

“A world turned upside down”: a study of the changing social world of the landed nobility of County Meath, 1875-1945

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Introduction

Certainly it [one's life-story] cannot be written impersonally. If one were to keep the teller out of it, it would be like a room without a fire, a book without a heart. Because it is a life. I make no claim for it, or excuse for it; but for those whom it interests, this is how we lived. And no one certainly will ever live like that again.

Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 10.

The above quote comes from the memoirs of Lady Elizabeth [Daisy] Fingall, which were published in 1937. She was born seventy-one years before, in 1866, the eldest daughter of George Burke of Danesfield in County Galway. In 1883, after something of a whirlwind romance, she married Arthur Plunkett, 11th Earl of Fingall, when she was just seventeen years old. Her memoirs essentially cover the period from the late 1870s to the late 1930s. As a social document they offer a valuable insight into what she herself rightly describes as “the twilight years” of the Irish landed class.¹ Most particularly they describe the social lives of the Irish nobility into which Elizabeth Burke married. Her memoirs clearly illustrate that the nobility, who were invariably large landowners,² moved usually, though not exclusively, in different social circles to the lesser gentry. (Elizabeth Burke's own experience demonstrates the exception to the rule here, for she was the daughter of an untitled middling-sized landowner who married into the nobility.) They also show that the social lives of the nobility were much more varied and usually much more extravagant than those of the lesser gentry.³

To provide something of a microcosmic insight to the social lives of the Irish nobility, this essay focuses upon the experiences

of eight titled families who owned estates and big houses in County Meath in the 1870s and it traces the changes that took place in their lives between then and the 1940s. These landowning nobles were at the social apex of a landed community in Meath that was made up of around 100 landowners of 500 acres or more who were resident in the county.⁴ Between them, the eight noblemen owned a total of 76,000 acres in Meath, or around 13 per cent of the county's total acreage. Lord Athlumney of Somerville owned 10,200 acres; the Earl of Darnley of Clifton lodge, Athboy owned 25,500 acres; the Earl of Fingall owned 9,600 acres; Viscount Gormanston owned 9,650 acres; the Marquis of Headfort owned 7,500 acres; Marquis Conyngham of Slane owned 7,060 acres; Lord Dunsany owned 4,400 acres and Lord Langford owned 2,231 acres.

With the exception of the Earl of Fingall (who owned a mere five acres in Berks) and Lord Athlumney (who owned 270 acres in Dublin) the other six nobles owned substantial estates either elsewhere in Ireland or in England. Taking these lands into consideration the eight families owned between them almost 280,000 acres.⁵ Marquis Conyngham was, in fact, one of the largest landowners in the country, owning a total of almost 157,000 acres divided between the counties of Meath, Donegal and Clare as well as almost 17,000 acres in England (see Appendix I).

i. Big houses and servants: symbols of wealth and social standing

By reasons of wealth (drawn almost exclusively from agricultural rents), social standing, cultural upbringing and political power (at both local and national level), the landlords of Meath distanced themselves from the vast majority of the people of the county. Indeed, the same was true for reasons of religion for while the Fingalls of Killeen were amongst a minority of Catholic landed families in the country as a whole, their social, cultural and political sympathies lay with Protestant landlords rather than with their Catholic tenantry.

The most obvious symbols of wealth and social standing were the big houses owned by the eight noble families; a certain degree of extravagance was incumbent upon the social function which these houses fulfilled. However, while they were obviously grand in physical scale, the great houses of Meath, with the possible exception of Summerhill, were not nearly as architec-

turally imposing or impressive as some of the great houses in neighbouring Kildare, such as Carton, Castletown and Lyons. The architectural structure of Headfort, for example, attracted little praise from contemporaries. In 1792, George Hardinge described the castle as being "more like a college or infirmary".⁶ Of course, the great irony of his comment is that now, over two hundred years later, three quarters of the house is in use as a preparatory school.

The core structures of Killeen and Dunsany castles dated back to the Middle Ages. Both were built between 1180 and 1200 by Hugh de Lacy and both were passed by marriage to Sir Christopher Plunkett from whom the Fingall and Dunsany lines came. The other six houses were built between the beginning of the eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth century. The building boom of the first half of the eighteenth century coincided with a period of landlord enterprise and investment due to a sharp rise in rental incomes from 1710 to 1730 and again from the mid 1740s.⁷ Summerhill, described by Mark Bence-Jones as "the most dramatic of the great Irish Palladian houses", was built in 1731 for Hercules Rowley, probably from the design of Sir Edward Lovett Pearce in collaboration with Richard Castle.⁸ Headfort was built between 1760 and 1770 for Sir Thomas Taylour, 1st Lord Headfort. Slane was an example of a very early Gothic Revival castle built around 1785 by the 2nd Lord Conyngham, probably to the design of James Wyatt. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Gormanston was built as a three storey Gothic Revival castle for the 12th Viscount Gormanston. Houses such as Killeen and Dunsany which originated before the building boom were then greatly embellished. Dunsany was restored and modernised in the 1780s by the 13th Lord Dunsany, and in the 1840s by his successor. In the early 1780s the 7th Earl of Fingall carried out various improvements to Killeen. It was further enlarged and altered in both 1804 and 1841 by the 8th and 9th Earls. Finally, Somerville, a much more modest Georgian house, was also greatly renovated around 1830.⁹

There is little information available as to the cost of building or renovating big houses such as these but a conservative estimate may perhaps be drawn from comparisons with houses such as Palmerstown, the home of the earl of Mayo in Kildare, which was completed in 1874 at a cost of £25,000 (approximately £1.5 million in today's terms).¹⁰ Of course, this estimate does not take into consideration the cost of furnishing such houses when

completed, or decorating them with works of art. A recent article in *The Sunday Tribune* estimated that the building of such great mansions could today cost up to £30 million.¹¹ Considering that the building of houses such as Summerhill or Headfort took a number of years and involved the employment of dozens of labourers and craftsmen (including, for example, specialised teams of stucco workers from Italy, who often spent years intricately decorating each room) this estimate is probably quite realistic.

Each of the eight houses was located amidst hundreds of acres of demesne lands that were characterised by parkland with grazing cattle, ornamental gardens, kitchen gardens and woodland (that not only offered privacy but was also essential for the rearing and preservation of game for shooting and hunting purposes). In the 1840s, Sir William Wilde wrote of Headfort demesne:

though possessing no natural features that attract attention, [it] has in its general appearance a degree of significance arising from its extent, unity of design, the richness of verdure, the long and gently inclined planes into which the surface is naturally disposed, and the arrangement and preservation of the plantations.¹²

Great houses such as these tended to be surrounded by high demesne walls. However, Killeen was one of the few big houses of its type throughout the country that was “not hidden away”. This was to Lady Fingall’s satisfaction:

... I was always so glad that they stopped their building with the home and raised no walls about it such as there are about so many Irish country houses, keeping Ireland and the people outside. Round Killeen we had only hedges or low fences which you could look over, or climb through, and the gates were the simplest possible, quite unsuitable, possibly, for a castle.¹³

Yet, despite her high ideals regarding having the demesne open to “Ireland and the people outside”, the fact of the matter was that a buffer of employees made up of agents and stewards ensured that these noble landowners had minimal contact with their tenantry. (Lady Fingall’s memoirs make no significant reference to any type of social interaction between her and the estate’s tenantry. It would probably be fair to conclude that she remained aloof from and largely ignorant of the wider local community outside Killeen.) While agents looked after the day-to-day running of the estate, stewards looked after the admin-

istration of the demesne. By the late nineteenth century, agents were drawn largely from the landed class themselves or else were part of professionalised land agency firms. In the case of stewards, these tended to be taken in from outside. This ensured that an acceptable "distance" existed between steward and estate employees. In 1911 the stewards at Slane, Dunsany, Headfort and Summerhill were all Scots Presbyterians, while even at the Catholic-owned Killeen (where the vast majority of demesne employees seem to have been local Catholics), the steward was a Protestant from Wicklow.¹⁴

Perhaps more than anything else servants were the outward symbols of the luxurious and leisured lifestyle lived by Irish landlords during the heyday of the big house. Domestic servants were an integral part of all big house communities. They were needed to keep the big house going and to cater for the large numbers of guests (which could perhaps run into hundreds during the course of any given year). As late as 1911 Marquis Conyngham employed at least 18 servants at Slane.¹⁵ They included a private nurse, a governess, two lady's maids, a butler, cook, housekeeper, valet, two footmen, a hall boy, and a variety of scullery, kitchen, parlour, dairy and house maids.¹⁶ There were also at least 18 servants employed at Headfort in 1911, 12 at Killeen and 12 at Dunsany.

Within the big house servants formed their own hierarchical structure. Butlers organised the male staff, looked after the family plate, ensured the wine cellar was kept well stocked and waited at table; housekeepers organised the female staff, ordered supplies, and decided the week's rota of guests with the mistress; cooks did what cooks do best; lady's maids tended to the mistress (Lady Fingall recalled changing her dress as often as five times a day during her visits to Carton for riding, tennis, croquet, tea and dinner. "Our frocks were voluminous", she wrote, and "our luggage, of course, absurd"¹⁷); footmen waited at table, accompanied the carriages, carried coal and answered the door; a variety of housemaids dusted, cleaned and organised the various rooms; kitchenmaids helped the cook; scullerymaids helped the kitchenmaids and at Killeen "there were two boys to do the [100] lamps and keep the fires of wood going, and carry enormous cans of hot water for baths".¹⁸

Dozens more were employed on the eight demesnes (at least 60 at Slane alone) as stewards, bailiffs, agricultural and general labourers, gardeners, gamekeepers, lodgekeepers, coachmen, grooms, herds, carpenters and masons. Retainers – successive

generations of the same family who often specialised in particular estate work – were employed on most of the estates. In 1911 at Dunsany, for example, three members of the Flynn family were labourers; two members of the Clynch family were gardeners (another was a messenger boy) and two members of the Farrell family were herdsman. At Headfort, two members of the Wright family were gamekeepers (another was a labourer) and three members of the King family were carpenters.

