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# The Protestant Community of South Tipperary

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By William Neely

## Part II\*

On the whole, the Protestant community were well satisfied with what they had achieved by the last quarter of the 18th century, and only wished to secure their prosperity by a greater control over the affairs of their country. They entered wholeheartedly into the Volunteer movement, and the names of the leading families of the South Riding were to be found in the lists of its officers. Many members of the smaller landowning families were only too happy to serve as Volunteers in the various corps that their richer neighbours raised.

The great thing was not to be left out of so patriotic, so gallant and so popular a movement. For the moment all were united, not only in determination to resist the French and preserve the peace, but also in determination to secure the legislative independence of the Irish Parliament. The same could have been said of the county as a whole as Mary Ponsonby said of Kilcooley: "We are all patriots here."

Such unity was not, however, to survive the joyous fellowship of the years 1776-1782. Some, like Tom Barton, were to join the Whig Club to work for parliamentary reform; but most were content to accept things as they were. Even Barton took no part in opposition to the Union, and cheerfully accepted compensation for the loss of his representation of the borough of Fethard. However, in the Volunteer years there appeared to be a real sense of unity in a common purpose.

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### List of the Volunteer Companies and Commanding Officers<sup>20</sup>

<b>CAVALRY</b>	Clanwilliam Union	Col. John Earl of Clanwilliam.
	Clogheen Union	Col. Cornelius O'Callaghan.
	Tipperary Light Dragoons	Col. Sir Cornelius Maude.
		Lt. Col. William Barker.
	Slieveardagh Light Dragoons	Col. John Hamilton Lane.
<b>INFANTRY</b>	Clonmel Independents	Col. Richard Moore.
	Cashel Volunteers	Col. Richard Pennefather.
		Lt. John Power.
	Fethard Independents	Col. William Barton.
		Lt. Col. Matthew Jacob.
	Thurles Union	Col. Francis Matthew.
	Cahir Union	Col. Pierce Butler.
	Kilcooley True Blues	Col. Sir William Barker.
Carrick Union	Col. Earl of Tyrone.	

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Footnote-markers are continued from Part 1, which contained notes 1 to 19. — Ed., THJ



On average, a cavalry company had about 30 men and an infantry unit about 60. Except where the company was outfitted by its colonel, men were expected to provide their own uniform and equipment. Great pride was taken in appearance and efficiency. Mary Ponsonby wrote of hearing nothing but the exercise of arms all summer at Kilcooley.

Cashel was the chosen centre of the annual reviews. What a splendid sight it must have been with the great fortress-like cathedral on the Rock as its back-cloth, this military pageant with its marching ranks of blue and white, scarlet and black; its wheeling charging cavalry, all blue and green, silver and gold braid and epaulets. All performed before the admiring gaze of the ladies of fashion, dressed in their best for the occasion in the carriages that ringed the field.

And then to the ball, always associated with the review. Here was Ascendancy Ireland in its peacock pride and confidence. Mary Ponsonby also described another memorable occasion, the summer camp at Ardfinnan, with the colourful tents and pavilions set out among the park trees.

There were high hopes too for a free Parliament, no longer filled by corruption and placemen, but by the true representatives of the people, albeit, of course, the people of property. Tipperary sent five delegates to the Dublin Volunteer Convention to demand Parliamentary reform. They were Sir William Barker, Colonel Daniel Toler, Major Edward Moore, Thomas Hackett and Captain Alleyn, all pledged to press for reform.

Major Moore gave vent to his sense of outrage at Parliament's cavalier treatment of the Volunteer demands. "Is it thus our defence of their country against foreign foe and domestic insurgent was to be rewarded"? He went on to express his confidence that "the Volunteers would disappoint the malice of the enemies and smile at every attempt to violate a character too sacred for detraction."

