a fair and equitable rent, is free and independent of his landlord'.⁵¹ This had some similarities to Butt's ideas about land reform whereby, he wanted to see tenants being given leases of sixty years, though he also wanted landlord interests protected through an independent review of rents from time to time. He attempted to deal with the inadequacies of the 1870 land act by drawing up a land bill in 1876 in consultation with the Central Tenant Defence Association. Their influence and lack of deference to Butt's superior legal and political expertise resulted in numerous amendments being made that Butt did not approve of. The bill's complicated structure resulted in Mitchell Henry, M.P. for Galway, voting against it and he never regained the trust of larger farmers afterwards.⁵²

The B. T. D. A. said that if security of tenure for small farmers was strengthened, tillage would improve, which would ensure that rents were promptly paid and any improvements could only take place with the co-operation of landlords and tenants.⁵³ 'The few thousand landlords of Ireland are accustomed to look at their tenants as mere chattels, mere serfs or slaves, from whom they may wring at any moment the fruits of their hard earnings'.⁵⁴

While the three Fs was the primary focus for the association, it campaigned on other issues, such as: 'to have the grand jury laws so amended that there shall be "no

⁴⁹ *C. T.*, 19 Jan. 1878.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, 14 Aug. 1876; 3 June 1876; 19 Jan. 1878; R. V. Comerford, 'Isaac Butt and the Home Rule party', p. 15.

⁵¹ *C. T.*, 3 June 1876.

⁵² Comerford, 'Isaac Butt and the Home Rule party', p. 16.

⁵³ *C. T.*, 14 Aug. 1876; 3 June 1876; 19 Jan. 1878.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 9 Dec. 1876.

taxation without representation”⁵⁵. In essence, it hoped that there would be increased tenant farmer involvement in elected bodies, especially as many were being subjected to rates and landlords dominated the boards of guardians and town commission. Farmers were slow to embrace the association because they were not self-conscious as a class, which caused some frustration. However, this gradually changed as they became increasingly aware of class divisions in the countryside and the failure of the wealth that was in the countryside to trickle down.⁵⁶

Even though the B. T. D. A. had its origins in Ballinasloe town, Lord Clancarty was only mentioned once at a meeting recorded in the *Connaught Telegraph*, between 1876 and 1878. That exception was the eviction of Mr Reynolds at Moher. When the sheriff arrived at his house to proceed with the eviction, Redington, the sub-sheriff was told ‘that the first man who would enter the house, he (Reynolds) would take his life’. Patrick Comber of Mackney was promised the holding and attempted to break down the door of the house during the sheriff sale, but was stabbed with a pitchfork. Reynolds was eventually removed from the house, disarmed and remanded. Clancarty’s agent, Edward Fowler was keen to emphasise that the eviction was not at the instigation of Clancarty, rather, the new tenant, Comber, who had purchased Reynolds’ interest in the holding.⁵⁷ In his evidence to the *Select Committee on the Irish Land Act, 1870*, Harris said that graziers around Ballinasloe used bailiffs to remove small farmers from holdings in order to amalgamate farms and this eviction bears such characteristics, further adding: ‘there is a very great contrast between the class of old landlords that we have about Ballinasloe and the class of new ones that have come in’, which indicates a greater ruthlessness

⁵⁵ Sweetman Papers, (National Library of Ireland, MS 47,573/3.)

⁵⁶ *C. T.*, 24 June 1876; Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780, programme, myth and reality* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 101.

⁵⁷ *C. T.* 23 Feb. 1878; for more on Sheriff sales see, Adam Pole, ‘Sheriffs’ sales during the land war, 1879–82’ in *I. H. S.*, xxxiv, no. 136 (2005), pp 386–402.

amongst stronger farmers against their smaller counterparts.⁵⁸

III.) Anti-landlord and anti-grazing rhetoric and activity

Harris, Kilmartin and O'Sullivan wanted to present themselves as an alternative leadership to the farmers and the reliance on the aristocracy in previous generations was seen to be a grave error because they did not entertain the same principles as the people they were supposed to represent.⁵⁹ The Secret Ballot Act of 1872 signalled the declining influence of Protestant landlord involvement in electoral politics in Galway, with Captain Nolan and Mitchell Henry, both Catholic landowners and supporters of Home Rule being returned as M.P.s in 1874 and 1880.⁶⁰ The clergy played a less significant role in electoral politics in Galway in the aftermath of the 1872 by-election, due in part to their over-exuberant campaigning and the emergence of an effective and well-organised lay leadership, which Harris called a 'new phase in Irish politics and a very hopeful one'.⁶¹ Emmet Larkin noted:

The basic lesson of [the Galway] by-election was not that the Catholic tenant-farmers were now the determinant factor in politics in the counties outside of Ulster ... but rather that the tenants had now demonstrated that they had developed not only a political mind of their own but also a political will to make that mind effective.⁶²

K. T. Hoppen argued that 'well into the second half of the [nineteenth] century, bad landlords, not landlordism *per se*, constituted the main object of attack' by tenants⁶³ and at the first B. T. D. A. meeting in Shannonbridge, those in attendance were told that:

⁵⁸ *Report from the Select Committee on the Irish Land Act, 1870; together with the Proceedings of the Committee*, pp 271–2, Qs 5003, 5020.

⁵⁹ *C. T.*, 19 Aug. 1876.

⁶⁰ B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801-1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 284.

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Emmet Larkin, *The Roman Catholic Church and the Home Rule movement in Ireland, 1870–1874* (Dublin, 1990), p. 121.

⁶³ K. T. Hoppen, *Election, politics and society in Ireland, 1832–1885* (London, 1984), pp 136–7.

In no hostile spirit to any class or party have we invited you, neither is it too unjustly to blame your landlords, among whom are to be found some excellent and upright men ... it is for the higher and nobler purpose of forming an association for the protection not alone of your homes, your honest industry, and your legitimate rights in the soil you till, but also for the protection of interests to you still more dear.⁶⁴

Landlords were portrayed as the embodiment of an exclusive and unrepresentative body that were 'enemies of their country ... Irishmen in blood and birth, but aliens in heart and sentiment ... it is absolutely indispensable that those who profess to speak in the name of the tenant farmers should not be men whose interests are in direct opposition to those of the people they are supposed to represent'.⁶⁵ Despite such rhetoric, animosity towards landlords was not as strong as nationalists hoped, though Harris argued that the establishment of the association indicated to him that they had lost the support of their tenants.

We are not going to denounce any man because he is a landlord. We are all aware that there are numbers of Irish landlords who require no act of parliament to make them good. When these men come to know the objects of our association they will have no objection to our principles.⁶⁶

The return of aristocratic M.P.s reflected a certain loyalty felt towards them by their tenants and other voters and the failure of nationalists to put forward credible alternative candidates in their constituencies. The B. T. D. A. wanted representatives that were sympathetic to tenant farmers returned as M.P.s, as happened in Mayo with John O'Connor Power's election in 1874.⁶⁷ His election was significant because he was the first old Fenian to co-operate with the constitutional nationalist movement.⁶⁸

The failure of the O'Connor Don and Charles French to support Butt's land bill resulted in them being accused of using Home Rule as an expedient to be returned to the

⁶⁴ *C. T.*, 13 May 1876.

⁶⁵ *C. T.*, 19 Aug. 1876.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 24 Jun. 1876.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 19 Aug. 1876.

⁶⁸ Jordan, 'John O'Connor Power, Charles Stewart Parnell and the centralisation of popular politics in Ireland', p. 48.

House of Commons for Roscommon. Kilmartin did not think that they were acting in the best interests of their constituents, who needed to become more aware of the actions of their representatives.⁶⁹ However, the people had to accept some accountability for the inaction of their M.P.s, because they did not elect those that would actively promote their welfare, which would prevent suitable reforms from being initiated.⁷⁰ At a meeting in Taughmaconnell, those in attendance heard that ‘our two members (the O’Conor Don and French) ... have done all that lay in their power to spread disunion in the ranks of the Irish party’ and acted in defiance of the wishes of the Roscommon electorate.⁷¹ Electors had returned poor quality men, in order to prevent worse ones from being elected⁷² and in 1878, Parnell stated that he did not want members of the Irish Parliamentary Party to use Home Rule as an expedient to get elected.⁷³

As has been discussed in chapter one, the overwhelming majority of tenants on the Clancarty estate were either small holders or urban tenants, because the third earl refused to consolidate holdings and his successor continued with a similar estate policy. The evidence suggests that the fourth earl of Clancarty – Richard – was not as involved in day-to-day events as his father, and it appears that his agent – Edward Fowler – had greater involvement in the day-to-day operations of the estate. Harris was aware of the acquiescence of the Clancarty tenants and their unwillingness to antagonize their landlord because of the paternalistic attitudes the family expressed towards their tenants. Therefore, it could be argued that Clancarty was the epitome of Harris’s definition of a good landlord, which was one that did not upset the *status quo* nor engage in the consolidation of holdings and it is possible that such a definition was inspired by the management policies of both Clancarty and his neighbour, Lord Clonbrock, who was

⁶⁹ *C.T.*, 5 May 1877; 22 Sept. 1877.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 9 Nov. 1878.

⁷¹ *C. T.*, 1 Aug. 1876.

⁷² *ibid.*, 19 Aug. 1876.

⁷³ *ibid.*, 9 Nov. 1878.

also a highly regarded landlord. Nevertheless, Harris said ‘the greatest enemies of the good landlords are those persons that would make a barrier of them to protect the bad ones’⁷⁴ and stated there were three forms of landlord oppression:

the landlord who is fond of changing his tenants is a bad man; the landlord who, after evicting his tenants, amalgamates their farms, is still a worse man; but the landlord who, after doing both these things, lays down the land in grass is the worst of all. What I maintain is that there are some bad landlords – not all are bad – and if it be argued that the percentage is very small, and should not influence us in passing a general law that would affect the whole class, I would answer that if their numbers be small and the calamities they have brought to this country are very great, and no where greater than in this province of Connaught ... the landlords power of doing mischief does not end when he evicts his tenantry and amalgamates their farms, he claims the right, and the law allows his claim, of prohibiting tillage altogether – of putting chains upon the plough (that ancient symbol of industry), striking the spade from the hands of the husband man, and proclaiming throughout the land that on their estate (and their estates are everywhere in this island) industry shall cease; that the Irish soil shall cease to produce food for the use of the Irish people. Why was it that Ireland has fallen into the state of a petty province, her legislature extinct, and that we have to go more than three hundred miles from her shores to look for redress or justice for the tenant-farmers of this country? It is owing to the division of the people. Let us hope in the future, on the land question there will be harmony amongst the tenant-farmers. It will secure to them just rights, and extend to every town and village the objects of this society, which our country has so long needed.⁷⁵

Harris further stated that: ‘unless the landlords can prove that they alone are the children of men, they have no right to claim the land as their absolute property’.⁷⁶ His anti-landlord rhetoric became increasingly radicalised by November 1878 as he argued that the land of Ireland should be held in trust for the people, which could only be done so by the overthrowing of landlordism across the country.⁷⁷ These land agitators appeared to have been influenced by J. S. Mill’s definition of land, which was:

the original inheritance of the whole people ... When private property in land is not expedient it is unjust. It is no hardship to anyone, to be excluded from what others have produced; they are not bound to produce it for his use, and he loses

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 2 Sept. 1876.

⁷⁵ *C. T.*, 24 June 1876.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 8 July 1876.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 31 Mar. 1877, 9 Nov. 1878.

nothing by not sharing in what otherwise would not have existed at all.⁷⁸

Harris dismissed any sympathies that were expressed towards good landlords, stating that they were still part of a pernicious system that was responsible for retarding the prosperity of small farmers:

unfortunately the good landlords will not exempt themselves; they put on the harness of juggernaut and help to keep it moving; otherwise they would not defend, they would not support, they would not assist in making the laws which bad men use ... this parleying in favour of landlords is your weak point. It does infinite honour to the goodness of your heart, but it enfeebles all your efforts. The exterminating laws of England do not spare the good any more than it does the bad tenant; yet we are always mindful of this distinction, a distinction which the good landlords themselves will not recognise. They cannot see that the great laws of retributive justices apply to all classes and nations as well as individuals.⁷⁹

He was of the opinion that landlords would encourage tenants to partake in activities organised by agricultural societies in order to capitalise upon any improvements they would make and increase rents accordingly. However, the obvious attempts of the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society – an initiative of the third earl of Clancarty to assist small tenant-farmers in improving their condition challenged such a claim.⁸⁰ It struggled to convince farmers of its utility and this was due to their suspicion of it, rather than any possible ulterior motive on the part of Clancarty. While landlords like Clancarty may have had the best intentions for their tenants through paternalistic actions, they constantly faced obstacles to gaining their trust.⁸¹

As the B. T. D. A. was not initially aligned with any political movement, it was not engaged in a traditional agitation, which explains its militant anti-grazing rhetoric. Fenians led this attack on graziers in the west, because they were seen to be a new, burgeoning elite. While graziers attempted to focus criticisms towards the landlord class as the common enemy of all tenant-farmers, large and small, western Fenians were firm

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, 24 June 1876; J. S. Mill, *The principles of political economy* (1848), p. 295.

⁷⁹ *C. T.*, 9 Nov. 1878.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 31 Mar. 1877.

⁸¹ Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine, 1798–1848* (Dublin, 1972), p. 147.

critics of grazing as a nefarious system, and ‘ribbon Fenians’ encouraged small tenant-farmers to engage in a class struggle with both landlords and graziers.⁸²

Grazing was a particular focus of criticism for the B. T. D. A. Tensions between graziers and small tenant-farmers existed where extensive consolidation of holdings was taking place. Harris attested that ‘any person not acquainted with the country would imagine that if the advocates of high farming got their way they would in a short time change this country into an earthly paradise, and convert all our barren wastelands into the most fertile land’.⁸³ In March 1877 he was vociferous in his disdain for graziers because they ‘do nothing to improve their country or themselves, and what is worse; they prevent others from doing it by their selfishness and rapacity’.⁸⁴ Fr Walsh noted that there was increased grazing around Ballinasloe, but maintained that the land was unsuitable for such farming owing to poor drainage and the abundance of rushes. Graziers were hesitant to invest in drainage and such reticence about improving land may also have been a by-product of the eleven-month leasing system, which meant that graziers may have moved on once a particular lease expired.⁸⁵ ‘In this context it may be worth noting that it had long been an axiom of fixity of tenure that the Irish farmers had hesitated to sink their capital in the land, merely spreading it onto the land (in the form of cattle) and this avoiding the risk of loss of investment’.⁸⁶ Such an analysis reflected the opinion of the third earl of Clancarty, who – as discussed in chapter one – did not think that the land in the district was suitable for grazing, owing to the poor drainage and the inability or

⁸² Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 1, 38, 40; Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, p. 215.

⁸³ *C. T.*, 24 June 1876. Harris’ interest in finding a resolution to the land question and the subsistence of farmers extended beyond mere rhetorical musings at meetings. See Matthew Harris, *The improvement of rivers and reclamation of waste lands ... considered in relation to the Shannon, its tributaries, and the districts through which they flow. A letter addressed to ... B. Disraeli, M.P.* (Dublin, 1876); idem, *Matthew Harris on the political situation* (Dublin, 1880); idem, *Land reform: a letter to the council of the Irish National Land League* (Dublin, 1881).

⁸⁴ *C. T.*, 31 Mar. 1877.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 8 Jul. 1876

⁸⁶ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, p. 16.

unwillingness of farmers to invest in the initial capital outlay. Small farmers were believed to have been more effective at draining and reclaiming poor quality land, though this had been disputed by various land agents of the period and the third earl of Clancarty and has been discussed in chapter one.⁸⁷

The principal objection Harris had to universal tenant-right was that stronger farmers and graziers were in a position to offer landlords higher rents, which he feared would result in the creation of monster farms and also because 'it is impossible for any landlord to give even one acre of land that is now in monster farms to a poor man after the law would give fixity of tenure to those occupying those same monster farms ... if the law compels them to give possession ... to those who now hold these farms, it renders them utterly powerless to give even an acre of it to others'.⁸⁸ He wanted to restrict fixity of tenure to farmers that held sixty acres or less and was concerned that if graziers received it, they would buy out landlords and tenants, thus augmenting and increasing their power in the countryside. He called them 'a class of men who are more exacting and avaricious than the landlords themselves and who, in the course of time, would become more cruel and tyrannical than the landlords are or ever have been'⁸⁹ because they saw themselves as part of a new elite that was emerging in the countryside and they did not have the same sentimental attachment to the land as other landlords may have had. Harris was accused of begrudging farmer prosperity, because he wanted to exclude graziers from land reform. His 'answer for the justice of their exclusion is that when contracting with their landlords, they (graziers) were very well able to take care of themselves' because 'the typical grazier cares little for his country'.⁹⁰

It was inevitable that graziers would be resistant to such proposals: 'fixity of

⁸⁷ *Report from the Select Committee on the Irish Land Act, 1870; together with the Proceedings of the Committee*, p. 272, Q. 5,024

⁸⁸ *C. T.*, 13 Apr. 1878; 11 May 1878.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1878; 13 Apr. 1878; 20 Apr. 1878.

⁹⁰ *C. T.*, 24 Jun. 1876; 13 Apr. 1878; 20 Apr. 1878.

tenure is an absolute quantity, and we can see no possible reason for attempting to make it the exclusive prerogative of a section of the agricultural community'.⁹¹ It was suggested that it would be 'far better to our minds to leave these details to the gradual influence of time and of a healthier public opinion than to attempt to map out with mathematical precision the boundary line between deserving tenants and those who are not'.⁹² In an attempt to reach a compromise, Michael O'Sullivan suggested that peasant proprietorship should be restricted to holdings with a valuation of £150 or less.⁹³ James Kilmartin disagreed with both of these proposals, stating that 'many things are good in theory and very bad in practice and I am sure Mr Harris's plan is one of those',⁹⁴ arguing that if grass lands were excluded from peasant proprietorship, landlords would rush to clear small holdings and keep an estate of grass farms instead and he thought it was fallacious to fight for tenant right in this way. Kilmartin further stated: 'what chance have we, even united, to get tenant right from a landlord parliament?'⁹⁵ Such a disagreement reflected the chasm between the radical and moderate wings of the association and the dominance of radical ideas in the overall ideology of the movement

Thomas Robertson, a grazier from Athy, Co. Kildare and member of the Central Tenant Defence Association, disagreed with Harris's sentiments about graziers. He argued that landlords were responsible for the shift towards grass farming because they allowed graziers to take possession of consolidated holdings. He said that the eleven month grazing system meant that large farmers were as vulnerable as their smaller counterparts and 'the proof that he is unable is to be had in almost every large holding throughout the country'.⁹⁶ The B. T. D. A. had assumed 'to be wider on the subject than

⁹¹ *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1878.

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1878; 13 Apr. 1878.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 13 Apr. 1878.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1878; 20 Apr. 1878.

their brethren, who, are at the last Conference in Dublin, unanimously decided that fixity of tenure, valuation of rent and the right to free-sale should be applicable to all sizes of farms in Ireland'.⁹⁷ He further asserted that Harris's proposals were regressive and called him 'crochety'.⁹⁸ Robertson could not comprehend why he had no interest in maintaining harmonious landlord-tenant relations, or even inter-tenant harmony and dismissed the divisiveness of the B. T. D. A., viewing it as a nefarious influence.

it would afford a splendid opportunity to the landlord of saying that tenant-right is not really wanted by the masses of the people, it would array tenant against tenant, graziers against the tillage farmers, the holders of mountain land against those of the rich level plains ... it would break up the tenant movement into embittered fragments, each hating each other more than the landlords'. Rather than providing good to tenants, 'incalculable evils' would result from it.⁹⁹

Donnelly has asserted that western Fenians were not interested in pursuing unity of action because the demands of the larger tenant farmers would and did win out in the end and especially as it was such farmers that demanded unity of action.¹⁰⁰ Harris would not compromise on his proposals, even for the sake of unity, which resulted in him becoming increasingly isolated. He maintained that they could not 'be expected to make too great a sacrifice of consistency even for the sake of union'.¹⁰¹ Campaigning for small tenant farmers became part of initial Land League thinking and what Bew called 'the supposedly sturdy peasant "community" of pre-Famine Ireland. To many outside its ranks it seemed that the Land League's project was to have Ireland dominated by a *petite culture* rather than a system of scientific farming'.¹⁰² Because the C. T. D. A. was dominated by large farmers, it did not reflect public opinion in the west of Ireland and Harris did not want them to garner any influence in the fledgling tenant-right movement

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, 20 Apr. 1878; 11 May 1878.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1878; 20 Apr. 1878.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 6 Apr. 1878.

¹⁰⁰ Donnelly, 'The Land question in nationalist politics', pp 90-1.

¹⁰¹ *C. T.*, 13 Apr. 1878; 20 Apr. 1878.

¹⁰² Bew, *Land and national question in Ireland*, p. 18.

as their demands would override those of smaller farmers. Harris was confident that public opinion would concur with his argument and would in turn reduce the influence graziers had in the countryside.¹⁰³

It was always a fixed idea of mine [Harris] that the advocates of justice best promote their own objects when confining themselves to the language of moderation. But while appealing to the moderation, the good sense, the calm reason of the people, we should always appeal to their manhood and patriotism, for in public affairs, wisdom and prudence, without energy and patriotism, are but other names for selfishness and cowardice.¹⁰⁴

The B. T. D. A. was forced to dampen its radical ideas in order to become more appealing to moderate tenant-farmers, who may not have mobilised otherwise. According to Bew: ‘the ultra-radical opinions of Matthew Harris can hardly have inclined the Central Tenant Defence Association constituency in a favourable way towards the new land movement in the west with which he was so obviously connected’.¹⁰⁵ While the B. T. D. A. initially supported Isaac Butt, their allegiance shifted to Parnell once he began to criticise Butt’s policies and when it became obvious that he was willing to pursue more advanced ideals.¹⁰⁶ He was the only senior Home Rule politician the B. T. D. A. perceived as being able to initiate changes for the benefit of the peasantry and their support of him resulted in O’Sullivan proposing the motion that ‘we consider it the duty of the Irish constituencies to support no one, but men pledged to the policy of action initiated by Mr Parnell and the advanced sections of the Home Rule party’.¹⁰⁷

Parnell had become the nominal head of the Irish Parliamentary party by 1877, at the expense of his more radical nemesis, John O’Connor Power. Parnell won the support of the Central Tenant Defence Association early on in his parliamentary career and was determined to maintain it once he began to seek the support of the small tenant farmer.

¹⁰³ *C.T.*, 6 Apr. 1878; 20 Apr. 1878.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, 22 Sept. 1877.

¹⁰⁵ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 54–5.

¹⁰⁶ *idem*, *Ireland, the politics of enmity, 1789–2006* (Oxford, 2007), p. 310.

¹⁰⁷ *C. T.*, 9 November 1878; Sweetman papers, (National Library of Ireland, Ms 47,573/3).

He did not fully commit himself to active involvement in the land question until November 1878 because he thought the radicalism of the movement would be unacceptable to graziers.¹⁰⁸ Because Parnell did not want to antagonise the C. T. D. A., he had some difficulty involving himself in the western agitation. Despite this, his address to the B. T. D. A. in November 1878 was the association's high point. According to the *Connaught Telegraph*, it was one of the largest tenant-right meetings ever held in Connaught, with 'large contingents of tenant farmers, ready and willing to co-operate with their indefatigable president, vice-president and secretary'.¹⁰⁹ O'Connor Power, who was from Ballinasloe, and James Daly were also in attendance. Donald Jordan has argued that while Parnell was not fully convinced of the usefulness of utilising the land movement: 'it is quite likely that during his visit to Ballinasloe in 1878, [he] became intrigued with the possibility that a land movement may have for the nationalist struggle ... the vigour of the nascent agitation had caught Parnell off guard, but he had yet to be convinced of its usefulness to his parliamentary campaign'.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, he became wary of aligning himself to an agitation that he would have difficulty containing. Harris was disappointed that the local M.P.s, Mitchell Henry and Captain Nolan, were absent from this meeting, and he opined that they were not interested in the welfare of the people. While Nolan sent his apologies, Henry stated that he did not attend meetings on a Sunday as a rule. Such was the clergy's suspicion of Parnell that only two priests attended this meeting, though he did secure the support of Archbishop MacHale and Bishop Duggan, both of whom sent letters endorsing the objectives of the meeting. Duggan conceded that some of his clergy would not attend as a matter of conscience and he would not force them to attend. Parnell later retreated in his emphasis on peasant proprietorship, possibly because of the poor clerical support he received at this meeting

¹⁰⁸ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 54–5.

¹⁰⁹ idem, *C. S. Parnell*, (Dublin, 1980), p. 25.

¹¹⁰ Jordan, *Land and popular politics in Ireland*, p. 213.

and argued that it was the three Fs which were the objectives of 'practical land reformers'.¹¹¹

Ballinasloe was disconnected from the metropolis, with the Dublin elite apparently unable to fully appreciate the reasoning behind the agitation. However, a Dublin correspondent that visited Ballinasloe in order to observe the new movement was taken aback by the excitement of the people as they listened to speeches from Mitchell Henry and Captain Nolan pertaining to the land question, which implied to him that it was the land question and not Home Rule that the people were interested in. 'It has often been said by the landlord press and the satellites of the aristocracy that the agitation only exists amongst a few who desire to turn it into their own political advantage'.¹¹²

IV.) Conclusion

Harris believed that tenants could only bring about change through systematic organisation. His organisational *élan* was something that Davitt respected and praised in *The fall of feudalism in Ireland* (1904).¹¹³ While he did not criticise Clancarty at B.T.D.A meetings, he did so at various stages during both phases of the Land War, which is discussed in chapters five and six. Meetings were held trying to convince farmers about the importance of mobilising, with Harris saying: 'from the beginning our hopes were centred on the people ... they must make up their minds to pander no longer to the worn out ideas of the superiority of aristocrats as representatives of the people'. It linked the fortunes of the tenant farmer with that of every other class in Irish society, in particular, the shopkeepers. While it initially championed a radical agenda, by 1878, M. M.

¹¹¹ C. T., 9 Nov. 1878; Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 55–6; idem *C. S. Parnell* (Dublin, 1980), pp 25–6.

¹¹² C.T., 4 Nov. 1876.

¹¹³ Michael Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland, or the story of the Land League revolution* (London, 1904), p. 158.

O'Sullivan sought to dampen this in order to appeal to a broader range of farmers.¹¹⁴

Mass meetings were reflective of the conviviality of collective activity and socialisation that was a significant feature of the mid-Victorian age, which R.V. Comerford has explored in his seminal article, 'Patriotism as pastime, the appeal of Fenianism in the mid-1860s'.¹¹⁵ The B. T. D. A. succeeded in creating a more politically active and conscious farming class, so that by the time of the establishment of the Land League, they readily understood the ideas being espoused. The B. T. D. A. emphasised the importance of small tenant farmers being involved in a mass movement as active participants. 'At each of our meetings, some of the tenant farmers came forward and expressed their opinions openly and fearlessly from the public platform'.¹¹⁶ Comerford also argued 'the other tenant associations generally represented the interests of larger farmers and had a decidedly more cautious outlook. What they did have in common with the Mayo and Ballinasloe movements was a membership sensitive to economic crisis and a politically ambitious leadership'.¹¹⁷ They articulated clearly defined and well thought out objectives that identified local concerns. While a resolution to the national question was the main objective of the radicals involved in this and other similar movements, they readily identified more immediate and local concerns that could eventually mobilise participants into a wider national movement.

Eric Hobsbawm has asserted that the existence of such movements does not imply that they were egalitarian, as peasants generally distrusted those that were not peasants. They were potentially a massive power base, but this actual power and influence was more limited, because 'the normal strategy of the traditional peasantry is passivity'.¹¹⁸ In

¹¹⁴ C. T., 1 July 1876; 19 Aug. 1876.

¹¹⁵ R. V. Comerford, 'Patriotism as pastime, the appeal of Fenianism in the mid-1860s' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxii (1981), pp 239–250

¹¹⁶ C. T., 3 June 1876; 19 Aug. 1876.

¹¹⁷ R. V. Comerford, 'The land war and the politics of distress, 1877–82' in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*. vi: *Ireland under the Union, 1870–1921*, p. 35.

¹¹⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, *Uncommon people, resistance, rebellion and jazz* (London, 1998), pp 198–9, 209–11.

his examination of the Kerry Tenant Defence Association, D. S. Lucey argued that: ‘the low level of agrarian outrage and eviction, coupled with the failure of the Kerry Tenant Defence Association to mobilise widespread tenant support indicated a level of stability within the rural economy’ and similar problems presented themselves to the leaders of the B. T. D. A.¹¹⁹

Like the Land League, the intellectual backbone of the B. T. D. A. came not from the tenant farmer class, but, rather from urban tenants, men who very often had no land to call their own. David Seth Jones argued that it was ironic that there was opposition to grazier involvement in the Land League, even though they supported it. The B. T. D. A. was a reflection of the disdain felt towards that section of the farming community in the west of Ireland. It seems that Seth-Jones did not fully appreciate the crucial role the B. T. D. A. and the initial Land League played in anti-grazier sentiment in the early stages of the agitation.¹²⁰ John Callanan, a leading member of the B. T. D. A. and proprietor of the *Western News* newspaper was so pleased with the successful outcome of J. J. Loudon’s and Matthew Bodkin’s challenge to the 1870 Land Act which resulted in a stay on evictions, that he oversaw the assimilation of the B. T. D. A. with the Land League in February 1880.¹²¹

‘Local and regional action ... turns into wider action only by external force and when sufficient numbers of communities are challenged into going into that direction’.¹²² The most significant consequence of the B. T. D. A. at a local level, was the confidence that was now instilled in tenants to be able to criticise their landlords and that peasant proprietorship was now the apparent panacea for the woes that came about through the economic crisis of 1878–9. There was increased resistance to landlord authority,

¹¹⁹ D. S. Lucey, ‘Land and popular politics in Kerry, 1872–86’ (Ph.D thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2007), p. 35.

¹²⁰ David Seth Jones, *Graziers, land reform and political conflict in Ireland* (Washington D.C., 1995), p. 179.

¹²¹ *Western News*, 7 Feb. 1880; Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 94.

¹²² Hobsbawm, *Uncommon people, resistance, rebellion and jazz*, p. 205.

primarily through elected bodies, and Clancarty's authority was increasingly challenged by men that received their political education from the B. T. D. A. and these challenges are discussed in greater detail in chapters five and six.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CLANCARTY ESTATE, 1879–1885

I.) Introduction

W. E. Vaughan argued that prior to the Land War: ‘combinations – certainly those of a criminal kind – against landlords were sporadic, localized and rarely involved more than groups of neighbours or kinsmen’ and such ribbon type activity was frequently in response to immediate local concerns and lacked sophistication and direction.¹

Conflict, which was so prevalent in pre-Famine Ireland, gave way to a spirit of co-operation between landlords and tenants in the post-Famine period. Harmonious landlord–tenant relations existed as tenants generally paid their rents promptly, but ‘when prosperity came to an end in the late 1870s, the groundwork had been laid by the challenging collectivities ... for the greatest challenge to established power in nineteenth-century Ireland’.²

Prior to the mid-1870s, there was no effective leadership for farmers outside of the Catholic clergy. Despite the existence of a plethora of farmers clubs and tenant defence associations across the country, it was still difficult to organise farmers into something analogous to a trade union. This was because there was nothing communal in the countryside that gave farmers a sense of a shared identity because their self-sufficiency garnered from working the land gave them no reason to become involved

¹ W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Dublin, 1994), p. 183

² Samuel Clark, *The social origins of the Irish Land War* (Princeton, 1979), pp 153–7, 221.

in such organisations.³ However, the agitation that emerged as a result of the economic depression of 1877 was different, coming as it did after one of the most prosperous periods witnessed in Ireland. J. S. Donnelly called it: ‘a product not merely of agricultural crisis, but also a revolution of rising expectations’.⁴

Small farmers in the west of Ireland were in a particularly vulnerable position because they were heavily indebted to both their landlords and shopkeepers, with the problems presented by this crisis resulting in them being unable to honour both sets of creditors. Donnelly stated that ‘for the generation of Irish farmers who remembered the hardship of the Famine there was no desire to return to it; for the generation that had grown up with economic prosperity there was no great desire to relinquish it’.⁵ The crisis was further intensified by the collapsing yield in potatoes from 1877, with average yields of 1.8 tons being recorded that year. This was in comparison to an average of 3.3 tons per acre being produced between 1871 and 1876. Yields collapsed further in 1879, as average yields of 1.4 tons per acre were recorded.⁶ While there had been periods of unrest during previous economic downturns: ‘the speed at which economic adversity renewed hostilities indicates that, underlying the apparent harmony that prevailed during most of the 1860s and 1870s, there remained a basic weakness in the Irish landlord–tenant relationship’.⁷ It also reflects the success of Tenant Defence Associations in inculcating political awareness amongst farmers and

³ Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants*, p. 204.

⁴ J. S. Donnelly, Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork: the rural economy and the Irish land question* (London and Boston, 1975), pp 250–2.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ Gerard Moran, “‘Near famine’: The Roman Catholic Church and the subsistence crisis of 1879–82”, in *Studia Hibernica*, no. 32 (2004), p. 156.

⁷ Clark, *The social origins of the Irish Land War*, pp. 153–7.

the existence of the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association, discussed in chapter four, presented the opportunity for farmers to become self-conscious as a class. The consequences of their activities will be explored both in this chapter and chapter six as a collectivity of farmers, town tenants and clergy challenged Clancarty's authority on his estate.

This chapter is an examination of the Clancarty estate between 1879 and 1885, a period of significant agrarian and political activity in Ireland. While east Galway may have been highly agitated – especially the district of Loughrea – the Clancarty estate and the neighbouring Clonbrock estate were relatively peaceful. This chapter explores why this was the case on the Clancarty estate. It will explore co-operation between Clancarty and nationalists in attempts to provide such relief, rent reductions, local political struggles and the fourth earl's reaction to the agitation. This chapter will also explore intra-tenant divisions, focusing upon the diverging opinions regarding the place of labourers in the land movement. While Clancarty traditionally engendered a loyal tenantry, this was now under increasing threat, with a politically mobilised tenantry challenging his authority in the management of his estate through participation on board of guardians and town commissions and the land courts, established under the 1881 Land Act.

