

The Established Church and the Tithe War disturbances in Clonmany 1832 – 1838

INTRODUCTION

The payment of a Tithe or Tax, in money or in kind, to the Protestant Established Church of Ireland for the upkeep of that Church and its clergy, had long been resented in Ireland. This was because the burden of the tithe or tax fell mostly on the Irish Roman Catholics who comprised by far the largest majority in Ireland. They had their own Church to support and the Tithe was a heavy burden on them. They thus found themselves in the unenviable position of being forced by the law of the land to finance an institution to which they did not belong, an Institution that viewed them and their Church as contemptible idolaters. The Catholic underclass was further enraged by the exemption of pastureland from the tithe whilst the potato plot was not. The pastureland was owned mainly by well off Protestant Graziers. The Catholic underclass however eked out a living on small potato plots. The tithe was collected for the church by Tithe Proctors or Tithe Farmers on a commission basis. It paid such agents of the establishment to be harsh when exacting the tithe from the catholic peasant. It is worth noting that in Clonmany the tithe proctor or tithe agent was a Catholic. This added further to the Catholic Peasant's sense of injustice. The majority of the people of the parish of Clonmany in the 1830s, being Catholic, harboured these grievances. However, in the end they did not disturb the peace of the parsons of the Established Church over their sense of injustice; rather their fury was directed against the peace of a few catholic landlords and one Protestant landlord, a Mrs Merrick. Let us go back to the year 1832 and trace the series of events which occurred from that year until 1838, a series of events which directed the ire of the catholic peasantry away from the Established Church towards a few catholic upstarts who deserved to feel the full fury of the mob.

THE DISTURBANCES OF 1832

The disturbances of 1832 over the payment of tithes forms part of the folk memory of the people of Clonmany and was alluded to by McGlinchy in the now famous book 'The Last of the Name'. The names of two champions of the Clonmany peasantry come to the fore in the story of the disturbances. The champions came from Gaddyduff. One was called Neal Roe Doherty a Catholic and the other was Daniel Bratton a protestant. Both men were neighbours and both had connections to the church in Straid. Bratton was the Church Warden and the daughter of Neal Roe Doherty later married Francis Little a member of the select vestry of that church. Indeed Francis Little along with Michael Doherty of the Glen House together attested that a new minister to the church, the Rev. Mungo Thompson, preached his first sermon in accordance with '**The Book of Common Prayer**'. Ironically these two men were to the fore in the Tithe disturbances of 1832 in

Clonmany. As we shall see from a perusal of the newspaper reports of the disturbances they were not sectarian or political in origin.

The protests over the tithes seem to have come to a head in January and February 1832. In McGlinchy's classic work 'The Last of the Name' Chapter 12 is devoted to factions. These factions were agrarian secret societies whose activities were revived all over Ireland after the fervour of the Emancipation Campaign had died down. The new fervour grew in response to attempts by the Tithe Holders to claw back money from those tenants who withheld tithes. There were quite a few such tenants in Clonmany and these tenants added insult to injury by holding back their rents as well. Thus it was that in the parish of Clonmany in the winter of 1832 the aggrieved tenants assembled in their hundreds to assert their rights against the Landlords and the Established Church.

These exciting and tumultuous times in Clonmany are well documented in sources such as police reports, newspaper reports as well as in personal correspondence. For a time two Gaddyduff men, Neal Roe Doherty and Daniel Bratton were at the centre of the action and controlling events. Thus McGlinchy reminisces:

'Another strong party man was Neal Roe Doherty. He was a son of George Doherty of Gaddyduff and had a brother a priest, Father Edward Doherty. The priests were out strong against the parties and one Sunday Father O'Donnell the Waterloo priest was preaching against them when Neal Roe went up to the altar and got him by the throat and bent him back over the altar.....that was the highest day Neal Roe ever saw. There is not one belonging to him in the parish today.'

The Freemans Journal of February 1832 is less dramatic than McGlinchy in its reporting of this dreadful incident in the Clonmany chapel and gives a more measured account of the events in the parish which led up to it and which took place in the week after it.