"Let the Castle spy or prerogative lawyer hunt for confiscations; our doors are open. The Volunteers stand entrenched in conscious virtue... I consider the real enemies of their country to be the mock representatives of the people, who have prevented the voice of the people from being heard in Parliament... The borough-mongers are equally dangerous to the prerogatives of the sovereign as to the liberties of the people."<sup>21</sup>

It is an interesting speech from a representative of a family that did not rest until they had corrupted and controlled the freemen of Clonmel and transformed the town into a pocket borough of the Moores. Nevertheless, the speech demonstrates the importance that the Tipperary delegates attached to the political aspirations of the Volunteers. However, despite all the cheers and demonstrations of the people of Dublin, their hour had already passed. With the passing of that hour went the hope that the Dublin Parliament could ever be the parliament of the people of Ireland.

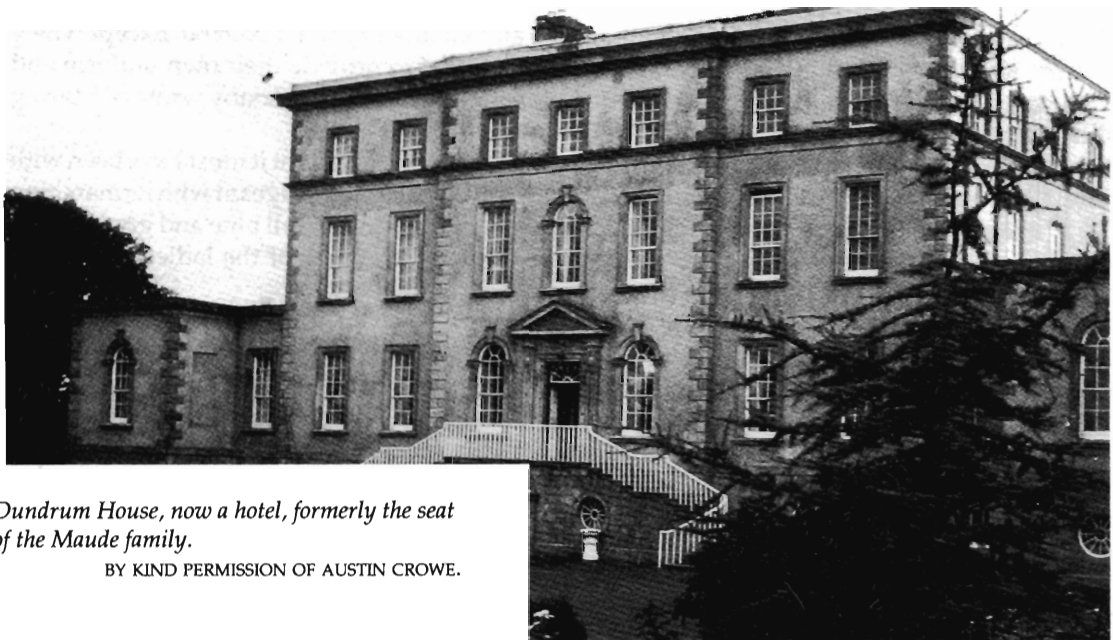
After 1785 those with an appetite for soldiering were absorbed into the Yeomanry units and into the newly-formed Tipperary Militia. The Kilcooley family never really distinguished between the Volunteers and their Yeomanry successors. They were still Sir William Barker's men, as far as public opinion was concerned.

On 25 April, 1793 with the nation once more at war, the Tipperary Artillery was formed, with Colonel John Bagwell of Marlfield as its commanding officer. His friendship with the Royal Duke William eventually earned the regiment the title of "The Duke of Clarence's Munster Regiment of Militia".

Unlike the Volunteers, the ranks were drawn from the Roman Catholic population though the officers were supplied by the Protestant gentry. It remained in Ireland until 1811, when the regiment was sent to England on garrison duty at Dover, Deal and Portsmouth, before returning to take up duty in Cork in 1813.

Although it saw no active service, about 100 men a year transferred to regiments of the line, many serving throughout the Peninsula War. Thirty-three officers also transferred to the regular army and some played their part with distinction, as the monument to the Beere brothers in Littleton





*Dundrum House, now a hotel, formerly the seat of the Maude family.*

BY KIND PERMISSION OF AUSTIN CROWE.

Church records. An attractive work, with the Peninsula soldiers resting in mourning on reversed arms, it honours the dead brothers, one slain at Salamanca in the Peninsula, the other on the field of Waterloo.