Each demesne was, therefore, a veritable hive of industry. At Slane in 1911 there were 40 stables, four coach houses, six sheds, three cow houses, two harness houses, two fowl houses, two boiling houses, and one calf shed, barn, workshop, potato shed, store, forge, laundry, sawmill and motor shed. The predominance of stables not only reflected the importance of horses in farm work but also their importance to the social lives of landed families such as the Conynghams who spent much of their leisure time hunting and racing. Lady Fingall wrote that: "The stables were the best part of Killeen, and there was room in them for thirty or forty horses. When Fingall had the Hounds and we stabled some of the Hunt horses, every one of the boxes would be filled."¹⁹

ii. Social exclusivity

Fingall, who all his life hated society, had accepted the State Stewardship for the sake of his sisters.

Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 77.

From 1882 to 1885, the 11th Earl of Fingall was state steward to the lord lieutenant of Ireland. His functions included the arrangement of banquets and dinners and seeing to the order of precedence at them, in other words ensuring that people entered the banquet hall in accordance to their rank and the date of their creation as peers. For somebody who was rather shy and who had no great love of socialising, his was a job "that was not at all enviable."²⁰ But, as his wife pointed out, Fingall was aware of the importance of the position to his sisters' future; the social contacts he made could be used to their benefit in the long term. He realised that at state banquets and dinners, they would be introduced to the most prominent members of Irish society and in that way might marry well.

The social exclusivity of the Meath landed class (and, indeed, the landed class of Ireland as a whole) was most discernible in

marriage patterns. Rarely did members of the Meath nobility, particularly heirs to estates, move outside the landed class to seek partners. Marriages were regarded as an important means of regenerating the tightly knit, exclusive nature of the landed community. Even if the occupational status of husbands of landlords' daughters were described as army officers, clergymen, naval officers, members of the legal or medical professions, one must remember that these men invariably came from landed backgrounds themselves; they were often the younger sons of landlords who had to find occupational outlets that would supplement their family allowances and allow them to perpetuate their social status. In 1905, for example, Florence Conyngham, daughter of the 3rd Marquis Conyngham, married Lt.-Col. Claud Heathcote-Drummond-Willoughby, son of the 1st Earl of Ancaster.

Marriages sometimes took place between county families. When Mary and Henrietta Plunkett, the two sisters of the 11th Earl of Fingall married: "their marriages took them only a short distance away still within the borders of Meath".²¹ Mary married George Fitzgerald Murphy of The Grange in 1884 while Henrietta married Robert Gradwell of Dowth Hall in the same year.²² In 1911 their niece, also Mary, and the only married daughter of the 11th Earl of Fingall, married Capt. Cyril Kirk of Tyrrellstown. In 1877, Catherine Rowley, daughter of 3rd Baron Langford, married James Lennox Naper of Loughcrew who although untitled was one of the largest landowners in the county.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the heirs to the eight estates showed a marked propensity to stay within titled circles and chose their brides, probably with a great deal of care, from large and titled landed families resident in Ireland or Britain. Through social events such as the Dublin and London seasons, participation in the affairs of Britain as politicians or officers in the army or navy, and through the ownership of English estates and London houses, the Meath nobility were exposed to a widening circle of potential partners. Few of these heirs had the courage of Geoffrey Taylour, 4th Marquis of Headfort, who, in 1901, married the reputedly beautiful Rose Boote, a gaiety girl who belonged to a music hall troupe of dancers. As a consequence of his marriage, Lord Headfort had to resign his commission in the Irish Guards.²³ Similarly, Lord Fingall's marriage to Elizabeth Burke of Danesfield was also frowned upon in some circles. While she was from a landed background, it was from a poorer one than some of Fingall's relatives would have wished. Lady Fingall was later to write: "it

was a great disappointment to them all that Fingall had not married some great and rich lady to bring money to the castle and estate which so badly needed it".²⁴ The new bride was expected to be well-versed in entertaining and to have moved in all the right social circles prior to her elevation as wife of a peer. So when Elizabeth Burke attended her first ball at Killeen she noted that "in the background were some alarming old ladies, Fingall's relatives, examining and considering me". The following morning she spent "a rather uncomfortable time with a terrifying old aunt of Fingall's, Lady Henrietta Riddell" who interrogated her about her family, about where she lived, and about the landed families with whom she was acquainted.²⁵

As the nineteenth century progressed the families of large landowners moved more regularly to Dublin and London to partake in the ball seasons. The Dublin season lasted from the end of January to St. Patrick's Day when it culminated with a ball in Dublin Castle. Members of landed families who did not own houses in Dublin or who did not take a house for the season usually stayed in hotels such as Buswells or the Shelbourne; the former, according to Lady Fingall: "was an old-fashioned, friendly, family hotel, greatly frequented by the country gentry bringing their daughters to Dublin for the Season".²⁶ A passage from Lady Fingall's memoirs shows the social mix that gathered in Dublin during this time:

In the carriages rode the staid people: members of the nobility, generals and colonels and country gentlemen bringing with them in the grey street something of the smell of the country, to which presently they would return with relief. There were Church dignitaries, too, ... learned professors ... On the outside cars rode many of my future dance partners, soldiers and sailors, looking very gay in their uniforms.²⁷

The London season was a much more extravagant affair that only the very wealthiest of Irish families could afford. In her diaries Lady Alice Howard of Shelton records how she used to meet the Conynghams of Slane on the boat over to Holyhead.²⁸ In London, the Meath nobility mixed with the wealthiest Irish landowners who had town houses, as well as with the elite of the British landed class. "It was great fun to be alive and to be young then", wrote Lady Fingall, as she recalled stays with the Londonderrys at Wynard, the Iveaghs at Elveden, the Earl of Cadogan at Culford, and the Herberts who "were much connected

with the diplomatic world and [who] had grand and dignified parties to which many foreign diplomats and their wives came".²⁹

Social exclusivity was engendered from an early stage. Rarely did the children of the landed class mix with the lower classes to any significant degree. (Landlords' children may have mixed to some extent with estate workers' children or attended picnics given on demesnes for tenants' children but they never socialised with them for long enough or often enough to become familiar with the different lifestyle of the lower class.) In the home, governesses, nurses, tutors and all upper servants who were in close contact with the family were carefully chosen by parents so as to ensure that children were exposed to what they considered to be proper influences from an early age. Probably for this reason the upper servants employed in the homes of the families under study were rarely from the locality and tended to share the religion of their employers. In 1911, none of the 18 servants returned for Slane was born in Meath (15 were born in England or Scotland) and all were Protestant. At Dunsany six out of the 11 servants returned were Catholics (given the family's history and their relationship to the Catholic Fingalls this might be understandable) but "cook/housekeeper", two nurses, head housemaid and butler were all Protestants and with the exception of the butler, born in County Monaghan, all had been born in England. Of the 18 servants at Headfort, 13 were Catholics but the housekeeper, valet, nurse and both of the footmen were English and Protestant. Of the 12 servants returned for the Catholic-owned Killeen, 11 were Catholics but the butler was an English Protestant.³⁰

Education began in the home and quite often was provided more by nannies and governesses than by parents. Schoolrooms were set aside in each house and furnished with the requisite desks, chairs, blackboards and so on. At an early age boys were usually sent to preparatory schools in England to prepare them for public school life at Eton or Harrow. Of the eight landlords *in situ* at the beginning of the period under study, five went to Eton, one to Harrow and one to Downside (the Catholic equivalent of Eton or Harrow). English public schools were seen by Irish landlords as places where sons achieved not only an education but "discipline", "wholesome training" and "the intimate friendships that spring from public school life".³¹ There they acquired the cultural values that were to integrate them into the British landed class and as an extension of this made them supporters of the British empire. Frank Harris, in a less than flattering manner,

commented upon the early education of the 18th Baron Dunsany: "At Eton ... he came to believe in British Imperialism and the world-devouring destinies of the British Empire all this imperialistic foolery I put down to his Eton training and, of course, in the last resort, to his want of brains".³² Of the eight landlords, the earl of Fingall was the only one who had not received a public school education and during the remainder of his life he felt the practical drawbacks of not having done so. His wife wrote:

Never having been to a public school, he had missed the association with other boys In the ordinary sense he was never educated. But he had good Fr. MacNamara's teaching. He could not spell either English or French – to the end of his days he spelt boat *boath* – and he wrote such an atrocious hand that I had great difficulty in reading the letter in which he proposed to me.³³

It seems that daughters in the main stayed at home and were educated there, although from the 1890s there does seem to have been an increase in the number of daughters who went to English public schools for girls such as Cheltenham Ladies College.³⁴

As national government was dominated by landlords in the nineteenth century, it became inevitable that the administration of the state would follow. This opened up avenues of employment for younger sons of landlords and, indeed, for eldest sons who wished to pursue a career before taking over the running of their estates. (At the age of sixteen, the 18th Baron Dunsany was taken away from Eton by his father in preparation for Sandhurst military academy. "Then and later he regretted leaving Eton, suspecting his father of wishing to economise on the fees".³⁵) As army officers and foreign diplomats the eight families under study made significant contributions to the affairs of the empire. By the age of twenty-four the 14th Viscount Gormanston, for example, was a lieutenant in the 60th Rifles and had served during the Indian Mutiny. From 1885 to 1887 he was governor of the Leeward Islands; from 1887 to 1893 he was governor of British Guiana and from 1893 to 1900 he was governor of Tasmania. He had also been chamberlain to the duke of Abercorn when the latter was lord lieutenant of Ireland from 1866 to 1868.³⁶ It could be argued that British foreign diplomats drawn from families such as the Gormanstons had the necessary upbringing to mix easily at court in other European states. They had the required education and had undertaken the grand