During the last week the movements of the peasantry assumed a more extensive and threatening character.....On Sunday night in the chapel in Clonmany the Reverend Mr Doherty took occasion to address his flock and feelingly expatiated on the folly and sinfulness of the conduct of some of them, particularly on an attack which had been made on the house of Mr Loughrey. A fellow who was present undertook to reply to the Reverend Gentleman's observations. He was ordered to observe silence but he persisted and advanced towards the altar when Mr Doherty attempted to prevent him; on which being aided by some of the rest of the people he seized the priest by the collar; but no further violence was done to the Reverend Gentleman. Mr Loughrey was in the chapel at the time but fortunately made his escape.'

Note that this was an attack by members of a catholic congregation on their priest. The records of the time show no evidence of anti protestant feeling in the parish and thankfully the protestant minister and his congregation suffered no molestations at this time.

On the Monday after the attack in the Chapel about 3000 people went in a body to the house of Loughrey in Binnion and demanded that their rents be reduced which Loughrey promised to do. The crowd then turned their attention to Michael Doherty of the Glen House, who was agent to a Mrs Merrick the chief landlord of Urris, as well as being the tithe agent, note not the tithe proctor, to the Rev Mr Dobbs the parson of the parish. The Rev Dobbs did not reside in the parish but in County Antrim; yet he drew an income from Clonmany courtesy of the catholic peasantry of that parish. This

outrageous situation must have been resented by those good people. Yet this resentment did not express itself in violence been done to the good Rector or to the good Church of Ireland people who lived in Clonmany at that time.

Outside the Glen House Neal Roe Doherty harangued Michael Doherty and his family alleging that Michael Doherty was attempting to recoup unpaid tithes of longstanding. This allegation infuriated the crowd further and in an attempt to assuage their anger Michael Doherty felt obliged to sign a document by which he bound himself to seek from Mrs Merrick a reduction in the rents of her tenants. He was also forced to return a portion of the tithe which he had collected.

On the Wednesday the people then set off for Carn where they were addressed by a protestant farmer on the subject of their grievances. The outcome was that other landlords in North Innishowen were forced to reduce their rents. Clearly wherever Clonmany went the rest of Innishowen followed.

A description of those in the crowd given at the time suggests that this tumult sprang from poverty and desperation and not from sectarian animosity or political fervour. An observer of the Freeman's Journal described the crowd as comprising men young and old, ill fed and ill clad and broken hearted. According to the observer a few carried a banner of green and orange. On one side of the banner was inscribed '**reduction of Rents' and 'Erin go Bragh.'** On the other side of the banner was inscribed '**King William 4th.**' Their demeanour was described as being most peaceable. This was not a mob determined on provoking attacks on their fellow protestant neighbours or in spreading sedition. Indeed the Freeman's Journal opined that.....'**nothing could have been more untrue and absurd than to suppose that what had taken place had any connection with party or political feeling for Protestants of all persuasions as well as Catholics had engaged together in all processions.'** The writer went on to lament that..... '**it was both ungrateful and unjust to ascribe the reported explosion of popular feeling to the influence of the Catholic Priesthood. Such a charge was completely belied by the treatment of Father Doherty in the Clonmany Chapel and by the fact that most of those who sustained violence at the hands of the people were of the Catholic persuasion.'**

All the while soldiers and dragoons were being drafted into 'Ennishowen' to deal with the crisis and the Belfast News Letter on the 14th February 1832 could report that 'Ennishowen' was tranquil and that those who had combined to resist the payment of tithes had been terrified into submission.

Meanwhile Neal Roe Doherty and his protestant neighbour in Gaddyduff, Daniel Bratton, were made an example of. Along with four others they were taken via Derry to Lifford Jail. A report in the Londonderry Sentinel dated 16th March 1832 described Neal Roe Doherty as being a remarkably athletic and good looking man. The report went on to say that he was of a respectable family and had a mother and sister to support. In his defence Neal Roe said that he had merely told the crowd that Michael Doherty had said that until the matter of the Tithes was settled by the King and Parliament he, Michael Doherty, would not ask for any tithe payment. Neal Roe went on to say that in response the crowd cheered for The King, The Constitution, half rent and no Tithes. If Neal Roe was telling the truth then most certainly this was a crowd without any malice to the Government. The outcome of the trial was that Neal Roe was convicted of a riot and was further indicted for having, along with 2000 others on 27th January 1832, made an affray in the Catholic Chapel of Clonmany and assaulting the Rev. Mr O'Donnell. Note that in the Freeman's journal the molested

priest was named as The Rev. Mr Doherty. Neal Roe threw himself on the mercy of the court, was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment and disappeared from the history of Clonmany.