II.) The alleviation of distress on the Clancarty estate, 1879–85

Irish farming became increasingly pastoral after the Famine, with 84 percent of land

in Connaught being used for grazing by 1876.⁸ As has been discussed in chapters one and four, large graziers were treated with suspicion in the west of Ireland. Eugene Hynes argued that this was because they did not fit well into traditional communities. ‘In Mayo, more than a few were foreigners, (English and Scottish) and were detested for their foreign faith as well as their economic practice’⁹. He further stated that *all* (my emphasis) graziers were derided in the local community:

Many people resented locals who became graziers as upstarts and derided them as “shoneens” whose acquisitiveness violated traditional notions of sharing. Others condemned them as bulwarks of the landlord system because of their demand for land to rent. Many saw them as monopolising access to land that others needed for subsistence. Anti-landlord feeling often spilled over into anti-grazier sentiment.¹⁰

Stephen Ball opined that small farmers were opposed to the capitalisation of farming and the denial of what they saw as their natural rights and grazing threatened this. Such ire was directed towards graziers and new landlords within the vicinity of the Clancarty estate in the aftermath of the Famine. One such example was Allan Pollok, who made his fortune in Scotland as a timber merchant and then purchased a significant estate of almost 30,000 acres through the Encumbered Estates Court in the early 1850s. His management techniques were frowned upon as he began clearing and consolidating uneconomic holdings and creating large grazing tracts.¹¹

Grazing was seen to be detrimental to the economic well-being of both small farmers and labourers and James Kilmartin reiterated this in his evidence to the

⁸ Clark, *The social origins of the Irish Land War*, pp 108–10.

⁹ Eugene Hynes, *Knock: the Virgin’s apparition in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cork, 2009), p. 168.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ For more on the Pollok family, see Joe Molloy (ed.), *The parish of Clontuskert, glimpses into its past* (Galway, 2009), pp 205–38.

Bessborough commission, when he called them the curse of the country.¹² As has been discussed in chapter one, no consolidation of farms took place on the Clancarty estate after the Famine and it appears that this policy continued with Richard, the fourth earl of Clancarty. Their absence on the Clancarty estate meant that the focus of class tensions was between small farmers and labourers.

Labourers ceased being a significant section of the population after the Famine and the casualisation of their employment accentuated their marginalisation. They were employed at the discretion of farmers and the agricultural boom of the post-famine period saw their wages increase, especially during harvest times. Samuel Clark highlighted how the shift from payment by conacre to cash wages was the final stage in the proletarianisation of the Irish countryside. While such a change succeeded in moderating the conflict between labourers and the farmers that employed them, it did not totally eliminate it. The nature of labourers' employment meant that they were frequently at the precipice of destitution, which was deeply accentuated if there was a bad harvest.¹³ Such instability resulted in them becoming reliant upon altruistic landlords to help them through difficult periods, but as Gerard Moran has argued, such optimism frequently resulted in disappointment.¹⁴ While there was an improvement in the condition of labourers in the post-Famine period, there was an excess of casual labourers and their problems were intensified by the economic

¹² *Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners of Inquiry into the working of the Landlord and Tenant (Ireland), 1870, and the acts amending the same*, H.C. 1881, xviii, (2779-iii), p. 652, q. 20,018. (Hereafter, Bessborough Commission)

¹³ Clark, *The social origins of the Irish Land War*, pp 113–7; see also David Fitzpatrick, 'The disappearance of the Irish agricultural labourer, 1841–1912' in *Irish Economic and Social History*, vii (1980), pp 66–92.

¹⁴ Moran, "'Near famine': The Roman Catholic Church and the subsistence crisis of 1879–82', p. 159.

downturn of the late 1870s, which hit urban labourers in an especially harsh way.¹⁵

Regular employment dried up and their dire condition was accentuated by the failure of the agrarian leadership to take up their cause, discussed in greater detail below.

K. T. Hoppen has contended that the Land War occurred ‘at the precise moment when labourers were beginning to constitute a rapidly declining proportion of the population’ and reforms for tenant-farmers were pursued at the expense of their rights.¹⁶

Gerard Moran stated that ‘the delay in establishing relief committees may have been due to the general belief that town labourers and tradesmen were in constant poverty and the distress of 1879 to 1882 was no different’.¹⁷ By the winter of 1879, there was a general consensus that there was a need to increase the employment available for the ‘working agricultural classes’ on public works. While the British government under Beaconsfield agreed with such a premise, it refused to become directly involved and left the provision of relief at the discretion of landlords and local authorities, such as the local board of guardians, or the town commission. These bodies were encouraged to apply to the board of works for grants, despite the problems that bedevilled the awarding of such grants. The Catholic clergy – who were most aware of the problems facing the poor – frequently sought the assistance of charitable organisations, such as the Mansion House relief committee and the Duchess of Marlborough committee. The clergy also sought to establish local relief

¹⁵ J. W. Boyle, ‘A marginal figure: The Irish rural labourer’ in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly Jr. (eds), *Irish peasants: violence and unrest, 1780–1914* (Manchester, 1983), p. 318.

¹⁶ K. T. Hoppen, ‘Landlords, society and electoral politics in mid-nineteenth century Ireland’ in C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 287.

¹⁷ Gerard Moran, ‘The Land War, urban destitution and town tenant protest, 1879–1882’, in *Saothar*, 20 (1995), pp 20, 23–4.

committees. For example, in Mayo, in December 1878, Canon James Magee sought contributions to a fund to assist the most destitute of the labouring classes. While such local initiatives were a genuine effort at alleviating the condition of the poorest, they soon proved to be inadequate and government support for the ‘working agricultural classes’ remained insipid, because it believed that the poor law as it stood was sufficient in dealing with the crisis and no supplementary works were required.¹⁸

Local relief committees in east Galway were soon overwhelmed by the series of crises that they faced. The Loughrea guardians were reticent about providing relief which resulted in eighty labourers staging a protest until they received assistance. Works provided were inadequate in preventing the condition of labourers deteriorating and by January 1880, many were stretched to capacity and were on the precipice of collapse.¹⁹ The same year saw labourers and artisans in poor circumstances in Ballinasloe, Galway town and Tuam, with little help forthcoming. Farmers were particularly resistant to the granting of relief works because any increase in rates would hit them the hardest. Efforts were made to instigate relief works for distressed labourers in Ballinasloe; one example was an attempt to initiate a sewage scheme in November 1879.²⁰

While they were treated shoddily by farmers, labourers were passive participants in the Land War.²¹ Little regard was given to their condition because the

¹⁸ R. V. Comerford, ‘The Land War and the politics of distress, 1877–82’, in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland vi: Ireland under the Union, II, 1870–1921* (Dublin, 1995), p. 36; Moran, “‘Near famine’: The Roman Catholic Church and the subsistence crisis of 1879–82’, pp 157–60.

¹⁹ Moran, ‘The Land War, urban destitution and town tenant protest, pp 21–2.

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp 18–19.

²¹ Boyle, ‘A marginal figure: The Irish rural labourer’, p. 322; Moran, ‘The Land War, urban destitution and town tenant protest, 1879–1882’, pp 18–22.

land question attracted more publicity and their rights were ignored in pursuit of suitable reforms for farmers, resulting in them failing to get a sympathetic and influential advocate. Andrew Dillon from Killimor said labourers needed to present a united front if they wanted to destroy grazing.²² Hugh Brody contended that self-reliance was a fundamental characteristic of farmers in the west of Ireland and they had no interest in being beholden to anyone. Thus, urban labourers seeking relief, which was to be provided from rates paid by farmers, did not fit into the paradigm of rural Ireland as it was viewed by farmers.²³ At a Land League meeting in Ballinasloe, Fr James Carroll said that it was inappropriate to agitate for reform for labourers until they ‘first get the land for the people ... [and] national self government for Ireland’ and he objected to any potential measures that would see labourers getting land on similar terms as farmers.²⁴

The declining condition of the Clonmacnowen and Longford baronies resulted in baronial sessions being organised for 2 February 1880 with the intention of discussing the need, cost, location and benefit of certain relief works in these two baronies. Such was their condition that the Ballinasloe board of guardians requested the holding of a further baronial session and the local government board arranged for it to take place between 6 and 8 March.²⁵ The grand jury act of 1836 limited the

²² *W. N.*, 4 Nov. 1882.

²³ Hugh Brody, *Iniskillane: change and decline in the west of Ireland* (London, 1973, 1982), pp 131–2; Moran, ‘The Land War, urban destitution and town tenant protest, 1879–1882’, pp 17–28.

²⁴ *W. N.*, 4 Nov. 1882; P. G. Lane, ‘Agricultural labourers and the land question’ in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, land and culture in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), pp 101–3; K. T. Hoppen, ‘Landlords, society and electoral politics in mid-nineteenth century Ireland’ in C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and popular protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 287; David Fitzpatrick, ‘Class, family and rural unrest in nineteenth century Ireland’, pp 39, 41, in P. J. Drudy (ed.), *Ireland, land, politics and people* (Cambridge, 1982).

²⁵ C. S. O., R. P., 1880/3521 in the National Archives of Ireland (N. A. I.)

power of grand juries in relation to presentments and ‘the baronial sessions dealt with expenditure for the benefit of the barony and was composed of justices and baronial cesspayers’.²⁶ These meetings saw a series of correspondence between Dr Roughan, a local government board inspector, the board of guardians and Dublin Castle pertaining to the provision of such relief works. On 28 June 1880 Roughan attended a board of guardians meeting in Ballinasloe and his subsequent correspondence with under-secretary Burke highlighted the widely differing opinions as to what constituted hardship and what were the conditions necessary to be eligible for relief:

A great diversity of opinion exists as to the extent to which distress prevails. Some maintaining that it is very severe and that if the people in various localities had not been relieved from charitable funds they should have come either into the workhouse or have perished from want. Distress exists to a large extent in the Ballinasloe and Creagh dispensary districts, but it has been mitigated to a considerable extent by public charity and works which are in operation on Lord Clancarty’s property. Work is also given extensively by Lord Ashtown in Killaan electoral division by the Rev Sir William Mahon in Ahascragh, by Mr. Pollok in Lismany and by several other proprietors in different parts of the union. There are very many resident landlords in this union and with the aid given from her graces fund and other sources. I have no doubt that the people will be well maintained until works under the baronial sessions come into operation. The extent for demand for poor law relief does not exceed that of past years there are 315 persons in the workhouse at present, while there were 319 last year, a slight increase has taken place in the number of persons in receipt of outdoor relief. There are thirty-four persons in receipt of it at present, while there were only twelve at the same period last year.²⁷

It is obvious from the above excerpt that Roughan was satisfied that ample relief works were being initiated in the district and government measures that had been in

²⁶ J. Collins, ‘The beginning of county administration’, p. 4, located at http://www.ipa.ie/upload/documents/The_beginnings_of_county_administration_Collins.pdf [date accessed, 21 Apr. 2011].

²⁷ C. S. O., R. P., 1880/3521.

place for the previous year were adequate. Some government officials and landlords were sceptical about the levels of distress farmers claimed to be suffering: ‘if they had livestock and crops that they could sell, then the seriousness of the situation was being misrepresented by the agitators’.²⁸ A local government board inspector said labourers had the option of entering the workhouse until their circumstances improved; whereas ‘if these men [tenant farmers] are forced to part with their cow ... they are utterly and hopelessly ruined’.²⁹

The Ballinasloe board of guardians made a further request for assistance to the local government board, because they wanted to extend employment schemes in the union, as ‘there is no reasonable prospect of such want of employment being supplied either by landed proprietors, or sanitary authorities, or by means of works already passed at extraordinary presentment sessions and sanctioned by government or otherwise’.³⁰ Roughan disagreed with the claim that landlord responses to the crisis were inadequate, reiterating an earlier point that: ‘a great deal of employment is given by Lord Clancarty and other proprietors and I am credibly informed that it is found most difficult to get labourers to work at present except at very high wages’.³¹

A further series of relief works to relieve destitute labourers in the Athlone South and Moycarn baronies were proposed, but Roughan was not convinced of their potential usefulness. He once again stated that local landlords had provided a sufficient degree of relief works to assist tenants: ‘indeed some of it can not be

²⁸ Clark, *The social origins of the Land war*, pp 223–7

²⁹ *ibid.*, 239–40.

³⁰ C. S. O., R. P., 1880/3521.

³¹ C. S. O., R. P., 1880/4891.

finished until next spring'.³² While Roughan conceded that there may have been a need for employment in certain parts of the barony, he had not witnessed any. He cast a critical opinion upon various proposed relief works, marked on the two maps in appendix two. He stated that number thirteen was next to a badly managed baronial work that was costing £1,000 and was unnecessary. 'On Monday, there had not been £80 expended on it ... fifty men employed ... this road if properly worked would offer employment to 300 men for the next month the cause assigned to me for having so few men at work was that the engineer had not been there to lockspit the road and consequently the work could not be proceeded with'.³³

The existence of extensive agricultural works in the locality meant relief work number twenty-four which was turnip weeding and thinning, saving of hay and turf was unnecessary. Roughan believed conditions would be unsuitable for two weeks before this work could be carried out: 'after that time, things I hope will return to their ordinary course'. These three works were seen to be of great benefit in the locality and were estimated to cost £300, 'suitable for the employment of unskilled labour and are such as can be completed in each case ... [in two] months'.³⁴

Roughan was frustrated with the carelessness of the work being carried out by labourers, arguing that they were not performing their duties competently and such a cavalier attitude increased costs and prevented their timely completion:

a measurement has been made because owing probably to the thoughtlessness the stones were not prepared so as to be measured on the day of measurement. It will be remembered that things of this kind must occur at the beginning of

³² C. S. O., R. P., 1880/19311 and 1880/20613

³³ C. S. O., R. P., 1880/19311.

³⁴ *ibid.*

works to which the people are not accustomed. A delay as has been seen from the number of persons employed has arisen from this cause. With the approaching harvest, it will be difficult to get men to work at the ordinary wages of the county. Proprietors complain of the difficulty they experience in carrying out works according to the notices of the board of works, by means of the difficulty they experience in getting labourers.³⁵

Despite being a mixture of prosperity and decay, towns were also important centres of communication, transport and local government, but they were treated with suspicion by rural dwellers. The lack of a substantial industrial base in many towns in Ireland resulted in an over-reliance upon farmers for their economic survival and such suspicion became mutual.³⁶ According to Moran, the ‘Land League dwelt on distress among rural groups and never mentioned town dwellers ... the overall situation in western towns was not helped by declining opportunities in industry’.³⁷ The stagnation of the early 1880s resulted in Bishop Patrick Duggan initiating an exploratory meeting regarding the feasibility of establishing a woollen factory for unemployed labourers in Ballinasloe on 17 January 1883. Duggan had made similar efforts for the poorest in the diocese of Clonfert when poverty in the diocese had reached a crisis point. In a letter to Cardinal McCabe of Dublin, he said every parish in the diocese had a large number of families in distress and he expressed concern at the prospect of a massive increase in destitution amongst labourers and small farmers as they were:

so utterly without means ... it will be impossible for them to hold their position without extensive aid. In some cases, landlords are aiding them. The clergy are

³⁵ C. S. O., R. P., 1880/19311.

³⁶ Brian Graham and Susan Hood, “‘Every creed and party’”: town tenant protest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland’ in *Journal of Historical Geography*, xxiv, no. 2, Apr. 1998, p. 171.

³⁷ Moran, ‘The Land War, urban destitution and town tenant protest, 1879–1882’, pp 18–22.

trying to aid both these classes in many ways through means of relief committees and the monies I am able to find them. Up to this also, I find that the classes, better off in former times, are now unable to employ labour. In towns artisans of all descriptions are all but idle, as their former employers are now unable to employ.³⁸

‘People of all creeds and classes’ such as F. A. Harpur, Junius Horne, J. J. Elder, Matt Harris, Michael McGiverin and James Goode attended this exploratory meeting. They hoped that the establishment of such a factory would alleviate distress and reduce the burden of rates in the town, which was an attractive prospect for many farmers. Duggan encouraged those that attended the meeting to make a financial contribution to ensure the establishment of the factory because it had the potential of reducing mendicancy in the town. John Goode remarked that ‘if the factory was established, we would not have to be contributing £70 or £80 a year to relieve distress in the town’. Clancarty and other landed proprietors were consulted because it was: ‘their duty to come forward and assist ... The public have large claims on the landed gentry of the neighbourhood and now is the time for them to prove their desire to assist the people’.³⁹

Junius Horne, a wool merchant, said: ‘they owed a great debt of gratitude to Lord Clancarty for his actions; not only on this occasion, but every time they required his Lordship’s assistance’.⁴⁰ Clancarty wanted to assist his poorer town tenants, because it was ‘his responsibility as lord of the soil’. Such efforts reflected an attempt by Clancarty to inspire tenants to use their own initiatives by embracing a latent

³⁸ Letter from Duggan to McCabe 12 Mar. 1880, in McCabe Papers, Section 346/4 File III Shelf 331, box description 1880 Priests, religion, relief of distress, in Dublin Diocesan Archives.

³⁹ *W. N.*, 27 Jan. 1883.

⁴⁰ *W. N.*, 27 Jan. 1883. The 1901 census records Junius Horne residing in 18 Society Street, Ballinasloe, with a servant, Mary Hast. Both are registered as Roman Catholic.

entrepreneurial spirit and reflected the reservoir of informal power that had been built up on the estate.⁴¹ Clancarty's desire to assist his tenants was compared to Clanricarde's recalcitrance towards his tenants. Duggan was pleased with this consensus and Clancarty's desire to assist in the alleviation of distress in the district and thanked him for the 'anxiety he felt in the interests of the town ... His lordship (Duggan) said he felt very deeply the interests Lord Clancarty took in the wants of the people and the kindness which he has shown, contrasted with the owners of the soil of Loughrea'.⁴² Duggan had previously contended that between 1,100 and 1,200 people out of a total population of 3,000 in Loughrea were dependent upon relief and there was increased consolidation of holdings on the Clanricarde estate as a result of the land acts, which according to Duggan, had deepened the level of poverty being felt.⁴³ Duggan accused the marquis of 'flinging the people into the ditch like dogs ... We see our towns crowded with idle people who are the victims of ruthless landlordism'. This was an interesting comparison and was useful to Clancarty, especially after he promised to 'give any site in his gift declared by competent authority to be suitable for the purpose of establishing a factory', and would subscribe to shares of a limited company if one was established. Michael McGiverin recommended the holding of another public meeting, with John Callanan suggesting Clancarty be consulted in identifying a suitable site. Clancarty recommended that prior to the construction of the factory, they needed to consult experts in the woollen industry and if it was to be

⁴¹ L. P. Curtis Jr., 'Landlord responses to the Irish Land War, 1879-87', in *Eire-Ireland: Journal of Irish Studies* (Fall-Winter 2003), p. 134.

⁴² *W. N.*, 27 Jan. 1883.

⁴³ *Reports of her majesty's commissioners into the depressed condition of agricultural interests, preliminary report* H.C., 1881 [2778-i], p. 494, qs 14,133, 14,141.

built, it should be on a small scale initially; ‘so that if there were ever a loss, it would be small at first’ and it could be extended if it succeeded, but if it failed, at least technological knowledge would have been acquired. The owner of Kidderminster Carpets, Mr Crosstress expressed interest about becoming an investor.⁴⁴

Duggan had alluded to the problems faced by labourers, arguing that the increase in their wages had made it difficult for farmers to pay them adequately during this crisis. J. W. Boyle stated that ‘by 1870 the cash wages of agricultural labourers had risen considerably over the levels of twenty years previously, with a Poor Law Inspector stating that they had doubled’.⁴⁵ Duggan further differentiated between rural and urban labourers, stating that rural tenants had access to land from which they could derive some benefits, while many urban labourers did not have such an option, resulting in the need for such a factory to be established. His opinion supports Boyle’s argument that labourers’ grievances were not necessarily directed towards landlords, as they were frequently good employers that paid good wages, in comparison to farmers.⁴⁶

The enthusiasm for this factory was very short lived and there was no more reference to it in subsequent editions of the *Western News*. Despite this, such an episode reflected the potential of cross-community co-operation in a time of real distress and it was obvious that even advanced nationalists, such as Matt Harris, appreciated the avuncular nature of Lord Clancarty. Despite their general contempt for the landlord class, Duggan and Harris appear to have had some implicit respect for

⁴⁴ *W. N.*, 20 Jan. 1883; 27 Jan. 1883.

⁴⁵ Boyle, ‘A marginal figure: The Irish rural labourer’, p. 321.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 327.

Clancarty. His co-operation was necessary in order to achieve any assistance for the destitute and any attempts to antagonise him could have proven to be unsuccessful, embarrassing or have a negative impact on the poorest in the region. This supports Gerard Moran's argument, highlighted above, that the clergy did not care where relief came from, so long as they could get some for the poorest in their community. Despite this co-operation, Harris was still willing to criticise Clancarty when he deemed it to be necessary and such criticism is highlighted below and in chapter six. While previous attempts at assisting the poor during times of crisis on the Clancarty estate had evangelical undertones attached to them, no such activity took place during this crisis. The conditions were ripe in the west of Ireland for such a revival, especially as the Catholic clergy were so desperate to get relief for the poor that they did not care where it came from, so long as it was found.⁴⁷ Despite such vulnerability, no action took place.

III.) The political mobilisation of tenant-farmers and labourers.

While the land question was generally interpreted as land reform for farmers, some nationalists believed that labourers should derive some benefit from it. Michael Davitt was disappointed the government did not do anything for labourers under the terms of the 1881 Land Act, though nationalists also ignored their plight.⁴⁸ Parnell appreciated that labourer support was useful for the advancement of the constitutional nationalist movement. This had to be done without alienating farmers and it necessitated

⁴⁷ Moran, "'Near famine': The Roman Catholic Church and the subsistence crisis of 1879–82", p. 165.

⁴⁸ Michael Davitt, *The fall of feudalism in Ireland, or the story of the Land League Revolution* (London, 1904), p. 368.

Parnell's deft political manoeuvrings to find a balance between the two in order to keep:

the labourers happy without showing so much concern for them as to alienate the farmers, who had a highly developed sense of [property] rights when it came to their dealings with those below them in the economic order ... The land acts had proved so favourable towards tenant farmers at the expense of landless labourers that some type of conciliation in favour of the latter was called for ... As rural conflict among farmers and labourers would have proved disastrous for constitutional nationalism, this unity between both classes was essential.⁴⁹

By 1880 'it was clear that there was a need to broaden the base of the agitation but at the same time, Parnell had to maintain his original support'⁵⁰ but it was not until the summer of 1881 that Land League leaders saw the political expediency of including labourer grievances into a programme of agitation. Despite this, their plight was only raised on an intermittent basis. Prior to this, labourers participated in the land movement on the premise that farmers would agitate for them once their own grievances were resolved.⁵¹ Such local divisions helped to sustain the dynamic of the agitation, as local branches strove to keep the land question the central question, thus discussions of reforms for labourers had the potential of distracting branches from its central aim.⁵²

The establishment of the Labourers League in the summer of 1882 was an attempt to transform labourers into more active participants in the agitation and a

⁴⁹ Frank Cullen, *Cleansing rural Dublin: Public health and housing initiatives in the South Dublin Poor Law Union, 1880–1920* (Dublin, 2001), pp 35–6; Donnelly, *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork*, pp 328–35.

⁵⁰ Fitzpatrick, 'Class, family and rural unrest in nineteenth century Ireland', pp 39, 41.

⁵¹ E. F. Biagini, *British democracy and Irish nationalism, 1876–1906* (Cambridge, 2007), pp 127–8.

⁵² Donald Jordan, 'The Irish National League and the "Unwritten Law": rural protest and nation-building in Ireland, 1882-1890', in *Past and Present*, 158 (February, 1998), p. 148.

branch was established in Ballinasloe in July 1882, with a large number of labourers, plus local nationalists such as James Kilmartin, Matt Harris, John Callanan, Michael McGiverin, William Ivers and J. F. Ward in attendance. Head Constable Barnaville, six police officers and two police note takers were witnesses to the proceedings and John Callanan said their presence indicated that the authorities feared there would be a breach of the peace. Police officers were present at meetings where notable nationalists were expected to speak in order to identify any seditious language that may have been uttered that could have breached the coercion acts. James Kilmartin said there were two reasons for the meeting; the advancement of the labour movement in Ballinasloe and the improvement of agricultural labourers wages, because they were 'the poorest of any class of man in the civilised world'.⁵³ Despite being a notable attendee at this meeting, Kilmartin's sympathies lay firmly with the tenant farmers: 'to my own knowledge, the labouring man is very often better off than the struggling tenant farmer'.⁵⁴

Parnell and Gladstone were responsive to the plight of labourers and in 1882, the Labour and Industrial Union was formed. In November 1883, T. G. Griffen of Gurteen said labourers played an important role in the land movement and the Irish National League needed to do more in the advancement of their rights. The 1883 Labourers (Ireland) Act compelled farmers to provide housing for rural labourers and to provide them with a half-acre plot, though this was a very modest attempt at

⁵³ *W. N.*, 29 Jul. 1882.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 29 Jul. 1882.

reform.⁵⁵ This was something that had been advocated by Harris for a significant length of time and in *Land reform: A letter to the council of the Irish National Land League* (1881), he proposed that any restrictions on tillage be removed in order to benefit small farmers and labourers. He wanted farmers with farms of more than fifty acres to build adequate housing for labourers. He suggested that the government should provide purchase money to farmers that had thirty acres or less to enable them to purchase their holdings and they could repay it on an interest free basis.⁵⁶ Access to land was a fundamental aspect of the ‘unwritten law’, which was, according to Donald Jordan, a ‘savvy response to the market economy, one which excluded the landlord class’⁵⁷ and labourers did not fit comfortably into this projection of the nation.

Eugenio Biagini has argued that ‘though the I. N. L. interceded for the concession of rent-free plots of land for the labourers, and tried to act as a mediator between farmers and farm workers, the latter often felt neglected and manipulated, especially after Gladstone’s legislation of 1881–2’.⁵⁸ Biagini further argued that ‘the Liberal government passed [this act], virtually [as] an attempt to outbid Parnell’. While labourers appeared to have been pleased with it, farmers were reluctant to pay the rates needed to fund it, adding further credence to Brody’s assertion of self-sufficiency and reflective of a certain selfishness on the part of farmers.⁵⁹ The establishment of the Irish National League resulted in it being viewed as the only

⁵⁵W. N., 21 Oct. 1882; Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland*, p. 135.

⁵⁶W. N., 21 Oct. 1882; Matthew Harris, *Land Reform, a letter to the council of the Irish National Land League* (Dublin, 1881); Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland*, p. 135.

⁵⁷Jordan, ‘The Irish National League and the “Unwritten Law”’, pp 148–9.

⁵⁸Biagini, *British democracy and Irish nationalism*, pp 127–8

⁵⁹ibid., p. 129.

legitimate authority in Ireland as it sought to revive the nationalist movement from the ashes of the Land League, which had become divided by the time of its proclamation.⁶⁰ ‘In October [1882], the I. N. L., reviving part of the more radical features of the old Land League’s programme, adopted some of the farm worker’s demands in a successful bid for their support’.⁶¹

In an example of the complicated structure of the I. N. L. at a local level, the Ballinasloe branch passed a motion supporting the rights of labourers in November 1882, because they were ‘perhaps the most vilified people on earth’.⁶² William Roche said that because farmers were paying extortionate rents to landlords, it hindered their ability to pay labourers decent wages: ‘twas time for the labourers and artisans of all classes to insist on getting their rights from the so-called government who ruled them’ and this could only be achieved through unity of action.⁶³

We cannot yet see the dawn of that prosperous morn when every tenant farmer will rejoice in his emancipation from serfdom’, and when the tenant farmer becomes a peasant proprietor, it was hoped that the landless and labourers would not be forgotten either. They were entitled to a fair days rent and a fair day’s work. The toiler and the wealth producer shall be also sharers in the fruits of his labour and the enjoyment of the wealth which he has helped to produce.⁶⁴

Such a statement reflected a fundamental of the ‘unwritten law’, that is that access to land and the opportunity for subsistence were vital and the ambiguity of language regarding labourers reflected the problems they faced in gaining support for others in

⁶⁰ Jordan, ‘The Irish National League and the “Unwritten Law”’, pp 146–8.

⁶¹ Bew, *Land and the National Question in Ireland*, p. 135.

⁶² *W. N.*, 25 Nov. 1882.

⁶³ *ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1882.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 21 Jan. 1882.

the countryside.⁶⁵ Such language makes labourers' loyalty towards Clancarty more understandable and this is discussed below. By November 1885 T. J. Manning suggested the I. N. L. should play a more substantive role in mobilising labourers so they could agitate for improved access to housing and land. The *Connaught People* argued labourers suffered 'unceasing toil ... periods of distress come now and then to the working classes of other lands, [but] to those of this misgoverned and unfortunate country, they come often'.⁶⁶ Despite Harris's efforts, the Land League and I. N. L. were reluctant to incorporate the grievances of town tenants and labourers into their programme of agitation. While there was an acute response to rural distress, the reaction to the difficulties of urban residents was insipid. This was due to the fact that urban destitution was not perceived as an exclusively Irish phenomenon, rather it was a perpetual problem throughout Europe. Because there was no distinction made between urban and rural labourers in poor law returns, the real level of urban destitution cannot be ascertained.⁶⁷

It is likely that there was a great deal of frustration in nationalist circles regarding landlord influence over the distribution of relief and their 'almost total domination over a comparatively minor political institution such as the local poor-law board gives us some indication of the political power possessed by the landed class on the eve of the Land War'.⁶⁸ Prior to the 1870s 'the gentry dominated county affairs, because they owned the bulk of the land, controlled influential committees and

⁶⁵ Jordan, 'The Irish National League and the "Unwritten Law"', p. 148.

⁶⁶ *Connaught People*, 14 Nov. 1885.

⁶⁷ Moran, 'The Land War, urban destitution and town tenant protest, 1879–1882', pp 18–22

⁶⁸ Clark, *The social origins of the Irish Land War*, p. 192.

[endured] little interference from central government'.⁶⁹ They were the main power brokers in the nineteenth century. While new power groups had emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century and challenged the authority of landlords, they did not totally replace it. The lay leadership that emerged in the 1860s and 1870s had a more fluid interpretation of the national question and were not restricted by dogmatic ideologues like Catholic priests and orthodox Fenians. As has been discussed in chapter four, farmer participation in the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association gave them the necessary political education and confidence needed to challenge Clancarty hegemony on local elected boards, i.e., the Ballinasloe board of guardians and town commission.⁷⁰

In his seminal study, *The revolt of the tenantry, the transformation of local government in Ireland, 1872–1886*, W. L. Feingold discusses the slow rise of a nationalist middle class taking control of boards of guardians during the 1870s, as increased prosperity led them to seek out the respectability the gentry had achieved.⁷¹ Similarly, R. V. Comerford argued that 'despite the incompatibility of the farmer's way of life with active participation in politics, their social and economic weight was not without its impact on political life' and tensions between landlords and tenants in the countryside were often mirrored at board of guardians and town commission meetings.⁷² Poor law elections were held in the last week in March and usually

⁶⁹ Patrick Melvin, *The landed gentry of Galway, 1820–1880* (Ph.D thesis, Trinity College Dublin, 1991), p. 335.

⁷⁰ Clark, *The social origins of the Irish Land War*, pp 187, 202, 219.

⁷¹ W. E. Feingold, *The revolt of the tenantry, the transformation of local government in Ireland, 1872–86* (Boston, 1984), pp 102–3; see also D. S. Lucey, *The Irish National League in Dingle, Co Kerry* (Dublin, 2003).

⁷² R. V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context: Irish politics and society, 1848–1882* (Dublin, 1998), p. 224.

received superficial coverage in the press. Despite such neglectful reporting, these elections were important to the people that were affected the most by them. Poor law administration was a vital mechanism by which relief could be provided to those in the most need of it, as discussed in the previous section. Nationalists realised in the closing decades of the nineteenth century that it could also become an important sphere of nationalist activity, providing a platform from which nationalists could advertise and advance their aims, often to the neglect of the actual administration of the board of guardians.⁷³

Landowners wielded disproportionate influence on the board of guardians, as there were equal numbers of *ex-officios* and elected guardians. While many of the elected guardians were men without property, they were often tenants of an *ex-officio* member. Contesting poor law elections appealed to the left-wing of the land movement and helped to quell the radicalism that threatened to overwhelm the countryside, especially during the 1880s. Notwithstanding this, questions lingered as to whether tenants would vote against the wishes of their landlords, considering that the board of guardians was a microcosm of the community at large. Attempts to wrest control away from landlords was problematic, due to the willingness of many elected guardians to be led by the *ex-officios*, to the annoyance of nationalists and it meant that ‘the Irish landlord class were prominent in local government and virtually controlled the local administration of their counties until 1898’.⁷⁴ Conservative propaganda talked about nationalist jobbery and patronage if they were elected. While

⁷³ Virginia Crossman, *Politics, pauperism and power in late nineteenth-century Ireland* (Manchester 2006), p. 65.

⁷⁴ Fergus Campbell, *The Irish Establishment, 1879–1914* (Oxford, 2009), p. 30.

there was evidence of landlord intimidation in some elections, none has been identified in Ballinasloe. Despite the best efforts of nationalists, they still found it difficult to stymie the influence Clancarty had over the running of Ballinasloe.⁷⁵

The ‘New Departure’ – a rapprochement between orthodox Fenians and constitutional nationalists to pursue peaceful means for a set period of time – gave way to a realisation amongst nationalists that the board of guardians could be a suitable tool for rallying public opinion to their cause if they could gain control of them. Administrative experience, previously the preserve of the gentry, was now within the grasp of farmers and the ‘shopocracy’ and this was valuable for gaining political experience.⁷⁶ ‘All indications are that local interest in the Poor Law elections increased in 1880 over earlier levels’⁷⁷, which is indicative of the success of nationalists in convincing people of its relevance. The provincial press played an important role in this regard, for example, the *Connaught Telegraph* was utilised by James Daly as a platform to appeal to voters not to elect landlord flunkeys or sympathisers, as the newspaper further argued that guardians who had been elected on previous occasions were unrepresentative of the people.⁷⁸

While the influence of the Clancarty family may have declined in county and national affairs by the early 1870s, as discussed in chapters two and three, the fourth earl’s influence over the running of the board of guardians and town commission into the mid-1880s was resolute. The first real attempt at challenging his political authority

⁷⁵ Crossman, *Politics, pauperism and power*, p. 41; Campbell, *The Irish Establishment*, p. 30.

⁷⁶ W. L. Feingold, ‘The Tenant’s Movement to Capture the Irish Poor Law Boards, 1877–1886’ in *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 7, no. 3 (1975), p. 218.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *idem*, *The revolt of the tenantry*, pp 102–3, 114–19.

on the estate was at the 1877 board of guardians election, which, according to the *Western News* was contested ‘on Catholic and Liberal grounds. The aim of nationalists was to break down the ascendancy power of Lord Clancarty, who held the representation of the town in his pocket and put eleven Protestants on the board and four Catholics when none others could be found’, though no other information on these persons has been located. In spite of this challenge, no significant advances were made by nationalists at this election.⁷⁹

William O’Brien called the 1882 board of guardians election an ‘historic struggle between Irish landlord and tenant for control of the soil, [which] focused for a time in a struggle for control of the board of guardians’.⁸⁰ While there was no significant change to the make up of the Ballinasloe board of guardians, its first meeting was not without controversy. William Ivers objected to J. J. O’Shaughnessy taking the chair, because he felt that there had been an agreement reached at the previous meeting, whereby he (Ivers) would be chairman when the board resumed. O’Shaughnessy had resigned from his position on the board in order to take up an appointment at the land court. As Ivers began to sit in the newly vacated chair, Captain Cowen suggested that the clerk, Mr Gill should occupy it until the election of a new chairman. Gill agreed to do so until such time and requested that Ivers vacate it, but he refused until the letter from the local government board regarding his election was read out. This letter stated that his election as chairman was invalid because it had been carried out by the old board and a new chairman was to be appointed on the

⁷⁹ *W. N.*, 21 Oct. 1882.