Colonel Bagwell showed his respect for the religious beliefs of his men by establishing a school for their children, where each was taught according to his denomination by a chaplain provided by the regiment. The subsequent commanders were in 1826, the Earl of Glengall, in 1855 the Earl of Donoughmore, and the last commander Colonel Mansergh.

A delightful description of the regiment in the Crystal Palace survives from *The Times* of 1860 when the paper reported: "It has had the honour of guarding her Majesty at Osborne... Some dozen years ago London would have been in panic had it been informed that the Queen was at her seaside home protected only by some hundreds of Irishmen, all freshly arrived from Tipperary whose name was supposed to be synonymous with lawless violence. Some several hundred sat down to dine in the Crystal Palace and drank the health of the Queen and the Earl of Donoughmore".<sup>22</sup> The military tradition begun by the Volunteers continued in the county to World War I, when Tipperary men distinguished themselves in the trenches.

Politically, the county remained in the control of a few families throughout the 18th century. The county was represented by the Mathews of Thomastown and Maudes of Dundrum for most of the century. The boroughs were completely controlled by those who had come to regard them as their private property. These were the Moores in Clonmel, the Ponsonbys (who gave their interest in a marriage settlement to the Bartons) in Fethard, the Pennyfathers in Cashel and the Bagwells who, despite their defeat in Clonmel, managed to keep control of a variety of seats.

Despite the enthusiasm for Volunteer ideals, Whig allegiances were not really strong enough to resist the blandishments of Dublin Castle. The Earl of Donoughmore made a great profession of liberalism and sought to gain the leadership of the Roman Catholic community by championing the granting of the vote to its wealthier members by abolishing the lower-value freeholders' vote.

A number of the families climbed into the peerage, the Moores as Earl of Mountcashel, the Mathews as Earl of Llandaff, the Maudes as Lord de Montalt and Viscount Hawarden, as well as

Earl of Clanwilliam. Two of these peerage families were newcomers to the county and reputed to be of humble origins. His enemies said of Hely-Hutchinson in 1773 "that he would prostitute his conscience to advance his relations who are very poor for he is of but mean rank and birth".

Equally humble in his origins was John Scott, first Earl of Clonmel. Unlike Donoughmore, he never exercised much influence in the county. These families had been rewarded for their faithfulness to Dublin Castle, so it was to be expected that they would take no stand against the Government.

Of the county representatives, Richard Pennefather throughout voted for the Union; but the rest were rapidly persuaded that their best interests lay in changing sides, so the three Bagwell MPs and Stephen Moore voted against the Union. Only Lord Mathew, heir of the Earl of Llandaff, remained constant in his opposition. Popular opinion in the county was opposed to the Union; the Grand Juries refused to return the sheriff's resolutions in favour of the Union. This so annoyed the great magnates that they made clear their support for the Union.

There is little doubt that part of the reason for the change in attitude was reaction to the events of 1798. While the rebels did not apparently penetrate the county, crimes of violence increased and the Yeomanry were called to arms. The strength of the United Irishmen is hard to estimate, as their organization was speedily broken by the harsh tactics of the High Sheriff Judkin Fitzgerald. The fact that he flogged so many innocent victims may well suggest that United Irishmen were fewer in number than rumour suggested.

Lecky records Colonel Bagwell's persistent protection of a United Irishman, Prendergast; but this may well have been for family reasons or because of a desire to retain the goodwill of the Prendergasts in the area. His letter to Fitzgerald reflects little credit on him, when Bagwell wrote as military officer in charge of the district "that if it be found any good to come from floggings he might go on with it but let it not reach my ears".

Judkin Fitzgerald's conduct was indeed scandalous. Respectable citizens were among his victims, who were selected without regard to their religious beliefs. A French teacher was flogged for possessing a note written in that language. Fitzgerald was particularly active in Thurles and Clonmel. Indeed, those in authority knew so well of his abuse of office as to pass a special Indemnity Act in the Irish Parliament to protect him from the consequences of his actions.

In 1799 Captain Jephson of the Yeomanry testified in court that the conduct of Judkin Fitzgerald was the most infamous he had ever witnessed. The latter, confident in the knowledge that the government regarded him as the man who had kept Tipperary out of the rebellion, placed no restraint on his words, and boasted quite openly that when Jephson had tried to stop him "I defied him and flogged Wells and more men though they were all innocent".