European tours that gave them experience of other European cultures and languages thus enabling them to mix easily with monarchs and ministers. Sir Francis Plunkett, uncle of the 11th Earl of Fingall was ambassador to Vienna from 1900 to 1905. Edward VII reputedly had a very high regard for him, once claiming that: "he is a very good friend of mine and one of my best ambassadors. He does not talk too much and always does the right thing by instinct".³⁷

Pursuing an army career was another means of perpetuating social position. Certainly it was not for any great financial gain that sons joined the army: being an officer cost more money than one was actually paid. The 3rd Marquis Conyngham, for example, was a lieutenant-general in the 1st Life Guards; his eldest son, Henry, was a lieutenant in the Scots Guard and his second son, Charles, was a lieutenant in the Rifle Brigade. The 5th Marquis Conyngham was a lieutenant in the South Irish Horse. The 11th Earl of Fingall served in the Boer War 1900-01. William Rowley, 6th Baron Langford, served in the Afghan War 1879-80 (and later in World War I). Mark Amory tells us that the 18th Baron Dunsany "had no scruples about fighting [in the Boer War], which he regarded as an honorable profession and, in times of crisis, a duty and [he] seems to have been a calm and efficient soldier in action".³⁸

iii. Leisure pursuits

As a result of the economic boom that characterised the post-Famine period, the social life of the landed nobility settled down once again from the mid 1850s to one of leisure and quite often extravagance.³⁹ Leisure activities took up their days: fox hunting, shooting and racing, luncheons, croquet parties and balls. By the early twentieth century, the 18th Baron Dunsany still spent his winter shooting at Dunsany; May and June in London for the season; July and August in Dunsany for cricket; September in Yorkshire with Lord and Lady Messborough at Arden Hall for the partridge shooting season; and October and November in Scotland for the grouse shooting season.⁴⁰ At home on his demesne, Lord Dunsany entertained family and friends to such outdoor games as tennis and croquet, while cricket matches were an established feature at Dunsany where the "home-team" of friends and neighbours took on the Free Foresters, Old Harrovians, Trinity College, and teams from various regiments quartered in Dublin and the Curragh.

The nobility were, however, as careful about whom they entertained or were entertained by as they were about choosing marriage partners. It is probably fair to state that big houses fulfilled many of the functions of modern hotels. Big house hospitality was extended all year round. From May 1887 to May 1888, a total of 278 guests were entertained at Headfort. In the Headfort visitors' book the same names appear on a frequent basis suggesting that there were a number of close family friends who were regular visitors.⁴¹ As a rule members of the lower classes were not invited as guests to big house functions. There were, as always, exceptions. In 1911, Padraic Colum stayed at Dunsany. Lady Beatrice, wife of the 18th Baron Dunsany and daughter of the 7th Earl of Jersey later wrote:

I believe he started life as a cattle drover. He has a fine head and is a very nice little man. We had a heated argument at dinner Eddie [Lord Dunsany], brilliant talker though he is, is so medieval in his views that it is difficult for him and an advanced nationalist to argue I think my parents' hair would stand on end if they knew we had guests of that kind.⁴²

On a somewhat different level, tenants were sometimes invited into the demesne to celebrate events such as the birth of a child to the landlord and his wife, or to celebrate a coming of age, but these events were usually held in marquees specially erected for the celebration, or perhaps occasionally in the servants' hall (after Lord and Lady Fingall arrived home from their honeymoon in 1883 "there was a tenants' party in the big Servants' Hall and it overflowed into a marquee that had been put up on the lawn"⁴³) but never in the main reception rooms of the big house.

Formal dinners were ceremonial occasions. Display was imperative and so dinner parties were often used to allow the host family to show off their plate collection which was usually silver. ("Only at Buckingham Palace and the Viceregal Lodge have I eaten off gold plate. And very nasty and scratchy it is, too, to eat from", wrote Lady Fingall.⁴⁴) Balls were amongst the most popular form of big house entertainment. In January 1874, Lady Alice Howard travelled from Shelton in Wicklow to a ball at Headfort and did not get home until around 6 a.m.⁴⁵ Hunt balls were regularly held at Dunsany: "There you will see every member of the Hunt; and not to be present then, if you belong to the Hunt, is to be thought dead."⁴⁶ "All the county people" were at the first ball attended by Elizabeth Burke, later Lady Fingall, at Killeen.

She had never stayed in “such a large house” before and was very much in awe of the fact that the ball:

lasted the whole night and was magnificently done in every way. Killeen, lit up with many lamps and candles, roaring fires in the old fireplaces ... with the music in it and the tables in the great dining-room spread for supper, seemed to me more than ever like a fairy palace.⁴⁷

Lady Fingall’s experience also illustrates that big houses were used for wedding receptions. Her uncle, Sir Patrick Keenan, gave the wedding reception for herself and Lord Fingall at his home, Delville, in County Dublin which was attended “by an enormous number of guests” including “the viceroy [Lord Spencer], Lady Spencer and all the viceregal court”.⁴⁸

Lady Fingall had “little heart” for hunting but soon came to realise that “if you didn’t hunt in Meath you might as well be dead. The whole life of the county centred round that occupation. During the hunting season no one talked of anything else.”⁴⁹ To the 18th Baron Dunsany, foxhunting was “the occupation of a lifetime” deserving of “a place with the graver more serious professions, among the great illusions of man.”⁵⁰ The Meath nobility and large landowners travelled between each other’s houses at Killeen, Dunsany, Loughcrew, Beauparc, Headfort and so on. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Meath had become “Ireland’s most fashionable hunt” and remained so until at least 1914.⁵¹ In rather elegiac terms, Muriel Bowen wrote:

The fashionable society that surrounded the Viceroy’s establishment in Dublin found in Meath a happy hunting ground on four or five days of the week. Meath in its extent of country – it is the largest country in Ireland – its oceans of grass, abundance of well-stocked coverts and above all a hunting establishment which could not fail to please the severest critic have combined to bring far-flung fame to the royal county.⁵²

The reputation of County Meath as a satisfying hunting area spread, and even the Empress Elizabeth of Austria was impressed enough by it to lease Summerhill for the hunting seasons in 1879 and 1880.⁵³ Already dominant in counties as landowners and politicians, the title of Master of Foxhounds enhanced the social position of landlords such as the earl of Fingall. Despite the fact that being MFH in Meath from 1888 to 1891 and from 1908 to 1911 “nearly ruined” him, and despite the fact that Lady Fingall

took to the hunting field rather reluctantly, she “enjoyed being ‘mistress’ and the position” it gave her.⁵⁴ While landlords did not monopolise the composition of the field – it became much more open to the rising Catholic middle class from the 1870s onwards and had always been widely supported by army officers, clergymen and members of the Protestant professional class – they did control its administration.

The hunt itself was of great importance. When the season opened it was not unusual for members of the Meath Hunt to take to the field five days a week. John Watson hunted six days a week (including Wednesdays when he went out with the Ward Staghounds).⁵⁵ The fact that there was “a chilly raw air and strong wind, with ominous dark clouds all around betokening hail or snow” did not dampen the enthusiasm of 120 members of the Meath Hunt who gathered at Batterstown in December 1883.⁵⁶ Appearances in the field had to be maintained. Lord Fingall might not recognise a dress that his wife had been wearing for five years, but it was an entirely different matter when it came to her hunting clothes. Lady Fingall later recalled:

He would say of a dress after I had worn it for five years or so and when I was about to discard it “I like that thing you are wearing. Is it new?” But my hunting clothes were a different matter. If they had fallen short of his high standards he would not have allowed me to come out in them.⁵⁷

While foxhunting was the most popular sport, certain members of the Meath nobility were also members of harrier clubs (who chased hares instead of foxes). There was a certain element of superiority amongst foxhunters who looked upon harriers with some disdain; nevertheless this did not prevent Randal Plunkett, 19th Baron Dunsany, from establishing the Dunsany Harriers at the end of World War I.⁵⁸ In 1926 Plunkett joined the British army and the pack was sold off to the Shanghai Hunt.⁵⁹

There were close links between foxhunting and steeplechasing. In 1851 the Ward Union Hunt in Meath transferred their annual steeplechase meeting from Ashbourne to Fairyhouse where on 23 April that year a four mile steeplechase for a purse of thirty sovereigns was the first race run over the new course that was to become home to the Irish Grand National.⁶⁰ Across the border in Kildare the advantages of Punchestown as a race course attracted the attention of the Kildare Hunt Club in 1850, which up to then had been holding races in a variety of locations across the Kildare Hunt country.⁶¹ By the 1870s the April meeting at Punchestown

had become the most popular race meeting in Ireland, if not the United Kingdom, and a major landlord society event. The big houses of Kildare opened their doors to landlords from all over Ireland who wished to stay in the vicinity of the race course for the week. At the meeting in April 1880, for example, the Fowlers of Meath stayed at Killashee with the Moores; the Headforts stayed with the Bartons at Straffan and Lord Langford of Summerhill stayed with the Bourkes of Roseborough.⁶² Throughout the 1880s the "Meath Hunt Steeplechase" was run at Punchestown for the Slane Cup and a prize of twenty-five guineas put up by Marquis Conyngham.⁶³

The Meath nobility had some success as owners and breeders of horses. "Cloister" was bred at Killeen in 1884 and in 1893 (having been sold to Lord Dudley) won the English Grand National. As flat racing became more organised, landlords began to develop the Curragh as a training area. Amongst those to establish a training lodge there was Marquis Conyngham who transformed Pope Hall into the impressive Conyngham lodge. In 1870 he was also one of twenty-two members of the Turf Club who were responsible for the organisation and administration of flat racing in Ireland.⁶⁴ Back in the late 1820s, Lord Langford of Summerhill owned the great "Sir Hercules". In 1828, he was unbeaten in Ireland as a two-year-old and the following year he won a number of major races in England. As F.A. Darcy points out, "Sir Hercules" stud career was even more impressive. In "Corsair", he produced the winner of the 1839 Two Thousand Guineas; "Coronation" won the 1841 English Derby; "Birdcatcher" won the Madrid and Peel Cups at the Curragh and "Faugh-A-Ballagh" became the first Irish-bred winner of the St. Leger and Cesarewitch in the same year.⁶⁵ "Sir Hercules" was, therefore, very much instrumental in establishing Irish breeding.