⁸⁰ Feingold, ‘The Tenant’s Movement to Capture the Irish Poor Law Boards, 1877–1886’, p. 218.

first Wednesday after 25 March by the incoming board. W. E. Duffy suggested Ivers should remain as chairman because he was sitting in the chair!⁸¹ Once this election was declared invalid, Junius Horne proposed Lord Clancarty as chairman, Edward Fowler as vice-chairman and John Ward as deputy vice-chairman. Ivers objected to this because Clancarty and Fowler were *ex-officio* guardians, repeating his assertion that he had been elected at the previous meeting: ‘that’s contrary to law. The election was made this day week. This election is illegal’.⁸² Ivers was forcibly ejected from the chair by Captain Cowen and he quipped: ‘I am not the first man your family, Captain Cowen put out of the chair and out of his house too. Though you are a great man in your own estimation you should learn to behave yourself. You are indeed a credit to the *ex-officios*’.⁸³ The *Western News* remarked that the failure to get a chairman elected was because of an erroneous interpretation of the law. Such was the commotion that ensued; there was a concern that the police would have to be called to restore calm.⁸⁴

Nationalists also attempted to gain control of the town commission because it was also controlled by Clancarty. The *Western News* stated that this was due to Clancarty being an extensive ratepayer, having paid a total amount of £1,963 in 1885.⁸⁵ While William O’Brien had alluded to the board of guardians election being a defining moment in national electoral politics in 1882, the Ballinasloe town

⁸¹ *W. N.*, 8 Apr. 1882.

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Return of the names of one hundred of the largest ratepayers in each county in Ireland, distinguishing whether in the Commission of the Peace 1884–5*, H.C. Papers; accounts and papers. Paper number [219] lxvii.477

commission election was also interpreted as the critical election for the advancement of nationalism in Ballinasloe. Discussions about its importance emerged in the press in April, despite the election not being scheduled to take place until October. Andrew Manning and William Ivers had already been elected due to their membership of the Land League⁸⁶ and other members, Thomas Carroll, Garrett Larkin and John Ward were returned in 1882.⁸⁷ While there was great hope associated with this election, the *Western News* said there was resistance to electing ‘anyone professing liberalism’, which resulted in their agenda being ‘sunk in the mire’. The newspaper further argued that Ballinasloe would descend into a state of tyranny if there were no Land League members elected to the town commission.⁸⁸ Members that had been returned on previous occasions as nationalists were accused of abandoning their principles after being elected: ‘there is nothing in the history of local boards to compare with the vanity of men in this town’. They were accused of voting against proposals which would have provided assistance to poorer tenants in the town: ‘it is painful to see men who stood on Land League platforms pretending to sympathise with the people coming into the board rooms to vote against the man who suffered in their cause’.⁸⁹

Some nationalists were accused of becoming Clancarty minions after their election: ‘when [the conservatives] cannot return a member of their own body, [they] are determined to avenge their own defeat by sticking together to keep out men who would as well as discharging their local duties represent the national cause ... when

⁸⁶ *W. N.*, 15 Apr. 1882.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 7 Oct. 1882.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 21 Oct. 1882.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 15 Apr. 1882.

they cannot return conservative Protestants, they seek to return conservative Catholics'.⁹⁰ The nature of the franchise meant that nationalist guardians felt obliged to canvass Protestant and conservative voters in order to be elected, but 'the nominee of landlordism and of slavery headed the poll in a remarkable degree'.⁹¹ While Thomas Carroll and Garrett Larkin were elected on nationalist principles, they were accused of courting conservative support in order to increase their vote. This manifested itself when Larkin refused to allow Land League members attend a meeting because Lord Clancarty was in attendance. The *Western News* further criticised the ability of nationalists to act as capable commissioners, arguing that they failed to reduce rates as promised and had accepted tenders from outside the town: 'They try to gull the people with an untruthful card, but they do not lay down a programme for the future'.⁹² Despite the election of nationalists, the *Western News* thought the process of returning candidates in Ballinasloe was biased towards members of the gentry: 'why, above all towns in Ireland were Catholics excluded from the Ballinasloe town board? We wish it now to be borne in mind that we are not raising any sectarian question; we are stating facts to which we will adhere, no matter the consequences'.⁹³

Clancarty's tenants were also accused of becoming more conservative in the hope of attracting favours from him. Despite aggrieved mutterings in the pages of the *Western News*, there was no evidence to suggest that Clancarty was reviving the anti-

⁹⁰ *W. N.*, 21 Oct. 1882.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ *ibid.*, 7 Oct. 1882.

Catholic leanings of his predecessors in order to assert his authority over the running of the board or the estate. Nationalists were treated with circumspection because some were engaging in unsuitable political rhetoric, instead of making an effort to effectively manage the town. There is no evidence to suggest that Clancarty tenants were dissatisfied with his estate management policies, therefore they did not challenge his hegemony or authority at election time.⁹⁴ It may also have been the case as R. V. Comerford argued that apathy and deference prevented farmers from seeking election to town commissions and boards of guardians especially when landlord politicians showed some interest in their concerns.⁹⁵

Matt Harris's arrest in April 1881, because of his seditious language on Land League platforms, was a significant development in the Land War and helped to smash the militant core of the Land League executive. After his release from prison in February 1882, he was asked to sign a declaration when he resumed attending town commission meetings, but he refused to do so, fearing that this could be setting a dangerous precedent. Harris thought the board was being evasive by not giving him an answer regarding his status as a member, but he eventually resumed attending meetings without apparently signing the affidavit. It is unclear how this matter was eventually resolved, but while it was ongoing, nationalists murmured that Clancarty was treated in a more deferential manner. He had not attended town commission meetings between October 1882 and July 1883. The *Western News* pointed out that the 'Ballinasloe town board enjoys the unique position of being without a chairman, a

⁹⁴ *W. N.*, 4 Nov. 1882.

⁹⁵ Comerford, *The Fenians in context*, p. 224.

position that will not be found in any other municipality in Ireland'.⁹⁶ No attempt was made to replace him until the election of the new commission in October, while they appeared to have been more willing to censure Harris, despite his absence being a result of incarceration.⁹⁷

In July 1882 the Ballinasloe branch of the Land League proposed that parliamentary election laws needed to be restructured because 'the tenant farmers are wholly unrepresented, the artisans are unrepresented and the labourers are totally unrepresented'.⁹⁸ Harris wanted 'the working men of Ballinasloe [to realise] the great and absorbing necessity [that] there is for union amongst themselves', because they could remove the 'shackles of slavery' if they organised.⁹⁹ He was sceptical of the sincerity of anyone claiming to represent the interests of the labouring classes: 'if you want to improve your own condition and raise yourself in the social status, then it is to your own class that you will have to look'.¹⁰⁰ James Kilmartin recommended that a fund be established to ensure the election of working men to parliament: 'out of the eighty, artisans and labouring classes would be fairly represented and you would have for the first time in the British House of Commons, tenant farmers, artisans and working men of Ireland' and he said:

My friends though this meeting was hurriedly got up, I am proud to see it so well attended. The great land movement received its inception [here in

⁹⁶ *W. N.*, 28 Jul. 1883.

⁹⁷ For more on Harris' arrest see file on him in *Protection of Persons and Property Act*, Box 1 and Box 2, in N.A.I.; *W. N.*, 25 Feb. 1882; *ibid.*, 28 July 1883; Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, p. 170.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 29 Jul. 1882.

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

Ballinasloe] and was so productive of benefit to all classes so it is now to be hoped that Ballinasloe taking the lead as always that this great Labour League will extend the length and breadth of the country and be the means of conferring unheard of blessings on the people of this country.¹⁰¹

Kilmartin wanted Irish M.P.s to receive some form of financial remuneration so that they ‘would be more independent of English and government influence and more under the control of their constituencies and of Irish public opinion if they were paid by the Irish people’, but for this to happen ‘we must put our hands into our pockets and fill our own exchequer and pay our representatives’.¹⁰² In 1880 Harris stated that it would be degrading for him as an Irishman to seek election and in 1882 he further said that he was not inspired with the parliamentary candidates elected by voters in Ballinasloe on previous occasions because they were the ‘vile nominee of the landlord ... candidates that made protestations of patriotism which they never intended to fulfil’.¹⁰³ The alliance with moderate Home Rulers and the threat that this presented to the radicalism of the movement undoubtedly alarmed Harris and the emergence of graziers as the dominant force amongst Irish farmers added to his concerns.¹⁰⁴ Up until the 1885 election, the Irish Parliamentary Party was hesitant about running working class candidates for election. Henry Harrison, a former nationalist M.P., said: ‘in Parnell’s days a rich as well as a politically robust parliamentary candidate would be preferred to a poor one, on the grounds, not of class, but of costs to party funds’. Liberal caucuses in Britain also preferred to run bourgeois candidates instead of

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

¹⁰² *W. N.*, 29 Jul. 1882.

¹⁰³ *W. N.*, 29 Jul. 1882; Text of speech at Ahascragh, County Galway, 19 December 1880, *Irish Land League and Irish National League*. Reports of speeches A-L, 1879-1888 Carton 2, in N. A. I.

¹⁰⁴ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, p. 75.

penniless and expensive working men.¹⁰⁵ However, the influence that the I. N. L. had now gathered in the countryside, coupled with the expansion of the franchise, made it more feasible that by 1885 Harris would run. He decided to do so at the instigation of Parnell, who called him the ‘Grandfather of the Land League’ and he was comfortably returned, defeating Liberal candidate Richard Anthony Nugent by 4,866 to 352 votes.¹⁰⁶ His election was significant because any potential influence the landlords could have exerted in the newly created constituency of Galway east was now gone and in turn, it signified Clancarty’s declining influence. While Parnell wanted his M.P.s to ‘sit, act and vote as one’ in parliament, Harris issued a caveat to his leader, stating that he would:

Go into the house, the citadel of the enemy ... I go there not for the purpose of assisting that house or the members of that House, in any effort they make to oppress Ireland. If I go in there it will be alone in the interests of my country, and I shall face them in the interests of our common humanity against that monstrous government ... that government of inequity that has done more evil than any government has ever done since the creation of the world .¹⁰⁷

Ballinasloe was never a centre of any sort of sustained agitation during the first phase of the Land War. P. K. Egan stated that ‘while many of the more stirring events of the Land League and Plan of Campaign took place in the diocese of Clonfert, the agitation did not reach great heights in the parish of Ballinasloe, where landlords were, on the whole, comparatively liberal’, despite 1,200 persons being dependent upon aid from the Mansion House Relief Committee, the Duchess of Marlborough

¹⁰⁵ Biagini, *British democracy and Irish Nationalism* p. 178.

¹⁰⁶ *W. N.*, 31 Oct. 1885; B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (Dublin, 1977), p. 132.

¹⁰⁷ *W. N.*, 5 Dec. 1885.

and other similar private charitable initiatives and loyalty for Clancarty while implicit, was resolute. However, Tory peers, like Clancarty were becoming demoralised by the Land War and the legislation that emerged from it.¹⁰⁸

IV.) Lord Clancarty's reaction to the Land War and rent reductions on the estate

The British government did not initially see the land agitation as a significant threat until May 1880, when rents were due and there was real worry about the condition of farmers in the west, because of intensity of the distress there. Parnell's speech in Ennis that September extolling tenants not to be afraid to use a 'moral coventry' against their neighbours and landlords that did not conform to the ways of the Land League increased both its popularity and that of Parnell, with resident magistrates expressing alarm at large displays of strength during the winter of 1880–1.¹⁰⁹ The political propaganda and speeches on Land League platforms electrified the countryside. Pent up resentment rather than any ideology caused many of the more serious outrages in east Galway. Such unrest was indicative of the various social realignments and tensions taking place in nineteenth-century Ireland. While the Galway East Riding saw a massive jump in the number of threatening letters issued to persons in the district, from seventeen in 1879 to 116 in 1882, Ballinasloe town and the Clancarty estate were in a relatively peaceful condition.¹¹⁰

In order to make the Land League more appealing to farmers outside of

¹⁰⁸ Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, pp 267, 276; David Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, Conn., 1990), pp 63–5.

¹⁰⁹ Stephen Ball, 'Policing the Irish Land War: Official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879–91' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2000), pp 57, 62.

¹¹⁰ A. B. Finnegan, *The Land War in south-east Galway* (unpublished M. A. thesis, UCG, 1974), pp 39, 51.

Connaught and to make it a truly national movement, it became necessary for it to dampen its radicalism. The growing influence of graziers saw the movement lurching towards the right and Matt Harris expressed the resentments of western farmers in relation to such a shift and his comments on the political power of graziers showed a shrewdness that has not been appreciated sufficiently in historiography; especially considering that the Land League was initially established and organised by lower class politicians.¹¹¹ The most significant obstacle that small farmers and labourers faced was that larger farmers' objectives eventually became the dominant ideology of the Land League and there were no circumstances whereby they would advocate self-immolation by acceding to reforms for either labourers or small farmers. While the social base of the movement was wider than anything that preceded it; motions passed at meetings focused upon the grievances of farmers to the neglect of labourers. This nascent, loose and supposedly pragmatic alliance soon dominated Land League ideology, as stronger farmers fought to assert their hegemony.¹¹²

Clancarty only suffered intermittent odium during the first phase of the Land War. At a Land League meeting held in Ballinasloe on 19 March 1881 James Kilmartin called him a tyrant and accused him of serving forty eviction notices, though no evidence survives to substantiate this. Kilmartin said he 'would denounce [Clancarty] if he tyrannises over and rackrents tenants' and he criticized the estate management policies in his testimony to the Bessborough Commission. He said that

¹¹¹ Owen McGee, *The I. R. B., The Irish Republican Brotherhood: from the Land League to Sinn Fein* (Dublin, 2007), p. 66.

¹¹² L. P. Curtis, Jr, 'On class and class conflict in the Land War' in *Irish Economic and Social History* viii (1981), p. 87,

Clancarty prevented his tenants from selling their holdings for fear of setting a precedent (but possibly to prevent consolidation, considering his father's antipathy to same: see chapter one). This, Kilmartin argued, increased hardship for tenants in arrears: 'any estate that works in that way injures the tenant'. Kilmartin drew upon the example of a tenant with a nine acre farm on the estate that wanted to surrender her holding, but was only allowed to claim for improvements, which amounted to £18. Kilmartin was of the belief that she could have been entitled to claim £100 if she was allowed to sell her interest in the holding.¹¹³ Harris was especially displeased with Clancarty and the condition of some of his tenants' cabins and in October 1885 he called Clancarty a 'wretched and a diseased rotten old ruin'. In the same speech, Harris made further comments were about Clancarty after he visited one of his tenants lying on a damp bed of straw. He said that he 'would take and place Lord Clancarty on this bed of damp straw, and let the rain pour down on his rotten old head and his rotten old bones'.¹¹⁴ By the late 1880s, criticisms of Clancarty became more frequent and this is discussed in chapter six.

Samuel Clark contended that many landlords failed to exploit the fortuitous circumstances of the post-Famine period for their benefit by increasing the rents of tenants accordingly and when demands for reductions were made, landlords were presented with a peculiar dilemma. While some landlords did grant abatements on an individual basis, most were aghast at the very notion of universal reductions.¹¹⁵ The

¹¹³ Bessborough commission, p. 652, Qs 21,020–1.

¹¹⁴ Text of speech by Matt Harris at Ballinasloe, 18 Oct. 1885, in *Irish Land League and Irish National League*. Reports of speeches A–L, 1879–1888 Carton 2, in N.A.I.

¹¹⁵ Clark, *The social origins of the Land war*, pp 153–7, 223–7, 239–40; Terence Dooley, 'Landlords and the land question, 1879–1909' in Carla King (ed.), *Famine, land and culture in Ireland* (Dublin,

collapse of the price of agricultural produce was so significant that some ‘prices were not to reach their 1876 levels until 1914’. Many became cavalier in their attitude towards spending and borrowing as land was seen to be safe collateral. The construction of such a fickle credit system lured many into a false sense of security and the economic collapse of the late 1870s was a shock for those that did not know how to cope.¹¹⁶ This depression hit landlords in an acute way, with the value of estates collapsing and increasing number of tenants defaulting on their rents.¹¹⁷ By 1882 many small tenants in the Ballinasloe district were in such a poor condition that they could not afford to manure their holdings.¹¹⁸

The 1881 Land Act saw the establishment of land courts, whose purpose was to define a fair rent. While the three Fs were a decided benefit for tenant farmers, the pressing social problems in the west of Ireland still remained. However, it is important to note that the 1881 Land Act saw 275,000 rents being reduced by an average of twenty-one percent, and it provided the impetus for further reform¹¹⁹ As anti-landlordism was now firmly implanted in the collective consciousness of tenants farmers across the country, the three Fs were no longer adequate to satisfy their demands. There were manifold problems for the act to operate successfully, the most significant of which was the exclusion of tenants in arrears from the act.¹²⁰ Landlords became bitterly disillusioned and believed they had been emphatically failed by the

2000), p. 117; B. L. Solow, *The Land Question and the Irish economy, 1870–1903* (Cambridge, Mass, 1971), p. 17.

¹¹⁶ Donnelly, Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth-century Cork*, pp 250–2.

¹¹⁷ Clark, *The social origins of the Irish Land War*, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ *W. N.*, 14 Jan. 1882.

¹¹⁹ Bew, *Land and the national question in Ireland*, pp 224, 236.

¹²⁰ Donnelly., *The land and the people of nineteenth century Cork*, pp 300–305; see also Bew, *Land and the national question*, pp 104–11.

government and they could not comprehend the rationale behind reducing rents. The fixing of 'fair rents' coincided with an increase in arrears, which was a further burden for landlords. Rents could be fixed by the two parties concerned through negotiation, but if that failed, the land court would fix the rent through arbitration.¹²¹ The government attempted to address the problem of arrears with the 1882 Arrears Act, which wrote off over £2 million in overdue rents for tenants owing £30 or less. However, it is unclear what benefit tenants on the Clancarty estate derived from this act.

The *Western News* expressed disappointment with the lack of tenant farmers on any of the sub-committees: 'it is an extraordinary thing that not one out of the 600,000 tenant farmers in Ireland was thought worthy of being appointed a sub-commissioner ... Since the landlord meeting in Dublin; the decisions of the Commissioners seem to lean more and more to the landlord side'.¹²²

Tenants were presented with two problems in getting their rents reduced. The first was that many could not afford the average cost of an appeal, which could be between £3 and £4. Secondly, many were ignorant of the minutiae of the law and did not realise that they were obliged to pay the negotiated rents for fifteen years. The volatility of the agricultural economy meant that many of those caught unawares would not have acceded to such an agreement if they had been fully informed.¹²³

The *Western News* objected to landlords using the land courts because of the cost that

¹²¹ Terence Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860–1960* (Dublin, 2001), pp 90–6.

¹²² *W. N.*, 14 Jan. 1882.

¹²³ *ibid.*; K. Buckley, 'The fixing of rents by agreement in Co. Galway, 1881–5' in *Irish Historical Studies*, vii, no. 27, (1951), p. 152

tenants would be forced to bear. However, because they would ‘subject themselves to the public odium which the exposure of their nefarious conduct must sooner or later incur’, the newspaper saw some benefit to this.¹²⁴

Landlords that negotiated reductions with their tenants were seen to be good, while those that went to the Land Court were accused of acting in a capricious manner. Tenant-farmers in the Ballinasloe district did not want to go to the land courts, because they believed it would only rule in favour of landlords. Samuel Clark has pointed out that ‘taking a landlord to court was a dangerous way in which to bargain with him’.¹²⁵ Tenants’ hopes to have their rents reduced to the poor law valuation alarmed landlords and their agents. According to Buckley: ‘Generally speaking, all landlords ... regarded the poor law valuation of a holding a danger point, below which they were very loath to reduce rents’.¹²⁶ Buckley argued that in Galway, the poor law valuation of a holding was a better indication of its value rather than its size.¹²⁷

The *Western News* did not think judicially fixed rents would lead to an equitable resolution of the land question, because they were deemed to favour landlords who tried to ‘evade the law by every means in their power’.¹²⁸ Nationally 16.7 per cent of all rents were reduced in agreements reached outside of court, with a further 19.5 per cent reduced in court, while in Galway, this figure was 19.2 per cent

¹²⁴ *W. N.*, 7 Oct. 1882; Buckley, ‘The fixing of rents by agreement in Co. Galway, 1881–5’, pp 149–51.

¹²⁵ Clark, *The social origins of the Irish land war*, p. 179.

¹²⁶ Buckley, ‘The fixing of rents by agreement in Co. Galway, 1881–5’, p. 163.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*, pp 152–4, 163, 171.

¹²⁸ *W. N.*, 14 Jan. 1882.

and 21 per cent respectively.¹²⁹ Tenants on the Clancarty estate were frequently granted abatements by the agent, Edward Fowler, once there were no proceedings being initiated in the land courts. Such a policy resulted in Clancarty tenants paying their rents punctually and those that did were accused of damaging the nationalist cause and were obviously not obeying the law of the League.¹³⁰ The *Western News* remarked:

What can we do? If we object, out we go. We must submit to the rules of the office. As long as men of intelligence punctually pay their rents in such a fashion, we don't pity them, or sympathise with them in their slavish submission to the rules of the office.¹³¹

In 1885 abatements were granted to rural tenants, but not urban tenants, as they were not covered under the terms of the land acts. Clancarty was accused of acting unfairly when he demanded the full payment of their rents, but he had no legal obligation to grant any abatements to them because their tenancies were not covered under the terms of the 1881 land act.¹³²

Despite Land League leaders across the country stating their dissatisfaction with the 1881 Land Act, tenants on the Clancarty estate appeared to have been satisfied with the level of rents they were being asked to pay. Unsurprisingly some were not, and they went to the land court in order to have their rents reduced.. One tenant, John Morgan began to rent a fifty-one acre farm from Clancarty in 1864 and its poor law valuation was £18 and he paid £31 4s. in rent. He wanted the rent

¹²⁹ *W. N.*, 14 Jan. 1882; 8 Apr. 1882; Buckley, 'The fixing of rents by agreement in Co. Galway, 1881-5', pp 150-1.

¹³⁰ *W. N.*, 14 Oct. 1882; 21 Oct. 1882; 4 Nov. 1882.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, 7 Oct. 1882.

¹³² *C. P.*, 19 Sept. 1885.

reduced to its valuation because the land was of quite poor quality. ‘And here your honour is all I am able to produce. The witness here produced some heath from out of his pocket and said that it was what he was asked to pay £1 4s. 0d. for. There was a good deal of laughter in the court’.¹³³ Morgan said that he had been threatened with eviction if he did not pay his rent prior to entering the court, ‘no matter the struggles ... Mr. St. George told me not to come late to courts and if I owed any rent I would be served with a writ’. A neighbour of Morgan’s testified he was always punctual in paying his rent and George Walker called him honest and ‘wished that Lord Clancarty had more tenants like him’. Mr. O’Farrell said that the grass farm did not come under the jurisdiction of the act and the case needed to be dismissed. The chairman disagreed with him and said that this case was under the terms of the act because the holding was under £50 valuation. Edward Fowler concurred with this and the rent was reduced to £22 1s. 0d.¹³⁴ Laurence Stoney held a farm of forty-eight acres, four roods and three perches and its poor law valuation was £33. His rent was £42 3s. 6d. and he wanted this reduced, despite the holding being of excellent quality overall. However, part of it declined in value over the previous three years, resulting in the rent being reduced to £33 10s. Clancarty was later commended for the ‘admirable drainage work [that] has been carried out’.¹³⁵ Fowler later expressed annoyance at the courts lack of appreciation of the investment in drainage Clancarty made and this is discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

In 1873 Patrick Byrne took possession of a farm of fifty-seven acres, four

¹³³ *W. N.*, 14 Jan. 1882.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, 25 Feb. 1882.

roods and six perches for an annual rent of £35 and this was increased to £45 in 1874 but was reduced again to £35 in 1879 by Edward Fowler. Despite resistance to this appeal, Byrne succeeded in getting it reduced to £30. After this, Fowler remarked: ‘when it is remembered that in 1879 it was reduced from £43 to £35 a year, this will be admitted as a substantial reduction’. However, St. George said ‘the landlord, Lord Clancarty by the reduction admitted that he had been rackrenting the tenant for a number of years’ and each side was then ordered to pay their own costs.¹³⁶

Fowler did not issue receipts to all tenants after they paid their rents, arguing that many did not look for one. Such implicit trust of Clancarty was dismissed as naivety by nationalists, especially as some tenants received ejection notices for accumulating arrears of two-and-a-half or three years, ‘and we are now within a fortnight of another half year being added to the already too heavy arrears ... The statement of particulars on the back set forth separately three half year rents at £2 10s. the half year’, which the Clancarty tenants were alleged to have owed.¹³⁷ Arthur Blake, a sub-agent on the estate, denied that extensive evictions were taking place as reported in the press, but admitted that one had taken place in Brackerneagh. The *Western News* said: ‘in times of distress and when the poor people have barely begun to resuscitate from the past three severe years, we say it is harsh for a rich noble man to resort to such extreme measures ... to exact even half the rent for these three years that was paid on previous years we deny to be a just debt’.¹³⁸ It further stated that processes for eviction were served for arrears of a year and a half of £7 10s., when it

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, 29 Apr. 1882.

¹³⁷ *W. N.*, 21 Oct. 1882.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, 21 Oct. 1882; 4 Nov. 1882.

should have been £4 10s. Clancarty was asked to explain this because ‘the statement in the process is a complete puzzle ... We do not wish to write stronger until we have an explanation of the figures in the processes’. Fowler admitted such demands was a clerical error.¹³⁹ He did not appreciate the opinions of the *Western News* in this matter: ‘and now, because Lord Clancarty is enabled to recover his legal rights, he is held up by you to public odium’¹⁴⁰ Clancarty was accused of serving twenty processes on small holdings in the districts of Killahornia, Kilclooney, Derrymullen and Brackernagh, where tenants had accumulated arrears of a-year-and-a-half’s rent. The *Western News* was aghast with this and said such writs inflicted undue hardship: ‘if the poor people are not able to pay rent, they are less able to pay legal expenses ... The poor have scarcely begun to resuscitate from the past three severe years ... it is harsh for a rich noble man to resort to such extreme measure’.¹⁴¹ The newspaper contended that the arrears involved did not go beyond £7; therefore the costs were quite harsh. Tenants had complained, but they were worried they would be evicted if their names were published.¹⁴² The *Western News* was concerned that if evictions did occur and traders began to seek payments from their creditors, workhouses would be full to capacity: ‘is this extermination of the people to be allowed to be continued? ... We recommend [Lord Clancarty] and his agent to realize the change in the times and recollect that the people have a stronger claim to the land than the beast that roams it ... in order that man may perish and bulls might fatten’.¹⁴³ A similar

¹³⁹ *W. N.*, 14 Oct. 1882; 21 Oct. 1882.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 14 Oct. 1882; 21 Oct. 1882.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1882.

¹⁴² *ibid.*, 21 Oct. 1882; 4 Nov. 1882.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, 7 Oct. 1882.

sentiment was expressed in the late 1880s and is referred to in chapter six.

The *Western News* acknowledged Clancarty was entitled to claim rents, but only from those that had the ability to pay; otherwise, ‘it is wrong to drive them to desolation’.¹⁴⁴ Fowler echoed Mark Bence-Jones’s (the land agent in Cork) concern that tenants were grossly mismanaging their holdings because ‘rents were very much in arrears’ on the estate and while economic stagnation affected the Clancarty estate, no noticeable agitation took place. Fowler claimed that rental income had declined by 20 percent in the previous seven years and this weakened the influence Clancarty could wield over his estate.¹⁴⁵

Clancarty tenants demanded a 25 percent reduction in their rents, but accepted a reduction of 20 percent on 23 June 1887 and this is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. This was in stark contrast to the marquis of Clanricarde, who was one of the most recalcitrant landlords in the country and he refused to grant any abatements to his tenants, despite the desperate condition of the Loughrea, Portumna and Woodford districts. Such a policy resulted in 541 rents on this estate being fixed between 1881 and July 1903.¹⁴⁶

In September 1885, further rumours emerged that Clancarty was contemplating a series of evictions and the I. N. L. encouraged tenants to unite in order to prevent this from happening, as they believed that Clancarty could do nothing if they presented a united front. Despite ‘the organisation of popular resistance to

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 4 Nov. 1882.

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Edward Fowler to Clonbrock dated 17 Jan 1883 (Clonbrock papers, MS 35,770 in the National Library of Ireland)

¹⁴⁶ Finnegan, *The Land War in south-east Galway* pp 66–7; Laurence Geary, *The Plan of Campaign, 1886–1891* (Cork, 1986), appendix two, p. 159, For more on rent reductions, see Donnelly, *The land and the people of nineteenth century Cork*, p. 301.

evictions [being] an integral part of Land League strategy during the first phase of the Land War’, there was little such resistance recorded on the Clancarty estate.¹⁴⁷

Evictions and the threat thereof were more emotive issues in rural Ireland than high rents and attracted sensationalist attention. W. E. Vaughan has estimated that twenty tenants in every 10,000 were evicted every year; therefore the threat of evictions exceeded the actual number of evictions that took place.¹⁴⁸ Such threats of evictions on the estate were rare. They were often an attempt to ensure that order was maintained on the estate and have been discussed in chapter one and will be examined in chapter six.¹⁴⁹

The intensity of the agitation and farmers’ determination to achieve reforms impressed Gladstone and his colleagues. John Morley – the chief secretary of Ireland between February and July 1886 and August 1892 and June 1895 – said: ‘In my heart, I feel that the League has done downright good work in raising up the tenants against their truly detestable tyrants’.¹⁵⁰ The intensity of the agitation forced the government to intervene through various coercion acts, which was an anomaly to their love of *laissez-faire*. Gladstone and his government interpreted Irish landlordism as a particularly pernicious system, viewing it beyond its social and economic paradigm once it transcended into the political realm and this resulted in them formulating an ‘intervention to end all interventions’. The government justified their legislative

¹⁴⁷ Ball, ‘Policing the Irish Land War: Official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879–91’, p. 124.

¹⁴⁸ W. E. Vaughan, ‘Landlord and tenant relations in Ireland between the famine and the Land War, 1850–1875’ in L. M. Cullen and Thomas Smout (eds), *Comparative perspectives of Scottish and Irish economic and social history 1600–1900* (Edinburgh, 1977), pp 218–19.

¹⁴⁹ For recent work on evictions, see L. P. Curtis, Jr., *The depiction of evictions in Ireland, 1845–1910* (Dublin, 2011).

¹⁵⁰ Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*, pp 63–5.

interference by arguing that Irish landlordism was the ‘last embodiment of feudalism’.¹⁵¹

Lord Clonbrock was opposed to such changes taking place because they had been initiated ‘by resistance to the law and by votes in the ballot box’ and this reflected the feelings that many Irish landlords had to the advance of democracy.¹⁵² Irish landlords felt betrayed by successive governments and were now isolated in their capacity to meet the challenge to the legitimacy of private property and their privileged position in Irish society.¹⁵³ ‘Allegedly, “landlordism” in Ireland was even more monopolistic than in the rest of the United Kingdom, because the landlords controlled not only the land, but also the police, the courts of justice and ultimately Dublin Castle’.¹⁵⁴

The land movement had gathered significant momentum by the time the Property Defence Association was established in January 1881. This association was established to assist boycotted landlords in the operation of their estates during a time of significant landlord demoralisation and was a very confrontational organization. L. P. Curtis called it the antithesis of the Irish Land Committee; which was a short lived and rather insipid landlord propaganda entity that lobbied against land reform.¹⁵⁵ The P. D. A. was the most effective landlord combination during the Land War and was both a well-managed and well-funded organisation.¹⁵⁶ It worked to counteract

¹⁵¹ Biagini, *British democracy and Irish nationalism*, pp 110, 131.

¹⁵² Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*, p. 66.

¹⁵³ Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp 90–6.

¹⁵⁴ Biagini, *British democracy and Irish nationalism*, pp 110, 131.

¹⁵⁵ Bew, *Land the national question in Ireland*, pp 155–6; L. P. Curtis, Jr., ‘Landlord responses to the Land War’ in *Eire-Ireland*, xxxviii, nos 3–4 (2003), pp 169–70, 178.

¹⁵⁶ Curtis, ‘Landlord responses to the Land War’, p. 173.

boycotts by deploying workers, known as 'emergency men', to work on boycotted estates and organised evictions in Craughwell and Loughrea, but it failed to take root in the vicinity of the Clancarty estate.¹⁵⁷

It soon became obvious in the early months of 1881 that 'where the landlords were prepared to finance agents to bid for the interests of farms, cattle and other goods sold at sheriff sales, they had the power to unnerve the tenantry'.¹⁵⁸ Clancarty contributed £20 to the P. D. A. and in a letter to Clonbrock, he stated that he would continue making a financial contribution: 'as long as the association may be obliged to continue, which I suppose will be till the government re-establish law and order and renew confidence among all classes in the country, if ever such a happy day should arrive, this side of the millennium'.¹⁵⁹

Despite supporting the P. D. A., Clancarty had no interest in becoming an active member, because its objectives did not personally concern him:

I suppose my position will be altered by the Association, if I require at any time 'Emergency men'. I think I have the best kind of P. D. A. here, as Lord Clonbrock also has in a loyal staff of labourers, one half of whom would be in the workhouse or some kind of relief if not employed by us.¹⁶⁰

Clancarty was true to his word. While the Galway branch of the Irish Land Committee eventually morphed into the P. D. A. on 23 January 1882, there is no record of Clancarty having attended any meetings of either organisation in the surviving minute book, located in the Clonbrock papers in the National Library of

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁵⁸ Bew, *Land the national question in Ireland*, pp 155–6.