The most flagrant abuse of justice was when one of his innocent victims took a court case for damages; he lost and had to pay Fitzgerald £424 for defamation of character.<sup>23</sup> His cruelty was rewarded by a knighthood, and as far as is known he never suffered any ill consequence for his notorious conduct.

It was a sad end to a century that seemed so full of promise for the future peace and prosperity of the county. It was a long way from the high-minded idealism and patriotic fervour of the Volunteer days. The system was a corrupt one, where men used power and influence for their own advancement. Men were bought with titles, by position, by public office. In the affairs of Clonmel, as in the affairs of the nation in Dublin, the same system prevailed.

The Union was achieved by the kind of bribery that treated Thomas Barton's representation of Fethard as a private property, and paid him a handsome sum in compensation. Titles were not a reward for merit and service, but an indication of the price the recipient was felt to merit. In many



ways 1798 was a nemesis on a community which had selfishly exploited its advantages and lacked the will to solve its problems.

The affairs of the Established Church were at least conducted in a more satisfactory way after 1660. Nearly every parish had, if not a resident rector, at least a curate to do its pastoral work. Rectors were often absentees; so very few rectories were built until the end of that century nearly all were pluralists.

Tipperary tithes made the parishes the natural target for men who were determined to get rich by their office. The Rev. John Walsh until his death in 1758, like his predecessors in that office, was not only Rector of Kilcooley but also held Kilvemnon and Lismolin, whose combined tithes would have made him a wealthy man. He at least did live on his own farm at Kilcooley.

Some rectors did little but collect the tithes, leaving the work to the curates. In 1773 the Rector of Killenaule, the Rev. Samuel Riall, added Ballingarry to his charge. At least such representatives of local landed families resided in the area; but in 1822, when Christopher Darby was appointed Rector of Killenaule, he appointed a succession of curates and never set foot in the parish.

Small wonder that most churches were inadequate or even ruinous. When in 1803 John Jebb, the future Bishop of Limerick, came as curate to Magobban, he had to take services in John Godfrey's house, Beechmount, as no church was available.<sup>24</sup>

However, between 1780 and 1840 most parishes acquired an adequate well built church. One of the first was Littleton, built in 1785 at the expense of Parson Grady, who had established the coaching inn around which the town grew. The church and rectory, both built at his expense, were handsome buildings, well appointed and, in the case of the church, embellished with fine wood panelling and twin pulpits for preaching and prayer.

The Protestant population climbed to a peak before the Famine. William Shee's statistics of 1835 record that peak, but also illustrate the discrepancy between income and population, the result of the tithe system by which all were required to pay to the upkeep of the Church of Ireland Rector.

Parish	Church of Ireland population	Tithes
Borrisoleigh	292	£887
Athassel	215	£642
Ballingarry	136	£164
Fennor	67	£443
Holycross	124	£171
Kilcooley	612	£377
Killenaule	343	£795
Kilvemnon	75	£517
Lismolin	31	£778
Magobban	115	£83
Cashel St Johns	491	£417
St. Patrick's Rock	47	—
Thurle	294	£944
Tipperary	630	£796
Clonmel	1737	£575 <sup>25</sup>



In the Archdiocese the total of Protestants was, however, only 6,178, as against a Roman Catholic population of 196,256 — roughly 3% of the total. When compared with the 1776 figures, the difference seems to be that the Protestant population showed only a slight increase, as against a huge increase in the Roman Catholic population. The towns still remained the main centres of Protestant population. In Clonmel about 12% were Church of Ireland; there were also strong congregations of Quakers, Methodists and Presbyterians.

Towns like Killenaule, Fethard and Cashel had strong Protestant communities. By far the smallest percentage of Protestants in a town was in Thurles. Kilcooley with its Palatine settlement was by far the biggest of the Protestant communities. This settlement, established in the Slieveardagh hills in 1772 by Sir William Barker, made the parish unique in the area as the only large Methodist community outside the major towns.