From the end of the Famine to the beginning of the land war the landed nobility of Meath continued to enjoy a leisured and luxurious lifestyle. Big house functions such as dinner parties and balls proliferated; fox hunting was more organised and more popular than ever; new racecourses such as Fairyhouse (and Punchestown in neighbouring Kildare) were established, and meetings there attracted huge interest, and shooting parties on demesnes were highly successful. Better communication links meant that Dublin and London became much more accessible. The winds of change, however, began to blow from around the late 1870s. From then onwards much was to change in the quality and scale of big house social life.

iv. The winds of change: economic depression and the land war.

At one touch of a harsh wind, most of what we had made came tumbling down, as if it were indeed, a house of cards, with no roots or foundations in the Irish earth on which it was built.

Elizabeth Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 164.

Although the effects of the land war and the prolonged economic depression of the 1880s were not felt as acutely in County Meath as they were in many other counties, particularly those along the western seaboard and in the south, the fall in agricultural prices, the call for reductions in rents, and the fair rent-fixing terms of the 1881 Land Act combined to test the economic performance of most estates. The seeds of economic decline were ironically sown in the 1860s and 1870s. During the economic boom of these years Irish landlords, in general, did not raise their rents in accordance with the rise in agricultural prices with the result that it was tenants who secured the greater share of the new wealth. At the same time landlords continued to be too cavalier in their borrowing, believing (as money-lending financial institutions obviously did) that the economic boom would last well into the future.

From the early 1880s landlords were pressurised by agrarian movements (the Land League, the National League and the United Irish League), government legislation and mortgagees to transfer their lands to appease the land hungry, satisfy a growing democracy and to meet their financial obligations. The early land acts from 1881 to 1891 did not entice the larger landowners in Meath onto the market, at least not to sell either their core estates or large tracts of land. For example, under the 1885 Land Act, twenty landlords in Meath sold between them a total of only 7,600 acres for approximately £106,000.⁶⁶ In the middle of an economic depression it may have been difficult for tenants to raise the one quarter deposit to buy their estates. Under the repayment conditions annuities would be no more favourable than the payment of rents and there was the possibility that the latter would continue to be diminished by government legislation. The gap between what tenants offered and what landlords demanded was too great.

From 1882 to 1890, almost 1,000 tenants in Meath entered the land courts and had their rents reduced by over 20 per cent

under the fair rent fixing terms of the 1881 Land Act. This in itself is not a significant number of tenants but it is quite possible that many more came to agreements with their landlords independently of these courts.⁶⁷ Under the terms of the Arrears of Rent (Ireland) Act of 1882, 110 Meath landlords had £16,300 extinguished from their rentals. Again, this is not a very significant sum compared, for example, to the average of £127,000 for each of the five counties of Connaught.⁶⁸ However, the greater significance of the act was that the extinction of arrears was perceived to be a form of confiscation and this government interference in the writing off of arrears, that hitherto had been a matter between individual landlords and their tenants, possibly more than any other factor undermined confidence in landed property. So much so that all avenues of borrowing to landlords closed from around this time forward as few lending institutions regarded land as safe collateral.

The loosening of legal restrictions under the terms of the 1882 Settled Land Act provided an opportunity to some landlords to sell outlying estates (it prohibited the sale of core estates) and, therefore, offered some form of respite to indebted landlords. For example, under the 1885 Land Act, Lord Langford sold 130 acres for £3,000.⁶⁹ This was only a very small portion of his estate, the rental of which had been £203 per annum, but the sale provided him with a capital sum equivalent to about one quarter of his total annual rents. This act also facilitated the sales of entailed heirlooms by allowing trustees to set aside a will in order to sell the contents of a house. No examples of such sales were found for the eight houses under study here, but it is likely they were affected in the same way as Carton, in neighbouring Kildare, for example, where, in 1902, 140 paintings including works by Gainsborough, Breughel and Van Der Hayden were sold.⁷⁰

Furthermore under the terms of the 1887 Land Act leaseholders were admitted to the fair rent fixing system and had their rents reduced on average by around 20 per cent. At the same time, terms of fair rents were reduced from fifteen years to five years in consequence of continued depression, with the result that from that year onwards landlords were faced with a further round of decreases. By the 1890s, the level of rents on estates throughout the country had fallen to that of Griffith's valuation if not below it. The rise of the UIL in the early part of the twentieth century simply put more pressure on landlords to sell. From the late 1880s, more and more landlords were considering the sale of their estates as the only viable solution to economic

survival. In the late 1880s, Lord Cloncurry (who, although resident in Kildare, had a substantial estate in Meath) for example, claimed to have had conversations with “nearly all the large landed proprietors” who were willing to sell “all the outlying portion” of their estates. He said that he would be glad to sell all his outlying properties and to retain only that part of his estate “within a day’s drive or journey” of his residence at Lyons.⁷¹

When the social and the political revolutions merged in the 1880s landlords became the targets of both sets of revolutionaries who blamed them for all the ills of society. By the turn of the century, landlords and their representatives had lost virtually all of their political power at local government level. This process began when nationalists targeted the boards of poor law guardians in the 1880s. It was effectively completed when the 1898 Local Government Act established county, urban and rural district councils to take over the functions of the grand juries. The landlords of Meath could no longer influence local government; the best they could hope to achieve was a seat or two on the county council. At national level, landlord political influence had first been diluted by the 1872 Secret Ballot Act. The trebling of the electorate and redrawing of constituencies under the Franchise and Redistribution Acts of 1884-85 ended their influence. From then on landlords could not hope to be returned as M.P.s for Meath unless they stood as nationalists (as Parnell did in 1875) or stood for English constituencies (the 17th Baron Dunsany was M.P. for Gloucester from 1886-92). These politico-economic developments had serious repercussions upon the social life of the Meath nobility.

v. Disruption of social life

It was no wonder that our fortunes – or what was left of them – went blazing up the chimney cheerfully with the enormous fires in those days. As cheerfully as they were being eaten up also by the horses in the stables, and by the endless grooms and retainers outside, including what Fingall called ... “the hereditary pipe smokers”.

Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 117.

As the social life of the landed class was largely dependent upon the income derived from rents and, indeed, stable landlord-tenant relations in the countryside (such as the tacit agreement of tenant farmers to allow hunts to travel across their property)

anything that disrupted either rental income or rural stability was bound to have repercussions upon the leisure pursuits of the landed class. From the end of 1881, Land League branches throughout the country began to stop hunts as a nationalist means of condemning the imprisonment of prominent Land Leaguers.⁷² While hunts in counties bordering Meath such as Kildare, King's County and Louth were seriously disrupted in the 1881-82 season, the Meath Hunt escaped unmolested. However, it was not so fortunate during the second phase of the Land War from the mid 1880s. In December 1887, a meeting of the local branch of the National League at Navan made it clear that landlords could no longer take for granted their perceived right to hunt over the land of local farmers. They called on all farmers in the county to poison their land in order to stop the hunt. Those present concurred that landlords' arguments regarding the loss of jobs in the local communities no longer carried any weight:

If they [landlords] imagine that behind the protection of some unfortunate stablemen and dog boys they can conquer the national spirit of the country, they are very much astray in their calculations. What is more intolerable is their arrogant assumption of a right to hunt in defiance of the people.⁷³

Of course, one should consider whether the stopping of these hunts, as R.V. Comerford suggests, was actually welcomed by some landlords who were becoming increasingly indebted.⁷⁴ It was after all an expensive pastime – in the early 1880s it could cost up to £39,000 per annum to keep a pack of foxhounds.⁷⁵ While the expense of keeping a pack was theoretically funded by the hunt members, in practice the MFH bore a disproportionate amount of the financial burden each year. Lady Fingall has claimed that her husband's two terms as MFH to the Meath Hunt (1888-91, 1908-11) "nearly ruined him."⁷⁶ In the short term the anti-hunting campaign in Meath probably did no more damage than to compound the growing tensions between landlords and tenants that characterised the Land War period. However, in the long term the decline in landlord economic fortunes was to have much more far reaching consequences.

From the 1880s the nobles of Meath were being forced to retrench. In most cases this involved cutting expenditure on the running of their big houses which in the past cost them anything up to about 30 per cent of their gross annual rental. In the late

1880s and again in the 1890s, Killeen was let for at least two winter hunting seasons to wealthy Americans such as the Colliers, while Somerville was also let to the Heskeths (who also took Killeen for a season).⁷⁷ Around the same time, the Earl of Fingall sold his Dublin house in Great Denmark Street to the Jesuits.⁷⁸ For the years 1901 to 1903 inclusive the Headforts received rents of £45,900 but expenditure amounted to £52,300. Family charges alone came to almost £5,000 but landlords perceived these as priorities and though the running of the house cost around £1,000 less, the family decided to close it temporarily and retrench to a rented house in Hampshire from 1904 to 1908. From 1904 to 1908 inclusive the average annual expenditure on the house was around £600.⁷⁹

vi. The success of the Wyndham Land Act, 1903.

...it was certainly a jolly bonus for the broken-down landlords, and for the spendthrifts, who were relieved of their mortgaged estates and made a free gift as well...

Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 282.