¹⁵⁹ Clancarty to Clonbrock letter dated 5 Feb. 1882 (N. L. I., Clonbrock papers MS 35,771), Minute book of the Galway Irish Land Committee and Property Defence Association, (N. L. I., Clonbrock papers, MS 19,678)

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

Ireland, though his agent, Edward Fowler attended four meetings. While Clancarty appreciated that ‘emergency men’ were necessary on some estates, he was concerned that if they continued to act in such a provocative manner, it would contribute to a further deterioration in the condition of the countryside. Clonbrock disagreed with this, asserting that they were crucial in preventing harvests from going to waste and for filling labour shortages.¹⁶¹

With the proclamation of the Land League as an illegal organisation on 20 October 1881, the authorities hoped that they had seen the last of the agitation that had swept the countryside. However, the formation of the Irish National League saw ‘plans for the pacification of the Irish countryside frustrated’ and there was a revival of meetings taking place in November and December 1882. Stephen Ball stated that twenty-five public meetings had taken place, mostly in large market towns.¹⁶² ‘At this time of the year when landlords are pressing for rents and when agitators are endeavouring to frighten the farmers into subscribing for their maintenance, protection cannot be further reduced’.¹⁶³ The agitation had died down after this, but special resident magistrate Clifford Lloyd was concerned that there would be a revival by August 1883 in the west of Ireland. He noted there was disagreement amongst nationalists and the movement took divergent roads with a more obvious urban/rural division beginning to emerge.

¹⁶¹ Letter to the Irish Land Committee re the establishment of a branch of the Property Defence Association in Galway (N. L. I., Clonbrock papers, MS 35,771). For more on landlord responses to the Land War, see also Curtis, ‘Landlord responses to the Irish Land War, 1879–87’, pp 134–89.

¹⁶² Ball, ‘Policing the Irish Land War: Official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879–91’, p. 65.

¹⁶³ C. S. O., R. P., 1882/45568.

There are now in [provincial] Ireland, two parties, one the farming class and other respectable people who wish to take advantage of late legislation and to enjoy its fruits, the other the village members of the late Land League who “toil not” but are rather anxious to continue to live upon what they can extort from others and to enjoy the local influence which they possess as the recognised commanders of the ‘moonlighters’ of their districts. It is the opinion of every district officer that if the national league meetings are permitted this autumn throughout the country that the former class will be thrown again as they were at the beginning of the Land League movement into the arms of the latter. The Irish people will always openly declare whatever their feelings would be for what appears to them to be the strong side. A farmer may be excused believing the party of disorder to be in the ascendant when he finds every element of crime (of which a National League meeting and the circumstances attending it is let loose about the district in which he lives.¹⁶⁴

The primary aim of special resident magistrates was to suppress the agrarian agitation, and they frequently had a rigid and simplistic interpretation of it.¹⁶⁵ Lloyd was of the opinion that the progression of the Land War saw local nationalist leaders assume positions of a dictatorial nature and he was dismissive of the people that attended land meetings; calling them impulsive and uneducated that were easily swayed by priestly influences. ‘That many priests even in their spirited contact with the people inculcate their doctrine is beyond doubt’.¹⁶⁶ This reflected the idea of the I. N. L. emerging as a proto-governmental organisation that the people demurred to. Harris and Kilmartin believed that meetings like this symbolised a form of liberty, but Lloyd thought: ‘it is a liberty that every local farmer in his heart prays to be deprived of’ and he believed that significant collective pressure was exerted upon tenants to attend these meetings and there was a massive risk of social ostracisation for non-attendance. Stephen Ball argued that ‘rural communities attempted to become self-

¹⁶⁴ C. S. O., R. P., 1883/20404.

¹⁶⁵ Ball, ‘Policing the Irish Land War: Official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879–91’, p. 163.

¹⁶⁶ C. S. O., R. P., 1880/20404.

regulating under the influence of branch committees, which was reflective of the power of rural collective action'.¹⁶⁷ Despite this, the leadership failed to revive the agitation in many parts of Galway between 1883 and 1885, with Lloyd remarking:

The farmers have shown clearly that they do not want to join the new movement; they have declined to attend its meetings and refused to pay their subscriptions to its funds. The agitation will now if they are allowed by public speeches excite the people and by private pressure compel them to make the national league a success.¹⁶⁸

The vigour of the I. N. L. revitalised a dormant movement and while landlord–tenant relations had improved during 1883, with few outrages recorded in the aftermath of evictions; intimidation was still being used to prevent people taking evicted farms and giving evidence at criminal trials.¹⁶⁹ Lloyd said professional agitators were intimidating tenants into not paying their rents. He said that they were reviled by the authorities for stirring up agitation on previous occasions to the point of murder. 'Harris has fled the country as evidence against him of having instigated the murders in county Galway was accumulating', though Lloyd was prone to exaggeration in his reports.¹⁷⁰

They show an almost complete immunity from agrarian crime of any sort and record a complete dying out of every sign of activity in the various secret societies which were organised throughout the country ... Hundreds of leaders in the movement of disorder and crime have left the country for America, leaving the people to be guided by their own instincts, in accordance with their own interests. With an almost complete cessation of crime, with trade reviving, the prospect of a good harvest ... all classes of criminals flying out of the country ... the future will be one of less anxiety and ... if the government now

¹⁶⁷ Ball, 'Policing the Irish Land War: Official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879–91', p. 236.

¹⁶⁸ C. S. O., R. P., 1880/20404.

¹⁶⁹ C. S. O., R. P., 1883/20404

¹⁷⁰ C. S. O., R. P., 1882/45568.

adopts measures for developing the resources of the country by promoting schemes for opening up communication throughout the south and west ... hope for a permanent improvement in the condition of the people both politically and socially.¹⁷¹

By June 1883, agrarian crime had died out almost completely and Ballinasloe was in a peaceable condition with the exception of Ahascragh, a village seven miles outside the town.

V.) Conclusion

The 1880s was a significant decade in the development of popular politics in Ireland.¹⁷² Involvement in political and agrarian agitation gave local nationalists greater confidence to challenge Clancarty's management of his estate. However, tenant loyalty prevented any real or systematic threat being presented to his legitimacy. Donald Jordan maintained that larger farmers were responsible for many of the periods of unrest, thus the lack of agitation on the Clancarty estate could be apportioned to the structure of land holding on the estate, i.e. it was made up of small tenant farmers and town tenants, many of whom appeared to have derived benefit from the altruistic estate management that was perpetuated during the time frame of this thesis.¹⁷³

The Land War became the critical episode in transforming the position of the landlord class by removing any popular support for landlordism. L. P. Curtis argued

¹⁷¹ C. S. O., R. P., 1883/15227.

¹⁷² Ball, 'Policing the Irish Land War: Official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879–91', p. 120.

¹⁷³ Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe*, pp 267, 276; Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British Aristocracy*, pp 63–5; Donald Jordan, 'Merchants, "strong farmers" and Fenians, the post-famine elite and the Irish Land War', p. 320.

that: ‘Land League leaders had made it clear that their long-term goal was to eliminate landlords, no matter how benevolent individual landowners might be’.¹⁷⁴ The rise of the urban bourgeoisie in post-Famine Ireland saw an increased inter-dependency between towns and the rural hinterland, resulting in the Land War becoming a ‘bitter conflict between two sets of creditors’.¹⁷⁵ Even though the urban milieu had a disproportionate influence upon the land movement, it would not have achieved the proportions it did without their assistance.¹⁷⁶

Harris said ‘the labourers were the great backbone of the great Land League agitation, while if left to those who have derived all the benefit, the farmers, it would never have assumed the proportions that it did’. There was a purity about the feckless labourer for Harris: ‘the poorer he is, the lower he is, the more despised he is, the better’.¹⁷⁷ Those that claimed to be representatives of the various strata of the countryside outside the landlord class were contemptuous of labourers. While they were courted by revolutionary and constitutional politicians, their plight was not as romantic as the rhetoric suggested. No attempts were made to unite urban and rural labourers in a common agitation, resulting in labourers being isolated in the crisis that they faced. They had to fight for their own cause, because ‘no help had been forthcoming from rural Ireland and none was imminent’.¹⁷⁸

R. V. Comerford has claimed that the Ballinasloe branch of the Land League was a significant branch within the movement, but despite being so, it

¹⁷⁴ Curtis, ‘Landlord responses to the Land War’, p. 149.

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁷⁷ *W. N.*, 29 July 1882.

¹⁷⁸ Moran, ‘The Land War, urban destitution and town tenant protest, 1879–1882’, pp 24, 27–8.

comprehensively failed to mobilise Clancarty tenants to agitate against their landlord. Despite such an apparent anomaly, this period saw repeated challenges to Clancarty's authority on various bodies in the town of Ballinasloe, such as the board of guardians and the town commission and such a challenge to landlord authority was taking place across the country. This was juxtaposed with periods of co-operation between Clancarty, nationalists and the clergy, in efforts to alleviate mendicancy in the town. Nationalists failed to break the stranglehold of the Clancarty family in electoral politics at a local level, as the first phase of the agitation dissipated. Tenants still felt a degree of loyalty towards the family, with the *Western News* stating some still touched their caps as they walked past his agent, Edward Fowler in the street in December 1885. This was despite the success of the Land League of 'having taught the tenants the simple, but symbolic gesture of not doffing their caps to landlords'.¹⁷⁹ As the agitation began to enter its second phase, opinion against Clancarty became more vehement as nationalists began to challenge the legitimacy to his rule more strenuously and more frequently in the second half of the 1880s.

¹⁷⁹ *W. N.*, 5 Dec. 1885; J.J. Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society, 1848–1918* (Dublin, 1972), p. 89.

CHAPTER SIX:
THE CLANCARTY ESTATE DURING THE ERA OF THE PLAN OF
CAMPAIGN, 1886–1891

I.) Introduction

Landlords had become increasingly economically and politically vulnerable as a result of the agitation of 1879–82. Terence Dooley has argued that many ‘were demoralised by how indiscriminate the Land War was in that it affected improving landlords in the same way as it affected negligent ones’ and their grip on local politics began to loosen.¹ Until the 1870s landlords could dictate the outcome of local government elections though there was a metamorphosis of Poor Law administration in Ireland, ‘as it ceased to operate as a branch of landlord–dominated local government and became tenant controlled assemblies’. Prior to this, landlord influence ensured that their favourites were returned.² Political representation brought with it respectability and the small town middle classes – shopkeepers, publicans and tenant farmers desired the respectability and influence once held by their aristocratic overlords and the desire for such respectability intensified in the late 1880s.

Virginia Crossman contended that once tenants ‘began to operate collectively, the illusory nature of landlord pre–eminence was exposed’ and such unity of purpose ensured that they began to gain control in local political affairs.³ Landlords were now becoming unimportant as the British government began losing interest in their plight, seeing them as an avaricious entity that was doing little to stem their decline. Similarly, W. E.

¹ Terence Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860–1960* (Dublin, 2001), pp 209–10

² Virginia Crossman, *Politics, pauperism and power in late nineteenth–century Ireland* (Manchester, 2006), p. 36.

³ *ibid.*

Vaughan remarked that ‘they were a less important vested interest in a rapidly expanding empire than they would have been in an Irish polity’.⁴ Their remaining source of power, their estates, were slowly disintegrating, due in part to the land legislation being initiated in parliament and this was coupled with declining deference from tenants, which they believed would spring eternal. All this resulted in them facing a multiplicity of problems in controlling local interests. Terence Dooley has stated that this declining deference, coupled with increased hostility, saw landlords becoming increasingly isolated so that as R. V. Comerford has contended, the Land War became a form of civil war that poisoned relations in the countryside. Irish landlords were not in W. E. Gladstone’s vision of a changing empire, with Eugenio Biagini asserting that Gladstonian land purchase required a massive investment of capital, in the hope that it would finally resolve this imperial crisis.⁵

The apathy of Irish landlords as a result of this tenant activity isolated them from even their most ardent supporters in the Conservative party, who were becoming dismayed with their attitudes and somewhat recidivistic estate policies. Nationalists portrayed them as heartless oppressors and the English press treated them with a disdain that bordered on contempt, which intensified during the Plan of Campaign. L. P. Curtis has recently argued that the reputation of landlords had been irreparably damaged due to the attitude of the incredibly eccentric Marquis of Clanricarde, who ‘single-handedly did more to tarnish the reputation of his class than any other landowner’.⁶

The lack of a clearly defined Irish policy on the part of the Conservatives after they came to power had left a lacuna regarding the governing of many districts, which the Irish National League filled. The Inspector General of the Royal Irish Constabulary,

⁴ W. E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994) p. 219

⁵ Eugenio Biagini, Gladstone (New York, 2000), p. 105; R. V. Comerford, *The Fenians in context, Irish politics and society, 1848–1882* (Dublin, 1998), p. 224; Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp 211–12; Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants* pp 221–2.

⁶ L. P. Curtis, *The depiction of eviction in Ireland, 1845–1910* (Dublin, 2011), p. 137.

Sir Andrew Reed, attributed the decline in crime to the efforts of the league.⁷ The I. N. L. became well established in the countryside and served as a quasi governmental organisation in many districts, partly due to the moral legitimacy that the land question afforded.⁸

On the Clancarty estate, this burgeoning nationalist elite wanted to capitalise on the obvious decline of the Clancarty family. Previous, infrequent criticisms towards Clancarty became more regular and focused upon his apparent refusal to co-operate with tenants on matters regarding the management of the estate. Prior to the mid-1880s, deference towards the Clancarty family was reasonably solid, though with some challenges to it and this has been explored in previous chapters. Rather than trying to turn public opinion against Lord Clancarty, nationalists challenged his hegemony on elected boards. This chapter explores all these issues within the confines of the Clancarty estate, while also assessing how the estate, located so close to the highly disturbed Loughrea district and Clanricarde estate, escaped the worst of the Plan of Campaign. While nationalists were slowly gaining the upper hand in local politics, the animosity of local landowners to their growing influence was never far from the surface and clashes between nationalists and *ex-officio* guardians often resulted in the disruption of the effective management of local government in Ballinasloe and also threatened to irreparably damage hitherto harmonious relations on the estate.

II.) Lord Clancarty, the Ballinasloe town commission and urban improvements

The previous benevolence of the Clancarty family led the chairman of the Ballinasloe town commission in 1886, John Ward, to suggest that they identify a suitable site for the construction of a town hall and then ask Lord Clancarty if he would provide a site *gratis*.

⁷ Virginia Crossman, *Politics, law and order in nineteenth century Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), pp 153, 156.

⁸ Philip Bull, 'Land and politics, 1879-1903' in D. G. Boyce (ed) *The revolution in Ireland, 1879-1923* (Dublin, 1988) pp 28-9.

As the agricultural hall was being under utilised, it was recommended that it be acquired to fulfil such a purpose. Clancarty did not respond to repeated communications about this matter and his failure to do so was interpreted as a direct refusal to co-operate with his tenants. William Putrill remarked that this was becoming a frequent occurrence: ‘several public matters dealing with this town are not treated properly by either the rent office or Lord Clancarty’.⁹ Matt Harris suggested the town commission had the power to appropriate the hall and if it was utilised, it would have the added effect of showing Clancarty that his influence and control over the running of the town was waning.¹⁰ This matter was not resolved until 1913, when Fr Timothy Joyce succeeded in raising sufficient funds to purchase the Agricultural Hall from the Clancarty estate and he then converted it into a town hall, which remained under the control of the parish. The *East Galway Democrat* commended Fr Joyce for his work and remarked: ‘now within a couple of weeks more there will be opened for Ballinasloe, a town hall, one of the finest and most spacious to be found in any town in Ireland’.¹¹

Clancarty’s unwillingness to relocate the market house became a far more contentious affair. The building was erected in 1868 and consisted of twelve butcher stalls, which were rented out to traders for one shilling a week. By 1888 it had become dilapidated and unsanitary due to an accumulation of offal and filth. Patrick O’Connor said its dishevelled appearance resulted in inadequate market facilities being available in the town. George Gleeson Bowler argued that they were entitled to have it removed because it was a health hazard under section eighty-eight of the 1887 Public Health Act, which stated that: ‘any urban authority may purchase any premises for the purpose of widening ... [or] improving any street’.¹²

⁹ *W. N.*, 8 Mar. 1886;

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 8 Mar. 1886; 13 Mar. 1886; 27 Mar. 1886; 23 Jan. 1888.

¹¹ *East Galway Democrat*, 29 Mar. 1913.

¹² *W. N.*, 2 Jun. 1888.

A petition was signed by 600 of Clancarty's tenants, which requested that he relocate the market house to Reeves Lane. The *Western News* said: 'it was the opinion of the board and the opinion of the people that [Reeves Lane] was a suitable place ... Lord Clancarty has always been treated in a very respectful manner by the people of Ballinasloe and his Lordship should have shown more concern for their interests' in this regard'.¹³ Harris had previously asked the lord lieutenant as to whether he was aware that there was a significant sum of money received by Clancarty through the tolls and customs of the fairs and nothing was forwarded for the upkeep of the town. He requested that the royal commission on market rights and tolls hold an inquiry into this state of affairs.¹⁴ It held an inquiry in Ballinasloe and suggested that the town commission needed to acquire it because Clancarty had failed in his responsibility as proprietor of the stalls to maintain them. Clancarty attempted to counter these accusations by claiming that he spent £180 cleaning and maintaining it. Neither Patrick O'Connor nor the commissioners accepted this assertion and O'Connor was adamant that no effort had been made to maintain it for twenty years.¹⁵

The royal commission stated that 'no marketable qualities [were] sold in the shed, which [was] unsuitable for the purpose'. It further attested that despite being the owner of Ballinasloe and largest ratepayer, Clancarty made no contribution to the upkeep of the town. He received £208 13s. 8d. in tolls in 1883 but the royal commission stated that they went 'into the pockets of Lord Clancarty to the great disadvantage of the ratepayers and the people of the town', who made a more substantial contribution to the maintenance of the town.¹⁶ 'Lord Clancarty is receiving double revenue. He gets rent for

¹³ *ibid.*, 2 Jun. 1888; 28 July 1888.

¹⁴ C. S. O., R. P. 1888/12353, in the National Archives of Ireland (N. A. I.)

¹⁵ *W. N.*, 28 July 1888; *The Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls. Precis of the minutes of evidence taken from the Royal Commissioners and the assistant commissioners in the United Kingdom*, xii [6268–v] pp 93 192, 218 qs 8443–6, 8671–2, 8678–80.

¹⁶ *Market Tolls (Ireland), return to an order of the Honourable The House of Commons, dated 3 Mar. 1884 for return of the values of the market tolls, of the rates, and of the other sources of local revenue in each of the*

the stalls ... [in the market house] and he charges tolls for what people sell out in the streets. It is quite clear the whole thing is a gross imposition'.¹⁷ The commission further recommended that the town commission be given compulsory powers to acquire the tolls and customs because they would be able to utilise them in a much more efficient manner than Clancarty. However, because they were a lucrative source of income, he needed to be adequately compensated if he were to relinquish them. Matt Harris recommended that the town commission investigate whether they had a legal mechanism by which they could remove the house and stated that if they failed to find one, Clancarty's tenants needed to be mobilised to pressurise him into removing it.¹⁸

I (Harris) do not fear to say that the man who would deny this small boon to the Catholic inhabitants of Ballinasloe was born after his time. He should have lived in some of the sad periods of history when fanaticism made war against conscience ... learning, literature and art. I do not desire to make these charges against Lord Clancarty, but if it be his good will and pleasure to leave himself open to them, the fault is his own, not mine.¹⁹

That the house obstructed the view of St Michael's church from the top of the market square was another reason for the eagerness to have it removed:

Instead of building a handsome two-storeyed (sic) building which he [the third earl of Clancarty] intended to have done, he built the present low shed in order that they not obstruct view of the new chapel from the street, and thus the appearance and much of the usefulness of the market house was sacrificed to please Dr Derry, the bishop of the Roman Catholic citizens ... As a specimen of Gothic architecture, our church is an edifice that any man of taste must admire ... It appears that Lord Clancarty is not satisfied with refusing the almost unanimous request of the Roman Catholics of Ballinasloe in regard the removal of the eyesore to our Roman Catholic Church.²⁰

William Putrill wanted to send a deputation to Clancarty but Meagher was sceptical of such an approach as Clancarty had refused to meet any on previous occasions. His

towns of Galway, Ballinasloe, Loughrea, Portumna and Gort in the county of Galway; see also C.S.O., R.P. 1888/12353.

¹⁷ *W. N.*, 28 Jul. 1888.

¹⁸ *W. N.*, 23 Jan. 1888; 19 May 1888; 28 Jul. 1888; 26 Oct. 1889; *The Royal Commission on Market Rights and Tolls*, pp 93 192, 218, qs 8183–8190, 8596–8, 8671–2, 8678–80.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 23 Jan. 1888.

²⁰ *W. N.*, 7 Jul. 1888.

repeated refusal to meet deputations resulted in the *Western News* stating that ‘such a state of affairs would not be tolerated in any similar town in Ireland’. His non co-operation restricted the options of the town commission and frustrated its members as the ‘entire district [was] in his possession’²¹, with Dunlo Hill being suggested as an alternative to Reeves lane.²² Such behaviour on the part of Clancarty resulted in Harris calling him ‘an utterly worthless man’, with Harris subsequently being accused of trying to antagonise Clancarty with such a comment.²³

Donald Jordan has argued that when it came to adjudicating violations of the “unwritten law” of the Irish National League and enforcing their judgements, the branches largely operated independently from each other, with few formal checks on their activity.²⁴ The Ballinasloe branch asserted that the town commission had to bear some responsibility for this debacle because they had not ‘remove[d] everything inimical to the interest of society and to the interests of the town’. The I. N. L. wanted to portray the idea that they were the only authority recognised in the countryside and argued that the town commission appeared to have been begging Clancarty to remove the market house and such behaviour was interpreted as a sign of weakness and it was not looked upon too kindly by the I. N. L., who wanted to assert the idea that they were the proto-governmental organisation that the people demurred to.²⁵ George Gleeson Bowler, a local solicitor, also criticised the town commission, saying: ‘they would prefer to herd like a gang of conspirators in a disused shebeen by the canal than seek the open forum of discussion in other towns’.²⁶ This controversy symbolised declining deference towards Clancarty and his unwillingness to agree to a compromise did not endear him to his

²¹ *W. N.*, 5 Jan. 1889

²² *ibid.*, 19 May 1888; 13 Apr. 1889.

²³ *ibid.*, 7 Jul. 1888.

²⁴ Donald Jordan, ‘The Irish National League and the “Unwritten Law”: rural protest and nation-building in Ireland, 1882-1890’, in *Past and Present*, 158 (February, 1998), p. 164.

²⁵ *W. N.*, 14 Jul. 1888; 28 Jul. 1888

²⁶ *ibid.*, 14 Jul. 1888.

tenants and it was not removed until September 1918.²⁷

The town commission applied to the board of works for a grant in 1886 in order to improve the waterworks in the town; and such a project had the added benefit of providing work for unemployed labourers. In order for this work to be carried out, it was necessary to secure a lease on the site in Derrymullen from Clancarty,²⁸ and there was a lack of clarity surrounding the lease, which led the town commission to question whether they were operating the gasworks for public benefit or to protect Clancarty's interests. As the commission was paying tax on the site, O'Connor was curious as to why they had no right of title to it and he accused the commission of 'attending to the business of Lord Clancarty'. It later transpired that Clancarty had given a £1,000 loan to the commission to assist in the construction of the works, but this had not been repaid and the minutes of the town commission indicated that a previous request had been made to Clancarty on 29 December 1878.²⁹

It was discovered in March 1887 that the third earl of Clancarty had a lease drawn up shortly before he died in 1872. He did not sign it because he could not bind his successors to it and the fourth earl once again would not respond to queries about it. Patrick O'Connor did not think that this was an acceptable explanation: 'we are here representing the public and we should not allow Lord Clancarty and Mr Fowler to go on this way. Clancarty should have an interest in this place, as he is getting a higher rate percent for his money than he would get any place else'. Corcoran found Clancarty's intransigence over the lease inexplicable, especially because the object for securing one was so that the commission could get a loan to construct artisan dwellings. O'Connor deemed the fourth earl's behaviour unacceptable, claiming it had the potential of being detrimental to the welfare of the people of the town. He wanted to pressurise Clancarty

²⁷ Declan Kelly, *Ballinasloe from Garbally Park to the fair green* (Dublin, 2007), p. 32.

²⁸ *W. N.*, 13 Mar. 1887.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 13 Mar. 1887.

into meeting a deputation from the town board, because he refused to meet any on previous occasions and questioned his dedication to ensuring that the town was suitably maintained: 'he was never a benefit to this board, for he scarcely ever attended'.³⁰

Shifting opinions towards landlords saw public displays of loyalty appear unseemly. Nevertheless there was a large turnout at the funeral of Clancarty's former agent, Major Gascoyne in May 1886. The shops in the town closed from Monday evening 10 May 1886, the day after his death until his burial on Wednesday 12 May. Such was the regard he was held in that 'relays of Lord Clancarty's [tenants] carried the coffin'. The *Galway Vindicator* said he never treated a tenant badly and 'he was ever anxious to help the poor and struggling man'.³¹ He was interred in the Clancarty family crypt at St John's Church and such a turnout showed that there was some resistance to the league on the estate.

IV.) Conflict on the Ballinasloe board of guardians and town commission

Increased nationalist control on the board of guardians and town commission was a nationwide phenomenon and the beginnings of this change in Ballinasloe has been explored in previous chapters. As boards of guardians were 'the only administrative body in rural areas with a popularly elected element [they] provided tenant farmers and businessmen with a rare opportunity to participate in local government'.³² The advancement of local democracy eroded landlords' political power, while ruthlessly exposing the fragility of their influence. As *ex-officio* influence at the boards of guardians collapsed across the country, they stopped attending meetings, though the increasingly combative nature of these meetings was another reason for their poor attendance. The sensitivity of *ex-officio* guardians to their treatment by elected guardians was derived

³⁰ *W. N.*, 6 Feb. 1886; 1 May 1886; 5 Jun. 1886.

³¹ *Galway Vindicator*, 19 May 1886.

³² Crossman, *Politics, pauperism and power*, pp 45–6.

from their assumption that they had a natural right to influence the proceedings and Virginia Crossman maintained that ‘once that right was challenged, the boards became a hostile environment acting as a constant reminder of their declining influence’.³³ Such hostility was manifested in the Ballinasloe board of guardians, Clancarty’s last sphere of influence, which was in steady decline in the 1880s.

In the aftermath of the 1886 poor law election, Laurence Conroy was proposed as vice-chairman of the Ballinasloe board of guardians by nationalists in opposition to Fowler, because ‘in the past [Fowler] has at all times displayed a great antipathy to the majority of the elected guardians’, but Conroy failed to be returned. In his testimony to the Cowper commission, Fowler stated that some members were there for political purposes only and were disinterested in the intricacies of the operation of the poor law.³⁴ Nationalists accepted that they faced difficulties getting control of the board of guardians in 1887 because ‘Lord Clancarty, Mr Fowler and Mr Ward have sent their whips around to bring in their class from all quarters to prevent a nationalist from being returned’. Fowler proposed Clancarty as chairman *in absentia*, because ‘he has been chairman for a number of years and I hope that he will continue [as] chairman as long as God will leave him life’.³⁵ T. J. Manning proposed George Gleeson Bowler as chairman in 1887 in opposition to Clancarty because he thought the actions of *ex-officio* guardians were inimical to the greater interests of the people. Despite this challenge and being in poor health, Clancarty was elected chairman, but there was stronger resistance to his election on this occasion than previously. His non-attendance, yet repeated election as chairman fostered hostility towards him from nationalists and thus the *Western News* reported: ‘it is sufficient for them that he is the lord of the soil and to be chairman of the board of

³³ *ibid.*, pp 38–41.

³⁴ *Report of the royal commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act 1881 and the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act 1885 minutes of evidence and appendices*, [496], HC 1887 xxvi, (hereafter cited Cowper commission) p. 673 q. 21,644

³⁵ *W. N.*, 2 Apr. 1887.

guardians ... It would be a good thing to get up a wooden statue of Lord Clancarty to place in the “rotten old chair” for the Maddens and men of that ilk to worship in the absence of the real golden calf’.³⁶ Because of Clancarty’s absence once again, Bowler facetiously commented: ‘I hear a great deal about the election of the phantom chairman who has been conspicuous by his absence over the past year’, and accused him of using ‘every species of tyranny to get his own way’.³⁷

The loyalty Clancarty garnered from *ex-officio* guardians ensured that either he or one of his supporters was returned as chairman annually.³⁸ While Reddy claimed that he had no intention of disparaging Clancarty, he did say: ‘I disrespect him for allowing these sycophants to make use of his name as a guardian of the poor ... Has he as chairman of this board looked into the interests of the poor?’³⁹ This was in response to the deteriorating condition of the countryside and Edward Fowler’s refusal to acknowledge this, is discussed in further detail below. Clancarty’s long-term absences meant that Fowler was the *de facto* chairman. Despite this, nationalists still believed that they were gaining the upper hand: ‘the nationalists have crushed forever the ascendancy spirit of the board ... [they] showed an organization and resource that completely unnerved them’.⁴⁰ They were adulated for their activism and their ‘uncompromising patriotism [in] one of the greatest struggles of our time’.⁴¹

Thomas Byrne accused Fowler of exerting undue influence over proceedings on the board because he attempted to adjourn a meeting held on 1 May 1887 after arriving late, because Byrne had signed off on the minutes of the previous meeting. Byrne accused Fowler of acting in an autocratic and bigoted manner and he argued that

³⁶ *W. N.*, 2 Apr. 1887.

³⁷ *ibid.*, 18 Jun. 1887.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 14 Apr. 1888; 13 Apr. 1889.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 2 Apr. 1887.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 26 May 1888.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

Fowler's actions implied that he was not treating the Catholic tenants in a sufficiently respectful manner. Nationalists were accused of threatening the harmony of the board through their actions, while *ex-officios* were accused of being too domineering.⁴² Madden had been a founder member of the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association, discussed in chapter four and was treated with great hostility because of his loyalty towards Clancarty. Donohue remarked: 'I would not give John Joe Madden a half glass unless I was sure it would poison him'.⁴³

While attempting to defend the presence of the head constable, Edward Fowler alluded to his role as a magistrate. T. J. Manning rebuked him for making such a comment: 'you are no magistrate here. You are simply a guardian and I won't stand this nonsense'. Fowler simply told him to 'shut up'.⁴⁴ The police were in attendance at board meetings in June 1887 due to a concern that violence would break out. Nationalists did not appreciate their attendance because they thought they were there to protect the interests of *ex-officios* and Fowler said their presence was inappropriate because it implied that crimes had been committed and asked that they be excluded from the board room because guardians should not get preferential treatment from the police owing to their status or wealth: 'Every guardian who came into that board, *ex-officio* or elected, came there on equal terms ... [and] they left their dignities and titles outside when coming in'.⁴⁵

Ex-officio members were accused of behaving cynically in the operation of the board, once it became obvious that they were losing influence and power once the board was essentially under the control of nationalists. They did very little in attempting to counteract this declining influence by engaging more vigorously with the advance of

⁴² *W. N.*, 7 May 1887; 18 June 1887.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 14 Apr. 1888.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 2 Apr. 1887.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 18 June 1887.

local democracy and were criticised by nationalist guardians for their lack of participation: ‘We are not coming here to suit the convenience of people who only appear once in twelve months to do some job ... we are the working majority and we are not going to give these men a position to which they are not entitled’.⁴⁶ Such an attitude on the part of the *ex-officios* was reflective of the lethargic attitude towards the growth of democracy felt by many landowners in the 1880s.⁴⁷ Virginia Crossman argued that the failure of the *ex-officio* guardians to attend meetings was due, in part, to their frustration with the administrative incompetence of nationalist guardians.⁴⁸

Elected guardians claimed to represent the interests of all classes in society and presented an illusion of unity on boards, frequently adopting populist measures, such as the erection of houses, even if such decisions had no sound basis for implementation.⁴⁹

Edward Fowler was sceptical of the actual benefit of these measures, calling them ‘a fad’ and guardians that pushed for them were often not substantial ratepayers.⁵⁰ Nationalists in the locality were concerned that both *ex-officios* and some elected guardians like J. J. Madden would try and stop the continuation of outdoor relief, because ‘he [was] without one bit of human kindness or human charity’.⁵¹ Fowler did not think that nationalists could act as competent guardians: ‘I do not think they are a class of persons to whom the collection of and supervision of the rates should be entrusted at all’. He said that they were using the money for expedient purposes, such as building cottages, and had no real plan as to what should be done in the long-term. *Ex-officio* guardians resisted the implementation of such plans in order to keep poor rates under control and they were

⁴⁶ *W. N.*, 2 Apr. 1887

⁴⁷ Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp 208–9.

⁴⁸ Virginia Crossman, ‘Middle class attitudes to poverty and welfare in post-Famine Ireland’ in Fintan Lane (ed.), *Politics and the middle class in Modern Ireland* (London, 2010), pp 130–47.

⁴⁹ See Stephen Ball, ‘Policing the Irish Land War: Official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879–91’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 2000); Jordan, ‘The Irish National League and the “Unwritten Law”’, pp 146–71

⁵⁰ Cowper commission, p. 674, qs 21,644–5.

⁵¹ *W. N.*, 2 Apr. 1887.

reticent about granting outdoor relief on an *ad hoc* basis, unlike elected guardians. As the gentry remained aloof of the poor, they did not feel the need to engage in populist patronage.⁵² However, it was becoming obvious that they were losing their influence and control over its operation, resulting in antagonistic meetings becoming more frequent. The poor were marginalised by the nascent elite on the estate and while they may have claimed to represent all classes in society, they were eager to maintain the existing distinct stratification on the estate, as the declining influence of the fourth earl of Clancarty and the *ex-officio* guardians in the operation of local affairs, meant that they were poised to replace their former masters.

The election of the chairman of the board was disputed once again in April 1888, resulting in J. Donoghue, the guardian from Kiltormer deciding to occupy the chair. This was despite J. J. Madden claiming that he had been elected at the previous meeting and Thomas Seymour Blake concurred with Madden regarding his election, as he had voted for him. However, because Blake was a certified bankrupt, he was not entitled to vote. The *Western News* said: ‘there was brute force used this day week, but the representatives of the sheep and bullocks are not here today. That element is not as strong as last week’.⁵³ Bowler then proposed Andrew Manning as chairman, but Manning would not agree to this; because he would have to sign the minutes of the previous meeting, where he objected to the presence of Major Thornhill and Seymour Blake, who, despite being bankrupt, were still allowed attend meetings. J. J. Madden reflected the sense of frustration felt by the *ex-officio* guardians, when he said: ‘we pay a good deal of rates and gentlemen who pay little are dictating to us’.⁵⁴

Bowler disputed the votes of Seymour Blake, Major Thornhill, Orme Handy and

⁵² Cowper Commission, p. 676, q, 21,701; Patrick Melvin, ‘The landed gentry of Galway, 1820–80’ (unpublished Ph.D thesis, T. C. D.), p. 126.