The Quaker communities remained strong until the growing wealth and social aspirations of their members led to conformity to the established church. A piano played its part in breaking the last Grubb connection with the Quakers. John Wesley made Clonmel one of his regular stops on his Irish tours, but never with any great success attending his preaching. An early visit involved the collapse of the building in which he had been preaching, which injured some of the congregation.

This seems to have resulted in a certain measure of hostility. On one occasion only the presence of troops prevented the mob from attacking him. Wesley seems often to have been successful with soldiers, and the one other occasion that he preached in South Tipperary was to the garrison in Cahir.

After 1760 he did not return to Clonmel until near the end of his preaching tours, when his comments were acid. "I know not when I have seen so well dressed and ill behaved a congregation but I was told it was the same way they behaved in Church. Pity that they did not turn Papists. The Church of England needs no such members. They are no honour to it".<sup>26</sup> Clearly Tipperary was not a fruitful corner of the Lord's vineyard for Wesley!

Probably the best of the Archbishops of Cashel was Theophilus Bolton. John Jebb records his gratitude for the fine library he had bequeathed the Archdiocese. His contemporary Swift bestowed rare praise: "and who but Lord Bolton was mitred for merit".

Arthur Price his successor owes his chief claim to fame because of his butler Arthur Guinness, but he earned the scorn of succeeding generations by abandoning all efforts to maintain the Rock, where Bolton had carried out extensive repairs. In 1749 the then archbishop obtained permission to use the soldiers of the garrison to unroof the cathedral and rebuild the Church of St. John as a more convenient cathedral.

The most noted Archbishop at the end of the century was Charles Agar, appointed in 1780. A man of considerable ability, he was much consulted by the Government as a privy councillor and in the House of Lords. He was created Viscount Somerton in 1800, when he also became Archbishop of Dublin. His predecessors had done little about the building of the new Cathedral; he at least brought about its completion at his own cost.

A much needed vigorous archbishop, he saw to the erection of 17 churches and 22 glebe houses. He was a bitter opponent of granting the Parliamentary vote to Roman Catholics, and in all his attitudes was hostile towards them. He was particularly in favour of harsh measures at the time of the '98 rebellion and urging the Government to execute rebels without mercy. Curiously enough, his palace had its woodwork torn out by soldiers temporarily garrisoned in it!

After 1800 the Protestant community were as dominant as ever. The Union made little difference to them, except that the ambitious had to look further afield for their sphere of activity. Yet all the easygoing security of the previous century had gone. Police reports were constant in their references to robberies of mail-coaches, attacks on houses and murders. When one studies the list of grand jury presentations for the building of roads and bridges, all the familiar names are there.



But forces were at work which in the end would destroy their influence and leave many of their names only as a memory in an area where so many had flourished in the 1700s. In that century they had tamed a wilderness into rich farming land studded with substantial houses.

They were the creators of modern Tipperary, but they failed to build on what they had achieved, largely because of their fears and prejudices. Too many of them in the service of the British Empire learnt skills that, however great their success, diverted their interests from their home estates. They needed to be practical farmers rather than soldiers. Many estates were treated simply as sources of rental income.

There was a sense of the hopelessness of it all: better to follow a career or immerse oneself in sport, pretend that this was the way things had always been and that no remedies were possible. Perhaps there were none; but too many of the landowners refused to try. The failure to solve the problems of the poor made men all too conscious of religious differences and racial origins. It was too easy to blame it all on the Cromwellians, the landlords or the Castle, to see Protestants as the exploiters of the Roman Catholic majority.

Sir Samuel Ferguson, writing in 1848, recognised that a profound change in attitude had taken place in the outlook of the landed proprietors of his day from that of their predecessors of the 18th century. "Their grandfathers, better Irishmen, were also better scholars and more polished men. Base caricaturists have made money, and gained a kind of spurious reputation by defaming them . . . but men who judge them by the legitimate evidence of their acts and monuments - by their mansion houses, their libraries, their collection of painting and sculpture - by works written by them and published amongst them - and by the testimony of contemporary competent judges, know for a fact that society has not advanced in Ireland".<sup>27</sup>

The achievement he recognised is evidenced in the landscape of Tipperary, and in any judgement of the contribution of the Protestant community it is not evidence to be lightly set aside. In any honest assessment of the making of the county, their contribution ought to be recognised and, whatever their other faults, "honour given where honour is due".