In terms of the transfer of landownership from tenants to landlords, the Wyndham Land Act of 1903 was by far the most successful. The 12 per cent bonus awarded to landlords on the sale of their estates was a very real incentive for them to dispose of their property. Most of the larger landowners were confident that the money they received, once invested, would allow them to continue to live the type of leisured lifestyle that they had been used to for generations. Certainly from 1903 onwards the nobility of Meath were probably better off than they had been for a long time. The Conynghams, Dunsanys and Fingalls received between £200,000 and £300,000 each from the sale of their Meath estates. (Of course, these nobles did not sell off their entire properties. They continued to hold on to large demesnes and a good deal of untenanted land. The earl of Fingall, for example, retained at least 1,500 acres.) Retrenchment was no longer necessary. The Headforts returned to their Kells home in 1908, having sold off part of their estate and spent twice as much on the running of the castle as had been spent in any of the previous five years.⁸⁰ Another solid indicator of the fact that life within the homes of the nobility continued apace up to World War I is the number of servants employed in these houses in 1911 (see above).

The success of the Wyndham Land Act had some consequences

for foxhunting. Many landlords wanted to reserve to themselves the hunting rights over lands which they sold. Tenant purchasers were not always in favour. In the past the latter had been "forced" to allow hunts to cross their farms and quite often considerable damage was done to their crops (for which they were compensated). When they began to negotiate the purchase of their holdings they were adamant that they would have the final say as to who would cross their lands. When Lord Dunsany tried to sell a portion of his estate under the Wyndham Land Act:

I told my tenants who had come to see me about it that I should like to keep the shooting rights. Their spokesman told me that I could do that if I liked; though it was plain to me that they were all against it. On the other hand he pointed out to me that the advantage of giving up the shooting rights would be that if ever I wanted to shoot over their land I would be welcome.⁸¹

The point was subtly made that this was now to be *their* land and they would be the ones obliging the former landlord. If he was not prepared to accept this, he might not be allowed to shoot at all.

The shift of wealth from the landed class to the business community made it inevitable that the social composition of hunts would change.⁸² But also of significance to the Meath Hunt was the loss of the British garrison, the viceregal staff and those who often accompanied various lords-lieutenant to the Meath Hunt. By the 1930s, there were those (former) landlords who had slipped into the large farming class and a few members of the old nobility of Meath such as Lord Dunsany who continued to take to the field. Around this time Anita Leslie, a member of the Leslie family of Glaslough in Monaghan, visited Meath for the foxhunting and found that maids still carried trays to the riders, "stirrup cup to be quaffed in the saddle". But she was aware that such aspects of Irish country life, at that stage continuing "in unawareness", were on a "slide towards Armageddon."⁸³ By the 1970s, C.A. Lewis, in an historical and geographical analysis of hunting in Ireland, was able to conclude that: "fox hunting, at least with the recognised packs, appears to be the preserve of large farmers, the business and professional men, the leisured ladies, and, greatly, the more economically successful members of the community".⁸⁴ Regarding a "fashionable" fox hunt "near Dublin" (presumably the Meath?) Lewis found that of its 200 members, 39 farmed over 200 acres; 18 were businessmen;

18 were professionals; 22 were stud farmers and managers; 12 were "racing people"; eight were vets; 67 were ladies; while the remainder came from a variety of occupations including an ambassador, clergyman, politicians, army officers, artists and a butler.⁸⁵ However, the question which needs to be addressed is how many of these large farmers, professionals, vets and so on could trace their recent ancestry to the Irish nobility or gentry?

vii. The consequences of World War I

"The lights are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime" [Sir Edward Grey].

"He spoke the truth, alas, for all of us" [Lady Fingall].

Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 360.

The Great War had a very damaging psychological effect on the landed class. The Meath nobility responded with enthusiasm to the plight of the empire (and, so it seems, did some of their employees; two footmen from Dunsany were amongst the first volunteers).⁸⁶ And they suffered their fair share of casualties. The 11th Earl of Fingall saw active service from 1914 to 1915, despite being fifty-five at the time. Both of his sons, Oliver and Gerald also served. The 18th Baron Dunsany was wounded in action. The 15th Viscount Conyngham, his brother Richard (mentioned in despatches, DSO with bar), and his step-brother, Hubert (twice wounded) also served. Their kinsmen, Jenico and Rudolph Conyngham (grandsons of the 12th Viscount Conyngham) also served, Rudolph being killed in action in 1916. The 15th Viscount's son-in-law, Lord Ninion Crichton-Stuart, was also killed in action in 1915. George Rowley, the second son of the 4th Baron Langford, was killed in action in 1917. The 6th Baron Langford (brother of the 4th Baron) and the 7th Baron Langford (a nephew of the 6th Baron) also served. Because of the isolated, self-contained nature of the landed community in Meath it was inevitable that a great sense of loss would permeate it. At an early stage of the war, Lady Beatrice Dunsany wrote in her journal: "And there almost daily are those terrible lists from France, not one without some friend's name."⁸⁷ Similarly Lady Fingall recalled in her memoirs:

I used to think and say, during the war, that if ever that list of dead and wounded would cease, I would never mind anything or grumble at anything again. But when the

armistice came at last, we seemed drained of all feeling and one felt nothing. We took up our lives again, or tried to take them up. The world we had known had vanished. We hunted again but ghosts rode with us. We sat at table and there were absent faces.⁸⁸

Social life was naturally disrupted. Country houses were in many cases closed up or evacuated by their families who moved to London from 1914 to 1918. The Fingalls had difficulties travelling from Killeen because of "limited motor service" and so they rented a house in Dublin.⁸⁹ Entertaining and sports activities were largely left to one side. The period of the Great War became for many the "missing years" of their lives. As Mark Amory has put it regarding the Dunsanys:

The war was a great division for everyone, but the contrast was particularly painful for the Dunsanys; before the war they had been young, now they were not. Dunsany's greatest friends were dead and he did not replace them. A photograph album of army friends has the dates when they were wounded, missing or killed underneath in red ink and the entries are terribly frequent.⁹⁰

The war also meant the loss of many friendships built up with members of the European aristocracy in the decades beforehand. In the early twentieth century, Count Paul Metternich, who was then the German ambassador to London, was a close friend of Lady Fingall. On his Irish visits she brought him to houses such as the earl of Meath's at Kilruddery. Count Mensdorf, the Austrian ambassador to London had stayed "in happier times at Elveden and in Ireland."⁹¹

The dilution of the landed class also became inevitable as western society underwent profound changes after World War I. No longer were marriages confined to members of the landed class in Ireland or Britain. The 9th Baron Langford's second wife, for example, was Grete Von Freiseleben from Denmark. The 19th Baron Dunsany's first wife was Vera de Sa Sottomajor from San Paulo in Brazil ("Dunsany [the 19th Baron's father] recognised her charm and enjoyed her company, and though he and Beatrice thought it unlikely that she would settle down as an army wife in India or as a chatelaine in County Meath, they accepted the inevitable and with perfect manners made her welcome"⁹²). This marriage was dissolved by divorce in 1947, which in itself is significant for the fact that in the Victorian era

divorce was largely frowned upon in aristocratic circles and was quite rare. Similarly, the 6th Marquis Conyngham's first marriage to an Australian, Bessie Tobin, also ended in divorce in 1921. Thus, whereas at the beginning of the period under study the old status elite of the Meath nobility was largely maintained through marriage alliances, by the end of the period the social base was being diluted somewhat as peers moved away from the traditional landed or titled families of Ireland and Britain to the new wealthy elite of elsewhere and, indeed, by the fact that they divorced more readily. These "foreign" spouses often came from a background of City wealth.

viii. The revolutionary period, 1919-23

For us, I suppose, the Irish Troubles were a continuation of the War.

Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 386.

The psychological effects of the war and the disruption to the social life of the landed class from 1914 to 1918 was nothing compared to what they had to face in the years afterwards. No sooner had the Great War ended than revolution broke out in Ireland in 1919 and from that year until the middle of 1923 both social and political revolutions co-existed with one giving impetus to the other.⁹³ The landed class of Meath had no time to re-organise and there was to be no return to social life as it had been in the pre-war days:

At Dunsany the old pattern struggled to re-emerge. House parties and cricket matches and hunting could be arranged, some of the old verve regained, but the political situation, which was bad and growing worse, intruded, and the carelessness of pre-war gaiety would not return.⁹⁴

Shortly after the beginning of the War of Independence, Lord Dunsany realised he could no longer arrange cricket matches: "the resultant troubles made the roads too difficult and uncertain for me to be able to collect a team."⁹⁵ While Meath did not rank amongst the most active counties in Ireland during the War of Independence or the Civil War (according to a recent study by Peter Hart of the geography of revolution in Ireland from 1917 to 1923, it ranked in twentieth position of most active counties⁹⁶) the revolutionary period became a worrying time for (former)

landlords who were perceived to be symbols of everything the revolution wanted to overthrow.

As had been the case during the Land War of the 1880s, hunts once again became the targets of groups variously described as "agitators", "Sinn Féiners" and "Volunteers". In January 1919, efforts were made to stop the Meath Hunt (as well as the hunts in neighbouring Westmeath and Kildare) as a protest against the internment of political prisoners, the same pretext that had been used during the Land War period.⁹⁷ On 19 February a gang of twenty or so men fired two shots at those gathered for a meet of the Ward Union Stag hounds in protest against the internment of prominent Meath Sinn Féiners. Although nobody was injured the subsequent apprehension amongst the members of the hunt led to the abandonment of the Kells point to point races and the cancellation of the Fairyhouse races in April.⁹⁸ Both the Meath and Ward Union hunts included army officers and RIC officers in its membership. They were, therefore, not only objects of nationalist scorn but also soft targets. As attacks on hunts intensified, fewer meetings were held and the numbers attending those that were held declined greatly.⁹⁹

Much more dangerous and sinister were the attacks on landlords and their property which characterised the period from March to September 1920.¹⁰⁰ Initially the attacks or raids on big houses were reputedly to acquire much-needed arms and ammunition for the IRA. One IRA officer, Peter O'Connell, later recalled that during one such raid: "We secured about twenty shotguns and three rifles ... the rifles were got in a raid on the home of a retired British army officer, Archdale of Maperath house".¹⁰¹ It seems that servants in some houses provided information to the raiders. When one big house was raided in March 1920, the county inspector of the RIC concluded that it was "with the connivance, if not with the actual assistance of some of the servants".¹⁰² When Killeen was raided for arms, the family recognised "familiar voices" and one of the maids claimed of the raiders: "They are no strangers here".¹⁰³

A much more unsettling form of intimidation was the burning of big houses. In total there were ten big houses burned in County Meath during the War of Independence and Civil War. Of these only Summerhill belonged to the noble families under study here.