⁵³ *W. N.*, 14 Apr. 1888.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

J. W. Potts, because they were bankrupt and remarked: 'we have made our objection known, and if we are beaten we will accept honourable defeat; but until the local government board has given their decision, we will not recognise the validity of the election of this day week'. An erroneous interpretation of the law had resulted in Gairdner's appointment being sanctioned by the local government board. Despite pressure being exerted by nationalist guardians to resign, Gairdner refused, stating: 'I am prepared to take the chair and if I am refused, I shall go away. I am chairman until the local government board tells me I am not'. Gairdner physically remonstrated with Reddy in an attempt to gain possession of the chair and Reddy told him 'you won't get the chair; you may put that idea out of your head' and such was the level of consternation at this meeting that it was abandoned.⁵⁵

The position with *ex-officio* guardians was complicated. Because of their position, the local government board could not dismiss them, so if they were declared bankrupt or did something criminal, they would have to wait for them to be removed from the commission of the peace and it was not until then that they would be removed from their position as *ex-officio* guardians. Virginia Crossman has argued that during disputes as discussed above, the local government board stuck resolutely to the facts presented to them and the repeated obfuscation over Gairdner's election as chairman resulted in the board being disbanded in June 1888 and paid guardians were subsequently appointed to manage the Union, which cost £1,500. A note attached to a communication to the chief secretary's office, dated 24 May 1888 stated: 'the proceedings of the board of guardians of Ballinasloe have, of late, been ... disorderly and the business of the union has been neglected [and] we have temporarily disbanded the board of guardians'.⁵⁶ The paid

⁵⁵ *W. N.*, 26 May 1888.

⁵⁶ *C. S. O.*, R.P. 1888/10959; *W. N.*, 26 May 1888; 2 June 1888; Crossman, *Politics, pauperism and power*, pp 48, 59. My thanks to Professor Crossman for clarifying this rather tricky issue pertaining to *ex-officio* guardians and bankruptcy in an email dated 25 Jun. 2011.

guardians were R.C.C. Lynch and Colonel Robertson and they appeared to have been relentless in collecting unpaid rates in the union. There were £1,659 in outstanding rates and the guardians said that proceedings would be initiated after 7 July in order to recover outstanding payments, with extra pressure being exerted upon the rate collectors to ensure this was done.⁵⁷

M.P.s were assiduous in bringing issues regarding poor law unions in their constituencies to the attention of the government in the House of Commons⁵⁸ and Matt Harris questioned the chief secretary, Arthur Balfour, regarding the disbandment of the board of guardians :

If he is aware that in the Ballinasloe poor law board the elected guardians and the *ex-officio* guardians are nearly equal as regards numbers; that, owing to this fact, close and bitter contests have arisen from time to time at the election of the chairman and deputy chairman to the board; why, having regard to this state of things, did the local government board delay a fortnight before they replied to the objections sent to them against the election of Mr. John Gardiner as chairman of the Ballinasloe board of guardians; whether they have pronounced the action of the gentleman who presided at the election of Mr. John Gardiner, on [4] April last, as illegal, and have issued an order for a new election; whether he is aware that the gentlemen who acted in this illegal manner had the sanction of the local government board to act as presiding officer, and that he was voted into that position by the *ex-officio* guardians, and against the will of the elected guardians, and that this course was at variance with the usage of the board, which up to that time always got the clerk of the union to act as presiding officer at the election of the chairman; whether the local government board have received a formal communication signed by six of the elected guardians claiming the chairmanship for Mr Thomas Byrne, who got eighteen votes, Mr Gardiner getting nineteen at the election of 4 April, on the ground that some of the *ex-officio* guardians who voted for Mr Gardiner had no legal right to vote; whether, at the election held on 16 May, a formal protest was handed to the chairman objecting to a new election on the ground that Mr Byrne was the legally elected chairman of the board, and formal objections lodged against Major Thornhill, Mr Orme Handy, and Mr J. W. Potts, as having no right to vote at the election of chairman; whether it is true that in the interval between [14] May, the day on which these objections were lodged with the local government board, and 23 May, the day on which the new board first met, no answer to these objections had been received from the local government board; that in consequence of such delay the board had to adjourn, being powerless to go on with business while in a state of uncertainty as to their right to act as a legally-constituted body; and, is it on account of this failure on

⁵⁷ C. S. O., R. P. 1888/12970

⁵⁸ Crossman, *Politics, pauperism and power*, pp 45–6.

the part of the Ballinasloe poor law board to fulfil duties which, owing to the inaction of the local government board they were powerless to perform, that paid guardians have been sent down to transact the business of the union?⁵⁹

Balfour succeeded Michael Hicks-Beach as chief secretary to Ireland in March 1887.

While he was initially derided as a lightweight, having been called ‘Tiger Lily’ in school, it was in Ireland that his reputation was made. L. P. Curtis stated that ‘he soon proved himself to be a canny and ruthless operator and a firm proponent of law and order, resulting in him being given the moniker ‘Bloody Balfour’. He was less sympathetic to the plight of tenants than his predecessors and had none for tenants that made no effort to pay rents. He was the mastermind behind the financing of test estates, which were targeted by nationalists because of their precarious financial condition, during the Plan of Campaign in an effort to destroy the Plan and the Irish National League.⁶⁰

The Plan of Campaign was the brainchild of Timothy Harrington and the I. N. L. subsidised evicted tenants, as they achieved quasi-martyrdom for being evicted. Curtis argued that ‘those tenants who subscribed to the plan welcomed any excuse to reduce their rents’ and divisions deepened between landlords and tenants. Curtis further stated that after the Plan’s publication, Hicks-Beach redoubled his efforts to reconcile landlords and their tenants before it was too late. Where cordial landlord-tenant relations prevailed, rents were generally paid, as resistance to rent depended upon three factors: the poverty of the local population, their susceptibility to nationalist propaganda and their fear of the league’s authority. As Balfour was exasperated by the inability of landlords to organise, he decided that Dublin Castle would secretly dedicate their resources to the plan’s test estates and ensured that they were guaranteed significant financial support and such a policy succeeded in depleting the finances of the I. N. L.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *Hansard* cccxxvii 991 (22 June 1888).

⁶⁰ L. P. Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation in Ireland, 1880–1892* (Princeton, 1963), pp 238–41.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp 148–9, 158, 241.

Balfour dismissed Harris's concerns and stated that the board of guardians had been warned previously about the disorderly conduct that took place at meetings, which resulted in the business of the union being neglected. Because these warnings were unheeded, there was no alternative but to disband the board.⁶² P. A. Chance, M.P. for Kilkenny South was of the opinion that the board was dissolved because nationalists objected to the election of a conservative chairman and not because of riotous proceedings and was not satisfied with Balfour's answer: 'that is not an answer to my question. What I asked was, whether this board was not superseded immediately after they had instituted proceedings to set aside the riotous, disorderly, and grossly illegal election of their conservative chairman?'⁶³ When the paid guardians relinquished control ten months after the board's dissolution, J. J. Madden was elected chairman. When he 'rose to return thanks [he] was received with cheers from the Conservative side and derisive applause from the nationalists' and was accused by Putrill of bungling the responsibilities of the chair. Reddy remarked that he had not seen some of the *ex-officio* guardians prior to this meeting: 'what brings the ascendancy and landocracy here today'?⁶⁴ Byrne thought they impeded the business of the board and were an imposition on the ratepayers in the district.⁶⁵ *Ex-officio* members thought nationalists were susceptible to undue influence and neglected the operation of the board in favour of passing overtly political resolutions that had nothing to do with the operation of the board. For example, a motion proposed by Thomas Byrne and seconded by Laurence Conroy on 5 May 1886 stated:

⁶² *Hansard* cccxxvii 991 (22 Jun. 1888)

⁶³ *ibid.*, 990–2 (22 Jun. 1888); P. A. Chance was elected M.P. for Kilkenny South in 1885, defeating Raymond de la Poer, a Conservative candidate by 4,088 votes to 222. He was returned unopposed in 1886 and defeated de la Poer again in 1892 by 3,346 to 253 votes, when he ran as an anti-Parnellite candidate. He resigned as an M.P. in 1894. See B. M. Walker, *Parliamentary election results in Ireland, 1801–1922* (Dublin, 1978), p. 357.

⁶⁴ *W. N.*, 13 Apr. 1889.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

That the best thanks of this board is due to William Ewart Gladstone Esq., First Lord of the Treasury for the large, comprehensive, generous and courageous measure of legislative independence for Ireland he has introduced into the British House of Commons. That we also recognise with pleasure his great effort to settle by his constructive genius and most eminent administrative abilities the land question which is to the agricultural population of this country of burning interest and vital importance and which question caused each broil, riot and turmoil between landlord and tenant and which we trust shall be forever at an end by the passing of the two great heroic and conciliatory measures introduced by the prime minister to whom we owe a debt of eternal gratitude for the able manner in which he has presented those much desired measures before the people of Great Britain and Ireland.⁶⁶

Nationalists were eager to portray the I. N. L. as a non-sectarian organisation in the hope that Protestants would support it. The reality was completely different, with R. V. Comerford arguing that Home Rule was an assertion of Catholic power that resulted in the ‘polarisation of voting along religious lines [which] was a concomitant of the consolidation of Parnell’s party’.⁶⁷ Such a polarisation was highlighted when the Ballinasloe branch of the league was accused of harbouring anti-Protestant feelings. John Dillon was requested to send: ‘Mr Swift, MacNeill, Pinkerton or Abraham in order to contradict the assertion of our enemies, that we as Catholics are intolerant of our fellow Protestant brethren’. Despite this hope, Protestants were made to feel isolated at times, especially in Ballinasloe after Thomas Byrne remarked that only Catholics could be patriotic: ‘It is futile to trifle with Irish catholicity and Irish nationality, even though some Catholic guardians, such as J. Ward were supportive of Clancarty ... Mr Fowler now recognises in the person of J. Ward the embodiment of his second self and of every attribute to the anti-Irish Irishman’.⁶⁸ Such attitudes reinforced Unionist objectives to Home Rule, as they simultaneously feared the emergence of Tammany Hall style

⁶⁶ C. S. O., R. P. 1886/8868

⁶⁷ R. V. Comerford, ‘The Parnell era, 1883–91’ in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vi: *Ireland under the Union, 1870–1921*, p. 66.

⁶⁸ *W. N.*, 7 May 1887; E. F. Biagini, *British democracy and Irish nationalism, 1876–1906* (Cambridge, 2007), pp 121–2.

corruption.⁶⁹

George Gleeson Bowler's appointment to the town commission as legal advisor was rescinded by the chairman, John Rigney in August 1888, who was subsequently labelled a Tory and political traitor. The *Western News* said: 'bodies elected on nationalist principles had no right to ally themselves with the enemies of the people against Mr Bowler. They should have been on the side of the people'.⁷⁰ Rigney denied dismissing Bowler; rather, he stated he had rescinded the resolution that sanctioned his appointment. The *Western News* said: 'the league saw this action as playing into the hands of the landlords and conservatives, leaving the nationalists at a distinct disadvantage ... It would be better, if this were to go on, to dissolve the whole board and leave it to Lord Clancarty and his agent'. Fr Costello – the administrator of Ballinasloe parish – also defended Bowler, while attacking the commission: 'they had branded their nationalist solicitor a criminal without trial or a reply to his letter'. Costello called Bowler a sincere nationalist that had assisted the cause greatly and said that 'the town commission should examine their conscience and see had they acted rightly by allying themselves with evictors and coercionists'.⁷¹ This fiasco resulted in the I. N. L. demanding a greater input into the appointments process because it argued that the town commission 'consulted no one, but themselves'.⁷²

The I. N. L. stated that Rigney's actions disrupted the unity it was trying to foster amongst nationalists and it argued that such divisions were advantageous to conservative board members, who could exploit such divisions. 'The town commission allowed themselves to be dragged at the wheels of the chariot of coercionists and evictors ... nationalists should not be found voting on the same side as the enemies of

⁶⁹ Comerford, 'The Parnell era, 1883–91', p. 67.

⁷⁰ *W. N.*, 11 Aug. 1888.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 18 Aug. 1888.

⁷² *ibid.*

their cause ... If Mr Bowler had done anything, it was their duty to bring his conduct before the League' and not the town commission.⁷³ The league had established courts across the country, though no sittings took place that are related to this study. These courts had greater legitimacy in the eyes of the people than the British legal system and their laws were 'clear, concise, purposeful, systematic, consistent and secular'.⁷⁴

February 1889 saw Bowler resign membership of the I. N. L. after Fr Costello censured him for acting as a solicitor to Patrick Barrett of Woodmount, who had been boycotted by the league for seeking payment of rent from a tenant. Costello was described as an extreme nationalist and was appointed as parish priest to Looscaun, near Woodford, in April 1889 and in his report to the divisional commission; the county inspector, William Byrne, was concerned that his proximity to Woodford would inflame further agitation there.⁷⁵

There was a noticeable difficulty in paying the November 1886 gale on the estate, especially at Coorheen. Fowler offered a 15 percent abatement to those who paid their rents in full by December 1886.⁷⁶ He was aggrieved with the land courts fixing rents without taking all factors into consideration. He drew on the example of a tenant having his rent reduced from £42 3s. 8d. to £32, even though Clancarty had expended £1,300 on drainage, which had not been completed by the time the rent had been fixed. If this was taken into consideration, Fowler was of the opinion that the rent would not have been reduced by as much, especially as the tenant in question had sold his interest in his holding for £100 two weeks later. A letter sent to the chief secretary's office, dated 3 September 1887, stated that there was no evidence of distress on the estate. Nevertheless, tenants that faced difficulties paying the May 1886 gale received assistance. Fowler came

⁷³ *W. N.*, 11 Aug. 1888; 18 Aug. 1888.

⁷⁴ Jordan, 'The Irish National League and the "Unwritten Law"', p. 170.

⁷⁵ Divisional Commissioners and County Inspectors monthly confidential report of William Byrne for Galway east riding, 22 Feb. 1889 and 18 Apr. 1889 in *N. A. I.*

⁷⁶ Cowper commission, pp 672-3, qs. 21,631, 21,635-7.

to the decision that tenants with holdings under £50 would be offered a 20 percent reduction on the May 1886 gale if they paid by May 1887. the letter further stated that: ‘although no abatement was offered to judicial tenants, no pressure was put upon them to pay beyond one half years rent although many of them are in arrears and it may be added that not more that 8 percent of the tenantry have had judicial rents fixed’.⁷⁷ While he was initially reticent granting universal reductions in rent, he sanctioned a 20 percent reduction in 1887. He further stated to the Cowper commission that he granted universal reductions because he did not want either side to incur expenses by entering the land court, though any tenant that sought a reduction through the land courts and failed would not be granted one at the behest of Clancarty. Abatements were granted to all tenants not because he thought it was deserved, rather he wanted all tenants to be on an equal footing on the estate.⁷⁸

There were disagreements over the level of poverty on the estate between nationalists and Edward Fowler. He refused to accept that the condition of the district was as bad as nationalists claimed and in his testimony to the Cowper commission, said he said: ‘I did not think that the poverty of the tenant and their consequent inability to pay existed generally ... [considering] the sum they give for superior feed, horses, clothes and buildings, plus subscriptions to the League’.⁷⁹ L. P. Curtis has argued that such disputes over levels of poverty were frequent, as unionists denied that there was extensive distress in order to prevent any tampering with judicial rents.⁸⁰ T. J. Manning said rents were fixed during the period of economic prosperity prior to 1877 and there was a need to readjust them because of the economic crisis that was affecting the ability of many tenants to pay their rent. If they were readjusted, tenants would be able to make

⁷⁷ Cowper commission, p. 671, qs. 21,604, 21,617–20.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, qs. 26,131, 26,135–7, 21,637.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 673, q. 21,637.

⁸⁰ Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation in Ireland, 1880–1892* p. 143.

some effort at repaying rents and Manning told Fowler that ‘we don’t want to prevent you from getting the rents’.⁸¹ He was concerned that if tenants were vigorously pursued for rents, there would be increased pressure upon the workhouse. This indicated that Clancarty tenants were willing to pay their rents in full and nationalists accepted this. Nevertheless Fowler was exasperated with the inaction of the government over the issue of rents and stated that he ‘told Lord Clancarty a whole year ago that if the government would assist and protect us, that we would get our rents paid that that most of the tenants were eager to keep well with us’.⁸²

In 1889 Clancarty was accused of becoming disinterested in the welfare of his tenants, as some were living in very poor conditions in Pollboy. One tenant, Peter Nevin, criticised this neglect and remarked that he ‘was not afraid to state that his landlord was doing nothing for his tenants’.⁸³ In April 1890 Clancarty issued processes of eviction against Mrs Berrane in Pollboy because she had sub-let part of her holding, which was in breach of the tenancy and frowned upon on the estate. Berrane claimed that her rent and those of her sub-tenants had been paid in full, but they had all received notices to quit because her sons joined the I. N. L, but Fowler reiterated that it was because she had sub-let part of her holding. She argued that he did nothing to prevent sub-letting on other holdings, but had singled her out. The *Western News* claimed that ‘Mr Fowler would not have treated a person who was not the mother of a nationalist in the same harsh manner’, but Fowler was unrepentant for carrying out such evictions; ‘I would rather be an evictor than a grabber’.⁸⁴

Prior to his departure as Chief Secretary, Michael Hicks-Beach appealed to landlords to be more reasonable about evictions and he would only approve police

⁸¹ *W. N.*, 12 Jun. 1886.

⁸² Cowper commission, p. 673, q. 21,637.

⁸³ *W. N.*, 2 Feb. 1889.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 5 Apr. 1890.

protection for the eviction of the most intransigent tenants.⁸⁵ Fowler would not carry out evictions without police protection and Hicks-Beach's actions meant that it was becoming increasingly difficult to carry out any without incurring expenses. On previous occasions that evictions took place on the estate, Fowler claimed that he had been threatened and intimidated, but did not seek police protection.⁸⁶ It is possible that he did not want police protection because of the unwanted attention that it would draw, especially considering that nationalist activity on the estate was faltering and he did not want to give them a reason for reviving it.

V. Faltering agitation on the Clancarty estate

As the agitation faltered, Thomas Byrne tried to get more urban support by appealing to shopkeepers' assistants, because they were the sons of farmers and should naturally be sympathetic to the plight of their rural neighbours: 'nobody should be so eager to come into our ranks as shop assistants, as they are generally farmers' sons, and they should be the first to sympathise with the class from which they have sprung'.⁸⁷ Despite such a hope, both shopkeeper's assistants and labourers were not active participants in the land movement, because as Fintan Lane has highlighted, the prioritisation of working class concerns went against the *raison d'etre* of the constitutional nationalist movement, and chapter seven explores the difficulties faced by the urban poor in Ballinasloe, as they had no discernable advocate campaigning for the improvement of their condition. Lane also argued that 'the man who works for a wage for another is an infinitely lower class than the man that works for himself' and such an attitude would surely have rankled with urban tenants.⁸⁸ These rural agitators had played an important role in the formation of a

⁸⁵ Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation in Ireland, 1880–1892*, pp 139–41.

⁸⁶ Cowper commission, p. 674, q. 21,657.

⁸⁷ *W. N.*, 30 Jul. 1887.

⁸⁸ Fintan Lane, 'Rural labourers, social change and politics in late nineteenth century Ireland' in Fintan Lane

national consciousness, and with labourers being deliberately excluded from this; it became increasingly difficult for them to become effectively integrated into the new milieu being created in provincial Ireland, which resulted in them becoming increasingly isolated. While shopkeepers were now beginning to play a more important role in local politics, their assistants were in a vulnerable position, as their efforts to organise into something that was analogous to a trade union could be problematic and was so in the late 1890s, which John Cunningham has effectively explored in *Labour in the west of Ireland* (1995) and is discussed in some detail in the next chapter.⁸⁹

In February 1888 Arthur Balfour told the House of Commons that the Ballinasloe branch of the I. N. L. was in poor financial condition and was not able to cover its liabilities. He said that members wanted the names of those who would not join to be displayed in public in the hope such odium would embarrass them into joining: ‘They would show up those men who were an injury to the national cause. There was no alternative, and any punishment that would be inflicted on them they would deserve it’.⁹⁰ He also argued that this reflected the coercive influence of the law of the League and the risk involved in joining. Thomas Byrne refuted allegations that there was a lack of interest in the town. He claimed that there were hundreds of members and the agitation had been more vigorous than it had been for a time, while hoping that Balfour’s statement about its demise would motivate people to join. William Putrill remarked that there was a catchment area of 5,000 for potential members, but there were only thirty-four in Creagh, thirteen in Kilclooney and eleven in Derrymullen registered; thus contradicting Byrne’s claims that there were hundreds of members. Harris suggested that

and Donal O Drisceoil (eds) *Politics and the Irish working class, 1830–1945* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp116, 135.

⁸⁹ John Cunningham, *Labour in the west of Ireland, working life and struggle, 1890–1914* (Belfast, 1995); Conor McNamara, ‘A Tenants’ League or a shopkeepers’ league? Urban protest and the Town Tenants Association in the west of Ireland, 1909–1918’ in *Studia Hibernica* vol 36 (2009–10), p. 148.

⁹⁰ *Hansard*, cccxxi 741–2 (17 Feb.1888)

if the affiliation fee was reduced from 5s. to 2s. 6d., it would encourage more labourers and Clancarty tenants to join. J. S. Donnelly Jr., has illustrated that the Irish National League in Cork exaggerated their claims of success at meetings and struggles initiated by local branches were failures overall and this is also pertinent for the I. N. L. in Ballinasloe and more particularly on the Clancarty estate⁹¹ This is obvious from the monthly confidential reports of the divisional commissioners and county inspectors between 1887 and 1890, which highlight the fact that there was no significant league activity in Ballinasloe, rather it was concentrated within the vicinity of the Clanricarde estate. This was supported by Edward Fowler, who testified to the Cowper commission that no outrages were committed on the estate. As Clancarty was a resident and progressive landlord, tenants did not feel that it was necessary to agitate against him and the terms of agreement reached by Edward Fowler in granting reductions stifled any potential there was for agitation. The Plan of Campaign was born on the neighbouring Clanricarde estate and it highlighted how successful resistance could be and it soon spread to other estates, especially where the landlord was economically vulnerable.⁹²

The Tenant Defence Association was formed at a meeting in the Mansion House on 24 October 1889 in order to fund the expenses incurred during the Plan of Campaign,⁹³ especially considering that its finances depleted after the Ponsonby evictions in Cork. Parnell was initially eager for the Irish Parliamentary Party to get behind the Association and ‘he impressed upon them the absolute necessity for united action on their part’. Despite his initial enthusiasm for the organisation: ‘Parnell’s non-chalance and his capriciousness regarding the Tenant Defence League, after publicly committing himself and the parliamentary party to it, disenchanted several of his

⁹¹ W. N., 25 Feb., 28 Jan. 1888; J. S. Donnelly, Jr., *The land and the people of nineteenth century Cork: the rural economy and the Irish land question* (London, 1975), pp 322–4.

⁹² Curtis, *Coercion and conciliation in Ireland, 1880–1892*, p. 139.

⁹³ Comerford, ‘The Parnell era, 1883–91’ p. 71.

followers'. This led to a confrontation with William O'Brien, who seemed to triumph and resulted in 'the Tenant Defence Association [infusing] new life into the agrarian agitation and for the first time since the autumn of 1886, the whole of nationalist Ireland appeared to support it'. The hierarchy and parish clergy especially embraced it with great enthusiasm and local priests were important fundraisers, with collections being made outside church gates, resulting in an implicit obligation for the people to contribute towards its operation.⁹⁴

A branch of the association was established in Ballinasloe in December 1889 in order to revive the stagnant agitation in the locality and because it was 'a critical juncture of the Irish agrarian struggle'.⁹⁵ The *Western News* stated that 'the work proposed to be done by the association is enormous [and] will require enormous funds to bring it to a successful issue. The sirens of war must be provided. The syndicate of landlords is unusually rich and money is pouring from other sources'. The Ballinasloe T. D. A. wanted members to subscribe three pence in the pound on the valuation of their holdings.⁹⁶ Its early meetings were well attended and the greatest financial support they received was from the 'traders of the town, many of whom have not a perch of land ... with their usual generosity subscribed to liberally as to elicit the thanks of all concerned' and the priests of the locality also gave £1 each. 'Some tenant farmers may say they do not want to be protected, that they have good landlords in whom they have confidence and that they, are well able to pay their present rents'. The T. D. A. thought this was a selfish attitude as they failed to act in solidarity with tenants evicted on other estates, such as the neighbouring Clanricarde estate. Those that attended this meeting realised that there were very few evictions within the Ballinasloe district, but 'true also

⁹⁴ Laurence Geary, *The Plan of Campaign, 1886-1891* (Cork, 1986), pp 122-8.

⁹⁵ *W. N.*, 14 Dec. 1889.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, 11 Jan. 1890.

we have evicted tenants in our midst who [need] to be sustained and supported'.⁹⁷ This statement was in reference to the extreme stance taken by the marquis of Clanricarde on the Woodford estate in 1885, where a tenant defence fund had been established and each tenant had to contribute in proportion to the size of their holding, which worked out at six pence in the pound. Thomas Feeney argued that 'Clanricarde's hardline no surrender attitude was tantamount to a declaration of war to the now formidably organised tenants', with 5,000 attending a meeting on 30 May 1886 in Woodford in order to listen to speeches denouncing Clanricarde. George Shaw-Lefevre claimed that this was the first large scale, organised defiance against landlords, with the stronger tenants standing by and supporting the weaker ones.⁹⁸

The deaths of John Callanan in April 1888, George Gleeson Bowler in May 1889 and Matt Harris in April 1890 were three significant blows to the nationalist movement in east Galway. Callanan founded the *Western News* in 1876, and had 'never ceased to be a fearless and unswerving champion of our holy religion'.⁹⁹ Bowler had been the *de facto* legal advisor of nationalists in Ballinasloe and defended many of those involved in the Woodford evictions and 'he would make any sacrifice to serve his friends'. Shaw-Lefevre was impressed by his actions defending tenants at Woodford and remarked: 'I am sure that his death will be a very great misfortune to the tenants of the district'.¹⁰⁰

The most significant blow to the nationalist movement in the region was the death of Matt Harris. His unquestioned radicalism saw him call the rapprochement between small and large farmers the alliance of the shark and the prey. Paul Bew argued: 'Despite this forthright condemnation of the rancher, Harris had, in effect, to welcome these men into the Land League, though equally characteristically, he was soon to regret this

⁹⁷ *W. N.*, 11 and Jan. 1890.

⁹⁸ Curtis, *The depiction of eviction in Ireland*, p. 138; Thomas Feeney, 'The Woodford evictions' (M.Ed. Thesis, U. C. G., 1978), pp 24, 30.

⁹⁹ *W. N.*, 21 Apr. 1888.

¹⁰⁰ See obituary for Bowler in *Western News*, 11 May 1889 and *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 May 1889.

decision'.¹⁰¹ P. K. Egan said 'there was a live zone of Fenianism about Ballinasloe and South Roscommon', which centred on Harris. Nationalist politics moved beyond the land question after the Kilmainham Treaty and became more conservative in its nature, as it focused its efforts on the campaign for Home Rule. While Harris was less visible after his arrest and release in 1881, he still emphasised that the land question was the one of most concern to western farmers. It was more important to them than Home Rule and the idea of an independent parliament: 'we must often begin with the less in order to achieve the greater ... the land movement, due to its class basis, is in its essence, national'.¹⁰² Nevertheless, he became very sceptical of the role farmers would play in future agitations, telling the Parnell commission: 'when a farmer would become emancipated and get his land, such a man would look upon the boundary of his farm as the boundary of his country, because, as a rule, farmers are very selfish men'.¹⁰³

Harris's ideas appeared to have been influenced by the radical milieu that was prevalent in Britain during the Victorian period. While he may have been of the Chartist generation, considering he was born in 1826, there is no evidence to suggest that Harris ever spent any time in Britain during the period of the Chartists existence. Some of his ideas, such as paying M.P.s a salary, and returning working class men to parliament could have been influenced by discussions in British Lib-lab circles, and these radical ideas that existed during Harris's lifetime, and could have influenced him are explored in great detail in Eugenio Biagini's *British democracy and Irish nationalism, 1876-1906* (2007). Harris possessed an unrivalled knowledge of local affairs and he was an effective communicator of such ideas at Land League meetings. His disdain for landlords was never in question, accusing them of retarding the welfare of the people and hindering the

¹⁰¹ Paul Bew, *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland, 1890-1910* (Oxford, 1987), p. 10.

¹⁰² idem, *Land and the national question, 1858-82* (Dublin, 1978); P. K. Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe: its history from the earliest time to the present* (Dublin, 1960), p. 267; A. B. Finnegan, *The Land War in south-east Galway* (unpublished M. A. thesis, U. C. G, 1974), p. 22.

¹⁰³ Quoted in Bew, *Land and the national question*, p. 229.

prospect of an independent Ireland. ‘Who are the destroyers of the people? Are they not the landlords and all other agencies that cripple and retard industry? ... I dislike this class; because as a Christian and a man, I dislike tyranny and crime ... I dislike social distinctions ... which reverse the natural order of things’.¹⁰⁴ He consistently advocated the rights of the lower classes, such as labourers, despite the contempt with which they were treated by other nationalists.

Harris died on 14 April 1890 from stomach cancer, having suffered from health problems for the last decade of his life. There was a genuine sense of loss in the west of Ireland when he died and according to the *Western News*:

He saw the sword of Damocles hanging over him every day ... hopeful he would live a little longer to see the ambition of his life fulfilled ... he was never ashamed of his work ... he was the workman’s friend. He was the determined foe of the oppressors of his country. He was connected with every movement for the regeneration of his country.¹⁰⁵

4,000 people attended his funeral in Ballinasloe, with William O’Brien M.P. delivering the graveside oration:

We stand over the coffin of our brave friend, one of the best and truest of those faithful souls that make the Irish cause so sacred and so unconquerable. It is pathetic that he should have fallen just on the eve of victory – victory for the course for which he laboured during many a dark and hopeless day.¹⁰⁶

O’Brien paid tribute to Harris’s powerful rhetoric of Harris: ‘somehow or other the sun will never seem to me to shine quite the same again over a Connaught meeting, now poor Matt Harris is missed’ and concluded his oration by saying ‘may God be good and kind to our dear old comrade and to the country he served well’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Fergus Campbell, *Land and revolution. Nationalist politics in the West of Ireland, 1891–1921* (Oxford, 2005), p. 18; Finnegan, *The Land War in South-east Galway*, pp 23–4.

¹⁰⁵ *W. N.*, 19 Apr. 1890.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

VI.) Conclusion

Nationalists in Ballinasloe saw the operation of the town commission and board of guardians as a struggle of the masses against the classes; an ‘uphill fight of the people against landlordism’ and they were slowly gaining the upper hand. Nationalist guardians believed the *ex-officios* could not be entrusted with the running of the board, because they were ‘elected by the law of the bullock and not the voice of the people’.¹⁰⁸ The influence of Lord Clancarty in local politics receded in the 1880s, to the delight of nationalists in the ‘decaying Tory stronghold of Ballinasloe’ and his personal popularity did not prevent attacks being made on his character.¹⁰⁹ Dooley has further argued that: ‘A great sense of anxiety pervaded the landed class that under elected representation, landlords and their representatives would only form a contemptible minority’.¹¹⁰ Another Galway landlord, Sir William Gregory noted his disappointment at the behaviour of his tenants because they combined to have their rents reduced on his estate. He felt that he had done everything in his power to assist them and they were not treating him with the respect he felt he had earned through his paternalistic endeavours.¹¹¹ While it is not possible to say categorically that Clancarty had the same opinion, his behaviour regarding petitions and his refusal to relocate the market house could be interpreted as a disappointment at the activities of nationalists in the town of Ballinasloe.

Terence Dooley has asserted that ‘in their localities, landlords had dominated local government and this changed from the 1880s, culminating with the 1898 Local Government Act’ and Clancarty’s refusal to meet his tenants regarding infrastructural developments indicated previously harmonious relationships were cooling.¹¹² Options for

¹⁰⁸ *W. N.*, 2 Apr. 1887.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, 7 May 1887.

¹¹⁰ Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*, p. 214.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 216.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 212.

labourers became increasingly limited and they became more dependent upon the generosity of private benefactors, such as Clancarty and such assistance solidified their loyalty towards the family. W. E. Vaughan argued that such ‘pieces of benevolence were possible ... but these created spasms of gratitude rather than habitual dependence’.¹¹³

Dooley also maintained that landlords became politically isolated as a result of the Land League, as it spelled the end of tenants showing political deference to landlords, who were now in direct opposition with a new rural alliance of tenant-farmers. Landlord alliances manifested themselves through the auspices of the likes of the Irish Land Committee, the Property Defence Association and the Irish Loyal and Patriotic Union, but most of them remained inchoate and ineffective.¹¹⁴ Even benevolent, resident landlords and those with long ties to the area in which they lived were made to feel like outsiders by their tenants as a result of the first two phases of the Land War. This feeling of alienation gave them a greater incentive to sell and the only purchasers were their tenants. Landlords were under greater pressure during the second phase of the Land War with the renewal of the agricultural depression and those on Plan of Campaign estates feeling the pinch most acutely. The emergence of the United Irish League in 1898 increased the pressure on landlords to sell their estates by the early twentieth century. A new phase of the agitation took place after the enactment of the 1903 act in the guise of the ranch war, as farmers fought for a share of untenanted land and the breaking up of large tracts of grazing land.

Landlords failed to see the rationale behind reducing rents and the fixing of ‘fair rents’ coincided with an increase in arrears, which added to the grief landlords had to endure and the withholding of rents left landlords in a precarious position. They felt they were not being safeguarded enough and Dooley has stated that ‘the fact of the matter was

¹¹³ Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland*, p. 220.

¹¹⁴ Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp 211–12.

that any reduction, no matter how slight, was decreasing the net income of landlords and bringing them precariously close to bankruptcy'.¹¹⁵ Landlords felt betrayed and the greater democratisation of the countryside added to their woes. Clonbrock felt that such changes were initiated 'by resistance to the law and by votes in the ballot box' and there was a fear that these changes would also impact upon British landlords, though as Biagini argued, Irish landlords were seen to be an undeserving class of individuals by many in Britain. However, British landowners were isolated from this challenge to the legitimacy of landed property that was taking place in Ireland, though there was similar legislation enacted in Scotland, such as the Crofters Act of 1886, but this piece of legislation was not as radical as that enacted in Ireland.¹¹⁶

Reports from the divisional commissioners show that Ballinasloe was a relatively peaceful district in the Galway East Riding. Even though this was one of the most highly agitated areas in the country, Plan of Campaign related activity was negligible on the estate, which has hitherto been underappreciated in the historiography of the movement. The agitation was at its most intense in the south-eastern part of the riding, especially within the districts of Loughrea, Portumna and Woodford, which were all part of the Clancarde estate, with Woodford being called, 'the battleground of the agitation'.¹¹⁷ Despite the insignificant activity on the Clancarty estate, the manifold attacks on landlords across the country indicated that Clancarty may have felt tenants were being ungrateful for any assistance they may have received to that point. The nascent provincial middle-class attempted to fill the lacuna left by the departure of the landlords. They were the leaders and instigators of anti-landlord movements throughout the country. Relationships in the countryside became more straightforward, with farmers now only

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp 90–6.