And what became of his protestant fellow traveller, Daniel Bratton of Gaddyduff Heights and Clerk of the Church of Ireland parish Church in Straid. The Belfast Newsletter reporter was of the opinion that Bratton was forced to join 'The Whiteboys' as the crowd was called, against his will, even though, it was suggested by the reporter..... ***'he was a person who was obnoxious to them because of his loyal principles and against whom and his brother, personal violence had been used'***. If this were so it helped Bratton's case not a bit. He was sent to jail for one month and like Neal Roe disappeared from the folk memory of Clonmany.

The Outrages of 1838

Disturbances and protests against the payment of tithes in Clonmany seems to have come to a head again in 1838 despite the Government having passed in that year an Irish Tithe Act which in effect ended the tithe war. This act offered a solution to the problem which the tithe holder had experienced in the collection of the tithe. Until the passing of Act of 1838 the Church of Ireland clergymen had to collect tiny sums from their numerous Catholic parishioners and employed a tithe proctor or tithe agent or tithe farmer to perform this task on their behalf. As we have seen the peasantry fiercely resisted this. The Act of 1838 transferred the payment of the Tithe from the Catholic tenant to the Landlord who was expected to include the tithe in the rent of his tenant. Thus the office of Tithe Proctor was abolished and in Clonmany the Catholic landlord became the tithe collector for the Protestant clergyman. The Church of Ireland Clergyman would thus be paid the tithe by the landlord who had incorporated the tithe in his rent collection. By the terms of the Act the landlord was expected to collect only 75% of the total tithes owed by the parish as a whole. By way of an example, suppose the clergyman had before the act expected to receive a sum of £100 being the total amount of tithes from the parish as a whole. Under the terms of the Act the landlord would be expected to hand to the clergyman the sum of £75. Now herein is to be found a possible source of further annoyance to the tithe payers, for the landlord could collect the full sum of £100 from those liable for the tithe yet pass on only £75 to the Clergyman. Furthermore the 1838 Act exempted those poor tenants who held their lands at will or from year to year from the tithe but the more substantial tenants were not. Thus the scene was set for further unrest in Clonmany.

The Landlords of Innishowen were not happy at being turned into tithe proctors by the Act of 1838 and a monster protest meeting was held in Buncrana on 30th August 1838 chaired by Big Tom Dougherty of Muff. At the meeting Michael Loughrey of Binnion proposed that the people had strong reasons to be dissatisfied with the 1838 Tithe Bill because by the terms of the Bill the Landlords were to be converted into Tithe Proctors. At the meeting they also condemned....***'The Tithe system by which the ministers of the Establishment are enabled to live in luxurious affluence by an impost compulsorily collected from a people scarcely one tenth of whom receive from them any service or benefit whatever'***.

The imprisonment of Father William O'Donnell the Waterloo Priest for withholding the tithe was also referred to.....***'we are proud to recognise The Rev. William O'Donnell, the only clergyman, who in order to effectuate the abolition of the Tithe has submitted for days to the restraints of a dungeon.....and who is this man asked the chairman, who has experienced this injurious treatment? He was at one time of his life an officer in the British army;he had received an education befitting him for any profession (great cheering). Long and gloriously had he fought in***

the Peninsula; nor did he lay aside his arms until the peace of Europe was secured at The Battle of Waterloo. Ironically a plea was also made at the meeting that, out of respect for their God their Country and their families, no one in the crowd should commit any breach of the peace or join any association of Whiteboys or Rightboys. The Dark Club domiciled in Clonmany and so beloved by Michael Doherty and Michael Loughrey wasn't on the list of prescribed associations.

A lot of the excitement in Clonmany in 1838 took place at the Glen House where Michael Doherty lived. This man was the factotum of Mrs Merrick the biggest landlord in Urris, who spent most of the 1830s getting Doherty to exact as much rent as he possibly could from her tenantry. He was in essence Mrs Merrick's 'enforcer'. The Dark Club was a creation of his and the Police Reports associated Michael Loughrey and Michael Doherty with the nefarious activities of that association of men. The activities of the Dark Club took place at night and involved its members removing the cattle of those people who did not pay their tithes, to the pound. Under the 1838 Tithe Act Mrs Merrick, as the landlord of Urris, was responsible for collecting the Global tithe for that area as well as her own rents. Michael Doherty her enforcer went to work for his Mistress with a will.