In February 1920, the War of Independence was still very much in its embryonic stages. IRA activity was largely concerned with the acquisition of arms and the neutralisation of the RIC as a law enforcement body. The IRA were intent on destroying

evacuated RIC barracks throughout the county. Rumours began to circulate that abandoned big houses, whose owners had gone to live on a more permanent basis in England since the troubles began, were to be used as substitutes for destroyed barracks. Sean Boylan, one of the IRA leaders in Meath, later recalled:

In the spring of 1921 I received a message from GHQ to the effect that the Auxiliaries were about to occupy Summerhill Castle ... it appears that the information was received by Mick Collins from one of his men in Dublin Castle who had seen a decoded message to that effect. I called on Battalion Adjutant, Bernard Dunne, and instructed him to have Summerhill Castle burned down immediately. He conveyed the message to Michael Graham, Captain of the Summerhill Company, who carried out the order within twenty-four hours.¹⁰⁴

The burning was carried out on the night of 4 February when the only occupants in Summerhill were the butler and a number of servants, as Col. Rowley had been living in England since December 1919.¹⁰⁵ At 10 p.m., the butler heard a knock at the back door. Having consulted with the servants, he decided not to open it, obviously fearing at least a raid for arms. The raiders, between 30 and 40 of them, then broke down the back door (or depending on which report is more accurate broke into the house "in a number of different places"), seized about 30 gallons of petrol (or 56 gallons as Boylan claimed) "which were on the premises for the purpose of making gas", poured it over the floors and set the house on fire. The terrified servants escaped out through a passage and hid in the plantation until the raiders left.

When it was safe for the servants to come out they raised the alarm by sending a telegram to Trim police station. By the time the police arrived: "the fire had gained such a hold that there were no hopes of saving the building".¹⁰⁶ The police fired rifle bullets into a large tank of water on the top of the house but the water made no impact on the flames. The "absence of proper fire extinguishing appliances" meant that the police and some civilian helpers could do nothing to prevent the house being "reduced to a mass of blackened ruins" with the complete loss of its contents. The estimated cost of the damage was £200,000.¹⁰⁷ The following day an official report issued from Dublin castle claimed that Summerhill had been burned in order "to prevent military occupation".¹⁰⁸

Some big houses in Meath such as Summerhill were burned because the local IRA feared they would be used as military barracks by the British forces. Boylan's claim that Summerhill was to be occupied by the Auxiliaries seems to be correct. (Lady Fingall heard the rumour that Col. Rowley had been corresponding with the military authorities who proposed to quarter soldiers in the house and that one of these letters was intercepted by the local IRA.¹⁰⁹) Boylan claimed that the burning of Summerhill was imperative because of its strategic position, located "on high ground which commanded one of the routes to the west. The Auxiliaries with field glasses could have swept the country".¹¹⁰ Other big houses in the county were burned in revenge or as reprisals for atrocities carried out by the Black and Tans against civilians (When Sir John Dillon asked the raiders why they had come to burn Lismullen, he was told: "Nothing against yourself, Sir John, but there was a man killed on the road above, and this is a reprisal".¹¹¹) Others were burned during the Civil War because neither faction of the IRA wanted them to be used as barracks. Some may have been burned for agrarian reasons as locals wanted their owners' lands broken up and distributed amongst themselves. For example, agrarianism may also have played some part in the burning of Lismullen. Sir John Dillon, as the editor of *The Leinster Leader* commented, had continued to be "a large farmer and breeder of pedigree live stock". From the beginning of the revolutionary period such large farmers were targeted in Meath by the Back to the Land movement who wanted "to reclaim the soil which their forefathers once cultivated and made rich by the sweat of their own brows".¹¹² Because of the social and political chaos that co-existed during the revolutionary period, it is difficult to separate political from agrarian motives. As Patrick Hogan informed W.T. Cosgrave in April 1923: "the cases through the country where houses have been burned [have been noted] and in more than 50 per cent of these cases the circumstances make it plain enough that the destruction was not for political but for agrarian motives".¹¹³ Local people used the chaos as a means of exacting revenge for ancestral grievances; in the process falsely associating themselves with the IRA in order to give themselves more clout. In August 1920 the headquarters of the Meath IRA found it necessary to publish a letter in *The Meath Chronicle* which stated that:

There are a lot of people in Meath at the present time who for some personal reasons of their own attempt to bring the

name and honour of the Irish Republican Volunteers into disrepute by threatening their personal enemies that “we will get the Volunteers on you” ... a warning should be issued to these thin-skinned patriots who are using the name of an honourable body for their own contemptible ends.¹¹⁴

One house was burned because of a dispute between its owner and his employees. According to Lady Beatrice Dunsany, Ferrams, the home of the North-Bomfords, was reputedly burned because of the owner’s quarrels with his herd (significantly the Dunsanys were careful not to dismiss any of their own employees at this time¹¹⁵). There was even a tinge of sectarianism in the motivation behind the burning of Ballinlough in October 1922. The previous August the owner of Ballinlough, W.H. Bond, had received an anonymous letter telling him that “we have ascertained through our intelligence department that you are an Ulster Volunteer ... we cannot permit such as you to wander at large through the Free State. Anyone associated with the shameless Belfast murder gang must go...”¹¹⁶ Finally, it is quite possible that there was no real motivation behind the burning of some houses. As Lady Fingall suggested:

[The revolutionary period] became a bonfire for a generation that was having its full fling and escape from the dullness of Irish life Some made the most of this wild hour before they went back to the hard work on the farm and the parental tyranny that existed to a peculiar degree in Irish country life.¹¹⁷

As difficult as it is to determine the real motivation behind the burning of some big houses, it is even more difficult to determine why others were left untouched. Was it perhaps the religious affiliation of the Fingalls that saved Killeen? It is ironic that on the night that the Fingalls heard that Killeen was to be burned, Lady Fingall almost wished it to be so:

When they had burnt Killeen, I thought, we would rebuild it with compensation money. We should have a smaller comfortable house for two people growing old, and their children and their friends. I thought of my struggles to heat Killeen, and how all the roaring wood and turf fires could only warm corners of these great rooms. We should have a lower house, well-fitting windows, no draughts or ghosts,

and the bathrooms that I had always dreamed of, with plenty of hot water. I kept myself warm through the cold hours of darkness with these comforting thoughts, while Fingall slept, and I stayed awake, waiting for the burning party.¹¹⁸

It has been suggested by the 18th Baron Dunsany's biographer that one of the family's keepers, who "was an ardent Sinn Féiner", was invaluable to the family "as he could dissuade anyone who thought of bothering the castle."¹¹⁹ Perhaps there is some truth in this, but the claim would have to be regarded with a certain amount of scepticism. One could also suggest that the amiable landlord-tenant relations that had existed on this estate even at the height of the Land War of the 1880s meant it attracted less of the ancestral desire for revenge than existed elsewhere. (When during the Civil War Lord Dunsany's car was commandeered, the chauffeur, Mick Flynn, was assured that because "his lordship was a good man ... they didn't wish to disturb him or his family".¹²⁰) At the height of big house raids in Meath, Sir Nugent Everard of Randalstown was described as "a very popular landowner ... one reason for his popularity being the keen interest he has always shown in the Irish industries movement". During the Civil War (at which time he was a Free State senator), his house was protected by Free State troops "in view of attacks on senators' houses elsewhere".¹²¹

Houses which were burned were invariably completely destroyed. Little time was afforded to family members or servants to save valuable contents or personal possessions. There is much truth in how Lady Fingall perceived it: "Often it was the valueless things that were stocked on the lawn, to be examined when the cold day broke on the blackened walls and ashes, while the Romneys and the Chippendale furniture and Waterford glass or old Irish silver had perished".¹²² Before Lismullen was burned, the Dillons were reputedly given only twelve minutes to save what they could; all they managed was a Gainsborough painting and some of the relics belonging to King William of Orange.¹²³ If valuables did not perish, they were often looted and ended up in farmhouses and cottages in the neighbourhood. Even servants attempted to benefit from looting. Shortly after Moydrum in neighbouring Westmeath was burned in July 1921, Michael Grady, the butler, and Patrick Delaney, the footman, were both charged with the larceny of a fur coat, dress suit, a bicycle and other goods to the value of £360 from Lord Castlemaine. Both

men pleaded guilty and were sentenced to between four and six months hard labour.¹²⁴

Owners of burned houses were unable to claim for damages under their insurance policies as these did not cover damage caused by riot or civil commotion. Initial claims came under the 1898 Local Government Act and the Criminal Injuries (Ireland) Acts of 1919 and 1920. Basically compensation awards were levied against either the council of the county in which the house was located or against that council and the council of neighbouring counties. Amounts initially awarded by county court judges in respect to big houses were often quite high because claims were uncontested by the nationalist dominated county councils who refused to appear as defendants. By 1920, Sinn Féin was largely in control of local government and so county councils refused *en bloc* to pay the sums awarded by the county courts as their members were in no position to be seen to be imposing exacting rates on relatively impoverished ratepayers in order to rebuild landlords' houses. In any case, because of the chaos of the time, county councils had great difficulties in collecting rates.