¹¹⁶ Biagini, *British democracy and Irish nationalism*, p. 10; David Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy* (New Haven, Conn. 1990), p. 66.

¹¹⁷ Divisional Commissioners and County Inspectors monthly confidential report of William Byrne for Galway east riding, 4 Nov. 1887, in N. A. I.

indebted to the shopkeeper. K. T. Hoppen stated that ‘the gathering economic and political triumph of Irish farmers was ... undoubted and was matched by and related to a concurrent growth in the importance of retailing in general and shopkeepers in particular’.¹¹⁸

A gap emerged in elite structures in provincial Ireland, which shopkeepers and merchants were eager to fill. Increased confidence amongst nationalists resulted in such a confrontational attitude towards Clancarty. Nevertheless, they did not represent all strata on the estate. As has been discussed in the previous chapter, farmers were only interested in looking after their own interests and not those of labourers. Options for labourers became increasingly limited as they were dependent upon the benevolence of landlords, though W. E. Vaughan contended that while such ‘pieces of benevolence were possible ... [they] created spasms of gratitude rather than habitual dependence’.¹¹⁹ The third earl of Clancarty believed that a labouring class, distinct from the tenant farmer class, needed to be formed. It was something that he believed to be ‘a most essential principle’, which his son, the fourth earl also embraced. Both men wanted to assist labourers through relief works and the construction of adequate housing. Labourers felt excluded from the movement and their loyalty towards Clancarty was resolute. Despite the rhetoric at meetings, there appeared to have been no material change to the condition of tenants on the estate. While such harmony was mutually beneficial, the fourth earl’s request to be buried in Highgate Cemetery and not with his ancestors in the family vault at Ballinasloe could be construed as a disappointment because of the breakdown of harmonious relationships on the estate. The next chapter will explore the circumstances underpinning the bankruptcy and sale of this once great estate.

¹¹⁸ K. T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (London, 1989), p. 108.

¹¹⁹ Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland*, p. 220.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE DECLINE OF THE CLANCARTY ESTATE , 1891–1914

I.) Introduction

Events in Ireland between 1891 and the first decade of the 1900s moved sedately due to the impotency of the Irish Parliamentary Party following the Parnellite split and the death of Parnell. The result of this saw the Parnellites achieve little support outside of Dublin and the anti-Parnellites were bitterly divided between the Healy and Dillon camps.¹ This was a seismic contrast with the previous decade, which saw unprecedented popular political participation. J. C. Beckett stated that ‘the fall of Parnell was a blow both to the Home Rule movement and to its liberal allies in Britain’ and presented a significant advantage to the Conservatives.² The Tories were the party of government between 1891 and 1906, though there was a short Liberal interlude between 1892 and 1895. The failure of the 1894 Home Rule Bill saw Gladstone depart from the political scene, and his successor Lord Rosebery, had no interest in returning to that contentious issue. This period also saw constructive unionism attempt a rapprochement with a new Ireland and, according to Paucic Travers, such approaches were similar to conservative policies throughout Europe. Travers further argued that ‘conciliation was added to the traditional Tory policy of coercion’ and they came to believe that land purchase legislation was the only way that social harmony could be achieved.³ Home Rule was now ripe for the killing and Conservatives had the opportunity to make a unionist settlement of the Irish question.⁴ Land purchase became the corner stone of conservative policy because as J. J.

¹ F. S. L. Lyons, ‘The fall of Parnell’, in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vi: *Ireland under the Union, 1870–1921*, p. 81.

² J. C. Beckett, *The making of modern Ireland, 1603–1923* (London, 1966), p. 405.

³ Paucic Travers, *Settlements and divisions, Ireland 1870–1922* (Dublin, 1988), pp 55–8.

⁴ Andrew Gailey, ‘Unionist rhetoric and Irish local government reform, 1895–9’, in *Irish Historical Studies* no.

Lee remarked: ‘moral force unionism was based on the assumption that every native has his price’.⁵ Eugenio Biagini has also argued that:

English hostility to “landlordism”, which years of public discussion and exposure by government commissions had identified as the root cause of the social question in both Ireland and the Highlands, was rekindled by unionist plans to buy off Irish landlords.⁶

F. S. L. Lyons said that a peaceful social revolution was taking place thanks to the resolute governance of the Tories and the legislation that they enacted saw new ground being broken in the settlement of the land question.⁷ This period also saw the continued assault on the British landowning class, which succeeded in eroding their political power and Eric Hobsbawm stated that ‘landownership lost its prerequisite of local political power in Britain, partly because of the democratisation of the national franchise in 1884–5 and of the county administration in 1889, partly because administration became too complicated to be left to part-time and unqualified squires’.⁸ Similar attacks in Ireland stemmed from the land agitation movement and the increased nationalist control of local elected bodies culminated in the Local Government Act of 1898, as landlords became politically isolated and this has been discussed at length in relation to the Clancarty family in chapters five and six.⁹ Andrew Gailey has contended that this act was the best example of conciliatory unionism and it profoundly shaped the Irish nation that emerged after independence.¹⁰ David Cannadine remarked that ‘from the 1880s onwards, it was widely believed that the essential answer to the Irish question was the rapid and complete

24 (1984), p. 57.

⁵ Beckett, *The making of modern Ireland, 1603–1923* (London, 1966), p. 406; J. J. Lee, *The modernisation of Irish society 1848–1918* (Dublin, 1971), p. 127.

⁶ Eugenio Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism, 1876–1906* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 100.

⁷ Lyons, ‘The aftermath of Parnell’ in *A new history of Ireland*, vol. vi, pp 81–6.

⁸ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire* (1969), p. 203.

⁹ David Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy* (New Haven, Conn, 1990), p. 139; Terence Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860–1960* (Dublin, 2001), p. 212.

¹⁰ Gailey, ‘Unionist rhetoric and Irish local government reform, 1895–9’, p. 58.

elimination of traditional landlordism'.¹¹ This meant that traditional forms of control were breaking down and a new order emerged that was distinctly nationalist, with many of the new participants in local government being former agitators. These forms of control on the Clancarty estate initially began to break down at a rather glacial pace, but, as has been already explored in the previous two chapters, it intensified as a result of the Land War.

Irish landlords were at a loss after the vigour of the Land War and Plan of Campaign, as they realised that they would not be playing a significant role in local government, especially after the chief secretary, Gerald Balfour, refused to enact legislation to protect minority interests, because of his desire to abolish class distinctions.¹² The rise of Parnellism, the unpopularity of coercion and the enthusiasm of nationalists for self-government, as evidenced by their takeover of Boards of Guardians, meant that self-government was becoming increasingly difficult to ignore.¹³ Cannadine has also contended that members of the British aristocracy were reticent about becoming involved in new forms of local democracy, due to 'the financial anxieties of many landowners [which] meant that they were less inclined to shoulder these traditional responsibilities or to assume new ones, while the break up of their estates before and after the First World War only accentuated this withdrawal from county politics and local leadership' and Irish landlords faced similar anxieties.¹⁴

The world in which the Clancarty family lived was unravelling before their eyes and there was nothing that they could do to stop it. This chapter explores the break-up of the Clancarty estate, which saw the fourth earl of Clancarty disinherit his heir, Lord Dunlo from the unsettled estates, because of his marriage to the actress Belle Bilton,

¹¹ Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*, p. 472.

¹² Gailey, 'Unionist rhetoric and Irish local government reform, 1895–9', p. 59.

¹³ Biagini, *British democracy and Irish nationalism*, pp 210, 362.

¹⁴ Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*, p. 139.

which Clancarty found to be unacceptable. This, coupled with Dunlo's proclivity to debt, were important factors in the decline of the estate, though the land legislation enacted by the conservative government played a more substantive role and local democracy was now subjugated to local nationalists and those being elected were becoming the new elites, replacing the Clancarty family. It will also examine the dominance of new local elites and their reticence about assisting the poorest on the former Clancarty estate, as they sought to augment their newly found positions of respectability.

II.) The marriage of William, Lord Dunlo and the divorce petition

Aristocratic families utilised marriages to increase their wealth, rank and power and they were frequently nothing more than economic contracts employed to sustain influential alliances. The parents of the prospective couple played important roles in the legal and financial elements of marriages in order to ensure their children met eligible and financially solvent suitors. 'For the landed class, marriage settlements were important. Dowries were a prime consideration in any marriage settlement involving a member of a landlord's family, but particularly the eldest son who had the responsibility of passing on the family estate'. This resulted in marriage settlements frequently becoming complicated affairs.¹⁵ If a generous dowry was attached to a potential bride, it could save her suitor from financial oblivion, for example: 'in 1736, the debt-laden fifth earl of Orrery was seriously advised, "you have no possibility of retrieving yourself but by marrying"'.¹⁶ The Trench/Clancarty family had followed this trend, with successive heads of the family marrying into influential British and Irish landed families, and the most fortuitous of these marriages was that of Frederick Trench to Frances Power of Coorheen, discussed in the introduction of this thesis. The marriage of William, Lord Dunlo, to a dance hall

¹⁵ Terence Dooley, *The Big Houses and landed estates of Ireland: a research guide* (Dublin, 2007), p. 97.

¹⁶ A. P. W. Malcomson, *The pursuit of the heiress: aristocratic marriage in Ireland, 1740-1840* (Belfast, 2006), p. 2.

singer in 1890, left his father furious because it did not fit into the paradigm of aristocratic marriages and had the potential of presenting significant problems in sustaining the various charges on the estate. Clancarty was determined to put this right and assert control over his wayward son.

Landlords believed that if their sons served in the military, it would be a suitable training ground for the management of an estate, which resulted in Clancarty arranging for Dunlo to join the Herefordshire militia. Dunlo had previously been described as a ‘weak-faced, beardless boy’ and he never reported for training with the militia because he eloped with Belle Bilton.¹⁷ Isabel Maude Penrice ‘Belle’ Bilton was the daughter of John George Bilton of Charlton, Kent. She was a music hall singer that had a double act with her sister, Flo and they made their stage debut at the barracks where their father was based. Dunlo and Bilton were married at a Registry Office in the district of Hampstead, London on 10 July 1889 and stayed at the Victoria Hotel, London after they got married. When Clancarty became aware of this marriage, he was furious and sent Dunlo to Australia, where he was to remain until his coming of age on 29 December 1889. While in Australia, Dunlo received and signed an affidavit for divorce, in which he accused his wife of committing adultery with Isidor Emanuel Wertheimer, a bric-a-brac salesman. Dunlo later claimed that he did not fully understand what was being asked of him when he signed it and if he had been fully informed, he would not have done so.¹⁸

Dunlo’s legal team attempted to portray Bilton as an untrustworthy woman that had an insatiable sexual appetite and several immoral relationships. She had given birth to an illegitimate child, whose father Aldon Carter Weston was later sentenced to

¹⁷ *New York Times*, 1 Jan. 1907; see also A. P. W. Malcomson, *Virtues of a wicked earl: the life and legend of William Sydney Clements, third earl of Leitrim* (Dublin, 2009).

¹⁸ Divorce court file: 3538, Appellant: William Frederick le Poer Trench, Lord Dunlo, Respondent Isabel Maud Penrice le Poer Trench, Lady Dunlo, Co-respondent: Isider A Wertheimer. Husband’s petition for divorce. J77/444/3538/6 in The National Archives, Kew (hereafter abbreviated to T.N.A.); *The Times*, 24 Jul. 1890 and 25 Jul. 1890; *N. Y. T.*, 1 Jan. 1907; Charles Kidd and David Williamson (eds), *Debrett’s peerage and baronetage* (London and New York, 1990), p. 225.

seventeen years penal servitude for fraud. Clancarty was deeply suspicious of her friendship with Wertheimer, especially considering that he proposed marriage to her after she became pregnant, which was further evidence to Clancarty that she was untrustworthy. After she became pregnant, Bilton lived with Wertheimer at 63 Avenue Road, St John's Wood and she remained there until she married Dunlo and returned there on 18 July the day before Dunlo left for Australia, with Wertheimer subsequently spotted entering the house the following day.¹⁹ Another of Bilton's supposed liaisons was with Lord Albert Osbourne, son of the ninth duke of Leeds. An acquaintance, Marmaduke Wood testified that Osbourne and Dunlo had competed for Bilton's affections, with Dunlo apparently emerging triumphant after a coin toss and the fourth earl was horrified that his son would partake in such uncouth behaviour, though Dunlo naturally denied such a version of events.²⁰

Two private detectives, Graville Clark and J. H. Clark were hired by Clancarty to follow Bilton after Dunlo's departure for Australia, with the express intention of uncovering definitive evidence of something untoward in her relationship with Wertheimer. While Graville Clark admitted seeing Bilton in Wertheimer's company on five or six occasions, he claimed never to have seen anything inappropriate taking place. J. H. Clarke said that he saw them kiss, but he subsequently admitted that they probably did not, arguing that their body positions could have implied that they did. He also admitted giving false testimony and failing to record some of the alleged incidents in his memorandum books. It was eventually ascertained that neither detective discovered anything inappropriate between Wertheimer and Bilton. A theatrical agent, Alexander Lumsden claimed to have seen Bilton kiss Wertheimer on five or six occasions, but he later stated that he had been given a drink and guinea to testify to this. A former landlady

¹⁹ *The Times*, 24 Jul. 1890, 30 Jul. 1890, *N.Y.T.*, 31 May 1891.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 24 Jul., 26 Jul., 29 Jul., 31 Jul. 1890, *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 Jan. 1907.

of Bilton's, plus another five unidentified witnesses all swore that they saw nothing inappropriate taking place between Bilton and Wertheimer. *The Times* argued that: 'in trying to make out the charges of adultery against Lady Dunlo, the petitioner's advisors relied upon her past life and on nothing that had occurred since she became the wife of Lord Dunlo'.²¹

Clancarty testified that his son had agreed to go to Australia in order to gather his thoughts and explore the possibility of getting the marriage annulled. Prior to his departure, he warned Dunlo that his conduct prior to his coming of age would be noted for future benefices, but denied pressurising his son into getting a divorce. Clancarty insisted that it was Dunlo who wanted to end the marriage and produced a letter purporting to be from him, which said: 'I believe that I am really married and there is no use in denying it. Why I did it, I don't know. I have no excuse to make. I can't say that I was drunk. I don't think I was, but I believe I must be rather off my head the last few months'. While Clancarty initially refused to accept the validity of the marriage, he eventually did so while being cross-examined during the petition.²² Bilton testified that she felt isolated after her husband departed for Australia and that she had no choice but to turn to Wertheimer for assistance. While he admitted visiting her on several occasions, Wertheimer never stayed overnight and refused to enter the house if she was alone. As Bilton had no discernable income, he paid some of her living expenses and occasionally gave her trinkets as gifts. Sir Charles Russell accused Bilton of not being honest in her letters to her husband about her relationship with Wertheimer while he was in Australia. She denied this, stating that she had been truthful about it and her husband did not have any issues regarding her friendship with Wertheimer.²³ She testified that her husband 'told her that he was the son of Lord Clancarty, and when he first proposed she said that

²¹ *ibid.*, 25 Jul., 26 Jul., 30 Jul. 1890.

²² *The Times*, 25 Jul. 1890.

²³ *ibid.*, 30 Jul. 1890.

his father would not consent'.²⁴ Bilton was sceptical about her husband's participation in the divorce proceedings, believing that they had been initiated by his father. She said that Clancarty tricked Dunlo into signing the affidavit, despite knowing that the information contained in it was false.²⁵

The petition was rejected, with the jury deliberating for less than an hour: 'Thus, Lord Dunlo, or rather the parent who has taken Lord Dunlo's marital conscience and conduct into his keeping, fails to procure the divorce which was to have rid the house of Clancarty of a distasteful alliance'.²⁶ Dunlo did not escape censure for his part in the whole proceedings, with Sir Charles Russell stating that he did not think 'that Lord Dunlo disregarded the importance of an oath, but what he had done was to have shown an utter want of appreciation of the obligation ... he was merely a cipher and puppet in the hands of his father'.²⁷ His behaviour was also subjected to odium by *The Times*, which stated: 'except indeed, certain fixity of affection for his wife, there is little about Lord Dunlo's conduct which is pleasant to contemplate'.²⁸ The fact that the jury exonerated the respondents in under an hour further highlighted the farcical nature of the proceedings. Such was his wish to cleanse the family from this unsuitable match; Clancarty had perjured himself and offered others financial inducements to do the same. In an attempt to make sense of the proceedings, *The Times* contended that: 'we prefer to believe that he (Clancarty) did not fully realise the flagrant unfairness of the proceeding ... the trial had, we trust, altered somewhat his conceptions of parental duty in such circumstances, or, at least, brought into prominence the honourable obligation under which a father rests towards his son's wife'.²⁹ While Lady Dunlo had lived a morally

²⁴ *ibid.*, 31 Jul. 1890

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ *ibid.*, 31 Jul. 1890; Divorce court file: 3538.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 31 Jul. 1890.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 30 Jul., 31 Jul. 1890.

ambiguous life that Clancarty disapproved of prior to her marriage, no evidence was presented at the petition, which definitively suggested that there was anything inappropriate in her relationship with Wertheimer. Dunlo's return from Australia exposed the suit as a fraudulent act initiated by Clancarty in an effort to assert control over his wayward son.

Dunlo's allowance was stopped after the petition, which resulted in Bilton resuming her stage career in order to support them and Wertheimer continued providing financial assistance, but once her husband acceded to the earldom, Bilton retired from the stage.³⁰ The secrecy surrounding the marriage was indicative of Dunlo's perspicacity of how his father would react, but also indicates a certain naivety on his part to expect that either his father would not find out about the marriage or would accept it once he learned about it.³¹

Mark Bence-Jones argued that Belle Bilton had never been accepted by the ascendancy and in order 'to relieve the tedium of life in her husband's rather austere mansion in county Galway, she would drive into the nearby town of Ballinasloe and dazzle the inhabitants with the extravagance of her turnout'.³² Her pleasant demeanour resulted in her being held in great affection by the tenants of the estate. One example of Lady Clancarty's generosity was when she invited sixty-four students from Brackerneagh national school to Garbally on 27 January 1893 and she gave each child two or three pieces of fruit as they were leaving, with the *Western Star* remarking that: 'no entertainment could be more gratifying or successful'.³³ Such activities ensured the consistent popularity of both her and the fifth earl, whose late father was criticised by the *Western Star*, ostensibly because of his distant relationship with his tenants during the

³⁰ *New York Daily Tribune*, 1 Jan. 1907; *N.Y.T.*, 1 Jan. 1907.

³¹ *The Times*, 25 Jul., 30 Jul. 1890.

³² Mark Bence-Jones *Twilight of the ascendancy* (London, 1987), p. 94.

³³ *Western Star*, 4 Feb. 1893.

last five years of his life and discussed in the previous chapter:

the earl and countess will ignore the absentee precedent of the late earl and dowager countess ... His lordship intends to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, than whom no nobleman nor landlord held a higher place in the estimation of the people, and takes a personal interest in all that concerns the management of his estates and the well-being of the tenantry and the general community.³⁴

Lady Clancarty was diagnosed with cancer in 1904 and she went to Paris for treatment from Dr E. Doyen, a cancer specialist, though this treatment proved to be unsuccessful in curing her. Her death on 31 December 1906 caused a reflection on her marriage and the controversy surrounding it. Her death was reported in *The Mercury* of Hobart, Tasmania, the *New York Times*, and the *New York Daily Tribune*. While the marriage attracted a lot of attention, scepticism and surprise, it became a stable and loving relationship.³⁵ After her death, the *New York Daily Tribune* commented that 'this marriage, which began in so stormy a fashion and for which so much ill was predicted, turned out remarkably well'.³⁶ Clancarty no longer felt obliged to remain in Ballinasloe and left soon after, thus ending the family's long term presence in Ballinasloe. He moved to 21 Cadogan Gardens, London and in 1908, he remarried, this time to Mary Gwatkin Ellis.³⁷

III.) The death of the fourth earl of Clancarty and the bankruptcy of the Clancarty estate

Lord Dunlo was unaware of the imminence of his father's death on 29 May 1891, due to the rift between them being only partially healed. The fact that other family members were aware of its inevitability is further evidence of the level of estrangement between

³⁴ *ibid.*, 24 Jun. 1893.

³⁵ *N. Y. D. T.*, 1 Jan. 1907; *The Mercury*, Hobart, Tasmania, 8 Jan. 1907.

³⁶ *N. Y. D. T.*, 1 Jan. 1907.

³⁷ Court of Bankruptcy and successors: Proceedings under the Bankruptcy Acts, Trench, The Right Honourable William Frederick Le Poer, Earl of Clancarty, B 9/847 in T.N.A.

Dunlo and his family, in particular his mother.³⁸ The fourth earl's death was met with a genuine sense of mourning on the estate and despite being critical of him in the past, the *Western News* wanted to make amends in an attempt to court favour with his young son and successor, in the hope that he would continue with the progressive estate management policies of his father and grandfather, especially considering the number of people that were employed on the estate: 'we hope his [the fourth earl's] lamented death will cause no changes in Garbally, where two or three hundred people are employed'.³⁹

The fourth earl was called an exemplary resident landlord and extensive employer of tenants on the estate and the *Western News* commented that 'his loss will be much felt in town and country. We hope the present [fifth] earl will follow the footsteps of his ancestors, and that he will see his way to reside in Garbally amongst his tenants and thus be a benefit to the country'. The Church of Ireland rector, Rev. Tibbs articulated a widely held belief that Clancarty was a sympathetic friend of the poor: 'quietly and unostentatiously he relieved the poor when he cried, and not a case of real distress ever went away from him unsatisfied' and the *Western News* called him: 'a remarkable, clever man, who for years was chairman of the board of guardians, town commissioners and agricultural society'. He had been in poor health for a number of years prior to his death and was interred in Highgate Cemetery, London and not in the family vault at St John's Church like his predecessors.⁴⁰

The fourth earl appeared to have been more aloof in his approach to managing the estate in comparison to his father. Instead, he left the day-to-day operation in the hands of his agent, Edward Fowler. Fowler played a significant role in the operation of the estate than the fourth earl, whose distant relationship with his tenants appeared to have been the

³⁸ *The Times*, 25 Jul. 1890, *N.Y.T.*, 30 May 1891, 31 May 1891.

³⁹ *Western News*, 30 May 1891, 6 Jun. 1891; Eugene Hynes, *Knock: the Virgin's apparition in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cork, 2009), pp 143–7.

⁴⁰ *W. N.*, 30 May 1891, 6 Jun. 1891.

cause of some tension. As discussed in the previous section, the *Western Star* regarded this as a form of absenteeism. The frequent attacks on his character, as discussed in chapters five and six, indicate that the fourth earl was not as highly regarded as his father by the tenantry and he appeared to have had a great sense of his position as a landlord, which was challenged through the various elected bodies in Ballinasloe. His absence from Town Commission and Board of Guardians meetings, refusal to meet deputations or to engage in discussions regarding improvements on the estate with tenants could be interpreted as disdain towards the evolving nature of class relations on the estate. The lack of coverage in the local press regarding his death and his interment in Highgate Cemetery are indicative of a certain detachment from the estate and town of Ballinasloe.

There was some trepidation as to the future management of the estate after the fourth earl's death. Eugene Hynes offered the hypothesis that tenants feared that unwritten understandings which had been in place on an estate would not be adhered to by the new landlord, who would then create numerous problems for tenants. He drew upon the example of such unrest emerging on the Dillon estate in Knock, county Mayo during the Land War prior to the retirement of the benevolent and popular agent, Charles Strickland. 'Landlords or agents such as Strickland who prided themselves on their just paternalism found that the deference traditionally given them by their tenants was suddenly gone'.⁴¹ While this deference had been disappearing on the Clancarty estate from the late 1880s especially, tenants were still keen to show their appreciation for the previous benevolence of the family. While relations between the fourth earl and his tenants were somewhat fraught at times, they were still relatively harmonious in comparison to neighbouring estates, such as Clanricarde, Ashtown and Dunsandle.

The fourth earl had his will redrawn after the failed divorce petition and

⁴¹ Hynes, *Knock*, pp 143–7.

bequeathed all his residuary real and personal estate to his wife, her heirs, executors and administrators respectively. He appointed her executor of his will because he felt that she would 'religiously carry out what she knows to be my wishes in the disposal of it'.⁴² The fourth earl was the owner of a personal estate of over £53,000 which included chattels, plate and the family residence.⁴³ A fund of £19,707 had been created for his younger son and daughter, Richard and Catherine, which he had the power of appointment and he ensured that the settled estates were placed into a trust.⁴⁴

A memorandum made by the testator in which he expressed a wish that whatever furniture, pictures and plate with the Clancarty crest at Garbally or Coorheen at the time of his death should be sold and the proceeds given, after the payment of his debts two thirds to his son Richard John and one third to his daughter Catherine Anne.⁴⁵

The fifth earl contested the will because he felt that its language was ambiguous and the master of the rolls ruled in his favour. He stated that 'the trust [had] not being sufficiently defined, she (the dowager countess) should hold the unsettled real estate for the heir at law, the present earl, and the personal estate for the persons entitled under the statute of distributions'.⁴⁶ She appealed this decision to the lord chief justice because she was adamant that the trust should have been upheld. She testified that her husband was determined to disinherit the fifth earl from the unsettled estates, which were referred to in paragraphs three, four, six, seven, fifteen and sixteen of the fourth earl's will. The unsettled estates consisted of lands in the town land of Kilclooney, between the river Kilclooney and Killure castle. The second earl, Richard, became tenant for life of these estates by an indenture dated 21 January 1833 His son had become tenant for life on land that comprised of farm and lands of Killuremore and he later accumulated land in

⁴² *I.T.*, 13 Jun. 1893, see also MS 35,816/6 (N. L. I., Clonbrock papers)

⁴³ *I.T.*, 13 Jun. 1893.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 11 May 1893.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, 11 May 1893; 13 Jun. 1893.

Ballinasloe at Soldier's Row, which was subsequently renamed Society street.⁴⁷ The dowager countess's barrister, Mr White Q.C., argued that the 'true meaning of the residuary clause was that they created a trust to such an extent as to render it impossible for the dowager countess to claim beneficial interest in the assets to which the claim related'. The lord chief justice ruled that 'the effect of the will was to make the dowager countess after the testator's death, his second self, investing her with no legal responsibilities and expressing no imperative command but conferring on her absolute dominion over the property, and confiding everything to her conscience'. The lord chancellor overturned the ruling of the master of the rolls and asserted that the language in the will was not ambiguous, concluding that it made her the absolute owner of the property that had been contested. He further declared that the dowager countess was entitled to the residuary estates and awarded costs in her favour.⁴⁸ In 1894, she auctioned off the substantial art collection amassed by the second earl when he was ambassador to the Hague in the 1810s and 1820s. This collection consisted of 120 paintings, mostly by Flemish artists.⁴⁹

By 1883, the Clancarty estate comprised 23,986 acres in Galway, valued at £11,724 and 1,614 acres in Roscommon, worth £1,093. Edward Fowler testified to the Cowper Commission that there were 1,400 tenants on the estates and of these, there were 1,110 agricultural holdings, with 110 holding more than one farm and there were 140 holdings in the town of Ballinasloe. The entailed estates brought in a net rental of £4,000 and the fifth earl took out a number of mortgages on them, but he failed to maintain repayments on these, resulting in him being declared bankrupt in 1907.⁵⁰ This series of

⁴⁷ Will that formed part of the opinion in the case of Clancarty versus Clancarty, (MS 35,816/6, in Clonbrock papers, N. L. I.)

⁴⁸ *I.T.*, 11 May 1893, 20 May 1893, 13 Jun. 1893.

⁴⁹ *The Times*, 1 Mar. 1892, 8 Mar. 1892, 14 Mar. 1892 and 17 Jul. 1894; *W.N.*, 20 May 1893.

⁵⁰ *The Times*, 13 Jan. 1910; *Report of the royal commission on the Land Law (Ireland) Act 1881 and the Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act 1885* [C4969] HC 1887, 1; *minutes of evidence and appendices*, [C496], HC 1887 xxvi, 25, Q. 21,611; P. K. Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe: its history from the earliest time to*

mortgages had been taken out with the Commercial Union Assurance Company and he struggled to maintain the repayments on them, resulting in a series of charges being struck on the estates as the C. U. A. C. attempted to recover the money that was owed to them.⁵¹ Clancarty did not pay duties on his inheritance to the Inland Revenue, which amounted to £3,276 3s. 11*d.* and they threatened legal action until the mortgagees pledged to oversee the discharge of these expenses and he was obliged to repay the mortgagees by 23 July 1897.⁵²

These financial woes dominated from the time he succeeded to the earldom in 1891, until he went bankrupt and chancery proceedings to place the estate into the hands of a trust were initiated in July 1892. New trustees had been appointed on 2 December 1903 that had the discretion to control Clancarty's spending.⁵³ In 1904, the dowager countess sought and was granted an application to intervene in the proceedings taken by the assignees in order to protect her son's property after the payment of debts.⁵⁴ As Clancarty repeatedly defaulted on his mortgage repayments, it resulted in his father's agent, Edward Fowler being appointed agent and receiver to ensure all encumbrances were paid in 1892. Any rents Fowler received during this period were to go towards the maintenance of outgoings, jointure interest and charges on the estates. Clancarty made no effort to repay £2,000 he owed to his mother, resulting in her approaching the trustees to 'carry out said trust by executing such mortgages as aforesaid'. She became entitled to a percentage of the purchase money once the life estates were sold under the terms of the 1903 land act. One of the trustees, Francis Crozier predicted there would be a bonus of

the present (Dublin, 1960), p. 286.

⁵¹ *I.T.*, 3 Jul. 1907, 31 Jul. 1907; Court of Bankruptcy and successors: Proceedings under the Bankruptcy Acts, Trench, The Right Honourable William Frederick Le Poer, Earl of Clancarty, B 9/847 in T.N.A.

⁵² *Conveyance: Winifred Conway of Glenville, Loughrea to Clancarty, Lord Francis Hervey and Francis Rowden Maria Crozier*, 29 Oct. 1910, I.25.18, in Clonfert Diocesan Archives (C. D. A.).

⁵³ *Conveyance: Winifred Conway of Glenville, Loughrea to Clancarty, Lord Francis Hervey and Francis Rowden Maria Crozier*, 29 Oct. 1910, I.25.18.

⁵⁴ *I.T.*, 19 Nov. 1904; *The Times*, 22 Oct. 1908; MS 35,815/6, Clonbrock papers in the National Library of Ireland.

£16,000 once the sale of the estate had been completed, but there was a charge of £18,600 on it, with £14,000 owed to the National Mutual Insurance Company, £2,600 to Lady Granard and £2,000 to his mother.⁵⁵ Once money was secured, the trustees acted in a swift manner to repay the dowager countess. They were the recipients of £3,542 2s. 0d. from a sum of £3,931 0s. 7d. Clancarty received from his agent and £1,400 from a £3,000 bequest Clancarty received from his recently deceased grandmother, which consisted of stock in the Midland and Great Western Railway.⁵⁶

Clancarty's life estates were placed under the management of a trust weeks before he was declared bankrupt and it had the express responsibility of preserving his interests in them for 'both himself and his family and the trust carried out that objective faithfully'. They gave him an allowance, but only so long as he 'behaved himself' and threatened to cut it off if he attempted to mortgage his remaining property. Mr Justice Holmes was sceptical of Francis Crozier's efforts to protect Clancarty from himself and his wayward spending, warning Crozier that if he did nothing, he would be failing in his duty as Clancarty's solicitor, thus implying that the trustees were partially responsible for Clancarty's dire financial management.⁵⁷

Clancarty had accumulated debts beyond the mortgages he had taken out on the estates. For example, he purchased £1,900 worth of jewellery for his wife before he died and £1,000 was raised from their sale after her death. He owed Isaac Abrahams £1,300 from the sale of racehorses; which was later reduced to £300 following the sale of the jewellery. He owed at least £500 to various shops in Ballinasloe; £109 10s. 6d. to the Urban District Council for the gas supply to Garbally House; £8 5s. 3d. to John Wood, a

⁵⁵ *Registry of Deeds*, Box 48, no. 231; *The Times*, 3 Jul. 1907; *Order of the High Courts of Justice in Ireland, King's bench division in bankruptcy* I.25.8, in C.D.A.

⁵⁶ *Registry of Deeds*, Box 48, no. 231; *Copy of conveyance of life estate to trustees: Earl of Clancarty, first part, Rt. Hon Adeliza Hervey, Countess of Clancarty, second part; Lord Francis Hervey and Thomas Francis Crozier, 3rd part*, I.25.9, in C. D. A.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 3 Jul. 1907, 25 Nov. 1909, 18 Jun. 1920.

draper; £25 4s. 11d., to Patrick Bannerton of Tea Lane, a coach man and farrier and Jonathan Ogle, a farmer and former gamekeeper on the estate £15 in unpaid wages.⁵⁸ By 1907 he appeared to have no discernable property remaining, with the exception of horses that were valued at £500 and he had difficulty trying to sell those. There was a hope that some of his debts would be recovered after the sale of his racing stud, though there was a poor attendance at the auction and prices were not as high as had been expected.⁵⁹

The sale of the estate was managed by the estate commissioners and this presented problems for tenants while negotiating the sale of the estate, as the commissioners were less flexible than what a landlord might have been.⁶⁰ In spite of the money that was raised from the sale of the estate, Clancarty still had accumulated liabilities of £5,956 and as he had not repaid this debt, he was discharged a bankrupt on 1 August 1907.⁶¹ On 19 August 1910, the first meeting of Clancarty's English creditors was held at the bankruptcy buildings under a receiving order made against him. This meeting, along with their second was adjourned so that they had more time to gather information regarding the respective creditors' claims.⁶² Some opponents to the land legislation feared that landlords would abandon the country once they sold their estates. However, as Patrick Cosgrove has recently illustrated, the estate commissioners stated this generally did not happen as there was a mechanism in place to allow them to repurchase their demesne land and become country gentlemen. 'Landlords for the first time in living memory, had the opportunity to establish themselves in other spheres of business free of

⁵⁸ Court of Bankruptcy and successors: Proceedings under the Bankruptcy Acts, Trench, The Right Honourable William Frederick Le Poer, Earl of Clancarty, B 9/847 in T.N.A.

⁵⁹ *I.T.*, 3 Jul. 1907, 31 Jul. 1907.

⁶⁰ *The Times*, 13 Jan. 1910; P. K. Egan, *The parish of Ballinasloe: its history from the earliest time to the present* (Dublin, 1960), p. 286.