It is, however, significant the Ferguson considered the change of character of the landowners to be recognisable by 1848. Perhaps they never really recovered from the mental shock of the French Revolution. The century of their greatest achievement had ended in '98, and this had been followed by many years when violence flared again and again.

One does not find it easy to identify with their position. Yet W.E.H. Lecky, the champion of a liberal interpretation of history with an international reputation for fair-minded scholarship, regarded with horror Gladstone's Land Acts. To him the legislation was a shameful act of despoilation.

He, the champion of Grattan's Parliament, could say of Home Rule that the party who sought it were "animated by two leading ideas - a desire to plunder the whole landed property of the country and an inveterate hatred of the English connection in every form". He was not inconsistent, because (like Grattan) he believed that property could alone be trusted to preserve civilisation. In the end, despite the injustice he clearly recognised in his *Leaders of Public Opinion* and in his *History*, he was a landlord who could not envisage a worthwhile future for Ireland except as a component of the British Empire.

If such a man, with all his knowledge and justice of mind, could not shed the convictions of a protestant landowner, small wonder that his fellows in Tipperary (as throughout Ireland) could not survey the drift of events without despair. Perhaps there was no way to save their world. There are many who would contend that it did not deserve to be saved, because it rested on a basic injustice. Yet their achievements are a part of all that makes Tipperary what it is. They left a heritage for all.

Perhaps if they had, in Ferguson's words, been better Irishmen, they would have left more. One





wonders if in their change in educational policy the landowners did not contribute in some measure to this failure in sympathy. In the 18th century they educated their sons in Ireland privately or in local schools; in the 19th century they sent their sons to English public schools, where all too often they came to be ashamed of their Irishness.

At Kilcooley the 18th-century Barkers were educated at Kilkenny College; but the 19th-century Ponsonbys made Eton their family school. Most others of their class did likewise. Yet it was an almost impossible task for men with the deep loyalty of military families to the Crown, and their basic conviction that property was sacred, to accept the changes that were forced upon them. Men like Lord Dunraven or Sir Horace Plunkett were convinced that if only they had worked for Ireland and taken advantage of the opportunity for leadership their wealth conferred, so much of what they had to contribute would not have been lost.

Essentially, however, the history of the Protestant community of Tipperary is one of decline and fall. Those who are left are Tipperary men, at home in their county and ready again to contribute to the life of its society, but unavoidably aware of the fewness and of the contrast with what they once were. Men never find it easy to rise above their preconceptions, to see beyond what they conceive as the natural order of things.

It is easy to blame them for the consequences of forces outside their control. Why did the work of men like Stephen Moore or visionaries like Sir Vere Hunt fail to grow — surely simply because Ireland could not compete with the cheap products of an industrialised society. Without the coal, the iron, all that fuelled England's industrial revolution, such local industries could only struggle to survive.

Nor could agriculture provide a fully stable basis for an ever-growing population. Unrest in the county nearly always coincided with bad harvest or falling rents, and died away in periods of agricultural prosperity. The truth may be not so much that the Protestant community lost interest, but that it required all their effort merely to stand still.

Despite this, the 19th century did witness slow progress and a broadening of the distribution of wealth. To evaluate truly the contribution of the Protestant community requires research to a greater degree, so that the concepts of prevailing mythologies can be evaluated.

#### FOOTNOTES

20. Munster Volunteer Registry, National Library of Ireland.
21. MacNevin, T.: *History of the Volunteers of 1782* (Dublin, 1845, p.204)
22. Tipperary Artillery, NLI, I.R.S.55942 T.1.
23. Wm. P. Burke, op.cit.
24. Foster, C.: *Life of Bishop Jebb* (London, 1837), p.65.
25. Shee, W.: *The Irish Church* (London, 1852), p.63.
26. Journal of John Wesley ( London, 1909-1916).
27. Ferguson, H.: *Sir Samuel Ferguson in the Ireland of his Day* (London, 1896) Vol.1, p.85.