The compensation problem was recognised in clause 3 of the Anglo-Irish treaty. Each side in the war was now to pay for the losses it had inflicted. Unpaid and undefended decrees were suspended and a Compensation (Ireland) Commission to hear claims and determine awards was set up in early 1922 under the chairmanship of Lord Shaw of Dunfermline. Significantly there was to be no compensation for looting or theft, for losses sustained from the commandeering of big houses (as had happened at Ballymacoll after the Anglo-Irish truce was called when it was commandeered by the IRA and used as a training camp¹²⁵) or the billeting of soldiers in them. Inevitably awards previously made by the county courts under British jurisdiction were diminished. What happened is best illustrated in the case of the compensation case of Lord Langford whose home, Summerhill, was the only house under study here to have been burned during the revolutionary period.

In September 1921, a claim for £100,000 was made at Trim quarter sessions for Summerhill and a further claim of £30,000 for its contents. Judge Fleming considered the claim to be rather exorbitant and awarded £65,000 for the house and £11,000 for contents.¹²⁶ (The claim was undoubtedly inflated in the first place in anticipation of this level of award.) The award was not paid because the county council refused to budget for it. In April 1923, the Summerhill case was reviewed by the Shaw Commis-

sion. The original award was diminished to £16,775, at least £12,000 of which had to be spent on the building of a new house on the demesne or else to be used towards the rebuilding of the original house. If neither of these conditions was adhered to, the award was to be cut to £2,000.¹²⁷ An appeal was lodged in August 1923. It was successful to the extent that the award for the house was raised to £27,500 with no obligation to rebuild and £16,500 was added for contents.¹²⁸ This whole delay in settling cases became a grave source of concern to most big house owners who had suffered the loss of their homes. The award for Summerhill was not paid until 1924, three years after the original claim had been made. By the time the Civil War had ended, a new crop of claims by big house owners had to be dealt with. These claims came under the terms of the Damage to Property (Compensation) Act of 1923 passed by the Free State government. Once again funding of awards fell upon the county councils which again was ominous for big house owners as nationalist dominated councils were unlikely to award substantial amounts to big house owners. Even more contentious from the landed class's point of view was clause 10 which stipulated that claims were payable only upon the fulfillment of conditions which the court might impose requiring the house to be wholly or partially rebuilt on the existing site.

A study of the Damage to Property (Compensation) Act, 1923: register of claims reveals that Meath landlords whose houses were burned during the Civil War received on average around 28.5 per cent of their claims. W.H. Bond, for example, claimed £6,642 for Ballinlough but received only £1,545; J.G. Bomford claimed £25,000 for Ferrams but received only £4,741; Sir John Dillon did much better, claiming £24,319 and receiving £10,942.¹²⁹

ix. In the Free State

Their children were to pay the price when they discovered themselves to belong to no country, the world their ancestors had built within their walls lying now in ashes. And England abandoned her colony, with her colonists, when it suited her.

Elizabeth Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 38.

The type of terrorism that characterised the revolutionary period was incomprehensible to the landed class in Meath. They had not been subjected to such intimidation even at the height of the

Land War of the 1880s. The bitterness engendered by the events of the revolutionary period contributed to an almost complete withdrawal by the old landed class of Meath from Irish society. This was physical in the sense that many emigrated either during the years 1919 to 1923 or shortly afterwards. When the new owner of Summerhill, Col. William Rowley sought advice from his relations about the prospects of rebuilding the house, Douglas Rowley wrote to him from the Riviera: "Much as I should like to see the old house rebuilt, one must remember that even if this was done you could not put back the old things that formed part of it".¹³⁰ Arthur Rowley advised him that "living in Ireland would be, for all loyal subjects, quite impossible for many years to come" and added, "I personally have no wish to reside in that unfortunate country". Another cousin, Mrs Edward Milner assured him that "nothing would induce me to live in Ireland if I was paid to do so, a country of murderers."¹³¹ Like many more of his class, Col. William Rowley took the compensation awarded to him (without the reinstatement conditions) and moved permanently to England.

Withdrawal was also psychological, in the sense that they now realised that the new Ireland was not a country whose political management they could share or whose mainstream social and cultural life they could integrate with; and so they became more and more turned in upon themselves. Lady Fingall summed up the general feeling amongst her class in the aftermath of the Troubles: "People whose families had lived in the country for three or four hundred years, realised suddenly that they were still strangers and that the mystery of it [Ireland] was never to be revealed to them".¹³²

Yet, some members of the old ascendancy claimed they were reluctant to leave it all behind. Lady Beatrice Dunsany wrote:

... if one could speak one's mind and shake off responsibility and go, one would not be happy – one would miss the gentle friendly helpless country people, whom one loves, though without trust or respect, even as one would miss one's home or memories. We talk of it very little – there is so little to say – but we are weary of barbarian ways and of incapable tyranny, and though one laughs at it more often than not it takes the heart out of things for me.¹³³

Those who remained at least semi-resident in Ireland attempted to keep a foot in both camps, so to speak. Their homes were in Ireland but their loyalties remained with Britain. They continued

to send their children to British public schools: both the 18th Baron and the 19th Baron Dunsany were educated at Eton; the 6th Marquis Conyngham at Winchester and his eldest son, Lord Mountcharles, at Eton; the 19th Earl of Fingall at Downside and Sandhurst; the 16th Viscount Gormanston at Downside and the 9th Baron Langford at Marlborough and RMA Woolwich. Some of the Meath nobility and their sons continued to serve Britain as soldiers, naval officers or diplomats. (For many of these a career had become by now an economic necessity.) The 9th Baron Langford, 19th Baron Dunsany and the 12th Earl Fingall served in World War II. The 16th Viscount Gormanston was killed in action in France in June 1940. Reginald Plunkett, son of the 17th Baron Dunsany, was Naval ADC to King George V 1927-28, Rear-Admiral of 1st Battle Squadron from 1920 to 1930, and Commodore of Ocean Convoys from 1943 to 1954. The 8th Baron Langford was Consul-General at Barcelona 1918-23, at Antwerp 1923-30 and at Paris 1930-32.¹³⁴

Back in 1908, Sir Horace Plunkett, in his oft quoted passage from *Noblesse Oblige*, had argued that “the abolition of landlordism, so far from destroying the usefulness of the Irish gentry, really gives them their first opportunity, within the memory of living men, to fulfill the true functions of a nobility.” He appealed to them to recognise this fact and to use their wealth (presumably from the sale of their estates under the Wyndham Act) and education “for the common good”. This, of course, would have necessitated the landed class integrating itself with the lower classes, something that it had been loath to do in the past. It would have entailed landlords shedding their unionism (which remained their political creed up to the foundation of the Free State) or their loyalism thereafter and working within the Free State to uphold the position of the minority, not only of the former landed class but of Protestants in general. Plunkett was naive, if anything. The unionist stance adopted by landlords from the 1880s had pitted them against the public will. In the Free State they had few political outlets. Lord Headfort sat in the first Senate but it was never to become a very powerful representative platform from the old landed class’s point of view, its powers greatly restricted as compared with those of second chambers elsewhere. He did not seek re-election in 1928 and by 1936 de Valera’s Fianna Fáil government had abolished the Senate.¹³⁵

Furthermore, Plunkett had not foreseen the catastrophic consequences that developments after World War I were to have

upon the wealth of the landed class. Firstly, the social chaos which accompanied the revolutionary period was used by tenants on unpurchased estates in Meath as a pretext for not paying their rents. Most tenants who were still paying rents now saw an opportunity of getting their holdings for free. In April 1923, Patrick Hogan, minister for agriculture, wrote to W.T. Cosgrave: "While tenants are not paying rents, and while they consider that they need not pay rents in the future, they don't want a land bill, except on terms which would amount to confiscation".¹³⁶

It was largely with confiscation in mind that the terms of the 1923 Land Act were framed.¹³⁷ Landlords were entitled to a standard price of only fifteen years' purchase on current rents, much less than what they received under the Wyndham Act, and payable in 4.5 per cent land bonds rather than cash. From the tenants' point of view the annuities payable were approximately one third less than rents that they had been paying. Between April and June 1925, the Land Commission acquired 10,000 acres belonging to Lord Cloncurry, of which 2,700 were in County Meath and which the Land Commission "declared to be required for the purpose of relieving congestion."¹³⁸ These lands around Enfield and Newtown were subsequently settled with migrants from western counties such as Mayo. While some landowners managed to exploit certain loopholes in this act and hold on to untenanted land and demesne lands, it became more difficult for them to do from the 1930s when Fianna Fáil's policy was very much one of having any large remaining estates that were not productive or employing enough labour broken up to provide small holdings for those who desired them. This was often a very lengthy process. Between 1923 and the late 1930s, the Land Commission acquired 1,500 acres from the earl of Fingall. It took almost forty years from 1925 for the Land Commission to acquire and redistribute the De Stacpoole estate in south west Meath.¹³⁹ By the late 1930s most of the remaining large estates in Meath had been targeted for transfer and redistribution.

The 1920s were also characterised by economic depression. Farming profits were once again decimated making it very difficult for those who had retained large tracts of untenanted land to continue farming on a viable basis. The protracted Economic War (1932-38) pursued by de Valera was particularly damaging to the large graziers that remained in Meath. Income tax, super tax and rates rose to unprecedented levels. Just as significantly, the depression of the 1920s severely infringed upon those who had invested globally in stocks and shares, decimating investment

portfolios. It is no mere coincidence that those large landowners of Meath who had secured large capital sums for their estates under the Wyndham Land Act fell on particularly hard times from the late 1920s and early 1930s in the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash. Retrenchment and economising became a necessity for most. Around 1928, Lady Beatrice Dunsany wrote of her plans:

We can cut cricket, school treats, dances at Dunsany, try and let 66 [Cadogan Place, their London home], but these are drops in the ocean there is a lot to make up, and the leaf-sweeping industry seems to absorb endless Clynces and McTaggarts who can't be all thrown out. My only feeling is begin somewhere at once and other economies will follow more easily. But I don't see how we can keep the harriers.¹⁴⁰

Cadogan was let for a few months and fourteen demesne workers were dismissed.