⁶¹ *Copy of conveyance of life estate to trustees: Earl of Clancarty, first part, Rt. Hon Adeliza Hervey, Countess of Clancarty, second part; Lord Francis Hervey and Thomas Francis Crozier, 3rd part, I.25.9.*

⁶² *The Times*, 10 Sept. 1910, 20 Aug. 1910, *Copy of conveyance of life estate to trustees: Earl of Clancarty, first part, Rt. Hon Adeliza Hervey, Countess of Clancarty, second part; Lord Francis Hervey and Thomas Francis Crozier, 3rd part, I.25.9.*

the millstone which Irish land had become', though, like other members of the gentry, Clancarty decided that remaining in situ was no longer an option. He did not embrace Horace Plunkett's excitement about the potential new role landlords could play in becoming leaders of the country.⁶³

Coorheen house had traditionally been the residence of the dowager countess and after Lady Adeliza's death in 1911, Clancarty initiated negotiations for its sale to the diocese of Clonfert, which was completed by 1912, resulting in it becoming the residence of the bishop of Clonfert. Included in the sale were Coorheen house, offices, gardens, dressed grounds and avenue. Bishop O'Dea agreed to pay the vendor interest of 5.5 percent of the purchase price and on 21 May 1912, Clancarty, the trustees of the estate and other mortgagees all agreed to the sale of Coorheen to Bishop O'Dea of Galway, who was Bishop of Clonfert when the sale was initiated, his successor, Bishop Gilmartin, Fr John Cunningham P. P. V. F. of Tynagh and Joseph Corcoran P. P. V. F. of Portumna, who all acted as grantees. The sale resulted in the trustees of the C. U. A. C. releasing the property unto the new grantees.⁶⁴

Clancarty had spent £4,154 on household expenses over a three year period, but did not think that such expenditure was excessive, despite it exceeding his income. When the trustees discovered what he was doing, they drew up an agreement in an attempt to control his spending, but it was never acted upon. Even after being declared bankrupt, he was desirous of sustaining the lifestyle of a rich aristocrat and continued to engage in outlandish spending. The trust suspended his allowance for five months in 1918 and during this period, Clancarty signed £14,000 worth of cheques, despite being aware that

⁶³ Patrick John Cosgrove, 'The Wyndham Land Act, 1903: The final solution to the Irish Land Question?' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, NUI Maynooth, 2008), pp 147, 213–5.

⁶⁴ Registry of Deeds, Box 4 no. 287; *Copy of conveyance of life estate to trustees: Earl of Clancarty, first part, Rt. Hon Adeliza Hervey, Countess of Clancarty; second part; Lord Francis Hervey and Thomas Francis Crozier, 3rd part*, in C.D.A. Coorheen, I.25.11, I.25.12, I.25.18; *Conveyance: Winifred Conway of Glenville, Loughrea to Clancarty, Lord Francis Hervey and Francis Rowden Maria Crozier*, 29 Oct. 1910; *The earl of Clancarty and others to the Most Reverend Thomas O'Dea and others. Copy conveyance of property called 'Coorheen in the County of Galway*, I.25.22 in C.D.A.

his allowance had been suspended. Crozier stated that while the trust had sufficient funds to honour them, they chose not to, because they had discretion over what they could authorise. Clancarty's solicitor, Cecil Hayes suggested that he had been 'stripped by stages ... in 1893, he was bequeathed the freehold of an estate of £10,000 a year, and now, under the 1906 trust, he was in the position of being paid an allowance as an act of grace'. Crozier was accused of exploiting the trust for private gain, though he retorted that he was entitled to any expenses he incurred. Hayes wanted the trustees to be held accountable for Clancarty's recklessness and asked Crozier: 'how did you expect he would live during these five months? Did you think he might starve', but the magistrate would not entertain such an argument, especially after learning about the extent of Clancarty's expenditure during this period, 'if Lord Clancarty was starving he need not have gone to the Ritz or the Berkeley Hotels'. Clancarty stated that his insolvency was because the sale of the estate had not been finalized and once its sale had been completed, his income would improve. On 17 June 1920, he appeared before Bow street police courts charged with 'incurring credit to the extent of £10 and upwards without disclosing the fact he was an undischarged bankrupt' and was later imprisoned for three months.⁶⁵

IV. The sale of the Clancarty estate and the emergence of new elites

When the Conservative party was elected to office in 1885, they lacked a clearly defined Irish policy and previous policies had been reactionary in their nature, with Virginia Crossman contending that they had consisted of 'criticisms of the liberals for their failure to keep order or protect the rights of property owners'.⁶⁶ The Conservatives disagreed with the Liberal concept of dual ownership, formulated under the 1881 Land Act and by

⁶⁵ *The Times*, 18 Jun. 1920; Court of Bankruptcy and successors, B 9/847

⁶⁶ Virginia Crossman, *Politics, law and order in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1996), p. 153.

the 1890s; they began to advocate land purchase as a solution to this quandary. They were eager to return to a traditional concept of land ownership, even if it meant the destruction of Irish landlordism. Terence Dooley argued that ‘when a tenant becomes an owner-occupier, many areas of potential conflict had been removed’, and this was an additional reason to enact such legislation, thus epitomising constructive unionism.⁶⁷

A more concerted effort at passing land legislation began in 1891 and by 1900; both nationalists and unionists were committed to the idea of land purchase. The United Irish League was founded by William O’Brien in Mayo in 1898 and became an alternative source of authority in Ireland like the Land League and Irish National League before it. It soon had 100,000 members and while it was essentially non-violent in its outlook, boycotting frequently spilled over into violence and intimidation, resulting in coercive legislation, which in turn increased support for the league.⁶⁸ The land conference of 1902 was an attempt to find a rapprochement between landlord and tenant interests, while also trying to achieve a definitive solution to the land question. Captain John Shawe-Taylor, a hitherto relatively unknown landlord, was the driving force behind this initiative and William O’Brien, the founder of the United Irish League, concurred with him. The chief secretary, George Wyndham was amenable to the conclusions reached by the conference, despite divisions amongst landlords and set about writing the 1903 land bill that became the Wyndham land act. In an effort to incentivise landlords to sell, the terms of the act were quite generous. The 12 percent cash bonus on the final purchase price encouraged many landlords to avail of it. Philip Bull has also maintained that substantive agreements between landlords and tenants were necessary for the bill to succeed. However, it soon became obvious that it was going to be inadequate and there were tensions surrounding its implementation. There was a question as to whether the

⁶⁷ Terence Dooley, *The land for the people: the land question in independent Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p. 91.

⁶⁸ F. S. L. Lyons, ‘The aftermath of Parnell’, in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, vi: Ireland under the Union, 1870–1921*, p. 93.

land conference proposals would result in too high a price being paid to landlords. Bull stated that the generosity to landlords perpetuated an assumption that this was an injustice to tenants, but it was also argued that such generosity was a small price to pay and was necessary in order to expedite the sale of estates. Bull also said that the ideological and cultural contexts of nationalism that existed heretofore had disintegrated because ‘agrarian agitation and denunciation of landlordism had become a political cul-de-sac’ and there was now a need to redefine nationalism beyond the land question and the settlement of the land question presented an opportunity to remove agrarianism from the concept of Irish nationalism.⁶⁹ However, as Patrick Cosgrove and Terence Dooley have illustrated, the Wyndham land act was not the final solution to the land question and an attempt to find a solution to it was something that enraptured successive Free State governments.⁷⁰

Bull also claimed that by 1902 the basis on which the whole machinery of alternative government could be constructed had been laid through the United Irish League. There was increased U. I. L. discontent in the west by the middle of 1904 and Lord Clonbrock maintained that tenants were determined to coerce landlords into selling and in his opinion; such behaviour had made the act virtually inoperative. Despite its strong presence in the west of Ireland, the league was relatively inactive on the Clancarty estate, concentrating most of its activity in east Galway within the vicinity of the Clanricarde estate. Nevertheless, a convention was held in Ballinasloe on 18 November 1904, which demanded that Clancarty negotiate the sale of the estate directly with his tenants. The U. I. L. told the tenants that Clancarty could consider making a sale if he had a good rent collection at the November 1904 gale. However, the tenants would not make

⁶⁹ Philip Bull, ‘The significance of the nationalist response to the Irish land act of 1903’ in *Irish Historical Studies* vol. 28 No. 111 (May, 1993), pp 283–98.

⁷⁰ See Cosgrove, ‘The Wyndham Land Act, 1903, Dooley, *The land for the people*.

any payments until there was either a reduction in the gale, or a purchase taking place.⁷¹ Because the fifth earl of Clancarty was losing his battle to stave off bankruptcy, it resulted in the estate commissioners handling the sale of both his and his mother's estates. This presented problems for tenants, as the commissioners were much more rigid during negotiations for the sale of estates, which serves as an explanation as to why there was no significant collective action on the Clancarty estate. 512 purchasers were identified from the returns of advances of the 1903 and 1909 acts, with the largest number of advances being made in February 1912, when 182 purchasers paid an average of 19.8 years for their holdings.⁷²

The ranch war was concentrated in congested districts, as provocateurs demanded the redistribution of grazing land. The agitators focused upon non-residential holdings as this exacerbated land hunger and it was left to the U.I.L. to exploit the ill-feeling that was felt towards ranchers. They were not considered to be authentic farmers because they were not resident and shopkeeper-graziers were subjected to particular odium, especially as their power had increased because of their involvement in local politics.⁷³ The Royal Commission on Congestion was amenable to the redistribution of grazing lands, despite warnings that it would be a regressive step and harm the cattle industry. The idea of resettlement was put forward as it would benefit more congests, though it was intended that compulsory acquisition would be used sparingly.⁷⁴ Because the Clancarty estate was predominately made up of small holders, activity relating to the ranch war was infrequent

⁷¹ Patrick John Cosgrove, 'The Wyndham Land Act, 1903: The final solution to the Irish Land Question?', p. 202.

⁷² *Returns of advances made under the Irish Land Acts, 1903–1909, during the year ended 31st December, 1912–31st December 1919* 1914–21 [Cd. 1142, 1247, 1298, 1357, 6507, 6592, 6648, 7223, 7664, 7665, 7761, 7762, 7864, 7925, 8007, 8064, 8093, 8159, 8164, 8118, 8888, 8562, 8646, 8753], [Cmd. 623]; *Return of advances made under the Irish Land Purchase Acts, during the months of July, 1915, January, February and March, 1917* 1917–19 [Cmd. 57, 68, 370, 1526, 8562, 8646, 8753]

⁷³ Fergus Campbell discusses the congested districts in greater detail in *idem Land and revolution: nationalist politics in the west of Ireland, 1891–21* (Oxford, 2005), pp 9–11.

⁷⁴ David Seth-Jones, *Graziers, land reform and political conflict in Ireland* (Washington D. C., 1993, pp 209–13, 230–3.

on the estate. In fact, only one cattle drive was recorded to have taking place on the estate and it was at Gralla farm near Loughrea, with several baton charges being made and seventeen men were arrested.⁷⁵ There were 120 tenants on the Coorheen estate, near Loughrea and twenty-three formed a combination in an attempt to force the sale of the estate in 1909 and they were served with caretaker notice as a result of this. A further six combined on the neighbouring Derrybrien estate. While these tenants withheld rents, the U.I.L. did not make any significant breakthrough on the estate.⁷⁶

Landlords were less inclined to sell untenanted land along with the rest of their estate under the terms of the 1909 Land Act, especially in the west of Ireland: 'the letting of untenanted grasslands to large farmers and graziers was profitable for landlords and it may explain their reluctance to part with such lands'.⁷⁷ Fergus Campbell argued that the western problem was 'the juxtaposition of vast tracts of untenanted land ... next to the plots of impoverished farmers'.⁷⁸ Contrary to popular belief, the Wyndham land act did not end landlordism; rather, land was now regarded by the gentry as a liability rather than a prerequisite for social position.⁷⁹ The act presented multifarious problems for landlords. In the initial stages of its operation, many landlords sold their lands on the assumption that they would receive the purchase money and 'bonus' within a reasonable period of time ... [and] smaller landlords who were solvent at the time of sale, often faced the prospect of becoming mired in debt while they waited for their purchase money and bonus'⁸⁰ and Clancarty suffered such solvency issues while waiting for his bonus, which has already been discussed in this chapter. A neighbouring landlord, Sir William Mahon of Castlegar, faced a similar delay while the sale of his estate was being processed. In a

⁷⁵ *I.T.*, 19 Nov. 1904, 7 May 1908, 16 May 1908.

⁷⁶ County Inspector's monthly report, east Galway, Jan.–Mar. 1909, (T. N. A., CO 904/77, consulted on microfilm at John Paul II library, NUI Maynooth).

⁷⁷ Cosgrove, 'The Wyndham Land Act, 1903', p. 201.

⁷⁸ Campbell, *Land and revolution*, p. 9.

⁷⁹ Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*, p. 274.

⁸⁰ Cosgrove 'The Wyndham Land Act, 1903', pp 208–9.

letter from his agent, he was informed: ‘In the list of pending cases prepared by the estates commissioners earlier this year, there was £18,287,010 in front of your estate ... as the treasury only allows £2 million a year for all cash cases, it will be some years before your estate is reached’.⁸¹

The Local Government Act of 1898 ensured that former members of the Land League and I. N. L. had ensconced themselves onto local elected boards, such as the board of guardians, town commission and urban district council and they had been a strong presence on these boards for many years, as discussed in greater detail in chapters five and six. Thomas Byrne, formerly an active member of the Land League and the I. N. L. described himself as a gentleman farmer in the 1901 census. His rise to the position of Justice of the Peace was indicative of how a nationalist could succeed in filling the role once held by the landlords that he wanted removed from such spheres of influence. As David Cannadine argued: ‘the conservative reform of Irish local government in 1898 merely completed this process of political overthrow: territorial abdication came in its aftermath, rather than brought it about’.⁸²

While there was a certain pragmatic union between urban and rural tenants during the lifetime of the Land League and Irish National League, the emergence of trade unions in the late 1890s saw distinct and separate organisations emerging for urban workers and rural farmers. Labour candidates claiming to represent the interests of the urban poor became a feature in local politics in Ballinasloe from the late 1890s through to the first decade of the 1900s, which also saw a proliferation of representative bodies for town workers. The Ballinasloe Workingmen’s Association was established in 1896 and its primary focus was on organising social events for the likes of shop assistants, rather than concentrating on industrial or political matters. John Brutin established the United

⁸¹ MS 22,373, Mahon of Castlegar papers in the National Library of Ireland; see also Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*, p. 131

⁸² Cannadine, *The decline and fall of the British aristocracy*, p. 140.

Trades' Association, which later became the Ballinasloe and East Galway Trades Association. The main objective of this association was to prevent the hiring of handymen in place of skilled labour because they argued that the quality of the handymen's work would not be of the same standard of skilled tradesmen.⁸³

Despite the concentration on socialisation by labour organisations, they succeeded in organising eight candidates to seek election to the Ballinasloe urban council in 1899 under the leadership of carriage trimmer John Brutin, who became the most prominent figure in the labour movement in Ballinasloe. The *Western Star* did not agree with so many labour candidates seeking election and argued that there was the potential for a conflict of interest, as 'workingmen to carry through various works for them and it does not represent any roseate prospect to know that workingmen will be the employers of workingmen'.⁸⁴ Despite the reticence of the *Western Star*, six out of the eight candidates were returned, but 'the old members [of the board], used their majority to prevent John Brutin's election to the vice-chairmanship of the council and to block his proposal to hold meetings in the evenings, at a time convenient to those who had jobs' which was indicative of the difficulties that labour candidates faced in asserting any influence.⁸⁵

William Hastings arrived in Ballinasloe in the late 1890s to run the *Western Star*, which was the main newspaper in the town at this time and he used it to launch tirades or pursue personal vendettas against those 'who disturbed his commercial, political or personal sensibilities'. Hastings played an important role in urban politics in the town for over a decade and the nature his personality meant that his presence at urban district council meetings caused such a disturbance that transactions very often could not take place. While he claimed to be sympathetic to the cause of labour, he had been convicted

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *W.S.*, 14 Jan. 1899, John Cunningham, *Labour in the west of Ireland: working life and struggle, 1890–1914* (Belfast, 1995), pp 137–9.

⁸⁵ *W. S.*, 14 Jan. 1899.

of breaches of the Factory Act in his own business, yet despite such infractions; he still won the support of a section of the working class.⁸⁶

Brutin was also a founder of the Galway Artisans' and Labourers' Housing Association, because urban housing became a dominant issue and this organisation succeeded in bringing the wretched condition of labourers to greater attention.⁸⁷ Such was the condition of the urban poor in Ballinasloe that a housing association was set up in late 1900 and it quickly gathered momentum. The county inspector welcomed its establishment because it brought the condition of 'the most wretched' in the town to greater attention.⁸⁸ Town Tenant Leagues began to emerge in 1904 as a response to their neglect under the terms of the 1903 Act and they were desirous in attracting support for their plight across the political spectrum. The league claimed that 'Ireland's economic future could only be assured by the enactment of legislation designed to remedy the lacunae in contemporary legislation governing the urban rental sector'.⁸⁹ Conor McNamara has contended that 'by utilising the political language of the 1880s, the league hoped to tap into the residual pride, anger and self-righteousness that the land struggle aroused in the public ... [and] in the west, despite their rhetoric of inclusivity, the organisation struggled to attract significant support for the urban poor'.⁹⁰ As discussed in chapter one, landlords had paid particular attention to the development of towns, which could have attracted some animosity from rural tenants. Their departure from spheres of influence meant that no one was really interested in taking effective responsibility for upholding adequate conditions in towns or tending to the needs of its residents and such neglect was witnessed on the Clancarty estate.

⁸⁶ Cunningham, *Labour in the west of Ireland*, p. 139.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ County Inspector's monthly report, east Galway, 4 May 1901 (T. N. A., CO 904/72)

⁸⁹ Conor McNamara, 'A Tenants' League or a shopkeepers' league? Urban protest and the Town Tenants Association in the west of Ireland, 1909–1918' in *Studia Hibernica* vol 36 (2009–10), p. 135.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, pp 136–8.

Despite rallying calls of ‘the land for the people’, those living in towns were excluded from any reforms that took place for farmers because they did not fit into the paradigm of a new Ireland being constructed by nationalists. This resulted in the condition of the urban poor being neglected, even though they had participated in the agitation in the 1870s and 1880s on the assumption that their country neighbours would reciprocate once the land question was either settled or came close to settlement. Large farmers and shopkeepers were now becoming the most influential groups in the provinces, and as Fergus Campbell has argued, they collectively became the most powerful section of Irish society by 1914.⁹¹ Town tenants felt that they gained nothing in proportion to the sacrifices they had made in favour of peasant proprietorship and nationalist. In June 1915, Thomas Sweeney, a noted nationalist in Loughrea, expressed his disappointment at the indifference of rural farmers to the plight of their urban neighbours, considering the role that they had played in the Land War:

In the Land War, which extended over thirty years, the towns of Ireland played an important part. I am not afraid to say that the brunt of the war has been borne in large measure by the men living in towns. While they looked unceasingly and unselfishly after the interests of the tenant farmer, they unfortunately often neglected their own affairs.⁹²

Such ingratitude was also apparent amongst those that considered themselves to be the new elite in the countryside. Strong farmers, along with merchants were the burgeoning elite that were poised to take over from the old aristocratic guard and they were resistant to reforms that would assist the urban poor because of a potential increase in the burden of rates. The commercial elements in towns filled the lacuna left by the departure of the gentry from local politics and often, these new local elites embraced the aloofness that

⁹¹ Fergus Campbell, *The Irish Establishment, 1879–1914*, (Oxford, 2008), p. 304.

⁹² *Connacht Tribune*, 5 Jun. 1915. The 1911 census records a Thomas Sweeney, building contractor, living at Bride Street, Loughrea.

had previously been associated with the gentry, and they embodied a self-serving, parochial type of politics that resulted in the likes of labourers being excluded, or at the very least, being subservient in any alliance. Despite this suspicion of towns, F. S. L. Lyons argued that there was a gradual encroachment of urban ways in Ireland by the early twentieth century and town and country remained inter-dependent.⁹³ This inter-dependency was frequently a begrudging alliance, with Susan Hood and Brian Graham arguing that ‘if urban history has been neglected, then this mirrors the general neglect of urban dwellers and their claims for fair rent and fixity of tenure’.⁹⁴

Shortly after Clancarty’s agricultural tenants began purchasing their holdings under the terms of the 1903 Act, the town tenants established their own branch of the Town Tenant League in the hope that they would derive some benefit from the land acts. However this branch soon became dominated by the local commercial interest, which frustrated ‘even episodic attempts at social progress’.⁹⁵ There was a failure to present a united front regarding issues of real social concern in the town and the poorest members of society in the town were the ones that suffered the most. Discussions on the levels of rents being paid by town tenants and the condition of their housing were directed by the local merchants, rather than the those directly affected, with local auctioneer, Edward Rothwell accusing many of those seeking labourer cottages or reductions in rents of being ‘quasi-gentlemen’.⁹⁶ This was despite J. J. Ward’s testimony to the Royal Commission on Congestion in 1907, in which he said that Ballinasloe had streets in

⁹³ F. S. L. Lyons, ‘The watershed, 1903–7’, in W. E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, vi: *Ireland under the Union, 1870–1921*

⁹⁴ David Seth Jones, ‘The cleavage between graziers and peasants in the land struggle, 1890–1910’ in Clark and Donnelly, p. 410, Susan Hood and Brian Graham ‘Every creed and party: Town tenant protest in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland in *Journal of Historical Geography*, xxiv (1998), pp 170–88.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 136.

⁹⁶ Conor McNamara, ‘The Town Tenants Association’ (unpublished manuscript), p. 8; *idem*, ‘Politics and Society in East Galway, 1914–21’ (Ph.D Thesis, St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, 2008), pp 81–90.

which ‘labourers huddled together in filthy slums’.⁹⁷

At a branch meeting in February 1914, Fr T. J. Joyce said that town tenants would not be forgotten when it came to the purchase of their houses and he further added that a judicial body would be set up to assist them. The league called upon the Ballinasloe urban district council to use their statutory power to force slum property owners to improve the sanitary condition of their properties and ‘the views of the local shopocracy rather than the local urban poor, whom the association claimed to represent, was expressed by the committee’. There was a degree of bitterness from this meeting, because it was seen as a *volte-face*, with the local ‘shopocracy’ being compared to the landlords that they had replaced as plutocrats in the town.⁹⁸

In October 1914 the *East Galway Democrat* reported that the committee of the Ballinasloe Town Tenants Association attempted to bring forward a resolution calling on the urban council to establish a fair rent tribunal that would have the power to fix rents and it wanted to ensure that no one would take a house from a tenant that was unjustly evicted. ‘However, on the subject of the rents currently being paid for labourers cottages built by the local council, the views of the local shopocracy rather than the local urban poor, whom the association claimed to represent, was expressed by the committee’.⁹⁹ The committee then suggested that rent reductions should only be considered on an individual basis, rather than a general reduction being granted. Fr Joyce had argued that four-fifths of the houses in Ballinasloe were unfit for human habitation: ‘these abodes are an insult to God and they degrade men and women made to his image and likeness, herded together in these wretched dens to the level of brutes’.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Evidence of J.J. Ward, Digest of Evidence, p. Ixv, (57565); *Tenth report of the Royal Commission appointed to inquire into and report upon the operation of the acts dealing with congestion in Ireland: evidence and documents*, minutes of evidence taken in counties Galway and Roscommon, 18th September to 4th October, 1907, [Cd, 4007], H.C., 1908, Vol. XLII, p. 5.

⁹⁸ *East Galway Democrat*, 28 Feb. 1914..

⁹⁹ *ibid.*, 2 Oct. 1914.

¹⁰⁰ McNamara, ‘A Tenants’ League or a shopkeepers’ league?’, p. 148.

From its inception, the town tenant's league was influenced by local elites, i.e. shopkeepers, who wanted to ensure that its demands would not lead to an increase in rates. It failed to address the needs of slum tenants and the urban poor were reluctant to join it, with no 'weekly' tenants joining in Ballinasloe despite the absence of fair rents in the town.¹⁰¹ The domination of commercial interests ensured that the league could not present a united front and the 'the gulf between the farmer and the landless man came to mirror all too faithfully the gulf that had formerly existed between landlord and tenant'.¹⁰² They were especially resistant to reform in order to consolidate their own power base, to the detriment of the more vulnerable in the town. The condition of the urban poor appeared to have worsened with the departure of the Clancarty family and the new elites expressed little interest in actually continuing with the benevolent ways of the family, as they were more interested in serving their own interests.

V.) Conclusion

The Clancarty family's influence had become impotent by the time of the fourth earl's death in 1891 and the fifth earl was distracted from the management of the estate by his attempts at regaining the unsettled estates and staving off bankruptcy and his disinheritance from the unsettled estates presented problems that he may not have faced, had he inherited them. The Wyndham land act presented landlords with an opportunity to escape the financial quagmire that many had become entangled in, though the fifth earl of Clancarty's financial woes were so severe that nothing could be done to save him from financial oblivion. Popular memory portrayed him as inconsolable when being forced to sell his estate because the livelihoods of a large number of his staff were at risk. Patrick O'Connor said that he tried to sell staff their houses to them at a reduced price in order to

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, pp 141–3.

¹⁰² *E. G. D.*, 2 Oct. 1914; F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland since the Famine* (Dublin, 1971), p. 26.

minimise the burden of repayments, though no contemporary evidence survives to support this. While landlords in the country received bad press after their final decline and there were attempts to portray the Clancarty family as indifferent to their tenants, O'Connor also attested that his great-grand uncle was a former employee of Clancarty's and always remained resolute in his defence of his former employer, because of the family's generosity to their staff.¹⁰³ The fifth earl's imprisonment for fraud added to the humiliation felt by the family in the aftermath of the estate's bankruptcy. He, like so many of his contemporaries, was groomed to manage estates and earn their income from them and when that was taken away from him, he was at a loss as to what he could do.

A result of the social upheaval of the 1880s was that the farming classes were now equated with the progress of the Irish nation and the plight of those resident in towns was neglected, and this was the case in Ballinasloe. Towns and their residents were viewed with deep hostility by rural residents and shopkeepers still desired owning land because of the status of respectability that came with it, which added to the rural suspicion of towns. As discussed in chapter five, towns did not fit comfortably into the paradigm of a new Ireland. The neglect of town tenants on the Clancarty estate is an example of this policy being pursued by local elites and communal solidarity was non-existent. Farmers' disdain for their urban neighbours was obvious. While the earls of Clancarty provided relief and assistance to town tenants during periods of distress, their departure from Ballinasloe and the changing structures in society, meant that this was now a distant dream.

Collective action was frequently in response to immediate social concerns, such as the creation of housing associations and their organisation reflected the underlying class tensions that existed in towns.¹⁰⁴ The condition of town tenants and labourers in

¹⁰³ Interview with Patrick O'Connor, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway, 7 Jun. 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Fintan Lane, 'Rural labourers, social change and politics in late nineteenth century Ireland' in Fintan Lane

Ballinasloe were now being brought to greater attention by a new generation of activist, such as John Brutin and Fr T. J. Joyce. However no labourers rose to an obvious position of leadership because of the resolute class prejudice against them assuming such positions and they were often restricted financially in their ability to actively participate in local politics. Their employers would also frown upon such political activity, viewing their employees as acting in a subversive manner. Despite this, many members of the urban working classes were either not eager to or unable to agitate for a change in their circumstances, despite trade unions organising strikes for better pay and conditions. In the case of shop assistants, John Cunningham has argued: 'it may be that some shop assistants thought themselves too 'respectable' to strike. Many of them aspired to be shopkeepers themselves and saw their period in employment as training for that eventuality. The prospect of a stake in the community, however intangible and distant, could have influenced their behaviour'.¹⁰⁵

Despite being established to assist the urban poor, town tenants leagues struggled to attract their support in places like Ballinasloe, because of their dominance by vested interests and the ingratitude of farmers was the cause of a great deal of anger amongst town tenants.¹⁰⁶ Small farmers and labourers felt disappointed and betrayed by farmers and shopkeepers that pledged to assist them in their plight and they were impotent in attempts to mobilise. K. T. Hoppen remarked that merchants and strong farmers were now punching above their weight politically after the decline of landlordism. Despite efforts to move beyond agrarian issues, Hoppen also stated: 'what in the end is perhaps most remarkable is how a particular kind of farmer culture was able ... to align

and Donal O Drisceoil (eds) *Politics and the Irish working class, 1830–1945* (Basingstoke, 2005), pp 116–18.

¹⁰⁵ Cunningham, *Labour in the west of Ireland*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁶ McNamara, 'A Tenants' League or a shopkeepers' league?', p. 136.

nationalist politics ... it its own particular view of it'.¹⁰⁷

While Clancarty had originally planned to reside in Ballinasloe after the sale of the estate, he left soon after the death of his wife. Garbally was eventually sold to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Clonfert to act as the diocescan school. It was purchased for £6,200 because the previous facilities used in The Pines in Portnick, Ballinasloe had become inadequate for the growing student population. Garbally became both a boarding and day school for boys, serving the community of Ballinasloe and beyond. Despite the boarding school being closed in 2007, due to declining numbers, which is reflective of similar declines in western boarding schools in Ireland. While the survival of the house was under threat during the War of Independence; its purchase by the diocese of Clonfert and the residence of a priest in the house in the immediacy of its purchase, saved the house from a fate that befell other houses in Ireland during this period.¹⁰⁸ The current, ninth earl of Clancarty, Nicholas le Poer Trench, resides in London, is a visual artist and was elected to the House of Lords as a crossbencher in 2010.

Even after the sale of the estate, Clancarty's financial problems were never resolved, but he still desired to sustain the lifestyle of a wealthy aristocrat. As discussed in this chapter, Clancarty received an allowance from the trustees of the estate because of his excessive spending and they had the discretion to stop it at any stage. When the allowance was stopped, Clancarty continued to sign cheques in the knowledge that they were unlikely to be honoured. This resulted in him being imprisoned for three months and when the sentence was being handed down, the judge made a remark that was pertinent to both Clancarty and many of his contemporaries regarding the sense of loss many landlords felt after selling their estates:

You are one of those unfortunate men who had not been brought up to do anything for a living. You might have been in happier circumstances if you had

¹⁰⁷ K. T. Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: conflict and conformity* (London, 1989), pp 109–10.

¹⁰⁸ See Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*, pp 171–207

been called upon to discharge the sufficiently onerous and responsible duties of a landlord. But owing to the state of the country in which you lived, you were deprived of even that occupation.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the ascendancy*, p. 197.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored issues related to land, politics and religion on the Clancarty estate between 1851 and 1914. In the absence of estate records, it has attempted to chart and examine the decline of one aristocratic landed family by using alternative sources, thereby suggesting that the loss of estate records should not be a pretext for undertaking a study of this nature. In his article 'Incumbered wealth: landlord indebtedness in post-Famine Ireland', L. P. Curtis said:

case histories of great estates – usually so much better documented than small estates – may reveal many important facets of the landlord system, but, without knowledge of how medium and small-sized estates functioned in the same period, the extent to which the great estate was typical of the whole can never be fully understood.¹

This thesis has paid particular attention to the lives of the community resident on the estate and such a perspective regarding Irish landlordism has not been attempted in such a systematic fashion before. The opinions and lives of those that made up the fabric of an estate have been neglected by historians, and this thesis has attempted to redress this imbalance; thereby offering an additional perspective to the phenomenon of Irish landlordism. The various classes on the estate existed in a complex juxtaposition that led to the creation of influential groups, such as the nascent urban bourgeoisie that played a significant role in the operation of local government in the aftermath of Lord Clancarty's departure.

The most significant consequence of the approach adopted in this thesis is the dominance of class and class relations in this study of the Clancarty estate.

This thesis has shown that class-consciousness was not as E. P. Thompson argued

¹ L. P. Curtis Jr., 'Incumbered Wealth: Landed Indebtedness in Post-Famine Ireland' in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (1980), pp 332–367.

a theoretical construct, rather it was an historical phenomenon that arose out of human relationships that existed on the Clancarty estate.² The progress and evolution of these human relations during the post-Famine period, coupled with the changes in class relations on the estate has been explored in this thesis.

The third earl of Clancarty had total control over the operation of his estate and the town of Ballinasloe in the immediate aftermath of the Famine and tenants appreciated the progressive management policies through public displays of gratitude. A statue was erected in the third earl's honour and a monument to the memory of his uncle, Charles le Poer Trench, as public symbols of tenant gratitude to their astute and progressive management policies and these were referred to in chapters one and three. These public symbols of deference were erected despite both men being staunch evangelicals, which attracted significant opprobrium from contemporaries and harboured underlying sectarian animosity that saw significant episodic tensions come to the surface on occasions.

Terence Dooley has argued that 'the hand of an aristocratic landlord was to be seen in all aspects of community life'³ and chapter one has explored the estate management policies of the Clancarty family and their attempts at infrastructural and social improvements. The estate was an example of social experimentation on the part of the third earl of Clancarty because he was 'an apostle of agricultural reform'⁴ and he attempted to improve the agricultural techniques of farmers on the estate because he perceived their methods of farming as being backward. However as Jonathan Bell and Mervyn Watson have maintained, these so-called backward

² E. P. Thompson, *The making of the English working class*, (London, 1963), p. 9.

³ Terence Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland: a study of Irish landed families, 1860–1960*, (Dublin, 2001), p. 272.

⁴ *Tuam Herald*, 1 Oct. 1842; my thanks to Cathal Smith for bringing this quote to my attention.

techniques were adequate for farmers, because they were just interested in subsistence, often in fear of being penalised financially if they improved their holdings significantly, such as a substantial increase in rent.⁵ Nevertheless Clancarty persevered in his attempts to improve the condition of his tenants, but as there was nothing analogous to the Ulster Custom on the estate, it could serve as a further explanation as to why tenants were so reticent about embracing change. He expressed ideas regarding improvement in a pamphlet entitled *Ireland: its present condition and what it might be* (1864), in which he remarked that:

It is very observable that, in districts the best favoured by nature, there is often to be found the most miserable and unimproving population; and that tenants who hold by the longest and most advantageous leases, are commonly far behind those who hold from year to year, and pay the landlord the full value of the land.⁶

Barbara Solow has argued that ‘there was profit to be made in Irish agriculture and there was English capital ready to exploit it, but not on the terms the Irish tenants would expect’.⁷ However, a reason for the failure for agriculture to take off as the third earl of Clancarty had hoped was because of the failure of landlords to assuage the fears of tenants regarding tenurial policy on the estate, and this presented significant difficulties in efforts to improve agriculture on the estate. Such difficulties remained even into the early decades of the Free State, as the tenantry were slowly transformed into owner-occupiers, ‘Irish farm families clung tenaciously to their land and their specialised way of life’, and Solow failed to appreciate that such a way of life was very difficult for farmers to let go of.⁸

⁵ See Jonathan Bell and Mervyn Watson, *A history of Irish farming, 1750–1950* (Dublin, 2008).

⁶ Earl of Clancarty, *Ireland: her present condition and what it might be* (Dublin, 1864), p. 27.

⁷ Barbara Solow, *The land question and the Irish economy, 1870–1903* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp 196–7.