Godfrey F. Duffy delivered a painstakingly researched and riveting paper on the tithe disturbances in Clonmany in a lecture given by him during Heritage Week in September 2003 in the Glen House itself. This seminal paper was also published in Issue No. 6 of the **'McGlinchy 'Summer School Journal'** in the Summer of 2003. In his paper he narrates for example that The Glen House was attacked on 27th May 1838 at 1a.m. with several shots being fired into the house. The police reports detail investigations made into supposed attacks on Doherty's Bailiffs in their own homes between March and July of 1838. However the reader of those reports would be forgiven if she concluded that the writer of these reports doubted if in fact the attacks had actually happened. A report speaks of one attack in Tullagh for example where the victim, despite being supposedly severely beaten and traumatised, turned up at a wedding next day. Again, despite all the attacks having happened within clusters of houses no one could be found to say that they had heard supposed shots being fired. Nor was evidence found of a score of men surrounding the houses of the alleged victim. Could it be the case that the writer of the report believed that it suited Mrs Merrick for a report to go abroad that her agent and his minions were being attacked and thus more police should be sent to the area? According to Duffy's paper Captain Roberts, the Resident Magistrate in Clonmany, was not in the least sympathetic to Mrs Merrick believing that her persistence in getting Doherty to collect tithe arrears served to enrage her tenants. Was she collecting the full 100% of the global sum due from her tenants and keeping the excused 25% for herself? I suggest that much of the violence which took place in Clonmany originated from the Landlords and their agents and not from the long suffering tenantry. Indeed Duffy wrote that Roberts was of the opinion that.....' ***Michael Doherty was a despicable character and he acquainted Thomas Drummond with Doherty's reply when charged with bullying his tenants. Doherty apparently had said that the more he ground the tenants the better the tenants would like him and if he treated them kindly they would have no regard for***

him.' Doherty was certainly Mrs Merrick's 'Heavy' and in another era could easily have found suitable employment working for the Mafia or for one of many drug gangs as an 'enforcer'.

Conclusion

Godfrey Duffy narrates in his paper of 2003, that in Mrs Merrick's opinion '***Clonmany was a hotbed of sedition as well as being a stronghold of combinations and illegal societies and that the tenants were aligned with the desperate and organised Ribbon system that was openly and daringly carried on in the district***'. One wonders if she included Michael Doherty's Dark Club in the organised Ribbon system that she referred to. I doubt that Clonmany was at that time a hotbed of seditious activity. That there was violence directed against Mrs Merrick, Michael Doherty and Michael Loughrey cannot be denied. Duffy has described the violence against the landlords in 1832 and in 1838 in his paper and in his lecture and certainly attributes it to the tenants. However, he does not postulate a reason for the violence in Clonmany in the 1830s as emanating from a desire of the tenantry to overthrow a political system or to harm the Established Church in Clonmany. In reference to the display of anger in Clonmany outside the Glen House and outside Binnion House in January 1832 The Freeman's Journal castigated the Evening Mail because its report of the disturbances was headed '***Revolution in Donegal***' and spoke of the hoisting of a tri coloured flag by the crowd. The Freeman's Journal went on to say that the statement.....'***is the basest of all falsehoods. The poor men perhaps never heard of the tri colour. They may have committed treason against Tithes and high rents; but of treason against the State, even in imagination, we must acquit them***'

A further proof that the peasantry of Clonmany in the 1830s did not harbour a desire to harm either their protestant neighbours or the rectors of Clonmany, must surely be evidenced by the fact that the Protestant Church in Straid was never attacked or damaged at this time. The only outrage committed at the time against church property and church personnel took place in the Catholic chapel in Cleagh and that outrage was perpetrated by Catholics on their own Padre. Furthermore the members of the Dark Club comprised only Catholics and it was these people who persecuted their Catholic neighbours by impounding their cattle in lieu of unpaid tithes. Michael Doherty, Mrs Merrick's agent, pennyboy, and dogsbody, was a Catholic and even though he abandoned the faith of his fathers to embrace the Reformed Faith, it is doubtful, given his general ignorance and obvious uncouthness, that he made this conversion for doctrinal reasons. It is more likely that he did it to continue to earn his thirty pieces of silver.