From the early 1920s sales of big houses and their contents grew at an unprecedented rate. In 1923, the spendthrift Edward Fitzgerald, 7th Duke of Leinster, was forced to sell a great deal of the furniture from Carton just across the border in neighbouring Kildare in order to meet income and super tax debts. Again in 1925 he was forced to do likewise; this time most of the family heirlooms, paintings and furniture were bought by William Randolph Hearst and exported to his Californian castle.¹⁴¹ In her memoirs, written a few years later, Lady Fingall, recalling a portrait of her close friend Hermione Fitzgerald, wife of the 5th Duke of Leinster, lamented:

it is the only thing that hung in her room now. Everything else was taken out to be sold that tragic day when fourteen pantehnicons took away most of the treasures of Carton that were not entailed The house is stripped of its great treasures. Even many of the precious books had to go.¹⁴²

The Taylours had managed to return to Headfort in 1908 after their period of retrenchment once they began to sell off their estate under the Wyndham Land Act. They lived there quite comfortably until the great depression of the 1920s and 1930s. However, by the early 1940s they were unable to maintain the house as in former years and so Lord Headfort leased out three quarters of it to a boys' preparatory school after World War II.

By 1946 Gormanston Castle was put up for sale and was

bought by the Franciscans for use as a school. Killeen castle was sold around 1953 and has since become a ruin. Ironically, during the revolutionary period when Lady Fingall and her husband sat up all night waiting for the raiders who had burned Lismullen to come to Killeen, she thought:

How Killeen would burn. Badly – that old Norman castle of stone that had been built as a Pale fortress. Then I remembered the big oak staircase: that would send up a glorious flame. Then I remembered, too, how I had often thought that Killeen would make a lovely ruin. And I saw it in my mind, with the light falling through its empty window spaces and its battlemented walls lifted gauntly against the sky.¹⁴³

Killeen escaped on that night. But sixty years later, long after it had passed from the Fingalls, a wing of it was burned during the H-Block protest of 1981.¹⁴⁴ From the early 1980s, Lord Mountcharles used the natural amphitheatre of the demesne of Slane Castle to host concerts of the Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, Queen, and more recently Robbie Williams. This has undoubtedly enabled him to keep the castle in the family. And despite the horrendous damage done to the castle by fire in recent times, Lord Mountcharles is once again making plans to have it opened to the public in the near future. After its burning, Summerhill stood as a ruin for 35 years. In 1957, the ruin was eventually demolished which as Mark Bence-Jones points out was “an act of destruction, which, at the time, passed almost unnoticed.”¹⁴⁵

x. Conclusion

Reading her memoirs, one can sense that Lady Fingall apportions at least some of the blame for the socio-economic decline of Irish landlords to themselves, but she never vilifies their extravagant behaviour to the same extent that novelists with the decline of the big house as the central theme of their works have often done. This is, indeed, fair enough for their decline was more as a result of the convergence of a number of external factors over which they had very little control. Perhaps they did not adapt quickly enough in the face of change and perhaps they were too intransigent in their politics but there was little they could do to defend their position against agricultural depression, the growth of various land movements between 1879 and the beginning of

the twentieth century, all of which had the transfer of the ownership of estates from landlords to tenants as their primary aim. They could do little to stem the tide of nationalism that from the 1880s demanded Home Rule (in one form or another). In a growing democracy from the mid-1880s the landed class became very much a political minority who clung stubbornly, and perhaps arrogantly, to their belief in the union of Great Britain and Ireland. Their resultant economic and political decline inevitably meant their social decline.

Appendix I: The acreage and geographical location of the estates owned by the eight landed families in 1876.

Landowner	Address(es)	Acreage	
Lord Athlumney	Somerville, Navan	Meath	10,213
		Dublin	274
Marquis Conyngham	Slane Bifrons, Canterbury	Canterbury	7,060
		Kent	9,737
		Donegal	122,300
		Clare	27,613
		Meath	7,060
Earl of Darnley	Clifton Lodge, Athboy Cobham Hall, Gravesend	Meath	25,463
		Kent	9,309
Lord Dunsany	Dunsany Castle	Meath	4,379
		Kilkenny	2,320
		Cavan	31
		Radnor	1,670
Earl of Fingall	Killeen Castle	Meath	9,589
		Berks.	5
Visc. Gormanston	Gormanston Castle	Meath	9,657
		Dublin	1,300
Marquis of Headfort	Headfort Castle	Meath	7,576
		Cavan	14,220
Lord Langford	Summerhill	Meath	2,231
		Limerick	3,855
		Dublin	3,654

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2. There were, of course, obvious exceptions to this rule in County Meath as there were throughout the country. For example, the untitled James Lennox Naper of Loughcrew owned almost 19,000 acres.
3. For the strengths and weaknesses of memoirs as sources for the study of Irish landed estates see T.A.M. Dooley, *Sources for the history of landed estates in Ireland* (Dublin, 2000), pp 50-51.
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5. John Bateman, *The great landowners of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1883).
6. Quoted in A.W. Hutton (ed.), *Arthur Young's tour in Ireland, vol. I* (London, 1882), p. 31.
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10. Estimate of building costs of work carried out by B.T. Patterson, builders, 1860-1933 (Architectural Archives, DN C/39).
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13. Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 114.
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15. Household schedule return, Slane castle, 1911 census. As not all domestic servants may have been live-in the number employed there might actually be higher.
16. Household schedule return, Slane Castle, 1911 census.
17. Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 337.
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28. Diaries of Lady Alice Howard, April-July 1874 (NLI, Diaries of Lady Alice Howard, MS 3,600).
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31. Earl of Dunraven, *Past times and pastimes, vol. I* (London, 1922) , pp 4-9.
32. Quoted in Mark Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany* (London, 1972), p. 22.
33. Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 79.
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39. See W.E. Vaughan, *Landlords and tenants in mid-Victorian Ireland* (Oxford, 1994).

40. Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany*, p. 45.
41. Diary of visitors to Headfort, 1887-92 (NLI, Headfort papers, MS 25,369).
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43. Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 96.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 76. It seems surprising that during all her visits to Carton, she never got a chance to use the gold plate there! For an inventory of the same see *Catalogue of pictures, plates, antiquities etc. at Carton, Kilkea castle and 13 Dominick Street Dublin and 6 Carlton House Terrace, London* (Privately published, 1885); see also, *Inventory of plate at Headfort, 1866* (NLI, Headfort papers, MS 25,414).
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47. Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 86
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111. Quoted in Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 436.
112. For the burning of Lismullen see *Leinster Leader*, 14 April 1923; for activities of the Back to the Land movement see *Meath Chronicle*, 28 Jan. 1920.
113. Patrick Hogan to W.T. Cosgrave, 7 April 1923 (NA, Dept of Taoiseach files, S3192).
114. Quoted in *Meath Chronicle*, 21 Aug. 1920.
115. Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany*, pp. 170, 193.
116. Quoted in *Meath Chronicle*, 7 Oct. 1922.
117. Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, pp. 412-13.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 440.
119. Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany*, p. 170.
120. Diary entry of Lady Beatrice Dunsany, April 1923; quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 193.

121. *Meath Chronicle*, 28 Aug. 1920; 10 Feb. 1923.
122. Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 414.
123. Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany*, p. 193.
124. *Westmeath Guardian*, 8 July, 5 Aug. 1921.
125. Police breaches of truce reports, 19-24 Sept. 1921 (PRO, CO 904).
126. *Irish Times*, 22 Sept. 1921.
127. *Ibid.*, 12 April 1923.
128. Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the ascendancy*, pp 238-89.
129. Damage to Property (Compensation) Act, 1923: register of claims (NA, OPW files, 2D/62/60-69).
130. Quoted in Bence-Jones, *Twilight of the ascendancy*, p. 238.
131. Both quoted in *ibid.*
132. Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 414.
133. Quoted in Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany*, p. 194.
134. *Burke's peerage and baronetage* (various eds.).
135. For a history of the Senate, see Donal O'Sullivan, *The Irish Free State and its Senate: a study in contemporary politics* (London, 1940).
136. Patrick Hogan to W.T. Cosgrave, 7 April 1923 (NA, Dept of Taoiseach files, S3192).
137. *An Act to Amend the Law Relating to the Occupation and Ownership of Land and for Other Purposes Relating thereto*, no. 42 of 1923.
138. *Iris Oifigiúil*, 14 April, 13 June 1925.
139. See, Mary Hayes, "The operation of the Land Commission on two estates in south west Co. Meath, 1883-1966 (MA thesis, NUI Maynooth, 1997).
140. Quoted in Amory, *Biography of Lord Dunsany*, p. 206.
141. *Irish Times*, 9 Jan. 1923; *Weekly Irish Times*, 13 Jan. 1923; *Catalogue of an important and valuable collection of works of art removed from Carton with the consent of the trustees of his grace, the Duke of Leinster, to be sold ... on 2 December 1925 and two following days* (Architectural Archives, RP.D 28.4).
142. Lady Fingall, *Seventy years young*, p. 180.
143. *Ibid.*, p. 438.
144. In the neighbouring county of Monaghan, Rossmore cottage, home of Lord Rossmore, was also burned at this time by a group calling themselves the "Republican Action Group" which warned that if Bobby Sands died, "every realm of colonialism in the republic and the North would be attacked" (Architectural Archives, PWC 596).
145. Bence-Jones, *A guide to Irish country houses*, p. 268.