⁸ Hugh Brody, *Inishkillane: change and decline in the west of Ireland* (London, 1973), p. 9; see also

Landlords frequently believed that their tenants needed to be civilised because of the primitive agricultural practices that they used and agricultural societies could play an important role in this regard. However, the Ballinasloe Agricultural Society was an elitist organisation, with only local landlords becoming members because of the restrictive costs involved in joining. Therefore it failed in its objective to encourage the improvement of farming practices of small farmers in east Galway. Its members failed to fully appreciate the concerns that tenant-farmers had regarding the inadequate legal protections that they had. Small farmers in the district were not interested in a capitalist form of farming; rather, subsistence was the key to their survival. This, coupled with the death of the third earl in 1872, resulted in the society stagnating. Despite this, the society reflected the keen interest that the third earl of Clancarty had in improving the agricultural techniques of tenant farmers both on his estate and beyond.

The third earl's desire for such improvements and social engineering stemmed from his evangelical upbringing and such efforts were frequently in tandem with efforts to redeem his tenants' souls and chapter two examined proselytism and evangelicalism in the 1850s and 1860s on the estate and was also an assessment of the first significant challenge to the legitimacy of the Clancarty family's authority over affairs on the estate. The third earl's proselytising activity in the workhouse was a continuation of similar efforts that took place during the Famine, which is outside the scope of this thesis. He was influenced by the 'Second Reformation', of which, his uncle, Power le Poer Trench was a leading

Michel Peillon, *Contemporary Irish society: an introduction* (Dublin, 1982), part one.

light.⁹ The third earl's refusal to allow the Sisters of Mercy to enter the Ballinasloe workhouse was indicative of his devout evangelicalism; how he took tenant deference for granted and also how he was concerned at the threat that the Sisters of Mercy presented to his attempt at introducing an evangelical mission in the workhouse. This reflected his awareness that religious sisters were used to counteract proselytising activities and were an important weapon in Cardinal Cullen's armoury to challenge the Gallican nature of the Catholic Church in the west of Ireland, which had led proselytising to flourish in the region without being adequately counteracted by the hierarchy. Contemporaries believed that Clancarty exploited both his position as chairman of the board of guardians and landlord of the town in repeatedly thwarting attempts to have them admitted to the workhouse and they believed that because he succeeded in blocking their admission to the workhouse for a decade was indicative of the power he could wield.

The admittance of the Sisters of Mercy to the workhouse signified the beginning of the declining influence the third earl of Clancarty could exert over affairs on his estate. The determination in preventing Lord Dunlo from being elected as an M.P. during the 1859 election was a humiliation for the family and reflected the futility of members of the Clancarty family running in parliamentary elections, something which the third earl admitted in the immediate aftermath of the election. His determination to attract converts to Protestantism attracted deep resentment from the Catholic Church. However, due to his evangelical upbringing and their belief in the notion of freedom of conscience, he did not engage in forceful conversions like Alexander Dallas, the driving force of the Irish Church

⁹ For more on the 'Second Reformation', see Irene Whelan, *The bible war in Ireland the "second reformation" and the polarisation of Protestant-Catholic relations in Ireland, 1800–1810* (Dublin, 2005).

Missions, who naively assumed that 'English middle-class morality and evangelical religious practice would have universal appeal among the lower classes in Ireland'.¹⁰ Instead he hoped that his tenants would see that converting to Protestantism would bring about spiritual improvement through the medium of the scripture schools on the estate and they could become empowered through education.¹¹

The 1872 by-election, as discussed in chapter three, saw attempts at preventing Captain Trench being elected as M.P. for Galway take place, as the clergy of the county united in their endeavours at vilifying Trench, and more especially, Clancarty, with sectarian rhetoric being adopted to negate any possibility of Trench being elected and the clergy was frequently abetted by the nationalist press in fuelling such sectarian animosity. The extreme vituperation against Clancarty and Trench was carried out by agents outside of the estate and sphere of influence of the family. The Catholic clergy united behind Captain Nolan – not because they were of the opinion that he was the most suitable candidate – but because it reflected their determination in not having Trench returned because of his father's evangelical exploits. They had access to the people that Captain Trench could never hope for, and condemnations from the altar regarding Trench and Clancarty added a sectarian tinge to the election.

Bishop John MacEvilly of Galway admitted these extensive problems surrounding the by-election in correspondence to Cardinal Paul Cullen, stating that it was important for the clergy to present a united front in the election of a suitable

¹⁰ Desmond Bowen, *The Protestant crusade in Ireland: A study in Protestant-Catholic relations between the Act of Union and Disestablishment* (Dublin and Montreal, 1978), p. 227.

¹¹ Earl of Clancarty, *Ireland: her present condition and what it might be* (Dublin, 1864), p. 6, Eugenio Biagini, *Gladstone* (London, 2001), p. 4.

candidate. As Nolan received the unequivocal backing of the clergy – thanks to his expedient Portacarron award – landlords were concerned that he would become beholden to their demands. The clergy refused to accept that Trench was a liberal, despite evidence to the contrary, sustaining the polemic that he was an evangelical bigot like his father. The Galway landlords successfully challenged Nolan's victory in an election petition that saw Judge William Keogh deliver a judgment of such scathing proportions, the House of Commons feared it would create a much larger crisis, as effigies of Keogh were burnt across the country. The 1872 by-election marked the end of the Clancarty family's involvement in electoral politics in Galway. There were two significant consequences of this by-election that are relevant to this study: firstly, as already stated, the disappearance of the Clancarty family from having any significant political influence in county Galway and secondly, the emergence of neo-Fenians, such as Matt Harris, in playing a role in the political organisation of farmers in place of priests. There is no evidence to suggest that Fenians were involved in stirring up such sectarian animosity, rather it appears that they were taken aback by the extremity of the clerical attacks, which was sustained by the nationalist press, and together they stirred sectarian animosity against the Clancarty family. The Fenians desired to present themselves as an alternative leadership to the Catholic clergy for small tenant farmers. While no evidence has been uncovered to suggest the existence of sustained and overt sectarian tensions in the east Galway region during the period covered in this thesis, with Protestants and Catholics apparently living in relative harmony, there were occasions where tensions that had a sectarian hue did arise. Such animosity was directed towards Protestant landowners, which suggests that such tensions

were frequently more class based rather than confessional based, and it also indicates the difficulty of trying to definitively prove or disprove the existence of such tension. Nevertheless, as Miriam Moffitt has recently illustrated, Protestant farmers were less likely to participate in agrarian agitation 'by virtue of their educational and associational background'.¹²

From the 1870s there was a shift in the make up of Irish political institutions, as they became involved in a 'more sensitive relationship with the body of popular political activity' and increased reliance on the market forged links between town and the countryside that were later to prove to be of crucial political importance.¹³ Tenant-farmers were now beginning to have a voice representing their interests at a local level, as landlord influence on local political bodies, such as the board of guardians and town commission began to decline. Walter Walsh has stated that the Home Government Association, founded by Isaac Butt, eventually evolved into a nationalist and Catholic middle-class opposition movement to landlords.¹⁴ The association was also seen as a threat to the primacy of the land question and the Fenian embracement of the idea of a constitutional agrarian agitation played an important role in bringing the land question to greater public attention and ensured that it became the *de facto* national question.

While Fenianism began to play an important role as a social outlet for many young men by the mid-1860s, resulting in it entering the mainstream of Irish peasant life, many members received political instruction and developed

¹² Miriam Moffitt, 'Protestant tenant farmers and the Land League in North Connacht', in Conor McNamara and Carla King (eds) *The west of Ireland: New perspectives on the nineteenth century* (Dublin, 2011), p. 114

¹³ Liam Kennedy, 'Farmers, traders and agricultural politics in pre-independence Ireland' in Samuel Clark and James S. Donnelly, Jr. (eds), *Irish peasants: violence and political unrest 1780–1914* (Manchester, 1983), pp 343, 345.

¹⁴ Walter Walsh, *Kilkenny: the struggle for the land, 1850–82* (Kilkenny, 2009), p. 421

organisational skills which they then could transfer to other spheres and this was witnessed in the nascent Land League. This is an extension and development of the argument that R. V. Comerford put forward in 'Patriotism as pastime, the appeal of Fenianism in the mid-1860s'. Fenianism could and did play in the political education of small farmers in the west of Ireland, and inculcating a class consciousness in small tenant-farmers, that heretofore they had not been aware of¹⁵ and chapter four focused upon the development of class-consciousness of the burgeoning challenging collectivities on the Clancarty estate, in the guise of the Ballinasloe Tenant Defence Association. The dominance of neo-Fenian ideas proved to be a suitable training ground for the future agitation, as much of the rhetoric and structure of the B. T. D. A. bore striking similarities to that of the later Land League, of which Matt Harris and Michael O'Sullivan were founding members. The association provided foci for farmer political activity and education, with a strong anti-grazing element remaining amongst western radicals well into the twentieth century. The driving force and personality behind all this was Matt Harris, as he attempted to build a rural/urban alliance in order to strengthen this challenging collectivity against forces – such as landlords and graziers – that threatened the livelihoods of the lower orders.

What was particularly significant about this association was the absence of clergy on the executive committee after it was founded. This was despite the fact that the clergy were often seen as the natural leaders of the people, because they were entrenched in the local community, were seen to be the natural leaders of the lower classes and saw first-hand how the people lived. They were kept at arms

¹⁵ Paul Bew, *Conflict and conciliation in Ireland, 1890–1910, Parnellites and radical agrarians* (Oxford, 1987), p. 1; see also R. V. Comerford, 'Patriotism as pastime, the appeal of Fenianism in the mid-1860s' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxii (1981), pp 239–250.

length, due in part, to the fiasco that surrounded the 1872 by-election. The leadership of the B. T. D. A. had an acute sensitivity to the economic conditions of farmers and town tenants. Its establishment was a public manifestation of this alacrity, and coupled with the role of the press, especially the *Connaught Telegraph*, its aims and objectives were brought to greater national prominence. The growth of the agrarian movement overwhelmed landlords and played a crucial role in challenging the perception that landlords represented the proper social and civilising function in society. This resulted in many landlords being overwhelmed by the power and influence of such organisations as they emerged from the late 1870s. The fourth earl of Clancarty responded to this by withdrawing co-operation with his tenants regarding improvements that they wished to carry out on the estate and this has been discussed in chapter six.

Chapter five's primary focus was on the first phase of the Land War and its aftermath on the Clancarty estate. While local nationalists had solidified their influences in east Galway as a whole, they systematically failed to mobilise the Clancarty tenantry during this period. It is significant that there were periods of co-operation between nationalists and the fourth earl of Clancarty and this was seen to be essential in efforts to alleviate the distress of the most impoverished on the estate. This reflects a certain pragmatism on the part of staunch nationalists, such as Harris. He appreciated the difficulty in successfully convincing Clancarty tenants to turn against their landlord, and appreciated that he could play a role in the industrialisation of the town, thereby improving the condition of the urban poor on the estate.

The woes of the small tenant farmer and the struggle for land dominated

discourse in the country, to the neglect of urban tenants and repeated attempts to bring their plight to greater attention failed. The inactivity of Clancarty tenants during the Land War can be explained in two ways: firstly, the presence of a significant urban centre on the estate isolated a large chunk of the tenantry from the agitation because the reliance on urban tenants towards the Clancarty family had a conservatising effect upon any potential radical thought or actions; secondly, the benevolence of the Clancarty family removed any reason for potential conflict, as any threat of ending such charity was a risk many tenants did not want to take. Evictions did take place on the estate, yet there was no systematic mobilisation of tenants to prevent them from being carried out. While urban tenants had supporters in the locality, such as Bishop Patrick Duggan, Harris and even the third and fourth earls of Clancarty, the dominance of agrarian and rural issues ensured that their lot was neglected by rural based agitators, which had a significant impact on their condition following the departure of the Clancarty family. The Land War was critical in removing popular support for landlords, though there was still implicit loyalty to Clancarty, possibly because he was an extensive employer and attempted to carry out significant private relief works. The cause of labourers and urban tenants began receiving more attention at this time. However, there was a systematic failure to unite farmers and labourers into a common cause, despite having similar grievances. Despite this, increased nationalist interest in board of guardians and town commission elections saw the previously harmonious relations on the estate begin to slowly disintegrate and chapter six examined the progress of these changes and illustrated how attitudes towards the fourth earl became quite acrimonious. He was now becoming increasingly vulnerable and had great

difficulties facing down the challenges being presented to him, despite strong support remaining for him amongst a sizable minority in the district. Nationalists attempted to flex their muscle on the board of guardians and Ballinasloe town commission in an effort to affect change on the estate, but with no success. This reflects how Clancarty could still dictate the operation of his estate and he – along with many of his contemporaries – had difficulties appreciating the onward march of democracy and the desire of his tenants to improve certain aspects of the estate as they saw fit.

Increased tensions on the board of guardians and town commission highlighted the gulf between nationalists and *ex-officio* board members. Such tensions resulted in the temporary disbandment of the Ballinasloe board of guardians as the authorities attempted to restore order. This chapter also explored the reticence of *ex-officio* guardians, such as Edward Fowler, to the populist predilections of nationalist guardians that used the town commission and board of guardians to forward political motions, rather than focus upon the administration of the boards and the responsible management of the town. Clancarty's increasing disinterest in co-operating with his tenants was probably because he, along with many other landlords, was now made to feel like an outsider in the locality, thanks to the virulent agitation within the vicinity of Ballinasloe.

Chapter seven explored the decline of the Clancarty estate and the emergence of new elites within the town of Ballinasloe. The decline of the estate was inevitable because of external factors, such as land legislation. Land purchase, which was the corner stone of this legislation, ensured that the decline of the Irish landlord as landowners was now unstoppable, though they still survived as a social

class until the late 1920s. The collapse of the Clancarty estate was coupled with the fourth earl's acute embarrassment that stemmed from the failed divorce petition and his son's subsequent bankruptcy, due in part to his disinheritance from the unsettled estates and his reckless spending. The death of the fifth earl's beloved wife, Belle Bilton, signified the end of the Clancarty family's presence in Ballinasloe, as he left Ireland soon afterwards, thus definitively ending 250 years of the family's presence in Ballinasloe.

There were two groups of elites vying for control of Irish society at the turn of the twentieth century: landlords that were still trying to hold onto the last vestiges of power and a new, rising elite that saw the respect and influence upward social mobility could bring.¹⁶ As Olwen Purdue has recently argued, there was a sense of displacement amongst members of the Anglo-Irish gentry: 'Although they had for generations occupied a position of authority and influence within Irish society, that society now appeared to reject all that they and their country houses represented'.¹⁷

The evangelical drive of the Clancarty family did play a role in their altruism towards their tenants, even if there were ulterior motives to it. The centrality of the Clancarty family to life on the estate came to an end by the early 1900s and the new elites in Ballinasloe were more interested in consolidating their own power base as they began to play a more substantial role in the management of local affairs on the once great estate on the eve of World War One. They were an establishment in waiting and

together with the Catholic Church, they effectively controlled political,

¹⁶ Fergus Campbell, *The Irish Establishment, 1879–1914* (Oxford, 2008), pp 304–5.

¹⁷ Olwen Purdue, *The big house in the north of Ireland: Land, power and social elites, 1878–1960* (Dublin, 2009), p. 233.

economic, cultural and moral life in rural Ireland... As individuals, their wealth may have been miniscule, but collectively the thousands of provincial merchants, small businessmen, shopkeepers and large farmers were the most powerful section of Irish society by 1914.¹⁸

Terence Dooley has claimed that ‘better education became the nemesis of deference’¹⁹ and tenants became more confident and better organized in challenging what was heretofore acceptable as a result of the land agitation that began sweeping the countryside in the late 1870s. The success of farmers in challenging the hegemony of landlords was due in part to the leadership of these various organisations. Philip Bull contended that ‘agrarian grievances were the fabric out of which skilled political operators crafted an entity in which diversity of interest was consolidated into a strong institutional form’.²⁰ Such resolute organisation resulted in the creation of an alternative rule of law. However, such unity was only superficial and divisions emerged between the various social classes in provincial Ireland, thus supporting David Fitzpatrick’s argument that ‘no nation ever shouted in unison for its freedom’, though all groups were submissive to collective discipline to drive forward their aims.²¹

What is equally pertinent to the decline of the landlord class, and the Clancarty family, was their inability to appreciate that their former tenants could play an important role in the sphere of politics. The fourth earl’s gradual withdrawal from political life in Ballinasloe and refusal to meet tenants regarding various issues pertaining to the operation of the town of Ballinasloe and other matters on the estate was hubris towards their potential as political leaders and as

¹⁸ Campbell, *The Irish establishment*, p. 304.

¹⁹ Dooley, *The decline of the Big House in Ireland*, p. 276.

²⁰ Philip Bull, *Land, politics and nationalism: a study of the Irish land question* (Dublin, 1996), p. 142.

²¹ David Fitzpatrick, ‘The geography of Irish nationalism’ in *Past and Present*, no. 78 (Feb 1978), pp 113–14.

Fergus Campbell argued:

The failure of the Irish landlord class to naturalise their rule in Ireland, was in part, because they were largely the descendents of a colonizing landowner class, who viewed their Catholic tenants as second-class citizens, who were not deserving of reinvestment in their tenants or fair treatment.²²

The lack of a clear identity and sense of belonging on the part of the fifth earl of Clancarty hastened his departure from Ireland. The onward march of democracy, coupled with a refusal to embrace this changing tide in the countryside, isolated many former landlords. The new elites that emerged in Ballinasloe after the departure of Clancarty were disinterested in the welfare of poorer tenants on the former Clancarty estate, which deeply accentuated the condition of the poor. Urban residents did not receive any support from the mainstream nationalist movement and Conor McNamara has rightly suggested that this was because of ‘the antipathy of the upper echelons of nationalist politics to the prospect of a serious urban protest’ and the dominance of a rancher/shopkeeper culture was particularly strong and dictated government policy into the early decades of the Free State.²³ Government policy during the Land War and Plan of Campaign had seen them target reforms at key socio-economic groups, which increased the marginalisation of the least influential groups in society²⁴ and this marginalisation of vulnerable socio-economic groups continued into the early twentieth century and beyond.

²² Campbell, *The Irish establishment*, p. 309.

²³ Conor McNamara, ‘A Tenants’ League or a shopkeepers’ league? Urban protest and the Town Tenants Association in the west of Ireland, 1909–1918’ in *Studia Hibernica* vol 36, 2009–10; For an interesting discussion on the role of ranchers in shaping Irish government policy in the early decades of the Free State, see Conor McCabe, *Sins of the father: tracing the decisions that shaped the Irish economy* (Dublin, 2011), chapter one.

²⁴ Stephen Ball, ‘Policing the Irish Land War: official responses to political protest and agrarian crime in Ireland, 1879–91’ (Ph.D thesis, University of London, 2000), pp 360–1.

Case studies of landed estates are vital in unravelling and understanding the multiplicity of relationships that existed on estates, which this thesis set out to do by focusing upon land, politics and religion on the Clancarty estate. This study has shown that it is feasible to carry out a study of an estate without a significant corpus of estate papers, by the utilisation of a wide array of other sources which have constructed a picture of social relations on the estate. While this thesis has built upon the rich historiography on landlords, the land question and landlord-tenant relations, two important aspects of this work, which have been hitherto been underappreciated in historiography were: the rural/urban chasm that existed amongst the lower classes and the role of local government as a centre of power struggle between a landlord and his tenants, especially after 1886, which W. L. Feingold stated was probably the last year of any major clash between nationalist and *ex-officio* guardians. The historiography of Irish landlordism has heretofore focused upon the estate management policies of estates, with attention being paid to the lives of landlords, their families and others involved in the operation of estates. This thesis has paid attention to the subaltern, i.e. the lives of the tenants resident on the estate was explored in intricate detail. It has also explored the limitations of a mass political organisation and the problems faced when attempting to unite urban and rural tenants into a common cause. Fergus Campbell has examined the lives of 'the ordinary people' within the vicinity of the parish of Craughwell, county Galway in *Land and revolution: Nationalist politics in the west of Ireland, 1891–1921* (Oxford, 2005). However Campbell's methodology is limited due to his failure to acknowledge the significant urban/rural conflicts and tensions that were in existence in east Galway, which this thesis has addressed in

regards to the Clancarty estate. The simplistic rural paradigm within which Campbell views relations in east Galway is problematic, especially as he treats the lower classes in the region with a degree of condescension and romanticises the conflict that took place in the region. While he mourns the lack of an Irish E. P. Thompson for example, Campbell is guilty of the ‘condescension of posterity’, something which Thompson warned against in *The making of the English working class*.²⁵ Eugenio Biagini has argued that the ‘Irish National League ... relied on the strong sense of community engendered by nationalism and the farming interest’, though divisions were quite significant and Campbell further fails to appreciate that intra-tenant tensions were systemic and quite significant.²⁶

The Clancarty estate was somewhat unusual, but not unique in that there was both a large urban centre and a resident landlord that directed the management of the estate and the dominance of an urban centre played an important role in conservatising the tenantry on the estate. While the nearby towns of Loughrea and Portumna were owned by the marquis of Clanricarde, he was an absentee and other neighbouring estates, like Ashtown, Clonbrock and Mahon were overwhelmingly rural in their make up, and this presented different and equally complex social relations. Therefore, as Terence Dooley has argued:

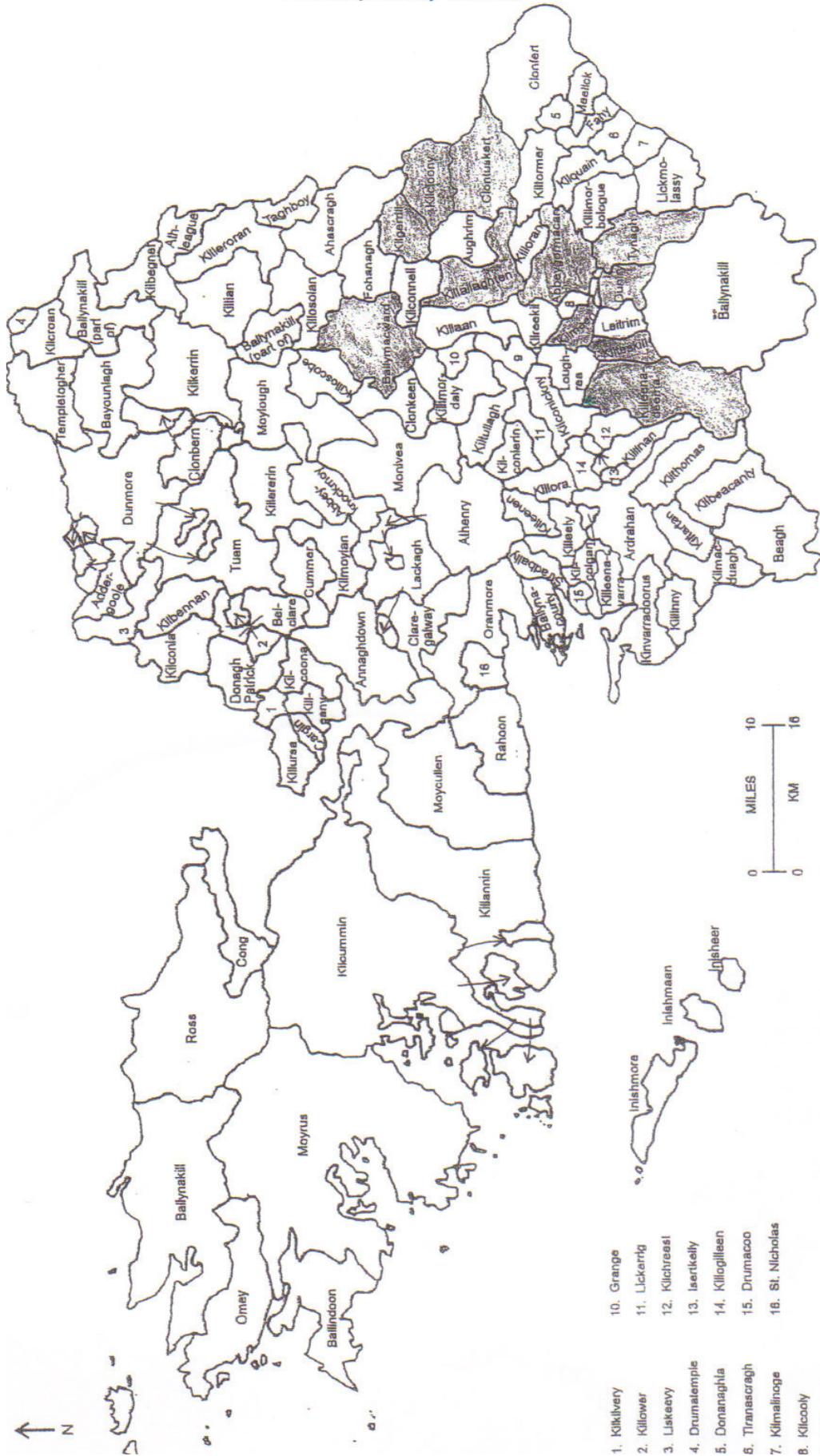
it is only through the study of local estates ... that historians can truly foster an understanding of the system of landlordism ... and therefore help to expose the anomalies and act as corrections to national histories which, because of their very nature, tend to hide such anomalies in generalisations.²⁷

²⁵ Campbell, *Land and revolution*, p. 293.

²⁶ Eugenio Biagini, *British Democracy and Irish Nationalism, 1876–1906* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 23.

²⁷ Terence Dooley, *The Big Houses and landed estates of Ireland: a research guide* (Dublin, 2007), p. 182.

Appendix one: Map of Galway, with parishes that contained land owned by the Clancarty family shaded.

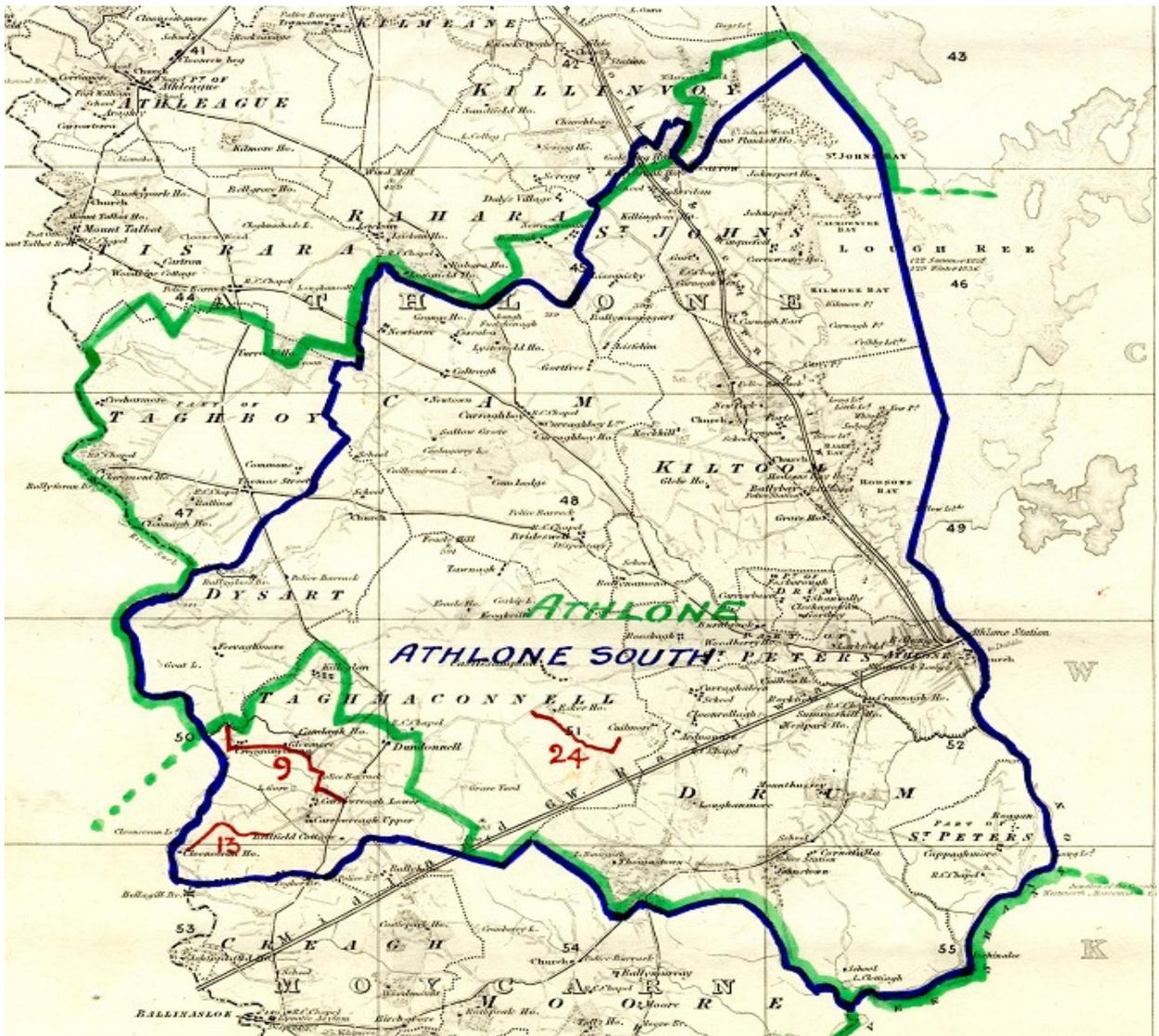


- 10. Grange
- 11. Lickerrig
- 12. Kichreesi
- 13. Iaertikely
- 14. Killogilleen
- 15. Drumacoo
- 18. St. Nicholas

- 1. Kilcliverty
- 2. Killoower
- 3. Liskeavy
- 4. Drumatemple
- 5. Donanaghla
- 6. Transacrach
- 7. Kilmalincge
- 8. Kilcooly
- 9. Pullaun

Appendix Two:
Maps of relief works discussed in Chapter five

Figure 1: Map of the barony of Athlone South, indicating proposed relief works

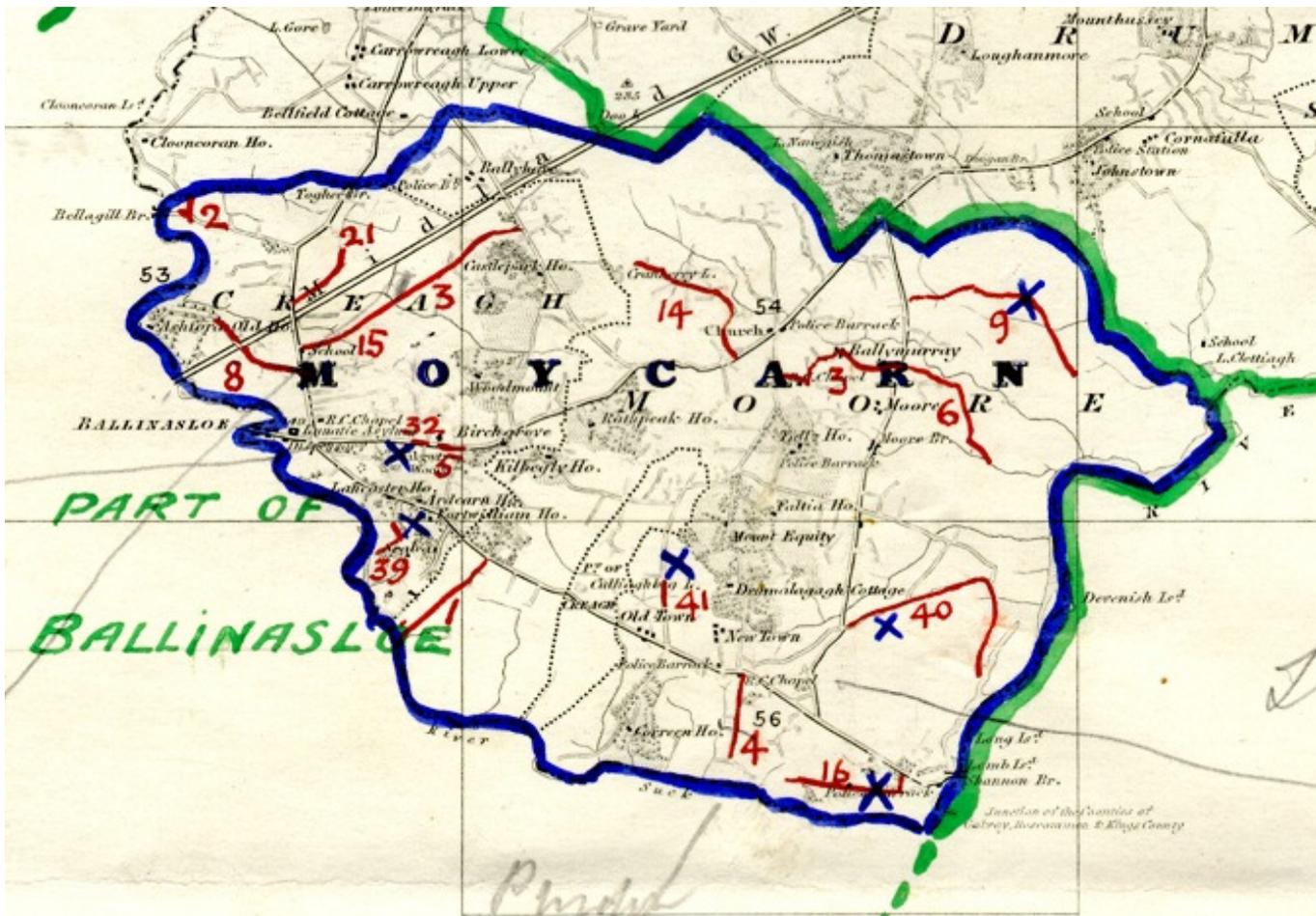


Source: C.S.O., R.P., 1880/19311

The proposed works are numbered and indicated in red. Number nine was to repair 900 perches of Clonbigney, Glenmore and Creganycarna from Pat Flynn's house to Creganycarna. Number thirteen was to repair 860 perches of road from Pat

Hardiman's House to Ballygill Bridge. Both of these were in the Ballinasloe Union and the costs were estimated to be £130 and £70 respectively. Number twenty-four was to repair the road between Michael Keogh's gate at Cloonohill and the village of Cuifadd (sic). Its cost was estimated to be £100 and this work was located in the Athlone Union.

Figure 2: Map of the barony of Moycarn, in the Ballinasloe Poor Law Union, indicating proposed relief works



Source: C.S.O., R.P., 1880/20613

The proposed works are numbered and indicated in red.

No. of presentment	Amount of presentment	Amount applied to be expended	Mode to be carried out
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	<i>l</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>l</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>d</i>	subcontract
9	364	0	0	364	0	0	do
16	38	2	6	38	2	6	do
32	52	10	0	52	10	0	do
39	21	5	0	21	5	0	do
40	185	0	0	185	0	0	do
41	30	0	0	30	0	0	do
Total	690	17	6	690	17	6	

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